

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE SURAH AS ARGUMENTATION: THE EARLY STUDY OF THE SURAH  
STRUCTURE IN THE EXEGESIS OF FAKHR AL-DĪN AL-RĀZĪ (D. 606/1210)

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVINITY SCHOOL  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

AHMED ARAFAT

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

AUGUST 2022

## Table of Contents

<b>Acknowledgments .....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>Transliteration Note.....</b>	<b>viii</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1. Literature Review.....	9
2. Three Evaluations of al-Rāzī’s Approach to <i>Naẓm</i> .....	13
2.1 Al-Rāzī and the History of Arabic Rhetoric .....	14
2.2 Assessment of al-Rāzī’s Conception of <i>Naẓm</i> .....	18
2.3 Al-Rāzī’s Literary Theory in Recent Arabic Works.....	22
3. Objectives of the Present Study .....	23
<b>Chapter 1 Qur’anic Composition (<i>Naẓm</i>) before al-Rāzī: From al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/869) to al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144) .....</b>	<b>29</b>
1. <i>I’jāz</i> in Its Formative Stage.....	30
1.1. Al-Jāḥiẓ and the Literary Case for the Qur’ān.....	36
1.2. Reasoning from <i>Lafẓ</i> .....	37
1.3. Other Key Actors in the Formative Stage.....	41
1.4. Al-Rummānī and the High Noon of the Formative Stage .....	45
2. <i>I’jāz</i> in Its Growth Stage.....	48
2.1 Exploring the Functions of <i>Lafẓ</i> .....	49
2.2 Exploring the Sequence of Verses .....	72
Conclusion .....	76
<b>Chapter 2 Al-Rāzī’s Interpretive Strategy for Developing the Study of <i>Naẓm</i>.....</b>	<b>78</b>
1. Starting from the Beginning.....	79
1.1 Al-Rāzī’s Assumptions about the Surah Form .....	79
1.2 Al-Rāzī and the Mu’tazilites: Contact and Impact .....	83
2 Al-Rāzī’s Three Premises about the Surah Content .....	86
2.1 The Surah as a Dialectical Text .....	86
2.2 The Qur’anic Commentator as a Theologian-Exegete.....	100
2.3 The Literary Phenomenon of Intentional <i>Taṣrīf</i> .....	110
Conclusion .....	120
<b>Chapter 3 The Kalam Reading of the Surah.....</b>	<b>121</b>
1. The Dialectic Approach to the Surah Structure .....	122
1.1 Surah 38 as a Warning against <i>Taqḥīd</i> and a Stimulus for <i>Naẓar</i> .....	128
1.2 Surah 46 (Al-Aḥqāf) and the Major Kalam Themes of the Qur’ān.....	156

2. Surah Structure in Support of Theological Views .....	166
Conclusion .....	171
<b>Chapter 4 Persuasive Strategies in the Composition of the Surah.....</b>	<b>173</b>
1. Antithetical Pairs.....	173
2. Complementary Pairs.....	182
3. Blended Themes and the Argumentation of Surah 2 (Al-Baqarah):.....	189
3.1 The Unifying Focus of Surah 2 (al-Baqarah) .....	193
3.2 Prophecy-related Themes.....	196
3.3 Outline of Surah 2 (al-Baqarah).....	199
Conclusion .....	221
<b>Chapter 5 Surah Structure as a Medium for Countering Exegetical <i>Taqlīd</i>.....</b>	<b>222</b>
1. <i>Asbāb al-Nuzūl</i> and the Literary Flow of the Surah .....	223
1.1 Three Ways to Prioritize <i>Naẓm</i> over <i>Asbāb al-Nuzūl</i> .....	226
1.2 Multiple Occurrences of the Same Revelation?.....	237
2. The Problem of Qur'anic Abrogation .....	243
3. The Call for Unconventional Interpretations .....	260
Conclusion .....	264
<b>Chapter 6 The Post-Rāzī Developments: Impact of al-Rāzī's Study of the Surah on Later Qur'anic Studies.....</b>	<b>265</b>
1. Al-Rāzī and the Later Exegetical Tradition .....	267
1.1 Burhān al-Dīn al-Nasafī (d. 687/1288) .....	269
1.2 Nizām al-Dīn al-Nīsābūrī (d. 728/1328).....	270
1.3 Abū Ḥayyān al-Gharnāṭī (d. 745/1344) .....	276
1.4 Shams al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī (d. 749/1348).....	279
1.5 Ibn 'Ādil al-Ḥanbalī (d. ca. 880/1405).....	281
1.6 Burhān al-Dīn al-Biqā'ī (d. 885/1450).....	286
1.7 Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505).....	292
2. Beyond al-Rāzī: The Echo of <i>Munāsabāt</i> Elements in Two Seventh-Century Works of Rhetoric.....	293
2.1. <i>Takhalluṣ</i> in the <i>Qaṣīdah</i> .....	294
2.2. <i>Takhalluṣ</i> in the Surah .....	298
3. The Special Case of Abū Ishāq al-Shāṭibī (d. 790/1388).....	302
Conclusion .....	308
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>310</b>
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>315</b>

## **Acknowledgments**

This dissertation would not have been possible without the assistance of many dedicated mentors, teachers, and friends. In essence, the project owes its genesis to inspirations gained from discussions about the literary structure of the surah in some of the classes facilitated by my esteemed advisor Professor Michael Sells. I gratefully take this opportunity to thank Prof. Sells for his warm support and unwavering guidance throughout each stage of this project. I would also like to express my deepest appreciation to my reading committee, Prof. Tahera Qutbuddin and Prof. Yousef Casewit, for their invaluable insights, constructive feedback, and helpful advice, which have enriched this work considerably. Their extensive comments have rescued me from many inconsistencies and numerous embarrassing errors. Similarly, their corrections and questions have made me rethink many of my interpretations. For the errors in facts or interpretation that remain in the text, I alone am responsible. I would also like to acknowledge Dean James T. Robinson for his unrelenting support, which was influential in shaping my learning experience in the Divinity School.

In addition, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my former teachers at al-Azhar. With you, I was privileged to study many foundational classical works, and I consequently had a firsthand experience of the classical making of scholars. I am equally grateful for the superb intellectual environment provided by the University of Chicago, which opened my eyes to wider perspectives in the study of religion in general and the study of Islam in particular. It is also a pleasure to acknowledge the various types of financial assistance I received from the Divinity School of the University of Chicago.

To my own family, I owe everything. For my mother, I deeply appreciate your support, thoughts and prayers. To my late father, your encouragement and true love transcend time and

place. May your soul rest in peace. My sincerest thanks go to my wife Rehab Elsayed, who has been a partner in every sense of the word. I do understand that your relief at having this work finished may well exceed my own. To our children: Jenna, Sarah, Muhammad and Hana, you are the delight of my eyes.

My heartfelt appreciation goes to my brother Reda Arafat and my friends Sarah Aziz, Samara Salah Ballut, Haytham Dahrouj, Asma Jarad, Dina Rehab and Ariz Saleem for their considerable assistance. I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to the many educators and friends with whom I worked in Bridgeview, Illinois. Many thanks go to Dr. Abdurahman Amine, Dr. Muhammad Eissa, Dr. Omar Khalil, Dr. Taha ElGhawaby, Emad Melhem, and Imams Jamal Said and Kifah Moustafa for their relentless support and encouragement. Special thanks go to Dr. Fiaz Ahmed, Dr. Farah Ahmed, and their daughters, Sara and Jannah, for gracing me with warmth and love and making me a part of their family. I am more grateful to you than words can say.

## Abstract

In examining Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's (d. 606/1210) approach to the surah structure as a form of argumentation, the present dissertation seeks to refine our understanding of the medieval contribution to the literary study of the surah. Known as the Sultan of rational theologians (*sulṭān al-mutakallimīn*), al-Rāzī focuses on how ideas, in the Qur'anic text, are discussed or debated with the aim of influencing the thoughts and actions of others. Depending primarily on al-Rāzī's encyclopedic exegetical commentary *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* (The Keys to the Unseen), the present study explores al-Rāzī's utilization of his dialectical, logical, theological and rhetorical training to examine the literary architecture of the Qur'anic text. His structural analysis of the flow of the surah material reveals that he is fully *au fait* with the challenges and consequences of this unconventional approach.

For instance, he establishes the case that the Qur'ān is essentially dialectical in nature. In this regard, he surveys the content of the Qur'ān to affirm that the Qur'ān is replete with "disputations," and that the art of disputation is the profession of the prophets (*ḥirfat al-anbiyā'*). He goes further to propose that the interpretation of the Qur'ān requires a theologian-exegete who can identify the theological objectives and persuasive techniques that, in his view, explain the logical flow of the Qur'anic text. Practically speaking, he identifies some iterative thematic pairs and structuring patterns (*'ādāt al-Qur'ān*) that he considers to be inextricably connected with Qur'anic argumentation and persuasion. In his view, understanding how the Qur'ān argues is an essential guide for explicating the juxtaposition of the discourse units within the surah as well as the literary architecture of many surahs. Furthermore, the study highlights al-Rāzī's engagement with the philosophical and Mu'tazilite tradition, which is sometimes normalized and adopted in his approach to the arrangement of the Qur'anic text.

Hermeneutically, al-Rāzī's deliberate consideration of the surah as a unified composition prompts him to counter exegetical *taqlīd*. This is evidenced in his critique of many cases of abrogation (*naskh*) and causes of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) that he considers to be breaking the flow of the surah text. Moreover, he utilizes the notion of Qur'anic unified composition to endorse some original interpretations that are not supported by the transmitted reports (*āthār*). Furthermore, al-Rāzī's exegetical approach does not remain a solitary voice. Instead, his approach to the surah structure marks a turning point in medieval exegetical practice. This profound impact is evidenced in the integration of his remarks on the structural and dialectical dimensions of the surah in later genres of Sciences of the Qur'ān (*'ulūm al-Qur'ān*) and Qur'anic commentaries. For instance, both Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī (d. 794/1392) and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūfī (d. 911/1505) include the examination of the thematic connectedness of the surah (*munāsabāt*) and the dialectal reasoning in the surah (*jadāl*) as parts of *'ulūm al-Qur'ān*. Additionally, al-Rāzī's method in approaching the surah structure is followed closely by many later exegetes, such as Burhān al-Dīn al-Nasafī (d. 687/1288), Nizām al-Dīn al-Nīsābūrī (d. 728/1328), Shams al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī (d. 749/1348), and the Ḥanbalite exegete Ibn 'Ādil (d. ca.808/1405).

### **Transliteration Note**

I follow the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* (IJMES) system for Arabic transliteration. However, familiar terms like *surah* and *kalam* are used without regular transliterations. Unless otherwise stated, all translations of the Qur'ān in this dissertation are from M. A. S Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an: A New Translation by M. A. S. Abdel Haleem* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).



## Introduction

By the end of the twentieth century, scholarship on the Qur'anic text has marked a growing interest in studying the Qur'ān in its final form and on its own terms to understand its message.<sup>1</sup> This premise of approaching the Qur'ān as a comprehensible text has sparked considerable interest in approaching the Qur'anic surah as a formal unit and a definable genre. On the basis of this literary approach, many insights have been offered regarding reading many Qur'anic surahs more holistically and making sense of their overall themes, despite the differing methodologies adopted by various scholars, such as Angelica Neuwirth, Mustansir Mir, Neal Robinson, Michael Sells, M. A. Abdel Haleem, Mathias Zahniser, Salwa El-Awa, Marianna Klar, Michael Cuypers, Raymond Farrin, and, more recently, Nevin Reda.

In spite of the proliferation of scholarship on the literary architecture of the Qur'anic surah and the vital service it provides for the development of the field of Qur'anic studies, little attention is paid to the medieval conception of the literary structure of the surah. Because this

---

<sup>1</sup> For an examination of this current trend in the literary approach to the Qur'ān, see Travis Zadeh, "Qur'anic Studies and the Literary Turn," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 135, no. 2 (2015): 329–43. For some modern works on the literary approach to or literary issues in the Qur'ān, see Issa J Boullata, ed., *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'ān* (Richmond: Curzon, 2000); G. H. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef, eds., *Approaches to the Qur'ān* (London: Routledge, 1993); Andrew Bannister, *An Oral-Formulaic Study of the Qur'ān* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014); Carl W Ernst, *How to Read the Qur'ān: A New Guide, with Select Translations* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011); Neal Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'ān: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text* (London: SCM Press, 1996); Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur'ān: The Early Revelations* (Ashland: White Cloud Press, 2007); Salwa M. S. El-Awa, *Textual Relations In Quran: Relevance, coherence and structure* (Routledge Studies in the Qur'an, 2006); Nevin Reda, *The al-Baqara Crescendo: Understanding the Qur'an's Style, Narrative Structure, and Running Themes* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017); Raymond Farrin, *Structure and Qur'anic Interpretation* (White Cloud Press, 2014); Michel Cuypers, *The Banquet, A Reading of the Fifth Sura of the Qur'an* (Miami: Convivium Press, 2009); idem, *A Qur'anic Apocalypse: A Reading of the Thirty-Three Last Sūras of the Qur'ān* (Lockwood Press, 2018); idem, *The Composition of the Qur'an: Rhetorical Analysis* (Bloomsbury Publishing, , 2015); and Angelika Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007). The literary approach is covered in publications on companions to the Qur'ān. For instance, see Andrew Rippin, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'ān* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2006); Jane Dammen McAuliffe, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Quran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); and Mustafa Shah and M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the Qur'ān* (Oxford University Press, 2020). For a recent collection of 40 chapters covering different themes on the Qur'ān, see George Archer, Maria M. Dakake, Daniel A. Madigan, eds., *The Routledge Companion to the Qur'ān* (New York, Routledge, 2021). See also Mariana Klar, ed., *Structural Dividers in the Qur'ān* (London: Routledge, 2020).

area of scholarship is under-explored, a number of misconceptions have grown up around the medieval contributions to the study of the surah structure. For instance, Stefan Wild states that modern Muslim exegetes have developed an interest in the issues of the coherence and disjointedness of the Qur’anic text “only when Western non-Muslims in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries complained about or ridiculed what they considered a lack of “unity” or “coherence” in the sūras.”<sup>2</sup> In the same vein, Michael Cuypers holds that the medieval Qur’anic exegetical tradition is primarily atomistic. He argues that this exegetical trend results in disregarding the surah context in the interpretive process, thereby causing many hermeneutical problems.<sup>3</sup>

To add nuance and depth to the medieval study of the literary architecture of the surah, the present study focuses on examining Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s (d. 606/1210) transformative contributions to the literary study of the surah design. To this end, the study seeks to analyze al-Rāzī’s approach to the surah as developed in his exegesis *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* (The Keys to the Unseen), alternatively entitled *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* (The Grand Commentary), which appears in eighteen large volumes in modern print.<sup>4</sup> What motivates al-Rāzī to examine the surah structure? What contributions does he make? In what ways does the examination of the surah design

---

<sup>2</sup> Stefan Wild, “Unity and Coherence in the Qur’ān,” in *Exegetical Crossroads: Understanding Scripture in Judaism, Christianity and Islam in the Pre-Modern Orient*, ed. Georges Tamer, Regina Grundmann, Assaad Elias Kattan and, Karl Pinggéra (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 304.

<sup>3</sup> See Michel Cuypers, Semitic Rhetoric as a Key to the Question of the nazm of the Qur’anic Text, *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 13, no. 1 (2011): 5-7.

<sup>4</sup> The Egyptian historian Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qifṭī (d. 646/1248) states that al-Rāzī names his commentary *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*. See al-Qifṭī, *Ikhbār al-‘Ulamā’ bī Akhbār al-Ḥukamā’* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2005), 220. However, al-Rāzī refers to this commentary in many of his works as *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*. See for instance, al-Rāzī, *Al-Maṭālib al-‘Āliyah* (Cairo: Al-Maktabah al-Azhariyyah, 2013), 4:355, idem, *Kitāb al-Arba‘īn fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*, ed. Aḥmad Ḥijāzī (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 2004), 415, and idem, *Manāqib al-Imām al-Shāfi‘ī* (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1993), 181. Given that al-Rāzī wrote another exegetical work entitled *Asrār al-Tanzīl wa Anwār al-Ta’wīl* (The Secrets of Revelation and the Lights of Interpretation), which is small compared to *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, it seems that the commentary is originally called *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, and that *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* (Grand Commentary) describes the size and grandeur of the work. What substantiates this view is that al-Qifṭī refers to al-Rāzī’s *Asrār al-Ta’wīl* as *al-Tafsīr al-Ṣaghīr* (The Small Commentary) after mentioning *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* as the latter’s main exegetical work.

influence his interpretive strategy? To what extent does al-Rāzī's approach bear upon later exegetes? These are the primary questions motivating this study.

### Al-Rāzī's Literary Study of the Surah Structure

Al-Rāzī is a medieval polymath who hails from Rayy (near present-day Tehran). His areas of interest include rational theology, philosophy, logic, syntax, mysticism, exegesis, legal theory, jurisprudence, ethics, rhetoric, literature, medicine, physiognomy, astronomy and astrology.<sup>5</sup> Besides his great diversified learning, al-Rāzī is renowned for his disputation and dialectical skills, which are developed as part of his scholarly education and engagement in Rayy

---

<sup>5</sup> The scope and depth of al-Rāzī's interests are reflected in the fact that his biography is found in many variegated biographical dictionaries (*Ṭabaqāt*) that serve as commemorations of distinct groups of scholars—jurists, grammarians, exegetes, physicians, etc. For medieval entries on al-Rāzī, see the following works in a chronological order from the 7<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> century to the 10<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> century: Al-Qazwīnī, *Al-Tadwīn fī Akhbār Qazwīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1987), 1:477-478; Al-Qiftī, *Ikhbār al-ʿUlamāʾ bī Akhbār al-Ḥukamāʾ* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 2005), 219-221; Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Muʿjam al-Udabāʾ* (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1993), 6:2585-2592; Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh* (Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 2003), 10:350; Al-Mūṣilī, *Qalāʾid al-Jumān fī Farāʾid Shuʿarāʾ ḥadhā al-Zamān* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 2005), 5:80-88; Šibt̄ ibn al-Jawzī, *Mirʾāt al-Zamān fī Tawārīkh al-Aʾyān* (Syria: Dār al-Risālah al-ʿĀlamiyyah, 2013), 22:169-170; Shihāb al-Dīn Abū Shāmah, *Al-Dhayl ʿalā al-Rawḍatayn* (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1974), 68; Ibn Abū Uṣaybiʿah, *ʿUyūn al-Anbāʾ fī Ṭabaqāt al-Aṭibbāʾ* (Beirut: Dār Maktabat al-Ḥayāh, n/d), 462-470; Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-Aʾyān wa Anbāʾ Abnāʾ al-Zamān* (Beirut: Dār Šādir, 1978), 4:248-252; Al-Qazwīnī, *Athār al-Bilād wa Akhbār al-ʿIbād* (Beirut: Dār Šādir, n/d), 377-379; Al-Shahrazurī, *Tārīkh al-Ḥukamāʾ* (Libya: Jamʿiyyat al-Daʾwah al-Islāmiyyah, n/d), 392-396; Al-Fihri, *Fihrist al-Lablī* (Tunisia: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1988), 127-129; Al-Dhababī, *Tārīkh al-Islām wa Wafayāt al-Mashāhīr wa al-Aʾlām* (Tunisia: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2003), 13:137-145; idem, *Siyar Aʾlām al-Nubalāʾ* (Beirut: Muʿassasat al-Risālah, 1984), 21:500-501; idem, *Mizān al-ʿItidāl fī Naqd al-Rijāl* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1995), 5:411; Faḍl Allāh al-ʿUmarī, *Masālik al-Abṣār fī Mamālik al-Amṣār* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 2010), 9:71-80; Al-Šafadī, *Al-Wāfi bī al-Wafayāt* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 2000), 4:175-182; Al-Yāfiʿī, *Mirʾāt al-Jinān wa ʾIbrat al-Yaqzān* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1997), 6:6-10; Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʾiyyah al-Kubrā* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth, n/d), 8:81-96; Al-Asnawī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʾiyyah* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1987), 2:123-124; Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah* (Al-Jīzah: Hajar lī al-Ṭibāʿah wa al-Nashr, 1997), 17:11-14; idem, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʾiyyah* (Beirut: Dār al-Madār al-Islāmī, 2004), 2:716-721; Ibn al-Mulaqqin, *Al-ʿIqd al-Mudhhab fī Ṭabaqāt Ḥamalāt al-Madhhab* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1997), 149-150; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, *Ṭabaqāt al-Nihāh wa al-Lughawīyyīn* (Al-Najaf: Maṭbaʿat al-Nuʿmān, 1974), 215-216; Ibn Ḥajar, *Lisān al-Mizān* (Beirut: Maktabat al-Maṭbūʿāt al-Islāmiyyah, 2002), 6:318-321; Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Al-Nujūm al-Zāhirah fī Mulūk Miṣr wa al-Qāhirah* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1992), 6:175-176; Al-Suyūṭī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Mufasssīrīn* (Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, 1976), 115-116; Mujīr al-Dīn al-ʿUlaymī, *Al-Tārīkh al-Muʿtabar fī Anbāʾ man Ghabar* (Syria: Dār al-Nawādir, 2011), 3:162-163; Al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Mufasssīrīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1983), 2:215-218; Al-Hijrānī, *Qilādat al-Nahr fī Wafayāt Aʾyān al-Dahr* (Jaddah: Dār al-Minhāj, 2008), 5:23-25; and Taṣkōprüzade, *Miftāḥ al-Saʿādah wa Miṣbāḥ al-Siyādah fī Mawḍūʿāt al-ʿUlūm* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1985), 2:102-108.

(distinctly known for being home to many theological and juristic sects and polemical tumults) and Transoxiana (where Maturīdī theology and Ḥanafī Fiqh were more dominant).<sup>6</sup>

Al-Rāzī's polymathic learning and dialectical reasoning are unmistakably reflected in his monumental exegetical work *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*.<sup>7</sup> With this encyclopedic learning and dialectical interests, he revolutionizes the medieval approach to the interpretation of the Qur'ān. His role in revolutionizing medieval Qur'anic exegesis is not manifested merely in incorporating complex bodies of knowledge into explicating the content of individual verses but also in offering holistic readings of some surahs and providing structural analyses of large blocks of many surahs. A close reading of *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* reveals that al-Rāzī reads the surah as a rational theologian, who focuses on the surah argumentation to make sense of the flow of its material. In other words, al-Rāzī argues that the surah units are arranged in accordance with the Qur'anic theological objectives and persuasive techniques.

This early treatment of the surah as a literary unit with interconnected parts is mainly informed by al-Rāzī's dialectical, disputational, and theological training. For instance, he addresses an uncommon medieval question on the disjointedness of the surah. In his discussion about the thematic flow of the beginning of surah 38 (Ṣād), al-Rāzī raises an objection against

---

<sup>6</sup> For a critical survey of al-Rāzī's works, see Ṭahā Jābir, *Al-'Ulwānī's Al-Imām Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī wa Muṣannaḥātuh* (Cairo: Dār al-Salām, 2010). Al-Zarkān identifies 194 works associated with al-Rāzī and classifies the works into three groups: (1) works that are certainly ascribed to al-Rāzī (1-93), (2) works that are dubiously attributed to al-Rāzī (94-165), and (3) spurious works (*manḥūlah*: 166-194). See al-Zarkān's *Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī wa Ārā'uh al-Kalāmiyyah* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1963). For an alphabetical order of al-Rāzī's works, see F. Kholeif, *A Study on Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and His Controversies in Transoxiana* (Beirut: International Publication Service, 1966). See also, Frank Griffel, "On Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Life and the Patronage He Received," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 18, no. 3 (2007): 313-344.

<sup>7</sup> The centrality and value of al-Rāzī's commentary in the classical exegetical tradition is fairly highlighted by Ignaz Goldziher. In his pioneering work *Die Richtungen der islamischen Koranauslegung*, which provides an overview of the various modes of Qur'anic interpretation, Goldziher considers al-Rāzī's exegesis as the "Abschluss der produktiven Tafsir-Litteratur" (the culmination of the productive exegetical literature). See Goldziher, *Die Richtungen der islamischen Koranauslegung* (Leiden: Brill, 1920), 123. One can also assert that *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* signals a culmination in al-Rāzī's intellectual odyssey, as he writes the commentary roughly during the last ten years of his life—extending from around 595/1198 to 606/1210. For the dating of al-Rāzī's commentary, see "Les Mafatih al-ghayb de l'imam Fakhr al-Din al-Razi: Quelques dates, lieux, manuscrits," *MIDEO* 13 (1977): 253–290.

the coherence of the initial segments of the surah but finds the answer in the Qur'anic strategies of argumentation and persuasion. Furthermore, he posits that the Qur'ān adopts the method of debate between the prophets and their adversaries as a way of uncovering and establishing truths in theology and ethics. Al-Rāzī goes further to assert that disputation is essentially the profession of the prophets (*ḥirfat al-nabiyā'*).

In light of this Qur'anic legitimization of dialectical reasoning, al-Rāzī postulates that the surah integrates both arguments and counterarguments to develop a final conclusion. In his opinion, identifying the thematic shifts in the surah is achieved by recognizing how its argumentation unfolds. Thus, the dialectical strategies in the surah serve as an effective instrument in al-Rāzī's examination of the thematic flow of its content. It is against that background that al-Rāzī proposes that Qur'anic commentary must be provided by a theologian-exegete. To challenge the jurists (*fuqahā'*) who oppose kalam, al-Rāzī argues that the Qur'anic space devoted to legal discussions is extremely limited compared to the theological and ethical content, which occupies most of the Qur'anic discourses.

Similarly, al-Rāzī deals with the surah as a persuasive text, in which various strategies are intentionally employed to present the same point of view in different occasions without bogging down the reader with repetitiveness. For instance, the case for divine unity (*tawḥīd*) is typically reinforced and defended by enhancing logical reasoning (*naẓar*), providing narratives of the past prophets, conveying moral principles through parables, and describing the eschatological fate of the believers and disbelievers in divine unity. Repeating the same point in different forms is a literary phenomenon, to which al-Rāzī refers as *taṣrīf* (diversification of themes). In his view, this compositional strategy appears to be an essential part of the Qur'anic self-image as expressed in Q. 17:41, Q. 17:89, and Q. 18:54.

With the notion of Qur'anic persuasion in mind, al-Rāzī adopts another method in detecting and expounding the juxtaposition of the surah's distinct units. This new method is an inductive activity through which he conducts a thorough examination of the Qur'anic text in hopes of finding some iterative techniques employed in the Qur'ān. Al-Rāzī's search for an inner-Qur'anic grammar of composition yields a structural insight, namely, *'ādāt al-Qur'ān* (Qur'anic structuring patterns). Al-Rāzī uses this term to refer to some compositional conventions that are frequently used in the Qur'ān to bind the surah units together. For instance, he observes that many neighboring units in a surah can be explained in terms of antithesis and complementarity, as in the case of the juxtaposition of the fate of believers and disbelievers, and the rights of God and the rights of others respectively. Furthermore, legal and ethical themes sometimes go hand in hand as a Qur'anic strategy to encourage sincere obedience. In this way, a legal instruction on divorce could deliberately be followed by the significance of observing daily prayers. Even though the legal and the moral could seemingly be seen as distinct units, al-Rāzī notes that this is an intentional compositional strategy that can be best understood as a form of Qur'anic persuasion, not a sign of textual fragmentation.

This unconventional interpretive strategy is not al-Rāzī's solitary endeavor. To advance his project, al-Rāzī partly relies on the Mu'tazilite exegetes, who can be considered to be his foes and friends. Theologically, al-Rāzī's commentary is replete with polemics against the Mu'tazilites' utilization of the Qur'anic text to support their theological positions. However, many Mu'tazilite figures equally appear as al-Rāzī's friends from two major perspectives: supporting theological reasoning in general and advancing the literary study of the Qur'ān in particular. For example, al-Rāzī incorporates many of the Mu'tazilite theological insights in his arguments for promoting the primacy of rational reasoning as an essential component of Islamic

theology and Qur'anic interpretation. To develop his study of the surah structure, al-Rāzī additionally makes himself *au fait* with the Mu'tazilite exegetical tradition and integrates the Mu'tazilite structural observations into his literary study of the surah design. Examples of the Mu'tazilite exegetes who impact al-Rāzī's view of the literary architecture of the surah include Abū Muslim al-Ṣfahānī (d. 322/1066), al-Qaffāl (d. 365/976) and 'Abd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025).

In view of al-Rāzī's analysis of the surah structure, theology and literary theory become inextricably linked in a connective network of relations. Al-Rāzī unequivocally utilizes the surah theological content as an instrument to unearth its literary structure. Similarly, al-Rāzī utilizes his observations about the dialectical nature of the surah (1) to promote rational reasoning (*naẓar*) as a medium for attaining knowledge, (2) to authoritatively encourage practicing rational theology (*kalam*) on the grounds that the Qur'anic text encompasses the essence of rational proofs advanced by the *mutakallimūn*, and (3) to attack theological *taqlīd* or the tendency to embrace beliefs without critical examination.

Meanwhile, reading the surah as a unified composition has its own literary consequences. For instance, many individual verses are traditionally explained in light of external sources, such as the occasions of revelation *asbāb al-nuzūl*, abrogation (*naskh*), and transmitted exegetical reports (*āthār*). Prioritizing the surah context, al-Rāzī opposes exegetical conformity (*taqlīd*) to these external channels of interpretation. In this way, it does not come as a surprise to find al-Rāzī rejecting some of the *asbāb al-nuzūl* reports, critiquing the overuse of *naskh* and stating that “the less abrogation, the better” (*al-naskh kullama kana aqal kana awlā*).<sup>8</sup> Moreover, he encourages original interpretations that prioritize the surah context, even if these interpretations appear to be unprecedented.

---

<sup>8</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Mafātiḥ al-Ghayb* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 2009), 5:69.

What is more significant is that al-Rāzī's literary approach to the surah design continues to influence later exegetes to this day. Some of the post-Rāzī Qur'anic commentaries are partly abridgments of al-Rāzī's own exegesis; such as the Qur'anic commentaries produced by Burhān al-Dīn al-Nasafī (d. 687/1288), Shams al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī (d. 688/1289), Niẓām al-Dīn al-Nīsābūrī (d. 728/1328), and the Ḥanbalite exegete Ibn 'Ādil (d. ca. 880/1476). Under the direct influence of al-Rāzī, Ibn 'Ādil, for instance, incorporates al-Rāzī's literary remarks on the thematic relations in the surah. Furthermore, Ibn 'Ādil adopts many Ash'arite positions held by al-Rāzī—most notably the allegorical interpretations of the Qur'anic references to God's hand or wrath and the like to avoid any theological implications of anthropomorphism. Furthermore, al-Rāzī's exegetical remarks are still present in modern exegetical works. For instance, Rashid Reda, in spite of some of his reservations toward al-Rāzī's commentary, adopts many of the latter's observations about the thematic flow of the surah units.

Taking these transformative contributions into consideration, one can easily discern that al-Rāzī serves as a unique case of a medieval exegete who breaks with the notion of atomistic exegesis, instead offering a fresh voice legitimizing the holistic reading of the Qur'anic text. In spite of al-Rāzī's unique approach to the surah structure and the profound impact it had on many later exegetes, the dialectical dimensions of al-Rāzī's approach to the surah structure has not attracted a devoted study. To address this gap and better understand the medieval consideration of the thematic flow of the Qur'anic text, this study focuses on examining al-Rāzī's systematic considerations of the surah design and highlights his dialectical approach to the arrangement of the surah content. In the following section, I will provide a survey of the scholarly resources on the study of al-Rāzī's exegesis and the various evaluations of his literary approach to the literary composition of the surah.



## 1. Literature Review

While al-Rāzī's theological, philosophical and ethical views have attracted the attention of many scholars, his literary approaches in his exegesis work *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* are still less explored.<sup>9</sup> There are two recent focused studies on al-Rāzī's commentary: Michael Legarde's *Les secrets de l'invisible: Essai sur le Grand Commentaire de Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī* and Tariq Jaffer's *Rāzī: Master of Quranic Interpretation and Theological Reasoning*. Legarde succinctly identifies four major instruments that explain the conceptual framework and the underlying principles that inform al-Rāzī's approach to the Qur'anic text. According to Legarde, al-Rāzī recognizes that the Qur'ān communicates its message through four major themes or methods, namely, the Qur'anic secrets (*asrār*), subtleties (*laṭā'if*), niceties (*daqā'iq*) and arrangement (*naẓm*). Legarde argues that al-Rāzī seeks to unravel the "hidden beauty and marvel" of the Qur'ān through these four mediums. On the basis of these four notions and through an examination of al-Rāzī's commentary on many different verses, Legarde explores the theological, mystical, persuasive and pedagogical dimensions of the Qur'ān as put forth by al-Rāzī. With close relevance to this study, Legarde delves into the "meaning" communicated by

---

<sup>9</sup> For an extensive study of al-Rāzī's treatment of God's existence, prophecy, free will and predestination, as laid down in his *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* and other theological works; see Yasin Ceylan, *Theology and Tafṣīr in the Major Works of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1996). Ayman Shihadeh brings al-Rāzī's ethical theories to the limelight. In his in-depth monograph *The Teleological Ethics of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī*, Shihadeh examines al-Rāzī's positions on human action, predestination and mortality with a focus on his engagements with the Avicennian and Ash'arite tradition. See Ayman Shihadeh, *The Teleological Ethics of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Science* (Leiden: Brill, 2006). See also, Ayman Shihadeh, "From al-Ghazālī to al-Rāzī: 6th / 12th Century Developments in Muslim Philosophical Theology," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 15, no. 1 (2005): 141–79; idem, "Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Response to Sharaf al-Dīn al-Mas'ūdī's Critical Commentary on Avicenna's *Ishārāt*," *Muslim World* 104, no. 1/2 (April 1, 2014): 1–61; idem, "Aspects of the Reception of Avicenna's Theory of Prophecy in Islamic Theology," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 86 (July 1, 2012): 23–32; idem, "Al-Rāzī's Earliest Kalam Work," in *Theological Rationalism in Medieval Islam: New Sources and Perspectives*, ed. G. Schwarb, L. Muehlethaler, and S. Schmidtke (Leuven: Peeters, 2018). See also Max Horten, *Die philosophischen Ansichten von Rāzī und Tusi (1209 und 1273) mit einem Anhang; Die griechischen Philosophen in der Vorstellungswelt von Rāzī und Tusi* (Bonn: P. Hanstein, 1910); and Ignaz Goldziher, "Aus der Theologie des Fakhr al-dīn al-Rāzī," *Der Islam* 3, no. 1 (2009): 213–247.

the sequential order of the verses and units of the surah. Furthermore, Legarde posits that al-Rāzī is interested in the “intrinsically moral connotation” that is communicated through *naẓm*.<sup>10</sup>

Legarde’s monograph is replete with examples from al-Rāzī’s commentary. For instance, Legarde examines al-Rāzī’s explanation of the sentence sequence in Joseph’s reply to Potiphar’s wife, or in Qur’anic terms, *imra’at al-‘Azīz*. In rejecting her sexual advances, Joseph says: “God forbid! My master has been good to me; wrongdoers never prosper” (Q. 12:23). Here, al-Rāzī argues that this three-element answer is arranged in the best way (*‘alā aḥsan wujūh al-tartīb*). He explains that the first element “God forbid (*ma‘āza Allāh*) is a reference to the spiritual cognizance of God’s right, which dissuades one from infidelity. The second element “My master has been good to me” is a reference to the moral awareness of people’s rights, which must be protected (*wājibat al-ri‘āyah*). Furthermore, Joseph affirms that it is more heinous to meet the master’s benevolence with offence and abuse. The third element is a reminder of the relationship between moral decisions and awareness of the consequences. In his *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, al-Rāzī observes:

Self-protection is a must. This fleeting pleasure will be followed by disgrace in this life and painful punishment in the afterlife. In the case of a fleeting pleasure that is followed by painful harm, reason dictates that one must abstain from it.<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, Legarde provides a good illustration of al-Rāzī’s interest in showing that the Qur’anic arrangement of its verses reflects moral and logical insights. Consider the following passage from Surah 15 (al-Ḥijr):

But the righteous will be in Gardens with springs-  
“Enter them in peace and safety!”—  
And We shall remove any bitterness from their hearts: [they will be like] brothers, sitting  
on couches, face to face

---

<sup>10</sup> Michel Lagarde, *Les secrets de l’invisible: essai sur le Grand Commentaire de Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (1149—1209)* (Beirut: Albouraq, 2008), 431. See also Tariq Jaffer, Review of *Les secrets de l’invisible: Essai sur le Grand Commentaire de Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī*, by Michael Legarde, *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 15, no. 3 (2013): 276.

<sup>11</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, 18:92.

No weariness will ever touch them there, nor will they ever be expelled' (Q. 15: 45-48).

Al-Rāzī's commentary on the sequential order of these verses typically illustrates his well-established tendency to represent Qur'anic schemas of moral, logical or pedagogical reasoning. He usually theorizes specific categorizations pertaining to a moral or pedagogical theme, and then he shows his readers that the Qur'anic thematic sequence reflects these moral or logical precepts. Pursuant to this strategy, al-Rāzī shows that the Qur'anic composition exhibits the best type of arrangement (*aḥsan tartīb*). For instance, he argues that the arrangement of the above-cited passage depicts the best form of reward. To that end, al-Rāzī first theorizes that the exemplary type of reward must meet four qualities: beneficial, honorary, faultless and permanent. Thereafter al-Rāzī surprises his readers that these four qualities are respectively contained in this four-verse passage.<sup>12</sup> Even though Legarde appreciates al-Rāzī's explanations of the moral values and logical presentations found in the thematic relations between the Qur'anic sentences or series of verses, he still argues that al-Rāzī's categorizations, as in the above-mentioned four conditions, could have been reached through a pre-reading of the passage, not necessarily a moral priori that the passage endorses.<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, as Legarde's analysis primarily deals with al-Rāzī's examination of the thematic sequence between sentences and verses or a surah discourse unit, the former successfully includes some observations about al-Rāzī's examinations of the persuasive functions of the Qur'anic narratives and recurring strategies such as promise of reward and threat against punishment (*al-wa'd wa al-wa'id*). Moreover, Legarde briefly discusses al-Rāzī's approach to the surah as a whole. To demonstrate this dimension of Qur'anic composition in al-Rāzī's commentary, Legarde gives a good presentation of al-Rāzī's view of surah 18 (al-Kahf) as

---

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 19:154

<sup>13</sup> See also Michel Lagarde, *Les secrets de l'invisible*, 449.

a well-arranged unified composition. Relying on al-Rāzī's commentary, Legarde identifies twelve main units that, in spite of their apparent fragmentation, are proved to be thematically connected according to al-Rāzī's analysis. Legarde argues that al-Rāzī's view of the connectedness of the surah (1) relies on the recurring theme of God's reprobation of the rich Meccans who despise the poor believers, and (2) draws on an extrinsic link that deals with the Jewish questions on Muḥammad's prophecy.<sup>14</sup>

Legarde does not stand alone in his reference to al-Rāzī's interest in unraveling the surah structure as a whole. Recognizing the centrality of the literary analysis of the surah structure in al-Rāzī's commentary, Abdul Haleem observes:

Al-Rāzī's Tafsīr offers a rare example of a "holistic" approach to the text. He was a philosopher with a mind that could take in the overall structure of surahs and identify the main divisions according to themes rather than rather than individual words or verses. In addition, al-Rāzī was a master jurist and accomplished linguist who raised questions in his discussions that continue to provide relevant engagement for contemporary Qur'anic scholarship.<sup>15</sup>

Continuing the examination of al-Rāzī's underlying strategies for the exegetical practice, Jaffer focuses on al-Rāzī's appropriation of the heritage of Aristotelian and Avicennian philosophy and the synthesis of the Mu'tazilite and Sufi tradition as a central interpretive methodology in *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*.<sup>16</sup> According to Jaffer, al-Rāzī is interested in assigning philosophical and mystical meaning to the verses of the Qur'ān. However, Jaffer's identification of al-Rāzī's interpretative methodology is not solely derived from *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* but from an array of al-Rāzī's philosophical and theological works. Furthermore, Jaffer places emphasis on

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 537.

<sup>15</sup> Abdel Haleem, "Structural Coherence in the Qur'an: How to See the Connections," in *Structural Dividers in the Qur'an*, ed. Marianna Klar (London: Routledge, 2020), 340.

<sup>16</sup> With regard to the Muslim reception of Greek sciences, Abdelhamid Sabra refers to two steps: (1) appropriation through translation and adaptation to the Muslim Arabic context, and (2) naturalization of the sciences to the extent that the Greek was no longer palpable. See A. Sabra, "The Appropriation and Subsequent Naturalization of Greek Science in Medieval Islam: A Preliminary Statement," *History of Science* 25, no. 3 (1987): 223–243.

al-Rāzī's utilization of the Qur'ān to "express his philosophical theology" and to grant philosophical and rational reasoning an undisputed authority in Sunni exegesis.<sup>17</sup>

The present study continues the investigation of al-Rāzī's tools in reading the Qur'anic text by focusing on his reading of the surah as argumentation and examining the hermeneutical implications of his view of the surah as a unified composition. While Legarde offers great insights on al-Rāzī's discovery of the meaning found in the sequence of words and verses, the present study focuses on the meaning found in the architecture of the surah. Furthermore, the study unravels al-Rāzī's utilization of the concept of Qur'anic composition (*naẓm*) to advance his theological agenda and to counter the uncritical reception of earlier exegetical tradition (*taqlīd*). This second dimension of al-Rāzī's theological and hermeneutical utilization of *naẓm* is best understood as an extension to Jaffer's emphasis on al-Rāzī's appropriation of philosophy and rational theory to transform the exegetical tradition.

## 2. Three Evaluations of al-Rāzī's Approach to *Naẓm*

Apart from these two important monographs on al-Rāzī's commentaries, many modern works on the surah structure have made preliminary observations on al-Rāzī's treatment of the textual connectedness of the surah as part of their application of different modern trends in structural analysis. Surveying the Arabic and Western scholarship on al-Rāzī's study of the Qur'anic *naẓm*, one can discern three major approaches: (1) the characterization of al-Rāzī, in the Arabic history of *balāghah*, as a rhetorician responsible for the decline of the literary study of Qur'anic composition; (2) the assessment of al-Rāzī's contributions to thematic analysis as an

---

<sup>17</sup> Al-Rāzī's theology attracts the attention of many scholars. For instance, see the following: Goldziher, "Aus der Theologie des Fachr al-dīn al-Rāzī," *Der Islam* 3, no. 1 (2009): 213–247; Muammer Iskenderoglu, *Fakhr al-Din al-Razi and Thomas Aquinas on the Question of the Eternity of the World* (Leiden: Brill, 2002); Yasin Ceylan, *Theology and Tafsir in the Major Works of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī* (Kuala Lumpur : ISTAC , 1996); and Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ al-Zarkān, *Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī wa arā'uhu al-kalāmiyyah wa al-falsafīyyah* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1963). For al-Rāzī's theory on ethics, human action and free will, see A. Shihadeh, *The Teleological Ethics of Fakhr al-Din al-Razi* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

example of a “linear-atomistic” study of Qur’anic composition (*naẓm*); and (3) the acknowledgment of al-Rāzī’s efficient methodology in unraveling a complex network of thematic relations in the surah.

## 2.1 Al-Rāzī and the History of Arabic Rhetoric

Regarding the first approach, it is sometimes presumed that al-Rāzī’s preoccupation with speculative theology led to de-emphasizing the literary aesthetics that are celebrated in ‘Abd al-Qāhir’s (d. 471/1078) *balāghah* works. Some scholars negatively characterize al-Rāzī’s impact on the literary study of the Qur’anic structure in part due to their reliance on al-Rāzī’s sole work on rhetoric *Nihāyat al-Ījāz fī Dirāyat al-I’jāz* (Ultimate Concision: On Recognizing Qur’anic Inimitability), wherein he rigidly summarizes ‘Abd al-Qāhir’s major works—*Asrār al-Balāghah* (*The Niceties of Poetics*) and the *Dalā’il al-I’jāz* (*The Signs of Inimitability*). For instance, Shawqī Ḍayf observes:

The phenomena of repetition, intellectual unproductiveness and rigidity are found to be pervasive among rhetoricians who came after ‘Abd al-Qāhir and al-Zamakhsharī. They advanced nothing new in their rhetorical study, because they limited their task to summarizing what ‘Abd al-Qāhir and al-Zamakhsharī wrote. They did not even broaden their knowledge by reading al-Zamakhsharī’s *Kashshāf*. Instead, they are satisfied with summarizing ‘Abd al-Qāhir alone. Whether such abridgements were limited to ‘Abd al-Qāhir [works] or extended to include al-Zamakhsharī’s, nothing new was added—except for some complexities imported from the study of philosophy and logic. This is how the rules of rhetoric became unyielding and stagnant ... Among the first to engage in writing abridgements was al-Rāzī and then al-Sakkākī<sup>18</sup>

Accordingly, the supposed medieval decline in the pursuit of literary and rhetorical investigation is attributed to al-Rāzī’s treatment of rhetoric as a semi-philosophical task.<sup>19</sup> This view is usually attested by the fact that al-Rāzī’s contemporary al-Sakkākī (d. 626/1229) is

---

<sup>18</sup> Shawqī Ḍayf, *Al-Balāghah Taṭawwur wa Tārīkh* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1992), 272-273. See also ‘Abd al-Qādir Ḥusayn, *Al-Mukhtasar fī Tārīkh al-Balāghah* (Beirut, Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 1982), 199.

<sup>19</sup> See ‘Abd al-Qādir Ḥusayn, *Al-Mukhtasar fī Tārīkh al-Balāghah* (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 1982): 199; ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ‘Āṭīq, *Fī Tārīkh al-Balāghah al-‘Arabīyyah* (Beirut: Dār al-Nahḍah al-‘Arabīyyah, n.d.): 269-270; and Māzin al-Mubārak, *Al-Mūjaz fī Tārīkh al-Balāghah* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1999):101.

influenced by al-Rāzī's *Nihāyat al-Ījāz*. Under this influence, al-Sakkākī writes his *Miftāh al-ʿUlūm (The Key to Knowledge)*, the third section of which is devoted to poetics. Inspired by al-Sakkākī, al-Qazwīnī (d. 739/1338) summarizes the third section in *Talkhīṣ al-Miftāh* and glossed over it in *al-Īdāh li sharḥ al-Talkhīṣ*. Al-Qazwīnī's *Talkhīṣ al-Miftāh* becomes the most famous classic that serves as a main source of learning and teaching Arabic poetics. The many commentaries on this classic attest to its central role in the medieval, and even modern, study of Arabic poetics.<sup>20</sup> Due to al-Rāzī initial role in the emergence of this classic, many of the attacks on Arabic poetics become easily associated with al-Rāzī's summary of ʿAbd al-Qāhir's works.

### 2.1.1 Al-Rāzī's Purpose of *Nihāyat al-Ījāz*

Even though *Nihāyat al-Ījāz* is al-Rāzī's sole work that is entirely devoted to Arabic poetics, it is a mistake to use it as the only way to assess al-Rāzī's approach to the question to *naẓm* or the literary analysis of the Qurʾān. A simple reason for this stance is that al-Rāzī's original development of ʿAbd al-Qāhir's *naẓm* is not to be found in his *Nihāyat al-Ījāz*, because this work is essentially a succinct summary and reorganization of ʿAbd al-Qāhir's theory, which represent the latest development of literary study during al-Rāzī's lifetime. In his introduction to the *Nihāyat al-Ījāz*, al-Rāzī affirms that ʿAbd al-Qāhir marks a turning point in the study of Arabic poetics and Qurʾanic analysis after a long period that, in al-Rāzī's view, suffered negligence in unveiling the rules and subtleties that govern the creation of effective speech.

According to al-Rāzī, ʿAbd al-Qāhir's works, the *Asrār al-Balāghah* and *Dalāʿil al-Ījāz*, bring forth "Arabic rules, wondrous subtleties, rational arguments, scriptural proof-texts, literary

---

<sup>20</sup> The currently available printed commentaries and glosses on the *Talkhīṣ* are Ibn Yaʿqūb al-Maghribī's (d. 739) *Sharḥ Mawāhib al-Fattāh*, Shams al-Dīn al-Khalkhālī's (d. 745) *Miftāh Talkhīṣ al-Miftāh*, Bahāʾ al-Dīn al-Subkī's (d. 773) *ʿARūs al-Afrāḥ*, Saʿd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī's (d. 792) *Mukhtaṣar al-Maʿānī and Al-Muṭawwal*, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī's (d. 911), *Al-Jumān and ʿUqūd al-Jumān*, ʿIṣām al-Dīn al-Ḥanafī's (d. 943) *Al-Aṭwal*, ʿAbd al-Raḥīm al-ʿAbbāsī's (d. 963) *Maʿāhid al-Tanṣīṣ*, Al-Sayālkūnī's (d. 1067) *Hāshiyah ʿalā al-Taftāzānī*, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Shirbīnī's (d. 1326/1908) *Fayḍ al-Fattāh ʿalā Ḥawāshī Talkhīṣ al-Miftāh*, and Al-Dusūqī's (d. 1230) *Hāshiyat al-Dusūqī ʿalā Mukhtaṣar al-Saʿd*.

niceties and linguistic studies that are not found in his predecessors' works or reached by well-versed scholars."<sup>21</sup> However, al-Rāzī expresses a key reservation about the content organization in 'Abd al-Qāhir's works. In al-Rāzī's view, 'Abd al-Qāhir "neglects the arrangement of the rules and chapters and instead gives lengthy explanations throughout [his works]."<sup>22</sup> Yet, al-Rāzī is quick to excuse, what he sees as the lack of a strong organizational structure in 'Abd al-Qāhir's works. In this regard, al-Rāzī affirms that 'Abd al-Qāhir is "fully concerned with deducing the rules, foundations, conditions and states of this science [of *bayān* and *ma'ānī*]."<sup>23</sup>

Having given this evaluative assessment of 'Abd al-Qāhir's role in the study of Arabic rhetoric, al-Rāzī moves on to state the purpose of his work *Nihāyat al-Ījāz*:

As God fortunately guided me to read these two books, I identified and selected the beneficial notes (*fawā'id*) and unique precious pieces contained therein. Furthermore, I considered rearranging the text (*tartīb*) along with refining (*tahdhīb*), corroborating (*taqrīr*) and modifying (*tahrīr*) it. In each chapter, I grouped the general points into certain classifications and gathered the scattered thoughts under rational criteria—avoiding both tedious verbosity and deficient brevity.<sup>24</sup>

It is clear that al-Rāzī's logic-oriented analysis notices the scattered *fawā'id* in 'Abd al-Qāhir works. Based on his statement of purpose, al-Rāzī composes his *Nihāyat al-Ījāz* to reorganize 'Abd al-Qāhir's works with some supportive and evaluative notes. Therefore, al-Rāzī's *Nihāyat al-Ījāz* is originally designed to serve as a base text (*matn*) or a well-run and concise guide to, not an expanded commentary (*sharh*) on, 'Abd al-Qāhir's *Dalā'il* and *Asrār*. Based on the above-quoted passage, al-Rāzī follows three steps in approaching 'Abd al-Qāhir's works. First, he identifies the essence of 'Abd al-Qāhir's unique contributions that draw a new direction for the literary study of the Qur'ān. Second, he finds it necessary to reorganize 'Abd al-

---

<sup>21</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Nihāyat al-Ījāz fī Dirāyat al-Ījāz* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 2004), 24-25.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.



Qāhir's content concisely and precisely so that his *Nihāyat al-I'jāz* can serve as a more convenient companion to the original work. Third, he does not intend for *Nihāyat al-I'jāz* to be as a shorter reference version of 'Abd al-Qāhir's works but rather a revised abridgement that licenses al-Rāzī to include some critical views of some of 'Abd al-Qāhir's rhetorical opinions. Concise as it is, al-Rāzī's *Nihāyat al-I'jāz* follows these three steps very closely.

Concerning the first step, al-Rāzī's summary of 'Abd al-Qāhir's two works clearly shows that al-Rāzī is able to identify the latter's perceived aims and purposes in the *Asrār* and *Dalā'il*. For instance, the notion of *nazm*, the meaning-centered analysis of words and structures are precisely covered. Additionally, al-Rāzī incorporates essential passages from the *Dalā'il* and the *Asrār* to highlight the key elements of these works.

As for the second step, al-Rāzī successfully reconstructs 'Abd al-Qāhir's ideas in an unprecedented way. Al-Rāzī is the first to group the *balāghah* topics into two categories: topics associated with the single words (*mufradāt*) and topics associated with the structures. The first category deals mainly with the *bayān*, whereas the second with the *ma'ānī*.<sup>25</sup> This classification paves the way for al-Sakkākī to follow the classification and the terms adopted in al-Rāzī's work. For this reason, al-Rāzī serves as a link between 'Abd al-Qāhir and al-Sakkākī.<sup>26</sup> Considering al-Rāzī's dialectical and disputation skills, both Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī and Ibn Khallikān commend him for his mastery of the method *al-sabr wa al-taqṣīm* (examination and division) in organizing his works.<sup>27</sup> This skill is frequently employed in legal theory and kalam—two areas al-Rāzī master. To fulfill the purpose of the *Nihāyat al-I'jāz* as a critical abridgement and helpful companion to

---

<sup>25</sup> See Mahir Hilāl, *Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī Balāghiyān* (Baghdād: Al-Dār al-Waṭaniyyah, 1977), 283; and 'Abd al-Qādir Ḥusayn, *Al-Mukhtaṣar fī Tārīkh al-Balāghah* (Cairo: Dār Gharīb, 2001), 193-194.

<sup>26</sup> Shawqī Ḍayf, *Al-Balāghah Taṭawwur wa Tārīkh* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1992), 286.

<sup>27</sup> See Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī's *Mu'jam al-Udabā'* (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1993), 6:2586; and Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-A'yān* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1994), 4:249.

‘Abd al-Qāhir’s works, al-Rāzī is satisfied with his classifications along with brief, and sometimes not so brief, notes on his selected *shawāhid* (evidentiary examples).

With regard to the third step, al-Rāzī’s *Nihāyat al-Ījāz* inspires al-Sakkākī to incorporate al-Rāzī’s own critical comments on some of ‘Abd al-Qāhir’s views. For instance, al-Rāzī disagrees with ‘Abd al-Qāhir when the latter posits that *kināyah* (metonymy) is more eloquent than *ifṣāḥ* (explicit expression).<sup>28</sup> In his *al-Ījāz al-Balāghī fī al-Qur’ān*, ‘Azīz al-Khaṭīb lists al-Rāzī’s critical views, which run in sharp contrast with ‘Abd al-Qāhir’s.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, in his study of al-Rāzī’s treatment of the figures of speech in *al-Taḥsīn al-Kabīr*, Aḥmad Hilāl illustrates that al-Rāzī lists more relations for *al-majāz al-mursal* (metonymy) than those found in ‘Abd al-Qāhir’s or al-Zamakhsharī’s works.<sup>30</sup>

## 2.2 Assessment of al-Rāzī’s Conception of *Naẓm*

In Western scholarship on al-Rāzī’s treatment of Qur’anic *naẓm*, the widely accepted view is that al-Rāzī is primarily concerned with the stitches that bind adjacent verses together without a clear view of the surah overall structure or purpose. Some add that this approach is also a result of the literary interests of medieval Arabic rhetoric. For instance, in his meticulous work *The Banquet: A Reading of the Fifth Surah of the Qur’ān*, Michael Cuypers holds that the Qur’anic surah exhibits coherence and compositional unity, not according to Arabic rhetoric, but according to Semitic rhetoric which is entirely based on the principle of symmetry as illustrated by Rolan Meynet in his works on Biblical texts. Thus, Michel Cuypers recognizes the significance and adequacy of considering Semitic rhetoric and its basic principle of symmetry,

---

<sup>28</sup> Māhir Ḥilāl, *Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī Balāghīyyan* (Baghdād: Al-Dār al-Waṭaniyyah, 1977), 283.

<sup>29</sup> ‘Azīz al-Khaṭīb, *Al-Ījāz al-Balāghī fī al-Qur’ān: Dirāsah Taḥlīliyyah ‘Inda Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī* (Beirut: Dār Qutaybah, 2011), 348-370.

<sup>30</sup> Aḥmad Ḥilāl, *Al-Mabāḥith al-Bayāniyyah fī Taḥsīn Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī* (Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, 1999), 197-225.

which is “developed entirely within the framework of Biblical studies,”<sup>31</sup> as a practical medium that can finally make sense of the overall Qur’anic structure. Through his application of Semitic rhetoric, Cuypers reaches the conclusion that what seemingly appears to be fragmented material in the Qur’ān is not the result of a lack of composition. On the contrary, it is the result of a very sophisticated composition, according to a rhetorical system that was widespread in the antique world of the Middle East, but later forgotten, by even the Arabs, most probably under the influence of Hellenistic culture.<sup>32</sup> To justify his reliance on Semitic rhetoric, which admittedly produces intriguing results regarding the composition of the Qur’anic surah and does not necessarily collide with the practice of Arabic rhetoric as will be demonstrated later, Cuypers argues for two premises about both the exegetical and rhetorical literature during the classical Arabic period.

The first premise Cuypers maintains is that the Muslim exegetical tradition is atomistic in nature, as it follows the method of verse by verse commentary, and is apparently indifferent about the role of the context. In his opinion, this exegetical methodology fails to ascertain the intended meaning of the text. For instance, Cuypers complains of the traditional method of atomistic exegesis which, according to him, causes “the danger of interpreting a verse in isolation, without considering its literary context”<sup>33</sup> To support his view, Cuypers clearly explains that the oft-quoted verse on the validity of *naskh* (abrogation), Q. 2:106, is erroneously understood by medieval exegetes to refer to the Qur’anic abrogation of earlier Qur’anic verses.

---

<sup>31</sup> Cuypers here refers to Johann Albrecht Bengel’s (d. 1752) insights on chiasmus and parallelism in his *Gnomon Novi Testamenti* (Exegetical Annotations on the New Testament), Robert Lowth’s (d. 1787) emphasis on the parallel verses that display a relationship of synonymy, antithesis or complementarity in his *Readings on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews* and Roland Meynet’s works on Biblical rhetoric: *Rhetorical Analysis: An Introduction to Biblical Rhetoric* and *Traité de rhétorique biblique* (Treatise on Biblical Rhetoric), trans. Leo Arnold (Leiden: Brill, 2012). See his bibliography at Rhetorica Semitica’s website: [https://www.retoricabiblicaesemitica.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/0\\_BiblioMeynet\\_21.02.19.pdf](https://www.retoricabiblicaesemitica.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/0_BiblioMeynet_21.02.19.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> Michel Cuypers, Semitic Rhetoric as a Key to the Question of the nazm of the Qur’anic Text, *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 13, no. 1 (2011): 5.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

To Cuypers, the hermeneutical error could have been avoided had the exegetes considered the context that addressed the position of the Torah and Jewish community. Thereby, the *naskh* verse (2:106) should have been taken as a reference to the Qur'anic abrogation of the Torah, an interpretation that Cuypers sees as fitting the context wherein Jewish leaders were addressed.<sup>34</sup>

The second premise Cuypers defends suggests that Arabic rhetoric is insufficient to uncover the structure of the surah. However, to illustrate the relevance of classical rhetorical thought to the elements of literary coherence, one can refer to a list of literary devices and observations that are typically explored in most *balāghah* manuals. For instance, Arabic rhetoricians provide some devices that directly deal with the anatomy of literary works. These devices can be employed to explicate the correlations between sequential units and correspondences of a unit to another. The list includes the following nine devices: *husn al-ibtidā'* (Good Beginning), *husn al-khitām* (Good Closure), *husn al-takhalluṣ* (Good Transition), *al-istiṭrād* (Digression), *al-iqtidāb* (Cutting), *radd al-'ajuz 'lā al-ṣadr* (Correspondence of the Epilogue with the Prologue), *al-iqtiṣāṣ* (Intertextuality/Referentiality), *al-takrār* (Repetition) and *murā'āt muqtaḍā al-ḥāl* (Semantic and Topical Propriety).<sup>35</sup>

Mir, for his part, maintains that the focus on unity and coherence of the Qur'anic surah is a modern enterprise that is initially well-represented by al-Farāhī (d.1930) and amply applied by his student Iṣlāhī (d. 1997). Mir evaluates Iṣlāhī's project on the thematic coherence of the Qur'anic surah as a radical departure from and a "definite break with the traditional style of exegesis ... from the early Islamic centuries to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century."<sup>36</sup> Mir demonstrates

---

<sup>34</sup> As demonstrated in Chapter Five, Cuypers' interpretation of abrogation was actually voiced by the Mu'tazilite exegete Abū Muslim al-Iṣfahānī (d. 322/934) whose position on the Q. 2:106 was quoted and supported by al-Rāzī in his *Mafātiḥ al-Ghayb*.

<sup>35</sup> For the employment of some of these devices in Arabic and Persian Qaṣīdah, see, J. S. Meisami, *Structure and Meaning in Medieval Arabic and Persian Lyric Poetry: Orient Pearls* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003).

<sup>36</sup> Mustansir Mir, "The sūra as a unity," in *Approaches to the Qur'ān*, ed. G R Hawting and Abdel Kader Shareef (New York: Routledge, 1993), 211.

that the defining characteristic of this break is “the view that the Qur’anic sūras are unities,” and that the thematic unity of each surah can be demonstrated through the discovery of its *‘amūd* (axis or main theme), which is “the unifying thread of the surah”<sup>37</sup> or the “master idea under which a main idea seems to emerge and unite the verses the section is composed of.”<sup>38</sup> As far as al-Rāzī’s literary analysis of the surah is concerned, Mir acknowledges al-Rāzī to be a pioneer in revealing the textual interconnectedness in the Qur’anic surah. However, Mir posits that al-Rāzī’s methodology “may be described as linear-atomistic: with verse 1 of a sūra he links up with verse 2, with which he links up verse 3, and so on until the end of the sūra.”<sup>39</sup> Mir concludes that this method “aims at establishing ad hoc relationships between verses, ignores the wood for the trees— the sura for the verses—and so could hardly have been conducive to the development of an organic approach to the quranic sūras.”<sup>40</sup> Elsewhere, Mir acknowledges al-Rāzī as “probably the first major *mufasssīr* to make a relatively systematic attempt to find *naẓm* in the Qur’ān.”<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, Mir recognizes that al-Rāzī sometimes “explains the connectedness of a surah with reference to a principal idea in the surah,” “invokes Qur’anic *naẓm* as a determinant of interpretation,” and “rejects a verse’s alleged *sabab al-nuzūl*.”<sup>42</sup>

Similarly, Salwa El-Awa follows Mir’s view on the absence of discussions on the compositional scheme of the surah in al-Rāzī’s *tafsīr*. In her *Textual Relations in the Qur’ān*, El-Awa agrees with Mir that al-Rāzī’s contributions to the architecture of the surah are limited to unraveling the linear relations between sequential verses. She adds that attention “was not paid to the fact that parts of the whole text cohere to form an integrated structure, but rather was directed

---

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>41</sup> Mustansir Mir, “Continuity, Context, and Coherence in the Qur’ān: A Brief Review of the Idea of Naẓm in Tafsīr Literature,” *Al-Bayan: Journal of Qur’an and Hadith Studies* 11, no. 2 (2013):18.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 20-21.

towards the explanations of reasons why each verse is placed where it is in relation to the following and the preceding verse only.”<sup>43</sup> Moreover, El-Awa claims that al-Rāzī’s long introduction to his exegesis is devoid of any presentation of a theoretical framework or methodology that he is committed to follow. Accordingly, she concludes that “the approach of Qur’anic exegetes to the linguistic aspect of *munāsaba* was still in the development stage as shown by their intuitive employment of the idea rather than following a clear framework which guided their analysis.”<sup>44</sup>

### 2.3 Al-Rāzī’s Literary Theory in Recent Arabic Works

Several modern Arabic works attempt to fill some of the gaps in the literary examination of the surah structure in al-Rāzī’s exegesis. Of these works, two titles stand out: Ra’fat al-Miṣrī’s *Al-Munāsabāt al-Qur’āniyyah ‘inda al-Imām al-Rāzī fī Tafṣīrih Maḥātīḥ al-Ghayb* (The Qur’anic Thematic Relations in Imām al-Rāzī’s Exegesis *Maḥātīḥ al-Ghayb*) and Manāl al-Mas’ūdī’s *Al-Tanāsub fī Tafṣīr al-Imām al-Rāzī: Dirāsah fī Asrār al-Iqtirān* (Thematic Relations in Imām al-Rāzī’s Exegesis: A Study of the Secrets of Interconnection). These two studies offer a thorough presentation of al-Rāzī’s analysis of the sequence between the different units of the surah. For example, an exhaustive list of thematic correspondent units in the surah is given. This list includes the thematic correspondence between the beginning and the end of the surah, the beginning of the surah and its body, the end of the surah and its body, the beginning of a surah and the closure of the previous surah, the beginning of a surah and the content of the previous surah, etc. Moreover, both studies give examples of al-Rāzī’s identification of *‘ādāt al-Qur’ān* or the structuring patterns employed in the surah.

---

<sup>43</sup> Salwa El-Awa, *Textual Relations in the Qur’ān: Relevance, Coherence and Structure* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 15. See also Nevin Reda, *The al-Baqara Crescendo: Understanding the Qur’an’s Style, Narrative Structure, and Running Themes* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2017).

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

Based on these various assessments of al-Rāzī's approach to Qur'anic composition, it is clear that there are a number of conflicting views. These varying conclusions about al-Rāzī's approach to *naẓm* emanate from the varying attentions given to his complex exegetical strategies and objectives. While the first proposal misses the great wealth of literary material in his exegetical work *Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb*, the second proposal does not identify the complex dialectical, theological and literary underpinnings for al-Rāzī's recognition of these "linear-atomistic" connections. Unequivocally, the third proposal, provided by al-Miṣrī and al-Mas'ūdī, engages more with al-Rāzī's exegesis and manages to identify different structural patterns he employs in unraveling the thematic relations in the surah (*munāsabāt*). However, the present study differs from al-Miṣrī's and al-Mas'ūdī's in that it considers two facets that are missing in the current literature on al-Rāzī's compositional theory: (1) it contends that understanding the complexity of al-Rāzī's *munāsabāt* requires a focused examination of these *munāsabāt* in relation to al-Rāzī's theological and dialectical milieu, and (2) it places more focus on al-Rāzī's examination of the surah as a whole.

### **3. Objectives of the Present Study**

Given these missing elements in the current state of research, this study examines al-Rāzī's unconventional treatment of the surah as an argumentation with theological intents and persuasive strategies. My broad objectives include the following:

- To explain how al-Rāzī utilizes his theological and dialectical expertise to devise a new interpretive strategy that takes into consideration the dialectical nature of the surah,
- To identify the structuring patterns, which inform the surah argumentation as developed in al-Rāzī's holistic reading of the surah and as assimilated from al-Rāzī's engagement with the Mu'tazilite exegetical tradition,

- To analyze the ways al-Rāzī employs the surah design to promote his theological agenda. Such issues include the significance of *nazar* in religious enquiries, the Qur’anic validation of the kalam practice and the confrontation with exegetical *taqlīd*,
- To examine the hermeneutical implications of al-Rāzī’s approach to the surah as a unified composition and how this type of composition influences al-Rāzī’s treatment of related issues. Such issues include the traditional views on abrogation (*naskh*) and occasions of revelations (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) that sometimes seem to collide with his understanding of the expected interconnectedness of the surah sections, and
- To explicate the role al-Rāzī’s commentary plays in the next two centuries after his death.

### **Overview of Dissertation Chapters**

To demonstrate these objectives in a way that traces an overarching narrative trajectory,

**Chapter One**, “Qur’anic Composition (*Naẓm*) before al-Rāzī: The Quest for the Locus of Qur’anic Inimitability (*I’jāz*) from al-Jāhīz to al-Zamakhsharī,” maps the pre-Rāzī developments of the study of Qur’anic *naẓm*. Due to the early correlation between *i’jāz* (literary inimitability) and the literary study of the Qur’anic text, gaining a fuller comprehension of al-Rāzī’s contribution to the literary structure of the Qur’ān is not contextually possible without a careful consideration of the basic facets of the literary analysis of the Qur’ān that were in circulation before al-Rāzī. Surveying the early developments of the literary approach to the Qur’ān shows that the pre-Rāzī’s focus on poetics is inspired by al-Jāhīz, who poses the issue of *lafẓ* (form) and *ma’nā* (content) in response to great intellectual and social milieu that correspond with the rise of the Abbasid Caliphate. Al-Jāhīz places emphasis on the *lafẓ* as an essential element in the process of literary evaluation. To demonstrate the Qur’anic self-portrait of exhibiting an unrivaled literary quality, the post-Jāhīz’s generations become more involved with the intricate



functionalities of the *lafz* as an element that exhibits the power of creating a superior style, matchless genre and richer meaning. Therefore, the pre-Rāzī focus on poetics is not a deficiency but rather a timely focus on the expressive qualities of the Qur’anic text in an effort to establish a case for the Qur’anic self-portrayal of literary matchlessness, which was under attack with the rise of the Abbasid Caliphate. Furthermore, the chapter highlights the Mu‘tazilite pioneering contributions to the study of the thematic flow of verses in the Qur’anic text. Al-Ḥākim al-Jushamī’s (d. 494/1100) commentary, *al-Tahdhīb fī al-Tafsīr* (The Refinement of Exegesis) is examined as a case in point.

In addition to this poetics-centered approach and drawing on the Mu‘tazilite exegetical tradition, al-Rāzī’s *Mafātiḥ al-Ghayb* marks a seismic shift to the dialectical design of the surah—a new focus of medieval study that is motivated by al-Rāzī’s preoccupation with speculative theology, mastery of the art of disputation and engagement with the Mu‘tazilites. In this regard, **Chapter Two**, “Al-Rāzī’s Interpretive Strategy for Developing the Study of *Nazm*,” presents al-Rāzī’s theoretical framework for approaching the surah as an argumentation, the units of which can be best be detected by a theologian-exegete. Given this perspective, al-Rāzī posits that theological training is a prerequisite for the exegetical practice. This intermixture of the theological and literary approaches to the overall structure of the Qur’anic surah seems to be unprecedented in Arabic exegetical literature. Furthermore, al-Rāzī’s dialectical reading of the surah leads him to assert that the surah exhibits an intentional employment of variegated material. In other words, al-Rāzī connects this literary observation to the different persuasion strategies the surah employs.

Drawing on al-Rāzī’s emphasis on the role of a theologian-exegete for the reading of the surah, **Chapter Three** “The Kalam Reading of the Surah,” provides practical examples from

*Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* on how the surah structure can be approached dialectically and theologically. Furthermore, al-Rāzī utilizes this dialectically holistic reading to endorse his theological agenda, which includes rational reasoning (*nazar*), critique of the uncritical reception of transmitted reports or earlier opinions (*taqlīd*), and assimilation of rational theology. This theological function of *nazm* serves as a response to al-Rāzī’s contemporary critics of rational theology, as in the case of the *fuqahā’* and the *Karrāmiyyah*. Apart from his defense of rational reasoning in theological works, al-Rāzī uses his concept of the dialectically-structured surah to promote rationalism through the undisputed authority of the Qur’ān. Moreover, the chapter also highlights al-Rāzī’s utilization of the surah design in supporting his Ash‘arite views and engaging polemically with the Mu‘tazilites.

Moving beyond the kalam reading of the surah, **Chapter Four**, “The Persuasive Strategies in the Composition of the Surah,” seeks to identify three compositional strategies that al-Rāzī highlights as forms of Qur’anic persuasion, through which reason is provoked to influence doctrinal positions and moral decisions. These strategies include (1) antithetical structure, (2) complementary strands, and (3) blending of different but reinforcing themes. Because he finds these structuring patterns to be present in large blocks of surahs and sometimes in whole surahs as well, al-Rāzī develops his notion (*‘ādāt al-Qur’ān*), or the iterative structuring patterns of the Qur’ān, as a valid compositional strategy that explains the flow of the Qur’anic text. To illustrate al-Rāzī’s employment of the devices of antithesis, complementarity and blended themes, surah 76 (al-Insān), surah 73 (al-Muzzammil) and surah 2 (al-Baqarah) will be examined, respectively.

Having established the case for al-Rāzī’s analysis of the dialectical and persuasive techniques that inform the arrangement of the surah material, the present study moves on to

examine how al-Rāzī's endorsement of a unified surah composition also serves as a channel through he introduces a new strategy to counter the uncritical acceptance of earlier exegetical interpretations (*taqlīd*). In this respect, **Chapter Five** "Surah Structure as a Medium for Countering Exegetical *Taqlīd*," illustrates how al-Rāzī epistemically and practically employs the notion of Qur'anic unified composition to counter the exegetical *taqlīd* in Qur'anic interpretation. Furthermore, this chapter seeks to demonstrate that al-Rāzī's development of the theory of *naẓm* prompts him to break with the exegetical practice in three main areas that, he thinks, are closely related to the Qur'anic unified *naẓm*: (1) the genre of *asbāb al-nuzūl* (occasions of revelation), (2) the issue of *naskh* (Qur'anic abrogation), and (3) the call for unconventional interpretations that may not be supported by traditional views but derived from the contextual flow of the surah material. In this way, this chapter adds new layers to al-Rāzī's exegetical confrontation with *taqlīd* through Qur'anic *naẓm*. This layer of *taqlīd* criticism can also be seen as an extension to Tariq Jaffer's conclusion that al-Rāzī rationalized Qur'anic hermeneutics through the systematic appropriation of philosophy in the exegetical tradition. In this way, al-Rāzī counters *taqlīd* not only through theological mediums but through his literary view of *naẓm* as well.

Finally, the study closes with **Chapter Six**, "The Post-Rāzī Developments: The Impact of al-Rāzī's Study of the Surah on Later Qur'anic Studies," which investigates the influence of al-Rāzī's perception of the surah structure on later exegetes. The chapter posits that al-Rāzī's methodology is enthusiastically adopted by some exegetes who not only follows al-Rāzī's observations on the surah structure but also abridges his *tafsīr* work and incorporates it as part of their own commentaries. Examples of these exegetes include Niẓām al-Dīn al-Nīsābūrī (d. 728/1328) and the Ḥanbalite exegete Ibn 'Ādil (d. ca. 880/1476). However, the chapter contends

that the seventh century witnesses a rise in the study of Qur'anic thematic relations in *balāghah* works. This thematic interest seems to be a reaction to an attack against Qur'anic *takhalluṣ*, a continuity device that is highly celebrated in Arabic literary analysis as a medium through which a transition from one topic to another is smoothly effected. Two rhetorical works represent the interest in Qur'anic thematic relations: *Al-Mathal al-Sā'ir* by ibn al-Athīr (d. 637/1239) and *Tahrīr al-Taḥbīr* by ibn Abū al-Iṣba' (d. 654/1256). In light of this debate on Qur'anic *takhalluṣ* in *balāghah* circles, the chapter posits that the resurgent interest in studying Qur'anic *takhalluṣ* could have been a stimulus for the exegetes—who were usually trained in Arabic rhetoric—to seek information from al-Rāzī's commentary regarding the thematic connectedness of the surah. Moreover, the interest in thematic relations is also motivated by the desire to ensure a better understanding of the Qur'ān as the first source of legal reasoning. This dimension is best represented by the Andalusian legal theorist al-Shāṭibī (d. 790/1388), who provides a thematic study of surah 23 (al-Mu'minūn) in his well-received *al-Muwāfaqāt fī Uṣūl al-Sharī'ah* (The Reconciliation of the Fundamentals of the Law).

## Chapter 1

### **Qur'anic Composition (*Naẓm*) before al-Rāzī: From al-Jāhīz (d. 255/869) to al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144)**

Al-Rāzī's examination of the surah structure is an episode in the literary history of the study of Qur'anic composition (*naẓm*). To better understand al-Rāzī's contribution to, and development of, the study of Qur'anic composition, this chapter seeks to map the pre-Rāzī developments of the *naẓm* theory. Relying on the primary enquiries motivating the study of the Qur'anic composition in both the rhetorical and exegetical tradition before al-Rāzī, the chapter identifies two major phases through which one can readily recognize the major developments and main actors in the study of Qur'anic *naẓm*. Both phases are inextricably connected with the doctrine of Qur'anic inimitability (*i'jāz*).

The first is the formative phase spearheaded by al-Jāhīz, who sparks off the debate over the binary of *lafẓ* (form) and *ma'nā* (content). This literary discourse on the relationship between verbal expressions and ideas becomes a main, if not the main, issue that generally broaches the topic of literary evaluation and specifically shapes the literary approach to the Qur'anic text. Apart from broaching the binary of *lafẓ* and *ma'nā*, al-Jāhīz offers an equally significant contribution; that is, the early differentiation between the dialectical case for *i'jāz* and the literary quest for *i'jāz*. This distinction affords the *i'jāz* theorists an opportunity for inner-sectarian differences and exogamic alliances in many literary issues.

The second is the growth phase, which does not treat *lafẓ* and *ma'nā* as a dichotomy that needs to be dissolved, but rather it focuses on two practical questions: what is in the *lafẓ* that qualifies it to be a criterion for literary distinctiveness? And is the notion of *naẓm* limited to the

sentence or verse structure? These are the two questions that motivate the long history of the medieval attempts at finding the locus of inimitability in the Qur'anic composition.

Surveying the major works of many of the *i'jāz* theorists, one finds that the first question on the functions of *lafz* enriches the rhetorical examination of the Qur'anic text and yields different results. For instance, this question leads to in-depth explorations of how a carefully crafted *lafz* (1) generates a unique style, as adopted by al-Khaṭṭābī and al-Bāqillānī; (2) produces richer meanings, as adopted by 'Abd al-Qāhir and al-Zamakhsharī, who focus on the rhetorical effects of the syntactic relations; and (3) creates an aesthetic symphony for the soul, as shared by all the *i'jāz* participants.

Concurrently, the second question motivates many Mu'tazilite exegetes to focus on the flow of meaning found in the verse sequence of a given surah. This marks another step forward in the medieval examination of the Qur'anic composition. Even though many Mu'tazilite Qur'anic commentaries are still lost, a surviving Mu'tazilite commentary reflects one of the earliest attempts to carry out a structural analysis of the thematic flow found in the verse sequence. Here, I am referring to the recently published commentary, *al-Tahdhīb fī al-Tafsīr* (The Refinement of Exegesis), by al-Ḥākīm al-Jushamī (d. 494/1100). Furthermore, some of the exegetical Mu'tazilite insights on the thematic flow of the surah verses are preserved in al-Rāzī's *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, in which some of the views held by Mu'tazilite exegetes, such as Abū Muslim al-Iṣfahānī (d. 322/1066), al-Qaffāl (d. 365/976), and 'Abd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025), are incorporated.

### **1. *I'jāz* in Its Formative Stage**

A glance at the Qur'anic text reveals that the Qur'ān presents itself as both a scripture and *sign* (āyah) or, in later theological terms, a miracle on the grounds that it exhibits a uniquely

insuperable composition. This Qur'anic self-image asserts that the Qur'ān, as a literary genre, cannot be rivaled by any human effort. This self-portrayal finds mention in the Q. 2:23-24, 10:37-39, 11:13-14, 17:88-89, 28:48-51, and 52:33-34. The Qur'ān unequivocally employs this notion of “sign” to attest to the position that the Qur'anic message is the work of a divine agency, thereby establishing the prophecy office of Muhammad.<sup>1</sup> However serious and challenging this self-image is, one can discern that, before the rise of the Abbasid dynasty, there is no record of any systematic examination of the literary peculiarities of the Qur'anic composition in defense of this Qur'anic challenge (*tahaddī*). With the rise of the Abbasid caliphate, however, al-Jāhīz recognizes three major evolving shifts, which he considers to be threatening the religious and social fabric of Muslim society.<sup>2</sup> These shifts include the following: (1) the rise of inner-religious polemics, (2) the resurgent voice of the *shu'ūbiyyah* movement,<sup>3</sup> and (3) the public expression of *zandaqah* (heretical views). These new developments provoke al-Jāhīz to address the literary value of the Qur'anic composition.

Regarding the intellectual shifts, the Abbasid caliphate ushered in an era of interreligious disputations, and sometimes Christian missionary work, which was a corollary of the new cultural and intellectual diversity that was pervasive during the Abbasid reign, especially as the

---

<sup>1</sup> See Mustafa Shah, “The word of God: The Epistemology of Language in Classical Islamic Theological Thought,” in *Language and Religion*, ed. Robert Yelle, Courtney Handman, and Christopher Leirich (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019); Claude Gilliot and Pierre Larcher, “Language and Style of the Qur'ān,” in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Claude Gilliot, William A. Graham, Wadad Kadi, Andrew Rippin (Leiden; Brill, 2006), 3: 109.

<sup>2</sup> For al-Jāhīz's life and works, see Charles Pellat's *The Life and Works of al-Jāhīz: Translations of Selected Texts* (London, Routledge & K. Paul, 1969).

<sup>3</sup> In the dawn of the Abbasid dynasty, the *Shu'ūbiyyah* movement erupts as a Muslim Persian reaction to the growing Arabization of the Muslim life and the favorable treatment of the Arabs. It starts with a demand on equality between Arabs and non-Arabs and gradually develops into a feeling of non-Arab superiority and hostility to the Arab tradition. The expression of these anti-Arab sentiments is reflected not only in poetry but in the study of linguistics as well. See Ignaz Goldziher, *Muhammedanische Studien* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1888), 1:147-216. For the social implications of *Shu'ūbiyyah*, see H. A. R. Gibbs, “The Social Significance of the Shuubiya,” in *Studia Orientalia Ioanni Pedersen dicata* (Copenhagen, 1953), 105-114; idem, “Government and Islam under the Early Abbasids,” in *L'Elaboration de l'Islam*, ed. C. Cahen et al (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1961), 115–127. For a survey of the different approaches to *Shu'ūbiyyah*, see Gören Larsson, “Goldziher on the shu'ūbiyya,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 155, n. 2 (2005): 365-372.

translation movement flourished. For instance, the House of Wisdom, which was initially founded by Harun al-Rashid and later thrived during the reign of his son al-Ma'mūn, served as a library and translation institute. In this intellectual center, important works from Greek, Syriac, and Persian were translated into Arabic, a task that saved much of the knowledge of antiquity from becoming extinct. Many translators were not Muslims as in the case of the Christian physician Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq, the Sabian mathematician Thābit ibn Qurrah and the former Jewish astronomer Sind ibn 'Alī.

The patronage of intellectual diversity during al-Ma'mūn's reign is attested by al-Mas'ūdī who observes:

Al-Ma'mūn drew near to him dialecticians and theologians like Abū al-Ḥudhayl al-'Allāf, Abū Ishāq al-Nazzām and others who agree or disagree with them. Additionally, he organized regular sessions with the jurists and literati. He brought them from different cities offering them regular allowances. Therefore, people became more interested in the art of speculative thinking, thereby learning the art of disputation. Each group wrote books to demonstrate and support their doctrines and views.<sup>4</sup>

This intellectual environment gives rise to cross-cultural and polemical disputations, which seem so pervasive that al-Jāḥiẓ argues that a religious scholar must be versatile and equally pioneered in religious traditions and philosophical speculations alike.<sup>5</sup> This emphasis on the synthesis of the traditional and philosophical learning can be partly due to the interreligious polemics al-Jāḥiẓ notices in Baghdad. In his *al-Radd 'Alā al-Nasārā*, for instance, al-Jāḥiẓ refers

---

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Shawqī Ḍayf's *Tārīkh al-Adab al-'Arabī* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif), 3: 106 For accounts of Muslim-Christian debates before and during al-Ma'mūn time, see Newman's *Early-Christian Muslim Dialogue: A Collection of Documents from the First Three Islamic Centuries, 632-900 A.D.: Translations with Commentary*, (Hatfield, Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute, 1993); Alphonse Mingana, *The Apology of Timothy the Patriarch before the Caliph al-Mahdī* (Bulletin of the John Rylands Library 12, 1928), 137-298; Clare Wilde's Is There Room for Corruption in the 'Books of God'? in *The Bible in Arab Christianity*, ed. David Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 2007); *Christian Arabic Apologetics during the Abbasid Period*, ed. Samir Khalil Samir and Jorgen Nielsen (Leiden: Brill, 1994).

<sup>5</sup> Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Al-Ḥayawān* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2011), 1:322. For an overview of the Christian-Muslim polemics, see Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, Mark R. Cohen, Sasson Somekh, Sidney H. Griffith, eds., *The Majlis: Interreligious Encounter in Medieval Islam* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1999).

"وليس يكون المتكلم جامعا لأقطار الكلام متمكنا في الصناعة، يصلح للرياسة، حتى يكون الذي يحسن من كلام الدين في وزن الذي يحسن من كلام الفلسفة، والعالم عندنا هو الذي يجمعهما."



to some Christians who are aware of Muslim sources and accuses them of sharing unfounded or contradictory texts to subvert the weak-minded Muslims and to cast doubts in their hearts.<sup>6</sup> Most importantly, al-Jāhiz finds that the Qur'anic notion of miraculous inimitability can effectively serve as the appropriate medium, through which he can confront these polemical challenges of his time with full force.

Concerning the *shu'ūbiyyah* challenge, al-Jāhiz witnesses the upswing of the movement which, in some of its forms, designates some ethnic groups, as in the case of the Persians, to be equal or superior to the Arabs. This resurgent voice of the *shu'ūbiyya* results in more intellectual rebellion against the Arabs and, by extension, anything associated with Arabic such as the Qur'ān. The movement starts during the Umayyad dynasty and suffers from the Umayyad's preferential treatment of the Muslim Arabs. To overthrow the Umayyads and broaden their base of support, the Abbasids manage to form a coalition of Persian *mawali* (non-Arab Muslims), Eastern Arabs and Shiites. Each of them has a reason of contention against the Umayyads. However, under the Abbasids, the *mawali* receive an official recognition and a fair, and sometimes favorable, treatment. Al-Jāhiz remarkably observes that the Abbasid dynasty is cosmopolitan in its outlook and that the difference between the Abbasid and Umayyad dynasty was that "the Abbasid dynasty was non-Arab and Khorasan-based, whereas the dynasty of Banu Marwān was Arab and Bedouin based."<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Al-Jāhiz, *Thalāth Rasā'il li Abī 'Uthmān al-Jāhiz*, ed. J. Finkel (Cairo, Salafyah press 1962), 24. In *al-Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā*, al-Jāhiz seeks to provide his Muslim readers with a compelling, non-editorializing presentation of, and succinct counterarguments against, what he assesses as the five false claims Christians argue the Qur'ān makes. See also David Thomas, ed., *The Bible and Kalam in Bible in Arab Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 179.

<sup>7</sup> Al-Jāhiz, *Al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1970), 3: 235. For the Persian influence on the Abbasid caliphate see Roberto Marin-Guzman, *Popular Dimensions of the 'Abbasid Revolution: A Case Study of Medieval Islamic Social History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Fulbright-LASPAU, 1990); Moshe Sharon's: *black banners from the East II Revolt: The social and military aspects of the 'Abbasid revolution* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1990); and Mohsen Zakeri, *Sasanid Soldiers in Early Muslim Society: The Origins of 'Ayyaran and Futuwwa* (Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag, 1995). For a review of these three books, see Elton L. Daniel, "Arabs, Persians, and the Advent of the Abbasids Reconsidered," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 117, no. 3 (1997): 542-548.

However, al-Jāhiz notes that this social change does not end the *shu'ūbiyya* movement; instead, it enhances more ethnic polemics in medieval Baghdad. Al-Jāhiz observes that *shu'ūbiyyah* seeks to degrade the Arabs, attack their language and oration style and strip them of any privilege.<sup>8</sup> To silence this movement that, among other things, assumes literary superiority over the Arabic literary tradition, al-Jāhiz seeks to demonstrate the superiority of the Arabic language by referring to the unique style of the Qur'ān, which, in al-Jāhiz's view, "epitomizes the excellence of the Arabic language."<sup>9</sup> In his *al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn*, al-Jāhiz lists different methods for confronting the *shu'ūbiyyah* attacks. Among these methods, he plans to illustrate all the different types of composition and how the Qur'ān is so different from all rhymed and prose speech that its composition becomes one of the greatest proofs (*hujaj*).<sup>10</sup>

These new changes enhance what is described as heretical views (*zandaqah*) about the Qur'anic text, a development which occasions literary *responsa* that motivates the rhetorical study of the Qur'ān. In effect, al-Jāhiz is clear that *shu'ūbiyya* and *zandaqah* are correlated, because the opposition against the Arabs leads to hostility against the faith they hold.<sup>11</sup> Throughout al-Jāhiz works, one can find examples of these heretical views against the style and content of the Qur'ān. For instance, al-Jāhiz reports some critiquing the Qur'anic description of hell "its fruits are like the devils' heads" (Q. 65:37) on the grounds that the *secundum comparatum* (*mushabbah bihi*) is unknown, and thereby the simile is not stylistically appropriate. Regarding the Qur'anic content, al-Jāhiz personally reports hearing an objection against the animal classification in "and God created each animal out of [its own] fluid: some of them crawl

<sup>8</sup> Al-Jāhiz, *Al-Hayawān*, 7: 131. Also see Norris, H. T. "Shu'ūbiyyah in Arabic Literature." in *Abbasid Belles-Lettres*, ed. Julia Ashtiany (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 31-47.

<sup>9</sup> Richard C Martin, The Role of the Basrah Mu'tazilah in Formulating the Doctrine of the Apologetic Miracle, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 39, no. 3 (July 1980): 179.

<sup>10</sup> Al-Jāhiz, *Al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, n.d.), 1:283

"و لا بد أن نذكر فيه أقسام تأليف جميع الكلام وكيف خالف القرآن جميع الكلام الموزون والمنثور وهو منشور غير مقفى على مخارج الأشعار والأسجاع وكيف صار نظمه من أعظم البرهان وتأليفه من أكبر الحجج."

<sup>11</sup> Al-Jāhiz, *Al-Hayawān*, 7: 131

on their bellies, some walk on two legs, and some on four. God creates whatever He will; God has power over everything” (Q. 24:45). According to al-Jāhīz, the objection lies in the observation that the animal classification in the verse is not all-inclusive.

Furthermore, al-Jāhīz’s contemporary Ibn al-Rāwandī authors *al-Dāmigh lī al-Qur’ān* to raise some dialectical and linguistic objections against the Qur’ān. *Al-Dāmigh* is not fully extinct, because parts of it are preserved in *al-Intisār*—a work that the Mu‘tazilite al-Khayyāt devotes to countering Ibn al-Rāwandī’s arguments.<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, al-Jāhīz considers disseminating unexamined or misinterpreted hadith reports as a form of *zandaqah*. In his treatise *Hujaj al-Nubuwwah*, al-Jāhīz mentions three names and associates them with *zandaqah* and harshly accuses them of attacking the Qur’ān, raising questions on its *mutashābih* (ambiguous verses) along with fabricating ḥadīth-like reports and disseminating them in different cities.<sup>13</sup> Al-Jāhīz’s attitude to these types of ḥadīth narrations may be another reason for him to advance his study of Arabic poetics and figurative language. He explicitly adds:

Such people do not understand the interpretation of ḥadīth, what type of ḥadīth is rejected, what type is figuratively understood and what type is an anecdote ascribed to some tribes. For that reason, I say: were it not for the *mutakallimūn*, the masses would have been ruined, hijacked and enslaved; were it not for the Mu‘tazilites, the *mutakallimūn* would have been ruined.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> See ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī, *Min Tārīkh al-Ilḥād fī al-Islām* (Beirut: Al-Mu‘assasah al-‘Arabiyyah lī al-Dirāsāt wa al-Nashr, 1980), 67-154; and ‘Abd al-Amīr al-A‘sam, *History of Ibn al-Riwandī the Heretic* (Beirut: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadīdah, 1975).

Sarah Stroumsa, *Freethinkers of Medieval Islam: Ibn Al-Rāwandī, Abū Bakr Al-Rāzī, and Their Impact on Islamic Thought* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1999); idem, “The Blinding Emerald: Ibn al-Rāwandī’s Kitāb al-Zumurrud,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 114, no. 2 (April-June 1994): 163-185; and Norman Calder, “The Barāhima: Literary Construct and Historical Reality,” in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 57, no. 1 (1994): 341-357.

<sup>13</sup> See al-Jāhīz, *Hujaj al-Nubuwwah*, In *Rasā’il al-Jāhīz*, ed. ‘Abd al-Salām Ḥārūn (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khanjī, 1964), 3:277-278. Here al-Jāhīz also mentions three heretics by name: Ibn Abī al-‘Awjā’, Ishāq ibn Ṭālūt and al-Nu‘mān ibn al-Mundhir. Al-Jāhīz rejects a hadīth on killing al-wazagh (chameleons) because of the illogical claim that the chameleons, unlike other creatures, were blowing the fire on Abraham. Al-Jāhīz calls those who use such texts for argumentation *aṣḥāb al-jahālāt* (people of ignorance). Satirically, al-Jāhīz states chameleons are to be killed because they embrace the faith of the chameleon that was blowing the fire on Abraham. See al-Jāhīz, *Al-Hayawān*, 4:206.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

### 1.1. Al-Jāhiz and the Literary Case for the Qur'ān

Noting that the Qur'ān itself is the object of the ethnic, interreligious and heretical attacks, al-Jāhiz creates a roadmap that seeks to turn these obstacles into opportunities as he establishes the literary superiority and stylistic features of the Qur'anic text. This one goal serves a three-fold purpose: silencing the *shu'ūbiyyah*, answering the heretics and overcoming the interreligious objections. In defense of Qur'anic inimitability, al-Jāhiz writes a treatise on *Nazm al-Qur'ān*, which must have been circulating during his lifetime and afterwards as it gained some praise from Abū Ḥusayn al-Khayyāṭ in his *al-Intisār*. Al-Khayyāṭ confidently highlights the theological purpose of al-Jāhiz's treatise:

Other than al-Jāhiz's work on the inimitability of the Qur'ān, no other book is known for proving the *nazm* of the Qur'ān, its wondrous arrangement, and its pointer to the prophethood of Muhammad.<sup>15</sup>

Unfortunately, al-Jāhiz's work *Nazm al-Qur'ān* is still lost; however, it is interesting to notice that al-Jāhiz's other works and treatises encompass many excerpts that illustrate his theological and literary approach to the Qur'ān.<sup>16</sup> As a dialectician and man of letters (*adīb*), al-Jāhiz separately formulates a theological and a literary case for the Qur'ān.<sup>17</sup>

Concerning his literary approach to the Qur'ān, al-Jāhiz has a different tone. Relying on al-Jāhiz's *al-Bayān* and *al-Maqālah al-'Uthmāniyyah*, Rāḍī brings together two succinct

---

<sup>15</sup> Al-Khayyāt, *Al-Intisār* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfah al-Dīniyyah, 1988), 60.

<sup>16</sup> For an anthology of al-Jāhiz's I'jāz-related observations, see Sa'd 'Abd al-'Azīm Muḥammad, *Nazm al-Qur'ān min Turāth al-Jāhiz* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Zahrā', 1995).

<sup>17</sup> Al-Jāhiz offers a dialectical argument for *i'jāz* which becomes a standard argument in medieval kalam manuals. Dialectically, al-Jāhiz describes the contemporary Arabs of Muḥammad as (a) having great literary skills (2) showing great interest in combating early Muslims and (3) being challenged and provoked to imitate the Qur'ān as a way of disproving Muḥammad. However, al-Jāhiz posits that there is a series of 'ajz (inability to meet the challenge), the absence of *mu'aradah* (imitatio), and the waging of wars. Therefore, to al-Jāhiz, the Qur'anic *i'jāz* (inimitability) is demonstrated by the empirical 'ajz (inability) that led to waging many wars, not composing a *mu'aradah*. See al-Jāhiz, Hujaj al-Nubuwwah, in *Rasā'il al-Jāhiz*, ed. 'Abd al-Salām Ḥārūn (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khanjī, 1964), 3: 274-275. Furthermore, al-Jāhiz compares the Qur'ān with the physical miracles of the past prophets, noting that each miracle had to match with the skills of the people of each prophet to conclude that the Qur'ān is more fitting with Muḥammad's people who excelled in Arabic. See al-Jāhiz, *Rasā'il al-Jāhiz*, ed. 'Abd al-Salām Ḥārūn (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khanjī, 1979), 3:279.

excerpts, which clarify al-Jāhiz's position on the Qur'anic unique genre and distinct style.<sup>18</sup> In setting his riposte against the *shu'ūbiyyah*, al-Jāhiz affirms that the Qur'ān is different from all rhymed or prose speech, and that it does not resonate with the rhyming system found in poetry or rhymed prose (*saj'*).<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, al-Jāhiz observes in *al-Maqālah al-'Uthmāniyyah* that one cannot claim to know the subtle differences between genres unless one can readily recognize poetry—with all of its types—from prose and orations from epistles. Then he adds that “when one recognizes the different types of speech, one will recognize the Qur'anic dissimilarity to the rest of the [types of] speech.”<sup>20</sup> Here, al-Jāhiz suggests that the surest way to recognize the literary distinctiveness of the Qur'ān is to undertake an in-depth study of non-Qur'anic genres, such as poetry and orations, in hopes of acquiring a level of literary aptitude, through which literary recognition of different genres would be possible. Therefore, al-Jāhiz is not trying to prove *i'jāz* rhetorically but to help people recognize it on their own as they master other genres.<sup>21</sup>

## 1.2. Reasoning from *Lafz*

Apart from the demarcation of literary genres as a means of recognizing the literary uniqueness of the Qur'anic text, al-Jāhiz is interested in a practical question related to literary evaluation: where does literary distinctiveness reside? This question about searching for the literary merit in a text excites a lively controversy that will significantly enhance the development of Arabic rhetoric in general and the analysis of the Qur'anic text in particular for

<sup>18</sup> 'Abd al-Ḥakīm Rāḍī, *Al-Ab'ād al-Kalāmiyyah wa al-Falsafīyyah fī al-Fikr al-Balāghī wa al-Naqdī 'inda al-Jāhiz* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Ādāb, 2006), 191

<sup>19</sup> Al-Jāhiz, *Al-Bayān wa al-Tabayīn*, ed. 'Abd al-Salām Ḥārūn (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khanjī, 1998), 1:383.

"و لا بد أن نذكر فيه أقسام تاليف جميع الكلام وكيف خالف القرآن جميع الكلام الموزون والمنثور وهو منثور غير مقفى على مخارج الأشعار والأسجاع..."

<sup>20</sup> Al-Jāhiz, *Al-Maqālah al-'Uthmāniyyah*, in *Rasā'il al-Jāhiz*, ed. 'Abd al-Salām Ḥārūn (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khanjī, 1979), 4: 31.

فإذا عرف صنوف التاليف عرف مباينة نظم القرآن لسائر الكلام

<sup>21</sup> This early call will be closely followed by al-Bāqillānī in his *I'jāz al-Qur'ān* and readily developed by 'Abd al-Qāhir whose semantic study *dalā'il al-i'jāz* (Sigs of Inimitability) is dominantly based on analysis of poetical, not Qur'anic *shawāhid* (evidentiary examples). See Julie Scott Meisami, *Structure and Meaning in Medieval Arabic and Persian Lyric Poetry* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003).

centuries. According to al-Jāhiz, the poetic excellence of a literary piece does not reside in the content alone but extends more essentially to include its verbalized qualities and aesthetic values.<sup>22</sup>

Based on his *al-Ḥayawān*, al-Jāhiz's view on the significance of *lafẓ* is explicitly reflected in his reaction to a poetical piece that was acclaimed for its content. Considering the role of internal and external form of poetry, al-Jāhiz expresses his disappointment with the poet whom he sharply describes as an abecedarian who "knows nothing about composing poetry" (*lā yaqūlu al-shi'ra abadan*).<sup>23</sup> After that, al-Jāhiz moves on to explain that the prime purpose of poetry is not merely a communication of a thought but also a combination of three essential elements: *ṣinā'ah* (artistry), *nasj* (texture), and *taṣwīr* (imagery). He argues that through these elements, the content becomes conventionally poetic as it is expressed to its best effect.<sup>24</sup> According to him, these elements must inventively and skillfully be employed to accentuate the effect of the poetical or prosaic message. He further posits that fine literary pieces are not purposed only to inform but also to delight, move the audience, elicit pleasurable feelings associated with the perception of beauty and deliver a memorable message so that it can be widely circulated. He remarkably describes the effects of a good style:

Whenever the wording is intrinsically good, well-chosen, and free of ambiguity and complexity, it will be endeared to the spirit, connected to the mind, attached to reason,

---

<sup>22</sup> Lara Harb argues that the history of the literary evaluation of poetry reveals two major paradigms: the first revolving around truthfulness and naturalness whereas the second, as explicated by 'Abd al-Qāhir, is motivated by poetical aesthetics. See Lara Harb, *Arabic Poetics: Aesthetic Experience in Classical Arabic Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 1-74. For a survey on the medieval reception of the idea of truthfulness and untruthfulness in poetic discourse, see Mansour Ajami, "The Alchemy of Glory: The Dialectic of Truthfulness and Untruthfulness," in *Medieval Arabic Literary Criticism* (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1988). However, the history of the literary approach to the Qur'ān reveals an intentional focus on the poetics and aesthetics of the Qur'ān from its outset. 'Abd al-Qāhir's contributions are actually a culmination of the literary approach to the Qur'ān as will be illustrated later.

<sup>23</sup> Al-Jāhiz, *Al-Ḥayawān*, 3:131. See Margaret Larkin, *The Theology of Meaning: Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani's Theory of Discourse* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1995), 67.

<sup>24</sup> Al-Jāhiz, *Al-Ḥayawān*, 3:67.

and pleasurable for the ears to hear and for the hearts to find rest. It will also trip off the narrators' tongues and thereby spread far and wide.<sup>25</sup>

Here, al-Jāhiz clearly argues that poetry addresses one's full being and that meaning and style must cooperate to create the intended message and effect the desired change in the recipients of the text. To substantiate his position on the significance of the quality of expression, al-Jāhiz famously explains that thoughts (*ma'ānī*) are accessible to everyone (*maṭrūḥah fī al-ṭarīq*),<sup>26</sup> and that the real challenge is to frame the thoughts into the appropriate practical expression. Al-Jāhiz's position on *lafz* does not indicate his neglect of the *ma'nā*, simply because his works are replete with passages that explicate the significance of meaning and rebuke the rhetoricians who are obsessed with superficial ornamentation that misses the *ma'nā*. For instance, al-Jāhiz compares meaning to the soul and wording to the body<sup>27</sup>. This very comparison is also ascribed to al-'Itābī (d. 220), who observes:

Words are bodies and thoughts are spirits. Indeed you see the thoughts with the inner eyes (*'uyūn al-qulūb*): if you dislocate a word you corrupt the form and change the meaning as human complexion and hilyah is changed when a head is positioned in the hand place.<sup>28</sup>

The observation that "*al-ma'ānī maṭrūḥah fī al-ṭarīq*" is best understood as a reference to general ideas and thoughts that most poets share. Two poets, for instance, can share the same thoughts about, and understanding of, a specific event or moral precept; yet, they may differ significantly in the way they channel their ideas into appropriate words and moving images. Therefore al-Jāhiz's focus on the forms does not exclude, but presupposes, good content or good thought. In other words, al-Jāhiz deals with poets or orators who know what to say and argues

<sup>25</sup> Al-Jāhiz, *Al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn*, 2:8.

"ومى كان اللفظ ايضاً كرمياً في نفسه متخيراً في جنسه وكان سليماً من الفضول بريناً من التعقيد حيب الى النفوس واتصل بالاذهان والتحم بالعقول وهشت اليه الاتساح وارتاحت له القلوب وخف على ألسن الرواة وشاع في الآفاق ذكره وعظم في الناس خطره وصار ذلك مادة للعالم الرئيس ورياضة للمتعلم الرئس."

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 3:67

<sup>27</sup> Al-Jāhiz, *Rasā'il al-Jāhiz*, ed. 'Abd al-Salām Ḥārūn (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khanjī), 1:262.

<sup>28</sup> Abū Ḥilāl Al-'Askarī, *Al-Ṣinā'atayn* (Beirut: Al-Maktabah al-'Aṣriyyah, 2013), 147.

"الألفاظ أجساد والمعاني أرواح، وإنما تراها بعيون القلوب، فإذا قدمت منها مؤخرًا أو أخرت منها مقدمًا، أفسدت الصورة وغيّرت المعنى كما لو حول رأس إلى موضع يد، أو يد إلى موضع رجل."

that the distinguished poet or orator is the one who knows how to say it elegantly, not diffusely or obscurely. Regarding the confusion about *lafẓ* and *ma' nā*, Larkin remarks:

Lafẓ' did not always refer to wording, divorced from the idea or content underlying it, but the distinctions were poorly, if at all, articulated. Likewise, "*ma' nā*" sometimes seems to be the undervalued because it was taken to denote "meaning" in the broadest sense of the term; that is, the general topic or idea the discourse conveyed.<sup>29</sup>

Considering the context of al-Jāhiz's observation on the accessibility of thoughts (*ma' ānī*), one can certainly discern that al-Jāhiz does not argue that good content is insignificant but insufficient. Accordingly, al-Jāhiz finds that stylistics is the most appropriate area for poetical judgment, because similar "ideas" can easily be shared by different candidates. To relate al-Jāhiz's view on thought and wording to his treatment of the Qur'ān as a unique genre, one can discern that most of the narratives and ethics of the Qur'ān, as thoughts, were not foreign to the early recipients and audience; however, the way it was expressed as a unique genre is what sets it apart from other literary forms.

Consequently, the rhetorical analysis of stylistics, figures of speech, and poetics assumes a central place in the study of Arabic rhetoric in general and Qur'anic analysis in particular.<sup>30</sup> Not only does al-Jāhiz utilize rhetorical analysis for building a case for Qur'anic *i'jāz* but also relies on rhetorical analysis to defend the Qur'ān against the many heretical views on its style. For instance, al-Jāhiz raises his opponents' objection against the obscurity and vagueness of the *secundum comparatum* (*al-mushabbah bihi*) in Q. 37:65, where a tree in hell is described as "its

---

<sup>29</sup> Margaret Larkin, *The Theology of Meaning*, 10.

<sup>30</sup> Amīn al-Khūlī lists the *Shu'ūbiyyah* voice among the factors motivating the study of *lafẓ* and *ma' nā*. See Amīn al-Khūlī, *Fann al-Qawl* (Cairo: Maṭba'at Dār al-Kutub al-Maṣriyyah, 1996). For the centrality of *lafẓ* and *ma' nā* in the classical Arabic literary theory, see G.E. von Grunebaum, "The Nature of the Arab Literary Effort," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 7, no. 2 (April 1948): 116-122; and idem, "The Aesthetic Foundation of Arabic Literature," in *Themes in Medieval Arabic Literature*, ed. Dunning S. Wilson (London: Variorum Reprints, 1981). For a comprehensive study on the issue of *lafẓ* and *ma' nā* and its role in the canonization of Arabic *balāghah* in general, see 'Alī al-'Ummārī, *Qaḍiyyat al-Lafẓ wa al-Ma' nā wa Atharuhā fī Tadwīn al-Balāghah al-'Arabiyyah* (Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, 1999); and Tāriq al-Nu'mānī, *Al-Lafẓ wa al-Ma' nā bayna al-Aydulūjiyyah wa al-Ta'isīs al-Ma'rifī lī al-'Ilm* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Anglo al-Maṣriyyah, 2003).



fruits are like the devils' heads." Since no one has seen the devils' heads, the simile seem incongruous. Al-Jāḥiẓ explains that even though the devils were not seen before, what validates the simile is that people have conceptually associated "heads of devils" with "the most grotesque, ghostly and displeasing" image. Al-Jāḥiẓ argues that people shape a terrifying, unpleasant vision of Satan in their common expressions, as in the statement "*lahuwa aqbahu mina al-shayṭān*" (He is indeed more displeasing than the devil). Therefore, al-Jāḥiẓ insists that similes could be established based on the audience's conceptual experience.

### 1.3. Other Key Actors in the Formative Stage

Al-Jāḥiẓ's inclination toward a figurative and philological interpretation of Q. 37:65 is preceded by Abū 'Ubaydah (d. 209/824), one of al-Jāḥiẓ's significant teachers of poetry and *adab*. The simile in Q. 37:65 is said to be the driving force behind Abū 'Ubaydah's *Majāz al-Qur'ān* as noted by ibn al-Anbārī in his *Nuzhat al-Alibbā'*. In the *majlis* of al-Faḍl ibn al-Rabī', the vizier of al-Amīn, Abū 'Ubaydah is asked about a simile that has an unknown *secundum comparatum*. Abū 'Ubaydah argues that God addresses the Arabs according to the conventional usage of their language. In support of his view, Abū 'Ubaydah quotes Imru' al-Qays' famous simile that compares a sword to the ghouls' fangs (*anyāb aghwāl*). Mysterious as this creature is, Abū 'Ubaydah explains that the simile was justified, because ghouls become a symbol of horror and fright. As his answer is welcomed by al-Faḍl, Abū 'Ubaydah decides to write a book on *majāz al-Qur'ān*.<sup>31</sup> However, neither does Abū 'Ubaydah comment on this verse in his *Majāz al-Qur'ān* nor does he state this incident or motive in his introduction to *Majāz al-Qur'ān*.

---

<sup>31</sup>Abū al-Barakāt al-Anbārī, *Nuzhat al-Alibbā'*, ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī), 98.

Regardless of the veracity of this incident,<sup>32</sup> Abū ‘Ubayda’s informative introduction to his *Majāz* gives birth to the first systematic philological interpretation of the Qur’ān. Abū ‘Ubayda’s primary hermeneutical tool is a recovery of the original Arabic usage and conventional styles. He argues that the contemporaneous audience of the prophet, along with the succeeding generations did not need to ask the prophet for the interpretation of the Qur’ān since they relied on their competent knowledge of the Arabic language and clear recognition that the Qur’ān reflects similar conventional usage of their tongue.<sup>33</sup>

As it is implied, Abū ‘Ubayda’s work is not a proactive measure but rather a response to some detractors of the Qur’anic style that he has in mind. For instance, in Q. 2: 177,<sup>34</sup> the phrase *wa al-ṣābirīn* appears in the accusative case, whereas it is grammatically expected to follow the nominative case of the preceding phrase *wa al-mūfūn*. Justifying this grammatical choice, Abū ‘Ubaydah quotes pre-Islamic poetry as *shāhid* (evidentiary example) that variations of the grammatical cases are acceptable in case of long series of descriptions (*idhā kathura al-kalam*).<sup>35</sup> This grammatical tension still finds mention in al-Zamakhsharī’s *Kashshāf*, wherein he rebuts the critics of this grammatical choice as being ignorant of the Arabs’ technique of *ikhtisāṣ* and its rhetorical value.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>32</sup> For a discussion on the attribution of this incident to Abū ‘Ubaydah along his usage of the word *majāz*, see Kamal Abu-Deeb, “Studies in the *Majāz* and the Metaphorical Language of the Qur’ān: Abū ‘Ubayda and al-Sharīf al-Raḍī,” in *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur’ān*, ed. Issa J. Boullata (Richmond, Surrey, U.K.: Curzon Press, 2000), 310-353.

<sup>33</sup> Abū ‘Ubaydah ibn al-Muthannā, *Majāz al-Qur’ān*, ed. Fuat Sezgin (Maktabat al-Khanjī, Cairo, 1954), 1:8.

<sup>34</sup> “أَيُّسَ الْبِرِّ أَنْ تُوَلُّوا وُجُوهَكُمْ قِبَلَ الْمَشْرِقِ وَالْمَغْرِبِ وَلَكِنَّ الْبِرَّ مَنْ ءَامَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةِ وَالْكِتَابِ وَالنَّبِيِّينَ وَءَاتَى الْمَالَ عَلَى حُبِّهِ ذَوِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَالْمَسْكِينِ وَابْنَ السَّبِيلِ وَالسَّائِلِينَ وَفِي الرِّقَابِ وَأَقَامَ الصَّلَاةَ وَءَاتَى الزَّكَاةَ وَالْمُؤْتُونَ بِعَهْدِهِمْ إِذَا عَاهَدُوا وَالصَّابِرِينَ فِي الْبَأْسَاءِ وَالضَّرَّاءِ وَحِينَ الْبَأْسِ أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا، وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُتَّقُونَ.”

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 1:65.

<sup>36</sup> See al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf*, 2:178.

”ولا يلتفت إلى ما زعموا من وقوعه لنا في خط المصحف ، وربما التفت إليه من لم ينظر في الكتاب ولم يعرف مذاهب العرب وما لهم في الصب على الاختصاص من الافتنان .

On the rhetorical value of this grammatical shift, many exegetical works quote Abū ‘Alī al-Fārisī (d. 377/987) who explains:

” وإذا ذكرت الصفات الكثيرة في معرض المدح أو الذم فالأحسن أن تخالف بإعرابها ولا تجعل كلها جارية على موصوفها ؛ لأن هذا الموضوع من مواضع الإطناب في الوصف والإبلاغ في القول ، فإذا خولف بإعراب الأوصاف كان المقصود أكمل ؛ لأن الكلام عند اختلاف الإعراب يصير كأنه أنواع من الكلام وضروب من البيان ، وعند الاتحاد في الإعراب يكون وجهها واحدا وجملة واحدة.”

Abū ‘Ubaydah uses the term *majāz* not to refer figurative meaning but to mean “interpretation” in general.<sup>37</sup> Abū ‘Ubaydah lays out thirty nine modes of expressions in the Qur’ān that are common in conventional Arabic usage. These modes include different figures of omission, such as asyndeton and ellipsis; and figures of speech such as personification, substitutions and many semantic inversions and *iltifāt* (pronoun shifts) and *tawkīd* (repetition for emphasis). According to al-Bayyūmī, the early inclusion of these rhetorical devices in Abū ‘Ubaydah’s work is evidence that Arabic rhetoric has its own Arabic, not Greek, origins.<sup>38</sup>

Within this informative stage appears Ibn Qutaybah, nicknamed “the orator of the Sunni people” (*khaṭīb ahl al-sunnah*), who aims at synthesizing the efforts of both Abū ‘Ubaydah and al-Jāhīz. Like al-Jāhīz, Ibn Qutaybah engages in the *i’jāz*-related issues, such as the *shu‘ūbiyya* dispute, the controversy over form and content, and the polemics of the signs of prophethood. For instance, Ibn Qutaybah dedicates his *faḍl al-‘Arab wa al-tanbīh ‘alā ‘Ulūmiha* (Excellence of the Arabs) solely to defend the Arab identity and virtue, despite his Persian origin. He devotes half of his work to describing the fields of knowledge the Arabs mastered such as horse husbandry, astronomy, divination and poetry.

However, Ibn Qutaybah’s most significant contribution to the study of the Qur’ān lies in his *Ta’wīl Mushkil al-Qur’ān*. In this book, he effectively answers the *Mushkil* of the Qur’ān through a philological and exegetical medium. He aims at confronting the detractors (*tā’inīn*) who level stylistic, grammatical, canonical objections against the Qur’anic text that they also

---

<sup>37</sup> See Ella Almagor, “The Early Meaning of *Majāz* and the Nature of Abū ‘Ubaydah’s Exegesis,” in *Studia Orientalia Memoriae D. H. Baneth Dedicata*, ed. S. Shaked, Joseph L., Blau, Shlomo, Pines, and M. Kister (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1979), 307-326. See also Wolfhart Heinrichs, “On the Genesis of the Ḥaḳīqa-Majāz Dichotomy,” *Studia Islamica* 59 (1984): 111-140; and idem, “Contacts between scriptural hermeneutics and literary theory in Islam: the Case of *Majāz*,” *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte der Arabisch-Islamischen Wissenschaften* 7 (1991/92): 253-254.

<sup>38</sup> Muhammad Rajab Al-Bayyūmī, *Khutuwāt al-Taḳṣīr al-Bayānī lī al-Qur’ān al-Karīm* (Cairo: Al-Ḥay’at al-‘Āmmah lī shu’ūn al-maṭābi’ al-Amīriyyah, 2017), 1:43.

describe as being contradictory and exhibiting imperfect composition (*fasād al-naẓm*).<sup>39</sup> To repulse these attacks, Ibn Qutaybah primarily relies on the Arabic figurative capacity (*ittisāʿ al-lughah fī al-majāz*) and unique poetical conventions. Practically, Ibn Qutaybah's project in his *Taʾwīl Mushkil al-Qurʾān* is a synthesis of the methods of Abū ʿUbaydah and al-Jāḥiẓ by elaborating on the thirty nine modes of Qurʾanic expressions provided by Abū ʿUbaydah and defending the Qurʾanic content against hostile attacks in the Jāḥiẓī way. As al-Jāḥiẓ uses *majāz* to counter the attacks against the Qurʾanic style, Ibn Qutaybah similarly stresses the significance of studying *majāz* so much that he starts his section on *majāz* by showing that the divinity of Jesus is a hermeneutical mistake that stems from the disregard of the Biblical figurative language.

However, Ibn Qutaybah indicates that some objections require an examination of the historical context of some verses. For instance, he lists Q. 5:97 as a typical example of thematic disharmony, and thereby indicative of imprecise transmission of the text:

God has made the Kaʿbah—the Sacred House— a means of support for people, and the Sacred Months, the animals for sacrifice and their garlands: all this. Know that God has knowledge of all that is in the heavens and earth and that He is fully aware of all things (Q. 5:97).

The objection is about the thematic relation between making the kaʿbah a sanctuary of well-being for people and affirming God's omniscience. In other words, some object that making the kaʿbah a refuge for the well-being of people is seemingly unrelated to the notion of establishing a case for divine knowledge. To answer this question, Ibn Qutaybah provides a historical background about the divine intent for the Kaʿbah and its surroundings to be a safe

---

<sup>39</sup> See Ibn Qutaybah, *Taʾwīl Mushkil al-Qurʾān* (Cairo: Maktabat Dār al-Turāth, 2006), 22; and Yusuf Rahman, "Ellipsis in the Qurʾān: A Study of Ibn Qutaybah's *Taʾwīl Mushkil al-Qurʾān*," in *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qurʾān*, ed. Issa J. Boullata (Richmond, Surrey, U.K.: Curzon Press, 2000), 277-291. See also Joseph E. Lowry's "Ibn Qutaybah," in *The Dictionary of Literary Biography: Arabic Literary Culture, 500-915*, ed. Michael Cooperson and Shawkat M. Toorawa (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2005), 172-183.

sanctuary, where people find safety and refuge for their life and belongings against the frequent invasions, larceny and retaliation as indicated by Q. 29:67. Furthermore, the sacred months are four months when wars, aggressions and attacks were forbidden—a law that lead to some stability in the middle of a chaotic life. Without this injunction, Ibn Qutaybah continues, people would have lost their lives, property, and home. Therefore, this injunction is indicative of divine care and knowledge. Based on this background, Ibn Qutaybah remarks that the two parts of the verse are intimately related.<sup>40</sup>

#### 1.4. Al-Rummānī and the High Noon of the Formative Stage

The Mu'tazilite al-Rummānī (d. 386) delineates the purpose of Arabic poetics, stating that "poetics (*balāghah*) is delivering the meaning to the heart in the best expression."<sup>41</sup> This definition presents a balanced view on the controversy over form and content, thereby going hand in hand with al-Jāhiz's underpinnings of the literary approach to the Qur'ān. Al-Rummānī observes:

Rhetorical eloquence is not merely the rendering of meaning understandable, for a meaning may be understood by two persons—one of whom is eloquent and the other ineloquent. Nor is rhetorical eloquence attention to the accuracy of wording over meaning, for a word may be accurate in relation to a meaning but weak and loathsome, or inappropriate and affected. Rhetorical eloquence is rather the conveyance of meaning to the heart in the most beautiful wording.<sup>42</sup>

Al-Rummānī's emphasis on beautiful wording, as a criterion for literary distinction, prompts him to highlight the Qur'anic *badī'* style. That is why, al-Rummānī celebrates the different figures of speech in the Qur'ān, such as simile, metaphors, hyperbole; and the expressive style, such as brevity, paronomasia, and regular rhyme and assonance. Al-Rummānī's analysis of the Qur'anic figures of speech indicates that he is not only impressed by their vocal

---

<sup>40</sup> Ibn Qutaybah, *Mushkil al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: Maktabat Dār al-Turāth, 2006), 73-74.

<sup>41</sup> Al-Rummānī, "Al-Nukat fī I'jāz al-Qur'ān," in *Thalāth Rasā'il fī I'jāz al-Qur'ān*, ed. Muḥammad Khalaf Allah and Muḥammad Zaghlūl (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 2008), 26. "إيصال المعنى إلى القلب في أحسن صورة من اللفظ"

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

ornamentations but also by their emotional impacts. He is fully aware that the image created by the figures of speech is part of the effective deliverance of meaning. For instance, al-Rummānī prefers the phrase *qayd al-awābid* (fetter on a running animal) over *māni‘ al-awābid*. Even though the two phrases share the same meaning, al-Rummānī chooses the first, because it exhibits an image that helps communicate the desired thought more effectively and vividly.

It is helpful to note here that al-Rummānī’s emphasis on “beautiful wording” is not only a recapitulation of al-Jāhiz’s standpoint but also a reflection of the state of the *badī‘* debates during the Abbasid era. The word *badī‘* refers to something novel or, more clearly, “newly created.”<sup>43</sup> What was new in this *badī‘* trend was the fact that their poetry was typically marked by “its consciously ornate style that was replete with rhetorical figures.”<sup>44</sup> The advocates of the *badī‘* style among poets, the *muḥdathūn* (moderns), are usually contrasted with the *qudamā’*; that is, the poets belonging to the *Jahīlī*, *mukhaḍramūn* and *Islamiyūn* poets. Heinrichs posits that the rise of this new style “goes hand in hand with the shift in cultural orientation brought about by the ‘Abbasid revolution.”<sup>45</sup>

In this context, Ibn al-Mu‘tazz (d. 296/908) writes his *Kitāb al-Badī‘* whose stated purpose reveals a renewed unresolved tension that needed to be defused or eased. Ibn al-Mu‘tazz explains that the purpose of his *al-Badī‘* is to illustrate that Bashshār, Muslim, and Abū Nuwās are not the originators of these stylistic modes by showing how *badī‘* was economically but effectively employed by the ancients (*qudamā’*). He also states that *badī‘* is associated with the moderns (*muḥdathūn*) due to their frequent, not innovative, use of it.<sup>46</sup> Finally, Ibn al-Mu‘tazz

---

<sup>43</sup> This is Heinrichs’ translation. See W. P. Heinrichs, “Ancient and Moderns,” in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, ed. Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey (London: Routledge, 1998), 90.

<sup>44</sup> Rachel Anne Friedman, “Theological Echoes of Literary Controversies: Reading Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī’s I‘jāz al-Qur’ān in Light of the Debate over Badī‘ Style,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 49 (2018): 308.

<sup>45</sup> Heinrichs, “Ancient and Moderns,” 90.

<sup>46</sup> See Pierre Lacher, “Arabic Linguistic Tradition II: Pragmatics,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Arabic Linguistics*, ed. by Jonathan Owens (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 197.

identifies Ḥabīb ibn Aws al-Ṭā'ī as a master of *badī'*, who artfully uses it in some verses yet overuses it in other verses.<sup>47</sup> Despite its great reception, scholars do not come to a consensus regarding what Ibn al-Mu'tazz means by his stated purpose. It can be a balanced, unbiased view on *badī'* to ease the tension between the *qudamā'* and the *muḥdathūn* by giving the *qudamā'* credit for using it and validating the *muḥdathūn* practice if not overly done.<sup>48</sup>

Given this context, al-Rummānī's delineation of the superiority of *badī'* in the Qur'ān can also be understood as a timely response to this Abbasid cultural milieu. In this way, al-Rummānī's indirect message is that the Qur'anic *balāghah* still surpasses “the newly created poetics” in terms of quality. He classifies the levels of *balāghah* into three ranks: the highest, lowest, and middle ranks, with the Qur'ān solely occupying the most elevated position. But, on what basis does the Qur'anic *balāghah* rise to the superior class? A close reading of al-Rummānī's treatise reveals two significant elements of the Qur'anic rhetoric: (1) the conveyance of meaning in the most beautiful wording and (2) the new *ta'liḥ* against which no imitation (*mu'āraḍah*) was possible. In al-Rummānī's view, the result is the Qur'anic text that appears in “a unique way which was out of the customary and which had a degree of beauty exceeding all others.”<sup>49</sup>

The first element was extensively exemplified by a lengthy discussion on the Qur'anic figures of speech. As for the second element, al-Rummānī identifies two distinct types of *dalālah* (signification): *dalālat al-Ishtiqāq* and *dalālah al-ta'liḥ*. Al-Rummānī argues that thoughts can be

<sup>47</sup> Ibn al-Mu'tazz, *Kitāb al-Badī'*, ed. 'Irfān Maṭrajī (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyyah, 2012), 9-10.

"ليعلم أن بشارًا ومسلمًا وأبا نواس ومن تقيلهم وسلك سبيلهم لم يسيقوا إلى هذا الفن؛ ولكنه كثر في أشعارهم فعرف في زمانهم حتى شبي بهذا الاسم فأعرب عنه ودل عليه، ثم إن حبيب بن أوس الطائي من بعدهم شغف به حتى غلب عليه وتفرغ فيه وأكثر منه فأحسن في بعض ذلك وأساء في بعض، وتلك عقى الإفراط وثمره الإسراف، وإنما كان يقول الشاعر من هذا الفن البيت والبيتين في القصيدة، وربما فرئت من شعر أحدهم قصائد من غير أن يوجد فيها بيت بديع، وكان يُستحسن ذلك منهم إذا أتى نادرًا ويزداد حظوة بين الكلام المرسل".

<sup>48</sup> See, Shawqī Dayf's *Al-Balāghah: Taṭawwur wa Tārīkh* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1995), 74; Iḥsān 'Abbās, *Tārīkh al-Naqd al-Adabī 'inda al-'Arab* (Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfah, 1983), 121-122. While some understand listing the *qudamā'*'s use of *badī'* as an indication of Ibn al-Mu'tazz's inclination towards the *Qadīm*, others interpret it to validate the *muḥdathūn*'s new style. Mazin al-Mubārak sees Ibn al-Mu'tazz's work as an attack on *shu'ūbiyyah*, see *al-Mūjaz fī Tārīkh al-Balāghah* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr), 70.

<sup>49</sup> Al-Rummānī, *Three Treatises on the I'jāz of the Qur'ān*, 79.

conveyed by means of derivatives (*ishtiqāq*). For example, the word “killer” indicates the existence of the subject and object of the act of killing. Other thoughts can be conveyed through the medium of *ta’līf* (arrangement) of words. He further adds that whereas the meaning communicated by the different derivatives is limited and finite, *ta’līf* is unlimited and infinite. With this distinction, al-Rummānī identifies the power of *ta’līf* to be the actual object of the Qur’anic challenge. It seems that al-Rummānī goes back to al-Jāhīz observation of the Qur’anic unique genre. In his opinion, it appears that there is a *ta’līf* that makes prose, a *ta’līf* that makes poetry, and a *ta’līf* that makes Qur’ān. Furthermore, al-Rummānī argues that since *ta’līf* is infinite, the composition of a *mu’arāḍah* will always be possible. Even though al-Rummānī is keen on illustrating the imagery, power, and aesthetics of the Qur’anic poetics throughout his treatise, the later *i’jāz* theorists are not entirely satisfied with highlighting *badī’* as the locus of *i’jāz*. As will be discussed in the following section, they seek something beyond the use of rhetorical devices.

## 2. *I’jāz* in Its Growth Stage

With the culmination of the formative stage of the literary approach to the Qur’ān, the literary analysis of *i’jāz* starts to take shape. As mentioned in the introduction, two critical questions seem to develop the study of *lafẓ* and *ma’nā*: What is in the *lafẓ* (form) that makes it a valid criterion for literary superiority? And is the *naẓm* limited to the sentence or verse structure? The first question paves the way to explore the functions and the various rhetorical roles the *lafẓ* plays in creating unique styles, novel genres and appropriate meanings. Beyond this examination of the power of the *lafẓ*, the second question widens the scope of the study of the Qur’anic composition to include the thematic relations in the text.



## 2.1 Exploring the Functions of *Lafz*

As for the first aspect of Qur'anic composition, the rhetorical analysis of the functions of the *lafz* results in three literary approaches to Qur'anic poetics. The first is the style-centered approach, which is typically represented by al-Khaṭṭābī and al-Bāqillānī who seek to examine how the *lafz* could create a unique style in an attempt to explain the Qur'anic matchless language. The second is the meaning-centered approach which is classically associated with 'Abd al-Qāhir and al-Zamakhsharī. We can add here that 'Abd al-Jabbār's contributions foreshadow this second approach. The third is the aesthetics-centered approach which is practically shared by most of the *i'jāz* interlocutors who highlight the aesthetic experience of the Qur'ān.

### 2.1.1 Style-Centered Approach

Lamenting the *i'jāz* course of study and its apologia as “turning the equivocal into the obscure” (*ishkāl uḥīla bihi 'alā ibhām*), Abū Sulaymān al-Khaṭṭābī (388/988) seeks to engage with a specific issue; that is, the Qur'anic style. What makes the Qur'anic style stand out? That seems to be the question motivating al-Khaṭṭābī's treatise *Bayān I'jāz al-Qur'ān* (On the Elucidation of the Incapacitation of the Qur'ān), in which he expresses his disappointment with the majority of *aḥl al-naẓar* (speculative theoreticians). In his view, al-Khaṭṭābī argues that many theologians consider Qur'anic eloquence to be the locus of *i'jāz* but fail to explain the *kayfiyyah* or the how of this *i'jāz*.<sup>50</sup> He further explains that this failure arises from yielding to the authority of traditional conformity (*taqlīd*) and unwarranted speculation. In this context, he sharply observes:

---

<sup>50</sup> For al-Khaṭṭābī's critique of kalam, see al-Khaṭṭābī's *Al-Ghunyah 'an al-Kalām wa Ahlih* (Cairo: Dār al-Minhāj, 2004). For al-Khaṭṭābī's life and scholarly interest, see Sebastian Günther, “In our days, religion has once again become something alien: Al-Khaṭṭābī's Critique of the State of Religious Learning in Tenth-century Islam,” *American Journal of Islam and Society* 25, no. 3 (July 1, 2008): 1-30.

[W]hen they are asked to define this rhetorical eloquence specific to the Qur'ān that exceeds others in quality, and to give the sense in which it is distinguished from other kinds of speech qualified as eloquent, they say, "We cannot describe it or define it in a way showing clearly the difference of the Qur'ān from other speech; but, on hearing it, those who know it will recognize it as a kind of indefinable knowledge." They also refer to other kinds of speech in which there are qualitative degrees of superiority that those who know will recognize on hearing, and it will be distinguished in their minds as surpassing in excellence that speech which it has bettered. They say the reason for this may not be detected on the investigation but its effect on one's soul is so clear that it does not go unnoticed by the learned and those who know it.<sup>51</sup>

Al-Khaṭṭābī sidesteps the controversy over the binary of form and content and delineates three categories of styles, all of which he depicts as elegant (*fāḍil*) and praiseworthy (*maḥmūd*) but distinct and unequal in their conspicuous signification of meanings (*bayān*). In his opinion, suitable styles are of three types: the grand or high, the middle or moderate, and the plain or more accessible. Each class has its expressive characteristics. He explains that the grand style is eloquent, sedate and copious; the middle style clear, accessible and easy; the plain style permissible, leisurely, and unrestrained.<sup>52</sup> Since al-Khaṭṭābī evaluates the three levels as elegant and praiseworthy, it seems that the disparity between them is that of function and purpose. He seems to be aware of the expressive function of each category and moves on to argue that the Qur'ānic style is not solely one of these categories; it is a coalescence of these three different styles with a total exclusion of the blameworthy informal style.

According to al-Khaṭṭābī, the literary unification of these different styles results in a new technique, the Qur'ānic style, which exhibits a pleasant blend of both magnification and harmony. These two effects of literary magnification and harmony, al-Khaṭṭābī argues, seem to be wholly distinct and almost contradictory when their characteristics are separately analyzed. In al-Khaṭṭābī's view, magnification is a corollary of a convoluted, opulent style (*wu'ūrah*),

---

<sup>51</sup>Al-Khaṭṭābī, "Bayān I'jāz al-Qur'ān," in *Three Treatises on the I'jāz of the Qur'ān*, ed. Muḥammad Khalafallāh Aḥmad and Muhammad Zaghlūl Sallām and trans. Issa J. Boullata (DeYoung, Reading: Garnett, 2015), 13.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 26.

whereas harmony is a result of ease (*suhūlah*). Accordingly, al-Khaṭṭābī observes that it is the synchronized convergence of these two opposite qualities of vigor and charm that makes the Qur'ān rhetorically distinct. Having established the notion of literary blending in the Qur'ān; that is, the integration of grandeur, harmony and easiness at the level of its style and the integration of wording, meaning and arrangement at the level of its form; al-Khaṭṭābī concludes that it is this stylistic and formulaic amalgamation that turn the audience of the prophet speechless and unable to match it. He argues that this new literary combination explains the confusion and perplexity of the original recipients of the Qur'ān as they at times describe the Qur'ān as poetry due to its seeming rhyme and, at times, sorcery as they feel unable to rival it.<sup>53</sup>

#### 2.1.1.1 Al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013) and another Look at the Qur'anic Style

Al-Bāqillānī seems to be in conversation with al-Rummānī. Unlike al-Rummānī, al-Bāqillānī refuses to locate the *i'jāz* in the superior use of *badī'*. As a dialectician, al-Bāqillānī understands a miracle to be beyond human capabilities, something that cannot be attained by study or practice. With this in mind, al-Bāqillānī considers mastering the rhetorical devices to be something within human capacity, and thereby *badī'* cannot be the locus of *i'jāz*. Meanwhile, al-Bāqillānī understands the relevance of the argument of a better *badī'* in a *badī'* milieu. Therefore, al-Bāqillānī formulates an *i'jāz* case that simultaneously passes the test of a divine miracle and relates to the debates on *badī'* in the Abbasid cultural milieu.

A close reading of al-Bāqillānī's *I'jāz al-Qur'ān* shows that two major observations mark his case for the literary unique composition of the Qur'ān: (1) the Qur'ān exhibits a unique,

---

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 28. Besides this new approach, al-Khaṭṭābī closely follows the broad outline used by al-Jāḥiẓ in approaching the *i'jāz*; that is, dealing with a triad of *i'jāz*-related themes: theological defense, rhetorical analysis and literary interpretations of some Qur'anic verses that seemingly depart from traditional Arabic style. Al-Khaṭṭābī's view on *i'jāz* is recognized by both al-Zarkashī and al-Biqā'ī. Al-Biqā'ī describes this view as the best he read on the topic. See al-Biqā'ī, *Naẓm al-Darar fī Tanāsib al-Āyāt wa al-Suwar* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-Īlmiyyah, 2011), 1:66.

unprecedented genre, and (2) the Qur'anic stylistic quality is consistently maintained.<sup>54</sup> In this way, al-Bāqillānī presents the Qur'anic text as a linguistic phenomenon that breaks the norms of both human genre and style. In other words, the Qur'anic unprecedented genre violates the norms of existing literary forms, and the consistent stylistic quality breaks the standards of human levels of maintaining eloquence.<sup>55</sup> How does al-Bāqillānī argue for this thesis from a literary perspective?

It is clear that al-Bāqillānī assesses al-Jāhīz's *Nazm al-Qur'ān* as (1) adding nothing new beyond what the previous *mutakallimūn* had offered and (2) failing to unravel the ambiguous matters surrounding the discussions on Qur'anic inimitability.<sup>56</sup> However, al-Bāqillānī's literary approach to the theorization of the Qur'anic literary-rhetorical excellence is primarily motivated by al-Jāhīz's demarcation of the literary scope of *i'jāz*; that is, *i'jāz* is to be observed, not proved. Additionally, al-Bāqillānī formulates his theorization of *nazm* in a way that converses with some of the contemporaneous debates on poetry during the Abbasid period. To illustrate al-Bāqillānī's methodology, one can identify three hallmarks of al-Bāqillānī's approach to the literary matchlessness of the Qur'ān.

First, al-Bāqillānī defines his target audience. As Abū Mūsā rightfully observes, al-Bāqillānī opines that the only category of people who can recognize the inimitability of the Qur'ān is the advanced and experts, because they are able to recognize the different genres (*al-*

---

<sup>54</sup> This emphasis on “consistency” seems to be the difference between al-Rummānī and al-Bāqillānī. To al-Rummānī, the Qur'ān exhibits a higher level of *badī'*, whereas al-Bāqillānī argues for a sustained Qur'anic *badī'*.

<sup>55</sup> Sophia Vasalou sees that al-Bāqillānī locates the *i'jāz* in “the creation of a new, unidentifiable and inimitable genre of expression.” See Sophia Vasalou's “The Miraculous Eloquence of the Qur'ān: General Trajectories and Individual Approaches,” *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 4, no. 2 (2002): 23-53. However, Friedman places more emphasis on the relationship between al-Bāqillānī's project and the controversy over *badī'* poetry in the Abbasid era. See Rachel Anne Friedman, “Theological Echoes of Literary Controversies: Reading Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī's *I'jāz al-Qur'ān* in Light of the Debate over *Badī'* Style,” *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 49 (2018): 305-329.

<sup>56</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I'jāz al-Qur'ān*, ed. Muḥammad 'Abd al-Mun'im Khafājī (Beirut: Dar al-Jīl, 2013), 53.

و قد صنف الجاحظ في نظم القرآن كتابا لم يزد فيه على ما قاله المتكلمون قبله و لم يكشف عما يلتبس في أكثر هذا المعنى.

*muntahūn fī maʿrifat ṣunūf al-kalām*). Yet, these experts are very few.<sup>57</sup> Practically, al-Bāqillānī identifies four types of potential inquires of *iʿjāz*: (1) a non-Arab who does not know Arabic, (2) an Arab who is not cognizant of the art of eloquence, (3) one who is expert in Arabic, and (4) one with intermediate knowledge of Arabic. After that, al-Bāqillānī clarifies that his work does not address the first three levels. According to him, those who are experts in Arabic will not find it hard to recognize the distinct style of the Qurʾān. For them, the mere act of hearing a recitation of the Qurʾān is sufficient for recognizing the uniqueness of the Qurʾān, as in Q. 9:6. Al-Bāqillānī then argues that even though the analysis of different genres is a subtle exercise, it is still non-confusing for the experts. They can naturally recognize the peculiar qualities of literary pieces as an experienced jeweler can easily and assuredly tell genuine gold from counterfeit.

Al-Bāqillānī’s goal is to nurture students’ poetic skills so they can pass accurate poetic judgments. In his opinion, a naturally gifted critic can recognize good literary pieces “as an artisan recognizes his craft: a goldsmith can easily recognize the qualities of a currency that can be entirely difficult for others to realize, and a cloth trader can readily recognize the value, quality or inferiority of a specific type of cloth in a way that others find hard to reach.”<sup>58</sup> Regarding the non-Arabs or the Arabs who lack recognition of the art of eloquence, al-Bāqillānī posits that their only way to acknowledge the Qurʾānic *iʿjāz* is *taqlīd* or imitation. On the other side, al-Bāqillānī states that his work is for people at the intermediate level who possesses a good level of Arabic “that could be improved to the advanced level through the cultivation of literary

---

<sup>57</sup> See Muḥammad Abū Mūsa, *Al-Iʿjāz al-Balāghī: Dirāsah Tahlīliyyah lī Turāth Ahl al-ʿIlm* (Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, 1997), 185.

<sup>58</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Iʿjāz al-Qurʾān*, 113.

taste so they could recognize the *i'jāz* with no mediator.”<sup>59</sup> To this end, al-Bāqillānī’s is a task of improving students’ *dhawq* and qualifying them to approach the Qur’anic text as experts.<sup>60</sup>

Second, al-Bāqillānī shares samples of different genres for the intermediate students so that they recognize Qur’anic literary peculiarities on their own. In al-Bāqillānī’s view, the intermediate student can see the *i'jāz* by “providing him with the examples, presenting the different styles to him, explaining the samples of poetry and prose and then giving him an example of each literary genre so he fully ponder them.”<sup>61</sup> Al-Bāqillānī hopes that this learning strategy can help students “make a ruling based on a reasoned deliberation as scholars do and suggest emendations as critics do.”<sup>62</sup>

Al-Bāqillānī’s enthusiasm for, and trust in, this approach may be explained by his convention that literary pieces vary by era or individual composer. In a more detailed manner, specific ears share specific intellectual, linguistic and artistic aspects, and individual composers are usually identified with particular styles. Al-Bāqillānī is hopeful that, through literary study, one can develop the skill of recognizing the author merely by hearing a few lines from any poem. He observes that “anyone familiar with poetic artistry can readily distinguish the *sabk* of Abū Nuwās from that of Muslim and the *nasj* of Ibn al-Rūmī from that of al-Buḥturī.”<sup>63</sup> Banqib notes that the terms *sabk* and *nasj* here refer to nothing but the rhetorical peculiarities or the expressive style each poet possesses.”<sup>64</sup>

---

<sup>59</sup> Muḥammad Abū Mūsā, *Murāja‘āt fi ‘Uṣūl al-Dars al-Balāghī* (Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, 2008), 233

<sup>60</sup> Rachel Anne Friedman notes that al-Bāqillānī presents himself as “an educated non-specialist in literary theory on the grounds that he ‘refers to the experts’ in literary studies whose opinions he recounts. See Rachel Anne Friedman, *Theological Echoes of Literary Controversies*, 312. However, al-Bāqillānī’s introduction, wherein his methodology is laid out, reveals an authoritative tone.

<sup>61</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I’jāz al-Qur’ān*, 127.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>64</sup> Banqib, *Manāhij al-Taḥlīl al-Balāghī ‘Inda ‘Ulamā’ al-I’jāz* (Riyāḍ: Dār Kunūz Ishbīliyyah, 2009), 210.

Having established the notion of literary idiosyncrasy, al-Bāqillānī moves on to provide his thoughts on the Qur'anic literary peculiarities. Al-Bāqillānī's many thoughts can be regrouped in two significant areas that, he believes, separate the Qur'anic text from other literary forms. The first line of thinking relates to the Qur'anic themes, whereas the second pertains to the Qur'anic stylistic expressions. However, one can find the common denominator in these two areas; namely, demonstrating that the high quality of the Qur'ān is consistently sustained throughout the text. For instance, al-Bāqillānī pinpoints that Qur'anic themes are at variance with the poetry themes. According to him, the novel Qur'anic themes, that range from theological, eschatological, moral to legal issues, could have easily reduced its eloquence. Al-Bāqillānī emphasizes this difference to credit the Qur'ān for maintaining its eloquence despite tackling new themes. In the same vein, al-Bāqillānī adds that the Qur'anic eloquence is not affected by the repetition of some topics or by the need to effect a smooth transition from one topic to another. Confidently, al-Bāqillānī suggests using the notion of paraphrasing; that is, identifying a Qur'anic thought and attempting to express it in a better way.

Regarding stylistic variances between the Qur'ān and other literary forms, al-Bāqillānī similarly argues that, unlike the Qur'ān, poetic eloquence can be found only in a poetical verse or a hemistich that stands out in a long poem. More specifically, al-Bāqillānī adds that poetic eloquence varies by the poet's familiarity with, and preferability of, a specific topic. However, al-Bāqillānī argues that the Qur'ān consistently maintains a sustained level of eloquence in each verse and every topic to the point that each sentence in a verse stands out so elegantly that if a Qur'anic sentence were to be inserted in a poetic verse, the Qur'anic piece would appear as "foreign" compared to the passage with which it is inlaid.<sup>65</sup> Finally, al-Bāqillānī posits that this sustained eloquence has its overriding aesthetic and visceral influence on the listeners of the

---

<sup>65</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I'jāz al-Qur'ān*, 201

Qur'ān. He sees that the Qur'ān “leads one to marvel, rejoice, worry, delight, smile, weep, feel sad and joyous, and [it also] appeals to one’s ears.”<sup>66</sup>

Third, al-Bāqillānī moves from his theorization of the Qur'anic sustained eloquence to a critical engagement and a literary evaluation of two famous poems by two gifted poets, Imru' al-Qays' *qifā nabk* and al-Buḥtirī's *lāmiyyah*.<sup>67</sup> Rachel Anne Friedman reads al-Bāqillānī's choice of these two poems in light of the Abbasid controversy over *badī'* poetry. Imrū' al-Qays and al-Buḥtirī are undoubtedly two great representatives of the *qadīm* and the *muhḍathūn* poetry respectively. Friedman argues that al-Bāqillānī examines these two long poems to conclude “that all human-authored literature falls short of sustained excellence, and that even the best poetry from both schools is similarly flawed when compared to the Qur'an's consistent, majestic eloquence.”<sup>68</sup>

Similarly, al-Bāqillānī relies on the idea of *ta'līf* to illustrate the superiority of the sustained Qur'anic eloquence. Besides his attempts to study the key elements of Qur'anic style, al-Bāqillānī develops al-Khaṭṭābī's notion of *ta'līf* more deeply and argues that the Qur'anic style is noted for its compositional strategy of *ta'līf al-mukhtalif* (harmonizing the heterogeneous), which turns the Qur'anic verses as simultaneously independent and interrelated. According to al-Bāqillānī, this two-fold function of “independency” and “relatedness” is a sign of unique literary artfulness that reflects the literal meaning of *naẓm*; that is, “the ordering of

---

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 277

<sup>67</sup> Al-Bāqillānī is determined to spot many shortcomings in these two celebrated poems in an attempt to illustrate the Qur'anic superior style. Due to his harsh attitude towards these two poems, al-Bāqillānī is criticized by many modern scholars, such as Ḥusein al-Mirṣafī (d.1889) in his *al-Wasīlah al-Adabiyyah* wherein Imru' al-Qays is defended for his diction and style. With this cavil approach to poetry, al-Bāqillānī misses al-Jāḥiẓ's intent and debilitates his own goal. Yet, he follows al-Jāḥiẓ in countering the anticipated and already raised questions regarding the Qur'anic style and content. To this end, al-Bāqillānī devotes an entire work *al-Intisār lī al-Qur'ān* where he seeks to rebut the theological, grammatical, philological, and rhetorical objections against the Qur'ān. See also Grunebaum, *A Tenth-century Document of Arabic Literary Theory and Criticism: The sections on poetry of al-Bāqillānī's I'jāz al-Qur'ān* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950).

<sup>68</sup> Rachel Anne Friedman, *Theological Echoes of Literary Controversies*, 308.



pearls on a string to form a necklace.” He adds that this type of *nazm*, as effected by *ta’līf*, can be found in poetry but not as predominantly as found in the Qur’ān.

Practically speaking, al-Bāqillānī stresses the distinctiveness of the parts of a Qur’anic sentence. He repeats that, if any part of the sentence were to be inserted in any speech, it would uniquely shine as *wāsiṭat al-’iqd* (the middle and best part of a jeweled necklace). Al-Bāqillānī demonstrates his idea of *ta’līf* at the levels of a single verse and sequel of verses. The following is an example that illustrates the thematic cohesiveness of the Qur’anic neighboring sentences:

He makes the dawn break;  
He makes the night for rest;  
and He made the sun and the moon to a precise measure.  
That is the design of the Almighty, the All Knowing (Q. 6:96).

Al-Bāqillānī points out that there are four *ma’ānī* in this verse, each of which stands on its own as a star or a sparkling pearl in a necklace. However, the *nazm* binds these separate epigrams together as they all emanate from, and point to, the manifestation of divine sovereignty and the splendor of divine power. Accordingly, the diverse parts in this verse conform to illustrate that God is supreme, an end that serves as a conceptual thread that unifies the various thoughts. This unification of miscellaneous ideas is what al-Bāqillānī celebrates as the ability to devise *ta’līf al-mukhtalif*, through which a speaker makes their audience see unity, not fragmentation, in the diverse parts, and thereby each part serves as “a star in its height and light and a pearl that sparkles amongst its jewels.”<sup>69</sup>

As Friedman reads al-Bāqillānī’s attitude towards rhetorical devices in light of the Abbasid *badī’* poetry, al-Bāqillānī’s exposition of the Qur’anic *ta’līf* can also be understood in light of the celebration of *qalā’id al-shu’rā’*’s selections. In effect, al-Bāqillānī’s description “*wāsiṭat al-’iqd*” is reminiscent of the works of the anthologist al-Tha’ālibī (d. 429/1039), who

---

<sup>69</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I’jāz al-Qur’ān*, 233.

frequently uses the term *wasā'it qalā'id al-shu'ārā'* to refer to his selected *muqallad* verse. According to Ibn Sallām al-Jumaḥī (d. 232/845), who seems to be the first to use and define this term, the *muqallad* verse is *al-bayt al-mustaghni bi nafsih al-mashhūr al-ladhī yuḍrab bihi al-mathal* (the self-sustaining verse and the famous [verse] that is set up as an adage). Abū Bakr al-Ṣūlī (d. 335/946) affirms this notion by arguing that “the best poetry is that which stands on its own (*qāma bi nafsih*), has complete meaning in its verse, and whose parts stand on its own and prove self-sustaining if other parts are unstated.” In effect, al-Ṣāhib ibn 'Abbād's (d. 385/995) selects the widely used lines from al-Mutanabbī's poetry in *al-Amthāl al-sā'irah min shi'r al-Mutanabbī* (Al-Mutanabbī's Circulating Poetical Adages).<sup>70</sup>

Therefore, al-Bāqillānī analyzes the parts of the Qur'anic sentences to show that they consistently stand out in their artistic expression and serve as *wāsiṭat al-'iqd*, flow naturally and collaborate to produce a larger unified *ma'nā*. Assessing the Qur'anic verses as *wāsiṭat al-'iqd* indicates that al-Bāqillānī wants his readers to recognize that what is occasionally celebrated in poetry is consistently maintained in the Qur'anic composition.

### 2.1.1.2 Foreshadowing the Meaning-Centered Approach

Unlike his predecessors who focus on how the *lafẓ* generates a unique style or genre, the Mu'tazilite 'Abd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025) does not see the unique genre alone a basis for rhetorical distinctiveness. To be eligible for *i'jāz*, 'Abd al-Jabbār insists that this unique genre must exhibit the highest level of eloquence. In his view, the credit for literary uniqueness goes to the *faṣāḥah*; whereas the unique genre, when found, would be a supplement, not supplant, to the literary distinctiveness. Therefore, 'Abd al-Jabbār opines that the locus of *i'jāz* resides in the

---

<sup>70</sup> The standalone poetical verses continue to be singled out. For instance, Zayn al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 666/1261) arranges his collection *Kitāb al-Amthāl wa al-ḥikam* (The Book of Adages and Aphorisms) according to themes and divides it into two major sections: one on single lines of poetry and another on hemistiches. Thereafter comes Ibn Aydamur (d. 710/1310) with the largest collection of solitary poetical lines that are alphabetically arranged in his 12-volume encyclopedia *al-Durr al-Farīd wa Bayt al-Qasīd*.

combination of exhibiting the highest level of eloquence (*faṣāḥah*) in a novel genre, with a clear emphasis on the element of *faṣāḥah*.

What does ‘Abd al-Jabbār mean precisely by *faṣāḥah*? In answer to this question, ‘Abd al-Jabbār brings the issue of form and content to the frontline again, giving a two-fold aspect of *faṣāḥah*. The first part of ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s conception of *faṣāḥah* can be easily considered as an explanation of what al-Jāḥiẓ thinks about *lafẓ* and *ma‘nā*. He initiates his cause with a direct quote from his teacher Abū Ḥāshim al-Jubbā’ī (d. 321/888). He writes:

[S]peech exhibits *faṣāḥah* (eloquence) on account of its forcible words (*jazālat lafdhih*) and good meaning (*ḥusn ma‘nā*). Therefore, these two properties must be considered together since a speech with elegant words but a weak meaning is not deemed eloquent. Therefore an eloquent speech must be a combination of both.<sup>71</sup>

However, ‘Abd al-Jabbār departs from his teacher’s view and affirms that the form is to be prioritized in the case of delivering a thought that different speakers can share.<sup>72</sup> As an illustration, ‘Abd al-Jabbār uses the example of spinning. While the material for the spinning process can be the same, textiles vary based on their weaving, composition and embroidery.<sup>73</sup> With this illustration that serves as a reinstatement of the significance of form, the ten rhetorical devices are rehabilitated.

The second part of *faṣāḥah* relates to what can be called “the formulators of meaning.” In ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s opinion, meaning is not delivered through the mere words; however, meaning resides in the triad of *muwāḍa‘ah* (conventional usage of words), *i‘rāb* (grammatical case) and *mawqī‘* (structural position).<sup>74</sup> Put another way, ‘Abd al-Jabbār stresses three context-sensitive elements of eloquence: the diction, the flow of syntax, and the semantic changes in word order.

---

<sup>71</sup> Abū Bakr ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Al-Mughnī fī Abwāb al-Tawhīd wa al-‘Adl* (Cairo: Maṭba‘at Dār al-Kutub, 1960), 16: 197.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

المعاني لا يقع فيها تزايد، فإذاً يجب أن يكون الذي يعتبر؛ التزايد عند الألفاظ، التي يعبر بها عنها

‘Abd al-Jabbār is also aware of the aspect of propriety as he illustrates that one word may be eloquent in one context yet inarticulate in another. In this way, ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s triad can be deemed as a precursor to ‘Abd al-Qāhir’s thoughtful examination of how the *lafz* generates meaning.<sup>75</sup>

### 2.1.2 The Meaning-Centered Approach

Using ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s example of weaving, ‘Abd al-Qāhir (d. 471/1078) compares *nazm* or composition to textile.<sup>76</sup> He argues that the aesthetics of compositional design must be revealed and explained in the same way a textile worker gradually explains or shows how he creates the interlocking of the thread network to produce an elaborate design and overall pattern. ‘Abd al-Qāhir adds that as one witnesses the weaving process and how different threads are interlaced at right angles, one can readily recognize the craftsmanship, ornaments, precise geometric patterns, and exquisite skills required for the production of quality textile.<sup>77</sup> With the image of weaving in mind, ‘Abd al-Qāhir asserts that the literary quality of speech resides in its total *nazm* (arrangement). Furthermore, ‘Abd al-Qāhir explores the constituents of *nazm* to show his readers, step by step, how the elements of meaning are formed and what purpose they serve.

In contrast to al-Jāhiz, who evaluates the *ma‘nā* as general thoughts commonly shared by people, ‘Abd al-Qāhir’s emphasis on *ma‘nā* has a different approach. According to ‘Abd al-Qāhir, *ma‘nā* is not something to be contrasted with *lafz* but instead formulated by it. A *lafz* (vocal expression) is as good as its semantic and connotative role is. With this approach and his self-positioning in the history of *i‘jāz* inquiry, ‘Abd al-Qāhir seeks to end the controversy about

---

<sup>75</sup> For ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s concept of *faṣāḥa* and influence on future generations, see Yusuf Rahman, “The Miraculous Nature of Muslim Scripture: A Study of ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s *Ī‘jāz al-Qur’ān*,” *Islamic Studies* 35, no. 4 (1996):409–424.

<sup>76</sup> ‘Abd al-Qāhir is usually referred to as al-Jurjānī. However, I prefer using ‘Abd al-Qāhir to avoid confusing him with one of his teachers, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Qāḍī al-Jurjānī (d. 392/1001) who wrote *al-Waṣāṭah bayna al-Mutanabbī wa Khuṣūmih* (The Mediation between al-Mutanabbī and His Detractors).

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

form and content.<sup>78</sup> He suggests a reconciliatory posture, which proposes that the earlier rhetoricians who favor *lafẓ* do not practically argue for the mere merit of the *lafẓ*. Instead, they use *lafẓ* to refer to *ṣūrat al-maʿnā* (the reflection of meaning or thought), because the qualities traditionally associated with *lafẓ* are essential qualities of the *maʿnā*. ʿAbd al-Qāhir specifies that qualities like “*lafẓun mutamakkin ghayr qaliq wa lā nabin bihi mayḍi uhuh*” (a word that is deep-seated, unshakable and does not seem foreign in its position) are eventually descriptions of thoughts, since *tamakkun* and *qalaq* (appropriateness and uneasiness) are qualities that involve ideas, not merely forms.<sup>79</sup>

He further asserts that mere words gain no primacy or significance; their semantic value and participation are the elements that give them worth.<sup>80</sup> He defines *naẓm* as “syntactic ordering of words by semantic aims.”<sup>81</sup> According to him, the simple syntactic ordering entails establishing a network of semantic constituents with purposeful interrelations from which meaning is generated. Accordingly, ʿAbd al-Qāhir starts with the interaction between syntax and semantics. Elaborating on the elements on which ʿAbd al-Qāhir relies for generating meaning, Alexander Key explains that ʿAbd al-Qāhir’s theory “was constructed with the lexicon, grammar, and syntax, and all three were made up of *maʿānī*. Lexical accuracy pointed at *maʿānī*, grammar structured *maʿānī* in sentences, and syntax manipulated the *maʿānī* of those sentences.”<sup>82</sup>

Furthermore, ʿAbd al-Qāhir goes further to discuss what can be called the semantics of the figures of speech. He places more emphasis, not on their mere denotations but, on their

---

<sup>78</sup> See W. Heinrichs in “ʿAbd al-Qāhir,” in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, ed. Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey (London: Routledge, 1998), 17.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 482

<sup>80</sup> ʿAbd al-Qāhir, *Dalāʾil al-Iʿjāz*, ed. Maḥmūd Shākir (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Madanī, 1992), 44-5

<sup>81</sup> Heinrichs, “ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī,” in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, ed. Meisami, Julie Scott & Paul Starkey. (London: Routledge, 1998) 1:17.

<sup>82</sup> Alexander Key, *Language between God and the Poets: Maʿna in the Eleventh Century* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2018), 196. See also Raji M. Rammuny’s “Al-Jurjānī: A Pioneer of Grammatical and Linguistic Studies,” *Historiographia Linguistica*, 12, no. 3 (January 1985): 351 – 371.

connotations and impacts, which serve the meaning intended to be communicated. ‘Abd al-Qāhir observes that the value of the figures and tropes goes beyond the artistic function and extends to contribute a depth of association and suggestion far beyond the scope of lexical use of imagery.

He remarks:

When you see an expert in the pearls of speech commending a piece of poetry or appraising a piece of prose and focusing the praise on the wording by describing it as ‘sweet, beautiful, good, stylish, attractive and wondrous,’ know that he is not telling you about the states that relate to the sounds of the letters or the apparent conventional usage; but rather [he is referring to the ]states that relate to what one finds in one’s heart and the extra [associations] ignited by the sparks of reason.<sup>83</sup>

To substantiate his observation, ‘Abd al-Qāhir explains that homonymy (*tajnīs*), for instance, can be appreciated in one position but depreciated in another. The merit does not reside in the mere wording, and thereby a homonymy becomes acceptable “only if it is reasonably well-chosen and the implied resemblance is not far-fetched.”<sup>84</sup>

### 2.1.2.1 Theology and the Literary History of *Naẓm*

This literary narrative of the *i’jāz* issue is generally entangled or disoriented by reading each *i’jāz* interlocutor independently from other actors of the *i’jāz* discussions or by confining the *i’jāz* contributions to the notion of serving a communal theological purpose<sup>85</sup> or supporting a theological background.<sup>86</sup> For instance, given ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s triplicity of *muwāḍa‘ah* (conventional usage of words), *i’rāb* (grammatical case) and *mawqī‘* (structural position) and its impact on ‘Abd al-Qāhir, one may not insist on a necessary connection between ‘Abd al-Qāhir’s

---

<sup>83</sup> ‘Abd al-Qāhir, *Asrār al-Balāghah* (Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-Madanī, 1991), 3.

<sup>84</sup> ‘Abd al-Qāhir, *Dalā’il al-I’jāz*, ed. Maḥmūd Shākīr (Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-Madanī, 1992), 8.

<sup>85</sup> For instance, John Wansbrough argues that *i’jāz* appears not merely as evidence for Muḥammad’s prophethood but as an endorsement of the authority of the Qur’ān in an evolving Islamic theology. See Wansbrough’s *Qur’anic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (London: Oxford University Press, 1977), 78; idem, *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1978); and A. S. Tritton’s *Muslim Theology* (London: Luzac for Royal Asiatic Society, 1947).

<sup>86</sup> Margaret Larkin places emphasis on the idea that ‘Abd al-Qāhir is more than a literary critic by stressing the Ash‘arite theological motives associated with ‘Abd al-Qāhir’s theory of *naẓm*. See Larkin, *The Theology of Meaning: Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani’s Theory of Discourse* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1995).

theory of meaning and his Ash‘arite dialectical position on divine *kalām*, which stipulates that the relationship between God and the Qur‘ān is that of *dāl* (Signifier) and *madlūl* (Signified) to avoid any anthropomorphic problems. To illustrate this theological connection, some refer to ‘Abd al-Qāhir’s focus on the notion that speech is a verbalized expression of our inner thoughts. However, the concept that words translate what is in one’s mind is a general concept that is not necessarily Ash‘arite.

From instance, the Mu‘tazilite al-Jāhiz argues that the gift of eloquence, that is praised and encouraged in the Qur‘ān as a divine blessing, resides in the ability to verbally express the “hidden thought.” Rāḍī supports this view in his study of the dialectical and philosophical background of al-Jāhiz’s practice of rhetoric. To illustrate al-Jāhiz’s position, Rāḍī quotes a passage at length from *al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn*, wherein al-Jāhiz stresses that the thoughts residing in the heart and imagined in mind are veiled and hidden, and that one’s needs and intentions cannot be known unless they are revealed using verbal narration, which turns the “hidden” into “manifest” and the “far” into “close.” After that, al-Jāhiz emphasizes that the hidden meaning is accurately manifested in proportion to the clarity, appropriateness, and precision of the verbal communication.<sup>87</sup>

Furthermore, in his *al-Khaṣā‘iṣ*, the Mu‘tazilite grammarian Ibn Jinnī (d. 392/1002) devotes one chapter as a riposte to the claim that the Arabs are so overconcerned with stylistics that they neglect the content. His chapter is entitled *bāb fī al-radd ‘alā man idda ‘ā ‘alā al-Arab ‘ināyataha bī al-alfāz wā ighfālaha al-ma‘ānī* (On Responding to Those who Claim that Arabs Care about the Form and Neglect the Content). In this brief chapter, Ibn Jinnī explains that the

---

<sup>87</sup> ‘Abd al-Ḥakīm Rāḍī, *Al-Ab‘ād al-Kalāmiyyah wa al-Falsafiyah fī al-Fikr al-Balāghī wa al-Naqdī ‘inda al-Jāhiz* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Ādāb, 2006). See also al-Jāhiz, *al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn*, 1:75.

Arabs' interest in stylistics does not bespeak their concern about the forms (*alfāz*); instead, stylistics is their medium of serving the content (*khidmah minhum lī al-ma'ānī*),<sup>88</sup> because, Ibn Jinnī continues, the forms serve as “the symbol (*unwān*) of their *ma'ānī* (thought/content) and the way to display their purposes.”<sup>89</sup> To illustrate his point, Ibn Jinnī compares the interest in “stylistics as a means of serving the content” to people’s interest in beautifying and preserving a container for what is contained therein. Furthermore, Ibn Jinnī does not miss a reference to the aesthetic experience caused by the appropriate style. He remarks that the Arabs are determined to “revamp, organize and substantially improve it [the form] to have a profound impact on listeners and more indicative of its purpose.”<sup>90</sup> Same position is also found in the Epistles of *Ikhwān al-Ṣafā*.<sup>91</sup>

Moreover, placing ‘Abd al-Qāhir in the history of the rhetorical analysis of the nature of Qur’anic expressiveness suggests that he is building upon the contributions of his predecessors. As early as al-Rummānī, the search is essentially about the role of the form in communicating the content, and ‘Abd al-Qāhir’s theory marks the culmination of how the form shapes the content. It is safe to say that earlier theorists of *i’jāz* spark the constituents of ‘Abd al-Qāhir’s theory of meaning. For instance, al-Khaṭṭābī’s notion of *ḍam* and ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s trilogy of *muwāḍa‘ah*, *i’rāb* and *mawqī‘* are essential dynamics of ‘Abd al-Qāhir’s development of the theory of meaning. Interestingly, ‘Abd al-Jabbār stresses that eloquence is not related to mere words but to their functions. In actuality, when ‘Abd al-Qāhir remarks that exact words can “delight and charm you in a position but make you feel heavy and lonely in another,”<sup>92</sup> and that

<sup>88</sup> Abū al-Fath Ibn Jinnī, *Al-Khaṣā‘iṣ* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2013), 1:238.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:237.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:238. See also Aḥmad Maṭlūb, “Athar Ibn Jinnī fi ‘Abd al-Qāhir wa Ibn al-Athīr,” *Majallat al-Majma‘ al-‘Ilmī al-‘Irāqī* 41 (1990).

<sup>91</sup> See *Rasā‘il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 2011), 3:121-122.

<sup>92</sup> ‘Abd al-Qāhir, *Dalā‘il al-I’jāz*, 46.



the worth of a word is contingent on “its neighboring word and intimate relations with its sisters,” he is providing anonymous verbatim quotes from ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s *Mughnī*.<sup>93</sup>

This level of sectarian interactions, which is pervasive in the *i’jāz* discussions, can be put down to the early distinction between the dialectical and literary scopes of *i’jāz*. This early awareness gives room not only for the inter-sectarian exchange of ideas<sup>94</sup> but also for intra-sectarian differences. For example, al-Jāhīz disagrees with his teacher al-Nazzām on *ṣarfah*, whereas al-Khaṭṭābī has a softer note of criticism against *ṣarfah*. Similarly, ‘Abd al-Jabbār denies the *ṣarfah* adopted by some Mu‘tazilites and sides with al-Khaṭṭābī about the idea that Qur’anic prophecies cannot be considered part of the literary *i’jāz*. Furthermore, ‘Abd al-Jabbār disagrees with his teacher Abū Ḥāshim on *jazālah*. Abū Ḥāshim holds that *jazālah* (good style) and beautiful content are the criteria of eloquent speech. However, ‘Abd al-Jabbār argues that the arrangement (*tartīb* or *ḍamm*) of speech was also an essential aspect.<sup>95</sup> With inter-sectarian exchange of ideas on *i’jāz*, one should not be quick to connect literary views to sectarian affiliation. Nasr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, for instance, explains al-Bāqillānī’s rejection of *ṣarfah* as part of his Ash‘arite school even though the vast majority of Mu‘tazilites reject *ṣarfah* as well.<sup>96</sup>

Speaking of sectarian assimilation of *i’jāz* ideas, one can certainly assert that the best champion and proponent of ‘Abd al-Qāhir’s project is the Mu‘tazilite al-Zamakhsharī,<sup>97</sup> who writes *al-Kashshāf*, the first complete poetics-focused exegesis dedicated to the examination of the niceties of the Qur’anic *naẓm*. Flowing in ‘Abd al-Qāhir’s direction that emphasizes drawing

---

<sup>93</sup> ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Al-Mughnī*, 16:295.

<sup>94</sup> Richard Martin notes the similarity between al-Bāqillānī’s doctrine of *I’jāz* and that of the Basran Mu‘tazilites as contrasted with the Baghdad Mu‘tazilites. See Martin’s “The Role of the Basrah Mu‘tazilite in Formulating the Doctrine of Apologetic Miracle,” *Journal of near eastern studies* 39, no. 3 (1980): 175-181.

<sup>95</sup> Yūsuf Raḥmān, “The Miraculous Nature of Muslim Scripture: A Study of ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s *I’jāz al-Qur’ān*,” *Islamic Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 416.

<sup>96</sup> Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ* (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-‘Arabī, 1994), 142.

<sup>97</sup> For a detailed study of al-Zamakhsharī’s life and history of his work, see Andrew J. Lane, *A Traditional Mu‘tazilite Qur’ān Commentary* (Leiden, Brill, 2006), 10-101.

meaning from the *lafz* or verbal expression and sentence structure, al-Zamakhsharī primarily discusses the rhetorical effects of the Qur’anic figures of speech, literary devices, semantics and sentence structure. The full title of al-Zamakhsharī’s exegesis reveals that central goal: *al-Kashshāf ‘an ḥaqā’iq ghawāmiḍ al-tanzīl wa ‘uyūn al-aqāwīl fī wujūh al-ta’wīl* (Revealer of the Realities of the Subtle Revelation and the Jewel-like Statements Regarding the Ways of Interpretation). The literary value of *al-Kashshāf* is well-received in the Sunni circles.<sup>98</sup>

In his exegesis, al-Zamakhsharī posits that the central task of a Qur’anic exegete is engaging in revealing the subtle thoughts (*laṭā’if al-ma’ānī*). He adds that this task can only be accomplished by rhetoricians who exceed in the two sciences of *bayān* and *ma’ānī* (eloquence and linguistic pragmatics). In his introduction, al-Zamakhsharī lays down a condition for the exegete:

One must exceed in two branches of knowledge exclusively related to the Qur’ān; that is, *‘ilm al-ma’ānī* and *‘ilm al-bayān*, studied them carefully for an extended period of time, carried out a long, exhaustive examination of them, possessed a great concern for recognizing the subtleties of God’s scriptural proof (*ḥujjah*) in a way that inspires him to inquire into their application, and proved keen on perceiving the miracle of God’s messenger—after a satisfactory acquisition of the other branches of knowledge.<sup>99</sup>

This continued adoption, promotion, and development of ‘Abd al-Qāhir’s theory on *nazm* makes al-Zamakhsharī’s exegesis a central work that attracts particular attention in Sunni learning despite his adherence to Mu‘tazilite theology in the interpretation of the Qur’ān.<sup>100</sup>

---

<sup>98</sup> Lane posits that the evaluation of the *Kashshāf* in primary sources is, on the whole, positive. See, *ibid.*, xix.

<sup>99</sup> Al-Zamakhsharī, Abū al-Qāsim, *Al-Kashshāf* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2009), 7.

<sup>100</sup> For a detailed list of the Sunni’s commentaries, abridgment and glosses on al-Zamakhsharī’s exegesis, see al-Muṣṭafā Juwaynī, *Manhaj al-Zamakhsharī fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān wa Bayān I’jāzih* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma’ārif), 266-279. For a medieval engagement with the Mu‘tazilite theology motivating al-Zamakhsharī’s interpretive methodology, see ibn al-Munayyir’s (d.683/1284) *al-Inṣāf fī mā Taḍammanahu al-Kashshāf min al-I’tizāl* (The Fair Judgment Regarding Mu‘tazilism in al-Kashshāf).

### 2.1.3 Aesthetics-Centered Approach

The last dimension of the functions of *lafz*, as explicated by the *i'jāz* actors, is the sound effects. As early as al-Jāhiz's formative insights on the Qur'anic composition, the role the *lafz* sound plays in creating pleasures in the ears of the listeners has already been in view. However, the later *i'jāz* theorists bring that aspect to the Qur'anic *lafz* and describe the Qur'anic text as an object of beauty with arrays and intricacies of emotions. This aspect of the Qur'anic aesthetics can be captured in the Qur'anic self-image that stipulates that the Qur'ān is first received as an oral text that "is laid upon the heart of the prophet" (Q. 26:193-194).

In his *al-Nukat fī I'jāz al-Qur'ān*, al-Rummānī sees the carefully crafted message as more inviting and appealing to listeners. He compares between reading a manuscript in the most beautiful calligraphy and lettering possible and reading the same manuscript in the ugliest penmanship and lettering possible. He affirms that "although the ideas in both are the same, they exhibit a disparity in form."<sup>101</sup> Furthermore, al-Rummānī pinpoints the role of the Qur'anic *lafz* in creating an experience of awe and a vocation of emotions. For example, consider the following two verses:

1. "And we shall *come to* (*qadimnā*) the work they have done, and make it scattered dust" (Q. 25:23).
2. "So *Crack* that (*iṣḍa'*) which you are commanded" (Q. 15:94).

Al-Rummānī ponders the verbs "come to" (*qadimnā*) and "crack that" (*faṣḍa'*), explaining that the first means "we intentionally turn to," whereas the second means "declare." He observes:

"We come to" is more eloquent, because it shows that He will treat them like someone coming from travel, and He will treat them so in order to give them time like a person who was away from them, then came back, and he saw them doing something contrary to

---

<sup>101</sup> Al-Rummānī, *Three Treatises on the I'jāz of the Qur'ān*, 69.

what he had commanded them. Here, there is a warning against being lured by being given a respite... As for scattered dust, it is an elucidation that brought out what is not perceived by the senses as something perceived by the senses.<sup>102</sup>

Similarly, al-Rummānī prefers “crack” over “declare,” “because “cracking” a command must have an effect like cracking a bottle, otherwise “declaring” may be so difficult that it has no effect and becomes as though it has not occurred. The idea that is common to both is communicating, but communicating with an effect like cracking a bottle is more eloquent.<sup>103</sup> Furthermore, al-Rummānī stresses the role of the *lafz* in communicating the Qur’anic message effectively by explicating the experience found in Qur’anic similes. For instance, al-Rummānī observes that a simile enhances the imagery in four ways that are to be found in the literal sense of other equivalent words:

A simile brings out (1) what is not perceived by the senses as something perceived by the senses, (2) what is not prevalent in custom as something prevalent in custom, (3) what is not known by spontaneous intuition as something known by spontaneous intuition, and (4) what has no descriptive power as something that has descriptive power.<sup>104</sup>

Moreover, al-Rummānī’s observations on the use of *talā’um* (assonance) and *fāṣilah* (verse-ending) are clear indications that he sees form and content going hand in hand. This form is used in the service of content. Even though *talā’um* and *fāṣilah* deal essentially with the rhythmic value of a text, al-Rummānī argues that their literary power resides in how much they serve the communication of the thoughts intended to be expressed. This view is in line with his emphasis on the notion that rhetoric is all about *īṣāl al-ma’nā* (delivering the meaning). It is for this reason that al-Rummānī does not prefer to use the word *fāṣilah* interchangeably with the word *saj’*. He describes Qur’anic rhymes an embodiment of eloquence and wisdom, giving the following explanation:

---

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 57.

They are a means to making needed ideas understood in the most beautiful form indicated by them. The word *saj'* [for rhymed prose] has been taken from the *saj'* (cooing) of pigeons, because there is nothing in [this prose] but similar repetitive sounds, very much as in the cooing of pigeons there is nothing but similar repetitive sounds. Because of the needless and useless affectation [of rhyme], the ideas are not given any regard and have become equivalent to words having nothing but similar repetitive sounds.<sup>105</sup>

In line with his description of the Qur'anic style as conflating magnification and harmony, al-Khaṭṭābī refers to the ecstasy of the Qur'ān and its profound aesthetic impact on the hearts of its recipients. According to him, harmony, complexity, and proportionality communicate and evoke emotions such as awe, respect, pleasure, joy, and reverential fear. He writes:

No discourse on being heard, be it in verse or prose, causes in the heart the pleasure and sweetness or the awe and fear that the Qur'ān does. Souls rejoice and hearts relax on hearing it until, having had their satisfaction from it, they are overtaken by fear and overwhelmed by palpitation and anxiety, and they plunge into fright and trepidation. One's skin has gooseflesh and one's heart is perturbed, as it imposes itself between one's soul and its rooted feelings and beliefs.<sup>106</sup>

Al-Khaṭṭābī's remark here seems to be the first explicit attempt into the aesthetic experience and ecstasy of the Qur'ān.<sup>107</sup> His emphasis on the aesthetic experience matches with the literary portrayal of the Qur'anic text as exhibiting a blend of style that associates and harmonizes majesty with beauty, glory with mercy, and distance with nearness. This multifaceted style seems to bring the listener closer to the divine through the experience of a variety of emotions.

Similarly, al-Bāqillānī provides a lengthy description of one's visceral reaction to the Qur'anic wording and arrangement. Friedman offers a translation of a long passage from al-

---

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 70

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>107</sup> For the aesthetic reception of the Qur'ān among the first generation of Muslim converts, see Kermani's *God Is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Quran*, trans. Tony Crawford (Cambridge: Polity Press, 12015). Also see Navid Kermani, "The Aesthetic Reception of the Qur'ān as Reflected in Early Muslim History," in *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'an*, ed. Issa J. Boullata (Richmond: Curzon, 2000), 255-276.

Bāqillānī's *I'jāz al-Qur'ān* on the emotional influence of the Qur'ān. In part of this passage, al-Bāqillānī engages with his readers:

If you contemplate what we have guided you to and stopped you at, look: do you find that this light has come into your heart, encompassed your core, spread through your senses, pierced your veins, filled you and surrounded you with surety, and led you to belief and sight? Or do you find a kind of fear taking you over, a sort of trembling in your sides, a sense of pleasure [*aryāhiyya*] taking you over from some direction? And do you find rapture rousing you to the subtlety of what you have discerned, and happiness moving you due to the marvelousness of what you have encountered, and do you find in yourself the knowledge that created strength in you, and serenity and joyous excitement in your whole body, and see yourself advancing in clear merit, and in achieving certainty? And do you find the ignorant ones cast under the feet of foolishness, and their caprices thrown into the darkness of insignificance and baseness, and their worth with the eye with which it must be seen, and the stations as they should be judged? All this comes from contemplating the discourse and its arrangement [*nizāmihi*], and astonishing ideas [*ma'ānī*] and judgments [*aḥkām*].<sup>108</sup>

Here, al-Bāqillānī's provides these general remarks without supportive explanations. This tendency is possibly due to his plan to address students with sufficient knowledge of Arabic and those who are satisfied with *ishārāt* to nurture their skills.

However, 'Abd al-Qāhir explains how the figures and tropes, especially metaphors and similes, engage the listeners. In his view, such devices synthesize two types of cognitive processing: sensory and noetic. With this synthesis follows intimacy. He explains that the first way of perception is achieved through the senses, and then comes the intellectual perception. Between these two ways of perception are kindred relation (*raḥim*), companionship (*ṣuḥbah*), and sacredness (*ḥurmah*). Psychologically, 'Abd al-Qāhir adds that this intimacy is a corollary of the synchronistic interaction between the sensory and the noetic. He states that the intimacy of the souls is contingent on moving them from the invisible to the visible, informing them of the direction after the indirect and instructing them about something by comparing it to another that is more knowable and more believable. With this synchrony, 'Abd al-Qāhir imagines the speaker

---

<sup>108</sup> Rachel Anne Friedman, "Clarity, Communication, and Understandability: Theorizing Language in al-Bāqillānī's *I'jāz al-Qur'ān* and *Uṣūl al-Fiqh* Texts," (PhD diss., University of California, 2015), 162.

before the *nafs* interceding for the foreign through the familiar and for the new companionship through the old companionship. He adds that, through the use of figures and tropes, the speaker is “like someone who talks about something veiled and then unveils it and says: here is it! Behold, and you will see it as I described.”<sup>109</sup>

Besides this synchrony, ‘Abd al-Qāhir celebrates the power of the imagery and what the *lafẓ* does in the *nafs*. ‘Abd al-Qāhir posits that imageries make us “see the inanimate as a rational live being, and the mute as outspoken, and the mute objects as eloquent, and the hidden thoughts as manifest ... and the subtle meanings, which are the repositories of reason, as personified and seen by our eyes.”<sup>110</sup> Lara Harb’s study of Arabic poetics principally revolves around what the *lafẓ* evokes in the *nafs*. In her *Arabic Poetics Aesthetic Experience in Classical Arabic Literature*, Lara Harb pinpoints that, by the turn of the fifth/eleventh century, ‘Abd al-Qāhir leads a new school of literary criticism that “articulated a universal conception of poetic beauty”<sup>111</sup> and gave birth to unique qualities of poetic aesthetics for the purpose of literary evaluation. These qualities “such as strangeness, farfetchedness, and unexpectedness”<sup>112</sup> reflected an experience of wonder. In Harb’s opinion, the aesthetics of wonder is what underlies ‘Abd al-Qāhir’s project on *badī‘*, imagery, *takhyīl* (make-believe) and *naẓm*.<sup>113</sup> This ascetics-centered approach still finds support in modern scholarship. For instance, Abu-Deeb calls for the development of this approach or, in his own words, “a new Jurjānī.”<sup>114</sup>

---

<sup>109</sup> ‘Abd al-Qāhir, *Asrār al-Balāghah*, 122.

وكم من يجزر عن شيء من وراء حجاب ثم يكشف عنه الحجاب و يقول ها هو ذا فأبصر تجده على ما وصفت

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 116, 121, 43.

<sup>111</sup> Lara Harb, *Arabic Poetics*, 28.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 30-74. For an anthology of texts on *takhyīl*, see *Takhyīl: The Imaginary in Classical Arabic Poetics II: Studies*, texts selected, translated, and annotated by Geert Jan Van Gelder and Marlé Hammond (Cambridge: Gibb Memorial Trust, 2008).

<sup>114</sup> See Kamal Abu-Deeb, “Aesthetically oriented interpretations of the Qur’ān,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Qur’anic Studies*, ed. Mustafa Shah and Muhammad Abdel Haleem (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 795-805.

## 2.2 Exploring the Sequence of Verses

This stage marks a change in the scope of *naẓm*. Besides the interest in finding meaning in the Qur'anic figures of speech, sentence structure, and aesthetics; some of the scholars of the Qur'ān, in the pre-Rāzī period, examine the substance found in the flow of the text. This concurrent interest results in searching for the thematic and rhetorical effects of the juxtaposition of verses or units in the surah. For instance, al-Bāqillānī observes:

Now think about one matter I will show you; that is, this *naẓm* (discourse arrangement) evenly occurs in short, long and middle-size verses. Think about [the Qur'ān] surah by surah, *āyah* by *āyah*, *fāṣilah* by *fāṣilah* (verse-ending), and ponder on the epilogue and the prologue, conjunctions of connections or lack thereof, instances of movement and transition. Then pass whatever judgment you want. If you find full examination long for you, then limit yourself to one surah or some surahs.<sup>115</sup>

Here, al-Bāqillānī affirms the notion of thematic connectedness in the Qur'anic structure.<sup>116</sup> However, al-Bāqillānī offers no systematic application of his literary observation to the body of the surah.<sup>117</sup> The only exception to this observation appears in surahs 40 and 41. In his reading of these two surahs, al-Bāqillānī provides overall outlines of their major thematic shifts. These outlines are based on what he finds as a dominant and overarching theme, which turns the *mukhtalif* into *mu'talif* (the heterogeneous parts into a homogenous unity). For instance, in surah 41, al-Bāqillānī illustrates that the theme of the authority of the Qur'anic revelation and people's reaction towards it is dominantly reiterated and expanded throughout the whole surah.

---

<sup>115</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I'jāz al-Qur'ān*, 233-234.

<sup>116</sup> Makhlūf affirms that al-Bāqillānī is among the pioneers who view the *naẓm* of a literary piece as a tight-knit whole or “*kull lā tanqaṭi 'awṣāluh*.” See 'Abd al-Ra'ūf's *Al-Bāqillānī wa Kitābuh I'jāz al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Dār Maktabat al-Ḥayāh, 1987). Similarly Abū Mūsā places al-Bāqillānī among the early contributors to thematic relations in the Qur'anic surah. See Muḥammad Abū Mūsā, *Al-I'jāz al-Balāghī: Dirāsah Taḥlīliyyah li Turāth Ahl al-'Ilm* (Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, 1997), 210. For references on the textual cohesiveness in the classical period, see Michel Cuypers' *The Banquet*, 493-512.

<sup>117</sup> Al-Bāqillānī's discussions on the literary structure of the Qur'anic text leave his readers with the impression that, for advanced critics, the task of deciphering the structure of the Qur'anic surah is so easy that it can be undertaken without his detailed expositions. This explains why his writing appears in a form of *ishārāt* (allusions) due to his “*karāhiyat al-iṭālah*” (the distaste for tedious discussions).



In his outline of the surah, al-Bāqillānī shows that every part of the surah moves towards this central idea and conforms to it.

However, it should be noted that al-Bāqillānī's early reading of surah 41 is not intentionally given to illustrate literary coherence in the Qur'ān but to advance the argument that many surahs, especially those starting with the separate letters (*al-ḥurūf al-mutaqaṭṭi'ah*), revolve around the notion of the binding authority and miraculous nature of the Qur'ān that establish the case for Muḥammad's prophethood. This argument is made in response to some voices that try to limit the addressees of *i'jāz* to the original recipients of the Qur'ān. This objection implies that no imitatio (*mu'āraḍah*) of the Qur'ān is required, simply because the challenge time had elapsed.<sup>118</sup> Al-Bāqillānī is not convinced of this idea of “timed-out *i'jāz* challenge,” and thereby outlined surah 41 as a whole to illustrate that the inimitable quality of the Qur'ān is unceasing, since it serves as part and parcel of Muḥammad's assertion of the prophecy office.

However, it seems that the Mu'tazilite exegetes pay more special and systematic attention to the flow of the surah verses and the thematic connectedness between the surah units. As stated before, these exegetes include Abū Muslim, al-Qaffāl and 'Abd al-Jabbār.<sup>119</sup> Even though these exegetes' commentaries are still extinct, al-Rāzī, in his *Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb*, incorporates some of their literary remarks on different thematic relations in the surah. Recently, a complete Mu'tazilite commentary has fortunately been discovered and published. I am here referring to *Tahdhīb fī al-Taḥsīn* authored by the Mu'tazilite al-Ḥākim al-Jushamī, who incorporates many

---

<sup>118</sup>Mir voices a similar opinion that the literary challenge of the Qur'ān has no relevancy today on the grounds that the challenge addresses the original recipients and contemporary audience of Prophet Muḥammad. See Mustansir Mir, “Some figures of speech in the Qur'ān,” *Religion & Literature* 40, no. 3 (2008): 32.

<sup>119</sup> Khaḍr Nabha retrieves many fragments of the extinct Mu'tazilite commentaries. For example, compiling the different exegetical citations from Abū Bakr al-Aṣamm, Abū Muslim, Abū 'Alī al-Jubbā'ī, Abū al-Qāsim al-Ka'bī, and 'Abd al-Jabbār as they appear in various Qur'anic commentaries—primarily those authored by al-Rāzī, al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1274), Tabarsī (d.548/1153) and others. See Khaḍr Nabha, ed., *Mawsū'at Taḥsīn al-Mu'tazilah*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2007).

exegetical notes from different Mu‘tazilite exegetes. In effect, al-Jushamī’s commentary can be considered as an archetype of Mu‘tazilite exegesis. As ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sālimī points out, the voices of many Mu‘tazilite exegetes are dominant in this work. The list of these exegetes includes Abū Bakr al-Aṣamm, Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbā’ī, al-Rummānī, Abū al-Qāsim al-Balkhī and Abū Muslim al-Iṣfahānī.<sup>120</sup>

A cursory reading of al-Jushamī’s commentary reflects a systematic consideration of how the surah verses are thematically weaved together.<sup>121</sup> To have a grasp of the Mu‘tazilite early interest in the flow of the Qur’anic text, it is helpful to examine the interpretive methodology found in al-Jushamī’s exegesis. In his introduction, al-Jushamī lays down his interpretive methodology, which seems to represent a Mu‘tazilite exegetical trend that would later have its profound impact on al-Rāzī. In al-Jushamī’s view, a verse is to be interpreted in light of eight issues: the different reading variants (*qirā’āt*), philology (*lughah*), syntactic parsing (*i’rāb*), composition (*nazm*), intended meaning (*ma’nā*) with reference to *ḥaqīqah/majāz* (literal/non-literal) relations, occasion of revelation (*sabab al-nuzūl*), and the proofs/rules (*aḥkām*) communicated by the Qur’anic text.<sup>122</sup> Whenever applicable, al-Jushamī uses these interpretive approaches in his interpretation of individual verses or cluster of verses.

The sections on *nazm* and *aḥkām* make al-Jushamī’s exegesis stand out in the pre-Rāzī exegetical literature. It can be safely considered to be a precursor of al-Rāzī’s approach. First, when al-Jushamī examines *nazm*, he does not refer to the figures of speech or the rhetorical effect of the syntactical relations; rather, he refers to his observation that “the surahs and verses

<sup>120</sup> ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sālimī, Introduction to *al-Tahdhīb fī al-Tafsīr*, ed. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sālimī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Miṣrī/Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnānī, 2019), 1:53.

<sup>121</sup> See ‘Adnān Zarzūr, *Al-Ḥākim al-Jushamī wa Manhajuh fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān* (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risālah, 1971).

<sup>122</sup> Al-Ḥākim al-Jushamī, *al-Tahdhīb fī al-Tafsīr* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Miṣrī/Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnānī, 2019) 1:193-194.

of the Qur'ān are interrelated and revealed in this way for a purpose (*gharaḍ*) and benefit (*fā'idah*).”<sup>123</sup> Second, when he discusses the *aḥkām* contained in verse, al-Jushamī does not refer to the legal rules but the theological insights he derives from verses in support of his Mu'tazilite theological and epistemic principles. Examples of al-Jushamī's *aḥkām* include: the invalidity of uncritical acceptance of earlier views (*taqlīd*), the necessity of rational reasoning (*naẓar*), the possibility of minor sins for prophets, and the falsity (*buṭlān*) of determinism (*jabriyyah*) etc.

To illustrate al-Jushamī's systematic consideration of these literary and theological dimensions of the Qur'anic text, consider the following passage on primordial covenant with God:

[Prophet], when your Lord took out the offspring from the loins of the Children of Adam and made them bear witness about themselves, He said, 'Am I not your Lord?' and they replied, 'Yes, we bear witness.' So you cannot say on the Day of Resurrection, 'We were not aware of this,' or, 'It was our forefathers who, before us, ascribed partners to God, and we are only the descendants who came after them: will you destroy us because of falsehoods they invented?' In this way We explain the messages, so that they may turn [to the right path] (Q. 7:172-174).

In answer to the question on the thematic juxtaposition of this passage, al-Jushamī explains that it is preceded by two major passages: (Q. 7:59-171) which gives a series of narratives pertaining to past prophets, and (Q. 7:54-58) which lists signs that pointer to the divine unity (*dalā'il al-tawḥīd*). With this delineation of these two major units, al-Jushamī posits that the above-cited passage is thematically connected with the previous passage on divine unity. He explains that the surah introduces divine unity, followed by proofs for it and supported by the experiences of the past prophets. Thereafter, al-Jushamī continues, the surah reintroduces the case of divine unity and denounces polytheism. Considering that the narratives about the past prophets are closed with Moses' experience with the Israelites, al-Jushamī adds that the covenant

---

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 193.

with the Israelites eases the transition to the universal covenant with humans.<sup>124</sup> Besides these thematic connections, al-Jushamī lists a number of theological affirmations that he finds in the passage. This list includes the following: (1) this covenant is evidence that God chooses what is best (*al-aṣlah*) for His creatures, (2) the passage indicates that imitation (*taqlīd*) in religious matters is invalid, and (3) God wants all to turn back to Him—an indication that runs in stark contrast with the determinists' doctrines (*al-Mujbirah*).<sup>125</sup>

## Conclusion

With the rise of the Abbasid caliphate, the doctrine of Qur'anic literary inimitability is threatened by the evolving cultural milieu in which the Qur'anic style and literary superiority was questioned. In response, al-Jāhīz argues that recognizing the Qur'anic inimitable composition requires recognition of the power of its *lafẓ* and familiarity with other genres. To establish a rhetorical case for the literary superiority of the Qur'anic composition, later *i'jāz* theorists direct their attention to analyzing the multifaceted functions and effects of the *lafẓ* (form) that is received as an essential factor in the production of varying levels style, meaning and aesthetics. The greatest achievement in Arabic poetics is admittedly represented by 'Abd al-Qāhir's contributions the *Asrār al-Balāghah* and the *Dalā'il al-I'jāz* and al-Zamakhsharī's applications of the poetics-oriented approach to the Qur'anic text. Concurrently, some Mu'tazilite exegetes extend the concept of *naẓm* to include the arrangement of verses, thereby examining the thematic relations that explain the sequence of verses in a given surah. This Mu'tazilite approach is typically represented in al-Jushamī's commentary wherein *naẓm* is primarily connected with the thematic relations between subsequent verses of the surahs.

---

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 4:2773.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 4:2779.

The seeds sown in the pre-Rāzī period steadily bloom in al-Rāzī's commentary *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*. Drawing on the literary contributions of these rhetoricians and exegetes along his own dialectical training, al-Rāzī extends the approach to Qur'anic *naẓm* to include the blocks of the surah and the surah as a whole. Furthermore, he places more emphasis on the dialectical nature of the surah, thereby devising a new interpretive methodology to read the surah as argumentation. In the following chapter, we will explore al-Rāzī's underlying premises for approaching the surah structure.

## Chapter 2

### Al-Rāzī's Interpretive Strategy for Developing the Study of *Nazm*

Know that whoever has a strong God-given disposition and a profound share of unveiling theological knowledge will recognize that there is no finer or superior arrangement than that which is found in the flow of the Qur'anic verses.<sup>1</sup>

Such intricacies cannot be extracted from the Qur'ān until one masters [the field of] rational theology. I assert that it is no exaggeration that rational theology be authoritative in the interpretation of God's speech.<sup>2</sup>

In highlighting the rhetorical and interpretive value of the study of Qur'anic composition (*nazm*), al-Rāzī asserts that “most of the Qur'anic nuances are found in the verse sequence (*al-tartībāt*) and [thematic] connections (*al-rawābiṭ*).”<sup>3</sup> He further posits that as Qur'anic *i'jāz* is present in the eloquence of its wording and the nobility of its meaning, it is equally present in the arrangement of the surah material.<sup>4</sup> In light of the previous chapter, these two assertions echo the pre-Rāzī study of the Qur'anic *nazm*. Known as *sulṭān al-mutakallimīn* (The Sultan of rational theologians), as ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah (d. 851/1448) describes him,<sup>5</sup> al-Rāzī utilizes his expertise in rational theology to develop the study of the orderly sequence of verses in the Qur'ān and widen its scope to include the examination of the surah structure or large blocks of units within a surah.

In order to recognize the theological mechanism of this literary development, this chapter examines the underlying premises, which account for al-Rāzī's strategy of reading the Qur'anic

<sup>1</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṣin al-Ghayb*, 27:173.

و اعلم أن من آتاه الله قريحة قوية و نصابا و افيا من العلوم الإلهية الكشفية عرف أنه لا ترتيب أحسن و لا أكمل من ترتيب آيات القرآن.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 7:164

”و هذه الدقائق لا يمكن فهمها من القرآن إلا بعد إتقان علم الأصول و أقول لا يبعد أن يصير علم الأصول العقلي قاهرا في تفسير كلام الله تعالى.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 10:113.

”أكثر لطائف القرآن مودعة في الترتيبات و الروابط“

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 7:112.

”ومن تأمل في لطائف نظم هذه السورة وفي بدائع ترتيبها علم أن القرآن كما أنه معجز بحسب فصاحة ألفاظه و شرف معانيه، فهو أيضاً معجز بحسب ترتيبه و نظم آياته و لعل الذين قالوا: إنه معجز بحسب أسلوبه أرادوا ذلك إلا أني رأيت جمهور المفسرين معرضين عن هذه اللطائف غير متبهيين لهذه الأمور.“

<sup>5</sup> See Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyyah* (Beirut: Dār al-Nudrawah al-Jadīdah, 1987), 3:396. See also al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Mufasssīrīn* (Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, 1972), 2:214.

text more holistically. These premises include the following: (1) The surah is a dialectical text, (2) the interpretation of the surah's content requires a theologian-exegete, and (3) the surah exhibits intentional *taṣrīf* (diversification of themes)<sup>6</sup> in arranging its overall argument. In essence, these premises can be viewed as a continuation of the Ash'arite tradition and a development of its direct contact with the Mu'tazilites. Finally, the chapter argues that even though al-Rāzī's theological and logical approach yields some literary fruits that help explain the flow of the surah text, al-Rāzī utilizes his approach to the surah structure to reaffirm his positions on rational reasoning as opposed to *taqlīd*.

## 1. Starting from the Beginning

As posited by Andrew Rippin, reading the Qur'ān “requires the adoption of a series of assumptions in the reading process in order to derive meaning from the written words.”<sup>7</sup> Therefore, before venturing into al-Rāzī's underlying premises for his study of the surah structure, it is instructive to commence with his main assumptions about the surah form. Additionally, some examples of, and pointers to, the Mu'tazilite impact on al-Rāzī's exegetical project will be provided.

### 1.1 Al-Rāzī's Assumptions about the Surah Form

The first assumption al-Rāzī makes regarding the surah is the view that the surah as a text that had been complete, at least in its recital form, during the lifetime of the prophet.<sup>8</sup> The

---

<sup>6</sup> Al-Rāzī uses *taṣrīf* to refer to a literary Qur'anic strategy through which themes are repeated in different forms that together work synergically to serve a common overarching theme.

<sup>7</sup> Andrew Rippin, “Contemporary Scholarly Understandings of Qur'anic Coherence,” *Al-Bayān* 11, no. 2 (2013):1–14.

<sup>8</sup> For an extensive medieval theological defense of the traditional narrative of the Qur'anic compilation and transmission, see al-Bāqillānī, *Al-Intiṣār lī al-Qur'ān*, ed. Muḥammad 'Iṣām al-Qudāh (Beirut: Dār ibn Ḥazm, 2001). Muḥammad Jabal reviews many transmitted reports on the arrangement of the surah segments and identifies three types of narrations that signal the prophet's supervision of the making of the final form of the surah: (1) narrations that indicate that the place where Qur'anic segment belongs to a surah is directly decided by the prophet (2) narrations that describe some verses by virtue of their position in the surah as in the case of the Summer Verse at

traditional view acknowledges that there appears to be signs of later additions to the body of the surah, as in the case of the occurrence of Medina verses in Meccan surahs and Meccan verses in Medina n surahs.<sup>9</sup> It is also acknowledged that the surahs revealed in their entirety are few in number.<sup>10</sup> However, the development of the body of the surah is believed to be supervised by the prophet himself.<sup>11</sup> In his commentary on surah 31 (Luqmān), al-Rāzī acknowledges that the final written order of the verses within the surah is not necessarily congruent with the chronological revelations that prophet Muḥammad received. However, he states that the order (*al-tartīb*) that appears in the final form of the Qurʾān was supervised by the prophet. Therefore, al-Rāzī relies on the notion that “a true prophet is a spokesman of God” to argue that the arrangement of the surah material is ultimately made through divine guidance.<sup>12</sup>

In Western scholarship, there has been long conflicting views on two major issues: (1) the historical assessment of the traditional narrative of the collection of the Qurʾān and (2) the literary identification of the “original unit of revelation.” With regard to the historicity of the

---

the end of surat al-Nisāʾ (*Āyat al-Ṣayf allatī fī ākhir sūrat al-nisāʾ*), which is a reference to the Q. 4:176, the closing verses of surah al-Baqarah (*khawātīm sūrat al-Baqarah*), and the first ten verses of surat al-Kahf, and (3) narrations that name the surahs the prophet recites during his public prayers. See Muḥammad Jabal, *Wathāqat Naql al-Naṣṣ al-Qurʾānī al-Karīm* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Ādāb, 2015), 207-210.

<sup>9</sup> See al-Zarkashī, *Al-Burhān fī ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān* (Beirut: Al-Maktabah al-ʿAṣriyyah, 2009), 1:143-146.

<sup>10</sup> See, for instance, al-Suyutī, *Al-Itqān fī ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān* (Beirut: Al-Maktabah al-ʿAṣriyyah, 2015), 94-95.

<sup>11</sup> As noted by Carl W Ernst, the observation that the surah went through stages of growth is based entirely on “internal stylistic evidence rather than on external proof; there are no manuscripts that contain any earlier versions of these Qurʾānic texts.” Ernst adds that “the dialogical character of the Qurʾān” and “the strong presence of symmetrical composition throughout the Qurʾān” makes it “more plausible to assume that the process of revision could indeed have taken place with the explicit involvement of the Prophet Muhammad.” See Carl W. Ernst, *How to Read the Qurʾān: A New Guide, with Select Translations* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 97-98. Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ lays more emphasis on the role of “the memorized Qurʾān” in the arrangement of the surah material and adds that tradition highlights this prophetic supervision role. In a transmitted report, for instance, Zayd ibn Thābit tells us that he is among a group of the companions with the prophet arranging the Qurʾān from the patches (*riqāʾ*). See Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ, *Mabāḥith fī ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān* (Beirut: Dār al-ʿIlm lī al-Malayīn, 2014), 65-74. According to Sunni tradition, there were two major stages in the process of the collection of the Qurʾān as a codex (*Muṣḥaf*): the collection of Abū Bakr (d. 13/634), which was motivated by the fear of the death of the *ḥuffāz* in the battlefield, and the collection of ʿUthmān (d. 35/655), which was motivated by the conflicts over many reading variations. The Shiite scholar Al-Sayyid ʿAlī al-Shihristānī complains of the proliferation of this narrative not only among Muslims but also among Western scholars of the Qurʾān who do not consider the Shiite position. Questioning the Sunni narrative, al-Shihristānī argues that the task of the collection of the Qurʾān is undertaken by ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661), long before the collection of Abū Bakr and ʿUthmān. See al-Shihristānī, *Jamʿ al-Qurʾān: Naqd al-Wathāʾiq wa ʿArḍ al-Ḥaqāʾiq* (Najaf: al-Markaz al-Islāmī lī al-Dirāsāt al-Istirāṭijyyah).

<sup>12</sup> See al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, 25:137. See also Michel Lagarde, *Les secrets de l'invisible*, 428.



master narrative of Qur'anic compilation, John Burton and John Wansbrough arrive at far ranging theories and spark various responses, which support, validate, develop or refute the traditional accounts of Qur'anic compilation of surahs.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, some radical views of the emergence of the Qur'anic text are also expressed by the German protestant theologian Günter Lüling, who posits that the Qur'ān is originally a Christian work that was later revised, and Christoph Luxenberg, who emphasize the Syriac origin of the Qur'ān.<sup>14</sup>

However, many other Western scholars argue for an early codification of the Qur'ān. For instance, Fred Donner, motivated by the observation that “the Qur'an text itself bears no tell-tale signs of later origin,” leans towards the position that the Qur'anic text “must have been codified relatively early (no later than the first half of the seventh century).”<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, Estelle Whelan “refers to evidence of Qur'anic inscription at the Dome of the Rock, in Jerusalem, that dates from around 65-88/685-705, only half a century after the Prophet's death” and suggests

---

<sup>13</sup> While Burton attributes the task of compiling the final edition of the Qur'ān to Muḥammad himself, Wansbrough argues that the compilation took place two or three years after the death of the prophet. See John Burton, *The Collection of the Qur'ān* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); and John Wansbrough, *Qur'anic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977). For a summary of Wansbrough's arguments for his position, see Daniel A. Madigan, “Reflection on Some Current Directions in Qur'anic Studies,” *Muslim World* 85 (1995): 345-362. Wansbrough's approach is dissimilarly received by different scholars. For instance, P. Crone and M. Cook develop Wansbrough's approach in *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977). On the other side, Wansbrough's views are critically assessed by other scholars. See H Motzki, “The Collection of the Qur'ān: A Reconsideration of Western Views in Light of Recent Methodological Developments,” *Der Islam* 78 (2001): 1-34. One of the Muslim responses to Wansbrough's arguments is the work of Muhammad Azzami who seeks to argue for the historical reliability of the Qur'ān through an examination of the available transmitted reports. See Muhammad Azzami, *The History of the Qur'anic Text from Revelation to Compilation* (Leicester: UK Islamic Academy, 2003). For a thorough review of Western approach to the composition and final codification of the Qur'ān, see Gerhard Bowering, “Recent Research on the Construction of the Qur'ān,” in *The Qur'ān in Its Historical Context*, ed. Gabriel Said Reynolds (London: Routledge, 2008), 70-87.

<sup>14</sup> Carl Ernst evaluates these revisionist theories as “unprovable and unfalsifiable.” See Carl W. Ernst, *How to Read the Qur'ān: A New Guide, with Select Translations* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 31.

<sup>15</sup> Fred Donner, “The Qur'ān in Recent Scholarship: Challenges and Desiderata,” in *The Qur'ān in Its Historical Context*, ed. Gabriel Said Reynolds (London: Routledge, 2008), 42. For Donner's development of this view, see idem, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of the Islamic Historical Writing* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1998), 35-61.

that the creative use of these Qur'anic texts implies that they must have been “the common property of the community.”<sup>16</sup>

With regard to the original unit of revelation; that is, the surah skeleton before later expansions, different Western approaches yield varying conclusions. Some scholars, as in the case of Richard Bell and William Montgomery Watt, view the Qur'ān as a heap of disconnected fragments, with the short passages representing the original unit of revelation. Others, as in the case of Angelica Neuwirth, imply that the original unit of revelation is the surah itself. Neuwirth finds that surahs follow discernable structural conventions.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, Behnam Sadeghi's analysis of the Ṣan'ā' palimpsest “suggests that the sequence of verses within each surah probably attained stability at a very early date.”<sup>18</sup> In spite of these different approaches, Carl W. Ernst posits that “the majority of scholars of Islamic studies today regard the traditional account of the historical context of the Qur'ān, centered on the Prophet Muhammad in the Arabian Peninsula, to be the indispensable starting point for all research.”<sup>19</sup>

The second assumption al-Rāzī makes about the surah is that the innerconnections between the constituent sections of the surah is a basic corollary of *i'jāz*.<sup>20</sup> In many of his explanations of the thematic relations in the surah, al-Rāzī notes that the occurrence of disjointed

---

<sup>16</sup> See Abdullah Saeed, *The Qur'an: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2008), 49-50. Also see Estelle Whelan, “Forgotten Witness: Evidence for the Early Codification of the Qur'ān,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 118, no. 1 (1998): 1-14. Estelle uses her inscription observations as a critique of some of the aspects of John Wansbrough's theory.

<sup>17</sup> For an evaluation of these two approaches, see Nicolai Sinai, The Qur'ān as Process, in *The Qur'ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'anic Milieu* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 413. For a summary of Neuwirth's position that “the surah is the formal unit that Muḥammad chose for his prophecy,” see Harald Motzki, “Alternative Accounts of the Qur'ān's Formation,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 63-65.

<sup>18</sup> Marianna Klar, “Text Critical Approaches to Sura Structure: Combining Synchronicity with Diachronicity in Sūrat al-Baqara. Part One,” *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 19, no. 1 (2017): 1. See also Behnam Sadeghi and Uwe Bergmann, “The Codex of a Companion of the Prophet and the Qur'ān of the Prophet,” *Arabica* 57 (2010): 343-436, esp. 355.

<sup>19</sup> Carl W. Ernst, *How to Read the Qur'ān*, 32.

<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Muslim theologians discussed “*al-qadr al-mu'jiz min al-Qur'ān*” as in al-Bāqillānī's *I'jāz al-Qur'ān*. So the concern for the surah design could be part of the view that the *i'jāz* challenge is met by formulating a unified complete surah, not merely few isolated verses.

verses in the surah constitutes an attack against the Qur'ān and a challenge to its *i'jāz*.<sup>21</sup> This assumption has its interpretive consequences, which relate to issues like *asbāb al-nuzūl* and *naskh*—two issues that sometimes challenge the flow of the surah according to al-Rāzī's analysis.<sup>22</sup>

## 1.2 Al-Rāzī and the Mu'tazilites: Contact and Impact

It is contended here that al-Rāzī is not the originator of widening the concept of *nazm* to include the thematic relations between the surah units or identify the topic shifts in the surah. According to al-Rāzī's own commentary, one finds many citations on *munāsabāt* (thematic relations) from Mu'tazilite exegetes—most notably al-Qaffāl, Abū Muslim al-Iṣfahānī and al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār. These different quotes indicate that examining textual relations in the surah was one of the areas commonly examined in the Mu'tazilite exegetical tradition. The argument that al-Rāzī's relationship with the Mu'tazilite tradition is that of contact and impact is voiced during the classical period. For instance, Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Mufassir, the teacher of Abū 'Alī al-Zawāwī (d. ca. 770/1368), states that “al-Rāzī's commentary contains four major disciplines that are copied from four books, the authors of which were Mu'tazilites: theology from Abū al-Ḥusayn's *al-Dalā'il*, legal theory from the Abū al-Ḥusayn's *al-Mu'tamad*, exegesis from al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār's commentary and rhetorical analysis from al-Zamakhsharī's *Kashshāf*.”<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, on his notes on Abū Bakr al-Qaffāl, al-Suyūṭī adds that al-Rāzī embraces some of al-Qaffāl's Mu'tazilite opinions. Concerning his own contributions on *munāsabāt*, al-Suyūṭī acknowledges that he also has many citations from al-Qaffāl.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> See for instance, Al-Rāzī, *Mafāṭih al-Ghayb*, 2:113 and 27:115.

<sup>22</sup> These interpretive consequences will be covered in chapter four.

<sup>23</sup> This observation was recorded by one of the students of al-Zawāwī; that is, the famed Andalusian al-Shāṭibī who would later have his own participation in the study of the surah structure. For Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Mufassir's observation, see al-Shāṭibī, *Al-Ifādāt wa al-Inshādāt*, ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Ajḡān (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 1983), 100-101.

<sup>24</sup> See al-Suyūṭī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Mufassirīn* (Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, 1976), 110.

While al-Rāzī's approach to the surah is too sophisticated to be explained merely with reference to some Mu'tazilite exegetes, it is still safe to posit that al-Rāzī is greatly motivated by the Mu'tazilite tradition on *munāsabāt*. Sometimes al-Rāzī adopts some Mu'tazilite literary insights without attribution. For instance, al-Zamakhsharī argues that the command to Muḥammad "So ask them (*fastafihim*): is it true that your Lord has daughters, while they choose sons for themselves?" (Q. 37:149) is syntactically and thematically connected with (*ma'ṭūf 'alā*) a similar command at the beginning of the surah: "So ask them (*fastafihim*): is it harder to create them than other beings We have created? We created them from sticky clay" (Q. 37:11). Al-Rāzī utilizes al-Zamakhsharī's syntactic observation to argue that the surah is based on addressing these two questions in vv. 11 and 149 yet without naming his source.<sup>25</sup>

In the same vein, al-Rāzī utilizes al-Zamakhsharī's rhetorical interpretations that support shared theological positions. For instance, al-Zamakhsharī provides a theological value for the pronoun shift (*iltifāt*) in the following verse:

Who created the heavens and earth? Who sends down water from the sky for you- with which We cause gardens of delight to grow: you have no power to make the trees grow in them- is it another god beside God? No! But they are people who take others to be equal with God" (Q. 27:60).

In this verse, the pronoun "We" replaces the expected pronoun "He." Rhetoricians usually seek to find meaning in the *iltifāt* cases beyond the notion that it is stylistically legitimate and attention-grabbing. In this case, al-Zamakhsharī theologially explains that the pronoun shift

---

<sup>25</sup> See al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf*, 4:60 and Al-Rāzī, *Mafātiḥ al-Ghayb*, 26:146. There are many other instances where al-Zamakhsharī is named and supported. For instance in surah 28 (al-Qaṣaṣ), Pharaoh's family picks up Moses "to be (*liyakūna*) an enemy and source of sadness for them." Al-Rāzī posits that the majority view argue that the *lām* in (*liyakūna*) is *lām al-'āqibah* which is used to express an unexpected result. This *lām* is similar to the English usage of "only to" in "He arrived home only to die." However, al-Rāzī quotes and supports al-Zamakhsharī's view which stresses that the *lām* expresses causality yet in metaphorical manner. As a brave person could metaphorically be called a lion, this unexpected result is metaphorically expressed in the causality form. With al-Zamakhsharī's choice, there is an implied simile. In other words, since the end result of adopting Moses is that of enmity and sadness, the family of Pharaoh is *likened to* those who seek their own misery. In this sense, the *lām* creates an irony about Pharaoh who ironically acts like a sovereign lord. See al-Rāzī, *Mafātiḥ al-Ghayb*, 24:195. For other examples, see *ibid.*, 27:153 and 30:58.

here “highlights the divine prerogative of causation and indicates that, through the same water, different beautiful gardens of various types, colors, tastes, smells, and forms are made.”<sup>26</sup>

Similarly, al-Rāzī considers this *iltifāt* to be an answer to the following objection: “God created the heavens and the earth but man is the one who grew the plants.” In this way the pronoun shift counters this materialistic understanding of growing and affirms that God is still the real actor.<sup>27</sup>

Another example for al-Rāzī’s celebration of al-Zamakhsharī’s rhetorical and theological remarks is found in the former’s commentary on the following verse:

Those [angels] who carry the Throne and those who surround it celebrate the praise of their Lord and believe in Him (*yu`minūnā bihi*). They beg forgiveness for the believers: “Our Lord, You embrace all things in mercy and knowledge, so forgive those who turn to You and follow Your path. Save them from the pains of Hell” (Q. 40:7).

Here, the verse describes the angels as praising God, and then speaks of their belief in Him. Al-Zamakhsharī thus wonders: what is the point of affirming the angels’ belief in Him? Al-Rāzī raises the same question and approvingly cites al-Zamakhsharī’s answer:

The answer is what al-Zamakhsharī offered. He gave a very good answer. He stated that the point is to stress that were God Almighty to be [physically] present (*ḥāḍiran*) on the Throne, those who carry and surround the Throne would physically see Him, and thereby their faith in God would deserve no praise. Do you not see that acknowledging the existence of the sun and its light does not entitle one to praise or recognition? Therefore, God’s reference to their faith in an honorary manner is evidence that they did not see Him sitting there. May God show His mercy on the author of *al-Kashshāf*. Were this point to be the only subtle point (*nukṭah*) in his book, it would be enough to entitle him to great honor and pride.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> See al-Zamakhsharī, 3:363.

تأكيد معنى اختصاص الفعل ببداته، والإيدان بأن إنبات الحدائق المختلفة الأصناف والألوان والطعوم والروائح والأشكال مع حسنها وبمجتها بماء واحد. لا يقدر عليه إلا هو وحده.

<sup>27</sup> For some instances where al-Rāzī disagrees with al-Zamakhsharī, see *ibid.*, 27:5 and 27:99. Sometimes al-Rāzī approvingly quotes Mu‘tazilite sources and then adds his interpretation. See *ibid.*, 17:56. See also ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Majdūb, *Al-Rāzī min Khilāl Tafsīrih* (Tunisia: Al-Dār al-‘Arabiyyah lī al-Kitāb, 1980), 99-100.

28

الفائدة فيه ما ذكره صاحب «الكشاف»، وقد أحسن فيه جداً فقال إن المقصود منه التنبيه على أن الله تعالى لو كان حاضراً بالعرش لكان حملة العرش والحافون حول العرش يشاهدونه ويعاينونه، ولما كان إيمانهم بوجود الله موجباً للمدح والثناء لأن الإقرار بوجود شيء حاضر مشاهد معين لا يوجب المدح والثناء، ألا ترى أن الإقرار بوجود الشمس وكونها مضيئة لا يوجب المدح والثناء، فلما ذكر الله تعالى إيمانهم بالله على سبيل الثناء والمدح والتعظيم، علم أنهم آمنوا به بدليل أنهم ما شاهدوه حاضراً جالساً هناك، ورحم الله صاحب «الكشاف» فلو لم يحصل في كتابه إلا هذه النكتة لكفاه فخراً وشرفاً.

Abū Muslim is similarly praised for his theological interpretations that affirm the timeless and spaceless nature of God. For instance, al-Rāzī writes:

What a fine interpretation provided by Abū Muslim al-Iṣfahānī! With regard to the Qur'anic statement 'Say, 'To whom belongs all that is in the heavens and earth?' Say, 'To God,' (Q. 6:12), he states that this indicates that space in its entirety is possessed by God as part of His kingdom. With regard to the Qur'anic statement 'All that rests by night or by day belongs to Him. He is the All Hearing, the All Knowing,' (Q. 6:13) he adds that this implies that time in its entirety is possessed by God as part of His kingdom. Holy be God beyond the thought that His Highness is due to space.<sup>29</sup>

## 2 Al-Rāzī's Three Premises about the Surah Content

Having recognized al-Rāzī's underlying assumptions about the surah and the Mu'tazilite impact, we can now move to al-Rāzī's fundamental postulations that serve as the basis for his approach to the surah design. To advance his understanding of the progression of meaning in a given surah, al-Rāzī lays down three essential assertions: (1) the surah is a dialectical text, (2) understanding the surah content requires a theologian-exegete, and (3) the heterogeneous content of the surah is an intentional compositional strategy. Following is an analysis of these three assertions.

### 2.1 The Surah as a Dialectical Text

To validate the necessity of a dialectical approach to the Qur'ān, al-Rāzī lists three types of disputation (*munāẓarah*) in the Qur'ān: (1) God's *munāẓarah* with the angels as in (Q. 2:30-33), (2) God's *munāẓarah* with Satan<sup>30</sup>, and (3) the prophets' *munāẓarah* with the disbelievers. Al-Rāzī makes a special reference to Noah, Abraham, Moses and Muḥammad. Noah, for instance, is addressed as "Noah, you have argued with us for too long" (Q. 11:32). Al-Rāzī posits that Noah's arguments must have been about divine unity and prophecy, not legal matters.

<sup>29</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Mafātiḥ al-Ghayb*, 7:13. For a similar note on Abū Muslim, see *ibid.* 12:138. Other examples on al-Rāzī's praise of Abū Muslim's commentary can be found in *ibid.*, 8:179 and 22:98.

"وما أحسن ما قال أبو مسلم بن بحر الأصفهاني في تفسير قوله { قُلْ لَنْ مَأ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ قُلْ لِلَّهِ { الأنعام: 12 } قال: وهذا يدل على أن المكان والمكانيات بأسرها ملك الله تعالى وملكوته، ثم قال: { وَلَهُ مَا سَكَنَ فِي اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ { الأنعام: 13 } وهذا يدل على أن الزمان والزمانيات بأسرها ملك الله تعالى وملكوته، فعلى وتقديس عن أن يكون علوه بسبب المكان."

<sup>30</sup> See Q. 7:11-18, 15:28-44, 17:61-65, and 38:71-85.

Furthermore, al-Rāzī considers Noah’s prolonged disputations to be “evidence that engaging in debates to corroborate the text-proofs and to dismantle the doubts is the profession of the prophets, and that uncritical acceptance of beliefs or practices (*taqlīd*), ignorance and persistence in embracing falsehood are the craft of the disbelievers.”<sup>31</sup> Here, al-Rāzī presents the prophets as the earliest *mutakallimūn* who have a two-fold mission that foreshadows the very definition and purpose of kalam; that is, corroborating true beliefs and disproving false beliefs. Furthermore, al-Rāzī’s emphasis on presenting prophets as rational theologians leaves no space for *taqlīd*, simply because “tradition” is now presented as originally rooted in logical reasoning.<sup>32</sup>

With regard to Abraham, dialectical disputations become more vivid in the Qur’ān. In his spiritual journey to reach God, Abraham examines everything around him. The Qur’ān speaks of Abraham’s reaction to the stars: “When the night grew dark upon him he beheld a star. He said: This is my Lord. But when it set, he said: I love not things that set” (Q. 6:76). Here, al-Rāzī reads Abraham as setting a precedent for the theologians to use “change” as evidence against the eternity of the world. Furthermore, al-Rāzī sees Moses as following the same theological path of Abraham. In al-Rāzī’s view, both prophets use the same gradual arguments for God: (a) a reference to present creation (Q. 20:49-50/26:78), (b) a reference to past creations (Q.26:26/2:258), and (c) a reference to God’s lordship of the east and west (Q. 26:28/2:258). Having surveyed different succinct examples of other disputations, al-Rāzī is determined to provide extensive discussions about these theological debates throughout his commentary. He

---

<sup>31</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṣin al-Ghayb*, 17:174.

و هذا يدل على أن الجدل في تقرير الدلائل و في إزالة الشبهات حرفة الأنبياء و على أن التقليد و الجهل و الإصرار على الباطل حرفة الكفار.

<sup>32</sup> The discipline of Islamic disputations is covered in many works. See, for instance, Larry Benjamin Miller, *Islamic disputation theory. The uses and rules of argument in medieval Islam* (Cham: Springer, 2020); Amir Dziri, *Die ars disputationis in der islamischen Scholastik. Grundzüge der muslimischen Argumentations- und Beweislehre* (Freiburg im Breisgau 2015); and Abdessamad Belhaj, *Argumentation et dialectique en Islam. Formes et séquences de la munāẓara* (Louvain, 2010).

justifies his project on the grounds that disputation is the profession of all prophets “*ḥirfat kull al-anbiyā*” and that any doubt on this task amounts to heresy or ignorance.<sup>33</sup>

In this way, one is left with the impression that there are only two paths: the prophets’ and the disbelievers’, and that theological reasoning is part of following the prophet’s way. Having the opponents of kalam in mind, al-Rāzī refers to the verses that record the various disputations between the prophets and their audience. He resorts to these verses to legitimize the kalam practice and present it as a necessary tool for the interpretation of the Qur’ān. In light of the “And We verily sent unto Thamūd their brother Ṣāliḥ, saying: Worship Allah. And lo! They (then became two parties quarrelling,” (Q. 27:45) al-Rāzī argues that the Qur’ān invalidates the unexamined beliefs (*taqlīd*), and that the practice of disputations concerning religious matters is valid and acceptable.<sup>34</sup>

Furthermore, al-Rāzī treats the disbelieving opponents like Quraysh leaders and Pharaoh as kalam authorities, who engage in disputations to support their *madhhab*. It is common for al-Rāzī to rephrase the statements made by believers and disbelievers into dialectical arguments that serve his rational reading of the Qur’ān. To illustrate this point, we shall consider two examples: one that reflects Quraysh’s philosophical mind and another that teaches the ethics of debate as reflected by the confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh.

First, consider the following passage on Quraysh’s attitude towards bodily resurrection:

They have sworn by God with their strongest oaths that He will not raise the dead to life. But He will- it is His binding promise, though most people do not realize it- In order to make clear for them what they have differed about and so that the disbelievers may realize that what they said was false. When We will something to happen, all that We say is, ‘Be,’ and it is (Q. 16:38-40).

---

<sup>33</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṣin al-Ghayb*, 2:84.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 24:173.

و إذا كان هذا الاختصاص في باب الدين دل ذلك على أن اجادل في باب الدين حق و فيه إبطال التقليد.



Al-Rāzī reads the passage as a debate on whether bodily resurrection belongs to necessary (*‘ilm ḍarūrī*) or contingent (*mumkin*) knowledge. In his view, the mere notion of taking a solemn oath indicates that the Quraysh leaders believe that denying bodily resurrection is rationally necessary (*ḍarūrī*). He goes further to affirm that, according to Quraysh chiefs, denying the prophecy office is a corollary of denying bodily resurrection. In response, al-Rāzī corrects Quraysh’s philosophical *madhhab* by offering three indications from the passage affirming that bodily resurrection falls under the category of rational possibility, not rational impossibility: (1) the divine promise as in the verse-ending in v. 38, (2) moral justice in v. 39, and (3) God’s infinite power as in v. 40.<sup>35</sup>

Second, let us see how al-Rāzī approaches the conversation between Moses and Pharaoh in surah 20:

(Pharaoh) said: Who then is the Lord of you twain, O Moses?

Moses said, ‘Our Lord is He who gave everything its form, then gave it guidance.’

He said, ‘What about former generations?’

Moses said, ‘My Lord alone has knowledge of them, all in a record; my Lord does not err or forget.’

It was He who spread out the earth for you and traced routes in it. He sent down water from the sky. With that water We bring forth every kind of plant, so eat, and graze your cattle. There are truly signs in all this for people of understanding. From the earth We created you, into it We shall return you, and from it We shall raise you a second time. (Q. 20: 49-55).

Based on his dialectical reading of this passage, al-Rāzī demonstrates that both Pharaoh and Moses teach us about the value of disputation and the significance of rational theology. The lessons al-Rāzī draws from this passage deal directly with the opponents of kalam, the jurists (*fuqahā’*) with their law-oriented mind and the extreme traditionalists (*ḥashwiyyah*) with their strong opposition to rational reasoning. With regard to the mere idea of a debate between Pharaoh and Moses, al-Rāzī confronts his opponents with two Qur’anic insights.

---

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 20:26.

1. In spite of his great power and dominance, Pharaoh willingly accepts Moses' invitation for a discussion on God and initially refuses to respond with violence for fear of being accused of ignorance and impertinence. In Pharaoh's readiness for debate, al-Rāzī finds a fortiori argument. In his opinion, if the disbelieving Pharaoh favors evidence (*ḥujjah*) over impertinence (*safāhah*), then, by greater reason, those who claim to be the upholders of Islam and knowledge are fully expected to honor dialectical reasoning.
2. Given that Moses listened to Pharaoh's objections without feeling intimidated or annoyed, the upholders of truth must listen to the discourses of the upholders of falsity.<sup>36</sup>

Al-Rāzī's emphasis on the dialectical atmosphere of the Qur'anic text serves a three-fold purpose: (1) demonstrating that the surah is best approached as an argument, (2) inspiring a new generation to give primacy to reason and dialogue as tools for theological investigation and argumentation, and (3) countering *taqlīd*. In this regard, al-Rāzī ponders Pharaoh's philosophical *madhhab* and offers the following two insights.

1. When asked about God, Moses becomes concerned with demonstrating the existence of the Maker (*al-ṣāniʿ*) as he refers to the many signs (*āyāt*) in creatures (*aḥwāl al-makhlūqāt*), which point to God before providing any proofs for his prophecy. According to al-Rāzī, Moses' method disproves (a) the *taqlīd* tendency; (b) the *Bāṭinīs*, who argue that knowing God is attained through the prophets' statements; and (c) the extreme traditionalists (*ḥashwiyyah*), who claim that knowing God and faith is attained only from the scripture and Sunnah.

---

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 22:55. These insights are best read in light of the many bloody conflicts that occurred in Rayy as mentioned before.

2. Regarding Pharaoh's philosophical identity, al-Rāzī posits that it is very unlikely that the former claims to be literally Lord (*rabb*) in the sense of creating and sustaining the world; rather, Pharaoh's claim of lordship is a representation of the kingly privilege that all must obey and surrender to him alone, not anyone else.<sup>37</sup>

Al-Rāzī discusses Pharaoh's faith in great length. In effect, he numerates many Qur'anic references that Pharaoh knows God and concludes that he may be a philosopher who considers *al-'illah al-mūjabah* as valid.<sup>38</sup> Among these many Qur'anic references, al-Rāzī pinpoints the debate in surah 26 (Al-Shu'arā'). When Pharaoh asks Moses: "who is the Lord of the Worlds?" (Q. 26:23), Moses responds with many descriptions of God, including "He is the Lord of the heavens and the earth and what is in between" (Q. 26:24). Finally, Pharaoh announces: "the messenger sent to you is a madman!" (Q. 26:27). Al-Rāzī dialectically explains Pharaoh's astonishment by noting that he is asking about quiddity (*māhiyyah*), whereas Moses' answer is a description of God, or existence (*wujūd*). Al-Rāzī argues that Pharaoh acknowledges the *wujūd* and requested an answer to his question on *māhiyyah*—a request that, according to al-Rāzī, Moses misses, and thereby arouses Pharaoh's anger. Therefore, Pharaoh is received as an expert on *al-ḥikmah al-ilāhiyyah* (divine wisdom or theosophia), which usually introduces the student to the distinction between *wujūd* and *māhiyyah*.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 22:55-56. See also 24:111-113 and 216.

<sup>38</sup> Essentially *al-Qawl bī al-Mūjab* (close to *ignoratio elenchi*, or missing the point) is frequently used in medieval disputation as a way of discrediting the opponent by affirming that the opponent's proof is true but fails to address the issue in question. It is frequently used in legal theory and theological debates. See al-Juwaynī, *Al-Kāfiyah fī al-Jada* (Cairo: Al-Ḥalabī, 1979), 69. Al-Rāzī, *Al-Jadal* (Damascus: Maktabat al-Bayrūtī, 2018), 93.

<sup>39</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Mafātih al-Ghayb*, 22:56. See also al-Rāzī, *Al-Maṭālib al-'Āliyah* (Cairo: Al-Maktabah al-Azhariyyah lī al-Turāth, 2013), 2:244-245. For *wujūd* and *māhiyyah*, see Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Existence (*Wujūd*) and Quiddity (*Māhiyyah*) in Islamic Philosophy," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 29 (4 -1989). For other treatment of the Qur'anic disputations, see al-Rāzī's identification of the different disputations in Surah 14 (Ibrāhīm). See al-Rāzī, *Mafātih al-Ghayb*, 19:72-92, esp. 87.

### 2.1.1 Al-Ghazālī and al-Rāzī on Surah 16 (al-Naḥl):125

One of al-Rāzī's sources for the dialectical approach to the surah is al-Ghazālī, who highlights the Qur'anic instructions on argumentation. For instance, the verse "Summon unto the way of your Lord with wisdom (*ḥikmah*) and good instruction (*al-maw'izah al-ḥasanah*), and argue (*jādilhum*) with them in a way that is best" (Q.16:125) is foundational in the formation of al-Ghazālī's thesis in his *al-Qisṭās al-Mustaqīm*, one of his three works on Isma'īlīs.<sup>40</sup> McAuliffe precisely observes that "[O]ut of the initial diffusion and multiplicity of Qur'anic citation attached to the arguments for *jadāl* emerged an increasing focus of a key proof text, Q. 16:125."<sup>41</sup> In light of this verse, al-Ghazālī finds a trilogy of addressees: the philosophers, who are to be approached with *ḥikmah*; the lay people, who are to be addressed with good admonition; and the eristic, who are to be countered with fine disputation (*jadāl*).<sup>42</sup> Al-Ghazālī's interpretation of this verse is a clear reflection of al-Farābī's differentiation between demonstrative (*al-burhāniyyah*), eristic (*al-jadaliyyah*) and rhetorical (*al-khiṭābiyyah*). These three categories respectively correspond with the philosophers, rational theologians and the lay people.<sup>43</sup> Ibn Rushd similarly relies on Q. 16:125 to give legitimacy to these three categories.<sup>44</sup>

Al-Rāzī closely follows this philosophical interpretation of the Q. 16:125, which becomes his foci for obligating rational reasoning in his *Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb*. In his view, the verse lists

---

<sup>40</sup> For a focused study on Isma'īlīs, see F. Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs: Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). For a fine introduction to Isma'īlīs, see Daniel De Smet, *Ismā'īlī Theology*, in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke (London: Oxford University Press, 2016)

<sup>41</sup> McAuliffe, *Debate and Disputation*," in *Encyclopedia of the Quran* (Leiden: Brill), 1: 511-514.

<sup>42</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *al-Qisṭās al-Mustaqīm* (Damascus: Maṭba'at al-Fawwāl, 1993), 12, 98-99.

<sup>43</sup> For a discussion on al-Farābī's theory of demonstration and how it relates to the binary of reason and revelation, see Miriam Galston, "Al-Farabi on Aristotle's Theory of Demonstration," in *Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism* (Delmar, N.Y., 1981), 23-34; Shukri Abed, *Aristotelian Logic and the Arabic Language in Al-Farabi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991). For al-Farābī's foundational role in the emergence of Islamic philosophy, see Muhsin S. Mahdi, *Alfarabi and the Foundation of Islamic Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010),

<sup>44</sup> Ibn Rushd applies the same trilogy to the Qur'an 16:125. See Ibn Rushd, *Faṣl al-Maqāl*, ed. Muḥammad al-Jābirī (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Wahdah al-'Arabiyyah, 1997), 96. See also *Averroes on the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy*, trans. Hourani (London: Luzac, 1961).

three modes of *da‘wah* (calling), and, thus, each mode must be distinct from the rest. Al-Rāzī dialectically associates “calling” here with advocating for a school of thought (*madhhab*) or specific opinion (*maqālah*) by providing the appropriate proof (*hujjah*). He further posits that *hujjah* has two major categories and two main roles. According to him, *hujjah* could either be definitive (*qaṭ‘ī*) or speculative (*ẓannī*). In these two categories, a proof could be demonstrated for the sake of convincingly corroborating a doctrine or polemically forcing the opponent to adopt a different view (*ilzām*) respectively. Al-Rāzī’s categorizations of *hujjah* results in three types of evidence that match with the modes of ‘calling’ enumerated in Q. 16:125.

1. The definitive evidence (*hujjah qaṭ‘iyyah*) is the *ḥikmah*, which occupies a highly praiseworthy status in the Qur’ān, as in Q. 2:269 “whoever is granted wisdom (*ḥikmah*) is certainly blessed with a great privilege.” This mode of calling is appropriate for the perfect truth-seekers, who accept nothing but definitive arguments.<sup>45</sup>
2. *Ilzām*-based evidence, which consists of premises taken as axiomatic by the majority or by the opponent, is “the better disputation” (*jadāl bī al-latī hiya aḥsan*). The appellation “better” excludes the fallacious arguments with invalid premises that are deceptively presented to sound appealing for others. *Ilzām* is more appropriate with the false truth-seekers, who are mostly predisposed to dissension and altercation.
3. Speculative evidence is the good admonition (*al-maw‘izah al-ḥasanah*). This mode of calling targets a group that maintains a pure level of *fiṭrah* (natural disposition), which neither reaches the highest level of the philosophers, who only accept definitive proofs,

---

<sup>45</sup> Here al-Rāzī associates the Qur’anic *ḥikmah* with philosophical kalam. For a discussion on the meaning and role of philosophy, see Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “The Meaning and Role of Philosophy in Islam” in *Islamic Philosophy from Its Origins to the Present* (Albany, New York: State University, 2006), 31-47. For al-Rāzī’s reading of al-Farābī and Ibn Sīna in Khorasan, see Al-Qifṭī, *Tārīkh al-Ḥukamā’* (Cairo: Al-Khanjī), 291.

nor does it fail to belong to the lowest level of the eristics, who are given to disputation, not truth.<sup>46</sup>

In light of this classification, al-Rāzī interprets Q. 16:125 in a philosophical way and takes it to mean: “call the perfect truth-seekers to the true faith through wisdom, namely, definitive proofs; call the lay people with good instruction, namely, the speculative proofs; and dispute with the eristic in a better way.”<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, al-Rāzī adds that the Qur’anic diction supports his dialectical interpretation: the verb “summon” is used with the first two categories, and the verb “dispute” is used with the eristics who can be defeated only through *ilzām*, which usually turns them dumbstruck.<sup>48</sup> Accordingly, al-Rāzī limits the purpose of the Qur’anic argumentations against its opponents to the *ilzām* technique. This emphasis on *ilzām* adds more dialectic value to the Qur’ān, simply because this technique constitutes the backbone of kalam texts.<sup>49</sup>

### 2.1.2 Negative *Jadal* in the Qur’ān

Even though the Qur’anic text is fairly embedded in theological discussions, the Qur’anic references to argumentation and disputation, as noted by Kate Zebiri, are overwhelmingly negative, as in Q. 40:4, 2:197, 6:25 and 8:6.<sup>50</sup> Al-Rāzī’s commentary on these verses reveals that he has the kalam opponents in mind. To maintain the Qur’anic legitimization of dialectical

---

<sup>46</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb*, 20:111-112.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 112. See also See also idem, *al-Manṭiq al-Kabīr*, ed. Ṭurghūd Āq Yūz (Riyadh: Dār Fāris, 2022), 2:604.

معناه ادع الأقوياء الكاملين إلى الدين الحق بالحكمة، وهي البراهين القطعية اليقينية وعموم الخلق بالموعظة الحسنة، وهي الدلائل اليقينية الإقناعية الظنية، والكلم مع المشاغين بالجدل على الطريق الأحسن الأكمل.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>49</sup> See Sarah Stroumsa, “Saadya and Jewish Kalam,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, ed. Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 71- 72.

<sup>50</sup> See Kate Zebiri, “Argumentation,” in *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur’ān*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2006), 269; El-Sheikh, Salah, “Al-Mujādalāh and Al-Mujādilah Then and Now: Kalam, Dialectical Argument, and Practical Reason in the Qur’ān,” *The Muslim World* 93, no. 1 (2003): 1-50; McAuliffe, Debate and Disputation,” in *Encyclopedia of the Quran*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill), 1: 511-514; and Scholler, “Opposition to Muhammad,” in *Encyclopedia of the Quran*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill), 3: 576-580.

reasoning, he consistently posits that disputation is recommended when it is practiced in the service of truth, and it is considered to be reprehensible when used to corroborate falsity.<sup>51</sup>

For instance, the Qur'anic command "There should be no indecent speech, misbehavior, or quarrelling (*jidāl*) for anyone undertaking the pilgrimage" (Q. 2:197) seems to be a frequently cited text against the practice of disputation. In his commentary on this verse, al-Rāzī unreservedly discusses his opponents' arguments against the validity of disputation:

Some people criticize dialectical reasoning and disputation and argue for their case in different ways. First, they state that "no quarrelling (*jidāl*) in pilgrimage" implies that all types of disputations are included. Were disputation in matters of faith be an act of obedience and a way of knowing God Almighty, it would not be forbidden during pilgrimage. [Were disputation valid,] it would instead be considered as an act of worship to be encouragingly added to pilgrimage. Second, they quote [the Qur'ān]: "They exclaimed: 'which is better: our gods or Jesus?' They cite him only to argue. In fact, they are a people prone to dispute" (Q. 43:58). [They argue that] people here are condemned for being among the advocates of disputation (*ahl al-jadal*), and thereby disputation is reprehensible. Third, they quote "And do not dispute with one another, or you would be discouraged and weakened" (Q. 8:46), which forbids quarrelling. However, the majority of rational theologians (*mutakallimūn*) state that disputation in matters of faith is a great act of obedience (*tā'ah*), and cite "Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best" (Q. 16:125). They also cite the disbelievers' response to Noah as reported in the Qur'ān: "Noah, you have argued with us for too long" (Q. 11:32). It is known that Noah's argumentation was for the sole purpose of corroborating the metaphysical truths (*uṣūl al-dīn*). Given all of these points, reconciliation between these texts is necessary. The reprehensible disputation applies to arguing for corroborating falsity, seeking money and gaining prestige. However, praiseworthy disputation applies to corroborating truth, calling people unto God's path and defending His religion.<sup>52</sup>

Furthermore, al-Rāzī turns the negative remark about disputation into an opportunity to offer a dialectical explanation of the negative portrayal of disputation in Q. 2:197. He explains

<sup>51</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb*, 2:84.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 5:142-143.

" من الناس من عاب الإستدلال والبحث والنظر والجدال واحتج بوجوه أحدها: أنه تعالى قال: "وَلَا جِدَالَ فِي الْحَجِّ" وهذا يقتضي نفي جميع أنواع الجدال، ولو كان الجدال في الدين طاعة وسبيلاً إلى معرفة الله تعالى لما نهي عنه في الحج، بل على ذلك التقدير كان الإشتغال بالجدال في الحج ضم طاعة إلى طاعة فكان أولى بالترغيب فيه وثانيها: قوله تعالى: "مَا صَرَّفْنَاهُ لَكَ إِلَّا جِدَالًا بَلْ لَمْ يَكُنْ لَكُمْ قَوْمٌ خَصِمُونَ". الزخرف: 58] عابهم بكوفهم من أهل الجدال، وذلك يدل على أن الجدال مذموم، وثالثها: قوله: "وَلَا تَنَزَّعُوا فَتَفْشَلُوا وَتَذْهَبَ رِيحُكُمْ". الأنفال: 46] نهي عن المنازعة. وأما جمهور المتكلمين فإنهم قالوا: الجدال في الدين طاعة عظيمة، واحتجوا عليه بقوله تعالى: { أَدْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجَادِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ } [النحل: 125] ويقول تعالى حكاية عن الكفار إنهم قالوا لنوح عليه السلام { يَا نُوحُ قَدْ جَادَلْتَنَا فَأَكْثَرْتَ جِدَالَنَا } [هود: 32] ومعلوم أنه ما كان ذلك الجدال إلا لتقرير أصول الدين. إذا ثبت هذا فنقول: لا بد من التوفيق بين هذه النصوص، فنحمل الجدال المذموم على الجدال في تقرير الباطل، وطلب المال والجاه، والجدال المدحج على الجدال في تقرير الحق ودعوة الخلق إلى سبيل الله، والذب عن دين الله تعالى. "

that “there should be no indecent speech, misbehavior, or quarrelling for anyone undertaking the pilgrimage” is a reference to the four faculties of the soul: the appetitive, sensitive, imaginative, and rational. He seems to be following al-Farābī in these categories. In al-Rāzī’s opinion, “no *rafath*” refers to the appetitive desire; “no *fusūq*,” to the sensitive; and “no *jidāl*,” to the imaginative faculty which entices one to dispute against God, His attributes, acts and wisdom. People’s tendency to dispute and quarrel, al-Rāzī continues, is motivated by this third faculty. Thus, al-Rāzī reaches the following conclusion:

Since all evil is limited to these three, God said “no indecency (*rafath*), no misconduct (*fusūq*), and no disputes (*jidāl*) during pilgrimage.” Therefore, anyone who aspire to know God, love Him and recognizes the light of His glory and seek to be included among His special servants must avoid these [three] matters. These are precious nuances which serve as the prime purpose of these verses, and thereby a rational agent should not be heedless of them.<sup>53</sup>

Furthermore, al-Rāzī highlights the philological implication of the word *mujādalah* to explain the negative references to disputations in the Qur’ān. According to him, *mujādalah* must necessarily engage two parties representing truth and falsity, typically the prophets and the disbelieving chiefs. Therefore, any Qur’anic condemnation of disputation, al-Rāzī continues, is to be understood as explicitly disapproving the disbelievers’ way and implicitly supporting the prophets’ way.<sup>54</sup>

### 2.1.3 A Dialectical Milieu

It should also be noted that al-Rāzī’s interest in “Qur’anic dialectics and disputations” reflects his interest in, and mastery of, disputations. Hallaq argues that, by the middle of the fourth/tenth century, the practice of disputation began to grow, and it culminated in *al-Juwaynī’s*

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 142.

“فلما كان منشأ الشر محصوراً في هذه الأمور الثلاثة لا جرم قال: {فَلَا رَفَثَ وَلَا فُسُوقَ وَلَا جِدَالَ فِي الْحَجِّ} أي فمن قصد معرفة الله ومحبهه والاطلاع على نور جلاله، والانخراط في سلك الخواص من عباده، فلا يكون فيه هذه الأمور، وهذه أسرار نفسية هي المقصد الأقصى من هذه الآيات، فلا ينبغي أن يكون العاقل غافلاً عنها.”

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 21:119.

قال بعض المحققين والآية دالة على أن الأنبياء عليهم السلام جادلهم في الدين حتى صاروا هم مجادلين لأن المجادلة لا تحصل إلا من الطرفين وذلك يدل على أن القول بالتقليد باطل



*al-Kifāyah fī al-Jadal*. Hallaq adds that, in the fifth/eleventh century, dialectics served “as a method of argumentation was incorporated into works of legal theory, a practice that became increasingly popular in the following centuries”.<sup>55</sup> Al-Ghazālī’s *al-Qisṭās al-Mustaqīm*, for instance, is a typical disputation with an Ismaili who is converted from following the infallible imam (*al-imām al-ma‘ṣūm*) to following al-Ghazālī’s model of logical reasoning as found in Aristotelian tradition. The infiltration of classical learning with dialectical reasoning is further reflected in the centrality of the *munāẓarah* and *khilāf* genres that are pervasive in the writings of opposing schools. In contrast to John Wansbrough’s notion of “sectarian milieu,” Mehmet Kadri Karabela suggests that the epithet that best characterizes the classical discourses is “dialectical milieu.”<sup>56</sup> Following Karabela’s suggestion, one can see al-Rāzī as a typical representative of this dialectical milieu.

Actually, if one were to select only one epithet that well describes al-Rāzī, it would be “a master of disputation.” Al-Rāzī adopts the method of *munāẓarah* and engages in countless polemical conversations with different sects— something that broadens al-Rāzī’s perspectives on different contested issues and turns al-Rāzī into ‘a philosophical *mujtahid*’.<sup>57</sup> In his *al-Jadal*, al-Rāzī covers disputation in theory and in practice. Theoretically, al-Rāzī defines the purpose of *jadal*, its etiquette, ways of demonstrations, analogy (*qiyās*) and debate procedures. Furthermore, al-Rāzī adds illustrations that present *jadal* as an instrumental science that regulates legal and

---

<sup>55</sup> Wael B. Hallaq, *A History of Islamic Legal Theories: An Introduction to Sunni Uṣūl al-Fiḥ* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 136.

<sup>56</sup> Mehmet Kadri Karabela, “The Development of Dialectic and Argumentation Theory in Post-classical Islamic Intellectual History,” (PhD diss., McGill University, 2011), 35.

<sup>57</sup> See For al-Rāzī’s polemical engagement with the Mu‘tazilites and others, see Paul Krause, “The *Controversies* of Fakhr al-Din Rāzī,” *Islamic Culture* 12, no. 2 (1938): 131-150.

theological reasoning.<sup>58</sup> Practically, al-Rāzī closes his work with a list of some theological contested conflicts with a commitment to approach these issues without *taqlīd*.

It is helpful to let al-Rāzī tell us about his disputation skills. The purpose of considering al-Rāzī's self-recognition of disputation mastery is not to take it at face value but to get to recognize the dialectical spirit that was pervasive during his lifetime. The initial remarks in the beginning of his *al-Munāẓarāt* (Disputations) say it all:

When I reached Transoxiana, I first settled in a city called Bukharā, then Samarqand. Thereafter I moved to Khujand, and then to the city called Banākat and finally to Ghazni and India. It happened that in each city, I had disputations and debates with its finest scholars and local nobles.<sup>59</sup>

A cursory glance at al-Rāzī's collection of disputations communicates to the reader his ability to defeat his opponents, expose their wrong reasoning and cause them a sense of amazement at his vast knowledge. Wherever he goes, al-Rāzī's reputation in *munāẓarah* precedes him. He tells us that when he reached Nishapur, he was commissioned to discuss some of the controversial issues (*al-masā'il al-khilāfiyyah*) in some sessions which were highly attended.<sup>60</sup> As a debater, al-Rāzī is well recognized for his fair presentation and corroboration of his opponents' opinions. In the words of Peter Adamson, each topic al-Rāzī takes up "is subjected to a detailed dialectical consideration, with arguments, counter-arguments, counter-counter-arguments, and so on being listed and evaluated."<sup>61</sup> Usually, his disputation ends in

---

<sup>58</sup> For the relationship between *jadal* and *qiyās*, see Sohaira Siddiqui, *Jadal and Qiyās in the Fifth/Eleventh Century: Two Debates between al-Juwaynī and al-Shīrāzī*, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 139, no. 4 (October-December 2019): 923-944.

<sup>59</sup> Fathalla Kholeif, *A Study on Fakhr al-Din al-Razi and his Controversies in Transoxania* (Beirut: Dar El-Mashreq, 1984), 7.

لما دخلت بلاد ما وراء النهر وصلت أولاً إلى بلدة بخارى ثم إلى سمرقند ثم انتقلت منها إلى خجند ثم إلى البلدة المسماة بيناكت ثم إلى غزنة و بلاد الهند. و اتفق لي في كل واحدة من هذه البلاد مناظرات و مجادلات مع من كان فيها من الأفاضل و الأعيان.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>61</sup> Peter Adamson, *Philosophy in the Islamic World: A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 310.

crushing his rivals, leaving them speechless and generating overwhelming applaud for the victorious Rāzī.

Throughout his *al-Munāẓarāt*, there is also a notable sense of pride. Sometimes al-Rāzī describes his arguments as being too sophisticated to be comprehended by his opponents. In such situations, al-Rāzī either repeats his arguments slowly<sup>62</sup> or gives some preliminaries for easier understanding. The Maturīdī Nūr al-Dīn al-Ṣābūnī (d. 580/1184) was fully impressed by al-Rāzī's strong theological arguments. Al-Rāzī records al-Ṣābūnī's witness: "Having read Abū al-Mu'īn al-Nasafī's *Tabṣīratu al-Adillah*, I thought there is nothing more to add. However, after seeing you and listening to your discussion, I realized that I needed to restudy theology as a novice."<sup>63</sup> Al-Rāzī's disputations extend from sectarian debates to interreligious polemics. His practice of polemical disputations is reflected in his lengthy debate with a Christian theologian in Khwarazm.<sup>64</sup> Hearing that a Christian, known for theological verifications (*tahqīq*), arrived in Khwarazm; al-Rāzī made the initiative to visit the Christian guest. In this debate, significant topics were investigated; such as, the divinity of Jesus, the prophecy of Muḥammad, anthropomorphism among Muslims, Muslim sectarianism and the mutual accusations of blasphemy among sects, and the spread of Islam by the sword.

Finally, related to *munāẓarah* (disputation) is the practice of *jadāl* (dialectic). According to al-Rāzī, there is a subtle difference between the two terms. While both involve a process of *istidlāl* (seeking and offering proofs), they differ in their objective. In *jadāl* there is an associated sense of mutual contending '*munāẓa'ah*,' whereas *munāẓarah* does not necessarily usher in sharp disagreement but usually take the form of a study (*muẓākarah*) through which the two

---

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>63</sup> Fathalla Kholeif, *A Study on Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and his Controversies*, 23-24.

<sup>64</sup> See Al-Rāzī, *Munāẓarah fī al-Radd 'alā al-Nasāra*, ed. 'Abd al-Majīd al-Najjār (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1986), idem, *Maḡātib al-Ghayb*, 8:69-71. Also see al-Sakūnī (d. 717/1317), *Uyūn al-Munāẓarāt* (Tunisia: Manshūrāt al-Jāmi'ah al-Tūnisīyyah, 1976), 283-287.

parties can amiably reach the truth.<sup>65</sup> Etymologically, al-Rāzī adds that the word *jadal* has gymnastic connotations, as it suggests a dual sense of litigation (*khuṣūmah*: from *jadalahu* or ‘he defeated him’) and verification (*tawthīq*). According to him, this word-origin accurately captures the dialectic process. As a debater verifies his case (*tawthīq*) to discredit the opponent’s claims, the interlocutor correspondingly reacts in a similar manner, and, therefore, a strong sense of litigation (*khuṣūmah*) develops.<sup>66</sup>

## 2.2 The Qur’anic Commentator as a Theologian-Exegete

Drawing on the assumption that the Qur’ān establishes its truths through reasoned argumentation, al-Rāzī argues that understanding the Qur’anic message in general and the surah progression of meaning in particular is necessarily the task of a dialectician and a well-trained theologian. Amid fierce opposition from the *karrāmiyyah*<sup>67</sup> on one side and the legal jurists on the other, al-Rāzī adds a new requirement for the Qur’anic exegete; that is, an exegete is expected to be firmly rooted in theological training. In his commentary on the verse-ending “Those firmly grounded in knowledge say, ‘We believe in it: it is all from our Lord’—only those with real perception will take heed,” (Q. 3:7)<sup>68</sup> al-Rāzī provides the following observation:

<sup>65</sup> See Al-Rāzī, *Al-Kāshif ‘an Uṣūl al-Dalā’il wa Fuṣūl al-‘Ilal* (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1992), 28-29. In his *Mujarrad Maqālāt al-Shaykh Abī al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī*, Ibn Fūrak (d. 406/1015) ascribes a similar distinction between *baḥth* and *jadal* to Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī. See Larry Benjamin Miller, *Islamic disputation theory. The uses and rules of argument in medieval Islam* (Cham: Springer, 2020), 5-6.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, 29.

<sup>67</sup> A sect founded by the Khurasan-based Ibn Karrām (d. 255/896), whose teachings include anthropomorphism and incline towards literalism. This sect spread in Greater Khorasan, Transoxiana and was active during al-Rāzī’s time. See Aron Zysow, “Karrāmiyya,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke (London: Oxford University Press, 2016), 252-262. See also, see Margaret Malamud, “The Politics of Heresy in Medieval Khurasan: The Karrāmiyya in Nishapur,” *Iranian Studies* 27, no. 1 (April 1994): 37–51; and Clifford Edmund Bosworth, “The Rise of the Karrāmiyyah in Khurasan,” *The Muslim World* 50, no. 1 (1960): 5–14. For a detailed study on Karrāmiyyah in Arabic, see Suhair Mukhtār, *Al-Tajsim ‘Inda al-Muslimīn: Madhhab al-Karrāmiyyah* (Alexandria: Sharikat al-Iskandria li al-Ṭibā’ah, 1971).

<sup>68</sup> This is the verse on the *muḥkam* and *mutashābih*, which is usually employed to support silence on many theological issues. However, al-Rāzī relies on the same verse to support the need for rational reasoning. For al-Rāzī’s understanding of *muḥkam* and *mutashābih*, see Leah Kinberg, “Muḥakamāt and Mutashābihāt (Koran 3/7): Implication of a Qur’anic Pair of Terms in Medieval Exegesis,” *Studia Islamica* 35 (1988): 135. See also Mahmoud Ayoub, *The Qur’ān and Its Interpreters* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1984), 1:19-20.

This means that only those of perfect minds that are devotedly away from false whims can find admonition in the Qur'ān. This applauds the good reasoning and discernment of those who are firmly grounded in knowledge. This verse is indicative of the lofty status of the rational theologians who examine rational proofs through which they recognize the being, attributes and acts of God, and thereby they interpret the Qur'ān only in accordance with rational arguments, language and grammar... Know that the nobler a thing is, the more ignoble its opposite is. Therefore, a Qur'ān exegete who exhibits this quality will reach this greatest level that God praised. Whenever an exegete interprets the Qur'ān without being versed in the science of rational theology, language and syntax—he will be far away from God. That is why the prophet says, whoever interprets the Qur'ān relying on his own opinion—let him prepare for his seat in hell.<sup>69</sup>

Here, al-Rāzī contends that, apart from linguistics, mastering rational theology is an essential perquisite for Qur'ān commentators. Even though al-Rāzī's statement does not necessarily exclude *ḥadīth* and transmitted narrations in the hermeneutical process, there is a clear indication that such reports have to be examined in light of language and reason. Furthermore, the dialectical and philosophical insights in Qur'anic interpretation are no longer presented as a discredited *tafsīr bī al-ra'y* (reason-based exegesis).<sup>70</sup> To the contrary, al-Rāzī conflates rational theology and grammar to argue that both disciplines protect the exegetes from error, and, thus, failing to master kalam, will make the exegete more susceptible to exegetical mistakes. This emphasis on the necessity of dialectical skills for the exegete should not be separated from al-Rāzī's position on reason (*'aql*) and revelation (*naql*)<sup>71</sup>—with the former being the ultimate arbitrator in case of any theologically *mutashābih* issue.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Maḥātib al-Ghayb*, 7:155.

وما يتعظ بما في القرآن إلا ذوق العقول الكاملة الخالصة عن الركون إلى الأهواء الزائفة . وهذا مدح للراسخين بجودة الذهن وحسن النظر . وهذه الآية دالة على علو شأن المتكلمين الذين يبحثون عن الدلائل العقلية ، ويتوسلون بما إلى معرفة ذات الله تعالى وصفاته وأفعاله ، ولا يفسرون القرآن إلا بما يطابق دلائل العقول ويوافق اللغة والإعراب ، واعلم أن الشيء كلما كان أشرف كان ضده أخس ، فكذلك مفسر القرآن متى كان موصوفاً بهذه الصفة كانت درجته هذه الدرجة العظمى التي عظم الله الثناء عليه ، ومن تكلم في القرآن من غير أن يكون متبحراً في علم الأصول وفي علم اللغة والنحو كان في غاية البعد عن الله تعالى ولهذا قال النبي ﷺ : « من فسر القرآن برأيه فليتبوأ مقعده من النار . »

<sup>70</sup> For the uncomfortable place of the interpretation based on reason and the arguments for its legitimacy, see Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'ān: Towards a Contemporary Approach* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 57-68.

<sup>71</sup> For al-Rāzī's prioritization of reason, see Tariq Jaffer, *Rāzī: Master of Quranic Interpretation and Theological Reasoning* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 94-98. See also Faḥ Allāh Khalaf, *Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī* (Alexandria: Dār al-Jāmi'āt al-Miṣriyyah, 1976), 68; al-Rāzī, *Al-Maḥātib al-'āliyah*, 9:113-118; idem, *Al-Muḥaṣṣal*, 51; and idem, *Al-Arba'īn*, 2:251-254.

<sup>72</sup> In theological issues, al-Rāzī considers the *mutashābih* verses to be beneficial for the lay people who, if only told of a God Who does not have a body or occupy a place, may think that He is 'nothing' (*'adam*). In al-Rāzī's view,

### 2.2.1 Fierce Opposition

Al-Rāzī's overindulgence in philosophical theology, now with Qur'anic piquancy, attracts many adversaries for him in Rayy. In his geographical dictionary *Mu'jam al-Buldān*, Yaqūt al-Ḥamawī (d. 626/1229) tells us that the medieval Persian city of Rayy, where al-Rāzī spent most of his life, was home to three major sectarian groups: the Shāfi'īs (representing a minority), the Ḥanafīs (representing more adherents) and the Shiites (representing the majority).<sup>73</sup> Other components of the intellectual environment in Rayy included the Mu'tazilites with whom al-Rāzī must have had many personal disputations.<sup>74</sup> Finally, Rayy was also home to the bitterest enemy of al-Rāzī: the *Karrāmiyyah* who held an anthropomorphic view of God. The many works al-Rāzī dedicated to expose the *karrāmiyyah* doctrines are indicative of their strong presence.<sup>75</sup>

Coupled with a commitment to *taqlīd*, this growth of sectarianism in Rayy gave rise to many bloody conflicts between the Shāfi'īs and the Ḥanafīs on one side and between the Ash'arites and other sectarian groups on another. Ibn al-Athīr recounts a *fitnah* (civil strife) between the Shiites and the Shāfi'īs in Esterabad in 554/1159 and another in Isfahan in 560/1165. These bloody conflicts precipitated many casualties, deaths and ruined cities.<sup>76</sup> We can now understand the hostile attitudes the *fuqahā'* would have against theological conflicts. The jurists' opposition against speculative theology in Rayy was not different than that found in

---

the lay people should receive *Mutashābihāt* first to satisfy their imagination, and later the *Muḥkamāt* would reveal the ultimate reality for them. See al-Rāzī, *Mafātiḥ al-Ghayb*, 7:149.

<sup>73</sup> Ya'qūb al-Ḥamawī, *Mu'jam al-Buldān* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1993), 3:117.

<sup>74</sup> In his *Manāqib al-Shāfi'ī*, al-Rāzī speaks about a group of Mu'tazilites, who ask him about the Qur'anic reference on free-will, "let those who wish to believe in it do so, and let those who wish to reject it do so" (Q. 18:29), to challenge his views on *Qadar* (predestination). See al-Rāzī, *Manāqib al-Imām al-Shāfi'ī* (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1993), 113. For another incident between al-Rāzī and the Mu'tazilites in Khwarizm, see al-Qazwīnī, *Āthār al-Bilād* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1960), 4:378.

<sup>75</sup> Al-Shahrazūrī states that the Ghor province was replete with the Karrāmī adherents. See al-Shahrazūrī's *Tārīkh al-Ḥukamā'* OR *Nuzhat al-Arwāḥ wa Rawḍat al-Afrāḥ* (Jam'iyat al-Da'wah al-Islāmiyyah, n.d.), 394.

<sup>76</sup> Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil* (Cairo: Dār al-Ṭibā'ah al-Muniriyyah), 9:66 and 92. See also Ya'qūb al-Ḥamawī, *Mu'jam al-Buldān* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1993), 3:117.

Baghdād. As the Ḥanbalite al-Kīlānī's (d. 611/1214) library was burned due to his interest in logic and philosophy,<sup>77</sup> theologians in Rayy, including al-Rāzī, were expelled from different cities due to their theological philosophical tendencies.<sup>78</sup> For instance, due to a disputation between al-Rāzī and Karrāmī Ibn al-Qudwah in 595/1199, a *fitnah* erupted and did not come to an end until al-Rāzī was forced to leave Herat.<sup>79</sup> It seems that the Karrāmī threats were so real that al-Rāzī asked some of his students to withhold the news of his death when the time comes “lest his opponents desecrate his body.”<sup>80</sup>

Thanks to the official patronage he received during his lifetime, al-Rāzī was determined to continue his theological and philosophical project in spite of this troubled region. In contrast to Goldziher's thesis that Muslim rulers were largely unfavorable to rationalist movements after the Sunni revival of the fifth/eleventh century, al-Rāzī's biographers placed emphasis on the continuing support and honor he received,<sup>81</sup> especially from Ghiyāth al-Dīn, the Ghūrid ruler, and ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Tekish, the Shah of Khwarazmian Empire from 1172 to 1200.<sup>82</sup> This patronage enhanced al-Rāzī's authoritative role in incorporating philosophy in madras curriculum,<sup>83</sup> especially after Ghiyāth al-Dīn built a school for al-Rāzī Herat where al-Rāzī began his magnum

<sup>77</sup> See Ibn al-‘Imād, *Shadharāt al-Dhahab fī Akhbār man Dhahab* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Maqdisī, 1351), 3:45-46. See also al-Qifṭī, *Tārīkh al-Hukamā’* (Cairo: Al-Khanjī), 228-229.

<sup>78</sup> For instance, al-Rāzī converted the Karrāmī Ghiyāth al-Dīn, the brother of the Ghūrid ruler of Ghazna, yet the former was forced to leave the country. See John A. Haywood, “Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Contribution to the Ideas of Ultimate Reality and Meaning,” *Ultimate Reality and Meaning* 2, no. 4 (1979):264-267. For the Ismaili attacks against al-Rāzī, see S. J. Nasr, “The School of Istaban,” in *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, ed. M M Sharif (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1966), 2:653.

<sup>79</sup> See Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil* (Cairo: Dār al-Ṭibā‘ah al-Munīriyyah), 9:247. See also al-Dhahabī, *Al-‘Ibar fī Khabar man Dhahab* (Kuwait: 1963), 4:285.

<sup>80</sup> See John A. Haywood, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Contribution to the Ideas of Ultimate Reality, 267. See also Al-Qifṭī, *Tārīkh al-Hukamā’* (Cairo: Al-Khanjī), 291.

<sup>81</sup> Ignaz Goldziher, “Aus der Theologie des Fakhr al-dīn al-Rāzī,” *Der Islam* 3, (1912): 213-47.

<sup>82</sup> See Frank Griffel, “On Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Life and the Patronage He Received,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 18, no. 3 (2007): 313-344.

<sup>83</sup> For the incorporation of philosophy in madrasa curriculum, see G. Endress, “Reading Avicenna in the Madrasa: Intellectual Genealogies and Chains of Transmission of Philosophy and the Sciences in the Islamic East,” in *Arabic theology, Arabic philosophy: from the many to the one: essays in celebration of Richard M. Frank*, ed. J. E. Montgomery (Leuven: Peeters, 1996), 371-422; A. I. Sabra, “The Appropriation and Subsequent Naturalization of Greek Science in Medieval Islam: A Preliminary Statement,” *History of Science* 25 (1987): 223-43

opus in theological metaphysics *al-Maṭālib al-Āliyah* (The Higher Issues).<sup>84</sup> We also know that al-Rāzī's classes were attended by rulers and scholars of different backgrounds.<sup>85</sup>

Al-Rāzī's theological works, especially *Mafātih al-Ghayb*, include many references that reflect a renewed tension between the rational theologians on one side and the traditional jurists and literalists on the other. In his *Manāqib al-Shāfi'ī*, al-Rāzī tells us about an incident that illustrates how many jurists vehemently opposed the mere notion of dialectical reasoning, let alone the *necessity* of a dialectical reading of the Qur'ān. Al-Rāzī recounts that he attended a Friday morning session in Khwarizm. The session was held by a *hashwī*,<sup>86</sup> who was attacking kalam and endorsing the *fatwa* against the *mutakallimūn*. The *fatwa* briefly affirms that if one made a legal will (*waṣiyyah*) for scholars, then rational theologians are axiomatically excluded. Al-Rāzī referred to this *fatwa* as “the famous question” (*al-mas'alah al-mashhūrah*), an appellation that reflects the continuing unresolved tension between rational theologians and legal jurists.<sup>87</sup>

In addition to this incident, al-Rāzī recounts that he used to hold a Friday evening *tafsīr* session, in which he had a discussion about Q. 19: 42-46:

He said to his father, ‘Father, why do you worship something that can neither hear nor see nor benefit you in any way?’

---

<sup>84</sup> Frank Griffel, “Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī,” in *Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy: Philosophy Between 500 and 1500*, ed. Henrik Lagerlund (Dordrecht and London: Springer, 2011), 341-342.

<sup>85</sup> For the attendees of al-Rāzī's classes, see for instance Ibn Khallikān, *Al-Wafāyāt* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahḍah al-Miṣriyyah, 1948), 3:383; and Al-Yāfi'ī, *Mir'āt al-Jinān* (Hyderabad: Dār al-Ma'ārif al-Nizāmiyyah, 1338), 4:8-10.

<sup>86</sup> A S Halkin identifies the *hashwiyyah* as the Hadīth folk, see “The Hashwiyyah,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 54 (1934):1-28. In his riposte against the Mu'tazilites, Yaḥya al-'Umrānī (d. 558/1163), a Shāfi'ī from Yemen, critiques the Mu'tazilites for considering the ḥadīth transmitters to be *hashwiyyah*. Ironically, al-'Umrānī discredits the Mu'tazilite appellation through a non-traceable ḥadīth: “At the end of time, there would appear a group of people of heretics (*zanādiqah*), who will call my nation (*ummah*) “*hashwiyyah*” due to their upholding of reports (*akhbār*)!” See al-'Umrānī, *Al-Intiṣār fī al-Radd 'alā al-Mu'tazilah al-Qadariyyah al-Ashrār* (Medina: Aḍwā' al-Salaf, 1960), 140. See also Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: The Classical Age of Islam* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), 391-392. For *Hashwiyyah* as a reference to “vulgar anthropomorphism,” See D. S. Margoliouth, “Karrāmiyyah,” in *Encyclopedia of Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1927), 2:773.

<sup>87</sup> One of the strongly worded *fatwas* against Greek logic was issued by the Shāfi'ī al-Shahrazūrī's (d. 643/1245). See Ignaz Goldziher, “The Attitude of Orthodox Islam toward the Ancient Sciences,” in *Studies on Islam*, trans. and ed. M. L. Swartz (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 185–215.



Father, knowledge that has not reached you has come to me, so follow me: I will guide you to an even path.

Father, do not worship Satan- Satan has rebelled against the Lord of Mercy.

Father, I fear that a punishment from the Lord of Mercy may afflict you and that you may become Satan's companion [in Hell].'

His father answered, 'Abraham, do you reject my gods? I will stone you if you do not stop this. Keep out of my way!'

Noticing that the *hashwī* was among the attendees, al-Rāzī said:

The *hashwī* happened to enter as I was commenting on Abraham's statement 'why do you worship something that can neither hear nor see nor benefit you in any way?' (Q. 19:42). I started my comments by saying that God Almighty showed in this verse that the Close Servant (Abraham) enumerated many signs in support of divine unicity (*tawhīd*), following them with admonitions as in 'my father, do not worship the devil' (Q. 19:44). Thereafter, God Almighty narrated that Abraham's father met these demonstrations with *taqlīd* (traditional conformity to forefathers' beliefs) and persistent denial [as reflected by] 'I will stone you if you do not stop this. Keep out of my way!' (Q. 19:46). Accordingly, whoever supports rational theology (*'ilm al-uṣūl*) and corroborates the signs of divine unicity is adopting the school thought (*madhhab*) of Abraham, and thereby deserves the honor mentioned in 'Such was the argument We gave to Abraham against his people- We raise in rank whoever We will' (Q. 6:83). Conversely, whoever denies rational theology and persists on imitation (*taqlīd*) and following the predecessors (*aslāf*) is actually adopting the faith of Āzar, Abraham's father, and following his way of ignorance and misguidance. Hearing this, the *hashwī* turned red and yellow and became dumbstruck.<sup>88</sup>

By the same token, al-Rāzī's biographies reflect a renewed tension between al-Rāzī and *al-hashwiyyah*. For instance, al-Rāzī used to find parchments with insulting and hurtful remarks placed on his *minbar* so that he can easily find and read. In al-Subkī's *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyyah al-Kubrā*, al-Rāzī once read out a parchment and exclaimed:

If my son does this, I wish him sincere repentance; if my wife does this, then she has no fidelity; and if my servant does this, so does others except those whom God preserve. However, I thank God that neither my son nor my wife nor my servant believes in God in any anthropomorphic way. Which party is then upright?<sup>89</sup>

<sup>88</sup> Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Manāqib al-Imām al-Shāfi'ī*, 100-101.

<sup>89</sup> Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'ī* (Cairo: Al-Ḥalabī Publisher, 1964), 8:89.

في هذه الرقعة أن ابني يفعل كذا فإن صح هذا فهو شاب أرجو له التوبة وأن امرأتني تفعل كذا فإن صح هذا فهي امرأة لا أمانة لها وأن غلامي يفعل كذا وجدير بالعلمان كل سوء إلا من حفظ الله وليس في شيء من الرقاع - والله الحمد - أن ابني يقول إن الله جسم ولا يشبهه به خلقه ولا أن زوجتي تعتقد ذلك ولا غلامي فأبي الفرقتين أوضح سبيلا

For the severe struggle between al-Rāzī and his theological opponents, specially the *karrāmiyyah*, see Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ al-Zarkān, *Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī wa Ārā'uh al-Kalāmiyyah* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1963), 21-23.

This opposition against al-Rāzī seems to be a continuity of the negative attitude against kalam as expressed in the motto “one of the signs of heresy (*zandaqah*) is giving the appellation *hashwiyyah* to the advocates of sunnah.”<sup>90</sup>

Furthermore, al-Rāzī was equally aware that this juristic opposition against kalam was justified by the claim that al-Shāfi‘ī was also against it.<sup>91</sup> As a staunch authority in the Shāfi‘ī *madhhab*, al-Rāzī devotes a long section in his *Manāqib al-Shāfi‘ī* not merely to absolve al-Shāfi‘ī of attacking kalam but to present al-Shāfi‘ī as an exceeding theologian whose “concise remarks outweigh the theologians’ lengthy works.”<sup>92</sup> Moreover, al-Rāzī places equal emphasis on al-Shāfi‘ī’s legal reasoning and exceeding ability for ratiocination (*istidlāl*), which brought an unprecedented balance between the people of *ra’y* (reason-based opinion) and advocates of prophetic transmitted reports (*ahl al-ḥadīth*). With the emergence of al-Shāfi‘ī and his normalization of legal reasoning, al-Rāzī argues that the traditionalists gained more victory over the reason-based jurisprudence.<sup>93</sup> There is no doubt that al-Shāfi‘ī’s *Risālah* marks the early canonization of legal reasoning and accounts for the developments al-Rāzī pinpointed.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>90</sup> See Al-Lālakā‘ī, *Sharḥ Uṣūl I’tiqād Aḥl al-Sunnah* (Alexandria: Dār al-Baṣīrah, 2001), 1:167.

<sup>91</sup> For the classical *fuqahā’* modern reformists’ attitude towards kalam, see Aḥmad Sālim’s *Naqd al-Fuqahā’ lī ‘Im al-Kalam* (Cairo: Ru’yah lī al-Nashr, 2008); and ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd, *Al-Islām wa al-‘Aql* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1998). For juristic views against kalam, see also Muḥammad Ḥilmī, *Manhaj ‘Ulamā’ al-Ḥadīth fī ‘Ilm Uṣūl al-Dīn* (Alexandria: Dār al-da‘wah, 1992). Classical works on the critique of kalam include al-Ḥarawī’s *Thamm al-Kalam wa Aḥliḥ*, Ibn Taymiyyah’s *Sharḥ al-‘Aqīdah al-Aṣfahāniyyah*, and al-Ṣuyūfī’s *Sawn al-Manṭiq wa al-Kalam*.

<sup>92</sup> Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Manāqib al-Imām al-Shāfi‘ī*, 107. In this work, al-Rāzī interprets many statements attributed to al-Shāfi‘ī on divine unicity, prophecy, divine attributes, seeing God (*ru’yat Allāh*), growing in faith (*ziyādat al-‘Imān*), human will or the creation of human acts (*khalq al-a‘māl*), and the Prophet’s companions (*ṣaḥābah*). See *ibid.*, 95-139. Ibn Taymiyyah does with Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal what al-Rāzī does with al-Shāfi‘ī. Against al-Juwaynī and al-Ghazālī, Ibn Taymiyyah supports the case for Ibn Ḥanbal as a theologian. See Ḥasan al-Shāfi‘ī, *Al-Madkhal ilā Dirāsāt ‘Ilm al-Kalam* (Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, 2013), 34-36.

<sup>93</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Manāqib al-Imām al-Shāfi‘ī*, 346.

<sup>94</sup> A complete English translation of the *Risālah* with parallel Arabic text can be found in Lowry’s *Epistle on Legal Theory* (New York: New York University Press, 2013). For a detailed study of the *Risālah*, see Lowry, *Early Islamic Legal Theory* (Brill: Leiden and Boston, 2007).

## 2.2.2. More Qur'anic Evidence for the Validity of Rational Reasoning

With those opposing *fuqahā'* in mind, al-Rāzī relies on the Qur'anic references once again to substantiate his endorsement of exegetical reasoning in Qur'anic exegesis. Al-Rāzī utilizes the following passage:

There are signs in the heavens and the earth for those who believe:  
And in the creation of yourselves and what He disperses of moving creatures are signs for people who are certain [in faith].  
In the alternation of night and day, in the rain God provides, sending it down from the sky and reviving the dead earth with it, and in His shifting of the winds there are signs for those who use their reason" (Q. 45:3-5).

In his *Mafātiḥ al-Ghayb*, al-Rāzī reflects on the order of the verse-ending in the above-cited verses. Al-Rāzī calls attention to a series of "those who have faith (*yu'minūn*), those whose faith is certain (*yūqinūn*), and those who reason (*ya'qilūn*)." He argues that this order is intentional. In his opinion, the third verse is a call for rational thinking for those who do not belong to the first two categories. Then al-Rāzī writes:

Know that many jurists say: the Qur'ān does not embody the sciences rational theologians pursue; it only encompasses law-related matters. However, this is [a result of] great heedlessness. While there are no long surahs entirely devoted to laying out laws, there are many surahs, especially the Meccan ones, which contain nothing but the signs of monotheism, prophethood, resurrection, and eschatology. All of these [topics] belong to the knowledge of rational theologians. Sensibly, one can discern that theologians offer nothing but lengthy explanations of the Qur'anic concise statements.<sup>95</sup>

The lengthiest theorization of the significance of rational theology for the exegete is found in his sixteen-page commentary on the Q. 2:21-22:

People, worship your Lord, who created you and those before you, so that you may be mindful [of Him] who spread out the earth for you and built the sky; who sent water

<sup>95</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Mafātiḥ al-Ghayb*, 7:223.

واعلم أن كثيراً من الفقهاء يقولون إنه ليس في القرآن العلوم التي يبحث عنها المتكلمون، بل ليس فيه إلا ما يتعلق بالأحكام والفقهاء، وذلك غفلة عظيمة لأنه ليس في القرآن سورة طويلة منفردة بذكر الأحكام وفيه سور كثيرة خصوصاً المكيات ليس فيها إلا ذكر دلائل التوحيد والنبوة والبعث والقيامة وكل ذلك من علوم الأصوليين، ومن تأمل علم أنه ليس في يد علماء الأصول إلا تفصيل ما اشتمل القرآن عليه على سبيل الإجمال."

In his commentary on the Q. 2:21, al-Rāzī similarly makes a comparison between the legal and theological content of the Qur'ān. He states that the legal commandments of the Qur'ān are covered in less than 600 verses, whereas the rest of the Qur'ān is dominantly theological. See *Ibid.*, 2:80.

"واعلم أن كثيراً من الفقهاء يقولون إنه ليس في القرآن العلوم التي يبحث عنها المتكلمون، بل ليس فيه إلا ما يتعلق بالأحكام والفقهاء، وذلك غفلة عظيمة لأنه ليس في القرآن سورة طويلة منفردة بذكر الأحكام وفيه سور كثيرة خصوصاً المكيات ليس فيها إلا ذكر دلائل التوحيد والنبوة والبعث والقيامة وكل ذلك من علوم الأصوليين، ومن تأمل علم أنه ليس في يد علماء الأصول إلا تفصيل ما اشتمل القرآن عليه على سبيل الإجمال."

down from it and with that water produced things for your sustenance. Do not, knowing this, set up rivals to God.

Al-Rāzī considers the signs in v. 22 as a reference to the typical Qur’anic method for demonstrating the existence and essential attributes of God. He further employs the sequence of worship and proofs for God as an indication that knowing Him is Qur’anically attained through rational reasoning (*al-naẓar wa al-istidlāl*), a term used interchangeably with the term *kalam* to refer to rational theology which is an appellation of the science of *kalam*. It is also the same term that refers to the first mandatory act for the believer in Ash‘arite thought. Al-Rāzī then identifies the *hashwīyah* as opposing *kalam* and deeming it a heretical science. In response, al-Rāzī elaborates on the defense of dialectical reasoning. Following are four points that summarize al-Rāzī’s defense of rational reasoning.

#### **A. Kalam is the root (*aṣl*) of all religious sciences.**

Al-Rāzī views *kalam* as the superior science in the hierarchy of traditional sciences (*‘ulūm*) on the grounds that *kalam* represents the root, whereas other *‘ulūm* serve as the offshoots of *kalam*. In his opinion, the exegetes’ interpretation of God’s word presumes the existence of the Maker Who has will (*mukhtār*) and speaks (*mutakallim*). A *muḥaddith* seeks to understand the meanings of Prophet Muḥammad’s words, and this task cannot be fulfilled unless prophecy is established. Similarly, a jurist seeks to unravel God’s laws—and that is still an extension to divine unity and prophecy. Al-Rāzī concludes that all sciences depend on *kalam*, whereas *kalam* works independently of them.<sup>96</sup> This argument, which is very classical in the defense of *kalam* and its appellation as *‘ilm al-uṣūl*, has a broader significance for al-Rāzī. In effect, this argument serves as a valid appropriation of rational reasoning in his exegetical practice. In other words, al-

---

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 2:80.

Rāzī asserts that theological reasoning must logically antecede any legal, traditional, philological, or rhetorical approach to the Qur'anic text.

### **B. The Qur'anic text encompasses the kalam arguments.**

Al-Rāzī deals with the Qur'anic text as a reservoir of the *mutakallimūn's* methods and arguments in speculative reasoning. For instance, he considers the verse “How could He who created not know His own creation, when He is the Most Subtle, the All Aware?” (Q. 67:14) to be indicative of the theologians' method of deriving God's omniscience from His perfect way of creation. Similarly, the Qur'anic reference to the varieties of creation in spite of the idea that all creatures share the four elements (*al-ṭabā'i' al-arba'ah*) is indicative of divine power and will as in (Q. 13:4). Tracing back the theological topics to their Qur'anic roots, al-Rāzī affirms that the role of rational theologians is to identify, corroborate and defend the dialectical arguments of the Qur'ān.<sup>97</sup> Philosophically, al-Rāzī still posits that using Qur'anic references to establish his rational approach do not discredit his propensity for rational reasoning. In his *al-Maṭālib al-Āliyah*, al-Rāzī justifies his use of Qur'anic references on the grounds that Aristotle's works are replete with quotes from the Greek poet Homer, a decision that brought Aristotle no shame and thus should be the case with the Qur'ān.<sup>98</sup>

### **C. Logical reasoning is a Qur'anic command.**

To counter the texts the kalam opponents bring against dialectical reasoning, al-Rāzī turns our attention to the Qur'anic references that praise “pondering” and “thinking” about God's signs in the universe. References include Q. 3:13, 190; 4:82, 10:101, 13:41, 20:54, 128; 41:53, and 88:17. In addition, al-Rāzī refers to the many verses that speak about conformity to

---

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 2:81.

وأنت لو فتشت علم الكلام لم تجد فيه إلا تقرير هذه الدلائل والذب عنها ودفع المطاعن والشبهات القادحة فيها، أفترى أن علم الكلام يذم لاشتماله على هذه الأدلة التي ذكرها الله أو لاشتماله على دفع المطاعن والقوادح عن هذه الأدلة ما أرى أن عاقلاً مسلماً يقول ذلك ويرضى به

<sup>98</sup> See Al-Rāzī, *Al-Maṭālib al-Āliyah*, 7:173.

forefathers' beliefs and blind faith as in Q. 19:46, 25:42, 26:74, 31:21, and 43:23. Al-Rāzī uses similar references to reach a provoking conclusion:

Such references are indicative of the obligation (*wujūb*) of rational reasoning, contemplation and *taqlīd* condemnation. Therefore, the advocates of rational reasoning are following the Qur'ān and the prophet's faith, whereas the advocates of *taqlīd* are opposing the Qur'ān and supporting the disbelievers' faith.<sup>99</sup>

#### **D. Arguments against kalam are self-defeating.**

Based on the two previous points, al-Rāzī argues that any text that seemingly condemns disputation must be contextually understood as arguing for wrong beliefs. Interestingly, al-Rāzī dismisses any rational argument against rational reasoning as self-contradictory, simply because such arguments use rational proofs to argue against using rational proofs.

### **2.3 The Literary Phenomenon of Intentional *Taṣrīf***

Approaching the surah as exhibiting a dialectical and theological content, al-Rāzī observes a recurring phenomenon in the surah discourse units; that is, the employment of variegated themes for theological and persuasive purposes. To him the various thematic blocks of a surah are not arbitrarily arranged. Rather, they reveal a deliberate Qur'anic compositional strategy that plays a significant role in addressing issues of faith or encouraging compliance with the divine law (*sharī'ah*). To support this premise, al-Rāzī associates this Qur'anic compositional strategy with the Qur'anic self-image. For instance, al-Rāzī identifies three verses that describe *taṣrīf*, through which the Qur'ān seeks to produce certain effects on its audience. In accordance with the occurrences of the verb *ṣarrafa* (lit. to use something in various ways) and its relationship with al-Rāzī's explication of the interweaving diverse themes and registers in a

---

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 2:84.

وكل ذلك يدل على وجوب النظر والاستدلال والتفكير ودم التقليد فمن دعا إلى النظر والاستدلال، كان على وفق القرآن ودين الأنبياء ومن دعا إلى التقليد كان على خلاف القرآن وعلى وفاق دين الكفار.

given surah, Ghunaym suggests the term *taṣrīf* as a literary device utilized by al-Rāzī both theoretically and practically.<sup>100</sup> The following are the three verses on *taṣrīf*:

1. We have explained things in various ways (*ṣarrafnā*) in this Quran, so that such people might take notice, but it has only turned them further away (Q. 17:41),
2. In this Quran, We have set out all kinds of examples (*ṣarrafnā*) for people, yet most of them persist in disbelieving” (Q. 17:89), and
3. In this Quran We have presented every kind of description (*ṣarrafnā*) for people but man is more contentious than any other creature (Q. 18:54).

These three verses set the Qur’anic text as a social discourse that employs the technique of *taṣrīf* for communicative purposes. How does al-Rāzī explain this Qur’anic phenomenon of *taṣrīf*? In his commentary on (Q. 17:41), al-Rāzī explains:

Philologically, *taṣrīf* means causing something to turn from one direction to another as in the phrase *taṣrīf al-riyāh* [the changing of the wind directions] and *taṣrīf al-umūr* [changing of matters]. Then the word *taṣrīf* became a metaphor (*kināyah*) for exposition (*al-tabyīn*), because the one who tries to explain something would turn his speech from one type to another and from one example to another so that the exposition would be complete and the expression more reinforced.<sup>101</sup>

Practically, al-Rāzī explains *taṣrīf* in the Q. 17:89 as susceptible to the following interpretations. The first interpretation considers the immediate context which poses a challenge that any attempt to produce a book like the Qur’ān will be doomed to failure. In light of this context, al-Rāzī interprets *taṣrīf* here as a reference to the variety of ways the Qur’ān challenges its original recipients to emulate its composition by producing the likeness of the entire Qur’ān (Q. 17:88), ten surahs (Q. 11:13), one surah (Q. 2:23) or part of a surah (Q. 52:34). The second interpretation relates to the Qur’anic narrations about the fate of past detractors. In this regard, *taṣrīf* refers to the many recurring narratives that describe how the opponents of the prophets, such the people of Noah, ‘Ād, and Thamūd, faced many tribulations on account of their disbelief.

<sup>100</sup> See ‘Ādil Ghunaym, “Uṣūl Fikrat al-Naẓm wa Taṭbīqātuhā fī Tafsīr al-Rāzī,” (PhD Diss., University of Zaqaziq, 1992).

<sup>101</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb*, 20:173.

اعلم أن التصريف في اللغة عبارة عن صرف الشيء من جهة إلى جهة، نحو تصريف الرياح وتصريف الأمور هذا هو الأصل في اللغة، ثم جعل لفظ التصريف كناية عن التبيين، لأن من حاول بيان شيء فإنه يصرّف كلامه من نوع إلى نوع آخر ومن مثال إلى مثال آخر ليكمل الإيضاح ويقوي البيان

The third interpretation relates to repetition within the Qur'anic message; that is, the numerous ways by which the Qur'ān proves divine unity, discredits polytheism, and addresses doubts regarding prophecy and resurrection. Thus, *taṣrīf* means “a variety of ways” and “repetition,” both of which are also captured in al-Rāzī’s commentary on the third verse (Q. 18:54). According to Mir, *taṣrīf* provides an “important clue to understanding the organization of the Qur’anic text.”<sup>102</sup>

Besides the notion of *taṣrīf*, al-Rāzī focuses on some Qur’anic qualities that place emphasis on its intentional employment of miscellaneous themes. For example, consider the following Qur’anic descriptions:

1. Ḥā Mīm
2. A revelation from the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy;
3. A Scripture whose verses are made distinct as a Quran in Arabic for people who understand,
4. Giving good news and warning. Yet most of them turn away and so do not hear (Q. 41:1-4).

And

God has sent down the most beautiful of all teachings (*aḥsan al-ḥadīth*): a Scripture that is consistent (*mutashābihan*) and draws comparisons (*mathānī*); that causes the skins of those in awe of their Lord to shiver. Then their skins and their hearts soften at the mention of God: such is God’s guidance. He guides with it whoever He will; no one can guide those God leaves to stray (Q. 39:23).

With regard the first passage, al-Rāzī demonstrates how the Qur’anic qualities refer to its heteronomous textual nature. First, he explains that a major implication of the divine epithets

---

<sup>102</sup> Mustansir Mir, “Some Aspects of Narration in the Quran,” in *Sacred Tropes: Tanakh, New Testament, and Qur’ān as Literature and Culture*, ed. Roberta Serman Sabbath (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 97. Mir explains that the Qur’anic text is so different than the other texts with which we are familiar. To better understand the Qur’anic narration, Mir suggests two principles: the principles of *taṣrīf* and the principle of association. With regard to *taṣrīf*, Mir uses this principle in the sense of “variegation” and as a narrative principle and a mode of presenting the Qur’anic material. However, he explores the term in a deeper way by explaining how the story of Adam is reiterated in different surahs with “a different thrust in each place” and in accordance with “the thematic exigencies of the surahs in which they occur”. See Mustansir Mir, “Some Aspects of Narration in the Quran,” 93: 106, esp. 97-103; and idem, “The Sura as a Unity: A Twentieth-Century Development in Qur’ān Exegesis,” in *Approaches to the Qur’ān*, ed. G. R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef (London: Routledge, 1993), 211-224.



“Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy” (*al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm*) is that the Qur’ān was revealed in a way that addresses the needs of its recipients: healing for the sick and nutrition for the well.<sup>103</sup> Second, the word *kitāb* is philologically related to the notion of *jam‘* (compilation) which indicates that the Qur’ān as a book encompasses the knowledge of the earlier and later generations (*‘ulūm al-awwalīn wa al-ākhirīn*). Third, the Qur’anic verses are made as *mufaṣṣal* which is interpreted as “containing distinct verses that detail different thoughts about the description of God and its related themes, the wonders of the heavens and the earth, the obligations that relates to the hearts (*qulūb*) and the limbs (*jawāriḥ*), promise of rewards and warnings of punishment, admonitions and advice, disciplining one’s character and soul, narratives of the past.”<sup>104</sup> Fourth, the Qur’ān is assigned the role of giving good tidings and warnings. Fifth, people turn away from it, a condition that required the reiteration of the Qur’anic reminders. In general, al-Rāzī considers the multiplicity of the Qur’anic themes as a privilege that distinguishes the Qur’ān from other books.<sup>105</sup>

Concerning the second passage, al-Rāzī offers two interpretations for the phrase *aḥsan al-ḥadīth* (the best discourse). In his view, this epithet is a reference to either the form (*lafẓ*) or content (*ma‘nā*). He posits that the distinction of the Qur’anic *lafẓ* lies in its eloquence and new form that does not agree with the rules of poetry and orations. Then he adds that one of the privileges of the Qur’anic content is that it encompasses a variety of areas of knowledge (*‘ulūm*), which mainly explicates the Qur’anic faith, as in “They all believe in God, His angels, His scriptures, and His messengers. We make no distinction between any of His messengers. They

<sup>103</sup> In his *Hujaj al-Qur’ān*, Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Farāhī offers a similar explanation of the Qur’anic strategy of thematic amalgam where divine unity, prophecy, faith and practice are combined together. In his view, the Qur’ān treats the *nafs* in the way a physician treats the sick and prescribes the medicine in accordance with their condition.

”وذلك لأن النفس وما تصادفه كلاهما في حالة التركيب، فالتدبير في تعليمها هو رعاية جميع ذلك معاً، كما أن الطبيب يُراعي إصلاح أعضاء المريض ويركّب الدواء بحسبها.”

<sup>104</sup> See Al-Rāzī, *Mafātiḥ al-Ghayb*, 27:81.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 27:82.

say, ‘We hear and obey. Grant us Your forgiveness, our Lord. To You we all return’” (Q. 2:285). Here, al-Rāzī provides a thorough numeration of the themes of the Qur’ān that relates to theology of God, angels, prophets, eschatology, history, ethics and laws.

In the same vein, al-Rāzī sees the Qur’anic self-identifications as a “*mutashābih* book” and “*mathānī* book” (Q. 39:22) as another affirmation of its thematically repetitive and collocative nature. Part of the meaning of *mutashābih* is that its multiple topics conform to the same purpose of honoring God and preaching the faith. According to al-Rāzī, the term *mathānī* implies that “most of the things mentioned in it [the Qur’ān] are expressed in couples: command and prohibition, general and particular, concise and detailed, heaven and earth, heaven and hell, darkness and light, tablet and pen, angels and devils, throne and seat, promise of rewards and warning of punishment, and hope and fear. The purpose of this is to demonstrate that everything, other than God the Truth, is contrasted with its opposite and the Sole being is God alone.”<sup>106</sup> Furthermore, the reactions of shivering and softening of the heart when the Qur’ān is recited is taken to refer to the reactions to the verses on punishment and mercy. However, al-Rāzī adds a Sufi explanation: in the path of honoring God, when the seekers ponder the world of majesty, the hearts become out of control (*tāshat*), and when they ponder the aspects of beauty, they become resuscitated (*‘āshat*).<sup>107</sup>

In al-Rāzī’s *Kitāb al-Muḥaṣṣal*, there seems to be a close connection between the heteronomous form of the surah and the major role of prophets. Al-Rāzī identifies the general purpose behind the mission of a prophet in the Qur’anic notion of “bearing glad tidings and forewarning, that mankind may have no excuse before Allah after the (coming of the)

---

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 26:237.

أكثر الأشياء المذكورة وقعت زوجين زوجين مثل: الأمر والنهي، العام والخاص، والجمل والمفصل، وأحوال السموات والأرض، والجنة والنار، والظلمة والضوء، واللوح والقلم، والملائكة والشياطين، والعرش والكرسي، والوعد والوعيد، والرجاء والخوف، والمقصود منه بيان أن كل ما سوى الحق زوج ويدل على أن كل شيء مبتلى بضده ونقيضه وأن الفرد الأحد الحق هو الله سبحانه.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 26:237.

messengers, for Allah has always been Almighty, All-Wise” (Q. 4:165). In al-Rāzī’s opinion, the prophetic presentations of the divine message are expected to be expressed in the miscellaneous form of *tabshīr* (promising rewards to encourage obedience) and *indhār* (warning against punishments to discourage rebellion).<sup>108</sup> Given this Qur’anic plan, surah 20 (Ṭāhā) affirms that the disbelieving people would have no valid argument for their rejection of faith before God.<sup>109</sup> However, al-Rāzī provides a list of ways, through which the prophet’s message makes disbelief unjustifiable. This list includes the following varied tasks:

1. Showing the right way to connect with God in worship
2. Giving constant reminders to fight against heedlessness and temptations
3. Explaining how good is rewarded and bad punished
4. Establishing the divine law to meet the civil nature of man and to avoid the conflicts that result from lawlessness
5. Leading people both ethically and civilly by teaching the sciences of ethics and statecraft (*‘ilmay al-akhlāq wa al-siyāsah*).<sup>110</sup>

The last task situates the office of prophecy in Avicennian context. Here, al-Rāzī argues that man is civil by nature, a quality that necessitates the presence of a law-giver who can regulate people’s life in a way that prevents conflicts and fighting. Furthermore, al-Rāzī posits that a prophet serves the role of a *ra’īs* (leader). While some leaders manage the outer affairs of people, as in the case of sultans, or regulate the inner affairs of people, as in the case of religious scholars; prophets must have authority over both the outer and the inner since they represent the

---

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 11:87.

<sup>109</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-Muḥaṣṣal*, 513. “If We had destroyed them through punishment before this Messenger came, they would have said, ‘Lord, if only You had sent us a messenger, we could have followed Your revelations before we suffered humiliation and disgrace!’” (Q. 20:134).

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 512-519.

perfect level of the human species.<sup>111</sup> In Campanini's words, Islam recognizes two kinds of prophets: the "legislative" prophet and the "warning" prophet.<sup>112</sup> Similarly, Jomier considers the announcement of a terrible punishment for the disbelievers and ineffable bliss for the believers to be one of the Qur'anic characteristics of "the prophet-messenger".<sup>113</sup>

In al-Rāzī's analysis, the surah utilizes various themes to enable the prophet to reach his goal of persuading his different audience into faith and obedience to the divine covenant. For instance, the juxtaposition of many surah units is designed to lead the listeners into faith emotionally, persuasively, and rationally. These different aspects of decision-making makes the Qur'anic message reach the different personalities with which the prophets deal. For instance, a frequently common thematic pair in the surah is the risk/reward presentation of faith choice. The great descriptions of heaven, coupled with the graphic description of hell, generate responses to faith according to innate human capacity of weighting risk and reward. Additionally, the Qur'anic command to worship God or abide by the divine covenant is usually associated with reminders of divine blessings. Theologically, the Qur'anic description of the signs of divine power and knowledge is usually preceded or followed by arguing for divine unity or resurrection. These two themes are intrinsically connected on the grounds that the acknowledgment of an All-knowing, All-Powerful God makes idolatry more questionable and resurrection more plausible. Consider the following passage and its final impression

1. Alif Lam Mim Ra: These are the signs of the Scripture. What your Lord has sent down to you [Prophet] is the truth, yet most people do not believe.
2. It is God who raised up the heavens with no visible supports and then established Himself on the throne; He has subjected the sun and the moon each to pursue its course for an appointed time; He regulates all things, and makes the revelations clear so that you may be certain of meeting your Lord;

---

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 518.

<sup>112</sup> Massimo Campanini, *The Qur'an: the Basics*, trans. Oliver Leaman (London: Routledge, 2016), 59-64.

<sup>113</sup> Jacques Jomier, *The Great Themes of the Qur'an*, trans. Zoe Hersov (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1997), 68.

3. it is He who spread out the earth, placed firm mountains and rivers on it, and made two of every kind of fruit; He draws the veil of night over the day. There truly are signs in this for people who reflect.
4. There are, in the land, neighbouring plots, gardens of vineyards, cornfields, palm trees in clusters or otherwise, all watered with the same water, yet We make some of them taste better than others: there truly are signs in this for people who reason.
5. If anything can amaze you [Prophet], then you should surely be amazed at their asking, ‘What? When we become dust, shall we be created anew?’ These are the ones who deny their Lord, who will wear iron collars around their necks and be the inhabitants of the Fire, there to remain (Q. 13:1-5).

Al-Rāzī reads the first four verses as a compendium of heavenly and earthly manifestations of God’s attributes of power, knowledge, wisdom and will. Theologically, al-Rāzī argues that these wondrous varieties of creation constitute a rational proof for God, because they unavoidably require a particularizing agent (*mukhaṣṣiṣ*) and a preponderating factor (*murajjih*). The dialectical value of this passage is reflected in the closing part of v. 4 “there truly are signs in this for people who reason,” which is taken by al-Rāzī to serve as a signal that the Qur’anic argument is irrefutable (*lā dāfi ‘a lahā*) unless one, he continues, discredits his own rationality by arguing that things were brought into existence with absolutely no influencing factor or effective cause (*mu’aththir*).<sup>114</sup> Having established the theological purpose of these four verses, al-Rāzī explains the wonder in v. 5. Ironically, many Qur’anic passages depict the Meccans’ surprise about the possibility of bodily resurrection; however, in this sequence of verses, the prophet is given the chance to wonder: how is it impossible for God to bring people back to life? Having the power to bring into being all these variegated creations, God, by greater reason, is able to resurrect people.<sup>115</sup>

Furthermore, al-Rāzī utilizes such Qur’anic patterns in arranging its material as a hermeneutical tool. For instance, al-Rāzī attempts to decide the meaning of *al-naba’ al-‘aẓīm* (momentous announcement) in surah 78 (al-Naba’):

<sup>114</sup> See al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṭiḥ al-Ghayb*, 19:3-7, esp. 7.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 19:8.

## Unit One (1-5)

What are they asking about?  
The momentous announcement,  
About which they differ.  
They will find out.  
In the end they will find out.

## Unit Two (6-16)

Did We not make the earth smooth,  
And make the mountains to keep it stable?  
Did We not create you in pairs,  
Give you sleep for rest,  
The night as a cover,  
And the day for your livelihood?  
Did We not build seven strong [heavens] above you,  
And make a blazing lamp?  
Did We not send water pouring down from the clouds  
To bring forth with it grain, plants,  
And luxuriant gardens?

In the first unit, al-Rāzī identifies the ‘momentous announcement’ (*al-naba’ al-‘azīm*) to be a reference to the Judgment day and the second unit as purported to give a demonstration for the possibility of bodily resurrection. To al-Rāzī, this demonstration is achieved through the natural signs that point to (1) God’s “power,” which is recognized by the mere process of creation, and (2) God’s “knowledge,” which is recognized through precision and regularity in creation. Then, al-Rāzī connects the doctrine of bodily resurrection with these two divine attributes. He observes:

Whenever one demonstrates that these two foundational attributes are true and that ‘bodies’ or ‘corporeal substances (*ajsām*) equally accept the attributes and accidents (*a’rāq*), then it becomes inevitable that God Almighty can demolish this worldly life and bring another into being. This explains the way of this *naẓm*.<sup>116</sup>

---

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 31:6.

Here, we see the term *nazm* used to refer to the flow of two distinct units, not merely parts of a sentence or two consecutive sentences. We also see how al-Rāzī relies on the structural pattern of signs/resurrection to determine the meaning of *al-naba' al-‘azīm*.

Aside from his interest in the theological and persuasive function of the heterogeneous nature of the surah, al-Rāzī highlights the aesthetics of *taṣrīf*. Rhetorically, he argues that the different thematic perspectives in the surah brings pleasure to the listeners as they get to appreciate the different “tastes” of a speech made of unified segments. He observes:

Know that God Almighty habitually incorporates three types of discourses in the Glorious Book: *‘ilm al-tawhīd*, *‘ilm al-aḥkām* (laws) and *‘ilm al-qaṣaṣ* (stories)—the last of which is designed to either affirm the signs of *tawhīd* or accentuate the obligations of the laws. This is the best way that does not keep one [listening to] the same type [of discourse] as it entails boredom. Yet, when one moves from an *‘ilm* to another, it is like relieving the chest (*tashrah al-ṣadr*), and it pleases the heart—as if one traveled from a county to another, moved from an orchard to another, switches from eating a delicious type of food to another which will be undoubtedly more delicious and more appealing.<sup>117</sup>

It is interesting to note how the different assumptions about a text could lead to different readings and far-ranging conclusions. The various but persuasively oriented surah discourses make al-Rāzī appreciate the flow of the surah message, as his levels of “feel good” increases through his experience of the “different tastes” communicated by the variegated themes. However, this literary device of *taṣrīf* has made others view the organization of the surah as an “impossible muddle,”<sup>118</sup> “farrago of long-winded narratives and prosaic exhortations,”<sup>119</sup> or “haphazard compilations of isolated text passages”.<sup>120</sup> Maybe al-Rāzī’s message for students of the Qur’ān is to acknowledge that it has different flavors that may not conform to the ones with

---

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 2:243.

<sup>118</sup> See Massimo Campanini, *The Qur’an: the Basics*, 36. Reading Gabrieli’s definition in light of the many modern works on Qur’anic structure, Campanini concludes that “nowadays Gabrieli’s undervaluation of the Qur’an as an “impossible muddle” sounds to be a orientalist prejudice.” See *ibid.*, 37.

<sup>119</sup> Reynold Alleyne Nicholas, *A Literary History of the Arabs* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1907), 161.

<sup>120</sup> Neuwirth, Angelica, “Structural, Linguistic and Literary Features,” in *Cambridge companion to the Quran*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 98.

which we are familiar. These flavors can be discovered, or even appreciated, when the Qur'ān, as Mustansir implicitly suggested, is regarded “as a sui generis text that ought to be studied on its own terms.”<sup>121</sup>

## Conclusion

In his development of the theory of *naẓm*, al-Rāzī grounds his literary analysis in highlighting the theological, dialectical and persuasive nature of the surah. According to al-Rāzī, discerning the surah structure and determining its meaning requires an exegete who is theologically and dialectically trained. With this unprecedented prerequisite for the exegete, al-Rāzī argues that a holistic reading of the surah is possible and explains that theologian-exegete can reconstruct the surah dialectical purpose and unravel the compositional strategy, through which the surah segments can be seen as unfolding in a discernable manner. Through this approach, al-Rāzī is also committed to read the Qur'anic text on its own terms with an eye to identify its own strategies in arranging its material, or, in al-Rāzī's vocabulary, its argument (*ḥujjah*). One controlling literary observation al-Rāzī found in the Qur'anic organization of its material is the notion of *taṣrīf*. Examples of this literary strategy include two main trajectories: (1) the Qur'anic recurring trilogy of divine unity, prophecy and resurrection, and (2) the persuasive tactics that appear in the recurring use of antithetical parallels (e.g., believers/disbelievers, heaven/hell, rewards/punishment), complementary pairs (e.g., God's rights/people's rights) and the confluence of the legal and the moral in presenting Qur'anic laws. In the next chapter, we will examine the first trajectory of *taṣrīf*; that is, how al-Rāzī approaches the surah design by focusing on its dialectical nature and its theological trilogy of divine unity, prophecy and resurrection.

---

<sup>121</sup> Mustansir Mir, “The Structure of the Qur'an: the Inner Dynamic of the Surah,” in *Oxford Handbook of Qur'anic Studies*, ed. Abdel Haleem and Mustafa Shah (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 363.



## Chapter 3

### The Kalam Reading of the Surah

“Know that the Almighty arranged this disputation in the best way.”<sup>1</sup>

“Having established the evidence for divine unity, God almighty gave the essential argument against the objections raised by the partisans of polytheism, simply because a well-arranged disputation commences with giving the evidence that proves the claim which needs to be demonstrated. Thereafter follows the answer to the specious argument of the opponents.”<sup>2</sup>

The observation that al-Rāzī played a significant role in the appropriation of philosophy into the *kalam* tradition has been emphasized in many studies.<sup>3</sup> Yet, the impact of al-Rāzī’s rationalist approach on his literary study of the surah design has hardly been scrutinized in any depth. To demonstrate the relationship between rational theology and literary theory in al-Rāzī’s thought, this chapter argues that al-Rāzī’s mastery of the dialectical methods of argumentation, along with his deep theological training, influenced his reading of the Qur’anic surah in significant ways. To this end, the chapter will mainly discuss al-Rāzī’s reading of surahs 38 (Ṣād) and 87 (Al-Aḥqāf). Very early on in his interpretation of surah 38, al-Rāzī raises an objection against the cohesiveness of the various discourse units of the surah, claiming that the integrity of the text can only be maintained when the surah is dialectically understood as an

---

<sup>1</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṣin al-Ghayb* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2009), 27:173.

”و اعلم أنه تعالى رتب هذه المناظرة على أحسن الوجوه..“

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 22:134.

”فلما كان مدار أمر القائلين بالشريك على طلب اللمية لا جرم أنه سبحانه وتعالى بعد أن ذكر الدليل على التوحيد ذكر ما هو النكتة الأصلية في الجواب عن شبهة القائلين بالشريك ؛ لأن الترتيب الجيد في المناظرة أن يقع الابتداء بذكر الدليل المنبث للمطلوب ثم يذكر بعده ما هو الجواب عن شبهة الخصم.“

<sup>3</sup> For instance, see Frank Griffel, “Kalam” and “Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī,” in *Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy. Philosophy Between 500 and 1500*, ed. Henrik Lagerlund (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), 1:341–45 and 665–672; Tariq Jaffer, *Rāzī: Master of Quranic Interpretation and Theological Reasoning* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); and Ayman Shihadeh, “From al-Ghazālī to al-Rāzī: 6th/12th Century Developments in Muslim Philosophical Theology,” *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, 15, no. 1 (2005): 141–179.

”و هذه ملا مع من المباحث العالية الإلهية مدرجة في هذه الآيات المقدسة.“

argumentation that follows the standard techniques of disputation.<sup>4</sup> To prove the dialectical nature of surah 38, al-Rāzī posits that its overall message is a call for rational reasoning (*naẓar*) and a warning against the uncritical emulation of authority (*taqlīd*). While al-Rāzī centers critical thinking in surah 38, he utilizes surah 87 to represent a Qur’anic model for rational theology. According to al-Rāzī’s analysis, surah 87 reflects the classical theological trilogy of divine unity (*tawḥīd*), prophecy (*nubuwwah*) and resurrection (*ma’ād*). It is contended herein that there are instances where al-Rāzī utilizes the flow of a surah section to support his own theological views. For instance, al-Rāzī employs the structure of surah 10 (Yūnus) to advance his theological views on determinism in his polemical engagement with the Mu‘tazilites.

### 1. The Dialectic Approach to the Surah Structure

How does al-Rāzī’s dialectical reasoning fuel his interest in approaching the structural architecture of the surah? The answer to this question comes directly from al-Rāzī. In his commentary on surah 38 (Ṣād), al-Rāzī remarks that the flow of the surah discourse may leave the reader feeling bewildered and befuddled because of how one section abruptly breaks from the first section of the surah. Known for his fair presentation of his opponents’ views, al-Rāzī explains how surah 38 makes one wonder just what the point has been:

---

<sup>4</sup> The Qur’anic aspect of argumentation has been the subject of a large number of articles and monographs. See Jane Dammen McAuliffe, “Debate with them in a better way”: The Construction of a Qur’anic Commonplace, in *Myth, Historical Archetypes and Symbolic Figures in Arabic Literature: Towards a New Hermeneutical Approach*, ed. Angelica Neuwirth, Birgit Embaló, Sebastian Günther, and Maher Jarrar (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1999) 163-188; idem, “Debate and Disputation,” in *Encyclopedia of the Qur’ān*, ed. J D McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 1:511-514; idem, “Opposition to Muḥammad,” in *Encyclopedia of the Qur’ān*, ed. J D McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 3:576-580; Rosalind Ward Gwynne, *Logic, Rhetoric and Legal Reasoning in the Qur’an: God’s Arguments* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014); Kate Zebiri, “Argumentation,” in *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur’ān*, ed. Andrew Rippin ((Oxford: Blackwell, 2004); 265-281, J. Waardenburg, “Faith and Reason in the Argumentation of the Qur’ān,” in *Perennitas: Studi in Onore di Angelo Brelich* (Rome: Edizioni dell’Ateneo, 1980), 619-633; Oliver Leaman, “Arguments and the Qur’ān,” in *An Encyclopedia of the Qur’ān*, ed. Leaman (London: Routledge, 2015), 55-67; Muḥammad Abū Zahrah, *Tārīkh al-Jadal* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr); Zāhir al-Alma’ī, *Manāḥij al-Jadal fī al-Qur’ān al-Karīm* (Beirut, 1980); Barakāt Murād, *Minḥāj al-Jadal wa al-Munāẓarah fī al-Islāmī* (Cairo, 1990); and Ḥasan al-Sharqāwī, *Al-Jadal fī al-Qur’ān* (Alexandria, 1986).

Someone may wonder: in the beginning of the surah, God presented the disbelieving mockers as being vehemently opposed to physical resurrection and the afterlife—as reflected in “Our lord, give us our share of punishment before the Judgment Day” [Q. 38:16]. Having described this appeal, God almighty gave no reply; rather, [addressing the prophet,] He said: “Bear patiently with what they say and remember our servant David” [Q. 38:17]. It is clear that there is no relation between mentioning David, peace be with him, and affirming the truth of Judgment. Further, God mentioned the story of David in great detail and followed it with: “It was not without purpose that We created the heavens and the earth and everything in between.” Yet, it is still clear that there is no relation between affirming God’s purposefulness and narrating the story of David. Having confirmed His purposefulness and employed it as a means of proving physical resurrection, God mentioned that the Qur’ān is a noble, notable and valuable scripture [Q. 38:29]. However, this part has no relevance to the preceding sections. Given this, the surah segments seem to be disparate. How would then the Qur’ān be described here as noble and notable?<sup>5</sup>

This is a clear example where al-Rāzī conflates the dialectical reading of the surah and the hermeneutical departure from atomistic reading, which, according to al-Rāzī, leaves the readers of the Qur’ān with the impression of a disjointed surah. The mere exegetical observation that a surah design seems disjointed and requires an explanation is unprecedented in the history of classical *tafsīr*—simply because the pre-Rāzī exegetes were concerned more with discovering and/or defending the meanings imbedded in the poetics of the Qur’ān. However, al-Rāzī’s fresh investigation of the surah structure is clearly motivated by his emphasis on the relationship between the cohesiveness of the text and the dialectics of the surah.<sup>6</sup> With this developing interest in thematic relations, new questions about the design of the surah start to evolve.

Having acknowledged that the David digression in the surah’s otherwise argumentative discourse makes one lose the original point of contention, al-Rāzī still believes in a seamlessly smooth flow of the surah content. He posits that the David narrative is not an unintended error

<sup>5</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, 26:176.

لسائل أن يسأل فيقول إنه تعالى حكى في أول السورة عن المستهزئين من الكفار، أنهم بالعوا في إنكار البعث والقيامة، وقالوا: “رَبَّنَا عَجَلْ لَنَا فِطْنًا قَبْلَ يَوْمِ الْحِسَابِ” [ص: 16] وما حكى الله تعالى عنهم ذلك لم يذكر الجواب، بل قال: “أَصْبِرْ عَلَىٰ مَا يَقُولُونَ وَأَذْكُرْ عَبْدَنَا دَاوُدَ” [ص: 17] ومعلوم أنه لا تعلق لذكر داود عليه السلام بأن القول بالقيامة حق، ثم إنه تعالى أطب في شرح قصة داود، ثم أتبعه بقوله: “وَمَا خَلَقْنَا السَّمَاءَ وَالْأَرْضَ” ومعلوم أنه لا تعلق لمسألة إثبات حكمة الله بقصة داود، ثم لما ذكر إثبات حكمة الله وفرع عليه إثبات أن القول بالخير والنشر حق، ذكر بعده أن القرآن كتاب شريف فاضل كثير النفع والخير، ولا تعلق لهذا الفصل بالكلمات المتقدمة، وإذا كان كذلك كانت هذه الفصول فصولاً متباينة لا تعلق للبعض منها ببعض، فكيف يليق بهذا الموضع وصف القرآن بكونه كتاباً شريفاً فاضلاً؟

<sup>6</sup> See Ra’fat al-Miṣrī, *Al-Munāsabāt al-Qur’āniyyah ‘inda al-Imām al-Rāzī fī Tafsīriḥ Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* (Amman: Dār al-Nūr al-Mubīn, 2016), 249.

but an intentional strategy designed to invite inferences that make the surah discourse more intelligible, thereby resolving the apparent confusion. Al-Rāzī explains that the surah is dialectical in nature and insists that a basic familiarity with debate tactics will make what appears to be a jarring, off-the-wall comment a chaining out of the argument. In the case of surah 38 (Ṣād), he identifies a debate tactic rational debaters (*al-‘uqalā’*) purposefully employ when confronted by a stubborn, fanatic interlocutor. Debaters wisely redirect the argument to another topic—simply because the more arguments one proffers, the more resistance one receives. This strategy of a topic change in debate, however, has to be executed in a clever way that meets the following criteria: (a) the off-topic should make the interlocutor assume that it is unrelated to the subject matter of the debate so as to ease his tension and prompt him to think more logically and freely without being concerned about losing the debate, (b) the off-topic should include a premise that indirectly relates to the debate topic, which will eventually corroborate the conclusion you want your opponent to accept, and (c) the interlocutor will be faced with the seemingly “unrelated premise,” and how it essentially relates to the original argument. In this way the adamant interlocutor will unavoidably agree with the debater’s conclusion.<sup>7</sup>

Before proceeding to demonstrate how al-Rāzī applies this dialectical technique to surah 38 (Ṣād), it is worth mentioning that al-Rāzī identifies the opponent as belonging to the category of a *mu‘ānid* (obstinate interlocutor). In al-Rāzī’s terminology, a *mu‘ānid* is in a middle position between the *ḥukāmā’* who are moved only by demonstrative proofs that lead to certitude (*yaqīn*) and the lay people who are satisfied merely by rhetorical proofs. With the *mu‘ānid* debaters, the main purpose of *jadāl* is to win the debate, and not necessarily to proffer a demonstrative proof. Second, the most common way of causing the *mu‘ānid* opponent to admit defeat is to employ the

---

<sup>7</sup> See al-Rāzī, *Maḥātib al-Ghayb*, 26:176-177. See also idem, *al-Manṭiq al-Kabīr* ed. Ṭurghūd Āq Yūz (Riyadh: Dār Fāris, 2022), 2:606-607.

*ilzām*,<sup>8</sup> a common kalam technique, through which the opponents' views are proved to be incompatible and inconsistent, thereby pushing the opponents to feel more logically compelled (*mulzam*) to accept their detractor's argument.

Al-Rāzī indicates that this *ilzām* is commended, not only for the argument it offers but also for the way it deals with the opponent's obstinate attitude. In his *al-Jadal* (Disputation), al-Rāzī provides a list of etiquettes for debaters to follow. The first etiquette he lists is a moral and psychological one. In al-Rāzī's view, arguments should not to be motivated by fanaticism for one's intellectual affiliation or out of a sense of revenge, because these motives stimulate the opponents' intransigency and guile. Rather, al-Rāzī explicates that one of the prime purposes of debates (*jadal*) is *istidrāj*; that is, "to gradually draw the contestant to what is right and to avoid anything that goes against this purpose"<sup>9</sup>

This tactic of *istidrāj* finds mention in Aristotle's Book VIII of the Topics which deals directly with "the dialectical process of forming and refuting arguments."<sup>10</sup> In Aristotle's Topics, the dialecticians' methods of catching the adversary by surprise are listed. These methods include off-topic and irrelevant questions.<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, al-Rāzī deals with David narrative as serving precisely the same function of Aristotle's subterfuges. This tactic allows the principal issue to be replaced by another topic that is related only in appearance; however, this off-topic

---

<sup>8</sup>Ibid, 177.

<sup>9</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Al-Jadal*, ed. Muḥammad Zaynū and Sālim Shab'anyah (Damascus: Dār al-Bayrūtī, 2018), 46.

هذه الطريقة الدقيقة في الإلزام في القرآن

استدراج الخصم إلى ما هو الصواب فلا يأتي بشئ ينعكس على المقصود بالإبطال

<sup>10</sup> See Alex J. Novikoff, *The Medieval Culture of Disputation: Pedagogy, Practice and Performance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 106. For an English translation of and a commentary on the Topics, see Robin Smith, *Aristotle, Topics I, VIII, and Selections* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997). For a fine analysis of Book VIII of the Topics, see L. M. De Rijk, *Aristotle: semantics and ontology*, vol. 1 (Leiden, Brill, 2002), 529-536. For Aristotelian dialectic in general, see *Aristotle on Dialectic: The Topics* (Proceedings of the Third Symposium Aristotelicum), ed. Owen G. E. L. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968); Paul Slomkowski, *Aristotle's Topics* (Leiden: Brill, 1997); J. D. G. Evans, *Aristotle's Concept of Dialectic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); and D. W. Hamlyn, "Aristotle on Dialectic", *Philosophy* 65, (1990): 465-476.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 117. Novikoff illustrates the way this technique is also employed in the thirteenth century anonymous debate poem *Owl and the Nightingale*, which reflects a close articulation of Aristotle's methods and procedures for argumentation.

will eventually enable the debater outsmart the enemy by surprise. As illustrated in the words of von Moos, the off-topic move is to “throw sand in the eyes of the adversary.”<sup>12</sup> Therefore, al-Rāzī’s debate tactic, which he describes as the way of the “‘*uqalā*’,” seems to be the “Aristotelian way.”<sup>13</sup> Robin Smith describes how this Aristotelian tactic or *ilzām* tactic (as al-Rāzī and the partisans of *kalam* call it) relates to overcoming competition tensions and winning the debate:

Dialectic is a competitive activity, and Aristotle gives due emphasis to the importance of strategy. It makes a difference which questions I ask first: if my opponent sees where I am going, he may try to avoid giving me the premises I need. Therefore it might help if I put the premises forward in a confusing order, perhaps mixing in any number of irrelevant premises to conceal my argument until it is too late.<sup>14</sup>

These disputational trickeries are likened to warfare deceptions in the *Epistles of Ikhwān al-Ṣafa*.<sup>15</sup> With this disputation strategy in mind, al-Rāzī goes back to the derisive appeal voiced by the Quraysh chiefs “Our Lord, give us our share of punishment before Judgment Day” to deride the doctrine of resurrection. Al-Rāzī characterizes this response as a form of mockery, with which a direct engagement will be futile. Therefore, the Qur’ān, al-Rāzī argues, commands the prophet to make a topic shift in addressing the story of David which, on the surface, does not relate to resurrection. The story of David does, however, close with a moral argument for the afterlife. David narrative closes with the divine command of administering justice: “David, We have given you mastery over the land. Judge fairly between people” (Q. 38:26). According to al-

<sup>12</sup> Von Moos, “Le Dialogue Latin au moyen âge: Fexemple d’Evrard d’Ypres,” *Annales. Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations* (1989): 1012. Cited in *ibid.*, 117.

<sup>13</sup> It is very likely that al-Rāzī is relying here on the Arabic translation of and commentaries on the Topics by al-Farābī and Ibn Sīnā. On dialectic and Arabic Philosophy, see Larry Benjamin Miller, *Islamic disputation theory. The uses and rules of argument in medieval Islam* (Cham: Springer, 2020), 29-45.

<sup>14</sup> Robin Smith, “Logic,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle*, ed. J. Barnes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 62. See also Larry Benjamin Miller, *Islamic disputation theory. The uses and rules of argument in medieval Islam* (Cham: Springer, 2020), 23.

<sup>15</sup> See *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Ṣafa* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 2011), 3:438.

”و اعلم أن الجدل هو أيضا صناعة من الصنائع و لكن الغرض منها ليس هو إلا غلبة الخصم و الظفر به كيف كان و ليلك يقال الجدل قتل الخصم عما هو عليه إما بحجة أو شبهة أو شعبة و هو التناقض في الحرب و الحرب كما قيل خدعة و هو يشبه الحرب و المعركة إذ الحرب خدعة.”

Rāzī, anyone who hears this divine command will appreciate the virtue of justice. Through this acknowledgment of justice, al-Rāzī argues that the Qur'ān affirms the afterlife on the grounds that God's absolute justice demands that the righteous and the wicked cannot possibly be compensated equally.

Dialectically speaking, al-Rāzī argues that the Qur'ān usually relies on the innate recognition and appreciation of justice to affirm belief in the afterlife as part of natural disposition (*fīṭrah*).<sup>16</sup> In this way, the story of David becomes connected with responding to the deniers of resurrection. Based on al-Rāzī's explanation, it is understandable why the story of David is closed with:

It was not without purpose that We created the heavens and the earth and everything in between. That may be what the disbelievers assume- how they will suffer from the Fire!- but would We treat those who believe and do good deeds and those who spread corruption on earth as equal? Would We treat those who are aware of God and those who recklessly break all bounds in the same way? (Q. 38:27-28).

In his *Kitāb al-Arba'īn fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*, al-Rāzī uses this moral argument and asks his readers to seek more details in his *tafsīr*.<sup>17</sup> With this dialectical explanation of the thematic relations between the story of David and the Qur'anic argument for resurrection, al-Rāzī goes back to the objection raised against the Qur'anic design of the surah:

When one fails to contemplate, reflect and receive divine guidance, one will not be able to reach these wondrous subtleties contained in the great Qur'ān. Simply one may see the Qur'ān seemingly exhibiting a bad arrangement whereas it embodies the perfect ways of arrangement.<sup>18</sup>

While utilizing a disputation technique to reveal the coherence of a long surah section that seemingly appears disjointed and superfluous, al-Rāzī also employs the argumentative

---

<sup>16</sup> See for instance, Q. 23:115-116, 32:18, 40:58, 45:31, 68:35-36, and 75:36.

<sup>17</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-Arba'īn fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*, 286. This indicates that part of al-Rāzī's exegetical project was to incorporate more dialectical discussions that serve as extensions to his kalam works. It also suggests that al-Rāzī worked on different projects simultaneously as in the case of the *Maṭālib* and large parts of *Maṭāliḥ al-Ghayb*.

<sup>18</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Maṭāliḥ al-Ghayb*, 26: 177.

"من لم يتدبر ولم يتأمل ولم يساعده التوفيق الإلهي لم يقف على هذه الأسرار العجيبة المذكورة في هذا القرآن العظيم، حيث يراه في ظاهر الحال مقروناً بسوء الترتيب، وهو في الحقيقة مشتمل على أكمل جهات الترتيب."

reasoning of the surah to support his project of the Qur'anization of theological reasoning. In his exegetical commentary on surah 38, al-Rāzī uses the literary design of the surah to lay stress on the theological obligation of *naẓar* and the abandonment of *taqlīd*.

### 1.1 Surah 38 as a Warning against *Taqlīd* and a Stimulus for *Naẓar*

Al-Rāzī's dialectical reading of surah 38 is not limited to its initial segments; rather, he considers the surah as a whole to be dialectical in nature.<sup>19</sup> He sees two major actors in the disputation characterizing the surah: the obstinate polytheists on one side and the guidance-instructing prophet on the other. Concerning the polytheists, he provides a list of their theological and philosophical problems in the surah. The list includes the uncritical conformity to the religious views held by earlier generations (*taqlīd*), abandoning the binary of reasoning (*naẓar*) and demonstration (*istidlāl*), falling into the trap of false analogies (*aqyisah fāsidadah*), the analogy from that which is perceivable to that which is imperceptible (*qiyās al-shāhid 'alā al-Ghā'ib*), and ethical errors—the most notorious of which are their misconception of the levels of

---

<sup>19</sup> Similarly, Angelica Neuwirth posits that “debate is a central means of negotiation” in this surah. See Angelica Neuwirth, “Negotiating Justice: A Pre-Canonical Reading of the Qur'anic Creation Accounts (Part I),” *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 2, no. 1 (2000): 25–41, esp. 34–38. Al-Jābirī reaches a similar conclusion about surah Ṣād. He studies the Qur'anic narratives in a chronological order that does not follow that of the Muṣḥaf. His study is evidence that the thematic developments of the Qur'anic accounts reflect the major historical event in the life of Muḥammad and the different experiences with Quraysh in Mecca and the People of the Book in Medina. In his opinion, the Qur'anic accounts can be categorized in four major stages. The first stage is marked by the *Aḥl al-Qurān* accounts and the role-modeling prophets. According to al-Jābirī, the earliest accounts primarily focus on the ‘Arabian prophets’ whose traces are employed to serve as a reminder and warning for Muḥammad's contestants. Furthermore, al-Jābirī places Surat Ṣād as marking a new development; that is, the Qur'anic approach to the Quraysh negotiations/bargains (*musāwamāt*) with the prophet. With these bargains, the accounts tend to present past prophets as models in rejecting the different temptations, as in the case of David and Solomon. The second stage broadens the scope of the treatment of the prophets' accounts and adds more engagements with non-Arabian prophets, as reflected in Surat al-A'rāf 7 which presents a chronological synthesis of the Arabian and Hebrew prophets. The third stage reflects the Qur'anic response to Quraysh's new standpoints that they formulate based on their interactions with the Jews. Finally, the Medinan accounts reflect the polemical interactions between Muḥammad and the Judeo-Christian audience. While the content of many accounts may be similar in each stage, the form and function of each narrative, al-Jābirī concludes, is distinctly unique. Finally, al-Jābirī posits that placing the final stage of the Qur'anic narratives in the beginning of the Qur'ān (as in the case of surahs 2 and 3) way have been justified by the social, economic and political situation after the death of the prophet. In his view, the non-chronological order matches with the emergence of the Muslim State. See Muḥammad al-Jābirī, *Madkhal ilā al-Qur'ān al-Karīm: Fī al-Ta'rīf bi al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥdah al-'Arabiyyah, 2013), 257–425. Al-Jābirī's theory is also reflected in his systematic structural reading and exegesis of the Qur'anic surahs in their chronological order. See al-Jābirī, *Faḥm al-Qur'ān al-Karīm: Al-Tafsīr al-Wāḍiḥ ḥasba Tartīb al-Nuzūl* (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥdah al-'Arabiyyah, 2012).



happiness (*marātib al-sa'ādah*). In the face of these faulty dialectical methods, the prophet is instructed to practice patience and to reason with the Quraysh chiefs.

Based on al-Rāzī's demarcation of the surah themes and the ties that bind them together, there seem to be four major sections:

1. Section One (1-16): The Quraysh Rejection,
2. Section Two (17-48): From Rejection to Direction,
3. Section Three (49-64): The Fate of the Two Camps, and
4. Section Four (65-88): From the Prophet to Quraysh Chiefs.

### **Section One: (1-16): Setting the Stage for a Dialectical Atmosphere**

- A.** (1) *Ṣād*, By the Quran, full of reminders (*dhikr*)! (2) Yet the disbelievers are steeped in self-glory (*'izzah*) and contention (*shiqāq*). (3) How many generations have We destroyed before them; and they cried for mercy, but it was too late to escape.

Bringing focus to the words *'izzah* (self-glory) and *shiqāq* (dissent), al-Rāzī identifies the addressees as the Quraysh chiefs whose envy and arrogance dissuade them from yielding to the truth. Al-Rāzī's definition of *'izzah* and *shiqāq* sets the stage for the dialectical reasoning or *jadal* in the surah. Al-Rāzī explains that *'izzah* keeps the Quraysh addressees from following the truth, and that the word *shiqāq* indicates that one side of the debate is in a *shiqq* (side) and the other is in another *shiqq* (side).<sup>20</sup> The image of a *shiqq* is ideal for reflecting the dialectical nature of the surah.

- B.** (4) They wonder that a warner from among themselves hath come unto them. And the unbelievers said, this man is a magician, and a liar: (5) How would he make the gods to be but one God? Surely this is an astonishing thing. (6) And the chief men among them departed, saying to one another, walk away, and patiently stay faithful to your gods: Verily this is the thing which is designed. (7) We have not heard anything like this in the previous faith: This is no other than a fabrication.

---

<sup>20</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Maḥātib al-Ghayb*, 26:153.

In al-Rāzī’s view, this subsection is an extension of the *‘izzah* and *shiqāq*, which provoke Quraysh chiefs to oppose the prophet and defame him as a liar. Given this bitter contention, al-Rāzī divides the Quraysh claims as falling into three categories: *ilāhiyyat* (metaphysics), *nubuwwāt* (prophecy) and *ma‘ād* (resurrection). With regard to the *ilāhiyyat*, the doubts on divine unity are covered in vv. 5-7 and clearly captured in this exclamation of amazement: “How would he make the gods to be but one God? Surely this is an astonishing thing” (Q. 38:5). Al-Rāzī provides a dialectical explanation of this polytheistic rejection of the concept of one God. He argues that it stems from two problems: (1) their lack of practicing *naẓar* and *istidlāl*, and (2) their falling into the trap of *taqlīd*.<sup>21</sup> These two problems are significant consequences in al-Rāzī’s rational theology. In Ash‘arite theology, the first mandatory act for a *mukallaf* (an agent who is legally held accountable for his actions) is *naẓar*, which saves one from *taqlīd* in matters of faith.<sup>22</sup>

- C. (8) Hath the reminder [*dhikr*] been sent unto him preferably to any other among us? Verily they are in a doubt concerning My admonition [*dhikr*]: But they have not yet tasted My punishment. (9) Or do they possess the treasures of the mercy of your Lord—the Almighty, the Munificent. (10) Or is the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, and of whatever is between them, in their possession? If it be so, let them climb their way to heaven. (11) Their armed alliance is weak and will be crushed.

Having singled out the metaphysical concerns of the Quraysh, al-Rāzī envisions questions of prophecy encapsulated in this subsection which addresses the rejection of Muḥammad as a true prophet. However, al-Rāzī stresses the weaknesses of the arguments of the Quraysh because of their reliance on an ethical fallacy: “Has the reminder (*dhikr*) been sent unto him preferably to any other among us?” (Q. 38:8). With a syllogistic framing, that he often

---

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 155

<sup>22</sup> For instance, see Al-Juwaynī, *Al-Shāmil fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*, ed. ‘Alī Sāmī al-Nashshār, Fayṣal ‘Awn, and Suhayr Mukhtār (Alexandria: Mansha’at al-Ma‘ārif, 1969), 119-121; al-Bāqillānī, *Al-Inṣāf fī mā yajib i‘tiqāduh wa lā yajūz al-Jahl bih*, ed. Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī (Cairo: Al-Maktabah al-Azhariyyah li al-Turāth, 2000), 21-28. For countering *taqlīd* in the Ash‘arite tradition, see Tariq Jaffer, *Rāzī*, 17-18.

employs against competing theological schools, al-Rāzī voluntarily gives a *taqrīr* of Quraysh's objection; that is, presenting the Quraysh chiefs' objection in dialectical form, or more specifically, in a three-premise argument:

1. Prophecy is the noblest status.
2. Prophecy is to be granted to the noblest.
3. Muḥammad is not one of the noblest.

---

Prophecy is not to be granted to Muḥammad.

Thereafter, al-Rāzī evaluates the Quraysh syllogistic reasoning. He explains that the first two premises are true, whereas the third is false, and thereby the conclusion drawn from this logical argument is untrue. To disprove the third premise, al-Rāzī explains that the Quraysh chiefs falsely assume that nobility is gained only by means of money or followers. He goes on to enumerate three levels of *sa'ādah* (happiness) as stated by al-Ghazālī in *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*: the *naḥsāniyyah* (the spiritual) being the highest, the *badaniyyah* (the physical) occupying the middle level and the *khārijīyyah* (outer) as manifested in possessing money and prestige.<sup>23</sup> Accordingly, al-Rāzī shows that the Quraysh chiefs employ a false analogy (*al-Qiyās al-fāsid*) because of their misplacement of these levels. He asserts that they consider the lowest level to be the highest.<sup>24</sup>

Having refuted the Quraysh position on moral grounds, al-Rāzī reads the rest of subsection C as three direct replies to the Quraysh chiefs' doubts (*shubuhāt*) about Muḥammad's prophecy. The first reply is mentioned in v. 8, wherein al-Rāzī explains the word *dhikr* in "they

---

<sup>23</sup> For al-Ghazālī's view of happiness, see R. Rania Shah, "Saint Thomas Aquinas and Imam Al-Ghazālī on the Attainment of Happiness," *The International Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Society* 6, no. 2 (2015): 15-29. However, Shah does not include al-Ghazālī's three categorizations as presented in the *Iḥyā'*. See also Mohamed A. Sherif, *Ghazali's Theory of Virtue* (Albany: Suny Press, 1975).

"وهذه السعادة لا تتل إلا بثلاث وسائل في الدنيا وهي الفضائل النفسية، كالعلم وحسن الخلق، والفضائل البدنية: كالصحة والسلامة، والفضائل الخارجة عن البدن: كالمال وسائر الأسباب. وأعلىها النفسية، ثم البدنية، ثم الخارجة. فالخارجة أخسها..."

<sup>24</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb*, 26:157.

are in a doubt concerning my (*dhikr*)” as a reference to God’s signs, which prove Muḥammad’s prophecy. Thereby, he concludes that Quraysh’s doubts are a corollary of neglecting rational reasoning (*al-naẓar wa al-istidlāl*). Comparing this negligence of *naẓar* to al-Rāzī’s *al-Maṭālib al-‘Āliyah*, one can see that the real problem with the Quraysh’s chiefs is that they simply are not good theologians.

In this regard, al-Rāzī identifies two ways of knowing metaphysical subtleties: (1) the path of the partisans of rational reasoning (*ṭarīq aṣḥāb al-naẓar wa al-istidlāl*), and (2) the path of the partisans of spiritual discipline and self-striving (*ṭarīq ahl al-riyāḍah wa al-mujāhadah*). Al-Rāzī associates the first path with the theologian philosophers (*al-ḥukamā’ al-ilāhiyyūn*), whereas the second path is associated with the Sufis, who engage in *dhikr*—a practice meant to dissociate the heart from everything besides God. The first path leads to knowing, whereas the second qualifies the heart to receive divine light in order to restore the original *fiṭrah*.<sup>25</sup> The second reply to the Quraysh rejection of Muḥammad’s prophecy is mentioned in v. 9, which affirms that the prophecy office is a great gift from the absolute munificent God whose bestowal of blessings does not depend on the riches or poverty of the recipients. The third reply is posited in vv. 10-11, which places emphasis on God’s infinite sovereignty—a matter far beyond the shallow comprehension of the Quraysh chiefs.

**D.** (12) Before them, the people of Noah, and the tribe of ‘Ād, and Pharaoh of the mighty structures, belied the prophets, (13) [and so did] Thamūd, the people of Lot, and the residents of the Forest. These were all enemy forces. (14) Each belied their prophet, and so was my punishment justly executed upon them. (15) And they wait only for one sounding of the trumpet which shall not be deferred. (16) And they scoffingly say, O Lord, hasten our share of punishment, before the day of reckoning.

Al-Rāzī identifies this subsection as an extension that completes the message communicated in subsection C. He observes that this last subsection evokes the punishments of

---

<sup>25</sup> See al-Rāzī, *Al-Maṭālib al-‘Āliyah*, 1:53-59.

past nations as a warning for those who neglect *naẓar* and *istidlāl* because of experiencing no divine chastisement in their lifetimes. With this, al-Rāzī affirms that these narratives serve the purpose of warning, whether or not the chiefs of Quraysh accept these stories as trustworthy *akhbār*. Even if they cannot trust these narratives regarding the fate of past nations, the Quraysh chiefs are nonetheless witnesses to the vestiges of the past (*al-āthār al-bāqiyah*), which constitute a strong probability (*al-ẓann al-qawī*) in their minds.<sup>26</sup> The last section closes with the chiefs' stubborn reaction to these punishment narratives by highlighting their adamant denial of physical resurrection. This denial of the eschatological life completes al-Rāzī triad of the Quraysh's foundational categories of *shubuhāt* that belong to the realms of the metaphysics, prophecy and eschatology.

## Section Two: (17-65)

- A. (17) Bear their words patiently [Prophet]. Remember Our servant David, a man of strength who always turned to Us: (18) We made the mountains join him in glorifying Us at sunset and sunrise; (19) and the birds, too, in flocks, all echoed his praise. (20) We strengthened his kingdom; We gave him wisdom and a decisive way of speaking. (21) Have you heard the story of the two litigants who climbed into his private quarters? (22) When they reached David, he took fright, but they said, 'Do not be afraid. We are two litigants, one of whom has wronged the other: judge between us fairly- do not be unjust- and guide us to the right path. (23) This is my brother. He had ninety-nine ewes and I just the one, and he said, "Let me take charge of her," and overpowered me with his words.' (24) David said, 'He has done you wrong by demanding to add your ewe to his flock. Many partners treat each other unfairly. Those who sincerely believe and do good deeds do not do this, but these are very few.' [Then] David realized that We had been testing him, so he asked his Lord for forgiveness, fell down on his knees, and repented: (25) We forgave him [his misdeed]. His reward will be nearness to Us, a good place to return to. (26) 'David, We have given you mastery over the land. Judge fairly between people. Do not follow your desires, lest they divert you from God's path: those who wander from His path will have a painful torment because they ignore the Day of Reckoning.' (27) It was not without purpose that We created the heavens and the earth and everything in between. That may be what the disbelievers assume- how they will suffer from the Fire!- (28) but would We treat those who believe and do good deeds and those who spread corruption on earth as equal? Would We treat those who are aware of God and those who recklessly break all bounds in the same way? (29) This is a blessed

---

<sup>26</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb*, 26:159.

Scripture which We sent down to you [Muhammad], for people to think about its messages, and for those with understanding to take heed.

- B. (30) We gave David Solomon. He was an excellent servant who always turned to God. (31) When well-bred light-footed horses were paraded before him near the close of day, (32) he kept saying, ‘My love of fine things is part of my remembering my Lord!’ until [the horses] disappeared from sight- (33) ‘Bring them back!’ [he said] and started to stroke their legs and necks. (34) We certainly tested Solomon, reducing him to a mere skeleton on his throne. (35) He turned to Us and prayed: ‘Lord forgive me! Grant me such power as no one after me will have- You are the Most Generous Provider.’ (36) So We gave him power over the wind, which at his request ran gently wherever he willed, (37) and the jinn—every kind of builder and diver (38) and others chained in fetters. (39) ‘This is Our gift, so give or withhold as you wish without account.’ (40) His reward will be nearness to Us, and a good place to return to.
- C. (41) Bring to mind Our servant Job who cried to his Lord, ‘Satan has afflicted me with weariness and suffering.’ (42) ‘Stamp your foot! Here is cool water for you to wash in and drink,’ (43) and We restored his family to him, with many more like them: a sign of Our mercy and a lesson to all who understand. (44) ‘Take a small bunch of grass in your hand, and strike [her] with that so as not to break your oath.’ We found him patient in adversity; an excellent servant! He, too, always turned to God.
- D. (45) Remember Our servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, all men of strength and vision. (46) We caused them to be devoted to Us through their sincere remembrance of the Final Home: (47) with Us they will be among the elect, the truly good. (48) And remember Our servants Ishmael, Elisha, and Dhu ’l-Kifl, each of them truly good.

Al-Rāzī reads this long section on the experiences of past prophets as closely related to the first section (1-16). Dealing with the first section as a typical example of mocking rejection and false reasoning against the prophecy office, al-Rāzī assumes that Muḥammad—who represents the other *shiqq* or side of the debate—grows more and more despondent, and thereby is in dire need of encouragement and motivation before reengaging in reasoning with the Quraysh. Therefore, al-Rāzī reads the six narratives of various prophets as a means of the divine alleviation of Muḥammad’s exhaustion and sorrow by narrating to him the difficult experiences of past prophets and encouraging the practice of *i’tibār* (drawing lessons that would help him get

beyond (*ya 'abur*) these emotional struggles).<sup>27</sup> In al-Farāhī's words, the Qur'ān uses narratives from the past as "evidence for the triumph of truth and the defeat of evil."<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, al-Rāzī associates patience with rational qualities. In his opinion, a rational agent must necessarily demonstrate patience in the face of trials.<sup>29</sup> But, why is patience necessary for a true prophet? To answer this question, one needs to recognize al-Rāzī's methodology of proving prophecy. Al-Rāzī posits that prophecy is logically established in two ways: working miracles and perfecting the imperfect (*ikmāl al-nāqīṣīn*).<sup>30</sup> Even though al-Rāzī considers proving prophecy by way of miracles to be common and valid among the masters of religions and sects (*arbāb al-milal wa al-niḥal*), he tends to give preference to the second way, which he generally evaluates as "closer to reason and further from doubt."<sup>31</sup> Therefore, the Qur'anic emphasis on narratives of past prophets is central to the preparing Muḥammad for his moral function of perfecting others. The task of perfecting others is of paramount significance for al-Rāzī who not only sees it as a duty but as a validation for the claim of prophecy office.

### **Al-Rāzī on *Ikmāl al-Nāqīṣīn***

Through probing and division (*al-sabr wa al-taqṣīm*), an investigative method in the kalam tradition, al-Rāzī groups people under three categories based on his distinction between the theoretical faculty (*al-quwwah al-naẓariyyah*), which enables one to grasp the truth; and the

---

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 185.

<sup>28</sup> 'Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Farāhī, *Hujaj al-Qur'ān: Al-Ḥikmah al-Bāzighah wa al-Hujjah al-Bālighah* (Azamgarh: Dairah Hameedia Madrasatul Islah, 2009), 153.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 185.

<sup>30</sup> For the lengthiest discussion on *ikmāl al-nāqīṣīn*, see al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib al-Āliyah*, 8:103-124. The two ways of working miracles and perfecting the masses as signs of prophethood are frequently utilized in *Mafātiḥ al-Ghayb*. For a detailed discussion on al-Rāzī's changing attitude towards the two ways of proving prophecy, see Ayman Shihadeh, *The Teleological Ethics of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 129-153.

<sup>31</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Al-Maṭālib al-Āliyah*, 8:103. For another example of proving prophecy through *ikmāl al-nāqīṣīn*, see al-Rāzī, *Ma'ālim Uṣūl al-Dīn* (Kuwait: Dār al-Diyā', 2012), 117-119.

و هذا الطريق أقرب إلى العقل و الشبهات فيه أقل

practical faculty (*al-quwwah al-‘amaliyyah*), through which one becomes attuned to good deeds and oriented towards the afterlife:<sup>32</sup>

1. Those who lack in the theoretical and the practical faculties, and this category applies to the majority of people.
2. Those who are perfect in their theoretical and practical faculties, yet they may not perfect others, and this category applies to the saints (*al-awliyā’*).<sup>33</sup>
3. Those who are perfect in both faculties and possess the capacity to save the imperfect from the abyss of deficiency to the peak of perfection, and this category applies to the prophets.<sup>34</sup>

According to al-Rāzī, the validity and strength of the argument from *ikmāl al-nāqishīn* comes from the observation that it is overwhelmingly employed and preferred by the Qur’ān itself. Al-Rāzī analyses several Qur’anic surahs to demonstrate that prophecy is best proven through possession of both the most perfect theoretical and practical faculties. A simple example comes from surah 103 (al-‘Aṣr):

By time,  
Man is in loss,  
Except those who have faith  
And do good deeds  
And exhort one another to truth  
And exhort one another to patience (Q. 103:1-3).

Al-Rāzī skillfully maps the two descriptions (having faith and doing good) on the individual exemplification of the theoretical and practical faculties. Regarding the last two

---

<sup>32</sup> Without dismissing al-Rāzī’s reliance on miracles for establishing prophecy claims, Abrahamov has successfully demonstrated that the philosophical proof for prophecy characterizes al-Rāzī’s later works such as the *Maṭālib*, the *Ma’ālim* and *Mafātiḥ al-Ghayb*. Abrahamov sees al-Rāzī as a good example for one who criticizes a theory and becomes influenced by it. See Binyamin Abrahamov, “Religion versus Philosophy: The Case of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s Proof for Prophecy,” *Oriente Moderno* 19 (2000): 415-425.

<sup>33</sup> In his *Ma’ālim Uṣūl al-Dīn*, al-Rāzī argues that the difference between the prophets’ and *awliyā’*’s perfection of the imperfect is what is drop of water to the sea is (*ka al-qaṭrah bī al-nisbah lī al-baḥr*). See al-Rāzī, *Ma’ālim Uṣūl al-Dīn* (Kuwait: Dār al-Ḍiyā’, 2012), 125.

<sup>34</sup> See al-Rāzī, *Al-Maṭālib al-‘Āliyah*, 8:104.



descriptions (exhorting one another to truth and to patience), he asserts that they refer to the task of perfecting others in both faculties respectively.<sup>35</sup> This interpretation is undoubtedly influenced by Ibn Sīnā's exegetical commentary on some Qur'anic texts. Remarkably, Ibn Sīnā provides a philosophical interpretation of surah 87 (al-A'lā) to substantiate his proof of prophecy through the perfection of the theoretical and practical faculties. In his *al-Maṭālib al-Āliyah*, al-Rāzī provides almost an identical philosophical interpretation of the same surah to support the argument from *ikmāl al-nāqiṣīn*. Both Ibn Sīnā and al-Rāzī affirm that surah 87 covers the theological trilogy of *ilāhiyyat*, (metaphysics) *nubuwwāt* (prophecy) and *ma'ād* (resurrection).

The following is the central part of surah 87:

6. [Prophet], We shall teach you [the Quran] and you will not forget—
7. unless God wishes; He knows both what is open and what is hidden—
8. We shall show you the easy way.
9. So remind, if reminding will help.
10. Those who stand in awe of God will heed the reminder,
11. but it will be ignored by the most wicked,
12. who will enter the Great Fire,
13. where they will neither die nor live.
14. Prosperous are those who purify themselves,
15. remember the name of their Lord, and pray.
16. Yet you [people] prefer the life of this world,
17. even though the Hereafter is better and more lasting.
18. All this is in the earlier scriptures,
19. the scriptures of Abraham and Moses.

Al-Rāzī follows Ibn Sīnā in his claim that v. 6 is a reference to the perfection of the theoretical faculty, and that v. 8 is an indication of the perfect exemplification of the practical faculty. Vv. 9-17 describe the varying reactions of the recipients of the prophet's message and their respective fates. In this vein, the closure of the surah is employed by both Ibn Sīnā and al-Rāzī as a Qur'anic affirmation that this argument is logically valid not only in Muḥammad's case

---

<sup>35</sup> See Ibid., 8:113. See also Al-Rāzī, *Risālah fī al-Tanbīh 'alā Ba'd al-Asrār al-Mūda'ah fī ba'd suwar al-Qur'ān al-Āzīm wa al-Furqān al-Karīm*, ed. Bahā' al-Dīn Dārthamā (Beirut: Dār ibn Ḥazm, 2012), 220-223.

but for all past prophets as well.<sup>36</sup> Ayman Shihadeh analyzes al-Rāzī’s reception of Ibn Sīna’s theory of prophecy as a religious turn in medieval Arabic philosophy (as Ibn Sīna handles religious issues in Islamic terminology) and a philosophical turn in medieval Islamic theology (as al-Rāzī integrates a good deal of Ibn Sīna’s views on prophecy).<sup>37</sup>

In fact, al-Rāzī utilizes his commentary to systematically endorse the notion of proving prophecy using the argument of *ikmāl al-nāqiṣīn*. Following in Avicenna’s footsteps, al-Rāzī identifies the two methods of proving prophecy in surah 10. In his *Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb*, al-Rāzī makes a connection between v. 38 and v. 57.

<p>38. Or do they say, ‘He has devised it’? Say, ‘Then produce a sura like it, and call on anyone you can beside God if you are telling the truth.’</p>	<p>57. “People, a teaching (<i>maw‘izah</i>) from your Lord has come to you, a healing (<i>shifā‘</i>) for what is in [your] hearts, and guidance (<i>hudā</i>) and mercy (<i>rahmah</i>) for the believers.</p>
---	--

<sup>36</sup> For the Arabic text of Ibn Sīna’s exegesis of surah 87, see Ḥasan ‘Āṣī, *Al-Tafsīr al-Qur‘ānī wa al-Lughal al-Ṣūfiyyah fī Falsafat Ibn Sīnā* (Beirut: Al-Mu‘assasah al-Jāmi‘iyyah li al-Dirāsāt wa al-Nashr wa al-Tawzī‘, 1983), 94-103. For an English translation of this text, see Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq, “Ibn Sīnā’s Interpretation of the Qur‘ān,” *Islamic Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (1988): 46-56. ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq’s translation is based on the Arabic text edited by professor ‘Alī Asgar Hikmat and published in the Commemoration volume of the Tehran University Journal in 1954. However, the same Arabic text was later edited and published by Bahā‘ al-Dīn Darthma, who ascribed the text to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. In Darthma’s edition, the exegesis of surah al-A‘lā appears as part of a one treatise entitled *Risālah fī al-Tanbīh ‘alā Ba‘ḍ al-Asrār al-Mūda‘ah fī ba‘ḍ suwar al-Qur‘ān al-‘Azīm wa al-Furqān al-Karīm*. The short treatise gives a purely theological commentary in four surahs: Al-Ikhlāṣ 112, al-A‘lā 87, al-Tīn 95 and al-‘Aṣr 103. The style in all four surahs appears to be the same, and most likely it is al-Rāzī’s style, which closely resembles the writing style in *Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb*. In any case, whether the philosophical commentary on surat al-A‘lā is Ibn Sīna’s or al-Rāzī’s, al-Rāzī’s appropriation of the Avicennian prophecy theory, as reflected in his philosophical works, is still a well-established position. For al-Rāzī’s interpretation of surah 87, see al-Rāzī, *Al-Maḥāṭib al-‘Āliyah*, 8:109-112; and idem, *Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb*, 31:123-136. Even though al-Rāzī’s interpretation of the surah in his exegesis is not philosophically oriented, one sees a brief but spectacular reference to the practical faculty enunciated in v. 8 and to *takmīl al-nāqiṣīn* in v. 9. In his description of the prophet’s role in perfecting other, al-Rāzī interestingly posits that whoever undertakes this task must be emanating and overflowing perfection (*fayyāḍan lī al-kamāl*).

<sup>37</sup> See Ayman Shihadeh, “Aspects of the Reception of Avicenna’s Theory of Prophecy in Islamic Theology,” in *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association*, ed. R. E. Houser (Houston, TX: Philosophy Documentation, 2012), 23-32. See also Frank Griffel, “al-Ghazālī’s Concept of Prophecy: The Introduction of Avicennan Psychology into Ash‘arite Theology,” *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 14 (2004): 101-144, esp. 101-113.

Bringing together these two verses in surah 10, al-Rāzī provides a Qur’anic legitimization of the philosophical method of proving prophecy. In al-Rāzī’s opinion, the verses model the two major methods of proving prophecy. He explains that while v. 38 addresses the miraculous quality of the Qur’ān, v. 57 addresses the influential content of the Qur’ān. Reiterating his emphasis on *ikmāl al-nāqīṣīn* and the necessity for a perfect agent, al-Rāzī goes further to argue that proving prophecy through the fulfillment of the role of prophecy is superior since it is a form of *lammī* or *propter quid* demonstration (which uses the cause to prove the effect), whereas the former method belongs to the *annī* (inductive, *quia*) demonstration which relies on the effect to prove the cause.<sup>38</sup>

In a philosophical and mystical synthesis, al-Rāzī utilizes the four terms in v. 57 to compare the influence of the Qur’ān to that of a physician. According to him, the prophet perfectly undertakes four roles in the reformation of hearts. The first role is the *maw’izah*, which refers to the *sharī’ah* that amends the exoteric form (*ẓāhir*). This role resembles the instructions physicians give about what can and cannot be consumed. The second role is the *shifā’*, which refers to the *ṭarīqah* that heals the corrupt spirit as a medicine causes healing for a diseased body. The third task is *hudā*, which refers to the *ḥaqīqah* that causes the light of the Truth to manifest in the hearts of the saints. The fourth and final role is the *raḥmah*, which refers to the prophecy

---

<sup>38</sup> For al-Rāzī’s utilization of the same argument, see al-Rāzī, *Ma’ālim Uṣūl al-Dīn*, 115-119. Al-Rāzī presents a lengthy discussion on the notion of *ikmāl al-nāqīṣīn* in the *Ma’ālim* as a decisive argument in face of those who may doubt the miraculous nature of the Qur’ān. Similarly, Ibn Rushd raises many objections on proving prophecy through miracles. Alternatively, he grounds his acknowledgment of one’s prophecy on two principles: (1) the appearance of prophets is proved through *tawātur* and needed for leading people towards good and dissuading them from evil as asserted by the philosophers, and (2) whoever fulfills this role is a prophet. Admitting that miracles are more convincing for people, Ibn Rushd uses an illustration to support his position. He argues that if two individuals claim the ability to heal the sick, and one proves his claim by walking on water, whereas the second proves his claim by actually healing the sick—then the second individual’s proof is stronger. He argues that our trust in the first claim is based on a *fortiori* argument and our trust in the second claim is based on actual demonstration (*burhān*). See Ibn Rushd, *Manāhij al-Adillah fī ‘Aqā’id al-Millah*, ed. Maḥmūd Qāsim (Cairo: Al-Anglo al-Miṣriyyah, 1964), 208-222. For Ibn Rushd’s emphasis on prophecy as a ‘historical phenomenon’ and the necessity of examining the ‘message’ as a means of proving the veracity of the ‘messenger,’ see Muḥammad al-Jābirī, *Madkhal ilā al-Qur’ān al-Karīm: Fī al-Ta’rīf bi al-Qur’ān* (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥdah al-‘Arabiyyah, 2013), 140-146.

office. In this level, prophets reach the ultimate level of perfection and *ishrāq* or illumination, through which the task of *ikmāl al-nāqīṣīn* becomes attainable.<sup>39</sup>

Unlike the Ash‘arites, al-Rāzī sides with the Mu‘tazilites and conforms to their view that prophecy is necessary (*wājib*), not contingent (*mumkin*). The necessity of prophecy emanates from the Mu‘tazilite doctrine of *taḥsīn* and *taqbiḥ*.<sup>40</sup> However, it seems that al-Rāzī’s stance on the necessity of prophecy and the role of prophets in *ikmāl al-nāqīṣīn* is significantly based on al-Fārābī’s and Ibn Sīnā’s positions.<sup>41</sup> Al-Fārābī connects the necessity and qualities of the agent of prophecy to his concept of the virtuous city,<sup>42</sup> whereas Ibn Sīnā connects his stance on prophecy to the idea of divine providence (*ināyah*).<sup>43</sup> Eventually both the virtuous city and divine providence would necessitate the presence of a perfect moral agent able to regulate social life for human survival. Al-Rāzī’s insistence on the necessity of prophets for perfecting the masses requires patience in teaching and integrity in behavior.

### ***Ikmāl al-Nāqīṣīn* and the Challenge in Ṣād Narratives:**

Al-Rāzī’s theory of prophecy is certainly questioned by the incidents from the lives of David and Solomon, wherein they are accused of committing immoral sins, not only in Biblical sources, but also in some Muslim exegetical *isrā’iliyyāt* reports that ground their legitimacy in

<sup>39</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṣin al-Ghayb*, 17:92-95.

"الموعظة إشارة إلى تطهير ظواهر الخلق عما لا ينبغي وهو الشريعة، والشفاء إشارة إلى تطهير الأرواح عن العقائد الفاسدة والأخلاق الذميمة وهو الطريقة والهدى وهو إشارة إلى ظهور نور الحق في قلوب الصديقين وهو الحقيقة، والرحمة وهي إشارة إلى كونها بالغة في الكمال والإشراق إلى حيث تصير مكملة للناقصين وهي النبوة."

<sup>40</sup> For instance, ‘Abd al-Jabbār affirms that “whenever prophecy is good, it becomes necessary, and necessity here means that it would unavoidably be bad if not fulfilled.” See ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah* (Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, 1996), 564. *قال مشيختنا : إن البعثة متى حسنت وجبت على معنى أنها متى لم تجب فبحت لا محالة*. Al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṣin al-Ghayb* (Cairo: Al-Dār al-Miṣriyyah lī al-Ta’līf wa al-Tarjamah, 1965), 15:28.

<sup>41</sup> Al-Rāzī’s early view of prophecy is consistent with the Ash‘arite view, whereas his later views reflect an adoption of the Avicennian view. For instance, al-Rāzī affirms the contingency (*jawāz*) of prophecy in *Al-Ishārah fī Uṣūl al-Kalam*; however, he refers to the necessity of prophecy as held by Ibn Sīnā in the closing chapter of *al-Mabāḥith al-Mashriqiyyah*. For the presence of philosophical Qur’anic exegesis in the works of al-Kindī and Ibn Sīnā, al-Ghazālī and al-Rāzī, see Jules Janssens, “Philosophical Commentaries,” in *Oxford Handbook of Qur’anic Studies*, ed. Abdel Haleem and Mustafa Shah (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 781-793.

<sup>42</sup> See al-Fārābī, *Ārā’ al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Ḥusayn al-Tujāriyyah), 87-88.

<sup>43</sup> Ibn Sīnā, *Al-Najāh* (Beirut: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadīdah, 1985), 339. For a detailed account of the function of a prophet in Ibn Sīnā’s theory, see Fazlur Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam Philosophy and Orthodoxy* (Routledge: London & New York, 2008), 52-64.

the Qur'anic allusions in surah 38. These reports, which threaten the impeccability of the prophets (*'iṣmat al-anbiyā'*), push al-Rāzī to continue his dialectical reading. In his theological works, al-Rāzī lists six groups who deny prophecy for a variety of epistemological reasons. Among these groups are those who deny prophecy on account of the depraved acts ascribed to prophets in scripture.<sup>44</sup>

While al-Rāzī uses his kalam analysis to advance the literary design of the surah in our earlier discussion, here, he does the opposite here. With regard to the character of David, al-Rāzī employs his theory of thematic cohesiveness and intentional flow of the surah to corroborate David's rational soul (*al-naḥs al-nuṭqiyyah*) and infallibility (*'iṣmah*). Yet again, using the method of *sabr* and *taqṣīm*, al-Rāzī identifies three major themes in the surah's treatment of David's story (17-29): (1) the exhibition of ten qualities that qualify him to be a model for Muḥammad (17-20), (2) the incident of the two disputants (21-25), and (3) assuming the position of a vicegerent (*istikhlāf*) on earth (26-29).<sup>45</sup>

Concerning the ten qualities as reflected in vv. (17-20), al-Rāzī lists the following: (1) the honor of serving as a model for Muḥammad to follow, (2) the title "servant of God," (3) moral and spiritual strength, (4) God-oriented living, (5) the mountains celebrating God's praise with him, (6) the gathering of the birds for him, (7) the mountains and the birds reacting to David's praise of God, (8) the divine establishment of David's kingdom, (9) wisdom (*al-ḥikmah*), and (10) eloquence of speech (*faṣl al-khiṭāb*). Al-Rāzī emphasizes the last two qualities since they

---

<sup>44</sup> According to al-Rāzī, the six sects (*firaq*) that deny prophecy respectively rely on the following six reasons: (1) denying God as a *willful* doer (*fā'il mukhtār*), (2) denying the notion of obligations (*taklīf*), (3) denying the need for prophets on the ground that reason is sufficient in knowing the obligations, (4) denying the occurrence of miracles, (5) denying the moral integrity of the prophets due to the immoral acts ascribed to them, and (6) denying the notion of *human* prophets and expecting *angelic* prophets. See al-Rāzī, *Al-Maṭālib al-ʿĀliyah*, 8:7-9. Al-Rāzī adds two other groups that deny prophecy: one that claims that divine messages include pointless matters, such as prayer, fasting and pilgrimage, and another that denies Muḥammad's prophecy in particular. See al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-Arbaʿīn*, 295-296, and idem, *Kitāb al-Muḥaṣṣal*, 503-512. For the engagement with the miracles' detractors, see al-Rāzī, *Maʿālim Uṣūl al-Dīn*, 119-124.

<sup>45</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb*, 26:161.

reflect the perfect level of David's rational soul and his ability to express himself. In al-Rāzī's view, David's innocence is supported by the mere fact that the incident two-disputant— which is interpreted by some exegetes as a reference to David's sins— is preceded by the ten great virtues and followed by the divine selection of David to serve as vicegerent on earth. Using this contextual analysis, al-Rāzī pushes for a reinterpretation of the words that seem to imply blemishes in David's character and appear to challenge his infallibility. In his initial remarks about v. 26, which affirms David's role as a vicegerent on earth, al-Rāzī observes:

This is one of the strongest pointers to the speciousness of the notorious interpretation of David's story. It is inconceivable that a man would be described as seeking the blood-shedding of *Muslims* [those who surrender before God] and desiring the seizure of their wives and then immediately commended by God as the vicegerent on earth.<sup>46</sup>

Furthermore, al-Rāzī uses the surah design as a whole to argue for the impeccability of David's character. In his *'Iṣmat al-Anbiyā'* (the Impeccability of the Prophets), a work solely dedicated to explain away all Qur'anic implications against the infallibility of the prophets, al-Rāzī argues that surah 38, from beginning to end, engages in disputation against the detractors of prophethood. Therefore, ascribing shamelessly unscrupulous acts to some of the great prophets, al-Rāzī continues, is incongruous with the spirit of the surah.<sup>47</sup> Even though al-Rāzī cites the context of the surah as exonerating David from the *Isrā'īliyyāt* charges, his reading of the surah structure can be also understood as being motivated by his theological position on the prophets' infallibility.

---

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 174.

"وهذا من أقوى الدلائل على فساد القول المشهور في تلك القصة ، لأن من البعيد جدا أن يوصف الرجل بكونه ساعيا في سفك دماء المسلمين ، راغبا في انتزاع أزواجهم منهم ، ثم يذكر عقبيه أن الله تعالى فوض خلافة الأرض إليه."

Al-Rāzī did with Solomon what he did with David. Solomon was similarly defended as an infallible prophet in spite of the ayat that were negatively interpreted in some *tafsīr* works.

<sup>47</sup> Al-Rāzī, *'Iṣmat al-Anbiyā'* (Cairo: Al-Maktabah al-Azhariyyah, 2009), 67. For another discussion on the infallibility of David, see al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-Arba'īn fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*, 342-347.

"السورة من أولها إلى آخرها في محاجة منكري النبوة فكيف يلامها القدرح في بعض أكابر الأنبياء بهذا الفسق القبيح."

With regard to the common Qur'anic references to the prophets' *istighfār* (seeking divine forgiveness), as in the (Q. 83:24-25) about David and (Q. 110:3) about Muḥammad, al-Rāzī frequently argues that seeking forgiveness is not necessarily an indication of sinning. Thus, he offers different possibilities for begging for divine pardon. These possibilities seem to revolve around two interconnected points: (1) the unavoidable human nature of the prophets, and (2) the higher spiritual aspirations of the prophets. For instance, a prophet may seek forgiveness for a misdeed done due to the possibility forgetfulness (*sahw*), misconception (*ishtibāh*), a personal judgment that turns out to be contrary to what is more desirable (*khilāf al-awlā*). These “excusable” mistakes become more aggravated in the eyes of the prophets due to their close connection with the divine. This unflinching spiritual level makes the prophets experience a sense of *taqṣīr* (falling short of the required veneration). *Taqṣīr* is typically generated by the belief that that worship, no matter how perfect it may seem, is always lacking when compared to the devotion due to God. In this regard, al-Rāzī adds that since the spiritual stages in the path to God are infinite, seeking forgiveness is accordingly endless.<sup>48</sup> This experience of spiritual *taqṣīr* is similarly captured in various Qur'anic references, as highlighted in Q. 2:199, where *istighfār* is encouraged following acts of worship, and not necessarily after one commits a sin. Traditionally, the Muslim prayer is concluded with the litany “I pray for God’s forgiveness” (*astaghfir Allāh*), repeated three times.<sup>49</sup>

### **Section Three (49-64): Good News and Bad News**

(49) This is a lesson. The devout will have a good place to return to: (50) Gardens of lasting bliss with gates wide open. (51) They will be comfortably seated; they will call for abundant fruit and drink; (52) they will have well-matched [wives] with modest gaze.

---

<sup>48</sup> Al-Rāzī’s treatment of the incidents of the prophets’ *istighfār* appears in many of his works. See, for instance, al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-Muḥaṣṣal*, 526, idem, *‘Iṣmat al-Anbiyā’* (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Azhariyyah li al-Turāth, 2009), and *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, 32:149.

<sup>49</sup> For more on al-Rāzī’s arguments for the infallibility of the prophets, see Yasin Ceylan, *Theology and Tafṣīr in the Major Works of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1996), 172-174.

(53) ‘This is what you are promised for the Day of Reckoning: (54) Our provision for you will never end.’ (55) But the evildoers will have the worst place to return to: (56) Hell to burn in, an evil place to stay- (57) all this will be theirs: let them taste it- a scalding, dark, foul fluid, (58) and other such torments.(59) [It will be said], ‘Here is another crowd of people rushing headlong to join you.’ [The response will be], ‘They are not welcome! They will burn in the Fire.’ (60) They will say to them, ‘You are not welcome! It was you who brought this on us, an evil place to stay,’ (61) adding, ‘Our Lord, give double punishment to those who brought this upon us.’ (62) They will say, ‘Why do we not see those we thought were bad (63) and took as a laughing-stock? Have our eyes missed them?’ (64) This is how it will really be: the inhabitants of the Fire will blame one another in this way.

In contrast to Mir’s description of the medieval exegetical methodology as “linear-atomistic”<sup>50</sup> and Cuypers’ assessment of the medieval understanding of textual correlations as “a concatenation of verses rather than a real structuring of the text,”<sup>51</sup> al-Rāzī links this whole section on the eschatological fate of the believers and disbelievers to v. 16 which marks the mocking rejection of resurrection. Al-Rāzī’s initial remark on how this section fits with the surah theme is worth quoting in full. Al-Rāzī observes the following:

Having narrated the Quraysh chiefs’ mockery against the prophet, their accusation of him of being a magician and liar and their scornful statement “Our Lord, hasten for us our share of punishment,” [v. 16] God commanded Muḥammad to exercise patience in the face of this disdain. Furthermore, God showed that this patience is necessary from two perspectives. First, as God revealed that the previous prophets were patient when confronted with similar misfortune and difficulties, the prophet must follow their lead in this sense. Second, showing that obeying God entitles one to rewards and disobeying God leads one to punishment makes one bear God’s obligations with patience. This is a fine *naẓm* and a subtle arrangement.<sup>52</sup>

Connecting this penultimate section of the surah to the central problem of *jadāl* in the first section is very telling. It clearly illustrates al-Rāzī’s recognition of the flow and development of the central argument in the surah. However, the content of this section is

<sup>50</sup> Mustansir Mir, “The Surah as a Unity: A Twentieth Century Development in Qur’ān exegesis,” in *Approaches to the Qur’ān*, ed. Hawting G. R. and Shareef, Abdel Kader A. (New York: Routledge, 1993), 212.

<sup>51</sup> Michel Cuypers, *The Banquet: A Reading of the Fifth Sura of the Qur’an*, trans. Patricia Kelly. Miami (FL: Convivium Press, 2009), 500.

<sup>52</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṣin al-Ghayb*, 26:190.

“اعلم أنه تعالى لما حكى عن كفار قريش سفاهتهم على النبي ﷺ بأن وصفوه بأنه ساحر كذاب، وقالوا له على سبيل الاستهزاء { رَبَّنَا عَجَلْنَا لَنَا قِطْعًا } { ص: 16 } فعند هذا أمر محمدًا بالصبر على تلك السفاهة، وبين أن ذلك الصبر لازم من وجهين الأول: أنه تعالى لما بين أن الأنبياء المتقدمين صبروا على المكروه والشدائد، فيجب عليك أن تقتدي بهم في هذا المعنى الثاني: أنه تعالى بين في هذه الآية أن من أطاع الله كان له من الثواب كذا وكذا، ومن خالفه كان له من العقاب كذا وكذا، وكل ذلك يوجب الصبر على تكاليف الله تعالى، وهذا نظم حسن وترتيب لطيف.”



dialectically related to al-Rāzī's emphasis on the central role of *ikmāl al-nāqiṣīn*. In his *Maṭālib al-Āliyah*, al-Rāzī makes a connection precisely between this moral function of the prophet and the Qur'anic way of argumentation. While Oliver Leaman points to the idea that the Qur'ān uses a whole variety of "weaker forms of arguments,"<sup>53</sup> al-Rāzī, follows Ibn Sīna and explains the Qur'anic way of argumentation in light of the role of the prophet and the wider audience of the Qur'ān.<sup>54</sup> According to al-Rāzī, one of the dialectical corollaries of the task of the moral elevation of others is that a prophet should refrain from presenting his teachings in the way of the partisans of disputations (*ahl al-jadal*) who attracts nothing but agitations (*mushāghabāt*) and counter-arguments (*mujādālāt*). Al-Rāzī adds that a prophet is expected to amalgamate demonstrative proofs with rhetorical proofs, such as enticement and intimidation (*targhīb wa tarhīb*). When these two different ways of proofs coalesce into one discourse, al-Rāzī continues, the impact on the recipients' hearts is greater, and the distance between the prophets and any impropriety is larger.<sup>55</sup>

#### Section Four (65-88)

A. (65) [Prophet] say, 'I am only here to give warning. There is no god but God the One, the All Powerful, (66) Lord of the heavens and earth and everything between, the Almighty, the Most Forgiving.' (67) Say, 'This message is a mighty one, (68) yet you ignore it. (69) I have no knowledge of what those on high discuss: (70) it is only revealed to me that I am here to give clear warning.'

B. (71) Your Lord said to the angels, 'I will create a man from clay. (72) When I have shaped him and breathed from My Spirit into him, bow down before him.' (73) The angels all bowed down together, (74) but not Iblis, who was too proud. He became a rebel. (75) God said, 'Iblis, what prevents you from bowing down to the man I have made with My own hands? Are you too high and mighty?' (76) Iblis said, 'I am better than him: You made me from fire, and him from clay.' (77) 'Get out of here! You are rejected: (78) My rejection will follow you till the Day of Judgement!' (79) but Iblis said, 'My Lord, grant me respite until the Day when they are raised from the dead,' (80) so He said, 'You have respite (81) till the Appointed Day.' (82) Iblis said, 'I swear by Your might! I

<sup>53</sup> Oliver Leaman, *The Qur'ān: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Oliver Leaman (London/New York: Routledge, 2008), 63.

<sup>54</sup> Ayman Shihadeh, *Aspects of the Reception of Avicenna's Theory of Prophecy in Islamic Theology*, 27-28.

<sup>55</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Al-Maṭālib al-Āliyah*, 8:116.

'يكون تأثيره في القلوب أكمل و يكون بعد السامعين عن سوء الأدب— الذي يحصل بسبب المشاغبات— أتم.'

will tempt all (83) but Your true servants.’ (84) God said, ‘This is the truth- I speak only the truth- (85) I will fill Hell with you and all those that follow you.’

C. (86) [Prophet], say, ‘I ask no reward from you for this, nor do I claim to be what I am not: (87) this is only a warning for all people. (88) In time you will certainly come to know its truth.’

In his preliminary interpretation of the last section, al-Rāzī pauses to remind his readers of the dialectical progression of meaning from the beginning to the end of the surah. Al-Rāzī explains the development of the arguments in the surah as a whole:

Know that when God almighty mentioned in the outset of the surah that Muḥammad called people unto the belief that ‘there is no god but Allah (*tawhīd*), and that Muḥammad is a God-sent prophet (*nubuwwah*), and that resurrection is true (*ma‘ād*); those disbelievers displayed their derision, called him a magician and liar and ridiculed him. Thereafter God almighty mentioned some narratives of the prophets for two reasons: (1) to motivate Muḥammad to follow the prophets’ model and prove patient in the face of his people’s sarcasm and (2) to serve as a deterrent from their persistence on disbelief and mockery and as a motivation to accept faith. Having given these details, God almighty went back to corroborate the issues listed in the beginning of the surah; that is, *tawhīd*, *nubuwwāt*, and *ma‘ād* by saying “say O Muḥammad, I am but a warner and it is incumbent to affirm that there is no god but the One, the All-Powerful.” The sound arrangement [of arguments] requires mentioning the opponents’ objections first, followed by a riposte. Thereafter proofs for the original argument are provided. This is what was done here [in this surah]. God answered their objections and riveted the attention to their false statements. Then He offered proofs for the veracity of the original arguments— simply because removing the undesirable is given preference over affirming the desirable and cleansing the tablet from the wrong inscriptions is prioritized over writing right inscriptions. Whoever ponders on this arrangement would acknowledge that the discourse, from the beginning to the end of the surah, appeared in the best forms of organization and order.”<sup>56</sup>

This passage reveals al-Rāzī’s interest in finding the central argument of the surah to demonstrate how the Qur’anic argumentation develops in a clearly dialectical manner. Here, al-Rāzī views the last section of the surah as a direct rejoinder to the theological triad presented in

<sup>56</sup>Ibid, 195.

“اعلم أنه تعالى لما حكى في أول السورة أن محمداً ﷺ لما دعا الناس إلى أنه لا إله إلا الله واحد، وإلى أنه رسول مبین من عند الله، وإلى أن القول بالقيامة حق، فأولئك الكفار أظهروا السفاهة وقالوا إنه ساحر كذاب واستهزؤا بقوله، ثم إنه تعالى ذكر قصص الأنبياء لوجهين الأول: ليصير ذلك حاملاً لحمد ﷺ على الناسي بالأنبياء عليهم السلام في الصبر على سفاهة القوم والثاني: ليصير ذلك رادعاً للكفار على الإصرار على الكفر والسفاهة وداعياً إلى قبول الإيمان، ولما تم الله تعالى هذه البيانات عاد إلى تقرير المطالب المذكورة في أول السورة وهي تقدير التوحيد والنبوة والبعث، فقال قل يا محمد إنما أنا منذر ولا بد من الإفراج بأنه ما من إله إلا الله الواحد القهار، فإن الترتيب الصحيح أن تذكر شبهات الخصوم أولاً ويجاب عنها ثم تذكر عقبيها الدلائل الدالة على صحة المطلوب، فكأننا ههنا أجاب الله تعالى عن شبهتهم ونبه على فساد كلامهم، ثم ذكر عقبيه ما يدل على صحة هذه المطالب، لأن إزالة ما لا ينبغي مقدمة على إثبات ما ينبغي، وغسل اللوح من النقوش الفاسدة مقدم على كتب النقوش الصحيحة فيه، ومن نظر في هذا الترتيب اعترف بأن الكلام من أول السورة إلى آخرها قد جاء على أحسن وجوه الترتيب والنظم.”

the beginning of the surah. In other words, the dialectical problems in the first section are followed by two sections that respond to the Quraysh chiefs who adopt an arrogant and contemptuous tone. As mentioned earlier, part of the treatment of the surah in response to the Quraysh attitude is the reminder about the prophets' narratives and the future fate of the two disputing camps. According to al-Rāzī, this Qur'anic treatment of the Quraysh arrogance is directed at both camps: (1) at the prophet so he may find comfort and take the preceding prophets as models for patience, leading to the prophetic function of *ikmāl al-nāqīṣīn* being successfully fulfilled and (2) at the Quraysh chiefs so they may rethink their position and come to faith.

However, al-Rāzī sees the last section as the actual message from the prophet to the Quraysh chiefs. This is actually the first time Muḥammad gets the opportunity to respond to the detractors of his prophecy office. Relying on the rhyme rather than the theme, Richard Bell assumes that 67-88 may seem to be in itself a unity but it appears “in a different rhyme and does not properly belong to it.”<sup>57</sup> Similarly, Angelica Neuwirth adds that the eschatological passage on heaven and hell is in line with the standard closure of a surah. She adds that the subsequent section (Q. 38:67-68), when judged by its rhyme and rhythm, “distinctly deviates from the text that precedes it”.<sup>58</sup> However, Angelica Neuwirth seems to suggest that this diachronic observation does not prevent a meaningful synchronic reading of the surah's final form. She suggests that the new closing of the surah fits well with its overall theme of “arguing”—a theme on which al-Rāzī based his reading of the surah. Regarding the thematic function of (Q. 38:67-68), Neuwirth observes:

---

<sup>57</sup> Richard Bell, *The Qur'ān Translated with a Critical Re-arrangement of the Surahs* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1960), 2:450.

<sup>58</sup> Angelika Neuwirth, “Negotiating Justice: A Pre-Canonical Reading of the Qur'anic Creation Accounts (Part I),” *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 2, no. 1 (2000): 34.

It may have been linked to further underline a central idea of the sūra, indeed to supply a heavenly prototype (Q. 38:69) for the ambivalent activity of arguing which appears as the leitmotiv of the whole sūra. In view of the prevailing dissent (*shiqāq*) among the unbelievers, dispute is observable over and again, it is thus not surprising that the notion *khuṣūmah* (strife, argument) constitutes the ‘musical key’ to the whole sūra.<sup>59</sup>

Neuwirth’s observation was also voiced by Ibn al-Qayyim (d. 751/1350) who finds a connection between the sound *ṣād* and the prevailing tone of *khuṣūmah* in the surah. He observes the following:

Ponder the variety of disputes encompassed in Surah Ṣād: it commences with the prophet’s dispute with the disbelievers who said “did he make the gods one? (v. 5), then another dispute between David’s contenders, then a disputation among the people in the hellfire, then a dispute among the Highest Assembly with regard to knowledge ... and finally the Devil’s disputation with his Lord and the refusal to prostrate before Adam, and then the Devil’s related dispute with regard to the seduction of Adam’s descendants except for the sincere amongst them.<sup>60</sup>

More than a century before Ibn al-Qayyim, al-Rāzī reads the last section as symmetrically resonating with the argumentation, not the redaction activity or sound, of the surah. Based on his dialectical reading of the first section of the surah, al-Rāzī considers *taqlīd* and the lack of *naẓr* as the underlying cause of the religious opposition against Muḥammad. In accordance of his identification of these theological problems, al-Rāzī reads Muḥammad’s response as deliberately designed to awaken the Quraysh chiefs to a thoughtful consideration of faith. In this three-part section (65-88), al-Rāzī identifies one dominant theme that permeates the whole section; that is, the indispensability of absolute precaution (*iḥtiyāt*) in discussing sublime theological queries (*al-maṭālib al-‘āliyah*).<sup>61</sup>

---

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>60</sup> Ibn al-Qayyim, *Badā’i ‘al-Fawā’id* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1994), 3:134.

"تأمل ما اشتملت عليه سورة ص من الخصومات المتعددة ، فأولها خصومة النبي ﷺ مع الكفار ، وقولهم : أجعل الآلهة إلها واحدا ( ص:5) إلى آخر كلامهم . ثم اختصاص الخصمين عند داود ، ثم تخاصم أهل النار ، ثم اختصاص الملأ الأعلى في العلم و هو الدرجات و الكفارات ثم مخاصمة إبليس و اعتراضه على ربه في أمره بالسجود لآدم ثم خصامه ثانيا في شأن بنيه و حلقه ليغويهم أجمعين إلا أهل الإخلاص منهم."

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 34.

In effect, when al-Rāzī argues that the last section is a call for a theological *iḥtiyāt*, he actually means that the Qurʾān is urging the contemporaneous adversaries of the prophet to temporarily abandon their proud assumption that they are right and to seriously consider the case of Muḥammad. Essentially this call for *iḥtiyāt* is equivalent to speaking against *taqlīd* and calling for logical reasoning. Another possible meaning for al-Rāzī’s use of *iḥtiyāt* is the notion of taking “the best bet.” In other words, due to the serious consequences of disbelief, al-Rāzī argues that a rational agent is expected to act as though the One God exists and that resurrection will surely occur. In his commentary on “To Him is your return,” (Q. 10:4), al-Rāzī provides twelve arguments for the afterlife—the eighth of which is *ṭarīqat al-iḥtiyāt*. His formulation of this argument serves as one of the early precursors to decision theory or Pascal’s Wager and as an early connection between probability theory and philosophy of religion.<sup>62</sup> Al-Rāzī writes the following:

The Precautionary Way: if believing in, and preparing for, the afterlife turned out to be the true school of thought “*madhhab*,” we would be saved and the denier ruined. However, if turned out to be false, this faith would not cause us any harm. In the final analysis, it could be argued that we would miss the physical pleasures. However, we say that a rational agent is not to worry about missing these pleasures for two reasons. First, they are very vile since it is equally shared by and beetles, worms, and donkeys. Second, they are temporary and short-lived. Therefore, *iḥtiyāt* sides with nothing but faith in the life to come. For that reason, a poet [Abū al-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī] says: “Both astrologers and physician say: the dead are not to be resurrected.” To that I responded, stay away from me. If you are right, I lose nothing; if I am right, you are the losers.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>62</sup> M. Asin Palacios (a Spanish scholar of Islamic Studies, d. 1944) gives precedents to Pascal’s Wager in Muslim writers like al-Ghazālī. See Palacios, “Los precedentes musulmanes del Pari de Pascal,” *Boletín de la Biblioteca Menéndez y Pelayo Santander II* (1920): 171-232. Among other three articles, this article was republished in Palacios’ book *Huellas del Islam*. For a review of the four articles, see A. R. Nykl, “Huellas del Islam by Miguel Asin Palacios,” *Isis* 33, no. 4 (December, 1941): 539-544.

<sup>63</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṣin al-Ghayb*, 17:20. For al-Rāzī’s employment of *iḥtiyāt*, see *Al-Maḥāṣin al-‘Āliyah*, 1:272 and 7:226-227. In the *Maḥāṣin*, al-Rāzī lists the argument from *iḥtiyāt* as evidence for the divine unity and acceptance of the divine law. However, he considers this argument to be part of the *iqnā’* (speculative) not *qaṭ’* (definitive) proofs. To validate his *iqnā’* arguments, al-Rāzī posits many speculative proofs could amount to the certainty level of a definitive proof. See al-Rāzī, *Al-Maḥāṣin al-‘Āliyah*, 1:239.

الحجة الثامنة: طريقة الاحتياط، فإن إذا آمننا بالمعاد وتأهبنا له، فإن كان هذا المذهب حقاً، فقد نجونا وهلك المنكر، وإن كان باطلاً، لم يضرنا هذا الاعتقاد. غاية ما في الباب أن يقال إنه تفوتنا هذه اللذات الجسمانية إلا أنا نقول يجب على العاقل أن لا يبالي بفوتها لأمرين أحدهما: أنها في غاية الحساسية لأنها مشترك فيها بين الخنافس والديدان والكلاب. والثاني: أنها منقطعة سريعة الزوال. فثبت أن الاحتياط ليس إلا في الإيمان بالمعاد، ولهذا قال الشاعر:

Long before al-Rāzī, al-Ghazālī presents the same insight on the ephemeral nature of this life. Instead of *iḥtiyāṭ*, al-Ghazālī uses the term *ṭarīq al-amn* (the safe path) or being on the safe side. Along with quoting Abū al-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī (d. 449/1057), al-Ghazālī also quotes ‘Alī who once said to an interlocutor: “If what you said was right, all of us would be saved; otherwise, I get saved, and you get ruined.”<sup>64</sup>

Al-Rāzī does not intend this argument to convey logic of fear but a reason to take faith more seriously. For instance, al-Rāzī reads v. 65, “[Prophet] say, ‘I am only here to give warning. There is no god but God the One, the All Powerful,” as a direct symmetrical response to v. 5 “How would he make the gods to be but one God? Surely this is an astonishing thing.”<sup>65</sup> In his view, the epithet *al-Qahhār* (irresistible subduer) is carefully chosen to counter the belief in multiple gods who, by virtue of this epithet, are subdued, and thereby deserving no right to divinity.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, al-Rāzī reads vv. 67-68, “Say, this message is a mighty one, yet you ignore it,” as a response to the problem of *taqlīd* and as a call for handling matters of faith with a greater degree of seriousness.<sup>67</sup> In his commentary on v. 68, al-Rāzī explains the theological function of the verse:

Know that His statement “Say, this message is a mighty one, (68) yet you ignore it” is an encouragement for rational reasoning (*naẓar*) and dialectical demonstration (*istidlāl*) and a deterrent from the uncritical acceptance of religious views (*taqlīd*)—simply because these are highly noble queries. Regarding these queries, one could have the right position and thereby gain the greatest bliss or follow the wrong path and consequently fall into the abyss of misery. That is why; these dialectical interrogations constitute weighty messages

---

قال المنجم والطبيب كلاهما لا تخشع الأممات قلت إلكما  
إن صح لكما فلست بخاسر أو صح فوئي فإخسار عليكما

<sup>64</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn* (Jeddah: Dār al-Minhāj, 2011), 7:195.

إن صح ما قلت فقد تخلصنا جميعا وإلا فقد تخلصت وهلكت

<sup>65</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, 26:195.

كما بدأ في أول السورة بأدلة التوحيد حيث حكى عنهم أنهم قالوا “أَجْعَلْ آلِهَةً إِلَٰهًا وَجِدًا” [ص: 5] فكذلك بدأ ههنا بتقرير التوحيد فقال: “وَمَا مِنْ إِلَٰهٍ إِلَّا اللَّهُ الْوَحْدُ الْقَهَّارُ”

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 195.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 196.

and subtle inquiries. Pure reason obligates one to be totally cautious, not recklessly careless.<sup>68</sup>

Similarly, al-Rāzī presents the disputes among the Highest Council (*al-mala' al-a'la*) in v. 69 as a deterrent from *taqlīd*. There is a *takhāṣum* (disputation) in this verse, which reads “I have no knowledge of the Highest Council when they disputed.” Al-Rāzī interprets this disputation as a reference to the angels’ questions about the purpose of human creation.<sup>69</sup> In his opinion, the angels’ conversation with God is not a blasphemous “disputation” against God. Since this conversation takes the form of questions and answers, al-Rāzī argues, it is metaphorically referred to as “disputation.”

But, how does this incident contribute to a call for the serious consideration of theological reasoning? To answer this question, al-Rāzī dialectically analyzes the intent of the divine conversation as an antidote to *taqlīd*.<sup>70</sup> Al-Rāzī pragmatically divides all creatures into four categories:

1. Those who possess reason (*'aql*) and wisdom (*ḥikmah*) yet with no carnal desires (*nafs or shahwah*): the angels
2. Those who possess the carnal desires (*nafs and shahwah*) yet with no reason or wisdom: the animals.
3. Those who possess none of these qualities: inanimate things (*jamādāt*)

---

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 196

"واعلم أن قوله: "أَنْتُمْ عَنْهُ مُعْرِضُونَ" ترغيب في النظر والاستدلال ومنع من التقليد، لأن هذه المطالب مطالب شريفة عالية، فإن بتقدير أن يكون الإنسان فيها على الحق يفوز بأعظم أبواب السعادة، وبتقدير أن يكون الإنسان فيها على الباطل وقع في أعظم أبواب الشقاوة فكانت هذه المباحث أبناء عظيمة ومطالب عالية بمية، وصريح العقل يوجب على الإنسان أن يأتي فيها بالاحتياط التام وأن لا يكتفي بالمساهلة والمساهمة."

<sup>69</sup>Ibid, 198.

قصة سؤال الملائكة عن الحكمة في تخلق البشر يدل على أن الحكمة الأصلية في تخلق آدم هو المعرفة والطاعة لا الجهل والتكبر

<sup>70</sup>Ibid, 197.

"ولما أمر الله تعالى محمدًا ﷺ لم يذكر هذا الكلام على سبيل الرمز أمره أن يقول: "إن يوحى إليّ إنّ أنّما أنا نذيرٌ مُبينٌ " يعني أنا ما عرفت هذه المخاصمة إلا بالوحي، وإنما أوحى الله إليّ هذه القصة لأنذركم بما ولنصير هذه القصة حاملة لكم على الإخلاص في الطاعة والاحتراز عن الجهل والتقليد."

4. Those who possess all these qualities of reasons and desires: humans.<sup>71</sup>

Based on this classification, al-Rāzī goes on to elaborate on the purpose of human creation and how this purpose stimulates one to embrace rational reasoning and abandon religious conformity. Al-Rāzī's dialectical explanation of human creation and the way it fits into enhancing the purpose of the surah as a whole is worth citing in full:

The purpose of human creation does not lie in attaining ignorance, conformity to the predecessors' views (*taqlīd*), arrogance or rebellion because these are bestial qualities. Rather, the purpose of human creation is the actualization of gnosis, wisdom, and obedience. God's statement 'I know what you do not know' means that [humans] as a type of creation, not merely have the desires that lead to corruption and the anger that motivates blood-shedding but also the intellect ('aql) that calls them to gnosis, love, obedience and service. Given that this was God's reply to the angels, it is incumbent on man to earnestly seek these qualities and abandon the path of ignorance, conformity to unexamined views, intransigence and haughtiness. Consequently, one's recognition of this incident will make one more encouraged to seek real knowledge more earnestly and deeply. In addition, the acquisition of noble virtues will deter one from the opposites and antipodes of these qualities. For this reason, God almighty mentioned this statement in this context.<sup>72</sup>

In the same vein, Gwynne posits that the Qur'anic concept of a covenant between God and man serves as "the cosmic rule, the unshakable basis for the structure of moral reasoning that God requires of human beings."<sup>73</sup>

Following the theme of opposition against *taqlīd*, al-Rāzī considers the Satan's disputation with Adam (71-83) to be triggered primarily by arrogance and evil envy (*ḥasad*); therefore, he reasons that this disputation relates to the disputation between the Quraysh chiefs

---

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 197. Al-Rāzī also mentioned these four categories in his *Kitāb al-Nafs wa al-Rūḥ*. See al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-Nafs wa al-Rūḥ wa Sharḥ Quwāhumā fī 'Ilm al-Akhlāq*, ed. 'Abd Allāh Ismā'īl (Cairo: Al-Maktabah al-Azhariyyah lī al-Turāth, 2013), 83-84; and idem, *Asrār al-Tanzīl wa Anwār al-Ta'wīl* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 2011), 404.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 197.

"المقصود من تخليق الإنسان ليس هو الجهل والتقليد والتكبر والتمرد فإن كل ذلك صفات البهائم والسياس بل المقصود من تخليقه ظهور العلم والحكمة والطاعة، فقله "إِنِّي أَعْلَمُ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ" يعني أن هذا النوع من المخلوقات، وإن حصلت فيه الشهوة الداعية إلى الفساد والغضب الحامل له على سفك الدماء، لكن حصل فيه العقل الذي يدعو إلى المعرفة والخبرة والطاعة والخدمة، وإذا ثبت أنه تعالى إنما أجاب الملائكة بهذا الجواب وجب على الإنسان أن يسعى في تحصيل هذه الصفات، وأن يجتهد في اكتسابها، وأن يحترز عن طريقة الجهل والتقليد والإصرار والتكبر، وإذا كان كذلك فكل من وقف على كيفية هذه الواقعة صار وقوفه عليها داعياً له إلى الجهد والاجتهاد في اكتساب المعارف الحقة والأخلاق الفاضلة زاجراً له عن أضدادها ومقابلتها، فلهذا السبب ذكر الله تعالى هذا الكلام في هذا المقام."

<sup>73</sup> Rosalind W Gwynne, *Logic, Rhetoric and Legal Reasoning in the Qur'an: God's Arguments* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 24.



and Muḥammad as captured in v. 16.<sup>74</sup> In other words, both the Quraysh chiefs and Satan share the same roots of rebellion against God’s message. In the words of Neuwirth, Iblīs is presented “as the prototype for the arrogant behavior of the opponents.”<sup>75</sup>

Along similar lines, the last section of the surah (86-88) makes the case that Muḥammad deserves a more serious consideration, thereby encouraging the Quraysh chiefs to adopt a more logical method of engagement. Al-Rāzī interprets the three verses as encouraging reasoning in relation to the messenger (Muḥammad) and his message (the essential elements of the faith). The verses close in a warning against abandoning logical reasoning (*naẓar*). The following is a chart that reveals al-Rāzī’s interpretation of the closing of the surah:

Verse	Commentary
(86) [O Prophet], say, “I ask no reward from you for this, nor do I claim to be what I am not ( <i>mutakallifīn</i> ).”	With regard to Muḥammad’s personal traits, he is not a liar who seeks worldly benefits. In addition, the message has no <i>takalluf</i> ; that is, it is characterized by simplicity and lack of complexities since it is based on eight rational principles: (1) the existence of God, (2) His holiness, (3) His perfect attributes of knowledge, power, wisdom and mercy; (4) being beyond associates, (5) no idolatry, (6) exalting the pure souls like those of the angels and the prophets, (7) Judgment day for

<sup>74</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṣin al-Ghayb*, 26:198.

<sup>75</sup> Angelika Neuwirth, “Negotiating Justice: Part I, 35.

إبليس إنما خاصم آدم عليه السلام لأجل الحسد والكبر فيجب على العاقل أن يحترز عنهما

	absolute justice, and (8) forsaking the worldly life and aspiring for the afterlife.
(87) This is only a warning for all people.	Every rational agent testifies to the correctness and splendor of these principles.
(88) In time you will certainly come to know its truth.	If you persist in accepting the unexamined teachings ( <i>taqlīd</i> ) and ignorance and refuse these statements, there will come a Day when you will see whether your rejection was right or wrong.

Al-Rāzī’s interpretation of the aforementioned concluding verses is in line with his preference for proving prophecy through the notion of *ikmāl al-nāqīṣīn*, and not through the argument of miracles. In the *Matālib*, al-Rāzī goes further in using the message and impact of the prophets, as opposed to their miracles, as a criterion for determining who the best is among them. Relying on Muḥammad’s theological message and its impact on other faiths, al-Rāzī singles out Muḥammad as the prophet who enjoys the highest rank. Furthermore, al-Rāzī’s identification of the rational aspects in the Qur’anic message motivates him to reveal that the power of the Qur’ān not only resides in the form (*lafẓ*) (as the *i’jāz* theorists did) but also in the content (*ma’nā*). Al-Rāzī’s treatment of the argumentative discourse of surah 38 (Ṣād) supports Erlwein’s conclusion that al-Rāzī utilizes *tafsīr* to demonstrate that the “mutakallimūn’s rational arguments have their origin in Qur’anic forms of argumentation” and that “the Qur’an itself is essentially a rational

text that not only addresses itself to people’s ability to reason but even calls them to make use of this ability.”<sup>76</sup>

Before moving to Surah 46, it is important to highlight here that combatting *taqlīd* and encouraging *naẓar* through the exegetical tradition is also a Mu‘tazilite trend. In light of this, there is a high probability that al-Rāzī’s familiarity with Mu‘tazilite *tafsīr* influences his exegetical strategies. One of the most significant surviving Mu‘tazilite commentaries is that of al-Ḥākim al-Jashmī (d. 494/), a close student of al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār and one of the teachers of al-Zamakhsharī, is also interested in the thematic connections between the surah passages as manifested in his *al-Taḥdhīb fī al-Tafsīr*. In his commentary on surah 38, al-Jashmī highlights many verses that condemns *taqlīd* and calls for *naẓar* and *istidlāl*. This does not necessarily suggest that al-Rāzī was directly influenced by al-Ḥākim al-Jushamī but points to the likelihood that al-Rāzī’s approach is cultivated within the context of an intellectual engagement with the Mu‘tazilite literature that was available to him. The shared interest in defending *naẓar* in al-Jushamī’s *Tahdhīb* and al-Rāzī’s *Maḥāṣin al-Ghayb* can possibly be due to the reliance of these two exegetes on the Mu‘tazilite Abū Muslim al-Ḥafḥānī (d. 322/934), who is noted for his commentary *Jāmi‘ al-Ta’wīl lī Muḥkam al-Tanzīl*— a work that is still extinct; however, parts of it are preserved in al-Rāzī’s commentary.

Al-Jushamī’s interest in endorsing *naẓar* throughout his commentary gives us a taste of what Mu‘tazilite exegetes prioritize. For instance, commenting on “They wonder that a warner from among themselves hath come unto them. And the unbelievers said, this man is a magician, and a liar. How would he make the gods to be but one God? Surely this is an astonishing thing,” (Q. 38: 4-5) al-Jushamī observes that these verses “pinpoint the ugliness of *taqlīd* that turns the

---

<sup>76</sup> Hannah C. Erlwein, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī on the Question ‘Why Worship God?’, *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 21, no. 2 (2019): 39.

ugly into good and the far into near.”<sup>77</sup> Similarly, al-Jushamī interprets the subsequent verses to underline “the invalidity of *taqlīd* and the obligation of rational reasoning” (*fasād al-taqlīd wa wujūb al-naẓar*).<sup>78</sup> With regard to the disputations among the partisans of hellfire in Q. 38: 55-61, al-Jushamī provides his readers with a theological advice (*maw‘īzah*):

This proves that the dwellers of the hell-fire will curse each other, the leaders will disavow the followers and the followers will disavow the leaders. In effect, this is a warning against *taqlīd*, an encouragement to follow evidence, and an indication that any friendship that is not founded on faith will be followed by animosity.<sup>79</sup>

## 1.2 Surah 46 (Al-Aḥqāf) and the Major Kalam Themes of the Qur’ān

As discussed earlier, al-Rāzī frequently relies on a dialectical reading of the surah grounded in the theological trilogy of the divine unity (*tawḥīd*), Muḥammad’s prophecy (*nubuwwah*) and resurrection (*ma‘ād*). Another instance of the theological reading of the Qur’ān is found in his discussion about Q. 2:21-25.<sup>80</sup> One major function of this kind of dialectical reading in al-Rāzī’s exegetical project is to highlight the necessity of giving primacy to the theological (*uṣūl*) over the legal (*furū‘*) dimension of the Qur’ān. This exegetical motivation brings into focus the contested dichotomy between rational theology and legal authority. It is worthwhile to note here that the notion of a theological trilogy, which explains the arrangement of some sections in the surah is also found in al-Jushamī’s commentary. However, this technique is more systematically utilized in al-Rāzī’s exegesis.

To illustrate that the confluence of the divine unity, prophecy and resurrection explains the arrangement of some surahs, we will examine how al-Rāzī approaches the structure of surah 46 (*al-Aḥqāf*). Richard Bell starts his brief notes on the disconnectedness of surah with the

<sup>77</sup> Al-Ḥākim al-Jushamī, *al-Tahdhīb fī al-Tafsīr* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Miṣrī/Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnānī, 2019), 8:5971.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 8:5975.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 8:6018.

و تدل على أن أهل النار يلعن بعضهم بعضا و يتبرأ القادة من الأتباع و الأتباع من القادة تحذيرا من التقليد و حثا على اتباع الأدلة و أن كل صداقة في غير الدين تقب العداوة.

<sup>80</sup> See al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb*, 2:80-103; and idem, *‘Ajā‘ib al-Qur’ān*, 4-8.

assertion: “That this surah is not all of a piece is acknowledged.”<sup>81</sup> Moreover, he states that vv. 6-7 connect better with v.2, vv. 14-17 are of different character than the rest of the surah, vv. 26-27 are puzzling, 28-31 stand unconnected, 32-35 stand isolated.<sup>82</sup> However, based on a careful reading of al-Rāzī’s discussions on the thematic connections of the surah, the following chart shows the structural architecture of the surah as a whole.

**Section One: Introduction (1-3)**

Section Two: Doubts on Divine Unity (4-6)

Section Three: Doubts on the Qur’ān and Muḥammad’s prophecy: (7-12)

Section Four: Two different Responses to Divine Unity (13-16 and 17-20)

Section Five: Two different Responses to Prophecy (21-26 and 27-32)

Section Six: Affirming the afterlife (33-34)

**Section Seven: Closure: (35)**

Al-Rāzī uses the introduction of the surah to support his dialectical approach. In this typical way, he identifies many allusions that call for logical reasoning and critical thinking early on in the surah. Furthermore, he observes that the prologues in both surah 45 and 46 share the same purpose of awakening one’s mind to the duty of pondering.

**Section One: A Dialectical Setting:**

1. Ḥāmīm
2. This Scripture is sent down from God, the Almighty, the Wise.
3. It was for a true purpose (*bī al-ḥaqq*) and a specific term that We created heaven and earth and everything in between, yet those who deny the truth ignore (*mu’ridūn*) the warning they have been given.

<sup>81</sup> Richard Bell, *The Qur’ān Translated*, 2:507.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:507.

Al-Rāzī focuses on the Qur’anic notion that everything is purposefully created (*bī al-ḥaqq*). But going further, al-Rāzī extends the meaning of the phrase *bī al-ḥaqq* to mean that the signs of God in this universe are to be known through rational proofs, not mere scriptural references (*dalīl naqlī*). In surah 45, al-Rāzī argues that the veracity of scriptural proof-texts is essentially contingent on the rational demonstration of the divine attributes like knowledge, power and wisdom and the rational proofs of prophecy and how miracles point to the authenticity of a prophecy claim. These three principles, al-Rāzī continues, cannot be verified by scriptural proofs; otherwise, a *dawr* (circular reasoning) will necessarily follow. Therefore, al-Rāzī concludes that recognizing God’s signs, which point to divine unity, prophecy and miracles, can be only attained through pure reason (*maḥḍ al-‘aql*).<sup>83</sup> In this way, al-Rāzī establishes that the phrase *bī al-ḥaqq* enables people to reach God through a rational examination of His signs in creation. According to him, the *ḥaqq*-based creation is “one of the greatest indications that encourage pursuing theology studies and corroborating rational issues.”<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, he explains the blameworthy *i’rād* (ignoring the warnings) in v. 3 as a confirmation that logical reasoning is mandatory, and that ignoring the *dalīl* is reprehensible (*mathmūm*).

In surah 46, al-Rāzī adds a moral dimension to the *ḥaqq*-based creation. He argues that the idea that the world came into being with *ḥaqq* indicates that the creator must be just and merciful, because *bī al-ḥaqq*, can also mean “for the sake of bestowing grace, mercy and benevolence.” This interpretation is a good example of the sunnization of Mu‘tazilite exegesis. Al-Rāzī quotes the Mu‘tazilite al-Jubbā’ī, who utilizes the contradiction between the *ḥaqq*-based creation and the ascription of evil to God to support the Mu‘tazilite position that God does not create evil, and that any evil on earth can only be ascribed to humans. In response, al-Rāzī adopts

---

<sup>83</sup> This is a typical argument that al-Rāzī always brings forth to give reason primacy over revelation.

<sup>84</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṣin al-Ghayb*, 27:223.

the Mu‘tazilite interpretation with an Ash‘arite twist. He reasons that since God is the eternal possessor and lord of sovereignty (*mālik al-mulk*), then all of his acts and decrees (*taṣarruf*) are *ḥaqq*-based. Al-Rāzī needs to interpret the phrase *bī al-ḥaqq* in this manner to set a perfect dialectical atmosphere for the whole surah. He explains that this phrase communicates the existence of a just deity and by extension the necessity of resurrection. Following Ibn Sīnā, al-Rāzī also views this dual corollary of *bī al-ḥaqq* as closely related to prophecy on the grounds that prophecy is a reflection of God’s providence and care (*‘ināyah*). In this way, *bī al-ḥaqq* serves as a preliminary note to the surah, which al-Rāzī reads as corroborating the theological triad of divine unity, prophecy and resurrection.

## Section Two: Doubts about Divine Unity

Having pinpointed these theological implications, al-Rāzī argues that the surah builds upon some ramifications (*tafāri‘*) of the theological affirmations embedded in the prologue of the surah.<sup>85</sup> With regard to the surah content, al-Rāzī remarks that the first section (*far‘*) deals with the issue of divine unity in vv. 4-6. Interestingly, al-Rāzī deals with the idolaters as adherents of a school of thought (*aṣḥāb madhhab*), whose objections to Qur’anic arguments are implicitly considered in a way that only dialecticians can detect.

4. Say, [O Muḥammad], “Have you considered that which you invoke besides Allah? Show me what they have created of the earth; or did they have partnership in [creation of] the heavens? Bring me a scripture [revealed] before this or a [remaining] trace of knowledge, if you should be truthful.”
5. And who is more astray than he who invokes besides Allah those who will not respond to him until the Day of Resurrection [i.e., never], and they, of their invocation, are unaware.
6. Those who, when all mankind is gathered, will become his enemies and disown his worship?

---

<sup>85</sup> The use of *tafāri‘* here is very telling because it indicates that al-Rāzī views the surah as an advanced text in kalam where *tafāri‘* are encouraged. This kalam writing technique is reflected in al-Rāzī’s *al-Maṭālib al-‘Āliyah* and *Nihāyat al-‘Uqūl fī Dirāyat al-Uṣūl*. Two centuries after al-Rāzī, Ibn Khaldūn proposes a classification of the branches of knowledge in Muslim tradition in light their value. In Ibn Khaldūn’s view, some areas of study have instrumental values (*‘ulūm al-ālah*), where *tafāri‘* are discouraged as in the case of grammar; whereas other areas have intrinsic value (*maqṣūdah lī thātihā*), where *tafāri‘* are encouraged as in the case kalam.

According to al-Rāzī, the initial part of v. 4 “Show me what they have created of the earth; or did they have partnership in [creation of] the heavens” is a robust riposte to idolatry. He argues that explains that worship is the ultimate form of exaltation (*ta'zīm*) which befits only the ultimate source of blessings (*man ṣadara 'anhu al-in'ām*). In this way, he reasons that worship is to be offered only to the real Creator, and not to the idols.<sup>86</sup> In dealing with the surah content as a dialectical disputation, he imagines that the idolaters could counterargue: idol-worship is not motivated by the belief that idols deserve worship but by the divine command to honor the idols. With this potential objection in mind, al-Rāzī justifies the juxtaposition of the adjacent part in v. 4 “Bring me a scripture [revealed] before this or a [remaining] trace of knowledge, if you should be truthful,” which he sees as a response affirming that idolatry was not commanded in any previous scripture. Moreover, al-Rāzī argues that vv. 5-6 provide further evidence for the falsity (*buṭlān*) of the idolatry *madhhab*.

### Section Three: Doubts about Muḥammad’s Prophecy

Al-Rāzī goes on to state that this quick demonstration of divine unity is followed by a list of objections that are indicative of the Meccans’ incertitude about Muḥammad’s prophecy.

7. When Our revelations are recited to them in all their clarity, the disbelievers say of the Truth that has reached them, ‘This is clearly sorcery,’
8. Or do they say, "He has invented it"? Say, "If I have invented it, you will not possess for me [the power of protection] from Allah at all. He is most knowing of that in which you are involved.<sup>1</sup> Sufficient is He as Witness between me and you, and He is the Forgiving, the Merciful."
9. Say, ‘I am nothing new among God’s messengers. I do not know what will be done with me or you; I only follow what is revealed to me; I only warn plainly.’
10. Say, ‘Have you thought: what if this Quran really is from God and you reject it? What if one of the Children of Israel testifies to its similarity [to earlier scripture] and believes in it, and yet you are too proud to [do the same]? God certainly does not guide evildoers.’

---

<sup>86</sup>Even though al-Rāzī here connects worship with divine attributes, Munich identifies passages where al-Rāzī connects worship with creation, thereby raising questions about the latter’s doctrine of occasionalism. See Hannah C. Erlwein, “Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī on the Question ‘Why Worship God?’” 39-67.



11. Those who disbelieve say of the believers, ‘If there were any good in this Quran, they would not have believed in it before we did,’ and, since they refuse to be guided by it, they say, ‘This is an ancient fabrication.’
12. And before it was the scripture of Moses to lead and as a mercy. And this is a confirming Book in an Arabic tongue to warn those who have wronged and as good tidings to the doers of good.

With regard to this passage on prophecy, al-Rāzī identifies four *shubuhāt* with which the section deals: (1) equating miracles with sorcery, (2) Muḥammad’s own composition of the Qur’ān, (3) requiring additional miracles, and (4) the poor followers of Muḥammad’s faith. These four *shubuhāt* are typical kalam questions. The passage does not take the first *shubhah* seriously. In surah 10, al-Rāzī considers the Quraysh’s view of the Qur’ān as magic in a positive sense. In his view, describing the Qur’ān as magic indicates that the disbelievers hold the Qur’ān in high esteem and that the Qur’ān is so miraculous for them that they fail to imitate it, and they thereby resort to such accusations.<sup>87</sup> This explains why the second *shubhah* starts with “*Or do they say, (am yaqūlūn),*” which means, according to al-Rāzī, “keep this (accusation of sorcery) aside and listen to this wondrous voice.”<sup>88</sup>

### Clues in the Context

The claim that Muḥammad authored the Qur’ān is handled in v. 8, which commands Muḥammad to say: “were I to author the Qur’ān and ascribe it to God, I would not be able to escape his immediate punishment.” In dealing with the surah as an argument, al-Rāzī shows great interest in trying to figure out the implicit questions that normally characterize a theological debate. In this way, the neighboring verses or units appear to make more sense dialectically and

<sup>87</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, 17:7.

وصف القرآن بأنه سحر يدل على عظم محل القرآن.  
"و اعلم أن وصف الكفار القرآن بكونه سحرا يدل على عظم محل القرآن عندهم و كونه معجرا و أنه تعذر عليهم فيه المعارضة فاحتاجوا إلى هذا الكلام."

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 17:7.

synchronously. For instance, al-Rāzī reads the formulaic addresses of “say” (*Qul*) as responses to implicit questions that must have been raised in debates between Quraysh and Muḥammad.

According to al-Rāzī, vv. 9-10 presuppose the Quraysh’s demands for miracles— which are met with a reminder of the prophet’s role in instructing and a reference to scriptural prophecies about Muḥammad in the Torah. He asserts that these two responses demand a dialectical explanation. With regard to miracles, al-Rāzī explains elsewhere the reason why these demands for miracle are not met. In addition to his emphasis on the futility of miracles for adamant disputants,<sup>89</sup> al-Rāzī argues that miracles must be limited in number. According to him, the very definition of a miracle defies the frequency of its occurrence. He explains that a miracle is “something that breaks the norm;” therefore, frequent breakings of norms will paradoxically transform the “miraculous” into the “normal.”<sup>90</sup>

As for the “witness” for Muḥammad’s prophecy in the Hebrew scripture, many exegetes identify the Jewish convert ‘Abd Allah ibn Salām to be the intended witness. However, al-Rāzī is fully aware that ibn Salām embraced Islam in Medina, whereas surah 46 is a Meccan surah. Due to this chronological discrepancy, al-Rāzī cites al-Sha‘bī and Masrūq in support of disassociating this incident from the verse under discussion. In addition, al-Rāzī quotes al-Kalbī, who tries to harmonize between associating the verse with ibn Salām and acknowledging surah 46 to be Meccan by stating that the juxtaposition of this verse is the prophet’s later choice. However, al-Rāzī inclines towards widening the meaning of “witness” (*shāhid*) to include any one knowledgeable about the Torah to avoid this diachronic conflict altogether.<sup>91</sup> Equally important is al-Rāzī’s interest in generalizing the Qur’anic content to fit into his project of a dialectical

---

<sup>89</sup> Al-Rāzī holds the position that the Qur’ān, being a proof for prophecy, is overabundant (*āyah fawqa al-kifāyah*), and that one decisive miracle is sufficient. See *ibid*, 25:69-70 and 15:83.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, 4:27.

"و ربما كنت كثيرها و تعاقبها يدح في كونها معجزة لأن الخوارق متى تواترت صار الخوارق العادة عادة."

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, 28:9.

reading that transcends time and place. According to al-Rāzī, *asbāb al-nuzūl* incidents serve as examples to which the general meaning of a surah reference applies.

Al-Rāzī similarly views the juxtaposition of v. 11 to be indicating an implied dialectical position. He reasons that the idolaters were challenged by the fact that some amongst them had already embraced the new faith and reacted to this news by saying: “If there were any good in this Quran, they would not have believed in it before we did” (Q. 46:11). Al-Rāzī further argues that v. 12, on the Torah, is an extended response to the Quraysh’s belittlement of the Muslim converts. To make sense of the Qur’anic argument, al-Rāzī imagines that the Meccan idolaters were sufficiently aware of the story of Moses having received the Torah.<sup>92</sup> Therefore, instead of struggling with a Medinan-like verse in a Meccan surah, al-Rāzī opts to deduce that the Meccan audience has some familiarity with the beliefs of the Jewish community.<sup>93</sup>

#### **Section Four: Two different Responses to Divine Unity (13-16 and 17-20)**

Towards the end of the surah, al-Rāzī reaffirms the holistic design of the surah and argues that it is centered on the notion of corroborating the theological triad of divine unity, prophecy, and resurrection. He reads the long section (13-20) as an exemplification of the fate of those who respond positively to *tawhīd* (13-16) and those who respond negatively to *tawhīd* (17-20). These verses, taken together, portray a contrast between a dutiful son and an undutiful son. Al-Rāzī elsewhere recognizes that the Qur’anic collocation of worshiping God and honoring parents. For instance, in surah 17 (*Al-Isrā’*), al-Rāzī explains the thematic flow in “And your Lord decreed that you worship none but Him, and that you prove dutiful to your parents” (Q. 17:23) by

---

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 28:11.

<sup>93</sup> It should be also noted that the occurrence of some Medinan verses in Meccan surahs does not necessarily discredit the tendency to read the surah as whole, because such Medinan verses could be a deliberate later addition or enlargement of the surah that serves a specific role in the meaning of its final form.

highlighting the relationship between God and parenthood. Al-Rāzī offered the following three connections:

1. God is the real cause for creation, and parents are the immediate cause or the means through which creation is made.
2. God is the real bestower of blessings, and parents are the greatest source of blessings for children.
3. God is eternal and thereby deserves ultimate exaltation, whereas parents are created and compassionate and thereby deserve the kindest of treatment.<sup>94</sup>

### Section Five: Two different Responses to Prophecy (21-26 and 27-32)

The stark contrast between the believers and disbelievers in their faith in God and in their relationship to parents helps corroborate the theme of divine unity. Shifting to the theme of prophecy, al-Rāzī uses another contrast between some humans who opposed the divine message of prophet Thamūd (21-26) and a group of jinn who accepted the message of prophet Muḥammad (27-32). Al-Rāzī sees these two narratives as serving the dual purpose of conveying good news and deterring through warnings (*tarhīb wa targhīb*), both essential elements of prophecy.<sup>95</sup> Overall, al-Rāzī asserts that the Qur'anic narratives and parables are not intrinsically intended to deliver surface-level information but to substantiate the higher theological themes of *tawhīd*, *nubuwwah* and *ma'ād*.

Al-Rāzī's interpretation of the greater role narrative accounts of past prophets play in the Qur'ān is also expressed in some more recent studies. Examining the different accounts of Noah

---

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 20:148.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 28:29.

"اعلم أنه تعالى ذكر في أول السورة ما يدل على وجود الإله القادر الحكيم المختار، ثم فرع عليه فرعين: الأول: إبطال قول عبدة الأصنام والثاني: إثبات النبوة وذكر شبهاتهم في الطعن في النبوة، وأجاب عنها، ولما كان أكثر إعراض كفار مكة عن قبول الدلائل بسبب اغترابهم بالدنيا واستغراقهم في استيفاء طبيعتهم وشهواتها، وبسبب أنه كان ينقل عليهم الانقياد لحمد والاعتراف بتقدمه عليهم ضرب لذلك مثلاً وهم قوم عاد فإنهم كانوا أكمل في منافع الدنيا من قوم نوح فلما أصروا على الكفر أبادهم الله وأهلكهم، فكان ذلك تخويفاً لأهل مكة بإصرارهم على إنكار نبوة نوح عليه الصلاة والسلام، ثم لما قرر نبوته على الإنس أردفه بإثبات نبوته في الجن، وإلى هنا قد تم الكلام في التوحيد وفي النبوة، ثم ذكر عقبيهما تقرير مسألة المعاد ومن تأمل في هذا البيان الذي ذكرناه علم أن المقصود من كل القرآن تقرير التوحيد والنبوة والمعاد، وأما القصص فالمراد من ذكرها ما يجري مجرى ضرب الأمثال في تقرير هذه الأصول."

in the Qur’ān, Abdel Haleem, for instance, reaches a similar conclusion: these accounts are not primarily “stories of punishments, but rather each account “has details specific to it, and what is given in all of them is not the story of Noah as a person, or even a ‘prophet of punishment’ but of his prophethood, what he calls his people to do, their response and the result.”<sup>96</sup> Abdel Haleem further remarks that the function of prophetic stories “is to reinforce the prophethood of Muḥammad, and reassure both him and the believers in their long struggle against persecution, which, in the end, they will win.”<sup>97</sup> In his analysis of the Qur’anic usage of the term *sunna*, Gwynne affirms that Qur’anic accounts of the prophets are best understood as examples of “normative precedent” and that the succession of historical events is “cited to support arguments.”<sup>98</sup> He further adds that when the Qur’ān is approached in this way, “we find another reason for the stories’ relative brevity and allusiveness as well as the frequency of their repetition in series.”<sup>99</sup> In another study, Al-Jābirī argues that Qur’anic narratives are employed as a “method of persuasion that designates reason as an arbitrator.”<sup>100</sup>

### **Section Six: Affirming the afterlife (33-34)**

Having explained the surah’s treatment of the issue of divine unity and prophecy, al-Rāzī posits that the reference to resurrection is found in vv. 33-34. The short passage reads:

33. Do the disbelievers not understand that God, who created the heavens and earth and did not tire in doing so, has the power to bring the dead back to life? Yes indeed! He has power over everything.

34. On the Day the disbelievers are brought before Hell [it will be said to them], ‘Is this not real?’ ‘Yes, by our Lord,’ they will reply and He will say, ‘Then taste the punishment for having denied the truth.’

---

<sup>96</sup> Abdel Haleem, “The Qur’anic Employment of the Story of Noah,” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 8, no. 1, (February 2006): 49.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*, 55.

<sup>98</sup> Rosalind Ward Gwynne’s *Logic, Rhetoric and Legal Reasoning in the Qur’an: God’s Arguments* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 40 (emphasis in the original).

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*, 32.

<sup>100</sup> Muḥammad al-Jābirī, *Madkhal ilā al-Qur’ān al-Karīm*, 425.

The surah ends in a declaration of God’s power, which symmetrically resonates with the emphasis on God’s power in the beginning of the surah. While al-Rāzī employs the reference to divine power in the prologue to prove divine unity, it is employed to prove resurrection in the epilogue.

**Section Seven: Closure: (35)**

35. Be steadfast [Muhammad], like those messengers of firm resolve. Do not seek to hasten the punishment for the disbelievers: on the Day they see what they had been warned about, it will seem to them that they lingered no more than a single hour of a single day [in this life]. This is a warning. Shall any be destroyed except the defiant?

The surah, according to al-Rāzī, rounds out its presentation of the theological trilogy with advice for the prophet to administer the patience necessary for his theological task: *ikmāl al-nāqīshin*. Finally, al-Rāzī’s division of the surah can also be used to illustrate a thematic symmetry which, according to the device of chiasm, would lay emphasis on the divine unity. The following chart shows the symmetry of the surah: abcdcba

1-3	4-6	7-12	<b>13-20</b>	21-32	33-34	35
I’rād (turning away from the message)	God’s Power to establish divine unity and resurrection	Objections against Muḥammad ’s prophecy	Two responses towards divine unity	Two responses towards prophecy	God’s Power to establish divine unity and resurrection	Patience in face of i’rād

**2. Surah Structure in Support of Theological Views**

As demonstrated above, al-Rāzī utilizes his dialectical approach to determine the thematic progression of the surah argument. There are, however, many instances where al-Rāzī

does just the opposite; that is to say, he focuses on the surah structure to support a specific position he holds. For instance, towards the end of surah 10 (Yūnus), al-Rāzī utilizes the literary architecture of the surah to support his radical determinist position that goes against the Ash‘arite’s *kasb* (acquisition) and the Mu‘tazilite’s emphasis on free will. According to al-Rāzī, humans are essentially compelled in the form of free agents (*muḍṭar fī ṣūrat mukhtār*).<sup>101</sup> In his commentary on vv. 99-101, al-Rāzī expresses his view on determinism and explains how the literary design of the surah supports his theological position. The following is Q. 10:99-101:

Had your Lord willed, all the people on earth would have believed. So can you [Prophet] compel people to believe?  
No soul can believe except by God’s will, and He brings disgrace (rijs) on those who do not use their reason.  
Say, ‘Look at what is in the heavens and on the earth.’ But what use are signs and warnings to people who will not believe?

Al-Rāzī’s position on *jabr* has been closely studied, especially by Ayman Shihadeh, Livnat Holtzman and Yasin Ceylan who all capture the major theological arguments al-Rāzī uses against the Mu‘tazilites: the *ad hominem* argument and the motive argument. In his commentary on (Q. 10:99-101), al-Rāzī presents these arguments.<sup>102</sup> Al-Rāzī uses a valid form of *ad hominem* argument; that is, using the Mu‘tazilites’ own beliefs against them. He posits that the Mu‘tazilites hold the belief that humans have will or power ‘*qudrah*’ that can equally be harnessed for either belief or disbelief. In the Mu‘tazilite understanding, it is this *qudrah* that enables one to choose. However, al-Rāzī raises a fundamental objection that he frequently lodges against his detractors throughout his exegesis. Al-Rāzī typically argues that any action is

---

<sup>101</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Mafāṭīḥ al-Ghayb*, 15:53.

<sup>102</sup> See Ayman Shihadeh, *The Teleological Ethics of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī*, 13-44; Livnat Holtzman, “Debating the doctrine of *jabr* (compulsion): Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya reads Fakhr al-Din al-Razi,” in *Islamic Theology, Philosophy and Law: Debating Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyya*, ed. Birgit Krawietz, Georges Tamer & Alina Kokoschka (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 61-93; and Yasin Ceylan, “Free Will and Predestination,” in *Theology and Tafsīr in the Major Works of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1996), 155-166.

contingent on the *dā'ī* (the motivation) for it.<sup>103</sup> This *dā'ī* for the action, al-Rāzī continues, emanates either from the human agent or from the divine will. With this dual categorization in place, al-Rāzī argues that ascribing the motivating factor to humans is logically untenable, because it eventually leads to either the problem of infinite regress of causes (*tasalsul*) or the problem of “preponderance without a preponderator” (*al-rujḥān bilā murajjih*). Raising these two problems, al-Rāzī resorts to the solution of the ultimate cause; that is, the divine will.<sup>104</sup>

In his *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, al-Rāzī continues to utilize the literary design and dialectical reading of the surah to support his theological position on determinism. As al-Rāzī reaches this section in surah 10, he pauses to remind his readers of the intentional flow of the preceding verses and the major theme around which the entire surah revolves. Dialectically, al-Rāzī observes that the surah design is founded on two axes: (1) an account of the specious arguments (*shubuhāt*) the disbelievers raised against Muḥammad’s prophecy and (2) a series of counter-arguments against these objections (*ḥikāyat shubuhāt al-kuffār fī inkār al-nubuwwah ma‘ah al-jawāb ‘anhā*).<sup>105</sup> Based on his understanding of the flow of the surah content, al-Rāzī posits that one of the *shubuhāt* is that the contemporaneous detractors of Muḥammad were threatened to suffer divine chastisement for their rejection; yet, they haughtily argued that that no punishment was carried out to date. This objection led to the polytheists scornfully praying for divine retributions. In this context, argues al-Rāzī, the surah is designed to demonstrate that a delayed execution of the promised punishment does not annul the veracity of the divine promise (*‘ta’khīr*

<sup>103</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, 16:64.

“صدور الفعل يتوقف على حصول الداعي إليه”

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 16:133. For a discussion on the argument from the preponderance without a preponderator, see Sherman A. Jackson, “The Alchemy of Domination? Some Asharite Responses to Mutazilite Ethics,” *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 31, no. 2 (1999): 185–201; and Wilfred Madelung, “The Late Mu‘tazila and Determinism. The Philosophers’ Trap,” in *Yād-Nāma in Memoria di Alessandro Bausani*, ed. Biancamaria Scarcia Amoretti and Lucia Rostagno (Rome: Islamistica, 1991), 1: 245–257.

<sup>105</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, 17:133.



*al-maw'ūd bihi la yaqdaḥ fī ṣiḥḥat al-wa'd*).<sup>106</sup> According to al-Rāzī, this Qur'anic response is corroborated by several prophetic narratives in the surah (10:72-98).

With this structural design of the surah laid out, al-Rāzī introduces the passage under discussion (10:99-101) to argue that the Qur'ān tells the prophet that, no matter how sensible and persistent his responses to the objections of the polytheists are, no faith will be established unless God creates it, wills it and directs it. Al-Rāzī utilizes this passage to engage in a theological discussion with the Mu'tazilite on divine will (*mashī'ah*). He supports the Ash'arites whom he describes as “our fellow Ash'arites” (*aṣḥābuna*)—which is a clear indication that al-Rāzī shares the same position on the issue of divine/human will with the rest of the Ash'arites.<sup>107</sup> To demonstrate that God is the sole creator of human will, al-Rāzī provides various arguments from syntactical, dialectical and literary perspectives.

Principally, al-Rāzī relies on the if/then conditional in v. 99 “If your Lord had willed, all the people on earth would have believed. So can you [Prophet] compel people to believe?” to argue that “if” implies “the non-occurrence of something due to the non-occurrence of something else.” Therefore, al-Rāzī concludes, some did not profess their faith—simply because God did not will it. He further interprets the *rijz* in v. 100 as a reference to disbelief that is affirmed to be created by none but God. Al-Rāzī uses the juxtaposition of these two verses as an indication that

---

<sup>106</sup>Ibid, 17:133.

<sup>107</sup> In their attempt to constitute a *via media* between radical determinism, as held by the Jabrites, and free will, as advocated by the Mu'tazilites; the Ash'arites form their *kasb* (human acquisition) theory, which assumes that when one has a determination (*'azm*) to do something, God creates the act, and the agent “*acquires*” it. In this way, God is the creator of actions; yet, humans are still responsible on account of their will. However, al-Rāzī critiques this view in *al-Muḥḥaṣṣal* and argues that *kasb* is a signifier with no signification (*ism bilā musammā*). See al-Rāzī, *Al-Muḥḥaṣṣal*, 455-471, esp. 469-470. In *Mafātiḥ al-Ghayb*, al-Rāzī usually raises the question: if one wills, where does one get the thought from? This question always turns him to the ultimate cause, God, to avoid infinite regress of causes (*tasalsul*). For various interpretations of *kasb*, see Hammouda Ghoraba, “Al-Ash'arī's Theory of Acquisition (al-Kasb),” *Islamic Quarterly* 2 (1955): 3; Mohammed Yusoff Hussain, “Al-Ash'arī's Doctrine of Human Actions,” *Islamic Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (1992): 78–79; M. Schwarz, “Acquisition” (*kasb*) in Early Kalam,” in *Islamic Philosophy and the Classical Tradition*, ed. S. M. Stern, A. Hourani, V. Brown (Oxford: Bruno Cassirer Ltd, 1972), 355-387; and Binyamin Abrahamov, “A Re-Examination of al-Ash'arī's Theory of “Kasb” According to “Kitāb al-Luma',” *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 2, no. 2 (1989): 210-221.

both verses make a clear contrast between the faith God creates in the believers' hearts and the disbelief God creates in the disbelievers' hearts. To avoid any accusation of adopting a determinist position, al-Rāzī highlights the dialectical purpose of the initial statement in v. 101 "Say, 'Look at what is in the heavens and on the earth.'" In his comment on this verse, al-Rāzī observes the following:

Know that after God almighty explicated in the preceding verses that faith cannot be obtained except through God's creation and will, He commanded logical reasoning and demonstration seeking (*al-naẓr wa al-istidlāl*) so that no one would imagine that absolute determinism is the true view.<sup>108</sup>

However, al-Rāzī is motivated by the second part of the verse "But what use are signs and warnings to people who will not believe?" to reaffirm his position on determinism. To al-Rāzī, this part affirms that even seeking logical reasoning (*al-naẓar wa al-istidlāl*) will be valueless in the case of those who, from all eternity, were divinely predestined to misery and misguidance (*shaqā' wa ḍalāl*).<sup>109</sup>

With regard to the Mu'tazilite view on divine will, al-Rāzī presents the views voiced by al-Jubbā'ī and al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, who interpret "the divine will" in v. 99 to mean "the will to compel" (*mashī'at al-iljā'*).<sup>110</sup> In their view, God does not will to *compel* people into faith; otherwise, all can proclaim their full acceptance of belief in God. However, God does not execute this type of will since forced faith is of no value.<sup>111</sup> To counter this idea of *mashī'at al-iljā'*, al-Rāzī brings the literary context of the surah into focus. He argues that the context does not support the interpretation of "forced faith" but rather "valued faith." Al-Rāzī explains that the prophet was praying that his people be *truly* guided, or, in al-Rāzī's words, the prophet was

<sup>108</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb*, 17:135.

"اعلم أنه تعالى لما بين في الآيات السالفة أن الإيمان لا يحصل إلا بتخليق الله تعالى ومشيتته، أمر بالنظر والاستدلال في الدلائل حتى لا يتوهم أن الحق هو الجبر الخاض. فقال: 'فَلِأَنْظُرُوا مَاذَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ'."

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 136.

<sup>110</sup> See Michael Schwarz, "Some Notes on the Notion of *iljā'* (constraint) in Mu'tazilite Kalam," *Israel Oriental Studies* 2 (1972): 413-427.

<sup>111</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb*, 17:133.

"أجاب الجبائي والقاضي وغيرهما بأن المراد مشيئة الإلجاء، أي لو شاء الله أن يلجئهم إلى الإيمان لقدر عليه ولصح ذلك منه، ولكنه ما فعل ذلك، لأن الإيمان الصادر من العبد على سبيل الإلجاء لا ينفعه ولا يفيد فائدة"

praying that his people would have the faith that would be beneficial to them in the life to come. To maintain the coherence of these verses (*ḥattā yantaẓima al-kalam*), al-Rāzī argues that one has to see v. 99 as responding to the prophet’s request, and the “faith” mentioned in the verse, therefore, is praiseworthy, and not of a forced nature.<sup>112</sup> Going further still, al-Rāzī refines *iljā’* (compulsion) for the Mu‘tazilites and limits it to two meanings—both of which support al-Rāzī’s view. Al-Rāzī explains that *iljā’* may either mean that God (1) causes people to see something extraordinary, so they feel bound to surrender to God; or (2) creates faith in people’s hearts. He dismisses the first option based on the preceding verses “Those against whom your Lord’s sentence is passed will not believe, even if every sign comes to them, until they see the agonizing torment” (Q. 10: 96-97), thereby demonstrating that miracles are not a source of *iljā’*. By process of elimination, then, *iljā’* can only mean that the divine creation of faith, which, according to v. 99, is not meant for everyone.<sup>113</sup>

## Conclusion

A close reading of al-Rāzī’s interpretive methodology in *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* clearly shows that he is interested in uncovering the thematic connections not only between neighboring verses in a given surah but also between the discourse units that make up the surah structure. Based on al-Rāzī’s analysis of surahs 38 and 46, al-Rāzī heavily relies on his theological training and expertise in debate and disputation to decipher the surah design and its overall argument. Approaching the surahs as overwhelmingly dialectical, al-Rāzī promotes rational reasoning and

---

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, 134.

<sup>113</sup> Based on the hermeneutical conflicts between al-Rāzī and the Mu‘tazilites on surah 10, it is clear that eliciting theological meaning that is aligned with the exegetes’ extra-Qur’anic worldview was a common feature of classical theological commentaries. For more on the hermeneutics of theological exegesis, see Tariq Jaffer, “Theological Commentaries,” in *Oxford Handbook of Qur’anic Studies*, ed. Abdel Haleem and Mustafa Shah (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 767-779; Karen Bauer, “Introduction,” in *Aims, Methods, and Contexts of Qur’anic Exegesis (2<sup>nd</sup>/8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> C.)*, ed. Karen Bauer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1-16, esp. 8; and Johanna Pink, “Classical Qur’anic Hermeneutics,” in *Oxford Handbook of Qur’anic Studies*, 818-831, esp. 825.

rational theology as Qur'anically-grounded disciplines. Meanwhile, al-Rāzī utilizes the surah design to support some of his theological positions. It is contended here that the underpinnings of al-Rāzī dialectical approach to the surah represent a nuancing of Mu'tazilite exegesis, as in the case of al-Jushamī. Al-Rāzī's contact with the Mu'tazilite exegetical tradition has its profound impact on his interpretive approach. This influence is generally evidenced in al-Rāzī's inclination towards philosophical tolerance as captured in his assertion: "Know my brother we all aim to nothing but the declaration of [God's] exaltation and holiness ... The Sunnis approach God's exaltation from the perspective of His absolute power, and the Mu'tazilites from the perspective of His justice ... Some are right and others are wrong. Yet all cling to "Your Lord is the Self-Sufficient, Full of Mercy" (Q. 6:133)."<sup>114</sup> Importantly, when compared to the classical exegetical tradition currently in print, the emergence of al-Rāzī's exegesis marks a turning point in hermeneutical practice, as *tafsīr* moves from investigating the topic of a given verse to deciphering the topic of the surah as a whole.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid, 13:165. This is the advice offered by al-Rāzī's father, Ḍiyā' al-Dīn, who learned it from his teacher Abū al-Qāsim al-Anṣārī (d. 512/1118), one of al-Juwaynī's students.

واعلم يا أخي أن الكل لا يحاولون إلا التقديس والتعظيم، وصمعت الشيخ الإمام الوالد ضياء الدين عمر بن الحسين رحمه الله قال: سمعت الشيخ أبا القاسم سليمان بن ناصر الأنصاري، يقول: نظر أهل السنة على تعظيم الله في جانب القدرة ونفاذ المشيئة، ونظر المعتزلة على تعظيم الله في جانب العدل والبراءة عن فعل ما لا ينبغي، فإذا تأملت علمت أن أحداً لم يصف الله إلا بالتعظيم والإجلال والتقديس والتنزيه، ولكن منهم من أخطأ ومنهم من أصاب، ورجاء الكل متعلق بهذه الكلمة وهي قوله: {وَرَبُّكَ الْغَنِيُّ ذُو الرَّحْمَةِ.}

## Chapter 4

### Persuasive Strategies in the Composition of the Surah

Moving beyond the kalam reading of the surah, al-Rāzī identifies four iterative structuring patterns in the Qur'ān, or what he calls (*'ādāt al-Qur'ān*), through which, he maintains, the surah organization can be safely recognized. As far as rhetorical analysis is concerned, al-Rāzī's approach constitutes an early attempt to read the surah on its own terms and in its final form. His aim is to construct what can be called the "Qur'anic figures of composition" as a step beyond the figures of speech. Given this additional perusal of the Qur'anic text, this chapter examines three compositional strategies al-Rāzī finds in large blocks within surahs and, sometimes, in whole surahs as well. These strategies include (1) antithetical structure, (2) complementary strands, and (3) the blending of various but reinforcing themes. Several Qur'anic examples are analyzed to demonstrate how a surah could be structurally designed through the devices of antithesis and complementarity. However, more attention will be paid to the other two strategies. Specifically, surah 2 (Al-Baqarah) is outlined, in accordance with al-Rāzī's observations, to illustrate how the recurring motif of prophecy and the intentional Qur'anic blending of themes harmonize the heteronomous material of the surah and make its argument persuasive. Dialectically, al-Rāzī posits that these four structural patterns are forms of Qur'anic persuasion, through which reason is provoked to influence doctrinal positions and moral decisions.

#### 1. Antithetical Pairs

According to al-Rāzī, one of the common organizing strategies of the Qur'anic text is the use of antithesis. This strategy is employed in many dual pairs: warning/promise, hell/heaven,

dwellers of hell/dwellers of heaven, believers/disbelievers, and punishment/reward. These concomitant pairs are frequently utilized in al-Rāzī’s commentary as a Qur’anic ‘*ādah* in the text arrangement.<sup>1</sup> Since this is a Qur’anic strategy of arranging its material, this technique is found in both the Meccan and Medinan surahs. The following are two examples from a Medinan surah to illustrate the frequent employment of this Qur’anic technique.<sup>2</sup>

**Example 1:**

2:163 Your God is the one God: There is no god except Him, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy.

2:164 In the creation of the heavens and earth; in the alternation of night and day; in the ships that sail the seas with goods for people; in the water which God sends down from the sky to give life to the earth when it has been barren, scattering all kinds of creatures over it; in the changing of the winds and clouds that run their appointed courses between the sky and earth: There are signs in all these for those who use their minds.

2:165 Even so, there are some who choose to worship others besides God as rivals to Him, loving them with the love due to God, but the believers have greater love for God. If only the idolaters could see—as they will see when they face the torment—that all power belongs to God, and that God punishes severely.

2:166 When those who have been followed disown their followers, when they all see the suffering, when all bonds between them are severed,

2:167 the followers will say, “If only we had one last chance, we would disown them as they now disown us.” In this way, God will make them see their deeds as a source of bitter regret: They shall not leave the Fire.

Here, the surah lays emphasis on divine unity in 2:163-164 by means of an adjacent unit that condemns polytheism in 2:165-167. Commenting on this sequence, al-Rāzī writes:

Denouncing something is a way of emphasizing the value of its opposite. For this reason, a poet says: “With their opposites, things become more obvious.” They also say:

<sup>1</sup> In his commentary *al-Tahdhīb fī al-Tafsīr*, the Mu‘tazilite al-Jushamī (d. 494/1101) also calls this compositional strategy a ‘*ādah*—a note that shows the considerable Mu‘tazilite interest in the surah structure. The Mu‘tazilite exegetical tradition has a profound influence on al-Rāzī as one recognizes that al-Qaffāl, Abū Muslim and ‘Abd al-Jabbār are important sources for al-Rāzī’s approach to the thematic development of the surah.

<sup>2</sup> For antithesis in Meccan Surahs, see Rabāb Jamāl, “*Al-Muqābalah fī Āyāt al-Jazā’*,” (PhD. Diss., Umm al-Qurā University, 2000).

Blessings are unknown. Yet, when lost, they become known. People do not know the value of health. Only when they get sick and regain their health, they get to know its value. This is the case with all blessings. Accordingly, God followed the verse on divine unity with this verse [denouncing the opposite of divine unity].<sup>3</sup>

Al-Rāzī is clear that this device is utilized in the Qur'ān, not to state the obvious but to reinforce a value by letting the hearers understand the result of following the opposite direction. In general, antithetical pairs are typically employed in the Qur'ān to eschatologically compare the fate of the believers with the fate of the disbelievers to convey a type of argument from negative consequences; that is, if X causes Y, and Y is unwanted, then X is unwanted.<sup>4</sup>

### Example 2:

274. Those who give, out of their own possessions, by night and by day, in private and in public, will have their reward with their Lord: No fear for them, nor will they grieve.

275. But those who take usury will rise up on the Day of Resurrection like someone tormented by Satan's touch. That is because they say, "Trade and usury are the same," but God has allowed trade and forbidden usury. Whoever, on receiving God's warning, stops taking usury may keep his past gains—God will be his judge—but whoever goes back to usury will be an inhabitant of the Fire, there to remain.

276. God blights usury, but blesses (*yurbī*) charitable deeds with multiple increases: He does not love the ungrateful sinner.

277. Those who believe, do good deeds, keep up the prayer, and pay the prescribed alms will have their reward with their Lord: no fear for them, nor will they grieve (Q. 2:274-277).

In this passage, v. 274, which closes the discussion on charity, is part of the initial argument on usury. Al-Rāzī explains that the juxtaposition of usury is justified by the contrast created by two images: (1) there is an apparent decrease of money in the case of charity and a desire to increase money in the case of usury, and (2) charity is commanded by God whereas usury is forbidden by God.<sup>5</sup> Due to this conceptual connection between charity and usury, no

<sup>3</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Mafātih al-Ghayb*, 4:184.

"تفويض ضد الشيء مما يؤكد حسن الشيء ولذلك قال الشاعر: وبضدها تتبين الأشياء، وقالوا أيضاً النعمة مجهولة، فإذا فقدت عرفت، والناس لا يعرفون قدر الصحة، فإذا مرضوا ثم عادت الصحة إليهم عرفوا قدرها، وكذا القول في جميع النعم، فلهذا السبب أردف الله تعالى الآية الدالة على التوحيد بهذه الآية. (عن قبح ما يضاد التوحيد)"

<sup>4</sup> See Rosalind W Gwynne, *Logic, Rhetoric and Legal Reasoning in the Qur'an: God's Arguments* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 130-151, esp. 148-151.

<sup>5</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Mafātih al-Ghayb*, 7:74-75.

linking word is needed to effect the transition. The word “but” in v. 275 is added by the translator to reflect the implied contrast as understood in Arabic poetics. Al-Rāzī adds that v. 276 reaffirms that contrast by highlighting the consequences of the motives that dissuade people from charity-giving and which lure them into usury practice. The verse clearly promises to punish the usurers in a way that makes them suffer consequences that are in stark contrast with their original goals (*al-mu‘āmalah bi naqīḍ al-qaṣd*); that is, blighting their monetary gains. On the other side, charity-givers are promised an increase of their money because God will bless (*yurbī*) their deeds. With this contrast, the hearers of the Qur’ān are motivated to find the actual increase (*ribā*) of their money in charity, not usury. In this way, antithesis serves as a form of emphasis (*ta’kīd*) because the Qur’anic value is stressed twice: one time by praising the value itself and another time by disparaging its opposite. Furthermore, al-Rāzī highlights the contrast between *wa‘īd* (warning) in “He does not love the ungrateful sinner” (Q. 2:276) and the *wa‘d* (rewards) that will be bestowed on “those who believe, do good deeds, keep up the prayer, and pay the prescribed alms” (Q. 2: 277).

### 1.1 Antithesis and Surah Design

Al-Rāzī extends the use of antithesis to the body of the surah. In his discussions on the architectural design of surah 76 (Al-Insān), al-Rāzī offers a detailed shift analysis and posits that the surah as a whole is designed in the finest form of arrangement and order.<sup>6</sup> In his view, the antithetical remarks, which are pervasive in the surah, explain its arrangement and the flow of the material.<sup>7</sup> The following is an examination of al-Rāzī’s structural analysis of surah 76.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 30:227.

"و من تأمل فيما ذكرناه علم أن هذه السورة وقعت على أحسن وجوه الترتيب و النظام."

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 30: 208-232.

<sup>8</sup> In this discussion, the focus is placed on al-Rāzī’s notes on the surah structure, not the theological discussions unless closely related to the surah design.



### 1.1.2. (Unit 1: vv. 1-3) The Prologue: Decision-Making

1. Was there not a period of time when man was nothing to speak of?
2. We created man from a drop of mingled fluid to put him to the test; We gave him hearing and sight;
3. We guided him to the right path, whether he was grateful or ungrateful.

According to al-Rāzī, this short passage creates an antithetical setting as represented by the closing epithets: grateful (*shākir*) and ungrateful (*kafūr*). Al-Rāzī sees this antithetical result as being seamlessly facilitated by the first two verses. The first verse is purported to convey the argument that man is created (*muhdath*), and thereby a willful Maker (*ṣāni‘ mukhtār*) becomes necessary. Furthermore, the second verse stipulates that man is not created in vain but for a higher purpose; that is, going through a test (*nabtālīh*). To qualify for this test, man is granted hearing, sight and reason to find the right path. However, al-Rāzī argues that this test turned people into two categories: the grateful and the ungrateful.<sup>9</sup>

It should be noted here that these modes of antithetical structure represent an essential part of the Qur’anic moral structure. As Izutsu observes, “Throughout the Qur’ān there runs the keynote of dualism regarding the moral values of man: the basic dualism of believer and unbeliever.”<sup>10</sup> According to Izutsu, this dualism is clearly captured in surah 109, which marks “the formal declaration of independence on the part of Islam from all that was essentially incompatible with the monotheistic belief that it proclaimed.”<sup>11</sup> Izutsu adds that the Qur’ān provides yardsticks to divide all human qualities into two radically opposed categories of “good”

---

<sup>9</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Mafātīh al-Ghayb*, 30:227. Al-Rāzī is aware that the Kharijites rely on this classification to argue that sinning will render one as a disbeliever. They base their opinion on the notion that the verse gives only two categories that allow for no middle grounds. Therefore, al-Rāzī posits that the context reveals that *shākir*, in this verse, is not the one who does grateful actions but rather the one who acknowledges that thanking the Creator is mandatory. Similarly, the *kafūr* here is not the one who does exhibits an ungrateful behavior but rather the one who does not acknowledge that thanking God is mandatory—either because he does not believe in God at all or believes in God but denies the necessity of giving thanks. See *ibid.*, 30:212.

<sup>10</sup> Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts of the Qur’ān* (Montreal: McGill University, 2002), 105.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 105. For more on the employment of contrast as an aspect of Qur’anic arguments, see Rosalind Gwynne, “Contrast,” in *Logic, Rhetoric and Legal Reasoning in the Qur’ān: God’s Arguments* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 130-151.

and “bad” or “the class of positive moral properties and the class of negative moral properties.”<sup>12</sup>

These yardsticks are monotheism, eschatology and a practical code of conduct, elements, which Izutsu evaluates as “unprecedented in the spiritual history of the Arabs.”<sup>13</sup> The notion of moral categorization is highly present in this surah. The good are here presented as the virtuous (*abrār*) who stand out based on their acts of kindness and strong belief in the afterlife.<sup>14</sup>

### 1.1.3. (Unit 2: vv. 4-22) Two Eschatological Contrasts

4. We have prepared chains, iron collars, and blazing Fire for the disbelievers, but
5. the righteous will have a drink mixed with kafur,
6. a spring for God’s servants, which flows abundantly at their wish.
7. They fulfil their vows; they fear a day of widespread woes;
8. they give food to the poor, the orphan, and the captive, though they love it themselves,
9. saying, ‘We feed you for the sake of God alone: We seek neither recompense nor thanks from you.
10. We fear the Day of our Lord—a woefully grim Day.’
11. So God will save them from the woes of that Day, give them radiance and gladness,
12. and reward them, for their steadfastness, with a Garden and silken robes.
13. They will sit on couches, feeling neither scorching heat nor biting cold,
14. with shady [branches] spread above them and clusters of fruit hanging close at hand.
15. They will be served with silver plates
16. and gleaming silver goblets according to their fancy,
17. and they will be given a drink infused with ginger
18. from a spring called Salsabil.
19. Everlasting youths will attend them—if you could see them, you would think they were scattered pearls—
20. and if you were to look around, you would see bliss and great wealth:
21. they will wear garments of green silk and brocade; they will be adorned with silver bracelets; their Lord will give them a pure drink.
22. [It will be said], “This is your reward. Your endeavours are appreciated.”

---

<sup>12</sup> Possibly driven by the theological implications of this categorical division, Izutsu later adds the category of “doubtful Muslims” or “the imperfect type of the believer”. See *ibid.*, 108.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 105-106. This does not imply that the pre-Islamic life in Arabia was not regulated by a moral code. Izutsu explained the system of *murūwah* but connects it with narrow tribalism. Furthermore, Izutsu examines how the pre-Islamic values were received in the Qur’ān: some values were totally rejected but most were accepted, modified and developed according to new ethico-religious grounds. See Toshihiko Izutsu, “The Spirit of Tribal Solidarity” and “The Islamization of Old Arab Values,” in *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur’ān* (Montreal: McGill University, 2002), 55-104.

<sup>14</sup> In his chronological order and interpretation of the Qur’anic surahs, al-Jābirī lists Sūrat al-Insān among the earliest surahs in the pre-Ḥijrah stage. The general content of social solidarity and religious categorization seem to support al-Jābirī’s selections. See *Fahm al-Qur’ān al-Ḥakīm: al-Tafsīr al-Wāḍiḥ ḥasba Tartīb al-Nuzūl* (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥdah al-‘Arabiyyah, 2012), 2:183-188.

Having identified the surah introduction, al-Rāzī designates the next unit, which provides an antithetical description of the fate awaiting the ungrateful and the grateful. He writes:

Thereafter God Almighty mentioned the punishment of the disbelievers briefly and then the rewards of the obedient more extensively. This [part] extends to His statement, “And your endeavours are appreciated.” Know that the brief description of the punishment with the detailed description of the rewards indicates that the side of mercy is more outbalancing and impregnable.<sup>15</sup>

Besides this general note, al-Rāzī highlights the contrast between hope and fear as experienced by the righteous (*abrār*).<sup>16</sup> He observes that the *abrār* has two main objectives in helping the needy: (1) gaining the divine pleasure (*taḥṣīl riḍa Allāh*), which is underlined by “We feed you for the sake of God alone: We seek neither recompense nor thanks from you,” (Q. 76:9) and (2) gaining protection from the fear of Judgment Day which is underlined by “We fear

---

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 30:227.

”ثم إنه تعالى ذكر عذاب الكفار على الاختصار، ثم ذكر بعد ذلك ثواب المطيعين على الاستقصاء، وهو إلى قوله ”وَكَانَ سَعْيُكُمْ مَشْكُورًا“. واعلم أن الاختصار في ذكر العقاب مع الإطناب في شرح الثواب يدل على أن جانب الرحمة أغلب وأقوى.“

<sup>16</sup> The *Abrār* are described in vv. 11-22. Richard Bell finds the flow of this description confusing. He states that this passage “is in inextricable confusion from v. 15 onward, and any reconstruction must be regarded as merely tentative. Verse 14 was perhaps followed by 21, 19; these were removed in favour of 15,17. Later, 18 was substituted for the latter half of 17 (because of wine being implied in it ?) and with 20 was written on the back of 19, and 22 was added on the back of 21.” See Richard Bell, *The Qur’ān Translated with a Critical Re-arrangement of the Surahs* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1937–1939), 2:623. Bell’s reading of the surah seems to be highly speculative and unsupported by any external evidence. With regard to the internal flow of meaning in vv. 15-21, al-Rāzī explains the logical connectedness of the descriptions of the *abrār*. In al-Rāzī’s opinion, after the food and dwelling of the *abrār* are described, vv. 15-20 describe their drinks (*sharāb*): how the *sharāb* is served (vv. 15-16), what is served (vv. 17-18) and who will serve (vv. 19-20). In this context, v. 21 describes how the *abrār* are dressed. See al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb*, 30:220-224. Concerning the repetition of the *sharāb* in v. 21 (*their Lord will give them a pure drink*), al-Rāzī argues that this must be a different *sharāb*. He inclines towards a Sufi interpretation by posting that it is possibly a spiritual *sharāb* that causes *fanā’*. This Sufi interpretation is in line with al-Rāzī’s emphasis on the heavenly spiritual bliss which, according to al-Rāzī, is far superior to the physical bliss. He voices this view in his commentary on the Q. 9:72. See *ibid.*, 17:106-107. In this way, there is no need to assume that some verses were written at the back of other verses. A more convincing contextual explanation of the distinct description of heaven in this surah is found in al-Bustānī’s commentary. He observes that six human needs are reflected in the description of heaven: water, food, dwelling, clothes, service and aesthetic pleasure. Then he highlights a thematic parallelism in the flow of the surah units. He argues that all of the minute details in the description of the *sharāb*, including what kind of drink, the type of cups, how it is served, where it is served, and who provides the service—fit to be a corresponding compensation for the *abrār* who are described in the initial remarks of the surah as “people who give food to the poor, the orphan, and the captive, though they love it themselves, saying, ‘We feed you for the sake of God alone: We seek neither recompense nor thanks from you. We fear the Day of our Lord—a woefully grim Day’” (Q. 76:8-10). For more on the unique portray of heaven in this surah, see Maḥmūd al-Bustānī, *Al-Taḥsīn al-Binā’ī lī al-Qur’ān al-Karīm (Mashhad: Majma’ al-Buḥūth al-Islāmiyyah, 1422/2001)*, 5:216-239, esp. 234-235.

the Day of our Lord—a woefully grim Day” (Q. 76:10).<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, al-Rāzī reads v. 11 as a form of parallelism that corresponds in meaning to the two objectives the *abrār* were seeking. The *abrār*’s aspiration of protection from fear is harmoniously paralleled with “God will save them from the woes of that Day,” whereas the aspiration of obtaining God’s pleasure is compensated by “give them radiance and gladness.”<sup>18</sup> This divine pleasure is also expressed in the closing verse of this unit: “This is your reward. Your endeavours are appreciated” (Q. 76:22). To al-Rāzī, the rewards are closed with the acquisition of divine pleasure or approval since this *riḍā* is the highest station (*maqām*) for the *abrār*.<sup>19</sup>

#### 1.1.4. (Unit 3: vv. 23-28) Two Worldly Contrasts

23. We Ourselves have sent down this Quran to you [Prophet] in gradual revelation.  
24. Await your Lord’s Judgment with patience; do not yield to any of these sinners or disbelievers;  
25. remember the name of your Lord at dawn and in the evening;  
26. bow down before Him, and glorify Him at length by night.  
27. These people love the fleeting life. They put aside [all thoughts of] a Heavy Day.  
28. Yet We created them; We strengthened their constitution; if We please, We can replace such people completely.

With regard to this unit, al-Rāzī reads it in relation to the previous unit. As previously noted, the preceding unit is concerned with a pronouncement about the states of the afterlife (*aḥwāl al-ākhirah*) which are expressed in the form of a contrast between the fate of the believers and the disbelievers. Correspondingly, al-Rāzī reads this penultimate unit as an exposition of the states of this worldly life (*aḥwāl al-dunyā*), which are expressed in the form of a contrast between the prophet’s obedience and his contemporaries’ denials of the afterlife.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 30:217.

"واعلم أنه تعالى لما ذكر أن الأبرار يحسنون إلى هؤلاء المحتاجين بين أن لهم فيه عرضين أحدهما: تحصيل رضا الله. وهو المراد من قوله: "إِنَّمَا نُطْعِمُكُمْ لِوَجْهِ اللَّهِ" والثاني: الاحتراز من خوف يوم القيامة وهو المراد من قوله: "إِنَّا نَخَافُ مِنْ رَبِّنَا يَوْمًا غُيُوبًا قَمَطًا مَرِيئًا".

<sup>18</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb*, 30:219.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 30:226.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 30:227.

"ظهر مما بينا أن السورة من أولها إلى هذا الموضع في بيان أحوال الآخرة، ثم إنه تعالى شرع بعد ذلك في أحوال الدنيا، وقدم شرح أحوال المطيعين على شرح أحوال المتمردين. أما المطيعون فهم الرسول وأمنه، والرسول هو الرأس والرئيس، فلهذا خص الرسول بالخطاب".

Therefore, as al-Rāzī identifies the contrasts in each unit, he also sees unit 2 and unit 3 as forming a type of wider antithesis that moves the listener from an eschatological scene on Judgment Day to its origin in Meccan days.

Furthermore, al-Rāzī's commentary on unit 3 implies some internal contrasts. For example, the message directed to the prophet takes the form of prohibition (*nahy*), as in "do not yield to any of these sinners or disbelievers," and the form of injunction (*amr*), as in "remember the name of your Lord at dawn and in the evening."<sup>21</sup> With regard to vv. 27-28, which concerns the disbelievers' indifference to the afterlife, al-Rāzī observes that the two verses convey irony. He asserts that v. 27 ostensibly states that the cause of the disbelievers' unresponsiveness to faith is due to the base desires (*shahwah*), not the argument/ obfuscation (*shubhah*). However, v. 28 actually indicates that these very pleasures are created and controlled by God. In al-Rāzī's view, this statement conveys a subtle form (*ṭarīqah laṭīfah*) of arguing with the Meccan idolaters. Al-Rāzī explains that the Meccans' love of this worldly life (*al- 'ājilah*) should lead to obedience to, not rebellion against, God. In al-Rāzī's opinion, v. 28 instills *raghbah* (longing for God) and *rahbah* (reverential fear) in the hearts of the Meccan hearers, and thereby motivates them to embrace faith. In a more detailed manner, the Meccan disbelievers are encouraged to respond positively to God's call through the mere recognition that worldly desires are created by God, who also gives them the senses that enable them to experience the benefits of these pleasures. They are equally warned against their rebellion since God has the power to rid them

---

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 30:277.

"واعلم أن الخطاب إما النهي وإما الأمر، ثم إنه تعالى قبل الخوض فيما يتعلق بالرسول من النهي والأمر، قدم مقدمة في تقوية قلب الرسول ﷺ، وإزالة الغم والوحشة عن خاطره، وإنما فعل ذلك، لأن الاشتغال بالطاعة والقيام بعهدة التكليف لا يتم إلا مع فراغ القلب ثم بعد هذه المقدمة ذكر نهي عن بعض الأشياء، ثم بعد الفراغ عن النهي، ذكر أمره ببعض الأشياء، وإنما قدم النهي على الأمر، لأن دفع الضرر أهم من جلب النفع، وإزالة مالا ينبغي مقدم على تحصيل ما ينبغي."

of the pleasures that are distracting them from Him. In this way, al-Rāzī finds an incongruity between the motive of disbelief (like *ḥubb al-‘ājilah*) and rebellion against God.<sup>22</sup>

### 1.1.5. (Unit 4: vv. 29-31) The Epilogue: Decision-Making

29. This is a reminder. Let whoever wishes, take the way to his Lord.

30. But you will only wish to do so if God wills- God is all knowing, all wise-

31. He admits whoever He will into His Mercy and has prepared a painful torment for the disbelievers

What does “this” in v. 29 refer to? In line with his conception of the antithetical material upon which the surah is structured, al-Rāzī interprets “this” as a reference to “the whole surah and its wondrous arrangement (*tarīb ‘ajīb*) and profound structure (*nasaq ba‘īd*), which includes the promise of reward (*wa‘d*) and the threat of punishment (*wa‘īd*), exhortation (*targhīb*) and admonition (*tarhīb*).”<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, the notion of “seeking the path of God” connects the end with the beginning of the surah because v. 29 appears to be thematically related to v. 3.

## 2. Complementary Pairs

The development of meaning at the level of a sentence or even a surah is sometimes explained as a completion of a two-part theme. In this regard, al-Rāzī reiteratively uses the following thematic couples: the rights of God, which is frequently followed by the rights of others; the theoretical faculty, which is usually followed by the practical faculty; conveying benefit (*īṣāl al-naḥ*) and removing harm (*daf‘ al-ḍarar*); and, finally, God’s signs in the soul

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 30:230.

”والمراد أن حبهيم للعاجلة يوجب عليهم طاعة الله من حيث الرغبة ومن حيث الرهبة، أما من حيث الرغبة فلأنه هو الذي خلقهم وأعطاهم الأعضاء السليمة التي بما يمكن الانتفاع باللذات العاجلة، وخلق جميع ما يمكن الانتفاع به، فإذا أحبوا اللذات العاجلة، وتلك اللذات لا تحصل إلا عند حصول المنتفع وحصول المنتفع به، وهذان لا يحصلان إلا بتكوين الله وإيجاده، فهذا مما يوجب عليهم الانقياد لله ولتكاليفه وترك التمرد والإعراض، وأما من حيث الرهبة فلأنه قدر على أن يمتنعهم، وعلى أن يسلب النعمة عنهم، وعلى أن يلقبهم في كل لحظة وبليّة، فالأجل من فوت هذه اللذات العاجلة يجب عليهم أن ينقادوا لله، وأن يتركوا هذا التمرد، وحاصل الكلام كأنه قيل لهم: هب أن حكّم هذه اللذات العاجلة بطريقة مستحسنة، إلا أن ذلك يوجب عليكم الإيمان بالله والانقياد له، فلو أنكم توصلتم به إلى الكفر بالله، والإعراض عن حكمه، لكنتم قد تمردتم، وهذا ترتيب حسن في السؤال والجواب، وطريقة لطيفة.”

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 30:231.

والمعنى أن هذه السورة بما فيها من الترتيب العجيب والنسق البعيد والوعد والوعيد والترغيب والترهيب، تذكره للمتأملين وتبصرة للمستبصرين، فمن شاء الخير لنفسه في الدنيا والآخرة اتخذ إلى ربه سبيلاً.

which is normally followed by God’s signs in the universe. The following are some individual verses that illustrate the thematic correlation between honoring God and serving humans:

1. “Offer the prayer and give the alms” (Q. 2:43).
2. “God is with those who are mindful [of Him], and those who are good-doers” (Q. 16:128).
3. “They exhort one another to patience (ṣabr) and exhort one another to compassion (marḥamah)” (Q. 90:17).
4. “Be steadfast in your devotion to God and bear witness impartially” (Q. 5:8).
5. “Those [angels] who carry the Throne and those who surround it celebrate the praise of their Lord and have faith in Him, and they beg forgiveness for the believers: ‘Our Lord, You embrace all things in mercy and knowledge, so forgive those who turn to You and follow Your path. Save them from the pains of Hell’ (Q. 40:7).
6. “Those [disbelievers] who do not pay the prescribed alms and refuse to believe in the world to come!” (Q. 41:7).
7. “Sleeping only little at night, praying at dawn for God’s forgiveness, giving a rightful share of their wealth to the beggar and the deprived” (Q. 51:17-19).

This thematic duality is originally a Sufi maxim, which al-Rāzī usually ascribes to the masters of the Sufi path. For instance, in surahs 16 (al-Naḥl) and 90 (al-Balad), al-Rāzī speaks of truthfulness with the *ḥaqq* (the Truth) and morality towards the *khalq* (the created) as the “foundation of Sufism” (*al-aṣl fī al-taṣawwuf*) and the “perfection of the spiritual path” (*kamāl al-ṭarīq*).<sup>24</sup> Spiritually speaking, al-Rāzī sometimes explains that compassion for others is a mystical corollary of honoring God. He illustrates this by arguing that when one has reverence for a king and then sees one of the kings’ servants in need, then one must give a helping hand. Neglecting this duty is a sign of dishonoring the king. Al-Rāzī moves on to support this illustration with a renowned sacred ḥadīth (Qudsī) in which God questions a man: ‘My servant, I fell sick, but you did not visit Me?’ The man responds: ‘How would you fall sick, when You are the Lord of the worlds?’ God answers: ‘My servant such and such fell sick but you did not visit him. If you did, you would find me there.’ After citing this illustration and sacred ḥadīth, al-Rāzī

---

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 20:115.

concludes: “Reverence and compassion are closely connected. Where is no compassion for God’s creation, there is no reverence for God’s due.”<sup>25</sup>

Apart from the Sufi phraseology of this thematic couple, al-Rāzī sometimes presents it in a philosophical way. For example, Q. 40:7 is presented as an expression of the ultimate bliss (*kamāl al-sa‘ādah*) that is attained in showing honor (*ta‘zīm*) for God, and compassion (*shafaqah*) for people.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, in *al-Maṭālib al-‘Āliyah*, al-Rāzī explains “honoring God” (*ta‘zīm amr Allāh*) as a sign of perfecting the theoretical faculty of the soul and “showing compassion for the creatures of God” (*al-shafaqah ‘alā khalq Allāh*) as a sign of perfecting the practical faculty of the soul.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 26:20-21. التعظيم متعلق بالشفقة فحيث لا شفقة على خلق الله لا تعظيم لجانب الله.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 27:29.

<sup>27</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Al-Maṭālib al-‘Āliyah*, 7:230. For al-Rāzī’s relationship with Sufism, see al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-Nafs wa al-Rūh wa Sharḥ Quwāhumā fī ‘Ilm al-Akhlāq*, ed. ‘Abd Allāh Ismā‘īl (Cairo: Al-Maktabah al-Azhariyyah lī al-Turāth, 2013); al-Jazzār, *Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī wa al-Taṣawwuf* (Alexandria: Mansha‘at al-Ma‘ārif, 2000); Ayman Shihadeh, “The Mystic and the Sceptic in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī,” in *Sufism and Theology*, ed. Ayman Shihadeh (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 118. 164; and “Ibn ‘Arabī’s Letter to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī: A Study and Translation,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 25 (2014): 113–137. Al-Rāzī’s admiration of *taṣawwuf* can be easily discerned from his book on Fīraq (Sects) wherein he laments the exclusion of Sufism from Muslim sects. He argues that Sufis have their valid way of knowing God; that is, the way of purification (*taṣfiyah*) and the abandonment of corporeal attachments (*al-‘alā‘iq al-badaniyyah*). This insistence on including the Sufis as a sect may be a result of the Ghazālī’s influence on al-Rāzī. In his *Al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl* (Deliverance from Error), al-Ghazālī gives us a hint why Sufism is to be treated as a sect: he presents an epistemological trajectory of the “seekers of truth” (*Ṭālibī al-Ḥaqq*). In this regard, al-Ghazālī lists four sects that adopt distinct approaching in their pursuit of truth. They include the rational theologians, the Bāṭinīs, the philosophers and the Sufis. Al-Rāzī’s consideration of the Sufi approach to knowing God, as epistemically distinct from the rationalists’ approach, is more validated and reinforced in the *al-Maṭālib al-‘Āliyah*. See al-Rāzī, *Al-Maṭālib al-‘Āliyah*, 1:53-59. However, al-Rāzī divides the Sufis into six categories and admires the third group as the best among human sects (*khayr fīraq al-‘ādamiyyīn*). See al-Rāzī, *I’tiqādāt fīraq al-Muslimīn wa al-Mushrikīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1982), 72-74. In his *Fīraq*, al-Rāzī lists the following six Sufi sects: (1) The partisans of customs (*aṣḥāb al-‘ādāt*), who focus only on exterior matters like wearing the *khirqah*; (2) the partisans of worship (*aṣḥāb al-‘ibādāt*), who abandon work and busy themselves with asceticism and worship; (3) the partisans of Reality (*aṣḥāb al-ḥaqīqah*), who, after finishing the mandatory ritual duties, do not engage in voluntary worship but in incessant *dhikr* and contemplation (*fīkr*), and they are the best in all human sects (*khayr fīraq al-‘ādamiyyīn*); (4) The illuminatory (*Nūriyyah*) sect, which posits that there are two veils (*ḥijābān*): one that comes from light which compels them to acquire good qualities, such as love, surrender and intimacy, and another that comes from fire which keeps concerned about lust, anger and cupidity (*hirs*); (5) The Incarnationists (*al-ḥulūliyyah*), who are not versed in rational sciences but experience some states that make them imagine the incarnation (*ḥulūl*) and unification (*ittiḥād*); and (6) The Permissivists (*Mubāḥiyyah*), who violate the divine law (*sharī‘ah*) and claim that God exempted them from religious obligations. Al-Rāzī describes this sect as the most evil sect that essentially follows the religion of the Persian Mazdak.



## 2.1 Complementary Pairs and the Structure of Surah 73 (al-Muzzammil)

Given this mystical background, al-Rāzī considers surah 73 (al-Muzzammil) as being structured around three main commands. The first two commands are to honor God (73:1-9) and to exemplify patience and compassion with people (Q. 73:10).<sup>28</sup>

### 2.1.1 Having Reverence for God

For honoring God, the surah commands the prophet to spend two thirds or one half, or, at least, one third of the night in ritual prayer and a slow-paced meditative recitation of the Qur'ān (*tartīl*). This special form of Qur'anic recitation, al-Rāzī explains, instills awe, hope, and fear in the heart as one encounters verses on God, promises and warnings. With this experience the heart is filled with the light of knowing God.<sup>29</sup> Al-Rāzī adds that this intense spiritual exercise is justified by the following:

We shall send a momentous message down to you.  
Night prayer (*nāshi`at al-layl*) makes a deeper impression and sharpens words—  
you are kept busy for long periods of the day (Q. 73:5-6).

Here, al-Rāzī provides a purely Sufi interpretation of this passage. In his view, when one engages in worship and *dhikr* during the darkness of the night, one's senses will not be distracted by any sensory things or sensoria (*al-maḥsūsāt*). Therefore, the heart becomes more receptive to the spiritual inspirations (*al-wāridāt al-rūḥāniyyah*), illuminating insights (*al-khawāṭir al-nūrāniyyah*), meditations (*ta`ammulāt*), lights (*anwār*), inner emotions such as joy in and reverence of God, and epiphanies or unveilings (*mukāshafāt*). Al-Rāzī asserts that the word *nāshi`ah* in v. 6 is a reference to these Sufi experiences. Since they occur during the night, when

---

<sup>28</sup> Even though these two complementary themes are rightfully communicated but these two texts, the imbalance between the length of the passage on honoring God and the length of the passage on serving others may suggest a subjective demarcation of the surah divisions.

<sup>29</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb*, 30:153.

the *nafs* is free from bodily distractions, they are called *nāshi'at al-layl*.<sup>30</sup> However, the expected devotion to God reaches its climax when the surah addresses the prophet:

So celebrate the name of your Lord and devote yourself wholeheartedly to Him. He is Lord of the east and west, there is no god but Him, so take Him as your Disposer [of all affairs]" (Q. 73:8-9).

In this Qur'anic message, al-Rāzī identifies three main mystical teachings: *dhikr* (recollection of God), *tabattul* (total devotion to God) and the spiritual degrees of *tabattul*. In his discussions on these three spiritual dimensions, al-Rāzī demonstrates that the two verses provide a series of progressive stations for the seeker of God.

With regard to *dhikr*, al-Rāzī provides a description of four progressive modes of one's recollection of God. In the beginning, the name of God is to be verbally repeated, as indicated by "celebrate the *name* of your Lord" (73:8), until the name (*al-ism*) departs and the Named (*al-musammā*) remains—as pointed out in "and mention your Lord" (Q. 7:205).<sup>31</sup> This second level of *dhikr* is generated by pondering divine providence and benevolence, which keeps one's focus on God's blessings and favors. From the focus on the aspects of lordship (*rubūbiyyah*), one experiences a *dhikr* growth that turns the focus to divinity (*ilāhiyyah*) as expressed in "Remember *God*" (Q. 2:200). With this third level of *dhikr*, one enters into the station of reverential fear (*haybah wa khashyah*) and keeps progressing through the stations of divine veneration, exaltation, transcendence and incomparability (*tanzīh*). Ultimately, one reaches the 'He Alone station' (*maqām al-huwiyyah al-aḥadiyyah*), through which one experiences the True One (*al-wāḥid al-ḥaqq*). This oneness, al-Rāzī continues, is represented by the two epithets: *al-zāhir*, in the sense that He is the origin of all worldly manifestations, and *al-bāṭin*, in the sense that He is above the comprehension of all created beings. Al-Rāzī closes his discussion on these

---

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 30:154-155.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 30:157. سبحانه من احتجب عن العقول لشدة ظهوره و اختفى عنها بكمال نوره.

*dhikr* levels with the prayer: “Holy be the one who is veiled from the intellect due to His absolute appearance and is hidden from the intellect due to His absolute light.”<sup>32</sup>

As for *tabattul*, al-Rāzī breaks with the majority of exegetes on the actual meaning of devotion to God in v. 8. He states that the exegetes define *tabattul* as sincere devotion (*ikhhlās*) to God in worship. In this sense, al-Rāzī continues, the exegetes explain that Mary is called the *batūl* because she was fully dedicated to worshipping God. However, he argues that *tabattul* is a detachment from anything other than God. Al-Rāzī asserts that this exclusion is literal and absolute. Worshipping with an eye to be rewarded in the afterlife or walking the spiritual path for the sake of knowing, continues al-Rāzī, is practicing devotion to the afterlife and knowledge, not to God. A real servant is the one who seeks the Known (*al-ma ‘rūf*), not knowing (*al- ‘irfān*) and the Worshipped (*al-ma ‘būd*), not the servitude (*al- ‘ubūdiyyah*). Speaking as a Sufi authority, al-Rāzī affirms that this spiritual station is inexpressible (*lā yashraḥuhu al-maqāl*) and beyond imagination (*al-yu ‘abbiru ‘anhu al-khayāl*). He also speaks as a Sufi master when he asserts that the only parable that makes this spiritual station conceivable in our minds is that of the type of passionate love (*‘ishq*) that causes body sickness and defective faculties. With this type of *‘ishq*, he continues, one is totally detached from everything except the beloved (*al-ma ‘shūq*) and thereby discerning the difference between devotion to the beloved and devotion to the vision (*ru ‘yat*) of the beloved.<sup>33</sup>

Al-Rāzī continues his mystical interpretation of *tabattul* by arguing that the three sentences in v. 9 indicate three factors that generate three levels of devotion. In his view, genuine *tabattul* is not attainable without love. The cause of love, adds al-Rāzī, is either perfection (*kamāl*) or perfecting (*takmīl*) which ultimately belong to God. Thus, none deserves ultimate

---

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 30:157.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 30:157.

love but Him. Al-Rāzī applies this notion of *kamāl*-based love to the initial part of v. 9 “He is Lord of the east and west,” which is a reference to the first level of *tabattul*. As one grows in *tabattul*, one starts to seek the Known (*Ma‘rūf*), not knowing (*‘irfān*). Al-Rāzī reads the middle part of v. 9, “there is no god but Him,” as a reference to the second degree of *tabattul*. Finally, *tabattul* reaches its peak with the delegation of all matters to God (*tafwīd*) and satisfaction with God’s choice and decree. This paramount level of *tabattul* is implied by the closing sentence: “So take Him as your Disposer [of all affairs].” Mystically, al-Rāzī utilizes the sequence in “there is no god but Him, so take Him as your Disposer [of all affairs]” to posit that failing to show that *tafwīd* reflects a deficient knowledge of the reality of “there is no God but Him.”<sup>34</sup>

### 2.1.2 Showing Compassion for Others

After al-Rāzī discusses the part on honoring God, he moves on to the complementary part regarding the kind treatment of people. According to him, this part is referenced only in one verse: “Patiently endure what they say, and ignore them politely.” Furthermore, he asserts that this verse gives the prophet two options regarding his response to the Meccans’ insults: engaging with them patiently or avoiding them peacefully. In consistency with the notion of the ethical value of this complementary pair of exaltation of God and kindness to people, al-Rāzī rejects the exegetical view that this verse is abrogated.

The two concomitant duties of showing reverence for God and compassion for people were followed by two brief units. The first starts with “and leave to Me those who deny the truth and live in luxury. Bear with them for a little while” as a command to the prophet leave the affairs of the Meccan detractors to God’s judgment (Q. 73:11-14), whereas the second commences with “We have sent a messenger to you [people] to be your witness, just as We sent

---

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 30:158-159. Al-Rāzī also gives Sufī interpretations of Moses’ experience of *maḥw* (effacement), *fanā’* (annihilation), hope and fear in the Q. 20:9-16. See *ibid.*, 22:21.

a messenger to Pharaoh” as a reminder of the fate of Pharaoh (Q. 73:15-19).<sup>35</sup> Finally, the surah closes with a long corresponding verse which, in spite of its clearly Medinan style, sheds light on the night worship—a discussion that is evocative of the prologue of the surah.<sup>36</sup>

### 3. Blended Themes and the Argumentation of Surah 2 (Al-Baqarah):

Undoubtedly, heterogeneous themes (*tanawwu‘ al-ma‘ānī*) are more complicated in the long Medinan surahs. In the words of Ernst, “many readers of the Qur’ān have despaired of finding a literary structure in these often long and complicated compositions.”<sup>37</sup> Medinan surahs are generally characterized by laws that are blended with various topics, such as prophecy, and debates with the Jews and Christians.<sup>38</sup> However, al-Rāzī argues that these variegated themes thematically reinforce each other and conform to the Qur’anic manner of persuasion which does not merely aim at preaching to the mind but, more importantly, targeting the heart to inspire the desired changes. In other words, the Qur’anic text combines elements of rules and ethico-religious precepts to produce arguments that influence human conduct. Therefore, instead of viewing the juxtaposition of moral and legal units as disparate, al-Rāzī views this type of sequence as a typical case of the dyadic logical relationship of means-purpose. For instance, on

---

<sup>35</sup> Richard Bell notes that vv. 15-19 are “unconnected being addressed to the people, not to the prophet”. See Richard Bell, *The Qur’ān Translated*, 2:613. However, this direct address to the Meccans was anticipated and facilitated by the preceding unit starting with “and leave to me those who deny the truth ...” (v. 11).

<sup>36</sup> As indicated by Carl W. Ernst this long verse seems likely to be a later addition, an observation that raises questions about how and under whose authority such later additions were inserted. Furthermore, Ernst also acknowledges that these observations are based on internal stylistic evidence, not external proofs that provide, for instance, manuscripts that contain earlier versions of the Qur’anic text. Drawing on the dialectical character of the text and the strong presence of symmetrical Qur’anic composition he observes, Ernst argues that it is plausible to assume that the process of revision could have been done by the explicit involvement of the prophet. See Carl W. Ernst, *How to Read the Qur’an: A New Guide, with Select Translations* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 97-98.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>38</sup> For the new emphases in the Medina n Surahs, see *Ibid.*, 156. See also Nicolai Sinai, “The Qur’ān as Process,” in *The Qur’ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur’anic Milieu*, ed. Angelica Neuwirth, Nicola Sinai, and Michael Marx (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 407-439, esp. 410-412.

the heterogeneous nature of surah 4 (Al-Nisā') and how to determine its primary purpose amid the varying themes, al-Rāzī writes:

Know that God customarily arranges this noble Book in the finest ways. Particularly, He mentions some rules, follows them with verses on exhortation and admonition and blends them with verses that are evocative of God's supremacy, majesty, omnipotence and great divinity. Then He turns back to the rules. This is the best types and arrangement. As far as influence (*ta`thīr*) is concerned, it is the closest to the heart because hard obligations are not to be fully internalized unless they are accompanied by promise of reward (*wa`d*) and warning against punishment (*wa`īd*). Concurrently, the promise and warning will have its impact on the heart only after attesting to the absolute perfection of the One who gave the promise and warning. Therefore, this is the best form of arrangements and the most suitable for preaching the true faith. Given this, we say that God Almighty mentioned many laws and obligation. Then He followed them with an extensive explanation of the states of the disbelievers and the hypocrites. These verses were subsequently closed with verses indicative of God's great majesty and absolute supremacy. Finally, He turns back to unfolding the laws by saying "they ask you [prophet] for a ruling on women" [Q. 4:127]."<sup>39</sup>

According to al-Rāzī's observation, surah 4 is mainly about the laws that appear in the beginning and at the end of the surah. However, these laws are presented in a way that not only informs the mind but, more significantly, influences behavior. To this end, the middle part of the surah, which clearly occupies most of it, is designed to lead people into obeying the law by addressing non-legal issues that serve a three-fold purpose: (1) affirming that the laws are worthy of honor because their source is the Holiest and Greatest, (2) promising rewards for obedience, and (3) instilling fear of punishment for those who are indifferent to faith. This pedagogic insight is similarly stressed in *Ikhwān al-Ṣafa*'s epistles. For instance, one finds the following:

My brethren, know that the Law is not to be complete except through commands and prohibitions. Commands and prohibitions would not be carried out except through promise [of reward] and warning [against punishment]. The promise and warning would not take root [in the heart] except through encouragement and discouragement; yet, these

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 24:49.

اعلم أن عادة الله في ترتيب هذا الكتاب الكريم وقع على أحسن الوجوه وهو أنه يذكر شيئاً من الأحكام ثم يذكر عقيبه آيات كثيرة في الوعد والترغيب والترهيب ويخلط بما آيات دالة على كبرياء الله وجلال قدرته وعظمته إلهيته. ثم يعود مرة أخرى إلى بيان الأحكام، وهذا أحسن أنواع الترتيب وأقربها إلى التأثير في القلوب، لأن التكليف بالأعمال الشاقة لا يقع في موقع القبول إلا إذا كان مقروناً بالوعد والوعيد، والوعد والوعيد لا يؤثر في القلب إلا عند القطع بغاية كمال من صدر عنه الوعد والوعيد، فظهر أن هذا الترتيب أحسن الترتيبات اللائقة بالدعوة إلى الدين الحق. إذا عرفت هذا فنقول: إنه سبحانه ذكر في أول هذه السورة أنواعاً كثيرة من الشرائع والتكاليف، ثم أتبعها بشرح أحوال الكافرين والمنافقين واستقصى في ذلك، ثم ختم تلك الآيات الدالة على عظمة جلال الله وكمال كبريائه، ثم عاد بعد ذلك إلى بيان الأحكام فقال "وَيَسْتَفْتُونَكَ فِي النِّسَاءِ فَلِئِنَّ اللَّهَ لُفِيئِكُمْ فِيهِنَّ".

two would be useful only for those who have hope and fear—both of which will be known only when the commands and prohibitions are followed. In other words, those who have no fear or hope will not develop a desire or aversion to do anything—a state of being makes promise and warning and command and prohibition useless.”<sup>40</sup>

Among the modern exegetes, both Muḥammad al-Ghazālī in his *Naḥwa Tafṣīr Mawḍūʿī lī Suwar al-Qurʾān* and Sayyid Quṭb in his *Fī Zilāl al-Qurʾān* pay attention to this Qurʾanic method of blending several themes together. However, there is a distinctive difference between al-Rāzī and Quṭb in their theorization of this Qurʾanic method of composition. While al-Rāzī explains this Qurʾanic phenomenon as a form of persuasion designed to produce certain effects on the listeners and to motivate them into action, Quṭb fits it into the socio-political dimension of his exegetical work. For instance, Quṭb observes the correlation between religious obligations and practicing God-mindfulness. He then explains

These miscellaneous topics have close connections that stem from the nature of this faith, in which the worship rites, spiritual emotions, and legal and organizational matters are inseparable. Furthermore, this faith will not function well unless it supervises all aspects of life, where the matters of this life and the afterlife, and matters of the heart and international relations are included and regulated in accordance with one complete perspective, one consistent method, one comprehensive system and one tool which is the special system that is regulated by the divine law in all matters.”<sup>41</sup>

Following al-Rāzī, M. A. S. Abdel Haleem supports the view that the topic shifts do not necessarily constitute a thematic discontinuity. On the contrary, a shift from laws to God-mindfulness can be intentionally designed to influence moral conduct or act as a catalyst that, in

---

<sup>40</sup> See *Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-Ṣafā* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1966), 4:77.

”واعلم يا أخي أن الناموس لا يتم إلا بالأوامر والنواهي، والأمر والنهي لا ينفذان إلا بالوعد والوعيد، والوعد والوعيد لا يتمكان إلا بالترغيب والترهيب، والترغيب والترهيب لا ينجعان إلا فمين يخاف ويرجو، والخوف والرجاء لا يظهران إلا عند اتباع الأمر والنهي، فمن لا يخاف شيئاً ولا يرجو أملاً فهو لا يرغب ولا يرهب، ومن لا يرغب ولا يرهب فلا ينجع فيه الوعد والوعيد، ولا ينجع فيه الأمر والنهي، ومن لا يأتمر لواضعي النواميس ولا ينتهي عن نواهيهم فلا يكون له نصيب في الناموس الإلهي البتة.”

<sup>41</sup> Sayyid Quṭb, *Fī Zilāl al-Qurʾān* (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 2004), 1:179.

هكذا نجد هذه الأمور المتعددة مرتبطة ارتباطاً وثيقاً، ناشئة من طبيعة هذا الدين، الذي لا تنفصل فيه الشعائر التعبدية، عن المشاعر القلبية، عن التشريعات التنظيمية، ولا يستقيم إلا بأن يشمل أمور الدنيا وأمر الآخرة، وشؤون القلب وشؤون العلاقات الاجتماعية والدولية، وإلا أن يشرف على الحياة كلها، فيصرفها وفق تصور واحد متكامل، ومنهج واحد متناسق، ونظام واحد شامل، وأداة واحدة هي هذا النظام الخاص الذي يقوم على شريعة الله في كافة الشؤون.”

Abdel Haleem's words, would "secure obedience."<sup>42</sup> In this way, the non-legal material ultimately supports the Qur'anic legal system as stressed by Al-Matroudi.<sup>43</sup> Critiquing the methodological problem of the split between the legal and the moral in European culture and offering a reevaluation of the modernists' assumptions about the legal content of the Qur'ān, Hallaq argues that "the Qur'ān has, *ab initio*, provided Muslim believers with a cosmology entirely grounded in *moral* natural laws, a cosmology with perhaps far more persuasive power than any of its Enlightenment metaphysical counters, and one that had powerful and deep psychological effects."<sup>44</sup>

To fully recognize al-Rāzī's methodology of explaining the intentionality of *tanawwu' al-ma'ānī*, we will examine his approach to surah 2 (al-Baqarah), and how to find the dominant theme amid its admittedly multiple topics. Reading al-Rāzī's treatment of the longest surah in the Qur'ān is not an easy task. It requires a close reading of about four volumes tracking al-Rāzī's observations on each topic shift in the surah. A cursory reading could leave one with the impression that al-Rāzī is only interested in the "stitches" that connect adjacent units together. However, an in-depth examination of his observations on the topic shifts in surah 2 and the interrelationships between the units reveals that al-Rāzī is aware of the unifying focus of the surah, its major sections and thematic progression. Al-Rāzī's holistic reading of surah 2 appears to be motivated by treating the surah as a persuasive text with a main idea, purpose and audience.

---

<sup>42</sup> For examples that illustrate this purpose and other objectives, such as "highlighting an important point" or "giving reassurance," see M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, "Structural Coherence in the Qur'an: How to See the Connections," in *Structural Dividers in the Qur'an*, ed. Marianna Klar (London: Routledge, 2020), 339-364, esp. 341-349.

<sup>43</sup> See Al-Matroudi, "The Relationship Between Legal and Non-legal Verses in the Qur'ān: An Analytical Study of the Three Themes of the Qur'an," *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law* 29, no. 2, (2016): 261-283. However, there is no reference to al-Rāzī throughout the article in spite of al-Rāzī's original presentation on how the legal and the moral are mutually reinforced. See also idem, "Manhaj al-Qur'ān fi Taqrīr al-Aḥkām: Dirāsah Taḥlīliyyah li Āyāt al-Ṣadaqah fi Sūrat al-Baqarah," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 23, no. 1 (2021):180-196.

<sup>44</sup> Wael B. Hallaq, "Groundwork of the Moral Law: A New Look at the Qur'ān and the Genesis of Sharī'a," *Islamic Law and Society* 16, no. 1 (2009): 259.



Based on his identification of the surah or section argumentation, al-Rāzī starts the process of the demarcation of the surah divisions.

### 3.1 The Unifying Focus of Surah 2 (al-Baqarah)

As will be illustrated below, the governing focus of the surah, in al-Rāzī's analysis, falls on Muḥammad's prophecy: the warning prophet and the legislative prophet. In other words, the main purpose of the surah was "accepting Muḥammad as the new prophet and his sharī'ah as the binding law." Dealing with the surah as a case for the warning and legislative prophet, al-Rāzī is able to find the ties that bind the surah heterogamous material together. In his view, the surah arrangement does not merely reflect a demonstration of Muḥammad's prophecy and legislations, but equally reveals the Qur'anic methods of persuasion. For instance, the initial units on the story of Adam and the special divine blessings bestowed on the Israelites were identified in al-Rāzī's analysis as a Qur'anic persuasive technique for winning the Jews' hearts to Muḥammad's message, which is now supported by a quasi-genealogical continuity with figures such as Adam and Moses. Similarly, the legal legislations for the prophet's community is interrupted by spiritual reminders of God's sovereignty and power to lead the new believers into a level of unflinching obedience that is from the hearts, not merely performed by the limbs.

It is noteworthy that al-Rāzī's scattered observations about the centrality of Muḥammad's prophecy in surah 2 are succinctly reflected in Iṣlāḥī's work as the *'amūd* (axis) of the surah. In Iṣlāḥī's view, the surah's *'amūd* revolves around the notion of *īmān bī al-risālah*; that is, "an invitation to believe in Muḥammad's prophecy," ... the invitation being extended to the Jews ... and also as the preparing of Muslims to receive the new Sharī'ah."<sup>45</sup> This dual function of

---

<sup>45</sup> Mustansir Mir, "The Structure of the Qur'an: the Inner Dynamic of the Surah," in *Oxford Handbook of Qur'anic Studies*, ed. Abdel Haleem and Mustafa Shah (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 370. For an analysis of Iṣlāḥī's treatment of the coherence in surah 2, see idem, "The sūra as a unity," in *Approaches to the Qur'ān*, ed. G. R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef (London: Routledge, 1993), 215-217.

Muḥammad’s prophecy seems to be congruent with the early Medinan context to which this surah belongs. The context is most probably a Muslim-Jewish conflict that revolves around “the question of which community—the Jews of Medina or the new arrivals from Mecca—were God’s true “chosen people.”<sup>46</sup>

Before outlining the surah, it is helpful to start with a selection of verses that highlight the centrality of Muḥammad’s prophecy in the surah according to al-Rāzī’s exegetical observations.

Consider the following verses:

1. “This is the Scripture in which there is no doubt, containing guidance for those who are mindful of God, who believe in the unseen, keep up the prayer, and give out of what We have provided for them; those who believe in the revelation sent down to you [Muhammad], and in what was sent before you, those who have firm faith in the Hereafter” (Q. 2:2-4)
2. “If you have doubts about the revelation We have sent down to Our servant, then produce a single sura like it- enlist whatever supporters you have other than God- if you truly [think you can]. If you cannot do this- and you never will- then beware of the Fire prepared for the disbelievers, whose fuel is men and stones” (Q. 2:23-24).
3. “Children of Israel, remember how I blessed you. Honor your pledge to Me and I will honor My pledge to you: I am the One you should fear. And believe in what I have sent down confirming that which is [already] with you, and be not the first to disbelieve in it. And do not exchange My signs for a small price, and fear [only] Me” (Q. 2:40-41).
4. “So can you [believers] hope that such people will believe you, when some of them used to hear the words of God and then deliberately twist them, even when they understood them?” (Q. 2:75)
5. “Our Lord, make a messenger of their own rise up from among them, to recite Your revelations to them, teach them the Scripture and wisdom, and purify them: You are the Mighty, the Wise” (Q. 2:129).

---

<sup>46</sup> Hartmut Bobzin, “‘The Seal of the Prophets’: Towards an Understanding of Muhammad’s Prophethood,” in *The Qur’ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur’anic Milieu*, ed. Angelica Neuwirth, Nicola Sinai, and Michael Marx (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 574. Here, Bobzin argues that the term *nabī* was first ascribed to the prophet in Madīnah. He adds that the two references of *nabī* in the Meccan Surah, al-A’rāf, are better understood as a reference to “the gentile prophet.” In his opinion, this Meccan usage is different from the Medinan concept of *nabī*. He explains that the Medinan usage is typically “supported by means of a quasi-genealogical continuity with earlier ‘chosen’ individuals and communities. See also “Muhammad’s Understanding of Himself: The Koranic Data,” in *Islam’s Understanding of Itself*, ed. Richard Hovannisian and Speros Vyronis (Malibu, CA: Undena, 1983), 15–52; and W. Bijlefeld, “A Prophet More Than a Prophet? Some Observations on the Quranic Use of the Terms ‘Prophet’ and ‘Apostle,’” *Muslim World* 59, no. 1 (1969): 1–28. Furthermore, the content of the Medinan Surahs reaffirms the basic framework portrayed in the biography of prophet Muḥammad. By basic framework, I refer to the event of *hijrah*, the presence of the Jews in Medina, and the tensions with the hypocrites (*munāfiqūn*). Acknowledging such elements will partly make the attempts towards chronological reading of the Qur’ān more plausible. See Nicolai Sinai, “The Qur’ān as Process,” in *The Qur’ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur’anic Milieu*, ed. Angelica Neuwirth, Nicola Sinai, and Michael Marx (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 407-439.

6. "Just as We have sent among you a Messenger of your own to recite Our revelations to you, purify you and teach you the Scripture, wisdom, and [other] things you did not know" (Q. 2:151).
7. "These are the revelations of God which We recite to you [Muhammad] with the truth, and you truly are one of the messengers. We favored some of these messengers above others. God spoke to some; others He raised in rank; We gave Jesus, son of Mary, Our clear signs and strengthened him with the holy spirit. If God had so willed, their successors would not have fought each other after they had been brought clear signs. But they disagreed: some believed and some disbelieved. If God had so willed, they would not have fought each other, but God does what He will" (Q. 2:252-253).
8. "The Messenger believes in what has been sent down to him from his Lord, as do the faithful. They all believe in God, His angels, His scriptures, and His messengers. 'We make no distinction between any of His messengers,' they say, 'We hear and obey. Grant us Your forgiveness, our Lord. To You we all return!'" (Q. 2:285).

The first reference to Muḥammad's prophecy appears in the introductory verses of the surah. Here, Muḥammad's prophecy is associated with past revelatory divine messages, and the righteous are praised for believing in Muḥammad and the past prophets. v. 23 reflects an early point of contention and represents those who cast doubts on the divine source of the Qur'ān, the locus of Muḥammad's prophecy. In response, v. 24 reiterates the Meccan argument that the Qur'anic literary matchlessness points to the divine source of the Qur'ān. In vv. 40-41, there is a gentle acknowledgement of the divine blessings bestowed on the Israelites followed by a command to believe in Muḥammad's message, which affirms the Torah.

However, v. 75 reveals an implied disenchantment. On the relation of this verse to the prophecy office, al-Rāzī argues that the prophet was keen on calling his the Jews of his time to his faith and was disappointed about their rejection and obstinacy; therefore, this verse was revealed to reassure and console the prophet by saying that their predecessors had witnessed great miracles but had nevertheless been similarly rebellious.<sup>47</sup> To counter the Jewish rejection of Muḥammad's message, the figure of Abraham, who is admired by both the Arabian and the

<sup>47</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb*, 3:121.

"إنه عليه السلام كان شديد الحرص على الدعاء إلى الحق وقبولهم الإيمان منه، وكان يضيق صدره بسبب عنادهم وقردهم، فقص الله تعالى عليه أخبار بني إسرائيل في العناد العظيم مع مشاهدة الآيات الباهرة تسلية لرسوله فيما يظهر من أهل الكتاب في زمانه من قلة القبول والاستجابة، فقال تعالى: أَفَتَنْتَهَوْنَ أَنْ يُؤْمِنُوا لَكُمْ ."

Judeo-Christian audience, appears to establish close ties with Muḥammad. In this regard, Abraham and Ishmael are presented as raising the pillars of the Ka‘bah and offering a sincere prayer for the coming of a prophet from Arabia: “our Lord, make a messenger of their own rise up from among them, to recite Your revelations to them, teach them the Scripture and wisdom, and purify them: You are the Mighty, the Wise.” This Abrahamic prayer is later answered in the rising of Muḥammad as a prophet: “just as We have sent among you a Messenger of your own to recite Our revelations to you, purify you and teach you the Scripture, wisdom, and [other] things you did not know.” Such references set the stage for the representation of Muḥammad as “the second Abraham.”<sup>48</sup>

Towards the end of the surah, two incidents are cited from the life of the Israelites, with a special focus on Jālūt and Ṭālūt. The surah closes these narratives with the comment “These are the revelations of God which We recite to you [Muhammad] with the truth, and you truly are one of the messengers.” Drawing partly on the Mu‘tazilite Abū Muslim, al-Rāzī emphasizes the function of these narratives. In this view, they serve a two-fold function: (1) authenticating the prophecy claim in Muḥammad’s case on the grounds that he told these stories without prior learning, and (2) giving comfort to the prophet when he sees models of the Hebrew prophets who were saddened by the pain of rejection and rebellion despite their many miracles.<sup>49</sup> Finally, in v. 285, faith in all prophets is praised at the end of the surah as it was at the beginning.

### 3.2 Prophecy-related Themes

Apart from these unequivocal references to Muḥammad’s prophecy in the beginning, middle and end of the surah, al-Rāzī interprets many of the surah narratives as a means of

---

<sup>48</sup> See Abū Ya‘rub al-Marzūqī, *Al-Jalīyy fī al-Tafsīr* (Tunisia: Al-Dār al-Mutawassiṭīyah lī al-Nashr, 2010), 1:181. For Abraham’s connection with Arabia, see R. Firestone, “Abraham’s Association with the Meccan Sanctuary and the Pilgrimage in the Pre Islamic and Early Islamic Periods,” *Le Museon Revue d’études orientales* 104, (1991): 365-393, idem, “Abraham’s Journey to Mecca in Islamic Exegesis: A Form Critical Study of a Tradition,” *Studia Islamica* 76, (1992): 5-24.

<sup>49</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb*, 6:164. Compare with Abū Muslim’s insight in idem, 6:165.

encouraging Muḥammad to carry out his mission as a prophet and to support Muḥammad's claim to the prophecy office. For instance, the Israelites' experiences with past prophets and Abraham's story have a close connection to the centrality of Muḥammad's prophecy in the surah.

First, the juxtaposition of the Israelites' harsh reactions against their prophets (as in the Q. 2:65-73) and the unresponsive attitude of Muḥammad's Jewish contemporaries towards Islam (as in Q. 2:75-82) are interpreted as forms of consoling the prophet. Here, al-Rāzī quotes the Mu'tazilite al-Qaffāl (d. 365/976), who argues that the Israelite narratives in the surah serve several purposes:

1. The Qur'anic narration of the Israelite narratives is indicative of the divine source of the Qur'ān, since he had no prior knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures.
2. The Israelite harsh attitude towards Moses, who saved them from Pharaoh and slavery, reinforces the message that their attitude towards Muḥammad is not unprecedented. Therefore, these narratives convey the message: "let Muḥammad and his adherents mitigate their disappointment with the Jewish rejection".<sup>50</sup>
3. Warning the Judeo-Christian audience and the polytheistic Arabs of against suffering a similar punitive end at the time of Muḥammad, as happened with the disobedient Israelites at the time of Moses.
4. Muḥammad's narration of the Israelites' history with their prophets, coupled with the resurrection references in those narratives, as in Q. 2:73, also targets the polytheists in

---

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 3:121-122.

"فكان الله تعالى يقول: إذا كانت هذه أفعالهم فيما بينهم ومعاملاتهم مع نبيهم الذي أعزهم الله به وأنقذهم من الرق والآفة بسببه، فغير بديع ما يعامل به أخلافهم عُذراً عليه السلام، فليهن عليكم أيها النبي والمؤمنون ما ترونه من عنادهم وإعراضهم عن الحق."

two ways: (1) providing proof of the divine origin of the Qur'ān, and (2) reaffirming the belief in bodily resurrection, which was vehemently denied in Mecca.<sup>51</sup>

Second, the Abrahamic narrative is another way of highlighting Muḥammad's prophecy. Al-Rāzī argues that Abraham is greatly honored by the Meccans and the Judeo-Christian audience. Furthermore, the story of Abraham in surah 2 is phrased and presented in a way that motivates the three groups, the polytheistic Arabs, the Jews and the Christians, to accept Muḥammad's prophecy, acknowledge his faith, and abide by his law (*sharī'ah*).<sup>52</sup> To substantiate the claim that the story of Abraham relates to this triad audience and supports Muḥammad's prophecy, al-Rāzī identifies the following allusions:

1. Abraham attained prophecy (*nubuwwah*) and leadership (*imāmah*) after carrying out the obligations assigned to him, which alerts the Jews, Christians, and pagans to the fact that worldly or otherworldly good (*khayr*) is attained only by abandoning rebellion and obstinacy and yielding to God's decrees and obligations.
2. "My pledge does not hold for those who do evil" (Q. 2:124) is the divine answer to Abraham's request for the leadership (*imāmah*) to remain in his descendants' lands; therefore, the aspiration for a leadership position requires the abandonment of stubbornness and fanaticism.
3. Hajj is one of the Islamic rituals in which focus is on Abraham, and this point serves as an encouragement for the Jews and Christians to follow Muḥammad who is reviving Abraham's tradition.

---

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 3:121-122.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 4:31.

"والحكمة فيه أن إبراهيم عليه السلام شخص يعترف بفضلته جميع الطوائف والملل، فالمشركين كانوا معترفين بفضلته متشرفين بأنهم من أولاده ومن ساكني حرمه وخادمي بيته. وأهل الكتاب من اليهود والنصارى كانوا أيضاً مقرين بفضلته متشرفين بأنهم من أولاده، فحكى الله سبحانه وتعالى عن إبراهيم عليه السلام أموراً توجب على المشركين وعلى اليهود والنصارى قبول قول محمد ﷺ والاعتراف بدينه والانقياد لشرعه."

4. The emphasis on Abraham eases the anger that was aroused in the Jews and Christians when the prayer direction (*Qiblah*) changed from Jerusalem to Mecca. In other words, since the Ka‘bah is honored by Abraham, and Abraham is honored by the Jews and Christians, anger at the new *Qiblah* is unjustified.
5. Abraham is a symbol of unfailing obedience (*inqiyād*) to the divine command; therefore, the three groups are to take him as a model of abandoning envy and accepting Muḥammad’s call.<sup>53</sup>

With this emphasis on Muḥammad’s prophecy and Abraham as a model, the surah seeks to persuade the Jews to join the new community of believers and Muslims, and follow the divine law (*sharī‘ah*). Based on al-Rāzī’s adoption of the Mu‘tazilite reading of the relevance of Abraham in the surah, the intervening reference to Abraham between the polemical discussion with the Jewish community and the legal creation of the Muslim community brings harmony to the heterogeneous material of the surah. In this way, the story of Abraham serves as a transitional hinge because it points both backward and forward. It points backward because it relates to persuading the Jewish audience to accept Muḥammad’s faith which is presented as rooted in Abraham’s legacy. It also points forward because it defends the new *Qiblah*, which officially marks the spiritual independence to the followers of the prophet. This spiritual independence paves the way for legal independence as well.

### **3.3 Outline of Surah 2 (al-Baqarah)**

The structure of surah 2 has attracted the attention of many scholars.<sup>54</sup> A salient feature of al-Rāzī’s approach to the structure of this surah lies in his consideration of the persuasive

---

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 4:31. According to Zahniser, both Robinson and Işlāhī find the sections of surah 2 unified under “the theme of creating a Muslim community in light of the change in the direction of prayer from Jerusalem to Mecca.” See Mathias Zahniser, “Major transitions and Thematic borders in two long Sūras: al-Baqara and al-Nisā’,” in *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur’ān*, ed. Issa J. Boullata (New York: Routledge, 2009), 28. See also Neal Robinson, *Discovering the Qur’ān: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text* (London: SCM Press, 2003), 201.

techniques found therein.<sup>55</sup> The following is an outline of al-Rāzī's observations on the movement of meaning in the surah:

### **1. Introduction (Q. 2:1-27)**

- A. Three responses to the guidance of the Qur'ān
- B. Calling the three groups to Faith
- C. Answering an objection

### **2. Persuading the Jews to accept Muḥammad's Call to Faith (Q. 2:27-103)**

- A. Universal blessings (Q. 2:28-39)
- B. Special blessings of the Israelites in brief (Q. 2:40-48)
- C. An antilogy of blessings and awful acts (Q. 2:49-103)

### **3. A transitional confrontational point (Q. 2:104-150): [this closes the discussions with the Jews and the paves the way for addressing Muslims)]**

- A. Addressing the objections
- B. Appealing to Abraham
- C. Addressing the objections

### **4. The emergence of the Muslim community with a neo-covenant (Q. 2:151-284)**

- A. Muḥammad's prophecy as the answer to Abraham's prayer: (Q. 2:151-162)

<sup>54</sup> For instance, see Neal Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an*, 201-223; Joseph E. Lowry, "Law, Structure, and Meaning in Sūrat al-Baqarah," *Journal of the International Quranic Studies* 2 (2017): 111-148; David E. Smith, "The Structure of al-Baqarah," *Muslim World* 91 (2001): 124; Raymond K. Farrin, "Surat al-Baqara: A Structural Analysis," *Muslim World* 100 no.1 (2010): 17-32; Marianna Klar, "Text Critical Approaches to Sura Structure: Combining Synchronicity with Diachronicity in Sūrat al-Baqara. Part One," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 19, no.1 (2017); and Nevin Reda, *The al-Baqara Crescendo: Understanding the Qur'an's Style, Narrative Structure, and Running Themes* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017) For a review of many modern approaches to surat al-Baqarah, see Mustansir Mir, "The Structure of the Qur'ān: The Inner Dynamics of the Sura," in *The Oxford Handbook of Qur'anic Studies*, ed. Mustafa Shah and Muhammad Abdel Haleem (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 362-373. For some Arabic fine readings of the structure of surah 2, see Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh Dirāz, *Al-Naba' al-'Azīm* (Kuwait: Dār al-Qalam, n.d.); idem, *The Qur'ān: An Eternal Challenge*, trans. Adil Salahi (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 2017); Maḥmūd al-Bustānī, *Al-Tafsīr al-Binā'ī lī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (Mashhad: Majma' al-Buḥūth al-Islāmiyyah, 1422/2001), 31-32; idem, *Al-Manhaj al-Binā'ī fī al-Tafsīr* (Beirut: Dār al-Ḥādī, 2001), 64-65; Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Naḥwa Tafsīr Mawḍū'ī lī Suwar al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 1999); idem, *A Thematic Commentary on the Qur'an*, trans. A. A. Shamis (Virginia: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2000); and 'Abd al-Muta'āl al-Ṣi'īdī, *Al-Naẓm al-Fannī fī al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Ādāb, n.d.).

<sup>55</sup> The list include (1) establishing authority as clear in affirming the divine source of the Qur'ān and the prophecy office of Muḥammad, (2) focusing on mutual beliefs: Adam, blessings, (3) reasoning by analogy, (4) address objections early, (5) creating the perception of renovation of (Abraham faith), and (6) creating emotional responses.



- B. The core of Muḥammad’s message: Affirming the divine unity and denying polytheism (Q. 2:163-167)
- C. Blessings and the implication of obedience (Q. 2:168-171)
- D. Series of laws and *wa’z* (Q. 2:172-284)

**5. Conclusion (Q. 2:285-286)**

According to this outline, each part leads smoothly to the next. In al-Rāzī’s analysis, the focus seems to be on the conceptual transition between major sections, not the verbal stitches, between major sections. The following is a presentation of al-Rāzī’s examination of the surah structure.

**3.3.1 Section One: Introduction (Q. 2:1-27)**

The surah starts with the Qur’ān as an undeniable source of guidance: “this is the Scripture in which there is no doubt, that contains guidance for those who are mindful of God” (Q. 2:2), an affirmation that is congruent with the unifying “theme of prophecy.” This long introduction gives a general description of what al-Rāzī calls the “three sects” (*al-firaq al-thalāth*); that is, the believers, the disbelievers and the hypocrites.<sup>56</sup> These descriptions depict the various responses to the guiding Qur’ān: the believers, whose inner conscience and hearts are sound (Q. 2:1-5), the disbelievers, whose attitudes are driven by denial and stubbornness (Q. 2:6-7), and the hypocrites, whose verbal statements contradict their inner conscience (Q. 2:8-21).<sup>57</sup> Al-Rāzī adds that the part on the hypocrites appear in two segments: (1) a description of four awful acts they commit (Q. 2:9-15), and (2) two parables that expose their unreceptivity to the light of faith (Q. 2:16-20).

---

<sup>56</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb*, 2:75.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:53.

Delineating these three responses of these three groups, al-Rāzī detects a topic shift that is marked by a pronoun shift: “People, worship your Lord, who created you and those before you, so that you may be mindful [of Him]” (Q. 2:21). In al-Rāzī’s opinion, this verse addresses the three groups directly in a form of topical *iltifāt*, where the text “moves from talking about them to talking to them” (*intaqal mina al-ghaybah ilā al-ḥuḍūr*). Al-Rāzī sees this shift as indicative of honorary respect for, and care about, the addressees who will be soon called on to respond positively to the common theological trilogy:

1. Divine unity (Q. 2:21-22), which directs attention to God’s signs;
2. Prophecy (Q. 2:23-24), which highlights the miraculous nature of the Qur’ān as a basis for authenticating Muḥammad’s claim to prophecy; and
3. Eschatology (Q. 2:25), which appears in the form of *wa‘d* (promise of rewards) and *wa‘id* (warning of punishment)—which is the typical Qur’anic way of presenting Muḥammad’s core message, as seen in the previous chapter.<sup>58</sup>

Furthermore, al-Rāzī argues that the pronoun shift in v. 21 is designed to make the obligations (*takālīf*) communicated in the passage easier to accept and follow. This ease is achieved as the addressees recognize the honor of receiving a direct divine speech with no intermediaries (*min ghayr wāṣīṭah*).<sup>59</sup>

In line with his focus on Muḥammad’s prophecy in the surah, al-Rāzī argues that it moves on to identify a specious argument (*shubḥah*) against the inimitability of the Qur’ān, as pinpointed in Q. 2:23-24.

Q. 2:2:26 God does not shy from drawing comparisons even with something as small as a gnat, or larger: the believers know it is the truth from their Lord, but the disbelievers say,

<sup>58</sup>See Ibid., 2:75, 106 and 113. In his *Niẓām al-Qur’ān*, al-Farāhī follows al-Rāzī’s theological trilogy as an explanation for the flow of these three units. See ‘Abd al-Ḥamid al-Farāhī, *Niẓām al-Qur’ān wa Ta’wīl al-Furqān bī al-Furqān* (Tunisia: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2012), 224-227.

<sup>59</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb*, 2:75.

“What does God mean by such a comparison?” Through it He makes many go astray and leads many to the right path. But it is only the rebels He makes go astray:

Q. 2:2:27 Those who break their covenant with God after it has been confirmed, who sever the bonds that God has commanded to be joined, who spread corruption on the earth- these are the losers.

Here, al-Rāzī explains that the objection rests on the fact that the Qur’ān contains references to bees, flies, spiders and ants and the claim that such references are inappropriate in an eloquent speech. Identifying the exact addressees in these verses, al-Rāzī follows the Mu‘tazilite al-Qaffāl, who argues that it is possible that this *shubhah* is raised by the disbelievers, the hypocrites, and the Jews.<sup>60</sup>

### 3.3.2 Section Two (Q. 2:27-103)

According to al-Rāzī, the recurring motif of the section is “divine blessings.” He connects blessings bestowed on people with obedience to God. These blessings are progressively presented to denote (1) the general blessing of creation, (2) the special creation of Adam or humans with the capability of acquiring knowledge and the honor of knowing God, and (3) the more special blessings bestowed on the early obedient Israelites. After this motivating call to obedience, the section closes with a warning against the Israelite dishonoring of the covenant of God. At this point, the tone of the surah changes due to its treatment of preaching to the Jewish audience. Understanding these passages as “reminders of divine blessings” is clearly found in the exegetical work *al-Tahdhīb fī al-Tafsīr*, an extant Mu‘tazilite commentary by al-Ḥākim al-Jushamī.<sup>61</sup>

---

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 2:121-122.

<sup>61</sup> See Al-Ḥākim al-Jushamī, *Al-Tahdhīb fī al-Tafsīr* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Miṣrī/Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnānī, 2019), 1:307-533.

### 3.3.2.1 General Blessings Bestowed on Humans:

This part is communicated by a self-contained passage (27-39) that highlights two universal blessings: (1) being brought to life (*iḥyāʾ*), and (2) the blessing of the divine providence in the creation of heaven and earth:<sup>62</sup>

Q. 2:28. “How can you ignore God when you were lifeless and He gave you life, when He will cause you to die, then resurrect you to be returned to Him?”

Q. 2:29. “It was He who created all that is on the earth for you, then turned to the sky and made the seven heavens; it is He who has knowledge of all things.”

V. 28 does not merely deal with *iḥyāʾ* but rather *iḥyāʾ* and *imātah* (causing to die). Furthermore, v. 29 describes God’s power in creation. Therefore, these two verses convey a strong sense of Divine power—a concept that corresponds with the initial verses of the theological trilogy (Q. 2:21-26), as demarcated by al-Rāzī. Even though including vv. 28-29 as a closure to this theological trilogy creates a good case of Qur’anic chiasm, al-Rāzī was not fundamentally looking for verbal devices to decipher the surah structure, but was more motivated by his two favorite conceptual mediums of surah reading: Qur’anic theological trilogy and the Qur’anic argumentation techniques.<sup>63</sup>

---

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 2:138.

اعلم أنه سبحانه وتعالى لما تكلم في دلائل التوحيد والنبوة والمعاد إلى هذا الموضوع فمن هذا الموضوع إلى قوله: { يٰٓبَنِي إِسْرٰٓءِيْلَ اذْكُرُوْا اَللّٰهَ الَّذِيْ اَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ } [البقرة: 40] في شرح النعم التي عمت جميع المكلفين وهي أربعة.

<sup>63</sup> For how (Q. 2:21-22) and (2:28-29) create a chiasmic structure, see Muḥammad ‘Abd Allāh Dirāz, *Al-Naba’ al-‘Azīm*, 76. Besides the role of these two verses in creating a chiasmic structure, al-Bustānī (d. 2011) remarks that the theme of *iḥyāʾ* and *imātah* are echoed throughout the surah, as in the case of the Cow (v. 73), the story of the unnamed man who was resurrected hundred years after his death (v. 259), the four birds of Abraham (v. 260), and the story of the unnamed man who was resurrected hundred years after his death (v. 259). Furthermore, al-Bustānī notes that the reference to divine knowledge in v. 29 paves the way to the story of Adam, which Qur’anicly revolves around the divine attribute al-‘Alīm (the All-Knowing). See Maḥmūd al-Bustānī, *Al-Tafsīr al-Binā’ī*, 31-32 and idem, *Al-Manhaj al-Binā’ī*, 64-65.

### 3.3.2.2 Special Blessing on Humans

Two other special corresponding blessings are expressed in vv. 34-39: (1) the honor of knowing God (*ma'rifah*), represented in God's honorable creation of Adam (Q. 2:30-33), and (2) the angelic honoring of Adam.<sup>64</sup> After the universal divine blessings bestowed on humans, al-Rāzī observes a movement to the special divine blessings bestowed on the Israelites (Q. 2:40-48/49-103). He explains the flow of the Qur'anic material on the Israelites and the Jews based on what he sees as the Qur'anic method of persuasion which includes: (1) reminders of blessings that generate the will to obey, (2) revealing the real obstacles to faith, (3) promise of rewards and warning about punishments, and (4) teaching by analogy. This explains the varying tone of the Qur'ān in the treatment of the Jewish question in surah 2. For easier presentation of al-Rāzī's roadmap of this section, we can refer to these shifts as the gentle way and the contrasting way.

### 3.3.2.3 Special Blessings on the Israelites

Q. 2:40. Children of Israel, remember how I blessed you. Honor your pledge to Me and I will honor My pledge to you: I am the One you should fear" 41. Believe in the message I have sent down confirming what you already possess. Do not be the first to disbelieve in it, and do not sell My messages for a small price: I am the One of whom you should be mindful. 42. Do not mix truth with falsehood, or hide the truth when you know it. 43. Keep up the prayer, pay the prescribed alms, and bow your heads [in worship] with those who bow theirs. 44. How can you tell people to do what is right and forget to do it yourselves, even though you recite the Scripture? Have you no sense? 45. Seek help with steadfastness and prayer- though this is hard indeed for anyone but the humble, 46. who know that they will meet their Lord and that it is to Him they will return. 47. Children of Israel, remember how I blessed you and favored you over other people. 48. Guard yourselves against a Day when no soul will stand in place of another, no intercession will be accepted for it, nor any ransom; nor will they be helped.

---

<sup>64</sup> The identification of these blessings is found in al-Rāzī's exegesis in 2:138, 141, 146 and 194. Al-Rāzī's focus on the progression of the section argument and its relation with the adjacent section makes him disinterested in how different sections relate to the broader context of the surah. In Klar's words, "one should of course read the pericope within the macro context of the sura, but one should also read the surah within the micro context of the pericope." Practically, Klar studies the recurrence of some of the lexical terms of the pericope of Adam throughout the Surah. See Marianna O Klar, "Through the Lens of the Adam Narrative: A Re-consideration of Sūrat al-Baqara," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, 17, no. 2 (2015).

The first set of blessings (Q. 2:40-48) is given in a brief manner. This passage commences and closes with the same reminder of the general blessings bestowed on the Israelites. Between these two book-ending reminders, there is a call to believe in Muḥammad's message in v. 41, coupled with a warning against two causes of disbelief in v. 42 (mixing truth with falsehood and hiding the truth).<sup>65</sup> The call to faith (*īmān*) is followed by a call to practice the divine law (*sharī'ah*): praying and alms-giving in v. 43, modeling the acts of kindness in v. 44, and being committed to seeking help through patience, prayer, and faith in returning to God in vv. 45-46. While many exegetes argue that vv. 45-46 address Muslims, al-Rāzī insists that the whole passage addresses the Jews because "addressing others [in this context] would necessarily lead to a disjointed composition."<sup>66</sup>

Al-Rāzī argues that the whole passage is enclosed by the reminders of the divine blessings bestowed on the Israelites (the predecessors of the Jews, *aslāf al-yahūd*) to influence Muḥammad's Jewish contemporaries in the following ways: (1) to wear down their obstinacy and obduracy, (2) to stimulate their hearts to follow the model of obedience practiced by their predecessors, (3) to generate a sense of shame (*ḥayā'*) of violating the divine command since sins become more serious when contrasted with God's blessings, (4) to hope for a continuation of past blessings by following the new covenant, and (5) to substantiate the case for Muḥammad's prophecy on the ground that these descriptions of past events are indicative of the divine source of Muḥammad's revelations as these descriptions of the past blessings belong to narration of what is unknown [to Muḥammad] (*ikhbār bī al-ghayb*).<sup>67</sup> Dialectically, al-Rāzī argues that utilizing the theme of divine blessings is indicative of a good arrangement (*ḥusn al-*

<sup>65</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Maḥātib al-Ghayb*, 3:40.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:46.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:27, 32 and 33.

والأقرب أن المخاطبين هم بنو إسرائيل لأن صرف الخطاب إلى غيرهم يوجب تفكيك النظم

*tartīb*) for those who work for calling others unto God (*da‘wah*) and instilling faith in the hearts of the listeners.”<sup>68</sup>

Dialectically, al-Rāzī’s comment lays emphasis on the centrality of Muḥammad’s prophecy in the surah—an observation that will also be mentioned in a different thematic development in the surah. As far as structure is concerned, one can safely state that al-Rāzī’s reading of the flow of this long section is founded on his identification of a Qur’anic manner of argumentation; that is, the divine blessings are supposed to lead people to faith, not rebellion. Therefore, understanding the structure of the Qur’ān’s argumentation is essential to al-Rāzī’s argument for the connectedness of the surah units. This inter-Qur’anic argumentation is also stressed in Gwynne’s principle of reciprocity in his examination of the Qur’anic legal arguments. He observes that “[M]any of the Qur’ān’s strongest arguments for pious behavior are those which show God and human beings engaged in reciprocal acts that produce mutual esteem and support, as well as concomitant obligations.”<sup>69</sup>

#### 3.3.2.4 Blessings Contrasted with Disobedience

The *da‘wah* is extended to the adjacent unit (Q. 2:49-103) through the reminders of divine blessings. However, al-Rāzī notes that the divine blessings are more detailed<sup>70</sup> and the Qur’anic remarks more disapproving since these blessings (*ni‘am*) are usually interrupted by a paralleled description of the Israelites’ hideous acts (*qabā’ih*). Given that the reminders of the divine blessings are intended to lead people into compliance and obedience (*inqiyād*), the juxtaposition of blessings and heinous acts creates a type of contrast that, structurally, takes the

---

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 3:27-28.

"و من تأمل و أنصف علم أن هذا هو النهاية في حسن الترتيب لمن يريد الدعوة و تحصيل الاعتقاد في قلب المستمع."

<sup>69</sup> Rosalind Ward Gwynne, *Logic, Rhetoric and Legal Reasoning*, 84.

<sup>70</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Mafātih al-Ghayb*, 3:63.

اعلم أنه تعالى لما قدم ذكر نعمه على بني إسرائيل إجمالاً بين بعد ذلك أقسام تلك النعم على سبيل التفصيل ليكون أبلغ في التذكير وأعظم في الحجّة، فكانه قال: اذكروا نعمتي واذكروا إذ نجيناكم واذكروا إذ فرقنا بكم البحر وهي إعامات

repetitious form of AbAbAb. In a more detailed manner, the blessings are first covered in (Q. 2:49-64)<sup>71</sup> and contrasted by (1) some harsh penalties (*tashdīdāt*) that weighed heavily on the Israelites in Q. 2:65-74, which narrates the case of the Sabbath and the story of the cow, and (2) by the awful acts of some of Muḥammad’s Jewish contemporaries in Q. 2:75-82.

This contrast between the blessings for the obedient Israelites and the penalties (*tashdīdāt*) for the disobedient Israelites is intended to encourage obedience and to warn the Jews against rebellion.<sup>72</sup> Besides encouragement and warning, al-Rāzī quotes the Mu‘tazilite al-Qaffāl on the purpose of reporting rebellious incidents in the life of the Israelites. Part of al-Qaffāl’s analysis is that these stories were communicated partly to give comfort to the prophet, who was keen on leading them to his covenant. Al-Qaffāl asserts that these incidents implied, “If this is how they treated each other and how they reacted to the prophet who saved them from slavery, then cope, O prophet, with their obstinacy and rebellion.”<sup>73</sup> This is an example of a dyadic logical relationship of reason-result in the surah coverage of the Jewish rejection. In a similar manner, the list of blessings resumes in unit Q. 2:83-87, which is stitched again by the contrast in Q. 2:88-91. Finally, the blessings and evils acts are paralleled in Q. 2:92-103.

### 3.3.3 Section Three: Confrontations and a Parting of the Ways (Q. 2:104-150)

Here, al-Rāzī observes that the long segment Q. 2:104-150 records some of the Jewish attacks against Muḥammad’s prophecy.<sup>74</sup> Examples of these attacks include verbal insults (v. 104), abrogation (v. 106), and objections to the change of the prayer direction from Jerusalem to Mecca (v. 142).<sup>75</sup> Not only does the Qur’anic answer address the Jewish questions, but also

<sup>71</sup> Al-Rāzī counted ten blessings in the passage, covered in *bid.*, 3:63-101.

<sup>72</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, 3:102.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:121-122.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:202.

اعلم أن الله تعالى لما شرح قبائح أفعالهم قبل مبعث محمد عليه الصلاة والسلام أراد من ههنا أن يشرح قبائح أفعالهم عند مبعث محمد ﷺ وجددهم واجتهادهم في القبح فيه والظعن في دينه

<sup>75</sup> In this section, Neal Robinson finds what he sees as “a better guide to the surah”; that is, v. 143. In his view, this verse presents Muslims as “middle nation” (*ummataṅ wasaṭan*), which is followed by reaffirmations of Muslims as



paves the way for reaffirming the identity of the emerging new community of believers. In his holistic reading of this section, al-Rāzī connects v. 106 on abrogation with v. 142 on the *Qiblah* change. On a possible interpretation of “The East and the West belong to God: Wherever you turn, there is His Face. God is all pervading and all knowing,” (Q. 2:115) al-Rāzī writes:

*Qiblah* is not intrinsically a set direction; it is *Qiblah* because God makes it *Qiblah*. Therefore, if God make the Ka‘bah a *Qiblah*, do not deny because God leads His servants in the way He will, and He is fully aware of their interests. It is as if God mentions this [v. 106] to show that the abrogation of the *Qiblah* is possible. In this way, this [verse] serves as a prelude to God’s will to change the *Qiblah*.<sup>76</sup>

The connectedness of this section is also implied in al-Rāzī’s observation that the two segments about the Jewish attacks (Q. 2:104-123 and 135-141/142-150) are interrupted by the story of Abraham’s life and faith (Q. 2:124-134). One might ask: how would the story of Abraham fit in with this discussion of the Jewish attack? It seems that al-Rāzī is cognizant of this question. To answer it, he argues that the story of Abraham (who is acknowledged by the Meccan polytheists, Jews and Christians) is phrased in a way that “makes it incumbent on the polytheists, Jews and Christians to accept the statement of Muḥammad acknowledge his faith and comply with his law.”<sup>77</sup> Al-Rāzī supports his observation with the following points:

1. Verse 124 presents Abraham as *imām* due to his obedience, a quality that implies that there is no good to be gained except through abandoning rebellion.<sup>78</sup>

---

constituting “a distinct community with their own cultic regulations and legal code”. See Neal Robinson, *Discovering the Qur’an*, 201-202.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 4:18.

القبلة ليست قبلة لذاتها، بل لأن الله تعالى جعلها قبلة، فإن جعل الكعبة قبلة فلا تنكروا ذلك لأنه تعالى يدبر عبادته كيف يريد وهو واسع علمه بمصالحهم فكانه تعالى ذكر ذلك بياناً لجواز نسخ القبلة من جانب إلى جانب آخر، فيصير ذلك مقدمة لما كان يريد تعالى من نسخ القبلة.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 4:31.

”والحكمة فيه أن إبراهيم عليه السلام شخص يعترف بفضل جميع الطوائف والملل، فالمشركين كانوا معترفين بفضل متشرفين بأنهم من أولاده ومن ساكني حرمه وخادمي بيته. وأهل الكتاب من اليهود والنصارى كانوا أيضاً مقرين بفضل متشرفين بأنهم من أولاده، فحكى الله سبحانه وتعالى عن إبراهيم عليه السلام أموراً توجب على المشركين وعلى اليهود والنصارى قبول قول محمد ﷺ والاعتراف بدينه والانقياد لشريعته.”

<sup>78</sup> V. 124 reads: “When Abraham’s Lord tested him with certain commandments, which he fulfilled, He said, ‘I will make you a leader of people.’ Abraham asked, ‘And will You make leaders from my descendants too?’ God answered, ‘My pledge does not hold for those who do evil.’”

2. Abraham prays for leadership (*imāmah*) for his descendants, and the answer he receives is “My pledge does not hold for those who do evil,” which again calls for obedience and abandoning rebellion.
3. The story presents Ḥajj as one of the rituals of Abraham as evidence that the Jews and Christians should follow Muḥammad’s covenant.
4. The change of the prayer direction (*Qiblah*) from Jerusalem to Mecca is hard for the Jews and Christians to accept; therefore, the story indicates that this Ka‘bah is the Qiblah of Abraham, who is honored by all.<sup>79</sup>

### 3.3.4 Section Four (Q. 2:151-274): Muḥammad and the Believers

The dominant theme in this section is the legal prescription of some rulings related to the social and political order in Medina. How is the transition from the discussion on the Israelites to the legal legislations made? The initial passage (Q. 2:151-162) serves as a smooth transition from the warning prophet to the legislative prophet. According to al-Rāzī’s interpretation, the passage introduces Muḥammad as the answer to Abraham’s prayer for an Arabian prophet (see below). The passage proceeds to commend not only faith commitment but also sacrifice for its right to be proclaimed. Then v. 158 immediately acts as a catalyst for the spiritual independence of this new community, as signaled by the quick reference to one of the Ḥajj rituals, *al-Ṣafā and al-Marwah*, which directly evokes the symbol of the Ka‘bah and the renovation of Abraham’s faith. In Lowry’s analysis of the surah structure, the reference to this Ḥajj ritual “may reflect complexities relating to the separation of the qur’anic community from its pagan environment.”<sup>80</sup>

---

<sup>79</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb*, 4:31.

<sup>80</sup> Joseph E. Lowry, “Law, Structure, and Meaning in Sūrat al-Baqarah,” 125. However, this Ḥajj reference can still relate to the preceding discussions on the honor of the legacy of Abraham and the Ka‘bah which facilitated the change of the Qiblah from Jerusalem to Mecca. This change is better viewed as part of the emergence of a new covenant. This interpretation could supplement Lowry’s argument that the legal injunctions in the surah contribute to indexing the surah structure and drawing boundaries around the Qur’anic community. Concerning the positioning of the Ṣafā and Marwah verse, Lowry also observes that Klar and Mehdi Bazargan agree that this verse may be

Finally, v. 158 (which depicts a practice of hiding divine revelation) is contrasted with v. 151 (which designates a new prophet to deliver divine revelation), thereby creating a form of parallelism that justifies the emergence of “a neo-covenantal code.” The following chart shows al-Rāzī’s conception of the connectedness of this part of the surah:

Verses	Connections
151. Just as We have sent among you a Messenger of your own to recite Our revelations to you, purify you and teach you the Scripture, wisdom, and [other] things you did not know.	Al-Rāzī reads this verse as an answer to Abraham’s prayer in the first section: “Our Lord, make a messenger of their own rise up from among them, to recite Your revelations to them, teach them the Scripture and wisdom, and purify them: You are the Mighty, the Wise”(Q. 2:109).
152. So remember Me; I will remember you. Be thankful to Me, and never ungrateful	Al-Rāzī connects v. 152 with the previous section by arguing that the Muslim believers are commanded to remember God whereas the Israelites were commanded to remember the blessings of God.
153. You who believe, seek help through steadfastness and prayer, for God is with the steadfast.	Al-Rāzī sees prayer and patience as aids for worship and obedience. However, it can be seen as evoking vv. 45: “Seek help with steadfastness and prayer- though this is hard indeed for anyone but the humble.” In contrast to the mainstream exegesis, al-Rāzī insists it addresses the Israelites lest the narrative be disjointed.
154. Do not say that those who are killed in God’s cause are dead; they are alive, though you do not realize it. 155. We shall certainly test you with fear and hunger, and loss of	This means: Seek help in prayer and patience to establish your faith; however, if you need, for your practice of the faith, to strive against your enemies through your property and body, know that your efforts are not wasted.

---

structurally separate or a later addition. See M. Klar, “Text-Critical Approaches to Sura Structure: Combining Synchronicity with Diachronicity in Sūrat al-Baqara. Part two,” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 19, no. 1, (June 2017): 1-38.

<p>property, lives, and crops. But [Prophet], give good news to those who are steadfast,  156. those who say, when afflicted with a calamity, ‘We belong to God and to Him we shall return.’  157. These will be given blessings and mercy from their Lord, and it is they who are rightly guided.</p>	
<p>158. Safa and Marwa are among the rites of God, so for those who make major or minor pilgrimage to the House it is no offence to circulate between the two. Anyone who does good of his own accord will be rewarded, for God rewards good deeds, and knows everything.</p>	<p>Here al-Rāzī sees a double reminder:  (1) a reminder of the divine blessing on Muḥammad and his <i>Ummah</i> who are now entrusted with reviving the faith of Abraham  (2) a reminder of the sacrifices of Ḥājar and Ishmael who embodied the precepts in vv. 154-157.</p>
<p>159. As for those who <u>hide the proofs and guidance We send down, after We have made them clear to people in the Scripture</u>, God rejects them, and so do others,  160. unless they repent, make amends, and declare the truth. I will certainly accept their repentance: I am the Ever Relenting, the Most Merciful.  161. As for those who disbelieve and die as disbelievers, God rejects them, as do the angels and all people.  162. They will remain in</p>	<p>Al-Rāzī reads this passage as a general warning against concealing God’s revelations (v. 159).</p>

this state of rejection: their punishment will not be lightened, nor will they be reprieved.	
--	--

### 3.3.5 The New Covenant: (Q. 2:163-284) and Legal Persuasion

- |   |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Wa'z</i> on the foundations: <i>Tawhīd/ Shirk</i> (Q. 2:163-164/165-167), and blessings/Obedience (Q. 2:168-171)</li> <li>2. A binary of rules/<i>wa'z</i> (Q. 172-203/2:204-214) and (Q. 2:215-237/238-239/240-242)</li> <li>3. A chiasm on sacrificing life and money (Q. 2:243-254)</li> <li>4. A spiritual supplement: <i>Wa'z</i> on <i>tawhīd/resurrection</i> [Abraham's story] (Q. 2:255/258-260)</li> <li>5. A return to rulings/<i>Wa'z</i>: Rules on charity and usury/<i>wa'z</i> (261-274 and 275-280/281) and financial documentation (282-283)/ <i>wa'z</i> (Q. 2:284)</li> </ol> |
|---|

The new covenant starts with the foundation of divine unity and the denouncement of idolatry. As they are utilized in the section on the Israelites, divine blessings are similarly evoked here to encourage obedience. Noting the major sections of the surah, al-Rāzī posits that v. 172 marks the shift from engaging with the Jews to laying down the legal rulings (*al-aḥkām*).<sup>81</sup> In the first set of rules, al-Rāzī identifies ten rulings that make up section Q. 172-203. As mentioned above, al-Rāzī refers to the Qur'anic strategy of mixing rulings with *wa'z*. On that basis, the ten rulings are followed by a description of two models: the hypocrites in Q. 2:204-206 and the believers Q. 2:207. In al-Rāzī's opinion, this juxtaposition "aims at leading people unto the right position on the deeds of the heart and the limbs (*af'āl al-qulūb wā al-jawāriḥ*) and letting them know that nothing can be hid from the One they worship."<sup>82</sup> Developing a sincere devotion is

<sup>81</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb*, 5:9.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 5:167.

إن الله سبحانه وتعالى تكلم من أول السورة إلى ههنا في دلائل التوحيد والنبوة واستقصى في الرد على اليهود والنصارى، ومن هنا شرع في بيان الأحكام والغرض بكل ذلك أن يعث العباد على الطريقة الحسنة فيما يتصل بأفعال القلوب والجوارح، وأن يعلموا أن المعبود لا يمكن إخفاء الأمور عنه

more aroused with the contrast “But there is also a kind of man who gives his life away to please God, and God is most compassionate to His servants” (Q. 2:207). This *wa‘z* section moves smoothly to command full obedience, warning against disobedience, as in the case of the Israelites (Q. 208-211), and against preferring the present life to the afterlife (Q. 2:212-114).<sup>83</sup>

This note of *wa‘z* on prioritizing the afterlife eases the resumption of rulings in a long passage (Q. 2:215-242) that encourages giving and sacrifice. Having delineated the boundaries of this long passage, al-Rāzī once again reiterates that law and *wa‘z* are intentionally blended together to support each other.<sup>84</sup> Similarly, two verses appear within this long passage on law on maintaining ritual prayer (Q. 2:238-239), an interruption about which al-Rāzī writes:

Know that after God Almighty showed the legally accountable agents (*al-mukallaḥīn*) parts of the milestones of His Faith and Law, He commanded them to maintain observing the prayers for several reasons. First, prayer includes the recitation, standing, bowing, prostration, and surrender that generate the brokenness of the heart owing to standing in awe of God. Furthermore, [the prayers] eliminate rebellion and encourage conformity to God’s commands and avoidance of His prohibitions, as stated in “Indeed, prayer deters one from indecency and wickedness” (Q. 29:45). Second, prayer reminds the servant of the glory of Lordship, the humbleness of servitude, reward and punishment. Thereupon, surrendering to worship becomes easier. This is why God says: “Seek help through patience and prayer” (Q. 2:45). Third, the preceding [verses] on marriage, divorce and the waiting period pertain to the interests of this life; therefore, they were followed by the reminder about prayer which is the interest of the otherworldly life.<sup>85</sup>

### 3.3.6 Protection of the New Community: The Duality of Sacrificing Life and Money (Q. 2:243-254)

Al-Rāzī reads the long passage (Q. 2:243-254) as a self-contained unit that creates a form of repetition (ABAB) to present the commands to fight and protect the new emerging

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 6:3, 5, 10, and 16.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 6:20.

"اعلم أنه سبحانه وتعالى لما بالغ في بيان أنه يجب على كل مكلف أن يكون معرضاً عن طلب العاجل، وأن يكون مشغولاً بطلب الآجل، وأن يكون بحيث يبذل النفس والمال في ذلك شرع بعد ذلك في بيان الأحكام وهو من هذه الآية إلى قوله: { أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى الَّذِينَ خَرَجُوا مِن دِيَارِهِمْ } [البقرة: 243] لأن من عادة القرآن أن يكون بيان التوحيد وبيان الوعظ والنصيحة وبيان الأحكام مختلطاً بعضها ببعض، ليكون كل واحد منها مقوياً للآخر ومؤكداً له."

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 6:124.

"اعلم أنه سبحانه وتعالى لما بين للمكلفين ما بين من معالم دينه، وأوضح لهم من شرائع شرعه أمرهم بعد ذلك بالمحافظة على الصلوات وذلك لوجوه أحدها: أن الصلاة لما فيها من القراءة والقيام والركوع والسجود والخضوع والحشوع تفيد انكسار القلب من هيبه الله تعالى، ووزوال التمرد عن الطبع، وحصول الانقياد لأوامر الله تعالى والانتفاء عن مناهيه، كما قال: { إن الصلاة تنهى عن الفحشاء والمنكر } { العنكبوت: 45} والثاني: أن الصلاة تذكر العبد جلالة الربوبية وذلة العبودية وأمر الثواب والعقاب فعند ذلك يسهل عليه الانقياد للطاعة ولذلك قال: { اسْتَجِيبُوا بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلَاةِ } [البقرة: 45] والثالث: أن كل ما تقدم من بيان النكاح والطلاق والعدة اشتغال بمصالح الدنيا، فأتبع ذلك بذكر الصلاة التي هي مصالح الآخرة."

community.<sup>86</sup> With regard to the command to fight, al-Rāzī explains that the surah relied on the form of “stories” (*Qaṣaṣ*), as in the unspecified group in (Q. 2:243) and the story of Ṭālūt (the Israelite king Saul) in Q. 2:246-254, to inspire obedience and to prevent rebellion.<sup>87</sup> However, al-Rāzī delineates the boundaries of this section during his discussion of its last verse. Practically, he finds the stitches that bind the verses together and then pauses to explain its broader flow and thematic contribution. In his commentary on Q. 2:254, al-Rāzī reflects on the thematic flow of the whole passage. He writes:

Know that the hardest thing for one is to sacrifice one’s life in fighting and to give out in charity. Having given the command to fight, God followed it with the command to give. Furthermore, in the preceding verses, God commanded fighting in “And fight in the cause of Allah” (Q. 2:244) and followed it with “Who is to lend God a good loan ...?” (Q. 2:245) to [encourage] giving for *Jihād*. The same command to fight was reiterated in the story of Ṭālūt [Q. 2:246-253], and followed by the command to give for *Jihād* in “O you who believe, give” (Q. 2:254).<sup>88</sup>

### 3.3.7 A Spiritual Supplement (Q. 2:255-260)

In line with his motivating notion of Qur’anic *taṣrīf*, al-Rāzī identifies the subsequent passage as a spiritual lesson on the beginning (*al-mabda’*), which is a reference to God and his glory, and the end (*al-ma’ād*), which is a reference to the afterlife. This passage (Q. 2:255-260) includes (1) the famous Throne Verse that immediately triggered a creation of a dichotomy between *awliyā’ Allāh* and *awliyā’ al-Ṭāghūt* and (2) three stories about Abraham’s journey to prove the existence of God and resurrection. As mentioned before, al-Rāzī posits that such a discontinuity is not a break from discussing details of the rules, but rather one to ensure obedience to the rules by stressing the element of being mindful of God as a basis for obeying

<sup>86</sup> Robinson and Iṣlāḥī connect these commands with liberating the Ka’bah. See Neal Robinson, *Discovering the Qur’an*, 215-218.

<sup>87</sup> See Ibid., 6:137 and 144.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 6:174.

"اعلم أن أصعب الأشياء على الإنسان بذل النفس في القتال، وبذل المال في الإنفاق فلما قدم الأمر بالقتال أعقبه بالأمر بالإنفاق، وأيضاً فيه وجه آخر، وهو أنه تعالى أمر بالقتال فيما سبق بقوله: { وَقَاتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ } [البقرة: 244] ثم أعقبه بقوله: { مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يُقرضُ اللَّهَ قَرْضًا حَسَنًا } { [البقرة: 245] والمقصود منه إنفاق المال في الجهاد، ثم إنه مرة ثانية أكد الأمر بالقتال وذكر فيه قصة طالوت، ثم أعقبه بالأمر بالإنفاق في الجهاد، وهو قوله: يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا أَنْفِقُوا ."

the divine law.<sup>89</sup> In this way, the acts of the limbs (*a‘māl al-jawāriḥ*) and the acts of the heart (*a‘māl al-qulūb*) are complementarily addressed and enriched.

### **3.3.8 A Return to Rulings /*Wa‘z* (Q. 261-284)**

Al-Rāzī identifies the function of this section as a return to rulings and obligations or, more specifically, a discussion on giving, usury and financial documentation. Quoting the Mu‘tazilite exegetical tradition, al-Rāzī reflects on how this section is bound together by the last two sections. According to the Mu‘tazilite ‘Abd al-Jabbār, the laws on giving in sections A and C are interrupted by an assertion regarding the belief in the afterlife in section B to emphasize that the financial contributions (*al-infāq*) will not be wasted. Rather they will be greatly rewarded by the One Who causes death and life.<sup>90</sup> Apart from ‘Abd al-Jabbār, al-Rāzī relies on al-Aṣamm to highlight another thematic function of placing the discussion on resurrection between two sections on laws. According to al-Aṣamm, section B functions as a support for believing in Muḥammad’s prophecy and thereby motivates its audience to support him and hold up his divine law (*sharī‘ah*).<sup>91</sup>

### **3.3.9 Encouraging Charity (vv. 261-274)**

Having acknowledged the resumption of stipulating rulings in the surah, al-Rāzī identifies v. 274 as the closing verse on charity in the surah.<sup>92</sup> With regard to the thematic progression in this section, al-Rāzī stresses the logical presentation of alms-giving. According to al-Rāzī’s isolated observations, this section starts with an encouragement to give in v. 261 and ends in praise for the sincere givers in v. 274. The body of the section appears in dual classifications of charity. For instance, in Q. 2:262-266, two categories of charity are given with

---

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 7:3.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 7:39.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 7:39.

<sup>92</sup> This note appears in the commentary on v. 274. See *ibid.*, 7:73.



illustrative parables: sincere charity followed by no *mann* (hurtful words) and the insincere charity followed by *mann*.<sup>93</sup> Then the charitable items are classified into good and bad in Q. 2:267-270 to encourage giving the good and to warn against giving the bad as an act of following the devil's thoughts. This classification ends in "Whatever you may give, or vow to give, God knows it well" (Q. 2:270), which reinforces both the encouragement and the warning. In al-Rāzī's view, evoking God's knowledge of our acts serves as an implied promise of reward for the sincere (*wa'd*) and a warning against punishment for the insincere (*wa'īd*). Highlighting God's knowledge leads to another classification of charity in Q. 2:271, in which the possibility of giving charity in public and in secret is discussed.

Finally, the section closes with two types of charity recipients: (1) non-Muslims (v. 272) and (2) needy Muslims (v. 273). Al-Rāzī gives differing accounts of *asbāb al-nuzūl* with regard to v. 272 which reads "It is not for you [Prophet] to guide them; it is God who guides whomever He will. Whatever charity you give benefits your own soul, provided you do it for the sake of God: whatever you give will be repaid to you in full, and you will not be wronged." In light of *asbāb al-nuzūl*, al-Rāzī asserts that the verse addresses the prophet:

It is not your task to lead into guidance those who disagree with you, and thereby do not withdraw charity from them so as to lead them into embracing Islam. Give charity to them for the sake of God alone, and do not make it conditional on their [profession of] Islam.<sup>94</sup>

In the same vein, v. 273 moves from the general giving that extends to the polytheists to the specific giving that should be directed "to those needy who are wholly occupied in God's way and cannot travel in the land [for trade]. The unknowing might think them rich because of

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 7:53.

إعلم أنه رغب في الإنفاق، ثم بين أن الإنفاق على قسامين: منه ما يتبعه المن والأذى، ومنه ما لا يتبعه ذلك. ثم إنه تعالى شرح ما يتعلق بكل واحد من هذين القسمين، وضرب لكل واحد منهما مثلاً يكشف عن المعنى ويوضح المقصود منه على أبلغ الوجوه.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 7:67.

"ليس عليك هدى من خالفك حتى تمنعهم الصدقة لأجل أن يدخلوا في الإسلام، فتصدق عليهم لوجه الله، ولا توقف ذلك على إسلامهم."

their self-restraint, but you will recognize them by their characteristic of not begging persistently. God is well aware of any good you give” (Q. 2:273).

### 3.3.10 Forbidding Usury (vv. 275-280/281)

This passage deals with the prohibition of usury (Q. 2:275) in contrast to the encouragement to give in charity. Al-Rāzī places emphasis on the contrast (*jihat al-taḍād*) between the apparent “decrease of money” in giving and seeking the “increase of money” in usury. According to him, this contrast helps to ease the transition. This contrast is also stressed in “God blights usury, but blesses charitable deeds with multiple increase: He does not love the ungrateful sinner” (Q. 2:276). Furthermore, usurers are contrasted the believers who maintain their prayers and offerings in Q. 2:276.<sup>95</sup> Given these contrasts, the passage reaffirms the prohibition of usury (Q. 2:278-280) and closes with a warning for the usurers: “Beware of a Day when you will be returned to God: every soul will be paid in full for what it has earned, and no one will be wronged” (Q. 2:281).<sup>96</sup>

### 3.3.11 Documenting Transactions as a Means of Preserving Money (vv. 282-283/284)

To explain the thematic relationship between this passage and the preceding passages on giving and usury, al-Rāzī turns to the Mu‘tazilite sources. He quotes the Mu‘tazilite al-Qaffāl who argues that engaging in charitable activities and forsaking usury practices would not be possible without “preserving the legally-earned money” (*ḥifẓ al-māl al-ḥalāl*) during residency (Q. 2:182) and travelling (Q. 2:284).<sup>97</sup> Al-Rāzī’s reliance on the Mu‘tazilite exegetical tradition reaches its climax when he explains the thematic function of the closing verse: “Whatever is in

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 7:84.

اعلم أن عادة الله في القرآن مطردة بأنه تعالى مهما ذكر وعيداً ذكر بعده وعداً، فلما بالغ ههنا في وعيد المرابي أتبعه بهذا الوعد

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 7:91.

اعلم أن هذه الآية في العظماء الذين كانوا يعاملون بالربا وكانوا أصحاب ثروة وجلال وأنصار وأعوان وكان قد يجري منهم التغلب على الناس بسبب ثروتهم، فاحتاجوا إلى مزيد زجر ووعيد وتقييد، حتى يمتنعوا عن الربا، وعن أخذ أموال الناس بالباطل، فلا جرم توعدهم الله بهذه الآية، وخوفهم على أعظم الوجوه

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. 7:94 and 104.

the heavens and on the earth belongs to God and, whether you reveal or conceal your thoughts, God will call you to account for them. He will forgive whoever He will and punish whoever He will: He has power over all things” (Q. 2:284). To unearth the thematic value of this section closure, al-Rāzī quotes three Mu‘tazilite sources: Abū Bakr al-Aṣamm, Abū Muslim and al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār. Each one provides one layer of connection. Al-Aṣamm reads this closure in light of the surah structure. Highlighting the heterogeneous content of the surah, which encompasses a discussion on divine unity, prophecy, and laws; al-Aṣamm reads the verse as a threatening closure (*tahdīd*) to these variegated sections of the surah. On the other hand, ‘Abd al-Jabbār adds another layer of connection. In light of the documentation of financial transactions, ‘Abd al-Jabbār adds that the verse implies that the beneficiaries of these laws on preserving people’s money are people themselves, not God to Whom belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth. Finally, Abū Muslim reads the verse as evidence of the divine knowledge expressed in the closing remark of the preceding verse: “Indeed, He is all-aware of what you do” (Q. 2:2283). Abū Muslim explains that the creation of the heavens and the earth with precision necessitates omniscience and thereby affirms that God has full knowledge of all details.<sup>98</sup>

### **3.3.12 Surah Closure (Q. 2: 284-286)**

Al-Rāzī observes that the end of the surah explains the initial remarks on the righteous at the beginning of the surah. For instance, he sees Q. 2:285 “The Messenger believes in what has been sent down to him from his Lord, as do the faithful. They all believe in God, His angels, His scriptures, and His messengers. ‘We make no distinction between any of His messengers,’ they say, ‘We hear and obey. Grant us Your forgiveness, our Lord. To You we all return” as an

---

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 7:108.

indication that the praised group at the beginning of the surah (Q. 2:3-5) are Muḥammad's followers.<sup>99</sup>

It is worth noting that al-Rāzī's unveiling the structure of surah 2 rests on the recognition of the Qur'anic text as a record of Muḥammad's proclamations that gradually results in establishing a community. This perception of the Qur'anic text enhances the readability of the surah. In this regard, Michael Marx argues that the chronology of the Qur'anic text allows for this recognition of the prophetic proclamations and the establishment of a new community. With this approach in mind, he analyzes how the telling of the story of Mary in Mecca and the retelling of the same story in Medina reflects the polemic development of the prophet's religious encounters with the Meccan audience on the one hand and the Judeo-Christian audience on the other.<sup>100</sup>

In summary, according to al-Rāzī's commentary, surah 2 appears to be a typical case of persuasion in the organization of the text. Based in al-Rāzī's observations, it addresses two major types of active listeners: the Jewish community, who were called to accept Muḥammad as a prophet, and the emerging Muslim community, who were called to maintain their faith and abide by the laws of the new covenant. To motivate the prophet's Jewish contemporaries to embrace Islam, the following tactics are purportedly used to inspire obedience:

---

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 7:111.

أنه بدأ في السورة بمدح المتقين الذين يؤمنون بالغيب، ويقومون بالصلاة وما رزقناهم ينفقون، وبين في آخر السورة أن الذين مدحهم في أول السورة هم أمة محمد ﷺ، فقال: {وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ كُلٌّ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَمَلَكِهِ وَكُتُبِهِ وَرُسُلِهِ لَا يُفَرِّقُونَ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِّن رُّسُلِهِ} وهذا هو المراد بقوله في أول السورة {الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ} {البقرة: 3.}

<sup>100</sup> See Michael Marx, "Glimpses of Mariology in the Qur'an: From Hagiography to Theology via Religious-Political Debate," in *The Qur'an in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'anic Milieu*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai and Michael Marx (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010), 533-563. For further examples of how the recognition of the surah structure is influenced by the recognition of the text as a record of Muḥammad's proclamations, see also Anthony H. Johns, "Prophets and Personalities of the Qur'an," in *The Oxford Handbook of Qur'anic Studies*, ed. Abdel Haleem and Mustafa Shah (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 488-501, esp. 495-499.

- A. Progressing reminders of God's blessings which start with the blessing of life and the divine honor and covenant Adam received and culminate in the special divine blessings the Israelites enjoyed as a result of their obedience to God.
- B. Reminders of the consequences of rejecting God's message,
- C. Drawing an affinity between the Jewish community and Muḥammad through the centrality of Abraham and the Ka'bah in Islam

On the other hand, the Muslim believers need corresponding motivations for faith and practice.

To this end, the following tactics are used in the surah:

- A. Reclaiming Abraham and the genealogical line of prophets as models of unfailing obedience and surrender (*islām*)
- B. Legal abidance by the law and intimate connection with God are inseparable
- C. Modeling the sacrifice of the early committed Israelites

## **Conclusion**

In his attempt to discern the formation of the thematic blocks or the organization of the surah text, al-Rāzī focuses on the logical relationships between similar or disparate topics and draws them together. In the many examples discussed in this chapter, al-Rāzī explains that the surah discourses advance through the logical associations between units and the persuasion techniques employed. The possible logical relations and persuasion methods identified by al-Rāzī include several forms of antithesis, complementarity, cause-effect, reason-result, and means-purpose. It is also observed here that al-Rāzī credits many Mu'tazilite exegetes with the detection of some of these logical and persuasive mediums in the surah.

## Chapter 5

### Surah Structure as a Medium for Countering Exegetical *Taqīd*

In his study on al-Rāzī's hermeneutical and theological reasoning in *Mafātiḥ al-Ghayb*, Tariq Jaffer elucidates al-Rāzī's role in confronting and challenging exegetical *taqīd* (the uncritical acceptance of the viewpoints and methodologies of earlier exegetes). A salient feature of this countering-*taqīd* approach is that al-Rāzī aims at extracting philosophical subtleties (*laṭā'if*) from the Qur'anic text to facilitate the integration of philosophy and kalam into the exegetical tradition. In this new exegetical development, al-Rāzī appropriates the interaction with, and sometimes adoption of, philosophical and Mu'tazilite epistemic methodologies.<sup>1</sup> Building on the contribution advanced by Jaffer, this chapter argues that al-Rāzī epistemically and practically employs the idea of 'Qur'anic unified composition' to counter uncritical exegetical conformity (*taqīd*) to the authoritative transmitted reports in previous *tafsīr* literature. In particular, the aim is to demonstrate that al-Rāzī's development of the theory of *naẓm*, which he extends to include the structural design of the surah, prompts him to break with traditional exegetical practice in three main areas that he considers to be inextricably related to the Qur'anic unified *naẓm*: (1) the occasions of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) genre, (2) the issue of Qur'anic abrogation (*naskh*), and (3) the call for unconventional interpretations that may not be supported by traditional views but derived from the contextual flow of the surah material. Notably, al-Rāzī's role in rationalizing *tafsīr* is not achieved solely through the integration of philosophy into the exegetical tradition but also through the reasoned employment of *naẓm* to handle these three major issues in medieval exegetical practice.

---

<sup>1</sup> Tariq Jaffer, *Rāzī: Master of Quranic Interpretation and Theological Reasoning* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

## 1. *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* and the Literary Flow of the Surah

Traditionally, the *asbāb al-nuzūl* genre has occupied a central role in the process of Qur'anic interpretation. Rippin identifies four major works on *asbāb al-nuzūl*: al-Wāḥidī's *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, al-'Irāqī's (d. 567/1171) *Asbāb al-Nuzūl wa al-Qaṣaṣ al-Furqāniyyah*, al-Ja'barī's (d. 732/1332) *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* and al-Suyūfī's (d. 911/1505) *Lubāb al-Nuqūl*.<sup>2</sup> To the early exegetes, recognizing the occasions of revelations is not a mere preoccupation with surveying the historical incidents that surrounded the formulation of the Qur'anic text but a purposeful desire to understand the text and recognize its connotations.<sup>3</sup> To illustrate how the absence of *asbāb al-nuzūl* leads to formulating opinions that go counter to the established legal norms, al-Shāṭibī cites the following verse:

There is no blame on those who believe and do good for what they consumed as long as they fear Allah, have faith, and do what is good; then they believe and act virtuously, then become fully mindful [of Allah] and do righteous deeds. For Allah loves the good-doers" (Q. 5:93).

Drawing solely on its surface meaning, one can conclude that the verse challenges the legal rule on the total abstinence from alcohol. However, this surface meaning is disregarded, because this verse was revealed in response to an issue raised after the prohibition of alcohol, namely, the moral responsibility of the early Muslims who died before the prohibition of drinking but might have consumed alcohol. Thus, the verse was revealed to exonerate them for

---

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed list of the early works on *asbāb al-nuzūl*, see Andrew Rippin, "The Exegetical Genre "asbāb al-nuzūl": A Bibliographical and Terminological Survey," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 48, no. 1 (1985): 1-15. The problem with identifying these sources is that it limits the *asbāb* genre to the classical independent works on the subject. See Bassām al-Jamal, *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* (Al-Dār al-Bayḍā': Al-Markaz al-Thaqāfi al-'Arabī, 2005), 44-45. For an article review discussing al-Jamal's book, see Islam Dayeh, *Asbāb al-nuzūl: 'ilman min 'ulūm al-Qur'an*, *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 9, no. 1 (2007): 111-116. In al-Wāḥidī's *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, al-Jamal identifies some narrations that are clearly traceable to al-Tabarī's exegesis. See Bassām al-Jamal, *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, 84-86.

<sup>3</sup> Naṣr Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ: Dirāsah fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Al-Markaz al-Thaqāfi al-'Arabī, 2011), 102.

the past consumption of alcohol.<sup>4</sup> According to a ḥadīth that sheds light on *sabab al-nuzūl*, this background was offered by Ibn ‘Abbās in the presence of Omar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb who was determined to discipline Qudāmah ibn Maz‘ūn for drinking. In support of the absence of a Qur’anic punishment for drinking, Qudāmah cited the Q. 5:93.<sup>5</sup> At the request of Omar, Ibn ‘Abbās interfered to contextualize the verse in a way that clarifies its meaning. Accordingly, the *asbāb al-nuzūl* (occasions of revelations) genre is traditionally employed to provide a background to some given verses for the sake of offering explicatory remarks. In Rippin’s words, “the *sabab* functions to provide an interpretation of a verse within a basic narrative framework,”<sup>6</sup> and these *asbāb* thereby serve a “haggadically exegetical function”<sup>7</sup>. However, being a staunch supporter of the thematic coherence in the Qur’anic text, al-Rāzī recognizes that the *asbāb al-nuzūl* and *munāsabah* are not always harmonious.

Unlike previous exegetes, al-Rāzī pays special attention to the possibility of a conflicting relationship between the *asbāb al-nuzūl* and the thematic flow of the surah material (*munāsabah*). To him, a transmitted account on the *asbāb al-nuzūl* may suggest a meaning that can be reasonably applicable to an individual verse but may not be supported by the context of the neighboring verses. Therefore, al-Rāzī is worried that an uncritical reception of the transmitted *asbāb al-nuzūl* may suggest a fragmentary and arbitrary composition of the Qur’anic surah. The critique of some of the *asbāb al-nuzūl* reports serves as an early and serious

---

<sup>4</sup> Al-Shāṭibī, *Al-Muwāfaqāt* (Al-Khubar: Dār ibn ‘Affān, 1997), 4:155.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 4:151.

<sup>6</sup> Andrew Rippin, “The Function of *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* in Qur’anic Exegesis,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 51, no. 1 (1988): 19. Contrary to the common view that the *asbāb* genre primarily deals with law-related verses, al-Jamal examines the *asbāb* narrations and concludes that 80% of these transmitted reports deal with *akhbār* (non-law-related verses). See Bassām al-Jamal, *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, 155-174.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 1. In his introduction to *al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*, Ibn ‘Āshūr (d. 1393/1973) lays out five functions of *asbāb al-nuzūl*: (1) providing a necessary background without which a verse would be hard to understand, (2) unraveling the incidents that motivated specific laws, (3) recounting incidents as illustrations for the meaning of a single verse without confining the verse to a specific incident, (4) narrating a historical event whose meaning is mirrored in a verse, and (5) describing incidents that explicate an ambiguous verse. See Ibn ‘Āshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr* (Tunisia: Al-Dār al-Tūnīsiyyah li al-Nashr, 1984), 46-50.



consideration of the literary consequences of approaching the surah as a unity. In the twentieth century, Amīn Iṣlāḥī correspondingly posits that the *asbāb al-nuzūl* genre gives the impression that the Qur’anic surah consists of a series of disconnected verses and therefore affects our view of the surah as a unified whole.<sup>8</sup> However, in the sixth/twelfth century, al-Rāzī brings this problematic function of *asbāb al-nuzūl* into focus. The interpretation of Q. 41:44 is an example of al-Rāzī’s rejection of *asbāb al-nuzūl* on the ground that it gives the impression that the Qur’ān consists of fragmented pieces—a thought al-Rāzī repeatedly dismisses as intolerable in the Divine speech. The verse reads:

If We had made it a foreign Quran, they would have said, ‘If only its verses were clear! What? Foreign speech to an Arab?’ Say, ‘It is guidance and healing for those who have faith, but the ears of the disbelievers are heavy, they are blind to it, it is as if they are being called from a distant place (Q. 41:44).

Al-Rāzī states that it is reported that this verse is revealed in response to the obstinacy of the Arabs who derisively requested a Qur’ān in a foreign language.<sup>9</sup> To reject this account, al-Rāzī goes back to the beginning of the surah and identifies v. 5 as the central theme around which the whole surah revolves. Instead of dealing with the surah as consisting of disconnected pieces, al-Rāzī prefers to deal with its units as unified elements contributing to the quintessence of the surah. Al-Rāzī’s argument against *sabab al-nuzūl* in v. 44 is worth quoting at length. He remarkably observes:

To me, such statements cause gross injustice against the Qur’ān since they entail the contiguity of unrelated verses and necessarily bring about the worst types of blasphemy. Given this unavoidable profanity, how would one claim that the Qur’ān is an organized book, let alone a miraculous one? I truly see that the surah, from the beginning to the end, is a homogeneous speech about God’s delineation of their statement “our hearts are encased about what you are calling us unto ...” (Q. 41:5). This statement [in v. 44] is mentioned in connection with, and as response to it [v. 5]. [V. 44] actually says: Had we revealed the Qur’ān in a foreign language, they would have rightfully asked: How would you send down a foreign Qur’ān to an Arab nation?” In this way they would conceivably

<sup>8</sup> Mustansir Mir, *Coherence in the Qur’ān* (Washington: American Trust Publication, 1987), 62.

<sup>9</sup> The occasion of revelation associated with this verse is found in al-Zamakhsharī’s *Kashshāf*, not in al-Wāḥidī.

say: “Our hearts are encased about what you are calling us unto,” (meaning this Qur’anic speech), “and there is deafness in our ears;” (meaning, we cannot understand it or comprehend its thoughts). Therefore, [v. 44 addresses the same audience]: Since God sent down this Scripture to you in your language, using your words.), how would you then claim that your hearts are encased about it and that there is deafness in ears while you belong to the people of this language? It appears that connecting this statement [in v. 44] with that speech [in v. 5] would make the surah sustain the finest form of composition from the beginning to the end. As for the other explanation people offer, it is very wondrous.<sup>10</sup>

We know that the *asbāb* genre became an independent field of Qur’anic studies in the fifth/eleventh century.<sup>11</sup> In his introduction to *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, al-Wāḥidī tells his readers that he compiled his book in an attempt to counter the pervasive fabrications of *asbāb* during his life.<sup>12</sup> Al-Rāzī’s reservation about the *asbāb al-nuzūl* genre can be also read as part of this campaign against the overuse of these *asbāb*. Similarly, it is correspondingly possible that al-Rāzī is worried that the emergence of the *asbāb* genre can result in the canonization of more reports that may eventually dissociate single verses from their context.<sup>13</sup> With these possible motives, al-Rāzī utilizes the surah *naẓm* to counter this exegetical *taqlīd*.

### 1.1 Three Ways to Prioritize *Naẓm* over *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*

When directing attention to the problematic aspects of *asbāb*, al-Rāzī utilizes three strategies to employ against those that, he thinks, may threaten the literary flow of the surah material. This trilogy includes (1) generalization of meaning of the verse, (2) considering the

<sup>10</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb*, 27:115.

"وعندي أن أمثال هذه الكلمات فيها حيف عظيم على القرآن، لأنه يقتضي ورود آيات لا تعلق للبعض فيها بالعض، وأنه بوجب أعظم أنواع الطعن فكيف يتم مع التزام مثل هذا الطعن ادعاء كونه كتاباً منتظماً، فضلاً عن ادعاء كونه معجزاً؟ بل الحق عندي أن هذه السورة من أوها إلى آخرها كلام واحد، على ما حكى الله تعالى عنهم من قولهم " قُلُوبُنَا فِي أَكِنَّةٍ بِمَا تَدْعُونَا إِلَيْهِ وَفِي آذَانِنَا وَقْرٌ " وهذا الكلام أيضاً متعلق به، وجواب له، والتقدير: أنا لو أنزلنا هذا القرآن بلغة العجم لكان لهم أن يقولوا: كيف أرسلت الكلام العجمي إلى القوم العرب، ويصح لهم أن يقولوا " قُلُوبُنَا فِي أَكِنَّةٍ بِمَا تَدْعُونَا إِلَيْهِ " أي من هذا الكلام " وفي آذاننا وقر " منه لأننا لا نفهمه ولا نحيط بمعناه، أما لما أنزلنا هذا الكتاب بلغة العرب، وبألفاظهم وأنتم من أهل هذه اللغة، فكيف يمكنكم ادعاء أن قلوبكم في أكِنَّة منها، وفي آذانكم وقر منها، فظهر أنا إذا جعلنا هذا الكلام جواباً عن ذلك الكلام، بقيت السورة من أوها إلى آخرها على أحسن وجوه النظم، وأما على الوجه الذي يذكره الناس فهو عجيب جداً."

<sup>11</sup> Bassām al-Jamal, *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, 82.

<sup>12</sup> Al-Wāḥidī, *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, 11.

<sup>13</sup> Al-Jamal observes that al-Ṭabarī designates *asbāb* incidents for 564 verses, whereas al-Wāḥidī includes *asbāb* incidents for 629 verses. With al-Ṣuyūṭī’s *Lubāb*, the number of verses jumps to 857. Al-Jamal explains this observation in view of al-Ṭabarī’s limited resources and the sweeping sectarianism. See Bassām al-Jamal, *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, 121-122.

immediate context, and/or (3) considering the general atmosphere of the surah. These hermeneutical decisions correspond with al-Rāzī's dialectical training, which makes him expect the surah to exhibit a well-reasoned argument with a universal message that transcends the time and place of the Qur'ān.

### 1.1.1 Generalization of the Content

Al-Rāzī's interest in demonstrating the coherent content of the surah prompts him to resist restricting the scope of the verse to one individual. He argues that the Qur'anic message ingrained in a surah must be understood in a general sense. He, thus, deals with the *asbāb* accounts as special models that exemplify, not the direct limiting causes but the general purport of, the verse or surahs. The following is a passage that demonstrates this observation:

Indeed, the virtuous will have a drink mixed with camphor  
From a spring for God's servants, which flowing at their wish  
They fulfil their vows; they fear a day of sweeping horror  
And give food—despite their desire for it—to the poor, the orphan, and the captive  
[Saying to themselves], "We feed you for the sake of God alone: We seek neither  
recompense nor thanks from you, we fear the Day of our Lord—a woefully grim Day (Q.  
76:5-10).

In his commentary on this passage, al-Rāzī acknowledges that only al-Wāḥidī and al-Zamakhsharī associate this passage with the acts of kindness attributed to 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib. Before disassociating the passage from the exclusive application to 'Alī, al-Rāzī assures his readers that great Mu'tazilite exegetes such as Abū Bakr ibn al-Aṣamm, Abū 'Alī al-Jubbā'ī, al-Ka'bī, and Abū Muslim al-Iṣfahānī do not mention that this passage addresses the kind acts of 'Alī. He explains that such a passage cannot be restricted to one individual:

The *naẓm* of the surah, from the beginning to this verse, is an explication of the behavioral state of the virtuous and the obedient. Were we to limit that state to one person, the *naẓm* of the surah would be diluted. Furthermore, the descriptions, in the whole passage, are given in the plural form and thereby any limitations of the meaning goes against the apparent connotations.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb*, 30:216.

To disaffiliate himself from any sectarian bias and to stress that his concern is mainly about the *naẓm*, al-Rāzī is quick to affirm that ‘Alī is not denied these noble descriptions; yet, the verse must be treated as communicating general moral precepts that agree with the flow of the ayat and apply to all virtuous people. It seems that al-Rāzī is still concerned about this sensitive case of ‘Alī. Therefore, he posits that ‘Alī being especially referenced in this passage is possible only if the whole surah was revealed when ‘Alī was engaged in these virtuous acts. This emphasis on the “whole surah” is indicative of al-Rāzī’s prioritization of the unified composition of the Qur’anic text. Depending on the legal maxim *al-‘ibrah bī ‘umūm al-laḥẓ lā bī khuṣūṣ al-sabab* (what is to be considered is the general meaning, not the specified occasion),<sup>15</sup> al-Rāzī, nevertheless, asserts that even the special reference to a specific individual does not negate the general application of the surah message according to which the *naẓm* is to be understood.

Furthermore, al-Rāzī prefers that the background for a Qur’anic text should be both general and congruent with the flow of the surah content. Take, for example, the following passage:

Whoever obeys God and the Messenger will be among those He has blessed: the messengers, the truthful, those who bear witness to the truth, and the righteous- what excellent companions these are! That is God’s favour. No one knows better than Him. (Q. 4:69-70).

Regarding this passage, the transmitted reports of *asbāb al-nuzūl* revolve around some companions who are worried about occupying a lower level of heaven than that of the prophet. Accordingly, the passage was revealed to assure them that God’s obedient servants would be in the company of the prophets in heaven. Even though al-Rāzī is not interested in denying or examining the historicity of these reports, he argues that the occasion of this passage “should be

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 30:216. Same technique was also applied to the Q. 4:58 on the value of returning trusts to their rightful owners. This verse was specifically understood to be referencing ‘Uthmān ibn Ṭalḥah. However, al-Rāzī reaffirms “that the revelation of this verse in relation to this story does not necessarily restrict the verse to that specific case [of ‘Uthmān]; rather, it applies to all types of trusts.” اعلم أن نزول هذه الآية عند هذه القصة لا يوجب كونها مخصوصة بهذه القضية بل يدخل فيه جميع أنواع الأمانات.

something greater than these reports”<sup>16</sup>. As an alternative to these traditional reports, in which an attempt was made to locate the passage under discussion in the context of a historical incident, al-Rāzī undertakes a rhetorical examination of the preceding verses. Going back to verse 59, he reviews the thematic development of the surah content until it culminated in verse 70. He observes that the command to obey in vv. 69-70 is preceded by four thematic developments: (1) a clear command to obey God and his messenger, as in “O you who believe, obey God and obey the messenger” (Q. 4:59); (2) exposing the way of those who worshipped other deities and dissuaded people from the way of the messenger (Q. 4:60); (3) reiterating the command to obey, as in “We sent no prophet but to be obeyed with the permission of God” (Q. 4:64); and (4) inspiring the believers to obey, as in “it would have been far better for them and stronger confirmation of their faith, if they had done as they were told” (Q. 4:66). Having illustrated that the broader context of this passage revolves around the concept of obedience, al-Rāzī concludes that the passage under discussion is a culmination of enticing people to be obedient and stresses that this goal generally applies to all people.<sup>17</sup>

It is worth noting that al-Rāzī’s exegetical method of generalizing the meaning of the Qur’anic content goes against the common trend of classical exegetes who are obsessed with ‘naming’ the ‘unnamed’ (*al-mubhamāt*) in the Qur’ān. The *mubhamāt* genre becomes an independent area of study during al-Rāzī’s time—in the sixth/twelfth century under the influence of Abū al-Qāsim al-Suhaylī (d. 581/1185) in his *al-Ta’rīf wa-al-i’lām li-mā ubhima min al-Qur’ān min al-asmā’ wa-al-a’lām* (Introducing and Identifying the Unstated Names and People of the Qur’ān). Al-Jamal finds that one of the avenues through which the *asbāb* genre unexpectedly gained popularity with time is the desire to name the unnamed in the Qur’ān. In al-

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 10:136.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 10:136.

Jamal's words, "nothing was more worrying to the exegete than the Qur'anic tendency to employ general expressions."<sup>18</sup> Due to his interest in preserving the generality of the Qur'anic message to facilitate a smooth synchronic reading of the surah, al-Rāzī is essentially worried about the exegetes' worries. Al-Jamal gives an example of the Qur'anic usage of the word "man" which is mentioned in the Qur'ān 65 times, most dominantly in the Meccan period, as in "Does man think that We will not reassemble his bones?" (Q. 75:3). While the exegetes associates the word 'man' with 'Uday ibn Rabī'ah or Abū Jahl, al-Jamal notices that al-Rāzī, in this verse and similar Qur'anic references, opposes this specification and maintains that it applies to all.<sup>19</sup> In a similar context, al-Rāzī lays out a definite interpretive methodology: "there is absolutely no need to associate a general word (*lafẓ*) with a specific individual."<sup>20</sup>

### 1.1.2 Prioritization of the Context:

In cases of literary conflicts between the context and the reported occasion of revelation, al-Rāzī gives preference to the context over the *sabab al-nuzūl*. A typical example is found in al-Rāzī's commentary on the Q. 4:77.

Do you not see those who were told, 'Restrain yourselves from fighting, perform the prayer, and pay the prescribed alms'? When fighting was ordained for them, some of them feared men as much as, or even more than, they feared God, saying, 'Lord, why have You ordained fighting for us? If only You would give us just a little more time.' Say to them, 'Little is the enjoyment in this world, the Hereafter is far better for those who are mindful of God: you will not be wronged by as much as the fibre in a date stone.'

Classical exegetes agree that the prophet himself is addressed in this verse, but they try to identify the group to which the prophet is commanded to communicate the message. Does it refer to a group of Muslims who once desired to fight back against the aggressive attacks launched

<sup>18</sup> See Bassām al-Jamal, *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, 184. For the major works on *mubhamāt* and its relation with *Isrā'iliyyāt*, see Yusuf al-Dāwī, "Al-Mubhamāt fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm wa 'Alāqatuha bī al-Isrā'iliyyāt 'inda al-mufasssīrīn," *Majallat al-Dirāsāt al-Islāmiyyah wa al-Buḥūth al-Akādīmiyyah* 70, (May 2016):159-198.

<sup>19</sup> Bassām al-Jamal, *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, 184-186.

<sup>20</sup> See *Ibid.*, 186, 189 and 205. For the sectarian employment of *asbāb al-nuzūl*, see *Ibid.*, 194-197. See also al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, 28:21.

against them during the early period of Islam, but held back when the permission to confront the hostile attacks was given to the Muslims in Medina? Does it refer to a group of hypocrites who were pretending to be Muslims? Al-Rāzī lists these two views: the first is supported by al-Kalbī's transmitted report, which goes even further by identifying the names of some Muslims the verse is thought to address, whereas the second view relies on some of the verse descriptions that match the hypocrites' qualities that often employed in the Qur'ān. However, the advocates of the meaning derived from *sabab al-nuzūl* argue that the descriptions in the verse are so general that they could apply to non-hypocrites. Having noticed that relying solely on the context of the verse does not resolve the disagreement about the intended meaning of the verse, al-Rāzī supports the second view and disregards the *sabab al-nuzūl* on the grounds that the adjacent verse clearly addresses the hypocrites:<sup>21</sup> "When something good befalls them, they say, 'This is from Allah,' but when something evil befalls them, they say, 'This is from you'" (Q. 4:78). In his view, the argument from the sequence of the verses is stronger than depending merely on *sabab al-nuzūl*.

In his attempts to harmonize the validity of the *asbāb al-nuzūl* genre and the prioritization of the unbroken flow of the surah material, al-Rāzī argues that *asbāb al-nuzūl* can function as occasions, not causes, of revelation. In his view, insisting on making direct connections between some verses and their *sabab al-nuzūl* can sometimes lead to a fragmentation of the surah material, and thereby signals *sū' al-tartīb* (bad arrangement) from which the Divine Speech must be kept free. For this reason, he argues that if the *sabab al-nuzūl* historically limits some verses to specific incidents, the *naẓm* of the surah requires assigning a general application of the verses

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 10:148.

"والأولى حمل الآية على المنافقين لأنه تعالى ذكر بعد هذه الآية قوله "وإن تُصِيبْهُمْ حَسَنَةٌ يَقُولُوا هَذِهِ مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ وَإِنْ تُصِيبْهُمْ سَيِّئَةٌ يَقُولُوا هَذِهِ مِنْ عِنْدِكَ" ولا شك أن من هذا كلام المنافقين، فإذا كانت هذه الآية معطوفة على الآية التي نحن في تفسيرها ثم المعطوف في المنافقين وجب أن يكون المعطوف عليهم فيهم أيضاً."

beyond any assumedly historical events.<sup>22</sup> In other words, he supports the idea of *'umūm al-ma'nā* (the general meaning), which serves his interest in maintaining the flow and *naẓm* of the surah material.

### 1.1.3 Prioritization of the surah Design

Over and above using the context as a justification for rejecting some *asbāb al-nuzūl*<sup>23</sup>, al-Rāzī insists that the design and atmosphere of the surah are the main sources of determining a sound interpretation of a given verse. For instance, he rejects the narration attributed to Ibn 'Abbās with regard to the interpretation of the verse “indeed, in the story of Joseph and his brother are lessons [signs, āyāt] for all who ask” (Q. 12:7). According to Ibn 'Abbās, a Jewish scholar heard the whole surah of Yūsuf from the prophet and then returned to his people informing them that he had heard the story of Joseph as told in the Torah from Muhammad. Upon this, some of them headed towards the prophet to hear the surah from him. Having heard it, the Jewish group asked the prophet about his source. “God taught me” was the prophet’s answer. In this context, the verse was revealed as an indication that the surah contained signs for the Jewish inquirers.<sup>24</sup>

Al-Rāzī is not moved by this report and argues that it is far-fetched. His argument is based on a textual examination of the verse and a historical analysis of the conditions of early Muslims and how the message of the surah related to them. Textually, al-Rāzī argues that Ibn 'Abbās’ report indicates that the signs (*āyāt*) reside in the prophet’s telling of the story, whereas the verse teaches clearly that the signs reside in Joseph’s story itself. Historically, al-Rāzī understands the signs to be the similarities between the events in the story of Joseph and the

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 27:5.

"واعلم أن العبرة بعموم اللفظ لا بخصوص السبب فنزول هذه الآيات في هذه الوقائع لا يمنع من عمومها

<sup>23</sup> For further examples, see al-Rāzī’s commentaries on the Q. 4:77 and 5:67.

<sup>24</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Maḥātib al-Ghayb*, 7:74.



challenges in the life of the emergent Muslim community during the early period of Islam. He notes three similarities that show how the audience in Mecca would find signs in the story of Joseph. First, most of the Meccans were the prophet's relatives who rejected his message out of *ḥasad* and envy. Here al-Rāzī views the Meccan pagans and their envious attitude towards the prophet as counterparts of Joseph's brothers. To al-Rāzī, the pagans were expected to perceive a strong reproach or *zajr* in the events of the story. Second, Jacob's interpretation of Joseph's dream was fulfilled in eighty years, and thereby the prophet would find comfort in the surah if he felt that the fulfillment of the divine promise of victory was delayed. Third, the many plots hatched against Joseph failed due to the divine plan, which overrode other plans. The plots hatched against Muhammad would likewise fail.<sup>25</sup> Remarkably, we can see al-Rāzī's inclination to find the contextual relevance (*sabab*) in the Qur'anic text itself rather than relying solely on external sources that could threaten the thematic flow of the Qur'anic text.

The following is another passage in which al-Rāzī evaluates the occasion of revelation as problematic:

125. Call unto the way of your Lord with wisdom and good teaching. Argue with them in the most courteous way, for your Lord knows best who has strayed from His way and who is rightly guided.

126. If you [believers] have to respond to an attack, make your response proportionate, but it is best to stand fast.

127. So [Prophet] be steadfast: your steadfastness comes only from God. Do not grieve over them; do not be distressed by their scheming,

128. Indeed, God is with those who are mindful of Him and who do good (Q. 16:125-128).

Based on al-Wāḥidī, al-Rāzī reports three opinions on the occasion of revelation with regard to v. 126. He argues that the frequently cited reason for this verse is that the prophet intended to avenge the mutilation of his uncle Ḥamzah by killing seventy pagans. After taking this decision, the closing passage of surah 16 was revealed, and the prophet abandoned his plan.

---

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 7: 74.

This *sabab* is attributed to Ibn ‘Abbās and others, such as Ubayy ibn Ka‘b and al-Sha‘bī. Based on this connection, the exegetes state that surah 16 is all Meccan except for this closing passage.<sup>26</sup>

Having provided this report, al-Rāzī vehemently opposed it. He argues that “understanding this verse in light of an unrelated story would entail bad arrangement in God’s speech and lead to blasphemy against it.”<sup>27</sup> Al-Rāzī is aware that such a clear rejection of this frequently cited report can create needless confusion about his consideration of the historicity of the incident. Therefore, he is quick to differentiate between the veracity of a report and the view that a verse is revealed for a specific incident.<sup>28</sup> In al-Rāzī’s opinion, this particularization entails a fragmentary reading of the Qur’ān, thereby inviting sacrilegious remarks regarding its composition. Al-Rāzī still holds the view that v. 126 can apply to the Ḥamzah incident; yet, the incident does not particularly cause the revelation of the verse, since the context supports a general precept, not a particular unrelated incident. Then al-Rāzī supports a general reading of v. 126 in light of the preceding verse. He observes:

To me the more accurate meaning is to say: God commanded Muhammad to call people to embrace the true faith through one of three means, namely, wisdom, gentle preaching and good discourse. This call includes commanding them to forsake their predecessors’ faith and to consider it a form of disbelief and misguidance. Such a command will surely confuse and harden their hearts. Moreover, it will incite most listeners to intentionally plan to get the caller killed, beaten or insulted. When the caller witnesses these forms of foolishness and hears these riots, he will naturally incline towards disciplining those fools through killing or beating. At this point, the caller is commanded to administer justice and fairness and avoid excess. This is the sound view through which the verse is to be understood.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 20:113.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 2:113.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 2:113.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 2:113.

إن حمل هذه الآية على قصة لا تعلق لها بما قبلها يوجب حصول سوء الترتيب في كلام الله تعالى و ذلك يطرُق الطعن إليه

As illustrated above, al-Rāzī considers the *naẓm* as a valid source of *asbāb*. This decision causes him to break with the traditional rule laid down by al-Wāḥidī that *asbāb al-nuzūl* are determined solely via transmitted reports.<sup>30</sup> Unlike the traditional exegetes, al-Rāzī usually mentions the thematic relations of a verse before citing its *sabab*. Al-Zarkashī's insight into the intersection between *munāsabah* (thematic relation) and *asbāb al-nuzūl* is noteworthy, because it can actually serve as a description of al-Rāzī's approach. Al-Zarkashī differentiates between the verses that can be understood only via the *sabab* and the verses that can be understood without the *sabab*. The first category requires creating the historical background first, but, it is more appropriate to start with unveiling the thematic connections for the second category.<sup>31</sup>

Even though al-Rāzī rejects some transmitted reports of *asbāb al-nuzūl*, he tries to reconstruct historical backgrounds for a given verse or passage from the text itself. To that end, al-Rāzī tends to reconstruct a context for the Qur'anic text by actively spotting its implications, connections and inferences. It appears that this strategy of active reading is sometimes preferred over reports of *asbāb al-nuzūl*. Consider the following passage, which is mentioned in the context of a discussion with the Jews of Medina:

Say [Prophet], 'If anyone is an enemy of Gabriel who, by God's leave, brought down the Quran to your heart confirming previous scriptures as a guide and good news for the faithful. If anyone is an enemy of God, His angels and His messengers, of Gabriel and Michael, then God is certainly the enemy of such disbelievers. (Quran 2:97-98)

With regard to this passage, al-Rāzī commences his commentary with the following observation:

"There must have been a reason for this [command], and the Jews must have shown something that ought to be addressed since this command is a form of argumentation.

<sup>30</sup> Al-Wāḥidī, *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, 10.

"لا يخلُ القول في أسباب نزول الكتاب إلا بالرواية والسماع ممن شاهدوا التنزيل، ووقفوا على الأسباب، وبحثوا عن علمها، وجدوا في الطلب"

<sup>31</sup> Al-Zarkashī, *Al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-ʿAṣriyyah, 2009), 1:35.

Had they done nothing, God would not have commanded him [the prophet] in this way.”<sup>32</sup>

Searching for a situational context for this command, al-Rāzī provided some transmitted reports that communicate the Jews’ hatred of Gabriel, who was seen as disfavoring the Jews or mistaking Muhammad for a Jew when imparting divine revelations to him. However, al-Rāzī argues that the initial statement “if anyone is an enemy of Gabriel who, by God’s leave, brought down the Quran to your heart” implies that “divine revelation should not be a cause of enmity because Gabriel did what God commanded him to do.”<sup>33</sup> In al-Rāzī’s opinion, this textual implication is sufficient for establishing a safe context for the passage under discussion; that is, the cause of enmity is Gabriel’s role in bringing God’s message to the prophet.

This does not mean that al-Rāzī is always critical of the *asbāb al-nuzūl* genre. Rather, he sometimes finds in *sabab al-nuzūl* a good explanation for the flow of a given verse. This indicates that Qur’anic *nazm* becomes the litmus test for accepting or rejecting the traditional methods of interpretation. For instance, he wonders about the reason for the following sequential verses from surah 5 (al-Mā’idah).

87. You who believe, do not forbid the good things God has made lawful to you- do not exceed the limits: God does not love those who exceed the limits,

88. but eat the lawful and good things that God provides for you. Be mindful of God, in whom you believe.

89. God does not take you [to task] for what is thoughtless in your oaths, only for your binding oaths: the atonement for breaking an oath is to feed ten poor people with food equivalent to what you would normally give your own families, or to clothe them, or to set free a slave. If a person cannot find the means, he should fast for three days. These is the atonement for breaking your oaths—keep your oaths. In this way God makes clear His revelations to you, so that you may be thankful

What is the relationship between the ruling in v. 89 and the preceding ruling? Al-Rāzī raises this question and relies on the *sabab al-nuzūl* associated with v. 87. In his opinion, v. 87

---

<sup>32</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb*, 3:177.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 3: 178.

addresses some of the companions who made an oath to lead a form of monastic and ascetic life that forbade them the pleasures of eating and dressing. When vv. 87-88 forbade this form of monastery, the companions asked about their now broken oaths. Therefore, v. 89 addresses the ruling regarding breaking an oath.<sup>34</sup>

## 1.2 Multiple Occurrences of the Same Revelation?

Given al-Rāzī's concern for the *naẓm* and its sensitive interactions with *asbāb al-nuzūl*, how would he deal with the verses that have a wide variety of *asbāb* assigned to them? In the case of conflicting accounts of what occasioned the revelation of a particular verse, exegetes would usually "attempt to assess which of them is best attested."<sup>35</sup> If the different accounts pass the traditional *isnād* test, priority is to be given to the *asbāb* account, whose narrator was present during the incident; otherwise, it would be supposed that there were multiple revelations of the same verse (*ta'addud nuzūl al-āyah*).<sup>36</sup> Abū Zayd doubts the solution of multiple occurrences of revelation on the grounds that, theologically, this entails the oblivion of revelations<sup>37</sup>. Instead, he suggests an examination of the internal structure of the verse to determine the most appropriate occasion to be adopted. Comparably, the Shi'ite scholar al-Ṭabaṭaba'ī (d. 1981) is one of the modern scholars who question the possibility of multiple occasions. He relies on the multiplicity of *asbāb* accounts for a given verse to challenge the adequacy and reliability of the *asbāb* reports. In al-Ṭabaṭaba'ī's view, most of these reports are merely forged traditions that are either historically unreliable narratives or a compendium of personal insights and exegetical attempts of the early generations of *tafsīr*.<sup>38</sup> To al-Ṭabaṭaba'ī, unless a ḥadīth on *asbāb* is ranked as *mutawātir*, the *sabab* has to be understood in light of the Qur'ān, not inversely. Al-Ṭabaṭaba'ī

---

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 12:61.

<sup>35</sup> Neal Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'ān*, 62.

<sup>36</sup> Nasr Abū Zayd, *Maḥmūd al-Naṣṣ*, 112.

<sup>37</sup> Al-Zarkashī explains that the notion of multiple revelations pedagogically serves as "reminders" for instructing a growing community." See al-Zarkashī, *Al-Burhān*, 1:31.

<sup>38</sup> Al-Ṭabaṭaba'ī, *Al-Qur'ān fī al-Islām* (Beirut: Dār al-Zahrā', 1973), 124.

acknowledges that his litmus test will leave only few *asbāb* accounts as reliable; however, he argues that the Qur'anic universal objectives do not necessarily require this obsession with *asbāb*.

In contrast to Abū Zayd, al-Rāzī is not particularly concerned with giving weight to a specific occasion. With the exception of historically problematic events, al-Rāzī pays little attention to the idea of *tarjīh*. The conceptual *naẓm* directs al-Rāzī focus more to the broad context and controlling theme of the surah to determine which occasion is *relevant*, not *preponderant*. In relying on the thematic atmosphere of the surah to determine the most befitting background for a verse, al-Rāzī deals practically with other transmitted occasions as examples that illustrate the applicability of a verse, not necessarily as the direct circumstance that necessitates its revelation. Abū Zayd and al-Rāzī's interpretation of Q. 9:113 illustrate their diverse approaches:

It is not fitting for the Prophet and the believers to ask forgiveness for the idolaters—even if they are related to them- after having been shown that they are bound for the Hellfire” (9:113).

The accounts cited as *asbāb al-nuzūl* for this verse refer to four incidents. In the first narration, the prophet visited his uncle Abū Ṭālib who was on his deathbed and made a final appeal to him to embrace Islam. Feeling troubled about abandoning his forefather's faith, Abū Ṭālib rejects the prophet's call. However, the prophet promised to keep seeking forgiveness for him unless he was forbidden to pray for his uncle. The second explanation is that the Q. 9:113 was revealed in response to the prophet's request to pray for his mother. The last two narrations indicate that this verse was revealed in response to two different companions who were offering prayers for their fathers who died as pagans.

Depending on these various occasions, Abū Zayd remarks that the genre of *sabab al-nuzūl* is a matter of personal reflection or in his own words “a matter of independent reasoning” (*mas’alat ijtihādiyyah*).<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, Abū Zayd posits that the occasions of revelations “reflect merely the social context of the Qur’anic text,” and that, in addition to outside reports, “they can be derived from the text itself and the relations between its units.”<sup>40</sup> Attempting to use the text itself to determine which narration is more preponderate, Abū Zayd states that the expression “it is not fitting for the prophet and the believers to” indicates that the prophet is primarily addressed and then his companions; therefore, Abū Zayd continues, the incident about Abū Ṭālib is more probable. He adds that the incident about the prophet’s mother should be disregarded because she died before his *ba’tah* (mission as a prophet).

Al-Rāzī adopts a different approach to these multiple occasions. He starts with unveiling the thematic relation between v. 113 and the whole surah and then lists the transmitted reports on *asbāb*. This order of exegetical *masā’il* is extremely telling. Methodologically, it reveals that he prioritizes the meaning drawn from *naẓm* and treats the *asbāb* as explications of that *naẓm*-related meaning. In his initial remarks on v. 113, al-Rāzī writes:

From the beginning of the surah till this position, God Almighty expounded the necessity of declaring all disassociations with the disbelievers and hypocrites. Thereafter he clearly stated that as the disassociation in this verse applies to the living, it equally applies to the deceased—no matter how close they were like fathers and mothers. The focal point here is that they [the believers] must withdraw from them to the utmost degree and must abstain from connecting with them by any means.<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> Naṣr Abū Zayd, *Maḥmūd al-Naṣṣ*, 119. Similar view is adopted by Ḥasan Ḥanafī, who argues for the designation of a *sabab* for each Qur’anic verse or section revealed. See Ḥanafī, “Al-Waḥy wa al-Wāqī’: Dirāsah fī Asbāb al-Nuzūl,” in *Al-Islām wa al-Ḥadāthah* (London: Dār al-Sāqī, 1990), 133-176. This view is in line with Ḥanafī’s epistemological proposition that religious texts are merely historical and social products that keeps evolving in accordance with the communal needs. In his view, *asbāb al-nuzūl* and abrogation are mediums for this evolving process of the making of religious beliefs. See Ḥanafī, *Ḥumūm al-Fikr wa al-Waṭan* (Cairo: Dār Qibā’, 1998), 1:73; idem, *Min al-Naql ilā al-‘Aql* (Cairo: Al-Ḥay’ah al-Miṣriyyah al-‘Āmmah lī al-Kitāb, 2014), 1:63. In effect, Ḥanafī utilizes *naskh* as evidence for his proposition that revelation appears when societies lack in change. See Ḥanafī, *Ḥumūm al-Fikr wa al-Waṭan* (Cairo: Dār Qibā’, 1998), 1:23.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>41</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Maḥmūd al-Ghayb*, 16:165.

Not wanting to miss the wood for the tree, al-Rāzī considered v. 113 as part of the *barā'ah* (disassociations) mentioned in the beginning of the surah.<sup>42</sup> Having confirmed the meaning of the verse in light of the controlling theme of the surah, al-Rāzī treats all the transmitted reports as acceptable *illustrations* of what the verse enjoins. He is aware that al-Ḥusayn ibn al-Faḍl (d. 282/895), a Nishapurian exegete, believes that the narration about Abū Ṭālib is implausible on the grounds that Abū Ṭālib belongs to the early Meccan period, whereas the verse under discussion belongs to the late Medinan period. However, al-Rāzī asserts that this reason does not necessarily discredit this account. He argues further that ibn al-Faḍl's implausibility is implausible (*hādha al-istib'ād 'indī mustab'ad*). Based on the context of the whole Qur'ān, al-Rāzī remarks that the intensity against the pagans appears principally in surah 9; therefore, it is possible that the prophet and the believers had sought divine forgiveness for their deceased relatives until this verse was revealed.<sup>43</sup>

In his comment on the need for the clause “even if they are related to them,” al-Rāzī explains that the reason why they were forbidden from seeking forgiveness for them [the disbelievers] is their assurance that they would be the rightful people of hellfire. With this general *'illah* (reason), there would be no difference between relatives and non-relatives.”<sup>44</sup> Then, al-Rāzī concludes that *sabab al-nuzūl* supports his interpretation.<sup>45</sup>

---

”اعلم أنه تعالى لما بين من أول هذه السورة إلى هذا الموضع وجوب إظهار البراءة عن الكفار والمنافقين من جميع الوجوه بين في هذه الآية أنه تجب البراءة عن أمواتهم. وإن كانوا في غاية القرب من الإنسان كالآب والأم، كما أوجبت البراءة عن أحيائهم، والمقصود منه بيان وجوب مقاطعتهم على أقصى الغايات والمنع من مواصلتهم بسبب من الأسباب.”

<sup>42</sup> Mustansir Mir describes al-Rāzī's method as 'linear atomistic' on the ground that al-Rāzī ignores the wood for the tree. See Mir's "The sūra as a unity: A Twentieth Century development in Qur'anic exegesis," in *Approaches to the Qur'ān*, ed. G. R. Hawting and Abdul Kader A. Shareef (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 212.

<sup>43</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Mafātiḥ al-Ghayb*, 16:164.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 16:166.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 16: 166.

وكون سبب النزول ما حكيناه يقوي هذا الذي قلناه.



Similarly, in surah 3, we find “Say, if you truly love Allah, then follow me and Allah will love you and forgive your sins, and Allah is All-Forgiving, Most Merciful” (Q. 3:31). Here, al-Rāzī approvingly lists three occasions that explain this verse. According to these *asbāb al-nuzūl*, the verse was revealed in response to the Jews who claimed “we are the children of God and his loved ones” (Q. 5:18), or the pagans of Quraysh who justified their idolatry as “we worship them only as a means of bringing us closer to God” (Q. 39:3), or the Christians who state that they glorify the Messiah as an expression of love.<sup>46</sup> Notably, al-Rāzī tolerates these different occasions, because they share the same principle that endorses the correlation between love and worship. Finding no problem in accepting a variety of *asbāb* for a given verse may suggest that al-Rāzī treats some of these *asbāb* traditions as personal reflections of the early commentators, not necessarily historical circumstances that need to be examined and verified. In other words, al-Rāzī tolerates these variant *asbāb* when they serve as clarifications supported by the Qur’ān.

However, al-Rāzī sometimes engages in a critical evaluation of the *asbāb* and relies on the controlling theme of the surah to determine which *asbāb al-nuzūl* is more reliable and closer to the spirit of the surah. For instance, in surah 8 (al-Anfāl), al-Rāzī lists three opinions on the occasion or the historical background of v. 17: “it was not you who killed them but God, and when you [the Prophet] threw [sand at them] it was not your throw [that defeated them] but God’s, to do the believers a favour: God is all seeing and all knowing.” Al-Rāzī states that most exegetes connected this verse with the battle of Badr, although some of them understood this verse to refer to the battle of Khaybar and others to the battle of Uhud. Based on the flow of the surah, al-Rāzī considers the first opinion more reliable on the grounds that the other views would indicate that “a foreign speech was inserted into the narrative, and that is unbecoming (*lā*

---

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 8:16.

*yalīq*).”<sup>47</sup> He posits a more reconciliatory view that does not break the flow of the surah thought, namely that, the verse under discussion is so general that it can apply to all events. Thus, it is not necessary to limit the verse to a specific event.

Similarly, many occasions were reported to create a background for the Q. 2:114: “Who does greater wrong than those who prohibit the mention of God’s name in His places of worship and strive to have them deserted? As for such, it was never meant that they should enter them except in fear. Theirs is a disgrace in life here and painful punishment in life hereafter”.

Al-Rāzī lists four main occasions for this verse, all of which aim at providing a background that answers two questions: who are the people who “prohibited the mention of God’s name?” and what does “place of worship” stand for here? The first two accounts suggest that the verse is referencing Nebuchadnezzar II, who destroyed Jerusalem with the aid of Christians. Even though this view is supported by al-Ṭabarī<sup>48</sup>, al-Rāzī unhesitatingly rejects it. Al-Rāzī argues that it is historically incorrect, because Nebuchadnezzar II reigned long before Jesus.<sup>49</sup> Another account mentions the Meccan pagans as the “doers of wrong,” who prevented the prophet from praying in Mecca. Similarly Abū Muslim argues that it is a reference to the pagans who prevented the prophet from praying in al-Masjid al-Al-Ḥarām in the year of al-Ḥudaybiyah. However, al-Rāzī rejects these accounts as being unsupported by the context which does not mention the pagans at all. Having dismissed these transmitted reports as either historically erroneous or contextually irrelevant, al-Rāzī adds another *wajh*:<sup>50</sup> “I have a fifth explanation that considers the *naẓm* more fittingly.”<sup>51</sup> Considering the tensions with the Jews in

---

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 15:113.

<sup>48</sup> Interestingly, al-Ṭabarī rejects this account as implausible in his *Tārīkh*. See *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1967), 1:589.

<sup>49</sup> Al-Rāzī attributed this objection to Abū Bakr al-Rāzī’s *Aḥkām al-Qur’ān*.

<sup>50</sup> For the usage of the term *wajh*, see Andrew Rippin, “Lexicographical Texts and the Qur’ān,” in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur’ān*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2013), 158-174.

<sup>51</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, 4:9.

surah 2, al-Rāzī posits that the broader context implies that the Jews might have been troubled by the turning of the Qiblah from Jerusalem to Mecca, and thereby tried to dissuade people away from the new direction. Al-Rāzī argues that this “suggested *sabab*” is implied by the larger context of v. 114, since the preceding and adjacent units are series of repugnant acts done by some Jews and Christians.

Al-Rāzī’s approach to the Qur’anic surah as a formal unit with a controlling theme helps him to reconstruct a history of the early emergence of the Muslim community. Actually al-Rāzī utilizes his notion of Qur’anic literary coherence as an apparatus to forge an authoritative methodology for the critical examinations of *akhbār* or transmitted reports. By postulating this unconventional hermeneutical principle, al-Rāzī gives *nazm* primacy over transmitted reports. This literary epistemic approach to the Qur’anic text can be considered to be the earliest authoritative systematic example of tracing history from the Qur’ān through the adoption of the surah as a unit. Dealing with the surah as a formal unit and definable genre, Angelica Neuwirth argues that the history of the Qur’ān “does not start with canonization but is inherent in the text itself where not only contents but also form and structure can be read as traces of a historical or a canonical process, attesting both the emergence of a scripture and the emergence of a community.”<sup>52</sup>

## 2. The Problem of Qur’anic Abrogation

Related to the *asbāb al-nuzūl* is the concept of abrogation. Given that *asbāb al-nuzūl* partly recounts some incidents that shape the legal structure of the emerging Muslim community, an incident describing the abrogation of an earlier legal practice is called an incident of *naskh*

---

و عندي فيه وجه خامس و هو أقرب إلى رعاية النظم

<sup>52</sup>Angelika Neuwirth, “Some Remarks on the Special Linguistic and Literary Character of the Qur’ān,” in *The Qur’ān: Style and Contents*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Aldershot, VT: Ashgate, 2001), 255.

(abrogation).<sup>53</sup> Both *asbāb al-nuzūl* and *naskh* are of the historical interest in terms of locating a specific incident that lead to the revelation or the abrogation of specific verses. In this way, al-Jamal adds that, among other things, *asbāb al-nuzūl* serve the purpose of affirming *naskh*.<sup>54</sup> Broadly speaking, *naskh* is closely connected with two Qur'anic self-images: a final scripture and a gradual revelation. In terms of the first feature, the Qur'ān is believed to enjoy a divine authority over past scriptures, a doctrine that vindicated the concept of cross-scriptural abrogation which was supported by the Sunni and Mu'tazilite theologians. Since this form of abrogation was implacably opposed by the Jews, it resulted in a long history of Muslim-Jewish polemics.<sup>55</sup> In accord with the second feature, the Qur'ān is believed to have been revealed in piecemeal over the course of twenty-three years. During this period, certain legal practices or procedures were believed to have been abrogated by later verses as part of the Qur'anic transformation of, and legal engagement with the circumstances facing, the emergent Muslim community during the lifetime of the prophet. This second form of intra-scriptural abrogation points to the legal interrelations between some corresponding verses and helps jurists and exegetes to determine which verses are legally in effect.

Due to the legal significance of this inter-Qur'anic abrogation, the *naskh* genre becomes a necessary hermeneutic strategy in exegetical and legal reasoning. In his *Risālah* on legal theory, al-Shāfi'ī lists *naskh* among the compendium of techniques essential for knowing God's

---

<sup>53</sup> For the meaning of *naskh* according to classical legal theorists and exegetes, see John Burton, "The Exegesis of Q. 2: 106 and the Islamic Theories of *naskh*: mā nansakh min āya aw nansaha na'ti bikhairin minhā aw mithlihā," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 48, no. 3 (1985): 452-455.

<sup>54</sup> On the correlation between the *asbāb al-nuzūl* and *naskh*, see Bassām al-Jamal, *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, 273-311.

<sup>55</sup> For works on Muslim-Jewish polemics in the medieval period, see John Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978); Camilla Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm* (Leiden: Brill, 1996); and Theodore Pulcini, *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse: Ibn Ḥazm on Jewish and Christian Scriptures* (Atlanta: GA, 1998).

scripture (*jimā' ʿilm kitāb Allāh*).<sup>56</sup> In general, works on *naskh* “were probably intended to serve as handbooks for commentators and legal scholars.”<sup>57</sup> In principle, both Sunni and Muʿtazilite scholars accepted *naskh* as a valid Qurʾanic concept. However, the Muʿtazilites dealt with *naskh* more cautiously to avoid its theological and legal challenges which attracted many Sunni - Muʿtazilite legal interactions and scholarly engagement that became typical in classical works on legal theory.

A Muʿtazilite exegete who stands out in this regard is Abū Muslim al-Ḥafḥānī (d. 322/1066), who consistently rejects the concept of intra-Qurʾanic abrogation. In his extinct exegesis, Abū Muslim supports his position by providing a reinterpretation of the abrogated verses depending on their scriptural and social context.<sup>58</sup> Apparently, Abū Muslim’s exegetical rational prioritization of the Qurʾanic context makes his approach to the question of *naskh* distinct from that of the legal theorists. In the classical *Uṣūl* works, Qurʾanic verses are usually treated as fragmentary *shawāhid* that are typically understood in light of the transmitted *akhbār* (reports) or backgrounds that support and validate the cases of abrogation. Therefore, Abū Muslim’s stance on rejecting *naskh* may be a result of giving the Qurʾanic context primacy over the transmitted reports that seem to have been favored and prioritized more by legal theorists. It is noteworthy that Abū Muslim’s stance on *naskh* signals an early distinction between approaching the abrogation cases legally and interpreting them contextually.

There is no doubt that al-Rāzī is aware of these two approaches, mainly due to his scholarly enterprise in both the legal and exegetical tradition. As a legal theorist, al-Rāzī is fully

---

<sup>56</sup> Al-Shāfiʿī, *Al-Risālah*, ed. Aḥmad Shākir (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Mustafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1940), 1:40-41.

<sup>57</sup> David S. Powers, “The Exegetical Genre *Nāsikh al-Qurʾān wa Mansūkhuhu*, in Andrew Rippin,” in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qurʾān*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2013), 117–138. For the hermeneutical consequences of abrogation, see Massimo Campanini, *The Qurʾan: the Basics*, trans. Oliver Leaman (London: Routledge, 2016), 82-85.

<sup>58</sup> In 1330/1911, the Indian scholar Saʿīd al-Anṣārī combined Abū Muslim’s interpretations in *Multaqaṭ Jāmiʿ al-Taʾwīl li Muḥkam al-Tanzīl*.

familiar with the Mu‘tazilite tradition in *‘uṣūl al-fiqh*. For instance, his *al-Maḥṣūl* reflects an active reading and enrichment of four classical legal works: al-Juwaynī’s *al-Burhān*, al-Ghazālī’s *al-Mustaṣfā*, ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s *al-‘Umad* and Abū al-Ḥusayn’s *al-Mu‘tamad*. The first two sources are authored by two leading Sunni figures, whereas the other two are authored by two leading Mu‘tazilite scholars. Furthermore, a cursory examination of al-Rāzī’s *Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb* reveals that he is actively engaged with many Mu‘tazilite figures, most notably ‘Abd al-Jabbār and Abū Muslim al-Asfahānī who are deeply interested in the thematic connectedness of the surah material. Even though the exegetical works by ‘Abd al-Jabbār and Abū Muslim are now extinct, it is clear that al-Rāzī had full access to these works.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, al-Rāzī’s interest in the thematic relations in, and contextual reading of, the Qur’anic surah can be traced back to his familiarity with the Mu‘tazilite exegesis. To explain the transition from one theme to another, al-Rāzī quotes Mu‘tazilite exegetes, most notably Abū Muslim al-Isfahānī and al-Qāḍī. Related to the notion of the thematic arrangement of the surah is the issue of intra-Qur’anic abrogation, the adoption of which, in Abū Muslim’s view, could result in a disregard of the circumstantial context of the surah or even a breach of the flow of the Qur’anic material.

Comparing al-Rāzī’s approach to *naskh* in his *al-Maḥṣūl* and *Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb*, one can easily discern two opposing trends. As a legal theorist, al-Rāzī openly opposes Abū Muslim’s views on *naskh* as manifested in the former’s *al-Maḥṣūl*, a significant work on legal theory that marks the culmination of Muslim legal thought until the sixth/eleventh century. To justify his rejection of *naskh* in the Qur’ān, Abū Muslim relies on some Qur’anic proof-texts and offers reinterpretations of the verses claimed to be abrogated. In his *al-Maḥṣūl*, al-Rāzī is extremely passionate about refuting Abū Muslim’s arguments for the rejection of *naskh* and countering his

---

<sup>59</sup> For instance, al-Rāzī quotes al-Qāḍī’s lengthy arguments in support of the Mu‘tazilite denial of the Sunni doctrine of the possibility of seeing God in the afterlife. Al-Rāzī clearly indicates that his lengthy quote, which covers around two pages, comes directly from al-Qāḍī’s *tafsīr*. See al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb*, 13:106.

reinterpretation of the verses that are widely recognized as abrogated. However, with his endorsement of the notion of unified Qur'anic composition and his active engagement with Mu'tazilite *tafsīr*, al-Rāzī has a drastically different tone when addressing *naskh* in his exegesis.

The following two verses are among the Qur'anic proof texts that Abū Muslim utilizes to deny *naskh*:

- A. “No falsehood can approach it [the Qur'ān] from before or behind it: It is sent down by One Full of Wisdom, Worthy of all Praise” (Q. 41:42).
- B. “Whatever revelation We abrogate [nansakh] or cause to be forgotten, We replace with something better or similar. Do you [Prophet] not know that God has power over everything?” (Q. 2:106)

Abū Muslim argues that these two verses do not support the technical meaning of abrogation as understood in legal manual. To substantiate his rejection of intra-Qur'ān abrogation, Abū Muslim uses Q. 41:42 to argue that the abrogation Qur'anic laws is a form of falsehood (*bāṭil*) that cannot be ascribed to the Qur'ān. Meanwhile, he reinterprets Q. 2:106 as referring to “moving the ayat from the Preserved Tablet to the Holy Script, not abrogation of laws.” Here, Abū Muslim seems to use *naskh* in the way one says *nasakhtu al-kitāb* (I transcribed the book), which is a Qur'anic usage, as in Q. 45:29. Furthermore, Abū Muslim argues that Q. 2:106, the frequently quoted verse on abrogation, can be seen as a reference the doctrine of cross-scriptural abrogation.

In his *al-Maḥṣūl*, al-Rāzī disagrees with Abū Muslim and affirms that the “falsehood from before or behind” in Q. 41:42 refers to the doctrine that the Qur'ān to be annulled by any past Scripture nor would there be a future scripture to annul it.<sup>60</sup> In his *Mafātiḥ al-Ghayb*, however, al-Rāzī reaffirms Abū Muslim's interpretations and adds three more possible meanings:

---

<sup>60</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Al-Maḥṣūl* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 2019), 3:311.

- A. What the Qur'ān judges as right cannot be annulled, and what the Qur'ān judges as false cannot be right.
- B. The Qur'ān is immune from alteration: additions and subtractions.
- C. The Qur'ān is not subject to *mu'āraḍah* (imitation), which did not occur in the past and will not happen in the future.

Broadening the scope of meaning in this verse, al-Rāzī goes on to state that this verse might be an understandable proof-text for Abū Muslim. He writes: “Know that Abū Muslim al-Ḥafḥānī can use this verse to argue that abrogation does not exist in the Qur'ān since abrogation is *ibṭāl* [annulment].<sup>61</sup> Were abrogation to apply to the Qur'ān, falsehood would come to it, and this goes against this verse.”<sup>62</sup>

Al-Rāzī displays some changing attitude in his evaluation of Abū Muslim's stance on Q. 2:106 as in the *bāṭil* verse. In his *al-Maḥṣūl*, al-Rāzī disapproves Abū Muslim's reinterpretation of the *naskh* verse. Considering the context of Q. 2:106, some modern scholars have expressed a similar interpretation without a reference to, or most likely in cognizance of, Abū Muslim's position. For instance, Neal Robinson denies that *naskh* verse is a reference to abrogation in its technical legal sense. He argues that “the Qur'anic abrogation of elements in the Jewish and Christian dispensations.”<sup>63</sup> Likewise, with Q. 2:106 in mind, Michael Cuypers complains of the traditional exegetical method of atomistic exegesis which, according to him, causes “the danger of interpreting a verse in isolation, without considering its literary context, and also the shortcomings of many of the occasions of revelation.”<sup>64</sup> In Cuypers' view, the hermeneutical

<sup>61</sup> *Ibṭāl* is a verbal noun that shares the same root of *bāṭil*.

<sup>62</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Maḥṣūl al-Ghayb*, 27:114.

و اعلم أن لأبي مسلم الأصفهاني أن يحتاج بهذه الآية على أنه لم يوجد النسخ فيه لأن النسخ إبطال فلو دخل النسخ فيه لكان قد أتاه الباطل من خلفه و إنه على خلاف هذه الآية.

<sup>63</sup> Neal Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an*, 67.

<sup>64</sup> Michel Cuypers, “Semitic Rhetoric as a Key to the Question of the *naẓm* of the Qur'anic Text,” *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 13, n. 1 (2011): 7.



error could have been avoided had the exegetes considered the context, which addressed the position of the Torah and Jewish community.<sup>65</sup>

Practically, many exegetes had avoided this hermeneutical error. Not only did Abū Muslim avoid it but al-Rāzī also shifted his evaluation of Abū Muslim’s reinterpretation of the abrogation verse from a complete denial in *al-Maḥṣūl* to considerable support in *Mafātiḥ al-Ghayb*. This is a remarkable shift, because Abū Muslim is now receiving support from a leading Sunni authority with regard to a verse that is traditionally deemed as “the *locus classicus* for the doctrine of abrogation.”<sup>66</sup> In his *Mafātiḥ al-Ghayb*, al-Rāzī repeatedly takes a positive attitude towards Abū Muslim in a two-fold way. First, he presents a more reasonable interpretation, which he attributes to Abū Muslim. Al-Rāzī enthusiastically explains Abū Muslim’s position:

Abū Muslim replied with a series of arguments. First, the abrogated āyāt refer to the laws mentioned in ancient scriptures such as the Torah and the Gospels which endorsed the Sabbath and praying to the East and West. God relieved us from these and their likes and rather commanded us to worship in a different way. The Jews and Christians used to say: do not believe in any except those who follow your faith. Therefore, God nullified their statements with this verse.”<sup>67</sup>

Second, al-Rāzī acknowledges a change of opinion regarding the use of Q. 2:106 in support of abrogation. He writes:

Know that after we demonstrated this in the book *al-Maḥṣūl fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, we substantiated the occurrence of abrogation by virtue of Q. 2:106 “Any revelation We abrogate [*nansakh*] or cause to be forgotten, We replace with something better or similar.” Yet, this textual inference is weak since “whatever” here expresses an antecedent and consequent. [This is the same] as the sentence “whoever comes to you, honor him” does not indicate the act of coming but merely [the condition] that whenever he comes honoring becomes mandatory. Accordingly, this verse does not point to the occurrence of abrogation but [implies that] whenever abrogation occurs, a better

---

<sup>65</sup> Naṣr Abū Zayd argues that the context, which emphasizes God’s sovereignty and Judea-Christian opposition to the prophecy of Muḥammad, indicates that āyah in 2:106 means “a sign or supporting evidence for the veracity of Muḥammad’s message.” In his view, 2:106 promises continual support for substantiating Muḥammad’s claims to the office of prophecy to the extent that the supporting evidence that God replaces or causes to be forgotten will be followed by a similar, if not better, proof. See, Naṣr Abū Zayd, *Mafḥūm al-Naṣṣ*, 119.

<sup>66</sup> John Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2004), 196.

<sup>67</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Mafātiḥ al-Ghayb*, 3:207.

alternative must follow. To approve abrogation, it is stronger to depend on Q. 16:101: “And when We substitute a verse in place of a verse” and Q. 13:39 “Allah eliminates what He wills or confirms, and with Him is the Mother of the Book.” God knows best.<sup>68</sup>

This support and minor critique of Abū Muslim’s position on Q. 2:106 mark a rapid shift in al-Rāzī’s contextual reinterpretation of many of the traditionally accepted abrogation cases. This shift is clearly informed by his contextual approach to the Qur’anic composition, a goal that both Abū Muslim and al-Rāzī share. As an exegete, al-Rāzī is more cautious with the overuse of *naskh* because it can easily break the flow of the text and, in turn, supports claims regarding the fragmentary nature of the Qur’ān which al-Rāzī vehemently rejected as (*yajib tanzīh kalam Allāh ‘anhu*).<sup>69</sup> Interestingly, al-Rāzī is so passionate about this new shift that he lays down three clear hermeneutical principles on *naskh*: “The less abrogation, the better” (*al-naskh kullama kana aqal kana awlā*),<sup>70</sup> “Abrogation is principally unanticipated” (*al-aṣl ‘adam al-naskh*)<sup>71</sup> and “Abiding by abrogation without irrefutable evidence is erroneous” (*iltizām wuqū‘ al-naskh min ghayr dalīl yuljī ‘ ilayhī khaṭa*).<sup>72</sup>

Having addressed al-Rāzī’s theoretical stance on the foundational proof-texts Abū Muslim employed to vindicate his rejection of *naskh*, it is appropriate now to examine a practical

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 3:207.

“واعلم أنا بعد أن قررنا هذه الجملة في كتاب الحصول في أصول الفقه تمسكنا في وقوع النسخ بقوله تعالى: “ما ننسخ من آية أو ننسها نأت بخير منها أو مثلها”، والاستدلال به أيضاً ضعيف، لأن «ما» ههنا تفيد الشرط والجزاء، وكما أن قولك: من جاءك فأكرمه لا يدل على حصول النسخ، بل على أنه متى جاء وجب الإكرام، فكذا هذه الآية لا تدل على حصول النسخ، بل على أنه متى حصل النسخ وجب أن يأتي بما هو خير منه، فالأقوى أن نعول في الإثبات على قوله تعالى: “وإذا بدلنا آية مكان آية” [النحل: 101] وقوله: “يُنسخ الله ما يشاء ويثبت وعنده أم الكتاب” [الرعد: 39] والله تعالى أعلم.”

<sup>69</sup> John Burton notices al-Rāzī’s changing attitudes towards abrogation. To explain al-Rāzī’s different positions on abrogation, Burton differentiates between al-Rāzī as a legal theorist and al-Rāzī as an exegete. See John Burton, “The Exegesis of Q. 2: 106 and the Islamic Theories of *naskh*: mā nansakh min āya aw nansahā na’ti bi khairin minhā aw mithlihā,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 48, no. 3 (1985): 456. For a focused study on abrogation, see John Burton, *The Sources of Islamic Law: Islamic Theories of Abrogation* (Edinburg, University Press 1990). For modern critique of *naskh*, Muṣṭafa Abū Zayd limits the *naskh* cases to six verses. See Muṣṭafa Abū Zayd, *Al-Naskh fī al-Qur’ān: Dirāsah Tashrī’iyah Tārīkhiyyah Naqdiyyah* (Almansurah: Dār al-Wafā’, 1987). Building on Abū Zayd’s thesis, ‘Abd al-Muta’āl al-Jabrī reexamines the six cases and concludes that there is essentially no abrogation in the Qur’ān. See ‘Abd al-Muta’āl al-Jabrī, *Lā Naskha fī al-Qur’ān: Limādha?* (Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, 1980). See also, Daniel W Brown, “The Triumph of Scripturalism: The Doctrine of *Naskh* and its Modern Critics,” in *The Shaping of an American Islamic Discourse: A Memorial to Fazlur Rahman*, ed. Earle Waugh and Fredrick Denny (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 49-66.

<sup>70</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Mafāṭih al-Ghayb*, 5:69.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 13:110.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 7:106.

case of abrogation. As mentioned earlier, al-Rāzī shifts from attacking Abū Muslim in *al-Maḥṣūl* to defending him in *Maḥāṭih al-Ghayb*. In his *al-Maḥṣūl*, al-Rāzī states that there is consensus among Muslims on the permissibility of abrogation in the Qurʾān. Then, he singles out Abū Muslim as a Muslim scholar who was against *naskh*. To substantiate the majority view, al-Rāzī lists a number of widely-recognized *naskh* cases, followed by a rebuttal of Abū Muslim’s views on these verses. Let us first consider an example of *naskh* in al-Rāzī’s *Maḥṣūl*, namely, the case of the bequest verses from surah 2 (al-Baqarah), wherein v. 240 is traditionally deemed to be abrogated by v. 234:

If any of you die and leave widows, make a bequest for them: a year’s maintenance and no expulsion from their homes [for that time]. But if they leave of their own accord, you will not be blamed for what they may reasonably choose to do with themselves: God is almighty and wise (Q. 2:240).

If any of you die and leave widows, the widows should wait for four months and ten nights before remarrying. When they have completed this set time, you will not be blamed for anything they may reasonably choose to do with themselves. God is fully aware of what you do (Q. 2:234).

According to the majority view in the legal and exegetical literature, v. 240 “contains two separate legal provisions, each of which is subsequently abrogated by a different Qurʾanic verse: the one-year “waiting period” was reduced to four months and ten nights by Q. 2:234, and the testator’s obligation to make provisions for his wife’s maintenance was abrogated by Q. 4:12 which awards a fractional share of the estate to the widow.”<sup>73</sup> In *al-Maḥṣūl*, al-Rāzī supports the majority view that v. 240 is abrogated by v. 234. In addition to his support of this instance of abrogation, al-Rāzī states that Abū Muslim rejects this *naskh* case on the grounds that v. 234 is a case of specification, not abrogation. Al-Rāzī explains that Abū Muslim argues that the one-year waiting period is not utterly abrogated since, in case of a one-year pregnancy, a widow will have a one-year waiting period, and thereby v. 240 is still in force in some circumstances. Al-Rāzī

---

<sup>73</sup> David Powers, “On the Abrogation of the Bequest Verses,” *Arabica* 29, no. 3 (September 1982): 285.

does not question the pregnancy duration Abū Muslim is supposing, probably, because he understands Abū Muslim’s argument as belonging to what the *mutakallimūn* would call *imkān ‘aqlī* (rational possibility), which may apply to things that are empirically non-existent but rationally possible. However, al-Rāzī undermines Abū Muslim’s interpretation as irrelevant, since the waiting period for a pregnant widow ends with her delivery as in (Q. 65:4); therefore, the one-year specification would be needless.

Moving to *Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb*, we find al-Rāzī presenting Abū Muslim’s interpretation in a more compelling way and shifting towards his position. In his discussion on the bequest verses, David S. Powers examines al-Rāzī’s fair presentation of, and clear support for, Abū Muslim’s rejection of the abrogation of v. 240. In Powers’ words, Abū Muslim “suggested that in order to be properly understood, Q. 2:240 must be seen against the background of the social situation in pre-Islamic Arabia.”<sup>74</sup> Powers adds that, prior to Islam, “a widow was obligated to remain in her deceased husband’s dwelling for one year. Islam not only reduced the waiting period to four months and ten nights (Q. 2:234), but also offered the widow who had observed the waiting-period the choice of either remaining in that dwelling for the remainder of the year, or leaving.”<sup>75</sup>

In addition, al-Rāzī provides three arguments to support Abū Muslim’s case that there are no acceptable grounds for the abrogation of Q. 2:240. Related to al-Rāzī’s way of endorsing Abū Muslim’s stance on *naskh* is the argument from *naẓm*. As noted by Powers, al-Rāzī “cites the phenomenon of *tartīb* as one of the grounds for his contention that Q. 2/240 was not abrogated by 2/234.”<sup>76</sup> When mentioned in the same surah, it is more befitting for the abrogating verse, al-Rāzī argues, to appear after the abrogated verse. Even though he acknowledges that the reverse order is generally possible, al-Rāzī opines that such a reverse order is considered to be part of “a

---

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 288.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 288.

<sup>76</sup> Powers, S. David, “The Exegetical Genre *nāsikh al-Qur’ān wa mansūkhuhu*,” 135.

poor arrangement from which God’s speech must be kept free.”<sup>77</sup> Interestingly, al-Rāzī closes his defense of Abū Muslim’s interpretation by saying that “this is the demonstration and clarification (*taqrīr*) of Abū Muslim’s view, and it is absolutely true (*fī ghāyat al-ṣiḥḥah*).”<sup>78</sup> This drastic shift from rebutting Abū Muslim’s rejection of the alleged abrogation of Q. 2:240 to praising his stance on the same verse goes back to al-Rāzī’s interest in the intentional literary design of the surah. Illustrating the thematic relations in a given surah is a shared goal for both al-Rāzī and Abū Muslim. It does not come as a surprise, then, to notice the many citations al-Rāzī attributes to Abū Muslim in explaining the flow of the surah material.

To demonstrate that al-Rāzī’s support of Abū Muslim’s reinterpretation of many *naskh* cases is not accidental, let us consider two more examples that show al-Rāzī’s continual adoption of Abū Muslim’s interpretative method for minimizing the application of abrogation in the Qur’anic text. Consider the following verses:

You who believe, when you come to speak privately with the Messenger, offer something in charity before your conversation: that is better for you and purer. If you do not have the means, God is most forgiving and merciful.

Were you afraid to give charity before consulting the Prophet? Since you did not give charity, and God has relented towards you, you should [at least] observe your prayers, pay the prescribed alms, and obey God and His Messenger: God is well aware of your actions. (Q. 58:12-13)

In *al-Maḥṣūl*, al-Rāzī uses these two verses to encounter Abū Muslim’s rejection of *naskh*. In al-Rāzī’s view, v. 12 evidently commands a charitable donation to the needy before having a private conversation with the prophet, whereas v. 13 eases this obligation. However, Abū Muslim explains the passage in light of a circumstantial context. He argues that the mandatory charity was prescribed as a means of distinguishing the hypocrites from the true believers. As the hypocrites were identified, Abū Muslim continues, there was no need for this

---

<sup>77</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb*, 6:135.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 6:135.

legislation. Depending on some transmitted reports that single out ‘Alī ibn Abū Ṭālib as the only charity-giver, al-Rāzī argues that v. 12 was not intended to set the hypocrites and believers apart; otherwise, all the believers who did not give charity would have been counted as hypocrites.<sup>79</sup> In *Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb*, however, al-Rāzī presents Abū Muslim’s interpretation in an approving way.

He writes:

Abū Muslim denied the occurrence of abrogation. He stated that the hypocrites used to refrain from giving charity; yet, some of them abandoned hypocrisy and proclaimed faith outwardly and inwardly. To set the true converts and the remaining hypocrites apart, God commanded giving charity ahead of holding any private conversation [with the prophet]. Since this obligation was made for a given purpose at a specific time, there is no wonder that the obligation was limited to that time. The epitome of Abū Muslim’s opinion is that this obligation was ordained for a specific goal, and thereby the obligation must be revoked when the goal is attained. Therefore, this is not abrogation, and this view is good and unproblematic (*lā ba’sa bihi*). The majority commonly hold this [v. 12] as abrogated by “were you afraid?” [v. 13] while others say it is abrogated by the enforcement of Zakāh.<sup>80</sup>

In this passage al-Rāzī assimilates Abū Muslim’s reinterpretation as an example of *‘umūm* and *khuṣūṣ* (generalization and specification). However, al-Rāzī adopts this technique to restrict the sphere of abrogation. For instance, Q. 8:65 encourages believers who are engaged in a military confrontation to be steadfast affirming that one hundred Muslims are to be steadfast in facing one thousand idolaters. However, the subsequent verse eases the instruction affirming that now one hundred Muslims are to be steadfast when facing two hundred idolaters. Al-Rāzī states that the majority of the exegetes are quick to infer that the latter verse abrogated the former. In his discussion on the validity of the majority view, al-Rāzī cites Abū Muslim’s view which runs counter to the majority view. Moreover, al-Rāzī supports Abū Muslim’s interpretation as “sound

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 3:308.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 29:237.

“أنكر أبو مسلم وقوع النسخ وقال: إن المنافقين كانوا يمتنعون من بذل الصدقات، وإن قوماً من المنافقين تركوا النفاق وآمنوا ظاهراً وباطناً إيماناً حقيقياً، فأراد الله تعالى أن يميزهم عن المنافقين، فأمر بتقديم الصدقة على النجوى ليشير هؤلاء الذين آمنوا إيماناً حقيقياً عن بقي على نفاقه الأصلي، وإذا كان هذا التكليف لأجل هذه المصلحة المقدرة لذلك الوقت، لا جرم يقدر هذا التكليف بذلك الوقت، وحاصل قول أبي مسلم: أن ذلك التكليف كان مقدرًا بغاية مخصوصة، فوجب انتهاءه عند الانتهاء إلى الغاية المخصوصة، فلا يكون هذا نسخاً، وهذا الكلام حسن ما به بأس، والمشهور عند الجمهور أنه منسوخ بقوله: “أَشْفَقْتُمْ” ومنهم من قال: إنه منسوخ بوجوب الزكاة.”

and good” (*ṣaḥīḥ ḥasan*). In al-Rāzī’s view, both verses continue to be binding as each considers the fact that the means of confrontation could vary from one circumstance to another. In other words, al-Rāzī argues that when a group of one hundred Muslims have the ability to confront one thousand idolaters, then it becomes binding on believers to stay steadfast and avoid fleeing; however, in the case of their inability to engage in this level of confrontation, the rule is eased to fit the new circumstance.<sup>81</sup>

Similarly, al-Rāzī uses *‘umūm* and *khuṣūṣ* to explain away the *naskh* claim associated with the following verses:

2:282 You who believe, when you contract a debt for a stated term, put it down in writing: have a scribe write it down justly between you. No scribe should refuse to write: let him write as God has taught him, let the debtor dictate, and let him fear God, his Lord, and not diminish [the debt] at all.

2:283 If you are on a journey, and cannot find a scribe, something should be handed over as security, but if you decide to trust one another, then let the one who is trusted fulfil his trust; let him be mindful of God, his Lord. Do not conceal evidence: anyone who does so has a sinful heart, and God is fully aware of everything you do.

Some exegetes cite these verses as constituting a case of *naskh*. However, in his commentary on these verses, al-Rāzī tries to understand each verse in its context and assign different scope of meaning to each verse so that he can avoid the *naskh*. In surah 2, we find that v. 282 obligates the written documentations of loans; yet, it is followed by v. 283 which some exegetes take as allowing loan transactions without documentations and thereby deem it a *naskh* case. However, al-Rāzī denies that this verse was a case of *naskh*. In his view, v. 282 indicates that the obligatory act of written documentations is applicable “as a form of instruction and precaution,” whereas v. 283 indicates that the permissibility of non-documentation is applicable “as a form of license.”<sup>82</sup> It is true that the context of v. 283 suggests a license in the case of

---

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., 15:156.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 7:106.

travelling, when means of documentation are unavailable and the trustworthiness of the borrower is assured.

Apart from his adoptions of many of Abū Muslim’s reinterpretation of *naskh*-related verses, al-Rāzī confronts some alleged *naskh* cases by appealing to the preservation of Qur’anic moral precepts. For instance, he argues that abrogation does not apply to verses that are calling for *husn al-adab* (good decorum), because it is an ethical principle that cannot be entirely abrogated. For instance, Q. 16:126, “If you retaliate, then let it be equivalent to what you have suffered. But if you patiently endure, it is certainly best for those who are patient,” is taken to be abrogated by the Verse of Fighting. However, al-Rāzī rejects this interpretation arguing that this claim of abrogation “is absolutely far-fetched (*fī ghāyat al-bu’d*) as the verse is intended to teach good decorum in preaching God and to desist aggression and additional transgression. These things have no connections with the verse of the sword.”<sup>83</sup> Al-Rāzī then concludes that “most exegetes are obsessed with increasing the *naskh* which, to me, seems pointless.”<sup>84</sup>

Al-Rāzī’s concern about the risk of devaluing the Qur’anic verses commanding forbearance reappears in his commentary on Q. 6:104: “Indeed, there have come to you insights from your Lord. So whoever chooses to see, it is for their own good. But whoever chooses to be blind, it is to their own loss. And I am not a keeper over you.” In his commentary on this verse, he laments the exegetical tendency to abrogate these general ethical principles affirming that the claim that such a verse was abrogated is far-fetched (*ba’īd*). He observes:

Such exegetes are needlessly obsessed with increasing the number of abrogation cases. The truth view is held by the scholars of legal theory who posit that the fundamental principle is the non-existence of abrogation (*al-aṣl ‘adam al-naskh*). Therefore, it is incumbent to decrease its cases as much as possible.<sup>85</sup>

---

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 20:115.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 20:115.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 14:110.



Based on al-Rāzī's familiarity and engagement with the Mu'tazilite Abū Muslim, we can discern three shifts in al-Rāzī's stance on *naskh*: attacking Abū Muslim, supporting Abū Muslim and attacking the exegetes' obsession with *naskh*. These changes can be explained by al-Rāzī's consideration and adoption of *naẓm* as the yardstick with which he measures the reliability of the transmitted reports and views on *naskh*. This audacious step in naturalizing Mu'tazilite views in a major Sunni work like *Mafātiḥ al-Ghayb* is a turning point in the Qur'anic exegetical tradition.<sup>86</sup>

Exegetically, the discussion on abrogation leads to an examination of the conflict between what the context suggests and what the transmitted report provides. Here, al-Rāzī prioritizes the meaning drawn from context over the meaning drawn from transmitted reports. Through this emphasis on the reasonableness of the Qur'anic *naẓm*, al-Rāzī assigns an authoritative role to the Qur'anic context as a source of religious knowledge. In this way, he rejects the uncritical reception of transmitted reports that he himself accepted in his legal work *al-Maḥṣūl*. With the prioritization of *naẓm* and the assimilation of Mu'tazilite thought, many transmitted reports on *naskh* cease to be the ultimate arbitrator in Qur'anic hermeneutics. Due to the Mu'tazilite influence on al-Rāzī, as attested by his approving remarks on, and direct citations from, Mu'tazilite exegetes—most notably Abū Muslim al-Iṣfahānī, one is sometimes left with the impression that al-Rāzī uses the Mu'tazilite Abū Muslim to represent the former's own support of limiting the *naskh* cases in face of the *fuqahā*'s obsession of with abrogation. A typical example of this is found in surah 2 (al-Baqarah) with regard to legal permission for intimate spousal relations and food consumptions during the nights of the Ramadan fast.

---

<sup>86</sup> For a further discussion on Abū Muslim's impact on al-Rāzī with regard to the issue of abrogation, see Yasin Ceylan, *Theology and Tafsīr in the Major Works of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1996), 42-48.

You [believers] are permitted to lie with your wives during the night of the fast: they are [close] as garments to you, as you are to them. God was aware that you were betraying yourselves, so He turned to you in mercy and pardoned you: now you can lie with them. Seek what God has ordained for you. Eat and drink until the white thread of dawn becomes distinct from the black. Then fast until nightfall. Do not lie with them during the nights of your devotional retreat in the mosques: these are the bounds set by God, so do not go near them. In this way, God makes His messages clear to people, that they may guard themselves against doing wrong (Q. 2:187).

According to the majority view, a man was allowed to eat and have intimate relations during the night as long as he did not fall into a deep sleep or offer the night (*‘ishā’*) prayer—after which fasting must resume. The majority view explains Q. 2:187 in the sense that this practice is abrogated, and that both intimate relations and food consumption become unconditionally permissible during Ramadan nights. However, al-Rāzī quotes Abū Muslim, who argues that this verse abrogates the earlier fasting practice of past nations, not early Islam. Remarkably, al-Rāzī notes six objections raised by the majority view and then presents Abū Muslim’s clever responses to each objection. He then leaves the readers to judge the strength of Abū Muslim’s points.<sup>87</sup>

Accordingly, it is safe to suppose that al-Rāzī is indebted to the Mu‘tazilites in his interpretive methods related to the notion of *nazm*.<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, al-Rāzī’s adoption of the Mu‘tazilite interpretive methodology can be also seen as response to the classical Sunni obsession with increasing the *naskh* cases in the Qur’ān. In his examination of Ibn Salāmah’s *al-Nāsikh wa al-Mansūkh*, Şubhī al-Şāliḥ notes that only forty three surahs escaped *naskh*, as if surahs were approached with the assumption that abrogation is the governing rule.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, from Ibn Salāmah’s *al-Nāsikh wa al-Mansūkh*, al-Şāliḥ cites an example of abrogation that

---

<sup>87</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb*, 5:88.

<sup>88</sup> For the Mu‘tazilite positive influence on al-Rāzī’s thought, see Ignaz Goldziher, “Aus der Theologie des Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī,” *Der Islam* 3 (1912): 213-47. For the Mu‘tazilite theological interpretive methodology on al-Rāzī, see Tariq Jaffer, “Mu‘tazilite Aspects of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s Thought,” *Arabica* 5 (2012): 510-535; and idem, “Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī System of Inquiry” in *Aims, Methods, and Context of Qur’anic Exegesis*, ed. Karen Bauer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 241-261.

<sup>89</sup> Şubhī al-Şāliḥ, *Mabāḥith fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān* (Dār al-‘Ilm lī al-Malāyīn, n.d.), 273.

serves as a sign for the early obsessive preoccupation with the exegetical genre of Qur'anic abrogation.<sup>90</sup> In surah 76, the righteous are commended for their kind acts: “And they give food—despite their desire for it—to the poor, the orphan, and the captive” (Q. 76:8). Oddly enough, Ibn Salāmah singles out the word “captive” as abrogated by the sword verse. Hearing her father’s book on abrogation read in his presence, Ibn Salāmah’s daughter was dismayed by the claim that feeding the captives was abrogated. “You made a mistake in the book, my father,” said the daughter. “How is that, my daughter,” asked Ibn Salāmah. “Muslims unanimously agree that captives are to be fed and not to be killed by hunger,” affirmed the daughter. Upon this, Ibn Salāmah agreed: “You told the truth!”<sup>91</sup> Therefore, al-Rāzī’s stance on *naskh* can be evaluated as an attempt to deter Qur’anic commentators from exegetical *taqlīd*.<sup>92</sup>

Countering *taqlīd* and being open to the cross-sectarian views are not foreign to the Ash‘arite thought. One century before al-Rāzī, al-Ghazālī warns against *taqlīd* in philosophy and *kalam*. If we take his word for it, al-Ghazālī indicates in his introduction to *Tahāfut al-Falāsifah* that he is actually lamenting the problem of philosophical *taqlīd* that he thinks is pervasive in Muslim intellectual circles due to the great erudition and fame with which Greek philosophers were associated. Furthermore, al-Ghazālī, in his *al-Mustasfā*, calls for cross-sectarian exchange of ideas. In his view, one of the sources of falling into error is *sabq al-wahm ila al-‘aks*, namely, when we mistake one thing for another due to wrong mental associations. He gives the example of a person who is bit by a serpent and thereby develops a distaste for variegated rope, which mentally evoke memories of the past painful experience with the serpent. Moving from this psychological note, which is close to Pavlov’s classical conditioning, al-Ghazālī moves on to

---

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 273.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 273.

<sup>92</sup> See also al-Rāzī’s opposition to the *naskh* case related to Q. 7:199.

illustrate how our receptions of others' views are wrongly influenced by our negative perceptions of them. He writes:

Some lay people would accept a clear theological issue conveyed to them. However, if they were told that this was the view of al-Ash'arī, Ibn Ḥanbal or a Mu'tazilī, they would detest it if they misperceived the one to whom the view is attributed. Not only is this the nature of the lay people but also of most rational people with knowledge—except for the deeply-rooted scholars whom God has shown right as right and gave them the strength to follow it. The faculties of most people conform to false imaginations in spite of knowing its falsity. Most of people's approval and disapproval is attributed to these perceptions. Mental perceptions have profound influence on the soul.<sup>93</sup>

A century later, al-Rāzī would “open the gates widely, allowing a more liberal exchange of ideas, a “synthesis” even, between *kalam* and *falsafa*.”<sup>94</sup> In addition to the exchange of ideas in the realm of philosophy, as illustrated by Tariq Jaffer, and the realm of ethics, as illustrated by Ayman Shihadeh, we can see that this feature manifests no less in the area of rhetorical analysis and Qur'anic composition. Mu'tazilite views that prioritize the general *nazm* of the surah are systematically integrated in al-Rāzī's Sunni exegesis to rationalize orthodox *ta'wīl* and combat exegetical *taqlīd*. Long after al-Ghazālī, al-Rāzī remains actively committed to naturalizing philosophy into Sunni *tafsīr* and articulating exegetical views in a reasoned manner.

### 3. The Call for Unconventional Interpretations

In addition to utilizing *nazm* in critiquing many traditional cases of occasions of revelation and legal abrogation, al-Rāzī encourages drawing meaning from considering the sequence of the discourse units within a given surah. Throughout his commentary, al-Rāzī proposes new interpretations that he knows are not supported by earlier traditional exegetes. To legitimize his new interpretations, al-Rāzī assigns an authoritative role to the unified *nazm* of the Qur'ān. In al-Rāzī's opinion, this authoritative role has to override other traditional sources of

---

<sup>93</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Al-Mustasfā*, ed., Ḥamzah Ḥāfīz (Cairo: Dār al-Hady al-Nabawī, 2013), 1:175.

<sup>94</sup> Ayman Shihadeh, *The Teleological Ethics of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī* (Brill: Leiden, Boston, 2006), 3.

knowledge in case of a conflict between what reports affirm and what the composition of the surah implies. For drawing newer meanings, al-Rāzī hermeneutically relies on the context, the governing theme of the surah and the notion of Qur’anic intertextuality. Let us consider the following verses:

He has revealed to you the Book in truth, confirming what came before it, as He revealed the Torah and the Gospel earlier, as guidance to mankind, and He sent down the [furqān] all-distinctive Criterion (Q. 3: 3-4).

In his interpretation of the word *furqān*, al-Rāzī lays down some criteria that support a new interpretation even if it is not traditionally transmitted or supported in previous exegetical works. With regard to the traditional interpretations of the *furqān*, al-Rāzī lists three views: the Psalms, the Qur’ān, and the scriptural characterization of the legal matters of *ḥalāl* and *ḥarām* (the forbidden and the permissible). Al-Rāzī disregards these view for the following reasons: (1) the Psalms do not deal with legal matters, (2) the Qur’ān was already mentioned in the preceding verse, and (3) the sentence “and He sent down the [furqān] all-distinctive Criterion” cannot grammatically serve as an adjective for the divine books except in rare poetical pieces. Considering the need for a more befitting meaning and the argumentative nature of the surah, al-Rāzī suggests a fourth view that he supports as his preferable interpretation (*al-mukhtār*). He argues that the *furqān* refers to the miracles, with which the various scriptures were divinely accompanied as a proof and supplement for the prophets. Then he assures his readers that new interpretations should be welcomed. He observes:

Imagine that no previous exegete mentioned this view and [imagine that one can] understand the Divine Speech in light of a new interpretation that reinforces a strong thought, concise form, sound arrangement and clear *naẓm* and that other interpretations do not contradict it. In such a case, what we mentioned should be given preference.<sup>95</sup>

---

<sup>95</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṣin al-Ghayb*, 7:140.

وهب أن أحداً من المفسرين ما ذكره إلا أن حمل كلام الله تعالى عليه يفيد قوة المعنى، وجزالة اللفظ، واستقامة الترتيب والنظم، والوجه التي ذكروها تنافي كل ذلك، فكان ما ذكرناه أولى

As he counters exegetical *taqlīd* emanating from the overwhelming obsession with *naskh*, al-Rāzī repeatedly rationalizes *tafsīr* by encouraging new interpretations that are supported by the context—even if these interpretations contradict mainstream orthodox views. Al-Rāzī justifies this call by bringing into focus the notion that Qur’anic unified composition should serve as a standard litmus test for rethinking exegetical orthodox interpretations.

In al-Rāzī’s view, the meaning of the verse can also be construed from the general atmosphere of the surah. In his interpretations of a given verse, al-Rāzī is prompted to side with the meaning that was in line with the purpose or controlling theme of the surah. For example, he uses the structural design of surah 26 (al-Shu‘arā’) as an aid to provide the most accurate interpretation of the last sentence of the surah. At first glance, this last verse can easily be understood as belonging to the last section of the surah; yet, al-Rāzī deals with this verse as a closure that relates to the general purpose of the surah. The last section of surah 26 reads as follows:

As for the poets, they are followed by those lost in error.  
Do you not see that they aimlessly rant in every valley?  
And that they say what they do not do?  
Except those who believe, do good, remember God often and gain victory after being wronged—and those who do wrong will come to know what end they will meet!

Al-Rāzī mentions that the exegetical majority view inclines towards interpreting the last verse as referring to the poets and the Qur’anic lamentation of their wrong ways. However, al-Rāzī considers the architectural design of the surah to be the only means by which the accurate meaning can be construed. He relates the verse to the broader theme of the surah, not the surrounding section. With the surah outline in mind, al-Rāzī observes:

As far as I am concerned, and God knows the best, when God mentioned in this surah what removes sadness from the heart of his prophet (God’s peace and blessings be with him) by means of [providing] rational proofs, narrating some of the stories of the past prophets, mentioning some evidence for his prophecy, confronting the polytheists

questions on naming Muhammad (God’s peace and blessings be with him) as a soothsayer and sometimes as a poet, and telling the difference between him and soothsayer on one hand and the difference between him and poets on the other hand—God closed the surah with a grave threat. This means: “Those who wronged themselves and turned away from pondering on these verses and contemplating on these proofs will surely know what kind of end they will meet.”<sup>96</sup>

By the same token, al-Rāzī uses the flow of the verse’s thought as a *murajjih* (preponderator) when determining the most accurate meaning of a given phrase. For instance, the Qur’ān reads: “The disbelievers say, ‘Why has no miracle been sent down to him from his Lord?’ But you are only a warner: for each community there is a guide” (Q. 13:17). Al-Rāzī reflects on the intended meaning of the word “guide” in the verse. He lists different interpretations that he attributed to what he calls *aḥl al-zāhir mina al-mufasssirīn* (exegetical exotericists). According to these interpretations, the warner and the guide are not the same. Some reports suggest that the warner is Muḥammad and the Guide God, whereas others state that the warner is Muḥammad and the guide ‘Alī ibn Abū Ṭālib. However, al-Rāzī does not accept any of these views. He prefers al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s interpretation, which is deduced from the flow of thought in the verse. According to them, the end of the verse corresponds to its beginning; that is, it was a response to the pagans’ requests for physical miracles. They observe that the closure, “[earlier] communities each had their guide,” is a reference to the observation that miracles are appropriately chosen in a way that matches with the skills of the targeted audience. Both argue that Moses’ miracles are adapted to fit the common practice of magic at the time of Moses, and that Jesus’ miracles are congruent with the common practice of medicine during his time. Similarly, the flourishing of poetry at the time of the prophet makes the notion of a linguistic miracle more befitting. Since the Arab contemporaries of the prophet denies the miracle that

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 24:151.

فالذي عندي فيه والله أعلم أنه تعالى لما ذكر في هذه السورة ما يزيل الحزن عن قلب رسوله ﷺ من الدلائل العقلية، ومن أخبار الأنبياء المتقدمين، ثم ذكر الدلائل على نبوته عليه السلام، ثم ذكر سؤال المشركين في تسميتهم محمدًا ﷺ تارة بالكاهن، وتارة بالشاعر، ثم إنه تعالى بين الفرق بينه وبين الكاهن أولاً ثم بين الفرق بينه وبين الشاعر ثانياً ختم السورة بهذا التهديد العظيم، يعني إن الذين ظلموا أنفسهم وأعرضوا عن تدبر هذه الآيات، والتأمل في هذه البيئات فإنهم سيعلمون بعد ذلك أي منقلب يتقلبون.

relates to them, they are all the more predisposed to deny other miracles. To emphasize the reason for supporting this interpretation, al-Rāzī concludes that “this is the sound meaning through which the discourse remains well-organized.”<sup>97</sup>

## Conclusion

Influenced by the Mu‘tazilite exegetes who staunchly support the Qur’an’s unified composition, al-Rāzī utilizes his development of the concept of *naẓm* to revisit the uncritical reception of transmitted reports with regard to *asbāb al-nuzūl* and *naskh*. These genres are sometimes overused in a way that disregards the context and architecture of the Qur’anic surah. By explicating the literary implications of a Qur’anic unified *naẓm*, such as the implausibility of textual fragmentation, al-Rāzī seeks to deter Qur’ān exegetes from relying on old methods of interpretation. Through his prioritization of the intentional surah structure, al-Rāzī severs attachments to some established exegetical authorities when their views collided with the meaning drawn from the context.

---

<sup>97</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṣin al-Ghayb*, 19:12.

و هذا هو الوجه الصحيح الذي يبقى الكلام معه منتظما.



## Chapter 6

### The Post-Rāzī Developments: Impact of al-Rāzī's Study of the Surah on Later Qur'anic Studies

In his *The Formation of Post-Classical Philosophy in Islam*, Frank Griffel argues that there is no need “to assume that Islam ever lost its philosophy to the overwhelming power of religious authorities.”<sup>1</sup> He then highlights the presence of “a rich tradition of philosophy in the seven or eight centuries after the sixth/twelfth that needs to be explored and analyzed.”<sup>2</sup> In considering Yaḥya al-Suhrawardī and al-Rāzī as the two most impactful philosophers of the sixth/twelfth century, Griffel adds that al-Rāzī is also the most influential philosopher and theologian in Islam throughout the two centuries after his death.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, al-Rāzī's exegetical methodology bears upon later exegetes. Two centuries after his death, certain topics, such as Qur'anic thematic relations (*munāsabāt*) and Qur'anic disputations (*jadāl*), become established areas of Qur'anic studies. This is reflected in the field of *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, which essentially serves as an introduction to the study of the Qur'anic text. The significance of studying the surah structure and Qur'anic argumentation is unequivocally highlighted by al-Zarkashī (d. 794/1392) in his *al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* (The Evidence for the Sciences of the Qur'ān) and by al-Ṣuyūfī (d. 911/1505) in his *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* (The Perfect Guide to the Sciences of the Qur'ān).<sup>4</sup> In what ways does al-Rāzī shape the course of the literary study of the surah? This is the question I attempt to answer in this chapter.

---

<sup>1</sup> Frank Griffel, *The Formation of Post-Classical Philosophy in Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 571.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 571.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 240. Here, Griffel refers to Yaḥya al-Suhrawardī.

<sup>4</sup> Al-Zarkashī's work included forty seven topics, such as, the occasion of revelation, abrogation, collection of the text, the distinction between Meccan and Madinan verses, meanings of ambiguous vocabulary, *muḥkam* and *mutashābih*, etc. However, al-Zarkashī's list includes two topics that are representative of the exegetical practice

Surveying different exegetical works after al-Rāzī in this chapter, I argue that this development is partly motivated by al-Rāzī's emphasis on thematic relations in his commentary. However, the adoption of al-Rāzī's analysis in the exegetical tradition (*tafsīr*) is probably motivated by a rising interest in studying the *badī'* of the Qur'ān in the rhetorical tradition (*balāghah*), despite some voices that denied the Qur'anic employment of *takhalluṣ*, a continuity device that refers to the smooth transition between parts of the Qaṣīdah.<sup>5</sup> Beyond the exegetical and rhetorical interest in the surah design, there is a unique case of al-Shātibī (d. 790/1388), a legal theorist who advocates a holistic reading of the surah as part of his hermeneutical understanding of the first source of Islamic sharī'ah: the Qur'ān. In demonstrating how these three factors spark a common desire to studying the surah structure, the chapter is divided into three main sections.

The first part briefly introduces seven commentaries whose authors consciously incorporated al-Rāzī's contributions on the surah structure in their exegetical practice. This list is not intended to be exhaustive but is rather a pathway to further studies on post-classical exegesis and al-Rāzī's role in its formation. Exegetes influenced by al-Rāzī include Burhān al-Dīn al-Nasafī (d. 687/1288), Shams al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī (d. 688/1289), Niẓām al-Dīn al-Nīsābūrī (d.

---

that was further enriched by reasoned analysis (*ra'y*) as seen in al-Rāzī's exegesis and the Mu'tazilite exegetical tradition. These two topics are recognizing the thematic relations (*ma'rifat al-munāsabāt bayna al-āyāt*) and Qur'anic disputation (*ma'rifat jadalih*). With this recognition, drawing meaning from the structure and argumentation of the surah becomes necessary, not merely legitimate. See al-Zarkashī, *Al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: al-Maktabah al-'Aṣriyyah, 2009), 1:41-51, 2:17-19 and 3:2861. Around a century after the emergence of al-Zarkashī's *Burhān*, al-Suyūṭī follows in the footsteps of al-Zarkashī and reaffirms these two topics in his *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* which covers eighty issues related to the study of the Qur'ān. See al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: al-Maktabah al-'Aṣriyyah, 2015), 724-736 and 778-782. For an English translation of the first thirty five *naw'* of the *Itqān*, see Al-Suyūṭī, *The Perfect Guide to the Sciences of the Qur'ān (al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān)*, trans. Hamid Algar, Michael Schub, and Ayman Abdel Haleem (Reading: Garnet Publishing, 2012). For a detailed biography of al-Suyūṭī, see E.M. Sertain, *Jalal al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī: Biography and Background* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

<sup>5</sup> See, for instance, Julie Scott Meisami, *Structure and Meaning in Medieval Arabic and Persian Lyric Poetry: Orient Pearls* (London: Routledge, 2002).

728/1328), the Ḥanbalite exegete Ibn ʿĀdil (d. ca. 880/1476), Abū Ḥayyān al-Gharnāṭī (d. 745/1344), al-Biqāʿī and al-Ṣuyūṭī.

The second section highlights the corresponding interest in finding meaning in, and reason for, the flow of the Qurʾanic verses in rhetorical works (*balāghah*). Arabic rhetors have a term for the thematic connection: *takhalluṣ*, which is a continuity device used to effect a smooth seamless transition between distinct discourse units. To recognize how al-Rāzī’s project on Qurʾanic *munāsabāt* was likely a sought-after endeavor in the post-classical period, this section addresses the emergence of the study of Qurʾanic *takhalluṣ* in two works of Arabic rhetoric (*balāghah*): *al-Mathal al-Sāʿir* by Ibn al-Athīr (d. 637/1239) and *Tahrīr al-Taḥbīr* by Ibn Abū al-Iṣḥāq (d. 654/1256).

Finally, the third part deals with the approach taken by renowned Andalusian legal theorist al-Shāṭibī in his study of surah 23 (al-Muʾminūn) as appears in his well-received *al-Muwāfaqāt fī Uṣūl al-Sharīʿah* (The Reconciliation of the Fundamentals of the Law). The case that “al-Rāzī instilled in al-Shāṭibī an interest in *Uṣūl al-Fiqh* and *Kalam*”<sup>6</sup> can also be supported by al-Shāṭibī’s approach to surah 23. For instance, al-Shāṭibī’s utilized the notion of theological trilogy (i.e., divine unity, prophecy and resurrection) in his outline of some parts of the surah. In addition, I chose to include al-Shāṭibī’s case here as a demonstration that the interest in thematic relations (*munāsabāt*) is echoed in legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), and not merely through Qurʾanic exegesis and Arabic rhetoric.

## 1. Al-Rāzī and the Later Exegetical Tradition

How did al-Rāzī play a role in the proliferation of studying the surah structure before it became an established discipline? Answering this question requires tracking the post-Rāzī

---

<sup>6</sup> Maribel Fierro, “al-Shāṭibī,” in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W.P. Heinrichs (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 9:364.

exegetical tradition that was informed by al-Rāzī's conception of the surah design. In tracking al-Rāzī's influence on later exegetes, I focus now on two types of influences: direct and indirect influences. Direct influence is here signaled by (1) indicators of direct access to al-Rāzī's commentary, (2) verbatim citations from and critical abridgement of al-Rāzī's commentary, and (3) explicit adoption of the notion of *taṣrīf* as advanced by al-Rāzī. On the other side, indirect influence is determined by meeting the following yardsticks: (1) there is an absence of clear clues that a particular exegete had direct access to al-Rāzī's commentary, (2) the approach to *munāsabāt* is primarily motivated by non-Rāzī sources, (3) al-Rāzī's authority is only appealed to as a validation for continuing the study of the surah structure and counters the scholarly voices against *munāsabāt*, and (4) the notion of *taṣrīf* is not consistently embraced. In other words, direct influence means that al-Rāzī's approach to the surah structure is consciously adopted in an exegetical commentary, whereas indirect influence means that al-Rāzī serves as a source of validation for another exegete without necessarily relying on al-Rāzī's contributions.

Given these criteria, I examine four examples of direct influences and three examples of indirect influences. The four Qur'anic exegetes whose approach to the surah structure are unequivocally informed by al-Rāzī are Burhān al-Dīn al-Nasafī in his *Kashf al-Ḥaqā'iq wa Sharḥ al-Daqā'iq* (Unveiling the Realities and Explicating the Subtleties), Shams al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī (d. 688/1289) in his *Anwār al-Ḥaqā'iq al-Rabbāniyyah fī Tafṣīr al-Laṭā'if al-Qur'āniyyah* (The Lights of the Divine Realities on Explicating the Qur'anic Subtleties), Nizām al-Dīn al-Nīsābūrī (d. 728/1328) in his *Gharā'ib al-Qur'ān wa Raghā'ib al-Furqān* (The Ambiguities of the Qur'ān and the Abundance of the Furqān), and the Ḥanbalite exegete Ibn 'Ādil in his *al-Lubāb fī 'Ulūm al-Kitāb* (The Kernel in the Sciences of the Scripture).<sup>7</sup> The three exegetes who are indirectly influenced by al-Rāzī's studies on the surah structure are Abū

<sup>7</sup> In modern Qur'anic exegesis, Rashīd Riḍa (d. 1345/1935) adopts many of al-Rāzī's *munāsabāt* in *Tafṣīr al-Manār*.

Ḥayyān al-Gharnāṭī (d. 745/1344) in his *al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ* (The Expanded Sea), Burhān al-Dīn al-Biqā'ī (d. 885/1450) in his *Naẓm al-Durar fī Tanāsub al-Āyāt wa al-Suwar* (The Pearled Arrangement Regarding the Correlations between Verses and Chapters), and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) in his *munāsabāt*-based works. Given these different levels of influence, these exegetes are chronologically discussed in the following pages.

### 1.1 Burhān al-Dīn al-Nasafī (d. 687/1288)

Al-Nasafī, also referred to as al-Burhān al-Nasafī, spent most of his life in Nasaf (in Transoxiana) where he was born and in Baghdad where he died. Some sources approximate his birth date to be in 600 or 606, which is near to the time when al-Rāzī passed away. Al-Nasafī's works demonstrate his training in rational theology and legal theory: two areas that al-Rāzī mastered. In many biographical dictionaries, al-Nasafī is known as “the Shaykh of philosophy in Baghdād.”<sup>8</sup> Such an epithet highlights the continuity of the philosophical training after al-Rāzī. Part of this continuity is reflected in al-Nasafī's Qur'anic commentary *Kashf al-Ḥaqā'iq wa Sharḥ al-Daqā'iq*.<sup>9</sup> Even a cursory reading of the manuscript reveals that al-Nasafī relies heavily on al-Rāzī's commentary. As a matter of fact, al-Nasafī's commentary is often referenced by al-Biqā'ī as “the abridgment of al-Rāzī's commentary.”<sup>10</sup> To great extents, al-Biqā'ī's description is a true assessment of *Kashf al-Ḥaqā'iq*, which incorporates not only al-Rāzī's notes on the topic

<sup>8</sup> See al-Dhahabī, *Duwal al-Islām fī al-Tārīkh* (Hyderabad: 1364 AH), 2:143; and Al-Ḥanafī, *Al-Jawāhir al-Muḍī'ah fī Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanafīyyah* (Al-Maṭba'ah al-'Uthmāniyyah, 1332 AH.), 3:351. Al-Nasafī's works include a commentary on Ibn Sīna's Remarks and Admonition (*Sharḥ al-Ishārāt wa al-Tanbīhāt*), a commentary on al-Ghazālī's *The Jerusalem Epistle* (*Sharḥ al-Risālah al-Qudsiyyah*), a treatise on circular arguments and infinite regression (*Risālah fī al-Dawr wa al-Tasalsul*), and a treatise on disputation (*Sharḥ al-Fuṣūl fī al-Jadal*). See al-Nasafī, *Sharḥ al-Fuṣūl fī 'Ilm al-Jadal*, ed. Sharīfah al-Ḥūshānī (Riyāḍ: Jāmi'at al-Malik Su'ūd, 2012), 4-7.

<sup>9</sup> The work is still in manuscript. Some parts of it are edited as part of dissertation projects; yet, it has not been published yet. Only some excerpts were published in Arabic journals. For instance, 'Iyādah al-Kabīsī published al-Nasafī's commentary on Surah 114 (al-Nās). See al-Nasafī, *Tafsīr Sūrat al-Nās*, ed. 'Iyādah al-Kabīsī (Dubai: Dār al-Buḥūth lī al-Dirāsāt al-Islāmiyyah wa Iḥyā' al-Turāth, 2001). Moreover, the al-Nasafī's commentary on the Q. 3:110-116 and 6:68-71 were separately published by al-Ḥayyānī, al-Jamīlī and al-Mahdāwī. See *Majallat al-Dirāsāt al-Tarbawīyyah wa al-'Ilmiyyah, Kullīyyat al-Tarbiyah* 8, no. 16 (October 2020), 29-51.

<sup>10</sup> See, for instance, al-Biqā'ī, *Naẓm al-Durar fī Tanāsub al-Āyāt wa al-Suwar* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2011), 1:616 and 6:240. "ثم رأيت البرهان السفي قال في تفسيره— الذي هو مختصر التفسير الكبير للإمام الرازي— في آخر السورة ..."

shifts in the surah but also most of al-Rāzī's *masā'il*, which becomes *mabāḥith* in al-Nasafī's work. According to al-Kabīsī, al-Nasafī's commentary is best described as a critical abridgement, a description that contains al-Nasafī's selective material along with his evaluative and explanatory insights and non-Rāzī sources.<sup>11</sup>

## 1.2 Niẓām al-Dīn al-Nīsābūrī (d. 728/1328)

Niẓām al-Dīn al-Nīsābūrī (d. 728/1328) studied under Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, one of the students of both Nasīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274) and Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (d. 710/1311).<sup>12</sup> Besides his interests in Sufism, philosophy and astronomy, Niẓām al-Dīn authors a full Qur'anic commentary entitled *Gharā'ib al-Qur'ān wa Raghā'ib al-Furqān*. In his introduction to this six-volume exegesis, Niẓām al-Dīn identifies al-Rāzī's *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* (The Grand Commentary) and al-Zamakhsharī's *al-Kashshāf* as primary sources for his work.<sup>13</sup> These sources are also quoted with attribution throughout Niẓām al-Dīn's commentary.<sup>14</sup> As far as al-Rāzī's commentary is concerned, Niẓām al-Dīn acknowledges his indebtedness to al-Rāzī's work.<sup>15</sup> It is

<sup>11</sup> Al-Nasafī, *Tafsīr Sūrat al-Nās*, 46-48.

<sup>12</sup> There is a debate regarding al-Nīsābūrī's religious affiliation. While Morison presents al-Nīsābūrī as a Shiite scholar, al-Jallād stresses his Sunni inclinations based on an examination of Shiite biographical works and analysis of al-Nīsābūrī's statements and theological opinions regarding Sunni-Shi'ī questions, such as those related to the Imamate and the superiority of 'Alī. See Mājid al-Jallād, *Niẓām al-Dīn al-Nīsābūrī wa Manhajuh fī al-Tafsīr* (Ammān: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, 2000); and Robert G. Morrison, *Islam and Science: The Intellectual Career of Niẓām al-Dīn al-Nisaburi* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 191.

<sup>13</sup> Niẓām al-Dīn is not merely a book of citations from these two sources. Niẓām al-Dīn appears as an arbitrator between al-Zamakhsharī and al-Rāzī. He sometimes reconciles between the views expressed by al-Rāzī and al-Zamakhsharī on a given verse by highlighting the differences are not essentially contradictory but reflect the different approach taken by each exegete. In his view, al-Zamakhsharī mainly represents the rhetors (*al-ṭarīq al-bayānī*), whereas al-Rāzī represents the legal theorists (*al-ṭarīq al-uṣūlī*). See Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī, *Al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssirūn* (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2012), 1:276-277. It is worth mentioning that many medieval commentaries highlight al-Zamakhsharī's rhetorical contributions on an equal foot with al-Rāzī. The divergence in the rhetorical views expressed by al-Rāzī and al-Zamakhsharī is usually considered by later exegetes, who either incline towards reconciliation, as in the case of Niẓām al-Dīn, or arbitration, as in the case of Abū Ḥayyān.

<sup>14</sup> At the end of his exegesis, al-Nīsābūrī identifies other sources for his commentary. For instance, he names Najm al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 645/1256), known as Dāya, as a source for his Sufi comments. Besides his reliance of al-Rāzī and al-Zamakhsharī on rhetoric and the occasions of revelation, al-Nīsābūrī consults al-Wāḥidī and al-Sakkākī. For al-Nīsābūrī's Sufi interpretation, see Kristin Sands, *Sufi Commentaries on the Qur'ān in Classical Islam* (London: Routledge, 2006), 77.

<sup>15</sup> See Al-Nīsābūrī, *Gharā'ib al-Qur'ān wa Raghā'ib al-Furqān* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1996), 1:6.

not an overstatement to say that Niẓām al-Dīn abridged *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* and incorporated this summary as an essential part of his exegetical work.

Focusing on Niẓām al-Dīn’s reception of al-Rāzī’s emphasis on the thematic flow within the surah, one can easily discern that al-Nīsābūrī’s exegesis contained verbatim uncritical citations of all of al-Rāzī’s observations on thematic connections. Al-Rāzī’s reliance on the Mu‘tazilite tradition for unearthing the connectedness of the surah units is also preserved in Niẓām al-Dīn’s exegesis. Following al-Rāzī, Niẓām al-Dīn attributes many observations to their Mu‘tazilite providers. It is clear that Niẓām al-Dīn had access to these Mu‘tazilite insights through al-Rāzī’s exegesis, and not through direct access to the Mu‘tazilite exegetical works. In this way, al-Rāzī serves as a connecting link between the Mu‘tazilite and the Sunni exegetical tradition.

Why does al-Nīsābūrī resort to al-Rāzī’s exegesis as a major resource for his *Gharā’ib al-Qur’ān*? It is possible that al-Nīsābūrī’s interest in philosophy and science directs him to al-Rāzī’s commentary. In his brief introduction to *Gharā’ib al-Qur’ān*, al-Nīsābūrī presents al-Rāzī as the best of later scholars (*afḍal al-muta’akhhirīn*) who offer a synthesis of rationality and tradition (*al-ma’qūl wa al-manqūl* and master the legal and theological issues (*al-furū’ wa al-uṣūl*). Concerning al-Rāzī’s *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, al-Nīsābūrī stresses that this title (the Grand Commentary) says it all, because it combines countless issues (*masā’il*). It is clear that al-Nīsābūrī is attracted to the astronomical *masā’il* in al-Rāzī’s commentaries. The following is one of the Qur’anic verses that is the focus of al-Rāzī’s astronomical and theological analysis:

“Your Lord is God, who created the heavens and earth in six Days, then established Himself on the throne; He makes the night cover the day in swift pursuit; He created the sun, moon, and stars to be subservient to His command; all creation and command belong to Him. Exalted be God, Lord of all the worlds!” (Q. 7:54).

Having provided a lengthy discussion on the astronomical issues related to the verse, al-Rāzī justifies his approach to the verse by assuming an objection. He writes, “Some fools and ignorant people may object: Breaking with the normal, you have incorporated much of the science of astronomy and stars in interpreting God’s Scripture. To these poor people, I say that: were you to fully ponder on God’s scripture, you would recognize how corrupted your view is.”<sup>16</sup> Al-Rāzī then provides five reasons why his astronomical discussions relate directly to Qur’anic interpretation.

First, the Qur’ān frequently uses the celestial and terrestrial realms as indicators of divine knowledge, power and wisdom. The profusion of such references in the Qur’ān makes astronomical contemplations permissible. Second, the Qur’ān calls for reflections about how the sky is made such as in the following “Do they not see the sky above them—how We have built and adorned it, with no rifts in it” (Q. 50:7). Thus, astronomy is nothing but contemplations about how the upper atmosphere is made. Third, the Qur’ān, which commends reflections about the human condition as in Q. 51:21, also asserts that the “creation of the heavens and earth is greater by far than the creation of mankind, though most people do not know it” (Q. 40:57). Therefore, that which demonstrates the divine wonders deserves greater contemplation. Fourth, those who ponder the creation of the heavens and Earth are praised as those “who remember God standing, sitting, and lying down, who reflect on the creation of the heavens and earth: ‘Our Lord! You have not created all this without purpose- You are far above that!- so protect us from the torment of the Fire’” (Q. 3:191). If these astronomical contemplations were forbidden, there would be no such praise. Fifth, the Qur’ān encompasses the unique niceties of the religious and rational sciences. Those who believe in the nobility of this text are of two categories: some who

---

<sup>16</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṣin al-Ghayb*, 14:99.

وربما جاء بعض الجهال والحمقى وقال إنك أكثر في تفسير كتاب الله من علم الهيئة والنجوم، وذلك على خلاف المعتاد! فيقال لهذا المسكين: إنك لو تأملت في كتاب الله حق التأمل لعرفت فساد ما ذكرته



have a general knowledge of these niceties and others who exhibit a deeper and more profound understanding of these niceties. With these classifications, al-Rāzī deems the second group as more cognizant of the Holiness of the Author, more genuine in faith and less doubtful about God.<sup>17</sup>

Al-Nīsābūrī recapitulates many of al-Rāzī’s points on astronomy and theology. However, al-Nīsābūrī is not merely quoting al-Rāzī without reservation. In his introduction, Niẓām al-Dīn posits that al-Rāzī’s exegesis also contains other undoubted stances of *zawā’id* and *ghuthūth* (superfluous and graceless content).<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, Niẓām al-Dīn promises to incorporate, explicate and critique al-Rāzī’s insights in *Gharā’ib al-Qur’ān wa Raghā’ib al-Furqān*. In the works of Robert G. Morrison, al-Nīsābūrī’s dependence on, and departure from, al-Rāzī’s positions are clear.<sup>19</sup> For instance, Morrison observes that, while al-Rāzī is so passionate about his Ash‘arite occasionalism that he denounces the philosophers’ naturalistic view of the causes as operating by virtue of its *ṭab‘* (nature), al-Nīsābūrī provides space for the role of the causes: “But denying the powers and the elements is also far from just treatment. And the truth is that they [the elements] are instruments and intermediaries for what is above them in the way of principles and causes.”<sup>20</sup>

However, constructing al-Rāzī’s positions on the philosophical issues is difficult. It is challenging to select a passage or even a book that would represent al-Rāzī’s decisive view on a

---

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 14:99.

<sup>18</sup> For instance, al-Nīsābūrī succinctly acts as an arbiter upon the Rāzī/Mu‘tazilite disputes, such as the questions on free will and determinism (*jabr*). See al-Nīsābūrī, *Gharā’ib al-Qur’ān wa Raghā’ib al-Furqān* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1996), 155-156. Al-Nīsābūrī also identifies instances where he sees al-Rāzī adopting interpretations that are theologically congruent with Mu‘tazilite doctrines. See Mājid al-Jallād, *Niẓām al-Dīn al-Nīsābūrī wa Manhajuh fī al-Taḥsīn* (Ammān: Dār al-Fikr al-‘Arabī, 2000).

<sup>19</sup> Robert G. Morrison wrote extensively on Nīsābūrī. See, for instance, *Islam and Science: The Intellectual Career of Nizam al-Din al-Nisaburi* (New York: Routledge, 2007); idem, “The Portrayal of Nature in a Medieval Qur’an Commentary,” *Studia Islamica*, 94 (2002): 115–38; idem, “Natural Theology and the Qur’ān,” *Journal of Quranic Studies* 15, no. 1 (2013): 1–22; and “Reasons for a Scientific Portrayal of Nature in Medieval Commentaries on the Qur’ān,” *Arabica* 52 (2005): 182–203

<sup>20</sup> Robert G. Morrison, “The Portrayal of Nature,” 120.

philosophical issue. It is actually common to find al-Rāzī expressing different or evolving views about the same theological problem (*mas'alah*).<sup>21</sup> To substantiate the view that al-Nīsābūrī departs from al-Rāzī's adoption of occasionalism and sides with the philosophers, Morrison analyses al-Nīsābūrī's commentary regarding the following: "Moses said, "Our Lord is He who gave everything its form, then gave it guidance" (Q. 20:50). To Morrison, al-Nīsābūrī's commentary "reiterates his belief in the elements' existence."<sup>22</sup> However, in considering al-Rāzī's commentary, it seems that al-Nīsābūrī's ideas are actually an abridged quote from al-Rāzī.<sup>23</sup>

Contextualizing al-Rāzī's critique of the philosophers' association of *ṭab'* with the immediate causes reveals that al-Rāzī is essentially criticizing the philosophers who utilize the notion of *ṭab'* as evidence for denying the Wise Planner (*al-mudabbir al-ḥakīm*) or divine power and will.<sup>24</sup> For instance, he provides commentary about the following "Who is it that guides you through the darkness on land and sea? Who sends the winds as heralds of good news before His mercy? Is it another god beside God? God is far above the partners they put beside Him" (Q. 27:63). In his commentary, al-Rāzī engages with the naturalists who deny that God sends the wind on the ground that the natural causes of wind are verifiable. To demonstrate that knowing the causes does not end the work of God, al-Rāzī provides the following answer:

Suppose this matter [of the scientific explanation of wind] is as they mentioned. The operation and receptivity of causes is created by God. But for the layers of the atmosphere and the sun and its effect in the vapors and smoke, nothing of these matters would happen. It is known that whoever places causes that lead to great benefits and profound interests is the actual creator of these benefits. In all cases, these matters testify

---

<sup>21</sup> For the challenges of identifying al-Rāzī's positions on theological issues, see Yasin Ceylan, *Theology and Tafsīr in the Major Works of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1996), xiv-xv.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. 120

<sup>23</sup> See Al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb*, 22:57.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 24:180 and 30:47.

that there is a Wise Planner (*mudabbir ḥakīm*) who is the Necessary Being (*wājib lī dhātih*), [needed] to stop the endless chain of needs.<sup>25</sup>

Similarly, al-Rāzī comments on the following text: “Among His signs, too, are that He shows you the lightning that terrifies and inspires hope; that He sends water down from the sky to restore the earth to life after death. There truly are signs in this for those who use their reason” (Q. 30:24). He concludes that “for a rational person, a cause, regardless of how it works, is a pointer to God’s power.”<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, where al-Rāzī’s commentary includes passages denouncing the Naturalists’ emphasis on *ṭab* ‘ as the actual cause, al-Rāzī accepts the immediate causes as having an actual effect (*athar*) in some parts of his *tafsīr*. He comments on the following text: “It was He who spread out the earth for you and traced routes in it. He sent down water from the sky. With that water We bring forth every kind of plant” (Q. 20:53). In his description, al-Rāzī inclines towards the philosophers who see an actual effect caused by the *ṭab* ‘ in water. Al-Rāzī here posits that those who support the notion of *al-quwwah al-mūda‘ah* (the deposited power or the inherent ability to cause things which is placed in the natural agents by God) do not fall into the category of blasphemy (*kufr*). Being aware that his position is at odds with earlier theologians, al-Rāzī writes the following:

The second issue: the verse apparently indicates that God causes plants to grow by means of bringing down water which has its *athar* (effect) on them. Supposing this to be true does not violate any of the fundamentals of Islam, simply because it is God Almighty who gave it these properties and natures. Yet, earlier theologians deny that and say there is no effect associated with the causes at all.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 24:180 and 31:29.

”هب أن الأمر كما ذكره ولكن الأسباب الفاعلية والقابلية لها مخلوقة لله سبحانه وتعالى، فإنه لولا الشمس وتأثيرها في تصعيد الأبخرة والأدخنة ولولا طبقات الهواء، وإلا لما حدثت هذه الأمور، ومعلوم أن من وضع أسباباً فأدته إلى منافع عجيبة وحكم بالغة فذلك الواضع هو الذي فعل تلك المنافع، فعلى جميع الأحوال لا بد من شهادة هذه الأمور على مدبر حكيم واجب لذاته، قطعاً لسلسلة الحاجات.“ ج 24 ص 180

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 25:98.

”... ثم إننا نقول هب أن الأمر كما تقولون فيهب تلك الريح القوية من الأمور الحادثة العجيبة لا بد من سبب وينتهي إلى واجب الوجود، فهو آية للعاقل على قدرة الله كيفما فرضتم ذلك“.

<sup>27</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb*, 24:86.

المسألة الثانية: ظاهر الآية يدل على أنه سبحانه إنه يخرج النبات من الأرض بواسطة إنزال الماء فيكون للماء فيه أثر وهذا بتقدير ثبوته لا يقدر في شيء من أصول الإسلام لأنه سبحانه وتعالى هو الذي أعطاه هذه الخواص والطباع لكن المتقدمين من المتكلمين ينكرونه ويقولون لا تأثير له فيه ألبتة.

”واعلم أن التحقيق أن من جعل الأفلاك والكواكب مستقلة باقتضاء هذه الأشياء فلا شك في كفره، وأما من قال الصانع تعالى جبلها على خواص وصفات تقتضي هذه الحوادث، فعمله لا يبلغ خطؤه إلى حد الكفر“.

### 1.3 Abū Ḥayyān al-Gharnāṭī (d. 745/1344)

In his introduction to *al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ fī al-Tafsīr*, Abū Ḥayyān of Granada specifies a hermeneutical methodology to follow in *tafsīr*: (1) consideration of the vocabulary and related philological or syntactical notes, (2) interpretation of the verses along with the related occasion of revelation (*sabab al-nuzūl*) or abrogation reports (*naskh*), (3) consideration of the thematic connection between verses/units, (4) conduct of variant readings of the Qur'anic text (*Qirā'āt*), and (5) implementation of legal rulings when applicable.<sup>28</sup> Abū Ḥayyān follows these steps in his commentary and adds sections concerning the flow of the surah units without specifying a governing theme for the surah or a reason for the major topical transitions.

As far as al-Rāzī's influence is concerned, there are many instances where al-Rāzī's notes on thematic relations are approvingly quoted in Abū Ḥayyān's commentary. Examples include the following: al-Rāzī's explanation of how the divine attributes the Living, the All-Sustaining (*al-Ḥayy al-Qayyūm*), in the initial verses of surah 3 (Āl-'Imrān), are congruent with the surah's polemical engagement with a Christian audience.<sup>29</sup> In the same vein, Abū Ḥayyān quotes al-Rāzī's elucidation of how the beginning of surah 4 (Al-Nisā') is mirrored in its closure. According to al-Rāzī, the epilogue and prologue of the surah place emphasis on divine power and knowledge which are indicative of God's majesty and glory—an emphasis that leads one to abide by the obligations contained in the surah.<sup>30</sup>

However, Abū Ḥayyān is critical of al-Rāzī's philosophically-oriented explanations of the flow of the verses.<sup>31</sup> Abū Ḥayyān's interest in the thematic relations is not solely motivated

---

<sup>28</sup> Abū Ḥayyān, *Al-Tafsīr al-Muḥīṭ* (Beirut: Dār al-fikr, 2010), 1:12.

<sup>29</sup> For instance, al-Rāzī argues that these two epithets disprove the divinity of Jesus. He explains that Jesus' daily habits (as in the case of eating and drinking) and life events (as in the case of the crucifixion narrative) run counter to the embodiment of the qualities of the Living, the All-Sustaining. See, al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb*, 7:135.

<sup>30</sup> See Ra'fat al-Miṣrī, *Al-Munāsabāt al-Qur'āniyyah 'inda al-Imām al-Rāzī fī Tafsīrih Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb* (Amman: Dār al-Nūr, 2016), 485-491.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 492-499.

by al-Rāzī. Abū Ḥayyān’s teacher, Abū Ja‘far ibn al-Zubayr (d. 708/1308) can possibly be the real influencer, because he devotes a work to the coherence of the surah entitled *al-Burhān fī Tanāsub Suwar al-Qur‘ān* (The Evidence for the Correlations between the Surahs of the Qur‘ān), which summarizes themes and the movement of meaning in all surahs of the Qur‘ān. For instance, ibn al-Zubayr reads surah 2 (al-Baqarah) as an extension to, and explanation for, the straight path (*al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*) with which the opening surah (al-Fātiḥah) is closed.<sup>32</sup> In addition, Abū Ḥayyān disregards some of al-Rāzī’s notes that illustrate the notion of the Qur‘anic intentional employment of variegated themes (*taṣrīf*) as explained in the previous chapter. The fact that Abū Ḥayyān is selective in his citations of al-Rāzī’s observations on thematic relations (*munāsabāt*) can be narrowed down to two reasons.

First, it is possible that Abū Ḥayyān did not have direct access to al-Rāzī’s commentary. There are two clues in al-Abū Ḥayyān’s discourse that supports this conclusion. In his introduction to *al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ*, Abū Ḥayyān states that most of his citations come from *Al-Taḥrīr wa al-Taḥbīr* by ibn al-Naqīb (d. 698/1299). Abū Ḥayyān describes ibn al-Naqīb’s work as “the biggest written work of *tafsīr* we ever saw” (*akbar kitābin ra‘aynāhū ṣunnifa fī ‘ilm al-tafsīr*). Describing how ibn al-Naqīb compiled this work, Abū Ḥayyān adds that ibn al-Naqīb used to ask his scribe to read out from an exegetical work before saying the following: “Copy down this part: from this to this.” This process is followed in the exegetical works designated by ibn al-Naqīb, and most of the citations are attributed [to] their sources.”<sup>33</sup> Moreover, al-Biqā‘ī (d. 885/1480), who is noted for his interest in detailed *munāsabāt*, states that Ibn al-Naqīb’s commentary explains the thematic connections in the surah. Sharing the same interest in *munāsabāt*, al-Biqā‘ī found Ibn al-Naqīb’s commentary in the library of al-Ḥākim’s mosque.

<sup>32</sup> See Ja‘far ibn al-Zubayr, *Al-Burhān fī Tanāsub Suwar al-Qur‘ān* (Al-Dammām: Dār ibn al-Jawzī, 1428 AH, 2007), 84-89.

<sup>33</sup> Abū Ḥayyān, *Al-Tafsīr al-Muḥīṭ*, 1:22.

Having reading parts of it, al-Biqā'ī affirms the following: “I found out that it is true; yet the *munāsabāt* focuses on the verses, not its sentences and the narratives as wholes, not their verses.”<sup>34</sup>

Similarly, Abū al-Faḍl al-Mursī (d. 655/1257) could be the link between Abū Ḥayyān and al-Rāzī. Following Abū al-Faḍl, Abū Ḥayyān reads the following as the fifth blessing that the Qur'ān lists for the Israelites:<sup>35</sup> “Moses said to his people, My people, you have wronged yourselves by worshipping the calf, so repent to your Maker and kill [the guilty among] you. That is the best you can do in the eyes of your Maker.’ He accepted your repentance: He is the Ever Relenting and the Most Merciful” (Q. 2:54). This is the same reading provided by al-Rāzī. The reason why this may not be a coincidence is that it carries the same numbering of blessings and the verse itself seemingly reports a punitive consequence for the Israelites, something al-Rāzī tries to counter to preserve his numerations of the divine blessings for the Israelites.

The second possibility for Abū Ḥayyān’s selectiveness in citing al-Rāzī’s *munāsabāt* is the exceptional value Abū Ḥayyān attached to linguistic analysis in the exegetical process. For example, Abū Ḥayyān evaluates Sībawayh’s *al-Kitāb* as “the reliable source in the art of interpretation” (*al-mu‘awwal ‘alayhī fī fann al-tafsīr*).<sup>36</sup> To Abū Ḥayyān, understanding the vocabulary and the sentence structure is sufficient for one to understand the verse. He is so enthusiastic about this approach that he rebukes those who “claim that Qur’anic commentaries are intrinsically in need of expository reports transmitted by Mujāhid, Ṭāwūs, ‘Ikrimah and their peers or think that understanding the Qur’anic verses is contingent on these [reports].”<sup>37</sup> In a witty illustration, Abū Ḥayyān compares the exegetes who practice *tafsīr* with an exclusive

---

<sup>34</sup> Al-Biqā'ī, *Nazm al-Durar*, 1:7.

<sup>35</sup> Abū Ḥayyān, *Al-Tafsīr al-Muḥīṭ*, 1:322.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:11.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:13.

reliance on transmitted reports to someone who learns Turkish and, upon receiving a Turkish message, “he backs away from examining and understanding the meaning contained therein until he asks a Turkish Sanjar or Sunqur!”<sup>38</sup> It does not come as a surprise that Abū Ḥayyān admires Ibn ‘Atīyyah and al-Zamakhsharī as “the two horsemen of Qur’anic commentary.”<sup>39</sup> Al-Zamakhsharī’s commentary is so well-received in *al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ* that Abū Ḥayyān affirms that al-Zamakhsharī’s introduction to the *Kashshāf* is “sufficient to prove that al-Zamakhsharī was well-qualified to interpret the Qur’ān and extract its subtleties (*latā’if*).”<sup>40</sup>

Due to this substantial dependence on linguistic analysis, Abū Ḥayyān sometimes dismisses some of al-Rāzī’s analysis as “a discourse that oscillates between philosophical and Sufī ideas, both of which are alien to Arabic speech and ways [of expression].”<sup>41</sup> This is a statement that reflects the different approaches taken by Abū Ḥayyān and al-Rāzī. While Abū Ḥayyān makes linguistic analysis foundational in interpreting the text, al-Rāzī insists that the Qur’anic patterns in delivering its theological and mystical content should be added to the tools through which the flow of the text can be explained. These distinct approaches made Abū Ḥayyān side with al-Zamakhsharī regarding some of the conflicting views between al-Zamakhsharī and al-Rāzī.<sup>42</sup>

#### 1.4 Shams al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī (d. 749/1348)

The Iṣfahān-born Shams al-Dīn spent most of his life teaching in Tabriz, Damascus and Egypt where he died due to the plague of 749/1348.<sup>43</sup> He is known for his exegetical work

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 1:13-14.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 1:21.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 1:20. "و هو شاهد له بأهليته للنظر في تفسير القرآن و استخراج لطائف القرآن."

<sup>41</sup> See Ibid., 4:413-414. "كلام دائر بين لفظ فلسفي و لفظ صوفي و كلاهما بعيد عن كلام العرب و مناجيها."

<sup>42</sup> See Ra’fat al-Miṣrī, *Al-Munāsabāt al-Qur’āniyyah*, 495.

<sup>43</sup> This exegete is not to be confused with Shams al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī (d. 688/1289). Both have the same surname (*laqab*) and locality or place-name (*nisbah*). Moreover, both were directly influenced by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. However, the earlier Shams al-Dīn (d. 688/1289) is noted for his commentary on *al-Maḥṣūl* and his dialectical work *Al-Qawā’id al-Kullīyyah fī Jumlah min al-Funūn al-‘Ilmiyyah*.

*Anwār al-Ḥaqqā'iq al-Rabbāniyyah fī Tafsīr al-Laṭā'if al-Qur'āniyyah* work and for a theological work entitled *Tasdīd al-Qawā'id fī Sharḥ Tajrīd al-'Aqā'id*. In his introduction to the *Anwār*, Shams al-Dīn lists dialectical reasoning as one of the prerequisites for the exegete.<sup>44</sup> This explains why his introduction to his commentary includes a discussion about fundamental theological issues, such as human actions, the basis of ethical judgments (*taḥsin wa taqbiḥ*), anthropomorphism, and the holiness of God.

With regard to his Qur'anic commentary, a cursory reading of al-Iṣfahānī's *tafsīr* illustrates that he relied primarily on two works: al-Zamakhsharī's *Kashshāf* and al-Rāzī's *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*.<sup>45</sup> Whereas al-Zamakhsharī's work is a source of rhetorical analysis, al-Rāzī's commentary is a source of *munāsabāt* and theological discussions. Unfortunately, al-Iṣfahānī's commentary has not yet been published.<sup>46</sup> Examining the manuscript of al-Iṣfahānī's commentary on surah 2 (al-Baqarah), one can easily discern that al-Iṣfahānī places great emphasis on explaining the movement of meaning in the surah. To this end, al-Iṣfahānī adopts al-Rāzī's views and provides verbatim quotes of al-Rāzī's explanation of the unit shifts in the surah. As far as the influence of al-Rāzī's *tafsīr* is concerned, al-Iṣfahānī's commentary made al-Rāzī's conception of the surah structure and Qur'anic dialectical reasoning more normalized in Damascus and Egypt. The biographies on al-Iṣfahānī reveal that he was well-respected in

---

<sup>44</sup> Shams al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī, *Al-Muqaddimāt*, ed. Muḥammad 'Abd al-Raḥīm (Dubai: Jā'izat Dudai al-Dawliyyah lī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm, 2019), 272.

<sup>45</sup> Shams al-Dīn's student, al-Bulghārī, tells us that his teacher instructed him to consult al-Rāzī's and al-Zamakhsharī's commentaries to verify the quoted parts. There are also references to al-Tha'labī's commentary *al-Kashf wa al-Bayān*. See *Ibid.*, 26-27. See also, Al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Mufasssīrīn* (Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, 2008), 2:260.

<sup>46</sup> However, al-Iṣfahānī's commentary was edited in a series of unpublished dissertations by a group of researchers in Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University in Riyadh. The first part of the commentary (which included the introduction, surahs 1 and 2) was edited by Ibrāhīm al-Huwaymil in 1989, and the last part (which included Surah 54 al-Qamar through Surah 114 al-Nās) was edited by 'Abd al-Mun'im al-Ḥawwās in 2002.



Damascus (where his contemporary Ibn Taymiyyah honored his views) and in Egypt (where the Mamluki Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qalawūn used to attend his classes).<sup>47</sup>

### 1.5 Ibn ‘Ādil al-Ḥanbalī (d. ca. 880/1405)

Al-Rāzī’s exegetical influence travels all the way to Damascus to appear in the large full-featured *al-Lubāb fī ‘Ulūm al-Kitāb* (The Kernel: On the Sciences of the Scripture) by the Ḥanbalite exegete Ibn ‘Ādil.<sup>48</sup> As seen in Niẓām al-Dīn’s exegesis, Ibn ‘Ādil’s exegesis relies heavily on al-Rāzī’s *tafsīr*. In surah 2 (al-Baqarah) alone, al-Rāzī is referred to as Ibn al-Khaṭīb around one hundred and sixty times, not to mention the countless anonymous quotes from *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*. Al-Rāzī’s notes on the thematic connections within the surah are usually quoted in a verbatim manner. Like Niẓām al-Dīn, Ibn ‘Ādil approvingly quotes the Mu‘tazilite exegetes on *munāsabāt* as appears in al-Rāzī’s commentary. In *al-Lubāb*, the Mu‘tazilite voice is not limited to thematic relations but extends to include other hermeneutical issues. For instance, Abū Muslim’s reinterpretation of the proof-texts utilized by the majority Sunni view to support the wide use of abrogation (*naskh*) are uncritically quoted from al-Rāzī’s commentary without any rejoinders.

Ibn ‘Ādil not only incorporates al-Rāzī’s contributions to *munāsabāt* in a complete and verbatim manner but also assimilates many of al-Rāzī’s kalam and theological discussions into the *Lubāb* and engages with the Mu‘tazilite theological stances. Under the direct influence of al-

---

<sup>47</sup> Shams al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī, *Al-Muqaddimāt*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Raḥīm (Dubai: Jā’izat Dudai al-Dawliyyah lī al-Qur’ān al-Karīm, 2019), 16.

<sup>48</sup> Concerning Ibn ‘Ādil’s Ḥanbalī juristic expertise, ibn ‘Ādil wrote a gloss (*Hāshiyah*) on *al-Muḥarrar fī al-Fiqh* by Majd al-Dīn ibn Taymiyyah (d. 652), the grandfather of Taqiyy al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328). As for Ibn ‘Ādil’s death date, the biographical works show much discrepancy in designating the exact year. Even though some suggest that Ibn ‘Ādil died after 880 A.H. based on a note at the end of Ibn ‘Ādil’s commentary on surah 20 (Ṭāhā). The note indicates that the commentary on surah 20 was concluded in Ramadan of the year 880 A.H. However, al-‘Awlaqī argues that there is another note that suggests that the whole commentary was completed in Ramadan of the year 879 A.H. Investigating Ibn ‘Ādil’s network of teachers and students, al-‘Awlaqī suggests that an earlier date for Ibn ‘Ādil’s death, possibly the year 775/1374, is more plausible. See al-‘Awlaqī, *Al-Dars al-Lughawī ‘inda ibn ‘Ādil al-Ḥanbalī fī Kitābih al-Lubāb fī ‘Ulūm al-Kitāb* (Damascus: Nūr Ḥūrān, 2020), 21-24.

Rāzī, an unusual case can be witnessed: a Ḥanbalite siding with his contemporaneous Ashʿarites concerning many major theological issues. Most notable is the allegorical interpretation of the divine epithets that communicate seemingly anthropomorphic qualities as in the cases of hand, wrath, and *istiwāʿ*.<sup>49</sup> In discussion about how to approach the divine epithets of wrath (*ghaḍab*), wonder (*taʿajjub*), and deception (*makr*), Ibn ʿĀdil quotes a Razian canon in full:

The basic rule with regard to these words is to say: each of these states (*ahwāl*) has some accompanying matters that arise in the beginning and effects that emanate from them at the end. Take wrath (*ghaḍab*) as an example. It is a state that materializes in the heart upon the boiling of the heart blood and hot temper. However, its eventual effect lies in bringing harm to those to whom anger applies (*al-maghḍūb ʿalayhim*). Therefore, when you hear anger ascribed to God, take it as a reference to the end-results, not the beginnings of the attributes. And apply this to the rest.<sup>50</sup>

Additionally, Ibn ʿĀdil applies a similar approach to the epithets of wonder (*taʿajjub*) and deception (*makr*). Why would a Ḥanbalite normalize al-Rāzī's exegesis? This question becomes more pressing in recalling the intense theological debates between Ibn Taymiyyah and al-Rāzī. For instance, Ibn Taymiyyah writes the voluminous *Darʿ Taʿarūḍ al-ʿAql wa al-Naql* (Debunking the Contradiction Between Reason and Revelation) in response to al-Rāzī's attack against the Karrāmiyyah in his *Taʿsīs al-Taqdīs* (Establishing Divine Holiness).<sup>51</sup> The normalization of al-Rāzī's approach to *tafsīr* in a Ḥanbalite exegetical commentary is significant, especially when one recognizes that al-Rāzī's commentary not only represents an Ashʿarite authority but also validates theological interactions with the philosophers and the Muʿtazilites. In the case of Ibn ʿĀdil, this normalization of al-Rāzī's theological standpoints sheds new light on

<sup>49</sup>This is why al-Maghrāwī counted Ibn ʿĀdil among the Ashʿarite exegetes. See ʿAbd al-Rahmān al-Maghrāwī, *Al-Mufasssirūn bayna al-Taʿwīl wa al-Ithbāt fī Āyāt al-Ṣifāt* (Beirut: Muʿassasat al-Risālah, 2000), 3:1113-1151.

<sup>50</sup> Compare al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, 1:130 with Ibn ʿĀdil, *Al-Lubāb fī ʿUlūm al-Kitāb*, 1:155. Same cannon was reiterated in al-Rāzī's commentary and closely followed in Ibn ʿĀdil's commentary. See al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, 1:211 with Ibn ʿĀdil, *Al-Lubāb fī ʿUlūm al-Kitāb*, 1:225.

"إن القانون الصحيح في هذه الألفاظ أن نقول : لكل واحد من هذه الأحوال أمور توجد معها في البداية ، وآثار تصدر عنها في النهاية ، ومثال ذلك الغضب : فهو حالة تحصل في القلب عند غلبان دم القلب وسخونة المزاج ، والآخر الحاصل منها في النهاية : إيصال الضرر إلى المعضوب عليه ، فإذا سمعت الغضب في حق الله -تعالى- فأحمله على نهایات الأعراض ، لا على بدايات الأعراض ، وقس الباقي عليه."

<sup>51</sup> For a devoted study on Ibn Taymiyyah's *Darʿ*, see Carl Sharif El-Tobgui, *Ibn Taymiyya on Reason and Revelation: A Study of Darʿ taʿarūḍ al-ʿaql wa-l-naql* (Leiden: Brill, 2020).

the theological reception of Ibn Taymiyyah in later Ḥanbalite circles.<sup>52</sup> Ibn ‘Ādil’s adoption of al-Rāzī’s theological approach to divine attributes cannot be separated from the *fitnah* (civil strife), that breaks out in 835/1432 between the Ḥanbalites and the Ash‘arites in Damascus.

This civil strife erupts as a result of Abu al-‘Alā’ al-Bukhārī’s (d. 841/1438) *Muljimat al-Mujassimah* (Bridling the Anthropomorphists) in which Abū al-‘Alā’ declares it blasphemous to call Ibn Taymiyyah “*Shaykh al-Islām*.”<sup>53</sup> Abū al-‘Alā’ spent most of his life in India, Mecca and Egypt and was greatly honored in these places. He was well trained in theology as he studied under Sa‘d al-Dīn al-Taftazānī (d. 793/1390). Upon finishing Ḥajj, Abū al-‘Alā’ resided in Damascus where he became familiarized with Ibn Taymiyyah’s theological opinions. According to Abū al-‘Alā’, the theological problems into which Ibn Taymiyyah fell were mainly anthropomorphism and the denial of the eternity of the punishment in hell.<sup>54</sup> These theological problems as interpreted by Abū al-‘Alā’ were sufficient to issue a *fatwa* against calling Ibn Taymiyyah *Shaykh al-Islām*. With regard to the Qur’anic language of anthropomorphism which describes God as having hands, eyes, and a face and to be sitting on His throne, Ibn Taymiyyah insists that these qualities must be affirmed as people understand them, alongside another affirmation that God is incomparable to humans. Meanwhile Ibn Taymiyyah does not endorse

---

<sup>52</sup> Similarly, Ibn Taymiyyah’s legal views were also critically received in later Ḥanbalite jurisprudence. See Christopher Melchert, “The Relation of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya to the Ḥanbalī School of Law,” in *Islamic Theology, Philosophy and Law: Debating Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya*, ed. Birgit Krawietz and George Tamer with Alina Kokoschka (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 146-161. See also Abdul Hakim Al-Matroudi, *The Ḥanbalī School of Law and Ibn Taymiyyah* (London: Routledge, 2006). H. Laoust presents Ibn Taymiyyah as the representative of the Ḥanbalite community; however, Caterina Bori reexamines this representation. See H. Laoust, “Le Hanbalisme sous les Mamlouks Bahrides (658/784–1260/1382),” *Revue des Études Islamiques* 28 (1960): 1–71; and idem, *Essai sur les doctrines sociales et politiques de Taḳī-d-Dīn Aḥmad b. Taimīya, canoniste ḥanbalite né à Harrān en 661/1262, mort à Damas en 728/1328* (Cairo: Imprimerie de l’institut français d’archéologie orientale, 1939); and Caterina Bori, “Ibn Taymiyya wa-Jamā‘atuhu: Authority, Conflict and Consensus in Ibn Taymiyya’s Circle,” in *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*, ed. Yossef Rapoport and Shahab Ahmed (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 23-52.

<sup>53</sup> See ‘Alā’ al-Dīn al-Bukhārī, *Muljimat al-Mujassimah*, ed. Sa‘īd Fūdah (Beirut: Dār al-Dhakhā’ir, 2013).

<sup>54</sup> Abū al-‘Alā’ also adds two other juristic views for which he attacks Ibn Taymiyyah: (1) the denial of the intentional journey to visit the grave of the Prophet and saints, and (2) counting the three verbal pronouncements of divorce in one setting as only one instance of divorce. See Abū al-‘Alā’ al-Bukhārī, *Muljimat al-Mujassimah*, ed. Sa‘īd Fūdah (Beirut: Dār al-Dhakhā’ir, 2013), 39.

that God is a physical being (*jism*). This is where Abū al-‘Alā’ found Ibn Taymiyyah’s views inaccurate and inconsistent.

Abū al-‘Alā’ posits that the supporters of Ibn Taymiyyah defend their position by resorting to the following principle: “*lāzim al-madhhab laysa bī madhhab*” (What necessarily follows from a position is not binding for its proponents). Even though this principle has its own applications in different theological and juristic discourses, Abū al-‘Alā’ argues that this principle does not apply to the clearly rational questions. To Abū al-‘Alā’, it is nonsensical to state the following: I acknowledge that this number is 4 without necessarily acknowledging that it is an even number.<sup>55</sup>

Abū al-‘Alā’ was fully aware that the *salaf* (the first three generations of the Muslim community) believed in these Qur’anic references; such as the hand and the eyes, *bilā kayf* (without how). However, he seems to argue that Ibn Taymiyyah believes in *bilā kayf na‘lamuh* (without a knowable how). In other words, the *salaf* believe that there is not a how, whereas Ibn Taymiyyah argues that there is a how, but humans do not know it. With this subtle difference, Abū al-‘Alā’ affirms that the *salaf* adopted a doctrine of *tafwīd* (i.e., relegating the meaning of these references to God without believing in the how). Furthermore, Abū al-‘Alā’ adds that later theologians and rhetors, such as ‘Abd al-Qāhir and al-Zamakhsharī, opt to endorse the allegorical interpretations of these references in accordance with God’s knowledge, power, will, and so on.<sup>56</sup> For instance, “hand” is a reference to power and benevolence, whereas “anger” is a reference to punishment.

---

<sup>55</sup> Abū al-‘Alā’ al-Bukhārī, *Muljimat al-Mujassimah*, 61. The Ḥanbalite Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1116) highlighted paradox as well. See Ibn al-Jawzī, *Kashf shubhat al-Tashbīh*, ed. al-Kawtharī (Cairo: Al-Maktabah al-Azhariyyah li al-Turāth, n.d.). For Ibn al-Jawzī’s intra-Ḥanbalite polemic and theological reasoning in the ḥanbalite school, see M. Swartz, *A Medieval Critique of Anthropomorphism: Ibn al-Jawzī’s Kitāb Akhbār aṣ-Ṣifāt: A Critical Edition of the Arabic Text with Translation* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

<sup>56</sup> Abū al-‘Alā’ al-Bukhārī, *Muljimat al-Mujassimah*, 67-73.

Regardless of how Ibn Taymiyyah’s views are critically reviewed in Ḥanbalite circles, he is typically deemed a great Ḥanbalite scholar. This is why Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn (d. 842/1438) countered Abū al-‘Alā’’s provoking call with a treatise entitled *Al-Radd al-Wāfir ‘alā man za‘ama anna Ibn Taymiyyah Shaykh al-Islām Kāfir* (The Sufficient Response to Whomever Claims that Ibn Taymiyyah, the Shaykh of Islam, Is an Infidel). The book is a biographical dictionary of eighty seven scholars who call Ibn Taymiyyah “Shaykh al-Islām.”<sup>57</sup> With these two adverse representations of Ibn Taymiyyah, a civil strife erupts and finally ends, when the sultan intervenes by forbidding the reproachment of different schools of thought—except for issues that receive *ijmā‘* (unanimous agreement).<sup>58</sup>

Given this context, Ibn ‘Ādil’s acknowledgment of al-Rāzī as a fundamental authority in theology and exegesis is a declaration of siding with the Ash‘arites who expressed theological concerns on the Ḥanbalite trap of anthropomorphism (*tajsīm*). In his support of the allegorical interpretation, Ibn ‘Ādil usually presents the issue of *tajsīm*, as in his detailed discussion on “Rather, both His hands are outstretched” (Q. 5:64). Here, Ibn ‘Ādil’s is a kalam discussion that is completely borrowed from al-Rāzī’s exegesis without attribution.<sup>59</sup> In the Ash‘arite and Maturīdite circles, there is a common self-compliment that their theological stances are embraced by the vast majority of the legal jurists, including the Mālikīs, Shāfi‘īs, Ḥanafīs and the noble Ḥanbalīs (*fuḍalā’ al-Ḥanābilah*) as asserted by Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 771/1370).<sup>60</sup> Thus, Ibn ‘Ādil’s exegetical commentary, *al-Lubāb*, seems to practically support al-Subkī’s view.

<sup>57</sup> See Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Dimashqī, *Al-Radd al-Wāfir* (Beirut: Al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1991).

<sup>58</sup> See Ibn Ḥajar, *Inbā’ al-Ghumr bi Anbā’ al-Umr*, ed. Ḥusayn Ḥabashī (Cairo: Al-Majlis al-A‘lā li al-Shu‘ūn al-Islāmiyyah, 1972), 3:476-477. The *fitnah* was similarly covered in Ḥanbalite biographical dictionaries. See, for instance, Ibn al-‘Imād, *Shadharāt al-Dhahab fi Akhbār man Dhahab*, ed. ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Arna’ūt and Maḥmūd al-Arna’ūt (Damascus: Dār ibn Kathīr, 1986), 9:307-308.

<sup>59</sup> Compare Ibn ‘Ādil, *Al-Lubāb fi ‘Ulūm al-Kitāb*, 7:427-429 with al-Rāzī, *Al-Taḥsīn al-Kabīr*, 36-37.

<sup>60</sup> See Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 771-1370), *Mu‘īd al-Ni‘am wa Mubīd al-Niqam* (Beirut: Al-Maktabah al-‘Aṣriyyah, 2007), 63.

Given the Rāzī content in the *Lubāb*, one can easily discern that Ibn ‘Ādil, like Niẓām al-Dīn, summarized al-Rāzī’s *tafsīr* and incorporated it into the *Lubāb*. However, Ibn ‘Ādil’s summary is more extensive than Niẓām al-Dīn’s. This larger summary partly accounts for the large size of the *Lubāb*. Another important reason for Ibn ‘Ādil’s encyclopedic *tafsīr* is the space given to other frequently-quoted exegetes such as Ibn al-Samīn al-Ḥalabī (d. 756/1355), al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273), and al-Baghawī (d.510/1122). Other exegetes are less quoted; such as, al-Zamakhsharī, Ibn Ḥayyān, Ibn ‘Atīyyah, and Abū Bakr al-Rāzī (Aḥkām al-Qur’ān). The inclusion of these variegated exegetes turns Ibn ‘Ādil’s *Lubāb* into a compendium of theological, rhetorical, philological, syntactical, and legal exegesis. Such encyclopedic works were a typical tendency during the Mamluk period.

### 1.6 Burhān al-Dīn al-Biqā‘ī (d. 885/1450)

With the emergence of al-Biqā‘ī’s *Naẓm al-Durar fī Tanāsub al-Āyāt wa al-Suwar*, the study of how verses and sentences within verses are tied together becomes an independent ‘ilm (science) or area of study that attracts the first devoted work that is primarily designed to explore the thematic relations in and between the surah verses.<sup>61</sup> In his introduction to *Naẓm al-Durar*, al-Biqā‘ī is fully aware that he is not providing his readers with a regular work on *tafsīr* but rather a novel independent branch of knowledge (‘ilm) that examines not merely how surah units or section are interrelated but also how each sentence leads smoothly and seamlessly to the adjacent sentence or verse. For instance, al-Biqā‘ī introduces the study of thematic connections in the Qur’ān in the same way any ‘ilm is introduced in the classical period. Basic elements for delineating the boundaries of a ‘ilm would typically include its definition, subject-matter,

---

<sup>61</sup> As will be explained later, al-Biqā‘ī was not the first to deal with the *munāsabāt* as an independent ‘ilm but the first to devote an entire commentary to explore this ‘ilm more specifically. He was preceded by al-Zarkashī, who introduced the *munāsabāt* as a neglected area of Qur’anic studies that received more attention from al-Rāzī and less attention from others.

significance and method. For what he calls *‘ilm al-Munāsabāt* (The Science of Thematic Connections), al-Biqā‘ī provides the following definition: “It is a science through which the reasons for arrangement are recognized.”<sup>62</sup> Concerning the subject-matter of this science, al-Biqā‘ī specifies “the parts of what needs to be examined as far as arrangement and thematic connections are concerned.”<sup>63</sup> Highlighting the parts here seems to be indicative of al-Biqā‘ī’s emphasis on the micro-*munāsabāt* (rather than the identification of major sections in a text). For this reason, al-Biqā‘ī’s commentary is rightfully described as the book of *lammā* (since God said X, therefore He said Y), which is the most frequently repeated word in al-Biqā‘ī’s commentary.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, al-Biqā‘ī moves on to stress the significance of this science by describing it as the “secret of rhetoric” (*sirr al-balāghah*) because this science examines how meaning (*al-ma‘ānī*) corresponds with the situational context (*ma iqtadahū al-ḥāl*). He goes further to state that *munāsabāt* is to Qur’anic commentary what rhetoric is to syntax.

Concerning the methodology he suggests for his micro-analysis of thematic relations in each surah, al-Biqā‘ī relies on two major strategies: (1) determining the major theme of the surah and thereby explaining how the surah content conforms to it, and (2) providing Biblical citations to explain and support the connections between the surah parts.<sup>65</sup> For the first strategy, al-Biqā‘ī gives the credit to his teacher Abū al-Faḍl al-Bijā‘ī (d. 864/1460) who taught him that the key to

---

<sup>62</sup> Al-Biqā‘ī, *Naẓm al-Darar fī Tanāsib al-Āyāt wa al-Suwar*, 1:5.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:5.

<sup>64</sup> Al-Biqā‘ī described his commentary as the Book of *Lammā*. At the end of *Naẓm al-Darar*, al-Biqā‘ī praised his work stating, with a poetical pun, هذا كتاب لما في المعاني لما (This is the Book of *lammā* that gathered all meanings together). See Al-Biqā‘ī, *Naẓm al-Darar fī Tanāsib al-Āyāt wa al-Suwar*, 8:621.

<sup>65</sup> For al-Biqā‘ī’s use of Biblical passages to elucidate the Qur’anic context and not merely to engage in polemical discussions, see Walid Saleh, “‘Sublime in Its Style, Exquisite in its Tenderness’: The Hebrew Bible Quotations in al-Biqā‘ī’s Qur’ān Commentary,” in *Adaptations and Innovations*, ed. Y. Tzvi Langermann and Josef Stern (Paris: Peeters, 2007), 331–47. See also, Walid Saleh and Kevin Casey, “An Islamic Diatessaron: Al-Biqā‘ī’s Harmony of the Four Gospels,” in *Translating the Bible into Arabic. Historical, Text-critical, and Literary Aspects.*, eds. S. Binay and S. Leder (Beirut: Orient-Institut Beirut, 2012), 85-115. For the possible reasons why al-Biqā‘ī incorporated Biblical passages in his commentary, see Samuel Jonathan Ross, *The Biblical Turn in Modern Qur’ān Commentary*, (PhD Diss., Yale University, 2018), 138-166.

understanding the movement of meaning in a given surah lies in deciphering its governing theme, the constituent parts that conform to this theme and the digressions related to these parts.<sup>66</sup> Al-Biqā'ī's commitment to these two strategies is so strictly followed that, surprisingly, there is limited use of transmitted reports to explain individual verses (as is usually seen in other traditional commentaries). This is the reason why al-Biqā'ī presents his commentary as “unprecedented” (*fann lam yusbaq ilayhī*) and reaches it through “contemplation” (*tadabbur*) in response to “This is a blessed Scripture which We sent down to you [Muhammad], for people to ponder on its messages, and for those with understanding to take heed” (Q. 38:29).<sup>67</sup> Given the two strategies that explain the formation of *Nazm al-Durar*, al-Biqā'ī's own description of his work does not seem to be an overstatement. This unprecedented step in *tafsīr* attracts many criticisms and enemies to al-Biqā'ī. He counters this criticism three times in three different ways.

First, in the introduction to his commentary, al-Biqā'ī provides a list of many previous exegetes who highlight the significance of the study of the thematic relations in the surah. In his theoretical defense of the micro-analysis of the surah structure, al-Biqā'ī, in his introduction, quotes al-Zarkashī's endorsement of this field of Qur'anic studies and appraisal of al-Rāzī for his theoretical and practical affirmation that “most of the subtleties of the Qur'ān are lodged in its arrangement and thematic connections.”<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, in his commentary of surah 2 (al-Baqarah), al-Biqā'ī supports his own practical project by quoting al-Rāzī's noted comment at the end of his presentation surah 2 (al-Baqarah). Through Shams al-Din al-Iṣfahānī (d. 749/), al-Biqā'ī quotes al-Rāzī's observation:

Whoever ponders on the subtleties of composition in this surah and its fine arrangement would know that as the Qur'ān is miraculous in its eloquent wording and noble meaning,

<sup>66</sup> Al-Biqā'ī, *Nazm al-Darar fī Tanāsub al-Āyāt wa al-Suwar*, 1:11.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:3.

<sup>68</sup> See al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, 10:113.



it is also so by virtue of the arrangement and composition of its verses. Most likely, this is the meaning intended by those who attach its matchlessness to its style. Yet, the majority of exegetes turned away from these subtleties paying no attention to these niceties.<sup>69</sup>

Here one can notice that al-Rāzī is appealed to as an authority, yet al-Biqā'ī presents al-Rāzī through another link, as in the case of al-Zarkashī and Shams al-Din al-Iṣfahānī. There are other indications that al-Biqā'ī consults al-Rāzī's commentary. For instance, in his discussions regarding the question of whether prophets were sent to the angels, al-Biqā'ī affirms that he consults al-Rāzī (who is usually identified as the Imām) and determines that the latter does not report any unanimous agreement (*ijmā'*) on this issue.<sup>70</sup>

However, the most frequently consulted source for al-Biqā'ī is *Miftāḥ al-Bāb al-Mughlaq lī Fahm al-Qur'ān al-Munzal* by Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ḥarrālī (d. 638/1241).<sup>71</sup> The centrality of al-Ḥarrālī in al-Biqā'ī's exegesis is also noted by al-Munāwī (d. 1031/1621) in his Sufī biographical work *al-Kawākib al-Durriyyah*.<sup>72</sup> Second in importance comes *al-Burhān fī Tartīb Suwar al-Qur'ān* by Andalusian Abū Ja'far ibn al-Zubayr (d. 708/1308), who is usually quoted in the beginning of the presentation of each surah, maybe as a fulfillment of al-Biqā'ī's advice.

Second, al-Biqā'ī wrote another major work on *munāsabāt* entitled *Maṣā'id al-Nazar lī al-Ishrāf 'alā Maqāṣid al-Ṣuwar* as a supplement to his commentary. In this work, one can easily discern two main features. The first is the many favorable laudatory notes (*taqārīz*) regarding the significance of his commentary. These notes come from leading jurists of the four main Sunni

<sup>69</sup> Al-Biqā'ī, *Naẓm al-Darar*, 1:6.

<sup>70</sup> See Akram al-Mawṣilī, *Al-Imām Burhān al-Dīn al-Biqā'ī (808-885 AH) wa Manhajuh fī al-Tafsīr* (Jordan: Dār al-Fath, 2014), 130.

<sup>71</sup> For an Arabic edition of the *Miftāḥ*, see *Turāth Abī al-Ḥasan al-Ḥarrālī al-Murrākushī fī al-tafsīr*, ed. al-Khayyāfī ed. (Al-Dār al-Bayḍā': Maṭba'at al-Najāḥ al-Jadīdah, 1997). For a complete study on the life of al-Ḥarrālī, see Paul Nwyia, "Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī al-Ḥarrālī," in *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph* (Beirut: Dar el-Machreq Sarl, 1990). For a more devoted study on al-Ḥarrālī, especially his theological and mystical circles and influence on al-Biqā'ī's commentary, see Faris Casewit, *Harmonizing Discursive Worlds: The Life and Times of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ḥarrālī* (d. 638/1241) (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2019).

<sup>72</sup> In the words of al-Munāwī, al-Biqā'ī relied so heavily on al-Ḥarrālī that the latter was the former's main resource (*ra's mālih*) and wherever he stops, al-Biqā'ī does. See Al-Munāwī, *Al-Kawākib al-Durriyyah fī Tarājim al-Sādah al-Ṣūfiyyah* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 2008), 2:190

و هو رأس مال البقاعي و من حيث وقف وقف حال البقاعي في مناسباته

legal schools (*madhāhib*): Shāfi‘ī, Mālikī, Ḥanafī and Ḥanbalī. Not only do these scholars endorse al-Biqā‘ī’s exegetical methodology, but many also highlight the legitimacy of al-Biqā‘ī’s choice to include extended quotes from the Bible. The second feature of this work is its emphasis on the virtues of each surah through a list of transmitted reports. These two features seem to be al-Biqā‘ī’s way of silencing the opposing camps that were critical of the detailed *munāsabāt* and the lack of the traditional transmitted reports in *tafsīr*.

Third, it seems that the laudatory notes of the jurists who side with al-Biqā‘ī are not sufficient to end the controversy around the Biblical quotes in *Nazm al-Durar*. In defense of his Biblical citations, al-Biqā‘ī writes a separate book entitled *al-Aqwāl al-Qawīmah fī Ḥukm al-Naql min al-Kutub al-Qadīmah*.<sup>73</sup>

Al-Biqā‘ī’s focus on the micro-analysis of thematic relations in a given surah does not necessarily mean that he neglected the broader context. Founding his strategy for deciphering *munāsabāt* on the general purpose of the surah (or what he even called “its ‘*amūd*”) al-Biqā‘ī had to handle the broader context of the surahs on many occasions.<sup>74</sup> To prove that his identification of the axis of the surah is correct, al-Biqā‘ī becomes interested in connecting different verses and parts of the surah together. An example of this can be noted in his commentary on Q. 2:163: “Your God is the one God: there is no god except Him, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy.” Al-Biqā‘ī argues that this verse is connected with the closing part of

<sup>73</sup> See Walid Saleh, “A Fifteenth-Century Muslim Hebraist: Al-Biqā‘ī and His Defense of Using the Bible to Interpret the Qur’ān,” *Speculum* 83 (2008): 629–54. For a critical edition of al-Biqā‘ī’s *Nuqūl*, see Walid Saleh, *In Defense of the Bible: A Critical Edition and an Introduction to al-Biqā‘ī’s Bible Treatise* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

<sup>74</sup> Al-Biqā‘ī’s use of the ‘*amūd* of the surah, here, indicates that al-Farāhī might have been inspired by al-Biqā‘ī’s introduction to his commentary. What substantiates this presumption is that the first printed edition of al-Biqā‘ī’s *Nazm al-Durar* appeared in India through Dā‘irat al-Ma‘ārif al-Uthmāniyyah. The first volume was published in 1969 and the last in 1984. The Indian interest in this commentary may be put down to the rising interest in *munāsabāt* study and Biblical use. See Akram al-Mawṣilī, *Al-Imām Burhān al-Dīn al-Biqā‘ī (808-885 AH) wa Manhajuh fī al-Tafsīr* (Jordon: Dār al-Fath, 2014); and Walid Saleh, “Al-Biqā‘ī Seen Through Reuchlin: Reflections on the Islamic Relationship with the Bible,” in *Medieval Exegesis and Religions Difference*, ed. Ryan Szpiech (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015). Also al-Farāhī and his student al-Iṣlāhī had an interest in incorporating Biblical passages in his *tafsīr*. See Mustansir Mir, *Coherence in the Quran: A Study of Iṣlāhī’s concept of Nazm in Tadabbur-i Qur’ān* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2011), 6.

v. 29: “It was He who created all that is on the earth for you, then turned to the sky and made the seven heavens; it is He who has knowledge of all things.” Here, al-Biqā‘ī not only refers to a thematic relation but also a syntactic connection (*‘atf*).<sup>75</sup> Being cognizant of the potential rejection of this view by virtue of the large gap between these two verses, al-Biqā‘ī highlights the Qur’anic disputative nature which, to al-Biqā‘ī, allows for such distant connections. Referring his readers to the way al-Bāqillānī and his contemporaries arrange their arguments, al-Biqā‘ī explains that when one establishes a case, they follow it with sufficient evidence and further demonstrations. However, when one finds that their opponents are not fully convinced; one would resort to different manners of demonstration with a restatement of the original argument.<sup>76</sup>

Similarly, al-Biqā‘ī’s connections between thematic relations and the situational context of the surah pushed him to reject the notion of *saj’* in the Qur’ān. To him *saj’* is necessitated by the context, and it is not merely employed for stylistic purposes. Relying on Abū Ḥayyān’s commentary, al-Biqā‘ī approvingly quotes al-Rāzī’s opinion that the inversion of the order of Qur’anic words (as in the case of pre and post-positioning or *taqdīm wa ta’khīr*) “is not for the purpose of *saj’* because the matchlessness of the Qur’ān is not merely located in the wording but in the meaning.”<sup>77</sup> Al-Biqā‘ī relies on his *munāsabāt* to demonstrate that *saj’* is primarily employed to serve the meaning. For instance, whereas “Moses and Ḥārūn” are usually associated in this order in the Qur’ān, surah 20 (Ṭāhā) breaks that pattern and introduces Ḥārūn first as in Q. 20:70. Many exegetes explain this Qur’anic variant by the need to maintain the musicality of the

<sup>75</sup> Al-Biqā‘ī, *Naẓm al-Durar*, 1:291.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:292.

<sup>77</sup> Al-Biqā‘ī, *Maṣā‘id al-Naẓar lī al-Ishrāf ‘alā Maqāṣid al-Suwar* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Ma‘ārif, 1987), 1:178. Compare with al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṣin al-Ghayb*, 26:16.

Qur'anic *fāṣilah* (a term used to refer to *saj'* cases in the Qur'ān).<sup>78</sup> However, al-Biqā'ī has a different interpretation. He observes the following:

Surah [20] Ṭāhā shows a great consideration of the vizier (*al-wazīr*) and the instruction to seek him... In this surah, Moses specifically requested a vizier. Due to this added emphasis on him (the vizier), he (Ḥārūn the vizier) was prepositioned to signal this significance. For the same reason, it is said in the [same] surah “We are the [two] Messengers of Your Lord (*rasūlā rabbik*)” (Q. 20:47). Yet, in surah [26] Al-Shu'arā', [*rasūl*, messenger] is used in the singular form since there was no focus on that [emphasis on the vizier] therein.<sup>79</sup>

### 1.7 Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505)

Al-Suyūṭī is renowned for his exegetical work *al-Durr al-Manthūr fī al-Tafsīr bī al-Ma'thūr* (*The Scattered Pearls of Tradition-based Exegesis*).<sup>80</sup> However, his works on Qur'anic exegesis is a complete compendium of *tafsīr*, yet they appear in different complementary titles. The Quran-related works include an introduction to Qur'anic studies (as in the *Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, *al-Taḥbīr fī 'Ilm al-Tafsīr*, *Mu'tarak al-Aqrān fī I'jāz al-Qur'ān* and *Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*), Qur'anic laws (as in *al-Iklīl fī Istinbāṭ al-Tanzīl*), exegetical glosses (as in his gloss *Nawāhid al-Abkār* on al-Bayḍāwī's commentary), biographical dictionaries (as in *Ṭabaqāt al-Mufasssīrīn*), and occasions of revelation (as in *Lubāb al-Nuqūl fī Asbāb al-Nuzūl*).<sup>81</sup>

However, al-Ṣuyūṭī produces three other works about thematic relations in the Qur'ān. The first two works are very small in size: one on how the beginning of each surah corresponds with its closure (*Marāṣid al-Maṭāli' fī Tanāsub al-Maqāṭi' wa al-Maṭāli'*) and another on the thematic sequence of the Qur'anic surah entitled *Tanāsuq al-Durar fī Tanāsub al-Suwar*.

---

<sup>78</sup> Many Ash'arites distinguish between *fāṣilah* and *saj'* by stating “in *fāṣilah*, the wording follows the meaning, whereas, in *saj'*, the meaning follows the wording.” See, for instance, al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Itqān*, 3:702.

<sup>79</sup> Al-Biqā'ī, *Maṣā'id al-Nazar*, 1:183.

<sup>80</sup> For an analysis of al-Suyūṭī's exegetical goals of stressing the tradition-based commentary, see Shabir Ally, “The Culmination of Tradition-based Tafsīr The Qur'ān Exegesis al-Durr al-manthūr of al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505),” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2012).

<sup>81</sup> For instance, al-Ṣuyūṭī's *al-Itqān* could be considered an introduction to his Qur'anic compendium. With regard to the *tafsīr* that is based on transmitted reports, he wrote *al-Durr al-Manthūr*. Legal rulings of the Qur'ān appear in a special work *al-Iklīl fī 'Ulūm al-Tanzīl* (*The Crowning Book on the Sciences of Revelation*).

However, the most important work al-Şuyūṭī writes on thematic relations is *Qatf al-Asrār fī Kashf al-Asrār*. This commentary covers almost one third of the Qurʾān: from surah 1 (al-Fātiḥah) to surah 9 (al-Tawbah). In this commentary, rhetorical analysis is highly emphasized; that is, many exegetes (e.g., al-Zamakhsharī, al-Rāzī, Abū Ḥayyān, and al-Ṭībī) are often quoted. Part of this analysis addresses an interest in unearthing the thematic relations among units in the surah. Mostly, the thematic explanations of the topic shifts in the surah are from al-Rāzī through Shams al-Dīn al-Işfahānī. For instance, the major shifts in surah 2 closely follows al-Rāzī's theory, especially the idea of a theological trilogy, the general and particular blessings of the Israelites, the centrality of Abraham in the argumentation of the surah, and the intentional blending of the legal and the spiritual for mutual reinforcement.<sup>82</sup>

## 2. Beyond al-Rāzī: The Echo of *Munāsabāt* Elements in Two Seventh-Century Works of Rhetoric

Even though many exegetical works are either influenced or inspired by al-Rāzī, some seventh/thirteenth century rhetorical works can also be credited for facilitating the exegetical interest in *munāsabāt* as part of the medieval commitment to the doctrine of Qurʾanic inimitability (*iʿjāz*). Regarding Arabic literary analysis, the seventh/thirteenth century marks an observable turn to exploring Qurʾanic *takhalluṣ*: a continuity device that, when explored, concerns how a transition is effected from one unit to another. In this way, *takhalluṣ* in *balāghah* is closely related to *munāsabāt* in the Qurʾān. However, an individual by the name of al-Ghānimī appears to oppose the Qurʾanic *takhalluṣ*. In response, both Ibn al-Athīr and ibn Abī al-Işbaʿ highlight the Qurʾanic *takhalluṣ* as a literary feature that ensures a smooth flow of the surah material. Whereas ibn al-Athīr provides a counterargument against al-Ghānimī's rejection of

---

<sup>82</sup> See for instance, al-Şuyūṭī, *Qatf al-Azhār fī Kashf al-Asrār* (Doha: Wazārat al-Awfāq, 1994), 1:208, 210, 215, 220, 239, 319, 364, 368, 499, 539 and 547.

*takhalluṣ* in the surah, ibn Abī al-Iṣba‘ presents *takhalluṣ* as the locus of Qur’anic matchlessness (*wajh al-i‘jāz*) that is easily perceptible by astute critics (*al-ḥuththāq min dhawi al-naqd*).

Before examining some examples from ibn al-Athīr and ibn Abū al-Iṣba‘ (and to sense why these two authors posit that denying Qur’anic *takhalluṣ* is rhetorically problematic), it is helpful to shed some light on how medieval literary critics celebrated *takhalluṣ* in the Arabic Qaṣīdah. In the following brief review of *takhalluṣ*, it can be seen that the masterful employment of *takhalluṣ* is associated with the unity of the Qaṣīdah, poetical arbitration, poetical skills and aesthetics.

### 2.1. *Takhalluṣ* in the Qaṣīdah

I begin with one of the earliest references attributed to Abū ‘Ubaydah ibn al-Muthannā (d. 209/824) in al-Ḥātimī’s *Ḥilyat al-Muḥāḍarah*. Ibn al-Muthannā refers to few verses by Zuhayr ibn Abū Salma, al-A‘shā, Ḥātim al-Ṭā’ī and Dhū al-Rummah as *ahsanu takhalluṣ lī al-‘Arab* (best *takhalluṣ* by the Arabs) without saying *da‘ dhā* (leave this) or *‘ud ‘ammā tarā* (return from what you see). For instance, he quotes Zuhayr’s transition point:

إن البخيل ملوم حيث كان ول كن الجواد على علاته هرم

*Indeed, the stingy, wherever he goes, is blameworthy,  
Yet, the generous, in every case, is Harim*

Here Zuhayr closes his introduction through blaming the stingy and then introducing the *mamdūḥ*, *Harim*, for the first time as the antithesis of stinginess. In this way, the introduction is sewn together with the original purpose of a eulogy. Ibn Abū al-Iṣba‘ celebrates this connection: not only the contrast cut created to introduce the *mamdūḥ* but also the verbal connection in the word *lākin* (yet) which is sliced to connect the two hemistiches of the verse. For him, Zuhayr manages to make the two themes “fully-intertwined both rhythmically and thematically.”<sup>83</sup> In

<sup>83</sup> Ibn Abū al-Iṣba‘, *Taḥrīr al-Taḥbīr* (Cairo: Al-Majlis al-A‘lā lī al-Shu‘ūn al-Islāmiyyah), 434.

other words, the topic shift from the introduction to the *madḥ* is thematically facilitated by the creation of contrast and rhythmically tied, as the two hemistiches, representing the two topics, share parts of the word *lākin*: the contrast word that plays the role of binding the two themes.

In his *Mi'yār al-Shi'r*, Ibn Ṭabāṭabā places emphasis on the idea of unity in the Arabic Qaṣīdah and uses the term *takhalluṣ* so that it becomes the most widely-used term to denote the transition from one *ma'nā* to another. He observes that “poetry has *fuṣūl* as those of treatises. Thus a poet needs to gently bind his talks together and to move from *love-lyric* to panegyric and from panegyric to complaint with the gentlest transition and best narration without separating the new topic from the previous one.”<sup>84</sup> To Ibn Ṭabāṭabā, it seems that the challenge a poet faces is not the limitation of the poem to one theme but the skill to move from one theme to another. To him, poetry is a *ḥirfah* or craft with a long traditional history, part of which is the conventional themes of the Qaṣīdah that ought to be followed. As a poet is encouraged to creatively reach *sabq* (originality), he is still required to follow the already-established rhetorical norms in his *sabk* (formulation). For instance, Ibn Ṭabāṭabā presents some foundational tools for the making of a poet: “profound knowledge in linguistics, absorbing the *I'rāb*, narrating the arts of literature, recognizing people's biographies, their pedigree, merits and demerits, and recognition of the Arabs' ways of [composing] poetry and expressing the meanings in every art.”<sup>85</sup> Al-Ḥātīmī follows in the steps of Ibn Ṭabāṭabā and affirms the validity of the parts of the Qaṣīdah and the necessity of a smooth transition. He explicitly notes the following:

One of the rules of the *nasīb* with which the poet commences his poem is that it has to be intermixed with the adjacent *madḥ*, *dhamm*, or other [theme], without any disconnection since the Qaṣīdah is like the creation of man whose parts are so interconnected that if one part is separated from the other, or proves to be dissimilar in its original composition, the

---

<sup>84</sup> Ibn Ṭabāṭabā, *Iyār al-Shi'r* (Damascus: Manshūrāt Ittīḥād al-Kuttāb al-'Arab, 2005), 178

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 6

body will suffer a blemish that diminishes its charms and leaves no trace of the hallmarks of its beauty.<sup>86</sup>

Even though he observes that the *muḥdathūn* pay more attention to the *takhalluṣ* technique, he still quotes pre-Islamic poets, like al-Nābighah al-Zubyānī, whose *takhalluṣ* is celebrated as original and naturally flowing as a Bedouin poet “ladle from the kernel of his heart and draw from his improvised thoughts.”<sup>87</sup>

*Takhalluṣ* mastery is so celebrated that it becomes a means of poetical arbitration. For instance, in his poetical arbitration between al-Mutanabbī and his opponents in *al-Waṣāṭah bayna al-Mutanabbī wa khusūmih* (The Mediation between al-Mutanabbī and His Detractors), al-Qāḍī al-Jurjānī uses *husn al-takhalluṣ wa al-khurūj*<sup>88</sup> as an area of comparison between poets to conclude that “Al-Buḥturī was fully concerned about his beginnings. Abū Tammām and al-Mutanabbī explored *takhalluṣ* in every way possible and paid it all attention; yet, al-Mutanabbī reached the desired [level] and proved to be more skillful and more productive.”<sup>89</sup> However, al-Jurjānī identifies some examples of al-Mutanabbī’s *takhalluṣ* as “repulsive.” Unlike al-Jurjānī who generally preferred the Mutanabbī’s *takhalluṣ*, Ibn Wakī‘ al-Tinnīsī focuses on criticizing al-Mutanabbī in *al-Munṣif fī naqd al-shi‘r wa bayān sariqāt al-Mutanabbī wa Mushkil Shi‘rih*. It is interesting here that *takhalluṣ* was a criterion al-Tinnīsī used to criticize al-Mutanabbī. However, Abū Manṣūr al-Tha‘ālibī (d. 429/1038) devotes part of his *al-Yatīmah* to al-Mutanabbī illustrating examples of his fine *takhalluṣ*. Additionally, under al-Jurjānī’s influence, some other examples of “not good *takhalluṣ*” are listed.

---

<sup>86</sup> Al-Ḥātimī, *Ḥilyat al-Muḥāḍarah* (Baghdad: Dar al-Rashid, 1979), 1:215.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 215

<sup>88</sup> Al-Jurjānī was preceded by two earlier works on literary criticism, Qudāmah ibn Ja‘far’s *Naqd al-Shi‘r* and *Naqd al-Nathr* and al-Āmidī’s *Al-Muwāzanah bayna Abu Tammām and al-Buḥturī*. Al-Jurjānī wrote his book in response to Abū al-Qāsim Ibn ‘Abbād’s (d.385/1042) *Masāwi‘ al-Mutanabbī*.

<sup>89</sup> Al-Jurjānī, *Al-Waṣāṭah bayna al-Mutanabbī wa Khusūmih* (Beirut: Al-Maktabah al-‘Aṣriyyah, 2010), 51.



Another aspect of celebrating *takhalluṣ* in medieval literary theory is the focus on its aesthetics. For instance, al-Tinnīsī's discussion about *takhalluṣ* provokes the impression that *takhalluṣ* becomes part of the listeners' predictability and a source of aesthetics for them. One can say that what *takhalluṣ* is to the Qaṣīdah, a climax is to the narrative in the sense that both the *takhalluṣ* and the climax bring the reader to "the turning point." Al-Tinnīsī reports about the story of 'Alī ibn Ḥārūn asking his father about the best *takhalluṣ* a poet has designed to move to *madḥ* or *dhamm*. Answering this question, the father affirms that only the *muḥdathūn* are interested in this *madhhab*. However, he adds that Ibn Wuhayb al-Ḥimyarī's *takhalluṣ* to *madḥ* is unanimously recognized as *ḥasan* (or fine).<sup>90</sup> It seems that the creativity in this *takhalluṣ* lies in the creation of an "image" that binds the *nasīb* and the *madḥ* together. When Ibn Wuhayb describes the darkness of the night, he observes rays of light penetrating through the darkness to create a morning that is full of such brightness that resembles the Caliph's face.

This subtle shift from his *wasf* to *madḥ* is appreciated as the poet closes his introduction with the light that is picked up to describe the caliph in the adjacent unit.<sup>91</sup> This created *muwā'amah* (correlation) can provide an aesthetic pleasure for the listeners. As *takhalluṣ* eases the transition,<sup>92</sup> it also amuses the listener who "feels the transition from the first discourse only when he is already engaged with the second topic due to the intensity of the [textual] intermixture, consolidation and concordance."<sup>93</sup> This is the magic of *takhalluṣ* as is supposed to be felt by the listeners. This structural and aesthetic function of *takhalluṣ* explains why some early critics included *takhalluṣ* as a *fann* and others as one of the *muḥassināt*.

<sup>90</sup> Al-Tinnīsī, *Al-Munṣif* (Damascus, Dar Qutaybah, 1982), 82-83.

<sup>91</sup> In *Balaghah* manuals, this simile is also called *al-tashbīh al-maqlūb* (the Reversed Simile) because the poet compares the light to the caliph, not the other way around.

<sup>92</sup> For this reason, al-Zarkashī and al-Suyūṭī used the term *al-tawṭī'ah*, which roughly means "paving" and is indicative of a deliberate gradual movement from one *ma'nā* to another.

<sup>93</sup> Al-Ḥamawī, *Khizānat al-Adab* (Beirut, Al-Maktabah al-'Aṣriyyah, 2006), 1:329.

The implications of this dual function of *takhalluṣ* appear in the works of later rhetoricians. As far as the structural function of *takhalluṣ* is concerned, Ḥāzīm al-Qarṭajannī (d. 684/1211) classifies poems into *basīṭ at al-aghrād* (of a simple theme, such as those purely for *madḥ* or *rithā'*) and *murakkabah* (with compound themes, such as those with *nasīb* and *madīḥ*).<sup>94</sup> Due to the sophistications associated with compound poems, Al-Qarṭajannī prefers poets who compose compound poems that are *ba'īd al-marāmī* (insightful and inventive) and evaluates other poets as *ghayr ba'īd al-marāmī* (non-insightful).<sup>95</sup> Al-Qarṭajannī's preference is justified by the poet's ability to employ an artful *takhalluṣ* and thereby move from one *ma'nā* to another smoothly, selecting the suitable diction that matches each theme, without forgetting to place greater emphasis and focus on the beginning of each new *ma'nā*.

Regarding the aesthetic function of *takhalluṣ*, al-Qazwīnī (d.739/1338) stresses the role that *takhalluṣ* plays in engaging the listeners in the reception of the poem by emphasizing the *muwā'amah* (or correlation) between the two joined units, as this *muwā'amah* enhances the listeners' activity and motivates them to keep listening. Al-Qazwīnī describes the listeners' predictability: "The listener is watchful to see how the transition from the *nasīb* to the actual purpose is achieved: if the transition is good and fitting, it will make the listener more energetic and helps him to listen attentively to what follows; otherwise not."<sup>96</sup>

## 2.2. *Takhalluṣ* in the Surah

The significance of *takhalluṣ* as a criterion for poetic excellence and preference communicates more about ibn al-Athīr's reaction to the voices against the employment of *takhalluṣ* in the Qur'anic text. In his *al-Mathal al-Sā'ir*, Ibn al-Athīr (d. 637/1239) starts his discussion on the Quranic *takhalluṣ* with a vehement rejection of al-Ghānimī's claim that

<sup>94</sup> Al-Qarṭajannī, *Minhāj al-Bulaghā'* (Beirut, Dar al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1986), 303.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 324

<sup>96</sup> Al-Qazwīnī, *Al-Īdāh* (Riyād: Maktabat al-Ma'ārif, 2006), 455.

*takhalluṣ* does not occur in the Qurʾān. In response to al-Ghānimī, Ibn al-Athīr presents his understanding of the function of *takhalluṣ* in the Qurʾān and supports this view with some Qurʾanic examples. He writes the following:<sup>97</sup>

This view is flawed (*fāsīd*), simply because the reality of *takhalluṣ* is the movement from one discourse (*kalam*) to another through a subtle allusion (*laṭīfah*) that harmonizes between the discourse one moves from and the discourse one shifts to. In this regard the Qurʾanic examples are manifold; such as, the movement from admonition to warning-based reminders, and from glad news for Heaven to commandments, prohibitions, promise and threat, from decisive (*muḥkam*) to allegorical (*mutashābih*) from a description of a delegated prophet and a divinely sent angel to the defaming of devilish rebels and obstinate tyrants—all [effected] by delicate allusions and notions that intimately hold all [constituents] together.<sup>98</sup>

This passage demonstrates that Ibn al-Athīr has a clear understanding of the function, requirement and purpose of *takhalluṣ* as a conventional structuring feature in the Qurʾān. According to him, it seems that the diversity of topics within a surah does not constitute a problem as long as they are intimately woven into the text. Ibn al-Athīr moves on to illustrate his position on *takhalluṣ* by celebrating how it functions in the story of Abraham as mentioned in Q. 26: 69-102. In this example, the reader can observe how the surah employs the *takhalluṣ* technique to expand smoothly from Abraham’s argumentation with the idolaters to a list of God’s attributes to a set of prayers and finally to an eschatological note. To appreciate the *takhalluṣ* solutions in this passage, one may ask some pre-reading questions, such as the following: How could one move from a discussion on criticizing the idolatry to a description of God, to a description of the Last Day and the reward and punishment prepared for the righteous and the wicked without causing some abrupt shifts? Here is the passage:

And rehearse to them (something of) Abraham’s story.  
Behold, he said to his father and his people: “What worship ye?”

---

<sup>97</sup> وهذا القول فاسد لأن حقيقة التخلّص إنما هي الخروج من كلام إلى آخر غيره بلطفة تالئم بين الكلام الذي خرج منه والكلام الذي خرج إليه وفي القرآن الكريم مواضع كثيرة من ذلك كالأخروج من الوعد والتذكير بالإندار والشارة بالجنة إلى أمر ونهي ووعد ووعد ومن محكم إلى متشابه ومن صفة لبي مرسل وملك منزل إلى ذم شيطان مرید وجبار عنيد بلطائف دقيقة ومعان أخذ بعضها برقاب بعض.

<sup>98</sup> Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Mathal al-Sāʿir* (Beirut: Al-Maktabah al-ʿAṣriyyah, 2010), 2: 251.

They said: “We worship idols, and we remain constantly in attendance on them.”  
He said: “Do they listen to you when ye call (on them)?”  
“Or do you good or harm?”  
They said: “Nay, but we found our fathers doing thus (what we do).”  
He said: "Do ye then see whom ye have been worshipping,  
Ye and your fathers before you?  
For they are enemies to me; **not so [except for (*illā*)] the Lord and Cherisher of the Worlds;**  
Who created me, and it is He Who guides me;  
Who gives me food and drink,  
And when I am ill, it is He Who cures me;  
Who will cause me to die, and then to life (again);  
And who, I hope, will forgive me my faults on the day of Judgment.  
O my Lord! bestow wisdom on me, and join me with the righteous;  
Grant me honorable mention on the tongue of truth among the latest (generations);  
Make me one of the inheritors of the Garden of Bliss;  
Forgive my father, for that he is among those astray;  
**And let me not be in disgrace on the Day when (men) will be raised up;**  
The Day whereon neither wealth nor sons will avail,  
But only he (will prosper) that brings to Allah a sound heart;  
To the righteous, the Garden will be brought near,  
**And to those straying in Evil, the Fire will be placed in full view;**  
And it shall be said to them: “Where are the (gods) ye worshipped  
Besides Allah? Can they help you or help themselves?”  
Then they will be thrown headlong into the (Fire), they and those straying in Evil,  
And the whole hosts of Iblīs together.  
They will say there in their mutual bickerings:  
By Allah, we were truly in an error manifest,  
When we held you as equals with the Lord of the Worlds;  
And our seducers were only those who were steeped in guilt.  
Now, then, we have none to intercede (for us),  
Nor a single friend to feel (for us).  
“Now if we only had a chance of return we shall truly be of those who believe!” (Yusuf Ali Translation)

Ibn al-Athīr begins his comment on appreciating the *takhalluṣ* in this passage with the following text: “this discourse intoxicates the minds and bewitches the mindful and is sufficient for the seekers of *balāghah*.”<sup>99</sup> In a long discussion, Ibn al-Athīr is impressed by how Abraham arranges his general arguments and works his thematic transitions. After he refutes the idolatry, Abraham starts to talk about the God to whom worship must solely be attributed. Ibn al-Athīr

<sup>99</sup> Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Mathal al-Sā'ir*, 2:133-234.

sees the transitional sentence in “For they are enemies to me; not so [لا] except for] the Lord and Cherisher of the Worlds” as the exception that opened an avenue for Abraham to list the attributes of the God Who is worthy of worship. Then Abraham “moves to what matches these attributes by offering sincere prayers.” Among his prayers is one dedicated to obtaining salvation or removal of disgrace on the Day of Judgment. This very prayer provokes a smooth transition to a portrayal of the righteous and the wicked.<sup>100</sup>

Furthermore, Ibn Abū al-Iṣba‘ presents a general observation about Quranic *takhalluṣ*:

*Takhalluṣ* is permeated throughout the whole Quran, from beginning to end. You may come across some parts in the Quran that are seemingly discontinuous without recognizing a way to harmonize them; yet, if you have a deeper look [into the text] along with a trained faculty of this craft [of *balāghah*], the harmony will appear to you.<sup>101</sup>

With observation in mind, Ibn Abī al-Iṣba‘ explains the connections between the first two verses of surah 17:

“Glory to Him who made His servant travel by night from the sacred place of worship to the furthest place of worship, whose surroundings We have blessed, to show him some of Our signs: He alone is the All Hearing, the All Seeing. We also gave Moses the Scripture, and made it a guide for the Children of Israel. ‘Entrust yourselves to no one but Me, you descendants of those We carried with Noah: he was truly a thankful servant’” (Q. 17:1-3).

Ibn Abū al-Iṣba‘ notices the shift from discussing Muḥammad’s Night Journey (al-Isrā‘) in v. 1 and Moses’ reception of the divine scripture in v. 2. To him, the juxtaposition of these verses seems dissonant; yet, with some scrutiny, they appear congruent on the grounds that Moses had a similar experience. Depending on an embedded background, Ibn Abū al-Iṣba‘ explains the following:

God mentions that He took Muḥammad, God’s peace and blessings be with him, on a night journey to show him some of His signs and to send him to His servants as He took the terrified Moses on a night journey from Egypt till he [Moses] reached Madyan and

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 234

<sup>101</sup> Ibn Abū al-Iṣba‘, *Taḥrīr al-Taḥbīr* (Cairo: Al-Majlis al-A‘lā al-Shu‘ūn al-Islāmiyyah), 433.

"و هو ميثوث في الكتاب العزيز من أوله إلى آخره فإنك تقف من الكتاب العزيز على مواضع تجدها في الظاهر فصولا متنافرة لا تعرف كيف تجمع بينها فإذا أنعمت النظر و كنت ممن له دربة بهذه الصناعة ظهر لك الجمع بينهما."

got married to Shu‘ayb’s daughter. As Moses took her on a night journey, God addressed him, sent him to Pharaoh and gave him the Book.”<sup>102</sup>

In the words of al-Rāzī, the juxtaposition is that of honor: Muḥammad was honored by experiencing the *Isrā’* and Moses by receiving the scripture.

### 3. The Special Case of Abū Ishāq al-Shāṭibī (d. 790/1388)

Having recognized the direct impact of al-Rāzī’s approach to the surah on many later exegetes and the possible role of Arabic *balāghah* in promoting this exegetical tendency, it is worth closing this discussion on the development of the post-Rāzī study of the surah design with Abū Ishāq al-Shāṭibī. What distinguishes al-Shāṭibī’s case is that his view of the surah design emanates from his expertise in legal theory. Additionally, al-Shāṭibī’s exploration of the structure of surah 23 (al-Mu‘minūn) is done in a way that differs from that of al-Rāzī—even though the former adopts the theological trilogy of divine unity, prophecy and resurrection.

In his well-received *al-Muwāfaqāt fī Uṣūl al-Sharī‘ah* (The Reconciliation of the Fundamentals of the Law), renowned Andalusian legal theorist al-Shāṭibī (d. 790/1388) devotes a long section on the hermeneutics of the Qur’ān as one of the main sources of sharī‘ah. In his view, the *naẓm* of the surah derives no benefit (*la yatim bihi fā’idah*) unless the surah is considered in its entirety (*illā ba‘da istifā’i jamī‘ihā bī al-naẓar*). He adds that the method of confining the reading of a given surah to one portion of it is analogous with confining the reading of a given verse to one part of it. In other words, al-Shāṭibī posits that as half-verse reading may lead to a misreading or misinterpretation, so may half-surah reading.

From theory to practice, al-Shāṭibī outlines some surahs and treats each one as consisting of a unified message despite its heterogeneous nature. His illustration of the structure of surah 23 (Al-Mu‘minūn) reflects a clear approach. He initiates his discussion with a note referring not

---

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 434.

only to the surah, but also to the defining content of the Meccan Quran. He posits that the main concern of the Meccan surah is the worship and obedience of God, a goal that is achieved by tackling a trilogy of thematic dimensions: *wahdāniyyah* (monotheism), *nubuwwah* (prophethood) and *ba‘th* (bodily resurrection). Furthermore, al-Shāṭibī adds that these three theological goals are usually associated with seemingly disparate but essentially related topics; such as, past narratives, *targhīb* (exhortation), *tarhīb* (warnings), *amthāl* (parables), *qaṣaṣ* (stories), *jannah* (heaven), *nār* (hell), and so on.

Thereafter, al-Shāṭibī refocuses his attention on surah 23 and states that the surah reflects the Meccan trilogy of themes (i.e., divine unity, prophecy and resurrection). Of these three themes, al-Shāṭibī identifies Muḥammad’s prophecy as the dominant theme of the surah. He also notes that the pagan chiefs’ (*ashrāf*) denial of the concept of prophethood is greater emphasized in the surah. Al-Shāṭibī observes that the *ashrāf*, driven by haughtiness and superiority (as the surah reveals), raise the objection of *bashariyyah* (being human) to argue that it is most unlikely for God to send a messenger like them and to view themselves as more worthy of the office of prophecy than the prophet himself. This is an issue that was also raised in the Q. 43: 31. Consequently, al-Shāṭibī concludes that the content and phraseology of the surah revolves around this concept of *bashariyyah* as the focal point of the *ashrāf*’s objections.

For an easier understanding of al-Shāṭibī’s holistic reading of surah 23, the following outline reflects his view of the surah structure:

### **Section I: Prophethood and the *Ashrāf* Challenge**

#### **Part I. Introduction on countering the *ashrāf*’s vainglory**

1-11 Virtues that lead to real *falāḥ* (success) and the divine elevation of mortals

12-16 Human creation and humility

17-22 Divine providence and human dominance on earth

#### **Part II. Prophets as Exemplars of Virtues as opposed to the *ashrāf*’s vainglory**

23-30 Nūḥ

- 31-41 Unnamed messenger
- 42-44 Messengers at regular intervals
- 45-49 Mūsā and Hārūn
- 50- Special reference to Jesus, Son of Mary
- 51-52 Consoling the messengers
- 53-56 Exposing the *ashrāf*'s vainglory

**Part III. Closure**

- 57-61 List of virtues

**Section II: An Eschatology of the *Ashrāf***

**Part I. Introduction**

- 62-65 Recorded deeds and imminent punishment

**Part II. The *ashrāf* facing death**

- 68-98 A series of reproaching points that the *ashrāf* will face on the Doomsday
- 99-114 A detailed account of the *ashrāf*'s sufferings in hell

**Part III. Closure**

- 115-116 Moral insight for the afterlife

**Section III: A Final Postlude:**

- 117-118 Warning against losing *falāḥ* and a prayer

Regarding the thematic shifts in the first forty eight verses, al-Shāṭibī starts with a cluster of three units: the first part (vv.1-11) focuses on the qualities servants ought to have to receive divine honor (*rafa'ahu biha Allah wa akramah*), the second part (vv.12-16) on the creation of man (including fetal developments), and the third part (vv. 17-22) on the many manifestations of divine providence for man who was granted manifold blessings and dominion over things.<sup>103</sup> Al-Shāṭibī continues his unit-by-unit analysis and indicates the surah's shift to the *qaṣaṣ* or prophetic narratives (vv. 23:48). Then, he illustrates that the recurring objection in each narrative is mainly about *bashariyyah* (mortality) as both the formula "this is merely a mortal (*bashar*) like you" and the word *mala'*, indicative of honor and prestige, are reiterated in many verses (as in 24, 33, 34, 38, 44, and 47).

---

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 3:465.



One may wonder the following: what are the relationship among this sequence of (1) moral virtues, (2) fetal developments, (3) divine blessings and (4) narratives of past prophets? Looking ahead for a literary escalation point, al-Shāṭibī does not struggle with the juxtaposition of this trilogy of the first three units. Contextually, he refuses to read them as “disparate fragments” but instead observes them as preliminary counterarguments in anticipation of the chiefs’ subsequent accusation of *bashariyyah* around which, al-Shāṭibī believes, the surah will revolve. Reducing this *bashariyyah* accusation to something deeply rooted in arrogance, al-Shāṭibī argues that the initial units of the surah guards against arrogance, as the first note elaborates on servanthood and obedience to God, the second on human weakness (as evidenced by the surah description of fetal developments), and the third on human *iftiqār* (essential need), as they cannot survive without divine providence.<sup>104</sup>

In this way, al-Shāṭibī’s description of the role of the first three units resembles psychological priming; that is, exposing someone to something that would later influence their behavior. The proposal of the fetal development along with the divine blessings on humans (without which there would be no survival) serve as a stimulus to influence how later pieces of information are perceived by the same audience. Al-Shāṭibī’s method of recognizing the connectedness of these units rests on the assumption that the text is dialectical in nature and is part of a conversation with active listeners. As practiced by al-Rāzī, al-Shāṭibī attempts to uncover the implied dialectical role of the surah units as a means to understand the flow of the surah material.

Having demonstrated the recurrence of the *bashariyyah* objection in the prophecy narratives, al-Shāṭibī singles out the special reference (v. 50) to *ibn Maryam wa ummahu* (The Son of Mary and his Mother) to demonstrate the validity of prophets who are humans. Then, al-

---

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 3:466.

Shāṭibī pinpoints that the closure in vv.57:61 refers to the virtues and spiritual states one needs to develop to enjoy divine honor. This unit serves a two-fold function: (1) responding to the opponents who take pride in their wealth and children and neglect the moral criteria in receiving divine honor vv. 54-55 and (2) exhibiting chiasmus with the initial unit vv. 1-11, as both list a number of virtues exemplified by the successful servants of God.

Concerning the employment of the stories of previous prophets, al-Shāṭibī opines that the thematic subtext of *bashariyyah* not only explains the generation of the Qur’anic narrative but also affects the way prophecy stories are phrased and presented. He argues that a major function of these stories is that they offer solace and support to the prophet during times of distress, which were caused by the pagans’ obstinacy (*inād*) and rejection of his message as a lie (*takdhīb*). Al-Shāṭibī continues by arguing that the different accusations of falsehood provoke the different wording and focus of the same stories in different surahs due to *ikhtilāf al-aḥwāl* (the different circumstances).<sup>105</sup>

Finally, al-Shāṭibī reads the rest of the surah vv. 62:118 as a discussion on the eschatological fate of those *mutrafūn* (the wealthy), who are alluded to in the introduction and explicitly mentioned in the prophecy narratives of the surah. Interestingly enough, al-Shāṭibī states that if one read this second part of the surah as an elaboration on the fate of the *mutrafūn*, one would discover that the thematic approach, which he set in the beginning of his discussion of the controlling theme, is still operative in the surah. Furthermore, he finishes his discussion with the note that the door is open for all who wish to apply his schema on the rest of the Quranic surahs.<sup>106</sup>

---

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 3:467.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 3:466 "و من أراد الاختبار في سائر سور القرآن فالباب مفتوح و التوفيق بيد الله" "Whoever wants to extend the application to the rest of the Qur’anic Surahs, the door is open, and with God comes success."

Neal Robinson illustrates many examples of chiasmic patterns in the surah and reveals the recurring words and phrases diffused in the first and second section of the surah.<sup>107</sup> Robinson reaches many conclusions that align with al-Shāṭibī's insights on the structure of the surah. For instance, both agree that the prophets or envoys in the surah are the exemplary believers who embody the virtues listed in the initial part of the surah. They also both acknowledge that the surah has two major sections with slight differences. However, Robinson's eye for chiasmic patterns (in contrast with al-Shāṭibī's eye for the thematic subtext) recognizes the divergence of their viewpoints regarding the interrelations between some units. For instance, where al-Shāṭibī reads the three-unit introduction as containing counterarguments to the anticipated claim of *bashariyyah* and its associated corollaries (which would soon be diffused throughout the surah), Robinson explains vv. 12-16 on human creation and development as an extension of the discussion on Adam on the grounds that the first unit vv. 1-11 ends in the inheritance of paradise. For Robinson, this implicitly evokes the character of Adam. It is true that Robinson's analysis helps to explain the immediate juxtaposition of these two units and the role of the second unit in easing the transition to the resurrection discussion. This thematic sequence is supported by the recurring Qur'anic strategy of employing God's power in creation to illustrate His ability to recreate. However, al-Shāṭibī's finding of the thematic thread that binds all units together adds more cohesiveness to the text, while not ruling out Robinson's insights.

By the same token, Robinson's expectations for symmetrical patterns makes him view the first section as well-formed whereas the second section on eschatology is described as being "comparatively hollow"<sup>108</sup> and judged as "less structured."<sup>109</sup> However, considering vv. 66-98 as

---

<sup>107</sup> Robinson, Neal, "The Structure and Interpretation of Sūrat al-Mu'minūn," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 2, no. 1, (2000): 89-106.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

a deliberate digression that lists some reproaching points, which would be used against the *ashrāf* on Judgment Day, would keep the eschatological section coherent. This digression gives another chance for the *ashrāf* to reconsider their *takdhīb* and rethink their position as the reproaching points forecast a rebuttal to some excuses they would make on the Judgment Day. Al-Shāṭibī's reading of surah 23 demonstrates a clear approach that focuses on a thematic subtext or generative theme that provides the surah with direction and purpose and explains the generation of meaning, or what Muhammad Abū Mūsā calls *tawālud al-ma'ānī* (the generating of meaning).<sup>110</sup>

## Conclusion

The adoption of al-Rāzī's approach to the surah structure in later exegetical works is easily traceable in theologically oriented commentaries, as in the cases of Burhān al-Dīn al-Nasafī, Nizām al-Dīn al-Nīsābūrī, Ibn 'Ādil and others. Furthermore, the emphasis on Qur'anic *takhalluṣ* in classical Arabic rhetoric in the seventh/thirteenth century onwards appears to have played some role in calling attention to the structural analysis of the topic shifts in the surah. Al-Rāzī's commentary seems to have been an advantageous resource for meeting this *balāghah* need—especially when one recognizes that classical exegetes were trained in *balāghah*. In addition, the interest in considering the surah structure moves beyond the exegetical and rhetorical literature to find a place in legal discussions. The example of al-Shāṭibī's approach to surah 23 highlights the value of a holistic reading of the surah for a legal theorist, who calls for

---

<sup>110</sup> Abū Mūsā applies this concept in his study of the *Hawāmīm* in four volumes. One can easily discern that Abū Mūsā represents a modern amplification and development of this al-Shāṭibī's suggested method. An independent study on Abū Mūsā's rhetorical analysis would be necessary to illustrate the relevance, feasibility, restorability and improvability of classical *balāghah* in the literary analysis of the Qur'anic text. See Abū Mūsā, *Āl Ḥamīm: Ghāfir-Fuṣṣilat* (Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, 2009); idem, *Āl Ḥamīm: al-Shūrā, al-Zukhruf, al-Dukhān* (Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, 2010); idem, *Āl Ḥamīm: al-Jāthiyah-al-Aḥqāf* (Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, 2011); and idem, *Al-Zumar-Muḥammad wa 'Alāqatumā bī Āl Ḥamīm* (Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, 2012).

such a holistic reading of the surah to ensure proper understanding of the first source of Islamic law: the Qur'ān.

## Conclusion

In this dissertation, I examine Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's contributions to the development of the concept of Qur'anic composition (*naẓm*). Drawing on some Mu'tazilite exegetical sources and utilizing his own dialectical and theological training, al-Rāzī treats the surah as a unified composition. In his view, the *naẓm* of the surah is corroborated and sustained through theological argumentation that can be read in accordance with the Qur'anic dialectical and persuasive strategies. In other words, recognizing the way the Qur'ān argues and the persuasion strategies it employs is necessary to decipher the surah structure. Failing to recognize this guiding principle leaves al-Rāzī's readers with the impression that *Mafātiḥ al-Ghayb* is merely concerned with the thematic relations between verses or units—as indicated in different previous studies.

To gain a fuller understanding of al-Rāzī's approach to Qur'anic *naẓm*, I devote Chapter One to providing a succinct overview of the pre-Rāzī treatment of *naẓm* and pinpoint that the early interest in Qur'anic *naẓm* is closely associated with the doctrine of Qur'anic inimitability. This early association directs the literary analysis of the Qur'ān to the examination of two questions: “what is in the *lafẓ* that produces a unique literary piece?” And how does one account for the orderly sequence of the Qur'anic verses in a given surah? Such stimulating questions turn the focus of Arabic rhetoric to the examination of two complementary trajectories. The first focuses on the rhetorical effects of the figures of speech, stylistic features, syntactical relations and aesthetics. These rhetorical endeavors culminate in the works of 'Abd al-Qāhir's *Asrār al-Balāghah* (The Secrets of Rhetoric) and *Dalā'il al-I'jāz* (Signs of Inimitability) and al-Zamakhsharī's *al-Kashshāf* (The Unveiling Commentary). However, the second trajectory focuses on exploring the different thematic threads that bind adjacent verses together. This approach was mainly undertaken by Mu'tazilite exegetes, as in the case of al-Ḥākim al-Jushamī.

Al-Rāzī commentary *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* reveals that he is reasonably *au fait* with both literary trajectories. In response to these developments, al-Rāzī values ‘Abd al-Qāhir’s works and abridges them in his *Nihāyat al-Ījāz* (The Ultimate Brevity). Furthermore, al-Rāzī incorporates many of al-Zamakhsharī’s literary observations in *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*. In addition, he develops the second trajectory of *naẓm* and expands it to include the examination of what a surah or a large of block of its units seeks to convey.

How does al-Rāzī read the surah more holistically? To answer this question, the study demonstrates the ways in which al-Rāzī highlights the dialectical nature of the surah as an interpretive strategy in understanding the surah architecture. In this regard, I identify three foundations al-Rāzī lays down for approaching the surah as argumentation. Chapter Two explores these three foundations. In the first foundation, al-Rāzī seeks to validate his approach by referring to the many disputations between the prophets and their adversaries in the Qur’ān. This validation is culminated in al-Rāzī’s affirmation that engaging in dispute is intrinsically part of the prophetic career (*ḥirfat al-anbiyā’*). With this solid Qur’anic foundation, al-Rāzī introduces another correlating foundation: interpreting the Qur’ān requires a theologian-exegete, who can decipher the Qur’anic methods of argumentation. Finally, he unravels a literary technique that he finds to reflect the Qur’anic self-image, namely, *taṣrīf* or the Qur’anic diversification of themes in a single surah. He situates this literary phenomenon as part of the persuasive and dialectical nature of the Qur’ān.

Having demonstrated al-Rāzī’s foundations for approaching the surah as argumentation, the study addresses one of its core aims, that is, demonstrating al-Rāzī’s dialectical interpretation of the surah argumentation. To this end, Chapter Three highlights al-Rāzī’s dialectical and theological reading of surah 38 (Ṣād) and surah 87 (Al-Aḥqāf). In al-Rāzī’s interpretation of the

thematic connectedness in these surahs, I illustrate al-Rāzī's adoption of an Aristotelian dialectical technique as a compositional strategy. Furthermore, I highlight al-Rāzī's identification of some theological goals as the governing themes that bind the surah parts together. The examination of al-Rāzī's view of the surah design reveals that he utilizes his developed notion of *nazm* to support his own theological views.

To further investigate al-Rāzī's reading of the surah as argumentation, I explore three main structuring patterns that he usually employs as persuasive techniques to bring harmony to a text that he viewed as intentionally heterogeneous. The three compositional patterns are covered in Chapter Four and includes (1) antithesis, which is illustrated by surah 76 (Al-Insān), (2) complementarity, which is illustrated by surah 73 (al-Muzzammil), and (3) blended themes, which are applied to the longest and most heterogeneous surah of the Qur'ān: surah 2 (al-Baqarah). According to al-Rāzī, these different compositional strategies are designed to influence and shape the listeners' behavioral and moral decisions.

While the dialectical and persuasive dimensions of the Qur'ān makes approaching the surah as argumentation more feasible, many hermeneutical implications can easily follow from this type structural analysis. For instance, adjacent units in a given surah are sometimes given different historical and spatial setting in the exegetical literature. Therefore, one of the aims of the study is to investigate the degree of al-Rāzī's recognition and treatment of the hermeneutical implications of considering the surah as exhibiting a unified *nazm*. In Chapter Five, I find that al-Rāzī is cognizant of the literary consequences of his *nazm* theory, as evidenced in his prioritization of the flow of the surah material over reports of *asbāb al-nuzūl* or *naskh*, which can signal a break in the thematic flow in the surah. I also find that the Mu'tazilite exegete Abū Muslim is to be credited for al-Rāzī's insistence on limiting the *naskh* cases as much as possible.



Similarly, al-Rāzī prioritizes the interpretations that support the coherence of the text even if they collide with the report-based (*ma'thūr*) exegesis. In short, al-Rāzī's commitment to the holistic reading of the surah prompts him to challenge the *hujjiyyah* (binding proof) assigned to reports on *asbāb al-nuzūl*, *naskh* and *ma'thūr*. This action is al-Rāzī's way of countering exegetical *taqlīd* through his *nazm* theory.

Given al-Rāzī's dialectical reading of the surah and its unconventional hermeneutical implications in the exegetical tradition, Chapter Six investigates how this bold approach is received by later exegetes. Even though some exegetes, as in the case of Abū Ḥayyān al-Gharnāṭī, express some reservations on al-Rāzī's philosophically oriented view of the surah structure, I manage to locate different exegetes, who not only follow al-Rāzī's footsteps in adopting the notion of a unified composition but also abridge his commentary and assimilate many of his theological views and polemics in their commentaries. As I give a long list of influenced exegetes, the Ḥanbalite Damascus-based Ibn 'Ādil stands out as a unique case. Ibn 'Ādil is so greatly influenced by al-Rāzī that the former adopts the latter's allegorical interpretations of some divine qualities expressed in terms of human traits and emotions, such as wrath, hand and eyes. In contrast to the more literal teachings in his Ḥanbalite circles, Ibn 'Ādil approvingly quotes al-Rāzī's allegorical interpretations. Ibn 'Ādil's decision comes at a time when al-Rāzī is viewed as Ibn Taymiyyah's first adversary. In addition, Ibn 'Ādil is Ḥanbalite, who witnesses a civil strife (*fitnah*) between the Ash'arites and the Ḥanbalites. Beyond al-Rāzī's influence on later exegetes, I find that al-Rāzī's approach becomes a frequently consulted medieval commentary. The medieval reliance on al-Rāzī's analysis of thematic relations (*munāsabāt*) in the surah is a consequence of the rising interest in studying Qur'anic *takhalluṣ* in Arabic rhetoric, as stressed by ibn al-Athīr and ibn Abū al-Iṣba'. Similarly, al-Rāzī's *munāsabāt*

becomes more appealing due to the resurgent desire to understand the surah in its entirety as a source of legal reasoning, as stressed by al-Shāṭibī.

With these findings in mind, I should also stress that my study has been primarily concerned with al-Rāzī's dialectical approach to the surah along with the exegetical and hermeneutical implications of surah design. However, the findings of this study do not imply that al-Rāzī's complex theory of *nazm* is fully covered. There are many areas in al-Rāzī's *nazm* project that need further research. One of these areas is the issue of surah order and the "meaning" al-Rāzī finds therein. As an illustration, al-Rāzī asserts that surahs 17 (al-Isrā'), 18 (al-Kahf) and 19 (Maryam) are placed together since each surah has a reference to a "supernatural event." Here, al-Rāzī refers to the miracles of Night Journey of Muḥammad, the People of the Cave (Seven Sleepers) and the virgin birth of Jesus, respectively. To al-Rāzī, this shared thematic thread binds the three surahs together. Furthermore, al-Rāzī is also interested in the role of context in informing the propriety of the Qur'anic diction and the many stylistic varieties found in communicating the same narrative in different surahs. Exploring the meaning in the order of the surahs and the role of context in determining the surah diction, as manifested in *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, will further demonstrate the robustness of al-Rāzī's literary contributions in the study of the Qur'anic *nazm*.

## Bibliography

### Primary Sources

- ‘Abd al-Jabbār, Abū al-Ḥasan. *Al-Mughnī fī Abwāb al-Tawḥīd wa al-‘Adl*. 16 vols. Cairo: Al-Dār al-Miṣriyyah lī al-Ta’līf wa al-Tarjamah, 1965.
- Abū Ḥayyān, Athīr al-Dīn. *Al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ*. Edited by Ṣidqī Muḥammad Jamīl. 11 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 2010.
- ‘Alā’ al-Dīn al-Bukhārī. *Muljimat al-Mujassimah*. Edited by Sa‘īd Fūdah. Beirut: Dār al-Dhakhā’ir, 2013.
- Al-Anbārī, Abū al-Barakāt. *Nuzhat al-Alibbā’*. Edited by Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr al-‘Arabī, 1998.
- Aṣfahānī, Shams al-Dīn al-. *Al-Muqaddimāt*. Edited by Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Raḥīm. Dubai: Jā’izat Dudai al-Dawliyyah lī al-Qur’ān al-Karīm, 2019.
- ‘Askarī Abū Ḥilāl al-. *Al-Ṣinā’atayn*. Beirut: Al-Maktabah al-‘Aṣriyyah, 2013.
- Bāqillānī, Abū Bakr al-. *Al-Inṣāf fī mā yajib i’tiqāduh wa lā yajūz al-Jahl bih*. Edited by Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī. Cairo: Al-Maktabah al-Azhariyyah lī al-Turāth, 2000.
- Bāqillānī, Abū Bakr al-. *Al-Intiṣār lī al-Qur’ān*, Edited by Muḥammad ‘Iṣām al-Quḍāh. Beirut: Dār ibn Ḥazm, 2001.
- . *I’jāz al-Qur’ān*. Edited by Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Mun‘im Khafājī. Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 2013.
- Biqā’ī, Burhān al-. *Naẓm al-Durar fī Tanāsub al-Āyāt wa al-Suwar*. Edited by ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Mahdī. 8 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2011.
- Bustānī Maḥmūd al-. *Al-Manhaj al-Binā’ī fī al-Tafsīr*. Beirut: Dār al-Ḥādī, 2001.
- . *Al-Tafsīr al-Binā’ī lī al-Qur’ān al-Karīm*. 5 vols. Mashhad: Majma‘ al-Buḥūth al-Islāmiyyah, 1422/2001.
- Dāwūdī, Shams al-. *Ṭabaqāt al-Mufasssīrīn*. Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, 2008.
- Dhahabī, Shams al-Dīn al-. *Al-‘Ibar fī Khabar man Ghabar*. Edited by Ṣalāh al-Dīn al-Munjjid. 6 vols. Kuwait: 1963.
- Farāhī, ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd al-. *Ḥujaj al-Qur’ān: Al-Ḥikmah al-Bāzighah wa al-Ḥujjah al-Bālighah*, (Azamgarh: Dairah Hameedia Madrasatul Islah, 2009.

- . *Nizām al-Qurʿān wa Taʿwīl al-Furqān bī al-Furqān*. Edited by ʿUbayd Allāh al-Farāhī. 2 vols. Tunisia: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2012.
- Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid al-. *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn*. 10 vols. Jeddah: Dār al-Minhāj, 2011.
- Ḥamawī, Ibn Ḥujjah al-. *Khizānat al-Adab*. Edited Ṣalāḥ al-Hawwārī. 2 vols. Beirut, Al-Maktabah al-ʿAṣriyyah, 2006.
- Ḥamawī, Yaʿqūb al-. *Muʿjam al-Buldān*. 5 vols. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1993.
- . *Muʿjam al-Udabāʾ*. Edited Iḥsān ʿAbbās. 7 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1993.
- Ḥātimī, Abū ʿAlī al-. *Ḥilyat al-Muḥāḍarah*. Baghdad: Dar al-Rashid, 1979.
- Ibn Abū al-Iṣbaʿ, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīm. *Taḥrīr al-Taḥbīr*. Cairo: Al-Majlis al-Aʿlā lī al-Shuʿūn al-Islāmiyyah, 2012.
- Ibn ʿĀdil, Abū Ḥaṣṣ. *Al-Lubāb fī ʿUlūm al-Kitāb*. Edited by ʿĀdil ʿAbd al-Mawjūd and ʿAlī Muʿawwad. 20 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 2011.
- Ibn al-Athīr, Ḍiyāʾ al-Dīn. *Al-Mathal al-Sāʿir*. Edited by Muḥammad Muḥyī al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Ḥāmid. 2 vols. Beirut: Al-Maktabah al-ʿAṣriyyah, 2010.
- Ibn al-Khayyāt, ʿAbd al-Raḥīm. *Al-Intiṣār*. Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfah al-Dīniyyah, 1988.
- Ibn al-Muʿtazz, *Kitāb al-Badīʿ*. Edited by ʿIrfān Maṭrajī. Beirut: Muʿassasat al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyyah, 2012.
- Ibn al-Muthannā, Abū ʿUbaydah. *Majāz al-Qurʿān*. Edited by Fuat Sezgin. 2 vols. Cairo: Maktabat al-Khanjī, 1954.
- Ibn al-Qayyim, Shams al-Dīn. *Badāʾiʿ al-Fawāʾid*. Edited by Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Salām. 2 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1994.
- Ibn al-Zubayr, Jaʿfar. *Al-Burhān fī Tanāsuh Suwar al-Qurʿān*. Al-Dammām: Dār ibn al-Jawzī, 1428 AH, 2007.
- Ibn ʿĀshūr, Muḥammad al-Ṭāhir. *Al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*. 12 vols. Tunisia: Al-Dār al-Tūnisiyyah lī al-Nashr, 1984.
- Ibn Ḥajar, Shihāb al-Dīn. *Inbāʾ al-Ghumr bī Anbāʾ al-ʿUmr*. Edited by Ḥusayn Ḥabashī. 4 vols. Cairo: Al-Majlis al-Aʿlā lī al-Shuʿūn al-Islāmiyyah, 1972.
- Ibn Jinnī, Abū al-Fath. *Al-Khaṣāʾiṣ*. Edited by ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd Hindāwī. 3 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 2013.
- Ibn Khallikān, Abū al-ʿAbbās, *Wafayāt al-Aʿyān*. Edited by Iḥsān ʿAbbās. 8 vols. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1994.

- Ibn Nāsir al-Dīn al-Dimashqī, Muḥammad. *Al-Radd al-Wāfir*. Beirut: Al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1991.
- Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, Abū Bakr. *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyyah*. Edited by al-Ḥāfiẓ Khān. 2 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Nadwah al-Jadīdah, 1987.
- Ibn Qutaybah, Abū Muḥammad. *Ta'wīl Mushkil al-Qur'ān*. Cairo: Maktabat Dār al-Turāth, 2006.
- Ibn Rushd, Abū al-Walīd. *Manāhij al-Adillah fī 'Aqā'id al-Millah*. Edited by Maḥmūd Qāsim. Cairo: Al-Anglo al-Miṣriyyah, 1964.
- Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī. *Al-Najāh*. Beirut: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadīdah, 1985.
- Ibn Ṭabātabā, Abū al-Ḥasan. *'Iyār al-Shi'r*. Damascus: Manshūrāt Ittiḥād al-Kuttāb al-'Arab, 2005.
- Ikhwān al-Ṣafa. *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā*. 4 vols. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1966.
- Jābirī, Muḥammad 'Ābid al-. *Fahm al-Qur'ān al-Karīm: Al-Tafsīr al-Wāḍiḥ ḥasba Tartīb al-Nuzūl*. Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥdah al-'Arabiyyah, 2012.
- . *Madkhal ilā al-Qur'ān al-Karīm: Fī al-Ta'rīf bi al-Qur'ān*. Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥdah al-'Arabiyyah, 2013.
- Jāḥiẓ, Abū 'Uthmān al-. *Al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn*. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1970.
- . *Al-Ḥayawān*. Edited by Muḥammad Bāsil 'Uyūn al-Sūd. 4 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2011.
- . *Rasā'il al-Jāḥiẓ*, Edited by 'Abd al-Salām Ḥārūn. 4 vols. Cairo: Maktabat al-Khanjī, 1964.
- . *Thalāth Rasā'il lī Abī 'Uthmān al-Jāḥiẓ*. Edited by J. Finkel in Cairo, Salafiyah press 1962.
- Jurjānī, 'Abd al-Qāhir al-. Al-Risālah al-Shāfiyah, In *Thalāth Rasā'il fī i'jāz al-Qur'ān*, edited by Muḥammad Khalaf Allāh and Muhammad Zaghlūl Sallām. Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1956.
- . *Asrār al-Balāghah*. Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Madanī, 1991.
- . *Dalā'il al-I'jāz*. Edited by Maḥmūd Shākir. Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Madanī, 1992.
- Jurjānī, 'Alī ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz. *Al-Wasā'at Bayna al-Mutanabbī wa Khuṣūmih*. Beirut: Al-Maktabah al-'Aṣriyyah, 2010.
- Jushamī, al-Ḥākim al-. *al-Tahdhīb fī al-Tafsīr*. Edited by 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sālimī. 9 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Miṣrī/Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnānī, 2019.

- Juwaynī, Ḍiyā' al-Dīn al-. *Al-Shāmīl fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*. Edited by 'Alī Sāmī al-Nashshār, Fayṣal 'Awn, and Suhayr Mukhtār. Alexandria: Mansha'at al-Ma'ārif, 1969.
- Khaṭṭābī, Abū Sulaymān al-. *Al-Ghunyah 'an al-Kalam wa Ahlih*. Cairo: Dār al-Minhāj, 2004.
- Lālakā'ī, Ḥibatu Allāh al-. *Sharḥ Uṣūl I'tiqād Ahl al-Sunnah*. Alexandria: Dār al-Baṣīrah, 2001.
- Nasafī, Burhān al-Dīn al-. *Tafsīr Sūrat al-Nās*. Edited by 'Iyādah al-Kabīsī. Dubai: Dār al-Buḥūth lī al-Dirāsāt al-Islāmiyyah wa Ihyā' al-Turāth, 2001.
- Nīsābūrī, Nizām al-Dīn al-. *Gharā'ib al-Qur'ān wa Raghā'ib al-Furqān*. 6 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1996.
- Qarṭajannī, Abū al-Ḥasan Ḥazim al-. *Minhāj al-Bulaghā'*. Beirut, Dar al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1986.
- Qazwīnī, Jalāl al-Dīn al-. *Al-Īḍāḥ*. Riyāḍ: Maktabat al-Ma'ārif, 2006.
- Qiftī, 'Alī ibn Yūsuf al-. *Tārīkh al-Ḥukamā'*. Cairo: Al-Khanjī, n.d.
- Quṭb, Sayyid, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*. Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 2004.
- Rāzī, Fakhr al-Dīn al-. *Al-Jadal*. Edited by Muḥammad Zaynū and Sālīm Shab'anyah. Damascus: Dār al-Bayrūtī, 2018.
- . *Al-Kāshif 'an Uṣūl al-Dalā'il wa Fuṣūl al-'Ilal*. Edited by Aḥmad Ḥijāzī al-Ṣaqqā. Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1992.
- . *Al-Maḥṣūl fī 'Ilm Uṣūl al-Fiqh*. Edited by Ṭāhā Jābir al-'Alwānī. 3 vols. Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 2019.
- . *Al-Manṭiq al-Kabīr*. Edited by Ṭurghūd Āq Yūz. 2 vols. Riyadh: Dār Fāris, 2022.
- . *Al-Maṭālib al-'Āliyah*. Edited by Aḥmad Ḥijāzī al-Ṣaqqā. 5 vols. Cairo: Al-Maktabah al-Azhariyyah, 2013.
- . *Asrār al-Tanzīl wa Anwār al-Ta'wīl*. Edited by Maḥmūd Muḥammad, Baba al-Shaykh Umar and Ṣāliḥ 'Abd al-Fattāḥ. Beirut: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 2011.
- . *'Iṣmat al-Anbiyā'*. Cairo: Al-Maktabah al-Azhariyyah, 2009.
- . *I'tiqādāt firaq al-Muslimīn wa al-Mushrikīn*. Edited by 'Alī Sāmī al-Nashshār. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1982.
- . *Kitāb al-Arba'in*. Edited by Aḥmad Ḥijāzī al-Ṣaqqā. Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 2004.
- . *Kitāb al-Muḥaṣṣal wa ḥuwa Afkār al-Mutaqaddimīn wa al-Muta'akhhirīn min al-'Ulamā' wa al-Ḥukamā' wa al-Mutakallimīn*. Edited by Hüseyin Atay. Cairo: Maktabat al-Kulliyāt al-Azhariyyah, 1991.

- . *Kitāb al-Nafs wa al-Rūḥ wa Sharḥ Quwāhumā fī ‘Ilm al-Akhlāq*. Edited by ‘Abd Allāh Ismā‘īl. Cairo: Al-Maktabah al-Azhariyyah lī al-Turāth, 2013.
- . *Ma ‘ālim Uṣūl al-Dīn*. Edited by Nizār Ḥammādī. Kuwait: Dār al-Ḍiyā’, 2012.
- . *Mafātih al-Ghayb*. 18 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2009.
- . *Manāqib al-Imām al-Shāfi‘ī*. Edited by Aḥmad Ḥijāzī al-Ṣaqqā. Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1993.
- . *Munāẓarah fī al-Radd ‘alā al-Nasāra*. Edited by ‘Abd al-Majīd al-Najjār. Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1986.
- . *Nihāyat al-Ījāz fī Dirāyat al-Ījāz*. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 2004.
- . *Risālah fī al-Tanbīh ‘alā Ba‘ḍ al-Asrār al-Mūda‘ah fī ba‘ḍ suwar al-Qur‘ān al-‘Aẓīm wa al-Furqān al-Karīm*. Edited by Bahā’ al-Dīn Dārthamā. Beirut: Dār ibn Ḥazm, 2012.
- Rummānī, Khaṭṭābī and Jurjānī. *Three Treatises on the Ījāz of the Qur‘ān*. Edited by Muḥammad Khalafallāh Aḥmad and Muhammad Zaghlūl Sallām. Translated by Issa J. Boullata; reviewed by Terri L. DeYoung, Reading: Garnett, 2015.
- Shāfi‘ī, Muḥammad ibn Idrīs., *Al-Risālah*. Edited by Aḥmad Shākir. Cairo: Maṭba‘at Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1940.
- Shahrazūrī, Shams al-Dīn al-. *Tārīkh al-Ḥukamā’ aw Nuzhat al-Arwāḥ wa Rawḍat al-Afrāḥ. Jam‘iyyat al-Da‘wah al-Islāmiyyah*, n.d.
- Shāṭibī, Abū Ishāq al-. *Al-Muwāfaqāt*. Edited Mashhūr Āl Salmān. 6 vols. Al-Khubar: Dār ibn ‘Affān, 1997.
- Shāṭibī, Abū Ishāq al-. *Al-Ifādāt wa al-Inshādāt*. Edited by Muḥammad Abū al-Ajfan. Beirut: Mu‘assasat al-Risālah, 1983.
- Subkī, Tāj al-Dīn al-. *Mu‘īd al-Ni‘am wa Mubīd al-Niqam*. Beirut: Al-Maktabah al-‘Aṣriyyah, 2007.
- . *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi‘ī*. Edited Maḥmūd al-Ṭanāḥi and ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ al-Ḥulw. 10 vols. Cairo: Al-Ḥalabī Publisher, 1964.
- Suyūṭī, Jalāl al-Dīn al-. *Al-Itqān fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur‘ān*. Beirut: Al-Maktabah al-‘Aṣriyyah, 2015.
- . *Qatf al-Azhār fī Kashf al-Asrār*. 2 vols. Doha: Wazārat al-Awfāq, 1994.
- . *Al-Itqān fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur‘ān*. Beirut: al-Maktabah al-‘Aṣriyyah, 2015.
- Ṭabarī, Ibn Jarīr al-. *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī*. Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1967.
- Ṭabaṭaba‘ī, al-Sayid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-. *Al-Qur‘ān fī al-Islām*. Beirut: Dār al-Zahrā’, 1973.
- Tinnīsī, Ibn Wakī‘ al-. *Al-Munṣif*. Damascus, Dar Qutaybah, 1982.

Wāḥidī, Abū al-Ḥasan al-. *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1991.

Zamakhsharī, Abū al-Qāsim al-. *Al-Kashshāf*. 4 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2009.

Zarkashī, Badr al-Dīn al-. *Al-Burhān fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān*. 4 vols. Edited by Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm. Cairo: al-Maktabah al-‘Aṣriyyah, 2009.

## Secondary Sources

‘Abd al-Ḥaqq, Muḥammad. “Ibn Sīnā’s Interpretation of the Qur’ān.” *Islamic Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (1988): 46-56.

‘Abd al-Ra’ūf. *Al-Bāqillānī wa Kitābuh I’jāz al-Qur’ān*. Beirut: Dār Maktabat al-Ḥayāh, 1987.

Abdel Haleem, M. A. S. “Structural Coherence in the Qur’an: How to See the Connections.” In *Structural Dividers in the Qur’an*, edited by Marianna Klar, 338-364. London: Routledge, 2020.

———. “The Qur’anic Employment of the Story of Noah.” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 8, no. 1 (February 2006): 38–57.

Abdullah Saeed. *Interpreting the Qur’ān: Towards a Contemporary Approach*. New York: Routledge, 2006.

———. *The Qur’an: An Introduction*. London: Routledge, 2008.

Abū Mūsa, Muḥammad. *Al-I’jāz al-Balāghī: Dirāsah Tahlīliyyah lī Turāth Ahl al-‘Ilm*. Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, 1997.

———. *Al-I’jāz al-Balāghī: Dirāsah Tahlīliyyah lī Turāth Ahl al-‘Ilm*. Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, 1997.

———. *Murāja ‘āt fī ‘Uṣūl al-Dars al-Balāghī*. Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, 2008.

Abū Zayd, Muṣṭafa. *Al-Naskh fī al-Qur’ān: Dirāsah Tashrī‘iyyah Tārīkhiyyah Naqdiyyah*. Almansurah: Dār al-Wafā’, 1987.

Abū Zayd, Naṣr Ḥāmid. *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ Dirāsah fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān*. Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-‘Arabī, 1994.

Abu-Deeb, Kamal. “Aesthetically oriented interpretations of the Qur’ān.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Qur’anic Studies*, edited by Mustafa Shah and Muhammad Abdel Haleem, 394-805. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.



- . “Studies in the Majāz and the Metaphorical Language of the Qur’ān: Abū ‘Ubayda and al-Sharīf al-Raḍī.” In *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur’ān*, edited by Issa J. Boullata, 310-353. Richmond, Surrey, U.K.: Curzon Press, 2000.
- Adamson, Peter. *Philosophy in the Islamic World: A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Almagor, Ella, “The Early Meaning of Majāz and the Nature of Abū ‘Ubayda’s Exegesis.” In *Studia Orientalia Memoriae D. H. Baneth Dedicata*, edited by S. Shaked, Joseph L., Blau, Shlomo, Pines, and M. Kister, 307-326. Jerusalem: Magnes, 1979.
- Al-Matroudi, Abdul Hakim. “Manhaj al-Qur’ān fī Taqrīr al-Aḥkām: Dirāsah Taḥlīliyyah lī Āyāt al-Ṣadaqah fī Sūrat al-Baqarah.” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 23, no. 1 (2021):180-196.
- . “The Relationship Between Legal and Non-legal Verses in the Qur’ān: An Analytical Study of the Three Themes of the Qur’an.” *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law* 29, no. 2 (2016): 261-283.
- ‘Āṣī, Ḥasan. *Al-Tafsīr al-Qur’ānī wa al-Lughal al-Ṣūfiyyah fī Falsafat Ibn Sīnā*. Beirut: Al-Mu’assasah al-Jāmi‘iyyah lī al-Dirāsāt wa al-Nashr wa al-Tawzī’, 1983.
- ‘Atīq, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz. *Fī Tārīkh al-Balāghah al-‘Arabiyyah*. Beirut: Dār al-Naḥḍah al-‘Arabiyyah, n.d.
- ‘Awlaqī, Ṣāliḥ al-. *Al-Dars al-Lughawī ‘inda ibn ‘Ādil al-Ḥanbalī fī Kitābih al-Lubāb fī ‘Ulūm al-Kitāb*. Damascus: Nūr Ḥūrān, 2020.
- Azzami, Muhammad. *The History of the Qur’anic Text from Revelation to Compilation*. Leicester: UK Islamic Academy, 2003.
- Banqīb, ‘Abd Allāh. *Manāḥij al-Taḥlīl al-Balāghī ‘Inda ‘Ulamā’ al-I’jāz*. Riyāḍ: Dār Kunūz Ishbīliyyah, 2009.
- Bayyūmī, Muhammad Rajab al-. *Khutuwāt al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī lī al-Qur’ān al-Karīm*. Cairo: Al-Ḥay’at al-‘Āmmah lī shu’ūn al-maṭābi‘ al-Amīriyyah, 2017.
- Bell, Richard. *The Qur’ān Translated with a Critical Re-arrangement of the Surahs*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1960.
- Bobzin, Hartmut. “The Seal of the Prophets’: Towards an Understanding of Muhammad’s Prophethood.” In *The Qur’ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur’anic Milieu*, edited by Angelica Neuwirth, Nicola Sinai, and Michael Marx, 565-585. Leiden: Brill, 2010.
- Bowering, Gerhard. “Recent Research on the Construction of the Qur’ān.” In *The Qur’ān in Its Historical Context*, edited by Gabriel Said Reynolds, 70-87. London: Routledge, 2008.

- Burton, John. "The Exegesis of Q. 2: 106 and the Islamic Theories of naskh: mā nansakh min āya aw nansaha na'ti bikhairin minhā aw mithlihā." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 48, no. 3 (1985):452-455.
- . *The Collection of the Qur'ān*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.
- Campanini, Massimo. *The Qur'an: the Basics*. Translated by Oliver Leaman. London: Routledge, 2016.
- Ceylan, Yasin. *Theology and Tafṣīr in the Major Works of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī*. Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1996.
- Cuypers, Michel. "Semitic Rhetoric as a Key to the Question of the naẓm of the Qur'anic Text." *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 13, no. 1 (2011): 1-24.
- . *The Banquet: A Reading of the Fifth Sura of the Qur'an*. Translated by Patricia Kelly. Miami, FL: Convivium Press, 2009.
- David, Powers S. "The Exegetical Genre nāsikh al-Qur'ān wa mansūkhuhu." In *Approaches to the History of the Qur'ān*, edited by Andrew Rippin, 117-138. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2013.
- Dayeh, Islam. "Asbāb al-nuzūl: 'ilman min 'ulūm al-Qur'ān." *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 9, no. 1 (2007):111-116.
- Ḍayf, Shawqī. *Al-Balāghah Taṭawwur wa Tārīkh*. Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1992.
- Dhahabī, Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-. *Al-Tafṣīr wa al-Mufassirūn*. Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2012.
- Dirāz, Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh. *Al-Naba' al-'Azīm*. Kuwait: Dār al-Qalam, n.d.
- Donner, Fred. *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of the Islamic Historical Writing*. Princeton: Darwin Press, 1998.
- . "The Qur'ān in Recent Scholarship: Challenges and Desiderata." In *The Qur'ān in Its Historical Context*, edited by Gabriel Said Reynolds, 29-50. London: Routledge, 2008.
- Drāz, Muḥammad 'Abdullāh. *The Qur'ān: An Eternal Challenge*. Translated by Adil Salahi. Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 2017.
- El-Awa, Salwa. *Textual Relations in the Qur'ān: Relevance, Coherence and Structure*. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- El-Sheikh, Salah. "Al-Mujādalah and Al-Mujādilah Then and Now: Kalam, Dialectical Argument, and Practical Reason in the Qur'ān." *The Muslim World* 93, no. 1 (2003): 1-50.

- Erlwein, Hannah C. “Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī on the Question ‘Why Worship God?’” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 21, no. 2 (2019): 39-67.
- Ernst, Carl W. *How to Read the Qur’ān: A New Guide, with Select Translations*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011.
- Farrin, Raymond K. “Surat al-Baqara: A Structural Analysis.” *Muslim World* 100 no.1 (2010): 17–32.
- Fierro, Maribel. “al-Shāṭibī.” Edited by P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W.P. Heinrichs. *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Leiden: Brill, 1997.
- Frank, Richard M. “Knowledge and Taqlīd: The Foundations of Religious Belief in Classical Ash‘arism.” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 109, no. 1 (1989): 37–62.
- Friedman, Rachel Anne. “Theological Echoes of Literary Controversies: Reading Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī’s I’jāz al-Qur’ān in Light of the Debate over Badī‘ Style.” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 49, no. 4 (2018): 305-329.
- Goldziher, Ignaz. “Aus der Theologie des Fakhr al-din al-Razī.” *Der Islam* 3. (1912): 213-47.
- . *Die Richtungen der islamischen Koranauslegung*. Leiden: Brill, 1920.
- Griffel, Frank. “al-Ghazālī’s Concept of Prophecy: The Introduction of Avicennan Psychology into Ash‘arite Theology.” *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 14 (2004):101-144.
- . “Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī.” Edited by Henrik Lagerlund. Dordrecht and London, *Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy: Philosophy Between 500 and 1500*. Springer, 2011.
- . “On Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s Life and the Patronage He Received.” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 18, no. 3 (2007): 313–344.
- . *The Formation of Post-Classical Philosophy in Islam*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2021.
- Grunebaum, Gustave E Von. *A Tenth-century Document of Arabic Literary Theory and Criticism: The sections on poetry of al-Bāqillānī’s I’jāz al-Qur’ān*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950.
- Günther, Sebastian. “In our days, religion has once again become something alien: Al-Khaṭṭābī’s Critique of the State of Religious Learning in Tenth-century Islam.” *American Journal of Islam and Society* 25, no. 3 (July 1, 2008): 1–30.
- Gwynne, Rosalind W. *Logic, Rhetoric and Legal Reasoning in the Qur’an: God’s Arguments*. London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004.

- Hallaq, Wael B. "Groundwork of the Moral Law: A New Look at the Qur'ān and the Genesis of Shari'a." *Islamic Law and Society* 16, no. 1 (2009): 239-279.
- Ḥanafī, Ḥasan. *Al-Wahy wa al-Wāqī': Dirāsah fī Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, In *Al-Islām wa al-Ḥadāthah*. London: Dār al-Sāqī, 1990.
- Ḥanafī, Ḥasan. *Humūm al-Fikr wa al-Waṭan*. Cairo: Dār Qibā', 1998.
- . *Min al-Naql ilā al-'Aql*. Cairo: Al-Ḥay'ah al-Miṣriyyah al-'Āmmah lī al-Kitāb, 2014.
- Harb, Lara. *Arabic Poetics: Aesthetic Experience in Classical Arabic Literature*. Cambridge University Press, 2020.
- Ḥarrālī, Abū al-Ḥasan al-. *Turāth Abī al-Ḥasan al-Ḥarrālī al-Murrākushī fī al-tafsīr*. Edited by al-Khayyāfī. Al-Dār al-Bayḍā': Maṭba'at al-Najāḥ al-Jadīdah, 1997.
- Haywood, John A. "Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Contribution to the Ideas of Ultimate Reality and Meaning." *Ultimate Reality and Meaning* 2, no. 4 (1979):264-291.
- Heinrichs, Wolfhart. "Contacts between scriptural hermeneutics and literary theory in Islam: the Case of Majāz," *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte der Arabisch-Islamischen Wissenschaften* 7, (1991/92): 253-254.
- . "Abd al-Qāhir." Edited by Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey. *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*. London: Routledge, 1998.
- . "Ancient and Moderns." Edited by Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey. *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*. London: Routledge, 1998.
- . "On the Genesis of the Ḥaqīqa-Majāz Dichotomy." *Studia Islamica* 59 (1984): 111-140.
- Hilāl, Mahir. "Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī Balāghiyān." Baghdād: Al-Dār al-Waṭaniyyah, 1977.
- Ḥusayn, 'Abd al-Qādir. *Al-Mukhtaṣar fī Tārīkh al-Balāghah*. Cairo: Dār Gharīb, 2001.
- Holtzman, Livnat. "Debating the doctrine of jabr (compulsion): Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya reads Fakhr al-Din al-Razi." In *Islamic Theology, Philosophy and Law: Debating Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyya*, edited by Birgit Krawietz, Georges Tamer & Alina Kokoschka, 62-93. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013.
- Ḥusayn, 'Abd al-Qādir. *Al-Mukhtasar fī Tārīkh al-Balāghah*. Beirut, Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 1982.
- Izutsu, Toshihiko. *Ethico-Religious Concepts of the Qur'ān*. Montreal: McGill University, 2002.

- Jabal, Muḥammad. *Wathāqat Naql al-Naṣṣ al-Qur'ānī al-Karīm*. Cairo: Maktabat al-Ādāb, 2015.
- Jaffer, Tariq. "Review of Les secrets de l'invisible: Essai sur le Grand Commentaire de Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, by Michael Legarde." *Journal Of Qur'anic Studies* 15, no. 3 (2013): 267-280.
- . "Theological Commentaries." In *Oxford Handbook of Qur'anic Studies*, edited by Abdel Haleem and Mustafa Shah, 766-779. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.
- . *Rāzī: Master of Quranic Interpretation and Theological Reasoning*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Jallād, Mājid al-. *Nizām al-Dīn al-Nīsābūrī wa Manhajuh fī al-Tafsīr*. Ammān: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, 2000.
- Jamal, Bassām al-. *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*. Al-Dār al-Bayḍā': Al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-'Arabī, 2005.
- Jazzār, Maḥmūd al-. *Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī wa al-Taṣawwuf*. Alexandria: Mansha'at al-Ma'ārif, 2000.
- Johns, Anthony H. "Prophets and Personalities of the Qur'an." In *The Oxford Handbook of Qur'anic Studies*, edited by Abdel Haleem and Mustafa Shah, 488-501. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.
- Jomier, Jacques. "Les Mafatih al-ghayb de l'imam Fakhr al-Din al-Razi: Quelques dates, lieux, manuscrits." *Melanges Institut Dominicain d'Études orientales* 13 (1977): 253–290
- Jomier, Jacques. *The Great Themes of the Qur'an*. Translated by Zoe Hersov. London: SCM Press Ltd, 1997.
- Jundī, Darwīsh al-. *Nazariyyat 'Abd al-Qāhir fī al-Naẓm*. Cairo: Maktabat Nahḍat Miṣr, 1960.
- Juwaynī, Muṣṭafa. *Manhaj al-Zamakhsharī fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān wa Bayān I'jāzih*. Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, n.d.
- Karabela, Mehmet Kadri, "The Development of Dialectic and Argumentation Theory in Post-classical Islamic Intellectual History." Ph.D., McGill University, 2011.
- Kate Zebiri, "Argumentation," In *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'ān*, edited by Andrew Rippin, 266-281. Oxford: Blackwell, 2004.
- Kermani, Navid. *God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Quran*. Translated by Tony Crawford. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015.
- Key, Alexander. *Language between God and the Poets: Ma'na in the Eleventh Century*. Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2018.

- Khaṭīb, ‘Azīz al-. *Al-Ījāz al-Balāghī fī al-Qur’ān: Dirāsah Taḥlīliyyah ‘Inda Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī*. Beirut: Dār Qutaybah, 2011.
- Kholeif, Fathalla. *A Study on Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and His Controversies in Transoxiana*. Beirut: International Publication Service, 1966.
- Khūlī, Amīn al-. *Manāhij Tajdīd*. Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘rifah, 1961.
- Klar, Marianna. “Text Critical Approaches to Sura Structure: Combining Synchronicity with Diachronicity in Sūrat al-Baqara. Part One.” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 19, no. 1 (2017): 1-40.
- Lacher, Pierre. “Arabic Linguistic Tradition II: Pragmatics.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Arabic Linguistics*, edited by Jonathan Owens, 185-212. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Lane, Andrew J. *A Traditional Mu‘tazilite Qur’ān Commentary*. Leiden, Brill, 2006.
- Larkin, Margaret. *The Theology of Meaning: Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani's Theory of Discourse*. New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1995.
- Lowry, Joseph E. “Law, Structure, and Meaning in Sūrat al-Baqarah.” *Journal of the International Quranic Studies* 2, (2017):111-148.
- Majdūb, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-. *Al-Rāzī min Khilāl Tafsīrih*. Tunisia: Al-Dār al-‘Arabiyyah lī al-Kitāb, 1980.
- Martin, Richard C. “The Role of the Basrah Mu‘tazilah in Formulating the Doctrine of the Apologetic Miracle.” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 39, no. 3, (Jul., 1980): 175–189.
- Marx, Michael. “Glimpses of Mariology in the Qur’an: From Hagiography to Theology via Religious-Political Debate.” In *The Qur’ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur’anic Milieu*, edited by Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai and Michael Marx, 533-564. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010.
- Marzūqī, Abū Ya‘rub al-. *Al-Jaliyy fī al-Tafsīr*. 3 vols. Tunisia: Al-Dār al-Mutawassīṭiyyah lī al-Nashr, 2010.
- Maṭlūb, Aḥmad. “Athar Ibn Jinnī fī ‘Abd al-Qāhir wa Ibn al-Athīr.” *Majallat al-Majma‘ al-‘Ilmī al-‘Irāqī* 41, (1990): 58-87.
- Mawṣilī, Akram al-. *Al-Imām Burhān al-Dīn al-Biqā‘ī (808-885 AH) wa Manhajuh fī al-Tafsīr*. Jordan: Dār al-Faḥ, 2014.
- McAuliffe, Jane Dammen. “Debate with them in a better way”: The Construction of a Qur’anic Commonplace.” In *Myth, Historical Archetypes and Symbolic Figures in Arabic*

*Literature: Towards a New Hermeneutical Approach*, edited by Angelica Neuwirth, Birgit Embaló, Sebastian Günther, and Maher Jarrar, 163-188. Beirut : Orient - Institut der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft, 1999.

Meisami, J. S. *Structure and Meaning in Medieval Arabic and Persian Lyric Poetry: Orient Pearls*. London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003.

Miller, Larry Benjamin. *Islamic disputation theory. The uses and rules of argument in medieval Islam*. Cham: Springer, 2020.

Mir, Mustansir. "The Sura as a Unity: A Twentieth-Century Development in Qur'ān Exegesis." In *Approaches to the Qur'ān*, edited by G. R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef, 211-224. London: Routledge, 1993.

———. "Continuity, Context, and Coherence in the Qur'ān: A Brief Review of the Idea of Naẓm in Tafsīr Literature." *Al-Bayan: Journal of Qur'an and Hadith Studies*, 11(2): 15-29.

———. "Some Aspects of Narration in the Quran." In *Sacred Tropes: Tanakh, New Testament, and Qur'ān as Literature and Culture*, edited by Roberta Sterman Sabbath, 93-106. Leiden: Brill, 2009.

———. "Some figures of speech in the Qur'ān." *Religion & Literature* 40, no. 3 (2008): 32.

———. "The Structure of the Qur'an: the Inner Dynamic of the Surah." In *Oxford Handbook of Qur'anic Studies*, edited by Abdel Haleem and Mustafa Shah, 362-373. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.

———. *Coherence in the Qur'ān*. Washington: American Trust Publication, 1987.

Miṣrī, Ra'fat al-. *Al-Munāsabāt al-Qur'āniyyah 'inda al-Imām al-Rāzī fī Tafsīrih Mafātīh al-Ghayb*. Amman: Dār al-Nūr al-Mubīn, 2016.

Motzki, H. "The Collection of the Qur'ān: A Reconsideration of Western Views in Light of Recent Methodological Developments." *Der Islam* 78, (2001): 1-34.

Motzki, Harald. "Alternative Accounts of the Qur'ān's Formation." In *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'ān*, edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, 59–76. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Mourison, Robert G. "Reasons for a Scientific Portrayal of Nature in Medieval Commentaries on the Qur'ān." *Arabica* 52 (2005): 182-203.

———. "Natural Theology and the Qur'ān." *Journal of Quranic Studies* 15, no. 1 (2013): 1–22.

———. "The Portrayal of Nature in a Medieval Qur'an Commentary." *Studia Islamica*, 94 (2002): 115–38.

- . *Islam and Science: The Intellectual Career of Nizam al-Din al-Nisaburi*. New York: Routledge, 2007.
- Mubārak, Māzin al-. *Al-Mūjaz fī Tārīkh al-Balāghah*. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1999.
- Muḥammad, Sa‘d ‘Abd al-‘Azīm. *Naẓm al-Qur‘ān min Turāth al-Jāhīz*. Cairo: Maktabat al-Zahrā’, 1995.
- Neuwirth, Angelica. “Structural, Linguistic and Literary Features.” In *Cambridge companion to the Quran*, edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, 97–113. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- . “Negotiating Justice: A Pre- Canonical Reading of the Qur’anic Creation Accounts (Part I).” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 2, no. 1 (2000): 25–41.
- . “Negotiating Justice: A Pre- Canonical Reading of the Qur’anic Creation Accounts (Part I).” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 2, no. 1 (2000): 25–41.
- . “Some Remarks on the Special Linguistic and Literary Character of the Qur’ān.” In *The Qur’ān: Style and Contents*, edited by Andrew Rippin. Aldershot, 253-257. VT: Ashgate, 2001.
- Nicholas, Reynold Alleyne. *A Literary History of the Arabs*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1907.
- Nicolai Sinai, The Qur’ān as Process, In *The Qur’ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur’anic Milieu*, edited by Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, and Michael Marx. Leiden, 407–439. Leiden: Brill, 2010.
- Novikoff, Alex J. *The Medieval Culture of Disputation: Pedagogy, Practice and Performance*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013.
- Oliver Leaman, “Arguments and the Qur’ān,” In *An Encyclopedia of the Qur’ān*, edited by Oliver Leaman, 55-67. London: Routledge, 2015.
- Palacios, Miguel Asín. “Los precedentes musulmanes del Pari de Pascal.” In *Boletín de la Biblioteca Menéndez y Pelayo Santander II*, (1920): 161–233.
- Powers, David. “On the Abrogation of the Bequest Verses.” *Arabica* 29, no. 3 (September 1982): 256–295.
- Rādī, ‘Abd al-Ḥakīm. *Al-Ab‘ād al-Kalāmiyyah wa al-Falsafiyah fī al-Fikr al-Balāghī wa al-Naqdī ‘inda al-Jāhīz*. Cairo: Maktabat al-Ādāb, 2006.
- Rahman, Fazlur. *Prophecy in Islam Philosophy and Orthodoxy*. London & New York: Routledge, 2008.



- Rammuny, Raji M. "Al-Jurjānī: A Pioneer of Grammatical and Linguistic Studies." *Istoriographia Linguistica* 12, no. 3 (January 1985): 351–371.
- Reda, Nevin. *The al-Baqara Crescendo: Understanding the Qur'an's Style, Narrative Structure, and Running Themes*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017.
- Rippin, Andrew. "The Exegetical Genre "asbāb al-nuzūl": A Bibliographical and Terminological Survey." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 48, no. 1 (1985): 1-15.
- . "Lexicographical Texts and the Qur'ān." In *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān*, edited by Andrew Rippin, 158-172. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2013.
- . "The Function of Asbāb al-Nuzūl in Qur'anic Exegesis." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 51, no. 1 (1988): 1-20.
- Robinson, Neal. "The Structure and Interpretation of Sūrat al-Mu'minūn." *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 2, n. 1 (2000): 89-106.
- . *Discovering the Qur'ān: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text*. London: SCM Press, 2003.
- Rustom, Mohammed. "Ibn 'Arabī's Letter to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī: A Study and Translation." *Journal of Islamic Studies* 25, (2014): 113–137.
- Sadeghi, Behnam and Bergmann, Uwe. "The Codex of a Companion of the Prophet and the Qur'ān of the Prophet." *Arabica* 57, (2010): 343-436.
- Saleh, Walid. "A Fifteenth-Century Muslim Hebraist: Al-Biqā'ī and His Defense of Using the Bible to Interpret the Qur'ān." *Speculum* 83, (2008): 629–54.
- . *In Defense of the Bible: A Critical Edition and an Introduction to al-Biqā'ī's Bible Treatise*. Leiden: Brill, 2008.
- Şālih, Şubhī al-. *Mabāḥith fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*. Beirut: Dār al-'Ilm lī al-Malayīn, 2014.
- Sands, Kristin. *Sufi Commentaries on the Qur'ān in Classical Islam*. London: Routledge, 2006.
- Shah, Mustafa. "The word of God: The Epistemology of Language in Classical Islamic Theological Thought." In *Language and Religion*, edited by Robert Yelle, Courtney Handman and Christopher Leirich, 158-192. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019.
- Shihadeh, Ayman. "Aspects of the Reception of Avicenna's Theory of Prophecy in Islamic Theology." In *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association*, edited by R. E. Houser, 23–32. Houston, TX: Philosophy Documentation, 2012.

- . “The Mystic and the Sceptic in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī.” In *Sufism and Theology*, edited by Ayman Shihadeh, 101–122. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007.
- . *The Teleological Ethics of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī*. Leiden: Brill, 2006.
- Shihristānī, al-Sayyid ‘Alī al-. *Jam‘ al-Qur‘ān: Naqd al-Wathā‘iq wa ‘Arḍ al-Haqā‘iq*. Najaf: al-Markaz al-Islāmī lī al-Dirāsāt al-Istirātījiyyah, n.d.
- Sinai, Nicolai. “The Qur‘ān as Process.” In *The Qur‘ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur‘anic Milieu*, edited by Angelica Neuwirth, Nicola Sinai, and Michael Marx, 407–439. Leiden: Brill, 2010.
- Smith, David E. “The Structure of al-Baqarah.” *Muslim World* 91, (2001): 124.
- Smith, Robin. “Logic.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle*, edited by J. Barnes, 27–65. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Stroumsa, Sarah. “Saadya and Jewish Kalam.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, edited by Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman, 71–90. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Thomas, David. *The Bible and Kalam in Bible in Arab Christianity*. Edited by David Thomas. Leiden: Brill, 2007.
- Vasalou, Sophia. “The Miraculous Eloquence of the Qur‘ān: General Trajectories and Individual Approaches.” *Journal of Qur‘anic Studies* 4, no. 2 (2002): 23-53.
- Waardenburg, Jacques. “Faith and Reason in the Argumentation of the Qur‘ān.” In *Perennitas: Studi in Onore di Angelo Brelich*, edited by Angelo Brelich, 619-633. Rome: Edizioni dell’Ateneo, 1980.
- Wael, Hallaq B. *A History of Islamic Legal Theories: An Introduction to Sunni Uṣūl al-Fiqh*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Wansbrough, John. *Qur‘anic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- . *Qur‘anic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*. London: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- . *Qur‘anic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*. New York: Prometheus Books, 2004.
- . *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History*. London: Oxford University Press, 1978.

- Whelan, Estelle. "Forgotten Witness: Evidence for the Early Codification of the Qur'ān." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 118, no. 1 (1998): 1-14.
- Zahniser, Mathias. "Major transitions and Thematic borders in two long Sūras: al-Baqara and al-Nisā'." In *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'ān*, edited by Issa J. Boullata, 26–55. New York: Routledge, 2009.
- Zarzūr, 'Adnān. *Al-Ḥākim al-Jushamī wa Manhajuh fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*. Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 1971.
- Zebiri, Kate. "Argumentation." In *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'ān*, edited by Andrew Rippin, 266-281. Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2006.