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**Contact between theology, hermeneutics and literary  
theory: The role of *majāz* in the interpretation of  
anthropomorphic verses in the Qur'ān from the 2<sup>nd</sup>  
AH/8<sup>th</sup> CE until the 7<sup>th</sup> AH/13<sup>th</sup> CE.**

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Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD in Islamic Studies

2012

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## DEDICATION

To My Parents

And to all the martyrs of Syria

Who have paid their lives for freedom

May God have mercy upon their souls

**Declaration for PhD thesis**

I have read and understood regulation 17.9 of the Regulations for students of the School of Oriental and African Studies concerning plagiarism. I undertake that all the material presented for examination is my own work and has not been written for me, in whole or in part, by any other person. I also undertake that any quotation or paraphrase from the published or unpublished work of another person has been duly acknowledged in the work which I present for examination.

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## Abstract

Our knowledge of tropical interpretation of anthropomorphic verses in the Qur'ān by Muslim theologians is very limited. We are mostly in the dark with regard to history, development and methods of tropical interpretation of these verses.

The research shows that the process of interpreting anthropomorphic verses in the Qur'ān (from the 2<sup>nd</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> century focusing on the Mu'tazilites and the Ash'arites schools) is not a mere exegetical practice, rather it is a result of interaction of three disciplines: Islamic theology, Qur'ānic hermeneutics and theory of *majāz*. The thesis has demonstrated the importance and impact of the development of the theory of *majāz* on the interpretation of anthropomorphic verses given the parallel developments in Islamic theology and Qur'ānic hermeneutics. For each author studied I examined, where possible, his theological views, Qur'ānic hermeneutics and theory of *majāz* before analysing his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses. The development of theory of *majāz* from the 2<sup>nd</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> century to the time of Al-Khaṭīb al-Qazwīnī (d.739AH/1338CE) serves as a background for the subsequent chapters. In the first three centuries of Islam, the awareness of the phenomenon of *majāz* in its early stage provided our authors with the tool to interpret anthropomorphic verses. The Mu'tazilites emphasised the role of reason in their theology and hermeneutics. They employed and developed a theory of *majāz* as an effective tool in their interpretation of anthropomorphic verses and it was in the writing of al-Zamakhsharī that their interpretation reached its maturity by his use of both tropes: *majāz* based on *kināya* and *takhyīl*. Ash'arites's tropical interpretation of anthropomorphic verses involves a complex web of the three disciplines especially in the writings of al-Rāzī. The impact of the development of the theory of *majāz* can be seen in the writings of all authors discussed.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

TITLE PAGE.....	1
DEDICATION.....	2
DECLARATION.....	3
ABSTRACT.....	4
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	5
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	6
 <b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	 <b>10</b>
Aims and scope of the research.....	13
Typology of rhetorical figures in Western thought.....	15
De-anthropomorphism in Judaism and Christianity up to 6 <sup>th</sup> C.E.....	22
Approaches to anthropomorphism in the Qur’ān.....	36
Typology of Muslim approaches to anthropomorphic verses.....	38
Anti-Anthropomorphism in Islamic thought: A historical overview.....	42
Reason and Revelation in ‘ <i>Ilm al-Kalām</i> .....	45
Q (3:7) as a foundation of ‘ <i>ilm al-Ta’wīl</i> .....	46
Literature review.....	49
Method and research plan.....	51
 <b>CHAPTER I</b>	
 <b>Historical development of theory of <i>majāz</i> .....</b>	 <b>53</b>
1.1 The treatment of <i>majāz</i> and <i>isti‘ara</i> before al-Jāhiz.....	58

1.2	Al-Jāhiz (d. 255AH/ 869).....	60
1.3	Tha‘lab (d. 291AH/904CE).....	66
1.4	Ibn al-Mu‘tazz (d.296AH/908CE).....	67
1.5	Qudāma b. Ja‘far (d. 337AH/948CE).....	68
1.6	Ishāq b. Wahb al-Kātib (fl. Mid-fourth/tenth century).....	69
1.7	Al-Āmidī (d.371AH/987CE).....	70
1.8	Al-Rummānī (d.384AH/994CE).....	71
1.9	Al-Qāḍī al-Jurjānī ( 392 AH/1002CE).....	73
1.10	Ibn Jinnī (d. 392AH/1002CE).....	74
1.11	Ibn Fāris (d. 395AH/1004CE).....	76
1.12	Abū Hilāl al-‘Askari (d. after 395AH/1005CE).....	77
1.13	Al-Tha‘ālibī (d.429AH/1038CE).....	78
1.14	Ibn Rashīq al-Qayrawānī (d. 456 or 463AH/1063 or 1071CE).....	80
1.15	Ibn Sinān al-Khafājī (466AH/1074CE).....	82
1.16	‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d.471AH/1078CE or 474AH/1081CE).....	84
1.17	Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606AH/1209CE).....	96
1.18	Al-Sakkākī (d. 626AH/1229CE).....	100
1.19	Ibn al-Athīr (d. 637AH/1239CE).....	103
1.20	Al-Zamalkānī d.651AH/1253CE).....	110
1.21	Ibn Abī al-Iṣba‘ al-Miṣrī (d.654AH/d.1256).....	112
1.22	Badr al-Dīn b. Mālik (d.686AH/1287).....	114
1.23	Al-Khaṭīb al-Qazwīnī (d.739AH/1338CE).....	115
	Conclusion.....	118

## CHAPTER II

	<b>The beginnings: Early authors.....</b>	<b>121</b>
2.1	Mujāhid b. Jabr (21/642, d. between 100/718 and 104/722 ).....	122
2.1.1	Interpreting Q (3:7).....	122
2.1.2	Mujāhid’s interpretation of anthropomorphic verses.....	123
2.2	Muqātil b. Sulaymān (150/767).....	126
2.2.1	Muqātil’s Hermeneutics.....	126
2.2.2	Muqātil’s views of tropical language.....	127
2.2.3	Muqātil on Anthropomorphism in the Qur’ān.....	128
2.3	Abū ‘Ubayda (110/728-210/825).....	133
2.3.1	Interpreting Q (3:7).....	134



2.3.2	Abū ‘Ubayda’s usage of the word <i>majāz</i> .....	134
2.3.3	Abū ‘Ubayda on Anthropomorphism in the Qur’ān.....	138
2.4	Al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm al-Rassī (169/246-785/860).....	144
2.4.1	Interpreting Q (3:7).....	144
2.4.2	Al-Qāsim’s view of the tropical language.....	146
2.4.3	Al-Qāsim’s interpretation of anthropomorphic verses.....	147
2.5	Ibn Qutayba (213/828-276/889).....	152
2.5.1	Ibn Qutayba’s views on Ta’wīl.....	152
2.5.2	Ibn Qutayba on <i>Majāz</i> .....	153
2.5.3	Interpreting Anthropomorphic verses.....	157
	Conclusion.....	161

### CHAPTER III

	<b>The Mu‘tazilites.....</b>	<b>164</b>
3.1	Early Mu‘tazilites on Anthropomorphism.....	167
3.1.1	Abū Bakr al-Aṣamm (d. 200/816 or 201/817).....	167
3.1.2	Al-Jāhiz (255/869).....	169
3.1.3	Al-Jubbā’ī (303/915).....	171
3.2	‘Abd al-Jabbār (c. 325–415/937–1024).....	177
3.2.1	Reason and revelation.....	177
3.2.2	The foundation of Qur’ānic hermeneutics.....	181
3.2.3	‘Abd al-Jabbār views on <i>majāz</i> .....	187
3.2.4	Interpreting anthropomorphic verses.....	193
3.3	Al-Zamakhsharī (b. 467/1075- d. 538/1144).....	202
3.3.1	Theology and hermeneutics of al-Zamakhsharī.....	204

3.3. 2 Al-Zamakhsharī's theory of <i>majāz</i> .....	207
3.3.3 Al-Zamakhsharī's interpretation of anthropomorphic verses.....	211
Conclusion.....	227
<b>CHAPTER IV</b>	
<b>The Ash'arites.....</b>	<b>232</b>
4.1. Al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013).....	235
4.1.1 Interpreting Q (3:7).....	236
4.1.2 Al-Bāqillānī on <i>Majāz</i> .....	237
4.1.3 Al-Bāqillānī's treatment of anthropomorphic verses.....	239
4.2. Abū al-Ma'ālī al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085).....	243
4.2.1 Interpretation of Q (3:7).....	244
4.2.2 Al-Juwaynī's theory of <i>Majāz</i> .....	245
4.2.3 Al-Juwaynī's interpretation of anthropomorphic verses.....	245
4.3 Al-Rāzī (543/1149/606/1209).....	249
4.3.1 Theological justifications.....	249
4.3.2 Al-Rāzī's Qur'ānic hermeneutics.....	250
4.3.3 Detailed interpretation of anthropomorphic verses.....	253
4.4 'Izz al-Dīn b. 'Abd al-Salām al-Sulamī (d. 660/1262).....	264
4.4. 1 Qur'ānic hermeneutics.....	264
4.4. 2 Ibn 'Abd al-Salām's views of <i>majāz</i> and its classification.....	266
4.4.3 Interpreting Anthropomorphic verses.....	268
Conclusion.....	273
<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>278</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>289</b>

# Introduction

God-talk is one of the fundamental issues within both philosophy of religion and philosophical theology, especially within the Abrahamic religions. The issue of God-talk can be analysed from two interrelated angles, the first one consists of the analysis of the language used by philosophers and theologians when talking about God. The other angle is the study of what the scripture of any particular religious tradition says about God. Or as Aquinas puts it in his *Summa Theologiae*, one needs to distinguish ‘between the claims of *sacra doctrina* -revealed and to his mind privileged Christian teaching, especially in the Bible-and *theologia*, the speaking about God in which “pagan” philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle, as well as Christian writers, engaged<sup>1</sup>’. The problematic aspect of God-talk in both its angles consists of answering the question ‘how is it possible to speak meaningfully of God, who infinitely transcends everything we know of the world and of ourselves<sup>2</sup>’? The previous question helps us to situate the discussion about anthropomorphism in scripture within the debate about the relationship between reason and revelation. How do we reconcile the idea of a transcendent God which has been established by the use of reason with anthropomorphic descriptions of God in the scripture? The whole enterprise of figurative interpretation of anthropomorphic verses can be seen as a way to reconcile reason and revelation.

The recourse to figurative language (such as metaphor and allegory) has played and continues to play a central role in answering this question. Metaphor, more than any other trope, is increasingly dominating the landscape of the philosophy of religious language; this is due to the change of attitude towards it in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As Mark Johnson, one of the pioneers of contemporary theory of

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<sup>1</sup> Soskice, Janet. Religious Language in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, eds. Philip L. Quinn and Charles Taliaferro, Blackwell, 1999, p. 198.

<sup>2</sup> De Pater, Wim A., Analogy and disclosures: On religious language, in *Metaphor and God-talk*, (eds) Lieven Boeve and Kurt Feysaerts, Peter Lang, 1999, p. 33.

metaphor, puts it: ‘Metaphor is no longer confined to the realm of aesthetics narrowly conceived-it is now coming to be recognized as central to any adequate account of language and has been seen by some to play a central role in epistemology and even metaphysics<sup>3</sup>’. Metaphor is no longer considered as an ornament important only in poetics and rhetoric which can be substituted for literal language without any loss of meaning; rather metaphor has a cognitive<sup>4</sup> dimension which cannot be expressed by literal language. These developments, with regard to the nature and function of metaphor, have great repercussions in the area of religious language and have highlighted the centrality of metaphor for any meaningful talk about God in both dimensions mentioned above which were distinguished by Aquinas.

In Islamic thought, Muslim rhetoricians developed a distinctive theory of tropical language (*majāz*) that accounts for and connects major figures of speech with each other. This theory of *majāz* (theory of tropes) was an important tool in the hands of theologians and exegetes in their endeavour to reconcile reason and revelation with regard to the attributes and anthropomorphic description of God in the Qur’ān. This theory enabled them to harmonize between reason and revelation. This thesis is mainly concerned with the role of *majāz* in the interpretation of anthropomorphic verses in the Qur’ān by Muslim theologians and Qur’ānic exegetes from the 2<sup>nd</sup> AH/8<sup>th</sup> CE to the 7<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> focusing on the Mu’tazilite and the Ash‘arite schools.

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<sup>3</sup> Johnson, Mark. (ed.), *Philosophical Perspectives on Metaphor*, University of Minnesota Press, 1981, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Soskice defines metaphor as ‘speaking about one thing in terms which are seen to be suggestive of another’, , Soskice, J. M., *Metaphor and Religious Language*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1987, p. 49.

## Aims and scope of the research:

The issue of Anthropomorphism<sup>5</sup> in the Qur'ān attracted the attention of Muslims and was a subject of intense discussions from the second century of Islam up till now. Tropical interpretation of anthropomorphic verses was the means which was used by Muslim theologians to reconcile Qur'ānic revelation and reason. This study examines the history and development of tropical interpretation of anthropomorphic verses and it is based on the premise that this interpretation is the fruit of contact between three intellectual disciplines. These disciplines are: *'Ilm al-Kalām* (speculative theology), (*'ilm al-Ta'wīl*) Qur'ānic hermeneutics and *'Ilm al-balāgha* (literary theory). *'Ilm al-Kalām* establishes the doctrine of each school and provides a theological justification for the process of interpretation (*ta'wīl*) and plays also an active role in the methods of *ta'wīl* (interpretation). *'Ilm al-Ta'wīl* has, in addition to its theological dimension, a linguistic dimension related to semantics and pragmatics. *'Ilm al-Balāgha* or more specifically the theory of *majāz* is the main tool in the interpretation process which shapes and determines the final form of the interpretation.

It is well known that Muslim theologians and Qur'ānic exegetes used the linguistic phenomenon of *majāz* as a tool in their interpretation of anthropomorphic verses, but how they employed this device to de-anthropomorphise these verses is not fully known. More importantly, given the long period it took the *majāz* theory to develop, one could ask what is the impact of this development on the interpretation of anthropomorphic verses. Indeed the theory of *majāz* in Islamic thought has not been formulated at once; rather it took centuries to develop like other disciplines such as rhetoric, grammar, *kalām*, etc. My central research question in this work is: To what extent did the development of the theory of *majāz* affect the interpretation of anthropomorphic verses? In other word, is there any change in the figurative interpretations of anthropomorphic verses from one author to another ( from 2<sup>nd</sup> AH/8<sup>th</sup> CE until 7<sup>th</sup> AH/13<sup>th</sup> CE) and if so is the development of the theory of *majāz*

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<sup>5</sup> Two Greek terms are used to refer to phenomenon of ascribing human characteristics to God: Anthropopathism and anthropomorphism. Anthropopathism (anthrop from Greek *anthropos*, man and *pathos* means affections and feelings, see E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, Baker Book House, 2003, p. 871) is used of ascription of human emotions to God while anthropomorphism (*morphē* in Greek means form or shape) is used of ascription of human form to God. I will use the term anthropomorphism to refer to both types of ascriptions in line with the modern usage.

responsible for this change and multiplicity of interpretations? At the same time I will show also how other factors such as the refinement of theological justifications and the increasing sophistication of Qur'ānic hermeneutics affected the interpretation of anthropomorphic verses of some authors in the study. In my attempt to answer the main research question I will also challenge some accepted generalisations showing the shortcomings of uncritical acceptance of summary accounts and vague use of certain words.

The span of this study is from the 2<sup>nd</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> century. It focuses on the most important theological schools in Islamic thought: the *Mu'tazilites* and the *Ash'arites*. The study starts with Mujāhid b. Jabr in the early 2<sup>nd</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> century because there were hardly any theological discussions related to anthropomorphism in the Qur'ān in the 1<sup>st</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> century, and the vast majority of the available literature goes back to the 2<sup>nd</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> century. The study stops with 'Izz al-Dīn b. 'Abd al-Salām in the 7<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> because of his important contribution to the study of figurative language in the Qur'ān and also by his time the Ash'arites' theology reached its maturity in the writing of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. Two criteria govern my choice of authors in this study; first the historical importance of their contribution, and second the availability of their writings.

In the rest of this chapter I will first outline the main western rhetorical figures which will be used in this study. I then look at how the issue of anthropomorphism has been approached in Judaism and Christianity up to the 6<sup>th</sup> CE in order to contextualise the debate within the Abrahamic religions. Then I will examine types of anthropomorphic verses in the Qur'ān and the typology of Muslims' attitudes towards them. Finally, I will review and evaluate existing literature on the topic of my research and finish with the method and the structure of the study. In the following I will briefly outline the main rhetorical figures in Western thought that are relevant to my study.

## Typology of rhetorical figures in Western thought

In Western studies of rhetorical figures three main categories are used: figure<sup>6</sup>, scheme<sup>7</sup> and trope<sup>8</sup>. The difficulties associated with defining and distinguishing between these terms have been noted since the time of Quintilian<sup>9</sup> (c. C.E). All of these types are called figures of speech or rhetorical figures and the oldest arrangement<sup>10</sup> of rhetorical figures is to classify them into schemes (or figures) and tropes<sup>11</sup>.

Scheme (or figure) is defined by Quintilian in *Institutio Oratoria* as ‘a change in meaning or language from the ordinary and simple form<sup>12</sup>’. Blair, who calls them figures of thought, states that use of these figures ‘supposes the words to be used in their proper and literal meaning, and the figure consist in the turn of the thought; as is the case in exclamations, interrogations, apostrophes, and comparisons.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Figure from Latin *figura* meaning the made, the shaped and the formed, in Timothy Bahti ‘Figure, Scheme and Trope, in *The New Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics*’, (eds) Alex Preminger and T. V. F. Brogan, Princeton University Press, 1993, p. 410. In its general sense it is used to denote ‘any striking or unusual configuration of words or phrases’, Lanham, Richard A. *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*, University of California Press, 1991, p 78.

<sup>7</sup> Scheme from Greek meaning form or figure and in its general sense it is used to denote ‘any kind of figure or pattern of words’, Lanham, *ibid.*, p. 134.

<sup>8</sup> Trope from Greek *tropein* meaning to turn and to swerve, Bahti, *ibid.*, p. 410.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 409.

<sup>10</sup> In the 19<sup>th</sup> century onward, the practice of compiling handlists of all the figures and rhetorical terms became popular and it is ‘with the rise of modern linguistics and stylistics in the twentieth century that rhetoricians ventured to modernize the traditional system of figures’, Heinrich F. Plett “Figures of speech” *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric*. Ed. Thomas O. Sloane. *Oxford University Press*, 2006, p. 325.

<sup>11</sup> Blair divides them into figures of words (tropes) and figures of thought (schemes) later he adds that ‘This distinction, however, is of no great use; as nothing can be built upon it in practice; neither is it always very clear’, Blair, Hugh. *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Letters, Edited with an Introduction by Linda Ferreira-Buckley and S. Michael Halloran*, Southern Illinois University Press, 2005, p. 146 (First edition of this book appeared in 1783).

<sup>12</sup> Bahti, p. 409.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

Trope is defined by Quintilian as the artificial alteration of a word or phrase from its proper meaning to another<sup>14</sup>. For Blair tropes (figures of words) ‘consist in a word’s being employed to signify something that is different from its original and primitive meaning<sup>15</sup>’. Simile, metonymy, synecdoche, periphrasis, metaphor and allegory are commonly classified as tropes. In what follows I will give a brief account of these tropes.

### **Simile**

Simile is defined as ‘an explicit comparison<sup>16</sup>, by using the particles “like” or “as”. It is used ‘to reveal an unexpected likeness between two seemingly disparate things’.

### **Metonymy**

Metonymy (change of name) is Greek word is derived from *meta* indicating change and *onoma* meaning a name or noun<sup>17</sup>. Metonymy is ‘a figure in which one word is substituted for another on the basis of some material, causal, or conceptual relation<sup>18</sup>, and Bullinger contends that metonymy ‘is not founded on resemblance but on relation<sup>19</sup>’. In classical rhetoric metonymy is divided into four types<sup>20</sup>.

1. Metonymy of the cause: using the cause in the place of the effect
2. Metonymy of the effect: using the effect in the place of the cause
3. Metonymy of the subject: ‘when the subject is put for something pertaining to it<sup>21</sup>, such as using the container for the contents.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 409.

<sup>15</sup> Blair, p. 146.

<sup>16</sup> Brogan, J. V., Simile in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ibid., p. 1149.

<sup>17</sup> Bullinger, E. W. *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, Baker Book House, Michigan, 2003, p 539.

<sup>18</sup> Martin, Wallace. Metonymy in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, p. 783.

<sup>19</sup> Bullinger, op. cit., p. 538.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., pp. 538-9.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 538.



4. Metonymy of the adjunct: it is when that which pertains to anything is put for the thing itself such as the content for the container

### **Synecdoche**

Synecdoche means in Greek ‘act of taking together, understanding one thing with another<sup>22</sup>’. It is defined as ‘a figure by which one word receives something from another which is internally associated with it by the connection of two ideas’. The difference between it and metonymy is that the exchange in case of metonymy is made between two ‘related nouns’ whereas in synecdoche it is between two ‘associated ideas<sup>23</sup>’. In classical rhetoric it is divided into four types<sup>24</sup>:

1. Synecdoche of the Genus where the genus is substituted for the species
2. Synecdoche of the Species where the species is substituted for the genus
3. Synecdoche of the whole where the whole is substituted for the part
4. Synecdoche of the part where the part is substituted for the whole.

### **Periphrasis**

Periphrases is a Greek word derived from *peri* (around or about) and *phrazein* (to speak). It is defined as ‘roundabout expression that avoids naming something by its most direct term<sup>25</sup>’.

### **Metaphor**

Metaphor is from Greek *metaphora* (transference<sup>26</sup>) and it is derived from (*meta*) beyond or over and (*pherein*) to carry<sup>27</sup>. Defining metaphor is very difficult issue

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<sup>22</sup> Martin, Wallace. Metonymy in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, *ibid.*, p. 1261.

<sup>23</sup> Bullinger, p. 613.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 613.

<sup>25</sup> Parks, W. P. et al., Periphrasis in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, *ibid.*, p. 896.

<sup>26</sup> Other Latin words for metaphor are *translatio* and *transfere*. See Innes, D. Metaphor, Simile and Allegory as Ornaments, in *Metaphor, Allegory and the Classical Tradition*, ed. G. R. Boys-Stones, OUP, 2003, p. 7.

<sup>27</sup> Bullinger, E. W. *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, Baker Book House, Michigan, 2003, p. 735.

because definitions of metaphor are theory dependent and as Soskice remarks ‘definition of metaphor useful to one discipline often proves unsatisfactory to another<sup>28</sup>’. In what follows I will briefly sketch the history of the figure, giving some definitions and views that reflect the development of this concept.

Aristotle was the first person to offer a philosophical treatment of this trope. Metaphor is treated in Poetics as ‘a means by which the poet provides knowledge through artistic imitation (mimesis) and in Rhetoric as a means for persuasive arguments<sup>29</sup>’. In his poetics he offers the following definition and types of metaphor ‘Metaphor consists in giving the thing a name that belongs to something else; the transference being either from genus to species, or from species to genus, or from species to species, or on grounds of analogy (1457b)<sup>30</sup>’. The first two categories are synecdoche while the third and the fourth are considered as types of metaphor<sup>31</sup>. From the above it seems that what Aristotle considered metaphor is broad and encompasses other tropes. Ricoeur contends that the idea of *epiphora* (transference) designates other tropes such as synecdoche and metonymy and in this sense ‘for Aristotle the word metaphor applies to every transposition of terms<sup>32</sup>’. Furthermore, in his book On Rhetoric, Aristotle argues<sup>33</sup> that simile is also a metaphor and the difference between them is that the particle of comparison is mentioned in the case of simile while it is omitted in the case of metaphor. In other words metaphor is ‘an elliptical simile<sup>34</sup>’. Quintilian took this view of metaphor and defined it as ‘[in the case of simile] we compare some object to the thing which we wish to describe, whereas in the former [metaphor] the object is actually substituted<sup>35</sup>’. This reductive view coupled with an ornamental and decorative

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<sup>28</sup> Soskies, p. 15.

<sup>29</sup> Johnson, p. 5.

<sup>30</sup> Aristotle, Poetics, in *the Complete Works of Aristotle*, the revised Oxford translation, ed. J. Barnes, Princeton University Press, vol. 2, p. 2332.

<sup>31</sup> Leexenberg, M. *Context of Metaphor*, Elsevier, 2001, p. 34.

<sup>32</sup> Ricoeur, P. *The Rule of Metaphor*, Routledge, 1986, p. 17.

<sup>33</sup> Aristotle, Rhetoric (1406a), p. 2243.

<sup>34</sup> Johnson, p. 7.

<sup>35</sup> Martin, W., metaphor in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, p. 761.

view of metaphor by philosophers such as Hobbes and Locke<sup>36</sup>, dominated the discussion about metaphors up to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In opposition to comparison and substitution views of metaphor in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, critics and philosophers started to develop new theories<sup>37</sup> of metaphor. Among the first pioneers in this regard were I. A. Richards and Max Black<sup>38</sup>. Generally speaking all the advocates of the new theories<sup>39</sup>

‘hold that metaphor creates meanings not readily accessible through literal language. Rather than simply substituting one word for another or comparing two things, metaphor invokes a transaction between words and things, after which the words, things, and thoughts are not quite the same. Metaphor, from this perspective, is not a decorative figure, but a transformed literalism, meaning precisely what it says<sup>40</sup>’.

Modern theories of metaphors are also characterised by their criticism of the primacy of the word as the primary unit of meaning in the classical theory of metaphor.

Ricoeur argues that ‘purely rhetorical treatment of metaphor is the result of the excessive and damaging emphasis put initially on the word, ..whereas a properly semantic treatment of metaphor proceeds from the recognition of the sentence as the primary unit of meaning<sup>41</sup>’. Soskice warns that we should not be strict in insisting that metaphor can only operate at the level of sentence; we should not ‘replace the hegemony of the word with the hegemony of the sentence<sup>42</sup>’. She adds that we can identify and construe certain metaphors in clauses like ‘and standing, faced the rosy-fingered dawn’ even if we don’t know its position in a sentence. Furthermore,

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<sup>36</sup> Soskice, p. 12.

<sup>37</sup> Soskice (ibid., pp. 24-53) classifies all the theories of metaphor (old and new) into three types: 1. Substitution theories (Aristotle and Quintilian): here metaphor is another way of saying what can be expressed in literal speech. 2. Emotive theories (logical positivists): metaphor is considered as a deviant use of language with no cognitive value and only its impact is affective. 3. Incremental theories, here ‘what is said by metaphor can be expressed adequately in no other way, that the combination of parts in a metaphor can produce new and unique agents of meaning’, Soskice, ibid., p. 31.

<sup>38</sup> Johnson, pp. 16-20.

<sup>39</sup> For most up to date treatment of metaphor see Raymond W. Gibbs, Jr. *The Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor and Thought*, CUP, 2008.

<sup>40</sup> Martin, W., metaphor in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ibid., p. 761

<sup>41</sup> Ricoeur, p. 44.

<sup>42</sup> Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, p. 21.

sometimes ‘it takes more than one sentence to establish a metaphor<sup>43</sup>’; therefore ‘the minimal unit in which a metaphor is established is semantic rather than syntactic<sup>44</sup>’.

## **Allegory**

There is no exact and comprehensive definition of allegory because it varies ‘in its operations, turning from one sense to another in widely divergent texts and times<sup>45</sup>’. The following is an attempt to offer a brief account of allegory especially in the early period.

Allegoria is a compound Greek word which has parts; the first is *allo* which means “other”. The second part is derived from the verb *agoreuein* which means to speak in public in the *agora*. When both components are used the word *allegoria* gives the meaning of something ‘said in secret and that which was unworthy of the crowd<sup>46</sup>’ or ‘to say other than that which is meant’. Whitman observes that there are two traditions of allegory; namely: allegorical composition and allegorical interpretation which are inverse in procedure<sup>47</sup>.

In the allegorical composition tradition, if the emphasis is placed on saying other than what is meant, then the practice and theory of allegory ‘is largely a grammatical or rhetorical matter, concentrating on the compositional technique of creating an allegorical text’ and the word *allegoria* means here ‘to say other than that which is meant<sup>48</sup>’. The first time the word allegory is used as a trope linked to metaphor is in the writing of Philodemus (60 BCE). Cicero gives the word the sense of a continued series of metaphors and Quintilian similarly considered it as continuous metaphor<sup>49</sup>, a

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Whitman, J. Allegory in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, p. 31.

<sup>46</sup> Whitman, Jon. On the History of the Term Allegory, Appendix I in *Allegory: The Dynamics of an Ancient and Medieval Technique*, Harvard University Press, 1987, p. 263.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 264.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., pp. 264-5.

brief trope and irony<sup>50</sup>. We find Pseudo-Heraclitus (1<sup>st</sup> CE) also defining *allegoria* as ‘rhetorical trope whereby it was possible to say one thing and at the same time allude to something else<sup>51</sup>’. Generally speaking, allegory ‘lies on a spectrum<sup>52</sup>’ and it is hard to distinguish it from other related figures of speech. Young contends that ‘there is then allegory and allegory’ and she distinguished between 8 various types of allegory<sup>53</sup>:

1. Rhetorical allegory: allegory as a figure of speech related to metaphor and irony
2. Parabolic allegory: found in fables and riddles
3. Prophetic allegory: found in oracles, dreams and narrative signs
4. Moral allegory
5. Natural or psychological allegory: mythological texts read as referring to the forces of nature
6. Philosophical allegory: ‘where the transcendent world is revealed, in veiled fashion, through the material world, and/or a text employing earthly language to convey heavenly meanings’
7. Theological allegory: where Christ or the creative purpose of the Trinity becomes the true meaning of life
8. Figural allegory

In allegorical interpretation, ‘the emphasis is placed on meaning other than what is said’ and in this case ‘allegorical theory and practice is largely a philosophic or exegetical matter, stressing the interpretive technique of extracting meaning from a text already written’. In this sense, *allegoresis*<sup>54</sup> means explicit interpretive act of

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<sup>50</sup> Whitman, J. *Allegory in The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ibid, p. 31.

<sup>51</sup> Jean Grondin, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*, Yale University Press, 1994, p. 25.

<sup>52</sup> Young, F. *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture*, CUP, 1997, p. 190.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 191-92.

<sup>54</sup> The practice of allegorical interpretation, see Grondin, p. 25.

tracing the literal back to the meaning communicated through it (that is, just the reverse of allegory<sup>55</sup>). It is this tradition of allegory that will be examined later in the writings of Jewish and Christian theologians in their attempt to interpret the scripture.

## **De-anthropomorphism in Judaism and Christianity up to 6<sup>th</sup> C.E.**

Judaism and Christianity had to deal with the issue of anthropomorphism in scripture long before the rise of Islam. Muslim theologians had to confront similar issues and offer solutions that resembled those used by Jewish and Christian theologians in their attempt to de-anthropomorphise the scripture. In this section I will look at how some Jewish and Christian theologians approached anthropomorphism in order to situate the Muslim treatment of anthropomorphism in a wider context of Abrahamic religions. But before that I will look briefly at the beginning of allegorisations in Greek and Hellenistic thought.

### **Anti-anthropomorphism and allegorisations of Greek myths**

Ascribing human characteristics to God or gods is a widespread phenomenon across all cultures. In ancient Greek, poetic works (which are full of anthropomorphic descriptions of gods) were held in high esteem because they were believed to be the result of divine inspiration. 'In both the Iliad and Odyssey the aid of Muses is invoked, and we find explicit statements that merely human powers are inadequate for the poet's task<sup>56</sup>'. In other words the writings of these poets were considered sacred in Ancient Greece: 'Homer's poems in fact have been described as 'the Bible' of ancient Greece<sup>57</sup>'. Two approaches can be observed towards this anthropomorphism by many philosophically oriented individuals and groups. The first approach consists of attacking and ridiculing the poets for their crude anthropomorphic descriptions of the

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<sup>55</sup> Grondin, p. 25.

<sup>56</sup> Grant, R. M. *The letter and the Spirit*, London, SPCK, 1957, p. 2.

<sup>57</sup> Procope, J. F., Greek Philosophy, Hermeneutics and Alexandrian Understanding in in Magne Saebø (ed.) *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1996, vol. I, part 1, p. 462.

deities and the second approach tries to allegorise these myths to harmonize them with the demands of philosophy.

### The first approach: Anti-anthropomorphism of Xenophanes

The earliest recorded attack on anthropomorphism is attributed to Xenophanes (c.570-c.475 BC) a philosophically minded Greek poet<sup>58</sup>. He criticised the depiction of gods in the poems of Homer and Hesiod stating that: ‘Homer<sup>59</sup> and Hesiod have ascribed to the gods all deeds that among men are a reproach and disgrace: thieving, adultery, and mutual deception?’

For Xenophanes Homer’s depiction of gods does not represent the absolute truth because Xenophanes believes that no one has access to this truth:

‘Concerning the gods and whatever I say about anything, no one has any certainty, nor ever will; and if someone should happen to utter the absolute truth, how would he know it? Seeming is present in everything<sup>60</sup>,

Therefore, because Homer and others are humans they made their gods with human forms and attitudes. In a very remarkable anti-anthropomorphic passage Xenophanes states that:

‘Ethiopians imagine their gods as black and snub-nosed, Thracians as blue eyed and red-haired” But if oxen and horses or lions had hands, or could draw and fashion works as men do, horses would draw the gods shaped like horses and lions like lions, making the bodies of the gods resemble their own forms. Men suppose that gods are brought to birth, and have clothes and voice and shape like their own<sup>61</sup>’.

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<sup>58</sup> See Xenophanes in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Version 1.0, London and New York: Routledge (1998), pp. 9084-86.

<sup>59</sup> In ancient Greece, poets believed to be divinely inspired and consequently their poems reflects the truth. At the time of Xenophanes the Iliad and Odyssey formed the basis of religious, moral and literary education in ancient Greece. Xenophanes contends that 'What all men learn is shaped by Homer from the beginning.' W. K. C Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, vol. 1, CUP, 1962, p. 371.

<sup>60</sup> Translation from M. I. Finley, ed., *The Legacy of Greece: A New Appraisal*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 235-6.?

<sup>61</sup> Guthrie, p. 371.

This type of anti-anthropomorphism combined with Plato's criticism of gods in the Greek myths

‘made a significant contribution to later Platonic development of a monotheistic doctrine of a transcendent Being with largely negative attributes. That God has no beginning or end, is beyond time and place, has no needs and, being perfect, is unchangeable, are deliberate contrasts to the gods of popular religion and mythology<sup>62</sup>’.

#### The second approach: Allegorising Greek myths: by the Stoics

The poems of Homer and Hesiod ‘provided the Greek, as the Torah provided the Jews, with the foundation of their cultural identity<sup>63</sup>’. On the other hand, given the attack of Xenophanes on the immoral contents of these poems, they have to be interpreted to be ‘more in line with current cultural expectations, than what they appeared to be saying. What was needed, in short, were techniques of creative hermeneutics<sup>64</sup>’ and the use of allegory provided the means to do so.

The beginnings of allegorical interpretation are attributed to the followers of Pythagoras who ‘regard the poets as true theologians and interpreted their poems in harmony with Pythagorean doctrine<sup>65</sup>’. In the Hellenic period, philosophy reached a point of identifying God with the ‘rational logos’ and therefore to attribute to gods on the divine Olympus human characteristics: such as jealousy and chicanery is no longer acceptable<sup>66</sup>. These descriptions need to be interpreted to be in harmony with the philosophical conceptions of the divine at that time. At this point allegorical interpretation was born and the Stoics were the pioneers of this type of interpretation.

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<sup>62</sup> Young Frances M. The God of the Greeks and the Nature of Religious Language, in *Early Christian Literature and The Classical Intellectual Tradition in Honorem Robert M. Grant*, (eds.) William R. Schoedel and Robert L. Wilken, Editions Beauchesne, Paris, pp. 45-74, p. 49.

<sup>63</sup> Procope, J. F., p. 462.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 463.

<sup>65</sup> Grant, ibid., p. 4.

<sup>66</sup> Grondin, p. 23.



Philosophical interpretation of myth can be traced in the work of Plato and Aristotle, but it was the Stoics who ‘systematized the practice, raising it thereby to the status of a conscious method<sup>67</sup>’. The Stoics try to combine ‘the rationalism of Aristotle with a thoroughgoing allegorization of the poets’. For the Stoics God ‘was the cosmic rational principle’ and anthropomorphic descriptions of the gods therefore had to have meaning other than the literal one<sup>68</sup>.

The Stoics did not use the word “*allegoria*” in their writing, instead they used the synonymous word “*hyponoia*” which ‘is a form of indirect communication that says one thing in order to make something else understood<sup>69</sup>’. The practice of allegorical interpretation (or *allegoresis*) of myth can be defined as a method that allows the unveiling of ‘something more profound behind the shocking literal sense’, and the offensiveness of the literal meaning indicates that it is not meant by the author. Three motives for stoic allegorical interpretations are identified. The first is the moral motive that aims to ‘purify written tradition of scandalous material’, and for Pseudo-Heraclitus *allegoresis* functions as ‘an antidote for impiety’. The second motive is rational which consists of showing that ‘rational interpretation of the world was compatible with myth’ because of their belief of the universality of the logos. The third motive pragmatic, the stoics did not want to be seen ‘contradicting the authority of the ancient poets’ because ‘they needed the support of tradition in order to maintain their closed worldview<sup>70</sup>’.

### **Interpreting anthropomorphism in Judaism**

The existence of anthropomorphic descriptions of God in the Hebrew Bible troubled many Jewish writers and led them to de-anthropomorphise these expressions. This can be observed in the translation of the Torah into Aramaic and Greek. The best known translation is the ‘Targum’ attributed to Onkelos (2<sup>nd</sup> CE). Generally speaking, ‘the

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>68</sup> Grant, pp. 6-7.

<sup>69</sup> Grondin, p.24. The word *Hyponoia* is also used by Plato in an allegorical sense.

<sup>70</sup> Grondin, pp. 25-26.

tendency of the Targum is towards transcendentalization of God<sup>71</sup>, and this can be seen in the translations of various anthropomorphic expressions. For example The Mouth of God/the voice of God are rendered as The Memra (word) of God<sup>72</sup>, 'He went down' is translated as 'He revealed Himself', and 'He heard' is translated as 'it was heard before Him'. As for the statements where human emotions are attributed to God such as love, hate, anger and the like, Onkelos did not make 'any changes except for those words which indicate regret and sadness on the part of God<sup>73</sup>'. This inconsistency on the part of Onkelos is noted by Maimonides (*Guide of the Perplexed* 2:33), and the reason given for this inconsistency is that Onkelos only de-anthropomorphised those expressions which might be understood literally by ordinary people<sup>74</sup>. The writers of the Septuagint went further than the Aramaic translators in their rendering of anthropomorphic expressions in the Bible; for example 'The "image of God" becomes "the glory of the Lord". Human emotions such as wrath and repentance are paraphrased so as to exclude any similarity between Man and God<sup>75</sup>'. However, the same inconsistency with regard to rendering anthropomorphic expressions is also observed in the Septuagint translation<sup>76</sup>.

### Jewish interpretation in a Hellenistic Style: Aristobulus and Philo

From the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE to the 1<sup>st</sup> Cent, interpreting the scripture by Hellenistic Jews is recognised as a way to harmonize Judaism with Hellenistic culture and philosophy. Two prominent figures existed in this period namely: Aristobulus and Philo.

#### Aristobulus

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<sup>71</sup> Martin McNamara, Kevin J. Cathcart, Michael Maher. *The Aramaic Bible: The Targums*, Continuum International Publishing Group, 1994, p. 19.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 19

<sup>73</sup> *Anthropomorphism in Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 2, p. 189.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Anthropomorphism in <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=1574&letter=A&search=anthropomorphism> accessed 1/3/2009.

<sup>76</sup> *Anthropomorphism in Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 2, p. 189

Aristobulus of Paneas (first half of second century BCE) was among the first Jewish philosophers who attempt to harmonize Hellenistic philosophy and the Bible<sup>77</sup>. Five fragments survived from his writing which was addressed to Ptolemy VI (ca. 180-145 BCE) in the form of a dialogue in which, Aristobulus answers the questions of Ptolemy about the Bible. According to Aristobulus, Moses's words should not be understood 'at face value since he may speak of other things than what the words seem to mean', for example 'God's hand are his forces or his achievements'<sup>78</sup>, as Aristobulus puts it,

'Consequently, the hands are thought of in terms of the power of God. For truly, it is possible to think metaphorically that all men's strength and activities are in their hands. Thus, quite appropriately has the lawgiver spoken metaphorically in an expanded sense in saying that the accomplishments of God are his hands'<sup>79</sup>.

As for God's resting on the seventh day

'it must not be understood as rest following laborious toil, but as the bestowal of a permanence upon the universe' and finally ' "Descending" signifies the revelation at Mt. Sinai, i.e., the manifestation of God's sublimity to human beings on earth'<sup>80</sup>. Siegert argues that Aristobulus should not be called an allegorist because 'he does not discard the literal meaning of a problematic passage. But the literal meaning, he claims, may be a trope. It may be the interpreter's task to make plain a metaphor'<sup>81</sup>.

The importance of Aristobulus lies 'in allowing Jewish intellectuals to take a clear stance vis-a-vis two different apologetic fronts: pagan accusations of "impiety", and Jewish determination to "cling to the letter"<sup>82</sup>'. The allegorical method which he employed without discarding the literal sense will be fully implemented a few generations after him by Philo.

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<sup>77</sup> Aristobulus in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 2, p. 459.

<sup>78</sup> Folker Siegert. *Early Jewish Interpretation in a Hellenistic Style* in Magne Saebo (ed.) *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1996, vol. I, part 1, p. 156.

<sup>79</sup> Holladay, Carl R. Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish authors, Vol. III, *Aristobulus*, Society of Biblical Literature, 1995, p. 139.

<sup>80</sup> Aristobulus in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 2, p. 459.

<sup>81</sup> Siegert, p. 160.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 162.

## Philo

Philo of Alexandria (c. 20 B.C.E. --50 C.E.) is an important exegete and philosopher in Jewish Hellenism and early Christianity. Philo follows a similar approach to that of Aristobulus and others in the same period, consisting of interpreting ‘the laws of Moses and Jewish existence by means of Greek ideas and religious traditions’<sup>83</sup>. Moreover, he is also considered to be as ‘the father of allegory’<sup>84</sup> because of the allegorical method he employed in his commentary on some passages of the Bible. What makes him different from Aristobulus is the great attention he gave to the deeper meaning over the literal one of the scripture<sup>85</sup>.

His interpretation of scripture he seeks to harmonise it with the similar views of Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics<sup>86</sup>. Philo believes that scripture has two layers of meanings; the literal or obvious meaning, and a deep meaning. He frequently used the term “allegory” to refer to this deep meaning. This allegorical meaning is ‘ “obscure to the many” and “clear only to those who can contemplate bodiless and naked facts”<sup>87</sup> ‘. But how can one know which passage should be taken literally or interpreted allegorically? Philo believes that God ‘ensures that the text will be understood allegorically by scattering objective signs or grounds of allegory in the text’<sup>88</sup>, such as aporias, absurdities, strangeness or error in the literal, which can only have been intentional .....since divine revelation can contain no falsehood<sup>89</sup>. His interpretation is based on his Jewish faith in God as a creator and ruler of history so ‘the biblical passages which correspond to this faith are taken literally, while others are

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<sup>83</sup> Peder Borgen, Philo of Alexandria as Exegete in *A History of Biblical Interpretation*, Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson (eds.), Wm. B. Eerdmans publishing, Michigan, 2003, vol. 1, p. 114.

<sup>84</sup> Grondin, p. 26.

<sup>85</sup> Siegert, p. 165.

<sup>86</sup> Grant, p. 33.

<sup>87</sup> Harry A. Wolfson, *Philo: Foundation of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, Harvard University Press, 1968, vol. 1, p. 115.

<sup>88</sup> Grondin, p. 26.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., pp. 26-27.

allegorized<sup>90</sup>. Philo believes that anthropomorphic expressions should not be interpreted literally because the scripture indicates clearly that: ‘God is not as man<sup>91</sup>, and God should not be compared to anything perceived by the senses: ‘to say that God uses hands or feet or any created part at all is not the true account<sup>92</sup> (conf. 98)’. The scripture also indicates that ‘God is immutable (Ex. 2. 12); therefore passages ascribing passions to him must be allegorized<sup>93</sup>. In other words, Philo interprets certain passages in the scripture that are in accord with basic Jewish doctrine of God literally, while he interprets other verses that are in conflict with literally understood ones allegorically. Therefore, any passage that ascribes to God something unworthy of him must be interpreted allegorically.

Moreover, God ‘is not even comprehensible by the intellect and beyond the fact of his existence, we can understand nothing<sup>94</sup>. As for anthropomorphic expressions in scripture, Philo contends ‘such things are spoken of with reference to God by the great lawgiver in an introductory sort of way, for the sake of admonishing those persons who could not be corrected otherwise’. Furthermore, these anthropomorphic expressions are used ‘for the instruction of the many and out of regard for the ways of thinking of the duller folk<sup>95</sup>. He adds that the reason for using these expressions for instructions is due to the fact that ‘we are unable to advance out of ourselves, but derive our apprehension of the uncreated God from the circumstances with which we ourselves are surrounded<sup>96</sup>. It should be noted that Philo’s quest and persistence in avoiding the predication of any attribute to God because of his Platonic philosophical background led him to empty the concept of God of any positive attribute or quality. At the same time, Philo was fully aware of the God of the Bible who intervenes in history and

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<sup>90</sup> Grant, *ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>91</sup> Num. 23:19. This is similar to the Islamic practice of interpreting the *mutashābih* (indefinite) verses in the light of *muḥkam* (definite) ones as we will see later.

<sup>92</sup> Borgen, p. 124.

<sup>93</sup> Grant, p. 34

<sup>94</sup> Philo, *On the Unchangeableness of God*, in *The Works of Philo*, translated by C. D. Young, New Updated Edition, Hendrickson, 1993, p. 162.

<sup>95</sup> Wolfson, *Philo*, Vol. 1, p. 116.

<sup>96</sup> Philo, *On the Confusion of Tongues*, pp. 242-243.

revealed Himself to Moses. ‘This contradiction caused him to posit an intermediate being [the logos] between God and the world<sup>97</sup>, which later became an essential doctrine in Christianity. Grant argues that Philo is important for two reasons: first he was the first Greek writer ‘to subordinate the varieties of biblical religion to a rational theology’ and ‘he prepares the way for his Christian successors, Clement and Origen, who simply develop the theory based on Philo’s practice, and (in Origen’s case) make it more radical<sup>98</sup>’.

### **Interpreting Anthropomorphism in Christianity**

From the beginning of Christian theology in the Patristic period, Christian theologians emphasised the transcendental and incorporeal nature of God which became the hallmark of Christian orthodoxy. In this section I will briefly examine the approach of Origen to Anthropomorphism in the Bible because of his importance in the development of Biblical interpretation.

#### Origen (d. 254 CE)

Christian theologians by the time of Origen, ‘adopted the refined theism of philosophy to characterise the God<sup>99</sup>’ and consequently were critical of anthropomorphism like earlier Greek philosophers and Philo. Consequently, ‘Christians were driven into a defensive position in respect to the anthropomorphism of the Old Testament<sup>100</sup>’. This issue of anthropomorphism dominated Origen’s writings, and the incorporeal conceptions of God played a central role in his thought. Stroumsa argues that Origen ‘faces a major tension (one might almost say an antinomy) inherent within biblical tradition, a tension which leads to the double temptation of anthropomorphism and dualism’. In other words, Origen was fighting groups on two fronts; the first are those

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<sup>97</sup> Anthropomorphism in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 2, p. 190

<sup>98</sup> Grant, p. 37.

<sup>99</sup> Young, p. 54.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

‘Christians who admitted with the Stoics that God, being a Spirit had a body<sup>101</sup>, and the second ‘Gnostic heretics’ who ‘reject the God of the Old Testament<sup>102</sup>, because of the anthropomorphic descriptions of God. Both groups insist on a literal reading of Biblical anthropomorphic verses and fighting this approach is what dominated Origen’s writings.

To begin, Origen affirms his belief in a transcendent God, stating that ‘We assert that in truth he is incomprehensible and immeasurable. For whatever may be the knowledge which we have been able to obtain about God, whether by perception or by reflection, we must of necessity believe that he is far and away better than our thoughts about him<sup>103</sup>. He believes that those ‘who hold false opinions and make impious or ignorant assertions about God’ are doing so because they misinterpret the scripture by understanding it literally not spiritually<sup>104</sup>. Having identified the problem, Origen then lays down his threefold way of reading scripture; as man has body, soul and spirit so ‘simple man may be edified by what may call the flesh of the scripture (literal interpretation)..and while the man who has made some progress may be edified by its soul (moral) ..and those who are perfect.. may be edified by the spiritual law<sup>105</sup>. Hanson observed that ‘Origen writes as if there were only two senses in Scripture, the literal and the spiritual<sup>106</sup>. Having said that, Origen warns people not to accept ‘what is found in the letter’; for occasionally ‘the records taken in a literal sense are not true, but actually absurd and impossible<sup>107</sup>, thus the literal<sup>108</sup> meaning has to be discarded if it is found to be not reasonable.

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<sup>101</sup> Stroumsa, Guy. The Incorporeality of God: Context and Implications for Origen’s Positions, “*Religion* 13 (1983): p. 350. (345-358). P. 347.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid. p. 348

<sup>103</sup> Origen *on First Principles*, translated by G. W. Butterworth, London, 1936, p. 9.

<sup>104</sup> Origen, pp. 271-72.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., pp. 275-276.

<sup>106</sup> Hanson, R. P. C. *Allegory and Event: A Study of the Sources and Significance of Origen’s Interpretation of Scripture* (With an Introduction by Joseph W. Trigg), Westminster John Knox Press, 2002, 236.

<sup>107</sup> Origen, pp. 294.

The Church Fathers understood the word “literal” differently from the modern usage (plain sense of the words) because they ‘distinguished wording from sense, and the normal sense of a word from its use as a metaphor, so that they would argue that ‘God is my Rock’ is an absurdity ‘according to the letter’, and so one must take it *tropikos*, that is, metaphorically or tropologically<sup>109</sup>. The Church Fathers also has no notion equivalent to the modern understanding of literalness, especially its association with the ‘claim to an inerrant report of historical fact<sup>110</sup>. Young distinguishes five types<sup>111</sup> of literal reading in the writings of Church Fathers and all of these types ‘presume correspondence between the wording and the idea expressed or reference intended’. In this regard, ‘interpretation ‘according to the letter’ could simply focus on the words, but one understood ‘according to the letter’ when idea and wording were taken to correspond straightforwardly without figures of speech<sup>112</sup>. The Church Fathers also distinguished between sense and reference; the same words can have many references and for Origen ‘words could be taken as referring to something immediate in the world of the text, or to a past or future event, or to an experience of the soul or to a heavenly reality<sup>113</sup>. Those who practice allegorical interpretation believed that the deep meaning (*hyponoia*) is intended by the author of the text which they are trying to interpret. This applies to the Stoics and Origen. Among others ‘Origen believed that the Holy Spirit had clothed the divine *skopos* in the dress of the wording, and that only those who probed for the deeper meaning really understood what the text was about. The Word of God used the conceit of allegory like a well-trained rhetorician<sup>114</sup>’

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<sup>108</sup> Hanson contends that ‘More often, however, Origen will insist that the literal sense must retained as well as the allegorical. He tells us that one of the functions of the literal sense is to attract people to study the Bible so that they may eventually venture upon the allegorical sense’, *ibid.*, p. 238.

<sup>109</sup> Young, F. *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture*, CUP, 1997, p. 187.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> 1. Attending solely to the wording, 2. Taking individual words in their normal sense 3. Attending the plain sense of words in sentences 4. Discerning the overall logic of an argument 5. Accepting the implied factual reference. Young. *Biblical Exegesis*, *ibid.*, p. 187-88.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 187-88.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 188.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190.



For Origen, the spiritual meaning is more important than the literal<sup>115</sup> one but this does not mean that we should not interpret some parts of the scripture according to the letter because ‘there are commandments written which need no inquiry whether they are to be kept literally or not<sup>116</sup>, such as Matt. 4. 22. But then how do we interpret these parts of the scripture which are absurd and impossible? The translator of the “*First principles*” describes Origen’s hermeneutical methods as follows

‘The scriptures contain many composite narratives, one part being historically true and the other false. In the story of the Fall, for instance, he would have regarded Adam and Eve as being historically true and God walking in the garden as historically false. He would then interpret the whole story allegorically, feeling that the literal meaning has a value of its own: e.g. the Commandments. But even here the deeper meanings, when discovered, are the more important<sup>117</sup>.

The rationalist attitude of Origen to the Bible is best represented in his interpretation of anthropomorphism and ‘his determination to do away with it. In this he had as his main exemplar Philo<sup>118</sup>. Firstly, Origen admits that ‘the term incorporeal is unknown not only to the majority of Christians but also to the Scriptures<sup>119</sup>’, however, the scripture calls corporeal beings visible ‘whereas the incorporeal and substantial powers it calls invisible<sup>120</sup>. Stroumsa argues that

‘it is this equivalence, throughout the book, between biblical invisibility and philosophical incorporeality which constitutes the core of Origen’s exegetical system. According to this system, theological research should investigate points upon which the apostolic tradition is silent, exegeting biblical passages in the light of philosophical concepts. Here is the great

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<sup>115</sup> One important point to be noted here is that for Origen the literal sense includes the figurative sense as well, See Hanson, *ibid.*, pp. 246-7.

<sup>116</sup> Origen, pp. 295.

<sup>117</sup> Origen, footnote no. 3, pp. 296

<sup>118</sup> Hanson, p. 220.

<sup>119</sup> Origen, p. 5.

<sup>120</sup> Stroumsa, Guy. The Incorporeality of God: Context and Implications for Origen’s Positions, “*Religion* 13 (1983): p. 350. (345-358).

intellectual achievement of Origen, which demarcates between him and the earlier Fathers<sup>121</sup>”.

Now let us look at how Origen interprets allegorically some anthropomorphic expressions in the bible. *The First Principles* opens with this statement<sup>122</sup> ‘I am aware that there are some who will try to maintain that even according to our scriptures God is a body, since they find it written in the books of Moses, “Our God is a consuming Fire<sup>123</sup>”, Origen contends that if we look at similar verses such as “God is Light<sup>124</sup>” the light here is not like that of the sun rather; God ‘lightens the whole understanding of those who are capable of receiving truth<sup>125</sup>. The same reasoning can be applied to consuming fire;

‘are we suppose that he consumes bodily matter.., God does indeed consume and destroy, but that what he consumes are evil thoughts of the mind, shameful deeds and longings after sin, when these implant themselves in the minds of believers; ..and “He dwells” in the souls of those who can receive “His word and Wisdom” in line with the saying ”I and the Father will come and make our abode with him<sup>126</sup>”.

Furthermore, Origen allegorises not only references to God’s members but also God’s love which should not be understood in a human way. The same applies to God’s hate and anger<sup>127</sup>.

Origen’s anti-anthropomorphic attitude has its roots in Hellenistic philosophy. He is in full agreement with the view that ascribing to God anthropomorphic descriptions threatens the foundation of piety. Only ‘allegorical readings of scripture overlaid scriptural language with a philosophical piety such that even when anthropomorphic

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<sup>121</sup> Stroumsa, p. 350.

<sup>122</sup> Origen, p7

<sup>123</sup> Deut. IV. 24.

<sup>124</sup> I John I. 5.

<sup>125</sup> Origen, p. 7.

<sup>126</sup> Origen, pp. 7-8

<sup>127</sup> Hanson, pp. 221-228.

language was preached, what was understood was the incorporeality of God<sup>128</sup>. His allegorical<sup>129</sup> interpretation of Biblical anthropomorphism managed ‘to resolve the implicit conflict between the personal creator God and his absolute incorporeality; it has had momentous implications upon subsequent Christians exegesis, theology and mysticism<sup>130</sup>. How God is described and depicted in the Qur’an and how Muslims approach these depictions is the subject of my next section.

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<sup>128</sup> Jo Torjesen, Karen. The Enscripturation of Philosophy: The Incorporeality of God in Origen’s Exegesis, in *Biblical Interpretation: History, context and Reality*, ed. Christine Helmer, Brill, 2005. P.83 (73-83)

<sup>129</sup> The widespread designation of Antiochene exegesis to be literal and Alexandrian exegesis to be allegorical has been challenged by F. Young who argues that ‘Antiochene exegesis is not according to the letter..rather they used standard literary techniques’ including allegory in their interpretation and allegory for them was a figure of speech, Young, F. *Biblical Exegesis*, *ibid.*, p. 182 ff.

<sup>130</sup> Stroumsa, p. 346.

## Approaches to anthropomorphism in the Qur'an:

God is depicted in the Qur'an in many different ways by means of human terms and expressions. Muslims differ about the nature of God and the right approach to treat these verses. God is depicted in the Qur'an as having both transcendent and immanent aspects<sup>131</sup>; regarding His transcendent aspect we find in the Qur'an 'like Him there is naught' Q (11:9) and regarding his immanence<sup>132</sup> the Qur'an states 'We indeed created man; and We know what his soul whispers within him, and We are nearer to him than the jugular vein' Q (50:15). The Qur'an employs various names and attributes to refer to God and His actions, and all of these nouns and attributes are de facto of human origin.

Van Ess differentiated<sup>133</sup> between four aspects of Qur'anic anthropomorphism: 1. anthropomorphism proper 2. God's actions 3. Anthropopathisms 4. Passive anthropomorphism. For these types to be more comprehensive of God's depiction in the Qur'an, one can add another type to account for other attributes which are not included in Van Ess's classification; I call this type abstract anthropomorphism.

1. Anthropomorphism proper: The Qur'an here ascribes to God eyes, hands, face, and side.
2. God's actions: such as seeing, hearing, speaking, creating, sustaining, and sitting on the Throne, etc.
3. Anthropopathisms: His feelings and passions such as mercy, love, anger, wrath, satisfaction, His cunning and so on.
4. Passive anthropomorphism: God here is the object of human perception such as being heard or seen (in the day of judgement).

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<sup>131</sup> Ian R. Netton, *Allāh transcendent : studies in the structure and semiotics of Islamic philosophy, theology and cosmology*, Richmond, Curzon Press, 1994, *ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>132</sup> Netton expressed this aspect in a fourfold paradigm 'The Qur'anic Creator Paradigm embraces a God who (1) creates ex nihilo; (2) acts definitively in historical time; (3) guides His people in such time; (4) can in some way be known indirectly by His creation', *ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>133</sup> Ess, J. van. "*Tashbīh wa- Tanzīh*." *Encyclopaedia of Islam 2<sup>nd</sup>*, vol. X, p. 342.

5. Abstract anthropomorphism: God's knowledge, power, God being the first, the last, etc..

Netton identified<sup>134</sup> three major ways in which God was perceived in medieval Islamic thought in addition to the Qur'ānic depiction of God outlined above: 1. God of the theologians (*mutakalimūn*) 2. God of the philosophers<sup>135</sup> 3. God of the mystics (*Sūfis*). Within this division my study here deals with the God of the theologians, and more specifically their approaches to anthropomorphic verses in the Qur'ān.

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī identified two basic concepts on which theologians and philosophers build their arguments, namely: the concept of perfection/imperfection (*al-kamāl wa al-nuqsān*) and the concept of necessity/contingency (*al-wujūb wa al-imkān*)<sup>136</sup>. Al-Rāzī argues that most of the debated issues among Muslim theologians (*mutakalimūn*) are based on the concept of perfection and imperfection. The main idea of this concept is that the theologians will say about a particular attribute: this attribute is an attribute of perfection, therefore it should be affirmed to God. They will say also about a particular attribute, this attribute is an imperfect one and therefore it should not be affirmed of God. Further, perfection and imperfection have three types: perfection and imperfection in the Essence (*al-dhāt*), in the attributes (*al-sifāt*) and in the actions<sup>137</sup> (*al-af'āl*). The perfection and imperfection in the actions is related to the issues of distinction between and origin of moral good and moral evil. With regard to the attributes, it is related to the eternity or createdness of the Qur'ān. As for the perfection and imperfection in the Essence, which is my present concern, it is related to the issue of *tashbīh* (assimilating God to Man) and *tanzīh* (de-assimilating God to

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<sup>134</sup> Netton, 4-6

<sup>135</sup> Netton's book *Allah Transcendent* is mainly devoted to the God of the philosophers (mainly neoplatonic ones), unfortunately there is no study devoted to the God of the theologians or God of the mystics on the same scale and scope of Netton's study of the neoplatonists philosophers.

<sup>136</sup> Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. *Al-arba'īn fī uṣūl al-dīn*, ed. by Aḥmad Ḥijāzī al-Saqqa, Cairo, Maktabat al-Kulliyat al-Azhariyya, 1986, vol. 2, p. 325.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., p. 325

Man). Those who adhere to *tanzīh* say that if God has a body or essence or is in a place then He will be similar to these creatures. These creatures are imperfect and being similar to imperfect things indicates imperfection; therefore one should de-assimilate God to His creatures. The corporalist would say if God is not localised nor can be indicated by means of senses or in a place then he would resemble nothingness, and this is the utmost imperfection<sup>138</sup>. What is interesting in al-Rāzī's treatment of the issue of the right depiction of God is that he considers both the anthropomorphists and the anti-anthropomorphists as striving for the perfect way of speaking and describing God. This is unlike other theologians who condemned anthropomorphic depiction of God as tantamount to disbelief.

My main concern in this thesis is those anthropomorphic verses which indicate the corporeality of God, be that in relation to His essence, attributes or actions. Therefore, my research will not deal with the other attributes mentioned in the Qur'an, such as knowledge, power, creation, justice, etc.

Muslims' approach to this type of anthropomorphic verses; was not unified; rather it constitutes a spectrum ranging from literal interpretation to tropical interpretation of these verses.

### **Typology of Muslim approaches to anthropomorphic verses:**

The Muslim approaches to anthropomorphic verses in the Qur'an can be divided into four categories and this typology is based on the treatment of Ibn Khaldūn of the issue in his Muqaddima<sup>139</sup>. These approaches are: *al-mushabbihā* (the anthropomorphists), *al-muthbita* (the affirmists), *al-muwaqqifa* (those who suspend their judgement), *al-mu'awwila* (those who engage in figurative interpretation).

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., p. 325.

<sup>139</sup> Ibn Khaldūn. *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, translated by Franz Rosenthal, 1958, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, vol. 3, pp. 34-69.

## 1. *Al-Mushabbiha*<sup>140</sup>

This is a generic term used to denote all those who liken God or assimilate Him to His creatures, under this heading one can also include *al-mujassima* (the corporealists). Ibn Khaldūn identified two early trends within this approach: those who assume anthropomorphism in God's essence and those who assumed it with regard to his attributes<sup>141</sup>. The first group believed that God has hands, feet and face and some of these people try to escape from this crude anthropomorphism by saying that God has 'a body unlike (ordinary human) bodies'.. Ibn Khaldūn comments that this statement is 'contradictory in itself and a combination of negation and assertion, if both (negation and assertion) are used here for one and the same concept of body<sup>142</sup>'. Al-Ash'arī identified two early figures who subscribe to this view 'Dāwūd al-Jawāribī, and Muqātil b. Sulaymān who believed that God has a body. 'He has a physical appearance like a human being, flesh and blood, hair and bones. Nevertheless nothing is like Him nor is He like anything else<sup>143</sup>'. The other group assumed direction, voice, descending for God. Like the first group they say 'a direction unlike directions' and the previous refutation applies to them as well<sup>144</sup>.

## 2. *Al-Muthbita*

*Muthbita* is attributed to those who affirm anthropomorphic attributes to God which at the same time confirming the unknowability of their modalities<sup>145</sup> (*kayfiyya*). For example they say regarding 'He sat upright upon the throne'<sup>146</sup>,

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<sup>140</sup> Other groups considered as *mushabbiha* by later sources are *nābita*, *karrāmiya* and *hashwiyya*. See the relevant articles in EI 2<sup>nd</sup> edition for further information.

<sup>141</sup> Ibn Khaldūn (Rosenthal's translation), pp. 46-47.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>143</sup> Al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, p. 209, cited by Josef Van Ess in *The Youthful God: Anthropomorphism in Early Islam*, The University lecture in Religion at Arizona State University, 1989, p. 17.

<sup>144</sup> Ibn Khaldūn, (Rosenthal's translation), p. 47.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>146</sup> Q (7:54)

they say, “we affirm His sitting, as the word indicates, because we fear to divest<sup>147</sup> [the word *istiwā*’ from its signification], but we do not comment about the modality<sup>148</sup> [of this sitting], because we fear anthropomorphism which is denied by negative verses such as “nothing like Him<sup>149</sup>”. Ibn Khaldūn states<sup>150</sup> that this approach to anthropomorphic verses, which is common among *al-muḥaddithūn*<sup>151</sup> (the traditionists) and later Ḥanablites, is far<sup>152</sup> from being associated or identified with that of the *salaf*<sup>153</sup> (ancestors).

### 3. *Al-Mufawwiḍa*:

*Al-mufawwiḍa* are those who delegate the meaning of anthropomorphic verses to God; Ibn Khaldūn identifies this approach with the *Salaf*. The *Salaf* among the companions and the successors “affirmed God's (possession of) the attributes of divinity and perfection. They delegated (*fawwaḍū*) to Him what seems to suggest deficiency, and did not say anything as to what they might mean<sup>154</sup>”. Ibn Khaldūn adds that The *Salaf* “gave preference to the evidence for God's freedom (from

<sup>147</sup> The Arabic of this phrase is *nuthbitu lahu istiwāan biḥaythu madlulu al-lafẓati firāran min taʿtīlihi*. Rosenthal translated it as follows ‘We affirm that He sits, as the word indicates, because we fear to negate Him’, Ibn Khaldun, (Rosenthal’s translation), p. 65. I believe divesting is nearer to the Arabic word *taʿtīl* than negation and the referent of the pronoun goes to the word *istiwā*’ not to God.

<sup>148</sup> Rosenthal translated the phrase *la naqūlu bi kayfiyyatihi* as we do not say how.

<sup>149</sup> Q (23:91). Ibn Khaldūn, (Rosenthal’s translation), pp. 65-66

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., p. 65ff.

<sup>151</sup> Rosenthal vocalised the word as *muḥdithūn* in a sense like *mubtadiʿa* (innovator) and translated it as novelty-conscious. The context of utterance supports my reading because Ibn Khaldūn earlier considered both groups (*muḥaddithūn* and later *ḥanbalites*) as followers of the *salaf*

<sup>152</sup> *Al-Shahrastānī* comments also on the followers of this approach: ‘A group of late scholars went beyond what is said by the *Salaf* [regarding anthropomorphic verses], maintaining that these verses must be understood according to their obvious meanings. By doing so they lapsed into anthropomorphism which is contrary to the belief of the *salaf*’, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, eds. Amīr ‘Alī Mahnā and ‘Alī Ḥasan Fāʿūr, *Dār al-Maʿrifā, Beirut, 2001, p. 105.*

<sup>153</sup> This approach to anthropomorphic verses is championed and defended by Ibn Taymiyya and his disciple Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya. At present, both the Wahhābies and the Salāfis consider this approach to be representative of the true creed of *ahl al-sunna wa al-Jamāʿa* (the Sunnis), therefore all other approaches are heretical ones at best. See Muhammad Saʿīd Ramaḍān al-Būṭī, *al-Salāfiyya: marḥala zamāniyya mubāraka lā madhhab islāmī*, (Damascus: *Dār al-Fikr pp. 131-144.*

<sup>154</sup> *Ibn Khaldūn*, (Rosenthal’s translation), p. 61, (I slightly modified Rosenthal’s translation).



human attributes), because it was ample and clear. They knew that anthropomorphism is absurd. They decided that (those) verses were the word of God, and, therefore, believed in them and did not try to investigate or interpret their meaning. This is what is meant by the statement made by most early Muslims: [*amirrūhā kamā jā'at*] "Let them pass on as they have come." That is, believe that they are from God, and do not try to interpret or explain<sup>155</sup> them; they may be a temptation. It is, thus, necessary to stop and submit to (God)<sup>156</sup>. This position is also exemplified by the statement of Mālik b. Anas who said (*al-istiwā'u ma'lūmun wa al-kayfu majhūl*) sitting is known but the *kayf* is unknown. Ibn Khaldūn comments that what Mālik meant by this statement is that 'the meaning of sitting is known linguistically and it is something corporeal, and *kayfiyyatuhu* means its reality (*haqīqatuhu*) [which is unknown]<sup>157</sup>. Generally speaking, this approach is associated with some Ash'arite theologians.

#### 4. *Al-mu'awwila*

*Al-Mu'awwila* are those theologians who engage in the tropical interpretation of Anthropomorphic verses. This approach is adopted by the Mu'tazilites, some Ash'arites, the Māturīdīs, the Ibādīs and the Shī'a among the Muslim theologians. The interpretations of these theologians/exegetes, mainly within the Mu'tazilites and the Ash'arites schools, is the focus of this research. This thesis is concerned with the history and development of this approach to anthropomorphic verses. But before outlining the foundation of tropical interpretation, I will examine first the beginning of an anti-anthropomorphic trend in Islamic thought and situate the Mu'tazilites and the Ash'arites within this trend.

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<sup>155</sup> Rosenthal gave the following translation "change them" because the Arabic version he used has the phrase "*taghyīruhā*". However, in a new edition of the *Muqaddima* which is based on 40 manuscripts the phrase used is *tafsīruhā* (explain them) which perfectly agrees with the context. See ...Ibn Khaldūn, Abd al-Rahman, al-*Muqaddima*, ed. 'Abd al-Salām al-Shaddādī, al-Dar al-Baydā, 2005, vol. 3, p., 32.

<sup>156</sup> Ibn Khaldūn, (Rosenthal's translation), p. 46.

<sup>157</sup> Ibn Khaldūn (Rosenthal's translation), p. 66. I Modified translation of Rosenthal of this phrase.

## Anti-Anthropomorphism in Islamic thought: A historical overview

Islamic sources indicate that al-Ja'd b. Dirham (124/742 or 125/743) and Jahm b. Ṣafwān (128/746) were the first theologians to criticise the literal interpretation of anthropomorphic verses in the Qur'ān. What we know about these figures is limited and based on later sources mostly written by their critics. Al-Ja'd b. Dirham was considered the first person to advocate the doctrines of the denial of Divine attributes (*ta'tīl*), the created Qur'ān and free will which will later become essential Mu'tazilite creeds<sup>158</sup>. More importantly for our concern is what is attributed to him as saying: *lam yukallim mūsā taklīmā wa la ittakhadha ibrahīma khalīlā* "God did not speak to Moses, nor take Abraham as His friend". Allegedly he was killed by the Umayyads because of his views<sup>159</sup>. Apart from this statement the sources do not indicate how Ibn Dirham interprets God's speech to Moses or other anthropomorphic verses. Nevertheless, our sources tell us that al-Jahm b. Ṣafwān was influenced by al-Ja'd b. Dirham with regard to his views regarding the creation of the Qur'ān and the denial of the attributes of God, including his criticism of literal interpretation of Qur'ānic anthropomorphism<sup>160</sup>.

Muslim sources associate Jahm b. Ṣafwān with three doctrines: the denial of Divine attributes, the perishing of hell and paradise, and predestination. What concerns us here are his views of the attributes of God and Qur'ānic anthropomorphism. Jahm denies the existence of any distinct attribute of God, he even believes that one cannot call God a thing *shay'* because *shay'* is a being which has an equal and also *al-Shay'* is temporal (*muḥdath*) and God is the originator of all things<sup>161</sup>. Muslim writers on Jahm usually refer to a group called Jahmites when they refer to Jahm and his views. One early book written about this group is the refutation of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (241/) of the Jahmites *al-Radd 'alā al-Jahmiyya*. Ibn Ḥanbal contends that the Jahmites interpret "Nothing is like Him" Q (42:11) as follows

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<sup>158</sup> Khālīd al-'Alī, *Jahm b. Ṣafwān wa makānatuhu fī al-fīkr al-Islāmī*, Baghdad: Maṭba'at al-Irshād, 1965, p. 53.

<sup>159</sup> G. Vajda, *Jahm b. Dirham* in EI2.

<sup>160</sup> Al-Ali, p. 56 and also Vajda, *ibid*.

<sup>161</sup> Al-Ali, p. 77.

‘there is nothing among the things like Him, he is below the seven earths as He is on the throne, no place is devoid of Him, He does not speak neither did He speak, no one gazes at Him in this worldly life neither in the hereafter, He cannot be qualified, neither is he known by any attribute or action, nor can He be perceived by reason, He is all face, all hearing, all sight, all light, all power ...He is other than anything you know that comes to your mind<sup>162</sup>’.

As a result of Jahm’s denial of attributes, he denied also all anthropomorphic descriptions of God in the Qur’ān such as eyes, face, hand, or throne<sup>163</sup> but again the sources did not tell us how he did interpret these anthropomorphic descriptions. One important question comes to mind: what are the reasons behind these discussions of the attributes of God and Qur’ānic anthropomorphism?

There are two trends in the current literature about the origin of Islamic theology (*‘Ilm al-Kalām*); one sees Islamic theology as a result of its ‘encounter with Christian theology,’ and the other sees it as an original internal development within Islamic thought without denying external influences<sup>164</sup>. Stroumsa contends that it is difficult to give a definite answer to the question of origins of *Kalām* because of the nature of the sources and the nature of the question, but one can argue ‘that interest in questions such as God’s unity, theodicy, and anthropomorphism might appear within any monotheistic system. Thus, although Islamic theology can often be shown to be strikingly similar to Christian theology of an earlier period, it is often easier to speak about parallels than about sources<sup>165</sup>’. In this regard, it can be argued that the reason behind early Muslim discussion about the attributes of God and Qur’ānic anthropomorphism is similar to that which affected the other Abrahamic Religions Judaism and Christianity which is the impact of Hellenistic philosophy as we have

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<sup>162</sup> Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *al-Radd ‘alā al-Jahmiyya wa al-Zanādiqa*, ed. Ṣabrī b. Salāma Shāhīn, Riyadh *Dār al-Thabāt*, 2003, pp. 98-99.

<sup>163</sup> Al-‘Afi, *ibid.*, 79-100. Seale believes that Jahm adopted the method of figurative interpretation of the scripture from Christian theologians and he ‘interpreted allegorically anthropomorphic passages in the Qur’ān in the same way as Philo and the Fathers interpreted the Bible and the Greek Homer’. As a matter of fact, all the examples given by Seale to support his view do not contain any allegorical or figurative interpretation of Qur’ānic verses. See Morris S. Seale, *Muslim Theology: A Study of Origins with Reference to the Church Fathers*, London, Luzac and Company Limited, 1964, pp. 53-56.

<sup>164</sup> Sarah Stroumsa, The Signs of Prophecy: The emergence and Early Development of a Theme in Arabic theological Literature, *Harvard Theological Review* 78:1-2 (1985) 101-14.

<sup>165</sup> Stroumsa, p. 101.

seen earlier. This does not mean that early Muslims understood anthropomorphic verses literally and tropical interpretation started only as a result of the impact of Hellenistic philosophy as I will show later.

Regarding the early period of Islamic theology, Van Ess contends that ‘At that time, in the late Umayyad period, part of Islamic theological thinking may still have been tinged by a Neoplatonic spirit<sup>166</sup>’. On the other hand, Richard Frank goes further by arguing that ‘with Jahm b Ṣafwān we have the first clearly defined attempt to adapt an identifiable Greek philosophical System [Neo-Platonism] to an Islamic theology<sup>167</sup>’. Zimmermann disputes Frank’s conclusion by arguing that

’ Frank’s attempt to connect the early *mutakallim* Jahm b. Ṣafwān (d. 746) with Neoplatonism is flawed by the neglect of a crucial distinction. Jahm’s negative theology may plausibly be related to Neoplatonism; but I doubt that he would have known or professed himself to be a follower of Plotinus or any other Greek thinker. To trade worn coins is not to pay allegiance to the issuing authority. I would not call Jahm a Neoplatonist for picking up a Neoplatonic commonplace or two. More generally, I would not care to call him a Hellenist just because as a *mutakallim*, he carried on traditions of argument firmly rooted in Greek antiquity<sup>168</sup>’.

Similarly, Adamson believes that ‘If there is Plotinian influence on earlier *Kalām* that influence is very likely indirect<sup>169</sup>’. Regardless of whether Jahm b. Ṣafwān was directly or indirectly influenced by Neoplatonism, he was the first Muslim theologian to advocate some sort of negative theology<sup>170</sup> as we have seen in his conception of God

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<sup>166</sup> Van Ess believes also that what influenced Muslim theologians on the issue of anthropomorphism in the Quran ‘was Neoplatonic philosophy, especially in the form it had assumed in Christian theology’, Van Ess, *Tashbīh wa Tanzīh*, ibid.

<sup>167</sup> R. M. Frank, “The Neoplatonism of Gahm Ibn Ṣafwān,” *Le Muséon* 78, 1965, pp. 395- 424, p. 396.

<sup>168</sup> F. W. Zimmerman, The Origins of the So-Called Theology of Aristotle. In J. Kraye et al (eds.) Warburg Institute Surveys and texts XI: Pseudo-Aristotle in the Middle Ages (London: Warburg Institute, 1986), pp. 110-240, p. 135.

<sup>169</sup> Peter Adamson, *The Arabic Plotinus: A Philosophical Study of the Theology of Aristotle*, London, Duckworth, 2002, note 14, p. 208.

<sup>170</sup> This transcendent conception of God will only appear later in the writing of the Ismā‘īlīs who used Neoplatonic philosophy to developed *theologia negativa*, where God was viewed to be absolutely other and ineffable. For further information about The God of Medieval Ismā‘īlīs see, Netton, *Allāh Transcendent*, ibid., pp. 203-255.

as ‘beyond any form, but also beyond being as such; he is not anything’<sup>171</sup>, (*shay*). This form of transcendence was not shared by other theological schools such as the Mu‘tazilites and the Ash‘arites, where each school developed its own theory of attributes including anthropomorphism. As I mentioned earlier, the premise of my research is that tropical interpretation of anthropomorphic verses is the fruit of contact between three intellectual disciplines which are: *‘Ilm al-Kalām* (speculative theology), (*‘ilm al-Ta’wīl*) Qur’ānic hermeneutics and *‘Ilm al-balāgha* (literary theory). In what follows I will briefly discuss the essential points of *‘Ilm al-Kalām* and *ilm al-Ta’wīl* which are relevant to my study.

### Reason and Revelation in *Ilm al-Kalām*

Generally speaking in Islamic theology, knowledge of God can be attained from two sources *‘aql* (reason) and *naql*<sup>172</sup> (revelation). The term *‘aql* in its primary signification means the act of withholding or restraining. Later the word is used to signify intelligence, reason, mind, intellect or knowledge (see *‘aql* in Lane’s Arabic-English Lexicon). It is used to signify ‘reason because it “restrains man from precipitous conduct”; it is used in a technical sense in Islamic philosophy, theology ‘but has different nuances in each’ which reflect ‘the impact of Greek philosophical ideas’. The theologians did not produce any theory of reason but they speak of natural reason or sound reason according to al-Fārābī. Fazlur Rahman believes that this can be traced to the Stoic concept of a natural reason which they also call *lumen natural* (natural light)<sup>173</sup>. Reason is used in this study to refer to the knowledge that is attained through *nazar* (reflection or discursive thinking). Generally speaking, Muslim theologians believe that it is only through *nazar* (reflection) that one can attain peremptory

<sup>171</sup> Van Ess, *Tashbīh wa Tanzīh*, ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Literally means transmission and it is used to refer to the Qur’ān and the teaching of the Prophet as it is codified in the *Ḥadīth* literature.

<sup>173</sup> F. Rahman, *Aql* in Encyclopaedia Iranica, in <http://www.iranica.com/articles/aql-intellect-intelligence-reason>, accessed 5/1/2011). For general study about reason and revelation in Islamic thought see also Arthur J. Arberry, *Revelation and Reason in Islam*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1957; Nicholas Heer, “The Priority of Reason in the Interpretation of Scripture: Ibn Taymiyyah and the *Mutakallimūn*,” in *The Literary Heritage of Classical Islam: Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honor of James A. Bellamy*, M. Mir (ed.), Princeton: Darvin Press, pp. 181–95. P. 187; Binyamin Abrahamov, Ibn Taymiyya on the agreement of reason with tradition, *MW* 82/3–4 (1992), 256–73.

knowledge (*ma'rifa qat'iyya*) about God's existence, incorporeality, attributes, and validity of prophecy or *naql*.

Regarding the existence of God, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī identified 'four categories: (1) arguments from the creation of the attributes of things (a subspecies of the argument from design); (2) arguments from the creation of things; (3) arguments from the contingency of the attributes of things (a subspecies of the argument from particularisation); and (4) arguments from the contingency of things', the second and the third are considered to be types of *Kalām* cosmological arguments'; and the fourth one is 'Avicenna's argument from contingency',<sup>174</sup>.

Regarding the incorporeality of God, one argument in its support runs as follow: 'it can be shown on the basis of the argument from contingency that God is not a body, for a body is by definition composite, viz., an aggregation of atoms qualified by a certain number of accidents; if He were a body, He would necessarily require a cause for His composition, that is, He would require a composer',<sup>175</sup>.

### **Q (3:7) as a foundation of *ilm al-Ta'wīl***

No verse in the Qur'ān that influenced Qur'ānic hermeneutics more than Q(3:7).

Stefan Wild considers it as 'the locus classicus in which Qur'ānic revelation sets the tone for the history of Qur'ānic exegesis'<sup>176</sup>, and Wansbrough contends that

'Commentary on this passage, unanimously agreed to represent the point of departure

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<sup>174</sup> Ayman Shihada, The Existence of God in The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology, ed. Tim Winter, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 197-217, 2008, p. 198.

<sup>175</sup> Merlin Swartz, *A Medieval Critique of Anthropomorphism: Ibn al-Jawzī's Kitāb Akhbār as-Ṣifāt* (A Critical Edition of the Arabic Text with Translation, Introduction and Notes). (Leiden: Brill, 2002), p. 50.

<sup>176</sup> Wild, Stefan. The Self-Referentiality of the Qur'ān: Sūra 3:7 as an Exegetical Challenge, in *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, eds Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Barry D. Walfish and Joseph W. Goerin, OUP, 2003, p. 422. For other studies on Q (3:7) see Lagrade, Michel. "De l'ambiguïté (mutashābih) dans le Coran: tentative d'explication des exégètes musulmans," *Quaderni di studi arabi* 3 (1985): 45-62., Kinberg, Leach. "Muḥkamāt and Mutashābihāt (Koran 3/7): Implication of a Koranic Pair of Terms in Medieval Exegesis," *Arabica* 35 (1988):143-72, and McAuliffe J. D. "Text and Textuality: Q. 3:7 as a Point of Intersection, in " *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'an*. Ed. I. Boullata. London: Curzon Press, 2000, pp. 56-76.

for all scriptural exegesis method<sup>177</sup>. In what follows I will examine the key issues and terms associated with this verse.

#### The Verse and the possibility of interpretation:

هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ مِنْهُ آيَاتٌ مُحْكَمَاتٌ هُنَّ أُمُّ الْكِتَابِ وَأُخَرُ مُتَشَابِهَاتٌ فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ زَيْغٌ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ مَا تَشَابَهَ مِنْهُ ابْتِغَاءَ الْفِتْنَةِ وَابْتِغَاءَ تَأْوِيلِهِ وَمَا يَعْلَمُ تَأْوِيلَهُ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَالرَّاسِخُونَ فِي الْعِلْمِ يَقُولُونَ آمَنَّا بِهِ كُلٌّ مِنْ عِنْدِ رَبِّنَا وَمَا يَذَّكَّرُ إِلَّا أُولُوا الْأَلْبَابِ (7)

There are two readings of this verse; one reading restricts the interpretation of part of the Qur'ānic text to God, the other allows 'those who are rooted in knowledge' to know the interpretation of this part.

Translation of the first reading:

It is He who sent down upon thee the Book, wherein are verses definite (*muḥkamāt*) that are the Essence of the Book, and others indefinite (*mutashābihāt*). As for those in whose hearts is swerving, they follow the indefinite part, desiring dissension, and desiring its interpretation (*ta'wīlihi*), **and none knows its interpretation (*ta'wīlahu*), save only God**. And those firmly rooted in knowledge say, 'We believe in it; all is from our Lord'; yet none remembers, but men possessed of minds<sup>178</sup>.

The translation of second reading:

It is He who sent down upon thee the Book, wherein are verses definite (*muḥkamāt*) that are the Essence of the Book, and others indefinite (*mutashābihāt*). As for those in whose hearts is swerving, they follow the indefinite part, desiring dissension, and desiring its interpretation (*ta'wīlihi*), **and none knows its interpretation (*ta'wīlahu*), save only God and those firmly rooted in knowledge**. They say, 'We believe in it; all is from our Lord'; yet none remembers, but men possessed of minds.

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<sup>177</sup> Wansbrough, J. *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*, Foreword, Translations, and Expanded Notes by Andrew Rippin, Prometheus Books, 2004, p. 149.

<sup>178</sup> The translation of the Qur'ān in this thesis generally follows Arberry's version with some modifications (A. J. Arberry. *The Koran Interpreted*, Touchstone edition, 1996)

The Uthmanic text of the Qur'ān supports both readings and the difference hinges upon the particle *wāw* between Allāh and *al-rāsikhūna fī al-'ilm* (those firmly rooted in knowledge). If the *wāw* is considered as *waw al-ibtidā'* (inceptive *waw*) so in this case we have a breaking off of the sentence after Allāh (or in the terminology of the Qur'ānic recitations *waqf*—pause) and the sentence signifies that only God knows the interpretation of *mutashābihāt* (indefinite verses). On the other hand if the *waw* is considered as *wāw al-'atf* (conjunctive *wāw*) then there is no pause, which means that both God and those who are firmly rooted in knowledge know the interpretations of these verses.

### **Key operative terms:**

#### *Muhkam and Mutashābih*

*Muhkam*: the root is *ḥ-k-m* in and *ḥ-k-m* has the following primary meanings : he prevented, he restrained, he governed. While *Aḥkama* (IV) has the meaning of he made it, rendered it (namely a thing) firm, stable, solid, sound or free from defect or imperfection<sup>179</sup>.

*Mutashābih*: the root is *sh-b-h* and when it is used in the form *tashābaha* it has two meanings: 1. To resemble one another, to be alike 2. (for two things or more) to resemble one another so that they become confounded, confused, obscure or ambiguous<sup>180</sup>.

*Ta'wīl*: from *'-w-l* which signify returning, restoring to, reverting to, to infer, to deduce, to go first. *Ta'wīl* is the verbal noun and in the Qur'ān it has five main senses: Interpretation of dreams, inference and interpretation, consequence, realisation and effect<sup>181</sup>. The term *ta'wīl* acquired a technical meaning and came to signify the process of turning the utterance away from its prima facie meaning (*Zāhir*) to its tropical meaning (*majāz*). Thus, it became the foundation of tropical interpretation of

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<sup>179</sup> Lane, q.v. *ḥ-k-m*

<sup>180</sup> Lane, q.v. *sh-b-h*

<sup>181</sup> Elsaid M. Badawi and Muhammad Abdel Haleem, *Arabic-English Dictionary of Qur'anic Arabic*, Leiden Brill, 2008, p. 64.



anthropomorphic verses. Now I will briefly examine the available literature on the issue of tropical interpretation of anthropomorphic verses.

### Literature review:

Generally speaking, Muslims' tropical interpretation of anthropomorphic<sup>182</sup> verses of the Qur'ān has not attracted the attention it deserves in modern Western scholarship. Apart from very few monographs<sup>183</sup> or articles dealing with single authors, there is as

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<sup>182</sup> Western scholarship about anthropomorphism in Islam is slight by comparison with scholarship on Biblical anthropomorphism. Williams identifies the following literature in Western scholarship: "EQ, 1: 106ff. s.v. Anthropomorphism (Martin), 2: 316-31 s.v. God and His Attributes (Böwering); Gimaret, *Dieu a l'image de l'homme*; van Ess, *TG*, particularly vol. 4; idem, "Tashbīh wa-Tanzīh," in *Ef*, 10: 341-44; idem, "The Youthful God: Anthropomorphism in Early Islam," The University Lecture in Religion at Arizona State University, March 3, 1988 (Tempe, 1988); Glaude Gilliot, "Muqātil, grand exégète, traditionniste et théologien maudit," *Journal asiatique* 279 (1991): 39-92; *El*, 4: 685f. s.v. Tashbīh (Strothmann); Michel Allard, *Le Problème des attributs divins dans la doctrine d'al-As'arī et de ses premiers grands disciples* (Beirut, 1965); Helmut Ritter, *Das Meer der Seele* (Leiden, 1955), 445-503 (= Helmut Ritter, *The Ocean of the Soul: Men, the World and God in the Stories of Farīd al-Dīn 'Attār*, tr. and ed. John O'Kane and Bernd Radtke [Leiden, 2003], 448-519); Kees Wagtendonk, "Images in Islam: Discussion of a Paradox," in *Effigies Dei*, 112-29; J. M. S. Baljon, "Qur'anic Anthropomorphisms," *Islamic Studies* 27 (1988): 119-27; W. Montgomery Watt, "Some Muslim Discussions of Anthropomorphism" and "Created in His Image: A Study in Islamic Theology," in idem. *Early Islam: Collected Articles* (Edinburgh, 1990), 86-93, 94-100; Georges C. Anawati, "Attributes of God: Islamic Concepts," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd ed. (Detroit, 2005; hereafter *ER*), 1: 616-22; A. Al-Azmeh, "Orthodoxy and Hanbalite Fideism," *Arabica* 35 (1988): 253-66; Robert M. Haddad, "Iconoclasts and *Mu'tazila*: The Politics of Anthropomorphism," *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 27 (Summer-Fall 1982): 287-305; W. Madelung, "The Origins of the Controversy Concerning the Creation of the Koran," in idem. *Religious Schools and Sects in Medieval Islam* (London, 1985), V; Sweetman, *Islam and Christian Theology*, 1.2: 27-47; Binyamin Abrahamov, *Anthropomorphism and Interpretation of the Qur'ān in the Theology of al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm*: Kitāb al-Mustarshid' (Leiden, 1996); idem, *Al-Kāsim b. Ibrāhīm on the Proof of God's Existence*. Kitāb al-Dalīl al-Kabīr (Leiden, 1990), 25ff.; Merlin Swartz, *A Medieval Critique of Anthropomorphism: Ibn al-Jawzī's Kitāb Akhbār as-Ṣifāt* (Leiden, 2002); idem, "A Ḥanbalī Critique of Anthropomorphism," *The Arabist* 21-22 (1999): 27-36; 'Abd al-Raḥmān Ibn al-Jawzī, *The Attributes of God*, tr. 'Abdullah bin Hamid 'Ali (Bristol, 2006); Wesley Williams, "Aspects of the Creed of Imām Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal: A Study of Anthropomorphism in Early Islamic Discourse," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 34 (2002): 441-63; idem, "*Tajallī wa-Ru'yā*"; Moḥammad Ḥassan Khafīl, "A Closer Look at the Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Western Obsession with the Medieval Muslim Theological Obsession with Anthropomorphism," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 17 (2006): 387-401". See Wesley Williams, *A Body Unlike Bodies: Transcendent Anthropomorphism in Ancient Semitic Tradition and Early Islam* (*Journal of the American Oriental Society* 129 [2009]: 19-44), p. 29. One can add to these: Holtzman, Livnat. "Anthropomorphism." *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, THREE, 2012 and also by the same author, Does God really laugh?. Appropriate and inappropriate descriptions of God in Islamic traditionalist theology, in Albrecht Classen (ed.), *Laughter in the Middle Ages and early modern times* (Berlin 2010), 165-200

<sup>183</sup> Binyamin Abrahamov, *Anthropomorphism and Interpretation of the Qur'ān in the Theology of al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm*: Kitāb al-Mustarshid', Leiden, 1996. Abrahamov's book is an annotated translation of one of al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm's books on anthropomorphism in the Qur'ān and I will refer to this book

yet no historical-analytical study of this issue that covers the Mu'tazila, the Ash'arites or any other theological school. Indeed, the literature contains concerning the Mu'tazilite's position, general statements such as '[for the Mu'tazilites anthropomorphic description of God] is to be understood only in a figurative sense: by the "hand" of God, His blessing (*ni'ma*) is meant, by His "eye", His knowledge<sup>184</sup>, and 'the method of *ta'wīl* was to interpret single words of the sacred text according to secondary or metaphorical meanings found elsewhere in the Qur'ān or in good poetry. There was no question of novel metaphors or of the metaphorical interpretation of whole phrases<sup>185</sup>'. We are left in the dark as to how the Mu'tazilites and those who followed them engaged with the texts and justify their interpretation theologically, hermeneutically and linguistically. Furthermore, are the Mu'tazilites' interpretations of anthropomorphic verses really confined to single words without paying attention to the whole sentence or phrase, as Watt asserts? Is there any differences between the tropical interpretations of early Mu'tazilites and later ones and if so, what are the reasons for these differences?

When it comes to the attitudes of the Ash'arites towards anthropomorphic verses, the picture is contradictory or confusing at best. One author asserts that the Ash'arites developed an intermediate position between the literalists and the Mu'tazilites; 'they [the Ash'arites] held that one should take the literal meaning of the Qur'ān "without asking how" (*bi-la kayf*)<sup>186</sup>'. While Gardet contends that

'the first Ash'arites reacted against this use of reason in *tafsīr*. For them, the anthropomorphic terms, including the sitting on the throne and the motion in space, are just the expression of actions and attributes which are consistent with the divine Majesty but of which we can know neither the nature nor the manner, and which have nothing in

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in my treatment of al-Qāsim in chapter 2. Another important study devoted to an individual author is Merlin Swartz's edition and translation of Ibn al-Jawzī's book on anthropomorphism in the Qur'ān. The main purpose of this book is to defend tropical interpretations of anthropomorphic utterances in the Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth* and to refute literal interpretations of these texts by the Hanbalities. Merlin Swartz, *A Medieval Critique of Anthropomorphism: Ibn al-Jawzī's Kitāb Akhbār as-Ṣifāt* (Leiden, 2002).

<sup>184</sup> Gimaret, D. "Mu'tazila." *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*.

<sup>185</sup> Watt, W. M., Some Muslim Discussions of Anthropomorphism, *Transactions of the Glasgow University Oriental Society*, 13 (1947-49), p. 3.

<sup>186</sup> Heath, Peter. Metaphor in EQ, vol. 3, p. 385.

common with the corresponding human actions or attributes. This was the *bilā kayf* attitude, often confused with that of the “ancients” and advanced by the master, Ash‘arī himself. Later, under an influence picked up from the Mu‘tazilites and especially from the *falāsifa* opposition, another attitude, known as that of the “moderns”, was admitted into the *kalām*. *Ta’wīl* was permitted. Thus al-Djawayni, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, etc. The “hand” of God was interpreted as “the protection extended over mankind”, His “eyes” denote “the intensity of His providence and watchfulness”, etc<sup>187</sup>.

On the other hand, Watt argues that after al-Ash‘arī his school ‘adapted views similar to those of his opponents among the Mu‘tazilah. Examples of this new attitude are...al-Baghdādī and.. al-Juwaynī<sup>188</sup>, and both of them belong to the pre-modern school.

Given the above state of scholarship we still need to find out whether there was uniformity in their interpretations or there were various approaches to the issue of anthropomorphism in the Qur’ān. It is hoped that my work will overcome the shortcomings of the previous research and advance our knowledge of the history and development, methods of tropical interpretation of anthropomorphic verses especially within the the Mu‘tazilite and Ash‘arite schools up to the 7<sup>th</sup> AH/13<sup>th</sup> CE.

## Method and research plan

The method I follow in this research is a combination of historical, linguistic, and comparative analyses of sources. I believe that this combination of methods is the most suitable one for the purpose of my research because it will enable me to examine words, concepts, ideas and methods synchronically and diachronically. This will allow me to uncover any continuity or change and trace their development. The research will be carried out as follows: first, I will examine the theological views of each author, his hermeneutical principles as exemplified in his interpretation of Q (3:7), and his views on *majāz* where available, as not every author discussed these issues. Then the interpretation of anthropomorphic verses of each author will be analysed in the light of his views on *majāz* and compared with other views where relevant.

The thesis consists of an introduction, four chapters and a conclusion.

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<sup>187</sup> Gardet, L. "Allāh." *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition

<sup>188</sup> Watt, Some Muslim Discussions, *ibid.*, p. 6.

Chapter one deals with the historical development of the theory of *majāz* within the discipline of *balāgha* from the second century to al-Qazwīnī. Chapter two examines the treatment of anthropomorphic verses in the first three centuries of Islam. Chapter three examines the Mu‘tazilites’ interpretations of anthropomorphic verses. Chapter four is concerned with the Ash‘arites’ interpretations of anthropomorphic verses.

Now I will turn to the theory of *majāz* and trace its development from the beginning to the time of al-Qazwīnī.

# Chapter 1

## Historical development of theory of *majāz*

*Majāz* was a weapon in the hands of Muslim theologians; they used it to defend their doctrines and to attack their opponents' views. This chapter traces the historical development of the theory of *majāz* in Arabic rhetorical tradition from the beginning in the (2AH/8 CE) century up to the writings of al-Khaṭīb al-Qazwīnī (d.739AH/1338CE), due to its utmost importance for interpreting anthropomorphic verses. The chapter will serve as a background against which I will examine the views of the authors discussed in the rest of this study on *majāz*. Before I will start, I will give a brief overview of the discipline of *al-balāgha*, and the place of *majāz* in it.

The issue of *majāz*<sup>1</sup> in Arabic is treated under '*ilm al-bayān* (theory of imagery) which is in turn a branch of, larger discipline, '*ilm al-Balāgha* (literally eloquence, or as some authors translate it, rhetoric).

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<sup>1</sup> While the term *majāz* was developing in various circles (philological, literary, *Qur'ānic*, *uṣūlī*, theological) other attitudes to the issue of existence of *majāz* in language in general and in the *Qur'ān* in particular were emerging as well, such as the attitudes of those who deny the existence of *majāz* in language and the *Qur'ān*. The major representative of this trend is the theologian Abū Iṣḥāq al-Isfara'īnī (d. 418/1077). This trend found more advocates later in Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1327) in his book *al-ʿImān* and his student Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya in his book *al-Ṣawāʾiq al-Mursala* (d.751/1350). This attitude had a lasting effect to the modern times especially among the Wahhabī and the *Salafī* trends. For more information about this issue see: Muṣṭafā Shāh, The Philological Endeavours of the Early Arabic Linguists: Theological Implications of the Tawaqif-iṣṭilāḥ Antithesis and the *majāz* Controversy, Part II, *Journal of Quranic Studies*, vol. 2, Issue I, 2000, pp. 43-66. Furthermore, in his study entitled "*al-Majāz ʿinda Ibn Taymiyya wa talāmīdhīh Bayn al-Inkār wa al-Iqrār* (*Maktabat Wahba*, Cairo 1995), 'Abd al-ʿAzīm Ibrāhīm Muḥammad al-Maṭāʿnī offers an alternative interpretation to the views of Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya and al-Shanqīṭī about *majāz*, he argues that although previous authors denied the existence of *majāz* in the *Qur'ān* and language in their books *al-ʿImān*, *al-Ṣawāʾiq* and *Man ʿJawāz al-Majāz* respectively, they accepted its existence in the *Qur'ān* and language in their other writings, p. 4. Muḥammad Al-Amīn Al-Shanqīṭī (d. 1393 A.H./

*Balāgha* is an abstract noun, from the verb *balagha* meaning to be effective or eloquent, and the adjective *baligh* means effective, eloquent (from *balāgha* to attain something), meaning therefore eloquence<sup>2</sup>. The term took a long time to develop before it came to denote a three-pronged science under the title: *‘ilm al-Balāgha* (literary theory). The major figure in this development is ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī in his two books *Asrār al-Balāgha* and *Dalā’il al-I’jāz*. *Asrār al-Balāgha* deals mostly with what is later called *‘ilm al-bayān* (theory of imagery), in this book he clarifies and defines various terms, such as *majāz* (trope), *tashbīh* (simile), *isti’āra* (metaphor), *kināya* (periphrastic expression). In his *Dalā’il*, his principle concern is the problem of *Nazm* (structuring) of the *Qur’ānic* text, and the book deals with questions of word order, use of particles and the like. This book spurred the rise of the *‘ilm al-ma’ānī* (syntactical stylistics). Al-Jurjānī's books were not systematically presented and it was al-Sakkākī in his book *miftāḥ al-‘Ulūm* (relying on al-Rāzī's *nihāyat al-‘Ijāz* before him) who organised them and gave *‘ilm al-Balāgha* the structure which it was to retain to the present. The last part of the section of *Balāgha* in the *miftāḥ* was given the name *‘ilm al-Badī‘* (rhetorical figures)<sup>3</sup> by Badr al-Dīn b. Mālik in his book *al-Miṣbāḥ*. Thus, the three parts of *‘ilm al-Balāgha*<sup>4</sup> are: *ilm al-bayān*, *ilm al-ma’ānī* and *ilm al-Badī‘*.

Some writers<sup>5</sup> on the history of *balāgha* distinguish between two trends in the study of the subject; the literary trend and the theological one. Al-Suyūṭī called these trends “the method of the Arabs and eloquent people, and the method of non-Arabs and

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1973) is a modern author who denied the existence of *majāz* in both language and the *Qur’ān* in his book " *Man ‘Jawāz al-Majāz fī al-Munazzal li al-ta‘abbudi wa al-I’jāz*, edited by *Abū Ḥafṣ Sāmī b. al-‘Arabī, Dār al-Jīl, Beirut*, 1995.

<sup>2</sup> Cl. Cahen, article on *balāgha* in EI 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed..

<sup>3</sup> For all the above Arabic terms I followed the translation of Heinrichs in his article about Rhetoric and poetics in *Encyclopaedia of Arabic Literature*, Edited by Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey, Routledge, 1999.

<sup>4</sup> For a general study of *ilm al-balāgha* in English see Hussein Abdul-Raof, *Arabic rhetoric: a pragmatic analysis*, London ; New York : Routledge, 2006 and Basil Hatim, *Arabic rhetoric : the pragmatics of deviation from linguistic norms*, Muenchen : Lincom Europa, 2010.

<sup>5</sup> See: Amīn al-Khūlī, *Manāḥj Tajdīd: fī al-Naḥw wa al-Balāgha wa al-Shi‘r wa al-Adab*, the section about History of *Balāgha* entitled *min tarīkh al-Balāgha*, *Dār al-Ma‘rifā*, Cairo, 1961. Abd al-Fattāḥ Lāshīn, *al-Ma’ānī fī ḍaw’ asālīb al-Qur’ān*, *Dār al-Fikr al-‘Arabī*, Cairo, Fourth edition, 2002, pp. 24-30. Aḥmad Maṭlūb, *al-Balāgha ‘inda al-Sakkākī*, *Maktabat al-Nahda*, Baghdad, 1964, pp. 111- 115. Shawqī Ḍayf, *al-*

philosophers.”<sup>6</sup> According to al-Khūfī, the theological trend is characterised by exact definition of terms, argumentation, minimum use of literary examples and by using logical forms (syllogism) to determine the quality of the discourse<sup>7</sup>. Wansbrough described this trend as

... a marked tendency to furnish the art of eloquence with a sound logical framework. This inclination found its most common expression in a detailed and rigid terminology much of which was borrowed from the vocabularies of theologians and philosophers.<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, the literary trend is characterised by excessiveness in the use of literary examples, be it poetry or prose, minimum numbers of definitions and categories, depending on artistic taste more than on philosophy and logic in their literary evaluation and criticism.<sup>9</sup> The Theological trend spread mostly in the eastern part of the Islamic world. This school dominated the study of *Balāgha* especially after al-Jurjānī.<sup>10</sup> The literary trend spread mostly in the Arab regions of the Islamic world such as Iraq, Syria, Egypt and North Africa. This study of the development of the theory of *majāz* covers writers of both schools but before that I will give a brief overview of two literary figures associated with the theory of *majāz* namely: *tashbīh* and *kināya*.

In later manuals<sup>11</sup> of *Balāgha*, *majāz* is treated in *‘Ilm al-Bayān* which also covers *tashbīh* (simile), and *kināya* (periphrastic expression). I will deal briefly with *tashbīh* and *kināya* because of their importance for our study before I turn to the historical development of the theory of *majāz*.

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*Balāgha Taṭwūr wa tārīkh*, Dār al-Ma‘ārif, Cairo, 1965, pp. 314-367. (Ḍayf does not name these schools; instead he entitled his chapter Lateral studies).

<sup>6</sup> Al-Suyūfī, *Husn al-Muḥāḍara fī akhbār miṣr wa al-Qāhira*, Maṭba‘at idārat al-Waṭānī, Cairo, vol. 1, p. 190, quoted by Aḥmad Maṭlūb, *al-Balāgha ‘inda al-Sakkākī*, *ibid.*, p.100.

<sup>7</sup> Amīn al-Khūfī, *Min tārīkh al-balāgha*, pp. 126-30.

<sup>8</sup> John Wansbrough, A Note on Arabic Rhetoric, in *Lebende Antike: Simposion für Rudolf Sühnel*, Berlin, 1967, pp. 55-63.

<sup>9</sup> al-Khūfī, *op. cit.*

<sup>10</sup> Aḥmad Maṭlūb, *al-Balāgha ‘inda al-Sakkākī*, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

<sup>11</sup> Such as *Jawāhir al-Balāgha fī al-Ma‘ānī wa al-Bayān wa al-Badī‘*, by Aḥmad al-Hāshimī, Cairo, 1960, and *al-Balāgha al-Wāḍiḥa* by ‘Alī al-Jārim and Aḥmad Amīn, Dār al-Ma‘ārif, Cairo, 1959.

*Tashbīh* is a very important literary technique which also serves as a basis for metaphor. It is based on the concept of similarity between two things. It has four parts: the two things compared, article of comparisons and the aspect of similarity. Such as in this example: وجهها كالبدر في ضيائه

(Her face is like a full moon in its brightness)

When the aspect of similarity and the particle are omitted, the *tashbīh* is called *tashbīh balīgh* (eloquent simile) such as وجهها بدر (Her face is a full moon).

This type of *tashbīh* was subject to intensive discussions by rhetoricians, as some of them classify it as metaphor. There is also another type of *tashbīh* which is called *tashbīh tamthīlī*, where the aspect of comparison is extracted from multiple entities such as that is found in this verse Q(24:39)

وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَعْمَالُهُمْ كَسَرَابٍ بِقِيعَةٍ يَحْسَبُهُ الظَّمْآنُ مَاءً حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءَهُ لَمْ يَجِدْهُ شَيْئًا وَوَجَدَ اللَّهَ عِنْدَهُ فَوَفَّاهُ حِسَابَهُ وَاللَّهُ سَرِيعُ الْحِسَابِ

“And as for the unbelievers, their works are as a mirage in a spacious plain which the man athirst supposes to be water, till, when he comes to it, he finds it is nothing; there indeed he finds God, and He pays him his account in full; (and God is swift at the reckoning.)”

*Kināya*<sup>12</sup> as a rhetorical phenomenon is difficult to translate into English or European languages, where some authors translated it as metonymy and others as periphrasis. *kināya* is defined as an utterance used to indicate an implied meaning with the possibility of indicating the proper meaning. It is different from *majāz* because in the case of *majāz* the tropic meaning is intended. For example when we say about a person that: زيد كثير الرماد

(Zayd has got plenty of ashes)

This expression indicates the generosity of Zayd because the phrase ‘plenty of ashes’ indicates that he cooks for many guests who visit him. At the same time, this expression could be interpreted in non-tropical way to indicate that he has in reality plenty of ashes.

There is no comprehensive study about the historical development of *majāz* in European languages. The most important contribution to the study of *majāz* is that of

<sup>12</sup> For further information about the development of *kināya* see Joseph Dichy, *kināya* in Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics, Brill, pp. 578-583



Wolfhart Heinrichs<sup>13</sup> who wrote two seminal papers and a monograph on the subject. Discussions of *majāz* are found in various areas of intellectual pursuits<sup>14</sup> in Islamic civilisation such as literary studies, philological studies, Qur'ānic exegesis and studies, theological writings, juristic writings (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) and philosophical writings<sup>15</sup>. I have chosen this division because it is broader than that of Heinrichs; nevertheless, what he said is true that "there is considerable interdependence and cross-fertilization between these various approaches to *majāz*"<sup>16</sup>. In this study, I will mostly focus<sup>17</sup> on literary and philological writings because of their relevance to my later analysis.

The word *majāz* as a technical term is rendered as trope (this word does not match exactly the Arabic term), has a long history of development from a term that covers all figures of speech to a more specific type of trope. Therefore, translating the term as trope is not possible with all the writers who used this word in their writings. The same can be said of *isti'āra* (metaphor), another important term associated with *majāz*,

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<sup>13</sup> Contacts between scriptural Hermeneutics and Literary Theory in Islam: The case of Majaz, *Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Arabisch-Islamischen Wissenschaften* 7 (1991/92): 253-84, and On the Genesis of the Haqiqa-Majaz Dichotomy, *SI* 59 (1984): 111-140. For a historical study of the development of metaphor in Arabic see *The Hand of The Northwind: Opinions on Metaphor and the Early Meaning of Isti'āra in Arabic Poetics*, Wiesbaden, 1977. See also the most recent article on *majāz* by Udo Simon, *Majāz* in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics*. In Arabic, the most important study of the historical development of *majāz* in *balāgha* is that of Ahmed Matloub in his entries about *majāz* and related tropes in his dictionary of rhetorical terms, *A Dictionary of Arabic Rhetorical Terms and Their Development: Arabic-Arabic*, Librairie du Liban Publishers, Beirut, 2000.

<sup>14</sup> Heinrichs in his seminal paper entitled "On the Genesis of *The Haqiqa-Majāz Dichotomy*" distinguishes between four treatments of *majāz*: 1. language-oriented Qur'ānic commentary (*majāz al-Qur'ān* of Abū 'Ubayda), 2. Qur'ānic hermeneutics as contained in the books on legal methodology (K. *Uṣūl al-fiqh* of al-Jaṣṣāṣ, 3. lexicology, i.e. a theory of words and their meanings (*al-Sāhibī fī fiqh al-lughā* of Ibn Fāris, 4. rhetoric especially the theory of imagery (*Asrār al-Balāgha* of "Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī. He also argues that in the later Middle Ages this variety is narrowed down to two basic approaches, that of the *Uṣūl al-Fiqh* works and that of the rhetoricians in their discussions of *'ilm al-Bayān*, p. 114 in *SI* 59 (1984), 111-140.

<sup>15</sup> The philosophical discussion on *majāz* is based on the commentaries on Poetics and Rhetoric of Aristotle by Muslim philosophers (Al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā, and Ibn Rushd). See Black, D.L. *Logic and Aristotle's 'Rhetoric' and 'Poetics' in Medieval Arabic Philosophy*, Leiden: Brill 1990.

<sup>16</sup> Heinrichs, On the Genesis, p. 114.

<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, I will touch on the *uṣūlī* approach through my treatment of al-Rāzī as he combines both the literary and *uṣūlī* approaches in his writings

in later writings is considered the most important part of *majāz*. Therefore, my study will deal with both terms.

### 1.1 The treatment of *majāz* and *isti'ara* before al-Jāhiz:

The term استعارة was used in the early times to refer to “borrowing of a theme by one author from another”; while metaphor was indicated by the term مثل (figurative expression) or بديع.<sup>18</sup>

The first person to use the term استعارة is reported to be the philologist Abū ‘Amr b. al-‘Alā<sup>19</sup> when he was commenting on the verse:

أقامت به حتى ذوى العود في الثرى      وساق الثريا في ملاءته الفجر

*“She dwelled in it [a place] until the rod withered in the soil*

*And the dawn—in its veil—drove the Pleiads (thurayyā) away.”*

Abū ‘Amr said, ‘ I do not know a saying better than this saying:

" وساق الثريا في ملاءته الفجر "

He made the dawn having a *milā'a* (veil), in reality he has no *milā'a*, but he borrowed (استعار) this word and this is one of the marvellous *isti'arāt*.<sup>20</sup>

In his book entitled *al-Kitāb*, Sībawayh<sup>21</sup> does not distinguish between grammar and *balāgha*; rather he mixes them together. He touches on the issues of *majāz*, *tashbīh* (simile), *isti'ara* (metaphor) and *kināya* and *ḥadhf* (ellipsis). Regarding the term *majāz*, he did not use it when speaking about figurative expressions, instead he uses

<sup>18</sup> The article about *Isti'ara* by S. A. Bonebakker in EI 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.

<sup>19</sup> (d. around 154/770), *isti'ara*, *ibid*.

<sup>20</sup> See Maṭlūb, Aḥmad. Mu'jam *al-Muṣṭalahāt al-Balāghiyā wa taṭwuruhā* (Arabic – Arabic), Second edition, Librairie du Liban Publishers, Beirut 1993, pp. 82 -83.

<sup>21</sup> Sībawayh (second century AH/eighth century CE)

Abū Bishr ‘Amr b. ‘Uthmān b. Qanbar Sībawayh, of Persian origin, was born in the mid-second/eighth century. He came to Baṣra to study religion and law, but is said to have turned to grammar after committing a solecism himself; Sībawayh is the creator of systematic Arabic grammar. He died in 177AH/793CE or perhaps later, aged about forty. *Encyl. Of Arabic Literature*, edited by Julie Scott Meisami, Routledge, 1999.

the term *sa'at al-kalām* (semantic expansion) when he comments on a verse of al-Khansā' describing a she-camel which lost its new born baby

ترتع ما رتعت حتى إذا ذكرت      فإنما هي إقبال وإدبار

“It pastures at pleasure but when it remembers

then it is in a relentless advance and retreat.”

He says “her use [al-Khansā's] of إقبال و إدبار is allowed by way of expansion in the discourse like your saying نهارك صائم (your day is fasting)”.<sup>22</sup> This example was categorised by later writers as *majāz 'aqlī* (cognitive trope). In a chapter entitled the non-literal use of verbs for the purpose of brevity and conciseness, Sībawayh gives this example:

(وَاسْأَلِ الْقَرْيَةَ الَّتِي كُنَّا فِيهَا وَالْعَيْرَ الَّتِي أَقْبَلْنَا فِيهَا وَإِنَّا لَصَادِقُونَ)

“Enquire of the city wherein we were and the caravan in which we approached; surely we are truthful men”. Q (12/82)

Sībawayh says: “What is meant here is ask the people (أهل) of the “city” /village<sup>23</sup> (*al-qarya*), so here the verb used the word قرية as an object instead of using the word أهل as an object for the purpose of brevity”.<sup>24</sup>

On the issue of *isti'āra*, Sībawayh does not use the term but he comments on a verse of poetry by al-Khansā':

وداهية من دواهي المنو      ن ترهبها الناس لا فالها

“Many a misfortune is there, of the misfortunes of time,  
which men fear, that has no mouth.”

Sībawayh says, “someone whom we trust narrated to us that the poet made the misfortune having a mouth.”<sup>25</sup> This comment was later used by other writers.

<sup>22</sup> Sībawayh, *Al-Kitāb*. ed. By Abd al-Salām Hārūn. *Dār al-'Ilm*, Cairo, 1966, Vol. 1, pp. 236- 237.

<sup>23</sup> *Qarya*, A town, or village; a small *balad*, smaller than a *madīna* not well applied to a *madīna* unless qualified by an epithet denoting greatness (Lane, *q.r.y*).

<sup>24</sup> Sībawayh, *op cit*, vol. 1 pp. 211-212.

<sup>25</sup> Sībawayh, *ibid.*, vol. 1, P. 316. For more information about the rhetorical features of *al-Kitāb* of Sībawayh see Abd al-Qādir Ḥusayn, *Athar al-Nuḥāt fī al-Baḥṭh al-Balāghī, Dār Nahḍat Miṣr*, Cairo 1970. pp. 66- 130.

Towards the end of 2<sup>nd</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> century, Abū 'Ubayda (d. 210/825) wrote a book entitled *Majāz al-Qur'ān*. Abū 'Ubayda did not use the word to mean a trope, but he used the word *majāz* in a sense of the original form of utterance as opposed to what is used in the Qur'ān, as we will see later in chapter 2.

## 1.2 Al-Jāhiz (d. 255AH/ 869)<sup>26</sup>

Al-Jāhiz is considered by many<sup>27</sup> writers as the founder of the *'Ilm al-Balāgha*. His views about *'Ilm al-Balāgha* can be found scattered mainly in his two major books as well as in his epistles. Moreover, al-Jāhiz wrote another book entitled *Naẓm al-Qur'ān* which is lost;<sup>28</sup> he mentions it in *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān* "I have a book in which I collected in it verses from the *Qur'ān* to know the merit of brevity and ellipses...."<sup>29</sup>

His major books are *Kitāb al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn* (The Book of Lucid Style and Elucidation) and *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān* (The Book of Animals). In these two books he collects many texts and ideas about *balāgha* and *bayān*, but he fails to develop any theoretical framework for *'Ilm al-Balāgha* as the material in these works constitutes a broadly defined theory of literary criticism. He analyses the dimensions of *bayān*, meaning and word, and human communication; and he provides copious examples of Arabic eloquence to rival the traditions of other cultures. What concerns us here is al-

<sup>26</sup> Al-Jāhiz, Abū 'Uthmān 'Amr b. Baḥr al-Baṣrī, was a famous Arab prose writer, the author of works of *adab*, Mu'tazilī theology. Born in *Baṣra* about 160/776. From early age he had a strong desire for knowledge and learning. He was influenced by the great Mu'tazilīs al-Nazzām and Thumāma b. Ashras. He died in 255/December 868-January 869. EI 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition article on al-Jāhiz. See also the article about al-Jāhiz *Encyl. Of Arabic Literature*, edited by Julie Scott Meisami, Routledge, 1999.

<sup>27</sup> Dayf, Shawqī. "*Al-Balāgha Taṭawur wa Tārīkh*" Dār al-Ma'arif, Cairo, 1965, pp. 57-58. Dawūd Sallūm says: "Truly I think That al-Jāhiz is the true founder for *'ilm al-balāgha* because he was not a collector of the views of the scholars of *al-balāgha* (as he called them in his time) but he was a critic of their ideas which he did not take them for granted", see *al-naqd al-manhajī 'inda al-Jāhiz*, Baghdad, 1986, p. 88, also Sayyid Nawfal in his book "*al-balāgha al-'arabiyya fī dawr nash'atihā*" makes a similar claim, Cairo, 1984, p. 170. Ṭāha Ḥusayn was more cautious in his approach to the issue, see his introduction to the book "*Naqd al-Nathr*" (the book was attributed wrongly to Qudāma b. Ja'far al-Kātib), p. 3, (eds) Ṭāha Ḥusayn and 'Abd al-Ḥamīd al-'Abbādī, Beirut 1982.

<sup>28</sup> See a reference to this book in *al-fihrist* of Ibn al-Nadīm, edited by Yūsuf 'Alī al-Tawīl, *Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya*, Beirut 1996, p. 294.

<sup>29</sup> al-Jāhiz "*kitāb al-Ḥayawān*" vol.3, p. 76. Edited by 'Abd al-Salām Hārūn, second edition, Beirut 1968.

Jāḥiẓ's views about *mājaz* and *isti'āra* which were influenced by the *Mu'tazilites*<sup>30</sup> views regarding anthropomorphism in the *Qur'ān*.

Al-Jāḥiẓ uses various terms within the field of figurative language such as ،مثل تمثيل، مجاز، فرع، اشتقاق، استعارة. تشبيه. Their relationships with each other have not yet been established.<sup>31</sup>

He speaks about *isti'āra* in his book *Kitāb al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn* when he comments on a line of poetry:

وطفقت سحابة تغشاها      تبكي على عراصها عيناها

“And a cloud started warping it up (i.e., the deserted camp) – (a cloud) whose eyes wept over its (empty) lots.”

He comments: “its eyes here refer to the clouds, and he has made the rain a weeping on the part of the clouds by way of (استعارة) borrowing and of calling one thing by the name of another, if it stands in its place”.<sup>32</sup>

According to Heinrichs, the term *isti'āra* clearly refers to the replacement of rain by weeping, and in order to find the exact meaning of the term as understood by al-Jāḥiẓ, we would have two different indications : an example and a (quasi-) definition. The example points to a metaphor based on similarity (تشبيه) but the (quasi-) definition, by way of (استعارة) borrowing and of calling one thing by the name of another if it stands in its place (إذا قام مقامه), “expresses the pre-condition of the *isti'āra* and, significantly, does not set up similarity as the necessary condition”.<sup>33</sup> Heinrichs compares other cases qualified by al-Jāḥiẓ as *isti'āra* and finds they belong to what is called inexpressive metaphors<sup>34</sup> by later writers. Examples include:

1. *ya'sūb* – “king (we would say : queen) of the bees” = leader of a group of men or animals (*al-Hayawān*, vol. 3, p. 329)<sup>35</sup>

<sup>30</sup> For more details about al-Jāḥiẓ and *Mu'tazila*, see M. H. Echigurer, *al-Gaḥiẓ Et Sa Doctrine Mu'tazilite*, Rabat, 1986. For a summary of *al-Mu'tazila* see the article about them in *Encyl of Islam* 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.

<sup>31</sup> Heinrichs, Wolfhart, *The Hand of The Northwind: Opinions on Metaphor and the Early Meaning of Isti'āra in Arabic Poetics*. Wiesbaden, 1977, p. 30.

<sup>32</sup> al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn*, edited by 'Abd al-Salām Hārūn, Second edition 1960-1961, vol. 1, pp. 152- 153, translated by Heinrichs *ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

<sup>33</sup> Heinrichs, *The Hand of The Northwind*, p. 28.

<sup>34</sup> In the inexpressive metaphor, the equivalent terms from the spheres of different kinds of animals (including man) are substituted for each other, e.g., hoof standing for a human foot. Heinrichs *ibid.* p. 10, note 20. See also *Asrār al-Balāgha* of 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī, edited by Hellmut Ritter, Istanbul, 1956, ch 2/4 pp. 29-31.

<sup>35</sup> Heinrichs, *The Hand of The Northwind*, p.28.

2. *jarwa* whelp = self (al-Jāhiz says, “and among the borrowings استعارات from the name of dog .... ضربت جروتي meaning I disciplined my self).<sup>36</sup>

But there is one case which defies all his attempts to fit it into the general frame, which is the word صداي in the phrase إن يصبح صداي بقفرة from the verse of a poem by al- Nimr b. Tawlab:<sup>37</sup>

أعاذل إن يصبح صداي بقفرة

“O censurer if my bird becomes in a void [land]”.

Al-Jāhiz comments that “الصدى is a bird which emerges from the brain of the dead person. Thus it [the bird] complains to him, the weakness and incapability of his protector to seek his purpose. This is what the people in the time of Jāhiliyya used to say. [The phrase صداي] here is مستعار ( borrowed) and it signifies: if I become”.<sup>38</sup>

Heinrichs concludes by saying, “it seems, therefore, that al-Jāhiz has enlarged the range of application of the term *isti‘āra* beyond the narrow confines of the traditional "inexpressive" metaphor, and this may account for the fact that, only in this place, he gives a (quasi-) definition of the term *isti‘āra* and sets up a condition of a more general validity in the words *idhā qāma maqāmahu* (if it stands in its place)”.<sup>39</sup> Then he adds that the term *isti‘āra* with al-Jāhiz denotes – first and foremost – the inexpressive metaphor<sup>40</sup> (hoof – foot). Heinrichs' conclusion is based mainly on his analysis of al-Jāhiz's use of the term *isti‘āra*. If he were to consider other terms<sup>41</sup> used by al-Jāhiz to denote *isti‘āra* such as مثل , بدل , مجاز , and بديع the picture would be different.

<sup>36</sup> *al-Ḥayawān, op cit.*, vol. 2, p. 308.

<sup>37</sup> *al-Bayān op cit.*, vol. 1, p.284.

<sup>38</sup> al-Jāhiz, *al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn*, vol. 1, p. 284. edited by ‘Abd al-Salām Hārūn, Second edition 1960-1961. What is meant by the purpose in the above quotation is the retaliation for the slain when his blood has not been avenged (See Lane s.d.y).

<sup>39</sup> Heinrichs, *The Hand of The Northwind*, p.29.

<sup>40</sup> *ibid* p. 30.

<sup>41</sup> For al-Jāhiz's use of the terms مثل and بديع as *isti‘āra* see *al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn, op cit.*, vol. 4, p. 55.

Furthermore, Zaghlūl Sallām states that al-Jāhīz uses the term *majāz* for *isti'āra* and in some instances he uses the term *badal* for *isti'āra* as is the case in this verse<sup>42</sup> (this verse will be considered later)

“ قَالَ أَلْقِهَا يَا مُوسَى (19) فَأَلْقَاهَا فَإِذَا هِيَ حَيَّةٌ تَسْعَى ”

“Said He, ‘Cast it down Moses!’ and he cast it down, and behold it was a serpent sliding”. Q (20:20)

Similarly Shawqī Dayf states that al-Jāhīz considers *isti'āra* as *majāz* and comments on the verse of poetry mentioned earlier,

(وظفت سحابة تغشاها تبكي على عراصها عيناها).

He says that al-Jāhīz was responsible for considering this image as

*isti'āra* and it would have been better, had he considered it as a personification, since the poet in making the cloud cry does not compare or borrow but personalise<sup>43</sup>.

In his book *al-Hayawān* we find a sub-section entitled “On *Majāz* and *Tashbīh* in Food,” in which he says, “they might say that by way of تشبيه, مثل, اشتقاق. If you say that God (the Great and all-Mighty) said in the Book:

(الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ عٰهَدَ اِلَيْنَا اَلَّا نُوْمِنَ لِرَسُوْلٍ حَتّٰى يَأْتِيَنَا بِقُرْبٰنٍ تَاْكُلُهٗ النَّارُ

قُلْ قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ رُسُلٌ مِّن قَبْلِي بِالْبَيِّنٰتِ وَبِالَّذِي قُلْتُمْ فَلِمَ قَتَلْتُمُوهُمْ اِنْ كُنْتُمْ صٰدِقِيْنَ)

“Those same men said, ‘God has made covenant with us, that we believe not any Messenger until he brings to us a sacrifice devoured by fire’. Say: ‘Messengers have come to you before me bearing clear signs, and that you spoke of; why therefore did you slay them, if you speak truly’. Q (3:183)

We know that God (the Great and al-Mighty) spoke to them in their language, where he quotes various verses from the *Qur'ān* and poetry and comments on them. For the verses:

(اِنَّ الَّذِيْنَ يٰكُفُّوْنَ اَمْوَالَ الْيَتٰمٰى ظُلْمًا يٰكُفُّوْنَ فِيْ بُطُوْنِهِمْ نَارًا وَّسَيَصْلَوْنَ سَعِيْرًا)

<sup>42</sup>Zaghlūl Sallām, M., *Athar al-Qur'ān fī Taṭawwur al-Naqd al-'Arabī ilā Nihāyat al-Qarn al-Rābi' al-Hijrī*, second edition, *Dār al-Ma'ārif* of Egypt, p. 86.

<sup>43</sup>Dayf, Shawqī. *Al-Balāgha Taṭawwur wa Tārīkh. Dār al-Ma'ārif* of Egypt. 1965, pp. 54-55.

“Those who devour the property of orphans unjustly, devour Fire in their bellies, and shall assuredly roast in a Blaze”. Q (4:10)

(سَمَاعُونَ لِلْكَذِبِ أَكَالُونَ لِلْسُّحْتِ)

“Those...who listen to falsehood, and consume the unlawful”. Q (5: 42)

He comments on them saying, “This can be said about them even if they drink wine, wear clothes, and mount riding animals with this money and do not spend one dirham on food. And God (the Great and al-Mighty) says, *وَأَنَّمَا يَأْكُلُونَ فِي بُطُونِهِمْ نَارًا*, (devour Fire in their bellies) and this is another *majāz*”.<sup>44</sup> Al-Jāhiz also said under the heading *مجاز* "الذوق" (*majāz* of taste),<sup>45</sup> “it is the saying of the man when he punishes his slave severely: taste and how did you find the taste.” And God explains, (ذُقْ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَزِيزُ الْكَرِيمُ) “Taste Surely thou art the mighty, the noble”. Q (44:49)

He also says that some atheists, and those who have no knowledge about the ways [of expressions] of the language and vagueness of the Arabs in [the use of] their language, attacked the verse of bees. Al-Jāhiz after refuting and mocking those who believe that there are some prophets among the bees, said “An opinion on *Majāz*, about His saying (the Great and al-Mighty):

(وَأَوْحَىٰ رَبُّكَ إِلَى النَّحْلِ أَنِ اتَّخِذِي مِنَ الْجِبَالِ بُيُوتًا وَمِنَ الشَّجَرِ وَمِمَّا يَعْرِشُونَ ثُمَّ كُلِي مِن كُلِّ الثَّمَرَاتِ فَاسْلُكِي سُبُلَ رَبِّكِ ذُلًّا يَخْرُجُ مِنْ بُطُونِهَا شَرَابٌ مُّخْتَلِفٌ أَلْوَانُهُ فِيهِ شِفَاءٌ لِلنَّاسِ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَةً لِّقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ).

And thy Lord revealed unto the bees, saying; ‘Take unto yourselves, of the mountains, houses, and of the trees, and of what they are building. Then eat of all manner of fruit, and follow the ways of your Lord easy to go upon’. Then comes there forth out of their bellies a drink of diverse hues wherein is healing for men. Surely in that is a sign for a people who reflect. Q (16: 68-69)

Honey is not a beverage, it is something which can be transferred by water into a drink or *nabīdh* (kind of beverage); so [God] called it [the honey] شراب beverage since beverage is derived from it.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>44</sup> *Al-Hayawān*, vol. 5, p. 25.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid* p. 28.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 425-426.



He also refutes those who object to the use of the word for walking المشي metaphorically by saying that walking can only be performed with legs. He says, you could also say that Q (20: 19-20)

“ قَالَ أَلْقِهَا يَا مُوسَى (19) فَأَلْقَاهَا فَإِذَا هِيَ حَيَّةٌ تَسْعَى ”

is wrong because السعي means walking quickly and vigorously . He adds that poets used this word المشي [and its derivatives] in a non-literal sense.....The word can be used by way “of التشبيه و البدل .....and God al-Mighty says in the Qur’ān:

(هَذَا نُزُلُهُمْ يَوْمَ الدِّينِ)

“This shall be their hospitality on the Day of Doom”. Q (56:56)

Chastisement cannot be نُزْلٌ (food prepared for the guest), but God made His words follow the same rules that the Arabs use in their speech.<sup>47</sup>

From the above mentioned examples, it can be concluded that al-Jāhiz believes that sometimes the apparent meaning of a vocable is something and its intended meaning is something else, and in this way he considers the phenomenon of *majāz*. In his opinion *majāz* is not considered to be a sort of lying because there is a frame of reference from which the hearer understands the intended meaning of the speaker. The *Qur’ān* was revealed in the Arabic language, thus the *Qur’ān* uses the styles of the Arabs in their language in order to influence them; therefore there is *majāz* in the *Qur’ān*.

On the distinction between حقيقة (proper sense) and مجاز (figurative sense) as opposites, we find few examples in his *Rasā’il* . In the ninth epistle entitled “An Epistle About The Distinction Between Enmity And Envy”, al-Jāhiz spoke about fake scholars who envy the true scholars saying, “they call themselves with the names of knowledge by way of مجاز which has no حقيقة (proper sense).<sup>48</sup> In another instance in his epistle entitled “The Createdness Of The *Qur’ān*” خلق القرآن al-Jāhiz mentions the opinion of those who believe that the *Qur’ān* is created. He says, “everyone who claimed that the acts of nature is created by way of مجاز with no حقيقة (real sense).<sup>49</sup>

<sup>47</sup> *al-Hayawān*, vol. 4, p. 273.

<sup>48</sup> *al-Risāla al-Tāsi’a : faṣl mā bayna al-’adāwati wa al-ḥasad*, *Rasā’il al-Jāhiz*, edited by ‘Abd al-Salām Hārūn, Maktabat al-Khānjī, Cairo, 1964, vol. 1, p. 239.

<sup>49</sup> *Khalq al-Qur’ān*, *Rasā’il al-Jāhiz*, edited by ‘Abd al-Salām Hārūn, Maktabat al-Khānjī, Cairo, 1979, vol. 3, p. 288.

We find also in his epistle “*al-Radd ‘Alā al-Mushabbihā*” that he uses *majāz*, *tashbīh*, *ishtiqaq* and *far‘* (branch) in contrast to *aṣl* (original) and the apparent meaning.<sup>50</sup>

From the above examples, there is no doubt that al-Jāhiz makes a contrast between *ḥaqīqa* (proper sense) and *majāz* (figurative sense). On the other hand, al-Jāhiz uses the word *majāz* in a similar way to Abū ‘Ubayda’s usage of the word, when he refutes those who object about the *prima facie* meaning of this verse :

(مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يُقْرِضُ اللَّهَ قَرْضًا حَسَنًا فَيُضَاعِفَهُ لَهُ أَضْعَافًا كَثِيرَةً وَاللَّهُ يَقْبِضُ وَيَبْسُطُ وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ)

“Who is he that will lend God a good loan and He will multiply it for him manifold? God grasps, and outspreads; and unto Him you shall be returned”.  
Q (2: 245)

Al-Jāhiz says, “the *majāz* of this verse in language is obvious and its interpretation is clear...”.<sup>51</sup>

Al-Jāhiz’s contribution to the study of *majāz* and *isti‘āra* cannot be underestimated. His usage of the terms *ḥaqīqa* and *majāz* reflects a clear understanding and awareness of each of these terms. His importance lies in his collection of various examples from poetry and the *Qur’ān* and connecting them with the terms *ḥaqīqa*, *majāz*, and *isti‘āra*, thus paving the way for others to build on the foundation he helped to establish.

### 1.3 Tha‘lab (d. 291AH/904CE)<sup>52</sup>

In his book *Qawā‘id al-Shi‘r*, which is the first systematic book on poetics, Tha‘lab gives this definition of *isti‘āra*: <sup>53</sup> “أن يستعير لشيء اسم غيره أو معنى سواه” “to borrow for

<sup>50</sup> *al-radd ‘alā al-Mushabbihā*, edited by ‘Abd al-Salām Hārūn, Maktabat al-Khānjī, Cairo, 1979, vol. 4, p. 15. See also a section entitled “*fī al-radd ‘alā al-Nazzām*” in his epistle “*al-masā’il wa al-Jawābāt fī al-Ma‘rifā*”, *ibid.*, p. 58, where he contrasted *al-majāz* with *al-ḥaqīqa* “المجاز مستطيعا” [and man] cannot, in addition to what has been mentioned, choose his action and being able [to perform it] in a proper sense not in a figurative one”.

<sup>51</sup> *Al-Radd ‘Alā al-Naṣārā*, *op cit.*, vol. 3, p. 344.

<sup>52</sup> Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā called Tha‘lab, born in Baghdād. He was the leading representative of the Kūfan school of grammar. His listed works give the impression of a scholar more interested in the meanings of words than in the grammatical system of the language. Tha‘lab died accidentally in 291AH/904CE. *Encyl. Of Arabic Literature*, *op cit.*

<sup>53</sup> Tha‘lab, *Qawā‘id al-shi‘r*, ed. by Ramadan ‘Abd al-Tawwāb, Cairo, 1966, p. 57.

something the name of something else or (to attribute to it) a characteristic that is not its own".<sup>54</sup> So he comments on the verse 45 of Imru' al-Qays's *Mu'allaqat*:

فقلت له لما تمطى بصلبه وأردف أعجازا وناء بكلل

"And I said to it (the night) when it stretched out its back

and followed up with (its) hindquarters and struggled to get up with (its breast<sup>55</sup>)."

He says that Imru' al-Qays borrowed the description of the camel in describing the night.<sup>56</sup>

The collection of examples used by Tha'lab represents what is called later *isti'āra bi al-kināya* or *isti'āra makniyya*. He also uses the term *isti'āra* to refer to what is called later تشبيه بليغ (eloquent simile).<sup>57</sup> Tha'lab does not add much to the study of *isti'āra* and his definition resembles that of al-Jāhiz.<sup>58</sup> Now we will move to the student of Tha'lab, Ibn al-Mu'tazz.

#### 1.4 Ibn al-Mu'tazz (d.296AH/908CE)<sup>59</sup>

In his book *al-Badī'*, Ibn al-Mu'tazz gives a definition<sup>60</sup> of *isti'āra* after stating two examples of *badī'*:

"من الكلام البديع قول الله تعالى ( وإنه في أم الكتاب لدينا لعلي حكيم )  
ومن الشعر قوله ( من البسيط ) .... والصبح بالكوكب الذي منحور  
وإنما هو استعارة الكلمة لشيء لم يعرف بها من شيء قد عرف بها مثل أم الكتاب و مثل جناح الذل.."

<sup>54</sup> Bonebakker, S. A. , article about *isti'āra* in EI 2.

<sup>55</sup> This translation is done by Heinrichs op cit., pp.3-4.

<sup>56</sup> Tha'lab, p. 57.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* 60.

<sup>58</sup> See Ḥusayn, 'Abd al-Qādir, *op cit.*, p. 226.

<sup>59</sup> Abū al-'Abbās 'Abd Allāh b. al-Mu'tazz, the Caliph of one day, was a poet and critic, son of the thirteenth 'Abbasid Caliph al-Mu'tazz (r. 247-55/861-9). He was born in Samarra and received his education from the philologists al-Mubarrad and Tha'lab. After the death of al-Muktafi (296AH/908CE) Ibn al-Mu'tazz was fatally drawn into the struggles for his succession. One of the contending factions proclaims him Caliph, and he was assassinated the same day by the supporters of al-Muqtadir (295-320AH/908-32CE). *Encyl. Of Arabic Literature, op cit.*

<sup>60</sup> Ibn al-Mu'tazz. *Kitāb al-Badī'*, edited by E. I. Kartchkovsky, Messrs, Luac and co, London 1935 p. 2 (Arabic text).

“Among the *badī‘* discourse are the saying of God the Most High: “And behold it is in the Essence of the Book [the mother of the book (*umm al-kitāb*)], with Us; sublime indeed, wise”. Q (43:4)

Ibn al-Mu‘tazz explains that

“it is in the mother of the book for us the most high and wise”, and in this verse of poetry ... And the dawn is slaughtered with the shining star. *Badī‘* here consists in borrowing a word for a thing, in which it is not known, from a thing with which that word is known such as the mother of the book and wing of humility”.

This definition is so general and covers most types of *majāz* whether there is similarity between the two words or not. Again, the majority of examples used by Ibn al-Mu‘tazz in his chapter about *isti‘āra*, like his teacher, represents what later writers call *isti‘āra bi al-Kināya*.<sup>61</sup>

### 1.5 Qudāma b. Ja‘far (d. 337AH/948CE; other dates are also given)<sup>62</sup>

In his book *Naqd al-Shi‘r*, Qudāma gives examples of the metaphor under *tamthīl* (analogy) and *isti‘āra* without indicating the relationship between them. Qudāma after talking about *فالحش الاستعارة* (ugly borrowing) he states that “many of the great poets have used cases of borrowing in which there is no such ugliness and for which they

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<sup>61</sup> *Kitāb al-Badī‘* *ibid.* pp. 2 – 24. For more information about the importance of *Kitāb al-Badī‘* in *Balāgha*, see Shawqī Dayf, *ibid.*, pp. 67- 75, and Bonebakker: Ibn al-Mu‘tazz and *Kitāb al-Baī‘*, pp. 388-410, in *Abbasid Belles Letters*, ed. by Julia Ashtiani and T. M. Johnstone, Cambridge University Press, 1990. For the relationship between *Badī‘* and *isti‘āra* see: Wolfhart Heirichs, *Isti'arah and Badī' and their Termonological Relationship in Early Arabic Literary Criticism*, "Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Arabisch-Islamischen Wissenschaften", Vol. 1 (1984), pp. 180-211.

<sup>62</sup> Qudāma b. Ja‘far: Abū al-Faraj Qudāma b. Ja‘far al-Kātib al-Baghdādī was a scribe with philosophical interests, a philologist and a literary theorist. *Encycl. Of Arabic Literature*, *op cit.*

could be excused, since basically, these [cases] functioned like *tashbīh*. To this belongs the verse of Imru' al-Qays:<sup>63</sup>

فقلت له لما تمطى بصلبه وأردف أعجازا وناء بكلل

“And I said to it (the night) when it stretched out its back

and followed up with (its) hindquarters and struggled to get up with (its breast).”

According to Bonebbaker, Qudāma considers the accepted *isti'āra* as essentially a simile.<sup>64</sup> On the other hand, Hinerichs disagrees and states that *tashbīh* in this context does not have the narrow sense of a simile but rather the broader one of comparison including analogy.<sup>65</sup> He rightly observes the significance of Qudāma's contribution to the study of *isti'āra* by stating that Qudāma “is the first to introduce the word *tashbīh* into the discussion of *isti'āra*. But this does not mean that he defines *tashbīh* and *isti'āra* in terms of their mutual relationship”.<sup>66</sup>

#### **1.6 Ishāq b. Wahb al-Kātib (fl. Mid-fourth/tenth century)**<sup>67</sup>

In a chapter entitled “*al-Isti'āra*” in his book *al-Burhān fī Wujūh al-Bayān*, Ibn Wahb states that “as for *isti'āra*, it is needed in the speech of the Arabs because their words are far more than their meanings. This does not apply to any other language. The Arabs express a single meaning with different expressions which might be exclusive to [this single meaning] or in common with other [meaning]. They could use (in another

<sup>63</sup> Qudām b. Ja'far. *Naqd al-Shi'r*, edited by Kamāl Muṣṭafā, *Maktabat al-Khānjī*, Egypt 1963. p.202. Heinrichs, *The Hand of the North Wind*, op cit., p. 35.

<sup>64</sup> Qudāma b. Ja'far. *Naqd al-shi'r*, op cit., pp. 90 -2. Quoted by Bonenakker, *isti'āra* op cit.

<sup>65</sup> Heinrichs, *The Hand of The North Wind*, p.35.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p.36.

<sup>67</sup> Ishāq b. Wahb al-Kātib: Abū al-Ḥusayn Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm b. Sulaymān b. Wahb al-Kātib was the author of a work on rhetoric, who lived in Baghdād. He was a member of the famous Wahb family of secretaries, but of his life almost nothing is known. His *al-Burhān fī wujūh al-Bayān (The Proof; on the ways of Exposition)*, written after 335AH/946CE, is intended primarily for the *kātib* or secretary, although it also touches on matter of poetry. It offers some interesting thoughts on genre classification, both in prose and in poetry. *Encyl. Of Arabic Literature*, op cit.

manuscript it is (استعملوا instead of استعاروا) some of the [words] in the place of others by way of توسع (semantic expansion) and مجاز".<sup>68</sup> Then he quotes the *Qur'ān*:

وَإِذَا قَرَأْتَ الْقُرْآنَ جَعَلْنَا بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَ الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْآخِرَةِ حِجَاباً مَسْتُوراً (45) وَجَعَلْنَا عَلَى قُلُوبِهِمْ أَكِنَّةً أَنْ يَفْقَهُوهُ وَفِي آذَانِهِمْ وَقْراً وَإِذَا ذُكِّرْتِ رَبِّكَ فِي الْقُرْآنِ وَحْدَهُ وَلَوْ أَنَّ عَلَى أَهْلِ الْبَرِّ نَفُوراً

“When thou recitest the Koran, We place between thee, and those who do not believe in the world to come, a curtain obstructing, and We lay veils upon their hearts lest they understand it, and in their ears heaviness. And when thou mentionest thy Lord only in the Koran, they turn in their traces in aversion”. Q (17: 45-46)

Ibn Wahb comments that

“when the *Qur'ān* used to be recited they used to cover their hearts from understanding it and to block their ears from appreciating it; thus it is allowed to say by way of مجاز and استعارة that the one who recited [the *Qur'ān*] to them made them like that”.<sup>69</sup>

What can be concluded from the above quotation is that Ishāq b. Wahb does not distinguish between *majāz* and *isti'āra* and uses them synonymously, whether the cases are based on comparison or not.

### 1.7 Al-Āmidī (d.371AH/987CE)<sup>70</sup>

In a chapter in his book *al-Muwāzana*, al-Āmidī denounces the ugliness of Abū Tammām's *isti'āra*. Al-Āmidī gives the following definition of *ista'āra*,

the [ancient] Arabs borrowed an idea [from its usual context in order to give it] to something where it does not belong only on condition that it is near to it or

<sup>68</sup> Abū al-Ḥusayn Ishāq b. Wahb al-Kātib. *Al-Burhān fī wujūh al-Bayān*. Edited by: Aḥmad Maṭlūb and Khadīja al-Hudaythī. *Maṭba'at al-ānī*, Baghdad 1967, p. 142. In the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century this book was wrongly attributed to Qudāma b. Ja'far under the title *Naqd al-Nathr*, then the discovery of a new manuscript in Dublin rectified this mistake. See the introduction of this edition.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 142 -143.

<sup>70</sup> Al-Āmidī: Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥasan b. Bishr al-Āmidī, a literary critic from Basra. He worked in Basra and Baghdad as a *kātib*. Yāqūt mentions in his biography thirteen titles by him, mostly on poets and poetry, as well as a collection of poetry. *Encycl. Of Arabic Literature, op cit.*

corresponds to it or resembles it in some respects or is one of its causes, so that the borrowed word then becomes suitable for the thing it has been borrowed for and agreeing with its idea.<sup>71</sup>

This definition of *isti'āra* actually covers most aspects of metaphorical language whether there is a similarity or not.<sup>72</sup>

### 1.8 Al-Rummānī (d.384AH/994CE)<sup>73</sup>

In his book *al-Nukat fi I'jāz al-Qur'ān*; al-Rummānī divides *balāgha* into ten categories, among them *isti'āra*. In his chapter on *isti'āra* he gives the following definition:<sup>74</sup>

“*al-isti'āra* is the use of an expression for something which it has not originally been set up for in the language by way of transference for the purpose of elucidation. And the difference between *isti'āra* and *tashbīh* is that an expression, in a *tashbīh* with the particle of comparison in the discourse, is used in its original meaning and the usage does not change its meaning. And this is not the case for *isti'āra* because the condition of *isti'āra* requires the use of an expression in a sense which does not belong to it originally.”<sup>75</sup>

Furthermore, he states that

“every eloquent *isti'āra* consists of combining two things by means of a common idea to both in such a way that an elucidation of one of them is

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<sup>71</sup> Al-Āmidī. *Al-Muwāzana bayna shi'r Abī Tammām wa al-Buḥturī*. Edited by Aḥmad Ṣaqr. *Dār al-Ma'ārif*, Egypt. Vol. 1 p. 250. The definition is translated by Heinrichs, *ibid.* p.38.

<sup>72</sup> See also Shawqī Dayf. *Ibid.* pp. 128-132 and also Heinrichs, *The Hand of the North Wind, op cit.*, pp. 38-40.

<sup>73</sup> Al-Rummānī: Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī b. 'Isā was a Mu'tazilī grammarian, rhetorician and theologian from Baghdad. (Ibn al-Nadīm's *Fihrist* gives 296AH/909CE as his year of birth). Ibn Durayd was among his teachers. According to some of his contemporaries, he incorporated too much logic in his grammatical speculations. *Encycl. Of Arabic Literature, op cit.*

<sup>74</sup> Al-Rummānī: *al-Nukat fi I'jāz al-Qur'ān* in *Thalāth rasā'il fi I'jāz al-Qur'ān*, edited by Muḥammad Khalaf Allāh and Muḥammad Zaghlūl Sallām, *Dār al-Ma'ārif*, Egypt 1991, pp. 85 – 86.

achieved by the other one like *al-tashbīh*, but this combination is achieved by *naql* (transference) [in *isti'āra*] and by the particle of comparison in the case of *tashbīh*.... and every good *isti'āra* entails elucidation of which a *ḥaqīqa* cannot replace it...And each *isti'āra* must have a *ḥaqīqa*.<sup>76</sup>

Then he analyses 44 examples from the *Qur'ān* to show the eloquence of *isti'āra* in them by indicating the proper and metaphorical meanings, the common idea between them (the proper and the metaphorical), the reason behind using *isti'āra*, and the psychological effect of *isti'āra*.<sup>77</sup> For example the verse of the *Qur'ān* :

(قَالَ رَبِّ إِنِّي وَهَنَ الْعَظْمُ مِنِّي وَاشْتَعَلَ الرَّأْسُ شَيْبًا وَلَمْ أَكُنْ بِدُعَائِكَ رَبِّ شَقِيًّا)

“[He said] ‘O my Lord, behold the bones within me are feeble and my head is all aflame with hoariness. And in calling on Thee my Lord, I have never been hitherto unprosperous”. Q (19:4)

Originally inflaming denotes fire. However using inflaming (metaphorically) in this verse is more eloquent and it signifies the plentifulness of hoariness. Since this plentifulness increases rapidly it becomes like fire in its spreading and inflaming. Attributing inflaming to hoariness is wondrous eloquence because hoariness is spread on the head in a way which cannot be stopped like the inflaming of fire.<sup>78</sup>

We find here for the first time *isti'āra* is explained by using the concept of *naql* (transference) and in terms of its relationship with the *tashbīh* (simile). Al-Rummānī was also the first one to show the psychological effect of *isti'āra* and to point out the reasons for using it. However, he considers a *tashbīh*, whereas the particle of comparison is omitted, as *isti'āra*.<sup>79</sup> He also did not distinguish between *majāz* and

<sup>75</sup> al-Rummānī here expands the range of *isti'āra* by using *ibāra* (expression) instead of using *shay'* (a thing) or *kalima* (vocabulary).

<sup>76</sup> Al-Rummānī, p. 86.

<sup>77</sup> *ibid.* pp.86–94.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>79</sup> Later writers on this subject called this kind of simile *tashbīh balīgh* (eloquent simile).



*isti'āra* as he used the term *isti'āra* for all the figurative texts whether there is a similarity or not.<sup>80</sup>

### 1.9 Al-Qāḍī al-Jurjānī ( 392 AH/1002CE)<sup>81</sup>

In a chapter about *al-Badī'* in his book *al-Wasāṭa bayna al-Mutanabbī wa khuṣūmih*, al-Qāḍī al-Jurjānī states that many people do not distinguish between *isti'āra*, *tashbīh* and *mathal*

I came to know someone among the men of letters who mentioned some kinds of *isti'āra* including the verse of Abū Nuwās

والحب ظهر أنت راكبه      فإذا صرفت عنانه انصرفا

“And love is a mount and you are its rider

*Thus whenever you steer its bridle, it will obey you”*

I do not see this ... as *isti'āra*, rather the meaning of this verse is that love is like a back ... it is either striking a similitude or comparing something with something else.<sup>82</sup>

Then he gives this definition for *isti'āra*

“the borrowing exists only where one has contented oneself with the borrowed name in place of the real word and where the expression has been transferred and put in the place of another (expression); its basic function is that it brings

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<sup>80</sup> See also Shawqī Ḍayf, *op cit.*, pp. 103–107, and Zaghlūl Sallām, *op cit.*, pp. 234 - 255.

<sup>81</sup> Al-Qāḍī al-Jurjānī: Poet and critic. Born in Jurjān, he moved, when still a child, to Nishapur in 337AH/948CE with his brother. He was an esteemed poet and is extensively quoted in anthologies such as *Yatīmat al-Dahr* by al-Tha'ālibī and biographical works like *Mu'jam al-Udabā'* by Yāqūt. He is said to have written a commentary on the *Qur'ān* and a compendium of history both lost. He wrote an important and original monograph on the great but controversial poet al-Mutanabbī, *al-Wasāṭa bayna al-Mutanabbī wa Khuṣūmih (the Mediation between Encyl. Of Arabic Literature, op cit. tween al-Mutanabbī and his Opponents)*. Al-Qāḍī Jurjānī became chief qāḍī in Rayy, where he died. See also Shawqī Ḍayf, *op cit.*, pp. 132- 139.

<sup>82</sup> Al-Qāḍī al-Jurjānī, Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī b. 'Abd al- 'Azīz : *al-Wasāṭa bayn al-Mutanabbī wa khuṣūmih* (edited by Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm and Aḥī Muḥammad Al-Bijāwī. Cairo 1966, p. 41.

home the similarity and the relationship of the receptor with the donor of the borrowing and that the (new) word is melted into the (underlying) idea, so that there is no repulsion between the two and in none of them an apparent aversion from the other”.<sup>83</sup>

This definition is clearer than the previous definitions. It indicates the relationship between the components of the *isti‘āra* which is similarity, and distinguishes between *isti‘āra* and *tashbīh*. It is also clear here that al-Qāḍī al-Jurjānī uses the word *isti‘āra* to cover all aspects of *majāz*, whether the relationship of the *majāz* is based on similarity or not.

### 1.10 Ibn Jinnī (d. 392AH/1002CE)<sup>84</sup>

According to Ibn Jinnī in this book *al-Khaṣā’iṣ*:

“*al-ḥaqīqa* (veridical) is a what has been established to use in its original positing in language and *majāz* is the opposite of this. ..the *majāz* is used instead of *ḥaqīqa* for three reasons: [semantic] expansion, emphasis and comparison (Ibn Jinnī is clearly influenced by al-Rummānī in this last issue of the function of *majāz*). If none of these reasons exist then it is the pure *ḥaqīqa*”.<sup>85</sup>

Moreover, there should be a *qarīna* (frame of reference) to indicate that a particular word is not used in its veridical sense.<sup>86</sup> Ibn Jinnī also considers (like his teacher<sup>87</sup> Abū ‘Alī al-Fārisī) that most of the language is *majāz*.<sup>88</sup> Then Ibn Jinnī gives as an example the saying of the Prophet Muḥammad about the horse “it is a sea”. The three reasons exist in this example: 1. expansion (because he added a new name for the names of the

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41, translated by Heinrichs, *The Hand of the North Wind*, pp. 42 – 43.

<sup>84</sup> Ibn Jinnī: Abū al-Faṭḥ ‘Uthmān b. Jinnī was the son of a Greek slave; born in Mūsīl, he attached himself for forty year to his teacher Abū ‘Alī al-Fārisī and succeeded him on his death in 377AH/987CE as the leading grammarian of Baṣra. He later travelled to Aleppo where he became a good friend of al-Mutanabbī, on whose poetry he wrote two commentaries which provoked a considerable number of critical refutations and responses. *Encyl. Of Arabic Literature*, *op cit*.

<sup>85</sup> Ibn Jinnī, Uthmān Ibn ‘Abd Allāh . *Al-Khaṣā’iṣ*. Edited by Muḥammad ‘Alī al-Najjār, *Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya* 1955. vol. 2. p. 442.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 442.

<sup>87</sup> ‘Abd al-Qādir Ḥusayn, pp. 317-319.

horse 2. comparison (the platitude of running water of the sea can be compared with the vehement running of the horse) 3. emphasis (because he compared accident with substance).<sup>89</sup>

He also considers the following verse as *majāz*:

(وَأَدْخَلْنَاهُ فِي رَحْمَتِنَا إِنَّهُ مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ)

“And We admitted him into Our mercy; he was of the righteous”. Q (21:75)

This is because all the three reasons are valid here; expansion (because He added a new name to the names of directions and spaces), comparison (because He compares mercy with something that can be entered in) and emphasis (because He describes the accident in terms of substance).<sup>90</sup>

From the above we can infer that Ibn Jinnī does not distinguish between *majāz* and *isti‘āra* and his definition of *majāz* resembles the definition of *isti‘āra* by earlier writers (*majāz* based on comparison). He also considers eloquent simile تشبيه بليغ and what is later called المجاز المرسل (in the above verse) as *majāz* based on comparison. Moreover, he does not consider as *majāz* the following verse:

(قَالَ أَحَدُهُمَا إِنِّي أَرَانِي أَعْصِرُ خَمْرًا)

“Said one of them, ‘I dreamed that I was pressing wine’. Q (12:36)

Ibn Jinnī does not consider this example as *majāz* because it is not based on comparison; instead he considers it as an example of the use of the *musabbab* (the thing occasioned by a cause) خمر (wine) instead of the cause<sup>91</sup> عنب (grapes). In fact there is no casual relationship between wine and grapes; rather the *majāz* here refers to what will become of the grape when squeezed. This shows that the idea behind this type of *majāz* is not clear in his mind and one has to wait for ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī to clarify it.

Ibn Jinnī, like his teacher Abū ‘Alī al-Fārisī, believes that most of the language is *majāz* not *ḥaqīqa*, including the verbs such as ‘Amru sat down, and the summer

<sup>88</sup> Ibn Jinni, p. 447.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.442 -433.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.* p. 443.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 3, 1956, p. 173.

came.<sup>92</sup> Ibn Jinnī's views on *majāz* influenced Ibn al-Athīr (in his early book about *balāgha*) as we will see in subsequent chapters.

### **1.11 Ibn Fāris (d. 395AH/1004CE)<sup>93</sup>**

In his book *al-Ṣāhibī fī Fiqh al-Lughā wa sunan al-‘Arab fī Kalāmihā*, Ibn Fāris devotes a chapter on the customs of the Arabs in the veridical usage of the words and *majāz*. *Ḥaqīqa* is for him the discourse used in its original positing which is not *isti‘āra*, neither *tamthīl* (analogy) nor *taqdīm wa ta’khīr* (hysteron proteron). On the other hand, *majāz* is anything that goes beyond *ḥaqīqa* such as *tashbīh*, *isti‘āra* and *kaff* (suppression of a nominal predicate).<sup>94</sup> In another chapter on *isti‘āra* in which he considers it among the customs of the Arabs in their language, he defines it by saying "among the customs of the Arabs [in their language] is *isti‘āra* which is when they (the Arabs) posit a word for something by borrowing it from another place"<sup>95</sup>. He then enumerates examples from the *Qur’ān* and poetry including cases of *kināya* and *tashbīh* among them.<sup>96</sup> It can be observed that Ibn Fāris has not advanced the study of *majāz* in Arabic, and his choice of examples for *isti‘āra*, *tashbīh* and *kināya* reflects an ambiguity on his part regarding the concept of *isti‘āra*. Furthermore, he does not distinguish between *isti‘āra* and *majāz*.

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.* vol. 2 pp. 447- 457. See also ‘Abd al-Qādir Ḥusayn *ibid.* pp. 317 – 320.

<sup>93</sup> Ibn Fāris al-Lughawī: Abū al-Ḥusayn Aḥmad b. Fāris b. Zakariyyā al-Lughawī was probably born in Qazwīn; he studied there and in Hamadhān and Baghdad. Called to l-Rayy by the Būyid Fakh al-Dawla as his son’s tutor, he there became friendly with the vizier al-Ṣāhib b. ‘Abbād. His considerable output covers most areas lexicography and grammar, see Ibn Fāris in *Encyl. Of Arabic Literature*.

<sup>94</sup> Ibn Fāris al-Qazwīnī. *Al-Ṣāhibī fī Fiqh al-Lughā wa Sunan al-‘Arab fī Kalāmihā*. Edited by Muṣṭafā al-Chouemi. Beirut, *al-Risāla*, 1963. pp. 196-198.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p.214.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 204- 205.

### 1.12 Abū Hilāl al-‘Askarī (d. after 395AH/1005CE)<sup>97</sup>

In the introduction to his book *Kitāb al-Ṣinā‘atayn*, al-‘Askarī states that one of the objectives of writing his book is to enable people to understand and appreciate the arguments surrounding the inimitability of the *Qur’ān*.<sup>98</sup> He discusses *majāz* and *isti‘āra* under his chapter on *Badī‘*; *isti‘āra* according to al-‘Askarī is

“the transference of an expression from the place where it is originally used in the language to another place for a definite purpose. This purpose can be:

1. to express an idea more explicitly and to show the excellence of elucidating it;
2. to express the idea (literally meaning) more emphatically or hyperbolically;
3. to present a thought more concisely;
4. to present a concept in an artistic manner.”<sup>99</sup>

He also states that

“each *isti‘āra* and *majāz* must have *ḥaqīqa* which is the original indication of the meaning in language.... And there must be a common meaning between the donor and the recipient of the borrowed word...and this applies to all *isti‘ārāt* and *majāzāt*.”<sup>100</sup>

Al-‘Askarī was influenced by Ibn al-Mu‘tazz in his treatment of *isti‘āra* as part of *badī‘*, and in his definition of *isti‘āra* we can clearly see the influence of al-Rummānī, especially with regard to the idea of transference (*al-naql*) and *al-ibāna*. But unlike al-Rummānī who indicates the difference between *isti‘āra* and *tashbīh* and their mutual

<sup>97</sup> Abū Hilāl al-‘Askarī : Abū Hilāl al-Ḥasan b. ‘Abd Allāh al-‘Askarī, philologist, poet and literary critic. Born in the early decades of the fourth century AH/tenthCE in ‘Askar Mukram, Ahwāz province, and of Persian, or even royal Sasanian, descent (as he proudly declares in his own poetry), he seems to have earned his livelihood mostly as a cloth-merchant. His main teacher was Abū Aḥmad al-‘Askarī (d.382/992), a religious scholar and philologist. Abū Hilāl’s strength was assiduous and circumspect compilation. He commanded a large amount of transmitted materials, he was not devoid of novel ideas and he had a firm poetic taste. *Encycl. Of Arabic Literature, op cit.*

For studies of *Kitāb al-Ṣinā‘atayn* see Sallām *op cit.*, pp. 312- 331, Ṭabāna, pp 154-167 and Dayf, 140- 146.

<sup>98</sup> ‘Askarī, Abū Hilāl: *Kitāb al-Ṣinā‘atayn*. Ed. ‘A. M. al-Bijāwī and M. Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm. *Al-Babī al-Ḥalībī*. Cairo 1971. pp. 1-3.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.* p.274. This translation is a slightly modified version of the translation George J. Kanazi in his book "Studies in the *Kitāb al-Ṣinā‘atayn* of Abū Hilāl al-‘Askarī. Brill. 1989. p. 149.

<sup>100</sup> ‘Askarī, pp. 276-277.

relationship, al-‘Askarī does not refer to this issue. He excludes *tashbīh* from the *badī‘* chapter in *al-Ṣinā‘atayn*.<sup>101</sup> He also considers a case of *kināya* in the *Qur’ānic* verse (68:42) as *isti‘āra*:<sup>102</sup>

(يَوْمَ يُكْشَفُ عَنْ سَاقٍ وَيُدْعَوْنَ إِلَى السُّجُودِ فَلَا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ)

“Upon the day when the leg shall be bared, and they shall be called to bow themselves, but they cannot”. Q (68:42)

Furthermore, al-‘Askarī does not define the term *majāz* as he does not distinguish between it and *isti‘āra*.

Regarding the purpose of *isti‘āra* Hinerichs states that al-Rummānī knows only one purpose of the *isti‘āra*, viz. *ibāna* (illustration), giving distinctness to something, while Abū Hilāl adds three more, viz. emphasis, conciseness and embellishment of the wording.<sup>103</sup> George Kanazi rightly observes that “three of the causes set forth by Abū Hilāl are mentioned by Rummānī, while the fourth - the presentation of the idea in an artistic form - seems to be Abū Hilāl's own contribution”.<sup>104</sup> Indeed if we look at al-Rummānī's commentary on the examples he enumerates after his definition of *isti‘āra*, we will clearly see the first three objectives identified by al-‘Askarī.<sup>105</sup>

### 1.13 Al-Tha‘ālibī (d.429AH/1038CE)<sup>106</sup>

Majāz is treated in three chapters of the second part of his book *Fiqh al-Lughā*. In his chapter on *majāz*<sup>107</sup> he quotes al-Jāhiz without giving any definition of *majāz*. The

<sup>101</sup> But in his book *Furūq* (p. 27) he followed the same approach of al-Rummānī by pointing out the basic difference between *isti‘āra* and *tashbīh*. George Kanazi, p. 151.

<sup>102</sup> Al-‘Askarī, p. 274.

<sup>103</sup> Heinrichs, *The Hand of the North Wind*, p.45.

<sup>104</sup> Kanazi, pp. 149-150.

<sup>105</sup> Al-Rummānī, pp. 86- 94.

<sup>106</sup> Al-Tha‘ālibī: Abū Maṣṣūr ‘Abd al-Malik b. Muḥammad al-Tha‘ālibī was a prolific anthologist and literary critic. He spent his entire life in the Eastern Islamic lands, mostly at his native Nishapur, where he was patronized by the local notables and, later, the Ghaznavid governor, but he also stayed for some time with a family of scholars in Jurjān and the court of the Khwārazmshāh in al-Jurjāniyya. Living at a time when the New Persian renaissance was in full bloom (he was an exact contemporary of the Persian epic poet Firdasī), he dedicated his life to the promotion and promulgation of Arabic literature and the Arabic language, on which he composed a number of eloquent paeans, see Al-Tha‘ālibī in *Encyl. Of Arabic Literature*.

<sup>107</sup> Al-Tha‘ālibī. *Fiqh al-Lughā wa Sirr al-‘Arabiyya*. ed. Amīn Nasīb, Beirut 1998, pp. 438-440.

quotations are from the book of *al-Ḥayawān* of al-Jāḥiẓ which are related to the *majāz* of food and taste<sup>108</sup>. A good example is

وَضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا قَرْيَةً كَانَتْ آمِنَةً مُطْمَئِنَّةً يَأْتِيهَا رِزْقُهَا رَغَدًا مِنْ كُلِّ مَكَانٍ  
فَكَفَرَتْ بِأَنْعُمِ اللَّهِ فَأَذَاقَهَا اللَّهُ لِبَاسَ الْجُوعِ وَالْخَوْفِ بِمَا كَانُوا يَصْنَعُونَ

“God has struck a similitude: a city that was secure, at rest, its provision coming to it easefully from every place, then it was unthankful for the blessings of God; so God let it taste the garment of hunger and of fear, for the things that they were working”. Q (16:112)

He starts his chapter on *isti‘āra* with this definition,

“it means that they borrow for the thing (they are talking about) something that agrees with it and that they coin the word as something that agrees with it and that they coin the word as something borrowed for it from another place as their saying in borrowing of organs for things not belonging to the animal world”.<sup>109</sup>

Then in the next chapter he numerates various verses as examples of *isti‘ārāt* in the *Qur’ān*:

وَإِنَّهُ فِي أُمِّ الْكِتَابِ لَدَيْنَا لَعَلِيَّ حَكِيمٌ.

“And behold it is in the Essence of the Book [the mother of the book (*umm al-kitāb*)], with Us; sublime indeed, wise”. Q (43:4)

وَاحْفَظْ لَهُمَا جَنَاحَ الذُّلِّ مِنَ الرَّحْمَةِ وَقُلْ رَبِّ ارْحَمْهُمَا كَمَا رَبَّيَانِي صَغِيرًا.

“And lower to them the wing of humbleness out of mercy and say, My Lord, Have mercy upon them, as they raised me up when I was little”. Q (17:24)

وَضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا قَرْيَةً كَانَتْ آمِنَةً مُطْمَئِنَّةً يَأْتِيهَا رِزْقُهَا رَغَدًا مِنْ كُلِّ مَكَانٍ  
فَكَفَرَتْ بِأَنْعُمِ اللَّهِ فَأَذَاقَهَا اللَّهُ لِبَاسَ الْجُوعِ وَالْخَوْفِ بِمَا كَانُوا يَصْنَعُونَ

“God has struck a similitude: a city that was secure, at rest, its provision coming to it easefully from every place, then it was unthankful for the blessings

<sup>108</sup> al-Jāḥiẓ. *Al-Ḥayawān op cit.*, vol. 5, pp. 23,25,27-28,32,273.

of God; so God let it taste the garment of hunger and of fear, for the things that they were working.” Q (16:112)

The majority of these examples fell under the category of *isti‘āra makniyya* (alluded metaphor). As can be observed from the above, Al-Tha‘ālibī quotes the same verse he used earlier in his chapter on *majāz*.<sup>110</sup> In another chapter entitled التشبيه بغير أداة التشبيه (on simile without the particle of comparison), he does not use the word *isti‘āra* nor does he quote any *Qur’ānic* verses. The majority of his examples come under what is called explicit *isti‘āra (taṣrīḥiyya)* by later critics, while some examples come under eloquent simile.<sup>111</sup>

From the above one can observe that in his treatment of *majāz* al-Tha‘ālibī was influenced by various people such as al-Jāḥiẓ and Ibn Fāris<sup>112</sup> and that there is a confusion on his part with regard to the classification of figurative language. He fails to give a definition *al-majāz* (like al-Jāḥiẓ) or to link *majāz* to *isti‘āra* although he uses the verse Q (16:112) as an example in both chapters. In his chapter التشبيه بغير أداة التشبيه he does not quote any *Qur’ānic* verses or attempt to link it to his chapter on *isti‘āra*, although some of the examples used in the chapter on *isti‘āra* belong to this kind of metaphor, as in the case of the verse Q (43:4).

#### **1.14 Ibn Rashīq al-Qayrawānī (d. 456 or 463AH/1063 or 1071CE)**<sup>113</sup>

In a subsection about *majāz* in his book *al-‘Umda*, Ibn Rashīq gives this definition of *majāz* after stating the opinion of earlier authorities on this matter:

<sup>109</sup> Al-Tha‘ālibī, *op cit.*, p.467; translated by Heinrichs, *The Hand of the North Wind*, *op cit.*, p. 47.

<sup>110</sup> Al-Tha‘ālibī. *Ibid.*, pp. 467-470.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 446-447.

<sup>112</sup> Heinrichs comments on al-Tha‘ālibī's chapter on *isti‘āra*: "this part owes much to the book of Ibn Fāris who is quoted in the list of sources", *The Hand of the North Wind*, p. 47.

<sup>113</sup> Ibn Rashīq al-Qayrawānī: Abū ‘Alī al-Ḥasan b. Rashīq al-Qayrawānī was a poet and critic, author of a famous encyclopaedia of poetry and poetics. He was born in Ifrīqiyya, near present-day Constantine, and made a career in Qayrawān as a poet, becoming court poet to the Zīrid ruler al-Mu‘izz. Towards the end of his life he emigrated to Sicily, where he died. In his lifetime he owed his fame mainly to his poetry; but to posterity he is first of all the author of *al-‘Umda* (The Support), see Ibn Rashīq al-Qayrawānī in *Encyl. Of Arabic Literature*.



“*majāz* is more eloquent than *ḥaqīqa* in the majority of cases in the speech and its reception by hearts and ears is much more pleasant. And whatever goes beyond the veridical meaning among all the vocables and not being pure impossibility is considered *majāz*. This is because it is open to many ways of interpretation so *tashbīh* and *isti‘āra* among the embellishments of speech are considered *majāz*. However people distinguished by it - I mean *majāz* - a specific type that is the thing which is called by the name of something near to it or caused by it”.<sup>114</sup>

Then he enumerates examples classified by later critics as *majāz mursal*, *majāz ‘aqli*, *kināya* and *tashbīh* to illustrate his point such as

إذا سقط السماء بأرض قوم      رعيناه وإن كانوا غضابا

“When the sky falls upon the land of people

We would pasture it even though they are angry”

sky = rain or clouds, pasture it = plants.<sup>115</sup>

Ibn Rashīq starts his chapter on *isti‘āra* by saying “*isti‘āra* is considered by people as the most excellent type of *majāz* and the first among the sections of *badī‘*”<sup>116</sup> Heinrichs comments on this by saying that

“this is a conscious acknowledgement of both traditions in the history of the term *isti‘āra*: the Koranic (*majāz*) and poetic (*badī‘*); but unlike al-‘Askarī... Ibn Rashīq has effected a true combination”.<sup>117</sup>

Ibn Rashīq proceeds by saying that

people differed (regarding *isti‘āra*), some of them borrow for a thing something which does not belong to it (like the phrase the hand of the north wind) in the line of Labīd:

<sup>114</sup> Abū al-Ḥasan b. Rashīq al-Qayrawānī., *al-‘Umda fī Ṣinā‘at al-Shi‘r wa naqdih*. Ed. Al-Nabawī ‘Abd al-Wāḥid Sha‘lān. *Maktabat al-Khānījī*. Cairo 2000. p.30.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 435.

<sup>117</sup> Heinrichs, *The Hand of the North Wind*, p. 48. Koranic *majāz* is discussed by Ibn Qutayba which I will examine later in a subsequent chapter. He means by *badī‘* the treatment of *isti‘āra* discussed by writers like Ibn al-Mu‘taz and al-‘Askarī.

إذ أصبحت بيد الشمال زمامها

وغداة ريح قد وزعت وقرة

“The reins of the morning had come to the hand of the north wind”

and other people consider it based on *tashbīh* like in the line of Dhū al-Rumma:

أقامت به حتى ذوى العود في الثرى وساق الثريا في ملاءته الفجر

She dwelled in it [a place] until the rod withered in the soil

And the dawn—in its veil—drove the Pleiads (*thurayyā*) away.<sup>118</sup>

Then Ibn Rashīq quotes the definitions of al-Qāḍī al-Jurjānī, Ibn Jinnī and al-Rummānī among others.<sup>119</sup>

It can be concluded that Ibn Rashīq considered *isti‘āra*, *majāz mursal*, *tashbīh* and *kināya* as subcategories of *majāz* without attempting to relate them to each other. Regarding *isti‘āra*,<sup>120</sup> he quotes and discusses various writers but without trying to produce a coherent picture of the term.

### **1.15 Ibn Sinān al-Khafājī (466AH/1074CE)**<sup>121</sup>

In his book *Sirr al-Faṣāḥa*, he states that “one of the norms which enhances the composition is putting the words in their right place either in their veridical sense or in their figurative one (*majāz* and *ḥaqīqa*)”.<sup>122</sup> Regarding *isti‘āra* he states that “good *isti‘āra* is putting the words in their places,”<sup>123</sup> then restates the definition of al-Rummānī in this regard and bases his discussion on al-Rummānī and ‘Alī al-Jurjānī. Regarding the difference between *isti‘āra* and *tashbīh*, he disagrees with al-Rummānī

<sup>118</sup> Ibn Rashīq, p. 435.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 436-439.

<sup>120</sup> Ibn Rashīq considers *tamthīl* (analogy) as a subcategory of *isti‘āra* see Ibn Rashīq. *Ibid.*, p. 450.

<sup>121</sup> Ibn Sinān al-Khafājī : Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Sa‘īd b. Sinān al-Khafājī was a Syrian poet and critic. Unlike his revered teacher Abū al-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī, he combined a literary with a political career. As envoy of Aleppo he went to Constantinople in 43AH/1061CE, one year before finishing his work on stylistics, *Sirr al-Faṣāḥa*. He was poisoned at the instigation of the mirdāsīd ruler Maḥmūd because he had made himself independent in Qal‘at ‘Azīz. His *ḍiwan* is preserved, see Ibn Sinān al-Khafājī in *Encycl. Of Arabic Literature*.

<sup>122</sup> Ibn Sinān al-Khafājī al-Ḥalabī. *Sirr al-Faṣāḥa*. *Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya* Beirut 1982. p.111.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

who considers that *tashbīh* can be achieved only with the particle of comparison, hence he does not accept this statement *وأسبلت لؤلؤاً من نرجس* (She dropped pearls from narcissus) as *isti'āra* but as simile, although the particle of comparison is omitted.<sup>124</sup>

Bonnebeker comments

“what he (al-Khafājī) has in mind is perhaps that because *asbalat*, “she dropped,” in this context only allows us to take “pearls” and “narcissi” as standing for “tears” and “eyes” a simile is forced upon the hearer and it becomes impossible to argue that the two words are not to be understood in their proper sense.<sup>125</sup>

Al-Khafājī's position on the *isti'āra* is similar to that of Ibn Rashīq as both adopted the definition of al-Rummānī. However, Ibn Rashīq has a more systematic mind than his contemporary and his discussions have greater logical stringency.<sup>126</sup> Furthermore, al-Khafājī fails to distinguish clearly between *isti'āra* and *tamthīl* and prefers *isti'āra* that is immediately apparent to the hearer to those that cannot be justified as based on intelligible similarities, or derived from expressions that are themselves metaphors.<sup>127</sup> For example one speaks of the “eye of *nuwwār* (flower)” since there is a similarity, but the “eye of religion that finds consolation” is far-fetched as there is nothing in religion that can be compared with the eye.<sup>128</sup>

The study so far shows that there is no clear theory of *majāz* can be observed in the writings of authors studied above, and this can be seen in the confusion about the relationship between various figures such as *majāz*, *isti'āra*, *tamthīl*, etc. However, this confusion will be cleared mainly in the writings of ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī and others who clarified his views and developed them as we will see next.

<sup>124</sup> Al-Khafājī. *Ibid.*, pp. 118-119.

<sup>125</sup> Bonnebeker, *isti'āra*, *op cit.*

<sup>126</sup> Heinrichs, *The Hand of the North Wind*, p. 51.

<sup>127</sup> Bonebakker. *isti'āra*, *op cit.*

<sup>128</sup> al-Khafājī, p.124.

### 1.16 ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d.471AH/1078CE or 474AH/1081CE)<sup>129</sup>

In the fifth century A.H. / eleventh C.E the study of *balāgha* in general and *majāz* in particular reached their maturity with the works of ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī, in his books *Asrār al-Balāgha* and *Dalā’il al-I’jāz*. The purpose of his first book *Dalā’il* is to prove the inimitability of the *Qur’ān* but in reality it is a very subtle theory of syntactic constructions which later came to be known as ‘*ilm al-ma‘anī*. The second book deals with the issues of simile, *majāz*, *kināya* and *tamthīl* which later become ‘*ilm al-Bayān*. According to Ritter in his introduction to *Asrār al-Balāgha*, *Asrār* is composed probably after the *Dalā’il*<sup>130</sup>, but Heinrichs disagrees, stating that as ‘Abd al-Qāhir mentioned in his *Dalā’il* “that he has already treated *majāz* extensively elsewhere we can assume that the *Asrār* treatment precedes the *Dalā’il*”<sup>131</sup>. It is really difficult to ascertain which book is the first as it is possible that al-Jurjānī wrote both books at the same

<sup>129</sup> ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī : ‘Abd al-Qāhir Abū Bakr b. ‘Abd al-Rahmān Majd al-Dīn al-Jurjānī, was a grammarian, minor poet, and highly influential literary theorist. He never left his native Jurjān and it is not unlikely that, by foregoing the receptive mode of studying with many teachers he stimulated his own original thinking. Apart from a number of grammatical writings, some of which have only recently come to light and been published, al-Jurjānī composed two substantial books in the field of literary theory. The first is *Asrār al-Balāgha, Mysteries of Eloquence* and *Dalā’il al-I’jāz, Proofs for the [Qur’ān’s] Inimitability*. In both his works al-Jurjānī appears as a highly original and sensitive thinker who constantly grapples with his topic and looks at it from different angles.

<sup>130</sup> Al-Jurjānī, ‘Abd al-Qāhir, *Asrār al-Balāgha*. Edited by Hellmut Ritter, Istanbul. Government Press, 1954. p. 6. Among those who believe that *Dalā’il* is composed before *Asrār* are Muḥammad Aḥmad Khalaf Allāh (*min al-wujha al-naḥsiyya fī dirāsāt al-adab wa naqdih*, Cairo 1970, p. 108), Shawqī Dayf (ibid., pp. 190-191, 204), Aḥmad Aḥmad Badawī (‘*Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī, Maktabat Miṣr*, n.d.), Aḥmad Maṭlūb (‘*Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī*, al-Kuwayt 1973, pp. 29-33) and Iḥsān ‘Abbās (*Tārīkh al-Naqd al-Adabī ‘inda al-‘Arab (naqd al-Shi‘r min al-Qarn al-Thānī ḥattā al-Qarn al-Thāmin*, Beirut 1971, p. 429). On the other hand those who believe that *Asrār* was the first to be composed are: ‘Alī Abd al-Rāziq (*Amālī ‘Alī ‘Abd al-Rāziq fī al-Bayān wa tārīkhīh*, p.23), Aḥmad Ibrāhīm Mūsā ( *al-Sibgh al-badī‘ī fī al-Lughā al-‘Arabiyya*, Cairo 1969, p. 235) and Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Mun‘im Khafājī (in his introduction to his edition of *Dalā’il al-I’jāz*, Cairo 1969, p. 3).

<sup>131</sup> Wolfhart Heinrichs. *Contacts Between Scriptural Hermeneutics and Literary Theory in Islam: The Case of Majāz*., p. 276, note 54.

time. Abu Deeb<sup>132</sup> hinted at this in his discussion of al-Jurjānī's concept of *isti'āra*.

'Abd al-Qāhir discusses *majāz* in the last part of his book *Asrār al-Balāgha*<sup>133</sup> and returns to the issue in two places in his *Dalā'il al-I'jāz*.<sup>134</sup> He analyses *majāz* using his theory of *isnād* (predication). He introduced a new dichotomy<sup>135</sup> between single word *majāz* and sentence *majāz*, in his words *majāz lughawī* (lexical trope) and *majāz 'aqlī* (mental trope) he also uses *majāz ḥukmī* in his *Dalā'il* to refer to *majāz 'aqlī*. The first type (single word *majāz*) occurs when a direct replacement of one object by another is carried out and the second type (*majāz 'aqlī*) does not involve a single word but it occurs in the relationship between two or more words in a sentence<sup>136</sup> (this division continued after him in the vast majority of books on *balāgha* without any serious modification). In other words, *Majāz* can take place in the discourse in two ways; it may consist of the ascription (*ithbāt*)<sup>137</sup> of a certain action to a certain subject, or appear in the ascribed thing (*muthbat*) itself.<sup>138</sup>

#### *Al-majāz al-'aqlī (al-Ḥukmī)*<sup>139</sup>:

<sup>132</sup> K. Abu Deeb, *Al-Jurjānī's Theory of Poetic Imagery*, Aris & Phillips Ltd, Warminster, Wilts., 1979, pp. 179-180.

<sup>133</sup> Al-Jurjānī, *Asrār*, pp. 365-383.

<sup>134</sup> al-Jurjānī, 'Abd al-Qāhir. *Dalā'il al-I'jāz*, edited by Yāsīn al-Ayūbī. *Al-Maktaba al-'Asriyya*, Beirut 2000.

<sup>135</sup> *Asrār*, p.376.

<sup>136</sup> Abū Deeb, *Al-Jurjānī's Theory of Poetic Imagery*, p. 231.

<sup>137</sup> In other words, it is the attribution of the characteristic in question to that subject.

<sup>138</sup> *Asrār*, pp. 242-243, 273,

<sup>139</sup> Some writers such as Ṭāha Ḥusayn (in his introduction to *Naqd al-Nathr* which was wrongly attributed to Qudāma b. Ja'far, states that 'Abd al-Qāhir is the inventor of *al-majāz al-'aqlī*, *op cit.*, p. 29) and Shawqī Dayf (*op cit.*, p. 185). But as it is clear from above that Sībawayh was the first to indicate this kind of expression even though he did not use the word *majāz 'aqlī* (or *ḥukmī*) to refer to it, rather he states that it is a type of semantic expansion and brevity in the speech (*al-Kitāb*, *op cit.*, vol. 1, p. 80.) After Sībawayh Abū 'Ubayda ,al-Frrā', Ibn Jinnī among others also mentioned this way of speech. (See 'Abd al-Qādir Ḥusayn, pp. 100-102). On the other hand 'Abd al-Fattāh Lāshīn (in his book "*al-Ma'āni fī Ḍaw' Asālib al-Qur'ān*", 4<sup>th</sup> Ed., *Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī*, Cairo 1998, pp. 95-102 ) contends that it is al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār who founded and analysed this type of *majāz* . On the influence of al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār on al-Jurjānī in general see Margaret Larkin, "*The Theology*

In *Asrār al-Balāgha* Abd al-Qāhir states that *majāz* may occur in a sentence either in the *ithbāt* (ascription) or the *muthbat* itself, or in both of them at the same time. He gives these examples for each case:

1. *majāz* in the *ithbāt*: وشيب أيام الفراق مفارقي (The days of separations have made my hair full of hoariness) the *majāz* here occurs in actually attributing (making) white hair to the days of separations (the subject). But as a matter of fact the true agent here is God. There is no *majāz* in the *muthbat* because white hair actually exists.<sup>140</sup>
2. *Majāz* in the *muthbat*:

(أَوْ مَنْ كَانَ مَيِّتًا فَأَحْيَيْنَاهُ وَجَعَلْنَا لَهُ نُورًا يَمْشِي بِهِ فِي النَّاسِ كَمَنْ مَثَلُهُ  
فِي الظُّلُمَاتِ لَيْسَ بِخَارِجٍ مِنْهَا كَذَلِكَ زُيِّنَ لِلْكَافِرِينَ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ)

“Why, is he who was dead and We gave him life, and appointed for him a light to walk by among the people as one whose likeness is in the shadows, and comes not forth from them? So it is decked out fair to the unbelievers the things they have done”. Q (6:122)

Here knowledge, guidance and wisdom are considered as life for human's hearts. So *majāz* here is in the *muthbat* which is الحياة (the verbal noun of أحييناه) as for the *ithbāt* it is literal because it indicates that guidance, knowledge and wisdom are favours from God.<sup>141</sup>

3. *Majāz* in both the *ithbāt* and the *muthbat*:  
أحييتني رؤيتك (seeing you made me alive) meaning that it gave me pleasure. The first *majāz* here (in *al-muthbat*) is that considering the pleasure of seeing the person in question as life. The second *majāz* (in *al-ithbāt*) is that making الرؤية an agent for this life.<sup>142</sup>

### Single word *majāz* :

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of Meaning: ”‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī’s theory of Discourse”, American Oriental Society, New Haven 1995).

<sup>140</sup> *Asrār*, pp. 342-343.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid, p. 343.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, p. 344.

In *Asrār al-Balāgha*, al-Jurjānī gives this definition of *majāz*: *al-majāz* is a *maʿal* pattern from the verb *jāza*, meaning to cross, traverse or go beyond something. If an utterance is made to depart from what is required by its original meaning in language, then it is described as *majāz*, meaning that they extended it beyond its original position, or that it went beyond the place it was originally set down in.<sup>143</sup> In a chapter about *al-majāz al-ḥukmī* in his *Dalāʾil*, al-Jurjānī gives this definition for *al-majāz al-lughawī*:

"اعلم أن طريق المجاز والاتساع في الذي ذكرناه قبل، أنك ذكرت الكلمة وأنت لا تريد معناها، ولكن تريد معنى ما هو ردف له أو شبيهه، فتجاوزت بذلك في ذات الكلمة وفي اللفظ نفسه"<sup>144</sup>

"You should know the way of *majāz* and extension, regarding what we have mentioned before, is that you mention a word without intending its meaning (literal meaning) but you intend the meaning of something that is contiguous to it or similar to it, and by doing that you use *majāz* in this particular word and utterance."

Heinrichs comments on this passage: the two terms contiguous and similar here define the two branches of the lexical trope, metonymy and metaphor. The latter is of course, called *istiʿāra* but for the former there is no clear term in al-Jurjānī (in the later textbooks it is called *majāz mursal*, as for *kināya* it is discussed as a distinctive type from *majāz* unlike al-Jurjānī who considers it as a type of *majāz*).<sup>145</sup> Abu Deeb comments on this distinction between the two types of relationship; similarity and contiguity:

"Similarity is the basis of simile, metaphor, etc.; contiguity produces figures like allusiveness (*kināyah*) and tropes not based on similarity such as part/whole, cause/effect relationships, etc. Failure to recognize these basic distinctions results in a serious misunderstanding of the nature of religious language."<sup>146</sup>

<sup>143</sup> *Asrār al-Balāgha* ibid., 365 quoted by Larkin ibid., pp. 73-74.

<sup>144</sup> *Dalāʾil*, p. 295.

<sup>145</sup> Heinrichs, Wolfhart. "Contacts between Scriptural Hermeneutics and Literary Theory in Islam: The case of *Majāz*." *Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Arabisch-Islamischen Wissenschaften* 7(1991/92): pp. 253-84, p. 279.

<sup>146</sup> K. Abu Deeb, *Literary Criticism, in Abbasid Belles Letters*, p. 380.

So the relationship between the primary meaning and the secondary meaning is similarity in the case of *isti'āra* and contiguity in the case of *majāz mursal*. There is also another difference between the two with regard to the idea of *mulāḥaẓa* according to al-Jurjānī:

“... you go beyond what has come to be for it in the established (system) of the one who established it (*waḍ‘ al-wāḍi‘*) to something that was not set down for it, without originating a new assignment for it (i.e. for the word), due to an association (*mulāḥaẓa*<sup>147</sup>) between what you have allowed it to pass to and the origin to which it was assigned in the system of the originator of the language.”<sup>148</sup>

According to al-Jurjānī, *mulāḥaẓa* is always stronger with the case of *isti'āra* than it is with *al-majāz al-mursal*

“..it is inconceivable for *asad* (lion) to occur for a man with the meaning you intended by way of comparison (*tashbīh*) in the form of exaggeration and suggestion that an aspect of a lion occurred in him, unless you keep (the fact that it is) a name for the animal, before your eyes. This is an inclining towards its foundation (*istinād*) that you necessarily know, and if you try to banish it from your awareness, you are trying (to do) the impossible. For when was a derivative (far‘) (ever) apprehended without the origin (*aṣl*), and the topic (in a comparison) (*mushabbah*) without the analogue (*mushabbah bi-hi*) ?”<sup>149</sup>

Al-Jurjānī adds “Every thing related to *tashbīh* should be understood this way (the previous quotation) ...including *isti'āra*. Anything else apart from that does not have a strong inclining (*istinād*) (like in the case of *isti'āra*)”.<sup>150</sup>

***Isti'āra***.<sup>151</sup>:

<sup>147</sup> Heinrichs translated this term in negative sense as "not losing sight of" while Ritter in his German translation of *Asrār* coined the term *augenverbindung* literally eye-connection. Heinrichs *Contacts, op cit.*, pp. 279-80.

<sup>148</sup> *Asrār al-Balāgha*, *op cit.*, 325-26, quoted and translated by Larkin, p. 88.

<sup>149</sup> *Asrār al-Balāgha*, p. 326, as quoted and translated by Larkin *ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>150</sup> *Asrār al-Balāgha*, p.326.



As we have seen above *isti'āra* according to al-Jurjānī is a part of *al-majāz al-lughawī* where the relationship between the primary meaning and the secondary intended meaning is based on similarity. He offers two accounts for the concept of *isti'āra*: one in his *Dalā'il* and the other in his *Asrār*. In *Dalā'il al-I'jāz*, al-Jurjānī argues that it is wrong to define *isti'āra* as نقل (transference) of terms as we have seen earlier (al-Qāḍī al-Jurjānī and others); rather it is a claim ادعاء that something is identical to something else or, as in the words of al-Jurjānī, "it is to claim the meaning of a thing to something else".<sup>152</sup> In other words, there is a transference of a concept before there is a transfer of a term and consequently *isti'āra* can be comprehended intellectually.<sup>153</sup> In his *asrār* al-Jurjānī defines *isti'āra* as the incidental transference of an utterance from its original sense to a different sense so that it looks like a loan<sup>154</sup> عارية (or borrowed good).<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> For more details of the treatment of *isti'āra* by al-Jurjānī see chapter 5 in Abu Deeb's book " *al-Jurjānī's Theory on Poetic imagery*."

<sup>152</sup> *Dalā'il*, p. 403.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 407. For the inconsistency between these two concepts of *isti'āra*, (in *Dalā'il* and *Asrār*) we will see later what al-Rāzī said about it.

<sup>154</sup> *Asrār*, p. 29.

<sup>155</sup> Abū Deeb comments on this apparent contradiction between al-Jurjānī's views in *Dalā'il* and *Asrār* by saying that al-Jurjānī in "the first half of each book, whenever he tackles the nature of *isti'āra*, he produces the traditional definition of this form (*isti'āra* using the concept of transference) without any criticism of it... This is precisely the view of transference which al-Jurjānī has so persistently and convincingly attacked in the second half of *Dalā'il* and the final part of *Asrār*. This fact, however, should not be overemphasized, for it does not show either that al-Jurjānī contradicts himself or that he changes his views on the nature of *isti'āra* towards the end of his book... a close study of the contexts in which he uses the phrase 'transference of a name' excludes both these possibilities. Abū Deeb adds that al-Jurjānī relates the traditional view without any criticism when this view does not have direct bearings on his treatment but in another context al-Jurjānī criticises such a view where he feels it essential to establish the right principle, Abū Deeb, *al-Jurjānī's Theory on Poetic imagery*, *op cit.*, p179. Heinrichs disagrees with Abū Deeb about this point he argues that" Kamal Abū Deeb, ("Al-Jurjani's Classification of *Isti'āra* with special reference to Aristotle's Classification of Metaphor". *Journal of Arabic Literature* 2 (1971), pp. 48-75, 73, is wrong in supposing that the rejection of *naql al-ism* (or *naql al-lafẓ*) applies only to what we have called old metaphors [the hand of the north wind]. Al-Jurjānī leaves no doubt that the essential process in creating a metaphor of any kind is not *naqlu ismin min shay'in ilā shay'* "the transference of a name from one thing to another"-not really a transference at all-, but *iddi'ā'u ma'na l-ismi li-shay'* "the claiming of the meaning of the name for something". *The Hand of the North Wind*, pp. 2-3.

*Isti'āra* can occur in a verb as well as in a noun and in both cases there is one to one relationship between the two terms of *tashbīh* which are *mushabbah* (the topic) and *al-mushabbah bi-hi* (analogue).<sup>156</sup>

*Isti'āra* in a noun is of two kinds; one is based on *tashbīh* and the other based on *tamthīl* (analogy<sup>157</sup>). For the first type al-Jurjānī argues "that is your saying رأيت أسداً (I saw a lion) and you mean a courageous man ...and أبديت نوراً (I have shown a light) and you mean guidance, elucidation, and proof and anything else similar to that. The noun in all of that as you can see is something possible to indicate. Thus it can be said that that is what was meant by the noun and what was alluded to by it, and that it was transferred from its original referent and made a name for it (to the *mushabbah*) by way of borrowing and hyperbolic in *tashbīh*.<sup>158</sup>

The second type of *isti'āra* occurs when

“a noun (used in its original sense) is taken and placed in a position where it cannot be seen and pointed out and said to be the thing that was intended by the noun for which it was borrowed and made a substitute and a stand in.”

The following line by Labīd is an example of this case:

و غداة ریح قد كشفت وقرة  
إذ أصبحت بيد ریح الشمال زمامها

“How many a cold windy day have I protected people against, when the rein of the day has been taken by the hand of the north wind”<sup>159</sup>

According to al-Jurjānī, the poet has attributed a hand to the north wind and it is known that nothing can be pointed out as being the one to which the word hand is applied, as it is in the first type where the word lion is borrowed for a brave man (the similarity lies in an attribute which exists in the very nature of the *asad* (lion). Rather similarity here (hand of the north wind) is between the topic and

<sup>156</sup> These are the translations of Heinrichs in his book *The Hand of the North Wind*, *op cit.*, p.8.

<sup>157</sup> Abu Deeb translated *tamthīl* as parable "(using this word in the sense of the New Testament parable, introduced in the New English Bible by the form, "The kingdom of heaven is like this: a man..)", *Literary Criticism*, *op cit.*, p. 80. Translating *tamthīl* as analogy is much better as the meaning of the word analogy involves comparison.

<sup>158</sup> *Asrār*, p.42.

the relationship between the borrowed thing (hand) and its actual owner (Man), thus the poet intended here to attribute to the north wind, in its directing the morning, complete control similar to the control by a human being of something which he handles at will. The similarity in this case is that one has to reflect and think deeply to discern unlike the similarity in the first type.<sup>160</sup>

Moreover, *al-Jurjānī* does not accept that *tashbīh* and *isti'āra* are interchangeable and that metaphor is a mere concise equivalent of *tashbīh*. Abu Deeb comments on al-Jurjani's classification of *isti'āra*, "his classification of *isti'āra* is the first of its type in Arabic and the basis for practically all subsequent work on the subject."<sup>161</sup>

#### Al-Jurjānī and anthropomorphism in the *Qur'ān*:

Al-Jurjānī distinguishes between two types of *isti'āra*, one is based on *tashbīh* رأيت أسداً the other on *tamthīl* (analogy) يد ربح الشمال. *Isti'āra* based on *tashbīh* is not difficult to discern but when it is based on *tamthīl* a certain amount of contemplation is required. What is more important is that *tamthīl* is understood on the level of one sentence or more.<sup>162</sup>

*Isti'āra* based on *tamthīl* is of particular concern to al-Jurjānī due to its implication in interpreting anthropomorphic verses in the *Qur'ān*. He states that neglecting the second type of *isti'āra* [that is based on *tamthīl*] could lead people to accept (تشبيه) anthropomorphism in the *Qur'ān*:

"the reason for this [falling into anthropomorphism] is that if they put in their minds [the idea] that for every borrowed word there must necessarily be something identifiable that it corresponds to when it is used in figurative discourse (*majāz*) just as it corresponds to its referent when it is used in veridical discourse (*ḥaqīqa*), and then they consider the words of God Almighty, '...that you may be trained under My eye,' Q (20: 39) and 'Build

<sup>159</sup> *Asrār* pp.42-43. This line of Labīd is translated by Abu Deeb in *al-Jurjānī's Theory on Poetic imagery*, p. 204.

<sup>160</sup> *Asrār*, *ibid.*, pp.43-48 and see also Margaret Larkin, *The Theology of Meaning: 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī's Theory of Discourse*, New Haven, 1995, pp. 76-77 and Abu Deeb, *al-Jurjānī's Theory on Poetic imagery*.

<sup>161</sup> Abu Deeb, *Literary Criticism*, p. 83.

<sup>162</sup> *Asrār*, p.44-45.

the ark under Our eyes,’ Q (11: 37) and have not found for the word eye anything that it corresponds to, in the way that the word light refers to right-guideness, e.g. they would become confused by doubt and incline toward the literal [meaning] and would enjoin themselves to adhere to it until it lead them to grave error and to perpetrate that which violates the unity [of God], and may God save us from [such] errancy.<sup>163</sup>

As Larkin points out

“the distinction [between *isti‘āra* based on *tashbīh* and *isti‘āra* based on *tamthīl*] is crucial from a theological point of view: the *tamthīl* amounts to a way of characterizing God without threatening too close to His essence. *Isti‘āra* based on *tashbīh* refers to some shared point of comparison between two entities. The specificity of the comparison is reflected linguistically in the fact that it can be pinpointed in a single word. In contrast, the *tamthīl* can only be understood from constructed discourse.”<sup>164</sup>

In a section devoted to what is later called later *al-majāz al-mursal*, Al-Jurjānī<sup>165</sup> gives an example of the word يمينه (His right hand) in the *Qur’ān*.

(وَمَا قَدَرُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ قَدْرِهِ وَالْأَرْضُ جَمِيعًا قَبْضَتُهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ  
وَالسَّمَاوَاتُ مَطْوِيَّاتٌ بِيَمِينِهِ سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ)

“And the heavens shall be rolled up in His right hand”. Q (39:67)

They say that يمين means قدرة (power) and this is a hasty generalised interpretation “intended to negate the attribution of a limb to God”.<sup>166</sup> They did not intend to elucidate the method and the way by which the idea of power is arrived at. He adds that if you think deeply you will realize that this verse can be understood by way of similitude; since in the beginning of this verse:

(وَمَا قَدَرُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ قَدْرِهِ وَالْأَرْضُ جَمِيعًا قَبْضَتُهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ  
وَالسَّمَاوَاتُ مَطْوِيَّاتٌ بِيَمِينِهِ سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ)

<sup>163</sup> *Asrār* p. 47, this quotation translated by Larkin *ibid.*, p. 85

<sup>164</sup> Larkin, *ibid.*, p. 90. For more details of the theological implication of al-Jurjānī's ideas of *majāz* on theology see chapter 4 in the same book.

<sup>165</sup> *Asrār*, pp. 331-333.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 332.

“The earth altogether shall be His handful on the Day of Resurrection”. Q (39:67)

the overall meaning indicates power and the word قبضة (handful) cannot be considered as a name for power.<sup>167</sup> Rather,

“we arrive at power by way of interpretation and similitude and we say that the meaning - and only God knows - is that the similitude of the earth in its being under the command and power of God and that nothing in it is excluded from his authority - the Almighty; is like the similitude of something being in the grasp of one - among us - and enveloping it in his hand. In the same manner we should proceed [in our interpretation] of His saying مطويات يمينه ; the meaning is – and only God knows that God create in them the characteristic of folding so that they [the heavens] appear as a folded scroll in someone's right.”<sup>168</sup>

In a section entitled الإفراط والتفريط في تأويل القرآن (excessiveness and negligence in the interpretation of the *Qur'ān*) al-Jurjānī attacks two groups for their treatment of *majāz* in the *Qur'ān*. The first group represents those who deny the existence of *majāz* in the *Qur'ān* and offer literal interpretation of the *Qur'ān*. So they interpret these verses literally:

(هَلْ يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَّا أَنْ يَأْتِيَهُمُ اللَّهُ فِي ظُلَلٍ مِّنَ الْغَمَامِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ وَقُضِيَ الْأَمْرُ

وَأِلَى اللَّهِ تُرْجَعُ الْأُمُورُ)

“What do they look for, but that God shall come to them” Q (2:210),

(وَجَاءَ رَبُّكَ وَالْمَلَكُ صَفًّا صَفًّا)

“And thy Lord comes” Q (89:22),

(الرَّحْمَنُ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ اسْتَوَى)

“The All-compassionate sat Himself upon the Throne” Q(20:5),

When it is said to them that coming is a transportation from one place to another, which is a characteristic of bodies, and استواء , when it is understood literally, can only be applied to a body that occupies a locality and space. But

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<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 333 this quotation is a modified version of Larkin translation, p. 91.

God – Almighty - is the creator of places and times and the originator of everything that can move, rest and contact [other objects].<sup>169</sup>

While the other group excessively use the *majāz* when interpreting the *Qur'ān* and impose meanings on words which do not denote them out of pretension.<sup>170</sup>

Abu Deeb comments on al-Jurjānī saying that

“Imagery is no longer viewed either as ornament or as a substitute for literal statement. Imagery in his view exists at times without there being any possibility of its having a literal origin or equivalent. This is the core of religious language which attributes human traits to God, where the admission of a literal counterpart would lead to ‘error’ (dalalah).”<sup>171</sup>

To summarise: according to al-Jurjānī we have two major types of *majāz*. The first occurs when a direct replacement of one object by another is carried out imaginatively - in order to reveal a relationship between them - and is then expressed in a particular linguistic form. The second does not involve a single object or word, but occurs in the relationship established between two or more objects or words. In other words, *al-majāz* may occur with reference to either the *ithbāt* (ascription) or the *muthbat* (ascribed) itself, or to both of them at the same time. If the *majāz* occurs in the *al-ithbāt*, it is related to the intellect and is called *majāz ‘aqli* or *ḥukmī*,<sup>172</sup> and if it occurs in the *al-muthbat*, then it is related to language and is called *lughawī*.

*Al majāz al-lughawī* also called *al-majāz al-mufrad*, is to use a vocable, not in its ordinary original sense, but in a certain tropical connotation, provided there is a *qarīna* (a frame of reference) to indicate that the original meaning is not intended. This is divided into: *al-majāz al-mursal* which consists of a number of ‘*alāqāt*’ relationships, e.g. *la-hu yadun ‘alayya* which means: he did me a favour, and *isti‘āra* metaphor, I saw a lion which means I saw a courageous man.

*Al-majāz al-‘aqli* is to ascribe an action or an adjective to something which usually does not support such an action or adjective. In the *Qur’ān*:

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<sup>169</sup> *Asrār*, *ibid.*, pp. 361-362.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 263.

<sup>171</sup> Abu Deeb, *Literary*, p. 80.

<sup>172</sup> Al-Jurjānī uses this word to denote *al-majāz al-‘aqli* in his book *Dalā’il*.

(وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ اسْتَضَعُّوا لِلَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا بَلْ مَكْرُ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ إِذْ تَأْمُرُونَنَا أَنْ نَكْفُرَ بِاللَّهِ وَنَجْعَلَ لَهُ أَنْدَاداً وَأَسْرُوا النَّدَامَةَ لَمَّا رَأَوْا الْعَذَابَ وَجَعَلْنَا الْأَغْلَالَ فِي أَعْتَاقِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا هَلْ يُجْزَوْنَ إِلَّا مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ)

“And those that were abased will say to those that waxed proud ‘Nay, but devising night and day, when you were ordering us to disbelieve in God, and to set up compeers to Him’”. Q (34:33)

In the foregoing verse *makr* (cunning) as an abstract meaning is tropically ascribed to the day and the night.

Ritter in his introduction to his edition of *Asrār al-Balāgha* states, “these books (*Asrār al-Balāgha* and *Dalā’il al-I’jāz*) revolutionized the studies of rhetoric in the East”.<sup>173</sup> These two books gave rise to two new disciplines in *balāgha* : ‘*ilm al-Bayān* (based on *Asrār al-balāgha* ) and ‘*ilm al-ma‘ānī* (based on *Dalā’il al-I’jāz*). His contribution to the study of *majāz* lies in his distinction between *majāz ‘aqli* and *al-majāz al-lughawī* and his elaboration to the theory of *isti‘āra* based on *tashbīh* . Due to their importance Al-Jurjānī's books (*Asrār* and *Dalā’il*) were abbreviated and rearranged by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzi in his book *Nihāyat al-I’jāz fī Dirāyat al-I’jāz*.

<sup>173</sup> Ritter, *Asrār al-Balāgha*, p. 6 (in the English section).

### 1.17 Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606AH/1209CE)<sup>174</sup>

Al-Rāzī states in the introduction to his book that the greatest and most honourable discipline is *‘ilm al-bayān* (this discipline came later to be known as *‘ilm al-balāgha*). In spite of its importance, people failed to comprehend and master its fundamentals and branches. This state of affairs lasted until the appearance of ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī’s two books: *Dalā’il al-I’jāz* and *Asrār al-Balāgha* which superseded all the books written before them on the subject.<sup>175</sup> But *al-Jurjānī* “neglected arranging the chapters and the sub-sections and expatiated on the issues discussed in his books”.<sup>176</sup> For this reason al-Rāzī re-arranged and abbreviated the two books to maximise the benefit for people.

In his section on *ḥaqīqa* and *majāz*, al-Rāzī gives al-Jurjānī’s definition of *majāz* as a general introductory definition :

“*al-majāz* is a *maḥal* pattern from the verb *jāza*, meaning to cross, traverse or go beyond something. If an utterance is made to depart from what is required by its original meaning in language, then it is described as being

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<sup>174</sup> Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī: Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. ‘Umar, Major Ash‘arite theologian and Qur’ānic exegete. He has been described as ‘the only equal of al-Ghazālī in philosophical erudition in the twelfth century’, and ‘one of the last encyclopaedic writers of Islam’. He was born and studied in Rayy, where he also spent a part of his career, much of which was marked by journeys to Khuwārazm and Transoxiana, where he engaged in controversies with Mu’tazilīs and other non-Ash‘arīs. He finally settled in Herat—having secured the patronage of the Ghūrīd ruler Ghiyāth al-Dīn—where he lived out the rest of his life.

Al-Rāzī was author of a massive corpus whose subject matter ranged from Qur’ānic exegesis and history to *fiqh*, medicine and mineralogy. Early in his life he was a student of alchemy and magic but later turned to religious and philosophical sciences, writing, among other things, a commentary on several works by Ibn Sīna, whom he often criticized sharply. A celebrated teacher, he was known by the title of Shaykh al-Islam. In the breadth and depth of his erudition he resembles not only al-Ghazālī but the great Ibn Sīna himself, and made a notable contribution to Arabic literature in diverse branches.

<sup>175</sup> Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. *Nihāyat al-Ijāz fī dirāyat al-i’jāz*, edited by Bakrī Shaykh Muḥammad, *Dār al-‘ilm*, Beirut 1985. pp. 71-74.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.



*majāz*, meaning that they extended it beyond its original position, or that it went beyond the place it was originally set down in.”<sup>177</sup>

Then Al-Rāzī states (following al-Jurjānī in his *Asrār*<sup>178</sup>) that

“the vocable has to satisfy two conditions in order to be considered as *majāz*: First it has to be transferred from its original conventional meaning, second this transference (from the primary meaning to the secondary one) should be for an association and a relationships between them”.<sup>179</sup>

He followed the footsteps of al-Jurjānī in his division of *majāz* into *majāz ‘aqlī* and *lughawī* but he used *majāz ḥukmī* or *majāz fī al-ithbāt* (al-Jurjānī uses *majāz ḥukmī* for *majāz ‘aqlī* in his *Dalā’il*). Then he gave this definition for *isti‘āra* which combines the two types of *isti‘āra* mentioned by al-Jurjānī (*isti‘āra* based on *tashbīh* and *isti‘āra* based on *tamthīl*)

“*al-isti‘āra* is to mention something using the name of something else (I saw a lion) or affirming what belongs to something else to it (the hand of the north wind)<sup>180</sup> for the purpose of hyperbole in *tashbīh*”.<sup>181</sup>

Then al-Rāzī proceeded to clarify the two contradictory views expressed by al-Jurjānī, regarding the nature of *isti‘āra* in his *Dalā’il* and *Asrār*. He presented the two views of al-Jurjānī, the first one in *Asrār* in which al-Jurjānī states that this type of *majāz* is (*lughawī*) lexical (by calling a man lion, one is attributing to him the courage of the lion not his physical characteristics, so there is a transference and the word lion is used in more restricted sense) and the second view in his *Dalā’il* as we have seen earlier, where he did not accept the idea of transference as a base for *isti‘āra* and consequently considered *isti‘āra* as a type of *majāz ‘aqlī*. Al-Rāzī prefers the view of al-Jurjānī in his *Asrār* and that is because *isti‘āra* is a special case of *majāz* and *majāz* requires transference, therefore transference occurs in the *isti‘āra*<sup>182</sup> and subsequently *isti‘āra* is a lexical trope.

<sup>177</sup> *Asrār*, p. 365, and *Nihāyat al-Ijāz*, p. 167.

<sup>178</sup> *Asrār*, pp.365- 366.

<sup>179</sup> al-Rāzī, *Nihāyat al-Ijāz*, p. 168.

<sup>180</sup> al-Rāzī calls this type *isti‘āra takhyīliyya* .

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., p. 232.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., pp. 236-237.

In his section on الاستعارة التخيلية (fantastic *isti'āra*) he states that the majority of the verses of the *Qur'ān* adhered to by those who accept anthropomorphism in the *Qur'ān* fall under these categories as well as other verses such as:

(وَاحْفَظْ لَهُمَا جَنَاحَ الذُّلِّ مِنَ الرَّحْمَةِ وَقُلْ رَبِّ ارْحَمْهُمَا كَمَا رَبَّيَانِي صَغِيرًا)

“And lower to them the wing of humbleness out of mercy and say, ‘my Lord have mercy upon them, as they raised me up when I was little’. Q (17:24)

Al-Rāzī also discussed the issue of *majāz* in his book about *uṣūl al-fiqh* (principles of jurisprudence) entitled المحصول في علم أصول الفقه<sup>183</sup>. His treatment of *majāz* in this book has not been taken into account by those who wrote about his contribution to ‘ilm al-balāgha<sup>184</sup>. In a section entitled “On *Ḥaqīqa* and *Majāz*” he offers this definition of *majāz*:

“*al-majāz* is what denotes a conventional meaning [secondary meaning] that is different from [the primary meaning] which was agreed upon originally in the convention in which the discourse has taken place on account of a relationship between it [the secondary meaning] and the first one [the primary meaning].”<sup>185</sup>

<sup>183</sup> al-Rāzī, *al-Maḥṣūl fī ‘ilm uṣūl al-fiqh*, edited by Ṭāha Jābr al-‘ilwānī, *Mu’assasat al-Risāla*, Beirut 1992 Vol. 1.

<sup>184</sup> Shawqī Ḍayf, Badawī Ṭabāna, Aḥmad Maṭlūb and the editor of his book *nihāya al-Ījāz*, Bakrī Shaykh Amīn.

<sup>185</sup> al-Rāzī, *al-Maḥṣūl* vol. 1, p. 286. The first part of this definition is offered by the *Mu’tazilite* Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī in his book *al-Mu’tamad fī uṣūl al-fiqh*, edited by Khafīl al-Mays, *Dār al-Kutub al-‘ilmiyya*, Beirut 1983, p. 11. I think that the mentioning of a relationship, in the last part of the definition, reflects al-Jurjānī’s influence on al-Rāzī. The previous book “*al-Mu’tamad* (this book is an abbreviation of another book by Al-Baṣrī which is a commentary on *Kitāb al-‘Umad*) is one of four books which al-Rāzī mainly relies on in writing his book *al-Maḥṣūl*. The other three are: *Kitāb al-Burhān* of Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī (edited by Ṣalāḥ b. Muḥammad b. ‘Uwayda, 2 vols, *Dār al-Kutub al-‘ilmiyya*, Beirut 1997), *al-Mustaṣfā* of al-Imām al-Ghazālī and *al-‘Ahd* of al-Qāḍī ‘abd al-Jabbār al-Hamadānī (There is no trace of this book as far as I know). Compare this definition with that offered by his contemporary al-Āmidī (631/1633) in his book *al-Iḥkām fī Uṣūl al-Aḥkām* (edited by Ibrāhīm al-‘Ajūz, *Dār al-Kutub al-‘ilmiyya*, Beirut n.d. vol. 1, p. 28, ( his treatment of *majāz* can be found in pages 26-48): “*majāz* is a vocable used to convey a meaning other than the meaning to which it was originally assigned on account of a relationship between the two meanings”, translated by Bernard G. Weiss, *The Search For God’s Law*, University of Utah Press, 1992, pp. 134-135. Al-

Then he refutes various opinions about *ḥaqīqa* and *majāz*, including those of al-Jurjānī.<sup>186</sup> In the second section he divides *majāz* broadly (following al-Jurjānī) into three categories:

1. *majāz* in a single word;
2. *majāz* in the structure or of a sentence;
3. *majāz* in the combination of the two.

After that al-Rāzī comments that the *Qurʾān* and traditions contain a lot of these types of *majāz* but the *Uṣūliyyūn*<sup>187</sup> (the scholars of *uṣūl al-fiqh*) do not pay attention to the distinction between these three types, however ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī summarised it.<sup>188</sup> He analyses the first type of *majāz* (that which occurs in a single word) and divides it into twelve types [cause/effect, whole/part..etc.,] including *istiʿāra* with examples and illustrations for each type.<sup>189</sup> This elaboration of *al-majāz al-lughawī* is the first comprehensive treatment written on the subject.<sup>190</sup> Al-Rāzī

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Amidī did not mention *al-majāz al-ʿaqlī* in his discussion of *majāz* and if one compares his treatment of the subject with that of al-Rāzī in his *Maḥṣūl*, it will be clear that the treatment of al-Rāzī is more comprehensive and thorough.

<sup>186</sup> al-Rāzī, *ibid.*, pp.291-292.

<sup>187</sup> The issue of *majāz* is usually discussed in the books of *uṣūl al-fiqh* since al-Jaṣṣāṣ (370/981). See the section about al-Jaṣṣāṣ's concept and subcategories of *majāz* in Wolfhart Heinrichs : *Contacts between Scriptural Hermeneutics and Literary Theory in Islam: The Case of Majāz* *op cit.* See also Hossein Modarressi, *Some Recent Analyses of the Concept of majāz in Islamic Jurisprudence*, *Journal of American Oriental Society* 106 (1986), pp. 787-91.

<sup>188</sup> Al-Rāzī, *ibid.*, pp. 321-322. Indeed if one looks at the major available sources of *al-Maḥṣūl* mentioned earlier; al-Ghazālī in his book *al-Mustaṣfā min ʿIlm al-Uṣūl* (Published: edited by Muḥammad Sulaymān al-Ashqar, 2 vols, *Muʾassasat al-Risāla*, Beirut, 1997) and *al-Muʿtamad* (*op cit.*, pp. 11-3), one will see the immaturity of the treatment (al-Juwaynī does not discuss the issue of *majāz* substantially in his book *al-Burhān*).

<sup>189</sup> Al-Rāzī, *al-Maḥṣūl*, pp. 322-327.

<sup>190</sup> Reinert (the article about *madjaz* (sic.) in the *EI* 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.) was not accurate when he says that "The different modes of expression labelled as *madjaz* by the Arabic theorists were divided into twelve categories by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (606-1210) without, however, following a consistent system of criteria". First of all as we have seen above al-Rāzī divided *majāz* into two: *majāz ʿaqlī* and *lughawī*, then divided the second type into 12 categories. Secondly al-Rāzī is consistent in his division as all the 12 categories belong to the *majāz* which occurs in a single word (*majāz lughawī*) one of them *istiʿāra* and the rest belong to *al-majāz al-mursal*. His division was modified by some later authors such as: Kamal al-Dīn al-Zamalkānī, *al-Burhān al-Kāshif ʿan Iʿjāz al-Qurʾān*, edited by Khadīja al-Ḥudaythī and Aḥmad Maṭlūb, *Maṭbaʿat al-ʿānī*, Baghdad, 1974, pp. 102-104 and Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b.

did not invent all these types of *majāz*; al-Jurjānī in his books identifies four types of this *majāz* which are: *تسمية الشيء باسم جزئه* causality, *مجاورة* proximity, *محلية* locality, while al-Zamakhsharī added four more types. They are: Using the whole to indicate the part, consideration of what it was, consideration of what it will lead to, and using the effect to indicate the cause.

In addition to al-Jurjānī, al-Rāzī was influenced by *al-Kashshāf* of al-Zamakhsharī<sup>191</sup>, al-Rummānī and *Ḥadā'iq al-Sihr fī Daqā'iq al-Shi'r* of al-Waṭwāṭ.<sup>192</sup> Al-Rāzī's presentation<sup>193</sup> of the material in his books as well as his discussions of various issues throughout them reflects his theological and philosophical training, especially in his attempts to give an exact definition to various terms. *Nihāyat al-Ījāz* was a major source used by al-Sakkākī in the section about *balāgha* in his book *Miftāḥ al-'Ulūm*.

### 1.18 Al-Sakkākī (d. 626AH/1229CE)<sup>194</sup>

The third part of al-Sakkākī's *Miftāḥ al-'Ulūm*, which is a compendium based on 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī's two books *Asrār* and *Dalā'il*, almost completely

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Muḥammad al-Jurjānī (729 A.H./ ), *al-ishārāt wa al-tanbīhāt fī 'ilm al-balāgha*, edited by 'Abd al-Qādir Ḥusayn, *Dār Nahḍat Miṣr*, Cairo, 1982, pp. 230 -238.

<sup>191</sup> al-Zamakhsharī's treatment of *majāz* in the *Qur'ān* will be discussed in another chapter in this study.

<sup>192</sup> Rashīd al-Dīn al-Waṭwāṭ, writer and a poet, was born in *Balkh* and died in *Khuwārazm* in 573 AH./ 1177 C.E.). One of his most important books is *Ḥadā'iq al-sihr* in Persian which resembles *Kitāb al-Badī'* of ibn al-Mu'tazz in its methodology and way of presenting examples. For more information See Aḥmad Maṭlūb, *al-Balāgha 'inda al-Sakkākī*, *Maktabat al-Nahḍa*, Baghdad 1964, pp. 242-248 and the introduction of *Nihāyat al-Ījāz* of al-Rāzī, pp.63-67.

<sup>193</sup> For further details about the contribution of al-Rāzī to *'ilm al-balāgha* see: Shawqī Dayf, pp. 271-286, and Badawī Ṭabāna, pp. 334-336.

<sup>194</sup> Al-Sakkākī: Abū Yūsuf b. Abī Bakr al-Sakkākī was a grammarian and rhetorician from *Khuwārazm*, and autor of the influential compendium *Miftāḥ al-'Ulūm*. Not much is known of his life, the last three years of which he is said to have spent in prison on the order of Jaghatay, son of Chinghiz Khan.

For more information about the contribution of al-Sakkākī to *balāgha* see: Aḥmad Maṭlūb, *al-Balāgha 'inda al-Sakkākī*, *Maktabat al-Nahḍa*, Baghdad, 1964. William Smyth, The Canonical Formulation of *Ilm al-Balāgha* and al-Sakkākī's *Miftāḥ al-'Ulūm*, *Der Islam* 72 (1995):pp. 7-24. And also Shawqī Dayf, pp. 286-314, Badawī Ṭabāna, pp. 336 -355.

superseded them. In addition to al-Jurjānī, al-Sakkākī was influenced<sup>195</sup> by al-Zamakhsharī (*al-Kashshāf*), al-Waṭwāṭ (*Hadā'iq al-Sihr*) and al-Rāzī.

In the introduction to his book, Al-Sakkākī states that he composed it because of the insistence of some people in his time and he guaranteed to those who master it that they will be able to avoid making mistakes in the Arabic language. According to al-Sakkākī, the possible sources for committing mistakes are three: مفرد single word, التأليف grammatical composition and كون المركب مطابقاً لما يجب أن يتكلم له the manner in which these grammatical compositions correspond exactly to whatever require to be said. For this reason al-Sakkākī divides his book into three sections: علم (Morphology), علم النحو (grammar) and في علمي المعاني والبيان.<sup>196</sup> The focus here is his last part which deals with the issue of *Balāgha*.

Al-Sakkākī was at that time the first<sup>197</sup> to divide *‘Ilm al-Balāgha* into three branches *bayān*, *ma‘ānī* and what he called محسنات (embellishments) which later came to be known as بديع as we will see later, and the first to determine their exact topics and divisions.

Al-Sakkākī discusses the issue of *majāz* and *isti‘āra* under his section on بيان. He says that the scholars of this art among the ancestors divided this *majāz* into two types: *lughawī* which is *majāz* in a single word and *‘aqlī* which is *majāz* in a sentence.

*Al-lughawī* is divided into four categories<sup>198</sup>:

1. Semantic which has no value: this includes the transference of generic names of parts of the body from one genus to another as shown in the use of hoof for a foot. Al-Jurjānī called this type as استعارة غير مفيدة (inexpressive metaphor)

<sup>195</sup> For more information see Aḥmad Maṭlūb: *al-Balāgha ‘inda al-Sakkākī*, pp. 191-262

<sup>196</sup> Abū Ya‘qūb Yūsuf b. Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Sakkākī, *Miftāḥ al-‘ulūm*, edited by ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Hindāwī, *Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya*, Beirut 2000, pp. 38-40.

<sup>197</sup> What Reinert says is not accurate in his article about al-Ma‘ānī wa ‘l-bayān in *EI 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.* which runs "the two terms appear for the first time" in the *Miftāḥ al-‘Ulūm* of al-Sakkākī". As a matter of fact, al-Zamakhsharī in his *Kashshāf* (*al-Kashshāf, Dār al-Fikr*, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed., 1977, vol. 1, p.16) says that no one can interpret the *Qur’ān* save the one "masters two disciplines related to the *Qur’ān*, which are *‘ilm al-Ma‘ānī wa ‘ilm al-bayān*", and al-Rāzī also mentions these terms in his book *Nihāyat al-Ījāz* as quoted by Aḥmad Maṭlūb in his book *al-Balāgha ‘inda al-Sakkākī*, p. 120. Although these terms were mentioned by al-Rāzī and al-Zamakhsharī in relation to *al-Balāgha* they did not define nor clarify them.

<sup>198</sup> *Miftāḥ al-Ulūm*, p. 471.

2. Semantic which has a value and not based on *tashbīh* (what is later called (مجاز مرسل) e.g., using hand to mean power.

3. Semantic which has a value based on *tashbīh* (similarity): *isti'āra*. Al-Sakkākī gives this definition

“*Isti'āra* is to mention one part of the *tashbīh* (simile) and intend by it the other part; claiming that the *mushabbah* (topic) comes under the genus of the *mushabbah bi-hi* (analogue), indicating that by affirming to the topic what belongs to the analogue. As you say في الحمام أسد (there is a lion in the bathhouse) where you mean a courageous man”.<sup>199</sup>

Then he speaks about the divisions of *isti'āra* following al-Jurjānī and al-Rāzī.<sup>200</sup> Al-Sakkākī here agrees with al-Jurjānī in his *Asrār* in considering *isti'āra* as *majāz lughawī* not *majāz 'aqlī*.

4. Related grammatically to the case ending of a word, for example:

(وَأَسْأَلُ الْقَرْيَةَ الَّتِي كُنَّا فِيهَا وَالْعَيْرَ الَّتِي أَقْبَلْنَا فِيهَا وَإِنَّا لَصَادِقُونَ)

“Enquire of the city [village (al-qarya)] wherein we were”. Q (12:82)

Originally it is اسأل أهل القرية (Ask the inhabitants of the village); the original case ending of the word قرية is جر (genitive) and النصب (accusative) is *majāz*. Al-Sakkākī believes that this type of expression should be attached to *majāz*, not to be considered as *majāz* in its own right.

As for the *al-majāz al-'aqlī*:

“it is the utterance that conveys an opposite judgement to that of speaker through intellectual effort (or interpretation); the conveying of this opposite judgement is not through [linguistic] convention. Example: أنبت الربيع البقل (springtime brought forth the herbage) the true subject of this verb is God if the speaker is a believer (a case of *majāz 'aqlī*).”<sup>201</sup>

Then al-Sakkākī denies that this type of *majāz* is *'aqlī*; instead he made it استعارة (alluded metaphor). So for the previous example الربيع is أنبت الربيع البقل (alluded metaphor). So for the previous example

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 477.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 477-501.

alluded metaphor for the true subject by way of hyperbolism in comparison and the predication of *inbāt* (bringing forth) is the frame of reference قرينة for this *isti'āra*.<sup>202</sup>

Al-Sakkākī's section on *'ilm al-balāgha* proved to be very popular among later writers on the subject. This section attracted twenty-five commentaries (*shurūḥ*).<sup>203</sup> The summarization (*talkhīṣ al-Miftāḥ*) of the *Miftāḥ* by al-Khaṭīb al-Qazwīnī also attracted huge attention in the scholastic age, which I will discuss later in the section about al-Qazwīnī.

### 1.19 Ibn al-Athīr (d. 637AH/1239CE)<sup>204</sup>

The literary study of *balāgha* reached its culmination in the work of Ibn al-Athīr. His major works on the subjects are: *Al-Jāmi' al-Kabīr fī Ṣinā'at al-Manẓūm min al-Kalām wa al-Manthūr*<sup>205</sup> and *al-Mathal al-Sā'ir fī Adab al-Kātib wa al-Shā'ir*<sup>206</sup>.

The previous studies available to me of Ibn al-Athīr's views on *balāgha* relied only on his major work *al-Mathal al-Sā'ir* and did not take his early work *al-Jāmi' al-Kabīr*

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<sup>201</sup> *Miftāḥ al-'Ulūm, ibid.*, p. 503. B. Reinert (*Madjaz EI*, ) did not mention that al-Sakkākī does not consider this type of *majāz* as *'aqḷī*.

<sup>202</sup> *Miftāḥ al-'Ulūm, ibid.*, p. 511. B. Reinert (*Madjaz EI, ibid*) did not mention that al-Sakkākī does not consider this type of *majāz* as *'aqḷī*.

<sup>203</sup> William Smyth, Controversy in a tradition of commentary : The academic legacy of al-Sakkākī 's *Miftāḥ al-'Ulūm*, *The Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Oct-Dec 1992, vol 112, No. 4, p. 589 -91

<sup>204</sup> Ibn al-Athīr, *Ḍiyā' al-Dīn*: Abū al-Faṭḥ Naṣr Allāh b. Muḥammad al-Jazarī *Ḍiyā' al-Dīn* b. al-Athīr was an epistolographer, literary theorist and critic. Born in Jazīrat Ibn 'Umar, present-day Cizre (southeast Turkey). He was the youngest of three brothers who all left their mark on Islamic intellectual history, the other two being the *ḥadīth* scholar Majd al-Dīn (d.606AH/1210CE) and the historian 'Izz al-Dīn (d. 630AH/1233CE). He had a distinguished, if chequered, career as a statesman, serving briefly with Saladin, then as vizier with the latter's son al-Malik al-Afḍal in Damascus and elsewhere and finally, after many ups and downs, ending his administrative life as chief chancellor in Mūsil under the last Zangid ruler and his successor, the atabeg Badr al-Dīn Lu'lu'. His literary output is exclusively addressed to the needs of the state scribe and epistolographer.

<sup>205</sup> *Ḍiyā' al-Dīn Ibn al-Athīr, Al-Jāmi' al-Kabīr fī Ṣinā'at al-Manẓūm min al-Kalām wa al-Manthūr*, Edited by Muṣṭafā Jawād and Jamīl Sa'īd, *Maṭba'at al-Majma' al-'ilmī al-'Irāqī*, 1956.

into account.<sup>207</sup> The focus here is to study his views on *majāz* and *isti'āra*, taking into account his views in both books to get a clear picture of the development of his thought in this matter.

#### *Majāz* and *isti'āra* in *al-Jāmi' al-Kabīr*:

Ibn al-Athīr defines *Majāz*:

و أما المجاز: فهو ما أريد به غير المعنى الموضوع له في أصل اللغة، اتساعاً

“As for *majāz* what is meant by it is other than its conventional meaning in the origin of the language by way of semantic expansion”.<sup>208</sup>

This is a re-phrase of Ibn Jinnī's definition<sup>209</sup> of *majāz*. After that Ibn al-Athīr offers another definition for *majāz*:

وقيل هو ما نقل عن موضوعه الأصلي إلى غيره بسبب مشابهة بين محل الحقيقة ومحلها في أمر مشهور

“It is said that it is what has been transferred from its original conventional [sense] to another because of the similarity between the place of *ḥaqīqa* and its place and that in a famous matter”.<sup>210</sup>

He divides the *majāz* into 14 categories including various types of *al-Majāz al-Mursal*, *isti'āra* and ellipsis (اسأل القرية), and he repeats what Ibn Jinnī<sup>211</sup> has said without acknowledging him:

إنما يعدل عن الحقيقة إلى المجاز لمعان ثلاث و هي الاتساع والتشبيه والتوكيد

And most of the language is *majāz* not *ḥaqīqa*.<sup>212</sup> In this section Ibn al-Athīr does not mention or give any example regarding what is called *al-Majāz al-'aqīlī*.

Regarding *isti'āra*, Ibn al-Athīr offers this definition without indicating his source:<sup>213</sup>

<sup>206</sup> Abū al-Faṭḥ Ḍiyā' al-Dīn Ibn al-Athīr *al-Mathal al-Sā'ir fī Adab al-Kātib wa al-Shā'ir*, edited by Muḥamad Muḥyī al-Dīn 'Abd al-Ḥamīd, al-Bābī al-Ḥalībī, 2 vols, Cairo, 1939.

<sup>207</sup> See: Shawqī Ḍayf, *al-Balāgha Taṭwūr wa Tārīkh*, *op cit.*, 323-335, Badawī Ṭabāna, *al-Bayān al-'Arabī*, *op cit.*, pp. 267-322, and Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Ṣūfiyya, *al-Mabāḥith al-Bayāniyya bayna Ibn al-Athīr wa al-'Alawī*, Tripoli, Libya, 1984.

<sup>208</sup> Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Jāmi'*, p. 28.

<sup>209</sup> Already mentioned in the section about Ibn Jinnī.

<sup>210</sup> *Al-Jāmi' al-Kabīr*, p. 28.

<sup>211</sup> Ibn Jinnī, p. 442.

<sup>212</sup> Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Jāmi'*, pp. 30-31.



و هو أن تريد تشبيه الشيء بالشيء فتدع الإفصاح بالتشبيه وإظهاره، وتجيء على اسم المشبه به وتجريه عليه كقولك: " رأيت رجلاً هو كالأسد في شجاعته وقوة بطشه سواء", فتدع ذلك و تقول " رأيت أسد".

“It is when you want to compare something with something else thus you do not disclose or reveal the comparison and then you treat the *mushabbah bi-hi* (analogue) in the same manner as if it is the[ *mushabbah* ] (the topic). As you say: I saw a man who is like a lion in both his courage and the strength of his attack; then you leave this and say I saw a lion.”<sup>214</sup>

Then Ibn al-Athīr divides *isti‘āra* into two types: the first is to conceal the *mushabbah* and to mention only the *mushabbah bi-hi* like رأيت أسداً and the second type is to make *al-mushabbah bi-hi khabar* (predicate) for the *mushabbah* such as زيد أسد. Ibn al-Athīr states that Qudāma b. Ja‘far, al-Jāhiz, Abū Hilāl al-‘Askarī, al-Ghānimī<sup>215</sup> and Ibn Sinān al-Khafājī all consider this type as *isti‘āra*, but Ibn al-Athīr believes that this type is *tashbīh balīgh* (eloquent simile) not *isti‘āra*. Ibn al-Athīr then discusses *tashbīh* using the concept of *majāz*:

“as for *majāz* [in *tashbīh* ], it is to say about two things which resemble each other in some of their characteristics as when say " زيد أسد" (Zayd is a lion). This statement is true with respect to the usage of the Arabs in their speech and it comes under hyperbolism, however Zayd is not a lion in reality”.<sup>216</sup>

In this matter of considering *tashbīh* in terms of *majāz*, Ibn al-Athīr differs from other writers on the subject in this book while his other views on *majāz* and *isti‘āra* are mere repetitions of opinions of others.

<sup>213</sup> As a matter of fact this is the definition of *isti‘āra* (Ibn al-Athīr omits the phrase **فتعيره المشبه** from his definition) as offered by al-Jurjānī in his *Dalā’il al-I‘jāz*, *op cit.*, p. 114 which is

فلاستعارة: أن تريد تشبيه الشيء بالشيء، فتدع أن تفصح بالتشبيه وتظهره، وتجيء إلى اسم المشبه به **فتعيره** تريد أن تقول: رأيت رجلاً هو كالأسد في شجاعته وقوة بطشه سواء فتدع ذلك وتقول **المشبه** وتجريه عليه. رأيت أسداً

<sup>214</sup> Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Jāmi‘ al-Kabīr*, p. 82.

<sup>215</sup> Muḥammad b. Ghānim, a poet and man of letters, the great vizier Nizām al-Mulk was a topic of his panegyric poetry. See footnote no. 2, p. 2 (of the text of Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Jāmi‘*).

<sup>216</sup> *Al-Jāmi‘ al-Kabīr*, p. 90.

Majāz and isti'āra in al-Mathal al-Sā'ir:

In his chapter on *ḥaqīqa* and *majāz*, Ibn al-Athīr gives this definition:

“*majāz* is what is meant by it other than its conventional meaning in the origin of the language and it is derived from جاز to cross from this place to another place... so the true nature of *majāz* is the transference from one locality to another and this has been applied to the transference of utterances from one locus to another as in our saying زيد أسد, Zayd is a human and lion is a known animal and here [by saying Zayd is a lion] we have crossed from humanity to lionism أسدية ...meaning we crossed from this to this because there is a connection between them and the connection in this case is the attribute of courage. The crossing might be without connection and this is [called] semantic expansion (اتساع).”<sup>217</sup>

It can be observed that Ibn al-Athīr in his definition of *majāz* combines the two definitions mentioned in his book *al-Jāmi'*. So according to this definition *majāz* can take place either if there is a connection between the primary sense and the secondary sense, or for the purpose of semantic expansion.

Ibn al-Athīr then states that some people believe that the discourse is all *ḥaqīqa* and has no *majāz* in it, while others believe the opposite, that the discourse is all *majāz* and has no *ḥaqīqa* in it. He argues that both opinions are false, and language contains both *ḥaqīqa* and *majāz*.<sup>218</sup> In this matter Ibn al-Athīr withdraws what he said in *al-Jāmi' al-Kabīr*, that most of the language is *majāz* which is as a matter of fact the opinion of Ibn Jinnī, as we have seen earlier.

In the beginning of his chapter about *isti'āra*, Ibn al-Athīr states that his work is a product of his own mind and not something he heard from others. He goes on to say that:

“*Majāz* can be divided into two parts: semantic expansion in the discourse and *tashbīh*. *Tashbīh* is of two types: complete *tashbīh* and omitted *tashbīh*; the complete *tashbīh* is when you mention *al-mushabbah* (the topic) and *al-mushabbah bi-hi* (the analogue), while the omitted *tashbīh* is to mention *al-*

<sup>217</sup> Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Mathal al-Sā'ir*, vol. 1, p. 58.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

*mushabbah* only and to omit *al-mushabbah bi-hi*. The last type of *tashbīh* is called *isti'āra*; this term has been coined to distinguish between this type of *tashbīh* and the complete one, otherwise both can be called *tashbīh*. It is also possible for this kind of *tashbīh* [the second type] to be called *isti'āra* because both [*al-mushaba* and *al-mushabbah bi-hi*] share the meaning [like courage when we say I saw a lion]. As for the semantic expansion, it is used for the purpose of having freedom in using the language not for other benefit. If you wish you can say: *Majāz* can be divided into semantic expansion in the discourse, *tashbīh* and *isti'āra*. It does not go beyond any of these three categories, so whichever [of these categories] is there then it is *majāz*".<sup>219</sup>

Then he states that the *tashbīh* where the particle of comparison is omitted cannot be considered as *isti'āra*, for example; زيد أسد .

It is clear from above that his view about *isti'āra* ("to mention *al-mushabbah* only and to omit *al-mushabbah bi-hi*") is not clear. How can we explain this expression if we accept his definition: رأيت أسداً as we have omitted here the *mushabbah* not *al-mushabbah bi-hi*? If one argues that Ibn al-Athīr means what is called استعارة مكنية (which is to mention *al-mushabbah* and to omit the *mushabbah bi-hi* but at the same time you allude to the *mushabbah bi-hi* using one of its significant qualities) the answer will be that he failed to mention that there should be an indication to the *mushabbah bi-hi* in some way or another (لوازم المشبه به). Furthermore, later in his chapter he presented some examples including poetry and *Qur'ānic* verses which contain استعارات مكنية (metaphors by way of allusion), but he did not consider them as *isti'ārāt* rather as semantic expansion in the discourse.<sup>220</sup>

(فَمَا بَكَتْ عَلَيْهِمُ السَّمَاءُ وَالْأَرْضُ وَمَا كَانُوا مُنْظَرِينَ)

"Neither heaven nor earth wept for them". Q (44:29)

So it can be concluded that he does not mean by the expression أن يذكر المشبه دون المشبه an alluded metaphor (استعارة مكنية). There might be a possible explanation which is an error in the editing of this book and the statement: والتشبيه المحذوف: أن يذكر المشبه و التشبيه المحذوف: أن يذكر المشبه به دون المشبه can be read as أن يذكر المشبه به دون المشبه . What supports this reading is that in the same page Ibn al-Athīr, speaking about the reasons to use *majāz* instead

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p.356.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 361- 363.

of *ḥaqīqa*, says that one of the reasons to use *majāz* could be if there is مشاركة (sharing [the meaning]) - note that he used the word وصلة (connection) to describe the same thing in his definition of *majāz* in his book *al-Mathal al-Sā'ir*. So if there is مشاركة then we have two types:

"فإما أن يذكر المنقول والمنقول إليه معاً وإما أن يذكر المنقول إليه دون المنقول"

"either the transferred term and the term transferred to are both mentioned [this is the case of *tashbīh*] or the term transferred to is mentioned excluding the transferred term [this is the case of *isti'āra*]"

Ibn al-Athīr defines *isti'āra* saying that:

"[it is] the transference of meaning from an utterance to [another] utterance because of a shared meaning between them, [this is done by] concealing the term transferred to (المنقول إليه) ...and its procedure is that you lend the name of the *mushabbah bi-hi* to the *mushabbah* ...For example when you say:<sup>221</sup>  
”رأيت أسداً”

Then Ibn al-Athīr quotes Ibn jinnī's view about *majāz*, which we came cross earlier: “*majāz* is used instead of *ḥaqīqa* for three ideas: semantic expansion, emphasis and comparison. If none of these reasons exist then it is the pure *ḥaqīqa*”<sup>222</sup> He criticises Ibn Jinnī's method of applying these three ideas to explain *majāz*. Ibn al-Athīr states in this regard that Ibn jinnī made the existence of these three ideas, the reason for the existence of *majāz*, which is wrong, since *majāz* can be achieved even if there is only either *tashbīh* or *ittisā'* (semantic expansion); furthermore, تأكيد (emphasis) and تشبيه (comparison) are the same if Ibn jinnī means by the word *tawkid* a hyperbolism.<sup>223</sup>

Then Ibn al-Athīr states that he read a book<sup>224</sup> about *Uṣūl al-fiqh* written by Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī in which he divides *majāz* into 14 categories<sup>225</sup> including *isti'āra*,

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 365.

<sup>222</sup> Ibn Jinnī, Uthmān Ibn 'Abd Allāh . *Al-Khaṣā'is*. Edited by Muḥammad 'Alī al-Najjār, *Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya* 1955. vol. 2. p. 442.

<sup>223</sup> *al-Mathal al-Sā'ir*, vol. 1, pp. 366-368.

<sup>224</sup> I could not find al-Ghazālī's book to which Ibn al-Athīr refers to. Al-Ghazālī wrote five books on *uṣūl al-fiqh* which are: 1. *al-Mankhūl min ta'liqāt al-uṣūl* (published, edited by Muḥammad Ḥasan Hītū, *Dār al-Fikr al-Mu'āṣir*, Beirut 1998). 2.

*al-majāz al-mursal* and *majāz al-ziyāda wa al-nuqsān* (pleonasm and ellipses). He goes on to refute these categories by showing how they can be explained by his division of *majāz* (*tawassu'*, *tashbīh* and *isti'āra*); so for instance Ibn al-Athīr states that the second category of al-Ghazālī (which is calling something by the name of what it will end up with, as in this verse:

(وَدَخَلَ مَعَهُ السَّجْنَ فَتَيَانٍ قَالَ أَحَدُهُمَا إِنِّي أَرَانِي أَعْصِرُ خَمْرًا وَقَالَ الْآخَرُ إِنِّي أَرَانِي أُحْمِلُ فَوْقَ رَأْسِي خُبْرًا تَأْكُلُ الطَّيْرُ مِنْهُ نَبْنَأُ بِتَأْوِيلِهِ إِنَّا نَرَاكَ مِنَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ)

“Said one of them, ‘I dreamed that I was pressing [wine]<sup>226</sup>’. Q (12:36)

Here *khamr* stands for grape but it is called *khamr* because it will turn into *khamr*; this is *isti'āra*. No one else before Ibn al-Athīr called this type of *majāz isti'āra*<sup>227</sup> and Ibn al-Athīr stands in sharp contrast to all other writers on the subject.

*Al-Mathal al-Sā'ir* draws excessive appraisal and harsh criticism alike. In his book *Kashf al-Zunūn*,<sup>228</sup> Ḥājī Khalīfa mentions various books including *al-Falak al-Dā'ir* ‘*alā al-Mathal al-Sā'ir*’<sup>229</sup> by Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd<sup>230</sup> and in turn Abū al-Qāsim al-Sinjārī wrote a reply to this book entitled *Nashr al-Mathal al-Sā'ir wa Ṭayy al-Falak al-Dā'ir*.

In his book *al-Jāmi' al-Kabīr*, Ibn al-Athīr was not original in his views about *majāz* and *isti'āra*. He was influenced, as we have seen earlier, by Ibn Jinnī in his views on

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*Shifā' al-Ghalīl fī bayān al-Shabah wa al-Mukhīl wa Masālik al-Ta'fīl* (Published, *Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya*, Beirut, 1999). 3. *al-Mustaṣfā min 'Ilm al-Uṣūl* (Published: edited by Muḥammad Sulaymān al-Ashqar, 2 vols, *Mu'assast al-Risāla*, Beirut, 1997). 4. *Asās al-Qiyās* (Published: Edited by Fahd al-Sarḥān, al-Riyāḍ, 1413 A.H.). 5. *Tahdhīb al-Uṣūl* (Lost: This book is an extensive treatment of *uṣūl al-fiqh*; it was mentioned by al-Ghazali in his *al-Mustaṣfā* vol. 1, p. 33. See 'Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī: *Mu'allafāt al-Ghazālī*, Wakālat al-Maṭbū'āt, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Kuwait 1977 pp. 210 -211). So I believe that the book which Ibn al-Athīr is referring to is *Tahdhīb al-Uṣūl*.

<sup>225</sup> Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 1, pp. 368-374

<sup>226</sup> The original translation of this word by Arberry is (grapes).

<sup>227</sup> The editor of *al-Mathal al-Sā'ir* Muḥammad Muḥyī al-Dīn 'Abd al-Ḥamīd does not consider this example as *isti'āra* "No this example can not be considered as *isti'āra* even if the author (Ibn al-Athīr) swears on this matter". *Al-Mathal al-Sā'ir*, vol. 1, p. 369, no. 1.

<sup>228</sup> *Kashf al-Zunūn*, Dar al-Fikr, Lebanon, 1999, vol. 2, pp.486-487.

<sup>229</sup> *Hadhā kitāb al-falak al-dā'ir 'alā al-mathal al-sā'ir*, Bombay, 1891.

<sup>230</sup> Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd is the famous Mu'tazili commentator on *Nahj al-Balāgha* of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, philologist and a poet (d.655 or 56/1257 or 58).

*majāz* and by ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī in his definition of *isti‘āra*. What is new in his discussion is his consideration of *tashbīh* as a form of *majāz*.

In his book *al-Mathal al-Sā’ir*, he combines his two previous definitions in *al-Jāmi‘* and restates clearly his classification of *tashbīh* as *majāz*. He refers to the views of Ibn Jinnī about *majāz* and refutes them. He does not mention *al-majāz al-‘aqlī* in either of his books, nor does he consider *al-isti‘āra al-makniyya* (alluded metaphor) as *isti‘āra*; instead he considers it as *ittisā‘* (semantic expansion). The novelty of his approach lies in his division of *majāz* into three types: *isti‘āra*, *tashbīh* and *ittisā‘*. Shawqī Dayf commenting on his views about *isti‘āra* believes that his view “is not precise”,<sup>231</sup> which is true if we read the statement والتشبيه المحذوف أن يذكر المشبه دون المشبه به as it is, but if we accept it as a mere editing error as I mentioned earlier, then his views are consistent and there is no contradiction in them. Finally Ibn al-Athīr was familiar with ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī’s views at least in his book *Dalā’il al-I’jāz*, even though he did not mention his name.

## 1.20 Al-Zamalkānī d.651AH/1253CE)<sup>232</sup>

Al-Zamalkānī wrote two books on the issues of *balāgha* and *i’jāz* (inimitability) in the *Qur’ān*; *al-Tibyān fī ‘ilm al-Bayān al-Muṭṭali‘ ‘alā I’jāz al-Qur’ān*<sup>233</sup> and *al-Burhān al-Kāshif ‘an I’jāz al-Qur’ān*. Al-Zamalkānī wrote *Al-Tibyān* in order to simplify *Dalā’il al-I’jāz* of ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī and make it accessible. *Al-Tibyān* is dominated by grammatical concerns due to the fact that it was based on *al-Dalā’il*.<sup>234</sup> The editors of the book<sup>235</sup> state that al-Zamalkānī was influenced by

<sup>231</sup> Shawqī Dayf, p. 329.

<sup>232</sup> Al-Zamalkānī: Kamāl al-Dīn Abū al-Makārim ‘Abd al-Wāhid b. ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Ansārī al-Simākī al-Dimashqī al-Shāfi‘ī al-Zamalkānī. He is attributed to Zamalkān which is a village in al-Ghūṭa in Damascus. He was appointed as a judge in Ṣarkhad and he taught for sometime in Ba‘labak. He is the author of the two books *al-Tibyān fī ‘ilm al-Bayān* and *al-Burhān al-Kāshif ‘an I’jāz al-Qur’ān*. Furthermore, he was a poet but only one poem survived and the manuscript can be found in Leiden library. Most of the ancient sources, however, do not mention al-Zamalkānī and they give more importance to his grandson al-Kamāl al-Zamalkānī. Therefore we do not have knowledge about our author save what is mentioned above. He says nothing about his life and teachers save his teacher Abū ‘Umar b. al-Ḥājib. Thus the biography of this secretive judge and scholar remains obscure (see the introduction of the editors of : al-Zamalkani 1974, *al-Burhān al-Kāshif ‘an I’jāz al-Qur’ān*, Khadīja al-Hudaythī & Aḥmad Maṭlūb (ed.), pp. 12-13)

<sup>233</sup> Edited by Aḥmad Maṭlūb and Khadīja al-Ḥadīthī, Baghdad, 1964.

<sup>234</sup> *Al-Burhān al-Kāshif*, p. 20.

*Dirāyat al-Ījāz* of al-Rāzī , *Miftāḥ al-‘Ulūm* of al-Sakkākī, *al-Badī‘ fī naqd al-Shi‘r* of Ibn Munqidh and *al-Mathal al-Sā‘ir* of Ibn al-Athīr.

In his other book *al-Burhān al-Kāshif* which was written after *al-Tibyān*,<sup>236</sup> al-Zamalkānī covered most of the topics of *al-Burhān* with some modification including elaborate discussion of some points.<sup>237</sup>

Al-Zamalkānī divides his book into three parts: the first part deals with the issue of *i‘jāz al-Qur’ān*, the second with individual words and the third with composition and constructions. He deals with the issue of *majāz* in the second part of his book. In a section entitled “On *Ḥaqīqa* and *Majāz*” he speaks about the significations of vocables and offers this definition for *majāz*<sup>238</sup> as “المجاز ما استعمل فيما لا يفهم منه عند الإطلاق لعلاقة مع قيام القرينة” which can be translated as

“*al-majāz* is the vocable used in a sense which does not indicate his original semantic signification. [The vocable] is used because of a relationship [between its original semantic signification and the secondary meaning] and with existence of frame of reference [to indicate that the original meaning is not meant here]”.

Al-Zamalkānī acknowledges that *majāz al-ziyāda* in the verse Q (42:11) and *al-majāz al-‘aqli* which occurs in a sentence do not come under his definition, but he attempts to accommodate them in his definition or alter it. In the same page he acknowledges that *majāz* can take place in a single word and in a structure or sentence, following ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī<sup>239</sup>. In the next section he speaks of the division of *al-majāz al-ifrādī* (*majāz* that takes place in a single word) – following al-Rāzī 's division in his *al-Maḥṣūl* mentioned above – including various relations of what is later called *al-majāz al-mursal*, *isti‘āra*, and *majāz al-ziyāda wa al-nuqṣān* (pleonasm and ellipses).

In the next section he states that *kināya*, *isti‘āra* and *tamthīl* are generally<sup>240</sup> related to *majāz*. Regarding *isti‘āra*, he defines<sup>241</sup> it in a similar way to that of al-Jurjānī in his *Dalā’il*, that is to call *al-mushabbah* with the name of *mushabbah bi-hi* without using the particle of comparison (رأيت أسداً) or to make something belong to

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>236</sup> the editors introduction to the *al-Burhān*, *ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, (introduction by the editors) pp. 28-29.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, p.105.

something else (يد الشمال). He comments that attributing a hand to the wind is a kind of fantasy and delusion (تخييل ووهم) and whoever ignores such an understanding will fall in the fathomless deep sea, which has no shore (لجة بحر لا ساحل له) when he hears these verses:<sup>242</sup>

(تَجْرِي بِأَعْيُنِنَا جَزَاءَ لَمَن كَانَ كُفِرَ)

“..running before Our eyes”. Q (54:14)

(أَنِ افْزَفِيهِ فِي التَّابُوتِ فَأَقْذِفِهِ فِي الْيَمِّ فَلْيُلْقِهِ الْيَمُّ بِالسَّاحِلِ يَأْخُذْهُ عَدُوٌّ لِّي وَعَدُوٌّ لَهُ وَالْقَيْتُ عَلَيْكَ مَحَبَّةٌ مِّنِّي

وَلَتُصْنَعَ عَلَيَّ عَيْنِي)

“..and to be formed in My sight”. Q (20:39)

Al-Zamalkānī's views about *majāz* and *isti'āra* were mainly influenced by al-Jurjānī and al-Rāzī but he departed from al-Rāzī in considering *kināya* as *majāz*.

### 1.21 Ibn Abī al-Iṣḥā' al-Miṣrī (d.654AH/d.1256)<sup>243</sup>

Ibn Abī al-Iṣḥā' wrote two major books on *balāgha* which are *Taḥrīr al-Taḥbīr* and *Badī' al-Qur'ān*. His approach to *balāgha* is a literary one. In his book *Taḥrīr al-Taḥbīr* he enumerated 122 types of *badī'* (embellishment). He starts with those of Ibn al-Mu'tazz, Qudāma b. Ja'far and then moves to other writers. This amounted to 92 types in total of the reminder 20 were attributed to him and eight types attributed to others.<sup>244</sup> In his book *Badī' al-Qur'ān*,<sup>245</sup> he numerates 108 types<sup>246</sup> of *badī'* which could be found in the *Qur'ān*: 102 types from his other book and six new types.<sup>247</sup>

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 110 -111.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

<sup>243</sup> Ibn Abī al-Iṣḥā' al-Miṣrī: 'Abd al-'Azīm b. 'Abd al-Wāḥid b. Abī al-Iṣḥā' was an Egyptian poet and scholar who wrote on stylistics. Very little is known of his life. Apart from some poetry, three of his books have survived and have been published: *Taḥrīr al-Taḥbīr*, *Badī' al-Qur'ān* and *al-Khawāṭir al-Sawānīh*.

<sup>244</sup> Shawqī Ḍayf, p.359.

<sup>245</sup> Ibn Abī al-Iṣḥā' al-Miṣrī, *Badī' al-Qur'ān*, edited by Ḥafnī Muḥammad Sharaf, *Dār Nahḍat Miṣr*, Second edition, Cairo (n. d.) .

<sup>246</sup> Shawqī Ḍayf, *ibid.*, p. 359 and see also Badawī Ṭabāna, *al-Bayān al-'Arabī*, pp. 66- 70.

<sup>247</sup> See the introduction of the editor of *Badī' al-Qur'ān*, p. 92-93.



Like Ibn al-Mu‘tazz, Ibn Abī al-Iṣḥā‘ starts his book with *isti‘āra* quoting al-Rāzī (in his book *Nihāyat al-Ījāz*) “*al-isti‘āra* is to mention something using the name of something else (I saw a lion) or affirming what belongs to something else to it (the hand of the north wind) for the purpose of hyperbolism in *tashbīh*”.<sup>248</sup> Then he offers a definition for the second type of *isti‘āra* mentioned by al-Rāzī (the hand of the north wind type)

الاستعارة هي تسمية المرجوح الخفي باسم الراجح الجلي

“*al-isti‘āra* is calling the hidden preponderated with the name of the apparent preponderating”. This definition is more elegant than that of al-Rāzī's and it implies hyperbolism in *tashbīh*.<sup>249</sup>

Following al-Rāzī's method, Ibn Abī al-Iṣḥā‘ analyses what al-Rāzī calls استعارة تخيلية. What is new here is his elaborate analysis of two anthropomorphic verses in the *Qur’ān*. This analysis reminds us of ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī's treatment of the subject. Here is an example:

(الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ  
ثُمَّ اسْتَوَى عَلَى الْعَرْشِ الرَّحْمَنُ فَاسْأَلْ بِهِ خَبِيرًا)

“Who created the heavens and the earth, and what between them is, in six days, then sat Himself upon the throne, the All-compassionate: ask any informed of Him”. Q (25:59)

He says that *al-musta‘ār* (borrowed term) is *al-istiwā’* (sitting firmly), *al-musta‘ār min-hu* (the term borrowed from) is every firmly seated body and *al-must‘ār la-hu* (the term borrowed for) is God.<sup>250</sup> So when one hears this *isti‘āra*, one will imagine a king who has finished organising his kingdom and looking after his subjects and providing them with everything they need; this king then sat himself firmly on the throne of his kingdom with masterly might. The hearer would then compare what lies beyond his senses of Divine matters with what he imagines of the earthly kingdom. Therefore the *Qur’ān* always mentions “sitting firmly on the throne” after speaking about the creation of the heavens and the earth and what lies between

<sup>248</sup> al-Rāzī, *Nihāyat*, p. 232 and *Badī‘ al-Qur’ān*, p. 18.

<sup>249</sup> *Badī‘ al-Qur’ān*, p.19.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

them, even though there is no erected throne, perceived sitting nor *istiwā'* as understood literally.

In his chapter about *majāz*, Ibn Abī al-Iṣḥā' restates the definition of Al-Rāzī<sup>251</sup> already mentioned (where al-Rāzī quotes al-Jurjānī in his *Asrār*<sup>252</sup>):

“the vocable has to satisfy two conditions in order to be considered as *majāz*: First it has to be transferred from its original conventional meaning; Second this transference (from the primary meaning to the secondary one) should be for an association and a relationships between them.”<sup>253</sup>

Then Ibn Abī al-Iṣḥā' refers to the contradiction between this definition of *majāz* and the definition of *isti'āra* mentioned by al-Rāzī which is “*al-isti'āra* is to mention something using the name of something else (I saw a lion)”.<sup>254</sup> Ibn Abī al-Iṣḥā' states that for a vocable to be *majāz* it has to satisfy the two conditions mentioned above, and the condition of transference is not met in the definition of *isti'āra*. This is true provided that al-Rāzī did not change his views on this matter, but as we have seen earlier in the section about al-Rāzī, he prefers the view of al-Jurjānī in his *Asrār*. That is because *isti'āra* is a special case of *majāz*, and *majāz* requires transference ...[and therefore] transference occurs in the *isti'āra*.<sup>255</sup> So in this case there is no contradiction.

Ibn Abī al-Iṣḥā' did not contribute to the study of *majāz*; he was a collector more than an original thinker in this matter.

## **1.22 Badr al-Dīn b. Mālīk (d.686AH/1287)<sup>256</sup>**

<sup>251</sup> al-Rāzī, *Nihāyat al-Ijāz*, p. 168.

<sup>252</sup> *Asrār*, 365- 366.

<sup>253</sup> *Badī' al-Qur'an*, p.176 and al-Rāzī, *Nihāyat al-Ijāz*, p. 168.

<sup>254</sup> *Badī' al-Qur'an*, p. 176 and al-Rāzī, *Nihāyat al-Ijāz*, p.232. This definition is based on the definition of 'Abd al-Qāhir of *isti'āra* in his book *Dalā'il al-Ijāz*, pp. 403-406.

<sup>255</sup> al-Rāzī, pp.236-237.

<sup>256</sup> Ibn Mālīk: Abū 'Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abd Allāh b. Mālīk Badr al-Dīn al-Dimashqī; the son of the scholar Jamāl al-Dīn al-Ṭā'ī al-Jiyyānī al-Shafī'ī al-Dimashqī. He was a grammarian and a scholar in balāgha; born in Jayyan in Andalusia and emigrated with his father to Damascus where he received knowledge from his own father. He was a scholar in grammar, al-Ma'ānī, al-Bayān, al-Badī', prosody and logic. Moreover he had good contribution to jurisprudence. Ibn Mālīk died in Damascus in d.686AH/1287 (see the introduction of the editor of: Badr

Badr al-Dīn's major work<sup>257</sup> on *balāgha* is his book *al-Miṣbāḥ fī al-Ma‘ānī wa al-Bayān wa al-Badī‘*<sup>258</sup> which is a summary of the third section of *al-Miftāḥ* of al-Sakkākī . He was the first scholar to call the third part of the section about *Balāgha* in *al-Miftāḥ* علم البديع . Badr al-Dīn in his summary simplifies *al-Miftāḥ* by omitting many of its complicated definitions and logical arguments.

In his section on *majāz* he enumerates five types of *majāz* (four that occur in a single word) and one in the *isnād* or *al-majāz al-‘aqlī*<sup>259</sup> Badr al-Dīn here considers *majāz al-isnād* as ‘*aqlī*’ and does not mention the opinion of al-Sakkākī in this matter of considering this *majāz* as *lughawī*.

*Al-Miṣbāḥ* was the first summary of the *balāgha* section of the *Miftāḥ* to appear in the Arab regions of the Islamic world. It is *al-Miṣbāḥ* who introduced the views of *al-Sakkākī* to the Arabic speaking regions of the Islamic world. This book is one of the sources of many later books, such as *al-Ṭirāz* of al-‘Alawī and al-Qazwīnī's books (*Sharḥ al-Talkhīṣ*, *al-Idāḥ*, *al-Talkhīṣ* and the commentaries on them). *Al-Miṣbāḥ* was especially famous in the western part of Islamic world, to the extent that Ibn Khaldūn considered it as one of the main sources of *Balāgha* during his time, consequently many commentaries were written on it.<sup>260</sup> Badr al-Dīn wrote another book on *balāgha* entitled *Rawḍ al-Adhhān fī ‘ilm al-Bayān*<sup>261</sup> which is not different from *al-Miṣbāḥ*. *Rawḍ al-Adhhān* was one of the sources of Bahā’ al-Dīn al-Subkī. *Al-Miṣbāḥ* was soon followed by another famous summary which superseded it, *Talkīṣ al-Miftāḥ* written by al-Qazwīnī.

### 1.23 Al-Khaṭīb al-Qazwīnī (d.739AH/1338CE)<sup>262</sup>

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al-Dīn b. Mālik, 2001, *al-Miṣbāḥ fī al-Ma‘ānī wa al-Bayān wa al-Badī‘*, ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Hindāwī (ed.), pp. 6-8)

<sup>257</sup> For more information see: Shawqī Ḍayf, pp. 315-316.

<sup>258</sup> Edited by ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Hindāwī, *Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya*, Beirut, 2001.

<sup>259</sup> *Al-Miṣbāḥ*, pp. 171-184.

<sup>260</sup> Aḥmad Maṭlūb , *al-Qazwīnī wa shurūḥ al-Talkhīṣ*, *Maktabat al-Nahḍa*, Baghdad, 1967, pp. 89-93.

<sup>261</sup> Aḥmad Maṭlūb, p. 92. Matlub mentions that there is a copy of this manuscript in Liedn library.

<sup>262</sup> Al-Khaṭīb al-Qazwīnī: Abū ‘Abd Allāh (and Abū al-Ma‘ālī) Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Jalāl al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb al-Qazwīnī, also known as Khaṭīb Dimashq (the preacher of Damascus), was a legal scholar and rhetorician. In spite of his Persian place-of-origin name al-Qazwīnī, he was of pure Arab descent. He was trilingual in

Al-Qazwīnī wrote two books on ‘*ilm al-balāgha* : *al-Talkhīṣ*<sup>263</sup> and *al-Idāh*<sup>264</sup>. Al-Qazwīnī states in his *Talkhīṣ* that the greatest book written on ‘*Ilm al-Balāgha*’ is the third section of *al-Miftāḥ* of al-Sakkākī. But he adds that *al-Miftāḥ* is long, full of extraneous comments and prolixity; therefore his *Talkhīṣ* (summary) is to explain the ambiguities in the *Miftāḥ* and edit it.<sup>265</sup> In the introduction to his *Idāh*, al-Qazwīnī states that this book is organised in the same manner as that of *Talkhīṣ* and is written as a commentary in order to explain the difficult points of al-*Talkhīṣ*.<sup>266</sup> Al-Qazwīnī was influenced by al-Mubarrad, ‘Alī al-Jurjānī, al-Rummānī, al-’Askarī, al-Khafājī, ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī, al-Zamakhsharī, Ibn al-Athīr, Ibn Abī al-Iṣḥāq, and Badr al-Dīn b. Mālīk.<sup>267</sup>

On *majāz* al-Qazwīnī divides *al-Majāz* into two types: *mufrad* (single word *majāz*) and *murakkab* (constructed *majāz*).

#### A. Single word *majāz* :

Al-Qazwīnī gives this definition:<sup>268</sup>

"أما [المجاز] المفرد فهو الكلمة المستعملة في غير ما وضعت له في اصطلاح التخاطب على وجه يصح، مع قرينة عدم إرادته"

“*al-majāz al-mufrad* is a vocable when it is used [in a sense] other than the one which [the word] originally signifies in the convention of the discourse, in a right manner with [the existence of] frame of reference to indicate that [the veridical sense] is not intended.”

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Arabic, Persian and Turkish, but wrote only in Arabic. In his legal and religious career he was rather successful; in 706AH/1307AD he was made preacher and *imām* at the Umayyād Mosque in Damascus; in 724/1324 he attained a high judgeship in Syria; and three years later he was appointed Shāfi‘ī chief judge in Cairo under the Mamlūk ruler al-Nāṣir b. Qalāwūn. He returned to Damascus where he died.

<sup>263</sup> Jalāl al-Dīn al-Qazwīnī, *al-Talkhīṣ*, edited with commentary by Muḥammad Ḥāshim Duwaydarī, *Dār al-Jīl*, Beirut, Second edition, 1982.

<sup>264</sup> Jalāl al-Dīn al-Qazwīnī. *Al-’Idāh fī ‘Ulūm al-Balāgha*, edited with commentary by Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Mun‘im Khafājī, *al-Sharika al-’Alamiyya lil-kitāb*, Beirut, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed, 1989.

<sup>265</sup> Al-Qazwīnī, *al-Talkhīṣ*, p 8.

<sup>266</sup> Al-Qazwīnī, *al-Idāh*, p. 70.

<sup>267</sup> Aḥmad Maṭlūb, *al-Qazwīnī wa Shurūḥ al-Talkhīṣ*, pp. 191- 243.

Then he divides *al-majāz al-mufrad* into two types: *al-majāz al-mursal* and *isti'āra*. Al-Qazwīnī is the first scholar to coin the term *al-majāz al-mursal* to this type of *majāz*.

1. *al-majāz al-mursal*: it is a *majāz mufrad* where the relationship between what is used for and its conventional meaning is other than similarity. Such as the word يَد (hand) for نعمة (favour).
2. *al-isti'āra*: it is a *majāz mufrad* where the relationship is based on similarity.<sup>269</sup>

#### B. *al-Majāz al-Murakkab*<sup>270</sup>:

What al-Qazwīnī means by this type is called by al-Jurjānī *isti'āra* based on *tamthīl* (analogy) الاستعارة التمثيلية. As an example of this type al-Qazwīnī uses a verse quoted by 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (already mentioned above) as well as his explanation to illustrate this point. The verse in question is

(وَمَا قَدَرُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ قَدْرِهِ وَالْأَرْضُ حَمِيعاً قَبْضَتُهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ وَالسَّمَاوَاتُ مَطْوِيَّاتٌ بِيَمِينِهِ سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ)

“The earth altogether shall be His handful on the Day of Resurrection”. Q (39:67)

#### *Al-Majāz al-'Aqlī*:

Regarding *al-Majāz al-'aqlī*, al-Qazwīnī does not consider this type of *majāz* to belong to *'ilm al-bayān* but its proper place is *'ilm al-ma'ānī*.<sup>271</sup> So in his discussion about the types of *isnād* (predication) he discusses *al-majāz al-'aqlī* as a form of predication. Al-Qazwīnī gives this definition of *al-majāz al-'aqlī*:

“it is to attribute a verb or an element carrying verbal force to something it is semantically involved with (*mulābis la-hu*) through an intellectual effort (*bi l-ta'awwul*). The things it can be semantically involved with are manifold. It

<sup>268</sup> *Al-Talkhīṣ, op cit.*, p. 137 and *al-Īdāh*, p. 394.

<sup>269</sup> *Al-Talkhīṣ, op cit.*, p. 139, *al-Īdāh*, p. 407.

<sup>270</sup> *al-Īdāh*, pp. 438-439.

<sup>271</sup> For more information in English about al-Qazwīnī's *Talkhīṣ* and his life see the recent study by herbjorn Jenssen, *The Subtleties and Sectrets of the Arabic Language: Preliminary Investigations into al-Qazwīnī's Talkhīṣ al-Miftāh*, Bergen 1998.

may be semantically involved with the subject (*fā'il*) or object (*maf'ūl bi-hi*) or the verbal noun (*maṣḍar*) or the adverbial of time (*zamān*) or the adverbial of reason (*sabab*)...such as عيشة راضية (a tranquil life), نهاره صائم (his day is fasting) and بنى الأمير المدينة (the prince built the city)".<sup>272</sup>

Al-Qazwīnī's work goes beyond summarising and editing al-Sakkākī's *Miftāḥ*. As is clear from his treatment of *majāz*, he introduces a new division of *al-majāz* (*mufrad* and *murakkab*) and appears to disagree with al-Sakkākī (who considers all the *majāz* as *lughawī*). Al-Qazwīnī treats *al-majāz al-'aqlī* as part of *'ilm al-ma'ānī* not *al-bayān* as earlier scholars have done.

### **Conclusion:**

The issue of *majāz* is an important topic of discussion in several disciplines of learning in Islamic thought, such as philology, rhetoric, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, theology, philosophy and *Qur'ānic* exegesis. *Al-majāz* as a figure of speech developed through many stages; early authors such as Sībawayh were aware of the phenomenon without explicitly mentioning the term. Generally speaking these authors identified various strategies such as *ḥadhf* (ellipsis), *ziyāda* (pleonasm), *kināya* and *iltifāt* (grammatical shift), and *isti'āra* (the first figure to use the term *isti'āra* was Aḥmad b. al-'Alā'). All these strategies were applied to the *Qur'ān* and compared with proper Arabic usage. In the same line the work of Abū 'Ubayda (*Majāz al-Qur'ān*) can be considered. Towards the middle of the third century A.H., the term *majāz* became prevalent in the writing of the *Mu'tazilite* al-Jāḥiẓ, who is considered to be the founder of *'ilm al-balāgha*. Al-Jāḥiẓ failed, however, to develop any theoretical framework for it; nevertheless he was aware of the distinction between *ḥaqīqa* and *majāz* as opposite concepts. From the time of al-Jāḥiẓ onwards *majāz* became a major device in the hand of early theologians (*Mu'tazilites*) in their approach to the issue of anthropomorphic verses in the *Qur'ān*.

Ibn al-Mu'tazz's definition of *isti'āra* is general and covers most kinds of *majāz*. Qudāma cites examples under the titles of *tamthīl* and *isti'āra* without determining

<sup>272</sup> *al-Talkhīṣ* pp. 22-23 (this quotation is translated by Herbjorn Jenssen, *The subtleties and Secrets of the Arabic Language*, p. 69.

the relationship between them. Furthermore, Ishāq b. Wahb does not distinguish between *majāz* and *isti'āra* and uses them synonymously whether the cases are based on comparison or not. Al-Āmidī's definition covers most aspects of metaphorical language and al-Rummānī divides *balāgha* into ten categories, *isti'āra* among them; in his definition of *isti'āra* we find the use of the word *naql* (transference). He was the first to show the psychological effect of *isti'āra* and the reasons behind it. However, he does not distinguish between *majāz* and *isti'āra*.

Al-Qāḍī al-Jurjānī gives a more specific definition of *isti'āra* and covers all aspects of *majāz*. Ibn Jinnī finds that *majāz* is used for the following reasons: expansion, emphasis and comparison. He too does not distinguish between *majāz* and *isti'āra*. Like his teacher Abū 'Alī al-Farīsī he considers that most of the language is *majāz* and not *ḥaqīqa*. Ibn Fāris finds *majāz* as anything which goes beyond *ḥaqīqa*; *isti'āra* is among the linguistic customs of the Arabs but he does not distinguish between *isti'āra* and *majāz*. Abū Hilāl al-'Askarī was influenced by Ibn al-Mu'tazz in his treatment of *isti'āra* as part of *badī'*. In his definition of *isti'āra* we can clearly see the influence of al-Rummānī.

Ibn Rashīq al-Qayrawānī does not attempt to relate various categories of *majāz* to each other; regarding *isti'āra*, he quotes and discusses various writers but without trying to produce a coherent theory. With the writing of al-Khafājī the branches of '*ilm al-bayān* (simile, *majāz* and *isti'āra*) reach an advanced stage in their development but without a unifying theory that can spell out the exact relationship between them especially with regard to *majāz* and *isti'āra*. This would be achieved by 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī.

Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī's contribution to the study of *majāz* in particular and *balāgha* in general affected all those who came after him. His main contribution consists of distinction between *majāz 'aqli* and *al-majāz al-lughawī*, and the division of *al-majāz al-lughawī* into *isti'āra* and what is called later *majāz mursal*. He also contributed greatly to the issue of interpreting anthropomorphic verses in the Qur'ān; where those who came before him were satisfied to say for example that يد stands for power in ( و السموات مطويات بيمينه ) al-Jurjānī explains how one can go from hand to power. Al-Rāzī acknowledges the importance of al-Jurjānī's books, which he abbreviated and rearranged in his book *Nihāyat al-ījāz fī Dirāyat al-I'jāz*. This book

was very influential on subsequent generations (such as al-Sakkākī) due to its clarity, which reflected al-Razī's theological and philosophical training. Al-Sakkākī's section on *'ilm al-balāgha* in his book *al-Miftāḥ* proved very popular among later writers to the extent that they have forgotten al-Jurjānī's work.

Al-Sakkākī rearranged al-Jurjānī's books and gave *'ilm al-balāgha* its classical form. He disagrees with earlier writers on *al-Majāz* by considering all forms of *majāz* to be lexical (*lughawī*). A summary of *al-Miftāḥ* by al-Qazwīnī (*talkhīs al-Miftāḥ*) proved to be more popular than the *Miftāḥ* itself. Subsequently many commentaries and supercommentaries were written on it. These commentaries hardly added anything new or advanced the discussion after al-Jurjānī; nevertheless they enrich the intellectual life of Muslims. Having now presented the development of theory of *majāz* up to al-Qizwini, the next chapter will examine the interpretation of anthropomorphic verses in the first three Islamic centuries of selected authors in the light of the development of this theory in the corresponding period.



## Chapter 2

### The beginnings: Early authors

It is known that Muslim authors used the theory of *majāz* to interpret anthropomorphic verses, but does this imply that before the development of this theory, early authors took these anthropomorphic expressions at their *prima facie* sense, especially those authors who did not belong to the Mu'tazilite's school? To be able to answer this important question we need to examine the interpretations of early authors to see if they were sensitive to the issue of anthropomorphism in the Qur'ān even though we have very few complete commentaries in the first three centuries of Islam. At this period also Qur'ānic hermeneutics had not yet been fully developed neither the theory of *majāz*, however, both had their beginning in the 3<sup>rd</sup> A.H/8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup>. For these reasons, my treatment of the selected authors here would be limited and the link between Kalām, Qur'ānic hermeneutics and *balāgha* would not be strong in comparison with the Mu'tazilites and the Ash'arites. Generally speaking, I will focus on the interpretation of anthropomorphic verses of these authors and I will also examine their Qur'ānic hermeneutics, theological views and views on *majāz* were possible. My study of these authors is chronologically presented according to their date of death.

This chapter is divided into five sections: First section examines Mujāhid b. Jabr , second; Muqātil b. Sulymān, third, Abū 'Ubayda, fourth; al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm, and Fifth Ibn Qutayba.

## 2.1 Mujāhid b. Jabr<sup>1</sup> (21/642, d. between 100/718 and 104/722 )

The *tafsīr* of Mujāhid<sup>2</sup> is one of the earliest commentaries of the Qur'ān to reach us so far. There is only one known manuscript of this commentary in Egypt and this does not cover the whole Qur'ān. In addition to this manuscript we find many of his comments scattered in the books of *tafsīr* and *ḥadīth* such as al-Ṭabarī and *Musnad* al-Rabī' b. Ḥabīb<sup>3</sup>. In what follows I will examine his views on Q (3:7) and his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses, as no discussion of *majāz* theory is mentioned in his commentary.

### 2.1.1 Interpreting Q (3:7)

Regarding the interpretation of Q (3:7), Mujāhid offers the following interpretations of the key terms of this verse<sup>4</sup>:

*Āyātun muḥkamāt*: He sets clear what is lawful and unlawful in these verses.

*Ukharu mutashābihāt* (ambiguous verses): each part confirm other part such as Q (2:26), (6:125), (47:17). The previous verses deal with the issue of the source of guidance and their prima facie sense indicate that it is God who guides and misguides.

وَالرَّاسِخُونَ فِي الْعِلْمِ يَقُولُونَ : *qāla ya 'lamuna ta'wīlahu wa yaqūlūna*

'and those firmly rooted in knowledge –he said: they know its interpretation by saying we believe in it; all is from our Lord'.

We can observe two things from the above quotations; firstly, Mujāhid considers *mutashābihāt* as those verses that deal with theological issues i.e. free will and more precisely the issue of the source of guidance and error, but without interpreting these

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<sup>1</sup> He was a successor (*tabi'ī*) associated with Ibn 'Abbās. Mujāhid 'is associated with a rationalist approach to Qur'ān interpretation.. and with *ra'y* in *fiqh*', see Rippin, A. " Mudjāhid b. Djabr al-Makkī." *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition.

<sup>2</sup> There are two editions of this manuscript; the first one is edited by 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Ṭāhir b. Muḥammad al-Sūrātī, and the second one is edited by Muḥammad 'Abd al-Salām Abū al-Nīl. I will use the second edition in this study because it is more comprehensive than the first one.

<sup>3</sup> Al-Rabī' b. Ḥabīb, *al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ Musnad al-Imām al-Rabī'*, edited by Abū Ya'qūb Yūsuf b. Ibrāhīm al-Warjalānī and Nūr al-Dīn 'Abd Allāh b. Ḥumayd al-Sālimī, *Maktabat Masqat*, Oman, 2003

<sup>4</sup> Ibn Jabr, al-Imām Mujāhid, *Tafsīr al-Imām Mujāhid*, edited by Muḥammad 'Abd al-Salām Abū al-Nīl, *Dār Hunayn*, 2003, pp. 248-249.

verses. At the same time, *muḥkamāt* for him are those verses that deal with Islamic law, such as lawful and unlawful acts. The second observation is his recitation of the verse without pausing before *al-rāsikhūna* which means that those firmly rooted in knowledge know its interpretation. Thus he opens the door for the interpretation of *mutashābihāt* verses.

### 2.1.2. Mujāhid's interpretation of anthropomorphic verses:

Before we examine Mujāhid's interpretation of anthropomorphic verses, it is worth mentioning that there is no reference (in what has been attributed to Mujāhid) to *majāz* or related concepts. Furthermore, as we have seen in chapter one, the available sources do not mention any discussion about tropical language during his time or before.

As I mentioned earlier Mujāhid did not comment on the whole of the Qur'ān and therefore we have only a few interpretations of anthropomorphic verses.

The following are his interpretations in the published book:

1. Q(2:19) وَاللَّهُ مُحِيطٌ بِالْكَافِرِينَ “and God encompasses the unbelievers”  
‘He will gather them in Hell’<sup>5</sup>
2. Q(7:51) فَالْيَوْمَ نَنْسَاهُمْ كَمَا نَسُوا لِقَاءَ يَوْمِهِمْ  
the encounter of this their day”  
‘He says: We will leave them in Hell’<sup>6</sup>
3. Q(25:23) وَقَدِمْنَا إِلَى مَا عَمِلُوا “We shall advance upon what work they have done”  
‘We shall turn’<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Tafsīr Mujāhid*, ibid., p. 197

<sup>6</sup> ibid., p. 337

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 497

4. Q(39:56) *أَنْ تَقُولَ نَفْسٌ يَا حَسْرَتًا عَلَى مَا فَرَّطْتُ فِي جَنْبِ اللَّهِ* “Lest any soul should say, 'Alas for me, in that I neglected my duty to [the side] of God”  
‘meaning what I have deserted of the command of God’<sup>8</sup>
5. Q(49:1) *يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَقْدُمُوا بَيْنَ اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ* ‘O believers, advance not before [both hands of] God and His Messenger; and fear God. God is All-hearing, All-knowing”  
‘Do not do anything without the permission of the Prophet of God until God passes his judgement through the Prophet’s speech’<sup>9</sup>.
6. Q(75:22-23) *وَجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ نَّاصِرَةٌ (22) إِلَىٰ رَبِّهَا نَاظِرَةٌ* “Upon that day faces shall be radiant, gazing upon their Lord”  
‘waiting for the reward from their Lord who cannot be seen by any of His creation’<sup>10</sup>.

Other interpretations attributed to him in various books:

1. Q(20:39) *وَلْيُصْنَعْ عَلَىٰ عَيْنِي* “and to be formed under my eye”  
he said with my knowledge<sup>11</sup>
2. Q(2:115) *فَإَيْنَمَا تُوَلُّوا فَثَمَّ وَجْهُ اللَّهِ* “whithersoever you turn, there is the Face of God”  
‘The direction of God (the direction of prayer that was ordained by God) so whenever you may be, do not turn your face but to it’<sup>12</sup>.
3. Q(24:35) *اللَّهُ نُورُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ* “God is the Light of the heavens and the earth”  
‘God is the director of affairs in heaven and earth’<sup>13</sup>.

The above interpretations clearly indicate that Mujāhid was sensitive to anthropomorphic descriptions of God in the Qur’ān. He does not offer any justification for his interpretations, nor does he give any reason as to why the prima facie sense of the verses should not be taken. It can also be observed that his interpretation of Q(75:22) is similar

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 580.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 610

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 687.

<sup>11</sup> Musnad al-Rabī‘ vol 3, p. 36-43

<sup>12</sup> Al-Bayhaqī, al-Sunan al-Kubrā, vol. 2, p. 13.

<sup>13</sup> Al-Baghawī, Abū Muḥammad al-Husayn b. Mas‘ūd, Tafsīr al-Baghawī (Ma‘ālim al-Tanzīl), Dār Ibn Ḥazm, Beirut, 2002, p. 909

to the Mu‘tazilites interpretation<sup>14</sup> of this verse which is used to justify their denial of seeing God by sight in the hereafter. Goldziher rightly observes that “ We can say that the Mu‘tazilites were no trailblazers of metaphorical interpretation of anthropomorphic expressions, rather, in some points of contention they could refer to very reputable representatives and teachers of tradition as their precursors<sup>15</sup>”.

*Tafsīr Mujāhid* being the first *tafsīr* to reach us is of a great importance for the history of Qur’ānic exegesis. Regarding the interpretation of Q (3:7) first, we see here one of the earliest attempts to identify *mutashābihāt* verses with theological issues; at the same time the *Muḥkamāt* verses were not contrasted with them. Second, Mujāhid does not restrict the interpretation of *mutashābihāt* verses to God; on the contrary those who are firm in knowledge can interpret them. This *tafsīr* also contains one of the earliest tropical interpretations of anthropomorphic verses, which indicate that this type of interpretation did not start with the Mu‘tazilites but at the same time there is no theological justification for this type of interpretation. Next we will examine the first complete *tafsīr* to reach us which is the *tafsīr* of Muqātil b. Sulymān.

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<sup>14</sup> Another interesting observation is that later *salafīs* such as Ibn Taymiyya asserts that their view of anthropomorphic verses represents the view of the *Salaf*.

Mujāhid is considered a *Salafī* according to their view so one wonders what will they make of his views about anthropomorphic verses which are clearly fits into the Mu‘tazilite trend especially with regard to his interpretation of Q(75:22) which is at odd with the Aḥl al-ḥadīth group and later Ash‘aris

<sup>15</sup> Goldziher, *Schools of Koranic Commentators*, ibid., p. 72.

## 2.2 Muqātil b. Sulaymān<sup>16</sup> (150/767)

Muqātil was accused by authors of sects of being a gross anthropomorphist. al-Ash‘arī contends that Muqātil considered God to have flesh and blood<sup>17</sup>. Is this view of Muqātil justified in the light of what has been survived from his writings? This section will shed some light on this issue. The *tafsīr* of Muqātil is the oldest complete *tafsīr* to reach us so far and therefore it is a very important document about the state of *tafsīr* in the first half of the second century A.H. Therefore, Muqātil’s approach to anthropomorphic verses reflects the attitudes towards anthropomorphism of some Muslims in the eastern part of the Muslim world at that time. In what follows I will examine Muqātil’s interpretation of Q (3:7), his views of figurative language and finally his interpretations of anthropomorphic verses.

### 2.2.1 Muqātil’s Hermeneutics:

Regarding the interpretation of Q (3:7), Muqātil offers his interpretation of the key terms as follows:

*Muhkamāt*: the base for practice and they are the verses Q (6:151-153)

*Mutashābihāt*: the four disjoined letters الم, المص, المر, الر

*Ibtighā’a ta’wīlihi*: meaning the limit and the duration of Muslim power

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<sup>16</sup> Muqātil b. Sulaymān was a traditionist and a commentator on the Qur’ān. His use of biblical material in his *tafsīr* made him unpopular in later periods, see Plessner, M.; Rippin, A. "Muqātil b. Sulaymān." *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition.

<sup>17</sup> Al-Ash‘arī, Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Ismā‘īl, *Maqālat al-Islāmiyyīn*, edited by Hellmut Ritter, Franz Steiner, Weisbaden, 1980, 152-153

*Wa mā ya‘lamu ta’wīlahu illā Allāh*: How long the Muslim power will last to the day of judgement.

Then he will pause and start reading *wa al rāsikhūna fī al-‘ilm* meaning those who study the Torah<sup>18</sup>.

As we can see Muqātil limits the *muḥkamāt* to three verses which are related to legal and moral issues, and the *mutashābihāt* to four disjoint letters; thus everything else is open to interpretation.

### 2.2.2 Muqātil’s views of tropical language:

During the first half of 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.H. ,as we have seen in chapter one of this study, the word *majāz* was not used to refer to tropical language but the term *isti‘āra* was used by Abū ‘Amr b.al-‘Alā’ (d. 154/770) and the term *ittisā’* was used by Sībawyh. Muqātil in his *tafsīr* did not use any of these words to refer to tropical use of the language: *majāz*, *isti‘āra*, and *ittisā’*.

Instead Muqātil used the word *mathal* to refer to tropical language and the word *mathal* will be replaced by the *majāz* in a century or so. In the introduction to his *tafsīr* Muqātil enumerates various types of discourses in the Qur’ān one of them is “ *amthāl* which God the Exalted struck for Himself<sup>19</sup>”. The question now is what does Muqātil mean by the word *amthāl*? In his book *al-Ashbāh wa al-Nazā’ir* he gives four meanings to the word *mathal*: 1. *shibh* (similar, similitude) such as *ḍaraba Allāhu mathalan* meaning God struck a similitude. 2. *siyar*: conducts in life 3. *‘ibra*: lesson/example 4. *‘adhāb*: torment. The first meaning is the most plausible one for the above quotation and the statement can be translated by using Muqātil’s usage of the term *mathal* as “Similitudes which God struck for Himself”. Moreover, in his treatment of the usage of the word *yad* in this verse Q (5:64) he comments “this is *mathal ḍarabahu Aallāh ta‘ālā*”-this is a similitude stuck by

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<sup>18</sup> Ibn Sulaymān, Muqātil , *Tafsīr Muqātil b. Sulaymān*, edited by Aḥmad Farīd, *Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya*, Beirut, 2003, p. 157-158.

<sup>19</sup> *Tafsīr Mujāhid*, *Ibid.*, p. 22.

God”. Based on these three comments I believe that this word *mathal* is one of the earliest words used to describe tropical language before the use of the word *majāz*.

### 2.2.3 Muqātil on Anthropomorphism in the Qur’ān:

I have surveyed the most common anthropomorphic attribution of God as interpreted by Muqātil and arranged them in the table below where the first column indicates the topic, the second indicates the number of occurrences, the third indicates the number of tropical interpretation offered by Muqātil, the fourth represents the anthropomorphic interpretation and finally the fifth represents the number of the verses where he either did not offer any interpretation or repeated the same wording without any comment.

As a general observation we can notice that the number of tropical interpretations exceeds anthropomorphic ones 30:21, 5 topics are interpreted anthropomorphically (*istiwā’*, *kalām*, *fawqiyya*, *ityān* and *ru’ya*), 2 topics are interpreted tropically in some places and anthropomorphically in others (hand, *qurb*) and finally 10 topics are interpreted tropically (*istihzā’*, *wajih*, *nafs*, *makr*, *nafkh*, *nisyān*, *sāq*, *‘ayn*, *janb*, and *nūr*). I will examine first his anthropomorphic interpretations and then I will examine his tropical interpretations.



Topic	Number of occurrences	Tropical interpretation	Anthropomorphic Interpretation	No comment or Repeating the wording of the verse
<i>Istihzā'</i> (Mocking)	1	1	0	0
<i>Istiwa'</i> (sitting)	11	0	3	8
<i>Wajih</i> (face)	11	4	0	7
<i>Ityān</i> (coming)	8	0	3	5
<i>Yad</i> (Hand)	17	6	1	10
<i>Kalām</i> (speech)	7	0	1	6
<i>Nafs</i> (soul)	5	3	0	2
<i>Qurb</i> (nearness)	6	4	1	1
<i>Makr</i> (cunning)	7	3	0	4
<i>Fawqiyya</i> (God in heaven)	7	0	7	0
<i>Nafkh</i> (breath)	5	2	0	3
<i>Nisyān</i> (forgetfulness)	4	4	0	0
<i>Al-ru'ya</i> (looking at God)	2	0	1	1
<i>Al-Sāq</i> (leg)	1	1	0	0
<i>Janb</i> (Side of God)	1	1	0	0
<i>‘Ayn</i> (eye)	5	1	0	4
<i>Nūr</i> (light)	1	1	0	0
Total Number	99	30	21	48

Table 1

I will examine selected examples of his anthropomorphic interpretations.

*Istiwa'* 'arsh: He offered three anthropomorphic interpretations for Q (2:255), (20:5), (69:17). For Q (2:255) he comments on the word *kursi* by giving a graphical description of it and the number of angles and each angel has four faces<sup>20</sup>. For Q (20:50) he explained the word *istawa'* by *istiqrar* (settled). Finally for Q (69:17) he comments on the word 'arsh by saying that it is above their heads (angels).

*Fawqiyya*/God in Heaven: He offered anthropomorphic interpretations for all the verses. For example for Q (16:50) God is above them (angels) because God is above everything. He created the 'arsh (throne) and the 'arsh is above everything<sup>21</sup>.

*Kalam*: Commenting on Q(4:164) he says: it means verbally<sup>22</sup> (*mushafaha*).

*Ru'ya*: In his commentary on Q (75:23) he says: it means they look to God with their eyes<sup>23</sup> (*mu'ayana*).

*Ityan*: For Q (89:22) he says the angels will descend and God will come<sup>24</sup> and in a similar way for (6:158) and (25:23).

Hand: For Q (39:67) he said both earth and heaven are in his right hand meaning in his right fist<sup>25</sup>. In his book *al-Ashbah wa al-Nazā'ir* he gives three meanings to *yad* 1. hand itself (part of the body) he gives as an example (38:75) and (5:64) *yadahu mabsutatan* 2. *mathal* (as mentioned above) Q(5:64) 3. act. For the last meaning he gives Q (36:71) and Q (48:10) and he states that hand stands for the act of God<sup>26</sup>.

The word hand is used twice in Q(5:64) and Muqātil interpreted the first occurrence according to its prima facie meaning and the second as *mathal*. I think the reason behind this contradiction is that the prima facie sense of *yadahu mabsutatan* is positive while the

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<sup>20</sup> *Tafsīr Muqātil*, vol. 1, p. 136.

<sup>21</sup> *Muqātil*, ibid., vol. 2, p. 225.

<sup>22</sup> *Tafsīr* M. vol. 1, p. 271.

<sup>23</sup> *Tafsīr*, M. vol 3, p. 423.

<sup>24</sup> *Tafsīr*, vol. 3, p. 483.

<sup>25</sup> *Tafsīr*, vol. 3, p. 139.

<sup>26</sup> *Al-Ashbah wa al-Nazā'ir*, pp. 321-322. He gives similar interpretations in his commentary.

prima facie sense of *yadu Allāhi maghlūlat* is negative, therefore he interpreted it tropically. On other occasions such as Q(49:1) and Q (51:47) he interprets *yad* tropically like for Q(51:47) he says with power<sup>27</sup>.

These above interpretations clearly attribute to God human and physical characteristics. The type of image they portray is that God is above in the heaven sitting on His throne which is above everything else and carried by angels. God also holds the heaven and earth with his right hand or fist. God will come in the day of judgement. Furthermore, God spoke to Moses verbally and can be seen with the eyes in the Day of Judgement. None of the gross anthropomorphism that is attributed to him is detected in his commentary. As a matter of fact he did not differ much from other traditionalists who share much of his views, especially regarding God in the heaven, hand of God or God setting on His throne<sup>28</sup>. His views about seeing God in the day of judgement by eyes will be accepted as an essential feature of *Sunnī* creed. Having said that, Muqātil also offers tropical interpretation of many other verses as, will be shown next.

#### Muqātil's tropical interpretations:

He offered tropical interpretations to 12 topics which are:

*Wajih* (face): In Q(28:88) Muqātil said *illā wajhuhu*. but Him<sup>29</sup>. The same goes for (2:115), (55:27), (76:9).

*Nafs* (soul): Q(3:28) it means his punishment<sup>30</sup>. The same goes for (3:30).

‘*Ayn* (eye): Q(11:37) with our knowledge<sup>31</sup>

*Janb* (side): Q(39:56) it means in the essence of God; it means from the *dhikr* (this could mean either the Quran or mentioning the name of God) of God<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> *Tafsīr* vol. 3, p. 280.

<sup>28</sup> See for example: Abū Ya‘lā b. al-Farrā’, *Ibtāl al-ta’wīlāt li-akhbār al-ṣifāt*, ed. Abū ‘Abdallāh b. Ḥamd al-Ḥamūd al-Najdī, Hawallī 1989.

<sup>29</sup> *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 509.

<sup>30</sup> *Tafsīr* vol. 1, p. 164.

<sup>31</sup> *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 117.

*Sāq* (leg): Q(68:44) it means the intensity of the hereafter<sup>33</sup>

*Nūr* (light): Q(24:35) God is the guide of the people of heaven and earth<sup>34</sup>.

*Nisyān* (forgetfulness): Q(7:51) today (in the hereafter) we will leave them in the hell as the left/ignored the faith<sup>35</sup>. He interpreted Q(9:67) in a similar way.

*Nafkh* (breath into): Q(21:91) Jibrīl's breath in her bosom<sup>36</sup>. The same interpretation is offered for Q(66:12)

*Makr* (cunning): Q(7:99) it means the punishment of God<sup>37</sup>. Similarly Q(3:54) and (10:21).

*Qarīb* (near): Q(2:186) I am near to them with regard to my answering<sup>38</sup> [their supplication].

The same goes for Q(11:61), (34:50) and (50:16).

*Istihzā'* (mocking): Q(2:15) God mucks them in the day of judgement by keeping them in the darkness<sup>39</sup>.

The wealth and diversity of the above interpretations clearly show that Muqātil was not anthropomorphist all the way. Moreover, his tropical interpretations of some of the verses will be shared by later authors who interpreted these verses tropically as will be shown later in this study.

The commentary of Muqātil shows that anthropomorphic verses are open to interpretation although no clear Qur'anic hermeneutics is offered. By the time of Muqātil, the word *mathal* is used to denote tropical use of language and no theory of tropical language exists yet. Muqātil himself was not consistent in his approach to anthropomorphic verses; he was anthropomorphist in some places but he was also sensitive to anthropomorphic

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<sup>32</sup> *Tafsīr* vol 3, p. 138.

<sup>33</sup> *Tafsīr* vol 3, p. 390. At the same page there is also another interpretation attributed to Ibn Mas'ūd which gives an anthropomorphic interpretation to this verse. It seems that the tropical interpretation is considered to be the correct one. This interpretation is also attributed to Ibn 'Abbās.

<sup>34</sup> *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 419.

<sup>35</sup> *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 394.

<sup>36</sup> *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 368.

<sup>37</sup> *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 404.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

descriptions of God in others, and he used the word *mathal* in his interpretation of these verses. Nevertheless, Muqātil cannot be considered as a gross anthropomorphist as later writers have claimed. Now we will look at Abū ‘Ubayda and his treatment of anthropomorphic verses.

## 2.3 Abū ‘Ubayda (110/728-210/825)<sup>40</sup>

Abū ‘Ubayda is considered one of the earliest authors to use the word *majāz* as a title for his work on the Qur’ān. His book *Majāz al-Qur’ān* influenced many subsequent writings on the Qur’ān and attracted many studies in modern times. Nevertheless, his treatment of anthropomorphic verses was ignored in these studies and some of them offered unsubstantiated general remarks about his theological views.

In the introduction of his book *majāz al-Qur’ān* Abū ‘Ubayda states that the Qur’ān was revealed in a clear Arabic tongue and the ancestors and those who were with the prophet did not need to ask about its meanings because they were native speakers of Arabic. Therefore, their knowledge of Arabic and its aspects of expressions was sufficient for them to understand the Qur’ān. Then Abū ‘Ubayda states that the Qur’ān contains various ways of expression, unfamiliar words and meanings in a similar manner to that of Arabic tongue. Then he enumerates 36 aspects which need to be explained, presumably to those who are not familiar with Arabic language and style<sup>41</sup>. Then he offers interpretations of selected verses which contain the 36 aspects mentioned above.

My concern here is to find out his views on tropical language, terms used and how he interpreted anthropomorphic verses in the Qur’ān. Before that I will examine his interpretation of Q (3:7)

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<sup>40</sup> He was an Arabic philologist who lived in Basra. His book *majāz al-Qur’ān* is considered one of the main sources of later commentaries. See Weipert, Reinhard. " Abū ‘Ubayda ." *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*.

<sup>41</sup> Abū ‘Ubayda, *Majāz al-Qur’ān*, edited by. Muḥammad. F. Sesgin, Cairo, 1954, Maktabat al-Khānjī, p. 8.

### 2.3.1 Interpreting Q (3:7)

#### 1. *Tafsīr* and *Ta'wīl*:

In his interpretation of Q(3:7) Abū 'Ubayda gives the following explanations for the key terms in this verse:

مِنْهُ آيَاتٌ مُحْكَمَاتٌ meaning these verses which we call them in the Qur'ān

وَأُخْرُ مُتَشَابِهَاتٌ they resemble each other

تَأْوِيلُهُ he gives two meaning for this word: 1. *al-ta'wīl* is *al-tafsīr* 2. the ending: its destiny. He did not mention any of the issues and disagreements surrounding this verse<sup>42</sup>.

2. هَلْ يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَّا تَأْوِيلَهُ Q(7:53): what are they waiting for but its elucidation, elaboration, clarification and explanation<sup>43</sup>.

For Abū 'Ubayda, *ta'wīl* has two meanings 1. *tafsīr* 2. end. He did not comment on other occurrences of the word *ta'wīl* and its derivatives in the Qur'ān, nor does he give any further explanations. We can conclude that there was no theory of Qur'ānic hermeneutics at that time.

### 2.3.2 Abū 'Ubayda's usage of the word *majāz* and his attitudes towards tropical language:

There is a consensus among those who studied Abū 'Ubayda that the word *majāz* is not to be understood as the antithesis to *haqīqa*. Ibn Taymiyya was one of the earliest scholars who commented on Abū 'Ubayda's book and his usage of the word *majāz* "...." Among

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid. vol. 1, p. 86.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. vol. 1, p. 216

other scholars who believed that Abū ‘Ubayda did not mean by the word *majāz* a rhetorical trope are: Wansbrough<sup>44</sup>, Almagor<sup>45</sup>, Abu Deeb<sup>46</sup>, and Heinrich.

If Abū ‘Ubayda did not use the word *majāz* as trope then what did he mean by it and how did he use it in his book? There is no consensus about this issue in modern scholarship. Wansbrough believes that the Abū ‘Ubayd used the word *majāz* in the sense of *taqdīr* (textual restoration), *majāz* is the earlier word for *taqdīr* and the book *Majāz al-Qur’ān* is periphrastic exegesis. Furthermore, the term *majāz* “evolved from the vague designation of an exegetical practice to the closely reasoned description of several rhetorical phenomena found in the scripture as well as in profane literature<sup>47</sup>”.

Almagor while accepting the frequencies of periphrasis states that “it is still hard to agree to its (*Majāz al-Qur’ān*) general characterization as periphrastic exegesis<sup>48</sup>”. She believes that Wansbrough simplified the issue by not taking into account of the dual function of the word *majāz* in Abū ‘Ubayda’s book. She states that “*majāz* in this early use seems to refer at one and the same time to the mode of expression (as in *wa min majāz mā ..* of the introduction) and to the designation or interpretation of the thing expressed (as in *majāzuḥu..*) inasmuch as interpretation consists in substituting on expression for another<sup>49</sup>”. Almagor believes that the word *majāz* “is related to *jāza, yajūzu* as meaning to be allowable, to pass as valid sound or to be current”. Abū ‘Ubayda in the second part of his introduction summarized all the cases he discussed by saying *wa kullu hādha jā’izun ma’rūf* so Almagor concluded that *majāz* of the introduction is related to *jā’iz* (allowable) in the last sentence and “*majāz* here means a valid, sound or current mode of expression,

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<sup>44</sup> Wansbrough states that “[Abū ‘Ubayda] did not understand that term [*majāz*] in the sense of the antithetical relation *majāz-haqīqa*” in *Majāz al-Qur’ān: Periphrastic Exegesis*, BSOAS, ...p. 254.

<sup>45</sup> Ella Almagor, The Early meaning of *Majāz* and the Nature of Abū ‘Ubayda’s Exegesis, in Y. Navon et al., eds., *Studia orientalia memoriae D. H. Beneth* (Jerusalem, 1979), Pp. 307-26.

<sup>46</sup> He argued that “The idea that *majāz* is process which involves transferences that generate *isti’āra* as well as contiguity based modes of expression was totally unfamiliar to him. This was developed in the works of other scholars..” in Abu Deeb, Kamal. *Studies in the Majāz and Metaphorical Language of the Qur’ān: Abū ‘Ubayda and al-Sharīf al-Raḍī*, p. 316.

<sup>47</sup> Wansbrough, *ibid.*, p. 248.

<sup>48</sup> Almagor, p. 315.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 315

and more loosely—just a mode of expression<sup>50</sup>”. Furthermore, she adds that “in addition to the idea of soundness/validity/currency, early *majāz* connotes the idea of variegated manners or modes of expression<sup>51</sup>”.

Heinrichs starting from the original meaning of the verb *jāza*, quoting Lane “he passed along the place and left it behind” offers the following translation of the word *majāz*: “that place in a discourse where the explicit meaning goes beyond (or, if we include the activity of the speaker: is taken beyond) the actual wording of a phrase and leaves it behind; in other words: *majāz* denotes an explanatory re-writing of a given phrase which consists in establishing its *ma‘nā* by various means of “going beyond” the original wording, such as addition, subtraction, substitution, etc<sup>52</sup>.” He rightly observes that in this sense *majāz* refers to the “natural equivalent of an unusual idiom” which is similar to the meaning of the word *haqīqa* in later discussions of it as a counterpart of *majāz*<sup>53</sup>.

Abu Deeb reached a similar conclusion after examining the various ways in which Abū ‘Ubayda uses *majāz*, and concluded by saying that “Abū ‘Ubayda used the word *majāz* itself in its original, ordinary, linguistic sense ....derived from the verb *jāza* (crossed over, passed from to) to mean ‘the original or more familiar mode of formulation to the different mode in which it appears in the Qur’ān<sup>54</sup>”.

By the time of Abū ‘Ubayda we saw in chapter 1 that there was awareness among the critics, Qur’ānic commentators and grammarians of tropical language but there was no theory nor fixed term to describe this phenomenon. We have seen earlier that Muqātil used the word *mathal* to refer to tropical use of language and we will see below Abū ‘Ubayda’s use of this term.

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 317.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.319-320

<sup>52</sup> Heinrichs On the genesis, *ibid.*, p. 127

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>54</sup> Abu Deeb, *Studies in the Majāz and Metaphorical language*, p. 316.



But as Abū ‘Ubayda sets his aim of explaining all unusual verses in the Qur’ān he has to deal with tropical verses. Wansbrough states after his presentation of the 38 categories identified by Abū ‘Ubayda in the introduction of his book that “Indeed, none of the categories described nor the examples adduced to illustrate them suggest a consciousness of figurative language<sup>55</sup>” and he also states that some of Abū ‘Ubayda’s categories of *majāz* “belong also to corpus of rhetorical schemata, though the Qur’ānic instances adduced by him exhibit but weak reflection of figurative usage<sup>56</sup>”. I disagree with the second quotation because as it will become clear below Abū ‘Ubayda was aware of many of figurative instances in the Qur’ān and he engaged in interpreting them tropically. Abu Deeb analyses<sup>57</sup> few verses that were considered to contain tropes namely (*isti‘āra* and *majāz mursal*) by later writers. He came to the conclusion that Abū ‘Ubayda was not “thinking of the transference in word” or the contiguity relation (*majāz mursal*) “when he was thinking of *majāz*<sup>58</sup>”.

Abū ‘Ubayda interpreted only few verses which later commentators considered to contain tropical language. In some places he only gives the tropical interpretation of the verses while in others he used these terms (*mathal*, *tamthīl*, *tashbīh*) to refer to the type of the rhetorical devices in the verses in question. For example:

1. Q(8:35) فَذُوقُوا الْعَذَابَ “taste you now the chastisement”: *majāzuhu* experience it not from the taste of the mouth<sup>59</sup>.

Here Abū ‘Ubayda gives a tropical interpretation of the verse without using any term to refer to the tropical language.

2. Q(6:39) وَالَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا صُمٌّ وَبُكْمٌ “And those who cry lies to Our signs are deaf and dumb”: *mathal* (similitude) for the unbelievers because they do not hear the truth and religion although they hear other things and *bukmun* because they do not say it although they are not dumb<sup>60</sup>.

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<sup>55</sup> Wansbrough, *Majāz al-Qur’ān*, 254

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 265.

<sup>57</sup> Abu Deeb *Studies in the Majāz and Metaphorical language*, pp. 314-315

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 315

<sup>59</sup> Abu Ubayda, vol. 1, p. 246.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 191.

Here Abū ‘Ubayda used the word *mathal* to describe the tropical use of the words *summ* and *bukm*. Later authors consider their use either as *tashbīh balīgh* (eloquent simile) or *isti‘āra* (metaphor).

3. Q(9:109) أَفَمَنْ أَسَّسَ بُنْيَانَهُ عَلَى تَقْوَىٰ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَرِضْوَانٍ خَيْرٌ أَمْ مَنْ أَسَّسَ بُنْيَانَهُ عَلَىٰ شَفَا جُرُفٍ هَارٍ فَانْهَارَ بِهِ فِي نَارٍ جَهَنَّمَ وَاللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الظَّالِمِينَ  
 “Why, is he better who founded his building upon the fear of God and His good pleasure, or he who founded his building upon the brink of a crumbling bank that has tumbled with him into the fire of Gehenna? And God guides not the people of the evildoers”: ‘*majāz* of this verse is *majāz al-tamthīl* because what they built on *taqwā* has a firm base than the building which they built on disbelief and hypocrisy therefore the latter is ‘*alā shafā jarf*’<sup>61</sup>.

In this verse Abū ‘Ubayda uses the word *tamthīl* (analogy) which is related to *mathal* to refer the trope in this verse.

4. Q(24:45) فَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ يَمْشِي عَلَىٰ بَطْنِهِ “and some of them walk upon their bellies” this is considered *tashbīh* because walking cannot be on the belly, instead only those creatures who have legs can walk<sup>62</sup>.

Here Abū ‘Ubayda used the word *tashbīh* (comparison or similarity) to refer to the *isti‘āra* in this verse. Later authors would say that this *isti‘āra* is based on *tashbīh* where the particle of comparison is omitted.

All of the above verses are considered to contain tropes by later authors, and although their interpretations are more refined and elaborate the core ideas are expressed by Abū ‘Ubayda. It is also clear from the above that the rhetorical terms have not yet been fixed by his time. These terms (*mathal*, *tashbīh*, *tamthīl*) will be used by later writers in more precise way to designate rhetorical devices.

### 2.3.3 Abū ‘Ubayda on Anthropomorphism in the Qur’ān:

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 269.

<sup>62</sup> Abū ‘Ubayda. Vol. 2, p. 68.

Wansbrough, Abu Deeb and Madelung all assert that dogmatic considerations did not play a role in Abū ‘Ubayda’s treatment of the Qur’ān. Wansbrough states that “Although it is not impossible to regard the whole as an expression of piety, it may be remarked that Abū ‘Ubaida’s exposition of *majāz* is singularly free of dogmatic interpretation”, while Madelung asserts that Abū ‘Ubayda’s book *Majāz al-Qur’ān* “is purely linguistic and lacks any religious dimension<sup>63</sup>”. Abu Deeb asserts that Abū ‘Ubayda “does not seem to have been aware of what bearings *majāz* can have on anthropomorphism<sup>64</sup>”, he used Abū ‘Ubayda’s comments on Q (20:5) as evidence for this assertion.

Abū ‘Ubayda treated a substantial number of anthropomorphic verses in the Qur’ān though he did not comment on every verse in the Qur’ān. He interpreted 28 verses of which 26 interpreted tropically and 2 verses literally.

#### Verses interpreted literally:

1. Q(10:3) اسْتَوَى عَلَى الْعَرْشِ “then sat Himself upon the Throne”: *majāzuhu zahara ‘alā al-‘arsh wa ‘alā ‘alyhi wa yuqālu istawaytu ‘alā zahri al-bayt*<sup>65</sup> (its *majāz* is he mounted the throne and climb over it. It is said I have climbed the top of the house)

2. Q(20:5) الرَّحْمَنُ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ اسْتَوَى “the All-compassionate sat Himself upon the Throne” *ay ‘alā yuqālu istawaytu ‘alā al-dābba, fawqa al-bayt*<sup>66</sup> (it means mounted; it is said I mounted the beast and I climbed the top of the house).

In the above verses it is obvious that Abū ‘Ubayda did not attempt to interpret these verses tropically as he did for other verses. What made him choose this position is difficult to ascertain for sure.

<sup>63</sup> Madelung, W. Abū ‘Ubayda Ma‘mar b. al-Muthannā as a Historian, *Journal of Islamic Studies* 3:1 (1992) pp. 52.

<sup>64</sup> Abu Deeb, *Studies in the Majāz and Metaphorical language.*, p. 315

<sup>65</sup> Abū ‘Ubayda vol. 1, p. 273.

<sup>66</sup> Abū ‘Ubayda vol. 2, p. 14.

Verses interpreted tropically:

1. Q(16:26) فَأَتَى اللَّهُ بُنْيَانَهُمْ مِنَ الْقَوَاعِدِ “then God came upon their building from the foundations”: Its *majāz* is *majāz al-mathal* and *al-tashbīhi* and *al-qawā'id* means: the foundations (*al-asās*).. When they remove something completely they use this discourse which is *mathal*<sup>67</sup>
2. . In his commentary on Q(2:87) he explains that *rajulun dhū aydin* means a man who has power and God the most high is *dhū al-ayd*. Then he quotes Q(47:51) وَالسَّمَاءَ بَنَيْنَاهَا بِأَيْدٍ and states that *aydin* means power<sup>68</sup>.
2. Q(3:54) وَمَكُرُوا وَكَرَّ اللَّهُ “And they devised, and God devised”: *ahlakahum Allāh*<sup>69</sup> ‘God destroyed them’
3. Q(2:115) إِنَّ اللَّهَ وَاسِعٌ “God is all wide”  
*ay jawād yasa ‘u limā yus’al* (he is generous and can provide whatever he is asked for)<sup>70</sup>.
3. Q(5:26) فَادْهَبْ أَنْتَ وَرَبُّكَ فَقَاتِلَا “Go forth, thou and thy Lord, and do battle”: *majāzuha* go you and your Lord and fight (only you) and let your Lord fight means may he support you; and God does not go<sup>71</sup>.
4. Q(5:64) يَدُ اللَّهِ مَغْلُولَةٌ “God's hand is fettered”: meaning the bounty of God is withheld (*mumsak*)<sup>72</sup>.
5. Q(9:40) إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَنَا “God is with us”: meaning He supports and protects us<sup>73</sup>.
7. Q(10:21) اللَّهُ أَسْرَعُ مَكْرًا “God is swifter at devising”: meaning he is faster with regard to taking them, punishment and *istidrāj*<sup>74</sup>.

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<sup>67</sup> Abū ‘Ubayda vol. 1 p.359.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 260.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 276.

9. Q(20:39) وَلِتُصْنَعَ عَلَى عَيْنِي “and to be formed under my eye”: ‘he said with my knowledge. Its *majāz* is so that you will be fed and raised according to what I want and love<sup>75</sup>.

10. Q(20:46) إِنِّي مَعَكُمْ “Surely I shall be with you”: Its *majāz* is I support you<sup>76</sup>.

11. Q(28:88) كُلُّ شَيْءٍ هَالِكٌ إِلَّا وَجْهَهُ “All things perish, except His Face”: Its *majāz* is except him<sup>77</sup>.

Q(32:14) إِنَّا نَسِينَاكُمْ “We indeed have forgotten you”: Its *majāz* is we left you and did not look at you and God the most high does not forget<sup>78</sup> Q(45:31).

Q(55:31) سَنَفْرُغُ لَكُمْ أَيُّهَا الثَّقَلَانِ “We shall make ourselves free [to attend to] you two huge armies” We will call you to account and nothing occupies Him be He raised far above<sup>79</sup>

Q(30:27) وَهُوَ الَّذِي يَبْدَأُ الْخَلْقَ ثُمَّ يُعِيدُهُ وَهُوَ أَهْوَنُ عَلَيْهِ “who originates creation, then brings it back again, and it is very easy for Him”: ‘comments that if a one argues that God cannot be described by this as this description fits the creation<sup>80</sup>.

12. Q(39:56) فِي جَنْبِ اللَّهِ “I neglected my duty to [the side] of God”: *wa fī dhāt Allāh wahid*<sup>81</sup>, in the essence of God-the same’

Q(51:47) وَالسَّمَاءَ بَنَيْنَاهَا بِأَيْدٍ meaning with power<sup>82</sup>

Q(68:42) يَوْمَ يُكْشَفُ عَنْ سَاقٍ “Upon the day when the leg shall be bared”: When the matter or war intensifies then it is said: the matter has unveiled its leg<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Abū ‘Ubayda vol. 2, p. 19.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 244.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 190.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 266.

Abū ‘Ubyda’s interpretations of anthropomorphic verses are brief. Only in one place Q(16:26), did he use the words *mathal* and *tashbīh* in his interpretation and he tried to explain the mechanism of the trope in the verse. This is a new development in the interpretation of anthropomorphic verses started by him, and it will be the norm in later writings. Abū ‘Ubayda’s interpretations of anthropomorphic verses show clearly that dogmatic considerations played a role in his interpretation, and it is untenable to argue to the contrary as did Wansburoug, Abu Deeb and Madelung.

In his creed it is certain that he was not a traditionalist. Both Madelung and Gibb argue against the idea that Abū ‘Ubayyda was a Khārijite while Goldziher and Lecker argue for the contrary. I agree with Goldziher and Lecker<sup>84</sup> in considering Abū ‘Ubayda as a Khārijite; this is because of the testimonies of al-Jāhiz and students of Abū ‘Ubayda (which are hard to refute) as shown by Lecker’s treatment<sup>85</sup> of the issue. Furthermore in a book about Ibāḍī Kalām entitled *al-Kashf wa al-Bayān*<sup>86</sup> the only authority mentioned with regard to the interpretations of Anthropomorphic verses in the Qur’ān is Abū ‘Ubayda. This reference to him in itself does not constitute compelling and strong evidence but other sources and testimonies support the view that Abū ‘Ubayda was a Khārijite.

There is a kind of consensus among those who wrote about Abū ‘Ubayda, that he did not use the word *majāz* as a technical term to refer to tropical language, but the agreement ends here. Regarding what he meant by the word *majāz* both Hienerich and Abu Deeb rightly argue that Abū ‘Ubayda meant by the word *majāz* the original or natural mode of expression. Abū ‘Ubayda interpreted various verses tropically sometimes without using any term to refer to the tropical usage and at others he used three terms *mathal*, *tamthīl* and *tashbīh*. *Mathal* is already used by Muqātil and it is used by Abū ‘Ubayda in a similar sense to refer to tropes. *Tashbīh* and *Tamthīl* are also used to refer to tropes and these two

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<sup>84</sup> Lecker, Michael. Biographical notes on Abū ‘Ubayda Ma‘mar b. al-Muthannā, *Studia Islamica*, 1995/1 (juin) 81, p. 72.

<sup>85</sup> Lecker, *ibid.*, pp. 94-97.

<sup>86</sup> See, al-Qalhātī, Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Sa‘īd al-Azdī, *al-Kashf wa-al-bayān*, edited by Sayyida Ismā‘īl Kāshif, Wazārat al-Turāth al-Qawmī wa-al-Thaqāfa, Masqat, 1980

words will be used by later authors to refer to tropical language. Regarding anthropomorphic verses, Abū ‘Ubayda was sensitive to the issue of anthropomorphism; he interpreted 26 verses tropically and in one instance tried to explain the trope in the verse, which is a new development of the treatment of anthropomorphic verses in comparison with earlier authorities. Nevertheless, Abū ‘Ubayda was not consistent in his treatment of anthropomorphism in the Qur’ān, as he interpreted literally two verses related to God’s setting on the throne. The number of anthropomorphic verses he interpreted and his actual interpretations indicate that dogmatic considerations played a role in his commentary on the Qur’ān. Now I will deal with the treatment of anthropomorphic verses by al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm al-Rassī

## 2.4 Al-Qasim b. Ibrahim al-Rassi<sup>87</sup> (169/246-785/860)

Al-Qāsim al-Rassī is one of the earliest Shī‘ī theologians whose work survived up to the present time. His theology and interpretation of the Qur’ān will have a lasting effect on Zaydī Shī‘ites. His approach to the Qur’ān reflects the intellectual and theological<sup>88</sup> climate in the first half of the third Islamic century. In this section, I will deal first with al-Qāsim’s approach on Q (3:7) then I will look at his views on tropical language. Finally I will examine his interpretations of anthropomorphic verses.

### 2.4.1 Interpreting Q (3:7)

In his book *al-Masā’il* in question 89; his son asked him about the interpretation of “*minhu āyātun muḥkamātun hunna ummu ‘l- kitābi wa ukharu mutashābihāt*” (wherein are verses clear that are the Essence of the Book, and others ambiguous) in Q (3:7). al-Qāsim comments “*al-muḥkam* represents what the intellects consider to have a true argument” and the *umm* (mother) of the knowledge of everything is what is clear and not concealed. Therefore, the *muḥkamāt* of the Qur’ān are what is clear and evident and one does not need much to elucidate them; in other words they do not need further interpretation<sup>89</sup> such as Q (42:11) لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ “Like Him there is naught”: and Q(6:103) لَا تُدْرِكُهُ الْأَبْصَارُ “The eyes attain Him not”. As for *al-mutashābih* it remains unknown and only God encompasses its knowledge. Furthermore, no one is obliged to know these verses but one is obliged to know that they are from God. Had it been possible to know them through reflection, then they would cease to be *mutashābih*.

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<sup>87</sup> He was a Zaydī *imām* and a founder of the legal and theological school of Zaydiyya the Yemen. While he was in Egypt, He studied the Bible and Christian theology and debated Muslim and non-Muslim scholars. He was influenced by Christian writings and this can be seen in his views of Divine attributes where ‘placed the essential generosity (*ḍjūd*) and goodness of God at the centre of his doctrine’, Madelung, W. " al-Rassī." *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition.

<sup>88</sup> For a study of his views about existence of God, see B. Abrahamov, *Al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm on the proof of God’s existence: Kitāb al-dalīl al-kabīr*, Leiden 1990.

<sup>89</sup> Al-Rassī, al-Imām al-Qāsim b, Ibrāhīm, *Masā’il* in *Majmū‘ Kutub wa Rasā’il*, edited by ‘Abd al-Karīm Aḥmad Jadbān, Dār al-Ḥikma al-Yamāniyya, Yemen, 2001, vol. 2, pp 578-579



Al-Qāsim in his book *al-Nāsikh wa al-Mansūkh* also states that the Qur'ān contains commands, prohibitions and *mutashābih*. This *mutashābih* is *bāṭin*<sup>90</sup> (hidden) and concealed, cannot be known and this is how God made it; no one knows it save God. The utmost knowledge of it is the knowledge that it cannot be known. Therefore, the only way for someone to know about the *mutashābih* is when God Himself imparts this knowledge to the person<sup>91</sup>. Nevertheless, he adds<sup>92</sup> that some verses of the Qur'ān might be considered *mutashābih* by some people, but these verses are indeed *muḥkam* and need to be interpreted and made clear to these people by those who have a deep knowledge of the Qur'ān.

From the above we can see that for al-Qāsim, *muḥkamāt* are those verses which are clear and need no further interpretation, and *mutashābihāt* are those verses known only to God. Some people might consider some verses as *mutashābihāt*, but in reality they are not. It can also be observed from the verses al-Qāsim quotes to illustrate the *muḥkamāt* that these verses are used by him and others as a starting point to interpret anthropomorphic verses and the beatific vision of God in the hereafter respectively. His definition of *muḥkamāt* indicates the role of the intellect in determining these verses which is clearly a major theological principle in the *mu'tazilī* hermeneutics of the Qur'ān as we will see later. Regarding *al-mutashābihāt*, al-Qāsim did not tell us which verses can be considered as such nor did he give us explicit criteria to distinguish between the two. It can also be observed that al-Qāsim did not make explicit the hermeneutical principle according to which all *mutashābihāt* have to be interpreted in the light of the *muḥkamāt*. We will see later that he will use this principle but without mentioning it explicitly.

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<sup>90</sup> The reference here to the hidden meaning *bāṭin* can be understood in a mystical way. This can be seen at the end of his treatise *al-Mustarshid* where he said that "Perception is divided into two parts: the first is seeing and encounter openly and the second lies in the heart. The believers have perceived their Lord in this world and known Him through their hearts, therefore they have obeyed Him, when they have loved Him. *al-Mustarshid*, translated by Binyamin Abrahamov in his book *Anthropomorphism And Interpretation Of The Qur'ān In the Theology Of Al-Qāsim Ibn Ibrāhīm: Kitāb al-Mustarshid*, Brill, 1996 pp. 141-143.

<sup>91</sup> *Al-Nāsikh wa al-Mansūkh* in *Majmū' Kutub wa Rasā'il*, vol 1, p. 60.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

### 2.4.2 Al-Qāsim's view of the tropical language

Al-Qāsim employs two terms used by Abū 'Ubayda in his book *majāz al-Qur'ān* to refer to the tropical usage of language namely: *mathal*, and *tamthīl*. He did not use the word *majāz* to refer to tropical language even though the word was used in a technical sense in the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.H. by al-Jāhīz as we saw in the first chapter of this study.

Before examining al-Qāsim's view of tropical language it is worth looking at his views of the language of the Qur'ān. Al-Qāsim condemned those who interpret the Qur'ān without having the means to carry out this task, chief among these means is the knowledge of Arabic language and its ways of expressions. He argues that God revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad "His speech in a clear Arabic [which contains] pure sayings with utmost brevity and brief sayings with utmost purity. Those who do not know the language are forbidden to deal with issues of the Qur'ān which the exegetes, namely the masters of the language and the book, do not perceive. The masters of the language know that it has different ways and diversified directions, and that it has measures, ascents and descents, roots, allusions and subtleties of explanation<sup>93</sup>".

One of the most salient features of Arabic which is widely used in the Qur'ān; is *al-amthal* (the similitudes) which some people err when interpreting<sup>94</sup> with grave consequences such as Q (47:24) أَمْ عَلَى قُلُوبٍ أَقْفَالُهَا "Or is it that there are locks upon their hearts?" therefore anyone who understand *aqfāl* to mean iron lockers is indeed an ignorant and stupid person<sup>95</sup>. Al-Qāsim adds that the Qur'ān and Arabic poetry are abundant with *amthāl*.

For example Q (33:43) هُوَ الَّذِي يُصَلِّي عَلَيْكُمْ وَمَلَائِكَتُهُ لِيُخْرِجَكُم مِّنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ وَكَانَ بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ رَحِيمًا

"It is He who blesses you, and His angels, to bring you forth from the darkness into the light", it is only the one who has no intellect, who will interpret *zulumāt* as black night or

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<sup>93</sup> Binyamin Abrahamov. *Anthropomorphism and Interpretation of the Qur'ān in the Theology of al-Qāsim Ibn Ibrāhīm*, edited with translation, introduction and notes, Brill, 1996, p. 99.

<sup>94</sup> *Tafsīr 'al-'Arsh wa al-kursī* in *Majmū' Kutub wa Rasā'il*, p. 672. vol .1.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. p. 672 vol. 1

something similar and will interpret the *nūr* as sun or moon<sup>96</sup>. There are also *amthāl* in Arabic poetry and only those who are ignorant of Arabic will misunderstand their meanings, such as this line of poetry of Zuhayr b. Abī Sulmā.

*Mā ‘aḍḍanī al-dahru illā zādanī karamā*

And biting can only be imagined of what has a mouth<sup>97</sup>.

What is interesting in the above examples is the way in which al-Qāsim is using the word *amthāl* to refer to tropical language in Arabic and in the Qur’ān. This really reflects that by his time it is now fully established to use it (and to a lesser degree the word *tamthīl* and we will see below that he used the word in a sense of representation) to refer to tropes. I think what made the word *amthāl* popular is its Qur’ānic origin and usage (especially in phrases such as *ḍaraba Allāhu mathalan*). There are also other examples from the Qur’ān and Jāhili and Islamic poetry used by al-Qāsim to support his thesis that as the Arabic language is full of *amthāl* which cannot be taken literally, the same applies to the verses of the Qur’ān which describe God in anthropomorphic terms. This will be our next topic.

### 2.4.3 Al-Qāsim’s interpretation of anthropomorphic verses:

Two main treatises of al-Qāsim are devoted to the interpretation of anthropomorphic verses. The first is *Kitāb al-Mustarshid* and the second is *Kitāb Al-‘arsh wa al-kursī*. *Kitāb al-Mustarshid* is translated and analysed by Abrahamov so I will only quote his summary of al-Qāsim’s methods of interpreting anthropomorphic verses. Thus, I will deal mainly with his book on *al-‘Arsh wa al-Kursī*.

*Kitāb al-Mustarshid* deals with 7 themes namely: place of God, soul of God, God as light, God as a thing, God’s unity, God’s face and beatific vision. According to Abrahamov “*Kitāb al-Mustarshid* contains characteristics of the Mu‘tazilite exegesis. These are: the

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<sup>96</sup> vol 1. *Tafsīr ‘al-‘Arsh wa al-kursī* in *Majmū‘ Kutub wa Rasā’il*, p. 676

<sup>97</sup> *ibid.* pp. 677-678.

discussion of words, prepositions and homonyms, and providing pieces of evidence from the ordinary use of the language and from poetry<sup>98</sup>.

*Kitāb al-‘Arsh wa al-Kursī* deals mainly with the issue of the throne of God as the title indicates. It is interesting because in this book al-Qāsim uses the rhetorical terms *amthāl* and *tamthīl* in his interpretations. He also offers his explanation as to the reason behind Qur’ānic description of God and His actions in anthropomorphic terms.

The book is written as an answer to a question about *al-Kursī* and *al-‘Arsh*, put forward by al-Qāsim’s son. Al-Qāsim starts his answer by stating that one should not compare or liken God to anything in His creation in any meaning and in any form<sup>99</sup>. After that al-Qāsim cites a number of Qur’ānic verses to prove that God is beyond any speech and nothing from his creation resembles Him in any way or form. The first 4 verses to quote are Q (42: 11), Q (6:103), Q (2:255), and Q112. What is interesting about his citations of these verses is that the first one (and to some extent Q112) will be used later by all commentators as a starting point to interpret all anthropomorphic verses in the Qur’ān. In other words both this verse as well as Q 112 will be considered as *muḥkam* verses in the sense that all *mutashābihāt* (anthropomorphic) verses should be interpreted in the light of these *muḥkamāt*. Al-Qāsim here did not explicitly state this hermeneutical principle and as we have seen earlier he believes that *mutashābihāt* are known only to God. So his methods can be classified as interpreting the Qur’ān by the Qur’ān. In this case interpreting the *mutashābihāt* in the light of *muḥkamāt* can be considered as a special case of the general hermeneutical principle of interpreting the Qur’ān by the Qur’ān.

Al-Qāsim cites also psalm 135 and other parts of the Hebrew Bible as proof of God’s unity and majesty. As for the Gospels he states that the *Injīl*<sup>100</sup> contains many verses which

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<sup>98</sup> Abrahamov, anthropomorphism, p. 8

<sup>99</sup> *Al-‘Arsh wa al-Kursī*, p. 657

<sup>100</sup> The attitude of al-Qāsim towards the Bible differs from the majority of later Muslim scholars (or maybe some of his contemporaries). His quotations and use of Biblical references indicate that he does not consider the Bible to be altered and therefore an authentic source which can be used to support the argument of the Qur’ān against anthropomorphism.

negate likening God to his creation and he did not mention them in order to avoid lengthening the discussion<sup>101</sup>.

Turning now to his interpretation of *al-Kursī* (seat) in Q (2:255) بِمَا شَاءَ وَسِعَ كُرْسِيُّهُ “His Seat comprises the heavens and earth” and *al-Arsh* (throne), he states that” the Interpretation of what God has mentioned regarding *al-Kursī* and *al-Arsh* is like the interpretation of His fist and his *batsh* (assault) if the person believes in God. The origin and the branch of all of what I have mentioned [the anthropomorphic descriptions] are nothing but His domain, His Might, His Sovereignty, and His Power which no one shares these with Him<sup>102</sup>”. The same goes for Q (11:7) وَكَانَ عَرْشُهُ عَلَى الْمَاءِ “and His Throne was upon the waters” and the interpretation of this is that “His domain is over the water”. As for *al-Kursī*, it is “His preservation and domain”. Al-Qāsim adds that God by striking a similitudes (*amthāl*) he clarified to His servants the revelation and made them understand it. “The *amthāl*, parables and comparison are signs of His mercy” and people will miss the point if they concentrate on the things used and the their substances. Instead these things should be understood as comparisons<sup>103</sup>. Indeed all the attributes of God and His beautiful names should be understood in a way that removes any resemblance between God and His creatures<sup>104</sup>. For example Q (40:15) ذُو الْعَرْشِ “Possessor of the Throne” is His domain and not what can be imagined it to be a chair with legs. Al-Qāsim adds that the *‘arsh* is “a (*tamthīl*) representation to the servants by what they recognise not by what they know about the characteristics of their states<sup>105</sup>”. The servants are certain that God is beyond any resemblance and cannot be described by human attributes<sup>106</sup>. As for Q (69:17) وَيَحْمِلُ عَرْشَ رَبِّكَ فَوْقَهُمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ ثَمَانِيَةٌ “and upon that day eight shall carry above them the Throne of thy Lord”. Qāsim argues the *‘arsh* and its carriers is a *tamthīl* for the administration of justice in the Day of Judgment. The representation (*tamthīl*) is based on what the Arabs saw and knew about earthly kings when they

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<sup>101</sup> *Al-‘arsh* pp. 661-662

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 663.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 664.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 665.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 667

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

administer the justice in their kingdoms and how their thrones and chairs used to be erected in order to adjudicate among their subjects<sup>107</sup>. Similarly the notion that the throne being carried by angels should be understood as *tamthīl*, not in an anthropomorphic way. This is because the reason does not accept that God can be carried on a chair or a throne<sup>108</sup>. What is mentioned in these verses of ‘*arsh*, *kursī*’ and its carriers is *mathal* among many struck by God and only the fools who misunderstand them<sup>109</sup>.

As for *thamāniya* (eight) and *min fawqihim* (above them) in the above mentioned verse, al-Qāsim offers the following interpretation for the *tamthīl*: “as for *min fawqihim* it refers to the carriers and their heads, regarding *thamāniya* I think, God knows best” that the most prestigious royal thrones known to the ancients are those which have eight legs, two legs at each corner on each side. The ancients also consider carrying the royal throne by eight carriers as a sign of greatness and majesty and for the throne to be carried on the heads of the carriers reflects more grandeur in subjects of the king. Therefore, each leg is carried on the head of one carrier<sup>110</sup>. But why does God use these *amthāl*? Al-Qāsim answers this question by saying: “God struck *amthāl* (similitudes) to His servants according to what they know about things [around them] and what they saw in this earthly life to which all of what they perceive is confined. Thus He made them understand the similitudes by means of these things and what they know about them<sup>111</sup>”.

One final example of al-Qāsim’s interpretation of the Qur’ān is his treatment of Q (16:26) فَآتَى اللَّهُ بُنْيَانَهُم مِّنَ الْقَوَاعِدِ “then God came upon their building from the foundations”: he states one should not be deluded in thinking that *Ityān* here is physical coming and the same goes for the building and the basis. Actually it is “a truthful *mathal wa tamthīl* (similitude and representation)” represented by the Mighty, the Truthful and the Creator<sup>112</sup>. As we have seen the same verse is commented upon by Abū ‘Ubayda who called the trope in this verse a *mathal* and *tashbīh*. It can be observed that al-Qāsim

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 667.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 667-678

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 669.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 671

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 669- 670.

continues to use the word *mathal* but dropped the word *tashbīh* and used instead of it the word *tamthīl*<sup>113</sup>. I think that the reason behind dropping the word *tashbīh* is that this word by al-Qāsim's time is used to refer to the act of likening<sup>114</sup> God to His creatures, especially in the context of his treatise.

Al-Qāsim interpretation's of Q (3:7) reflects an earlier stage in the development of Qur'ānic theological interpretation, but on the other hand it is a far more advanced level in comparison with early authors. As for his views on tropical language, he accepts its existence in Arabic language and in the Qur'ān, and he used two words to refer to it, namely *mathal* and *tamthīl*. Nevertheless, he did not use the word *majāz* which is used by his time in the writing of al-Jāhiz as we have seen in chapter one. Al-Qāsim used both terms, *mathal* and *tamthīl*, to interpret anthropomorphic verses which he did not consider as a type of *mutashābihāt*. His interpretation of anthropomorphic verses is more mature and nuanced than that of earlier authors, and he attempted to explain the reasons for the use of these anthropomorphic verses in the Qur'ān by using the concepts of *mathal* and *tamthīl*. This makes his contribution original and represents an advanced stage in the history of the development of the interpretation of these verses. Next we will turn to Ibn Qutayba and examine his approach to anthropomorphism in the Qur'ān.

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<sup>113</sup> al-Qāsim used both verbs *maththala* and *daraba* to refer to the act of giving *tamthīl* and to refer to the act of giving a similitude throughout his treatise such as in Ibid., p. 664, 665, 669, 671.

<sup>114</sup> He used the word *tashbīh* in this sense in his treatise see Ibid., p. 662, 666, 674

## 2.5 Ibn Qutayba<sup>115</sup> (213/828-276/889)

Ibn Qutayba is credited with being the first to devote a chapter each to *majāz* and *isti'āra*. We also find in his writing a first defence of the phenomenon of *majāz* in language and the Qur'ān. Ibn Qutayba is theologically associated with Sunnism and Ibn Taymiyya called him *Khāṭib al-Sunna* as opposed to al-Jāhiz *Khāṭib al-Mu'tazila*<sup>116</sup>. Ibn Qutayba's approach to anthropomorphism in the Qur'ān is important for two reasons: first because his views represent a Sunnī pre-Ash'arite position, and second because he came after the crystallisation of the distinction between *majāz* and *haqīqa* in the writings of al-Jāhiz. In this section on Ibn Qutayba, I will make use of five of his books which are relevant to this study namely: *Ta'wīl mushkil al-Qur'ān*, *Ta'wīl mukhtalaf al-Ḥadīth*, *Kitāb al-Masā'il wa al-Ajwiba fī al-Ḥadīth wa al-Tafsīr*, *al-Ikhtilāf fī al-lafẓ wa al-radd 'alā al-Jahmiyya wa al-mushabbihā*, and *Tafsīr Gharīb al-Qur'ān*. I will first look at his interpretation of Q(3:7) then his views on *majāz*. Finally I will examine his approach to anthropomorphism.

### 2.5.1 Ibn Qutayba' views on Ta'wīl

Ibn Qutayba believes that *mutashābihāt* verses in the Qur'ān encourage people to reflect and everything in the Qur'ān can be interpreted. In a chapter on *mutashābih* in *Ta'wīl Mushkil al-Qur'ān*, he argues that the Qur'ān was revealed according to the styles and ways of the Arab including (*ījāz*) brevity, and (*ikhtisār*) conciseness, making some statements ambiguous so that only intelligent people can grasp them, and using (*amthāl*) parables to indicate what is hidden. So if all the Qur'ān was explicit and easy to understand to both the scholar and the unlearned person, then there would be no distinction between people and no motivation for them to reflect<sup>117</sup>. Ibn Qutayba adds “we do not subscribe to the claim that *mutashābih* in the Qur'ān cannot be known by

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<sup>115</sup> He was one of the great Sunnī prolific writers of the 3rd/9th century. His writings cover both theology and *adab*.

<sup>116</sup> *Athar al-Nuḥat*, 'Abd alqādir Ḥusayn, p. 176

<sup>117</sup> *Ta'wīl Mushkil al-Qur'ān* p. 86



those who are established in knowledge<sup>118</sup>”. He adds that those who interpret Q(3:7) in this way err with regard to the meaning of the verse, because God revealed the Qur’ān in order to benefit his servants, and it is not permissible to say that the Prophet did not know the *mutashābih*. Furthermore, “we have not seen the exegetes stopping on a particular verse and say this is *mutashābih* only God knows it<sup>119</sup>”, on the contrary they interpreted all the Qur’ān “even they (the exegetes) interpreted the disjoined letters (*al-ḥurūf al-muqāṭṭa‘a*) at the beginning of the *sūras* such as *alif lām rā*<sup>120</sup>”... He adds that “the phrase *yaqūlūna* in this verse indicates *ḥal* as if He said *al-Rāsikhūna fī al-‘ilmi qa’līna* those who are established in knowledge saying<sup>121</sup>”..

Regarding the word *mutashābih*, Ibn Qutayba states that” the origin of *tashābuh* is for an utterance to resemble another one in appearance but the two meanings are different so if one cannot distinguish between things he will say *ishtabah al-amru ‘alayya*<sup>122</sup>. “Then every ambiguous matter is called *mutashābih* even though the perplexity is not related to resemblance between things such as the disjoined letters in the Qur’ān<sup>123</sup>” they are called *mutashābih* even though the dispute about these letters is not related to any resemblance between these letters or anything else<sup>124</sup>. In sum, Ibn Qutayba believes that interpretation of *mutashābihāt* is possible, and for him they represent the verses that require reflection and further study.

## 2.5.2 Ibn Qutayba on *Majāz*

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<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102

<sup>124</sup> See also Ibn Qutayba’s book: *Kitāb al-Masā’il wa al-Ajwiba fī al-Ḥadīth wa al-Tafsīr*, edited by Marwān al-‘Aṭiyya and Muḥsin Kharāba, *Dār Ibn Kathīr*, Damascus, 1990 where he also argues that established scholars know the interpretation of the Qur’ān, p. 48 and pp. 209-214.

Ibn Qutayba, who was a student of al-Jāḥiẓ, used the word *majāz* in two different senses: the first as of a “way of saying” in a similar fashion to that of Abū ‘Ubayda and the second meaning is the technical meaning as a counterpart of *ḥaqīqa* following al-Jāḥiẓ as we have seen in chapter 1. So in his book *Ta’wīl Mushkil al-Qur’ān* he states that “The Arabs have *majāzāt* in their speech and the meaning of [*majāzāt*] is *turuq al-qawl wa ma’ākhidhuhu* (the ways (methods) of speech and the modes of handling it (or: the places from which it is taken))<sup>125</sup>. [the *majāzāt*] include *isti’āra*, analogy (*tamthīl*), inversion (*qalb*), hysteron proteron (*taqdīm wa-takhīr*), elision (*ḥadhf*), repetition (*takrār*), concealing and revealing (*ikhfā’ wa izhār*), allusion and outspokenness (*ta’rīd wa ifshā’*), periphrasis and proper designation (*kināya wa ḥdāḥ*)..and many others you will see in the *abwāb al-majāz* (section on *majāz* God willing<sup>126</sup>”. Here Ibn Qutayba is using the word *majāz* in a broad sense to cover various forms of expressions including metaphor. Heinrichs rightly observes that ‘the common denominator seems to be that *majāz* is everything that goes beyond the strictly logical application of language, i.e., beyond being a true and simple copy of reality<sup>127</sup>’.

Regarding the second sense of Ibn Qutayba’s usage of the word *majāz*, it can be established that he used *majāz* as a counterpart to *ḥaqīqa*, contrary to what is asserted by Heinrichs regarding this issue that “The idea of a *ḥaqīqa-majāz* dichotomy has however not yet developed<sup>128</sup>”. Heinrichs adds that “there is only one surprising instance of *ḥaqīqa* being used opposite *majāz*<sup>129</sup>” by Ibn Qutayba, when he was addressing the issue of reality of the speech of God<sup>130</sup>. As a matter of fact, there are other instances within the writings of Ibn Qutayba which indicate that he used the word *majāz* as counterpart to *ḥaqīqa*. In his book *Ta’wīl mukhtalaf al-Ḥadīth* in a section about burning the papers of the *mushāf*, Ibn Qutayba states that “we do not doubt that the Qur’ān in the *maṣāḥif* is in

<sup>125</sup> This phrase and other terms in this quotation are translated by Heinrichs in on the Genesis pp. 13-131

<sup>126</sup> Ibn Qutayba, Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd Allāh b. Muslim, *Ta’wīl mushkil al-Qur’ān*, edited by al-Sayyid Aḥmad Ṣaqr, *Dār al-Turāth*, 2nd edition, 1973, pp. 20-21.

<sup>127</sup> The Hand of the north wind p. 31

<sup>128</sup> On the Genesis p. 131.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p. 131

<sup>130</sup> Ibn Qutayba, *mushkil* p. 106 translated by Heinrichs in on Genesis p. 131-132.

truth (‘*alā l-haqīqa*’) not tropically (‘*alā l-majāz*’)<sup>131</sup>. Furthermore, in his book *al-Ikhtilāf fī al-lafẓ wa al-radd ‘alā al-Jahmiyya wa al-mushabbiha* Ibn Qutayba describes the views of those who adhere to predestination as follows:”They believe that “the servant.. is unable to perform any act good or bad in truth (‘*alā l-haqīqa*’) instead every act attributed to the servant is attributed to him figuratively (‘*alā l-majāz*’)<sup>132</sup>”. From the above, one can safely conclude that Ibn Qutayba used the word *majāz* like his teacher al-Jāhiz in a technical sense as a counterpart to *haqīqa*.

Ibn Qutayba considers *isti‘āra* to be part of *majāz* and begins his section on *majāz* with *isti‘āra* because the majority of cases of *majāz* come into this category<sup>133</sup>. He defines it in this way ”The Arabs borrow a word to put it in the place of another word if the thing named by [the second word] is caused (*bi -sabab*) or adjacent (*mujāwir*) or similar (*mushākil*) to the first word. They call the plant *naw’* (rain) because it is caused by the *naw’* (rain) as they [believe]”. They call the rain sky because the rain descends from sky... They say The earth laughed (*ḍahikat al-arḍ*) when it brought forth plants<sup>134</sup>”. This definition and the examples he cites indicate that what he calls *isti‘āra* comes under what later authors consider as *isti‘āra*, *majāz mursal*, *kināya* and *tashbīh balīgh*<sup>135</sup>. It should be also mentioned that Ibn Qutayba used Abū ‘Ubayda’s expression *tamthīl wa tashbīh* to interpret anthropomorphic descriptions of God. This can be observed in his comments on the following *ḥadīth*:

He said: ‘we said this is *tashbīh wa tamthīl*. What is meant by this is that: whoever comes to me in a hurry with obedience I will come to him with reward much faster than his coming. He alluded (*kannā*) to this by using *masfī* (walking) and *harwala*<sup>136</sup> (jogging)’. It

<sup>131</sup> *Ta’wīl Mukhtalaf al-Ḥadīth*, edited by Muḥammad Muhyī al-Dīn al-Aṣfar, *al-Maktab al-Islāmī*, 2nd edition, 1999, p. 291.

<sup>132</sup> *Al-Ikhtilāf fī al-lafẓ wa al-radd ‘alā al-Jahmiyya wa al-mushabbiha*, *Dār al-Kutb al-‘Ilmiyya*, Beirut, 1985, p.20. See also p. 23 for other occurrences of the technical usage of *haqīqa*-*majāz* pair.

<sup>133</sup> *Ta’wīl mushkil* p. 134.

<sup>134</sup> *Ta’wīl mushkil* p. 135.

<sup>135</sup> *Ta’wīl mushkil* pp. 135-184 . Heinrichs comments ‘In fact, it seems that *isti‘āra* is a general term for ‘figurative use of words’, but it ought to be noted that “figurative” here is not identical with non-proper”, because one case of non-proper use of words’ is mentioned by Ibn Qutayba in another place. The Hand of the North wind, *ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>136</sup> *Ta’wīl mushkil al-ḥadīth* p. 327

seems that Ibn Qutayba considers these categories as part of *kināya* (allusion) but his concept of *kināya* is different from what later authors considered as *kināya* because for Ibn Qutayba the surface meaning of such statements does not have to be true in reality<sup>137</sup>. One might ask what is the contribution of Ibn Qutayba to the development of the theory of *majāz*? Heinrichs believes that Ibn Qutayba's view on *majāz* "is clearly an amalgamation of Abū 'Ubayda's *majāz* and Mu'tazilī positions<sup>138</sup>" and therefore no originality can be attested in his writing about *majāz*<sup>139</sup>. Similarly Shawqī Ḍayf asserts<sup>140</sup> that Ibn Qutayba was influenced by al-Jāhiz, especially in his refutation of those who criticized the Qur'ān, but it was Abū 'Ubayda who exerted the biggest influence on him. Ḍayf adds that Ibn Qutayba "did not add anything new in comparison with Abū 'Ubayda save only his subtle classification<sup>141</sup>". One can also credit Ibn Qutayba with the first elegant defence of the phenomenon<sup>142</sup> of *majāz* in the Qur'ān which later scholars used with some modification. Now I will look at Ibn Qutayba's interpretation of anthropomorphic verses to see to what extent his interpretation was influenced by his views on *majāz*.

### 2.5.3 Interpreting Anthropomorphic verses

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<sup>137</sup> *Athar al-nuḥāt* pp. 192-194

<sup>138</sup> On the Genesis p. 138

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., p. 132

<sup>140</sup> Shawqī Ḍayf, *al-Balāgha Taṭwur wa Tārīkh, Dār al-Ma'ārif*, Cairo, 12<sup>th</sup> edition, 2003, p.59.

<sup>141</sup> Shawqī Ḍayf, *ibid*, p.60. 'Abd al-Qādir Ḥusayn agrees with Ḍayf on this point see *Athar al-Nuḥāt fī al-Baḥth al-Balāghī*, Dār Gharīb, Cairo, 1998, p. 180

<sup>142</sup> Against those who consider *majāz* as equivalent to lying because the wall Q (18:77) does not will and the town cannot be asked, Ibn Qutayba states "If *majāz* is considered to be lying (*kadhib*) and every action attributed to a non-living entity is false, then large part of our speech would be wrong because we say ..the tree grow taller ..and the price has fallen", *Ta'wīl mushkil al-Qur'ān*, p. 132.

Ibn Qutayba was not consistent in his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses. He approached these verses in four different ways:

#### I. First approach: Offering tropical interpretation

The face of God

The *wajh* is *zyāda* (addition) in Q (28:88) *كُلُّ شَيْءٍ هَالِكٌ إِلَّا وَجْهَهُ* “All things perish, except His Face”: the word *wajh* means He and also in Q (76:9) *wajh* means for the sake of God<sup>143</sup>. Clearly here he offers a tropical interpretation for these verses.

Hand of God

Q(36:71) *أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا أَنَّا خَلَقْنَا لَهُمْ مِمَّا عَمِلَتْ أَيْدِينَا* “Have they not seen how that We have created for them of that Our hands”. Ibn Qutayba contends that Our hands could mean what we have done with Our power and strength. *Al-Yad* indicates strength and ability to work. This is why the word *yad* can be borrowed to replace [power and strength]. This is a *majāz* (a way of expression) used by the Arabs *yaḥtamiluhu* this *ḥarf*<sup>144</sup>. Here Ibn Qutayba did not use the word *majāz* in a technical sense although he interpreted this verse tropically. One could also notice that Ibn Qutayba used the word *isti‘āra* in its primary sense, to explain the usage of *yad* in this verse and he did not try to link it to his classification of *isti‘āra* as a category of *majāz* as we have seen earlier. Later commentators will usually refrain from using the word *isti‘āra* to interpret anthropomorphic verses that refer to body parts; instead they will use the word *majāz*.

*Istihzā*’ (mocking)

Q(2:15) *اللَّهُ يَسْتَهْزِئُ بِهِمْ* “God shall mock them”. He discussed this under the reward for an action using the same vocable but different meanings

*Makr* (mocking)

The same goes for Q(3:54) *وَمَكَرُوا وَمَكَرَ اللَّهُ* “And they devised, and God devised”:

<sup>143</sup> *Ta’wīl mushkil al-Qur’ān* p. 480

<sup>144</sup> *Tafsīr gharīb* p. 368

They are sins for the doers of the action but when they are predicated of God they mean reward<sup>145</sup> from the person who initiated the action.

### *Farāgh*

Q(55:31) سَنَفْرُغُ لَكُمْ أَيُّهَا الثَّقَلَانِ “We shall make ourselves free [to attend to] you two huge armies” and God nothing can occupies Him and its *majāz* is we will turn towards you after we gave you<sup>146</sup> سنقصد لكم بعد طول الترك والامهال

### *Nisyān* (forgetfulness)

Q(7:51) meaning *natrukhum*<sup>147</sup>

### *Ityān* (coming)

Q (16:26) it is *mathal*. It means that God *ahlakahum* like the one who destroyed his house from the foundation<sup>148</sup>. Ibn Qutayba followed Abū ‘Ubayda here by using the word *mathal* as mentioned in Abū ‘Ubayda’s section.

### Advancing

Q(25:23) وَفَعِمْنَا إِلَىٰ مَا عَمِلُوا “We shall advance upon what work they have done”: meaning ‘*amadnā ilayhi* we turned our intention towards it’<sup>149</sup>.

### Lifting

Q (41:11) ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ إِلَى السَّمَاءِ “Then He lifted Himself to heaven”: --- ‘*amada lahā* he turned his attention towards it’<sup>150</sup>.

The above interpretations show both the influence of Abū ‘Ubayda and al-Mu‘tazila on Ibn Qutayba. He did not use the word *majāz* in its technical sense in interpreting these

<sup>145</sup> *Ta’wīl* p. 277 see also *Tafsīr Gharīb al-Qur’ān*, p. 41

<sup>146</sup> *Ta’wīl* p. 105.

<sup>147</sup> *Tafsīr Gharīb* p. 168

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 242

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 312

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 388

verses although as we have seen above he used it elsewhere in his writings. The same can be said about *Isti‘āra*.

## II. The second approach: offering anthropomorphic interpretation

Q(20:5) الرَّحْمَنُ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ اسْتَوَى “the All-compassionate sat Himself upon the Throne”.

Ibn Qutayba repeats<sup>151</sup> what Abū ‘Ubayda has said as we have seen above *istawaytu fawqa al-dābba* and *istawaytu fawqa al-bayt*. He also gives another interpretation *istaqarra*<sup>152</sup> (settled down).

Q(20:39) وَلِصْنَعِ عَلَى عَيْنِي “and to be formed under my eye”: meaning in order to be raised under my sight this is because of my love to you<sup>153</sup>

## III. The third approach: *ithbāt* (affirming)

Q(39:67) وَمَا قَدَرُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ قَدْرِهِ وَالْأَرْضُ جَمِيعاً قَبْضَتُهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ وَالسَّمَوَاتُ مَطْوِيَّاتٌ بِيَمِينِهِ  
سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ

They measure not God with His true measure. The earth altogether shall be His handful on the Day of Resurrection, and the heavens shall be rolled up in His right hand. Glory be to Him! High be He exalted above that they associate!

He comments “we do not say a finger like our fingers nor a hand like our hands, nor a fist like our fists. This is because everything which is part of Him –does not resemble anything which is part of us<sup>154</sup>”.

## V. The fourth approach: No comment

Q(2:210)<sup>155</sup>, Q (6:12)<sup>156</sup>, Q(6:158)<sup>157</sup>, and Q(21:44)<sup>158</sup>.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 277

<sup>152</sup> *Ta’wīl mukhtalif* p. 394.

<sup>153</sup> *Tafsīr gharīb* p. 278

<sup>154</sup> *Ta’wīl mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth*, p. 303

<sup>155</sup> *Tafsīr Gharīb* p. 81

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 286

To sum up: Ibn Qutayba was not consistent in his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses, thus to call him an outright anthropomorphist (*mushabbih*) as some earlier scholars had done is far from the truth. On the other hand, his tropical interpretations of anthropomorphic verses reflect the influence of both Abū ‘Ubayda and *al-Mu‘tazila* (through his teacher al-Jāḥiẓ) and his originality consists in applying the terms which were used/developed by Abū ‘Ubayda and al-Jāḥiẓ to new verses.

Ibn Qutayba believes in the possibility of interpreting the *mutashābihāt* in the Qur’ān and for him they refer to those verses that require an effort on the part of the reader. Therefore, anthropomorphic verses come under this category but are not exclusive to it. As for his views on *majāz* and tropical language, we can still detect an older usage of the word *majāz* in addition to the new dichotomy which was introduced by al-Jāḥiẓ. He used the terms *isti‘āra*, *mathal* and *majāz* without distinguishing between them. Furthermore, Ibn Qutayba was an ardent critic of those who deny the phenomenon of *majāz* in the Qur’ān. Ibn Qutayba was not consistent in his approach to anthropomorphic verses in the Qur’ān, as four approaches can be identified in his writing. Regarding his tropical interpretation of these verses, it can be observed that his approach combines the approaches of Abū ‘Ubyada and al-Jāḥiẓ and use their terminology to interpret anthropomorphic verses, but he did not use the word *majāz* in a technical sense in his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses.

### **Conclusion:**



The early authors examined in this chapter exhibit diverse approaches and interpretations of anthropomorphic verses. Mujāhid, the author of the first partial *Tafsīr* to reach us, identified *mutashābihāt* verses with those related to theological issues believed in the possibility of interpreting them thus paving the way for later authors. Nevertheless, he did not contrast *muhkamāt* verses with the *mutashābihāt*. What we found in this *tafsīr* is one of the earliest tropical interpretations of anthropomorphic verses but at the same time no justification of these verses is given.

Muqātil believes also that anthropomorphic verses can be interpreted but at the same time he uses the word *mathal* to refer to the instances of tropical language in the Qur'ān. His approach to anthropomorphic verses was not consistent; in some places he interpreted anthropomorphic verses according to the *prima facie* sense of these verses and at others he offered tropical interpretation using the term *mathal* to refer to the tropical use of language in these verses. For this reason, one cannot call Muqātil a gross anthropomorphist. As for Abū 'Ubayda, he did not use the word *majāz* as a counterpart to *haqīqa*. More probably he used it to mean the original natural mode of expression. Instead he used the words *tashbīh*, *mathal*, and *tamthīl* to refer to tropical use of language. Abū 'Ubayda interpreted a large number of anthropomorphic verses tropically and only on two occasions understood them according to their *prima facie* sense. What is new in his interpretation is that he tried to explain the trope in the verse, and this will be followed by later authors. Al-Qāsim's interpretation of Q (3:7) is an advanced stage in the development of Qur'ānic theological hermeneutics in comparison with earlier authors discussed here. Al-Qāsim did not use the word *majāz* to refer to tropical language; instead he used the words *mathal* and *tamthīl*. His interpretations of anthropomorphic verses are more mature and advanced because of his attempt to explain the reasons for the use of these anthropomorphic verses in the Qur'ān by using the concepts of *mathal* and *tamthīl*. His approach to anthropomorphic verses is original and represents a major step in the development of the interpretation of these verses.

Finally, Ibn Qutayba believes that *mutashābihāt* are those ambiguous verses which require effort on the part of the interpreter. Thus, anthropomorphic verses can be considered as a category of the *mutashābih*. He used *majāz* in two ways; first the older usage which was associated with Abū 'Ubayda, and secondly *majāz* as a counterpart of *haqīqa* as introduced

by al-Jāḥiẓ. No distinction is attested in his writing between *isti'āra* and *majāz*. He criticised those who deny the existence of *majāz* in the Qur'ān and used this concept to interpret anthropomorphic verses. But he was not consistent in his approach, as an additional three approaches to anthropomorphic verses are also attested in his writings. His tropical interpretation of anthropomorphic verses can be considered as combinations of the approaches of Abū 'Ubayda and al-Jāḥiẓ but without using the word *majāz* in a technical sense when interpreting these verses.

Three points raised by the above findings are worth discussion namely: the beginning of tropical interpretation, the development of Qur'ānic hermeneutics and the impact of the theory of *majāz* on the interpretation of anthropomorphic verses. First, the treatment of Mujāhid of anthropomorphic interpretations indicates that tropical interpretation of anthropomorphic verses begun before the establishment of theological schools and the formation of their doctrine. This means that the tropical interpretation of anthropomorphic verses has a root in earlier Islamic tradition and represents a genuine position within Islamic scholarship. In my opinion the only reason behind his tropical interpretation is other verses of the Qur'ān which indicate God's dissimilarity to his creation. Second, the interpretation of our authors of Q(3:7) shows that there was no clear theory of theological Qur'ānic hermeneutics towards the middle of the third Islamic century. Nevertheless, we can detect the beginning of its development in the treatment of Mujāhid, al-Qāsim and to some extent Ibn Qutayba. Third, the awareness of the phenomenon of *majāz* and its development provided our authors with the tool to interpret anthropomorphic verses. It also enabled some of these authors, especially al-Qāsim and Ibn Qutayba, to offer more detailed interpretations that try to explain the reasons behind describing God anthropomorphically. Next I will examine the contribution and the treatment of anthropomorphic verses by the Mu'tazilites in the context of their theology and hermeneutics.

## Chapter 3

### The Mu'tazilites

“ Mu'tazilites unanimously agree that God the all Mighty is a thing unlike things and that he is not a body neither an accident. But He is the creator of bodies and accidents and none of the senses can perceive Him in this life or in the Hereafter. He cannot be confined to places neither can He be bounded by regions<sup>1</sup>”.

The Mu'tazilites are considered the champions of tropical interpretations of anthropomorphic verses and their approach and interpretation of these verses shaped the views of all other theological schools, whether they agree with them or not. Generally speaking, the Mu'tazilites are one of the most important theological groups in Islam, their methods, issues discussed, and terms shaped all subsequent theological thinking in Islamic thought. Their doctrine is based on five principles (*al-‘uṣūl al-khamsa*): 1. Unity of God ( *al-tawḥīd*); 2. Justice of God ( *al-‘adl*); 3. “the promise and the threat” ( *al-wa‘d wa al-wa‘īd*); 4. The intermediate state ( *al-manzila bayna al-manzilatayn*) of the sinful Muslim, considering him/her as malefactor ( *fāsiq*) 5. “commanding the good and forbidding the evil” ( *al-amr bi-al-ma‘rūf wa al-nahy ‘an al-munkar*). The first two principles are by far the most important ones and because of them the Mu'tazilites are called the people of justice and unity of God ( *ahl al-‘adl wa al-tawḥīd*)<sup>2</sup>.

Regarding the unity of God, they understood unity as incorporeality and he is unlike anything else, unity in essence: God is beyond time and place, he is unchangeable. The Mu'tazilites divided the attributes of God into two types: the attributes of the essence ( *ṣifat al-dhāt*) and the attributes of the act ( *ṣifat al-fī ‘l*). The attributes of the essence are identical with His essence and God merits them from eternity such as knowledge, power and life. In other words, they are unchangeable and tell us something about

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<sup>1</sup> Abū al-Qāsim al-Balkhī, *Bāb dhikr al-Mu'tazila Min Maqalāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, ed. by Fu'ād Sayyid, *al-Dār al-Tunisiyya*

<sup>2</sup> Josef Van Ess, Mu'tazilah in *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, ed. by M. Eliad, pp. 6317 - 6325

God's essence. The attributes of the act are those attributes that God merits on account of His actions, such as creating, willing, speaking and nourishing. These attributes describe God's relations with the world. For the Mu'tazilites, God's speech is an attribute of the act and therefore the Qur'ān is created not eternal. As for the justice of God, the Mu'tazilites assert that God is subject to the same moral obligations which apply to man and reason that tells us what is morally good and what is morally bad. Therefore, from the Mu'tazilī point of view 'the necessary justice of God is not only fact, it is for Him a permanent obligation; in the name of His justice, God is required to act in such-and-such a fashion, since otherwise He would be unjust<sup>3</sup>'. As a consequence of this principle, the Mu'tazilites believe that humans have free will and every person is responsible for his acts. His fate in the hereafter is determined by what he does in this life.

The Mu'tazilites were the first to emphasize the role of reason and its primacy in Islamic theology. They can be considered as rationalists for their insistence that certain things are known only through the exercise of reason in the absence of, or prior to, any revelation. The existence of God and His attributes can be known to us through reasoning and knowing God in this way is the first obligation upon every human being. Reason can tell us that God exists as a creator<sup>4</sup>, it also informs us that He is powerful, omniscient, living, self-sufficient, just and does not have a body. Reason can also establish the prophethood of Muḥammad and only then can the revelation to him in the form of scripture (the Qur'ān) be relied upon to find out more about God and other matters. But what if there are contradictions between what is contained in the revelation and the knowledge acquired by the use of reason such as these anthropomorphic verses which give the impression that God has a body. This chapter

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<sup>3</sup> Gimaret, D. " Mu'tazila." *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Edited by: P. Bearman , Th. Bianquis , C.E. Bosworth , E. van Donzel and W.P. Heinrichs. Brill

<sup>4</sup> The Mu'tazilites used "the argument *c novitate mundi*; deriving the existence of God from the "accidental" character of creation corresponded to their atomistic worldview", see Van Ess, Mu'tazilah. See also Ḥusām Muḥyī al-Dīn Alūsī, *The Problem of Creation in Islamic Thought*, Baghdad, 1968 and Ayman Shihadeh, 'The Existence of God. In: Winter, T., (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp. 197-217.

examines the theory, hermeneutics, and tools that have been used by the Mu'tazilites to harmonize reason and revelation with reference to anthropomorphic verses.

The only available study that deals with this issue is the pioneering study of Naṣr Hāmid Abū Zayd which is entitled *al-Ittijāh al-'Aqlī fī al-Tafsīr: Dirāsa fī Qaḍiyyat al-Majāz 'inda al-M'utazila*<sup>5</sup>. The study examines the relationship between Mu'tazilite thought and *majāz* in the Qur'ān in their writings up to the time of 'Abd al-Jabbār. His treatment of earlier writers such as Muqātil b. Sulaymān and al-Qāsim al-Rassī is inadequate and this is due to the unavailability of their writings in edited form at the time of the research. Abū Zayd focuses in his study on 'Abd al-Jabbār and examined his theological views and his use of *majāz* in relation to the issues of seeing God in the hereafter and free will. He shows how 'Abd al-Jabbār use the tool of *majāz* to defend the Mu'tazilites' views regarding the two issues mentioned above. This study will overcome the shortcomings of Abu Zayd's treatment by examining earlier Mu'tazilite thinkers as well as al-Zamakhsharī with regard to their use of *majāz* to interpret anthropomorphic verses in order to harmonize reason and revelation. This chapter is divided into three sections; section one deals with early Mu'tazilites, section two covers the treatment of 'Abd al-Jabbār including his elaborate Qur'ānic hermeneutics and finally section three examines al-Zamakhsharī focusing on his theory of *majāz* and how he used it to interpret anthropomorphic verses.

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<sup>5</sup> Naṣr Hāmid Abū Zayd, *al-Ittijāh al-'Aqlī fī al-Tafsīr: Dirāsa fī Qaḍiyyat al-Majāz 'inda al-M'utazila*, al-Markaz al-Thāqafī al-'Arabī, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Beirut, 1996.

### 3.1 Early Mu‘tazilites on Anthropomorphism:

The Mu‘tazilite school championed the tropical interpretation of anthropomorphic verses from its inception and this is due to the Mu‘tazilites’ continued endeavour to harmonise between reason and revelation. From the beginning, the Mu‘tazilites emphasised the role of reason in their theology and this has an impact on their approach to Qur’ān and the methods they used to interpret these verses which they consider not in accord with their theology. Very little Mu‘tazilite literature reached us from the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries and therefore it is difficult to present a complete picture of their theology, hermeneutics and their exegesis of the Qur’ān. In the following I will use the available writings to analyse the methods and the tools used by the early Mu‘tazilites to interpret anthropomorphic verses. I will focus on three writers, namely: Abū Bakr al-Aṣamm, Al-Jūbbā’ī and al-Jāḥiẓ.

#### 3.1.1 Abū Bakr al-Aṣamm (d. 200/816 or 201/817)<sup>6</sup>

Al-Aṣam wrote a commentary on the Qur’ān which was used by later commentators<sup>7</sup>. His commentary did not survive and his views on selected verses of the Qur’ān were collected from later commentaries by Khaḍr Muḥammad Nabḥā<sup>8</sup>. My analysis is based on this collection and other secondary sources that mention his views. Nothing survived of al-Aṣamm’s detailed views on God and his attributes but we can assume

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<sup>6</sup> Abū bakr ‘abd al-rahmān b. Kaysān al-Aṣamm, (d. 200/816 or 201/817), is an early theologian and commentator on the Qur’ān. He is known for his denial of the existents of *a‘rād* (accidents) and for his belief that *Imāma* (leadership) is not obligatory characteristic of societies. See van Ess, Josef. "al-Aṣamm." *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Ibn al-Nadīm attributed 26 treatises attributed to him by Ibn al-Nadīm, none of which is survived. He was well known for his commentary on the Qur’ān which appears to have been systematic and broad, see Schwarb, Gregor M.. "al-Aṣamm ." *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE* ., 2012.

<sup>7</sup> 1. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī (460/ 1067 ), *al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān* 2. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (606/1292 ), *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, and al-Faḍl b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabarsī (548/ 1154 ), *Majma‘ al-Bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*.

<sup>8</sup> Nabḥā, Khaḍr Muḥammad. *Mawsū‘at Tafasīr al-Mu‘tazila 1-2: Tafsīr Abī Bakr al-Aṣamm, Dār al-Kutub al-‘ilmiyya*, Beirut, 2007.

that his views are in accord with the Mu'tazilites<sup>9</sup> in his time. We only find a quotation in the *Maqālāt* of al-Ash'arī who states that al-Aṣamm believes that "God is neither a body nor an accident"<sup>10</sup>. Nor did anything survive of his views of the relations between reason and revelation. His views on Q (3:7) are mentioned by al-Ash'arī in his *Maqālāt* where he states that for al-Aṣamm *al-muḥkamāt* are the verses that yield clear proofs and do not need reflection such as the verses that tell us about ancient nations. As for the *Mutashābihāt*, al-Aṣamm believes that they are the verses that require reflection such as the verses that tell us about future events like bodily resurrection<sup>11</sup>. What is interesting about his views about *mutashābihāt* and *muḥkamāt* is his emphasis on the role of reason to determine these verses.

What have survived from his commentary are his views on four anthropomorphic verses:

Q (2: 19) ”وَاللَّهُ مُحِيطٌ بِالْكَافِرِينَ” and God encompasses the unbelievers”

“He is aware of them, knows what they hide and inform His prophet about their secrets<sup>12</sup>”

Q(10:15) ”قَالَ الَّذِينَ لَا يَرْجُونَ لِقَاءَنَا” “those who look not to encounter Us say”

“meaning that they do not hope to gain any good, as a reward for their obedience, when meeting Us<sup>13</sup>” because of their sins.

Q (24:34) ”اللَّهُ نُورُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ

" God is the Light of the heavens and the earth”

‘What is intended [here] is that He the one who controls and manages the heavens and earth with wisdom and radiating proof; thus He described Himself like the master and the scholar is

<sup>9</sup> Van Ess believes that “The theological principles defended by al-Aṣamm were essentially identical to those upheld by the *Qadaṛīs* and *Mu'tazilīs* of his time”, See "al-Aṣamm." *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*.

<sup>10</sup> al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, ed. Helmut Ritter, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 1980, p. 588.

<sup>11</sup> al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, , p. 223.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 33

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 77.

described as the light of the town. When the master perfectly manages the affairs of the town then he is for them like a light which is used as a guide for the routs<sup>14</sup>,

Q (112: 2) “God, the Everlasting Refuge” **اللَّهُ الصَّمَدُ**

“*Al-Ṣammad* is the Creator of things because being Master entails this<sup>15</sup>”

Due to the limited number of verses, any generalisation will lack a strong base. Thus, only tentative comments can be offered here. The above interpretations are short and two of them are a kind of a substitution of one word for another. In his comments on only one verse Q (24:35), one finds a justification of the interpretation. All of these interpretations are tropical and no terms mentioned to describe the phenomenon of *majāz* nor are any explanations given as to why one should interpret them figuratively. The first observation confirms what we know that it was al-Jāḥiẓ who used the terms *majāz-ḥaqīqa* in a technical way for the first time.

### 3.1.2 Al-Jāḥiẓ (255/869)

We already discussed al-Jāḥiẓ's views on *majāz* in chapter one of this thesis. Here I will examine his theology and hermeneutics with regard to his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses. Regarding the issue of anthropomorphism, *al-Jāḥiẓ* in his book *al-radd ‘alā al-mushabbihā* (refutation of the anthropomorphists) defends a tropical interpretation of Q (75:22-23) and quotes Mujāhid's interpretation (examined in chapter 2) where *nāẓira* means waiting the reward of their Lord. Then he asserts that ‘in the proofs of reasons God does not resemble any creature in any aspect, so if He is visible then you are likening him to [his creatures] in many ways<sup>16</sup>’ (I could not find any elaboration on why God should not resemble His creatures in his writings). His views on the relationship between reason and revelation can be known from his reply to the anthropomorphists who believe that God can be seen in the hereafter where al-Jāḥiẓ states that ‘it is more appropriate to negate the assimilation of God to

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 93

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>16</sup> Al-Jāḥiẓ, Abū ‘Uthmān ‘Amru b. Baḥr, *Al-Radd ‘Alā al-Mushabbihā, Rasā’il al-Jāḥiẓ*, edited by ‘Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn, *Maktabat al-Khānījī*, Egypt, 1979, vol. 4, p. 10.



his creatures (*tashbīh*) because reason has indicated this in the Qur’ān<sup>17</sup> (42:11). This is one of the earliest statements which indicate the priority of reason over revelation as far as I know. Here al-Jāhiz puts the proofs of reason before the Qur’ān in order to support his tropical interpretation of anthropomorphic verses. He did not elaborate on this point, which might indicate that this doctrine had become fully established in the Mu‘tazilites circles. As for Q (3:7) I could not find any interpretation of this verse and related terms *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt* in the writing of al-Jāhiz. His statement quoted above indicates the use Q (42:11) to interpret Q (75: 22-23) without identifying the first verse with *muḥkam* and the second one with *mutashābih*.

al-Jāhiz offers another supporting argument for the above interpretation based on *majāz*. He argues that God does not speak unless “this speech has a meaning which can be either the origin (*al-aṣl*) and the meaning is based on it, or the meaning is the branch (*al-far‘*) and the derivative (*al-ishtiqāq*) which the Arabs call *majāz*<sup>18</sup>”. Al-Jāhiz continues his argument” in the Word of God-and He is Just according to our belief<sup>19</sup>- Q (2:18) صُمُّ بُكْمٌ عُمْيٌ فَهُمْ لَا يَرْجِعُونَ “deaf, dumb, blind -- so they shall not return”. ‘we realised that had these people been disabled then God would have burdened them with something above what they can bear. Since God is just then these people are not disabled and nothing is wrong with them. If this is the case then our judgement should be based on the branch(*al-far‘*) and *majāz* leaving the origin (*al-aṣl*) and the meaning which is based on it aside. The interpretation of Q (2:18) would be in this case is that “they are ‘*umyun*, *ṣummun* and *lā ya‘qilūn* in a sense that they pretended to be blind, deaf and acted like those who do not have intellect<sup>20</sup>’.

In a similar manner, al-Jāhiz argues, “the interpretation of *nāẓira* (gazing) and Q (89:22) and Q (6:3). They say (the Arabs): someone came by himself (*Jā’anā fulānun bi- nafsihi*), He brought his son (*jā’anā bi- waladihi*) and He brought to us ample good [things] (*Jā’anā bi khayrin kathīrin*). All of the above have various meanings. They say

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>18</sup> *Al-radd ‘alā al-Mushabbihā*, ibid., pp. 14-15.

<sup>19</sup> ibid., p. 15

<sup>20</sup> ibid., p. 15

the heaven brought to us an enormous matter (*Jā'atnā al-samā'u bi- amrin 'azīmin*) and the heaven is in its place. They also say the heaven came to us (*jā'atnā al-samā'u*) and they mean by it the clouds which bring rain from the sky<sup>21</sup>.

Al-Jāhiz is the first theologian we know so far to assert the priority of reason over revelation and to use explicitly the term *majāz* in a technical sense in interpreting anthropomorphic verses as seen above. We saw earlier that he was the first person to use it in a technical sense and here again he was the first to apply it. His interpretations reflect a big step in the interpretation of anthropomorphic verses if we compare him with al-Aṣamm or with early commentators such as Mujāhid, Muqātil or Abū 'Ubayda. Al-Jāhiz played an important role in the articulation of the theory of *majāz* and which had an impact on his interpretations by basing them on solid linguistic grounds. The theological and hermeneutical premises that he articulated and used will be the basis for any future attempt to interpret anthropomorphic verses by the Mu'tazilites.

### 3.1.3 Al-Jubbā'ī<sup>22</sup> (303/915)

Abū 'Alī Muḥammad b. 'Abd-al-Wahhāb al-Jubbā'ī was an important figure in the Baṣran school of Mu'tazilism. Al-Jubbā'ī wrote a commentary<sup>23</sup> on the Qur'ān which did not survive<sup>24</sup>. But like al-Aṣamm before him, many quotations from his *Tafsīr* are found in various later books. In recent years there were three attempts to collect al-Jubbā'ī's quotations from various sources. The first attempt is that of Rosalind

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>22</sup> Abū 'Alī wrote many books including a commentary on the Qur'ān and only one part of one of his books survived: *Kitāb al-Maqalāt*. Sabine Schmidtke, Jobba'i, in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/jobbai-name-of-two-mutazilite-theologians> (accessed 29/3/2012)

<sup>23</sup> Estimated by Gimaret to be around 1000 folios, see *Gimaret, Une Lecture Mu'tazilite Du Coran Le Tafsīr d'Alī al-Gubbā'ī (m.303/915) partiellement reconstitué à partir de ses citateurs*, Peeters, 1994, p. 30.

<sup>24</sup> Nabhā, Khaḍr Muḥammad. *Mawsū'at Tafasīr al-Mu'tazila 3: Tafasīr Abū 'Alī al-Jubbā'ī, Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya*, Beirut, 2007, pp. 6-8.

Gwynne<sup>25</sup> in her PhD dissertation, the second attempt is that of Daniel Gimaret<sup>26</sup> and the last attempt is that of Khaḍr Muḥammad Nabhā<sup>27</sup>.

### Interpretation of Q (3:7)

According to al-Jubbā'ī, Muḥkam is what can yield only one meaning while *mutashābih* can yield two meanings or more<sup>28</sup>. Regarding (*mā ya'lamu ta'wīlahu Illā Allāhu...*), al-Jubbā'ī interpreted this to mean that only God knows all of the *mutashābih* because people might know part of it and might not know other parts and in this case one should pause after *illā Allāh* and start the recitation with *wa al-rāsikhūna fī al-'ilm*. Ta'wīl is understood to be *al-muta'wwal* (the things indicated by a *mutashābih* verse) and in this case only God has unique knowledge of these things although scholars might know some of it as indicated above<sup>29</sup>. His interpretation of Q (3:7) represents a significant development in the history of interpretation, especially his views on *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt* which will be adopted by later writers.

### Al-Jubbā'ī's views on Majāz

As we have seen, by the time of al-Jubbā'ī *majāz-ḥaqīqa* dichotomy was established and used by various writers such as al-Jāhiz. It seems that certain issues related to *majāz* were debated by the time of al-Jubbā'ī and he contributed to this debate as the following quotation from *al-Mughnī* of 'Abd al-Jabbār indicates his view on whether *qiyās* (analogy) can be based on *majāz* "Our master 'Abū 'Alī-may God have mercy on him-said that analogy cannot be based on *majāz* like it is based on *ḥaqīqa*<sup>30</sup>", Al-Jubbā'ī adds that one cannot say "ask the book" and mean by it the owner or the

<sup>25</sup> The *Tafsīr* of Abū 'Alī al-Jubbā'ī: First Steps toward a Reconstruction, with Texts, Translations, Biographical Introduction and Analytical Essay, University of Washington, 1982, University Microfilm International.

<sup>26</sup> Gimaret, *Une Lecture Mu'tazilite Du Coran*.

<sup>27</sup> Nabhā, Khaḍr Muḥammad. *Mawsū'at Tafasīr al-Mu'tazila 3: Tafīr Abū 'Alī al-Jubbā'ī, Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya*, Beirut, 2007

<sup>28</sup> Nabhā, *Tafsīr al-Jubbā'ī*, ibid., p. 122 and Gimaret, *Une Lecture Mutazilite Du Coran*, ibid., p. 167.

<sup>29</sup> Nabhā, *Tafsīr al-Jubbā'ī*, pp. 122-123.

<sup>30</sup> 'Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī fī Abwāb al-'Adl wa al-Tawḥīd : al-Firaq ghayr al-Islāmiyya*, vol. 5, edited by Maḥmūd Muḥammad Qāsim, P.188.

writer as one can say “ask the town” and mean by it the people of the town<sup>31</sup>. This view will be adopted later by other writers on *majāz* including al-Jaṣṣaṣ and ‘Abd al-Jabbār among others. Al-Jubbā’ī also believes that languages are not based on human convention; rather it was God who taught all languages to humans. He based his view<sup>32</sup> on Q (2:31). This view will be challenged by later Mu‘tazilites who believed that language is based on human convention.

#### Al-Jubbā’ī’s interpretation of anthropomorphic verses

Q (2:19)

وَاللَّهُ مُحِيطٌ بِالْكَافِرِينَ “and God encompasses the unbelievers”

[it] means He has a power over them<sup>33</sup>.

Q(2:115) فَأَيْنَمَا تُوَلُّوا فَثَمَّ وَجْهُ اللَّهِ “whithersoever you turn, there is the Face of God”

Al-Jubbā’ī interpreted *wajh Allāh* to mean the contentment of God (*riḍwān Allāh*)<sup>34</sup>.

Q (4:171) إِنَّمَا الْمَسِيحُ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ وَكَلِمَتُهُ “The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only the Messenger of God, and His Word”

Al-Jubbā’ī said ”this is *majāz*, He meant by ‘the word’ that they are guided by Jesus as they are guided by his speech. They also become alive through him in their religion like the living person being alive by the *rūḥ* (sprit), therefore He called him *rūḥan*<sup>35</sup>’.

Q (6:18) وَهُوَ الْقَاهِرُ فَوْقَ عِبَادِهِ “He is Omnipotent over His servants”

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<sup>31</sup> ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī*, vol. 5, ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Nabhā, *Tafsīr al-Jubbā’ī*, ibid., pp. 70-71 and Gimaret, *Une Lecture Mutazilite Du Coran*, ibid., p. 82.

<sup>33</sup> Gimaret, *Une Lecture Mutazilite Du Coran*,., p.78.

<sup>34</sup> Nabhā, *Tafsīr al-Jubbā’ī*, p. 80 and Gimaret, *Une Lecture Mutazilite Du Coran*, ibid., p. 106.

<sup>35</sup> Nabhā, *Tafsīr al-Jubbā’ī*, p. 178.

Al-Jubbā'ī states that God cannot be predicated to be above His servants by way of *ḥaqīqa*. Therefore, when we come across such an attribute, this has to be understood as *majāz*<sup>36</sup>.

Q(7:51) فَالْيَوْمَ نَنْسَاهُمْ “Therefore today We forget them”

Al-Jubbā'ī states that *nansāhum* means we will deal with them in the same way we deal with those who are forgotten<sup>37</sup>.

Q (9:104) أَلَمْ يَعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ يَقْبَلُ التَّوْبَةَ عَنْ عِبَادِهِ وَيَأْخُذُ الصَّدَقَاتِ “Do they not know that God is He who accepts repentance from His servants, and takes the freewill offerings”

Al-Jubbā'ī said “God made the taking of free will offering by the Prophet and the believers as taking from Him by way of *tashbīh* and *majāz* (comparison and trope) since [the taking] was by His command<sup>38</sup>.

Q (20:39) وَلَتُصْنَعَ عَلَيَّ عَيْنِي “and to be formed under my eye”

Al-Jubbā'ī interpreted *‘alā ‘aynī* to mean by my knowledge and awareness ( *‘alā ‘ilmin minī wa ma‘rifatin*)<sup>39</sup>.

Q (35:30) إِنَّهُ غَفُورٌ شَكُورٌ ” Lord is All-forgiving, All-thankful”

According to al-Jubbā'ī *shakūr* is a *majāz* because it means He rewards [people] for their obedience<sup>40</sup>.

Q(38:75) لِمَا خَلَقْتُ بِيَدَيَّ “that I created with My own hands”

Al-Jubbā'ī interpreted *bi- yadī* to mean by Myself without intermediary<sup>41</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> Nabhā, *Tafsīr al-Jubbā'ī*, p. 204.

<sup>37</sup> Nabhā, *Tafsīr al-Jubbā'ī*, p. 244 and Gimaret, *Une Lecture Mutazilite Du Coran*, p. 348.

<sup>38</sup> Nabhā, *Tafsīr al-Jubbā'ī*, p. 290 and Gimaret, *Une Lecture Mutazilite Du Coran*, p. 426.

<sup>39</sup> Gimaret, *Une Lecture Mutazilite Du Coran*, p. 599.

<sup>40</sup> Nabhā, *Tafsīr al-Jubbā'ī*, p. 425 and Gimaret, *Une Lecture Mutazilite Du Coran*, p. 688.

<sup>41</sup> Nabhā, *Tafsīr al-Jubbā'ī*, p. 435 and Gimaret, *Une Lecture Mutazilite Du Coran*, p. 710.

Al-Jubbā'ī's interpretations reflect as expected a Mu'tazlite theology and hermeneutics. Indeed al-Jubbā'ī was a major figure in Mu'tazilite theology within the Baṣran school and his influence can be discerned in the writings of later Mu'tazilites especially 'Abd al-Jabbār as we will see later as well as in the writings of his onetime disciple al-Ash'arī. Al-Jubbā'ī, as is clear from above, used the word *majāz* in a technical sense in some of his interpretations. This demonstrates that the concept of *majāz* was fully diffused within the Mu'tazilite school in his time. In his interpretation of Q (9:104), he used the phrase *majāz wa tashbīh* which indicates that the terminology was not stable and there was a confusion about the boundaries of these terms. Although he did not use the term *majāz* in all of his interpretations, nevertheless his interpretations can be classified as tropical ones.

The attempt to harmonise reason and revelation started with the Early Mu'tazilites. Although very few of their writings survived, the available literature can shed some light on their views. They all agree implicitly or explicitly that anthropomorphic verses have to be interpreted tropically to be in harmony with the dictates of reason regarding the attributes of God. The earliest attestation of the doctrine of priority of reason over revelation is found in the writing of al-Jāḥiẓ but this does not mean that he was the first to formulate this doctrine.

The linking between this doctrine and Qur'ānic hermeneutics through Q(3:7) is not attested in the writing of the three authors examined. For al-Aṣamm, *Muḥkamāt* verses are those which do not need reflection while *mutashābihāt* are those verses which require reflection to be understood. On the other hand, al-Jāḥiẓ did not comment on this verse at least in what has survived in his writing although he made use of certain verses to interpret others. As for al-Jubbā'ī, it is his interpretation of *Muḥkamāt* as those verses which can yield only one meaning and *mutashābihāt* verses as those which can yield two meanings or more that represents a significant development in the history of interpretation of this verse.

The theory of *majāz* started with al-Jāḥiẓ who was the first to speak about the dichotomy of *ḥaqīqa-majāz* as indicated in chapter one. My research in the writing of early Mu'tazilites confirms this and shows that the term *majāz* was used in its technical sense after al-Jāḥiẓ in the writing of al-Jubbā'ī and late writers. Before al-Jāḥiẓ

various commentators offer tropical interpretations of anthropomorphic verses but without using the term *majāz* and with little explanation of their interpretation as with the interpretation of al-Aṣamm. In the writing of al-Jāḥiẓ we find the use of technical language and linguistic and theological explanation in his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses in order to establish his interpretations on solid rational grounds. After al-Jāḥiẓ the use of *majāz* in a technical sense to interpret anthropomorphic verses became established as we have seen in the interpretation of al-Jubbā'ī of anthropomorphic verses. It will be in the writing of 'Abd-al-Jabbār that we find a mature development of Mu'tazilite theology and hermeneutics, and this will be the topic of my next section.

## 3.2 ‘Abd al-Jabbār (c. 325–415/937–1024)<sup>42</sup>

‘Abd al-Jabbār was one of the most important Mu‘tazilīs in 4 AH/11 CE and his views affected the development Mu‘tazilī *kalām*, *uṣūl al-fiqh* and *Balāgha*. His views also had an impact on Jewish *kalām* within Rabbinic and Karaite traditions<sup>43</sup>. Many of his books survived unlike other early Mu‘tazila thanks to the Zaydīs of Yemen who adopted the Mu‘tazilī theology and preserved his books. This section deals first with ‘Abd-Jabbār’s views on the relation between reason and revelation,

### 3.2.1 Reason and revelation

‘Abd al-Jabbār builds his Qur’ānic hermeneutics on Mu‘tazilī theology and its main principles of *al-‘Adl wa al-Tawḥīd* (justice and unity of God). He argues that before one tries to interpret the Qur’ān or as he puts it in a question format ‘how to derive from the Qur’ān that which it signifies,’<sup>44</sup> one has to establish the truthfulness of the Qur’ān. This can be achieved by knowing the state of the actor who produced it by relying on reason alone. Only then the Qur’ān can be interpreted and used as a proof.

‘Abd al-Jabbār’s main argument for knowing the state of the actor, by relying on reason alone, is based on the following two premises:

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<sup>42</sup> *Qāḍī l-quḍāt* ‘Imād al-Dīn Abū l-Ḥasan ‘Abd al-Jabbār b. Aḥmad b. ‘Abd al-Jabbār b. Aḥmad b. al-Khalīl al-Hamadhānī al-Asadābādhī was a prominent theologian of the Bahshamī branch of the Basran Mu‘tazilites. His main writings are 1. *al-Mughnī fī abwāb al-tawḥīd wa-l-‘adl*, a 20-volume work of which 14 volumes have survived 2. *Mukhtaṣar sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsa*, 3. *Kitāb al-Uṣūl al-Khamsa*, 4. *Bayān mutashābih al-Qur’ān*, 5. *Tanzīh al-Qur’ān ‘an al-Maṭā’in*, 6. *Tathbīt dalā’il al-nubuwwa*, 7. *Kitāb faḍl al-‘itizāl*, 8. *al-Amālī fī al-ḥadīth* (manuscript). Two of his book survived as annotated quotations and paraphrases made by his disciples: 1. *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsa* by Mankdim (425/1034), 2. *al-Muḥīṭ bi al-taklīf* by Ibn Mattawayh (468/1075). See Heemskerk, Margaretha. " ‘Abd al-Jabbār b. Aḥmad al-Hamadhānī." *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*. Edited by: Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas and Everett Rowson. Brill, 2008. Brill Online. S.O.A.S (soas). 05 August 2008 [http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=ci3\\_COM-0102](http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=ci3_COM-0102)

<sup>43</sup> Sabine Schmidtke, Jobba’i, in Encyclopedia Iranica, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/jobbai-name-of-two-mutazilite-theologians> (accessed 29/3/2012)

<sup>44</sup> ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Bayān Mutashābih al-Qur’ān*, edited by ‘Anān Muḥammad Zarzū, *Dār al-Turāth*, Cairo, 1969, vol.1, p. 1



First premise: ‘Abd al-Jabbār argues **that to know the truthfulness of an action and what it signifies one should know the state of the actor and this action cannot be utilized to demonstrate the existence and the attributes of the actor**<sup>45</sup>. Because if an action indicates the state of the actor and the truthfulness of this action cannot be established unless [the state of] its actor is known<sup>46</sup>” we will end up with a circular argument.

**Second premise:**”It has been established that **the speech [of God] is an action**<sup>47</sup> because it originated in time in a specific way similar to *Ihsān* (grace) and *In‘ām* (endowment)”.

**Therefore, to know the truthfulness of the Qur’ān and what it signifies one should know the state of its actor and the Qur’ān cannot be utilized to demonstrate the existence and the attributes of the actor.**

Consequently, in order to be able to use the Qur’ān as proof, one should rely first on reason alone (*al-‘aql*) to establish the existence of God, His attributes including His wisdom and that He does not chose to do what is considered to be hideous<sup>48</sup>. Once this is achieved then the truthfulness of the Qur’ān can be established<sup>49</sup> and consequently

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<sup>45</sup> ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Mutashābih al-Qur’ān*, vol. 1, p. 1. He adds that “rather only the (*al-aḥkām*) rules can be deduced from such an action”.

<sup>46</sup> *Mutashābih* p. 1

<sup>47</sup> *Mutashābih*, p. 10. In Mu‘tazilī theology there is a distinction between the attributes of the essence (*ṣifāt al-dhāt*) and the attributes of the act (*ṣifāt al-fi‘l*). The attributes of the essence are those attributes that God merits from eternity such as Knowledge, power. While the attributes of the act are those attributes which God merits when he acts such as creator and provider. Within this framework, the Mu‘tazilites consider al-Qur’ān (*kalāmu Allāh*) -the speech of God to be created or in other words an action. See ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī fī Abwāb al-‘Adl wa al-Tawḥīd*, General editor Ṭāha Ḥusayn, *al-Dār al-Miṣriyya li- al-Ta’līf wa al-Nashr*, Cairo, 1961-1974, vol. 7, p. 208 and also see Peters, J.R.T.M., *God's created speech : a study in the speculative theology of the Mu‘tazilī Qāḍī al-Qudāt Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Abd al-Jabbār b. Aḥmad al-Hamadhānī*, Leiden : Brill, 1976

<sup>48</sup> *Mutashābih al-Qur’ān*, p. 5

<sup>49</sup> ‘Abd al-Jabbār established this on the basis of the eloquence of the Qur’ān which indicates its miraculous features, see ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Al-Mughnī fī Abwāb al-‘adl wa al-Tawḥīd*, vol. 7, p. 180.

the Qur'ān can be interpreted and used as a proof<sup>50</sup>. The use of reason will not stop in the first two steps mentioned above (establishing the truthfulness of the Qur'ān and the state of the actor) on the contrary reason will play a vital role in the process of interpretation itself, as will be shown later when I will examine 'Abd al-Jabbār's views regarding the pair *muḥkam* and *mutashābih*.

*Muḥkam* and *mutashābih* can be defined as follows: the word *muḥkam* is from the verb *aḥkama* (he made precise) meaning that God made what he intended precisely expressed by the *muḥkam*. 'This is done by making the *muḥkam* have a distinctive quality as this quality affects what is intended. This quality affects what is intended by expressing it in a way that it is only capable of yielding what is intended in one of these three means: 1. Original primary meaning 2. Convention 3. proofs of reason<sup>51</sup>'. Whatever has this quality must be *muḥkam* such as Q (112:1-2) and Q (10:44). On the other hand, *mutashābih* is what God has made, having a quality that confused the hearer. 'The confusion is attributed to the fact that prima facie meaning (*ẓāhir*) does not indicate what is intended by the utterance because of either the lexical meaning or the convention<sup>52</sup>', such as Q (33:57) where the prima facie meaning of this verse indicates what we consider as impossible therefore what is intended is not clear and one needs to refer to the *muḥkam* in order to know what is really intended by it<sup>53</sup>. 'Abd al-Jabbār does not mention here the proof of reason although the example he quotes to explain what *mutashābih* reflects rational grounds for rejecting the prima facie meaning of the verse. Regarding the proof of reason 'Abd al-Jabbār contends 'that if it prevents something and the prima facie meaning of a the discourse permits it then we have to use *ta'wīl* in this case because the one who erected the proofs of revelation is

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<sup>50</sup> Similar views are expressed by the student of 'Abd al-Jabbār, Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī, see his book *al-mu'tamad fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, edited by Muhammad Hamidullah, Institut Francais De Damas, Damascus, 1965, vol. 2, p. 908.

<sup>51</sup> *Mutashābih al-Qur'ān*, p. 19

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

the one who erected the proofs of reason and therefore there is no contradiction between the two<sup>54</sup>.

Furthermore, *Muḥkam* and *mutashābih* verses agree with each other in one respect and differ from each other in another. They agree with each other in a sense that both cannot be used as proof unless one knows the wisdom of the actor and that he does not chose to do what is considered to be hideous. They differ from each other in a sense that the *muḥkam*, if it is considered to be so because either lexically it has only one meaning or there is an accompanying clue (*qarīna*), can yield only one meaning, and consequently the recipient can determine its signification provided he is familiar with the manner of the discourse and the associated clues<sup>55</sup>. The *mutashābih*, even if the recipient is linguistically competent and aware of the accompanying clues, requires contemplation and reflection in order to determine its signification in a manner that conforms either with the *muḥkam* or with reason. This is because the *muḥkam* is the origin of *mutashābih*, thus the knowledge of the *muḥkam* should precede the *mutashābih*<sup>56</sup>.

When both *muḥkam* and *mutashābih* are related to matters of ‘*adl wa tawḥīd* (justice and unity) then one must base them on the proof of reason because it is not valid for the one who does not know that God is Wise and that He does not chose to do the hideous, to infer from His speech that He merits these attributes<sup>57</sup>. Moreover, the knowledge that God does not chose to do the hideous is related to the knowledge about His essential attributes and how they differ from the attributes of the action. The knowledge of all the above should be prior to any attempt to know the validity of knowing that His speech is true and can be used as evidence<sup>58</sup>. The question now is how can we distinguish between *muḥkam* and *mutashābih*? ‘Abd al-Jabbār argues that the proof of reason is the only criterion for distinguishing between *muḥkam* and

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<sup>54</sup> ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Al-Mughnī*, vol. 13, p. 280

<sup>55</sup> *Mutashābih al-Qur’ān* p. 6

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9

*mutashābih*, so whatever is capable of yielding only what is required by the proof of reason must be identified as *muḥkam*. On the other hand, whatever is capable of yielding both what is required by the proof of reason and its contrary should be identified as *mutashābih*. The proof of reason is the most powerful criterion to distinguish between *muḥkam* and *mutashābih*, although this criterion can be strengthened with what comes before or after the *mutashābih* as this indicates that what is meant by the *mutashābih* is determined by the *muḥkam*<sup>59</sup>. For example Q (42:11) cannot be interpreted without prior certain knowledge that God is incorporeal and does not resemble things<sup>60</sup> and only then can it be considered as *muḥkam*.

### **3.2.2 the foundation of Quranic hermeneutics**

According to ‘Abd al-Jabbār God willed everything in the Qur’ān to be known to Mankind. God only addresses mankind for a reason related to them because He is beyond good and evil. His address is for the benefit of the addressees, like his acts, which are for the interests of the servants. Benefits cannot be achieved by genus of the discourse nor by all its other characteristics, but benefits can be attained through the meaning of the discourse. It is considered abhorrent for one human being to speak to another person in a language not known to the addressee. If it can be established that God addresses humans by using specific language with the aim of benefiting them, then all His speech must be an indication which can serve to find out what is meant by this speech. If we allow that part of His discourse is not meant by Him to be known to humans, then we have to allow this for the whole of the discourse. Thus His discourse cannot be trusted and He will be considered as *‘ābith*. Therefore, God meant everything in the Qur’ān to be understood and this is clear from the Book itself as it is described as cure (*shifā’*), guidance (*hudā*) and mercy (*raḥma*). God also indicates that

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5

the Book is *bayān* (clarification) and if it cannot be understood then the Qur'ān cannot be described as such<sup>61</sup>.

As for His saying (*wa mā Ya'lamu ta'wīlahu*) this can be interpreted to mean that the *wāw* here is *wāw al-'aṭf* so the scholars know the *ta'wīl* of the *mutashābih*. 'Abd al-Jabbār argues that it cannot be assumed that God confined the knowledge of the *mutashābih* to Himself because it is not possible for God to send down a speech and a discourse and not to provide a way for the addressee to know what is intended by it<sup>62</sup>. In addition to the knowledge they possess about the *mutashābih*, the scholars say we believe in it so their praise is perfected<sup>63</sup>. As for the disjoined letters at the beginning of some *sūra*, 'Abd al-Jabbār contends that various scholars interpreted these letters and the best interpretation is that of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī who said that these letters are the names of the *sūras*. The point here is to show that there is nothing in the Qur'ān which can be considered without any benefit<sup>64</sup>.

Interpreting *muḥkam* and *mutashābih* verses requires adhering to a set of methods that can accommodate the differences between them as mentioned above. The same also applies to other types of discourse (*al-khiṭāb*) such as *mujmal*, *mufassar*, *ḥaqīqa* and *majāz*<sup>65</sup>. 'Abd al-Jabbār's hermeneutics has two main components one related to the nature and the other to the significance of the discourse.

#### I. Nature and the subject matter of the discourse<sup>66</sup>

'Abd al-Jabbār divides the discourse in this regard into two types:

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13-141

<sup>62</sup> 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Al-Mughnī*, vol. 12, p. 174

<sup>63</sup> *Mutashābih al-Qur'ān*, p. 15

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34

1. The first type is self-sufficient which can convey what is intended by itself alone. This type is a proof and evidence and does not need anything else.
2. The second type is not self-sufficient and cannot convey by itself the intended meaning. It is further divided into two categories:
  - A. The first category: what is intended can be known with the combination of this discourse and something else
  - B. The second category: what is intended can be only known through something else. This type of discourse is considered as (*luṭf*) favour and (*ta'kid*) emphasis.

The entirety of the Qur'ānic discourse comes under these three classifications. Clues (*al-qarā'in*) could be either attached (*muttaṣila sam'an*) and based on revelation or could be unattached, whether based on revelation or on reason. Evidence that is based on reason<sup>67</sup> (*dalīl al-'aql*) even when it is unattached is considered like an attached one in a sense that the discourse should be interpreted in its light. This can be shown in the interpretation of Q (2:21), 'interpreting this verse with such an evidence which states that God does not command anyone who is insane; is more emphatic than saying O sane people fear your Lord'<sup>68</sup>.

People referred to the discourse which is not self-sufficient in different ways. Various expressions are used to refer to this discourse such as *muḥkam*, *mutashābih*, and *majāz*, what is important is not the expression one uses because they agree with the exposition above. The exposition shows that a clue is required in order to know what is intended by the discourse. Some discourses require many clues, others require only one. In the last case, the meaning might be either clear or ambiguous and this is the reason behind conflict of interpretations among scholars<sup>69</sup>.

Practical implications:

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<sup>67</sup> 'Abd al-Jabbār states that *Dalīlu al-'aqli k-al-qarīna* (evidence based on reason is like a clue), 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Al-Mughnī*, vol. 16, p. 353.

<sup>68</sup> *Mutashābih al-Qur'ān* p. 34

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

If it is possible to interpret the discourse according to its *prima facie* meaning (‘*alā zāhirihi*’) and the discourse is evident on the account of the primary lexical meaning regardless of it being general (‘*āmm*’) or specific (*khāṣṣ*), then the discourse must be accepted (or interpreted) according to its *prima facie* meaning. In this case the discourse belongs to (or is classified as self-sufficient-) the first type (self-sufficient) mentioned above.

If it is not possible to interpret the discourse according to its *prima facie* meaning, then serious reflection is required on the part of the interpreter to find out how this discourse should be best interpreted. This reflection consists of searching for the clues as mentioned earlier. If the hearer is well versed in the fundamentals – having grasped what is possible and what is not with regard to rational matters, knowing whether the commandment of obligations (*taklīf*) is morally good or bad, and being linguistically competent to be able to discern between various types of *majāz* and *ḥaqīqa*- then the hearer can understand what is meant by the discourse<sup>70</sup>.

## II. The significance of the discourse: reason or revelation

‘Abd al-Jabbār also divides the discourse in this regard into two types:

1. The first type is defined by ‘Abd al-Jabbār as follows “had it not been for the discourse it would be invalid to know the signification by of reason<sup>71</sup>”. In other words, this type signifies what can be only known by the discourse and relying on the proof of reason to know the signification is not valid.
2. The second type signifies what could be known by the proof of reason in the absence of the discourse. It is further divided into two categories<sup>72</sup>:

- A. The first category signifies what could be known by the proof of reason in the absence of the discourse and it would be valid to know the signification by relying on the discourse. So both the reason and the discourse are on a

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<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

par with each other in a sense that both are valid ways to know the matter of the signification.

- B. The second category signifies what could be known by reason in the absence of the discourse, and this knowledge can only be attained by reason.

Practical implications:

1. The first type: religious legal rules are instances of the first type because they can be only known by the discourse and what is associated with it. In the absence of the discourse, reason would not be a valid tool to know obligatory prayers or their conditions, or their times. The same applies to all other rituals<sup>73</sup>.
2. The second type:
  - A. An example of this category is the belief that God cannot be seen, because it is valid to arrive at this belief by relying on revelation and on reason. Many issues of (*al-waḥd*) threat come under this category<sup>74</sup>.
  - B. The issues of unity of God and justice (*al-Tawḥīd wa al-ʿadl*) come under this category, because the issue of unity of God, denying anthropomorphism and justice cannot be known from the following verses Q (42:11), Q(18:49), Q (112:3).

This is because if one does not have previous knowledge about these matters, one would not know that the discourse of God is true, then how it is possible to use as evidence something without establishing its truthfulness first<sup>75</sup>.

This is in brief ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s Qur’ānic hermeneutics, which reflects a great advancement in the theory of Qur’ānic interpretation in comparison with earlier authors. His hermeneutics is fully based on his Mu’tazilite theology and its emphasis on rationality. It is through reason that one can know about the unity and justice of

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<sup>73</sup> *Mutashābih al-Qur’ān* P. 35

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*



God. Furthermore, reason also tells us about essential attributes of God and that He is incorporeal. According to ‘Abd al-Jabbār, once we acknowledge these doctrines with their proofs then we can start interpreting the Qur’ān. Reason will tell us which verses are *muḥkamāt* and which verses are *mutashābihāt*. In this case, the latter should be understood in the light of the former. The major tool that can be used to interpret the *mutashābihāt* is *majāz* and this will be the topic of the next section.

The writings of ‘Abd al-Jabbār preserved for us a complete Mu‘tazilite theological system. He consolidated Mu‘tazilite thinking at his time and presented a fully developed Qur’ānic hermeneutics that was built on Mu‘tazilite theology. In addition to his hermeneutics, his theory of *majāz* enabled him to interpret anthropomorphic verses to harmonize them and the proof of reason. In his theology, he emphasised that it is only through the use of reason and not by depending on the Qur’ān that one can know about God’s existence, transcendence and justice. It is only then one can proceed and read the Qur’ān because in order to know the truthfulness of the Qur’ān and what it signifies one should know the state of its actor and the Qur’ān cannot be utilized to demonstrate the existence and the attributes of the actor. ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s doctrine of priority of reason over revelation has an impact on his Qur’ānic hermeneutics and it is through his interpretation of Q (3:7) one can see the contact between theology and hermeneutics. For ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *muḥkamāt* are verses that precisely express what is intended by them and *mutashābihāt* are those in which their prima facie meaning (*ẓāhir*) does not indicate what is intended by them. If the prima facie meaning of a verse is not in accord with proof of reason then one has to resort to *ta’wīl* to harmonise between the two because both reason and revelation have the same origin and therefore there should be no contradiction between the two. In this case the *mutashābihāt* have to be interpreted in the light of *muḥkamāt* verses which they should be in accord with reason. The main tool in the process of *ta’wīl* is *majāz* and ‘Abd al-Jabbār enacted his own theory of *majāz* within the context of *uṣūl al-fiqh* and *Kalām* to use it in his interpretation. His interest in *majāz* reflects its utmost importance in his hermeneutics because *majāz* is the primary tool to harmonise between reason and revelation. ‘Abd al-Jabbār applied systematically his theory of *majāz* to all anthropomorphic verses and

interpreted them to be in accord with proof of reason. His interpretation of these verses clearly reflects the advanced stage of the theory of *majāz* at his time. Next we will examine the approach of al-Zamakhsharī to anthropomorphic verses which revolutionised Qur’ānic hermeneutics.

### 3.2.3 ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s views on *majāz*:

By the time of ‘Abd al-Jabbār, the theory of *majāz* was not fully developed as we have seen in chapter one of this work. It seems that the views of Ibn Jinnī influenced the writers on *majāz* in the discipline of *uṣūl al-fiqh* and theology. This can be observed in Ibn Jinnī’s definition of *ḥaqīqa* and its relation to *majāz* (as we have seen in chapter 1). ‘Abd al-Jabbār elaborated his theory of *majāz* by building on the works of predecessors in the 4<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> century. His views on *majāz* are scattered in many books including books authored by him and others. The obvious starting point is to look at his writing on *uṣūl al-fiqh*. Indeed ‘Abd al-Jabbār wrote a number of books on *uṣūl al-fiqh* which could also be used to find his views on *majāz*, because it is one of the topics discussed in the books of *uṣūl al-fiqh*. In what follows I will reconstruct<sup>76</sup> the views of ‘Abd al-Jabbār on *majāz* from the available sources, concentrating only on those views relevant to his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses.

#### **Definition of Majāz:**

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<sup>76</sup> ‘Abd al-Jabbār wrote the following books on *‘uṣūl al-fiqh*: *Kitāb al-‘Umad*, *Kitāb al-Sharḥ* (over 30 times mentioned in *al-Mu‘tamad*), *Kitāb al-nihāya* (2 times mentioned in *al-Mu‘tamad*), *Al-Mughnī* vol. 17 *Kitāb al-Shar‘iyyāt*. Unfortunately only portions of vol 17 of *al-Mughnī* survived from his writings on *uṣūl*, and these portions do not contain his treatment of *Majāz*, see ‘Abd al-Karīm ‘Uthmān, *Qāḍī al-Quḍāt ‘Abd al-Jabbār b. Aḥmad al-Hamadhānī, Dār al-‘Arabiyya*, Beirut 1967. Among the later books on *Uṣūl al-fiqh* which I surveyed, references to ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s views on *majāz* are found in these books: *Kitāb al-Mu‘tamad* by his student *Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī* (436/1044), Al-Ḥākim al-Jushamī (494/ 1100): *Sharḥ ‘Uyūn al-Masā’il* (manuscript), *Al-Maḥṣūl* of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (606/1209), *Sharḥ al-Maḥṣūl* of al-Isfahānī (688/1289), *Al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ* of al-Zarkashī (794/1392).

‘Abd al-Jabbār’s theory of *majāz* is based on his views about the origin of language as an arbitrary and a man made phenomenon based on *muwāḍa‘a*<sup>77</sup> (agreed upon assignment of words to objects and ideas). He states that there should first be a language based on *muwāḍa‘a* in order for the discourse of God to be understood and perhaps later other language could be taught through the means of revelation (*tawqīfan*)<sup>78</sup>. This is because God is Wise and he would not address us with a discourse without a prior *muwāḍa‘a* otherwise the case would be like addressing the Arabs by using an African language unknown to them<sup>79</sup>. He also states that what is signified by names (*ma‘anī al-asmā’*) is not affected by the naming process, in other words the naming process is arbitrary and does not affect the state of what is named. So if the lexicographers decided to change the meaning of the word *muḥdath* (created) to mean *qadīm* (eternal), it would not be improper. Therefore, it is allowed to transfer the signification of lexical vocables to a new legal signification based on revelation and to transfer the signification of a lexical vocable from haqiqa to *majāz*<sup>80</sup>. ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s view of the origin of *majāz* is found in the following statement

*‘li anna al-lafẓata la yajūzu an takūna majāzan wa la haqīqata la-ha, li’anna al-tajwīza bi- isti‘māli al-lafẓati fī al-majāzi yaqtaḍī anna la-ha haqīqatan fa –wuḍi‘at fī ghayri mawḍi‘ihā, wa ‘ufīda bi-ha ghayru mā wuḍi‘at la-hu’<sup>81</sup>*

It is not permissible for a vocable to be considered as *majāz* without having a *haqīqa* because the process of assigning a tropical meaning by using a vocable by [ way] of *majāz* requires that the vocable has a *haqīqa*; then the vocable has been assigned a signification other than its originally assigned lexical one, and this vocable is used to convey a signification other than what has been [originally] assigned.

<sup>77</sup> Weiss explains *muwāḍa‘a* as a kind of naming process in which certain vocal sound-patterns were arbitrarily chosen to be the labels for certain ideas. See Bernard Weiss. *The Search For God’s Law, Islamic Jurisprudence in the Writing of Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī*, University of Utah Press, Salt Lake City, 1992, p. 121.

<sup>78</sup> ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Al-Mughnī fī Abwāb al-‘adl wa al-Tawḥīd*, vol. 5, p. 166.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Al-Mughnī fī Abwāb al-‘adl wa al-Tawḥīd*, vol. 5, pp. 172-173.

<sup>81</sup> ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Al-Mughnī fī Abwāb al-‘adl wa al-Tawḥīd*, vol. 7, p. 209.

We find a similar definition attributed to ‘Abd al-Jabbār in his comments on the definition of Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Baṣrī, in which he states ‘the noun if it was *ḥaqīqa* or used to convey a signification other than what has been [originally] assigned, then it is considered as *majāz*<sup>82</sup>. This view about *majāz* does not fully reproduce ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s notion of *ḥaqīqa* and *majāz*, indeed al-Iṣfahānī quotes the definition verbatim from one of ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s books which did not reach us. According to al-Iṣfahānī<sup>83</sup>, ‘Abd al-Jabbār states” what he mentioned<sup>84</sup> at the beginning is the aspects of *ḥaqīqa* and *majāz* not a definition of both. He said because if the noun was once *ḥaqīqa* and once *majāz* then what makes a [vocal] *ḥaqīqa* or *majāz* is not its originally assigned lexical signification because this signification stays the same, contrary to *ḥaqīqa* and *majāz* which differ from each other. In this case what makes a vocable *ḥaqīqa* or *majāz* is related to the manner in which a vocable is used to convey the intended signification”.

From the above quotation we could say that for ‘Abd al-Jabbār what makes a vocable *majāz* is the manner in which a vocable is used and in this case if it is used to convey a signification other than its originally assigned lexical one then it will be considered as *majāz*. It should also be mentioned here that ‘Abd al-Jabbār excluded proper names from the realm of *ḥaqīqa* and *majāz*<sup>85</sup>. Regarding the concept of *Ḥaqīqa*, it is divided into three types; this division is attested in the writing of Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Baṣrī and has been accepted in the writing of ‘Abd al-Jabbār as we will see later. Indeed Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Baṣrī gives the following definition<sup>86</sup> to *ḥaqīqa* “[for a vocable to be considered as *ḥaqīqa*] it should be used to convey a signification that has been

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<sup>82</sup> Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī, *al-mu’tamad fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, ed. by Muhammad Hamidullah, Institute Français De Damas, Damascus, 1965, vol. 1, p.18.

<sup>83</sup> Al- Iṣfahānī, Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Maḥmūd b. ‘Abbād al-‘Ijlī, *al-Kāshif ‘an al-Maḥṣūl fī ‘ilm al-uṣūl*, edited by ‘Ādil Aḥmad ‘Abd al-Mawjūd and ‘Alī Muḥammad Mu‘awwaḍ, *Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmīya*, Beirut, 1998, vol. 2, p.202.

<sup>84</sup> He is referring to Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Baṣrī, his views on *majāz-ḥaqīqa* is presented below in the section about the types of *majāz*.

<sup>85</sup> al-‘Ijlī al- Iṣfahānī, *al-Kāshif ‘an al-Maḥṣūl*, vol. 2, p. 344.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 203.

originally assigned to it: either through *lugha* (original lexical signification) or *shar‘* (revelation) or *‘urf* (convention).

### Types of *majāz*

‘Abd al-Jabbār recognised various types of *majāz* in his writings. The first three are identified from his comments on Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Baṣrī’s definition<sup>87</sup> of *majāz*, whereas he accepted them but not as part of the definition of *majāz*

1. *Majāz* based on *ziyāda* (addition): (*laysa ka-mithlih shay‘*) Q (42:11) whereas *kāf* is an addition and when we omit it; the meaning will be nothing is like him<sup>88</sup>.
2. *Majāz* based on *ḥadhf* (ellipsis): It is not impossible in the usage of words to mention something and mean something else and to omit mentioning what is intended<sup>89</sup>. This is a known type of *majāz* such as *وَاسْأَلِ الْقَرْيَةَ* “ask the town” in Q (12:82)
3. *Majāz* based on *naql* (transference): such as when one says I saw the lion, meaning a brave man<sup>90</sup>.
4. *Majāz ‘aqlī*: when one says “the prince built his house” it is known by convention that he ordered it to be built. The same also applies to the Q (39:42) where God attributed the action to Himself by way of *majāz* because the angels obey Him when He orders them and we know that the

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<sup>87</sup> He defined *majāz* as “*mā lā yantaẓim lafẓuhu ma‘nāhu imām li-ziyādatin aw li-nuqṣānin aw li-naqlin ‘an mawḍi‘ihī*” (an utterance is considered as *majāz* when the utterance does not indicate its intended signification either because of an addition or an omission or transferring the utterance from its original signification to another one), Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī, *al-mu‘tamad fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, 1965, vol. 1, p.18.

<sup>88</sup> Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī, *al-mu‘tamad fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, 1965, vol. 1, p.18.

<sup>89</sup> ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Al-Mughnī fī Abwāb al-‘adl wa al-Tawḥīd*, vol. 8, p. 308.

<sup>90</sup> Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī, *al-mu‘tamad fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, 1965, vol. 1, p.18.

angels who are in charge of collecting the souls by the command of God as in Q (6:61)<sup>91</sup>.

5. *Tamthīl*: ‘Abd al-Jabbār used the word *tamthīl* in his interpretation of the verse Q (37:65) طَلْعُهَا كَأَنَّهُ رُءُوسُ الشَّيَاطِينِ “its spathes are as the heads of Satans”

He states that because the first recipients of the Qur’ān know that the *Shayṭān* is deformed and by nature they dislike this shape, the image is used to make them abstain from committing sins. This is why the shape of the tree is compared to heads of the *shayāṭīn* and perhaps *al-tamthīl* with such matters is more eloquent<sup>92</sup>.

### **Rules of *majāz*.**

1. Al-Ḥakīm al-Jushamī quotes from a lost book of ‘Abd al-Jabbār (*Kitāb al-Sharḥ*) as follows [one way to distinguish between *ḥaqīqa* and *majāz*] is when the lexicographers use a vocable provided that there is no signs of *majāz* associated with it, then we know that this vocable is a *ḥaqīqa*, this is mentioned by al-Qāḍī in *al-Sharḥ*<sup>93</sup>
2. When *majāz* is used, it should not be treated as *ḥaqīqa*, otherwise it will replace *ḥaqīqa*. Therefore, analogy cannot be based on *majāz* and Abd al-Jabbar indicates that this is the view of Abu Ali al-Jubba’ī. Abd al-Jabbar explains it as follows: “The meaning of our saying analogy cannot be based on *majāz* (*al-majāzu lā yuqāsu ‘alayhī*), is that if the usage of [an expression] among people contains an omission of something which is intended by their speech and this omission is based on convention such as His saying Q (12:82)ask the town” meaning its inhabitants, then no one can say by way of analogy ask the donkey meaning its

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<sup>91</sup> ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Al-Mughnī fī Abwāb al-‘adl wa al-Tawḥīd*, vol. 16, p. 353.

<sup>92</sup> ‘*Ibid.*, p. 406.

<sup>93</sup> Al-Ḥakīm al-Jushamī, *Sharḥ ‘Uyūn al-Masā’il, Maktabat al-Jāmi‘ al-Kabīr al-Gharbiyya*, Sana, Yemen, ‘*Ilm kalām* 99, ‘*Izzāwī*, no. 657, folio 267.

owner. This is the case if there is no convention among them that allows the omission of the owner of the donkey while they mean it<sup>94</sup>. ‘Abd al-Jabbār, speaking here as a theologian and a jurist, restricts the creativity of poets and writers in producing new tropes, leaving them with only one option which is to employ old established tropes. He also argues against the view that the discourse of God contains many types of *majāz*, which describe God and others, unknown to the first addressees of the discourse. ‘Abd al-Jabbār Q (26:195) بِلِسَانٍ عَرَبِيٍّ مُبِينٍ “in a clear, Arabic tongue” as evidence to support his argument that all forms of expression in the Qur’ān are known and used by the Arabs even though it did not reach us.’ Abd al-Jabbār allows one form of novel transference by the Divine discourse that is the transference of vocable from its primary lexical meaning to a new religious meaning, such as the word *ṣalāt*<sup>95</sup>.

3. There should be evidence to warrant interpreting something as *majāz* and ‘Abd al-Jabbār is adamant:”If an utterance indicates a ruling by way of *ḥaqīqa* we affirm that this indication is intended by the utterance if there is no evidence to the contrary. If the utterance indicates the meaning figuratively we should not affirm this meaning because when the Wise addresses someone through a discourse which points to a ruling regarding a thing or more and He did not indicate that he did not intend this, then we should affirm that this ruling is what is intended by the discourse. ...*Majāz* must not be intended [by the Wise] unless there is evidence, however if there is an evidence then the interpretation should be based on it. Otherwise the ruling as indicated by the utterance by way of *ḥaqīqa* must be accepted according to the evidence that necessitates it<sup>96</sup>”.
4. The existence of *majāz* with its clue is considered like a *ḥaqīqa* in its signification. Therefore, as the *ḥaqīqa* indicates what is intended by the discourse, thus *majāz* with its clue is more fitting in this regard<sup>97</sup>.

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<sup>94</sup> ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Al-Mughnī*, vol. 4, p. 188.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190.

<sup>96</sup> al-‘Ijlī al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Kāshif ‘an al-Maḥṣūl*, vol. 2, p. 541.

<sup>97</sup> ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Al-Mughnī*, vol. 16, p. 381.

5. It is not valid for a vocable to be used as *majāz* without having a *ḥaqīqa*<sup>98</sup>
6. If one *ḥaqīqī* meaning can be assigned to a vocable in all of its occurrences in the discourse then assigning multiple meanings or a *majāzī* one is not permissible<sup>99</sup>.

Abd al-Jabbar enacted his own theory of *majāz* within the context of *usul al-fiqh* and *Kalam*. His theory is far more advanced than al-Jubbai and other early Mutazilites. He benefited from the works of lexicographers such as Ibn Jinni and covers many issues related to the theory of *majāz* that have not been discussed by the lexicographers or literary critics. This interest in *majāz* reflects its importance in the Mu'tazilite theology as a tool to interpret what they consider as *mutashābihāt*, including anthropomorphic verses. This is will be clear in the interpretation of 'Abd al-Jabbār of anthropomorphic verses which will be examined next.

### 3.2.4 Interpreting anthropomorphic verses:

In the following I will examine how 'Abd al-Jabbār interpreted anthropomorphic verses by basing himself on the theological framework of the Mu'tazilites, and by using the tool of *majāz* in order to harmonize reason and revelation.

#### Beatific vision:

Q(75:22-23) *وَجُوهٌ يُّوْمِنُذِ نَاصِرَةٌ (22) إِلَى رَبِّهَا نَاظِرَةٌ* "Upon that day faces shall be radiant, gazing upon their Lord"

According to 'Abd al-Jabbār the issue of beatific vision (*al-ru'ya*) is related<sup>100</sup> to *tashbīh* (anthropomorphism). Therefore, to believe that God can be seen implies that He has a body. Those who believe in the Beatific vision use the verse Q (75: 22-23) as justification for their belief. In what follows I will examine how 'Abd al-Jabbār's views on *majāz* is used to interpreted this verse.

<sup>98</sup> 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Al-Mughnī*, vol. 7, p.130. See al-'Ijlī al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Kāshif 'an al-Maḥṣūl*, vol. 2, p. 357.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 213.

<sup>100</sup> 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Al-Mughnī*, vol. 4, p. 220



‘If it is established that it is impossible for God to be seen then the only way to interpret this verse is to say that God mentioned Himself and meant something else in a sense of either waiting for something else (waiting for the reward of their Lord) or looking at something else<sup>101</sup>. ‘Abd al-Jabbār accepted here two interpretations; waiting for the reward of their Lord and looking at His reward.

Both interpretations assume an insertion of the word *thawāb* before *rabbihā* (their Lord); ‘Abd al-Jabbār justifies<sup>102</sup> this by using the second type of *majāz- majāz al-ḥadhf* (*majāz* by ellipsis)- accordingly there is an ellipsis here and the elided word is *thawāb* (reward). The second interpretation then follows *ilā rabbihā nāzira* means gazing at His reward.

In order to justify the first interpretation of *ilā rabbihā nāzira* as (waiting for the reward of their Lord) assuming that the word *thawab* (reward) is inserted before *rabbihā* (their Lord) as mentioned above, ‘Abd al-Jabbār offered four possible meanings of the word *al-naẓar* such as (*al-fikr*) reflection, (*al-ta‘āṭuf wa al-raḥma*) mercy, *al-intizār* (waiting) and (*al-ru’ya*) gazing. The last meaning (gazing) is rejected because of theological considerations, reflection could not be meant here as God cannot be the object of reflection, (*al-ta‘āṭuf wa al-raḥma*) could not be meant here as God cannot be the recipient of mercy<sup>103</sup>. The only possible meaning left for the word (*nāzira*) then is waiting<sup>104</sup>. Q (75: 24) supports this interpretation because God mentioned what awaits the residents of hell of chastisement, therefore what he intends for the residents of paradise should be identical in a sense of reward waiting for them<sup>105</sup>.

If someone says that, how it is possible to have two different interpretations for the same verse and how it is possible that both meaning are intended<sup>106</sup>? ‘Abd al-Jabbār

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<sup>101</sup> ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Al-Mughnī*, vol. 4, p. 215.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 215

<sup>103</sup> ‘*Ibid.*, p. 197.

<sup>104</sup> ‘*Ibid.*, p. 211

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 211-212

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p 214

states that the meanings do not contradict each other and early exegetes like Mujāhid accepted both interpretations. Referring to his views on the matter mentioned above he contends that “according to our views it is not impossible for a statement to have two [valid] interpretations<sup>107</sup>” even if it not related to legal issues.

Having interpreted *ilā rabbihā nāzira* as a case of *majāz al-ḥadhf* (*majāz* based on ellipsis) by inserting the word *thawāb* (reward) in a sense that he mentioned Himself and meant something else, ‘Abd al-Jabbār contends that one must not interpret every place God mentioned Himself in this way, such as interpreting Q (2:21) *’u’budū rabbakum* (worship Your Lord). Based on his views of *majāz* that there must be evidence to warrant such an interpretation ‘Because what we have mentioned [regarding *ilā rabbihā nāzira*] as a *majāz* we have done so for the existence of a evidence which indicates that gazing at God cannot be taken as *ḥaqīqa*, and there is no evidence for these verses<sup>108</sup>. As there is no evidence to warrant tropical interpretation, these verses must be interpreted according to their prima facie meanings because only He deserves to be worshiped and obeyed<sup>109</sup>.

Having said that the inhabitants of paradise will be gazing towards God in a sense of gazing towards His reward, the same cannot be said about the inhabitants of Hell in a sense of gazing towards His chastisement ..because [the first case] is *majāz* and *qiyās* cannot be based on *majāz*. *Majāz* is used only in the perceived world and it is not valid for analogy to be based on it, therefore *majāz* can only be applied to God if it is based on revelation<sup>110</sup>. For example, it cannot be said *masha rabbuka* (your Lord walked) by way of analogy to Q(89:22) *وَجَاءَ رَبُّكَ* “and thy Lord comes”<sup>111</sup>. Furthermore, ‘Abd al-

<sup>107</sup> ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Al-Mughnī*, vol. 4, p 216

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 216-217

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217

<sup>110</sup> ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Al-Mughnī*, p. 182.

<sup>111</sup> ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Al-Mughnī*, vol. 4, p. 217.

Jabbār states that we should not call God by names and attributes that are based on *majāz* whether the origin of this *majāz* names the perceived world or revelation; even though we recite these names as they are in the Qur’ān. This applies to God’s names and attributes including the attributes of the essence, the attributes, of the act and names that are added to Him such as to say that God created the unbelievers for hell because we have in the Qur’ān Q (7:179 ). On the other hand, one could say that God is everywhere even though there is an ellipsis<sup>112</sup>, because this expression became like a *ḥaqīqa* by convention<sup>113</sup>.

Names of God: *al-awwal*, *al-ākhir*, *al-zāhir* and *al-Bāṭin* Q (57:3)

‘Abd al-Jabbār interpreted the names of God *al-Awwal* (the first) and *Ākhir* (the last) to indicate the existence of God before the existence of everything else and after the existence of everything else unlike the interpretation of Jahm b. Ṣafwān who believes that the reward will stop at one point and everything else will cease to exist. Then he posed an objection to this interpretation and replied to it as follows “why did not you interpret *al-awwal wa al-ākhir* by way of *majāz* as you interpreted His saying *al-Zāhir wa al-Bāṭin* by way of *majāz*. It was said to him: to interpret His speech-Glory is to Him- by way of *majāz* is only valid when it cannot be interpreted by way of *ḥaqīqa*. If it is valid for the [speech of God] to be interpreted by way of *ḥaqīqa* then interpreting

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<sup>112</sup> According to ‘Abd al-Jabbār, God is everywhere is a *majāz* which means that He is aware of all the places. ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Al-Mughnī*, vol. 4, p. 228.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 191.

it by way of *majāz* without evidence is not valid. We said His saying *Huwa al-Bāṭin* (He is the Inward) is *majāz* because its *ḥaqīqa* can only be valid with regard to bodies, therefore we said what is intended by it is God's knowledge of hidden matters. Similarly, we said that what is intended by His saying *huwa al-Zāhir* (He is the outward) is that He is *al-Qāhir al-Musta'li* (the Subduer and Superior) and this interpretation is a *ḥaqīqa* with regard to the word *al-Zāhir* which means *al-zuhūr wa al-ghalaba* (overpowering and victory). When evidence requires interpreting some vocables by way of *majāz*, other vocables must not be interpreted in the same way without a compelling necessity<sup>114</sup>.

‘Abd al-Jabbār clearly adheres to his theory of *majāz* to the letter and does not accept using *majāz* without compelling evidence.

#### *Istiwā’ and Kursī* (throne)

Q (2:255)

بِمَا شَاءَ وَسِعَ كُرْسِيُّهُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ

“His Throne comprises the heavens and earth”

‘Abd al-Jabbār argues against those who say that God has a body and that He sits on *kursī* by relying on this verse. He states that the *prima facie* meaning of this verse does not indicate that God sits on this *Kursī* or it is His place. ‘Abd al-Jabbār states that there are various types of predication such as describing the *ka‘ba* as *baytu Allāh* (the house of God), not because He resides in it but because it has an advantage for the servants with regard to worship. The same can be said about the *kursī*<sup>115</sup>.

#### *Istawā* (He sat) such as in Q (10:3) and Q (2:29)

<sup>114</sup> ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Al-Mughnī*, vol. 11, pp. 438-439 .

<sup>115</sup> *Mutashābih al-Qur’ān*, vol 1, p. 132-133

‘Abd al-Jabbār states that *Istiṭwā*’ has various significations depending on its position in the discourse, in other words how it is connected with the other parts of an utterance. These significations are<sup>116</sup>:

1. *Istiṭwā*’ signifies *istīlā*’ (mastery over) and *iqtidār* (dominance) such as this verse of poetry

*Qadi istwā Bishrun ‘alā al-‘Irāqi min ghayri sayfin wa damin mihrāqi*

(Bishr has gained the mastery over El-Iraq without sword and without shed blood<sup>117</sup>)

‘Abd al-Jabbār explains that this verse of poetry means that Bishr has taken control over Iraq because it is not possible to eulogise him that Bishr is sitting somewhere in Iraq. Had he meant this, the poet would have specified, certain locality, as all of Iraq cannot be the place of his sitting.

2. *Istiṭwā*’ signifies the equality of constituent parts of an object (*tasāwī al-ajzā*’) such as their saying *istawā al-ḥā’iṭ* the wall became even or level.
3. *Istiṭwā*’ can also be used to signify (al-qasd) directing of oneself. It is said “*istawaytu ‘ala hadha al-amri*” I directed myself towards this matter.
4. One also could say *istawā ḥālu fulānin fī nafsīhi wa mālihi* which means that his affair has been rectified with regard to his state and money.
5. *Istiṭwā*’ could signify also sitting firmly on a chair or upon back of a beast.

Interpreting Q (2:29) *ثُمَّ اسْتَوَى إِلَى السَّمَاءِ* “then He lifted Himself to heaven”

‘Abd al-Jabbār quotes Al-Jubbā’ī’s interpretation of this verse in which the third meaning of *istiṭwā*’ is meant here “what is intended by [*istiṭwā*] is that He directed Himself to create the heaven..therefore *istiṭwā*’ is transient by means of “*ilā*” and if sitting on a place is meant by *istiṭwā*’, *ilā* would not be used<sup>118</sup>”.

<sup>116</sup> *Mutashābih al-Qur’ān*, vol. 1, p. 73-74

<sup>117</sup> Edward William Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon* (London: Willams & Norgate 1863), Book I, p. 1478.

<sup>118</sup> *Mutashābih al-Qur’ān*, vol. 1, p. 74

‘Abd al-Jabbār gives another argument to support this interpretation “that if *istiwā*’ here means sitting on a place then the heaven should have been created before the sitting can take place for God to sit and moves towards it. But the verse indicates the contrary because God said “ *thuma istawā ...sab‘a samāwāt*” as a way of showing His benevolence, had He meant by it moving to sit on heavens then this act cannot be considered as a form of benevolence towards us<sup>119</sup>”. So this verse should be understood to mean that “He created for us everything on earth and He created for us heavens as well as other things”. By creating all of these, the benevolences of God will be comprehensive and uncountable<sup>120</sup>.

Interpreting Q (10:3) اسْتَوَى عَلَى الْعَرْشِ “then sat Himself upon the Throne”

‘Abd al-Jabbār interprets *istiwā*’ here as *istīlā*’ (mastery over) and *iqtidār* (dominance) which is the first meaning mentioned above of *istiwā*’. He argues that the word *istiwā*’ signifies *istīlā*’ and sitting firmly and *istiwā*’ must be interpreted to mean *istīlā*’ (mastery over) because this is the requirement of reason as it indicates the eternity of God. If we suppose that God has a body then he would be a temporal being and not eternal<sup>121</sup>.

‘Abd al-Jabbār’s approach here is consistent with his theory; if the apparent meaning contradicts his theology then the verse must go through the process of ta’wil. He will list all possible meanings of a word and will choose one tropical meaning, and argue for it as the best meaning to suit the context of the verse. In general his argument has two components, one theological and the other linguistic (theory of *majāz*).

Hand

Q(5:64) يَدُ اللَّهِ مَغْلُولَةٌ “God's hand is fettered”:

‘Abd al-Jabbār argues that what is intended here is “that his favours (*ni‘matuhu*) are wide for His servants, and He meant by it favour of religion and this worldly life as

<sup>119</sup> *Mutashābih al-Qurān*, vol. 1, p. 74-75

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 351

well as the apparent and the hidden favour. *Yad* is used to convey the meaning of *ni‘ma* so it is said “*li-fulanin ‘indī yad*” someone did me a favour<sup>122</sup>”

Q (51: 47) وَالسَّمَاءَ بَنَيْنَاهَا بِأَيْدٍ

What is meant by *yad* here is power and capability, otherwise we should attribute to God many hands, which is absurd<sup>123</sup>.

### *Ityān:*

Q(89:22) وَجَاءَ رَبُّكَ “and thy Lord comes

The verse does not indicate that God is like one of us in the sense that He can come and go, otherwise He would be temporal. What is meant is that the command of your Lord came (*jā’a amru rabbika*) or those who carry the command of God. Similarly when it is said (*idhā jā’a al-Shāfi‘ī fa-qad kafāna*) It is sufficient for us when al-Shāfi‘ī arrives, what is meant here is his book<sup>124</sup>.

Q(39:56) أَنْ تَقُولَ نَفْسٌ يَا حَسْرَتَا عَلَى مَا فَرَّطْتُ فِي جَنْبِ اللَّهِ “Lest any soul should say, 'Alas for me, in that I neglected my duty to [the side] of God”

*Janb* does not indicate that God has a side as the anthropomorphists say; because when a vocable is mentioned with an action which is carried out for the sake of the other, then it indicates the essence. For example when one says *iḥtamaltu hādhā fī janbī fulān* I beared this in the side of someone which means for the sake of him/her. What is meant here ‘*alā mā farraṭtu fī dhāti Allāh*<sup>125</sup>.

As it is clear from the above, ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s method of interpretation generally consists of listing all the possible meanings of a word, then taking tropical meaning that can be reconciled with his theology. The same method is also used by al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm al-Rassī but here ‘Abd al-Jabbār applies it systematically to all the verses

<sup>122</sup> *Mutashābih al-Qur’ān*, vol. 1, p. 231.

<sup>123</sup> *Tanzīh al-Qur’ān ‘an al-Maṭā’in*, al-Maktaba al-Azhariyya li- al-Turāth, Cairo, 2006, p. 354.

<sup>124</sup> *Mutashābih al-Qur’ān*, vol. 2, p. 689.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 597.

whose *prima facie* meanings are in conflict with his theology, using the weapon of *majāz* to justify his interpretation.

The writings of ‘Abd al-Jabbār preserved for us a complete Mu‘tazilite theological system. He consolidated Mu‘tazilite thinking at his time and presented a fully developed Qur’ānic hermeneutics built on Mu‘tazilite theology. In addition to his hermeneutics, his theory of *majāz* enabled him to interpret anthropomorphic verses to harmonize them with the proof of reason. In his theology, he emphasised that it is only through the use of reason and not by depending on the Qur’ān that one can know about God’s existence, transcendence and justice. It is only then one can proceed and read the Qur’ān because in order to know the truthfulness of the Qur’ān and what it signifies one should know the state of its actor and the Qur’ān cannot be utilized to demonstrate the existence and the attributes of the actor. ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s doctrine of priority of reason over revelation has an impact on his Qur’ānic hermeneutics, and it is through his interpretation of Q (3:7) one can see the contact between theology and hermeneutics. For ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *muḥkamāt* are verses that precisely express what is intended by them and *mutashābihāt* are those in which their *prima facie* meaning (*ẓāhir*) does not indicate what is intended by them. If the *prima facie* meaning of a verse is not in accord with proof of reason then one has to resort to *ta’wīl* to harmonise between the two, because both reason and revelation have the same origin and therefore there should be no contradiction between the two. In this case the *mutashābihāt* have to be interpreted in the light of *muḥkamāt* verses which should be in accord with reason. The main tool in the process of *ta’wīl* is *majāz* and ‘Abd al-Jabbār enacted his own theory of *majāz* within the context of *uṣūl al-fiqh* and *Kalām* to use it in his interpretation. His interest in *majāz* reflects its utmost importance in his hermeneutics, because *majāz* is the primary tool to harmonize reason and revelation. ‘Abd al-Jabbār applied systematically his theory of *majāz* to all anthropomorphic verses and interpreted them to be in accord with proof of reason. His interpretation of these verses clearly reflects the advanced stage of the theory of *majāz* at his time. Next we will examine the approach of al-Zamakhsharī to anthropomorphic verses which revolutionised Qur’ānic hermeneutics.



### 3.3 Al-Zamakhsharī<sup>126</sup> (b. 467/1075- d. 538/1144)

Al-Zamakhsharī is one of the most influential Mu‘tazilite commentators on the Qur’ān. His commentary on the Qur’ān *al-Kashshāf* attracted a larger number<sup>127</sup> of super-commentaries (*hawāshī*), abridgments, refutations than any other commentary. With *al-Kashshāf*, the Mu‘tazilite<sup>128</sup> tradition of Qur’ānic exegesis reached its peak especially with regard to interpreting anthropomorphic verses. What made *al-Kashshāf* unique among other commentaries, is al-Zamakhshari’s application<sup>129</sup> of *balāgha* theory as developed by ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī in his two books; *Asrār al-Balāgha* and *Dalā’il al-i’jāz*. Ibn Khaldūn evaluated *al-Kashshāf* and expressed the

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<sup>126</sup> Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd b. ‘Umar (He was called also “Jāru Allāh” neighbour of God, because he resided in Mekka for few years). He was born in Zamakhshar and died at Jurjāniyya both in Khawārizm. He contributed to the fields of grammar, lexicography, literature and Qur’ānic studies. His most important grammatical work is *al-Mufaṣṣal fī al-Naḥw*, what is important about this work is the its arrangement of the grammatical topics. He also composed a unique Arabic dictionary called *Asās al-Balāgha* where he gave a special attention to metaphorical meanings of words. C.H.M. Versteegh, "al-Zamakhsharī , Abū ‘l-Qāsim Maḥmūd b . ‘Umar ." *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Edited by: P. Bearman , Th. Bianquis , C.E. Bosworth , E. van Donzel and W.P. Heinrichs. Brill, Volume XI, page 431, column 2.

<sup>127</sup> See Hājī Khalīfa where he numerated over 300 books associated with al-Kashshaf.

<sup>128</sup> In the latest study on *al-Kashshāf* , Lane claims that “al-Zamakhsharī’s Mu‘tazilism simply did not have any significant influence on him as he composed his commentary”; not only is the Mu‘tazilite content small but also the Mu‘tazilite method of interpretation is “non-existent”: Andrew J. Lane, *A Traditional Mu‘tazilite Qur’ān Commentary: The Kashshāf of Jār Allāh al-Zamakhsharī*, Brill, 2006, p. 147. Regarding the issue of Mu‘tazilī’s content of *al-Kashshāf*, Lane bases his conclusion mainly on the analysis of two chapters (44 & 54) and by finding only “one possible Mu‘tazilite comment” he concluded that Mu‘tazilism did not play any significant role in al-Zamakhsharī’s commentary. It is his choice of these two chapters that led to this apparently sound conclusion. I believe that if someone wants to find whether a particular commentary is influenced by Mu‘tazilism or not, one has to look at specific verses that reflect or are made to reflect Mu‘tazilite’s doctrine (the five principles). See also the following reviews of the book, Karen Baue, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, pp. 435-37, Suleiman A. Mourad ; pp. 409-11, Bruce Fudge; *Journal of Qur’ānic Studies*, pp. 131-134. As for al-Zamakhsharī’s Mu‘tazilite method I will examine it below.

<sup>129</sup> Shawqī Dayf states that al-Zamakhsharī absorbed and understood “all of what ‘Abd al-Qāhir wrote in his two books *al-Asrār* and *al-Dalā’il*, then he skilfully applied [‘Abd al-Jabbār’s views] to the verses of the Qur’ān, *Al-Balāgha: Taṭawur wa Tārīkh*, ibid., p. 243. See also Muḥammad Muḥammad Abū Mūsa, *al-Balāgha al-Qur’āniyya fī Tafṣīr al-Zamakhsharī wa atharuhā fī al-Dirāsāt al-Balāghiyya*, *Maktabat Wahba*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Cairo, 1988, pp. 36-37, Darwīsh al-Jundī; *al-Naẓm al-Qur’ānī fī Kashshāf al-Zamakhsharī*, *Dār Nahḍat Miṣr*, 1969, p.16, Murtaḍā Āyatu Allāh Zāda al-Shīrāzī; *al-Zamakhsharī: Lughawīyyan wa Mufasssiran*, *Dār al-Thaqāfa*, Cairo, 1977, p. 220, Aḥmad Muḥammad al-Ḥūfī; *al-Zamakhsharī, Dār al-Fikr al-‘Arabī*, Cairo, 1966, pp. 201-203.

Sunnī attitude towards it by saying “The commentary in which this discipline [*balāghah*] is best represented is the *Kitāb al-Kashshāf* by az-Zamakhsharī, of Khuwārizm in Iran. However, its author is a Mu‘tazilah in his dogmatic views. Therefore, he uses the various methods of rhetoric (*balāghah*), arguing in favour of the pernicious doctrines of the Mu‘tazilah, wherever he believed they occurred in the verses of the Qur’ān. Competent orthodox scholars have, therefore, come to disregard his work and to warn everyone against its pitfalls. However, they admit that he is on firm ground in everything relating to language and style (*balāghah*). If the student of the work is acquainted with the orthodox dogmas and knows the arguments in their defence, he is no doubt safe from its fallacies. Therefore, he should seize the opportunity to study it, because it contains remarkable and varied linguistic information<sup>130</sup>”

The superior status of *al-Kashshāf* was recently challenged by ‘Adnān Zarzūr<sup>131</sup> in his study of al-Ḥākim<sup>132</sup> al-Jushamī’s commentary on the Qur’ān. Zarzūr argues that al-Zamakhsharī does not deserve his place in Muslim intellectual history<sup>133</sup> and the commentary of al-Ḥākim (*al-Tahdhīb*) indicates that al-Zamakhsharī plagiarised the work of earlier commentators. Zarzūr also states that in his opinion al-Zamakhsharī read and benefited from al-Jushamī’s commentary. One could say that al-Zamakhsharī was not the only one who did not mention all the sources of his writing, indeed this was the norm among Muslim scholars. If we look at *Mutashābih al-Qur’ān* of ‘Abd al-Jabbār (the book is edited by Zarzūr himself), one cannot fail to notice that ‘Abd al-Jabbār mentioned only a few scholars by name, and this practice did not affect his

<sup>130</sup> Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah : an introduction to history / Ibn Khaldūn* ; translated from the Arabic by Franz Rosenthal, Princeton U.P., 1967, vol 3, chapter VI, section 10 (The Qur’anic sciences of Qur’ān interpretation and Qur’ān reading)

<sup>131</sup> ‘Adnān Zarzūr, *al-Ḥākim al-Jushamī wa manhajuhu fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān, Mu’assasat al-Risāla*, Beirut, 1972.

<sup>132</sup> Al-Ḥākim al-Jushamī (484/1101) Mu‘tazilī turned Zaydī scholar. He studied Mu‘tazilism with one of the student of al-Qāḍī ‘Abd Al-Jabbār. One of his students was Abū Ishāq al-Khawārizmī who became the teacher of al-Zamakhsharī. His extant (still in manuscript) Qur’ānic commentary *al-Tahdhīb* contains many quotations from earlier Mu‘tazilī sources which did not survive. Madelung, W., Al-Ḥākim al-Djushamī in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. Edited by: P. Bearman , Th. Bianquis , C.E. Bosworth , E. van Donzel and W.P. Heinrichs, Volume XII, page 343, column 1.

<sup>133</sup> Zarzūr, *al-Ḥākim al-Jushamī*, *ibid.*, p. 458.

contribution to the subject. As for the issue of originality of al-Zamakhsharī, I will come back to it again after examining his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses.

### 3.3.1 Theology and hermeneutics of al-Zamakhsharī

Al-Zamakhsharī studied the theology of al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār and his school (the Bahshamiyya) with his teachers who followed the Baṣran school of Mu‘tazilism. Moreover, his only surviving work on theology *al-Minhāj fī Uṣūl al-dīn* reflects the influence of Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī who differed with ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s school on various points. According to Madelung, who analysed the text, al-Zamakhsharī tried to be impartial in the dispute between the two sides<sup>134</sup>.

In his book *al-Minhāj*, al-Zamakhsharī states his views on God which influenced his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses, as we will see later: ‘God is neither a body nor an accident nor similar to them in any respect. He does not occupy a position in space, does not subsist in a body, is not in a place, cannot be perceived by any of the senses, and He cannot be seen in Himself<sup>135</sup>. Al-Zamakhsharī uses rational arguments for the above views; he only used the Qur’ān as supporting evidence with regard to the issues of beatific vision and createdness of the Qur’ān, as these issues were raised because of the revelation<sup>136</sup>. To be able to interpret anthropomorphic verses in the light of the above doctrine, one needs a hermeneutical theory to support such interpretation, and al-Zamakhsharī’s interpretation of Q(3:7) will provide such a theory as we will see next.

### Interpreting Q (3:7)

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<sup>134</sup> Madelung, W. "al-Zamakhsharī, Abū ‘l- Kāsim Maḥmūd b. ‘Umar." *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (supplement) and also “The Theology of al-Zamakhsharī”, Actas del XII congreso de la U.E.A.I. (held in Malaga, 1984), Madrid, 1986, pp. 485-495.

<sup>135</sup> Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Minhāj fī ‘uṣūl al-Dīn* (A Mutazilite Creed of Az-Zamakhsharī), translated and edited by Sabine Schmidtke, Kommissionsverlag Franz Steiner Stuttgart, 1997, p. 16.

<sup>136</sup> Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Minhāj*, *ibid.*, p. 17 (for beatific vision) and p. 18 for createdness of the Qur’ān.

Q (3:7) plays an important role in al-Zamakhsharī's hermeneutics of the Qur'ān as it enables him to situate his interpretation of the Qur'ān within his theological framework. al-Zamakhsharī gives the following interpretation for the word *muḥkamāt*: “*uḥkimat ‘ibāratuhā bi- an ḥufizat minā al-iḥtimāl wa al-ishtibāh*”<sup>137</sup> (the expression [of these verses] are protected from yielding multiple interpretations and from indistinctness). al-Zamakhsharī's interpretation is similar to that of ‘Abd al-Jabbār in seeing the *muḥkamāt* as those which yield only one meaning.

*Mutashābihāt*: “*mushtabahāt muḥtamalāt*”<sup>138</sup> (indistinct and capable of yielding several interpretations<sup>139</sup>). His view of *mutashābihāt* here is also similar to that of ‘Abd al-Jabbār as we have seen earlier.

*Ummu al-Kitāb*: “*aṣlu al-kitābi tuḥmalu al-mutashābihātu ‘alayhā wa turaddu ilayhā*”<sup>140</sup> (the origin of the book; [*muḥkamāt* verses] function as basis for *mutashābihāt* through which these [*mutashābihāt*] are interpreted in the light of [the *muḥkamāt*]). This interpretation of this verse became standard interpretation within theological schools which accepted the possibility of *ta’wīl* and it is the Mu’tazilites who first advocated this interpretation. Al-Zamakhsharī gives the following example to show how a *muḥkam* verse can be used to interpret a *mutashābih* one: Q (6:103) is the *muḥkam* verse and Q (75:23) is a *mutashābih* which should be interpreted in the light of the *muḥkam*. As we have seen with ‘Abd al-Jabbār, this interpretation is in accord with the Mu’tazilite belief that God cannot be seen either in this life or in the hereafter. This is related to the Mu’tazilite principle of *tawḥīd*, al-Zamakhsharī gives also another example related to ‘*Adl*’ (the second principle of Mu’tazilite) which is not related to my concern in this study<sup>141</sup>. It is clear from above that Al-Zamakhsharī

<sup>137</sup> Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf ‘an Ḥaqā’iq al-Tanzīl wa ‘Uyūn al-Aqāwīl fī Wujūh al-Ta’wīl*, Dār al-Fikr, 1997, vol. 1, 412.

<sup>138</sup> Al-Zamakhsharī; *Al-Kashshāf*, p. 412.

<sup>139</sup> McAuliffe's translation is “endowed with dubiety (*mutashābihāt*) and with possibility (*muḥtamalāt*) in *Text and Textuality : Q. 3:7 as a Point of Intersection*, Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'an, p. 59.

<sup>140</sup> Al-Zamakhsharī; *Al-Kashshāf*, p. 412.

<sup>141</sup> Sahiron Syamsuddin argues that al-Zamakhsharī “can be said to be reductionist” with respect to his definition of *muḥkam* and *mutashābih* where he limits its scope (the Qur'ān) to theology” see *Muḥkam*

believes that both God and those who are firm in knowledge know the (*ta'wīl*) interpretation of the Qur'ān (he did not pause on the word Allāh and he considered the *wāw* (and) as a conjunctive particle<sup>142</sup>.

Al-Zamakhsharī's interpretation of Q (3:7) clearly shows that he based his Qur'ānic hermeneutics on it like other Mu'tazilites<sup>143</sup>. Theological considerations (the dictates of reason regarding God and His attributes as we have seen above) as well as the notion of *muḥkam* and *mutashābih* will be used as justification for his tropical

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and *Mutashābih*: An Analytical Study of al-Ṭabarī's and al-Zamakhsharī's Interpretation of Q.3:7 in Journal of Qur'anic Studies, vol.1, issue 1, 1999, pp. 68-69. As a matter of fact al-Zamakhsharī did not restrict his definition of *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt* to theological verses; his definition of both can be applied to any other topic. As an example for both, al-Zamakhsharī chose theological verses and he states "*wa mithālu dhālika*" (as an example for this.) such and such verses( *al-Kashshāf*, ibid., p. 412). These theological verses were used as an illustration for these types of verses (*muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt*), and in no where al-Zamakhsharī states that *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt* are restricted to theological verses.

<sup>142</sup> Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, p. 413.

<sup>143</sup> Lane argues against Goldziher's view that al-Zamakhsharī's interpretation of Q(3:7) constitutes a methodological principle, Lane states that al-Zamakhsharī's view cannot be considered to be an "exegetical principle" used systematically in the Qur'ān because in the chapters analysed by Lane (44 & 54), al-Zamakhsharī "never refers to such a principle or makes explicit use of it again" and "While he [al-Zamakhsharī] frequently makes use of one Qur'ānic verse to explain another, following the exegetical principle of *tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi-l-Qur'ān*, ..., nowhere does he state that such a verse is *muḥkam* and that the one in need of an explanation is *mutashābih*; nor does even imply it". He adds that the principle of interpreting the *mutashābih* in the light of *muḥkam* is not new and he quotes al-Ṭabarī's commentary as an example of an earlier identification and use of the principle, Lane, A Traditional Mu'tazilite Commentary, ibid., pp. 111-112. In fact Goldziher never said that this principle solely used or invented by al-Zamakhsharī (Ignác Goldziher, *al-Madhāhib al-Islāmīyah fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, translated into Arabic by 'Alī Ḥasan, al-Qāhirah : Maṭba'at al-'Ulūm, 1364 h. [1944], pp. 151-152.) . As far as I know no one says that this principle was invented by al-Zamakhsharī and as we have seen earlier the first attestation in the available sources of the use of this principle can be found with al-Jāhiz the Mu'tazilite. This does not mean that this principle is only used by the Mu'tazilite, in fact many other writers used this principle in addition to the Mu'tazilite. But the difference let us say between the Mu'tazilite and the Ash'arite in using this principle consists in determining which verse is *muḥkam* and which one is *mutashābih*. Some of what is considered *muḥkam* by the Mu'tazilite is considered *mutashābih* by the Ash'arite and vice versa (see the article about Anthropomorphism in the Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān ). By not finding al-Zamakhsharī made use of this principle in the chapters analysed by Lane, this does not mean that al-Zamakhsharī did not applied this principle elsewhere to verses which he considered as *mutashābih*. Finally, if al-Zamakhsharī did not state explicitly that this verse is *muḥkam* and this is *mutashābih* throughout his commentary, this does not mean that the principle is not operative here. One only has to look at the way he dismisses the evident meaning of a particular verse because it contradicts his Mu'tazilite principles to see how this principle has been applied.

interpretation of anthropomorphic verses. For these interpretations to be considered as legitimate, they must be based on a solid theory of language and tropes, and this is my next topic.

### 3.3. 2 Al-Zamakhsharī's theory of *majāz*.

Al-Zamakhsharī's theory of *majāz* is based mainly on the writings of 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī. This does not mean that he did not contribute to the development of the theory; on the contrary, various studies<sup>144</sup> show his contribution to the field. Our concern here is with his views that have an impact on the interpretation of anthropomorphic verses.

Al-Zamakhsharī divides the discourse into two types<sup>145</sup> and connects his division to the doctrine of *I'jāz al-Qur'ān*:

- I. The first type is *al-Zāhir* (prima facie) "in which [its meaning] is not concealed for its hearers and the utterance is only capable of yielding [one meaning which is] the evident one<sup>146</sup>".
- II. The second type contains *kināyāt*, *ishārāt*<sup>147</sup> (indications or allusions) and *al-tajawwuz* (the use of *majāz*). He adds that the Qur'ān contains both types and the challenge to produce something similar applies to both.

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<sup>144</sup> See the relevant sections in the following books: Shawqī Dayf, *Al-Balāgha: Taṭawur wa Tārīkh*, ibid., p. 243. Muḥammad Muḥammad Abū Mūsā, *al-Balāgha al-Qur'āniyya fī tafsīr al-Zamakhsharī wa atharuhā fī al-Dirāsāt al-Balāghiyya*, Maktabat Wahba, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Cairo, 1988, pp. 595-735, Darwīsh al-Jundī; *al-Naẓm al-Qur'ānī fī Kashshāf al-Zamakhsharī*, Dār Nahḍat Miṣr, 1969, pp. 16-18 Murtaḍā Āyatu Allāh Zāda al-Shīrazī; *al-Zamakhsharī: Lughawīyyan wa Mufasssiran*, Dār al-Thaqāfa, Cairo, 1977, pp. 205-220, and Aḥmad Muḥammad al-Ḥūfī; *al-Zamakhsharī*, Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, Cairo, 1966, pp. 200-205.

<sup>145</sup> Al-Zamakhsharī, al-Durr al-Dā'ir al-Muntakhab min Kināyāt wa isti'ārāt wa Tashbīhāt al-'Arab, edited by Bahīja al-Ḥasanī, *Majallat al-Majma' al-'Ilmī al-'Irāqī*, vol. 16, 1968, p. 228. This important treatise by al-Zamakhsharī is never used by those who examined his views on *balāgha* as far as I know.

<sup>146</sup> Al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Durr*, p. 228

<sup>147</sup> Al-Zamakhsharī did not indicate in his treatise what he meant by *Ishārāt* and he did not give an example to illustrate this as he did with other categories. However in his commentary *al-Kashshāf*, he did not use the word *Ishārāt* which is in the plural form but in the singular form *ishāra* he used it about 135 times but none of them related to rhetorical figures (The majority of these related to *asmā' al-ishāra* (demonstratives) and the rest he used it to signify indication).

What is important for us here is this division which has its origin in the writings of ‘Abd al-Jabbār as we have seen earlier, and also in *Dalā’il al-I’jāz* of ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī<sup>148</sup> as we have seen earlier. We can see from the above that al-Zamakhsharī indicates two types of discourses; one is capable of yielding one meaning (*ẓāhir*) and the other needs some effort to be understood and can yield more than one meaning such as *kināya* and *majāz*.

#### *Kināya*:

al-Zamakhsharī defines *kināya* as “to mention the thing not by the utterance which was originally assigned to it such as your saying [about someone] that he is “*ṭawīlu al-nijād*” (with long suspensory cords to his sword) which means a man of tall stature. For example in Q (2:235) لَا تُؤَاخِذُوهُمْ سِرًّا “but do not make troth with them secretly” (*al-sirr* is *kināya* for marriage<sup>149</sup>). Abū Mūsā<sup>150</sup> rightly observes that for al-Zamakhsharī, the original meaning of an utterance could be meant in a *kināya* type figure of speech (unlike *majāz*) and the intended meaning is inferred from the original one. This can be seen from al-Zamakhsharī’s interpretation of Q (10:18)<sup>151</sup>

#### Division of *majāz*:

##### *Tashbīh*:

I will start with *tashbīh* because both *Isti‘āra* and *Tamthīl* (*mathal* is used as well) are based on it, following al-Jurjānī. Al-Zamakhsharī distinguished between various types of *tashbīh*<sup>152</sup> and emphasised its eloquence and importance. My

<sup>148</sup> What I mean here is Al-Jurjānī’s theory of *ma‘na al-ma‘nā* which we will look at later.

<sup>149</sup> *Al-Kashshāf*, vol. 1, pp. 372-73.

<sup>150</sup> Abū Mūsā, *al-Balāgha al-Qur’āniyya*, ibid., pp. 546-47 and p. 549.

<sup>151</sup> *Al-Kashshāf*, vol. 2, pp. 178-79.

<sup>152</sup> See the relevant sections in the following books: Shawqī Dayf, *Al-Balāgha: Taṭawur wa Tarīkh*, ibid., p. 262, Muḥammad Muḥammad Abū Mūsā, *al-Balāgha al-Qur’āniyya fī tafsīr al-Zamakhsharī wa atharuhā fī al-Dirāsāt al-Balāghiyya*, Maktabat Wahba, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Cairo, 1988, pp.474-487, Darwīsh al-Jundī, *al-Naẓm al-Qur’ānī fī Kashshāf al-Zamakhsharī*, Dār Nahḍat Miṣr, 1969, pp.153-159, and Aḥmad Muḥammad al-Ḥūfī, *al-Zamakhsharī, Dār al-Fikr al-‘Araḍi*, Cairo, 1966, pp. 205-209.

concern here is with one type which he coined a term for *al-tashbīh al-Takhyīlī* (imaginary simile). In his commentary on Q (37:65) طَلْعُهَا كَأَنَّهُ رُءُوسُ الشَّيَاطِينِ “its spathes are as the heads of Satans” the *ṭal‘* is compared to the heads of the Satan as an indication for its utmost ugliness because Satan in the minds of people is detested and repulsive and this is why the simile is considered as *takhyīlī* (imaginary)<sup>153</sup>. As we have seen earlier ‘Abd al-Jabbār called the image in this verse *tamthīl*. Here al-Zamakhsharī gave an explanation to the working of this simile and basing it on the perception of people without paying attention to the issue of truthfulness of the comparison, because what is important for him is the function of the image whether the image is real or imaginary.

### *Isti‘āra and tamthīl*

Al-Zamakhsharī following ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī recognises two types of *isti‘āra*; the first type based on *tashbīh* (one word simile) and the other on *tamthīl* (the simile is based on an image extracted from multiple things, and this type of *isti‘āra* is called in the later manuals of Balāgha *Isti‘āra tamthīliyya* or metaphor based on analogy). This can be seen in his interpretation of Q (2:7) خَتَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَى قُلُوبِهِمْ “God has set a seal on their hearts”; he said that *khatam*” comes under the category of *majāz* and it can possibly be of its two types; *isti‘āra* and *tamthīl*. Al-Zamakhsharī gave two interpretation, of the word *khatam* one as *isti‘āra* and the other as *tamthīl*<sup>154</sup>. As for *Isti‘āra*, al-Zamakhsharī did not give a definition of it, he only states that *Isti‘āra* can occur in nouns and verbs and the topic of the *isti‘āra* (*al-musta‘ār la-hu*) should not be mentioned; for example when you say I saw lions. But if you say “they are lions” this should be considered as eloquent simile not as *isti‘āra*<sup>155</sup>. Al-Zamakhsharī agrees here with ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī on this fine

<sup>153</sup> Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, vol. 3, p. 342.

<sup>154</sup> In the case of *isti‘āra*: as the truth cannot penetrate their hearts because of their arrogance and their hearings do not like listening to it; the hearts and the hearings are made as if they were sealed, and as their eyes cannot see the signs of God; their eyes are made as if they were covered and prevented from seeing. The *tamthīl* case is based on representing their hearts, eyes and hearings, which they did not benefit from them with regard to religious purposes for which they were created, by things that were prevented from being useful by sealing and covering, Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, vol. 1, pp. 155 - 156.

<sup>155</sup> Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, vol.1, pp. 204-205.



distinction between *Isti‘ara* and *tashbīh balīgh*. Al-Zamakhsharī also recognises other types of *majāz*, such as *majāz ‘aqli* (conceptual trope) in the same verse<sup>156</sup>, and he also considers the *majāz* in Q (17:78) as an example of using the part to signify the whole (the dawn prayer is called Qur’ān because the Qur’ān constitutes an essential part of it). Therefore we can conclude that al-Zamakhsharī’s concept of *majāz* is much broader than these two types mentioned above *Isiti‘ara*, and *tamthīl*.

It should be noted that al-Zamakhsharī did not distinguish lexically between *mathal* (similitude), *tamthīl* (analogy) and *tashbīh* (similie) and in many instances he used these words interchangeably, but this does not mean he did not differentiate between them conceptually. Al-Zamakhsharī states that similitudes (*amthāl*) struck by the Arabs play a very important role by making the hidden meanings of the discourse manifest the truth. “The similitudes show you the imaginary (*al-mutakhayyal*) in the form of the real (*al-muḥaqqaq*), the illusion (*al-mutawahham*) as certain (*mutayaqqan*) and the absent (*al-ghā’ib*) as perceptible (*al-shāhid*)...For some reason God made ample use of similitudes in His book and in His other books...and God said ...in Q (29:20) and among the chapters of the Gospel there is a chapter called *al-Amthāl* (Proverbs). *Mathal* (similitude) in their speech [the Arabs] means *mithl* which is the similar (*al-Nazīr*); it is said *mathal*, *mithl* and *mathīl* like *shibh*, *shabah* and *shabīh*”, he adds that the proverb is also called *mathal*<sup>157</sup>. This shows that the concern of al-Zamakhsharī is to explain the origin of *mathal* and to show the function of this device; rather than giving an exact definition<sup>158</sup>. It can be argued that al-Zamakhsharī used these words interchangeably because he considered them related and similar<sup>159</sup> to each other.

<sup>156</sup> Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, ibid., vol. 1, p. 160-162. Al-Zamakhsharī as a Mu‘tazilī made ample use of this type of *majāz* to interpret all these verses that he believes are in conflict with the principle of ‘Adl such as this verse Q(2:7).

<sup>157</sup> *Al-Kashshāf*, vol. 1, p. 195.

<sup>158</sup> See also Abū Mūsā, *al-Balāgha al-Qur’āniyya*, ibid., pp. 479-482. Abū Mūsā rightly argues that al-Zamakhsharī distinguished between *tashbīh* and *tamthīl* as rhetorical concepts like al-Jurjānī before him and when al-Zamakhsharī used these terms interchangeably he was merely speaking about them lexically. Al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī also in his *Ḥāshiyā* (super-commentary) on *al-Kashshāf* states that al-Zamakhsharī was speaking on the lexical meaning of the *mathal* before giving the customary

To sum up, al-Zamakhsharī's views on figurative language are based on 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī's theory. This does not negate his originality; on the contrary many studies (mentioned above) indicate that he advanced the theory of *majāz* in many ways (with regard to *isti'āra*, *tashbīh* and *majāz 'aqlī*) and his contribution was recognised by later writers on *Balāgha*. In the following section I will examine al-Zamakhsharī's interpretations of anthropomorphic verses to find out the extent of which his theory of *majāz* reflected and influenced his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses.

### 3.3.3 Al-Zamakhshari's interpretation of anthropomorphic verses:

al-Zamakhsharī approached anthropomorphic verses in three ways; interpreting anthropomorphic expressions using single-word *majāz*, introducing and using *majāz* based on *kināya*, and finally introducing and using *takhyīl*

#### I. Using single word *majāz*

Q (6:52) يُرِيدُونَ وَجْهَهُ “desiring His face”

Al-Zamakhsharī states that “*al-wajh* (face) can be used to express the essence of the thing and its reality<sup>160</sup>”. This is a standard Mu'tazilite interpretation of face<sup>161</sup>. Here al-Zamakhsharī did not add anything new in this regard.

Q (2:29) ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ إِلَى السَّمَاءِ “then He lifted Himself to heaven”

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usage of the word *mathal* as proverb which must be based on *isti'āra* (metaphor), *al-Hāshiya* in on the margin of *al-Kashshāf*, ibid., vol. 1, p. 195.

<sup>159</sup> These words (*tashbīh*, *mathal*, *tamthīl*) are also conceptually related to each other within the theory of *majāz*, as all of them are based on the idea of comparison one way or another

<sup>160</sup> Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshaf*, vol. 2, p. 21.

<sup>161</sup> See 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Mutashābih al-Qur'ān*, vol. 1, p. 105, where he interprets *wajh* as essence.

Al-Zamakhsharī interpreted *istawā* as a metaphor in a sense that “God directed His Will towards the heaven<sup>162</sup>”. This interpretation is similar to that of ‘Abd al-Jabbār, as we have seen.

He also gave a standard Mu‘tazilite interpretation to *Ityān* in Q (2:210) *an Ya’tiyahum Allāh*; meaning the coming of his command<sup>163</sup> which is based on *majāz* based on ellipsis. The same can be observed in his interpretation of Q<sup>164</sup> (75:23) and Q<sup>165</sup> (6:158).

Al-Zamakhsharī in the above interpretations did not offer anything different from earlier theologians such as ‘Abd al-Jabbār.

## II. Using *majāz* based on *kināya*

As far as I know al-Zamakhsharī is the first to introduce such a notion in his commentary. What is meant by it will be clear after examining his interpretation of Q(20:5).

Q(20:5) الرَّحْمَنُ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ اسْتَوَى “the All-compassionate sat Himself upon the Throne”

Al-Zamakhsharī states that ‘Because sitting firmly on the throne, which is the sitting place of the king, is concomitant to (*radīf*) the reign; they (the Arabs) made sitting as *kināya* for reign so they say “so and so sat firmly on the throne” meaning he reigned over, even though he never sat on the throne. They also used it (sitting firmly) because it became well known usage and equivalent to the saying “he reigned over” (*malaka*), however, using [sitting firmly on the throne] is more delightful, pleasant and more indicative to the matter in question. For example, your saying the hand of so and so is outspread (*mabsūṭa*) and the hand of so and so is fettered; which means that he is a generous or miser and the difference between the two expressions is only a matter of form. Even if the one who never outspread his hand by handing over charity or if he has no hand in the first instance, it will be said about him [provided that he is charitable in an indirect way] his hand is outspread; meaning he is generous because

<sup>162</sup> Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, vol. 1, p. 270.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 353. See ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s interpretation of *ityān* above

<sup>164</sup> He interpreted gazing in the expression “gazing towards their Lord” to mean anticipation and hope (*tawaqqu’ wa rajā’*). *Al-Kashshāf*, *ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 192.

<sup>165</sup> He interpreted the expression “Your Lord comes” to mean the sings of your Lord have come, which is based on *majāz* based on ellipsis.

for the [Arabs] this expression is an equivalent of saying he is generous. Similar to this is the saying of God the Most High Q (5:64) (*wa qālati ‘l-yahūdu yadu Allāhi maghlūlatun*) “The Jews have said, ‘God’s hand is fettered’” meaning He is a miser, (*bal yadāhu mabsūtātāni*) “but His hands are outspread” meaning he is generous; without imagining hand, or fettering, or outspreading. Interpreting [hand] as favour and (*al-tamahhul fī al-tathniya*) resorting to ploys to interpret the duality [in the expression *yadāhu mabsūtātāni*] is a kind of narrow mindedness (*ḍiq al-‘aṭan*) and like travelling on foot for years away from *‘ilm al-bayān* (theory of imagery)<sup>167</sup>.

There is something here needs to be clarified, al-Zamakhsharī considered (*al-istiwā’ ‘alā al-‘arsh*) as a type of *kināya* as we have seen above regarding his views on *kināya*; the original meaning of the utterance could also be meant by a *kināya*-type figure of speech and this amounts to a gross anthropomorphism in this case of *istiwā’* if one says it is *kināya* and does not add anything else! Al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī comments on al-Zamakhsharī’s use of *kināya* in his *Hāshiya*<sup>168</sup> on *al-Kashshāf* and in his *Hāshiya* on *al-Muṭawwal* of al-Taftāzānī<sup>169</sup>, he argues that al-Zamakhsharī here refers to *majāz* that is based on *kināya* because in his commentary<sup>170</sup> on Q (3:77) that Allāh *‘la yanẓuru ilayhim’* (God shall not speak to them neither look on them on the Resurrection Day), he states that “not looking at them” is used originally as *kināya* for those whom it is possible for them to gaze<sup>171</sup>. Then the utterance is used as *majāz* based on *kināya* for the one whom it is not

<sup>166</sup> Al-Zamakhsharī is probably referring here to the type of interpretation such as the one offered by ‘Abd al-Jabbār who as we have seen interpreted the two hands as two favours; favour of religion and this worldly life, as we have seen above.

<sup>167</sup> Al-Zamakhsharī, *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 530. Abū Mūsā argues that al-Zamakhsharī used the expression “*‘ilm al-Bayān*” in many places in his commentary to refer to cases related to *‘ilm al-Bayān* as developed by later scholars although in other places he used *‘ilm al-Bayān* to refer to cases which are considered to be as part of *‘ilm al-ma‘ānī* by as developed by later rhetoricians, see Abū Mūsā, *ibid.*, pp. 248-254. I translated here *‘ilm al-Bayān* as theory of imagery because of the nature of the verse and al-Zamakhsharī’s interpretation. We will see later that al-‘Alawī will consider *takhyīl* to be part of *‘ilm al-Badī’*.

<sup>168</sup> Published in the first volume of the edition I am using here, pp. 3-261.

<sup>169</sup> Al-Sayyid al-Jurjānī, *Hāshiya ‘alā Sharḥ al-muṭawwal* of al-taftāzānī, manuscript in al-Azhar library, 530/10165 *balāgha*.

<sup>170</sup> *Al-Kashshāf*, vol. 1, p. 439.

<sup>171</sup> “the utterance indicates contempt and discontent, when you say so and so does not look at so so; you indicate the negation of any consideration and benevolence towards this person”, Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, vol. 1, p. 439.

possible for him to gaze (i.e. God) to indicate the negation of his benevolence<sup>172</sup>. Al-Sayyid adds that if the original meaning could be meant the utterance is *kināya* and if not then it is *majāz* based on *kināya*<sup>173</sup> and in this case *kināya* could be used to refer to this utterance because it is the origin of this *majāz*. The use<sup>174</sup> of *istiwā* in Q (20:5) is exactly the same as fettering and outspreading the hands in Q (5:64). Al-Zamakhsharī also used *majāz* based on *kināya* to interpret (side of God) in Q (39:56) Lest any soul should say, 'Alas for me, for what I neglected with respect to the side of God<sup>175</sup>, and was a scoffer). Al-Zamakhsharī refers to the figure of speech here (neglecting with respect to the side of God) as *kināya* which means neglecting his right. He also did not accept interpreting “side of God” as the essence of God<sup>176</sup>.

Al-Zamakhsharī in his elaboration and use of *majāz* based on *Kināya* breaks new ground in the theory of *majāz*. I argue that this new trope is best explained by using the theory of signification of ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī, in which he elaborated his views on meaning and the meaning of meaning. ‘Abd al-Qāhir states that *ma‘nā* refers to the prima facie meaning (*ẓāhir*) of the utterance which one reaches without a medium while *ma‘nā al-ma‘nā* “it is when you figure out a meaning from utterance and this meaning leads you to another meaning<sup>177</sup>”.

This can be illustrated in this diagram:

Utterance ----->--- prima facie meaning->----- meaning of the prima facie meaning (*majāz & kināya*)

*Majāz* based on *kināya* can be illustrated in this diagram:

<sup>172</sup> Al-Sayyid al-Jurjānī, *Hāshiya ‘alā al-Kashshāf*, vol. 1, p. 158. See also al-Zamakhsharī’s commentary on this verse, *al-Kashshāf*, vol. 1, p. 439.

<sup>173</sup> Al-Sayyid al-Jurjānī, *Hāshiya ‘alā al-Kashshāf*, ibid., p. 158.

<sup>174</sup> Al-Sayyid al-Jurjānī, *Hāshiya ‘alā sharḥ al-muṭawwal of al-taftāzānī*, ibid., MMs, folio, 166.

<sup>175</sup> Arberry’s translation reads: Lest any soul should say, 'Alas for me, in that I neglected my duty to God, and was a scoffer.

<sup>176</sup> This is the interpretation of ‘Abd al-Jabbār. See Mutashābih al-Qur’ān, ibid., vol. 2, p. 597.

<sup>177</sup> ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī, *Asrār*, p. 263.

Utterance-►- prima facie meaning---- meaning of the prima facie meaning  
(*kināya*)---- meaning of the meaning of the prima facie meaning (*majāz* based on  
*kināya*).

The interpretation of al-Zamakhsharī of the notion of *istiwā*’ is different from earlier Mu‘tazilite commentators. As we have seen ‘Abd al-Jabbār interpreted *istiwā*’ to mean (mastery over), this type of interpretation is rejected by al-Zamakhsharī because it centres on specific words (interpreted figuratively) and misses the point of the verse. Another Mu‘tazilite commentator; al-Ḥākim al-Jushamī gives the following interpretation to this verse: “It was said that His benevolence and direction of the affairs were established, this is the opinion of al-Ḥasan”, then al-Jushamī adds that “He sat Himself upon the Throne” He mentioned Himself to indicate glorification as if it was said as heavens and earth are under His rule, so as the Throne<sup>178</sup>. There is a big difference between al-Jushamī’s interpretation and that of al-Zamakhsharī and Zarzūr’s claim that al-Zamakhsharī plagiarised the writing of al-Jushamī could not be sustained on this occasion at least<sup>179</sup>.

By analyzing anthropomorphic verses using this novel idea, al-Zamakhsharī interprets the expressions in question in each verse as a whole without paying attention to their components. He wanted the reader to move away from the first meaning to the second and from the second to the third meaning, because to pause on these components such as “hand” or “sitting firmly” might lead (in his view) to either immature interpretation, which would miss the point of what the Qur’ān tries to convey (as we have seen in his criticism of such an interpretations) or worse, might lead to gross anthropomorphism which he tries to eliminate in the first instance.

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<sup>178</sup> Al-Ḥākim al-Jushamī, *al-Taḥdhīb*, MMs, *Maktabat al-Jāmi‘ al-Kabīr*, Sanna, Yemen, Q (20:5)

<sup>179</sup> The same can be said on al-Jushamī’s interpretation of Q (3:77) where he states “that God shall not speak to them **neither look at them**” meaning that He will not have mercy upon them, neither he will bestow benevolence upon them, nor He will purify them”. Al-Jushamī, *ibid*.

### III. Using *takhyīl*

Al-Zamakhsharī was also the first to introduce and use the concept of *takhyīl* in the interpretation of the Qurʾān, especially with regard to anthropomorphic verses.

Heinrichs identified five usages<sup>180</sup> of the term *takhyīl* in Islamic thought, one of which is ‘*Takhyīl* in Qurʾānic exegesis:’ the visual, anthropomorphic, representation of an abstract notion like Gods’ omnipotence’, This was introduced by the Qurʾānic commentator and philologist al-Zamakhsharī<sup>181</sup>.

Heinrichs also devoted an article to *takhyīl*<sup>182</sup> in Islamic tradition a substantial part of which deals with the reception of *takhyīl* as introduced by al-Zamakhsharī in later Islamic tradition; I will refer again to this article later. One of the earliest western studies that examined al-Zamakhsharī’s use of this term was that of Goldziher<sup>183</sup> who states “No exegete has done more for the rhetorical sublimity of the Korʾānic diction than al-Zamakhsharī”. In modern Arabic sources, Muḥammad Muḥammad Abū Mūsā in his monograph about al-Zamakhsharī, also devoted a section about al-Zamakhshari’s usage of *takhyīl*.

It was ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī who discussed the concept of *takhyīl*<sup>184</sup> in detail in his book *Asrār al-balāgha* with regard to poetry, but he stopped short of applying it to the Qurʾān. Al-Zamakhsharī took this term, developed it and applied it to the Qurʾān without hesitation. In what follows I will try to find out what he means by *takhyīl*, what is its relation to *tamthīl*, how did he use it and for what aim.

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<sup>180</sup> 1. *Takhyīl* in philosophical poetics 2. *Takhyīl* in the rhetoric of poetry 3. *Takhyīl* in the theory of imagery 4. *Takhyīl* in Qurʾānic exegesis 5. *Takhyīl* as a rhetorical figure, Heinrichs in the Introduction to *Takhyīl: the Imaginary in Classical Arabic Poetics*. Volume 1: Texts, selected, translated and annotated by Geert Jan van Gelder and Marlé Hammond; Volume 2: Studies, edited by Geert Jan van Gelder and Marlé Hammond. Oxford: Oxbow, 2008 (E.J.W. Gibb Memorial Trust), p. 2. See also Heinrichs, W.P. "Takhyīl (a)." *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition.

<sup>181</sup> Heinrichs, Introduction, p. 2.

<sup>182</sup> Heinrichs, W. P. “*Takhyīl*” and its traditions, in Alma Giese and J. Chr. Bürgel (eds.), *Gott ist schön und Er liebt die Schönheit. Festschrift für Annemarie Schimmel*, Berne 1994, 227-47.

<sup>183</sup> Goldziher, Ignaz, *Schools of Koranic commentators*, Harrassowitz in Kommission Wiesbaden, 2006, pp. 79-88.

<sup>184</sup> See Larkin, chapter 6, *takhyīl*.

Al-Zamakhsharī used the word *takhyīl* with reference to 16 verses in the Qur’ān. In one place Q (20:66) it is used in a sense of illusion which does not concern us here. In the remaining verses *takhyīl* was used by itself 7 times and with *tamthīl* 8 times. Of the 15 times the word is mentioned, three are related to anthropomorphic verses. In order to answer the above mentioned questions and also to find the relationship between *tamthīl* and *takhyīl*, I will analyse al-Zamakhsharī’s interpretation of key verses to see what he means by *takhyīl* and how he used it to interpret anthropomorphic verses.

In Q (50:30) يَوْمَ نَقُولُ لِجَهَنَّمَ هَلْ امْتَلَأْتَ وَتَقُولُ هَلْ مِنْ مَزِيدٍ “Upon the day We shall say unto Gehenna, 'Art thou filled?' And it shall say, Are there any more to come?” Al-Zamakhsharī states that asking Gehenna and its answer is a kind of “*takhyīl* and what is intended by it is the (*taṣwīr*) depiction and consolidating of the meaning in the heart<sup>185</sup>”. In this verse al-Zamakhsharī tells us about the purpose of *takhyīl* which is the depiction of meaning in order to make it accessible to the hearer of the revelation. But what is the difference between *takhyīl* and *tamthīl* and how they are related? In his interpretation of the following verse he explained their relationship and the distinction between them:

Q (33:72)

إِنَّا عَرَضْنَا الْأَمَانَةَ عَلَى السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَالْجِبَالِ فَأَبَيْنَ أَنْ يَحْمِلْنَهَا وَأَشْفَقْنَ مِنْهَا وَحَمَلَهَا الْإِنْسَانُ إِنَّهُ كَانَ ظَلُومًا جَهُولًا

“We offered the trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they refused to carry it and were afraid of it; and man carried it. Surely he is sinful, very foolish”

al-Zamakhsharī offers two different interpretations to this verse the first he based on *majāz* saying that *amāna* (trust) here is (*ṭā‘a*) obedience and these objects (heavens, earth and mountains) followed God’s command at the end while man carried the trust but did not discharge it. However “offering the trust to inanimate objects and their refusal and fear are *majāz*<sup>186</sup>”.

<sup>185</sup> *Al-Kashshāf*, vol. 4, p. 9.

<sup>186</sup> *Al-Kashshāf*, vol. 3, pp. 226-277.



In the second interpretation, al-Zamakhsharī offers an overall interpretation of this verse, saying that man’s obligation is so mighty and heavy that it was offered to the greatest and strongest objects of God’s creation, but they refused and were afraid of it; but man carried it in spite of his weakness and sinfulness, very foolish because he carried the trust and did not fulfill it. Then al-Zamakhsharī offers the following explanation to this interpretation stating that “similar to this type of speech (he means the personification in the verse) in the language of the Arabs is widespread and the Qur’ān came according to their ways [of expression] and styles. For example, their saying “If it was said to the fat where do you go? It would reply: to straighten the deformedness<sup>187</sup> (*law qīla lī al-shaḥmi ayna tadhhabu la- qāla usawwī al-‘awaj*)”. He adds that such type of personification of animals or inanimate objects is so common and it would be impossible to imagine the fat speaking and the purpose of using such an expression can be explained as follows

‘as fatness in an animal makes its ugly features beautiful and thinness makes its beautiful features ugly then the effect of fatness is depicted in a way which has a great impact on the soul of the listener in that it is cheered [by the depiction], inclined towards it and it is more acquainted with it. In a similar way is the depiction (*taṣwīr*) of the greatness of the trust (*al-amāna*), its difficulty, the heaviness of its weight, and its fulfillment<sup>188</sup>.

Al-Zamakhsharī here is defending this type of discourse (personification) by showing that it is a common way of expression used by the Arabs. It seems that al-Zamakhsharī was anticipating some opposition to the use of the term *takhyīl* with reference to the Qur’ān because of its association with imagination, lying and false poetic imagery. He also argues for its usefulness on the ground of impact of this type of depiction on the soul of the listener.

What is the nature of this *takhyīl* and how does it differ from *tamthīl*? Al-Zamakhsharī argues

“If you say the basis of the *tamthīl* (analogy) is known in their saying for the one who does not stick to one opinion “I see you moving forward on foot and moving backward the other”, because you made an analogy between the state of this person in his tilting and oscillation between two opinions without adhering to one of them, and the state of

<sup>187</sup> *Al-Kashshāf*, vol. 3, p. 277

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*

a person who hesitates in his walking and does not gather his feet to move ahead. In this *tamthil* every part it; the topic (*al-mumaththal*) and the analogue (*al-mumaththal bi-hi*) are considered as something which has a valid [meaning] which can be regarded as truthful and recognised. But this is not the case in this verse, because offering the trust to the inanimate object and its refusal and fear is an impossible matter (*muḥāl*) in itself and its meaning is invalid [if it is understood to signify its evident meaning], then how can basing the analogy (*al-tamthīl*) on the impossible be considered as valid? [The basis of this *tamthīl*] is similar to a case of [simile] where you compare something [to something else] and this analogue is absurd (*ghayr ma‘qūl*). The analogue in this verse, in their saying “If it was said to the fat where do you go...” and similar cases to it is a hypothesised thing (*mafrūḍ*). Hypothesised things are imagined in the mind like real things. The state of religious obligation (*taklīf*) in its difficulty and the burden of its weight is represented by its hypothesised state: if the [trust] were offered to the heavens, earth and mountains they would refuse to bear it and be fearful of it<sup>189</sup>.

Al-Zamakhsharī here explained what he meant by *takhyīl* and in what sense it differs from the general category of *tamthīl*. The distinction between them consists in the nature of the image; if the image is expressed by verified things or in other words things that exist in reality then it is the case of *tamthīl*. On the other hand if the image is expressed by using hypothesised things that are absurd or impossible (*ghayr ma‘qūl*) and these things can be imagined by the mind then it is the case of *takhyīl*<sup>190</sup>. The Mu‘tazilite creed is at work here, reason is the arbiter and can decide which expression should be considered as a case of *takhyīl* and which one is not.

In saying above that *takhyīl* is different from the general category of *tamthīl*, I am in agreement with ‘Umar al-Qazwīnī<sup>191</sup> (745/1344) in his gloss on *al-Kashshāf* as quoted by al-Khafajī (1069/1659)<sup>192</sup> “*al-takhyīl*<sup>193</sup> is a special type of *tamthīl*

<sup>189</sup> *Al-Kashshāf*, vol. 3, p. 277

<sup>190</sup> Heinrichs comments on this saying “Here we have the first instance of the root that we are interested in (*takhyīl*); closely related in meaning is the term *taṣwīr*, which occurs several times in our passage”. *Takhyīl* and its traditions, *ibid.*, p. 234.

<sup>191</sup> His commentary is called “*Al-Kashf ‘an Mushkilāt al-Kashshāf*”, (still in manuscript) see Lane, *A Traditional Mutazilite Commentary*, p. 303.

<sup>192</sup> *Ḥāshiyat al-Shihāb al-Musammāt ‘Ināyat al-Qāḍī wa Kifāyat al-Rāḍī ‘ala Tafsīr al-Bayḍāwī*, Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Khafajī, ed. by ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Mahdī, *Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya*, Beirut, 1997.

<sup>193</sup> Only in a sense of using hypothesised things as analogue. This will be clarified below.

opposite<sup>194</sup>” and when al-Zamakhsharī uses both terms such as in his interpretation<sup>195</sup> of Q (59:21) he is emphasising that both terms are connected, as indicated above. This is also the view of al-Khafājī who can be considered among those who agreed with al-Zamakhsharī’s view of this term<sup>196</sup>. Al-Khafājī when commenting on al-Zamakhsharī’s use of the term for Q (7:172) states that what is intended by *takhyīl* is “the depiction of the abstract by using the image of the sensible because the mass’s acquaintance with the sensible is more perfect and complete. What distinguishes *takhyīl* from *tamthīl* is that the analogue in the case of *takhyīl* is a hypothesised matter which does not have external real existence<sup>197</sup>”. Al-Khafājī also quoted al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī’s classification of *takhyīl* in his commentary on *al-Miftāḥ* of al-Sakkākī; where according to al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī *takhyīl* can be used to refer to three cases<sup>198</sup>: 1. *Tamthīl* (metaphor based on analogy) in which the analogue is hypothesised thing (*al-tamthīl bi al-’umūr al-mafrūda*) 2. Postulation of proper meanings (*farḍ al-ma’ānī al-haqīqiyya*) 3. Clue for metaphor by way of allusion (*qarīnat al-makniyya*).

Now I will turn to al-Zamakhsharī’s interpretation of anthropomorphic verses using the notion of *takhyīl*. As stated above al-Zamakhsharī used *takhyīl* explicitly with reference to three verses Q Q (39:67), Q (2:255), and Q (48:10)

<sup>194</sup> Al-Khafājī, *Hāshiyā*, ibid., v. 8, p. 300. See also Hienriches, *Takhyīl* and its traditions, ibid., p. 236, Hienriches examined al-Khafājī’s treatment of this verse found in his book *Ṭirāz al-Majālis* (Cairo, 1284 A.H.) where al-Khafājī quoted the views of many authors regarding the concept of *takhyīl*.

<sup>195</sup> Al-Kashshāf, vol. 4, p. 87.

<sup>196</sup> Al-Mashnī lists the following authors as those who used the notion of *takhyīl* in their interpretation of the Qur’ān: al-Rāzī, al-Bayḍāwī, Abū al-Su’ūd, al-Ālūsī, al-Qāsimī, Ibn ‘Ashūr, Muḥammad ‘Abduh, Darwaza, Muḥammad Aḥmad Khalaf Allāh, see Muṣṭafā Ibrāhīm al-Mashnī, *Al-Takhyīl: Maṭhūmuḥu wa mawqif al-mufasssirīna minhu qudāmā wa muḥdathīn*, Dār al-Rāzī, Amman, 2001, pp.88-152. It should be noted that his verdict on these authors needs to be re-examined, as he tends to read into their statements more than they can yield.

<sup>197</sup> *Hāshyat al-Khafājī*, vol. 4, p. 399.

<sup>198</sup> *Hāshyat al-Khafājī*, ibid., vol. 8, p. 224, and vol. 6, p. 51. See also *al-Khafājī*’s criticism of this in his book *Ṭirāz al-Majālis*, p. 42 which was summarised by Hienriches in *Takhyīl* and its tradition, ibid., p. 241, see also pp. 243-245 for a summary of al-Khafājī’s attempt of linking al-Zamakhsharī’s notion of *takhyīl* to that of philosophical *takhyīl* as elaborated by Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna).

وَمَا قَدَرُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ قَدْرِهِ وَالْأَرْضُ جَمِيعاً قَبْضَتُهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ وَالسَّمَوَاتُ مَطْوِيَّاتٌ بِيَمِينِهِ سُبْحَانَهُ (Q(39:67) وَتَعَالَى عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ

“They measure not God with His true measure. The earth altogether shall be His handful on the Day of Resurrection, and the heavens shall be rolled up in His right hand. Glory be to Him! High be He exalted above that they associate!”

We have already seen the interpretation of ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī of this verse in Chapter1, now let us see how al-Zamakhsharī approached it. I believe it is worth translating the main point of this interpretation because only at this place did he elaborate on his use of *takhyīl* to interpret anthropomorphic verses:

“God draws their attention to His might and grandeur by way of *takhyīl* by saying “The earth altogether shall be His handful on the Day of Resurrection, and the heavens shall be rolled up in His right hand”. The purpose of this speech, if you take it in its totality and as whole, is the depiction (*taṣwīr*) of His might and to make known [to us] the essence of His grandeur and nothing more without interpreting handful (*qabḍa*) and right hand (*yamīn*) as *haqīqa* or *majāz*. The same analysis also applies to a *ḥadīth* in which “Abdullah b. Mas‘ud reported that a Jew scholar<sup>199</sup> came to Allāh’s Apostle (may peace be upon him) and said, Muḥammad, or Abū al-Qāsim, verify, Allāh, the Exalted and Glorious, would carry the Heavens on the Day of Judgment upon one finger and earth upon one finger and the mountains and trees upon one finger and the ocean and moist earth upon one finger-in fact the whole of the creation upon one finger, and then He would stir them and say: I am your Lord, I am your Lord. Thereupon Allāh’s Messenger (may peace be upon him) smiled testifying what that scholar had said. He then recited this verse:” They measure not God with His true measure...”. The most eloquent person among the Arabs (may peace be upon him) laughed and expressed amazement because what he understood from [what the rabbi said] is what the scholars of *Bayān* (theory of imagery) understand from it without imagining *imsāk* (literally grasp), or *ishba‘* (finger), or stirring (*hazz*) or anything else. [The Prophet], first and foremost, understood the essence and crux of [the Rabbi’s speech] which indicates the magnificent power and that the immense actions, which bewilder understanding and minds to the extent that even the imaginations cannot penetrate their essence, are easy for Him [to do]. The hearer can only comprehend this ease by interpreting the expression using this method of *takhkhyīl*. You will not find in the theory of imagery (*‘ilm al-Bayān*) a topic more subtle or delicate or fine than this topic. Nor will you find a more useful and beneficial topic [than *takhyīl*] to interpret equivocal [expressions] (*mushtabahāt*) in the Word of God in the Qur’ān, and other revealed scriptures as well as in the speech of the Prophets. This is because the majority of the cases of *ta’wīl* (interpreting equivocal expressions) and their causes are *takhyīlāt* which are misinterpreted in the past. The blunder of those who carried

<sup>199</sup> In al-Kashshāf the person who asked the Prophet is Jibrīl. In the books of *ḥadīth* such as *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* and *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* it was a Jewish scholar or a rabbi. This *ḥadīth* is found in Book 039, Number 6699 of *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*. This hadith is translated by Abdul Hamid Siddiqui which can be found in website of the University of Southern California: Compendium of Muslim Texts.

<http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/hadithsunnah/muslim/039.smt.html>

accessed on 4/09/2008.

the interpretation can be attributed to their lack of concern towards research and investigation; this misinterpretation will continue until they recognise that among the subtle disciplines there is discipline; if they give it the attention it deserves, it will be apparent to them that all disciplines are in need and dependent on it... How many Qur'ānic verses and *ḥadīths* of the Messenger were wronged and underestimated by inadequate interpretations and worn-out explanations, because those who interpret [the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*] have no clue whatsoever about<sup>200</sup> [*takhyīl*].

al-Zamakhsharī also mentions other tropical interpretations of the key terms of this verse in a dismissive manner ‘it was said that *qabḍatuhu* means His kingdom without any repeller or contender and *yaminihi* means His power. It was said that *maṭwiyyātun biyamīnihi* (be rolled up in His right hand) means [heavens] will perish as a result of his oath because he swore that He will make them perish<sup>201</sup>. Then he contends that these interpretations do not do any justice to the eloquence of the Qur'ān, unlike his own interpretation<sup>202</sup>.

Al-Zamakhsharī is making a few important points: first, this type of discourse can only be understood in its totality, not by looking at its components. As we have seen above, single terms such as “handful” and “right hand” should not be interpreted as either *ḥaqīqa* or *majāz*. Both the anthropomorphists (*mushabbihā*) who interpret them as *ḥaqāiq* (literally true) and others who interpret them tropically (such as right-hand as power) are wrong. Only when this type of discourse is understood in its totality will the purpose of using it be known and in this the verse is to depict God's might and grandeur.

Second, related to the first point, al-Zamakhsharī argues that one should not pay much attention to the words used to create the image; instead one should concentrate on the essence and crux of the expression. Otherwise one will miss the point and might fall into the trap of *tashbīh* (anthropomorphism). Al-Zamakhsharī here follows ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī regarding this issue, and shows his dissatisfaction with these types of interpretations. He severely criticised those who interpreted anthropomorphic verses in this way whether they are Mu'tazilite or not.

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<sup>200</sup> *Al-Kashshāf*, vol. 3, pp. 408-9.

<sup>201</sup> *Al-Kashshāf*, vol. 3, p. 409

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*

Third, the most suitable method of interpreting equivocal expressions in the Qur’ān and *Ḥadīth* is the method of *takhyīl* which is part of ilm *al-Bayān*. Failure to follow this method will lead to inadequate interpretations and worn-out explanations.

Q (2:255)

بِمَا شَاءَ وَسِعَ كُرْسِيُّهُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ

“His Throne comprises the heavens and the earth..”

Al-Zamakhsharī offers four interpretations<sup>203</sup> for this expression. Only the first is of concern here. He states

‘His Throne is not limited by heavens and earth because of its extent and vastness. This is only a depiction of His might and *takhyīl* and there is no Throne, neither sitting nor seated [being], like His saying in Q (39:67) “They measure not God with His true measure. The earth altogether shall be His handful on the Day of Resurrection, and the heavens shall be rolled up in His right hand” without imagining handful, rolling up and right hand. It is only *takhyīl*<sup>204</sup> for the Might of His affair and an analogy based on sensory perception (*tamthīl ḥisī*), don’t you see His saying<sup>205</sup> “They measure not God with His true measure”.

<sup>203</sup> The second interpretation: His knowledge comprises...and Knowledge is called *Kursī* and knowledge is called *Kursī* (chair) after its place which is the chair of the scholar. Third interpretation: His reign comprises..., reign is called *kursī* after its place which is the chair of the king. Fourth interpretation: God created the *Kursī* smaller than the ‘*arsh* (throne) and bigger than the heavens and the earth. He adds another interpretation by al-Ḥasan who said that *al-kursī* is the ‘*arsh*. *Al-Kashshāf*, ibid., vol. 1, pp. 385-86.

<sup>204</sup> Ibn al-Munīr in his comments on al-Zamakhsharī’s interpretation of this verse states that “al-Zamakhsharī’s expression in his first interpretation of the Throne; “*takhyīl* for the Might” represents an ill mannered way in referring to God...Because *al-takhyīl* (imagination) is used to refer to false things and to things which do not have true existence. If the meaning of what he said was true, he was mistaken in expressing it by using an ambiguous expression”, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Al-Munīr, *Al-Inṣāf fī-mā taḍammanahu al-Kashshāf min al-I’tizāl*, printed on the lower margin of the edition of al-Kashshāf mentioned above, vol. 1, p. 385. It seems that Ibn al-Munīr here accepts the interpretation offered by al-Zamakhsharī, but his objection is directed towards al-Zamakhsharī’s use of the word *takhyīl* which he found to be offensive.

<sup>205</sup> *Al-Kashshāf*, vol. 1, p. 385.

Al-Zamakhsharī's interpretation here is consistent with his interpretation of Q (39:67) –he also referred to it as we have seen- but he added a new element when he said that the expression “His Throne comprises the heavens and the earth” is *takhyīl* and an analogy based on sensory perception. Now I will examine the issue of al-Zamakhsharī's originality by comparing his interpretation with that of al-Ḥākim al-Jushamī of this word *kursī*. Al-Jushamī offers four interpretations for the term *Kursī* (Throne) without indicating his preference to any of them. First interpretation: His *Kursī* means His knowledge (Ibn ‘Abbās and Mujāhid), second interpretation *al-Kursī* is the Throne (al-Ḥasan), third interpretation: “It was said [*kursī*] is a seat smaller than the (Throne) ‘*arsh*“, forth interpretation: His reign<sup>206</sup>. These four interpretations are mentioned by al-Zamakhsharī as we have seen above. One can ask: does this mean that al-Zamakhsharī plagiarised al-Jushamī and did not offer anything new, as Zarzūr has implied? I believe this is not the case because first of all al-Zamakhsharī's preferred interpretation in which he used the notion of *takhyīl* is totally new and not mentioned by al-Jushamī. Secondly, it is true that the four interpretations of al-Jushamī are mentioned by al-Zamakhsharī but this does not mean that al-Zamakhsharī plagiarised al-Jushamī's work because it is possible that both al-Jushamī and al-Zamakhsharī relied on the same sources.

Q (48:10) يَدُ اللَّهِ فَوْقَ أَيْدِيهِمْ “God's hand is over their hands”

“Those who swear fealty to thee swear fealty in truth to God; God's hand is over their hands”

Al-Zamakhsharī states that

“when God said those who “swear fealty in truth to God” he strongly emphasised it by way of *takhyīl*, then He said “God's hand is over their hands” He meant by it that the hand of the Messenger of God, which is over the hands of those who swear fealty, is the hand of God. God is deemed far above having limbs and attributes of bodies. Therefore, the meaning is a confirmation that concluding a treaty with the Messenger is like concluding it with God and there is no difference between them, like His saying Q(4:80) “Whosoever obeys the Messenger, thereby obeys God”<sup>207</sup>.”

<sup>206</sup> *Tafsīr al-Jushamī*, Q (2:255)

<sup>207</sup> *Al-Kashshāf*, vol. 3, p. 543.

In this verse also Al-Zamakhsharī used the word *takhyīl* to interpret the expression “the hand of God” in the context of the verse. As God is deemed far above having limbs or any other physical attributes therefore it is absurd to attribute such a hand to Him. Therefore, interpreting this verse by using *takhyīl* will help to get to the point of this verse and this usage of *takhyīl* corresponds to the third category of al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī namely Clue for metaphor by way of allusion (*qarīnat al-makniyya*). This clue is also called *isti‘āra takhyīliyya* in later manual of *balāgha*.

Al-Zamakhsharī offers unique ways to interpret anthropomorphic verses in the Qur’ān in comparison with earlier Mu‘tazilites such as ‘Abd al-Jabbār and al-Ḥākim al-Jushamī. The uniqueness of these ways rests first and foremost on the ideas of ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī as found in his two books *Dalā’il al-I‘jāz* and *Asrār al-Balāgha*. Indeed, al-Zamakhsharī absorbed these books fully and applied them to the Qur’ān. ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī’s theory of imagery in general and his theory of *majāz* in particular served as a base on which al-Zamakhsharī establishes his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses. More importantly is that al-Zamakhsharī developed some of ‘Abd al-Qāhir’s ideas further and invented new theories which he used in his interpretation (with regard to *isti‘āra*, *tashbīh*, *majāz ‘aqlī*, *majāz* based on *kināya*, *tamthīl* and *takhyīl*).

As a Mu‘tazilī, al-Zamakhsharī believes that the proof of reason indicates that “God is neither a body nor an accident nor similar to them in any respect”, therefore any *mutashābih* expression in the Qur’ān which is contrary to the above view of God has to be interpreted to be in harmony with the proof of reason and other *muḥkam* verses in the Qur’ān.

When it comes to his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses, I identified three main approaches:

First approach: here Al-Zamakhsharī did not offer anything unique that differs from earlier theologians such as ‘Abd al-Jabbār.



Second approach, al-Zamakhsharī developed a unique way of interpreting some anthropomorphic verses by using what it is called *majāz* based on *kināya*. Before al-Zamakhsharī, al-Jurjānī elaborated on what he calls the meaning of the meaning; here al-Zamakhsharī's new trope can be described following 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī as the meaning of the meaning of the meaning. The following diagram illustrates this notion:

Utterance→- prima facie meaning→→ meaning of the prima facie meaning  
(*kināya*)→-- meaning of the meaning of the prima facie meaning (*majāz* based on *kināya*).

By using *majāz* based on *kināya* to interpret certain expressions (such as God “sitting firmly on the Throne”) in their entirety without pausing on the single words that make these expressions, al-Zamakhsharī wants the hearer to move away from the first meaning to the second and from the second to the third meaning, because to pause on these components such as “hand” or “sitting firmly” might lead to either farfetched interpretation which would miss the point of what the Qur'ān tries to convey or worse might lead to gross anthropomorphism, which he tries to eliminate in the first instance. By comparing al-Zamakhsharī's interpretation of the previous expression with those of 'Abd al-Jabbār and al-Jushamī, I showed that al-Zamakhsharī's interpretation is novel and represents an original contribution to the theory of imagery.

Third approach, al-Zamakhsharī was the first to introduce the concept of *takhyīl* in the field of Qur'ānic exegesis and use it to interpret anthropomorphic verses. *Takhyīl* is a special case of *tamthīl* in which the analogue in the case of *takhyīl* is absurd and is considered as hypothesised thing. On the other hand hypothesised things can be imagined in the mind like real objects.

For al-Zamakhsharī *takhyīl* is the depiction of meaning for the purpose of making it accessible to the recipient in a meaningful and effective way which cheers the soul, and when using *takhyīl* one does not pay much attention to the words used to create the image; instead one should concentrate on the essence and crux of the expression. When it comes to anthropomorphic verses he believes that *takhyīl* is the

most suitable method to interpret them because by using it one gets to the point of the expression, which is the depiction of God's majesty and might without falling into the trap of anthropomorphism or farfetched interpretations. Al-Zamakhsharī criticised what could be described as "traditional Mu'tazilite" interpretations of anthropomorphic verses of using single-word *majāz* as a means to interpret these verses. Al-Zamakhsharī attributed the misinterpretation of anthropomorphic verses to the failure of these exegetes to appreciate and study *'ilm al-Bayān* in general and *takhyīl* in particular, because it is the most suitable method of interpreting equivocal expressions in the Qur'ān. Since God is transcendent and cannot be perceived by any of the senses, then the best way of conveying to human beings something about Himself that makes sense to them is by using analogies based on sensory perception, thus they could imagine His might and grandeur.

### **Conclusion:**

One of the main aims of the Mu'tazilites is to harmonize reason and revelation. Their endeavour started from their early beginnings. The available sources from their early stage indicate that they all agree implicitly or explicitly that anthropomorphic verses have to be interpreted tropically to be in harmony with the dictates of reason regarding the attributes of God. The earliest attestation of the doctrine of priority of reason over revelation is found in the writing of al-Jāhiz but this does not mean that he was the first to formulate this doctrine. The link between this doctrine and their Qur'ānic hermeneutics was not fully established until a later date as the use of Q(3:7) is not attested in the writing of early Mu'tazilites. As we have seen, for al-Aṣamm, *Muḥkamāt* verses are those which do not need reflection while *mutashābihāt* are those verses which require reflection. al-Jāhiz did not use this explicitly although he made use of certain verses to interpret others. al-Jubbā'ī, interpreted *Muḥkamāt* as those verses which can yield only one meaning and *mutashābihāt* verses as those which can yield two meanings or more. Al-Jubbā'ī's contribution represents a significant development in the history of interpretation of this verse.

The Mu'tazilites recognise the importance of *majāz* for their endeavour to harmonize reason and revelation in their interpretation of anthropomorphic verses. Therefore they played a major role in its development. The theory of *majāz* started with al-Jāḥiẓ who was the first to speak about the dichotomy of *ḥaqīqa-majāz* as indicated in chapter one of this work. Before al-Jāḥiẓ various commentators offer tropical interpretation of anthropomorphic verses, but without using the term *majāz* and with little explanation of their interpretation like that of the interpretation of al-Aṣamm. It is in the writing of al-Jāḥiẓ we find for the first time the use of technical language and linguistic and theological explanation in his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses, in order to establish his interpretations on solid rational grounds. After al-Jāḥiẓ the use of *majāz* in a technical sense to interpret anthropomorphic verses became established, as we have seen in al-Jubbā'ī's interpretation of anthropomorphic verses.

The contribution of 'Abd al-Jabbār represents a big step in the Mu'tazilites attempt to harmonize reason and revelation with reference to anthropomorphic verses. He consolidated Mu'tazilite thinking at his time and presented a fully developed Qur'ānic hermeneutics that was built on Mu'tazilite theology. In addition to his hermeneutics, his theory of *majāz* enabled him to interpret anthropomorphic verses to harmonize them and the proof of reason. In his theology, he emphasised that it is only through the use of reason and not by depending on the Qur'ān that one can know about God's existence, transcendence and justice. It is only then one can proceed to interpret the Qur'ān because in order to know the truthfulness of the Qur'ān and what it signifies, one should know the state of its actor. This is based on the Mu'tazilite belief that the Qur'ān on its own cannot be utilized to demonstrate the existence and the attributes of the actor. 'Abd al-Jabbār's doctrine of priority of reason over revelation has an impact on his Qur'ānic hermeneutics and it is through his interpretation of Q (3:7) one can see the contact between theology and hermeneutics. For 'Abd al-Jabbār, *muḥkamāt* are verses that precisely express what is intended by them and *mutashābihāt* are those in which their prima facie meaning (*ẓāhir*) does not indicate what is intended by them. If the prima facie meaning of a verse is not in accord with proof of reason then one has to resort to ta'wil to harmonise between the two because both reason and revelation have the same origin and therefore there should be no contradiction between them. In this case the *mutashābihāt* has to be interpreted in the light of *muḥkamāt* verses which they

should be in accord with reason. The main tool in the process of *ta'wīl* is *majāz* and 'Abd al-Jabbār enacted his own theory of *majāz* within the context of *uṣūl al-fiqh* and *Kalām* to use it in his interpretation. His interest in *majāz* reflects its utmost importance in his hermeneutics because *majāz* is his primary tool to harmonise between reason and revelation. 'Abd al-Jabbār systematically applied his theory of *majāz* to all anthropomorphic verses and interpreted them to be in accord with proof of reason. His interpretation of these verses clearly reflects the advanced stage of the theory of *majāz* at his time, as we have seen in section two of this chapter.

It is with Al-Zamakhsharī that Mu'tazilite interpretation of anthropomorphic verses reached its peak of sophistication and maturity. The uniqueness of his approach rests first and foremost on the ideas of 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī as found in his two books *Dalā'il al-I'jāz* and *Asrār al-Balāgha*. Indeed, al-Zamakhsharī fully absorbed these books, developed some of their ideas and applied them to the Qur'ān. 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī's theory of imagery in general and his theory of *majāz* in particular served as a base on which al-Zamakhsharī establishes his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses.

As a Mu'tazilī, al-Zamakhsharī believed that the proof of reason indicates that "God is neither a body nor an accident nor similar to them in any respect", therefore any *mutashābih* expression in the Qur'ān which is contrary to the above view of God has to be interpreted to be in harmony with the proof of reason and other *muḥkam* verses in the Qur'ān. Al-Zamakhsharī was not satisfied with the approaches of earlier writers and their interpretation of anthropomorphic verses, because they do not do justice to the Qur'ānic message. Therefore he developed two unique tropes to interpret anthropomorphic verses.

First trope: *majāz* based on *kināya*

As we have seen I explained this approach using 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī's theory of meaning. The following diagram illustrates this new trope:

Utterance-►- prima facie meaning-►- meaning of the prima facie meaning  
(*kināya*)-►- meaning of the meaning of the prima facie meaning (*majāz* based on  
*kināya*).

By using *majāz* based on *kināya* to interpret certain expressions (such as God “sitting firmly on the Throne”) in their entirety without pausing on the single words that make these expressions, al-Zamakhsharī wants the hearer to move away from the first meaning to the second and from the second to the third meaning..

Second trope: *takhyīl*.

For al-Zamakhsharī *takhyīl* is a special case of *tamthīl* in which the analogue in the case of *takhyīl* is absurd and is considered as a hypothesised thing. *Takhyīl* is the depiction of meaning for the purpose of making it accessible to the recipient. When using *takhyīl* one does not pay much attention to the words used to create the image; instead one should concentrate on the essence and crux of the expression. When it comes to anthropomorphic verses he believes that *takhyīl* is the most suitable method to interpret them because by using it one gets to the point of the expression which is the depiction of God’s majesty and might without falling into the trap of anthropomorphism or engages in farfetched interpretations.

This chapter shows that interpreting anthropomorphic verses is not an isolated exegetical task in the Mu‘tazilites school. The foundation of their interpretation rests above all on their theology and Qur’ānic hermeneutics as well as the deployment of *majāz* as a tool to facilitate this interpretation. The main concern of the Mu‘tazilites is to harmonize reason and revelation but by keeping in mind their doctrine of priority of reason over revelation. In order to interpret anthropomorphic verses to be in accord with their theology, the Mu‘tazilites needed a scriptural support to their endeavor. The Mu‘tazilites found in Q(3:7) what they were looking for because this verse links *muḥkamāt*, *mutashābihāt* and *ta’wīl* together. It was ‘Abd-Jabbār who laid the foundation of their hermeneutics and linked it with their theology, thus enabling their interpretation of the Qur’ān and giving it a solid theoretical ground.

Motivated by their desire to give the most objective interpretation of anthropomorphic verses to be in harmony with their views of God established by reason; the Mu‘tazilites employed and developed a theory of *majāz* as an effective

tool in their endeavor. This does not mean that their interpretations were uniform and identical, on the contrary as this section shows there are big differences between the early Mu‘tazilite and later ones. Within early Mu‘tazilites circles, the employment of *majāz* was simple due to the immaturity of the theory of *majāz* and Qur’ānic hermeneutics. It was al-Jāhiz who laid the foundation of the theory of *majāz* and used it to interpret anthropomorphic verses. This was followed by ‘Abd al-Jabbār who developed a Mu‘tazilite Qur’ānic hermeneutics and developed and accommodated the theory of *majāz* on a large scale in his interpretation of these verses. In the writing of al-Zamakhsharī the theory of *majāz* reached its maturity, by basing his views on ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī’s works, al-Zamakhsharī developed the theory of *majāz* further and applied it to anthropomorphic verses. His two novel tropes are *majāz* based on *kināya* and *takhyīl* allowed him to move away from earlier authors in their focus on single word *majāz* to an utterance or sentence based *majāz* which enabled him to interpret anthropomorphic verses in a complete new way.

As this chapter concludes, I will turn next to the Ash‘arites, who were the adversaries of the Mu‘tazilites though nevertheless greatly influenced by them with regard to their methods and theories.

## Chapter 4

### The Ash‘arites

The Ash‘arite school is considered one of the most important three Sunnī theological schools in Islam, in addition to al-Māturīdiyya and Ḥanbalite traditionalists. The Ash‘arites take their name from the founder of the school Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī<sup>1</sup> (AH 260-324/874-935 CE) who converted from Mu‘tazilism to the “orthodox” doctrine of Sunnism around 300/912. The history of the school is divided into two periods following the observation of Ibn Khaldūn: *ṭarīqat al-aqdamīn*<sup>2</sup> (the method of the ancients) and *ṭarīqat al-muta‘akhhirīn*<sup>3</sup> (the method of the moderns)<sup>4</sup> whereas al-Ghazālī (505/1111) is the link between them. According to Frank the first period ‘is characterized by the formal language, analysis, and argumentation of the Baṣran *kalām* employed by al-Ash‘arī himself, while the second is characterized by the language, concepts, and formal logic of philosophy (*falsafah*), that is, of the Islamic continuation

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<sup>1</sup> Many scholars ancient and modern believe that al-Ash‘arī’s doctrine represents what is called the ‘middle way’ between the Mu‘tazilite rationalism and extreme conservatism of the traditionalists. Contrary to the Mu‘tazilites, he believes in the primacy of revelation (expressed in the Qur’ān and Sunna) and the consensus of Muslims over reason but at the same time he used the formal language of Kalām to express and defend his views, and this use of the method of *kalām* made his ideas unacceptable to the Ḥanbalites. al-Ash‘arī believes that God has eight distinct essential attributes (power, knowledge, Will, life, speech, sight, hearing and perdurance) which are neither identical with His essence nor other than Him. Human voluntary actions ‘occur through an ability to act (*bi-qudrah*) created in us at the moment the act occurs and are formally referred to as *kasb* or *iktisāb* (“performance”)’. Ethical values are based on the Divine command and whatever God does and wills is just by definition. God does what he wills, and what he wills is just by definition, Richard Frank, al-Ash‘arī, in *Encyclopaedia of Religion*. See also Richard M. Frank: “Elements in the Development of the Teaching of al-Ash‘arī.” In: *Le Muséon* 104 (1991) pp. 141-190 (Frank tries in this paper to solve the ‘problem of al-Ash‘arī’ by offering a coherent presentation of al-Ash‘arī’s theology by taking into account all of his extant books into consideration unlike other authors who cast doubt on some of his books, regarding this issue see Robert Caspar, *A Historical Introduction to Islamic Theology: Muḥammad and the Classical period*, Pontificio Istituto di studi Arabi e d’Islamistica, Rome, 1998, pp.198-210). For a partial translation of *al-Ibāna* see W.C. Klein (trans): *Abū l-Ḥasan ‘Alī ibn Ismā‘īl al-Ash‘arī’s al-Ibānah ‘an uṣūl ad-Diyānah (The Elucidation of Islam’s Foundation)*. (American Oriental Series, 19) New Haven 1940, and for a translation of *al-Luma’* see R.J. McCarthy (ed./translator.): *The Theology of al-Ash‘arī*. Beirut 1953. For a comprehensive treatment of al-Ash‘arī’s doctrine see Daniel Gimaret: *La doctrine d’al-Ash‘arī*, cerf, Paris 1990.

<sup>2</sup> The main representatives of this method are: Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī, al-Bāqillānī (403/1013), Abū Bakr b. Fawrak (1015), ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī (429/1037), Abū al-Ma‘ālī al-Juwaynī (478/1085).

<sup>3</sup> The main representatives of this method are: al-Ghazālī, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (606/1209), al-‘Amidī, ‘Izz al-Dīn b. ‘Abd al-Salām, ‘Aḍud al-dīn al-Ījī (756/1355).

<sup>4</sup> Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddima*, ed. al-Shaddādī, vol. 3, pp. 34-35.

of Greek philosophy<sup>5</sup>. It is very difficult to give a summary of the main Ash‘arite doctrine<sup>6</sup> which covers both periods because of the large number of authors and the diversity of their views, Frank observes that ‘Because of the differences in language and conceptualization between the Ash‘arī theology of the classical period and that of later times, especially after al-Rāzī, it is impossible to define or characterize the tradition in terms of a single way of conceiving, formulating, and dealing with theological and metaphysical problems<sup>7</sup>’. Nevertheless I will give a brief general account of the main doctrines of Ash‘arite creed related to the issue of anthropomorphism.

The vast majority of Ash‘arites adopted<sup>8</sup> the Mu‘tazilite doctrine of the priority of reason over revelation which has a great impact on their views on God and his attributes. According to al-Shāfi‘ī the Ash‘arites adopted the Mu‘tazilite classification of theological issues into three main sections:

1. The main issues that are related to the foundation of prophethood such as belief in God and his attributes, can be only based on reason.
2. Issues related to the day of Judgement; punishment and reward can be only based on revelation.
3. Other issues related to some divine perfections on which the validity of prophethood does not depend, can be based on both reason and revelation<sup>9</sup>

Al-Shāfi‘ī argues that the Ash‘arite’s adoption of the previous classification is a consequence of their acceptance of the following doctrines:

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<sup>5</sup> Richard M. Frank, art. Ash‘ariyah in *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, p. 533. Caspar puts the difference between the two methods in this way: ‘the first is characterized by the use of the old logic of *fiqh* with two terms (either this of that; if not this, then it is that) and the second by the use of the Aristotelian syllogism with three terms, with major, minor and intermediate terms and conclusion’, Robert Caspar, *A Historical Introduction to Islamic Theology: Muḥammad and the Classical period*, Pontificio Istituto di studi Arabici e d’Islamistica, Rome, 1998, p. 213.

<sup>6</sup> For the early development of Ash‘arism and its place in the historical development of Muslim theology see: G. Makdisi: ‘Ash‘arī and Ash‘arites in Islamic Religious History.’ In: *Studia Islamica* No. 17 (1962), pp. 37-80 and No. 18 (1963), pp. 19-39 and for the development of Ash‘arism in its philosophical phase see Ayman Shihadeh, From al-Ghazālī to al-Rāzī: 6<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> century development in Muslim Philosophical Theology, in *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, vol. 15 (2005) pp. 141–179.

<sup>7</sup> Frank, Ash‘ariyah, p. 538.

<sup>8</sup> The earliest attestation of this doctrine is found in al-Bāqillānī’s book

<sup>9</sup> Maḥmūd al-Shāfi‘ī, *al-Madkhal ilā dirāsāt ‘ilm al-kalām*, Cairo, 1991, p. 152.



- I. Reason is the foundation of revelation, therefore, issues related to God (existence and attributes) and prophethood cannot be established by relying on revelation otherwise the origin will become the branch, in other words this is a circular argument.
- II. The texts of the revelation can only yield probable knowledge due to the nature of language; therefore those texts that seem to signify anthropomorphism must be interpreted<sup>10</sup>. In other words these texts cannot be taken to signify their *prima facie* meanings.

The above classification and doctrines influenced the Ash‘arite attitude towards anthropomorphic verses in the Qur’ān and their interpretations.

Two major approaches<sup>11</sup> to anthropomorphism in the Qur’ān dominated the Ash‘arite school. The first approach is characterised by not engaging in the interpretation of these verses while the second approach is characterised by offering tropical interpretation (*ta’wīl*) of them. The double way of approaching anthropomorphic verses started with al-Ash‘arī himself. Indeed al-Ash‘arī<sup>12</sup> is reported to have had two approaches to anthropomorphic verses: his first approach to anthropomorphism in the Qur’ān is manifest in his book *al-Ibāna ‘an ‘Uṣūl al-Diyāna* in which al-Ash‘arī states that the face, and the two hands of God, are to be confirmed<sup>13</sup> *bilā kayf*<sup>14</sup>. He also believes that hands, face, side, eye, sitting, coming, descending are all attributes<sup>15</sup> of God (these attributes are also called ‘revealed

<sup>10</sup> Al-Shāfi‘ī, p. 159.

<sup>11</sup> al-Makdisi states that ‘The former attitude is regarded by the Ash‘arites as being *ṭarīq as-salāma*, the road of salvation, and the latter is regarded by them as being *ṭarīq al-ḥikma*, the road of wisdom; both of which roads were travelled by Ash‘arī himself’, Makdisi, 1962, *ibid.*, p. 52. Al-Mutawallī (478-1085) who is an Ash‘arite theologian justifies both approaches by the two different ways of reading Q (3:7) i.e. to pause after ‘*wa mā ya‘lamu ta’wīlahu illā Allāh*’ or to pause after ‘*wa al-rāsikhūna fī al-‘ilm*’ Kitāb al-Mughnī lil- Imām al-Mutawallī, ed. Marie Bernand, Cairo, 1986, pp. 13-14.

<sup>12</sup> Al-Shahrstānī, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, ed. Amīr ‘Alī Mahnā and ‘Alī Ḥasan Fā‘ūr, Beirut, 2001, vol. 1, p. 114.

<sup>13</sup> Al-Ash‘arī, *al-Ibāna ‘an ‘Uṣūl al-Diyāna*, ed. Fawqiyya Ḥusayn Maḥmūd, Cairo, 1977, p. 22.

<sup>14</sup> This phrase has two meanings: 1. it means that one should accept the text as it is without any further comments or without asking question and this is how the traditionalists and most of the Ḥanbalites understand this phrase. 2. Within Ash‘arites’s school it means “one does not attribute to God; he does not, that is, ascribe to God the characteristics and properties of creatures”, Frank, *elements*, *ibid.*, p. 155.

<sup>15</sup> Ibn Fawrak, *Mujarrad maqālāt al-Ash‘arī* ed. Daniel Gimaret, *Dār el-Machreq*, Beirut, 1987, p. 41.

attributes<sup>16</sup>). Al-Ash‘arī in his second approach resorts to tropical interpretation of these verses, al-Āmidī states that al-Ash‘arī in one of his two sayings interpreted the face of God (*wajhu Allāh*) as his existence<sup>17</sup> without indicating whether this interpretation is an earlier or later one. Regarding this point, Frank argues that ‘in the earliest period of his conversion al-Ash‘arī held that God has an attribute (or attributes) called “hands” in the revelation, though this attribute is not to be thought of as consisting of bodily members. For this he cites (in his book *Risāla ilā ahl al-Thaghr*) Q5,64 as well as 38,75. Later he came to interpret ‘hands’ in the former verse as an extended use of the word, contextually employed to refer to God’s power<sup>18</sup>. This double way of approaching anthropomorphic verses in the Qur’ān will characterise the attitudes of most Ash‘arites. My main concern here is with those Ash‘arites who practiced *ta’wīl*. Therefore, I will examine the detailed interpretations of anthropomorphic verses of four Ash‘arites; two from the early period (al-Bāqillānī and al-Juwaynī) and two from the later period (al-Rāzī and ‘Izz al-Dīn b. ‘Abd al-Salām) in order to find out the methods they follow and the role of the *majāz* in their interpretations. This chapter is divided into four sections, each devoted to one of these authors.

#### 4.1. Al-Bāqillānī<sup>19</sup> (d. 403/1013)

Al-Bāqillānī was one of the main Asha‘rite theologians in the 4<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> century, he followed the Mālikī school and it is said that he was ‘a major factor in the systematising and popularising of Ash‘arism<sup>20</sup>’. He was a typical Asha‘rite in a sense that both approaches to anthropomorphism in the Qur’ān are attested in his writings and my concern here is his *ta’wīl* of these verses. His interpretations are based on the

<sup>16</sup> These attributes are also called additional attributes and are divided into two types: those related to the essence like (the eye, two hands, the side and the face and the others related to the attributes of the act like sitting (*istiwā*), coming (*majī*) and descending (*nuzūl*) see *Mujarrad Maqālāt al-Ash‘arī*, p. 41.

<sup>17</sup> Al-Āmidī, *Abkār al-Afkār*, ed. Aḥmad F. Al-Mazīdī, *Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya*, Beirut, 2003, vol. 1, p. 358.

<sup>18</sup> Frank, *Elements in the Development of the Teaching of al-Ash‘arī*, p. 185.

<sup>19</sup> The kāfī abū bakr muḥammad b. al-ṭayyib b. muḥammad b. dja‘far b. al-kāsim. Very few of his writings survived. “He did much to propagate Ash‘arism, and he is mentioned fairly frequently by later writers” see R.J. McCarthy, *al-Bāqillānī*, EI 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.

<sup>20</sup> R.J. McCarthy, *al-Bāqillānī* in EI2. ?

belief that God does not resemble its creation either in genes or in form and this belief is supported by reason and revelation<sup>21</sup> alike<sup>22</sup>. But before examining his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses, I will outline his approach to the issue of *ta'wīl* as expressed in his interpretation of Q (3:7) as well as his views on *majāz*.

#### 4.1.1 Interpreting Q (3:7)

Al Bāqillānī believes that there is nothing in the Qur'ān which cannot be interpreted. For him, to describe an utterance as *muḥkam* in this verse means that 'the utterance indicates and discloses its significance in a such a way as to remove any ambiguity and probability<sup>23</sup>, such as "Muḥammad is the Messenger of God" Q (48:29). For the utterance to be *mutashābih* it means that the utterance 'is capable of yielding various significations; these significations can be veridical ( '*alā wajhī al-ḥaqīqa*) or some veridical and others tropical (*majāzan*), and also its prima facie meaning does not indicate what is intended by it<sup>24</sup>, such as Q (4: 43) and those verses that are related to the fundamentals of religions<sup>25</sup>. To be able to know what is intended by *mutashābih* requires 'reflection and contemplation by referring it to another obvious utterance (*zāhir*) and indicator based on reason (*dalīlu 'aql*)', al-Bāqillānī adds that the interpretation of *mutashābih* utterances 'is known to God and those who are firm in knowledge and God did not reveal in his book anything whose interpretation can be said to be unknown<sup>26</sup>'. What is clear from this quotation is that it is legitimate to interpret anthropomorphic verses in the light of reason and other clear verses. But which has priority over the other is not explicit in his available writings although one can infer that he is in favour of the priority of reason over revelation from his

<sup>21</sup> Such as Q (42:11) and (112:3-4).

<sup>22</sup> See Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Inṣāf fī-mā Yajibu l'tiqāduhu wa lā Yajūzu al-Jahulu bihi*, ed. M. Zāhid al-Kawtharī, Cairo, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2000, pp. 30-37, and *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, ed. by R. Y. McCarthy, Beirut, Librairie Orientale, 1957, pp. 24-29.

<sup>23</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Taqrīb wa al-Irshād al-Ṣaghīr*, ed. by 'Abd al-Ḥamīd b. 'Alī Abū Zunayd, Mu'assasat al-Risāla, Beirut, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1998, vol. 1, pp. 328-9. Al-Bāqillānī's book on '*uṣūl al-fiqh*' is the second important book to have reach us from the 4<sup>th</sup> A.H. apart from *al-Jaṣṣās*'s book. His book influenced later books on '*uṣūl al-fiqh*' within *kalāmī* school in '*uṣūl al-fiqh*' especially writers such as Abū al-Ma'ālī al-Juwaynī and al-Ghazālī see the editor introduction to the book, pp. 95-98.

<sup>24</sup> *Al-Taqrīb wa al-Irshād*, ibid., pp. 330-331.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 331.

<sup>26</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Intiṣār li al-Qur'ān*, ed. Muḥammad 'Iṣām al-Quḍāt, Amman and Beirut, 2001, vol. 2, p. 776.

treatment of the issue of existence of God and his attributes in his book *al-Inṣāf*, where he first gives *kalām*-type argument then cites the scripture to support it<sup>27</sup>.

#### 4.1.2 Al-Bāqillānī on *Majāz*.

Like all other writers on *majāz* al-Bāqillānī starts with *ḥaqīqa* before he defines *majāz*. According to him, *ḥaqīqa* has two meanings<sup>28</sup>: 1. Essence in a sense when we say *ḥaqīqatu waṣfi al-Shayʿ* (the essence of describing the thing) we mean its definition and the cause by which it merited this description. For example when we say the essence of a scholar ( *ʿālim*) is that he has knowledge. *Ḥaqīqa* could mean also the attribute of a thing by which the thing is characterised, as when we say the essence of the *muḥdath* is that it exists out of nothing.

2. *Ḥaqīqa* in relation to speech: *Ḥaqīqa* here is a saying that is used to [convey a meaning] that was originally assigned to it (*qawlun istuʿmila fī-mā wuḍiʿa la-hu fī al-aṣli*)<sup>29</sup>.

On the other hand *majāz* is defined as a “[saying] used to convey a meaning other than the [original] assigned meaning (*mustaʿmalun fī ghayri mā wuḍiʿa la-hu*), in other words it is the saying which has been crossed over from one thing to another (*mutajāwazun bi-hi*) from your saying *juztu al-nahra* when you cross over the river<sup>30</sup>”. Such as Q (12:82) and also calling a stupid man a donkey and calling a strong, brave man a lion<sup>31</sup>.

Types of *majāz*.

Al-Bāqillānī explicitly identified three types of *majāz*.

1. *Majāz* based on addition such as Q(42:11) because if He said *Laysa mithlahu shayʿ* the utterance will be perfectly understood<sup>32</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> See *al-Inṣāf*, pp. 28-33.

<sup>28</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Al-Taqrīb wa al-Irshād al-Ṣaghīr*, ed. by ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd b. ʿAlī Abū Zunayd, *Muʿassasat al-Risāla*, Beirut, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1998, vol. 1, p. 352.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*,

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *ibid*, pp. 352-3

<sup>32</sup> *ibid*, p. 353

2. *Majāz* based on omission such as Q (12:82) where the word “*ahl*” people is omitted<sup>33</sup>.
3. *Majāz* based on *tashbīh*: “their saying I saw a donkey or an ox if they [the Arabs] meant a stupid man who is compared with oxen and donkeys because of his stupidity<sup>34</sup>”.

Distinguishing between *ḥaqīqa* and *majāz*.

According to al-Bāqillānī there are four ways to distinguish between *ḥaqīqa* and *majāz*.

1. Analogy cannot be based on *majāz*<sup>35</sup> such as to say “ask the rug” to mean its owner, except where the new usage is related to the established one such as to say “ask the ruins” instead of saying “ask the abodes”.
2. When derivatives cannot be obtained from a word<sup>36</sup>, the word in this case is *majāz* such as calling an affair or state *amr* (command) as in Q (11:97).
3. If a plural form of a word used as *majāz* is different from the plural form of the same word used as *ḥaqīqa*. For example, the plural of the word *amr* (command) used as *ḥaqīqa* is *awāmir* (commands) and the plural of the word *amr* (state) used as *majāz* is *umūr* (states)<sup>37</sup>.
4. The word is used as *ḥaqīqa* when it has an association with other things or with something else related to this other such as knowledge, power and command. The last three are associated with things that are known, powered and commanded. So if something is called knowledge, power and command in which this thing has no association with things that are known, powered and commanded, then this thing is *majāz*<sup>38</sup>.

Rules of *majāz*.

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<sup>33</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *ibid*, p. 353

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, p. 351.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, p. 345-5.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, p. 355.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 356-7.

1. Every *majāz* has a *ḥaqīqa* but not vice versa because there are two types of names which cannot be used as *majāz*. These are: 1. Universal knowns such as known (*ma'lūm*), unknown (*majhūl*), mentioned (*madhkūr*) etc. 2. Proper names<sup>39</sup>
2. There must be evidence (*dalīl*) associated with the discourse for it to be considered as *majāz*<sup>40</sup>.

Al-Bāqillānī's treatment of *majāz* fits perfectly well into 4<sup>th</sup> AH/10CE century and it is similar to the treatment of 'Abd al-Jabbār. We can see this in his definition of *majāz* and the three types mentioned by him. There is no mention of *isti'āra* although he mentioned *tashbīh* as a basis for the third type. Nevertheless, al-Bāqillānī's views on *majāz* will be adopted with modification by later writers on *'uṣūl al-fiqh* such as al-Juwaynī and al-Ghazālī among others. Next I will examine al-Bāqillānī's interpretation of anthropomorphic verses in order to find out how his theory of *majāz* influenced his interpretation.

#### 4.1.3 Al-Bāqillānī's treatment of anthropomorphic verses:

Despite al-Bāqillānī's firm belief in the possibility of interpreting everything in the Qur'an including *mutashābih* verses, his treatment of the subject displays two conflicting approaches like those of his master al-Ash'arī himself as we have seen earlier. Indeed his book *Kitāb al-Tamhīd* reflects the first approach of refraining from offering tropical interpretation of anthropomorphic verses while his book *al-Inṣāf* reflects *ta'wīl* approach of offering tropical interpretations.

Regarding his first approach, al-Bāqillānī states that face, the two eyes, the two hands, anger, content, mercy love, and wrath are all attributes of the essence (*ṣifāt al-dhāt*). He argues that God 'affirms to Himself a face and two hands' (*athbata li-nafsihi wajhan wa yadayn*<sup>41</sup>) as it is stated in Q (55:27) وَيَقِفُ وَجْهُ رَبِّكَ "yet still abides the Face of thy Lord" and Q (38:75) *bi-yadayya*. Against those who believe that God is

<sup>39</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, pp. 358-9.

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*, p. 351.

<sup>41</sup> *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, p. 258.

everywhere he categorically states that God is sitting on His throne quoting Q (20:5)... as evidence<sup>42</sup> and in the same book he argues against interpreting *istiwā'* as domination<sup>43</sup> (*istīlā*). On the other hand in his book *al-Inṣāf* he states that God has dominion over his creation<sup>44</sup> (*mustawlin 'alā jamī'i khalqihī*) and quotes the same verse Q (20:5). Regarding the face of God, al-Bāqillānī in *al-Inṣāf* interprets it in Q (55:27) and in Q(28:88) as the essence of God<sup>45</sup>. It seems that al-Bāqillānī has changed his mind regarding these issues, at least with the progress of time; indeed Ibn 'Asākir states<sup>46</sup> that al-Bāqillānī wrote his book *al-Tamhīd* when he was a young scholar, thus what we find in *al-Inṣāf* represents a later development of his thought. Now I will look at his other tropical interpretations of some verses in detail to find out how he used his theory of *majāz* to interpret them.

### Is God in every place?

Against those who believe that God is in every place who quotes Q (43:84)

وَهُوَ الَّذِي فِي السَّمَاءِ إِلَهُهُ وَفِي الْأَرْضِ إِلَهُهُ "And it is He who in heaven is God and in earth is God"

as an argument, al-Bāqillānī argues that what is meant by the verse is that it is Him: God for the people of heaven and people of the earth. As for Q(16:128) إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا "Surely God is with those who are godfearing", this verse does not mean that His essence is with them but it means that God is with them by means of protection, victory and support. The same interpretation goes for Q (20:46). The above interpretations are all based on his second type of *majāz* mentioned above omission-type *majāz*. Furthermore, al-Bāqillānī used his first criterion for distinguishing between *ḥaqīqa* and *majāz* (analogy cannot be based on *majāz*) to argue against saying that God is in Baghdad<sup>47</sup> (*madīnatu al-Salām*).

### Beatific vision

<sup>42</sup> *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, ibid., p. 260.

<sup>43</sup> ibid., p. 262.

<sup>44</sup> *Al-Inṣāf*, ibid., p. 24.

<sup>45</sup> ibid., p. 36.

<sup>46</sup> Ibn 'Asākir, *Tabyīn Kadhib al-Muftarī fī-mā Nusiba ilā al-Imām Abī al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī*, Damascus, 1347/ , pp. 119-120.

<sup>47</sup> *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, p. 261.

It is known that one of the main issues of dispute between the Ash‘arites and the Mu‘tazilites is the issue of beatific vision; whereas the Mu‘tazilites believe that God cannot be seen either in this life or in the hereafter, the Ash‘arites believe that God can be seen by the sight in the hereafter. Each group used *majāz* to support their view. We have already seen how ‘Abd al-Jabbār interpreted Q (75:22-23) to rule out any possibility of beatific vision by using the device of *majāz*, al-Bāqillānī used the same device to argue for the contrary as follows: al-Bāqillānī considered Q (76:22-23) as a *muḥkam* verse and used it as an evidence for the beatific vision and against the Mu‘tazilites, who consider this verse as *mutashābih*, he contended that what is meant by gazing here is gazing of the eyes (*al-naẓaru bi al-baṣar*) and cannot be understood otherwise because gazing is associated with the face, transitive with the proposition *illa* (to) and has only one object<sup>48</sup>. Having established his interpretation of this verse, al-Bāqillānī moves to interpret Q (6:103) which he considers as *mutashābih* contrary to the Mu‘tazilites who considered it as *muḥkam*. He states that Q (6:103) should be understood in the light of the *muḥkam* verses Q (76:22-23) as follows<sup>49</sup> : ‘*lā tudrikuḥu al-absār*’ means here the sights of the disbelievers not the believers<sup>50</sup>. Al-Bāqillānī used here his second type of *majāz* (*Majāz* based on omission) to interpret this verse to harmonise it with his Ash‘arite creed.

#### Wrath and the contentment of God

For the wrath and contentment of God in verses such as Q (4:93) *وَغَضِبَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ* “God will be wrath with him” and also Q (48:18), al-Bāqillānī argues that wrath and contentment can be used to signify the will to harm or to benefit respectively or wrath can be used to signify the aversion and changing temperament and contentment is serenity after the changing of the temperament. As God cannot have a temperament that changes, averts and calms down- because God is unique, eternal, and self-subsistent<sup>51</sup> - therefore His wrath and contentment are *majāzāt*<sup>52</sup> and should be understood to mean His will to punish those whom He is wrathful and reward those

<sup>48</sup> *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, p. 267.

<sup>49</sup> *Al-Inṣāf*, ibid., p. 177.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, p. 27 and also *al-Inṣāf*, ibid., pp. 38-39.

<sup>52</sup> *Al-Taqrīb wa al-Irshād al-Ṣaghīr*, p. 367.



with whom He is content<sup>53</sup>. The same goes for His mercy and love in a sense that they are to be understood as a manifestation of His eternal will<sup>54</sup>.

Two approaches to anthropomorphic verses are manifest in Al-Bāqillānī's writings. It seems that in his early writing he did not attempt to interpret all anthropomorphic verses figuratively and he moved towards a *ta'wīl*-type approach in his late writings. There is also an indication of his endorsement of the principle of the priority of reason over revelation, which is reflected in his interpretation of Q (3:7) and consequently in his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses. His theory of *majāz* fits very well into what we know about *majāz* in the 4<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> century as we have seen in the writings of 'Abd al-Jabbār. His presentation of the phenomenon of *majāz* represents the first fully developed theory of *majāz* by an Ash'arite theologian to have reached us. His tropical interpretation of anthropomorphic verses reflects his understanding and presentation of the theory of *majāz* in the 4<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> century which he effectively utilised to defend his Ash'arite creed against the Mu'tazilite and to refute the interpretation of the *mushabbiha* (anthropomorphists). Al-Bāqillānī's interpretation of anthropomorphic verses reflects an advanced stage in the Ash'arite school in comparison with that of al-Ash'arī. The development of the theory of *majāz* enabled him to offer more detailed interpretation of these verses. Imām al-Ḥaramayn Al-Juwaynī is another important Ash'arite; his treatment of anthropomorphic verses is the subject of the next section in this chapter.

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<sup>53</sup> *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, p. 28

<sup>54</sup> *al-Inṣāf*, pp. 38-39.

## 4.2. Abū al-Ma‘ālī al-Juwaynī<sup>55</sup> (d. 478/1085)

Al-Juwaynī's importance in the Ash‘arite school stems from the fact that ‘he wrote in the intermediate period between the old Ash‘arism and the school which Ibn Khaldūn was to call “modern”’. His writing<sup>56</sup> reflects a substantial Mu‘tazilite influence, especially with regards to his clear endorsement of two Mu‘tazilite doctrines: 1. essentials of creed (existence of God and His attributes) can be only established by reason alone 2. Priority of reason over revelation. Regarding the first doctrine, al-Juwaynī states that

‘Fundamentals of creed are divided to what can be perceived by reason which cannot be permitted to be perceived by revelation, what can be perceived by revelation but cannot be perceived by reason and what can be perceived by both. Regarding what cannot be recognised except by reason, [it is] every foundation in religion that precedes knowing the word of God, the Exalted, and the necessity of it being characterised as true. [This is the case] because the contents of the revelation depend on the word of God, and what comes first in the order of affirmation is the affirmation of the necessity [of the truthfulness] of the word of [God], therefore, it is impossible for [the foundations of religion] to be recognised by the revelation<sup>57</sup>,

. Al-Juwaynī adds that what can be known only through revelation are matters such what is morally good and evil as well as matters related to Islamic law. Regarding what can be known by both reason and revelation; al-Juwaynī gives the beatific vision as an example of this category<sup>58</sup>. As for the second doctrine al-Juwaynī argues ‘When the content of revelation which has reached us [in an authentic way] is in a conflict

<sup>55</sup> Abū ‘l-Ma‘ālī ‘Abd al-Malik, celebrated under his title of Imām al-Ḥaramayn, see Brockelmann and C. Gardet; L. "al- Djuwaynī, Abū l-Ma‘ālī ‘Abd al-Malik, EI 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.

<sup>56</sup> For a comprehensive treatment of al-Juwaynī's theology, see Muhammad Moslem Adel Saflo, *al-Juwaynī's Thought and Methodology with a Translation and Commentary on Luma‘ al-Adillah*, Klaus Schwarz, Berlin, 2000.

<sup>57</sup> Abū al-Ma‘ālī al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-Irshād ilā Qawāṭil‘ al-Adilla fī ‘uṣūl al-I‘tiqād*, edited by Zakariyyā ‘Umayrāt, Beirut, 1995, 144. The original text of al-Juwaynī is: "فأما ما لا يدرك إلا عقلا، فكل قاعدة في الدين تتقدم على العلم بكلام الله تعالى ووجوب اتصافه بكونه صدقا، إذ السمعيات تستند إلى كلام الله تعالى، وما يسبق ثبوته في الترتيب ثبوت الكلام وجوبا، فيستحيل أن يكون مدركه السمع"

Walker mistranslated this crucial paragraph in his translation of *al-Irshād* as follows: ‘As for what cannot be perceived except by reason, all elements of faith depend originally on knowing the word of God, the Exalted, and on the necessity of its having the quality of being true. The evidence supplied by tradition is grounded in the speech of God. Thus, prior to the affirmation of the speech, what one must acknowledge cannot possible be grasped through tradition.’, Paul E. Walker, *A Guide to Conclusive Proofs For the Principles of Belief*, Garnet, 2000, p. 195.

<sup>58</sup> *Al-Irshād*, p. 195.

with the judgement of reason, then it must not be accepted because revelation does not conflict with reason<sup>59</sup>. In other words, what al-Juwaynī is saying is that if the *prima facie* meaning of the scripture is in conflict with the judgement of reason, then one must not accept this apparent meaning because reason has a priority over revelation. In this case the only way forward to harmonize between scripture and reason is to engage in *ta'wīl*. Regarding what is impossible to attribute to God, al-Juwaynī states that ‘anything associated with contingent beings or indicates any sign of imperfection, the Lord is far beyond and removed from such attribution<sup>60</sup>’. However, if the apparent meaning of any verse is in conflict with this view of God, then one must resort to *ta'wīl*.

#### 4.2.1 Interpretation of Q (3:7)

For al-Juwaynī, when the signification and the intended sense of the utterance are known then this utterance is considered *muḥkam*<sup>61</sup>. On the other hand, *al-Mutashābih* is *al-mujmal* which he defines as the ‘utterance which by itself alone does not convey its signification<sup>62</sup>’. As for *ta'wīl* he defines it as ‘is the diversion of the utterance from its apparent meaning to another meaning determined by the interpreter<sup>63</sup>’. This *ta'wīl* is carried out by understanding the *mutshābih* in the light of the *muḥkam*<sup>64</sup>. Al-Juwaynī believes that the reprimand in this verse is directed towards those who seek discord without engaging in *ta'wīl*<sup>65</sup>, therefore the act of *ta'wīl* is a legitimate exercise<sup>66</sup>. Before examining his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses, I will look first at his views on *majāz*.

<sup>59</sup> *Al-Irshād*, p. 145.

<sup>60</sup> Al-Juwaynī, *Luma' al-Adilla fī 'aqā'id Ahl al-Sunna*, (ed.) Fawqīyya Ḥusayn Maḥmūd, 'Ālam al-Kutub, Beirut, 1986, p. 94.

<sup>61</sup> Al-Juwaynī, *al-Burhān fī 'Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, ed. 'Abd al-'Azīm al-Dīb, Qatar, 1399 AH/1978 CE, p. 424.

<sup>62</sup> *Al-Burhān*, vol. 1, p. 501.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 511.

<sup>64</sup> Al-Juwaynī, *al-Shāmil fī 'Uṣūl al-Dīn*, ed. 'Abd Allāh Maḥmūd Muḥammad 'Umar, Beirut, 1999, p. 317.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* p. 317.

<sup>66</sup> Abrahamov claims that al-Juwaynī ‘uses the same verse [Q:3:7] to show that in the Qur'ān there are secrets which people cannot know. These secrets have no connection to the carrying out of religious precepts.’ Binyamin Abrahamov, “The *Bilā Kayfā* Doctrine and Its Foundations in Islamic Theology”, *ARABICA, Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies*, Tome XLII, Fascicule 3 Nov. 1995, p. 368. As a

#### 4.2.2 Al-Juwaynī's theory of *Majāz*:

Al-Juwaynī treats the issue of *majāz* in two of his surviving books<sup>67</sup>; *al-Talkhīṣ fī 'uṣūl al-fiqh*<sup>68</sup> and *al-waraqāt fī 'uṣūl al-fiqh*<sup>69</sup>. In his book *al-Talkhīṣ* which is an abridgment of al-Bāqillānī's book on *'uṣūl al-fiqh*, he did not advance any new thought on the subject. On the other hand, in his book *al-Waraqāt* his treatment was brief and did not go further than al-Bāqillānī in his treatment above apart from adding a new type of *majāz* and calling *majāz al-tashbīḥ* (third type in al-Bāqillānī's treatment) *majāz* based on *isti'āra* (metaphor). The new type introduced by al-Juwaynī is called *majāz* based on transference (*naql*) and as an example of this al-Juwaynī gives the word *ghā'iṭ* (low land) which is used as euphemism for body waste<sup>70</sup>.

#### 4.2.3 Al-Juwaynī's interpretation of anthropomorphic verses:

According to al-Juwaynī, *ta'wīl* consists of two pillars (*arkān al-ta'wīl*): the first, rejecting the prima facie meaning of an utterance (if it is in conflict with the dictates of reason). The second pillar: assigning another signification that is in accord with the dictates of reason<sup>71</sup> (tropical interpretation). In his book *al-Shāmil*, al-Juwaynī accepts as legitimate the position of those who engage in the first pillar of *ta'wīl* and at the same time do not attempt to assign any other signification<sup>72</sup>. However, in his later book *al-Irshād*, he argues against this approach because avoiding the second pillar of *ta'wīl* leads to confusion and illusion, therefore, one must engage in the second pillar of *ta'wīl* and attempt to find other significations for the rejected apparent meaning. These significations have to be in accord with the dictates of reason and *muḥkam*

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matter of fact, al-Juwaynī in this passage is only reporting various opinions regarding Q (3:7) and the opinion mentioned above is one of them and does not represent al-Juwaynī's views about the matter.

<sup>67</sup> Al-Juwaynī did not treat the topic of *majāz* in his most important book of *'Uṣūl al-Fiqh: al-Burhān*, for no obvious reason.

<sup>68</sup> Al-Juwaynī, Abū al-Ma'ālī, *al-Talkhīṣ fī 'Uṣūl al-fiqh*, ed. A. J. Al-Nībālī and S. A. Al-'Umarī, Beirut, 3 vols, 1996.

<sup>69</sup> Al-Juwaynī, Abū al-Ma'ālī, *Matn al-Waraqāt fī 'Uṣūl al-fiqh*, Dār al-Aṣma'ī, Saudi Arabia, 1996.

<sup>70</sup> *Al-Waraqāt*, p. 9.

<sup>71</sup> *Al-Shāmil*, p. 288 and *al-Irshād*, p. 22.

<sup>72</sup> *Al-Shāmil*, p. 288, 316.

verses<sup>73</sup>. In the following, I will examine his interpretation of selected anthropomorphic verses.

#### God is Light Q(24:35)

اللَّهُ نُورُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ

“God is the Light of the heavens and the earth”

Al-Juwaynī contends that accepting the *prima facie* meaning of this verse as the intended one contradicts the belief of all Muslims who do not consider the light of heaven and earth as the worshiped God<sup>74</sup>. He adds that there are two different interpretations mentioned by the exegetes of the Qur’ān; the first one is to interpret *Allāhu nūru al-samāwāt* as God is the one who ‘illuminates them and the creator of their lights’<sup>75</sup>. The other interpretation is that ‘God is the One who guides the people of the heavens and the earth’. Al-Juwaynī supports this interpretation by saying that ‘the context of this verse indicates the previous interpretation because the following phrase is mentioned in the verse *yahdī Allāhu li- nūrihi man yashā*’ and here light is coupled with guidance. [Furthermore], this is what is meant by His saying Q (42: 52) جَعَلْنَاهُ نُورًا نَهْدِي بِهِ مَنْ نَشَاءُ “We made it a light, whereby We guide whom We will “ Al-Juwaynī adds that what explains what we said is that the verse from its beginning to its end indicates that it should not be treated like other separate independent phrases whose apparent meanings [are rejected], this is the established approach to parables<sup>76</sup>. What al-Juwaynī is saying here is that parable-type verses should be understood as a whole not as separate entities. Furthermore, the scholars agreed that what is intended by parables is something other than their *prima facie* meanings<sup>77</sup>.

Al-Juwaynī states that there is no third interpretation to this verse and anyone who seeks such an interpretation will be in error. On the other hand, those who interpret *nūru al-samāwāt* by adding people ( the people of heaven) as a farfetched interpretation is far from the truth. This is because the second member of the construct state (*muḍāf*

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<sup>73</sup> *Al-Irshād*, p. 22.

<sup>74</sup> *Al-Shāmil*, p. 310.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 311.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

*ilayhi*) can replace the first member (*al-muḍāf*) if there is an indicator refers to it (the first member) in the discourse such<sup>78</sup> as Q (12:82). Here in this example al-Juwaynī used the first category of his classification of *majāz* to justify the second interpretation at the same time he did not argue about the *isti‘āra* (metaphor) light= guidance. One can observe also that he did not use the word *majāz* in his interpretation.

### God in Heaven

Q (67:16) أَلَمْ تَرَ مَنْ فِي السَّمَاءِ “Do you feel secure that He who is in heaven”

Al-Juwaynī gives two interpretations to this verse. The verse could be understood to refer<sup>79</sup> ‘to His rule, command and power’. Or the phrase “*man fī al-samā’*” could refer to an angel in charge of chastisement or could refer to Jibrīl<sup>80</sup>.

Having said that, it should be noted that al-Juwaynī in his last book on *Kalām* (*al-‘Aqīda al-Nizāmiyya*) changed his mind on the legitimacy of detailed interpretation of anthropomorphic verses and opted for the *tafwīḍ*<sup>81</sup>-type approach. He states that one should follow the way taken by the *salaf* with regard to these verses; which is to not attempt any interpretation, at the same time believing that God is far beyond the attributes of the contingent beings<sup>82</sup>. As for these verses, one should suspend his judgement by ‘delegating their meanings to the Lord; the Exalted<sup>83</sup>’ (*tafwīḍu ma‘ānīhā ilā al-rabbi ta‘ālā*).

al-Juwaynī’s books (*al-Shāmil* and *al-Irshād*) reflect Mu‘tazili influence more than what we have seen in al-Bāqillānī’s writing. This is clear in his endorsement of the doctrine of the priority of reason over revelation. This doctrine had a great impact on

<sup>78</sup> *Al-Shāmil*, p. 311.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid* p. 319.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, p. 319.

<sup>81</sup> What we see here with al-Juwaynī is a shift from *bilā kayf* to *tafwīḍ* within the Ash‘arite school. It seems that al-Juwaynī is the first person to use the word *tafwīḍ* in the context of anthropomorphic verses and after him the word is used to refer to those who delegate the meaning of these verses to God as we have seen in the introduction of this work. This is reflected in al-Shahrastānī’s presentation of the justification given by the adherents of *tafwīḍ* for not practicing *ta’wīl* as follows: as the outcome of *ta’wīl* is of a probable validity and when it comes to the issue of Divine attributes; probable knowledge is not permissible, therefore the safest way is to adopt *tafwīḍ*-approach. Al-Shahrastānī, *Milāl*, *ibid.*, pp. 119-120.

<sup>82</sup> Al-Juwaynī, *al-‘Aqīda al-Nizāmiyya*, (ed.) Muḥammad al-Zubaydī, Beirut, 2003, p. 165-66.

<sup>83</sup> *Al-‘Aqīda al-Nizāmiyya*, p. 165.

his views on *ta'wīl* and consequently on his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses. His theory of *majāz* did not differ much from that of al-Bāqillānī apart from minor points and it seems that the development of the theory of *majāz* in his lifetime did not have any impact on his views on *majāz*. In his book *al-Shāmil* he accepts the legitimacy of not engaging in *ta'wīl* while in *al-Irshād* he argued against it. His interpretation of anthropomorphic verses is more elaborate than al-Bāqillānī's. Al-Juwaynī offers more than one way of interpreting these verses and engages in subtle justifications of these interpretations. Finally, it should be noted that he opted for a *tafwīḍ*-type approach to anthropomorphic verses in his last book al-'Aqīda al-Nizāmiyya. By the time we reach what is called by Ibn Khaldūn 'the moderns', the theory of *majāz* has been developed and matured in the writing of 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī and al-Zamakhsharī. What are the effects of these developments on later Ash'arites' interpretation of anthropomorphic verses? To answer this question I will examine in the next section the writing of al-Rāzī.

### 4.3 Al-Rāzī<sup>84</sup> (543/1149/606/1209)

Al-Rāzī's writings represent the mature development of the Ash'arite theology when it is fused with philosophy<sup>85</sup>. Furthermore, Al-Rāzī is important for the topic of this thesis because he contributed to the development of the *majāz* theory as we have seen in chapter one and wrote a very important study on the issue of anthropomorphism in the Qur'ān where he was the first to offer a comprehensive theological and hermeneutical treatment to the issue of anthropomorphism in the Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth*. In what follows I will first outline al-Rāzī's theological justification of his Qur'ānic hermeneutics. This will be followed by an examination of his interpretation of Q (3:7) and his hermeneutics and finally I will examine his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses. His views on *majāz* are already analysed in chapter 1, therefore they will not be covered here.

#### 4.3.1 Theological justifications:

Al-Rāzī like many others in his school accepted the Mu'tazilite doctrine of the priority of reason over revelation. He states that if there are certain rational proofs that indicate positive knowledge about something and the same time the *prima facie* meaning of revelation contradicts these proofs then we have four options. First, believing in the validity of both reason and revelation, which is impossible. Second, rejecting both reason and revelation which is also impossible because it leads to the negation of two contradictory statements at the same time. Third, accepting the validity of reason and rejecting the validity of revelation, which is not acceptable. Fourth, believing in the validity of revelation and rejecting the validity of reason but this will lead to casting doubt over the validity of revelation itself as this validity is only known through reason<sup>86</sup>. Therefore this option is not acceptable. Al-Rāzī put forward another solution, which is to accept the certain dictates of reason and at the

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<sup>84</sup> He was a philosopher, theologian and commentator on the Qur'ān. He wrote large number of books on these disciplines. His commentary on the Qur'ān entitled "*Maḥāṣin al-ghayb* or *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*" is one of his most important works; where al-Rāzī put all of his knowledge and skills, see Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī by G.C. Anawati in EI 2<sup>nd</sup> edition.

<sup>85</sup> See Ayman Shihadeh, (2005) 'From al-Ghazālī to al-Rāzī: 6th/12th Century Developments in Muslim Philosophical Theology', *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, 15 (1). pp. 141-179

<sup>86</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Asās al-Taqdīs*, ed. Aḥmad Ḥijāzī al-Saqqa, Cairo, 1986, p. 220.



same time to categorically assert that the *prima facie* meaning of the revelation is not intended. In this case we have two options: either employing *ta'wīl* to harmonize the two or suspending our judgement and delegating the matter to God<sup>87</sup>. Al-Rāzī calls this procedure *al-qānūn al-kullī* (the comprehensive law) and indeed this law is the cornerstone of his hermeneutics.

#### 4.3.2 Al-Rāzī's Qur'ānic hermeneutics

Al-Rāzī's Qur'ānic hermeneutics is based on his interpretation on Q (3:7) like other authors. Al-Rāzī offers first lexical explanations of the terms *muḥkam* and *mutashābih* then he elaborates his hermeneutical theory. Lexically the root of the word *muḥkam* has the sense of to curb and to restrain and from this root the word *al-ḥākim* (the sovereign) is the one who restrains the transgressor. On the other hand, *mutashābih* is used when one thing resembles another or looking alike so one cannot distinguish between them<sup>88</sup>.

According to al-Rāzī *al-Muḥkam* covers two categories<sup>89</sup> of utterances *al-naṣṣ* (self-evident utterance) and *al-zāhir* (obvious utterance); whereas *al-naṣṣ* type is an utterance which is capable of yielding only one sense and *al-zāhir* is an utterance which is capable of yielding two senses one of which is *rājiḥ* (preponderant). On the other hand *mutashābih* covers two categories<sup>90</sup>: *mujmal* (broad utterance) and *mu'awwal* (reverted utterance); the *mujmal*<sup>91</sup> is an utterance which is capable of yielding two senses neither of which is more plausible than the other and the *mu'awwal* is an utterance that yields two senses and one of them is outweighed (*marjūh*) due to the existence of an indicator<sup>92</sup>.

One could ask, given the above definitions of *muḥkam* and *mutashābih*, how do we know whether a particular verse is *muḥkam* or *mutashābih*? Al-Rāzī recognises the seriousness of the matter because every theological school claims that the verses which are in accord with their doctrine to be *muḥkam* and the verses of their opponents to be

<sup>87</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Asās al-Taqdīs*, pp.220-1.

<sup>88</sup> *ibid.*, p.231

<sup>89</sup> *ibid.*, p. 232.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> Al-Rāzī, *al-Kāshif 'an 'Uṣūl al-Dalā'il wa Fuṣūl al-'Ilal*, ed. Aḥmad Hijāzī al-Saqqa, Beirut, 1992, p. 35 and see also al-Rāzī, *al-Maḥṣūl fī 'Uṣūl al-fiqh*, vol. 1, pp. 229-31.

<sup>92</sup> Al-Isfahānī, *al-Kāshif 'an al-Maḥṣūl*, pp. 50-51

*mutashābih*. For example ‘the Mu‘tazilite says that His Q (18:29) *فَمَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُؤْمِنْ وَمَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُكْفُرْ* “so let whosoever will believe, and let whosoever will disbelieve” is *muḥkam* and His saying that Q (76:30) *وَمَا تَشَاءُونَ إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ* “. But you will not unless God wills” to be *mutashābih*. [on the other hand] the Sunnite reverse the assertion<sup>93</sup>. Therefore, al-Rāzī contends, there must be a canon that can adjudicate the matter and it is as follows: when an utterance signifies two meanings and one of them is preponderant (*rājih*) and the other is outweighed (*marjūh*) and if the preponderant meaning is identified as the intended meaning then this utterance is *muḥkam* and when the outweighed meaning is identified as the intended meaning then the utterance is *mutashābih*<sup>94</sup>. Furthermore, ‘when the utterance of a verse or a report has a prima facie meaning<sup>95</sup> (*ẓāhir fī ma‘nā*)’ and if this meaning is deemed to be unacceptable ‘then it is permissible for us to discard this apparent meaning [provided we have] a separate indicator; otherwise the discourse will cease to be meaningful and the Qur’ān will cease to be a proof. This separate indicator can be either textual (*lafẓī*) or based on reason<sup>96</sup> (*‘aqlī*)’. Al-Rāzī asserts that for an indicator to be accepted; it must be certain. As for textual indicators, he argues that they are not certain; rather they are probable and therefore they cannot be used as evidence<sup>97</sup>. Thus, only an indicator that is based on reason can be used as evidence and al-Rāzī concludes that ‘diversion (*ṣarf*) of the utterance from its prima facie meaning to its outweighed meaning (*marjūh*) is not permissible unless it can be established with a decisive indicator that the prima facie meaning is impossible. In this case the one who possesses a legal capacity (*mukallaḥ*) must categorically deny that what God intended by this utterance is not its prima facie meaning. Then at this stage: those who believe in the permissibility of *ta’wīl*<sup>98</sup> will employ it and those who don’t believe in its permissibility will suspend

<sup>93</sup> *Asās al-Taqdīs*, p. 234.

<sup>94</sup> Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 7, p. 182.

<sup>95</sup> The term *ẓāhir* is applied by the jurists both to utterances and meanings and here in this quotation al-Rāzī employed it to refer to meaning not an expression. For more details about the differences between the two usages see Bernard G. Weiss, *The search for God’s Law: Islamic Jurisprudence in the Writings of Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī*, Salt Lake City, 1992, 470-477.

<sup>96</sup> *Asās al-Taqdīs*, p. 234

<sup>97</sup> Al-Rāzī argues that textual indicators do not yield certain knowledge because they depend on the transmission of lexical knowledge and other various aspects of language (such as grammar, conjugation, etc..) and all of these transmissions are of the solitary report-type (*khābar al-wāḥid*). However, *khābar al-wāḥid* can only yield probable knowledge, therefore knowledge attained by means of textual indicators is probable not certain. *Asās al-Taqdīs*, pp. 234-5.

<sup>98</sup> *Ta’wīl* means here: diversion (*ṣarf*) of the utterance from its prima facie meaning to its outweighed meaning (*marjūh*)

their judgment and delegate the matter to God the most High<sup>99</sup>. Al-Rāzī summarises his views regarding *muḥkam* and *mutashābih* as follows: The *muḥkam*-type are those verses where their prima facie meaning is corroborated by indicators based on reason. The *mutashābih*-type has two categories: The first comprises those verses about which the reason indicates that their prima facie meanings are not intended by God, the second category are those verses where there are no certain indications to determine their meanings, unlike the other two categories<sup>100</sup>.

As we have seen above, al-Rāzī identifies two legitimate approaches to anthropomorphic verses in the Qur’ān. Those who follow the first approach categorically deny that the *prima facie* meaning is intended in these verses; then they engage in the process of *ta’wīl* and give detailed interpretations to anthropomorphic verses. Those who take this route are called *mu’awwila*. Those who follow the second approach also deny that the *prima facie* meaning is intended but instead of engaging in the process of *ta’wīl* they suspend their judgement and delegate the matter (*yufawwiḍūna*) to God and they are called *mufawwiḍa*. Al-Rāzī called the second approach *madhhab ahl al-salaf* (the way of the ancestors) and indicated his preference for this approach. The adherents of this approach justify their position by using three arguments. First: the obligatory pausing in Q (3:7) after *wa mā ya’lamu Ta’wīlahu illā Allāh*. Second: the probable outcome of the detailed interpretations. Third the companions and their successors did not engage in detailed interpretations<sup>101</sup>.

Al-Rāzī framed his discussion on *muḥkam* and *mutashābih* within the issue of validity of interpretations. He argues with regard to the category of *mutashābih* (*mujmal* and *mu’awwal*) as identified above that when the *mu’awwal* (reverted utterance) has one veridical meaning (*ḥaqīqī*) and the indicator shows that this meaning is not intended then one should divert the utterance from the veridical meaning to a tropical one (*majāzī*). When this tropical meaning is unique then there is no alternative but to accept it, otherwise the reason will be divested. On the other hand, when we have more than one tropical meaning we have to establish which meaning is the intended one, and this can only be done by relying on textual indicators. Al-Rāzī argues that these

<sup>99</sup> *Asās al-Taqdīs*, p. 235.

<sup>100</sup> *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 7, p. 189.

<sup>101</sup> *Asās al-Taqdīs*, 236-239.

textual indicators can only yield probable knowledge not certainty, and when it comes to issues related to the Divine matters only certain indicators are allowed. Therefore, one should refrain from engaging in detailed interpretations<sup>102</sup>.

Al-Rāzī contends that the theologians who engage in detailed interpretations assert that everything in the Qur’ān can be understood, otherwise the Qur’ān will be incongruous<sup>103</sup>, therefore, *mutashābih* verses must be interpreted<sup>104</sup>. Although al-Rāzī indicated his preference to *tafwīd* position, he nevertheless offers detailed interpretation of anthropomorphic verses in the Qur’ān.

#### 4.3.3 Detailed interpretation of anthropomorphic verses

Al-Rāzī argues that both the dictate of reason<sup>105</sup> and evidence based on revelation<sup>106</sup> indicate that God is far beyond corporality, locality and direction. He also argues that all schools of thought in Islam believe in the necessity of *ta’wīl* of some verses in the Qur’ān especially when it comes to anthropomorphic verses<sup>107</sup> ‘the theologians say that as it is proven that God is far beyond corporality, locality and direction therefore we must find a valid interpretation to these anthropomorphic expressions in the Qur’ān<sup>108</sup>’. In what follows I will examine al-Rāzī’s interpretation of some anthropomorphic verses.

##### Eye(s) of God Q (20:39) and Q (11:37)

In his treatment<sup>109</sup> of *al-isti’āra al-makniyya* (metaphor by way of allusion), al-Rāzī states ‘that the majority of the verses that are used by the anthropomorphists are of this type such as His saying Q (20:39) and Q (11:37)’. In other words al-Rāzī asserts

<sup>102</sup> *Asās al-Taqdīs*, p. 240 and *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, ibid., p. 183.

<sup>103</sup> ibid., p. 227.

<sup>104</sup> ibid., p. 240.

<sup>105</sup> ibid., pp. 15-29, 48-78.

<sup>106</sup> ibid., pp. 30-47. It is interesting to note that the first *muhkam* verse used by al-Razi as an evidence against corporality, locality and direction is Q 112 while Q (42:11) comes second.

<sup>107</sup> *Asās al-Taqdīs*, p. 105.

<sup>108</sup> ibid., p. 109.

<sup>109</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Nihāyat al-Ījāz fī Dirāyat al-I’jāz*, pp. 256-57.

that employing this type of *majāz* (*isti'āra makniyya*) to interpret anthropomorphic verses is the right way to avoid falling in the trap of anthropomorphism<sup>110</sup>.

Regarding the eye(s) Q (20:39) and Q (11:37) al-Rāzī contends that *'ayn* and *a'yun* should be understood as referring to intensity of caring and guarding. What makes this type of *majāz* beautiful is that 'when someone greatly cares about something, inclines towards it and desires it, [all of these] make the person gaze at it a lot. Therefore the vocable *'ayn* (an eye)-which is the instrument of gazing- is employed as an allusion for the intensity of care<sup>111</sup>. Al-Rāzī here did not attempt to explain the trope behind the verse as he referred to it in his *book Nihāyat al-Ījāz*

### Meeting God

Such as Q (2:46) and Q (32:10) and Q (18:110)

Al-Rāzī argues that as it has been proven that God is not corporal then meeting God must be interpreted in one of these two ways<sup>112</sup>:

1. When one meets a human being; this meeting involves perception and gazing, therefore what is meant by meeting is gazing. This type of *majāz* is a kind of using the cause to refer to the caused thing<sup>113</sup> (this type of *majāz* is classified as *majāz mursal* by later scholars of *balāgha*). This interpretation is only valid for those who believe that God can be seen in the hereafter, such as the Ash'arites like al-Rāzī himself.
2. When someone meets a king, he will be under his rule and dominance in a way that such a person has no means to avoid it. Therefore, this meeting is a cause for the manifestation of the power of the king. In the same way, because the power, dominance and strength of God will be manifest in the day of Judgement, the word meeting is used to express this state of affairs<sup>114</sup>. In this interpretation the same type of *majāz* is used (*majāz mursal*) but with a

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<sup>110</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Nihāyat al-Ījāz*, ibid., p. 257.

<sup>111</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Asās al-Taqdīs*, p. 158.

<sup>112</sup> ibid., p. 127

<sup>113</sup> ibid.

<sup>114</sup> ibid., pp. 127-28.

different way of interpreting it. Those who deny the possibility of beatific vision will not find this interpretation a valid one.

### Coming of God Such as Q (89:22)

Al-Rāzī argues that there are two ways of approaching this verse:

I. The verse can be understood by using *majāz* based on ellipsis of *muḍāf* (the first name in the construct state) and in this way we have three interpretations:

1. The command of your Lord came with accounting, rewarding and punishing.
2. The overpowering of your Lord came like the saying the dominant king came where in fact his army came
3. The manifestation of knowledge of God came necessarily in that day (the day of judgement).

II. In this way *majāz* based on ellipsis is not used and we have two interpretations:

1. What is intended from this verse is to hold fast to the belief in the manifestation of the signs of God and the secret of effects of His power, dominance and authority in the day of judgement. More specifically what is intended by this verse is representing analogically (*tamthīl*) that state (manifestation of the signs of God) as the state of the king when he arrives, since the arrival of the king manifests awe and power which cannot be manifest with the arrival of all of his army<sup>115</sup>.
2. As one of meaning of *rabb* is *murabī*, so it could be that a great angel was nurturing the prophet and this is what is intended by the verse<sup>116</sup>.

Comparing al-Rāzī's interpretation of the above two verses with the interpretations of his Ash'arite predecessors reveals an increase of sophistication and complexity of

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<sup>115</sup> *Asās al-Taqdīs*, ibid., p. 141-142.

<sup>116</sup> ibid., p. 143.

the interpretation of anthropomorphic verses due to two factors. First: the development of *majāz* theory in which al-Rāzī played a significant role. Second: the increased sophistication of Qur’ānic hermeneutics which in turn depended on the development of *‘ilm al-Kalām* and *‘uṣūl al-fiqh*.

#### Setting on the Throne Q (7:54)

إِنَّ رَبَّكُمُ اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ ثُمَّ اسْتَوَى عَلَى الْعَرْشِ

Surely your Lord is God, who created the heavens and the earth in six days -- then sat Himself upon the Throne

Al-Rāzī states that there are two opinions regarding this verse; the first is to state categorically that God transcends any locality or direction and then not to offer any detailed interpretation and (*nufawwiḍu*) delegate its interpretation to God<sup>117</sup>. The second opinion is to offer a detailed interpretation; here al-Rāzī quotes al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī’s interpretation with approval as one possible way to interpret the verse. al-Qaffāl states

‘ al-‘Arsh (the throne) in their speech (the Arabs) is the seat of kings then the seat is made to stand for reign by way of *kināya*, it is said[in reference to a king] *zāla ‘arshuhu* (his throne was destroyed) which means his reign was destroyed and degenerated. When a king is in full command and control of his reign; [the Arabs say] *istawā ‘alā ‘arshihi* (he sat on his throne) or he rested on the seat of his reign<sup>118</sup>.

Al-Rāzī comments on this by saying

‘what he said is true, right and correct which is like what [the Arabs] say for the man of a tall stature that he has long suspensory cords or springs to his sword (*tawīlu al-nijād*). ..what is intended by these utterances is not their apparent meanings, rather what is intended by them is to indicate what is meant by way of *kināya* so in the same manner setting on the Throne is mentioned here and what is meant is the execution of his authority and the fulfillment of His will<sup>119</sup>.

Then al-Rāzī presents another quotation from al-Qaffāl, saying that the validity of the above interpretation depends on the negation of any comparison between God and man<sup>120</sup>. Al-Rāzī does not mention here the difficulties associated of using *kināya* to

<sup>117</sup> *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 14, p. 121.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid*

interpret this verse because as we have seen in chapter one an utterance is called *kināya* when it is used to indicate an implied meaning with the possibility of indicating the proper meaning. In fact al-Rāzī himself accepts this definition of *kināya* in his book on *balāgha*<sup>121</sup>.

Another interpretation of this verse according to al-Rāzī is to interpret *istawā* (he sat) as *istawfā* (he seized) and he elaborated on this in his commentary on

Q (20:5) الرَّحْمَنُ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ اسْتَوَى

“the All-compassionate sat Himself upon the Throne”

al-Rāzī argues for the validity of this interpretation (*istawā* as *istawfā*) then he quotes al-Zamakhsharī’s interpretation<sup>122</sup> of this verse which I examined above. After the quotation, al-Rāzī asserts that

‘I say that if we open this door, then we should open the door for the interpretations of the *Bāṭiniyya* (Ismā‘īlīs) because they say that what is intended from His saying Q (20:12) أَنَا رَبُّكَ فَأَخْلَعْ نَعْلَيْكَ إِنَّكَ بِالْوَادِي الْمُقَدَّسِ طَوَى “Moses, I am thy Lord; put off thy shoes; thou art in the holy valley, Towa” is to be absorbed in the service of God the most high without any action. Also what is intended from His saying

Q (21:69) قُلْنَا يَا نَارُ كُونِي بَرْدًا وَسَلَامًا عَلَى إِبْرَاهِيمَ “We said, 'O fire, be coolness and safety for Abraham!’

is to liberate Abraham from the hand of the aggressor without believing in the existence of fire or an address [to the fire]. The same goes for every verse of the Qur’ān. The canon [of interpretation] is that every utterance in the Qur’ān should be understood in its primary meaning unless there is a certain rational indicator that [this primary meaning] is not intended. I wish that any person who does not know about something should refrain from engaging in such a thing (*layta man lam ya’rif shay’an lam yakhud fī-hi*)<sup>123</sup>,

Al-Rāzī’s criticism of al-Zamakhsharī is unwarranted because what al-Zamakhsharī has done, by interpreting the phrase as a *kināya* and then negating its primary meaning by considering it as *majāz* based on *kināya* when applied to God because it leads to assimilating God to His creatures, is similar to what al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī has done, although in a different manner. As we have seen, al-Rāzī approved the interpretation of al-Qaffāl and disapproved that of al-Zamakhsharī by accusing him of being ignorant at best.

<sup>121</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Nihāyat al-Ījāz*, ibid., p. 270.

<sup>122</sup> *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 22, p. 7.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid*



### Interpreting Q (39:67)

“They measure not God with His true measure. The earth altogether shall be His handful on the Day of Resurrection, and the heavens shall be rolled up in His right hand. Glory be to Him! High be He exalted above that they associate!”

In his interpretation of Q (39:67), al-Rāzī quotes a substantial part of al-Zamakhsharī’s interpretation of this verse discussed in my section on al-Zamakhsharī above. Then al-Rāzī presents his criticism in a twofold argument<sup>124</sup>:

First:

‘we say to him [al-Zamakhsharī] do you accept that in the first instance the discourse should be interpreted according to its primary meaning and we only resort to *majāz* when it is absurd to understand it according to its primary sense. If he denies this principle then the Qur’ān will cease to be a proof at all. In this case everyone can say that what is intended from this verse is such and such and I understand the verse to mean that meaning without taking the prima facie meanings into considerations. The following is an illustration of this approach: interpreting Qur’ānic verses that refer to the reward of the people of paradise and punishment of the people of hell as only indicating the happiness of the God-fearing people and the misery of the wrong doers....without confirming the reality of eating, drinking and other bodily states<sup>125</sup>. Or when someone interprets the verses which affirm the obligatory prayer as an obligation to lighten the heart with the invocation of the name of God ...without performing the required acts of the prayer...In these cases the Qur’ān will cease to be a proof (*ḥujja*) in the matter of creed and law and this is null and void<sup>126</sup>’.

In this argument, Al-Rāzī is hinting that the interpretation of al-Zamakhsharī of this verse using *takhyīl* can be compared to esoteric interpretations of the Qur’ān that ignore the prima facie meaning of the Qur’ān without evidence, hence the Qur’ān will cease to become a proof. As a matter of fact, al-Zamakhsharī as we have seen earlier only resorts to tropical interpretations when the prima facie meaning of the text contradicts the dictates of reason. Furthermore, al-Zamakhsharī’s use of *takhyīl* to interpret this verse and others is supported by various textual quotations and arguments, as we have seen earlier in our treatment of *takhyīl*. But it seems that al-Rāzī here has chosen not to mention these textual evidences to give the impression

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<sup>124</sup> *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 27, pp. 15-16.

<sup>125</sup> al-Rāzī here might be referring to the Muslim philosophers who denied bodily resurrection such as al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā.

<sup>126</sup> *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 27, p. 16.

that al-Zamakhsharī's interpretation is based on his mere opinion and has no evidence to support it.

Second:

'If [al-Zamakhsharī] accepts that in the first instance when one interprets the Qur'ān, the discourse should be interpreted according to its primary meaning (*al-ḥaqīqī*) and only if there is a separate indicator showing the absurdity of interpreting it according to its primary meaning then we should interpret it figuratively. If there are multiple tropical interpretations then you should refrain from accepting any single interpretation without evidence. Then we say here that the primary meanings (*ḥaqīqa*) of the vocables *qabḍa* (handful) and *yamīn* (right hand) indicate the known limbs and you cannot divert the apparent meaning of the discourse from its primary meaning unless you prove that the prima facie meaning is absurd and then you can interpret [the discourse] figuratively. Then you should demonstrate with evidence that a specific tropical meaning is intended and to show further that this specific meaning is more appropriate than other meanings. If these foundations in the previous order are established this will be the true method [of interpretation] which is used by learned scholars. In this regard, you did not bring any new method or unusual ideas; rather it is exactly what is mentioned by the learned scholars. Then it is established that the joy shown by him [al-Zamakhsharī] that he was guided to the method unknown to anybody else is [in fact] a false method which indicates his inadequate understanding and knowledge (*dāllun 'ala qillati wuqūfihi 'alā al-ma'anī*)<sup>127</sup>.

In this second argument, al-Rāzī contends that there is only one true method to interpret anthropomorphic verses which is laid down by learned scholars, and it is not invented by al-Zamakhsharī. On the contrary, the method followed by al-Zamakhsharī is declared to be a false one because it does not conform to the correct method of the learned scholars.

Al-Rāzī then presents the interpretation of this verse according to the right way (*al-ṭarīq al-ḥaqīqī*) as follows: 'there is no doubt that the vocables (*qabḍa*) and (*yamīn*) indicate limbs but because rational indicators point to the impossibility of God the most high having limbs then these vocables should be interpreted figuratively (*'alā wujūhi al-majāz*)<sup>128</sup>. Then he interprets *qabḍa* to mean dominion or control and interprets *yamīn* to mean power. He adds that 'one should interpret these vocables figuratively in order to safeguard the texts of the revelations from being empty of any signification (*ṣawnan li-hādhihi al-nuṣūṣi mina al-ta'fīl*) and this is the right discourse in this matter<sup>129</sup>. Al-Rāzī adds that al-Zamakhsharī considers the previous interpretations as unsound and believes that interpreting them by using *tamthīl*

<sup>127</sup> *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 27, p. 16.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid*, p. 17.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid*.

(analogy) is a more appropriate method<sup>130</sup>. Then al-Rāzī scornfully criticised al-Zamakhsharī, saying ‘I say that manner of this man is very strange in rendering his method good and the method of the ancients bad one then al-Rāzī summarises his previous two arguments wondering ‘where is the discourse which he claims to have known? Where is the knowledge which no one else knew but him? Albeit his interpretations are far-fetched and his views are unsound<sup>131</sup>. Al-Rāzī reiterates his preference for the method of *al-Salaf* which is *al-tafwīḍ* and adds that ‘it has been established that the interpretations of this man are devoid of any benefit in the first place. And God knows best<sup>132</sup>’.

Al-Rāzī believes that al-Zamakhsharī’s method of interpreting anthropomorphic verses by using *takhyīl* does not come under any of the two legitimate methods of approaching the text of the Qur’ān, namely: the method of the *Salaf* which is *tafwīḍ* and the method of the learned scholars who believe that one resorts to *majāz* only when there is an independent indicator which warrants it. Al-Rāzī considers al-Zamakhsharī’s interpretation as tantamount to the esoteric interpretations of the Ismā‘īlīs and the philosophers who have no regard to the prima facie meaning of the text of the Qur’ān. This could explain al-Rāzī’s negative attitude to *takhyīl* which deserves a closer look because of its lasting effect on Arabic rhetoric and Qur’ānic exegesis.

#### *Al-Takhyīl* and al-Rāzī

In his book *Nihāyat al-Ījāz fī Dirāyat al-I’jāz*, al-Rāzī did not use the term *takhyīl* to refer to the category of imagery as used by al-Zamakhsharī. Instead he used the term *īhām*<sup>133</sup> (making somebody imagine) and as an illustration of this figure he quotes Q (39:67) which was interpreted by al-Zamakhsharī as an instance of *takhyīl* as we have seen earlier. Al-Rāzī gives the following definition to *īhām* ‘when a vocable has two

<sup>130</sup> *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 27, p. 17.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 16-18.

<sup>132</sup> *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 27, p. 17.

<sup>133</sup> Literally *īhām* means making vague and as a term it is used interchangeably with another well known rhetorical term *tawriya* (double entendre) by some authors. *Tawriya* is based on *ishtirāk*, homonymy, the figure depends on the "nearer" meaning (*ma‘nā Qarīb*) of a noun, adjective, or a verbal form "hiding" (*warra*) the "farther" meaning (*ma‘nā ba‘īd*) intended by the poet, S.A. Bonebakker, *Tawriya* in EI 2<sup>nd</sup>.

significations; one is nearer (*qarīb*) and the other is farther/unusual (*baʿīd/gharīb*<sup>134</sup>), in the first instance the recipient's understanding of the vocable will be directed towards the nearer signification but what is intended in the further one. This figure is beautiful only if the intention is the depiction of the further signification by the nearer one. The majority of *mutashābihāt* verses are of this type, such as His saying<sup>135</sup>, Q (39:67).

Before examining his definition of *ihām*, it is worth mentioning the definition of the same term by a near contemporary of al-Rāzī: Ibn al-Waṭwāṭ (578/1182) who wrote a well known book on Badī' *Ḥadā'iq al-siḥr fī daqā'iq al-shi'r* in Persian. The editor of al-Rāzī's book *Nihāyat al-Ījāz* shows the extent of al-Rāzī dependence on al-Waṭwāṭ's book, even though al-Rāzī did not mention his dependence on him<sup>136</sup>.

Al-Waṭwāṭ gives the following definition of *ihām*:

‘*ihām* lexically has the sense of *takhyīl* and therefore this device is called also *takhyīl*. [This device works] when a writer or a poet employs, in his writing (prose or poetry), vocables that have two significations, one nearer (*qarīb*) and the other stranger (*gharīb*). When the recipient hears the vocable, his understanding will be directed towards the nearer signification but what is intended is the stranger signification<sup>137</sup>’.

Comparing the two definitions shows that al-Rāzī omits mentioning the word *takhyīl* from his definition, on the other hand he used the word depiction (*taṣwīr*) which is used by al-Zamakhsharī with regard to *takhyīl* and he also quotes Q (39:67) as an illustration of this figure. Al-Waṭwāṭ did not mention the word depiction nor did he use any Qur'ānic verse to illustrate this figure. al-Rāzī's paragraph on *ihām* can be divided into two sections; the first one fits into what is later called *tawriya* while the second part (when he starts explaining why this figure is beautiful) fits well into al-Zamakhsharī's view of *takhyīl*. The question one could ask why did al-Rāzī mix the two figures together? Bonebakker attempts to explain this “confusion” between *takhyīl* and *tawriya* (*ihām*) by proposing that ‘some scholar who was not acquainted with Zamakhshari's special terminology mistook this discussion of the *takhyīl* for a discussion of the *tawriya*’ and the Qur'ānic verse quoted by al-Rāzī in his definition of

<sup>134</sup> In the printed book the word *baʿīd* is used while in the footnote the editor indicates that the word *gharīb* is used in all the manuscripts of the book apart from one.

<sup>135</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Nihāyat al-Ījāz*, ibid., p. 291.

<sup>136</sup> ibid., pp.63-66.

<sup>137</sup> Ibn al-Waṭwāṭ, Rashīd al-Dīn Muḥammad al-ʿImrī, *Ḥadā'iq al-Siḥr fī Daqā'iq al-Shi'r*, (tr.) Ibrāhīm Amīn al-Shawāribī, Cairo, 2004, p. 135.

*ihām* Q (39:67) goes back to this source<sup>138</sup>. Bonebakker did not consider the possibility that al-Rāzī could have used al-Waṭwāṭ's book as one of his sources. If we assume this to be the case (as the editor of al-Rāzī's book believes) then the source of this apparent "confusion" can be attributed to both al-Waṭwāṭ and al-Rāzī.

Al-Waṭwāṭ identifies *ihām* (*tawriya*) with *takhyīl* and this is the first stage of the confusion. Based on this identification, al-Rāzī made use of al-Waṭwāṭ's term *ihām* and explained it by using al-Zamakhsharī's view on *takhyīl*. One could ask: why *al-Rāzī* did not use the term *takhyīl* in his definition of *ihām* like al-Waṭwāṭ? It is clear from my discussion of al-Rāzī's interpretation of Q (39:67) that he was not happy about employing the term *takhyīl* to interpret the Qur'ān. The figure of *takhyīl* requires surface meaning (not intended) and deeper meaning (intended) and al-Rāzī considers this approach to the text similar to that of the *Bāṭinīs* and the philosophers, and therefore unacceptable. Thus, he employs the term *ihām* and rejects the use of the term *takhyīl*. What is surprising is that he did not use the term *ihām* in his interpretation of Q (39:67) instead he followed the usual method i.e. the method of the ancients!

It is worth mentioning that Al-Rāzī ' displays a very different approach to anthropomorphic verses in a later little known work entitled *Risālat Dhamm al-Ladhdhāt al-dunyā* (Censure of the Pleasures of this World) written in 604/1208 towards the end of his life<sup>139</sup>. Al-Rāzī states that

‘I have found the most correct and advantageous [method] (*al-aṣwab al-aṣlah*) in this regard to be the method of the holy Qur'ān (*ṭarīqat al-Qur'ān*), the noble Furqān, which is the abandonment of the delving deeply. And of inferring the existence of the Lord of the Worlds from the divisions of bodies in the heavens and the earth and then proclaiming the greatness [of God] to the maximum extent (*al-mubālagha fī l-ta'zīm*), without wading into details. Thus, I read, on deanthropomorphism (*tanẓīh*), [God's] saying, “God is the Self-sufficient and you are the needy”, His saying, “Naught is as His likeness”, and His saying “Say, He is God, the One. And I read, on the affirmation [of divine attributes] (*ithbāt*), “ The Beneficent is established on the Throne, His saying “They fear their Lord above them”.. and so forth, by this same rule (*qānūn*)<sup>140</sup>.

<sup>138</sup> S.A. Bonebakker, *Some Early Definitions of the Tawriya and Ṣafadī's Faḍḍ al-xitām 'an at-Tawriya wa'l-istixdām*, The Hague.Paris 1966, p. 26.

<sup>139</sup> The work is edited and examined by Ayman Shihadeh in *The Teleological Ethics of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī*, Brill, 2006.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., pp. 187-188.

Al-Rāzī's treatment of anthropomorphic verses reflects a sophisticated approach to the issue in comparison with earlier Ash'arites. This sophistication is manifest in three connected areas namely: theology, Qur'ānic hermeneutics and the theory of *majāz*. In theology he gave a detailed elaboration of the doctrine of priority of reason over revelation and its impact on Qur'ānic hermeneutics, where he argues that one has to accept the certain dictates of reason and at the same time deny that the prima facie meaning of the revelation is intended if it is in conflict with reason. Two legitimate routes emerge out of this, either employing *ta'wīl* to harmonize the two or suspending our judgement and delegating the matter to God (*tafwīḍ*). This route of *Ahl al-Salaf* (the way of the ancestors) is the preferred one. Nevertheless, he offers detailed interpretations to anthropomorphic verses by anchoring them, his hermeneutics of *muḥkam* and *mutashābih*. For him *muḥkam* covers two categories *al-naṣṣ* (self-evident utterance) and *al-zāhir* (obvious utterance) and *mutashābih* covers two categories: *mujmal* (broad utterance) and *mu'awwal* (reverted utterance). When the *mu'awwal* (reverted utterance) has one primary meaning (*ḥaqīqī*) and the indicator shows that this meaning is not intended, then one should divert the utterance from the primary meaning to the tropical one (*majāz*).

For al-Rāzī, the phenomenon of *majāz* is incorporated in his hermeneutics and plays a major role in his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses. As we have seen in chapter one, al-Rāzī made a significant contribution to the development of the theory of *majāz* as manifest in his book *Nihāyat al-Ijāz*. His views on *majāz* has a great impact on his interpretations of anthropomorphic verses by comparison with his Ash'arite predecessors such as al-Bāqillānī and al-Juwaynī with regard to the details and the complexity of the explanations.

Al-Rāzī rejected the two approaches that were developed by al-Zamakhsharī: *majāz* based on *kināya* and *takhyīl*. His rejection of the first method (*majāz* based on *kināya*) is unwarranted because al-Rāzī quoted the interpretation of al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī for the same verse with approval and this interpretation is not that different from al-Zamakhsharī's. Regarding *takhyīl*, al-Rāzī shows his aversion to it by his severe criticism of al-Zamakhsharī's employment of this word. Al-Rāzī considers the method of *takhyīl* when applied to the Qur'ān to be similar to the approaches of the *Bāṭinīs*

and philosophers in their division of the meanings of the text into *ẓāhir* (exoteric) and *bāṭin* (esoteric). For him the only valid way to interpret the Qur'ān is 'the method of the ancients' which he later abandoned and replaced with 'the method of the Qur'ān' as 'the most correct and advantageous [method]'. But not all the Ash'arites will agree with him as we will see with another Ash'arite 'Izz al-Dīn b. 'Abd al-Salām.

#### 4.4 'Izz al-Dīn b. 'Abd al-Salām al-Sulamī<sup>141</sup> (d. 660/1262)

'Izz al-Dīn b. 'Abd al-Salām's importance stems from his novel treatment and classification of figurative language in the Qur'ān in his book *Majāz al-Qur'ān*<sup>142</sup> or *al-Ishāra ilā al-Ījāz fī Ba'd Anwā' al-Majāz*. His detailed classification of the types of *majāz* is unique and unmatched as we can tell from extant sources.

In what follows I will present Ibn 'Abd al-Salām's hermeneutics of the Qur'ān. I will then examine his views and classifications of the figurative language in the Qur'ān and finally I will analyse his treatment of anthropomorphic verses in the Qur'ān in the light of his classification of *majāz*.

##### 4.4. 1 Qur'ānic hermeneutics

Ibn 'Abd al-Salām divides<sup>143</sup> the contents of the Qur'ān into three types:

1. What is only known to God like the timing of the Hour.

<sup>141</sup> He was a shāfi'ī jurist, an Ash'arite theologian and a commentator on the Qur'ān, see al-Sulamī by E. Chaumont in EI 2<sup>nd</sup> edition.

<sup>142</sup> There is one partial and one complete edition of this book. The partial one was the subject of a Ph.D thesis by Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Belḥāj 'A critical Edition of the first part of Kitāb Majāz al-Qur'ān by Ibn 'Abd al-Salām, submitted to the University of Exeter, 1984. The second complete edition which is used here is: *Majāz al-Qur'ān*, ed. by Muṣṭafā M. H. Al-Dhahābī, *al-Furqān* Foundation, London, 1999.

<sup>143</sup> 'Izz al-Dīn b. 'Abd al-Salām, *Majāz al-Qur'ān*, p. 519.

2. What should be known by all people such as general legal rules and indications of the unity of God

3. What is known to scholars such as specification of the general term and the interpretation (*ta'wīl*) of the *mutashābih*.

Regarding the word *mutashābih*, Ibn 'Abd al-Salām does not explain what he means by it in his book *majāz al-Qur'ān*. However, in his unpublished commentary<sup>144</sup> on the Qur'ān, he interprets Q (3:7) as follows: *Muḥkamāt* [means] that 'the [verses] are made perfect by clarification and their proofs as well as evidences were confirmed by what has been revealed regarding these verses concerning lawful, unlawful, promise and threat'<sup>145</sup>. Ibn 'Abd al-Salām mentioned other interpretations but it seems that he prefers the previous one because he introduces other interpretations by saying *qīla* (it was said) which is used when one is doubtful about something or when the thing said is a mere assertion<sup>146</sup>. What Ibn 'Abd al-Salām is saying here is that *muḥkamāt*-type verses are those related to legal and ethical issues.

He explains the word *mutashābihāt* by giving examples of this type of verse such as the disjoined letters at the beginning of some chapters, and spirit from him (*rūḥun min-hu* (4:171). The word *ta'wīlahu* he explains as *al-marji'* (reverting). He has also chosen the pause before *al-Rāsikhūn* which means that only God knows the *ta'wīl* of these *mutashābihāt*<sup>147</sup>. Thus Ibn 'Abd al-Salām has two views regarding the *mutashābihāt*; in his book *Majāz al-Qur'ān* he believes that the scholars know their interpretations and in his commentary they don't. Having said that, nowhere in his book *Majāz al-Qur'ān* does he equate *mutashābihāt* with anthropomorphic verses, even though he engages with their interpretations. It is his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses which concerns us here regardless of his attitude to *mutashābihāt*. But before turning

<sup>144</sup> Parts of this commentary have been edited in two theses in Saudi Arabia, the first one by Yūsuf Muḥammad Raḥma al-Shāmisī, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm li- Izz al-Dīn 'Abd al-'Azīz b. 'Abd al-Salām al-Sulamī al-Mutawaffā fi 660 AH min awal sūrat al-fātiḥa [Q 1] ilā ākhir sūrat al-tawba [Q9], Jāmi'at Umm al-Qurā, 1998*. The second one is by Abd Allāh b. Sālim b. Yaslam Bāfaraj, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm li al-imām 'Izz al-Dīn 'Abd al-'Azīz b. 'Abd al-Salām Raḥimahu Allāh (d. 660 AH) min awal sūrat Yūnus [Q 10] ilā nihāyat sūrat al-Kahf [Q 18], Jāmi'at Umm al-Qurā, 2000*.

<sup>145</sup> Ibn 'Abd al-Salām, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, ed. by al-Shāmisī, p. 362.

<sup>146</sup> See Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, entry on مرض.

<sup>147</sup> Ibn 'Abd al-Salām, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, ed. by al-Shāmisī, pp. 363-66.



to his interpretation, I will examine his views and classification of *majāz in the Qur'an* (figures of speech in the Qur'an).

#### 4.4. 2 Ibn 'Abd al-Salām's views of *majāz* and its classification:

Ibn 'Abd al-Salām defines *majāz* as follows: '*al-majāz* is a branch of *ḥaqīqa* because it is the usage of an utterance to convey the first signification that has been assigned to it. *Majāz* is the usage of a *ḥaqīqa* utterance to convey a second signification that has been assigned to it because of an association (*nisba*) and a relationship ( '*alāqa*) between what has been signified by *ḥaqīqa* and what has been signified by *majāz*. Thus, [an utterance] cannot be used tropically (*al-tajawuz*) unless there is an association between what has been signified by *ḥaqīqa* and what has been signified by *majāz*<sup>148</sup>'.

Ibn 'Abd al-Salām then numerates 44 main types of *majāz* among them:

1. Using the cause (*sabab*) to signify the caused (*musabbab*)
2. Using the caused to signify the cause
3. Attributing the act to its cause
4. Attributing the act to the one who orders it
5. *Majāz al-luzūm* (*majāz* based on concomitance); and this type of *majāz* is in turn subdivided into 16 kinds such as<sup>149</sup>:
  - a. *al-ta'bīru bi al-maḥalli 'an al-ḥāl* (using the container to signify the content): this is because of the concomitant relation between them such as using the hand to signify power, an eye for perception and the chest for the heart.
  - b. *Al-tajawuz bi- nafi al-naẓar 'an al-idhlāl* (Using the action of not gazing figuratively to signify humiliation)

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<sup>148</sup> Ibn 'Abd al-Salām, *Majāz al-Qur'an*, p. 43.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., pp. 136-148.

- c. *Al-kināyāt*: Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām gives various examples to illustrate this figure such as he has a plenty of ash (*kathīru al-ramād*) which means that the person is hospitable and generous. Then he adds that ‘it seems that *kināya* is not a part of *majāz*<sup>150</sup>, because the utterance can be used to convey its primary signification.
6. *Majāz al-Tashbīh* (*majāz* based on similarity): Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām explains this type as follows: ‘When the Arabs compare a body with a body (*jarman bi jarman*), an abstract term with an abstract term (*ma‘nā bi-ma‘nā*) or an abstract term with a body; if they use the particle of comparison then this simile is *ḥaqīqī* (non-tropical) and if they discard the particle then the simile is *majāzī*<sup>151</sup> (tropical). Then Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām numerates 109 kinds of this type of *majāz* with various examples from the Qur’ān to illustrate them. The treatment of this type is the most elaborated one in his book

Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām’s classification of tropical language of the Qur’ān is unique with regard to its method and comprehension. The only surviving treatment of tropical language of the Qur’ān besides his book is that of al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā entitled *Majāzāt al-Qur’ān*<sup>152</sup> in which al-Murtaḍā identifies and interprets all tropical expressions in the Qur’ān in each chapter according to their order in the Qur’ān without any attempt to classify them and his interpretation was based on the theory of *majāz* as it was in the 4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> AH- 10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> CE.

Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām in his classification of *majāz* ignored all the fine distinctions between *majāz lughawī* (linguistic trope), *majāz ‘aqlī* (cognitive trope), *kināya* that were current during his milieu<sup>153</sup>. He did not use the term *isti‘āra* (metaphor) instead he opted for *majāz al-tashbīh* and for him no distinction is made between *tashbīh balīgh* (eloquent simile) and *isti‘āra*. It can be also observed that *tamthīl* and *takhyīl* do not figure in his classification<sup>154</sup>. Nevertheless, his classification is more detailed and

<sup>150</sup> Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām, *Majāz al-Qur’ān*, ibid., p. 148.

<sup>151</sup> ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn, *Talkhīs al-bayān fī majāzāt al-Qur’ān*, edited by Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Ghanī Ḥasan, ‘Isā al-Bābī : al-Ḥalabī, Cairo. 1955.

<sup>153</sup> For the views of Ibn al-Athīr, al-Zamalkānī and al-Rāzī in particular, see the relevant sections on these authors in chapter 1 of this study.

<sup>154</sup> Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām’s classification of *majāz* influenced subsequent writers on the issue of *majāz* in the Qur’ān such as al-Zarkhashī and al-Suyūfī: see Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkhashī, al-Burhān fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān,

has no equal. Next we shall see how he uses his classification in his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses.

#### 4.4.3 Interpreting Anthropomorphic verses:

Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām approaches anthropomorphic verses by connecting them with the Ash‘arites’ theory of attributes, and by using his theory of *majāz*. According to Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām, attributes in general are divided into three types: imperfect, perfect and what is not perfect or imperfect. Only perfect attributes can be predicated to God and all the three previous types of attributes can be predicated to humans. All human attributes are characterised by being dependent and in need of God who is self-sufficient by His essence and attributes<sup>155</sup>.

Following the Ash‘arite theory of attributes<sup>156</sup>, Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām divides the attributes of God into two main types: negative and affirmative attributes<sup>157</sup> (*salbī wa ithbātī*).

##### I. Negative attributes:

Negative attributes are those attributes that negate all imperfections that do not suit God<sup>158</sup> such as *al-Qudūs* (The Holy one), *al-Salām* (the source of peace) and *al-Ghanī* (Self-Sufficient).

##### II. Affirmative attributes:

Affirmative attributes are divided into two types: *ṣifāt al-Dhāt* (the attributes of the Essence) and *Ṣifāt al-Af‘āl* (the attributes of the Acts).

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eds. Yousuf ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Mar‘ashfī, et al, Dār al-Ma‘rifa, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Beirut, 1984, vol. 2, pp. 379-407, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān*, Pakistan, (n.d.), vol. 2, pp. 47-54.

<sup>155</sup> Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām, *Majāz al-Qur’ān*, ibid., pp. 238-9.

<sup>156</sup> For further information see Michel Allard. *Le problème des attributs divins dans la doctrine d'al-ASari et de ses premiers grand disciples*. Beirut: Imprimeur catholique, 1965.

<sup>157</sup> Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām, *Al-Imām fī Adillat al-Aḥkām*, ed. Raḍwān Mukhtār b. Gharbiyya, Dār al-Bashā‘ir, Beirut, 1987, p. 217.

<sup>158</sup> Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām, *Majāz al-Qur’ān*, p. 239.

1. The attributes of the Essence: These attributes are mentioned to inform and to arouse glorification and grandeur. There are seven attributes: Life, Knowledge, Will, Hearing, Seeing, Power and Speech<sup>159</sup>.
2. The attributes of the Acts: These attributes are mentioned for glorification, reminding people about the favours of God, encouraging good acts by the promise of reward and discouraging evil acts by the threat of punishment<sup>160</sup>. They are called the attributes of the Acts ‘because they indicate His actions that have been originated from His power and Will in something other than Him<sup>161</sup>’. Among His attributes are *al-Khāliq* (the creator), *al-Razzāq* (supreme Provider) and so on.

Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām then adds that some attributes if interpreted according to their primary meaning (*ḥaqīqī*) cannot be predicated of God because they indicate imperfection. However, these attributes should be interpreted tropically<sup>162</sup>. The tropical interpretations of these verses can be either connected to the attributes of the essence or to the attributes of the act<sup>163</sup>. Here lies the novelty of Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām’s approach to anthropomorphic verses namely connecting them consciously to the Ash‘arite theory of attributes. He states that ‘the scholars differ regarding the attributes that cannot be predicated to God if they are understood according to their primary significations (*ḥaqāīqa*). Some of [the scholars] interpreted them to be a manifestation of the Will [of God] which is concomitant with an attribute (*al-Irāda al-mulāzima li-dhālika al-waṣf*) in most cases<sup>164</sup>, and in this case these attributes are connected with the attributes of the Essence because the Will of God is one of these attributes. Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām adds that ‘Other scholars interpreted [these attributes] to signify actions that are yielded by these attributes in most cases. In general some of these attributes are related to what is good and other to what is evil<sup>165</sup>’. For example, the following attributes are related to good: (*al-Maḥabba*) Love, (*al-Raḥma*) mercy, (*baṣṭ al-yadayn*) stretching the hands, and (*al-mawadda*)..etc. The following attributes

<sup>159</sup> Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām, *Al-Imām fī Adillat al-Aḥkām*, p. 218.

<sup>160</sup> *ibid.*, p. 219.

<sup>161</sup> Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām, *Majāz al-Qur’ān*, p. 238.

<sup>162</sup> *ibid.*, p. 239.

<sup>163</sup> Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām, *Al-Imām fī Adillat al-Aḥkām*, p. 219.

<sup>164</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 226-7.

<sup>165</sup> *ibid.*, p. 227.

are related to evil such as (*al-ghaḍab*) the anger, *al-sakhaṭ* (the wrath), and *al-‘adāwa*<sup>166</sup> (the enmity)..etc.

Before using his theory of *majāz* to interpret anthropomorphic verses, Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām states that for a given utterance there might be two or more tropical interpretations that are associated with different types of *majāz* and each type reflects a different aspect<sup>167</sup>. He then identifies three types of *majāz* which can be used to interpret all attributes of God that signify imperfection if understood according to their primary signification<sup>168</sup>. The three types of *majāz* are:

1. *Majāz al-luzūm* (*majāz* based on concomitance): This type of *majāz* is valid when the attributes express His will which is the attribute of the Essence. Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām adds that ‘this is the view of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī and the majority of his followers<sup>169</sup>. Moreover, Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām uses this type of *majāz* to interpret other anthropomorphic verses or attributes not connected with the Will of God as we will see later.
2. *Majāz al-tasbīb* (*Majāz* based on causation): this type of *majāz* is used to signify the effects that are caused by these attributes and therefore these attributes can be linked to the attributes of the Action (*ṣifāt al-fi‘l*)<sup>170</sup>.
3. *Majāz al-tashbīh* (*majāz* based on similarity): this *majāz* is used to indicate that His treatment of His servants with the effects of these attributes is similar to the treatment of the one who has these attributes in their primary significations<sup>171</sup>.

Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām then goes on to interpret anthropomorphic verses in the light of the above types of *majāz*. For some verses he gives three interpretations and for others either two or one interpretation as will be shown below. Unlike al-Rāzī, Ibn ‘Abd al-

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<sup>166</sup> Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām, *Al-Imām fī Adillat al-Aḥkām*, pp. 227-229.

<sup>167</sup> Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām, *Majāz al-Qur’ān*, ibid., p. 238. Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām here, unlike al-Rāzī, accepts that there might be more than one figurative interpretation for a given verse and even if one cannot be certain regarding any specific interpretation this does not mean that one has to suspend his/her judgement and opt for *tafwīḍ*.

<sup>168</sup> Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām, *Majāz al-Qur’ān*, p. 239.

<sup>169</sup> ibid.

<sup>170</sup> ibid.

<sup>171</sup> ibid.

Salām is not troubled with the multiplicity of interpretations for a given verse, even if one cannot determine which one is the most plausible one.

(al-Rahma) The mercy of God

Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām used the above three types of *majāz* to give three tropical interpretations of this attribute. He states that *al-Rahma* ‘is a tenderness (*riqqa*) and pity (*shafaqa*) and most cases it is associated with having the will of compassion (*al-‘atf*) towards the object of mercy. What comes out of this mercy in most cases is the beneficence towards the subject of mercy by removing the cause that necessitated this mercy<sup>172</sup>’.

Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām adds that ‘for *al-Shaykh* [Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī mercy] is related the Will of God in a sense of what the merciful will for the object of his mercy<sup>173</sup>’. In this interpretation, the attributes are linked to the attributes of the Essence and the type of *majāz* used is *majāz al-luzūm* (*majāz* based on concomitance). Then Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām introduces the second interpretation saying ‘as for those who consider the attribute as *majāz al-tasbīb*, [mercy] refers to manner in which the merciful treats the object of his mercy<sup>174</sup>’. This type of *majāz* is connected to the attributes of the Acts. Finally, for those who consider the attribute of mercy to be based on *majāz al-tashbīh* (*majāz* based on similarity); God’s treatment of the object of his mercy is similar to the merciful’s treatment the object of his mercy understood in their primary meaning<sup>175</sup> (*ḥaqīqa*). Again mercy here is linked to the attribute of the Acts.

Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām does not indicate his preference to any of the above interpretations.

Q (5: 64)

بَلْ يَدَاهُ مَبْسُوطَتَانِ

“His hands are outspread”

Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām indicates that outspreading the hands can be interpreted either as *majāz al-mulāzama* or *majāz al-tashbīh* ‘Because the one who outspread his hand is

<sup>172</sup> Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām, *Majāz al-Qur’ān*, p. 239.

<sup>173</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 239-240.

<sup>174</sup> *ibid.*, p. 240.

<sup>175</sup> *ibid.*

indicating that he does not prevent what is in it therefore he compares spending and generosity with outspreading the hand for [the purpose] of giving...and this is either [based] on the *majāz* of *mulāzama* (*majāz* based on concomitant) or *majāz al-tashbīh*<sup>176</sup> (*majāz* based on similarity).

#### Q (36:71)

أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا أَنَّا خَلَقْنَا لَهُمْ مِمَّا عَمِلَتْ أَيْدِينَا

“Have they not seen how that We have created for them of that Our hands”

Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām gives one tropical interpretation for this verse under the type *majāz al-luzūm* (*majāz* based on concomitance) in the sub-section of *al-ta‘bīru bi- al-maḥall ‘an al-hāl* (using the container to signify the content): He states that *aydīna* here signifies ‘what Our power has made’<sup>177</sup>.

#### Setting on the throne

Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām gives a standard tropical interpretation of this expression stating that *istiwā’uhu* is ‘*majāz* that [signifies] his dominion over His kingdom’<sup>178</sup>. Then he adds that the *majāz* here’ is *majāz al-tamthīl* (*majāz* based on analogy) because it is customary for kings to run their kingdoms when they sit on their chairs<sup>179</sup>. Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām use of *tamthīl* here is very interesting because he did not mention this type of *majāz* in his classification.

Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām offers a coherent theory to interpret anthropomorphic verses in the Qur’ān. His treatment of these verses differs from early writers in two ways: First, he connects the issue of anthropomorphism in the Qur’ān to the Ash‘arite theory of attributes mainly to their major division of the affirmative attributes into the attributes of the Acts and the attributes of the Essence. For Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām, all

<sup>176</sup> Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām, *Majāz al-Qur’ān*, p. 187.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., p. 250.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., p. 251.

anthropomorphic verses are attributes and therefore could be linked either to the attributes of the Acts or to the attributes of the Essence. His classification of *majāz* into 44 types is unique and unattested in earlier available literature on the subject. From the 44 types of *majāz*, he identified and used three types to interpret anthropomorphic verses in the Qur'ān. He offered more than one tropical interpretation for some verses which indicates that he was not troubled by the multiplicity of interpretations and the inability of determining one certain interpretation. In this regard, he differs from al-Rāzī who indicated his preference for the position of *tafwīḍ* because one cannot be certain regarding any given interpretation. Finally, *tamthīl* is only used one with regard to his interpretation of 'setting on the throne' without defining it or connecting it with his classification. As for *takhyīl*, he never mentioned or used this figure of speech.

### **Conclusion:**

The Ash'arites' school grew in the lap of the Mu'tazilites and their influence is reflected in the issues, methods and the terminology of the Ash'arites. The history of the Ash'arites school is divided into two periods the ancients and the moderns and what distinguished between the two is the fusing of Hellenistic philosophy into the schools of the moderns. Following the Mu'tazilites, the Ash'arites recognised reason as the foundation of revelation, therefore, issues related to God's existence and His attributes cannot be established by relying on revelation, otherwise the origin will become the branch which is absurd. Therefore, Qur'ānic verses whose *prima facie* meaning indicates anthropomorphism cannot be taken to signify their apparent meanings. At this point the Ash'arite attitudes to anthropomorphic verse can be divided into two; the first approach is characterised by not engaging in the interpretation of these verses, while the second approach is characterised by offering tropical interpretation (*ta'wīl*) of them. Both approaches have a basis in the writing of



al-Ash‘arī himself. Among those who followed the second approach at least in some of their writings I examined the contribution of al-Bāqillānī, al-Juwaynī, al-Rāzī and Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām two from the school of the ancients and two from the moderns.

Al-Bāqillānī’s writings displays both approaches to anthropomorphic verses and it seems that he adopted *ta’wīl*-type approach in his late writings. His views on *majāz* reflect the state of theory of *majāz* in the 4<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> century, nevertheless his presentation of this theory represents the first fully developed theory of *majāz* by an Ash‘arite theologian to have reached us. Al-Bāqillānī used the theory of *majāz* to defend his Ash‘arite doctrine against the Mu‘tazilites, and to challenge and refute the interpretation of the *Mushabbihā* (anthropomorphists). Al-Bāqillānī’s interpretation of anthropomorphic verses reflects an advanced stage in the Ash‘arites school in comparison with that of al-Ash‘arī. The development of the theory of *majāz* enabled him to offer more detailed interpretation of these verses.

Al-Juwaynī’s writings reflect greater Mu‘tazilī influence in comparison with his predecessors. This is manifest in his endorsement of the doctrine of priority of reason over revelation. This doctrine had a great impact on his views on *ta’wīl* and this affected his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses. His theory of *majāz* resembles that of al-Bāqillānī with minor differences. Two approaches to anthropomorphic verses in the Qur’ān are manifest in al-Juwaynī’s writings. In his book *al-Shāmil* he accepts the legitimacy of not engaging in *ta’wīl* while in *al-Irshād* he argued against it. His tropical interpretation of anthropomorphic verses is more elaborate than al-Bāqillānī’s where al-Juwaynī offers more than one way of interpreting these verses and engages in subtle justifications of these interpretations. Finally, it should be noted that he opted for a *tafwīḍ*-type approach to anthropomorphic verses in his last book *al-‘Aqīda al-Niẓāmiyya*.

In the second phase of the Ash‘arites school (the moderns), *‘Ilm al-Kalām*, Qur’ānic hermeneutics and theory of *majāz* reached their maturity and these developments affected the interpretation of anthropomorphic verses of authors in this period in various degrees. I examined the writings of two authors namely; al-Rāzī and Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām. Al-Rāzī’s treatment of anthropomorphic verses reflects a sophisticated approach to the issue in comparison with earlier Ash‘arites. This sophistication is

manifest in three connected areas namely: theology, Qur'ānic hermeneutics and the theory of *majāz*. In theology he gave a detailed elaboration of the doctrine of priority of reason over revelation and its impact on Qur'ānic hermeneutics where he argues that one has to accept the certain dictates of reason and at the same time deny that the *prima facie* meaning of the revelation is intended if it is in conflict with reason. Two legitimate routes emerge out of this: either employing *ta'wīl* to harmonize the two or suspending our judgement and delegating the matter to God (*tafwīḍ*), and this route of *Ahl al-Salaf* (the way of the ancestors) is the preferred one. Nevertheless, he offers detailed interpretations of anthropomorphic verses by anchoring them in his hermeneutics of *muḥkam* and *mutashābih*. For him *muḥkam* covers two categories *al-naṣṣ* (self-evident utterance) and *al-zāhir* (obvious utterance) and *mutashābih* covers two categories: *mujmal* (broad utterance) and *mu'awwal* (reverted utterance). When the *mu'awwal* (reverted utterance) has one primary meaning (*ḥaqīqī*) and the indicator shows that this meaning is not intended, then one should divert the utterance from the primary meaning to the tropical one (*majāz*). Al-Rāzī incorporated his theory of *majāz* in his hermeneutics and used it in his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses. His views on *majāz* has a great impact on his interpretations of anthropomorphic verses in comparison with his Ash'arite predecessors with regard to the details and the complexity of the explanations.

Nevertheless, Al-Rāzī rejected the two tropes identified by al-Zamakhsharī, *majāz* based on *kināya* and *takhyīl*. His rejection of the first trope (*majāz* based on *kināya*) is unwarranted because al-Rāzī quoted a similar interpretation to al-Zamakhsharī by al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī with approval. Regarding *takhyīl*, al-Rāzī shows his aversion by his severe criticism of al-Zamakhsharī's employment of this word. Al-Rāzī considers the method of *takhyīl* when applied to the Qur'ān to be similar to the approaches of the *Bāṭinīs* and philosophers in their classification of meanings of the text into *zāhir* (exoteric) and *bāṭin* (esoteric). For him the only valid way to interpret the Qur'ān is 'the method of the ancients' which he later abandoned and replaced with 'the method of the Qur'ān' as 'the most correct and advantageous [method]'.

Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām was consistent in his approach to anthropomorphism in the Qur’ān. He offers a coherent theory to interpret anthropomorphic verses in the Qur’ān. His treatment of these verses differs from early writers in two ways: First, he connects the issue of anthropomorphism in the Qur’ān to the Ash‘arite theory of attributes mainly to their major classification of the affirmative attributes into the attributes of the Acts and the attributes of the Essence. For Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām, all anthropomorphic verses are attributes and therefore could be linked either to the attributes of the Acts or to the attributes of the Essence. His classification of *majāz* in the Qur’ān into 44 types is unique and unattested in earlier available literature on the subject. From the 44 types of *majāz*, he identified and used three types to interpret anthropomorphic verses in the Qur’ān. He offered more than one tropical interpretation for some verses which indicates that he was not troubled by the multiplicity of interpretations and the inability of determining one certain interpretation. In this regard, he differs from al-Rāzī who indicated his preference for the position of *tafwīd* because one cannot be certain regarding any given interpretation. Finally, he used the trope *tamthīl* only once while *takhyīl* is never mentioned by him.

The Asha‘rites having accepted the Mu‘tazilites doctrine of priority of reason over revelation displayed two approaches to anthropomorphic verses as mentioned above. Their doctrine affected their interpretation. Their interpretation of anthropomorphic verses varies from one author to another and reflects the development of *kalām*, Qur’ānic hermeneutics and the theory of *majāz* and the influence of these disciplines on these authors. As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, due to the diversity of views within this school it is very difficult to generalise. However, two points are worth mentioning regarding the approaches of Ash‘rites authors studied here: first, interpreting anthropomorphic verses is not a matter of exegesis alone. It involves a complex web of disciplines as we have seen manifested especially in the writings of al-Rāzī. The impact of the development of the theory of *majāz* can be seen in the writings of all authors. However, they did not make use of certain elements of this theory such as those introduced by al-Zamakhsharī, nevertheless they employed the theory to the limit for two purposes. First, they used it to defend their doctrines

against the Mu'tazilites, such as the issue of the beatific vision. Second, they used it like the Mu'tazilites to harmonize reason and revelation with regard to other anthropomorphic verses.

## Conclusion

Hellenistic philosophy had a great impact on the three Abrahamic religions; it made the theologians of these religions rethink and present their doctrines according to the standards of rationality of this philosophy. The older siblings of Islam, Judaism and Christianity, had to take this path long before Islam when they tried to reconcile revealed notions of God with the rational conceptions of Him. This is manifest in their approach to anthropomorphism in the Bible, where they resort to allegorical methods developed in ancient Greece. This was seen especially in the writings of Philo and Origen. On the other hand, Muslim theologians resorted to different methods in their endeavour to harmonize reason and revelation with regard to the issue of anthropomorphism. Tropical interpretation of anthropomorphic verses in the Qur'ān was the way followed by Muslim theologians.

My research shows that the process of interpreting anthropomorphic verses in the Qur'ān (from the 2<sup>nd</sup> /8<sup>th</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> century focusing on the Mu'tazilite and the Ash'arite schools) is not a mere exegetical practice, rather it is a result of interaction of three disciplines: Islamic theology, Qur'ānic hermeneutics and theory of *majāz*. The theoretical foundations of tropical interpretations of anthropomorphic verses are based on two disciplines, namely theology and Qur'ānic hermeneutics, which justify and legitimise these interpretations. Theology and Qur'ānic hermeneutics are linked in the doctrine of the relationship between reason and revelation first introduced by the Mu'tazilites and later adopted by the Ash'arites. The doctrine can be summarised as follows: if there is a conflict between reason and revelation, then reason has priority over revelation and scripture must be interpreted tropically in order to harmonize the two. To give priority to scripture is impossible, because to do so would invalidate reason, and reason is the only method available for establishing the truth of the scripture. This doctrine is applied to Qur'ānic anthropomorphism as follows: anthropomorphic descriptions of God in the Qur'ān literally understood are in conflict with our knowledge of God as an incorporeal being which is attained by the use of reason; therefore these verses need to be interpreted figuratively in order to harmonize the two. In order to justify this approach to anthropomorphic verses, the theologians found in Q (3:7) the scriptural justification they need. Moreover, it is in this verse that

(*‘Ilm al-Kalām*) Islamic theology and Qur’ānic hermeneutics (or reason and revelation) meet again, providing theoretical foundation for the exegesis of anthropomorphic verses. In general, Muslim theologians accepted the second reading of this verse, that those who are firmly rooted in knowledge can interpret the *mutashābihāt* verses. It is the Mu‘tazilites who first consider anthropomorphic verses as a type of *mutashābihāt*, and the *Muḥkamāt* verses as those which indicate the dissimilarity of God to his creatures. (it is the proof of reason which tells use which is which), such as Q (42: 44) which is considered as *muḥkam*). Therefore, the *mutashābihāt* verses have to be understood in the light of *Muḥkamāt* ones. The term *ta’wīl* acquired a technical meaning and came to signify the process of turning the utterance away from its prima facie meaning (*Zāhir*) to its tropical meaning (*majāz*). Applied to anthropomorphic verses, these verses should not be understood according to their prima facie meaning; instead they should be turned away from this meaning to the tropical one. It is at this point we can see the importance of *majāz* as a device which allows the process of *ta’wīl* to take place, and this is the main theme of my research.

The theory of *majāz* in Islamic thought was not formulated at once; rather it took centuries to develop, like other disciplines such as rhetoric, grammar, *kalām*, etc. Early authors such as Sībawayh were aware of the phenomenon of *majāz* without explicitly mentioning the term. Generally speaking these authors identified various strategies such as *ḥadhf* (ellipsis), *ziyāda* (pleonasm), *kināya* and *iltifāt* (grammatical shift), and *isti‘āra*. All these strategies were applied to the Qur’ān and compared with proper Arabic usage. It is in the writings of al-Jāḥiẓ that we see the beginning of the theory of *majāz*, his usage of the terms *ḥaqīqa* and *majāz* reflects a clear understanding of each of these terms in their technical sense and an awareness of the dichotomy between them. With the writing of al-Khafājī the branches of *‘ilm al-bayān* (simile, *majāz* and *isti‘āra*) reach an advanced stage in their development, but without a unifying theory that can spell out the exact relationship between them, especially with regard to *majāz* and *isti‘āra*. This would be achieved by ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī who advanced the theory of *majāz* and affected all those who came after him. His main contribution consists of a distinction between *majāz ‘aqlī* and *al-majāz al-lughawī*, and

the division of *al-majāz al-lughawī* into *isti'āra* and what is called later *majāz mursal*. He also shifted the focus in the study of *majāz* from single words to the level of one sentence and more, calling this new figure *tamthīl* (analogy). Al-Rāzī acknowledges the importance of al-Jurjānī's books, which he abbreviated and rearranged in his book *Nihāyat al-Ijāz fī Dirāyat al-I'jāz*. His elaboration of *al-majāz al-lughawī* is the first comprehensive treatment written on the subject. Al-Rāzī's book was very influential on subsequent generations such as al-Sakkākī. Al-Sakkākī's section on '*ilm al-balāgha*' in his book *al-Miftāḥ* proved very popular among later writers, to the extent that they forgot al-Jurjānī's work. Al-Sakkākī was at that time the first to divide '*Ilm al-Balāgha*' into three branches: *bayān*, *ma'ānī* and what is known later as *badī'*, and the first to determine their exact topics and divisions. Al-Sakkākī discusses the issue of *majāz* and *isti'āra* under his section on *bayān*. A summary of *al-Miftāḥ* by al-Qazwīnī (*Talkhīs al-Miftāḥ*) proved to be more popular than the *Miftāḥ* itself where he introduces a new division of *al-majāz* (*mufrad* and *murakkab*). Subsequently many commentaries and super-commentaries were written on it. These commentaries hardly added anything new or advanced the discussion after al-Jurjānī; nevertheless they enrich the intellectual life of Muslims.

My thesis has shown how Muslim theologians and exegetes employed the theory of *majāz* to interpret anthropomorphic verses (from the 2<sup>nd</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> century focusing on the Mu'tazilite and the Ash'arite schools). More importantly, given the long period it took the *majāz* theory to develop, I have demonstrated the impact of the development of the theory of *majāz* on the interpretation of anthropomorphic verses. This impact can be seen in the increased sophistication of these interpretations and their multiplicity which corresponds to the development of the theory of *majāz* given the parallel development of Islamic theology and Qur'ānic hermeneutics.

Tropical interpretation of anthropomorphic verses is attested from the 2<sup>nd</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed, the *Tafsīr* of Mujāhid (d.104/722) contains one of the earliest tropical interpretations of anthropomorphic verses. He does not offer any justification for his interpretations, nor does he give any reason as to why the prima facie sense of the verses should not be taken. In the writings of Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d.150/767), we

observed his use of the word *mathal* to denote tropical use of language with regard to anthropomorphic verses, but as yet no theory of tropical language existed. Abū ‘Ubayda’s (d. 210/825) interpretations of anthropomorphic verses are brief. Only in one place did he use the words *mathal* and *tashbīh* in his interpretation and he tried to explain the mechanism of the trope in the verse. This is a new development in the interpretation of anthropomorphic verses started by him, and it will be the norm in later writings. Al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm (d. 246/ 860) used both terms, *mathal* and *tamthīl*, to interpret anthropomorphic verses. His interpretation of anthropomorphic verses is more mature and nuanced more than with earlier authors, and he attempted to explain the reasons for the use of these anthropomorphic verses in the Qur’ān by using the concepts of *mathal* and *tamthīl*. This makes his contribution original and represents an advanced stage in the history of the development of the interpretation of these verses. By the time of Ibn Qutayba (276/889), *majāz* in a technical sense as a counterpart to *ḥaqīqa* was used, nevertheless he did not employ this term in his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses. The awareness of the phenomenon of *majāz* and its development provided our authors with the tool to interpret anthropomorphic verses. It also enabled some of these authors, especially al-Qāsim and Ibn Qutayba, to offer more detailed interpretations that try to explain the reasons behind describing God in anthropomorphically.

The Mu‘tazilite school championed tropical interpretation of anthropomorphic verses from its inception and this is due to the Mu‘tazilites’ continued endeavour to harmonize reason and revelation. From the earliest times, the Mu‘tazilites emphasised the role of reason in their theology and this has an impact on their interpretation of the Qur’ān. Very little Mu‘tazilite literature reached us from the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries and therefore it is difficult to present a complete picture of their interpretation of anthropomorphic verses.

al-Aṣamm’s (d. 200/816 or 201/817) interpretations of anthropomorphic verses are short and some of them are a kind of a substitution of one word for another. In his comments on only one verse Q (24:35), one finds a justification of the interpretation. All of these interpretations are tropical, and with no terms mentioned to describe the



phenomenon of *majāz*, nor are any explanations given as to why one should interpret them figuratively. This confirms what we know that it was al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255AH/ 869) who first used the terms *majāz-ḥaqīqa* in a technical way. Al-Jāḥiẓ is also the first theologian we know so far to assert the priority of reason over revelation, and to use explicitly the term *majāz* in a technical sense in interpreting anthropomorphic verses. His interpretations reflect a big step in the interpretation of anthropomorphic verses if we compare him with al-Aṣamm or with early commentators such as Mujāhid, Muqātil or Abū ‘Ubayda. The theory of *majāz* which he played an important role in its articulation had an impact on his interpretations by basing them on solid linguistic grounds. The theological and hermeneutical premises that he articulated and used will be the basis for any future attempt to interpret anthropomorphic verses by the Mu‘tazilites. Al-Jubbā’ī’s (303/915) interpretations reflect as expected a Mu‘tazilite theology and hermeneutics. Al-Jubbā’ī used the word *majāz* in a technical sense in some of his interpretations. This demonstrates that the concept of *majāz* was fully diffused within the Mu‘tazilite school in his time. Although he did not use the term *majāz* in all of his interpretations, nevertheless his interpretations can be classified as tropical ones.

The theory of *majāz* started with al-Jāḥiẓ who was the first to speak about the dichotomy of *ḥaqīqa-majāz* as indicated in chapter one. My research in the writing of early Mu‘tazilites confirms this and shows that the term *majāz* was used in its technical sense after al-Jāḥiẓ in the writing of al-Jubbā’ī and late writers. Before al-Jāḥiẓ various commentators offer tropical interpretation of anthropomorphic verses, but without using the term *majāz* and with little explanation of their interpretation like the interpretation of al-Aṣamm. It is in the writing of al-Jāḥiẓ we find the use of technical language and linguistic and theological explanation in his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses in order to establish his interpretations on solid rational grounds. After al-Jāḥiẓ the use of *majāz* in a technical sense to interpret anthropomorphic verses became established as we have seen in the interpretation of al-Jubbā’ī of anthropomorphic verses.

‘Abd-al-Jabbār’s (d. 415/1024) writings reflect a mature development of Mu‘tazilite theology and hermeneutics. He enacted his own theory of *majāz* within the context of

'*Uṣūl al-fīqh* and *Kalām* to use it in his interpretation. His interest in *majāz* reflects its utmost importance in his hermeneutics because it is the primary tool to harmonize reason and revelation. 'Abd al-Jabbār applied systematically his theory of *majāz* to all anthropomorphic verses and interpreted them to be in accord with proof of reason. 'Abd al-Jabbār's method of interpretation generally consists of listing all the possible meanings of a word, then he will take one tropical meaning that can be reconciled with his theology. His interpretation of these verses clearly reflects the advanced stage of the theory of *majāz* at his time

It is with Al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144) that Mu'tazilite interpretation of anthropomorphic verses reached its peak of sophistication and maturity. The uniqueness of his approach rests first and foremost on the ideas of 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī. Indeed, Al-Zamakhsharī developed some of these ideas and applied them to the Qur'ān. 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī's theory of imagery in general and his theory of *majāz* in particular served as a base on which al-Zamakhsharī establishes his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses.

He developed two unique tropes to interpret anthropomorphic verses.

First trope: *majāz* based on *kināya*

By using *majāz* based on *kināya* to interpret certain expressions (such as God "sitting firmly on the Throne") in their entirety without pausing on the single words that make these expressions, al-Zamakhsharī wants the hearer to move away from the first meaning to the second and from the second to the third meaning. Because to pause on these components such as "hand" or "sitting firmly" might lead to either farfetched interpretation which would miss the point of what the Qur'ān tries to convey or worse might lead to gross anthropomorphism which he tries to eliminate in the first instance. Al-Zamakhsharī's interpretation is novel and this new trope represents an original contribution to the theory of imagery indeed.

Second trope: *takhyīl*.

For al-Zamakhsharī *takhyīl* is a special case of *tamthīl* in which the analogue in the case of *takhyīl* is absurd and is considered as a hypothesised thing. On the other hand hypothesised things can be imagined in the mind like real objects. *Takhyīl* is the

depiction of meaning for the purpose of making it accessible to the recipient in a meaningful and effective way that cheers the soul and when using *takhyīl* one does not pay much attention to the words used to create the image; instead one should concentrate on the essence and crux of the expression. When it comes to anthropomorphic verses, he believes that *takhyīl* is the most suitable method to interpret them because by using it one gets to the point of the expression which is the depiction of God's majesty and might without falling into the trap of anthropomorphism or farfetched interpretations. Al-Zamakhsharī criticised what could be described as "traditional Mu'tazilite" interpretations of anthropomorphic verses of using the single-word *majāz* as a means to interpret.

The Mu'tazilites employed and developed a theory of *majāz* as an effective tool in their interpretation of anthropomorphic verses. This does not mean that their interpretations were uniform and identical; on the contrary, there are big differences between the early Mu'tazilites and later ones. Within early Mu'tazilite circles, the employment of *majāz* was simple due to the immaturity of the theory of *majāz* and Qur'ānic hermeneutics. It is in the writing of al-Zamakhsharī the theory of *majāz* reached its maturity.

The Asha'rites, having accepted the Mu'tazilites' doctrine of priority of reason over revelation, displayed two approaches to anthropomorphic verses. The first approach is characterised by not engaging in the interpretation of these verses while the second approach is characterised by offering a tropical interpretation. Their interpretation of anthropomorphic verses varies from one author to another and reflects the development of *kalām*, Qur'ānic hermeneutics and the theory of *majāz*

Al-Bāqillānī's (d. 403/1013) theory of *majāz* fits very well into what we know about *majāz* in the 4<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> century. His presentation of the phenomenon of *majāz* represents the first fully developed theory of it by an Ash'arite theologian to have reached us. His tropical interpretation of anthropomorphic verses reflects his understanding and presentation of the theory of *majāz* in the 4<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> century which he effectively utilised

to defend his Ash‘arite creed against the Mu‘tazilites, and to refute the interpretation of the *mushabbihā* (anthropomorphists). Al-Bāqillānī’s interpretation of anthropomorphic verses reflects an advanced stage in the Ash‘arite school in comparison with that of al-Ash‘arī. The development of the theory of *majāz* enabled him to offer a more detailed interpretation of these verses.

Abū al-Ma‘ālī al-Juwaynī’s (d. 478/1085) theory of *majāz* did not differ much from that of al-Bāqillānī apart from minor points and it seems that the development of the theory of *majāz* in his lifetime did not have any impact on his views on *majāz*. His interpretation of anthropomorphic verses is more elaborate than al-Bāqillānī’s. Al-Juwaynī offers more than one way of interpreting these verses and engages in subtle justifications of these interpretations. It should be noted that he opted for a *tafwīḍ*-type approach to anthropomorphic verses in his last book *al-‘Aqīda al-Niẓāmiyya*.

Al-Rāzī ‘s(543/1149/606/1209) treatment of anthropomorphic verses reflects a sophisticated approach to the issue in comparison with earlier Ash‘arites. This sophistication is manifest in three connected areas namely: theology, Qur’ānic hermeneutics and the theory of *majāz*. In theology he gave a detailed elaboration of the doctrine of priority of reason over revelation and its impact on Qur’ānic hermeneutics. Two legitimate routes emerge out of this: either employing *ta’wīl* to harmonize the two or suspending our judgement and delegating the matter to God (*tafwīḍ*) and this route of *Ahl al-Salaf* (the way of the ancestors) is the preferred one. Nevertheless, he offers detailed interpretations to anthropomorphic verses by anchoring them on his hermeneutics of *muḥkam* and *mutashābih*. For al-Rāzī, the phenomenon of *majāz* is incorporated in his hermeneutics and plays a major role in his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses. His views on *majāz* have a great impact on his interpretations of anthropomorphic verses by comparison with his Ash‘arites predecessors, such as al-Bāqillānī and al-Juwaynī with regard to the details and the complexity of the explanations. Al-Rāzī rejected the two approaches that were developed by al-Zamakhsharī. Al-Rāzī considers the method of *takhyīl* to be similar to the approaches of the *Bāṭinīs* and philosophers in their division of the meanings of the text into *ẓāhir* (exoteric) and *bāṭin* (esoteric). For him the only valid way to interpret

the Qur'ān is 'the method of the ancients' which he later abandoned and replaced with 'the method of the Qur'ān' as 'the most correct and advantageous [method]'.

‘Izz al-Dīn b. ‘Abd al-Salām al-Sulamī (d. 660/1262) Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām offers a coherent theory to interpret anthropomorphic verses in the Qur'ān. His treatment of these verses differs from early writers in two ways: First, all anthropomorphic verses are attributes and therefore could be linked either to the attributes of the Acts or to the attributes of the Essence. Second, his classification of *majāz* into 44 types is unique and unattested in earlier available literature on the subject. He identified and used three types to interpret anthropomorphic verses in the Qur'ān. He offered more than one tropical interpretation for some verses, which indicates that he was not troubled by the multiplicity of interpretations and the inability of determining one certain interpretation. In this regard, he differs from al-Rāzī who indicated his preference for the position of *tafwīd*, because one cannot be certain regarding any given interpretation.

The Ash‘arites tropical interpretation of anthropomorphic verses involves a complex web of disciplines and as we have seen manifested especially in the writings of al-Rāzī. The impact of the development of the theory of *majāz* can be seen in the writings of all authors. However, they did not make use of certain elements of this theory like those introduced by al-Zamakhsharī, nevertheless they employed the theory to the limit

#### Issues clarified by this research

1. The research here shows that Muslim theologians like their Jewish and Christian counterparts attempted to harmonize their revelation and reason with regard to anthropomorphic descriptions of God in the Qur'ān. But the similarity stops here, because the Muslim theologians studied here did not employ allegorical interpretation in their endeavour. As we have seen they based their interpretation on the theory of *majāz* which they grounded in the Arabic language. They emphasised the objective nature of *majāz* and how it is grounded in the usage of early Arabs as manifest in Arabic poetry. Their aim was to establish interpretations of the Qur'ān on objective criteria which could

be verified, and this is not possible in the case of allegorical interpretation. Having said that, the allegorical interpretation of the Qur'ān developed by other groups such as the Ismā'īlīs, philosophers and the Sūfīs should be noted.

2. The treatment of Mujāhid of anthropomorphic interpretations indicates that tropical interpretation of anthropomorphic verses began before the establishment of theological schools and the formation of their doctrine. This means that the tropical interpretation of anthropomorphic verses has a root in earlier Islamic tradition and represents a genuine position within Islamic scholarship. In my opinion the only reason behind this tropical interpretation is other verses of the Qur'ān which indicate God's dissimilarity to his creation.
3. The treatment of al-Zamakhsharī of anthropomorphic verses represents a big shift in the history of the interpretation of these verses. This shift consists in his analysis of tropes on the level of one sentence of more contrary to the practice before him where the emphasis was on a single word-*majāz*. This shift is in accord with modern theories of metaphor as we have seen with Ricoeur who argues that 'purely rhetorical treatment of metaphor is the result of the excessive and damaging emphasis put initially on the word, ..whereas a properly semantic treatment of metaphor proceeds from the recognition of the sentence as the primary unit of meaning<sup>1</sup>'. Therefore, general statements describing Mu'tazilite interpretation of anthropomorphic verses such as Watt's comment (There was no question of novel metaphors or of the metaphorical interpretation of whole phrases<sup>2</sup>) are no longer tenable.
4. The research shows that the double way of approaching anthropomorphic verses started with al-Ash'arī himself and dominated the school after him. The *bilā kayf* approach was used by Al-Ash'arī but later it was developed into *tafwīḍ*-type approach in the writing of al-Juwaynī. Therefore, it is not tenable to say that the Ash'arites adopted 'an intermediate position between the

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<sup>1</sup> Ricoeur, *ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>2</sup> Watt, W. M., Some Muslim Discussions of Anthropomorphism, *Transactions of the Glasgow University Oriental Society*, 13 (1947-49), p. 3.

literalists and the Mu'tazilites...( *bilā kayf*)<sup>3</sup>, or to say that tropical interpretation of anthropomorphic verses started with al-Baghdādī or al-Juwaynī, as some authors have claimed.

Suggestions for future research:

The research here can be taken and expanded into three directions:

1. The treatment of the Ash'arites' interpretation of anthropomorphic verses can be expanded to cover later Ash'arite commentators such as al-Bayḍāwī and the super-commentaries written on it. It would be interesting to see the reception of al-Zamakhsharī's theory of *majāz* in these works.
2. The same treatment here can be applied to the interpretations of other theological schools and trends such as Māturīdīs, Shī'ites (Zaydīs, Ismā'īlīs, Imāmīs), Ibādīs, Sūfīs and modern commentaries.
3. Comparative study of Jewish-Christian-Muslim interpretations of anthropomorphic verses focusing on selected authors or periods.

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<sup>3</sup> Heath, Peter. Metaphor in EQ, vol. 3, p. 385.

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