Achtar, Ahmad Sakhr (2012) Contact Between Theology, Hermeneutics and Literary Theory: The Role of Majāz in the Interpretation of Anthropomorphic Verses in the Qurʾān from the 2nd AH/8th CE Until the 7th AH/13th CE. PhD Thesis. SOAS, University of London

http://eprints.soas.ac.uk/14565
Contact between theology, hermeneutics and literary theory: The role of *majāz* in the interpretation of anthropomorphic verses in the Qur’ān from the 2nd AH/8th CE until the 7th AH/13th CE.

Ahmad Sakhr Achtar

Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD in Islamic Studies

2012

Department of Near and Middle East
School of Oriental and African Studies
University of London
DEDICATION

To My Parents

And to all the martyrs of Syria

Who have paid their lives for freedom

May God have mercy upon their souls
Declaration for PhD thesis

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 I also undertake that any quotation or paraphrase from the published or unpublished work of another person has been duly acknowledged in the work which I present for examination.

Signed: ____________________________  Date: ________________
Abstract

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

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

From the depth of my heart I would like express my sincere gratitude for:

Dr. Michael Kirwan who read my thesis in a very short notice; I am grateful for his invaluable comments, kindness and generosity.

Prof. Andrew Rippin and Prof. Josef Van Ess for finding time to answer my questions.

This thesis would not have appeared in its present form without the invaluable guidance of my supervisor Prof. Muhammad Abdel Haleem. I would like to express my gratitude for his kindness and support.

From the depth of my heart also I would like to express my gratitude for my father in law Prof. Abdel Karim Khalifa for his continuous moral support and the discussions I have had with him.

No words can express my gratitude to my parents, and from the depth of my heart I thank my sister Lutfiyya and my brother Muhammad.

Finally this thesis would not have come into existence without the love and sacrifice of my wife Nouha Khalifa.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

TITLE PAGE...................................................................................................1
DEDICATION....................................................................................................2
DECLARATION...............................................................................................3
ABSTRACT......................................................................................................4
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS................................................................................5
TABLE OF CONTENTS...................................................................................6

INTRODUCTION.............................................................................................10
Aims and scope of the research.................................................................13
Typology of rhetorical figures in Western thought......................................15
De-anthropomorphism in Judaism and Christianity up to 6th C.E.................22
Approaches to anthropomorphism in the Qur’an.........................................36
Typology of Muslim approaches to anthropomorphic verses......................38
Anti-Anthropomorphism in Islamic thought: A historical overview..............42
Reason and Revelation in ‘Ilm al-Kalām.....................................................45
Q (3:7) as a foundation of ‘ilm al-Ta’wil.......................................................46
Literature review..........................................................................................49
Method and research plan............................................................................51

CHAPTER I

Historical development of theory of majāz..................................................53

1.1 The treatment of majāz and isti’ara before al-Jāḥiz...............................58
CHAPTER II

The beginnings: Early authors

2.1 Mujahid b. Jabr (21/642, d. between 100/718 and 104/722) 122
2.1.1 Interpreting Q (3:7) 122
2.1.2 Mujahid’s interpretation of anthropomorphic verses 123
2.2 Muqatil b. Sulayman (150/767) 126
2.2.1 Muqatil’s Hermeneutics 126
2.2.2 Muqatil’s views of tropical language 127
2.2.3 Muqatil on Anthropomorphism in the Qur’an 128
2.3 Abu ‘Ubayda (110/728-210/825) 133
2.3.1 Interpreting Q (3:7) 134
2.3.2 Abū ‘Ubayda’s usage of the word majāz .................................134
2.3.3 Abū ‘Ubayda on Anthropomorphism in the Qur’ān.........................138

2.4 Al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm al-Rassī (169/246-785/860)...............................144
2.4.1 Interpreting Q (3:7)........................................................................144
2.4.2 Al-Qāsim’s view of the tropical language.....................................146
2.4.3 Al-Qāsim’s interpretation of anthropomorphic verses..................147

2.5 Ibn Qutayba (213/828-276/889)..........................................................152
2.5.1 Ibn Qutayba’s views on Ta‘wīl..........................................................152
2.5.2 Ibn Qutayba on Majāz....................................................................153
2.5.3 Interpreting Anthropomorphic verses.........................................157

Conclusion..............................................................................................161

CHAPTER III

The Mu’tazilites.....................................................................................164

3.1 Early Mu’tazilites on Anthropomorphism........................................167
3.1.1 Abū Bakr al-Āṣamm (d. 200/816 or 201/817)...................................167
3.1.2 Al-Jāḥiz (255/869)...........................................................................169
3.1.3 Al-Jubbā’ī (303/915).......................................................................171
3.2 ‘Abd al-Jabbār (c. 325–415/937–1024)..............................................177
3.2.1 Reason and revelation....................................................................177
3.2.2 The foundation of Qur’ānic hermeneutics.....................................181
3.2.3 ‘Abd al-Jabbār views on majāz.......................................................187
3.2.4 Interpreting anthropomorphic verses.........................................193
3.3 Al-Zamakhshārī (b. 467/1075- d. 538/1144)........................................202
3.3.1 Theology and hermeneutics of al-Zamakhshārī..............................204
3.3. 2 Al-Zamakhšārī’s theory of majáz ................................................................. 207

3.3.3 Al-Zamakhšārī’s interpretation of anthropomorphic verses ....................... 211

Conclusion ............................................................................................................. 227

CHAPTER IV

The Ash’arites ............................................................................................................. 232

4.1. Al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013) ............................................................................. 235

4.1.1 Interpreting Q (3:7)..................................................................................... 236

4.1.2 Al-Bāqillānī on Majāz ............................................................................. 237

4.1.3 Al-Bāqillānī’s treatment of anthropomorphic verses ................................. 239

4.2. Abū al-Ma‘āfī al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085)..................................................... 243

4.2.1 Interpretation of Q (3:7).............................................................................. 244

4.2.2 Al-Juwaynī’s theory of Majāz ..................................................................... 245

4.2.3 Al-Juwaynī’s interpretation of anthropomorphic verses ............................. 245

4.3 Al-Rāzī (543/1149/606/1209) ......................................................................... 249

4.3.1 Theological justifications ........................................................................... 249

4.3.2 Al-Rāzī’s Qur’ānic hermeneutics ............................................................ 250

4.3.3 Detailed interpretation of anthropomorphic verses .................................... 253

4.4 ‘Īzz al-Dīn b. ‘Abd al-Salām al-Sulamī (d. 660/1262)..................................... 264

4.4.1 Qur’ānic hermeneutics ............................................................................. 264

4.4.2 Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām’s views of majāz and its classification ......................... 266

4.4.3 Interpreting Anthropomorphic verses ....................................................... 268

Conclusion ............................................................................................................. 273

CONCLUSION ....................................................................................................... 278

BIBLIOGRAPHY ................................................................................................. 289
Introduction

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

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

---


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

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

---


Aims and scope of the research:

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

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

---

5 Two Greek terms are used to refer to phenomenon of ascribing human characteristics to God: Anthropopahism and anthropomorphism. Anthropopahism (anthrop from Greek anthropos, man and pathos means affections and feelings, see E. W. Bullinger, Figures of Speech Used in the Bible, Baker Book House, 2003, p. 871) is used of ascription of human emotions to God while anthropomorphism (morphē in Greek means form or shape) is used of ascription of human form to God. I will use the term anthropomorphism to refer to both types of ascriptions in line with the modern usage.
responsible for this change and multiplicity of interpretations? At the same time I will show also how other factors such as the refinement of theological justifications and the increasing sophistication of Qur’anic hermeneutics affected the interpretation of anthropomorphic verses of some authors in the study. In my attempt to answer the main research question I will also challenge some accepted generalisations showing the shortcomings of uncritical acceptance of summary accounts and vague use of certain words.

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

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

In Western studies of rhetorical figures three main categories are used: figure⁶, scheme⁷ and trope⁸. The difficulties associated with defining and distinguishing between these terms have been noted since the time of Quintilian⁹ (c. C.E). All of these types are called figures of speech or rhetorical figures and the oldest arrangement¹⁰ of rhetorical figures is to classify them into schemes (or figures) and tropes¹¹.

Scheme (or figure) is defined by Quintilian in *Institutio Oratoria* as ‘a change in meaning or language from the ordinary and simple form¹²’. Blair, who calls them figures of thought, states that use of these figures ‘supposes the words to be used in their proper and literal meaning, and the figure consist in the turn of the thought; as is the case in exclamations, interrogations, apostrophes, and comparisons.'¹³

---

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

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

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

⁹ Ibid., p. 409.

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

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

¹² Bahti, p. 409.

¹³ Ibid., p. 146.
Trope is defined by Quintilian as the artificial alteration of a word or phrase from its proper meaning to another\textsuperscript{14}. For Blair tropes (figures of words) ‘consist in a word’s being employed to signify something that is different from its original and primitive meaning\textsuperscript{15}. Simile, metonymy, synecdoche, periphrasis, metaphor and allegory are commonly classified as tropes. In what follows I will give a brief account of these tropes.

**Simile**

Simile is defined as ‘an explicit comparison\textsuperscript{16}, by using the particles”like” or “as”. It is used ‘to reveal an unexpected likeness between two seemingly disparate things’.

**Metonymy**

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

1. Metonymy of the cause: using the cause in the place of the effect

2. Metonymy of the effect: using the effect in the place of the cause

3. Metonymy of the subject: ‘when the subject is put for something pertaining to it\textsuperscript{21}, such as using the container for the contents.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., p. 409.

\textsuperscript{15} Blair, p. 146.


\textsuperscript{17} Bullinger, E. W. Figures of Speech Used in the Bible, Baker Book House, Michigan, 2003, p 539.


\textsuperscript{19} Bullinger, op. cit., p. 538.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., pp. 538-9.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., p. 538.
4. Metonymy of the adjunct: it is when that which pertains to anything is put for the thing itself such as the content for the container

**Synecdoche**

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

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

**Periphrasis**

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

**Metaphor**

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

---


23 Bullinger, p. 613.

24 Ibid., p. 613.


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

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

28 Soskies, p. 15.
29 Johnson, p. 5.
33 Aristotle, Rhetoric (1406a), p. 2243.
34 Johnson, p. 7.
view of metaphor by philosophers such as Hobbes and Locke\textsuperscript{36}, dominated the
discussion about metaphors up to the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. In opposition to comparison and
substitution views of metaphor in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, critics and philosophers started to
develop new theories\textsuperscript{37} of metaphor. Among the first pioneers in this regard were I. A.
Richard and Max Black\textsuperscript{38}. Generally speaking all the advocates of the new theories\textsuperscript{39}

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

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

\textsuperscript{36} Soskice, p. 12.

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

\textsuperscript{38} Johnson, pp. 16-20.

\textsuperscript{39} For most up to date treatment of metaphor see Raymond W. Gibbs, Jr. The Cambridge Handbook of
Metaphor and Thought, CUP, 2008.

\textsuperscript{40} Martin, W., metaphor in The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, ibid., p. 761

\textsuperscript{41} Ricoeur, p. 44.

\textsuperscript{42} Soskice, Metaphor and Religious Language, p. 21.
sometimes ‘it takes more than one sentence to establish a metaphor’; therefore ‘the minimal unit in which a metaphor is established is semantic rather than syntactic’.

**Allegory**

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

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

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

---

43 Ibid., p. 21.
44 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid., p. 264.
49 Ibid., pp. 264-5.
brief trope and irony. We find Pseudo-Heraclitus (1st CE) also defining *allegoria* as ‘rhetorical trope whereby it was possible to say one thing and at the same time allude to something else’. Generally speaking, allegory ‘lies on a spectrum’ and it is hard to distinguish it from other related figures of speech. Young contends that ‘there is then allegory and allegory’ and she distinguished between 8 various types of allegory:

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

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

---

53 Ibid., p. 191-92.
54 The practice of allegorical interpretation, see Gorndin, p. 25.
tracing the literal back to the meaning communicated through it (that is, just the reverse of allegory\textsuperscript{55}). It is this tradition of allegory that will be examined later in the writings of Jewish and Christian theologians in their attempt to interpret the scripture.

**De-anthropomorphism in Judaism and Christianity up to 6\textsuperscript{th} C.E.**

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

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

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

\textsuperscript{55} Grondin, p. 25.


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

The first approach: Anti-anthropomorphism of Xenophanes

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

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

> ‘Concerning the gods and whatever I say about anything, no one has any certainty, nor ever will; and if someone should happen to utter the absolute truth, how would he know it? Seeming is present in everything\(^ {60}\).’

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

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

---


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


\(^{61}\) Guthrie, p. 371.
This type of anti-anthropomorphism combined with Plato’s criticism of gods in the Greek myths

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

The second approach: Allegorising Greek myths: by the Stoics

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

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

---


63 Procope, J. F., p. 462.

64 Ibid., p. 463.

65 Grant, ibid., p. 4.

66 Grondin, p. 23.
Philosophical interpretation of myth can be traced in the work of Plato and Aristotle, but it was the Stoics who ‘systematized the practice, raising it thereby to the status of a conscious method’. The Stoics try to combine ‘the rationalism of Aristotle with a thoroughgoing allegorization of the poets’. For the Stoics God ‘was the cosmic rational principle’ and anthropomorphic descriptions of the gods therefore had to have meaning other than the literal one.

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

**Interpreting anthropomorphism in Judaism**

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

---

67 Ibid., p. 24.
68 Grant, pp. 6-7.
69 Grondin, p.24. The word *Hyponoia* is also used by Plato in an allegorical sense.
tendency of the Targum is towards transcendentalization of God\textsuperscript{71}, and this can be seen in the translations of various anthropomorphic expressions. For example, The Mouth of God/the voice of God are rendered as The Memra (word) of God\textsuperscript{72}, ‘He went down’ is translated as ‘He revealed Himself’, and ‘He heard’ is translated as ‘it was heard before Him’. As for the statements where human emotions are attributed to God such as love, hate, anger and the like, Onkelos did not make ‘any changes except for those words which indicate regret and sadness on the part of God\textsuperscript{73}’. This inconsistency on the part of Onkelos is noted by Maimonides (\textit{Guide of the Perplexed} 2:33), and the reason given for this inconsistency is that Onkelos only de-anthropomorphised those expressions which might be understood literally by ordinary people\textsuperscript{74}. The writers of the Septuagint went further than the Aramaic translators in their rendering of anthropomorphic expressions in the Bible; for example ‘The "image of God" becomes "the glory of the Lord". Human emotions such as wrath and repentance are paraphrased so as to exclude any similarity between Man and God\textsuperscript{75}'. However, the same inconsistency with regard to rendering anthropomorphic expressions is also observed in the Septuagint translation\textsuperscript{76}.

\textbf{Jewish interpretation in a Hellenistic Style: Aristobulus and Philo}

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

\textbf{Aristobulus}


\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., p. 19

\textsuperscript{73} \textit{Anthropomorphism in Encyclopedia Judaica}, vol. 2, p. 189.

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{76} \textit{Anthropomorphism in Encyclopaedia Judaica}, vol. 2, p. 189
Aristobulus of Paneas (first half of second century BCE) was among the first Jewish philosophers who attempt to harmonize Hellenistic philosophy and the Bible. Five fragments survived from his writing which was addressed to Ptolemy VI (ca. 180-145 BCE) in the form of a dialogue in which, Aristobulus answers the questions of Ptolemy about the Bible. According to Aristobulus, Moses’s words should not be understood ‘at face value since he may speak of other things than what the words seem to mean’, for example ‘God’s hand are his forces or his achievements as Aristobulus puts it,

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

As for God’s resting on the seventh day

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

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

---

81 Sergert, p. 160.
82 Ibid., p. 162.
Philo

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

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

85 Siegert, p. 165.
86 Grant, p. 33.
89 Ibid., pp. 26-27.
allegorized\textsuperscript{90}. Philo believes that anthropomorphic expressions should not be interpreted literally because the scripture indicates clearly that: ‘God is not as man\textsuperscript{91}, and God should not be compared to anything perceived by the senses: ‘to say that God uses hands or feet or any created part at all is not the true account\textsuperscript{92} (conf. 98)’. The scripture also indicates that ‘God is immutable (Ex. 2. 12); therefore passages ascribing passions to him must be allegorized\textsuperscript{93}. In other words, Philo interprets certain passages in the scripture that are in accord with basic Jewish doctrine of God literally, while he interprets other verses that are in conflict with literally understood ones allegorically. Therefore, any passage that ascribes to God something unworthy of him must be interpreted allegorically.

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

\textsuperscript{90} Grant, ibid., p. 34.

\textsuperscript{91} Num. 23:19. This is similar to the Islamic practice of interpreting the mutashābih (indefinite) verses in the light of muḥkam (definite) ones as we will see later.

\textsuperscript{92} Borgen, p. 124.

\textsuperscript{93} Grant, p. 34


\textsuperscript{95} Wolfson, Philo, Vol. 1, p. 116.

\textsuperscript{96} Philo, On the Confusion of Tongues, pp. 242-243.
revealed Himself to Moses. ‘This contradiction caused him to posit an intermediate being [the logos] between God and the world\textsuperscript{97}, which later became an essential doctrine in Christianity. Grant argues that Philo is important for two reasons: first he was the first Greek writer ‘to subordinate the varieties of biblical religion to a rational theology’ and ‘he prepares the way for his Christian successors, Clement and Origen, who simply develop the theory based on Philo’s practice, and (in Origen’s case) make it more radical\textsuperscript{98}’.

**Interpreting Anthropomorphism in Christianity**

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

**Origen (d. 254 CE)**

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

\textsuperscript{97} Anthropomorphism in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 2, p. 190

\textsuperscript{98} Grant, p. 37.

\textsuperscript{99} Young, p. 54.

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid.
‘Christians who admitted with the Stoics that God, being a Spirit had a body’\textsuperscript{101}, and the second ‘Gnostic heretics’ who ‘reject the God of the Old Testament’\textsuperscript{102}, because of the anthropomorphtic descriptions of God. Both groups insist on a literal reading of Biblical anthropomorphic verses and fighting this approach is what dominated Origen’s writings.

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


\textsuperscript{102} Ibid. p. 348


\textsuperscript{104} Origen, pp. 271-72.

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., pp. 275-276.

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

\textsuperscript{107} Origen, pp. 294.
The Church Fathers understood the word “literal” differently from the modern usage (plain sense of the words) because they ‘distinguished wording from sense, and the normal sense of a word from its use as a metaphor, so that they would argue that ‘God is my Rock’ is an absurdity ‘according to the letter’, and so one must take it tropikos, that is, metaphorically or tropologically. The Church Fathers also has no notion equivalent to the modern understanding of literalness, especially its association with the ‘claim to an inerrant report of historical fact’. Young distinguishes five types of literal reading in the writings of Church Fathers and all of these types ‘presume correspondence between the wording and the idea expressed or reference intended’. In this regard, ‘interpretation ‘according to the letter’ could simply focus on the words, but one understood ‘according to the letter’ when idea and wording were taken to correspond straightforwardly without figures of speech. The Church Fathers also distinguished between sense and reference; the same words can have many references and for Origen ‘words could be taken as referring to something immediate in the world of the text, or to a past or future event, or to an experience of the soul or to a heavenly reality. Those who practice allegorical interpretation believed that the deep meaning (hypomenia) is intended by the author of the text which they are trying to interpret. This applies to the Stoics and Origen. Among others ‘Origen believed that the Holy Spirit had clothed the divine skopos in the dress of the wording, and that only those who probed for the deeper meaning really understood what the text was about. The Word of God used the conceit of allegory like a well-trained rhetorician!’

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


110 Ibid.


112 Ibid., pp. 187-88.

113 Ibid., p. 188.

114 Ibid., p. 190.
For Origen, the spiritual meaning is more important than the literal\textsuperscript{115} one but this does not mean that we should not interpret some parts of the scripture according to the letter because ‘there are commandments written which need no inquiry whether they are to be kept literally or not\textsuperscript{116},’ such as Matt. 4. 22. But then how do we interpret these parts of the scripture which are absurd and impossible? The translator of the “First principles” describes Origen’s hermeneutical methods as follows

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

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

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

\textsuperscript{115} One important point to be noted here is that for Origen the literal sense includes the figurative sense as well, See Hanson, ibid., pp. 246-7.

\textsuperscript{116} Origen, pp. 295.

\textsuperscript{117} Origen, footnote no. 3, pp. 296

\textsuperscript{118} Hanson, p. 220.

\textsuperscript{119} Origin, p. 5.

intellectual achievement of Origen, which demarcates between him and the earlier Fathers.\(^{121}\)

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

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

Furthermore, Origen allegorises not only references to God’s members but also God’s love which should not be understood in a human way. The same applies to God’s hate and anger\(^{127}\).

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

\(^{121}\) Stroumsa, p. 350.

\(^{122}\) Origen, p7

\(^{123}\) Deut. IV. 24.

\(^{124}\) I John I. 5.

\(^{125}\) Origen, p. 7.

\(^{126}\) Origen, pp. 7-8

\(^{127}\) Hanson, pp. 221-228.
language was preached, what was understood was the incorporeality of God\textsuperscript{128}. His allegorical\textsuperscript{129} interpretation of Biblical anthropomorphism managed ‘to resolve the implicit conflict between the personal creator God and his absolute incorporeality; it has had momentous implications upon subsequent Christians exegesis, theology and mysticism\textsuperscript{130}. How God is described and depicted in the Qur’an and how Muslims approach these depictions is the subject of my next section.


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

\textsuperscript{130} Stroumsa, p. 346.
Approaches to anthropomorphism in the Qur’an:

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

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

1. Anthropomorphism proper: The Qur’an here ascribes to God eyes, hands, face, and side.

2. God’s actions: such as seeing, hearing, speaking, creating, sustaining, and sitting on the Throne, etc.

3. Anthropopathisms: His feelings and passions such as mercy, love, anger, wrath, satisfaction, His cunning and so on.

4. Passive anthropomorphism: God here is the object of human perception such as being heard or seen (in the day of judgement).

---


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

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

Netton identified three major ways in which God was perceived in medieval Islamic thought in addition to the Qur’anic depiction of God outlined above: 1. God of the theologians (mutakalimūn) 2. God of the philosophers 3. God of the mystics (Sūfis). Within this division my study here deals with the God of the theologians, and more specifically their approaches to anthropomorphic verses in the Qur’an.

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī identified two basic concepts on which theologians and philosophers build their arguments, namely: the concept of perfection/imperfection (al-kamāl wa al-nuqsān) and the concept of necessity/contingency (al-wujūb wa al-imkān). Al-Rāzī argues that most of the debated issues among Muslim theologians (mutakalimūn) are based on the concept of perfection and imperfection. The main idea of this concept is that the theologians will say about a particular attribute: this attribute is an attribute of perfection, therefore it should be affirmed to God. They will say also about a particular attribute, this attribute is an imperfect one and therefore it should not be affirmed of God. Further, perfection and imperfection have three types: perfection and imperfection in the Essence (al-dhāt), in the attributes (al-sīḥāt) and in the actions (al-afʿāl). The perfection and imperfection in the actions is related to the issues of distinction between and origin of moral good and moral evil. With regard to the attributes, it is related to the eternity or createdness of the Qur’an. As for the perfection and imperfection in the Essence, which is my present concern, it is related to the issue of tashbīḥ (assimilating God to Man) and tanzīḥ (de-assimilating God to...
Man). Those who adhere to *tanzih* say that if God has a body or essence or is in a place then He will be similar to these creatures. These creatures are imperfect and being similar to imperfect things indicates imperfection; therefore one should de-assimilate God to His creatures. The corporalist would say if God is not localised nor can be indicated by means of senses or in a place then he would resemble nothingness, and this is the utmost imperfection. What is interesting in al-Râzî’s treatment of the issue of the right depiction of God is that he considers both the anthropomorphists and the anti-anthropomorphists as striving for the perfect way of speaking and describing God. This is unlike other theologians who condemned anthropomorphic depiction of God as tantamount to disbelief.

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

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

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

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

---

138 Ibid., p. 325.

1. **Al-Mushabbiha**\(^{140}\)

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

2. **Al-Muthbita**

*Muthbita* is attributed to those who affirm anthropomorphic attributes to God which at the same time confirming the unknowability of their modalities\(^ {145}\) (*kayfiyya*). For example they say regarding ‘“He sat upright upon the throne”’\(^ {146}\),

\(^{140}\) Other groups considered as *mushabbiha* by later sources are *nābiya*, *karrāmiya* and *hashwiyya*. See the relevant articles in EI 2\(^{nd}\) edition for further information.

\(^{141}\) Ibn Khalidūn (Rosenthal’s translation), pp. 46-47.

\(^{142}\)Ibid., p. 47.


\(^{144}\) Ibn Khalidūn, (Rosenthal’s translation), p. 47.

\(^{145}\) Ibid., p. 65.

\(^{146}\) Q (7:54)
they say, “we affirm His sitting, as the word indicates, because we fear to divest \[\text{the word } istiwa’\] from its signification], but we do not comment about the modality\[\text{of this sitting}], because we fear anthropomorphism which is denied by negative verses such as “nothing like Him”. Ibn Khaldun states\[\text{that this approach to anthropomorphic verses, which is common among } al-muhaddithun\](the traditionists) and later Hanabites, is far\[\text{from being associated or identified with that of the } salaf\[\text{ (ancestors).}]

3. \textit{Al-Mufawwiḍa.}

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

---

147 The Arabic of this phrase is \textit{nuthbitu lahu istiwa’an bihaythu madlulu al-latizati firāran min ta’tiliihi}. Rosenthal translated it as fellows ‘We affirm that He sits, as the word indicates, because we fear to negate Him’, Ibn Khaldun, (Rosenthal’s translation), p. 65. I believe divesting is nearer to the Arabic word \textit{ta’til} than negation and the referent of the pronoun goes to the word \textit{istiwa’} not to God.

148 Rosenthal translated the phrase \textit{la naqulu bi kayfiyyatihi} as we do not say how.


150 Ibid., p. 65ff.

151 Rosenthal vocalised the word as \textit{muḥdīthūn} in a sense like \textit{mubtadi’a} (innovator) and translated it as novelty-conscious. The context of utterance supports my reading because Ibn Khaldu>n earlier considered both groups \textit{(muḥaddithūn and later ḥanbalites) as followers of the }salaf\[\text{.}

152 \textit{Al-Shahrastānī} comments also on the followers of this approach: ‘A group of late scholars went beyond what is said by the Salaf[regarding anthropomorphic verses], maintaining that these verses must be understood according to their obvious meanings. By doing so they lapsed into anthropomorphism which is contrary to the belief of the salaf’, al-\textit{Milal wa al-\textit{Nihal}}, eds. Amir ‘Afī Mahnā and ‘Afī Ḥasan Fā’ūr, Dār al-Ma’rifā, Beirut, 2001, p. 105.

153 This approach to anthropomorphic verses is championed and defended by Ibn Taymiyya and his disciple Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya. At present, both the Wahhābies and the Salafis consider this approach to be representative of the true creed of \textit{ahl al-sunna wa al-Jama’a} (the Sunnis), therefore all other approaches are heretical ones at best. See Muhammad Sa’īd Ramaḍān al-Būṭī, \textit{al-Salafiyya: marhala zamāniyya mubāraka lā madhhab islāmi}, (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr pp. 131–144.

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

4. Al-mu‘awwila

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

---

155 Rosental gave the following translation “change them” because the Arabic version he used has the phrase “taghyiruha”. However, in a new edition of the Muqaddima which is based on 40 manuscripts the phrase used is tafsiruha (explain them) which perfectly agrees with the context. See Ibn Khaldūn, Abd al-Rahman, al-Muqaddima, ed. ‘Abd al-Salām al-Shaddādī, al-Dar al-Baydā, 2005, vol. 3, p., 32.


Islamic sources indicate that al-Ja’d b. Dirham (124/742 or 125/743) and Jahm b. Ṣafwān (128/746) were the first theologians to criticise the literal interpretation of anthropomorphic verses in the Qur’an. What we know about these figures is limited and based on later sources mostly written by their critics. Al- Ja’d b. Dirham was considered the first person to advocate the doctrines of the denial of Divine attributes (taʿṭīl), the created Qur’an and free will which will later become essential Mu’tazilite creeds. More importantly for our concern is what is attributed to him as saying: *lām yuḵallim muṣa takliʿa wa lā ittakhadha ibrāhiʿa khaṭfa* “God did not speak to Moses, nor take Abraham as His friend”. Allegedly he was killed by the Umayads because of his views. Apart from this statement the sources does not indicate how Ibn Driham interprets God’s speech to Moses or other anthropomorphic verses. Nevertheless, our sources tell us that al-Jahm b. Ṣafwān was influenced by al- Ja’d b. Ibn Dirham with regard to his views regarding the creation of the Qur’an and the denial of the attributes of God, including his criticism of literal interpretation of Qur’anic anthropomorphism.

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

---


160 Al-Ali, p. 56 and also Vajda, ibid.

161 Al-Ali, p. 77.
'there is nothing among the things like Him, he is below the seven 
earthas as He is on the throne, no place is devoid of Him, He does not 
speak neither did He speak, no one gazes at Him in this worldly life 
neither in the hereafter, He cannot be qualified, neither is he known by 
any attribute or action, nor can He be perceived by reason, He is all 
face, all hearing, all sight, all light, all power ...He is other than 
anything you know that comes to your mind'.

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

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

162 Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, al-Radd ‘alā al-Jahmiyya wa al-Zanādiqa, ed. Ṣāḥī b. Ṣalāma Shāhīn, Riyad Dār 

163 Al-‘A‘ī, ibid., 79-100. Seale believes that Jahm adopted the method of figurative interpretation of the 
scripture from Christian theologians and he ‘interpreted allegorically anthropomorphic passages in the 
Qurʾān in the same way as Philo and the Fathers interpreted the Bible and the Greek Homer’. As a 
matter of fact, all the examples given by Seale to support his view do not contain any allegorical or 
figurative interpretation of Qurʾānic verses. See Morris S. Seale, Muslim Theology: A Study of Origins 

164 Sarah Stroumsa, The Signs of Prophecy: The emergence and Early Development of a Theme in 

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

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

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

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

---

\(^{166}\) Van Ess believes also that what influenced Muslim theologians on the issue of anthropomorphism in the Quran ‘was Neoplatonic philosophy, especially in the form it had assumed in Christian theology’. Van Ess, *Tashbih wa Tanzih*, ibid.


\(^{170}\) This transcendent conception of God will only appear later in the writing of the Ismā’īlīs who used Neoplatonic philosophy to developed *theologia negativa*, where God was viewed to be absolutely other and ineffable. For further information about The God of Medieval Ismā’īlīs see, Netton, *Allāh Transcendent*, ibid., pp. 203-255.
as ‘beyond any form, but also beyond being as such; he is not anything’ (shay’).

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

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

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

---

171 Van Ess, *Tashbih wa Tanzih*, ibid.

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

knowledge (ma’rifā qat‘iyya) about God’s existence, incorporeality, attributes, and validity of prophecy or naql.

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

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

Q (3:7) as a foundation of ilm al-Ta’wīl

No verse in the Qur’ān that influenced Qur’ānic hermeneutics more than Q(3:7). Stefan Wild considers it as ‘the locus classicus in which Qur’ānic revelation sets the tone for the history of Qur’ānic exegesis’ and Wansbrough contends that ‘Commentary on this passage, unanimously agreed to represent the point of departure


for all scriptural exegesis method\textsuperscript{177}. In what follows I will examine the key issues and terms associated with this verse.

The Verse and the possibility of interpretation:

\begin{quote}
	ext{هو الذي أرسلَ على كتابٍ ممن أتمَّ مقاماتُ هَذِهِ الْكُتَّابِ وَأُخْرِي مَنْتَقِباً فَأَنَا الدُّهُنُ فِي غَلِّبِهِمْ زَيْغٌ فَيَبْعَونَ ما
tَشَابِهُ مَنْ بَيْنَ الْبَيْغِ الْفَقْهِ وَبَيْنَ الْبَيْغِ تَأْوِيلِهِ وَمَا يَعْلَمْ تَأْوِيلِهِ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ وَالْعَامِرُونَ فِي الْعَلْمِ يَمْلُونَ آمَنًا بِكُلِّ مَنْ عَلَى يَدِهِ وَمَا يَمْلُونَ إِلَّا أَوَلَّيْاَلْأَلْبَابِ (7)}
\end{quote}

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

Translation of the first reading:

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

The translation of second reading:

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

\textsuperscript{177} Wansbrough, J. Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation, Foreword, Translations, and Expanded Notes by Andrew Rippin, Prometheus Books, 2004, p. 149.

\textsuperscript{178} The translation of the Qur’ān in this thesis generally follows Arberry’s version with some modifications (A. J. Arberry. The Koran Interpreted, Touchstone edition, 1996)
The Uthmanic text of the Qur’ān supports both readings and the difference hinges upon the particle \textit{wāw} between Allāh and \textit{al-rāsikhūna fī al-‘ilm} (those firmly rooted in knowledge). If the \textit{wāw} is considered as \textit{waw al-ibtidā’} (inceptive \textit{waw}) so in this case we have a breaking off of the sentence after Allāh (or in the terminology of the Qur’ānic recitations \textit{waqf}–pause) and the sentence signifies that only God knows the interpretation of \textit{mutashābihāt} (indefinite verses). On the other hand if the \textit{waw} is considered as \textit{wāw al-‘atf} (conjunctive \textit{waw}) then there is no pause, which means that both God and those who are firmly rooted in knowledge know the interpretations of these verses.

**Key operative terms:**

\textit{Muhkam and Mutashābih}

\textit{Muhkam}: the root is \textit{ḥ-k-m} in and \textit{ḥ-k-m} has the following primary meanings: he prevented, he restrained, he governed. While \textit{Ḥkama} (IV) has the meaning of he made it, rendered it (namely a thing) firm, stable, solid, sound or free from defect or imperfection\textsuperscript{179}.

\textit{Mutashābih}: the root is \textit{ṣh-b-h} and when it is used in the form \textit{tashabha} it has two meanings: 1. To resemble one another, to be alike 2. (for two things or more) to resemble one another so that they become confounded, confused, obscure or ambiguous\textsuperscript{180}.

\textit{Ta’wil}: from ‘-\textit{w-l} which signify returning, restoring to, reverting to, to infer, to deduce, to go first. \textit{Ta’wil} is the verbal noun and in the Qur’ān it has five main senses: Interpretation of dreams, inference and interpretation, consequence, realisation and effect\textsuperscript{181}. The term \textit{ta’wil} acquired a technical meaning and came to signify the process of turning the utterance away from its prima facie meaning (\textit{Ẓāhir}) to its tropical meaning (\textit{majaż}). Thus, it became the foundation of tropical interpretation of

\textsuperscript{179}Lane, q.v. \textit{ḥ-k-m}

\textsuperscript{180}Lane, q.v. \textit{ṣh-b-h}

\textsuperscript{181}Elsaid M. Badawi and Muhammad Abdel Haleem, \textit{Arabic-English Dictinary of Qur’anic Arabic}, Leiden Brill, 2008, p. 64.
anthropomorphic verses. Now I will briefly examine the available literature on the issue of tropical interpretation of anthropomorphic verses.

**Literature review:**

Generally speaking, Muslims’ tropical interpretation of anthropomorphic verses of the Qur’an has not attracted the attention it deserves in modern Western scholarship. Apart from very few monographs or articles dealing with single authors, there is as

---


183 Binyamin Abrahamov, *Anthropomorphism and Interpretation of the Qur’an in the Theology of al-Qâsim ibn Ibrâîhîm: Kitâb al-Mustarshid*, Leiden, 1996. Abrahamov’s book is an annotated translation of one of al-Qâsim ibn Ibrâîhîm ’s books on anthropomorphism in the Qur’an and I will refer to this book
yet no historical-analytical study of this issue that covers the Mu'tazila, the Ash'arites or any other theological school. Indeed, the literature contains concerning the Mu'tazilite’s position, general statements such as ‘[for the Mu'tazilites anthropomorphic description of God] is to be understood only in a figurative sense: by the “hand” of God, His blessing (ni'ma) is meant, by His “eye”, His knowledge and ‘the method of ta'wil was to interpret single words of the sacred text according to secondary or metaphorical meanings found elsewhere in the Qur’an or in good poetry. There was no question of novel metaphors or of the metaphorical interpretation of whole phrases. We are left in the dark as to how the Mu'tazilites and those who followed them engaged with the texts and justify their interpretation theologically, hermeneutically and linguistically. Furthermore, are the Mu'tazilites’ interpretations of anthropomorphic verses really confined to single words without paying attention to the whole sentence or phrase, as Watt asserts? Is there any differences between the tropical interpretations of early Mu'tazilites and later ones and if so, what are the reasons for these differences?

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

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

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


common with the corresponding human actions or attributes. This was the \textit{bilā kayf} attitude, often confused with that of the “ancients” and advanced by the master, \textit{Ashārī} himself. Later, under an influence picked up from the Mu’tazilites and especially from the \textit{fālāsifā} opposition, another attitude, known as that of the “moderns”, was admitted into the \textit{kālim} . \textit{Ta’wī} was permitted. Thus \textit{al-Djūwayni}, \textit{Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī}, etc. The “hand” of God was interpreted as “the protection extended over mankind”, His “eyes” denote “the intensity of His providence and watchfulness”, etc\textsuperscript{187}.

On the other hand, Watt argues that after al-\textit{Ashārī} his school ‘adapted views similar to those of his opponents among the Mu’tazilah. Examples of this new attitude are...al-Baghdādi and.. al-Juwayni\textsuperscript{188}, and both of them belong to the pre-modern school.

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

**Method and research plan**

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

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

\textsuperscript{187} Gardet, L. "Allāh." \textit{Encyclopaedia of Islam}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} edition

\textsuperscript{188} Watt, Some Muslim Discussions, ibid., p. 6.
Chapter one deals with the historical development of the theory of *majāz* within the discipline of *balāgha* from the second century to al-Qazwīnī. Chapter two examines the treatment of anthropomorphic verses in the first three centuries of Islam. Chapter three examines the Muʿtazilites’ interpretations of anthropomorphic verses. Chapter four is concerned with the Ashʿarites’ interpretations of anthropomorphic verses.

Now I will turn to the theory of *majāz* and trace its development from the beginning to the time of al-Qazwīnī.
Chapter 1

Historical development of theory of majāz

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

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

While the term majāz was developing in various circles (philological, literary, Qur’ānic, usūli, theological) other attitudes to the issue of existence of majāz in language in general and in the Qur'ān in particular were emerging as well, such as the attitudes of those who deny the existence of majāz in language and the Qur'ān. The major representative of this trend is the theologian Abū Iṣḥāq al-Iṣfara’īnī (d. 418/1077). This trend found more advocates later in Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1327) in his book al-‘Īmān and his student Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya in his book al-Ṣawa‘īq al-Mursala (d.751/1350). This attitude had a lasting effect to the modern times especially among the Wahhabi and the Salafi trends. For more information about this issue see: Muṣṭafā Shāh, The Philological Endeavours of the Early Arabic Linguists: Theological Implications of the Tawaqīf-istilāḥ Antithesis and the majāz Controversy, Part II, Journal of Qurānic Studies, vol. 2, Issue I, 2000, pp. 43-66. Furthermore, in his study entitled "al-Majāz ‘inda Ibn Taymiyya wa talāmidihīh Bayn al-Inkār wa al-Iqrār (Maktabat Wahha, Cairo 1995), ‘Abd al-‘Azīm Ibrāhīm Muḥammad al-Maṭā’īnī offers an alternative interpretation to the views of Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya and al-Shanqīṭī about majāz, he argues that although previous authors denied the existence of majāz in the Qur’ān and language in their books al-‘Īmān, al-Ṣawa‘īq and Man‘ Jawāz al-Majāz respectively, they accepted its existence in the Qur’ān and language in their other writings, p. 4. Muḥammad Al-Amīn Al-Shanqīṭī (d. 1393 A.H./
Balāgha is an abstract noun, from the verb balughana meaning to be effective or eloquent, and the adjective balīgh means effective, eloquent (from balāgha to attain something), meaning therefore eloquence. The term took a long time to develop before it came to denote a three-pronged science under the title: ‘ilm al-Balāgha (literary theory). The major figure in this development is ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī in his two books Asrār al-Balāgha and Dala‘il al-I‘jāz. Asrār al-Balāgha deals mostly with what is later called ‘ilm al-bayān (theory of imagery), in this book he clarifies and defines various terms, such as majāz (trope), tashbīh (simile), isti‘āra (metaphor), kināya (periphrastic expression). In his Dala‘il, his principle concern is the problem of Naẓm (structuring) of the Qur’ānic text, and the book deals with questions of word order, use of particles and the like. This book spurred the rise of the ‘ilm al-ma‘ānī (syntactical stylistics). Al-Jurjānī’s books were not systematically presented and it was al-Sakkākī in his book miṭṭāḥ al-‘Ulūm (relying on al-Rāzī’s niḥayat al-‘Ijāz before him) who organised them and gave ‘ilm al-Balāgha the structure which it was to retain to the present. The last part of the section of Balāgha in the miṭṭāḥ was given the name ‘ilm al-Badī‘ (rhetorical figures) by Badr al-Dīn b. Mālik in his book al-Miṣbāḥ. Thus, the three parts of ‘ilm al-Balāgha are: ilm al-bayān, ilm al-ma‘ānī and ilm al-Badī‘.

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


2 Cl. Cahen, article on balāgha in EI 2nd Ed..

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


philosophers.”

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

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

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

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

---

7 Amin al-Khūfī, Min tārīkh al-balāgha, pp. 126-30.
9 al-Khūfī, op. cit.
10 Ahmad Maṭlūb, al-Balāgha ‘inda al-Sakkāki, op cit., p. 106.
**Tashbih** is a very important literary technique which also serves as a basis for metaphor. It is based on the concept of similarity between two things. It has four parts: the two things compared, article of comparisons and the aspect of similarity. Such as in this example: 

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

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

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

```
والذين كفروا أعمالهم كسراب يخفيه نضبة الطفمان ماءاً حتى إذا جاءه لم يجده شيناً ووجد الله
```

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

*Kinaya*² as a rhetorical phenomenon is difficult to translate into English or European languages, where some authors translated it as metonymy and others as periphrasis. *kinaya* is defined as an utterance used to indicate an implied meaning with the possibility of indicating the proper meaning. It is different from *majaz* because in the case of *majaz* the tropic meaning is intended. For example when we say about a person that:

(Zayd has got plenty of ashes)

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

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

---

² For further information about the development of *kinaya* see Joseph Dichy, *kinaya* in Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics, Brill, pp. 578-583.
Wolfhart Heinrichs\textsuperscript{13} who wrote two seminal papers and a monograph on the subject. Discussions of \textit{majāz} are found in various areas of intellectual pursuits\textsuperscript{14} in Islamic civilisation such as literary studies, philological studies, Qur’ānic exegesis and studies, theological writings, juristic writings (\textit{usūl al-fiqh}) and philosophical writings \textsuperscript{15}. I have chosen this division because it is broader than that of Heinrichs; nevertheless, what he said is true that “there is considerable interdependence and cross-fertilization between these various approaches to \textit{majāz}”\textsuperscript{16}. In this study, I will mostly focus \textsuperscript{17} on literary and philological writings because of their relevance to my later analysis.

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

\begin{itemize}

\item \textsuperscript{14} Heinrichs in his seminal paper entitled "On the Genesis of The Haqiqa-Majaz Dichotomy" distinguishes between four treatments of \textit{majāz}. 1. language-oriented Qur’ānic commentary (\textit{majāz al-Qur’an} of Abū ‘Ubayda), 2. Qur’ānic hermeneutics as contained in the books on legal methodology (K. \textit{Usūl al-fiqh} of al-Jaṣṣāṣ, 3. lexicology, i.e. a theory of words and their meanings (\textit{al-Sāhibī fi fiqh al-lugha} of Ibn Fāris, 4. rhetoric especially the theory of imagery (\textit{Asrār al-Balāgha} of "Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī. He also argues that in the later Middle Ages this variety is narrowed down to two basic approaches, that of the \textit{Usūl al-Fiqh} works and that of the rhetoricians in their discussions of \textit{‘ilm al-Bayān}, p. 114 in \textit{SI} 59 (1984), 111-140.

\item \textsuperscript{15} The philosophical discussion on \textit{majāz} is based on the commentaries on Poetics and \textit{Rhetoric} of Aristotle by Muslim philosophers (Al-Fārābī, Ibn Sinā, and Ibn Rushd). See Black, D.L. Logic and Aristotle’s ‘Rhetoric’ and ‘Poetics’ in Medieval Arabic Philosophy, Leiden: Brill 1990.

\item \textsuperscript{16} Heinrichs, On the Genesis, p. 114.

\item \textsuperscript{17} Nevertheless, I will touch on the \textit{usūlī} approach through my treatment of al-Rāzī as he combines both the literary and \textit{usūlī} approaches in his writings.
\end{itemize}
in later writings is considered the most important part of majāz. Therefore, my study will deal with both terms.

1.1 The treatment of majāz and isti‘ara before al-Jāhiz:

The term استعارة was used in the early times to refer to “borrowing of a theme by one author from another”; while metaphor was indicated by the term مثل (figurative expression) or بديع. The first person to use the term استعارة is reported to be the philologist Abū ‘Amr b. al-‘Ala’ when he was commenting on the verse:

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

“She dwelled in it [a place] until the rod withered in the soil And the dawn—in its veil—drove the Pleiads (thurayyā) away.”

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

وُسَاقَ الثَّرِيَاءُ فِي مَلاَءِهِ الفَجْرِ”

He made the dawn having a milā‘a (veil), in reality he has no milā‘a, but he borrowed استعارة this word and this is one of the marvellous isti‘ārāt’. In his book entitled al-Kitāb, Sibawayh does not distinguish between grammar and balāgha; rather he mixes them together. He touches on the issues of majāz, tashbih (simile), isti‘āra (metaphor) and kināya and ḥadhīf (ellipsis). Regarding the term majāz, he did not use it when speaking about figurative expressions, instead he uses

---

18 The article about Isti‘āra by S. A. Bonebakker in EI 2nd ed.
19 (d. around 154/770), ibid.
21 See the article about Sibawayh in Encyl. Of Arabic Literature, edited by Julie Scott Meisami, Routledge, 1999.
the term *saʿat al-kalām* (semantic expansion) when he comments on a verse of al-Khansâ' describing a she-camel which lost its new born baby

“... then it is in a relentless advance and retreat.”

He says “her use [al-Khansa ‘s] of إقبال و إبصار is allowed by way of expansion in the discourse like your saying نهارك صائم (your day is fasting) “. This example was categorised by later writers as *majāz ‘aqli* (cognitive trope). In a chapter entitled the non-literal use of verbs for the purpose of brevity and conciseness, Sibawayh gives this example:

(وَاسَالُ الْفَرْيَةِ أَلْلَهُ كَنَا فِيهَا وَالْعِبَارُ أَلْلَهُ أَفْتَنَا فِيهَا وَإِذَا نَصَادَفْنَاهُ)

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

Sibawayh says: “What is meant here is ask the people (أهل) of the “city”/village* (الْقَرَى), so here the verb used the word قرية as an object instead of using the word أهل as an object for the purpose of brevity”. On the issue of *isti‘ara*, Sibawayh does not use the term but he comments on a verse of poetry by al-Khansâ':

ن ترهبها الناس لا فَ لَا نَ لَا

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

Sibawayh says, “someone whom we trust narrated to us that the poet made the misfortune having a mouth. This comment was later used by other writers.

---

23 *Qarya*, A town, or village; a small balad, smaller than a madīna not well applied to a madīna unless qualified by an epithet denoting greatness (Lane, q.r.y).
24 Sibawayh, *op cit*, vol. 1 pp. 211-212.
Towards the end of 2nd/8th century, Abū ‘Ubayda (d. 210/825) wrote a book entitled *Majāz al-Qur’ān*. Abū ‘Ubayda did not use the word to mean a trope, but he used the word *majāz* in a sense of the original form of utterance as opposed to what is used in the Qur’ān, as we will see later in chapter 2.

### 1.2 Al-Jāhiz (d. 255AH/ 869)

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

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

---


27 Dayf, Shawqi. "Al-Balāgha Taṭawur wa Tārīkh" Dār al-Ma‘ārif, Cairo, 1965, pp. 57-58. Dawūd Sallūm says:"Truly I think That al-Jāhiz is the true founder for *ilm al-balāgha* because he was not a collector of the views of the scholars of *al-balāgha* (as he called them in his time) but he was a critic of their ideas which he did not take them for granted", see *naqd al-manhaj 'inda al-Jāhiz*, Baghdad, 1986, p. 88, also Sayyid Nafīf in his book "al-balāgha al-'arabiyya fi dawr nash'atīḥa" makes a similar claim, Cairo, 1984, p. 170. Tāḥa Ḥusayn was more cautious in his approach to the issue, see his introduction to the book "Naqd al-Nāthir" (the book was attributed wrongly to Qudāmā b. Ja’far al-Kātib), p. 3,( eds) Tāḥa Ḥusayn and ‘Abd al-Ḥādī al-‘Abbādī, Beirut 1982.


Jāḥīz’s views about mājaz and istīʿāra which were influenced by the Muʿtazilites views regarding anthropomorphism in the Qurʾān.

Al-Jāḥīz uses various terms within the field of figurative language such as مَثَلُ، مَجَاز، فَرْعُ، أَسْتِغْفَرُ، أُسْتِعْعَابُ، تَشَيِّيْبُ. Their relationships with each other have not yet been established.

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

وَطَفِقَتْ سَحَابَةٌ تَغَشَّاهَا

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

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

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

1. yaṣūḥ – “king (we would say: queen) of the bees” = leader of a group of men or animals (al-Hayawān, vol. 3, p. 329)

---

30 For more details about al-Jāḥīz and Muʿtazila, see M. H. Echigurer, al-Gaḥīz Et Sa Doctrine Muʿtazilite, Rabat, 1986. For a summary of al-Muʿtazila see the article about them in Eucyl of Islam 2nd Ed.


33 Heinrichs, The Hand of The Northwind, p. 28.

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

2. *jarwa* whelp = self (al-Jāḥīz says, “and among the borrowings from the name of dog .... "meaning I disciplined my self).\(^{36}\)

But there is one case which defies all his attempts to fit it into the general frame, which is the word صدای in the phrase أن يصبح صدای بقفرة from the verse of a poem by al- Nimr b. Tawlab:\(^{37}\)

أعذر إن يصبح صدای بقفرة

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

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

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

---


\(^{37}\) *al-Bayān* op cit., vol. 1, p.284.

\(^{38}\) al-Jāḥīz, *al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn*, vol. 1, p. 284. edited by 'Abd al-Salam Hārūn, Second edition 1960-1961. What is meant by the purpose in the above quotation is the retaliation for the slain when his blood has not been avenged (See Lane s.d.y).


\(^{40}\) *ibid* p. 30.

\(^{41}\) For al-Jāḥīz's use of the terms مثل and بدیع as *isti‘ āra* see *al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn*, op cit., vol. 4, p. 55.
Furthermore, Zaghluł Sallām states that al-Jāḥīz uses the term majāz for isti‘āra and in some instances he uses the term badal for isti‘āra as is the case in this verse \(^{42}\) (this verse will be considered later)

“"قَالَ الَّذِينَ يَا مُوسَى (19) فَأَلْفَّاهَا فَإِذَا هِيَ حَيَّةً تَسْعَى "”

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

Similarly Shawqī Da‘yf states that al-Jāḥīz considers isti‘āra as majāz and comments on the verse of poetry mentioned earlier,

وطفقت سحابة تغشاها (وتبكي على عرائضها عيناها).

He says that al-Jāḥīz was responsible for considering this image as isti‘āra and it would have been better, had he considered it as a personification, since the poet in making the cloud cry does not compare or borrow but personalise \(^{43}\).

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

قُلْ فَإِذْ جَاهَدَ كُنُّمُ رَسُولٌ مِنْ فِيْلِي بِالْبَيْنَاتِ وَبَالْذِي قُلْتُمُ فِيْلُمُ فَقُلُوْهُمْ إِنَّ كُنُّمُ صَادِقٌ

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

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


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

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

He comments on them saying, “This can be said about them even if they drink wine, wear clothes, and mount riding animals with this money and do not spend one dirham on food. And God (the Great and al-Mighty) says, (devour Fire in their bellies) and this is another majáz”. Al-Jāhiẓ also said under the heading "majáz of taste", “it is the saying of the man when he punishes his slave severely: taste and how did you find the taste.” And God explains, (devour Fire in their bellies) and this is another majáz.

“Taste Surely thou art the mighty, the noble”. Q (44:49)

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

وَوَلَوْ حَيْثَ رَتَّكَ إِلَى النَّجْلَةِ الْأُحَدِّي، أَنَّ النَّجْلَةَ مِنَ الجِبَالِ بَيْوًا وَمِنَ النَّحْسِ وَمِمَّا يَعْصِرُونَ ثُمَّ كَلِبُ كَلِبٍ مِّنْ كُلِّ الْمَاهِرِينَ، فَأَسْلَكُي سِلَةً رَكِبْنَ زَلاً يُخْرِجُونَ مِنْ عَطَالٍ عُصْرُوبٌ مُّخَلِّفُ الْوَائِلَةَ فِيهِ صّفَافٌ لَّهُمْ فَالَّذِينَ أَسْلَكْنَ لَأُبْدِيَ لَهُمْ فَيَفْكَرُونَ.

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

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

44 Al-Hayawān, vol. 5, p. 25.
46 Ibid., pp. 425-426.
He also refutes those who object to the use of the word for walking metaphorically by saying that walking can only be performed with legs. He says, you could also say that Q (20: 19-20)

"قال الله تعالى: (19) فَأَلْفَتْهَا فَإِذًا هِيَ حَيَّةً تَسْمَعُ"

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

﴾

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

Chastisement cannot be (food prepared for the guest), but God made His words follow the same rules that the Arabs use in their speech. From the above mentioned examples, it can be concluded that al-Jāhīz believes that sometimes the apparent meaning of a vocable is something and its intended meaning is something else, and in this way he considers the phenomenon of majāz. In his opinion majāz is not considered to be a sort of lying because there is a frame of reference from which the hearer understands the intended meaning of the speaker. The Qur’an was revealed in the Arabic language, thus the Qur’an uses the styles of the Arabs in their language in order to influence them; therefore there is majāz in the Qur’an.

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

We find also in his epistle “al-Radd ‘Alā al-Mushabbiha” that he uses majāz, tashbīh, ishtiqāq and far’ (branch) in contrast to asl (original) and the apparent meaning.  

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

(Q 2: 245) 

"Who is he that will lend God a good loan and He will multiply it for him manifold? God grasps, and outspreads; and unto Him you shall be returned".

Al-Jāhiz says, “the majāz of this verse in language is obvious and its interpretation is clear...”.  

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

1.3 Tha’lab (d. 291AH/904CE)

In his book Qawa‘id al-Shi’r, which is the first systematic book on poetics, Tha’lab gives this definition of isti’āra: "to borrow for

50 al-radd ‘alā al-Mushabbiha, edited by ‘Abd al-Salām Hārub, Maktabat al-Khānjī, Cairo, 1979, vol. 4, p. 15. See also a section entitled "fi al-radd ‘alā al-Nazzam in his epistle "al-maṣa‘īl wa al-Jawa‘ba fī al-Ma‘rifā”, ibid., p. 58, where he contrasted al-majāz with al-ḥaqīqa "[and man] cannot, in addition to what has been mentioned, choose his action and being able [to perform it] in a proper sense not in a figurative one".


52 Abū al-‘Abbaṣ Aḥmad b. Yahyā called Tha’lab, born in Baghdaḏ. He was the leading representative of the Kuṇāf school of grammar. His listed works give the impression of a scholar more interested in the meanings of words than in the grammatical system of the language. Tha’lab died accidentally in 291AH/904CE. Encyl. Of Arabic Literature, op cit.

53 Tha’lab, Qawa‘id al-shi’r, ed. by Ramadan ‘Abd al-Tawwāb, Cairo, 1966, p. 57.
something the name of something else or (to attribute to it) a characteristic that is not its own”.

So he comments on the verse 45 of Imru’ al-Qays’s Mu’allaqat:

“And I said to it (the night) when it stretched out its back and followed up with (its) hindquarters and struggled to get up with (its breast).”

He says that Imru’ al-Qays borrowed the description of the camel in describing the night.

The collection of examples used by Tha’lab represents what is called later isti’āra bi al-kināya or isti’āra makniyya. He also uses the term isti’āra to refer to what is called later isti’āra bayn ṣulubiyah (elocutive simile). Tha’lab does not add much to the study of isti’āra and his definition resembles that of al-Jāhiz.

Now we will move to the student of Tha’lab, Ibn al-Mu’tazz.

1.4 Ibn al-Mu’tazz (d.296AH/908CE)

In his book al-Badī’, Ibn al-Mu’tazz gives a definition of isti’āra after stating two examples of badi‘:

"من الكلام البديع قول الله تعالى (وإنه في أم الكتاب لدينا حكيم)

ومن الشعر قوله (من البسيط) ... والصحيح بالكوكب الذي منثور...

وإنما هو استعارة الكلمة لنشيء لم يعرف بها من شيء قد عرف بها أم الكتاب وملت جناح الذل."

---

54 Bonebakker, S. A., article about isti’āra in EI 2.
55 This translation is done by Heinrichs op cit., pp.3-4.
56 Tha’lab, p. 57.
57 Ibid. 60.
59 Abū al-‘Abbās ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Mu’tazz, the Caliph of one day, was a poet and critic, son of the thirteenth ‘Abbasid Caliph al-Mu’tazz (r. 247-55/861-9). He was born in Samarra and received his education from the philologists al-Mubarrad and Tha’lab. After the death of al-Muktafi (296AH/908CE) Ibn al-Mu’tazz was fatally drawn into the struggles for his succession. One of the contending factions proclaims him Caliph, and he was assassinated the same day by the supporters of al-Muqtadir (295-320AH/908-32CE). Encyl. Of Arabic Literature, op cit.
“Among the badi’ discourse are the saying of God the Most High: “And behold it is in the Essence of the Book [the mother of the book (umm al-kitāb)], with Us; sublime indeed, wise”. Q (43:4)

Ibn al-Mu'tazz explains that

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

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

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

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

could be excused, since basically, these [cases] functioned like *tashbih*. To this belongs
the verse of Imru' al-Qays:”

وأريد أعجازا وناء بككل

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

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

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

1.6 Ishāq b. Wahb al-Kātib (fl. Mid-fourth/tenth century) 

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

---

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

69
manuscript it is instead of some of the [words] in the place of others by way of (semantic expansion) and مجاز. Then he quotes the Qurʾān.

وإذا قرأت القرآن جعلنا بينك وبين الذين لا يؤمنون بالآخرة حجارةً مستونراً (45) وجعلنا عليه قلوبهم أكثرةً أن يفهموه ولي أذانهم وقرأ وإذا ذكروا ربك في القرآن وحده ونذل على أذانهم نفوراً

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

Ibn Wahb comments that

“when the Qurʾān used to be recited they used to cover their hearts from understanding it and to block their ears from appreciating it; thus it is allowed to say by way of مجاز and استعارة that the one who recited [the Qurʾān] to them made them like that”.

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

1.7 Al-Āmīdī (d.371AH/987CE)

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

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

---


69 Ibid. pp. 142-143.

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

This definition of \textit{ist}ʻ\textit{āra} actually covers most aspects of metaphorical language whether there is a similarity or not.\textsuperscript{72}

\textbf{1.8 Al-Rummānī (d.384AH/994CE)}\textsuperscript{73}

In his book \textit{al-Nukat fī Ijāz al-Qurān}, Al-Rummānī divides \textit{balāgha} into ten categories, among them \textit{isti}ʻ\textit{āra}. In his chapter on \textit{isti}ʻ\textit{āra} he gives the following definition:\textsuperscript{74}

\begin{quote}
\textit{al-isti}ʻ\textit{āra} is the use of an expression for something which it has not originally been set up for in the language by way of transference for the purpose of elucidation. And the difference between \textit{isti}ʻ\textit{āra} and \textit{tashbih} is that an expression, in a \textit{tashbih} with the particle of comparison in the discourse, is used in its original meaning and the usage does not change its meaning. And this is not the case for \textit{isti}ʻ\textit{āra} because the condition of \textit{isti}ʻ\textit{āra} requires the use of an expression in a sense which does not belong to it originally.”\textsuperscript{75}
\end{quote}

Furthermore, he states that

\begin{quote}
“every eloquent \textit{isti}ʻ\textit{āra} consists of combining two things by means of a common idea to both in such a way that an elucidation of one of them is
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{72} See also Shawqī Dayf. \textit{Ibid}. pp. 128-132 and also Heinriches, \textit{The Hand of the North Wind}, \textit{op cit.}, pp. 38-40.

\textsuperscript{73} Al-Rummani: Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Ali b. ʻIsā was a Muʻtazī li grammarian, rhetorician and theologian from Baghdad. (Ibn al-Nadīm’s \textit{Fihrist} gives 296AH/909CE as his year of birth). Ibn Durayd was among his teachers. According to some of his contemporaries, he incorporated too much logic in his grammatical speculations. \textit{Encyl. Of Arabic Literature}, \textit{op cit.}

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

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

\[
(قَالَ رَبِّي إِنِّي أَخْفِفَتْيُ الْكَنُوزَ مِنِّي وَأَضْعَفْتُ الرُّسُلََ مِنِّي وَلَمْ أَكُنْ يَدْعَايْنِي رَبُّ نِيَ).
\]

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

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

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

---

75 Al-Rummānī here expands the range of isti‘āra by using ‘ībara (expression) instead 
of using Shay’a (a thing) or kalima (vocable).
76 Al-Rummānī, p. 86.
77 ibid., pp.86–94.
78 Ibid., p. 88.
79 Later writers on this subject called this kind of simile tashbīh balīgh (eloquent 
simile).
isti‘ara as he used the term isti‘ara for all the figurative texts whether there is a similarity or not.\textsuperscript{80}

1.9 Al-Qādī al-Jurjānī (392 AH/1002CE)\textsuperscript{81}
In a chapter about al-Badī‘ in his book al-Wasāṭa bayn al-Mutanabbī wa khusūmih, al-Qādī al-Jurjānī states that many people do not distinguish between isti‘ara, tashbih and mathal.

I came to know someone among the men of letters who mentioned some kinds of isti‘ara including the verse of Abū Nuwās

والحب ظهر أنت راكبه فاذدا صرفت عانه انصرفا

“And love is a mount and you are its rider

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

I do not see this … as isti‘ara, rather the meaning of this verse is that love is like a back … it is either striking a similitude or comparing something with something else.\textsuperscript{82}

Then he gives this definition for isti‘ara

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

\textsuperscript{80} See also Shawqi .DAO, \textit{op cit.}, pp. 103–107, and Zaghlūl Sallām, \textit{op cit.}, pp. 234 - 255.
\textsuperscript{81} Al-Qādī al-Jurjānī: Poet and critic. Born in Jurjān, he moved, when still a child, to Nishapur in 337AH/948CE with his brother. He was an esteemed poet and is extensively quoted in anthologies such as \textit{Yatīmat al-Dahr} by al-Tha‘ālibī and biographical works like \textit{Mu‘jam al-Udābā} by Yāqūt. He is said to have written a commentary on the \textit{Qur‘ān} and a compendium of history both lost. He wrote an important and original monograph on the great but controversial poet al-Mutanabbī, \textit{al-Wasāṭa bayna al-Mutanabbī wa Khuṣūmih (the Mediation be Encyl. Of Arabic Literature, op cit.tween al-Mutanabbī and his Opponents)}. Al-Qādī Jurjānī became chief qādī in Rayy, where he died. See also Shawqi DAO, \textit{op cit.}, pp.132- 139.
home the similarity and the relationship of the receptor with the donor of the borrowing and that the (new) word is melted into the (underlying) idea, so that there is no repulsion between the two and in none of them an apparent aversion from the other”.

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

**1.10 Ibn Jinnī (d. 392AH/1002CE)**

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

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

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

---

84 Ibn Jinnī: Abū al-Fath Uthmān b. Jinnī was the son of a Greek slave; born in Mūsīl, he attached himself for forty year to his teacher Abū ‘Alī al-Fārisī and succeeded him on his death in 377AH/987CE as the leading grammarian of Baṣra. He later travelled to Aleppo where he became a good friend of al-Mutanabbi, on whose poetry he wrote two commentaries which provoked a considerable number of critical refutations and responses. *Encycl. Of Arabic Literature*, *op cit.*
horse 2. comparison (the platitude of running water of the sea can be compared with the vehement running of the horse) 3. emphasis (because he compared accident with substance). 89

He also considers the following verse as majāz.

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

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

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

﴾فَذَرَّتْهُ َأَمْرُ ْنَا أَمْرضُ كَمْرًا﴾

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

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

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

88 Ibn Jinni, p. 447.
89 Ibid., pp.442 -433.
90 Ibid. p. 443.
Ibn Jinnī's views on majāz influenced Ibn al-Athīr (in his early book about balāgḥa) as we will see in subsequent chapters.

1.11 Ibn Fāris (d. 395AH/1004CE)

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

---

93 Ibn Fāris al-Lughawī: ʿAbū al-Ḥusayn Ahmad b. Fāris b. Zakariyyā al-Lughawī was probably born in Qazwīn; he studied there and in Hamadhān and Baghdad. Called to I-Rayy by the Būyid Fakhr al-Dawla as his son’s tutor, he there became friendly with the vizier al-Ṣaḥīb b. ‘Abbād. His considerable output covers most areas lexicography and grammar, see Ibn Fāris in Encyl. Of Arabic Literature.
95 Ibid., p.214.
96 Ibid., pp. 204-205.
1.12 Abū Hilāl al-‘Askari (d. after 395AH/1005CE)⁹⁷

In the introduction to his book *Kitāb al-Ṣīnā’atyn*, al-‘Askari states that one of the objectives of writing his book is to enable people to understand and appreciate the arguments surrounding the inimitability of the Qur’ān.⁹⁸ He discusses *majāz* and *isti‘āra* under his chapter on *Bādī*; *isti‘āra* according to al-‘Askari is

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

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

He also states that

“each *isti‘āra* and *majāz* must have *ḥaqqīqa* which is the original indication of the meaning in language…. And there must be a common meaning between the donor and the recipient of the borrowed word…and this applies to all *isti‘ārāt* and *majāzāt*.”ⁱ⁰⁰

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

---

⁹⁷ Abū Hilāl al-‘Askari : Abū Hilāl al-Ḥasan b. ‘Abd Allāh al-‘Askari, philologist, poet and literary critic. Born in the early decades of the fourth century AH/tenthCE in ‘Askar Mukram, Ahwāz province, and of Persian, or even royal Sasanian, descent (as he proudly declares in his own poetry), he seems to have earned his livelihood mostly as a cloth-merchant. His main teacher was Abū Aḥmad al-‘Askari (d.382/992), a religious scholar and philologist. Abū Hilāl’s strength was assiduous and circumspect compilation. He commanded a large amount of transmitted materials, he was not devoid of novel ideas and he had a firm poetic taste. *Encycl. Of Arabic Literature, op cit.* For studies of *Kitāb al-Ṣīnā’atyn* see Sallām *op cit.*, pp. 312- 331, Ṭaba‘a, pp 154-167 and Ḍayf, 140- 146.


¹⁰⁰ ‘Askari, pp. 276-277.
relationship, al-‘Askari does not refer to this issue. He excludes *tashbīh* from the *bādī’* chapter in *al-Ṣīnā’atayn*.\(^{101}\) He also considers a case of *kināyā* in the Qur’ānic verse (68:42) as *isti’āra*: \(^{102}\)

\[“\text{‘Upon the day when the leg shall be bared, and they shall be called to bow themselves, but they cannot”}. Q (68:42)\]

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

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

1.13 Al-Tha’ālībi (d.429AH/1038CE)\(^{106}\)

Majāz is treated in three chapters of the second part of his book *Fiqh al-Lugha*. In his chapter on *majāz*\(^{107}\) he quotes al-Jāhīz without giving any definition of *majāz*. The

---

\(^{101}\) But in his book *Furūq* (p. 27) he followed the same approach of al-Rummānī by pointing out the basic difference between *isti’āra* and *tashbīh*. George Kanazi, p. 151.

\(^{102}\) Al-‘Askari, p. 274.

\(^{103}\) Heinrichs, *The Hand of the North Wind*, p.45.

\(^{104}\) Kanazi, pp. 149-150.

\(^{105}\) Al-Rummānī, pp. 86- 94.

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

quotations are from the book of *al-Ḥayawān* of al-Jāḥīz which are related to the *majāz* of food and taste. A good example is

وَضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَدَّةً قَرْنَىٰ كَانَتَ اِمْنَانًا مُّضَطَّهَةً بِأَيْتِهَا رَفَقُهَا رَفَقًا مِّنْ كُلِّ مَكَانٍ

فَكَفَّرَتْ بِأَلْعَامِ اللَّهُ قَدَافِهَا اللَّهُ لِيَمْسَ الحُرُرُ وَالخَوْفُ بِنَفْسِهَا كَانُوا بِصِيَانٍ

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

He starts his chapter on *istiʿāra* with this definition,

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

Then in the next chapter he numerates various verses as examples of *istiʿārāt* in the *Qurʾān*:

وَإِذْ يَبَّغُضُ لَهُمَا جَنَابَ الْدُّلُّ مِنَ الرَّحمَةِ قُلْ رَبُّ ارْحَمْهُمَا كَمَا رَبَّيْنِي صَعِيرًا.

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

وَأَلْقَىَ لَهُمَا الْخَمْسَةِ نِمْرَةٍ مَّا كَانَ اِسْتَمَتْهَا جَنَابُهَا رَفَقُهَا رَفَقًا مِّنْ كُلِّ مَكَانٍ

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

وَضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَدََّةً قَرْنَىٰ كَانَتَ اِمْنَانًا مُّضَطَّهَةً بِأَيْتِهَا رَفَقُهَا رَفَقًا مِّنْ كُلِّ مَكَانٍ

فَكَفَّرَتْ بِأَلْعَامِ اللَّهُ قَدَافِهَا اللَّهُ لِيَمْسَ الحُرُرُ وَالخَوْفُ بِنَفْسِهَا كَانُوا بِصِيَانٍ

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

---

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

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

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

### 1.14 Ibn Rashīq al-Qayrawānī (d. 456 or 463AH/1063 or 1071CE)

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

---

112 Heinrichs comments on al-Tha‘alibi’s chapter on *isti’āra*. "this part owes much to the book of Ibn Fāirs who is quoted in the list of sources", *The Hand of the North Wind*, p. 47.
113 Ibn Rashīq al-Qayrawānī: Abū ‘Alī al-Ḥasan b. Rashīq al-Qayrawānī was a poet and critic, author of a famous encyclopaedia of poetry and poetics. He was born in Ifriqiyya, near present-day Constantine, and made a career in Qayrawān as a poet, becoming court poet to the Zirid ruler al-Mu‘izz. Towards the end of his life he emigrated to Sicily, where he died. In his lifetime he owed his fame mainly to his poetry; but to posterity he is first of all the author of *al-‘Umda* (*The Support*), see Ibn Rashīq al-Qayrawānī in *Encyl. Of Arabic Literature*. 

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

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

إذا سقط السماء بأرض قوم
رعبنا وإن كانوا غضابة

“When the sky falls upon the land of people
We would pasture it even though they are angry”

sky = rain or clouds, pasture it = plants.115

Ibn Rashiq starts his chapter on isti‘āra by saying “isti‘āra is considered by people as the most excellent type of majáz and the first among the sections of bādī”.116 Heinrichs comments on this by saying that

“this is a conscious acknowledgement of both traditions in the history of the term isti‘āra: the Koranic (majáz) and poetic (bādī’); but unlike al-‘Askari… Ibn Rashiq has effected a true combination”.117

Ibn Rashiq proceeds by saying that

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

115 Ibid.,
116 Ibid., p. 435.
117 Heinrichs, The Hand of the North Wind, p. 48. Koranic majáz is discussed by Ibn Qutayba which I will examine later in a subsequent chapter. He means by bādī the treatment of isti‘āra discussed by writers like Ibn al-Mu’taz and al-‘Askari.
And the dawn—in its veil—drove the Pleiads (*thurayya*) away.  

Then Ibn Rashiq quotes the definitions of al-Qāḍī al-Jurjānī, Ibn Jinnī and al-Rummānī among others.  

It can be concluded that Ibn Rashiq considered *isti‘āra*, *majāz mursal*, *tashbīḥ* and *kina‘ya* as subcategories of *majāz* without attempting to relate them to each other. Regarding *isti‘āra*, he quotes and discusses various writers but without trying to produce a coherent picture of the term. 

### 1.15 Ibn Sinān al-Khafājī (466AH/1074CE)

In his book *Sirr al-Fasāḥa*, he states that “one of the norms which enhances the composition is putting the words in their right place either in their veridical sense or in their figurative one (*majāz* and ḥaqīqa)”. Regarding *isti‘āra* he states that “good *isti‘āra* is putting the words in their places,” then restates the definition of al-Rummānī in this regard and bases his discussion on al-Rummānī and ‘Alī al-Jurjānī. Regarding the difference between *isti‘āra* and *tashbīḥ*, he disagrees with al-Rummānī...
who considers that *tashbih* can be achieved only with the particle of comparison, hence he does not accept this statement (She dropped pearls from narcissus) as *isti‘ara* but as simile, although the particle of comparison is omitted.\(^{124}\)

Bonnebekr comments

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

Al-Khafajī’s position on the *isti‘ara* is similar to that of Ibn Rashīq as both adopted the definition of al-Rummaṇī. However, Ibn Rashīq has a more systematic mind than his contemporary and his discussions have greater logical stringency.\(^{126}\) Furthermore, al-Khafajī fails to distinguish clearly between *isti‘ara* and *tamthīl* and prefers *isti‘ara* that is immediately apparent to the hearer to those that cannot be justified as based on intelligible similarities, or derived from expressions that are themselves metaphors.\(^{127}\)

For example one speaks of the “eye of *nuwwār* (flower)” since there is a similarity, but the “eye of religion that finds consolation” is far-fetched as there is nothing in religion that can be compared with the eye.\(^{128}\)

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

---


\(^{125}\) Bonnebekr, *isti‘ara*, op cit.

\(^{126}\) Heinrichs, The Hand of the North Wind, p. 51.


\(^{128}\) al-Khafajī, p.124.
In the fifth century A.H./eleventh C.E the study of *balāgha* in general and *majāz* in particular reached their maturity with the works of ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī, in his books *Asrār al-Balāgha* and *Dalā’il al-I’jāz*. The purpose of his first book *Dalā’il* is to prove the inimitability of the *Qur’ān* but in reality it is a very subtle theory of syntactic constructions which later came to be known as ‘*ilm al-ma’āni*. The second book deals with the issues of simile, *majāz*, *kināya* and *tanthil* which later become ‘*ilm al-Bayān*. According to Ritter in his introduction to *Asrār al-Balāgha*, *Asrār* is composed probably after the *Dalā’il* but Heinrichs disagrees, stating that as ‘Abd al-Qāhir mentioned in his *Dalā’il* “that he has already treated *majāz* extensively elsewhere we can assume that the *Asrār* treatment precedes the *Dalā’il*”. It is really difficult to ascertain which book is the first as it is possible that al-Jurjānī wrote both books at the same

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


time. Abu Deeb hinted at this in his discussion of al-Jurjānī's concept of isti‘āra.

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

Al-majāz al-‘aqli (al-Ḥukmī):

---

133 Al-Jurjānī, Asrār, pp. 365-383.
135 Asrār, p.376.
136 Al-Jurjānī, Theory of Poetic Imagery, p. 231.
137 In other words, it is the attribution of the characteristic in question to that subject.
139 Some writers such as Tāḥa Ḥusayn (in his introduction to Naqd al-Nathr which was wrongly attributed to Qudāma b. Ja’far, states that ‘Abd al-Qāhir is the inventor of al-majāz al-‘aqli, op cit., p. 29) and Shawqī Ǧayf (op cit., p. 185). But as it is clear from above that Sibawayh was the first to indicate this kind of expression even though he did not use the word majāz ‘aqli (or ḥukmī) to refer to it, rather he states that it is a type of semantic expansion and brevity in the speech (al-Kitāb, op cit., vol. 1, p. 80.) After Sibawayh Abū ‘Ubayyda al-Frrā’, Ibn Jinni among others also mentioned this way of speech. (See ‘Abd al-Qādir Ḥusayn, pp. 100-102). On the other hand ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Lāshin (in his book al-Ma‘ānī fi Ǧ Daw’ Asālīb al-Qurā’n”, 4th Ed., Dar al-Fikr al-‘Arabi, Cairo 1998, pp. 95-102 ) contends that it is al-Qādī ‘Abd al-Jabbār who founded and analysed this type of majāz. On the influence of al-Qādī ‘Abd al-Jabbār on al-Jurjānī in general see Margaret Larkin, "The Theology
In Asrār al-Balāgha Abd al-Qāhir states that majāz may occur in a sentence either in the ithbāt (ascription) or the muthbat itself, or in both of them at the same time. He gives these examples for each case:

1. majāz in the ithbāt: (The days of separations have made my hair full of hoariness) the majāz here occurs in actually attributing (making) white hair to the days of separations (the subject). But as a matter of fact the true agent here is God. There is no majāz in the muthbat because white hair actually exists.140

2. Majāz in the muthbat:

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

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

3. Majāz in both the ithbāt and the muthbat:

(seeing you made me alive) meaning that it gave me pleasure. The first majāz here (in al-muthbat) is that considering the pleasure of seeing the person in question as life. The second majāz (in al-ithbāt) is that making الرؤية an agent for this life.142

---


140 Asrār, pp. 342-343.
141 Ibid, p. 343.
142 Ibid, p. 344.
In Asrār al-Balāgha, al-Jurjānī gives this definition of majāz: al-majāz is a maf'al pattern from the verb jāza, meaning to cross, traverse or go beyond something. If an utterance is made to depart from what is required by its original meaning in language, then it is described as majāz, meaning that they extended it beyond its original position, or that it went beyond the place it was originally set down in. In a chapter about al-majāz al-ḥukmī in his Dalā'il, al-Jurjānī gives this definition for al-majāz al-lughawī:

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

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

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

143 Asrār al-Balāgha ibid., 365 quoted by Larkin ibid., pp. 73-74.
144 Dalā'il, p. 295.
So the relationship between the primary meaning and the secondary meaning is similarity in the case of isti‘āra and contiguity in the case of majāz mursal. There is also another difference between the two with regard to the idea of mulāḥaza according to al-Jurjānī:

“... you go beyond what has come to be for it in the established (system) of the one who established it (wād’ al-wādī’) to something that was not set down for it, without originating a new assignment for it (i.e. for the word), due to an association (mulāḥaza) between what you have allowed it to pass to and the origin to which it was assigned in the system of the originator of the language.”

According to al-Jurjānī, mulāḥaza is always stronger with the case of isti‘āra than it is with al-majāz al-mursal

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

Al-Jurjānī adds “Every thing related to tashbih should be understood this way (the previous quotation) …including isti‘āra. Anything else apart from that does not have a strong inclining (istinād) (like in the case of isti‘āra)”.

---

147 Heinrichs translated this term in negative sense as "not losing sight of " while Ritter in his German translation of Asrār coined the term augenverbinding literally eye-connection. Heinrichs Contacts, op cit., pp. 279-80.
149 Asrār al-Balāgha, p. 326, as quoted and translated by Larkin ibid., p. 88.
150 Asrār al-Balāgha, p.326.
As we have seen above \textit{isti‘âra} according to al-Jurjânî is a part of \textit{al-majâz al-lughawi} where the relationship between the primary meaning and the secondary intended meaning is based on similarity. He offers two accounts for the concept of \textit{isti‘âra}: one in his \textit{Dalâ’il} and the other in his \textit{Asrâr}. In \textit{Dalâ’il al-I’jâz}, al-Jurjânî argues that it is wrong to define \textit{isti‘âra} as نقل (transference) of terms as we have seen earlier (al-Qâdî al-Jurjânî and others); rather it is a claim إدعاء that something is identical to something else or, as in the words of al-Jurjânî, “it is to claim the meaning of a thing to something else”\textsuperscript{152}. In other words, there is a transference of a concept before there is a transfer of a term and consequently \textit{isti‘âra} can be comprehended intellectually.\textsuperscript{153} In his \textit{asrâr} al-Jurjânî defines \textit{isti‘âra} as the incidental transference of an utterance from its original sense to a different sense so that it looks like a loan\textsuperscript{154} (or borrowed good).\textsuperscript{155}

\textsuperscript{151} For more details of the treatment of \textit{isti‘âra} by al-Jurjânî see chapter 5 in Abu Deeb's book "\textit{al-Jurjânî's Theory on Poetic imagery}.
\textsuperscript{152} \textit{Dalâ’il}, p. 403.
\textsuperscript{153} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 407. For the inconsistency between these two concepts of \textit{isti‘âra}, (in \textit{Dalâ’il} and \textit{Asrâr}) we will see later what al-Râzî said about it.
\textsuperscript{154} \textit{Asrâr}, p. 29.
\textsuperscript{155} Abû Deeb comments on this apparent contradiction between al-Jurjânî's views in \textit{Dalâ’il} and \textit{Asrâr} by saying that al-Jurjânî in "the first half of each book, whenever he tackles the nature of \textit{isti‘âra}, he produces the traditional definition of this form (\textit{isti‘âra} using the concept of transference) without any criticism of it...This is precisely the view of transference which al-Jurjânî has so persistently and convincingly attacked in the second half of \textit{Dalâ’il} and the final part of \textit{Asrâr}. This fact, however, should not be overemphasized, for it does not show either that al-Jurjânî contradicts himself or that he changes his views on the nature of \textit{isti‘âra} towards the end of his book...a close study of the contexts in which he uses the phrase 'transference of a name 'excludes both these possibilities. Abû Deeb adds that al-Jurjânî relates the traditional view without any criticism when this view does not have direct bearings on his treatment but in another context al-Jurjânî criticises such a view where he feels it essential to establish the right principle, Abû Deeb, \textit{al-Jurjânî's Theory on Poetic imagery, op cit.}, p179. Heinrichs disagrees with Abû Deeb about this point he argues that" Kamal Abû Deeb, ("Al-Jurjânî's Classification of \textit{Isti‘âra} with special reference to Aristotle's Classification of Metaphor". \textit{Journal of Arabic Literature} 2 (1971), pp. 48-75, 73, is wrong in supposing that the rejection of \textit{naql al-ism} (or \textit{naql al-lafz}) applies only to what we have called old metaphors[the hand of the north wind]. Al-Jurjânî leaves no doubt that the essential process in creating a metaphor of any kind is not \textit{naqlu ismin min shay’in ilâ shay’} "the transference of a name from one thing to another"-not really a transference at all-, but \textit{iddi‘âu ma’na l-ismi li-shay’}"the claiming of the meaning of the name for something". \textit{The Hand of the North Wind}, pp. 2-3.
Istiʿāra can occur in a verb as well as in a noun and in both cases there is one to one relationship between the two terms of tashbīḥ which are mushabbah (the topic) and al-mushabbah bi-hi (analogue).

Istiʿāra in a noun is of two kinds; one is based on tashbīḥ and the other based on tamthīl (analogy). For the first type al-Jurjānī argues "that is your saying أساءت أسد (I saw a lion) and you mean a courageous man …and أبديت نورا (I have shown a light) and you mean guidance, elucidation, and proof and anything else similar to that. The noun in all of that as you can see is something possible to indicate. Thus it can be said that that is what was meant by the noun and what was alluded to by it, and that it was transferred from its original referent and made a name for it (to the mushabbah) by way of borrowing and hyperbolic in tashbīḥ.

The second type of istiʿāra occurs when "a noun (used in its original sense) is taken and placed in a position where it cannot be seen and pointed out and said to be the thing that was intended by the noun for which it was borrowed and made a substitute and a stand in."

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

إذ أصبحت بيد ريح الشمال زمامها

"How many a cold windy day have I protected people against, when the rein of the day has been taken by the hand of the north wind".

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

---

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

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

158 Asrar, p.42.
the relationship between the borrowed thing (hand) and its actual owner (Man),
thus the poet intended here to attribute to the north wind, in its directing the
morning, complete control similar to the control by a human being of something
which he handles at will. The similarity in this case is that one has to reflect and
think deeply to discern unlike the similarity in the first type. Moreover, *al-Jurjānī*
does not accept that *tashbih* and *isti‘ara* are interchangeable and that metaphor is a mere concise equivalent of *tashbih*. Abu Deeb comments on al-Jurjani's classification of *isti‘ara*, “his classification of *isti‘ara* is the first of its type in Arabic and the basis for practically all subsequent work on the subject.”

**Al-Jurjānī and anthropomorphism in the Qurʾān:**
Al-Jurjānī distinguishes between two types of *isti‘ara*, one is based on *tashbih* (تشبيه) the other on *tamthīl* (analogy). *Isti‘ara* based on *tashbih* is not difficult to discern but when it is based on *tamthīl* a certain amount of contemplation is required. What is more important is that *tamthīl* is understood on the level of one sentence or more.

*Isti‘ara* based on *tamthīl* is of particular concern to al-Jurjānī due to its implication in interpreting anthropomorphic verses in the Qurʾān. He states that neglecting the second type of *isti‘ara* [that is based on *tamthīl*] could lead people to accept anthropomorphism in the Qurʾān:

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

---

159 *Asrār* pp.42-43. This line of Labid is translated by Abu Deeb in *al-Jurjānī’s Theory on Poetic imagery*, p. 204.
161 Abu Deeb, Literary Criticism, p. 83.
162 *Asrār*, p.44-45.
the ark under Our eyes,’ Q (11: 37) and have not found for the word eye anything that it corresponds to, in the way that the word light refers to right-guideness, e.g. they would become confused by doubt and incline toward the literal [meaning] and would enjoin themselves to adhere to it until it lead them to grave error and to perpetrate that which violates the unity [of God], and may God save us from [such] errancy.163

As Larkin points out

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

In a section devoted to what is later called later al-majāz al-mursal, Al-Jurjānī165 gives an example of the word يمينه (His right hand) in the Qur’ān.

وَمَا فَتَرَى اللَّهُ خَلْقَهُ وَاخْتَرَأَهُ جَميِعًا فِي يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ وَالسَّمَاءُ مَطْوَاتِ يَمِينِهِ سَبِيلًا وَعَلَا عَنْهَا يَشَّرُّكُونَ

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

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

وَمَا فَتَرَى اللَّهُ خَلْقَهُ وَاخْتَرَأَهُ جَميِعًا فِي يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ وَالسَّمَاءُ مَطْوَاتِ يَمِينِهِ سَبِيلًا وَعَلَا عَنْهَا يَشَّرُّكُونَ

163 Asrār p. 47, this quotation translated by Larkin ibid., p. 85
164 Larkin, ibid., p. 90. For more details of the theological implication of al-Jurjānī’s ideas of majāz on theology see chapter 4 in the same book.
165 Asrār, pp. 331-333.
166 Ibid., p. 332.
“The earth altogether shall be His handful on the Day of Resurrection”. Q (39:67)

the overall meaning indicates power and the word قبضة (handful) cannot be considered as a name for power.\textsuperscript{167} Rather,

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

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


dan
\textsuperscript{167} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{168} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 333 this quotation is a modified version of Larkin translation, p. 91.
God – Almighty - is the creator of places and times and the originator of everything that can move, rest and contact [other objects].

While the other group excessively use the majāz when interpreting the Qur’ān and impose meanings on words which do not denote them out of pretension.

Abu Deeb comments on al-Jurjānī saying that

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

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

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

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

---

169 Asrār, ibid., pp. 361-362.
170 Ibid., p. 263.
171 Abu Deeb, Literary, p. 80.
172 Al-Jurjānī uses this word to denote al-majāz al-‘aqli in his book Dalā’il.
“And those that were abased will say to those that waxed proud ‘Nay, but devising night and day, when you were ordering us to disbelieve in God, and to set up compeers to Him’”. Q (34:33)

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

Ritter in his introduction to his edition of *Asrār al-Balāgha* states, “these books (*Asrār al-Balāgha* and *Dalā‘il al-I‘jāz*) revolutionized the studies of rhetoric in the East”.¹⁷³ These two books gave rise to two new disciplines in *balāgha*: *‘ilm al-Bayān* (based on *Asrār al-balāgha*) and *‘ilm al-ma‘ānī* (based on *Dalā‘il al-I‘jāz*).

His contribution to the study of *majāz* lies in his distinction between *majāz ‘aqlī* and *al-majāz al-lughawī* and his elaboration to the theory of *isti‘āra* based on *tashbih*.

Due to their importance Al-Jurjāni’s books (*Asrār* and *Dalā‘il*) were abbreviated and rearranged by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī in his book *Nihāyat al-Ijāz fī Dirāyat al-I‘jāz*.

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

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

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

---

174 Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī: Abu‘ Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. ‘Umar, Major Ash‘arite theologian and Qur’ānic exegete. He has been described as ‘the only equal of al-Ghazālī in philosophical erudition in the twelfth century’, and ‘one of the last encyclopaedic writers of Islam’. He was born and studied in Rayy, where he also spent a part of his career, much of which was marked by journeys to Khuwārīzmd and Transoxiana, where he engaged in controversies with Mu’tazilīs and other non-Ash‘arīs. He finally settled in Herat—having secured the patronage of the Ghūrid ruler Ghiyāth al-Dīn—where he lived out the rest of his life. A-Rāzī was author of a massive corpus whose subject matter ranged from Qur’ānic exegesis and history to *fiqh*, medicine and mineralogy. Early in his life he was a student of alchemy and magic but later turned to religious and philosophical sciences, writing, among other things, a commentary on several works by Ibn Sīna, whom he often criticized sharply. A celebrated teacher, he was known by the title of Shaykh al-Islam. In the breadth and depth of his erudition he resembles not only al-Ghazālī but the great Ibn Sīna himself, and made a notable contribution to Arabic literature in diverse branches.


Then Al-Rāzī states (following al-Jurjānī in his Asrār) that

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

He followed the footsteps of al-Jurjānī in his division of majāz into majāz ‘aqlī and lughawi but he used majāz ḥuknī or majāz fī al-itthbāt (al-Jurjānī uses majāz ḥuknī for majāz ‘aqlī in his Dalā‘īl). Then he gave this definition for istī‘āra which combines the two types of istī‘āra mentioned by al-Jurjānī (istī‘āra based on tashbih and istī‘āra based on tamthil)

“al-isti‘āra is to mention something using the name of something else (I saw a lion) or affirming what belongs to something else to it (the hand of the north wind)” for the purpose of hyperbole in tashbih”.

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

177 Asrār, p. 365, and Nihāyat al-Ījāz, p. 167.
178 Asrār, pp.365- 366.
179 al-Rāzī, Nihāyat al-Ījāz, p. 168.
180 al-Rāzī calls this type isti‘āra takhyiliyya.
181 Ibid., p. 232.
182 Ibid., pp. 236-237.
In his section on الاعتقاد التخيلتية (fantastic *isti‘āra*) he states that the majority of the verses of the *Qur‘ān* adhered to by those who accept anthropomorphism in the *Qur‘ān* fall under thses categories as well as other verses such as:

(وَخَلَصَّنَا حَجَاجَ الْذَّلِّلِّ مِنَ الْحَرَّمِ وَقَلَّ رَبُّنَا أَرْحَمُهُمَا كَمَا رَبَّيْنِي صَغِيرًا)

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

Al-Rāzī also discussed the issue of *majāz* in his book about *usūl al-fiqh* (principles of jurisprudence) entitled. His treatment of *majāz* in this book has not been taken into account by those who wrote about his contribution to ‘ilm al-balāgha’. In a section entitled “On Ḥaqīqa and Majāz” he offers this definition of *majāz*:

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

---


Then he refutes various opinions about *haqiqa* and *majaz*, including those of al-Jurjani.\(^{186}\) In the second section he divides *majaz* broadly (following al-Jurjani) into three categories:

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

After that al-Razi comments that the Qur’an and traditions contain a lot of these types of *majaz* but the *Uṣūlīyyūn*\(^{187}\) (the scholars of *usul al-fiqh*) do not pay attention to the distinction between these three types, however’Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani summarised it.\(^{188}\) He analyses the first type of *majaz* (that which occurs in a single word) and divides it into twelve types [cause/effect, whole/part., etc.,] including *isti’ara* with examples and illustrations for each type.\(^{189}\) This elaboration of al-*majaz* al-*lughawi* is the first comprehensive treatment written on the subject.\(^{190}\) Al-Razi

---


\(^{187}\) The issue of *majaz* is usually discussed in the books of *usul al-fiqh* since al-Jassas (370/981). See the section about al-Jassas’s concept and subcategories of *majaz* in Wolfhart Heinrichs: *Contacts between Scriptural Hermeneutics and Literary Theory in Islam: The Case of Majaz* *op cit*. See also Hossein Modarressi, *Some Recent Analyses of the Concept of Majaz in Islamic Jurisprudence*, *Journal of American Oriental Society* 106 (1986), pp. 787-91.

\(^{188}\) Al-Razi, *ibid.*, pp. 321-322. Indeed if one looks at the major available sources of al-*Maḥṣūl* mentioned earlier; al-Ghazali in his book *al-Mustasfā min ‘Ilm al-*Uṣūl* (Published: edited by Muhammad Sulaymān al-Ashqar, 2 vols, *Mu’assasat al-Riṣāla*, Beirut, 1997) and *al-Mu’tamad* (*op cit.*, pp. 11-3), one will see the immaturity of the treatment (al-Juwayni does not discuss the issue of *majaz* substantially in his book *al-Burhān*).


\(^{190}\) Reinert the article about *madjaz* (sic.) in the *EI* 2nd Ed.) was not accurate when he says that "The different modes of expression labelled as *madjaz* by the Arabic theorists were divided into twelve categories by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (606-1210) without, however, following a consistent system of criteria". First of all as we have seen above al-Rāzī divided *majaz* into two: *majaz* *aqli* and *lughawi*, then divided the second type into 12 categories. Secondly al-Rāzī is consistent in his division as all the 12 categories belong to the *majaz* which occurs in a single word (*majaz lughawi*) one of them *isti’ara* and the rest belong to *al-majaz al-mursal*. His division was modified by some later authors such as: Kamal al-Dīn al-Zamalkānī, *al-Burhān al-Kāshif ‘an I’jāz al-Qur’ān*, edited by Khadija al-Hudaythī and Ahmad Maṭlūb, *Maṭba‘at al-‘anī*, Baghdad, 1974, pp. 102-104 and Muḥammad b. ‘Alī b.
did not invent all these types of *majāz*. al-Jurjānī in his books identifies four types of this *majāz* which are: *causality*, *proximity*, *locality*, while al-Zamakhshāri added four more types. They are: Using the whole to indicate the part, consideration of what it was, consideration of what it will lead to, and using the effect to indicate the cause.

In addition to al-Jurjānī, al-Rāzī was influenced by *al-Kashshāf* of al-Zamakhshāri, al-Rummānī and *Hada’iq al-Sīhr fī Daqā’iq al-Shīr* of al-Waṭwāt. Al-Rāzī’s presentation of the material in his books as well as his discussions of various issues throughout them reflects his theological and philosophical training, especially in his attempts to give an exact definition to various terms. *Nihāyat al-Ījāz* was a major source used by al-Sakkāārī in the section about *balāgha* in his book *Miṭḥāḥ al-‘Ulūm*.

### 1.18 Al-Sakkāārī (d. 626AH/1229CE)

The third part of al-Sakkāārī’s *Miṭḥāḥ al-‘Ulūm*, which is a compendium based on ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī’s two books *Asrār* and *Dalā’il*, almost completely

---


191 al-Zamakhshāri’s treatment of *majāz* in the *Qur’ān* will be discussed in another chapter in this study.


193 For further details about the contribution of al-Rāzī to *‘ilm al-balāgha* see: Shawqi Ḥayf, pp. 271-286, and BadawiṬabānā, pp. 334-336.

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

superseded them. In addition to al-Jurjānī, al-Sakkākī was influenced by al-Zamakhsharī (al-Kashshař, al-Wātwaṭ (Hadā’iq al-Sīhr) and al-Rāzī.

In the introduction to his book, Al-Sakkākī states that he composed it because of the insistence of some people in his time and he guaranteed to those who master it that they will be able to avoid making mistakes in the Arabic language. According to al-Sakkākī, the possible sources for committing mistakes are three: مفرد، التأليف، and الصرف (single word, grammatical composition and the manner in which these grammatical compositions correspond exactly to whatever require to be said. For this reason al-Sakkākī divides his book into three sections: علم المفرد (Morphology), علم النحو (grammar) and علم المعاني والبيان. 196 The focus here is his last part which deals with the issue of بحث.

Al-Sakkākī was at that time the first to divide ‘علم البحث into three branches بحث، مصطلحات (embellishments) which later came to be known as بدع as we will see later, and the first to determine their exact topics and divisions.

Al-Sakkākī discusses the issue of مجاز and البتاود under his section on بيان. He says that the scholars of this art among the ancestors divided this مجاز into two types: لغوي which is مجاز in a single word and ‘أطي which is مجاز in a sentence.  

Al-Lughawi is divided into four categories:

1. Semantic which has no value: this includes the transference of generic names of parts of the body from one genus to another as shown in the use of hoof for a foot. Al-Jurjānī called this type as استعارة غير مفيدة (inexpressive metaphor)

---

196 What Reinert says is not accurate in his article about al-Maʿānī wa ʿl-bayān in EI 2nd Ed. which runs " the two terms appear for the first time" in the Miftāḥ al-ʿUlūm of al-Sakkākī. As a matter of fact, al-Zamakhsharī in his Kashshāf (al-Kashshāf, Dār al-Fikr, 1st Ed., 1977, vol. 1, p.16) says that no one can interpret the Qurʾān safe the one "masters two disciplines related to the Qurʾān, which are ʿilm al-Maʿānī wa ʿl-bayār" and al-Rāzī also mentions these terms in his book Nihāyat al-Ījāz as quoted by ʿAlī al-Sakkākī in his book al-Balāgha ʿinda al-Sakkākī, p. 120. Although these terms were mentioned by al-Rāzī and al-Zamakhsharī in relation to al-Balāgha they did not define nor clarify them.
197 Miftāḥ al-ʿulūm, p. 471.
2. Semantic which has a value and not based on *tashbīḥ* (what is later called مجاز مرسل) e.g., using hand to mean power.

3. Semantic which has a value based on *tashbīḥ* (similarity): *isti‘ārā*.

   Al-Sakkākī gives this definition
   
   "‘*isti‘ārā* is to mention one part of the *tashbīḥ* (simile) and intend by it the other part; claiming that the *mushabbah* (topic) comes under the genus of the *mushabbah bi-hi* (analogue), indicating that by affirming to the topic what belongs to the analogue. As you say في الحمام أسد (there is a lion in the bathhouse) where you mean a courageous man". 199

Then he speaks about the divisions of *isti‘ārā* following al-Jurjānī and al-Rāzī. 200

Al-Sakkākī here agrees with al-Jurjānī in his *Asrār* in considering *isti‘ārā* as *majāz lughawi* not *majāz ‘aqli*.

4. Related grammatically to the case ending of a word, for example:

   (وَاسْأَلْ الْقَرْيَةَ الَّتِي كَانَتَ فِيهَا وَالْبَيْرَةَ الَّتِي كَانَتَ فِيهَا وَإِنَّ أَمْسَادَكُنَّ)

   “Enquire of the city [village (al-qarya)] wherein we were”. Q (12:82)

   Originally it is اسْأَلْ أَهْلَ الْقَرْيَةِ (Ask the inhabitants of the village); the original case ending of the word قرية is جر (genitive) and النصب (accusative) is *majāz*.

   Al-Sakkākī believes that this type of expression should be attached to *majāz*, not to be considered as *majāz* in its own right.

As for the *al-majāz al-‘aqli*:

   “it is the utterance that conveys an opposite judgement to that of speaker through intellectual effort (or interpretation); the conveying of this opposite judgement is not through [linguistic] convention. Example: أنبت الربيع البقل (springtime brought forth the herbage) the true subject of this verb is God if the speaker is a believer (a case of *majāz ‘aqli*)." 201

Then al-Sakkākī denies that this type of *majāz* is ‘*aqli*; instead he made it استعارة بالكتابة (alluded metaphor). So for the previous example أنبت الربيع البقل is
alluded metaphor for the true subject by way of hyperbolism in comparison and the predication of *inbāt* (bringing forth) is the frame of reference for this *isti‘āra*.\textsuperscript{202}

Al-Sakkāki’s section on ‘ilm al-balāgha proved to be very popular among later writers on the subject. This section attracted twenty-five commentaries (*shurūḥ*).\textsuperscript{203} The summarization (*talkhīṣ al-Miftāḥ*) of the *Miftāḥ* by al-Khaṭīb al-Qazwini also attracted huge attention in the scholastic age, which I will discuss later in the section about al-Qazwini.

1.19 Ibn al-Athīr (d. 637AH/1239CE)\textsuperscript{204}

The literary study of *balāgha* reached its culmination in the work of Ibn al-Athīr. His major works on the subjects are: *Al-Jāmī‘ al-Kabīr fī Šinā‘at al-Manzūm min al-Kalām wa al-Manthūr*\textsuperscript{205} and *al-Mathal al-Sā‘ir fī Adab al-Kātib wa al-Shā‘ir*.\textsuperscript{206}

The previous studies available to me of Ibn al-Athīr’s views on *balāgha* relied only on his major work *al-Mathal al-Sā‘ir* and did not take his early work *al-Jāmī‘ al-Kabīr*

\textsuperscript{201} *Miftāḥ al-‘Ulm*, ibid., p. 503. B. Reinert (*Madjaz EY*,) did not mention that al-Sakkāki does not consider this type of *majāz* as ‘aqlī.

\textsuperscript{202} *Miftāḥ al-‘Ulm*, ibid., p. 511. B. Reinert (*Madjaz EY*, ibid) did not mention that al-Sakkāki does not consider this type of *majāz* as ‘aqlī.


\textsuperscript{204} Ibn al-Athīr, *Diyā‘ al-Dīn*: Abū al-Fatḥ Naṣr Allāh b. Muḥammad al-Jazari *Diyā‘* al-Dīn b. al-Athīr was an epistolographer, literary theorist and critic. Born in Jazīrat Ibn ʿUmar, present-day Cizre (southeast Turkey). He was the youngest of three brothers who all left their mark on Islamic intellectual history, he other two being the ḥadīth scholar Majd al-Dīn (d.606AH/1210CE) and the historian ʿIzz al-Dīn (d.630AH/1233CE). He had a distinguished, if chequered, career as a statesman, serving briefly with Saladin, then as vizier with the latter’s son al-Malik al-Afdal in Damascus and elsewhere and finally, after many ups and downs, ending his administrative life as chief chancellor in Müsil under the last Zangid ruler and his successor, the atabeg Badr al-Dīn Lu’lu’. His literary output is exclusively addressed to the needs of the state scribe and epistolographer.

into account. The focus here is to study his views on majāz and isti‘āra, taking into account his views in both books to get a clear picture of the development of his thought in this matter.

**Majāz and isti‘āra in al-Jāmi‘ al-Kabīr:**

Ibn al-Athīr defines majāz:

و أَمَا الْمَجَازُ: فَهُوَ مَا أَرِيَدُ بِهِ غَيْرِ الْمَعْنَىِّ الْمَوْضُوعُ لِهِ فِي أُصُلِّ الْلَّغَةِ، اسْتَعَاً

“As for majāz what is meant by it is other than its conventional meaning in the origin of the language by way of semantic expansion”.

This is a re-phrase of Ibn Jinnī’s definition of majāz. After that Ibn al-Athīr offers another definition for majāz:

وَقِيلُ هُوَ مَا نَقَلَ عَنْ مَوْضُوعِهِ الأَصْلِيِّ إِلَى غَيْرِهِ بِسُبْبٍ مَثَابِيَةَ بِيْنِ مَحَلِّ الْحَقِيقَةِ وَمَحِلِّهِ فِي أُمَرِ مَشْهُورٍ

“It is said that it is what has been transferred from its original conventional [sense] to another because of the similarity between the place of ḥaqīqa and its place and that in a famous matter”.

He divides the majāz into 14 categories including various types of al-Majāz al-Mursal, isti‘āra and ellipsis (اسئل القرية), and he repeats what Ibn jinnī has said without acknowledging him:

إنَّمَا يُعَدُّ عَنْ الْحَقِيقَةِ إِلَى الْمَجَازِ لِمَعَانٍ ثَلَاثٍ وَهُوَ الْاَتِّسَاعُ وَالْتَشَبِّهَ وَالْتَوْكِيدِ

And most of the language is majāz not ḥaqīqa. In this section Ibn al-Athīr does not mention or give any example regarding what is called al-Majāz al-‘aqli.

Regarding isti‘āra, Ibn al-Athīr offers this definition without indicating his source:

---


208 Ibn al-Athīr, al-Jāmi‘, p. 28.

209 Already mentioned in the section about Ibn Jinnī.

210 Al-Jāmi‘ al-Kabīr, p. 28.

211 Ibn Jinnī, p. 442.

It is when you want to compare something with something else thus you do not disclose or reveal the comparison and then you treat the *mushabbah bi-hi* (analogue) in the same manner as if it is the *mushabbah* (the topic). As you say: I saw a man who is like a lion in both his courage and the strength of his attack; then you leave this and say I saw a lion.”²¹⁴

Then Ibn al-Athîr divides *isti’âra* into two types: the first is to conceal the *mushabbah* and to mention only the *mushabbah bi-hi* like  رأيت رجلا هو كالأسد في شجاعته وقوة بطشه سواء. Then you leave this and say I saw a lion. Then Ibn al-Athîr divides *isti’âra* into two types: the first is to conceal the *mushabbah* and to mention only the *mushabbah bi-hi* like  رأيت رجلا هو كالأسد في شجاعته وقوة بطشه سواء. and the second type is to make *al-mushabbah bi-hi khabar* (predicate) for the *mushabbah* such as  زيد أسد . Ibn al-Athîr states that Qudâma b. Ja’far, al-Jâhîz, Abû Hilâl al-Askarî, al-Ghânîmi²¹⁵ and Ibn Sinân al-Khaṣâjî all consider this type as *isti’âra*, but Ibn al-Athîr believes that this type is *tashbih balîgh* (eloquent simile) not *isti’âra*. Ibn al-Athîr then discusses *tashbih* using the concept of *majâz*:

“as for *majâz* [in *tashbih*], it is to say about two things which resemble each other in some of their characteristics as when say "زيد أسد" (Zayd is a lion). This statement is true with respect to the usage of the Arabs in their speech and it comes under hyperbolism, however Zayd is not a lion in reality”.²¹⁶

In this matter of considering *tashbih* in terms of *majâz*, Ibn al-Athîr differs from other writers on the subject in this book while his other views on *majâz* and *isti’âra* are mere repetitions of opinions of others.

²¹³ As a matter of fact this is the definition of *isti’âra* (Ibn al-Athîr omits the phrase  فتعيره المشبه from his definition) as offered by al-Jurjâni in his *Dalâ’il al-I’jâz*, op cit., p. 114 which is

١٠٥

²¹⁵ Muhammad b. Ghânîm, a poet and man of letters, the great vizier Nizâm al-Mulk was a topic of his panegyrical poetry. See footnote no. 2, p. 2 (of the text of Ibn al-Athîr).
²¹⁶ Al-Jâmi’ al-Kabîr, p. 90.
**Majāz and istiʿāra in al-Mathal al-Sāʾir:**

In his chapter on ḥaqīqa and majāz, Ibn al-Athīr gives this definition:

“majāz is what is meant by it other than its conventional meaning in the origin of the language and it is derived from جاز to cross from this place to another place… so the true nature of majāz is the transference from one locality to another and this has been applied to the transference of utterances from one locus to another as in our saying زياد أسد, Zayd is a human and lion is a known animal and here [by saying Zayd is a lion] we have crossed from humanity to lionism أسدية …meaning we crossed from this to this because there is a connection between them and the connection in this case is the attribute of courage. The crossing might be without connection and this is [called] semantic expansion”.

It can be observed that Ibn al-Athīr in his definition of majāz combines the two definitions mentioned in his book al-Jāmi‘. So according to this definition majāz can take place either if there is a connection between the primary sense and the secondary sense, or for the purpose of semantic expansion.

Ibn al-Athīr then states that some people believe that the discourse is all ḥaqīqa and has no majāz in it, while others believe the opposite, that the discourse is all majāz and has no ḥaqīqa in it. He argues that both opinions are false, and language contains both ḥaqīqa and majāz. In this matter Ibn al-Athīr withdraws what he said in al-Jāmi‘ al-Kabīr, that most of the language is majāz which is as a matter of fact the opinion of Ibn Jinni, as we have seen earlier.

In the beginning of his chapter about istiʿāra, Ibn al-Athīr states that his work is a product of his own mind and not something he heard from others. He goes on to say that:

“Majāz can be divided into two parts: semantic expansion in the discourse and tashbih. Tashbih is of two types: complete tashbih and omitted tashbih; the complete tashbih is when you mention al-mushabah (the topic) and al-mushabah bi-hi (the analogue), while the omitted tashbih is to mention al-

---

218 Ibid., p. 59.
mushabbah only and to omit al-mushabbah bi-hi. The last type of tashbih is called isti‘ara; this term has been coined to distinguish between this type of tashbih and the complete one, otherwise both can be called tashbih. It is also possible for this kind of tashbih [the second type] to be called isti‘ara because both [al-mushaba and al-mushabbah bi-hi] share the meaning [like courage when we say I saw a lion]. As for the semantic expansion, it is used for the purpose of having freedom in using the language not for other benefit. If you wish you can say: Majāz can be divided into semantic expansion in the discourse, tashbih and isti‘ara. It does not go beyond any of these three categories, so whichever [of these categories] is there then it is majāz“. 219

Then he states that the tashbih where the particle of comparison is omitted cannot be considered as isti‘ara, for example; زيد أسد.

It is clear from above that his view about isti‘ara (“to mention al-mushabbah only and to omit al-mushabbah bi-hi”) is not clear. How can we explain this expression if we accept his definition: رأيت أسدأ as we have omitted here the mushabbah not al-mushabbah bi-hi? If one argues that Ibn al-Athīr means what is called استعارة مكتبة (which is to mention al-mushabbah and to omit the mushabbah bi-hi but at the same time you allude to the mushabbah bi-hi using one of its significant qualities) the answer will be that he failed to mention that there should be an indication to the mushabbah bi-hi in some way or another (لوازم المشبه به). Furthermore, later in his chapter he presented some examples including poetry and Qur’ānic verses which contain استعارات مكتبة (metaphors by way of allusion), but he did not consider them as isti‘ara rather as semantic expansion in the discourse. 220

“(فما يَكْتُبُ عَلَيْهِمُ السَّمَاءُ وَالْأَرْضُ وَمَا كَانَوا مُنَظَّرِينَ)

“Neither heaven nor earth wept for them”. Q (44:29)

So it can be concluded that he does not mean by the expression أن يذكر المشبه دون المشبه به an alluded metaphor (استعارة مكتبة). There might be a possible explanation which is an error in the editing of this book and the statement: و المشبه المحدود: أن يذكر المشبه دون المشبه به can be read as أن يذكر المشبه به دون المشبه به. What supports this reading is that in the same page Ibn al-Athīr, speaking about the reasons to use majāz instead

219 Ibid., vol. 1, p.356.
220 Ibid., pp. 361- 363.
of ُهاقِيْقا, says that one of the reasons to use ُمَجاْز could be if there is ُمشاركة (sharing [the meaning]) - note that he used the word ُوَصْلَة (connection) to describe the same thing in his definition of ُمَجاْز in his book ُمَثَال الْسَّاهِر. So if there is ُمشاركة then we have two types:

"فإما أن يذكر المنقول والمنقول إليه معاً وإما أن يذكر المنقول إليه دون المنقول"

“either the transferred term and the term transferred to are both mentioned [this is the case of ُتَشْبِيح] or the term transferred to is mentioned excluding the transferred term [this is the case of ُيَسْتَرْأ]”.

Ibn al-Aثيثr defines ُيَسْتَرْأ saying that:

“[it is] the transference of meaning from an utterance to [another] utterance because of a shared meaning between them, [this is done by] concealing the term transferred to (المنقول إليه) ...and its procedure is that you lend the name of the ُمَشْحَبَّة بِهِ to the ُمَشْحَبَّة ...For example when you say. ُ

Then Ibn al-Aثيثr quotes Ibn jinnī’s view about ُمَجاْز, which we came cross earlier:

“ُمَجاْز is used instead of ُهاقِيْقا for three ideas: semantic expansion, emphasis and comparison. If none of these reasons exist then it is the pure ُهاقِيْقا”. ُ

He criticises Ibn Jinnī’s method of applying these three ideas to explain ُمَجاْز. Ibn al-Aثيثr states in this regard that Ibn jinnī made the existence of these three ideas, the reason for the existence of ُمَجاْز, which is wrong, since ُمَجاْز can be achieved even if there is only either ُتَشْبِيح or ُيَتْسَا (semantic expansion); furthermore، ُتَوْكِيد (emphasis) and ُتَشْبِيْه (comparison) are the same if Ibn jinnī means by the word ُتَوْكِيد a hyperbolism. ُ

Then Ibn al-Aثيثr states that he read a book ُإيِّد about ُعُسُل الْفِقْه written by Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī in which he divides ُمَجاْز into14 categories ُincluding ُيَسْتَرْأ،

---

221 ُإيِّد، p. 365.
223 ُمَثَال الْسَّاهِر، vol. 1, pp. 366-368.
al-majaz al-mursal and majaz al-ziyada wa al-nuqsan (pleonasm and ellipses). He goes on to refute these categories by showing how they can be explained by his division of majaz (tawass'u, tashbih and isti'ara); so for instance Ibn al-Athir states that the second category of al-Ghazali (which is calling something by the name of what it will end up with, as in this verse:

(Said one of them, ‘I dreamed that I was pressing [wine]226’. Q (12:36)

Here khamr stands for grape but it is called khamr because it will turn into khamr; this is isti’ara. No one else before Ibn al-Athir called this type of majaz isti’ara227 and Ibn al-Athir stands in sharp contrast to all other writers on the subject.

Al-Mathal al-Sa’ir draws excessive appraisal and harsh criticism alike. In his book Kashf al-Zunun,228 Ḥāji Khalīfa mentions various books including al-Falak al-Da’ir ‘alā al-Mathal al-Sa’ir229 by Ibn Ābī al-Ḥādīḍ and in turn Abū al-Qāsim al-Sinjārī wrote a reply to this book entitled Nashr al-Mathal al-Sa’ir wa Ṭayy al-Falak al-Da’ir.

In his book al-Jami’ al-Kabīr, Ibn al-Athir was not original in his views about majaz and isti’ara. He was influenced, as we have seen earlier, by Ibn Jinnī in his views on


225 Ibn al-Athir, vol. 1, pp. 368-374
226 The original translation of this word by Arberry is (grapes).
227 The editor of al-Mathal al-Sa’ir Muhammad Muhīy al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd does not consider this example as isti’ara "No this example can not be considered as isti’ara even if the author (Ibn al-Athir) swears on this matter". Al-Mathal al-Sa’ir, vol. 1, p. 369, no. 1.
230 Ibn Abī al-Ḥādīḍ is the famous Mu’tazili commentator on Nahj al-Balāgha of ʿAfl b. Abī Ṭālīb, philologist and a poet (d.655 or 56/1257 or 58).
majáz and by ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī in his definition of istiti‘āra. What is new in his
discussion is his consideration of tashbih as a form of majáz.

In his book al-Mathal al-Sā‘īr, he combines his two previous definitions in al-
Jami‘ and restates clearly his classification of tashbih as majáz. He refers to the
views of Ibn Jinnī about majáz and refutes them. He does not mention al-majāz al-
‘aqīli in either of his books, nor does he consider al-isti‘āra al-makniyya (alluded
metaphor) as istiti‘āra, instead he considers it as ittiṣā‘ (semantic expansion). The
novelty of his approach lies in his division of majāz into three types: istiti‘āra, tashbih
and ittiṣā‘. Shawqi Dayf commenting on his views about istiti‘āra believes that his
view “is not precise”, 231 which is true if we read the statement وتشبيه المحذوف أن يذكَر
المشبه دون المشبه به as it is, but if we accept it as a mere editing error as I mentioned
earlier, then his views are consistent and there is no contradiction in them. Finally
Ibn al-Athīr was familiar with ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī’s views at least in his book
Dalā‘il al-I‘jāz, even though he did not mention his name.

1.20 Al-Zamalkānī d.651AH/1253CE 232

Al-Zamalkānī wrote two books on the issues of balāqha and i‘jāz (inimitability) in
the Qur‘ān, al-Tibyān fī ‘ilm al-Bayān al-Muṭṭali‘ alā I‘jāz al-Qur‘ān 233 and al-
Burhān al-Kāshīf ‘an I‘jāz al-Qur‘ān. Al-Zamalkānī wrote Al-Tibyān in order to
simplify Dalā‘il al-I‘jāz of ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī and make it accessible. Al-
Tibyān is dominated by grammatical concerns due to the fact that it was based on al-
Dalā‘il. 234 The editors of the book 235 state that al-Zamalkānī was influenced by

231 Shawqi Dayf, p. 329.
al-Ansārī al-Simākī al-Dimashqī al-Shāfi‘ī al-Zamalkānī. He is attributed to
Zamalkān which is a village in al-Ghūṭa in Damascus. He was appointed as a judge
in Sarkhad and he taught for sometime in Ba‘labak. He is the author of the two
Furthermore, he was a poet but only one poem survived and the manuscript can be
found in Leiden library. Most of the ancient sources, however, do not mention al-
Zamalkānī and they give more importance to his grandson al-Kamāl al-Zamalkānī.
Therefore we do not have knowledge about our author save what is mentioned above.
He says nothing about his life and teachers save his teacher Abū ‘Umar b. al-Hājib.
Thus the biography of this secretive judge and scholar remains obscure (see the
introduction of the editors of: al-Zamalkanī 1974, al-Burhān al-Kāshīf ‘an I‘jāz al-
233 Edited by Ahmad Matlūb and Khadija al-Ḥadīthī, Baghdad, 1964.
234 Al-Burhān al-Kāshīf, p. 20.

In his other book al-Burḥān al-Kāshīf which was written after al-Tībān, al-Zamalkānī covered most of the topics of al-Burḥān with some modification including elaborate discussion of some points.

Al-Zamalkānī divides his book into three parts: the first part deals with the issue of i‘jāz al-Qur’ān, the second with individual words and the third with composition and constructions. He deals with the issue of majāz in the second part of his book. In a section entitled “On Ḥaqīqa and Majāz” he speaks about the significations of vocables and offers this definition for majāz as “المجاز ما استعمل فيما لا يفهم منه عند الإطلاق لعلاقة مع قوم اللفظة” which can be translated as “al-majāz is the vocable used in a sense which does not indicate his original semantic signification. [The vocable] is used because of a relationship [between its original semantic signification and the secondary meaning] and with existence of frame of reference [to indicate that the original meaning is not meant here].”

Al-Zamalkānī acknowledges that majāz al-ziyāda in the verse Q (42:11) and majāz al-‘aqli which occurs in a sentence do not come under his definition, but he attempts to accommodate them in his definition or alter it. In the same page he acknowledges that majāz can take place in a single word and in a structure or sentence, following ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī. In the next section he speaks of the division of al-majāz al-ifrādī (majāz that takes place in a single word) – following al-Rāzī’s division in his al-Maḥṣūl mentioned above – including various relations of what is later called al-majāz al-mursal, isti‘āra, and majāz al-ziyāda wa al-nuqṣān (pleonasm and ellipses).

In the next section he states that kīnāya, isti‘āra and tamthīl are generally related to majāz. Regarding isti‘āra, he defines it in a similar way to that of al-Jurjānī in his Dalā‘īl, that is to call al-mushabbah with the name of mushabbah bi-hi without using the particle of comparison (رايت أسدًا) or to make something belong to

235 Ibid., p. 21.
236 the editors introduction to the al-Burḥān, ibid., p. 29.
237 Ibid., (introduction by the editors) pp. 28-29.
238 Ibid., p. 99.
239 Ibid., p. 100.
240 Ibid., p.105.
something else (يد الشمال). He comments that attributing a hand to the wind is a kind of fantasy and delusion (تخيل ووهم) and whoever ignores such an understanding will fall in the fathomless deep sea, which has no shore (لجة بحر لا ساحل له) when he hears these verses.242

“..running before Our eyes”. Q (54:14)

“..and to be formed in My sight”. Q (20:39)

Al-Zamalkānī’s views about majāz and isti‘āra were mainly influenced by al-Jurjānī and al-Rāzī but he departed from al-Rāzī in considering kīnaya as majāz.

1.21 Ibn Abī al-Iṣba’ al-Miṣrī (d.654AH/d.1256)243

Ibn Abī al-Iṣba’ wrote two major books on balāgha which are Tahrīr al-Tahlīl and Badi‘ al-Qur‘ān. His approach to balāgha is a literary one. In his book Tahrīr al-Tahlīl he enumerated 122 types of badi‘ (embellishment). He starts with those of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz, Qudāma b. Ja‘far and then moves to other writers. This amounted to 92 types in total of the reminder 20 were attributed to him and eight types attributed to others.244 In his book Badi‘ al-Qur‘ān,245 he numerates 108 types246 of badi‘ which could be found in the Qur‘ān: 102 types from his other book and six new types.247

241 Ibid., pp. 110 -111.
242 Ibid., p. 111.
243 Ibn Abī al-Iṣba’ al-Miṣrī: ‘Abd al-‘Azīm b. ‘Abd al-Wāḥid b. Abī al-Iṣba’ was an Egyptian poet and scholar who wrote on stylistics Very little is known of his life. Apart from some poetry, three of his books have survived and have been published: Tahrīr al-Tahlīl, Badi‘ al-Qur‘ān and al-Khawāṣir al-Sawānih.
244 Shawqi Dayf, p.359.
246 Shawqi Dayf, ibid., p. 359 and see also Badawi Ṭābānah, al-Bayān al-‘Arabī, pp. 66- 70.
247 See the introduction of the editor of Badi‘ al-Qur‘ān, p. 92-93.
Like Ibn al-Mu‘tazz, Ibn Abī al-Iṣba‘ starts his book with *isti‘āra* quoting al-Rāzī (in his book *Nihāyat al-Ījāz*) “*al-isti‘āra* is to mention something using the name of something else (I saw a lion) or affirming what belongs to something else to it (the hand of the north wind) for the purpose of hyperbolism in *tashbīh*.”

Then he offers a definition for the second type of *isti‘āra* mentioned by al-Rāzī (the hand of the north wind type).

اِسْتَعْمَارَةٌ هِيَ تَسْمِيةُالمرْجُوحِالخُفِيَبَاسِمِالرَّاجِحِالجَلِيَ

“*al-isti‘āra* is calling the hidden preponderated with the name of the apparent preponderating”. This definition is more elegant than that of al-Rāzī’s and it implies hyperbolism in *tashbīh*. 249

Following al-Rāzī’s method, Ibn Abī al-Iṣba‘ analyses what al-Rāzī calls *tashbīh* . What is new here is his elaborate analysis of two anthropomorphic verses in the *Qur‘ān*. This analysis reminds us of ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī’s treatment of the subject. Here is an example:

﴾

(الذي خلق السماوات والأرض وما بينهما في ستة آيَات

ثم استوى على العرش الرحبِّم فاستغرب به خُبْرًا)

“Who created the heavens and the earth, and what between them is, in six days, then sat Himself upon the throne, the All-compassionate: ask any informed of Him”. Q (25:59)

He says that *al-musta‘ār* (borrowed term) is *al-istiwa‘* (sitting firmly), *al-musta‘ār min-hu* (the term borrowed from) is every firmly seated body and *al-musta‘ār la-hu* (the term borrowed for) is God. 250 So when one hears this *isti‘āra*, one will imagine a king who has finished organising his kingdom and looking after his subjects and providing them with everything they need; this king then sat himself firmly on the throne of his kingdom with masterly might. The hearer would then compare what lies beyond his senses of Divine matters with what he imagines of the earthly kingdom. Therefore the *Qur‘ān* always mentions “sitting firmly on the throne” after speaking about the creation of the heavens and the earth and what lies between

\[\text{248} \text{ al-Rāzī, *Nihāyat*, p. 232 and *Badi‘ al-Qur‘ān*, p. 18.}
\[\text{249} \text{ *Badi‘ al-Qur‘ān*, p.19.}
\[\text{250} \text{ Ibid., p. 24.} \]
them, even though there is no erected throne, perceived sitting nor istiwhāʾ as understood literally.

In his chapter about majāz, Ibn Abī al-Iṣbaʿ restates the definition of Al-Rāzī already mentioned (where al-Rāzī quotes al-Jurjānī in his Asrār):

“The vocable has to satisfy two conditions in order to be considered as majāz: First it has to be transferred from its original conventional meaning; Second this transference (from the primary meaning to the secondary one) should be for an association and a relationships between them.”

Then Ibn Abī al-Iṣbaʿ refers to the contradiction between this definition of majāz and the definition of isti’āra mentioned by al-Rāzī which is “al-isti’āra is to mention something using the name of something else (I saw a lion)”. Ibn Abī al-Iṣbaʿ states that for a vocable to be majāz it has to satisfy the two conditions mentioned above, and the condition of transference is not met in the definition of isti’āra. This is true provided that al-Rāzī did not change his views on this matter, but as we have seen earlier in the section about al-Rāzī, he prefers the view of al-Jurjānī in his Asrār. That is because isti’āra is a special case of majāz and majāz requires transference …[and therefore] transference occurs in the isti’āra. So in this case there is no contradiction.

Ibn Abī al-Iṣbaʿ did not contribute to the study of majāz; he was a collector more than an original thinker in this matter.

1.22 Badr al-Dīn b. Mālik (d.686AH/1287)

---

251 al-Rāzī, Niḥāyat al-Ījāz, p. 168.
252 Asrār, 365-366.
255 al-Rāzī, pp.236-237.
256 Ibn Mālik: Abū ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh b. Mālik Badr al-Dīn al-Dimashqī; the son of the scholar Jamāl al-Dīn al-Ṭāʾī al-Jīyānī al-Shаfiiʾī al-Dimashqī. He was a grammarian and a scholar in balāgha; born in Jayyān in Andalusia and emigrated with his father to Damascus where he received knowledge from his own father. He was a scholar in grammar, al-Maʿānī, al-Bayān, al-Bādīʾ, prosody and logic. Moreover he had good contribution to jurisprudence. Ibn Mālik died in Damascus in d.686AH/1287 (see the introduction of the editor of: Badr
Badr al-Dīn's major work on balāgha is his book al-Miṣbāḥ fī al-Maʿāní wa al-Bayān wa al-Badī’ which is a summary of the third section of al-Miftāḥ of al-Sakkākī. He was the first scholar to call the third part of the section about Balāgha in al-Miftāḥ. Badr al-Dīn in his summary simplifies al-Miftāḥ by omitting many of its complicated definitions and logical arguments.

In his section on majāz he enumerates five types of majāz (four that occur in a single word) and one in the isnād or al-majāz al-‘aqli. Badr al-Dīn here considers majāz al-isnād as ‘aqīli and does not mention the opinion of al-Sakkākī in this matter of considering this majāz as lughawi.

Al-Miṣbāḥ was the first summary of the balāgha section of the Miṣbāḥ to appear in the Arab regions of the Islamic world. It is al-Miṣbāḥ who introduced the views of al-Sakkākī to the Arabic speaking regions of the Islamic world. This book is one of the sources of many later books, such as al-Ṭirāz of al-ʿAlawī and al-Qazwīnī’s books (Sharḥ al-Talkhiṣ, al-Īṭāḥ, al-Talkhiṣ and the commentaries on them). Al-Miṣbāḥ was especially famous in the western part of Islamic world, to the extent that Ibn Khaldūn considered it as one of the main sources of Balāgha during his time, consequently many commentaries were written on it.

Badr al-Dīn wrote another book on balāgha entitled Rawd al-Adhūn fī ‘ilm al-Baya’n which is not different from al-Miṣbāḥ. Rawd al-Adhūn was one of the sources of Bahāʾ al-Dīn al-Subkī. Al-Miṣbāḥ was soon followed by another famous summary which superseded it, Talkiṣ al-Miftāḥ written by al-Qazwīnī.

1.23 Al-Khaṭīb al-Qazwīnī (d.739AH/1338CE)

For more information see: Shawqi ʿDayf, pp. 315-316.


Al-Miṣbāḥ, pp. 171-184.


Ahmad Matlūb, p. 92. Matlūb mentions that there is a copy of this manuscript in Liedn library.

Al-Khaṭīb al-Qazwīnī: ʿAbū ʿAbd Allāh (and Abū al-Maʿāfī) Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Jalāl al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb al-Qazwīnī, also known as Khaṭīb Dimashq (the preacher of Damascus), was a legal scholar and rhetorician. In spite of his Persian place-of-origin name al-Qazwīnī, he was of pure Arab descent. He was trilingual in
Al-Qazwini wrote two books on ‘ilm al-balāgha: al-Talkhīṣ263 and al-Īdāḥ264. Al-Qazwini states in his Talkhīṣ that the greatest book written on ‘Ilm al-Balāgha is the third section of al-Mīftāḥ of al-Sakkākī. But he adds that al-Mīftāḥ is long, full of extraneous comments and prolixity; therefore his Talkhīṣ (summary) is to explain the ambiguities in the Mīftāḥ and edit it.265 In the introduction to his Īdāḥ, al-Qazwini states that this book is organised in the same manner as that of Talkhīṣ and is written as a commentary in order to explain the difficult points of al-Talkhīṣ.266 Al-Qazwini was influenced by al-Mubarrad, ‘Alī al-Jurjānī, al-Rummānī, al-‘Askarī, al-Khafajī, ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī, al-Zamakhsharī, Ibn al-Athīr, Ibn Abī al-Iṣba’, and Badr al-Dīn b. Mālik.267

On majāz al-Qazwini divides al-Majāz into two types: mufrad (single word majāz) and murakkab (constructed majāz).

A. Single word majāz:

Al-Qazwini gives this definition:268

"[المجاز] المفرد فهو الكلمة المستعملة في غير ما وضعته له في اصطلاح التخاطب على وجه

"المجاز المفرد is a vocable when it is used [in a sense] other than the one which [the word] originally signifies in the convention of the discourse, in a right manner with [the existence of] frame of reference to indicate that [the veridical sense] is not intended.”

Arabic, Persian and Turkish, but wrote only in Arabic. In his legal and religious career he was rather successful; in 706AH/1307AD he was made preacher and imām at the Umayyād Mosque in Damascus; in 724/1324 he attained a high judgeship in Syria; and three years later he was appointed Shāfiʿī chief judge in Cairo under the Mamlūk ruler al-Nāṣir b. Qalāwūn. He returned to Damascus where he died.

266 Al-Qazwīnī, al-Īdāḥ, p. 70.
Then he divides *al-majāz al-mufrad* into two types: *al-majāz al-mursal* and *isti‘āra*. Al-Qazwini is the first scholar to coin the term *al-majāz al-mursal* to this type of majāz.

1. *al-majāz al-mursal*: it is a majāz mufrad where the relationship between what is used for and its conventional meaning is other than similarity. Such as the word يد (hand) for نعمة (favour).

2. *al-isti‘āra*: it is a majāz mufrad where the relationship is based on similarity.**269**

B. *al-Majāz al-Murakkab* :**270**

What al-Qazwini means by this type is called by al-Jurjānī *isti‘āra* based on *tamthīl* (الاستعارة التمثيلية). As an example of this type al-Qazwini uses a verse quoted by ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (already mentioned above) as well as his explanation to illustrate this point. The verse in question is

(وما قدرنا الله خلّ قدره وثابنا جمعاً فَاعْلِمُوا لَهُمَّ الْقِيَامَةَ والْمَشَاعَةَ مَعْطَىٰ بِبَيْنِهِ سَبَعِينَ وَعَشَرَيْنَ عَامَّٰ‌شَماً) ْبِيُّشَرٌ كُون

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

**Al-Majāz al-‘Aqli:**

Regarding *al-Majāz al-‘aqli*, al-Qazwini does not consider this type of majāz to belong to ‘ilm al-bayān but its proper place is ‘ilm al-ma‘ānī.**271** So in his discussion about the types of isnād (predication) he discusses *al-majāz al-‘aqli* as a form of predication. Al-Qazwini gives this definition of *al-majāz al-‘aqli* :

“it is to attribute a verb or an element carrying verbal force to something it is semantically involved with (mulābis la-hu) through an intellectual effort (bi l-ta’awwul). The things it can be semantically involved with are manifold. It

---

**268** *Al-Talkhīṣ, op cit.,* p. 137 and *al-Īdāh,* p. 394.


**270** *al-Īdāh,* pp. 438–439.

**271** For more information in English about al-Qazwini's *Talkhīṣ* and his life see the recent study by herbjorn Jenssen, The Subtleties and Secrets of the Arabic Language: Preliminary Investigations into al-Qazwini’s *Talkhīṣ al-Miftah*, Bergen 1998.
may be semantically involved with the subject (fā‘iḥ or object (maṣdar bi-hi)
or the verbal noun (maṣdar) or the adverbial of time (zamān) or the adverbial
of reason (saḥab)...such as عيشة راضية (a tranquil life), نهاره صامم (his day is
fasting) and بنى الأمير المدينة (the prince built the city).272

Al-Qazwīnī’s work goes beyond summarising and editing al-Sakākī’s Miḥṭāḥ. As is
clear from his treatment of majāz, he introduces a new division of al-majāz (mufrad
and murakkab) and appears to disagree with al-Sakākī (who consideres all the
majāz as lughātī). Al-Qazwīnī treats al-majāz al-‘aqlī as part of ‘ilm al-ma‘ānī not
al-bayān as earlier scholars have done.

Conclusion:
The issue of majāz is an important topic of discussion in several disciplines of
learning in Islamic thought, such as philology, rhetoric, usūl al-fiqh, theology,
philosophy and Qur’ānic exegesis. Al-majāz as a figure of speech developed
through many stages; early authors such as Sibawayh were aware of the phenomenon
without explicitly mentioning the term. Generally speaking these authors identified
various strategies such as ḥadhif(ellipsis), ziyāda (pleonasm), kināya and iltifāt
(grammatical shift), and isti‘āra (the first figure to use the term isti‘āra was Aūr
‘Amr b. al-‘Ala’). All these strategies were applied to the Qur’ān and compared with
proper Arabic usage. In the same line the work of Abū ‘Ubayda (Majāz al-Qur’ān)
can be considered. Towards the middle of the third century A.H., the term majāz
became prevalent in the writing of the Mu’tazalīte al-Jāhiz, who is considered to be
the founder of ‘ilm al-balāgha. Al-Jāhiz failed, however, to develop any theoretical
framework for it; nevertheless he was aware of the distinction between ḥaqīqa and
majāz as opposite concepts. From the time of al-Jāhiz onwards majāz became a
major device in the hand of early theologians (Mu’tazilites) in their approach to the
issue of anthropomorphic verses in the Qur’ān.

Ibn al-Mu’tazz’s definition of isti‘āra is general and covers most kinds of majāz.
Qudāma cites examples under the titles of tamthīl and isti‘āra without determining

272 al-Talkhīṣ pp. 22-23 (this quotation is translated by Herbjorn Jenssen, The
subtleties and Secrets of the Arabic Language, p. 69.)
the relationship between them. Furthermore, Ishâq b. Wahb does not distinguish between majâz and isti‘âra and uses them synonymously whether the cases are based on comparison or not. Al-Âmidi’s definition covers most aspects of metaphorical language and al-Rummâni divides balâgha into ten categories, isti‘âra among them; in his definition of isti‘âra we find the use of the word naqîl (transference). He was the first to show the psychological effect of isti‘âra and the reasons behind it. However, he does not distinguish between majâz and isti‘âra.

Al-Qâdi al-Jurjâni gives a more specific definition of isti‘âra and covers all aspects of majâz. Ibn Jinnâf finds that majâz is used for the following reasons: expansion, emphasis and comparison. He too does not distinguish between majâz and isti‘âra. Like his teacher Abû ‘Alî al-Farisi he considers that most of the language is majâz and not haqîqa. Ibn Fâris finds majâz as anything which goes beyond haqîqa; isti‘âra is among the linguistic customs of the Arabs but he does not distinguish between isti‘âra and majâz. Abû Hilâlâl al-‘Askarî was influenced by Ibn al-Mu’tazz in his treatment of isti‘âra as part of bâdî’. In his definition of isti‘âra we can clearly see the influence of al-Rummâni.

Ibn Rashiq al-Qayrawâni does not attempt to relate various categories of majâz to each other; regarding isti‘âra, he quotes and discusses various writers but without trying to produce a coherent theory. With the writing of al-Khafâfî the branches of ‘ilm al-bayân (simile, majâz and isti‘âra) reach an advanced stage in their development but without a unifying theory that can spell out the exact relationship between them especially with regard to majâz and isti‘âra. This would be achieved by ‘Abd al-Qâhir al-Jurjâni.

Abd al-Qâhir al-Jurjâni’s contribution to the study of majâz in particular and balâgha in general affected all those who came after him. His main contribution consists of distinction between majâz ‘âqli and al-majâz al-lughawi, and the division of al-majâz al-lughawi into isti‘âra and what is called later majâz mursal. He also contributed greatly to the issue of interpreting anthropomorphic verses in the Qur’ân, where those who came before him were satisfied to say for example that يد stands for power in و السموت طويلا تيمنا) al-Jurjâni explains how one can go from hand to power. Al-Râzî acknowledges the importance of al-Jurjâni’s books, which he abbreviated and rearranged in his book Nihâyat al-‘ljâz fî Dirâyat al-Ijâz. This book
was very influential on subsequent generations (such as al-Sakkāki) due to its clarity, which reflected al-Razi's theological and philosophical training. Al-Sakkāki's section on 'ilm al-balāgha in his book al-Miftāh proved very popular among later writers to the extent that they have forgotten al-Jurjāni's work.

Al-Sakkāki rearranged al-Jurjāni's books and gave 'ilm al-balāgha its classical form. He disagrees with earlier writers on al-Majāz by considering all forms of majāz to be lexical (lughawi). A summary of al-Miftāh by al-Qazwīnī (talkhīs al-Miftāh) proved to be more popular than the Miftāh itself. Subsequently many commentaries and supercommentaries were written on it. These commentaries hardly added anything new or advanced the discussion after al-Jurjāni; nevertheless they enrich the intellectual life of Muslims. Having now presented the development of theory of majāz up to al-Qizwini, the next chapter will examine the interpretation of anthropomorphistic verses in the first three Islamic centuries of selected authors in the light of the development of this theory in the corresponding period.
Chapter 2

The beginnings: Early authors

It is known that Muslim authors used the theory of *majāz* to interpret anthropomorphic verses, but does this imply that before the development of this theory, early authors took these anthropomorphic expressions at their prima facie sense, especially those authors who did not belong to the Muʿtazilite’s school? To be able to answer this important question we need to examine the interpretations of early authors to see if they were sensitive to the issue of anthropomorphism in the Qurʾān even though we have very few complete commentaries in the first three centuries of Islam. At this period also Qurʾānic hermeneutics had not yet been fully developed neither the theory of *majāz*, however, both had their beginning in the 3rd A.H/8th-9th. For these reasons, my treatment of the selected authors here would be limited and the link between Kalām, Qurʾānic hermeneutics and *balāgha* would not be strong in comparison with the Muʿtazilites and the Ashʿarites.

Generally speaking, I will focus on the interpretation of anthropomorphic verses of these authors and I will also examine their Qurʾānic hermeneutics, theological views and views on *majāz* were possible. My study of these authors is chronologically presented according to their date of death.

This chapter is divided into five sections: First section examines Mujāhid b. Jabr, second; Muqāṭīl b. Sulymān, third, Abū ʿUbayda, fourth; al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm, and Fifth Ibn Qutayba.
2.1 Mujāhid b. Jabr\(^1\) (21/642, d. between 100/718 and 104/722)

The \textit{tafsīr} of Mujāhid\(^2\) is one of the earliest commentaries of the Qur’ān to reach us so far. There is only one known manuscript of this commentary in Egypt and this does not cover the whole Qur’ān. In addition to this manuscript we find many of his comments scattered in the books of \textit{tafsīr} and \textit{ḥadīth} such as al-Ṭabarānī and \textit{Musnad al-Rabī’} b. Ḥabīb\(^3\). In what follows I will examine his views on Q (3:7) and his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses, as no discussion of \textit{majāz} theory is mentioned in his commentary.

2.1.1 Interpreting Q (3:7)

Regarding the interpretation of Q (3:7), Mujāhid offers the following interpretations of the key terms of this verse\(^4\):

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textit{Āyātun muḥkamāt}: He sets clear what is lawful and unlawful in these verses.
  \item \textit{Ukharu mutashābihāt} (ambiguous verses): each part confirm other part such as Q (2:26), (6:125), (47:17). The previous verses deal with the issue of the source of guidance and their prima facie sense indicate that it is God who guides and misguides.
  \item \textit{‘qāla ya’lamuna ta’wiḥahu wa yaqūlūna’}\\
  ‘and those firmly rooted in knowledge –he said: they know its interpretation by saying we believe in it; all is from our Lord’.
\end{itemize}

We can observe two things from the above quotations; firstly, Mujāhid considers \textit{mutashābihāt} as those verses that deal with theological issues i.e. free will and more precisely the source of the error, but without interpreting these

\(^2\) There are two editions of this manuscript; the first one is edited by ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Ṭabarī b. Muhammad al-Sūrati, and the second one is edited by Muhammad ‘Abd al-Salām Abū al-Nīl. I will use the second edition in this study because it is more comprehensive than the first one.
verses. At the same time, *muhkamāt* for him are those verses that deal with Islamic law, such as lawful and unlawful acts. The second observation is his recitation of the verse without pausing before *al-rāsikhūna* which means that those firmly rooted in knowledge know its interpretation. Thus he opens the door for the interpretation of *mutashābihāt* verses.

**2.1.2. Mujāhid’s interpretation of anthropomorphic verses:**

Before we examine Mujāhid’s interpretation of anthropomorphic verses, it is worth mentioning that there is no reference (in what has been attributed to Mujāhid) to *majāz* or related concepts. Furthermore, as we have seen in chapter one, the available sources do not mention any discussion about tropical language during his time or before.

As I mentioned earlier Mujāhid did not comment on the whole of the Qurʾān and therefore we have only a few interpretations of anthropomorphic verses.

The following are his interpretations in the published book:

1. Q(2:19) *Wa lahu man hitchāt al-kaffarīn* (19) "and God encompasses the unbelievers"
   ‘He will gather them in Hell’

2. Q(7:51) *Fa’Allūmoo nisā‘ūmū kama nisā‘o ila yūmümūm* (51) "Therefore today We forget them as they forgot the encounter of this their day"
   ‘He says: We will leave them in Hell’

3. Q(25:23) *Wādhi‘nna ila ma’na wa‘ilā ‘amla‘a* (23) "We shall advance upon what work they have done"
   ‘We shall turn’

---

5 *Taṣīr Mujāhid*, ibid., p. 197
6 ibid., p. 337
7 Ibid., p. 497
4. Q(39:56) "Lest any soul should say, 'Alas for me, in that I neglected my duty to [the side] of God” ‘meaning what I have deserted of the command of God”

5. Q(49:1) "O believers, advance not before [both hands of] God and His Messenger; and fear God. God is All-hearing, All-knowing” ‘Do not do anything without the permission of the Prophet of God until God passes his judgement through the Prophet’s speech”.

6. Q(75:22) “Upon that day faces shall be radiant, gazing upon their Lord” ‘waiting for the reward from their Lord who cannot be seen by any of His creation”

Other interpretations attributed to him in various books:

1. Q(20:39) “and to be formed under my eye” he said with my knowledge

2. Q(2:115) “whithersoever you turn, there is the Face of God” ‘The direction of God (the direction of prayer that was ordained by God) so whenever you may be, do not turn your face but to it”.

3. Q(24:35) “God is the Light of the heavens and the earth” ‘God is the director of affairs in heaven and earth”

The above interpretations clearly indicate that Mujähid was sensitive to anthropomorphic descriptions of God in the Qur’ān. He does not offer any justification for his interpretations, nor does he give any reason as to why the prima facie sense of the verses should not be taken. It can also be observed that his interpretation of Q(75:22) is similar

---

8 Ibid., p. 580.
9 Ibid., p. 610
10 Ibid., p. 687.
11 Musnad al-Rabi’ vol 3, p. 36-43
to the Mu'tazilites interpretation\(^{14}\) of this verse which is used to justify their denial of seeing God by sight in the hereafter. Goldziher rightly observes that “We can say that the Mu'tazilites were no trailblazers of metaphorical interpretation of anthropomorphic expressions, rather, in some points of contention they could refer to very reputable representatives and teachers of tradition as their precursors\(^{15}\)."

\textit{Tafsîr Mujåhid} being the first \textit{tafsîr} to reach us is of a great importance for the history of Qur'ânic exegesis. Regarding the interpretation of Q (3:7) first, we see here one of the earliest attempts to identify \textit{mutashâbihât} verses with theological issues; at the same time the \textit{Muhkamat} verses were not contrasted with them. Second, Mujåhid does not restrict the interpretation of \textit{mutashâbihât} verses to God; on the contrary those who are firm in knowledge can interpret them. This \textit{tafsîr} also contains one of the earliest tropical interpretations of anthropomorphic verses, which indicate that this type of interpretation did not start with the Mu'tazilites but at the same time there is no theological justification for this type of interpretation. Next we will examine the first complete \textit{tafsîr} to reach us which is the \textit{tafsîr} of Muqâtîl b. Sulymân.

\(^{14}\) Another interesting observation is that later \textit{salafîs} such as Ibn Taymiyya asserts that their view of anthropomorphic verses represents the view of the \textit{Salaf}. Mujåhid is considered a Salafî according to their view so one wonders what will they make of his views about anthropomorphic verses which are clearly fits into the Mu'tazilite trend especially with regard to his interpretation of Q(75:22) which is at odd with the Aḩl al-ḥadîth group and later Ash'aris

\(^{15}\) Goldziher, Schools of Koranic Commentators, ibid., p. 72.
2.2 Muqātil b. Sulaymān\textsuperscript{16} (150/767)

Muqātil was accused by authors of sects of being a gross anthropomorphist. Al-Ash‘arī contends that Muqātil considered God to have flesh and blood\textsuperscript{17}. Is this view of Muqātil justified in the light of what has been survived from his writings? This section will shed some light on this issue. The \textit{tafsīr} of Muqātil is the oldest complete \textit{tafsīr} to reach us so far and therefore it is a very important document about the state of \textit{tafsīr} in the first half of the second century A.H. Therefore, Muqātil’s approach to anthropomorphic verses reflects the attitudes towards anthropomorphism of some Muslims in the eastern part of the Muslim world at that time. In what follows I will examine Muqātil’s interpretation of Q (3:7), his views of figurative language and finally his interpretations of anthropomorphic verses.

2.2.1 Muqātil’s Hermeneutics:

Regarding the interpretation of Q (3:7), Muqātil offers his interpretation of the key terms as follows:

\textit{Muhākama}: the base for practice and they are the verses Q (6:151-153)

\textit{Mutashābihā}: the four disjoined letters \\
\textit{Ibtighā’a ta’wilīhi}: meaning the limit and the duration of Muslim power

\textsuperscript{16} Muqātil b. Sulaymān was a traditionist and a commentator on the Qur’ān. His use of biblical material in his tafsir made him unpopular in later periods, see Plessner, M.; Rippin, A. "Muqātil b. Sulaymān." \textit{Encyclopaedia of Islam}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} edition.

Wa mā ya‘lamu ta’wilahu illā Allāh. How long the Muslim power will last to the day of judgement.

Then he will pause and start reading wa al-rāsikhūna fī al-‘ilm meaning those who study the Torah.\textsuperscript{18}

As we can see Muqātil limits the muhkamāt to three verses which are related to legal and moral issues, and the mutashābihāt to four disjoint letters; thus everything else is open to interpretation.

\textbf{2.2.2 Muqātil’s views of tropical language:}

During the first half of 2\textsuperscript{nd} century A.H., as we have seen in chapter one of this study, the word majāz was not used to refer to tropical language but the term isti‘āra was used by Abū ‘Amr b. al-‘Alā’ (d. 154/770) and the term ittisas was used by Sibawayh. Muqātil in his tafsīr did not use any of these words to refer to tropical use of the language: majāz, isti‘āra, and ittisas.

Instead Muqātil used the word mathal to refer to tropical language and the word mathal will be replaced by the majāz in a century or so. In the introduction to his tafsīr Muqātil enumerates various types of discourses in the Qur’ān one of them is “amthāl which God the Exalted struck for Himself\textsuperscript{19}”. The question now is what does Muqātil mean by the word amthāl? In his book al-Ashbāh wa al-Nazā‘ir he gives four meanings to the word mathal: 1. shibh (similar, similitude) such as dāraba Allāhu mathalan meaning God struck a similitude. 2. siyar: conducts in life 3. ‘ibra: lesson/example 4. ‘adhāb: torment. The first meaning is the most plausible one for the above quotation and the statement can be translated by using Muqātil’s usage of the term mathal as “Similitudes which God struck for Himself”. Moreover, in his treatment of the usage of the word yad in this verse Q (5:64) he comments “this is mathal dārabahu Aallāh ta‘ālā”-this is a similitude stuck by


\textsuperscript{19} Tafsīr Mujāhid, Ibid., p. 22.
God”. Based on these three comments I believe that this word *mathal* is one of the earliest words used to describe tropical language before the use of the word *majāz*.

### 2.2.3 Muqātil on Anthropomorphism in the Qur’ān:

I have surveyed the most common anthropomorphic attribution of God as interpreted by Muqātil and arranged them in the table below where the first column indicates the topic, the second indicates the number of occurrences, the third indicates the number of tropical interpretation offered by Muqātil, the fourth represents the anthropomorphic interpretation and finally the fifth represents the number of the verses where he either did not offer any interpretation or repeated the same wording without any comment.

As a general observation we can notice that the number of tropical interpretations exceeds anthropomorphic ones 30:21, 5 topics are interpreted anthropomorphically (*istiwā’, kalām, fawqiyya, ityān and ru’ya*), 2 topics are interpreted tropically in some places and anthropomorphically in others (hand, *qurb*) and finally 10 topics are interpreted tropically (*istiḥzā’, wajih, nafs, makr, nafkh, nisyān, sāq, ‘ayn, janb, and nūr*). I will examine first his anthropomorphic interpretations and then I will examine his tropical interpretations.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Number of occurrences</th>
<th>Tropical interpretation</th>
<th>Anthropomorphic Interpretation</th>
<th>No comment or Repeating the wording of the verse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Istihzā’</em> (Mocking)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Istiwa</em>’ (sitting)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Wajih</em> (face)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ityān</em> (coming)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Yad</em> (Hand)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Kalām</em> (speech)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Nafš</em> (soul)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Qurb</em> (nearness)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Makr</em> (cunning)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Fawqiyya</em> (God in heaven)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Nafkh</em> (breath)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Nisya</em> (forgetfulness)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Al-ru’ya</em> (looking at God)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Al-Sāq</em> (leg)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Janb</em> (Side of God)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>‘Ayn</em> (eye)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Nūr</em> (light)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Number</strong></td>
<td><strong>99</strong></td>
<td><strong>30</strong></td>
<td><strong>21</strong></td>
<td><strong>48</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I will examine selected examples of his anthropomorphic interpretations.

*Istiwa’* ‘arsh: He offered three anthropomorphic interpretations for Q (2:255), (20:5), (69:17). For Q (2:255) he comments on the word *kursī* by giving a graphical description of it and the number of angles and each angel has four faces. For Q (20:50) he explained the word *istawā’* by *istiqrār* (settled). Finally for Q (69:17) he comments on the word ‘arsh by saying that it is above their heads (angels).

*Fawqiyya* God in Heaven: He offered anthropomorphic interpretations for all the verses. For example for Q (16:50) God is above them (angels) because God is above everything. He created the ‘arsh (throne) and the ‘arsh is above everything.

*Kalām* Commenting on Q(4:164) he says: it means verbally *(mushāfahā).*

*Ru’ya* In his commentary on Q (75:23) he says: it means they look to God with their eyes *(mu‘ayana).*

*Ityān* For Q (89:22) he says the angels will descend and God will come and in a similar way for (6:158) and (25:23).

Hand: For Q (39:67) he said both earth and heaven are in his right hand meaning in his right fist. In his book *al-Ashba>h wa al-Naz{a>’ir* he gives three meanings to *yad* 1. hand itself (part of the body) he gives as an example (38:75) and (5:64) *yadāhu mabsūtātān* 2. *mathal* (as mentioned above) Q(5:64) 3. act. For the last meaning he gives Q (36:71) and Q (48:10) and he states that hand stands for the act of God.

The word hand is used twice in Q(5:64) and Muqātīl interpreted the first occurrence according to its prima facie meaning and the second as *mathal.* I think the reason behind this contradiction is that the prima facie sense of *yadāhu mabsūtātān* is positive while the

---

20 *Taʃīr Muqātīl,* vol. 1, p. 136.
22 *Taʃīr M.* vol. 1, p. 271.
23 *Taʃīr,* M. vol 3, p. 423.
25 *Taʃīr,* vol. 3, p. 139.
26 *Al-Ashba>h wa al-Naz{a>’ir,* pp. 321-322. He gives similar interpretations in his commentary.
prima facie sense of yadu Allāhi maghlūlat is negative, therefore he interpreted it tropically. On other occasions such as Q(49:1) and Q (51:47) he interprets yad tropically like for Q(51:47) he says with power27.

These above interpretations clearly attribute to God human and physical characteristics. The type of image they portray is that God is above in the heaven sitting on His throne which is above everything else and carried by angels. God also holds the heaven and earth with his right hand or fist. God will come in the day of judgement. Furthermore, God spoke to Moses verbally and can be seen with the eyes in the Day of Judgement. None of the gross anthropomorphism that is attributed to him is detected in his commentary. As a matter of fact he did not differ much from other traditionalists who share much of his views, especially regarding God in the heaven, hand of God or God setting on His throne28. His views about seeing God in the day of judgement by eyes will be accepted as an essential feature of Sunnī creed. Having said that, Muqātil also offers tropical interpretation of many other verses as, will be shown next.

Muqātil’s tropical interpretations:

He offered tropical interpretations to 12 topics which are:

Wajih (face): In Q(28:88) Muqātil said ills wajhuhu but Him29. The same goes for (2:115), (55:27), (76:9).

Nafs (soul): Q(3:28) it means his punishment30. The same goes for (3:30).

‘Ayn (eye): Q(11:37) with our knowledge31

Janb (side): Q(39:56) it means in the essence of God; it means from the dhikr (this could mean either the Quran or mentioning the name of God) of God32.

27 Taḥfīr vol. 3, p. 280.
30 Taḥfīr vol. 1, p. 164.
Saq (leg): Q(68:44) it means the intensity of the hereafter.

Nur (light): Q(24:35) God is the guide of the people of heaven and earth.

Nisyân (forgetfulness): Q(7:51) today (in the hereafter) we will leave them in the hell as the left/ignored the faith. He interpreted Q(9:67) in a similar way.

Nafkh (breath into): Q(21:91) Jibril’s breath in her bosom. The same interpretation is offered for Q(66:12).

Makr (cunning): Q(7:99) it means the punishment of God. Similarly Q(3:54) and (10:21).

Qarib (near): Q(2:186) I am near to them with regard to my answering [their supplication].

The same goes for Q(11:61), (34:50) and (50:16).

Istihzâ (mocking): Q(2:15) God mucks them in the day of judgement by keeping them in the darkness.

The wealth and diversity of the above interpretations clearly show that Muqātil was not anthropomorphist all the way. Moreover, his tropical interpretations of some of the verses will be shared by later authors who interpreted these verses tropically as will be shown later in this study.

The commentary of Muqātil shows that anthropomorphic verses are open to interpretation although no clear Qur’anic hermeneutics is offered. By the time of Muqātil, the word mathal is used to denote tropical use of language and no theory of tropical language exists yet. Muqātil himself was not consistent in his approach to anthropomorphic verses; he was anthropomorphist in some places but he was also sensitive to anthropomorphic

---

33 Taṣīr vol 3, p. 390. At the same page there is also another interpretation attributed to Ibn Mas‘ūd which gives an anthropomorphic interpretation to this verse. It seems that the tropical interpretation is considered to be the correct one. This interpretation is also attributed to Ibn ‘Abbās.
34 Taṣīr, vol. 2, p. 419.
38 Ibid., p. 98.
39 Ibid., p. 34.
descriptions of God in others, and he used the word *mathal* in his interpretation of these verses. Nevertheless, Muqāṭil cannot be considered as a gross anthropomorphist as later writers have claimed. Now we will look at Abū ‘Ubayda and his treatment of anthropomorphic verses.

2.3 Abū ‘Ubayda (110/728-210/825)\(^{40}\)

Abū ‘Ubayda is considered one of the earliest authors to use the word majāz as a title for his work on the Qur’ān. His book *Majāz al-Qur’ān* influenced many subsequent writings on the Qur’ān and attracted many studies in modern times. Nevertheless, his treatment of anthropomorphic verses was ignored in these studies and some of them offered unsubstantiated general remarks about his theological views.

In the introduction of his book *majāz al-Qur’ān* Abū ‘Ubayda states that the Qur’ān was revealed in a clear Arabic tongue and the ancestors and those who were with the prophet did not need to ask about its meanings because they were native speakers of Arabic. Therefore, their knowledge of Arabic and its aspects of expressions was sufficient for them to understand the Qur’ān. Then Abū ‘Ubayda states that the Qur’ān contains various ways of expression, unfamiliar words and meanings in a similar manner to that of Arabic tongue. Then he enumerates 36 aspects which need to be explained, presumably to those who are not familiar with Arabic language and style\(^{41}\). Then he offers interpretations of selected verses which contain the 36 aspects mentioned above.

My concern here is to find out his views on tropical language, terms used and how he interpreted anthropomorphic verses in the Qur’ān. Before that I will examine his interpretation of Q (3:7)

\(^{40}\) He was an Arabic philologist who lived in Basra. His book *majāz al-Qur’ān* is considered one of the main sources of later commentaries. See Weipert, Reinhard. “Abū ‘Ubayda.” *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE.*

2.3.1 Interpreting Q (3:7)

1. *Tafsir and Ta’wil*

In his interpretation of Q(3:7) Abū ‘Ubayda gives the following explanations for the key terms in this verse:

meaning these verses which we call them in the Qur’ān

they resemble each other

he gives two meaning for this word: 1. *al-ta’wīl* is *al-tafsīr*. 2. the ending: its destiny. He did not mention any of the issues and disagreements surrounding this verse.42

2. *Q(7:53): what are they waiting for but its elucidation, elaboration, clarification and explanation*43.

For Abū ‘Ubayda, *ta’wil* has two meanings 1. *tafṣīr* 2. end. He did not comment on other occurrences of the word *ta’wil* and its derivatives in the Qur’ān, nor does he give any further explanations. We can conclude that there was no theory of Qur’ānic hermeneutics at that time.

2.3.2 Abū ‘Ubayda’s usage of the word *majāz* and his attitudes towards tropical language:

There is a consensus among those who studied Abū ‘Ubayda that the word *majāz* is not to be understood as the antithesis to *haqīqa*. Ibn Taymiyya was one of the earliest scholars who commented on Abū ‘Ubayda’s book and his usage of the word *majāz* “…” Among

---

42 Ibid. vol. 1, p. 86.
43 Ibid. vol. 1, p. 216
other scholars who believed that Abū ‘Ubyada did not mean by the word majāz a rhetorical trope are: Wansbrough⁴⁴, Almagor⁴⁵, Abu Deeb⁴⁶, and Heinrich.

If Abū ‘Ubayda did not use the word majāz as trope then what did he mean by it and how did he use it in his book? There is no consensus about this issue in modern scholarship. Wansbrough believes that the Abū ‘Ubayd used the word majāz in the sense of taqdi‘r (textual restoration), majāz is the earlier word for taqdi‘r and the book Majāz al-Qur‘ān is periphrastic exegesis. Furthermore, the term majāz “evolved from the vague designation of an exegetical practice to the closely reasoned description of several rhetorical phenomena found in the scripture as well as in profane literature⁴⁷”.

Almagor while accepting the frequencies of periphrasis states that “it is still hard to agree to its (Majāz al-Qur‘ān) general characterization as periphrastic exegesis⁴⁸”. She believes that Wansbrough simplified the issue by not taking into account of the dual function of the word majāz in Abū ‘Ubayda’s book. She states that “majāz in this early use seems to refer at one and the same time to the mode of expression (as in wa min majāz mā .. of the introduction) and to the designation or interpretation of the thing expressed (as in majāzuhu.) inasmuch as interpretation consists in substituting on expression for another⁴⁹”. Almagor believes that the word majāz “is related to ja‘za, yajuzu as meaning to be allowable, to pass as valid sound or to be current”. Abū ‘Ubayda in the second part of his introduction summarized all the cases he discussed by saying wa kullu hādha jā ‘izun ma‘rūl‘so Amagor concluded that majāz of the introduction is related to jā ‘iz (allowable) in the last sentence and “majāz here means a valid, sound or current mode of expression,

⁴⁶ He argued that “The idea that majāz is process which involves transferences that generate isti‘āra as well as contiguity based modes of expression was totally unfamiliar to him. This was developed in the works of other scholars.” in Abu Deeb, Kamal. Studies in the Majāz and Metaphorical Language of the Qur‘ān: Abū ‘Ubayda and al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, p. 316.
⁴⁷ Wansbrough, ibid., p. 248.
⁴⁸ Almagor, p. 315.
⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 315
and more loosely—just a mode of expression\[^{50}\]. Furthermore, she adds that “in addition to the idea of soundness/validity/currency, early majāz connotes the idea of variegated manners or modes of expression\[^{51}\].”

Heinrichs starting from the original meaning of the verb jāza, quoting Lane “he passed along the place and left it behind” offers the following translation of the word majāz: “that place in a discourse where the explicit meaning goes beyond (or, if we include the activity of the speaker: is taken beyond) the actual wording of a phrase and leaves it behind; in other words: majāz denotes an explanatory re-writing of a given phrase which consists in establishing its maʿna by various means of “going beyond” the original wording, such as addition, subtraction, substitution, etc\[^{52}\].” He rightly observes that in this sense majāz refers to the “natural equivalent of an unusual idiom” which is similar to the meaning of the word bagīqa in later discussions of it as a counterpart of majāz\[^{53}\].

Abu Deeb reached a similar conclusion after examining the various ways in which Abū ‘Ubayda uses majāz, and concluded by saying that”Abū ‘Ubayda used the word majāz itself in its original, ordinary, linguistic sense ....derived from the verb jāza (crossed over, passed from to) to mean ‘the original or more familiar mode of formulation to the different mode in which it appears in the Qurʾān\[^{54}\].”

By the time of Abū ‘Ubayda we saw in chapter 1 that there was awareness among the critics, Qurʾānic commentators and grammarians of tropical language but there was no theory nor fixed term to describe this phenomenon. We have seen earlier that Muqāṭīl used the word mathal to refer to tropical use of language and we will see below Abū ‘Ubayda’s use of this term.

\[^{50}\] Ibid., p. 317.
\[^{51}\] Ibid., pp.319-320
\[^{52}\] Heinrichs On the genesis, ibid., p. 127
\[^{53}\] Ibid., p. 127.
\[^{54}\] Abu Deeb, Studies in the Majāz and Metaphorical language, p. 316.
But as Abū ‘Ubayda sets his aim of explaining all unusual verses in the Qur’ān he has to
deal with tropical verses. Wansbrough states after his presentation of the 38 categories
identified by Abū ‘Ubayda in the introduction of his book that “Indeed, none of the
categories described nor the examples adduced to illustrate them suggest a consciousness
of figurative language”55 and he also states that some of Abū ‘Ubayda’s categories of
majāz “belong also to corpus of rhetorical schemata, though the Qur’ānic instances
adduced by him exhibit but weak reflection of figurative usage56”. I disagree with the
second quotation because as it will become clear below Abū ‘Ubayda was aware of many
of figurative instances in the Qur’ān and he engaged in interpreting them tropically. Abu
Deeb analyses57 few verses that were considered to contain tropes namely (isti‘āra and
majāz mursal) by later writers. He came to the conclusion that Abū ‘Ubayda was not
“thinking of the transference in word” or the contiguity relation (majāz mursal) “when he
was thinking of majāz58”.

Abū ‘Ubayda interpreted only few verses which later commentators considered to contain
tropical language. In some places he only gives the tropical interpretation of the verses
while in others he used these terms (mathal, tamthīl, tashbīh) to refer to the type of the
rhetorical devices in the verses in question. For example:

1. Q(8:35) فَاقِفُواْ أَذَٰلِكَ الْعَذَابُ “taste you now the chastisement”: majāzuḥu experience it not
   from the taste of the mouth59.

   Here Abū ‘Ubayda gives a tropical interpretation of the verse without using any term
to refer to the tropical language.

2. Q(6:39) وَالَّذِينَ كَذَّبُواْ بَيَانًا صَمُّ وَبِكُمْ “And those who cry lies to Our signs are deaf and
dumb”: mathal (similitude) for the unbelievers because they do not hear the truth
   and religion although they hear other things and bukmun because they do not say it
   although they are not dumb60.

55 Wansbrough, Majāz al-Qurʾān, 254
56 Ibid., p. 265.
57 Abu Deeb Studies in the Majāz and Metaphorical language, pp. 314-315
58 Ibid., p. 315
60 Ibid., p. 191.
Here Abū ‘Ubayda used the word *mathal* to describe the tropical use of the words *summ* and *bukm*. Later authors consider their use either as *tashbīḥ balīgh* (eloquent simile) or *istiʿāra* (metaphor).

3. Q(9:109) ‘majāz of this verse is *majāz al-tamthīl* because what they built on *taqwa* has a firm base than the building which they built on disbelief and hypocrisy therefore the latter is ‘ʿalā shafā jarf’.

In this verse Abū ‘Ubayda uses the word *tamthīl* (analogy) which is related to *mathal* to refer the trope in this verse.

4. Q(24:45) “and some of them walk upon their bellies” this is considered *tashbīḥ* because walking cannot be on the belly, instead only those creatures who have legs can walk.

Here Abū ‘Ubayda used the word *tashbīḥ* (comparison or similarity) to refer to the *istiʿāra* in this verse. Later authors would say that this *istiʿāra* is based on *tashbīḥ* where the particle of comparison is omitted.

All of the above verses are considered to contain tropes by later authors, and although their interpretations are more refined and elaborate the core ideas are expressed by Abū ‘Ubayda. It is also clear from the above that the rhetorical terms have not yet been fixed by his time. These terms (*mathal, tashbīḥ, tamthīl*) will be used by later writers in more precise way to designate rhetorical devices.

### 2.3.3 Abū ‘Ubayda on Anthropomorphism in the Qurʾān:

---

61 Ibid., p. 269.

Wansbrough, Abu Deeb and Madelung all assert that dogmatic considerations did not play a role in Abū ‘Ubayda’s treatment of the Qu’ran. Wansbrough states that “Although it is not impossible to regard the whole as an expression of piety, it may be remarked that Abū ‘Ubayda’s exposition of majāz is singularly free of dogmatic interpretation”, while Madelung asserts that Abū ‘Ubayda’s book Majāz al-Qur’ān “is purely linguistic and lacks any religious dimension”. Abu Deeb asserts that Abū ‘Ubayda “does not seem to have been aware of what bearings majāz can have on anthropomorphism”, he used Abū ‘Ubayda’s comments on Q (20:5) as evidence for this assertion.

Abū ‘Ubyada treated a substantial number of anthropomorphic verses in the Qur’ān though he did not comment on every verse in the Qur’ān. He interpreted 28 verses of which 26 interpreted tropically and 2 verses literally.

**Verses interpreted literally:**

1. Q(10:3) “then sit Himself upon the Throne”: majāzuhu žahara ‘alā al-‘arsh wa ‘alā ‘alyhi wa yuqaṣlu istawaytu ‘alā žahrī al-bayt (its majāz is he mounted the throne and climb over it. It is said I have climbed the top of the house)

2. Q(20:5) the All-compassionate sat Himself upon the Throne” ay ‘alā yuqaṣlu istawaytu ‘alā al-dābbba, fawqa al-bayt (it means mounted; it is said I mounted the beast and I climbed the top of the house).

In the above verses it is obvious that Abū ‘Ubayda did not attempt to interpret these verses tropically as he did for other verses. What made him choose this position is difficult to ascertain for sure.

---

64 Abu Deeb, Studies in the Majāz and Metaphorical language., p. 315
65 Abū ‘Ubayda vol. 1, p. 273.
Verses interpreted tropically:

1. Q(16:26) ‘then God came upon their building from the foundations’: Its majāz is majāz al-mathal and al-tashbiḥi and al-qawā‘id means: the foundations (al-āsās) . When they remove something completely they use this discourse which is mathal

2. In his commentary on Q(2:87) he explains that rajulun dhū aydīn means a man who has power and God the most high is dhū al-ayd. Then he quotes Q(47:51) and states that aydīn means power.

3. And they devised, and God devised. God destroyed them

3. Q(3:54) ‘And they devised, and God devised’. ahlakahum Allāh ‘God destroyed them’

2. Q(2:115) ‘God is all wide’

ay jawa’d yasa ‘u lima yus’al (he is generous and can provide whatever he is asked for)

3. Q(5:64) ‘God’s hand is fettered’: meaning the bounty of God is withheld (mumsak)

4. Q(9:40) ‘God is with us‘: meaning He supports and protects us

7. Q(10:21) ‘God is swifter at devising’: meaning he is faster with regard to taking them, punishment and istidrāj

---

67 Abū ‘Ubayda vol. 1 p.359.
68 Ibid., p. 46.
69 Ibid., p. 95.
70 Ibid., p. 51
71 Ibid., p. 160
72 Ibid., p. 170.
73 Ibid., p. 260.
74 Ibid., p. 276.
9. Q(20:39) “and to be formed under my eye”: ’he said with my knowledge. Its majāz is so that you will be fed and raised according to what I want and love.”75

10. Q(20:46) “Surely I shall be with you”: Its majāz is I support you.”76

11. Q(28:88) “All things perish, except His Face”: Its majāz is except him.”77

Q(32:14) “We indeed have forgotten you”: Its majāz is we left you and did not look at you and God the most high does not forget.”78 Q(45:31).

Q(55:31) “We shall make ourselves free [to attend to] you two huge armies” We will call you to account and nothing occupies Him be He raised far above.”79

Q(30:27) “who originates creation, then brings it back again, and it is very easy for Him”:’comments that if a one argues that God cannot be described by this as this description fits the creation.”80

12. Q(39:56) “I neglected my duty to [the side] of God”: wa fi dhāt Allāh wahid’81 ‘in the essence of God-the same’

Q(51:47) والسماء بيناباها يابايد meaning with power.”82

Q(68:42) “Upon the day when the leg shall be bared”: When the matter or war intensifies then it is said: the matter has unveiled its leg.”83

---

76 Ibid., p. 20.
77 Ibid., p. 112.
78 Ibid., p. 132
79 Ibid., p. 244
80 Ibid., p. 121.
81 Ibid., p. 190.
82 Ibid., p. 46.
83 Ibid., p. 266.
Abū ‘Ubyda’s interpretations of anthropomorphic verses are brief. Only in one place Q(16:26), did he use the words mathal and tashbīh in his interpretation and he tried to explain the mechanism of the trope in the verse. This is a new development in the interpretation of anthropomorphic verses started by him, and it will be the norm in later writings. Abū ‘Ubayda’s interpretations of anthropomorphic verses show clearly that dogmatic considerations played a role in his interpretation, and it is untenable to argue to the contrary as did Wanshatur, Abu Deeb and Madelung.

In his creed it is certain that he was not a traditionalist. Both Madelung and Gibb argue against the idea that Abū ‘Ubayyda was a Khārijite while Goldziher and Lecker argue for the contrary. I agree with Goldziher and Lecker in considering Abū ‘Ubayda as a Khārijite; this is because of the testimonies of al-Jāḥīz and students of Abū ‘Ubayda (which are hard to refute) as shown by Lecker’s treatment of the issue. Furthermore in a book about Ibadī Kalām entitled al-Kashf wa al-Bayān the only authority mentioned with regard to the interpretations of Anthropomorphic verses in the Qur’ān is Abū ‘Ubayda. This reference to him in itself does not constitute compelling and strong evidence but other sources and testimonies support the view that Abū ‘Ubayda was a Khārijite.

There is a kind of consensus among those who wrote about Abū ‘Ubayda, that he did not use the word majaz as a technical term to refer to tropical language, but the agreement ends here. Regarding what he meant by the word majaz both Hienerich and Abu Deeb rightly argue that Abū ‘Ubayda meant by the word majaz the original or natural mode of expression. Abū ‘Ubayda interpreted various verses tropically sometimes without using any term to refer to the tropical usage and at others he used three terms mathal, tamthil and tashbīh. Mathal is already used by Muqātil and it is used by Abū ‘Ubayda in a similar sense to refer to tropes. Tashbīh and Tamthil are also used to refer to tropes and these two

85 Lecker, ibid., pp. 94-97.
words will be used by later authors to refer to tropical language. Regarding anthropomorphic verses, Abū ‘Ubayda was sensitive to the issue of anthropomorphism; he interpreted 26 verses tropically and in one instance tried to explain the trope in the verse, which is a new development of the treatment of anthropomorphic verses in comparison with earlier authorities. Nevertheless, Abū ‘Ubayda was not consistent in his treatment of anthropomorphism in the Qur’ān, as he interpreted literally two verses related to God’s setting on the throne. The number of anthropomorphic verses he interpreted and his actual interpretations indicate that dogmatic considerations played a role in his commentary on the Qur’ān. Now I will deal with the treatment of anthropomorphic verses by al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm al-Rassī
2.4 Al-Qasim b. Ibrahim al-Rassi\textsuperscript{87} (169/246-785/860)

Al-Qāsim al-Rassi is one of the earliest Shī‘ī theologians whose work survived up to the present time. His theology and interpretation of the Qur’ān will have a lasting effect on Zaydi Shī‘ites. His approach to the Qur’ān reflects the intellectual and theological\textsuperscript{88} climate in the first half of the third Islamic century. In this section, I will deal first with al-Qāsim’s approach on Q (3:7) then I will look at his views on tropical language. Finally I will examine his interpretations of anthropomorphic verses.

2.4.1 Interpreting Q (3:7)

In his book \textit{al-Maṣā’il} in question \textsuperscript{89}; his son asked him about the interpretation of “\textit{minhu āyātun muḥkamātun hunna ummu ‘l- kitābi wa ukharu mutashābihā”} (wherein are verses clear that are the Essence of the Book, and others ambiguous) in Q (3:7). al-Qāsim comments “al-muḥkam represents what the intellects consider to have a true argument” and the \textit{umma} (mother) of the knowledge of everything is what is clear and not concealed. Therefore, the \textit{muḥkamāt} of the Qur’ān are what is clear and evident and one does not need much to elucidate them; in other words they do not need further interpretation\textsuperscript{89} such as Q (42:11) “Like Him there is naught”: and Q(6:103) “The eyes attain Him not”. As for \textit{al-mutashābih} it remains unknown and only God encompasses its knowledge. Furthermore, no one is obliged to know these verses but one is obliged to know that they are from God. Had it been possible to know them through reflection, then they would cease to be \textit{mutashābih}.

\textsuperscript{87} He was a Zaydi inām and a founder of the legal and theological school of Zaydiyya the Yemen. While he was in Egypt, He studied the Bible and Christian theology and debated Muslim and non-Muslim scholars. He was influenced by Christian writings and this can be seen in his views of Divine attributes where ‘placed the essential generosity (djūd) and goodness of God at the centre of his doctrine’, Madelung, W. “al-Rassī.” \textit{Encyclopaedia of Islam}, 2nd edition.

\textsuperscript{88} For a study of his views about existence of God, see B. Abrahamov, Al-Kāsim b. Ibrāhīm on the proof of God’s existence: \textit{Kitāb al-dalīl al-kabīr}, Leiden 1990.

Al-Qāsim in his book *al-Nāsikh wa al-Mansūkh* also states that the Qur'ān contains commands, prohibitions and *mutashābih*. This *mutashābih* is *bātin*\(^90\) (hidden) and concealed, cannot be known and this is how God made it; no one knows it save God. The utmost knowledge of it is the knowledge that it cannot be known. Therefore, the only way for someone to know about the *mutashābih* is when God Himself imparts this knowledge to the person\(^91\). Nevertheless, he adds\(^92\) that some verses of the Qur'ān might be considered *mutashābih* by some people, but these verses are indeed *muḥkam* and need to be interpreted and made clear to these people by those who have a deep knowledge of the Qur'ān.

From the above we can see that for al-Qāsim, *muḥkamāt* are those verses which are clear and need no further interpretation, and *mutashābihāt* are those verses known only to God. Some people might consider some verses as *mutashābihāt*, but in reality they are not. It can also be observed from the verses al-Qāsim quotes to illustrate the *muḥkamāt* that these verses are used by him and others as a starting point to interpret anthropomorphic verses and the beatific vision of God in the hereafter respectively. His definition of *muḥkamāt* indicates the role of the intellect in determining these verses which is clearly a major theological principle in the *mu'tazilī* hermeneutics of the Qur'ān as we will see later. Regarding *al-mutashābihāt*, al-Qāsim did not tell us which verses can be considered as such nor did he give us explicit criteria to distinguish between the two. It can also be observed that al-Qāsim did not make explicit the hermeneutical principle according to which all *mutashābihāt* have to be interpreted in the light of the *muḥkamāt*. We will see later that he will use this principle but without mentioning it explicitly.

---

\(^90\) The reference here to the hidden meaning *bātin* can be understood in a mystical way. This can be seen at the end of his treatise *al-Mustarshid* where he said that “Perception is divided into two parts: the first is seeing and encounter openly and the second lies in the heart. The believers have perceived their Lord in this world and known Him through their hearts, therefore they have obeyed Him, when they have loved Him. *al-Mustarshid*, translated by Binyamin Abrahamov in his book *Anthropomorphism And Interpretation Of The Qur’ān In The Theology Of Al-Qāsim Ibn Ibrāhīm: Kita‘b al-Mustarshid*, Brill, 1996 pp. 141-143.

\(^91\) *Al-Nāsikh wa al-Mansūkh* in *Majmū‘ Kutub wa Rasā’il*, vol 1, p. 60.

\(^92\) *Ibid.*
2.4.2 Al-Qāsim’s view of the tropical language

Al-Qāsim employs two terms used by Abū ‘Ubayda in his book *majāz al-Qur’ān* to refer to the tropical usage of language namely: *mathal*, and *tamthil*. He did not use the word *majāz* to refer to tropical language even though the word was used in a technical sense in the first half of the 3rd century A.H. by al-Jāḥiz as we saw in the first chapter of this study.

Before examining al-Qāsim’s view of tropical language it is worth looking at his views of the language of the Qur’ān. Al-Qāsim condemned those who interpret the Qur’ān without having the means to carry out this task, chief among these means is the knowledge of Arabic language and its ways of expressions. He argues that God revealed to the Prophet Muhammad "His speech in a clear Arabic [which contains] pure sayings with utmost brevity and brief sayings with utmost purity. Those who do not know the language are forbidden to deal with issues of the Qur’ān which the exegetes, namely the masters of the language and the book, do not perceive. The masters of the language know that it has different ways and diversified directions, and that it has measures, ascents and descents, roots, allusions and subtleties of explanation."

One of the most salient features of Arabic which is widely used in the Qur’ān; is *al-amthal* (the similitudes) which some people err when interpreting with grave consequences such as Q (47:24) “Or is it that there are locks upon their hearts?” therefore anyone who understand *aqfāl* to mean iron lockers is indeed an ignorant and stupid person. Al-Qāsim adds that the Qur’ān and Arabic poetry are abundant with *amthāl*. For example Q (33:43) "It is He who blesses you, and His angels, to bring you forth from the darkness into the light", it is only the one who has no intellect, who will interpret *zulumāt* as black night or

---


94 *Tafsīr al-‘Arsh wa al-kursī* in *Majmū’ Kutub wa Rasā’il*, p. 672. vol. 1.

95 Ibid. p. 672 vol. 1
something similar and will interpret the *nūr* as sun or moon. There are also *amthāl* in Arabic poetry and only those who are ignorant of Arabic will misunderstand their meanings, such as this line of poetry of Zuhayr b. Abi Sulmā.

\[ \text{Mā 'aḍdanī al-dahru ʿillā zādanī karamā} \]

And biting can only be imagined of what has a mouth.

What is interesting in the above examples is the way in which al-Qāsim is using the word *amthāl* to refer to tropical language in Arabic and in the Qurʾān. This really reflects that by his time it is now fully established to use it (and to a lesser degree the word *tamthīl* and we will see below that he used the word in a sense of representation) to refer to tropes. I think what made the word *amthāl* popular is its Qurʾānic origin and usage (especially in phrases such as *daraba Allāhu mathalān*). There are also other examples from the Qurʾān and Jahili and Islamic poetry used by al-Qāsim to support his thesis that as the Arabic language is full of *amthāl* which cannot be taken literally, the same applies to the verses of the Qurʾān which describe God in anthropomorphic terms. This will be our next topic.

### 2.4.3 Al-Qāsim’s interpretation of anthropomorphic verses:

Two main treatises of al-Qāsim are devoted to the interpretation of anthropomorphic verses. The first is *Kitāb al-Mustarshid* and the second is *Kitab Al-ʿArsh wa al-Kursī*.

*Kitāb al-Mustarshid* deals with 7 themes namely: place of God, soul of God, God as light, God as a thing, God’s unity, God’s face and beatific vision. According to Abrahamov “*Kitāb al-Mustarshid* contains characteristics of the Muʿtazilite exegesis. These are: the

---

discussion of words, prepositions and homonyms, and providing pieces of evidence from the ordinary use of the language and from poetry\(^8\).

*Kitāb al-‘Arsh wa al-Kursī* deals mainly with the issue of the throne of God as the title indicates. It is interesting because in this book al-Qāsim uses the rhetorical terms *anthāl* and *tamthīl* in his interpretations. He also offers his explanation as to the reason behind Qur’ānic description of God and His actions in anthropomorphic terms.

The book is written as an answer to a question about *al-Kursī* and *al-‘Arsh*, put forward by al-Qāsim’s son. Al-Qāsim starts his answer by stating that one should not compare or liken God to anything in His creation in any meaning and in any form\(^9\). After that al-Qāsim cites a number of Qur’ānic verses to prove that God is beyond any speech and nothing from his creation resembles Him in any way or form. The first 4 verses to quote are Q (42: 11), Q (6:103), Q (2:255), and Q112. What is interesting about his citations of these verses is that the first one (and to some extent Q112) will be used later by all commentators as a starting point to interpret all anthropomorphic verses in the Qur’ān. In other words both this verse as well as Q 112 will be considered as *muhkam* verses in the sense that all *mutashābihāt* (anthropomorphic) verses should be interpreted in the light of these *muhkamāt*. Al-Qāsim here did not explicitly state this hermeneutical principle and as we have seen earlier he believes that *mutashābihāt* are known only to God. So his methods can be classified as interpreting the Qur’ān by the Qur’ān. In this case interpreting the *mutashābihāt* in the light of *muhkamāt* can be considered as a special case of the general hermeneutical principle of interpreting the Qur’ān by the Qur’ān.

Al-Qāsim cites also psalm 135 and other parts of the Hebrew Bible as proof of God’s unity and majesty. As for the Gospels he states that the *Injīl*\(^10\) contains many verses which

\(^8\) Abrahamov, anthropomorphism, p. 8
\(^9\) *Al-‘Arsh wa al-Kursī*, p. 657
\(^10\) The attitude of al-Qāsim towards the Bible differs from the majority of later Muslim scholars (or maybe some of his contemporaries). His quotations and use of Biblical references indicate that he does not consider the Bible to be altered and therefore an authentic source which can be used to support the argument of the Qur’ān against anthropomorphism.
nate likening God to his creation and he did not mention them in order to avoid lengthening the discussion\textsuperscript{101}.

Turning now to his interpretation of \textit{al-Kurṣī} (seat) in Q (2:255) “His Seat comprises the heavens and earth” and \textit{al-‘Arsh} (throne), he states that” the Interpretation of what God has mentioned regarding \textit{al-Kurṣī} and \textit{al-‘Arsh} is like the interpretation of His fist and his \textit{batsh} (assault) if the person believes in God. The origin and the branch of all of what I have mentioned [the anthropomorphic descriptions] are nothing but His domain, His Might, His Sovereignty, and His Power which no one shares these with Him\textsuperscript{102}. The same goes for Q (11:7) and His Throne was upon the waters” and the interpretation of this is that “His domain is over the water”. As for \textit{al-Kurṣī}, it is “His preservation and domain”. Al-Qāsim adds that God by striking a similitudes (\textit{amthaḥ}) he clarified to His servants the revelation and made them understand it. “The \textit{amthaḥ}, parables and comparison are signs of His mercy” and people will miss the point if they concentrate on the things used and the their substances. Instead these things should be understood as comparisons\textsuperscript{103}. Indeed all the attributes of God and His beautiful names should be understood in a way that removes any resemblance between God and His creatures\textsuperscript{104}. For example Q (40:15) “Possessor of the Throne” is His domain and not what can be imagined it to be a chair with legs. Al-Qāsim adds that the \textit{‘arsh} is “a (\textit{tamthiḥ}) representation to the servants by what they recognise not by what they know about the characteristics of their states\textsuperscript{105}”. The servants are certain that God is beyond any resemblance and cannot be described by human attributes\textsuperscript{106}. As for Q (69:17) “and upon that day eight shall carry above them the Throne of thy Lord”. Qāsim argues the \textit{‘arsh} and its carriers is a \textit{tamthiḥ} for the administration of justice in the Day of Judgment. The representation (\textit{tamthiḥ}) is based on what the Arabs saw and knew about earthly kings when they

\textsuperscript{101} Al-‘arsh pp. 661-662
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., p. 663.
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., p. 664.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., p. 665.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., p. 667.
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid.
administer the justice in their kingdoms and how their thrones and chairs used to be erected in order to adjudicate among their subjects. Similarly the notion that the throne being carried by angels should be understood as tamthīl, not in an anthropomorphic way. This is because the reason does not accept that God can be carried on a chair or a throne. What is mentioned in these verses of ‘ṣārsh, kūrsī and its carriers is mathal among many struck by God and only the fools who misunderstand them.

As for thamānīya (eight) and min fawqīhim (above them) in the above mentioned verse, al-Qāsim offers the following interpretation for the tamthīl: “as for min fawqīhim it refers to the carriers and their heads, regarding thamānīya I think, God knows best” that the most prestigious royal thrones known to the ancients are those which have eight legs, two legs at each corner on each side. The ancients also consider carrying the royal throne by eight carriers as a sign of greatness and majesty and for the throne to be carried on the heads of the carriers reflects more grandeur in subjects of the king. Therefore, each leg is carried on the head of one carrier. But why does God use these amthāl? Al-Qāsim answers this question by saying: “God struck amthāl (similitudes) to His servants according to what they know about things [around them] and what they saw in this earthly life to which all of what they perceive is confined. Thus He made them understand the similitudes by means of these things and what they know about them.”

One final example of al-Qāsim’s interpretation of the Qurā’n is his treatment of Q (16:26) “then God came upon their building from the foundations”: he states one should not be deluded in thinking that Ityān here is physical coming and the same goes for the building and the basis. Actually it is “a truthful mathal wa tamthīl (similitude and representation)” represented by the Mighty, the Truthful and the Creator. As we have seen the same verse is commented upon by Abū ʿUbayda who called the trope in this verse a mathal and tashbīh. It can be observed that al-Qāsim

107, Ibid., p. 667.  
108, Ibid., pp. 667-678  
109, Ibid., p. 669.  
110, Ibid., p. 671  
111, Ibid.,  
continues to use the word *mathal* but dropped the word *tashbih* and used instead of it the word *tamthil*. I think that the reason behind dropping the word *tashbih* is that this word by al-Qasim’s time is used to refer to the act of likening God to His creatures, especially in the context of his treatise.

Al-Qasim interpretation’s of Q (3:7) reflects an earlier stage in the development of Qur’anic theological interpretation, but on the other hand it is a far more advanced level in comparison with early authors. As for his views on tropical language, he accepts its existence in Arabic language and in the Qur’an, and he used two words to refer to it, namely *mathal* and *tamthil*. Nevertheless, he did not use the word *majaż* which is used by his time in the writing of al-Jahiz as we have seen in chapter one. Al-Qasim used both terms, *mathal* and *tamthil*, to interpret anthropomorphic verses which he did not consider as a type of *mutashabihat*. His interpretation of anthropomorphic verses is more mature and nuanced than that of earlier authors, and he attempted to explain the reasons for the use of these anthropomorphic verses in the Qur’an by using the concepts of *mathal* and *tamthil*. This makes his contribution original and represents an advanced stage in the history of the development of the interpretation of these verses. Next we will turn to Ibn Qutayba and examine his approach to anthropomorphism in the Qur’an.

\footnote{al-Qasim used both verbs *mathhala* and *daraba* to refer to the act of giving *tamthil* and to refer to the act of giving a similitude throughout his treatise such as in Ibid., p. 664 665, 669,671.}

\footnote{He used the word *tashbih* in this sense in his treatise see Ibid., p. 662, 666, 674}
2.5 Ibn Qutayba[^15] (213/828-276/889)

Ibn Qutayba is credited with being the first to devote a chapter each to *majāz* and *isti‘āra*. We also find in his writing a first defence of the phenomenon of *majāz* in language and the Qur‘ān. Ibn Qutayba is theologically associated with Sunnism and Ibn Taymiyya called him *Khaṭīb al-Sunna* as opposed to al-Jaḥīz *Khaṭīb al-Mu‘tazila*. Ibn Qutayba’s approach to anthropomorphism in the Qur‘ān is important for two reasons: first because his views represent a Sunnī pre-Ashʿarite position, and second because he came after the crystallisation of the distinction between *majāz* and *haqīqa* in the writings of al-Jaḥīz. In this section on Ibn Qutayba, I will make use of five of his books which are relevant to this study namely: *Ta‘wil mushkil al-Qur‘ān*, *Ta‘wil mukhtalaf al-Hadīth*, *Kitāb al-Masa‘il wa al-Ajwība fi al-Hadīth wa al-Tafsīr*, *al-Ikhtilāf fi al-lafẓ wa al-radd ‘alā al-Jahmiyya wa al-mushabbiha*, and *Tafsīr Gharīb al-Qur‘ān*. I will first look at his interpretation of Q(3:7) then his views on *majāz*. Finally I will examine his approach to anthropomorphism.

### 2.5.1 Ibn Qutayba’ views on *Ta‘wil*

In Qutayba believes that *mutashābihāt* verses in the Qur‘ān encourage people to reflect and everything in the Qur‘ān can be interpreted. In a chapter on *mutashābih* in *Ta‘wil Mushkil al-Qur‘ān*, he argues that the Qur‘ān was revealed according to the styles and ways of the Arab including (*ījāz*) brevity, and (*ikhtisār*) conciseness, making some statements ambiguous so that only intelligent people can grasp them, and using (*amthāl*) parables to indicate what is hidden. So if all the Qur‘ān was explicit and easy to understand to both the scholar and the unlearned person, then there would be no distinction between people and no motivation for them to reflect[^17]. Ibn Qutayba adds “we do not subscribe to the claim that *mutashābih* in the Qur‘ān cannot be known by

[^15]: He was one of the great Sunnī prolific writers of the 3rd/9th century. His writings cover both theology and *adab*.
[^16]: *Athar al-Nuḥat*, ‘Abd al-Qādīr Ḥusayn, p. 176
[^17]: *Ta‘wil Mushkil al-Qur‘ān* p. 86
those who are established in knowledge\textsuperscript{118}. He adds that those who interpret Q(3:7) in this way err with regard to the meaning of the verse, because God revealed the Qur’\textacutem in order to benefit his servants, and it is not permissible to say that the Prophet did not know the \textit{mutash\~abi}h. Furthermore, “we have not seen the exegetes stopping on a particular verse and say this is \textit{mutash\~abi}h only God knows it\textsuperscript{119}, on the contrary they interpreted all the Qur’\textacutem “even they (the exegetes) interpreted the disjoined letters (\textit{al-\textcopyright{hurif} al-\textcopyright{muqat\~ta}a’}) at the beginning of the \textit{s\textsuperscript{uras} such as alif l\textsuperscript{am} r\textsuperscript{a}…” He adds that “\textit{the phrase yaq\~ul\textsuperscript{una} in this verse indicates hal as if He said al-R\~asikh\~una fi al-‘ilm\textsuperscript{a} qa\~il\~ina-}} those who are established in knowledge saying\textsuperscript{121}.”

Regarding the word \textit{mutash\~abi}h, Ibn Qutayba states that” the origin of \textit{tash\~abuh} is for an utterance to resemble another one in appearance but the two meanings are different so if one cannot distinguish between things he will say \textit{ishtabah al-amru ‘alayya}\textsuperscript{122}. “Then every ambiguous matter is called \textit{mutash\~abi}h even though the perplexity is not related to resemblance between things such as the disjoined letters in the Qur’\textacutem\textsuperscript{123} they are called \textit{mutash\~abi}h even though the dispute about these letters is not related to any resemblance between these letters or anything else\textsuperscript{124}. In sum, Ibn Qutayba believes that interpretation of \textit{mutash\~abi}h\textit{t} is possible, and for him they represent the verses that require reflection and further study.

\textbf{2.5.2 Ibn Qutayba on \textit{Maj\~az}}

\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., p. 98
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., p. 100
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid.,
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid.,
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., p. 101
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., p. 102
\textsuperscript{124} See also Ibn Qutayba’s book: \textit{Kit\~ab al-Mas\~a’il wa al-Ajwiba f\~i al-\textcopyright{Hadith} wa al-Tafs\~ir}, edited by Marw\~an al-‘Atiyya and Mu\~hsin Khar\~aba, \textit{D\textsuperscript{a}r Ibn Kathi\~r}, Damascus, 1990 where he also argues that established scholars know the interpretation of the Qur’\textacutem, p. 48 and pp. 209-214.
Ibn Qutayba, who was a student of al-Jahiz, used the word *majaz* in two different senses: the first as of a “way of saying” in a similar fashion to that of Abū ‘Ubayda and the second meaning is the technical meaning as a counterpart of *haqiqa* following al-Jahiz as we have seen in chapter 1. So in his book *Ta’wil Mushkil al-Qur’ān* he states that “The Arabs have *majazāt* in their speech and the meaning of [*majazāt*] is *turuq al-qawl wa ma’ākhidhubu* (the ways (methods) of speech and the modes of handling it (or: the places from which it is taken))\(^{125}\). [the *majazāt*] include *istī’ārā*, analogy (*tamthīl*), inversion (*qalb*), hysteron proteron (*taqdim wa-takhrīr*), elison (*ḥadīf*), repetition (*takrīr*), concealing and revealing (*ikhfā* wa *izhār*), allusion and outspokenness (*ta’rīd wa ifshār*), periphrasis and proper designation (*kīnāya wa idhāh*). and many others you will see in the *abwāb al-majaz* (section on *majaz* God willing)\(^{126}\). Here Ibn Qutayba is using the word *majaz* in a broad sense to cover various forms of expressions including metaphor. Heinrichs rightly observes that “the common denominator seems to be that *majaz* is everything that goes beyond the strictly logical application of language, i.e., beyond being a true and simple copy of reality)”\(^{127}\).

Regarding the second sense of Ibn Qutayba’s usage of the word *majaz*, it can be established that he used *majaz* as a counterpart to *haqiqa*, contrary to what is asserted by Heinrichs regarding this issue that “The idea of a *haqiqa-majaz* dichotomy has however not yet developed.”\(^{128}\). Heinrichs adds that “there is only one surprising instance of *haqīqa* being used opposite *majaz*”\(^{129}\) by Ibn Qutayba, when he was addressing the issue of reality of the speech of God.\(^{130}\) As a matter of fact, there are other instances within the writings of Ibn Qutayba which indicate that he used the word *majaz* as counterpart to *haqiqa*. In his book *Ta’wil mukhtalaf al-Hadīth* in a section about burning the papers of the *musḥaf*, Ibn Qutayba states that “we do not doubt that the Qur’ān in the *maṣāḥif*’s in

---

\(^{125}\) This phrase and other terms in this quotation are translated by Heinrichs in on the Gensis pp. 13-131


\(^{127}\) The Hand of the north wind p. 31

\(^{128}\) On the Genesis p. 131.

\(^{129}\) Ibid., p. 131

\(^{130}\) Ibn Qutayba, *mushkil* p. 106 translated by Heinrichs in on Genesis p. 131-132.
truth (‘alā l-haqīqa) not tropically (‘alā l-majāz). Furthermore, in his book al-Ikhtilāf fī al-laft wa al-radd ‘alā al-Jahmiyya wa al-mushabbiha Ibn Qutayba describes the views of those who adhere to predestination as follows: "They believe that “the servant... is unable to perform any act good or bad in truth (‘alā l-haqīqa) instead every act attributed to the servant is attributed to him figuratively (‘alā l-majāz)." From the above, one can safely conclude that Ibn Qutayba used the word majāz like his teacher al-Jahiz in a technical sense as a counterpart to ḥaqīqa.

Ibn Qutayba considers isti‘āra to be part of majāz and begins his section on majāz with isti‘āra because the majority of cases of majāz come into this category. He defines it in this way "The Arabs borrow a word to put it in the place of another word if the thing named by [the second word] is caused (bi-sabab) or adjacent (mujāwir) or similar (mushākiḥt) to the first word. They call the plant naw’ (rain) because it is caused by the naw’ (rain) as they [believe]." They call the rain sky because the rain descends from sky... They say The earth laughed (dahikat al-arḍ) when it brought forth plants. This definition and the examples he cites indicate that what he calls isti‘āra comes under what later authors consider as isti‘āra, majāz mursal, kināya and tashbih baligh. It should be also mentioned that Ibn Qutayba used Abū ‘Ubayda’s expression tamthil wa tashbih to interpret anthropomorphic descriptions of God. This can be observed in his comments on the following ḥadīth:

He said: ‘we said this is tashbih wa tamthil. What is meant by this is that: whoever comes to me in a hurry with obedience I will come to him with reward much faster than his coming. He alluded (kanna) to this by using mashī (walking) and harwālā (jogging).’

---

132 Al-Ikhtilāf fī al-laft wa al-radd ‘alā al-Jahmiyya wa al-mushabbiha, Dār al-Kutb al-‘Ilmiyya, Beirut, 1985, p.20. See also p. 23 for other occurrences of the technical usage of haqiqa-majaz pair.
133 Ta‘wil mushkil p. 134.
134 Ta‘wil mushkil p. 135.
135 Ta‘wil mushkil pp. 135-184. Heinrichs comments ‘In fact, it seems that isti‘āra is a general term for ‘figurative use of words’, but it ought to be noted that “figurative” here is not identical with non-proper”, because one case of non-proper use of words is mentioned by Ibn Qutayba in another place. The Hand of the North wind, ibid., p. 30.
136 Ta‘wil mushkil al-Ḥadīth p. 327
seems that Ibn Qutayba considers these categories as part of *kīnāya* (allusion) but his concept of *kīnāya* is different from what later authors considered as *kīnāya* because for Ibn Qutayba the surface meaning of such statements does not have to be true in reality. One might ask what is the contribution of Ibn Qutayba to the development of the theory of *mājāz*? Heinrichs believes that Ibn Qutayba’s view on *mājāz* is clearly an amalgamation of Abū ‘Ubayda’s *mājāz* and Mu’tazili positions and therefore no originality can be attested in his writing about *mājāz*. Similarly Shawqi Ḍayf asserts that Ibn Qutayba was influenced by al-Jaḥiz, especially in his refutation of those who criticized the Qur’an, but it was Abū ‘Ubayda who exerted the biggest influence on him. Ḍayf adds that Ibn Qutayba “did not add anything new in comparison with Abū ‘Ubayda save only his subtle classification.” One can also credit Ibn Qutayba with the first elegant defence of the phenomenon of *mājāz* in the Qur’an which later scholars used with some modification. Now I will look at Ibn Qutayba’s interpretation of anthropomorphic verses to see to what extent his interpretation was influenced by his views on *mājāz*.

### 2.5.3 Interpreting Anthropomorphic verses

---

137 *Athar al-nuḥāt* pp. 192-194
138 On the Genesis p. 138
139 Ibid., p. 132
141 Shawqi Ḍayf, ibid., p.60. ‘Abd al-Qādir Husayn agrees with Ḍayf on this point see *Athar al-Nuḥāt fī al-Baḥth al-Balāghī*, Dār Gharib, Cairo, 1998, p. 180
142 Against those who consider *mājāz* as equivalent to lying because the wall Q (18:77) does not will and the town cannot be asked , Ibn Qutayba states “If *mājāz* is considered to be lying (*kadhib*) and every action attributed to a non-living entity is false, then large part of our speech would be wrong because we say ..the tree grow taller ..and the price has fallen”, *Ta’wil mushkil al-Qur‘ān*, p. 132.
Ibn Qutayba was not consistent in his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses. He approached these verses in four different ways:

I. First approach: Offering tropical interpretation

The face of God
The \textit{wajh} is \textit{zyāda} (addition) in Q (28:88): “All things perish, except His Face”: the word \textit{wajh} means He and also in Q (76:9) \textit{wajh} means for the sake of God.\footnote{Ta’wil mushkil al-Qur’ān p. 480} Clearly here he offers a tropical interpretation for these verses.

Hand of God
Q(36:71) “Have they not seen how that We have created for them of that Our hands”. Ibn Qutayba contends that Our hands could mean what we have done with Our power and strength. \textit{Al-Yad} indicates strength and ability to work. This is why the word \textit{yad} can be borrowed to replace [power and strength]. This is a \textit{majāz} (a way of expression) used by the Arabs \textit{yaḥtamiluhu this ḥart}\footnote{Tafṣīr gharib p. 368}. Here Ibn Qutayba did not use the word \textit{majāz} in a technical sense although he interpreted this verse tropically. One could also notice that Ibn Qutayba used the word \textit{ista’āra} in its primary sense, to explain the usage of \textit{yad} in this verse and he did not try to link it to his classification of \textit{isti’āra} as a category of \textit{majāz} as we have seen earlier. Later commentators will usually refrain from using the word \textit{isti’āra} to interpret anthropomorphic verses that refer to body parts; instead they will use the word \textit{majāz}.

\textit{Istihzā’} (mocking)
Q(2:15) “God shall mock them”. He discussed this under the reward for an action using the same vocable but different meanings

\textit{Makr} (mocking)
The same goes for Q(3:54) “And they devised, and God devised”:

\footnote{143 Ta’wil mushkil al-Qur’ān p. 480} \footnote{144 Tafṣīr gharib p. 368}
They are sins for the doers of the action but when they are predicated of God they mean reward \(^{145}\) from the person who initiated the action.

**Farāgh**

Q(55:31) “We shall make ourselves free [to attend to] you two huge armies” and God nothing can occupies Him and its majāz is we will turn towards you after we gave you \(^{146}\) سنقدص لكم بعد طول الترك والامهال.

**Nisyān** (forgetfulness)

Q(7:51) meaning natrūkhum \(^ {147}\)

**Ityān** (coming)

Q(16:26) it is mathal. It means that God ahlakuhum like the one who destroyed his house from the foundation \(^ {148}\). Ibn Qutayba followed Abū ‘Ubayda here by using the word mathal as mentioned in Abū ‘Ubayda’s section.

**Advancing**

Q(25:23) “We shall advance upon what work they have done”: meaning ‘amadnā ilayhi we turned our intention towards it \(^ {149}\).

**Lifting**

Q(41:11) “Then He lifted Himself to heaven”: ---‘amada lahā he turned his attention towards it \(^ {150}\).

The above interpretations show both the influence of Abū ‘Ubayda and al-Mu’tazila on Ibn Qutayba. He did not use the word majāz in its technical sense in interpreting these

---

\(^{145}\) *Ta’wil* p. 277 see also *Tafsir Gharib al-Qur’ān*, p. 41

\(^{146}\) *Ta’wil* p. 105.

\(^{147}\) *Tafsir Gharib* p. 168

\(^{148}\) *Ibid.* p. 242

\(^{149}\) *Ibid.* p. 312

\(^{150}\) *Ibid.* p. 388
verses although as we have seen above he used it elsewhere in his writings. The same can be said about *Isti‘ara*.

II. The second approach: offering anthropomorphic interpretation

Q(20:5) “the All-compassionate sat Himself upon the Throne”. Ibn Qutayba repeats what Abū ‘Ubayda has said as we have seen above *istawaytu fawqa al-dābba* and *istawaytu fawqa al-bayt*. He also gives another interpretation *istaqarra* (settled down).

Q(20:39) “and to be formed under my eye”: meaning in order to be raised under my sight this is because of my love to you

III. The third approach: *ithbāt* (affirming)

They measure not God with His true measure. The earth altogether shall be His handful on the Day of Resurrection, and the heavens shall be rolled up in His right hand. Glory be to Him! High be He exalted above that they associate!

He comments “we do not say a finger like our fingers nor a hand like our hands, nor a fist like our fists. This is because everything which is part of Him –does not resemble anything which is part of us”.

V. The fourth approach: No comment

Q(2:210) , Q (6:12) , Q(6:158) , and Q(21:44) .

---

151 Ibid., p. 277
152 *Ta‘wil mukhtalif* p. 394.
153 *Tafsīr gharīb* p. 278
154 *Ta‘wil mukhtalif al-Hadith*, p. 303
155 *Tafsīr Gharīb* p. 81
156 Ibid., p. 151.
157 Ibid., p. 164
158 Ibid., p. 286
To sum up: Ibn Qutayba was not consistent in his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses, thus to call him an outright anthropomorphist (*mushabbih*) as some earlier scholars had done is far from the truth. On the other hand, his tropical interpretations of anthropomorphic verses reflect the influence of both Abū ‘Ubayda and *al-Mu’tazila* (through his teacher al-Jāḥiz) and his originality consists in applying the terms which were used/developed by Abū ‘Ubayda and al-Jāḥiz to new verses.

Ibn Qutayba believes in the possibility of interpreting the *mutashābīhāt* in the Qurʾān and for him they refer to those verses that require an effort on the part of the reader. Therefore, anthropomorphic verses come under this category but are not exclusive to it. As for his views on *majāz* and tropical language, we can still detect an older usage of the word *majāz* in addition to the new dichotomy which was introduced by al-Jāḥiz. He used the terms *isti‘ārā, mathal* and *majāz* without distinguishing between them. Furthermore, Ibn Qutayba was an ardent critic of those who deny the phenomenon of *majāz* in the Qurʾān. Ibn Qutayba was not consistent in his approach to anthropomorphic verses in the Qurʾān, as four approaches can be identified in his writing. Regarding his tropical interpretation of these verses, it can be observed that his approach combines the approaches of Abū ‘Ubyada and al-Jāḥiz and use their terminology to interpret anthropomorphic verses, but he did not use the word *majāz* in a technical sense in his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses.

**Conclusion:**
The early authors examined in this chapter exhibit diverse approaches and interpretations of anthropomorphic verses. Mujāhid, the author of the first partial *Tafsīr* to reach us, identified *mutashābihāt* verses with those related to theological issues believed in the possibility of interpreting them thus paving the way for later authors. Nevertheless, he did not contrast *muḥkamāt* verses with the *mutashābihāt*. What we found in this *tafsīr* is one of the earliest tropical interpretations of anthropomorphic verses but at the same time no justification of these verses is given.

Muqātil believes also that anthropomorphic verses can be interpreted but at the same time he uses the word *mathal* to refer to the instances of tropical language in the Qurʾān. His approach to anthropomorphic verses was not consistent; in some places he interpreted anthropomorphic verses according to the prima facie sense of these verses and at others he offered tropical interpretation using the term *mathal* to refer to the tropical use of language in these verses. For this reason, one cannot call Muqātil a gross anthropomorphist. As for Abū ‘Ubayda, he did not use the word *majāz* as a counterpart to *haqīqa*. More probably he used it to mean the original natural mode of expression. Instead he used the words *tashbīh*, *mathal*, and *tamthīl* to refer to tropical use of language. Abū ‘Ubyada interpreted a large number of anthropomorphic verses tropically and only on two occasions understood then according to their prima facie sense. What is new in his interpretation is that he tried to explain the trope in the verse, and this will be followed by later authors. Al-Qāsim’s interpretation of Q (3:7) is an advanced stage in the development of Qurʾānic theological hermeneutics in comparison with earlier authors discussed here. Al-Qāsim did not use the word *majāz* to refer to tropical language; instead he used the words *mathal* and *tamthīl*. His interpretations of anthropomorphic verses are more mature and advanced because of his attempt to explain the reasons for the use of these anthropomorphic verses in the Qurʾān by using the concepts of *mathal* and *tamthīl*. His approach to anthropomorphic verses is original and represents a major step in the development of the interpretation of these verses.

Finally, Ibn Qutayba believes that *mutashābihāt* are those ambiguous verses which require effort on the part of the interpreter. Thus, anthropomorphic verses can be considered as a category of the *mutashābih*. He used *majāz* in two ways; first the older usage which was associated with Abū ‘Ubayda, and secondly *majāz* as a counterpart of *haqīqa* as introduced
by al-Jāhiṣ. No distinction is attested in his writing between istiʿāra and majāz. He criticised those who deny the existence of majāz in the Qurʾān and used this concept to interpret anthropomorphic verses. But he was not consistent in his approach, as an additional three approaches to anthropomorphic verses are also attested in his writings. His tropical interpretation of anthropomorphic verses can be considered as combinations of the approaches of Abū ʿUbayda and al-Jāhiṣ but without using the word majāz in a technical sense when interpreting these verses.

Three points raised by the above findings are worth discussion namely: the beginning of tropical interpretation, the development of Qurʾānic hermeneutics and the impact of the theory of majāz on the interpretation of anthropomorphic verses. First, the treatment of Mujāhid of anthropomorphic interpretations indicates that tropical interpretation of anthropomorphic verses begun before the establishment of theological schools and the formation of their doctrine. This means that the tropical interpretation of anthropomorphic verses has a root in earlier Islamic tradition and represents a genuine position within Islamic scholarship. In my opinion the only reason behind his tropical interpretation is other verses of the Qurʾān which indicate God’s dissimilarity to his creation. Second, the interpretation of our authors of Q(3:7) shows that there was no clear theory of theological Qurʾānic hermeneutics towards the middle of the third Islamic century. Nevertheless, we can detect the beginning of its development in the treatment of Mujāhid, al-Qāsim and to some extent Ibn Qutayba. Third, the awareness of the phenomenon of majāz and its development provided our authors with the tool to interpret anthropomorphic verses. It also enabled some of these authors, especially al-Qāsim and Ibn Qutayba, to offer more detailed interpretations that try to explain the reasons behind describing God anthropomorphically. Next I will examine the contribution and the treatment of anthropomorphic verses by the Muʿtazilites in the context of their theology and hermeneutics.
Chapter 3

The Mu‘tazilites

“Mu‘tazilites unanimously agree that God the all Mighty is a thing unlike things and that he is not a body neither an accident. But He is the creator of bodies and accidents and none of the senses can perceive Him in this life or in the Hereafter. He cannot be confined to places neither can He be bounded by regions.”

The Mu‘tazilites are considered the champions of tropical interpretations of anthropomorphic verses and their approach and interpretation of these verses shaped the views of all other theological schools, whether they agree with them or not. Generally speaking, the Mu‘tazilites are one of the most important theological groups in Islam, their methods, issues discussed, and terms shaped all subsequent theological thinking in Islamic thought. Their doctrine is based on five principles (al-‘usūl al-khamsa): 1. Unity of God (al-tawhīd); 2. Justice of God (al-‘adl); 3. “the promise and the threat” (al-wā‘d wa al-wa‘īd); 4. The intermediate state (al-manzila bayna al-manzilatayn) of the sinful Muslim, considering him/her as malefactor (fāsiq); 5. “commanding the good and forbidding the evil” (al-amr bi-al-ma‘rūf wa al-nahy ‘an al-munkar). The first two principles are by far the most important ones and because of them the Mu‘tazilites are called the people of justice and unity of God (ahl al-‘adl wa al-tawhīd).

Regarding the unity of God, they understood unity as incorporality and he is unlike anything else, unity in essence: God is beyond time and place, he is unchangeable. The Mu‘tazilites divided the attributes of God into two types: the attributes of the essence (ṣifāt al-dhāt) and the attributes of the act (ṣifāt al-fī ‘īl). The attributes of the essence are identical with His essence and God merits them from eternity such as knowledge, power and life. In other words, they are unchangeable and tell us something about

---

1 Abū al-Qasim al-Balkhi, Bab dhikr al-Mu'tazila Min Maqalat al-Islamiyyin, ed. by Fu‘ad Sayyid, al-Dar al-Tunisiyya

2 Josef Van Ess, Mu’tazilah in Encyclopaedia of Religion, 2nd edition, ed. by M. Eliad, pp. 6317 - 6325
God’s essence. The attributes of the act are those attributes that God merits on account of His actions, such as creating, willing, speaking and nourishing. These attributes describe God’s relations with the world. For the Mu'tazilites, God’s speech is an attribute of the act and therefore the Qur’an is created not eternal. As for the justice of God, the Mu'tazilites assert that God is subject to the same moral obligations which apply to man and reason that tells us what is morally good and what is morally bad. Therefore, from the Mu'tazilī point of view ‘the necessary justice of God is not only fact, it is for Him a permanent obligation; in the name of His justice, God is required to act in such-and-such a fashion, since otherwise He would be unjust’. As a consequence of this principle, the Mu'tazilites believe that humans have free will and every person is responsible for his acts. His fate in the hereafter is determined by what he does in this life.

The Mu'tazilites were the first to emphasise the role of reason and its primacy in Islamic theology. They can be considered as rationalists for their insistence that certain things are known only through the exercise of reason in the absence of, or prior to, any revelation. The existence of God and His attributes can be known to us through reasoning and knowing God in this way is the first obligation upon every human being. Reason can tell us that God exists as a creator, it also informs us that He is powerful, omniscient, living, self-sufficient, just and does not have a body. Reason can also establish the prophethood of Muḥammad and only then can the revelation to him in the form of scripture (the Qur'an) be relied upon to find out more about God and other matters. But what if there are contradictions between what is contained in the revelation and the knowledge acquired by the use of reason such as these anthropomorphic verses which give the impression that God has a body. This chapter

---


examines the theory, hermeneutics, and tools that have been used by the Mu'tazilites to harmonize reason and revelation with reference to anthropomorphic verses.

The only available study that deals with this issue is the pioneering study of Naṣr Hāmid Abū Zayd which is entitled *al-Ittijāḥ al-'Aqli fī al-Tafsi'r: Dirāṣa fī Qādiyyat al-Majāz 'inda al-Muṭāzila*\(^5\). The study examines the relationship between Mu'tazilite thought and *majāz* in the Qurān in their writings up to the time of ‘Abd al-Jabbār. His treatment of earlier writers such as Muqātil b. Sulaymān and al-Qāsim al-Rassī is inadequate and this is due to the unavailability of their writings in edited form at the time of the research. Abū Zayd focuses in his study on ‘Abd al-Jabbār and examined his theological views and his use of *majāz* in relation to the issues of seeing God in the hereafter and free will. He shows how ‘Abd al-Jabbār use the tool of *majāz* to defend the Mu'tazilites’ views regarding the two issues mentioned above. This study will overcome the shortcomings of Abu Zayd’s treatment by examining earlier Mu'tazilite thinkers as well as al-Zamakhshāri with regard to their use of *majāz* to interpret anthropomorphic verses in order to harmonize reason and revelation. This chapter is divided into three sections; section one deals with early Mu'tazilites, section two covers the treatment of ‘Abd al-Jabbār including his elaborate Qurānic hermeneutics and finally section three examines al-Zamakhshāri focusing on his theory of *majāz* and how he used it to interpret anthropomorphic verses.

---

3.1 Early Mu'tazilites on Anthropomorphism:

The Mu'tazilite school championed the tropical interpretation of anthropomorphic verses from its inception and this is due to the Mu'tazilites’ continued endeavour to harmonise between reason and revelation. From the beginning, the Mu'tazilites emphasised the role of reason in their theology and this has an impact on their approach to Qur’ān and the methods they used to interpret these verses which they consider not in accord with their theology. Very little Mu'tazilite literature reached us from the 2nd and 3rd centuries and therefore it is difficult to present a complete picture of their theology, hermeneutics and their exegesis of the Qur’ān. In the following I will use the available writings to analyse the methods and the tools used by the early Mu'tazilites to interpret anthropomorphic verses. I will focus on three writers, namely: Abū Bakr al-ʾAsamm, Al-Jūbba’ī and al-Jāḥīz.

3.1.1 Abū Bakr al-ʾAsamm (d. 200/816 or 201/817)

Al-ʾAsamm wrote a commentary on the Qur’ān which was used by later commentators. His commentary did not survive and his views on selected verses of the Qur’ān were collected from later commentaries by Khadr Muḥammad Nabḥā. My analysis is based on this collection and other secondary sources that mention his views. Nothing survived of al-ʾAsamm’s detailed views on God and his attributes but we can assume

---

6 Abū bakr ʿabd al-raḥmān b. Kaysān al-ʾAsamm, (d. 200/816 or 201/817), is an early theologian and commentator on the Qur’ān. He is known for his denial of the existents of aʾrād (accidents) and for his belief that Imāma (leadership) is not obligatory characteristic of societies. See van Ess, Josef. "al-ʾAsamm." Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition. Ibn al-Nadīm attributed 26 treatises attributed to him by Ibn al-Nadīm, none of which is survived. He was well known for his commentary on the Qur’ān which appears to have been systematic and broad, see Schwarb, Gregor M.. "al-ʾAsamm." Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE, 2012.


that his views are in accord with the Mu'tazilites\(^9\) in his time. We only find a quotation in the *Maqālāt* of al-Ash'ārī who states that al-As'ām believes that “God is neither a body nor an accident\(^{10}\). Nor did anything survive of his views of the relations between reason and revelation. His views on Q (3:7) are mentioned by al-Ash'ārī in his *Maqālāt* where he states that for al-As'ām *al-muḥkamāt* are the verses that yield clear proofs and do not need reflection such as the verses that tell us about ancient nations. As for the *Mutashābihāt*, al-As'ām believes that they are the verses that require reflection such as the verses that tell us about future events like bodily resurrection\(^11\). What is interesting about his views about *mutashābihāt* and *muḥkamāt* is his emphasis on the role of reason to determine these verses.

What have survived from his commentary are his views on four anthropomorphic verses:

Q (2: 19) 
وَاللَّهُ مَحِيطُ بِالْكَافِرِينَ (19) “and God encompasses the unbelievers”

“He is aware of them, knows what they hide and inform His prophet about their secrets”\(^12\)

Q (10:15) 
قَالَ الَّذِينَ لَا يَرْجُونَ لِقَانَةً (10:15) “those who look not to encounter Us say”

“meaning that they do not hope to gain any good, as a reward for their obedience, when meeting Us”\(^{13}\) because of their sins.

Q (24:34) 
اللَّهُ نُورُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالأَرْضِ “God is the Light of the heavens and the earth”

‘What is intended [here] is that He the one who controls and manages the heavens and earth with wisdom and radiating proof; thus He described Himself like the master and the scholar is

---

9 Van Ess believes that “The theological principles defended by al-As'ām were essentially identical to those upheld by the *Qada'īs* and *Mu'tazīs* of his time”. See “al-As'ām.” *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition.*


12 Ibid., p. 33

13 Ibid., p. 77.
described as the light of the town. When the master perfectly manages the affairs of the town then he is for them like a light which is used as a guide for the routs.\footnote{Ibid., p. 93}

Q (112: 2) “God, the Everlasting Refuge”

“Allāh al-Sammad” is the Creator of things because being Master entails this.\footnote{Ibid., p. 99.}

Due to the limited number of verses, any generalisation will lack a strong base. Thus, only tentative comments can be offered here. The above interpretations are short and two of them are a kind of a substitution of one word for another. In his comments on only one verse Q (24:35), one finds a justification of the interpretation. All of these interpretations are tropical and no terms mentioned to describe the phenomenon of majāz nor are any explanations given as to why one should interpret them figuratively. The first observation confirms what we know that it was al-Jāḥiẓ who used the terms majāz-ḥaqīqa in a technical way for the first time.

3.1.2 Al-Jāḥiẓ (255/869)

We already discussed al-Jāḥiẓ’s views on majāz in chapter one of this thesis. Here I will examine his theology and hermeneutics with regard to his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses. Regarding the issue of anthropomorphism, al-Jāḥiẓ in his book al-radd ‘alā al-mushabbiha (refutation of the anthropomorphists) defends a tropical interpretation of Q (75:22-23) and quotes Mujaḥid’s interpretation (examined in chapter 2) where nāzira means waiting the reward of their Lord. Then he asserts that ‘in the proofs of reasons God does not resemble any creature in any aspect, so if He is visible then you are likening him to [his creatures] in many ways’\footnote{Al-Jāḥiẓ, Abū ‘Uthmān ‘Amru b. Bahr, Al-Radd ‘Alā al-Mushabbiha, Rasā’il al-Jāḥiẓ, edited by ‘Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn, Maktubat al-Khānjī, Egypt, 1979, vol. 4, p. 10.} (I could not find any elaboration on why God should not resemble His creatures in his writings). His views on the relationship between reason and revelation can be known from his reply to the anthropomorphists who believe that God can be seen in the hereafter where al-Jāḥiẓ states that ‘it is more appropriate to negate the assimilation of God to
his creatures (tashbīḥ) because reason has indicated this in the Qur’ān\(^{17}\) (42:11). This is one of the earliest statements which indicate the priority of reason over revelation as far as I know. Here al-Jāḥiz puts the proofs of reason before the Qur’ān in order to support his tropical interpretation of anthropomorphic verses. He did not elaborate on this point, which might indicate that this doctrine had become fully established in the Mu’tazilites circles. As for Q (3:7) I could not find any interpretation of this verse and related terms muḥkamat and mutashābihāt in the writing of al-Jāḥiz. His statement quoted above indicates the use Q (42:11) to interpret Q (75: 22-23) without identifying the first verse with muḥkam and the second one with mutashābih.

al-Jāḥiz offers another supporting argument for the above interpretation based on majāz. He argues that God does not speak unless “this speech has a meaning which can be either the origin (al-asl) and the meaning is based on it, or the meaning is the branch (al-far) and the derivative (al-ishtiqāq) which the Arabs call majāz\(^{18}\)”. Al-Jāḥiz continues his argument “in the Word of God and He is Just according to our belief\(^{19}\) - Q (2:18) “deaf, dumb, blind -- so they shall not return”.

In a similar manner, al-Jāḥiz argues, “the interpretation of nāzira (gazing) and Q (89:22) and Q (6:3). They say (the Arabs): someone came by himself (Ja’anā fulānun bi-nafiṣihī), He brought his son (ja’anā bi- waladihi) and He brought to us ample good [things] (Ja’anā bi khayrin kathīrin). All of the above have various meanings. They say

\(^{17}\) Ibid., p. 10.


\(^{19}\) ibid., p. 15

\(^{20}\) ibid., p. 15
the heaven brought to us an enormous matter (Ja’atna al-samā’u bi- amrin ‘azimin) and the heaven is in its place. They also say the heaven came to us (ja’atna al-samā’u) and they mean by it the clouds which bring rain from the sky21.”

Al-Jāḥiẓ is the first theologian we know so far to assert the priority of reason over revelation and to use explicitly the term majāz in a technical sense in interpreting anthropomorphic verses as seen above. We saw earlier that he was the first person to use it in a technical sense and here again he was the first to apply it. His interpretations reflect a big step in the interpretation of anthropomorphic verses if we compare him with al-Asṣām or with early commentators such as Mujāḥid, Muqāṭil or Abū ‘Ubayda. Al-Jāḥiẓ played an important role in the articulation of the theory of majāz and which had an impact on his interpretations by basing them on solid linguistic grounds. The theological and hermeneutical premises that he articulated and used will be the basis for any future attempt to interpret anthropomorphic verses by the Mu’tazilites.

3.1.3 Al-Jubbā’ī22 (303/915)

Abū ‘Alī Muḥammad b. ‘Abd-al-Wahhāb al-Jubbā’ī was an important figure in the Bāṣrān school of Mu’tazilism. Al-Jubbā’ī wrote a commentary23 on the Qurʾān which did not survive24. But like al-Asṣām before him, many quotations from his Tafṣīr are found in various later books. In recent years there were three attempts to collect al-Jubbā’ī’s quotations from various sources. The first attempt is that of Rosalind

21 Ibid., pp. 15-16.

22 Abū ‘Alī wrote many books including a commentary on the Qurʾān and only one part of one of his books survived: Kitāb al-Maqalāt. Sabine Schmidtke, Jobba’i, in Encylopedia Iranics, http://www.irancaonline.org/articles/jobbai-name-of-two-mutazilite-theologians (accessed 29/3/2012)

23 Estimated by Gimaret to be around 1000 folios, see Gimaret, Une Lecture Mu’tazilite Du Coran Le Tafṣīr d’Alī al-Gubbā’ī (m.303/915) partiellement reconstitué a partir de ses citateurs, Peeters, 1994, p. 30.

In her PhD dissertation, the second attempt is that of Daniel Gimaret and the last attempt is that of Khadîr Muḥammad Nabhâ.

**Interpretation of Q (3:7)**

According to al-Jubba‘î, Muḥkam is what can yield only one meaning while *mutashâbih* can yield two meanings or more. Regarding *(mā ya‘lamu ta‘wīlu Illā Allāhu...)*, al-Jubba‘î interpreted this to mean that only God knows all of the *mutashâbih* because people might know part of it and might not know other parts and in this case one should pause after *illa Allāh* and start the recitation with *wa al-rāsikhu fī al-‘ilm*. Ta‘wil is understood to be *al-muta‘wâl* (the things indicated by a *mutashâbih* verse) and in this case only God has unique knowledge of these things although scholars might know some of it as indicated above. His interpretation of Q (3:7) represents a significant development in the history of interpretation, especially his views on *muḥkamât* and *mutashâbihât* which will be adopted by later writers.

**Al-Jubba‘î’s views on Majāz**

As we have seen, by the time of al-Jubba‘î, *majāz-ḥaqīqa* dichotomy was established and used by various writers such as al-Jāḥiẓ. It seems that certain issues related to *majāz* were debated by the time of al-Jubbâ‘î and he contributed to this debate as the following quotation from *al-Mughni* of ‘Abd al-Jabbar indicates his view on whether *qiyaṣ* (analogy) can be based on *majāz*.

> “Our master ‘Abū ‘Alî-may God have mercy on him-said that analogy cannot be based on *majāz* like it is based on ḥaqīqa”, Al-Jubbâ‘î adds that one cannot say “ask the book” and mean by it the owner or the

---


26 Gimaret, *Une Lecture Mutazilite Du Coran*.


writer as one can say “ask the town” and mean by it the people of the town\textsuperscript{31}. This view will be adopted later by other writers on \textit{majāz} including al-Jaṣṣāṣ and ‘Abd al-Jabbār among others. Al-Jubbā’i also believes that languages are not based on human convention; rather it was God who taught all languages to humans. He based his view\textsuperscript{32} on Q (2:31). This view will be challenged by later Mu’tazilites who believed that language is based on human convention.

\textbf{Al-Jubbā’i’s interpretation of anthropomorphic verses}

\textit{Q} (2:19)

\textit{“and God encompasses the unbelievers”}  

[it] means He has a power over them\textsuperscript{33}.

\textit{Q} (2:115)

\textit{“whithersoever you turn, there is the Face of God”}  

Al-Jubbā’i interpreted \textit{wajh Allāh} to mean the contentment of God (\textit{ridwān Allāh})\textsuperscript{34}.

\textit{Q} (4:171)

\textit{“The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only the Messenger of God, and His Word”}  

Al-Jubbā’i said ”this is \textit{majāz}, He meant by ‘the word” that they are guided by Jesus as they are guided by his speech. They also become alive through him in their religion like the living person being alive by the \textit{ruḥ} (spirit), therefore He called him \textit{ruḥan}\textsuperscript{35}.

\textit{Q} (6:18)

\textit{“He is Omnipotent over His servants”}


\textsuperscript{32} Nabha, \textit{Tašīr al-Jubbā’ī}, ibid., pp. 70-71 and Gimaret, \textit{Une Lecture Mutazilite Du Coran}, ibid., p. 82.

\textsuperscript{33} Gimaret, \textit{Une Lecture Mutazilite Du Coran}, p.78.

\textsuperscript{34} Nabha, \textit{Tašīr al-Jubbā’ī}, p. 80  and Gimaret, \textit{Une Lecture Mutazilite Du Coran}, ibid., p. 106.

\textsuperscript{35} Nabha, \textit{Tašīr al-Jubbā’ī}, p. 178.
Al-Jubbā'ī states that God cannot be predicated to be above His servants by way of ḥaqīqa. Therefore, when we come across such an attribute, this has to be understood as majāz.  

Q (7:51) “Therefore today We forget them”  

Al-Jubbā'ī states that nansāhum means we will deal with them in the same way we deal with those who are forgotten.

Q (9:104) “Do they not know that God is He who accepts repentance from His servants, and takes the freewill offerings”  

Al-Jubbā'ī said “God made the taking of free will offering by the Prophet and the believers as taking from Him by way of tashbīḥ and majāz (comparison and trope) since [the taking] was by His command.”

Q (20:39) “and to be formed under my eye”  

Al-Jubbā'ī interpreted ‘alā ‘aynī to mean by my knowledge and awareness (‘alā ‘ilmīn minī wa ma‘rifatin).

Q (35:30) “Lord is All-forgiving, All-thankful”  

According to al-Jubbā’ī shakūr is a majāz because it means He rewards [people] for their obedience.

Q (38:75) “that I created with My own hands”  

Al-Jubbā’ī interpreted bi- yadī to mean by Myself without intermediary.

36 Nabha, Tašīr al-Jubbā'ī, p. 204.  
37 Nabha, Tašīr al-Jubbā'ī, p. 244 and Gimaret, Une Lecture Mutazilite Du Coran, p. 348.  
39 Gimaret, Une Lecture Mutazilite Du Coran, p. 599.  
Al-Jubbā‘ī’s interpretations reflect as expected a Mu‘tazilite theology and hermeneutics. Indeed al-Jubbā‘ī was a major figure in Mu‘tazilite theology within the Baṣran school and his influence can be discerned in the writings of later Mu‘tazilites especially ‘Abd al-Jabbār as we will see later as well as in the writings of his onetime disciple al-Ash‘arī. Al-Jubbā‘ī, as is clear from above, used the word majāz in a technical sense in some of his interpretations. This demonstrates that the concept of majāz was fully diffused within the Mu‘tazilite school in his time. In his interpretation of Q (9:104), he used the phrase majāz wa tashbih which indicates that the terminology was not stable and there was a confusion about the boundaries of these terms. Although he did not use the term majāz in all of his interpretations, nevertheless his interpretations can be classified as tropical ones.

The attempt to harmonise reason and revelation started with the Early Mu‘tazilites. Although very few of their writings survived, the available literature can shed some light on their views. They all agree implicitly or explicitly that anthropomorphic verses have to be interpreted tropically to be in harmony with the dictates of reason regarding the attributes of God. The earliest attestation of the doctrine of priority of reason over revelation is found in the writing of al-Jāḥīz but this does not mean that he was the first to formulate this doctrine.

The linking between this doctrine and Qur’ānic hermeneutics through Q(3:7) is not attested in the writing of the three authors examined. For al-Aṣamm, Muḥkamāt verses are those which do not need reflection while mutashābihāt are those verses which require reflection to be understood. On the other hand, al-Jāḥīz did not comment on this verse at least in what has survived in his writing although he made use of certain verses to interpret others. As for al-Jubbā‘ī, it is his interpretation of Muḥkamāt as those verses which can yield only one meaning and mutashābihāt verses as those which can yield two meanings or more that represents a significant development in the history of interpretation of this verse.

The theory of majāz started with al-Jāḥīz who was the first to speak about the dichotomy of ḥaqīqa-majāz as indicated in chapter one. My research in the writing of early Mu‘tazilites confirms this and shows that the term majāz was used in its technical sense after al-Jāḥīz in the writing of al-Jubbā‘ī and late writers. Before al-Jāḥīz
various commentators offer tropical interpretations of anthropomorphic verses but without using the term majāz and with little explanation of their interpretation as with the interpretation of al-Âṣāmm. In the writing of al-Jāḥīẓ we find the use of technical language and linguistic and theological explanation in his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses in order to establish his interpretations on solid rational grounds. After al-Jāḥīẓ the use of majāz in a technical sense to interpret anthropomorphic verses became established as we have seen in the interpretation of al-Jubbâ‘î of anthropomorphic verses. It will be in the writing of ‘Abd-al-Jabbâr that we find a mature development of Mu‘tazilite theology and hermeneutics, and this will be the topic of my next section.
3.2 ‘Abd al-Jabbār (c. 325–415/937–1024)42

‘Abd al-Jabbār was one of the most important Mu’tazilīs in 4 AH/11 CE and his views affected the development Mu’tazilī kalām, uṣūl al-fiqh and Balāgha. His views also had an impact on Jewish kalām within Rabbinate and Karaite traditions.43 Many of his books survived unlike other early Mu’tazila thanks to the Zaydīs of Yemen who adopted the Mu’tazilī theology and preserved his books. This section deals first with ‘Abd-Jabbār’s views on the relation between reason and revelation,

3.2.1 Reason and revelation

‘Abd al-Jabbār builds his Qur’ānic hermeneutics on Mu’tazilī theology and its main principles of al-‘Adl wa al-Tawḥiḍ (justice and unity of God). He argues that before one tries to interpret the Qur’ān or as he puts it in a question format ‘how to derive from the Qur’ān that which it signifies’,44 one has to establish the truthfulness of the Qur’ān. This can be achieved by knowing the state of the actor who produced it by relying on reason alone. Only then the Qur’ān can be interpreted and used as a proof.

‘Abd al-Jabbār’s main argument for knowing the state of the actor, by relying on reason alone, is based on the following two premises:


First premise: ‘Abd al-Jabbār argues that to know the truthfulness of an action and what it signifies one should know the state of the actor and this action cannot be utilized to demonstrate the existence and the attributes of the actor. Because if an action indicates the state of the actor and the truthfulness of this action cannot be established unless [the state of] its actor is known, we will end up with a circular argument.

Second premise: ‘It has been established that the speech [of God] is an action because it originated in time in a specific way similar to Ḩsān (grace) and In‘ām (endowment).”

Therefore, to know the truthfulness of the Qur’ān and what it signifies one should know the state of its actor and the Qur’ān cannot be utilized to demonstrate the existence and the attributes of the actor.

Consequently, in order to be able to use the Qur’ān as proof, one should rely first on reason alone (al-‘aql) to establish the existence of God, His attributes including His wisdom and that He does not chose to do what is considered to be hideous. Once this is achieved then the truthfulness of the Qur’ān can be established and consequently

---

45 'Abd al-Jabbār, Mutashābih al-Qur’ān, vol. 1, p. 1. He adds that “rather only the (al-ahkām) rules can be deduced from such an action”.

46 Mutashābih p. 1

47 Mutashābih, p. 10. In Mu'tazili theology there is a distinction between the attributes of the essence (ṣifāt al-dhāt) and the attributes of the act (ṣifāt al-fi’il). The attributes of the essence are those attributes that God merits from eternity such as Knowledge, power. While the attributes of the act are those attributes which God merits when he acts such as creator and provider. Within this framework, the Mu'tazilites consider al-Qur’ān (kalānu Allāh) -the speech of God to be created or in other words an action. See ‘Abd al-Jabbār, al-Mughni fi Abwāb al-'Adl wa al-Tawḥīd, General editor Tāḥa Ḥusayn, al-Dār al-Miṣrīyya li- al-Ta’liʿ wa al-Nashr, Cairo, 1961-1974, vol. 7, p. 208 and also see Peters, J.R.T.M. God's created speech: a study in the speculative theology of the Mu'tazilī Qāḍī al-Qudāt Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Abd al-Jabbār b. Aḥmad al-Hamadhānī, Leiden : Brill, 1976

48 Mutashābih al-Qur’ān, p. 5

49 'Abd al-Jabbār established this on the basis of the eloquence of the Qur’ān which indicates its miraculous features, see ‘Abd al-Jabbār, Al-Mughni fi Abwāb al-'adl wa al-Tawḥīd, vol. 7, p. 180.
the Qur’an can be interpreted and used as a proof. The use of reason will not stop in the first two steps mentioned above (establishing the truthfulness of the Qur’an and the state of the actor) on the contrary reason will play a vital role in the process of interpretation itself, as will be shown later when I will examine ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s views regarding the pair *muḥkam* and *mutashābih*.

*Muḥkam* and *mutashābih* can be defined as follows: the word *muḥkam* is from the verb *ahḵama* (he made precise) meaning that God made what he intended precisely expressed by the *muḥkam*. ‘This is done by making the *muḥkam* have a distinctive quality as this quality affects what is intended. This quality affects what is intended by expressing it in a way that it is only capable of yielding what is intended in one of these three means: 1. Original primary meaning 2. Convention 3. proofs of reason.

Whatever has this quality must be *muḥkam* such as Q (112:1-2) and Q (10:44). On the other hand, *mutashābih* is what God has made, having a quality that confused the hearer. ‘The confusion is attributed to the fact that prima facie meaning (*zāhir*) does not indicate what is intended by the utterance because of either the lexical meaning or the convention’, such as Q (33:57) where the prima facie meaning of this verse indicates what we consider as impossible therefore what is intended is not clear and one needs to refer to the *muḥkam* in order to know what is really intended by it. ‘Abd al-Jabbār does not mentioned here the proof of reason although the example he quotes to explain what *mutashābih* is reflects rational grounds for rejecting the prima facie meaning of the verse. Regarding the proof of reason ‘Abd al-Jabbār contends ‘that if it prevents something and the prima facie meaning of a the discourse permits it then we have to use *ta’wil* in this case because the one who erected the proofs of revelation is

---


51 *Mutashābih al-Qur’an*, p. 19

52 Ibid., p. 19

53 Ibid.
the one who erected the proofs of reason and therefore there is no contradiction between the two\textsuperscript{54}.

Furthermore, Muḥkam and mutashābih verses agree with each other in one respect and differ from each other in another. They agree with each other in a sense that both cannot be used as proof unless one knows the wisdom of the actor and that he does not chose to do what is considered to be hideous. They differ from each other in a sense that the muḥkam, if it is considered to be so because either lexically it has only one meaning or there is an accompanying clue (qarīna), can yield only one meaning, and consequently the recipient can determine its signification provided he is familiar with the manner of the discourse and the associated clues\textsuperscript{55}. The mutashābih, even if the recipient is linguistically competent and aware of the accompanying clues, requires contemplation and reflection in order to determine its signification in a manner that conforms either with the muḥkam or with reason. This is because the muḥkam is the origin of mutashābih, thus the knowledge of the muḥkam should precede the mutashābih\textsuperscript{56}.

When both muḥkam and mutashābih are related to matters of ‘adl wa tawhīd (justice and unity) then one must base them on the proof of reason because it is not valid for the one who does not know that God is Wise and that He does not chose to do the hideous, to infer from His speech that He merits these attributes\textsuperscript{57}. Moreover, the knowledge that God does not chose to do the hideous is related to the knowledge about His essential attributes and how they differ from the attributes of the action. The knowledge of all the above should be prior to any attempt to know the validity of knowing that His speech is true and can be used as evidence\textsuperscript{58}. The question now is how can we distinguish between muḥkam and mutashābih? ‘Abd al-Jabbār argues that the proof of reason is the only criterion for distinguishing between muḥkam and

\textsuperscript{54} ‘Abd al-Jabbār, Al-Mughni, vol. 13, p. 280

\textsuperscript{55} Mutashābih al-Qur‘ān p. 6

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., pp. 6-7

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., p. 7

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., p. 9
mutashābih, so whatever is capable of yielding only what is required by the proof of reason must be identified as muḥkam. On the other hand, whatever is capable of yielding both what is required by the proof of reason and its contrary should be identified as mutashābih. The proof of reason is the most powerful criterion to distinguish between muḥkam and mutashābih, although this criterion can be strengthened with what comes before or after the mutashābih as this indicates that what is meant by the mutashābih is determined by the muḥkam. For example Q (42:11) cannot be interpreted without prior certain knowledge that God is incorporeal and does not resemble things, and only then can it be considered as muḥkam.

3.2.2 the foundation of Quranic hermeneutics

According to ‘Abd al-Jabbar God willed everything in the Qur’an to be known to Mankind. God only addresses mankind for a reason related to them because He is beyond good and evil. His address is for the benefit of the addressees, like his acts, which are for the interests of the servants. Benefits cannot be achieved by genus of the discourse nor by all its other characteristics, but benefits can be attained through the meaning of the discourse. It is considered abhorent for one human being to speak to another person in a language not known to the addressee. If it can be established that God addresses humans by using specific language with the aim of benefiting them, then all His speech must be an indication which can serve to find out what is meant by this speech. If we allow that part of His discourse is not meant by Him to be known to humans, then we have to allow this for the whole of the discourse. Thus His discourse cannot be trusted and He will be considered as ‘ābith. Therefore, God meant everything in the Qur’an to be understood and this is clear from the Book itself as it is described as cure (ṣhitā), guidance (ḥudā) and mercy (raḥma). God also indicates that

59 Ibid., pp. 7-8
60 Ibid., p. 5
the Book is *bayān* (clarification) and if it cannot be understood then the Qur’ān cannot be described as such\(^{61}\).

As for His saying (*wa mā Ya‘lamu ta’wilahu*) this can be interpreted to mean that the *wāw* here is *wāw al-‘atf* so the scholars know the *ta’wil* of the *mutashābih*. ‘Abd al-Jabbār argues that it cannot be assumed that God confined the knowledge of the *mutashābih* to Himself because it is not possible for God to send down a speech and a discourse and not to provide a way for the addressee to know what is intended by it\(^{62}\). In addition to the knowledge they possess about the *mutashābih*, the scholars say we believe in it so their praise is perfected\(^{63}\). As for the disjoined letters at the beginning of some *sūra*, ‘Abd al-Jabbār contends that various scholars interpreted these letters and the best interpretation is that of al-Ḥasan al-Ṭāhirī who said that these letters are the names of the *sūras*. The point here is to show that there is nothing in the Qur‘ān which can be considered without any benefit\(^{64}\).

Interpreting *muhkam* and *mutashābih* verses requires adhering to a set of methods that can accommodate the differences between them as mentioned above. The same also applies to other types of discourse (*al-khitāb*) such as *mujmal*, *mufassar*, *ḥaqīqa* and *majāz*\(^{65}\). ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s hermeneutics has two main components one related to the nature and the other to the significance of the discourse.

I. Nature and the subject matter of the discourse\(^{66}\)

‘Abd al-Jabbār divides the discourse in this regard into two types:

---

\(^{61}\) *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14


\(^{63}\) *Mutashābih al-Qur‘ān*, p. 15

\(^{64}\) *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17

\(^{65}\) *Ibid.*, p. 33

\(^{66}\) *Ibid.*, p. 34
1. The first type is self-sufficient which can convey what is intended by itself alone. This type is a proof and evidence and does not need anything else.

2. The second type is not self-sufficient and cannot convey by itself the intended meaning. It is further divided into two categories:

   A. The first category: what is intended can be known with the combination of this discourse and something else

   B. The second category: what is intended can be only known through something else. This type of discourse is considered as (lutf) favour and (ta’kid) emphasis.

The entirety of the Qur’anic discourse comes under these three classifications. Clues (al-qara’in) could be either attached (muttasila sam’an) and based on revelation or could be unattached, whether based on revelation or on reason. Evidence that is based on reason67 (dalil al-‘aqih) even when it is unattached is considered like an attached one in a sense that the discourse should be interpreted in its light. This can be shown in the interpretation of Q (2:21), ‘interpreting this verse with such an evidence which states that God does not command anyone who is insane; is more emphatic than saying O sane people fear your Lord’68.

People referred to the discourse which is not self-sufficient in different ways. Various expressions are used to refer to this discourse such as muḥkam, mutashābih, and majāz; what is important is not the expression one uses because they agree with the exposition above. The exposition shows that a clue is required in order to know what is intended by the discourse. Some discourses require many clues, others require only one. In the last case, the meaning might be either clear or ambiguous and this is the reason behind conflict of interpretations among scholars69.

Practical implications:


68 Mutashābih al-Qur’ān p. 34

69 Ibid.
If it is possible to interpret the discourse according to its prima facie meaning (‘alā ḏāhirihī) and the discourse is evident on the account of the primary lexical meaning regardless of it being general (‘āmm) or specific (khāṣṣ), then the discourse must be accepted (or interpreted) according to its prima facie meaning. In this case the discourse belongs to (or is classified as self-sufficient-) the first type (self-sufficient) mentioned above.

If it is not possible to interpret the discourse according to its prima facie meaning, then serious reflection is required on the part of the interpreter to find out how this discourse should be best interpreted. This reflection consists of searching for the clues as mentioned earlier. If the hearer is well versed in the fundamentals – having grasped what is possible and what is not with regard to rational matters, knowing whether the commandment of obligations (taklīf) is morally good or bad, and being linguistically competent to be able to discern between various types of majāz and ḥaqīqa—then the hearer can understand what is meant by the discourse.

II. The significance of the discourse: reason or revelation

‘Abd al-Jabbār also divides the discourse in this regard into two types:

1. The first type is defined by ‘Abd al-Jabbār as follows “had it not been for the discourse it would be invalid to know the signification by of reason”. In other words, this type signifies what can be only known by the discourse and relying on the proof of reason to know the signification is not valid.

2. The second type signifies what could be known by the proof of reason in the absence of the discourse. It is further divided into two categories:

A. The first category signifies what could be known by the proof of reason in the absence of the discourse and it would be valid to know the signification by relying on the discourse. So both the reason and the discourse are on a

---

70 Ibid., p. 35
71 Ibid.
72 Ibid.
par with each other in a sense that both are valid ways to know the matter of the signification.

B. The second category signifies what could be known by reason in the absence of the discourse, and this knowledge can only be attained by reason.

Practical implications:

1. The first type: religious legal rules are instances of the first type because they can only be known by the discourse and what is associated with it. In the absence of the discourse, reason would not be a valid tool to know obligatory prayers or their conditions, or their times. The same applies to all other rituals.

2. The second type:

   A. An example of this category is the belief that God cannot be seen, because it is valid to arrive at this belief by relying on revelation and on reason. Many issues of *(al-wa‘īd)* threat come under this category.

   B. The issues of unity of God and justice *(al-Tawḥīd wa al-‘adl)* come under this category, because the issue of unity of God, denying anthropomorphism and justice cannot be known from the following verses Q (42:11), Q(18:49), Q (112:3).

   This is because if one does not have previous knowledge about these matters, one would not know that the discourse of God is true, then how it is possible to use as evidence something without establishing its truthfulness first.

   This is in brief ‘Abd al-Jabbar’s Qur’anic hermeneutics, which reflects a great advancement in the theory of Qur’anic interpretation in comparison with earlier authors. His hermeneutics is fully based on his Mu’tazilite theology and its emphasis on rationality. It is through reason that one can know about the unity and justice of

---

73 *Mutashābih al-Qur‘ān* P. 35


God. Furthermore, reason also tells us about essential attributes of God and that He is incorporeal. According to ‘Abd al-Jabbār, once we acknowledge these doctrines with their proofs then we can start interpreting the Qur’ān. Reason will tell us which verses are *muhkamāt* and which verses are *mutashābiḥāt*. In this case, the latter should be understood in the light of the former. The major tool that can be used to interpret the *mutashābiḥāt* is *majāz* and this will be the topic of the next section.

The writings of ‘Abd al-Jabbār preserved for us a complete Mu’tazilite theological system. He consolidated Mu’tazilite thinking at his time and presented a fully developed Qur’ānic hermeneutics that was built on Mu’tazilite theology. In addition to his hermeneutics, his theory of *majāz* enabled him to interpret anthropomorphic verses to harmonize them and the proof of reason. In his theology, he emphasised that it is only through the use of reason and not by depending on the Qur’ān that one can know about God’s existence, transcendence and justice. It is only then one can proceed and read the Qur’ān because in order to know the truthfulness of the Qur’ān and what it signifies one should know the state of its actor and the Qur’ān cannot be utilized to demonstrate the existence and the attributes of the actor. ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s doctrine of priority of reason over revelation has an impact on his Qur’ānic hermeneutics and it is through his interpretation of Q (3:7) one can see the contact between theology and hermeneutics. For ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *muhkamāt* are verses that precisely express what is intended by them and *mutashābiḥāt* are those in which their prima facie meaning (*ẓāhir*) does not indicate what is intended by them. If the prima facie meaning of a verse is not in accord with proof of reason then one has to resort to *ta’wil* to harmonise between the two because both reason and revelation have the same origin and therefore there should be no contradiction between the two. In this case the *mutashābiḥāt* have to be interpreted in the light of *muhkamāt* verses which they should be in accord with reason. The main tool in the process of *ta’wil* is *majāz* and ‘Abd al-Jabbār enacted his own theory of *majāz* within the context of *uṣūl al-fiqh* and *Kalām* to use it in his interpretation. His interest in *majāz* reflects its utmost importance in his hermeneutics because *majāz* is the primary tool to harmonise between reason and revelation. ‘Abd al-Jabbār applied systematically his theory of *majāz* to all anthropomorphic verses and
interpreted them to be in accord with proof of reason. His interpretation of these verses clearly reflects the advanced stage of the theory of majāz at his time. Next we will examine the approach of al-Zamakhshari to anthropomorphic verses which revolutionised Qur’anic hermeneutics.

3.2.3 ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s views on majāz:

By the time of ‘Abd al-Jabbār, the theory of majāz was not fully developed as we have seen in chapter one of this work. It seems that the views of Ibn Jinni influenced the writers on majāz in the discipline of usūl al-fiqh and theology. This can be observed in Ibn Jinni’s definition of ḥaqīqa and its relation to majāz (as we have seen in chapter 1). ‘Abd al-Jabbār elaborated his theory of majāz by building on the works of predecessors in the 4th/10th century. His views on majāz are scattered in many books including books authored by him and others. The obvious starting point is to look at his writing on usūl al-fiqh. Indeed ‘Abd al-Jabbār wrote a number of books on usūl al-fiqh which could also be used to find his views on majāz, because it is one of the topics discussed in the books of usūl al-fiqh. In what follows I will reconstruct the views of ‘Abd al-Jabbār on majāz from the available sources, concentrating only on those views relevant to his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses.

Definition of Majāz:

76 ‘Abd al-Jabbār wrote the following books on ‘usūl al-fiqh: Kitāb al-‘Umad, Kitāb al-Sharḥ (over 30 times mentioned in al-Mu’tamad), Kitāb al-nihāya (2 times mentioned in al-Mu’tamad, Al-Mughūl vol. 17 Kitāb al-Shar’īyyāt). Unfortunately only portions of vol 17 of al-Mughūl survived from his writings on usūl, and these portions do not contain his treatment of Majāz, see ‘Abd al-Karīm ‘Uthmān, Qūdūl al-Qudūl ‘Abd al-Jabbār b. Ahmad al-Hamadhānī, Dār al-‘Arabiyya, Beirut 1967. Among the later books on Usūl al-fiqh which I surveyed, references to ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s views on majāz are found in these books: Kitāb al-Mu’tamad by his student Abū al-Husayn al-Bāṣrī (436/1044), Al-Hākim al-Jushāmī (494/1100), Sharḥ ‘Uyūn al-Masā’il (manuscript), Al-Mahsūl of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (606/1209), Sharḥ al-Mahṣūl of al-Isfahānī (688/1289), Al-Bahr al-Muḥīf of al-Zarkashī (794/1392).
‘Abd al-Jabbār’s theory of majāz is based on his views about the origin of language as an arbitrary and a man made phenomenon based on muwāda’a77 (agreed upon assignment of words to objects and ideas). He states that there should first be a language based on muwāda’a in order for the discourse of God to be understood and perhaps later other language could be taught through the means of revelation (tawqīfān)78. This is because God is Wise and he would not address us with a discourse without a prior muwāda’a otherwise the case would be like addressing the Arabs by using an African language unknown to them79. He also states that what is signified by names (ma’anī al-asmā’) is not affected by the naming process, in other words the naming process is arbitrary and does not affect the state of what is named. So if the lexicographers decided to change the meaning of the word muḥdath (created) to mean qādīn (eternal), it would not be improper. Therefore, it is allowed to transfer the signification of lexical vocables to a new legal signification based on revelation and to transfer the signification of a lexical vocable from haqīqa to majāz80. ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s view of the origin of majāz is found in the following statement

‘li anna al-laťzata la yajūzu an takūna majāzan wa la haqīqata la-ha, li’anna al-tajwīza bi- isti’māli al-laťzati fi al-majāzi yaqtaďi anna la-ha haqīqatan fā –wuďi’at fī ghayri mawdī’ihā, wa ‘ufīda bi-ha ghayru mā wuď’i ath la-hū’81”

It is not permissible for a vocable to be considered as majāz without having a haqīqa because the process of assigning a tropical meaning by using a vocable by [way] of majāz requires that the vocable has a haqīqa; then the vocable has been assigned a signification other than its originally assigned lexical one, and this vocable is used to convey a signification other than what has been [originally] assigned.

77 Weiss explains muwāda’a as a kind of naming process in which certain vocal sound-patterns were arbitrarily chosen to be the labels for certain ideas. See Bernard Weiss. The Search For God’s Law, Islamic Jurisprudence in the Writing of Sayf al-Dīn al-Amidi, University of Utah Press, Salt Lake City, 1992, p. 121.


79 Ibid.


We find a similar definition attributed to ‘Abd al-Jabbār in his comments on the definition of Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Baṣrī, in which he states ‘the noun if it was ḥaqqīqa or used to convey a signification other than what has been [originally] assigned, then it is considered as majāz’. This view about majāz does not fully reproduce ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s notion of ḥaqqīqa and majāz, indeed al-Īsfahānī quotes the definition verbatim from one of ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s books which did not reach us. According to al-Īsfahānī, ‘Abd al-Jabbār states” what he mentioned at the beginning is the aspects of ḥaqqīqa and majāz not a definition of both. He said because if the noun was once ḥaqqīqa and once majāz then what makes a [vocal] ḥaqqīqa or majāz is not its originally assigned lexical signification because this signification stays the same, contrary to ḥaqqīqa and majāz which differ from each other. In this case what makes a vocal ḥaqqīqa or majāz is related to the manner in which a vocal is used to convey the intended signification”.

From the above quotation we could say that for ‘Abd al-Jabbār what makes a vocal majāz is the manner in which a vocal is used and in this case if it is used to convey a signification other than its originally assigned lexical one then it will be considered as majāz. It should also be mentioned here that ‘Abd al-Jabbār excluded proper names from the realm of ḥaqqīqa and majāz. Regarding the concept of ḥaqīqa, it is divided into three types; this division is attested in the writing of Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Baṣrī and has been accepted in the writing of ‘Abd al-Jabbār as we will see later. Indeed Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Baṣrī gives the following definition to ḥaqīqa “[for a vocal to be considered as ḥaqīqa] it should be used to convey a signification that has been

---


84 He is referring to Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Baṣrī, his views on majāż-ḥaqīqa is presented below in the section about the types of majāż.


86 Ibid., p. 203.
originally assigned to it: either through *lugha* (original lexical signification) or *shar*' (revelation) or ‘*urf’ (convention).

**Types of majāz**

‘Abd al-Jabbār recognised various types of majāz in his writings. The first three are identified from his comments on Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Baṣrī’s definition97 of majāz, whereas he accepted them but not as part of the definition of majāz

1. **Majāz based on ziyaḥa (addition):** *(laysa ka-mithlih shay’)* Q (42:11) whereas *kāf* is an addition and when we omit it; the meaning will be nothing is like him88.

2. **Majāz based on ḥaddif (ellipsis):** It is not impossible in the usage of words to mention something and mean something else and to omit mentioning what is intended89. This is a known type of majāz such as *‘ask the town*” in Q (12:82)

3. **Majāz based on naql (transference):** such as when one says I saw the lion, meaning a brave man90.

4. **Majāz ‘aqli:** when one says “the prince built his house” it is known by convention that he ordered it to be built. The same also applies to the Q (39:42) where God attributed the action to Himself by way of majāz because the angels obey Him when He orders them and we know that the

---

97 He defined majāz as “*mā lā yantaẓim laẓuḥu ma’nāhu imanī li-ziyādatin aw li-nuqṣānin aw li-naqlin ‘an mawdū’iḥi*” (an utterance is considered as majāz when the utterance does not indicate its intended signification either because of an addition or an omission or transferring the utterance from its original signification to another one), Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Ǧašrī, *al-mu’tamad fi ‘Usūl al-Fiqh*, 1965, vol. 1, p.18.


angels who are in charge of collecting the souls by the command of God as in Q (6:61).91

5. Tamthil: ‘Abd al-Jabbâr used the word tamthil in his interpretation of the verse Q (37:65) “its spathes are as the heads of Satans”

He states that because the first recipients of the Qur’ân know that the Shaytân is deformed and by nature they dislike this shape, the image is used to make them abstain from committing sins. This is why the shape of the tree is compared to heads of the shayâtûn and perhaps al-tamthil with such matters is more eloquent.92

Rules of majâz.

1. Al-Ḥakim al-Jushami quotes from a lost book of ‘Abd al-Jabbar (Kitâb al-Sharh) as follows [one way to distinguish between ḥaqîqa and majâz] is when the lexicographers use a vocable provided that there is no signs of majâz associated with it, then we know that this vocable is a ḥaqîqa, this is mentioned by al-Qâdî in al-Sharh.93

2. When majaz is used, it should not be treated as haqiqa, otherwise it will replace haqiqa. Therefore, analogy cannot be based on majaz and Abd al-Jabbar indicates that this is the view of Abu Ali al-Jubba’î. Abd al-Jabbar explains it as follows: “The meaning of our saying analogy cannot be based on majâz (al-majâzu lâ yuqâsu ‘alayhi), is that if the usage of [an expression] among people contains an omission of something which is intended by their speech and this omission is based on convention such as His saying Q (12:82)ask the town” meaning its inhabitants, then no one can say by way of analogy ask the donkey meaning its

---

owner. This is the case if there is no convention among them that allows the omission of the owner of the donkey while they mean it. ‘Abd al-Jabbăr, speaking here as a theologian and a jurist, restricts the creativity of poets and writers in producing new tropes, leaving them with only one option which is to employ old established tropes. He also argues against the view that the discourse of God contains many types of majāz, which describe God and others, unknown to the first addressees of the discourse. ‘Abd al-Jabbăr Q (26:195) “in a clear, Arabic tongue” as evidence to support his argument that all forms of expression in the Qur’ān are known and used by the Arabs even though it did not reach us.’ Abd al-Jabbăr allows one form of novel transference by the Divine discourse that is the transference of vocable from its primary lexical meaning to a new religious meaning, such as the word ṣalāt.

3. There should be evidence to warrant interpreting something as majāz and ‘Abd al-Jabbăr is adamant.”If an utterance indicates a ruling by way of ḥaqīqa we affirm that this indication is intended by the utterance if there is no evidence to the contrary. If the utterance indicates the meaning figuratively we should not affirm this meaning because when the Wise addresses someone through a discourse which points to a ruling regarding a thing or more and He did not indicates that he did not intend this, then we should affirm that this ruling is what is intended by the discourse. Majāz must not be intended [by the Wise] unless there is evidence, however if there is an evidence then the interpretation should be based on it. Otherwise the ruling as indicated by the utterance by way of ḥaqīqa must be accepted according to the evidence that necessitates it.”

4. The existence of majāz with its clue is considered like a haqiqa in its signification. Therefore, as the ḥaqīqa indicates what is intended by the discourse, thus majāz with its clue is more fitting in this regard.

---

94 ‘Abd al-Jabbăr, Al-Mughni, vol. 4, p. 188.
95 Ibid., p. 190.
5. It is not valid for a vocable to be used as *majāz* without having a *ḥaqīqa*.\(^{98}\)

6. If one *ḥaqīqi* meaning can be assigned to a vocable in all of its occurrences in the discourse then assigning multiple meanings or a *majāzi* one is not permissible.\(^{99}\)

Abd al-Jabbar enacted his own theory of majaz within the context of usul al-fiqh and Kalam. His theory is far more advanced than al-Jubbai and other early Mutazilites. He benefited from the works of lexicographers such as Ibn Jinni and covers many issues related to the theory of majaz that have not been discussed by the lexicographers or literary critics. This interest in *majāz* reflects its importance in the Mu'tazilite theology as a tool to interpret what they consider as *mutashābihāt*, including anthropomorphic verses. This is will be clear in the interpretation of ‘Abd al-Jabbār of anthropomorphic verses which will be examined next.

### 3.2.4 Interpreting anthropomorphic verses:

In the following I will examine how ‘Abd al-Jabbār interpreted anthropomorphic verses by basing himself on the theological framework of the Mu'tazilites, and by using the tool of *majāz* in order to harmonize reason and revelation.

**Beatific vision:**

Q(75:22-23) \(\text{عَلَىَ رَيَا} \text{ (22) إلى رَيَا} \text{ (23)}\)

“Upon that day faces shall be radiant, gazing upon their Lord”

According to ‘Abd al-Jabbār the issue of beatific vision (*al-ru'ya*) is related to *tashbīḥ* (anthropomorphism). Therefore, to believe that God can be seen implies that He has a body. Those who believe in the Beatific vision use the verse Q (75: 22-23) as justification for their belief. In what follows I will examine how ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s views on *majāz* is used to interpreted this verse.

---


\(^{100}\) ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Al-Mughni*, vol. 4, p. 220
‘If it is established that it is impossible for God to be seen then the only way to interpret this verse is to say that God mentioned Himself and meant something else in a sense of either waiting for something else (waiting for the reward of their Lord) or looking at something else. ‘Abd al-Jabbār accepted here two interpretations; waiting for the reward of their Lord and looking at His reward.

Both interpretations assume an insertion of the word *thawāb* before *rabbihā* (their Lord); ‘Abd al-Jabbār justifies this by using the second type of *majāz*—majāz *al-ḥadīf* (majāz by ellipsis)—accordingly there is an ellipsis here and the elided word is *thawāb* (reward). The second interpretation then follows *ilā rabbihā nāzīra* means gazing at His reward.

In order to justify the first interpretation of *ilā rabbihā nāzīra* as (waiting for the reward of their Lord) assuming that the word thawab (reward) is inserted before *rabbihā* (their Lord) as mentioned above, ‘Abd al-Jabbār offered four possible meanings of the word *al-naẓar* such as (*al-fikr*) reflection, (*al-ta‘āṭuf wa al-rahma*) mercy, *al-intīzār* (waiting) and (*al-ru‘ya*) gazing. The last meaning (gazing) is rejected because of theological considerations, reflection could not be meant here as God cannot be the object of reflection, (*al-ta‘āṭuf wa al-rahma*) could not be meant here as God cannot be the recipient of mercy. The only possible meaning left for the word (*nāzīra*) then is waiting. Q (75: 24) supports this interpretation because God mentioned what awaits the residents of hell of chastisement, therefore what he intends for the residents of paradise should be identical in a sense of reward waiting for them.

If someone says that, how it is possible to have two different interpretations for the same verse and how it is possible that both meaning are intended? ‘Abd al-Jabbār

---

states that the meanings do not contradict each other and early exegetes like Mujāhid accepted both interpretations. Referring to his views on the matter mentioned above he contends that “according to our views it is not impossible for a statement to have two [valid] interpretations” even if it not related to legal issues.

Having interpreted *ilā rabbihi nāzira* as a case of *majāz al-ḥadhif* (*majāz* based on ellipsis) by inserting the word *thawāb* (reward) in a sense that he mentioned Himself and meant something else, ‘Abd al-Jabbār contends that one must not interpret every place God mentioned Himself in this way, such as interpreting Q (2:21) ’u’budū *rabbakum* (worship Your Lord). Based on his views of *majāz* that there must be evidence to warrant such an interpretation ‘Because what we have mentioned [regarding *ilā rabbihi nāzira*] as a *majāz* we have done so for the existence of a evidence which indicates that gazing at God cannot be taken as *ḥaqīqa*, and there is no evidence for these verses’. As there is no evidence to warrant tropical interpretation, these verses must be interpreted according to their prima facie meanings because only He deserves to be worshiped and obeyed.

Having said that the inhabitants of paradise will be gazing towards God in a sense of gazing towards His reward, the same cannot be said about the inhabitants of Hell in a sense of gazing towards His chastisement .because [the first case] is *majāz* and *qiyyās* cannot be based on *majāz. Majāz* is used only in the perceived world and it is not valid for analogy to be based on it, therefore *majāz* can only be applied to God if it is based on revelation. For example, it cannot be said *masha rabbuka* (your Lord walked) by way of analogy to Q(89:22) “and thy Lord comes”.

\[^{107}\]‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Al-Mughni*, vol. 4, p 216
\[^{108}\]Ibid., pp. 216-217
\[^{109}\]Ibid., p. 217
Jabbar states that we should not call God by names and attributes that are based on *majaz* whether the origin of this *majaz* names the perceived world or revelation; even though we recite these names as they are in the Qur’an. This applies to God’s names and attributes including the attributes of the essence, the attributes, of the act and names that are added to Him such as to say that God created the unbelievers for hell because we have in the Qur’an Q (7:179). On the other hand, one could say that God is everywhere even though there is an ellipsis112, because this expression became like a *haqīqa* by convention113.

Names of God: *al-awwal, al-ākhir, al-zāhir and al-Bātin* Q (57:3)

‘Abd al-Jabbar interpreted the names of God *al-awwal* (the first) and *Akhir* (the last) to indicate the existence of God before the existence of everything else and after the existence of everything else unlike the interpretation of Jahm b. Ṣafwān who believes that the reward will stop at one point and everything else will cease to exist. Then he posed an objection to this interpretation and replied to it as follows “why did not you interpret *al-awwal wa al-ākhir* by way of *majaz* as you interpreted His saying *al-Zāhir wa al-Bātin* by way of *majaz*. It was said to him: to interpret His speech-Glory is to Him- by way of *majaz* is only valid when it cannot be interpreted by way of *haqīqa*. If it is valid for the [speech of God] to be interpreted by way of *haqīqa* then interpreting

---

112 According to ‘Abd al-Jabbar, God is everywhere is a *majaz* which means that He is aware of all the places. ‘Abd al-Jabbar, *Al-Mughni*, vol. 4, p. 228.

113 Ibid., p. 191.
it by way of *majāz* without evidence is not valid. We said His saying *Huwa al-Baṭīn* (He is the Inward) is *majāz* because its *ḥaqīqa* can only be valid with regard to bodies, therefore we said what is intended by it is God’s knowledge of hidden matters. Similarly, we said that what is intended by His saying *huwa al-Ẓāhir* (He is the outward) is that He is *al-Qāhir al-Musta’lī* (the Subduer and Superior) and this interpretation is a *ḥaqīqa* with regard to the word *al-Ẓāhir* which means *al-ẓuhūr wa al-ghalaba* (overpowering and victory). When evidence requires interpreting some vocables by way of *majāz*, other vocables must not be interpreted in the same way without a compelling necessity.

‘Abd al-Jabbar clearly adheres to his theory of *majāz* to the letter and does not accept using *majāz* without compelling evidence.

*Istiwa‘ and Kursī (throne)*

Q (2:255)

> بما شاء وسع كُرْسِيَّهُ السَّمَوَاتُ والأَرْضَ

“His Throne comprises the heavens and earth”

‘Abd al-Jabbar argues against those who say that God has a body and that He sits on *kursī* by relying on this verse. He states that the prima facie meaning of this verse does not indicate that God sits on this *Kursī* or it is His place. ‘Abd al-Jabbar states that there are various types of predication such as describing the *ka‘ba* as *baytu Allāh* (the house of God), not because He resides in it but because it has an advantage for the servants with regard to worship. The same can be said about the *kursī*.

*Istawā‘* (He sat) such as in Q (10:3) and Q (2:29)

---


115 *Mutashābih al-Qur‘ān*, vol 1, p. 132-133
‘Abd al-Jabbar states that *Istiwa’* has various significations depending on its position in the discourse, in other words how it is connected with the other parts of an utterance. These significations are\(^{116}\):

1. *Istiwa’* signifies *isti’la’* (mastery over) and *iqtida’* (dominance) such as this verse of poetry

   \[Qadi istwā Bishrun ‘alā al-‘Irāqi min ghayrī sayfīn wa damīn mihrāqi\]

   (Bishr has gained the mastery over El-Iraq without sword and without shed blood\(^{117}\))

‘Abd al-Jabbar explains that this verse of poetry means that Bishr has taken control over Iraq because it is not possible to eulogise him that Bishr is sitting somewhere in Iraq. Had he meant this, the poet would have specified, certain locality, as all of Iraq cannot be the place of his sitting.

2. *Istiwa’* signifies the equality of constituent parts of an object (*tasāwī al-ajza’*) such as their saying *istawā al-hā’īt* the wall became even or level.

3. *Istiwa’* can also be used to signify (al-qasd) directing of oneself. It is said *“istawyatu ‘ala hadha al-amrī”* I directed myself towards this matter.

4. One also could say *istawā ḥālu fulānin fī nafsihi wa mālihi* which means that his affair has been rectified with regard to his state and money.

5. *Istiwa’* could signify also sitting firmly on a chair or upon back of a beast.

Interpreting Q (2:29) "then He lifted Himself to heaven"

‘Abd al-Jabbar quotes Al-Jubbâ’i’s interpretation of this verse in which the third meaning of *istiwa’* is meant here “what is intended by [*istiwa’*] is that He directed Himself to create the heaven..therefore *istiwa’* is transient by means of “*ilā’*” and if sitting on a place is meant by *istiwa’*; *ilā’* would not be used\(^{118}\).

\(^{116}\) *Mutashābih al-Qur’ān*, vol. 1, p. 73-74


\(^{118}\) *Mutashābih al-Qur’ān*, vol. 1, p. 74
‘Abd al-Jabbar gives another argument to support this interpretation “that if istiwa’ here means sitting on a place then the heaven should have been created before the sitting can take place for God to sit and moves towards it. But the verse indicates the contrary because God said “thuma istawa ...sab’a samawat” as a way of showing His benevolence, had He meant by it moving to sit on heavens then this act cannot be considered as a form of benevolence towards us 119. So this verse should be understood to mean that “He created for us everything on earth and He created for us heavens as well as other things”. By creating all of these, the benevolences of God will be comprehensive and uncountable 120.

Interpreting Q (10:3) “then sat Himself upon the Throne”

‘Abd al-Jabbar interprets istiwa’ here as istila’ (mastery over) and iqtidár (dominance) which is the first meaning mentioned above of istiwa’. He argues that the word istiwa’ signifies istila’ and sitting firmly and istiwa’ must be interpreted to mean istila’ (mastery over) because this is the requirement of reason as it indicates the eternity of God. If we suppose that God has a body then he would be a temporal being and not eternal 121.

‘Abd al-Jabbar’s approach here is consistent with his theory; if the apparent meaning contradicts his theology then the verse must go through the process of ta’wil. He will list all possible meanings of a word and will choose one tropical meaning, and argue for it as the best meaning to suit the context of the verse. In general his argument has two components, one theological and the other linguistic (theory of majâz).

Hand

Q(5:64) “God’s hand is fettered”:

‘Abd al-Jabbâr argues that what is intended here is “that his favours (ni’matuhu) are wide for His servants, and He meant by it favour of religion and this worldly life as’

119 Mutashâbih al-Qurân, vol. 1, p. 74-75
120 Ibid., p. 75
121 Ibid., p. 351
well as the apparent and the hidden favour. *Yad* is used to convey the meaning of *ni’m* so it is said “*li-fulanin ‘indi yad’* someone did me a favour”  

Q (51:47)

What is meant by *yad* here is power and capability, otherwise we should attribute to God many hands, which is absurd.

*Ityān*

Q (89:22)

The verse does not indicate that God is like one of us in the sense that He can come and go, otherwise He would be temporal. What is meant is that the command of your Lord came (*jâ’a amru rabbika*) or those who carry the command of God. Similarly when it is said (*idha > ja’a al-Shâfi’i fa-qad kafâna*) It is sufficient for us when al-Shâfi’i arrives, what is meant here is his book.

Q (39:56)

“Lest any soul should say, ‘Alas for me, in that I neglected my duty to [the side] of God’”

*Janb* does not indicate that God has a side as the anthropomorphists say; because when a vocable is mentioned with an action which is carried out for the sake of the other, then it indicates the essence. For example when one says *ihþamaltu hâdha> fi> janbi> fulaan* I beared this in the side of someone which means for the sake of him/her. What is meant here ‘*alâ mâ farrâtu fi> dhâti Allâh*’.

As it is clear from the above, ‘Abd al-Jabbâr’s method of interpretation generally consists of listing all the possible meanings of a word, then taking tropical meaning that can be reconciled with his theology. The same method is also used by al-Qâsim b. Ibrâhîm al-Rassi but here ‘Abd al-Jabbâr applies it systematically to all the verses.

---


125 Ibid., p. 597.

200
whose prima facie meanings are in conflict with his theology, using the weapon of majáz to justify his interpretation.

The writings of ‘Abd al-Jabbaar preserved for us a complete Mu’tazilite theological system. He consolidated Mu’tazilite thinking at his time and presented a fully developed Qur’anic hermeneutics built on Mu’tazilite theology. In addition to his hermeneutics, his theory of majáz enabled him to interpret anthropomorphic verses to harmonize them with the proof of reason. In his theology, he emphasised that it is only through the use of reason and not by depending on the Qur’ân that one can know about God’s existence, transcendence and justice. It is only then one can proceed and read the Qur’ân because in order to know the truthfulness of the Qur’ân and what it signifies one should know the state of its actor and the Qur’ân cannot be utilized to demonstrate the existence and the attributes of the actor. ‘Abd al-Jabbar’s doctrine of priority of reason over revelation has an impact on his Qur’anic hermeneutics, and it is through his interpretation of Q (3:7) one can see the contact between theology and hermeneutics. For ‘Abd al-Jabbar, muhkamât are verses that precisely express what is intended by them and mutashâbihât are those in which their prima facie meaning (zâhir) does not indicate what is intended by them. If the prima facie meaning of a verse is not in accord with proof of reason then one has to resort to ta’wil to harmonise between the two, because both reason and revelation have the same origin and therefore there should be no contradiction between the two. In this case the mutashâbihât have to be interpreted in the light of muhkamât verses which should be in accord with reason. The main tool in the process of ta’wil is majâz and ‘Abd al-Jabbar enacted his own theory of majâz within the context of uṣûl al-fiqh and Kalâm to use it in his interpretation. His interest in majâz reflects its utmost importance in his hermeneutics, because majâz is the primary tool to harmonize reason and revelation. ‘Abd al-Jabbar applied systematically his theory of majâz to all anthropomorphinc verses and interpreted them to be in accord with proof of reason. His interpretation of these verses clearly reflects the advanced stage of the theory of majâz at his time. Next we will examine the approach of al-Zamakhsharî to anthropomorphic verses which revolutionised Qur’anic hermeneutics.
3.3 Al-Zamakhshari (b. 467/1075- d. 538/1144)

Al-Zamakhshārī is one of the most influential Mu'tazilite commentators on the Qurʾān. His commentary on the Qurʾān al-Kāshf attracted a larger number of super-commentaries (ḥawāshi), abridgments, refutations than any other commentary. With al-Kāshf, the Mu'tazilite tradition of Qurʾānic exegesis reached its peak especially with regard to interpreting anthropomorphic verses. What made al-Kāshf unique among other commentaries, is al-Zamakhshārī’s application of balāgha theory as developed by ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī in his two books: Asrār al-Balāgha and Dalā’il al-i’jāz. Ibn Khaldūn evaluated al-Kāshf and expressed the

---

126 Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd b. ʿUmar (He was called also “Jāru Allāh” neighbour of God, because he resided in Mekka for few years). He was born in Zamakhshar and died at Jurjānīyya both in Khawārizm. He contributed to the fields of grammar, lexicography, literature and Qurʾānic studies. His most important grammatical work is al-Mufassal fī al-Nahw, what is important about this work is the its arrangement of the grammatical topics. He also composed a unique Arabic dictionary called Asās al-Balāgha where he gave a special attention to metaphorical meanings of words. C.H.M. Versteegh, "al-Zamakhshārī, Abu'l-Qāsim Maḥmūd b. ʿUmar." Encyclopaedia of Islam. 2nd ed., Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel and W.P. Heinrichs. Brill, Volume XI, page 431, column 2.

127 See Hāji Khalīfa where he numerated over 300 books associated with al-Kāshf.

128 In the latest study on al-Kāshf, Lane claims that “al-Zamakhshārī’s Mu’tazilism simply did not have any significant influence on him as he composed his commentary”; not only is the Mu’tazilite content small but also the Mu’tazilite method of interpretation is “non-existent”: Andrew J. Lane, A Traditional Mu’tazilite Qurʾān Commentary: The Kashshaﻢ of Jār Allāh al-Zamakhshārī, Brill, 2006, p. 147. Regarding the issue of Mu’tazilite content of al-Kāshf, Lane bases his conclusion mainly on the analysis of two chapters (44 &54) and by finding only “one possible Mu’tazilite comment” he concluded that Mu’tazilism did not play any significant role in al-Zamakhshārī’s commentary. It is his choice of these two chapters that led to this apparently sound conclusion. I believe that if someone wants to find whether a particular commentary is influenced by Mu’tazilism or not, one has to look at specific verses that reflect or are made to reflect Mu’tazilite’s doctrine (the five principles). See also the following reviews of the book, Karen Baue, Journal of the American Oriental Society, pp. 435-37, Suleiman A. Mourad; pp. 409-11, Bruce Fudge; Journal of Qurʾānic Studies, pp. 131-134. As for al-Zamakhshārī’s Mu’tazilite method I will examine it below.

Sunni attitude towards it by saying “The commentary in which this discipline [balághah] is best represented is the Kitāb al-Kashshāf by az-Zamakhshāri, of Khuwārizm in Iran. However, its author is a Mu'tazīlah in his dogmatic views. Therefore, he uses the various methods of rhetoric (balághah), arguing in favour of the pernicious doctrines of the Mu'tazīlah, wherever he believed they occurred in the verses of the Qur'ān. Competent orthodox scholars have, therefore, come to disregard his work and to warn everyone against its pitfalls. However, they admit that he is on firm ground in everything relating to language and style (balághah). If the student of the work is acquainted with the orthodox dogmas and knows the arguments in their defence, he is no doubt safe from its fallacies. Therefore, he should seize the opportunity to study it, because it contains remarkable and varied linguistic information.”

The superior status of al-Kashshāf was recently challenged by ‘Adnān Zarzūr in his study of al-Ḥākim al-Jushami’s commentary on the Qur’ān. Zarzūr argues that al-Zamakhshāri does not deserve his place in Muslim intellectual history and the commentary of al-Ḥākim (al-Tahdhib) indicates that al-Zamakhshāri plagiarised the work of earlier commentators. Zarzūr also states that in his opinion al-Zamakhshāri read and benefited from al-Jushami’s commentary. One could say that al-Zamakhshāri was not the only one who did not mention all the sources of his writing, indeed this was the norm among Muslim scholars. If we look at Mutashābih al-Qur’ān of ‘Abd al-Jabbār (the book is edited by Zarzūr himself), one cannot fail to notice that ‘Abd al-Jabbār mentioned only a few scholars by name, and this practice did not affect his


132 Al-Ḥākim al-Jushami (484/1101) Mu'tazīlah turned Zaydi scholar. He studied Mu'tazilism with one of the student of al-Qādi 'Abd Al-Jabbār. One of his students was Abū Ishaq al-Khawārizmī who became the teacher of al-Zamakhshāri. His extant (still in manuscript) Qur'ānic commentary al-Tahdhib contains many quotations from earlier Mu'tazīlah sources which did not survive. Madelung, W., Al-Ḥākim al-Djushamī in Encyclopaedia of Islam. Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel and W.P. Heinrichs, Volume XII, page 343, column 1.

133 Zarzūr, al-Ḥākim al-Jushamī, ibid., p. 458.
contribution to the subject. As for the issue of originality of al-Zamakhsharī, I will come back to it again after examining his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses.

3.3.1 Theology and hermeneutics of al-Zamakhsharī

Al-Zamakhsharī studied the theology of al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbar and his school (the Bahshamiyya) with his teachers who followed the Basrī school of Mu'tazilism. Moreover, his only surviving work on theology al-Minhāj fi 'Usūl al-dīn reflects the influence of Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Basrī who differed with ‘Abd al-Jabbar’s school on various points. According to Madelung, who analysed the text, al-Zamakhsharī tried to be impartial in the dispute between the two sides.\(^{134}\)

In his book al-Minhāj, al-Zamakhsharī states his views on God which influenced his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses, as we will see later: ‘God is neither a body nor an accident nor similar to them in any respect. He does not occupy a position in space, does not subsist in a body, is not in a place, cannot be perceived by any of the senses, and He cannot be seen in Himself.\(^{135}\) Al-Zamakhsharī uses rational arguments for the above views; he only used the Qur'ān as supporting evidence with regard to the issues of beatific vision and createdness of the Qur'ān, as these issues were raised because of the revelation.\(^{136}\) To be able to interpret anthropomorphic verses in the light of the above doctrine, one needs a hermeneutical theory to support such interpretation, and al-Zamakhsharī’s interpretation of Q(3:7) will provide such a theory as well see next.

**Interpreting Q (3:7)**


\(^{136}\) Al-Zamakhsharī, al-Minhāj, ibid., p. 17 (for beatific vision) and p. 18 for createdness of the Qur'ān.
Q (3:7) plays an important role in al-Zamakhshari’s hermeneutics of the Qur’ān as it enables him to situate his interpretation of the Qur’ān within his theological framework. al-Zamakhshari gives the following interpretation for the word *muhkamāt*:

*uḥkimat ‘ibāratuḥā bi- aḥfīẓat mina al-ḥiṣyāl wa al-ḥisābāḥ* (the expression of these verses are protected from yielding multiple interpretations and from indistinctness). al-Zamakhshari’s interpretation is similar to that of ‘Abd al-Jabbār in seeing the *muhkamāt* as those which yield only one meaning.

**Mutashābihāt: “mushtabahāt muḥtamalāt”** (indistinct and capable of yielding several interpretations). His view of mutashābihāt here is also similar to that of ‘Abd al-Jabbār as we have seen earlier.

**Ummu al-Kitāb: “aṣlū l-kitābi tuḥmalu l-mutashābihātu al-ayyāḥa wa turaddu ilayhā”** (the origin of the book; [*muhkamāt* verses] function as basis for mutashābihāt through which these [mutashābihāt] are interpreted in the light of [the *muhkamāt*]. This interpretation of this verse became standard interpretation within theological schools which accepted the possibility of *taʾwil* and it is the Mu’tazilites who first advocated this interpretation. Al-Zamakhshari gives the following example to show how a *muhkam* verse can be used to interpret a mutashābih one: Q (6:103) is the *muhkam* verse and Q (75:23) is a mutashābih which should be interpreted in the light of the *muhkam*. As we have seen with ‘Abd al-Jabbār, this interpretation is in accord with the Mu’tazilite belief that God cannot be seen either in this life or in the hereafter. This is related to the Mu’tazilite principle of *tawḥīd*, al-Zamakhshari gives also another example related to ‘Adl (the second principle of Mu’tazilite) which is not related to my concern in this study.

\[\text{References:} \]


138 Al-Zamakhshari; Al-Kashshāf, p. 412.

139 McAuliffe’s translation is “endowed with dubiety (mutashābihāt) and with possibility (muḥtamalāt) in *Text and Textuality: Q. 3:7 as a Point of Intersection*, Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qurʾān,..p. 59.

140 Al-Zamakhshari; Al-Kashshāf, p. 412.

141 Sahiron Syamsuddin argues that al-Zamakhshari “can be said to be reductionist” with respect to his definition of *muhkam* and mutashābih where he limits its scope (the Qurʾān) to theology” see *Muhkam*
believes that both God and those who are firm in knowledge know the (\textit{ta’wil}) interpretation of the Qur’ān (he did not pause on the word Allah and he considered the \textit{wāw} (and) as a conjunctive particle\textsuperscript{142}.

Al-Zamakhshari’s interpretation of Q (3:7) clearly shows that he based his Qur’ānic hermeneutics on it like other Mu’tazilites\textsuperscript{143}. Theological considerations (the dictates of reason regarding God and His attributes as we have seen above) as well as the notion of \textit{muhkam} and \textit{mutashābih} will be used as justification for his tropical

\textit{and Mutashābih: An Analytical Study of al-Ṭabarī’s and al-Zamakhshari’s Interpretation of Q.3:7} in \textit{Journal of Qur’anic Studies}, vol.1, issue 1, 1999, pp. 68-69. As a matter of fact al-Zamakhshari did not restrict his definition of \textit{muhkamāt} and \textit{mutashābihāt} to theological verses; his definition of both can be applied to any other topic. As an example for both, al-Zamakhshari chose theological verses and he states “\textit{wa mittālu dhālika}” (as an example for this.) such and such verses (\textit{al-Kashshāf}, ibid., p. 412). These theological verses were used as an illustration for these types of verses (\textit{muhkamāt} and \textit{mutashābihāt}) and in no where al-Zamakhshari states that \textit{muhkamāt} and \textit{mutashābihāt} are restricted to theological verses.

\textsuperscript{142} Al-Zamakhshari, \textit{al-Kashshāf}, p. 413.

\textsuperscript{143} Lane argues against Goldziher’s view that al-Zamakhshari’s interpretation of Q(3:7) constitutes a methodological principle, Lane states that al-Zamakhshari’s view cannot be considered to be an “exegetical principle” used systematically in the Qur’ān because in the chapters analysed by Lane (44 &54), al-Zamakhshari “never refers to such a principle or makes explicit use of it again” and “While he [al-Zamakhshari] frequently makes use of one Qur’ānic verse to explain another, following the exegetical principle of \textit{tafsīr al-Qur’ān bi-l-Qur’ān}, ..., nowhere does he state that such a verse is \textit{muhkam} and that the one in need of an explanation is \textit{mutashābih}; nor does even imply it”. He adds that the principle of interpreting the \textit{mutashābih} in the light of \textit{muhkam} is not new and he quotes al-Ṭabarī’s commentary as an example of an earlier identification and use of the principle, Lane, A Traditional Mu’tazilite Commentary, ibid., pp. 111-112. In fact Goldziher never said that this principle solely used or invented by al-Zamakhshari (Ignác Goldziher, al-Madhāhib al- İslāmiyah fi ṭafsīr al-Qur’ān, translated into Arabic by ‘Alī Ḥasan, al-Qāhirah : Маqṭa’at al-Ulūm, 1364 h. [1944], pp. 151-152.) . As far as I know no one says that this principle was invented by al-Zamakhshari and as we have seen earlier the first attestation in the available sources of the use of this principle can be found with al-Jahiz the Mu’tazilite. This does not mean that this principle is only used by the Mu’tazilite, in fact many other writers used this principle in addition to the Mu’tazilite. But the difference let us say between the Mu’tazilite and the Ash’arite in using this principle consists in determining which verse is \textit{muhkam} and which one is \textit{mutashābih}. Some of what is considered \textit{muhkam} by the Mu’tazilite is considered \textit{mutashābih} by the Ash’arite and vice versa (see the article about Anthropomorphism in the Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān ). By not finding al-Zamakhshari made use of this principle in the chapters analysed by Lane, this does not mean that al-Zamakhshari did not applied this principle elsewhere to verses which he considered as \textit{mutashābih}. Finally, if al-Zamakhshari did not state explicitly that this verse is \textit{muhkam} and this is \textit{mutashābih} throughout his commentary, this does not mean that the principle is not operative here. One only has to look at the way he dismisses the evident meaning of a particular verse because it contradicts his Mu’tazilite principles to see how this principle has been applied.
interpretation of anthropomorphic verses. For these interpretations to be considered as legitimate, they must be based on a solid theory of language and tropes, and this is my next topic.

3.3. 2 Al-Zamakhshari’s theory of majāz.

Al-Zamakhshari’s theory of majāz is based mainly on the writings of ‘Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjānī. This does not mean that he did not contribute to the development of the theory; on the contrary, various studies show his contribution to the field. Our concern here is with his views that have an impact on the interpretation of anthropomorphic verses.

Al-Zamakhshari divides the discourse into two types and connects his division to the doctrine of I’jaż al-Qur’ān:

I. The first type is al-Zāhir (prima facie) “in which [its meaning] is not concealed for its hearers and the utterance is only capable of yielding [one meaning which is] the evident one”.

II. The second type contains kināyāt, ishārāt (indications or allusions) and al-tajawwuz (the use of majāz). He adds that the Qur’ān contains both types and the challenge to produce something similar applies to both.

---


145 Al-Zamakhshari, al-Durr al-Dāʾir al-Muntakhab min Kināyāt wa istīʿārāt wa Tashbihāt al-‘Arab, edited by Bahīja al-Ḥasanī, Majallat al-Majnūn al-‘Ilmī al-‘Irāqī, vol. 16, 1968, p. 228. This important treatise by al-Zamakhshārī is never used by those who examined his views on balāgha as far as I know.

146 Al-Zamakhshari, Al-Durr, p. 228

147 Al-Zamakhshari did not indicate in his treatise what he meant by Ishārāt and he did not give an example to illustrate this as he did with other categories. However in his commentary al-Kashshāf, he did not use the word Ishārāt which is in the plural form but in the singular form ishāra he used it about 135 times but none of them related to rhetorical figures (The majority of these related to asmāʿ al-ishāra (demonstratives) and the rest he used it to signify indication).
What is important for us here is this division which has its origin in the writings of ‘Abd al-Jabbar as we have seen earlier, and also in Dalā’il al-I’jāz of ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī148 as we have seen earlier. We can see from the above that al-Zamakhshari indicates two types of discourses; one is capable of yielding one meaning (zāhir) and the other needs some effort to be understood and can yield more than one meaning such as kināya and majāz.

Kināya:

al-Zamakhshari defines kināya as “to mention the thing not by the utterance which was originally assigned to it such as your saying [about someone] that he is “tawīlū al-nījād” (with long suspensory cords to his sword) which means a man of tall stature. For example in Q (2:235)

куа-куа 0645 0627 0651 0631 0650 0633.init 0651 064E 0646 064F 06BE 0648 064F 062F 0650 0639.init 0627 064E 0648 064F 062A.init 0644 0627.isol

“but do not make troth with them secretly” (al-sirr is kināya for marriage149). Abū Muṣā150 rightly observes that for al-Zamakhshari, the original meaning of an utterance could be meant in a kināya type figure of speech (unlike majāz) and the intended meaning is inferred from the original one. This can be seen from al-Zamakhshari’s interpretation of Q (10:18)151

Division of majāz:

Tashbīḥ:

I will start with tashbīḥ because both Iṣtī‘āra and Tammīl (mathal is used as well) are based on it, following al-Jurjānī. Al-Zamakhshari distinguished between various types of tashbīḥ152 and emphasised its eloquence and importance. My

148 What I mean here is Al-Jurjānī’s theory of ma’na al-ma’na which we will look at later.


concern here is with one type which he coined a term for \textit{al-tashbīḥ al-Takhyīlī} (imaginary simile). In his commentary on Q (37:65) "its spathes are as the heads of Satans" the \textit{tālī} is compared to the heads of the Satan as an indication for its utmost ugliness because Satan in the minds of people is detested and repulsive and this is why the simile is considered as \textit{takhyīlī} (imaginary). As we have seen earlier ‘Abd al-Jabbār called the image in this verse \textit{tamthīl}. Here al-Zamakhsharī gave an explanation to the working of this simile and basing it on the perception of people without paying attention to the issue of truthfulness of the comparison, because what is important for him is the function of the image whether the image is real or imaginary.

\textit{Isti‘āra} and \textit{tamthīl} \\

Al-Zamakhsharī following ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī recognises two types of \textit{isti‘āra}, the first type based on \textit{tashbīḥ} (one word simile) and the other on \textit{tamthīl} (the simile is based on an image extracted from multiple things, and this type of \textit{isti‘āra} is called in the later manuals of Balāgha \textit{Isti‘āra tamthīliyya} or metaphor based on analogy). This can be seen in his interpretation of Q (2:7) "God has set a seal on their hearts"; he said that \textit{khatam} comes under the category of \textit{majaż} and it can possibly be of its two types; \textit{isti‘āra} and \textit{tamthīl}. Al-Zamakhsharī gave two interpretation, of the word \textit{khatam} one as \textit{isti‘āra} and the other as \textit{tamthīl}. As for \textit{Isti‘āra}, al-Zamakhsharī did not give a definition of it, he only states that \textit{Isit‘āra} can occur in nouns and verbs and the topic of the \textit{isti‘āra} (\textit{al-musta‘ar la-hu}) should not be mentioned; for example when you say I saw lions. But if you say “they are lions” this should be considered as eloquent simile not as \textit{isti‘āra}. Al-Zamakhsharī agrees here with ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī on this fine

\begin{flushright}
\textbf{154} In the case of \textit{isti‘āra} as the truth cannot penetrate their hearts because of their arrogance and their hearings do not like listening to it; the hearts and the hearings are made as if they were sealed, and as their eyes cannot see the signs of God; their eyes are made as if they were covered and prevented from seeing. The \textit{tamthīl} case is based on representing their hearts, eyes and hearings, which they did not benefit from them with regard to religious purposes for which they were created, by things that were prevented from being useful by sealing and covering, Al-Zamakhsharī, \textit{al-Kashshāf}, vol. 1, pp. 155 - 156.
\end{flushright}
distinction between *Isti‘ara* and *tashbīḥ balīgh.* Al-Zamakhshārī also recognises other types of *majāz,* such as *majāz ‘aqli* (conceptual trope) in the same verse 156, and he also considers the *majāz* in Q (17:78) as an example of using the part to signify the whole (the dawn prayer is called Qur’ān because the Qur’ān constitutes an essential part of it). Therefore we can conclude that al-Zamakhshārī’s concept of *majāz* is much broader than these two types mentioned above *Isti‘ara,* and *tamthīl.*

It should be noted that al-Zamakhshārī did not distinguish lexically between *māthāl* (similitude), *tamthīl* (analogy) and *tashbīḥ* (similitie) and in many instances he used these words interchangeably, but this does not mean he did not differentiate between them conceptually. Al-Zamakhshārī states that similitudes (*amthāl*) struck by the Arabs play a very important role by making the hidden meanings of the discourse manifest the truth. “The similitudes show you the imaginary (*al-mutakhayyal*) in the form of the real (*al-muḥaqqaq*), the illusion (*al-mutawāhham*) as certain (*mutayaqqan*) and the absent (*al-ghā‘īb*) as perceptible (*al-shāhid*)...For some reason God made ample use of similitudes in His book and in His other books...and God said ...in Q (29:20) and among the chapters of the Gospel there is a chapter called *al-Amthāl* (Proverbs). *Māthāl* (similitude) in their speech [the Arabs] means *mithl* which is the similar (*al-Nāzir*); it is said *māthāl,* *mithl* and *māthīl* like *shibh, shabah* and *shabīh*”, he adds that the proverb is also called *māthāl* 157. This shows that the concern of al-Zamakhshārī is to explain the origin of *māthāl* and to show the function of this device; rather than giving an exact definition 158. It can be argued that al-Zamakhshari used these words interchangeably because he considered them related and similar 159 to each other.

---

156 Al-Zamakhshari, *al-Kashshaf,* ibid., vol. 1, p. 160-162. Al-Zamakhshari as a Mu‘tazilī made ample use of this type of *majāz* to interpret all these verses that he believes are in conflict with the principle of ‘Adl such as this verse Q(2:7).

157 *Al-Kashshaf,* vol. 1, p. 195.

158 See also Abū Mūsa, *al-Balāgha al-Qur‘āniyya,* ibid., pp. 479-482. Abū Mūsa rightly argues that al-Zamakhshari distinguished between *tashbīḥ* and *tamthīl* as rhetorical concepts like al-Jurjānī before him and when al-Zamakhshari used these terms interchangeably he was merely speaking about them lexically. Al-Sayyid al-Shārif al-Jurjānī also in his *Ḥāshiya* (super-commentary) on *al-Kashshaf* states that al-Zamakhshari was speaking on the lexical meaning of the *māthāl* before giving the customary
To sum up, al-Zamakhshari’s views on figurative language are based on ‘Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjānī’s theory. This does not negate his originality; on the contrary many studies (mentioned above) indicate that he advanced the theory of majāz in many ways (with regard to isti‘āra, tashbih and majāz ‘aqīl) and his contribution was recognised by later writers on Balāgha. In the following section I will examine al-Zamakhshari’s interpretations of anthropomorphic verses to find out the extent of which his theory of majāz reflected and influenced his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses.

3.3.3 Al-Zamakhshari’s interpretation of anthropomorphic verses:

al-Zamakhshari approached anthropomorphic verses in three ways; interpreting anthropomorphic expressions using single-word majāz, introducing and using majāz based on kināya, and finally introducing and using takhyīl

I. Using single word majāz

Q (6:52) “desiring His face”

Al-Zamakhshari states that “al-wajh (face) can be used to express the essence of the thing and its reality”. This is a standard Mu’tazilite interpretation of face.

Here al-Zamakhshari did not add anything new in this regard.

Q (2:29) “then He lifted Himself to heaven”

usage of the word mathal as proverb which must be based on isti‘āra (metaphor), al-Hāshiya in on the margin of al-Kashshaf, ibid., vol. 1, p. 195.

159 These words (tashbih, mathal, tamthil) are also conceptually related to each other within the theory of majāz, as all of them are based on the idea of comparison one way or another


Al-Zamakhshari interpreted *istawā* as a metaphor in a sense that “God directed His Will towards the heaven”. This interpretation is similar to that of ‘Abd al-Jabbār, as we have seen.

He also gave a standard Mu’tazilite interpretation to *Ityān* in Q (2:210) *an Ya’tiyahuham Allāh*, meaning the coming of his command which is based on *majāz* based on ellipsis. The same can be observed in his interpretation of Q (75:23) and Q (6:158).

Al-Zamakhshari in the above interpretations did not offer anything different from earlier theologians such as ‘Abd al-Jabbār.

II. Using *majāz* based on *kināya*

As far as I know al-Zamakhshari is the first to introduce such a notion in his commentary. What is meant by it will be clear after examining his interpretation of Q(20:5).

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

Al-Zamakhshari states that ‘Because sitting firmly on the throne, which is the sitting place of the king, is concomitant to (*radīf*) the reign; they (the Arabs) made sitting as *kināya* for reign so they say “so and so sat firmly on the throne” meaning he reigned over, even though he never sat on the throne. They also used it (sitting firmly) because it became well known usage and equivalent to the saying “he reigned over” (*malakā*), however, using [sitting firmly on the throne] is more delightful, pleasant and more indicative to the matter in question. For example, your saying the hand of so and so is outspread (*mabsūṭa*) and the hand of so and so is fettered; which means that he is a generous or miser and the difference between the two expressions is only a matter of form. Even if the one who never outspread his hand by handing over charity or if he has no hand in the first instance, it will be said about him [provided that he is charitable in an indirect way] his hand is outspread; meaning he is generous because

---


163 Ibid., p. 353. See ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s interpretation of *ityān* above

164 He interpreted gazing in the expression “gazing towards their Lord” to mean anticipation and hope (*tawaqqu‘ wa raṭā*). *Al-Kashshāf*, ibid., vol. 4, p. 192.

165 He interpreted the expression “Your Lord comes” to mean the signs of your Lord have come, which is based on *majāz* based on ellipsis.
for the [Arabs] this expression is an equivalent of saying he is generous. Similar to this is the saying of God the Most High Q (5:64) (wa qālati ‘l-yahūdu yadu Allāhī maghīlātun) “The Jews have said, ‘God's hand is fettered” meaning He is a miser, (bal yadāhu mabsū’tātān) “but His hands are outspread” meaning he is generous; without imagining hand, or fettering, or outspreading. Interpreting [hand] as favour and (al-tamāhul ‘l-tathniya) resorting to ploys to interpret the duality [in the expression] is a kind of narrow mindedness (diq al-‘atan) and like travelling on foot for years away from ‘ilm al-bayān (theory of imagery).

There is something here needs to be clarified, al-Zamakhshāri considered (al-istiwā’ ‘alā al-‘arsh) as a type of kināya as we have seen above regarding his views on kināya, the original meaning of the utterance could also be meant by a kināya-type figure of speech and this amounts to a gross anthropomorphism in this case of istiwā’ if one says it is kināya and does not add anything else! Al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī comments on al-Zamakhshāri’s use of kināya in his Ḥāshiya on al-Kashshāf and in his Ḥāshiya on al-Muṭawwal of al-Taftāzānī, he argues that al-Zamakhshāri here refers to majāz that is based on kināya because in his commentary on Q (3:77) that Allāh ‘la yanzūru ilayhim’ (God shall not speak to them neither look on them on the Resurrection Day), he states that “not looking at them” is used originally as kināya for those whom it is possible for them to gaze.

Then the utterance is used as majāz based on kināya for the one whom it is not

166 Al-Zamakhshāri is probably referring here to the type of interpretation such as the one offered by ‘Abd al-Jabbar who as we have seen interpreted the two hands as two favours; favour of religion and this worldly life, as we have seen above.

167 Al-Zamakhshāri, ibid., vol. 2, p. 530. Abū Mūsā argues that al-Zamakhshāri used the expression “‘ilm al-Bayān” in many places in his commentary to refer to cases related to ‘ilm al-Bayān as developed by later scholars although in other places he used ‘ilm al-Bayān to refer to cases which are considered to be as part of ‘ilm al-ma‘ānī by as developed by later rhetoricians, see Abū Mūsā, ibid., pp. 248-254. I translated here ‘ilm al-Bayān as theory of imagery because of the nature of the verse and al-Zamakhshāri’s interpretation. We will see later that al-‘Alawi will consider takhīl to be part of ‘ilm al-Badi’.

168 Published in the first volume of the edition I am using here, pp. 3-261.


171 “the utterance indicates contempt and discontent, when you say so and so does not look at so so; you indicate the negation of any consideration and benevolence towards this person”, Al-Zamakhshāri, al-Kashshāf, vol. 1, p. 439.
possible for him to gaze (i.e. God) to indicate the negation of his benevolence. Al-Sayyid adds that if the original meaning could be meant the utterance is *kināya* and if not then it is *majāz* based on *kināya* in this case *kināya* could be used to refer to this utterance because it is the origin of this *majāz*. The use of *istiwa‘* in Q (20:5) is exactly the same as fettering and outspreading the hands in Q (5:64). Al-Zamakhsharī also used *majāz* based on *kināya* to interpret (side of God) in Q (39:56) Lest any soul should say, 'Alas for me, for what I neglected with respect to the side of God, and was a scoffer). Al-Zamakhsharī refers to the figure of speech here (neglecting with respect to the side of God) as *kināya* which means neglecting his right. He also did not accept interpreting “side of God” as the essence of God.

Al-Zamakhsharī in his elaboration and use of *majāz* based on *Kināya* breaks new ground in the theory of *majāz*. I argue that this new trope is best explained by using the theory of signification of ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī, in which he elaborated his views on meaning and the meaning of meaning. ‘Abd al-Qāhir states that *ma‘nā* refers to the prima facie meaning (*zāhir*) of the utterance which one reaches without a medium while *ma‘nā al-ma‘nā* “it is when you figure out a meaning from utterance and this meaning leads you to another meaning.” This can be illustrated in this diagram:

Utterance -- prima facie meaning --- meaning of the prima facie meaning (*majāz & kināya*)

*Majāz* based on *kināya* can be illustrated in this diagram:

---


173 Al-Sayyid al-Jurjānī, Ḥāshiya ‘alā al-Kashshāf, ibid., p. 158.

174 Al-Sayyid al-Jurjānī, Ḥāshiya ‘alā sharḥ al-muṭawwal of al-taftūzānī, ibid., MMs, folio, 166.

175 Arberry’s translation reads: Lest any soul should say, ‘Alas for me, in that I neglected my duty to God, and was a scoffer.

176 This is the interpretation of ‘Abd al-Jabbār. See Mutasha‘bih al-Qur‘ān, ibid., vol. 2, p. 597.

177 ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī, Asrār, p. 263.
The interpretation of al-Zamakhsharî of the notion of *istiwā’* is different from earlier Mu'tazilite commentators. As we have seen ‘Abd al-Jabbâr interpreted *istiwā’* to mean (mastery over), this type of interpretation is rejected by al-Zamakhsharî because it centres on specific words (interpreted figuratively) and misses the point of the verse. Another Mu'tazilite commentator; al-Ḥākim al-Jushamî gives the following interpretation to this verse: “It was said that His benevolence and direction of the affairs were established, this is the opinion of al-Ḥasan”, then al-Jushamî adds that “He sat Himself upon the Throne” He mentioned Himself to indicate glorification as if it was said as heavens and earth are under His rule, so as the Throne. There is a big difference between al-Jushamî’s interpretation and that of al-Zamakhsharî and Zarzûr’s claim that al-Zamakhsharî plagiarised the writing of al-Jushamî could not be sustained on this occasion at least.

By analyzing anthropomorphic verses using this novel idea, al-Zamakhsharî interprets the expressions in question in each verse as a whole without paying attention to their components. He wanted the reader to move away from the first meaning to the second and from the second to the third meaning, because to pause on these components such as “hand” or “sitting firmly” might lead (in his view) to either immature interpretation, which would miss the point of what the Qur’ân tries to convey (as we have seen in his criticism of such an interpretations) or worse, might lead to gross anthropomorphism which he tries to eliminate in the first instance.

---


179 The same can be said on al-Jushamî’s interpretation of Q (3:77) where he states “that God shall not speak to them neither look at them” meaning that He will not have mercy upon them, neither he will bestow benevolence upon them, nor He will purify them”. Al-Jushamî, ibid.
III. Using *takhyīl*

Al-Zamakhshari was also the first to introduce and use the concept of *takhyīl* in the interpretation of the Qur’an, especially with regard to anthropomorphic verses.

Heinrichs identified five usages of the term *takhyīl* in Islamic thought, one of which is ‘*Takhyīl* in Qur’ānic exegesis:’the visual, anthropomorphic, representation of an abstract notion like God’s omnipotence’, This was introduced by the Qur’ānic commentator and philologist al-Zamakhshari.

Heinrichs also devoted an article to *takhyīl* in Islamic tradition a substantial part of which deals with the reception of *takyl* as introduced by al-Zamakhshri in later Islamic tradition; I will refer again to this article later. One of the earliest western studies that examined al-Zamakhshari’s use of this term was that of Goldziher who states “No exegete has done more for the rhetorical sublimity of the Kor’ānic diction than al-Zamakhshari”. In modern Arabic sources, Muḥammad Muḥammad Abū Mūsa in his monograph about al-Zamakhshari, also devoted a section about al-Zamakhshari’s usage of *takhyīl*.

It was ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī who discussed the concept of *takhyīl* in detail in his book *Asrār al-balāgha* with regard to poetry, but he stopped short of applying it to the Qur’ān. Al-Zamakhshari took this term, developed it and applied it to the Qur’ān without hesitation. In what follows I will try to find out what he means by *takhyīl*, what is its relation to *tamthīl*, how did he use it and for what aim.

---

180 Heinriches, Introduction, p. 2.
183 See Larkin, chapter 6, *takhyīl*.
Al-Zamakhsharī used the word *takhyīl* with reference to 16 verses in the Qur’ān. In one place Q (20:66) it is used in a sense of illusion which does not concern us here. In the remaining verses *takhyīl* was used by itself 7 times and with *tamthīl* 8 times. Of the 15 times the word is mentioned, three are related to anthropomorphic verses. In order to answer the above mentioned questions and also to find the relationship between *tamthīl* and *takhyīl*, I will analyse al-Zamakhsharī’s interpretation of key verses to see what he means by *takhyīl* and how he used it to interpret anthropomorphic verses.

In Q (50:30) "Upon the day We shall say unto Gehenna, 'Art thou filled?' And it shall say, Are there any more to come?" Al-Zamakhsharī states that asking Gehenna and its answer is a kind of “*takhyīl* and what is intended by it is the (*taswīr*) depiction and consolidating of the meaning in the heart." In this verse al-Zamakhsharī tells us about the purpose of *takhyīl* which is the depiction of meaning in order to make it accessible to the hearer of the revelation. But what is the difference between *takhyīl* and *tamthīl* and how they are related? In his interpretation of the following verse he explained their relationship and the distinction between them:

Q (33:72)

"We offered the trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they refused to carry it and were afraid of it; and man carried it. Surely he is sinful, very foolish”

al-Zamakhsharī offers two different interpretations to this verse the first he based on *majāz* saying that *amāna* (trust) here is (*tā’ā*) obedience and these objects (heavens, earth and mountains) followed God’s command at the end while man carried the trust but did not discharge it. However “offering the trust to inanimate objects and their refusal and fear are *majāz*”.

---

185 *Al-Kashshāf*, vol. 4, p. 9.

In the second interpretation, al-Zamakhshārī offers an overall interpretation of this verse, saying that man’s obligation is so mighty and heavy that it was offered to the greatest and strongest objects of God’s creation, but they refused and were afraid of it; but man carried it in spite of his weakness and sinfulness, very foolish because he carried the trust and did not fulfill it. Then al-Zamakhshārī offers the following explanation to this interpretation stating that “similar to this type of speech (he means the personification in the verse) in the language of the Arabs is widespread and the Qur’ān came according to their ways [of expression] and styles. For example, their saying “If it was said to the fat where do you go? It would reply: to straighten the deformedness (lawqāla ī al-shāhmi ayna tadhhabu la-qaṣāla usawwī al-‘awaj)” 187. He adds that such type of personification of animals or inanimate objects is so common and it would be impossible to imagine the fat speaking and the purpose of using such an expression can be explained as follows

‘as fatness in an animal makes its ugly features beautiful and thinness makes its beautiful features ugly then the effect of fatness is depicted in a way which has a great impact on the soul of the listener in that it is cheered [by the depiction], inclined towards it and it is more acquainted with it. In a similar way is the depiction (taswīr) of the greatness of the trust (al-‘amāna), its difficulty, the heaviness of its weight, and its fulfillment 188.

Al-Zamakhshārī here is defending this type of discourse (personification) by showing that it is a common way of expression used by the Arabs. It seems that al-Zamakhshārī was anticipating some opposition to the use of the term takhyīl with reference to the Qur’ān because of its association with imagination, lying and false poetic imagery. He also argues for its usefulness on the ground of impact of this type of depiction on the soul of the listener.

What is the nature of this takhyīl and how does it differ from tamthīl? Al-Zamakhshārī argues

“If you say the basis of the tamthīl (analogy) is known in their saying for the one who does not stick to one opinion “I see you moving forward on foot and moving backward the other”, because you made an analogy between the state of this person in his tilting and oscillation between two opinions without adhering to one of them, and the state of

187 Al-Kashshāf, vol. 3, p. 277
188 Ibid.
a person who hesitates in his walking and does not gather his feet to move ahead. In this tamthil every part it; the topic (al-mumaththal) and the analogue (al-mumaththal bi-hi) are considered as something which has a valid [meaning] which can be regarded as truthful and recognised. But this is not the case in this verse, because offering the trust to the inanimate object and its refusal and fear is an impossible matter (muhāla) in itself and its meaning is invalid [if it is understood to signify its evident meaning], then how can basing the analogy (al-tamthil) on the impossible be considered as valid? [The basis of this tamthil] is similar to a case of [simile] where you compare something [to something else] and this analogue is absurd (ghayr ma’qūl). The analogue in this verse, in their saying “If it was said to the fat where do you go...” and similar cases to it is a hypothesised thing (mafrud). Hypothesised things are imagined in the mind like real things. The state of religious obligation (takliif) in its difficulty and the burden of its weight is represented by its hypothesised state: if the [trust] were offered to the heavens, earth and mountains they would refuse to bear it and be fearful of it.

Al-Zamakhsharī here explained what he meant by takhyīl and in what sense it differs from the general category of tamthil. The distinction between them consists in the nature of the image; if the image is expressed by verified things or in other words things that exist in reality then it is the case of tamthil. On the other hand if the image is expressed by using hypothesised things that are absurd or impossible (ghayr ma’qūl) and these things can be imagined by the mind then it is the case of takhyīl. The Mu’tazilite creed is at work here, reason is the arbiter and can decide which expression should be considered as a case of takhyīl and which one is not.

In saying above that tahyīl is different from the general category of tamthil, I am in agreement with ‘Umar al-Qazwīnī (745/1344) in his gloss on al-Kashf as quoted by al-Khafājī (1069/1659) "al-takhyīl is a special type of tamthil".

189 Al-Kashfā, vol. 3, p. 277

190 Heinrichs comments on this saying “Here we have the first instance of the root that we are interested in (takhyīl); closely related in meaning is the term taṣwīr, which occurs several times in our passage”. Takhyīl and its traditions, ibid., p. 234.

191 His commentary is called “Al-Kashf ‘an Mushkilāt al-Kashfā”, (still in manuscript) see Lane, A Traditional Mutazilite Commentary, p. 303.


193 Only in a sense of using hypothesised things as analogue. This will be clarified below.
opposite and when al-Zamakhshari uses both terms such as in his interpretation of Q (59:21) he is emphasising that both terms are connected, as indicated above. This is also the view of al-Khafají who can be considered among those who agreed with al-Zamakhshari’s view of this term. Al-Khafají when commenting on al-Zamakhshari’s use of the term for Q (7:172) states that what is intended by takhyil is “the depiction of the abstract by using the image of the sensible because the mass’s acquaintance with the sensible is more perfect and complete. What distinguishes takhyil from tamthil is that the analogue in the case of takhyil is a hypothesised matter which does not have external real existence”.

Al-Khafají also quoted al-Sharîf al-Jurjani’s classification of takhyil in his commentary on al-Miftah of al-Sakkâkî; where according to al-Sharîf al-Jurjani takhyil can be used to refer to three cases: 1. Tamthil (metaphor based on analogy) in which the analogue is hypothesised thing (al-tamthil bi al-’umur al-mafriḍa) 2. Postulation of proper meanings (farq al-ma‘ānî al-haqiqiyya) 3. Clue for metaphor by way of allusion (qarinat al-makniyya).

Now I will turn to al-Zamakhshari’s interpretation of anthropomorphic verses using the notion of takhyil. As stated above al-Zamakhshari used takhyil explicitly with reference to three verses Q Q (39:67), Q (2:255), and Q (48:10)

---

194 Al-Khafají, Hāshiyat, ibid., vlo. 8, p. 300. See also Hienriches, Takhyil and its traditions, ibid., p. 236, Hienriches examined al-Khafají’s treatment of this verse found in his book Tirāz al-Majālis (Cairo, 1284 A.H.) where al-Khafají quoted the views of many authors regarding the concept of takhyil.

195 Al-Kashshaf, vol. 4, p. 87.

196 Al-Mashnî lists the following authors as those who used the notion of takhyil in their interpretation of the Qur’ān: al-Rāzî, al-Baydāwî, Abû al-Su‘ûd, al-Ālūsî, al-Qāsimî, Ibn ‘Ashûr, Muhammad ‘Abduh, Darwaza, Muhammad Ahmad Khalaf Allâh, see Muṣṭafâ Ibrâhîm al-Mashnî, Al-Takhyil: Maḥthânuhu wa mawqiṭ al-muṣâsirîna minhu qudāmâ wa muḥdathîn, Dār al-Râzî, Amman, 2001, pp.88-152. It should be noted that his verdict on these authors needs to be re-examined, as he tends to read into their statements more than they can yield.

197 Hāshiyat al-Khafají, vol. 4, p. 399.

198 Hāshiyat al-Khafají, ibid., vol. 8, p. 224, and vol. 6, p. 51. See also al-Khafají’s criticism of this in his book Tirāz al-Majālis, p. 42 which was summarised by Hienriches in Takhyil and its tradition, ibid., p. 241, see also pp. 243-245 for a summary of al-Khafají’s attempt of linking al-Zamakhshari’s notion of takhyil to that of philosophical takhyil as elaborated by Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna).
Q(39:67)

“They measure not God with His true measure. The earth altogether shall be His handful on the Day of Resurrection, and the heavens shall be rolled up in His right hand. Glory be to Him! High be He exalted above that they associate!”

We have already seen the interpretation of ‘Abd al-Qa‘hir al-Jurjānī of this verse in Chapter1, now let us see how al-Zamakhsharī approached it. I believe it is worth translating the main point of this interpretation because only at this place did he elaborate on his use of takhyīl to interpret anthropomorphic verses:

“God draws their attention to His might and grandeur by way of takhyīl by saying “The earth altogether shall be His handful on the Day of Resurrection, and the heavens shall be rolled up in His right hand”. The purpose of this speech, if you take it in its totality and as whole, is the depiction (taṣwīr) of His might and to make known [to us] the essence of His grandeur and nothing more without interpreting handful (qaḍā) and right hand (yāmīn) as haqīqa or ma‘jāz. The same analysis also applies to a hadith in which “Abdullah b. Ma‘ṣūd reported that a Jew scholar 199 came to Alla‘h’s Apostle (may peace be upon him) and said. Muhammad, or Abū al-Qa‘sim, verify, Alla‘h, the Exalted and Glorious, would carry the Heavens on the Day of Judgment upon one finger and earth upon one finger and the mountains and trees upon one finger and the ocean and moist earth upon one finger—in fact the whole of the creation upon one finger, and then He would stir them and say: I am your Lord, I am your Lord. Thereupon Alla‘h’s Messenger (may peace be upon him) smiled testifying what that scholar had said. He then recited this verse: “They measure not God with His true measure...”. The most eloquent person among the Arabs (may peace be upon him) laughed and expressed amazement because what he understood from [what the rabbi said] is what the scholars of Bayān (theory of imagery) understand from it without imagining imsāk (literally grasp), or iṣbah (finger), or stirring (hazz) or anything else. [The Prophet], first and foremost, understood the essence and crux of [the Rabbi’s speech] which indicates the magnificent power and that the immense actions, which bewilder understanding and minds to the extent that even the imaginations cannot penetrate their essence, are easy for Him [to do]. The hearer can only comprehend this ease by interpreting the expression using this method of takhyīl. You will not find in the theory of imagery (‘ilm al-Bayān) a topic more subtle or delicate or fine than this topic. Nor will you find a more useful and beneficial topic [than takhyīl] to interpret equivocal [expressions] (mushtabaha) in the Word of God in the Qur‘ān, and other revealed scriptures as well as in the speech of the Prophets. This is because the majority of the cases of ta‘wil (interpreting equivocal expressions) and their causes are takhyīlat which are misinterpreted in the past. The blunder of those who carried

199 In al-Kashshāf the person who asked the Prophet is Jibrīl. In the books of hadith such as Sahīḥ al-Bukhārī and Sahīḥ Muslim it was a Jewish scholar or a rabbi. This is hadith is found in Book 039, Number 6699 of Sahīḥ Muslim. This hadith is translated by Abdul Hamid Siddiqi which can be found in website of the University of Southern California: Compendium of Muslim Texts.

http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/hadithsunnah/muslim/039.smt.html

the interpretation can be attributed to their lack of concern towards research and investigation; this misinterpretation will continue until they recognise that among the subtle disciplines there is discipline; if they give it the attention it deserves, it will be apparent to them that all disciplines are in need and dependent on it... How many Qur'anic verses and hadiths of the Messenger were wronged and underestimated by inadequate interpretations and worn-out explanations, because those who interpret [the Qur'an and hadith] have no clue whatsoever about\textsuperscript{200} [takhfīl].

al-Zamakhshārī also mentions other tropical interpretations of the key terms of this verse in a dismissive manner ‘it was said that qabḍatuhu means His kingdom without any repeller or contender and yaminihi means His power. It was said that maṭwiyyāṭun biyamiṇīhi (be rolled up in His right hand) means [heavens] will perish as a result of his oath because he swore that He will make them perish\textsuperscript{201}. Then he contends that these interpretations do not do any justice to the eloquence of the Qur'ān, unlike his own interpretation\textsuperscript{202}.

Al-Zamakhshārī is making a few important points: first, this type of discourse can only be understood in its totality, not by looking at its components. As we have seen above, single terms such as “handful” and “right hand” should not be interpreted as either ħaqīqa or majaż. Both the anthropomorphists (mushabbiḥa) who interpret them as ħaqīq (literally true) and others who interpret them tropically (such as right-hand as power) are wrong. Only when this type of discourse is understood in its totality will the purpose of using it be known and in this the verse is to depict God’s might and grandeur.

Second, related to the first point, al-Zamakhshārī argues that one should not pay much attention to the words used to create the image; instead one should concentrate on the essence and crux of the expression. Otherwise one will miss the point and might fall into the trap of tashbīḥ (anthropomorphism). Al-Zamakhshārī here follows ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī regarding this issue, and shows his dissatisfaction with these types of interpretations. He severely criticised those who interpreted anthropomorphic verses in this way whether they are Muʿtazilī or not.

\textsuperscript{200} Al-Kashṣāf, vol. 3, pp. 408-9.

\textsuperscript{201} Al-Kashṣāf, vol. 3, p. 409

\textsuperscript{202} Ibid.
Third, the most suitable method of interpreting equivocal expressions in the Qur’ān and Ḥadith is the method of takhyīl which is part of ilm al-Bayān. Failure to follow this method will lead to inadequate interpretations and worn-out explanations.

Q (2:255)

بما شاء وسع قُرْسِيْة السَّمَوَات والْأَرْضَ

“His Throne comprises the heavens and the earth..”

Al-Zamakhsharī offers four interpretations for this expression. Only the first is of concern here. He states

‘His Throne is not limited by heavens and earth because of its extent and vastness. This is only a depiction of His might and takhyīl and there is no Throne, neither sitting nor seated [being], like His saying in Q (39:67) “They measure not God with His true measure. The earth altogether shall be His handful on the Day of Resurrection, and the heavens shall be rolled up in His right hand” without imagining handful, rolling up and right hand. It is only takhyīl for the Might of His affair and an analogy based on sensory perception (tanthil hisṣī), don’t you see His saying “They measure not God with His true measure”.

---

203 The second interpretation: His knowledge comprises...and Knowledge is called Kursī and knowledge is called Kursī (chair) after its place which is the chair of the scholar. Third interpretation: His reign comprises... reign is called kursī after its place which is the chair of the king. Fourth interpretation: God created the Kursī smaller than the ‘arsh (throne) and bigger than the heavens and the earth. He adds another interpretation by al-Ḥasan who said that al-kursī is the ‘arsh. Al-Kashshāf, ibid., vol. 1, pp. 385-86.

204 Ibn al-Munīr in his comments on al-Zamakhshari’s interpretation of this verse states that “al-Zamakhshari’s expression in his first interpretation of the Throne; “takhyīl for the Might” represents an ill mannered way in referring to God...Because al-takhyīl (imagination) is used to refer to false things and to things which do not have true existence. If the meaning of what he said was true, he was mistaken in expressing it by using an ambiguous expression”, Aḥmad b. Muhammadr Al-Munīr, Al-Inṣāf fi-ma tadammānahu al-Kashshāf min al-‘itīzāl, printed on the lower margin of the edition of al-Kashshāf mentioned above, vol. 1, p. 385. It seems that Ibn al-Munīr here accepts the interpretation offered by al-Zamakhsharī, but his objection is directed towards al-Zamakhshari’s use of the word takhyīl which he found to be offensive.

Al-Zamakhshari’s interpretation here is consistent with his interpretation of Q (39:67) – he also referred to it as we have seen - but he added a new element when he said that the expression “His Throne comprises the heavens and the earth” is *takhyīl* and an analogy based on sensory perception. Now I will examine the issue of al-Zamakhsharī’s originality by comparing his interpretation with that of al-Ḥākim al-Jushamī of this word *kursī*. Al-Jushamī offers four interpretations for the term *Kursī* (Throne) without indicating his preference to any of them. First interpretation: His Kursī means His knowledge (Ibn ‘Abbās and Mujaḥid), second interpretation *al-Kursī* is the Throne (al-Ḥasan), third interpretation: “It was said [kursī] is a seat smaller than the (Throne) ‘ʿarsh’“, forth interpretation: His reign. These four interpretations are mentioned by al-Zamakhsharī as we have seen above. One can ask: does this mean that al-Zamakhsharī plagiarised al-Jushamī and did not offer anything new, as Zarzūr has implied? I believe this is not the case because first of all al-Zamakhsharī’s preferred interpretation in which he used the notion of *takhyīl* is totally new and not mentioned by al-Jushamī. Secondly, it is true that the four interpretations of al-Jushamī are mentioned by al-Zamakhsharī but this does not mean that al-Zamakhsharī plagiarised al-Jushamī’s work because it is possible that both al-Jushamī and al-Zamakhsharī relied on the same sources.

Q (48:10) “God's hand is over their hands”

“Those who swear fealty to thee swear fealty in truth to God; God's hand is over their hands”

Al-Zamakhsharī states that

“when God said those who “swear fealty in truth to God” he strongly emphasised it by way of *takhyīl*, then He said “God's hand is over their hands” He meant by it that the hand of the Messenger of God, which is over the hands of those who swear fealty, is the hand of God. God is deemed far above having limbs and attributes of bodies. Therefore, the meaning is a confirmation that concluding a treaty with the Messenger is like concluding it with God and there is no difference between them, like His saying Q(4:80) “Whosoever obeys the Messenger, thereby obeys God”.”

---

206 *Tafsīr al-Jushamī*, Q (2:255)

207 *Al-Kashshāf*, vol. 3, p. 543.
In this verse also Al-Zamakhshāri used the word *takhyīl* to interpret the expression “the hand of God” in the context of the verse. As God is deemed far above having limbs or any other physical attributes therefore it is absurd to attribute such a hand to Him. Therefore, interpreting this verse by using *takhyīl* will help to get to the point of this verse and this usage of *takhyīl* corresponds to the third category of al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī namely Clue for metaphor by way of allusion (*qarīnat al-makniyya*). This clue is also called *isti‘āra takhyīliyya* in later manual of *balāgha*.

Al-Zamakhshāri offers unique ways to interpret anthropomorphic verses in the Qur‘ān in comparison with earlier Mu‘tazilites such as ‘Abd al-Jabbār and al-Ḥākim al-Jushamī. The uniqueness of these ways rests first and foremost on the ideas of ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī as found in his two books *Dala‘il al-I‘jāz* and *Asrar al-Balāgha*. Indeed, al-Zamakhshārī absorbed these books fully and applied them to the Qur‘ān. ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī’s theory of imagery in general and his theory of *majāz* in particular served as a base on which al-Zamakhshārī establishes his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses. More importantly is that al-Zamakhshārī developed some of ‘Abd al-Qāhir’s ideas further and invented new theories which he used in his interpretation (with regard to *isti‘āra*, *tashbīh*, *majāz ‘aqūf*, *majāz* based on *kināya*, *tamthīl* and *takhyīl*).

As a Mu‘tazī, al-Zamakhshārī believes that the proof of reason indicates that “God is neither a body nor an accident nor similar to them in any respect”, therefore any *mutashābih* expression in the Qur‘ān which is contrary to the above view of God has to be interpreted to be in harmony with the proof of reason and other *muhkam* verses in the Qur‘ān.

When it comes to his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses, I identified three main approaches:

First approach: here Al-Zamakhshārī did not offer anything unique that differs from earlier theologians such as ‘Abd al-Jabbār.
Second approach, al-Zamakhshari developed a unique way of interpreting some anthropomorphic verses by using what it is called majaz based on kinaya. Before al-Zamakhshari, al-Jurjani elaborated on what he calls the meaning of the meaning; here al-Zamakhshari’s new trope can be described following ‘Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani as the meaning of the meaning of the meaning. The following diagram illustrates this notion:

Utterance---- prima facie meaning---- meaning of the prima facie meaning (kinaya)---- meaning of the meaning of the prima facie meaning (majaz based on kinaya).

By using majaz based on kinaya to interpret certain expressions (such as God “sitting firmly on the Throne”) in their entirety without pausing on the single words that make these expressions, al-Zamakhshari wants the hearer to move away from the first meaning to the second and from the second to the third meaning, because to pause on these components such as “hand” or “sitting firmly” might lead to either farfetched interpretation which would miss the point of what the Qur’an tries to convey or worse might lead to gross anthropomorphism, which he tries to eliminate in the first instance. By comparing al-Zamakhshari’s interpretation of the previous expression with those of ‘Abd al-Jabbar and al-Jushami, I showed that al-Zamakhshari’s interpretation is novel and represents an original contribution to the theory of imagery.

Third approach, al-Zamakhshari was the first to introduce the concept of takhyil in the field of Qur’anic exegesis and use it to interpret anthropomorphic verses. Takhyil is a special case of tamthil in which the analogue in the case of takhyil is absurd and is considered as hypothesised thing. On the other hand hypothesised things can be imagined in the mind like real objects.

For al-Zamakhshari takhyil is the depiction of meaning for the purpose of making it accessible to the recipient in a meaningful and effective way which cheers the soul, and when using takhyil one does not pay much attention to the words used to create the image; instead one should concentrate on the essence and crux of the expression. When it comes to anthropomorphic verses he believes that takhyil is the
most suitable method to interpret them because by using it one gets to the point of the expression, which is the depiction of God’s majesty and might without falling into the trap of anthropomorphism or farfetched interpretations. Al-Zamakhsharī criticised what could be described as “traditional Mu'tazilite” interpretations of anthropomorphic verses of using single-word majāz as a means to interpret these verses. Al-Zamakhsharī attributed the misinterpretation of anthropomorphic verses to the failure of these exegetes to appreciate and study ‘ilm al-Bayān in general and takhyīl in particular, because it is the most suitable method of interpreting equivocal expressions in the Qur’ān. Since God is transcendent and cannot be perceived by any of the senses, then the best way of conveying to human beings something about Himself that makes sense to them is by using analogies based on sensory perception, thus they could imagine His might and grandeur.

Conclusion:

One of the main aims of the Mu'tazilites is to harmonize reason and revelation. Their endeavour started from their early beginnings. The available sources from their early stage indicate that they all agree implicitly or explicitly that anthropomorphic verses have to be interpreted tropically to be in harmony with the dictates of reason regarding the attributes of God. The earliest attestation of the doctrine of priority of reason over revelation is found in the writing of al-Jāḥīẓ but this does not mean that he was the first to formulate this doctrine. The link between this doctrine and their Qur’ānic hermeneutics was not fully established until a later date as the use of Q(3:7) is not attested in the writing of early Mu'tazilites. As we have seen, for al-Asamm, Muhkamāt verses are those which do not need reflection while mutashābihāt are those verses which require reflection. al-Jāḥīẓ did not use this explicitly although he made use of certain verses to interpret others. al-Jubbā'ī, interpreted Muhkamāt as those verses which can yield only one meaning and mutashābihāt verses as those which can yield two meanings or more. Al-Jubbā'ī ‘s contribution represents a significant development in the history of interpretation of this verse.
The Mu'tazilites recognise the importance of *majāz* for their endeavour to harmonize reason and revelation in their interpretation of anthropomorphic verses. Therefore they played a major role in its development. The theory of *majāz* started with al-Jāḥiz who was the first to speak about the dichotomy of *ḥaqiqā-majāz* as indicated in chapter one of this work. Before al-Jāḥiz various commentators offer tropical interpretation of anthropomorphic verses, but without using the term *majāz* and with little explanation of their interpretation like that of the interpretation of al-Asāmm. It is in the writing of al-Jāḥiz we find for the first time the use of technical language and linguistic and theological explanation in his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses, in order to establish his interpretations on solid rational grounds. After al-Jāḥiz the use of *majāz* in a technical sense to interpret anthropomorphic verses became established, as we have seen in al-Jubbā'ī's interpretation of anthropomorphic verses.

The contribution of 'Abd al-Jabbār represents a big step in the Mu'tazilites attempt to harmonize reason and revelation with reference to anthropomorphic verses. He consolidated Mu'tazilite thinking at his time and presented a fully developed Qur'ānic hermeneutics that was built on Mu'tazilite theology. In addition to his hermeneutics, his theory of *majāz* enabled him to interpret anthropomorphic verses to harmonize them and the proof of reason. In his theology, he emphasised that it is only through the use of reason and not by depending on the Qur'ān that one can know about God's existence, transcendence and justice. It is only then one can proceed to interpret the Qur'ān because in order to know the truthfulness of the Qur'ān and what it signifies, one should know the state of its actor. This is based on the Mu'tazilite belief that the Qur'ān on its own cannot be utilized to demonstrate the existence and the attributes of the actor. 'Abd al-Jabbār's doctrine of priority of reason over revelation has an impact on his Qur'ānic hermeneutics and it is through his interpretation of Q (3:7) one can see the contact between theology and hermeneutics. For 'Abd al-Jabbār, *muhkamat* are verses that precisely express what is intended by them and *mutashābihāt* are those in which their prima facie meaning (*zāhir*) does not indicate what is intended by them. If the prima facie meaning of a verse is not in accord with proof of reason then one has to resort to tāwil to harmonise between the two because both reason and revelation have the same origin and therefore there should be no contradiction between them. In this case the *mutashābihāt* has to be interpreted in the light of *muhkamat* verses which they
should be in accord with reason. The main tool in the process of ta’wil is majâz and ‘Abd al-Jabbâr enacted his own theory of majâz within the context of usûl al-fiqh and Kalâm to use it in his interpretation. His interest in majâz reflects its utmost importance in his hermeneutics because majâz is his primary tool to harmonise between reason and revelation. ‘Abd al-Jabbâr systematically applied his theory of majâz to all anthropomorphic verses and interpreted them to be in accord with proof of reason. His interpretation of these verses clearly reflects the advanced stage of the theory of majâz at his time, as we have seen in section two of this chapter.

It is with Al-Zamakhshâri that Mu’tazilite interpretation of anthropomorphic verses reached its peak of sophistication and maturity. The uniqueness of his approach rests first and foremost on the ideas of ‘Abd al-Qâhir al-Jurjânî as found in his two books Dalâ’il al-I’jâz and Asrâr al-Balâgha. Indeed, al-Zamakhshâri fully absorbed these books, developed some of their ideas and applied them to the Qur’ân. ‘Abd al-Qâhir al-Jurjânî’s theory of imagery in general and his theory of majâz in particular served as a base on which al-Zamakhshâri establishes his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses.

As a Mu’tazî, al-Zamakhshâri believed that the proof of reason indicates that “God is neither a body nor an accident nor similar to them in any respect”, therefore any mutashâbih expression in the Qur’ân which is contrary to the above view of God has to be interpreted to be in harmony with the proof of reason and other muhkam verses in the Qur’ân. Al-Zamakhshâri was not satisfied with the approaches of earlier writers and their interpretation of anthropomorphic verses, because they do not do justice to the Qur’ânic message. Therefore he developed two unique tropes to interpret anthropomorphic verses.

First trope: majâz based on kinâya

As we have seen I explained this approach using ‘Abd al-Qâhir al-Jurjânî’s theory of meaning. The following diagram illustrates this new trope:

Utterance ➔ prima facie meaning ➔ meaning of the prima facie meaning (kinâya) ➔ meaning of the meaning of the prima facie meaning (majâz based on kinâya).
By using majāz based on kināya to interpret certain expressions (such as God “sitting firmly on the Throne”) in their entirety without pausing on the single words that make these expressions, al-Zamakhshari wants the hearer to move away from the first meaning to the second and from the second to the third meaning.

Second trope: takhyīl.

For al-Zamakhshari takhyīl is a special case of tamthīl in which the analogue in the case of takhyīl is absurd and is considered as a hypothesised thing. Takhyīl is the depiction of meaning for the purpose of making it accessible to the recipient. When using takhyīl one does not pay much attention to the words used to create the image; instead one should concentrate on the essence and crux of the expression. When it comes to anthropomorphic verses he believes that takhyīl is the most suitable method to interpret them because by using it one gets to the point of the expression which is the depiction of God’s majesty and might without failing into the trap of anthropomorphism or engages in farfetched interpretations.

This chapter shows that interpreting anthropomorphic verses is not an isolated exegetical task in the Muʿtazilites school. The foundation of their interpretation rests above all on their theology and Qurʾānic hermeneutics as well as the deployment of majāz as a tool to facilitate this interpretation. The main concern of the Muʿtazilites is to harmonize reason and revelation but by keeping in mind their doctrine of priority of reason over revelation. In order to interpret anthropomorphic verses to be in accord with their theology, the Muʿtazilites needed a scriptural support to their endeavor. The Muʿtazilites found in Q(3:7) what they were looking for because this verse links muḥkamāt, mutashābihāt and taʾwīl together. It was ‘Abd-Jabbār who laid the foundation of their hermeneutics and linked it with their theology, thus enabling their interpretation of the Qurʾān and giving it a solid theoretical ground.

Motivated by their desire to give the most objective interpretation of anthropomorphic verses to be in harmony with their views of God established by reason; the Muʿtazilites employed and developed a theory of majāz as an effective
tool in their endeavor. This does not mean that their interpretations were uniform and identical, on the contrary as this section shows there are big differences between the early Mu'tazilite and later ones. Within early Mu'tazilites circles, the employment of majāz was simple due to the immaturity of the theory of majāz and Qur'ānic hermeneutics. It was al-Jāḥīẓ who laid the foundation of the theory of majāz and used it to interpret anthropomorphic verses. This was followed by ‘Abd al-Jabbār who developed a Mu'tazilite Qur'ānic hermeneutics and developed and accommodated the theory of majāz on a large scale in his interpretation of these verses. In the writing of al-Zamakhshāri the theory of majāz reached its maturity, by basing his views on ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī’s works, al-Zamakhshāri developed the theory of majāz further and applied it to anthropomorphic verses. His two novel tropes are majāz based on kināya and takhyīl allowed him to move away from earlier authors in their focus on single word majāz to an utterance or sentence based majāz which enabled him to interpret anthropomorphic verses in a complete new way.

As this chapter concludes, I will turn next to the Ash'arites, who were the adversaries of the Mu'tazilites though nevertheless greatly influenced by them with regard to their methods and theories.
Chapter 4

The Ash‘arites

The Ash‘arite school is considered one of the most important three Sunni theological schools in Islam, in addition to al-Māturīdiyya and Ḥanbalite traditionalists. The Ash‘arites take their name from the founder of the school Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī\(^1\) (AH 260-324/874-935 CE) who converted from Mu‘tazilism to the “orthodox” doctrine of Sunnīsm around 300/912. The history of the school is divided into two periods following the observation of Ibn Khaldūn: َتَارِیقَت ِالاَءِلَمِیْرَ (the method of the ancients) and َتَارِیقَت ِالمَعْتَاصِرِینَ (the method of the moderns)\(^2\) whereas al-Ghazālī (505/1111) is the link between them. According to Frank the first period ‘is characterized by the formal language, analysis, and argumentation of the Başran kalām employed by al-Ash‘arī himself, while the second is characterized by the language, concepts, and formal logic of philosophy (falṣafāh), that is, of the Islamic continuation

\(^1\) Many scholars ancient and modern believe that al-Ash‘arī’s doctrine represents what is called the ‘middle way’ between the Mu‘tazilite rationalism and extreme conservatism of the traditionalists. Contrary to the Mu‘tazilites, he believes in the primacy of revelation (expressed in the Qur‘ān and Sunna) and the consensus of Muslims over reason but at the same time he used the formal language of Kalām to express and defend his views, and this use of the method of kalām made his ideas unacceptable to the Ḥanbalites. al-Ash‘arī believes that God has eight distinct essential attributes (power, knowledge, Will, life, speech, sight, hearing and perdurance) which are neither identical with His essence nor other than Him. Human voluntary actions ‘occur through an ability to act (bi-qudrah) created in us at the moment the act occurs and are formally referred to as َکِسَبُ یکَسَب ("performance")’. Ethical values are based on the Divine command and whatever God does and wills is just by definition. God does what he wills, and what he wills is just by definition, Richard Frank, al-Ash‘arī, in Encyclopaedia of Religion. See also Richard M. Frank: "Elements in the Development of the Teaching of al-Ash‘arī." In: Le Muséon 104 (1991) pp. 141-190 (Frank tries in this paper to solve the ‘problem of al-Asha‘rī by offering a coherent presentation of al-Asha‘rī’s theology by taking into account all of his extent books into consideration unlike other authors who cast doubt on some of his books, regarding this issue see Robert Caspar, A Historical Introduction to Islamic Theology: Muhammad and the Classical period, Pontificio Istituto di studi Arabi e d’Islandistica, Rome, 1998, pp.198-210). For a partial translation of al-Ibānā see W.C. Klein (trans): Abū I-Ḥasan ‘Alī ibn Ismā‘īl al-Ash‘arī’s al-Ibānāh ‘an ِعَضِیل ad-Diyānāh (The Elucidation of Islam’s Foundation). (American Oriental Series, 19) New Haven 1940, and for a translation of al-Luma’ see R.J. Mccarthy (ed./translator.): The Theology of al-Ash‘arī. Beirut 1953. For a comprehensive treatment of al-Asharī’s doctrine see Daniel Gimaret: La doctrine d’al-Ash‘arī, cerf,Paris 1990.


\(^3\) The main representatives of this method are: al-Ghazālī, Fākhār al-Dīn al-Rāzī (606/1209), al-Āmidī, ‘Izz al-Dīn b. ‘Abd al-Salām, ‘Aḍḍād al-dīn al-Ījī (756/1355).

of Greek philosophy. It is very difficult to give a summary of the main Ash’arite doctrine which covers both periods because of the large number of authors and the diversity of their views, Frank observes that ‘Because of the differences in language and conceptualization between the Ash’ari theology of the classical period and that of later times, especially after al-Rażī, it is impossible to define or characterize the tradition in terms of a single way of conceiving, formulating, and dealing with theological and metaphysical problems.’ Nevertheless I will give a brief general account of the main doctrines of Ash'arite creed related to the issue of anthropomorphism.

The vast majority of Ash'arites adopted the Mu'tazilite doctrine of the priority of reason over revelation which has a great impact on their views on God and his attributes. According to al-Shafi’i the Ash’arites adopted the Mu'tazilite classification of theological issues into three main sections:

1. The main issues that are related to the foundation of prophethood such as belief in God and his attributes, can be only based on reason.

2. Issues related to the day of Judgement; punishment and reward can be only based on revelation.

3. Other issues related to some divine perfections on which the validity of prophethood does not depend, can be based on both reason and revelation.

Al-Shafi’i argues that the Ash’arite’s adoption of the previous classification is a consequence of their acceptance of the following doctrines:

---

5 Richard M. Frank, art. Ash’ariyyah in Encyclopaedia of Religion, p. 533. Caspar puts the difference between the two methods in this way: ‘the first is characterized by the use of the old logic of fiqh with two terms (either this or that; if not this, then it is that) and the second by the use of the Aristotelian syllogism with three terms, with major, minor and intermediate terms and conclusion’, Robert Caspar, A Historical Introduction to Islamic Theology: Muḥammad and the Classical period, Pontificio Istituto di studi Arabi e d’Islamistica, Rome, 1998, p. 213.


7 Frank, Ash’ariyyah, p. 538.

8 The earliest attestation of this doctrine is found in al-Baqillānī’s book

I. Reason is the foundation of revelation, therefore, issues related to God (existence and attributes) and prophethood cannot be established by relying on revelation otherwise the origin will become the branch, in other words this is a circular argument.

II. The texts of the revelation can only yield probable knowledge due to the nature of language; therefore those texts that seem to signify anthropomorphism must be interpreted\textsuperscript{10}. In other words these texts cannot be taken to signify their prima facie meanings.

The above classification and doctrines influenced the Ash'arite attitude towards anthropomorphic verses in the Qur’ān and their interpretations.

Two major approaches\textsuperscript{11} to anthropomorphism in the Qur’ān dominated the Ash'arite school. The first approach is characterised by not engaging in the interpretation of these verses while the second approach is characterised by offering tropical interpretation (\textit{ta'wil}) of them. The double way of approaching anthropomorphic verses started with al-Ash’arī himself. Indeed al-Ash’arī\textsuperscript{12} is reported to have had two approaches to anthropomorphic verses: his first approach to anthropomorphism in the Qur’ān is manifest in his book \textit{al-Ibāna ‘an ‘Usūl al-Diyāna} in which al-Ash’arī states that the face, and the two hands of God, are to be confirmed\textsuperscript{13} \textit{bila‘ kayf}\textsuperscript{14}. He also believes that hands, face, side, eye, sitting, coming, descending are all attributes\textsuperscript{15} of God (these attributes are also called ‘revealed

\textsuperscript{10} Al-Shāfi‘i, p. 159.
\textsuperscript{11} Al-Makdisi states that ‘The former attitude is regarded by the Ash’arites as being \textit{tariq as-salāma}, the road of salvation, and the latter is regarded by them as being \textit{tariq al-hikma}, the road of wisdom; both of which roads were travelled by Ash’arī himself’, Makdisi, 1962, ibid., p. 52. Al-Mutawalli (478-1085) who is an Ash’arite theologian justifies both approaches by the two different ways of reading Q (3:7) i.e. to pause after ‘\textit{wa ma‘ ya‘lamu ta‘wilahu illā Allāh}’ or to pause after ‘\textit{wa al-rāsikhūna fī al-ilm}’ Kitāb al-Mughni līl- Imām al-Mutawalli, ed. Marie Bernand, Cairo, 1986, pp. 13-14.
\textsuperscript{14} This phrase has two meanings: 1. it means that one should accept the text as it is without any further comments or without asking question and this is how the traditionalists and most of the Ḥanbalites understand this phrase. 2. Within Ash’arites’s school it means “one does not attribute to God; he does not, that is, ascribe to God the characteristics and properties of creatures”, Frank, elements, ibid., p. 155.
attributes\(^{16}\)). Al-Ash‘ārī in his second approach resorts to tropical interpretation of these verses, al-Āmidī states that al-Ash‘ārī in one of his two sayings interpreted the face of God (\(wajhu\ \textit{Allāh}\)) as his existence\(^{17}\) without indicating whether this interpretation is an earlier or later one. Regarding this point, Frank argues that ‘in the earliest period of his conversion al-Ash‘ārī held that God has an attribute (or attributes) called “hands” in the revelation, though this attribute is not to be thought of a consisting of bodily members. For this he cites (in his book \textit{Risāla ilā ahl al-Thaghr\textasciitilde}) Q5,64 as well as 38,75. Later he came to interpret ‘hands’ in the former verse as an extended use of the word, contextually employed to refer to God’s power\(^{18}\). This double way of approaching anthropomorphic verses in the Qur‘ān will characterise the attitudes of most Ash‘arites. My main concern here is with those Ash‘arites who practiced \textit{ta‘wil}. Therefore, I will examine the detailed interpretations of anthropomorphic verses of four Ash‘arites; two from the early period (al-Bāqillānī and al-Juwaynī) and two from the later period (al-Rāzī and ‘Izz al-Dīn b. ‘Abd al-Salām) in order to find out the methods they follow and the role of the \textit{mājāz} in their interpretations. This chapter is divided into four sections, each devoted to one of these authors.

### 4.1. Al-Bāqillānī\(^{19}\) (d. 403/1013)

Al-Bāqillānī was one of the main Asha‘rite theologians in the 4\(^{th}\)/10\(^{th}\) century, he followed the Mālikī school and it is said that he was ‘a major factor in the systematising and popularising of Ash‘arism\(^{20}\). He was a typical Asha‘rite in a sense that both approaches to anthropomorphism in the Qur‘ān are attested in his writings and my concern here is his \textit{ta‘wil} of these verses. His interpretations are based on the

---

\(^{16}\) These attributes are also called additional attributes and are divided into two types: those related to the essence like (the eye, two hands, the side and the face and the others related to the attributes of the act like sitting (\textit{istiwa‘}), coming (\textit{maji‘}) and descending (\textit{nuzu‘l}) see \textit{Mujarrad Maqāla‘t al-Ash‘arī\textasciitilde}}, p. 41.


\(^{18}\) Frank, Elements in the Development of the Teaching of al-Ash‘arī, p. 185.

\(^{19}\) The kādhī abū bakr muhammad b. al-tayyib b. muhammad b. dja‘far b. al-kāsim. Very few of his writings survived. “He did much to propagate Ash‘arism, and he is mentioned fairly frequently by later writers” see R.J. McCarthy, al-Bākilla‘ī, EI 2\textasciitilde ed.

\(^{20}\) R.J. McCarthy, al-Bākilla‘ī in EI2. ?
belief that God does not resemble its creation either in genes or in form and this belief is supported by reason and revelation\(^2\) alike\(^2\). But before examining his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses, I will outline his approach to the issue of \(ta\'wil\) as expressed in his interpretation of Q (3:7) as well as his views on \(majāz\).

4.1.1 Interpreting Q (3:7)

Al Bāqillānī believes that there is nothing in the Qur'ān which cannot be interpreted. For him, to describe an utterance as \(muhkam\) in this verse means that ‘the utterance indicates and discloses its significance in a such a way as to remove any ambiguity and probability’\(^23\) such as “Muḥammad is the Messenger of God” Q (48:29). For the utterance to be \(mutashābīh\) it means that the utterance ‘is capable of yielding various significations; these significations can be veridical (‘alā wajhī al-ḥaqīqa) or some veridical and others tropical (majāzan), and also its prima facie meaning does not indicate what is intended by it\(^24\), such as Q (4: 43) and those verses that are related to the fundamentals of religions\(^25\). To be able to know what is intended by \(mutashābīh\) requires ‘reflection and contemplation by referring it to another obvious utterance (\(zāhir\)) and indicator based on reason (\(daḥlu ‘aqīḥ\)’, al-Bāqillānī adds that the interpretation of \(mutashābīh\) utterances ‘is known to God and those who are firm in knowledge and God did not reveal in his book anything whose interpretation can be said to be unknown’\(^26\). What is clear from this quotation is that it is legitimate to interpret anthropomorphic verses in the light of reason and other clear verses. But which has priority over the other is not explicit in his available writings although one can infer that he is in favour of the priority of reason over revelation from his

\(^{21}\) Such as Q (42:11) and (112:3-4).
\(^{24}\) Al-Taqrib wa al-Irshād, ibid., pp. 330-331.
\(^{25}\) Ibid., p. 331.
treatment of the issue of existence of God and his attributes in his book *al-Inšāf*, where he first gives *kalām*-type argument then cites the scripture to support it.  

### 4.1.2 Al-Bāqillānī on Majāz

Like all other writers on *majāz* Al-Bāqillānī starts with *ḥaqīqa* before he defines *majāz*. According to him, *ḥaqīqa* has two meanings: 1. Essence in a sense when we say *haqīqatu waṣṭi ‘al-Shay* (the essence of describing the thing) we mean its definition and the cause by which it merited this description. For example when we say the essence of a scholar (‘ālim) is that he has knowledge. Ḥaqīqa could mean also the attribute of a thing by which the thing is characterised, as when we say the essence of the *muhdath* is that it exists out of nothing.

2. *Ḥaqīqa* in relation to speech: *Ḥaqīqa* here is a saying that is used to [convey a meaning] that was originally assigned to it (*qawlun istu’mila fi-mā ṣuḥi‘a la-hu fi al-asli*).  

On the other hand *majāz* is defined as a “[saying] used to convey a meaning other than the [original] assigned meaning (*musta‘malun fi ghayri ma‘wūdi‘a la-hu*), in other words it is the saying which has been crossed over from one thing to another (*mutajāwazun bi-hi*) from your saying juztu al-nahra when you cross over the river.  

Such as Q (12:82) and also calling a stupid man a donkey and calling a strong, brave man a lion.

Types of *majāz*.

Al-Bāqillānī explicitly identified three types of *majāz*:

1. *Majāz* based on addition such as Q(42:11) because if He said *Laysa mithlahu shay* the utterance will be perfectly understood.

---

27 See *al-Inšāf*, pp. 28-33.  
29 *Ibid.*,  
2. *Majāz* based on omission such as Q (12:82) where the word “*ahl*” people is omitted.\(^{33}\)

3. *Majāz* based on *tashbih*: “their saying I saw a donkey or an ox if they [the Arabs] meant a stupid man who is compared with oxen and donkeys because of his stupidity.”\(^{34}\)

Distinguishing between *ḥaqīqa* and *majāz*.

According to al-Bāqillānī there are four ways to distinguish between *ḥaqīqa* and *majāz*:

1. Analogy cannot be based on *majāz* such as to say “ask the rug” to mean its owner, except where the new usage is related to the established one such as to say “ask the ruins” instead of saying “ask the abodes”.

2. When derivatives cannot be obtained from a word, the word in this case is *majāz* such as calling an affair or state *amr* (command) as in Q (11:97).

3. If a plural form of a word used as *majāz* is different from the plural form of the same word used as *ḥaqīqa*. For example, the plural of the word *amr* (command) used as *ḥaqīqa* is *awāmir* (commands) and the plural of the word *amr* (state) used as *majāz* is *umūr* (states).\(^{37}\)

4. The word is used as *ḥaqīqa* when it has an association with other things or with something else related to this other such as knowledge, power and command. The last three are associated with things that are known, powered and commanded. So if something is called knowledge, power and command in which this thing has no association with things that are known, powered and commanded, then this thing is *majāz*.\(^{38}\)

Rules of *majāz*.

---

\(^{33}\) Al-Bāqillānī, ibid., p. 353

\(^{34}\) ibid., p. 351.

\(^{35}\) ibid., p. 345-5.

\(^{36}\) ibid., p. 355.

\(^{37}\) ibid.

\(^{38}\) ibid., pp. 356-7.
1. Every majāz has a ḥaqīqa but not vice versa because there are two types of names which cannot be used as majāz. These are: 1. Universal knowns such as known (maʿlūm), unknown (majhūl), mentioned (madhkūr) etc. 2. Proper names 39

2. There must be evidence (dafīḥ) associated with the discourse for it to be considered as majāz 40.

Al-Baqillānī’s treatment of majāz fits perfectly well into 4th AH/10CE century and it is similar to the treatment of ‘Abd al-Jabbār. We can see this in his definition of majāz and the three types mentioned by him. There is no mention of īstī‘āra although he mentioned tashbīh as a basis for the third type. Nevertheless, al-Baqillānī’s views on majāz will be adopted with modification by later writers on usūl al-fiqh such as al-Juwaynī and al-Ghazālī among others. Next I will examine al-Baqillānī’s interpretation of anthropomorphic verses in order to find out how his theory of majāz influenced his interpretation.

4.1.3 Al-Baqillānī’s treatment of anthropomorphic verses:

Despite al-Baqillānī’s firm belief in the possibility of interpreting everything in the Qur‘ān including mutashābih verses, his treatment of the subject displays two conflicting approaches like those of his master al-Ash‘arī himself as we have seen earlier. Indeed his book Kitāb al-Tamhīd reflects the first approach of refraining from offering tropical interpretations of anthropomorphic verses while his book al-Insāf reflects ta‘wīl approach of offering tropical interpretations.

Regarding his first approach, al-Baqillānī states that face, the two eyes, the two hands, anger, content, mercy love, and wrath are all attributes of the essence (ṣīḥat al-dhāt).

He argues that God ‘affirms to Himself a face and two hands’ (athbata li-nafsihi wajhan wa yadayn 41) as it is stated in Q (55:27) “yet still abides the Face of thy Lord” and Q (38:75) bi- yadayya. Against those who believe that God is

40 ibid., p. 351.
41 Kitāb al-Tamhīd, p. 258.
everywhere he categorically states that God is sitting on His throne quoting Q (20:5)... as evidence\textsuperscript{42} and in the same book he argues against interpreting \textit{istiwā́} as domination\textsuperscript{43} (\textit{istiłā́}). On the other hand in his book \textit{al-Insāf} he states that God has dominion over his creation\textsuperscript{44} (\textit{mustawlin ʿalā ʾjamiʿi khalqīhī}) and quotes the same verse Q (20:5). Regarding the face of God, al-Bāqīlānī in \textit{al-Insāf} interprets it in Q (55:27) and in Q(28:88) as the essence of God\textsuperscript{45}. It seems that al-Bāqīlānī has changed his mind regarding these issues, at least with the progress of time; indeed Ibn ʿAsākir states\textsuperscript{46} that al-Bāqīlānī wrote his book \textit{al-Tamhīd} when he was a young scholar, thus what we find in \textit{al-Insāf} represents a later development of his thought. Now I will look at his other tropical interpretations of some verses in detail to find out how he used his theory of \textit{majāz} to interpret them.

\textbf{Is God in every place?}

Against those who believe that God is in every place who quotes Q (43:84) \textit{“And it is He who in heaven is God and in earth is God”} as an argument, al-Bāqīlānī argues that what is meant by the verse is that it is Him: God for the people of heaven and people of the earth. As for Q(16:128) \textit{“Surely God is with those who are godfearing”}, this verse does not means that His essence is with them but it means that God is with them by means of protection, victory and support. The same interpretation goes for Q (20:46). The above interpretations are all based on his second type of \textit{majāz} mentioned above omission-type \textit{majāz}. Furthermore, al-Bāqīlānī used his first criterion for distinguishing between \textit{ḥaqīqa} and \textit{majāz} (analogy cannot be based on \textit{majāz}) to argue against saying that God is in Baghdad\textsuperscript{47} (\textit{madīnatu al-Salām}).

\textbf{Beatific vision}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{42} \textit{Kitāb al-Tamhīd}, ibid., p. 260.
\item \textsuperscript{43} ibid., p. 262.
\item \textsuperscript{44} \textit{Al-Insāf}, ibid., p. 24.
\item \textsuperscript{45} ibid., p. 36.
\item \textsuperscript{46} Ibn ʿAsākir, \textit{Tabyīn Kadhib al-Muftarī ǧī-mā Nusiba ilā al-Imām Abī al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī}, Damascus, 1347/ , pp. 119-120.
\item \textsuperscript{47} \textit{Kitāb al-Tamhīd}, p. 261.
\end{itemize}
It is known that one of the main issues of dispute between the Ash’arites and the Mu’tazilites is the issue of beatific vision; whereas the Mu’tazilites believe that God cannot be seen either in this life or in the hereafter, the Ash’arites believe that God can be seen by the sight in the hereafter. Each group used majāz to support their view. We have already seen how ‘Abd al-Jabbār interpreted Q (75:22-23) to rule out any possibility of beatific vision by using the device of majāz, al-Baqqillānī used the same device to argue for the contrary as follows: al-Baqqillānī considered Q (76:22-23) as a muḥkam verse and used it as an evidence for the beatific vision and against the Mu’tazilites, who consider this verse as mutashābih, he contended that what is meant by gazing here is gazing of the eyes (al-nazaru bi al-basar) and cannot be understood otherwise because gazing is associated with the face, transitive with the proposition illa (to) and has only one object. Having established his interpretation of this verse, al-Baqqillānī moves to interpret Q (6:103) which he considers as mutashābih contrary to the Mu’tazilites who considered it as muḥkam. He states that Q (6:103) should be understood in the light of the muḥkam verses Q (76:22-23) as follows: ‘la tudrikhu al-absār means here the sights of the disbelievers not the believers’. Al-Baqqillānī used here his second type of majāz (Majāz based on omission) to interpret this verse to harmonise it with his Ash’arite creed.

Wrath and the contentment of God

For the wrath and contentment of God in verses such as Q (4:93) “God will be wrath with him” and also Q (48:18), al-Baqqillānī argues that wrath and contentment can be used to signify the will to harm or to benefit respectively or wrath can be used to signify the aversion and changing temperament and contentment is serenity after the changing of the temperament. As God cannot have a temperament that changes, averts and calms down- because God is unique, eternal, and self-subsistent- therefore His wrath and contentment are majāz and should be understood to mean His will to punish those whom He is wrathful and reward those

49 Al-Inṣāf, ibid., p. 177.
50 Ibid.
51 Kitaāb al-Tamhīd, p. 27 and also Al-Inṣāf, ibid., pp. 38-39.
52 Al-Taqrīb wa al-Irshād al-Ṣaghīr, p. 367.
with whom He is content\textsuperscript{53}. The same goes for His mercy and love in a sense that they are to be understood as a manifestation of His eternal will\textsuperscript{54}.

Two approaches to anthropomorphic verses are manifest in Al-Bāqillānī’s writings. It seems that in his early writing he did not attempt to interpret all anthropomorphic verses figuratively and he moved towards a \textit{taʿwīl}-type approach in his late writings. There is also an indication of his endorsement of the principle of the priority of reason over revelation, which is reflected in his interpretation of Q (3:7) and consequently in his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses. His theory of \textit{majāz} fits very well into what we know about \textit{majāz} in the 4\textsuperscript{th}/10\textsuperscript{th} century as we have seen in the writings of ʿAbd al-Jabbār. His presentation of the phenomenon of \textit{majāz} represents the first fully developed theory of \textit{majāz} by an Ashʿarite theologian to have reached us. His tropical interpretation of anthropomorphic verses reflects his understanding and presentation of the theory of \textit{majāz} in the 4\textsuperscript{th}/10\textsuperscript{th} century which he effectively utilised to defend his Ashʿarite creed against the Muʿtazilite and to refute the interpretation of the \textit{mushabbiha} (anthropomorphists). Al-Bāqillānī’s interpretation of anthropomorphic verses reflects an advanced stage in the Ashʿarite school in comparison with that of al-Ashʿarī. The development of the theory of \textit{majāz} enabled him to offer more detailed interpretation of these verses. Imām al-Ḥaramayn Al-Juwaynī is another important Ashʿarite; his treatment of anthropomorphic verses is the subject of the next section in this chapter.

\textsuperscript{53} \textit{Kitāb al-Tamhīd}, p. 28
\textsuperscript{54} \textit{al-Inṣāf}, pp. 38-39.
4.2. *Abū al-Ma‘āfl al-Juwaynī* (d. 478/1085)

Al-Juwaynī’s importance in the Ash’arite school stems from the fact that ‘he wrote in the intermediate period between the old Ash’arism and the school which Ibn Khaḍīlūn was to call “modern’’. His writing reflects a substantial Mu’tazilite influence, especially with regards to his clear endorsement of two Mu’tazilite doctrines: 1. essentials of creed (existence of God and His attributes) can be only established by reason alone. 2. Priority of reason over revelation. Regarding the first doctrine, al-Juwaynī states that

‘Fundamentals of creed are divided to what can be perceived by reason which cannot be permitted to be perceived by revelation, what can be perceived by revelation but cannot be perceived by reason and what can be perceived by both. Regarding what cannot be recognised except by reason, [it is] every foundation in religion that precedes knowing the word of God, the Exalted, and the necessity of it being characterised as true. [This is the case] because the contents of the revelation depend on the word of God, and what comes first in the order of affirmation is the affirmation of the necessity [of the truthfulness] of the word of [God], therefore, it is impossible for [the foundations of religion] to be recognised by the revelation’.

Al-Juwaynī adds that what can be known only through revelation are matters such what is morally good and evil as well as matters related to Islamic law. Regarding what can be known by both reason and revelation; al-Juwaynī gives the beatific vision as an example of this category. As for the second doctrine al-Juwaynī argues ‘When the content of revelation which has reached us [in an authentic way] is in a conflict

55 *Abū l-Ma‘āfl Ḥabd al-Malik, celebrated under his title of Imām al-Haramayn*, see Brockelmann and C. Gardet; L."al- Ɗjuwanyn”, Abū l-Ma‘āfl Ḥabd al-Malik, EI 2nd Ed.


“فأما ما لا يدرك إلا عقلنا، حكماً فاعقد في الدين تقدم على العلم بكلام الله تعالى، ووجوب أئتمائه يكون صدقًا، إذ السمعيات تستند إلى كلام الله تعالى، وما يسبق بلونه في الاتباع، ليوث الكلام وهو في سبيل، فإن يكون مدركه السمع

Walker mistranslated this crucial paragraph in his translation of *al-Irsha’d* as follows: ‘As for what cannot be perceived except by reason, all elements of faith depend originally on knowing the word of God, the Exalted, and on the necessity of its having the quality of being true. The evidence supplied by tradition is grounded in the speech of God. Thus, prior to the affirmation of the speech, what one must acknowledge cannot possible be grasped through tradition.’, Paul E. Walker, *A Guide to Conclusive Proofs For the Principles of Belief*, Garnet, 2000, p. 195.

58 *Al-Irsha’d*, p. 195.
with the judgement of reason, then it must not be accepted because revelation does not conflict with reason. In other words, what al-Juwayni is saying is that if the prima facie meaning of the scripture is in conflict with the judgement of reason, then one must not accept this apparent meaning because reason has a priority over revelation. In this case the only way forward to harmonize between scripture and reason is to engage in ta’wil. Regarding what is impossible to attribute to God, al-Juwayni states that ‘anything associated with contingent beings or indicates any sign of imperfection, the Lord is far beyond and removed from such attribution’. However, if the apparent meaning of any verse is in conflict with this view of God, then one must resort to ta’wil.

4.2.1 Interpretation of Q (3:7)

For al-Juwayni, when the signification and the intended sense of the utterance are known then this utterance is considered muḥkam. On the other hand, al-Mutashābih is al-mujmal which he defines as the ‘utterance which by itself alone does not convey its signification’. As for ta’wil he defines it as ‘is the diversion of the utterance from its apparent meaning to another meaning determined by the interpreter’. This ta’wil is carried out by understanding the mutashābih in the light of the muḥkam. Al-Juwayni believes that the reprimand in this verse is directed towards those who seek discord without engaging in ta’wil, therefore the act of ta’wil is a legitimate exercise. Before examining his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses, I will look first at his views on majāz.

---

59 Al-Irshād, p. 145.
63 Ibid., p. 511.
66 Abrahamov claims that al-Juwayni ‘uses the same verse [Q:3:7] to show that in the Qur‘ān there are secrets which people cannot know. These secrets have no connection to the carrying out of religious precepts.’ Binyamin Abrahamov, “The Bilā Kayfā Doctrine and Its Foundations in Islamic Theology”, ARABICA, Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies, Tome XLII, Fascicule 3 Nov. 1995, p. 368. As a
4.2.2 Al-Juwaynī’s theory of Majāz

Al-Juwaynī treats the issue of majāz in two of his surviving books; al-Talkhīṣ fī 'uṣūl al-fiqh and al-warqāt fī 'uṣūl al-fiqh. In his book al-Talkhīṣ which is an abridgment of al-Bāqillānī’s book on 'uṣūl al-fiqh, he did not advance any new thought on the subject. On the other hand, in his book al-Waraqāt his treatment was brief and did not go further than al-Bāqillānī in his treatment above apart from adding a new type of majāz and calling majāz al-tashbīḥ (third type in al-Bāqillānī’s treatment) majāz based on ʿistiʿāra (metaphor). The new type introduced by al-Juwaynī is called majāz based on transference (naqḥ) and as an example of this al-Juwaynī gives the word ghāʾit (low land) which is used as euphemism for body waste.

4.2.3 Al-Juwaynī’s interpretation of anthropomorphic verses:

According to al-Juwaynī, ta’wīl consists of two pillars (arkān al-ta’wīl): the first, rejecting the prima facie meaning of an utterance (if it in conflict with the dictates of reason). The second pillar: assigning another signification that is in accord with the dictates of reason (tropical interpretation). In his book al-Shāmil, al-Juwaynī accepts as legitimate the position of those who engage in the first pillar of ta’wīl and at the same time do not attempt to assign any other signification. However, in his later book al-Irshād, he argues against this approach because avoiding the second pillar of ta’wīl leads to confusion and illusion, therefore, one must engage in the second pillar of ta’wīl and attempt to find other significations for the rejected apparent meaning. These significations have to be in accord with the dictates of reason and muḥkam.

---

67 Al-Juwaynī did not treat the topic of majāz in his most important book of ‘Uṣūl al-Fiqh al-Burhān, for no obvious reason.
70 al-Waraqāt, p. 9.
71 Al-Shāmil, p. 288 and al-Irshad, p. 22.
72 Al-Shāmil, p. 288, 316.
verses. In the following, I will examine his interpretation of selected anthropomorphic verses.

**God is Light Q(24:35)**

اللهُ نُورُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالأَرْضِ

"God is the Light of the heavens and the earth"

Al-Juwaynī contends that accepting the prima facie meaning of this verse as the intended one contradicts the belief of all Muslims who do not consider the light of heaven and earth as the worshiped God. He adds that there are two different interpretations mentioned by the exegetes of the Qur’an; the first one is to interpret Allaḥu nūru al-samāwāt as God is the one who ‘illuminates them and the creator of their lights’. The other interpretation is that ‘God is the One who guides the people of the heavens and the earth’. Al-Juwaynī supports this interpretation by saying that ‘the context of this verse indicates the previous interpretation because the following phrase is mentioned in the verse yahdi Allaḥu li- nūrihi man yasha’ and here light is coupled with guidance. [Furthermore], this is what is meant by His saying Q (42: 52) جَعَلْنَا نُورًا نُهْدِي بِهِ مِنْ نَشَأٍَ "We made it a light, whereby We guide whom We will ”. Al-Juwaynī adds that what explains what we said is that the verse from its beginning to its end indicates that it should not be treated like other separate independent phrases whose apparent meanings [are rejected], this is the established approach to parables. What al-Juwaynī is saying here is that parable-type verses should be understood as a whole not as separate entities. Furthermore, the scholars agreed that what is intended by parables is something other than their prima facie meanings.

Al-Juwaynī states that there is no third interpretation to this verse and anyone who seeks such an interpretation will be in error. On the other hand, those who interpret nūru al-samāwāt by adding people (the people of heaven) as a farfetched interpretation is far from the truth. This is because the second member of the construct state (muḍāf

---

73 Al-Irshād, p. 22.
74 Al-Shāmil, p. 310.
75 Ibid., p. 311.
76 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
ilayhi) can replace the first member (al-mudāf) if there is an indicator refers to it (the first member) in the discourse such\textsuperscript{78} as Q (12:82). Here in this example al-Juwaynī used the first category of his classification of majāz to justify the second interpretation at the same time he did not argue about the isti’āra (metaphor) light= guidance. One can observe also that he did not use the word majāz in his interpretation.

God in Heaven

Q (67:16) “Do you feel secure that He who is in heaven”

Al-Juwaynī gives two interpretations to this verse. The verse could be understood to refer\textsuperscript{79} ‘to His rule, command and power’. Or the phrase “man fi al-sama’ could refer to an angle in charge of chastisement or could refer to Jibrīl\textsuperscript{80}.

Having said that, it should be noted that al-Juwaynī in his last book on Kalām (al-‘Aqīda al-Nizāmiyya) changed his mind on the legitimacy of detailed interpretation of anthropomorphic verses and opted for the tafwīd\textsuperscript{81}-type approach. He states that one should follow the way taken by the salaf with regard to these verses; which is to not attempt any interpretation, at the same time believing that God is far beyond the attributes of the contingent beings\textsuperscript{82}. As for these verses, one should suspend his judgement by ‘delegating their meanings to the Lord; the Exalted\textsuperscript{83} (tafwiḍu ma’anīhā ilā al-rabbi ta’ālā).

al-Juwaynī’s books (al-Shāmil and al-Irshād) reflect Mu’tazili influence more than what we have seen in al-Bāqillānī’s writing. This is clear in his endorsement of the doctrine of the priority of reason over revelation. This doctrine had a great impact on

\textsuperscript{78} Al-Shāmil, p. 311.

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid p. 319.

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid, p. 319.

\textsuperscript{81} What we see here with al-Juwaynī is a shift from bīlā kayf to tafwīd within the Ash’arite school. It seems that al-Juwaynī is the first person to use the word tafwīd in the context of anthropomorphic verses and after him the word is used to refer to those who delegate the meaning of these verses to God as we have seen in the introduction of this work. This is reflected in al-Shahrastānī’s presentation of the justification given by the adherents of tafwīd for not practicing ta’wil as follows: as the outcome of ta’wil is of a probable validity and when it comes to the issue of Divine attributes; probable knowledge is not permissible, therefore the safest way is to adopt tafwīd-approach. Al-Shahrastānī, Milal, ibid., pp. 119-120.


\textsuperscript{83} Al-‘Aqīda al-Nizāmiyya, p. 165.
his views on *ta’wil* and consequently on his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses. His theory of *majāz* did not differ much from that of al-Bāqillānī apart from minor points and it seems that the development of the theory of *majāz* in his lifetime did not have any impact on his views on *majāz*. In his book *al-Shamil* he accepts the legitimacy of not engaging in *ta’wil* while in *al-Irshād* he argued against it. His interpretation of anthropomorphic verses is more elaborate than al-Bāqillānī’s. Al-Juwaynī offers more than one way of interpreting these verses and engages in subtle justifications of these interpretations. Finally, it should be noted that he opted for a *tafwīd*-type approach to anthropomorphic verses in his last book *al-‘Aqīda al-Nizāmiyya*. By the time we reach what is called by Ibn Khaldūn ‘the moderns’, the theory of *majāz* has been developed and matured in the writing of ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī and al-Zamakhsharī. What are the effects of these developments on later Ash‘arites’ interpretation of anthropomorphic verses? To answer this question I will examine in the next section the writing of al-Rāzī.
4.3 Al-Rāzī\textsuperscript{84} (543/1149/606/1209)

Al-Rāzī’s writings represent the mature development of the Ashʿarite theology when it is fused with philosophy\textsuperscript{85}. Furthermore, Al-Rāzī is important for the topic of this thesis because he contributed to the development of the \textit{majāz} theory as we have seen in chapter one and wrote a very important study on the issue of anthropomorphism in the Qurʿān where he was the first to offer a comprehensive theological and hermeneutical treatment to the issue of anthropomorphism in the Qurʿān and \textit{Haddīth}. In what follows I will first outline al-Rāzī’s theological justification of his Qurʿānic hermeneutics. This will be followed by an examination of his interpretation of Q (3:7) and his hermeneutics and finally I will examine his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses. His views on \textit{majāz} are already analysed in chapter 1, therefore they will not be covered here.

\subsection*{4.3.1 Theological justifications:}

Al-Rāzī like many others in his school accepted the Muʿtazilite doctrine of the priority of reason over revelation. He states that if there are certain rational proofs that indicate positive knowledge about something and the same time the \textit{prima facie} meaning of revelation contradicts these proofs then we have four options. First, believing in the validity of both reason and revelation, which is impossible. Second, rejecting both reason and revelation which is also impossible because it leads to the negation of two contradictory statements at the same time. Third, accepting the validity of reason and rejecting the validity of revelation, which is not acceptable. Fourth, believing in the validity of revelation and rejecting the validity of reason but this will lead to casting doubt over the validity of revelation itself as this validity is only known through reason\textsuperscript{86}. Therefore this option is not acceptable. Al-Rāzī put forward another solution, which is to accept the certain dictates of reason and at the

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{84} He was a philosopher, theologian and commentator on the Qurʿān. He wrote large number of books on these disciplines. His commentary on the Qurʿān entitled “\textit{Mafā’ali al-ghayb or al-Talšr al-kaḥīr}” is one of his most important works; where al-Rāzī put all of his knowledge and skills, see Fakhir al-Dīn al-Rāzī by G.C. Anawati in EI 2\textsuperscript{nd} edition.
  \item \textsuperscript{86} Al-Rāzī, Asāṣ al-Taqdis, ed. Āḥmad Hijāzī al-Saqqa, Cairo, 1986, p. 220.
\end{itemize}
same time to categorically assert that the prima facie meaning of the revelation is not intended. In this case we have two options: either employing ta’wīl to harmonize the two or suspending our judgement and delegating the matter to God. Al-Rāzī calls this procedure al-qānun al-kullī (the comprehensive law) and indeed this law is the cornerstone of his hermeneutics.

4.3.2 Al-Rāzī’s Qur’ānic hermeneutics

Al-Rāzī’s Qur’ānic hermeneutics is based on his interpretation on Q (3:7) like other authors. Al-Rāzī offers first lexical explanations of the terms muḥkam and mutashābih then he elaborates his hermeneutical theory. Lexically the root of the word muḥkam has the sense of to curb and to restrain and from this root the word al-ḥākim (the sovereign) is the one who restrains the transgressor. On the other hand, mutashābih is used when one thing resembles another or looking alike so one cannot distinguish between them.

According to al-Rāzī al-Muhkam covers two categories of utterances al-naṣṣ (self-evident utterance) and al-zāḥir (obvious utterance); whereas al-naṣṣ type is an utterance which is capable of yielding only one sense and al-zāḥir is an utterance which is capable of yielding two senses one of which is rājih (preponderant). On the other hand mutashābih covers two categories: mujmal (broad utterance) and mu’awwal (reverted utterance); the mujmal is an utterance which is capable of yielding two senses neither of which is more plausible than the other and the mu’awwal is an utterance that yields two senses and one of them is outweighed (marjūh) due to the existence of an indicator.

One could ask, given the above definitions of muḥkam and mutashābih, how do we know whether a particular verse is muḥkam or mutashābih? Al-Rāzī recognises the seriousness of the matter because every theological school claims that the verses which are in accord with their doctrine to be muḥkam and the verses of their opponents to be

87 Al-Rāzī, Asās al-Taqdīs, pp.220-1.
88 ibid., p.231
89 ibid., p. 232.
90 ibid.
92 Al-Isfahānī, al-Ḥāshīf ‘an al-Maḥṣūl, pp. 50-51
mutashabih. For example ‘the Mu’tazilite says that His Q (18:29) فَمَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُمْنَ وَمَنْ شَاءَ’ is muḥkam and His saying that Q (76:30) وَمَا تَشَاءُونَ إِلَّا أن يَشَاءُ اللَّهُ’ is mutashabih. [on the other hand] the Sunnite reverse the assertion93. Therefore, al-Rāzī contends, there must be a canon that can adjudicate the matter and it is as follows: when an utterance signifies two meanings and one of them is preponderant (rājil) and the other is outweighed (marjūl) and if the preponderant meaning is identified as the intended meaning then this utterance is muḥkam and when the outweighed meaning is identified as the intended meaning then the utterance is mutashabih94. Furthermore, ‘when the utterance of a verse or a report has a prima facie meaning95 (zāhir fi ma’na)’ and if this meaning is deemed to be unacceptable ‘then it is permissible for us to discard this apparent meaning [provided we have] a separate indicator; otherwise the discourse will cease to be meaningful and the Qur’ān will cease to be a proof. This separate indicator can be either textual (lafzi) or based on reason96 (‘aqlī). Al-Rāzī asserts that for an indicator to be accepted; it must be certain. As for textual indicators, he argues that they are not certain; rather they are probable and therefore they cannot be used as evidence97. Thus, only an indicator that is based on reason can be used as evidence and al-Rāzī concludes that ‘diversion (sarf) of the utterance from its prima facie meaning to its outweighed meaning (marjūl) is not permissible unless it can be established with a decisive indicator that the prima facie meaning is impossible. In this case the one who possesses a legal capacity (mukallaṭf) must categorically deny that what God intended by this utterance is not its prima facie meaning. Then at this stage: those who believe in the permissibility of ta’wil98 will employ it and those who don’t believe in its permissibility will suspend

93 Asās al-Taqdis, p. 234.
95 The term zāhir is applied by the jurists both to utterances and meanings and here in this quotation al-Rāzī employed it to refer to meaning not an expression. For more details about the differences between the two usages see Bernard G. Weiss, The search for God’s Law: Islamic Jurisprudence in the Writings of Sayf al-Dīn al-‘Amidi, Salt Lake City, 1992,470-477.
96 Asās al-Taqdis, p.234
97 Al-Rāzī argues that textual indicators do not yield certain knowledge because they depend on the transmission of lexical knowledge and other various aspects of language (such as grammar, conjugation, etc.) and all of these transmissions are of the solitary report-type (khabar al-wāḥid). However, khabar al-wāḥid can only yield probable knowledge, therefore knowledge attained by means of textual indicators is probable not certain. Asās al-Taqdis, pp. 234-5.
98 Ta’wil means here: diversion (sarf) of the utterance from its prima facie meaning to its outweighed meaning (marjūl)
Life's judgment and delegate the matter to God the most High\textsuperscript{99}. Al-Rāzī summarises his views regarding \textit{muhkam} and \textit{mutashābih} as follows: The \textit{muhkam}-type are those verses where their prima facie meaning is corroborated by indicators based on reason. The \textit{mutashābih}-type has two categories: The first comprises those verses about which the reason indicates that their prima facie meanings are not intended by God, the second category are those verses where there are no certain indications to determine their meanings, unlike the other two categories\textsuperscript{100}.

As we have seen above, al-Rāzī identifies two legitimate approaches to anthropomorphic verses in the Qur’ān. Those who follow the first approach categorically deny that the \textit{prima facie} meaning is intended in these verses; then they engage in the process of \textit{ta’wil} and give detailed interpretations to anthropomorphic verses. Those who take this route are called \textit{mu’awwila}. Those who follow the second approach also deny that the \textit{prima facie} meaning is intended but instead of engaging in the process of \textit{ta’wil} they suspend their judgment and delegate the matter (\textit{yufawwida}) to God and they are called \textit{mufawwida}. Al-Rāzī called the second approach \textit{madhhab ahl al-salaf} (the way of the ancestors) and indicated his preference for this approach. The adherents of this approach justify their position by using three arguments. First: the obligatory pausing in Q (3:7) after \textit{wa ma ya’lamu Ta’wilahu illā Allāh}. Second: the probable outcome of the detailed interpretations. Third: the companions and their successors did not engage in detailed interpretations\textsuperscript{101}.

Al-Rāzī framed his discussion on \textit{muhkam} and \textit{mutashābih} within the issue of validity of interpretations. He argues with regard to the category of \textit{mutashābih} (\textit{mujimal} and \textit{mu’awwal}) as identified above that when the \textit{mu’awwal} (reverted utterance) has one veridical meaning (\textit{haqiq}) and the indicator shows that this meaning is not intended then one should divert the utterance from the veridical meaning to a tropical one (\textit{majazi}). When this tropical meaning is unique then there is no alternative but to accept it, otherwise the reason will be divested. On the other hand, when we have more than one tropical meaning we have to establish which meaning is the intended one, and this can only be done by relying on textual indicators. Al-Rāzī argues that these

\textsuperscript{99} Asās al-Taqdis, p. 235.
\textsuperscript{100} Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr, vol. 7, p. 189.
\textsuperscript{101} Asās al-Taqdis, 236-239.
textual indicators can only yield probable knowledge not certainty, and when it comes to issues related to the Divine matters only certain indicators are allowed. Therefore, one should refrain from engaging in detailed interpretations.\footnote{Asās al-Taqdis, p. 240 and al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr, ibid., p. 183.}

Al-Rāżī contends that the theologians who engage in detailed interpretations assert that everything in the Qurʾān can be understood, otherwise the Qurʾān will be incongruous\footnote{Ibid., p. 227.}, therefore, mutashābih verses must be interpreted\footnote{Ibid., p. 240.}. Although al-Rāżī indicated his preference to tafwīd position, he nevertheless offers detailed interpretation of anthropomorphic verses in the Qurʾān.

4.3.3 Detailed interpretation of anthropomorphic verses

Al-Rāżī argues that both the dictate of reason\footnote{Ibid., pp. 15-29, 48-78.} and evidence based on revelation\footnote{Ibid., pp. 30-47. It is interesting to note that the first muḥkam verse used by al-Razı as an evidence against corporality, locality and direction is Q 112 while Q (42:11) comes second.} indicate that God is far beyond corporality, locality and direction. He also argues that all schools of thought in Islam believe in the necessity of ta’wīl of some verses in the Qurʾān especially when it comes to anthropomorphic verses\footnote{Asās al-Taqdis, p. 105.} ‘the theologians say that as it is proven that God is far beyond corporality, locality and direction therefore we must find a valid interpretation to these anthropomorphic expressions in the Qurʾān\footnote{Ibid., p. 109.}’. In what follows I will examine al-Rāžī’s interpretation of some anthropomorphic verses.

Eye(s) of God Q (20:39) and Q (11:37)

In his treatment\footnote{Al-Rāżī, Nihāyat al-Ījāz ʿfi Dirāyat al-Ijāz, pp. 256-57.} of al-istiʿāra al-makniyya (metaphor by way of allusion), al-Rāżī states ‘that the majority of the verses that are used by the anthropomorphists are of this type such as His saying Q (20:39) and Q (11:37)’. In other words al-Rāżī asserts

\[ \text{(Equation)} \]
that employing this type of majāz (isti’āra makniyya) to interpret anthropomorphic verses is the right way to avoid falling in the trap of anthropomorphism\(^{110}\).

Regarding the eye(s) Q (20:39) and Q (11:37) al-Rāzī contends that ‘ayn and a’yun should be understood as referring to intensity of caring and guarding. What makes this type of majāz beautiful is that ‘when someone greatly cares about something, inclines towards it and desires it, [all of these] make the person gaze at it a lot. Therefore the vocable ‘ayn (an eye) which is the instrument of gazing- is employed as an allusion for the intensity of care\(^{111}\). Al-Rāzī here did not attempt to explain the trope behind the verse as he referred to it in his book Nihāyat al-Ījāz

Meeting God

Such as Q (2:46) and Q (32:10) and Q (18:110)

Al-Rāzī argues that as it has been proven that God is not corporal then meeting God must be interpreted in one of these two ways\(^{112}\):

1. When one meets a human being; this meeting involves perception and gazing, therefore what is meant by meeting is gazing. This type of majāz is a kind of using the cause to refer to the caused thing\(^{113}\) (this type of majāz is classified as majāz mursal by later scholars of balāgha). This interpretation is only valid for those who believe that God can be seen in the hereafter, such as the Ash’arites like al-Rāzī himself.

2. When someone meets a king, he will be under his rule and dominance in a way that such a person has no means to avoid it. Therefore, this meeting is a cause for the manifestation of the power of the king. In the same way, because the power, dominance and strength of God will be manifest in the day of Judgement, the word meeting is used to express this state of affairs\(^{114}\). In this interpretation the same type of majāz is used (majāz mursal) but with a

\(^{110}\) Al-Rāzī, Nihāyat al-Ījāz, ibid., p. 257.

\(^{111}\) Al-Rāzī, Asās al-Taqdīs, p. 158.

\(^{112}\) ibid., p. 127

\(^{113}\) ibid.

\(^{114}\) ibid., pp. 127-28.
different way of interpreting it. Those who deny the possibility of beatific vision will not find this interpretation a valid one.

**Coming of God: Such as Q (89:22)**

Al-Rāzī argues that there are two ways of approaching this verse:

I. The verse can be understood by using *majāz* based on ellipsis of *muḍāf* (the first name in the construct state) and in this way we have three interpretations:

1. The command of your Lord came with accounting, rewarding and punishing.
2. The overpowering of your Lord came like the saying the dominant king came where in fact his army came.
3. The manifestation of knowledge of God came necessarily in that day (the day of judgement).

II. In this way *majāz* based on ellipsis is not used and we have two interpretations:

1. What is intended from this verse is to hold fast to the belief in the manifestation of the signs of God and the secret of effects of His power, dominance and authority in the day of judgement. More specifically what is intended by this verse is representing analogically (*tamthīl*) that state (manifestation of the signs of God) as the state of the king when he arrives, since the arrival of the king manifests awe and power which cannot be manifest with the arrival of all of his army.\(^{115}\)

2. As one of meaning of *rabb* is *murrabī*, so it could be that a great angel was nurturing the prophet and this is what is intended by the verse.\(^{116}\)

Comparing al-Rāzī’s interpretation of the above two verses with the interpretations of his Ashʿarite predecessors reveals an increase of sophistication and complexity of

---

\(^{115}\) *Asās al-Taqdis*, ibid., p. 141-142.

\(^{116}\) ibid., p. 143.
the interpretation of anthropomorphic verses due to two factors. First: the development of *majāz* theory in which al-Rāzī played a significant role. Second: the increased sophistication of Qurʾānic hermeneutics which in turn depended on the development of *‘ilm al-Kalām* and *‘usūl al-fiqh*.

**Setting on the Throne Q (7:54)**

![Verse Image](image)

Surely your Lord is God, who created the heavens and the earth in six days -- then sat Himself upon the Throne

Al-Rāzī states that there are two opinions regarding this verse; the first is to state categorically that God transcends any locality or direction and then not to offer any detailed interpretation and *(nufawwīdī) delegate its interpretation to God*¹¹⁷. The second opinion is to offer a detailed interpretation; here al-Rāzī quotes al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī’s interpretation with approval as one possible way to interpret the verse. al-Qaffāl states

\[ \text{‘Ashr (the throne) in their speech (the Arabs) is the seat of kings then the seat is made to stand for reign by way of kináyā; it is said[in reference to a king] zāla ‘arsuh (his throne was destroyed) which means his reign was destroyed and degenerated. When a king is in full command and control of his reign; [the Arabs say] istawá’alā ‘arshih (he sat on his throne) or he rested on the seat of his reign}^{118}. \]

Al-Rāzī comments on this by saying

\[ ‘\text{what he said is true, right and correct which is like what [the Arabs] say for the man of a tall stature that he has long suspensory cords or springs to his sword (tawīlū al-nijād). ...what is intended by these utterances is not their apparent meanings, rather what is intended by them is to indicate what is meant by way of kináyā so in the same manner setting on the Throne is mentioned here and what is meant is the execution of his authority and the fulfillment of His will}^{119}. \]

Then al-Rāzī presents another quotation from al-Qaffāl, saying that the validity of the above interpretation depends on the negation of any comparison between God and man¹²⁰. Al-Rāzī does not mention here the difficulties associated of using kináyā to

¹¹⁷ *Al-Tafṣīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 14, p. 121.
¹¹⁸ *Ibid*
¹¹⁹ *Ibid*
¹²⁰ *Ibid*
interpret this verse because as we have seen in chapter one an utterance is called *kināya* when it is used to indicate an implied meaning with the possibility of indicating the proper meaning. In fact al-Rāzī himself accepts this definition of *kināya* in his book *balāgha*.

Another interpretation of this verse according to al-Rāzī is to interpret *istawā* (he sat) as *istawla* (he seized) and he elaborated on this in his commentary on Q (20:5) "the All-compassionate sat Himself upon the Throne”

al-Rāzī argues for the validity of this interpretation (*istawā* as *istawla*) then he quotes al-Zamakhsharī’s interpretation of this verse which I examined above. After the quotation, al-Rāzī asserts that

“I say that if we open this door, then we should open the door for the interpretations of the Bāṭinīya (Ismā‘īlīs) because they say that what is intended from His saying Q (20:12) "إِنَّ أَنَاُ رَبِّكَ فَأَخْلُصْ لَكَ اللهُ بِمَثْلِ الْمَلَائِمَ المُقْلِدُ (20:12) "Moses, I am thy Lord; put off thy shoes; thou art in the holy valley, Towa” is to be absorbed in the service of God the most high without any action. Also what is intended from His saying Q (21:69) “We said, ‘O fire, be coolness and safety for Abraham!” is to liberate Abraham from the hand of the aggressor without believing in the existence of fire or an address [to the fire]. The same goes for every verse of the Qur’ān. The canon [of interpretation] is that every utterance in the Qur’ān should be understood in its primary meaning unless there is a certain rational indicator that [this primary meaning] is not intended. I wish that any person who does not know about something should refrain from engaging in such a thing (*layta man lam ya’rif shay’an lam yakhud fi-hi*)

Al-Rāzī’s criticism of al-Zamakhsharī is unwarranted because what al-Zamakhsharī has done, by interpreting the phrase as a *kināya* and then negating its primary meaning by considering it as *majāz* based on *kināya* when applied to God because it leads to assimilating God to His creatures, is similar to what al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī has done, although in a different manner. As we have seen, al-Rāzī approved the interpretation of al-Qaffāl and disapproved that of al-Zamakhsharī by accusing him of being ignorant at best.

---

122 *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 22, p. 7.
123 Ibid
Interpreting Q (39:67)

“They measure not God with His true measure. The earth altogether shall be His
handful on the Day of Resurrection, and the heavens shall be rolled up in His right
hand. Glory be to Him! High be He exalted above that they associate!”

In his interpretation of Q (39:67), al-Rāzī quotes a substantial part of al-
Zamakhsharī’s interpretation of this verse discussed in my section on al-Zamaksharī
above. Then al-Rāzī presents his criticism in a twofold argument:

First:

‘we say to him [al-Zamakhsharī] do you accept that in the first instance the discourse
should be interpreted according to its primary meaning and we only resort to majāz
when it is absurd to understand it according to its primary sense. If he denies this
principle then the Qur’ān will cease to be a proof at all. In this case everyone can say
that what is intended from this verse is such and such and I understand the verse to
mean that meaning without taking the prima facie meanings into considerations. The
following is an illustration of this approach: interpreting Qur’ānic verses that refer to
the reward of the people of paradise and punishment of the people of hell as only
indicating the happiness of the God-fearing people and the misery of the wrong
doers....without confirming the reality of eating, drinking and other bodily states.
Or when someone interprets the verses which affirm the obligatory prayer as an
obligation to lighten the heart with the invocation of the name of God ...without
performing the required acts of the prayer...In these cases the Qur’ān will cease to be a
proof (hujja) in the matter of creed and law and this is null and void.

In this argument, Al-Rāzī is hinting that the interpretation of al-Zamakhsharī of this
verse using takhyīl can be compared to esoteric interpretations of the Qur’ān that
ignore the prima facie meaning of the Qur’ān without evidence, hence the Qur’ān will
cease to become a proof. As a matter of fact, al-Zamakhsharī as we have seen earlier
only resorts to tropical interpretations when the prima facie meaning of the text
contradicts the dictates of reason. Furthermore, al-Zamakhsharī’s use of takhyīl to
interpret this verse and others is supported by various textual quotations and
arguments, as we have seen earlier in our treatment of takhyīl. But it seems that al-
Rāzī here has chosen not to mention these textual evidences to give the impression

125 al-Rāzī here might be referring to the Muslim philosophers who denied bodily resurrection such as
al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā.
126 Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr, vol. 27, p. 16.
that al-Zamakhshari’s interpretation is based on his mere opinion and has no evidence to support it.

Second:

‘If [al-Zamakhshari] accepts that in the first instance when one interprets the Qur’an, the discourse should be interpreted according to its primary meaning (al-haqqi) and only if there is a separate indicator showing the absurdity of interpreting it according to its primary meaning then we should interpret it figuratively. If there are multiple tropical interpretations then you should refrain from accepting any single interpretation without evidence. Then we say here that the primary meanings (haqqi) of the vocables qabda (handful) and yamin (right hand) indicate the known limbs and you cannot divert the apparent meaning of the discourse from its primary meaning unless you prove that the prima facie meaning is absurd and then you can interpret [the discourse] figuratively. Then you should demonstrate with evidence that a specific tropical meaning is intended and to show further that this specific meaning is more appropriate than other meanings. If these foundations in the previous order are established this will be the true method [of interpretation] which is used by learned scholars. In this regard, you did not bring any new method or unusual ideas; rather it is exactly what is mentioned by the learned scholars. Then it is established that the joy shown by him [al-Zamakhshari] that he was guided to the method unknown to anybody else is [in fact] a false method which indicates his inadequate understanding and knowledge (dallun ‘ala qillati wuqufihi ‘ala al-ma’ani).

In this second argument, al-Razi contends that there is only one true method to interpret anthropomorphic verses which is laid down by learned scholars, and it is not invented by al-Zamakhshari. On the contrary, the method followed by al-Zamakhshari is declared to be a false one because it does not conform to the correct method of the learned scholars.

Al-Razi then presents the interpretation of this verse according to the right way (al-tariq al-haqqi) as follows: ‘there is no doubt that the vocables (qabda) and (yamin) indicate limbs but because rational indicators point to the impossibility of God the most high having limbs then these vocables should be interpreted figuratively (alā wujūhi al-majaz). Then he interprets qabda to mean dominion or control and interprets yamin to mean power. He adds that ‘one should interpret these vocables figuratively in order to safeguard the texts of the revelations from being empty of any signification (sawnan li-hadhahi al-nususi mina al-ta’il) and this is the right discourse in this matter’. Al-Razi adds that al-Zamakhshari considers the previous interpretations as unsound and believes that interpreting them by using tamthil

---

127 Al-Tafsi’r al-Kabir, vol. 27, p. 16.
128 Ibid, p. 17.
129 Ibid.
(analogy) is a more appropriate method. Then al-Rāzī scornfully criticised al-Zamakhshari, saying ‘I say that manner of this man is very strange in rendering his method good and the method of the ancients bad one then al-Rāzī summarises his previous two arguments wondering ‘where is the discourse which he claims to have known? Where is the knowledge which no one else knew but him? Albeit his interpretations are far-fetched and his views are unsound’. Al-Rāzī reiterates his preference for the method of al-Salaf which is al-tafwīd and adds that ‘it has been established that the interpretations of this man are devoid of any benefit in the first place. And God knows best’. Al-Rāzī believes that al-Zamakhshari’s method of interpreting anthropomorphic verses by using takhyīl does not come under any of the two legitimate methods of approaching the text of the Qur’ān, namely: the method of the Salaf which is tafwīd and the method of the learned scholars who believe that one resorts to majāz only when there is an independent indicator which warrants it. Al-Rāzī considers al-Zamakhshari’s interpretation as tantamount to the esoteric interpretations of the Iṣmā‘īlīs and the philosophers who have no regard to the prima facie meaning of the text of the Qur’ān. This could explain al-Rāzī’s negative attitude to takhyīl which deserves a closer look because of its lasting effect on Arabic rhetoric and Qur’ānic exegesis.

**Al-Takhyīl and al-Rāzī**

In his book *Nihāyat al-Ījāz fī Dirāyat al-I‘jāz*, al-Rāzī did not use the term takhyīl to refer to the category of imagery as used by al-Zamakhshari. Instead he used the term ʾīḥām (making somebody imagine) and as an illustration of this figure he quotes Q (39:67) which was interpreted by al-Zamakhshari as we have seen earlier. Al-Rāzī gives the following definition to ʾīḥām ‘when a vocable has two

---

130 Al-Tafṣīr al-Kabīr, vol. 27, p. 17.
131 Ibid., pp. 16-18.
133 Literally ʾīḥām means making vague and as a term it is used interchangeably with another well known rhetorical term tawrīya (double entendre) by some authors. Tawrīya is based on ishtirāk, homonymy, the figure depends on the “nearer” meaning (ma‘nā Qarīb) of a noun, adjective, or a verbal form “hiding” (warrā) the “farther” meaning (ma‘nā ba‘īd) intended by the poet, S.A. Bonebakker, Tawrīya in EI 2nd.
significations; one is nearer \((qarîb)\) and the other is farther/unusual \((ba‘id/gharîb)\), in the first instance the recipient’s understanding of the vocable will be directed towards the nearer signification but what is intended in the further one. This figure is beautiful only if the intention is the depiction of the further signification by the nearer one. The majority of \textit{mutashâbîhât} verses are of this type, such as His saying\footnote{134}{In the printed book the word \textit{ba‘id} is used while in the footnote the editor indicates that the word \textit{gharîb} is used in all the manuscripts of the book apart from one.}, \(Q\) (39:67).

Before examining his definition of \(\textit{ihâm}\), it is worth mentioning the definition of the same term by a near contemporary of al-Râzî: Ibn al-Wâtwât (578/1182) who wrote a well known book on Bâdi‘ \textit{Hadâ‘iq al-Sîhr fi Daqâ‘iq al-Shi‘r} in Persian. The editor of al-Râzî’s book \textit{Nihâyat al-Îjâz} shows the extent of al-Râzî dependence on al-Wâtwât’s book, even though al-Râzî did not mention his dependence on him\footnote{136}{ibid., pp.63-66.}.

Al-Wâtwât gives the following definition of \(\textit{ihâm}\):

\[\text{\(\textit{ihâm}\) lexically has the sense of takhyîl and therefore this device is called also takhyîl. [This device works] when a writer or a poet employs, in his writing (prose or poetry), vocables that have two significations, one nearer \((qarîb)\) and the other stranger \((gharîb)\). When the recipient hears the vocable, his understanding will be directed towards the nearer signification but what is intended is the stranger signification.} \]

Comparing the two definitions shows that al-Râzî omits mentioning the word \textit{takhyîl} from his definition, on the other hand he used the word depiction \((\textit{taswîr})\) which is used by al-Zamakhshari with regard to \textit{takhyîl} and he also quotes \(Q\) (39:67) as an illustration of this figure. Al-Wâtwât did not mention the word depiction nor did he use any Qur’ânic verse to illustrate this figure. Al-Râzî’s paragraph on \(\textit{ihâm}\) can be divided into two sections; the first one fits into what is later called \textit{tawryia} while the second part (when he starts explaining why this figure is beautiful) fits well into al-Zamakhshari’s view of \textit{takhyîl}. The question one could ask why did al-Râzî mix the two figures together? Bonebakker attempts to explain this “confusion” between \textit{takhyîl} and \textit{tawryia} \(\textit{ihâm}\) by proposing that ‘some scholar who was not acquainted with Zamaxsari’s special terminology mistook this discussion of the \textit{takhyîl} for a discussion of the \textit{tawryia}’ and the Qur’ânic verse quoted by al-Râzî in his definition of
ihām Q (39:67) goes back to this source. Bonebakker did not consider the possibility that al-Rāzī could have used al-Waṭwāṭ’s book as one of his sources. If we assume this to be the case (as the editor of al-Rāzī’s book believes) then the source of this apparent “confusion” can be attributed to both al-Waṭwāṭ and al-Rāzī.

Al-Waṭwāṭ identifies ihām (tawriya) with takhyīl and this is the first stage of the confusion. Based on this identification, al-Rāzī made use of al-Waṭwāṭ’s term ihām and explained it by using al-Zamakhshari’s view on takhyīl. One could ask: why al-Rāzī did not use the term takhyīl in his definition of ihām like al-Waṭwāṭ? It is clear from my discussion of al-Rāzī’s interpretation of Q (39:67) that he was not happy about employing the term takhyīl to interpret the Qur’ān. The figure of takhyīl requires surface meaning (not intended) and deeper meaning (intended) and al-Rāzī considers this approach to the text similar to that of the Bāṭinīs and the philosophers, and therefore unacceptable. Thus, he employs the term ihām and rejects the use of the term takhyīl. What is surprising is that he did not use the term Ihām in his interpretation of Q (39:67) instead he followed the usual method i.e. the method of the ancients!

It is worth mentioning that Al-Rāzī ‘ displays a very different approach to anthropomorphic verses in a later little known work entitled Risālat Dhamm al-Ladhhdhāt al-dunyā (Censure of the Pleasures of this World) written in 604/1208 towards the end of his life. Al-Rāzī states that

‘I have found the most correct and advantageous [method] (al-aswab al-aslah) in this regard to be the method of the holy Qur’ān (tariqat al-Qur’ān), the noble Furqān, which is the abandonment of the delving deeply. And of inferring the existence of the Lord of the Worlds from the divisions of bodies in the heavens and the earth and then proclaiming the greatness [of God] to the maximum extent (al-mubālagha fi l-taʿzīm), without wading into details. Thus, I read, on deanthropomorphism (tanzih), [God’s] saying, “God is the Self-sufficient and you are the needy”, His saying, “Naught is as His likeness”, and His saying “Say, He is God, the One. And I read, on the affirmation [of divine attributes] (ithbāt), “ The Beneficent is established on the Throne, His saying “They fear their Lord above them”.. and so forth, by this same rule (qāmūn).
Al-Rāzī’s treatment of anthropomorphic verses reflects a sophisticated approach to the issue in comparison with earlier Ash‘arites. This sophistication is manifest in three connected areas namely: theology, Qur‘ānic hermeneutics and the theory of majāz. In theology he gave a detailed elaboration of the doctrine of priority of reason over revelation and its impact on Qur‘ānic hermeneutics, where he argues that one has to accept the certain dictates of reason and at the same time deny that the prima facie meaning of the revelation is intended if it is in conflict with reason. Two legitimate routes emerge out of this, either employing ta‘wil to harmonize the two or suspending our judgement and delegating the matter to God (tafwiḍ). This route of Ahl al-Salaf (the way of the ancestors) is the preferred one. Nevertheless, he offers detailed interpretations to anthropomorphic verses by anchoring them, his hermeneutics of muḥkam and mutashaḥbih. For him muḥkam covers two categories al-naṣṣ (self-evident utterance) and al-zāhir (obvious utterance) and mutashaḥbih covers two categories: mujmal (broad utterance) and mu‘awwal (reverted utterance). When the mu‘awwal (reverted utterance) has one primary meaning (ḥaqiṣ) and the indicator shows that this meaning is not intended, then one should divert the utterance from the primary meaning to the tropical one (majāz).

For al-Rāzī, the phenomenon of majāz is incorporated in his hermeneutics and plays a major role in his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses. As we have seen in chapter one, al-Rāzī made a significant contribution to the development of the theory of majāz as manifest in his book Nihāyat al-Ijāz. His views on majāz has a great impact on his interpretations of anthropomorphic verses by comparison with his Ash‘arites predecessors such as al-Baqillānī and al-Juwaynī with regard to the details and the complexity of the explanations.

Al-Rāzī rejected the two approaches that were developed by al-Zamakhsharī: majāz based on kināya and takhyīl. His rejection of the first method (majāz based on kināya) is unwarranted because al-Rāzī quoted the interpretation of al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī for the same verse with approval and this interpretation is not that different from al-Zamakhsharī’s. Regarding takhyīl, al-Rāzī shows his aversion to it by his severe criticism of al-Zamakhsharī’s employment of this word. Al-Rāzī considers the method of takhyīl when applied to the Qur‘ān to be similar to the approaches of the Bāṭinīs.
and philosophers in their division of the meanings of the text into *zāhir* (exoteric) and *bātin* (esoteric). For him the only valid way to interpret the Qurʾān is ‘the method of the ancients’ which he later abandoned and replaced with ‘the method of the Qurʾān’ as ‘the most correct and advantageous [method]’. But not all the Ashʿarites will agree with him as we will see with another Ashʿarite ‘Izz al-Dīn b. ‘Abd al-Salām.

4.4  ‘Izz al-Dīn b. ‘Abd al-Salām al-Sulāmī\(^{141}\) (d. 660/1262)

‘Izz al-Dīn b. ‘Abd al-Salām’s importance stems from his novel treatment and classification of figurative language in the Qurʾān in his book *Majāz al-Qurʾān*\(^{142}\) or *al-Ishāra ilā al-Ījāz fī Baʿḍ Anwā‘ al-Majāz*. His detailed classification of the types of *majāz* is unique and unmatched as we can tell from extant sources.

In what follows I will present Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām’s hermeneutics of the Qurʾān. I will then examine his views and classifications of the figurative language in the Qurʾān and finally I will analyse his treatment of anthropomorphic verses in the Qurʾān in the light of his classification of *majāz*.

4.4. 1 Qurʾānic hermeneutics

Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām divides\(^{143}\) the contents of the Qurʾān into three types:

1. What is only known to God like the timing of the Hour.

---

\(^{141}\) He was a shāfiʿī jurist, an Ashʿarite theologian and a commentator on the Qurʾān, see al-Sulāmī by E. Chaumont in EI 2\(^{nd}\) edition.


2. What should be known by all people such as general legal rules and indications of the unity of God

3. What is known to scholars such as specification of the general term and the interpretation (ta’wil) of the mutashâbih.

Regarding the word mutashâbih, Ibn ‘Abd al-Salâm does not explain what he means by it in his book majâz al-Qur’ân. However, in his unpublished commentary on the Qur’ân, he interprets Q (3:7) as follows: Muḥkamât means that ‘the [verses] are made perfect by clarification and their proofs as well as evidences were confirmed by what has been revealed regarding these verses concerning lawful, unlawful, promise and threat’. Ibn ‘Abd al-Salâm mentioned other interpretations but it seems that he prefers the previous one because he introduces other interpretations by saying qâla (it was said) which is used when one is doubtful about something or when the thing said is a mere assertion. What Ibn ‘Abd al-Salâm is saying here is that muḥkamât-type verses are those related to legal and ethical issues.

He explains the word mutashâbihât by giving examples of this type of verse such as the disjoined letters at the beginning of some chapters, and spirit from him (rûḥun min-hu (4:171). The word ta’wilahu he explains as al-marjî’ (reverting). He has also chosen the pause before al-Râsikhûn which means that only God knows the ta’wil of these mutashâbihât. Thus Ibn ‘Abd al-Salâm has two views regarding the mutashâbihât; in his book Majâz al-Qur’ân he believes that the scholars know their interpretations and in his commentary they don’t. Having said that, nowhere in his book Majâz al-Qur’ân dose he equate mutashâbihât with anthropomorphic verses, even though he engages with their interpretations. It is his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses which concerns us here regardless of his attitude to mutashâbihât. But before turning

---


146 See Lane, Arabic-English Lexicon, entry on مرض.

to his interpretation, I will examine his views and classification of *majāz in the Qur‘ān* (figures of speech in the Qur‘ān).

### 4.4.2 Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām’s views of *majāz* and its classification:

Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām defines *majāz* as follows: ‘*al-majāz* is a branch of *ḥaqīqa* because it is the usage of an utterance to convey the first signification that has been assigned to it. *Majāz* is the usage of a *ḥaqīqa* utterance to convey a second signification that has been assigned to it because of an association (*nisba*) and a relationship (*‘alāqa*) between what has been signified by *ḥaqīqa* and what has been signified by *majāz*. Thus, [an utterance] cannot be used tropically (*al-tajawuz*) unless there is an association between what has been signified by *ḥaqīqa* and what has been signified by *majāz*.148

Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām then numerates 44 main types of *majāz* among them:

1. Using the cause (*sabab*) to signify the caused (*musabbab*)
2. Using the caused to signify the cause
3. Attributing the act to its cause
4. Attributing the act to the one who orders it
5. *Majāz al-luzūm* (*majāz* based on concomitance); and this type of *majāz* is in turn subdivided into 16 kinds such as149:
   a. *al-ta‘bīru bi al-mahālli ‘an al-ḥāl* (using the container to signify the content): this is because of the concomitant relation between them such as using the hand to signify power, an eye for perception and the chest for the heart.
   b. *Al-tajawuz bi- nafi al-nazar ‘an al-idhlāl* (Using the action of not gazing figuratively to signify humiliation)

---

149 Ibid., pp. 136–148.
c. **Al-kināyāt**: Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām gives various examples to illustrate this figure such as he has a plenty of ash (kathīru al-ramād) which means that the person is hospitable and generous. Then he adds that ‘it seems that kināya is not a part of majāz’ because the utterance can be used to convey its primary signification.

6. **Majāz al-Tashbīḥ** (majāz based on similarity): Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām explains this type as follows: ‘When the Arabs compare a body with a body (jarman bi jarm), an abstract term with an abstract term (maʿnā bi-maʿnā) or an abstract term with a body; if they use the particle of comparison then this simile is ḥaqiṣī (non-tropical) and if they discard the particle then the simile is majāzī (tropical).’ Then Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām numerates 109 kinds of this type of majāz with various examples from the Qur’ān to illustrate them. The treatment of this type is the most elaborated one in his book.

Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām’s classification of tropical language of the Qur’ān is unique with regard to its method and comprehension. The only surviving treatment of tropical language of the Qur’ān besides his book is that of al-Sharīf al-Murtadā entitled Majāzāt al-Qurʾān in which al-Murtadā identifies and interprets all tropical expressions in the Qurʾān in each chapter according to their order in the Qurʾān without any attempt to classify them and his interpretation was based on the theory of majāz as it was in the 4th/5th AH- 10th/11th CE.

Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām in his classification of majāz ignored all the fine distinctions between majāz lugḥawī (linguistic trope), majāz ʿaqūlī (cognitive trope), kināya that were current during his milieu. He did not use the term istiʿāra (metaphor) instead he opted for majāz al-tashbīḥ and for him no distinction is made between tashbīḥ balīgh (eloquent simile) and istiʿāra. It can be also observed that tamthīl and takhyīl do not figure in his classification. Nevertheless, his classification is more detailed and

---

150 Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām, Majāz al-Qurʾān, ibid., p. 148.
151 Ibid.
153 For the views of Ibn al-Athīr, al-Zamālkānī and al-Raẓī in particular, see the relevant sections on these authors in chapter 1 of this study.
154 Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām’s classification of majāz influenced subsequent writers on the issue of majāz in the Qurʾān such as al-Zarkhashī and al-Suyūṭī: see Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashi, al-Burhaṅ fī ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān,
has no equal. Next we shall see how he uses his classification in his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses.

4.4.3 Interpreting Anthropomorphic verses:

Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām approaches anthropomorphic verses by connecting them with the Ash‘arites’ theory of attributes, and by using his theory of majāz. According to Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām, attributes in general are divided into three types: imperfect, perfect and what is not perfect or imperfect. Only perfect attributes can be predicated to God and all the three previous types of attributes can be predicated to humans. All human attributes are characterised by being dependent and in need of God who is self-sufficient by His essence and attributes.\(^{155}\)

Following the Ash‘arite theory of attributes, Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām divides the attributes of God into two main types: negative and affirmative attributes\(^{157}\) (salbī wa ithbātī).

I. Negative attributes:

Negative attributes are those attributes that negate all imperfections that do not suit God\(^{158}\) such as al-Qudūs (The Holy one), al-Salām (the source of peace) and al-Ghanī (Self-Sufficient).

II. Affirmative attributes:

Affirmative attributes are divided into two types: ṣifāt al-Dhāt (the attributes of the Essence) and Ṣifāt al-Afāl (the attributes of the Acts).


\(^{158}\) Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām, Majāz al-Qur‘ān, p. 239.
1. The attributes of the Essence: These attributes are mentioned to inform and to arouse glorification and grandeur. There are seven attributes: Life, Knowledge, Will, Hearing, Seeing, Power and Speech\(^{159}\).

2. The attributes of the Acts: These attributes are mentioned for glorification, reminding people about the favours of God, encouraging good acts by the promise of reward and discouraging evil acts by the threat of punishment\(^{160}\). They are called the attributes of the Acts ‘because they indicate His actions that have been originated from His power and Will in something other than Him\(^{161}\). Among His attributes are *al-Khāliq* (the creator), *al-Razzāq* (supreme Provider) and so on.

Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām then adds that some attributes if interpreted according to their primary meaning (*ḥaqīqī*) cannot be predicated of God because they indicate imperfection. However, these attributes should be interpreted tropically\(^{162}\). The tropical interpretations of these verses can be either connected to the attributes of the essence or to the attributes of the act\(^{163}\). Here lies the novelty of Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām’s approach to anthropomorphic verses namely connecting them consciously to the Ash’arite theory of attributes. He states that ‘the scholars differ regarding the attributes that cannot be predicted to God if they are understood according to their primary significations (*ḥaqāiqā*). Some of [the scholars] interpreted them to be a manifestation of the Will [of God] which is concomitant with an attribute (*al-Īrāda al-mulāzima li-dhālika al-waṣf*) in most cases\(^{164}\) and in this case these attributes are connected with the attributes of the Essence because the Will of God is one of these attributes. Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām adds that ‘Other scholars interpreted [these attributes] to signify actions that are yielded by these attributes in most cases. In general some of these attributes are related to what is good and other to what is evil\(^{165}\). For example, the following attributes are related to good: (*al-Maḥabbā*) Love, (*al-Raḥma*) mercy, (*baṣṭ al-yadayn*) stretching the hands, and (*al-mawadda*).etc. The following attributes

---


\(^{160}\) Ibid., p. 219.


\(^{162}\) Ibid., p. 239.


\(^{164}\) Ibid., pp. 226-7.

\(^{165}\) Ibid., p. 227.
are related to evil such as (*al-ghadab*) the anger, *al-sakhat* (the wrath), and *al-‘adāwa*\(^{166}\) (the enmity). etc.

Before using his theory of *majāz* to interpret anthropomorphic verses, Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām states that for a given utterance there might be two or more tropical interpretations that are associated with different types of *majāz* and each type reflects a different aspect\(^{167}\). He then identifies three types of *majāz* which can be used to interpret all attributes of God that signify imperfection if understood according to their primary signification\(^{168}\). The three types of *majāz* are:

1. *Majāz al-luzu>m* (*majāz* based on concomitance): This type of *majāz* is valid when the attributes express His will which is the attribute of the Essence. Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām adds that ‘this is the view of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash’arī and the majority of his followers\(^{169}\). Moreover, Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām uses this type of *majāz* to interpret other anthropomorphic verses or attributes not connected with the Will of God as we will see later.

2. *Majāz al-tasbi>b* (*majāz* based on causation): this type of *majāz* is used to signify the effects that are caused by these attributes and therefore these attributes can be linked to the attributes of the Action (*ṣifāt al-fi’l*)\(^{170}\).

3. *Majāz al-tashbi>h* (*majāz* based on similarity): this *majāz* is used to indicate that His treatment of His servants with the effects of these attributes is similar to the treatment of the one who has these attributes in their primary significations\(^{171}\).

Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām then goes on to interpret anthropomorphic verses in the light of the above types of *majāz*. For some verses he gives three interpretations and for others either two or one interpretation as will be shown below. Unlike al-Rāzī, Ibn ‘Abd al-

---


\(^{167}\) Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām, *Majāz al-Qur’ān*, ibid., p. 238. Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām here, unlike al-Rāzī, accepts that there might be more than one figurative interpretation for a given verse and even if one cannot be certain regarding any specific interpretation this does not mean that one has to suspend his/her judgement and opt for *tafwi>d*.

\(^{168}\) Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām, *Majāz al-Qur’ān*, p. 239.

\(^{169}\) ibid.

\(^{170}\) ibid.

\(^{171}\) ibid.
Salām is not troubled with the multiplicity of interpretations for a given verse, even if one cannot determine which one is the most plausible one.

*(al-Rahma)* The mercy of God

Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām used the above three types of *majāz* to give three tropical interpretations of this attribute. He states that *al-Rahma* ‘is a tenderness (rizqa) and pity (shafâqa) and most cases it is associated with having the will of compassion (al-‘arf) towards the object of mercy. What comes out of this mercy in most cases is the beneficence towards the subject of mercy by removing the cause that necessitated this mercy’\(^\text{172}\).

Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām adds that ‘for *al-Shaykh* [Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash’arī mercy] is related the Will of God in a sense of what the merciful will for the object of his mercy’\(^\text{173}\). In this interpretation, the attributes are linked to the attributes of the Essence and the type of *majāz* used is *majāz al-luzūm* (*majāz* based on concomitance). Then Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām introduces the second interpretation saying ‘as for those who consider the attribute as *majāz al-tasbiḥ*, [mercy] refers to manner in which the merciful treats the object of his mercy’\(^\text{174}\). This type of *majāz* is connected to the attributes of the Acts. Finally, for those who consider the attribute of mercy to be based on *majāz al-tashbih* (*majāz* based on similarity); God’s treatment of the object of his mercy is similar to the merciful’s treatment the object of his mercy understood in their primary meaning\(^\text{175}\) (*ḥaqīqa*). Again mercy here is linked to the attribute of the Acts.

Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām does not indicate his preference to any of the above interpretations.

\(Q\ (5: 64)\)

بَنَٰنِ الْبَنَىَّ، مَسْعُوْدٌ

“His hands are outspread”

Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām indicates that outspreading the hands can be interpreted either as *majāz al-mulāzama* or *majāz al-tashbih* ‘Because the one who outspread his hand is

\(^{172}\) Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām, *Majāz al-Qur’ān*, p. 239.

\(^{173}\) ibid., pp. 239-240.

\(^{174}\) ibid., p. 240.

\(^{175}\) ibid.
indicating that he does not prevent what is in it therefore he compares spending and generosity with outspreading the hand for [the purpose] of giving...and this is either [based] on the majāz of mulāzama (majāz based on concomitant) or majāz al-tashbih (majāz based on similarity).

**Q (36:71)**

أَوِلَمْ نَرَأَهُمْ خَلْقًا فَلَمْ يَعْمَلُوا أَيْدِيَاهُمَا

“Have they not seen how that We have created for them of that Our hands”

Ibn ‘Abd al-Salam gives one tropical interpretation for this verse under the type majāz al-luzūm (majāz based on concomitance) in the sub-section of al-Ta‘īr bi- al-mahāll ‘an al-ḥaḍāl (using the container to signify the content): He states that aydīna here signifies ‘what Our power has made’.

**Setting on the throne**

Ibn ‘Abd al-Salam gives a standard tropical interpretation of this expression stating that istiwa‘uhu is ‘majāz that [signifies] his dominion over His kingdom’. Then he adds that the majāz here’ is majāz al-tamthīl (majāz based on analogy) because it is customary for kings to run their kingdoms when they sit on their chairs. Ibn ‘Abd al-Salam use of tamthīl here is very interesting because he did not mention this type of majāz in his classification.

Ibn ‘Abd al-Salam offers a coherent theory to interpret anthropomorphic verses in the Qur’ān. His treatment of these verses differs from early writers in two ways: First, he connects the issue of anthropomorphism in the Qur’ān to the Ash‘ārite theory of attributes mainly to their major division of the affirmative attributes into the attributes of the Acts and the attributes of the Essence. For Ibn ‘Abd al-Salam, all

---

177 Ibid., p. 140.
178 Ibid., p. 250.
179 Ibid., p. 251.
anthropomorphic verses are attributes and therefore could be linked either to the attributes of the Acts or to the attributes of the Essence. His classification of *majāz* into 44 types is unique and unattested in earlier available literature on the subject. From the 44 types of *majāz*, he identified and used three types to interpret anthropomorphic verses in the Qur’ān. He offered more than one tropical interpretation for some verses which indicates that he was not troubled by the multiplicity of interpretations and the inability of determining one certain interpretation. In this regard, he differs from al-Rāzī who indicated his preference for the position of *ta'wīl* because one cannot be certain regarding any given interpretation. Finally, *tamthīl* is only used one with regard to his interpretation of ‘setting on the throne’ without defining it or connecting it with his classification. As for *takhyīl*, he never mentioned or used this figure of speech.

**Conclusion:**

The Ash‘arites’ school grew in the lap of the Mu‘tazilites and their influence is reflected in the issues, methods and the terminology of the Ash‘arites. The history of the Ash‘arites school is divided into two periods the ancients and the moderns and what distinguished between the two is the fusing of Hellenistic philosophy into the schools of the moderns. Following the Mu‘tazilites, the Ash‘arites recognised reason as the foundation of revelation, therefore, issues related to God’s existence and His attributes cannot be established by relying on revelation, otherwise the origin will become the branch which is absurd. Therefore, Qur’ānic verses whose *prima facie* meaning indicates anthropomorphism cannot be taken to signify their apparent meanings. At this point the Ash‘arite attitudes to anthropomorphic verse can be divided into two; the first approach is characterised by not engaging in the interpretation of these verses, while the second approach is characterised by offering tropical interpretation (*ta‘wīl*) of them. Both approaches have a basis in the writing of
al-Ash’arī himself. Among those who followed the second approach at least in some of their writings I examined the contribution of al-Bāqillānī, al-Juwaynī, al-Rāzī and Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām two from the school of the ancients and two from the moderns.

Al-Bāqillānī’s writings displays both approaches to anthropomorphic verses and it seems that he adopted *ta’wīl*-type approach in his late writings. His views on *majāz* reflect the state of theory of *majāz* in the 4th/10th century, nevertheless his presentation of this theory represents the first fully developed theory of *majāz* by an Ash’arite theologian to have reached us. Al-Bāqillānī used the theory of *majāz* to defend his Ash’arite doctrine against the Mu’tazilites, and to challenge and refute the interpretation of the *Mushabbīha* (anthropomorphists). Al-Bāqillānī’s interpretation of anthropomorphic verses reflects an advanced stage in the Ash’arites school in comparison with that of al-Ash’arī. The development of the theory of *majāz* enabled him to offer more detailed interpretation of these verses.

Al-Juwaynī’s writings reflect greater Mu’tazilī influence in comparison with his predecessors. This is manifest in his endorsement of the doctrine of priority of reason over revelation. This doctrine had a great impact on his views on *ta’wīl* and this affected his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses. His theory of *majāz* resembles that of al-Bāqillānī with minor differences. Two approaches to anthropomorphic verses in the Qur’ān are manifest in al-Juwaynī’s writings. In his book *al-Shāmil* he accepts the legitimacy of not engaging in *ta’wīl* while in *al-Irshād* he argued against it. His tropical interpretation of anthropomorphic verses is more elaborate than al-Bāqillānī’s where al-Juwaynī offers more than one way of interpreting these verses and engages in subtle justifications of these interpretations. Finally, it should be noted that he opted for a *tafwiḍ*-type approach to anthropomorphic verses in his last book *al-‘Aqīda al-Nizāmiyya*.

In the second phase of the Ash’arites school (the moderns), *‘Ilm al-Kalām*, Qur’ānic hermeneutics and theory of *majāz* reached their maturity and these developments affected the interpretation of anthropomorphic verses of authors in this period in various degrees. I examined the writings of two authors namely; al-Rāzī and Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām. Al-Rāzī’s treatment of anthropomorphic verses reflects a sophisticated approach to the issue in comparison with earlier Ash’arites. This sophistication is
manifest in three connected areas namely: theology, Qur’anic hermeneutics and the theory of majāz. In theology he gave a detailed elaboration of the doctrine of priority of reason over revelation and its impact on Qur’anic hermeneutics where he argues that one has to accept the certain dictates of reason and at the same time deny that the prima facie meaning of the revelation is intended if it is in conflict with reason. Two legitimate routes emerge out of this: either employing ta’wil to harmonize the two or suspending our judgement and delegating the matter to God (tafwiḍ), and this route of Ahl al-Salaf (the way of the ancestors) is the preferred one. Nevertheless, he offers detailed interpretations of anthropomorphic verses by anchoring them in his hermeneutics of muḥkam and mutashābih. For him muḥkam covers two categories al-nāṣṣ (self-evident utterance) and al-ẓāhir (obvious utterance) and mutashābih covers two categories: mujmal (broad utterance) and mu’awwal (reverted utterance). When the mu’awwal (reverted utterance) has one primary meaning (ḥaqiqi) and the indicator shows that this meaning is not intended, then one should divert the utterance from the primary meaning to the tropical one (majāz). Al-Rāzi incorporated his theory of majāz in his hermeneutics and used it in his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses. His views on majāz has a great impact on his interpretations of anthropomorphic verses in comparison with his Ash’arite predecessors with regard to the details and the complexity of the explanations.

Nevertheless, Al-Rāzi rejected the two tropes identified by al-Zamakhshari, majāz based on kināya and takhyīl. His rejection of the first trope (majāz based on kināya) is unwarranted because al-Rāzi quoted a similar interpretation to al-Zamakhshari by of al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī with approval. Regarding takhyīl, al-Rāzi shows his aversion by his severe criticism of al-Zamakhshari’s employment of this word. Al-Rāzi considers the method of takhyīl when applied to the Qur’ān to be similar to the approaches of the Bāṭinīs and philosophers in their classification of meanings of the text into zāhir (exoteric) and bātin (esoteric). For him the only valid way to interpret the Qur’ān is ‘the method of the ancients’ which he later abandoned and replaced with ‘the method of the Qur’ān’ as ‘the most correct and advantageous [method]’. 
Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām was consistent in his approach to anthropomorphism in the Qur’ān. He offers a coherent theory to interpret anthropomorphic verses in the Qur’ān. His treatment of these verses differs from early writers in two ways: First, he connects the issue of anthropomorphism in the Qur’ān to the Ash‘arite theory of attributes mainly to their major classification of the affirmative attributes into the attributes of the Acts and the attributes of the Essence. For Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām, all anthropomorphic verses are attributes and therefore could be linked either to the attributes of the Acts or to the attributes of the Essence. His classification of majāz in the Qur’ān into 44 types is unique and unattested in earlier available literature on the subject. From the 44 types of majāz, he identified and used three types to interpret anthropomorphic verses in the Qur’ān. He offered more than one tropical interpretation for some verses which indicates that he was not troubled by the multiplicity of interpretations and the inability of determining one certain interpretation. In this regard, he differs from al-Ｒāzi who indicated his preference for the position of tafwīd because one cannot be certain regarding any given interpretation. Finally, he used the trope tamthīl only once while takhyīl is never mentioned by him.

The Asha’rites having accepted the Mu’tazilites doctrine of priority of reason over revelation displayed two approaches to anthropomorphic verses as mentioned above. Their doctrine affected their interpretation. Their interpretation of anthropomorphic verses varies from one author to another and reflects the development of kalām, Qur’ānic hermeneutics and the theory of majāz and the influence of these disciplines on these authors. As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, due to the diversity of views within this school it is very difficult to generalise. However, two points are worth mentioning regarding the approaches of Ash‘rites authors studied here: first, interpreting anthropomorphic verses is not a matter of exegesis alone. It involves a complex web of disciplines as we have seen manifested especially in the writings of al-Rāzi. The impact of the development of the theory of majāz can be seen in the writings of all authors. However, they did not make use of certain elements of this theory such as those introduced by al-Zamakhsharī, nevertheless they employed the theory to the limit for two purposes. First, they used it to defend their doctrines
against the Mu'tazilites, such as the issue of the beatific vision. Second, they used it like the Mu'tazilites to harmonize reason and revelation with regard to other anthropomorphic verses.
Conclusion

Hellenistic philosophy had a great impact on the three Abrahamic religions; it made
the theologians of these religions rethink and present their doctrines according to the
standards of rationality of this philosophy. The older siblings of Islam, Judaism and
Christianity, had to take this path long before Islam when they tried to reconcile
revealed notions of God with the rational conceptions of Him. This is manifest in their
approach to anthropomorphism in the Bible, where they resort to allegorical methods
developed in ancient Greece. This was seen especially in the writings of Philo and
Origen. On the other hand, Muslim theologians resorted to different methods in their
endeavour to harmonize reason and revelation with regard to the issue of
anthropomorphism. Tropical interpretation of anthropomorphic verses in the Qu’rān
was the way followed by Muslim theologians.

My research shows that the process of interpreting anthropomorphic verses in the
Qu’rān (from the 2nd/8th to the 7th/13th century focusing on the Mu’tazilite and the
Ash‘arite schools) is not a mere exegetical practice, rather it is a result of interaction
of three disciplines: Islamic theology, Qur’ānic hermeneutics and theory of majaţ. The
theoretical foundations of tropical interpretations of anthropomorphic verses are based
on two disciplines, namely theology and Qur’ānic hermeneutics, which justify and
legitimise these interpretations. Theology and Qur’ānic hermeneutics are linked in the
doctrine of the relationship between reason and revelation first introduced by the
Mu’tazilites and later adopted by the Ash‘arites. The doctrine can be summarised as
follows: if there is a conflict between reason and revelation, then reason has priority
over revelation and scripture must be interpreted tropically in order to harmonize the
two. To give priority to scripture is impossible, because to do so would invalidate
reason, and reason is the only method available for establishing the truth of the
scripture. This doctrine is applied to Qur’ānic anthropomorphism as follows:
anthropomorphic descriptions of God in the Qur’ān literally understood are in conflict
with our knowledge of God as an incorporeal being which is attained by the use of
reason; therefore these verses need to be interpreted figuratively in order to harmonize
the two. In order to justify this approach to anthropomorphic verses, the theologians
found in Q (3:7) the scriptural justification they need. Moreover, it is in this verse that
Islamic theology and Qur’anic hermeneutics (or reason and revelation) meet again, providing theoretical foundation for the exegesis of anthropomorphic verses. In general, Muslim theologians accepted the second reading of this verse, that those who are firmly rooted in knowledge can interpret the \textit{mutashabihāt} verses. It is the Mu’tazilites who first consider anthropomorphic verses as a type of \textit{mutashabihāt}, and the \textit{Muhkamāt} verses as those which indicate the dissimilarity of God to his creatures. (it is the proof of reason which tells us which is which), such as Q (42: 44) which is considered as \textit{muhkam}. Therefore, the \textit{mutashabihāt} verses have to be understood in the light of \textit{Muhkamāt} ones. The term \textit{ta’wil} acquired a technical meaning and came to signify the process of turning the utterance away from its prima facie meaning (\textit{Zāhir}) to its tropical meaning (\textit{majāz}). Applied to anthropomorphic verses, these verses should not be understood according to their prima facie meaning; instead they should be turned away from this meaning to the tropical one. It is at this point we can see the importance of \textit{majāz} as a device which allows the process of \textit{ta’wil} to take place, and this is the main theme of my research.

The theory of \textit{majāz} in Islamic thought was not formulated at once; rather it took centuries to develop, like other disciplines such as rhetoric, grammar, \textit{kalām}, etc. Early authors such as Sibawayh were aware of the phenomenon of \textit{majāz} without explicitly mentioning the term. Generally speaking these authors identified various strategies such as \textit{ḥadhīf} (ellipsis), \textit{ziyāda} (pleonasm), \textit{kinnāya} and \textit{iltifaṭ} (grammatical shift), and \textit{isti’āra}. All these strategies were applied to the Qur’ān and compared with proper Arabic usage. It is in the writings of al-Jāḥiẓ that we see the beginning of the theory of \textit{majāz}, his usage of the terms \textit{ḥaqīqa} and \textit{majāz} reflects a clear understanding of each of these terms in their technical sense and an awareness of the dichotomy between them. With the writing of al-Khafajī the branches of ‘\textit{Ilm al-bayān} (simile, \textit{majāz} and \textit{isti’āra}) reach an advanced stage in their development, but without a unifying theory that can spell out the exact relationship between them, especially with regard to \textit{majāz} and \textit{isti’āra}. This would be achieved by ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī who advanced the theory of \textit{majāz} and affected all those who came after him. His main contribution consists of a distinction between \textit{majāz ‘aqīl} and \textit{al-majāz al-lughawi}, and
the division of al-majāz al-lughawi into īṣṭiʿāra and what is called later majāz mursal. He also shifted the focus in the study of majāz from single words to the level of one sentence and more, calling this new figure tamthil (analogy). Al-Rāzī acknowledges the importance of al-Jurjānī’s books, which he abbreviated and rearranged in his book Nihāyat al-Ījāz fi Dirāyat al-Ijāz. His elaboration of al-majāz al-lughawi is the first comprehensive treatment written on the subject. Al-Rāzī’s book was very influential on subsequent generations such as al-Sakkākī. Al-Sakkākī’s section on ‘īlm al-balāgha in his book al-Miftāḥ proved very popular among later writers, to the extent that they forgot al-Jurjānī’s work. Al-Sakkākī was at that time the first to divide ‘Īlm al-Balāgha into three branches: bayān, maʿānī and what is known later as badī’, and the first to determine their exact topics and divisions. Al-Sakkākī discusses the issue of majāz and īṣṭiʿāra under his section on bayān. A summary of al-Miftāḥ by al-Qazwīnī (Talkhīṣ as-Miftāḥ) proved to be more popular than the Miftāḥ itself where he introduces a new division of al-majāz (mufrad and murakkab). Subsequently many commentaries and super-commentaries were written on it. These commentaries hardly added anything new or advanced the discussion after al-Jurjānī; nevertheless they enrich the intellectual life of Muslims.

My thesis has shown how Muslim theologians and exegetes employed the theory of majāz to interpret anthropomorphic verses (from the 2nd/8th to the 7th/13th century focusing on the Muʿtazilite and the Ashʿarite schools). More importantly, given the long period it took the majāz theory to develop, I have demonstrated the impact of the development of the theory of majāz on the interpretation of anthropomorphic verses. This impact can be seen in the increased sophistication of these interpretations and their multiplicity which corresponds to the development of the theory of majāz given the parallel development of Islamic theology and Qurʾānic hermeneutics.

Tropical interpretation of anthropomorphic verses is attested from the 2nd/7th century. Indeed, the Ṭafsīr of Mujāhid (d.104/722) contains one of the earliest tropical interpretations of anthropomorphic verses. He does not offer any justification for his interpretations, nor does he give any reason as to why the prima facie sense of the verses should not be taken. In the writings of Muqāṭil b. Sulaymān (d.150/767), we
observed his use of the word *mathal* to denote tropical use of language with regard to anthropomorphic verses, but as yet no theory of tropical language existed. Abū ‘Ubayda’s (d. 210/825) interpretations of anthropomorphic verses are brief. Only in one place did he use the words *mathal* and *tashbīh* in his interpretation and he tried to explain the mechanism of the trope in the verse. This is a new development in the interpretation of anthropomorphic verses started by him, and it will be the norm in later writings. Al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm (d. 246/860) used both terms, *mathal* and *tamthīl*, to interpret anthropomorphic verses. His interpretation of anthropomorphic verses is more mature and nuanced more than with earlier authors, and he attempted to explain the reasons for the use of these anthropomorphic verses in the Qur’ān by using the concepts of *mathal* and *tamthīl*. This makes his contribution original and represents an advanced stage in the history of the development of the interpretation of these verses.

By the time of Ibn Qutayba (276/889), *majzūz* in a technical sense as a counterpart to *ḥaqīqa* was used, nevertheless he did not employ this term in his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses. The awareness of the phenomenon of *majzūz* and its development provided our authors with the tool to interpret anthropomorphic verses. It also enabled some of these authors, especially al-Qāsim and Ibn Qutayba, to offer more detailed interpretations that try to explain the reasons behind describing God in anthropomorphically.

The Mu’tazilite school championed tropical interpretation of anthropomorphic verses from its inception and this is due to the Mu’tazilites’ continued endeavour to harmonize reason and revelation. From the earliest times, the Mu’tazilites emphasised the role of reason in their theology and this has an impact on their interpretation of the Qur’ān. Very little Mu’tazilite literature reached us from the 2nd and 3rd centuries and therefore it is difficult to present a complete picture of their interpretation of anthropomorphic verses.

al-ʿĀṣamm’s (d. 200/816 or 201/817) interpretations of anthropomorphic verses are short and some of them are a kind of a substitution of one word for another. In his comments on only one verse Q (24:35), one finds a justification of the interpretation. All of these interpretations are tropical, and with no terms mentioned to describe the
phenomenon of *majāz*, nor are any explanations given as to why one should interpret them figuratively. This confirms what we know that it was al-Jāḥīẓ (d. 255 AH/869) who first used the terms *majāz-*haqīqa in a technical way. Al-Jāḥīẓ is also the first theologian we know so far to assert the priority of reason over revelation, and to use explicitly the term *majāz* in a technical sense in interpreting anthropomorphic verses. His interpretations reflect a big step in the interpretation of anthropomorphic verses if we compare him with al-Āṣamm or with early commentators such as Mujāhid, Muqātil or Abū ‘Ubayda. The theory of *majāz* which he played an important role in its articulation had an impact on his interpretations by basing them on solid linguistic grounds. The theological and hermeneutical premises that he articulated and used will be the basis for any future attempt to interpret anthropomorphic verses by the Muʿtazilites. Al-Jubbāʾi’s (303/915) interpretations reflect as expected a Muʿtazilite theology and hermeneutics. Al-Jubbāʾi used the word *majāz* in a technical sense in some of his interpretations. This demonstrates that the concept of *majāz* was fully diffused within the Muʿtazilite school in his time. Although he did not use the term *majāz* in all of his interpretations, nevertheless his interpretations can be classified as tropical ones.

The theory of *majāz* started with al-Jāḥīẓ who was the first to speak about the dichotomy of *haqīqa*-majāz as indicated in chapter one. My research in the writing of early Muʿtazilites confirms this and shows that the term *majāz* was used in its technical sense after al-Jāḥīẓ in the writing of al-Jubbāʾi and late writers. Before al-Jāḥīẓ various commentators offer tropical interpretation of anthropomorphic verses, but without using the term *majāz* and with little explanation of their interpretation like the interpretation of al-Āṣamm. It is in the writing of al-Jāḥīẓ we find the use of technical language and linguistic and theological explanation in his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses in order to establish his interpretations on solid rational grounds. After al-Jāḥīẓ the use of *majāz* in a technical sense to interpret anthropomorphic verses became established as we have seen in the interpretation of al-Jubbāʾi of anthropomorphic verses.

ʿAbd-al-Jabbār’s (d. 415/1024) writings reflect a mature development of Muʿtazilite theology and hermeneutics. He enacted his own theory of *majāz* within the context of
`Uṣūl al-fiqh` and `Kalām` to use it in his interpretation. His interest in `majāz` reflects its utmost importance in his hermeneutics because it is the primary tool to harmonize reason and revelation. ‘Abd al-Jabbār applied systematically his theory of `majāz` to all anthropomorphic verses and interpreted them to be in accord with proof of reason.

‘Abd al-Jabbār’s method of interpretation generally consists of listing all the possible meanings of a word, then he will take one tropical meaning that can be reconciled with his theology. His interpretation of these verses clearly reflects the advanced stage of the theory of `majāz` at his time.

It is with Al-Zamakhshari (d. 538/1144) that Mu'tazilite interpretation of anthropomorphic verses reached its peak of sophistication and maturity. The uniqueness of his approach rests first and foremost on the ideas of ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī. Indeed, Al-Zamakhshari developed some of these ideas and applied them to the Qur’ān. ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī’s theory of imagery in general and his theory of `majāz` in particular served as a base on which al-Zamakhshari establishes his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses.

He developed two unique tropes to interpret anthropomorphic verses.

First trope: `majāz` based on `kināya`  
By using `majāz` based on `kināya` to interpret certain expressions (such as God “sitting firmly on the Throne”) in their entirety without pausing on the single words that make these expressions, al-Zamakhshari wants the hearer to move away from the first meaning to the second and from the second to the third meaning. Because to pause on these components such as “hand” or “sitting firmly” might lead to either farfetched interpretation which would miss the point of what the Qur’ān tries to convey or worse might lead to gross anthropomorphism which he tries to eliminate in the first instance. Al-Zamakhshari’s interpretation is novel and this new trope represents an original contribution to the theory of imagery indeed.

Second trope: `takhyīl`.

For al-Zamakhshari `takhyīl` is a special case of `tamthīl` in which the analogue in the case of `takhyīl` is absurd and is considered as a hypothesised thing. On the other hand hypothesised things can be imagined in the mind like real objects. `Takhyīl` is the
depiction of meaning for the purpose of making it accessible to the recipient in a meaningful and effective way that cheers the soul and when using takhyīl one does not pay much attention to the words used to create the image; instead one should concentrate on the essence and crux of the expression. When it comes to anthropomorphic verses, he believes that takhyīl is the most suitable method to interpret them because by using it one gets to the point of the expression which is the depiction of God’s majesty and might without failing into the trap of anthropomorphism or farfetched interpretations. Al-Zamakhsharī criticised what could be described as “traditional Mu’tazilite” interpretations of anthropomorphic verses of using the single-word majāz as a means to interpret.

The Mu’tazilites employed and developed a theory of majāz as an effective tool in their interpretation of anthropomorphic verses. This does not mean that their interpretations were uniform and identical; on the contrary, there are big differences between the early Mu’tazilites and later ones. Within early Mu’tazilite circles, the employment of majāz was simple due to the immaturity of the theory of majāz and Qur’ānic hermeneutics. It is in the writing of al-Zamakhsharī the theory of majāz reached its maturity.

The Asha’rites, having accepted the Mu’tazilites’ doctrine of priority of reason over revelation, displayed two approaches to anthropomorphic verses. The first approach is characterised by not engaging in the interpretation of these verses while the second approach is characterised by offering a tropical interpretation. Their interpretation of anthropomorphic verses varies from one author to another and reflects the development of kalām, Qur’ānic hermeneutics and the theory of majāz.

Al-Bāqillānī’s (d. 403/1013) theory of majāz fits very well into what we know about majāz in the 4th/10th century. His presentation of the phenomenon of majāz represents the first fully developed theory of it by an Ash‘rite theologian to have reached us. His tropical interpretation of anthropomorphic verses reflects his understanding and presentation of the theory of majāz in the 4th/10th century which he effectively utilised.
to defend his Ash’arite creed against the Mu’tazilites, and to refute the interpretation of the mushabbiha (anthropomorphists). Al-Baqillani’s interpretation of anthropomorphic verses reflects an advanced stage in the Ash’arite school in comparison with that of al-Ash’ari. The development of the theory of majaz enabled him to offer a more detailed interpretation of these verses.

Abū al-Ma‘āfi al-Juwayni’s (d. 478/1085) theory of majaz did not differ much from that of al-Baqillani apart from minor points and it seems that the development of the theory of majaz in his lifetime did not have any impact on his views on majaz. His interpretation of anthropomorphic verses is more elaborate than al-Baqillani’s. Al-Juwayni offers more than one way of interpreting these verses and engages in subtle justifications of these interpretations. It should be noted that he opted for a tafwīd-type approach to anthropomorphic verses in his last book al-‘Aqīda al-Nizāmiyya.

Al-Rāzi’s (543/1149/606/1209) treatment of anthropomorphic verses reflects a sophisticated approach to the issue in comparison with earlier Ash’arites. This sophistication is manifest in three connected areas namely: theology, Qur’anic hermeneutics and the theory of majaz. In theology he gave a detailed elaboration of the doctrine of priority of reason over revelation and its impact on Qur’anic hermeneutics. Two legitimate routes emerge out of this: either employing ta’wil to harmonize the two or suspending our judgement and delegating the matter to God (tafwiḍ) and this route of Ahl al-Salaf (the way of the ancestors) is the preferred one. Nevertheless, he offers detailed interpretations to anthropomorphic verses by anchoring them on his hermeneutics of muḥkam and mutashabih. For al-Rāzi, the phenomenon of majaz is incorporated in his hermeneutics and plays a major role in his interpretation of anthropomorphic verses. His views on majaz have a great impact on his interpretations of anthropomorphic verses by comparison with his Ash’arites predecessors, such as al-Baqillani and al-Juwayni with regard to the details and the complexity of the explanations. Al-Rāzi rejected the two approaches that were developed by al-Zamakhshari. Al-Rāzi considers the method of takhyīl to be similar to the approaches of the Bātinīs and philosophers in their division of the meanings of the text into zāhir (exoteric) and bāṭin (esoteric). For him the only valid way to interpret
the Qur’ān is ‘the method of the ancients’ which he later abandoned and replaced with ‘the method of the Qur’ān’ as ‘the most correct and advantageous [method]’.

‘Izz al-Dīn b. ‘Abd al-Salām al-Sulāmī (d. 660/1262) Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām offers a coherent theory to interpret anthropomorphic verses in the Qur’ān. His treatment of these verses differs from early writers in two ways: First, all anthropomorphic verses are attributes and therefore could be linked either to the attributes of the Acts or to the attributes of the Essence. Second, his classification of majāz into 44 types is unique and unattested in earlier available literature on the subject. He identified and used three types to interpret anthropomorphic verses in the Qur’ān. He offered more than one tropical interpretation for some verses, which indicates that he was not troubled by the multiplicity of interpretations and the inability of determining one certain interpretation. In this regard, he differs from al-Rāzī who indicated his preference for the position of tafwīd, because one cannot be certain regarding any given interpretation.

The Ash‘arites tropical interpretation of anthropomorphic verses involves a complex web of disciplines and as we have seen manifested especially in the writings of al-Rāzī. The impact of the development of the theory of majāz can be seen in the writings of all authors. However, they did not make use of certain elements of this theory like those introduced by al-Zamakhsharī, nevertheless they employed the theory to the limit

Issues clarified by this research

1. The research here shows that Muslim theologians like their Jewish and Christian counterparts attempted to harmonize their revelation and reason with regard to anthropomorphic descriptions of God in the Qur’ān. But the similarity stops here, because the Muslim theologians studied here did not employ allegorical interpretation in their endeavour. As we have seen they based their interpretation on the theory of majāz which they grounded in the Arabic language. They emphasised the objective nature of majāz and how it is grounded in the usage of early Arabs as manifest in Arabic poetry. Their aim was to establish interpretations of the Qur’ān on objective criteria which could
be verified, and this is not possible in the case of allegorical interpretation. Having said that, the allegorical interpretation of the Qur’ān developed by other groups such as the Ismā‘īlīs, philosophers and the Sūfis should be noted.

2. The treatment of Mujāhid of anthropomorphic interpretations indicates that tropical interpretation of anthropomorphic verses began before the establishment of theological schools and the formation of their doctrine. This means that the tropical interpretation of anthropomorphic verses has a root in earlier Islamic tradition and represents a genuine position within Islamic scholarship. In my opinion the only reason behind this tropical interpretation is other verses of the Qur’ān which indicate God’s dissimilarity to his creation.

3. The treatment of al-Zamakhshāri of anthropomorphic verses represents a big shift in the history of the interpretation of these verses. This shift consists in his analysis of tropes on the level of one sentence of more contrary to the practice before him where the emphasis was on a single word-

4. The research shows that the double way of approaching anthropomorphic verses started with al-Ash‘arī himself and dominated the school after him. The bi-lā kayf’approach was used by Al-Ash‘arī but later it was developed into tafwīd-type approach in the writing of al-Juwaynī. Therefore, it is not tenable to say that the Ash‘arites adopted ‘an intermediate position between the

---

1 Ricoeur, ibid., p. 44.
literalists and the Mu'tazilites...(* bila kayf*) or to say that tropical interpretation of anthropomorphic verses started with al-Baghdādī or al-Juwaynī, as some authors have claimed.

Suggestions for future research:

The research here can be taken and expanded into three directions:

1. The treatment of the Ash'arites’ interpretation of anthropomorphic verses can be expanded to cover later Ash'arite commentators such as al-Baydāwī and the super-commentaries written on it. It would be interesting to see the reception of al-Zamakhshārī’s theory of *majaż* in these works.

2. The same treatment here can be applied to the interpretations of other theological schools and trends such as Māturīdīs, Shī'ites (Zaydīs, Ismā‘īlīs, Imāmīs), Ibāḍīs, Sūfis and modern commentaries.

3. Comparative study of Jewish-Christian-Muslim interpretations of anthropomorphic verses focusing on selected authors or periods.

---

**Bibliography**

**Encyclopedias:**

*Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics*, general editor Kees Versteegh

*Encyclopaedia of Arabic Literature*, Edited by Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey,

*Encyclopedia Iranica:*


*Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*. Edited by: Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John
Nawas and Everett Rowson, Brill, 2008

*Encyclopaedia Judaica*, edited by Fred Skolnik, editor-in-chief; Michael Berenbaum,
executive editor, 2nd ed., Detroit : Macmillan Reference USA in association with the


*Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*, edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, general editor,

*Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Version 1.0, London and New York:
Routledge, 1998 , (C.D)

**Websites:**


University of Southern California: Compendium of Muslim Texts.

[http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/hadithsunnah/muslim/039.smt.html](http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/hadithsunnah/muslim/039.smt.html)
Dictionaries:
Edward William Lane, Arabic-English Lexicon (London: Williams & Norgate 1863)

Articles and Books

290


Alūsī, Ḥusam Muḥyī al-Dīn, The Problem of Creation in Islamic Thought, Baghdad, 1968


al-Balkhi, Abû al-Qâsim, Bâb dhikr al-Mu’tazila Min Maqalât al-Islâmiyyîn, ed. by Fu’âd Sayyid, al-Dâr al-Tûnisiyya, Tunisia, 1974


Daṭîf, Shawqi, *al-Balāgha Taṭwur wa tārīkh*, Dār al-Maʿārif, Cairo, 1965


Al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid, *Asās al-Qīyās*, Edited by Fahd al-Sarḥān, al-Riyāḍ, 1413 A.H


Al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid, *Shifāʾ al-Ghalīl fī bayān al-Shabah wa al-Mukhīl wa Masālik al-Taʿlīl*, Published, Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, Beirut, 1999


Holladay, Carl R. *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish authors*, Aristobulus, Society of Biblical Literature, 1995


298
Ibn al-Watwāt, Rashīd al-Dīn Muḥammad al-‘Imrī, *Hadāʾiq al-Sīhr fī Daqāʾiq al-Shiʿr*; translated from Persian into Arabic by Ibrāhīm Amin al-Shawārībi, Cairo, 2004


Johnson, Mark. (ed.), *Philosophical Perspectives on Metaphor*, University of Minnesota Press, 19981


al-Khafāfī, Shihāb al-Dīn ʿĀhmad,  *Ṭīrāz al-Majālīs*, Cairo, 1284 A.H (1868 CE)

Khalaf Allāh, Muḥammad ʿĀhmad Khalaf Allāh , *min al-wujha al-naṣīḥyya fi dirāsat al-adab wa naqdih*, Cairo 1970


Lagrange, Michel. “De l’ambiguïté (mutashābih) dans le Coran: tentative d’explication des exégetes musulmans, Quaderni di studi arabi 3 1985


Makdisi, G., *Ashʿarī and Ashʿarites in Islamic Religious History*, *Studia Islamica* No. 17, 1962 and No. 18 (1963)


Maṭlūb, ʿAḥmad Maṭlūb, ʿʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī, al-Kuwayt 1973


McNamara, Martin; Cathcart, Kevin J.; Maher, Michael. *The Aramaic Bible: The Targums*, Continuum International Publishing Group, 1994


Ricoeur, P. *The Rule of Metaphor*, Routledge, 1986


Al-Sayyid al-Jurjānī, ʿḤāshiya ʿalā Sharḥ al-muṭawwāl of al-taftāzānī, manuscript in al-Azhar library, 530/10165 *balāgha*


Shihadeh, Ayman, From al-Ghazālī to al-Rāzī: 6th/12th century Developments in Muslim Philosophical Theology, in *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, vol. 15 (2005)


Tha‘lab, *Qawā‘id al-shī‘r*, ed. by Ramadan ‘Abd al-Tawwāb, Cairo, 1966


Van Ess, Josef *The Youthful God: Anthropomorphism in Early Islam*, The University lecture in Religion at Arizona State University, 1989


Wansbrough, J. Quranic Studies: *Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*, Foreword, Translations, and Expanded Notes by Andrew Rippin, Prometheus Books, 2004

Watt, W. M., Some Muslim Discussions of Anthropomorphism, Transactions of the Glasgow University Oriental Society, 13 (1947-49)

Weiss, Bernard. *The Search For God’s Law, Islamic Jurisprudence in the Writing of Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmīdī*, University of Utah Press, Salt Lake City, 1992


