

any way they wish prior to that moment (Yanagihashi, Doctrinal development, 326 f.). Thus a proprietor may shift assets to his desired heir or heirs by means of a gift (see GIFT-GIVING), acknowledgement of a debt (q.v.), sale or creation of a family *waqf*, on the condition that these legal actions conform to the requisite formalities. Thus, to understand how property passed from one generation to the next in Muslim societies, it is important to consider not only the *‘ilm al-farā’id*, but also the wider and more comprehensive Islamic inheritance system.

David Stephan Powers

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Inimitability

An Arabic theological and literary term for the matchless nature of the qur’anic discourse (Ar. *ijāz al-Qur’ān*). Although “inimitability” (*ijāz*) is not attested in the Qur’ān, it has a qur’anic cognate, the fourth form verb *aʿjazahu*, “he found him to be without strength, or power, or ability; it frustrated his power or ability” (cf. Lane); *aʿjaza* and various derived forms occur sixteen times in the Qur’ān.

Of the four times the imperfect form of the verb (*yuʿjizu*) and the twelve times the active participle (*muʿjiz*) occur in the Qur’ān, none in context refers to the question of the human capacity to produce speech like that of the Qur’ān. Q 72:12, which employs the verb twice, is representative of most of the passages: “Indeed, we thought that we should never be able to frustrate (*lan nuʿjiza*) God in the earth, nor be able to frustrate him by [taking] flight.”

Several passages specifically refer to humankind being unable to frustrate or render God's will impotent (e.g. Q 8:59; 9:2, 3; see IMPOTENCE). The third form (*ʿajaza*) occurs three times in the Qurʾān, with the meaning “to contend with someone or something in order to overtake or outstrip him/it.” A cognate derived form in Q 22:50-1 provides an important Qurʾānic background to the later theological doctrine of *ijāz al-Qurʾān* with the following dialectic: “Those who believe and do deeds of righteousness (see BELIEF AND UNBELIEF; GOOD DEEDS) — theirs shall be forgiveness (q.v.) and generous provision. And those who strive against our signs to void them (*saʿaw fi āyātīnā muʿājizīnā*) — they shall be the inhabitants of hell” (q.v.; cf. Q 34:5, 38). The linguistic expression and religious framework of contending with God and his messenger Muḥammad by challenging divine revelation (see REVELATION AND INSPIRATION; OPPOSITION TO MUḤAMMAD) was to become an important backdrop to subsequent theological disputes about the miracle of the Qurʾān (see GREATNESS OF THE QURʾĀN).

If the term *ajaza* and its cognate forms are left aside, however, several verses in the Qurʾān are framed as occasions when Muḥammad is commanded by God to challenge his detractors among the Arabs to produce sūras like those of the Qurʾān (Q 2:23-4; 10:38; 11:13; 17:88; 52:33-4). The Qurʾān contains no verse attesting that any hearer of the word of God (q.v.) recited by the Prophet ever met the challenge, although there are reports in early sources of several attempts to do so. The Challenge Verses, as they came to be called, were taken as theological warrants for the claim that the Qurʾān was a *muʿjiz(a)*, the technical term in Islamic theology (*kalām*, see THEOLOGY AND THE QURʾĀN) for “miracle” (q.v.). The inimitable Qurʾān was under-

stood by the theologians (*mutakallimūn*) to be a miracle that served as an earthly sign and proof (q.v.) of Muḥammad's claim to be a prophet, akin to Moses' (q.v.) division of the Red Sea and Jesus' (q.v.) raising of the dead (see PROPHETS AND PROPHETHOOD). Whether or not other miracles were necessary or even rationally possible for Muḥammad and whether or not religious functionaries besides prophets could perform miracles generated serious debates among Sunnī, Shīʿī, and Ṣūfī Muslims (see SHĪʿISM AND THE QURʾĀN; ṢŪFISM AND THE QURʾĀN).

In another sense, the Qurʾān quite clearly asserts that the recitations which constitute the Qurʾān in their most discrete form, the *āyāt* (sing. *āya*), are “signs” (q.v.) from God, that is, transcendent tokens in this world (q.v.; *al-dunyā*) of God's being and activity. The term *āya*, which also means “verse” of the Qurʾān, appears approximately 275 times in the Qurʾān, in such meaning as: “[the Jews at Sinai] disbelieved in God's signs” (*kānū yakfurūna bi-āyāti llāhi*, Q 2:61). Still another Qurʾānic term that contributed to the early discourse on miracles as signs from God is the root ʿj-b and its derived forms. The tenth sūra of the Qurʾān, “Jonah” (Sūrat Yūnus), begins: “These are the signs (*āyāt*) of the wise book (q.v.). Was it a wonder (*ʿajab*) to the people that we inspired a man from among them...” (Q 10:1-2). In the theological literature on the miracle of the Qurʾān, the feminine form *ʿajība* (pl. *ʿajāʾib*) became a technical term for a particular wonder. For example, the fabled lighthouse of Alexandria, which was said to house a lens that made it possible to see the army leaving Constantinople, as well as the pyramids of Egypt, was classed as an *ʿajība*. In the *kalām* literature, an *ʿajība* generally referred to humanly produced wonders, such as strange and wonderful buildings and instruments, or the

beautiful works of great poets. By contrast, the term *muʿjiz* denoted divinely commissioned miracles and was thus restricted to religious figures, some said to prophets only. The term *ʿalam* (pl. *ʿalām*, *ʿalāmāt*), “a sign which offers guidance, as in navigation,” also appears in the Qurʾān (e.g. Q 16:16; 42:32; 55:24), and the term is also used in *kalām* literature, but usually not to refer to divine miracles.

The qurʾānic and early Muslim context

Already in the time of the Prophet, controversy over the Qurʾān developed among those who heard it, especially among the Quraysh (q.v.) tribe in Mecca, indicating that the recitation of its verses had an effect on those who heard it. Part of the evidence for this is negative, in the form of the widespread opposition that Muḥammad and the qurʾānic recitations faced. Indeed, a prevailing theme of the earlier sūras especially, is the rejection of the Prophet and his recitations. The Qurʾān reports several accusations made against Muḥammad and the Qurʾān he recited and the manner in which he recited it. Of the unbeliever, the Qurʾān says: “he has been stubborn to our revelations” (Q 74:16), for humans have turned away from the Qurʾān in pride (q.v.) and said: “This is nothing other than magic from of old; this is nothing other than speech of mortal man” (Q 74:24-5). The Qurʾān specifies the kinds of accusations hurled at the Prophet by the skeptics among the Quraysh. In a variety of passages he is tauntingly called a soothsayer (*kāhin*, see SOOTHSAYERS), a poet (*shāʿir*, see POETRY AND POETS), a madman (*majnūn*, see INSANITY); his recitations are called fabrications, tales, legends, or fables — all of which could be imitated by humans (see Boullata, Rhetorical interpretation, 140). The Qurʾān itself denies that Muḥammad is a soothsayer, madman, or poet (cf. Q 52:29-31; 69:41-2). The re-

buttal by Muslim theologians and literary scholars of these accusations during the next three centuries was closely related to the development of Arabic literary theory, which took qurʾānic language as the model for the purest, most eloquent Arabic speech (see ARABIC LANGUAGE; GRAMMAR AND THE QURʾĀN; LANGUAGE OF THE QURʾĀN; LITERARY STRUCTURES OF THE QURʾĀN). The counterclaim among theologians that the Qurʾān was a unique achievement, in language that was inimitable among humans, even the most eloquent Arabs, became part of the larger framework for the discussion of *ijāz al-Qurʾān*.

Some support exists for the belief that qurʾānic speech was unique among the linguistic productions of seventh-century Arabs (see ORALITY AND WRITINGS IN ARABIA). In Ibn Ishāqʿs (d. 151/767) biography (*sīra*) of the Prophet (as edited by Ibn Hishām [d. 218/833]), al-Walīd b. al-Mughīra, a famous opponent of the Prophet, tells his fellow opponents of Muḥammad that “... his speech is sweet, his root is a palm tree whose branches are fruitful, and everything you have said [in criticism of the Prophet’s recitations] would be known to be false” (Ibn Ishāq, *Sīra*, i, 243 f.; Ibn Ishāq-Guillaume, 121; see ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *Mughnī*, xvi, 268-9). A similar story is told about ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb before his conversion to Islam (Ibn Ishāq, *Sīra*, i, 294 f.; Ibn Ishāq-Guillaume, 156). The weight of opinion among Muslim scholars in early and medieval Islam, however, was that much of the speech in the Qurʾān was like *ṣajʿ* (the rhymed prose speech pattern of the *kāhin*, see RHYMED PROSE), which was characterized by assonance at the end of the verses.

The theological claim that the Qurʾān could not be imitated was a calque on the poetic *muʿārada*, the competitive imitation or emulation of one poet or poem (usually a *qasīda*) by another poet, a cultural prac-

tice going back to pre-Islamic times (see PRE-ISLAMIC ARABIA AND THE QUR'ĀN). A related concept is the *naqā'id* (polemical, repartee poems), which were offered with a stronger sense of contest and competition (Schippers, Mu'āraḍa). Insufficient textual evidence exists to ascertain how soon Muslims or non-Muslims attempted to emulate or, more negatively, to parody the Qur'ān, although the first/seventh-century false prophet, Musaylima (see MUSAYLIMA AND PSEUDO-PROPHETS), is said to have recited verses that attempted to imitate the Qur'ān. A few lines of imitation of the Qur'ān attributed to the early 'Abbāsīd Persian convert to Islam, Ibn al-Muqaffa' (d. ca. 139/756-7) indicate that by the second/eighth century the *mu'āraḍa* was a cultural form of honoring or challenging the qur'ānic style (van Ess, Some fragments). The linguistic association of the *mu'āraḍa* with theological discourse about the inimitability of the Qur'ān is found in major theological works of the fourth/tenth century. Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ṭayyib al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013), an Ash'arī theologian, wrote a book on *iṣṣāz al-Qur'ān* in which he mentions the attempts of poets to match the famous pre-Islamic *mu'allāqa* poem of Imru' al-Qays (d. ca. 540 C.E.) at the location of 'Ukāz. In comparison to any attempt to match the eloquence and style of the Qur'ān, he argues, the poetic devices of even a figure as great as an Imru' al-Qays are "within the orbit of human possibilities and are of a type mankind can match.... The composition of the Qur'ān, however, is a thing apart and a special process, not to be equalled, free of rivals" (quoted in von Grunebaum, *Tenth-century document*, 60).

Against this background, the Challenge Verses (*āyāt al-taḥaddī*) referred to above become the cornerstone of the doctrine of *iṣṣāz al-Qur'ān*. Muḥammad challenged those who mocked the Qur'ān and who opposed him to produce speech as good as

that of the Qur'ān. In Q 52:33-4, cited earlier, a series of rhetorical counterpoints are hurled at his accusers. He answers those who accuse him of fabricating the speech of the Qur'ān (*taqawwalahu*) by challenging them to bring a discourse like it (*bi-ḥadīthin mithlihi*) if they speak truly. In Q 11:13, in response to those who accused Muḥammad of forging the Qur'ān (*iftarāhu*): "Say, then bring ten sūras like it if you are truthful." Q 10:37 addresses directly the accusation that the Qur'ān is a forgery: "This Qur'ān could not have been forged apart from God, but it is a confirmation (*taṣdīq*) of what is before it and a detailing (*tafṣīl*) of the book (q.v.), wherein there is no doubt, from the lord (q.v.) of the worlds." Thereupon follows a more taunting challenge than Q 11:13 above: "Or do they say he has forged it? Say: then produce a sūra like it, and call upon whomever you can apart from God if you speak truly" (Q 10:38). Following the theme of inviting critics of the Qur'ān even to seek help in imitating the Qur'ān, the most frequently cited verse puts the challenge as follows: "Truly, if humankind and the jinn (q.v.) assembled to produce the like of this Qur'ān they could not produce the like of it, even if some of them helped others" (Q 17:88). That no one can ever match the speech of the Qur'ān, and that there are eschatological consequences (see ESCHATOLOGY) for those who try and fail is asserted in Q 2:23-4: "If you are in doubt concerning what we sent down to our servant [Muḥammad], then produce a sūra the like of it, and call upon your witnesses apart from God, if you are truthful. And if you do not [produce one] — and you never will — then fear the hell fire (q.v.), whose fuel is humans and stones, prepared for unbelievers."

Toward the end of his life, challenges to Muḥammad's religious leadership began to appear elsewhere in Arabia, beyond

Mecca. It was the period in which, according to the *Sīra* of Ibn Ishāq, many individuals were converting to Islam and many tribes were sending delegations to pay homage to the prophet Muḥammad. As news of Muḥammad's final illness spread, many who had earlier submitted to Islam now began to apostatize (see APOSTASY) and rebel against Muḥammad's authority and the authority of his immediate successor as head of the Muslim community (*umma*), Abū Bakr. Those who rivaled Muḥammad, and even the Qur'ān, were labeled the arch-liars (*kadhhabūn*). Most notable of these were Musaylima b. Ḥabīb from the tribe of Ḥanīf, Ṭulayḥa b. Khuwaylid from the tribe of Asad, and al-Aswad b. Ka'b al-ʿAnsī. With respect to the Qur'ān and the claims made about its inimitability, Musaylima is the most interesting and the one whose claims were refuted most vehemently in the later theological literature. Margoliouth (Origin, 485) argued that Musaylima had declared himself a prophet before Muḥammad had, though others disagree with this conclusion. The dispute has some bearing on whether Musaylima in history should be regarded as an imitator of Muḥammad and the Qur'ān or as a senior rival. Whatever conclusions may be drawn on the evidence (summarized in Watt, Musaylima), Ibn Ishāq and al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) record several occasions when Musaylima sought to approach Muḥammad, and indeed one occasion when he offered to rule half of Arabia leaving the other (western) half to Muḥammad, each serving as prophets of their respective areas (Ibn Ishāq, *Sīra*, iv, 183; Ibn Ishāq-Guillaume, 649). Groups that challenged Muḥammad's authority and scripture during his lifetime were among those who apostatized and against whom Abū Bakr was forced to send Muslim militias to stabilize a *pax islamica*. A

year after the death of Muḥammad, Musaylima was killed at 'Aqrabā' by Muslim forces led by Khālīd b. al-Walīd.

The intellectual environment of the discussion of the Qur'ān in early and medieval Islam

The earliest phase of the development of the doctrine of the inimitability of the Qur'ān is also difficult to reconstruct from extant sources. Given the challenges and opposition to the Prophet and the Qur'ān by many of his contemporaries, and the lengths to which later theologians went to emphasize the extraordinary linguistic qualities of the Qur'ān as proof of Muḥammad's prophethood, it seems quite likely that disputes about the nature of the Qur'ān as a sign of the authenticity of Muḥammad's mission took place during the first two centuries after the emigration from Mecca to Medina (*hijra*, see EMIGRATION). The earliest texts or fragments thereof that refer directly to the inimitability of the Qur'ān date, however, from the third/ninth century. Before reviewing that evidence, it will be useful to look briefly at the early intellectual and cultural environment of Islamic civilization as it conquered and was changed by the lands and religious communities it subsumed, from north Africa to central Asia.

Belief in divinely inspired prophets, raised from within and *sent* to their communities, was a common denominator of belief among the Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, and other religious communities that were to come under Islamic rule in the first/seventh and second/eighth centuries. In this shared cultural and religious context, claims made about the validity of each community's scripture (see SCRIPTURE AND THE QUR'ĀN) and the prophets who brought them became the subject of persistent controversy among Muslims, Christians, Jews and others, as well as among the

sectarian groups within the Muslim community itself (see POLEMIC AND POLEMICAL LANGUAGE; DEBATE AND DISPUTATION). Numerous texts exist that record the polemics and disputes, especially between Muslims and various Christian sects, such as the Nestorians, Jacobites, and Orthodox Christians, living under Islamic rule (see e.g. Griffith, *Comparative religion*). In the latter part of the third/ninth century, ‘Alī b. Sahl Rabban al-Ṭabarī composed a defense of Muḥammad’s prophethood, *Kūtāb al-Dīn wa-l-dawla*, arguing on the basis of prophetic miracles and signs, including the Qur’ān (Martin, *Basrah Mu’tazilah*, 177 and n. 8, 9). Also surviving is the text of a contrived polemical exchange in the first half of the third/ninth century between a Muslim and a Christian, ‘Abdallāh b. Isma‘īl al-Hāshimī and ‘Abd al-Masīḥ al-Kindī, who were reportedly members of the court of the caliph al-Ma’mūn (r. 198-218/813-33). Again, the Prophet and the Qur’ān were the targets of this somewhat patronizing treatise against Islam. Neither treatise, however, has yet the sophistication of the language of the *kalām* texts on *i’jāz al-Qur’ān* that have survived from the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries. More directly evident in theological writing in defense of *i’jāz al-Qur’ān* are those challenges that came from Muslim intellectuals themselves. Such critics were accused of *ilhād*, “atheism.” The most frequently cited atheist (*mulḥid*) in the *kalām* literature on the Qur’ān was Ibn al-Rāwandī (d. ca. 298/910-1), a philosophical theologian (*mutakallim*) who debated and wrote against many of those Sunnī theologians of the late third/ninth century who had written in defense of *i’jāz al-Qur’ān* (cf. Kraus/Vajda, *Ibn al-Rāwandī*).

Another important context for the doctrine of the inimitable Qur’ān was the interest of Muslim scholars, beginning in the

late second/eighth century, in literary criticism as it related to the style and linguistic qualities of the Qur’ān. A contemporary scholar of this genre also concludes that these early works of literary criticism “did not yet amount to a theory of the inimitability of the Qur’ān” (van Gelder, *Beyond the line*, 5). Among the better known and most influential works of this genre are *Ma‘ānī l-Qur’ān* by al-Farrā’ (d. 207/822), *Majāz al-Qur’ān* by Abū ‘Ubayda (d. 209/824), and *Ta’wīl mushkil al-Qur’ān* by Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889). Still another matter that has some bearing on the growing theological and literary discourse about the inimitable Qur’ān was the sharp dispute over the createdness of the Qur’ān. The *Mu’tazilīs* (q.v.), though not the first, were strong defenders of the view that the Qur’ān, like all that was not God, was created by God in space and time. The theological dispute over this doctrine of *khalq al-Qur’ān* intensified in 218/833 when the caliph al-Ma’mūn ordered an inquisition (q.v.; *miḥna*) against any judge or court witness who failed to proclaim his adherence to the doctrine of the created Qur’ān. Ḥanbalī traditionalists and later the Ash‘arī theologians opposed the *Mu’tazilī* doctrine; over the next century after al-Ma’mūn they established the Sunnī dogma of the eternity of the Qur’ān. That the dispute over *khalq al-Qur’ān* is linked to the claim that the Qur’ān was inimitable is a problem in the history of Islamic thought of considerable interest (see Bouman, *Le conflit*; Larkin, *Inimitability*). The third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries, then, were a time of intense theological speculation and disputation about the Qur’ān among Muslim schools of thought (*madhāhib*, sing. *madhhab*) and between Muslims and non-Muslim confessional communities. It was in this period that the theological problem of how to establish the

evidences of Muḥammad's prophethood (*tathbūt dalā'il al-nubuwwa*) and how to establish the Qur'ān as the primary evidence of Muḥammad's prophethood developed their chief lines of argument.

Classical theories of i'jāz al-Qur'ān

In his long, sometimes rambling, discussion of the miracles that established Muḥammad's prophethood, the Mu'tazilī theologian (al-Qāḍī) 'Abd al-Jabbār b. Aḥmad (d. 414/1025) mentions third/ninth century *mutakallimūn* who wrote on the miracles that established the validity of Muḥammad's prophethood. From this and other sources it becomes clear that by the late third/ninth century, a new genre of literature on establishing the evidences of prophethood (*tathbūt dalā'il al-nubuwwa*) had become popular among the *mutakallimūn* and other religious scholars. Abū l-Hudhayl (d. 227/841-2) is the earliest *mutakallim* named ('Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbūt*, ii, 511). It is not yet possible to confirm on the basis of extant texts, though one may suspect, that Abū l-Hudhayl held that the Qur'ān was inimitable. His pupil and contemporary, Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. Sayyār al-Nazzām (d. ca. 230/845) propounded a theory that the Qur'ān *per se* was not inimitable; rather, it lay within the linguistic abilities of ordinary humans and speakers of Arabic to produce speech like that of the Qur'ān. According to Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Khayyāt (d. ca. 300/913), al-Nazzām argued that the Qur'ān was a proof (*ḥujja*) of Muḥammad's prophethood on the basis of its several passages that reported on things unseen or in the future (see HIDDEN AND THE HIDDEN). Al-Khayyāt says that al-Nazzām held the view that the linguistic qualities of the Qur'ān were not superior to ordinary human speaking abilities "in spite of Allāh's saying (*ma'a qawl Allāh*): Truly, if humankind and the jinn assembled to

produce the like of this Qur'ān they could not produce the like of it, even if some of them helped others (Khayyāt, *Inliṣār*, 28; trans., 25; see Ash'arī, *Maqālāt*, 225/7-13).

This argument required al-Nazzām to come to terms with this and the other Challenge Verses discussed above. In a later Mu'tazilī work that belongs to the theological commentary tradition of the Baṣran school of the Mu'tazila (probably late fifth/eleventh century), the following account is given of al-Nazzām's view: "Know that al-Nazzām took the position that the Qur'ān is a miracle only with respect to *ṣarfa*. The meaning of *ṣarfa* is that the Arabs were able to utter speech like that of the Qur'ān with respect to linguistic purity and eloquence (*al-faṣāḥa wa-l-balāgha*) until the Prophet was sent. When the Prophet was sent, this [characteristic] eloquence was taken away from them and they were deprived of their knowledge of it, and thus they unable to produce speech like the Qur'ān.... Subsequent writers came along and supported this school of thought, and they raised many specious arguments for it" (Br. Mus. Oriental 8613, fol. 17b [bot]-18a; see RHETORIC OF THE QUR'ĀN). The theory of *ṣarfa* was rejected by al-Nazzām's one-time student at Baṣra, 'Amr b. Bar al-Jāhiz (d. 255/865). Half a century later, Abū Hāshim (d. 321-933), also of the Baṣran school of the Mu'tazila, and his followers during the next century, known as the Bahshamiyya, opposed the doctrine of *ṣarfa*, as well as did Abū Hāshim's contemporary and founder of the Ash'arite school of *kalām*, Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī, and the majority of Sunnī Muslims in the centuries to come. Nonetheless, the theory of *ṣarfa* found some acceptance in the fourth/tenth century among some of the *mutakallimūn* of the Baghdad branch of the Mu'tazila and the Imāmī Shī'a (Martin, *Basrah Mu'tazilah*, 181). A lengthy