AL-KASHSHĀF: AL-ZAMAKHSHARĪ’S (D. 538/1144)  
MU’TAZILITE EXEGESIS OF THE QUR’ĀN

A Dissertation
submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Georgetown University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Arabic and Islamic Studies

By

Kifayat Ullah, M.A.

Washington, DC
March 21, 2013
Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd b. ‘Umar al-Zamakhsharī Jār Allāh is one of the last widely known and outstanding Ḥanafī Mu‘tazilite scholars who made important contributions in the fields of Qur’ānic exegesis, theology, and Arabic linguistics. Primarily, his fame rests upon the Qur’ān commentary *al-Kashshāf ‘an haqā’iq al-tanzīl wa ‘uyūn al-ghawāmiḍ fī wujūh al-ta’wil*. My thesis is that al-Zamakhsharī’s Qur’ān commentary is squarely within the Mu‘tazilite tradition. I selected those verses where anthropomorphisms need clarification as well as verses that are known to be points of contention between the Mu‘tazilites and traditionists. I examined and evaluated *al-Kashshāf* within the dogmatic framework of “the five principles” (*al-ERVED al-khamsa*) which are considered indispensable for a Mu‘tazilite identity. These principles are: “God’s unity” (*al-tawhīd*), “God’s justice” (*al-‘adl*), “reward and punishment” (*al-wa‘d wa-al-wa‘īd*), “intermediate position between belief and unbelief” (*al-manzila bayna al-manzilatayn*) and “enjoining good and forbidding evil” (*al-amr bi-al-ma‘rūf wa-al-nahy ‘an al-munkar*). This dissertation demonstrates that al-Zamakhsharī’s *al-Kashshāf* is not only a quintessence of Mu‘tazilite doctrine which was adopted from the earlier Mu‘tazilite exegetes, but also unequivocally establishes the fact that he expounds the five principles throughout his interpretation of the Qur’ān. Despite, al-Zamakhsharī’s Mu‘tazilite *tafsīr*, it remained popular not only amongst the Mu‘tazilites but also was prescribed in the *madrassas*. 
curriculums, as well as cited, adopted, and commented upon by the orthodox community, the Shi’ites, and the Zaydites. In fact, no other book in the history of *tafsīr* has been commented upon in the forms of glosses, superglosses, supercommentaries, and *mukhtaṣars* more than *al-Kashshāf*. 
Acknowledgements

Special thanks to my Thesis Advisor Felicitas Opwis whose encyclopedic knowledge of Islamic Studies inspired this study and guided its progress. I am indebted to Barbara Stowasser, Daniel Madigan and Walid Saleh for their excellent advice, encouragement and support.

My thanks to my colleagues and friends at the Georgetown University, who provided suggestions, edited draft and motivated me throughout the research and writing process, specifically Nancy Farley and the staff of the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies.

I am immensely grateful for having constant support and encouragement of my family. I especially thank my wife Kahkashan for her sincere and steadfast support.
# Table of Contents

## Introduction

1. Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd b. ‘Umar al-Zamakhsharī 1
2. Origin of the Mu‘tazilites 2
3. *Tafsīr, Ta’wil, Ma‘ānī, and Sharḥ* 5
4. The Qur’ānic Exegesis 6
5. *Al-Kashshāf* 12
6. Thesis 14
7. Notes on Translation and Transliteration 16

## Chapter 1: Al-Zamakhsharī’s Biography

1. Early Life of al-Zamakhsharī 17
2. Education of al-Zamakhsharī 20
3. Al-Zamakhsharī’s Teachers 21
4. Al-Zamakhsharī’s Students 23
5. Travels of al-Zamakhsharī 25
6. Al-Zamakhsharī’s Visits to Mecca 26
7. Crises in the Lives of Muslim Scholars 28
8. Crisis of al-Ashʿarī 30
9. Crisis of al-Ghazālī 33
10. Crisis of Ibn ‘Aqīl 38
11. Crisis of al-Zamakhsharī 43
12. Conclusion 48

## Chapter 2: Mu‘tazilites

1. Origin of the Mu‘tazilites 52
2. Wāsil b. ‘Aṭā’ 53
3. ‘Amr b. ‘Ubayd 58
4. Viewpoints regarding the Emergence of the Mu‘tazilites 60
5. Abstinence from the Worldly Affairs 61
6. Neutrality in the Civil Wars 62
7. Withdrawal from the Community 63
8. Political Movement 68
9. Mu‘tazilite Schools of Baṣra and Baghdad 75
10. Conclusion 77

## Chapter 3: Qur’ānic Exegesis

1. *Tafsīr, Ta’wil, Ma‘ānī, and Sharḥ* 79
2. *Tafsīr* 80
3. Ta‘wīl 82
4. Ma‘ānī 84
5. Sharḥ 85
6. Similarities and Difference between tafsīr, ta‘wil, ma‘ānī, and sharḥ 85
7. Qur’ānic Exegesis in Early Islam 89
8. Traditional Muslims’ Views 89
9. Tafsīr bi-al-ma‘thūr and Tafsīr bi-al-ra’y 93
10. Western Scholars’ Views 95
11. The Development of the Qur’ānic Exegesis 103
12. Paraphrastic and Narrative Exegesis 104
13. Legal Exegesis 104
14. Linguistic Exegesis 105
15. Philosophical Exegesis 106
16. Mystical Exegesis 108
17. Theological Exegesis 110
18. Shi‘ite Exegesis 111
19. Zaydite Exegesis 112
20. Isma‘īlī Exegesis 114
21. Kharijite Exegesis 115
22. Mu‘tazilite Exegesis 116
23. Conclusion 121

Chapter 4: Al-Zamakhshari’s Methodology of Tafsīr 124

1. Muḥkamāt wa mutashābihāt 125
2. ‘Ilm al-ma‘ānī and ‘ilm al-bayān 130
3. Questions and Answers (as‘ila wa-ajwiba) 141
4. Grammar 144
5. Tafsīr al-Qur’ān bi-al-Qur’ān 147
6. Ḥadīth 148
7. Variant Readings of the Qur’ān (qirā‘āt) 155
8. Conclusion 158

Chapter 5: The Five Principles (al-uṣūl al-khamsa) 160

1. First Principle: Unity of God (tawḥīd) 162
2. Createdness of the Qur’ān 180
3. Anthropomorphism and Transcendence 186
4. Vision of God 190
5. God’s Seat (kursī) 196
6. God’s Throne (‘arsh) 197
7. God’s Hand (yad Allāh) 198
8. Coming of Lord (muji‘ rabb) 200
9. Appearing of God (ityān Allāh) 201
10. With (*ma‘iyyat*)
11. Face (*wajh*)
12. Conclusion

Chapter 6: Second Principle: Justice (‘*adl*)

1. The Concept of Grace (*lutf*)
2. The Best (*aṣlaḥ*)
3. Going Astray (*iḍlāl*)
4. Sealing of the Hearts (*khatm al-qulūb*)
5. God does not Will any Evil but Good
   (*anna Allāh lā yurīd sharr bal yurīd al-khayr*)
6. Conclusion


1. The Concept of Belief (*īmān*)
2. The Promise and the Threat (*al-wa‘d wa al-wa‘īd*)
3. The Intermediate Position between Belief and Unbelief (*al-manzila bayna al-manzilatayn*)
4. The Major and the Minor Sins (*al-kabā‘ir wa-al-saghā‘ir*)
5. The Concept of Constraint (*iljā‘*)
6. The Concept of Nullification and Atonement” (*al-īḥbāḥ wa al-takfīr*)
7. Repentance (*tawba*)
8. Forgiveness (*ghufrān*)
9. Intercession (*shafa‘a*)
10. Conclusion

Chapter 8: Fifth Principle: Enjoining what is Right and Forbidding what is Wrong (*al-amr bi al-ma‘rūf wa al-nahy ‘an al-munkar*)

Conclusion

Conclusions
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Al-Kashshāf</td>
<td>285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Al-Zamakhsharī’s Teachers and Students</td>
<td>318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Al-Zamakhsharī’s Scholarly Contribution</td>
<td>333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Muḥkamāt wa mutashābihāt</td>
<td>364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Mu‘tazilites’ Ṭabaqāt</td>
<td>382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The Retraction of Ibn ‘Aqīl</td>
<td>385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>386</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

1. Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd b. ‘Umar al-Zamakhsharī

Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd b. ‘Umar al-Zamakhsharī was one of the last widely known and outstanding Ḥanafī Mu'tazilite scholars who made important contributions in the fields of Arabic linguistics, theology, and Qur’ānic exegesis. Mu’tazilism continued to thrive in Khwārazm, at least until the second half of the eighth/fourteenth century, while in the rest of the Muslim world it had already declined.¹ Primarily, his fame rests upon the Qur’ān commentary al-Kashshāf ‘an haqā’iq al-tanzīl wa ‘uyūn al-ghawāmiḍ fī wujūḥ al-ta`wīl which he began to write upon his arrival in Mecca in 526/1132, and completed in 528/1134. Al-Zamakhsharī’s commentary contains a quintessence of Mu'tazilite doctrine which was adopted from the earlier Mu'tazilite exegetes; however, frequently presented his own views. He mentions the views of both the schools – Başra and Baghdad, but does not associate himself to any one of them. He was familiar with the Mu'tazilite theology of Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbohar and also studied the doctrine of Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī (d. 436/1044) which is evident in his Mu’tazilite creed al-Minhāj fī uṣūl al-dīn.²

Wilfred Madelung describes that, “For the Mu’tazilites, al-Kashshāf represents the peak of intellectual achievement in Qur’ān commentary.”³ According to Andrew Rippin,

---

The distinctiveness of al-Zamakhsharī’s Qur’ān commentary lies in his Muʿtazilī theological leanings... The Muʿtazilī doctrines of the unity and justice of God and the consequent ideas of the human free will and the need to deanthropomorphize the Qur’ān become the prime themes of the distinctive passages of interpretation.4

I will discuss about *al-Kashshāf* later.

2. Origin of the Muʿtazilites

Little is known about the origin of Muʿtazilites – one of the most important theological schools of Islam – which was founded in the first half the second/eighth century. Not only the origin of the term Muʿtazila but also its early sources are controversial and contradictory. There are four different viewpoints regarding the origin and emergence of Muʿtazilites. The first view is based upon the meaning of *iʿtazala* which denotes abstinence from the worldly desires, pleasures, and sins. Therefore, those who abstained from worldly affairs were called Muʿtazila.5 The second opinion is that those who took a neutral position during the Muslim civil strife were named Muʿtazila.6 The third view is that those who withdrew or separated from the community (*umma*) due

---

to their theological differences were called Mu'tazila. And finally, the fourth opinion is that Mu'tazila movement originated due to political reasons.

The doctrine of i'tizāl formed the starting point for the creation of the Mu'tazilite theological school. Wāṣil b. ‘Aṭā’ (d. 131/748) was the first to formulate the principle of manzila bayna al-manzilatayn (intermediate position between belief and unbelief). Later on ‘Amr b. ‘Ubayd (d. 144/761) was convinced by Wāṣil and he agreed with him. Wāṣil was the founder of the school and after his death ‘Amr became the leader of the Mu'tazilites. The period of their activities spanned from the beginning of the second/eighth century to the first half of the second/eighth century, when the Mu'tazilite school of Baṣra was established. Parallel to this school, another Mu'tazilite school was founded by Bishr b. al-Mu'tamar (d. 210/825-26) in Baghdād.

In the formative period of the Mu’tazilites which approximately lasted from the first half of the second/eighth century until the last quarter of the third/ninth century, there developed a variety of theological opinions of individuals, sometimes in agreement, while most of the times contradictory.

The ‘classical’ period of the Mu’tazilites spanned approximately three centuries, from the last quarter of the third/ninth century to the middle of the fifth/eleventh century (until the arrival of Saljūqīs). During this period, their scholastic thought was systematized and coherent theological frameworks were formulated by Abū ‘Alī al-

---

Jubbā’ī who represented the Baṣra school followed by his son Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā’ī and by Abū al-Qāsim al-Ka‘bī al-Balkhī who was associated with the Baghdād school.\textsuperscript{10}

Abū al-Hudhayl of the Baṣra school was the first who created a reliable dogmatic framework and defined al-uṣūl al-khamsa “the five principles” of the Mu‘tazila, which he developed in his Kitāb al-ḥujja. He considered that these principles were indispensable for a Mu‘tazilite identity. They were: “God’s unity” (al-tawhīd), “God’s justice” (al-‘adl), “reward and punishment” (al-wa‘d wa-al-wa‘īd), “intermediate position between belief and unbelief” (al-manzila bayna al-manzilatayn) and “enjoining good and forbidding evil” (al-amr bi-al-ma‘rūf wa-al-nahy ‘an al-munkar). These principles provided an indispensable identity to the Mu‘tazila, and determined the structure of their theological works for centuries.\textsuperscript{11}

Later on, Abū al-Qāsim al-Balkhī (d. 319/913) of the Baghdād school, and Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbā’ī (d. 303/915) of the Baṣra school formulated coherent theological frameworks. Abū Hāshim (d. 321/933), the founder of the Bahshāmiyya or Bahāshima school further systematized and refined the theological doctrines. The last innovative school within Mu‘tazilism originated with Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī (d. 436/1044), who developed independent theological views. However, all the refinements centered within the context of the five principles of Mu‘tazila, and these principles are still considered pertinent, and constitute the basis of the Mu‘tazilite theology.\textsuperscript{12}

\begin{flushright}
\end{flushright}
3. Tafsīr, Ta’wīl, Ma‘ānī, and Sharḥ

The terms *tafsīr*, *ta’wīl*, *ma‘ānī*, and *sharḥ* in Arabic language mean interpretation, explanation or elucidation of something.\(^\text{13}\) A *tafsīr* of the Qur’ān is a work, which provides an interpretation of the Arabic text of the scripture. Al-Zarkashī defines *ta’wil* as,

the science of elucidating the general as well as particular meanings of the words of the Qur’ān. The difference between *tafsīr* and *ta’wil* is that *tafsīr* primarily deals with the narratives and accounts (*riwāya*), while *ta’wil* relates to the deeper knowledge (*dirāya*) of the interior meaning of the Qur’ān. According to some scholars, the words *tafsīr* and *ta’wil* both have the meanings of explanation.\(^\text{14}\)

*Tafsīr* is divided into two broad categories: *tafsīr bi-al-ma’thūr* and *tafsīr bi-al-ra’y*. *Tafsīr bi-al-ma’thūr* is exegesis that relies on those traditions which are trustworthy in their transmission (*iṣnād*) and text (*matn*). It is considered by mainstream Sunnī exegesis to be authentic and reliable. *Tafsīr bi-al-ra’y* is exegesis that is based on personal opinion and rational analysis of the text. While the traditionists consider rationalist commentary to be opinion-based, whimsical and capricious, the rationalists do not find the traditions a reliable source for Qur’ānic interpretation. However, there are no clear-cut boundaries between these two types of commentary. Historically, both traditionists and rationalists have used traditions as well as their own opinions in their exegesis.\(^\text{15}\)

\(^{13}\) Andrew Rippin, “Tafsīr,” *ER*, 14:236-44.


4. The Qur’ānic Exegesis

According to the traditional Muslims view, Qur’ānic exegesis began quite early during the lifetime of Prophet Muḥammad. However, he did not explain the entire text of the Qur’ān to his companions as there was no need for it. This was because, as the Qur’ān was revealed in Arabic, the companions understood it and witnessed its circumstances of revelation at first hand. Thus, the Qur’ān was partially elucidated by the Prophet and his verbal explanations were either memorized or written by his companions. The companions added and transmitted his exegesis to their successors (tābi‘ūn) who added to the previous interpretations and transmitted to their successors (tābi‘ tābi‘ūn).

Subsequently, the following generations of commentators collected these interpretations of the Prophet, the companions, the successors and successors’ successors as established by the authoritative chains of transmission. Therefore, the first tafsīr tradition that was initiated by Muhammad is referred to as “the Prophetical exegesis” (tafsīr al-nabi).\(^{16}\)

By the end of the first half of the first century of Islam, four major schools of exegesis had evolved whose views and contribution in this field significantly shaped the science of exegesis of the later generations. These schools were named after the major cities: Mecca, Medina, Kūfā, and Baṣra. The Mecca school of exegesis was founded by ‘Abd Allāh b. ʻAbbās, who was the Prophet’s paternal cousin. He was well known for his extensive knowledge of the Qur’ān, Arabic language, pre-Islamic poetry, Arabic history and culture, and Arab genealogy. The Medina school was founded by Ubayy b. Ka‘b who was the first scribe of the Prophet. He was well known for his accurate memorization of the Qur’ān and sound knowledge of the Old and New Testaments. The founder of the

Kūfa school was ‘Abd Allāh b. Mas‘ūd. He was mainly interested in jurisprudence and Qur’ānic exegesis. The founder of the Başra school was Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, who was one of the students of Anas b. Mālik – a companion of the Prophet.\textsuperscript{17}

According to the Western scholars’ view, the reliability and authenticity of the \textit{isnāds} and \textit{matns} of exegetical \textit{ḥadīths}, reconstructing the early exegetical works and dating them at an early period of Islam cannot be relied upon because they are all suspect.

Nabia Abbott,\textsuperscript{18} Fuat Sezgin,\textsuperscript{19} and Muhammad Mustafa Azmi\textsuperscript{20} believe in the early and continuous written tradition in Islam and their position is that the \textit{isnāds} are historically reliable. Gregor Schoeler’s\textsuperscript{21} view is that orality and writing both were complementary and in practice in the beginning period. Georg Stauth,\textsuperscript{22} C.H.M. Versteegh,\textsuperscript{23} John Burton,\textsuperscript{24} Johann Fück,\textsuperscript{25} James Robson,\textsuperscript{26} N.J. Coulson,\textsuperscript{27} and Uri Rubin,\textsuperscript{28} though not in full agreement, come to the conclusions that \textit{isnāds} attached to the exegetical \textit{ḥadīths} are reasonably reliable. They are of the opinion that these \textit{isnāds} are

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{17}Hussein ‘Abdul-Rauf, \textit{Schools of Qur’ānic Exegesis: Genesis and development} (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 147–57.
\item \textsuperscript{20}M.M. Azmi, \textit{Studies in Early Hadith Literature} (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1992), 1-211.
\item \textsuperscript{22}Herbert Berg, \textit{The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam: The Authenticity of Muslim Literature from the Formative Period} (Richmond: Curzon Press, 2000), 73-75.
\item \textsuperscript{23}C.H.M. Versteegh, \textit{Arabic Grammar and Qur’ānic Exegesis in Early Islam} (Leiden: Brill, 993).
\item \textsuperscript{24}John Burton, “Notes towards a Fresh Perspective on the Islamic Sunna,” \textit{British Society for Middle Eastern Studies Bulletin} 11 (1984), 12.
\item \textsuperscript{25}Johann W. Fück, “Die Rolle des Traditionalismus im Islam,” \textit{Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft} 93 (1939), 17.
\item \textsuperscript{28}Uri Rubin, \textit{The Eye of the Beholder: The Life of Muhammad as Viewed by Early Muslims, a Textual Analysis} (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1995), 234.
\end{itemize}
reliable to the extent that the original exegetical works of certain exegetes, such as Ibn ‘Abbās or Mujāhid b. Jabr can be reconstructed. This sanguine approach is in line with the traditional Muslim methodology, which asserts that isnāds of tafsīr ḥadīths are reliable.29

Gautier H.A. Juynboll,30 Fazlur Rahman,31 and Harald Motzki32 are of the opinion that as a whole, some of the ḥadīths reflect the Prophet’s words and deeds. They seem to place confidence in the isnāds and matns despite the fact that either on large scale or small scale fabrication took place. Furthermore, there must have been in existence both oral and written ḥadīths upon which the canonical collections were made.

Fred Leemhuis, though skeptical, holds an intermediate position between Sezgin and Goldizher and Wansbrough. He accepts the basic historical framework for the Qur’ān and its tafsīr which is in line with the views of Muslims. However, from the skeptical point of view, he does not accept the ascription of exegetical material to Ibn ‘Abbās with certainty and agrees with the skepticism of Ignaz Goldizher and John Wansbrough.33

It is evident that the early period of Islamic history has been the main object of opposing views between the Muslim and Western scholars. The Muslim scholarship trusts in the early historical authenticity of exegetical ḥadīths and considers the interpretations of early commentators reliable and trustworthy. For Western scholars the

29 Herbert Berg, The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam: The Authority of Muslim Literature from the Formative Period (Richmond: Curzon Press, 2000), 42.
31 Fazlur Rahman, Islamic Methodology in History (Islamabad: Central Institute of Islamic Research, 1995), 31-32.
Historicity and authenticity of early exegesis is open to question. Therefore, there appears to be no resolution to this problem unless either the Western scholarship accepts the traditional Muslim historiography or new materials are discovered to substantiate or refute the skepticism of Western scholars about the early history of Islam.

The formative period of exegesis started in the early second/eighth century with the introduction of philological and grammatical sciences in the Qur’ânic exegetical works. Similarly, the refinement and codification of historiography which turned myths into history contributed to a great extent for the establishment of exegesis as a certain and exact science. In this period, four broad categories of tafsîr can be distinguished: paraphrastic, narrative, legal, and linguistic. Paraphrastic and narrative exegesis developed simultaneously. Paraphrastic exegesis consisted of giving brief, often synonymic explanations of the Qur’ânic terms and verses, whereas narrative exegesis illustrates the text of the Qur’ân through Judeo-Christian traditions (Isrâ’îliyyât), the nascent Prophetic biography, and pre-Islamic Arab tradition. The legal analysis of the Qur’ân emerged quite early in Islam and the exegetes attempted to order the text of the Qur’ân and its interpretation according to legal topics. The range of these subjects covered those aspects, which dealt with basic beliefs and communities’ interaction with each other, such as faith, prayer, charity, fasting, pilgrimage, retaliation, inheritance, usury, wine, marriage, divorce, adultery, thefts, debts, contracts, and holy war. In the first half of the fourth/tenth century, the variant readings of the Qur’ân (qirā’ât) were standardized, and seven “readings” belonging to the second/eighth century as authorities on the traditional readings of the ʻUthmânic text were considered authentic by the orthodoxy. These “readers” of the Qur’ân were also the philologists and grammarians
who explained and interpreted the “difficult” (mushkil) and “strange/foreign” (gharīb) words or passages of the Qur’ān through the sciences of philology and grammar.

Therefore, the readings of the Qur’ān and grammar (including elements of lexiconography and orthography) became disciplines of the Qur’ānic sciences and integral components of the exegesis.34

Theological exegesis started after the First Fitna (35/656-40/661).35 During this period, various sects in Islam emerged, such as Shi‘ite, Zaydite, Khārijite, and Mu‘tazilite, etc. These sects compiled their tafsīrs based on ‘ilm al-kalām (theology)36 to justify their views and existence.

The Mu‘tazilites introduced philosophical, philological, and grammatical methodology in the Qur’ānic exegesis. They contributed to the exegesis of the Qur’ān considerably but most of their works are lost. Some of the titles of their works are preserved, and ample quotations from them have survived in the extant works of later authors.37 The earliest Mu‘tazilite tafsir entitled Ma‘ānī al-Qur’ān was written by Wāṣil b. ‘Aṭāʾ (d. 131/748).38 Amr b. ‘Ubayd (d. ca. 144/761) composed a tafsīr of the Qur’ān

---

36 ‘Ilm al-kalām is defined as “a science which enables a person to procure a victory of the dogmas and actions laid down by the legislator of the religion and to refute all opinions contradicting them.” See Abū Naṣr Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Ṭarkhān al-Fārābī, Ihṣā’ al-ʻulūm, ed. Osmān Amine (Cairo: Librairie Anglo-Egyptienne, 1968), 131-32; L. Gardet, “ʻIlm al-kalām,” EF, 3:1141.
which is mainly derived from the teachings of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. Other prominent and distinguished Muʿtazilite exegetes are Abū ʿAlī Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Jubbāʿī (d. 303/915), Abū al-Qāsim al-Balkhī al-Kaʿbī (d. 319/931), ʿAbd al-Salām b. Abī ʿAlī Muḥammad Abū Ḥāshim al-Jubbāʿī (d. 321/933), Abū Muslim Muḥammad b. Baḥr al-Isfahānī (d. 322/934), Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025), Abū Saʿd al-Muḥāsin b. Muḥammad b. Karāma al-Ḥākīm al-Jushamī’s (d. 494/1101), and al-Zamakhsharī.45
5. *Al-Kashshāf*

Since its inception, *al-Kashshāf* has been subject to both explication and orthodox Sunnī criticism which centered on the basic principles of Mu‘tazilite theology. Those who have denounced and criticized *al-Kashshāf* include leading scholars of Sunnī orthodoxy. Yet, at the same time, al-Zamakhsharī’s *tafsīr* was cited, adopted, and commented upon by the orthodox community and there are an almost endless number of glosses, superglosses, and supercommentaries on it. The work by al-Bayḍāwī, *Anwār al-tanzīl wa-asrār al-ta’wil* is the most famous attempt to distill the essence of al-Zamakhsharī’s work while attempting to omit those views considered reprehensible to Sunnī orthodoxy. Ibn al-Munayyir (d. 683/1284) in his *Kitāb al-Intīsāf min al-Kashshāf* refuted al-Zamakhsharī’s Mu‘tazilite interpretations. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209) in his *Tafsīr al-kabīr*, Abū Ḥayyān al-Andalusī (d. 745/1344) in his *Bahṛ al-muḥīṭ*, Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406) in his *Muqaddima* and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) all criticized al-Zamakhsharī’s Mu‘tazilite views.\(^{46}\)

Modern scholarship on al-Zamakhsharī is divided on the extent to which his *tafsīr* expresses Mu‘tazilite doctrine and approach. One study compares the significance of al-Zamakhsharī and al-Bayḍāwī in Muslim theology and examines their works *al-Kashshāf* and *Anwār al-tanzīl* which represent the views of the Mu‘tazilites and the Ash‘arites respectively. The study concludes that al-Zamakhsharī as a Mu‘tazilite gives priority to reason over revelation, whereas, al-Bayḍāwī as an Ash‘arite maintains that revelation has priority over reason.\(^{47}\)

---


Another study written within the framework of the Mu‘tazilites’ five principles, examines al-Zamakhsharī’s various techniques to substantiate his Mu‘tazilite views, such as rational orientation, variant readings of the Qurʾān, support from the prophetic traditions, usage of similitudes and parables, extension of certain words’ meanings and syntactical methods.\(^{48}\)

Michael Schub states that according to Henri Fleisch, al-Zamakhsharī’s concise grammatical magnum opus *al-Mufassal* deals with almost all of the topics included in Sibawayh’s *Kitāb*.\(^{49}\) Schub’s main thesis is that al-Zamakhsharī significantly and extensively treats these topics covered in *al-Mufassal* in his commentary of *al-Kashshāf*. Al-Zamakhsharī is an excellent linguist who examines the Qurʾānic text in the light of relevant context and he evaluates various possible readings, or attempts a diachronic explanation. He is an innovative and critical analyst of textual material and does not hesitate to break with the accepted grammatical wisdom of his time. He concludes that al-Zamakhsharī provides many extra-linguistic bits of information which are potentially very illuminating. He is especially insightful in analyzing the syntactic problems.

Although al-Zamakhsharī tends to look at verses of the Qurʾān bearing on theological issues through the Mu‘tazilite perspective, his view of those verses containing

---


grammatical problems is, generally speaking, scientific in that it is unbiased as to meaning.⁵⁰

Andrew Lane argues in his study that “while al-Zamakhsharī may be well known for his ‘Mu’tazilite’ commentary on the Qurʾān, exegesis in general and Mu’tazilism in particular are hardly representative of his literary output… al-Zamakhsharī was neither a theologian nor even a religious scholar in the more limited sense of the word.”⁵¹ He concludes that “This study, then, puts to rest the myth that the Kashshāf is a ‘Mu’tazilite commentary’ that began with al-ḥamdu li-llāh alladhī khalaqa l-Qurʾān, and demonstrates that it would even be difficult to define what a ‘Mu’tazilite commentary’ actually is. There is, in fact, so little Mu’tazilism in the Kashshāf and so many missed occasions to inject some, that to call it such is a misnomer; nor is there any ‘special outlook’ or ‘distinctive approach’ that can be discerned in the Kashshāf by which its Mu’tazilite character could be redeemed.”⁵²

6. Thesis

My thesis is that al-Zamakhsharī’s Qurʾān commentary is squarely within the Mu’tazilite tradition. I will argue that Andrew Lane is incorrect because he studied and evaluated al-Zamakhsharī’s commentary only with regard to two sūras al-Dukhān (Q44: Smoke) and al-Qamar (Q54: The Moon), and concluded that al-Kashshāf is not a Mu’tazilite commentary.

⁵⁰ Michael B. Schub, Linguistic Topics in al-Zamakhsharī’s Commentary on the Qurʾān. Ph.D. Dissertation (Berkeley: University of California, 1977), 1-34.
⁵¹ Andrew J. Lane, A Traditional Mu’tazilite Qurʾān Commentary: The Kashshāf of Jār Allāh al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144) (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2006), 46.
⁵² Lane, Traditional Mu’tazilite Qurʾān Commentary, 229.
In order to substantiate my hypothesis, I will start with al-Zamakhsharī’s methodology of *tafsīr* which comprises: *muḥkamāt wa mutashābihāt*, ‘ilm al-*ma‘ānī* wa ‘ilm al-*bayān*, questions and answers (*as‘ila* wa-*ajwiba*), grammar, *tafsīr* al-*Qur’ān* bi-*al-Qur’ān*, ḥadīth and variant readings of the Qurʾān (*qirā‘āt*).

Then I will describe in detail the Muʿtazilites’ five principles (*al-uṣūl al-khamsa*): God’s unity (*al-tawḥīd*), God’s justice (*al-ʿadl*), reward and punishment (*al-wa‘d wa-al-wa‘īd*), intermediate position between belief and unbelief (*al-manzila bayna al-manzilatayn*) and enjoining good and forbidding evil (*al-amr bi-al-maʿrūf wa-al-nahy ‘an al-munkar*).

After that, I will examine and evaluate *al-Kashshāf* within the framework of these five principles (*al-uṣūl al-khamsa*) in order to find out whether and in what manner al-Zamakhsharī defends some or all of these five principles. I selected those verses where anthropomorphisms need clarification as well as verses that are known to be points of contention between the Muʿtazilites and traditionists.

To make my dissertation more convenient and understandable for readers, I have provided the following information either in individual chapters or appendices: al-Zamakhsharī biography; different viewpoints regarding the origins of the Muʿtazilites; definitions of *tafsīr*, *ta‘wīl*, *ma‘ānī*, and *sharḥ*; historical development of the Qurʾānic exegesis; *al-Kashshāf* and commentaries on *al-Kashshāf*; and different interpretations regarding *muḥkamāt wa-mutashābihāt*. 
7. Notes on Translation and Transliteration

All my Quran translations will be drawn from the translations of Ahmad Ali and Majid Fakhry.\(^5^3\) I have made some slight modifications to their translations to elucidate certain points where deemed necessary. So far as transliteration is concerned, I have followed the IJMES transliteration system.

Chapter 1

Al-Zamakhsharı’ı’s Biography

Biographical dictionaries (ṭabaqāt) provide very little information about al-Zamakhsharı’ı’s life. McAuliffe describes, “The biographical material on al-Zamakhsharı strikes very few personal notes.” In this study, the information derived from more than twenty-five biographical sources, spans a period of eight centuries from Ibn al-Anbārī’s (d. 577/1181) Nuzhat al-alibbā’ fī ṭabaqāt al-udabā’ to Khayr al-Dīn al-Ziriklī’s (d.1395/1976) al-A’lām. Qāmūs tarājim li-ashhar al-rijāl wa-al-nisā’ min al-‘Arab wa-al-musta ‘ribīn wa-al-mustashriqīn.

1. Early Life of al-Zamakhsharı

Al-Zamakhsharı’s full name is Maḥmūd b. ‘Umar b. Muḥammad b. ‘Umar (Aḥmad),¹ his kunya (patronymic) is Abū al-Qāsim and his alqāb (honorific titles) are Jār Allāh (neighbor of God), and Fakhr Khawārzm (Glory of Khawārzrm).² The nisba al-Zamakhsharı is derived from the place Zamakhshar in Khwārzrm, where he was born on Rajab 27, 467/3 March 1075.³

Al-Muqaddasī (d. 380/990) describes, “Zamakhshar is a small city having a fortress, a ditch, a prison, and gates braced with iron, and bridges are raised every night,


² Al-Qifṭī, Inbāh al-ruwāt, 3:268; al-Suyūṭī, Bughya, 2:279; Tāshkubrīzāda, Miftāḥ al-sa’āda, 2:98.

³ All the sources give Rajab 27, 467 A.H. as the date of birth of al-Zamakhsharı, except al-Suyūṭī, who mentions in Bughya, 2:279 that he was born in Rajab of 497 A.H. It seems to be incorrect.
and a main street that crosses through the city. The mosque is very elegant which is at the end of the market."4 Al-Sam‘ānī (d. 562/1167) mentions, “Zamakhshar is one of the big villages of Khwārazm which is equivalent to a small city.”5 Yāqūt quotes al-Zamakhsharī that he said, “As far as my place of birth is concerned, it is one of the unknown villages of Khwārazm.”6

Al-Zamakhsharī died on Dhū al-Ḥijja 8, 538/June 12, 1144 in Jurjāniyya, where he was buried. Jurjāniyya, also known as Gurganj, capital of Khurāsān is located on the bank of the Jayhūn River. It was ranked after Kath as the second principal city, and had four gates and a large palace near the Bāb al-Ḥajjāj, on the edge of a huge market place and consisted of an outer and an inner city.7

Although of Persian origin, al-Zamakhsharī’s command over Arabic was superb, and unparalleled. He was most basically motivated in his scholarship to serve and promote the Arabic language. He always taught his students in Arabic, and used Persian only for those who were beginners in their studies.8 Arabic was, in his view, the most perfect language which God had preferred to all languages as He preferred the Qur‘ān.

---

and Islam over all scripture and religions. He was a strong opponent of the shuʿūbiyya, who held the view that Persians were superior to the Arabs.

Al-Zamakhsharī was lame (aʿraj) because one of his feet was amputated. There are five different versions, which describe the reasons as to how this happened. According to the first version, when he was a small child, he fell from a roof (saṭḥ) and broke his foot. It became bent and was amputated. The second version states that while he was traveling through Khwārazm, “he got frostbite in an extreme cold weather” (aṣābahu thalj kathīr wa-bard shadīd) and his foot “fell off” (saqaṭa). The third version mentions that his foot was stung by an insect and later it had to be cut off due to abscess developed on the foot. The fourth version describes that on his way to Bukhārā; he fell from his horse and broke his foot. Afterwards, it became so painful that he had the foot removed. Finally, when al-Zamakhsharī was visiting Baghdād, Aḥmad b. ‘Alī b. Muḥammad Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Dāmaghānī (d. 540/1145), the Ḥanafīte jurist asked him about his foot. He replied that that the cause of his foot amputation was his mother’s prayer. He narrated that when he was a small child he caught a sparrow and tied its foot with a piece of thread. The sparrow managed to escape and took refuge in a wall’s hole. He tried to pull the bird out of the hole but its foot severed by the thread. His mother saw the incident and said, “May God sever your foot as you severed its foot.” Al-Zamakhsharī concluded that, “My mother’s benediction got me this.”

---

13 Al-Suyūṭī, Bughya, 2:280.
14 Al-Qīfī, Inbāḥ al-ruwāt, 3:268.
amputated foot replaced by a wooden one, which he used to hide by wearing a long cloak, so that people would consider him as lame. He always carried with him an official certificate (mahdar) signed by many witnesses who knew the circumstances and facts of his foot, to avoid suspicion or doubt of the people. The reason that he had to carry an official certificate was that he might not be suspected that his foot was amputated due to punishment for some crime. To avoid this suspicion he always carried the certificate as a proof of the circumstances under which he lost his foot.

2. Education of al-Zamakhsharī

Al-Andarasbānī and Ṭashkubrīzāda mention that al-Zamakhsharī’s father was a scholar (imām) in the village of Zamakhshar and he taught him the Qur’ān. His father wanted him to learn tailoring since he was handicapped. However, al-Zamakhsharī requested that he send him to Jurjāniyya for more education, to which he agreed. He studied and acquired knowledge from a number of scholars (asātidha, shuyūkh, masahāʾikh). In Jurjāniyya, the brother of Abū al-Faṭḥ b. ‘Alī b. al-Ḥārith al-Bayyaʿī saw his good handwriting and employed him as his secretary. According to Ibn Khallikān,

---

17 According to George Makdisi, “For the madrasa in eleventh-century Baghdad exercised an undeniably strong attraction, especially on those who had not the means for the leisure of study. To devote oneself to study meant to sacrifice the opportunity of monetary gain from plying a trade or profession. Prior to the big madrasas, both needy professors and needy students had to gain their livelihood outside the field of education. The professor had to hire himself out as copyist for wages. Those with a handsome handwriting gained large sums of money as copyists. This profession was not by any means left to the very greatest calligraphers, such as the Ibn Muqlas and the Ibn al-Bauwābs; others, whose primary interest was elsewhere, but who had a certain talent for calligraphy, could at times gain enough to become rich. But the great majority could only eke out a living with this time-consuming job which, however, had the advantage of keeping them close to their primary interest in helping them to learn their texts,” George Makdisi, “Muslim Institutions of Learning in Eleventh-Century Baghdad,” Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies 24 (1961), 52.
al-Zamakhsharī travelled to Bukhārā when he reached the age to acquire further knowledge and continue his studies outside of his village.\(^{18}\)

### 3. Al-Zamakhsharī’s Teachers

All the biographical dictionaries and ṭabaqāt works mention that al-Zamakhsharī acquired his education from a number of scholars. However, most of the information available about these scholars is scanty. There are approximately eleven names which have been mentioned in the sources who were his teachers. Sometimes, information is available about the area of studies in which they were specialized, while in other cases it is not mentioned at all.

According to al-Andarasbānī, al-Zamakhsharī when he was already a famous authority on the Qur’ān exegesis became associated with two prominent theologians of Khwārazm – Abū Manṣūr\(^{19}\) and Imām Rukn al-Dīn Maḥmūd b. al-Malāḥimī al-Uṣūlī. Al-Zamakhsharī instructed both of them in exegesis, and he studied theology (uṣūl) with them. The evidence of al-Zamakhsharī’s close relationship with Ibn al-Malāḥimī is supported by the elegiac verses composed by him on the occasion of the latter’s death.\(^{20}\)

Al-Zamakhsharī wrote a brief summary of his theological opinions entitled Kitāb al-Minhāj fī uṣūl al-dīn. In his Muʿtazilite creed, he was largely influenced by the doctrine of Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī, which is supported by the text. Throughout the book, he usually refrains from expressing his own preference with regard to the conflicting views

---


\(^{19}\) Al-Andarasbānī mentions his name Imām Abū Maṣūr and “the Shaykh Abū Maṣūr master of theology and preacher of the people of the Khwārazm” (al-Shaykh Abū Maṣūr sāhib al-uṣūl wa wāʾīz ahl al-Khwārazm). It seems that he is most likely the Shaykh al-Islām Abū Maṣūr Naṣr al-Ḥārithī, one of al-Zamakhsharī’s teachers mentioned by his nephew. See Al-Andarasbānī, “Sīra,” 368, 379; Yāqūt, Muʾjam al-udabā’, 6:2688.

of various schools on a question without ever entering the controversies. However, at
some places when he indicates his opinion, it seems that he is in agreement with the
views of Ibn al-Malāḥimī. The theologians most of the time mentioned by names are Abū
‘Alī al-Jubbā’ī and Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā’ī – “the two shaykhs” (al-shaykhān), and Qāḍī
‘Abd al-Jabbār is referred to only once.

Madelung states that,

Al-Zamakhsharī’s attitude to the Mu‘tazila and their schools thus seems
well consistent with what is known of his career. He had most likely been
a Mu‘tazili from his youth. Then he was attracted by the teaching of al-
Ḥākim al-Jishumī, representative of the Bahashmiyya, perhaps in
particular because of al-Ḥākim’s authority in Qur’ān exegesis. He
probably visited Jishum, though apparently after al-Ḥākim’s death, and
received his works from a student of his. Later he became closely
associated with Ibn al-Malāhimī, the Kawāzamian renewer of the doctrine
of Abū al-Ḥusayn al- Başrī. He was clearly impressed and influenced by
his teaching. Yet he did not identify himself with it. In his theological
compendium he rather lent support to a broadly based, catholic
Mu‘tazilism.21

Al-Zamakhsharī studied traditions with Ibn al-Baṭir, Abū Manṣūr Naṣr al-Ḥārithī
and Abū Sa’d al-Shaqqānī. Al-Andarasbānī mentions that al-Zamakhsharī and one of his
students Abū al-Mu’a’ayyad al-Muwaffaq b. Aḥmad al-Makkī revived the ḥadīth in
Khwārazm. He states that,

He [al-Zamakhsharī] was the first to revive the science of Tradition (‘ilm
al-ḥadīth) in Khwārazm and to make it to flourish there. He brought the
books of the Traditions from Iraq and “urged the people” (ḥathth al-nās)
to study it. This science was spread out by him and after him by Akḥtab

---

22 Abū al-Mu’a’ayyad al-Muwaffaq b. Aḥmad al-Makkī was al-Zamakhsharī’s favorite student and in the
year 550/1155 he wrote a commentary on al-Zamakhsharī’s Unmūdhaj entitled *Kifāyat al-naḥw*. See Al-

Al-Zamakhsharī studied literature with Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. al-Muẓaffar al-Naysābūrī and Abū Muḍar al-Ḍabbī, and compiled fourteen titles on literature. He studied grammar with ‘Abd Allāh b. Ṭalḥa al-Yāburī and Abū Muḍar al-Ḍabbī, and lexicography with Abū Manṣūr b. al-Jawālīqī and Abū Muḍar al-Ḍabbī. In the fields of grammar and lexicography he penned eight and five works respectively. However, no one is mentioned specifically as al-Zamakhsharī’s teacher in exegesis.

A list of al-Zamakhsharī’s teachers is provided in Appendix 2.

4. Al-Zamakhsharī’s Students

According to al-Qifṭī, al-Dhahabī, and al-Dāwūdī, “In any city or town where he entered, people joined him to become his students” (*mā dakhala balad illā wa-ajtamaʻū ʻalayhi wa-talamadhū lahu*).²³ Al-Anbārī, Yāqūt, al-Dhahabī and al-Fāsī mention that, “When he passed through ‘Irāq on his way to pilgrimage to Mecca, Abū al-Sa`ādāt Hibat Allāh b. al-Shajarī was delighted on his arrival and benefited (from his knowledge).”²⁴ Ibn Khallikān, al-Fāsī and Ibn al-‘Imād describe the meeting between al-Zamakhsharī and the Ḥanafī jurist al-Damaghānī in one of his visits to Baghdad.²⁵ This means that he

---


had not only contacts with a good number of scholars but had many students who studied and obtained knowledge from him.

students “license” (ijāza)²⁶ to transmit what they had learned and written. He also granted
to others “general license” (ijāza ‘āmma). Many students and contemporary scholars
attended his majālis and benefitted from each other’s knowledge.

The names of al-Zamakhsharī’s students are provided in Appendix 2.

5. Travels of al-Zamakhsharī

As mentioned above, al-Zamakhsharī went for the first time to Jurjāniyya for
more education. However, Ibn Khallikān mentions that he travelled to Bukhārā when he
reached the age to acquire further knowledge and continue his studies outside of his
hometown.

According to al-Fāsī, al-Zamakhsharī visited Baghdad sometime before 500/1106
where he met many scholars and heard ḥadīths from Abū al-Khaṭṭāb Naṣr b. al-Baṭīr and
others. Afterwards, he left for Mecca and stayed there in the neighborhood of Mecca for a
while “to lead a life of ascetism and religious contemplation,” benefitting from the others
and being of assistance to them. He studied with ‘Abd Allāh b. Ṭalḥa al-

²⁶ Ijāza means “permission,” “authorization” or “license.” It is one of the eight methods (other methods are: samā’, qirā’a, munāwala, mukātaba, i’lām al-rāwī, wasīya and wijāda) to obtain the permission of a
scholar to narrate to others the traditions compiled by him. Goldziher states that, “Ijāza became a surrogate
for those Muslims who were eager to obtain ḥadīths but either did not think long journeys convenient or
when they did go on talab travels were not able to stay long enough in the hometown of the ‘carrier’ of the
ḥadīths to receive them directly from him. This surrogate was to enable them, without prolonged direct
intercourse with the sheikh, to take over hadīths from him and to spread them in his name. They obtained
the sheikhs permission (ijāza) to hand down a ḥadīth as if they had picked it up from this in verbal from,
when in fact they had only received, or even only shown him, a booklet containing his traditions.” See
Muhammad Zubayr Siddiqi, Ḥadīth Literature: Its Origin, Development and Special Features (Cambridge:
The Islamic Texts Society, 1993), 86; Ignaz Goldziher, Muslim Studies (Muhammedanische Studien), ed.
Andalusī *Kitāb al-Sībawayh*, and this was his main reason. Then he returned to Khwārazm and stayed there for some time.27

He visited Baghdād again while he was going to Mecca for pilgrimage, where he met with Ibn al-Shajarī, and al-Jawāliqī.28 According to al-Suyūṭī and Ṭāshkubrīzāda, al-Zamakhsharī visited Baghdād more than once.29 Madelung states that al-Zamakhsharī performed pilgrimage for seven times, so it is possible that he may have visited ‘Irāq in any of these occasions.30

6. Al-Zamakhsharī’s Visits to Mecca

Al-Zamakhsharī visited and stayed in Mecca for at least two times for a period of approximately twelve years. Al-Andarasbānī and Ṭāshkubrīzāda mention that al-Zamakhsharī stayed for five years in “the sacred city” (*al-balad al-ḥaram*).31 Al-Zamakhsharī mentions about his stay in Mecca in the following verses:

\[
\text{fa-jāwartu rabbī wa-huwa khayru mujāwar}
\]
\[
\text{ladā baytīhi al-baytī al-muḥarram ʿakifā}
\]
\[
\text{aqamtu bi-idhni Allāh khamsan kawāmilan}
\]
\[
\text{wa-ṣādaftu sabʿan bi-al-muʿarraf wāqifā}
\]
\[
\text{ẓalaltu maʿ al-ʿummār muʿtamirā lahu}
\]
\[
\text{wa-bittu maʿ al-ṭuwwāfi bi-al-bayti ūfīa}
\]
\[
\text{wa-tamma lī al-Kashshāf thamma bi-baldatin}
\]
\[
\text{bihā hābaṭa al-tanzīl li-al-ḥaqqi kāshīfā} \quad 32
\]

I was my Lord’s neighbor and He is an excellent neighbor
by His House, the Sacred Sanctuary, assiduously
I stayed, with God’s permission, for full five years
and standing with determination [on the plains of ‘Arafāt] for seven times

---

I remained with those who made small pilgrimage\(^{33}\) and spent nights with the pilgrims circumambulating the Ka‘ba. And I completed the Kashshāf, there in the city where the revelation was sent down, unveiling the truth.

The first of these visits would have taken place sometime between 500/1106 and 518/1124 when al-Zamakhsharī visited Baghdad where he met many scholars and heard hadīths from al-Baṭīr, Abū Sa‘d al-Shaqqānī, and Abū Maṃṣūr al-Ḥārithī.\(^{34}\) Afterwards, he left for Mecca and stayed there in the neighborhood of Mecca.\(^{35}\) Most of the biographers mention in their notes that he spent some time (zamānan) or years (sinīn) there.\(^{36}\) However, Abū al-Fidā’ writes that al-Zamakhsharī went to Mecca for pilgrimage and stayed there many years.\(^{37}\) Other biographers mention that when he arrived at Mecca, al-Zamakhsharī visited his teacher ‘Abd Allāh b. Ṭalḥa al-Yāburī al-Andalusī and studied with him Kitāb al-Sībawayh and stayed there for five years.\(^{38}\)

The five years’ stay in Mecca is confirmed by al-Qifṭī who states that the greater part of al-Zamakhsharī’s life was spent in his town and not at Mecca. After his return from Mecca to Khwārazm, someone asked him, “You have spent the greater part of your life there. What is the motive for your coming back to Khwarazm?” He replied, “I find in my heart here that I do not find there.”\(^{39}\) The information provided by al-Qifṭī that he stayed in Mecca for five years and al-Zamakhsharī’s verse: “I stayed, with God’s

\(^{33}\) ‘Umra is a small pilgrimage which can be performed anytime during the year. See R. Paret [E. Chaumont, “‘Umra,” \textit{EI}\(^2\), 10: 864. \\
^{35}\) Madelung and others are of the opinion that he moved to Mecca in the year 512/1118 after recovering from his “serious illness” (nākiha) and “warning” (mundhira). See Madelung, “al-Zamakhsharī,” \textit{EI}\(^2\) Supplement, 11-12:840-1. \\
permission, for full five years and standing with determination [on the plains of ‘Arafāt] for seven times” (aqamtu bi-idhni Allāh khamsan kawāmilan wa-sādaftu sab‘an bi-al-
mu’arraf wāqifa) proves that during his first visit al-Zamakhsharī stayed in Mecca for five
years.

For the second time, al-Zamakhsharī arrived in Mecca in 526/1131 and stayed there for seven years. On his way to Mecca, he passed through Syria for a short time and praised Tāj al-Mulk Tughtakīn (d. 526/1131), the ruler of Damascus. After his death, his son Shams al-Mulk became the ruler and al-Zamakhsharī praised him too. According to
al-Qifṭī, Ṭāshkubrīzāda and al-Dhahabī, on his return from Mecca to Khwārazm, he visited Baghdad in 533/1138 and studied with al-Jawālīqī. All these events strongly prove that during his second visit, al-Zamakhsharī lived in Mecca for seven years from
526/1131 to 533/1138. During this period, he wrote al-Kashshāf, which took him two
years (from 526/1131 to 528/1133) to complete it. He mentions in the introduction of al-
Kashshāf that he completed the commentary of al-Kashshāf in two years, the duration of the caliphate of Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, even though it was the work of thirty years.

7. Crises in the Lives of Muslim Scholars

Crisis literally means a crucial or decisive point or situation. Intellectual crisis can be defined a dramatic change of thinking about the conventional and prevalent ideology. It is a universal phenomenon and has occurred to people in all times and all

---

41 Abū al-Qāsim Mahmūd b. ‘Umar al-Zamakhsharī, al-Kashshāf ‘an ghawāmid al-tanzīl wa-‘uyūn al-
places. There could be various causes for intellectual crisis, such as doubts about religious knowledge, clash between religion and political authority, customs and practices related ritual observances, disputation between the scholastic theologians, fear of God and the Last Day of Judgment. According George Makdisi,

Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013), Juwaynī (d. 478/1085), Shahristānī (d. 548/1153) and Rāzī (d. 606/1209), all had death-bed repentance for having used kalām, if we are to believe their biographers…they had begun as rationalists and ended by reverting to that traditionalism which was the legacy left them by their ancestors.

Some Muslim scholars experienced intellectual crises in their lives. Al-Zamakhsharī was afflicted with a serious illness (nākiha) and heard warning (mundhira). Al-Ashʿarī, one of the most prominent students of Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbāʾī, the leading Muʿtazilite theologian of his time, abandoned Muʿtazilism due to his differences with them on the issues of divine justice, and createdness of the Qurʾān. Al-Ghazālī experienced two crises. The first one was in his early age, when he became skeptical concerning the certainty of knowledge. The second crisis occurred at the height of his reputation as a great scholar of his time, when he suffered a complete physical breakdown which culminated in his serious sickness. Ibn ‘Aqlī’s early upbringing and education as a Ḥanafi Muʿtazilite encouraged him to study kalām. He preferred reason over revelation for searching the truth. He was also interested in mysticism especially the writings of mystic Ḥusayn b. Maḥṣūr al-Ḥallāj (244-309/857-922). Ibn ‘Aqlī was

42 According to Fazlur Rahman, the concept of taqwa (fear of God) is “perhaps the most important single term in the Qurʾān.” See Fazlur Rahman, Major Themes of the Qurʾān (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980), 28.
vehemently opposed by the Ḥanbalites and the Sharīf Abū Ja‘far, who issued an edict (fatwa) forcing him either to make a public retraction or face execution. ⁴⁶ Before we discuss al-Zamakhsharī’s crisis, I will mention the crises of al-Ash‘arī, al-Ghazālī and Ibn ‘Aqīl.

8. Crisis of al-Ash‘arī

There are three different events which are mentioned by the biographers regarding al-Ash‘arī’s ⁴⁷ intellectual crisis that led him to renounce Mu‘tazilism.

---
According to the first event,\(^{48}\) al-Ash‘arī was a Mu‘tazilite for forty years\(^{49}\) when he renounced Mu‘tazilism due to his differences with them on the “principle of justice” \((al-‘adl)\),\(^{50}\) and “createdness of the Qur’ān” \((khalq al-Qur’ān)\). He secluded himself from the people in his home for fifteen days. Then, he came in the mosque of Baṣra for a Friday congregation. He climbed on the pulpit and addressed his audience in a loud voice,

Whosoever knows me, knows me and whosoever does not know me, I am going to introduce myself that I am Abū al-Ḥasan ʻAlī b. Ismā‘īl al-Ash‘arī. I used to say that the Qur’ān is created and God does not see with His eyes. I renounce all those things in which I used to believe, and all those bad deeds which I committed, I repent now. I disassociate completely myself from the Mu‘tazilites and I exit from their disgrace and vices.\(^{51}\)

In the year 300/913, the second event took place when al-Ash‘arī during the month of Ramaḍān saw the Prophet Muḥammad in his dream three times who said to him, “Give your support to the teachings related on my authority, for they are true \(\text{(anṣar al-madhāhib al-marwīya ṣannī fa-‘innaha al-ḥaqq).}\)” After seeing the Prophet in his dream for the third time, al-Ash‘arī said, “Everything besides truth is error” \((mā ba‘d al-ḥaqq illā al-dalāl).\) Subsequently, “he defended the beatific vision of God, intercession and other doctrines with the support of traditions” \(\text{(wa akhadha fī nuṣrat al-aḥādīth fī al-ru‘yā’ wa al-shafā‘a wa ghayra dhālik).}\(^{52}\)

---


\(^{49}\) Al-Subkī and Ṭāshkubrīzāda mention the al-Ash‘arī remained Mu‘tazilite for forty years. Since al-Ash‘arī was born in 260/873, it is not correct that he continued to be Mu‘tazilite for forty years. His conversion took place in 300/913, therefore, it would be appropriate to infer that he was forty years old at that time. See Al-Subkī, Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi‘iyya, 3: 347; Ṭāshkubrīzāda, Miftāḥ al-sa‘āda, 2:166.

\(^{50}\) Justice \((al-‘adl)\) is the second principle of the Mu‘tazilites.


\(^{52}\) Al-Subkī, Ṭabaqāt, 3: 348-49.
The third event took place sometime after al-Asiʾariʾs three visions of the Prophet Muhammad in the month of Ramaḍān, which is as follows:

Al-Asiʾariʾ debated with Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbāʾiʾ one day and asked him about three brothers who died: the oldest an upright and pious believer; the middle one a damned and vicious unbeliever; and the youngest who died young, not having reached the age of puberty. Al-Jubbāʾiʾ said, “As for the ascetic, he is in the ranks [of Heaven]; and as for the unbeliever, he is in the depths [of Hell]” – based upon the fact that reward of the obedient and punishment of the sinner are obligatory upon God, according to them. “As for the child, he is one of those who are saved, neither rewarded nor punished.” So al-Asiʾariʾ said, “What if the child requested the rank of his big brother in Heaven?” Al-Jubbāʾiʾ said, “God will say, ‘High ranks are the fruits of obedience.’” Al-Asiʾariʾ said, “And if the child said, ‘The shortcoming and incapacity are not my doing; for if You had kept me alive until I grew up, I would have obeyed You and entered Heaven.’” Al-Jubbāʾiʾ said, “The Creator will say, ‘I knew of you thyf if you remained alive, you would have sinned and entered the painful torment of the lowest depths of Hell-fire; so it was best for you that you died young.’” Al-Asiʾariʾ said, “And what if the sinner abiding in painful torment says, calling out from the depths of the Fire and the strata of Hell, ‘O Lord of the Worlds, and oh Most Merciful of the merciful, Why did You take my brother’s interest into account and not mine, knowing that it would be best for me to die young and not become a prisoner in the Inferno?’ What will the Lord say then?” Al-Jubbāʾiʾ was immediately silenced and could not continue the debate (ingaṭaʾaʾ an al-al-idāl).

After his breakup with the Muʿtazilites, al-Asiʾariʾ followed the school of the great traditionalist Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal. He brought his rationalism and employed it in the service of traditionalism. However, he was severely criticized and despised by the ultra-

---

conservative traditionalists and the Hanbalites for his rational stance. It was not until a great patron of scholars and powerful Shāfi‘ī vizier Nizām al-Mulk, who established for the Ash‘arites “network of institutions called the Nižāmia Colleges, and to them turned over the endowed professional chairs.” The two greatest Ash‘arite theologians, Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī and al-Ghazālī defended, supported and protected the Ash‘arism. Later on al-Bāqillānī, al-Shahrastānī, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, Aḍud al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Ījī (d. 756/1355) and ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Jurjānī (d. 816/1413) played significant roles in projecting the greatness of al-Ash‘arī and the excellence of his doctrines. To sum up, al-Ash‘arī’s intellectual crisis led him to completely break his relationship with the Mu‘tazilites and in the long run the establishment of Ash‘arite school which was overwhelmingly representative of the orthodox Muslim thought.

9. Crisis of al-Ghazālī

Approximately two centuries after al-Ash‘arī, al-Ghazālī had intellectual crisis, rather he mentions two crises in his lifetime. The first crisis of knowledge occurred in his early youth sometime before 470/1078. He describes that,

56 ʻAbū Ḥāmid Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, honorific title “The Proof of Islam” (ḥujjat al-islām), was born at Ṭūs in Khurāsān in 450/1058. His early education began in Ṭūs and studied with ʻAlī Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Rādhakānī, and then he traveled to Jurjān and studied with ʻAbū Naṣr al-Ismā‘īlī. He returned to Ṭūs and stayed there for three years, and after that he went to Nayshābūr and joined the circle of the most distinguished theologian and jurist of his age, ʻAbū al-Ma‘ālī al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085), known as the Imām al-Ḥaramayn (Imām of the two holy places: Mecca and Medina), under whom he studied theology, philosophy, logic, dialectic and natural sciences. ʻAbū ʻAlī al-Ḥasan b. ʻAlī b. Iṣḥāq Nizām al-Mulk (d. 485/1092), the great vizier of Saljuq sultans Alp Arslān (regn: 455-65/1063-72) and Malik Shāh (regn: 465-85/1072-92) established a series of madrasas which were specifically meant for teaching Ash‘arite kalām and Shāfi‘ī jurisprudence. The most celebrated Nizāmīyya madrasa was built in Baghdad in 457/1065. Other Nizāmīyya madrasas were established in Balkh, Naysābūr, Harāt, and Marwin the province of Khurāsān; Baṣra, and Mawṣil in the province of Irāq; Isfahān in the province of Jibāl; and Āmul in the province of Ṭabristān. In 478/1085, Nizām al-Mulk invited al-Ghazālī to his camp-court and
The thirst for understanding the real meanings of things was my constant habit from the very early age of my life. It was not due to my choice but a basic instinct and natural impulse endowed by God.\textsuperscript{57}

This natural disposition led al-Ghazālī to investigate and verify the truthfulness of matters. He states that,

Then it became clear to me that certain knowledge is that in which the object known is so manifest that there remains neither any doubt, nor any possibility of error or delusion. Even the mind cannot stipulate such a possibility (\textit{wa lā yattasiʿa al-qalb li-taqdiṭ dhaliq}). Certain knowledge must also be safe from error to such an extent that if someone attempts to show it is false, it would not create any doubt or denial.\textsuperscript{58}

He examined the various kinds of knowledge and considered that there was no knowledge with such characteristics except sense perception (\textit{ḥissīyāt}) and necessary

\textsuperscript{57} Al-Ghazālī, \textit{al-Munqidh}, 81.

\textsuperscript{58} Al-Ghazālī, \textit{al-Munqīd}, 82.
knowledge (darūriyāt). When he investigated thoroughly, it became apparent that by reason (ʻaql) the sense perception was not always reliable and became skeptical. He came to the conclusion that there was no certain knowledge, nor was there any way to achieve it.

During this period, when al-Ghazālī was skeptical, he was inflicted with serious sickness, which lasted approximately for two months. He states that, “Eventually, God cured me from that sickness and my soul was restored to health and equilibrium, and I returned back to the necessary acceptable and reliable intellect with peace and certainty. However, this did not happen by systematic proof and sequential demonstration, but by a light with which God filled my heart, and that light is the key to most of the gnosis.”

Al-Ghazālī’s first crisis was resolved as suddenly as it occurred. His recovery of confidence in reason (ʻaql) did not take place due to demonstration of logic, but by the light of God in his heart. This fact clearly proved for him that reason has its limitations – neither self-sufficient nor absolute by itself.

At the height of his reputation, with brilliant prospects, and great honor bestowed upon al-Ghazālī, the second crisis occurred in which he suffered a complete physical breakdown, and for a time was incapable of even lecturing. In Rajab 488/July 1095, the crisis turned into his serious sickness. He lost his ability to speak because according to him,

God blocked my tongue and I was impeded from teaching. . . My tongue could not speak a single word and I had no ability. . . It affected my eating and drinking as I became unable to swallow and digest even a morsel, and the physicians stopped their treatment.

59 Al-Ghazālī, al-Munqidh, 86.  
60 Al-Ghazālī, al-Munqidh, 136.
When recovered from his illness, he announced that he was going on pilgrimage to Mecca, and left Baghdad in Dhū al-Qa‘ada 488/November 1095 and spent sometime in Damascus. Then he went to Jerusalem during the late spring or summer of 489/1096. After that he went to Mecca and Medina and performed the Pilgrimage in 489/1096. He then went back to Damascus for two years in the seclusion and solitude (al-‘uzla wa-al-khalwa) to worship and purify his soul and heart with the remembrance of God.61

Once again, in search for certainty, al-Ghazālī set out to scrutinize the teachings and doctrines of various seekers after truth and identified four groups: the scholastic theologians (mutakallimūn), the Ismā‘īlīs, the philosophers and the Sūfīs. He could not find certainty and reliability in the teachings and doctrines of the first three groups. However, he grasped the intellectual understanding of Sūfism, and realized that the ultimate truth could only be experienced by practice, that is by renunciation and separation from all worldly desires and attachment and devotion to God only.62

Al-Ghazālī left Damascus due to an incident which took place at the Amīniyya madrasa, where he was attending a teaching session incognito of a scholar. He heard his name being quoted by the scholar, fearing that pride (‘ujb) might overcome him, he left the city.63 Then he returned back to Ṭūs to join his family in Dhū al-Ḥijja 490/November 1097, and in the course of journey stayed in Baghdad in Jamādī al-Thānī 489/May-June 1097 for a brief time.64

In the year 499/1106 Fakhr al-Mulk, son of Niẓām al-Mulk who became the vizier of Sanjar, the Saljūqī ruler of Khurāsān, pressed al-Ghazālī to return to academic works,

---
61 Al-Ghazālī, al-Munqidh, 138.
62 Al-Ghazālī, al-Munqidh, 89-135.
63 Al-Subkī, Tabaqāt al-Shāfi‘iyya, 6:199.
64 Al-Ghazālī, al-Munqidh, 138.
which he accepted.\textsuperscript{65} He taught at the Niẓāmīya madrasa for at least three years or more and during this period, he wrote the autobiographical work \textit{al-Munqidh min ḍalāl}. He came back to Ṭūs, and there he established a hermitage (\textit{khanqa}), where he trained young disciples in the theory and practice of the asceticism. He died in Jamādí al-Thānī 505/December 1111.

Montgomery Watt states that, “There is no reason to doubt that he (al-Ghazālī) had an actual experience such as he describes (in \textit{al-Munqidh}).”\textsuperscript{66} Kojiro Nakamura agrees with Watt and describes it as follows,

Ghazālī certainly became sceptical about the traditional dogmas, but it was not merely his own particular problem, but also a general phenomenon of his age…The difference is that Ghazālī was conscious of this malaise of the age and faced it as his own problem and tried to overcome it faithfully.\textsuperscript{67}

According to Fazlur Rahman,

Although there may be found unconcealed contradictions in al-Ghazālī’s intellectual aspect, the spiritual integrity and organic unity of his personality is beyond a shadow of doubt. The synthesis thus achieved by al-Ghazālī between Ṣūfīsm and \textit{kalām} was largely adopted by orthodoxy and confirmed by \textit{Ijmāʿ}. Its strength lay in the fact that it gave a spiritual basis for the moral practical \textit{élan} of Islam and thus brought it back to its original religious dimensions.\textsuperscript{68}

\textsuperscript{65} Al-Ghazālī, \textit{al-Munqidh}, 159.
10. Crisis of Ibn ‘Aqīl

Ibn ‘Aqīl, contemporary of al-Ghazālī and al-Zamakhsharī, mentions that during his childhood two of the most important events took place which remained in his life. The first event was the entry of the Saljuqī hordes into Baghdād in 447/1055 with their ruthless pillaging of his quarter of Bāb al-Ṭāq which forced him to move. It seems that in the devastation he also lost his parents or guardians. Abū Manṣūr b. Yūsuf (d. 460/1068), a great Ḥanbalī merchant and confidential adviser of Caliph Abū Ja’far al-Qā’im bi-amr-Allāh, took Ibn ‘Aqīl under his protection, most probably on the recommendation of Abū Ya’lā b. al-Farrā’. The second event started after the death of his teacher Abū Ya’lā b. al-Farrā’. Ibn ‘Aqīl’s intellectual curiosity could not confine him within the limits of the traditional sciences. The grammarian Abū al-Qāsim ‘Abd al-Wāḥid b. Barhān (d.

69 Abū al-Wafā’ ‘Alī b. ‘Aqīl b. Muhammad b. ‘Aqīl b. Ahmad al-Baghdādī al-Zafarī, Ḥanbalī jurist and theologian, was born in Baghdād, on the left bank quarter of Bāb al-Ṭāq in 431/1040. He belonged to a Ḥanafī family, not only on his mother’s side, but also on that of his father. Ibn ‘Aqīl owed his literary humanism to the paternal side of his family; and his legal scholasticism and ‘ilm al-kalām, evidenced by his strong attraction for dialectic and keen interest in the art of disputation was from the maternal side. His ‘thought was molded by two major cultural forces: a rationalist family background immersed in kalām and literary humanism, and a Ḥanbalī Traditionalist education immersed in legal scholasticism. Ibn ‘Aqīl had broad interests ranging from Qur’ān and traditions, grammar and belles-lettres, asceticism and Sīfīsm, prosody and the art of letter-writing, to those subjects in which, he particularly excelled, the art of sermon, dogmatic theology, dialectics and legal studies. He mentions that he studied under twenty-three teachers, out of which only two belonged to the Ḥanbalī School, Qāḍī Abū Ya’lā b. al-Farrā’ (d. 458/1066) and Abū Muhammad al-Tamīmī (d. 488/1095). The others were Shāfi‘ite, notably Abū Ishāq Shīrāzī (d. 478/1086); Ḥanafite, including the most prominent Qāḍī al-quḍāt Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Dāmaghānī (d. 478/1086); Mu’tazilite, Abū al-Qāsim b. Barhān (d. 456/1064), Abū ‘Alī al-Walīd (d. 478/1086), who studied Mu’tazilism under two great masters of the century, Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār and his disciple, Abū al-Husayn al-Baṣrī (d. 436/1044)) and Abū al-Qāsim al-Tabbān (date of death unknown). He also studied law and pursued it for eleven years from 447/1055 to 458/1066. Ibn ‘Aqīl’s work include Kitāb al-Funūn in 200 to 800 volumes, Kitāb al-Wafā’ī fī ʿusūl al-fiqh, Kitāb al-Jadal and a series of bries treatises on the nature of the Qur’ān, written in refutation of Ash’arī’s doctrines, and Juz’ fi nasr karāmāt al-Ḥallāj, in praise of al-Ḥallāj. Among his other important non-extant works are Kitāb al-Irshād fī ʿusūl al-dīn and Kitāb al-Intīṣār li-aḥl al-hadīth. Ibn ‘Aqīl died in 513/1119 and according to Ibn Nāṣir, approximately 300,000 people attended his funeral prayers. See Ibn al-Jawzī, Abū Faraj ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. ‘Alī, Al-Muntaẓam fī al-tārīkh al-mulāk wa-al-umam, ed. Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Atā and Muṣṭafā ‘Abd al-Qādir Aṭā (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-’Ilmiyya, 1992), 17:179; Ibn Athīr, al-Kāmil fī al-Tāʾirīkh, 10:561; George Makdisi, “Ibn ‘Aḳīl, Abū ‘l-Wafā’ ‘Alī b. ‘Aḳīl b. Muhammad b. ‘Aḳīl b. Ahmad al-Baghdādī al-Zafarī,” EI², 3:699; George Makdisi, Ibn ‘Aqīl: Religion and Culture in Classical Islam (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 17-19.
456/1064) encouraged Ibn ‘Aqīl to study kalām with Abū ‘Alī b. al-Walīd (d. 478/1086), who was kalām theologian and an enthusiastic Mu‘tazilite propagandist. Before the death of his teacher Abū Ya’lā b. al-Farrā`, he frequently attended in secret the study circles of Mu‘tazilite masters and learned kalām and became interested in the writings of the great mystic of wahdat al-shuhūd, al-Ḥallāj. He was aware of the risks to which he was exposing himself, not only because of its condemnation in the Qādirī Creed, but also due to non-toleration of Ḥanbalī school of rationalist sciences. When some of the Ḥanbalīs found out about it, he was severely beaten to the extent of bleeding. This incident happened during 447/1055, the year of his transfer from to the Ḥanbalī school and 455/1063, the year in which Niẓām al-Mulk became the vizier. Ibn ‘Aqīl also praised early Şūfīs, whom he held in the highest regard, making a clear distinction between them and those contemporary Şūfīs whom he considered were at the lowest level of moral and ethical values. He became interested in the writings of

70 Makdisi, Ibn ‘Aqīl, 19.

71 The ‘Abbāsid caliph Abū ʻAbbās Ahmad b. Iṣḥāq al-Qādir bi-Allāh (caliphate: 381-422/991-1031) issued in 408/1018 his first edict which required the Mu‘tazilites to make a public retraction, stop from the public discussion of kalām-theology and stop offer courses on Mu‘tazilism, Rāfīḍism or any other anti-Sunnī doctrines. The guilty had to sign a retraction to this effect and in case of repetition would suffer corporeal punishment and exile. In 409/1019, he introduced Risāla al-Qādirīyya, a profession of faith, defining the official doctrine and promulgated the second edict proclaiming the doctrines of Sunnī Traditionalism, according to which “He who says that the Qur‘ān is created is an infidel, whose blood may legitimately be shed.” Three other edicts were issued in 420/1029: the first edict was concerned with the condemnation of Mu‘tazilism and the other two edicts condemned as transgressor (fāsiq) who professed that the Qur‘ān was created. His son Abū Ja‘far al-Qā‘im bi-amr-Allāh (caliphate: 422-467/1031-1075) continued with his father’s policy of profession of faith, known as the Qādirī-Qā‘īm Creed (al-‘ītiqād al-Qādirī al-Qā‘īm). The Creed was sanctioned by the consensus of the jurists. The Qādirī Creed condemned as heretical all doctrines opposed to Traditionalist Sunnī doctrine. It was manifestly anti-Rationalist, opposed inter alia to Mu‘tazilites and Ash’arites. The Qādirī Creed was not against Şūfism in general or al-Ḥallāj in particular. The Qādirī Creed stated that faith (īmān) was composed of words (qawl), deeds (‘amāl) and intentions (nīya); that was variable, capable of increasing or decreasing. It was in line with the concept of al-Shāfi’ī (d. 204/820) and Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), but opposed, inter alia, to the Mu’tazilite concept, which identified īmān and islām, and was therefore a profession of faith that was purely exterior, composed of a set form of words and gestures. It was also opposed to the Ash’arite concept, i.e., that the profession of faith was variable, the deeds had nothing with it. See D. Sourdel, “al-Ḳādir Bi-‘llāh,” EF, 4: 378 and D. Sourdel, “al-Ḳā‘īm Bi-Amr Allāh,” EF, 4: 457.

mystic theologian Ḥusayn b. Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj (244-309/857-922) specifically the concept of *waḥdat al-shuhūd.*

Usually, the appointments to the professorial chairs of the great mosques, such as the Mosque of al-Manṣūr, were made by the Caliph. Abū Ya‘lā b. al-Farrā’ (d. 458/1066) did not name his successor; though he himself had been designated by his professor, Ibn Ḥamīd (d. 403/1012), to succeed him as professor of law. After Abū Ya‘lā’s death, Abū Manṣūr b. Yūsuf (d. 460/1068) was instrumental for the appointment of Ibn ʻAqīl as the professorial chair, named *Halqat al-Barāmika.* Sharīf Abū Ja‘far (d. 470/1077) who was twenty years senior of Ibn ʻAqīl, resented the appointment and early distinction bestowed upon him. The Sharīf’s long years of study under the direction of Abū Ya‘lā,

---

73 It is translated as “unity of vision” or of look (in reference to the meaning of the third form of the root *sh h d*); or by “unity of presence.” However, *shuhūd* really means the act of being present at, of being a witness of. The *waḥdat al-shuhūd* is not only “sight” or “look,” but an actual presence which is total witness: it is God witnessing to Himself in the heart of His votary (ʻābid). This union with God (jamʿ) leads to a unification (ittiḥād) which is not a unification of substance, but operates through the act of faith and of love (ʻishq, maḥabba) which welcomes into the emptiness of oneself the Loving Guest (= God), “the essence whose Essence is Love,” as al-Ḥallāj expressed it. See L. Massignon and L. Gardet, “al-Ḥallāj,” *EF,* 3:99. Ibn ʻAqīl, 41, 43.

74 The appointment of Ibn ʻAqīl as successor to Abū Ya‘lā, at the age of twenty-seven was exceptional, but not unprecedented. Shafīʻī is reported to have started issuing fatwas as jurisconsult when he was only fifteen years old. Abū al-Ma‘ālī al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085) to his father’s chair of law at the age of twenty. Similarly, Ibn Taymīyya (d. 728/1328) succeeded his father’s chair at the age of twenty-one. It may be mentioned that Ibn ʻAqīl was also consulted for legal opinions in the caliphal Chancery of State. Although new institutions of learning were established with rules and regulations, old customs and practices were still followed by those who had power and influence, especially when the candidates were of the caliber of Shafīʻī, Juwaynī, Ibn Taymīyya and Ibn ʻAqīl. See Makdisi, *Ibn ʻAqīl,* 24.

68 The chair at the Mosque of Manṣūr was a Ḥanbalī chair, named *Halqat al-Barāmika,* after its founder. It takes its name from the Ḥanbalī jurisconsult and scholar of *hadith,* Abū Ḥafṣ al-Barmakī, whose *nisba* name is reported to relate to a village called al-Barāmakīya, and two of his sons who were also jurisconsults. Its occupants were the following professors: Abū Ḥafṣ ʻUmar b. Ḥajmād al-Barmakī (d. 387/997), founder of the chair; Abū Ishāq ʻIbrāhīm (d. 445/1053), the founder’s son; Abū Ya‘lā b. al-Farrā’; and Ibn ʻAqīl. See George Makdisi, “Muslim Institutions of Learning in Eleventh-Century Baghdad” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 24 (1961), 5-6; Makdisi, *Ibn ʻAqīl,* 27.

75 The chair at the Mosque of Manṣūr was a Ḥanbalī chair, named *Halqat al-Barāmika,* after its founder. It takes its name from the Ḥanbalī jurisconsult and scholar of *hadith,* Abū Ḥafṣ al-Barmakī, whose *nisba* name is reported to relate to a village called al-Barāmakīya, and two of his sons who were also jurisconsults. Its occupants were the following professors: Abū Ḥafṣ ʻUmar b. Ḥajmād al-Barmakī (d. 387/997), founder of the chair; Abū Ishāq ʻIbrāhīm (d. 445/1053), the founder’s son; Abū Ya‘lā b. al-Farrā’; and Ibn ʻAqīl. See George Makdisi, “Muslim Institutions of Learning in Eleventh-Century Baghdad” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 24 (1961), 5-6; Makdisi, *Ibn ʻAqīl,* 27.
his assistantship as repetitor to his master and being the first cousin of Caliph al-Qā’im did not help him to get the coveted position.\textsuperscript{76}

As long as Ibn ‘Aqīl was under the direction of Abū Ya’lā, and protection of Abū Manṣūr there was no overt opposition from Sharīf Abū Ja’far towards him. Opposition started after the death of Abū Ya’lā and it intensified after the death of Abū Manṣūr in 460/1068. The Sharīf was vehemently opposed to Mu’tazilism and to Ibn ‘Aqīl, whom he considered a Mu’tazilite. When Ibn ‘Aqīl had fallen ill, he entrusted some of his work to one of his friend Ma’ālî al-Hā’ik. Ibn al-Jawzī states that on finding their subject matter, Ma’ālî handed over them to the Sharīf. Based on these works, the Sharīf issued a fatwa, which was presumably seconded by Abū ‘Alī Ibn al-Bannā’, forcing Ibn ‘Aqīl either to make a public retraction or face execution.\textsuperscript{77}

The promulgation of al-Qādirī edicts and the Qādirī Creed was designed against Mu’tazilites, Ashʿarites and Shiʿites doctrines and could be considered a crime against the State. Moreover, neither the name of Ḥallāj, nor any Şūfī doctrine was mentioned in the Qādirī Creed. Despite the fact, that there were numerous and well known Mu’tazilites in Baghdād – most of them the members of Ḥanafī school – but the state power was not implementing any of the provisions of the Creed. However, in the Retraction document, two allegations were specified against Ibn ‘Aqīl: Mu’tazilism and Ḥallājism. Furthermore, it was not the Caliphal chancery that brought the charges against Ibn ‘Aqīl,\textsuperscript{76}

\textsuperscript{76} Makdisi, \textit{Ibn ‘Aqīl}, 23.
instead the petition was filed by Sharīf Abū Ja‘far, who was amongst others, the main accuser.78


Ibn ‘Aqīl lost the chair of the mosque of Abū Manṣūr, but after the death of Sharīf Abū Ja‘far, he resumed teaching in a masjid-college of his own and became head of the Ḥanbalī guild. The Retraction of Ibn ‘Aqīl continued to be the subject of controversy among the traditionalists of the Shafī‘ī and Ḥanbalī guilds. However, as the time passed posterity had highest praise for his achievements as a religious intellectual. Favorable towards him were Şadr al-Dīn Abū Ṭāhir Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Silāfī (d. 576/1180), Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200), Majd al-Dīn b. Taymiyya (d. 652/1254), Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) and Şalāḥ al-Dīn Ibn Shākir al-Kutubī (d. 764/1363).80 Muwaffaq al-Dīn Ibn Qudāma al-Maqdisī (d. 623/1220) severely criticized Ibn ‘Aqīl for having fallen under the influence of rationalist doctrines and considered him an Ash‘arīte.

---

78 Makdisi, Ibn ‘Aqīl, 41.
79 Makdisi, Ibn ‘Aqīl, 3-5.
He devoted an entire treatise, *Taḥrīm al-nazār fī kutub ahl al-kalām* to the censure of *kalām*, in which he condemns the Mu'tazilites, the Ash'arites and Ibn 'Aqīl. Dhahabī (d. 748/1347), Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373) and Ibn Rajab (d. 795/1393) were of the opinion that Ibn 'Aqīl was influenced by the Mu'tazilites, specifically in his metaphorical interpretation of the divine attributes.

According to Makdisi,

As an intellectualist, he insisted on the use of reason and authority on an equal footing, maintaining reason’s importance in search of the truth… Nevertheless, his early upbringing and education as a Ḥanafi-Mu’tazili remained deeply etched in his memory, and he recalled with fondness and pride his family background, as he did his admiration for the early Ṣūfīs, and keeping his vow of repentance not to replace by promoting Mu’tazilism.

11. Crisis of al-Zamakhsharī

Abū Muḍar Maḥmūd b. Jarīr al-Ḍabbī al-Iṣfahānī (d. 507/1114), one of al-Zamakhsharī’s teachers had access to the court of Niẓām al-Mulk, a generous patron of scholars of religion and litterateurs. It was through him that al-Zamakhsharī was introduced to Niẓām al-Mulk. Al-Zamakhsharī citing his close relationship with Abū Muḍar wrote many laudatory panegyrics for Niẓām al-Mulk, but unfortunately could not receive any reward or official position. He complained in his poetry that despite his

---

85 Al-Zamakhsharī, *Dīwān*, 73 (verses 33 to 47); 76-77 (verses 24-36); 79-80 (verses 13 to 31).
high caliber scholarly works and extensive erudition he was ignored, while those people who were no match to him were rewarded and got high offices.\textsuperscript{86}

In desperation, al-Zamakhsharī left for Khurāsān and visited the vizier Mujīr al-Dawla Abū al-Fatḥ ʻAlī b. Ḥusayn al-Adristānī and presented his works on grammar and lexicography as well as penned down a \textit{qaṣīda} in his praise. The vizier appreciated his works and rewarded him with one thousand \textit{dīnārs} and a horse.\textsuperscript{87}

In Khurāsān, al-Zamakhsharī also met Mu’ayyad al-Malik ʻUbayd Allāh, son of Niẓām al-Mulk, who was a high executive of the “office of seals and correspondence” (\textit{dīwān al-ṭughrā’ wa al-inshā’}), and well-versed in both Arabic and Persian poetry and prose. He wrote a \textit{qaṣīda} in his praise, however, his luck did not favor him there as well.\textsuperscript{88} Afterwards, al-Zamakhsharī arrived in Iṣfahān, in the court of Saljūqī Sulṭān Muḥammad b. Malik Shāh (d. 511/1117). He wrote panegyrics extolling the Sulṭān’s services in promoting the cause of Islam and suppressing the \textit{Bāṭiniyya} sect’s activities.\textsuperscript{89}

Şulṭān Malik Shāh appointed Anūshtigīn as governor of Khwārazm. After Anūshtigīn death, his son Quṭb al-Dīn Muhammad Khwārazmshāh became the governor. He was respectful to the people of knowledge and religion. Al-Zamakhsharī praised him for these qualities in him. After him, his son ʻAlā al-Dīn Atsīz (d. 551/1156) replaced him. Al-Zamakhsharī presented Atsīz his book \textit{Muqaddima al-Adab} which was kept in his collection of the books. In the introduction of this book, al-Zamakhsharī praises Atsīz’s generosity and his appreciation of \textit{belles-lettres}.\textsuperscript{90}

\textsuperscript{86} Al-Zamakhsharī, \textit{Dīwān}, 212-13 (verses 39 to 55).
\textsuperscript{87} Al-Zamakhsharī, \textit{Dīwān}, 85-88 (verses 1 to 48); 98-99 (verses 1 to 29); al-Qifṭī, \textit{Inbāh al-ruwāt}, 3:267.
\textsuperscript{88} Al-Zamakhsharī, \textit{Dīwān}, 153 (verses 1 to 9).
\textsuperscript{89} Al-Zamakhsharī, \textit{Dīwān}, 280-82 (verses 1 to 28).
\textsuperscript{90} Al-Zamakhsharī, \textit{Muqaddimāt al-adab} (Tehran: Mu’assassa-i-Muṭāla‘āt-i-Islāmī, 2007), 1-3.
However, the biographical sources, except al-Andarasbānī and Ṭāshkubrīzāda, indicate that al-Zamakhsharī could not develop intimate relations with high officials in any of the courts he visited. He was very eager for getting a position in the government but could not succeed in it as he often complained about it in his poetry. The year 512/1118 is the most important in the life of al-Zamakhsharī. He had completed forty-five years of his life, and in Rajab 512/October 1118, al-Zamakhsharī suffered a serious illness (nāhika) and warning (mundhira). Al-Zamakhsharī mentions in his book entitled Maqāmāt that “he saw in his early morning slumber as if someone called him loudly saying, O Abū al-Qāsim! Destined time and false expectations!” (annahu uriya fī ba’d ighfā’āt al-fajr ka annamā šawwata bihi man yaqūlu lahu yā abū al-Qāsim ajal maktūb wa-‘amal makdhūb). Upon hearing these words, al-Zamakhsharī was so terrified and perplexed that he penned down some aphorisms. He further states that “this incident happened in the year 512/1118 when he was afflicted with a serious illness, which he called as the warning” (al-wāqi’a fi sannatin ithnatayi ‘asharat ba’d al-khamsa mi’at bi al-marḍati al-nāhika allatī sammāha al-mundhira). He made a covenant with God (mithāq li Allāh) that if he were cured from the illness he would neither go to the thresholds of the rulers nor offer his services to them. He further

91 According to al-Andarasbānī and Ṭāshkubrīzāda, al-Zamakhsharī used to be guest at the table of ministers and kings, praising them in poetry and leading a life of luxury in this world until God showed him His vision, which became the cause of his breaking up with them and turning to the matter of religion. See Al-Andarasbānī, “Sīra,” 368; Ṭāshkubrīzāda, Miftāḥ al-saʿāda, 2:100.
92 Al-Zamakhsharī, Dīwān, 73 (verses 33 to 47); 79-80 (verses 13 to 31); 98-99 ((verses 1 to 29)).
93 Al-Andarasbānī and Ṭāshkubrīzāda mention in their biographical notes that al-Zamakhsharī was forty-one years old. The illness (nāhika) and warning (mundhira) took place in Rajab 512/October 1118, and al-Zamakhsharī was born on Rajab 27, 467/March 18, 1075. The age of forty-one reported by both al-Andarasbānī and Ṭāshkubrīzāda seems to be incorrect because he was actually forty-five years old. See Al-Andarasbānī, “Sīra,” 368; Ṭāshkubrīzāda, Miftāḥ al-saʿāda, 2:100.
94 Al-Andarasbānī and Ṭāshkubrīzāda mention book’s name as Naṣā‘īh al-kibār which is also known as Maqāmāt al-Zamakhsharī. It has fifty maqāmāt (articles) and it is mentioned in the first Maqāmat al-ridwān. See Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd b. ‘Umar al-Zamakhsharī, Maqāmāt al-Zamakhsharī (Miṣr: Maṭba’a al-Tawfīq, 1906), 5.
95 Al-Zamakhsharī, Maqāmāt, 5-6.
promised to himself that he would keep his soul and tongue above in composing poetry for their praise, refrain from earning his living with their gifts and presents, “and make utmost efforts to take his name out of the official register and remove it” (wa yajidda fī isqāṭi 'ismihi min al-dīwān wa maḥwih). He also promised that he would lead the life of guidance (al-hudā), desist from the desires (al-hawā) and devote his lifetime in pursuit of the “sciences of various readings of the Qur’ān, the tradition and jurisprudence” (‘ulūm al-qirāʿāt wa al-ḥadīth wa abwāb al-sharʿ).

Brocklemann and Pellat consider al-Zamakhsharī’s Maqāmāt as an indication of his repentance in which he addresses to himself a number of moral exhortations. However, it is not an evidence of his conversion from the previous worldly life rather it is a testimony of his decision to renounce writing profane literature. They further state that he was conscious of being a philologist and wrote a commentary (sharḥ) on his Maqāmāt.

According to Régis Blachère and Pierre Masnou, following the covenant which al-Zamakhsharī made during his serious illness, he could have turned away from profane literature and dedicated himself to writing that would edify his readers. His Maqāmāt, which he addressed to himself in order to stay on the straight path, would have been his

---

96 Al-Zamakhsharī, Maqāmāt, 6.
97 Al-Zamakhsharī, Maqāmāt, 6-7.
98 Maqāmāt (pl. maqāmāt) is a purely and typically Arabic literary genre. The word is generally translated as “assembly” or “session” (Fr. “séance”), but it is an approximation which does not convey exactly the complex nature of the term. The evolution of maqāmāt is attested in the third/ninth century by Ibn Qutayba who in 'Uyūn al-akhbār (2:333-43) gives the title Maqāmāt al-zuhhād ‘ind al-khalifā wa al-mulūk. Before him, the Mu‘tazilite al-Iṣkāfī had written a Kitāb al-maqāmāt fī tafḍīl ‘Alī. Aḥmad Bāḍī‘ al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī (d. 398/1008) is considered to be the first to have adopted maqāmāt for the creation of a new literary genre. He is said to have written approximately four hundred of the maqāmāt, out of which only fifty-two are extant. His most eminent successor was Abū Muḥammad al-Qāsim al-Ḥarīrī (d. 516/1122) whose maqāmāt are no more than a pale reflection of those of al-Hamadhānī. Inspired by al-Hamadhānī and al-Ḥarīrī, al-Zamakhsharī composed fifty maqāmāt in which he addresses to himself a number of moral exhortations. See C. Brockelmann and Ch. Pellat, “Maḳāma,” EF2, 6:107; Regis Blachère, “al-Hamadhānī,” EF2, 3:106; D.S. Margoliouth, “al-Ḥarīrī (sometime Ibn al-Ḥarīrī in Yāḳūt) Abū Muḥammad al-Ḵāsim b. Ṭālī b. Muḥammad b. ‘Uṯmān b. al-Ḥarīrī al-Ḫaṣrī,” EF2, 3:221.
eternal reward through repentance and good works. They further state that the contents of some of the *maqāmāt* show clearly that after his conversion, al-Zamakhsharī still had not changed completely and his desires remained dominated by the preoccupations of the secular world.\(^9\)

Al-Juwaynī’s observation is that al-Zamakhsharī’s works written after 513/1119 indicate that there is definitely a change in his style of writing. Specifically he mentions *al-Mufaṣṣal fī ṣanʿat al-iʿrāb, al-Fāʿiq fī gharīb al-ḥadīth, Maqāmāt, Aṭwāq al-dhahab, al-Nṣāʾīh al-sighār, Nawābigh al-kalim, and Rabīʿ al-ābrār*.\(^10\)

Almost all the biographical sources except that of al-Andarasbānī and Ṭāshkubrīzāda are silent about the intellectual crisis of al-Zamakhsharī. The only main source of his crisis is mentioned by al-Zamakhsharī himself in his own writings. Other than al-Zamakhsharī, both al-Andarasbānī and Ṭāshkubrīzāda provide the same information about it. Despite the fact that this crisis occurred when al-Zamakhsharī was forty-five years old, al-Andarasbānī and Ṭāshkubrīzāda give his age forty-one at the time. There are no other reports about the crisis from al-Zamakhsharī’s contemporaries or even later historians. On the other hand, we have documentation and verification from different sources about the intellectual crises of al-Ashʿarī, al-Ghazālī and Ibn ʿAqīl.

Though the description of these accounts may differ but there is a consensus about the main themes of their intellectual crises. This cannot be said about al-Zamakhsharī because we do not have any mention of his crisis by his biographers except al-Andarasbānī and Ṭāshkubrīzāda. The only reliable source of al-Zamakhsharī’s crisis is


his writings which we should accept and believe in them. After reading his *maqāmāt* and poetry, there is no reason to doubt about the veracity of his crisis. Al-Zamakhsharī might not be leading a life luxury in the company of high ranking government officials and might not have been their guest, but he was desirous to get a job in accordance with his knowledge and wanted to be appreciated and recognized for his works which were extraordinary compared with his contemporaries.

12. Conclusion

Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd b. ʿUmar al-Zamakhsharī was born in 467/1075 at Zamakhshar in Khwārazm, and died in 538/1144 in Jurjāniyya, where he was buried. Al-Zamakhsharī travelled for purposes of education and visited Mecca twice and stayed there for a period of approximately twelve years. His first visit took place sometime between 500/1106 and 518/1124. His second visit to Mecca was in 526/1131 and stayed there for seven years, hence he was called with honorific title of *Jār Allāh* (Neighbor of God). During this period, he wrote *al-Kashshāf*, which is considered a model of the Muʿtazilite exegesis of the Qurʾān. No other book in the history of *tafsīr* has been commented upon in the forms of *sharḥs*, *ḥāshiya*s, and *mukhtaṣars* more than *al-Kashshāf*. Hājjī Khalīfa in his *Kashf al-ẓūnūn* lists approximately fifty commentaries.

The biographical dictionaries and *tabaqāt* works mention that al-Zamakhsharī acquired his education from approximately eleven scholars. However, most of the information available about these scholars is scanty. These sources also identify about twenty-six of his students. In most of the cases they mention about what students studied
with or transmitted from al-Zamakhsharī, but in some cases information regarding their fields of study is not available.

Although of Persian origin, al-Zamakhsharī’s command over Arabic was superb, and unparalleled. He was an outstanding scholar of his time who excelled in many sciences. He was bestowed with the title of Fakhr Khawārzm (Glory of Khawārzm) by his contemporaries. Al-Zamakhsharī’s scholarly contribution covers a wide variety of fields: exegesis, traditions, jurisprudence, literature, grammar, and lexicography. The biographical dictionaries mention that al-Zamakhsharī compiled approximately fifty works during his lifetime.

The intellectual crises of al-Ashʿarī, al-Ghazālī, Ibn ʿAqīl, and al-Zamakhsharī have been examined in the preceding paragraphs. Every scholar’s intellectual crisis differs from each other. Al-Ashʿarī who remained a Muʿtazilite until the age he was forty years old, relinquished it because he was not satisfied with the answers of Abū ʿAlī al-Jubbāʿī regarding the three brothers’ anecdote. He became disillusioned with the Muʿtazilites concept of divine justice because he could not find satisfactory solution to resolve the issue of God’s justice. Al-Ashʿarī’s intellectual crisis culminated in his breakup with the Muʿtazilites and the establishment of Ashʿarite school (though it took a long time) which was overwhelmingly representative of the orthodox Muslim thought.

Al-Ghazālī experienced two intellectual crises. The first crisis pertained to his skepticism with all kinds of knowledge and he was in search of the certainty of knowledge (ʿilm al-yaqīnī). Al-Ghazālī’s crisis was resolved due to the light of God bewtowed in his heart, rather than demonstrative proofs.  

---

101 Al-Ghazālī, al-Munqidh, 82, 86.
when he had a conflict between the worldly fame (holding the most illustrious position of the Professorship in the Niẓāmia College) and desire to achieve success and salvation in the hereafter. After travelling for eleven years, and carefully investigating the teachings of various groups, he found the ultimate truth in mysticism.

Ibn ʻAqīl was persecuted and had to make public retraction because of his admiration of the Muʿtazilites, learning *kalām*, and interest in the writings of mystic Manṣūr b. al-Ḥallāj. He was the victim his times where intellectualism and rationalism was viewed in great suspicion. The triumph of traditionalism was at its pinnacle, and rationalism had lost its support from government and the majority of the scholars with the exception of a few. He endeavored to find a solution but failed.

Al-Zamakhsharī was afflicted with serious illness and warning. If we analyze his crisis and compare with the crises of al-Ashʿarī, al-Ghazālī, and Ibn ʻAqīl, we find that there are some similarities and some differences between them.

Al-Zamakhsharī and al-Ghazālī both suffered serious illness. During his illness, al-Zamakhsharī made a promise with God that upon his recovery from the illness he would neither approach the rulers nor request for any position from them. Furthermore, he would avoid composing poetry for their admiration, and lead the life of guidance. However, he could not keep up with his promise with God and resumed going to rulers after his recovery from illness. On the other hand, after his serious sickness, al-Ghazālī resigned from his position of Professorship and left in search of truth which he ultimately found in Ṣūfīsm.
Al-Zamakhsharī and al-Ashʻarī both were the Muʻtazilites. Al-Zamakhsharī was not only a Muʻtazilite, but professed it openly in public. Whenever he visited someone, he used to introduce himself at the door, “Abū al-Qāsim the Muʻtazilite is at the door” (Abū al-Qāsim al-Muʻtazīlī bi al-bāb). Al-Ashʻarī remained Muʻtazilite for a long time but relinquished it when he could not find satisfactory solution to resolve the issue of God’s justice in the Muʻtazilites principle of justice.

Al-Zamakhsharī and Ibn ‘Aqīl both were contemporaries. Muʻtazilism was in decline in most parts of the Muslim world except Khawārzm, the hometown of al-Zamakhsharī. According to Madelung, “In Khawārzm Ḥanafism was strongly predominant. However, among the Ḥanafites in Khawārzm Muʻtazilite theology prevailed throughout the Seljūq age. The Khawārzmshahs evidently favored Muʻtazilism, which survived there at least until the second half of the eighth/fourteenth century.” It was in this environment, that al-Zamakhsharī’s tafsīr al-Kashshāf, which is based upon the Muʻtazilites five principles, remained popular. On the contrary, Ibn ‘Aqīl’s Ḥanafī-Muʻtazilism and his thoughts were frowned upon in Baghdad due to the firm foundation of the traditionalism there.


Chapter 2

Muʿtazilites

1. Origin of the Muʿtazilites

According to Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā b. al-Murtaḍā (d. 840/1436), “the chain of authorities on which the Muʿtazilite school is based is clearer than dawn” (wa-sanad al-muʿtazila li-madhabihim awḍaḥ min al-falaq).¹ Four centuries earlier, Qādī ʻAbd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025) claimed that “their (Muʿtazilites) method in this regard is based upon unequivocal proofs and they have clearly expressed it with rational proofs, the Qurʾān, the Prophetic traditions and consensus” (wa-ṭarīqaḥum fī dhālika al-adillat al-qāṭiʿa wa qaḍ bayyinuhā bi-ḥujaj al-ʻaql wa al-kitāb wa al-sunna wa al-ijmāʾ).² However, the case is quite contrary to the claims made by these two scholars. Not only the origin of the term Muʿtazila but also its early sources are controversial and contradictory.

The verb ḍala means “to withdraw, to separate and to abstain.”³ Before the emergence of the Muʿtazilite school, the verb ḍala was used in different kinds of ‘withdrawal’ and was not used in a specific technical meaning. It also referred to various historical events such as refusal to pay zakāt to Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, the first caliph.⁴

---

neutrality at the battle of Camel (35/656) and battle of Ṣifṭīn (36/657), and neutrality in the involvement of political activities during the first civil war.\(^5\)

The historical sources attest that during the first Islamic century, the name *muʿtazila* applied to many different groups. Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan al-Nawbakhtī (d. 311/923) reports that the withdrawal (*iʿtizāl*) of al-ʾAḥnaf b. Qays al-Ṭamīmī was “not in the sense of adhering to doctrine of *iʿtizāl*” (*lā al-tadayyun bi-al-ʾiʿtizāl*), “but in pursuit of safety from killing and from the loss of property and he said to his people: ‘Abstain from the civil war, it will be better for you’” (*lākin ʿalā al-ṭalab al-salāma min al-qatl wa-dhahāb al-māl wa-qāla li-qawmihu iʿtazilū al-fitnat aṣlah lakum*).\(^6\)

Before dealing with a detailed analysis of different viewpoints regarding the origin and emergence of Muʿtazilites, it will be appropriate and relevant to provide the biographical information about Wāṣil b. ‘Aṭā’ and ‘Amr b. Ṭābi‘ who are considered to be the founders and pioneers of the Muʿtazila school.

2. Wāṣil b. ‘Aṭā’

Abū Ḥudhayfa Wāṣil b. ‘Aṭā’ was born in Medina in the year 80/699 and was brought up in Baṣra. He died in 131/748, probably due to the plague which raged at Baṣra during the same year. He was a client (*mawlā*), but it is not certain whether he was a client of the Banū Ḍabba or the Banū Makhzūm or the Banū Ḥāshim.\(^7\) He had an odd physical constitution (*muḍṭarib al-khalq*) with a very long and twisted neck (*ʿunuqihi ṭūl*

\(^5\) Al-Nāšī’, *Masā’il*, 16.


wa-i’wjāj). He used to remain silent for such a long period of time that people considered him mute. He had a speech defect (al-thagh) and could not pronounce the letter r (rā’) correctly, but he was a very fluent and eloquent orator of his time and was legendary for completely avoiding this letter in his talk.

Wāṣil’s piety and asceticism were exemplary and his main preoccupation was religion. He was considered among those who were known for their religious observance (fa-huwa ashbaha bi ahl al-dīn). He used to meet with intellectuals of different religious backgrounds such as Manichaean and Buddhist. He wrote in his Kitāb al-Alfā mas’ala against Manichaees and was the first to write against the various Muslim sects as well as against other religions. His theological system was developed by the encounters with adversaries and he encouraged his emissaries to invite people “to the truth” (ilā al-ḥaqq) and “to God’s religion” (ilā dīn Allāh). It is reported by his wife, who was the sister of ‘Amr b. ʻUbayd that he was the best in his knowledge and he used to spend the night in prayer and writing down arguments and proofs against other religions.

None of Wāṣil’s writings has been preserved, but several titles are mentioned in the biographical dictionaries. According to Ibn Khallikān, he compiled ten books: Aṣnāf

---

12 Ibn al-Murtaḍā, al-Munya, 23.
14 Al-Balkhī, Maqālāt, 67.
16 Ibn al-Murtaḍā, al-Munya, 19.
al-Murji’a, al-Tawba, al-Manzila bayna al-manzilatayn, Khuttatahu allati akhrajā
minhā al-rā’, Ma’ānī al-Qur’ān, al-Khutbā fi al-tawḥīd wa al-‘adl, Mā jarā baynahu wa-
bayna ‘Amr b. ‘Ubayd, al-Sabil ilā ma’rifat al-ḥaqq, al-Da’wa, and Ṭabaqāt Ahl al-‘ilm
wa al-jahl. Ibn Nadīm and al-Dāwūdī add two books: al-Futiya and al-Radd ‘alā al-
Qadariyya respectively.

He was very generous but never kept money for his personal use. It is reported
that “He inherited twenty thousand dirhams from his father but never took anything from
it. He ‘ordered to make a hole in the wall’ (wa amar an taj’ala fī kuwwa) of a room
behind his house (in which to keep that money) and appointed a guard and said to his
companions that whoever needs may take from it. The people used to take from it until he
died.” He was very careful to give money only to those who were pious.

Wāṣil never took gifts, rewards or honorariums offered to him. After the
assassination of al-Walīd II in 126/744, he visited as a member of a Baṣran delegation to
welcome the new governor ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar b. ‘Abd who was appointed by Yazīd
III. The governor, quite unexpectedly, asked him to say a few words, and he delivered a
speech extemporaneously and in authoritative manner. When the governor offered him an
honorarium, he refused to take it, and requested to donate the money for the required
improvement of Baṣra’s water supply, probably the canal (nahr).

---

17 Ibn Khallikān, Wafayāt, 6:11; Ibn al-Nadīm, al-Fihrist, 1:561; Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, Lisān al-mīzān, 7:
280-81; al-Ziriklī, al-A’lām, 8:109.
18 Ibn al-Nadīm, al-Fihrist, 1:561; Ḥāfiz Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ‘Ali al-Dāwūdī, Ṭabaqāt al-
Dictionary (Beirut: Makttab Lebanon Librairie du Liban, 2002), 571.
20 ‘Abd al-Jabbār, Fadl, 239.
21 Ibn al-Murtadā, al-Munya, 18.
Wāṣil’s odd and clumsy appearance, sternness, speech defect and long intervals of complete silence were so visible that his first impression upon others used to be embarrassing. However, he knew how to win people over, because with gradual and better acquaintance and understanding, people used to change their opinion about him and admired him. He was honest and straightforward in his talks and never missed an opportunity to admonish. In their first meeting ‘Amr b. ‘Ubayd, a celebrated Mu‘tazilite, while looking at him remarked: “There will be no good in a man who has such a long and twisted neck.” Wāṣil responded to him: “Whosoever finds faults with the product, he disgraces the producer because of its relationship between the producer and the product.” ‘Amr said: “O Abū Ḥudhayfā! It is admirable that you admonished me and I will never do it again.”

Wāṣil is the first Mu‘tazilite who formulated the principle of al-manzila bayna al-manzilatayn, literally meaning “the position between the two positions” or commonly referred to as “the intermediate position between belief and unbelief”. Wāṣil recorded in his book entitled Mā jarā baynahu wa-bayna ‘Amr b. ‘Ubayd “What happened between him and ‘Amr b. ‘Ubayd?” Like other books of Wāṣil, this book is also lost. The heresiographical accounts differ but the main theme appears to be the following. In one of their meetings between Wāṣil and ‘Amr, the latter presented the view of al-Baṣrī that a Muslim grave sinner was a hypocrite. Wāṣil responded that this view was not correct and explained his principle of the “intermediate position” (al-manzila bayna al-manzilatayn). He quoted from the Qur’ān that: “Those who do not judge according to God’s revelations

---

23 Sharīf al-Murtadā, Amālī, 1:165.
are the wrongdoers” (wa-man lam yaḥkum bi-mā anzala Allāhu fa-ʿūlāʾika hum al-ẓālimūn). He cited another verse in which unbelievers are called the wrongdoers: “And the unbelievers are the wrongdoers” (wa-al-kāfirūna hum al-ẓālimūn). On the basis of these verses, he said that a Muslim who commits grave sin should be called a wrongdoer. Wāṣil argued that it is appropriate to call him a transgressor, because God equates a hypocrite with a transgressor. In this regard, he quoted the verse of the Qur’an: “Surely the hypocrites are transgressors” (inna al-munāfiqūna hum al-fāsiqūn). He further stated that all the sects are unanimous in stating that a grave sinner deserves to be called a wrongdoer, as he deserves to be named as transgressor. Then, he explained the prevailing viewpoints of all those who disagreed with him. The Khārijites call a polytheist a

---

25 Qurʾān, 5:45.
26 Qurʾān, 2:254.
27 Qurʾān, 9:67.
28 There are various contradictory narratives regarding the origin of the Khārijites (al-Khawāridi, sing. Khāridjī) sect, but it can be traced back when “during the battle of Ṣiffīn (Ṣafar 37/July 657) to settle the differences, arising out of the murder of ʿUthmān, which had provoked the war, by referring it two referees who would pronounce judgment ‘according to the Kurʾān.’ While the majority of ‘Alī’s army readily adopted this proposal, …one group of warriors, mainly of the tribe of Tamīm, vigorously protested against the setting up of a human tribunal above the divine word. Loudly protesting that ‘judgment belongs to God alone” (lā ḥukma illā li-llāh) they left the army, and withdrawing to the village of Ḥarūra’…elected as their chief an obscure soldier, ‘Abd Allāh b. Wahb al-Rāsibī. These first dissenters took the name al-Ḥārūriya or al-Muhakkima…Another name given to those first Khawāridi …is al-Shurāt (pl. of shārī) the ‘vendors,’ i.e. those who have sold their soul for the cause of God… they proclaimed the nullity of ‘Alī’s claims to the caliphate but equally condemned ʿUthmān’s conduct and disclaimed any intention of avenging his murder.” See G. Levi Della Vida, “Khārdjites,” EI², 6:1074. According to the heresiographers, the Khārijites are divided into more than twenty independent sub-sects. They did not have any unity either in their political actions or theological doctrines. On the question of caliphate they were opposed equally to the legitimism of the Shi’ites and the quietism of the Murji’ites. They were of the view that it is the obligation of the believers to depose an imām who has gone off the right path, and every believer who is morally and religiously irreproachable can be appointed an imam, even if he were a black slave. They rejected the doctrine that a believer even without performing the religious obligations remains a Muslim, and regarded all non-Khārijites as apostates. See Abū al-Hasan ‘Alī b. Ismāʿīl al-Ashʿarī, Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn wa-ikhtilāf al-muṣallīn, ed. Hellmut Ritter (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1980), 86-131; Abū Maṣṣūr ‘Abd al-Qāhir b. Ṭāhir b. Muhammad al-Bāghdādī, Al-Farq bayna al-fīrq, ed. Muhammad Muḥyī al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd (Cairo: Dār al-Ṭalāʿiʾiʿ, 2005), 61-89; Abū al-Fath Tāj al-Dīn Muhammad b. ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, al-Milal wa-al-niḥal, ed. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Muḥammad al-Wakīl (Cairo: Muʾassasa al-Ḥalbī, 1968), 114-38.
transgressor (*mushrīkān fāsiqan*); the Shi’ites\(^{29}\) call an unbeliever a transgressor (*kāfir fāsiqan*); the Murji’ites\(^{30}\) call a believer a transgressor (*mu’minān fāsiqan*); and Ḥasan al-Baṣrī called a hypocrite a transgressor (*munāfiqān fāsiqan*). He concluded that since there is consensus among all the sects to call a grave sinner a transgressor, it is necessary that he should be called by this name. ‘Amr agreed with Wāṣil and accepted his principle of “the intermediate position.”\(^{31}\)

### 3. ‘Amr b. ‘Ubayd

Abū ‘Uthmān ‘Amr b. ‘Ubayd b. Bāb was born at Balkh in the year 80/699. He was at first a client (*mawla*) of Banū Uqayl and then of ‘Arāda b. Yarbū’ b. Mālik.

According to Ibn Nadīm, at first he was a client of Banū al-‘Adawiyya and then of Banū

---

\(^{29}\) The Shi’ites maintain that ‘Alī was the first caliph or *Imām* because the legitimate authority rests with a member of the Prophet’s family (*ahl al-bayt*). They reject the first three caliphs, Abū Bakr, ‘Umar and ‘Uthmān and consider them as usurpers. Their name is derived from *shī‘at* ‘Alī, i.e. the party of partisans of ‘Alī, which was first used during the caliphate of ‘Alī’s distinguishing them from the *shī‘at* ‘Uthmān, the partisans of the caliph ‘Uthmān who were opposed to ‘Alī. They are also called the *Imāmiyya* because they believe the Muslim religion consist in the true knowledge of the *Imām* or rightful leader of the faithful. They are also known as *tīhna* ‘ashariyya or the “twelvers” due to being the followers of twelve *imāns*. The Sunnites call them al-*rawāfiḍ* or “the defectors or dissenters.” However, the Shi’ites call themselves al-*mu‘minūn* or “the true believers” because they consider themselves as the “orthodox” Muslims. According to the heresiographers, the Shi’ites are divided into 45 sects but the main sects are Ghāliy, Muṣāfiyya, Imāmiyya, Ismā‘īliyya and Zaydiyya. See al-Ashtarī, *Maqālāt*, 5:85; Abū Mansūr al-Baghdādi, *al-Faqr*, 30:60; al-Shahrastānī, *al-Mīlal*, 1:146-98; Wifred Madelung, “Shī‘a,” *EI*, 9:420-24.

\(^{30}\) According to Madelung, “[The Murji‘ite sect] arose in the aftermath of the Kūfī Shī‘ī revolt under al-Mukhtar in favour of Muhammad b. al-Hanfīyya. Ibn Sa‘d and other sources describe Muhammad b. al-Hanfīyya’s son al-Ḥasan as the author of the doctrine of *irdjā‘*, which he first defended in a circle of scholars debating the conflict between ‘Uthmān, ‘Alī, Ṭalḥa, and al-Zubayr. Al-Ḥasan argued that the judgment about the right and wrong in this conflict should be deferred to God, and Muslims should abstain from declaring either solidarity with them or dissociation from them. He then composed an open letter on his doctrine of *irdjā‘* and had it read in public. Although some doubt has been cast on the role of al-Ḥasan and the authenticity of the *Kitāb al-Irdjā‘* attributed to him (M. Cook), there are no cogent reasons to reject them. Other early sources name either ʻĀṣa b. Abū Muslim al-Māṣhir or Dharr b. ʻĀbd Allāh, both Kūfīs, as the first propagators of *irdjā‘*.” See W. Madelung, “Murdjii’a” *EI*, 7:605. Wensinck states that they were of the opinion that “[W]here there is faith, sins will do no harm. On account of [this] doctrine they were called the adherents of promise (*ahl al-wa‘d*), in contra-distinction to the Mu’tazila who were called the adherents of threats (*ahl al-wa‘id*).” See A.J. Wensinck, “Al-Murdjii’a,” *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, eds. H.A.R. Gibb and J.H. Kramers (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 412. According to the heresiographers, the Murji‘ites are divided from five to twelve independent sub-sects. See al-Ashtarī, *Maqālāt*, 132-54; Abū Mansūr al-Baghdādi, *al-Faqr*, 151-54; al-Shahrastānī, *al-Mīlal*, 139-46.

Hanẓala. Originally, his family was from Kabul, Afghanistān, and from there his father moved to Baṣra. ‘Amr died in 144/761 in the town of Marrān, on the road from Mecca to Baṣra, while returning from the pilgrimage.\(^{32}\)

‘Amr was one of the closest and well-known disciples of Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728) and was very much involved in his “circle” (ḥalqa) of traditionists and qādirites.\(^{33}\) He was a great theologian and was one of the founders of the Mu‘tazilite school. He was famous for his great piety, asceticism, honesty and sincerity. It is reported that he prayed all night. For forty years, he performed the pilgrimage every year on foot, giving his camel to those who were weak.\(^{34}\) He was always serious and never laughed and looked as if returning from his parents’ funeral. He behaved like a person for whom alone hell was created. He was very careful while speaking and was an extraordinary orator.\(^{35}\)

Ḥasan al-Baṣrī had a very high opinion of him. When once asked by someone about him, he said: “You are asking me about a person who has been educated by the angels and brought up by the prophets. If he stands up to perform a task, he remains steadfast. If he is assigned a task, he accomplishes it with resolution and if he is prohibited from a thing, he is most strict in abstaining from it. I have never seen a man


\(^{33}\) See al-Balkhī, Maqālāt, 68, where he mentions “He (ʻAmr) was amongst the distinguished adherents of Ḥasan” (wa-huwa (ʻAmr) min jillat aṣḥāb al-Ḥasan). See also al-Sharīf al-Murtadā, Amāli, 1:165, who states that “ʻAmr b. ʻUbayd was amongst Ḥasan’s adherents and students” (wa-kāna ʻAmr b. ʻUbayd min aṣḥāb al-Ḥasan wa-talāmidhahu).

\(^{34}\) Al-Balkhī, Maqālāt, 68; ʻAbd al-Jabbār, Faḍlī, 243; Ibn al-Murtadā, al-Munya, 22.

\(^{35}\) Al-Balkhī, Maqālāt, 69; Ibn al-Murtadā, al-Munya, 22; ʻAbd al-Jabbār, Faḍlī, 247.
whose outward is like his inward and vice versa.”

He also called him “the best among the Baṣran youths” (khayrun fityan ahl al-baṣra).

ʿAmr had numerous followers who trusted him without any reservation. Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī states: “ʿAmr b. Ubayd’s position among the Muʿtazilites was such that he had their complete obedience; if he took off his shoes, thirty thousand (Muʿtazilites) took off their shoes.”

ʿAmr wrote a commentary on the Qurʾān, transmitted mainly on the authority of Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. Most of it is lost; however a few references to it are reproduced in later tafsīr literature. Besides it, he wrote Kitāb al-ʿAḍl wa-al-tawḥīd and Kitāb al-Radd ‘alā al-qadariyya. These two works are also not extant.

4. Viewpoints regarding the Emergence of the Muʿtazilites

There are four viewpoints regarding the origin and emergence of the Muʿtazilites. The first view is based upon the meaning of iʿtazala which denotes abstinence from the worldly desires, pleasures and sins. Therefore, those who abstained from worldly affairs were called Muʿtazila. The second view is that those who took neutral position during the Muslim civil strife were named Muʿtazila. The third opinion is that those who withdrew or separated from the community (umma) due to their theological differences were called Muʿtazila. The fourth is that Muʿtazila movement originated due to political reasons. In the following pages, I provide detailed information about these viewpoints.

36 Ibn Khallikān, Wafayāt, 3:460.
37 Nashwān al-Ḥimayrī, al-Hār al-ʿin, 111.
5. Abstinence from the Worldly Affairs

The first view is based upon the meaning of *iʿtazala* which denotes abstinence from the worldly desires, pleasures and sins. Some early Muʿtazilites were of the opinion that they chose this name themselves because they decided to adopt pious and ascetic lives.⁴⁰ ḌAmr b. ʿUbayd instructed his disciples to be “the party which abstains from evil (*al-firqa al-muʿtazila*)”.⁴¹ They called themselves *ahl al-ʿadl* or ‘adliyya “people of justice” because of God’s justice, and *muwahhid* “those who profess the unity of God” because they believed in the absolute unity of God. In support of their argument, they quoted that: “I will draw away from you and from those you call upon” (*wa aʿtazilukum wa mā taʿbudūn*).⁴² They also argued that their withdrawal was due to God’s grace as stated in the Qur’ān: “And forsake them graciously” (*waḥjurhum hajran jamīla*).⁴³ They also quoted Prophetic tradition in support of their name which states: “My community will be divided into more than seventy sects but the most reverent and God-fearing among them is the one which withdraws” (*abarruhā wa-atqāhā al-fiʿata al-muʿtazila*).⁴⁴

Muḥammad b. Yazdādh al-Iṣfahānī (d. 230/844) mentions that “the Muʿtazilites are moderate and avoid exaggeration and negligence” (*al-muʿtazila hum al-muqtaṣida, fa-iʿtazalat al-ifrāṭ wa-al-taqṣīr*).⁴⁵ According to Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Malaṭī (d. 377/987) when al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī gave allegiance to Muʿāwiya, his followers who were the companions of ʿAlī, separated (*iʿtazalū*) from him and said: “We will devote ourselves in

---

⁴² Qurʿān, 19:48.
⁴³ Qurʿān, 73:10.
⁴⁴ This tradition with some variations has been quoted by Tirmidhī, Abū Dāʾūd, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, Ibn Mājah, al-Bayhaqī, and al-Ḥākim.
⁴⁵ ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *Faḍl*, 165.
seeking knowledge and worship, therefore, for this reason they were named Muʿtazila”
(nashtaghilū bi al-ʿilm wa al-ʿibāda, fā-sammū bi-dhālika muʿtazila).  

Ignaz Goldziher is also of the view that the beginnings of the movement were due
to ‘fromme, zum Teil weltflüchtige Leute, muʿtazila, d. h. sich Zurückziehende (Büßer)’,
or in other words solitary ascetics. The “ascetics” (zuḥhād, nuṣṣāk) of that period were
called muʿtazila and there had been a number of ascetics among the early Muʿtazilites.”

6. Neutrality in the Civil Wars

The second view is that those who took a neutral position during the Muslim civil
strife were named Muʿtazila. Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan al-Nawbakhtī (d. 311/923)
reports that when ‘Uthmān b. ʿAffān (d. 35/656), the third caliph, was assassinated,
people gave their allegiance to ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 41/661) and were called al-jamāʿa
“the people of consensus”. However, later they were divided into three groups. The first
group remained loyal to ‘Alī. The second group turned against ‘Alī and among them
were Abū Ṭalḥa (d. 50/670 or 51/671), ‘Ā’isha bt. Abī Bakr (d. 58/678) and ‘Abd Allāh
b. Zubayr (d. 73/692). The third group consisting of Saʿd b. Abī Waqqās (d. between
50/670-1 and 58/677-8), ‘Abb Allāh b. ʿUmar (d. 73/693), Muḥammad b. Maslama, and
Usāma b. Zayd (d. ca. 54/674) separated (iʿtazilu) from ‘Alī and refused to fight on his
side or against him despite having already given their allegiance to him and accepting his

46 Abū al-Ḥusayn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Malaṭī, Al-Tanbīḥ wa al-radd, ed. Muḥammad Zāhid b. al-
 Ḥasan al-Kawthārī (Beirut, Maktabat al-Maʿārif, 1968), 36.
47 Ignaz Goldziher, “Arabische Synonymik der Askese”, Der Islam, 8 (1918), 207-209, reprinted in Ignaz
Goldziher’s Gesammelte Schriften, ed. Joseph De Somogyi (Hildesheim: Georg Olms
Verlagbuchhandlung, 1970), 5: 410-12; Ignaz Goldziher, Vorlesungen, 94.
48 The ascetics, the zuḥhād and nuṣṣāk of the time, were referred to as “the Muʿtazila”, but the verb was
also employed for other forms of withdrawal. See Louis Massignon, Essai sur les origines du lexique
technique de la mystique musulmane (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Virn, 1954), 165-168; and Leah
appointment. Their decision of being neutral was based on the conviction that it was not lawful either to fight against ‘Alī or to fight with him. They are called Mu’tazila and are known as the predecessors of the later Mu’tazila. ⁴⁹

Al-Nāshī’ al-Akbar (d. 293/906) narrates a similar account that Abū Mūsā al-Ash’arī (d. 52/672), Abū Sa’īd al-Khudrī (d. 74/693), Abū Mas‘ūd al-Anṣārī and Aḥnaf b. Qays al-Tamīmī withdrew from the war between ‘Alī and Mu‘āwiya (d. 60/680), because they were not sure which of the two parties was right. They were called Mu’tazila. He also states that Wāṣil and ‘Amr b. ‘Ubayd held the same opinion and they were the leaders of the Mu’tazlia. ⁵⁰

Al-Khayyāṭ mentions that Wāṣil considered that in the war between ‘Alī, Abū Ṭalḥa, Zubayr and ‘Ā’isha, one of the parties was wrong, but it is not known which one. Since one of them committed a grave sin, that party should be considered in a state of transgression. ⁵¹

On the basis of the second view, it can be concluded that the name of Mu’tazila was originally applied to those who were neutral in civil war; it was coined by the Khārijites and the Shi‘ites.

7. Withdrawal from the Community

The third opinion is that those who withdrew or separated from the community (umma) due to their theological differences were called Mu’tazila. The heresiographical narrations differ about the key figure but the main theme revolves around the religious state of the Muslim sinner. The account of the historian of the religions, ‘Abd al-Karīm

⁴⁹ Al-Nawbakhtī, Firaq al-Shi‘a, 5-6.
⁵⁰ Al-Nāshī’, Masā‘il, 16-17.
al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153) is usually regarded as the standard one, according to which someone once asked al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī whether the grave sinner should be considered as a believer or an unbeliever. While al-Ḥasan reflected Wāṣil b. ‘Aṭā said that the grave sinner was neither absolutely a believer, nor absolutely an unbeliever, but was in an intermediate position (manzila bayna al-manzilatayn) literally “a position between the two positions”. He then stood and withdrew to one of the pillars of the mosque, followed by a number of those in the circle. Al-Ḥasan remarked “Wāṣil has withdrawn (iʿtizala) from us”. From this remark, he and his followers were called the Muʿtazila.52

More than a century before al-Shahrastānī, a Shāfiʿite theologian, ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī (d. 429/1037) provides five different views about a person who commits a great sin. First, the Azāriqa53 and Ṣufriyya54 considered that whosoever committed sin, either major or minor, was an unbeliever. Second, the Najadāt55 held that a sinner for whom the whole community decided unanimously that he was a sinner and considered an

53 Azāriqa, named for one of its early leaders, Nāfiʿ b. al-Azraq (d. 65/685) is a sect representing the extremist wing of Khārijites from the middle to the later part of the first century of Islam. Their main doctrines consisted of the exclusion (barāʾa) of the quietists (al-qāʿada) from Islam; the examination (miḥna) of all those who wished to join their army; those who did not make hijra were considered unbelievers; exclusion from Islam of those who recognized “dissimulation” (taqiyya) either in word or deed; and rejection of the stoning penalty for adulterers. A person who committed a major sin was considered an unbeliever and would be eternally in hell. See al-Ashʿarī, Maqālāt, 86-9; Abū Mansūr al-Baghdādī, al-Farq, 68-71; al-Shahrastānī, al-Milal, 1:118-21; R. Rubinacci, “Azāriqa,” EI², 1:810; Keith Lewinstein, “Azāriqa,” EI², 1 (2008):174-76.
54 Ṣufriyya, named for its founder, variously called ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Aṣfar, ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Ṣaffār al-Saʿdī al-Tamīmī or Ziyād b. al-Aṣfar, is a sect arising out of the break-up of the Khārijite community in the year 64/684. They did not regard as unbelievers who abstained from fighting provided they agreed with them in their beliefs. Dissimulation was permissible in words though not in deeds. By committing those sins for which punishments are prescribed, a person would not become unbeliever or polytheist. However, in case of major sins such as not performing prayers or fleeing from battles one would become an unbeliever. See al-Ashʿarī, Maqālāt, 101, 118; Abū Mansūr al-Baghdādī, al-Farq, 74-6; al-Shahrastānī, al-Milal, 1:137; Wilfred Madelung and Keith Lewinstein, “Ṣufriyya,” EI², 9:766.
55 Najadāt, named for one of its early leaders, Najda b. Ḵāmūṣ b. Ḵāmūṣān (d. 72/692) is a sub-sect of Khārijites. Their main doctrines were admissibility of iḥtīād and rāʿ y; justification of an error committed in ignorance but not for the obligatory precepts (wājib); one who did not make hijra was called munāfīq; and one who committed lesser sins and persisted in his/her error was a mushrik, whereas who committed grave sin without persisting in it was a Muslim. See al-Ashʿarī, Maqālāt, 89-93; Abū Mansūr al-Baghdādī, al-Farq, 71-3; al-Shahrastānī, al-Milal, 1:122-5; R. Rubinacci, “Nadjadāt,” EI², 7:858.
unbeliever and polytheist whereas a sinner about whom the community differed was to be judged by the juriconsults. Third, the Ibāḍiyya\(^\text{56}\) claimed that the person who committed a sin against which he was warned, knowing of the existence of God and His revelations, was an unbeliever; however his heresy was not the same as that of the polytheist. Fourth, some of the people of that era were of the opinion that a person who committed a grave sin was a hypocrite and a hypocrite was worse than an unbeliever who publicly professed his unbelief. Fifth, “scholars amongst the successors of that period” (‘ulamā’ al-tābi‘īn fī dhālika al-‘aṣr) held the view that whoever committed a grave sin was a believer (mu’min) and remains in the community of the Islam due to his knowledge of the prophets and the books revealed by God, and his acknowledgement that whatever has been revealed is true; however, he is a “transgressor due to his committing a grave sin” (fāsiqun bi-kabīratahu).\(^\text{57}\)

However, Wāṣil differed from all the five views and claimed that he was neither a believer nor an unbeliever but in an intermediate position between unbelief and belief (manzila bayna al-manzilatayn al-kufr wa al-īmān). Al-Baghdādī suggests that Wāṣil was the person who seceded from al-Ḥasan’s circle.\(^\text{58}\)

Muḥammad b. al-Nu‘mān al-Mufīd (d. 413/1032) provides the generally accepted account that the name of Mu’tazila took place when Wāṣil introduced the doctrine of

\(^{56}\) Ibāḍiyya, named for ‘Abd Allāh b. Ibāḍ al-Murrī al-Tamīmī, is one of the main branches of the Khārijite, appeared in 65/685 after breaking away from the Khārijite extremists. Their main doctrine was that those opposed to them were unbelievers (kuffār) not polytheists (mushrikūn). They did not believe in the assassination of their adversaries for religious reasons. Marriage with non-Ibāḍīs was permissible. They considered that the existence of an īmām was not necessary because of the unfavorable circumstances, and it was called al-kitmān (the secret). An īmām elected in the normal situation was considered as īmām al-bay‘a (īmām of allegiance), while an īmām invested by the ahl al-kitmān (the people living in a state of secrecy) to defend them in misfortune was known as īmām al-difā‘ (īmām of defense). See al-Ash‘arī, Maqālāt, 102-5; Abū Maṣūr al-Baghdādī, al-Farq, 83; al-Shahrastānī, al-Milal, 1:134-6; T. Lewicki, “Ibāḍiyya,” EI², 3:648.

\(^{57}\) Abū Maṣūr al-Baghdādī, al-Farq, 92-93.

\(^{58}\) Abū Maṣūr al-Baghdādī, al-Farq, 93-94.
manzila bayn al-manzilatayn. However, he adds the name of ‘Amr b. ‘Ubayd who agreed with Wāṣil’s viewpoint and both of them withdrew from al-Ḥasan’s circle.59

Ibn Qutayba’s (d. 276/889) version gives the name of ‘Amr b. ‘Ubayd who believed in the doctrine of free will (qadar) “and used to invite people for it” (wa yad‘ū ilayhi). He and his companions withdrew from al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī’s circle and therefore, they were named the Mu‘tazilites.60 Similarly, Ibn Sa‘d (d. 230/845) provides information in his Ṭabaqāt only of ‘Amr b. ‘Ubayd as a Mu‘tazili, while Wāṣil is not even mentioned.61 However, the relations between al-Ḥasan and ‘Amr were never broken off. ‘Amr continued to regard himself as a disciple of al-Ḥasan and transmitted his teachings.62

Another version links ‘Āmir b. ‘Abd al-Qays63 to the circle of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. Abū Bakr b. Durayd (d.321/933) states that; “It is he (‘Āmir) who separated from al-

---

60 Ibn Qutayba, al-Ma‘ārif, 482-483.
62 Al-Balkhī, Maqālāt, 69.
63 ‘Āmir b. ‘Abd al-Qays was a successor of the companions (tābi‘ī) and an eloquent orator whose sayings have been preserved. He was a famous ascetic of Baṣra and was considered one of the eight great zuhhād in the generation of tābi‘ūn.63 Ibn Qutayba mentions that during the caliphate of ‘Uthmān, he was exiled from Baṣra to Syria but does not give any reason for that. He died probably during the caliphate of Mu‘āwiya. Tābi‘ūn (sing. tābi or tābi‘ī) are the members of the generation of Muslims that followed the companions (ṣahāba) of the Prophet Muḥammad or those Muslims who knew one or more of the companions but not the Prophet himself. See also M. Murani, “Ṣaḥāba,” EI², 8:827. Ṣaḥāba (sing. ṣaḥābī) are the companions of the Prophet Muḥammad. According to Muḥammad b. Isma‘īl al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870), a ṣaḥābī is one who is a believing Muslim and must have accompanied (ṣaḥiba, lahu ṣuḥba) the Prophet or have seen him. In general, a participation in a number of the Prophet’s campaigns, adulthood (bulūgh al-ḥulum) and capability of transmitting directly from the Prophet are considered basic prerequisites. See Ibn Sa‘d, Ṭabaqāt, 8:126; Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd Allāh b. Muslim Ibn Qutayba, ‘Uyūn al-akhbār (Cairo: Mu’assasat al-Miṣrīyya al-‘Āmma, 1964), 1:308, 2:370, 3:184; Abū Nu‘aym Ahmad b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Īṣfahānī, Ḥilyat al-awliyā‘ wa-tabaqāt al-asfiyā‘ (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 1967), 2:87-95; Ch. Pellat, “‘Āmir b. ‘Abd al-Ḳays,” EI², 1:441; Susan A. Spectorsky, “Tābī‘ūn,” EI², 10:28.
Ḥasan, so that they were called Mu'ṭazilites.⁶⁴ But it seems unlikely that he was such a great leader to have started a new school by his separation.

According to other sources it was not al-Ḥasan but Qatāda b. Di‘āma al-Sadūsī⁶⁵ who used the term Muʿṭazila. Qatāda and ‘Amr both were disciples of al-Ḥasan. After the death of al-Ḥasan, Qatāda used to conduct the circle. One day when Qatāda entered the mosque, he realized that ‘Amr and a group of people withdrew from his circle. Qatāda remarked that they were the Muʿṭazila, and from that day they were called Muʿṭazila.⁶⁶

This version appears to be credible in the sense that there was some rivalry between Qatāda and ‘Amr, and ‘Amr was the leading person who separated along with his followers. In addition, Wāṣil is not mentioned at all in this episode. However, this account also does not appear to be tenable and Qatāda could not have invented this term because it was already in use, although he might have used it in a derogatory manner.⁶⁷

Some historians derive the name of Muʿṭazila from the principle of al-manzila bayna al-manzilatayn (the intermediate position between belief and unbelief). One of the proponents of this theory is Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Masʻūdī (d. 345/956), an eminent

---

⁶⁷ See al-Balkhī, Maqālāt, 115; ‘Abd al-Jabbar, Fadl, 166, “When many people called them with this name, it became a title for them” (fa-lammā sammumuhum bi-dhālika wa-kathura sāra laqaban lahum ‘alā mā dhakarnā).
historian, who says that it is the basic foundation of iʿtīzāl. The orthodox claim that those people who adopted Wāṣil’s position and opposed the consensus “were called the Muʿtazilites” (lammā khālafū al-ijmāʿ fi dhālika summū muʿtazila). However, the Muʿtazilites assert that “they did not oppose the consensus and their position was agreed upon in the early period of Islam and they refused to accept all the novel innovations” (lam yakhālafū al-ijmāʿ balʿ amīlū bi-al-majmaʿ ‘alayhi fi al-ṣadr al-awwal wa-rafaḍū al-muḥdathāt al-mutadiʿa).

8. Political Movement

The fourth viewpoint is that the Muʿtazila movement originated due to political reasons. We discussed earlier that during the Muslim civil strife, people were divided into three groups. The first group remained loyal to ‘Alī. The second group turned against ‘Alī and the third group called itself neutral and separated from ‘Alī and refused to fight on his side or against him. Among the second group were Abū Ṭalḥa, ‘Ā’isha and Ibn Zubayr. During the civil war, political arguments revolved around ‘Uthmān, ‘Alī, Muʿāwiyah and the arbitrators. Wāṣil was of the view that “one of the parties in the battles of the Camel (35/656) and Ṣiffīn (36/657) was in error, though it could not be established which one” (fi al-fariqayn min aṣḥāb al-jamal wa-aṣḥāb al-ṣiffīn innā aḥada humā mukhṭi ī lā bi-ʿaynihi). Similarly, in the case of ‘Uthmān, those who assassinated and deserted him, he said that “one of the parties was certainly sinful” (inna aḥada al-fariqayn fāsiq lā maḥālā). In his opinion, the testimony of the party in error could not be

accepted and the situation was to be compared to the procedure of *liʿān*, when both litigants appear together, the culprit not being known, their judgment (*ʻadāla*) is suspended.\(^{70}\)

ʻAmr b. ʻUbayd’s views were similar to Wāṣil’s except with a difference towards the parties in the battle of Camel. He considered that one of the parties was more sinful and if anyone amongst he parties testifies, it must not be accepted.\(^{71}\) He was anti-ʻAlid and preferred Abū Bakr to ʻAlī.\(^{72}\)

Abū al-Hudhayl could not decide whether Abū Bakr or ʻAlī deserved the successorship after the Prophet Muḥammad, although he seems to agree with the traditional viewpoint that the succession from Abū Bakr to ʻUmar and ʻUthmān was justified.\(^{73}\) He also stated that “We do not know whether ʻUthmān was assassinated unjustly or justly” (*lā nadrī qutila ʻUthmān ẓāliman aw maẓlūman*).\(^{74}\) With regard to the battles of Ṣiffīn and the Camel, he sided with both parties because it could not be decided by consensus which of the two sides was right.\(^{75}\)

---

\(^{70}\) Al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal*, 1:49. See J. Schacht, “Liʿān,” *El*, 5:730 and Muḥammad Aʾlā b. ʻAlī al-Tahānawī, *Iṣṭilāḥāt al-ʻulūm al-Islamiyya al-maʿrūf bi-Kashshāf iṣṭilāḥāt al-funūn* (Beirut: Khayyāṭ li-al-Kutub wa-al-Nashr, 1966), 5:1309. In Islamic law, *liʿān* is an oath which gives a husband the possibility of accusing his wife of adultery without legal proof and without his becoming liable to the punishment for this, and the possibility also of denying the paternity of a child borne by the wife. In the language of *Shariʿa*, evidence given by husband, strengthened by oaths, by which the husband invokes the curse (*laʿna*) and the wife wrath of God upon themselves, if they should lie; it frees the husband from ḥadd for *qadhf* (the legal punishment) and the wife of ḥadd for incontinence.

\(^{71}\) Al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal*, 1:49.


\(^{73}\) Al-Malaṭī, *Tanbīḥ*, 41.

\(^{74}\) Al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt*, 455.

Bishr b. al-Mu‘tamar considered that ʻAlī was right in his appointment of arbitrators and his opponents were wrong. In his view arbitrators were also wrong because they did not render the judgment in accordance with the Qur’ān.  

Al-ʿAshārī states that ʻAlī, Abū Ṭalḥa, Zubayr and Mu‘āwiya are to be judged right or wrong according to their motives, whether they were seeking the good of the Muslims or their own advancement. If ʻAlī fought for the betterment of the people then his reason was right. On the other hand if Mu‘āwiya fought for his own sake and advancement then he was wrong. He is of the opinion that once someone has been elected by the consensus (ijmā’) of the Muslims, the election is irreversible, even if a better (afdal) candidate is available afterwards.

According to Nyberg, there are quite definite indications that the Mu‘tazila was of political origin, and that it arose under the same constellation as the Shi‘ī [sic] and Khārijī movements. The accession of ʻAlī (Dhū al-Ḥijja 35/May 656) is the greatest watershed in the currents of the history of Islam. It is well known that several notable Companions of the Prophet refused to pay ʻAlī the homage which he demanded, or offered it reluctantly. The most frequently mentioned were Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr but the names of many others have been preserved: Saʿd b. Abī Waqqāṣ, ʻAbd Allāh b. Ṭalḥa, Zubayr, Muḥammad b. Maslama, Usāma b. Zayd, Shu‘ayb b. Sinān and Zayd b. Thābit. [al-Ṭabarī, i:3072] Of these Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr openly rebelled against ʻAlī but the majority remained neutral. The Medinese in general followed the example of the latter and in Baṣra al-ʿĀṣaḥ b. Qays with 6,000 Tamīmīs and a group of Azadīs under Sābra b. Shaymān also stood aside from the quarrel. [al-Ṭabarī, i:3169, 3178] In speaking of the latter the text uses the verb i‘tizala, which still has its proper sense of ‘to separate from’, but which is already on the way to become a political term meaning ‘to take up a neutral attitude in the quarrel between ʻAlī and his adversaries.’

---

76 Al-ʿAshārī, Maqālāt, 453.  
77 Al-ʿAshārī, Maqālāt, 457-58.  
78 Al-Nāshī’, Māṣā’il, 59.  
79 H.S. Nyberg, al-Muʿtazila, EI¹, 6: 787-88.
Nyberg also states that,

In a general way the teaching of Wāṣil on *al-manzila bayna al-manzilatayn* can only be perfectly understood if we see in it the theoretical crystallization of political programme of the ‘Abbāsids before their accession to power.80

Nyberg’s thesis of political origin of Mu‘tazila has been accepted by Pellat, Gardet and Anawati with some modifications.81 Wilfred Madelung, Montgomery Watt and Josef van Ess do not agree with Nyberg’s views and they reject his identification of the Mu‘tazilites with ‘Abbāsid *da‘wa*. However, Watt and van Ess agree with Nyberg that the term *i’tizāl* meant political neutrality rather than an active involvement in political dissentions, which the Mu‘tazilites faced due to civil war among the Muslims.82

According to Josef van Ess, “the inclination towards systematic theology, which marked the physiognomy of the school, was not due to Wāṣil, and certainly not to ‘Amr, but to Ḍirār b. ‘Amr (d. ca. 200/815).” He further elaborates that, “Ḍirār went out of favor in the movement, so that his teaching was attributed to Wāṣil, and he is the only founder of the Mu‘tazila. ‘Amr b. ‘Ubayd kept his distance for a long time, until the moment when, after al-Ḥasan al- Баşrī’s death and before the advent of the ‘Abbāsids, he joined the movement.”83

Montgomery Watt argues that the divergence of views suggests that neither Wāṣil nor ‘Amr but Abū al-Hudhayl al-‘Allāf (d. 226/841) was the originator of the Mu‘tazilite

---

school. “There is no evidence whatsoever that either Wāṣil or ‘Amr was at all versed in the Greek conceptions or methods of argument which were at the heart of the distinctive Mu‘tazilite position.”

Nyberg’s thesis is not tenable because the origin of the Mu‘tazilites was not due to any political movement. Calo Nallino argues “that at the time of the first civil war, those of the Companions (‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar, Sa‘d b. Abī Waqqās, etc.), who had chosen to side neither with ‘Alī nor with his adversaries, were for this reason called mu‘tazila.” So far as the conclusions drawn by van Ess and Watt are concerned, these are contrary to what the Muslim sources describe. Wāṣil separated from the circle of Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, and formulated the principle of manzila bayna al-manzilatayn to which ‘Amr agreed. Therefore, the Mu‘tazilite school was formed by Wāṣil and ‘Amr.

The first beginning of theology (kalām) and asceticism in Islam in the proper sense of the word go back to the second/eighth century, when the Mu‘tazilites and a great number of other sects appeared as separate entities. Later Mu‘tazilite texts and heresiographers’ accounts, only some of which are reliable provide information about the formation and variations of common doctrines of the Mu‘tazilites. It is evident from these sources that they participated in the lively controversies which were characteristic of that period.

Wāṣil was not only a pious ascetic but also an intellectual who was interested in theological questions, such as free will and God’s unity. He developed his own

systematic thought which is evident in his writings. His interest in epistemology is confirmed by his works which includes the title of *Kitāb al-Sabīl ilā ma’rifat al-ḥaqq*. In this book, according to Abū ‘Uthmān al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/869), Wāṣil states that “the truth can be perceived by four aspects of knowledge: eloquent book, agreed-upon tradition, rational proof, and consensus” (*al-ḥaqq yu’rafu min wujūh arba’: kitāb nāṭiq, wa-khabr mujtama‘, alayhi, wa-ḥujjat al-‘aql, wa-ijma’*). According to ‘Abd al-Jabbār, Wāṣil introduced the concept of proof by deduction (*dalīl*) in a dispute between Jahm b. Ṣafwān and the Buddhists regarding the knowledge and existence of God.

According to Wāṣil’s wife, he was a prolific writer and he left two boxes of the books containing his manuscripts, which she gave to Abū al-Hudhayl. ‘Abd al-Jabbār mentions that: “Perhaps Abū al-Hudhayl might have taken most of his knowledge from these manuscripts” (*fa-‘asā an yakun jull kalāmihi min dhālik*).

Wāṣil’s doctrine of *al-manzila bayna al-manzilatayn* was an extraordinary solution to a very controversial and sensitive issue of that time. Both his works *Kitāb al-Manzila bayna al-manzilatayn* and *al-Tawba* dealt with it.

---

89 Jahm b. Ṣafwān (d. 128/746) a theologian, was a client of the Banū Rāsib, and secretary to Ḥārith b. Surajj (d. 128/746) and an intellectual protagonist of his revolt against the Umayyads. Jahm was the founder of Jahmiyya sect leaning towards the Murji’ites. He agreed with the Mu’tazilites in denying the eternal attributes to God. He held an extreme view of predestination (*jabr*) and believed that the Qurʾān was created. Jahm was captured and executed by Salm b. Ahwaz al-Māzinī. See al-Ash’arī, *Maqālāt*, 279-80; al-Shahristāni, *al-Milal*, 1:86-87; ‘Abd Muṣṭur al-Baghdādi, *al-Faqq*, 157-58; Montgomery Watt, “DJahm b. Ṣafwān, Abū Muḥriz,” *EI* 2, 2:388.
According to Abū Hilāl al-ʻAskarī (d. after 400/1010), Wāsil was the first to be called *muʿtazilī*.\(^94\) Stroumsa is of the opinion that:

It is very difficult to accept this statement literally …But certainly one could claim that Wāsil was the first *muʿtazilī* in the sense that Wāsil turned the *muʿtazila* into a movement. Before Wāsil, ‘the Muʿtazila’ was a term applied, without much precision, to various kinds of sects. It is only after Wāsil had appeared on the scene (and probably not immediately thereafter), that the name of Muʿtazila came to designate one specific movement, holding specific doctrines.\(^95\)

It is evident from the above mentioned viewpoints that the doctrine of *iʿtizāl* formed the starting point for the creation of the Muʿtazilite theological school.

Biographers may differ whether the Muʿtazilites’ origin was due to abstinence from the worldly affairs, or neutrality in the civil wars, or withdrawal from the community, but in all the first three viewpoints the doctrine of *iʿtizāl* is common theme for the establishment of the Muʿtazilite school. Furthermore, the Muʿtazilites’ origin did not take place due to political movement. Wāsil was the first to formulate the principle of *manzila bayna al-manzilatayn*. Later on, ‘Amr was convinced by Wāsil and he agreed with him. It can be concluded that Wāsil was the founder of the school and after his death ‘Amr became the leader of the Muʿtazilites. The period of their activities spanned from the beginning of the second/eighth century to the first half of the second/eighth century, when the Muʿtazilite school was firmly established.\(^96\)

In the formative period of the Muʿtazilites, which approximately lasted from the first half of the second/eighth century until the last quarter of the third/ninth century,

---


\(^{96}\) Al-Nāšī’ al-Akbar mentions in his *Rasāʾil* that “Wāsil b. ʻAṭā and ‘Amr b. ‘Ubayd both were leaders of the Muʿtazilites” (*Wāsil b. ʻAṭā wa ‘Amr b. ‘Ubayd wa-humā raʿṣā al- muʿtazila*). See Al-Nāshī’ al-Akbar, *Rasāʾil*, 17.
there developed a variety of theological opinions on individuals, sometimes in agreement, while most of the times contradictory.

The ‘classical’ period of the Mu‘tazilites spanned approximately three centuries, from the last quarter of the third/ninth century to the middle of the fifth/eleventh century (until the arrival of Saljūqīs). During this period, their scholastic thought was systematized and coherent theological frameworks were formulated by Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbā‘ī who represented the Baṣra school, followed by his son Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā‘ī and by Abū al-Qāsim al-Ka‘bī al-Balkhī who was associated with the Baghdād school. The classical period is further divided into two distinct periods between al-mutaqaddimūn or al-qudamā’ (those of the earlier period) and al-muta’akhkhirūn (those of the later period). 97

Very soon, the Mu‘tazilites constituted two separate schools: Baṣra and Baghdād.

9. Mu‘tazilite Schools of Baṣra and Baghdad

As mentioned above, the Mu‘tazilite school of Baṣra was established by Wāṣil b. ‘Aṭā in the first half of the second/eighth century. It subsequently became one of the most important schools, which articulated the speculative theology of Islam. It is evident from the preceding accounts that the doctrine of i‘tizāl was the focal point for the creation of the school. Muslims agreed that he who committed a grave sin deserved to be called “transgressor” (fāsiq), but opinions differed with regard to the terminology to be applied for such an individual. The Khārijites considered him as “unbeliever” (kāfir). The Murji‘ites regarded him as “believer” (mu‘min) in spite of his transgression. Ḥasan al-

Baṣrī and his circle described him as “hypocrite” (munāfiq). Wāṣil’s view was that the description provided in the Qur’an of a believer and unbeliever could not be applied to a believer who had committed a grave sin; the latter, therefore, could be neither a believer nor an unbeliever. The only possible terminology for a transgressor then was to call him “the one in an intermediate position” (al-manzila bayna al-manzilatayn).

‘Amr b. ‘Ubayd’s views were usually similar to Wāṣil’s. Both of them formulated the basic Mu’tazilite doctrines regarding God’s unity, justice, free will and al-manzila bayna al-manzilatayn. However, there were some differences between them on certain issues, especially their respective objections to the caliphs ‘Uthmān and ‘Alī and their opinions towards the parties involved in the battle of the Camel.

The other most significant figures of the earlier period (al-mutaqaddimūn or al-qudamā’) are Abū Bakr al-Aṣamm (d. 201/816), al-Nazẓām (d. 221/836), Mu’ammar b. ‘Abbād (d. 215/830), Abū al-Hudhayl (d. 226/841), Hishām b. ‘Amr al-Fuwāṭī (d. between 227/842 and 232/847), al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/869), ‘Abbād b. Sulaymān (d. ca. 250/864), and Abū Ya’qūb al-Shaḥḥām (d. after 257/871).

The most outstanding persons of the later period (al-muta’akhkhirūn) are Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbā’i (d. 303/933) and his son Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā’i (d. 321/933) – “the two Shaykhs” – Abū ‘Alī b. Khallād (d. middle of 4th/10th century), Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Baṣrī (d. 369/980), Abū Ishāq b. ‘Ayyāsh, Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025), Abū Rāshid al-Naysāburī, Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī (d. 426/1044), and Abū Muḥammad b. Mattawayh (d. 468/1075) – all three were the disciples of ‘Abd al-Jabbār.  

---

Parallel to the school of Baṣra, another Muʿtazilite school was founded by Bishr b. al-Muʿtamar (d. 210/825-26) in Baghdād. He wrote refutations of the views of Abū al-Hudhayl and other Baṣran Muʿtazilites.

The other most important figures of the earlier period (al-mutaqaddimūn or al-qudamāʾ) are Thumāma b. Ashras (d. 213/828), Abū Mūsā al-Murdār (d. 226/841), Jaʿfar b. Ḥarb (d. 236/850), Jaʿfar b. Mubashshir (d. 234/848), and Abū Jaʿfar al-Iskāfī (d. 240/854). The most prominent persons of the later period (al-mutaʿakhkhirūn) are Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Khayyāṭ (d. ca. 300/913), Abū Bakr b. al-Ikhshīd (d. 326/938), and ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā al-Rummānī (d. 384/994).99

10. Conclusion

The origin of the term “Muʿtazila” in its early sources is not only controversial and but also contradictory. The verb iʿtazala means “to withdraw, to separate and to abstain.” The historical sources attest that during the first Islamic century, the name muʿtazila applied to many different groups. The doctrine of iʿtizāl formed the starting point for the creation of the Muʿtazilite theological school. Biographers may differ whether the Muʿtazilites’ origin was due to abstinence from the worldly affairs, or neutrality in the civil wars, or withdrawal from the community, but in all the first three viewpoints the doctrine of iʿtizāl is common theme for the establishment of the Muʿtazilite school. However, the Muʿtazilites’ origin did not take place due to political movement as suggested by Nyberg, and others. Wāṣil was the first to formulate the principle of manzila bayna al-manzilatayn. Later on, ‘Amr was convinced by Wāṣil and

he agreed with him. It can be concluded that Wāsil was the founder of the school and after his death ‘Amr became the leader of the Mu‘tazilites.

In the formative period, from the first half of the second/eighth century until the last quarter of the third/ninth century, there developed a variety of theological opinions on individuals, sometimes in agreement, while most of the times contradictory among the Mu‘tazilites. During the ‘classical’ period, from the last quarter of the third/ninth century to the middle of the fifth/eleventh century, their scholastic thought was systematized and coherent theological frameworks were formulated by Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbā‘ī and his son Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā‘ī who represented the Baṣra school, followed by Abū al-Qāsim al-Ka‘bī al-Balkhī who was associated with the Baghdād school.
Chapter 3

Qur’ānic Exegesis

Muṣṭafā b. ʿAbd Allāh Kātib Čelebī also known as Ḥājjī Khalīfa (d. 1067/1628), the eleventh/seventeenth century historian, bibliographer and geographer, in his outstanding compendium entitled Kashf al-ẓunūn ʿan asāmī al-kutub wa-al-funūn says that tafsīr is “the noblest of sciences, and the greatest of them” (ashraf al-ʿulūm wa-aʿzamu-hā), and it is the first and foremost of the sciences (raʾs al-ʿulūm wa-raʾisu-hā).

1 Tafsīr, Taʾwīl, Maʿānī, and Sharḥ

The terms tafsīr, taʾwīl, maʿānī, and sharḥ in Arabic language mean interpretation, explanation, or elucidation of something. Various Arabic sources deal with these terms and opinions differ with respect to their precise meanings. Historically, maʿānī appears to have been the earliest major term used for the title of works of interpretation. Taʾwīl and tafsīr were introduced probably in the third/tenth or fourth/eleventh centuries specifically for Qur’ānic exegesis. Sharḥ has been primarily reserved for non-religious works such as commentaries on poetry, and religious works especially law, but it was also used for Qur’ānic supercommentaries.

---

1 Muṣṭafā b. ʿAbd Allāh Kātib Čelebi Ḥājjī Khalīfa, Kashf al-ẓunūn ʿan asāmī al-kutub wa-al-funūn (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1992), 1:427, 434. It is one of the greatest bibliographical dictionaries in Arabic. The introduction deals with the importance of learning and the classification of the various branches of knowledge; the main text lists some 14,500 titles in alphabetical order, with some commentary.
2 Andrew Rippin, “Tafsīr,” ER, 14:236-44.
2. *Tafsīr*

*Tafsīr* is one of the most important disciplines of the Qur’anic sciences (*ʻulūm al-Qur’ān*), and is mentioned only once in the Qur’ān as a commentary of it: “They do not

---


bring you any simile but We bring you the truth and the best explanation,” (walā ya’tūnaka bi-mithlin illā ji’nāka bi-al-ḥaqq wa aḥsana tafsīran).4

Tafsīr signifies discovering, detecting, revealing, and developing what is meant by a dubious expression.5 The Muslim sources describe tafsīr as an Arabic word which deals with the interpretation, explanation, and elucidation of Qurʾānic verses. However, Gilliot is of the opinion that “Although tafsīr with no other qualification refers in most cases to a Qurʾānic interpretation or commentary, its origin is not Arabic. The verb fassara, ‘to discover something hidden,’ is a borrowing from Aramaic, Syriac, or Christian-Palestinian (peshar, pushshar).”6 According to Fraenkel, fassara is a borrowing from the Syriac, ‘to expound, make clear,’ which is very commonly used in early Syriac texts in the sense of interpretation of scripture. In the Aramaic, it means ‘to solve, to interpret.’ The Arabic fassara is doubtless of the same origin, and tafassara and tafsīr were later formed from this borrowed verb.7

Rippin considers that,

Tafsīr is an Arabic word meaning ‘interpretation;’ it is, more specifically, the general term used in reference to all genres of literature which are commentaries upon the Qurʾān.8

---

4 Qurʾān, 25:33.
7 See Siegmond Frankel, Die Aramäischen Fremdwörter im Arabischen (Leiden: Brill, 1886), 286; Arthur Jeffery, The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qurʾān (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1938), 92.
8 Andrew Rippin, “Tafsīr,” ER, 14:236-44.
Rippin notes that although the word *tafsīr* is historically related to the exegesis of the Qur’ān, it is also used by Muslim scholars for commentaries on Greek scientific and philosophical works, being equivalent to *sharḥ*, ‘explanation, explication.’

Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Zarkashī (d. 794/1392) says that, *Tafsīr* is a knowledge through which the book of God that was revealed to His Prophet Muḥammad may be comprehended in its meanings, its law and wisdom. This knowledge is derived from philology (*‘ilm al-lugha*), grammar (*nahw*), morphology (*taṣrīf*), metaphorical and rhetorical sciences (*‘ilm al-bayān*), principles of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), various modes of Qur’ānic readings (*qirā‘āt*), occasions of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) and the familiarity with the abrogative and the abrogated verses (*al-nāsikh wa al-mansūkh*).

He elaborates that *tafsīr* includes the circumstances of the revelation of a verse, chapter or story and its historical context. It provides the chronology of the text whether it was revealed in Mecca or Medina. In addition, it determines whether a verse is *muḥkam* (perspicuous) or *mutashābih* (ambiguous) and whether it has a general or specific reference to the text.

3. *Ta‘wīl*

*Ta‘wīl* signifies the discovering, detecting, revealing, expounding, or interpreting to which a thing is or may be reduced or that which it comes or may come to be. *Ta‘wīl*, the verbal noun of the form II verb *awwala* is derived either from *awl* ‘going back to the origin, returning to the beginning,’ or *ma‘āl* ‘end, outcome, consequence’ or *iyālā*

---

9 Andrew Rippin, “*Tafsīr,*” *EI*, 10:83.
‘putting into right condition, managing properly.’ Therefore, *ta’wīl* means ‘explanation, clarification, discovery’ and is synonymous with *tafsīr*.\(^{12}\)

The word *ta’wīl* occurs seventeen times in the Qur‘ān signifying different meanings. In verse 3:7, it is mentioned twice and used in the context of interpretation of verses: “As to those in whose hearts there is doubt, they pursue what is allegorical in it seeking dissention and giving its interpretation. However, no one except God knows its interpretation,” (*fa amma alladhīna fī qulūbihim zayghun fā yattabi‘ūna mā tashābaha minhu ibtighā’a al-fitnati wa ibtighā’a ta’wīlihi*). In verses 12:36, 37, 44, 45, and 100, it implies explanation or interpretation of a dream (*ta’wīl al-aḥlām* and *ta’wīl ru’yā*). In verses 12:6, 21, 101; 18:78, and 82, it means explanation or interpretation of an event (*ta’wīl al-aḥādīth*). In verses 7:53 (twice) and 10:39, it is used to denote the occurrence of a forewarned future event: “Are they looking for anything but its interpretation? On the Day (of resurrection) will come its interpretation,” (*hal yanẓurūna illā ta’wīluhu yawma ya’tī ta’wīluhu*); and “And whose interpretation (in events) has not yet come to them,” (*wa lammā ya‘īhim ta’wīluhu*) respectively. However, in verses 4:59 and 17:35, it indicates the end, result, or final consequence of a thing: “That is the best and excellent (in respect of) consequence,” (*dhālika khayrun wa aḥsanu ta’wīla*).\(^{13}\)

---


\(^{13}\) Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 1:127; I. Poonawala, “*Ta’wīl*,” *EI*, 10:390.
4. Ma‘ānī

Ma‘nā signifies the meaning or intended sense of a word or saying, for instance, ‘anā bi al-qawl kadhā (he intended by the statement such and such). Ma‘nā is derived from ‘a n w and ‘a n a. The word ma‘ānī is used in Arabic language in the sense of ma‘ānī ashyā’, which means interpretation, explanation, or elucidation of something.

Ma‘nīyūn, according to al-Rāghib signifies the importance of a word or an expression from the phrase ‘anati al-arḍu bi al-nabāti (the land made apparent or showed its plants or herbage). Al-Munāwī (d. 1031/1621) states that a mental image in which a word is formed and a resulting image as having a word or an expression is termed as meaning. The intended meaning of that word or expression is termed comprehension (mafhūm). A response to “what is it?” (mā huwa) is termed essence (māhiyya). So far as its external proof is concerned it is considered its “reality” (ḥaqīqa) and distinguished from others and termed “essence” (huwiyya).

According to al-Rāzī, alfāẓ denote what is in the mind of a person and demonstrate their meanings (ma‘ānī). Hence, ma‘nā is what a speaker intends to say and it is synonymous with the term “intention” (qaṣd).

---

15 When an exegete uses qāla aṣhāb al-ma‘ānī, it means those interpreters who wrote books on ma‘ānī al-Qur‘ān, for instance, al-Kisā’ī (d. 189/805), al-Rū’āsī (d. 190/806), Qutrub (d. 206/821), al-Farrā’ (d. 207/822), Abū ’Ubayda Ma‘mar b. al-Muthannā (d. 209/824-5), Abū al-Ḥasan al-Akhfash (d. between 210 and 221/825 and 835), Abū ‘Ubayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām (d. 224/838), Abū al-‘Abbās al-Tha’lab (d. 291/904), Abū al-Ḥasan b. Kaysān (d. 299/912), Salma b. ‘Āṣim (d. 316/928), Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Mansūr b. al-Khayyāt (d. 320/932), Abū Ja‘far b. al-Nahlīs (d. 338/950), Ibn Durustawayh (d. 346/957) and Ibn al-Anbārī (d. 577/1181). However, when later writers refer the term ma‘ānī, they use it as a branch of the rhetoric sciences.
16 Lane, Arabic-English Lexicon, 5:2181; al-Zabīdī, Tāj al-‘Arūs, 39:122-23.
17 Al-Munāwī, al-Tawqīf, 309.
5. Sharḥ

Sharḥ means an ‘exposition, explanation or interpretation’ in the form of a running commentary comprising the entire text of the work which it expounds. It is distinguished from a ḥāshiya which is a commentary only on particular words and passages. However, according to Gilliot, probably the first shurūḥ (plural of sharḥ) were applied to the gharīb (strange/foreign) words of the Qur’ān and of hadīth. These were not commentaries on a work, but explanations of a term, of a verse or of a tradition. In fact, most often they are titled as gharīb/tafsīr al-Qur’ān or al-ḥadīth, or sharḥ gharīb al-Qur’ān or al-ḥadīth, for instance, Abū ‘Ubayda’s (d. 207/822) Majāz al-Qur’ān also known Majāz fī gharīb al-Qur’ān and the Mu‘tazilite Abū Muslim al-Ịṣfahānī’s (d. 322/934) Sharḥ ta’wil al-Qur’ān wa-tafsīr ma‘ānihī. For the explanation of isolated passages of the Qur’ān, sharḥ is sometimes applied to a few juz’ (parts) in the forms of sharḥ qawlihi ta’āla or sharḥ āyāt or sharḥ/tafsīr sura or sharḥ al-basmala or sharḥ kalimatayn al-shahāda.20

6. Similarities and Difference between Tafsīr, Ta’wil, Ma‘ānī, and Sharḥ

In the first two Islamic centuries, there was no differentiation between tafsīr, ta’wil, and ma‘ānī when used as a technical term for the works of exegesis. At the beginning of the third Islamic century, there arose differences of opinions among the lexicographers and philologists about the precise meaning of these terms and their relationship to each other. Some scholars considered that tafsīr, ta’wil, ma‘ānī, and sharḥ

---

were synonymous and have the same meanings, and early commentators used these terms interchangeably. However, others argued that these terms have different meanings.21

Abū al-ʿAbbās Āḥmad b. Yaḥyā Thaʿlab (d. 291/903) and Abū Maṣṣūr
Muḥammad b. Āḥmad al-Aẓharī (d. 370/980) state that maʿānī, tafsīr and taʿwīl are one and the same in their meanings as explanation or interpretation. Abū ʿUbayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām (d. 224/838), Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. Ziyād b. al-ʿArábī (d. 231/845), Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Mukarram Ibn Manẓūr (d. 711/1311) and Muḥammad b. Yaʿqūb Firūzabādī (d. 817/1415) subscribe to the same view. These terms have been used in the phrase hādha maʿna kalāmihi, signifies that ‘this is the meaning of his saying.’ It is in agreement with the viewpoints of both Abū Zayd Saʿīd b. Aws al-Anṣārī (d. 214/829 or 215/830) and Abū Ibrāhīm Ishāq al-Fārābī (d. 350/961). The grammarians and the lexicologists also have agreed in saying hādha bi-maʿnā hādha (this is used with the meaning of this) and hādha wa hādha fī al-maʿnā wāḥid (this and this are one in meaning) fī al-maʿnā sawa (in meaning alike) and hādha fī maʿnā hādha (this is used in the sense of this). Therefore, according to them, maʿānī, tafsīr and taʿwīl are synonymous, interchangeable and closely related to each other in their meanings and there is no difference between these terms as far as their meanings are concerned.22

The most widely used terms for the Qurʾānic exegesis have been tafsīr and taʿwīl. Some exegetes consider that these terms are synonymous. For instance, Mujāhid b. Jabr (d. 104/722), Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/927) and Abū Maṣṣūr Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944) used the term taʿwīl in the titles of their Qurʾānic commentaries: Jāmīʿ al-bayān ʿan taʿwīl āy al-Qurʾān and Taʿwīlāt al-

21 Andrew Rippin, “Tafsīr,” ER, 14:236-44.
22 Lane, Arabic-English Lexicon, 5:2181.
Qur’ān respectively. Even much later, the commentaries of ‘Abd Allāh b. ʿAhmad b. Maḥmūd Abū al-Barakāt al-Nasafī (d. 710/1310), Nāṣir al-Dīn ‘Abd Allāh b. ʿUmar al-Bayḍāwī (d. ca. 716/1316) and ‘Alā’ al-Dīn ʿAlī b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Khāzin (d. 745/1344) are entitled Madārik al-tanzīl wa-ḥaqā’iq al-tawīl, Anwār al-tanzīl wa-asrār al-tawīl and Lubāb al-tawīl fī ma‘ānī al-tanzīl respectively. Similarly, Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. ʿUmar Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209) considers that both terms – taʿwīl and taʾfsīr – refer to exegesis and are equivalent and taʿwīl in fact is taʾfsīr. He elaborates that these terms give the meaning of a text. Taʾfsīr or taʿwīl is an effort to understand the meaning of a statement by referring back to the text. To arrive at this definition, he considers the etymology of the term taʿwīl which is rooted in the verb āl (to return). Therefore, “taʿwīl is both the source and ultimate return of something” (wa al-taʿwīl marjaʿ al-shayʾ wa maṣīruhu).23

Other exegetes are of the opinion that taʾfsīr and taʿwīl are two different terms and differ in their meanings. Abū al-Qāsim b. Ḥabīb al-Naysābūrī (d. 406/1015-16) notes that those who claim to be exegetes, cannot even differentiate between taʾfsīr and taʿwīl. Taʾfsīr is associated with narration, tradition, and text (riwāya), while taʿwīl is associated with understanding and interpretation (dirāya). Another distinction between taʾfsīr and taʿwīl is that taʾfsīr is the explanation (bayān) of a word with one interpretation, while taʿwīl takes into account multiple meanings and aspects of a word.24 The early exegete Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 150/767) makes a distinction between taʾfsīr and taʿwīl. For him, taʾfsīr refers to what is known on the human level and taʿwīl as what is known to God

23 Al-Rāzī, al-Tafsīr al-kabīr, 14:95.
24 Al-Suyūṭī, al-Itqān, 2:381.
Al-Māturīdī differentiates between *tafsīr* and *ta’wīl*. According to him *tafsīr* belongs to the companions because they witnessed the events and knew the circumstances of the revelation of the Qur’ān, whereas *ta’wīl* is the domain of the scholars.\(^{26}\)

Abū Ishāq Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Tha‘labī (d. 427/1035) states that,

The function of *tafsīr* … is the unveiling (*al-kashf*) of the subject matter of the verse, its story, its meaning, and the reasons behind its revelation. *Ta’wīl*, on the other hand, is the rendering of the meaning of the verse (*ṣarf al-āyah*) into a different meaning that it might entertain (*ma’nā yaḥtamiluh*) which is consistent with what comes before and after it.\(^{27}\)

Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī (d. prob. 502/1109) considers that *tafsīr* deals with general explanation, whereas *ta’wīl* is concerned with specific meanings, and compared to *ta’wīl*, *tafsīr* is understood easily. Furthermore, *tafsīr* is used for both God’s scriptures and human beings’ books, while *ta’wīl* is used specifically only for God’s scriptures.\(^{28}\) Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥusayn al-Baghawī (d. 516/1122) and Aḥmad b. Yūsuf Muwaffiq al-Dīn al-Kawāshī (d. 680/1281) are of the same opinion that *ta’wīl* is the rendering of the meaning of the verse through inference (*istinbāṭ*) which is consistent with the earlier and later verses and is not contrary to the Qur’ān and *sunna*.\(^{29}\) Muḥyī’ al-Dīn Abū ‘Abd Allāh Ibn al-‘Arabī (d. 638/1240) considers that every verse of the Qur’ān has exoteric and esoteric meanings. *Tafsīr* signifies the uncovering of exoteric meanings and *ta’wīl* the esoteric meanings of the Qur’ān.\(^{30}\)

\(^{25}\) Andrew Rippin, “*Tafsīr,*” *ER*, 14:236-44.

\(^{26}\) Al-Māturīdī, *Ta’wīlāt*, 3.


\(^{28}\) Al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, 2:149.


Sharḥ has been mainly used in the context of ḥadīths, such as the “Forty Prophetic Traditions” (al-Arbaʿūn al-nawawīyya), the collection of Muḥyī’ al-Dīn Abū Zakariyyāʾ al-Nawāwī (d. 676/1277); Islamic Law (Ḥanafi, Mālikī, Shāfīʿī, Hanbalī and Shiʿī); dialectical and scholastic theology, such as al-ʿAqāʾīd of Abū Ḥafṣ al-Nasafī (d. 537/1142) and Muḥaṣṣal al-afkār of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī; mysticism, such as Kitāb al-Taʿarruf of Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Isḥāq al-Qalābādhī (d. 380/990) and the Risāla of Abū al-Qāsim ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072) and certain religious texts, such as the Burda, a panegyric of the Prophet Muḥammad by Sharf al-Dīn Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Saʿīd al-Būṣīrī (d. 694/1294).\(^{31}\)

7. Qurʿānic Exegesis in Early Islam

There are two views regarding the Qurʿānic exegesis in early Islam: the traditional Muslims’ views and the Western views.\(^{32}\)

8. Traditional Muslims’ Views

According to the traditional Muslims’ views, Qurʿānic exegesis began quite early during the lifetime of Prophet Muḥammad. Even before the whole of the Qurʿān was revealed, companions used to ask the Prophet questions relating to the meaning of certain terms or statements in the revealed verses. In case of an ambiguity, he would interpret

---


\(^{32}\) According to Herbert Berg, “The distinction between ‘Muslim’ and ‘Western’ is becoming more blurred. There are Muslims who work within the ‘Western’ tradition, and Western scholars (geographically speaking) who operate within a Muslim framework.” See Herbert Berg, *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam: The Authenticity of Muslim Literature from the Formative Period* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 2000), 5n.
and clarify the meanings of those verses, which were referred to him. According to Helmut Gätje,

As long as the Prophet was living, one could turn to him when in doubt and provide an occasion for him to give an explanation or even an elaborating revelation. Thus, it is statements by the Prophet and testimonies of his companions that stand in the center of the older exegesis, as tradition (ḥadīth) handed down from the first generation of Islam.³³

Thus, the Qurʾān was partially elucidated by the Prophet and his verbal explanations were either memorized or written by his companions. The companions added and transmitted his exegesis to their successors (al-tābiʿīn) who added to the previous interpretations and transmitted to their successors (tāhiʿ al-tābiʿīn).

Subsequently, the following generations of commentators collected these interpretations of the Prophet, the companions, the successors and successors’ successors as established by the authoritative chains of transmission. Therefore, the first tafsīr tradition that was initiated by Muḥammad is referred to as “the Prophetical exegesis” (tafsīr al-nabī).³⁴

After the death of the Prophet Muḥammad, the companions’ (ṣaḥāba)³⁵ exegetical views not only gained an extraordinary authority but also were held in great esteem and accorded a special status as marfūʿ (elevated) that is, attributed to Muḥammad. The

---

³³ Gätje, Qurʾān and its Exegesis, 31.
³⁵ Ten of the companions are considered as exegetes. They are the first four caliphs: Abū Bakr (d. 13/634), ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 23/644), ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān (d. 35/656), ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661); and Ubayy b. Kaʿb (d. 30/650), ʿAbd Allāh b. Masʿūd (d. 32/652), Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī (d. 42/662), Zayd b. Thābit (d. 45/666), ʿAbd Allāh b. Abbās (d. 68/687), and ʿAbd Allāh b. Zubayr (d. 73/693). Anas b. Mālik (d. 91/709), Abū Hurayra ʿAbd al-Rahmān b. Sahl (d. 57/676), ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿUmar (d. 73/693), Jābir b. ʿAbd Allāh (d. 78/697), and ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ (d. 63/682) are also mentioned in this category because they appear very frequently in the exegetical transmissions. See Ḥājjī Khalīfa, Kashf al-zunān, 1:429-30.
“companions’ successors” (tābiʿūn) and the “successors’ successors” (tabʾ tābiʿūn) interpreted the Qurʾān. By the end of the first half of the first century of Islam, four major schools of exegesis were evolved whose views and contribution in this field significantly shaped the science of exegesis of the later generations. These schools were named after the major cities: Mecca, Medina, Kufa, and Baṣra.

36 Among the “companions’ successors” (tābiʿūn), the famous exegetes are the disciples of Ibn ʿAbbās, who transmitted exegetical traditions from him. They are: Abū al-ʿĀliyya al-Riyāḥī (d. 93/711), Saʿīd Jubayr (d. 95/714), Mujāhid b. Jabr, ʿIkrama, the client of Ibn ʿAbbās (d. 105/723), al-Daḥḥāk b. Muzāḥim (d. 105/723), Abū Mījlaz Lāḥiq b. Ḥumayd al-Sadūsī al-Baṣrī (d. 106/724), al-Hasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728), Qatāda b. Dīʿāma al-Sadūsī (d. 118/736), ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭalḥa al-Hāshimī (d. 120/737), and Abū Ṣaḥīb Badhām, client of Umm Hānī bt. Abī Ṭālib. However, it may be pointed out that neither al-Daḥḥāk nor al- Ḥasan al-Baṣrī were disciples of Ibn ʿAbbās. Ḥājjī Khalīfa mentions Saʿīd b. Jubayr, Mujāhid b. Jabr, ʿIkrama, the client of Ibn ʿAbbās, Ṭāwūs b. Kaysān (d. 106/724) and ʿAṭāʿ b. Abī Rabāḥ (d. 114/732) with the remarks that all of them were scholars from Mecca. See Arthur Jeffery, Two Muqaddimāt to the Qurʾānic Sciences: The Muqaddima to the Kitāb al-Mabānī and the Muqaddima of Ibn ʿAbbās to his Tafsīr (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1954), 196; Gilliot, Beginnings of Qurʾānic Exegesis, 8; Ḥājjī Khalīfa, Kashf al-zunūn, 1:430.

37 Among the “successors’ successors” (tabʾ tābiʿūn), the famous exegetes are Abī Ṭalḥa (d. 143/760) Shuʿba b. al-Ḥajjāj (d. 160/776), Sufyān b. Saʿīd al-Thawrī (d. 161/778), Sufyān b. ʿUyaynā (d. 196/811), Wakī b. al-Jarrāḥ (d. 197/812), Rawḥ b. ʿIbāda al-Baṣrī (d. 205/820), Yazīd b. Hārūn al-Salīmī (d. 206/821), ʿAbd al-Razzāq b. Hammām al-Sanʿānī (d. 211/827), Ādam b. Abī lyās (d. 220/835), Abū Bakr b. Abī Shayba (d. 235/849), Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm Ibn Rāhwayh (d. 238/853) and ʿAbd b. Ḥumād (or Ḥumayd) (d. 249/863). Ḥājjī Khalīfa gives ʿAbd b. Ḥumād or Ḥumayd’s name as ʿAbd Allāh b. Ḥumād. See Ḥājjī Khalīfa, Kashf al-zunūn, 1:430.

38 The Meccan school of exegesis was founded by ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAbbās, who was the Prophet’s paternal cousin. He was well known for his extensive knowledge of the Qurʾān, Arabic language, pre-Islamic poetry, Arabic history and culture (ayyām al-ʿArab), and Arab genealogy (ansāb al-ʿArab). He was called the learned scholar and the pioneer commentator of the Qurʾān. Among his notable students were: Saʿīd b. Jubayr, Mujāhid b. Jabr, ʿIkrama, the mawlā of Ibn ʿAbbās, Ṭawūs b. Kaysān al-Yamānī (d. 106/724), and ʿAṭāʿ b. Abī Rabāḥ. The main characteristics of the school were that it emphasized the use of ijtihād (independent judgment) and istinbāṭ (inference) for Qurʾānic interpretation and encouraged the students of taking notes of Ibn ʿAbbās’s exegesis. Although Ibn ʿAbbās encouraged his students to take lecture notes, there was no Qurʾānic exegesis in book form that was holistic and well-structured until the first quarter of the second/eighth century. Ibn ʿAbbās, for instance, did not write his Tafsīr. Similarly, Tafsīr Mujāhid was in the form of lecture notes but was later recorded in a book form by Ibn Abī Najīḥ as transmitted by (ʿan) Mujāhid. The Medinan school was founded by Ubayy b. Kaʿb who was the first scribe of the Prophet. He was a well-educated Jewish convert, well known for his accurate memorization of the Qurʾān and sound knowledge of the Old and New Testaments. Among his students were Abū al-ʿĀliyya (d. 90/708), ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr (93/711), Mūḥammad b. Kaʿb al-Quraẓī (d. 118/736), and Zayd b. Aslam (d. 130/747). The school was mainly interested in the exegesis of those Qurʾānic verses, which were related to legal rulings. It also dealt with the circumstances and reasons of revelation. The school was not in favor of taking and recording lecture notes of Qurʾānic exegesis. It is reported that ʿUrwa b. Zubayr destroyed and burnt his lecture notes of Qurʾānic exegesis. In addition, the school was against Jewish anecdotes to be incorporated in the tafsīr. The founder of the Kufan school was ʿAbd Allāh b. Masʿūd. He was mainly interested in jurisprudence and Qurʾānic exegesis. Among his students were ʿAlqama b. Qays (d. 61/680), Masrūq b. al-Ajdaʿ (d. 63/682), al-Aswad b. Yazīd (d. 75/694), Mara al-Hamadānī (76/695), ʿAlqama b. Qays (d. 102/720), and ʿĀmir al-Shaʿbī (d. between 103/721 and 110/728). The school was mainly concerned in the interpretation of those Qurʾānic verses which related to legal rulings. It was not interested in the Judeo-
The Meccan school of exegesis was founded by ʻAbd Allāh b. ʻAbbās, who was the Prophet’s paternal cousin. He was well known for his extensive knowledge of the Qur’ān, Arabic language, pre-Islamic poetry, Arabic history and culture (ayyām al-ʻArab), and Arab genealogy (ansāb al-ʻarab). He was called the learned scholar and the pioneer commentator of the Qur’ān. Among his notable students were: Sa‘īd b. Jubayr, Mujāhid b. Jabr, ʻIkrima, the mawlā of Ibn ʻAbbās, ʻAbd Allāh b. Kaysān al-Yamānī (d. 106/724), and ‘Ata’ b. ʻAbī Rabāḥ. The main characteristics of the school were that it emphasized the use of ijtihād (independent judgment) and insinbāt (inference) for Qur’ānic interpretation and encouraged the students of taking notes of Ibn ʻAbbās’s exegesis.39

The Medinan school was founded by Ubayy b. Ka‘b who was the first scribe of the Prophet. He was a well-educated Jewish convert, well known for his accurate memorization of the Qur’ān and sound knowledge of the Old and New Testaments. Among his students were Abū al-ʻĀliya (d. 90/708), ʻUrwa b. al-Zubayr (93/711), Muḥammad b. Ka‘b al-Quraẓī (d. 118/736), and Zayd b. Aslam (d. 130/747). The school was mainly interested in the exegesis of those Qur’ānic verses, which were related to legal rulings. It also dealt with the circumstances and reasons of revelation. The school was not in favor of taking and recording lecture notes of Qur’ānic exegesis. It is reported

---

39 Although Ibn ʻAbbās encouraged his students to take lecture notes, there was no Qur’ānic exegesis in book form that is holistic and well-structured until the first quarter of the second/eighth century. Ibn ʻAbbās, for instance, did not write his Tafsīr. Similarly, Tafsīr Mujāhid was in the form of lecture notes but was later recorded in a book form by Ibn Abī Najīḥ as transmitted by (ʻan) Mujāhid. See Hussein Abdul-Raof, Schools of Qur’ānic Exegesis: Genesis and Development (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 147-57.
that ‘Urwa b. Zubayr destroyed and burnt his lecture notes of Qur’ānic exegesis. In addition, the school was against Jewish anecdotes to be incorporated in the *tafsīr*.\(^{40}\)

The founder of the Kufan school was ‘Abd Allāh b. Mas‘ūd. He was mainly interested in jurisprudence and Qur’ānic exegesis. Among his students were ‘Alqama b. Qays (d. 61/680), Masrūq b. al-Ajda‘ (d. 63/682), al-Aswād b. Yazīd (d. 75/694), Mara al-Hamadānī (76/695), ‘Alqama b. Qays (d. 102/720), and ‘Āmir al-Sh‘abī (d. between 103/721 and 110/728). The school was mainly concerned in the interpretation of those Qur’ānic verses which related to legal rulings. It was not interested in the Judeo-Christian anecdotes to be incorporated in the *tafsīr*. In addition, the school was against the recording of Qur’ānic exegesis.\(^{41}\)

The founder of the Başran school was Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, who was one of the students of Anas b. Mālik – a companion and servant of the Prophet. His notable student was Qatāda al-Sadūsī. The Başran school was influenced by the Medinan school of exegesis. The school was not stringent with *ḥadīth* in terms of its text and chain of authorities and incorporated them in the Qur’ānic exegesis without either sound chain of authorities or even without any chain of authorities.\(^{42}\)

9. *Tafsīr bi-al-ma’thūr* and *Tafsīr bi-al-ra’y*

*Tafsīr* is divided into two broad categories: *tafsīr bi-al-ma’thūr* and *tafsīr bi-al-ra’y*. *Tafsīr bi-al-ma’thūr* is exegesis that relies on those Prophetic traditions which are trustworthy in their transmission (*isnād*) and text (*matn*). It is considered by mainstream Sunnī exegesis to be authentic and reliable. *Tafsīr bi-al-ra’y* is exegesis that is based on

\(^{40}\) Abdul-Raof, *Schools of Qur’ānic Exegesis*, 151-52.

\(^{41}\) Abdul-Raof, *Schools of Qur’ānic Exegesis*, 152-54.

personal opinion and rational analysis of the text.\textsuperscript{43} The Prophet is reported to have said that: “Whoever says about the Qur’ān without knowledge let him make his place in the Fire” (\textit{man qāla fī al-Qur’ān bi-ghayri ʿilmān fa-āy yatabawwāʿu maqʿādahu min al-nār}).\textsuperscript{44} Another \textit{ḥadīth} indicates that the Prophet said: “Whoever speaks about the Qur’ān with his personal opinion, or without knowledge let him make his place in the Fire” (\textit{man qāla fī al-Qur’ān bi-raʾyihi aw bi-mā lā yaʾlamu fa-āy yatabawwāʿu maqʿādahu min al-nār}).\textsuperscript{45}

While the traditionists consider rationalist commentary to be opinion-based whimsical, and capricious, the rationalists do not find the traditions a reliable source for Qur’ānic interpretation. However, there are no clear-cut boundaries between these two types of commentaries. Historically, both traditionists and rationalists have used traditions as well as their own opinions in their exegesis. According to R. Marston Speight, “the polarity between \textit{tafsīr bi-al-maʿthūr} and \textit{tafsīr bi-al-raʾy} was often accentuated by polemics in disciplines other than scriptural exegesis alone, that is, in legal theory, philosophy, theology, and political theory. Practically speaking, even that great monument to \textit{maʿthūr} interpretation which is the commentary of al-Ṭabarī contains much that can be labeled as \textit{tafsīr bi-al-raʾy}.”\textsuperscript{46}


\textsuperscript{45} Al-Nasāʿī, \textit{al-Sunan al-Kubrā}, 2:1254.

10. Western Scholars’ Views

According to the Western scholars’ views, the reliability and authenticity of the isnāds and matns of exegetical ḥadīths, reconstructing the early exegetical works and dating them at an early period of Islam is all suspect. However, exegetical ḥadīths are a subset of all the ḥadīths as a whole. The exegetical ḥadīths relate to the Qur’ān and encompass the historical and legal genres in so far as they relate to the Qur’ān. In addition, most of the exegetical ḥadīths are immune from the sectarian and legal debates.\(^\text{47}\)

The debate about the origin of tafsīr started in the work of Goldziher who suggested that Qur’ānic exegesis in the early years of Islam was discouraged by the more pious Muslim scholars and leaders. And well into the second Islamic century, it was still considered a dubious activity. For Goldziher these suspicions arose because tafsīr, at least when it was condemned, was associated with the legendary material told by storytellers (quṣṣās) about the battles fought by Muḥammad and about the last days.\(^\text{48}\)

Joseph Schacht followed Goldziher’s tradition of skepticism and concluded that,

Every legal tradition from the Prophet, until the contrary is proved, must be taken not as an authentic or essentially authentic, even if slightly obscured, statement valid for his time or of the time of the Companions, but as the fictitious expression of a legal doctrine formulated at a later date.\(^\text{49}\)

Harris Birkeland agrees with Goldziher in his contention that at least certain circles opposed the utilization of the books of the ahl al-kitāb for the purpose of

\(^{47}\) Berg, *Development of Exegesis*, 2.
interpreting the Qur’ān and leading circles showed aversion towards the pious storytellers. However, he states that there was no opposition to any kind of tafsīr until late in the first century. Strong opposition to all types of tafsīr took place in the second century. During the second century and first half of the third century, when tafsīr was brought into line with orthodox doctrine and subjected to the strict methods of transmission used for legal hadīths, it received general acceptance. The opposition lessened and tafsīr became a Qur’ānic science because it had gradually obtained its theoretical foundation. The history of tafsīr is, thus, parallel to that of fiqh, with which it was intimately connected.\(^5\)

Nabia Abbott asserts that there was an early continuous written transmission of exegesis. During the first century the practice of tafsīr increased so rapidly that the hadīth and personal opinions of second-generation Muslims far exceeded those of the companions and the Prophet, especially tafsīr al-nabi. Two important characteristics of the exegetical activity were the absence of sound isnāds and the strong opposition to tafsīr mutashābihāt al-Qur’ān among the pious orthodox. Tafsīr literature increased steadily throughout the second century and it was classified into four main categories:

\(^5\) Harris Birkeland, *Old Muslim Opposition against Interpretation of the Koran* (Oslo: Jacob Dybwad, 1955), 31; Harris Birkeland, *The Lord Guideth: Studies on Primitive Islam* (Oslo: H. Aschehoug, 1956), 55, 133-4; R. Marston Speight, “The Function of hadīth as Commentary on the Qur’ān, as Seen in the Six Authoritative Collections,” in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur’ān*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 79; Frederick Mathewson Denny, “Exegesis and Recitation: their Development as Classical Forms of Qur’ān Piety,” in *Transitions and Transformations in the History of Religions: Essays in Honor of Joseph M. Kitagawa*, ed. Frank E. Reynolds and Theodore M. Ludwig, (Leiden: Brill, 1980), 105-6, 121; John Burton, “The Interpretation of Q 4:23 and the Muslim Theories of naskh,” *Occasional Papers of the School of Abbasid Studies* 1 (1986), 40-54; John Burton, “Notes towards a Fresh Perspective on the Islamic Sunna,” *British Society for Middle Eastern Studies Bulletin* 11 (1984), 3-17. It may be pointed out that tafsīr was able to find its way into the six canonical collections of hadīths, particularly those of al-Bukhārī, Muslim and al-Tirmidhī. However, it was by then already moulded into the form of hadīths and had become a category of hadīth literature. Older forms of exegesis are evident in the Sīra of Ibn Ishāq, but it has been moulded by the legendary interpretation of Muhammad – the legend of Muhammad was of course at work on strictly exegetical works too. Thus the oldest form of literary exegesis, in which ra’y was exclusively employed, is no longer extant. Speight comes to almost same conclusion when he finds the presence of tafsīr in the hadīth collections. Burton argues that exegesis and sunna not only overlap, but exegetical discussion originated and preceded the legal discussion. In addition, exegetical discussions were historicized in the form of hadīths.
legalistic *tafsīr* from the knowledge of which one is excused; linguistic *tafsīr* based on the speech of the Arabs; the formal *tafsīr* of scholars; and *tafsīr al-mutashābihāt* which is known only to God. In the second half of the century, as earlier *tafsīr* works became more readily available, these works began to be classified as “the best” and “the worst.”

Concentration on the formal *isnād* in the field of *ḥadīth* is reflected in greater emphasis on the *isnād* in *tafsīr* as well. It was not only the quality of the *isnād*, but also the contents of *tafsīr* that determined the acceptability of *tafsīr*. Abbott concludes that,

> During the third century, ways and means were devised by which the method and transmission of orthodox *tafsīr* were regulated. Also, there evolved a rationale for not only the permissibility but also the desirability of cautious commentary on the *mutashābihāt al-Qurʾān*. Typical arguments for this stand are presented by Ibn Qutayba, who devoted a chapter to this specific theme in a work that deals with entirely with the interpretation of the difficult passages of the Qurʾān.⁵¹

Fuat Sezgin considers that the bibliographical and biographical descriptions are genuine, and “almost all the earliest Qurʾānic commentary together with the transmission chains are preserved unaltered in later works.”⁵²

Mohammad Mustafa Azmi does not agree with Schacht that the *isnād* system began in the early second or perhaps the late first century,⁵³ and states that the use of *isnāds*, like the use of written records was very early and cites the report ascribed to Abū Bakr Muḥammad Ibn Sīrīn (d. 110/728) that the use of *isnād* was demanded after the

---


First *Fitna*.\(^{54}\) He admits that faulty *isnāds* exist in *ḥadīth* material and points out that al-Shāfiʿī admitted that his faulty memory had caused him to forget parts of *isnāds*. Others for the purpose of brevity might have given incomplete *isnāds*. Azmi concludes that, “There is no reason to reject the *isnād* system. It is proved that it has every element which can command the acceptance of the system as a whole.”\(^{55}\)

Johann Fück states that the Companions most frequently cited in *isnāds* as authority are the younger ones such as Abū Hurayra and Ibn ‘Abbās instead of Abū Bakr and ‘Uthmān. He argues that if all *isnād* were spurious, then it would be more likely for the older companions to be cited more frequently. In other words, if one is going to invent an *isnād*, then it should have been attached to older and more respected companions. Since the transmitters have not done this, it appears that the *isnāds* are genuine.\(^{56}\)

James Robson argues that it seems logical that Muḥammad’s followers, because the impression of his personality must have made on them, preserved a genuine core within the *ḥadīths*.\(^{57}\) With regard to *isnāds*, Robson accepts the report of Ibn Sīrīn concerning their beginning either in 64 or 72 A.H. That is when the Second *Fitna* took place and concludes that the use of *isnāds* started from the last third of the first Islamic century.\(^{58}\)

---

\(^{54}\) The First *Fitna* (35/656–40/661) started after the assassination of the third caliph ‘Uthmān in 35/656 and ended in 40/661 after the murder of the fourth caliph ‘Alī. Stalemate at the Battle of Șiffīn and inconclusive arbitration between ‘Alī and Mu’āwiya resulted in the formation of many sects in Islam.

\(^{55}\) Azmi, *Early Ḥadīth*, 247.


\(^{58}\) James Robson, “The *Isnād* in Muslim Tradition,” *Transactions of the Glasgow University Oriental Society* 15 (1953-4), 20. The Second *Fitna* (60/680–72/692) started when Husayn b. ‘Alī was killed in 60/680 at Karbalā and the most prominent figure in this movement was ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr who was killed in 72/692 at Mecca.
N.J. Coulson admits that isnād may be fictitious but this does not mean the substance of the matn has also been fabricated.\(^59\) He neither accepts the traditional Islamic view of ḥadīth nor subscribes to Schacht’s proposition and concludes that the truth lies somewhere between traditional Islamic legal theory and the rigorous historical approach of Schacht.\(^60\)

Uri Rubin believes that the isnāds were fabricated, and their presence was designed to make the reports to which they were attached appear authentic.\(^61\) He argues that the names of successors do not recur in the companion isnāds, regardless whether they are Prophetic or not. In other traditions, Muḥammad and the Companions are part of the “original hard core.” On the basis of these observations, he concludes that there was no backward growth of isnāds.\(^62\)

Gautier H.A. Juynboll states that,

The earliest origins of standardized ḥadīth cannot be traced back earlier than, at most, to the seventies or eighties of the first century. What had preceded this was … still unstructured and still unstandardized material of edifying contents (qusṣāṣ, tahrīb wa-targhīb) or with a political slant (fāḍāʾīl/mathālib).\(^63\)

He concludes that as a whole the ḥadīths do reflect reasonably accurately Muḥammad’s words and deeds.\(^64\)

According to Fazlur Rahman,

---


\(^62\) Uri Rubin defines those traditions which are original and essential part of matn as “hard core.” See Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder*, 246, 249, 354, 256-57.


\(^64\) Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition*, 71.
Hadīth from the Prophet must have existed from the very beginning of Islam is a fact which may not reasonably be doubted. Indeed, during the lifetime of the Prophet, it was perfectly natural for Muslims to talk about what the Prophet did or said, especially in a public capacity. The Arabs, who memorized and handed down poetry of their poets, sayings of their soothsayers and statements of their judges and tribal leaders, cannot be expected to fail to notice and narrate the deeds and sayings of one whom they acknowledged as the Prophet of God. Rejection of this natural phenomenon is tantamount to grave irrationality, a sin against history.65

For Rahman the allegations made by the skeptics that hadīths are merely an attempt to give the actual practice of the Community Prophetic authority is irrelevant. The actual practice of the Community was already Prophetic, at least in spirit if not always in detail. The isnāds and in some cases even the matns may have been fabricated; however, the hadīths remain Prophetic.66

Gregor Schoeler states that in early Islam, teaching often involved lecturing without the use of written notes. Expressions such as “I never saw a book or written material in his hands, he used to lecture orally” (mā raʾaytu fī yadihi kitāban qaṭṭu, innamā kāna yahfaṣu) does not mean that the teacher rejected the use of written notes. The Muwaṭṭāʾ of Mālik b. Anas is a good example of this practice. It appears that writing and orality were more complimentary than mutually exclusive and difficult to distinguish between the author and the transmitter during the early period of Islam.67

---

Harald Motzki argues that even if the *ḥādīth* and *asānīd* were forged, it must not lead someone to conclude that all of them are fictitious or that the genuine and the spurious cannot be distinguished with some degree of certainty.\(^{68}\)

Georg Stauth states that the *matn* contents of exegetical *ḥadīths* in the *tafsīrs* of Mujāhid b. Jabr, al-Ṭabarī, Sufyān al-Thawrī and ‘Abd al-Razzāq – Maʿmar b. Rāshīd are similar despite their various recensions, therefore *isnāds* appear to be fairly good indicators of the origin and chronology of early *tafsīr hadīths*. He is of the opinion that the doubts raised by Goldziher and Schacht about the fictitious nature of *isnāds* are not applicable to *tafsīr hadīths*.\(^{69}\)

Fred Leemhuis states that in the time of Warqā’ b. ‘Umar (d. 160/776) *tafsīr* traditions were written down\(^{70}\) which included both additional and contradictory material and were attributed to various predecessors, such as Ibn ‘Abbās, Mujāhid, al-Zuhrī, and others not identifying the actual exegete who originated the material. He concludes that, in the late second or early third century AH, commentaries which specialized in the textual difficulties of the Qur‘ān partly drew upon traditional sources, but also introduced more developed notions of grammar, syntax, and style in their analysis of the meaning of the text… From the end of the second century onward, *tafsīr* material of different kinds that could be considered authoritative on the basis of a sound *isnād* was collected more and more into compilatory *tafsīrs*. This process had in fact started when the living tradition had becoe fixed. It was developed and provided with a sound basis in accordance with the science of *ḥadīth* by men like Ādam b. Abī Iyās (d. 220/835), was continued by men like Muḥammad b. Ḥumayd al-Rāzī (d. 248/862), and al-Muthannā b. Ibrāhīm al-ʿAmuli (d. after 240/854), and was crowned by the achievement of Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 311/923).\(^{71}\)


\(^{69}\) Berg, *Development of Exegesis*, 73-75.

\(^{70}\) Leemhuis states that writing of already existing variant versions of a *tafsīr* tradition started around 150/767. See Leemhuis, *Origin*, 21.

\(^{71}\) Leemhuis, *Origin*, 30.
John Burton is in agreement with Leemhuis and maintains that in some cases exegetical discussions came first which later on resulted in the form of *ḥadīths*. He argues that the Muslim exegetes presented different explanations through different approaches to the text of the Qurʾān, and one can trace many of the different opinions that came to be reflected in *ḥadīths* and one should not disregard the role of the exegesis in the generation of *ḥadīths* and thus, in the creation of Muslim opinions. Burton concludes that the exegetical materials were earlier than the other *ḥadīth* material and they can be reliably gleaned from later collections.

John Wansbrough’s hypothesis is that the Islamic exegetical material is not homogeneous in terms of function and style. By function, he means the role a certain type of exegesis plays “in the formulation of history by a self-conscious religious community.” By style, he means the “explicative elements” or “procedural devices.”

C.H.M. Versteegh asserts that the Muslims’ interest in *tafsīr* began very early. Muqātil b. Sulaymān’s *Tafsīr* is authentic, while those of Sufyān al-Thawrī and Mujāhid are authentic to the extent that the works go back to these exegetes, but not in the sense of *verbatim* transmission. He does not think that Ibn ʿAbbās produced a book on *tafsīr*, but

---

74 John Wansbrough identifies twelve “explicative elements,” which are: variant readings, poetic citations, lexical explanation, grammatical explanation, rhetorical explanation, periphrasis, analogy, abrogation, circumstances of revelation, identification, Prophetic tradition and anecdote. Borrowing some terms from Jewish scriptural interpretation, he classifies the material into five sequential categories. Narrative (haggadic) exegesis is concerned with textual exegesis, which aims at furnishing the Qurʾānic passage with details based on prophetic tradition (*ḥadīth*). Allegorical exegesis is concerned with esoteric (*bāṭin*) interpretation (taʿwīl) of Qurʾānic passages in the light of mystical experience. Legal (halakhic) exegesis features Islamic legal topics such as faith, prayer, charity, fasting, pilgrimage, retaliation, inheritance, usury, wine, marriage, divorce, adultery, thefts, debts, contracts and holy war. The textual (masoretic) exegesis focuses upon the lexicon of scripture, grammar, philology and variant readings of the text. Rhetorical exegesis is concerned with the literary excellences and stylistic features of the Qurʾānic verses. See John Wansbrough, *Qurʾānic Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 121-246; Andrew Rippin, “Tafsīr,” *ER*, 14:236-44.
believes that the *tafsīr* literature can provide a clear picture of his teachings. He also does not agree with Gilliot’s assertion that Ibn ‘Abbās was a mythic figure to whom were attached all manner of teachings by latter generations.75

It is evident from the above discussion that the early period of Islamic history has been the main object of opposing views between the Muslim and Western scholars. The Muslim scholarship trusts in the early historical authenticity of exegetical *hadīths* and considers the interpretations of early commentators reliable and trustworthy. For Western scholars the historicity and authenticity of early exegesis is open to question. Therefore, there appears to be no resolution to this problem unless either the Western scholarship accepts the traditional Muslim historiography or new materials are discovered to substantiate or refute the skepticism of Western scholars about the early history of Islam.

11. The Development of the Qur’ānic Exegesis

The Qur’ānic exegesis started in the early second/eighth century with the introduction of philological and grammatical sciences in the Qur’ānic exegetical works. Similarly, the refinement and codification of historiography which turned myths into history contributed to a great extent for the establishment of exegesis as a certain and exact science. In this period, the following broad categories of *tafsīr* can be distinguished: paraphrastic, narrative, legal, linguistic, philosophical, mystical, and theological.

---

12. Paraphrastic and Narrative Exegesis

Paraphrastic and narrative exegesis developed simultaneously. Paraphrastic exegesis consisted of giving brief, often synonymic explanations of the Qur’ānic terms and verses. This type of exegesis is represented by Mujāhīd b. Jabr, Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, Sufyān al-Thawrī and Sufyān b. ‘Uyyāna (d. 196/811). Narrative exegesis illustrates the text of the Qur’ān through Judeo-Christian traditions (Isrāʾīliyyāt), the nascent Prophetic biography and pre-Islamic Arab tradition. To this genre belong al-Ḍaḥḥāk b. Muzāḥim, al-Suddī al-Kabīr, al-Kalbī, Muqāṭṭil b. Ḥayyān (d. 135/753) and Muqāṭṭil b. Sulaymān.

13. Legal Exegesis

The legal analysis of the Qur’ān emerged quite early in Islam and the exegetes attempted to order the text of the Qur’ān and its interpretation according to legal topics. The range of these subjects covered those aspects, which dealt with basic beliefs and community’s interaction with each other, such as faith, prayer, charity, fasting, pilgrimage, retaliation, inheritance, usury, wine, marriage, divorce, adultery, thefts, debts, contracts and holy war. This category of exegetes includes: Muqāṭṭil b. Sulaymān, Ibn Wahb, Maʿmar b. Rāshid (d. 154/770), ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Sanʿānī (d. 211/827), Qatāda and Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 124/742). Other prominent exegetes who wrote legal exegesis are Daʾūd b. ‘Alī b. Khalaf Zāhir al-Ḫṣāḥānī (d. 270/883), Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad Zāhid al-Ṭaḥāwī (d. 321/933), Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. ʿAlī al-Jaṣṣāṣ al-Rāzī (d. 370/981), Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Muḥammad Ilkīyā al-Harrāsī (d. 504/1110), Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. ‘Abd

---

Allāh b. al-ʻArabī (d. 543/1148), and Abū ʻAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1272).\textsuperscript{78}

14. Linguistic Exegesis

In the first half of the fourth/tenth century, the variant readings of the Qurʾān (\textit{qirāʾāt}) were standardized by Ibn Mujāhid (d. 324/936), the influential “reader” in Baghdad with the support of the government. He recognized seven “readings” belonging to the second/eighth century as authorities on the traditional readings of the ‘Uthmānic text.\textsuperscript{79} These “readers” of the Qurʾān were also the philologists and grammarians. They were the first to explain and interpret the “difficult” (\textit{mushkil}) and “strange/foreign” (\textit{gharīb}) words or passages of the Qurʾān through the sciences of philology and grammar. Therefore, the readings of the Qurʾān and grammar (including elements of lexicography and orthography) became disciplines of the Qurʾānic sciences and integral components of exegesis. In this category, the following \textit{mufassirīn} are worth mentioning: Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Ḥamza al-Kīsāʾī, al-Farrāʾ, Abū ʻUbayda Maʿmar b. al-Muthannā (d. ca. 210/825), Abū al-Ḥasan Saʿīd b. Masʿada al-Akhfash al-Awsaṭ (d. between 210/825 and 221/835), Ibn Qutayba, Abū Iḥṣāq Ibrāhīm b. al-Sarī al-Zajjāj (d. 311/923), Abū Bakr al-Anbārī (d. 328/940), Abū Jaʿfar al-Naḥḥās (d. 338/950), Makkī b. Abī Ṭālib al-Qaysī (d. 437/1047), Abū al-Baqāʾ al-ʻUkbarī (d. 616/1219), and Abū Ḥayyān al-Gharnāṭī (d. 754/1344).\textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{79} The recognized seven readers were: Abū ʻAbd Allāh b. ʻĀmir (d. 118/736), Abū Bakr ʻĀṣim (d. 128/745), Abū ʻAmr Zabbān b. ʻAlāʾ (d. 154/770), Ḥamza b. Ḥābīb (d. 156/722), Nāfiʾ b. ʻAbd al-Raḥmān (d. 169/785), Ḥāfṣ b. Sulaymān b. al-Mughīra (d. 180/796), and Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Ḥamza al-Kīsāʾī (d. 189/805).
15. Philosophical Exegesis

Towards the end of second/eighth century, a massive movement for the translation of Greek scientific and philosophical texts into Arabic took place. The Muslims learned these sciences, specifically philosophy and logic to respond adequately to the arguments of their opponents and new converts’ questioning about their new religion. In the learning process, two groups of philosophers emerged. The first group considered philosophy neither in accordance with nor against Islam. Whenever they interpreted the Qur’ān and found that the viewpoint of the Qur’ān is in accord with philosophy, they accepted it. However, when the interpretation of the Qur’ān was contrary to philosophy, they rejected the latter. Al-Rāzī’s *Tafsīr al-kabīr* also known as *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* falls in this group.

The second group considered that all philosophical thoughts are true and interpreted the Qur’ān in accordance with philosophical concepts. This group includes Ikhwān al-Ṣafā (ca. 313/927 - 363/975), Abū Naṣr Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Fārābī (d. 339/950), Abū ʻAlī al-Ḥusayn b. ʻAbd Allāh Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037) and Abū al-Walīd Muḥammad Ibn Rushd (d. 595/1198).

Ikhwān al-Ṣafā, literally “Brethren of Purity” was an association of authors of famous *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’ wa-khillān al-wafā’*. The Ikhwān believed in adopting all the sciences and wisdom produced by the efforts of the philosophers and those revealed by God in the course of the previous millennia. These sciences express the profound “realities” (*ḥaqā’iq*) of the universe, which support revelation and religious laws.

Traditional sciences essentially comprise the Qur’ānic and Traditional sciences. The interpretation of the Qur’ān refers to simple “commentary” (*tafsīr*) that is intended for the
general public while the realities or philosophical and prophetic sciences lead the soul progressively to the goal of the sciences and wisdom.\textsuperscript{81}

Al-Fārābī followed both Plato and Aristotle, and derived his views from the Plotinus treatise \textit{Theology} that he, along with the whole Alexandrian and Christian traditions, mistook for a work of Aristotle’s.\textsuperscript{82} He built “an elaborate metaphysical scheme in which the Qur’anic concepts of creation, God’s sovereignty in the world and the fate of the soul after death are interpreted in an entirely new spirit.”\textsuperscript{83} Al-Fārābī believed that human reason is superior to religious faith, and hence assigned only a secondary place to the different revealed religions which provide an approach to truth for non-philosophers through symbols. Philosophical truth is universally valid whereas these symbols vary from nation to nation; they are the work of philosopher-prophets, of whom Muḥammad was one.\textsuperscript{84} His Qur’anic exegesis of some verses can be found in \textit{Fūṣūṣ al-Ḥikma}.\textsuperscript{85}

Ibn Sīnā followed the encyclopaedic conception of the sciences that had been traditional since the time of the Greek Sages in uniting philosophy with the study of nature and in seeing the perfection of man as lying in both knowledge and action. He was also as illustrious as physician as he was as philosopher.\textsuperscript{86} He added his views in al-Fārābī’s speculative theories of logic, epistemology and metaphysics. The general


\textsuperscript{83} Majid Fakhry, \textit{al-Fārābī} (Oxford: Oneworld, 2002), 2.


frameworks of their thought were identical. Ibn Sīnā’s exegesis of Sūras Ikhlāṣ and Mu‘awwadhatayn (al-Nās and al-Falaq) can be found in Jāmi‘ al-badā‘ī." \(^{88}\)

Ibn Rushd states that God communicates the people through three types of discourse as revealed in the Qur’ān: “Call them to the path of your Lord with wisdom, good exhortation and reason with them in the best way possible.” \(^{89}\) In cases where the Qur’ān does not use rational demonstration, it means that it is clear in its meaning and in agreement with the conclusion of the syllogism. However, if it is in apparent disagreement, then it is necessary to make an interpretation (ta‘wīl) of the literal meaning in a figurative (majāzī) sense. With regard to the muḥkamāt and mutashābihāt verses, he illustrates that the muḥkamāt verses are perfectly explicit and precise in their meanings and do not need any interpretation. The interpretation (ta‘wīl) of the mutashābihāt verses is known to God and to those who have a solid grounding in scholarship. \(^{90}\)

16. Mystical Exegesis

Mystical exegesis is associated with the development of the Sufi movement (taṣawwuf) and intense interest in the spiritual aspects of Islam. The ṣūfīs believe that the philological, legal, philosophical, and theological debates have kept the Muslims away from understanding the real meanings of the Qur’ān. According to them, the Qur’ān could be interpreted literally (ẓāhirī) as well as symbolically (bāṭinī). For them, the

\(^{87}\) Al-Fārūqī, *Cultural Atlas*, 308.
\(^{89}\) Qur’ān, 16:125.
symbolical dimension of the Qur’ān was paramount and one could not understand it by literal interpretation alone.

Mystical exegesis is traced back to Ḥasan al-Baṣrī but there is no book, which could be solely attributed to him, rather his teachings have been preserved in the form of fragments in various tafsīr works. A tafsīr is attributed to Abū ‘Abd Allāh Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765) in which he consolidated the mystical doctrines of the earlier period. He said that there are four aspects of the Qur’ānic exegesis: al-‘ibāra (literal explanation), al-ishāra (allegorical allusion), al-laṭā’if (mystical subtleties), and al-ḥaqā’iq (spiritual realities). The literal explanations/expressions) and allegorical allusions are addressed to “the common people” (al-‘awāmm) and “the select” (al-khawāṣṣ) respectively, while the mystical subtleties and spiritual realities are perceived by “the mystics” (al-anbiyā’) and “the prophets” (al-anbiyā’) respectively.91


95 Abū al-Jannāb began writing his commentary entitled al-Ta’wilāt al-Najmiyya, also known as Baḥr al-ḥaqā’iq or ‘Ayn al-ḥayāt. Important contributions were made by his disciple Abū Bakr ‘Abd Allāh b.
17. Theological Exegesis

According to medieval Muslim heresiographers, after the First Fitna (35/656-40/661), a large number of “sects” (firaq) emerged in Islam, such as Shi‘ite, Zaydite, Kharjīte, and Mu‘tazilite, etc. However, most of these were not sects but legal and theological schools, as has been pointed out by Goldziher and others. These schools compiled their tafsīrs based on ‘ilm al-kalām (theology) to justify and substantiate their views and existence, and to refute the opinions of their opponents.

Muḥammad Najm al-Dīn Rāzī Dāya (d. 654/1256) and it was finally completed by ‘Alā al-Dawla al-Simmānī (d. 736/1336). Other than Tafsīr al-Qur’ān, Ibn al-‘Arabī’s monumental work is al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya fi `asrār al-mālikīyya wa al-mulkiyya in thirty-seven volumes. Ta’wilāt al-Qur’ān is falsely attributed to Ibn ‘Arabī and always published under his name, while it is ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī’s (d. 731/1331) magnum opus. It is a complete commentary of the Qur’ān and it may be ranked with al-Qushayrī’s Laṭā‘if al-ishārāt, Rūzbihān al-Baqīlī’s Shīrāzī’s ‘Arā’is al-hayān, and ‘Ayn al-hayāt of Najm al-Dīn Kibrā/Najm al-Dīn Rāzī Dāya completed by ‘Alā’ al-Dawla al-Simmānī. Al-Kashānī’s Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-hikam is considered one of the best known and most frequently used among the more than a hundred commentaries on Ibn ‘Arabī’s famous treatise. See A. Ateș, “Ibn al-‘Arabī,” EJ², 3:707-11; Lory Pierre, ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī, EJ², 3 (2009):10-14.

Fitna, literally means “temptation,” “trials,” or “civil war.” The Muslim chroniclers report four fitnas in Islam. The first fitna (36/656 - 41/661) is also known as “the fitna par excellence” or “the great fitna.” The second fitna (61/680 - 73/692) started with the succession of Yazīd b. Mu‘awiya and murder of Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī at Karbalā in 61/680. In 62/681, Ibn al-Zubayr revolted against the Umayyads and Mukhātār asserted the rule of Ibn al-Hanafiyya b. ‘Alī in 66/685. During this period, there were incessant wars of the Azāriqa Khārijītes and Shi‘ite against their opponents. The civil war ended in 73/692 after Ibn Zubayr was defeated and killed. During the third fitna (127/744 - 133/750), there were wars between the different factions of the Khārijītes, i.e. Ibāḍīyya, Sufiyya and Shaybāniyya. In 128/745, Ḥārith b. Suraṣ, a Murjī‘ite revolted in Khurāsān. In 130/747, Abū Muslim openly rebelled against the Umayyads in favor of the Abbāsid. In 132/749, the Abbāsids proclaimed al-Saffāḥ as caliph and finally they consolidated their power after defeating Marwān II, the last Umayyad caliph in 133/750. The fourth fitna (194/809 – 198/813) started after the death of Hārūn al-Rashīd in 194/809 who had divided the empire half and half between his two sons al-Amīn and al-Mā‘mūn. They both struggled and fought in order to be supreme in the whole empire. In 198/813, al-Mā‘mūn defeated al-Amīn and became the caliph of the empire. During this fitna, neither Shi‘ite nor Khārijītes played any major role. See Marshall G. S. Hodgson, The Venture of Islam (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1977), 214-301, Wensinck, Muslim Creed, 109; L. Gardet, “6.1:185-906:1:185-906:1:185-90,” EJ², 2:930.

According to Fazlur Rahman, “The Mu‘tazila … are not a sect, but a theological school, which has directly influenced the formation of the ‘orthodox’ partly by being integrated into the latter and partly by being rejected and reacted against. The nearest point they approached to sectarianism was when, after their dogma was exalted into a state creed, they became intolerant and resorted to persecution. After being dethroned, however, they continued to exist as a theological school and their doctrines had an influence both on the Shi‘a dogmatics and on Sunnī Islam, on the question of the freedom and efficiency of the human will, notably through Ibn Taymiyya.” See Fazlur Rahman, Islam, 167; Ignaz Goldziher, Vorlesungen über den Islam (Heidelberg: Carl Winter’s Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1925), 188.

‘Ilm al-kalām is defined as “a science which enables a person to procure a victory of the dogmas and actions laid down by the Legislator of the religion and to refute all opinions contradicting them.” See Abū
18. Shi'ite Exegesis

The Shi'ites disputed the validity of the 'Uthmānic codex of the Qur'ān and alleged that it was not complete and in some cases it had been falsified due to the absence of any explicit reference to the Shi'ites in the Qur'ān. The Shi'ite exegetes attempt to find in the Qur'ān explicit references to such themes as the *imāms*’ supernatural and mystical qualities, their authority to interpret the Qur'ān and other religious scriptures or such major Shi'ite doctrines as the duty of loyalty to the *imāms* (*walāya*) and dissociation from their enemies (*barā’a*). The most important principle of the Shi'ite exegesis is that the authority to interpret the Qur'ān is reserved for ‘Alī and his descendants, the *imāms*.\(^{100}\)

The earliest Shi'ite exegesis was composed by Jābir b. Ẓarrā'ī b. Yūsuf al-Kūfī (d. 128/745) in the second/eighth century but it has been lost.\(^{101}\) The notable Shi'ite mufassirīn of the third/ninth century are Furāt b. Ibrāhīm al-Kūfī (fl. second half of third/ninth and possibly fourth/tenth centuries),\(^{102}\) Abū al-Nadr Muḥammad b. Mas'ūd al-Sulamī al-ʻAyyāshī (d. 320/932). However, most of the commentaries were written between the middle of the third/ninth and late fourth/tenth centuries, which roughly corresponds to the time between the Minor Occultation (*al-ghayba al-ṣughrā*), and the Major Occultation (*al-ghayba al-kubrā*).\(^{103}\) During this

---

\(^{100}\) Meir M. Bar-Asher, “Shī‘ism and the Qur’ān,” *EQ*, 4:593.


\(^{102}\) Furāt’s commentary on the Qur‘ān is based upon traditions (*tafsīr bi al-ma‘thūr*). These traditions usually are traced back to Muḥammad al-Bāqir and Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq or ‘Alī’s disciples, such as Ibn ‘Abbās, Mujāhid (d. 103/721) and Aṣbaḥ b. Nubātā who frequently transmits *ḥadīths* in the name of ‘Alī. See Meir M. Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shi‘ism* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press; Leiden, Boston and Köln: Brill, 1999), 30.

\(^{103}\) Minor Occultation took place in 260/874 or 264/878 and the Major Occultation occurred in 329/941.
period, noteworthy commentators were ‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm b. Hāshim al-Qummī (alive before 329/941) and Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Ja‘far al-Nu‘mānī (d. 360/971).

Shi‘ite tradition ascribes many works to imāms but they are mostly unknown except their titles. The commentaries attributed to Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. 113/731-2), Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765), and Ḥasan al-‘Askarī (d. 260/874) are based on the earlier exegetical material which seems to have been edited and amended.


19. Zaydite Exegesis

The Zaydites differ with the Shi‘ites and reject doubts about the integrity of the ‘Uthmānic Qur‘ān. Zaydite imāms al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm al-Rassī (d. 246/860) and his grandson Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn (d. 298/911) wrote about the Zaydites hermeneutical principles. According to al-Qāsim, the classification of muḥkam and mutashābih verses leads to the correct worship of God, which is divided into three parts: knowledge of God; knowledge of what pleases and displeases God; and obeying what pleases Him and avoiding which displeases Him. These three are known from “three sources by which

---

105 See Bar-Asher, Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shi‘ism, 7-8.
God gives evidence against His servants” (thalāthu ḥujjatin ihtajja bi-hā al-ma‘būdu ‘alā al-‘ibād). The three sources of knowledge are the intellect, the Book and the Messenger. Each proof has its root (aṣl) and its branch (far‘). On the root, there is agreement; on the branches, people differ. The lack of consensus on the branches is due to the difference in rational investigation (al-naẓar), and “the differentiation regarding that which requires rational investigation and inference, from a known and present indicator, of that whose signification is absent and unknown” (li-ikhtilāfi al-naẓari wa al-tamyīzi fīmā yūjibu al-naẓara wa al-istidlāla bi al-dalīli al-hāḍiri al-ma‘lūmi ‘alā madlūli ‘alay-hi al-ghā’ibi al-majhūl). It is one’s capacity for enquiry and influence that determines the degree to which one grasps the truth of things. In the case of the Book, its root is the muḥkam. Its branch is the mutashābih, which must be referred back to the muḥkam verses. Yaḥyā states that the Qur’ān consists of muḥkam and mutashābih, ta‘wīl and tanzīl, abrogating and abrogated, ḥalāl and ḥarām, and so on, all of which are mutually affirming (wa kullu mā dhakarnā yuṣaddiqu ba‘ḍun ba‘ḍan).

The Zaydite exegetical works are still mainly in manuscript form. Several scholars agree that the early Zaydite exegesis was composed by Ziyād b. al-Mundhir Abū al-Jārūd (d. after 140/757-8). More than two hundred quotations of his exegesis have been preserved in the commentary of al-Qummī. Muqātil b. Sulaymān compiled al-Tafsīr al-kabīr and Nawādir al-tafsīr. Other Zaydite exegetes who wrote tafsīrs are al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhim Rassī (d. 246/860), Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. Maṣūr b. Zayd al-Kūfī

---

Ibn ʿUqda (d. 333/947), Ismāʿīl b. ʿAlī al-Bustī al-Zaydī (d. ca. 420/1029), Abū al-Fatḥ Nāṣir b. Ḫusayn al-Daylamī (d. 444/1052), Abū Yūṣuf al-Qazwīnī (d. 488/1095), ʿAlī al-Shawkānī (d. 494/1100), and Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Shawkānī (d. 1250/1834).

20. Ismāʿīlī Exegesis

The Ismāʿīlī distinguish between the exterior (ẓāhir) and the interior (bāṭin) meanings of the Qurʾān. For them, the exoteric exegesis is not as important as the esoteric interpretation, which can be derived through taʿwīl. They distinguish between the “speaking Qurʾān” (nāṭiq Qurʾān) and the “silent Qurʾān” (ṣāmit Qurʾān). The Prophet (nāṭiq) receives revelation (tanzīl) and promulgates the sharīʿa, while his plenipotentiary (waṣī) expounds the bāṭin through taʿwīl. This arrangement corresponds to the distinction between the hidden, spiritual meaning of scripture interpreted by the Imām (taʿwīl) and the divine message delivered by the Prophet in its literal form (tanzīl).

The Ismāʿīlī exegesis differs from the mystical exegesis in the sense that the Qurʾān’s inner and true meaning could be obtained only through the taʿwīl derived from the legitimate Imām. The mystical exegesis’ emphasis is on understanding and

---

112 Abū Yūṣuf al-Qazwīnī was Zaydite Muʿtazilite and a disciple of Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār. He was the author of a great tafsīr entitled Ḥadāʾiq dhāt bahja fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-kaʿīrīn. See footnote 136.
114 According to the Ismaʿīlite doctrine there are seven muṭaqāʾ (pl. of nāṭiq): Ādam, Nūḥ, Ibrāhīm, Mūsā, ʿĪsā, Muḥammad and the Qāʾīm. See Zāhid ʿAlī, Hamārī Īṭī madhab kī haqīqat awr uskā nizām (Hyderabad: The Academy of Islamic Studies, 1954), 129.
experiencing the inner dimensions and the allusions in the Qur’ān which are most closely related to the human beings spiritual aspect.\(^{116}\)

Some of the Ismāʿīlī exegeses are Qāḍī Nuʿmān b. Ḥayyūn Maghrībī (d. 363/973)\(^{117}\) and ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī’s (d. 548/1153). His *tafsīr* falls under the category of traditional commentaries and deals with the linguistic issues and exoteric exegesis. However, when necessary he interprets the mysteries (*asrār*) with Ismaʿīlīte ideas.\(^{118}\)

**21. Khārijite Exegesis**

The Khārijites have also contributed to exegesis but not as extensively as other groups. They interpret the text in line with their theological positions. These *tafsīrs* rely mainly on the literal meaning of the text and were written by ʿ Ibāḍīs, a moderate group among the Khārijites. Some of the Khārijites’ works have been lost, such as the *tafsīr* of ‘ Abd al-Raḥmān b. Rustum al-Fārisī (d. in third/ninth century). The earliest Kharijite commentary still extant is the *Tafsīr* of Hūd b. Muḥakkam al-Hawwārī (d. *ca.* 280/893 or 290/902-3). He borrowed a great part of the exegetical traditions from Yaḥyā b. Sallām al-Baṣrī who preserved a large amount of exegetical materials of al-Kalbī, Mujāhid, and Ḥasan al-Baṣrī in his work.\(^{119}\)

\(^{116}\) Andrew Rippin states that, “For al-Ghazālī as for most other mystics, the Qur’ān works on two levels: the practical and the cognitive. The former applies to the inner self and its purification without neglect of the outer activities, while the latter is meaning found through inner experience in light of mystical thought, and it can be reached only through firm knowledge of the practical or outer aspects.” See Andrew Rippin, “Tafsīr,” *ER*, 14: 236-44.


\(^{118}\) See Gilliot, L’exégèse du Coran, 158-60; Gilliot, Exegesis of the Qurʾān: Classical and Medieval, *EQ*, 2: 99-124.

22. Mu‘tazilite Exegesis

The Mu‘tazilites introduced philosophical, philological, and grammatical methodology in the Qur’ānic exegesis. They contributed to the exegesis of the Qur’ān considerably but most of their works are lost. Some of the titles of their works are preserved, and ample quotations from them have survived in the extant works of later authors.\(^1\) Wāṣil b. ‘Aṭā’ (d. 131/749), a pioneer of the Mu‘tazilite school was the first Mu‘tazilite who wrote a *tafsīr* of the Qur’ān entitled *Maʿānī al-Qur’ān*. None of his writings has been preserved, not even in fragments. But several titles are mentioned, though some of them are attributed to his disciples rather than to himself.\(^2\) ‘Amr b. ‘Ubayd (d. ca. 144/761) a celebrated ascetic and a scholastic theologian composed a *tafsīr* of the Qur’ān which is mainly derived from the teachings of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. However, most of it is lost and only a few references and fragments have been preserved in later *tafsīr* literature.\(^3\)

Other Mu‘tazilite exegetes are Ḍirār b. ʻAmr (d. 180/796),\(^4\) Abū ʻAlī ‘Amr b. Fā‘id al-Aswārī (d. after 200/815),\(^5\) Abū Bakr ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Aṣamm (d. 200/816),\(^6\) Abū ‘Alī Muḥammad b. al-Muṣṭanīr Qutrub (d. 206/821),\(^7\) Abū Sahl al-


\(^6\) Al-Aṣamm defines the *muḥkamāt* as those verses, the veracity of which can not be denied by any opponent, for instance, all statements about past events in the Qur’ān. The *mutashābihāt* are the verses, he
Hilālī Bishr b. al-Mu'tamir (d. 210/825-6),
Abū al-Ḥasan Sa'īd b. Mas'ada al-Akhfash
al-Awsat (d. 215/830),
Ja'far b. Ḥarb (d. 236/850),
Abu Ja'far Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Khaṭṭīb al-Islāfi (d. 240/854),
Abū Ya’qūb Yūsuf b. ‘Abd Allāh b. Isḥāq al-Shāhīm (d. after 257/870),
Abū ‘Alī Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Jubbā‘ī (d. 303/915),
Abū al-Qāsim al-Balkhī al-Ka‘bī (d. 319/931), a disciple of Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Khayyāt (d. 320/932),
Abū ‘Alī Muḥammad Abū Hāshim al-

states, which describe something about the future and which reveal their truth only after reflection, for instance, description about the Last Day of Judgment. There are no verses in the Qur’ān that remain permanently obscure to human reason. His views on muḥkamāt and mutashābihāt were adopted mostly by the later Mu'tazilī scholars who considered that there was nothing in the Qur’ān that could not be grasped by the human intellect. Al-Aṣammī’s views were reproduced by al-Māturīdhī in his Ta’wilāt ahl al-sunna and by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī in his Tafsīr al-kabīr. See Ibn al-Nadīm, Al-Fihrist, 1:594-5; Ibn al-Murtuḍā, al-Munyā, 32; Josef van Ess, “al-Asamm, Abu Bakr ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. Kaysān,” EIr, 12: 88: Al-Asḥarī, Maqālāt, 223; ‘Abū ʿAmīr Manṣūr al-Baghdādī, Uṣūl al-dīn, 221-22; al-Raḍī, Tafsīr al-kabīr, 7:182-83. Ibn al-Nadīm, Al-Fihrist, 1:147-9; Ibn Khallikān, Wafayat al-aʿyān, 4:312-13; al-Suyūṭī, Buḥuya, 1:312-13; Ibn al-‘Imād, Shāhadāt, 2:15-16; G. Troupeau, “Kutrub, the cognomen of Abū ‘Alī Muḥammad b. al-Muṣṭanīr,” EIr, 5:567.


Some quotations of al-Balkhī’s Tafsīr al-kabīr li-al-Qurʾān, also entitled Ḥaqāʾiq al-taʾwīl fī mutashābih al-tanzīl and in ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn al-Ṣarīf al-Murtuḍā’s (d. 436/1044) Amālī which is also known as Ghurar

al-fawā‘īd wa-durār al-qalā‘īd. Ibn Ṭawūs cites many passages from Abū al-Qāsim’s tafsīr and in one of the passages, Abū al-Qāsim states that the Qur’ān was compiled during the time of the Prophet under his supervision and he determined its grammatical inflection and the arrangement of its sūras and āyās. From the sections of al-Balkhī’s tafsīr, as cited by Ibn Tawūs in his Sa‘d al-su‘ūd and by Īsā in his al-Tībān, both of them conclude that like the majority of the Mu‘tazilites, he preferred the intellectual over the transmitted exegesis. For instance, in his tafsīr of the verse: “And when your Lord brought forth from the loins the children of Adam their descendants and made them witnesses over themselves, (He said): ‘Am I not your Lord?’ They said: ‘Yes, We bear witness.’” (wa idh akhdhā rabbuka min ba‘thā ‘ādama min zuhārihim dhurriyyatuhum wa-as-hadhāhum ‘alā anfusihum alastu bi-rabbikum qālā balā shahīnā), al-Balkhī explains that what is meant by ‘descendants’ are generations of humans throughout the centuries and the witnessing of the descendents to the lordship of God refers to the first intellect and primordial nature (fītra) that was entrusted to man.


138 Abū Yusuf al-Qazwīnī composed a very long comprehensive exegetical work on the Qur‘ān entitled Ḥadā‘iq dhāt bahja fī tafsīr al-Qur‘ān al-ka‘īm, which is said to have consisted of three hundred, four hundred, five hundred, or even seven hundred volumes, depending on the report. Various sources refer to the great volume the tafsīr, adding that the author expressed his Mu‘tazilite views throughout the work. His commentary on Sūrā al-Fāṭihā alone is said to have been written in seven volumes, and elsewhere he devoted an entire volume to the exegesis of verse 2:102, “They follow what the Satans recited” (wattaba‘ū ma tattāl al-shayātīn). Abū Yusuf seems to have followed in the works of earlier Mu‘tazilite authors of
Muḥammad b. Karāma al-Ḥākīm al-Jishumī (d. 494/1101), and Abū al-Qāsim

Məhmūd b. ʻUmar al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144) who composed the Qurʾān commentary entitled al-Kashshāf ‘an ḥaqāʾiq al-tanzīl wa ʿuyūn al-ghawāmiḍ fī wujūh al-taʿwīl, which explains the entire text of the Qurʾān grammatically, lexicographically, and rationally. More will be discussed later.

It may be appropriate to discuss the concept of the inimitability of the Qurʾān (iʾjāz al-Qurʾān). There are two explanations provided for this. The first was attributed to the Qurʾānic claim that its likeness could never be produced by anyone. The second

---

Qurʾānic exegesis, such as al-Aṣāmm, Abū Muslim al-Isfahānī, Abū al-Qāsim al-Balkhī, Abū ʻAlī al-Jubbāʾī, Abū Hāshim al-Jubbāʾī and Qādī ʻAbd al-Jabbār. Literary-historical legends are mentioned in the biographical dictionaries concerning the details of books written and their reproduction in case of loss, number of teachers and collection of books. For instance, it is reported by Ibn Subkī that books in the Library of the Niẓāmiyya College were burnt during the lifetime of Niẓām al-Mulk and he became distressed. He was told that he should not worry about it because Ibn al-Ḥaddād would dictate all those burnt books by his memory. He was summoned and he dictated all those books relating to tafsīr, hadith, fiqh, ʿusūl and naḥw within a period of three years. Some biographers mentioned that ʻUmar b. ʻAbd al-Malik was a student of Abū Ḥāmid Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Dīn ʻAṭṭār, ed. Reynold A. Nicholson and Mīrzā Muḥammad b. ʻAbdul-Qazwīnī, Edward Granville and Reynold A. Nicholson, Tāʾrīkh-i-guzīdā (Leiden: Brill and London: Luzac and Co., 1905), 1:196.

---

140 See Gimaret, Une lecture, 25-26.
141 There are five verses in the Qurʾān which describe it and these are called as “challenge verses” (āyāt al-taḥaddī). These are: 2:23-24; 10:38; 11:13; 17:88 and 52:34.
was directly related to the subject of the divine essence.\textsuperscript{143} \textit{I}‘\textit{jāz} (inimitability) became a technical term in theological and literary discussions during the third/ninth century after the death of Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) and before the death of the Mu‘tazilite \textit{mutakallim} Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Zayd al-Wāsiṭī (d. 307/918-9).\textsuperscript{144}

Abū ‘Uthmān ‘Amr b. Bahr al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/868) is the earliest \textit{mutakallim} and literary scholar who wrote in defense of the prophethood of Muḥammad and the superior stylistic attributes of the Qur‘ān. Although he did not use the term \textit{i}‘\textit{jāz al-Qur‘ān} in his works, other derived terms from the root ‘\textit{j}–\textit{z} such as \textit{a}‘\textit{jaza}, ‘\textit{ājiz and} \textit{mu}‘\textit{jiz} were used about the qualities of the Qur‘ān. He argued that the Qur‘ān was inimitable because of its composition (\textit{ta‘līf}) and its structure or organization of words (\textit{naẓm}).\textsuperscript{145}

Abū Zakariyyā Yaḥya b. Ziyād al-Farrā’ (d. 207/822), Abū ‘Alī al-Ḥasan b. ʻAlī al-Fārisī (d. 377/987) and Abū al-Ḥasan ʻAlī b. ʻĪsā al-Rummānī (d. 384/994) who were

\textsuperscript{143} According to L. Gardet, “The Mu‘tazilites denied that there was an uncreated Word subsisting in God…the Asharites …distinguish between the Word subsisting in the divine essence, which is without speech (\textit{qawl}), and its expression by means of letters and sounds. In itself, \textit{kalām} is not an ‘attribute of action (\textit{ṣifāt al-af‘āl}),’ like the creation or decree; it is, like will, knowledge, life, an attribute that is \textit{ma}‘\textit{ānī}, which ‘adds a concept to the essence’ but itself subsists within the essence by the very existence of God.’ See L. Gardet, “\textit{Kalām},” \textit{EI²}, 4:468-71. Margaret Larkin states that, “[S]ince the notion of the inimitability of the Book referred to its linguistic form as well as its content, the \textit{i}‘\textit{jāz was rhetorical question as much as it was theological, and in the logocentric atmosphere of medieval Islamic scholarship, the question of the inimitability of the Qur‘ān was necessarily the subject of research among scholars within the disciplines of grammar, rhetoric and theology alike. By establishing the notion that the Qur‘ān would be judged to be inimitable when considered from a point of view of known standards of stylistic excellence, Muslim doctrine imposed a requirement of consistency upon scholars who dealt with the \textit{i}‘\textit{jāz: anything said about the phenomenon of speech (\textit{kalām}) had to be consistent with the scholar’s theological view of speech of God (\textit{kalām Allāh}).” See Margaret Larkin, “The Inimitability of the Qur‘ān: Two Perspectives,” \textit{Religion and Literature} 20 (1988): 32.


the prominent Mu‘tazilite philologists and grammarians elaborated the doctrine of the
inimitability of the Qur‘ān (i‘jāz al-Qur‘ān) and wrote about the stylistic aspects of the
Qur‘ān.

23. Conclusion

_Tafsīr_ is one of the most important disciplines of the Qur‘ānic sciences. The terms
tafsīr, ta‘wīl, ma‘ānī, and sharḥ in Arabic language mean interpretation, explanation, or
elucidation of something. In the first two Islamic centuries, there was no differentiation
between tafsīr, ta‘wīl, and ma‘ānī when used as a technical term for the works of
exegesis. At the beginning of the third Islamic century, there arose differences of
opinions among the lexicographers and philologists about the precise meaning of these
terms and their relationship to each other. Some scholars considered that tafsīr, ta‘wīl,
ma‘ānī, and sharḥ were synonymous and have the same meanings, and early
commentators used these terms interchangeably. However, others argued that these terms
have different meanings.

There are two views regarding the Qur‘ānic exegesis in early Islam: the traditional
Muslims’ views and the Western views. According to the traditional Muslims’ views,
Qur‘ānic exegesis began quite early during the lifetime of Prophet Muḥammad, and the
tafsīr tradition initiated by Muḥammad is referred to as “the Prophetical exegesis” (tafsīr
_al-nabī_). After the death of the Prophet, the companions’ (ṣahāba) exegetical views not
only gained an extraordinary authority but also were held in great esteem and accorded a
special status as _marfū‘_ (elevated) that is, attributed to Muḥammad. After that, the
“companions’ successors” (tābiʿūn) and the “successors’ successors” (tabʿ tābiʿūn) interpreted the Qurʾān.

By the end of the first half of the first century of Islam, four major schools of exegesis were evolved whose views and contribution in this field significantly shaped the science of exegesis of the later generations. These schools were named after the major cities: Mecca, Medina, Kufa, and Baṣra.

*Tafsīr* is divided into two broad categories: *tafsīr bi-al-maʿthūr* and *tafsīr bi-al-raʿy*. *Tafsīr bi-al-maʿthūr* is exegesis that relies on those Prophetic traditions which are trustworthy in their transmission (*isnād*) and text (*matn*). It is considered by mainstream Sunnī exegesis to be authentic and reliable. *Tafsīr bi-al-raʿy* is exegesis that is based on personal opinion and rational analysis of the text.

According to the Western scholars’ views, the reliability and authenticity of the *isnāds* and *matns* of exegetical *ḥadīths*, reconstructing the early exegetical works and dating them at an early period of Islam is all suspect. However, exegetical *ḥadīths* are a subset of all the *ḥadīths* as a whole, and encompass the historical and legal genres in so far as they relate to the Qurʾān. In addition, most of the exegetical *ḥadīths* are immune from the sectarian and legal debates.

It is evident from the above discussion that the early period of Islamic history has been the main object of opposing views between the Muslim and Western scholars. The Muslim scholarship trusts in the early historical authenticity of exegetical *ḥadīths* and considers the interpretations of early commentators reliable and trustworthy. For Western scholars the historicity and authenticity of early exegesis is open to question. Therefore, there appears to be no resolution to this problem unless either the Western scholarship
accepts the traditional Muslim historiography or new materials are discovered to substantiate or refute the skepticism of Western scholars about the early history of Islam.

The Qur’ānic exegesis started in the early second/eighth century with the introduction of philological and grammatical sciences in the Qur’ānic exegetical works. Similarly, the refinement and codification of historiography which turned myths into history contributed to a great extent for the establishment of exegesis as a certain and exact science. In this period, the following broad categories of *tafsīr* could be distinguished: paraphrastic, narrative, legal, linguistic, philosophical, mystical, and theological. The theological *tafsīrs* were based on ‘ilm al-kalām to justify and substantiate their views and existence, and to refute the opinions of their opponents. Most of the theological exegeses were written by the Shi‘ite, the Zaydite, the Isma‘īlīs, the Kharijite, and the Mu‘tazilites.

The earliest texts date the concept of the inimitability of the Qur’ān (*i‘jāz al-Qur’ān*), from the third/ninth century. Abū Zakariyyā al-Farrā’, Abū ‘Alī al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī al-Fārisī, and Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. ‘Īsā al-Rummānī, not only elaborated the doctrine of the inimitability of the Qur’ān but also wrote about the stylistic aspects of the Qur’ān.
Chapter 4

Al-Zamakhshari’s Methodology of Tafsīr

There is a general consensus among the traditional Muslim scholars and the Western scholars that the tafsīr genre in written form emerged at least in the early second/eighth century, and constituted one of the most important disciplines of the sciences of the Qur’ān (‘ulūm al-Qur’ān) approximately from the third/ninth century.¹

Andrew Rippin states that,

In most cases, a work entitled Tafsīr will follow the text of the Qur’ān from the beginning to the end, and will provide an interpretation (tafsīr) of segments of the text (word-by-word, phrase-by-phrase, or verse-by-verse) as a running commentary.²

Most of the verses are interpreted by the other verses of the Qur’ān, traditions of the Prophet, and grammar. Other elements in the interpretation include “occasions of the revelation” (asbāb al-nuzūl), “abrogating and the abrogated” (al-nāsikh wa-l-mansūkh), “variant readings” (qirā’āt), and historical context, which are not necessarily present at the same time in one and the same exegete, but which are not mutually exclusive.

According to Feras Hamza and Sajjad Rizvi,

There has been a remarkable continuity of form and method in the production of tafsīr works since the beginnings of the exegetical enterprise. Such continuity, however, has not meant a uniformity of

opinions; varied hermeneutical approaches and interpretations have always found a place within a shared reverence for the divine text.⁴

One such example is of al-Zamakhsharī’s exegesis al-Kashshāf ‘an ḥaqā’iq al-tanzīl wa-‘uyūn al-aqāwīl. Despite the fact that his tafsīr follows the text of the Qur’ān from the beginning to the end, his exegetical techniques differ from the standard format of traditional exegesis. The main characteristics of his tafsīr are: emphasis on the muḥkam and mutashābih verses, significance of ‘ilm al-maʿānī and ‘ilm al-bayān, question and answer format (as’ila wa-ajwība), and extensive grammatical use. These components of exegesis are uniquely applied by him throughout the Kashshāf, which will be illustrated in the following pages.

In addition to the above mentioned techniques, al-Zamakhsharī used some of the elements of a traditional Qurʾān commentary, such as “interpretation of the Qurʾān by means of the Qurʾān” (tafsīr al-Qurʾān bi-al-Qurʾān), use of the aḥādīth, and the variant readings of the Qurʾān (qirāʾāt).

1. Muḥkamāt wa mutashābihāt

Al-Zamakhsharī’s starting point for exegesis is generally based on the verse 3:7:

It is He who has sent down upon you the book wherein are ‘perspicuous verses’ (āyātun muḥkamātun) and which are the ‘mother of the Book’ (umm al-kitāb), and others are ‘ambiguous’ (mutashābihātun). As for those ‘in whose hearts is swerving’ (fī qulūbihim zayghun), they follow what is ambiguous in it, seeking (to create) dissension and seeking its interpretation. However, no one except God knows its interpretation. And those who are firmly grounded in knowledge say: ‘We believe in it, all is from our Lord (āmannā bihi kullun min ‘indi rabbīnā),’ but only those who have wisdom understand.

Al-Zamakhsharī illustrates his interpretation of the word *muḥkamāt* on a lexical approach and interprets the word *muḥkamāt* (the *ism al-maʃʿūl* of *aḥkama*) as *ḥufiżat min al-ihtimāl wa-al-ishtibāh* (the verses that are preserved from speculation and doubt).⁴ He states that the issue of the *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt* is not only important but also the very foundation of the Qur’ānic interpretation. He maintains that no exegesis is possible without a complete understanding of the *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt* verses. According to him, *muḥkamāt* verses are those whose expression (*‘ibāra*) is clear (*uḥkimat*) because they have been preserved (*ḥufiżat*) and are free from speculation (*iḥtimāl*) and doubt (*ishtibāh*).⁵ He interprets ‘clear verses’ (*uḥkimat āyātuhu*) as “verses arranged firmly and perfectly in which there is neither contradiction nor imperfection” (*nuẓimat naẓman rašīnan muḥkaman lā yaqaʿu fīhā naqḍ wa-lā khalal*)⁶ as mentioned in the verse “Alif lām rā’, A book whose verses are set clear and made distinct” (*alif lām rā kitābun uḥkimat āyātuhu thumma fuṣṣilat*).⁷ The clarity of *muḥkam* verses can be found in their own wordings. They do not require any explanation from extraneous sources, such as other verses of the Qur’ān, Prophetic traditions or linguistic investigation in order to understand them. In addition, they are the “essence of the Book” (*umm al-kitāb*) since “they serve as a basis for interpreting *mutashābih* verses” (*tuḥmal al-mutashābihāt ‘alayhā wa-turadda ilayhā*).⁸

Al-Zamakhsharī states that the Qur’ān in its entirety is not *muḥkam*. Had it been completely *muḥkam* the people would have been attached to easiness and convenience in

⁴ Ibn Manzūr glosses the word *aḥkama shay’an* (a verbal use of the root *muḥkam*) as *amnaʿahu min al-fasād* (to protect it from imperfection). See Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, 12:143.
⁷ Qur’ān, 11:1.
their approach to the Qur’ān and turned away from investigation and perception of reasoning. In this case, they would have lost their way and could not achieve the gnosis and belief in the unity of God. There is a test and trial, and a distinction has to be made between a verse firmly established with truth and a wavering mutashābih verses. It is for this reason that the scholars need to investigate and consider the meaning with scrutiny and reasoning and exert great talent in deriving the exposition of a mutashābih verse by referring it to muḥkam verse. If one is successful, it results in great rewards and the attainment of higher ranks from God. It is a believer’s conviction that the word of God is neither inconsistent nor contradictory. When he observes some apparent incompatibility in it, he endeavors to find out conformity and harmony and adopts the customary practice sanctioned by the traditions. Due to his reflection, God helps him in his thoughts and clarifies the mutashābih verses in accordance with the muḥkam verses. It increases peace of mind in his belief and strengthens his conviction.

Al-Zamakhsharī cites two examples explaining how a muḥkam verse can provide the basis for interpreting a mutashābih verse. He considers that “Looking upon their Lord” (ilā raḥibihā nāẓiratun) is a mutashābih verse which can be interpreted by a muḥkam verse: “Vision cannot attain Him,” (lā tudrikhuḥu al-abṣār), Similarly, “We command its people (living a life of) luxury” (amarnā mutrafīhā) is a mutashābih verse

---

10 Al-Zamakhsharī, al-Kashshāf, 1:528.
11 Qurʾān, 75:23.
12 Qurʾān, 6:103.
13 Qurʾān, 17:16.
which can be interpreted by “God does not command indecency” (inna Allāh lā yā’maru bi al-faḥshā’i)\textsuperscript{14} which is a muḥkam verse.

Al-Zamakhsharī does not define the meaning of mutashābihāt as comprehensively as he does the meaning of muḥkamāt. He simply glosses mutashābihāt as a combination of mushtabihāt and muḥtamilāt. However, according to Ibn Manẓūr and Ibn Qutayba mutashābihāt is synonymous with mushkilāt (difficult or obscure words).\textsuperscript{15}

Al-Zamakhsharī further states that as for those in whose hearts is swerving, they follow what is ambiguous (mutashābih) in it and does not conform to the muḥkam. He also mentions that the interpretation of these verses “does not correspond with the statements of the people of the truth, that is the Muʻtazilites” (ma yuṭābiqah min qawl ahl al-ḥaqq). Thus, the non-Muʿtazilites interpret these verses according to their desires and turn away the people from their religion and mislead them.\textsuperscript{16}

This verse\textsuperscript{17} can be interpreted in two different ways. In the first case, wāw is read as a conjunctive particle (wāw al-ʻaṭf) that links the words Allāh and al-rāsikhūn a fi-al-ʻilmī. Therefore, the verse will be interpreted that not only God knows its interpretation, but also those who are firmly grounded in knowledge who say: “We believe in it, all is from our Lord.” In the second case, wāw is not a conjunctive particle (wāw al-ʻaṭf), rather it is read as wāw al-isti’nāf, indicating the beginning of the verse. Therefore, the verse will be interpreted that no one except God knows its interpretation. And those who are firmly grounded in knowledge say: “We believe in it, all is from our Lord.” Al-

\textsuperscript{14} Qurʻān, 7:28.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibn Qutayba, Ta‘wīl mushkil al-Qurʻān, 102; Ibn Manẓūr, Lisān al-ʻArab, 11:358.
\textsuperscript{16} Al-Zamakhsharī, al-Kashshāf, 1:528.
\textsuperscript{17} Qurʻān, 3:7 reads as follows: wa mā yaʻlamu tāʼwilahu ʻillā Allāh wa al-rāsikhūna fi al-ʻilmī yaqūlūna āmannā bihi.
Zamakhsharī’s interpretation is based upon his reading of \(wāw\) in the verse as a conjunctive particle. According to him, the interpretation of these verses is known not only to God, but also to those people who have sound knowledge, i.e. firmly established and deep rooted.\(^{18}\)

For al-Zamakhsharī, the classification of the Qur’ānic verses into \(muḥkam\) and \(mutashābih\) is limited to the theological aspects of the Qur’ān. Those verses which support any or all of the five principles of the Mu’tazilite doctrines are regarded as \(muḥkamāt\), while those which contradict them are considered \(mutashābihāt\). The following two verses can be cited to illustrate the point. The first verse: “Whosoever wishes, let him believe; and whosoever wishes, let him disbelieve” (\(fa-man shā’ a fal-yu’min wa-man shā’ a fal-yakfur\))\(^{19}\) is defined by the Mu’tazilites\(^{20}\) as \(muḥkam\) because it proves their argument for free will, whereas the Sunnites consider it \(mutashābih\). The second verse: “And you will not desire unless God wills” (\(wa-mā tashā’ūna illā an yashā’ Allāh\))\(^{21}\) is defined by the Mu’tazilites as \(mutashābih\) since it contradicts one of their principles, but the Sunnites consider it as \(muḥkam\) because it proves their concept of predestination.

It will be appropriate to discuss the concepts of predestination and free will (\(al-qaḍā wa al-qadar\)). \(Al-qaḍā\) means “God’s judgment (divine decree) in all the matters

---

\(^{18}\) Al-Zamakhsharī emphasizes with the following sentence: “And they bite fiercely with sharp molar tooth” (\(wa-‘addū fīhī bi-dirsi gātī\)). It means that they interpret the \(mutashābih\) verses conclusively and unequivocally. Al-Zamakhsharī, al-Kashshāf, 1:527-29.

\(^{19}\) Qur’ān, 18:29.

\(^{20}\) Al-Zamakhsharī interprets this verse as follows: “The truth has come and excuses have been taken away and there is nothing left except your choice for yourselves between the path of deliverance and the path of destruction” (jā’a al-haqq wa zāḥat al-‘ilal falam yabqa illā ikhtiyārikum li-anfusikum mā shi’tum min al-akhdhī fī ṭariq al-najāt aw fī ṭariq al-hilāk). See al-Zamakhsharī, al-Kashshāf, 3:583.

\(^{21}\) Qur’ān, 76:30.
from eternity to the end of the world.”

22 Al-qadar means “to determine, to measure or to assign,” and “al-qadariyya are those who consider that every man is creator of his acts and do not perceive disobedience and sins ordained by predestination.”

23 According to al-Ashʿarī, the Qadariyya held the view that “man’s will was not wholly under the domination of the (divine) decree.” In short, qadā pertains to pre-eternity, while qadar belongs to the present order of things” (al-qadā fī al-azal wa al-qadar lā yazal).

25 The Muʿtazilites were against the doctrine of predestination and adhered to the concept of human free will. For them, therefore, an individual was responsible for his/her actions and these actions could not be attributed to God.

2. ‘Ilm al-maʿānī and ‘ilm al-bayān

Al-Zamakhsharī states that knowledge of ‘ilm al-maʿānī and ‘ilm al-bayān is essential for understanding the finer meanings of the Qurʾān. He mentions that “no one can understand the real meanings except a person who is proficient in two sciences pertinent to the Qurʾān, and they are the science of expression and the science of semantics and syntax” (lā yaghūṣu ʿalā shayʿ min tilka al-ḥaqāʾiq illā rajulun qad barʿa fī ‘ilmayn mukhtassayn bi-al-Qurʾān wa-humā ‘ilm al-maʿānī wa-ʿilm al-bayān).

26 He mentions these terms twice in the introduction of al-Kashshāf, and in his earlier works, Aʿjab al-ʿujab. According to Zubir,

23 See Al-Jurjānī, Kitāb al-Taʿrīfāt, 181.
26 Al-Zamakhsharī, al-Kashshāf, 1:96.
If something can be inferred from the way he uses the terms, then it is perhaps the possibility that his direct audience, the Mu'tazilite scholars in Mecca, were already familiar with them. This is because he did not bother to introduce, nor specify what he meant by them.\(^{28}\)

I will deal with al-Zamakhsharī later, but it would be relevant to look into the development and definitions of these terms by other scholars. Abū Yaʾqūb Sirāj al-Dīn al-Sakkākī (d. 626/1229) in his Miftāḥ al-ʿulūm describes all the linguistic disciplines, except “lexicography” (lusga). The book is divided into three major sections. The first section deals with “science of morphology” (ʿilm al-ṣarf), in which he discusses briefly “phonetics” (makhārij al-huruf) and “principles of root formation and semantic derivation” (qawānīn al-ishtiqāq). In the second section, he discusses in greater detail the “science of syntax” (ʿilm al-nahw). The third section is devoted to the “science of stylistics and imagery” (ʿilm al-maʿānī wa-al-bayān), but the terms are confusing in their arrangement and obscure in their definitions. In the end of the book, al-Sakkākī defines the “science of demonstration” (ʿilm al-istidlāl) and the “science of poetry” (ʿilm al-shʿir) which elaborates the “science of meters” (ʿilm al-ʿarūḍ) and the “science of rhyme” (ʿilm al-qāfiya).\(^{29}\) Although, al-Sakkākī does not mention his sources, his work is based upon Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s (d. 606/1209) Nihāyat al-iʿjāz fī dirāyat al-iʿjāz. Al-Rāzī acknowledges that his own work is primarily based upon ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī’s (d. 471/1078) Asrār al-balāgha and Dalāʾil al-iʿjāz.\(^{30}\)

---

\(^{28}\) Badrī Najih Zubir, Balāgha as an Instrument of Qurʾān Interpretation: A Study of al-Kashshāf (Kuala Lumpur: International Islamic University Malaysia, 2008), 5.


Abū ‘Abd Allāh Badr al-Dīn b. Mālik (d. 686/1287), scholar and author of commentaries and compendia in many fields of Arabic philology abridged al-Sakkākī’s *Miṣṭāḥ* in his book entitled *al-Miṣbāḥ fī ‘ilm al-ma‘ānī wa al-bayān wa al-badī‘*. His most important contribution is the integration and enlargement of the term *badī‘* into the theory of rhetoric. The *Miṣbāḥ* is the first treatise to establish the standard tripartite division of Arabic rhetoric, i.e. ‘ilm al-ma‘ānī, ‘ilm al-bayān and ‘ilm al-badī‘. He states that “al-badī‘” is defined as complement to the eloquence” (*al-badī‘* huwa ma‘rifat tawābi‘ al-faṣāḥa).

While the three components of rhetoric were firmly established by Badr al-Dīn, his influence on al-Sakkākī’s commentators remained limited in other aspects of the figures. More than a century later after al-Sakkākī, chief qāḍī Abū ‘Abd Allāh Jalāl al-Dīn al-Qazwīnī (d. 739/1338) composed two famous compendiums on rhetoric entitled the *Talkhīṣ al-miṣṭāḥ* and the *Īdāh fī ‘ulūm al-balāgha*. The *Talkhīṣ* is a digest of al-Sakkākī’s *Miṣṭāḥ* al-‘ulūm. The *Īdāh* is a large version of the *Talkhīṣ*. He borrowed from ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī’s *Asrār al-balāgha* and Dalā‘il al-i’jāz, al-Zamakhsharī’s *al-Kashshāf*, and some of his other predecessors. The two books have completely superseded the two books of al-Jurjānī and *Miṣṭāḥ* al-‘ulūm of al-Sakkākī.

According to al-Qazwīnī, ‘ilm al-balāgha consists of three components: ‘ilm al-ma‘ānī, ‘ilm al-bayān and ‘ilm al-badī‘. He defines ‘ilm al-ma‘ānī as “the science through which one knows the various existing patterns of Arabic speech by means of which it meets the requirements of each situation” (huwa ‘ilmun yu’rafu bihi aḥwālu al-

---


lafzi al-’arabiyyi al-latî bihî yuṭābiq muqtađa al-ḥālí). ‘Ilm al-bayân is defined as “the science through which one knows how to express one and the same concept in ways which differ as to the degree of clarity achieved in indicating this concept” (huwa ‘ilmun yu’rafu bihi īrādu al-ma’nā al-wāḥidi bi-ṭuruqin mukhtalifatin fî wuṣūḥi al-dalālati ‘alayhi). ‘Ilm al-badī’ is defined as “the science through which one knows the possibilities of style embellishment and its clarity after its adaptation with the requirements of situation” (‘ilmun yu’rafu bihi wujūh taḥsīn al-kalāmî ba’da ri‘ayati taṭbiquhu ‘ala muqtađa al-hāli wa- wuṣūḥi al-dalālati).

Al-Qazwînî further elaborates that the ‘ilm al-ma’ānî deals with a number of syntactical and semantic figures, while in the ‘ilm al-bayân all the figures that are part of imagery, such as simile (tashbîh, tamthîl), metaphor (isti‘āra), and metonymy (kinâya) are incorporated. All the remaining figures are the part of the ‘ilm al-badī’, which are generally subdivided into two categories: lafżî, pertaining to sounds or wording, and ma’nawî, pertaining to meaning. These terms become more complicated because the relation between grammar, logic and rhetoric; and between literary theory and literary criticism is not clear and there is overlap between these sciences.

The Zaydî scholar and imâm Yaḥyâ b. Ḥamza al-‘Alawî’s (d. 745/1344 or 749/1348) Kitâb al-Ṭirâz al-mutaḍammin li-asrâr al-balâgha wa ‘ulūm haqâ’iq al-i’jâz was written as an introduction to the author’s lectures on al-Zamakhsharî’s al-Kashshâf. Al-‘Alawî presents his views in great detail and cites many examples. He states that “‘ilm-ma’ānî is the science regarding the conditions of the Arabic words which are in

agreement and conformity with the necessity of stylistic composition” (ʻilm-maʻānī huwa al-ʻilm bi-ḥwāl al-alfāz al-ʻarabiyya al-muṭābīqat li-muqtaḍā al-hāl min al-ʻumūr al-inshāʾiyya). So far as ʻilm al-bayān is concerned, it deals with the attainment of the single meaning through diverse methods like the istiʻāra (metaphor), the tashbīh (simile), and the kināya (metonymy) and like that for the distinctness of the meaning” (ʻilm al-bayān ḥasilahu irad al-maʻnā al-wāḥid bi-ṭuʾruq mukhtalifa fī wudūḥ al-dalāla ʿalyhi ka al-istiʻāra wa al-tashbīh wa al-kināya wa ghayrahā). According to him, “figure of speech that demonstrates the word’s essential essence depending upon its composition, not from its real meaning, rather exposition of its subsequent meaning, is called ʻilm al-badīʻ” (kalām fīmā yuʿradu li-jawhar al-lafz min al-alqābī bi-ḥasbi taʾlīfīhi lā min jihat dalāla ʿalā maʾnāh wa innamā dalālātuḥu ʿalā maʾnāt baṭīʿatun li-dhālika wa hādha huwa al-lladhī yulaqqabu bi-ʾilam al-badīʿ).\[35\]

According to Shawqī Dayf, al-Zamakhsharī was the first scholar who coined the terms ʻilm al-maʻānī and ʻilm al-bayān and drew a line between the study of the aspects of construction (naẓm) and the study of figures of speech.\[36\] By implication, he is suggesting that the distinction between these two sciences antedates al-Sakkākī’s Miftāḥ al-ʻulūm and al-Qazwīnī’s Talkhīṣ al-miftāḥ and the Īḍāḥ fī ʻulūm al-balāgha.

Aḥmad al-Ḥūfī and and Darwīsh al-Jundī are also of the opinions that al-Zamakhsharī’s understanding of ʻilm al-maʻānī and ʻilm al-bayān is the same as that of al-Sakkākī and al-Qazwīnī. Al-Jundī even goes further by stating that al-Zamakhsharī was the first scholar to name the three sub-sciences of ʻilm al-balāgha as ʻilm al-maʻānī,

---


\[36\] Shawqī Dayf, Al-Balāgha: Taṭawwur wa tārīkh (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1965), 221-2.
'ilm al-bayān and 'ilm al-badī’. But he also mentions that al-Zamakhsharī usually used 'ilm al-bayān as a general term for those three sub-sciences as a whole.\(^{37}\)

Zubir is of the opinion that,

‘Ilm al-bayān and 'ilm al-ma‘ānī, according to al-Zamakhsharī, represent two sciences, but he fails to draw a rigorous dividing line between the two. He identifies the former with the study of naẓm (in other words, the styles of phrasing), and the latter with the study of ma‘ānī, as meanings of discourse and as ideas in the abstract. This has resulted in certain overlapping areas between the two sciences, in which case what is said to be a ma‘ānī issue might equally be considered to be a bayān issue.\(^{38}\)

In general, al-Zamakhsharī identifies 'ilm al-ma‘ānī with the study of ma‘ānī, as meanings of discourse and as ideas in the abstract, while 'ilm al-bayān with the study of naẓm, as styles of phrasing. However, he does not make any demarcation between the 'ilm al-ma‘ānī and 'ilm al-bayān and liberally uses all the figures, i.e. majāz, tashbīḥ, tamthīl, takhyīl, isti‘āra, and kināya. Approximately a century later, al-Sakkākī defined 'ilm al-ma‘ānī and 'ilm al-bayān, though still obscure in their meanings. It was not until two centuries after al-Zamakhsharī when al-Qazwīnī al-Khaṭīb and Yaḥyā b. Ḥamza al-‘Alawī refined these concepts and incorporated 'ilm al-ma‘ānī, 'ilm al-bayān, and 'ilm al-badī’ as components of 'ilm al-balāgha.

In the following seven verses, al-Zamakhsharī employs 'ilm al-ma‘ānī and 'ilm al-bayān:

First verse: “He (Moses) said: ‘O Lord, reveal to me Yourself so that I may see You.’ He said: ‘You cannot see Me, but look at the mountain. If it remains firm in its


\(^{38}\) Zubir, Balāgha as an Instrument of Qur‘ān Interpretation, 24.
place you may then see Me.’ When his Lord revealed Himself on the mountain, He leveled it to ground, and Moses fell down unconscious. When he woke up, he said: ‘All glory to You. I turn to You in repentance, and I am the first to believe.’” 39

Al-Zamakhsharî’s interpretation of “reveal to me [Yourself]” (arînî anţur ilayka) is “cause me to know Yourself specifically, openly, and clearly” (‘arrafînî nafsaka taʿrifan wâdihan jaliyyan). Al-Zamakhsharî gives the example of the signs of the Day of Judgment when people are constrained to recognize Him clearly. When God said to Moses, “you cannot see Me” (lan tarâni) meant “you will never have the capability to know Me in this way and your strength will never have the endurance of this constrained marvel” (lan taṭîqa maʿrifatî ʿalâ hâdhi al-ṭarîqa wa lan taḥtamil quwwataka tilka al-ayat al-muṭṭarrata). He further elaborates that God told Moses that He would appear upon the hill to show His signs and if he could remain steadfast there he might be able see Him. However, when God manifested the power and reverberation of His command and will, the mountain was leveled to ground and Moses fell down unconscious. Al-Zamakhsharî interprets this verse metaphorically and proves that the vision God is not possible, a position in accordance with Muʿtazilite principles. 40

Second verse: “God has sealed their hearts and their hearing, and on their sight is a veil. For them is a great punishment.” 41 The sealing of the heart is one of the main issues in the Muʿtazilite theology, since it is contrary to the principle of justice (ʿadl).

Al-Zamakhsharî interprets “seal” (khatm) and “conceal” (katm) as belonging to the same category of words, i.e. cognate which are used in conjunction with each other. For instance, when a contract or document is finalized it is sealed with a “signet”

39 Qurʿān, 7:143.
41 Qurʿān, 2:7.
(khātim) to conceal and cover so that one may not have access to its contents or alter it. He says that neither “seal” (khatm) nor “cover” (taghshia) has been used in a literal sense but “metaphorically” (majāzan). He further elaborates that linking God to the “sealing of their hearts” is “evil” (qabīḥ) and God is above doing any evil act. If someone asks what does the sealing of heart and covering of the eyes mean, al-Zamakhsharī replies that in fact, there is neither a sealing nor a covering, rather it has been used figuratively (majāzan), that is, as a metaphor and simile. As a metaphor (istiʿāra), the truth does not enter into the hearts of the unbelievers because they turn away and reject it. Similarly, the eyes of the unbelievers are covered and veiled because they do not perceive the signs of God. Also there is a simile (tamthīl) in it because the unbelievers’ hearts and eyes are compared to the things which are separated through cover from the perception of the truth.\(^{42}\)

Al-Zamakhsharī quotes the following verses in support of his interpretation: “I (God) am not unjust to My servants” (wa mā anā bi-zallāmin li-l-ʻabīd),\(^{43}\) “We never do wrong to people, but they do wrong to themselves” (wa mā zalamnā hum wa lākin kānū hum al-ʻālimīn)\(^{44}\) and “God never enjoins indecency” (inna Allāh lā ya`mur bi-l-faḥshā’).\(^{45}\)

Al-Zamakhsharī gives five reasons for his interpretation of this verse. First, it is due to the unbelievers’ persistence in denying the truth of which God informs them that their hearts have been sealed. The seal is a consequence of the unbelievers’ deeds and it is not pre-ordained. Second, the seal should be interpreted metaphorically, since their

\(^{42}\) Al-Zamakhsharī, al-Kashshāf, 2:164-65.
\(^{43}\) Qurʻān, 50:29.
\(^{44}\) Qurʻān, 43:76.
\(^{45}\) Qurʻān, 7:28.
hearts are empty of intelligence (fīṭan) like the hearts of the animals. God does not want to prevent them from believing or to force them not to believe because He is above all these things. Third, the ascription of the sealing the hearts to God is metaphorical. In a real sense, Satan or the unbeliever is the one who is responsible for sealing the heart, because “God has granted him the ability and possibility to do it” (anna Allāh huwa alladhī aqdarahu wa makanahu). Hence, “the sealing of the heart is ascribed to him in the same sense as an act which he has caused” (asnada ilayhi al-khatm kamā yasnad al-fi‘l ilā al-musabbib). Fourth, since there is no possibility of their being believers except by force and constraint (al-qasr wa al-iljā’), God expressed this “impossibility” by the word “khatm” due to their persistence in disbelief. Fifth, in the following two verses that have a similar context, the unbelievers say sarcastically: “Our hearts are veiled from what you call us to, and in our ears is heaviness. Between us and you there is a veil. So act (your way), we are acting (ours)” (wa qālū qulūbunā fī akinnatin mimmā tad‘ūn ilayhi wa fī adhāninā waqrun wa min baynīnā wa baynika hijāb fa‘mal innanā ‘āmilūn)\(^46\) and “(God) seals his ears and heart, and covers over his eyers with a veil” (wa khatama ‘ala sam‘i-hi wa-qalbi-hi wa ja‘ala ‘ala baṣrī-hi ghishāwatan).\(^47\)

Al-Zamakhsharī does not interpret the following verses literally but states that Satan’s “power” (sulṭān), God’s “command” (amar), God’s “handful” and “right hand” (maṭwiyyātun bi-yamīnihī), God’s “eyes” (a‘yun), and “veiled from their Lord” (‘an rabbihim lamahjūbūn) have been used figuratively.

Third verse: “When the issue has been settled, Satan shall say: ‘Surely God made you a promise of truth and I made you a promise, but did not keep it. I had no power over

\(^{46}\) Qur‘ān, 41:5.
you except to call you, and you responded to my call. So do not blame me, but blame yourselves. I cannot help you nor can you help me. I deny your having associated me earlier (with God).”

In his interpretation of this verse, al-Zamakhsharī asks: “What is the nature of Satan’s power over human beings and to what extent can he lead them astray?” He answers this question with the argument that a man either chooses “the mischief” (al-shaqqāwa) or “the felicity” (al-sa‘āda) and gets it. God has no role in either, except “enabling” (tamkīn) him, nor does Satan except that he makes attractive (taz'īn) the choice of mischief with evil deeds. If the matter would be as the Mujbirites⁴⁹ claim, Satan would say: “Do not blame me and not to yourself because God decreed unbelief for you and He forcibly imposed it.”⁵⁰

Fourth verse: “And when We desire to destroy a town We command its people of luxury, but as they transgress therein Our sentence against them is pronounced, and We destroy them utterly.”⁵¹

Al-Zamakhsharī interprets “We command” (amarnā) in a figurative sense. He says that the people transgressed despite their being granted benefaction and kindness so that they may become good and grateful. They indulged in sinfulness and moral depravity. When they became transgressors they were destroyed completely because of their transgression.⁵²

---

⁴⁸ Qur‘ān, 14:22.
⁴⁹ The Mujbirites are those who hold the doctrine of jabr (compulsion), meaning that man does not really act but only God. The Mu‘tazilites applied the term to the Traditionalists more generally, i.e.all those who rejected free will, usually in the form of Mujbirites to the Traditionalists. Al-Zamakhsharī often uses it in his exegesis of al-Kashshāf against his adversaries. See Montgomery Watt, “Djabriyya or Mudjbira,” EI², 2:365.
⁵⁰ Al-Zamakhsharī, al-Kashshāf, 3:374-75.
⁵¹ Qur‘ān, 17:16.
Fifth verse: “They do not esteem God as is rightly due to Him. The whole earth will be [in] His grip and the heavens will be rolled up in His right hand on the Day of Resurrection. Glory to Him, may He be exalted above whatever they associate [with Him].”

Al-Zamakhsharī states that God is addressing those people who do not recognize His greatness and eminence. He states that in this verse, the grandeur and magnificence of God has been described by means of visualization (takhyīl). He states that His grasping of the earth and rolling up of the heavens in His right hand on the Day of Resurrection expresses His sublimity, exaltation, and power. It is a depiction (tašwīr) of His Majesty and nothing else, without taking the “handful” or the “right hand” into the realm of the literal or that of the figurative. W.P. Heinrichs elaborates,

As a Mu‘tazīlī, al-Zamakhsharī could not let the stark anthropomorphism of this passage stand. So the literal understanding was out of the question, but to consider the “handful” and the “hand” metaphors would not solve the problem, either, because then the unanswerable question would arise: what do they stand for? Therefore, al-Zamakhsharī considers the image presented by the Qur’ānic verse holistically: takhyīl is a visualization of an abstract notion such as God’s Majesty and Omnipotence in a comprehensive picture.

Sixth verse: “Await in patience the command (judgment) of your Lord; surely, you are before Our eyes.”

---

54 In the Qur‘ānic exegesis, the term takhyīl was introduced by al-Zamakhsharī. The most explicit presentation of this notion occurs in the verse [39:67] being described. See W.P. Heinrichs, “Takhyīl,” *EF*, 10:129-32.
In this verse “you are before Our eyes” (fa-‘innaka bi-a‘yininā) is also used as visualization (takhīl), and it means that “in such a manner that We see you and guard you” (bi-ḥaythu narāka wa-nakla ‘ūka).56

Seventh verse: “No indeed, that day they will be veiled from their Lord.”57

According to al-Zamakhsharī’s interpretation, humiliation, and disgrace of the sinners and transgressors is also an example of visualization (takhīl), because in this world only honorable people are allowed to visit kings, and lowly and vile people are prevented.58

Al-Zamakhsharī believed in the indispensability of comprehending the finer and deep meanings of the Qurān through ‘ilm al ma‘ānī and ‘ilm al-bayān. In the above mentioned interpretations of the verses, al-Zamakhsharī uses this technique and illustrates his viewpoint figuratively where it does not accord with the Mu‘tazilite principles.

3. Questions and Answers (as‘ila wa-ajwiba)

In Islamic history, this format of argumentation and disputation has been in practice since the medieval period and strongly influenced all fields of knowledge. H. Daiber states that,

The oldest Islamic questions-and-answer literature endeavours to solve philological and textual problems of the Qurān text. Mention may here be made of the answers given by ‘Umar to questions about kirā’āt, i‘rāb, tanzīl and meanings (ma‘ānī) of the Qurān, and of the Masā’il (su‘ālāt) of the Khāridjī leader Nāfi‘ b. Azraḳ (d. 65/685) on 200 difficult words in the Qurān, to which ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abbās answered with references to ancient Arabic poetry. This philological interest, especially present in the

57 Qurān, 83:15.
58 Al-Zamakhsharī, al-Kashshāf, 6:337.
oldest Qurʾān exegesis, increasingly made way for textual interpretation as a source of Islamic law and as a starting point of Islamic theology.⁵⁹

Though there is not a uniform model, two principal types can be identified. The first type is purely unilateral where an author presents successively each of the assertions of the adversary (“he says” qāla), and in each case gives his reply (“I say” qultu). This type consists of different forms such as Ibn Ḥanbal’s Kitāb al-Radd ʿalā al-zanādiqa, and al-Khayyāṭ’s Kitāb al-Intiṣār. The second type is presented in the form of an imaginary controversy (munāẓara) with a series of questions and answers. The standard pattern consists of thesis (madhhab, pl. madhāhib) and counter-thesis (shubha, pl. shubhāt); arguments (adilla, sing. dālīl) for the thesis; objections to the arguments (asʿila);⁶⁰ replies (ajwiba,) to objections; pseudo-arguments for the counter-thesis; and replies in refutation of these pseudo-arguments. The best examples of this type are al-Baqillānī’s Tahmīd and Ibn ‘Aqīl’s Kitāb al-Funūn.⁶¹

Al-Zamakhsharī uses the technique of “questions and answers” (asʿila, sing. suʿāl wa-ajwiba, sing. jawāb) not only in the exegesis frequently, but also in his theology book entitled al-Minhāj fī uṣūl al-dīn. He asks a question, preceded by ‘If you were to say’ (in qulta), and then answers his question, beginning with ‘I would say’ (qultu). The following two verses describe a conversation of hypocrites who say: “When they meet the believers they say: ‘We believe;’ but when they are alone with their evil ones they say: ‘We are really with you; we were merely joking.’” But God turns the joke against them leaving them to wander blindly in their wickedness (wa idhā laqū al-ladhīna āmanū

⁶⁰ Here asʿila is not translated as questions, but as objections.
qālū āmannā wa idhā khalaw ilā shayāţīnhim qālū innā ma’akum innamā naḥnu mustahzī’ūn Allāh yashzi’u bihim wa yamuddu him fī ṭughyāni him ya’mahūn).  

Al-Zamakhsharî interprets these verses by asking a question about the justification of God’s helping them, even though their evil friends would like to help them to continue in error which is an act of Satan. Then, he gives three reasons. First, God prevents His “graces” (alṭāf) which are conferred upon the believers. Their “abandonment” (khidhlān) is due to their unbelief and persistence in it. The darkness increases in their hearts, whereas the believers’ hearts become “wide open” (inshirāh) and “light” (nūr). Second, it can be due to the prevention of constraint” (al-qasr wa al-iljā’). Third, in fact it is an act of Satan but ascribed to God because He has given Satan authority to lead the people astray.

Al-Zamakhsharî’s use of questions-and-answer is intended to clarify his viewpoint and refute his opponent. He interprets the above cited verse by posing a question: What is God’s justification to help the unbelievers in continuing their error. He replies the question by providing three reasons: God’s grace, prevention of constraint and

63 The concept of “constraint” (al-qasr wa al-iljā’) is intended to solve the issue of the discrepancy between what God wills people to do and what they actually do. ‘Abd al-Jabbar distinguishes between what God wills of people “by way of constraint and force” (‘alā jihat al-iljā’ wa-al-ikrāh) and what He wills that they should do as a result of their own choice, as voluntary acts of obedience (‘alā jihat al-ikhtiyār wa-al-ṭaw‘). Actions (“objects of power” maqdūr) of the first type must necessarily come into being when He puts the constraint (iljā’) into effect. But if voluntary actions of the kind He wills the responsible persons (mukallafa‘) to perform, are not performed this does not necessitate any weakness or defect on His part. Neither do voluntary actions which come about against His will infringe His omnipotence. This is so because people’s voluntary actions are their exclusive objects of power and cannot reasonably be within God’s power (lā yaṣiḥḥ an yakūn maqdūran lahu). See Michael Schwarz. “Some Notes on the Notion of iljā’ (Constraint) in Mu’tazila Kalām,” Israel Oriental Studies 11 (1972): 413-27; Qādī ‘Imād al-Dīn Abū al-Hasan ‘Abd al-Jabbar b. Ḥamad al-Hamadānī al-Asadabādī, Al-Mughnī fī abwāb al-tawḥīd wa-’adl (Cairo: Wizārat al-Thaqāfa wa-al-Irshād al-Qawmī, 1960-8), Mughnī, 6: 2:257, 268.
64 When Satan refused to bow down to Adam out of pride, God expelled him from the Paradise. God granted his request. Satan said: “My Lord, as You have condemned me, I shall embellish for people (their evil deeds) on the earth and lead them astray.” See Qur‘ān, 15:32-40; al-Zamakhsharî, al-Kashshāf, 1:179-90.
Satan’s authority of leading the people astray. According to Daiber, “In the search for truth and its causes, the striving for knowledge (‘ilm) found expression in the question-answer literature, in which the didactic element often appears consciously linked to the didactic one which tried to persuade and refute.”

4. Grammar

Despite being of Persian descent, al-Zamakhsharī was one of the outstanding scholars in the fields of linguistic sciences of grammar, philology and lexicography. He was against the shuʿābiyya, and considered that Arabic is the language selected by God for the revelation. He states in his al-Mufaṣṣal, a compendium on Arabic grammar, that the Arabic language is eloquent and is needed in all the Islamic sciences, such as the principles of jurisprudence and the interpretation of the Qur’ān is based upon the grammar. Having a firm command of Arabic language and its grammar, al-Zamakhsharī constantly makes use of grammar throughout his commentary, to explain the text and its multiple meanings. As mentioned above, sometimes his exegesis is based

66 Originally, shuʿābiyya was the concept of extending the equality between the shuʿāb and the qabāʾil to include equality among all Muslims adhered to by the Khārijites in the early period of Islam. The Shuʿābiyya movement appeared in the second/eighth century and reached its peak in the third/ninth century. Its movement’s main objective was equality between non-Arabs (‘ajam) and Arabs, whose advocates were also known as ahl al-taswiya. Most of the Shuʿābis were Persians, although Armaeans, Copts and Berbers are also mentioned in the literature. Approximately, two centuries later, a new Shuʿābiyya appeared in the fifth/eleventh century in al-Andalus by the Berbers and the “Slavs” (ṣaqāliba) comprising Galicians, Franks, Germans, Langobards and Calabrians. See S. Enderwitz, “Al-Shuʿūbiyya.” E.asList, 9:513; P.B. Golden, C.E. Bosworth, P. Guichard and Mohamed Meouak, “Al-Ṣaḳaliba,” E.asList, 8:872-81; Edward G. Browne, A Literary History of Persia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), 2:362; Marshall G.S. Hodgson, The Venture of Islam (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1977), 1:461.
67 Al-Zamakhsharī uses the term ‘ilm al-iʿrāb for grammar. According to Kinga Děvěnyi, “Iʿrāb is regarded as an essential characteristic of Arabic. It is dealt with by nahw ‘grammar’ or ‘syntax,’ and in this sense it is contrasted with sarfṭasrīf, which deals with morphological and phonological changes in the declension of nouns and conjugation of verbs, whereas iʿrāb deals with syntactic changes.” See: Kinga Děvěnyi, “Iʿrāb,” Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics, 2:401-6.
on variant readings; other times, it is explained from the different ways a single text can be understood grammatically.

In the following two verses, there are some examples of his commentary where he makes the use of grammatical principles to interpret ambiguous passages of the Qur’ān.

First verse: “God will not forgive those who associate other gods with Him, but will forgive anything less than that to whom He pleases. And he who associates other gods with God has committed a very grave sin.”

This verse, at face value, contradicts the Mu‘tazilites’ principles of the promise and threat (wa‘d wa al-wa‘īd), and the intermediate position between belief and unbelief (manzila bayn al-manzilatayn). Al-Zamakhsharī interprets this verse using grammatical principles. He states that God’s statement, li man yasha‘ “to whom He pleases” applies to both the negative and the positive verbs. In the first case, God will not forgive the one who associates other gods with Him, which implies that the person has not repented. In the second case, God will forgive whoever does not associate other gods with Him, which implies that the person has repented. It is like a prince who does not spend a single dīnār but gives tremendous sums of money. He does not spend a single dīnār on the one he considers undeserving, while he spends fortunes on the one he considers worthy.

Second verse: “And God has made belief more desirable to you and attractive to your hearts, and rendered disbelief and sin and disobedience repugnant. They are those who are rightly guided, by God’s grace and blessing.”

---

68 Qur’ān, 4:48.
69 Al-Zamakhsharī, al-Kashshāf, 2:89-90.
70 Qur’ān, 49:7-8.
Al-Zamakhsharī defines belief, transgression, disobedience and guidance strictly on the basis of the Mu‘tazilites’ principles. “Unbelief” (kufr) is concealing God’s benefactions and blessings and being ungrateful. “Transgression” (fusūq) is a departure from the belief involving committing major sins. “Disobedience” (‘isyān) is renouncing the restrictions and abandoning the obligations imposed by the law-giver, that is, God. “Guidance” (rushd) is steadfastness and firmness on the path of the truth. There is a difference between belief (īmān) and submission (islām). Belief (al-īmān) is confirmation with certainty and peace of mind and agreement of heart” (al-īmān huwa al-taṣdīq ma‘ al-thiqa wa țamāniya al-nafs). An affirmation with tongue without an agreement of heart is called “submission” (islām). However, this verse contradicts the Mu‘tazilite principles because it says God has made belief more desirable and attractive to hearts, whereas disbelief, sin and disobedience are made repugnant, and He has rightly guided people because of His grace and blessing. Al-Zamakhsharī interprets faḍlan min Allāhi wa niʻma “by God’s grace and blessing” through grammatical means. He elaborates that “grace” (faḍlan) is object of verbal clause or verbal noun. If you say how its occurrence is permissible, when guidance is a function of a group and grace is is an activity of God, and the condition establishes limit on Creator’s activities. I reply that when guidance takes place its expression is manifested in the form of either attraction, or embellishment, or constraint and it is ascribed to His sanctified name. He further states that grace bestowed upon the people is for their guidance, and the grace and blessing mean favor and benefaction.71

71 Al-Zamakhsharī, al-Kashshāf, 5:569-70.
5. *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān bi-al-Qurʾān*

Another principle of al-Zamakhsharī’s exegesis is “to interpret the Qurʾān by means of the Qurʾān” (*tafsīr al-Qurʾān bi-al-Qurʾān*). He states that, “some parts of the Qurʾān interpret other parts” (*al-qurʾān tufassiru baʿḍahu baʿḍan*).72 In the *Kashshāf*, he follows this method to clarify and elucidate one verse of the Qurʾān by quoting one or several other verses of the Qurʾān. The main objective is to explain, illustrate and reinforce his viewpoint as found in other verses. He is always precise and does not repeat his arguments if he comes across the same issue later on. The following is an example where al-Zamakhsharī interprets the Qurʾān by other verses of the Qurʾān.

Al-Zamakhsharī proves the unity of God and His justice in his interpretation of the verse 3:1873 by quoting the four verses of *sūra* _al-Ikhlāṣ_,74 “*Say: ‘He is God the only one, God, the everlasting. He did not beget and is not begotten, there is no one comparable to Him.’*” He also uses another verse75 to support his viewpoint that “God, there is no God but He, the living, eternal. Neither slumber nor sleep overtakes Him. To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth; and who can intercede with Him except by His leave? He knows what is before them and what is behind them; and they do not comprehend of His knowledge except what He wills. His seat encompasses the heavens and the earth and protecting them does not tire Him. He is all high and supreme.” Thus, al-Zamakhsharī reiterates that God, His angels and the people of knowledge are witness that He is the upholder of justice. They are those who attest God’s unity and

---

73 “God is witness there is no God but He, and so are the angels and those endowed with knowledge, standing firm in justice. There is no God but He, the mighty and all-wise” (*shahīda Allāhu annahu lā ilāha ʾllā huwa wa-ʾl-malāʾikatu wa-ʾl-ʾulū al-ʾʾīlmī qāʾ iμān bi-al-ʾqīṣṣ lā ilāha ʾllā huwa al-ʾʾāʾiz al-ʾḥākim*).
74 Qurʾān, 112:1-4.
75 Qurʾān, 2:255.
justice with manifest proofs (ḥijaj al-sāṭiʻa) and irrefutable arguments (burhān al-qāṭiʻa) and they are the scholars of justice (ʻulamā’ al-ʻadl).\textsuperscript{76}

6. Ḥadīth


He [al-Zamakhsharī] was the first to revive the science of Tradition (ʻilm al-ḥadīth) in Khwārazm and to make it to flourish there. He brought the books of the Traditions from Iraq and “urged the people” (ḥathth al-nāṣ) to study it. This science was spread out by him and after him by Akhtāb al-khuṭābā’ (Abū al-Mua’yyad al-Muwaaffaq b. Aḥmad al-Makkī).\textsuperscript{77}

Al-Zamakhsharī cites ḥadīths in his commentary which prove his Mu‘tazilite views.\textsuperscript{78} He uses these traditions as long as they stand on his side, and suit him to interpret the Qur’ān in accordance with Mu‘tazilite principles. Despite the fact that he was well-versed with hadīth literature, in most cases, these traditions are cited with little regard to either their isnāds (chains of authorities) or fidelity to the actual transmitted text (matn).

Ḥadīth scholars adopted a method takhrīj for the authenticity and verification of such hadīths. A takhrīj of hadīths is an evaluation in which it is investigated where a

\textsuperscript{76} The Mu‘tazilite called themselves as “people of the justice and the unity” (ahl al-ʻadl wa al-tawhīd).
\textsuperscript{78} Generally, the Sunnī exegetes use hadīths reported by Sunnī authorities, whereas the Shi‘a exegetes use only those hadīths which are transmitted by ‘Āli and the Shi‘ī authorities. Al-Zamakhsharī quotes the hadīths from both of these sources as long as they support his Mu‘tazilite views.
particular hadīth can be found in authoritative collections, what is its complete isnād and in which category of hadīth it can be placed. According to Jonathan Brown,

With the hadīth canon firmly established hadīth critics turned their attention away from hadīth collections and towards the manner in which other areas of Islamic scholarship used hadīth. In books of takhrīj, a rash of which appeared during the 1300s and 1400s, a hadīth scholar took a book from another genre and discussed the status of the hadīths it contained. Since few books outside hadīth collections featured isnāds when they quoted hadīths, takhrīj books first provided all the hadīth collections that provided chains of transmission for a hadīth and then discussed its reliability.79

Jamāl al-Dīn ‘Abd Allāh b. Yūsuf b. Muḥammad al-Zayla‘ī (d. 762/1360), a Ḥanafī jurist and traditionist, mentions in his Takhrīj al-aḥādīth wa-al-āthār al-wāqi‘a fī tafsīr al-Kashshāf li-al-Zamakhsharī all the hadīths found in the Kashshāf. He verified and supplemented the isnāds of the Prophetic traditions where those had not been provided. By this process, it is known exactly who mentioned and first recorded any Prophetic tradition cited by al-Zamakhsharī in the Kashshāf. Al-Zayla‘ī concludes that al-Zamakhsharī used all types of hadīths, such as “sound” (ṣaḥīḥ), “fair” (ḥasan), “weak” (da‘īf), “forged” (mawḍū‘), and “abandoned” (matrūk).80

About a century later, Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī (d. 852/1449), a Shāfi‘ī, hadīth scholar, judge and historian extracted from al-Zayla‘ī’s work

80 Saleh states that, “Many of the hadīths (other than the merit-of-sūra hadīths) used by al-Zamakhsharī are only found in al-Tha‘labī and they are not even found in other hadīth works. These traditions are described as “odd” (gharīb) by al-Zayla‘ī, indicating that they are not found anywhere, not even in books devoted to fabricated tradition.” Saleh, Formation of the Classical Tafsīr, 211 n; Jamāl al-Dīn ‘Abd Allāh b. Yūsuf b. Muḥammad al-Zayla‘ī, Takhrīj al-aḥādīth wa-al-āthār al-wāqi‘a fī tafsīr al-Kashshāf li-al-Zamakhsharī, ed. Ṣulṭān b. Fahd al-Ṭabīshī (Riyāḍ: Dār al-Khuzayma, 1993), 1:158-62.
the traditions in the *Kashshāf* and compiled the book entitled *al-Kāfī al-shāfī fī takhrīj aḥādīth al-Kashshāf*. He states in the introduction of his book that,

In fact, this *takhrīj* of *aḥādīth* is from the commentary of *al-Kashshāf* which was originally extracted by Abū Muḥammad al-Zaylaʻī. I have abridged it keeping its original intent and its beneficial use. I have followed the (original) book particularly in its entirety, except where some ḥadīths escaped (slipped away) from him either inadvertently or intentionally. I have extracted from the original book and added some ḥadīths to it.\(^{81}\)

There are traditions with praises of particular *sūras* (chapters) or *āyāt* (verses) of the Qur’ān. According to Walid Saleh, “The merit-of-*sūra* ḥadīths are prophetic traditions that promise the reader of the Qur’ān varied rewards.”\(^{82}\) There are a large number of such reports in the form of statements and exhortations ascribed to the Companions and early Successors of the Prophet Muḥammad in the pre-canonical collections, especially in Ibn Abī Shayba’s *Muṣannaf*. *Sūrat al-Mulk* is considered to engender forgiveness from God. This tradition is attributed to Shuʻba.\(^{83}\) According to some traditions, the *Muʿawwadhatayn*, as well as *Sūra al-Fātiha* are commonly recited for the recovery from illness.\(^{84}\) The recitation of two verses of *Sūrat al-Baqara* is considered equivalent to spend (part of) the night in worship.\(^{85}\) Ibn Ḥanbal asserts that

---


\(^{82}\) Saleh, *Formation of the Classical Tafsīr*, 104.


somewhere in the *musabbihāt*, there is a verse that is more excellent than a thousand other verses of the Qur‘ān.

Reciting of *Sūrat al-Shams* is considered to be equivalent to the act of giving the whole earth as alms to the poor. The rewards promised by these traditions include the benefits and advantages of acquiring wealth, avoiding hardships, and a guarantee of a blissful and uneventful life in this world. *Sūrat al-Tīn* bestows on its reader good health (‘āfiyah) and certitude in faith (yaqīn). The reciter of the *Sūrat al-Kāfīrūn* is assured success in trade as well as that he or she will be invested with an aura of respectability (haybah). It can also protect against machinations of the devil and the demons.

Walid Saleh mentions that Abū Ishāq Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Tha‘labī (d. 427/1035) was the first to introduce the merit-of-*sūra hadīths* at the beginning of all 114 *sūras* into his exegesis entitled *al-Kashf wa-al-bayān ‘an tafsīr al-Qur‘ān*. Al-Zamakhsharī incorporated the same traditions into *al-Kashshāf*. “Although he copied these traditions from al-Tha‘labī, al-Zamakhsharī relegated them to the very end of his commentary on each *sūra*. What came first for al-Tha‘labī comes last for al-Zamakhsharī.”

In his interpretation of the verse 2:255, al-Zamakhsharī recounts some of the traditional reports already mentioned in a number of the previous commentaries. However, with regard to the nature of “seat” or “sitting” (*kursī*), he prefers a rationalist

---

86 There are six *musabbihāt suras* (57, 59, 61, 62, 64 and 87) in the Qur‘ān, which begin with the glorification of God.
approach, insisting that the kursī image is purely a metaphor expressing the majesty of God. It is nothing but an “imagination” (taswīr) and visualization (takhyīl) of God’s greatness. In reality, there is no such chair, no sitting (quʿūd) on a chair and no one seated (qāʿid) in it. Al-Zamakhsharī quotes the verse 39:67 to show that people cannot do justice to the true nature of His greatness and power and that it is totally inadequate to transpose the human notions of “seat” or “sitting” onto this aspect of the verse. The whole earth shall be in His grasp on the day of resurrection and the heavens shall be rolled up in His right hand. It is only an “imagination” (taṣawwur), not an actual rolling up and actual right hand. In fact, it is a “physical simile” (thamthīl ḥissī) of His greatness. In two instances, al-Zamakhsharī points out the high esteem in which God holds those of judicious minds and those referred to as the ahl al-ʿadl wa-l-tawḥīd – a reference to the Muʿtazilites, in whose theological doctrines the affirmation of God’s justice (ʻadl) and unity (tawḥīd) are fundamental principles – thereby confirming the Muʿtazilite character of his commentary.

He is “Living” (al-hayy), i.e. the Ever-enduring (al-bāqī) unto whom extinction has no access. He is the one who truly has knowledge and truly possesses power. Al-qayyūm means “always existing for the organization of the creation and its protection” (al-dāʿim al-qiyām bi-tadbīr al-khalq wa ḥifḍahu). The word al-qayyūm can also be read as either al-qayyām or al-qayyīm. Sīna (slumber) is the state of drowsiness (nuʿās) that precedes sleep. In other words, drowsiness does not overtake Him, nor sleep (nawm), and it is a confirmation of His being as al-qayyūm, because it is inconceivable that one who can be overcome in this way by sleep be eternally watchful.92

---

92 Al-Zamakhsharī, al-Kashšāf, 1:480.
Al-Zamakhsharī substantiates his interpretation by citing the following four ḥadīths:

First ḥadīth: It is reported that Moses asked the angels, and it was a question posed by his people like the one when they demanded to see God: “Does our Lord sleep?” God revealed to Moses that they should keep awake for three nights. He said: “Take two filled vessels.” Moses took them and God made him sleep, and one vessel was struck with the other, and both the vessels were broken. Then God revealed to him: “Say to the people, I hold fast the heavens and the earth with My power. If I were to fall asleep or drowsiness were to overtake me, they would go off course (and the world come to an end).”

Second ḥadīth: The Prophet said that in any place where the throne verse (āyat al-kursī) is recited, Satan keeps away from that place for three days, no sorcerer or sorceress enters for forty nights in that place. He said to ‘Alī, “You should teach your children, your family members, and your neighbors this great verse.”

Third ḥadīth: It is narrated by ‘Alī that he heard the Prophet saying from the pulpit, “Whoever recites the throne verse (āyat al-kursī) after every prescribed prayer, no one will stop him entering Paradise, and no one can do it persistently except the one who

---

93 This ḥadīth has been mentioned by Abū Ya‘lā, al-Ṭabarī in his Tafsīr, al-Khaṭīb in his Tarīkh al-Baghdād and al-Dārāqūṭnī in his al-Afrād as extracted by Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī. According to al-Khaṭīb, it has been reported by Mu‘ammār, who reported from al-Ḥakam, who reported from ‘Ikrama. It is reported by Ibn Ḥanbal in his Kitāb al-Sunan as sound (ṣaḥīḥ). Abū Ya‘lā considers it weak (da‘īf), and al-Bayhaqī reports it as suspended (mawqūf). Ibn Kathīr in his Tafsīr mentions it as very weak (gharīb jiddan). See al-Zamakhsharī, al-Kashshāf, 1:481-82.

94 Al-Zayla‘ī mentions this ḥadīth in his Takhrīj al-ḥādīth. Ibn Ḥajar states that he did not find it. See al-Zamakhsharī, al-Kashshāf, 1:484.
is righteous or a true worshipper. Whoever recites it before going to sleep God will protect him, his neighbor, his neighbor’s neighbor, and the houses around him.”  

Fourth hadīth: It is reported by ‘Alī that the Prophet said: “O ‘Alī! The most noble of the human beings is Adam, the most eminent of the Arabs is Muḥammad, the best of the Persians is Salmān, the best of the Romans is Ṣuhayb, the best of the Abyssinians is Bilāl, the best of the mountains is Mount SināĪ, the best of the days is Friday, the most sacred speech is of the Qur’ān, the most excellent part of the Qur’ān is sūrat al-Baqara, and the most excellent part of the sūrat al-Baqara is the seat verse (āyat al-kursī).”  

To illustrate and enumerate the virtues and merits of the seat verse (āyat al-kursī), al-Zamakhsharī quotes four hadīths which fall into the categories of weak, forged, and sound by leading hadīth critics and in most cases they are weak in isnāds. He states that the reasons for the virtues of this verse are God’s unity, His glorification, exaltation, and sublime attributes. Nothing is more worthy than God’s power and His commemoration is one of the best commemorations. He concludes “that the noblest and highest of the approaches to knowledge in God’s eyes is that of the people who focus on the concepts of justice and unity” (anna ashraf al-‘ulūm wa-a’lāhā ʿinda Allāhi ‘ilm ahl-‘adl wa-al-tawḥīd). In reality, the conclusion should have been that the knowledge of the unity of God is the best knowledge, not the knowledge of some specific theological school, or sect, as al-Zamakhsharī attributes to the Muʿtazilites.

96 Qurʾān, 2:255. Al-Zaylaʾī mentions this hadīth in his Takhrīj al-ahādīth. İbn Ḥajar states that he did not find it. There are contradictory views about its isnāds (chains of authority), weak (da‘īf) and sound (sahih). İbn al-Jawzī ignored it and considered it among the forged (al-mawdūʿāt). See al-Zamakhsharī, al-Kashshāf, 1:486-87.
97 Al-Zamakhsharī, al-Kashshāf, 1:486.
As mentioned in the preceding paragraphs, al-Zamakhsharī composed four books on the subject of traditions and revived the ʻilm al-ḥadīth, and brought the books of the Traditions from Iraq in Khwārazm. However, when he cited ḥadīths in his interpretation of the Qur’ān, he paid little attention for the verification of either to their isnāds or contents. His main objective in citing these ḥadīths was to prove his Muʻtazilite views. He employed them as long as they supported the Muʻtazilite principles and did not contradict them.

7. Variant Readings of the Qur’ān (qirā’āt)

Traditions from the Prophet Muḥammad mention the differences in recitation of the Qur’ān (which were permitted by him) and are linked to the seven ahruf (sing. ḥarf), according to which Gabriel is said to have recited the Qur’ān to Muḥammad. Frederick Leemhuis states that,

From early works, however, it is clear that in the second/eighth century ḥarf was taken to mean the same thing as qirā’a in its narrow sense of “variant reading.” Early commentaries on the Qur’ān, such as those of Mujāhid (d. 104/722), Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 162/778), ‘Abd Allāh b. Wahb (d. 197/812), al-Farrā’ (d. 207/822), ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Sa‘īdī (d. 211/827), al-Akhfash al-Awsat (d. between 210/825 and 221/835) and al-Farrā’ (d. 207/822), demonstrate that these variant readings did indeed occur across the whole range of lexical issues: from simple pronunciation variants through different case endings or verbal forms, synonyms or near synonyms, to interpolation of whole phrases.98

The promulgation of the ‘Uthmānic codex was inteded to limit the variant readings, but they continued to circulate. Ibn Mujāhid (d.324/936), renowned for his study of the variant readings of the Qur’ān, was very influential in persuading the authorities to proscribe the Qur’ān versions of Ibn Mas‘ūd, Ubayy b. Ka‘b, and ‘Alī b.  

Abī Ṭālib follow the variant readings in accordance with the ʻUthmānic consonantal text standardized by tradition and consensus of the scholars.99

Ibn Mujāhid recognized seven “readers” belonging to the second/eighth century, who were ʿAbd Allāh b. ‘Āmir (d. 118/736), ʿAbd Allāh b. Kathīr (d. 120/738), ʿĀṣim b. Abī al-Najūd (d. 127/745), Abū ‘Amr b. al-ʻAlāʾ (d. 154/770), Ḥamza b. Ḥabīb al-Zayyāt (d. 156/773), Nāfiʿ b. ʻAbd al-Raḥmān (d. 169/785), and ʻAlī b. Ḥamza al-Kisāʾī (d. 189/804).100 According to R. Paret,

To the seven “readers” recognized by Ibn Mujāhid were added later on three others, and afterwards another four, but these never attained the same standing as the first seven…After the readings had been limited to the “Seven” recognized as canonical, and to the other “Three after the Seven” and “Four after the Ten,” all the others were eliminated in the practice of recitation. The “readers” henceforward had to keep exclusively to the canonical readings. This however did not completely rule out the uncanonical “deviant” (shawādhdh) readings. They were later adduced as useful evidence in the practical interpretation of the Qur’ān and in the elucidation of linguistic problems.101

For the interpretation of the following two verses, al-Zamakhsharī uses three variant readings of the Qur’ān to prove the Muʿtazilite principles of unity (tawḥīd) and justice (ʻadl):

“God is witness there is no God but He, and so are the angels and those endowed with knowledge, standing firm in justice. There is no God but He, the mighty and all-wise. The (true) religion with God is Islam.”102

---

100 Frederik Leemhuis, “Readings of the Qur’ān,” EQ, 4:353.
Al-Zamakhsharī states that the conclusive proof of God’s unity is expressed in 
*Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ* (chapter on the unity)\(^{103}\) and *āyat al-kursī* (throne verse).\(^{104}\) God, His 
angels, and people of learning are witness that He is the upholder of justice. They prove 
God’s unity (*waḥdāniya*) and justice (*ʻadl*) with manifest proofs and irrefutable 
arguments and they are known as the scholars of justice.\(^{105}\)

According to the first variant reading, al-Zamakhsharī states that in verse 3:18, 
*annahu* is read with an initial short vowel *laَl* (*fatḥa*), and in verse 3:19, *inna al-dīnā* is 
read with an initial short vowel *liَl* (*kasra*),\(^{106}\) meaning that “God is witness upon it or 
with it” (*shahida Allāhu ‘alā annahu aw bi-annahu*). God says that “the [true] religion 
with God is Islam” (*inna al-dīnā ‘inda Allāhi al-islām*) which is a “definite emphatic 
sentence” (*jumla musta’nifa mu’akkida*) and it confirms what has been stated in the 
preceding sentence. He interprets that *annahu lā ilāha illā huwa* “there is no God but He” 
is God’s unity (*tawḥīd*) and *qā’iman bi-al-qist* “standing firm in justice” is “setting right” 
(*ta’dīl*). When the verse *inn al-dīnā ‘inda Allāhi al-islām* “the (true) religion with God is 
Islām” succeeds the first verse, it means that Islam is “justice” (*al-ʻadl*), and “unity” (*al-
tawḥīd*), and “this is the religion with God” (*huwa al-dīn ‘inda Allāh*). Anything contrary 
to it has nothing to do with the religion. He elaborates that anthropomorphism (*tashbīh*) 
or anything such as vision (*ru’ya*) of God, or the idea of divine “compulsion” (*al-jabr*)

\(^{103}\) Qur’ān, 112:1-4.  
\(^{104}\) Qur’ān, 2:255.  
\(^{105}\) See footnote 44.  
\(^{106}\) The difference between *anna* and *inna* is that *anna* (that) is a conjunction with following subject in the 
accusative or as a suffix and with nominal or copulative clause, whereas *inna* (behold, verily, truly) is a 
particle introducing a main clause, with following subject in the accusative or as a suffix. See W. Wright, *A 
Grammar of the Arabic Language*, translated from the German of Caspari (Cambridge: Cambridge 
which is merely an accusation of “injustice” (*al-jawr*) are not according to the religion of God which is Islām.\(^{107}\)

Al-Zamakhsharī gives three interpretations of *qā‘iman bi-al-qist* (standing firm in justice): God’s distribution to the people of their means of livelihood (*al-arzāq*), and their appointed times of death (*al-ājāl*); fulfillment of reward and punishment (*yuthīb wa-yuʿāqib*); and His commandment to His servants that they do justice to one another and they act on the basis of equality in their mutual relations (*wa-mā yā’muru bi-hi ‘ibādi-hi min inṣāf ba’dhum li-ba’d wa-al-‘amal ‘alā al-sawīyyahī fī-mā baynahum*). According to the second variant reading both verses are read with short vowel /a/ (*fatḥa*). In this case, the pronoun of the second verse reverts to the first verse and it is read: “God is witness that the religion with God is Islam” (*shahida Allāhu anna al-dīna ʻinda Allāhi al-islām*). The meanings are distinctly clear because God’s religion is unity (*al-tawḥīd*) and justice (*al-‘adl*). According to the third variant reading the first verse is read with short vowel /i/ (*kasra*), and the second verse is read with short vowel /a/ (*fatha*). In this case, it will be: “Truly, He is witness that the religion of Islam is justice and unity” (*shāhida ʻalā anna dīn al-islām huwa al-ʻadl wa-al-tawḥīd*). Al-Zamakhsharī concludes that all three variant readings support his interpretation that Islām is the religion of unity and justice.\(^{108}\)

8. Conclusion

To conclude, it can be said that al-Zamakhsharī’s interpretation of all the verses quoted above under the titles of his exegetical techniques reflect the Mu’tazilites


principles. Whenever he comes across a situation where a verse’s interpretation is in conflict with his viewpoint, he utilizes any of his exegetical techniques. For instance, in case of *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt*, if a verse supports his views then it is *muḥkam*, otherwise it is *mutashābih*. Similarly, he uses other exegetical techniques, such as variant readings of the Qur‘ān, ḥadīths, ‘ilm al-ма‘ānī and ‘ilm al-bayān and grammar to interpret the Qur‘ān in consonance with the Mu‘tazilite principles.
Chapter 5
The Five Principles
(al-uṣūl al-khamsa)

In the early period of the Muʿtazila school (ca. 200-35/815-50), there was a great diversity of opinions on theological issues, but the majority of them, as all other schools of thought, believed in the absolute unity of God and His justice. They upheld and defended the doctrine of qadariyya “free will”, and affirmed the absolute responsibility of an individual with regard to his/her transgressions and lapses in not performing the duties incumbent upon them. Regarding the controversy of ranking the sinful Muslim, Wāṣil b. ʿAṭā introduced the doctrine of manzila bayn a manzilatayn “intermediate position.” Similarly, Muʿtazilites were of the view that an unrepentant sinner will be subject to eternal torment of Hell, which developed later in the doctrine of al-waʿd wa al-waʿīd “the promise and the threat”.

It is widely believed that Abū al-Hudhayl¹ of the Baṣran school was the first who created a reliable and systematic dogmatic framework in his Kitāb al-Ḥujja that defined “the five principles” (al-uṣūl al-khamsa) of the Muʿtazila. He considered that these

---
¹Abū al-Hudhayl was born in Baṣra in 131/748. In 203/818, he settled in Baghdād and died in 226/841. He was the client (mawlā) of ʿAbd al-Qays. He was introduced to Muʿtazilism as a student by a number of disciples of Wāṣil. The theology which he inherited from Wāṣil was still in its early stages and not systematically articulated. He was the first to undertake scholastic theology in a systematic manner for which he was remarkably qualified due to his keen insight in philosophy, his sagacity and his eloquence. He became one of the most influential early Muʿtazilite theologians, an able disputant employing the strongest proofs, abundant demonstrations and decisive arguments. Abū al-Hudhayl was a prolific writer and according to Ibn Naḍīm, he wrote fifty-three books, none of which are extant. Most of the books were polemics or refutations and disputations against adversaries including Muʿtazilites, Traditionalists, Shiʿites, Murjiʿites, Predestinarians, Zoroastrians, Manichaeans, Jews and Christians. He also wrote on the ambiguous verses of the Qurʾān, motions, sound and atoms. See Ibn Naḍīm, al-Fihrist, 1:566-67,1:626; ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādi, al-Farq, 95-102; al-Shahrastānī, Milal, 1:49-52; ʿAbd al-Jabbār, Faḍl, 254-64; Ibn al-Murtada, Ṭabaqāt, 44-49; ʿIzz al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Aḥmad al-Dhahabi, Al-Muntaẓam fī al-tārīkh al-mulūk wa-al-umum, ed. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Qādir ‘Aṭā and Muṣṭafā ʿAbd al-Qādir Aṭā (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1991-2000), 11:234-36; Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ahmad al-Dhahabi, Tārīkh al-Islām wa-wafayāt al-mashāhīr wa-al-aʿlām, ed. ʿUmar ʿAbd al-Salām Tadmūrī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1991-2000), 17:348-49.
principles were indispensable for a Mu'tazilite identity. They were: “God’s unity” (al-tawhīd), “God’s justice” (al-‘adl), “reward and punishment” (al-wa’d wa-al-wa‘īd), “intermediate position between belief and unbelief” (al-manzila bayna al-manzilatayn) and “enjoining good and forbidding evil” (al-amr bi-al-ma'rūf wa-al-nahy 'an al-munkar). These principles provided an indispensable identity to the Mu'tazila, and determined the structure of their theological works for centuries.²

Later on, Abū al-Qāsim al-Balkhī³ of the Baghdād school, and Abū 'Alī al-Jubbā'ī (d. 303/915) of the Baṣrā school formulated coherent theological frameworks. Abū Hāshim (d. 321/933), the founder of the Bahšāshima school further systematized and refined the theological doctrines. The last major intellectual move within Mu'tazilism originated with Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī,⁴ who developed independent

---

³ According to Ibn Ḥajar, Abū al-Qāsim al-Balkhī was born at Balkh in 273/886, but it is certainly incorrect because he was a contemporary as well as friend of Abu Muslim Muhammad who was born in 254/868. Therefore, al-Balkhī must have been born long before 273/886, perhaps in the year 243/856. According to al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, he died in 319/913. According to Ibn Abī al-Wafī and Ibn Qulībughā, he belonged to Ḥanafī school. However, al-Sam‘ānī states that he was strongly committed adherent of the Jaḥmiyya and Mu'tazilite schools and sought to convert people to his belief. According to Ibn Murtaḍa, a large number of people in Kūrāshān were guided by Balkhī (i.e. they became Mu’tazilites). He was the disciple of Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Khayyāt who was the head of the Mu'tazilite of the Baghḍād. After the death of al-Khayyāt, al-Balkhī became the head and defender of the Baghdad school. He was a prolific writer and composed many books and treatises on theology, exeegesis, hadīth, logic and refutation of the opinions of his opponents. The most important works include Qabūl al-akhbār wa ma’rifa al-rījāl, al-Tafsīr al-kabīr li al-Qurān, al-Maqālāt, ‘Uyūn al-masā’il wa al-jawābāt and al-jadal wa ʿādāb ahlihi wa taṣḥīḥ ʿilālihi. See Ibn al-Nadīm, al-Fihrīst, 1:613-15; Ibn Abī al-Wafī, ‘al-Jawāhir al-muḍī’a, 2: 296-97; Ibn Qulībughā, Tāj al-tarājīm, 23; Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, Lisān al-mīzān, 4: 259-60; Yāqūt, Mu’jam al-udabā, 4:1491-93; al-Sam‘ānī, al-Ansāb, 4:635; Ibn Murtaḍa, Ṭabaqāt, 88; Albert N. Nader, “Al-Balkhī, Abū ‘l-Kāsim,” EI², 1:1002; Abbas Zaryab, “Abū al-Qāsim al-Balkhī,” EI², 2:418.
⁴ Muḥammad b. ‘Alī b. Ṭayyīb Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī (d. 436/1044) was a Mu’tazilite theologian and Ḥanafī jurisprudent. He studied Mu’tazilite theology and legal methodology (uṣūl al-fiqḥ) with the famous Qāḍī al-quḍāt ‘Abd al-Jabbār b. Ahmad. He had profound praise and veneration for the Qāḍī which is evidenced in the numerous references made in his work al-Mu’tamad fī uṣūl al-dīn. However, he did not agree with him in all the cases and opposed him in some. He also studied medicine and became attached to the Nestorian physician and philosopher Abū al-Faraj b. al-Ṭayyīb. In addition, he studied Aristotelian physics with Abū ‘Alī b. al-Saḥḥ (d. 418/1027). He died in Baghdad on 5 Rabi’ II al-thānī 436/28 October 1044 and the renowned Ḥanafī Qāḍī Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Ṣaymārī led the funeral prayers. Abū al-Ḥusayn has been called as the Shaykh al-Mu’tazila and is considered one of their lights. He was praised as being unique in his time and for his linguistic skill, eloquence, intelligence and wide knowledge. Abū al-Ḥusayn
theological views. However, all the refinements centered within the context of the five principles of Muʿtazila, and these principles are still considered pertinent, and constitute the basis of the Muʿtazilite theology.⁵

1. **First Principle: Unity of God (tawḥīd)**

   The most fundamental tenet in Islam is *tawḥīd*, the confession of divine unity.

   The focal point of the Qurʾānic teachings about God is the principle of absolute monotheism, such that any type of belief positing more than one deity (*shirk*) is rejected in the strongest terms.

   The term *ṣifa* means an attribute ‘signifying some of the characteristics of the personality’ (*al-dāll ‘alā baʾdi aḥwāl al-dhār*).⁶ Claude Gilliot states that,

   According to an al-Ashʿarī theologian, ‘the attribute/quality (*ṣifa*) is the thing that is in (the being) to which it is attributed (or in the qualified being, *bi-l-mawṣūf*) or to which it belongs, and that lets it acquire the attribution/qualification (*yuksibuhu l-ḥaws*), that is the qualitative (naʿt) deriving from the attribute/quality (*ṣifa*) … The Muʿtazilīs, on the other hand, are said to maintain that the name is not identical to the object named; for them name and naming are synonyms.⁷

---

The term ṣifa (attribute) is not mentioned in the Qur’ān, nor are divine attributes identified as such; however, forms of the verbal root ṣ-w-f are used a number of times, primarily with respect to the act of describing (waṣf) God. The attributes (ṣifāt) of God are distinct from the divine essence (al-dhāt). In fact, the term ṣifāt Allāh was borrowed in Islamic theology from the classical grammarians of the Arabic language. In the Qur’ān, however, the attributes of God are consistently called God’s “most beautiful names” (al-asmā’ al-ḥusnā).

From the sources dating back to the first half of the second/eighth century, it appears that by that time both the term names (asmā’) and the term attributes (ṣifāt) were well established in theological discourse. Through the separation of the derived names from the source of derivation, the term ‘names’ (asmā’) was employed for the derived divine names, such as ‘knowing’ (‘alīm), ‘living’ (ḥayy), and so on; while the term ‘attributes’ (ṣifāt) was applied to the ontological source from which these names were derived, that is, the attributes of ‘knowledge’ (‘ilm), ‘life’ (ḥayāt), and so on.

A controversial important point in the debate has been whether the names (asmā’) and attributes (ṣifāt) are interchangeable or do they have separate and discrete meanings? From the point of view of the Mu‘tazila, these two terms have distinct connotations, and a name of God does not necessarily entail an exclusive attribute. For example, names like ‘the knower,’ ‘the powerful,’ and ‘the hearing’ are specific and interchangeable, for they indicate God alone. In any case, the Mu‘tazila held that God can be called by names like

---

8 Qur’ān, 7:180; 20:8; 59:24.
“living,” “knowing,” and “powerful,” but He cannot be qualified by “life,” “knowledge,” and “power”.\(^{10}\)

By contrast, the orthodox ahl al-sunna not only consider the names inseparable from the attributes, but they believe that the affirmation of names without the affirmation of attributes to be impossible and inconceivable.\(^{11}\) From this perspective, they regard the names as identical to the attributes, and that the only distinction between these two is that attributes have a derivative quality, while names do not.\(^{12}\)

There has also been disagreement on the question of whether or not the names of God are originated and created or eternal and uncreated. The orthodox ahl al-sunna consider the names of God to be eternal, and they hold that before every act God is already named by His names, not that He became named by a name after performing an act. Thus from all eternity He has been the creator and the provider, and He did not become endowed with these names after creating and giving sustenance to the world.\(^{13}\)

The Mu'tazilites are the proponents of the separation of the name from the named, and they regard the names to be something other than the essence of God. They say that God in His eternity has neither names nor attributes, but after He created His creation, names and attributes were ascribed to Him. Therefore, His names and attributes, in this sense, are created.\(^{14}\)

\(^{10}\) Ibn Sallum, *Mukhtasār Lawāmi‘*, 96.


The first fundamental principle of the Muʿtazilites is the unity of God, which is the most important thesis of their doctrine because it is the source of the other principles. According to them, God is one and unique and He has no likeness and comparison with anyone. God is beyond time and place; He is not a body at all but only “something”, a being that cannot be perceived by the senses but is exclusively known through revelation or through reason. God is mentioned in the Qurʾān thus: “there is no other like Him” (laysa ka-mithlihi shay’), and “there is no one comparable to Him” (wa-lam yakun lahu kufuwan aḥad). The importance monotheism for the Muʿtazilites is demonstrated in that they call themselves “the people of justice and unity” (ahl al-ʿadl wa-al-tawḥīd).

Al-Ashʿarī gives the following account of the Muʿtazilites:

God is one, there is nothing like him; He is not a body, nor object, nor volume, nor form, nor flesh, nor blood, nor person, nor substance, nor attributes. He has no color, taste, smell, touch, heat, cold, moistness, dryness, length, breadth, depth, union, distinction, movement, rest or partition. Neither is He provided with parts, divisions, limbs, members, with directions, with right or left hand, before or behind, above or beneath. No place encompasses Him, no time passes over Him. Contiguity, withdrawal and incarnation cannot be conceived about Him. He cannot be described by any attribute, which are applicable to creatures, in so far as they are created, neither can it be said that He is finite. He cannot be described by measure, nor by movement in a direction. He is neither circumscribed, nor begetting nor begotten; measures do not encompass Him, nor do veils cover Him. The senses do not grasp Him, nor can man describe Him by any analogy. He does not resemble the creatures in any way. Neither accidents nor detriment can touch Him. Whatever occurs to any mind or is conceived by imagination cannot resemble Him (wa-kullu mā khaṭara bi-al-bāli wa-taṣawwara bi-al-wahmi fa-ghayra mushabbihin lahu). He is ceaselessly the first, and the foremost, He is the one who preceded created things and existed before the creation. He has not ceased to be knowing, deciding, living, nor does He cease to be so. Eyes do not

---

15 Qurʾān, 42:11.
16 Qurʾān, 112:4.
perceive Him, and vision does not penetrate Him. He cannot be conceived by imagination, nor can He be heard by ears. He is a being, but is not like other beings; knowing, deciding, living, unlike those who measure living beings by their knowledge. He is alone eternal, and there is none eternal besides Him (innahu al-qadimu wahdahu wa-lā qadīmun ghayrihi). There is no deity other than Him. He has no partner in His rule, and no sharing in His sovereignty. There is none who assists Him in producing what He produces and in creating what He creates. He has not created the creation on a preceding pattern. The creation of one thing is neither more easy nor more difficult to Him than the creation of any other thing (wa laysa khalqu shayin bi-ahwan ‘alayhi min khalqi shayin ākhar wa la biaṣ‘abi ‘alyhi minhu). There is no kind of relation between Him and what provides benefit; no harm can touch Him; neither joy nor pleasure can reach Him; neither pain nor sufferings can touch Him. There is no limit set to make Him finite. He will never cease to exist and He is not subject to any weakness and deficiency. He is exalted above touching women, and taking a companion and having children.\(^{17}\)

The Mu‘tazilites were among the first Muslim theologians to deal with the problem of divine attributes\(^{18}\) in detail. Their general approach sought to avoid any type of anthropomorphism and analyzed the problem of the relationship between the attributes and the essence from a strictly rationalist standpoint. They describe God by means of His “attributes” (ṣifāt sing. ṣifa), which are synonymous of “description” (waṣf) or “name”


\(^{18}\) In the beginning, the guiding principle was that any attribute not expressly indicated in the Qur’ān should not be affirmed. However, with the passage of time, there evolved a list of attributes by the scholars, enumerated in no particular order. These attributes are as follows: (1) attribute of essence (ṣifat al-dhāt): existence (wujūd); in the case of God, not distinguished from essence; (2) essential attributes (dhātī or nafsī), sometimes divided into (i) “negative” attributes which emphasize the divine transcendence: eternity (qidam), permanence (baqā), dissimilarity to the created (al-mukhālafat li al-ḥawādith), self-subistence (qiymam bi al-nafsī); and (ii) ma‘ānī attributes, “adding a concept to the essence”: power (qudra), will (irāda), knowledge (‘ilm), life (ḥayāt), speech (kalām), hearing (sam‘), sight (baṣar), perception (idrāk). Some denied that idrāk was an attribute; (3) attributes of “qualification” (ma‘nawīya), the ma‘ānī attributes taken verbally: having power, willing, knowing, etc., and (4) attributes of action (ṣifat al-afʿāl), designating not an intrinsic quality but a “possibility” of God, which God may or may not do: vision of God (ruʿat Allāh), creation (khālq), actual creation of the contingent world, command (amr), decree and predetermination (qadar wa qaḍā‘), whose relations with the divine knowledge and will vary according to the school, and consent (ridā). All except four of the attributes depend on the basis of intellect (aqilīyyāt): they are mentioned in the Qur’ān and human reason can “prove” them. The four attributes: vision, speech, hearing and sight depend on the sam‘īyyāt and are known only because they have been revealed. See: L. Gardet, “Allāh,” EI², 1: 406.
ism, which they understand to be only words (al-asma’ wa-al-ṣifāt hiya aqwāl), by which He is qualified when it is said that “God is knowing, God is having power, and nothing is like that” (Allāhu ʻālimun Allāhu qādirun wa-mā ashabah dhālika).19 The Mu’tazilites do not make any distinction between attribute and discription (ṣifā and waṣf),20 but they differentiate between types of attributes, namely “attributes of the essence” (ṣifat al-dhāt or al-nafs), and “attributes of the act” (ṣifāt al-fi’lī). The “attributes of the essence” (ṣifat al-dhāt or al-nafs) of God are ‘ilm (knowledge), qudra (power), and ḥayy (life). God is knowing by His essence, powerful by His essence, and living by His essence. These attributes are eternal and unchangeable like God Himself and not separate from His essence, but are identical with the essence.21 The “attributes of the act” (ṣifāt al-fi’lī) exist by the will and power of God, which are “will” (mashī’a), “hearing” (sam’), “seeing” (baṣar), and “perception” (naẓar). These attributes describe God’s temporal relationship to change, for they come into being when God acts and cease when His action ceases. They do not subsist in Him.

Wāṣil b. ‘Aṭā’ denied the attributes of God such as “knowledge, power, will and life” (al-‘ilm wa-al-qudra wa-al-irāda wa-al-ḥayāt). He stated that: “It is agreed that the existence of two eternal gods is impossible; so to assert the existence of an eternal entity, or an eternal attribute tantamounts to prove the existence of the duality of gods” (wa huwa al-ittifāq ʻalā istihāla wujūd ilāhayn qadimayn azliyyian wa-man athbata ma’ana ṣifat qadima fa-qad athbata ilāhayn).22

19 Al-Ash’arī, Maqālāt, 172, 198.
21 Al-Shahrastānī, Milal, 1:44-45.
22 Al-Shahrastānī, Milal, 1:46.
Wāṣil’s position on the divine attributes was adopted by other Mu’tazilites and came to constitute their standard view in the early period, until the theory of modes (ḥwāl) was proposed by Abū Hāshim al-Jubbāʾī. I will explain it later on when dealing with Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbāʾī and Abū Hāshim al-Jubbāʾī.

Ḍirār b. ‘Amr (d. ca. 200/815) denied that the attributes have any pre-existent reality, and understood them in a negative sense, explaining such attributes as knowledge and power as being an absence of unknowing or powerlessness. Al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad al-Najjār (d. ca. 220/835), a contemporary of Ḍirār had a similar understanding of the pre-eternal attributes in a negative sense, and he assigned the attribute of will a special status. He explained the combination of the pre-eternality of

---

23 Dirār b. ‘Amr was an important Mu’tazilite theologian and a disciple of Wāṣil b. ‘Aṭā. Dirār does not figure prominently in biographical dictionaries, and little is known for certain about his life. It is reported that he was a qāḍī, and after 170/786 he was in Baghdad and participated in the circle of the Barmakids together with Ḥakam, the Ibāḍī scholar ‘Abd Allāh b. Yazīd, the Zaydī Sulaymān b. Ğārīr, and others. He was a prolific writer and fifty seven titles are listed in Ibn Nadīm’s al-Fihrist, none of which has survived. Neither Ka‘bī in his Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn, nor Qāḍī ʻAbd al-Jabbār in his Faḍl al-i’tizāl, mention his biography. Similarly, Ibn al-Murṭḍa and al-Khayyātif did not consider him in their books. However, Ibn al-Nadīm and Nāshī’ al-Akbar count Dirār among those numerous Mu’tazilites who did not subscribe to the canonical principles established in the usūl al-khamsa. See Ibn al-Nadīm, al-Fihrist, 1:596-98; al-Ashʿarī, Maqālāt, 281-82; al-Shahrastānī, Milal, 1:90-91; Abū Ṭāhir b. Ṭāhir al-Baghḍāḏī, Kitāb al-Milal wa al-nihāl, ed. Albert N. Nader (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1970), 147-48; Watt, Formative Period, 189-95; J. van Ess, “Dirār b. ‘Amr, Abū ‘Amr al-Ghaṭafānī al-Kufī,” EI², 12:225.

24 Al-Shahrastānī, Milal, 1:90; al-Ashʿarī, Maqālāt, 166, 281.

25 Al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad al-Najjār, theologian was born in the city of Bamm. The sources do not provide the dates of his birth and death. If the report is accepted as true that he died of sorrow over his argument with al-Nazzām, the Mu’tazilite theologian, it is reasonable to assume that al-Najjār died after the end of the third decade of the third/ninth century. Al-Najjār was a follower and student of the Murji’a theologian Bishr al-Marīṣi and was influenced by the opinions of Dirār b. ‘Amr, although he did not follow him on all the issues. His circle of sources was broad enough to include Ibāḍ and Ḥanafīs. Al-Ashʿarī classifies him amongst the Murji’a, while al-Shahrastānī includes him amongst the Ḥanbīlya. Several reports associate him decisively with the Mu’tazilites, whereas others classify him amongst the ahl al-iṭḥbāt “the affirmationists,” i.e. those who affirm God’s qadar. The lack of unanimity regarding al-Najjār’s views is due to his diverse opinions on the theological issues. Ibn al-Nadīm in his al-Fihrist mentions that he compiled twenty-four works. See Ibn al-Nadīm, al-Fihrist, 1:643-44; Al-Ashʿarī, Maqālāt, 283-85; al-Shahrastānī, Milal, 1:88-90; Samʿānī, al-Ansāb, 5:355; Watt, Formative Period, 199-201; H.S. Nyberg and Khalīl Athāmina, “al-Nadjdjār,” EI², 7:866-68.
divine knowledge with divine will as follows: “God has been willing (murīd) from pre-eternity that each thing that He knows will come to be in its time.”

Abū al-Hudhayl described God as absolutely one in the perfect unity of His being, and said that God is “knowing through a knowledge”, “powerful through a power”, etc. He maintained that this knowledge by virtue of which God is knowing is nothing other than God himself. He further stated that “God is knowing through a knowledge identical to Himself (huwa ‘ālimun bi-‘ilmīn huwa huwa) and “powerful through a power identical to Himself (huwa qādirun bi-qudratī hiya huwa) and “living through a life identical to Himself (huwa ḥayyun bi-ḥayātih hiya huwa). “He (God) spoke in similar fashion concerning His hearing, and His seeing, and His eternity, and His honor, and His greatness, and His majesty, and His exaltedness, and all the attributes of His essence (wa-kadhālika qāla fī samʻihī wa-baṣārihi, wa-qidamihi, wa-‘izzatihī wa-‘azmatihī wa-jalālihi wa-kibriyā’ihi wa-fi-sā’i ir šifātihī li-dhātihi).” Abū al-Hudhayl seems to have made all the divine attributes eternal perfections of God’s being, including “hearing, seeing, forgiving, mercy, beneficence, creator, provider, rewarding, retributor, protector, restorer, master and forbidding” (samī‘an, baṣīran, ghafūran, raḥīman, muḥsinan, khāliqan, rāziqan, muthīban, mu‘āqiban, mawālian, ma‘ādiyan, āmiran, nāhiyan).

‘Abd Allāh b. Sa‘īd b. Muḥammad al-Tamīmī Ibn Kullāb’s (d. 241/855) chief contribution to kalām was his elaboration of the doctrine of the attributes (ṣifāt) of God.

---

26 Al-Ash‘arī, Maqālāt, 283.
28 Al-Shahrastānī, Milal, 1:53.
29 ‘Abd Allāh b. Sa‘īd b. Muḥammad al-Tamīmī Ibn Kullāb (d. 241/855) was the most influential of the mutakallimūn of the period of the miḥna. Nothing is known about his life. Abū Manṣūr al-Baghdādī mentions in his Uṣūl al-dīn that he argued against the Mu‘tazilites at the court of al-Ma’mūn. He also states that ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Makkī al-Kattānī and Abū al-Qāsim Muḥammad b. al-Junayd, the celebrated šīfi, were his pupils. See Ibn al-Nadīm, al-Fihrist, 1:645-46; Abū Manṣūr ‘Abd al-Qāhir b. Ṭāhir b. Muḥammad
He asserted that for each name such as ‘powerful,’ ‘knowing,’ ‘eternal,’ there was an attribute of ‘power,’ ‘knowledge’ or ‘eternity. According to him, God by His names and attributes has always been eternal, knowing, powerful, living, hearing, seeing, mighty, sublime, great, generous, majestic, one, eternal, absolute, unique, everlasting, first, sovereign, lord, beneficent, affectionate, protector, and restorer. The same must therefore be said with regard to their relationship with God’s essence: “they are not identical with Him nor they are different from Him (lā hiya huwa wa-lā hiya ghayrahu).” He also states that God’s will is eternal, likewise His kindness (karam) and His generosity (jūd), His friendship (walāya) and His enmity (‘adāwa, sakht).

Abū `Alī Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Jubbā’ī 31 played a crucial role in the development of Muʿtazilite doctrine formulating a refined theological framework. His theological views underwent some modifications during his lifetime. Since, with the exception of his Maqālāt, none of Abū `Alī’s writings are extant his views can only be learned through the scattered references and quotations in later works of the Muʿtazilites.

---

30 Al-Ash’arī, Maqālāt, 173, 514, 546.
31 Abū `Alī Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Jubbā’ī was born in 235/849 at Jubba in Khuzistān, and died in 303/915. He attended the school of Baṣra and received his education from Abū Yaʿqūb Yūsuf al-Shaḥḥām who was one of the most outstanding and brilliant students of Abū al-Hudhayl. Abū `Alī succeeded al-Shaḥḥām and was considered to be one of the most celebrated Muʿtazilites of his time. He had two students who later became famous. One of them was his son Abū Hāshim, and the other Abū al-Ḥasan Ash’arī who after breaking away from him, devoted himself to refuting Muʿtazilism and became the “founder” of the Ash’arite school. Abū `Alī al-Jubbā’ī authored numerous works, none of which, with the exception of the first volume of his Kitāb al-maṣāḥif survived. Ibn Naḍīm mentions seventy titles of his works, but lists only sixty-one. He also wrote the Qurʾān exegesis which was reportedly together with the commentaries by Abū Bakr al-Aṣamm, Abū al-Qāsim al-Balkhī al-Kaʿbī and Abū Muslim al-Iṣfahānī. It was among the most significant and unprecedented Muʿtazilite exegesis at that time in its comprehensiveness. See al-Ash’arī, Maqālāt, 622; Abū Manṣūr al-Baghdādī, al-Farq, 138-9; al-Shahrastānī, Milal, 1:78-85; Ibn Khallikān, Waṣfī al-aʿyān, 4:267-69; Ibn al-Murtaḍā, Ṭabaqāt, 109; ‘Abd al-Jabbar, Faḍl, 330; L. Gardet, “al-DJubbāʾi, ‘Alī Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb,” ET², 11:569; Hasan Ansari, “Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbāʾi et son livre al-Maqālāt,” in Camilla Adang, Sabine Schmidtkne and David Sklare, eds. A Common Rationality: Muʿtazilism in Islam and Judaism (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag in Kommission, 2007), 21-37; Ibn Naḍīm, al-Fihrist, 1:607-8; Etan Kohlberg, A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work: Ibn Ṭawús and his Library (Leiden, New York and Köln: Brill, 1992), 342.
and the *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn* of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī who was one of his outstanding students. Abū ‘Alī followed the doctrine of Abū al-Hudhayl with regard to the unity of God and refined it, yet he did not agree with all of his views. He maintained the principle of divine uniqueness and stated that “(God) is knowing by His essence, powerful, living because of His essence. The meaning of the expression by His essence is that God does not need in His knowing either an attribute which is knowledge or a mode by which He is knowing” (*ālimun li-dhātihi qādirun hayyun li-dhātihi wa maʿna qawlihi li-dhātihi ayy lā yaqtaḏī kawnihi ‘āliman šifati hiya ʿilm aw ḥāl tujibu kawnihi ‘āliman*).  

For Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbāʿī, an entity (*shayʿ*) or essence (*nafs, dhāt*) is an object of knowing (*maʿlūm*) that exists (*wujida*) or does not exist (*ʿudima*) and which as an object of knowing, may be directly referred to (*dhakara*) and may be made the subject of a predication (*ukhbira ʿanhū*). According to al-Jubbāʿī and the Baṣran Muʿtazilites *ṣifāt* are those expressions that name the “essence” or essential entity as such or that describe it as it is in some particular way distinguished from entities essentially similar to it. In these instances, the entities whose reality is asserted in the affirmation of the propositions are termed as the “cause” (*ʿilla*, pl. *īlal* or *maʾnā* pl. *maʾānī*) of the proposition or judgment (*ḥukm*) that the thing is so, and the predicate term comes, therefore, to be called *ṣifat maʾnan*. By the time of al-Jubbāʿī, the two words *ʿilla* and *maʾnā* were employed as synonyms, being used interchangeably in most contexts. According to the Baṣran

---

34 *Ṣifat maʾnan* is a term whose affirmation of the subject implies the reality of a *maʾnā*. *Maʾnā* originally meant the “sense” of the predicate or judgment: *ḥukm* the “sense” or “meaning” being contextually understood by the Baṣran *mutakallimūn* as the reality of that entity the presence of which, in a given relationship to the subject, is asserted by the particular predicate. See R.M. Frank, “Ḥāl,” *EF*, 12:343.
mutakallimūn, the maʿānī are not attributes. They are, rather, entities in the strict sense: beings that are themselves distinct objects and that as such are not predicable of something else. In al-Jubbāʾī’s analysis, since God is absolutely one and undivided, and when one says that “God knows” (Allāhu ʿālim) there is no assertion of the reality of any entity other than God’s self (nafsuhū) and accordingly in this sense, the predicate term is called an “essential predicate” (ṣifat nafsin). All terms that name or describe the self or essence of a thing as such are, when used predicatively, sifāt nafs. Thus, al-Jubbāʾī nowhere speaks of attributes, if attribute is understood in its usual sense; he has no term for such a concept and uses no formal expression that implies the reality of such a thing.35

‘Abd al-Salām Abū Hāshim al-Jubbāʾī 36 son of Abū ʿAlī al-Jubbāʾī held the same opinion as his father, but in the matter of divine attributes, he differed from him to a great

---

36 ‘Abd al-Salām Abū Hāshim al-Jubbāʾī son of Abū ʿAlī al-Jubbāʾī was born in Basra in 247/861. The most important teacher of Abū Hāshim was his father. He studied grammar with Abū ʿAlī b. Muḥammad b. Yazīd al-Mubarrad (d. 286/900) whose reputation as a great authority in matters of 'arabiyya was well established. In 314/926, Abū Hāshim arrived in Baghdad and remained there until his death in 321/933. Abū Hāshim had a kind and pleasant personality with noble disposition. He was a contemporary of Abū ʿAlī al-Ḥāšān al-Ashʿarī. After his father’s death, he formed and organized a distinct group of his own. Thus, there became two groups, the Jubbāʾīyya who were the followers of Abū ʿAlī and the Bahshāmīyya, the followers of Abū Hāshim. Even during his father’s lifetime, his scholarly standing was such that he argued against some of his father’s views. Tāhir al-Isfārāyīnī mentions that there were many differences of opinions between Abū ʿAlī and Abū Hāshim and Abū Hāshim charged his father with unbelief and disassociated himself from him, even to the extent of rejecting the inheritance bequeathed to him by his father. The report seems to be credible because the disagreement between the father and the son resulted in two schools of thought: the Jubbāʾīyya and the Bahshāmīyya. It is further proved by the evidence that two distinguished Muʿtazilite scholars wrote on the issues in dispute between them. One is ‘Abd al-Jabbār who wrote the book entitled: Khilāf bayn al-shaykhayn and the other is Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Ḥisā who also wrote on the same issue. None of the works ascribed to Abū Hāshim have survived. Ibn Naḍīm mentions ten titles of the books written by him, whereas Malaṭī states that he authored 160 works in disputation (fī al-jadal). The Muʿtazilite taḥaqqūq does not contain any information about Abū Hāshim’s works. The theological and jurisprudential sources of the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries reveal that Abū Hāshim’s ideas were essential to the discourse of the most prominent scholars of theology and jurisprudence of this period. ‘Abd al-Jabbār, who was a student of one of Abū Hāshim’s students, often referred to Abū Hāshim’s ideas in his books and in many places accepted them and used them as a basis for his own argumentation. See: Ibn Khallikān and Ibn al-Wardī metion in their biographical notes the date of Abū Hāshim’s birth as 247/861. However, al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī states that he was born in 277/890, and quotes the statement of Ahmad b. Yūsuf al-Azraq, who was a contemporary of Abū Hāshim, citing that Abū Hāshim’s death occurred in Rajab or Sh’abān 321/July or August 933. See Ibn Khallikān, Wafayāt al-aṣyān, 3:183-84; Ibn al-Wardī, Tāʾrīkh, 1:367; al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, Tāʾrīkh Baghdād, 11:55-6; ‘Abd al-
The most important contribution of Abū Hāshim is the concept of modes (al-ahwāl sing. ḥāl) which he elaborated in relation to the divine attributes (al-sifāt). He classified the modes into five categories which he applied to God and humans. The first category of modes is the attribute of essence (ṣifat al-dhāt or ṣifat al-nafs) through which the essences (dhawāt) differ from each other. For instance, the atom (al-jawhar) is described as an atom not through its essence but through its attribute of essence. The same applies to God, who does not differ from other essences through His mere essence, but rather through His attribute of essence. The second category of modes consists of the essential attributes (ṣifāt muqtaḍā ‘an ṣifāt al-dhāt) which are by necessity entailed by the attribute of essence as soon as it becomes existence. The attribute of essence of being an atom that is attached to an essence entails the spatiality of the atom whenever it exists. Thus, occupying a space is an essential attribute of an atom. In regard to God, the specific divine quality of His attribute of essence entails His essential attributes. These are His being powerful, knowing, living and existing. Therefore, God must necessarily and

37 The differences of opinion between Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbā’ī and Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā’ī were dealt with by ‘Abd al-Jabbār in his al-Khilāf bayn al-shaykhayn, which is lost.
38 Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā’ī adapted the concept of mode employed by the grammarians for a complement in the case of the accusative occurring in a sentence that consists of a subject and a form of kāna (to be) as a complete verb. In this case, the accusdative cannot simply be taken as a predicate to kāna as it would be if kāna were incomplete and transitive; it must rather be understood as a ḥāl. He “established a compromise by going back to the original Qur’ānic statements and inserting a copula into them (which is normally absent from nontemporal statements in Arabic): Allāhu ʻālimun thus became kāna Allāhu ʻāliman, ‘God is knowing.’ The copula was then understood as ‘complete verb,’ that is, it gained existential meaning: ‘God is;’ the assertion of God’s reality had been made explicit. The participle for ‘knowing,’ however, now put into the accusative instead of the nominative, was no longer interpreted as a predicate but as a ḥāl, a ‘state [mode]’ of the subject instead of an attribute. In the words of Abū Hāshim himself: ‘Since, it is true that [God] has a state [mode] in his being knowing, the knowledge that he is knowing is a knowledge of the thing itself [that is, the subject as] in this [mode] state rather than a knowledge of the act of knowing or of the thing itself.’ This theory allowed the above statements to be understood univocally of all knowers: a theological problem had been put into the general framework of grammatical analysis.” See Josef van Ess, “Mu’tazilah,” ER, 10:220-29.
eternally be described by these attributes, which cannot cease as long as His eternal attribute of essence lasts. The third category of modes comprises of those attributes which gain actuality through an entitative determinant (ma‘nā) or cause (‘illā) in the subject. They are accordingly termed simply li- ma‘nā or li-‘illa and are said to be “caused” (ma‘lūla). In this case, man’s attributes of being powerful, knowing and living differ in their quality from the corresponding attributes in God. The fourth category of modes consists of those attributes which are actualized by the action of an agent (bi-al-fā‘il), particularly the existence of a temporal activity which is founded in its producer’s capability. This category is not applicable to God as He exists outside of time. While the existence of all created beings is considered as belonging to this category, God’s existence is as an essential attribute entailed by His attribute of essence. The fifth category comprises those modes which gain actuality neither by virtue of the essence nor by an entitative determinant (lā li-al-nafs wa-lā li-ma‘nā). To this category belongs the attribute of “being perceiving” (kawnuhū mudrikan) which is entailed by the perceiver’s being living. In regard to God, it gains actuality when the condition (shart) of the presence of the perceptible is fulfilled. On the other hand, in order to perceive, human beings must possess senses in addition to the existence of the perceptible. This is not required for God, whose being alive is an essential attribute. Thus, He perceives without senses.39

With regard to cosmology, Abū Hāshim deals with the following issues. The first issue relates to “the solitary substances” (al-jawāhir al-munfarida) or “the parts which

---

cannot be further divided” (al-ajzā’ lā yatajazzā’) – that is, the “atom” (juz’)\textsuperscript{40} of which all corporeal things are composed. Both Abū ‘Alī and Abū Hāshim are of the opinion that they belong to one genus, being similar to one another. The second issue was whether the atoms were of the nature of “substance” (jawhar) in their state of non-existence, i.e. prior to their creation by God. The purpose was to find out whether God’s knowledge and power only pertain to the existentiation of the atoms, or does the determination of what is to be “substance” (jawhar) and what is to be “accident” (ʿaraḍ) also devolve upon this divine knowledge and power? In other words, do the knowledge and power of God merely bestow existence (wujūd) or do they also determine essence (dhāt) as well? Both Abū ‘Alī and Abū Hāshim considered that a substance (jawhar) is substance prior to its coming into existence, its substantiality being immutably fixed (thābit); thus only God brings it into existence. The third issue concerned whether the existence of the “void” (khalā) was possible or impossible in the corporeal world (ʿālam al-ajsām). Abū Hāshim believed that such void was not only possible, but in fact necessary. His reasoning on the necessity of the void was based on common sense experience. The fourth issue relates to atoms, and Abū Hashim maintained that atoms are possessed of extension and dimensions and have “aspect” (jiha) and “location” (taḥayyuz).\textsuperscript{41}

According to Abū Hāshim,

He (God) is knowing by His essence in the sense that He has a mode which is an attribute, perceived over and above His being an existing essence. The attribute can be known only with the essence, not isolatedly. The modes are attributes which are neither existent, nor non-existent, nor

\textsuperscript{40} Juz’ (pl. ajzā’) used in technical language of kalām and of flasfa describes the atom in the sense of ultimate (substantial) part, “that cannot be divided further” (alladhī lā yatajazzā’). See Al-Jurjānī, Kitāb al-Ta’rīfāt, 78; L. Gardet, “Djuz’,” EIr, 2:607-8.

Abū Hāshim differs from the rest of the Mutazilites with regard to the divine attributes. “His theory rests on the premise that the two philosophical-theological concepts of existence (wujūd) and nonexistence (‘ādām) must be supplemented by a third concept, that of mode (ḥāl). He then identifies God’s attributes as modes that do not possess an independent existence of their own but nevertheless are real things.”

Qāḍī Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Abd al-Jabbār b. Aḥmad al-Hamadhānī adhered to the five principles (usūl al-khamsa) in his Kitāb Uṣūl al-khamsa. However, in al-Mughnī fi
abwāb al-tawhīd wa-al-‘adl and al-Majmūʿ fī al-muḥīṭ bi-al-taklīf, he reduced the number from five to only two principles: unity of God (al-tawhīd) and justice (al-‘adl). In these books, he deals with the three remaining principles within the framework of these two principles – al-tawhīd and al-‘adl.

‘Abd al-Jabbār relies upon Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā‘ī’s concepts when he discusses God’s attributes. Material things consist of substance (jawhar pl. jawāhir) and accidents (a’rāḍ sing. ‘araḍ) which inhere in the substrate (maḥall) formed by the substance. The qualities (ṣifāt sing. ṣifa) of a material thing are determined by the accidents, some of which remain until an opposing accident occurs and some of which cease to exist of their own accord. ‘Abd al-Jabbār also adopted the concept of mode (ḥāl) in his discussion of some qualities of God and human beings.45

According to ‘Abd al-Jabbār, God is neither a substance nor a material object, nor an accident nor substrate. This means that God is imperceptible and His qualities or attributes do not inhere in a substrate. God is one, which means that He is unique and indivisible. God is existent (mawjūd) and His existence has no beginning and no end, He is the eternal (al-qadīm). God has eternal attributes that belong to His essence (dhāt), He is able to act (qādir), He is knowing (ʻālim) and He is living (ḥayy). He also states that God’s attributes cannot relate to Him as accidents relate to bodies. And since God is wholly immaterial, He is unchangeable, for only matter is subject to change in the sense of growing, deteriorating and perishing. However, because God alone is eternal, the

---


attributes, which characterize Him, can also be eternal notions existing beside Him in eternity. Therefore, they must be qualities, which are inseparable from His essence. So, there are two kinds of attributes: accidents with a certain level of materiality, which cause change in bodies, and divine attributes which are parts of God’s immaterial and unchanging essence. This means that God acts through the qualities of what He is, and His attributes of being able to act, knowing, living, existing and perceiving subsist in His essence. Since God’s essence is eternal, His attributes exist in Him in eternity. “God acts through Himself” (li-nafsihī) refers to the attributes which exist in the divine essence and express its qualities. In this way, he attributes different qualities to God without violating the unified nature of His essence. In contrast to human ability, God’s eternal ability can accomplish everything. His knowledge circumscribes all that can be known, whether existent or nonexistent, and His perception perceives all that can be perceived.\(^{46}\)

Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Ismā‘īl al-Ashʿarī’s opinions on the divine names and attributes were adopted as the definitive Sunnī orthodox view. His own views were largely inspired by that of Ibn Kullāb despite formal differences among them. Al-Ashʿarī developed his views in a work dedicated to the subject, Kitāb al-Ṣifāt, no longer extant, as well as generally in his other theological works.\(^{47}\) He maintains that God has eight attributes of essence, i.e. power, knowledge, life, will, sight, hearing, speech, and subsistence (baqā’), from which all other attributes are derived. He divides the attributes into two categories: those that entail divine acts (afʿāl, sing. fiʿl), such as life, knowledge and power; and those attributes such as hearing, sight, speech and subsistence, which can


With regard to God’s attributes, al-Zamakhsharī follows Wāṣil b. ‘Aṭā’,\footnote{Wāṣil b. ‘Aṭā denies the attributes of God such as “knowledge, power, will and life” (\textit{al-ʻilm wa-al-qudra wa-al-irāda wa-al-hayāt}). See al-Shahrastānī, \textit{Milal}, 1:46.} and does not agree with Abū al-Hudhayl, Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbā’ī and Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā’ī.

Al-Zamakhsharī interprets the following verse lexicographically, “As regards the people of ‘Ād, they became arrogant on the earth unjustly, and said “Who is stronger in power than us?” Did they not see that God who created them is superior to them in power?” (\textit{fa ammā ‘Ād fa-stakbaru fī al-arḍ bi-ghayr al-ḥaqq wa qālū man ashaddu minnā quwwa awa lam yara’u anna Allāh alladhī khalaqahum huwa ashaddu minhum quwwa}).\footnote{Qur’ān, 41:15.} He defines “power” (\textit{quwwa}) as strength in physique and its opposite is “weakness” (\textit{duʿf}). The power of human beings, by all means is right when an action is performed by an agent which is contrary to weakness. However, God is described with the power meaning His omnipotence. God is more powerful than men because His power emanates from His essence of which they are not capable.\footnote{Al-Zamakhsharī, \textit{al-Kashshāf}, 4:210.} Similarly, he interprets the verse “Do you not know that God knows whatever is in the heavens and on the earth? It is surely in a Book. It is all easy for God.”\footnote{Qur’ān, 22:70.} In this verse, he states that God knows by His essence and He is certainly not restrained in it. So, his interpretation of God’s knowledge is in accordance with the Muʿtazilite principles.\footnote{Al-Zamakhsharī, \textit{al-Kashshāf}, 5:375-76.}
is no god but He, the living, the eternal” (Allāh lā ilāha illā huwa al-ḥāyy al-qayyūm),

al-Zamakhsharī interprets “the living” (al-ḥāyy) as “the eternal for whom there is no possibility of cessation/the eternal for whom it is not possible to cease” (al-bāqī alladhī lā sabīl ‘alayhi lil-fānā’). Here, he does not say that God is living by His essence because the Mu‘tazilites do not believe in the “attribute of existentialism” (ṣifat wujūdiyya) and al-Zamakhsharī adheres to it.55

2. Createdness of the Qurʾān

Under the term tawḥīd (unity of God), there are a number of conceptions regarding the nature of God which are controversial in theological discussions, for example, His speech, anthropomorphic accounts about Him, and the vision of Him in the hereafter. In this section, I will deal with the first issue, that is, God’s speech.

All the Muslims throughout the centuries have agreed that the Qurʾān is God’s speech (kalām Allāh). The difference of opinions, however, remains upon the eternity of the Qurʾān or its createdness. According to the Sunnite, the Qurʾān is the speech of God, uncreated (kalām Allāh ghayr makhlūq), whereas the Mu‘tazilites’ thesis is that the Qurʾān is created (makhlūq).56

The biographical sources mention Ja‘d b. Dirham (d. 125/743) and Jahm b. Ṣafwān (d. 128/745) as the first proponents of the createdness of the Qurʾān. Ja‘d b. Dirham advanced the doctrines of the created Qurʾān and of free will, and professed a

54 Qurʾān, 2:255.
55 Al-Zamakhsharī, al-Kashshāf, 1:480.
56 The Mu‘tazilites affirm that the Qurʾān is the speech of God. Qāḍī ʻAbd al-Jabbār states that “Our doctrine is that the Qurʾān is the speech of God (kalām Allāh) and His revelation (wahyuḥu) is created (makhlūq) and temporal (muḥdath).” See ʻAbd al-Jabbār, Sharḥ, 528.
radical doctrine of denial of the divine attributes (ta‘īl). According to him, God did not speak to Moses, nor take Abraham as His friend.57

Jahm b. Ṣafwān (d. 128/745), a contemporary of Ja’d b. Dirham also believed in the doctrine of the created Qur’ān. Jahm’s view was founded on the strict assertion that God alone is eternal; all others, including heaven, hell, and even the prototype of scripture – written on “the preserved tablet” (al-lawḥ al-mahfūẓ), and the “heavenly original scripture” (umm al-kitāb) are created. Jahm held that God could not have a physical body like his creatures. Therefore God's attributes such as His speech must be unlike the speech of His creatures.58

The Mu‘tazilites consider that the Qur’ān is the speech of God and it is created by Him. Their reasoning is that God, identical with His attributes, is not subject to change. Therefore, it is impossible that the Qur’ān, in the sense of an attribute, is uncreated, for it is essentially multiple and temporal. Al-Shahrasatānī states that: “They agree that His speech is temporal and created in a place. It comprises letters and sounds written in their images in the scriptures. What is found in a place is an accident which perishes instantly” (wa ittafaqū ‘alā anna kalāmahu muḥdath makhlūq fī maḥall wa huwa ṣawt wa ṣawt kutiba amthālahu fī al-maṣāḥif ḥikāyāt ‘anhu fa immā wajada fī al-maḥall ‘araḍa qad fanā fī al-ḥal).59

57 Ja’d b. Dirham was a native of Khurāsān but spent most of his life at Damascus. He was imprisoned and executed in 125/743, on the orders of caliph Hishām b. ‘Abd al-Malik. Very few facts are known on the doctrinal position of Ja’d b. Dirham. He is described as dahrī and appears prominently in the list of zindīqs in al-Fihrist. He is also associated with Jahm b. Ṣafwān. See G. Vajda, “Ibn Dirham Dja’d,” EI², 3: 747.
58 Abū Muḥriz Jahm b. Ṣafwān, early theologian, sometimes called al-Tirmidhī or al-Samarqandī was a client of Rāsib and secretary to al-Ḥārith b. Surayj, who revolted against the Umayyads and from 116/734 to 128/746 controlled tracts of eastern Khurāsān. Jahm was captured and executed in 128/746, shortly before al-Ḥārith himself. Jahm was intellectual protagonist of al-Ḥārith’s movement of revolt. See: Ash‘arī, Maqālāt, 280, 1. 4, 279, 1. 2279-80; Montgomery Watt, "Djahm b. Ṣafwān," EI², 2:388.
59 Al-Shahrastānī, Milal, 1:45.
Abū al-Hudhayl asserts that “God, the Exalted, created the Qur’ān on the preserved tablet and it is an accident. The Qur’ān exists in three places: in a place where it is preserved in memory, in a place where it is written and in a place where it is recited and audible” (inna Allāh ‘azza wa jall khalāqa al-Qur’ān fī al-lawḥ al-mahfūz wa huwa ‘araḍ wa inna al-Qur’ān yūjida fī thalāthat amākin fī makān huwa mahfūz fihi wa fī makān huwa maktūb fihi wa fī makān huwa fihi matluwwun wa asmū‘un). He further states that God’s speech is found at various places (kalām Allāh qad yūjida fī amākin kathīra). When God will cause all the places to perish, the Qur’ān where it is preserved, recited or audible will also not exist.  

Ibn Kullāb introduced a distinction between the speech of God (kalām Allāh) and its realization. God is “eternally speaking (lam yazal mutakallim), but He can only be mutakallim, addressing Himself to somebody, if this addressee exists. Speech is a permanent and unchangeable attribute (ṣifā or ma ‘nā) which subsists in God; but when, in revelation, it becomes speech to somebody, it is subject to alteration: it may be represented in various languages, such as Arabic or Hebrew, and must adapt itself to various situations by taking the form of an order, a statement etc… God’s speech is eternal not by itself but by the eternity of God’s essence.”

Abū ‘Alī Jubbā’ī and Abū Hāshim Jubbā’ī state that God is a speaker with a word which He creates in a substrate. For both of them, the “reality of speech” (haqīqat al-kalām) consists essentially of fragmentary sounds (aṣwāt muqaffa’a) and orderly arrangement of letters (ḥurūf manẓūma). The speaker is the one who creates the word and not the one in whom the word subsists. However, Abū ‘Alī differs from other

---

60 Al-Ash'arī, Maqālāt, 598-99.
Mu’tazilites, especially in saying that God creates His own word in the place of recitation whenever a man himself recites the Qur’ān.\(^{62}\)

‘Abd al-Jabbār follows Abū ‘Alī Jubbā’ī and Abū Hāshim Jubbā’ī and believes in the createness of the Qur’ān and says that “the Qur’ān is the speech of God and His revelation (waḥy), it is created (makhlūq), and temporal (muḥdath). God sent it down to his Prophet so that it could be knowledge and evidence of (Muḥammad’s) prophethood. He made it an evidentiary proof (dalāla) so that we could have rules and regulations to which we could refer regarding the prescribed and prohibited activities. It is incumbent upon us to praise, thank and sanctify (God). And the Qur’ān is that which we hear and recite today. If it is not created by God (at the present moment) it is attributed to Him in reality, just as we recite the poetry of Imru’ al-Qays\(^{63}\) today in reality, even though he is not composing it now.”\(^{64}\)

Al-Ash’arī considers that the divine speech, like God’s attributes, subsists in His divine essence and is not subject to temporal origination. He distinguishes between the inner speech (al-kalām al-nafsī) and outward or originated speech (al-kalām al-hādith). He states that eternal divine speech, like eternal divine power or knowledge remains in itself one and indivisible. Therefore, in the Qur’ān, no distinction can be made between verses that refer to events in the past and those in the future, because it constitutes an

\(^{62}\) Al-Shahrastānī, Milal, 1:80-81.

\(^{63}\) Imru’ al-Qays is a pre-Islamic poet who may have died circa 550 A.D. His poems were collected towards the end of second/eighth century and two definitive recensions were established during the third/ninth century. He is admired for the ingenuity of his metaphors and his concise and skillful treatment of various traditional forms and poetic themes. Also, he is considered to be the creator of the classical form of the qaṣīda. See S. Boustani, “Imru’ al-Ḳays b. Ḥudjr,” EI², 3:1176.

\(^{64}\) In his supercommentary on ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s Sharḥ, Ahmad b. al-Ḥusayn b. Abī Ḥāshim, known as Mānkdīm (d. 425/1034), says that ‘Abd al-Jabbār classified the dispute about the createdness of the Qur’ān under the principle of divine justice (al-ʻadl), one of the five principles of the Mu’tazilite doctrine, because the Qur’ān is one of God’s acts. See ‘Abd al-Jabbār, Sharḥ, 527-29 and ‘Abd al-Jabbār, al-Mughnī, 7:3.
eternal act of information covering all different temporal events equally. In his illustration of al-Ash‘arī’s concept of the unity of the divine speech, al-Shahrastānī states that the words revealed by the angels to the prophets constitute an indication (dalāla) of the eternal speech, with such evidence being a created and originated thing but that which is indicated (madlūl) is pre-existent and eternal. To conclude, against the views of the Mu‘tazilites that the Qur‘ān was created, al-Ash‘arī maintained that it was God’s speech, an eternal attribute, and therefore uncreated.

Al-Zamakhsharī, like most Mu‘tazilites, believes that the Qur‘ān was created. He proves it with the interpretation of the following verse: “Say: ‘Were men and jinn to get together to produce the like of this (Qur‘ān), they will never come up with the like of it, even if they back up one another.’” Al-Zamakhshari states that the Qur‘ān claims that its likeness in its eloquence, excellent composition and compilation could never be produced by anyone. He also states that the Nawābit claim that the Qur‘ān is eternal (qadīm) and admit that it is miraculous (mu‘jiz). He argues against it and explains that “inability” (‘ajz) is opposite to “capability” (qudra). It is said that “God is powerful in His creation of substance and the human beings are not capable of this” (Allāh qādirun ‘alā khalq al-ajsām wa al-‘ibād ājizūna ‘anhu). So far as the “impossibility” (al-maḥāl) is concerned, there is neither any possibility in it for its capability nor any interference in it “like the (existence of) second eternity” (ka-thānī al-qadīm). It is not

68 There are five vesesin the Qur‘ān which describe it and these are called as “challenge verses” (āyāt al-tahaddī). These are: 2:23-24; 10:38; 11:13; 17:88 and 52:34.
69 Nawābit (sing. nābita) means rising generation, but acquired the pejorative sense of bad lot or rogue. Ibn Nadim devotes in his al-Fihrist a section to the mutakallimīn al-mujbira and the nābitat al-hashwiyya, amongst whom the main exponent was Ibn Kullāb. Al-Zamakhsharī specifically mentions in his Asās al-balāgha that the nābita/nawābit are Ḥashwiyya. See Ch. Pellat, “Nābita,” Eİ, 7:843.
said about a person who can perform that “he/she is unable to perform and he/she is not miraculous” (qad ‘ajaza ‘anhu wa-lā huwa mu’jiz). Those who are obstinate, they describe God with incapability because He is does not have power over impossibility. But it is wrong because “He is powerful over impossibility” (huwa qādirun ‘alā al-mahāl) and it is His attribute.\textsuperscript{70} He concludes that the Qur’ān did not exist from eternity.

The Qur’ān mentions how God speaks with the human beings: “It is not to any human being that God should speak to him except by revelation or from behind a veil, or that He send a messenger to reveal by His permission whatsoever He pleases.”\textsuperscript{71} Al-Zamakhsharī interprets that there are three methods in which God communicates with the people. First, He communicates through revelation (wahy) which may be in the form of inspiration (ilhām) or in the form of putting it in the heart of a person during his sleep or dream, as He revealed to Abrāham and the mother of Moses. Second, one may hear His speech (kalām) created in some form where a listener can hear without seeing Him, “because He is invisible in His essence” (li annahu fī dhātihi ghayr mar’ī). He cites an example of a king who speaks from behind a veil with his special audience who can hear him but cannot see him. He says that it was in this manner that God spoke to Moses and speaks with the angels. Third, He sends messengers from amongst the angels to convey His commands to the prophets, so it is revelation through the angels. Since the first and third methods are in accord with the Mu’tazilites principles, he elaborates on them. So far as the second method is concerned, he says that it is a figurative speech (tamthīl) otherwise the form of the speech is the same that God creates it in some form.\textsuperscript{72} Al-Zamakhsharī’s view regarding the cretedness of the Qur’ān is so emphatic that he

\textsuperscript{70} Al-Zamakhsharī, al-Kashshāf, 3:550-51.
\textsuperscript{71} Qur’ān, 42:51.
\textsuperscript{72} Al-Zamakhsharī, al-Kashshāf, 5:420-22.
mentions in the preface of al-Kashšāf that “He (God) is far above to transmit it (the Qur’an) from the beginning and eternity, and He marked the occurrence of everything from nonexistence (fa-subḥāna man ista’thara bi-al-awwaliya wa-al-qidam wa-wasama kulli shay’in sawāhu bi-al-ḥudūth ‘an al-‘adam).” Therefore, according to al-Zamakhsharī, the Qur’an is not God’s essence and does not exist from eternity rather it is an incident of phenomena and created.

3. Anthropomorphism and Transcendence

In this section, I will deal with the second issue, i.e. anthropomorphic accounts about God. Anthropomorphism (tashbīh literally ‘comparison’) and the affirmation of transcendence (tanzīh literally ‘purification’) in Islamic theology are used in the context of describing God. According to Josef van Ess,

\[\text{tanzīh}\] has a positive connotation whereas \[\text{tashbīh}\], together with its derivatives \[\text{mushabbih}\] and \[\text{mushabbiha}\] (denoting a person or a group practising \[\text{tashbīh}\]), is used in polemical language, as a derogatory term. The negative equivalent of \[\text{tanzīh}\] is \[\text{ta’ṭīl}\], divesting God of His attributes; as the positive pendant to \[\text{tashbīh}\], \[\text{ithbāt}\] is sometimes used, the affirmation of the divine attributes by analogy.

The Qur’an describes God as transcendent who is different from all existing things. “There is no other like Him” (laysa kamithlihi shay’), “And there is no one comparable to Him” (wa-lam yakun lahu kufuwan aḥad). However, there are anthropomorphic expressions in the Qur’an such as God’s hands, eyes, face, divine actions associated with God’s body such as seeing, hearing, speaking, coming and sitting and

\[\text{73}\] Al-Zamakhsharī, al-Kashšāf, 1:95.
\[\text{75}\] Qur’ān, 42:11.
\[\text{76}\] Qur’ān, 112:4.
on the throne. Also, the Qurʾān ascribes to God human feelings such as mercy, anger and satisfaction. There are also ḥadīths which state that “God created Adam in His image” (inna Allāh khalaqa Ādam ‘alā šūratihī) and “The believer’s heart is between two of God’s fingers” (qalb al-mu’min bayna iṣba‘ayn min aṣābi’ al-Raḥmān).\footnote{Abū Maṣūr al-Baghdādī, Ḫūṣūl al-dīn, 74-75; Montgomery Watt, “Created in His Image: A Study in Islamic Theology,” in Montgomery Watt’s Early Islam: Collected articles (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990), 94-100.}

The early traditionalists’ viewpoint was to accept the anthropomorphic accounts literally. They did not interpret anthropomorphic expressions metaphorically. Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 150/767) and Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/795) were of the opinion that “We believe in what is mentioned in the Book and the traditions and we do not interpret the text” (nu’minu bimā warada bihi al-kitābu wa al-sunna wa lā nata‘arraḍu lil-ta‘wīl).\footnote{Al-Shahrastānī, Milal, 1:104.} Sufyān b. ‘Uyayna (d. 196/811) emphasized the prohibition on interpreting the anthropomorphic descriptions in the Qurʾān.\footnote{Abū Bakr ʿAlī al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī al-Bayhaqī, Kitāb al-Asmāʾ wa al-sifāt, ed. Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawthārī (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1980), 314.} They called their conviction “affirmation” (ithbāt), and considered themselves “the people who affirm [God’s attributes]” (ahl al-ithbāt). Their main argument was that God has described Himself like this. If these accounts are not accepted it would tantamount to the rejection of God’s own description of Himself in the Qurʾān and ḥadīth.\footnote{Abī Bakr Muḥammad b. Isḥāq Ibn Khuzayma, Kitāb al-Tawḥīd wa-ithbāt sifāt al-Rabb ʿazza wa-jalla, ed. ‘Abd al-ʿAzīz b. Ibrāhim al-Shahwān (Riyadh, Dār al-Rushd, 1988), 1: 26-27.}

Among the early theologians who argued against anthropomorphism were Ja’d b. Dirham (d. 126/744) and Jahm b. Ṣafwān (d. 128/746). Jahm said that: “It is not possible to describe the Creator by an attribute by which His creatures are described because this would be like comparing God to His creatures” (lā yajūza an yuṣāfa al-bārī’ taʾāla bi-
ṣifati yūṣafa bihā khalqahu li-anna dhālika yaqḍī tashbīhan).\textsuperscript{81} Al-Ashʿarī quotes Jahm and some of the Zaydites saying that “the Creator cannot be described as a thing because a created thing has a similarity to other created things” (\textit{inna al-bārī’ lā yuqāla annahu shay’ li-anna al-shay’ huwa al-makhlūq alladhī lahu mithlu}).\textsuperscript{82}

The Muʿtazilites stressed absolute uniqueness and transcendence of God and denied His description anthropomorphically in any form, such as direction, place, image, body, face, hand, eye, domain, movement, extinction, change, or feeling.\textsuperscript{83} The Muʿtazilites considered the anthropomorphic verses in the Qurʾān as allegorical or figurative expressions to symbolize God’s attributes and actions. They dealt with such verses by the method of \textit{taʾwīl} or metaphorical interpretation. They interpreted single words in a Qurʾānic text according to a secondary or metaphorical meaning found elsewhere in the Qurʾān.\textsuperscript{84} By the “hand” (\textit{yad})\textsuperscript{85} is meant God’s blessing (\textit{niʿma}),\textsuperscript{86} and by His “eye” (\textit{ʿayn})\textsuperscript{87} is meant His knowledge (\textit{ʿilm}).\textsuperscript{88} His “face” (\textit{wajh})\textsuperscript{89} means God’s very essence.\textsuperscript{90} God’s sitting on the throne\textsuperscript{91} is a symbol of His authority, power and control upon everything.\textsuperscript{92}

\textsuperscript{81} Al-Shahrastānī, \textit{Milal}, 1:86.
\textsuperscript{82} Al-Ashʿarī, \textit{Maqālāt}, 181.
\textsuperscript{85} Qurʾān, 3:26,73; 5:64; 23:88; 38:75; 48:10; 57:29; 67:1.
\textsuperscript{86} Al-Ashʿarī, \textit{Maqālāt}, 167, 218.
\textsuperscript{87} Qurʾān, 11:37; 20:39; 23:27; 52:48; 54:14.
\textsuperscript{88} Al-Ashʿarī, \textit{Maqālāt}, 165, 195.
\textsuperscript{89} Qurʾān, 28:88; 55:27.
\textsuperscript{90} Al-Ashʿarī, \textit{Maqālāt}, 521.
\textsuperscript{91} Qurʾān, 7:54; 10:3; 13:2; 20:5; 25:59; 32:4; 57:4.
\textsuperscript{92} Al-Ashʿarī, \textit{Maqālāt}, 211.
Al-Shahrastānī states that al-Ashʿarī followed *ahl al-ithbāt*, affirming divine attributes as described in the Qurʾān, without using *taʾwīl*, though later he ascribed to *taʾwīl*. According to George Makdisi,

This makes Ashʿarī the follower of two middle roads: (1) that of the Pious Ancestors who were anxious to avoid two extremes: *taʾwīl* and *tashbīh*; and (2) that of the “*kalām*-using orthodox” who wanted to uphold the divine attributes, against the Muʿtazilites, and uphold the use of *taʾwīl* in order to avoid falling into *tashbīh*. The former attitude is regarded by the Ashʿarites as being *ṭarīq as-salāma*, the road of salvation, and the latter is regarded by them as being *ṭarīq al-ḥikma*, the road of wisdom; both of which were travelled by Ashʿarī himself.

Al-Ashʿarī adopted the method of *bi-lā kayfa* for the literal understanding of anthropomorphic statements in the Qurʾān. Binyamin Abrahamov states that:

According to this method, one should adhere to the sacred text of the Qurʾān and believe that it is the truth without trying to explain it through figurative interpretation. Asked how God, who is incorporeal, has face and hands, man must answer ‘God has hands *bi-lā kayfa,*’ i.e., without asking how or giving commentary. Moreover, the question *kayfa* applies to corporeal characteristics, therefore the statement ‘God has hands’ with the addition of the denial of *kayfa* means to accept this statement without attributing corporeal qualities to God.

Al-Ashʿarī stated that the literal meaning of a verse should not be replaced by a figurative meaning unless there is proof which necessitate such a change. He denied the

---

94 According to Georget Makdisi, Ashʿarite propagandists have presented us with an Ashʿarī who was first a thorough-going rationalist, who then became a thorough-going traditionalist, and who finally became a traditionalist keeping the rationalist method by adopting *kalām*. Georget Makdisi. See “Ashʿarī and the Ashʿarites in Islamic Religious History,” *Studia Islamica* 18 (1963), 22.
possibility of interpreting God’s hands either as His organs, or His favors or His ability and therefore affirmed God’s hand without interpreting its meaning.  

The Mu’tazilites consider the anthropomorphic verses in the Qur’an as allegorical or figurative expressions to symbolize God’s attributes and actions. Al-Zamakhsharī deals with such verses by the method of ta’wīl or metaphorical interpretation. He interprets single words in a Qur’ānic text according to a secondary or metaphorical meaning found elsewhere in the Qur’an. His main emphasis is to avoid literal meanings and illustrate in conformity with the Mu’tazilites principles.

4. Vision of God

In this section, I will deal with the third issue, i.e. vision of God in the Hereafter. The Qur’ān does not explicitly and specifically mention about the “vision of God” (ru’yat Allāh) except at one place where it states that: “On that Day, faces will be radiant, looking upon their Lord” (wujūhun yawma’izin nāḍiratun ilā rabbihā nāẓiratun). However, hadīth narratives mention the Prophet Muḥammad’s Night journey (isrā’) and Ascension (mi’rāj) when he had an experience of God’s vision. The Muslim theologians are divided in this matter whether the isrā’ and mi’rāj happened while Muḥammad was asleep or awake and whether it was his spirit or his body in which he journeyed. The orthodox opinion is that that the journey was performed by Muḥammad.
with his body and awake. The rationalists say that it took place in a dream when he was asleep. Another verse mentioning “meeting with Lord” (liqā’ rabbihī) is also quoted in support of God’s vision.\textsuperscript{101}

The Mu‘tazilites differ about the “vision of God” (ru’yat Allāh). They have nineteen conflicting opinions and the majority of them deny seeing God in this world as well as in the hereafter. Basing themselves on their cosmology and their understanding of the nature of God, they argue that in order to be seen, a thing must be either substance or accident, and God is neither a substance, nor an accident, nor a material object, nor a substrate. God cannot be perceived by the senses, i.e., He is imperceptible. They quote that: “Perception cannot grasp Him” (lā tudrikuhu al-absār).\textsuperscript{102} But the Qur’ān also states that: “On that Day, faces will be radiant, looking upon their Lord” (wujūhun yawma’izin nāḍiratun ilā rabbihā nāẓiratun).\textsuperscript{103} The Mu‘tazilites interpret nāẓara as “to wait” instead of “to look upon.” Furthermore, the proper complement of nāẓiratun is not rabbihā, but an implied word, thawāb, so they understand the real meaning of the verse to be “waiting for the reward of their Lord.”\textsuperscript{104}

However, some of the Mu‘tazilites are of the view that one can attain the vision of God. Abū al-Hudhayl believed that God can be seen through heart, but al-Fuwaṭī and Ibn ‘Abbād disagreed with him. Ğirār b. Ḍirār b. ‘Amr and Ḥafṣ al-Fard held that on the Day of Resurrection God will create in man a sixth sense capable of perceiving Him. Others said that: “We can see God in this world in dream, not when awake” (innā nara Allāh fī al-

\textsuperscript{101} Verse 18:110: Whosoever hopes to meet His Lord (liqā’ rabbihī) should do what is good and do not associate anyone in the worship of his Lord” is quoted in support of God’s vision.

\textsuperscript{102} Qur’ān, 6:103.

\textsuperscript{103} Qur’ān, 75: 22-23.

dunyā fī al-nawm fa-ammā fī al-yaqẓa falā). The companions of ʻAbd al-Wāhid b. Zayd narrated that God can be seen depending upon the good deeds, whosoever has excellent deeds can see Him the best.\footnote{Al-Ashʻarī, \textit{Maqālāt}, 213-17.}

Al-Ashʻarī states that according to the Qur’ān believers will see God with their eyes. He stipulates various conditions which would necessarily invalidate the possibility of seeing God, such as the supposition that He would be confined within a particular place or time. He concludes that if a description (\textit{wasf}) does not necessitate any of the following conditions, then the vision of God is possible from a purely rational point of view. These conditions are: if it does not imply attributing to God any temporal origination (\textit{hadath}); it does not require the positing of similarity (\textit{tashbīḥ}) of God; if it does not imply any fundamental alteration in His essence; and if it does not ascribe to Him any paronomasia (\textit{tajnīs}) or injustice (\textit{tajwīr}).\footnote{Al-Ashʻarī, \textit{al-Luma'}, 32-33.} Al-Ashʻarī identifies existence (\textit{wujūd}) as being the only essential condition for vision.\footnote{Abū al-Faṭḥ Tāj al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ʻAbd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, \textit{Kitāb al-Nihāyat al-iqdām fī ʻilm al-kalām}, ed. Alfred Guillaume (Cairo: Maktabat al-Mutanabbī, 1980), 365.}

Al-Ashʻarī acknowledges that vision entails directionality, and when God is seen, this must also apply to Him. However, according to him, such directionality must be applied figuratively in relation to God. He also examines evidence from the Qur’ān and elaborates certain verses pertaining to the vision of God, and denies that such vision is exclusively metaphorical (\textit{majāzī}). In other words, verses which describe about seeing God are to be taken literally. He explains the verse: “Vision cannot penetrate Him, but He
penetrates all visions” (lā tudrikhu al-abṣār wa huwa yudrik al-abṣār),\textsuperscript{108} as referring only to the impossibility of seeing God in this world, not the Hereafter.\textsuperscript{109}

However, the majority of the Muʿtazilites denies the “vision of God” (ruʿyat Allāh) in this world as well as in the hereafter. They argue that in order to be seen, a thing must be either substance or accident, and God is neither a substance, nor an accident, nor a material object, nor a substrate. God cannot be perceived by the senses, i.e., He is imperceptible. Al-Zamakhsharī maintains the same position as that of the Muʿtazilites and justifies that the vision of God is not possible. It is demonstrated by his interpretation of the following five verses.

First verse: “Vision cannot penetrate Him, but He penetrates all visions” (lā tudrikhu al-abṣār wa huwa yudrik al-abṣār).\textsuperscript{110}

Al-Zamakhsharī defines the “vision” (baṣar) as “the subtle substance” (al-jawhr al-latīf) which is conveyed by God to the sense of perception (ḥāssat al-naẓar) by which all the perceived things can be penetrated. It means that the vision has neither any linkage with Him nor can it perceive Him because He is the Supreme Being (mutaʿāl) who cannot be penetrated in His essence. The vision has linkage with those things which comprise sides or directions, primary or secondary, like bodies and forms. Since God is neither a body nor a form, vision cannot penetrate Him.\textsuperscript{111}

Second verse: “He (Moses) said: ‘O Lord, reveal to me Yourself so that I may see You.’ He said: ‘You cannot see Me, but look at the mountain. If it remains firm in its place you may then see Me.’ When his Lord revealed Himself on the mountain, He

\textsuperscript{108} Qurʾān, 6:103.
\textsuperscript{109} Al-Ashʿarī, al-Lumaʿ, 34-36; Al-Ashaʿrī, al-Ibāna, 13-21.
\textsuperscript{110} Qurʾān, 6:103.
\textsuperscript{111} Al-Zamakhsharī, al-Kashshāf, 2:382-83.
leveled it to ground, and Moses fell down unconscious. When he woke up, he said: ‘All glory to You. I turn to You in repentance, and I am the first to believe.’”

Third verse: Moses chose from his people seventy men for Our appointment (on Mount Sināī). When the earthquake overtook them, he (Moses) said: “O Lord, had You pleased, You would have destroyed them together with me before this time. Will You destroy us for something the foolish among us have done? This is only Your trial with which You lead astray whomever you will and guide whomever You please. You are our protector, so forgive us and have mercy on us, for You are the best forgiver of all.”

When al-Zamakhsharī interprets the verse 7:143, he also refers to the verse 7:155. He mentions that Moses already knew the “vision” of God was impossible. He raises a question that if Moses knew that the vision was not possible, then why did he ask God to reveal Himself so that he may see Him? He responds that Moses admitted before God that his people were foolish and ignorant, but they still insisted that Moses should request God to appear before them. When Moses asked God to reveal Himself to him, He replied that he could never see Him. In this verse (lan) is the emphatic negative imperative for everything in the future. Al-Zamakhsharī quotes the following verse “They will never create a fly, even if they get together” (lan yakhuqū dhubaban wal-wijtama‘ū). In this verse also, the emphatic negative imperative (lan) has been used to emphasize that such a task is impossible. So, in the same manner, vision of God is also impossible forever.

God told Moses to look at the mountain, which according to al-Zamakhsharī means that “looking towards Me is impossible” (anna al-naẓar ilayyī muḥāl). If the

---

112 Qurʾān, 7:143.
113 Qurʾān, 7:155.
114 Qurʾān, 22:73.
115 Al-Zamakhsharī, al-Kashshāf, 4:211-12.
mountain remained firm in its place then he might be able to see him. When God manifested the power and reverberation of His command and will, the mountain was leveled to ground and Moses fell down unconscious. Al-Zamakhsharī quotes verses 19:90-91 that “The mountains fall to pieces, for they ascribe a son to the Compassionate” (takādu al-samāwāt yatafṭarna minhu wa tanshaqqu al-ard wa takhirru al-jibāl hadda an da‘aw li-al-raḥmān walada) to prove that the demand for the vision is similar to ascribing a son to God. Therefore, do not ask God for His vision, but look towards the mountain which trembled and fell down. When Moses recovered from his unconsciousness, he repented and asked God for forgiveness.116

The people said to Moses that they would not believe in him until they see God themselves. He told them that a vision of God was impossible and advised them, rebuked them and refused to do so but they insisted him to ask God to appear before them. Moses selected seventy people and took them to the Mount Sināī. He requested God to manifest Himself. They were seized by a violent earthquake and were destroyed. Al-Zamakhsharī argues that since Moses himself could not see God, the foolish and ignorant people were far from seeing Him.117

Fourth and fifth verses: “On that Day, faces will be radiant, looking upon their Lord” (wujūhun yawmai’dhin nādira ilā rabbihā nāzīra).118 Al-Zamakhsharī states that on the Day of Resurrection people would be looking beyond their comprehension at countless things. However, the believers having neither any fear nor any grief will be looking specifically upon their Lord. He interprets “looking upon their Lord” (ilā rabbihā nāzīratun) as “the expectation and the hope” (al-tawaqqu’ wa-al-rijā’). They will expect

118 Qur‘ān, 75:22-23.
“the grace and munificence” (al-ni’ma wa-al-karāma) from their Lord as they were not afraid, and hoped from anyone except their Lord in this world.¹¹⁹

5. God’s Seat (kursī)

Al-Zamakhsharī interprets the anthropomorphic verses from the Mu’tazilites’ point of view. Verse 2:255 states that “His seat (kursī)¹²⁰ encompasses the heavens and the earth” (wasi’a kursiyuhu al-samāwāt wa-al-ard). He describes four aspects of this verse’s interpretation. First, God’s seat is not limited to the heavens and the earth in its magnitude and spaciousness, but it is a metaphor for His Exaltedness. In support of his argument, he quotes “They do not esteem God as is rightly due to Him. The whole earth shall be in His grasp and the heavens shall be rolled up in His right hand on the Day of Resurrection” (wa-mā qadaru Allāh ḥaqqa qadrihi wa al-arḍu jamī’an qabḍatuhi yawm al-qiyāma wa al-samāwāt maṭwiyyātun bi-yamīnihi).¹²¹ He interprets this verse also in the figurative sense and states that His grasp of earth and rolling up of the heavens in His right hand on the Day of Resurrection expresses His sublimity and power. Second, His knowledge is extensive (wasi’a ‘ilmuhu) and His knowledge is figuratively called kursī, meaning knowledge which encompasses the entire universe. Third, His kursī is a symbol of His supreme authority upon everything. Fourth, He created His kursī, which is in front of His ‘arsh (Throne)¹²² beneath which are the heavens and the earth and in comparison to ‘arsh it is smaller. According to Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, however, seat (kursī) and throne

¹¹⁹ Al-Zamakhsharī, al-Kashshāf, 6:269-70.
¹²⁰ Lane defines kursī as throne synonymous to sarîr meaning a chair. See Lane, al-Qāmūs, 7:2605.
¹²² Lane defines ‘arsh as booth or shed or thing constituted for shade. Al-arsh is applied to the ‘Arsh of God which is not definable. See Lane, al-Qāmūs, 5:2000.
(ʻarsh) are the same. Al-Zamakhsharī interprets the seat (kursī) metaphorically (takhyīl wa tamthīl) which expresses God’s sublimity, supreme authority and vast knowledge.

6. God’s Throne (ʻarsh)

The word ‘arsh appears twenty-one times in the Qur’ān with reference to God’s throne. When referring the throne to God, the verses either mention the throne itself or use it in a relational epithet to emphasize aspects of God’s majesty. The latter category is mentioned referring God as the “Lord of the Throne” (rabb al-ʻarsh), “Lord of the Glorious Throne” (rabb al-ʻarsh al-ʻaẓīm), “Lord of the Noble Throne” (rabb al-ʻarsh al-karīm) and “Owner of the Throne” (dhū al-ʻarsh).124

While interpreting “the Compassionate who is seated on the Throne” (al-raḥmān ʻalā al-ʻarsh istawā), al-Zamakhsharī states that in this verse istawā has been used metonymically (kināya) for God’s sovereignty.126 In the verse 17:42, “If there were other gods with Him, as they assert, they would surely have sought access to the Lord of the Throne” (law kāna ma‘ahu ālihatun kamā yaqūluna idhan la-abtaghaw ilā dhī al-ʻarsh sabīlā), he interprets la abtaghaw (seeking access) in the sense of that they would have demanded His authority, as it happens in this world when kings fight with each other to subdue their opponents and take their thrones. In support of his interpretation he quotes

---

125 Qur’ān, 20:5.
verse 21:22, “Had there been gods apart from God both (the heavens and the earth) would have been despoiled” (law kāna fī-himā ālihatun illā Allāh la-fasadatā).\textsuperscript{127}

In the verse in which the queen of Sheba’s throne is described “She has a throne that is magnificent” (lahā ‘arsh ‘aẓīm), al-Zamakhsharī compares it with God’s Magnificent Throne (rabb al-‘arsh al-‘aẓīm)\textsuperscript{128} and interprets that her throne may be magnificent, but there is a great difference between her throne and God’s Magnificent Throne. Her throne is among the many thrones which other kings possess, but the “description of God’s Magnificent Throne is its grandeur” (waṣf ‘arsh Allāh bi-al-‘aẓm): glorification with reference to all that is created between the heavens and the earth.\textsuperscript{129}

Finally, the following verse says that “Full of power, well-established (in position) with the Lord and Master of the Throne” (dhī quwwatin ‘inda dhī al-‘arsh makīn).\textsuperscript{130} Al-Zamakhsharī interprets this verse with the verses 53:5-6 that “He (Gabriel) is mighty one, possessed of steadfastness” (shadīd al-quwā dhū al-mirratin) who is with the Lord of the Throne. It demonstrates his dignity and power. He is obedient to God and among the close and favorite angels who proceeds with His command and returns to His judgment.\textsuperscript{131}

7. God’s Hand (\textit{yād Allāh})

The following verse describes that “The Jews say: ‘God’s hands are tied.’ May their own hands be tied, and cursed for what they say! Rather, both His hands are widely

\textsuperscript{128} Qur’ān, 27:23, 26.
\textsuperscript{130} Qur’ān, 81:20.
\textsuperscript{131} Al-Zamakhsharī, \textit{al-Kashshāf}, 6:326.
spread and He spends His bounty in any way He pleases.”

Al-Zamakhsharī states that if someone is described that his hands are “tied” (maghlūla) it means that he is a miser and if a person is described that his hands are “extended” (mabsūṭatān), it means that he is generous. Then, he interprets the above verse and states that “tied hand” (ghal al-yad) and “extended hand” (baṣṭ al-yad) are metaphorically “niggardliness” and “generosity” respectively. He quotes verse 17:29 in which God says: “Do not keep your hand tied to your neck and nor stretch it forth to its utmost reach” (wa lā ta‘jāl yadaka maghlūlatan ilā ‘unuqika wa lā tabsūt-hā kull al-baṣṭ). He refutes the allegation against God’s miserliness and quotes that “rather both His hands are widely spread” (bal yadāhu mabsūṭatān) which positively demonstrates His extreme generosity and rejection of niggardliness.

Verse 48:10 states that “Those who swear allegiance to you in fact swear allegiance to God. God’s hand is above their hands.” This verse was revealed in the context of the negotiations between the Prophet Muḥammad’s delegation and the Quraysh of Mecca prior to the treaty of Ḥudaybīyya. When it became uncertain whether the Quraysh treated one of the delegation members well or badly, the Companions of the Prophet pledged to the Prophet by placing their hands upon his hand for an alliance against the Quraysh. Al-Zamakhsharī interprets this verse metaphorically (takhyīl) and states that the Prophet’s hand was above the hands of those who were pledging to him: that was God’s Hand (hiya yad Allāh). And God’s Hand is pure from the limbs of the body and substance and matter, which means that the covenant with the Prophet was like

---

132 Qurʿān, 5:64.
the covenant with God, and there is no difference between both of them.\textsuperscript{134} Similarly, in
the verse “And that the bounty is in the hands of God; He gives it to whoever He pleases”
\textit{(wa anna al-faḍla bi-yad Allāh yuʿīhi man yashā‘)}\textsuperscript{135} al-Zamakhsharī interprets the
Hands of God \textit{(yad Allāh)} figuratively meaning that all the bounties are in His possession
and His disposal \textit{(fī milkihi wa taṣarrufihi)}.\textsuperscript{136}

8. Coming of Lord \textit{(mujiʿ rabb)}

The following two verses mention that “Surely when the earth will be demolished
completely, and your Lord will come together with the angels in row after row” \textit{(kallā
idhā dukkati al-arḍu dakkan dakkā wa jāʿ rabbuka wa al-malaku ṣaffan ṣaffā)}.\textsuperscript{137} Al-
Zamakhsharī poses a question “What is the meaning and basis of God’s coming, His
movement and motion and what is the justification of His direction?” Then he replies
that: “It is a portrayal of His splendor \textit{(ẓuhūr)} and signs of His power \textit{(iqtidār)} and
demonstration of His force \textit{(qahr)} and authority \textit{(sulṭān)}.” He also cites an example that it
is like a king who appears in person, his signs of authority become conspicuously visible
in the presence of the army, ministers and elites who all accompany him. After that he
interprets that the angels will come down from the heavens in the form of rows after
rows, but excludes God and does not even mention Him.\textsuperscript{138}

\textsuperscript{134} Al-Zamakhsharī, \textit{al-Kashshāf}, 5:537-38.
\textsuperscript{135} Qur’an, 57:29.
\textsuperscript{136} Al-Zamakhsharī, \textit{al-Kashshāf}, 6:54-55.
\textsuperscript{137} Qur’an, 89:21-22.
9. Appearing of God (ityān Allāh)

In the verse, “Are they waiting for God to appear in the shadows of clouds with the angels, and the matter to be settled? But all the matters revert to God,” al-Zamakhsharī provides two interpretations. First, “appearing of God” (ityān Allāh) is “His command” (amruhu) and quotes: “That your Lord’s command should come” (yāʾī amr rabbika) not the appearing of God Himself. Second, it is “His punishment” (bāʾsuhu) and al-Zamakhsharī supports this interpretation by quoting: “Our punishment came upon them” (jāʾahum bāʾsunā). He says that it means that God may bring upon them His “punishment” (bāʾs) and “retribution” (naqam) because He is all-Mighty (ʿazīz). Al-Zamakhsharī says that if it is questioned as to why the punishment may come from the clouds, the answer is that one expects “mercy” (raḥma) from the clouds. If the punishment comes from the clouds, the matter becomes “more horrible” (afẓaʿ) and “shocking” (ahwal), because if the “evil” (sharr) comes from a place where one could have never expected, it would have “more grief” (aghamm). Likewise, if the “goodness” (khayr) comes from a place where one could have never expected, it would be “more delightful” (asarr). Therefore, lightning will be the most horrible punishment which comes from the place where one expects the “rain” (ghayth), and rain is a symbol of God’s generosity.142

139 Qurʾān, 2:210.
140 Qurʾān, 16:33.
141 Qurʾān, 39:47.
142 Al-Zamakhsharī, al-Kashshāf, 1:419.

201
10. With (ma'īyyat)

In the following three verses, the Qur'ān mentions that God is with those who are righteous and is hearing and seeing whatever they do openly or secretly.

First verse: “God is verily with those who are pious and perform good deeds” (inna Allāh ma’a al-ladhīna at-taqwaw wa al-ladhīna hum muḥsinūn).\(^{143}\)

Al-Zamakhsharī interprets the word “with” (ma’a) as “friend” (walī) and says that God is a friend of those who avoid sins (huwa walī alladhīna ijtaniibū al-ma’āthī).\(^{144}\)

Second verse: “He (God) said: “Do not fear. Surely I am with you hearing and seeing” (qāla lā takhāfā innanī ma’akumā asma’u wa arā).\(^{145}\)

In this verse, he interprets “I am with you” (ma’akumā) as “your protector” (ḥāfiẓ kumā) and “your helper” (nāṣir-kumā).\(^{146}\)

Third verse: “Have you not seen that God knows all whatever is in the heavens and the earth? No three persons converse secretly but He is the fourth of them, and nor five but He is the sixth of them, nor even less than that or more but He is with them wherever they be. He will then inform them of their deeds on the Day of Judgment. Verily God has knowledge of everything.”\(^{147}\)

Al-Zamakhsharī interprets that “He is with them wherever they be” (huwa ma’ahum aynā mā kānū) that He knows whatever they converse secretly and nothing is hidden from Him, because He is always observing them. However, he adds that God is

\(^{143}\) Qur’ān, 16:128.  
\(^{144}\) Al-Zamakhsharī, al-Kashshāf, 3:490.  
\(^{145}\) Qur’ān, 20:56.  
\(^{146}\) Al-Zamakhsharī, al-Kashshāf, 4:85.  
\(^{147}\) Qur’ān, 58:7.
above “the place” (al-makān) and beyond being perceptible (al-mushāhida), so that there should not be any doubt about God being in a place and perceptible.  

11. Face (wajh)

In the verse: “Everyone upon it (earth) will perish, but the face of your Lord will abide (forever), full of majesty and nobility,” Al-Zamakhsharī interprets “the face of your Lord” (wajh rabbika) as His “essence” (dhāt) and “full of majesty and nobility” (dhū al-jalāl wa al-ikrām) as His “attribute” (ṣifat). He emphasizes that God is beyond comparison and ascribing any human characteristics, following the Muʿtazilite principle of tawḥīd.

12. Conclusion

The first fundamental principle of the Muʿtazilites is the unity of God, which is the most important thesis of their doctrine because it is the source of all other principles. Al-Zamakhsharī not only believes in this principle, but applies it in his interpretation of the Qurʿān. With regard to God’s attributes, al-Zamakhsharī agrees with Wāsil b. ‘Aṭā, who denies the attributes of God such as “knowledge, power, will and life” (al-ʿilm wa-al-qudra wa-al-irāda wa-al-ḥayāt). So far as the createdness of the Qurʿān is concerned, al-Zamakhsharī considers that the Qurʿān is the speech of God and it is created by Him. The Muʿtazilites’ reasoning is that God, identical with His attributes, is

149 Qurʿān, 55:26-27.
151 See al-Shahrastānī, Milal, 1:46.
not subject to change. Therefore, it is impossible that the Qur’ān, in the sense of an attribute, is uncreated, for it is essentially multiple and temporal.

Al-Zamakhsharī emphasizes the absolute uniqueness and transcendence of God and denies His description anthropomorphically in any form, such as direction, place, vision, image, body, face, hand, eye, domain, movement, extinction, change, speaking, sitting, coming or appearing. He is of the opinion that the anthropomorphic verses in the Qur’ān are allegorical or figurative expressions to symbolize God’s attributes and actions. He interprets such verses by the method of ta’wīl or metaphorical interpretation, and elucidates such words according to a secondary or metaphorical meaning found elsewhere in the Qur’ān. It is evident from his interpretation of such verses in the Kashshāf as discussed in the preceding paragraphs.
Chapter 6
Second Principle: Justice (‘adl)

The second fundamental principle of the Mu‘tazilites after the unity of God (al-tawḥīd) is God’s justice (al-‘adl). Even more than ahl al-‘adl wa-al-tawḥīd, they are and prefer to call themselves ahl al-‘adl.¹ According to D. Gimaret,

God is subject… to the same laws which apply to man…This is why, from the Mu‘tazili point, 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.²

The Mu‘tazilites unanimously agree that “the Creator (God) has always been just” (al-bāri’ lam yazal ‘ādilan)³ and “He created humans for their benefit not to harm them” (khalqa li-yanfa‘ahum lā li-yuḍarrahum).⁴ Therefore, all divine acts are good and none of God’s act is bad.

This principle is based upon the Mu‘tazilites’ doctrine of free will (qadar).⁵ They are of the view that human beings have “free choice” (ikhtiyār) and “capability” (istiṭā‘a) before the act, and “power” (qudra) over the act. In other words, “every capability is equally the power of an act and of its opposite” (qudratun ‘alayhi wa-‘alā ḍiddih), and “it

---

¹ Al-Shahrastānī, Milal, 1:43; ‘Abd al-Jabbār, Mughnī, 6:3.
² D. Gimaret, “Mu’tazila,” EI², 783-93.
³ Al-Ash‘arī, Maqālāt, 579.
⁴ Al-Ash‘arī, Maqālāt, 251.
⁵ According to George Hourani, “God knows all good and evil. He wishes and commands only good for men, but He allows them to do evil and to disobey His commands. Man has power to act as well as to know values, and so he is responsible for his just and unjust acts. God rewards the just and punishes the unjust in an everlasting afterlife, and He does so justly because of man’s full responsibility. See George F. Hourani, “Islamic and Non-Islamic Origins of Mu’tazilite Ethical Rationalism,” International Journal of Middle East Studies, 7 (1976), 61.
does not make the act necessary” (wa-hiya ghayr mujibat lil-fi‘l). They deny that God
imposes duties (yukallifa) on a person which is beyond his power (mā lā yaqdīr ʻalayhī).6

Hishām b. al-Ḥakam (d. 179/796)7 lists five elements in the capability (istiṭā‘a) to
act, such as soundness of body, circumstances, duration of time, an instrument, like hand,
hatchet, needle, and the cause (sabab) to perform an act, which usually exists at the time
of the action.8 Similarly, Bishr b. Mu‘tamar (d. 210/825)9 states that capability consists of
sound physical constitution, healthy limbs, and freedom from infirmities. He introduced
the concept of “engendered act” (tawallud)10 – “an act prompted by a cause which is
itself the effect of anoter cause. Thus in the act of opening a door with a key, there is
first voluntary act, then the movement of the hand which turns the key, and lastly that of
the key which turns the tongue of the lock. This last movement is an engendered act for it
does not  emanate directly from a voluntary decision.”11

---

6 Al-Ash‘arī, Maqālāt, 230.
7 Abū Muhammad Hishām b. al-Ḥakam, a client of the tribe of Kinda, was born in Wāsiṭ. He was the most prominent representative Imāmī kalām during the period of Imāms Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq and Mūsā al-Kāẓim. He was among the circles of theologians who participated in disputations in the presence of Yahyā b. Khālid al-Barmakī. Among his disciples were Yūnus b. ʻAbd al-Raḥmān (d. 208/823-4), Muḥammad b. Khalīl al-Sakkāk and al-Faḍl b. Shadhān Nisābūrī (d. ca. 260/874-5). Ibn Nadīm mentions of Hishām wrote twenty-six works, but none is extant. See Ibn al-Nadīm, al-Fihrist, 1:632-33; al-Ash‘arī, Maqālāt, 40-42; al-Khayyāṭ, al-Intiṣār, 81-84; W. Madelung, “Hishām b. al-Ḥakam,” EI², 3:496-98.
10 See al-Ash‘arī, Maqālāt, 401-3; al-Shahrastānī, 1:64; Abū Mansūr al-Baghdādī, al-Farq, 120-21.
The Muʿtazilites agree that a person has power over his good and bad deeds and is also their creator. However, they differ as to whether a man is able to act in the first moment or the second moment. According to Abū al-Hudhayl (d. 226/841), “Man is able to act in the first, and he acts in the first, and the act occurs in the second; because the first moment is the one when he acts, and the second moment is the one when he has acted” (al-insānu gādirun an yafʿala fī al-awwal wa huwa yafʿalu fī al-awwal wa fī al-thānī waqt faʿala). He further states that, “The moment is the division between actions and it extends through the interval from action to action; and with every moment there comes into being an act” (al-waqt huwa al-farq bayna al-aʿmāl wa annahu yuḥdithu maʿa kulli waqtin faʿlun).

According to Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbāʾī (d. 303/915) and Abū Hāshim al-Jubbāʾī (d. 321/933), “Whoever has the power of a thing can equally well do it or not do it” (min ḥaqqi al-gādir ‘alā al-shayʿ an yaṣīḥha an yafʿalahu wa-an lā yafʿalahu). Therefore, God creates in human beings the powers necessary for the fulfillment of acts, which His law imposes upon them. Any form of “obligation to the impossible acts” (taklīf mālā yuṭāq) is contrary to His justice. God is just, and He does not desire evil and does not ordain it for His servants. He has nothing to do with their evil deeds; all human actions result from their free will, because they have power and capability before performing their acts. They will be rewarded for their good deeds and punished for their evil ones.
ʻAbd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025) considers an act (fī ʿl) as an attribute (ṣifa) of an act and defines an act occurring from an agent (fāʿil) capable of exercising power over it (qādir ʿalayhi). He divides acts into two categories: acts that carry no attributes, i.e., they are neither good nor bad and acts that carry an attribute, such as goodness or badness. Neutral acts have no attribute over and above their existence, such as the acts of a person who is unaware (sāhin) or asleep (nāʿīm). He describes the value of an act (zāʿida ʿalā wujūdi-hi) by means of which one necessarily or intuitively knows whether or not the agent of act deserves blame (dhamm). Acts which have attributes are further divided into two categories: good (ḥasan) acts and bad (qabīḥ) acts. The performers of good acts do not deserve any blame while the performers of bad acts deserve blame when they do it deliberately and of their free will, such as lying (kidhb) and injustice (ẓulm) which he defines as undue harm inflicted on others.16

God’s acts fall into the categories of either gracious or obligatory which are intended for the goodness and aimed at assisting and benefitting others and consequently merit praise.17 The gracious acts of God are the act of creation and the act of providing the divine law, while His obligatory acts are those which come as a consequence of His gracious acts. Creation is the most important divine act which made God known to and manifested all His essential qualities. Creation of the world can neither be the act of someone who does not know nor is it useless because God has eternal wisdom. God only does which is “good” (ḥasan), and He is necessarily “exempt from any act which is bad or evil” (munazzah ‘an kull qabīḥ). God is incapable of doing evil, by virtue of the

17 ʻAbd al-Jabbār, Mughnī, 11:58-60, 68.
principle that anyone who recognizes an act as bad necessarily does not commit it.\textsuperscript{18} God does not do any wrong to His people; it is people who do wrong to themselves. The Qur’an reiterates in many places that God is not unjust to His servants and does not wrong anyone even of an atom’s weight.\textsuperscript{19}

God is “wise” (ḥakīm) and not “foolish” (safīh), and He acts for a certain motive, towards a certain end, otherwise His action would be a “vain act” (‘abath).\textsuperscript{20} The only motive, which God desires, is “the good” (salah) for His creatures. All the Mu’tazila agree that “God has created men for their benefit” (khalaqa ‘ibādi li-yanfa’ahum).\textsuperscript{21}

Al-Ash’arī states that there are limits to human free will and its relationship to God’s creative powers. His theory of acquisition (kasb) which was later elaborated and refined by his followers, is a reconciliation of the all-encompassing nature of the divine will with the real responsibility of human beings for actions, and thus to uphold the justice of human beings subject to reward and punishment. According to al-Ash’arī, “all the occurrences are created by God. When it is impossible that the creator does what He does not will, then it is conceivable that there proceeds from other than Him what He does not will, since all this (that is acts of others) are acts of God” (kulli al-muḥdathāt makhlūqāt Allāh ta‘ālā fa idhā istiḥāla an yaf‘al al-bāri ta‘ālā mā lā yurūduhu istiḥāla an yaqa‘ min ghayrihi mā lā yurūduhu idh kāna dhālika ajma‘ af‘ālan li-Allāh ta‘ālā).\textsuperscript{22}

Al-Ash’arī argues for the all-encompassing nature of the divine will on the basis of three propositions. First, His will belongs among the essential divine attributes and therefore, is not subject to any limit. Second, everything that is originated in time is

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{19} Qur‘ān, 4:40; 18:49; 41:46.
\textsuperscript{21} Al-Ash’arī, \textit{Maqālāt}, 250.
\textsuperscript{22} Al-Ash’arī, \textit{al-Luma’}, 25.
\end{footnotesize}
created by God, and He creates nothing without specifically willing it. Third, if something occurs that was not willed by Him, then this entails one of the two invalid conclusions: He is either ignorant of that thing or weak in relation to it, i.e. unable to create it.  

However, God is the true creator and doer of everything. In elaborating his views on temporal origination (hadath), al-Asha‘rī states that the creator and doer of each thing is one who is capable of bringing into existence in a manner wholly in conformity with His will; but human actions are frequently not in conformity with the intention behind them.

Al-Asha‘rī considers human action as being both attributable to them as a result of their free choice, for which they are responsible, and as being the direct creation of God. He states this formulation in terms of acquisition (kasb), i.e. man acquires his own actions, created by God. Acquisition in itself is an act that comes into being by means of originated power. The only requirement for an act to be attributed to a human being is that it should be accompanied by his will and the power to perform it. Thus any act intended by a person is performed in two stages: first, he has will and power exists within him to perform it; second, God brings it about through His will and power. Al-Asha‘rī states that this acquisition by man is simultaneously the act and the creation of God, and likewise ascribes the involuntary movements of man to the creative will of God. However, he distinguishes acquisition from involuntary action in that man is aware of the difference between these two types of motion. Accordingly, the reality of the freedom of human choice (ikhtiyār) is proven by the very fact that human beings are aware that they possess this freedom.  

So, al-Asha‘rī affirms the principle of choice, while identifying it

---

with the freedom of the will, and arguing that it is determined by the all-encompassing nature of the divine will; hence human will and power are dependent upon divine will and creation.

However, the Muʿtazilites have different viewpoints on almost all the issues with the exception of a few. For instance, in case of “grace” (lutf), they have four different opinions; and for “capability” (istaṭāʿa), there are also four views. Whether a man has power over an act at the first moment or at the second moment is also subject to seven contradictory opinions.26 Whenever any question arose, whether it was related to God’s power or human beings’ responsibility, the Muʿtazilites have been constantly debating, reaching no satisfactory answer. Whether the answer is affirmative or negative, in any case, either God’s omnipotence, or humans’ responsibility will be compromised. The Qurʾān maintains a balance between God’s omnipotence and man’s responsibility, but the Muʿtazilites tend to place lesser importance to God’s omnipotence and more emphasis upon the human beings’ responsibility.

In contrast to this, al-Ashʿarī insists on God’s omnipotence; everyting good and evil is willed by God and He creates the acts of men by creating in men the power to do each act. All the dimensions of al-Ashʿarī’s concept of justice are based upon the principle that the standards by which human actions are deemed to be either good or evil cannot be applied to God’s actions.

Al-Zamakhsharī believes in the principle of justice and quotes verse 3:18, “God is witness that there is no god but He and so do the angels and men of knowledge. He is the upholder of justice. There is no god but He, the mighty and all-wise.” His interpretation is

26 Al-Ashʿarī, Maqālāt, 233.
that God Himself, His angels and “people of knowledge” (‘ulū al-‘ilm) testify that there is no God but He and He is upholder of justice. When He is described with His being, His established attributes are His “oneness” (waḥdāniyya) and “justice” (‘adl). Those who establish His oneness and justice with “manifest” (sāṭi’) and “conclusive” (qāṭi’) proofs are the “scholars of justice” (‘ulamā’ al-‘adl).27

1. The Concept of Grace (lutf)

   The term lutf28 means granting of “divine grace,” while its opposite term, khidhlān means “abandoning or withholding of divine grace.” According to Bishr b. al-Mu’tamar (d. 210/825), if God bestows grace (lutf) upon all the human beings they will believe and deserve reward, but if they believe without grace, their reward will be more. However, it is not necessary for God to bestow His grace to all. And it is not necessary for God to do “the best” (al-aṣlaḥ) because there is no limit to goodness within His power; and there is always better. However, God must endow human beings with the capability and power and remove all impediments to belief through invitation and message (by the Prophets).29

   Ja’far b. Ḥarb (d. 236/850) agreed with Bishr and said that if God bestows grace upon the unbelievers they will believe in Him but they will not deserve as much reward as those who believed without the bestowal of grace. However, the majority of Mu’tazilites did not agree with the views of Bishr b. al-Mu’tamar and Ja’far b. Ḥarb.30

---

29 Al-Ash’arī, Maqālāt, 246-47, 573; Al-Shahrastānī, Milal, 1:65.
30 Al-Ash’arī, Maqālāt, 246-47.
Abū ʻAlī al-Jubbā’ī and Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā’ī both are of the view that God neither withhold grace from His creation, nor anything which is “good” (ṣalāḥ) and “best” (aṣlāḥ) for them, because He knows that if they were granted with grace it would lead them to their obedience and repentance. The reason for this is that God is omnipotent, omniscient, generous and wise, who suffers no loss in His treasures by giving and whose possessions are not increased by withholding them. However, Abū ʻAlī al-Jubbā’ī and Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā’ī differ on some issues of the grace. According to Abū ʻAlī, God knows that “if a person believes with bestowal of grace his reward will be less because of less hardship, and if a person believes without bestowal of grace his reward will be more because of more hardship” (law āmana ma’a al-lutf lakāna thawābuhu aqalla li-qillati mushaqquatuhu wa law āmana bi-lā al-lutf lakāna thawābuhu akthara li-kathrati mushaqquatuhu). In this case, it is not appropriate for God to impose an obligation upon him without grace. Similarly, He should not treat him like the one about whom He knows that he will not be obedient except with grace. If God were to impose an obligation on him without grace, He would be making his situation worse. Abū Hāshim disagrees with his father Abū ʻAlī al-Jubbā’ī and in his view it is not befitting for God to impose an obligation on a man without granting him grace. In such a case, man has to make great efforts to achieve belief without grace and therefore, his reward would be greater.

ʻAbd al-Jabbār provides the most systematic treatment of lutf. He states that the basis of lutf is God’s justice (ʻadl) and rationality. He does not differentiate between “the grace” (al-lutf) and “the best” (al-maṣlāḥa). According to him, “the grace and the best are

31 Al-Shahrastānī, Milal, 1:81.
32 Al-Shahrastānī, Milal, 1:83-84.
one and the same and their meanings are what a man chooses between what is obligatory upon him and abstains from evil deeds” (wa ammā al-lutf wa al-maṣlaḥa fa-wāḥid wa ma’nā humā mā yakhtāru al-ma’r’indahu wājib an awyajtanibu ʿindahu qabīḥ an). He states that at the bestowal of grace, a person is more likely to choose to perform what is obligatory upon him and abandon evil deeds.33

‘Abd al-Jabbār argues against Bishr b. al-Mu’tamar and the Baghdādī school, who claim that bestowing “the grace is not obligatory upon God” (al-lutf lā yajib ʿalā Allāh). Their reasoning is that if granting of grace is incumbent upon God, then there will be no sinful person found in this world because of his protection due to God’s grace. However, there are both types of people obedient and non-obedient in this world. It is obvious that grace is not obligatory upon God. ‘Abd al-Jabbār responds that the fact is quite the contrary to that which Bishr claims. There are some people who choose to fulfill God’s commands and avoid the evil deeds. God also knows that there are some people who do the opposite. Therefore, if God grants grace to everyone without any distinction, some of them may not perform God’s commands and do the evil deeds.34 However, he does not address the issue raised by Bishr that God cannot arbitrarily grant His grace to some and withhold it from others.

The majority of the Mu’tazilites believes that God has an obligation to do “the best for people in their religion” (aṣlaḥ lahum fī dīnihim) because it is inconceivable that He does not grant them all what they need to fulfill their obligations when He imposes obligations upon them. According to ‘Abd al-Jabbār, God imposes laws upon people for their advantage to achieve happiness in the form of reward if they follow His

34 ‘Abd al-Jabbār, Sharḥ, 520.
commandments. He does for human beings what is to their greatest advantage (al-\(\text{aṣlah lahum}\)).\(^{35}\) He is responsible to assist them in the fulfillment of His commands because humans are able to perform them with His favor (tafaḍḍul)\(^{36}\).

Al-Ash‘arî’s viewpoint is that God may bestow grace (\(\text{lutf}\)) upon unbelievers in order to inspire belief in them. However, if He refrains from doing so it is not considered miserliness (\(\text{bukhl}\)) on the part of God, because no creature has a claim upon Him. It is therefore not in any way incumbent upon God to admit the believers to paradise or send the unbelievers to hell, apart from the fact that He has informed them that He will do so and He does not lie. He does not lie due to its impossibility vis-à-vis the divine essence: lying contradicts the attribute of veracity (\(\text{ṣidq}\)) by which He has described Himself. Neither can God be called ignorant because it contradicts the fact that He has attributed Himself knowledge.\(^{37}\)

Al-Zamakhsharî uses the concept of \(\text{lutf}\) frequently in his interpretation. He prefers Abû ‘Alî al-Jubbâî’ and Abû Hâshim al-Jubbâî’\’s definition of \(\text{lutf}\) and refers to both of them in his \(\text{tafsîr}\) as \(\text{shaykhayn}\).

According to al-Zamakhsharî, bestowal of “grace” (\(\text{lutf}\)) upon the believers means “guidance” (\(\text{hudā}\)) while “abandoning” (\(\text{khidhlān}\)) of the unbelievers is synonymous to “leading astray” (\(\text{iḍlāl}\)). In the interpretation of “God leads astray whom He wills, and guides whom He pleases, He is all-mighty and all-wise” (\(\text{fa yuḍillu Allāh man yashā‘ wa yahdi man yashā‘ wa huwa al-‘azīz al-ḥakīm}\))\(^{38}\) and “It is He who created you, some of you are unbelievers and some are believers and God perceives what you do” (\(\text{huwa al-}\))

\(^{38}\) Qur‘ān, 14:4.
Al-Zamakhsharī says that these two verses are equivalent in their meanings because God does not lead astray anyone until He knows that he will never believe. Similarly, He does not guide except the one whom He knows that he will believe. *Idlāl* (leading astray) means prevention of grace and *hudā* (guidance) means granting of grace, and it is a metonymy (*kināya*) for unbelief (*kufr*) and belief (*īmān*). “He (God) does not abandon anyone except those who deserve to be abandoned and He does not grant grace except to those who deserve to be granted” (*falā yakhdhul illā ahl al-khidhlān wa lā yalṭaf illā bi ahl al-lutf*).

When God grants grace upon a person and when he deprives him of it is mentioned in the following verse: “We have sent a messenger to every community (saying): “Worship God, and keep away from idol worship. Thus some of them God guided, and some deserved to be led astray” (*wa laqad baʿathnā fī kulli ummatin rasūlan ani ʿabudū Allāh wajtanībū al-ṭāghūt fa minhum man hadā Allāh wa minhum man ḥaqqat alyhi al-ḍalāla*). Al-Zamakhsharī interprets the verse that God knows that a person who is granted grace will be a believer and a person who is abandoned will be an unbeliever because that person is determined to be so and hence no good will come from him.

Al-Zamakhsharī interprets the following three verses in which he uses the concept of grace:

---

39 Qurʾān, 64:2.
41 Qurʾān, 16:36.
First verse: “How could God guide those who disbelieved after they had believed?” (kayfa yahdī Allāhu qawman kafarū ba’da īmānihi).\(^{43}\)

He interprets it as “how can God grant them grace when they do not deserve it? God knows the determination of their disbelief. The proof of the firm disbelief is manifested in their reversion after accepting the belief, witnessing the truth of the Prophet (Muḥammad), and miracles verifying his prophethood.”\(^{44}\)

Second verse: “Those who do not believe in the signs of God are not guided by God. For them is severe punishment” (inna al-ladhīna la yu’minūna bi-ayāt Allāh lā yahdīhim Allāh wa lahum ’adhābun alīm).\(^{45}\)

In his interpretation of this verse he says that since God knows that they will never believe, He does not grant them any grace. They are the people who have been abandoned in this world and there will be severe punishment for them in the hereafter.\(^{46}\)

Third verse: “And We have created for Hell many jinns and human beings. They have hearts but do not understand; and they have eyes but do not see and they have ears but do not listen. They are like cattle, or rather even more misguided. They are people unconcerned” (wa laqd dhara’nā li-jahannam kathīran min al-jinn wa al-ins lahum qulūbun lā yaqfahūna bihā wa lahum a’yūnun lā yubṣirūna bihā wa lahum ādhānun lā yasmaʿūna bihā ’ūlāʾika ka al-anʿām bal hum aḍall ’ūlāʾika hum al-ghāfilūn).\(^{47}\)

He interprets that their hearts have been sealed (due to their disbelief) and God knows that there is no grace for them. They are those whose minds have no perception of the truth (maʿrifat al-ḥaqq), they do not see despite their eyes with discernment what God

\(^{43}\) Qurʿān, 3:86.
\(^{44}\) Al-Zamakhsharī, al-Kashshāf, 1:578.
\(^{45}\) Qurʿān, 16:104.
\(^{46}\) Al-Zamakhsharī, al-Kashshāf, 3:474-75.
\(^{47}\) Qurʿān, 7:179.
has created; they do not hear despite their hearing the message of God with contemplation, as if their minds cannot comprehend, their eyes cannot perceive and their ears cannot grasp. The severity of their obstinacy (shidda shakā `imihim) in their disbelief has made their deeds like the ones of the people of the Fire. They are like cattle in their understanding, observation and comprehension and more misguided than them.48

2. The Best (aṣlaḥ)

Most of the Mu‘tazilites agree that God created human beings “for their own good not to harm them” (li-yanfa‘ahum lā li-yuḍarrahum).49 Similarly, it is in their best interest that He imposed obligations upon them so that by fulfilling them they may achieve the sublime form of happiness which is the reward from God for the endurance of pain.50 Abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm b. Sayyār al-Nazzām (d. ca. 226/845) was the first who introduced the concept of “best” (ṣalaḥ). He considers that since “evil is an essential quality of the evil” (al-qabīḥ ṣifa dhātia lil-qabīḥ), therefore, the doing of it cannot be ascribed to God, and the possibility of God’s doing evil is also evil hence it cannot be attributed to God who is just. “God has power to do what He knows to be is good for his servants, but no power to do in this world what is not good for them” (innamā yaqdiru ʿalā mā ya‘lam anna fī-hi salāḥan ʿalā an yafʿal bi-ʿibādihi fī al-dunyā mā laysa fī-hi salāḥa-hum). According to him, only what God has created and brought into existence is within His power. If God knew of anything better or more perfect that was within His power to create like the order, arrangement and goodness of

48 Al-Zamakhsharī, al-Kashshaf, 2:533-34.
49 Al-Ash‘arī, Maqalāt, 251.
things, He would have created it.\textsuperscript{51} Abū al-Hudhayl was also of the opinion that God has created His servants for their benefit (\textit{li-manfi‘atihim}). Had it not been the reason then there was no need to create them because if He had created them neither for benefit nor for harm then it is frivolous (\textit{‘abath}).\textsuperscript{52}

Nu‘mān al-Mufīd is of the opinion that God is obliged to do for the people that which is to their greatest benefit both “in their religion and worldly life” (\textit{fī dīnīhim wa-dunyāhum}), a principle applying to the rich as well as the poor, to the healthy as well as to the sick.\textsuperscript{53}

Abū `Alī al-Jubbā‘ī and Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā‘ī were of the view that “the best is not the most pleasant” (\textit{laysa al-aṣlaḥ huwa al-aladhdh}) but it is most rewarding in the hereafter and most appropriate in this world even though it may be painful and disgusting.\textsuperscript{54}

Al-Zamakhsharī defending his Mu‘tazilite views, maintains that God does for His servants what is “the best” (\textit{aṣlaḥ}). His interpretation of the following four verses attests it.

First verse: “He (God) cannot be questioned about what He does, but they will be questioned” (\textit{lā yus‘alu ‘ammā yaf‘l wa hum yus‘alīn}).\textsuperscript{55}

Al-Zamakhsarī interprets that customarily the kings and the powerful persons are not questioned about their activities and affairs with regard to the management and administration of their kingdoms and possessions due to fear and grandeur despite their mistakes and corruption. “The King of kings and the Lord of the lords” (\textit{malik al-mulūk

\textsuperscript{51} Al-Shahrastānī, \textit{Milal}, 1:54.  
\textsuperscript{52} Al-Ash‘arī, \textit{Maqālāt}, 252.  
\textsuperscript{53} Al-Mufīd, \textit{Awā’il al-maqlāt}, 25-26.  
\textsuperscript{54} Al-Shahrastānī, \textit{Milal}, 1:81.  
\textsuperscript{55} Qur‘ān, 21:23.
wa-rabb al-arba’āb) who is their creator and provider is the one who is worthier and more entitled not to be questioned about His activities. He does everything with wisdom and neither any mistake nor any evil can occur from Him. But those who belong to Him under His subjugation and prone to making errors have been created by Him; they are to be questioned for all the activities they perform. He concludes that God’s activities are based on His wisdom and for the benefit of human beings.\(^{56}\)

Second verse: “Of all things there We have treasures with Us, send it down in a well-known proportion (wa in min shay’ illā ‘indanā khazā’īnuhu wa mā nunazziluhu illā bi-qadarin ma‘lūm).\(^{57}\)

He says that “treasures” (khazā’in) has been used figuratively and it means that everything which is beneficial to the people is in the power of God including “creation” (ījād), “origination” (takwīn) and benefaction (in’ām). He grants to the people according to the proportion which He knows is “good for him” (maṣlaḥa lahu) and He distributes His treasures according to one’s capacity and capability.\(^{58}\)

Third verse: “And do not speak to Me concerning those who are wrong-doers, for they will certainly be drowned” (wa lā tukhāṭibnī fī al-ladhina ẓalamū innahum mughraqūn).\(^{59}\)

Al-Zamakhsharī states that this verse relates to Noah’s people who did not accept his message and when it became clear that they were evil-doers, God in His wisdom commanded them to be drowned. Their drowning was good in the interest of society because leaving them unpunished was to spread more corruption in the society. It was


\(^{57}\) Qur‘ān, 15:21.


\(^{59}\) Qur‘ān, 23:27.
also good for other people to be warned and learn a lesson that if they did not follow the commands of God their end would be the same. To deal with the wrong-doings of the unbelievers in the form of their punishment and creating an environment for the believers was necessary for the goodness of the people.\textsuperscript{60}

Fourth verse: “To God leads the right path, though some deviate” (\textit{wa ʿalā Allāhi qaṣdu al-sabīl wa minhā jāʿir}).\textsuperscript{61}

Al-Zamakhsharī explains that the direction of the way leading His servants to the right path and truth is the purpose of God. He clarifies it by citing that “It is indeed for Us to show the guidance” (\textit{inna ʿalaynā lal-hudā}).\textsuperscript{62}

3. \textbf{Going Astray (iḍlāl)}

The following two verses describe a conversation of hypocrites who say: “When they meet the believers they say: ‘We believe;’ but when they are alone with their evil ones they say: ‘We are really with you; we were merely joking.’” But God turns the joke against them leaving them to wander blindly in their wickedness.\textsuperscript{63}

Al-Zamakhsharī interprets these verses by asking the question what is the justification of God helping them, even though their evil friends would like to help them to continue in error which is an act of Satan? Then, he gives three reasons. First, God prevents His “graces” (alṭāf) which are conferred upon the believers. Their “abandonment” (khidhlān) is due to their unbelief and insistence upon it. The darkness increases in their hearts, whereas the believers’ hearts become “wide open” (\textit{inshīrāh})

\textsuperscript{61} Qurʾān, 16:9.
\textsuperscript{63} Qurʾān, 2:14-15.
and “light” (nūr). Second, it can be due to the prevention of constraint” (al-qasr wa al-iljā’).

Third, in fact it is an act of Satan but ascribed to God because He has given Satan authority to lead the people astray.

Al-Zamakhsharī interprets the verses: “Whomsoever God wants to guide He opens wide his heart to Islam,” that if God wills He gifts His grace (lutf) and he becomes interested in Islam and his soul feels tranquility and likes to accept it. On the other hand, “Whomsoever He wants to lead astray, He makes his heart narrow and constricted,” al-Zamakhsharī says that God abandons (yakhdhil) and leaves him and no grace is awarded to him. Since he has no grace from God, his heart becomes so hardened that he refuses to accept the truth and “belief” (īmān) does not enter into his heart. He interprets “This is the straight path of your Lord,” (hādhā širāt rabbika mustaqimā) by explaining that this path which is upright and just has been chosen by wisdom (ḥikma). In his interpretation, al-Zamakhsharī does not attribute “guidance” (hudā) and “leading astray” (dalāla) to God since it goes against the concept of human freedom. In order to be in accordance with the Mu’tazilites principles, he uses the words “grace” (lutf) and

---

64 The concept of “constraint” (al-qasr wa al-iljā’) is intended to solve the issue of the discrepancy between what God wills people to do and what they actually do. ‘Abd al-Jabbār distinguishes between what God wills of people “by way of constraint and force” (‘alā jiṭat al-iljā’ wa-al-ikrāh) and what He wills that they should do as a result of their own choice, as voluntary acts of obedience (‘alā jiṭat al-ikhtiyār wa-al-taw’). Actions (“objects of power” maqdūr) of the first type must necessarily come into being when He puts the constraint (iljā’) into effect. But if voluntary actions of the kind He wills the responsible persons (mukallafūn) to perform, are not performed this does not necessitate any weakness or defect on His part. Neither do voluntary actions which come about against His will infringe His omnipotence. This is so because people’s voluntary actions are their exclusive objects of power and cannot reasonably be within God’s power (lā yaṣiḥḥ an yakūn maqdūran lahu). See Michael Schwarz, “Some Notes on the Notion of iljā’ (Constraint) in Mu’tazila Kalām,” Israel Oriental Studies, 11 (1972): 413-27; ‘Abd al-Jabbār, Mughnī, 6:II:257, 268.

65 When Satan refused to bow down to Adam out of pride, God expelled him from the Paradise. He requested God to give him time until the Day of Resurrection. God granted his request. Satan said:”My Lord, as You have condemned me, I shall embellish for people (their evil deeds) on the earth and lead them astray.” See Qurʻān, 15:32-40; al-Zamakhsharī, al-Kashshāf, 1:179-90.

“abandonment” (khidhlān) instead of “guidance” and “leading astray” respectively. He maintains that “faith” (īmān) is a man’s acquisition, not a divine gift.⁶⁷

In the verse where it is mentioned that if God wishes someone to leave in trial, nothing can be done to save him from God, and for him there is disgrace in this world and severe punishment in the hereafter,⁶⁸ is addressed to the Prophet Muḥammad that he should not grieve on account of those people who hasten to unbelief. They claim that they believe while they do not believe in their hearts. God states that whomsoever He wills to leave in trial, nothing can be done to save him. Al-Zamakhsharī maintains that God does not will anyone to be an unbeliever; rather He wills him to be a believer. He interprets that he is an unbeliever as a result of his own deeds and responsible for it. He says that he became an unbeliever due to God’s “trial” (fitna) and His “abandonment” (khidhlān) of him. God did not directly make him an unbeliever.⁶⁹

Al-Zamakhsharī states that the verse: “Whoever is guided by God follows the right path; and he whom He leads astray, you will not find friend to direct him,”⁷⁰ relates to the “People of the Cave” (aṣḥāb al-kahf) who are being praised by God for the steadfastness in their belief and submission to Him. God granted them His grace and led them to the right path and to the attainment of resplendent nobility (al-karāma al-saniyya) as well as the privilege of being mentioned in the splendid verse (al-ayā al-‘azīma). He interprets the verse that whosoever adopts the path of “the rightly guided” (al-muhtadiyyīn al-rāshidīn) people, he will achieve “success” (falāḥ) and “bliss”

---

⁶⁷ Al-Zamakhsharī, al-Kashshāf, 2:393-95.
⁶⁸ Qur’ān, 5:41.
⁷⁰ Qur’ān, 18:17.
(sa‘āda). On the contrary, a person who is abandoned by God would not find anyone who could guide him to the right path.\textsuperscript{71}

Al-Zamakhsharī’s interpretation of the verse that if God had pleased He would have made you a single nation, but He leads astray whom He wills, and guides whom He pleases,\textsuperscript{72} is that if God wished He could have made all the people one nation by force (qasr). However, God did not will to force the people to believe in Him even though He could have done so, because He preferred to endow the human beings with free will so that they could choose themselves by their own intellect whether they want to be believers or not. He states that God grants His grace to those people whom He already knows will choose belief (īmān). On the other hand, He abandons those people whom He already knows will choose the unbelief (kufr). For al-Zamakhsharī, belief or unbelief is not pre-ordained rather it is the peoples’ own choice. Al-Zamakhsharī quotes the last words of the verse that “You will surely be questioned concerning that which you used to do,” as a proof of human responsibility. He mentions that if God had forced people to believe or disbelieve, then there is no rationale for questioning the people about their deeds.\textsuperscript{73}

Al-Zamakhsharī’s interpretation of the verse: “Our Lord, do not make our hearts swerve after You have guided us and bestow on us Your mercy” (rabbanā lā tuzigh qulubanā ba‘da idh hadaytanā wa hab lanā min ladunka raḥma)\textsuperscript{74} is that “Our Lord, do not test us with trials in which our hearts may deviate from the truth and guide us to your

\textsuperscript{72} Qur‘ān, 16:93.
\textsuperscript{73} Al-Zamakhsharī, \textit{al-Kashshāf}, 3:470.
\textsuperscript{74} Qur‘ān, 3:8.
religion and do not withhold the favors which have been bestowed upon us.”  

It is clear from his interpretation that he emphasizes free human will. The deviation of the heart from the truth which is an evil thing is not being attributed to God because He is not directly responsible for unbelief.

4. Sealing of the Hearts (*khatm al-qulūb*)

The sealing of the heart is one of the main issues in the Mu’tazilite theology, since it is against the principle of justice (‘adl). The following verse states that: “God has sealed their hearts and their hearing, and on their sight is a veil.”

Al-Zamakhsharī interprets “seal” (*khatm*) and “conceal” (*katm*) belong to the same category of words which are used in conjunction with each other. For instance, when a contract or deed is finalized it is sealed with a “signet” (*khātim*) to conceal and cover so that one may not have access to its contents. He states that neither “seal” (*khatm*) nor “cover” (*taghshia*) has been used in a literal sense but “metaphorically” (*majāzan*). He further elaborates that linking of “sealing their hearts” to God is “evil” (*qabīḥ*) and God is above all doing any evil act. He quotes the following verses in support of his interpretation: “I (God) am not unjust to My servants” (*wa mā anā bi-ẓallāmin lil-‘abīd*) “We never do wrong to people, but they do wrong to themselves” (*wa mā zalamnā hum wa lākin kānū hum al-zālimīn*) and “God never enjoins indecency” (*inna Allāh lā ya’mur bil-fahšā*).

---

76 Qur’ān, 2:7.  
77 Qur’ān, 50:29.  
78 Qur’ān, 43:76.  

225
Al-Zamakhsharī gives the following reasons in his interpretation of this verse. First, it is due to the unbelievers’ persistence in denying the truth that God informs them that their hearts have been sealed. The seal is a consequence of the unbelievers’ deeds and it is not pre-ordained. Second, seal should be interpreted metaphorically, since their hearts are empty of intelligence (fiṭan) like the hearts of the animals. God does not want to prevent them from believing or to force them not to believe because He is above all these things. Third, in a real sense, Satan is the one who seals the hearts of the unbelievers. God has ascribed the seal to Himself because He is the one who empowered Satan or the unbelievers to do so. Fourth, since there is no possibility of them being believers except by the force and the constraint (al-qasr wa al-iljā’), God expressed their “impossibility” with “khatm” due to persistence in their disbelief. Fifth, there is a possible meaning which involves an ironic response. The unbelievers say sarcastically that, “Our hearts are veiled from what you call us to, and in our ears is heaviness. Between us and you there is a veil. So act (your way), we are acting (ours).”

Similarly, God responds them ironically that, “The unbelievers among the ‘people of the Book’ and the polytheists would never desist (from false beliefs) until the clear proof come to them.”

What is the nature of Satan’s power upon the human beings and to what extent can he lead them astray? Al-Zamakhsharī answers this question in his interpretation of the verse “When the issue has been settled, Satan shall say: ‘Surely, God made you a promise of truth and I made you a promise, but did not keep it. I had no power over you except to call you, and you responded to my call. So do not blame me, but blame

80 Qur’ān, 41:5.
yourselves. I cannot help you nor can you help me. I deny your having associated me earlier (with God)."\textsuperscript{82} His argument is that a man chooses either “mischief” (shaqāwa) or “felicity” (saʿāda) and gets it. There is neither any role of God except “enabling” (tamkīn) him, nor of Satan except embellishment (tazʿīn) of evil deeds. If the matter would be as the Mujbirites\textsuperscript{83} claim, Satan would say: “Do not blame me and not yourself because God decreed upon you the unbelief and He forcibly imposed it.”\textsuperscript{84}

5. God does not Will any Evil but Good (\textit{anna Allāh lā yurīd sharr bal yurīd al-khayr})

The Muʿtazilites believe that God does not will any evil and does not command it for His creation.\textsuperscript{85} Al-Zamakhsharī’s interpretation of the following eight verses indicates that he follows the Muʿtazilite doctrine.

First verse: When your Lord said to the angels: “I shall make a vicegerent on the earth,” they said: “Will you place one therein who would create disorder and shed blood, while we proclaim Your praise and glorify Your sanctity?” He said: “I know what you do not know.”\textsuperscript{86}

Al-Zamakhsharī’s interpretation of “Will you place one therein who would create disorder” (\textit{atajʿalu fī-hā man yufsidu fī-hā}) is that God will send human beings instead of

\textsuperscript{82} Qurʾān, 14:22.
\textsuperscript{83} The Mujbirites are those who hold the doctrine of \textit{jabr} (compulsion), meaning that man does not really act but only God. The Muʿtazilites applied it, usually in the form of Mujbirites to the Traditionists. Al-Zamakhsharī oftenly uses it in his exegesis of \textit{al-Kashshāf} against his adversaries. See Montgomery Watt, “DJabriyya or Mudjbira”, \textit{EI2}, 2:365.
\textsuperscript{84} Al-Zamakhsharī, \textit{al-Kashshāf}, 3:374-75.
\textsuperscript{85} According to al-Ashʿarī, since everything comes into being through God’s will, therefore human actions, good or evil, also emanate from His will. See al-Ashʿarī, \textit{al-Lumaʿ}, 24-31; al-Ashʿarī, \textit{al-Ibāna}, 7-8, 46-52.
\textsuperscript{86} Qurʾān, 2:30.
angels who will commit sins, but He does not do anything except which is good and He wills only the good.\(^{87}\)

Second verse: “O God, Master of the Kingdom, You give the kingdom to whom You please and You take away the kingdom (power) from whom You will. You honor whom You please and humble whom You please. All goodness is in Your hand. Indeed, You have the power over all things.”\(^ {88}\)

He interprets that the goodness (\textit{al-khayr}) is that the believers are driven towards good things and whosoever rejects them is an unbeliever. All the goodness is in His authority and He gives it to His friends against the will of His enemies. All the acts of God whether beneficial or harmful originate from His wisdom (\textit{ḥikma}) and goodness (\textit{maṣlaḥ}) and all the things He does are for the betterment of the people.\(^ {89}\)

Third verse: “And when We desire to destroy a town We command its people of luxury, but as they transgress therein Our sentence against them is pronounced, and We destroy them utterly.”\(^ {90}\)

Al-Zamakhsharī interprets “We command” (\textit{amarnā}) in figurative sense. He says that the people transgressed despite their being granted benefaction and kindness so that they may become good and grateful, but they indulged in sinfulness and moral depravity. When they became transgressors they were destroyed completely because of their transgression.\(^ {91}\)

\(^{88}\) Qur‘ān, 3:26.
\(^{89}\) Al-Zamakhsharī, \textit{al-Kashāf}, 1:542-44.
\(^{90}\) Qur‘ān, 17:16.
Fourth verse: “O mankind, worship your Lord who created you, as well as those before you, so that you may become righteous.”

Al-Zamakhsharī interprets “Who created you, as well as those before you, so that you may become righteous” (al-ladhī khalaqakum wa-al-ladhīna min qablikum la’allakum tattaqūn) that it does not mean that the believers should be righteous only in the hope of God. “Perhaps” (la’lā) in this verse has been used figuratively not in reality because God created human beings for the worship and performing of obligations imposed upon them. He provided them with intelligence, desires and guidance and bestowed upon them free choice. He expects from them righteousness, but they are free to make a choice between obedience and sinfulness.

Fifth verse: “And each sign that We showed them was greater than the other. Then We seized them with punishment so that they might turn back in repentance.”

Al-Zamakhsharī says that “they might turn back in repentance” (la’llahum yarji‘ūn) means that they may return from disbelief to belief. God does not will to force them rather it is a choice of the people to adopt either belief or unbelief.

Sixth verse: He (Satan) said: “My Lord, since You have misguided me I will make the earth attractive to them and lead them all astray.”

Al-Zamakhsharī says that in this verse: “My Lord, since You have misguided me” (rabbi bi-mā aghwaytanī) has been referred to God but it is not what it means in the real sense, rather it has been used figuratively. When God commanded Satan to bow down

---

92 Qur’ān, 2:21.
96 Qur’ān, 15:39.
before Adam he became proud and arrogant, whereas God wanted to reward him if he
had chosen humility and obedience.\textsuperscript{97}

Seventh verse: Satan said: “Since You led me astray, I shall lie in wait for them
along Your straight path.”\textsuperscript{98}

He interprets that “Since You led me astray” (\textit{fa-bi-mā aghwaytanī}) has been used
figuratively by referring it to God. God is only the “causer” (\textit{musabbib}) not the doer
(\textit{fā’il}).\textsuperscript{99}

Eighth verse: When they commit an indecency, they say: “We found our fathers
doing it, and God commanded us to do the same.” Say: “God does not command
indecency. Do you attribute to God what you do not know?”\textsuperscript{100}

Al-Zamakhsharī defines “indecency” (\textit{fāḥisha}) as the one which is repugnant
among the sins. He interprets the verse as those who commit indecencies justify them by
saying that their forefathers used to do it because God commanded it and they are
following them. Both of them, i.e. they and their forefathers, are false in their allegation
and fabricating lies against God. God is free from ugly things (\textit{qabīḥ}) and He does not
command His servants to perform indecencies.\textsuperscript{101}

6. Conclusion

The Mu‘tazilites called themselves “people of the justice and the unity” (\textit{ahl al-
‘adl wa al-tawhīd}), and emphasized God’s justice and His goodness towards human

\textsuperscript{97} Al-Zamakhsharī, \textit{al-Kashfī}, 3:405-7.
\textsuperscript{98} Qur’ān, 7:16.
\textsuperscript{100} Qur’ān, 7:28.
beings. Al-Zamakhsharī states that God is just and desires good and His inherent justice prevents Him from inflicting any harm or injustice to the people. It is due to people’s own good or bad deeds that their destiny is decided by God. The Qur’ān exhorts people repeatedly to repent and turn away from evil deeds and thus work for their own salvation. He quotes from the Qur’ān that “those who fulfill their covenant with God” (alladhīna yūfūna bi ʻahdi Allāhi), persevere in seeking the way of their Lord, remain steadfast in prayers and ward off evil with good (yadraʿūna bi al-ḥasanāti al-sayyīʿāt), for them is the recompense of paradise. While “those who break their covenant with God” (alladhīna yandaqūna bi ʻahdi Allāhi), and spread corruption on the earth (yufsidūna fī al-ard), for them is an evil abode.102

In order to avoid attributing of evil to God, al-Zamakhsharī maintains that “God does not burden a soul beyond its capacity.”103 His view is based on the Qur’ānic verse that God is not unjust to His servants.104 For al-Zamakhsharī, God’s praising Himself that He could not do evil to His servants, would have no sense if He imposed burden on a soul beyond his capacity. In addition, God is just and “enjoins justice” (yāʾmuru bi al-ʿadl),105 therefore, “He would impose upon them which is really below their capacity” (fa jaʿala mā faraḍahu ʿalayhim wāqiʿan taḥta taqatahum).106

104 Qur’ān, 50:29.
105 Qur’ān, 16:90.
Chapter 7

Third Principle: The Promise and the Threat (al-waʻd wa al-waʻīd)
Fourth Principle: The Intermediate Position between Belief and Unbelief (al-manzila bayna al-manzilatayn)

In this section I will combine the Mu‘tazilites’ third principle of “the promise and the threat” (al-waʻd wa al-waʻīd) and the fourth principle of “the intermediate position between belief and unbelief” (al-manzila bayna al-manzilatayn) because there is strong relationship and firm link between them. These two principles are based upon their concepts of “belief” (īmān) and God’s justice (‘adl al-Allāh). First, I will discuss the concept of “belief” (īmān) and then God’s justice (‘adl al-Allāh).

1. The Concept of Belief (īmān)

Jahm b. Ṣafwān was probably was the first person who defined the concept of belief (īmān). According to him, “Belief is merely the knowledge of God, and unbelief is merely the ignorance of Him” (al-īmān huwa al-ma‘rifa bi-Allāh faqaṭ wa al-kufr huwa al-jahl bihi faqaṭ). He further states that “Unbelief is nothing but ignorance and there is no unbeliever except one who is ignorant of God” (lā kufr illā al-jahl wa lā kāfir illā jāhil bi Allāh).

Abū Ḥanīfa3 says that: “Belief is the knowledge and the acknowledgement of God (al-ma‘rifa bi-Allāh wa al-iqrār bi-Allāh) and the knowledge and the acknowledgement

---

1 Al-Ash‘arī, Maqālāt, 279.
2 Al-Ash‘arī, Maqālāt, 477.
3 Abū Ḥanīfa al-Nu‘mān b. Thābit, theologian, renowned Kufan jurist and the eponym of the Ḥanafite school was born in 80/699 in Kufa. He is called by his followers as Imām al-‘azam (the greatest imām) and Sirāj al-‘imma (lamp of the imāms). He lived in Kufa and earned his livelihood as a manufacturer and merchant of khazz, a silk fabric. In theology, he was influenced by ‘Āmir al-Sha‘bī (d. ca. 104/722), a Kufan traditionist and jurist. In addition to al-Sha‘bī, he studied with Nāfi‘ (d. ca. 117/735), a mawlá of Ibn ‘Umar; ‘Aṭa b. Abī Rabāḥ (d. ca. 114/732), a leading Meccan jurist; and Rabi‘a b. Abī al-Raḥmān (d. ca.
of the messenger of God and of all that has arrived from God in its entirety, without
explanation (al-ma‘rika bi-al-rasūl wa al-iqrār bi-mā jā‘a min ‘indi Allāh bi-al-jumla
dūna al-tafsīr).”\(^4\) Al-Ash’ārī mentions that “He (Abū Ḥanīfa) considered that belief is not
divisible and it neither increases nor decreases and that people do not excel one another
in belief (za‘ama inna al-īmān lā yataba’ad wa lā yazīd wa lā yانمس wa la yatafaḍāl al-
nās fihi).”\(^5\)

In the letter to ‘Uthmān al-Battī (d. 143/760), Abū Ḥanīfa argues explicitly
against the Mu’tazilite principle of “the intermediate position between belief and

\(^{136}/753\), a Medinese authority. In jurisprudence, he attended the circle of the Kufan jurist Ḥammād b. Abī
Sulaymān (d. 120/737) who taught fiqh. After Ḥammād’s death, Abū Ḥanīfa became the leader of the circle and
the foremost authority on law in Kufa and the main representative of the Kufan school of law. For the
doctrines that he received from Ḥammād, the main sources are the Āthār of Abu Yūsuf and the Āthār of al-
Shaybānī. Abū Ḥanīfa did not himself compose any works on religious law but discussed his opinions with
and dictated them to his disciples. Several theological treatises are attributed to Abū Ḥanīfa: Risāla ilā
‘Uthmān al-Battī, al-Fiqh al-akbar, Kitāb al-‘Ālim wa al-muta‘allim, and Waṣiyyat Abī Ḥanīfa. Of these, only
Risāla is regarded as authentic. In theology, Abū Ḥanīfa’s disciples included Abū Muṭi’ al-Ḥakam b.
‘Abd Allāh b. Maslama al-Balkhī (d. 199/814), and Abū Muqāṭil Ḥafṣ b. Salm al-Samarqandī (d. 208/823),
who introduced Abū Ḥanīfa’s teachings to their homeland of Khurāsān, where Ḥanafism became
predominant. In jurisprudence, his disciples included Zufar b. al-Hudhayl b. Qays al-‘Anbarī (d. 158/775),
Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb b. Ibrāhīm al-Ansārī al-Kufī (d. 182/798), and Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan
al-Shaybānī (d. 189/805). Towards the end of the Umayyad period, Abū Ḥanīfa was flogged after refusing to
accept the position of qāḍī of Kufa offered by Yūsuf b. ‘Umar b. Hubayra, governor of Iraq (129/32746-
49). In 130/747, he left for Mecca and stayed there. During the ‘Abbāsid rule, the second caliph al-
Maṣūr (r. 136/587/754-75) summoned Abū Ḥanīfa to Baghdad to appoint him a qāḍī, which he refused and
was imprisoned. It is not clear whether he died in prison or after his release in the year 150/767. Al-Ḥasan
b. ‘Umāra al-Bajajī offered his funeral prayers and he was buried in the Khayzurān cemetery in Baghdad.
According to another report caliph Maṣūr offered the funeral prayers. Abū Ḥanīfa has been both praised
and criticized very strongly. In hagiographies composed by the Ḥanafites such as Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-
Saymārī (d. 436/1045), al-Muwaqqaf b. Ahmad al-Makki (d. 568/1172), and Ḥāfiz al-Dīn b. Muḥammad al-
Kardarī (d. 827/1424), he is portrayed as a man of utmost piety and virtues. He was criticized as the leader of the
ahl ar-rā’y and a weak transmitter of ḥadīths. He was accused as being Murji’ite, and holding the
doctrine of the created Qur’ān. His theology and jurisprudence have been attacked. He was denounced as a
secret unbeliever (zindiq), and was accused of infidelity (kufr). See Ibn Sa’d, Ṭabaqāt, 8:489; Ibn al-
Nadīm, al-Fihrist, 2:15-17; al-Sam‘ānī, al-Anṣāb, 3:40-41; Jamāl al-Dīn Abū al-Hajāj Yūsuf al-Mizzi,
5:594; Ibn Khallikān, Wafayāt al-aḥān, 5:405-5; Dhaḥabī, Ṭadḥkirat al-Haffāẓ, 1:168-69; Dhaḥabī,
al-Muwaqqaf b. Ahmad al-Makki and Ḥāfiz al-Dīn b. Muḥammad al-Kardarī, Manāqib Abī Ḥanīfa (Beirut:
Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 1981); Mu’allif al-majhūl, al-Uṣūn wa al-ḥadādā iq f ikh bīr al-ḥaqiq, ed. M.J. de
Geoe (Baghdad: Maktabat al-Muthanna, 1964 and Brill, 1871), 260-61; Wensinck, Muslim Creed, 102-


\(^5\) Al-Ash’ārī, Maqālāt, 139.
unbelief” (al-manzila bayna al- manzilatayn), and distinguishes the “transgressor” (fāsiq) from both the “believer” (mu’min) and the “unbeliever” (kāfir). According to him, the “name belief and its sacrosanctity” (ism al-īmān wa ḥurmatuhu) cannot be taken away from a “believer” (mu’min) who commits a sin because it is connected with this name. For Abū Ḥanīfa, “belief” (īmān) means “knowledge” (ma’rifā), “acknowledgement” (iqrār), and “assent” (taṣdīq).6

Abū Muqātil Ḥafṣ b. Salm al-Samarqandī (d. 208/823), one of Abū Ḥanīfa’s disciples, does not distinguish between various terminologies such as “assent” (taṣdīq), “knowledge” (ma’rifā), “conviction” (yaqīn), “acknowledgement” (iqrār), and “submission” (islām) used for “belief” (īmān) and considers them as synonymous: “These are different names, which have one and the same meaning” (inna hādhihi asmā’ mukhtalifa wa ma’nāhā wāḥid).7

Majority of the Muʿtazilites differ in their definition of belief (īmān) and there are six opinions in this matter. First, some of them say that belief consists of all the acts of obedience: “obligatory” (fard) as well as “supererogatory” (nafīl), and sins fall into two categories: “major or grave sins” (kabā’ir) and “minor or petty offences” (saghā’ir). Second, Hishām al-Fuwaṭī says that belief is an aggregation of all the acts of obedience, obligatory and supererogatory. Third, according to ‘Abbād b. Sulaymān, belief comprises God’s commandments which include obligatory acts and what He desires to be performed as supererogatory acts. Fourth, in Ibrāhīm al-Nazzām’s view, belief is to avoid grave sins; the grave sins are those for which punishment has been prescribed by God.

Fifth, some are of the viewpoint that belief is to avoid that for which there is threat of punishment (wa ‘īd) from God. So far as the minor offences are concerned they would be forgiven if major sins are avoided. Sixth, Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbā‘ī considers that belief in God is all that He has made obligatory upon His servants, and supererogatory acts are not part of the belief.⁸

Al-Ash‘arī’s defines faith as affirmation of God’s oneness. “To believe is to assent in the mind; it is the believer’s belief in the truthfulness of the one in whom he believes” (al-īmān huwa al-taṣdīq bi-al-qalbi wa huwa i’tiqād al-mu’taqid ṣidqa man yu’minu bihi).⁹ ‘Abb al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī mentions that “Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī stated that belief is an assent to God and His messengers (peace be upon them) in their statements and this assent is valid only through knowledge; disbelief in his opinion is denial” (fa qāla abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī inna al-īmān huwa taṣdīq li-Allāh wa li-rusulihi ‘alayhum al-salām fī akhbārihim wa la yakūna hadhā al-taṣdīq ṣaḥīḥan illā bi-ma’rifatihi wa al-kufr ‘indahu huwa al-takdhīb).¹⁰ For al-Ash‘arī, belief comes from the heart and only verbal affirmation but denial by the heart is not faith (īmān).¹¹

Al-Zamakhsharī’s definition of belief is reflected in his interpretation of the following six verses.

First verse: “Who believe in the Unknown and perform prayers, and spend out of what We have provided them” (al-ladhīna yu’minūna bi al-ghaybi wa yuqīmūn al-ṣalāt wa mimmā razaqna hum yunfiqūn).¹²

⁸ Al-Ash‘arī, Maqālāt, 266-70.
⁹ Ibn Fūrāk, Mujarrad, 16, 150; Al-Ash‘arī, Luma‘, 75.
¹⁰ Abū Maṣṣūr al-Baghdādī, Uṣūl al-dīn, 248.
¹¹ Ibn Fūrāk, Mujarrad, 151.
¹² Qur‘ān, 2:3.
Al-Zamakhsharī says that, “belief” (īmān) consists of performing “righteous deeds” (fiʿl al-ḥasanāt), avoiding “bad deeds” (tarak al-sayyiʿāt), especially believing in the unknown (takhṣīṣihā lil-īmān bi-al-ghayb), performing the prayers (iqām al-ṣalāt) and giving the charity (ītāʿ al-zakāt).\(^{13}\)

Second verse: The Bedouins say: “We believe.” Say: “You do not believe, but say: ‘We submit;’ for belief has not yet entered your hearts” (qālati al-aʿrābu āmannā qul lam tuʿminū wa lākin qūlū aslamnā wa lammā yadk[hulī al-īmānu fī qulūbikum].\(^{14}\)

He says that, “the belief is confirmation with certainty and peace of mind” (al-īmān huwa al-taṣdīq maʿ al-thiqa wa tamāniya al-nafs). An affirmation with the tongue without an agreement of heart is called “submission” (islām), while an affirmation with the tongue with an agreement of heart is called “belief” (īmān).\(^{15}\)

Third verse: “The true believers are those who believe in God and His Messenger, then are free of doubt, and strive with their wealth and souls in the cause of God. They are the truthful ones” (innama al-muʿminūn al-ladhīna āmanū bi-Allāh wa rasūlihi thumma lam yartābū wa jāhadū bi-amwālihim wa anfusihim fī sabīl Allāh īlaʿika hum al-ṣādiqūn).\(^{16}\)

In his interpretation of this verse al-Zamakhsharī elaborates that there should be no doubt in one’s heart when one believes. The true characteristic of belief is that it should be free of any suspicion and have perfect peace of mind with serenity. Such persons who are firm and steadfast in their belief are true believers.\(^{17}\)

---


\(^{14}\) Qurʿān, 49:14.


\(^{16}\) Qurʿān, 49:15.

Fourth verse: “Surely those who believe and do the good will be guided by their Lord for their belief” (inna al-ladēhīna āmanū wa ‘amilū al-ṣāliḥāt yahdihim rabbuhum bi-īmānihim).\(^{18}\)

Al-Zamakhsharī interprets that God guides on the right path to those people whose belief is accompanied by righteous deeds due to their belief (bi-īmānihim).\(^{19}\)

Fifth verse: “The day when some of your Lord’s signs come, the embracing of faith will not avail any soul which already did not accept it, or who did not perform good deeds by virtue of his faith” (yawm yā’ti ba’ḍ āyāt rabbika lā yanfa’u nafsan īmānahā lam takun āmanat min qabl aw kasabat fī īmānihā khayr).\(^{20}\)

He states that one should believe in God before the appearance of His signs which will take place prior to the Day of Judgment. If he does not believe before it, his belief will be of no avail. Similarly, if a person believes at a time when he cannot perform good deeds it will be of no benefit for him because the one who believes and performs righteous deeds will achieve success and blessings from God otherwise sufferings and destruction. He also states that belief and good deeds are combined together.\(^{21}\)

Sixth verse: “It is not in accordance with your desires, nor the desires of the people of the Book. Whosoever does evil will be recompensed for it, and will find no protector or friend apart from God” (laysa bi-amāniyyīkum wa lā amaniyyī ahl al-kitāb man ya’mal su’an yajza bihi wa lā yajid lahu min dūn Allāh walīyyan wa la našīrā).\(^{22}\)

He says that this verse is addressed to the Muslims and belief cannot be achieved by desire only. It has to be established in the heart and attested/confirmed by deeds.

---

\(^{18}\) Qur’ān, 10:9.

\(^{19}\) Al-Zamakhsharī, al-Kashshāf, 3:116.

\(^{20}\) Qur’ān, 6:158.

\(^{21}\) Al-Zamakhsharī, al-Kashshāf, 2:415-16.

\(^{22}\) Qur’ān, 4:123.
People of the Book are also mentioned in this verse, who desire to be forgiven despite having no good deeds. But God frustrates their desires and unequivocally states that belief is integrated with righteous deeds. Whosoever performs good deeds he will be successful and whosoever performs bad deeds he will be destroyed.\textsuperscript{23}

According to al-Zamakhsharī, belief consists of three elements: confirmation by heart (\textit{taṣdīq bi-al-qalb}), affirmation by tongue (\textit{iqrār bi-al-lisān}) and confirmation by deeds (\textit{taṣdīq bi-al-ʻamal}).

2. The Promise and the Threat” (\textit{al-waʻd wa al-waʻīd})

Majority of the Muʻtazilites believe that it is incumbent upon God to carry His “promise and threat” (\textit{al-waʻd wa al-waʻīd}) because He is just. God promises recompense to those who obey Him and threatens punishment to those who disobey Him. They are unanimous that man has power over his good and bad deeds and he is the creator of these actions. It is because of this reason that he deserves reward or punishment in the hereafter for what he does in this world.\textsuperscript{24}

In support of the principle of “the promise and the threat” (\textit{al-waʻd wa al-waʻīd}), the Muʻtazilites quote the verses of the Qur’ān that “God has promised the believing men and women gardens beneath which the streams flow, where they will abide forever (\textit{waʻd Allāh al-muʻminīn wa al-muʻmināt jannāt tajrī min taḥtihā al-anhār khālidīna fi-hā})\textsuperscript{25}

and “God has promised the hypocritical men and women and the unbelievers, the fire of hell, where they will abide forever” (\textit{waʻd Allāh al-munāfiqīn wa al-munāfiqāt wa al-}

\begin{itemize}
\item Al-Shahrastānī, \textit{Milal}, 1:45.
\item Qur’ān, 9:72.
\end{itemize}
So, in these two verses God clearly states that God will reward the believers and punish the unbelievers.

To fulfill His justice, God keeps the records of all good and bad deeds, small or great, that the human beings performed in this world. According to the Qur’an, everything whether small or great is written down and whosoever has done even an atom’s weight of good or bad deeds will see that on the Day of Judgment.\textsuperscript{27}

Al-Ash’arī does not agree with the Mu’tazilites’ principle regarding “the promise and the threat” (\textit{al-wa’d wa al-wa‘īd}) and states that conclusive judgments cannot be derived from the literal meanings of the verses as quoted and interpreted by them. He contends that “One has no more right to say that the threat-verses are universal and the others particular than one has to reverse the statement and to say that the threat-verses are particular and the others universal” (\textit{wa laysa qawl man qāla inna al-‘āyāt ‘āmma fi al-wa‘īd āmma wa al-‘āyāt al-‘ukhra khāṣṣa ‘ulā min qawl qālab qalb al-qiṣṣa wa ja‘ala āyāt al-wa‘īd khāṣṣa wa al-‘āyāt al-‘ukhra ‘āmma}).\textsuperscript{28}

3. The Intermediate Position between Belief and Unbelief (\textit{al-manzila bayna al-manzilatayn})

The intermediate position between belief and unbelief (\textit{al-manzila} \textsuperscript{29} \textit{bayna al-manzilatayn}) literally means “the position between the two positions.” In fact, it is the first principle formulated by Wāsil b. ‘Aṭā who defined the terminologies of “believer”

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[26] Qur‘ān, 9:68.
\item[27] Qur‘ān, 18:49; 54:53; 99: 7-8.
\item[29] The word \textit{manzila} (pl. \textit{manāzil}) means status, rank, degree or position.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
(mu‘min), “unbeliever” (kāfir), “hypocrite” (munāfiq) and “transgressor” (fāsiq) due to the controversy and contradictory definitions offered by different sects of Islam.  

According to Wāṣil, a sinful Muslim cannot be called either a believer or an unbeliever, but belongs to a separate category of transgressor. He wanted a sinful Muslim to remain a member of the Muslim community, with all the rights that this involved (safety of life and property, inheritance from other Muslims, etc.), but he insisted that the sinner would be condemned to eternal punishment in Hell if that person did not repent. His position was not much different from the one taken by al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, who called the Muslim sinner a “hypocrite” (munāfiq), while Wāṣil used the term “transgressor” (fāsiq) instead of hypocrite (munāfiq).

Ibn al-Rāwandi criticized Wāṣil that by his doctrine of the intermediate position he deviated from the consensus of the community which had agreed that the Muslim sinner was either a believer, or an unbeliever or a hypocrite. Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Khayyāṭ (d. ca. 300/913) in his response stated that Wāṣil accepted the point on which the three groups, that is, al-Baṣrī, the Murji’ites and the Khārijites were agreed, namely that the

---

30 Historically, it is considered that the emergence of schism in Islam started during the first civil war (fitna). Fitna, literally means “temptation,” “trials,” or “civil war.” The series of events included the assassination of the caliph ‘Uthmān, designation of ‘Alī as caliph, the battles of the Camel and Ṣiffīn, the emergence and formation of the Shia’ ‘Alī, the party or partisans of ‘Alī, (later known as Shi’ites), Shi’at ‘Uthmān, the partisans of ‘Uthmān opposed to ‘Alī and the Khārijites sects and the assassination of ‘Alī. The Shi’at ‘Uthmān demanded ‘Alī for the vengeance of ‘Uthmān’s killers. However, there arose differences between the Shi’at ‘Uthmān and the Khārijites about the status of his belief. The partisans of ‘Uthmān were of the opinion that he was a believer and killed unjustly. The Khārijites condemned ‘Uthmān’s conduct and disclaimed any intention of avenging his murder. They went to the extent that he was called a grave sinner and killed unjustly. The Murji’ites completely rejected all the allegations leveled against ‘Uthmān by the Khārijites and argued that the judgment about the right and wrong should be deferred to God. Similarly, after the battle of Ṣiffīn, when ‘Alī agreed to “arbitration” (tahkīm) for settling the differences arising out of the murder of ‘Uthmān, by referring it to “two arbitrators” (ḥakamayn), the Khārijites seceded from him protesting against the human arbitrators above the divine word and quoting that “the judgment belongs to God only.” (in al-ḥukmu illā lillāh). They proclaimed the invalidity of ‘Alī’s claims to the caliphate. One of their doctrines considered that a person who commits a major sin was an unbeliever and excluded from the community. See Marshall G.S. Hodgson, The Venture of Islam (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1977), 214-301, Wensinck, Muslim Creed, 109; L. Gardet, “6:I:185-906:I:185-906:I:185-90,” EF, 2:930.

31 Al-Khayyāṭ, al-Intīṣār, 118.
Muslim sinner was a transgressor, and avoided the matters on which they differed. Wāṣil quotes from the Qurʾān that: “Fight those among the People of the Book who do not believe in God and the Last Day, who do not prohibit what God and His Messenger have forbidden, and do not profess the true religion from those who have been given the Book, till they pay the protective tax out of hand and in submission.”32 Wāṣil states that this ruling of God is for the People of the Book and they do not fall into the category of those who commit grave sins. He quotes another verse: “When you meet the unbelievers, strike their necks until you overpower them, and hold them in bondage. Then, either set them free graciously or for a ransom.”33 According to Wāṣil, it specifically refers to the Arab polytheists and all the unbelievers except the People of the Book, and they do not come under those who commit grave sins.34

So far as the hypocrite is concerned, if he conceals it, and it is not known, then apparently he is a Muslim; but if he discloses his unbelief and repents then he should be considered a Muslim, otherwise he is liable to be killed. In this situation, a grave sinner does not fall in this category. In case of a believer, God’s judgment is that He is his friend; He loves him and promises Paradise for him. Wāṣil substantiates it with the verses of the Qurʾān.35 Finally, for a grave sinner, there is a curse from God and He has prepared for him severe punishment in the hereafter.36

Al-Ash’arī also does not agree with the Muʿtazilites’ principle regarding the principle of the intermediate position between belief and unbelief (al-manzila bayna al-manzilatayn). He states that “regarding the belief in God, there is a consensus of those

32 Qurʾān, 9:29.
33 Qurʾān, 47:4.
34 Al-Khayyāt, al-Intīṣār, 118-120.
36 Qurʾān, 11:18; 82:14.
who speak Arabic the language in which the Qurān was revealed” (al-taṣdiq bi-Allāh wa-
‘alā dhālika ijmā‘ ahl al-lughat allatī nazala bihā al-Qurān). Al-Ash‘arī further says
that “before the advent of Wāṣil b. ‘Aṭā’, the chief of the Mu’tazila, men followed two
opinions. The Khawārij among them regarded grave sinners as unbelievers, whereas the
‘People of Rectitude’ maintained the grave sinner was a believer by reason of his faith
and a sinner by reason of his grave sin. But no one said that he was neither believer nor
believer before the advent of Wāṣil b. ‘Aṭā’” (kāna al-nās qabl ḥudūth Wāṣil b. ‘Aṭā’
ra‘īs al-mu’tazila ‘alā maqālatayn minhum khawārij yukaffirūna murtakābī al-kabā‘ir
wa-minhum ahl al-istiqāma yaqūlūna huwa mu’min bi-īmānihi fāsiq bi-kabīratīhi wa-
lam yaqul minhum qā‘i il annahu layṣa bi-mu ‘min wa-lā kāfir qabl ḥudūth Wāṣil b.
‘Aṭā’). Al-Zamakhsharī supports this principle and wherever is necessary provides the
definitions and interpretations of “believer” (mu’min), “nonbeliever” (kāfir) and
“transgressor” (fāsiq). In his interpretation, most of the time he quotes other verses from
the Qur‘ān to emphasize his point of view.

4. The Major and the Minor Sins (al-kabā‘ir wa-al-saghā‘ir)

The Mu‘tazilites differ with regard to the definition of major and minor sins. According to Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbā‘ī sins fall into two categories: minor and major. The

---

37 Al-Ash‘arī, al-Luma‘; 75, 104.
38 Al-Ash‘arī, al-Luma‘; 76, 105.
39 Many commentators consider term like dhanb, ithm and maṣiya, a common gloss for ithm. The terms
like dhanb, ithm and masia refer to major sins while lamam, sayyia and khatia refer to minor sins. Kabā‘ir
are sins that have been expressly forbidden in the Qur‘ān and the sunna; acts that entail the ḥadd penalties.
According to a ḥadīth reported by Abū Hurayra, there are seven major sins: associating anyone with God,
sorcery, unlawful homicide, usurping the property of the orphans, usury, fleeing from the battlefield and
slandering believing women. Bukhārī, Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-waṣāya, no. 23; Kitāb al-ḥudūd, no. 44; Muslim,
minor sins deserve to be forgiven if the major sins are avoided. This assertion is based upon the following verses of the Qur’ān: “If you keep away from the grave sins you have been forbidden, We shall efface your evil deeds and lead you to a place of honor,” and “Those who avoid grave sins and indecent deeds, except minor offences, verily your Lord is ample in forgiveness.”\textsuperscript{40} The avoidance of the major sins nullifies the punishment of the minor sins.

Abū Bakr al-Aṣamm states that “the belief is an aggregation of all the acts of worship” (\textit{al-īmān jamī‘u al-ṭā‘āt}). If someone commits a major sin he is neither an unbeliever (\textit{kāfir}) nor a hypocrite (\textit{munāfiq}), but a transgressor (\textit{fāsiq}) and remains a believer due to his belief in the unity of God and performance of good deeds.\textsuperscript{41} Some of the Mu‘tazilites are of the opinion that major sins are those for which there is God’s threat (\textit{wa‘īd}) and others are the minor sins. According to Jafar b. Mubashshir, “all the intentionally committed sins are major.”\textsuperscript{42}

The Mu‘tazilites also differ regarding the forgiveness of the minor sins. Some say that God forgives by His “grace” (\textit{tafaḍḍul}) the minor sins if one avoids the major sins, while others say that God does not forgive the minor sins without repentance.\textsuperscript{43}

Al-Zamakhsharī says that “sins” consist of both major (\textit{kabā‘ir}) and minor (\textit{ṣaghā‘ir}) sins. Major sins are those offences that deserve punishment and it is not abolished until the repentance is made. Indecent and vile offences (\textit{fawāḥish}) and associating others with God are also major sins. The minor sins are venial offences (\textit{al-}

\textsuperscript{40} Qur’ān, 4:31; 53:32.
\textsuperscript{42} Al-Ash’arī, \textit{Maqālāt}, 271.
\textsuperscript{43} Al-Ash’arī, \textit{Maqālāt}, 271.
lamam) and petty in their nature, such as “touch by the insane person” (al-mass min al-
junūn) and “pollution or dirt” (al-lawtha).\textsuperscript{44}

Al-Zamakhsharī is also of the opinion that the prophets are infallible of
committing the major sins. However, when Adam was sent down on the earth, it was a
lapse on his part for forgetting what God had commanded him: not to listen to the Satan.
But when he repented, he was forgiven by God. Al-Zamakhsharī says that despite the fact
that it was only a minor offence, but since he was a prophet, his minor lapse was
considered a big offence and repentance was necessary for him.\textsuperscript{45}

Al-Zamakhsharī, in accordance with the Mu‘tazilite views, does not differentiate
between an unbeliever and a person who commits major sins and does not repent,
because he will not be forgiven without repentance.

5. The Concept of Constraint (iljā’)

The concept of “constraint” (iljā’)\textsuperscript{46} is intended to solve the issue of the
discrepancy between what God wills people to do and what they actually do. The
Mu‘tazilites, except Abū Musā al-Murdār (d. 226/841), maintain that “it is not possible
that God should will the acts of disobedience in any manner and command that which He
does not will to be and forbid that which He wills to be. God sometimes wills that which
is not, and things have come to be which He has not willed. However, He has power to
prevent that which he does not will and to constrain humans to perform what He wills”

\textit{(innahu lā yajūza an yakūna Allāhu subhānahu murīdan lil-ma‘āsī ‘alā wajhi min al-}

\textsuperscript{44} Al-Zamakhsharī, \textit{al-Kashshāf}, 5:645.
\textsuperscript{46} See Michael Schwarz, “Some Notes on the Notion of \textit{iljā’} (Constraint) in Mu‘tazila Kalām,” \textit{Israel
Michael Schwarz states that, ‘Abd al-Jabbār distinguishes between what God wills of men “by way of constraint and force” (‘alā jihat al-iljā’ wa-al-ikrāh) and what He wills that they should do as a result of their own choice, as voluntary acts of obedience (‘alā jihat al-ikhtiyār wa-al-ṭaw‘). Actions (“objects of power” maqdūr) of the first type must necessarily come into being when He puts the constraint (iljā‘) into effect. But if voluntary actions of the kind He wills the mukallafūn to perform are not performed, this does not necessitate any weakness or defect on His part. Neither do voluntary actions which come about against His will infringe His omnipotence. This is so because men’s voluntary actions are their exclusive “objects of power” and cannot reasonably be within God’s power (lā yasīḥḥ an yakūna maqdūran lahu)… although God theoretically has the power to do evil, He will never do it, that is, He will always choose not to do it. This is so because He knows evil for what it is and knows that He can do without it. He thus resembles a person constrained to perform a certain action. Such a person will also never choose to act differently despite the fact that it would be in his power to do so.

‘Abd al-Jabbār also points out that it is always considerations of benefit or avoidance of harm which “constrain” a person. God cannot enjoy benefit or suffer harm. Hence He is never constrained and He deserves praise even for those actions which He inevitably performs. When God chooses to perform good actions He does so because
these actions are good and not because of any benefit to Him. Hence He is not constrained and therefore He is praiseworthy.52

Al-Ash’arī argues that according to the Mu‘tazilites, God wills that men should believe voluntarily (taw’an) and if they do so then they deserve to be rewarded. However, if God were to constrain them (alja‘hum) they would neither be believers nor deserving reward. Therefore, God’s omnipotence is compromised because it would not achieve what He wills, that they believe in the manner in which He wills them to believe.53

The concept of “constraint” (iljā’) does not resolve the issue of discrepancy between what God wills men to do and what they actually do. According to ‘Abd al-Jabbār, God has power to accomplish only those acts which can possibly be in His power (lā yaṣīh an yakūna maqdūran lahu)54 and these do not include the objects of man’s power, i.e. the action which He granted them power to accomplish. It leads into a conflict between God’s power and man’s acquired power and therefore God’s omnipotence is infringed upon and compromised.

6. The Concept of Nullification and Atonement (al-iḥbāṭ wa al-takfīr)

The concept of “the nullification and the atonement” (al-iḥbāṭ wa al-takfīr)55 is related to obedience (tā‘a) and disobedience (ma‘ṣiya). ‘Abd al-Jabbār defines it as a person under obligation (mukallaf) deserves to be rewarded if the act of obedience is greater than the act of disobedience, and the smaller disobedience will be removed, i.e.

53 McCarthy, Theology of Al-Ash’arī, 38.
54 ‘Abd al-Jabbār, Mughnī, 6: II: 268.
nullified by the greater obedience. In other words, a person’s good deeds and bad deeds are weighed. If a person’s good deeds are more than his bad deeds, the punishment of the bad deeds is cancelled and he will receive eternal reward. On the other hand, if his bad deeds are more than good deeds, reward of the good deeds is cancelled and he will get eternal punishment. As for minor sins, the Mu'tazilites are of the view that such sins would be weighed against one’s good deeds and cancelled out through them as long as the good deeds outweighed the bad deeds. However, ‘Abbād b. Sulaymān al-Ṣumayrī is of the view that the punishment of the sins can only be forgiven by repentance.

Some of the Mu'tazilites are of the opinion that when a believer who is obedient to God and repentant departs from this world he deserves not only reward (thawāb) and recompense (‘iwaḍ) but also grace (tafaḍḍul) from God. However, if he departs from this world unrepentant of grave sins which he committed, he deserves eternal Hell fire, but his punishment will be lesser than that of the unbelievers.

The majority of the Mu'tazilites denies the possibility that God will pardon an unrepentant sinner because He has informed the human beings that He will punish the sinners and it is not appropriate not to carry out His threat; rather it is necessary for Him to punish them. However, some of them are of the view that there is no doubt that God has the ability to pardon, because the Qur'an states that: “He will pardon whom He pleases and punish whom He wills." In fact, according to ‘Abd al-Jabbār, pardon is only conceivable where there has previously been repentance on the part of the unbeliever or

---

the sinner (*inna al-maghfîra bi-sharî‘î al-tawba*), and God is obliged to accept this repentance (*qabûl tawba wâjib*). If a person repents, the Prophet Muḥammad will make intercession on his behalf on the Day of Judgment at which the sinner can expect God’s forgiveness.

Al-Zamakhsharî, in conformity with the Mu‘tazilites view, considers that *takfîr* is the removal of a punishment from a person who deserves to be punished either by means of increasing his/her reward or due to his/her repentance which is evident by his interpretation of the following four verses.

First verse: “Announce the good news to those who believe and have done good deeds, they will have gardens under which river flow.”

In his interpretation, al-Zamakhsharî says that God gives good news to that person who combines his belief with righteous deeds from the acts of worship and avoids sins. There are two things which can deprive a person of his reward (*thawâb*): unbelief (*kufr*) and major sins (*kabâ‘îr*). Al-Zamakhsharî quotes that “If you associate (anyone with God) all your deeds will be wasted and certainly you will be one of the losers” (*la‘în ashrakta la-yaḥbatanna ‘amaluka wa la-takûnunna min al-khâsîrîn*). He emphasizes that this verse was addressed to the Prophet Muḥammad who is the most noble and honored amongst all the human beings, not to associate other with Him, otherwise his “deeds will be wasted” (*la-yaḥbatanna ‘amaluk*). However, this verse is a hypothetical one and it is certainly impossible for the Prophet to associate anyone with God. He interprets “and certainly you will be one of the losers” (*wa-la-takûnunna min al-khâsîrîn*)

---

63 Qur‘ân, 2:25.
64 Qur‘ân, 39:65.
as “it is possible that you may be loser due to futility of deeds”\(^{65}\) (*yaḥtamilu wa latakūnanna min al-khāsirīn bi-sabab ḥubūṭ al-‘amal*).\(^{66}\)

Second verse: “O believers, obey God and obey the Prophet and do not waste your deeds.”\(^{67}\)

Al-Zamakhsharī interprets “And do not waste your deeds” (wa-Šā tubṭilū a’mālakum) as “Do not nullify pious deeds by committing major sins” (lā tuḥbiṭū al-Ŝū‘at bi-al-Šābab ‘ir). God says that: “O you who believe, do not raise your voices above the voice of the Prophet, and do not speak loudly to him as you do with one another lest your deeds are nullified while you are unaware” (yā ayyuhā al-ladhīna āmanū lā tarfa ‘ū ašwā’takum fawqa Šawt al-nabī wa lā taḥbarū lahu bi al-qawl ka-jahri ba’dikum li-ba’din an taḥbaṣa a’mālakum wa antum lā tash’urūn).\(^{68}\) Al-Zamakhsharī says that “When the Prophet speaks and you speak, it is necessary that you should not raise your voice above the voice of the Prophet and avoid looking at him directly” (idhā naṭaq wa-naṭaqtum fa-‘alaykum an lā tablaghū ašwā’tikum warā’ al-Šād al-ladhī yablaghahu bi-Šawtihi wa-an taghaḍdū min-hā). Furthermore, do not call him by his name Muḥammad or Ahmad but call him with respect keeping in mind his status as a Prophet.\(^{69}\)

Third verse: “If you avoid the major sins that you are forbidden, We shall remit your evil deeds, and let you enter an honorable place.”\(^{70}\)

Al-Zamakhsharī interprets “major sins that you are forbidden” (kabā‘ir mā tunhawna ‘an-hu) are those sins which God and the Prophet have forbidden. He interprets

---

\(^{65}\) ḥubūṭ al-‘amal can be translated as “wasted deeds” or “deeds in vain.”


\(^{67}\) Qur‘ān, 47:33.

\(^{68}\) Qur‘ān, 49:2.


\(^{70}\) Qur‘ān, 4:31.
“We shall remit your evil deeds” (*nukaffir ḍan-kum sayyiʿātkum*) as “We will efface from you the punishment of committing minor sins by enhancing the reward as a consequence of your avoiding the major sins and patience.”

Fourth verse: “And those who believe and do the righteous deeds We will remit their sins and We will give them a reward better than their deeds.”

Al-Zamakhsharī considers that this verse is intended either for the righteous believers or for the polytheists who became believers. He interprets that if it is in the context of righteous believers who committed some minor sins and their misdeeds were covered by good deeds then their punishment of the minor sins will be compensated by the reward of the good deeds and they will be recompensed better than what they used to do. If it is for the new believers and they performed the good deeds then God will efface their previous sins, unbelief and disobedience and will compensate them with better reward since they have become the Muslims.

7. Repentance (*tawba*)

The Muʿtazilites differ regarding the forgiveness of the sins. Most of the Muʿtazilites consider that the grave sinners are doomed to eternal damnation and in support of their assertion, they quote many verses of the Qurʾān which emphasize that God will punish the evil-doers and those committing sins will abide in hell forever.

Some say that God forgives by His “favor” (*tafaḍḍul*) the minor sins if one avoids the

---

72 Qurʾān, 29:7.
major sins, while others say that God does not forgive the minor sins without repentance.\textsuperscript{76}

Al-Zamakhsharī, in conformity with the Mu‘tazilites’ doctrine states that “repentance” (tawba) is the only way to be forgiven by God for a person who commits major sins. If he dies unrepentant he will abide in the fire forever. His interpretation of the following five verses regarding “repentance” (tawba) is as follows:

First two verses: “Those who do not believe and transgress God will not forgive them, nor guide them to any path except to Hell, abiding therein forever.”\textsuperscript{77}

Al-Zamakhsharī states that this refers to the unbelievers and those who commit major sins and there is no difference between them because both of them are united between unbelief (kufr) and disobedience (ma‘āṣī) and “they would not be forgiven except with repentance” (lā yaghfiru la-humā illā bil-tawba). There will be no grace bestowed upon them and they will be destined to Hell forever.\textsuperscript{78}

Second verse: “Say (Prophet Muḥammad): O My servants, those of you who have acted against your interests should not despair of God’s Mercy. Surely God forgives all sins. He is all-forgiving and all-merciful.”\textsuperscript{79}

Al-Zamakhsharī interprets “Surely God forgives all sins” (inna Allāh yaghfiru al-dhunūba jamī‘an) “with the condition of repentance” (bi-sharṭ al-tawba).\textsuperscript{80} He says that the condition of repentance has been mentioned in many verses of the Qur‘ān, though it is not stated in this verse. He also mentions that in the reading\textsuperscript{81} of Ibn ‘Abbās and Ibn

\textsuperscript{76} Al-Ash’arī, \textit{Maqālāt}, 270-71.
\textsuperscript{77} Qur‘ān, 4:168-69.
\textsuperscript{78} Al-Zamakhsharī, \textit{al-Kashāf}, 2:180-81.
\textsuperscript{79} Qur‘ān, 39:53.
\textsuperscript{80} Al-Zamakhsharī, \textit{al-Kashāf}, 5:312.
\textsuperscript{81} The \textit{qirā’a} (pl. \textit{qirā’āt}) denotes the variant readings of the Qur‘ān. Traditions from the Prophet Muhammad mention that differences in recitation were permitted by him. These differences in recitation
Mas'ūd, they added “whomsoever He wills” (li-}_man yashā’) after “forgives all sins” (yaghfiru al-dhunūba jamī’an) to the original verse. He states that the purpose of “whomsoever He wills” (bi-}_man yashā’) is “whosoever repents” (man tāba). He gives a reason for this interpretation of tawba that the “will of God is dependent upon His wisdom and His justice not His dominion and His power” (mashi’ Allāh tābi’ li-}_ḥikmatihi wa-‘adlihi lā li-mulkihi wa-jabrūtihi).⁸²

Third verse: “Your Lord forgives human beings for their wrongdoings and your Lord is truly severe in retribution.”⁸³

Al-Zamakhsharī interprets “for their wrongdoings” (‘alā ẓulmihi) as “transgressors for themselves” (ẓālimi}_n li-anfusihim). He interprets it in three different ways: First, God will forgive all the minor sins if one avoids the major sins. Second, God will forgive the major sins “subject to the condition of repentance” (bi-sharṭ al-tawba). Third, God’s “forgiveness” (maghfira) means concealment of one’s sins and delay in punishment.⁸⁴

---

Fourth verse: “O believers, Repent to God all of you so that you may be successful.”  

Al-Zamakhsharī states that those believers who commit minor sins and make mistakes are advised to repent and ask God for His forgiveness, with the hope of success and prosperity if their repentance is accepted and they are forgiven by God.  

Fifth verse: “He who repents and does the righteous deeds returns back to God by way of repentance.”  

According to al-Zamakhsharī, a sincere repentant should fulfill three conditions: to relinquish all the sins, to be remorseful and to perform righteous deeds. He says that God loves the repentant and loves those who purify themselves. 

8. Forgiveness (*ghufrān*)

The Muʿtazilites agree that God will not forgive a person’s major sins without repentance. Some of them are of the opinion that the minor sins will not be forgiven without repentance also. However, they consider that if someone avoids the major sins, God will forgive the minor sins. They differ about whether it is the right of a person that he should be forgiven after repentance or if it is God’s grace by which He forgives the sins. Abū Hudhayl and his followers believe that those who avoid committing major sins, their minor sins are wiped out by the grace of God, not of their right. Abū ‘Alī-Jubbāī’ differs and he says that just as the reward of good deeds is nullified by committing the major sins, avoiding the major sins results in the forgiveness of minor sins.

---

85 Qurʾān, 24:31.
87 Qurʾān, 25:71.
Zamakhsharī agrees with the majority position of the Muʿtazilites, while regarding the minor sins, he follows Abū ‘Ali-Jubbāī’.

Al-Zamakhsharī interprets the verses which deal with forgiveness, as follows:

First verse: “God accepts the repentance of those who commit evil in ignorance and then repent immediately after that. God accepts their repentance and God is all-knowing and all-wise.”

Al-Zamakhsharī states that whoever repents to God his repentance is accepted and he is forgiven because the acceptance of repentance and forgiveness is incumbent (wājib) upon God. He interprets “God accepts the repentance” (inna-mā tawba ‘alā Allāh) that it is as incumbent upon God in the same way as obedience (taʿāt) is obligatory upon His servants.

Second verse: “But repentance is not for those who commit evil deeds until when death comes to one of them, and he says: ‘I now repent;’ nor for those who die as unbelievers. For them, We have prepared a very painful punishment.”

Al-Zamakhsharī states that if an unbeliever dies without repentance, he will not be forgiven. Similarly, if someone repents at the time of his death, his repentance will not be accepted because approaching death is the first state of the Hereafter. It is “like that he is dying as an unbeliever who has lost the opportunity of repentance with certainty” (fakamā anna al-māʾīt ‘alā al-kufr qad fātat al-tawba ‘alā al-yaqīn).

---

89 Qurʿān, 4:17.
90 Al-Zamakhsharī, al-Kashshāf, 2:44.
91 Qurʿān, 4:18.
92 Al-Zamakhsharī, al-Kashshāf, 2:41-44.
Third verse: “It is He who accepts repentance of His servants, and pardons the evil deeds and He knows what you do.”\(^{93}\)

Al-Zamakhsharī states that there are three components of repentance: remorse upon the sins, resolve not go back to commit sins and firm determination not to commit sins in future.\(^{94}\)

Fourth verse: “O you who believe, turn to God in sincere repentance, perhaps your Lord may forgive your evil deeds.”\(^{95}\)

Al-Zamakhsharī states that one should make sincere and true repentance so that God may remit sins. Good advice is the distinguishing mark of the penitents who counsel themselves for repentance. They deal with it by eliminating their bad deeds and remorse upon what they have done in the past. They are severely grieved and determined not to revert back on these repulsive deeds.\(^{96}\)

Fifth verse: “God will not forgive those who associate other gods with Him, but will forgive anything less than that to whom He pleases. And he who associates other gods with God has committed a very grave sin.”\(^{97}\)

Al-Zamakhsharī interprets that God may forgive someone who associates other gods with Him, provided that he repented (\textit{li-man tāba}). However, He will not forgive the one who commits major sins except with repentance (\textit{al-kabā’ir illā bi-al-tawba}). He is of the opinion that the fate of the person who commits a major sin and does not repent is the same as that of the person who associates other gods with Him. In the interpretation of this verse, his main emphasis is on “He will forgive anything less than that to whom

---

\(^{93}\) Qur’ān, 42:25.  
\(^{95}\) Qur’ān, 66:8.  
\(^{97}\) Qur’ān, 4:48.
He pleases” (*wa-yaghfiru mā duna dhālika li-man yashāʾ*). He maintains that the first part of the verse that “God will not forgive those who associate other gods with Him” (*inna Allāh lā yaghfiru an yushraka bi-hi*) refers to the person who does not repent, whereas the second part of the verse “He will forgive anything less than that to whom He pleases” (*wa-yaghfiru mā duna dhālika li-man yashāʾ*) deals with the person who repents (*li-man ṭāba*). Al-Zamakhsharī cites an example of a ruler who does not spend even a *dīnār* for one person, but spends a whole treasure for another person if he desires. This means that the ruler does not spend even a dinar for a person whom he thinks does not deserve it, while he is prepared to spend a whole treasure for another person who is in his judgment deserving.98

9. **Intercession (shafaʿa)**

The Muʿtazilites maintain that intercession may take place in the hereafter if a person repents before his death. They also believe in it because the word intercession has been mentioned at many places in the Qurʾān. Al-Zamakhsharī also believes in intercession but differs from the orthodox point of view, who believe that it will be for all the Muslims including those who commit the major sins. His interpretation of the following verses is in accordance with the Muʿtazilite principles.

First verse: “And guard yourselves against the day when no soul will avail any other soul, and no intercession will be accepted from it, nor ransom will be taken from it, nor they will be helped.”99

---

99 Qurʾān, 2:48.
Al-Zamakhsharī interprets this verse in accordance with the Muʿtazilites’ principles and states that intercession (ṣafāʿa) will not be accepted for those people who commit the major sins (anṣaṣaṣaṣa lā tuqbal li-al-ʿusāt). He states that “The day when no soul will avail any other soul” (yawman lā ṭajzī nafsun ʿan nafsin) means that one soul will be not able to benefit the other soul. Also, in this verse the word “ransom” (ʿadl) means intercession (ṣafāʿa) and therefore, he interprets “no ransom will be taken from it” (lā yuʿḥadhu min-hā ʿadl) as “no intercession will be accepted from it” (lā yuqbalu min-hā ṣafāʿa).100

Second verse: “The sinners shall have none to help them.”101

Al-Zamakhsharī states that there will be no helper (nāṣir) for the evil-doer in any form, that is, neither by intercession nor by others (fa-lā nāṣira lahu bi-ṣafāʿa wa-lā ghayrahā). For al-Zamakhsharī, since God denies any help (nuṣra) to the evil-doers, intercession (ṣafāʿa) which is a form of help from God is also denied to them.102

Third verse: “O believers, spend of what We have provided you before the day arrives when there will be neither commerce nor friendship nor intercession. The unbelievers are the wrong-doer.”103

Al-Zamakhsharī states that there will be neither friends nor intercessors to intercede for the wrong-doers for the alleviation or mitigation of their punishment on the Day of Judgment. So far as the intercession is concerned, it is “enhancement of the grace,  

100 Al-Zamakhsharī, al-Kashshāf, 1:263-66.  
101 Qurʾān, 3:192.  
102 Al-Zamakhsharī, al-Kashshāf, 1:678-79.  
103 Qurʾān, 2:254.
no more” (ziyādat al-faḍl lā ghayr). In other words, there will be no intercession for the unbelievers and there will be an increase in the grace for the believers.\(^{104}\)

Fourth verse: “The sinners will have neither friend nor intercessor whose (words) will be heeded.”\(^{105}\)

Al-Zamakhsharī says that the intercessors are “friends of God” (awliyā’ Allāh) and they only love and are pleased with those people whom God loves and is pleased with. God does not love the evil-doers. Therefore, they will neither help nor intercede for those who commit major sins. He adds that intercession increases grace and people endowed with increased grace become entitled to reward (thawāb) and he quotes verse 4:173 that “He will give more out of His favor” (wa-yazīduhum min faḍlihi).\(^{106}\)

Fifth verse: “The intercession of intercessors will be of no avail to them.”\(^{107}\)

Al-Zamakhsharī states that even if all the intercessors from the angels, the prophets and others intercede for the person who commits the major sins it will not be accepted by God because they are loathsome (maskhūṭ). On that day, intercession will benefit those with whom God is pleased and He will elevate their ranks (tazīd fī darajāt).\(^{108}\)

Sixth verse: “The day the Spirit and the angels shall stand in rows. They will not speak except whom the Compassionate has allowed and he will speak what is right.”\(^{109}\)

Al-Zamakhsharī interprets that even if all the intercessors from the angels, from the prophets and others intercede for a person who has committed the major sins, they


\(^{105}\) Qur’ān, 40:18.


\(^{107}\) Qur’ān, 74:48.


\(^{109}\) Qur’ān, 78:38.
will not be accepted by God. On that day, intercession will be accepted only for those people with whom God is pleased and He will elevate their ranks. He also mentions that “the spirit” (al-rūḥ) and “the angels” (al-malā‘īka) are “the best and noblest among the creation of God” (afḍal al-khalā‘iq wa-ashrafahum) who are obedient and close to Him. However, they will not be allowed to speak unless two conditions are fulfilled. First, that they have been permitted to speak for intercession and second, they will speak the truth. No intercession can take place without God’s will.\textsuperscript{110}

Seventh verse: “And they do not intercede except for him whom He is well-pleased, and they stand in awe and reverence of Him.”\textsuperscript{111}

Al-Zamakhsharī says that the angels do not have the courage to intercede except for those with whom God is pleased and they deserve intercession and an increase in their reward. This will take place only with fear of God.\textsuperscript{112}

Al-Zamakhsharī’s view is that intercession will be granted to the believers only with God’s permission and the objective of intercession is to increase the grace and elevate the ranks of the believers. Intercession for those persons who commit the major sins will be rejected because they are the wrong-doers.

10. Conclusion

Al-Zamakhsharī, in conformity with the Mu‘tazilites believes that it is incumbent upon God to carry His “promise and threat” (al-wa‘d wa al-wa‘īd) because He is just. God promises recompense to those who obey Him and threatens punishment to those

\textsuperscript{111} Qur’an, 21:28.
who disobey Him. He also follows the principle of *al-manzila bayna al-manzilatayn*, literally meaning “the position between the two positions” or commonly referred to as “the intermediate position between belief and unbelief.” His definitions of the “believer” (*mu’min*), “non-believer” (*kāfir*) and “transgressor (*fāsiq*)” are synonymous to those of the Mu’tazilites.

According to al-Zamakhsharī, “belief” (*īmān*) consists of performing “righteous deeds” (*fi’l al-ḥasanāt*) and avoiding “bad deeds” (*tarak al-sayyi’āt*). He elaborates that belief consists of three elements: confirmation by heart (*taṣdīq bi-al-qalb*), affirmation by tongue (*iqrār bi-al-lisān*) and confirmation by deeds (*taṣdīq bi-al-ʻamal*). He states that “sins” (*āthām*, sing. *ithm*) consist of two types: major (*kabā’ir*) and minor (*ṣaḡhā’ir*). Major sins are those offences that deserve punishment and it is not abolished until the repentance is made. Indecent and vile offences (*fawāḥish*) and associating others with God are also major sins. The minor sins are venial offences (*al-lamam*) and petty in their nature, such as “touch by the insane person” (*al-mass min al-junūn*) and “pollution or dirt” (*al-lawtha*).

Al-Zamakhsharī agrees with the Mu’tazilites that *takfīr* is the removal of a punishment from him who deserves to be punished either by means of increasing his reward or due to his repentance. He also considers that “repentance” (*tawba*) is the only way to be forgiven by God for a person who commits major sins. If he dies unrepentant he will abide in the fire forever. Finally, he believes in intercession (*shafā’a*) but differs from the orthodox point of view, who believes that it will be for all the Muslims including those who commit the major sins.
Chapter 8

Fifth Principle: Enjoining what is Right and Forbidding what is Wrong (al-amr bi al-ma‘rūf wa al-nahy ‘an al-munkar)

The fifth principle of the Mu’tazilites is al-amr bi al-ma‘rūf wa al-nahy ‘an al-munkar “enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong.”¹ They justify this principle on the basis of the Qur’ān, the tradition of the Prophet and the consensus of the community (ijmā’).² They argue that it is in accordance with the Qur’ān: “Let there be among you a community inviting to goodness, enjoining the good and forbidding the wrong.”³ They also quote the tradition of the Prophet which states that: “When people see forbidden action and do not change it swiftly, God will render them blind with His punishment.”⁴ So far as the consensus of the community is concerned they say that all the Mu’tazilites agree on this issue.

The details and specifics of this principle in the early period of Mu’tazilites are scanty. Ibn Naḍīm mentions that Abū Bakr al-Āṣamm (d. 201/816), and Ja‘far b. Mubashshir (d. 234/848) both wrote Kitāb al-Amr bi al-ma‘rūf wa al-nahy ‘an al-

¹ Professor Felicitas Opwis advised me to look into Michael Cook’s Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). The following discussion is mainly based on the Chapter 9 (pages 195-226) of the book which deals with the Mu’tazilites. Cook’s translation of the four terms is as follows: “[C]ommanding’ (amr) is telling someone below one in rank (rutba) to do something, while forbidding (nahy) is telling them not to; ‘right’ (ma‘rūf) is any action of which the agent knows or infers the goodness (ḥusn), and ‘wrong’ (munkar) any action of which he knows or infers the badness (qubḥ).” See Cook, Commanding Right, 205; ‘Abd al-Jabbār, Sharḥ, 141.

² ‘Abd al-Jabbār, Sharḥ, 142.


⁴ I could not find the hadīth cited by ‘Abd al-Jabbār in any collections of aḥadīth. However, I found another hadīth in the Musnad of Ahmad b. Ḥanbal, which conveys more or less the same meaning. The hadīth quoted by ‘Abd al-Jabbār is: “No eye that witnesses God being disobeyed should twinkle before changing or leaving the scene” (laysa li-‘ayn tara Allāhu yu’ṣa fa-tatirīf hattā taghyyir aw tantaqil). Ahmad b. Ḥanbal. Musnad al-Imām Ahmad b. Ḥanbal (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1969), 1:2; ‘Abd al-Jabbār, Sharḥ, 142.
munkar. Hishām al-Fuwaṭī (d. ca. 230/844) compiled Kitāb Usūl al-khams.⁵ Most probably, Hishām al-Fuwaṭī might have mentioned this principle in his book because the title suggests five principles. According to al-Ashʿarī, all the Muʿtazilites, except al-Aṣamm considered “enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong” (al-amr bi al-maʿrūf wa al-nahy ’an al-munkar) as obligatory “provided they are able to perform it with the tongue, hand, and sword, in whatever manner they are able to do it” (maʿa al-imkān wa al-qudra bi al-lisān wa al-yad wa al-sayf kayfa qadarū ʿalā dhālika).⁶

Al-Khayyāṭ (d. 320/932) defines a Muʿtazilite who adheres to “the five principles” (uṣūl al-khmsa), and ranks “enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong” (al-amr bi al-maʿrūf wa al-nahy ’an al-munkar) in its classical fifth place.⁷ Similarly, al-Masʿūdī (d. 346/956) mentions that whosoever believes in the “five principles” is a Muʿtazilite, and if someone believes in more or less than these five principles then he cannot be called a Muʿtazilite. Regarding the fifth principle “enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong” (al-amr bi al-maʿrūf wa al-nahy ’an al-munkar), he states that “it is obligatory upon all the believers to perform this duty according to their capability” (ʿalā sāʾir al-muʾminīn wājib ʿalā ḥasbi istīṭāʾathum fī dhālika). He further states that it is like jihād in which “there is no distinction between fighting the unbeliever and the transgressor” (lā farq bayna mujāhadat al-kāfir wa al-fāsiq).⁸

---

⁶ Al-Ashʿarī, Maqālāt, 278.
⁷ Al-Khayyāṭ, al-Intisār, 93.
⁸ Al-Masʿūdī, Murūj al-dhahab, 3:221-23.
There is a difference of opinion between Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbā’ī and his son Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā’ī whether the obligatory nature of “enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong” could be known through reason or revelation. Abū ‘Alī’s view is that it is known through reason, whereas Abū Hāshim considers that it is through both reason, revelation except in one situation that a person observes someone doing wrong then it is obligatory through reason to stop that wrong. Abū Hāshim also states that good (ma’rūf) is of two types: one is obligatory (wājib) and the other is supererogatory (nāfil). The obligatory good is essential while the supererogatory goodness is not imperative but it is over and above the obligatory goodness. On the other hand, wrong (munkar) is only of one type and there is no such classification as minor wrong or major wrong.\footnote{‘Abd al-Jabbār, Sharḥ, 142, 146, 742.}

According to ‘Abd al-Jabbār, the unity of the Muslim community is of paramount importance and it is recommended that if there is division among people, efforts should be made for reconciliation between them not only through negotiations but with force also. He quotes the following verses of the Qur’ān: “If two groups of the believers fight one another, promote peace between them; but if one of them rebels against the other then fight against the rebellious group until it complies with God’s command. If it does so, make peace among them with justice and equitably.”\footnote{‘Abd al-Jabbār, Sharḥ, 144, 741; Qur’ān, 49:9.}

‘Abd al-Jabbār follows Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbā’ī and Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā’ī that good (ma’rūf) may be either obligatory or supererogatory depending upon whether the good to be commanded is by nature obligatory or supererogatory. However, forbidding wrong is always obligatory because a wrong (munkar) is repugnant (qabīḥ). Regarding whether the
obligation to command good and forbid wrong is known by reason or revelation, his view is that it is known only from revelation.

According to ʻAbd al-Jabbār, there are five conditions for commanding the right and forbidding the wrong. First, one should know what matters are right and what are wrong. If one cannot distinguish between the two, one will make error in one’s judgment. Second, he should know that “the wrong is going to happen” (al-munkar ḥādir); for instance, existence of necessary means for drinking alcohol, or musical and amusement instruments. Third, one should be aware that taking an action will not lead to a “greater harm” (muḍarrat aʿẓam). If he knows or feels that prohibiting the alcohol drinkers may result in the bloodshed of Muslims, or burning of a neighborhood, then there is no obligation to perform this act. Fourth, one knows or believes that his advice would have an “effect” (taʾthīr). Fifth, if he knows or feels that one’s action will not result in harm to one’s personal safety or property.¹¹

ʻAbd al-Jabbār states that since the objective of the fifth principle is to command what is right and forbid what is wrong one should not resort to difficult and unpleasant measures where the same can be accomplished by easy and convenient methods. This is known by both reason and revelation. So far as the reason is concerned, if a task can be performed easily, it is not prudent to pursue a difficult course. As far as revelation is concerned, God first commands to mediate through discourse between the two fighting groups of the believers. If they do not desist in fighting, the group at fault should be subdued by force and fighting.¹² He further states that if one is not persuaded by verbal warning then he should be prevented by force. He gives the example of a wine drinker.

---

¹¹ ʻAbd al-Jabbār, Sharḥ, 142-43.
¹² Qurʾān, 49:9; ʻAbd al-Jabbār, Sharḥ, 144.
First, he should be forbidden gently (bi al-qawl al-layyin); if he continues then he should be spoken harshly (khashshana lahu al-qawl); if he persists then he should be beaten; and finally, if he does not stop then he should be fought.\textsuperscript{13}

The Mu‘tazilites argue that a rational person knows that it is in his or her interest to acquire benefit and welfare and avoid harm. If there is oppression and harm being inflicted on the people, it is necessary to stop it. Religion also promotes peace and equity among the people and discourages injustice and violation of their rights. So, enjoining the right and forbidding the wrong is justifiable from the rational and religious point of view.

There are two viewpoints for the implementation of this principle. According to the first opinion only rulers (a‘imma) are responsible and preferable for executing the prescribed punishments (ḥudūd), safeguarding the territory, protecting the seaports, maintaining the army and appointing the judges and executives. People at large (kāffat al-nās) can take action against wine-drinking, theft, adultery, and the like. However, if there is a legitimate ruler, then it is better that he should carry out these duties.\textsuperscript{14}

According to the second opinion, it is a collective duty (fard kifāya), the fulfillment of which by some individuals exempts the other individuals from fulfilling it. In this case, if a sufficient number of people assume the responsibility to implement this principle so that the people may follow the right path and resist impiety, it will excuse other members of the society to perform this duty.\textsuperscript{15} Whether this principle is implemented through a ruler or by some individuals, the main purpose is that there should be a mechanism which ensures that the people are being commanded to perform good deeds and forbidden from the evil acts.

\textsuperscript{14} ‘Abd al-Jabbār, \textit{Sharh}, 148, 750.
Al-Zamakhsharī considers it a “collective duty” (fard ‘alā al-kifāya) the fulfillment of which by some persons exempts the others in the society.16 His interpretation of the verses pertaining to “enjoining the right and forbidding the wrong” (al-amr bi al-ma‘ruf wa al-nahay ‘an al-munkar) is as follows.

Verse 3:104: “And let there be a community among you who may call to goodness and enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong. They are those who will be successful.”

According to al-Zamakhsharī, it is a “collective duty,” and it can be done only by a person who can distinguish between right and wrong and knows how to perform and pursue this duty. There is a possibility that an ignorant person is may forbid the right and enjoin the wrong. He may become harsh in a situation where he is supposed to be lenient or may become gentle at an occasion when he is expected to be tough. If he does not know the juristic differences between the various legal schools (madhāhib),17 it is possible that he may forbid a person from those things which are permissible in his school. Also, if he forbids an obstinate person from doing something, that person may become more strict and persistent in his wrong-doing.

Al-Zamakhsharī also says that there are some conditions which must be taken into consideration while performing this duty. First, a person who is forbidding must be

16 The verse states that there should be a “community among you” (minkum ummatun). The issue is the meaning of “of” (min). Does it mean “consisting of,” or “from among”? In the technical language of the exegetes the first will be an instance of “specification” (tabyīn) implying that all members of the community have the duty of enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong. The second will be an instance of “some/partition” (tab ṭid) implying that only some members are obligated. Al-Zamakhsharī in his interpretation of this verse, uses “some/partition” (tab ṭid). See Michael Cook, “Virtues and Vices, Commanding and Forbidding,” EQ, 5:436.
17 Madhhab (pl. madhāhib) as a term of religion means “a doctrine, a tenet, or an opinion with regard to a particular case” and in law specifically, a technical term mostly translated as “school of law.” There are four legal schools recognized as orthodox by the Sunnite Muslims, viz. Ḥanafite, Mālikite, Shāfi‘ite and Ḥanbalite. The Shi‘ites’ two schools are Ja‘farite and Zaydite.
certain that it is a wrong thing. Second, the prohibited thing from which he is forbidding a person has not yet occurred, because if it has already taken place then it is in vain (‘abath) to stop. Third, he should be certain that his forbidding will not have negative consequences, i.e. he may commit more sins as a reaction. Fourth, he should be certain that from his forbidding that person will refrain from committing bad deeds. He emphasizes that one must be certain that the person is very close to committing a sin and that he will not be assaulted and hurt from the person whom he is forbidding.\(^{18}\)

Verse 3:110: “You are the best nation brought forth to mankind, enjoining the good, forbidding the wrong and believing in God.”

Al-Zamakhshharī states that in this verse God has compared this nation with the previous nations mentioned and found it to be the best among all the nations. God says that, “You were raised for commanding what is right and forbidding what is wrong.”\(^{19}\)

Verse 3:114: “They believe in God and the Last Day, and enjoin the good and forbid the wrong and hasten to do good things. They are among the righteous people.”

The preceding verse 3:113 describes that all the People of the Book (ahl al-kitāb) are not alike. Among them is a community of “upright people” (ummatun qā’imatun) who recite the scripture day and night, believe in God and the Last Day. They enjoin what is good and forbid what is wrong.\(^{20}\)

So far, all the verses have commanded enjoining the good and forbidding the wrong for the unity of the community of believers. In the following verse enjoining the good and forbidding the wrong is addressed to an individual.

\(^{19}\) Al-Zamakhshharī, al-Kashshāf, 1:608-10.
\(^{20}\) Al-Zamakhshharī, al-Kashshāf, 1:611-12.
Verse 31:17: “O my son, perform the prayer, command what is right and forbid what is wrong and bear with patience whatever befalls you.”

In this verse, Luqmān\textsuperscript{21} is addressing his son and giving pious counsel to command the good and forbid the wrong. Al-Zamakhsharī interprets “and bear with patience what befalls you” (wa-ṣbir ‘alā mā aṣābaka) that in general, one should be patient if one is afflicted with hardship, but specifically more patient in case of enjoining the right and forbidding the wrong because this act is of courage and resolve.\textsuperscript{22}

Verse 5:105: “O you who believe, on you rests (the responsibility) for your own selves. You follow the right path those who have gone astray will not be able to do you harm.”

Some people are of the view this verse exempts them from enjoining the right and forbidding the wrong and it is not mandatory (\textit{wājib}). Al-Zamakhsharī differs from this interpretation and states that this verse is addressed to those believers who were concerned and sad for the unbelievers not accepting faith and prayed for them to be believers. He says that the believers are responsible for their souls and those people who have gone astray will not harm them. His interpretation of this verse is that they should not waste away themselves with grief for them and one should not abandon enjoining the right and forbidding the wrong. If someone does not do it, and he is able to do it, he will not be on right path.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{21} Luqmān appears in the Qur’ān as a monotheist and a wise man. However, his identity is by no means certain. Muslim exegetes identify him as a Nubian, as Ethiopian or an Egyptian slave who worked as a carpenter or a shepherd. The majority of the exegetes agree that he was not a prophet. Orientalists associate him with such figures as Prometheus, Lucian and Solomon. See A.H.M. Zahniser, “Luqmān,” \textit{EQ}, 3:242 and B. Heller, “Luḵmān,” \textit{EF}, 5:811.

\textsuperscript{22} Al-Zamakhsharī, \textit{al-Kashshāf}, 5:14-6.

Conclusion

There are three main features of the Mutazilites’ principle of enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong: consistency in their views, homogeneity of the principle over space and time, and activism in varying degrees.24 According to al-Zamakhsharī, it is a “collective duty” (farḍ ʿalā al-kiemāya), the fulfillment of which by some persons exempts the others in the society. It can be done only by a person who can distinguish between right and wrong and knows how to perform and pursue this duty. He states that “enjoining the right” can be both “mandatory” (wājib) and “recommended” (mandūb); however, “forbidding the wrong” is “mandatory” (wājib) because abstaining from the reprehensible things (munkarāt) is mandatory due to their evil nature. Finally, al-Zamakhsharī elaborates in greater detail the prerequisites for enjoining the right and forbidding the wrong.

---

24 Cook, Commanding Right, 224-26.
Conclusions

My hypothesis is that al-Zamakhsharī’s Qur’ān commentary is squarely within the Muʿtazilite tradition. This dissertation contests Andrew Lane’s study in which he argues that “al-Zamakhsharī was neither a theologian nor even a religious scholar in the more limited sense of the word,”¹ and concludes that,

This study, then, puts to rest the myth that the Kashshāf is a ‘Muʿtazilite commentary’ that began with al-hamdu li-llāh alladhī khalaga l-Qurʿān, and demonstrates that it would even be difficult to define what a ‘Muʿtazilite commentary’ actually is. There is, in fact, so little Muʿtazilism in the Kashshāf and so many missed occasions to inject some, that to call it such is a misnomer; nor is there any ‘special outlook’ or ‘distinctive approach’ that can be discerned in the Kashshāf by which its Muʿtazilite character could be redeemed.²

In order to substantiate my hypothesis, I began with al-Zamakhsharī’s methodology of tafsīr which comprises: muḥkamāt wa mutashābihāt, ‘ilm al-maʿānī wa ‘ilm al-bayān, questions and answers (asʾila wa-ajwiba), grammar, tafsīr al-Qurʾān bi-al-Qurʾān, ḥadīth and variant readings of the Qurʾān (qirāʿāt).

Then I described the Muʿtazilites’ five principles (al-uṣūl al-khamsa): God’s unity (al-tawḥīd), God’s justice (al-ʿadl), reward and punishment (al-waʾd wa-al-waʾīd), intermediate position between belief and unbelief (al-manzila bayna al-manzilatayn) and enjoining good and forbidding evil (al-amr bi-al-maʿrūf wa-al-nahy ‘an al-munkar).

I examined and evaluated al-Kashshāf within the framework of these five principles to find out whether and in what manner al-Zamakhsharī defends these

---
¹ Lane, Traditional Muʿtazilite Qurʾān Commentary, 46.
² Lane, Traditional Muʿtazilite Qurʾān Commentary, 229.
principles. I selected those verses where anthropomorphisms need clarification as well as verses that are known to be points of contention between the Muʿtazilites and traditionists.

The following findings support my hypothesis:

The first fundamental principle of the Muʿtazilites is the “unity of God” (tawḥīd), which is the most important thesis of their doctrine because it is the source of all other principles. Al-Zamakhsharī not only believes in this principle, but applies it in his interpretation of the Qurʾān. With regard to God’s attributes, al-Zamakhsharī agrees with Wāṣil b. ʿAtā, who denies the attributes of God such as “knowledge, power, will and life” (al-ʿilm wa-al-qudra wa-al-irāda wa-al-ḥayāt).³ So far as the createdness of the Qurʾān is concerned, al-Zamakhsharī considers that the Qurʾān is the speech of God and it is created by Him. The Muʿtazilites’ reasoning is that God, identical with His attributes, is not subject to change. Therefore, it is impossible that the Qurʾān, in the sense of an attribute, is uncreated, for it is essentially multiple and temporal.

Al-Zamakhsharī emphasizes the absolute uniqueness and transcendence of God and denies His description anthropomorphically in any form, such as direction, place, vision, image, body, face, hand, eye, domain, movement, extinction, change, speaking, sitting, coming or appearing. He is of the opinion that the anthropomorphic verses in the Qurʾān are allegorical or figurative expressions to symbolize God’s attributes and actions. He interprets such verses by the method of taʿwīl or metaphorical interpretation, and elucidates such words according to a secondary or metaphorical meaning found elsewhere in the Qurʾān. It is evident from Zamakhsharī’s interpretation of such verses in the Kashshāf.

³ See al-Shahrastānī, Milal, 1:46.
The second principle is “justice” (‘adl). The Mu‘tazilites called themselves “people of the justice and the unity” (ahl al-‘adl wa al-tawḥīd), and emphasized God’s justice and His goodness towards human beings. Al-Zamakhsharī states that God is just and desires good and His inherent justice prevents Him from inflicting any harm or injustice to the people. It is due to people’s own good or bad deeds that their destiny is decided by God. The Qur’ān exhorts people repeatedly to repent and turn away from evil deeds and thus work for their own salvation. He quotes from the Qur’ān that “those who fulfill their covenant with God” (alladhīna yūfūna bi ʻahdi Allāhi), persevere in seeking the way of their Lord, remain steadfast in prayers and ward off evil with good (yadra’ūna bi al-ḥasanāti al-sayyīʻāt), for them is the recompense of paradise. While “those who break their covenant with God” (alladhīna yanquḍūna bi ʻahdi Allāhi), and spread corruption on the earth (yufsīdūna fī al-arda), for them is an evil abode.4

In order to avoid attributing of evil to God, al-Zamakhsharī maintains that “God does not burden a soul beyond its capacity.”5 His view is based on the Qur’ānic verse that God is not unjust to His servants.6 For al-Zamakhsharī, God’s praising Himself that He could not do evil to His servants, would have no sense if He imposed burden on a soul beyond his capacity. In addition, God is just and “enjoins justice” (yā’ muru bi al-‘adl),7 therefore, “He would impose upon them which is really below their capacity” (fa ja’ala mā faraḍahu ‘alayhim wāqi’an taḥta ṭaqatahum).8

---

6 Qur’ān, 50:29.  
7 Qur’ān, 16:90.  
I treated the third principle “promise and the threat” (al-wa’d wa al-wa’id), and the fourth principle “intermediate position between belief and unbelief” (al-manzila bayna al- manzilatayn) by combining them together. There is a strong relationship and firm link between these two principles because they are based upon the Mu’tazilites’ concepts of “belief” (īmān) and “God’s justice” (‘adl Allāh). Al-Zamakhsharī, in conformity with the Mu’tazilites believes that it is incumbent upon God to carry His promise and threat because He is just. God promises recompense to those who obey Him and threatens punishment to those who disobey Him. He also follows the principle of the intermediate position between belief and unbelief. His definitions of the “believer” (mu’min), “non-believer” (kāfir) and “transgressor (fāsiq)” are synonymous to those of the Mu’tazilites, and throughout his interpretation, he adheres to it.

According to al-Zamakhsharī, “belief” (īmān) consists of performing “righteous deeds” (fi’l al-ḥasanāt) and avoiding “bad deeds” (tarak al-sayyi’āt). He elaborates that belief consists of three elements: confirmation by heart (taṣdīq bi-al-qalb), affirmation by tongue (iqrār bi-al-lisān) and confirmation by deeds (taṣdīq bi-al-‘amal). He states that “sins” (āthām, sing. ithm) consist of two types: major (kabā’ir) and minor (ṣaghā’ir). Major sins are those offences that deserve punishment and it is not abolished until the repentance is made. Indecent and vile offences and associating others with God are also major sins. The minor sins are venial offences and petty in their nature, such as touch by the insane person, and pollution or dirt.

Al-Zamakhsharī agrees with the Mu’tazilites that takfīr is the removal of a punishment from him who deserves to be punished either by means of increasing his reward or due to his repentance. He also considers that “repentance” (tawba) is the only
way to be forgiven by God for a person who commits major sins. If he dies unrepentant he will abide in the fire forever. Finally, he believes in intercession (shafā’a) but differs from the orthodox point of view, who believes that it will be for all the Muslims including those who commit the major sins. Al-Zamakhsharī’s view is that intercession will be granted to the believers only with God’s permission and the objective of intercession is to increase the grace and elevate the ranks of the believers. Intercession for those persons who commit the major sins will be rejected because they are the wrong-doers.

The fifth principle “enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong (al-amr bi al-ma‘rūf wa al-naḥy ʿan al-munkar). There are three main features of this principle of the Mutazilites: consistency in their views, homogeneity of the principle over space and time, and activism in varying degrees. According to al-Zamakhsharī, it is a “collective duty” (fard ʿalā al-kifāya), the fulfillment of which by some persons exempts the others in the society. It can be done only by a person who can distinguish between right and wrong and knows how to perform and pursue this duty. He states that “enjoining the right” can be both “mandatory” (wājib) and “recommended” (mandūb); however, “forbidding the wrong” is “mandatory” (wājib) because abstaining from the reprehensible things (munkarāt) is mandatory due to their evil nature. Finally, al-Zamakhsharī elaborates in greater detail the prerequisites for enjoing the right and forbidding the wrong.

Andrew Lane’s study analyzes “al-Zamakhsharī’s commentary on Sūrat al-Dukhān (Q44: Smoke) and Sūrat al-Qamar (Q54: The Moon), with the intention of

---

9 Cook, Commanding Right, 224-26.
discovering, first of all, what it says and then how its contents can best be described and perhaps even classified if it lends itself to such a treatment. According to him, While it probably would not be correct to speak of these two sūras as being ‘representative’ of the Qur’anic sūra, the forty-fourth and fifty-fourth sūras are a good choice to illustrate how al-Zamakhsharī goes about his exegetical task in the Kashshāf. They are of manageable size; each had approximately the same number of verses (59 and 55) and is of the same approximate length. Furthermore, they are neither early nor late sūras; according to Blachère and Nöldeke, they are Meccan II, although Welch says that, “we can no longer speak of ‘middle Meccan’ or ‘late Meccan’ sūras,” and that, while we can speak more confidently about ‘early Meccan’ sūras, we cannot be certain which sūras belonged to this group.”

Lane states that, While the Kashshāf may be a mouthpiece for Mu’tazilism it is hardly speaking constantly on this topic nor seeking every occasion to do so. Within the framework of the traditional tafsīr musalsal, al-Zamakhsharī seems willing to offer up some Mu’tazilism when the opportunity presents itself but, even then, without going into a long development of the topic. It might have been possible for him, of course, to use many passages as starting point for a presentation of his Mu’tazilite opinions but, in fact, he does not. What distinguishes this commentary from others, then, is not an excess of Mu’tazilism. This restrained use of the tafsīr for expressing Mu’tazilite views is shown by the fact that, in Q44 and Q54, al-Zamakhsharī makes what appears to be only one reference to a Mu’tazilite tenet.

Lane’s choice of the two sūras is arbitrary without any reference to the exegetical tradition of the Mu’tazilites. It is difficult to find out from his work how far al-Zamakhsharī’s Mu’tazilism is muted in comparison with that of his Mu’tazilites predecessors. He also devotes so much more effort to showing where Mu’tazilism is absent than to where it is present that one barely gets an impression of what and where

10 Lane, Traditional Mu’tazilite Qur’ān Commentary, 117.
12 Lane, Traditional Mu’tazilite Qur’ān Commentary, 142-43.
the Muʿtazilite elements are. Lane finds out of the two sūras, only a single reference to a Muʿtazilī tenet, viz. promise and threat, contained in the commentary on verse 54:17.

In reality, however, this is not the case. For instance, al-Zamakhsharī believed in the createdness of the Qurʾān, and he proves it with his interpretation of verse 17:88. Al-Zamakhsharī stressed absolute uniqueness and transcendence of God and denied His description anthropomorphically in any form, such as direction, place, image, body, face, hand, eye, domain, movement, extinction, change, or feeling. He considered the anthropomorphistic verses in the Qurʾān as allegorical or figurative expressions to symbolize God’s attributes and actions. He dealt with such verses by the method of taʾwīl or metaphorical interpretation. He interpreted single words in a Qurʾānic text according to a secondary or metaphorical meaning found elsewhere in the Qurʾān. By the “hand” (yad), he meant God’s blessing (niʿma), and by His “eye” (ʿayn) his knowledge (ʿilm). According to him, God’s “face” (wajh) means God’s very essence, God’s sitting on the throne indicates a symbol of His authority, power and control upon everything. Similarly, al-Zamakhsharī interprets verse 2:7 “metaphorically” (majāzan) and says that neither “seal” (khatm) nor “cover” (taghshia) of the heart have been used in a literal sense. He further elaborates that linking of “sealing their hearts” to God is “evil” (qabīḥ) and God is above all doing any evil act.

---

13 See Schmidkite, Muʿtazilite Creed of az-Zamaḫšarī, 16-18.
14 Qurʾān, 3:26,73; 5:64; 23:88; 36:83; 38:75; 48:10; 57:29; 67:1.
15 Al-Ashʿarī, Maqālāt, 167, 218.
17 Al-Ashʿarī, Maqālāt, 165, 195.
18 Qurʾān, 28:88; 55:27.
19 Al-Ashʿarī, Maqālāt, 521.
20 Qurʾān, 7:54; 10:3; 13:2; 20:5; 25:59; 32:4; 57:4.
21 Al-Ashʿarī, Maqālāt, 211.
Suleiman Mourad’s review of Lane’s study confirms the same conclusions about *al-Kashshāf* which I have arrived at. He states that,

Lane’s study does not show sufficient familiarity with the Mu’tazilite scholarship on the Qur’ān…this book shows insufficient familiarity with what Mu’tazilism is, after all, about. Mu’tazilism is about theology. To establish whether or not *al-Kashshāf* is a Mu’tazilite commentary, one needs only to determine whether, and in what manner, al-Zamakhsharī defends some or all of the five principles of Mu’tazilite theology. For example, in verse 76:3 (innā hadaynāhu al-sabīla immā shākiran wa-immā kafūran), it is obvious that al-Zamakhsharī is upholding the doctrine of al-‘adl (God’s justice): a person’s unbelief is the result of his own wrong choices (bi-sū’i ikhtiyārihi). On another occasion, al-Zamakhsharī criticizes the predestinarians, whom he refers to as al-Mujbira. Moreover, he rejects anthropomorphism when he says that God’s throne (kursī), in verse 2:255, ‘is simply a metaphor and imaginary, for in reality there is no throne, or act of sitting, or one who sits’ (wa-mā huwa lā taswīrūn li-azmatihi wa-takhīyūn faqat, wa-lā kursīyun thamatun wa-lā qu’ūdun wa-lā gū ḍūdun). Similarly, the reference to the hand of God in ’yadu ‘lla maghlūlatu’ in verse 5:64 is, according to al-Zamakhsharī, an allegory, and ‘he who is not versed in the science of language (‘ilm al-bayān) is blind to the correct meaning of verses like this one.’ Al-Zamakhsharī also asserts the doctrine of the createdness of the Qur’ān in verse 43:3 (innā ja‘alnāhu qur’ānan ‘arabiyan…), when he says that God created it (ay, khalaqnāhu ‘arabiyan ghayra a‘jamī). Such passages demonstrate that al-Zamakhsharī’s commentary is indeed a Mu’tazilite one.

Lane also argues that, “while al-Zamakhsharī may be well known for his ‘Mu’tazilite’ commentary on the Qur’ān, exegesis in general and Mu’tazilism in particular are hardly representative of his literary output… al-Zamakhsharī was neither a theologian nor even a religious scholar in the more limited sense of the word.”

---

27 Lane, *Traditional Mu’tazilite Qur’ān Commentary*, 46.
mentions that “absolutely no one studied theology with him, although he had Mutazilites among his students.”

Lane states that,

The rather limited scope of al-Zamakhshari’s theological thinking can be seen in a comparison of the Kashshāf with his Minhāj fī uṣūl al-dīn, a short treatise described by Madelung as “a brief summary of his theological creed,” and by Schmidtke as “a short creedal tract on theology.” In this tract, al-Zamakhsharı cites twenty-eight quranic passages to support some of his arguments… al-Zamakhsharı refers to the Quran on only twelve occasions in the entire Minhāj fī uṣūl al-dīn…A careful examination of al-Zamakhsharı’s commentary on these same twenty-eight passages in the Kashshāf revealed that only at ten of them does he raise the theological points for which he used them in the Minhāj. Of the remaining eighteen, he expresses ideas that could be attributed to the Mu’tazilite influence at only seven of them; in the remaining eleven cases, Mu’tazilite commentary is lacking.

According to Sabine Schmidtke,

Lane compares al-Kashshāf with Zamakhsharı’s single theological treatise, al-Minhāj fī uṣūl al-dīn, paying particular attention to the scriptural quotations adduced throughout the Minhāj concludes that “al-Zamakhsharı displays an overall lack of concern in the Kashshāf for the specific ‘Mu’tazilite content’ of the verses that he used in the Minhāj.” However, no details (not even references) are given for the ten verses that evoked theological discussions, nor for the eleven that might show Mu’tazilite influence.

With respect to al-Zamakhsharı’s Mu’tazilism, a number of the biographical dictionaries mention that, when making a call on someone, al-Zamakhsharı used to have announced himself as follows: “Abū al-Qāsim the Mu’tazilite is at the door” (Abū al-

28 Lane, Traditional Mu’tazilite Qurʾān Commentary, 35.
29 The Minhāj fī uṣūl al-dīn is divided into nine chapters in the “question-and-answer” (masā’il wa-ajwiba), format, and deals with the Mu’tazilite principles. See Schmidtke, A Mu’tazilite Creed of az-Zamaḥšarı, 9; Madelung, The Theology of al-Zamakhsharı, 488.
30 Lane, Traditional Mu’tazilite Qurʾān Commentary, 146.
31 Lane, Traditional Mu’tazilite Qurʾān Commentary, 147.
Qāsim al-mu’tazīlī bi al-bāb). Abū al-Fidā’ (d. 732/1331) and Ibn Athîr (d. 774/1373) state that al-Zamakhsharî professed Mu’tazilism openly, and al-Kashshāf’s explicit theme is Mu’tazilite theology. It is beyond any doubt that al-Zamakhsharî was a Mu’tazilite and affirmed it himself.

All the scholars, contemporary of al-Zamakhsharî and of the subsequent generations, are in agreement that al-Zamakhsharî was a Mu’tazilite and affirmed it himself.

All the scholars, contemporary of al-Zamakhsharî and of the subsequent generations, are in agreement that al-Zamakhsharî was a Mu’tazilite and affirmed it himself.


Ibn al-Munayyîr intended to write against al-Ghazâlî too because his writings were in accord with contemporary Mālikites. However, his mother argued with him “you just finished war against the living, and now you want to start war against the dead” (faraghta min muḍārabat al-aḥyâ wa shara‘a ta fī muḍârabat al-amwāt). See al-Suyûṭî, al-Bughya, 1:384; Goldziher, Schools of Koranic Commentators, 80-81.

‘Abd Allāh b. Abī Jamāra al-Andalusī (d. 699/1300) states that al-Kashshāf is an exquisite and sublime commentary of the Qur’ān. The reader of this book falls in one of the two categories: either he is an expert in his knowledge or he does not have sufficient qualifications to comprehend it. If someone is expert and knowledgeable of the intrigues (i.e., Muʿtazilite doctrines and their views) which have been inserted in the tafsīr, then it will not be harmful and one can find those machinations. It may be beneficial because of its refined and eloquent use of Arabic language, logical interpretation, and things similar to that. However, if a person is not knowledgeable, then it is not permissible for him to look into it because he may slip into intrigues without realizing it.39

According to Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), the Muʿtazilites’ interpretation of the Qurʾān can be disproved by demonstrating that their views are erroneous in two ways: either by refuting the arguments which they advance or by defending the positions which they attack. Some of them have an elegant, lucid and eloquent style of writing and introduce their erroneous beliefs so clandestinely that many readers fail to perceive them. The author of al-Kashshāf, for instance, has succeeded in making his commentary so attractive to a great number of people that they would hardly look for his erroneous views in it. In fact, some scholars approvingly quote passages from his tafsīr in their writings without realizing that they contain ideas derived from the Muʿtazilite principles.40

Abū Ḥayyān (d. 745/1344) is of the opinion that al-Zamakhsharī is amply endowed with the Qurʾānic knowledge and combines in his commentary innovative meanings of the words, proficiency and eloquent style. In his book there are praiseworthy

---

as well as intriguing things. He has written down his evaluation in the form of poetry in which he praises the book and mentions its merits from which a person can benefit. However, he cautions about those things which are impertinent in it and should be avoided.\(^{41}\)

Al-Dhahābī (d. 748/1348) is very critical in his assessment about al-Zamakhšhārī. He mentions in *al-‘Ibar*, that al-Zamakhšhārī was a scholar of great qualities and used to propagate for Muʿtazilism. In *Tā’rīkh al-Islam*, he states that he expressed openly his Muʿtazilite creed and called others to innovation. He repeats in *Siyar*, that al-Zamakhšhārī used to propagate Muʿtazilism. May God have mercy on him. Finally, in *Mīzān al-iʿtīdāl*, after mentioning that he propagates Muʿtazilism openly, al-Dhahābī states that God may protect people and warns that one should be cautious when reading *al-Kashshāf*.\(^{42}\)

In al-Subkī’s (d. 771/1370) view *al-Kashshāf* is a great book in the field of exegesis and its author is a great scholar except that he is a heretic. It is, therefore, necessary that whatever is written in *al-Kashshāf* should be erased.\(^{43}\)

According to Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406), there are two types of Qurʾānic interpretations. The first type is traditional, based upon information received from the early Muslims. The second type is based upon the linguistic knowledge, such as lexicography and eloquence (*balāgha*) used for conveying meaning through rational means and methods. The second type of commentary is best represented by al-


Zamakhsharī’s *al-Kashšāf*, who is a Mu‘tazilite in his dogmatic views. He uses the various methods of rhetoric, arguing in favor of the pernicious doctrines of the Mu‘tazila, wherever he believed they occurred in the verses of the Qur‘ān. Competent orthodox scholars have, therefore, come to disregard this work and warn everyone against its pitfalls. However, they admit that he is on solid ground relating to language and eloquence. If the reader is well-versed with the orthodox dogmas and knows the arguments in their defense, he is undoubtedly safe from its fallacies. Therefore, he should take the advantage of studying it, because of its remarkable and varied linguistic information.44

Burhān al-Dīn Ḥyder (d. 830/1426) states that *al-Kashšāf* is of exquisite quality which he did not see similar to it among the works of earlier writers, and one will not find anything like it among the writings of the latter. It has precise and proficient wordings, elegant composition, and meticulous stylistic peculiarity. It does not fall short of any standards when someone examines the principles of exegesis, refinement of demonstrations and proofs, methodology, and reconstruction of points for synthesis. However, if one draws analogous conclusions from it, then one finds that its author’s Mu‘tazilite views are interwoven and the interpretation falls down into errors culminating into perilous mistakes. As a consequence, one finds the *tafsīr* altered from its real meaning and it is a great misfortune and immense calamity.45

According to Ibn Ḥajar al-ʻAsqalānī, people who are enthusiastic about reading *al-Kashshāf* should be very careful. If they are thoroughly familiar and well-versed with

the traditions (sunna) and read it with extreme care they can benefit from the commentary provided they safeguard against its intrigues and secret machinations.46

Amongst the modern scholars, Nöldeke speaks of “[al-Zamakhsharī’s] most clever and over-subtle investigations of philosophical and theological matters” in the Kashshāf,47 Nassau Lees refers to the Mu‘tazilite doctrines that “pervade the whole Preface;”48 Goldziher states that in the Kashshāf al-Zamakhsharī “produced a concise fundamental work for Mu‘tazilite Qur’ān interpretation.”49 Rashid Ahmad is of the opinion that “al-Zamakhsharī sometimes appears in his commentary more as a rigid Mu‘tazilī than as a commentator.”50 Jane Smith considers that “[al-Zamakhsharī] was most definitely both, his interpretation of and commentary on the Qur’ān strongly influenced by his theological viewpoints;”51 According to McAuliffe, [al-Kashshāf] is a “mouthpiece for the dogmas of the ahl al-‘adl wa-al-tawḥīd (People of [Divine] Justice and Unicity) as the Mu‘tazilites preferred to style themselves.”52 Rippin writes that “The Mu‘tazilī al-Zamakhsharī opts for interpretation based upon reason in his commentary [al-Kashshāf]. Apparent contradictions between verses of the Qur’ān are (sic) resolved in favour of the Mu‘tazilī doctrines of unity and justice of God.”53

I do not agree with Lane’s findings that, “This study, then, puts to rest the myth that the Kashshāf is a ‘Mu‘tazilite commentary.’” Since al-Zamakhsharī’s time, most of the commentators cautioned their readers to be aware of al-Kashshāf’s “ideas derived

46 Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalānī, Lisān al-mīzān, 7:64.
47 Nöldeke, Geschichte des Qorâns, xxviii.
48 Kashshāf, 1:7 (Calcutta edition).
50 Rashid Ahmad, “Qur’ānic Exegesis and Classical Tafsīr,” The Islamic Quarterly 12 (1968), 95.
51 Smith, Historical and Semantic Study of the Term ‘Islām’, 92-93.
52 McAuliffe, Qur’ānic Christians, 53.
53 A. Rippin, ER, 14:236-44.
from the Muʿtazilite principles,”⁵⁴ “Muʿtazilite contents and their propagation,”⁵⁵ “its intrigues and secret mechanitions.”⁵⁶ Some of them have written to the extent “that the author of al-Kashshāf is heretic and whatever is written in it should be erased.”⁵⁷ Their findings that al-Kashshāf’s contents are not only Muʿtazilite, but anyone who intends to read it, must be well-versed with the orthodox dogmas and must know arguments in their defense.

In chapters six, seven and eight, I have analyzed thoroughly al-Zamakhsharī’s interpretations of the Qur’ānic verses as provided in al-Kashshāf. After the analysis of these verses, I have come to the conclusion that al-Zamakhsharī’s tafsīr of al-Kashshāf is in accord with the Muʿtazilites’ five principles of al-tawḥīd, al-ʿadl, al-waʿd wa al-waʿīd, al-manzila bayna al-manzilatayn and amr bi-al-maʿrūf wa al-nahy ʿan al-munkar. He elucidated his interpretation with such convincing arguments that it is the only extant and complete Muʿtazilite tafsīr survived now. Finally, my thesis unequivocally establishes the fact that al-Kashshāf is a Muʿtazilite commentary.

⁵⁴ Ibn Taymiyya, Muqaddima, 85-86.
Appendix 1

Al-Kashshāf

1. Introduction of al-Kashshāf

Al-Kashshāf an ḥaqāʾiq ghawāmiḍ al-tanzīl wa ‘uyūn al-aqāwīl fī wujūh al-taʾwīl is the magnum opus of al-Zamakhsharī in which he explains the grammatical, lexicographical, and rhetorical features, variant readings and the miraculous nature (iʿjāz) of the Qurʾān.¹ In the preface to al-Kashshāf, al-Zamakhsharī describes the reasons for writing his exegesis of the Qurʾān. He states, “The learned Muʿtazilite companions used to come to ask me the interpretation of a Qurʾānic verse that I would explain to them clearly and distinctively and it was acclaimed and approved by them. They expressed their desire through some eminent scholars that I should write a commentary on the entire Qurʾān, but I declined it due to my inability to embark upon such a big task.” However, they insisted upon it and considered that it was his obligation like an individual duty (farḍ ‘ayn), because of the deplorable conditions, inadequacy (of knowledge) of the masses, and lack of determination in those days.² Al-Zamakhsharī further states that he elaborated


² Farḍ ‘ayn is an injunction or ordinance the obligation of which extends to every Muslim, such as five daily prayers and fasting during the month of Ramādān, etc. Fard kifāya is a collective duty in which the performance of an obligation by a sufficient number of Muslims excuses the other individuals from
and commented on the opening letters (fawātiḥ) of the Qur’ānic chapters and the real meanings of the second chapter entitled “The Cow” (al-Baqarah) in the expectation of inculcating in his readers an appreciation of the science of exegesis. When he made the decision for return to Mecca and embarked upon his journey, he encountered people, though a few of them, enthusiastically desired to learn and benefit from his knowledge. When he reached Mecca, the distinguished amīr and Zaydī Imām of Mecca, Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. ‘Īsā b. Ḥamza b. Wahhās (d. 526/1131) insisted and urged him that he should compose his commentary. He also told him that he was planning to visit him in Khwārazm and preparing for journey to convince him for writing it. Al-Zamakhsharī states that upon such insistence and desire of people, he was left with no other choice except to comply with their request. He finished his tafsīr in two years despite his old age and illness, while in fact it was a job of thirty years.4

2. Transmission of al-Kashshāf

The primary sources do not provide much information about the transmission of al-Kashshāf after its completion. The sources mention Abū Ṣāliḥ ‘Abd al-Raḥīm b. ‘Umar al-Tarjamānī, only one student of al-Zamakhsharī who studied al-Kashshāf with him over a period of seven years; however, there is no evidence that he transmitted it to others.5

---

3 Twenty-nine surās of the Qur’ān begin with a group of letters which are called fawātiḥ al-suwar, “the openers of the surās,” awā’il al-suwar, “the beginnings of the surās,” al-hurūf al-muqāṭṭa’tā ʿāt, “the disconnected letters.” According to al-Suyūṭī, the fawātiḥ are simply mysterious letters or symbols known fully to God. See A.T. Welch, “al-Ḳur’ān,” EI2, 5:400-32.

4 Al-Zamakhsharī, al-Kashshāf, 1:98.

Al-Fāsī states that he saw the title of *al-Kashshāf* mentioned in the *Fihris* of the jurist Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad b. ʿĪsā b. Muṭayr al-Yamanī. The *Fihris* describes that Abū al-Maʿālī Yaḥyā b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. ʿAlī al-Shaybānī, a qāḍī in Mecca, transmitted *al-Kashshāf* from al-Zamakhsharī to his nephew Abū al-Maʿālī Mājid b. Sulaymān b. al-Fihrī (d. 655/1257), who then transmitted it to others. Al-Fāsī also mentions that al-Zamakhsharī granted Abū al-Ṭāhir Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Silafī (d. 576/1180), Abū Ṭāhir Barakāt b. Ibrāhīm al-Khushūʿī (d. 598/1201) and Umm al-Muʿayyad Zaynab bint ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Shaʿrī (d. 615/1218) license (*ijāza*) to transmit *al-Kashshāf*.

According to Gilliot, Abū al-Ṭāhir Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Silafī (d. 576/1180) could be another source of transmission of *al-Kashshāf*. He moved to Alexandria in 511/1117-8 where he settled and remained until his death. He states, “The choice of Alexandria was quasi-strategic, since there he could meet Muslim intellectuals of East and West …without leaving his domicile, and this purpose was duly achieved. His renown extended far beyond that of a traditionist and a writer since it is impossible to count the number of times that he appears in certificates of audition (*samaʾāt*) or of reading, or in licenses of transmission (*ijāzāt*).” He mentions hundreds of works for which al-Silafī is credited for issuing the certificates of authenticity.

Al-Zamakhsharī studied theology with Rukn al-Dīn Maḥmūd b. al-Malāḥimī (d. 536/1141) and Abū Manṣūr. They were also al-Zamakhsharī’s students who studied exegesis with him. ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Khwārazmī (d. ca. 560/1165) studied traditions

---

with al-Zamakhsharī and composed his commentary on the Qur’ān. However, there is no proof in the sources that anyone of them transmitted *al-Kashshāf*.

3. Manuscripts of *al-Kashshāf*

*Al-Fihris al-shāmil* mentions 843 manuscripts of *al-Kashshāf*, out of which 443 manuscripts bear the date or century in which they were copied are available in various libraries and museums of the world. Out of 443 dated manuscripts, Lane analyzes 250 manuscripts most of which are in Istanbul. According to his analysis, the earliest (Feyzullāh 221, dated 542/1148) was copied only four years after al-Zamakhsharī’s death and fourteen years after he had finished the commentary in Mecca. The most recent manuscript given in *al-Fihris* is in Riyāḍ which is dated 1301/1882. This indicates that there never was a time when somebody somewhere was not copying al-Zamakhsharī’s *tafsīr*. Lane also describes the geographic dispersion of *al-Kashshāf*. Of the 250 manuscripts, only forty-one provide the name of the place where they were copied. The names of these places were taken directly from the actual manuscripts, not from the catalogues. All of these manuscripts have a date also, although in a few cases a definite date of a manuscript’s completion is not certain. The analysis shows that these manuscripts were copied in the great capitals of the Muslim world: Baghdad, Cairo, Damascus, and Istanbul; as well as important centers and regional capitals: Aq Sarāy, Damaghān, Gaza, Hamāt, Iṣfahān, Jurjāniyya, Kāth, Konya, Mosul, Nicaea (Iznīq),

---


Raqqa, Shīrāz, and Tabrīz. Lane concludes that from Khwārazm where the first dated manuscript was copied in 542/1148, *al-Kashshāf* spread to every region of the Muslim world: Khwārazm, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Egypt, and Turkey.

According to Lane, four of the manuscripts indicate that there were two originals of *al-Kashshāf* written by al-Zamakhsharī: the *umm al-Kashshāf* and the copy of *al-Kashshāf* bequeathed to the Abu Ḥanīfa’s (d. 150/767) mausoleum. The *umm al-Kashshāf* is obviously the first autographed copy for that is what the author writes in the postscript (*hiya nuskhat al-aṣl al-‘ūlā*). There was also the second original manuscript (*nuskhat al-aṣl al-thānī*). Both copies contained the epilogue but only the *umm al-Kashshāf* had the postscript. Regarding the second original manuscript, the tradition says that it was written by al-Zamakhsharī himself and not by a scribe working for him, whose copy al-Zamakhsharī would then have in some way authenticated. Lane poses a question as to why al-Zamakhsharī would have written two copies of the same work in the first place, the *umm al-Kashshaf* and another bequeathed to the Abū Ḥanīfa Mausoleum. According to him, the most likely reason for the second copy is the rough draft (*sawād*) to which al-Zamakhsharī explicitly refers in the postscript and from which he copied the *umm al-Kashshaf* in Mecca between 526/1132 and 528/1134. The postscript was added to the copy of *al-Kashshaf* completed in Mecca to show that it, and not the rough draft, was the first (*al-‘ūlā*), the primary, main, and most important copy of *al-Kashshāf*, and not the *sawād* from which it was copied and which must have been used to make other copies. This would explain that why al-Zamakhsharī felt the need to authenticate the 528/1134

---

11 These four manuscripts are: (1) Manuscript Nurosmaniye 297/406 (n.d.); (2) Manuscript Nurosmaniye 290/399 (1050 A.H.); Manuscript Veliyyudin 244 (677 A.H.); and Manuscript Hkm 132 (716 A.H.).
Meccan copy, perhaps several years after having finished it. Whether the rough draft was in circulation throughout al-Zamakhsharī’s lifetime and only later entrusted to the Abū Ḥanīfa mausoleum or whether it was already bequeathed to this sanctuary during the author’s lifetime is not known.12

4. Issue of khalaq al-Qur’ān

All biographical sources mention that al-Zamakhsharī was a Mu’tazilite and adhered to the Ḥanafī school of fiqh and expressed his theological viewpoint publicly.13 He was proud to be a Mu’tazilite, and it is reported that when he used to visit his friends and seek permission to enter, when asked about his identification, he would reply that Abū al-Qāsim, the Mu’tazilite was on the door (abū al-Qāsim al-mu’tazīli bi al-bāb).14

According to Ibn Khallikān, when al-Zamakhsharī compiled al-Kash shāf the first time he wrote in the introduction, “Praise be to God who created the Qur’ān” (alḥamdu li-llāh alladhī khalaqa al-Qur’ān). When he was told that if he left it behind in this form, people would renounce it and nobody would desire to read it. Then he changed it with the statement, “Praise be to God who made the Qur’ān” (alḥamdu li-llāh alladhī jaʿala al-Qur’ān). Ibn Khallikān states that according to them (Mu’tazilites), jaʿala (to make) means khalaqa (to create) and both words have the same meaning. He further mentions

---

12 Lane mentions that, “At the end of his introduction (muqaddima) to the Kashshāf, al-Zamakhsharī says he has put together a short tafsīr that is, nevertheless, quite useful and that with God’s blessing, despite age and illness, he has been able to finish in only two years what should have been the work of thirty. This statement need not be doubted but it has been understood to mean that he began to write the Kashshāf upon his arrival in Mecca in 526/1132, however, was not the Kashshāf as such, but only the final draft and it is that which he finished in 528/1134.” So, according to him, the Kashshāf is not the work of only two years. See Lane, Traditional Mu’tazilite Qur’an Commentary 48-75.


that he saw in many manuscripts, “Praise be to God who revealed the Qur’ān” \( (al\text{ḥamdu li-llāh alladhī anzala al-Qur’ān) }; however, this amendment was made by the people and not by the author himself.\(^{15}\) Al-Dhahābī, al-Fāsī, and Ibn al-‘Imād narrate the same account as mentioned by Ibn Khallikān.\(^{16}\)

Abū al-Fidāʾ states that \( al-\text{Kashshāf} \) is the commentary (of al-Zamakhshārī) and it openly deals with Muʿtazilīte creed. He started his commentary with the statement:

“Praise be to God who created the Qurʾān” \( (al\text{ḥamdu li-llah alladhī khalaqa al-Qurʾān) }.\)

Then his companions modified it and wrote, “Praise be to God who made the Qurʾān” \( (al\text{ḥamdu li-llah alladhī jaʿala al-Qurʾān) }.\)

Ibn al-WARDĪ mentions that his (al-Zamakhshārī’s) introductory statement of \( al-\text{Kashshāf} \) exegesis began with, “Praise be to God who created the Qurʾān” \( (al\text{ḥamdu li-llah alladhī khalaqa al-Qurʾān) }. \)

Then afterwards, he changed it with “Praise be to God who revealed the Qurʾān” \( (al\text{ḥamdu li-llah alladhī anzala al-Qurʾān) }.\)

Al-Yāfī describes that when he (al-Zamakhshārī) compiled the book \( (al-\text{Kashshāf}) \), he introduced it with the statement, “Praise be to God who created the Qurʾān” \( (al\text{ḥamdu li-llah alladhī khalaqa al-Qurʾān) }. \)

When he was told that if he left the book in this form, people would avoid it reading, then he changed it with the words, “Praise be to God who revealed the Qurʾān” \( (al\text{ḥamdu li-llah alladhī anzala al-Qurʾān) }.\)

It is also said that it was a modification of the people, not of the writer.\(^{19}\)

\(^{15}\) Ibn Khallikān, \( \text{Wafayāt al-aˈyān, 5:170.} \)

\(^{16}\) Al-Dhahābī, \( \text{Tāʾrīkh al-Islām, 36:489; al-Fāsī, al-ˈIqd al-thamān, 7:141; Ibn al-ˈImād, Shaddhārāt, 4:120.} \)

\(^{17}\) Abū al-Fidāʾ, \( \text{Kitāb al-Mukhtarāt 3:25.} \)

\(^{18}\) Ibn al-WARDĪ, \( \text{Tāʾrīkh 2:63.} \)

\(^{19}\) Al-Yāfī, \( \text{Mirʾāt al-janān 3:270.} \)
It can be observed that there are variations of accounts in the sources about two main issues. The first issue deals with the words *khalaqa* (created), *ja‘ala* (made) and *anzala* (revealed) in the introduction of *al-Kashshāf*. According to Ibn Khallikān, al-Dhahabī, al-Fāsī, and Ibn al-‘Imād the change was made from *khalaqa* to *ja‘ala* and both words are synonymous in their meanings. On the other hand, Abū al-Fidā’, Ibn al-Wardī, and al-Yaf’ī mention that the word *khalaqa* was substituted with *anzala* which has different meanings. The second issue concerns as to who actually made the change in the text. According to Ibn Khallikān and al-Fāsī, the amendment was made by the people and not by the author himself. Al-Dhahabī does not mention who made the change. Abū al-Fidā’ says that it was al-Zamakhsharī’s companions who later modified the text, while Ibn al-Wardī states that the text was amended after his death and like al-Dhahabī does not specify who made it. Al-Yaf’ī’s account is contradictory because he says that al-Zamakhsharī changed the word *khalaqa* with *anzala* himself. Then he adds that it was the correction made by the people not by the author.

There are some sources which indicate that al-Zamakhsharī did not write *khalaqa* in the introduction of his *tafsīr*. The author of *al-Qāmūs*, Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb al-Fīrūzābādī (d. 817/1415) says, “Some scholars are of the opinion, while commenting on *al-Kashshāf* that al-Zamakhsharī wrote in his original *tafsīr* (that God) created (*khalaqa*) the Qur’ān in place of revealed (*anzala*) the Qur’ān which was changed either by the author himself or someone else safeguarding against the ostensible negative reaction of the people. However, it is completely wrong because I presented this view to my
teacher\(^{20}\) who denied it vehemently.” According to al-Fīrūzābādī’s teacher, this statement was far from being true due to two reasons. The first is that it was of no importance for al-Zamakhsharī to write that it (the Qur’ān) was revealed. The second reason being that he did not conceal his Mu‘tazilite position, rather he was proud of it. Furthermore, in the subsequent manuscripts (of al-Kashshāf) the meanings are very clear and it was not considered impertinent. Al-Fīrūzābādī also states, “I saw the manuscript in the handwriting of al-Zamakhsharī preserved in the mausoleum of Abū Ḥanīfa which was free from any sign of erasure or correction.”\(^{21}\)

5. Commentaries on al-Kashshāf

Since its inception, al-Kashshāf has been subject to orthodox Sunni criticism which centered on the basic principles of Mu‘tazilite theology. In fact, no other book in the history of tafsīr has been commented upon in the forms of sharhs, hāshiyyas, and mukhtaṣars more than al-Kashshāf. Hājjī Khalīfa (d. 1067/1657) in his Kashf al-ẓūnūn lists approximately fifty commentaries.\(^{22}\) Al-Fīhris al-shāmil mentions seventy-three sharhs, hāshiyyas, and mukhtaṣars; however, twelve of these commentaries have been written by unknown authors.\(^{23}\) According to Lane, more than eighty scholars have written sharhs, hāshiyyas, and mukhtaṣars. Some of these commentaries have been written by well-known scholars, while other scholars are known by the names on the manuscripts of the sharhs, hāshiyyas, and mukhtaṣars that have survived, although some works on the

---


\(^{21}\) Hājjī Khalīfa, Kashf al-ẓūnūn, 2:1482.

\(^{22}\) Hājjī Khalīfa, Kashf al-ẓūnūn, 2:1475-84.

\(^{23}\) Al-Fīhris al-shāmil, 2:511-28.
Kashshāf bear no name at all. Although more than eighty commentaries have been compiled, none has been published in a critical edition, nor has been studied in a systematic manner. However, some of these works have been incorporated into the margins of different editions of *al-Kashshāf*. With the exception of the first two printed editions of *al-Kashshāf* all of them have two, three, or four sharḥs, ḥāshiyaṣ, and shawāhidṣ of the following authors either in the margins, or as footnotes, or at the end of al-Zamakhsharī’s *tafsīr*. They are: Ibn al-Munayyir, al-Zaylaʿī, al-Jurjānī, Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, Muḥibb al-Dīn Afandī, and al-Marzūqī.

Nāṣir al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. al-Munayyir (d. 683/1284) was a great scholar in grammar, literature, Arabic, jurisprudence, theology, and exegesis. He was unparalleled in rhetoric and calligraphy. He composed *al-Intiṣāf min ṣāḥib al-Kashshāf* in which he refutes the Muʿtazilite viewpoints of *al-Kashshāf* and provides Sunnī orthodox response. However, he generously praises the lexicological and grammatical knowledge and eloquent style of al-Zamakhsharī.

Al-Sayyid al-Sharīf ʿAlī b. Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Jurjānī (d. 816/1413) was a Ḥanafī theologian and a great scholar in grammar, logic, law, and language of his time.

---

24 Lane states that, “Some of the glosses in Istanbul were of a few pages each and were usually to be found in bound manuscripts containing a number of other works or fragments. The card catalogue of the Sulemymaniye listed about thirty ḥawāshī, a third of which were well under 100 folios in length (the longest was 67 folios). While there were 40 to 50 copies of such well-known commentaries as those by Saʿd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī (d. 793/1390) and al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī (d. 816/1413), many of the lesser known commentaries were limited to one or two copies. A few copies of the Kashshāf even had an anonymous ḥāshiya in the margins. For example, at the end of the fourth rubʿ of MS. Feyzullāh 223, a marginal note reads: *tammat al-ḥāshiya* [Tuesday, 7 Ramaḍān 772 H]. There is no indication as to whose ḥāshiya it is. MS. Feyzullāh 223 was completed on Wednesday, 16 Rabīʿ II 777 A.H., after the gloss on the fourth rubʿ had been finished. This date is given at the end of the third rubʿ, indicating that it and not the fourth rubʿ was the last to be copied; no name or date is given at the end of the fourth rubʿ. See Lane, *Traditional Muʿtazilite Qurʾān Commentary*, 86-87.

25 The first edition of *al-Kashshāf* was printed by Maṭbaʿāt al-Laysī, Calcutta in 1856-59. The second edition was published by Dār al-Ṭibāʿa al-Misriyya – al-Maṭbaʿa al-[Amīriyya], Bulāq in 1281/1864.

According to al-Suyūṭī, he wrote more than fifty books and composed a commentary on *al-Kashshāf* which he did not finish. His Ḥāshiya ‘alā tafsīr al-Kashshāf is also an orthodox explanation of al-Zamakhsharī’s *tafsīr*.

Jamāl al-Dīn ‘Abd Allāh b. Yūsuf al-Zaylā‘ī (d. 762/1360) was a Ḥanfī jurist, ḥadīth transmitter and theologian who compiled *Risāla fi takhrīj aḥādīth al-Kashshāf wa-mā fīhī qiṣaṣ wa-athār*. Shihāb al-Dīn Abū al-Faḍl Aḥmad b. ‘Alī b. Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī (d. 852/1449) made an abridgement of the *Risāla* entitled *al-Kāff al-shāff fī taḥrīr aḥādīth al-Kashshāf*. It deals with the traditions mentioned in *al-Kashshāf*, and classifies them in *ṣaḥīḥ* (sound), *ḥasan* (fair), *da‘īf* (weak), and *mawḍu‘* (spurious), and is printed in most of the *Kashshāf* editions.

Muḥībb al-Dīn Afandī Abū al-Faḍl Muḥammad b. Taqī al-Dīn (d. 1014/1605) was a Ḥanafī jurist and expert in several sciences. He compiled a commentary on the *shawāhid* used by al-Zamakhsharī in the *Kashshāf* titled *Tanzīl al-āyāt ‘alā al-shawāhid min al-abyāt*. This work is included in some of the *Kashshāf* editions.

Muḥammad ‘Aylān al-Marzūqī (d. 1355/1936) was a Shāfi‘ī theologian, Qurʾān commentator and scholar in several sciences. He is author of two books Ḥāshiya ‘alā tafsīr al-Kashshāf and *Mashāhid al-insāf ‘alā shawāhid al-Kashshāf*. Both of them are also included in most of the *Kashshāf* editions.

‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar Nāṣīr al-Dīn al-Bayḍāwī (d. ca. 685/1286) was a Shāfi‘ī theologian and reputed for wide learning. He wrote on a number of subjects including Qurʾān exegesis, law, jurisprudence, scholastic theology, and grammar. His famous work

---

is the commentary on the Qur’ān entitled *Anwār al-tanzīl wa-asrār al-ta’wīl* which he composed in response to *al-Kashshāf*. According to Robson, despite his refutation and amendments to the *Kashshāf*’s Mu'tazilite views, on occasions he retained them, possibly without full realizing their significance.\textsuperscript{31} Watt considers, “This was intended as a manual for instruction in colleges or mosque-schools, and therefore aims at giving in concise from all that was best and soundest in previous commentaries, including important variant interpretations.”\textsuperscript{32} Al-Subkī and al-Suyūṭī also mention al-Bayḍāwī’s dependence on al-Zamakhsharī. In addition, both of them list a summarized version of the *Kashshāf* entitled *Mukhtaṣar al-Kashshāf* by him.\textsuperscript{33}

Besides al-Bayḍāwī, there are a number of commentators who wrote *ḥāshiyas* on *al-Kashshāf*. They are as follows:

1. Muḥibb al-Dīn Abū al-Baqā’ ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Ḥusayn al-ʿUkbarī (d. 616/1219) was Ḥanbalī juristprudent, grammarian, philologist, Qur’ān reciter, exegete, and transmitter of ḥadīth. According to Mohammed Yalaouī, his reputation as a grammarian and commentator attracted pupils from distant parts. Al-Suyūṭī mentions that he was trustworthy in the transmission of ḥadīth, excellent and distinguished in his character, much committed to religion, modest in his disposition, and frequent visitor to those who were in charge of teaching and education. Amongst his disciples were e.g. Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd (d. 655/1256), commentator on the *Nahja al-balāgha*, the biographer, al-Mundhirī (d. 656/1257), the historian, Ibn al-Najjār (d. 643/1245) and al-Dubaythī (d. 637/1239).

\begin{footnotes}
\item J. Robson, “al-Bayḍāwī,” *Et*, 1:1129.
\end{footnotes}
Out of some sixty titles attributed to him, most of them deal with grammatical teaching and philological glosses on texts: the Qurʾān, ḥadīth, ancient poets and poetry, Sībawayh’s shawāhid, the sermons of Ibn Nubāta and the Maqāmāt of al-Ḥarīrī. In addition, he wrote many commentaries on well-known works. According to al-Fihris, he composed a gloss on al-Kashshāf.34

2. ‘Izz al-Dīn Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. ‘Abd al-Salām al-Sulamī (d. 660/1262), renowned as “Authority of the scholars,” (sultān al-ʿulamā) was Shāfiʿī jurist and a great scholar in theology and exegesis. He was expert in jurisprudence and his judicial approach centered around the concept of “the interest of the community” (al-maṣāliḥ). He was an imām at the Umayyad mosque in Damascus and professor of Shāfiʿī law at the Sāliḥiyya college, founded in Cairo by al-Malik al-Sāliḥ. His works include al-Qawāʿid al-kubrā on jurisprudence, al-Ghāya fī ikhtiṣār al-nihāya on al-Shāfiʿī’s jurisprudence, Tafsīr al-Qurʾān, and Mukhtaṣar al-Kashshāf.35

3. Nāsir al-Dīn Ahmad b. Muḥammad b. al-Munayyir al-Iskandarī (d. 683/1284) was a great scholar in grammar, literature, Arabic, jurisprudence, theology, and exegesis. He was unparalleled in rhetoric and calligraphy. He was Mālikī qāḍī in Alexandria. He composed al-Intisāf min sāḥib al-Kashshāf which explains and criticizes the Muʿtazilite viewpoints in al-Kashshāf.36

4. ‘Alam al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Kaḥīm b. ‘Alī b. ‘Umar al-Anṣarī al-ʻIraqī (d. 704/1304) was a Shāfiʿī Qurʾān exegete. He was jurisprudent, theologian, man of letters, and

excellent prose writer. His work *Tahdhib al-Kashshāf ‘alā sabīl al-insāf* is a gloss on *Kashshāf* in which he defends al-Zamakhsharī against Ibn al-Munayyir’s *al-Intiṣāf*. His other books are commentary on *al-Tanbih* of al-Shīrāzī’s *Furū’ al-fiqh al-Shāfi‘ī* and *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al- karīm*.\(^{37}\)

5. Quṭb al-Dīn Maḥmūd b. Mas‘ūd al-Shīrāzī (d. 710/1311) was a distinguished scholar in exegesis, jurisprudence, theology, mathematics, philosophy, astronomy, and medicine. Towards the end of his life he was devoted to the study of *ḥadīth* and wrote two critical books, *Jamʿ uṣūl* and *Sharḥ*. According to Ibn Shuhba and al-Subkī, Quṭb al-Dīn had a brilliant intelligence, combined with unusual penetration; at the same time his humor was innocent; he was known as “the scholar of the Persians”. It is evidence of his efforts to preserve his independence that, in spite of his prestige with princes and subjects, he lived far from the court. He also led the life of a Ṣūfī. He had many pupils, among them was Kamāl al-Dīn al-Fārisī who encouraged al-Taḥtānī (d. 766/1364) to write *Muḥākamāt* on the *Ishārāt* of Ibn Sīnā on points disputed between Naṣīr al-Dīn and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. However, he neglected his religious duties, but al-Suyūṭī mentions that in Tabrīz he always performed his *ṣalāt* with the congregation. His commentary on the *Ḥikma al-ishrāq* of Suhrawardī is undoubtedly connected with his religious attitude. Ḥajjī Khalīfa emphasizes that he distinguished himself in theology. He annotated the *Qur’ān* very thoroughly and in a fashion that won recognition in his *Fatḥ al-mannān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*. In his *Fī mushkilāt al-Qur’ān*, he dealt with passages in the *Qur’ān*

difficult to reconcile with one another. He wrote a commentary on *al-Kashshāf an ḥaqā’iq al-tanzīl* of al-Zamakhsharī.  

6. Quṭb al-Dīn Maḥmūd b. Mas‘ūd al-Sīrāfī al-Fālī al-Shuqqār (d. 712/1312) was exegete and grammarian. He wrote commentary on *al-Lubāb fī ‘ilm al-i’rāb* of Isfara’īnī. He also made a summary of *al-Kashshāf* entitled *Taqrīb al-tafsīr* in 698/1299.


8. Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. al-Bannā’ (d. 721/1321) was a mathematician and great scholar in many sciences. He composed numerous books on mathematics, rational sciences, algebra, and theology. He wrote a commentary on *al-Kashshāf*.

9. Shihāb al-Dīn Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Walī b. Jabbāra (d. 728/1328) was a Hanbali jurisprudent, theologian, grammarian, reciter of the Qur’ān, and exegete. Kaḥḥāla lists *Fath al-gadīr fī al-tafsīr*, al-Ziriklī gives the name of

---


Mukhtaṣar al-Kashshāf and al-Fihris mentions Mukhtaṣar al-Kashshāf ‘an ḥaqā’iq al-tanzīl.\textsuperscript{42}

10. ‘Imād al-Dīn al-Ḥusayn b. Abī Bakr b. Abī al-Ḥusayn al-Kindī (d. 741/1340) was an exegete, transmitter of hadīth, jurist, and qādī in Alexandria. Kaḥḥāla states that he composed a tafsīr in ten volumes. The Fihris mentions that he wrote a gloss entitled al-Kafīl bi-ma‘āní al-tanzīl ‘alā al-Kashshāf.\textsuperscript{43}

11. Sharf al-Dīn al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Ṭībī (d. 743/1342) was a great scholar in a variety of sciences. Al-Suyūṭī mentions him as an eminent and famous scholar in rational sciences, Arabic, and eloquence. He quotes Ibn Ḥajar that al-Ṭībī was exceedingly intellectual who used to go deep in extracting the meanings from the Qur’ān and the traditions, in the forefront for spreading the knowledge, pleasant personality, strongly opposed to philosophy and innovation, and vehemently in love with God and His Prophet, very modest and always supporting the students in their religious sciences. He was very rich due to inheritance and his own business, but always spent his wealth in charity until he became poor in his last days. He composed his commentary on al-Kashshāf entitled Futūḥ al-ghayb fī al-kashf ‘an qinā’ al-rayb. His other works are al-Kāshif ‘an haqā’iq al-sunan al-nabawiyya, al-Tībīyān fī ma‘āní wa-al-bayān, Muqaddima fī ‘ilm al-ḥisāb and Asmā’ al-rijāl.\textsuperscript{44}

12. Sirāj al-Dīn ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. ‘Umar al-Fārisī al-Qazwīnī (d. 745/1344) was an exegete. He wrote a commentary on al-Kashshāf with the title al-Kashf

\textsuperscript{42} Kaḥḥāla, Mu’jam al-mu’allīfūn, 2:125-26; al-Ziriklī, al-A’lām, 1:222-3; al-Fihris al-shāmil, 2:528.

\textsuperscript{43} Kaḥḥāla gives 741/1340 as the year of his death, the Fihris mentions 720/1320. See Kaḥḥāla, Mu’jam al-mu’allīfūn, 3:316-17; al-Fihris al-shāmil, 2:514.

\textsuperscript{44} Al-Suyūṭī, Bughya, 1:522-3; Ḥājjī Khalīfa, Kashf al-zunūn, 2:1478; al-Khavānsārī, Rawđāt al-jannāt, 8:125; Kaḥḥāla, Mu’jam al-mu’allīfūn, 4:53; al-Fihris al-shāmil, 2:515.

13. Fakhr al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Ḥasan al-Jārabardī (d. 746/1345-46) was a distinguished scholar and jurist. He was religious, munificent, venerable, and assiduous for knowledge and cared for the benefits of students. He composed a gloss on al-Kashshāf in ten volumes. Amongst his other works are commentary on al-Ḥawī al-saghīr of al-Qazwīnī dealing with Shāfi‘ī’s jurisprudence, entitled al-Hādī, but he did not complete the commentary on Minhāj of al-Bayḍāwī about the principles of jurisprudence and supercommentary of the commentary on al-Mufaṣṣal of Ibn al-Ḥājib which deals with grammar.46

14. ‘Imād al-Dīn Yaḥyā b. al-Qāsim al-‘Alawī al-Fāḍil al-Yamanī (d. 750/1348/9) was a Shāfi‘ī commentator of the Qur’ān, grammarian, and man of letters. According to al-Suyūṭī, he was well versed with al-Kashshāf and composed a gloss on it. Ḥājjī Khalīfa states that he wrote a commentary on al-Kashshāf entitled Durar al-aṣdāf min ḥawāshī al-Kashshāf [Durar al-aṣdaf fī ḥall ‘uqd al-Kashshāf] in two volumes. Afterwards, he compiled another commentary of al-Kashshāf which was known as Tuhfat al-ashrāf fī kashf ghawāmiḍ al-Kashshāf. Kaḥḥāla and al-Ziriklī also mention that he wrote two glosses on al-Kashshāf, one Durar al-aṣdāf fī ḥall ‘uqd al-Kashshāf and the other Tuhfat al-ashrāf fī kashf ghawāmiḍ al-Kashshāf.47

15. Jamāl al-Dīn ‘Abd Allāh b. Yūsuf al-Zaylā’ī (d. 762/1360) was a Ḥanfī jurist, ḥadīth transmitter and theologian. His Risāla fī takhrīj aḥādīth al-Kashshāf wa-mā fihī qiṣāṣ wa-athār deals with the traditions mentioned in al-Kashshāf.48

16. Quṭb al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Rāzī al-Taḥtānī (d. 766/1364-5) was physician, philosopher, grammarian and expert in exegesis, eloquence and religious sciences. He wrote the commentary on al-Kashshāf entitled Taqrīb.49


18. Iftikhār al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Naṣr Allāh b. Muḥammad al-Damaghānī (d. 775/1374) was a great scholar in rational and traditional sciences. According to Kaḥḥāla, his works include al-Kāshif fī al-tafsīr in seven volumes, commentary on al-‘Uyūn of al-‘Aḍad al-Dīn, commentary on al-Ishārāt entitled Tanqīḥ al-‘ibārāt fī...
tawḍīḥ al-ishārāt, and commentary on al-Mudrik in logic. The Fihris mentions that he wrote a commentary on al-Kashshāf entitled Kāshif al-sajāf ‘an wajh al-Kashshāf. Most probably, al-Kāshīfī al-tafsīr may be an abbreviation of Kāshif al-sajāf ‘an wajh al-Kashshāf.51

19. Akmal al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Maḥmūd al-Bābardī al-Dimashqī (d. 786/1384) was a Ḥanafī scholar, jurist, scholastic theologian, exegete, hadīth transmitter, grammarian, and an eloquent orator. He was a student of Ibn Ḥajar al-ʻAsqalānī. He wrote commentary on al-Kashshāf. His other works include commentary on al-Mashāriq, commentary on Mukhtaṣar of Ibn Ḥajib, commentary on ‘Aqīda al-Ṭūsī, commentary on al-Hidāyah on jurisprudence, commentary on Alfiyya of Ibn Muʿaṭ on grammar, commentary on al-Manār, and commentary on al-Bazdawī.52

20. Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Yūsuf b. ‘Alī al-Kirmānī (d. 786/1384) was an outstanding scholar in jurisprudence, hadīth, Qur’ān commentary, eloquence, and Arabic. In addition to Unmūdhaj al-Kashshāf which is an abstract of al-Kashshāf, he composed commentaries on Tafsīr al-Baydāwī, Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, al-Muwāfiq, Mukhtaṣar of Ibn Ḥajib entitled al-Sab’a al-sayyārah, al-Fawā’id al-Ghayāthiyya on rhetorics and al-Jawāhir.53

21. Sa’d al-Dīn Mas‘ūd b. ʻUmar al-Taftāzānī (d. 793/1390) known as “al-ʻallāma” was a renowned scholar of grammar, rhetoric, law, theology, logic, and exegesis of the Qur’ān. He was expert in both Ḥanafī and Shāfiʿī law and uṣūl. Faṣīḥ al-Āwāfī mentions in Faryūmad that al-Taftāzānī completed his commentary on al-Taṣrīf al-ʻIzzī

51 Kaḥḥāla, Muˈjamas muˈ allifin, 12:78-9; al-Fihris al-shāmil, 2:516.
by al-Zanjanī on Arabic morphology in 738/1338 at the age of sixteen. He became attached to the ruler of Harāt. Muʿizz al-Dīn Kart, to whom he dedicated his Sharḥ al-Talkhīs al-muṭawwal in 748/1347. Then he joined Jānī Beg, Khān of the Golden Horde to whom he dedicated his Mukhtāṣar al-maʿānī in 756/1355. When Tīmūr conquered Khwārazm in 759/1379, Muʿizz al-Dīn Kart’s son Malik Muḥammad, ruler of Sarkhs, asked his nephew Pīr Muḥammad b. Ghiyāth al-Dīn to obtain Tīmūr’s permission for al-Taftāzanī to join him in Sarkhs and he was there in 782/1380. Subsequently, due to his eminence in scholarship, Tīmūr insisted that he come to Samarqand. Al-Taftāzanī accepted the offer and stayed there until his death in 793/1390. However, during this period a scholarly rivalry took place between him and al-Šarīf ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Jurjānī (d. 816/1413), whom Tīmūr brought to Samarqand after his conquest of Sīrāz in 789/1387. A public debate between him and al-Šarīf al-Jurjānī took place in the presence of Timūr, about al-Zamakhsharī’s exegesis of Qurʾān.\(^{\text{54}}\) The Muʿtazilite scholar Nuʿmān al-Dīn al-Khwārazmī judging in favor of al-Jurjānī and Timūr backed him. It is said that al-Taftāzanī’s severe grief about this defeat might have hastened his end. His body was carried to Sarkhs where he was buried. Al-Taftāzanī’s fame rests mainly on his commentaries on well-known works in various fields of learning. Later scholars wrote supercommentaries on many of them. His works are commentary on al-Kashšāf which was not completed, a Persian commentary on the Qurʾān entitled Kashf al-asrār wa-

\(^{\text{54}}\) It was with regard to the āya 5 of sūra al-Baqara: “They are guided by their Lord and they will be successful” (ʻulā’ika ʻalā hudan min rabbihim wa ʻulā’ika hum al-muhtadīn).
uddat al-abrār, a Turkish versified translation of Saʻdī’s Būstān, al-Mağāṣid on theology, al-Miftāḥ on Shāfī’ī law, and a collection of Ḥanafī fatwās. ⁵⁵

22. Sirāj al-Dīn ʿUmar b. Raslān al-Bulqīnī (d. 805/1403) was the most celebrated jurist of his age, exegete, scholastic theologian, grammarian, and poet. According to Gibb, he was honored by the title of Shaykh al-Islām, ranked along with or above the grand qādīs, and regarded by some as the mujaddid of the eighth century. He composed a commentary on al-Kashshāf in three volumes. His other works are al-Tadrīb on Shafi’ī’s jurisprudence which he could not complete, Taṣḥīḥ al-minhāj in six volumes on jurisprudence and Mahāṣin al-iṣṭilāḥ on ḥadīth. ⁵⁶

23. ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Hādī b. Yahyā b. Hamzā (d. ca. 810/1407) was Zaydī Shī‘ite and composed a brief of al-Kashshāf entitled al-Jawhar al-shaffāf al-multaqat min maghāṣat al-Kashshāf. ⁵⁷

24. Al-Sayyid al-Ṣharīf ʿAlī b. Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Jurjānī (d. 816/1413) was a Ḥanafī theologian, physician, and a great scholar in grammar, logic, law, and language of his time. According to al-Suyūṭī, he wrote more than fifty books and composed a commentary on al-Kashshāf which he did not finish. His other titles are commentary on al-Bayḍāwī’s Tafsīr, commentary on al-Muwāfiq of al-ʿUḍad, commentary on al-Tajrīd of al-Naṣīr al-Ṭūsī, commentary on al-Tadhkira al-Naṣiriyya on physiognomy,  hāshiya

---


⁵⁷ Kahhāla, Mu’jam al-mu’allīfīn, 6:16; al-Fihrīs al-shāmil, 2:517.
on the commentary of al-Taftāzānī’s al-Tanqīḥ on jurisprudence and commentary on al-
Muṭawwil of al-Taftāzānī on rhetoric and eloquence.⁵⁸

25. Majd al-Dīn Abū Ṭāhir Muḥammad b. Yaʿqūb al-Fīrūzābādī’s (d. 817/1415)
works were concentrated on the subjects of tafsīr, ḥadīth, and history, but he excelled in
lexicography. According to Ḥājjī Khalīfa, he wrote two commentaries on al-Kashshāf,
the first entitled Quṭbat al-kkashshāf li-ḥall khutbāt al-Kashshāf and the second Naghb bat
al-rashshāf min khutbāt al-Kashshāf. He compiled more than fifty works, but his most
celebrated book is al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ wa-al-qābūs al-wasīṭ al-jāmi’ li-mā dhahaba min
kalām al-‘Arab shamaṭīṭ. He wished to compile a dictionary in sixty or it is said, in one
hundred volumes. His other books are al-Lāmi‘ al-‘ilm al-‘ujāb, al-jāmi‘ bayn al-
muḥkam wa-al-‘ubāb which only reached the fifth volume and was not completed, Fatḥ
al-bārī bi-al-samīḥ al-fasīḥ al-jārī on Ṣaḥiḥ al-Bukhārī and many other titles.⁵⁹

26. Walī al-Dīn Abū Zar‘a Aḥmad b. ‘Abd al-Raḥīm al-‘Irāqī (d. 826/1423) was a
Shāfi‘ī jurist, theologian, ḥadīth transmitter and expert in some sciences. He was a qāḍī
and professor. He wrote commentary on Jam‘a al-jawāmi‘ of al-Subkī on jurisprudence
and commentary on al-Bahja al-wardiyya on al-Shāfi‘ī’s jurisprudence. He compiled an
abstract of Ibn al-Munayyir’s (d. 683/1284) al-Insāf ‘alā al-Kashshāf and ‘Ilm al-Dīn
‘Abd al-Karīm’s (d. 704/1304) Tahdhīb al-Kashshāf ‘alā sabīl al-insāf in two volumes.⁶⁰

27. ‘Abd al-Karīm b. ‘Abd al-Jabbār (d. 830/1427) wrote a commentary on al-
Kashshāf entitled al-Muhākamāt ‘alā al-Kashshāf and defended the objections raised by

---

⁵⁸ Al-Suyūṭī, Bughya, 2:196-97; Kahhāla, Mu’jam al-mu’allifīn, 7:216; al-Fihris al-shāmil, 2:517;
⁵⁹ Ḥājjī Khalīfa, Kashf al-ẓunūn, 2:1480; Kahhāla, Mu’jam al-mu’allifīn, 12:118-19; al-Fihris al-shāmil,
⁶⁰ Ḥājjī Khalīfa, Kashf al-ẓunūn, 2:1479-80; Kahhāla, Mu’jam al-mu’allifīn, 1:270-1; al-Fihris al-shāmil,
2:517.
al-Aqsarā’ī (d. ca. 771/1370) in his commentary on *al-Kashshāf* in which he criticized Qutb al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Rāzī al-Taḥtānī’s (d. 766/1364–5) *al-Taqrīb*, a commentary on *al-Kashshāf*.

28. Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Hamzā b. Muḥammad al-Fanārī (d. 834/1431) was a scholar in rational and traditional sciences. He wrote numerous books *Fuṣūl al-badā’i‘*, a compilation on the *uṣūl al-fiqh*, commentary of Isāghujī on logic and commentary of *al-Fawā’id al-Ghayāthia* on rhetoric and eloquence. The *Fihris* mentions a commentary on *al-Kashshāf* entitled *Ta’līq ‘ala awā’il al-Kashshāf*.


---

31. ‘Ala’ al-Dīn ‘Alī b. Muḥammad b. Masʿūd al-Shāhrūdī Muṣannifak (d. 875/1470) was a Ḥanafī theologian and Persian scholar. Most of his works are commentaries or supercommentaries on Arabic texts. These are al-Ḥakām wa-al-ḥudud on Ḥanafī jurisprudence, glosses on al-Taftāzānī’s Sharḥ al-Muṭawwal, ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Jurjānī’s Sharḥ al-Miṣfāh and Ḥāshiya ‘alā al-Kashshāf.\(^{65}\)

32. Badr al-Dīn Ḥasan Chelebī b. Muḥammad Shāh b. Ḥamza al-Fanārī (d. 886/1481) was a Ḥanafī scholar in various sciences. Most of his works are supercommentaries on the commentaries. He compiled a supercommentary on al-Taftāzānī’s commentary of al-Muṭawwal which deals with rhetoric and eloquence and a supercommentary of al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī’s commentary of al-Ījī’s Muwāqif’ on scholastic theology. He annotated Durar al-ḥukkām of Mullā Khusrow on Ḥanafī jurisprudence and wrote a supercommentary on al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī’s commentary of al-Kashshāf.\(^{66}\)

33. Yaḥyā b. Muḥammad b. Masʿūd b. ‘Umar al-Taftāzānī Shaykh al-Islām (d. 887/1482) was a Ḥanafī exegete. He composed a supercommentary on the previous commentary written by his grandfather on al-Kashshāf.\(^{67}\)

34. Al-Khayālī (d. 893/1488) wrote a commentary on al-Kashshāf. There is no information available about his full name. Only the Fihris mentions about his commentary.\(^{68}\)

35. Muḥyī al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. al-Khaṭīb (d. 901/1495) was a Ḥanafī jurist, and scholastic theologian. His works are Risāla fi ruʿya wa-al-kalām, and a supercommentary on al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī’s commentary of al-Tajrīd. He annotated al-

---

\(^{67}\) Kaḥḥāla, Muʿjam al-muʿallīfīn, 13:228; al-Fihris al-shāmil, 2:518.  
\(^{68}\) Al-Fihris al-shāmil, 2:518.
Tawḍīḥ which deals with jurisprudence. He also wrote a supercommentary on al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī’s commentary of al-Kashšāf.⁶⁹

36. Kamāl al-Dīn Ismā’īl al-Qaramānī (d. 920/1514) known as Qara Kamāl was an exegete, jurist, and scholastic theologian. Most of his writings consist of glosses and commentaries. He annotated al-Kashšāf.⁷⁰

37. Khayr al-Dīn Khīḍr b. Mahmūd b. ʿUmar al-ʿAṭūfī al-Maẓfūnī (d. 948/1541) was a great scholar in a variety of sciences. His writings include commentary of Isāghūjī on logic, commentary of Mashāriq al-anwār al-nabawiyya min šīḥāḥ al-akhbār al-muṣṭafawiyya of al-Ṣaghānī, entitled Kashf al-mašāriq in three volumes, and commentary of al-Burda in praise of Prophet Muḥammad. He also compiled a commentary on al-Kashšāf.⁷¹

38. Ghayāth al-Dīn Manṣūr b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Ḥusaynī al-Dashtakī al-Shīrāzī (d. 948/1541 or 949/1542) was a scholar. In addition to his commentary on al-Kashšāf, he wrote a refutation of Unmūdhaj al-ʿulūm of Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Asʿad al-Dawānī.⁷²

39. Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ʿAḥmad al-Shirbīnī (d. 977/1570) known as al-Khaṭīb al-Shirbīnī was a Shāfiʿī jurist, commentator of the Qur’ān, theologian and grammarian. The Fihris mentions that he wrote a commentary on al-Kashšāf.⁷³

⁷² Kaḥḥāla, Muʾjam al-muʾallifīn, 8:43; al-Fihris al-shāmil, 2:519.
⁷³ Kaḥḥāla, Muʾjam al-muʾallifīn, 8:269; al-Fihris al-shāmil, 2:519.
40. Zakariyyā’ Afandī b. Bayrām (d. 1001/1592) was a Ḥanafī jurist, exegete, and scholar in some sciences. He annotated *al-Ghurar wa-al-durar* of Molla Khusrow. The *Fihris* mentions that he wrote a commentary on *al-Kashshāf*.74

41. Khiḍr b. ‘Aṭā’ Allāh b. Muḥammad al-Mawṣilī (d. 1007/1598) was a man of letters, scholar in grammar and lexicography and poetry. Ḥājjī Khalīfa mentions that his work on *al-Kashshāf* deals with shawāhid. Kaḥḥāla gives the full title as *al-Is‘āf fī sharḥ shawāhid al-qāḍī wa-al-Kashshāf*. The title indicates that he wrote the commentary on Bayḍāwī’s *Anwār al-tanzīl wa-asrār al-ta‘wil* as well.75

42. ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm b. Muḥammad Akhī Zāda (d. 1013/1604) a Ḥanafī jurist was expert in several sciences. His works are *Riyāḍ al-sādāt fī ithbāt al-karāt lil-awliyā’ ḥāl al-ḥayāt wa ba’d al-mamāt*, commentary on *al-Hidāya* of al-Marghiyānī on Ḥanafī jurisprudence, gloss on *al-Ishbāh wa-al-nazā‘ir* of Ibn Najīm and commentary on *al-Durar wa-al-ghurar*. The *Fihris* mentions that he wrote a ḥāshiya of al-Zamakhsharī’s commentary on *awwal Sūra al-Anbiyā‘*.76

43. Muḥibb al-Dīn Afandī Abū al-Faḍl Muḥammad b. Taqī al-Dīn (d. 1014/1605) was a Ḥanafī jurist and in several sciences. He compiled a commentary on the shawāhid used by al-Zamakhsharī in the *Kashshāf* titled *Tanzīl al-āyāt ‘alā al-shawāhid min al-abyāt*.77

44. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. al-Maghribī (d. 1016/1607) was Mālikī, exegete, and expert in several sciences. He compiled a gloss on *al-Kashshāf* entitled *Ghāyat al-ithāf fi-"

---

mā khaṭī min kalām al-qāḍī wa-al-Kashshāf. According to Kaḥḥāla, he completed it in 1005/1597.⁷⁸

45. Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Ardabīlī (d. 1036/1627) was exegete, jurist, and grammarian. Kaḥḥāla states that among his works are commentary on al-Baydāwī’s tafsīr Anwār al-tanzīl, al-Anwār which deals with al-Shāfī‘ī’s jurisprudence and commentary on al-Zamakhsharī’s Unmudhaj. The Fihris mentions that he compiled a commentary on al-Kashshāf.⁷⁹

46. Ṣāliḥ b. Dāwūd al-Anisī (d. 1062/1652) was a Zaydī jurist and expert in several sciences. His works are a brief commentary on al-‘Alfī lil-Jāmi‘ al-saghīr, commentary on al-‘Aqīda al-ṣaḥīha lil-Imam al-Muwakkal ‘alā Allāh and commentary on al-Masā’il al-Murtaḍā fi-ma ya’tamiduhu al-qaḍā. The Fihris mentions that he wrote a commentary on al-Kashshāf.⁸⁰

47. Shams al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Ḥakīm b. Muḥammad al-Siyālkūṭī (d. 1067/1657) was a Ḥanafī jurist, and versatile scholar. He wrote supercommentaries on several popular books. These supercommentaries include: Tafsīr al-Baydāwī, al-‘Aqā’id al-Nasafīyya of al-Taftāzānī, al-Muṭawwal of al-Taftāzānī, commentary of ‘Abd al-Ghafūr al-Lārī on al-Fawā’id al-ḍiyā’īyya which deals with grammar. The Fihris mentions that he wrote a commentary on al-Kashshāf.⁸¹

---

⁷⁸ Kaḥḥāla gives three entries of Muḥammad b. al-Maghrībī. In one entry, he mentions the year of his death 1005/1597 [Mu’jam al-mu’allifīn, 9:22], whereas in the other two entries [Mu’jam al-mu’allifīn, 8:306] which appear on the same page, he mentions him twice, in one place he gives the same year of his death, i.e. 1005/1597 and in the second place the year of his death is 1016/1607. The Fihris gives his year of death 1016/1607. See Kaḥḥāla, Mu’jam al-mu’allifīn, 8:306 and 9:22; al-Fihris al-shāmil, 2:520.


48. Al-Ḥasan b. Ḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Ṭalḥa al-Yamanī (d. 1084/1673) was a scholar in several sciences. His works are commentary on *al-Fuṣūl* which deals with the principles of religious science, commentary on *al-Tahdhib* which relates to logic and *Fatḥ al-ḥālāf fi taʾkīfī al-kashf ‘alā al-Kashshāf*. The *Fihris* mentions that he composed a commentary entitled *al-Jalāl ‘alā al-Kashshāf*.

49. Šāliḥ b. Mahdī b. Ṭalḥa al-Maqbalī (d. 1108/1696) was a Zaydī scholar of exegesis, sciences of the Qur’ān and *ḥadīth*, Arabic lexicography, mysticism and jurisprudence. His writings consist of *al-‘Ilm al-shāmīkh fī īthār al-ḥaq ‘alā al-ābā* wa-al-mashā’ ikh, commentary on *Kitāb al-bahr al-zukhkhār* entitled *al-Manār fī al-mukhtār min jawāhir al-bahr al-zukhkhār* and commentary on *al-Kashshāf* entitled *al-Ithāf li-ṭalabat al-Kashshāf*.

50. Ḥāmid b. Ṭalḥa b. ‘Abd al-Raḥīm al-‘Imādī al-Dimashqī (d. 1171/1757) was a Ḥanafī scholar, jurist, muftī, and poet. He was author of many books including *al-Fatāwa al-‘Imādiya al-Ḥāmidīya* entitled *Mughnī al-mufṭī ‘an jawāb al-mustatfī* and *Ittiḥād al-qamarayn fī bayt al-raqmatayn*. He compiled a commentary of *al-Kashshāf* entitled *al-Ithāf fi sharḥ kuṭbāt al-Kashshāf*.

51. Muḥammad Ṣiddīq Khān b. Ḥasan b. Ṭalḥa al-Luṭf Allāh (1248/1832 - 1307/1889) was a scholar of Qur’ānic exegesis, *ḥadīth* and lexicography who wrote in Arabic, Persian, and Urdu. His main works written in Arabic are *Fatḥ al-bayān fī maqāsid al-Qurʾān – taʾsīr* of the Qur’ān in ten volumes, *ʻAwn al-bārī* which deals with traditions and a summary of *al-Kashshāf* entitled *Khulāṣa al-Kashshāf*.

---

52. Muḥammad ‘Aylān al-Marzūqī (d. 1355/1936) was a Shāfiʿī theologian, Qur’ān commentator and scholar in several sciences. He is author of two books on al-Kashshāf: the first is Mashāhid al-insāfʿ alā shawāhid al-Kashshāf and the second one is a commentary on al-Kashshāf.\(^86\)

6. Scholars’ Opinions about al-Kashshāf

As mentioned above, al-Kashshāf has been widely read and subject to numerous commentaries since it was published. Some scholars criticized its Muʻtazilite contents and wrote against it. Others commented upon its lexicographical, grammatical, and eloquent style and praised it. However, some scholars expressed their views in a cautious manner that one should read it but be aware of its intrigues.

‘Abd Allāh b. Abī Jamāra al-Andalusī (d. 699/1300) states that al-Kashshāf is an exquisite and sublime commentary of the Qur’ān. The reader of this book falls in one of the two categories: either he is an expert in his knowledge or he does not have sufficient qualifications to comprehend it. If someone is expert and knowledgeable of the intrigues (i.e., Muʻtazilite doctrines and their views) which have been inserted in the tafsīr, then it will not be harmful and one can find those machinations. It may be beneficial because of its refined and eloquent use of Arabic language, logical interpretation, and things similar to that. However, if a person is not knowledgeable, then it is not permissible for him to look into it because he may slip into intrigues without realizing it.\(^87\)

According to Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), the Muʻtazilites initially form some ideas and then interpret the Qur’ān to suit their purpose. Their interpretation of the

\(^{86}\) Al-Ziriklī, al-‘lām, 6:310; Kahhāla, Mu’jam al-mu’allifīn, 11:73-74.

Qur’ān can be disproved by demonstrating that their views are erroneous in two ways: either by refuting the arguments which they advance or by defending the positions which they attack. Some of them have an elegant, lucid and eloquent style of writing and introduce their erroneous beliefs so clandestinely that many readers fail to perceive them. The author of al-Kashshāf, for instance, has succeeded in making his commentary so attractive to a great number of people that they would hardly look for his erroneous views in it. In fact, some scholars approvingly quote passages from his tafsīr in their writings without realizing that they contain ideas derived from the Mu’tazilite principles.88

Abū al-Fidā’ (d. 732/1331) and Ibn Athīr (d. 774/1373) mention that al-Zamakhsharī professed Mu’tazilism openly, and al-Kashshāf’s explicit theme is Mu’tazilite theology.89

Abū Ḥayyān (d. 745/1344) is of the opinion that al-Zamakhsharī is amply endowed with the Qur’ānic knowledge and combines in his commentary innovative meanings of the words, proficiency and eloquent style. In his book there are praiseworthy as well as intriguing things. He has written down his evaluation in the form of poetry in which he praises the book and mentions its merits from which a person can benefit. However, he cautions about those things which are impertinent in it and should be avoided.90

Al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348) is very critical in his assessment about al-Zamakhsharī. He mentions in al-‘Ibar, that al-Zamakhsharī was a scholar of great qualities and used to propagate for Mu’tazilism. In Tā’rīkh al-Islam, he states that he expressed openly his

Mu‘tazilite creed and called others to innovation. He repeats in *Siyar*, that al-Zamakhsharī used to propagate Mu‘tazilism. May God have mercy on him. Finally, in *Mīzān al-i’tidāl*, after mentioning that he propagates Mu‘tazilism openly, al-Dhahabī states that God may protect people and warns that one should be cautious when reading *al-Kashshāf*.\(^91\)

Shams al-Dīn al-Īṣfahānī (d. 749/1348) states in his commentary entitled *al-Jāmi‘ baynā al-tafsīr al-kabīr wa al-Kashshāf*, that he perused *al-Kashshāf* and found that whatever has been written by al-Zamakhsharī, he took it from al-Zajjāj (d. 311/923).\(^92\)

In al-Subkī’s (d. 771/1370) view *al-Kashshāf* is a great book in the field of exegesis and its author is a great scholar except that he is a heretic. It is, therefore, necessary that whatever is written in *al-Kashshāf* should be erased.\(^93\)

According to Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406), there are two types of Qur’ānic interpretations. The first type is traditional, based upon information received from the early Muslims. The second type is based upon the linguistic knowledge, such as lexicography and eloquence (*balāgha*) used for conveying meaning through rational means and methods. The second type of commentary is best represented by al-Zamakhsharī’s *al-Kashshāf*, who is a Mu‘tazilite in his dogmatic views. He uses the various methods of rhetoric, arguing in favor of the pernicious doctrines of the Mu‘tazila, wherever he believed they occurred in the verses of the Qur‘ān. Competent orthodox

---


scholars have, therefore, come to disregard this work and warn everyone against its pitfalls. However, they admit that he is on solid ground relating to language and eloquence. If the reader is well-versed with the orthodox dogmas and knows the arguments in their defense, he is undoubtedly safe from its fallacies. Therefore, he should take the advantage of studying it, because of its remarkable and varied linguistic information.94

Burhān al-Dīn Ḥyder (d. 830/1426) states that al-Kashšāf is of exquisite quality which he did not see similar to it among the works of earlier writers, and one will not find anything like it among the writings of the latter. It has precise and proficient wordings, elegant composition, and meticulous stylistic peculiarity. It does not fall short of any standards when someone examines the principles of exegesis, refinement of demonstrations and proofs, methodology, and reconstruction of points for synthesis. However, if one draws analogous conclusions from it, then one finds that its author’s Mu’tazilite views are interwoven and the interpretation falls down into errors culminating into perilous mistakes. As a consequence, one finds the tafsīr altered from its real meaning and it is a great misfortune and immense calamity.95

According to Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, people who are enthusiastic about reading al-Kashšāf should be very careful. If they are thoroughly familiar and well-versed with the traditions (sunna) and read it with extreme care they can benefit from the commentary provided they safeguard against its intrigues and secret machinations.96

Al-Suyūṭī considers that al-Zamakhsharī was a scholar of enormous insight in the science of eloquence and praises him generously as an authority (sultān) in this field. He

95 Ḥājjī Khalīfa, Kashf al-ẓunūn, 2:1482-83.
96 Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, Lisān al-mīzān, 7:64.
elucidated and proved the inimitability of the Qur’ān in *al-Kashshāf* with such convincing arguments that his book became famous in the farthest parts of the world from East to West. When the author became aware of its eminence, he said that it occurred by the grace and blessings of God and composed the following verses:

*Inna al-tafāsīr fī al-dunyā bi-lā ’adad*

*Wa laysa fī-hā la-‘umrī mithl kashshāfī*

*In kunta tabghī al-hudā fā-alzam qira ’tahu*

*Fa al-jahl ka al-dā’ wa al-Kashshāf ka al-shāfī*

Indeed, there are numerous commentaries in the world,
By my life! However, there is none like my *Kashshāf*.
If you desire to seek guidance then it is necessary that you read it,
Because ignorance is like a malady and the *Kashshāf* is like a remedy.97

---

Appendix 2

Al-Zamakhsharī’s Teachers and Students

Al-Zamakhsharī’s Teachers

Following are the teachers of al-Zamakhsharī who have been mentioned in various biographical dictionaries and ṭabaqāt works.

Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. al-Muẓaffar al-Naysābūrī

Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. al-Muẓaffar al-Naysābūrī (d. 442/1051) was a man of letters, poet, writer, and teacher of the people of Khawārazm in his time. Yāqūt, al-Suyūṭī, al-Dāwūdī, Ṭāshkubrizāda and al-Khavānsārī mention that al-Zamakhsharī studied literature (adab) with him. Yāqūt even states that he was al-Zamakhsharī’s teacher before Abū Muḍar.

It seems that there is confusion in the name of Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. al-Muẓaffar al-Naysābūrī and it cannot be established conclusively that he taught al-Zamakhsharī. Abū al-Ḥasan died in 442/1051, about a quarter of a century prior to al-Zamakhsharī’s birth. So he could not have been his teacher. There is a likelihood that al-Zamakhsharī might have studied with one of the descendants of Abū al-Ḥasan by the same name. The teacher of al-Zamakhsharī might be his son or grandson by the same name.¹

Abū al-Khaṭṭāb Naṣr b. Aḥmad b. ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Baṭir al-Baghdādī


Abū Muḍar Maḥmūd b. Jarīr al-Ḍabbī al-Isfahānī

Abū Muḍar Maḥmūd b. Jarīr al-Ḍabbī al-Isfahānī (d. 507/1114) was actively responsible for introducing and spreading of Muʿtazilism throughout Khwārazm.³ He was known as farīd al-ʿaṣr (unique in his time) and wahīd al-dahr (incomparable in his era), a great scholar in the fields of lexicography, grammar, and medicine and an exemplary character in his virtues and moral excellence. He lived in Khwārazm for a long time and many people obtained and benefited from his knowledge and high moral standards. Al-Zamakhsharī was one of them who not only studied literature, grammar, and lexicography with him, but also followed his school of thought.⁴


³ On Abū Muḍar’s introducing Muʿtazilism to Khwārazm, see McAuliffe, Qur’ānic Christians, 50; Lupti Ibrahim, Theological Questions, 4; al-Hūfī, al-Zamakhsharī, 48; Murtaḍā Ayat Allāh Zāda al-Shīrāzī, al-Zamakhsharī lughwiyyan wa-mufassiran (Cairo: Dār al-Thaqāfa, 1977), 96.

‘Abd Allāh b. Ṭalḥa al-Yāburī al-Andalusī

‘Abd Allāh b. Ṭalḥa al-Yāburī al-Andalusī (d. 518/1124) was born in Yābur and stayed for sometime in Seville (Ishbiliya). He was a grammarian, theologian (uṣūlī), and jurist (faqīh). His important works are al-Mudkhal sharḥ Risāla ibn abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī, Sayf al-Islām ‘alā madhhab Mālik, and al-Radd ‘alā ibn Ḥazm. Al-Fāsī states that al-Zamakhsharī traveled from Khawārārazm to Mecca to study grammar with him. However, according to al-Suyūṭī, while in Mecca, al-Zamakhsharī studied Kitāb Sibawayhi with ‘Abd Allāh b. Ṭalḥa al-Yāburī.5

Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. ʿĪsā b. Ḥamza b. Wahhās

Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. ʿĪsā b. Ḥamza b. Wahhās (d. 526/1131) was Zaydī Imām of Mecca. There are two reports about the date of his death. Al-Qīfī says that he died in 506/1112, whereas other sources mention the year of his death 526/1131. According to al-Qīfī and Ibn Taghrībardī, al-Zamakhsharī studied with Ibn Wahhās, both of them do not mention what he studied with him. However, they state that it was Ibn Wahhās who encouraged al-Zamakhsharī to write Muʿtazilite tafsīr of the Qurʾān. Al-Fāsī states, “Because of Ibn Wahhās, al-Zamakhsharī composed al-Kashshāf.” He also mentions that al-Wahhās was not only al-Zamakhsharī’s teacher, but was also his student. However, the sources do not mention what was studied. Al-Fāsī mentions that: “Because of Ibn Wahhās, al-Zamakhsharī composed the Kashshāf.” This indicates that his main interest might be in exegesis.6

**Rukn al-Dīn Maḥmūd b. al-Malāḥimī al-Uṣūlī**

Rukn al-Dīn Maḥmūd b. al-Malāḥimī al-Uṣūlī (d. 536/1141) was known as *farīd al-'aṣr* (unique in his time) in the field of theology. Al-Zamakhshārī studied theology with him. Besides being al-Zamakhshārī’s teacher, Ibn al-Malāḥimī was also his student and studied with him exegesis.7

**Abū Maṣūr Mawḥūb b. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. al-Khīṭr al-Jawālīqī**

Abū Maṣūr Mawḥūb b. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. al-Khīṭr al-Jawālīqī (d. 539/1144) was a great scholar in a variety of sciences, and an associate of al-Khaṭīb al-Tibrīzī. He taught philology at the Niẓāmīyya after al-Tibrīzī. He learned Ḥadīth from Abū al-Qāsim b. al-Baṣrī and Abū Ṭāhir b. Abū al-Saqr, and al-Kindī and Ibn Jawzī transmitted from him. He was trustworthy, pious, virtuous, and profoundly intelligent. He was prudent in his answers to questions and admired for his beautiful calligraphy. He had enormous knowledge in lexicography and grammar. Al-‘Imād al-Khaṭīb narrated that, “At that time, there were four grammarians in Baghdād: al-Jawālīqī, Ibn al-Shajarī, Ibn al-Khashshāb, and Ibn al-Dahhān.”8 Fleisch remarks that according to Ibn al-Anbārī, al-Jawālīqī was a “better lexicographer than grammarian.” Fleisch, further mentions, “His [Jawālīqī] works deservedly take their place along with those of al-Tibrīzī in raising the cultural level in the Arabic language from the depth to which it had fallen in the Saljuqī period to preserve the *faṣīḥ* language by collecting together words of foreign origin and recording them as such. This explanatory lexicon, which was highly thought of in its

---

8 Al-Suyūṭī, Bughya, 1:587, 2:29-31, 324, 308.
time, has proved to be very useful and made Ibn al-Jawālīqī’s reputation.”\(^9\) Al-
Zamakhsharī studied lexicography with him. Abū al-Yumn Zayd b. Ḥasan al-Kindī (d. 613/1217) one of Jawāliqī’s students reports that al-Zamakhsharī “came to us in Baghdād in 533/1138, and I saw him with Jawāliqī twice – first time, studying books on lexicography, and second time, seeking ijāza (license) for them, because prior to that, he had neither visited him nor transmitted from him.”\(^10\)

**Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Isḥāq al-Khwārazmī**

Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Isḥāq al-Khwārazmī was a student of the Zaydī exegete al-Jishumī (d. 494/1101). Madelung mentions Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Isḥāq al-Khawārazmī as one of al-Zamakhsharī’s teachers, though none of the biographical dictionaries lists his name. According to Madelung, al-Zamakhsharī might have visited Bayhaq, al-Jishumī’s hometown after the latter’s death. He might have met Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Isḥāq al-Khawarazmī there and studied with him. It is through him that he could have become familiar with al-Jishumī’s Qur’ānic exegesis and the Muʿtazilite doctrine of Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār. Some scholars are of the opinion that al-Zamakhsharī used al-Jishumī’s *al-Tahdhīb fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān* when composing his *al-Kashshaf*. However, Madelung does not agree with it.\(^11\)

Madelung’s information is based upon a narrative mentioned in al-Jishumī’s *Sharḥ ‘Uyūn al-masā’il fī ʿilm al-usūl*. Al-Jishumī had many students but three of them

---


mentioned by name were: Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ishāq al-Khawarazmī, whose name, father’s name and grandfather’s name were the same; ‘Alī b. Zayd b. al-Barūqanī; and al-Jishumī’s son Muḥammad who transmitted from his father and receives a sama‘ in 452/1061. It is mentioned that al-Qāḍī al-Ḥāfiẓ was al-Zamakhsharī’s teacher. However, it is not clear who al-Qāḍī al-Ḥāfiẓ was. The information provided in the Sharḥ ‘Uyūn is not corroborated by any other source because none of the biographical dictionaries mentions his name as al-Zamakhsharī’s teacher. So far as the name of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ishāq al-Khwārazmī is concerned, it is confirmed that he was student of al-Jishumī, however, it does not prove that he was a teacher of al-Zamakhsharī.

Abū Manṣūr

Abū Manṣūr was a theologian and preacher in Khwārazm. Al-Zamakhsharī studied theology with him and he studied Qur’ānic exegesis with al-Zamakhsharī. There is confusion of names between Abū Manṣūr Naṣr al-Ḥārithī, Abū Manṣūr al-Jawāliqī, and Abū Manṣūr. According to Yāqūt, al-Zamakhsharī studied Hadīth from Abū Manṣūr Naṣr al-Ḥārithī, while Ibn Khallikān states that he studied literature from him. Tashkubrizāda mentions the name of Abū Manṣūr al-Jawāliqī al-Ḥārithī.13

Abū Manṣūr Naṣr al-Ḥārithī

Abū Manṣūr Naṣr al-Ḥārithī is known as the Shaykh al-Islām in all of the sources that mention him. Ibn Khallikān states that al-Zamakhsharī studied literature with al-Ḥārithī, while other sources mention that he studied hadīth with him. ¹⁴

Abū Saʻd al-Shaqqānī

Abū Saʻd al-Shaqqānī or al-Shiqqānī was a scholar and al-Zamakhsharī studied hadīth with him in Baghdād. Biographical dictionaries do not provide much information about him. ¹⁵

Al-Zamakhsharī’s Students

Following are the students of al-Zamakhsharī who have been mentioned in various biographical dictionaries and ṭabaqāt works.

Abū ‘Amr ‘Āmir b. al-Ḥasan al-Simsār

Abū ‘Amr ‘Āmir b. al-Ḥasan al-Simsār was al-Zamakhsharī’s nephew. Al-Sam‘ānī mentions that he transmitted (rawā) from al-Zamakhsharī in his home village of Zamakhshar. However, he does not state specifically what he transmitted. ¹⁶

---


Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Muḥammad b. ‘Alī b. Aḥmad b. Hārūn al-‘Imrānī al-Khwārazmī (d. ca. 560/1165) was known as hujjat al-afādīl (Proof of the Excellence) and fakhr al-mashā’īkh (Pride of the Scholars). He came from Khwārazm, and was a learned scholar in grammar. He was Muʿtazilite and wrote a commentary on the Qurʿān. Al-Khavānsārī specifically mentions that he studied traditions with al-Zamakhsharī. Other sources state that he studied literature with al-Zamakhsharī.¹⁷

Muḥammad b. ‘Abī al-Qāsim b. Yabjūk al-Baqqālī al-Khwārazmī

Muḥammad b. ‘Abī al-Qāsim b. Yabjūk al-Baqqālī al-Khwārazmī (d. 562/1167) was known as zayn al-mashā’īkh (Adornment of the Learned), hujja fī lisān al-ʿArab (Authority on the Arabic Language), and leading authority in literature. His works include Miftāḥ al-tanzīl, al-i’jāb fī al-iʿrāb, Taqwīm al-lisān fī al-nahw, al-Bidāya fī al-ma’ānī wa-al-bayān, Manāzil al-ʿArab, and Sharḥ asmāʾ Allāh al-ḥusnā. He studied lexicography, grammar and traditions with al-Zamakhsharī. He took al-Zamakhsharī’s position after his death.¹⁸

Abū Bakr al-Azdī Yaḥyā b. Saʿdūn al-Qurtūbī

Abū Bakr al-Azdī Yaḥyā b. Saʿdūn al-Qurtūbī (d. 567/1171-2) was a scholar in the city of Moṣul and travelled widely in Cordova, Egypt and Baghdad to study. He was a

---

¹⁷ Al-Suyūṭī, Bughyā, 2:195; al-Khavānsārī, Rawḍāt al-jannāt, 8:123.
student of al-Zamakhsharī and excelled in Arabic and the variant readings of the Qur’ān.\(^{19}\)

**Abū al-Mu’ayyad al-Muwaffaq b. Ṣaḥmad b. Abī Sa’īd Isḥāq**

Abū al-Mu’ayyad al-Muwaffaq b. Ṣaḥmad b. Abī Sa’īd Isḥāq (d. 568/1172) known as *akhṭab al-khuṭabā’* (one of the best orators) and *akhṭab al-Khwārazm* (the best orator of Khwārazm) was a famous and great scholar in the fields of jurisprudence, literature, traditions, oratory, and poetry. Al-Andarasbānī states that he studied grammar and literature with al-Zamakhsharī, while al-Khavānsārī and al-Suyūṭī mention that he studied jurisprudence, literature, traditions, preaching, and poetry with him.\(^{20}\)

**Abū al-Ṭāhir Ṣaḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Silafī**

Abū al-Ṭāhir Ṣaḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Silafī (d. 576/1180) moved to Baghdād in 511/1117 and stayed there except for one time when he traveled to Cairo for a period of two years. In 546/1151 the Fātimid vizier al-Ẓafīr al-Malik al-Adī ‘Abd Allāh b. Isḥāq b. al-Sallār had a *madrasā* established for him, where he taught until his death. According to Ibn Khallikān, al-Silafī wrote to al-Zamakhsharī from Alexandria on two occasions, requesting him the license (*ijāza*) to transmit “what he had heard and what he had written,” which he granted to him. Some of the sources have preserved part of this correspondence and al-Maqarrī has full correspondence of them.\(^{21}\)


‘Abd al-Rahmān b. Muḥammad Abū al-Barakāt Kamāl al-Dīn al-Anbārī

‘Abd al-Rahmān b. Muḥammad Abū al-Barakāt Kamāl al-Dīn al-Anbārī (d. 577/1181), author of the *Nuzhat al-alibbā’ fī tabaqāt al-udabā’* was one of al-Zamakhshari’s students. However, al-Suyutī does not mention al-Zamakhsharī as Ibn al-Anbārī’s teacher.22

Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Jalīl al-‘Umarī Rashīd al-Dīn al-Waṭwaț

Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Jalīl al-‘Umarī Rashīd al-Dīn al-Waṭwaț (d. 578/1182) was a famous descendent of ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb. He participated in al-Zamakhsharī’s *majlis*, which is corroborated by his two letters he wrote. He was one of the outstanding students of al-Zamakhsharī.23

Abū Ṭāhir Barakāt b. Ibrāhīm al-Khushū’ī

Abū Ṭāhir Barakāt b. Ibrāhīm al-Khushū’ī (d. 598/1201) came from a family of scholars who taught *ḥadīth* at the Bayt al-Ḥadīth. Ibn Khallikān mentions that he had outstanding certificates of audition (*sam’at*) and was unique and possessed some of the licenses of transmission he held. Al-Zamakhsharī granted him the license (*ijāza*).24

Abū al-Fatḥ Nāṣir b. ‘Abd al-Sayyid b. Muṭarriz

Abū al-Fatḥ Nāṣir b. ‘Abd al-Sayyid b. Muṭarriz (d. 610/1213) known as al-Mutarrizī was a poet. He was a Ḥanafite and a Mu’tazilite and according to al-Dhahabī,

---

he was one of the leading Mu‘tazilites. He studied with al-Zamakhsharī but sources do not mention the field of study. Al-Khavānsārī states that due to Muṭarriz’s close friendship with al-Zamakhsharī, he received the title of “Successor of al-Zamakhsharī” (*khilāfat al-Zamakhsharī*). However, Muṭarriz was born in 538/1144, the year of al-Zamakhsharī’s death. Under these circumstances, it is not possible that either he studied with al-Zamakhsharī or received the title of *khilāfa*.25

**Umm al-Mu’ayyad Zaynab bt. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sha’riyya**

Umm al-Mu’ayyad Zaynab bt. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sha’riyya (d. 615/1218) was an outstanding scholar and visited a number of eminent scholars and received the knowledge and license (*ijāza*) to transmit it to others. Ibn Khallikan specifically mentions that al-Zamakhsharī granted her a general license (*ijāza ʻāmma*) to transmit all of his works.26

**Abū al-Ma‘ālī Yaḥyā b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. ‘Alī al-Shaybānī**

Al-Fāsī mentions that Abū al-Ma‘ālī Yaḥyā b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. ‘Alī al-Shaybānī was a judge (*qāḍī*) in Mecca who transmitted to his nephew Abū al-Ma‘ālī Mājid b. Sulaymān al-Fihrī (d. 655/1257) the *Kashshāf*. He heard it from al-Zamakhsharī in Mecca. Subsequently, Mājid b. Sulaymān al-Fihrī transmitted (*rawā ʻan*) the *Kashshāf* from his uncle Yaḥyā b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. ‘Alī al-Shaybānī.27

---

Sadīd b. Muḥammad al-Khayyāṭī ‘Alā al-Dīn

Sadīd b. Muḥammad al-Khayyāṭī ‘Alā al-Dīn, known as Shaykh al-Islām was a great scholar in jurisprudence and theology. He transmitted from (rawā ‘an) ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-‘Imrānī, fakhr al-mashā’ikh (Pride of the Learned) who was one of al-Zamakhsharī’s students. Al-Lucknawī mentions that al-Khayyāṭī was an expert in jurisprudence (fiqh) and theology (kalām) and he studied under al-‘Imrānī al-Khwārazmī who was one of al-Zamakhsharī’s students. However, the source does not mention the field of study.28


Yaʿqūb b. ‘Alī b. Muḥammad b. Jaʿfar Abū Yusūf al-Balkhī al-Jandalī is mentioned by al-Suyūṭī and Yāqūt in their biographical dictionaries. Al-Suyūṭī says that al-Balkhī was one of the leading scholars in literature (ahad min al-a’imma fī al-adab) and studied with al-Zamakhsharī. Yāqūt reports that he was an expert in grammar and disciple of al-Zamakhsharī but does not mention what he studied with al-Zamakhsharī.29

Abū al-Maḥāsin ‘Abd al-Raḥīm b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Bazzāz

Al-Samʿānī mentions in his Kitāb al-Ansāb that Abū al-Maḥāsin ‘Abd al-Raḥīm b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Bazzāz transmitted from al-Zamakhsharī in Abīward.30

28 Al-Tamīmī, Ṭabaqāt al-saniyya, 4:7; al-Lucknawi, Fawā’id al-bahiyya, 66.
29 Yāqūt, Mu’jam al-udabā’, 6:2844; al-Suyūṭī, Bughya, 2:351.
30 Al-Samʿānī, Kitāb al-Ansāb, 3:181.
Abū Ṭāhir Sāmān b. ‘Abd al-Malik

According to al-Sam‘ānī, Abū Ṭāhir Sāmān b. ‘Abd al-Malik was a jurist (faqīh) and transmitted from al-Zamakhsharī in Khwārazm. However, the report does not mention what was transmitted.\(^{31}\)

Abū al-Maḥāsin Ismā‘īl b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Ṭawīl

Abū al-Maḥāsin Ismā‘īl b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Ṭawīl “transmitted from” (rawā ‘anhu) al-Zamakhsharī in Ṭabristān and to al-Sam‘ānī himself.\(^{32}\)

Abū Sa‘d Aḥmad b. Maḥmūd al-Shāshī

According to al-Sam‘ānī, Abū Sa‘d Aḥmad b. Maḥmūd al-Shāshī transmitted from al-Zamakhsharī in Samarqand. However, it is not known what was transmitted from him.\(^{33}\)

Aḥmad b. Maḥmūd

Aḥmad b. Maḥmūd was a qāḍī in Samarqand who transmitted poetry from al-Zamakhsharī. According to Ibn Khallikān, he also transmitted poetry from al-Zamakhsharī to al-Sam‘ānī or his son, Abū al-Muẓaffār al-Dhahabī in Samarqand.\(^{34}\)

---

\(^{31}\) Al-Sam‘ānī, al-Ansāb, 3:181-82.
\(^{34}\) Ibn Khallikān, Wafayāt al-a’yān, 5:171-2; al-Dhahabī, Siyar, 20:155.
**Ibn Shahrāshūb**

Al-Khavānsārī mentions that Ibn Shahrāshūb transmitted from al-Zamakhsharī, but does not state what specifically he transmitted.\(^{35}\)

**Ismā‘īl b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Khawārzmī**

Al-Dhahabī mentions that Ismā‘īl b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Khawārzmī transmitted poetry *(rawā ‘anhu anāshīd)* from al-Zamakhsharī.\(^{36}\)

**‘Atīq b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Naysābūrī**

Al-Andarasbānī states that ‘Atīq b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Naysābūrī was one of al-Zamakhsharī’s students. He participated in al-Zamakhsharī’s *majlis* and studied the *Asās al-balāgha* with him.\(^{37}\)

**Abū al-Faraj al-Makkī**

Abū al-Faraj al-Makkī, known as “Light of the Scholars” (*shams al-a’imma*) and “Leader of the Scholars” (*ra’īs al-a’imma*) was a student of al-Zamakhsharī. He studied exegesis with al-Zamakhsharī.\(^{38}\)

**Abū Ṣāliḥ ‘Abd al-Raḥīm b. ‘Umar al-Tarjumānī**

According to al-Andarasbānī, al-Zamakhsharī corrected an error in Abū Ṣāliḥ ‘Abd al-Raḥīm b. ‘Umar al-Tarjumānī’s grammar course using Sībawayh’s *Kitāb*. He

---

\(^{35}\) Al-Khavānsārī, *Rawdāt al-jannāt*, 8:123.


\(^{38}\) Al-Andarasbānī, “Sīra,” 379.
also mentions that al-Tarjumānī studied *al-Kashshāf* from al-Zamakhsharī over a period of seven years.39

**Saʻīd b. ‘Abbād Allāh al-Jalālī al-Muʻabbār**


Appendix 3

Al-Zamakhsharī’s Scholarly Contribution

Al-Zamakhsharī’s scholarly contribution covers a wide variety of fields: exegesis, traditions, jurisprudence, literature, grammar, and lexicography. All the biographical dictionaries mention his important books, which he wrote during his lifetime. Al-Zamakhsharī compiled approximately fifty works during his lifetime. There is a substantial difference regarding the number of the books reported by the primary and secondary sources. In case of primary sources the range is between 9 and 50, whereas in secondary sources it is between 6 and 73. However, most of the sources agree that al-Zamakhsharī produced some fifty books, out of which about twenty titles are available in print form and probably the same number of manuscripts is preserved in various libraries of the world. It appears that that the remaining works are not extant.\(^1\)

\(^1\) Yāqūt gives a list of forty-nine titles produced by al-Zamakhsharī, and Ibn Khallikān gives the number of thirty-one works. Al-Fāsī and Ibn al-‘Imād both provide in their biographical notes twenty-nine titles. Al-Dāwūdī in his Ṭabaqāt al-mufassirīn, gives thirty-three works. Ibn Qutilughā and Ṭāshkūrīzāda, mention twenty-seven and twenty-six titles respectively. Al-Suyūṭī gives nine titles in Ṭabaqāt, and sixteen titles in Bughyā. Yāfī provides thirty titles of al-Zamakhsharī, while al-Dhahabī mentions only eleven works. Al-Ḥasanī also gives fifty-six titles and states the sources of these titles. Since her main research relates to al-Zamakhsharī’s Muhajat, she does not provide any other information. Al-Juwaynī mentions the titles of forty books. He is of the opinion that after 512/1118 when al-Zamakhsharī made a covenant with God after encountering the serious illness, his books are mostly influenced by ascetic, mystic, and religious tones. Al-Ḥufī gives the names of forty-seven books. He provides short summary of twenty-five books, while he considers that the remaining twenty-two books are unknown and no information is available. Dayf states that the sources describe approximately fifty works of al-Zamakhsharī. However, only some of them have been printed, while others are in manuscript form or lost. He gives the names of twenty-three books with brief description. He classifies these books into eleven categories: exegesis, traditions, religious sciences, jurisprudence, grammar, lexicography, rhetoric, prosody, logic, poetry, and prose. Al-Shīrāzī mentions that not all the books of al-Zamakhsharī have survived and some books in the manuscript form are scattered all over the world. He gives a list of twenty books with a brief description of each which are in print form and available. According to Ibrahim, there are fifty books, which are divided into two categories. The first category deals with books that have survived which are thirty. For these books, he gives their titles, and whether these have been published or are in the form of manuscripts. The second category consists of twenty books, which are missing. Rahman provides seventy-three titles of the books authored by al-Zamakhsharī, out of which seventeen are available in print form; eighteen are in manuscript form, which are preserved in various libraries of the world, while the remaining thirty-eight are lost. Sarkis and Kaḥḥāla mention twelve and six titles of the books respectively. Al-Ziriklī gives the number of books twenty-one. Faqir Jehlami provides the titles of thirty-one books. Agius’ bibliography provides a list of fifty-six books
I have divided al-Zamakhsharī’s works into eight categories. These categories in most of the cases have been determined by the titles of the books but there are some titles which are not definitive in identifying the subject matter of the book. This division, however, facilitates to understand al-Zamakhsharī’s interests his scholarly works. These eight categories are: exegesis, traditions, theology, jurisprudence, grammar, lexicography, and literature. There are some titles about which it is difficult to determine as to what category they belong because their contents are unknown.
I. Exegesis

1. Al-Kashshāf ‘an ḥaqā‘iq ghawāmiḍ al-tanzil wa ‘uyūn al-aqāwīl fī wujūh al-ta‘wīl

Al-Kashshāf is the magnum opus of al-Zamakhsharī. He explains the Qur’ān’s grammatical, lexicographical and rhetorical features, variant readings and the miraculous nature (i'jāz) of it. I will deal with greater details about it in Appendix 1.²

2. Risāla fī al-tafsīr

This book is also known as Kashf fī al-qirā‘āt and Kashf fī al-qirā‘āt al-‘ashr. It deals with the ten canonical variant readings (al-qirā‘āt al-‘ashr) instead of the widely accepted and recognized seven readings (al-qirā‘āt al-sab‘). This is the second book that al-Zamakhsharī composed on the Qur’ān, other than al-Kashshāf.³


II. Tradition

1. \textit{Al-Fā’iq fi gharīb al-ḥadīth}

Yaqūt and Ibn Khallikān are the two primary sources who list \textit{al-Fā’iq fi gharīb al-ḥadīth} in their biographical dictionaries. Most secondary sources rely upon them and there is a great number of other biographical works that mention \textit{al-Fā’iq}. According to Agius, \textit{al-Fā’iq} is a lexicon of rare words used in the \textit{ḥadīth} and divided into 28 parts. It was completed in 516/1122. It has excellent indexes containing subject, philological terms, proverbs, phonetic terms, distinguished personalities, poets and historical references. Madelung describes the book as “a large, alphabetically arranged dictionary of unusual word (in the \textit{ḥadīth}),” where the relevant traditions are quoted and explained in detail. He is of the opinion that it is a collection of traditions with a variety of explanations and grammatical analyses. Brokelmann considers it a work in which al-Zamakhsharī “collected the peculiarities of the language of the traditions.” Versteegh states that it is “a list of expressions used in \textit{ḥadīth}.” There is one of the earliest and most valuable manuscripts in Baghdad, copied in 56/1168, and another manuscript copied by Jāsim Muḥammad al-Rajab in Baghdād, no date is given. This book was first printed in Hyderabad in two volumes in 1324/1906. Later, it was edited by ‘Alī Muḥammad al-Bajāwī and Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm and published in four volumes in Cairo in 1392/1971. In a long critical philological study, G. Weil discusses some phonetic and morphological structures in \textit{al-Fā’iq}.\footnote{Al-Anbārī, \textit{Nuzhat al-alibbā’}, 391; Yaqūt, \textit{Mu’jam al-udabā’}, 6:2691; al-Qīfī, \textit{Inbāh al-ruwāt}, 3:266; Ibn Khallikān, \textit{Wafayāt al-a’yan}, 5:168; al-Dhahabī, \textit{Siyar}, 20:155; al-Dhahabī, \textit{Tā’rikh al-Islām}, 36:488; Ibn Abi Wafā, 3:448; Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, \textit{Lisān al-mīzān}, 7:63; al-Suyūṭī, \textit{Bughya}, 2:280; al-Dāwūdī, \textit{Ṭabaqāt al-mufassirīn}, 2:315; Ibn al-‘Imād, \textit{Shadharāt}, 3:119; Lucknawi, \textit{al-Fawā’id al-bahiyya}, 167;
2. Mukhtaṣar al-Muwāfaqāt bayna ahl al-bayt wa al-ṣaḥāba

According to Ṭāshkubrīzāda, the title of the book is al- Mukhtaṣar min al- Mukhtaṣar al-Muwāfaqāt al-ṣaḥāba, while Brocklemann gives the title as Mukhtaṣar al-Muwāfaqāt bayn Āl-bayt. However, Madelung considers that the original work is that of the Mu'tazilite Zaydite traditionist Abū Sa‘īd Ismāʻīl b. Alī al-Sammān al-Rāzī (d. 443/1051), and al-Zamakhsharī abridged it. In his preface, al-Zamakhsharī remarks that he has removed chains of authorities (asnāds) and describes only the narrative parts of the traditions. According to Ḥājjī Khalīfa, this book was written to demonstrate the harmony between the family of the Prophet Muḥammad and his major companions. It consists of a number of traditions in which Abū Bakr, ‘Umar and ‘Uthmān praise ‘Alī and ahl al-bayt, and ‘Alī praises Abū Bakr, ‘Umar and ‘Uthmān.5

3. Mutashābih asmā’ al-ruwāt

There are many variations of the title of this book which have been reported in the primary sources. These are: Kitab Tashabuh asma’ al-ruwāt, Mutashabih al-asma’ fi ‘ilm al-hadith, Mutashabih al-asma’ and Mushtabih asami al-ruwat. The title suggests that it deals with ‘ilm al-rijāl,6 specifically with those whose names appear to be similar and create doubts in the names. This book is not extant.7

---


6 ‘Ilm al-rijāl is the science devoted to the study of persons figuring in isnads of ḥadīths to establish their moral qualities and ascertain their truthfulness. The bibliographical information provides the necessary
4. *Khaṣā‘iṣ al-‘ashara al-kirām al-barara*

Brockelmann considers it as one of the works in the field of traditions. Madelung states that al-Zamakhsharī assembled in this book biographical information and reports about the virtues and exemplary qualities of the ten companions of the Prophet Muhammad whom he had promised paradise. In this book, al-Zamakhsharī narrates each of the ten companions’ lives and their virtues (*khaṣā‘is*) as exemplary models to be followed by the readers. According to Agius, “It is a treatise on the manifestation of high qualities of moral values in Islam represented by ten people chosen by God.” It was edited by Bahīja Bāqir al-Ḥasanī in Baghdad in 1968. She has included a short biography of al-Zamakhsharī and a bibliography.

III. Theology

1. *Al-Minhāj fī uṣūl al-dīn*

This book has been widely mentioned by all the primary and secondary sources. However, some sources give different titles of the book such as *al-Minhāj fī uṣūl al-dīn*.
A-Zamakhsharî in his Mu‘tazilite creed was largely influenced by the doctrine of Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrî, which is supported by the text. Throughout the book, he usually refrains from expressing his own preference with regard to the conflicting views of various schools on a question without ever entering the controversies. However, at some places he indicates his opinion. He mentions frequently the names of Abū ʻAlī al-Jubbâ’î (d. 303/915) and Abū Hāshim al-Jubbâ’î (d. 321/933) – “the two shaykhs” (al-shaykhân), while Qāḍî ʻAbd al-Jabbâr is referred only once. This book is extant in at least two manuscripts of Yemenite origin. The final section dealing with the imamate is lacking in both manuscripts, because it does not agree with the Zaydite doctrine. However, the chapter on the Imamate from Kitāb al-Murshid composed by Sayyid Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Abī al-Futūh al-ʻAlawî al-Ḥasanî has been added. It is written in the form of questions and answers (masāʾ il wa-ajwiba) and covers the fundamentals of Mu‘tazilite kalām. This book has been edited and translated into English by Sabine Schmidtkē.


IV. Jurisprudence

1. Al-Rā‘id fī al-farā‘id

This book is also known as al-Rā‘id fī ‘ilm al-farā‘id and Farā‘id al-fawā‘id. According to Ibn Khallikān’s editors the title is Dāllat al-nāshid wa-al-rā‘id fī ‘ilm al-farā‘id. The book has not survived. The title indicates that it deals with jurisprudence.12

2. Ru‘ūs al-masā’il fī al-fiqh

Many primary and secondary sources mention this book. Yāqūt gives the title of the book as Rūḥ al-masā’il. Agius mentions both the titles, Rūḥ al-masā’il and Ru‘ūs al-masā’il and considers that it deals with some principles of al-fiqh. The book edited by ‘Abd Allāh Nadīr Aḥmad is based on a microfilm copy from Umm al-Qurā University of Mecca of a unique original manuscript held by the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin. The subtitle of this edition is al-masā’il al-khilaﬁyya bayna al-Ḥanafīyya wa-al-Shāfī‘īyya.13 The book describes the principles of jurisprudence and the differences between the Shāfī‘ī and Ḥanafī schools. It consists of 404 questions and is divided into forty-two books.14

---


13 Lane, Traditional Mu‘tazilite Qur‘ān Commentary, 293.

3. **Shāfī al-ʻayi min kalām al-Shāfiʻī**

   This is another book that has not survived. According to al-Ḥūfī, the title of the book might be *Shaft al-ʻayy min kalām al-Shāfiʻī* or *Shaft al-ʻayyiy*. The title suggests that it was written in response to either the scholastic theology or some legal principles (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) of Shafiʻi school. It may be pointed out that al-Zamakhsharī was a Ḥanafi Muʻtazilite.¹⁵

4. **Shaqā'iq al-Nu‘mān fī ḥaqā'iq al-Nu‘mān**

   This book has some variations in the title such as, *Shaqā'iq al-Nu‘mān fī manāqib al-Imām al-Nu‘mān* and *Shaqā'iq al-Nu‘mān fī manāqib Abū Ḥanīfa*. Most probably, the original title is *Shaqā'iq al-Nu‘mān fī haqā'iq al-Nu‘mān*, however, the book has not survived. It praises the virtues and outstanding qualities of Nu‘mān b. Thābit Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767), founder of the Ḥanafi school of jurisprudence. As mentioned above, al-Zamakhsharī was a Ḥanafi Muʻtazilite.¹⁶

---


V. Grammar

1. Al-Ąḥājī al-naḥwiyya

Some primary sources give other titles of the book. Yāqūt gives the title of al-Muḥājjāt wa-mutammim mahāmm arbāb al-ḥājāt fī al-ahājī wa-al-alghāz. The title given by Ibn Khallikan is al-Muḥājjāt bi al-masā’il al-naḥwiyya. This book is published with both titles: al-Muḥajat bi-al-masail al-naḥwiyya, edited by Bahīja al-Ḥasanī and al-Ąḥājī al-naḥwiyya, edited by Muṣṭafā al-Ḥadrī.17 According to Agius, al-Ąḥājī al-naḥwiyya, is a philological treatise that discusses some grammatical problems found in the Qur’ān, ḥadīth, and classical poetry; [it has] excellent indexes of Qur’ānic verses, hadith, poetic lines, authors and subject. Versteegh states that it deals with the issues involving grammatical controversies.18

2. Al-Mufaṣṣal fī ṣanʿat al-iʿrāb

According to Brockelmann, al-Mufaṣṣal fī ṣanʿat al-iʿrāb is one of al-Zamakhsharī’s best known, most important and popular grammatical treatise which was written in 513-515/1119-1121. He lists 24 commentaries, of which the best-known is of Ibn Yaʿīsh. He describes it as a work “celebrated for its succinct yet exhaustive and lucid exposition,” and as “textbook [for the teaching] of grammar, classic due to its terse and

---

17 Lane, Traditional Muʿtazilite Qurʾān Commentary, 267.
clear formulation of the material.” Versteegh states that the most obvious difference
between this highly popular work and other grammatical writings, starting with the Kitāb
Sibawayhi, is the arrangement of material. Instead of classic arrangement in syntax,
morphology and phonology, al-Zamakhsharī divided the material into four sections:
nouns, verbs, particles and derived words (mushtarak). This book, though elementary,
has considerably influenced the Western grammars of Arabic. It formed the basis for
Caspari’s grammar and through its English translation by Wright, for all subsequent
grammars of Arabic.\textsuperscript{19}

3. Al-Mufrad wa-al-mu’alla\textsuperscript{f}

It is also known as al-Mufrad wa-al-murakkab and deals with compound terms.

According to Brokelmann and Versteegh, it is a treatise on syntax. There are two editions
of this book: one in Risālatān li-al-Zamakhsharī which is an offprint of Bahīja al-Ḥasanī
and published by Matba‘at al-Majma‘ al-‘Ilmī al-‘Irāqī, Baghdād in 1967, and the other
published by Dār al-Hānī, Cairo in 1990.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{19} Al-Anbārī, Nuzhat al-alībbā’, 391; Yāqūt, Mu’jam al-udabā’, 6:2691; al-Qīfī, Inbāh al-ruwāt, 3:266;
Ibn Ḥajar al-’Asqālānī, Lisān al-mīzān, 7:63; Ibn Ḥālībūghā, Tāj al-tarājim, 53; al-Suyūṭī, Bughya 2:280;
al-Dāwūdī, Tabaqāt al-mufassirīn, 2:315; Ṭashkubrīzāda, Miṣṭāḥ al-sa‘āda, 2:98; Ibn al-‘Imād, Shadhrat,
3:119; Lucknawi, al-Fawā’id al-bahiyya, 167; al-Khāvānsārī, Rawdāt al-jannāt, 8:119; Faqir Jehlami,
Hadhā’iq al-Ḥanafiyā, 246; Sarkis, Mu’jam al-maṭbū’ūt, 1:975; al-Zirīkī, al-A’lām 7:178; Kāhīlā, Mu’jam
al-mu’allīfīn, 12:186; Agius, Bibliographical Notes, 114; al-Ḥūfī, al-Zamakhsharī, 60; Ṣayf, al-Zamakhsharī,
84; Ibrahim, Theological Questions, 24; Rahman, Zamakhsharī kī tafsīr, 160; Brockelmann, GAL Supplement,
1:509; Brockelmann, “al-Zamakhsharī,” EI\textsuperscript{1}, 8:1206; Versteegh, “al-Zamakhsharī,” EI\textsuperscript{2},
11:431.

\textsuperscript{20} Al-Anbārī, Nuzhat al-alībbā’, 391; Yāqūt, Mu’jam al-udabā’, 6:2691; al-Qīfī, Inbāh al-ruwāt, 3:266;
Ibn Khalilkān, Waqayāt al-a’yān, 5:168; al-Dāwūdī, Tabaqāt al-mufassirīn, 2:316; Ṭashkubrīzāda, Miṣṭāḥ
al-sa‘āda, 2:99; Ibn al-‘Imād, Shadhrarāt, 3:119; Lucknawi, al-Fawā’id al-bahiyya, 167; Faqir Jehlami,
Hadhā’iq al-Ḥanafiyā, 246; Agius, Bibliographical Notes, 115; al-Ḥūfī, al-Zamakhsharī, 61; Ibrahim,
Theological Questions, 18; Rahman, Zamakhsharī kī tafsīr, 172; Brockelmann, “al-Zamakhsharī,” EI\textsuperscript{1},
4. *Nukat al-a’rāb fī gharīb al-i’rāb*

This book is listed only by Yāqūt and it deals with peculiarities in Qur’ānic grammatical analysis. This book was edited by Muḥammad Abū al-Futūḥ Sharīf and published by the Dār al-Ma‘ārif, Cairo in 1985. In this edition, each chapter is titled as *fī gharīb i’rāb sūra* followed by the name of the *sūra* under discussion. In addition, the text is arranged in the form of questions and answers (*masā’il wa-ajwiba*).²¹

5. *Risāla fī kalimat al-shahāda*

According to Agius, it is also known as *Mas’ala fī kalimat shahāda*. It is not mentioned in any biographical dictionaries. It was edited by Bahīja al-Ḥasanī and published in *Majallat al-Majma’ al-‘Ilmī al-‘Irāqī*. According to her, it is not a treatise on doctrine (‘aqīda) but rather on grammar. In this *Risāla*, al-Zamakhsharī deals with the grammatical analysis of the first phrase of *shahāda*, that is, ḥa ilā ha ilā Allāh.²²

6. *Sharḥ abyāt al-Kitāb*

This book also has variant titles in the biographical dictionaries. Yāqūt gives the title *Sharḥ Kitāb Sībawayh*, Ibn Khallikān as *Sharḥ abyāt Kitāb Sībawayh* and Ibn al-‘Imād as *Sharḥ abyāt Sībawayh*. This book is a commentary on some of the lines of

---


poetry (shawāhid) used by Sībawayh in his Kitāb, however, it is not a commentary on the entire book of Sībawayh. 23

7. Sharḥ al-Mufaṣṣal

This book has been mentioned in a number of biographical dictionaries. Other than Sharḥ al-Mufaṣṣal, there are three more titles of this book. Agius and al-Ḥuḍī give the title as Sharḥ ba’d mushkilāt al-Mufaṣṣal, while al-Khavansari gives Sharḥ mushkilāt al-Mufaṣṣal. Yāqūt mentions two titles the Sharḥ al-Mufaṣṣal and a Ḥāshiya ‘ala al-Mufaṣṣal. Al-Zamakhsharī wrote a hāshiya (gloss) as well as a sharḥ (commentary) on al-Mufaṣṣal. There are many commentaries on al-Mufaṣṣal available, but the one written by the author is not extant. 24

8. Al-Unmudhaj

Almost all the primary sources and secondary works mention that al-Unmudhaj is an abstract or abridgement of al-Zamakhsharī’s al-Mufaṣṣal. Brokelmann describes it as a “shorter grammar, an extract from the Mufaṣṣal” and a “short handbook” that was very popular. Agius is also of the same opinion that this book being “an abstract of al-


24 Yāqūt, Mu’jam al-udabā’, 6:2691; al-Suyūṭī, Bughya, 2:280; al-Dāwūdī, Ṭabaqāt al-mufassirīn, 2:316; Ṭāshkubrizāda, Miftāḥ al-sa’āda, 2:98; Lucknawi, al-Fawā’id al-bahiyya, 167; Faqir Jehlami, Ḥadā’iq al-Hanafiyya, 246; Agius, Bibliographical Notes, 113; al-Ḥūfī, al-Zamakhsharī, 61; Ibrahim, Theological Questions, 26; Rahman, Zamakhsharī kī tafsīr, 175.
Mufaṣṣal attained great popularity.” It was edited and published by J. Broch, Christiana in 1867 and reviewed and corrected by A. Fischer in 1910.²⁵

VI. Lexicography

1. Asās al-balāgha

Asās al-balāgha is a dictionary of the classical language remarkable for its methodical arrangement. It gives special consideration to the metaphorical meanings of the words. Al-Zamakhsharī elaborates the meaning of some vocabulary by citing synonyms with examples and lines of poetry, the variant usages of simple and derived nouns and verbs. The book is divided into sections arranged in alphabetical order and the vocabulary stemming from the different roots is given. Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī writes that, “al-Zamakhsharī’s book Asās al-balāgha is one of the finest books in which he expressed and distinguished between the real and metaphorical meanings of the words used singularly or compositely in an unprecedented manner.”²⁶

It was first printed in two volumes in Cairo by Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya in 1299/1882 and 1341/1922. Then it was published in 1311/1893 in Lucknow and in 1385/1965 in Beirut and in Cairo in 1398/1977. An abstract of al-Asās entitled Gharās al-Asās was composed by Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī (d. 852/1448) and a critique of al-Asās was composed by Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī (d. 852/1448) and a critique of al-Asās


was written by Ḥusayn ‘Alī Maḥfūẓ. In a long critical philological study, G. Weil discusses some phonetic and morphological structures in *al-Asās.*

2. *Al-Jibāl wa-al-amkina wa-al-miyāḥ*

The title of *al-Jibāl wa-al-amkina wa-al-miyāḥ* is known by five different variations in its name. According to Yāqūt, the title is *Kitāb al-Jibāl wa al-amkina.* Ṭāshkubrīzāda gives the title as *Kitāb Asmā’ al-awdiya wa-al-jibāl,* while al-Shirāzi and Ibrāhim give the title as *Kitāb al-Amkina wa al-jibāl wa al-miyāḥ.* Brockelmann gives two titles of the book: *Kitāb al-Amkina wa-al-jibāl wa al-miyāḥ* and *Kitāb al-Amkina wa-al-jibāl wa-al-miyāḥ wa-al-biqā’ al-mashhūra fi ash’ār al-’arab.* Madelung gives the title as *Kitāb al-Amkina wa al-jibāl.* According to Madelung, this book is “a small dictionary of Arabic geographical names.” Ḍayf states that it contains the names of well-known places referred to in the Arab poetry. Ibrāhīm al-Sāmara‘ī, in the preface of his edition suggests that al-Zamakhsharī drew on the pre-Islamic *mukhḍaram* and Islamic poets and his main source were Ibn Wahhās and al-Aṣma‘ī. According to Brockelmann


28 *Mukhḍaram* is a class of poets whose lives spanned both the pre-Islamic and Islamic periods. Born and raised in pre-Islamic (*jāhilīyya*) and after the rise of Islam, *mukhḍaram* poets responded the new religion in a variety of ways. Some greeted it with hostility and others with genuine acceptance. See R. Jacobi, “Mukhḍaram,” *EF,* 7:516.
and Agius, it was first published in Leiden by M. Salverda de Grave in 1856. Recently, it
was edited by al-Sâmara’ì and printed by Dár ‘Ammār, ‘Ammān in 1999.29

3. Mu‘jam al-ḥudūd

Almost all biographical dictionaries include Mu‘jam al-ḥudūd in the works of al-Zamakhsharī, but it has not survived. Brockelmann and al-Shirāzī do not mention this book in their listings. Al-Ḥufī and Ḍayf are of the opinion that this book deals with jurisprudence based on the juridical meaning of ḥudūd which seems to be not correct.

The word hadd also means “case” for a noun (rafʿ, naṣb, jar) and “class, category” for a word, as when a verb is said to be “of the class of ḥaraba (min ḥadd ḥaraba).” In this case, Mu‘jam al-ḥudūd appears to be a dictionary of words categories which was the main field of al-Zamakhsharī. It may be mentioned that the grammarians, al-Farrāʾ and al-Rummānī composed works entitled Kitāb al-ḥudūd.31

30 Lane, Lexicon, 2:525, at the root h-d-d.
4. Muqaddimat al-adab

Muqaddimat al-adab is an Arabic-Persian dictionary and Arabic grammar dedicated to the Sipāsālār Atsiz b. Khwārizmshāh (d. 551/1156). According to Brokelmann, al-Zamakhsharī made the Arabic vocabulary available to his countrymen with explanations in Persian. Agius states that there are seven manuscripts of this book at various places. The first European edition of the book entitled Samachsharii Lexicon Arabicum Persicum was edited by Godfrey Wetzstein and published in Paris in 1850. The University of Tehran published it in 1963 under the title of Pishrow-e Adab (Muqaddimat al-adab) which was edited with an index of Arabic and Persian words by Moḥammad Kāẓem Emām. A facsimile of an interlinear translation of Muqaddimat al-adab into old Khorezmian language as well as Persian and Turkish entitled Horezmce Tercümeli Muqaddimat al-adab (part two) was published by A.Z. Velidi in Istanbul in 1951. The work is divided into five sections: nouns, verbs, particles, inflexion of nouns and inflexion of verbs, however, in Wetzstein’s edition, it consists only of the first two sections. J. Benzing wrote in Das Chwaresmische Sprachmaterial einer Handschrift der Muqaddimat al-adab von Zamaxsari about the Khorezmian language which was published in Wiesbaden in 1968. Benzing gives a detailed survey of the number of translations and interpretations of Muqaddimat al-adab. A translation into Turkish under the title Akszâ al-Ereb fi Tercümet-i Muqaddimat il-Edeb by Aḥmad Ishāq was published in Istanbul in 1313/1895 and it also includes marginal notes by the editor about the Turkish gloss in al-Muqaddima.32

5. Nuzhat al-muta‘annis wa nuzhat al-muqtabis

Among the biographical authors, Yāqūt and al-Qifṭī mention this title. According to Brokelmann, it belongs to adab literature and it is kind of “lexikographische Bellettristik,” preserved in the Aya Sofia.33

VII. Literature

1. A‘jab al-‘ajab fī sharḥ Lāmiyyat al-‘Arab

A‘jab al-‘ajab fī sharḥ Lāmiyyat al-‘Arab is a commentary by al-Zamakhsharī on the pre-Islamic poet al-Shanfarah’s qaṣida Lāmiyyat al-‘Arab.34 Brokelmann states that it was printed with the commentary of Mubarrad alone in 1324/1906 and together with a series of other commentaries in 1328/1910 in Cairo. Agius mentions a unique manuscript of Shanfara’s qaṣida Lāmiyyat al-‘Arab found in Baghdad, but it is undated. Also, there are printed editions in Istanbul (1300/1882) and Damascus (1392/1972). Al-Ḥufī concurs with Agius and adds that the first edition was published in Istanbul (Qustanṭiniyya), by

33 Yāqūt, Mu‘jam al-udabā’, 6:2691; al-Qifṭī, Inbāh al-ruwāt, 3:266; Agius, Bibliographical Notes, 117; al-Ḥufī, al-Zamakhsharī, 63; Ibrahim, Theological Questions, 20; Rahman, Zamakhsharī kī tafsīr, 172; Brockelmann, GAL Supplement, 1:512; Brockelmann, “al-Zamakhsharī,” EI², 8:1207.
34 Thābit (‘Amr) b. Mālik al-Shanfarā was one of the pre-Islamic poets; however, details relating to his life are sparse and contradictory and marked by anecdotes. His qaṣida, Lāmiyyat al-‘Arab is “the most accomplished specimen of the poetry of the ṣa‘ālik,” which has aroused great interest since the first decades of the third/ninth century, and numerous sharḥs have been written about it. Noldeke, Krenkow, F. Gabrieli and Blachere expressed serious doubts about its authenticity, whereas G. Jacob, Brockelmann and S. Stetkevych are convinced about its authenticity. Ṣa‘ālik (sing. ṣu‘luk) were brigands, brigand-poets and mercenary-rebels in time of need. The ṣa‘ālik owe their place in history mainly to their poetic talents which were without equal at the time of the Jāhiliyya and until the end of the Umayyad regime. A lāmiyya is a poem in the rhyme of the letter lām. See A. Arazi, “al-Shanfara,” EI², 9: 301-3; A. Arazi, “ṣu‘luk,” EI², 9: 863-8; F. Gabrieli, “Adjam,” EI², 1: 206.
the Matbaʻat al-Jawāʻib. In addition, Shanfarā’s and al-Ţughrāʻī’s al-Lāmiyyatān commented by al-Zamakhsharī was edited and printed by ‘Abd al-Muʻīn al-Malūḥī at Damascus in 1966. The two qaṣidas are individually Shanfarā’s Lāmiyyat al-ʻArab and al-Ţughrāʻī’s Lāmiyyat al-ʻAjam. However, biographical sources do not mention that al-Zamakhsharī composed a sharḥ on al-Ţughrāʻī’s Lāmiyyat al-ʻAjam.35

2. Dīwān al-shiʻr

Dīwan al-shiʻr is a collection of al-Zamakhsharī’s poems. Agius says that it is also known as Dīwān al-Zamakhsharī. According to Ḍayf, it is a collection of five thousand verses that al-Zamakhsharī called as Dīwān al-adab. It is listed in most of the biographical dictionaries. Madelung states that the Dīwān “reflects his technical skill and understanding of the classical tradition of Arabic poetry more than an original poetical talent.”36


3. **Marthiyya**

It is not mentioned in any of the primary sources. However, modern research indicates that al-Zamakhsharī composed an elegy on the death of his teacher Abū Muḍar al-Ḍabbī (d. 507/1114).³⁷

4. **Al-Qaṣīda al-ba‘ūdiyya**

*Al-Qaṣīda al-ba‘ūdiyya* consists of only three verses. Al-Zamakhsharī refers it in his commentary with regard to verse 26 of chapter two of the Qur’ān. Ibn Khallikān states that al-Zamakhsharī expressed his desire that these verses be written on his tombstone.³⁸

5. **Al-Qusṭās al-mustaqīm fī al-‘arūḍ**

*Al-Qusṭās al-mustaqīm fī al-‘arūḍ* deals with the metrical structure of verses. Agius mentions that its manuscripts were found in Leiden and Patna. Bahīja al-Ḥasanī edited it and it was published in Baghdad in 1969. Ḍayf states that it was published in Najaf in 1970 entitled *al-Qusṭās al-mustaqīm fī ‘ilm al-‘arūḍ.*³⁹

---

6. **Maqāmāt and Sharḥ al-Maqāmāt**

Al-Zamakhsharī composed a series of aphorisms addressing to himself, as yā abā al-Qāsim (O Abū al-Qāsim!) which were known as *Maqāmāt*. It is a collection of fifty moral discourses. Later, al-Zamakhsharī wrote a *Sharḥ al-Maqāmāt* which is a commentary on each of these fifty *maqāmāt*. This work is also known as *al-Nasāʿīh al-kibār*. According to Brokelmann, al-Zamakhsharī added five *maqāmas* after recovering from his severe illness in 512/1118. They are *maqāmas* from 46 to 50. *Maqāmas* 46 and 47 deal with grammar (*naḥw*) and prosody (*al-ʻarūḍ*) respectively. *Maqāma* 48 “*al-qawāfī*” and 49 “*al-dīwān*” are puns. *Maqāma* 50’s theme is Ayyām al-ʻArab. Agius mentions that this work was completed in 525/1130. A valuable manuscript was found in Baghdad, while another in Madrid entitled *al-Maqāmāt al-khamsūn fī al-zuḥd*. *Sharḥ al-Maqāmāt* was first printed in 1313/1895 and then in 1325/1907 in Cairo. It was translated into German by Oskar Rescher entitled Beiträge zur Maqämen-litteratur and printed by Greifswald in 1913.

7. **Aṭwāq al-dhahab**

Most of the biographical dictionaries mention this work either as *Aṭwāq al-dhahab* or as *al-Nṣāʿīh al-ṣighār*. Yāqūt gives both titles. It is one of the three collections

---

40 See footnote 98 on page 46 of Chapter 1 for the definition and evolution of *maqāmāt*.
41 Pun is a play of words in different sense of the same word.
of apophthegms (the others: Nawābīgh al-kalim and Rabīʿ al-abrār). Brockelmann says that Aṭwāq al-dhahab is referred to as al-Naṣāʾiḥ al-ṣīghār by al-Zamakhsharī in the Kashshāf. Madelung states that the book consists of one hundred pious maxims with allusions to the Qurʾān, Sunna and proverbial expressions. It was dedicated to Ibn Wahhās and the people of Mecca. An edition of the Aṭwāq was printed in Cairo in 1950. It was first edited in Arabic and translated into German by J.V. Hammer entitled Samachsharī Goldene Halsbänder Arabisch und Deutsch and printed in Vienna in 1835. A new translation into German with notes by H.L. Fleischer was printed in Leipzig in 1835, and also another translation into German by G. Weil was published in Stuttgart in 1863. Both translations superseded that of Hammer and proved to be excellent. It was also translated into French by C. Barbier de Meynard and published in Paris in 1876. Two Turkish translations were printed in Istanbul in 1869 and 1872. There is a translation into Persian by Vaysal of Shīrāz (d. 1262/1846). Worth mentioning are imitations entitled Die Aṭbāq ed-dhahab by ‘Abd al-Mu’min b. Hibat Allāh al-Maghribī al-Īṣfahānī Shufurwa (d. 600/1203) and Abū al-Faraj b. al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200) which were published by Greifswald in 1914.44

8. *Dīwān al-khuṭab*

Yāqūt and al-Qīfī mention this work in their biographical dictionaries and there are a few references in the secondary sources. It is a collection of al-Zamakhsharī’s sermons or his exhortations. It has not survived.⁴⁵

9. *Dīwān al-tamthīl*

All the primary sources mention about this work. However, Yāqūt, Ibn al-Qutlūbughā and Ibn al-‘Imād give a different title as *Dīwān al-tamaththul*. It is a collection of proverbial maxims.⁴⁶

10. *Al-Durr al-dāʿir al-muntakahb fī al-kināyāt wa al-istiʿārāt wa al-tashbīḥāt*

This book is not listed in any of the biographical dictionaries. Only Brockelmann, Agius and Dayf mention about it with variant titles, one as mentioned above and the other as *al-Durr al-dāʿ ir al-muntakahb fī al-kināyāt wa al-istiʿārāt wa al-tashbīḥāt al-‘Arab*. It deals with a small list of similes, metaphors and allegories drawn from the usage of Arabic and its classical poetry. The only extant fragment manuscript was found in Karl Marx library at the University of Leipzig, edited by Bahīja al-Ḥasanī and printed in Baghdad in 1968.⁴⁷

---


11. Rabī‘ al-abrār wa-fuṣūṣ al-akhbār

Rabī‘ al-abrār wa-fuṣūṣ al-akhbār is one of the three collections of apophthegms (the others: Nawābigh al-kalim and Aṭwāq al-dhahab). Some primary sources mention Rabī‘ al-abrār and Fuṣūṣ al-akhbār as two independent titles.48 According to Agius, Rabī‘ al-abrār and Fuṣūṣ al-akhbār are the titles of two independent books. He describes that the Rabī‘ al-abrar is an excellent methodological collection of diverse anecdotes in one hundred chapters. About the Fuṣūṣ al-akhbār, he says that it has edifying and literary anecdotes. Brockelmann gives the title as Rabī‘ al-abrār fī mā yasurrū al-khawāṭir wa-al-afkār and states that it is a collection of apophthegms. Madelung gives the title of this book as Rabī‘ al-abrār wa-nuṣūṣ al-akhbār. He states that it contains extracts from literary and historical works arranged according to ninety-two topics and was written as a companion to al-Kashshāf. Agius mentions that according to W.M. de Slane, it is an excellent methodological collection of diverse anecdotes in one hundred chapters. A summary of Rabī‘ al-abrār wa-fuṣūṣ al-akhbār with additions from other sources was compiled by Ibn Khaṭīb al-Qāsim (d. 940/1533) and entitled Rawḍ al-akhyār which was published by Būlāq in Cairo in 1270/1853 and 1288/1871. It was translated into Turkish by ʻĀshiq Chelebī (d. 979/1571).49

48 In five biographical dictionaries it is mentioned as one book entitled Rabī‘ al-abrār wa-fuṣūṣ al-akhbār, while in six biographical dictionaries, Fuṣūṣ al-akhbār and Rabī‘ al-abrār are listed independently. Ṭāshkubrizāda and al-Andarasbānī list them separately, however, but both of them add another title as al-Ziyādāt ‘alā al-fuṣūṣ, over and above Fuṣūṣ al-akhbār.

12. *Al-Nawābigh al-kalim*

*Al-Nawābigh al-kalim* is one of the three collections of apophthegms (the others: *Rabi‘ al-abrār* and *Aṭwāq al-dhahab*). Agius considers *Nawābigh al-kalim* and *al-Kalim al-nawābigh* two separate books. According to him *al-Nawābigh al-kalim* is a collection of apophthegms while *al-Kalim al-nawābigh* a collection of sermons. Brockelmann lists the book as *Nawābigh al-kalim* and considers it as a collection of maxims. Ḍayf is of the opinion that that this book is a series of brief maxims in rhymed prose. There is a translation into Ottoman Turkish but the author is unknown. It was translated into Latin and edited by H. Albert Schultens entitled *Anthologia Sententiarum Arabicarum* and published in Leiden in 1772. According to Barbier de Meynard, translation was done in a very elegant style and the edition was enriched with good references and notes. Barbier de Meynard translated it into French, under the title *Les Pensées de Zamakhcharī*. In his preface, he claims that Schultens’ translation, though elegant in style, has failed at times to grasp the proper meaning of the text. Of the commentaries, the best known is that of al-Taftāzānī (d. 792/1389) entitled *al-Nī’am al-sawābigh*, lithographed in Istanbul in 1866, and in Cairo in 1287/1870 with glosses by Muḥammad al-Bayrūtī in Beirut in 1306/1888. A recent work on proverbs by Y.T. al-Bustānī (d. 1372/1952), under the title *Amthāl al-sharq wa-al-gharb* includes a section of *Nawābigh al-kalim* which was published in Cairo in 1960-61.50

13 Al-Mustaqṣā fī al-amthāl

Al-Mustaqṣā fī al-amthāl is an extensive dictionary of Arabic proverbs which al-Zamakhsharī completed in 499/1106. According to Muḥammad ʻAbd al-Mu‘īd Khān, Madelung and al-Ḥūfī, there are 3,461 proverbs arranged alphabetically according to their beginnings with explanation of their origin and use. Versteegh says that it has 3,500 proverbs. Al-Zamakhsharī’s contemporary Abū al- Faḍl Ṭḥām b. Muḥammad al-Maydānī’s (d. 518/1124) Majmaʻ al-amthāl consists of 2,763 proverbs. Ziriklī mentions one manuscript in the library of Ḥasan Ḥusnī ʻAbd al-Wahhāb in Tunis. The first edition of al-Mustaqṣā fī al-amthāl was published by Dā’irat al-Maʻārif al-ʻUthmāniyya, Hyderabad Deccan in 1381/1962.51

14. Risālat al-nāṣiḥa

Most of the biographical dictionaries mention the Risālat al-nāṣiḥa. This book deals with ethics and good counsels.52

---


VIII. Unknown

1. Ṣamīm al-‘Arabiyya

Most of the biographical dictionaries mention the Ṣamīm al-‘Arabiyya. According to Agius, it is also known as Himam al-‘Arabiyya. It is not clear in which category this book could be treated, i.e., literature, grammar or lexicography.53

2. Sawā’ir al-amthāl

Most of the biographical dictionaries mention the Sawā’ir al-amthāl. According to Agius, it is also known as Sawā’ir al-Islām. This book is missing.54

3. Tasliyat al-ḍarīr

Yāqūt, al-Qifṭī and Ṭāshkubrīzāda mention this title in their biographical dictionaries. There is no information available about the subject matter of this book.55


4. **Al-Ajnās**

Yāqūt and al-Qīfṭī mention this title in their biographical dictionaries. Ḍayf states that the title of the book is *al-Ajnās fī al-mantiq*. According to al-Ḥūfī and Ḍayf, this book is on logic. ⁵⁶

5. **Al-Amālī**

Yāqūt, Ibn Khallikān and al-Dāwūdī mention this title in their biographical dictionaries. However, two different titles of this book are given. Yāqūt, al-Ḥūfī and Ibrāhīm give the title as *al-Amālī fī al-nahw*, which means that it deals with grammar. Ibn Khallikān and al-Dāwūdī provide the title of *al-Amālī fī kull funn*, which means that it deals with topics of general nature. ⁵⁷

6. **‘Aql al-kull**

This title is mentioned only by Yāqūt. According to al-Ḥūfī, this book deals with either logic or diction. However, Ḍayf is of the opinion that the subject matter of the book is logic. ⁵⁸

---


7. **Risālat al-mas’ama**

This book is listed by Yāqūt and al-Qifṭī, and its contents are unknown. There are variations in the title of this book. Ibrāhīm refers to it as *Risālat al-mas’ama*, while Agius mentions it as *Risālat al-musa’ama*. 59

8. **Kitāb al-asmā’ fī al-lughat**

This title is mentioned only by Yāqūt in primary sources. Rahman quotes the same title as mentioned by Yāqūt, but Agius gives the title as *al-Asmā’*. 60

9. **Dāllat al-nāshid**

This title is mentioned in many primary as well as secondary sources, but it has not survived. 61

10. **Dīwān al-rasā’il**

This book is listed in many primary as well as secondary sources, but it has not survived either. 62

---


361
11. Jawāhir al-lugha

This work is mentioned by Yāqūt and al-Qifṭī only, as well as by some secondary sources. It deals with the Arabic language.\(^{63}\)

12. Risālat al-asrār

This title is also listed by Yāqūt and al-Qifṭī only and by some secondary sources. However, it has not survived.\(^{64}\)

Al-Zamakhsharī as a Muʿtazilite Scholar

Al-Zamakhsharī was a pious person and well known for his asceticism and irreproachable private and public life. He was considered by his contemporary and subsequent scholars as one of the outstanding intellectuals and men of learning of his age. He was famous as ‘pride of Khwarazm,’ a great scholar of the world in many sciences. His works including al-Kashshāf are proof of his well established knowledge and manifestation of his excellence. Ibn Quṭlūbugha states that al-Zamakhsharī wrote unprecedented and unparalleled books, amongst them is al-Kashshāf, a commentary of the Qurʾān which none composed similar to it, prior to him.

Al-Andarasbanī mentions that al-Zamakhsharī reached such a level of knowledge in lexicography, grammar, rhetoric, eloquence, and poetry that he did not consider anyone equivalent to him. Al-Zamakhsharī claimed that there was no issue in the Kitāb

\(^{63}\) Yāqūt, Muʾjam al-udabāʾ, 6:2691; al-Qifṭī, Inbāḥ al-ruwāt, 3:266; Agius, Bibliographical Notes, 113; al-Ḥūfī, al-Zamakhsharī, 60; Ibrahim, Theological Questions, 25; Rahman, Zamakhsharī kī tafsīr, 175.

\(^{64}\) Yāqūt, Muʾjam al-udabāʾ, 6:2691; al-Qifṭī, Inbāḥ al-ruwāt, 3:266; Agius, Bibliographical Notes, 118; al-Ḥūfī, al-Zamakhsharī, 63; Ibrahim, Theological Questions, 26; Rahman, Zamakhsharī kī tafsīr, 176.
Sibawayh, which had not been resolved by him. However, some scholars did not agree with him.

Al-Zamakhsharī was known for his Mu‘tazilite theological position, which he professed publicly and proudly. He traveled in Khurāsān and Iraq, and in any city where he went, many people gathered around him and acquired knowledge and benefited from him. He was an erudite scholar of literature, and had close affinity with the Arabs.⁶⁵

---

Appendix 4

Muḥkamāt wa mutashābihāt

The Qur’ānic exegetes focus on the three verses of the Qur’ān when they discuss the issue of muḥkam and mutashābih verses.

In one verse, the Qur’ān describes itself as clear and distinct, “A book whose verses are set clear and made distinct.” In a second verse, it indicates that all the Qur’ānic verses are similar and resembling, “God has sent down the very best discourse as a book conformable repetition.” However, in a third verse, the Qur’ān states that it comprises of both clear and similar as well as ambiguous verses, “It is He who has sent down upon you the book wherein are clear verses and which are the mother of the Book, and others are ambiguous. As for those in whose hearts is swerving, they follow what is ambiguous in it, seeking (to create) dissension and seeking its interpretation. However, no one except God knows its interpretation. And those who are firmly grounded in knowledge say: ‘We believe in it, all is from our Lord.’ but only those who have wisdom understand.”

Al-Zarkashī (d. 794/1392) and al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) quoting Ibn Habīb al-Naysābirī (d. 406/1015) state that these verses provide three different accounts regarding the nature of the Qurʿān: the Qurʿān as clear (muḥkam), as ambiguous (mutashābih), and as a combination the two. However, verse 3:7 which describes that the Qurʿān consists of both the clear and ambiguous verses is preferable because it is correct (ṣaḥīḥ).

---

1 Qurʿān, 11:1.
2 Qurʿān, 39:23.
3 Qurʿān, 3:7.
4 Al-Zarkashī, al-Burhān, 2:68; al-Suyūṭī, al-Itqān, 2:3.
The definition of the term *muḥkamāt* as clear verses is based on the meaning inherent in the root *h.k.m.* ‘to be firm and solid,’ ‘to prevent, restrain or withhold, and ‘to secure from falling to pieces.’  

*Muḥkam* means a passage or a verse of the Qur’ān whose meanings are secured from change and alteration such as the specification (*takhšīṣ*), interpretation (*taʿwīl*) and abrogation (*naskh*).  

*Muḥkam* is also defined as a verse of the Qur’ān which is elaborate (*mufaṣṣal*) because nothing is abrogated from it (*lam yunsikh minhu*) and it is not ambiguous (*mā lam yakun mutashābihan*) because it is unequivocal in its manifestation and it requires nothing to elucidate it.

The exegetical literature provides a variety of definitions and viewpoints regarding the terms of *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt*. Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200) describes eight different opinions regarding the *muḥkamāt* verses. First, ‘Abd Allāh b. Masʿūd (d. 32/652-3), Ibn ‘Abbās (d. 68/687), Qatāda b. Diʿāma al-Sadūsī (d. 117/735), Ismāʿīl b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Suddī (d. 127/745), and others are of the opinion that the *muḥkamāt* are defined as the abrogating verses (*al-nāsikhāt*). Second, Ibn ‘Abbās and Mujāhid b. Jabr (d. 104/722) narrate that *muḥkam* verses are those in which God’s commandments are clearly expressed about the permitted and prohibited things. Third, Jābir b. ʻAbd Allāh (d. 78/697) considers that the scholars (*ʻulamā‘*) know the interpretation of *muḥkam* verses. Fourth, according to al-Ḍaḥḥāk b. Muzāḥim (d. 102/720) *muḥkam* verses are never abrogated (*lam yunsikh*). Fifth, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Zayd (d. 182/798) is of the opinion that the words of the *muḥkam* verses are never repeated elsewhere in the Qur’ān (*mā takarrar/ lam tatakarrar alfāẓuhum*). Sixth, Qāḍī Abū Yaʿlā b. al-Farrā’ (d. 365

5 Lane, *Lexicon*, 2:618.
458/1066) on the authority of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) mentions that a muḥkam verse cannot be translated by itself with a new meaning and it does not require any elucidation. Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfiʻī (d. 204/820) and Abū al-Barakāt b. al-Anbārī (d. 577/1181) state that a muhkam verse has only one interpretation. Seventh, the whole Qur’ān consists of muḥkam verses except the mysterious letters (al-hurūf al-muqaṭṭaʻāt). Eighth, according to most exegetes, muḥkam verses are comprised of command and prohibitions, promises and threats, and allowed and forbidden matters. Qāḍī Abū Ya‘lā Ya‘lā b. al-Farrā’ mentions that these are the real mother of the Book (umm al-kitāb aṣl). Ibn ‘Abbās and Ibn Jubayr state that they are like the original book in which all the commandments have been provided and permissible and prohibited acts have been collected.

Ibn al-Jawzī also describes seven different opinions regarding the mutashābihāt verses. First, ʻAbd Allāh b. Masʻūd, Ibn ʻAbbās, Qatāda b. Diʻāma al-Sadūsī, Ismaʻīl b. al-Rahmān al-Suddī, and others are of the opinion that the mutashābihāt verses are the abrogated verses (al-mansukh). Second, according to Jābir b. ʻAbd Allāh, it is not possible for the scholars to know the interpretation of mutashābih verses, such as the appearance of the Day of Resurrection. Third, Ibn ʻAbbās is of the opinion that the

---

8 Twenty-nine sūras of the Qur’ān begin with ‘the isolated/disconnected’ (al-hurūf al-muqaṭṭaʻāt) or ‘the opening letters’ (al-hurūf al-fawātiḥ). According to Muslim tradition, these letters are part of the divine revelation of the Qur’ān itself. In the recitation of the Qur’ān, these ‘openers of the sūras’ (fawātiḥ al-suwar) or ‘beginnings of the sūras’ (awā‘ il al-suwar) are recited as letters of the alphabet, i.e. the beginning of sūra 2 is read alif lām mīm. Muslim scholars are of the opinion that the full significance and meaning of these letters is known to God. Western scholars’ theories fall into two categories: abbreviationist and redactional. Proponents of abbreviationist consider the mysterious letters as independent of the original Qur’ānic text. The redactional theorists examine the mysterious letters as a means for ordering the Qur’ānic text and tend to see these opening letters as part of the original text of the Qur’ān. However, none of these theories is definitive. See Keith Massey, “Mysterious Letters,” EQ, 3:471; A. Welch, “al-Kur‘ān: The Mysterious Letters,” EF, 5:412-14; Arthur Jeffery, “The Mystic Letters of the Qur‘ān,” The Muslim World 14 (1924): 247-60; Alan Jones, “The Mysterious Letters of the Qur‘ān,” Studia Islamica 16 (1962): 5-11; Keith Massey, “A New Investigation into the Mystery Letters of the Qur‘ān,” Arabica 43 (1996): 497-501.
mysterious letters like *alif lām mīm* are *mutashābihāt*. Fourth, according to Muṣḥīḥ b. Jabr, the *mutashābih* verses resemble in their meanings. Fifth, Ibn Zayd states that the *mutashābih* verses have been repeated elsewhere in the Qurʾān. Sixth, according to Ibn al-Anbarsī, *mutashābihāt* verses can be interpreted in many ways. Seventh, Qāḍī Abū Ya’lā b. al-Farrāʾ mentions that the *mutashābihāt* verses are the stories (*qaṣaṣ*) and parables (*amthāl*) described in the Qurʾān.⁹

The muḥkamāt verses are those verses of the Qur’ān which are consolidated by elucidation (bayān) and elaboration (tafsīl) and provide strong arguments and proofs for the issues relating to what is permitted and prohibited (ḥalāl wa-ḥarām), promise and threat (wa’d wa-wa’īd), reward and punishment (thawāb wa-‘iqāb), command and reprimand (amr wa-zajr), information and parable (khabar wa-mathal), exhortation and admonition (‘īza wa-‘ibar), and matters like that.\(^{10}\)

The muḥkam verses support themselves, i.e. self-evident and do not need proof (al-muḥkam ma qāmā bi-nafsihi wa lam yaḥtaj ilā istidlāl). In other words, they are clear verses that do not require interpretation in order to be comprehended. The mutashābih verses cannot be supported on their own but require other verses’ interpretation to be understood (wa al-mutashābih mā lā yastaqillu bi-nafsihi illā bi-raddih ilā ghayrihi).\(^{11}\)

The basic meanings of the muḥkam verses are so clear and evident that “they are not subject to alteration and distortion” (laysa lahunna taṣrīf wa taḥrīf).\(^{12}\) The muḥkam verses are those that deal with essential matters whereas mutashābih verses deal with secondary matters. There are two types of divine commandments. The muḥkam verses

---


\(^{10}\) Al-Ṭabārī, Jāmi‘ al-bayān, 3:113.

\(^{11}\) Al-Māwarī, Nukat al-‘uyūn, 1:369; Al-Khāzin, Lubāb al-ta’wil, 1:217; Abū Ḥayyān, Baḥr al-muḥīṭ, 2:397; al-Suyūṭī, Al-Iṣqān, 2:4.

contain the commandments that are universal and permanent, while *mutashābih* verses contain those commandments which are subject to change. The *muḥkam* verses deal with the basic commandments which are common to all religions, such as obeying God, performing good deeds and avoiding falsehood and injustice. The *mutashābih* verses deal with the practical aspects of these commandments and may vary from one religion to another, such as prayers, almsgiving, marriage. Finally, the *muḥkam* verses are those which have only one interpretation, while the *mutashābih* verses may be interpreted in more than one way.

The *muḥkam* verses are called as ‘mother of the book’ (*umm al-Kitāb*) because they are the origin of the book and comprise all the pillars of the religion and obligations and commandments (*hunna aṣl al-Kitāb alladhī ēḥī ‘imād al-dīn wa-l-farā’īd wa-l-ḥudūd*). These verses also constitute the majority of the Qur’ān (*muʿẓam al-Kitāb*) and therefore are identified as *muḥkam*. The *muḥkam* verses are found in all the previous revealed scriptures. Al-Suyūṭī narrates that *muḥkamāt* are the foundation of the book because they were recorded in all the books (*annahunna maktūbāt fī aṣl al-Kitāb li jamīʿi al-kutub*). Muqātil b. Sulaymān mentions that the *muḥkamāt* are called the basics of the book because they were recorded in a preserved tablet and in all the books (*wa innamā summina aṣl al-Kitāb li annahunna maktūbāt fī al-lawḥ al-mḥfūẓ wa fī jamīʿi al-kutub*).

---

According to Ibn ʻAbbās,¹⁸ the three verses 151-53 of the sūra al-Anʻām are the muḥkam verses which are as follows:

Say: “Come, I will recite what your Lord has forbidden you; that you associate nothing with Him, and be good to your parents and not kill your children because of poverty; We will provide sustenance for you and for them, and do not approach indecencies, whether open or secret, and do not kill the living soul which God has forbidden except for a just cause. This is what God commands you to do, so you may understand. Do not approach the property of the orphan, except for the betterment, until he comes of age, and give full measure and weigh justly on the balance. We do not burden any soul beyond its capacity. And whenever you speak, let it be just even if it is concerned to a relative, and fulfill God's covenant. Thus He commands you, so that you may remember. This is indeed My straight path, so follow it and do not follow other ways, lest they scatter you from His right path. Thus, He commands you, so that you may be righteous.”¹⁹

Muqātil b. Sulaymān is of the opinion that the muḥkam verses consist of five hundred verses (khams mi’at āya) of the Qur'ān because they provide detailed meaning and treatment of these verses.²⁰

The term mutashābihāt as ambiguous verses or similar and resembling verses is based on the sh.b.h. ‘things like or resembling one another,’ ‘equivocal or ambiguous,’ and ‘unclear or to be similar.’²¹ Similarity and resemblance between different verses may be expressed either in the wording (lafẓ) or in the meaning (maʻnā). The term mutashābihāt can be defined as one in which the same words are used to mean different things. Apparently, the words are similar and resembling but their meanings are different.

---


¹⁹ Qur’ān, 6:151-53.

²⁰ Muqātil b. Sulaymān, Taḥṣīl al-khams mi’at āya. It is a collection of legal verses and an abstract of Taḥṣīl Muqātil. See Abū Ḥayyān, Bahr al-muhīţ, 2:397.

(an yushibh al-lafz al-lafz fī al-zāhir wa-l-maniyāni mukhtalifān/ mutashābihāt fī al-tilawa mukhtalifāt fī al-ma‘nā). The term mutashābihāt also describes both possibilities together, i.e. where a narrative is in agreement with the wordings but differs in meaning and a narrative different in wordings but the same in meaning (fa-qiṣṣta bi-ittifāq al-alfāz wa-ikhtilāf al-ma‘ānī wa-qiṣṣata bi-ikhtilāf al-alfāz wa-ittifāq al-ma‘ānī).

There are two views regarding the interpretation of ambiguous (mutashābih) verses. Some scholars are of the view that the mutashābih verses should not be interpreted and are meant to remain ambiguous. Their first argument against the interpretation of the mutashābih verses is that the meanings of these verses are known to God only and it is beyond the perception of human beings (mā lā sabīl ilā ma‘rifatihi). In support of their argument, several events and words mentioned in the Qur’an are mentioned as mutashābih, such as resurrection day, condition in the hereafter, reward and punishment in the hereafter, number of angels in Hell, appearance of Jesus son of Mary, rising of the sun from the West, duration of the world and its end, and others.

The second argument against the interpretation of mutashābih verses is that their meanings can easily be distorted. Verse 3:7 states that: “As for those in whose hearts is swerving, they follow what is ambiguous in it, seeking (to create) dissension and seeking its interpretation.” The exegetes who correlate the mutashābih and fitna quote a number

---

of verses of the Qurʾān in support of their position. Al-Suyūṭī on the authority of Saʿīd b. Jubayr (d. 95/714) narrates that an early sect of the Khārijites, known as Ḥarūriyya, seceded from ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib on the basis of ini al-ḥukmu ill lillāh 26 (Judgment is God’s alone) because he accepted the arbitration offered by Muʿāwiya at Siffīn. They employed two verses of the Qurʾān to support their controversial doctrine: “And those who do not judge in accordance with what God has revealed are the transgressors,” 27 and “The unbelievers make the others equal to their Lord.” 28 They interpreted these two verses together and concluded that he who does not judge according to the command of God is an unbeliever. And an unbeliever is a polytheist (mushrik) who makes others equal to his Lord. 29

Others assert that the mutashābihāt are verses that cannot be understood on a rational basis, nor by reference to tradition (lā yudraku maʿnāhu ʿaqlan wa lā naqlan). 30

Some scholars are of the view that the mutashābih verses should be interpreted. The muḥkamāt are defined as independent verses and do not require elucidation (mā istaqalla bi-nafsihi wa-lam yaḥtaj ilā bayān) for their comprehension. 31 Conversely, the mutashābihāt are dependent verses that cannot be comprehended without being compared to other verses (mā lā yastaqillu bi-nafsihi illā bi-raddihi ilā ghayrihi). 32 The dependence of the mutashābihāt on the muḥkamāt is due to the clarity of the latter and the ambiguity of the former. The muḥkam verses are clear and lucid and there is no doubt and

26 Qurʾān, 6:57; 12: 40, 67.
27 Qurʾān, 5:47.
28 Qurʾān, 6:1.
30 Al-Ālūsī, Rūḥ al-maʿānī, 3:71.
31 Al-Khāzin, Lubāb al-taʿwīl, 1:217.
misunderstanding in them while mutashābih verses create doubts in most or some people. Thus, when a person refers to and compares a mutashābih verse to a muḥkam verse, he understands a mutashābih and finds guidance.\textsuperscript{33}

It is argued that the rationale behind the mutashābih verses is that people should ponder and scrutinize them. Had the Qur’ān consisted only muḥkam verses, there would be no need to develop the exegetical science to interpret and comprehend the Qur’ān. If the entire Qur’ān had been clear and unveiled to everyone, then the learned and the ignorant would have been equal in comprehension and the endeavor for precedence among the people would have become untenable (\textit{wa law kāna al-Qur’ān kullihi zāhiran magshufan ḥattā yastawī fī ma’ rifatihi al-‘ālim wa-l-jāhil la-baṭala al-tafāḍul bayna al-nās}).\textsuperscript{34} The mutashābih verses are intended to make people think and find out the true meanings by using their intellect and judgment.

The mutashābih verses enable people to understand these verses in more than one way which means that it allows many approaches to one issue. The flexibility in interpreting a verse can take into account the changing circumstances of the time. It can accommodate different perspectives of a problem and it invites people to look into all variants in the Qur’ān and everyone among them considers and finds whatever is suitable and helpful to him/her (\textit{anna dhālika ad’ā ilā naẓr jamī‘ al-mukhtalīfīn fī al-Qur’ān bi-ma’ anna yazunnu kullal wāḥidin minhum an yajid fīhī mā yanṣur bihī}).\textsuperscript{35}

There has been controversy regarding the interpretation of mutashābih verses and the majority of the exegetes discussed this issue in their exegeses. Interpretation of these

\textsuperscript{34} Ibn Qutayba, \textit{Ta’wil mushkil al-Qur’ān}, 86; al-Rāzī, \textit{Tafsīr al-kabīr}, 7:183.
verses is closely related to the word ta’wil and the particle waw between the words Alläh and al-rasikhūn in the verse which reads as follows: “However, no one except God knows its interpretation. And those who are firmly grounded in knowledge say: ‘We believe in it, all is from our Lord’” (wa-mā ya’lamu ta’wilahu illā Allāh wa-l-rasikhūna fi-l-‘ilmī yaqūlūna āmmā bihi kullun min ‘indi rabbinā).36

The early scholars interpreted the word ta’wil differently. According to Ibn ‘Abbās, ta’wil is interpreted in many ways such as “the end of this community” (‘āqibat hādhihi al-umma),37 “Day of Judgment no one knows (when will it happen) except God” (yawma al-qiyāma lā ya’lamuhu illā Allāh) and “interpretation of the Qur’ān” (ta’wil al-Qur’ān).38 Mujāhid b. Jabr and Abū Muḥammad interpret ta’wil as “interpretation of the dreams” (‘ibara al-ru’yā).39 Muqātil b. Sulaymān interprets ta’wil as “how many years they, meaning the community of Muḥammad, would remain in power and when God would afflict them the appearance of Dajjāl” (kam yamlikūna min al-sinīna ya’nī umma Muḥammad yamlikūna ilā yawm al-qiyāma illā ayyāman yabtalīhum Allāh bi al-Dajjāl).40 Al-Ḍaḥḥāk interprets it as “its consequences are when the abrogative will come to abrogate the abrogated” (‘awāqibhu matā yuji’a al-nāsikh fa-yansikhu al-mansūkh).41 Muhammad b. Iṣḥāq narrates that ta’wil means that “God knows what they distort and interpret and He knows the secrets and deeds of human beings” (mā ya’lamu mā harrafū wa-ta’walū illā Allāh alladhi ya’lamu sarā’ir ‘al-ibād wa-a’mālahum).42 Al-Ḍaḥḥāk’s

36 Qur’ān, 3:7.
37 Ibn ‘Abbās, Tanwīr al-miqbās, 34.
interpretation of ta’wīl is “its reward” (thawābuḥu).\textsuperscript{43} ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Zayd said that ta’wīl means “its reality” (tahqīqahu).\textsuperscript{44} Al-Ṭabarī states that “It is not appropriate that there should be such matters in the Qur’ān which are not needed by the Muslims. Similarly, it is not conceivable that there should be such verses in the Qur’ān which Muslims need but who do not know their interpretation. All those verses in the Qur’ān which the Muslims need have been clearly explained and the Qur’ān is silent in describing those verses which do not require interpretation. A mutashābih verse is one of which any one among the human beings has neither its knowledge nor its interpretation. It is only God with the exclusion of His creation who has knowledge of it. It is the determination of the time for future occurrences or events close to the Day of Judgment. The knowledge of such affairs and their determination does not fall in the purview of the people. It is because of this that God has concealed it from them.”\textsuperscript{45}

So far as the grammatical issue of wāw is concerned, there are two opinions of the exegetes. The first opinion, which is attributed to ‘Ā’isha bint Abī Bakr (d. 58/678), Ibn `Abbās, Hishām b. ‘Urwa, ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (d. 101/720), and Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/796), is that in this verse wāw is not a conjunctive particle (wāw al-‘aṭf) linking the words Allāh and al-rāsikhūn fi-l-ʻilm. It is rather wāw al-isti’nāf, indicating the beginning of the verse. In this case, the verse will be interpreted as: “However, no one except God knows its interpretation. And those who are firmly grounded in knowledge say: ‘We believe in it, all is from our Lord’” (wa-mā ya’lamu ta’wīlahu illā Allāh wa-l-rāsikhūna fi-l-ʻilmi yaqūlūna āmannā bihi kullun min ʿindi rabbinā).

\textsuperscript{43} Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī, Tafsīr al-Qur’ān, 2:71.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī, Tafsīr al-Qur’ān, 2:72.
\textsuperscript{45} Al-Ṭabarī, Jāmiʿ al-bayān, 3:116-17.
According to the second opinion, which is attributed to Ibn ʿAbbas, Mujāhid b. Jabr (d. 104/722), Rabīʿ b. Anas al-Bakrī (d. 139/756), and Jaʿfar b. Zubayr, the ṭāʾ (wāw) is a conjunctive particle (wāw al-ʻaṭf) that links the words Allāh and al-rāsikhūn fi-l-ʿilm. In this case, the verse will be interpreted as: “However, not only God knows its interpretation, but also those who are firmly grounded in knowledge who say: ‘We believe in it, all is from our Lord’” (wa-mā yaʿlamu taʿwīlahu illā Allāh wa-l-rāsikhūna fi-l-ʿilm yaqālūna āmannā bihi kullun min ʿindi rabbinā).

The majority of the exegetes prefers and supports the first opinion on the basis of the readings (qiraʾāt) of Ubayy b. Kaʿb and ʿAbd Allāh. According to them, those who are firm in knowledge say that they believe in it [the mutashābih] (wa yaqālu al-rāsikhuna fi-l-ʿilm āmannā bihi) and no one knows the interpretation of the mutashābih except God. And those who are firm in knowledge say that they believe in it. In addition, these exegetes define the word mutashābihāt as relating to concealed matters known only by God.66

It is evident from the preceding discussion that the Muslim commentators do not offer the definitions of muḥkamāt and mutashābihāt systematically. There is a great variety of definitions and some of them are contradictory. Modern scholars’ definitions of these terms also lack consistency and the meanings of muḥkamāt and mutashābihāt rendered by them differ considerably. These are as follows:

---

George Sale defines *muḥkamāt* as ‘verses clear to be understood,’ and *mutashābihāt* as ‘parabolical.’ Ignaz Goldziher translates *muḥkamāt* as ‘festgefügte’ [sound and precise verses], while *mutashābihāt* as ‘zweifelhafte’ [dubious verses].

According to Richard Bell, *muḥkamāt* are ‘clearly formulated verse,’ and *mutashābihāt* are ‘ambiguous verses.’ Arthur Arberry uses the terms for *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt* clear and ambiguous respectively. Abu al-Kalam Azad renders the terms *muḥkamāt* as ‘perspicuous’ and *mutashābihāt* as ‘figurative.’ Marmaduke Pickthall translates *muḥkamāt* as ‘clear revelations’ and *mutashābihāt* as ‘allegorical.’ Régis Blachère translates *muḥkamāt* as ‘āya confirmées’ (clear verses) and *mutashābihāt* as ‘équivoque’ (ambiguous). Ahmed Ali renders the terms *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt* as ‘categorical’ and ‘allegorical’ respectively. Majid Fakhry translates *muḥkamāt* as ‘precise in meaning’ and *mutashābihāt* as ‘ambiguous’.47

Al-Zamakhshari’s methodology for exegesis is also based on verse 3:7, and states that the issue of the *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt* is not only important but also the very foundation of the Qur’ānic interpretation. He further elaborates it that no exegesis is possible without the complete understanding of the *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt* verses.

According to him, *muḥkamāt* verses are those whose expression (‘*ibāra*) is affirmed

---


377
(uḥkimat) because they have been preserved (ḥufizat) and are free from probability (iḥtimāl) and doubt (ishtibāh). He interprets the word uḥkimat āyātuhu as “verses arranged firmly and perfectly in which there is neither contradiction nor imperfection” (nuẓimat naẓman rašīnan muḥkaman lā yaqa‘u fīhā naqḍ wa-lā khalal).

The clarity of muḥkam verses can be found in their own wordings. They do not require any explanation from extraneous sources, such as other verses of the Qur’an, prophetic traditions or linguistic investigation in order to understand them. In addition, they are the “essence of the Book” (umm al-kitāb) since they serve as a basis for interpreting mutashābih verses (tuḥmal al-mutashābihāt ‘alayhā wa-turadda ilayhā). In this respect, al-Zamakhshari’s view is similar to other exegetes, like al-Jaṣṣaṣ, al-Ṭūsī, al-Ṭabarsī, and Ibn Kathīr.

Al-Zamakhsharī cites two examples explaining how a muḥkam verse can provide the basis for interpreting a mutashābih verse. He considers that “Looking upon their Lord” (ilā rabbihā nāẓiratun) is a mutashābih verse which can be interpreted by a muḥkam verse: “Vision cannot attain Him,” (la tudrikuhu al-ḥabār). Similarly, “We command its people (living a life of) luxury” (amarnā mutrafīhā) is a mutashābih verse which can be interpreted by “God does not command indecency” (inna Allāh lā yā’muru bi-l-faḥshā’i) which is a muḥkam verse.

48 Ibn Manzūr glosses the word aḥkama shay ‘an (a verbal use of the root muḥkam) as amma’ahu min al-fasād (to protect it from imperfection). Al-Zamakhsharī bases his interpretation of the word muḥkamāt on lexical approach and interprets the word muḥkamāt (the ʻism al-mafʿūl of aḥkama) as ḥufizat min al-iḥtimāl wa-al-ishtībāb (the verses that are preserved from probability and doubt). Ibn Manzūr, Lisān al-ʻArab, 12:143; al-Zamakhshari, al-Kashshāf, 1:527.
50 Al-Zamakhsharī, Kashshāf, 1:528. See also Schmidtke, Muʿtazilite Creed, 44, 82.
52 Qurʿān, 75:23.
53 Qurʿān, 6:103.
54 Qurʿān, 17:16.
55 Qurʿān, 7:28.
The Qur’ān in its entirety is not *muḥkam*. Had it been completely *muḥkam* the people would have been attached to easiness and convenience in their approach to the Qur’ān and turned away from investigation and perception of reasoning. In this case, they would have lost their way and could not achieve the gnosis and belief in the unity of God. There is a test and trial and a distinction has to be made between a firmly established with truth and wavering *mutashābih* verse.\(^{56}\) It is for this reason that the scholars have to reject the objectionable meaning and exert great talent in deriving the exposition of *mutashābih* verse by referring it to *muḥkam* verse. If one is successful, it results in great rewards and attainment of higher ranks from God. It is a believer’s conviction that the word of God is neither inconsistent nor contradictory. When he observes some apparent incompatibility in it, he endeavors to find out conformity and harmony and adopts the customary practice sanctioned by the traditions. Due to his reflection, God helps him in his thoughts and clarifies the *mutashābih* in accordance with the *muḥkam*. It increases peace of mind in his belief and strengthens his conviction.

As for those in whose hearts is swerving, they are innovators. They follow what is ambiguous (*mutashābih*) in it and does not conform to the *muḥkam*. He also mentions that the interpretation of these verses does not correspond with the statements of the people of the truth (*qawl ahl al-haqq*), i.e. Muʿtazilites. Thus, they turn away the people from their religion and mislead them. They interpret these verses according to their desires.

\(^{56}\) Al-Zamakhsharī does not define the meaning of *mutashābihāt* as comprehensively as he does the meaning of *muḥkamāt*. He simply glosses *mutashābihāt* as a combination of *mushtabihāt* and *muhtamilāt*. According to Ibn Manẓūr and Ibn Qutayba *mutashābihāt* is synonymous with *mushkilāt* (difficult or obscure words). See Ibn Qutayba, *Taʿwil mushkil al-Qur’ān*, 102; Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, 11:358.
According to al-Zamakhsharī, the interpretation of these verses is known not only to God, but also to those people who have sound knowledge, i.e. firmly established and deep rooted. The argument for this concept is based upon his interpretation of the particle wāw as a conjunctive element. He mentions the “readings” (qirāʿāt) of Ubayy b. Kaʿb and ‘Abd Allāh b. Masʿūd in support of his argument.

For al-Zamakhsharī, the classification of the Qurʾānic verses into muḥkam and mutashābih is limited to the theological aspects of the Qurʾān. Those verses which support any or all of the five principles of the Muʿtazilite doctrines are regarded muḥkamāt, while those which contradict them are considered mutashābihāt.

Long before al-Zamakhsharī, this issue was discussed by al-Jaṣṣāṣ (d. 370/982) and he was of the opinion that reproach against those who follow the mutashābih does not mean that these verses cannot be interpreted. Rather, mutashābih verses can be interpreted in the light of the muḥkam verses. He states that it is not possible that a mutashābih verse that needs to be interpreted should not be interpreted to understand its real meaning. However, he cautions that all of the mutashābih cannot be interpreted because the meanings of some of these verses are known to God only. He illustrates that those who regard the particle wāw as a ḥarf al-istiʿnāf are of the view that the mutashābih cannot be known by human beings. On the other hand, those who consider it as a conjunctive particle (ḥarf al-ʿaṭf) argue that some of the mutashābih can be interpreted by the people in the light of the muḥkam.

---

57 Al-Zamakhsharī emphasizes with the following sentence: “And they bite fiercely with sharp molar tooth” (wa-aḍḍū fīhī bi-ḍirsi qāṭiʻ). It means that they interpret the mutashābih verses conclusively and unequivocally. Al-Zamakhsharī, al-Kashshāf, 1:529.
58 Al-Zamakhsharī, Kashshāf, 1:527-29.
59 Al-Jaṣṣāṣ, Aḥkām, 2:4-5.
Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373) states that there are two meanings of *ta‘wīl* when it is applied to the Qur’ān. One of the meanings of *ta‘wīl* is “real meaning of a thing” (*ḥaqīqa al-shay*’). The other meaning of it is “commentary, elucidation and interpretation of a thing” (*al-tafsīr wa-l-bayān wa-l-ta‘bīr ‘an al-shay*’). His opinion is that a *mutashābih* verse can be interpreted, but its real meaning is known only to God.\(^\text{60}\)

Appendix 5
Mu‘tazilites’ Ṭabaqāt

According to Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā b. al-Murtaḍā, the Mu‘tazilites can be divided into twelve generations (ṭabaqāt).


---

1 The term ṭabaqāt (sing. ṭabaqa) “book of categories” when used of place means “similar, lying above one another” and with regard to time as “similar, following one another.” Specifically, with reference to time, it means “generation.” The lexicographers use qarn as a synonym. The well-known book of Ṭabaqāt is of Ibn S’ad. According to Yaqūt’s Mu’jam al-udaba, 6:2795 and Ibn Khallikān’s Wafayāt, 6:11, Wāṣil b. ‘Atā wrote Ṭabaqāt ahl-‘ilm wa-al-jahl. See W. Heffening, “Ṭabaḳāt,” EI, 9:214 and Claude Gilliot, “Ṭabaḳāt,” EF, 10:7. In general, it is defined as a “rank, attributed to a group of characters who have played a role in history in one capacity or another, classes according to criteria determined by the religious, cultural, scientific or artistic order etc.” See al-Tahānawī, Kashshāf iṣṭilāḥāt al-funūn, 4:917-18 and Ibrahim Hafsi, “Recherches sur le genre ‘Ṭabaqāt’ dans la littérature arabe,” Arabica, 23 (1976), 1:229. The genre of the ṭabaqāt “was born within the framework of the ḥadīth and is inseparable from it, Hafsi, 1:227. Hafsi also discusses Ṭabaqāt al-Mu’tazila. See Ibrahim Hafsi, “Recherches sur le genre ‘Ṭabaqāt’ dans la littérature arabe,” Arabica, 23 (1977), 3:175-76.
and the companions of Ghaylān. From this ṭabaqa, the original school of Muʿtazilites started.


The notables among the eighth ṭabaqa are Abū ʿAlī Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Jubbāʾī, Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Khayyāṭ, Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd al-Balkhī al-

Muḥammad.


Appendix 6

The Retraction of Ibn ‘Aqīl

Following are the extracts of the Retraction of Ibn ‘Aqīl have been preserved by Ibn Qudāma (d. 620/1223), in his Taḥrīm:

I [Ibn ‘Aqīl] purify myself, before God, of the doctrines of the heretical innovators, Mu‘tazilīs and others; of frequenting the masters of this doctrinal system; of venerating its partisans; of invoking the mercy of God on their predecessors; and of emulating them. What I have written, and what has been found written in my hand concerning their doctrines and their errors, I repent to God for having written. It is not permitted to write those things nor to say them, nor to believe them.

I believed in al-Ḥallāj as a religious man, an ascetic, and a saint; and I maintained that opinion in a fascicle (juz‘) which I composed. But I repent to God – Exalted is He! – in renouncing him. I attest that he was put to death as a result of the consensus of the jurisconsults of the time and that they were right, and he was wrong.

I call on God, on His angels, and on the men of religious learning, to witness what I have just said voluntarily and without constraint. The sentiments of my heart are in complete accord with the expressions of my mouth – May God the Exalted, be the Judge! God has said: “For repetition God will exact from him the penalty, for God is Exalted and Lord of retribution [Qur’ān, 5:98].”¹

Bibliography

Primary Sources


Al-Malāḥīmī (Ibn), Ruhn al-Dīn Maḥmūd b. Muḥammad al-Khwārazmī. Kitāb al-
Al-Malāfī, Abū al-Ḥusayn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān. al-
Tanbih wa-al-radd ‘ālhā ahla al-ahwā wa-al-bid’. Edited. Muḥammad Zāhid b. al-
Al-Maqarrī, Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad Muṣṭafā. Taṣfīr al-Maṣāʾīl. Beirut: Dār al-
Al-Maṣʿūdī, Abū Zakariyyā Muḥyī al-
Al-Māwardī, Abū Manṣūr Muḥammad b. Mūsā. Kitāb Firaq al-
Qurʾān. Beirut: Al-
Maktabat al-Imāma wa-
Imārāt al-Mamlaka al-
Maghribiyya wa al-
Maqarrī, Shihāb al-
Maḥmūd Shaḥāt. Cairo: Al-
Maktabat Ḥaqīqat, 1951.
Edited. Faḍl Allāh Zanjānī and Hibat al-
Bashshār Maʿrūf. Beirut: Muʿassasat al-
Kutub al-
Muttaḥida, Aḥmad Vanlioğlu and Bekir Topaloğlu. Istanbul: Dār al-
Rashīd, 2006.
Ritter. Istanbul: Maṭbaʻa al-
Beirut: Dār al-
Maghribiyya wa al-
Al-Maṣʿūdī, Abū Zakariyyā Muḥyī al-
Al-Māwardī, Abū Manṣūr Muḥammad b. Mūsā. Kitāb Firaq al-
Qurʾān. Beirut: Al-
Maktabat al-Imāma wa-
Imārāt al-Mamlaka al-
Maghribiyya wa al-
Maqarrī, Shihāb al-
Maḥmūd Shaḥāt. Cairo: Al-
Maktabat Ḥaqīqat, 1951.
Edited. Faḍl Allāh Zanjānī and Hibat al-
Bashshār Maʿrūf. Beirut: Muʿassasat al-
Kutub al-
Muttaḥida, Aḥmad Vanlioğlu and Bekir Topaloğlu. Istanbul: Dār al-
Rashīd, 2006.
Ritter. Istanbul: Maṭbaʻa al-
Beirut: Dār al-
Maghribiyya wa al-
Al-Maṣʿūdī, Abū Zakariyyā Muḥyī al-
Al-Māwardī, Abū Manṣūr Muḥammad b. Mūsā. Kitāb Firaq al-
Qurʾān. Beirut: Al-
Maktabat al-Imāma wa-
Imārāt al-Mamlaka al-
Maghribiyya wa al-
Maqarrī, Shihāb al-


SECONDARY SOURCES


Dunlop, D. M. “Al-Balkhī.” EI², 1:1003.


El Cheikh, Nadiya and Bosworth, C. E. “Rūm.” EI², 8:601-6.


Ende, W. “Mudjāwir.” EI², 7:293-94.


_____ . “Tashbīh wa-Tanzīh.” EI², 10:341-44.


Fierro, Maribel “Al-Tabarānī.” EI², 10:10-11.


_____. “Djaʻfar as-Ṣādiḳ.” EI², 7: 2-6.


_____. “Al-Zuhrī.” EI¹, 4: 1239-41.


Laoust, H. “Aḥmad b. Ḥanbâl.” *EI* 1, 272-77.


Lecomte, G. “Ibn Ṭutayba.” *EI* 8, 844-47.

Leder, S. “Riwâya.” *EI* 8, 545-47.


______. “Al-Ghazâlî.” *EI* 1, 3/146-49.

______. “Mûsà.” *EI* 7, 638-40.


“Al-Taftazānī.” *EI* 2, 10: 89.


Pakatchi, Ahmad; Najib Mayel Heravi; and Shahram Khodaverdian, “Allāh,” EIs, 3:614-46.
Paret, R. “Ḵirā’a.” EI², 5:127-29.
Pedersen, J. “Madrasa.” Shorter EI, 300-10.
Pedersen, J. and Makdisi, G. “Madrasa” EI², 5:1123-34.
Poonawala, I. “Al-Nasafi.” EI², 7: 968.


---. “Tafsīr.” *ER* 14: 236-44.
---. “Al-Tha’labī.” *EI* 2, 1: 114.
---. “Al-Bayhaḵī.” *EI* 2, 1: 1130.

---. “Abū Dā’ūd al-Sidjistānī.” *EI* 2, 1: 114.
---. “Al-Bayhaḵī.” *EI* 2, 1: 1130.


Taeschner, F. “Ak Sarāy.” EI 2, 1: 312.


   “Ibn Mas‘ûd.” *EI* 2, 3: 873-75.


   “Al-Zamakhsharî.” *EI* 2, 11: 432-34.


   “Ash’ariyya.” *EI* 2, 1: 696.


   “DHajm b. Șafwân.” *EI* 2, 2: 388.


   “Haddîj.” *EI* 2, 3: 31-38.

   “Hawd.” *EI* 2, 3: 286.


   “Al-Nasâ’î.” *EI* 2, 7: 969-70.


Yalaoui, Mohammed. “Al-‘Ukbarī.” *EI*³, 10: 790-91.