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Author(s): Richard C. Martin

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## THE ROLE OF THE BASRAH MU‘TAZILAH IN FORMULATING THE DOCTRINE OF THE APOLOGETIC MIRACLE

RICHARD C. MARTIN, *Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona*

MUSLIM and non-Muslim orientalists have long held that the Sunni doctrine of the Prophet’s apologetic miracle (*i‘jāz al-qur’ān*) was formulated by the Ash‘arites, al-Bāqillānī being the chief architect. This belief falls victim to the danger of writing history, however cautiously, from heresiographies.<sup>1</sup> Lacking until recently were the writings of those presumed to oppose the pious view of the apologetic miracle, the Mu‘tazilites. From the Basrah branch of the school at Rayy, texts now available make possible a reconsideration of the history of the discussion of Muhammad’s prophethood (*al-nubuwwah*).<sup>2</sup>

Although the ordering assumptions of the Ash‘arites and the Mu‘tazilites differed in fundamental ways, al-Bāqillānī’s doctrine of the apologetic miracle is remarkably similar to the doctrine as it was conceived by the Basrah Mu‘tazilah.<sup>3</sup> The more crucial and interesting issues involved the Mu‘tazilites (and eventually the Ash‘arites) with other opponents inside and outside the pale of Islam. Many of the positions championed by both schools can be traced to the circle of Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbā‘ī (d. 303/915), the formative thinker of the early classical period of the Basrah Mu‘tazilah and the teacher of two important leaders of Kalam in the first part of the fourth/tenth century—his son, Abū Hāshim (d. 321/933), and the founder of the Ash‘arite school, Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī (d. 324/935). Al-Jubbā‘ī’s attempt to resolve the sharply debated cluster of problems known generically as “the arguments for prophethood” (*hujaj al-nubuwwah*) or as “establishing the evidences of prophethood” (*tathbit dalā’il al-nubuwwah*) now appears to have been a point of departure for the doctrine of succeeding generations of theologians (*mutakallimūn*).

The purpose of this paper is to focus on the role played by the Basrah school in converting the disparate elements of polemic and argument concerning prophethood into a

<sup>1</sup> Already in the eleventh century A.D., an Ash‘arite heresiographer, ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī (d. 1037) incorrectly charged that “most Mu‘tazilites maintain that the Zindiqs, Turks, and Khazars were capable of producing something similar to the eloquence of the Koran, or even better; what they lacked was the ability to produce the thing in the right order . . .” *Kitāb al-farq bayn al-firaq*, ed. M. Badr (Cairo, 1910), p. 128: 5 f. This and other judgments against the Mu‘tazilah have encouraged contemporary Muslim and non-Muslim scholars to assume that the prevailing doctrine of the apologetic miracle was a product of Ash‘arite thinking. See, for example, Muṣṭafā Ṣādiq al-Rifā‘ī, *I‘jāz al-qur’ān wa-l-balāghat al-nabawiyyah* (Cairo, 1346 [1928]); Abdul Aleem, “‘Ijāz al-Qur’ān,” *Islamic Culture* 7 (1933): 64–82,

215–33; Na‘īm al-Ḥimsī, “Ta‘rikh fikrat i‘jāz al-qur’ān,” *Revue de l’Académie Arabe de Damas [Majma‘ al-lughat al-‘arabiyyah bi-dimashq]* 27 (1952): 240–63, 418–33, 571–86; 28 (1953): 61–78, 242–56; Johan Bouman, *Le Conflit autour du Coran et la solution d’al-Bāqillānī* (Amsterdam, 1959); Richard J. McCarthy, “Al-Bāqillānī’s Notion of the Apologetic Miracle,” *Studia Biblica et Orientalia*, vol. 3, *Analecta Biblica*, vol. 12 (Rome, 1959).

<sup>2</sup> Qāḍī al-Qudāt ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Al-Mughnī fī abwāb al-tawhīd wal-‘adl*, ed. Ṭaha Ḥusayn. The most relevant volumes are vol. 15, “*Al-Tanabbu‘āt wal-mu‘jizāt*,” ed. Ibrāhīm Madkour (Cairo, 1965), and vol. 16, *I‘jāz al-qur’ān*, ed. Amīn al-Khūlī (Cairo, 1960). See also ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s *Sharḥ al-uṣūl al-khamsah*, ed. ‘Abd al-Karīm ‘Uthmān (Cairo, 1965). (Hereafter *al-Mughnī* will be designated by *M.*)

<sup>3</sup> Compare what McCarthy in “Apologetic Miracle,” has to say about al-Bāqillānī’s doctrine with the account of the Basrah Mu‘tazilite doctrine that forms the substance of this essay.

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positive doctrine structured within the systematic body of *kalām* (hereafter, Kalam). In the third and fourth centuries A.H., there were several parties to the conflict over prophethood and miracles in the intellectual circles of *dār al-islām*. As the discussion centered on Muhammad and the Koran, two main positions emerged. The Basrah Muʿtazilah, followed by the Zaydi Shiʿah and, to a large extent, by the Ashʿariyyah, maintained that Muhammad, like Moses and Jesus before him, had produced a miracle that proved his claim to prophethood. They asserted that the miracle consisted in the insuperable quality of the Koranic language. Another position, attributed to Ibrāhīm al-Nazzām (d. between 220/835 and 230/845), and also espoused by the Baghdad Muʿtazilah and by certain Imami Shiʿite theologians, rejected the belief that the Koranic language surpassed the abilities of competent speakers of Arabic to imitate. When Muhammad challenged his Arab enemies to produce surahs like those of the Koran, the miracle, these theologians argued, consisted in God's intervention to prevent (*ṣarfah*, hereafter *sarfah*) the Arabs from responding in the higher art of their language, of which they would otherwise have been quite capable.

Both the Baghdad and Basrah schools and other theologians who followed them accepted other qualities of the Koran, such as its information about future events and about things unseen by the Prophet, as being additional arguments for Muhammad's prophethood. The critical role of the Basrah Muʿtazilah was to develop what has come to be known as the argument for the inimitability of the Koran, a view that was later to become dogma in Sunni Islam.

Virtually the only writings on prophethood from the Basrah school are from the later stage of that school's development at Rayy. In addition to the well-known works of ʿAbd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025), especially his *Sharḥ al-uṣūl al-khamsah* and his *al-Mughnī fī abwāb al-tawḥīd wa-l-ʿadl*,<sup>4</sup> there is also available from his pupil and successor as head of that school, Abū Rashīd al-Nisābūrī (d. ca. mid-fifth/-eleventh century), a large fragment that is to be identified as part of the *Ziyādāt al-sharḥ*.<sup>5</sup> A text with similar viewpoints by the contemporary Zaydi theologian, Abū Ṭālib al-Nāṭiq bi-l-Ḥaqq (d. 425/1033), also exists.<sup>6</sup> When taken into consideration against the background of earlier available texts and the scholarship that has been based on them, these texts from the later development of the Basrah Muʿtazilah at Rayy provide material for a new interpretation of the historical development of the doctrine of prophethood and miracles, focusing on the differences between the two branches of the Muʿtazilah.

## I

The doctrine of prophethood, in one sense a common denominator of Near Eastern religions, was the subject of persistent controversy for Muslims with Christians and Jews, and among religio-political factions within Islam itself. The survival of some of the literature of these controversies affords an opportunity to view Islam's theological treatment of and by other religions.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> See n. 2 above.

<sup>5</sup> The MS in question is British Museum Oriental 8613, which was described, but not identified, by A. S. Tritton, "Some Muʿtazili Ideas about Religion," *BSOAS* 14 (1952): 612-22. The identification of this work and the so-called *Dīwān al-uṣūl* as fragments of Abū Rashīd's *Ziyādāt al-sharḥ* (hereafter designated as Z) is discussed by me in "The Identification of Two Muʿtazilite MSS," *JAOS* [in press].

<sup>6</sup> Abū Ṭālib al-Nāṭiq bi-l-Ḥaqq, *Ziyādāt sharḥ al-uṣūl*, Leiden Oriental MS 2949. This MS was mentioned by Tritton and is discussed by him elsewhere (see n. 5. above).

<sup>7</sup> An important bibliography on polemical literature was compiled by Moritz Steinschneider, *Polemische und apologetische Literature in arabischer Sprache zwischen Muslimen, Christen und Juden* (Leipzig, 1877). This work was discussed in relation to

In the second half of the third/ninth century, the Nestorian Christian convert to Islam, 'Alī b. Sahl Rabban al-Ṭabarī, composed a detailed defense of Muhammad's claim to hold prophetic office, arguing on the basis of prophetic miracles and signs, including the Koran. His *Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawlah* [Book of religion and empire] is one of the earliest surviving discussions of prophethood of the genre known as "establishing the evidences of prophethood." The scope is broad and includes, as Muhammad himself had, the prophets of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. Although the nature and tone of his arguments are not unlike later theological discourse, al-Ṭabarī's purpose in writing was to convert Christians to Islam. He addressed the Christian community with a deep knowledge of biblical religion, showing where and how he felt Islam to be superior. As in much of the polemical writing from that period, the *Book of Religion and Empire* expresses a less technical vocabulary than that found in the fourth/tenth century Kalam literature, and unlike that literature, the earlier texts contain no attempt to relate the doctrine of prophethood to any formal body of Kalam.<sup>8</sup>

Another third/ninth century document germane to the discussion of prophethood is a contrived polemical exchange whose participants bear the obvious pseudonyms of a Christian and a Muslim, 'Abd al-Masīḥ al-Kindī and 'Abdallāh b. Ismā'īl al-Hāshimī, alleged members of the court of al-Ma'mūn (reg. 198/813–218/833).<sup>9</sup> In polite but patronizing tones, the Christian point of view was imperiously sustained by copious arguments advanced against the Prophet and the Koran. Like al-Ṭabarī's *Book of Religion and Empire*, al-Kindī's treatise was simpler than fourth/tenth century Kalam works, employing discernibly different terms and arguments. Nevertheless, criticism of this type would have occasioned *responsa* from Muslim theologians.<sup>10</sup>

From these surviving inter-faith polemics on prophethood, it appears that the third/ninth century was a stormy yet formative period in the history of Islamic theology, producing several seminal thinkers, many of whom associated themselves in varying degrees with Mu'tazilism. By the end of the century, however, *i'tizāl* (Mu'tazilism) had become a term of opprobrium in many circles. During the first half of the century, the school had been at the height of its political, but not yet its intellectual achievement, especially during the reign of the pro-Mu'tazilite Caliph, al-Ma'mūn. Motivated by his

several aspects of prophecy and miracles by Martin Schreiner, "Zur Geschichte der Polemik zwischen Juden und Muhammedanern," *ZDMG* 52 (1888): 591–675. The polemical atmosphere of early Islam was also discussed by Ignaz Goldziher, "Ueber muhammedanische Polemik gegen Ahl al-Kitab," *ZDMG* 52 (1878): 341–87.

<sup>8</sup> 'Alī b. Sahl Rabban al-Ṭabarī, *Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawlah*, ed. Alfonso Mingana (Cairo, 1923) (English trans., idem, *The Book of Religion and Empire* [Manchester, 1922]). See David Margoliouth, "On 'The Book of Religion and Empire' by 'Alī b. Rabban al-Ṭabarī," *Proceedings of the British Academy* (London, 1930 [1932]).

<sup>9</sup> *Risālat al-Hāshimī ilā 'Abd al-Masīḥ ibn Ishāq al-Kindī* . . . (London, 1912). A partial English translation and commentary, based upon the Arabic manuscript, was prepared by William Muir, entitled *The Apology of al-Kindī* (London, 1882). Cf. Armand Abel "Apologie d'al-Kindī et sa place dans la polémique islamo-chrétienne," *Accademia Nazionale Lincei* 361 (1964): 501–23.

<sup>10</sup> Although there are some reasons for suspecting that the *Risālah* attributed to al-Kindī is contrived and that it is not the correspondence it purports to be, it nevertheless should not be dated later than the beginning of the fourth/tenth century. The lack of technical terms such as *mu'jiz* and *i'jaz al-qur'ān* may indicate that the work should be dated even prior to the fourth century. See the notice by Werner Caskel in *Oriens* 4 (1951): 153–58, which includes a review of the literature on al-Kindī. Paul Kraus pointed out the similarities between al-Kindī's arguments and those of Ibn al-Rāwandī, speculating that a literary dependence, perhaps on a third source, was possible. See Kraus, "Beiträge zur islamischen Ketzergeschichte," *RSO* 15 (1934): 335–41. Rachid Haddad has dated al-Kindī's letter ca. 249/863 in "Ḥunayn Ibn Ishāq apologiste chrétien," *Arabica* 16 (1974): 302. Because of the strong tone of al-Kindī's apologetic, Haddad thinks it might have been written prior to the Caliph al-Mutawakkil's reversal of the *mihnah*, which included a purging of non-Muslim religions.

own personal interest in theological matters, al-Ma'mūn had instigated an inquisition (*mihnah*) of several prominent and influential men, many of whom privately—and a few of whom publicly—were unprepared to accept the Caliph's embrace of heterodox theology and of pro-Shi'ite politics. They were especially resistant to the teaching that, as the divine speech, the Koran was one of God's *operationes ad extra*, created in space and time along with all other creatures in the universe (*khalq al-qur'ān*). Popular reaction to al-Ma'mūn's meddling in matters of faith, and to his attempt to appoint a Shi'ite successor, achieved a reversal of the policy two decades later under the more conservative Caliph, al-Mutawakkil (reg. A.H. 247–261). Royal patronage of Mu'tazilism was no longer practical. The reversal meant a considerable loss of prestige for the Mu'tazilah.<sup>11</sup>

The general ebb of Mu'tazilite political influence and public prestige during the second quarter of the third/ninth century must have been the impetus behind al-Jāhīz's *Kitāb faḍīlat al-mu'tazilah* [Book of the excellences of the Mu'tazilah]. Although this book is not extant, fragments of it cited in a later work indicate that controversies with the Imami Shi'ah on prophethood and the Imamate were of major concern. The infamous Ibn al-Rāwandī, a Baghdad Mu'tazilite who adopted extreme Imami Shi'ite religious-political doctrines, penned a scathing rebuttal to al-Jāhīz entitled *Kitāb faḍīhat al-mu'tazilah* [Book on the ignominy of the Mu'tazilah]. Works of this sort had profound and lasting effects on the course of Kalam. Fourth/tenth century Kalam literature introduced select topics as replies to non-Muslim opponents. The usual chapter heading for the doctrine of prophethood, "The Reply to the Brahmins," is misleading. The same arguments directed against the so-called Brahmins were in other contexts leveled against dissident voices in Islam, usually termed pejoratively "apostates" or "atheists" (*mulhīdūn*). Most frequently named was Ibn al-Rāwandī. Whatever the sources of his ideas, he was also a product of the Islamic heritage and of an education in Kalam.

Much of the material from al-Jāhīz's defense of the Mu'tazilah and from Ibn al-Rāwandī's counterattack was preserved in a work written toward the end of the third century that attempted to rescue the intellectual prestige of the Mu'tazilah from its heterodox critics. In this work, *Kitāb al-intiṣār* [Book of triumph (or revenge)], a Baghdad Mu'tazilite contemporary of al-Jubbā'ī, Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Khayyāṭ, showed that questions concerning the Imamate and prophethood were fiercely debated between the Shi'ah and the Mu'tazilah.<sup>12</sup>

Another Abbasid alliance in disarray by the mid-third/-ninth century was the attempted political rapprochement with the Shi'ites. The Abbasids had exploited the anti-Umayyad sentiments among Shi'ite sectaries a century earlier in order to broaden their own base of support in Iraq. Shi'ite intellectual and political aspirations were not to be realized under the Abbasid regime, however. Increasingly an umbrage for social, political, and religious protest against the state and its religious notables, Shi'ism encompassed several programs of subversion directed against the government as well as both Sunni and Mu'tazilite theological teachings.<sup>13</sup> Much of the dialectic of the Basrah Mu'tazilah on prophethood was addressed to various Shi'ite adversaries and movements.

<sup>11</sup> On the question of Mu'tazilism, the Abbasids, and al-Ma'mūn's inquisition, see Walter M. Patton, *Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and the Mihna* (Leiden, 1897). Al-Ma'mūn's theological position with respect to the *mihnah* is discussed by Josef van Ess, "Ibn Kullāb und die Mihna," *Oriens* 18–19 (1967): 92–142.

<sup>12</sup> See the review of Albert Nader's edition of *Kitāb al-Intiṣār* by Josef van Ess in *Archiv für*

*Geschichte der Philosophie* 55 (1963): 79–87. On Ibn al-Rāwandī, s.v. *ET*<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> W. Montgomery Watt views the *mihnah* as a pro-Shi'ite policy on the part of the Abbasids—an attempt to gain support from a wide body of Shi'ite opinion, idem, "The Rafidites: A Preliminary Study," *Oriens* 16 (1963): 110–21.

The intellectual environment in which the doctrine of prophethood was discussed also included the *shu'ūbiyyah* controversy. H. A. R. Gibb has pointed out that the term *shu'ūbi* originally applied to the Kharijites because they had denied that any race or tribe, including the Quraysh, had absolute right to the Caliphate. In the third/ninth century, *shu'ūbiyyah* appeared as a name both for the Persian social class of secretaries that boasted its own superiority in letters and, to a lesser extent, for their adversaries among the Arabs. The Arabs, led by al-Jāhīz, championed ethnic pride by expanding the scope of their own *adab*, a term meaning the sum of knowledge that makes a man witty and urbane. Previously, Arab letters had been restricted to poetry and stories; language study had focused on lexicography and religious disciplines related to the Koran and Traditions. Gibb suggested further that the literary controversy between arabophiles and persophiles had religious overtones. Speaking of the *shu'ūbiyyah* in the mid-third/ninth century, its most bitter moment, Gibb said:

The dangers of the shuubi movement . . . lay not so much in its crude anti-Arab propaganda (in spite of its appeal to the still lively hostility to the Arabs amongst the lower classes in Iraq and Persia) as in the more refined scepticism which it fostered among the literate classes. The old Perso-Aramaean culture of Iraq, the center of Manichaeism, still carried the germs of that kind of freethinking which was called *zandaqa*, and which showed itself not only by the survival of dualist ideas in religion, but still more by that frivolity and cynicism in regard to all moral systems which is designated by the term *mujun*.<sup>14</sup>

Al-Jāhīz, the leading arabophile *littérateur*, held that the Koran epitomized the excellence of the Arabic language, and this notion became an important aspect of the Basrah Mu'tazilite and Ash'arite definitions of the apologetic miracle. Persophiles, on the other hand, did not invoke the Koran as a source of literary inspiration.<sup>15</sup> The so-called heretics who attacked the Koran with bitter scepticism were usually from Iran and Iraq, and often they were not of Arab stock. While the evidence does not indicate that the *shu'ūbi* controversy was the cause of the doctrinal disputes over prophethood, the social and intellectual ferment of the *shu'ūbiyyah* was nonetheless an important constituent of the intellectual climate in which the controversy over Muhammad's prophethood took place.

These three third/ninth century developments—the rise and fall of the Mu'tazilah as an influence in public life, the growing dissidence of the Shi'ah with an alternative political theory that had ramifications for the doctrine of prophethood, and the pride of the Arabs in their language and Book in a milieu of scepticism and competing national and literary interests—charged the atmosphere in which prophethood was discussed, until, at the beginning of the fourth/tenth century, the specific problems of Muhammad's prophethood were treated of more systematically by al-Jubbā'ī and his followers.

## II

The earliest Mu'tazilite discussions of prophethood are lost. Some of the relevant material is imbedded in later writings, but the interpretation of these assorted pieces of

<sup>14</sup> H. A. R. Gibb, *Studies on the Civilization of Islam* (Boston, 1962), p. 69. Gibb's remarks should be compared with those of I. Goldziher in *Muhammedanische Studien*, 2 vols. in one (Halle, 1889-90), vol. 1, pp. 177-216. It should be further noted that the *mawālī*, the clients of the Arab tribes, did not consist solely of Persians, but they included Aramaeans, Syrians, and the nonintegrated populations of Lower

Mesopotamia. These were among the strata that were active in the social protest of the Abbasid period.

<sup>15</sup> Al-Jāhīz criticized the Persian "Secretaries" for their inclination to find fault with the Koran. See *Thalāth Rasā'il*, ed. T. Finkel (Cairo, 1344), pp. 42-43; cited by Gustav von Grunebaum, *A Tenth Century Document of Arabic Literary Theory and Criticism* (Chicago, 1950), p. xvi, n. 15.

information is problematic. From the circles of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. ca. 110/728) and Wāṣil b. ʿAtāʾ (d. 131/748) there are not enough texts or reports to determine what these traditional founders of the Muʿtazilah had to say about prophethood and miracles already in late Umayyad times. It is reported that Abū l-Hudhayl (d. 227/841–42) wrote on miracles, and that he was asked by al-Maʾmūn to compose a response to Shiʿite contentions about the prophet.<sup>16</sup> But Abū l-Hudhayl's teachings on this subject are not cited in the heresiographies or in the systematic works of the Basrah school from the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries, although his teachings on other subjects have survived in many instances.

In the two generations following Abū l-Hudhayl (the latter half of the third/ninth century) until the time of the Two Masters it is difficult to determine to what extent the theologians of the Basrah school held a doctrine of the apologetic miracle based on eloquence. Strong support for the doctrine appears in the next century. Later Ashʿarite heresiographies treated of the Muʿtazilites categorically as proponents of the doctrine of sarfah or as otherwise opposed to the miraculous eloquence of the Koran. In point of fact, the argument for the inimitability of the Koran by the Two Masters antedated the discussions of *iʿjāz al-qurʾān* in Ashʿarite circles. Prior to the time of al-Jubbāʾī, however, several theologians associated with the Basrah school had indeed rejected the Koranic miracle under the aspect of eloquence (*min jihat al-faṣāḥah*). One exception was al-Jāḥiẓ, a Basrah theologian who argued that the Koran contained structural and literary elements (*al-taʿlīf wa-l-naẓm*) that surpassed those of other expressions of eloquent speech. He appears nonetheless to have stopped short of defining the apologetic miracle in terms of this literary superiority.<sup>17</sup>

Other Muʿtazilites of the Basrah school in the third/ninth century were decidedly more sceptical. One, a student of Abū l-Hudhayl, was Hishām al-Fuwaṭī (d. before 218/833). Both he and his pupil, ʿAbbād b. Sulaymān (d. ca. 250/864), rejected the notion that the Koran could be a sign of Muhammad's prophethood. Their position derived from the general Muʿtazilite argument against the popular view that the Koran was an eternal attribute of God's speech; they argued instead that it was created in creaturely substrates, such as voice boxes, memories, and writing materials. For Hishām and ʿAbbād, it was logically impossible for a created entity to serve as a sign of the Creator, the Eternal.<sup>18</sup> Their argument was extreme, however. Hishām and ʿAbbād were severe critics of Abū l-Hudhayl on many points, and in turn they were criticized by the Two Masters and ʿAbd al-Jabbār in the next generations. Most of the rest of the Muʿtazilah accepted the general Islamic belief that the creation was filled with signs that pointed to the Creator.

In the third/ninth century, other Muʿtazilite theologians took positions contrary to

<sup>16</sup> Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt dalāʾil al-nubuwwah*, ed. ʿAbd al-Karīm ʿUthmān, vol. 2, pp. 511, 538 ff. The Ashʿarite biographer, Ibn ʿAsākir (d. A.D. 1176), said that influential theologians such as al-Jubbāʾī and al-Balkhī, who wrote *tafsīr*, took their ideas from Abū l-Hudhayl and al-Nazzām (namely, the wrong sources in his opinion); see Ibn ʿAsākir's *Tabyīn kidhb al-muftarī fī mā nusiba ilā l-imām Abī l-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī* (Damascus, 1347 [1928 or 1929]), pp. 137–38. Although Ibn ʿAsākir was surely right about the importance of the earlier figures, the contribution of al-Jubbāʾī and al-Balkhī lay in their reworking of the Koranic theologics of their predecessors in the light of more recent criticism.

<sup>17</sup> See Charles Pellat, "al-Djāḥiẓ," *EI* 2. Al-Khayyāt, *Intiṣār*, names several works by al-Jāḥiẓ which would seem to have to do with *al-nubuwwah* (see index of works). Passages from al-Jāḥiẓ's *Huǧaj al-nubuwwah* are found in Mubarrad, *Kāmil* (Cairo, 1324), vol. 1, p. 275 and vol. 2, p. 148 passim. These passages have been edited in Arabic by H. Sandubi, *Rasāʾil al-Jāḥiẓ* (Cairo, 1933) (which I have not seen). A translation of these works is given by C. Pellat, *The Life and Works of Jāḥiẓ*, trans. D. W. Hawkes (London, 1969). An important passage from the *Ḥayawān* will be discussed later in this essay.

<sup>18</sup> Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī, *Maǧālāt al-islāmiyyīn* (*Die dogmatischen Lehren der Anhänger des Islams*),

Koranic inimitability. The Basrah theologian named most frequently in this regard was Ibrāhīm al-Nazzām, also a pupil of Abū l-Hudhayl. Al-Nazzām had not denied that the Koran could be a sign of the prophetic office; rather his concern had been to deny that any formal grounds could be established for a miracle by words as expressions of intention or referential symbols (*‘ibārāt*) or as grammatical entities (*alfāz*). On the other hand, he had accepted certain material grounds with respect to content (*ma‘nā*) whereby the Koran could be judged to be a miracle. The material grounds he accepted consisted of the Prophet’s knowledge, as stated in the Koran, of events of which he could not have been cognizant (*al-ghuyūb*), including future events.<sup>19</sup>

The notion that the Koran was a sign that verified the Prophet’s authenticity was rooted in Muhammad’s experience in Mecca, as revealed in the Koran itself.<sup>20</sup> The question this posed for Muslim theologians was: what would constitute a valid sign (*dalīl*) that would verify (*taṣdīq*) a claim (*da‘wā*) to prophethood? The theologians of the third/ninth century could agree that the Meccans’ inability to meet the Prophet’s challenge (*taḥaddī*) to match (*mu‘āraḍah*) the eloquence of his speech was crucial, but they could not agree as to *how* this would constitute a miracle. For Muslims who could not accept the Koran as an inimitable literary piece, the failure to match the Prophet’s Koranic utterances required an explanation. Thus they came to the conclusion that the Meccans were deflected from (*surifū ‘an*) matching his speech. The doctrine of sarfah, as it was called, amounted to an assertion of divine intervention. In the view of al-Nazzām and of those who followed him on this point, the uttering of speech as eloquent as that of the Koran was in principle a capacity of anyone fluent in Arabic.<sup>21</sup>

Later theological works, in refuting the doctrine of sarfah, usually in the same context attributed the argument against the miraculous eloquence of the Koran to al-Nazzām. In the next century the doctrine of sarfah was argued mainly by Bagdadi Mu‘tazilites and Imami Shi‘ites. They argued it in contradistinction to the aspect of eloquence held by the Basrah Mu‘tazilites and the Ash‘arites. Still the question remains: what role did the doctrine of sarfah play in the third/ninth century when no clear argument for Koranic inimitability was apparent?

An answer is suggested by a passage in a work by al-Jāhīz in which sarfah was presented as an argument against early heretical circles known as the Materialists (*dah-riyyah*).<sup>22</sup> In this context al-Jāhīz was refuting the accusation of the Materialists that stories from the Koran and other scriptures contained a number of inconsistencies that rendered them irrational. Since biographies of al-Nazzām, the teacher of al-Jāhīz, regarded him as a polemical opponent of the Materialists, it may be that the arguments against them were derived from al-Nazzām.<sup>23</sup>

The Materialists had charged that in the Koranic story of Solomon, whom God had

2d ed., ed. Hellmut Ritter (Wiesbaden, 1963), pp. 225–26. Also see Ibn al-Murtadā, *Ṭabaqāt al-mu‘tazilah* (*Die Klassen der Mu‘taziliten*), ed. Susanna Diwald-Wilzer (Wiesbaden, 1961), index.

<sup>19</sup> Al-Ash‘ari, *Maqālāt*, pp. 225–26.

<sup>20</sup> The relevant loci are Koran 17: 88/90; 10: 38/39; and 11: 13/16.

<sup>21</sup> See the discussion of sarfah in Bouman, *Conflit*, pp. 20–23. Among the followers of al-Nazzām are several named in Ibn al-Murtadā, *Ṭabaqāt al-mu‘tazilah*, p. 78. See the discussion of al-Jāhīz’s statement

of al-Nazzām’s doctrine of sarfah as well as the notion of the excellence of the Koran over other discourse in Na‘īm al-Ḥimṣī, “Ta‘riḥ,” *RAAD* 28 (1953): 581–82. Al-Ḥimṣī concluded that al-Jāhīz held two contradictory notions of the miracle of the Koran, but in fact, although al-Jāhīz regarded the Koran to be inimitable, it remains difficult to conclude that he defined its miraculosity in these terms.

<sup>22</sup> Q.v. *EI*<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> Al-Jāhīz, *Kitāb al-ḥayawān*, 2d ed., ed. A. M. Harun (Cairo, 1950), vol. 4, pp. 85–90; vol. 6, p. 269.



made lord of mankind and the Jinn (capable even of speaking the languages of birds and of ants), it was incredible that so exalted a king should have been ignorant of the Kingdom of Sheba (Koran 27:22 ff.). Al-Jāhīz's rebuttal was that this and other stories from the Koran showed that from time to time God removed from their consciousness (*rafʿ ʿan awḥāmihim*) knowledge of which His servants would otherwise be in full possession.<sup>24</sup> Applying this interpretation also to the Verse of the Challenge (Koran 17:88/90), which contained the Prophet's challenge to the Arabs and the Jinn to produce a surah like those of the Koran, al-Jāhīz said:

Similar is [God's] removal from the consciousness of the Arabs, and His deflecting them, from matching the Koran [*ṣarafa nufūṣahum ʿan al-muʿāraḍah li-l-qurʾān*] after the Prophet had challenged them with its composition; hence we find that no one wanted to do it, and if anyone had wanted to do it, he would have had to have put out a greater than usual effort.<sup>25</sup>

Thus the argument from sarfah, mounted against heretical attacks on the Koran, also proved effective as a positive doctrine of the Koranic miracle.

Al-Jāhīz may not have seen the doctrine of sarfah as an argument against the miraculous eloquence of the Koran. The passage just cited was followed by this remark:

You have seen [how deceived were] the followers of Musaylimah and Ibn Nuwāhah, for they only knew of the speech that Musaylimah had composed for them. Everyone else who heard it knew it to be an attack on the Koran, and that Musaylimah had taken part [of the Koran] and tried to match it. This composition, which mortals cannot achieve even if they assemble together to do it, belongs to God.<sup>26</sup>

Again the reference is to the Verse of the Challenge, which reads: "Say, verily, though mankind and the Jinn should assemble to produce the like of the Koran, they could not produce the like thereof though they were helpers of one another." Al-Jāhīz was apparently one of the few third/ninth century Muʿtazilites to argue the doctrine of sarfah as well as the superior literary composition of the Koran. Most, like al-Nazzām, rejected the Koran's miraculous eloquence. This rejection became more prevalent in the Baghdad school. Already prior to al-Nazzām, Abū Mūsā al-Murdār (d. early third/ninth century), an early member of the Baghdad school, reportedly opposed the mode of eloquence by attempting to match Koranic speech himself. It is not known whether or not he argued a positive doctrine of the Koranic miracle on grounds other than rhetorical eloquence. Al-Murdār was the teacher of three well-known theologians of the Baghdad school: Jaʿfar b. Ḥarb, Jaʿfar b. Mubashshir, and Abū Jaʿfar al-Iskāfī.<sup>27</sup> Later heresiographers were to remark on the lively opposition between the Basrah and Baghdad schools regarding the doctrine of prophethood.<sup>28</sup> That opposition seems much more apparent from the time of the Two Masters.

In the fourth/tenth century, the doctrine of sarfah was defended in the writings of Imami Shiʿite theologians, some of whom had studied Kalam with Baghdad Muʿtazilite teachers. In the *Awāʿil al-maḡālāt*, al-Shaikh al-Mufīd Muḥammad b. Nuʿmān (d.

<sup>24</sup> *Hayawān*, vol. 4, pp. 86–89.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 89: 3–5.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 89: 9–12.

<sup>27</sup> On al-Murdār, see *Ṭabaqāt al-muʿtazilah*, 70: 7 ff.; 75: 12 ff.; 77: 14; and 85: 10; and al-Shahrastānī, *Kitāb al-mīlāl wa-l-nihāl*, ed. M. Badran (Cairo, 1947), pp. 104–6. W. M. Watt discusses al-Murdār and his pupils in the Baghdad Muʿtazilah in *Free Will and*

*Predestination in Islam* (London, 1948), p. 76. See also von Grunebaum, *Tenth Century Document*, p. xvi, n. 13 and p. xiv, n. 7 for mention of poets such as Bashshār b. Burd, Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, and the early theologian, Jahm b. Ṣafwān, three of several second/eighth century figures who denied the inimitability of the Koran.

<sup>28</sup> Al-Shahrastānī, *Al-Mīlāl*, p. 130.

413/1022), head of the Imami Shiʿites in Baghdad, defended the doctrine of sarfah, as did his successor to that post, al-Sayyid al-Murtaḍā (d. 433/1044).<sup>29</sup> The latest surviving Mu<sup>ʿ</sup>tazilite writing on prophethood, the *Ziyādāt al-sharḥ* by Abū Rashīd, contains a lengthy exchange with al-Murtaḍā, who is presented as one of those who resurrected the doctrine of sarfah against the miraculous eloquence of the Koran. Abū Rashīd introduced the discussion with al-Murtaḍā by citing from the original text on which he was commenting, *al-Uṣūl* by Ibn Khallād (a pupil of Abū Hāshim), which reads as follows:

Know that al-Nazzām believed that the Koran was a miracle with respect to sarfah, and that the meaning of sarfah is that the Arabs were able to produce speech like the Koran with respect to eloquence and rhetoric until the Prophet was sent, at which time this eloquence was deflected from them and their knowledge of it was stricken from them; hence they were unable to produce speech like the Koran. Then the later theologians came along and defended this doctrine, providing counterarguments [against us].<sup>30</sup>

Originally an argument premised on divine countervention of human faculties, leveled against heretical attacks on the Koran, at the time of the Two Masters and beyond the doctrine of sarfah was a counterargument against the doctrine of the Koranic miracle under the aspect of eloquence. The argument for the aspect of eloquence by the Two Masters and the later school at Rayy marks a clear distinction within the Mu<sup>ʿ</sup>tazilah between the Basrah and Baghdad branches in the fourth/tenth centuries. This distinction can be amplified by a careful consideration of the key terms, *mu<sup>ʿ</sup>jiz* and *i<sup>ʿ</sup>jāz al-qur<sup>ʿ</sup>ān*, as they were defined and expounded by ʿAbd al-Jabbār.

### III

The conception of *i<sup>ʿ</sup>jāz al-qur<sup>ʿ</sup>ān* was inspired, as has been indicated, by certain experiences of Muhammad that were recorded in the Koran. As a technical term, *i<sup>ʿ</sup>jāz al-qur<sup>ʿ</sup>ān* began to appear in the late third/ninth century, around the time of al-Jubbāʿī, although the meaning of “inimitability of the Koran” was controversial among those who discussed it. *Mu<sup>ʿ</sup>jiz[ah]* (miracle) and *i<sup>ʿ</sup>jāz* (to be or become a *mu<sup>ʿ</sup>jiz*) seem to have acquired technical meanings in late third/ninth century Kalam works but not in the mid-century works of al-Jāhīz or ʿAlī b. Sahl al-Ṭabarī. Even al-Jubbāʿī’s contemporary from the Baghdad Mu<sup>ʿ</sup>tazilah, al-Khayyāt, did not use the terms *mu<sup>ʿ</sup>jiz* or *i<sup>ʿ</sup>jāz al-qur<sup>ʿ</sup>ān*, at least not in his one surviving work.<sup>31</sup> The works of later Basrah Mu<sup>ʿ</sup>tazilites, especially those of ʿAbd al-Jabbār, suggest that these terms were redefined by al-Jubbāʿī and his followers in a technical sense that was to become the general view held by the Basrah Mu<sup>ʿ</sup>tazilites, the Ashʿarites, and Sunni Islam.

A contemporary of al-Jubbāʿī, Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/922), did employ the root <sup>ʿ</sup>-j-z in his commentary on the Koran, but the technical terms derived from it do not appear in passages pertaining to Muhammad’s challenge to produce the likes of the

<sup>29</sup> The doctrine of sarfah was discussed by al-Shaiḫ al-Mufīd, published together with the *Sharḥ ʿaqqāʿid al-ṣādūq* (Tabriz, 1330), pp. 31 f. Two letters written by al-Murtaḍā on the subject of sarfah, now in the Berlin collection (Ret. 40, fols. 4a-5b; 92b-96a) are summarized by al-Ḥimṣī, “Taʾrīkh,” pp. 69 ff. Wilferd Madelung has essayed the close association of the Baghdad Mu<sup>ʿ</sup>tazilah and the Imami Shiʿah in “Imamism and Mu<sup>ʿ</sup>tazilite Theology,” *Le Shiʿisme imamīte* (Paris, 1970), pp. 13-30.

<sup>30</sup> Z, 18a. This *faṣl* does not begin with the usual citation from Ibn Khallād, *Al-Uṣūl*; it is probably an excursus by Abū Rashīd. That the subject was discussed earlier by Ibn Khallād (and thus, probably by his mentor, Abū Hāshim) is suggested by the fact that Abū Rashīd’s older contemporary, Abū Ṭālib al-Nāṭiq bi-l-Ḥaqq, did in his *Ziyādāt sharḥ al-uṣūl*.

<sup>31</sup> Al-Khayyāt, *Intiṣār*, pp. 27 f.

Koran. His non-technical use of *ʿajz*, “incapacity,” nonetheless bears a certain resemblance to the general idea behind the prophetic miracle as defined by his contemporary, al-Jubbāʿī. Discussing Koran 11:13/16, al-Ṭabarī’s commentary included the following statement:

God is saying to His Prophet, Muhammad, upon whom be peace: The argument [i.e., the Koran] which you brought to them will suffice, and it is a proof [*dalālah*] of your prophethood . . . since the signs, (i.e., the verses) [*al-āyāt*] are only proper for one who gives them as proof of his veracity; for the whole of creation was unable [*ʿajz ʿan*] to produce the likes of them.<sup>32</sup>

A century later this non-technical use of *ʿajz* was classified by ʿAbd al-Jabbār as *taʿāruf*, by which he meant a commonly understood meaning that extended beyond the strict lexical sense of the word.<sup>33</sup> Following the turn of the third/ninth century, writers of non-Kalam literature began to use the term *muʿjiz* alongside older terms such as *āyah* and *ʿalam*.<sup>34</sup> The speculations of ʿAbd al-Jabbār concerning the development of the technical meaning of these terms in the Kalam are worth some consideration.

Beginning with lexical considerations, the Qāḍī (ʿAbd al-Jabbār) observed that the antonym of *muʿjiz* was *muqdir*, which meant “one who causes another to have the power, the capacity, to act (*qudrah*).”<sup>35</sup> *Muʿjiz*, then, meant “one who causes another to be devoid of the power to act.” In the Sunni universe of discourse (including in this instance the Basrah Muʿtazilites), both terms were properly predicted of God alone. Lexicographers define *muqdir* with the predicate *tamkīn*, “giving power to, making possible.” *Muʿjiz* they defined with the term *taʿadhdhur*, “unfeasible, impossible,” which rests not on theoretical but rather on practical grounds.<sup>36</sup> In a semi-technical sense (*taʿāruf*), the Qāḍī said, *muʿjiz* was to be understood as “an act, the likes of which would be extremely difficult for human beings to simulate.”<sup>37</sup>

The Qāḍī continued his explication by saying that theologians had transferred (*naql*) the original meaning of *muʿjiz* to a technical one (*iṣṭilāh*) that was connected with the root and semi-technical meanings of the term but not equivalent to them. The reason the term acquired another meaning was that it made poor sense to say that one could be rendered incapable of doing that of which he would not be capable in the first place. Universally recognized miracles, such as Moses’ transforming of rods into serpents and Jesus’ raising of the dead, could not have been effected by human agency alone. To say that human beings could not be agents of acts that were humanly impossible amounted to a tautology.<sup>38</sup>

Various Kalam discussions of *iʿjāz al-qurʿān* often contained the following analogy to the doctrine of sarfah: one claims to be a prophet and offers as proof the ability to perform a normal physical act, such as placing his hand upon his head; when others are challenged

<sup>32</sup> *Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʿwīl āy al-qurʿān*, s.v. locus for Koran 11: 13.

<sup>33</sup> *M*, vol. 13, p. 457: 3–10; vol. 16, pp. 99: 13–100: 20; vol. 8, p. 306: 8 f.

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, ed. Barbier de Meynerd (Paris, 1861–77), vol. 4, pp. 163–65, cited by von Grunebaum, *Tenth Century Document*, p. xvii, n. 16.

<sup>35</sup> The definition of *muʿjiz* is found in *M*, vol. 15, pp. 197–99. See also ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *Sharḥ al-uṣūl al-khamsah* (hereafter, *Sharḥ*), p. 568: 11 ff. The Basrah school defined *ʿajz* and *qudrah* as contraries in opposition to al-Balkhī; see Abū Rashīd, *Al-Masāʾil*

*fī l-khilāf bayn al-baṣriyyīn wa-l-baghdādīyyīn*, MS Berlin Glaser 12 (Ahlwardt 5125), fol. 133b.

<sup>36</sup> *M*, vol. 15, p. 197: 11–12.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 197: 19–20.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 198. Compare al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Bayān*, p. 9. Al-Bāqillānī’s charge that the Muʿtazilah (which he referred to as the *qadariyyah*) denied that miracles are contingent on divine agency does not apply to what his contemporaries in the Basrah Muʿtazilah taught. Much of what al-Bāqillānī had to say against the Muʿtazilites seems to reflect the negative view of the school that al-Kayyāt undertook to correct in the *Kitāb al-Intiṣār*.

to do likewise on a particular occasion and cannot, the claim to prophethood is thereby vouchsafed. In some passages, this analogy was directly attributed to the proponents of sarfah.<sup>39</sup> The Basrah Muṭazilah, on the other hand, could not have used this line of argument since it implied a tautology, as stated above. Thus it would seem that the Qāḍī's distinction of meanings for the term *muḥjiz* was an attempt to clarify the different understandings of the term between the Basrah and Baghdad branches and those who followed their discussions of *iḥjāz*.

The Two Masters, al-Jubbāʿī and his son Abū Hāshim, operating as they did with a quite different understanding of the apologetic miracle than did the Baghdadi proponents of sarfah, were nevertheless engaging in arguments over *quaestiones disputatae*. These issues were not as critical as those which engaged all of the Muṭazilah against heretical groups and individuals variously called the *mulhidūn*, the *Barāhimah*, the *muṭāʿinūn*, and the *Rāfiḍah* (Imami Shiʿah). Attacks from the likes of Ibn al-Rāwandī on such third/ninth century theologians as al-Jāḥiẓ drew fire from several theologians in the next few generations.<sup>40</sup> Also refuted were Abū ʿIsā al-Warrāq and Abū Ḥafṣ al-Ḥaddād to whom were attributed several works challenging (*taʿn*) Sunni beliefs about the Prophet and the Koran. ʿAbd al-Jabbār mentioned two philosophers whose views on prophethood were unacceptable: Yaʿqūb b. Ishāq al-Kindī (d. after 257/870) and Abū Bakr al-Rāzī (d. 320/932).<sup>41</sup>

Reaction to extreme expressions of Imami Shiʿite doctrine figured as a common element in much of the Basrah Muṭazilite polemic against heretical ideas on the doctrine of prophethood. ʿAbd al-Jabbār traced the influence upon the more extreme among them back to the second/eighth century Shiʿite theologian, Hishām b. al-Ḥakam, and from him back to the Gnostic dualist, Abū Shākīr al-Daysānī (Bardesanes).<sup>42</sup> The theory that heretical ideas must have come from foreign sources was related to the deepseated aversion to innovation (*bidʿah*) in Islam.

The Two Masters wrote extensively both on *quaestiones disputatae* and on the polemical controversies with heterodox and non-Muslim opponents. Al-Jubbāʿī was closely associated with two Muṭazilite authors of monographs on *iḥjāz al-qurʾān*: Abū ʿUmar al-Bāhili (n.d.), whose sessions were attended by al-Jubbāʿī, and Abū ʿAbdallāh al-Wāsiṭī (d. 306/918), both a pupil and a relative of al-Jubbāʿī.<sup>43</sup> Al-Jubbāʿī himself wrote against heresy, and although none of his works have survived, their importance as a foundation

<sup>39</sup> Al-Khaṭṭābī, *Bayān iḥjāz al-qurʾān*, in *Thalāth Rasāʾil*, pp. 22–23. Cf. *M*, vol. 16, p. 219: 11–14.

<sup>40</sup> I am indebted to Professor Josef van Ess for pointing out that the association of Muṭazilism with many of the so-called heretics calls for more elaboration (which lies beyond the scope of this essay). For example, it is clear from Ibn al-Nadīm's *Fihrist* that two traditions about Ibn al-Rāwandī were circulating, and in one of them the tone of censure was *not* expressed. Even the mention of several self-rebuttals by Ibn al-Rāwandī is puzzling and suggests the possibility that the argumentative tone of much that was written against him may be grossly unfair and distorted. As of yet, there is really very little we can say about the views of Ibn al-Rāwandī with certainty. See Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist (The Fihrist of al-Nadīm)*, ed. and trans. Bayard Dodge (New York, 1970), vol. 1, pp. 419–23. Although Dodge's translation must be read with extreme caution, his section on the Muṭazilah combines several new passages not found

in other editions singly.

<sup>41</sup> Al-Kindī and al-Rāzī are both mentioned in *Tathbūt*, q.v. index. Extracts from Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *Kitāb aʿlām al-nubuwwah*, in which he refutes the heretical views of Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, were published by Paul Kraus, "Raziana II," *Orientalia*, n.s. 5 (1936): 35–36, 358–78. As Kraus himself observed in the introduction to the Arabic text, the Ismāʿīli character of Abū Ḥātim's views is underplayed; in many passages the speaker could just as well be an Ashʿarite or a Muṭazilite.

<sup>42</sup> On the Qāḍī's theory that Rafiḍite heterodoxy could be traced back to Hishām b. al-Ḥakam, see *Tathbūt*, vol. 2, pp. 446–47; 528–29; 550–51. The association of Hishām with Abū Shākīr al-Daysānī is found in a most interesting passage, *ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 224–25. See Madelung, "Hishām b. al-Ḥakam," *EI*<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>43</sup> *Fihrist*, vol. 1, pp. 428, 430. Al-Bāhili's work is mentioned by ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *Tathbūt*, vol. 2, p. 511.

for later Mu'tazilite thought is well attested in the writings of 'Abd al-Jabbār and Abū Rashīd. The *Kitāb al-Jārūf* by the extreme Imami Shī'ite, Abū Ḥaḥṣ al-Ḥaddād, was refuted by al-Jubbā'ī, as well as by al-Khayyāṭ and by al-Ḥārith al-Warrāq.<sup>44</sup> Al-Jubbā'ī also wrote a *Naqḍ al-imāmah* against Ibn al-Rāwandī and others who had written in defense of Imami politico-theological doctrines.<sup>45</sup> In his *Kitāb al-muntaẓam*, Ibn al-Jawzī has preserved a portion of Ibn al-Rāwandī's *Kitāb al-dāmigh*, a scathing polemic against the Koran; also included in the *Kitāb al-muntaẓam* are some of the *responsa* of al-Jubbā'ī.<sup>46</sup>

The second chapter in the surviving portion of Abū Rashīd's *Ziyādāt* begins with a citation from Ibn al-Rāwandī's *Kitāb al-farīd*, in which the Sunni notion of miraculous Koranic eloquence came under sharp attack. Later Basrah Mu'tazilites frequently cited Abū Hāshim's rebuttal, entitled *Naqḍ al-farīd*.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, between the Two Masters there was frequent disagreement concerning the doctrine of prophethood and miracles, which formed many of the disputed questions debated by their followers; some of the more adventuresome points can be attributed to Abū Hāshim. The Two Masters' contemporary in the Baghdad school, Abū l-Qāsim al-Balkhī al-Ka'bī (d. 317/929), wrote in defense of al-Jāḥiẓ, against the attacks of Ibn al-Rāwandī.<sup>48</sup> In the case of al-Ash'arī, who left the circle of al-Jubbā'ī to found the famous orthodox school of Kalam, there are no surviving works which include discussions of prophethood and the apologetic miracle. His thinking on this subject must be inferred from the writings of the most important Ash'arite of the late fourth/tenth century, al-Bāqillānī (a contemporary of 'Abd al-Jabbār). Al-Ash'arī's biographer, however, Ibn 'Asākir, has furnished a list of the writings of al-Ash'arī that contains several titles on prophethood and miracles, including some in the form of replies to heretics.<sup>49</sup> Another contemporary who represented orthodox Kalam on the eastern frontier of *dār al-islām*, Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944) wrote a *Kitāb al-tawḥīd* in which are contained many *responsa* to the heretical opinions of Abū 'Isā al-Warrāq and Ibn al-Rāwandī, including the subjects of prophethood and miracles.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>44</sup> *Fihrist*, vol. 1, p. 419 (*K. al-jārūf* should probably be read for *K. al-ḥārūf*). Al-Ḥārith al-Warrāq wrote several treatises against Ibn al-Rāwandī, *ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> The *Naqḍ* is mentioned by 'Abd al-Jabbār, *M*, vol. 16, p. 152 (cf. *Tathbūt*, vol. 1, p. 64; vol. 2, p. 529) as a work in which al-Jubbā'ī had dealt with the importance of answering critics of the Kalam doctrines of the prophetic office and the Koran. *Tathbūt*, vol. 1, p. 64 also mentions al-Jubbā'ī's *Tafsīr*. 'Abd al-Jabbār also wrote a *Naqḍ al-imāmah*; see *Ṭabaqāt al-mu'tazilah*, p. 113: 12 f. On the works of al-Jubbā'ī, see Daniel Gimaret, "Matériaux pour une bibliographie des Ḥubbā'ī," *Journal Asiatique* 1976, pp. 277-98.

<sup>46</sup> Published by Helmut Ritter, "Philologica VI: Ibn al-ḡawzīs Bericht über Ibn al-Rāwandī," *Der Islam* 19 (1930): 1-17. Fragments of another important work by Ibn al-Rāwandī, the *Kitāb al-zumurrudh*, have been edited, partially translated, and exposted by Kraus, who identified the Brahmins mentioned in this work as a literary fiction of Ibn al-Rāwandī; see "Beiträge," pp. 341-57.

<sup>47</sup> *Fihrist*, vol. 1, p. 421. Cf. Ibn al-Murtaḍā, *Ṭabaqāt al-mu'tazilah*, p. 92. The work was cited by the *Qāḍī* in *M*, vol. 16, p. 310: 5.

<sup>48</sup> Abd al-Jabbār mentioned a work by Abū l-Qāsim al-Balkhī in which the latter is said to have written a rebuttal to Ibn al-Rāwandī's refutation of al-Jāḥiẓ's notion of *naẓm al-qur'ān*; see *Tathbūt*, vol. 1, p. 63: 6 f. and vol. 2, pp. 548 f. The reference is probably to Ibn al-Rāwandī's *al-Dāmigh*, to which Ibn al-Nadīm appended the remark "yaṭ'an fihī 'alā naẓm al-qur'ān" (in which he raised objections to the [alleged] eloquence of the Koran), *Fihrist*, vol. 1, p. 421. There is also a discussion between al-Balkhī and Abū Bakr al-Rāzī recorded in *Tathbūt*, vol. 2, pp. 624 ff.

<sup>49</sup> Ibn 'Asākir's biobibliography is included in *The Theology of al-Ash'arī*, trans. Richard McCarthy (Beirut, 1953), esp. pp. 211-228. See esp. items 21, 27, 53, 61, 74, 87, 95. The Arabic edition is cited in n. 16 above.

<sup>50</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, ed. F. Kholeif (Beirut, 1970), pp. 86-93.

## IV

Thus far it has been argued that from the mid-third/ninth century until the time of al-Jubbā'ī and his contemporaries and immediate followers the argument concerning the Prophet and the Koran reflected something of an existential crisis for theologians committed to a Sunni understanding of the Islamic faith. Yet by the end of the fourth/tenth century, as the writings of al-Bāqillānī, 'Abd al-Jabbār, and Abū Rashīd clearly demonstrate, the doctrine of prophethood and miracles was still a matter of urgent concern. *Prima facie* there would seem to be little reason for this. Insofar as proper names of groups and individuals occur in the later writings at all, they belong to foes long since dead, such as Ibn al-Rāwandī. The dilemma raised by the so-called Brahmins had been dealt with in the writings of the Two Masters and others decades earlier. Even the controversy with the Imami Shī'ah was now treated as one of the *quaestiones disputatae* within Mu'tazilite Kalam, rather than as a polemic with non-Muslim opponents. Who, then, were the enemies of the doctrine of prophethood in the late fourth/tenth and early fifth/eleventh centuries?

Kalam works such as those written by 'Abd al-Jabbār and Abū Rashīd lend little assistance to the attempt to answer this question. More helpful and interesting in this context is the *Tathbīt dalā'il al-nubuwwah* in which 'Abd al-Jabbār addressed himself to the very events and ideas that would lead, inter alia, to the eclipse of the Mu'tazilah in Iraq and western Iran. One learns from this revealing text that far from being simply a static dogma handed down in previous manuals of theology, the doctrine of prophethood remained a vital contemporary concern in the late fourth/tenth century. The *Tathbīt* is a study both in the history of religions and the religio-political theories propagated by dissident Shī'ite intellectuals who opposed the authority of the traditional religious notables ('*ulamā'*). From it one gains some idea of how a leading theologian interpreted the political events from which the continuing theological discussion of prophethood was abstracted.<sup>51</sup>

Some of the discussion stemmed from disputations, often quite lively, between the various schools of Kalam. In addition to the differences between the Basrah and Baghdad branches of the Mu'tazilah, a separate wing of the Baghdad Mu'tazilah, formed by Ibn Ikhshīdh (d. 326/938) and his followers, was so violently antagonistic to Abū Hāshim and his followers that the Buwayhid government was forced to intervene.<sup>52</sup> A work entitled *al-Nukat fi i'jāz al-qur'ān* [Remarks on the inimitability of the Koran] has survived from one of Ibn Ikhshīdh's followers, 'Alī b. 'Isā al-Rummānī (d. 386/996). This short treatise was devoted mainly to an analysis of the Koran's literary superiority. Al-Rummānī's facile treatment of the theological aspects of *i'jāz al-qur'ān* led one scholar to conclude that by the late fourth/tenth century, earlier disputations on the subject were no longer important and could thus be passed over lightly.<sup>53</sup> To the contrary, the polemical atmosphere was still highly charged, especially regarding the Imamate, prophethood, and the Koran. Al-Rummānī's treatise on the Koran, however, was not a theological work; the author was primarily a philologist and grammarian by profession. The main purpose of the work was to weigh the importance of the Koran for literary criticism (which was a

<sup>51</sup> The *Tathbīt*, frequently cited throughout this essay, is not a Kalam work. Nevertheless it contains information that helps to flesh out the history of the Kalam.

<sup>52</sup> Heribert Busse, *Chalif und Grosskönig* (Wiesbaden, 1969), pp. 440 ff. Cf. *Ṭabaqāt al-mu'tazilah*, p. 100.

<sup>53</sup> Bouman, *Confut.*

ramification of the doctrine of the miraculous eloquence of the Koran). The nonsectarian intentions of the writing of the book are borne out by the fact that an Ash'arite, al-Bāqillānī, could subsequently write a work very similar in content, namely, his own *I'jāz al-qur'ān*.<sup>54</sup>

In the late fourth/tenth century the Mu'tazilites and Ash'arites were engaged in controversy involving the propaganda programs of the extreme branches of the Shi'ah. Josef van Ess has observed that the skepticism aimed at Kalam doctrines came mainly from Shi'ite personalities:

This is no mere accident: the Shi'ites started from other epistemological principles. They did not believe in the infallibility of the theologians because they had already somebody who was infallible by definition: the Imam who, by his *'iṣmah* and descent from the Prophet was able to decide difficult religious questions by his authority *ex cathedra*.<sup>55</sup>

The unnamed interlocutors of Abū Rashīd's *Ziyādāt*, insofar as can be decided, were in most cases from the Shi'ah. This is confirmed, as mentioned previously, by 'Abd al-Jabbār's *Tathbīt*.

Ismā'īlī Shi'ites, claiming descendance from Ismā'il b. Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (d. 143/760–61), became a major political reality under the Fatimids who ruled North Africa from 297/909 until their fourth Caliph, al-Mu'izz, brought the seat of the dynasty to Egypt in 362/973. This was two years after 'Abd al-Jabbār began writing *al-Mughnī* and some twenty-three years prior to his writing of the *Tathbīt*.<sup>56</sup> During that quarter of a century, the Fatimids expanded their control to the Arabian Peninsula, including the Yemen (and parts of Syria), and they endeavored without much success to negotiate for recognition from 'Aḍud al-Dawlah, the Buwayhid prince in Baghdad.<sup>57</sup>

It is also clear from 'Abd al-Jabbār's *Tathbīt* that theologians were greatly concerned about the Qarmaṭians (a sect of the Ismā'ilīs which was located originally in Lower Mesopotamia near Kūfah), whose heritage was traced by the anti-Ismā'īlī polemicists to Maymūn al-Qaddāh and his son, 'Abdallāh; both were active in the generation of Ja'far al-Ṣādiq and of Hishām b. al-Ḥakam. As in the case of the latter, some opponents asserted that Maymūn's ideas came from Bardesanes, the Gnostic dualist. Whatever the source of their ideas may have been, through effective propaganda Bāṭinite-Qarmaṭian theological, philosophical, and mystical doctrines came to have enormous influence in several Near Eastern capitals.<sup>58</sup>

By the late third/ninth century these Shi'ite masters of skepticism had organized a

<sup>54</sup> See von Grunebaum, *Tenth Century Document*, p. xvii, n. 20; p. 118/C. Even beyond the scope of literary criticism, there was a sense in which Ash'arites and Mu'tazilites, in spite of their adversary roles on many points, could appreciate each other's contributions to the discussions of *al-nubuwwah*; see n. 41 above.

<sup>55</sup> van Ess, "Scepticism in Islamic Religious Thought," *Al-Abḥath* 21 (1968): 9. Cf. idem, *Die Erkenntnislehre des 'Aḍudaddīn al-ʿIṣī* (Wiesbaden, 1966), pp. 224 f.

<sup>56</sup> The date of the composition of the *Tathbīt* is mentioned in the course of the text by the Qāḍī himself (vol. 1, pp. 24, 168). Toward the end of the *Mughnī*, the Qāḍī mentioned that the latter had been composed over a twenty-year period, between a.h. 360 and 380 (*M*, vol. 20, pp. ii, 257).

<sup>57</sup> M. Canard, "Fāṭimids," *EI*<sup>2</sup>. One of 'Abd al-Jabbār's pupils, Abū l-Qāsim al-Bustī (d. a.h. 420), composed a refutation of Ismā'ilism entitled *Mīn kashf asrār al-bāṭiniyyah wa-ghawār madhhabihim* [From the exposure of the secrets of the Bāṭinites and the destruction of their doctrine]. See S. M. Stern, "Abū l-Qāsim al-Bustī and his Refutation of Ismā'ilism," *JRAS* 1961, pp. 14–35.

<sup>58</sup> On Bāṭinite skepticism and methods of argumentation, see van Ess, n. 55 above and n. 61 below. On the Qarmaṭians see Louis Massignon, "Qarmaṭians," *EI*<sup>2</sup>; Stern, "Ismā'ilis and Qarmaṭians," *L'Elaboration de l'Islam*, Colloque de Strasbourg 1959 (Paris, 1961); Madelung, "Fatimiden und Bahrain-qarmaten," *Der Islam* 34 (1959): 34–88.

rigorous community of peasant Nabateans and Arabs around Kūfah. They were led by a famous follower of Maymūn al-Qaddāh, Ḥamdān al-Ash‘ath, known as Qarmaṭ (d. 293/905–6).<sup>59</sup> Their influence, along with that of others who adopted Bāṭinite methods, prompted a concerned rebuttal from contemporary theologians. Al-Mas‘ūdī listed a number of theologians who opposed the Bāṭinites, including the disciples of al-Nazzām, al-Jubbā‘ī, Abū‘ Īsā al-Warrāq, Abū l-Qāsim al-Balkhī, and Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī.<sup>60</sup>

From the point of view of Sunni theologians, including many Muṭazilites, the growth of Ismā‘īlī influence must have represented a fearsome challenge to the authority of the traditional ‘ulamā’. The use of tricks and apparent miracles along with skillful sophistry in causing the masses to doubt the teachings of the orthodox ‘ulamā’ challenged traditional intellectual and religious leadership throughout *dār al-islām* in the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries. About the Bāṭinite methods of the Ismā‘īlīs, ‘Abd al-Jabbār said:

Consider the situation with these Bāṭinites who enshroud themselves with Islam, the recitation of the Koran, the Prayer, fasting and the Pilgrimage, and with the manifest certainty of the House of the Prophet. They force confidence in their doings by [declaring] secrecy, and the adoption [of their teachings on] faith alone, [feigning] covenant with those who oppose them, [yet] declining the invitation to become learned men [of Islam].<sup>61</sup>

Ripe with controversy over the religion of the Prophet, his office, his miracle (namely, the Koran), the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries were scenes of open controversy. The doctrine of *al-nubuwwah* remained in the later fourth/tenth and early fifth/eleventh centuries a living issue, requiring continued attempts at a coherent statement and analysis within the larger body of Kalam. Abū Rashīd’s *Ziyādāt al-sharḥ* and the works of ‘Abd al-Jabbār afford an opportunity to see how the Basrah Muṭazilah, sometimes with considerable internal differences of opinion, attempted to tighten its thinking in the eleventh hour of its influence in the Islamic East.

<sup>59</sup> See *Tathbūt*, vol. 2, p. 379: 11 ff.

<sup>60</sup> ‘Alī b. Husayn al-Mas‘ūdī, *Kitāb al-tanbīh wa-l-ishrāf*, ed. M. Ḥilmi (Baghdad, 1938), pp. 342–43.

<sup>61</sup> *Tathbūt*, vol. 2, p. 367: 8 ff. ‘Abd al-Jabbār was acquainted with Ismā‘īlī personalities and teachings that have been identified with the well-known secret society, the Brethren of Purity (Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’);

their epistles are believed to have been written between A.H. 350 and 370 (cf. *Tathbūt*, vol. 2, pp. 610 ff., esp. 611: 7 f.). On the Ikhwān, s.v. *EI*<sup>2</sup>, and Stern, “The Authorship of the Epistles of the Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā’,” *IC* 20 (1946): 367–72; and idem, “New Information about the Authorship of the Epistles of the Sincere Brethren,” *IS* 3 (1964): 404–28.