

Clarity, Communication, and Understandability:  
Theorizing Language in al-Bāqillānī's *I'jāz al-Qur'ān* and *Uṣūl al-Fiqh* Texts

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## Abstract

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Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 403 AH/1013 CE) is known as a preeminent theorist of both the Ash'arī school of Islamic theology and the Mālikī school of law, and his writings span a wide range of disciplines. This dissertation brings together his thought in two apparently disparate discourses, *uṣūl al-fiqh* (jurisprudence) and *i'jāz al-Qur'ān* (inimitability of the Qur'ān), to highlight how these discourses are actually in dialogue with each other. It explores the centrality of al-Bāqillānī's theory of language in his thought and devotes particular attention to his understanding of the role of figurative language.

In his jurisprudential work *al-Taqrīb wa-l-irshād fī uṣūl al-fiqh* (*Proximity and Guidance on the Roots of Law*), al-Bāqillānī redefines keywords in Islamic discourse in ways that support his vision of Qur'ānic and human language use. He emphasizes the argument that all language, even figurative language, is systematically understandable according to rules, thereby establishing a consistent basis for legal and theological interpretation.

Al-Bāqillānī's text on the literary inimitability of the Qur'ān provides another, consistent aspect of his theory of language. His *Kitāb I'jāz al-Qur'ān* (*Book of the Inimitability of the Qur'ān*) sheds light on al-Bāqillānī's theory of the relationship between aesthetics and meaning. He distinguishes between rhetorical features that are deeply connected with expressing ideas, which contribute to the Qur'ān's rhetorical inimitability, and ornamental figures, which do not.

In both texts, al-Bāqillānī explains the meanings of contested terms (including *muḥkam*, *mutashābih*, and *bayān*) in consistent ways that support his own arguments. The understandability and clarity of utterances, and particularly the Qur'ān, emerge as a central concern of al-Bāqillānī's thought. He establishes the expressive clarity of the Qur'ān as both a sign of its inimitability and a verification of its understandability, thereby setting the practice of exegesis on a stable theoretical footing. In this way, al-Bāqillānī proposes a resolution to the tension between views of the Qur'ān as rhetorical miracle and the Qur'ān as a reliably interpretable basis for Islamic doctrine and law.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

### Introduction

This dissertation explores the intellectual contribution of Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013), a preeminent scholar who was an influential participant in a diverse range of Islamic discourses.<sup>1</sup> Famous for his wide-reaching impact on the Ash‘arī school of theology and the Mālikī school of law, al-Bāqillānī authored a body of work that has proved difficult for scholars to conceptualize as a whole due not only to its participation in diverse specialized disciplines, but also to the circuitous arrangement of his texts. Extant studies contextualize and analyze aspects of specific genres of al-Bāqillānī’s writing without bringing into view his broader scholarly identity and contribution. This study provides a corrective to previous atomistic studies of his texts, focusing on his extant writings in *uṣūl al-fiqh* (jurisprudence) and *i’jāz al-Qur’ān* (inimitability of the Qur’ān). It brings together al-Bāqillānī’s writings in two seemingly disparate fields, highlighting important areas of overlap and intersection. It analyzes his theory of language, a central topic in al-Bāqillānī’s thought, devoting particular attention to his understanding of the roles of rhetoric and figurative language.

Classical Islamic jurisprudence and theories of Qur’ānic inimitability were both occupied with the workings of language. In legal theory, the concern with linguistic communication was a focal point in theorizing the correct ways of interpreting Qur’ānic verses and humans’ utterances in order to determine their legal force. In his jurisprudential work entitled *al-Taqrīb wa-l-irshād fī uṣūl al-fiqh* (*Proximity and Guidance on the Roots of Law*), one of the earliest extant treatises of Islamic legal theory, al-Bāqillānī interprets and redefines hotly debated elements of the Qur’ānic lexicon and Islamic discourse, such as *muḥkam*, *mutashābih*, and the so-called Mysterious Letters (*al-ḥurūf al-manẓūma*) in ways that support his vision of Qur’ānic and human language use. He develops a multifaceted argument, over the course of his extant treatise of legal theory, that all language, even figurative language, is systematically comprehensible according to rules. He emphasizes the communicativity of language and the understandability of the Qur’ān.

Al-Bāqillānī also authored a foundational treatise on the literary inimitability of the Qur’ān. Al-Bāqillānī’s text in this discipline constitutes a noteworthy contribution in the history of *badī‘* (roughly translatable as ‘rhetorical figures’ in this context), the most prominent literary critical debate of his time. An examination of his treatment of *badī‘* helps situate al-Bāqillānī in literary critical studies and explore his signature determination of those rhetorical features that are deeply connected with expressing meaning (*ma‘nā*), such as metaphor (*isti‘āra*). A comprehensive investigation of this treatise elucidates al-Bāqillānī’s theory of linguistic communication, which is distinguished from the thought of other literary scholars and *i’jāz* writers in that it conceives of the aesthetic dimensions of language as being in the service of conveying ideas. Thus, this study of al-Bāqillānī’s work highlights his emphasis on meaning, which predates the more recognized and finely articulated theories of later proponents of *ma‘nā* like ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d. 471/1078 or 474/1081) and Yūsuf ibn Abī Bakr al-Sakkākī d. (626/1229).

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<sup>1</sup> Dates will henceforth be listed in the following format: AH (After the Hijra)/CE (Common Era).

Bringing together al-Bāqillānī's thought in these two different genres sheds light on his theory of language and its importance within his oeuvre. It provides a more complete picture of the identity of a scholar who was concerned with providing a consistent and multifaceted theory of language. The understandability and clarity of utterances, and particularly the Qur'ān, emerge as the central concern of his thought across the genres that this study investigates. In this way, al-Bāqillānī establishes the expressive clarity of the Qur'ān as inimitable and, at the same time, as verification of its understandability, which sets the practice of exegesis on stable theoretical footing. This idea is a proposed resolution to the tension between views of the Qur'ān as inimitable miracle and the Qur'ān as a reliably interpretable basis for Islamic thought.

On a larger level, this dissertation contributes to scholarly understanding of the ways in which the concept of *majāz* (figurative language) developed. It brings together theoretical views on metaphor and simile with discipline-specific problematics in *i'jāz al-Qur'ān* and *uṣūl al-fiqh* to complicate and enrich knowledge of how scholars in these fields understood Qur'ānic and human-authored language. It highlights the ways in which theories of divine and human language use have immediate implications for the understandability and interpretability of all texts. This interdisciplinary analysis has implications for fields as diverse as metaphor theory, philosophy of language, literary criticism, legal theory, and hermeneutics.

The movement toward systematization in both jurisprudence and Qur'ānic inimitability during al-Bāqillānī's lifetime reflects the larger ethos of this period and its concern with conceptualizing and defending Arabo-Islamic heritage and ideology.<sup>2</sup> One contentious focal point of theological and related discussions was the identification and interpretation of figurative language in the Qur'ān, due to the theological implications of such interpretations, especially in connection with debates about anthropomorphism of the Divine. Al-Bāqillānī's treatise entitled *Kitāb I'jāz al-Qur'ān* assimilates his predecessors' knowledge and documents al-Bāqillānī's own theological contribution to the field, with lengthy discussions of figurative language and its forms. Scholarly efforts to account for the effects of different intellectual fields and currents of thought on rhetorical theories that were developed during the late 3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> century and the 4<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> century have demonstrated the fruitfulness of such approaches. It has become clear that concerns central to the intellectual milieu crosscut disciplinary boundaries in interesting ways, and that there was an especially close connection between linguistic and theological endeavors.<sup>3</sup> Understanding these dynamics in turn broadens scholarly understanding of each discipline.

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<sup>2</sup> See Ahmed El Shamsy, *The Canonization of Islamic Law: A Social and Intellectual History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Scott C. Lucas, *Constructive Critics, Ḥadīth Literature, and the Articulation of Sunnī Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 2-9.

<sup>3</sup> Wolfhart Heinrichs has described the dynamics between the study of linguistic expression and other Islamic endeavors. Margaret Larkin has demonstrated the theological underpinnings of 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī's work on Qur'ānic inimitability and figurative language, while Alexander Key's study on al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī (d. 502/1108) has examined the relationship between a theory of language and its ambiguities and diverse fields including exegesis, poetry, and theology. Wolfhart Heinrichs, "On the Genesis of the *Ḥaqīqa-Majāz* Dichotomy," *Studia Islamica* 59 (1984), 111-140 and *The Hand of the Northwind: Opinions on Metaphor and the Early Meaning of Isti'āra in Arabic Poetics* (Mainz: Deutsche Morgenländische Ges., 1977). Margaret Larkin, *The Theology of Meaning: 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī's Theory of Discourse* (New Haven, Conn.: American Oriental Society, 1995). Alexander Key, "A Linguistic



This introductory chapter begins with an overview of how early writings in *majāz al-Qur'ān* genre theorized Qur'ānic language and figurative speech, in order to situate al-Bāqillānī and this study. I draw attention to the relationship between the two discourses at the center of this study, namely *i'jāz al-Qur'ān* and *uṣūl al-fiqh*. Next, I provide some interpretive frameworks that serve as reference points in my thought, with special attention to issues of translation, semantic keywords, and figuration and metaphor. I then introduce the figure who is at the focus of my study, Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī, providing a short biography based on available sources about his life and discussing his identity as an Ash'arī *mutakallim*, a Mālikī jurist, and a defender of the Sunnī creed. This biography is followed by a list of the works al-Bāqillānī wrote that are known to be extant. These discussions lay the groundwork for the chapters that follow.

Chapter Two investigates al-Bāqillānī's theory of language in his writings on legal theory, as represented in his text *Kitāb al-Taqrīb wa-l-irshād*. He focuses on language for a large portion of the text, and over the course of many sections it becomes evident that he is asserting a theory of language according to which all of the Qur'ān is accessible to humans and thus entirely interpretable. This is an early example of a lasting characteristic of *uṣūl* works. Al-Bāqillānī does not just claim that all of the Qur'ān is clear; he maintains that *all* language production is clear, as long as its author is of sound enough mind and body to communicate effectively. All language, whether Qur'ānic or not, works the same way and follows the same rules. Because the Qur'ān and all other utterances intend and mean in the same way, the same system of interpretation applies to both: the same grammatical rules apply, the vocabulary is consistent, and notions like figurative language function in the same way. Thus, Qur'ānic and non-Qur'ānic language are consistent with each other. Qur'ānic utterances use this language in excellent and striking ways in order to communicate divine ideas that represent a break from pre-Islamic beliefs. The Qur'ān communicates these new ideas in language the audience could understand because it possessed the relevant linguistic knowledge. According to the conception of language that underlies this account of Qur'ānic communication, language is a stable, reliable system that was a trustworthy means of knowing the intentions of God and other people. In this way, I argue, al-Bāqillānī constructs a firm theoretical grounding for the understanding of the Qur'ān and hence its use as a basis for Islamic law and life. He also obliquely limits legitimate interpretation to that which is anchored in the known uses of language, thereby excluding modes of exegesis that do not confine themselves in this way, such as the *ta'wīl* (allegorical interpretation) that came to be associated with the Sufis.

Chapter Three focuses specifically on the facets of the *Taqrīb* that deal with literal and figurative language use. Al-Bāqillānī uses his discussions of what constitutes figurative language and its legitimate interpretation as a location for the assertion and defense of utterances' systematic interpretability. Figurative language includes any instances of meaning that are not in accordance with the signification of a term set down for it in language. Even in cases of figurative language where a reader might suppose there is no definitive, systematic way of determining meaning, al-Bāqillānī shows that these utterances are in fact subject to a reliable and methodical interpretive process. He presents an internally-consistent account of

various types of figurative speech including *majāz*, technical vocabulary, idioms, and *qiyās* (analogy) of a name. Chapter Three thus provides an account of al-Bāqillānī's theory of figurative language and its legitimate interpretation. I contextualize the role of al-Bāqillānī's explanations of types of figurative language in light of his larger theological project of synthesizing Islamic interpretive disciplines and demonstrating language to be a stable and reliable medium that humans can soundly understand. *Uṣūl al-fiqh* and *i'jāz al-Qur'ān* were two disparate genres that approached the analysis of utterances, particularly Qur'ānic verses, in different ways. As a scholar who aimed to articulate a consistent worldview across the breadth of his thought, al-Bāqillānī highlights issues that were of sustained importance to him in his texts in both of these disciplines. Careful comparison of his treatment of aspects of the Qur'ān and language common to both disciplines demonstrates his conception of the relationship between the goals of *uṣūl al-fiqh* and *i'jāz al-Qur'ān*.

Chapter Four introduces al-Bāqillānī's writing on the doctrine of the Qur'ān's inimitability in his *Kitāb I'jāz al-Qur'ān*. It focuses on the sections of the book that have been at the center of much of the extant scholarship on this canonical *i'jāz* text, including his discourse on *badī'* and evaluation of poetry. I respond to the extant scholarship and analyze his treatment of figurative language. I argue that as a theologian rather than a literary critic, al-Bāqillānī draws *i'jāz al-Qur'ān* discourse away from the domain of the literary by rejecting the claim that the Qur'ān's uniqueness can be captured in literary theoretical terms. In his treatise on the subject, al-Bāqillānī provides extensive literary analysis of classical Arabic poems in order to show the Qur'ān's linguistic superiority in comparison to human-authored texts. He concludes, however, that although the Qur'ān is in 'clear Arabic' understandable to humans, it has a unique quality that cannot be described in terms of human-made categories such as particular literary devices and rhetorical figures. While such categories may be able to describe in technical terms what items are found in the Qur'ān, they cannot account for the miraculous inimitability of the text.<sup>4</sup> Still, in discussing *isti'āra* and *tashbīh* (roughly, metaphor and simile respectively), al-Bāqillānī contributes to the debate about the role and meanings of figurative language in general and in scripture in particular.

Chapter Five focuses on less-studied parts of al-Bāqillānī's *Kitāb I'jāz al-Qur'ān*. While extant secondary scholarship on al-Bāqillānī has focused overwhelmingly on the famous sections of his treatise that were the subject of Chapter Four, this chapter amplifies scholarly understanding of al-Bāqillānī's contribution to the debate about the Qur'ān's uniqueness through a more comprehensive reading of his treatise. His treatment of different aspects of this issue is scattered throughout the text, rendering this broadly inclusive analysis necessary for a sound understanding of the text's central points. I demonstrate how such a reading provides insight into its author's theological goals behind engaging with the *i'jāz al-Qur'ān* discourse. Specifically, I show that an important thesis that emerges over the course of the book is the clarity of the Qur'ān. In this text, I argue, al-Bāqillānī presents a view of language that is consistent with his thesis of clarity and understandability presented in the *Taqrīb*. He reinterprets contentious Qur'ānic terms to depict the linguistic form of the whole Qur'ān as clear and understandable to humans. Al-Bāqillānī constructs a semantic field of key terms that

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<sup>4</sup> In calling the Qur'ān a text, and in occasionally referring to it as scripture, I do not mean to suggest it is essentially, or primarily, in written form.

describe the Qur'ān as being a clear and communicative guide to its human audience. A comprehensive reading of *Kitāb I'jāz al-Qur'ān* shows that al-Bāqillānī ties the idea of Qur'ānic clarity strongly to the idea of inimitability. Inimitability, for him, is not simply an aesthetic phenomenon, but rather a function of clear expression of meaning. It is precisely the Qur'ān's clear expression of complex ideas that renders its language miraculous and constitutes the focus of Qur'ānic inimitability.

In my concluding chapter, I sum up the results of my analysis, stating what I see to be al-Bāqillānī's larger point about Qur'ānic and linguistic clarity in his various writings on the Qur'ān. Al-Bāqillānī's theory contains a unique solution to the tension between the Qur'ān as miracle and the Qur'ān as the locus of Islamic interpretive activity. This solution privileges Qur'ānic language in terms of extent of clarity, yet still maintains that Qur'ānic language is made up of the same components as human language and is thus comprehensible to humans. All language is clear, but the Qur'ān is distinguished by its clear, rhetorically exceptional expression of original, excellent ideas. It communicates ideas in perfectly suited expressions, whereas ordinary human-authored language falters, expressing ideas excellently at times, but not consistently. Al-Bāqillānī does not tie together form and meaning in the way that al-Jurjānī later does, but al-Bāqillānī's work is a precursor to that later development. Even though the centrality of linguistic clarity is never announced as a thesis in any of al-Bāqillānī's writings or anticipated by these texts' genres, it becomes clear over the course of comprehensive readings of his work, as my previous chapters have shown. I discuss some of the main implications of this thesis of linguistic clarity within the larger context of the intellectual milieu in which al-Bāqillānī was writing. Al-Bāqillānī's ideas on this front locate meaning in the mind of the author, in accordance with the normative medieval Arabo-Islamic view of how language worked. According to this theory, there are correct and incorrect interpretations of an utterance, depending on whether the interpretation is aligned with the speaker's intention. If an utterance in a text seems unclear, that shortcoming belongs to the interpreter. Al-Bāqillānī emphasizes that the whole Qur'ān is available to human interpreters, despite the risk of divergent interpretations it allows. When an utterance is not clear on its own, other evidence in the form of texts or context must be brought to bear on it. Through this process, the meaning of the utterance (whether God's or people's) becomes clear.

## Language in the Medieval Arabo-Islamic World

Medieval Arabo-Islamic scholarship was occupied with the workings of language and its literary aspects. This meta-linguistic focus underlies the discourses that were dominant in this milieu, and it was part and parcel of central scholarly debates. Ways of theorizing figurative language are thus key to understanding the heritage of Islamic intellectual thought, and attention to it sheds light on influential theological debates and discourses. The question of how the scholars of the early and classical eras of Islam understood language to work has far-reaching implications for how readers approach these scholars' thought and understand the values of various currents of thought in Islam's formative eras. How can an interpreter differentiate between literal and figurative language—if a definitive separation can even be drawn—and what legal implications does this distinction have? Can an utterance have multiple meanings at one time? Are answers to such questions consistent across different disciplines

and schools of thought? In what ways do particular understandings of how language works contribute to the ideologies and modes of thought of formative Islamic thinkers? The far-reaching implications of these questions and their answers affirm the centrality of the issue of language, its understandability, and its reliability to the formation of the textual tradition. In al-Bāqillānī's work, one of the stakes of pinning down the ways in which language communicates is revealing the degree to which textual interpretation really is subjective. The answer to this question affects the basis of the entire interpretive tradition.<sup>5</sup>

Scholarship in recent decades has shed light on the issue of medieval Islamic approaches to language, but more work remains to be done in order to arrive at a fuller picture of what implicit and explicit theories of language were present and prevalent, and to determine how consistent these theories were across different disciplines. In the field of *balāgha*, Wolfhart Heinrichs' landmark study of how the term *isti'āra* developed, entitled *The Hand of the Northwind: Opinions on Metaphor and the Early Meaning of Isti'āra in Arabic Poetics*, was a major step in this field.<sup>6</sup> Heinrichs notes in his conclusion that his study is a preliminary investigation, and suggests that further work needs to be done to advance the understanding of this "still relatively unexplored area of Arabic thought."<sup>7</sup> He outlines four directions this research could take: an analysis and classification of quotations in literary theoretical texts that use the term *isti'āra*; a similar project examining related terms that refer to figurative language; an investigation of how the term *majāz* functions in Qur'ānic hermeneutics and particularly *uṣūl al-fiqh*; and a study on the interplay of poetic production and literary theory regarding metaphor.<sup>8</sup>

This dissertation takes up the third of these items in a modified form. It investigates how language, particularly figurative language, was understood to function in the fields of *i'jāz al-Qur'ān* and *uṣūl al-fiqh* for an influential scholar of the 4<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> century. As such, it explores a different facet of the ways that theories of figurative language developed. At relevant junctures, I make reference to the means by which other medieval Muslim scholars in both fields theorized language, both in order to contextualize al-Bāqillānī's views and to provide a fuller picture of the spectrum of views at that point in Islamic history. When Heinrichs suggested looking at Qur'ānic hermeneutics as a way of better understanding the process by which the usage of the term *isti'āra* developed, he did so in light of his own investigation in *The Hand of the Northwind* which includes insights on different meanings the term had in early *balāgha* and *tafsīr* (exegesis) and the crossover between the two discourses, a process that led to a merging of the usages. One question this dissertation aims to answer is whether this crossover also applied to other disciplines such as *uṣūl al-fiqh*, and whether terms describing figurative language, such as *majāz*, were used in much the same way across the fields of *i'jāz al-Qur'ān* and *uṣūl al-fiqh*. It is hoped that this study will contribute to greater scholarly understanding of this history by examining one scholar's work in these two fields at a key juncture in Islamic history.

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<sup>5</sup> Alexander Key undertakes a fascinating exploration of the thought of the scholar al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī on some of the same issues in his dissertation. Key, "Linguistic Frame of Mind."

<sup>6</sup> Heinrichs, *Hand of the Northwind*.

<sup>7</sup> Heinrichs, *Hand of the Northwind*, 53.

<sup>8</sup> Heinrichs, *Hand of the Northwind*, 53.

Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn al-Tayyib al-Bāqillānī is an ideal focal point for such a study. He was considered the most prominent Ash'arī theologian of his day and studied under the students of al-Ash'arī himself. He was also a famous Mālikī jurist and legal theorist. Because he authored books in both *uṣūl al-fiqh* and *i'jāz al-Qur'ān* (among numerous other fields), he offers a comparative case study of the ways the same thinker approached and theorized language in two fields.<sup>9</sup> If the comparison of legal and rhetorical discourse were to center on different authors, it would be difficult to tell whether significant divergences in terminology and theory of language were due to generic or disciplinary differences, or rather to other factors such as theological or legal school affiliation, regional ethos, chronological developments, personal background, and individual taste. A study of al-Bāqillānī's thought in two important realms, with reference to other texts in his oeuvre, will also contribute to the scholarly record of al-Bāqillānī's thought and scholarly identity. As later chapters show, some themes in al-Bāqillānī's work become prominent and distinct through attention to topics that reemerge in different forms across genres. The nature of language and its interpretability is the theme on which this dissertation focuses the most attention, but it also discovers a cohesive scholarly identity and vision that al-Bāqillānī maintained in the various theological discourses in which he engaged. Further characterization of al-Bāqillānī's larger mission as a thinker is a promising direction for future study.

### Al-Bāqillānī's Biography

His full name was Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ṭayyib b. Muḥammad b. Ja'far b. al-Qāsim al-Bāqillānī, according to the majority of scholars, and his *kunya* (patronymic) may have been a reference to his father being a merchant of fava beans or a type of greens (*bāqillā'*), or to a story where he is offered this food by a peer after the conclusion of a discussion.<sup>10</sup> It is believed that al-Bāqillānī came from a family of humble origins, but aside from this, little is known of his childhood. He is thought to have been born in Baṣra around 338/950, but to have lived in Karkh, the western section of Baghdad that was considered to be a Shi'ite quarter, while undertaking his education, after which he returned to Baṣra. During al-Bāqillānī's adult life, the Sunni Abbasid Caliphate was in decline, and the Shi'ite Buyid rulers were the real power.<sup>11</sup> He is often referred to as the Qāḍī Abū Bakr or the Qāḍī Ibn al-Bāqillānī, a reference to the prominence of his status as a judge. Bio-bibliographical works testify to his renown and respected stature by his contemporaries and successive generations. They mention that he was considered the greatest shaykh of his time, master of a large circle of students, and trusted adjudicator of conflicts between arguing scholars.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Other topics on which al-Bāqillānī authored books include theology, miracles, political and religious leadership, intra- and interreligious polemic, divine attributes and characteristics, free will, physical theories, and morals and virtues. See Yusuf Ibish, "Life and Works of al-Bāqillānī," *Islamic Studies* 4, no. 3 (September 1965): 226-29.

<sup>10</sup> Ibish, "Life and Works," 225-26. See also Fuat Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums, Band I: Qur'ānwissenschaften, Ḥadīth, Geschichte, Fiqh, Dogmatik, Mystik. Bis ca. 430 H* (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 608-11; [Qāḍī] 'Iyād b. Mūsā, *Tartīb al-madārik wa-taqrīb al-masālik li-ma'arifāt a'ālām madhhab Mālik*, vol. 3, ed. Aḥmad Bakīr Maḥmūd (Beirut: Dār Maktabat al-Ḥayāt, n.d.), 589.

<sup>11</sup> Ibish, "Life and Works," 609.

<sup>12</sup> 'Iyād, *Tartīb*, 585-86.

Sources indicate that he studied *ḥadīth* under the Baghdadi scholars Abū Bakr b. Mālik al-Qaṭī'ī, Abū Muḥammad ibn Māsī, and Abū Aḥmād al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī al-Nīsābūrī. While in Baghdad, he also studied debate under 'Abū 'Abd Allāh b. Mujaḥid al-Ṭā'ī (a friend and proponent of al-Ash'arī) and Abū al-al-Ḥasan al-Bāhili. In al-Bāhili's circle, al-Bāqillānī studied alongside Abū Ishāq al-Isfarāyīnī and Ibn Fūrak. He studied jurisprudence under the Mālikī jurist Abū Muḥammad al-Abharī, with whom he also sustained a long friendship, and Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Khafīf al-Shirāzī, who was one of al-Ash'arī's most distinguished students. He studied rhetoric and literary criticism under the poet and *adab*-expert Abū Aḥmad al-Ḥasan b. 'Abd Allāh al-Askarī (d. 395/1005)<sup>13</sup>. He studied law under the distinguished Mālikī imam of his time, Abū Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh b. Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī al-Mālikī, who was nicknamed 'the small Mālik' because he was so known for his exegesis of Mālik's sayings and consolidation of the Mālikī *madhhab* (school of jurisprudence).<sup>14</sup>

Al-Bāqillānī was later summoned by the Buwayhid ruler 'Aḍud al-Dawla, at whose court al-Bāqillānī served for some time, a testament to his wide renown. During this period, al-Bāqillānī taught the son of 'Aḍud al-Dawla, Ṣamṣām al-Dawla, an appointment that purportedly occasioned his writing the *Tamhīd* in order to teach his student the Ash'arī creed.<sup>15</sup> This treatise is said to have convinced 'Aḍud al-Dawla that the Ash'arī way was correct rather than the Mu'tazilī creed. Such was the ruler's pleasure with al-Bāqillānī that he sent the scholar as the head of a delegation to the king of Byzantium. After his time at 'Aḍud al-Dawla's court, al-Bāqillānī traveled around the lands east of Baghdad. He served as a judge and taught at mosques along his travels in cities including Basra, Baghdad, Shiraz, and Rayy. He had an extensive circle of students, many of whom went on to be influential scholars in their own right.<sup>16</sup> Al-Bāqillānī is considered to be one of the three principal 'builders' of Ash'arism, along

<sup>13</sup> Abū Hilāl al-Ḥasan b. 'Abdallāh al-'Askarī (d. 400/1010) was the author of *Kitāb al-ṣinā'atayn* [Book of the two crafts] (referring to poetry and prose). He was a lexicographer and *adīb*, and he wrote manuals for educated Buyid Persians to master Arabic literary culture. In *Kitāb al-ṣinā'atayn*, he expanded Ibn al-Mu'tazz's list of *badī'* to 29 figures; "his merit is that of assembling the accepted rules and principles of literary criticism in a more coherent, detailed, and comprehensive way than ever before." Beatrice Gruendler, "al-'Askarī, Abū Hilāl," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., ed. Kate Fleet et al. Brill Online, 2015. [http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/al-askari-abu-hilal-SIM\\_0230](http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/al-askari-abu-hilal-SIM_0230).

<sup>14</sup> The Mālikī school, one of the four enduring Sunnī schools of jurisprudence, had its basis in the practices of the inhabitants of Medina. Its founder, Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/795), authored *Kitāb al-Muwatta'*, which established 'amal (the *sunna* or practices of Medina) as a basis of law, reflecting the consensus of the time on the practices of Medina. The *aḥādīth* (prophetic reports) in it are limited to those transmitted by Medinans and those who frequented Mecca and Medina, and it excludes the traditions of 'Alī, a characteristic that differentiates it from the other Sunnī *madhāhib*. During Mālik's lifetime, its following spread as far as North Africa (where it is still dominant), Spain, Egypt, and Iraq. Mālik was hostile toward schismatics, including the Qadariyya and the Khārijites, an attitude reflected in al-Bāqillānī's work. N. Cottart, "Mālikiyya," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. P. Bearman et al. Brill Online, 2015. [http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/malikiyya-COM\\_0652](http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/malikiyya-COM_0652).

<sup>15</sup> Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī, *Tamhīd al-awā'il wa-talkhīṣ al-dalā'il*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad al-Khuḍayrī and Muḥammad 'Abd al-Hādī Maḥmūd Abū Rīda ([Cairo]: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, [1989?]).

<sup>16</sup> Among his most famous students were the following: Abū Dharr al-Harawī, al-Qāḍī Abū Mūhammad 'Abd al-Wahhāb b. Naṣr al-Baghdādī al-Mālikī, Abū 'Umrān al-Ghafjūmī, Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī b. 'Isā al-Sakarī, al-Qāḍī Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Aḥmād al-Simnānī al-Ḥanafī al-Ash'arī, Abū Ṭāhir Muḥammad b. 'Alī ibn al-Anbārī, 'Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Muhammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ḥarīrī al-Mālikī, Abū 'Abd Allāh Ḥusayn b. Ḥātim al-Azdī, Qāḍī Abū

with Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan ibn Furāq (d. 406/1015) and Abū Ishāq al-Isfarāyīnī (d. 418/1027), his peers and one-time companions in Baghdad's scholarly circles.<sup>17</sup> He died on the twenty-first of Dhū al-Qa'da in 403/1013, according to Qāḍī 'Iyād, who discounts conflicting reports regarding the date of his death.<sup>18</sup>

## Al-Bāqillānī's Works

No single listing of al-Bāqillānī's scholarly works is comprehensive, and in recent decades, books previously thought to be lost have been discovered. Moreover, in some cases there is some confusion regarding whether multiple titles were attributed to a single book. The incremental discovery of al-Bāqillānī's texts has allowed for further insight into his thought and also requires the continual revisiting of each text in light of newly discovered ones. Abdul Aleem wrote in 1933 that his book on *i'jāz al-Qur'ān* was his only preserved work.<sup>19</sup> As recently as 1952, Philip Hitti wrote that al-Bāqillānī only had two extant works.<sup>20</sup> In 1959, Johan Bouman only had access to three of al-Bāqillānī's works and believed them to be the only ones extant: *Kitāb I'jāz al-Qur'ān*, *al-Tamhīd*, and *al-Inṣāf*.<sup>21</sup> Following the discovery of manuscripts, his works have been edited and published, allowing for more insight into al-Bāqillānī's thought than previous generations of scholars have had. Qāḍī 'Iyād and Yusuf Ibish provide lists of al-Bāqillānī's work (including non-extant texts) which were in turn compiled from earlier bio-bibliographical sources.<sup>22</sup> Al-Bāqillānī authored dozens of texts not known to be extant but which are widely attested in other medieval authors' writings; the ones listed here are proven to be extant today:

1. *Hidāyat al-mustarshidīn* [Guide for Those Seeking the Right Way],<sup>23</sup> a comprehensive multi-volume work covering diverse theological matters;
2. *Kitāb I'jāz al-Qur'ān* [Book on the Inimitability of the Qur'ān],<sup>24</sup> an investigation of the Qur'ān's stylistic excellence, particularly in comparison to poetry;

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Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad ibn al-Labbān al-Iṣbahānī, Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī al-Nīsābūrī, Abū Muḥammad 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Naṣr, Abū Ḥātim Maḥmūd b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabarī al-Qazwīnī, Abū 'Amr Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Sa'dī, Abū 'Alī al-Ḥasan b. Shādhān, Abū al-Qāsim 'Abd Allāh b. Aḥmad b. 'Uthmān al-Ṣirāfī, and Abū al-Faṭḥ Muḥammad b. Abī al-Fawāris al-Ḥanbalī. See Ibish, "Life and Works," 231.

<sup>17</sup> Ahmet Karamustafa, "Specialized Sufi Literature," in *Sufism: The Formative Period*, 97.

<sup>18</sup> 'Iyād, *Tartīb*, 588.

<sup>19</sup> Abdul Aleem, "'Ijazu'l-Qur'an," *Islamic Culture* 7, no. 1 (1933): 75.

<sup>20</sup> Philip K. Hitti, Review of *A Tenth-Century Document of Arabic Literary Theory and Criticism, The Sections on Poetry of al-Bāqillānī's I'jāz al-Qur'ān*, by Gustave E. von Grunebaum, *The Journal of Religion* 32, no. 2 (April 1952): 146.

<sup>21</sup> Johan Bouman, *Le Conflit autour du Qur'ān et la Solution d'al-Bāqillānī* (Amsterdam: Drukkerij en Uitgeverij Jacob van Campen, 1959), 57.

<sup>22</sup> Ibish, "Life and Works," 226-29; 'Iyād, *Tartīb*, 601-02.

<sup>23</sup> Excerpts have been found in recent years. See Daniel Gimaret, "Un extrait de la *Hidāya* d'Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī: Le *Kitāb at-Tawallud*, réfutation de la thèse mu'tazilite de la génération des actes," *Bulletin d'études orientales* 58 (2008-2009): 259-313; Sabine Schmidtke, "Early Aṣ'arite Theology: Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013) and His *Hidāyat al-mustarshidīn*," *Bulletin d'études orientales* 60 (2011): 39-71. I would like to thank Sabine Schmidtke for generously sharing photographs of some pages of a manuscript of *Hidāyat al-mustarshidīn* with me.

<sup>24</sup> Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb I'jāz al-Qur'ān*, ed. Ahmad Ṣāqir (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, n.d.).

3. *Al-Inṣāf fīmā yajib al-i'tiqād wa-lā yajūz al-jahl bihi* [The Just Treatment of What It Is Necessary to Believe and about Which One May Not Be Ignorant],<sup>25</sup>
4. *Nukat al-intiṣār li-naql al-Qur'ān* [Remarks on the Victory of the Qur'ān's Transmission],<sup>26</sup> on aspects of the Qur'ān concerning rhetoric, language, exegesis, and transmission;
5. *Al-Intiṣār li-l-Qur'ān* [Victory Belongs to the Qur'ān],<sup>27</sup> a defense of theological doctrines surrounding the Qur'ān and its proper recitation;
6. *Manāqib al-a'imma al-arba'a* [The Merits of the Four Imams],<sup>28</sup> lauding the four Rightly Guided Caliphs and defending their right to authority;
7. *Kitāb al-Bayān 'an al-farq bayna al-mu'jizāt wa-l-karamāt wa-l-ḥiyal wa-l-kahāna wa-l-ṣiḥr wa-l-nārinjāt* [Miracle and Magic: A Treatise on the Nature of the Apologetic Miracle and Its Differentiation from Charisms, Trickery, Divination, Magic and Spells];<sup>29</sup>
8. *Ikfār al-muta'awillīn* [Accusing the Interpreters of Unbelief];<sup>30</sup>
9. *Tamhīd al-awā'il wa-talkhiṣ al-dalā'il* [The Introduction of the Primary Premises and Summary of the Indicants],<sup>31</sup> which comprises the first comprehensive laying out of theological doctrine;
10. *Al-Taqrīb wa-l-irshād (al-saghīr)* [Proximity and Guidance in Organizing the Ways of Independent Legal Reasoning],<sup>32</sup> a legal theory text further discussed in Chapters Four and Five;
11. [Kitāb] *al-Uṣūl al-kabīr fī-l-fiqh* [The Large Book of Principles of Jurisprudence].<sup>33</sup>

## Al-Bāqillānī's Audiences and Socio-Political Context

The spectrum of intellectual, theological, cultural, and political forces that form a backdrop for al-Bāqillānī's thought is important context for understanding the world in which he was writing. These forces became intertwined in notable configurations in al-Bāqillānī's milieu. I provide a brief account of these influences here, but other works in al-Bāqillānī's

<sup>25</sup> Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī, *Al-Inṣāf fīmā yajib al-i'tiqād wa-lā yajūz al-jahl bihi*, ed. Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī ([Cairo]: Mu'assasat al-Khānjī, 1963).

<sup>26</sup> Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī, *Nukat al-intiṣār li-naql al-Qur'ān*, ed. Maḥmūd Zaghlūl Sallām (Alexandria: Munshā'at al-Ma'ārif, [1971?]).

<sup>27</sup> Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī, *Al-Intiṣār li-l-Qur'ān*, ed. 'Umar Ḥasan al-Qayyām, 2 vols. (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 2004); ed. Muḥammad 'Iṣām al-Qudāt, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2001). The latter edition includes a preface by the editor differentiating *Nukat al-intiṣār li-naql al-Qur'ān* from *al-Intiṣār li-l-Qur'ān*.

<sup>28</sup> Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī, *Manāqib al-a'imma al-arba'a*, ed. Samira Farahāt (N.p.: Dār al-Muntakhab al-'Arabī, 2002).

<sup>29</sup> Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Bayān 'an al-farq bayna al-mu'jizāt wa-l-karamāt wa-l-ḥiyal wa-l-kahāna wa-l-ṣiḥr wa-l-nārinjāt*, introduced by Richard Joseph McCarthy in his edition under this title: *Miracle and Magic = Kitāb al-bayān: A Treatise on the Nature of the Apologetic Miracle and its Differentiation from Charisms, Trickery, Divination, Magic and Spells* (Beirut: Librairie Orientale, 1958).

<sup>30</sup> Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī, *Ikfār al-muta'awillīn* (Cairo: Ma'had al-Makhtūṭāt al-'Arabiyya, 2006).

<sup>31</sup> Also known as *al-Tamhīd fī al-radd 'alā al-mulḥida al-mu'aṭṭila wa-l-rāfiḍa wa-l-khawārij wa-l-mu'tazila*. Bāqillānī, *Tamhīd*.

<sup>32</sup> Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī, *Al-Taqrīb wa-l-irshād (al-saghīr)*, ed. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Abū Zunayd. 3 vols. (1993, repr., Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1998). Also known as *Al-Taqrīb wa-l-irshād fī tartīb ṭuruq al-ijtihād*.

<sup>33</sup> Sections of this manuscript have reportedly been discovered at al-Azhar. Anas Zakī, "Iktishāf makhtūṭa nādira li-l-bāqillānī fī miṣr" [Discovery of a rare manuscript of al-Bāqillānī's in Egypt], *al-Jazeera Net*, 2012.

<http://www.aljazeera.net/news/cultureandart/2012/9/24/%D8%A7%D9%83%D8%AA%D8%B4%D8%A7%D9%81-%D9%85%D8%AE%D8%B7%D9%88%D8%B7%D8%A9-%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%82%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D8%A8%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%B1>



oeuvre that fall outside the scope of the present study deal with the political and other ideological struggles of al-Bāqillānī's day much more directly.<sup>34</sup>

Some influences on al-Bāqillānī's thought appear in the form of adversaries, which are named or implied in his writing. Ann Lambton has argued that al-Bāqillānī was the first to systematically defend the Imamate (Islamic leadership) against Shi'ite, Mu'tazilite, and Kharijite opponents.<sup>35</sup> Al-Bāqillānī was a member of the Sunni intellectual and religious elite operating under Shi'ite rulers whose idea of Islam was very different from his own. Baghdad under the Buyids, a Shi'ite dynasty, was a cultural and intellectual center, but it had lost its status as a political and economic power by al-Bāqillānī's time. Since the Buyid ruler Mu'izz al-Dawla had come to power in 334/946, the 'Abbasid caliphs had been relegated to their palaces outside the realm of public life.<sup>36</sup> The Buyids were tolerant in allowing intellectual, political, and religious thought to develop and flourish under their power as long as scholarly activity did not directly threaten their rule.<sup>37</sup> The period between roughly 331/945 and 446/1055 has been called the 'Shi'ite Century' because during this time Shi'ism was so dominant in the cultural centers of the Islamic world.<sup>38</sup> The 'Abbasid Caliphate was in decline and by al-Bāqillānī's time was merely a figurehead.<sup>39</sup> The Buyids respected the institution of the caliphate, not claiming religious leadership for themselves, but they did not leave *individual* 'Abbasid caliphs any real power.<sup>40</sup> "It was in Baghdad that Twelver Shi'ism became a distinct and separate sect,"<sup>41</sup> so that Iraqi Muslims in the 4<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> century grew into two hostile groups: Sunnis and Twelver Shi'ites. Karkh, the Shi'ite quarter of Baghdad where al-Bāqillānī lived for some period, was burned down twice after 361/972. It was during this time that Shi'a-Sunni strife became political, and the Turks aligned with the Sunnis. Around the time al-Bāqillānī would have been undertaking his education and starting his career, a political upheaval took place. A powerful Buyid ruler from Fars, 'Aḍud al-Dawla, took advantage of the weakness of Baghdad's ruler, Bakhtiyār, and took over Baghdad in 366/977. He consolidated rule and restored the city; he was known to have had corrupt subordinates but was very determined. He died in 372/983, starting a period of decline. His son Ṣamṣām al-Dawla succeeded him but was not a strong ruler. He died in 388/998 and left power to Bahā' al-Dawla, who inherited an organized rulership in Baghdad and Shiraz, including a reformed army and system of payments. He settled in Fars until he died in 403/1012. Meanwhile, Bedouin pressure on the government was spreading to Baghdad. From 386/996 onward, "Baghdad was very much an

<sup>34</sup> Al-Bāqillānī's *Manāqib al-a'imma al-arba'a* deals with the topic of legitimate political and religious rulership. See Yusuf Ibish, *The Political Doctrine of al-Bāqillānī* (Beirut: [American University of Beirut, Faculty of Arts and Sciences], 1966).

<sup>35</sup> Ann K.S. Lambton, "Al-Bāqillānī and al-Baghdādī," *State and Government in Medieval Islam* (Oxford University Press, 1981), 69-82.

<sup>36</sup> For a detailed exploration of allegiances and power dynamics in this milieu, see Roy Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership in an Early Islamic Society* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 72-96.

<sup>37</sup> Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership*, 17-29.

<sup>38</sup> Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, Vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 36-39.

<sup>39</sup> Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates: The Islamic Near East from the 6th to the 11th Century* (London: Longman Publishing Group, 1987), 216-217. See also Joel L. Kraemer, *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam: The Cultural Revival during the Buyid Age* (1986; repr., Leiden: Brill, 1993), 31-102.

<sup>40</sup> Kennedy, *Prophet*, 217; Farhad Daftary, *A Short History of the Ismailis: Traditions of a Muslim Community* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 63-64.

<sup>41</sup> Kennedy, *Prophet*, 226.

island of Buyid control in a countryside dominated by powerful Bedouin tribes.”<sup>42</sup> The Buyid rulership was fragmenting, and each time a ruler died, power relations with other parts of the empire shifted. The Daylamite governor Ustādh-hurmuz tried to restore the city in 392/1002, followed by his *wazīr* successor in 400/1010, who “secured a measure of peace in the city until after the death of Bahā’ al-Dawla in 403/1012.”<sup>43</sup> The next caliph drew religious and political factions together under his rule: “Al-Qādir took the opportunity to issue a decree, attacking both Fatimid ideology and the genealogy by which the Fatimids claimed descent from ‘Alī. In this way he established himself as spokesman for both Sunnis and Twelver Shi’is.”<sup>44</sup> He created a lasting role for the ‘Abbasid caliphate as a Sunni spokesman. His attack on Fatimid ideology and claims to legitimacy can be understood as a response to the Fatimids’ aggressive missionary activity in the Islamic world, particularly in the power centers of Iraq. During this time, it was a point of contention that the Ismā’īlī Fatimid Caliphate headquartered in Egypt, a competing center of power, would send *dā’īs* (missionaries) to the Abbasid Caliphate in hopes of spreading their power and brand of Shi’ism, as well as the influence of its Caliph-Imam leader.<sup>45</sup> The *dā’īs* often operated in secret, part of a well-developed and hierarchical system that strove to infiltrate non-Ismā’īlī societies and spread ideas there, with the ultimate goal of ruling over the whole *umma* (Muslim community).<sup>46</sup> This surreptitious *modus operandi* could seem all the more threatening to non-Ismā’īlī scholars and leaders than if missionizing activity had only been in the open.

How might this factor play out in theological discussion? According to Shi’ite doctrine, the Imams have knowledge of hidden meanings in the Qur’ān, so that they have exclusive authority over Qur’ānic interpretation. The Shi’ite doctrine holds that the Imams, as Muhammad’s successors, the ‘friends of God’ [*awliyā’ Allāh*], and those ‘firmly grounded in knowledge’ [*al-rāsikhūn fī-l-‘ilm*] mentioned in Q 3:7, have exclusive access to esoteric and spiritual dimensions of the Qur’ān which they keep secret.<sup>47</sup> This knowledge contributed to the Imams’ power and did not leave room for a class of religious scholars to have power over interpretation.<sup>48</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, as a member of the class of Sunni jurists and theologians, only had power within a system that allowed for experts to interpret the Qur’ān and derive law on the basis of their findings. Only on the basis of a linguistically clear Qur’ān whose meanings were available to human experts in Arabic language could jurists and theologians like al-Bāqillānī create a niche for themselves within the economy of power in the political and theological configuration of society.<sup>49</sup> Still, his opponents were not the Imams in particular but rather other theological and legal positions and those who held them.

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<sup>42</sup> Kennedy, *Prophet*, 237.

<sup>43</sup> Kennedy, *Prophet*, 237.

<sup>44</sup> Kennedy, *Prophet*, 239.

<sup>45</sup> Daftary, *Short History*, 63–65.

<sup>46</sup> Daftary, *Short History*, 90.

<sup>47</sup> Diana Steigerwald, “Twelver Shi’ī Ta’wīl,” in *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur’ān*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 375–77.

<sup>48</sup> Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds offer a similar argument about the proto-Sunni caliphate in their book *God’s Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

<sup>49</sup> Cf. George Makdisi, *Ibn ‘Aqil: Religion and Culture in Classical Islam* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997) for the emphasis by some scholars in this milieu on using reason as a means of accessing knowledge.

Another way of approaching the question of the historical context of al-Bāqillānī's writing is by thinking about whose authority al-Bāqillānī endorses and underwrites in his textual production. With regard to the topics on which this dissertation focuses, such questions might look like this: Whom does the idea of Qur'ānic clarity, and hence interpretability, benefit? Against whom is al-Bāqillānī defending the Qur'ān's understandability and interpretability when he writes about the accessibility of Qur'ānic language and meanings? Some groups of opponents al-Bāqillānī mentions directly in his writing, while others come into view upon studying the times and environment in which al-Bāqillānī lived. We can categorize these opponents as belonging to the broad categories of Mu'tazilism, Shi'ism, and non-Muslims. Al-Bāqillānī's strong refutations of these opponents may be a result of his Mālikī identity, in addition to that of the general zeitgeist of his time.

Mu'tazilite opponents are often identified by name within al-Bāqillānī's texts. Al-Bāqillānī often claims to be responding to a particular group of Mu'tazilites called the Qadariyya. Al-Bāqillānī disagreed with them on central theological and philosophical issues. For example, the Mu'tazilites (including the Qadariyya) denied the distinction of divine attributes from than divine essence. They rejected predestination (*al-qadar*) in favor of believing in free will due to their belief that God does not create evil, so it must be human free will that introduces evil into the world. The name *Qadariyya* derives from this last doctrine's concern with predestination (*al-qadar*). Al-Bāqillānī, on the contrary, expressed what became the normative Ash'arī view, maintaining the absolute transcendence of God, which included the doctrine of predestination, with God creating the capacity in people to do a given action (*istiṭā'a*), whereby humans gain (*kasb*) responsibility for the action, thus accounting for the justice of rewarding and punishing people for their actions.<sup>50</sup> Al-Bāqillānī's view on the Divine Names represents the view taken by many later Ash'arites, too. He held a 'middle position' between that of the Mu'tazilites who said any name the human's reason (*'aql*) arrives at for God is valid, and strict Ash'arites who said only names listed in the Qur'ān and trustworthy ḥadīth were valid. Al-Bāqillānī allowed names to be attributed to God "according to the rules of the language" when the text of Qur'ān or ḥadīth tells of a characteristic or action of God, but he explicitly excludes the validity of extra-scriptural names.<sup>51</sup> The Mu'tazilites and Qadariyya figure centrally in the opponents al-Bāqillānī names and refutes directly, but it is also important to see this group as a foil for al-Bāqillānī's exposition and defense of his own ideas. Maintaining an awareness of the milieu in which al-Bāqillānī was working and forming his thought can shed light on what made his thought distinctive and the contrasting forces among which he carved out his own vision of Islamic doctrine.

## Al-Bāqillānī on Miracles

A brief account of al-Bāqillānī's doctrine of miracles will provide necessary background for understanding an aspect of his thought on the Qur'ān that is linked to both his thought on *i'jāz al-Qur'ān* and on *uṣūl al-fiqh*. Much of this discussion takes place in his book *Kitāb al-Bayān*

<sup>50</sup> See Majid Fakhry, *Ethical Theories in Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 53.

<sup>51</sup> L. Gardet, "al-Asmā' al-Ḥusnā," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. P. Bearman et al. Brill Online, 2015. [http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/al-asma-al-husna-COM\\_0070](http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/al-asma-al-husna-COM_0070).

*‘an al-farq bayna al-mu‘jizāt wa-l-karamāt wa-l-ḥiyal wa-l-kahāna wa-l-siḥr wa-l-nārinjāt* (which has been published with an introduction by R. J. McCarthy under the translated title *Miracle and Magic: A Treatise on the Nature of the Apologetic Miracle and its Differentiation from Charisms, Trickery, Divination, Magic and Spells*), which is devoted to the development of a doctrine of miracles in Islam.<sup>52</sup> The generations alive during the time of the Prophet Muḥammad have a special status within Islam because, among other reasons, they could provide eye-witness accounts of events such as the Prophet’s *sunna*, or practices. Once these generations had died, autopsy, or direct knowledge of this *sunna* was unavailable. Polemical discourse arose as a venue for arguing over what constituted authentic Islam and its borders, and participants aligned themselves with predecessors based on such reports.<sup>53</sup> The Qur’ān and *ḥadīth* were the textual relics of the Prophet’s age and what had been revealed during it, and they became the locus of doctrinal development. In the ninth century, one of the facets of the polemical discourse out of which Islamic theology emerged was that of Muḥammad’s miracles and signs of the validity of his prophecy. The Qur’ānic miracle was an aspect of these debates over the proof of the validity of Muḥammad’s prophecy. The earliest texts we have that concern Qur’ānic inimitability confirm this defensive, polemical valence of *i‘jāz* discourse. “The belief in God’s self-disclosure is the bedrock and fundamental ‘presupposition’ of any ‘theological’ activity. . . [E]vidence of the truthfulness of those to whom God first delivered His message is critical to any further argument. Hence the important theme of the prophetic miracle.”<sup>54</sup> The genre of literature proving the need for prophecy and the authenticity of individual prophets, known as *ithbāt al-nubuwwa* (establishment of prophecy) or a *‘lām al-nubuwwa* (signs of prophecy), flourished in the sectarian milieu, and it was standard to include sections on this topic in *kalām* (theology) works.<sup>55</sup> A widely-quoted passage by al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/868), found in *Ḥujaj al-nubuwwa* [Proofs of Prophecy], one of the earliest extant texts in the genre,<sup>56</sup> has it that Moses and Jesus each had miracles suited to their own communities’ circumstances, and likewise, the Qur’ān is uniquely appropriate to its first audiences because they valued eloquence so highly and were thus most struck by a miracle of linguistic excellence.<sup>57</sup> But it is deceptive to quote al-Jāḥiẓ on this point without contextualizing his idea within the larger debate over indications of Muḥammad’s authentic prophethood [*dalā’il al-nubuwwa*]. Al-Jāḥiẓ, rationalist that he was, objected to *ḥadīth*-scholars’ tendency to include what he saw as spurious legends of Muḥammad’s miracles in their corpora. He (and many scholars after him) worried about the vulnerability of these *aḥādīth* (and the *sīra* based on them) to accusations of spuriousness. For al-Jāḥiẓ, prophecy was meant to revive knowledge of God’s message among people, most of whom would not directly

<sup>52</sup> McCarthy, *Miracle and Magic*.

<sup>53</sup> See, for instance, J. van Ess, “The Beginnings of Islamic Theology,” in *The Cultural Context of Medieval Learning: Proceedings of the First International Colloquium on Philosophy, Science, and Technology in the Middle Ages*, ed. J. E. Murdoch and E. D. Sylla (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1973), 87-111; Montgomery Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1973); J. van Ess, *The Flowering of Islamic Theology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

<sup>54</sup> John Renard, “Theological Schools and Principles,” *Islamic Theological Themes: A Primary Source Reader* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014), 164.

<sup>55</sup> Sarah Stroumsa, “The Signs of Prophecy: The Emergence and Early Development of a Theme in Arabic Theological Literature,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 78, no. 1/2 (January-April 1985): 101-03.

<sup>56</sup> The earlier Muslim works in this genre have been lost. Stroumsa, “Signs of Prophecy,” 106.

<sup>57</sup> Cited in Tarif Khalidi, *Images of Muhammad: The Evolution of Portrayals of the Prophet in Islam across the Centuries* (New York: Doubleday, 2009), 182.

witness miracles.<sup>58</sup> Yet other scholars focused on the relationship to previous scriptures, like Ibn Qutayba (also a proponent of miracles found in *aḥādīth*) and the Christian convert ‘Alī ibn Rabbān al-Ṭabarī (d. c. 247/861), who argued that prefigurations of Muḥammad’s prophecy could be found in the Old and New Testaments.<sup>59</sup> For ‘Abd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1024), a key Mu‘tazilite figure living in the same environment as al-Bāqillānī, Muḥammad’s life itself was the custom-breaking miracle.<sup>60</sup> However, to al-Bāqillānī and like-minded scholars, the miracle of Islam was, significantly, distinguished by its availability to all audiences, whether during Muḥammad’s lifetime or afterward. He was invested in showing the text itself to be miraculous, and not just the event or circumstances of its revelation. He had his own take on the nature and proof of Muḥammad’s prophecy, which Tarif Khalidi summarizes as follows:

1. A religious law complements and details what human reason can only know in broad and general terms.
2. No true messenger (*rasul*) can come without a religious law (*shari’ah*).
3. God sends His messengers for the best interests (*masalih*) of His creatures.
4. The laws of prophets do not conflict with human reason (*‘aql*).
5. There are two preconditions of true prophecy: rational apprehension that the prophet is sent by God and that he as a breaker of custom (*kharij ‘an al-‘ada*).<sup>61</sup>

Al-Bāqillānī emphasizes the enduring nature of the Qur’ānic miracle. The Qur’ān differs from the prophetic miracles performed by the likes of Moses and Jesus because it also has enduring content that was to become the central source of Islamic theory and practice—doctrine, law, narrative, salvation history: all stemmed from the content of the Qur’ān, at least in theory. The miraculousness of the Qur’ān was an anchoring concept in the discourse of the defense of Islam, and it is considered to be the contribution of tenth-century scholars that they established the *literary* inimitability of the Qur’ān. The category of the miraculous necessitated its own elaboration in order for it to be a theoretically-solid and integral component of Islamic doctrine. Al-Bāqillānī strives to provide this grounding, and in doing so he fleshes out his definition and explanation of miracles in a way that sheds light on his idea of literary inimitability.

Al-Bāqillānī emphasizes the significance of the minimum length of text in determining the presence of a miracle. A small amount of eloquent language does not ‘break the custom’ of language usage and constitute a miracle. Rather, the Qur’ān’s distinctiveness is evident in its maintenance of an excellent style throughout, whereas human eloquence gives way after a couple of lines. All our basic elements of language are the same (letters, words, phrases), and these have to be used miraculously in a large enough amount of text to truly establish the uniquely excellent nature of the language use. The linguistic miracle of the Qur’ān is

<sup>58</sup> Khalidi, *Images*, 179–81.

<sup>59</sup> Khalidi, *Images*, 186–87. For further information on the scope of ideological positions regarding Muḥammad’s miracles and prophethood, see this whole chapter.

<sup>60</sup> Richard Martin, Mark R. Woodward, and Dwi S. Atmaja, *Defenders of Reason: Mu‘tazilism from Medieval School to Modern Symbol* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1997), 46–89.

<sup>61</sup> Khalidi, *Images*, 204–205.

distinguished from other types of miracles because it is evident to all; rather than an event, which takes place in time and is then relegated to the past, the textual miracle remains and allows for ongoing direct examination.<sup>62</sup> In contrast, raising the dead and healing someone who is paralyzed or has leprosy relies on the accountability of people who happened to witness those events. Al-Bāqillānī points out that there are many ways for falsehood to enter into accounts of such miracles: the witness may have been under the influence of some drug, or the healing may be the result of a medication taken earlier (before the witness was present).<sup>63</sup> The linguistic miracle is not susceptible to such problems. It does not rely on the report of an eye-witness or others' testimony as other miracles do. It is also miraculous in that eloquence cannot be learned. It is a natural ability that 'exists in the soul.' It cannot be faked or mistaken.

The Mu'tazilites' conflicting ideas echo in the backdrop of *Kitāb al-Bayān*. For example, the Mu'tazilites held that if we take God's goodness and self-revelation as a postulate, we can understand the truths of Islamic doctrine by using our intellect [*'aql*]. Al-Bāqillānī sees the linguistic miracle of the Qur'ān to be a way of avoiding having to take God's self-revelation on trust. We must be able to distinguish between true revelation and false prophecies and proclamations, he says.<sup>64</sup> The linguistic nature of the Qur'ānic miracle allows us to do so by way of a characteristic inherent in the text itself because we (or at least the Arabic-speaking receivers of the Qur'ān) are already knowledgeable about the nuances of good rhetoric and eloquence. It is a recognizable sign of the Qur'ān's authenticity—its divine origins.<sup>65</sup> Al-Bāqillānī also emphasizes the legal role of the prophet's message. It is revelation and not reason that announces God's unity, the prophet's authenticity, and the content of law—contrary to the claims of the Qadariyya, a group of Mu'tazilites who were strong supporters of the doctrine of free will.<sup>66</sup>

Al-Bāqillānī's doctrine of the Qur'ānic miracle will be examined from another vantage point, that of the rhetorical inimitability, later on. Here, it suffices to note the importance of defending the Qur'ānic miracle in al-Bāqillānī's thought across multiple genres as a central component of his larger theological vision. He emphasizes that Qur'ān's receivers must already be experts in Arabic language and rhetoric in order for the recognition of the Qur'ān as true revelation to be based on its level of linguistic and rhetorical excellence. Once the Qur'ān is recognized as such, it (and not the human intellect) is the basis for knowledge about the divine. The Qur'ān's eloquence is available to every audience directly (though it is a significant point that the Qur'ān has been faithfully and accurately transmitted), so that its value as a proof and sign is enduring. The same eloquence and clarity of expression that signify the Qur'ān's divine source also serve to communicate the ideas contained in it to its human audience in the very medium to which that audience was already especially attuned. This apparatus, though it itself relies on logic, points to the priority of the Qur'ān over the human '*aql*' as the ultimate source of knowledge. Within this way of conceptualizing the Qur'ān's role and importance, its rhetorical features are not only significant in and of themselves but also

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<sup>62</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Bayān*, 31.

<sup>63</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Bayān*, 26-28.

<sup>64</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Bayān*, 37-38.

<sup>65</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Bayān*, 38.

<sup>66</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Bayān*, 38-42.

important as a means of communication and as signs of the Qur'ān's linguistic and rhetorical distinction from human-authored texts.

## Questions of Translation and Interpretation

Next, I turn from al-Bāqillānī's own historical and intellectual milieu to methodological observations that respond to recent scholarly insights. I have provided my own translations of texts from Arabic into English except where otherwise noted. These translations are primarily for the convenience of the reader, but they also convey my own readings of the texts in question. Any act of translation is inevitably also an act of interpretation. As theorists of translation have shown, these interpretive decisions are influenced by, and have a bearing on, the politics and power dynamics between author, reader, and interpreter, as well as on the ways in which subsequent readers approach the text.<sup>67</sup> Scriptural interpretation and translation are especially fraught because the centuries of discussion, exegesis, and cumulative traditions formed around them guarantee that no reader is ever approaching them directly.<sup>68</sup> Chana Kronfeld has aptly and evocatively called this phenomenon the "intertextual echo chamber" of cultures of interpretation and commentary.<sup>69</sup> For example, a prominent word usage in scripture can change the denotation and connotation of that term, becoming part of the history of that word's usage and signification. The Qur'ān in particular has a complex translation history. Many interpreters of the Qur'ān have considered translation of it to be prohibited or impossible, because it defines itself as being an Arabic Qur'ān in several verses such as Q 41:2-3, which state: "A revelation from the Merciful, the Beneficent. A book whose verses are distinct, an Arabic Qur'ān for a people who know." Fazlur Rahman has attributed the Qur'ān's emphasis on its Arabic-ness to the linguistic and cultural superiority complex among the pre-Islamic Arabs.<sup>70</sup> Travis Zadeh has produced a fascinating account and analysis, however, of how different communities have nonetheless produced and employed different types of Qur'ānic translations.<sup>71</sup> Theological objections to the translatability of the Qur'ān have not stopped the proliferation of renderings of it into various languages. Nonetheless, some renderings mark themselves as interpretations of the meaning of the Qur'ān rather than 'translations' as such.<sup>72</sup>

Among the many available translations of the Qur'ān into English, some adopt a more readable style, while others try to preserve the highbrow feel often associated with the

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<sup>67</sup> For thought-provoking discussions of various aspects of the translator/interpreter's role and responsibility, see Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 1-12; Naomi Seidman, *Faithful Renderings: Jewish-Christian Difference and the Politics of Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); and André Lefevere, *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 11-25.

<sup>68</sup> See Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "The True Meaning of Scripture: An Empirical Historian's Nonreductionist Interpretation of the Qur'an," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 11, no. 4 (1980): 487-505.

<sup>69</sup> Chana Kronfeld, *On the Margins of Modernism: Decentering Literary Dynamics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 16.

<sup>70</sup> Fazlur Rahman, "Translating the Qur'ān," *Religion & Literature* 20, no. 1 (Spring 1988): 23-24.

<sup>71</sup> Travis Zadeh, *The Vernacular Qur'ān: Translation and the Rise of Persian Exegesis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>72</sup> Rahman, "Translating the Qur'ān," 26.

category of scripture. I have used the translation by M.A.S. Abdel Haleem as a basis for my own translations of Qur'ānic verses in this dissertation.<sup>73</sup> This translation tends toward a register of high readability, in contrast to many earlier English-language translations that use a grandiose and formal style characterized by “formal overloading.”<sup>74</sup> Abdel Haleem's translation has the virtue of being accessible, but like many other available translations, its readability is often due to Anglicizing the syntax and smoothing over images that are not readily understood, especially by an English-speaking audience. I have adapted Abdel Haleem's translation wherever such images and syntactic formulations are at the heart of my argument. It is precisely these linguistic features, which are often replaced in translations with glosses reflecting prevalent interpretations of the meanings of the images or marked syntax in question, that al-Bāqillānī cites and to which he provides a guide for interpreting. Domesticating translations that interpret away images obscure the whole point of the discourse in which al-Bāqillānī is engaged.

For example, in his section on figurative language in his *uṣūl al-fiqh* (legal theory) work, discussed in Chapter Three, al-Bāqillānī cites the example of a phrase from Q 18:77, which I have rendered as ‘a wall that wanted to fall down.’<sup>75</sup> As al-Bāqillānī follows other interpreters in pointing out that a wall cannot literally *want* to fall down, so the audience is clued into the metaphor in the expression. This phrase is an interesting example because the interpretation of this image as an eloquent expression of the wall being about to fall over is so engrained in the interpretive tradition that it is embedded in all major translations of the verse into English. Abdel Haleem translates the phrase ‘a wall there that was on the point of falling down,’ in an elegant rendering based on the prevalent interpretation of it. Other translations include ‘a wall about to tumble down’ (Arberry), ‘a wall upon the point of falling into ruin’ (Pickthall), ‘a wall on the point of falling down’ (Ali), and ‘a wall that was on the verge of tumbling down’ (Maududi). These translations obscure the image of a wall *wanting* to fall down, but they exemplify the observation that all translation is interpretation. Interpreters make decisions, however small or insignificant they might seem, that position them in relation to the larger interpretive tradition and convey the text to readers and listeners in particular ways. While the popular translations of Q 18:77 mentioned here are not conducive to a study of metaphor, even the most ‘literal’ or word-for-word translation of this or any other verse is not neutral or unproblematic: among the elements that may be lost are rhythm, connotation, sound-play, and insight into what may be a conventional or ‘dead’ metaphor that could be marked or unmarked to various audiences. And the question of what a ‘literal’ interpretation even is has been drawn into question by scholars of translation, with the debate over equivalence having special consequences in the case of the Qur'ān.<sup>76</sup> Robert Gleave has pointed out that the literal meaning might be irrelevant to understanding an utterance in context, and that Muslim readers have often disagreed about what the literal and intended meanings of a Qur'ānic verse were.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Muhammad Abdel Haleem, trans. *The Qur'an: A New Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>74</sup> For more on questions of tone and style in the history of Qur'ān translation, see Hussein Abdul Raof, *Qur'ān Translation* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2001), 22-67.

<sup>75</sup> “*Jidāran yurīdu an yanqadda.*”

<sup>76</sup> Abdul Raof, *Qur'ān Translation*, 5-7.

<sup>77</sup> Robert Gleave, *Islam and Literalism: Literal Meaning and Interpretation in Islamic Legal Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 3-5.



As I discuss further in Chapter Three, Q 18:77 is a relatively low risk verse to translate in comparison to some others al-Bāqillānī cites that were loci of controversies and divergent explanations that figured prominently in theological and other interpretive discourses. Given the issues already made clear in translating Q 18:77, the reader can imagine how much greater the magnitude of contention and weight of interpretive decisions when translating verses whose interpretations are widely divergent and theologically significant. While not providing English renderings of the verses cited in this dissertation would have been impractical and inconvenient to readers, I have striven to bear in mind the range of theoretical issues that any translation raises, and the special issues involved in rendering Qurʾānic verses. I have retained the ‘literal’ wording as much as possible, citing the interpretations of al-Bāqillānī and other interpreters in order to make them explicitly available rather than implicitly embedded or imposed on the Qurʾānic verses themselves. I have also included parenthetical transliterations of key terms in Arabic alongside my translation at points where the changing meanings of these words is at stake.

Another facet of translation worth noting has to do with Arabic’s root system. Arabic is based on a system of roots (usually trilateral) that are inflecting according to morphological patterns. A given root centers on a range or set of meanings, particular valences of which may be more or less prominent in different words from that root. The development of academic disciplines and discourses led to ordinary words being transformed into technical vocabulary (*naql*); sometimes, different disciplines used the same word in different ways that drew on disparate valences of the root word.<sup>78</sup> Any use of a lexical item, particularly if it had technical significations within one or more discourses, may draw more or less strongly on the core meaning(s) of the root, non-technical uses of a word from the root, and technical meanings that could be more reified and separated from that root’s lexical range. These possibilities for usage and connotation complicate interpretation and translation. In light of the possibilities provided by the Arabic system of roots and word derivation (*ishtiqaq*), adopting one standard translation for a term flattens the field of meaning. Al-Bāqillānī, like other scholars, makes use of the range of meanings, connotations, and associations that the root system provides, a technique that results in a dynamically signifying textuality and a complex field of meaning that is impossible to fully convey through translation. Determining which denotations and connotations are most salient in a given usage of a word also calls on the reader’s contextual knowledge, something that varies from one person to another to a certain extent within a shared cultural context. This dynamic and sophisticated word usage only adds to the difficulty of translation. I have often added parenthetical translations of terms, when introducing them or when first using them in a discussion, to indicate my own interpretation of which valence is most relevant. I have chosen to translate each instance of a word’s use according to its context rather than employing a standard translation for all cases.

This dynamic use of words points to the complex interplay between lexical items and their usages. Toshohiko Izutsu has shown that the study of keywords and their semantic fields as they are used in the Qurʾān can lead to a fruitful understanding of the conceptual weight of

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<sup>78</sup> Heinrichs, “*Istiʿārah and Badīʿ and Their Terminological Relationship in Early Arabic Literary Criticism*,” *Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Arabisch-Islamischen Wissenschaften* 1 (1984): 183.

these words and their meanings in relation to each other in the Qur'ān.<sup>79</sup> For example, the Arabic word *kitāb* (often translated as 'book') has a 'basic' meaning that it holds inside and outside the Qur'ān, but it also has a 'relational' meaning in the Qur'ān, where it "assumes an unusual importance as the sign of a very particular religious concept surrounded by a halo of sanctity."<sup>80</sup> In the Qur'ān, *kitāb* is in close relation with other terms (like *Allāh*, *waḥy*, and *tanzīl*) in a 'conceptual system,' leading to a "complex and particular meaning structure" arising from the text.<sup>81</sup> Some terms are more important than others in conveying and characterizing the Weltanschauung of the text, Izutsu argues. Izutsu refers to groups of keywords and the mapping of their proximities to one another as semantic fields, within which there are 'focus-words' that are points of particular importance within the conceptual system.<sup>82</sup> Analysis of these terms, he hopes, would ideally lead to a discovery of the Qur'ānic Weltanschauung or ontology.

In a very different context, Raymond Williams, in his seminal book, *Keywords*, has also pointed to the analytic role of investigating 'vocabulary' and its usage at a particular moment or in a specific system of thought.<sup>83</sup> He suggests that the way the keywords he analyzes are used in a given context is indicative of cultural and social meanings, values, and priorities. The idea is that attention to the ways in which these words, in particular contexts of use, tap into important avenues for analysis. Consciously and unconsciously, speakers and authors shift word meanings over time and across texts, and these changes are significant indications that point outward to other changes.

As the foregoing discussion has indicated, while translation and interpretation may draw attention to the issue of how terminology is used, dynamicism and slippage in lexical usage is worthy of discussion in its own right. The range of meanings and usages of a term reflect both a common conception of that word's semantic connections (i.e., what an author can expect audiences to understand) and a particular text or discourse's effects on how audiences come to think of that word as signifying (at least within that context)—through tugging in one particular direction of signification or constructing a shadow of positivity or negativity for the term, for instance. Critical attention to changes in usage can also be indicative of a paradigm shift or confusion in authors' own usages, as Heinrichs has so astutely explained.<sup>84</sup> These scholarly methods of approaching key words in a discourse are important reference points in my study of al-Bāqillānī, who, I argue, redefines significant and controversial terms related to Qur'ānic language (and language use in general) and reconfigures their significations in order to further his own theological vision. In describing al-Bāqillānī's purposeful redefinition and recasting of a set of related lexical items in order to convey his ideas and further his theological vision, I sometimes use the term 'semantic field,' of which I also referred to Izutsu's use above. I intend that term to refer to the configuration of key terms among which he constructs a set of relationships within a body of work or set of texts, a concept akin to what Benjamin Harshav, drawing on John Searle, calls an Internal Field

<sup>79</sup> Toshohiko Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur'ān: Semantics of the Koranic Weltanschauung* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2002), 18-35.

<sup>80</sup> Izutsu, *God and Man*, 19.

<sup>81</sup> Izutsu, *God and Man*, 20.

<sup>82</sup> Izutsu, *God and Man*, 24-25.

<sup>83</sup> Raymond Williams, *Keywords* (1976; repr., London: Fontana, 1983), 14-15.

<sup>84</sup> See Heinrichs, *Hand of the Northwind*, 11-13.

of Reference—the ‘reality’ that inheres in a text and that is constituted by the ‘world’ constructed within it.<sup>85</sup>

### **Ḥaqīqa and Majāz: The Concepts and Their Origins**

Scholars of medieval Arabic discourse on language and literary criticism have already undertaken studies and genealogies of keywords of this type, with the aim of discovering how their use developed historically, and thus how medieval Arabo-Islamic discourses developed. This type of scholarship can be exemplified through the body of work on the word *majāz* (often translated as ‘figurative speech’).<sup>86</sup> Investigation of how this word’s meaning developed across time and discourses sheds light on the modes of thought in which it was implicated, thus resulting in an understanding of important characteristics and trajectories of these discourses themselves. Some of these ‘keywords’ acquired technical usages that varied from one field to another as disciplines distinguished themselves from each other and became more specialized, while still retaining valences of the word’s root, as explained above. The development of the term *majāz* is an example of this phenomenon. In the first centuries after the rise of Islam, polemical exchanges shaped the beginnings of Islamic religious and theological thought. Over time, discussions became more technical and split into disciplines such as exegesis, jurisprudence, and theology, and technical meanings of terminology arose. The word *majāz* is a noun that comes from the Arabic verb *jāza*, which itself has a range of meanings including ‘to pass through, transcend, be allowed, be possible.’<sup>87</sup> According to the rules of Arabic morphology, the most ‘literal,’ root-based meaning of the noun *majāz* would thus mean ‘something that passes through, transcends, is allowed or possible.’

As such, the history of the term *majāz* is complex and requires some digging in order to peel back the layers of usage and the ways it changed over time. Heinrichs notes that the term *majāz* in its historical trajectory generally grew narrower in meaning, while retaining traces of its previous meanings.<sup>88</sup> *Majāz* came to be seen as forming half of a dichotomy with *ḥaqīqa* (‘literal’ meaning; ‘truth’), but early sources do not oppose these two terms; rather, while the origins of the term *majāz* are still murky, by the ninth century both the older usage and the one contrasted with *ḥaqīqa* were in circulation.<sup>89</sup> According to Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), contrasting *majāz* with *ḥaqīqa* did not arise until three centuries after the rise of Islam.<sup>90</sup> Among the great legal school founders and their students, he writes, only Ibn Ḥanbal and his followers used the term *majāz al-lughā* to refer to the Qur’ān’s use of non-literal language. However, other scholars at the time—notably, the Zāhirī school—interpreted the phrase to mean ‘what is permissible in language’ (*mimma yajūz fī al-lughā*), drawing on the meaning of *yajūz* as ‘be allowed’ mentioned above. Interpreting the term in this way supported a denial of the presence of figurative speech in language at all.

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<sup>85</sup> Benjamin Harshav, *Explorations in Poetics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 7-8.

<sup>86</sup> Salim Kemal provides an overview of the positions of several early scholars on the topic of metaphor in his article “Philosophy and Theory in Arabic Poetics,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 20, no. 2 (September 1989): 128-47.

<sup>87</sup> See Edward Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (1863; repr., Beirut: Librarie du Liban, 1968), 484.

<sup>88</sup> Heinrichs, “On the Genesis,” 111.

<sup>89</sup> Heinrichs, “On the Genesis,” 115.

<sup>90</sup> Heinrichs, “On the Genesis,” 116.

Early usages of the term *majāz* in Islamic writings refer to “the vague designation of an exegetical practice,” in John Wansbrough’s phrasing, a practice that comprised periphrastic explanations of Qur’ānic expressions. It was only later that the term developed the technical designation, in the rhetorical tradition, of figurative usages of language.<sup>91</sup> Broadly speaking, the term developed different valences in different fields and discourses, all of which were closely related, and its usage began early in the *uṣūl al-fiqh* (legal theory) genre as well as explanations of the Qur’ān’s phraseology that was seen to require explanation (*majāz al-Qur’ān*).<sup>92</sup> In this early usage, the term *majāz* refers to particular instances where the Qur’ān uses a word or phrase in a way other than the meaning set down for it in language.<sup>93</sup> To take a famous example, the Qur’ānic verse in which Joseph’s brothers argue for their innocence, telling the Egyptians: “Ask the village in which we were” [Yusuf (12:79)] about whether they had stolen any of the king’s property. The meaning of ‘village’ set down in language is a place where people live, but in this verse the word refers to the inhabitants of the village by metonymy. So in this case, using the word ‘village’ to refer to ‘the inhabitants of the village’ is a usage that is *majāz*—one that transcends the meaning of the word ‘village’ that is set down for it in language. As Bernard Weiss explains, medieval Muslim scholars on the whole saw the posited meaning of a lexical item to be relatively static (though they distinguished between general and particular vocables and meanings), so that divergences from that set-down meaning were marked; the late-blooming discipline of *‘ilm al-waḍ‘* (‘the science of positing’) explored this branch of knowledge.<sup>94</sup>

This is the way in which the word *majāz* is used in the earliest extant treatise that makes extensive use of the term, the exegete Abū ‘Ubayda’s (d. 210/825) *Kitāb Majāz al-Qur’ān*. Abū ‘Ubayda’s text has been used as a key point of analysis for gaining insight into how the term *majāz* developed as it did.<sup>95</sup> His concern is with explaining instances of unusual Qur’ānic grammar, which he accomplishes by listing different structures the Qur’ān uses and explaining the verses’ meaning in his own wording. John Wansbrough sees Abū ‘Ubayda’s use of the term *majāz* as denoting any deviation from the use of language in the way it was set down, i.e., as a perfect reflection of the natural world, the view of language that was held by Abū ‘Ubayda’s peers in the Basran school of grammarians.<sup>96</sup> He concludes, mostly agreeing with Ella Almagor, that the term *majāz* in Abū ‘Ubayda’s text refers to a meaning going beyond the original wording (of the Qur’ān), an “explanatory rewriting” of sorts. As such, this early usage is the common predecessor of the later meanings of the term *majāz* both in rhetorical and *i‘jāz al-Qur’ān* texts as well as in *uṣūl al-fiqh* texts. Wansbrough uses the term ‘periphrastic

<sup>91</sup> John Wansbrough, “*Majāz al-Qur’ān*: Periphrastic Exegesis,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 33, no. 2 (1970): 247–66.

<sup>92</sup> Wansbrough, “*Majāz al-Qur’ān*,” J. Stewart Robinson, “*Madjāz*,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. P. Bearman et al. Brill Online, 2014. [http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/madjaz-COM\\_0605](http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/madjaz-COM_0605).

<sup>93</sup> I have often translated the verb *waḍa‘a* as “set down” and the noun *waḍ‘* “setting-down” in an attempt to reflect the Arabic sense of the root W-Ḍ-‘, though this rendering is not meant to convey priority of a written system, but rather the positing through which signification is designated.

<sup>94</sup> Bernard G. Weiss, “*‘Ilm al-waḍ‘*: An Introductory Account of a Later Muslim Philological Science,” *Arabica* 34, no. 3 (November 1987): 339–56.

<sup>95</sup> Heinrichs, “On the Genesis,” 118.

<sup>96</sup> Heinrichs, “On the Genesis,” 122.

exegesis' to translate the term *majāz* as Abū 'Ubayda used it, to explain and paraphrase Qur'ānic verses in the interest of 'restoring' textual clarity. (He finds the term used to signify such 'restorations' of Qur'ānic phrasing to be *taqdīr* in later texts, as the meaning of the term *majāz* also changed.)

This "explanatory rewriting" can be seen as part of the movement to defend the Qur'ān's use of language in the first centuries of Islam. Some detractors evidently considered the Qur'ān's style, use of vocabulary, and grammar to be faulty and thus an indication that its origin was not God. Wansbrough himself repeatedly explains Abū 'Ubayda's choice of Qur'ānic verses as those that are stylistically 'infelicitous' or otherwise unclear, thereby conveying his own judgments about those verses' linguistic quality. As Heinrichs points out, Abū 'Ubayda's concern is actually with explaining instances of unusual Qur'ānic grammar, even in instances Wansbrough picks out as possible early usages of the term *majāz* in the sense of figurative language.<sup>97</sup> An important feature of Abū 'Ubayda's uses that distinguishes them from later usages is that for this early scholar, the term *majāz* refers to the explanation of the idiom rather than the idiom itself. Likewise, in the usage of his successor, the Basran grammarian and philologist Muḥammad b. Yazīd al-Mubarrad (d. 285/898), the term is used synonymously with the word *ta'wīl* (exegesis), thus retaining the sense of an explanation. However, 'Abd al-Malik al-Aṣma'ī (d. 213/828), a famous lexicographer and grammarian who was also a leader of the Basran school, criticized Abū 'Ubayda's *Majāz al-Qur'ān* on the basis "that the assumption of metaphorical expressions in the Qur'an was tantamount to an arbitrary interpretation of God's word."<sup>98</sup> This assertion reflects a belief that figurative interpretation is less verifiable, methodical, and grounded than 'literal' understanding. One might reply by asking whether and why an interpretation of a verse as metaphorical is more arbitrary than any other interpretation of it. Al-Bāqillānī's approach to language and its interpretation can be read as a response to this line of questioning, in arguing for the nature of linguistic utterances as being systematically interpretable.

While this genealogical history shows how the term *majāz* developed, it doesn't address one of the central debates in scholarship about the debate over figurative language in classical Arabo-Islamic texts, namely the origin of these ideas about figurative language. Can we trace them back to Aristotle and Greek thought, or were they developed from some other indigenous or inherited source? Some scholars have offered well-reasoned arguments to tie the distinction between *ḥaqīqa* and *majāz* to the Greek philosophical tradition, seeing *ḥaqīqa* as equivalent to Aristotle's *kyrion* (everyday language) and *majāz* or *musta'ār* (lit. 'borrowed') as referring to the transferred meaning of a word on the basis of a similarity.<sup>99</sup> Within this dichotomy, metaphor and comparison (simile) both fall under the domain of the latter.<sup>100</sup> Indeed, the term *isti'āra* is most literally translated as 'borrowing,' on the idea that a certain

<sup>97</sup> Heinrichs, "On the Genesis," 120.

<sup>98</sup> L. Kopf writes: "We thus see that the method of interpreting the Qur'an with the help of philological means, already initiated, according to tradition, by 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abbas, did not find general acceptance even in philologist circles of ancient times. Actually, there always existed, at least on the part of the theologians, some resistance to such exegetical procedure." L. Kopf, "Religious Influences on Medieval Arabic Philology," *Studia Islamica*, no. 5 (1956): 37.

<sup>99</sup> Miklos Maroth, "The Changes of Metaphor in Arabic Literature," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 12 (2002): 241-55.

<sup>100</sup> *Isti'āra* and *tashbīh* were not distinguished in this way in the Arabic tradition until al-Jurjānī. See S.E. Bonebakker, "Isti'ārat," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. 4, ed. E. van Donzel et al (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 248-49.

word is borrowed for a usage beyond the ordinary meaning of the word, and likewise, the term *majāz* denotes this transgressing of the bounds of the ordinary meaning. Maroth notes that the Islamic philosophical tradition, particularly commentaries on Aristotle, used the Arabic terms as equivalents of the Greek terms according to the ways Aristotle theorized them, a borrowing that is evident in Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037) and Ibn Rushd's (d. 594/1198) writings on the matter.<sup>101</sup> The literary critics 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d. 470/1078) and 'Abd Allāh ibn Sīnā al-Khafājī (d. 465/1073) also adopted the Aristotelian distinction as the basis of their work. However, the Aristotelian categories of metaphor are based on notions of species and genera (from genus to species, species to genus, species to species, or by analogy); but since Islamic philosophers used the category of 'states' (*ahwāl*) instead of species and genera, they describe metaphor as being based on a similarity between states. For al-Jurjānī, metaphor was a means of acquiring specific knowledge about something (the tenor of the metaphor) by means of shared characteristics with the metaphor's vehicle. Whereas in the Aristotelian tradition, similarity entailed a similar structure shared between two entities, in most of the Arabic philosophical tradition it needed only to be based on a similar feature. This latter understanding of metaphor is reflected in the structure of *kalām*-style discourse.<sup>102</sup> However, since al-Sakkākī wrote under the influence of the Arabic logic tradition, his definition of similarity is aligned with Aristotle's instead of his predecessor al-Jurjānī's.

In the case of Ibn Qutayba (d. 275/889), another scholar who made heavy use of the term *majāz* in his work, the term seems broader in meaning. Heinrichs points out that his text *Ta'wīl mushkil al-Qur'ān* [The Interpretation of Difficult Passages of the Qur'ān] is of the same genre as Abū 'Ubayda's *Majāz al-Qur'ān*, and he translates Ibn Qutayba's definition of *majāz* as "the ways (methods) of speech and the modes of handling it (or: the places from which it is taken)."<sup>103</sup> Thus, although both Abū 'Ubayda's and Ibn Qutayba's treatises defend Qur'ānic language usage by explaining particular verses, Ibn Qutayba uses the term *majāz* to refer to the rhetorical devices themselves. Nor does he restrict the meaning to figurative language: his list of chapters includes devices such as ellipsis and repetition, though figurative language does feature prominently in the list.

Ibn Qutayba was a prominent presence in the debate culture of the ninth century, participating in discussions about topics ranging from *ḥadīth* to *adab* to politics. He was particularly active in anti-Mu'tazili discourse. In his abovementioned text *Ta'wīl mushkil al-Qur'ān* [Interpretation of Problematic Features of the Qur'ān], Ibn Qutayba addresses particular passages of the Qur'ān that detractors had criticized, defending their figurative language as being both comprehensible and eminently meaningful. He asserts the Arabic language's superior capacity for *majāz*, which in turn leads him to deem the Qur'ān untranslatable, because foreign languages cannot express the range of miraculous *majāz* of the Qur'ān. His text is similar to Abū 'Ubayda's in that it identifies instances of unusual grammatical or lexical usages in the Qur'ān and explains them. However, Ibn Qutayba's tone is defensive as befits the polemical genre, a trait consistent with other treatises he wrote in

<sup>101</sup> Bonebakker, "Isti'ārat," 243.

<sup>102</sup> Bonebakker, "Isti'ārat," 249.

<sup>103</sup> Ibn Qutayba's phrase is "*ṭuruq al-qawl wa-ma'ākhidhuhu*." Heinrichs, "On the Genesis," 130.

defense of particular religious doctrines.<sup>104</sup> The reader gets the sense that this tone arises from Ibn Qutayba's desire to defend the integrity and meaningfulness of the Qur'ān's language against detractors who claimed it was flawed in its uses of Arabic grammar and vocabulary.

The meaning of the term *majāz* in Ibn Qutayba's text represents a development from Abū 'Ubayda's use of it. In his first use of the term, he writes: "The Arabs have *majāzāt* in speech, meaning ways and manners of speech. Among them are metaphor [*isti'āra*], simile, inversion, advancing, delaying, ellipsis, repetition, concealing, exposing, explicit expression, allusion, clarification, [. . .]"<sup>105</sup> So Ibn Qutayba begins a list of literary devices classified as types of *majāz*. He continues, "The Qur'ān came down with all these *madhāhib*"—a term that can be roughly understood to mean 'ways of doing something'—"and thus none of the translators could transfer it to any other languages in the way that the Gospels were translated from Syriac to Amharic and the Romans' language, and the Torah and Psalms and other books of God were translated into Arabic, because foreigners are less capable of *majāz* than Arabs."<sup>106</sup> This polemical explanation of the Qur'ān's *majāz* asserts that Arabs were most capable of *majāz*. Here, *majāz* encompasses ways of speaking and includes literary devices that have to do with word use and placement in discourse. The Arabs are most capable of expressing these constructions and word usages in speech.

Why, exactly, one language or one people would be more capable of metaphor, simile, ellipsis, repetition, or any of the other rhetorical devices Ibn Qutayba mentions might seem unclear. Couldn't an utterance employing a given rhetorical device be translated into any other language? After all, the items listed on Ibn Qutayba's list do not include literary figures that are stereotypically difficult to translate such as culturally-laden vocabulary, puns, or rhymes. A particular metaphorical mapping might exist in one language and not another, but this does not necessarily render the first language more capable of metaphor in general. Here, Ibn Qutayba's text contains traces of another prominent polemic of his time: the issue of the inherent superiority of the Arabic language. To those who supported *al-'arabiyya*, the idea that Arabic and Arabs had a superior rank, the Qur'ān's revelation to Arabs in Arabic confirmed this superiority. Though the concept of 'ranks' of quality in language usage may seem odd, it is conventional in this discourse, and *i'jāz* writers relied on the idea of ranks to describe, classify, and compare texts' literary and rhetorical quality. When Islam spread to non-Arab lands and particularly Persia, new Muslims challenged this ideology of Arabs' superiority and emphasized that the best Muslims are the most pious ones rather than those of a particular ethnicity, drawing on a quotation from Muḥammad himself.<sup>107</sup> Ibn Qutayba was a proponent of *al-'arabiyya*, so his assertion that Arabic is inherently more capable of expressing rhetorical devices can be understood as inserting a facet of the *'arabiyya* debate into Qur'ānic defense and interpretation. Likewise, at a later point in the text at hand, Ibn Qutayba says, "It is clear

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<sup>104</sup> For example, *Ta'wīl mukhtalif al-ḥadīth* [Interpretation of Contradictory *ḥadīth*] ([Cairo]: Maktabat al-Kulliyāt al-Azhariya, 1966), wherein Ibn Qutayba argues for the internal consistency in the body of sound *aḥādīth* (prophetic reports).

<sup>105</sup> 'Abd Allāh b. Muslim ibn Qutayba, *Ta'wīl mushkil al-Qur'ān*, ed. al-Sayyid Aḥmad Ṣaqr ([Cairo], n.p.: n.d.), 20.

<sup>106</sup> Ibn Qutayba, *Ta'wīl Mushkil al-Qur'ān*, 21.

<sup>107</sup> "There is no difference between an Arab and a foreigner except based on piety," according to an oft-cited excerpt of Muḥammad's Farewell Speech. For more on various positions on the Arabs' superiority, or lack thereof, vis-à-vis non-Arab Muslims, see H. T. Norris, "Shu'ūbiyyah in Arabic Literature," in *Abbasid Belles-Lettres*, ed. Julia Ashtiany et al (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 36-38.

to whoever knows the language when an utterance has *majāz* in it,”<sup>108</sup> which can be read as another articulation of the idea that since Arabs know Arabic and according to popular conceptions have a special relationship to Arabic, they necessarily have a superior understanding of the Qur’ān.

This polemical suggestion is a product of the struggle between the ideologies of ‘*Arabiyya* (Arab cultural superiority) and *Shu ‘ūbiyya* (non-Arab, and often specifically Persian, cultural pride) that blossomed in the 3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> century as a result of the expansion of the Islamic empire into non-Arab lands.<sup>109</sup> *Shu ‘ūbiyya* was closely associated with skepticism and heretical ideas of religion; its fierce debate with ‘*Arabiyya* was in part over how Islam and Islamic culture were to be articulated and expressed.<sup>110</sup> Of course, a group that could claim priority of interpretation of the Qur’ān could on that basis claim the authority to determine the best expression of Islam. Sophia Vasalou has posited a causal connection between the *Shu ‘ūbī* secretaries’ (*kuttāb*) purported imitation of Qur’ānic style with the rise of *i jāz* discourse, further stipulating that the secretaries’ detracting from Qur’ān’s stature played a part in the struggle for religious authority that was taking place between the caliphate and religious scholars.<sup>111</sup>

By way of explanation of his own claims that Arabic can express *majāz* more and better than other languages, Ibn Qutayba provides some examples of Qur’ānic verses that he believes to be untranslatable due to their use of *majāz*. Among them is Q 8:58: “If you fear treachery from a group, throw back (their covenant) to them, (so as to be) on equal terms, for God does not love the treacherous.” If you wanted to translate this verse, he writes, “you could not come up with these terms [*alfāz*] to render the meaning that was set down to explain or present the sum total of them and connect their pieces together, and expose what is hidden in them.”<sup>112</sup> In other words, the meaning of the utterance is greater than the sum of the meanings of the words that make up the utterance. He continues with just such an explanation of what the audience would come up with by way of translation: “You would say: ‘If there is a truce and a contract between you and a[nother] people, and you fear they will be treacherous and violate it, then let them know that you violated the conditions of your [agreement] with them, and permit them to make war, so that both you and they are aware of the violation of the arrangement.’”<sup>113</sup> Ibn Qutayba’s exegesis of the verse makes plain the internal logic of what he interprets the verse to be saying, while forgoing the conciseness of the Qur’ān’s expression and the eloquence of the image of throwing a covenant back at an enemy. In carrying out this explanation, Ibn Qutayba does in fact engage in a type of intralingual translation, as many modern scholars of translation theory would call it, though Ibn Qutayba clearly does not consider his own explanation of the verse to be a translation. His point comes through clearly, nonetheless: any translation of a Qur’ānic verse will necessarily be less rich and less eloquent than the scriptural source text.

<sup>108</sup> Ibn Qutayba, *Ta’wīl mushkil al-Qur’ān*, 109.

<sup>109</sup> Norris, “*Shu ‘ūbiyyah*,” 31.

<sup>110</sup> Norris, “*Shu ‘ūbiyyah*,” 36.

<sup>111</sup> Sophia Vasalou, “The Miraculous Eloquence of the Qur’ān: General Trajectories and Individual Approaches,” *The Journal of Qur’ānic Studies* 4, no. 2 (2002): 25.

<sup>112</sup> Ibn Qutayba, *Ta’wīl mushkil al-Qur’ān*, 21.

<sup>113</sup> Ibn Qutayba, *Ta’wīl mushkil al-Qur’ān*, 21.



Ibn Qutayba's next example is shorter but also takes some puzzling out. He cites Q 18:11: "We hit their ears in the cave for a number of years." His explanation is as follows: "If you wanted to translate it word for word [*bi-lafẓihi*], the translated [utterance] would not be understood. For if you said 'We made them sleep for a number of years,' you would be translating the meaning [*al-ma'nā*] without the wording [*al-lafẓ*]." <sup>114</sup> Here, the figurative language in question—saying 'we hit their ears' to mean 'we made them sleep'—is again a matter of interpretation. It is not that the Qur'ānic verse uses an indigenous idiom that does not already exist in languages other than Arabic. In fact, Qur'ānic exegetes struggled over verses like this one because they did not know of a standard way of understanding the turn of phrase 'we hit their ears.' These exegetes were not sure whether the Qur'ān's first audiences perceived this phrase as a fixed expression or a new formulation. If it had once been a familiar idiom, medieval Islamic exegesis had no access to it, thus leaving this verse of the Qur'ān and others like it open to the mockery and ridicule of some members of the Qur'ān's audience who saw such verses not as poetic or interesting but rather incomprehensible or abusive of the Arabic language's poetics and lexicon.

Such detractors were probably not the main opponents of theologians engaged in writing on *i'jāz al-Qur'ān* by the time that discourse was canonized as a standard genre of Islamic writing. The early debates that catalyzed its inception had long before cooled off, and expressing doubt about the Qur'ān's use of language and meanings had since been established as heretical. There was no real need, after a certain point in history, to defend Qur'ānic language against those who would call it inauthentic, at least not in the heartlands of the Islamic empire. But reading the likes of Ibn Qutayba's *Ta'wīl mushkil al-Qur'ān* can help us situate and understand the eventual *i'jāz al-Qur'ān* genre and the intense focus on *majāz* across many genres of Islamic scholarship. What these Qur'ānic detractors were maintaining becomes clearer when Ibn Qutayba steps back from particular verses of the Qur'ān. He writes:

Atheists objected to the Book of God [i.e., the Qur'ān] with slander, talking nonsense about it, and renouncing [it]. They followed [the verse] "But those in whose heart is perversity follow [the part of] the Qur'ān that is multivalent [*mā tashābaha*], seeking discord and searching for its hidden meanings" [Q 3:7] with feeble understandings, sickly viewpoints, and disordered gazes. They distorted the sense of the speech and deviated from its ways. Then they accused it of contradiction, being preposterous, having grammatical errors and corrupt structure [*naẓm*], and being disagreeable." <sup>115</sup>

For Ibn Qutayba, *majāz* is the most common site of exegetical errors. <sup>116</sup> Interestingly, the examples he provides to justify this claim are taken from Jewish and Christian contexts, interpretive mistakes from the non-Arabic scriptures of the Tanakh and the New Testament. Regarding the Christians' claim that Jesus is the Son of God in the sense of a son by birth, Ibn Qutayba writes, "How could this be literal when elsewhere, [Jesus] tells people to pray by

<sup>114</sup> Ibn Qutayba, *Ta'wīl mushkil al-Qur'ān*, 21.

<sup>115</sup> Ibn Qutayba, *Ta'wīl mushkil al-Qur'ān*, 22.

<sup>116</sup> Ibn Qutayba, *Ta'wīl mushkil al-Qur'ān*, 103.

saying, ‘Our father who is in heaven?’”<sup>117</sup> Ibn Qutayba proceeds to cite examples from his knowledge of the Psalms and Torah where according to the predominant interpretations known in his milieu, God refers to a person or people as God’s son(s) metaphorically in order to emphasize the merciful and sympathetic aspect of God’s relationship with people.<sup>118</sup> Ibn Qutayba then moves onto other metaphorical uses of the words ‘mother’ and ‘father,’ like the Arabs’ calling the earth ‘mother.’ Likewise, the Jews’ understanding of the creation story in Genesis to mean that God rested on the seventh day is an incorrect interpretation of the text, because rest is due to something tiring you out and exhausting you, and God is by definition not susceptible to weakness. Thus, the meaning of ‘rest’ when applied to God must simply refer to a cessation of work.<sup>119</sup>

As in the case of the ideology of the superiority of Arabic, Ibn Qutayba’s pointed examples of Christian and Jewish ‘misinterpretations’ can be best understood in light of his historical context. As a star polemicist and debater of his time, Ibn Qutayba also composed argumentation against beliefs that posed a threat to the newly-forming Islamic religious institution, which meant polemic against any heterodox groups living in the Islamic milieu. The refutation of Jewish and Christian doctrine is at home in this type of discourse. According to dominant readings of the Qur’ān, Jewish and Christian scriptures are true revelation from God, but they have been corrupted during the history of their transmission and interpretation.<sup>120</sup> Here, Ibn Qutayba is locating incorrect understanding in the interpretation of *majāz*, which seems to take the form of figurative language. His opponents err in failing to identify figurative meanings in utterance, which results in excessive literalness in their understandings of Qur’ānic verses. Ibn Qutayba is connecting the trope of Jewish and Christian divergence from truth with his own thesis about the dangers of incorrect understanding of metaphor. The Jewish and Christian misinterpretations act as a foil for Ibn Qutayba’s exposition of the dangers of incorrectly identifying or understanding the Qur’ān.

To the modern ear, it may seem that Ibn Qutayba has conflated Arabs, the Arabic language, and the Qur’ānic use of language. He writes “The Arabs have *majāzāt* in speech,” emphasizing the connection between the habits of the Arab people in their use of language. Then, he uses the Arabic language’s capacity for *majāz* to defend the doctrine of the Qur’ān’s untranslatability, indicating it is the Arabic language in and of itself that is distinguished from other languages, even those that also have revealed scriptures. However, according to normative Islamic doctrine, the Qur’ān is the direct word of God, not composed by Arabs or any other humans for that matter. Is it the incapability of translators or the paucity of linguistic resources in other languages that renders the Qur’ān untranslatable? In light of the strong, if convoluted, relationship Ibn Qutayba maintains between Arabs and the Arabic language, readers may be surprised to learn that Ibn Qutayba himself was a native Persian. And yet he and others like him wrote and conversed in Arabic, and his own polemical explanations of the ‘correct’ interpretations of *majāz* in the Qur’ān indicate that Ibn Qutayba considered himself to be adept at understanding *majāzāt* in Arabic. Such fissures in understanding the

<sup>117</sup> Ibn Qutayba, *Ta’wīl mushkil al-Qur’ān*, 103.

<sup>118</sup> Though these examples serve Ibn Qutayba’s polemic, they ignore the finer points of the scriptures from which the examples are drawn.

<sup>119</sup> Ibn Qutayba, *Ta’wīl mushkil al-Qur’ān*, 104-105.

<sup>120</sup> See Q 2:79, among other verses, and its interpretation.

work of Qur'ānic exegesis and *i'jāz al-Qur'ān* discourse were smoothed over in the generations after Ibn Qutayba. Later *i'jāz al-Qur'ān* discourse has a basically consistent technical definition of *majāz*, as well as unified and tightly-woven explanations of the various ways of understanding the position of Arabs and Arabic vis-à-vis the rhetorical superiority of the Qur'ān. Even where scholars continued to hold different views, these discrepancies were explained in more consistent and cohesive ways. It is instructive to study Ibn Qutayba's discourse as representative of an early stage in the development of both *i'jāz al-Qur'ān* discourse and conceptions of *majāz* in language. Cultivating a comprehensive view of these concepts within the classical Islamic intellectual milieu sheds light on the place that ideas about Qur'ānic superiority and figurative language held and their use in debates surrounding issues like the special status of the Arabic language, and who exactly is capable of undertaking interpretation of figurative language in the Qur'ān.

Another important figure whose writings left their mark on the history of the term *majāz* was Ibn Qutayba's contemporary, al-Jāḥiẓ. In the extant work of al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 869), there is no single comprehensive account of his conception of *majāz*, but the term does appear in some places. Heinrichs sees him using it in both senses described above: to refer to usages that transgress the bounds set for particular words in language, and to refer to the literary devices in which such usages happen, most prevalently in idioms of the figurative variety.<sup>121</sup> Further study of al-Jāḥiẓ's conception of *majāz* would shed light on an early Mu'tazilite view of this phenomenon and figurative language in the Qur'ān.

The debate over *ḥaqīqa* and *majāz* was one important dimension of language-centered discussion in the medieval Arabo-Islamic world. Beyond Heinrichs' call for tracing *uṣūl al-fiqh* usage of the term *majāz* in order to better understand the scope of the term's usage and development, why study the development of *balāgha* and the Qur'ān's literary inimitability along with *uṣūl al-fiqh*? There are several interesting points of intersection and comparison between what may at first sound like disparate fields. They are both sites of exegetical activity beyond *tafsīr* (exegesis) proper. As we will see, *i'jāz al-Qur'ān* and *uṣūl al-fiqh* are interpretive discourses that cover overlapping domains, citing *āyāt* and drawing them into explanations of Islamic doctrine, thought, and law. The shared logic they employ is evident from an example of their use of terminology. There is a similar metaphorical mapping that goes on in the application of technical terms about metaphor and *uṣūl al-fiqh*. Miklos Maroth has noted an awareness of this terminological mapping within the tradition in the case of the terms *aṣl* and *far'*, which in common usage (i.e., not within a technical discourse) mean 'root, source' and 'branch' respectively. He cites al-Khafājī's definitions, which he notes al-Jurjānī also applied: in the context of word usage, the term *aṣl* refers to the original meaning of the word and *far'* to the 'derived meaning' in a metaphor.<sup>122</sup> These same terms were given technical meanings in legal theory as well, to talk about the fourth accepted basis of Islamic jurisprudence, namely analogy (*qiyās*). Maroth writes:

The name of the analogical inference was *qiyās*, where the name of the 'basic case' of inference was *aṣl*, and the name of the 'derived case' was *far'*. Both the case of metaphor and the law-related inference *aṣl* and *far'* were connected by

<sup>121</sup> Heinrichs, "On the Genesis," 133.

<sup>122</sup> Maroth, "Changes of Metaphor," 246.

similarity. Thus both the logical basis and the phraseology of legal reasoning on the one hand and metaphorical expression on the other were identical.<sup>123</sup>

The case of these terms' metaphorical extensions in the fields with which this dissertation is concerned suggests the shared knowledge base from which scholars within these fields were operating, and that there was a common logic for metaphorical mapping at work. The type of analysis based on (or perhaps arising from) semantic fields suggested by Izutsu becomes more complex in cases like this; the Qur'ānic text was the center of his analytic work, but mapping keywords diachronically and interdisciplinarily must address shifting semantic fields. Still, he provides a conceptual framework that is useful for approaching the relationships between terms and their place in a discourse. Attention to these terms can shed light on important aspects of the discourse at hand.

### Points of Comparison

Important points of reference can also come from beyond the fields of Islamic and Qur'ānic Studies. Scholars have noted that the field of Islamic Studies has methodological gaps that the study of Christianity and Judaism have already faced and bridged.<sup>124</sup> Critical appropriation of intellectual tools that have been developed in those fields is worth considering due to the nascence of methodological lenses in Islamic Studies. To that end, I draw selectively on insights and vocabulary from the fields of literary studies, religion, pragmatics, and philosophy of language, in addition to other fields, without following a particular school of thought to the extent that it overshadows the particular emphases and frameworks of my primary texts. One particular source of investigative tools is the field of scriptural studies. Whether the Qur'ān is 'scripture' in the same sense that term is used in reference to the Bible is a complex question that lies outside the scope of this discussion, but one dimension of the category of 'scripture' that the Qur'ān and the Bible share, and that is especially relevant here, is their heritage of vast and multifaceted interpretive traditions that serve as bases of (or at least crucial reference points in) systems of thought. Scriptures hold the status of being authoritative discursive objects of influential interpretations that in turn generate and affect entire communities' directions of thought.<sup>125</sup> The particular connections exegetes make between different parts of the texts result in new understandings that can profoundly change the subsequent tradition of an interpretive community.

Examples drawn from the Christian tradition may serve as points of reflection and reference, though they are not meant to suggest a direct parallel with the Muslim tradition. The following studies of figurative language and metaphor in that scriptural context are drawn from the fields of literary studies and cognitive linguistics respectively. The literary scholar and philologist Erich Auerbach undertakes to trace the use of the term '*figura*' from its usage in

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<sup>123</sup> Maroth, "Changes of Metaphor," 246.

<sup>124</sup> Richard C. Martin, Heather J. Empey, Mohammed Arkoun, and Andrew Rippin, "Islamic Studies," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World*. Oxford Islamic Studies Online. <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t236/e0395>.

<sup>125</sup> Miriam Levering, ed. *Rethinking Scripture: Essays from a Comparative Perspective* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989). See also the foundational book by Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *What is Scripture? A Comparative Approach* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

Greek writings to early Christian writings.<sup>126</sup> The term developed from its early usage to mean a plastic form to taking on the meaning of a figuration or a prefiguration. The early Christian theologian Tertullian (d. circa 240 CE) was the first to use the word '*figura*' in this new way, and he did so often, to refer to 'a figure of things to come.' Joshua son of Nun was a *figura* of Jesus, Tertullian writes, and his naming by Moses is "a prophetic event foreshadowing things to come," and specifically a prefiguration of Jesus.<sup>127</sup> It is thus the event itself that is a *figura*, the announcement through one entity of a fulfillment to come through certain features to which the latter entity will bear significant similarity. Thus, for Tertullian, other prophets, too, such as Adam, prefigure a fulfillment in Jesus through features that are recognized as similarities. Acts such as the Eucharist and baptism are likewise figurations that exist in the real world, in the flesh. But the status of the harbinger as the one who prefigures does not diminish its importance or reality: it is a "concrete historical fact" that functions as an embodied prophecy that is part of the substance of the *figura*.<sup>128</sup> Some other writers, like Origen, chose to see the prefigurations (particularly from the so-called Old Testament) as spiritual and allegorical, but Tertullian was adamant that both parts of the figuration exist in reality—the similarity is not merely linguistic, metaphorical, or literary. Even when it is statements that form the parts of the *figura*, Tertullian considers them real world events.<sup>129</sup> This last point addresses the important question of the relationship between words and the phenomenal world.

The prefiguration took on a sense of deep meaning in the work of Church writers from the fourth century onward. Details or turns of phrase that may otherwise have seemed incidental were now seen as significant foreshadowings of similar things to come. The temporal aspect of the *figura* implies past events foretelling future ones, in a way that was performed retrospectively in these Christian accounts. Augustine pointed out that if God is eternal and omniscient, God cannot have 'foreknowledge,' only knowledge.<sup>130</sup> Nonetheless, to the human audience of revelation, the *figura* as viewed retrospectively became a popular tool in writings and sermons, particularly as a way of explaining the relationship of the 'Old' Testament to the New Testament.<sup>131</sup> The *figura*, in this conception, is allegorical, and it became a widespread Christian means of seeing the New Testament as subsuming, overshadowing, pointing to, or fulfilling the 'Old Testament' in such a way as to render the latter important *only* insofar as it prefigures the New Testament and underwrites the miracles of Jesus. Reducing the prefiguration to the allegorical or symbolic contributed to the eventual use of the term *figura* as an opposite for *veritas*. The *veritas* was the literal, and the *figura* was *imitatio veritatis*.<sup>132</sup> The term *historia* was sometimes also opposed to *figura* in writers who thought of *figura* as allegorical, and *historia* was seen as synonymous with *figura* for those who thought along the lines of Tertullian.<sup>133</sup>

The development of figural interpretation of texts within the Christian fold is an important part of the history of *figura*. Verses in early Christian writings were cited to justify

<sup>126</sup> Erich Auerbach, *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (New York: Meridian Books, 1959), 11-76.

<sup>127</sup> Auerbach, *Scenes*, 29.

<sup>128</sup> Auerbach, *Scenes*, 30.

<sup>129</sup> Auerbach, *Scenes*, 33-34.

<sup>130</sup> Auerbach, *Scenes*, 42-43.

<sup>131</sup> Auerbach, *Scenes*, 44.

<sup>132</sup> Auerbach, *Scenes*, 44.

<sup>133</sup> Auerbach, *Scenes*, 48.

figural interpretation; the most prominent example is calling Jews ‘figures of ourselves’ (I Cor. 10:6 and 11). Other passages used to support figural interpretation include those where explicit parallels are drawn between Tanakh characters and New Testament ones.<sup>134</sup> Auerbach comments on this type of interpretation, pointing out an important transformation: “The figural interpretation changed the Old Testament from a book of laws and a history of the people of Israel into a series of figures of Christ and the Redemption.” The legal force of the scripture was thus removed, the independent significance of its narratives reduced to what could be picked out and used in the context of understanding Jesus. The two parts of the *figura*, once they are identified as such, emphasize their mutual similarities. Those features are (or become) the most salient ones in each entity. They become associated with each other (in contrast to other types of allegorical interpretation wherein a textual object is taken as symbolic of a virtue or intangible truth).<sup>135</sup> Figural interpretation as a mode of understanding history remained popular in Europe throughout the Middle Ages, in visual art and literature in addition to Scripture. This history addresses the question of why one particular aspect of a term is defined as being the most prominent aspect, within one discourse at least.

The way in which figural interpretation builds on a similarity between certain features of both objects, thus pointing to their salience and significance, creates (or discovers, depending on one’s point of view) a new meaning. This meaning can over time become an integral part of a cumulative tradition and its interpretive community’s way of understanding its own canonical texts. This history of constructions of figuration demonstrates the stakes and the power of interpretation. Interpretations do not just tell us what verses are taken to ‘mean’ but also what force the verses have in realms from the legal to the literary. Hermeneutics raises the question of what interpretations of texts institutions with authority perpetuate, and how these interpretations in turn endorse particular narratives and ideologies.

Auerbach delineates what he suggests is a conscious construction of figuration, but other scholars have approached the results of prevalent interpretations of scripture with the suggestion that the construction of common metaphors in the scriptural text convey content in ways of which the reader is often not aware. Writing in a very different scholarly tradition, Eve Sweetser and Mary Therese DesCamp have examined metaphors of God in the Hebrew Bible and the Greek New Testament, showing the power of the metaphors these scriptures use to describe God.<sup>136</sup> They ask questions about the nature of metaphor that have a bearing on other discussions of metaphor, including what it means to say a metaphor is true or false and “what motivates the particular cultural system of metaphors in a given text or group of texts.”<sup>137</sup> Their research points to the importance of the content of the metaphor’s vehicle for understanding how salient metaphors in scripture influence the community’s conception of God (in this case) and for reflecting how a community conceives of God.<sup>138</sup> This research has

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<sup>134</sup> Auerbach, *Scenes*, 49.

<sup>135</sup> Auerbach, *Scenes*, 54.

<sup>136</sup> Mary Therese DesCamp and Eve Sweetser, “Metaphors for God: Why and How Do Our Choices Matter for Humans? The Application of Contemporary Cognitive Linguistics Research to the Debate on God and Metaphor,” *Pastoral Psychology* 53, no. 3 (January 2005): 207-38; Eve Sweetser and Mary Therese DesCamp, “Motivating Biblical Metaphors for God: Refining the Cognitive Model,” *Cognitive Linguistic Explorations in Biblical Studies*, ed. Bonnie Howe and Joel B. Green (Berlin: DeGruyter, 2014), 7-24.

<sup>137</sup> Sweetser and DesCamp, “Motivating,” 8.

<sup>138</sup> One of the central insights of their work is the gendered construction of the divine that results from the metaphors they discuss, despite the transcendence of God (in more properly philosophical conceptions)

relevance for the study of any field of metaphor, but it is particularly interesting in the case of ways of describing the divine, because as Sweetser and DesCamp point out, experiences and ideas of God are often seen as ineffable, unable to be captured in human language. Metaphor is one way of attempting, nevertheless, to convey ideas about God through language. Michael Sells, in his work on apophatic theology, also explores ways that religious thinkers from diverse contexts and traditions have made creative use of language to try to express the ineffable divine.<sup>139</sup> Daniel Boyarin's work on the manner in which perceptions of anthropomorphic descriptions of the divine have shaped the Jewish hermeneutical tradition focalizes the important intersection of figurative language and theological understanding from another perspective.<sup>140</sup> By pointing to these important areas of research, my aim is merely to draw attention to the fruits of scholarly inquiry at the intersection of metaphor, scripture, and theology. In light of these productive directions of research that point to the significance and signification of canonical and influential metaphors for the divine, I pay particular attention to the examples al-Bāqillānī cites of figurative language in the Qur'ān, particularly those verses that describe God directly. Toshohiko Izutsu has argued that *all* of the Qur'ān is about God;<sup>141</sup> for al-Bāqillānī, all of the Qur'ān is *of* God and thus requires a theory of language that explains the expression of divine ideas in ways that humans, with all of their limitations, can understand.

## Conclusion

What I have been suggesting is that theories of language do not amount to an insular, thematic kind of study but rather one that is integral to the analysis of how a community approached interpretation at large. Perhaps a concern with language can be seen as an aspect of a larger fascination and concern with the interpretive apparatus itself. For al-Bāqillānī, I suggest, an interest in the nature and dynamics of language is not the ultimate goal, but neither is participation in a particular discourse such as *i'jāz al-Qur'ān*, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, or the discourse about the Islamic miracle. Rather, as I argue, what underlies his discussions of language is an interest in showing language to be a reliable and stable system that effectively and clearly conveys meanings, both from God and among people. Characterizing language as such legitimizes exegetical activity and guarantees humans' ability to accurately understand the Qur'ān and, in turn, use it as a basis for divinely guided doctrine and practice. Tying the aesthetic, rhetorical miracle of the Qur'ān to its clarity allows al-Bāqillānī to support the Qur'ān's understandability at the same time as affirming that no human could produce a text as eloquent and marvelous as the Qur'ān.

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precluding the genders that are familiar to humans applying to God. In this vein, I note that I do not use gendered pronouns to refer to God in this dissertation, including in my translations of texts. I repeat the word "God" instead of using a pronoun.

<sup>139</sup> Michael Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

<sup>140</sup> Daniel Boyarin, "The Eye in the Torah: Ocular Desire in Midrashic Hermeneutic," *Critical Inquiry* 16, no. 3 (Spring 1990): 532-50.

<sup>141</sup> Izutsu, *God and Man*, 95-100.

## Chapter Two: Clarity and Communicativity in *al-Taqrīb wa-l-irshād fī uṣūl al-fiqh*

### Introduction

This chapter explores al-Bāqillānī's theory of language use and construction of meaning both in the Qur'ān and in human-authored texts from the perspective of his legal theory, specifically his treatise *al-Taqrīb wa-l-irshād fī uṣūl al-fiqh* [*Proximation and Guidance in the Roots of Jurisprudence*] (henceforth referred to as the *Taqrīb*). It looks closely at the *Taqrīb* with the goal of uncovering what al-Bāqillānī aimed to contribute to developing Islamic legal theory and interpretive frameworks. I begin by outlining the contributions of past scholarship to discourse on theories of language in the field of *uṣūl al-fiqh* (legal theory). While this other scholarship has focused on a small number of sections of al-Bāqillānī's *Taqrīb*, this chapter and the one that follows it take into account a more comprehensive reading of the text in order to characterize and analyze al-Bāqillānī's depiction of language more fully. This investigation, taken together with my analysis of al-Bāqillānī's *Kitāb I'jāz al-Qur'ān* in subsequent chapters, comprises a critical characterization of al-Bāqillānī's scholarly identity and elucidation of main ideas that transcend genres in his writing. I then present and discuss several topics in the *Taqrīb* that shed light on al-Bāqillānī's theory of language, with particular reference to how his propounded views on Qur'ānic and human-authored language contribute to his larger theme of language as clear and systematic. My observations on this topic are followed by elucidation of specific keywords that al-Bāqillānī redefines over the course of his treatise to suit his own worldview within a semantic field that he constructs in order to portray and characterize language as clear. These organizing primary words (translated roughly here and explained more fully at the relevant junctures) are *bayān* (clarity of communication), *muḥkam* (clear, consistent), and *mutashābih* (polysemous, multivalent), but words like *dalīl* (sign, signifier) and *mukhāṭaba* (communication) are also implicated in al-Bāqillānī's linguistic-clarity oriented semantic field. I suggest how his arguments about how language functions contribute to his goals as a systematizing theologian of his era.

As in *Kitāb I'jāz al-Qur'ān*, al-Bāqillānī's writing style allows him to return to a particular issue from multiple vantage points at different junctures in the text, and the recurring issues tend to be the ones that are important parts of al-Bāqillānī's overall message and intellectual contribution. Also similarly to *Kitāb I'jāz al-Qur'ān*, the *Taqrīb* contributes to key debates by arguing for particular meanings of contentious Qur'ānic verses (and here, also Prophetic *aḥādith*) in the course of its discussion. In contrast to al-Bāqillānī's own winding style, this chapter is organized thematically, framed in terms of various dimensions of language. Examining al-Bāqillānī's explanations of clarity and ambiguity in language, extension of meaning, and multiplicity of meaning allows me to analyze his understanding of how communication and signification work. Al-Bāqillānī has a wide and far-reaching conception of how language can signify. He portrays language as being at once dynamic and multifaceted in its ways of meaning, and yet also systematic and reliably understandable. This conception of how language works sets language on firm ground as a stable means of communicating, while allowing for the existence and importance of meanings that are not explicit (and thus, some would say, unverifiable).



This chapter takes up the issues of the Arabic of the Qur'ān and the definition of *bayān* before turning to al-Bāqillānī's explanations of three main facets of signification. Among these three facets, first, a section on explicit and implicit expression introduces al-Bāqillānī's main typology for understanding utterances: uncommunicative ones are not understandable because they lack meaning; some utterances contain meanings that can be understood on their own because they are comprehensible independently of any additional knowledge; and some meanings require an external 'indicant' [*dalīl*] in order to be understood. Second, I discuss al-Bāqillānī's discussion of clarity in expressions through looking at his explanation of *muḥkam* utterances. Third, I turn to his allowance for one utterance to signify multiple meanings at once, partially under the rubric of the term *mutashābih*. I use the terms univocality and multivocality to describe words and utterances that have one or multiple meanings respectively. Teasing apart these facets of signification is not a straightforward process. Many of al-Bāqillānī's chapters combine a discussion of more than one facet described below, explicitly or obliquely. Nonetheless, I have decided to divide my chapter along these lines in order to make plain these key oppositions in al-Bāqillānī's thought on language. My aim is to clarify and analyze al-Bāqillānī's categories of language use in order to bring into relief some of their implications. My study also has the effect of bringing to the fore some main themes that crosscut his discussions and, specifically, demonstrating al-Bāqillānī's construction of a system in which expression in language is clear, and the Qur'ān is entirely clear and comprehensible by humans.

## The Text

*Al-Taqrīb wa-l-irshād fī uṣūl al-fiqh* is one of the earliest extant books of Islamic legal theory.<sup>1</sup> The textual record indicates al-Bāqillānī authored multiple books in the *uṣūl al-fiqh* (legal theory) genre, but the *Taqrīb* is the only one that has survived and been published (if only in part). Bibliographies of al-Bāqillānī's works tell us that he authored three different versions of the *Taqrīb*: a long one, a mid-length one, and a short one.<sup>2</sup> In 1993, 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥamīd b. 'Alī Abū Zunayd published and edited a three-volume text that according to Abū Zunayd comprises the first of two volumes of the short version of the *Taqrīb*, which he has produced using a manuscript found at the Hyderabad State Library and marked as being the first of two volumes. Unfortunately, the second volume was not found, and no other copies of the manuscript are known to exist.<sup>3</sup> Records of the *Taqrīb* can be found in old registers of holdings from medieval libraries, but to date there is no evidence that these volumes still exist. For example, a copy of an ancient register of the Qayrawān Mosque Library lists what appears

<sup>1</sup> Hallaq argues that legal theory emerged in the 4<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> century as a product of the Great Synthesis between rational and traditionist methods. He points in particular to the Baghdādī Shāfi'ī jurist Ibn Surayj (d. 306/918), who developed legal theory as a synthesis between reason and revelation, and his students, who pioneered legal theory. Wael Hallaq, *Shari'ā: Theory, Practice, Transformations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 58-71. Another early text is the following: Aḥmad b. 'Alī al-Rāzī al-Jaṣṣāṣ, *al-Fuṣūl fī al-Uṣūl*, ed. Ajl Jāsim al-Nashmī (Kuwait: Wizārat al-Awqāf wa-l-Shu'ūn al-Islāmiyya, 1994). [Incomplete.]

<sup>2</sup> Iyād, *Tartīb*, 601.

<sup>3</sup> 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Abū Zunayd, "al-Qism al-dirāsī," in *al-Taqrīb wa-l-irshād fī uṣūl al-fiqh (al-saghīr)*, by Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī, ed. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Abū Zunayd. 3 vols. (1998; repr., Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1998), 91.

to be a six-volume set of the *Taqrib*, but that copy is no longer held among Qayrawān's manuscripts.<sup>4</sup>

The scholar Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085), an Ashʿarī Shāfiʿī legist of Persian origins, authored an explanatory abridgement of the text.<sup>5</sup> His abridgement, entitled *Kitāb al-Talkhīṣ fī uṣūl al-fiqh* [Book of the abridgement of the roots of law] (henceforth referred to as the *Talkhīṣ*), has been published in full and can serve as an indication of how some later scholars understood al-Bāqillānī's text as well as what lost portions of the *Taqrib* contained.<sup>6</sup> Some sections of al-Juwaynī's *Talkhīṣ* are longer than their abridgements in Abū Zunayd's version of the *Taqrib*, but Abū Zunayd maintains that the version of the *Taqrib* we have is the shortest version, on the basis of al-Bāqillānī's mentioning the mid-length and long versions in the text.<sup>7</sup> In any case, it is evident that the 'long' version of the *Taqrib* was produced prior to the version we have, because al-Bāqillānī refers to full discussions he already wrote in the long version and does not replicate.<sup>8</sup>

Like other *uṣūl al-fiqh* books, the *Taqrib* deals with the delineation and interpretation of legally significant content in scripture and ordinary speech. The part of the *Taqrib* that we have can be divided into several large sections based on the topics it covers. The first volume of Abū Zunayd's edition covers the following subjects:

1. *ʿIlm/ʿulūm* [knowledge and the sciences];
2. The *dalīl* [signifier] and signification;
3. *Nazar* [speculation/examination];
4. *Taklīf* [legal obligation];
5. *Khiṭāb* [address and oration], including the reciprocal nature of communication;
6. *Majāz* [figurative language], including how to distinguish it from *ḥaqīqa* [literal language], and *qiyās* [analogy];
7. *Maʿānī* [meanings], including individual particles, multiplicity of meaning, and intention.

<sup>4</sup> Ibrāhīm Shabbūḥ, "Sijill qadīm li-maktabat jāmiʿ al-Qayrawān," in *Majallat maʿhad al-makhtūṭāt al-ʿarabiyya* 1, no. 2 (1956): 373-74.

<sup>5</sup> Al-Juwaynī was an important thinker in the fields of jurisprudence and theology (*kalām*). He was forced to leave his native Nishapur under the rule of an anti-Ashʿarite ruler. He went to the Ḥijāz and taught in Meccan and Medina, whence comes his honorary title Imām al-Ḥaramayn ("leader of the two holy places"). Later in his life, he returned to Nishapur which was then under the rule of Nizām al-Mulk, who founded the Nizāmiyya academy for al-Juwaynī. In his *Kitāb al-burhān fī uṣūl al-fiqh*, he is, according to Brockelmann and Gardet, "probably the first to wish to establish a juridical method on an Ashʿarī basis." However, al-Juwaynī also expressed hesitations about al-Ashʿarī and Mālik. C. Brockelmann and L. Gardet, "al-Djuwaynī," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. P. Bearman et al. Brill Online, 2015. [http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/al-djuwayni-SIM\\_2130](http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/al-djuwayni-SIM_2130). ʿAbd al-Mālik b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Juwaynī, *Al-Burhān fī uṣūl al-fiqh*, ed. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīm al-Dīb (N.p.: n.p., 1978).

<sup>6</sup> ʿAbd al-Malik b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-talkhīṣ fī uṣūl al-fiqh*, 3 vols., ed. ʿAbd Allāh Jawlam Nibālī and Shubbayr Aḥmad ʿUmarī (Beirut: Dār al-Bashāʾir al-Islāmiyya, 1996).

<sup>7</sup> Abū Zunayd, "al-Qism al-dirāsī," 82. The reference he mentions is to "al-kitāb al-kabīr wa-l-awsaṭ fī al-uṣūl." Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrib*, vol. 1, 420. However, Qāḍī Iyāḍ lists *al-Uṣūl al-kabīr fī al-Fiqh* separately from *al-Taqrib wa-l-irshād fī uṣūl al-fiqh*, and if indeed these were separate compositions, it does not appear that al-Bāqillānī was referring to the long version of the book Abū Zunayd has published in the instance to which the editor refers. Iyāḍ, *Tartīb*, 601.

<sup>8</sup> In volume three alone, al-Bāqillānī references discussions in what he terms 'the big book' [*al-kitāb al-kabīr*] five times. Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrib*, vol. 3, 192, 207, 374, 381, 403.

Abū Zunayd's second volume covers these topics:

1. *Awāmir* [commands];
2. *Nahy* [prohibitions] and their rules.

Abū Zunayd's third volume covers the general topic of *‘āmm* [general] and *khāṣṣ* [particular], with attention to several subtopics:

1. Characteristics of *‘āmm* [general] and *khāṣṣ* [particular];
2. *Istithnā* [exceptions];
3. *Shurūṭ* [conditions];
4. *Muṭlaq* [absolute] and *muqayyad* [limited];
5. *Dalīl al-khiṭāb* [signifying (capacity) of speech];<sup>9</sup>
6. *Bayān* [clarifying speech].

Al-Juwaynī's abridgement of the *Taqrīb*, entitled *Kitāb al-Talkhīṣ fī uṣūl al-fiqh*, allows us insight into the contents of the rest of the *Taqrīb* (i.e. the second volume Abū Zunayd did not locate). In brief, the rest of the *Taqrīb*, based on al-Juwaynī's *Talkhīṣ*, covers the following topics:

1. Indicants [*dalā'il*]
2. Reports [*ahkām; aḥādīth*]
3. Abrogation [*naskh*]
4. Consensus [*ijmā'*]
5. Analogy [*qiyās*]
6. Legislative effort [*ijtihād*]
7. Imitation [*taqlīd*]

Judging from al-Juwaynī's *Talkhīṣ*, most of the material that is directly concerned with language is contained in the material Abū Zunayd edited and published. I reference al-Juwaynī's *Talkhīṣ* when relevant. It is possible to compare the text of the *Taqrīb* with the *Talkhīṣ* in order to judge the reliability and character of al-Juwaynī's abridgement. To take an example that is relevant to this chapter, al-Juwaynī summarizes al-Bāqillānī's section on three categories of speech in terms of how 'self-sufficient' they are (i.e. whether they can be understood on their own without additional context).<sup>10</sup> Al-Juwaynī quotes sentences defining the categories directly from al-Bāqillānī and paraphrases other parts. He cites the same Qur'ānic verses as the *Taqrīb* does for examples. Sometimes al-Juwaynī's sections are longer than al-Bāqillānī's because he adds explanation of al-Bāqillānī's succinct language. My discussion of *bayān*, below, provides a more detailed example of how al-Juwaynī's *Talkhīṣ* measures up to the *Taqrīb*. The *Talkhīṣ* generally appears to be an accurate account of al-

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Valerie Hoffman's definition of the term *dalīl al-khiṭāb* as "what is indicated by the words, what judgment the words indicate. This is something that is inferred from the discourse but that is not found in the explicit wording," quoting the 'teacher' in *Al-'Aqida al-wahbiyya* by the medieval Ibadi scholar Nāṣir b. Sālim b. 'Udayyam al-Rawāḥī. Valerie Hoffman, *The Essentials of Ibādī Islam* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2012), 77.

<sup>10</sup> The two passages are as follows: Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī, "*Fī Dhikr aqsām al-mufīd min al-khiṭāb*," *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 340-51; al-Juwaynī, "*Al-Qawl fī taqṣīm al-khiṭāb wa-mā yufīduhu*," *Talkhīṣ*, vol. 1, 180-84.

Bāqillānī's *Taqrīb*, except al-Juwaynī does not include some short sections that are found in al-Bāqillānī's text.

### Focus on Language

The important role of language in *uṣūl al-fiqh* thought has recently been explored by a number of scholars. Language is recognized as the means by which God and humans communicate, and thus understanding this medium was of utmost importance for theorists of law. As Paul Powers has written, “[P]re-modern Muslim jurists’ understandings of the nature of language, including divine speech, displays important continuities with jurists’ understanding of the nature of human action as encompassed by language. The assessments or rules (*aḥkam*, sg. *ḥukm*) of Islamic law are a meeting point—for jurists, *the* meeting point—between the divine and the human, a meeting that takes place in the realm of language.”<sup>11</sup> From this perspective, language is extremely important because it alone allows for communication between God and humans, including letting humans know God’s law. Still, there is play between clarity of communication and the inaccessibility of certain knowledge of God’s intentions. The difference between *sharī‘a* and *fiqh* alerts us to this ambiguity: the term *sharī‘a* refers to God’s law itself, whereas *fiqh* denotes humans’ efforts to understand God’s law. Interpretive activities attempt to arrive at the *sharī‘a* but there is ultimately no way to verify their accuracy.<sup>12</sup> Despite this technical distinction between *sharī‘a* and *fiqh*, the terms (particularly *sharī‘a*) are often employed more loosely to refer to “Islamic law,” especially in popular usage. The numenal law and the human attempts to arrive at it are conflated in these usages, betraying the desire for a truly reliable medium of conveying God’s law to people. This semantic blurring is a trace, a clue that alerts us to the presence of a difference between *sharī‘a* and *fiqh*. Nonetheless, legal theorists and other types of exegetes relied on the ability, and the reliability, of language to communicate both divine and human ideas.<sup>13</sup> The tension between language’s clarity and ambiguity is one of the central concerns of classical Islamic legal discourse.

Al-Bāqillānī’s work attests to his awareness of this tension. Large sections of his *Taqrīb* focus on language, how it communicates, how to discern levels of meaning in it, and how to understand the relationship between Qur’ānic and human-authored language. Al-Bāqillānī focuses his discussions around understanding a clear meaning at the levels of the word and the utterance. His text has begun to receive scholarly attention since its publication by Abū Zunayd in 1998, and in fact, the issue of language has been at the forefront of studies of the text. Still, al-Bāqillānī’s work on jurisprudential theory has not been fully integrated into scholarship yet. Ahmed El Shamsy points out that the scholar of Islamic legal history Wael Hallaq failed to mention three major thinkers, including al-Bāqillānī, in his magnum opus.<sup>14</sup> In

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<sup>11</sup> Paul R. Powers, “Finding God and Humanity in Language: Islamic Legal Assessments as the Meeting Point of the Divine and Human,” in *Islamic Law in Theory: Studies on Jurisprudence in Honor of Bernard Weiss*, ed. A. Kevin Reinhart and Robert Gleave (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 199-200.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Gleave, “Sunni Law,” in *Islamic World*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2008), 167-78. See also Fazlur Rahman’s discussion of the relationship between *sharī‘a*, *‘ilm*, and *fiqh*, in *Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (1966; repr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 100-03.

<sup>13</sup> Powers, “Finding God,” 207.

<sup>14</sup> El Shamsy writes, “Wael Hallaq’s recent six-hundred-page magnum opus on Islamic law (*Sharī‘a: Theory, Practice, Transformations*, Cambridge University Press, 2009) fails even to mention three of the five main thinkers examined

his review of Vishanoff's book, Robert Gleave notes the importance of al-Bāqillānī's position in Islamic history, specifically because it opens up possibilities of interpretation rather than closing them off.<sup>15</sup>

Robert Gleave has given attention to the *Taqrīb* in his book *Islam and Literalism*.<sup>16</sup> Gleave focuses on two chapters of al-Bāqillānī's text: 'Divisions of communicative speech' and 'Knowing the difference between *ḥaqīqa* and *majāz*.' He links al-Bāqillānī's first category of an utterance whose meaning is clear in and of itself to the concept of 'literal meaning.'<sup>17</sup> This designation includes both *naṣṣ* texts (not merely 'texts' here, as Gleave points out, but rather clear texts) and those texts whose general sense is clear without recourse to external indicants. The second category of utterance does not convey its meaning entirely explicitly, but it does not entail a mental reasoning process in order to understand the meaning. In laying out this category, Gleave says, al-Bāqillānī is staking out his position vis-à-vis literal meaning in the text, claiming it may not all be explicit, but this does not mean that analogical reasoning is necessary. Al-Bāqillānī's focus on the meaning of the 'text itself' indicates that he sees the text as possessing a meaning based on the words in it, not the speaker's intention.<sup>18</sup> Gleave, under his rubric of seeking the location of literalism, also outlines al-Bāqillānī's section on the meanings of '*ḥaqīqa*' and the ways it can occur, noting that al-Bāqillānī's explanation of *ḥaqīqa* indicates "the manner in which a word is used [*isti māl*]."<sup>19</sup> Gleave concludes that al-Bāqillānī's four designations of *ḥaqīqa* are technical rather than accessible in terms of ordinary people's language use. Al-Bāqillānī's conception of literal meaning in language, Gleave suggests, relies on technical categorizations rather than an intuitive or other commonplace understanding of literal versus figurative utterances: "Identifying the expression as *ḥaqīqa* (that the words within it are used with their literal meaning, and so by implication the literal meaning itself is discovered) emerges from the application of scholarly method. . ."<sup>20</sup>

David Vishanoff has also discussed al-Bāqillānī's legal theory with particular reference to linguistic interpretation in a chapter of his dissertation, published in revised form as *The Formation of Islamic Hermeneutics: How Sunni Legal Theorists Imagined a Revealed Law*.<sup>21</sup> Vishanoff does a masterful job of reconstructing early Sunni concerns with theorizing Islamic law, with chapters encompassing the early history of legal thought that focus on al-Shafī's *Risāla*,

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by Vishanoff ('Abd al-Jabbār, al-Bāqillānī, and Abū Ya'lā), while a fourth (Ibn Ḥazm) appears only in a single footnote." Ahmed El Shamsy, Review of *The Formation of Islamic Hermeneutics: How Sunni Legal Theorists Imagined a Revealed Law* by David Vishanoff, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 134, no. 1 (January-March 2014), 168-71.

<sup>15</sup> "Al-Shafī's notion that linguistic form does not (always) entail legal meaning creates, of course, a particular theory of language and communication; this theory is taken up and exploited by the great Ash'ārī theologian al-Baqillani (pp. 152-98). In al-Baqillani we have a flexibility in interpretation which supports a practical employment of legal theory: a properly constructed theory must be able to provide a guide whereby law is derived *ab initio*, and without constant reference to previously declared rules by eminent jurists of the past."

Robert Gleave, Review of *The Formation of Islamic Hermeneutics: How Sunni Legal Theorists Imagined a Revealed Law* by David Vishanoff, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 45 (2013), 622-23.

<sup>16</sup> Gleave, *Islam and Literalism*, 116-20.

<sup>17</sup> Gleave, *Islam and Literalism*, 116.

<sup>18</sup> Gleave, *Islam and Literalism*, 118.

<sup>19</sup> Gleave, *Islam and Literalism*, 119.

<sup>20</sup> Gleave, *Islam and Literalism*, 120.

<sup>21</sup> David Vishanoff, *The Formation of Islamic Hermeneutics: How Sunni Legal Theorists Imagined a Revealed Law* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 2011).

Zāhirism and Ibn Ḥazm's *Taqrīb*, 'Abd al-Jabbār and the Mu'tazila, al-Bāqillānī's *Taqrīb*, and Abū Ya'la ibn al-Farrā's *Udda*. He draws out five themes in each of these texts: clarity and ambiguity; ways of meaning; scope of reference; modes of speech; and verbal implication. Vishanoff's study convincingly shows the development of these themes during the classical period of Islamic jurisprudence. The chapter on al-Bāqillānī contextualizes his texts within a historical split consisting of two main responses to al-Ash'arī's method of interpretation. Some of al-Bāqillānī's peers retained the idea of inner speech (i.e., that God's eternal speech exists as a single unit of meaning, separately from words and sounds) but abandoned the doctrine of suspending judgment on the issue of whether expressions should be understood as general or particular when the utterance or its co-texts do not specify one way or the other. In contrast, al-Bāqillānī and others upheld the suspension of judgment on both of these issues.<sup>22</sup>

Vishanoff argues that al-Bāqillānī's most salient thesis regarding language is its essential ambiguity, "even when used in the most pedestrian ways."<sup>23</sup> Before we can understand the inner meaning of an utterance that could have more than one possible meaning, we must use additional evidence (i.e. other utterances) to clarify it.<sup>24</sup> Thus, ambiguity "is not the final resting place of interpretation, but an opportunity for the work of interpretation."<sup>25</sup> One of the key passages of the *Taqrīb* that Vishanoff uses to support this thesis is the chapter on what Vishanoff calls the levels of self-sufficiency of language, the same one that Gleave emphasized. Vishanoff's argument that al-Bāqillānī saw language as essentially ambiguous is reflected in his translation of the term *muḥṭamal* as 'ambiguous.' As I argue below, the term *muḥṭamal* does not refer to an utterance that is ambiguous in the sense of vague or whose meaning is unknown or unclear, but rather to an utterance that has more than one meaning (multivocal). These multiple meanings are available to the interpreter and are all signified by the utterance. Ironically, the use of the term 'ambiguity' in Vishanoff's writing on al-Bāqillānī might mislead due to the two different senses of the word 'ambiguity'—'unclear, vague, inexact' and 'having a double meaning.' For al-Bāqillānī, utterances can have more than one meaning at once, but language is not inexact or vague.

Gleave's observations impart an impression of al-Bāqillānī's writing on *ḥaqīqa* and literal meaning in utterances, and Vishanoff leaves the reader with an understanding of what al-Bāqillānī's stance was on the five key themes he examines, though there remains the question of what al-Bāqillānī's overall message is in the text. Despite the spate of recent research, al-Bāqillānī's larger theses in his thought has yet to be contextualized and situated within the history of Islamic legal thought, and there remain aspects of it that have not been thoroughly explained. In this chapter, I broaden the discussion of al-Bāqillānī's conception of language by taking a wider and more comprehensive look at sections of the *Taqrīb* that concern language and interpretation, with the goal of characterizing al-Bāqillānī's positions and theses about communicativity as expressed in this text. Through taking into account sections beyond those which deal most directly with literal and figurative language, I aim to provide a multifaceted account of al-Bāqillānī's theory of how language works as he elucidates it in the *Taqrīb*, in order to shed light on his efforts to describe language in strategically

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<sup>22</sup> Vishanoff, *Formation*, 152.

<sup>23</sup> Vishanoff, *Formation*, 162.

<sup>24</sup> Vishanoff, *Formation*, 160-61.

<sup>25</sup> Vishanoff, *Formation*, 163.

significant ways that in turn play into his larger theological vision. That vision comes into focus through a comparison of the content of the *Taqrīb* and *Kitāb I 'jāz al-Qur 'ān*.

### Al-Bāqillānī's Emphasis on Signification and Communication

A large section of the *Taqrīb* is concerned with signification and its relationship to truth. This is part of why showing language to be accurately communicative and systematic is so important to al-Bāqillānī: it is the means by which humans understand divine truth. He develops a vocabulary of signification that he uses to explain his conception of how signifiers communicate signifieds. The *dalīl* [signifier] is connected to non-necessary knowledge. Signs are of two types: intellect-based [*'aqlī*] or 'set down' [*waḍ 'ī*].<sup>26</sup> This dichotomy opposes those indications knowable by the intellect and those that are given and originate in primordial establishment of relationships between signifiers and signifieds.<sup>27</sup> Examples of signs known by the intellect are those governed by causation, like the actor being capable of an action. Examples of signs that have been 'set down' (i.e., posited) are the likes of words and symbols, which are only known through their setting-down, because there is no essential or natural relationship between a given word and what it signifies. There is no way to know these signs through the mind alone. And because signification in language or other forms al-Bāqillānī mentions is external, it does not communicate what is in "consciences and the actions of hearts."<sup>28</sup> Ideas exist inside an agent's mind or heart, and that agent can use modes of communication such as language to formulate expressions of these thoughts. Absent the decision to convey these ideas, the thoughts remain in a private 'alinguistic' state. Elsewhere, he elaborates on this suggestion of pre-linguistic speech: "Every speaker among creation needs a signification of the speech that is in his soul [*naḥs*] to express it, or something instead of [speech] of gesture, computation, inscription, and natural signs. God Almighty does not need that for God's speech to be heard for whoever God addresses of God's creation with God's self."<sup>29</sup> Signs are anything that signifies or indicates, and they are not exclusively linguistic.<sup>30</sup> The idea that thoughts and ideas exist before they are put into words gives speakers agency over how exactly they are expressed (and opening up the possibility that a given utterance may be more or less suitable for communicating the idea at hand). The special conditions of divine communication are the topic of a discussion below.

Signs are clarifications and proofs; al-Bāqillānī uses words meaning 'clarification' and 'proof' as synonyms for the term 'sign.' He begins his section introducing vocabulary from the root D-L-L as follows: "Know—may God have mercy on you—that the signifier [*dalīl*], the signification [*al-dalāla*], and that by which it is signified [*al-mustadall bihi*] are one thing, and it

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<sup>26</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 204-05.

<sup>27</sup> See B. G. Weiss, "Waḍ' al-Lughā," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. P. Bearman et al. Brill Online, 2015. [http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/wad-al-lugha-SIM\\_7797](http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/wad-al-lugha-SIM_7797).

<sup>28</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 205.

<sup>29</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 336.

<sup>30</sup> Al-Bāqillānī reiterates the same five categories of signification that al-Jāhiz (d.868) did in *Al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*: utterances, gesture, computation, inscription, and natural signs (a category excluded in a comparable passage of *Kitāb al-hayawān*), to adopt David Charles Larsen's interpretation. David Charles Larsen, "Means of Intelligibility" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2007; ProQuest order no. 3306212), 106-07. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/304899936?accountid=14496>.

is clarification [*bayān*], evidence [*hujja*], proof [*sulṭān*], and demonstration [*burhān*]; all these words are synonyms for the signification [*al-dalāla*] itself.”<sup>31</sup> Al-Bāqillānī’s explanation of signification, with its emphasis on signs as clarification and proof, frames language as being essentially clear, clarifying, and a means of demonstrating. This conception of language as a systematic network of signs used by all speakers and the Qur’ān, and the expression of utterances as separate from these signs’ existence, gives us a preliminary impression of al-Bāqillānī’s hermeneutic.

Language’s clear and clarifying role is built into al-Bāqillānī’s vocabulary for explaining language: “The signifier [*al-dāll*] is a clarifier of something other than it[self] by its attribution to the sign.”<sup>32</sup> God is the ultimate signifier, but we can call other speakers signifiers metaphorically. As for the signified, it is that for which the signification is set up, and figuratively speaking, it can refer to the signification itself. The *mustadill* is a homonym for the thinker seeking truth and the one trying to understand signification.<sup>33</sup> The *mustadall* means the thing sought by the signification [*dalāla*] and the thing inquired about. The *mustadall lahu* is both the judgment that speculation into the *dalīl* seeks, and the person seeking by means of the *dalāla*. The *mustadall ‘alayhi* can only refer to the judgment whose knowledge is sought through speculation into the *dalīl*. *Istidlāl* may refer to consideration of the indicant or asking about the indicant, where the difference between the two is that the first is a solitary activity and the second occurs between two people. These definitions are firmly rooted in a system of signification rather than their technical applications in legal discourse. In contrast, for instance, Bernard Weiss notes that Āmidī (d. 630/1233) uses the term *istidlāl* as a catch-all term for indicants that do not come from the Qur’ān, *sunna*, *ijmā‘*, or analogy, a meaning limited to the technical discourse of law.<sup>34</sup>

Al-Bāqillānī makes the distinction that signification [*dalāla*] is not verbalization itself; the expression [*ibāra*] of the signification [*istidlāl*] is the audible sounds of speech.<sup>35</sup> Al-Bāqillānī presupposes that ideas exist before their expression in language, both in the case of the Qur’ān and human-produced utterances.<sup>36</sup> The Qur’ān’s arrangement perfectly suits the meanings the Qur’ān expresses, implying an extant meaning that wording and grammatical arrangement can convey to varying degrees of excellence, with the Qur’ān’s being superior. Likewise, in the case of human language usage, there is an intended meaning behind an utterance that the speaker puts into words. In Weiss’s writing on the location of meaning in medieval Islamic conceptions of how language functions, he notes that for these medieval scholars, meaning was determined in the mind of the speaker, expressed in words, and then left for the audience to interpret. Successful communication occurred when the audience understood this intended meaning.<sup>37</sup> As usual, the Qur’ān is seen as a special case of language use. For the Mu‘tazila, the Qur’ān was created in time; for the Ash‘arīs, it was eternal, so its meanings could not be determined before being articulated in language. The Qur’ān is an

<sup>31</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 207.

<sup>32</sup> “*Fa-ammā al-dāll fa-huwwa al-mubayyin li-ghayrihi bi-naṣbihi al-dalīl*.” Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 207.

<sup>33</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 207-08.

<sup>34</sup> Bernard Weiss, *The Search for God’s Law: Islamic Jurisprudence in the Writings of Sayf al-Din al-Amidi* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1992), 152-54.

<sup>35</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 208.

<sup>36</sup> This distinction is the basis of a prominent Ash‘arite position. Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 208 fn 18.

<sup>37</sup> Weiss, *Search for God’s Law*, 118.



exception in that neither the content nor the wording of the Qur'ān can precede the other because they are both eternal. By contrast, any instance of articulation of the Qur'ān, such as a human recitation or a *muṣḥaf* [physical copy of the Qur'ān] is temporal.

### The Arabic Qur'ān and the Issue of Subjectivity

The language of the Qur'ān is understood, in the *Taqrīb* as in other medieval Islamic texts, as being in the Arabic of the Quraysh tribe from which the Prophet hailed and which formed the Qur'ān's first audiences. And yet the Qur'ān calls its own language Arabic (not that of a specific tribe) and addresses a still wider audience. Philologists and theologians theorized and continually revisited the issue of the Qur'ān's universal message in light of the particularity of its language.<sup>38</sup> The privileging of the state of language in the setting of the revelation and the Prophet's life raises the question of subjectivity. Given that for an Ash'arī like al-Bāqillānī, the Qur'ān is eternal, how is the interpreter to understand the focalization of that language community at a specific time (the moment of revelation)? Al-Bāqillānī reasons that the Qur'ān was revealed in language *the Prophet's own audience* could understand most clearly.<sup>39</sup> There would be no sense in the Qur'ān's claims to clarity otherwise, and suggesting that these claims (made in several Qur'ānic *āyāt*) are false is tantamount to blasphemy. But there is a real tension at play between the fixed Qur'ānic form and the changing audiences who encounter it. Almost from the time of the Qur'ānic revelation itself, and certainly as Islamic history continued, there was a linguistically diverse audience who heard and read it. Was the Arabic of the Qur'ān equally 'clear' to all members of this audience? Given that empirically it was not, how can the Qur'ān be a 'universal' revelation? A question that is never directly addressed in al-Bāqillānī's discussions is why the first audience of the revealed Qur'ān is the standard for what constitutes clear and understandable Arabic. Partial answers that were part of the standard rhetoric specify that in order to understand the language of the Qur'ān, one had to be an educated speaker of Arabic and that the language in which the Qur'ān was revealed was inimitable *even* to the Qur'ān's first (Arabic-speaking) audiences; it was even more inimitable to farther removed audiences who could accept the Qur'ān's inimitability based on those first audiences' inability to compose a *mu'ārada* (contrafacta) of it. Still, al-Bāqillānī and others strongly emphasized the idioms and customary lexical and grammatical usage of the Arabs at the time of the revelation. Al-Bāqillānī's texts indicate that for him, this linguistic form of revelation was accidental: it was not due to any intrinsic or ontological

<sup>38</sup> See Kopf, "Religious Influences," 33-59; Mustafa Shah, "The Philological Endeavours of the Early Arabic Linguists: Theological Implications of the *Tawqīf-Iṣṭilāḥ* Antithesis and the *Majāz* Controversy – Part I," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 1, no. 1 (1999): 27-46.

<sup>39</sup> Al-Bāqillānī writes, citing three Qur'ānic verses about clarity: "'We made it an Arabic Qur'ān' [Q 12:2], and the Almighty's saying: 'In a clear Arabic tongue' [26:195], and the Almighty's saying: 'And we have not sent a messenger except in the language of his people. . . The externally apparent meanings of these verses require that all of the speech be in the Arabic that the Arabs used, and that otherwise it would have been speech not in their language.'" Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 391. In another passage, he says: "The angel will not go to a human messenger except for in the language of the messenger, in which he has previously learned and spoken by way of conventional knowledge of its meanings and indication." [*Wa-lan yu'addī al-malak ilā al-rasūl min al-bashar illā bi-lughat al-rasūl allatī qad taqaddama 'ilmuhu wa-nuṭquhu bihā min ẓarīq al-muwāḍa'a 'alā ma'ānihā wa-dalālatihā.*] Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 431.

superiority that the Arabs or their language possessed, but rather that the Qur'ān's self-professed clarity was indexically attached to the Qur'ān's first audiences. He does find Arabic to be a superior language in the breadth of its lexicon, but he also asserts that God could have produced an even more eloquent Arabic Qur'ān if God had so willed it. As I argue, al-Bāqillānī's overall outlook on language supports the conception of the particular form of the Qur'ān as superior because it was clear to its human audience, taking into account this audience's particular knowledge base and capacity for understanding. In contrast, *umm al-kitāb*, that celestial ur-scripture that lies beyond human reach, does not have to take the accidental form of humanly-comprehensible language because it does not have to be clear to humans.<sup>40</sup> The paradox of an unchanging *muṣḥaf* (fixed text; codex) for a changing audience lies at the edges of al-Bāqillānī's thought on Qur'ānic language but is never addressed.<sup>41</sup> Other scholars dealt with the question differently; Weiss notes that al-Āmidī and others treated *ḥaqīqa* expressions in scripture as belonging to the 'primordial *wad'*' (setting-down) rather than a temporally-bound stage of language.<sup>42</sup> That treatment is consistent with the idea of metaphor as a limited linguistic 'extension' of meaning that makes meaning clear to an audience, one that is not essential to the meaning itself.<sup>43</sup>

Part of al-Bāqillānī's defense of the Qur'ān as clear Arabic is the refutation of the idea that any word in the Qur'ān is of foreign origin. He gives examples of Qur'ānic vocabulary accused of being foreign, and he says the accusers themselves say such things in violation of *ijmā'* (consensus), sayings of the *salaf* (predecessors), and the Qur'ān's own indications.<sup>44</sup> The verses al-Bāqillānī cites here emphasize the Qur'ān's clarity as an Arabic revelation: "And so We have revealed to you an Arabic Qur'ān, that you may warn the Mother of Cities and those who dwell around it" [Q 42:7]; "Surely it is a Reminder to you and to your people" [Q 43:44]; "Now We have made it easy for your tongue, that they may remember" [Q 44:58]; and "If We had made it a foreign Qur'ān, they would have said, 'Why are its signs not distinguished? What, foreign and Arabic?'" [Q 41:44]. The mixing of foreign and Arabic tongues could have been framed as an accusation against the Qur'ān that it needed to use words from a non-Arabic tongue in order to convey the desired meanings. The foreign vocabulary would then be a sign of the "incapability of proffering [the Qur'ān] and organizing it [*naẓmihi*] to have that extent of eloquent conveying [*balāgha*] in one tongue."<sup>45</sup> This hypothetical mixed-language Qur'ān would indicate a Divine shortcoming, according to al-Bāqillānī, suggesting that if God were more capable of linguistic expression, supplementing Arabic with foreign words would not have been necessary. This shocking suggestion would amount to "reproaching the

<sup>40</sup> *Umm al-kitāb* (lit. 'the mother of the book') is an enigmatic term used in Q 13:39: "God eliminates what God wills or establishes, and with God is *umm al-kitāb*." See Daniel Madigan, "Book," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe. Brill Online, 2015. [http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-quran/book-EQCOM\\_00027](http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-quran/book-EQCOM_00027).

<sup>41</sup> See Claude Gilliot, "Creation of a Fixed Text," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 46.

<sup>42</sup> Weiss, *Search for God's Law*, 142-43.

<sup>43</sup> Other accounts of figurative language see metaphorical mapping as an essential component of meaning. See DesCamp and Sweetser, "Metaphors for God," 207-38.

<sup>44</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 400-01.

<sup>45</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 401.

inimitability of the Qur'ān.”<sup>46</sup> Moreover, the Qur'ān itself refutes this idea, saying: “And We know well that they say: Only a man teaches him. The speech of him at whom they falsely hint is outlandish, and this is clear Arabic speech” [Q 16:103]. This verse comes from a catalogue of verses throughout the Qur'ān that defend the text against detractors who accused it of being flawed and of human origin. However, even an ordinary understanding of the Arabic language demonstrates that the Qur'ānic vocabulary accused of being foreign is indigenous to Arabic, al-Bāqillānī claims: the words in question are in accordance with Arabic word patterns.<sup>47</sup> Despite al-Bāqillānī's idea of the accidental, pragmatic nature of the Qur'ān's brand of Arabic described above, this focus on pure Arabic presumes the Qur'ān's first audiences would not have found expressions that included ‘foreign’ words to be the clearest way of conveying Qur'ānic meanings. It echoes the anti-Shu'ūbiyya's defense of ‘pure’ Arabic as ontologically superior to other languages.

Al-Bāqillānī's claim that no foreign vocabulary is found in the Qur'ān is an interpretation that has been traced back to the early exegete Abū 'Ubayda.<sup>48</sup> In this regard, al-Bāqillānī follows the opinion of the philologists rather than the early theologians, who allowed that some Qur'ānic vocabulary is not Arabic.<sup>49</sup> In showing how supposedly foreign words actually conformed to Arabic morphological patterns, he implicitly rejects al-Shāfi'ī's middle position of accepting the presence of words in the Qur'ān that were borrowed from other language but became part of Arabic. Rather, he agrees with a version of al-Ṭabari's view that there are incidental similarities between words in Arabic and words in other languages that do not imply borrowing.<sup>50</sup> According to a similar opinion expressed by 'Azīzī b. 'Abd al-Mālik, Arabic is the richest language and it thus includes these words, even if they were found in another language before Arabic.<sup>51</sup>

In a related vein, recent scholarship has also shown that early theologians did not consider Qur'ānic grammar and lexical usage to be normative.<sup>52</sup> Al-Asmā'ī was the harbinger of the shift to a Qur'ān-centric view of language, in a move that prefigured *i'jāz* discourse and its devotion to praising Qur'ānic language. He did not dare challenge or doubt Qur'ānic usages, even suspending his grammatical theories' application to the Qur'ān where a conflict would have arisen. Al-Bāqillānī did not focus on grammar as far as we know, so this situation did not arise for him, but the *Taqrīb* indicates he argued for the Qur'ān and human language production to be compatible and in mutual agreement.

Despite all these claims to Qur'ānic clarity, al-Bāqillānī spends some 20 pages detailing the meanings of individual particles [*hurūf al-ma'ānī*] in Arabic (e.g. *man*, *ayy*, *min*, *mā*), a feature shared with other early *uṣūl* works.<sup>53</sup> It might seem that given the supposedly self-evident, non-technical character of Qur'ānic language, explanations of simple Arabic words would be unnecessary, but al-Bāqillānī writes about several common particles and how they

<sup>46</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 401.

<sup>47</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 403-04.

<sup>48</sup> Kopf, “Religious Influences,” 40.

<sup>49</sup> Kopf, “Religious Influences,” 41.

<sup>50</sup> Kopf, “Religious Influences,” 43.

<sup>51</sup> Kopf, “Religious Influences,” 44.

<sup>52</sup> Kopf, “Religious Influences,” 47.

<sup>53</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 409-21.

are used. He explains the category of linguistic particle, defining the term (*ḥarf*) as meaning ‘edge’ in general language usage (e.g. ‘edge’ of a piece of bread being the crust, ‘edge’ of a riverbank), but in linguistics a word attached to nouns and verbs to change the meaning and communicative value of the utterance.<sup>54</sup> However, he does not comment on the meta-linguistic extension of the term *ḥarf* or the word’s transition from its common to technical meanings. In each section, al-Bāqillānī explains how each particle is used—an aim consistent with his project of laying out and elucidating how language works so that utterances’ legal content and implications can be systematically understood.

Why is it necessary to explain these terms—indeed, why are lexicons and lexical exegesis necessary in general—if language is so clear? The most straightforward explanation is that sections like this were a standard part of books in the *uṣūl al-fiqh* genre. However, beyond that, we as readers can ask how al-Bāqillānī’s section on particles fits into his larger schema and how it advances (or does not advance) his larger points about language and what it does. Al-Bāqillānī understands languages to change over time, and indeed he specifies that the Arabic of the Qur’ān was the language of the Prophet’s community.<sup>55</sup> The change in the usage of words and structures over time may have seemed reason enough to devote sections of his book to meanings of particles. Also, particles such as governed prepositions are famously variable across languages. The Islamic world was multilingual during al-Bāqillānī’s time, and some native Arabic speakers were bothered by non-native speakers’ use of the language and what was considered to be faulty style and grammar. At the same time, normative discourse maintained the importance of reciting and understanding the Qur’ān in Arabic.<sup>56</sup> Even within the ranks of Arabic-speakers, some elitist scholars felt, those who were not well-educated could not understand or use language properly.<sup>57</sup> Al-Bāqillānī may have directed his explanations of the meanings of particles toward any of these groups.

## Bayān

The discourse on *bayān* in *uṣūl al-fiqh* literature is a particular instance where al-Bāqillānī’s input could enrich the scholarly discussion, given the availability of textual evidence and the context in which to understand al-Bāqillānī’s contribution. In technical discourse, the topic of *bayān* is generally concerned with the clarifying ability of language and explanations in the service of understanding. For explanatory purposes, the most straightforward rendering of the term *bayān* may be ‘clearness’ or ‘distinctness.’ It is a verbal noun from the Form I verb *bāna* [to become clear, distinct, differentiated], whose root is *b-y-n*. Edward Lane notes in his dictionary of classical Arabic that the term *bayān* conventionally refers to the “means by which one makes a thing [distinct,] apparent, manifest, evident, clear,

<sup>54</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 409.

<sup>55</sup> However, al-Bāqillānī did not enter into the debate about whether the origin of language was divine or set down by humans and developed by convention. Weiss notes that later Ash’arites followed in suspending judgment on this issue. Weiss, *Search for God’s Law*, 122-23.

<sup>56</sup> For an enlightening exploration of the use of translations of the Qur’ān in Islamic history, cf. Zadeh, *Vernacular Qur’ān*.

<sup>57</sup> See, for instance, Lowry’s comments on al-Juwaynī’s understanding of *bayān*. Joseph E. Lowry, “Some Preliminary Observations on al-Šāfi’ī and Later *Uṣūl al-Fiqh*: The Case of the Term *bayān*,” *Arabica* 55, fasc. 5/6 (2008): 521.

plain, or perspicuous,” which can either be “a thing indicating, or giving evidence of, a circumstance, or state, that is a result, or an effect, of a quality or an attribute,” or the “language that discovers and shows the meaning that is intended.” It is also the name for “a faculty, or principles, [or a science,] whereby one knows how to express [with perspicuity of diction] one meaning in various forms,” and the name of the discipline concerned with those principles, which some restrict to “what concerns comparisons and tropes and metonymies.”<sup>58</sup>

Enlightening scholarship on this topic has contributed to knowledge of how *uṣūl* scholars explained *bayān*, but al-Bāqillānī’s work has been largely absent from this history of *bayān*. Marie Bernand, in her impressive article “*Bayān selon les uṣūliyyūn*,” provides a detailed account of the views on *bayān* of many scholars who wrote in the same discourses as al-Bāqillānī, including al-Jāḥiẓ, Ibn Qutayba, al-Shāfi‘ī, and al-Jaṣṣāṣ among al-Bāqillānī’s predecessors, and the later al-Juwaynī.<sup>59</sup> She does not touch on al-Bāqillānī’s position at all, though he was a legal theorist who clearly found language and its clarifying properties to be very central. Von Grunebaum also excludes al-Bāqillānī from his article on *bayān* in the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, aside from one single mention.<sup>60</sup>

Before turning to al-Bāqillānī’s treatment of *bayān*, a brief overview of other legal theorists’ definitions of *bayān* will help us contextualize al-Bāqillānī’s. Introducing the concept of *bayān*, Bernand provides the following basic definition: it is “a discursive process that provides the means thanks to which a perfect clarity of speech is obtained, a clear expression.”<sup>61</sup> Abū ‘Ubayda (d. 825) marks the beginning of specifically *uṣūlī* usages of the term, which are more theologically imbued (in contrast to *adab*-based definitions, discussed in von Grunebaum’s article on *bayān* in Brill’s *Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition*). Nonetheless, Wolfhart Heinrichs notes the interconnectedness of *uṣūl* and *bayān* scholars, and indeed, their common interest in interpretability and clarity helps explain this crossover. Early Arabic sources depicted *bayān* as a guide to cognition and knowledge, connecting it strongly to the instrument of language. Ja‘far al-Barmakī (d. 180/803) gave a definition, reported by al-Jāḥiẓ and Ibn Qutayba, that at once is more general (not mentioning language) and more philosophical (privileging the *‘aql*): “Anything that lifts the veil of a hidden idea (*ma‘ana*), so that it can be compromised and accepted by the mind (*aql*), is *bayān*.”<sup>62</sup> It also had to be free of ambiguity and available to understanding without the need for interpretation. Bernand sees in al-Barmakī’s definition the seeds of later *uṣūlī* understandings of *bayān*; it allows for “using a manner of exegetical argumentation leading a text from the ambiguity of what is said to the univocal clarity of what is intended to be said.”<sup>63</sup> The underlying idea is that utterances are imperfect expressions of the speaker’s intention. Al-Shāfi‘ī gave a definition of *bayān* that was later critiqued by later *uṣūlīs*: “a term that groups together diverse meanings and from which the communal roots diversify in significantly different notions.” Al-Shāfi‘ī provides five different ‘modalities’ of *bayān*: 1) explicit, self-explicating pronouncements in the Qur’ān, 2) the Prophet’s pronouncements that clarify passages of the Qur’ān, 3) the Prophet’s additional

<sup>58</sup> Lane, *Lexicon*, 288.

<sup>59</sup> Marie Bernand, “*Bayān selon les uṣūliyyūn*,” *Arabica* 32 (1995): 145-60.

<sup>60</sup> G.E. von Grunebaum, “*Bayān*,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. P. Bearman et al. Brill Online, 2015. [http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/baya-n-SIM\\_1298](http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/baya-n-SIM_1298).

<sup>61</sup> Bernand, “*Bayān*,” 145-46.

<sup>62</sup> Bernand, “*Bayān*,” 147.

<sup>63</sup> Bernand, “*Bayān*,” 147.

pronouncements that further specify what is found in the Qur'ān, 4) *sunna* not found in the Qur'ān, and 5) *ijtihād*, defined here as the individual's capacity to distinguish one thing from another using reason.<sup>64</sup> This definition was the subject of later discussion and critique, in part because it differs so much from later *uṣūlī* conceptions of *bayān* as a transitive, clarificatory, linguistic property of a text.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, in general terms, later *uṣūlīs* considered *bayān* to have levels and to describe clear speech in general. Al-Shāfi'ī's definition continued to serve as a reference point for later discussion, as Lowry aptly shows.

For al-Jaṣṣāṣ, one set of problems with al-Shāfi'ī's definition is that it is too imprecise, does not overlap completely with the actual meaning of *bayān*, and does not define or specify the contents of the terms he uses (the latter being a criticism echoed by Abū al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī). Furthermore, it reduces *bayān* to repetition and confirmation of an idea. *Bayān* is a discourse free of ambiguity, understood in this way, not an explanation or a demonstration. It allows for the Prophetic tradition to shed light on the Qur'ān, thereby legitimizing the Prophet's actions and deeds (a thesis that has been recognized as central to al-Shāfi'ī's contribution to Islamic law). It does not include *ijmā'* (consensus of scholars) as a category of *bayān* (an objection repeated by al-Juwaynī and al-Isfahānī) but includes independent legal reasoning [*ijtihād*].<sup>66</sup> Al-Jaṣṣāṣ, on the other hand, saw *bayān* as a process by which texts were elucidated, through "the suppression of all that could introduce ambiguity," though the terms in the discourse may be multivalent.<sup>67</sup> He also typologizes *bayān* in terms of modalities, summarized by Bernand as follows: 1) primordial statutes, 2) particularization of the general, 3) permitting one to distinguish between modes of meaning (e.g. literal vs. figurative, information vs. command), 4) interpretive explanation that sheds light on intended meaning, and 5) abrogation, insofar as it limits the duration of a statute.<sup>68</sup> The middle three items all aim to get at the intended meaning or sense of an utterance. The implication is that the 'true' meaning of the utterance is located within the speaker, and it is the job of the audience to distinguish this meaning (Bernand's 'vouloir dire' and 'sens voulu').

Al-Jaṣṣāṣ also refutes a definition Bernand attributes to the Mu'tazilī Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Baṣrī (d. 367/977) according to which *bayān* is that which helps us distinguish one thing from another (the verbal noun of clarifying). Like al-Jaṣṣāṣ, al-Baṣrī considers *bayān* to be unveiling [*kashf*] and demonstrating [*idāh*], adding that for the jurists [*fuqahā'*] it is speech or action that indicates the intended meaning of the utterance.<sup>69</sup> Indication is *bayān*. Similarly, according to al-Ṣayrafī (d. 330/941), *bayān* consists in transferring something from ambiguity to clarity. The Shāfi'ī Ash'arī Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085) had a complex response to others' definitions of *bayān*; his own definition, in brief, is that *bayān* is an indicant [*al-dalīl*], whether rational or scriptural, an echoing of al-Bāqillānī's definition.<sup>70</sup> This definition includes direct

<sup>64</sup> Lowry, "Preliminary Observations," 508. Bernand finds items 3 and 4 to be indistinguishable, interpreting both to refer to sunnaic pronouncements not found in the Qur'ān. Bernand, "Bayān," 149-50.

<sup>65</sup> Lowry, "Preliminary Observations," 513.

<sup>66</sup> Bernand, "Bayān," 155; Lowry, "Preliminary Observations," 514.

<sup>67</sup> Bernand, "Bayān," 151.

<sup>68</sup> Bernand, "Bayān," 152.

<sup>69</sup> Bernand, "Bayān," 152-53.

<sup>70</sup> Bernand, "Bayān," 157. Al-Juwaynī, *Al-Burhān fī uṣūl al-fiqh*, 160-65. In this chapter, al-Juwaynī lists the same two opposing definitions of *bayān* and refutes them using similar arguments to those he includes in his *Talkhīṣ*.

transmissions from the Prophet, sound *ijmāʿ*, and single-*isnād* reports and *qiyās* resulting from *ijmāʿ*.

Returning to al-Bāqillānī's definition of *bayān*, Lowry points out that al-Bāqillānī does not delve into a discussion of *bayān* in the short version of the *Taqrīb* that we have, because he had already done so in the long version.<sup>71</sup> However, Abū Zunayd's third volume of the *Taqrīb* does include sections on *bayān* that provide insight into al-Bāqillānī's views on the topic and can help us situate them in relation to other scholars' understandings of *bayān*. The *Taqrīb*'s sections on *bayān* begin with al-Bāqillānī's definition of the term:

It is the indicant [*dalīl*] that is connected, by sound reflection [*naẓar*] on it, to the knowledge [*ilm*] to which it is an indicant.<sup>72</sup>

In other words, *bayān* is an indicant of knowledge, the means by which that knowledge comes to be known by a thinker who reflects on and understands the indicant properly. This definition is repeated verbatim in al-Juwaynī's *Talkhīṣ*, where it is labeled as al-Bāqillānī's technical *uṣūlī* definition of *bayān*.<sup>73</sup> Al-Bāqillānī cites *ahl al-lughā*'s definition as the indication [*dalīl*] of this definition of *bayān*, i.e. the knowledge by which we know the word's meaning:

The appearance and discovery of a matter, such that it is distinguished from that which is not of it, and thus it is said: 'The matter was clear [*bāna*] to me' if it is uncovered, and 'The man made clear [*abāna*] what was in his inner self' if he made it apparent, and 'The crescent moon and the dawn came out [*bāna*]' if they appeared and became clear. The Prophet (PBUH) said: 'What has *bāna* of life, is dead,' meaning 'what is disconnected.' Among what God Almighty has said is: "This is *bayān* for people" [Q 3:138], i.e. making apparent what they had earned. And the Almighty's saying: "to make clear [*li-tubayyin*] to humankind what was sent down to them" [Q 16:44], i.e. to make it come out and appear. And the Almighty's saying: "And when God took up a pact with those who had been given the Book: 'You shall make it clear [*la-tubayyinunnahu*] unto the people, and not conceal it,'" [Q 3:187] i.e. you shall make it apparent to the people.

And among it[s uses] is their saying: 'Clarify [*abin* and *bayyin*] your intention,' meaning make it apparent in such a way that divides it from what is other than it. If this is so, we must say that this is its meaning, and that we define it as being 'the indicant by which one is connected, upon sound examination of it, to the act of knowing, of which it is an indicant,' even if the *bayān* is a manifest utterance of its meaning. Examining it is for [the sake of acquiring] knowledge of what was set down for its meaning, and all that is heard by him who does not know, is set down for its communication, [even] if he has no knowledge of its set down [meaning].

We clarified before that what is known by necessity does not need *bayān* and an indicant by which to be connected to its knowledge. Every indicant of a matter

<sup>71</sup> Lowry, "Preliminary Observations," 522. The reference is to al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 3, 374.

<sup>72</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 3, 370.

<sup>73</sup> Al-Juwaynī, *Talkhīṣ*, vol. 2, 204-05.

is apparent and clarifying of [the matter] without [*bayān*], insofar as reflection into it is a way to knowledge of that of which it is an indicant, whether the indicant is apparent and clarifying of the intention by action, by utterance, by pointing, or by any other thing.

The thing intellected [*ma 'qūl*] from the indicant of *bayān*, according to the custom of the legists and theologians, is *bayān* of the meaning of speech to the exclusion of all else known by an indicant. On this basis, the clarifying thing [*mubayyin*] must be the indicant of what is attributed to it, from among the indicants of the matter that the indicant makes apparent.<sup>74</sup>

The first paragraph of this passage may seem ironically unclear, especially in English translation, because al-Bāqillānī is using terms from a semantic field relating to clarity, appearance, distinction, and separation in order to get at the meaning of *bayān*. Al-Bāqillānī's examples show how the verb from which the term *bayān* derives can be used in many contexts to describe appearing and clarity, and a causative verb from the same root, *ibāna*, means making clear or making distinct. When applied to a text, the term *bayān* works analogously to its usage in the physical contexts for which al-Bāqillānī provides examples: it distinguishes and separates out a meaning. Al-Bāqillānī relates the term back to the verb that is its source (*bāna*), but he only uses the verbal noun *bayān* to refer to the non-physical. His method of explaining the meaning of a technical term by using common meanings of the word as his starting point is consistent with his understanding of technical terms as being continuous and connected with non-technical meanings of the word (a topic I address below).

Al-Juwaynī, in his *Talkhīṣ*, provides a gloss on al-Bāqillānī's definition of *bayān* by way of explanation. He defends al-Bāqillānī's definitions as being superior to those of some of his colleagues:

*Bayān* is an Arabic term that oscillates between meanings, the origin of all of which goes back to appearance [*zuhūr*]. So we say "the matter became clear [*bāna*]" if it is discovered, and "the crescent moon and the dawn became clear [*bāna*]," and "what is on so-and-so's conscience became clear [*bāna*]." Making clear [*ibāna*] is making appear [*iḥḥār*], and likewise clarifying [*tabyīn*], and making clear [*ibāna*] may be intended, by which is intended cutting and dividing. So you say: "So-and-so's hand was separated [*ubīnat*] from his body," if it was cut off and divided from him. It is as if that goes back to the meaning of appearing also, for if it is connected to a whole that was not known neutrally and by distinction, then if it is divided and clarified, it becomes apparent to itself, and it is known in and of itself without knowledge of the sentence of which it is a part.<sup>75</sup>

Only after providing this general explanation of what *bayān* means does al-Juwaynī provide the technical *uṣūlī* definition al-Bāqillānī gave of *bayān* (translated above). Al-Bāqillānī's technical *uṣūlī* definition of *bayān* is indeed a direct precursor of al-Juwaynī's own, and it is also similar

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<sup>74</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 3, 370-71.

<sup>75</sup> Al-Juwaynī, *Talkhīṣ*, vol. 2, 204.



to al-Shīrāzī's and al-Āmidī's later definitions, which also equate *bayān* with indicants. Al-Juwaynī's 'general' definition of *bayān* is similar to al-Bāqillānī's, though his examples of how the term *bāna* was used in ordinary language differ. He makes explicit al-Bāqillānī's point, made through examples, that all the different usages of 'bayān' are derived from the notion of appearance and distinction.

According to al-Bāqillānī's definition, *bayān* relies on sound reflection, meaning that it may not be immediately 'clear.' The reader/listener must employ the 'aql. This feature positions al-Bāqillānī's *uṣūlī* definition in opposition to the conceptions of *bayān* espoused by scholars like al-Barmakī, who said *bayān* must be comprehensible without the need for reflection in order to understand it.<sup>76</sup> Al-Bāqillānī's definition is similar to Abū al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī's earlier definition of *bayān* as 'signification' [*al-dalāla*].<sup>77</sup> Focusing on the precise difference between the indicant/signifier [*dalīl*] and the indication/signification itself [*al-dalāla*], al-Baṣrī's definition has *bayān* as the process of signification (which Lowry emphasizes is a transitive one), while al-Bāqillānī's definition positions *bayān* as the signifying, clarifying text itself that bridges the thinker's mind with knowledge contained in a text. For al-Baṣrī, the technical *uṣūlī* meaning of *bayān* is tied to the text; that is, "it is a text that only signifies in conjunction with another, presumably by being brought to bear on another text to clarify the (legislative) import of that other text."<sup>78</sup> Ibn 'Aqīl (d. 513/1119) and others echo this idea in saying *bayān* is when another, clear text is used in order to clarify a text whose meaning is not clear on its own. This latter definition is similar to al-Bāqillānī's idea of the clarification of non-self-sufficient texts (those whose meanings are only apparent when additional texts or knowledge are brought to bear on them), and texts that have non-self-sufficient aspects, and indeed al-Bāqillānī uses the word *bayān* in this context. About the text that is independently clear, whether in explicit speech or in sense, al-Bāqillānī says "it is *bayān* in itself, and there is no need for it to have *bayān*." The text is 'clear' and has no need for 'clarifying'; note the intransitive usages. They are not those intransitive usages of al-Shāfi'ī, however. As I note elsewhere, most sections of al-Bāqillānī's *Taqrīb* describe language as a whole, without treating scriptural language as having different properties. For al-Shāfi'ī, *bayān* was a phenomenon of religious knowledge, but for al-Bāqillānī, as for most classical thinkers, any utterance can possess *bayān*.

A subtle difference between al-Bāqillānī's and these other explanations of using one text to explain another turns out to be a significant clue to distinguishing al-Bāqillānī's thought on language. While other thinkers say a clear text is brought to bear on an ambiguous text in order to clarify it, al-Bāqillānī does not label either text as ambiguous. For him, the non-self-sufficient text is not ambiguous or unclear in any objective sense; it merely depends on another text or on context for its clarity. The process of clarification is profoundly intertextual, using one text to explain another. Modern pragmatics scholars would go even further in saying that context (whether textual or not) looms large in our understanding of any utterance. Al-Bāqillānī's position is thus a middle one, according to which texts that are not clear on their own are not ambiguous but rather clear, provided the clarifying text is available.

<sup>76</sup> Von Grunebaum, "Bayān."

<sup>77</sup> Lowry, "Preliminary Observations," 520.

<sup>78</sup> Lowry, "Preliminary Observations," 520.

This distinction does not just belong to the world of modern pragmatics and philosophy of language; rather, al-Bāqillānī refutes two opposing definitions of *bayān*, the first of which is based on just this distinction. Al-Bāqillānī (and, following him, al-Juwaynī) cites al-Ṣayrafī's definition of *bayān* (bringing something out from the realm of obscurity [*ishkāl*] to clarity) and a thought supplied by some unnamed *mutakallimīn* (among whom al-Juwaynī's editor identifies Abū Bakr al-Daqqāq) who said *bayān* is "knowledge [*ilm*] of something, so every knowledge is *bayān*, and every *bayān* is knowledge."<sup>79</sup> Al-Bāqillānī explains how al-Ṣayrafī's definition is problematic because some types of *bayān* are not encompassed by it. As al-Juwaynī summarizes it: "Bringing [something] from the realm of obscurity is particular to what is established as obscure overall and is then made clear [*yatabayyan*]."<sup>80</sup> This definition describes one type of *bayān*, but "if God establishes a law that starts out clear [*mubīn*], and there is not any confusion or obscurity in it, this is *bayān* by agreement."<sup>81</sup> There are utterances that do not require another text or context to clarify them, and they do not need to be brought out of the realm of the obscure, but it is agreed that they are still *bayān*. Al-Juwaynī rightly connects this idea to al-Bāqillānī's category of texts that are independently understandable: even if they do not clarify other texts, "they are *bayān*."<sup>82</sup> Interestingly, this last conception of *bayān* is intransitive, like al-Shāfi'ī's. Recalling that al-Juwaynī is a member of the Shāfi'ī school of jurisprudence, and that he was more sympathetic than many of his peers to al-Shāfi'ī's definition, this importation is not completely surprising.<sup>83</sup> Al-Bāqillānī's general definition of *bayān* in language includes intransitive definitions, but his *uṣūlī* definition relies on a relationship between an indicant and the knowledge to which it connects. There is conceptual, if not linguistic, transitivity. Unlike definitions that depend on clear texts *clarifying* unclear texts, al-Bāqillānī's transitivity of *bayān* has indicants clarifying non-linguistic knowledge [*ilm*]. However, it is equally important that for al-Bāqillānī, *bayān* is not *ilm* itself, as his refutation of a second definition of *bayān* demonstrates. It cannot be the case that all *ilm* is *bayān*, he reasons, for a couple of reasons. If all *ilm* were *bayān*, that would include necessary knowledge, meaning necessary knowledge itself needed *bayān* (which by definition has no intermediary). Also, it is agreed that God clarified [*bayyana*] religious matters to the apostate and the heretic, even if that person does not know [*ya lam*] what God made clear.<sup>84</sup>

In addition to rejecting those two competing definitions of *bayān*, al-Bāqillānī describes some additional restrictions on how it functions:

It is not proper not to [call something] *bayān* unless it clarifies or unless everyone who can examine it or hear it when it is uttered reaches clarity by means of it. Rather, it is correct that it is a *bayān* in and of itself, such that if it is heard and pondered and its conventional meaning is known, then it is possible to know by way of it that for which it is a *bayān*, though people's circumstances in hearing it, pondering it, and reflecting on it may differ.

<sup>79</sup> Al-Juwaynī, *Talkhīṣ*, vol. 2, 204.

<sup>80</sup> Al-Juwaynī, *Talkhīṣ*, vol. 2, 205.

<sup>81</sup> Al-Juwaynī, *Talkhīṣ*, vol. 2, 205-06.

<sup>82</sup> Al-Juwaynī, *Talkhīṣ*, vol. 2, 206.

<sup>83</sup> Lowry, "Preliminary Observations," 520.

<sup>84</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 3, 373.

It also [cannot properly be said to be] a *bayān* of unclear and obscure [*mujmal wa-mushkil*] speech, and that which is not independently comprehensible, because general and explicitly clear speech is a *bayān* for what it was set down for, and an uncovering of its meaning. Even if it is not possible for it to clarify what is intended by the vague and multivalent utterance, [it is] a type of *bayān*, even if there are some [instances of *bayān*] not like that.<sup>85</sup>

Al-Bāqillānī's definition of *bayān* as signifying communication does not rely on a second category of utterance that is 'unclear and vague' that the clarifying utterance would render clearer. It also does not rely on the competence of the interpreter: if the reader or listener fails to comprehend an instance of *bayān*, that does not change the status of the *bayān* itself. As I argue that other parts of the *Taqrīb* indicate, al-Bāqillānī marginalizes the category of 'unclear and vague' utterances, and accordingly, his theory of *bayān* does not rely on the existence of such a category. Thus al-Bāqillānī's definition and explanation of the term *bayān* position him in relation to his peers in the field of *uṣūl al-fiqh* and tie his theory of signification to a particular idea of clarity and clarifying text. In an indication of the importance of the term *bayān* in al-Bāqillānī's conception of signification, he lists his definitions of several of *bayān*'s closely related root words (e.g. *mubayyan lahu*, *mubayyan*, *tabayyun*), much as he did for words related to signs and referents from the root D-L-L (see above).<sup>86</sup> In fact, al-Bāqillānī's definitions of the words from the root B-Y-N all use words from the root D-L-L that he defined earlier, reflecting al-Bāqillānī's construction of a strong connection between the semantic ranges of these two roots.

### Explicit and Implicit Expression

A core part of al-Bāqillānī's explanation of how language functions is his classification of all speech into basic categories of communicativity. The first dichotomy is between communicative and uncommunicative language. This super-ordinate categorization sets the groundwork for the rest of his typologies of language, which are concerned only with communicative language. Uncommunicative language includes mumbling, words said backwards, and ungrammatical utterances.<sup>87</sup> It also includes 'organized speech' that is neither communicative [*lā yufīd*] nor understood, like the gurgling of those affected by pleurisy and the delusions of possessed people.<sup>88</sup> Al-Bāqillānī mentions that some scholars find the latter to be "speech, except it does not communicate [*kalām*]," meaning that it is an expression of something believed in the soul [*al-nafs*], just an uncommunicative one, and it would communicate words if the defect (of mind or body) were not there.<sup>89</sup> Because these utterances are uncommunicative, they are exempt from al-Bāqillānī's argument for utterances as clear.

Among communicative utterances, al-Bāqillānī delineates three types. The first type communicates its meaning as a standalone utterance, allowing its contents to be discovered

<sup>85</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 3, 372.

<sup>86</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 3, 371.

<sup>87</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 337.

<sup>88</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 337.

<sup>89</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 337.

independently and without multivocality [*iḥtimāl*].<sup>90</sup> The second type has an independently comprehensible aspect and another aspect that is not independent with regard to understanding. In the third type of communicative speech, all aspects of the intended meaning cannot be discovered through the utterance independently, “even if in the origin of its being set down it was independent unto itself in communicating its meaning.”<sup>91</sup> Within the category of communicative speech, utterances can be contradictory in their wording [*lafẓ*] or in their content [*maʿnā*]. An example of the first is saying ‘Zayd is alive and not alive,’ and an example of the second is saying ‘Zayd is alive and dead.’<sup>92</sup> There are also basic grammatical relationships between parts of speech (*ism*, *fiʿl*, *ḥarf*—the three delineated by classical Arabic grammarians) that delimit communicativity: there are rules that determine what parts of speech can be connected to one another meaningfully.<sup>93</sup>

The first type of communicative utterance, which is fully independent, is of two varieties. The first is independent in “clarifying [*bayān*] that which is intended in its apparentness [*naṣṣ*] and explicitness [*ṣarīḥ*].”<sup>94</sup> The second is independent in “clarifying it [i.e. the intended meaning] in its sense [*laḥn*] and concept [*mafhūm*].”<sup>95</sup> There is no ambiguity or problem with its meaning; it does not contain concealment [*iḍmār*] or allusion [*kināya*].<sup>96</sup> Examples are provided from Qurʾān, poetry, and linguists’ discourse. Al-Bāqillānī contends that utterances of the first type, those which are independently understandable from the aspect of their general sense, do not have to be subject to *qiyās* (analogizing)—depending on what one means by *qiyās*. It is uncontested that a given utterance from this category does not name explicitly what is understood from it; but if what is intended by ‘*qiyās*’ is recourse to another utterance in order to understand its meaning, that is unlikely. It is noteworthy that al-Bāqillānī provides two possible explanations for what *qiyās* may mean, indicating that he does not consider the term to carry primarily the technical meaning to which it was limited in later texts (i.e. analogizing, as a legal tool). Rather, the first possibility he mentions is much like the concept of implicature in pragmatics: a given utterance may convey a meaning that is not explicit in the wording of the utterance alone but rather relies on clues like context.<sup>97</sup> One of the examples al-Bāqillānī provides to this effect concerns the Qurʾānic phrases “do not consume their property with your own” [Q 4:2] (regarding orphans) and “Those who consume the property of orphans unjustly” [Q 4:10] about which he writes:

What is understood from [these phrases] is that the prohibition of destroying their property inheres in all aspects of destroying. [The Qurʾān] mentioned consumption because it [accounts for] most of that by which property is

<sup>90</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 340.

<sup>91</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 340.

<sup>92</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 338.

<sup>93</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 338.

<sup>94</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 340.

<sup>95</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 340. The terms *laḥn* and *mafhūm* gained separate technical meanings in post-classical texts, but here they both mean ‘general sense.’ See Rafiq al-ʿAjam, *Mawsūʿat muṣṭalaḥāt uṣūl al-fiqh ʿinda al-muslimīn*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Maktabat Lubnān), 1502-05.

<sup>96</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 341.

<sup>97</sup> H. P. Grice, “Logic and Conversation,” in *Studies in the Way of Words*, ed. H. P. Grice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989; in *Syntax and Semantics, 3: Speech Acts*, ed. P. Cole & J. Morgan (New York: Academic Press, 1975), 25. Citations are to Harvard University Press edition.

destroyed, and where destruction predominantly happens, and for that reason it did not say ‘and do not wear it’ and ‘do not take it away’ and ‘do not ride it,’ etc.<sup>98</sup>

The interpreter does an informal kind of *qiyās* to arrive at the understanding that ‘consuming’ an orphan’s property includes all manner of destruction. There is no recourse to another verse of the Qur’ān (or any other utterance) that explains the definitions of these words or adds specifications to the injunction in the two verses mentioned. Rather, the result of the reader understanding what the verses ‘mean’ is a generalization: whether it is called *qiyās* or merely subsumed under the rubric of understandable non-explicit meaning, the interpretation is ‘to consume,’ widely construed.

Al-Bāqillānī provides several other examples of this type of utterance that is independently comprehensible from its general sense, including the prophetic saying ‘the judge does not judge when angry,’ where ‘anger’ includes conditions like hunger, thirst, and exhaustion.<sup>99</sup> Another example is the Qur’ānic injunction against eating carrion, blood, and pig meat. Al-Bāqillānī writes, “What is understood [*mafhūm*] by prohibiting all of these mentioned items is the prohibition of a type [*ḍarb*] and kind [*naw’*] of behavior, [an understanding located] in the way that language [*lisān*] was set down and understood by speakers, without dispute or argument about what it conveys when it is heard.”<sup>100</sup> In contrast, the Qadariyya do not extend the meanings of particular injunctions as they should, thus rendering them overly literal. The limits of an utterance’s meaning, in terms of extension beyond its explicit meaning, are confined by genus and species—concepts taken most immediately from *kalām* discourse (speculative theology).<sup>101</sup> Features like this one contribute to al-Bāqillānī’s thought coming across as very systematic, especially for an early *uṣūl* writer, perhaps a mark of his background in *kalām*. Explaining the extension of an utterance’s communicated meaning in this way demarcates a specific boundary for what a given injunction (or other meaning) includes. This approach keeps the interpreted meaning from being arbitrary or subjective, but it also imposes an answer to what an ‘understood’ meaning is. It dictates that the extension of the expanded meaning of the utterance includes the whole species and genus of the item mentioned in the utterance, so that the utterance is using the word in question metonymically.

Some people claim that utterances that are independently-comprehensible from their general sense are elided speech [*maḥdhūf minhu*], al-Bāqillānī tells us,<sup>102</sup> describing a classification of utterance familiar from manuals of literary devices and more proximately *ijāz al-Qur’ān* discourse. Al-Bāqillānī recounts some of the stock cases of elision in the Qur’ān: “ask the town” [Q 12:82] means “ask the people of the town,” and “livestock animals are lawful for you” [Q 5:1] refers to eating livestock animals. These elisions function because people know what they mean: “it is known that what is intended by it [*al-murād minhu*] is what they

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<sup>98</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 343.

<sup>99</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 344.

<sup>100</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 345.

<sup>101</sup> Tony Street, “Arabic and Islamic Philosophy of Language and Logic,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2015 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta. The Metaphysics Research Lab, Center for The Study of Science and Information, Stanford University. <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2015/entries/arabic-islamic-language>.

<sup>102</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 346.

mentioned has been elided from it.”<sup>103</sup> Elsewhere in the *Taqrīb*, al-Bāqillānī describes elision [*ḥadhf*] as a type of *majāz*, a classification that is the topic of a later section of this chapter. As problematic as scholars have tended to find it to talk about the intention of Qur’ānic speech, the implication here is that because Qur’ānic language is intuitively understandable to humans, and because it operates systematically and logically according to knowable rules, it is not beyond our grasp to understand the meanings conveyed and thus what is intended by them. Here, as in his *i’jāz* text, al-Bāqillānī emphasizes that the point is not to label an utterance as elliptical or figurative for merely taxonomical purposes, but rather “to obtain knowledge of what is intended [*maqṣūd*] by it” and to refute the claim that a meaning not expressed explicitly in an utterance cannot be understood from it.<sup>104</sup> Qur’ānic language is systematic and clear. Labeling an utterance’s stylistics misses this point if it stops short of understanding its meaning. Aesthetics are not meaningful as such but only as means of conveying ideas. This driving concern with meaning is a hallmark of al-Bāqillānī’s work.

Moving onto the second type of utterance al-Bāqillānī described, that which is independent from one aspect but not another, al-Bāqillānī describes it as carrying multiple meanings [*muḥṭamal*].<sup>105</sup> All ‘general plurals’ [*al-alfāz al-mad’āt li-l-‘umūm*] are in this category: those words that refer to people and times, whether definite or indefinite, such as “kill the idolaters” [Q 9:5] and “and the wicked will burn in the Fire” [Q 82:14].<sup>106</sup> They are independently understandable because the terms in them are known but the conditions of the duty are not: for instance, the meanings of ‘kill’ and ‘idolaters’ are known, but it is not known whether the verse’s intention is all the idolaters or some of them.<sup>107</sup> This does not mean we do not know the meaning of that aspect of the verse, but rather that additional clarifying context is needed.

The third type of speech, that which is not independently comprehensible from any of its aspects, is “the *majāz*, used as other than what was set down for it in language.”<sup>108</sup> It is not elided language whose elision is customary in language. Rather, it is that which is transferred from what was set down for it—a distinction that lets us know not all elision is a type of *majāz*. Examples include “a wall there that wanted to fall down” [Q 18:77], “monasteries, churches, prayers, and mosques would have been destroyed” [Q 22:40], and “do not come near the prayer if you are intoxicated” [Q 4:43]. In the first example, a wall cannot ‘want,’ and the phrasing communicates that the wall was on the verge of falling down. Regarding the term ‘prayer’ in the second and third examples, al-Bāqillānī writes that the Qur’ān intends “the gathering-place mosques and the places of prayer.”<sup>109</sup>

Some of these Qur’ānic examples are soon used as examples of Qur’ānic *majāz*. *Majāz* is not independently comprehensible, for al-Bāqillānī, a classification that can be explained as being based on the need for cultural or other contextual information in order to understand

<sup>103</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 346.

<sup>104</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 346.

<sup>105</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 349.

<sup>106</sup> This category of ‘general plurals’ comprises plural nouns without any qualifier, collective nouns that al-Bāqillānī says must be further specified in order to know the scope of the verse’s referent.

<sup>107</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 350.

<sup>108</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 351.

<sup>109</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 351. Abū Zunayd notes that al-Zamakhsharī copied this interpretation in his *Kashshāf*. Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 351 fn 76.

the meaning of a figurative utterance. (Al-Bāqillānī shows more overt awareness of the accidental nature of the internal consistency of individual languages later on.) Examples drawn from ordinary speech are the likes of saying one saw a donkey or a bull, meaning a stupid man who resembled one of those animals in his stupidity.<sup>110</sup> We know the term ‘donkey’ or ‘bull’ refers to an idiotic person, some say, not because of its explicit meaning or ‘general sense’ [*lahn*] but rather because of something in the speech by which indicates it is ‘turned [away from literal meaning] toward [*ma ‘dūl bihi*] *majāz*’. This idea is similar to the idea of flouting the rules of communication in Gricean pragmatics: when an utterance does not seem to follow rules of straightforward discourse, other clues like context are used in order to determine the intended meaning of the utterance.<sup>111</sup> Al-Bāqillānī responds that the resultant meaning of the linguistic ‘transcending’ intended by this utterance is not known from the literal meaning of the utterance itself, but this does not mean that the utterance was not set down in order to communicate a meaning.<sup>112</sup> The result of al-Bāqillānī’s typology of the communicativity of language sets the groundwork for later discussion of how meanings are conveyed in non-explicit, non-‘independently-comprehensible’ ways. His categorization of communicative language frames utterances as being universally clear, given the right context and co-texts, or surrounding texts.<sup>113</sup> As long as a speaker is sound of mind and body, al-Bāqillānī’s typology does not reflect the possibility that the speaker’s utterances could be unclear. His presumption is that the healthy speaker always has a clear meaning in mind and that this meaning is conveyed seamlessly (perhaps faithfully) through language.

### Clarity and Consistency: *Muḥkam* Speech

A central and defining distinction al-Bāqillānī makes is between speech that is *muḥkam* (lit. ‘decisive’) and that which is *mutashābih* (lit. ‘similar to each other’), which he does through redefining and re-explaining these terms to suit his own purposes.<sup>114</sup> In doing so, he picks up a longstanding debate about what these two terms mean. Scholars have argued about what these terms mean and what it means for the Qur’ān to contain verses from each of these two varieties. I provide an overview of these positions to clarify al-Bāqillānī’s contribution and show how he was responding to a debate over understandability and interpretability that was taken to have implications for various disciplines.

The prevalence of exegetical activity throughout Islamic history might suggest that the interpretability of the Qur’ān was a given in the minds of Muslim thinkers. However, there was a live debate about whether humans were able or allowed to interpret the Qur’ān in its entirety, or whether the scope of human interpretation was (either prescriptively or descriptively) limited to some verses. Al-Bāqillānī’s thesis of Qur’ānic clarity is a substantive contribution to this debate, arguing strongly that the Qur’ān is entirely available to interpretation by people. After all, he claims, it is clear and comprehensible, even by its own

<sup>110</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 351.

<sup>111</sup> Grice, “Logic and Conversation.”

<sup>112</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 351.

<sup>113</sup> A context includes the background and situation of an utterance, while a co-text is a surrounding text. The concept of co-text is often discussed as a development of Grice and other speech act theorists’ work, especially on implicature. John Lyons, *Linguistic Semantics: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 271.

<sup>114</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 328.

definition. Before turning to al-Bāqillānī's position on this matter, it will be instructive to understand the debate to which he is responding.

Much of this discussion about the Qur'ān's interpretability revolved around Q 3:7, which reads as follows:

It is He who has sent this Scripture down to you [Prophet]. Some of its verses are definite [*āyāt muḥkamāt*] in meaning—these are the cornerstone of the Scripture [*umm al-kitāb*]<sup>115</sup>—and others are ambiguous [*mutashābihāt*]. The perverse at heart eagerly pursue the ambiguities [*mā tashābaha minhu*] in their attempt to make trouble and to pin down a specific meaning of their own: only God knows the true meaning [*ta'wīlahu*]. Those firmly grounded in knowledge [*al-rāsikhūn fī-l-ilm*] say, 'We believe in it: it is all from our Lord'—only those with real perception will take heed—

The three main points of debate concern the terms 'clear' [*muḥkamāt*] and 'ambiguous/similar' [*mutashābihāt*], 'the Essence of the Book,' and the term 'and' in the phrase 'save only God and those firmly rooted in knowledge.' The range of interpretations of *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt* has received much attention from scholars, as has the term '*umm al-kitāb*,' which most literally translates as 'the Mother of the Book.' The translation above favors one interpretation of the verse; I provide an alternative translation here (adapted from Abdel Haleem's above) that highlights another possible reading (with the changes in bold):

it is [God] who has sent this Scripture down to you [Prophet]. Some of its verses are **clear** [*āyāt muḥkamāt*] in meaning—these are the cornerstone of the Scripture [*umm al-kitāb*]<sup>115</sup>—and others are **mutually similar** [*mutashābihāt*]. The perverse at heart eagerly pursue the ambiguities [*mā tashābaha minhu*] in their attempt to make trouble and to pin down **its interpretation**: nobody knows the **interpretation** [*ta'wīlahu*] except God and those firmly grounded in knowledge [*al-rāsikhūn fī-l-ilm*] who say, 'We believe in it: it is all from our Lord'—only those with real perception will take heed—

The debate is wide-ranging, but the part of it that is important here concerns the question of whether the Qur'ān can be interpreted and understood by humans. Indeed, some commentators interpreted this verse to mean *mutashābih* verses were not to be interpreted by people. The exegete al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) theorized that there were three categories of verses: those only God understands, those the Prophet understood, and those accessible to experts of Arabic. The second category may be comprehended through Prophetic *ḥadīth*.<sup>115</sup> The scholar Sahiron Syamsuddin shows that al-Ṭabarī's position came to be representative of the orthodox position on exegesis, adopted by the likes of al-Samarqandī, al-Baghawī, and al-Ṣuyūṭī.<sup>116</sup> The classical exegete recorded both opposing views on the particle *wa-* in Q 3:7: the first is that it is conjunctive, leading to the reading that God *and* those 'firm in knowledge' [*al-rāsikhūn fī-l-ilm*] know the interpretation of the 'Book' (taken to mean the Qur'ān); the second opinion is that it

<sup>115</sup> Sahiron Syamsuddin, "Muḥkam and Mutashābih: An Analytical Study of al-Ṭabarī's and al-Zamakhsharī's Interpretations of Q.3:7," *Journal of Qur'ānic Studies* 1, no. 1 (1999): 63-79.

<sup>116</sup> Syamsuddin, "Muḥkam and Mutashābih," 72.



is not a conjunctive particle that joins two parts of a sentence, but rather marks the beginning of a new sentence, resulting in the reading that only God knows the Book's interpretation, as suggested by the first translation of the verse provided above.<sup>117</sup> Supporting this interpretation is al-Ṭabari's view that the term *mutashābihāt* earlier in the verse refers to the verses whose meaning is known only by God. Of course, al-Ṭabari himself compiled a *tafsīr* that addresses all verses of the Qur'ān, so the question arises of how seriously the commentator took the idea that there are some verses not to be interpreted by humans.

There are sources composed by al-Bāqillānī's contemporaries and predecessors that argue the Qur'ān is not accessible to human interpretation. The normative Shi'ite interpretation of Q 3:7 was that the term 'those firmly grounded in knowledge' [*al-rāsikhūn fī-l-ilm*] referred to the Imams, who had special access to the esoteric meaning [*ta'wīl*] of the Qur'ān and were thus the correct medium by which the rest of the community was to understand the content of the Qur'ān.<sup>118</sup> The Imams were considered the 'speaking Qur'ān,' able to correctly guide the *umma* through exegesis.<sup>119</sup> After the Occultation, various Shi'a groups formed divergent responses: the Twelvers did not have active contact with an Imam who could provide this exegesis and were forced to accept more of the Sunni readings, while the Isma'ilis maintained that there was still an Imam active in the world to serve as Qur'ānic interpreter.<sup>120</sup> For Isma'ilis, the supreme higher level of *ta'wīl* could only be performed by the Imam, and the lower *kashf* level of *ta'wīl* was within reach of any Isma'ili to varying degrees and according to his level of spiritual attainment.<sup>121</sup> Like Sufi exegetes, Isma'ilis emphasized the importance of the *bāṭin* (internally hidden) levels of Qur'ānic meaning. Isma'ili scholars such as al-Sijistānī (d. ~360/971) theorized that *ta'wīl* was necessary for verses that named physical objects and verses that were allegorical—his gloss on the *mutashābihāt* of Q 3:7.<sup>122</sup>

Among proto-Sunnis and Sunnis, there was a diversity of views on who could or should interpret the Qur'ān, based on this section of Q 3:7. Muqāṭil b. Sulaymān (d. 167/767), one of the Qur'ān's earliest interpreters from whom we have a complete commentary, quotes Sufyān as saying: 'Someone who reads the Qur'ān and does not know its exegesis is like someone who upon receiving a book that is liked by many people, rejoices in it and begs someone to read it to him, since he cannot read himself, but finds no one.'<sup>123</sup> Muqāṭil also cites a *ḥadīth* narrated on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās that says: "The Qur'ān has four aspects: exegesis [*tafsīr*] that the scholars know; Arabic language, which the Arabs know; allowed and forbidden things that people cannot afford to ignore; and interpretation [*ta'wīl*] only known to God Almighty."<sup>124</sup> The last phrase is a direct quotation from Q 3:7, but in the grammar of Muqāṭil's sentence, it can

<sup>117</sup> Syamsuddin, "Muḥkam and Mutashābih," 71.

<sup>118</sup> Steigerwald, "Twelver Shi'i Ta'wīl," 375-77.

<sup>119</sup> Steigerwald, "Twelver Shi'i Ta'wīl," 381.

<sup>120</sup> Diana Steigerwald, "Isma'ili Ta'wīl," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'ān*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 386-400.

<sup>121</sup> Steigerwald, "Isma'ili Ta'wīl," 387.

<sup>122</sup> Steigerwald, "Isma'ili Ta'wīl," 391.

<sup>123</sup> Muqāṭil ibn Sulaymān al-Balkhī, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, vol. 1, ed. 'Abd Allāh Maḥmūd Shihāta, 4 vols. (Cairo: al-Hay'at al-Miṣriyya al-Āmma li-l-Kitāb, 1979-87), 26-27; cited in Kees Versteegh, *Landmarks in Linguistic Thought III: The Arabic Linguistic Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1997), 11.

<sup>124</sup> Muqāṭil, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, 27 [my translation]; cited in Versteegh, *Landmarks*, 11.

only mean that knowledge of *ta'wīl* is known to God alone; the other possibility of meaning is removed.

Some scholars, such as the Mu'tazilī commentator al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144), took the opposing view, reading Q 3:7 to mean that those 'firm in knowledge' can understand even the *mutashābihāt*.<sup>125</sup> He does not comment on, or challenge, the validity of the opposing view, leading some to find him unconvincing. Interestingly, the early *uṣūlī* al-Jaṣṣāṣ (d. 370/981) interpreted the verse to mean it is necessary to understand *mutashābihāt* in light of the *muḥkamāt*—not that they are uninterpretable.<sup>126</sup> Humans can understand aspects the latter but not the fullness of their meaning, which is hidden to all but God; the classical *mufasssīr* (exegete) Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373) agreed with this reading of the verse.

Syamsuddin, in his research, concludes that al-Jaṣṣāṣ disagreed with al-Ṭabarī because “he was not aware of the different contexts of words that may have the same root but express different meanings, as in the case of the terms under discussion: *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt*.”<sup>127</sup> He further states: “Al-Zamakhsharī, on the other hand, can be considered reductionist in defining the two words, because he referred them only to the Qur'ān's theological aspects, when in fact the Qur'ān speaks of them not only in terms of theology, but also in other aspects, such as *halakha* and *haggada*.”<sup>128</sup> Both of these conclusions seem to speak more correctly of the article's author's own bias rather than the merits of the scholars he is discussing. It is doubtful that al-Jaṣṣāṣ was unaware of different usages of the terms *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt* and other words from these roots as Syamsuddin suggests. It is equally implausible to conclude that al-Zamakhsharī was blind to so-called non-theological aspects of the Qur'ān. If one wishes to explain the positions taken by al-Jaṣṣāṣ, al-Zamakhshari, and others who consider the *mutashābihāt* fair game for exegesis, a reason other than narrow-mindedness or ignorance must be found.

One factor in how a scholar would side on the issue of humans' ability to interpret Qur'ānic verses is the power dynamics involved in exegesis. The more exegesis is allowed, the wider and more divergent interpretations and textually-justified ideas can proliferate and be justified. Within the context of early Islamic polemics, before normative exegetical methods and doctrines existed, sectarians trying to gain traction for their own ideas of what Islam should be aimed to destroy the credibility of their opponents who had different visions of Islam. There was a movement against *tafsīr* toward the end of the first Islamic century by members of the forming institution of normative Islam who aimed to limit the sphere of interpretation and keep it out of the hands of those called heretics. By the end of the following century, however, the mainstream Islamic institution was embracing *tafsīr* more, within the

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<sup>125</sup> Syamsuddin, “*Muḥkam and Mutashābih*,” 72.

<sup>126</sup> Syamsuddin, “*Muḥkam and Mutashābih*,” 72.

<sup>127</sup> Syamsuddin, “*Muḥkam and Mutashābih*,” 73.

<sup>128</sup> Syamsuddin, “*Muḥkam and Mutashābih*,” 73. Syamsuddin borrows the terms *halakha* and *haggada* from the Jewish tradition, where (in very broad strokes) the former refers to legal and moral content of rabbinic texts, while the latter refers to narrative and interpretation of rules and their underlying meanings. Haïm Z'ew Hirschberg and Moshe David Herr, “*Aggadah*,” in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 2, ed. Cecil Roth et al (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1971), 354–58.

limits circumscribed by the rules of critical traditionists.<sup>129</sup> The threat of unruly interpretations had been tempered by the strictures placed on *tafsīr* and the privileging of recording *ḥadīth*-based interpretations over *tafsīr bi-l-ra'y*.<sup>130</sup> The terms *muḥkam* and *mutashābih* were mapped onto this anxiety: *muḥkamāt* were verses understood to be clear and not in need of interpretation (thus not open to alternative readings), while *mutashābihāt* were ambiguous verses open to multiple interpretations. For some commentators, as we have seen, these verses should be interpreted variously, while other commentators said only God could understand such verses, and trying to understand them could mislead people.

Some scholars considered the *mutashābihāt* and *muḥkamāt* to be an aspect of *i'jāz al-Qur'ān*. Al-Suyūṭī, al-Rāzī, and 'Abd al-Jabbār say the Qur'ān is made up entirely of *muḥkamāt* (the most eloquent and inimitable words) and *mutashābihāt* (verses that mutually confirm each other), two characteristics that only God could produce. For Ibn 'Atiyya, Ibn al-Jawzī, and al-Khāzin, the *mutashābihāt* represent metaphorical language and the *muḥkamāt* are concise language, covering the two stylistically excellent and inimitable ways in which the Qur'ān uses language.<sup>131</sup> Kinberg rightly notes that al-Bāqillānī does not espouse this interpretation in his *i'jāz* text.<sup>132</sup>

Al-Bāqillānī acknowledges that interpreters have struggled with the meanings of *muḥkam* and *mutashābih*, but he finds their opinions to be unconvincing.<sup>133</sup> Al-Bāqillānī summarizes their positions, saying some interpreters think the *muḥkam* deals with threats and promises, permitted and forbidden things, as opposed to narrative (stories, parables, biography), a hypothesis *ahl al-'arabiyya* find wrong. Some say the *muḥkam* is that which the people mentioned in Q 3:7 who are 'firmly grounded in knowledge' [*al-rāsikhūn fi-l-'ilm*] understand, and the *mutashābih* is what only God knows, but language experts also disagree with this.<sup>134</sup> Al-Bāqillānī continues, saying some claim the so-called Mysterious Letters (lit., disconnected/broken off letters) at the beginnings of verses are *mutashābih*, but language experts do not know this to be true.<sup>135</sup>

This last point al-Bāqillānī takes as an opportunity to discuss the Mysterious Letters. Scholars put forth various theories about what they mean, such as saying they are actually names of Qur'ānic *sūras*, he writes. However, to al-Bāqillānī's mind, the best of what has been said in this debate is that these letters are actually a *kināya*, or allusion, of the rest of the alphabet, a metonymic reference to the entirety of the Arabic letters, therefore encompassing the whole of the *sūra* for which these letters serve as a title.<sup>136</sup> Al-Bāqillānī provides some examples of poetry that he interprets to contain certain letters that metonymically stand for

<sup>129</sup> H. Birkeland, *Old Muslim Opposition against Interpretation of the Koran* (Oslo: Dybwad i komm., 1955), 42. Cited in Leah Kinberg, "Muḥkamāt and Mutashābihāt (Koran 3/7): Implication of a Koranic Pair of Terms in Medieval Exegesis," *Arabica* 37, no. 2 (1988): 154. See also C. H. M. Versteegh, *Arabic Grammar*, 41-47.

<sup>130</sup> Gleave, "Sunni Law," 167-78.

<sup>131</sup> Kinberg, "Muḥkamāt and Mutashābihāt," 147.

<sup>132</sup> Kinberg, "Muḥkamāt and Mutashābihāt," 147.

<sup>133</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 331.

<sup>134</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 331.

<sup>135</sup> For an overview of the topic, see Keith Massey, "Mysterious Letters," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe. Brill Online, 2014. [http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-quran/mysterious-letters-EQCOM\\_00128](http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-quran/mysterious-letters-EQCOM_00128).

<sup>136</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 332-33.

the whole poem. For example, some poems begin a line with the word ‘*a-lā*’.<sup>137</sup> There are different interpretations of this particle, al-Bāqillānī says. Some people say these are also ‘Mysterious Letters,’ even though they are found in human-authored compositions rather than the Qur’ān.<sup>138</sup> Others say, on the contrary, that God put these letters at the beginning of the *sūras* precisely because the Arabs did not have the habit of doing so, a reference to the explanation of *i’jāz* as having broken the customs of the Arabs in speech.<sup>139</sup> Al-Bāqillānī does not refute this idea. At the same time, he says the familiarity of the letters themselves underscores “the Arabs’ being informed that it [i.e. the Qur’ān] addresses them in their [own] language.”<sup>140</sup> This interpretation is consistent with al-Bāqillānī’s explanation of the Mysterious Letters in his *Kitāb I’jāz al-Qur’ān*, where his goal is also to cast these famously ‘mysterious’ elements of the Qur’ān as signs indicating the Qur’ān’s clarity—self-referential announcements, reminders that the Qur’ān is made up of the same letters familiar from Arabs’ own speech.<sup>141</sup> This explanation positions al-Bāqillānī on the side of debate that views the Mysterious Letters as pointedly familiar. Accepting the idea that the Qur’ān’s Mysterious Letters are akin to elements of human-authored poetry removes them from the realm of the ‘mysterious’ or ‘miraculous’ altogether, reassigning their signification as quite the opposite: an indication of the familiarity of the text’s language.

Al-Bāqillānī decouples the terms *muḥkam* and *mutashābih* by explaining them as categories that are not oppositional at all; in his understanding, an utterance could be both *muḥkam* and *mutashābih*. He discusses the terms together (as was consistently the case in discussion of these terms), but his explanations make clear that for him they are separate categories, not opposites of one another. Being *muḥkam* speaks to the clarity and consistency of an utterance, while the status of *mutashābih* concerns multivalence. In approaching the discussion in this way, he takes his readers from an expected starting point to a new understanding of *muḥkam* and *mutashābih* as decoupled, non-oppositional terms.

Describing speech as *muḥkam*, he writes, can mean two different things (*ma ‘nayayn*). This phrasing suggests that *any* speech can fall into this category, not just the verses of the Qur’ān. This is the first of many points at which al-Bāqillānī reframes terminology to describe language, moving the discussion of the Qur’ān and all other language to one realm. The implication is not that humans’ language use is miraculous like God’s language use; rather, al-Bāqillānī’s application of the term *muḥkam* emphasizes the point that all language is measurable and understandable in the same ways. The first aspect of *muḥkam* speech for al-Bāqillānī is when the utterance has a clear, overt meaning that it communicates (*mufīd li-*

<sup>137</sup> The implication is that *a-lā* does not impart a meaning in the sense that words ordinarily do but rather communicates something metapoetic or metalinguistic. Wright lists many uses for the particle *a-lā*, the most relevant here being his characterization of it as “often used to draw close attention to the certainty of the following assertion, and hence admits being rendered into English by *truly, verily, certainly*” and “as a corroborative before the optative perfect, the imperative, jussive, and energetic.” W. Wright, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language, Translated from the German of Caspari and Edited with Numerous Additions and Corrections*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., vol. 2, rev. W. Robertson Smith and M. J. de Goeje (London, 1859; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 310. Citations refer to the Cambridge edition.

<sup>138</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 334.

<sup>139</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 334.

<sup>140</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 333.

<sup>141</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I’jāz*, 68-69.

*ma 'nāhu*); this characteristic describes God's speech and much of human speech. The second possible signification of calling speech *muḥkam* is that its *naẓm* and *tartīb* (ordering, arrangement) are *muḥkam*, i.e. communicating without contradiction or inconsistency. Al-Bāqillānī writes that speech fitting this description is *muḥkam* even if it carries multiple facets (of meaning) and its meaning is obscured (*iḥtamala wujūhan wa-iltabasa ma 'nāhu*); thus an utterance can be both *muḥkam* and *mutashābih*. However, if speech's *naẓm* is corrupted, that speech is described as corrupt, not as having *tashābuh*. For al-Bāqillānī, *muḥkam* here means clear communication, either in meaning or (grammatical) structure (*naẓm wa-tartīb*).<sup>142</sup> The opposite of clear structure does not make an utterance *mutashābih* (often taken as the opposite of *muḥkam*) but rather excludes it from both categories. It is dismissed as corrupted speech, relegated perhaps to what al-Bāqillānī has previously classified as nonsensical or lacking in meaning. Thus, it is neither *muḥkam* nor *mutashābih*.

### ***Mutashābihāt: Allowing Multivalence of an Utterance***

Al-Bāqillānī defines speech that is *mutashābih* is that which carries multiple meanings. His explanation is distinguished from the more normative reading of *mutashābih* as meaning 'ambiguous/obscure verse.' The alternative meaning proposed suits al-Bāqillānī's turn away from the notion of linguistic vagueness and opacity. He writes:

The meaning of describing speech as *mutashābih* is that it carries diverse meanings, all of which may occur and be treated as literal [*ḥaqīqa*], or some of which may be treated as literal [*ḥaqīqa*] and some as figurative [*majāz*], where its exterior [*zāhir*] does not convey that which it intends. This term was used for it due to the questionability of its meaning for the listener, due to his failure to know its intended meaning. The Almighty's saying is among [the likes of these utterances]: "Divorced women must wait for three monthly periods" [Q 2:228]—it carries multiple meanings [*muḥtamal*]: the time of menstruation, and the time of purity [between menses]—and "unless the one who holds the marriage tie waives [his right]" [Q 2:237] and "or touched women" [Q 4:43]. Among the likes of these are those where contention and effort to seek its meaning may be possible. This is the case for all the homonymous terms.

As for the *mutashābih* that relates to the origins of religion, it is abundant.

As for what some of the exegetes and experts on meaning [*aṣḥāb al-ma 'ānī*] say in describing speech as *muḥkam* and *mutashābih*, that is not settled.<sup>143</sup>

Q 2:228, which is quoted in the middle of this passage, is a verse often cited in *uṣūl al-fiqh* works as an example of ambiguous language.<sup>144</sup> The verse states that a woman must wait three *qurū'*

<sup>142</sup> "Fa-kull kalām ḥādhihi sabīluhu fa-innahu yūsaf bi-annahu muḥkam wa-in iḥtamala wujūhan wa-iltabasa ma 'nāhu." Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 330.

<sup>143</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 330-31.

<sup>144</sup> See, for instance, *Uṣūl al-Shāshī*, which affirms the debate over the meaning of the term and classifies it as a homonym (*mushtarak*). Naẓẓām al-Dīn al-Shāshī [?], *Uṣūl al-Shāshī*, ed. Muḥammad Akram al-Nadawī (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2000), 37.

after divorce before remarrying, but interpreters have argued over whether the term *qurū* refers to instances of menses or to periods between menses. Examples like this and other homonymous words, claims al-Bāqillānī, are open to *ijtihād* seeking their meaning.

In theorizing an explanation of *muḥkam* and *mutashābih* as categories for speech in general, and how these terms apply to the Qur'ān's contents in particular, al-Bāqillānī makes his linguistically-centered interpretive approach clear. As is the case throughout most of the text, the primary group whose opinions he cites as authoritative is *ahl al-ʿarabiyya* (experts of Arabic) or *ahl al-luḡha* (experts of language),<sup>145</sup> giving language scholars a wide scope of influence that holds sway in the realm of understanding the Qur'ān and at the same time casting the question of *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt* as a linguistic question. But affirming the authority of *ahl al-ʿarabiyya* does not mean Arabic is ontologically superior. Rather, the point is that the Qur'ān addresses the Arabs in their own language so that it is clear to them; language in general is defended and not Arabic in particular.<sup>146</sup>

Al-Bāqillānī thus allows that a single utterance can carry two meanings at once, as long as the meanings do not contradict each other. His examples clarify how this multivocality works: a word that can indicate different meanings (homonymy or polysemy) is used in an utterance that does not indicate that one of the meanings is not operable in that utterance.<sup>147</sup> Al-Bāqillānī cites canonical examples of homonymous or polysemous words, like *jāriya* (meaning both 'female slave' and 'ship'), *qurū* (which can refer to menstrual periods and the times of purity between periods), and *nikāḥ* (meaning both 'intercourse' and 'marriage'). Al-Bāqillānī separates these homonymous words into two categories: those whose meanings oppose each other (like *qurū*), and those whose meanings are disparate but not contradictory. In cases where there is no opposition between the two meanings, both can be at play in an utterance, as in the Qur'ānic verse "And do not marry/have intercourse with [*tankiḥū*] women that your fathers married/had intercourse with [*nakaḥa*]," [Q 4:22] which al-Bāqillānī suggests

<sup>145</sup> The terms *ahl al-ʿarabiyya* and *ahl al-luḡha* appear quite often in al-Bāqillānī's text as authoritative references for the correct function of language and lexical items. Some scholars take one or both of these terms to refer to native speakers, while elsewhere they are interpreted to mean professional language-scholars. Rafael Talmon notes that the scholar al-Qiftī (d. c. 646/1248) differentiates between the two terms in his biographical work, but the latter does not elucidate the difference, and it appears that al-Bāqillānī uses the two terms interchangeably. Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qiftī, *Inbāḥ al-ruwwāt ʿalā anbāḥ al-nuḥḥāt*, vol. 2, ed. M. Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-ʿArabī; Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Kutub al-Thaqafiyya, 1950-73), 39; referenced in Rafael Talmon, "An Eighth-Century Grammatical School in Medina: The Collection and Evaluation of the Available Material," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 48, no. 2 (1985): 11. Scholars have translated *Ahl al-ʿArabiyya* to mean professional linguists. Djamel Kouloughli, "Contre la Synonymie: Kitāb al-Furūq fī l-luḡah de 'Abū Hilāl al-'Askarī," *Histoire Épistémologie Langage* 19, no. 19-2 (1997): 155-76. Zysow has taken *ahl al-luḡha* to mean 'philologists,' while Abdelhamid Sabra has defined it to mean 'language speakers.' Aron Zysow, "Tamannī, If Wishes Were... Notes on Wishing in Islamic Texts," in *Classical Arabic Humanities in Their Own Terms*, ed. Beatrice Gruendler and Michael Cooperson (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 535. Abdelhamid I. Sabra, "Kalām Atomism as an Alternative Philosophy to Hellenizing Falsafa," in *Arabic Theology, Arabic Philosophy: From the Many to the One*, ed. James E. Montgomery (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2008), 208.

<sup>146</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 333.

<sup>147</sup> Put simply, homonymy is when a single lexical item carries two or more distinct and unrelated meanings; polysemy is when a single lexical item has two or more different but related senses. However, closer study blurs the distinction between the two. John Lyons, *Semantics*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 550-69.

prohibits both marriage and sexual intercourse with these women.<sup>148</sup> If a man's father engaged in one of those two things with a woman, the son should not do either thing with her. I interpret al-Bāqillānī to be saying both are off limits to the son: in the event that a father had married or had intercourse with a woman (but not both), both marriage and intercourse with her are prohibited to the son. This is an application of al-Bāqillānī's theorizing that all possible meanings of God's speech are present in it—an application that limits valid action rather than opening it up. Another example that al-Bāqillānī claims proves his point is the verse “Oh people, fear your Lord! [Q 22:1] in which some say ‘people’ refers to both humans and beasts.<sup>149</sup> However, I did not find any other exegete who discussed the homonymy of the term *nikāḥ* in Q 4:22 or *al-nās* in Q 22:1.<sup>150</sup>

The above examples and their explanations show how language can be polysemous, leading to a multivalent utterance. The speaker's intention determines whether more than one meaning is at play. A single word and the utterance in which it is located can have more than one meaning, but similarly, so can actions. In this way, language and the numinous world are parallel realms whose functioning is alike. Just as intentions determine the meaning of utterances, they are important in determining the meaning and implications of actions. Elsewhere in the *Taqrīb*, al-Bāqillānī goes into depth regarding how a single lexical item or action could have divergent significations depending on context. The importance of intention in both speech and action is reflected in its impact on its legal status.<sup>151</sup> Speech and action operate and signify in parallel here: an insufficient utterance or act is, correctly put, ‘non-legal,’ that is, outside the realm of that which bears on a legal obligation. Al-Bāqillānī writes:

In place of saying “not fulfilling an obligation [*ghayr mujzi`a*],” it should be [said] “not legal” [i.e., not having legal force, *ghayr shar`iyya*] because the legal[ly binding] may not fulfill the obligation [*mujzi`*] if it is necessary to repeat it, like prayer done with the presumption of purity. If the doer mentions that he was not [in a] purified [state], he must redo it. If, when he performed [the prayer], it was done legally, out of obedience and sincerity, then the doer is rewarded, but it is not fulfilling of the obligation in the sense that acts similar to this are still required after the performance of the first [act] as a second, new obligation.<sup>152</sup>

In terms of a single action whose signification changes, al-Bāqillānī writes about differences in mental state among those who do an action. In a lengthy section that also concerns itself with divine justice, al-Bāqillānī provides the example of a singular sinful action

<sup>148</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 424.

<sup>149</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 426.

<sup>150</sup> The exegetes al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) and Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd al-Zamakhsharī (d. 537/1143-4) explain the content of the verse using the term *fāḥisha*; Ismā`il ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373) paraphrases it saying the ‘*ulamā`*’ agreed on forbidding *mulk* [possession], *tazwīj* [marriage], or *shubḥa* [doubt (about Islam)] of whomever the father had *waṭā`* [intercourse], but he does not address the question of homonymy. Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi` al-bayān*, vol. 8, (Shākir ed.), 132-40; Jār Allāh al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf `an ḥaqā`iq ghawāmid al-tanzīl wa-`uyūn al-aqāwīl fī wujūh al-ta`wīl*, vol. 2, ed. `Ādil `Abd al-Mawjūd, et al (Riyadh: Maktabat al-`Ubaykān, 1998), 48-49; Ismā`il ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur`ān al-`aẓīm*, vol. 3, ed. Mustafā al-Sayyid Muḥammad, et al (Giza: Mu`assasat Qurṭuba, 2000), 408.

<sup>151</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 384-85.

<sup>152</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 384-85.

that has different values depending on whether the sin was committed knowingly or due to forgetfulness.<sup>153</sup> In this case, it is not a single word with two significations but rather a single action with two significations and thus different consequences. Both types of identity and difference depend on the (state of the) subject. The impetus for al-Bāqillānī's discussion is sources of law that concern the state of an actor who undertakes an action. Al-Bāqillānī introduces this topic as an intervention on the importance of an action's intention, but in the course of this discussion he shows how certain grammatical constructions yield multivalent utterances. Thus, lexical items, grammatical constructions, and actions can all yield multivalence. The sources he discusses are the following:

1. The following *ḥadīth* [prophetic tradition]: "Lifted from my community [*umma*] are errors [*al-khaṭa*'] and forgetting [*al-nisyān*]." <sup>154</sup>
2. The following Qur'ānic verse: "God charges no soul save to its capacity; standing to its account is what it has earned, and against its account what it has merited. Our Lord, **take us not to task if we forget [*nasīnā*], or make mistake [*akhtā'na*]. Our Lord; charge us not with a load such as Thou didst lay upon those before us. Our Lord, do Thou not burden us beyond what we have the strength to bear.** And pardon us, and forgive us, and have mercy on us; Thou art our Protector. And help us against the people of the unbelievers" [Q 2:286]. <sup>155</sup>
3. The following *ḥadīths*: "Actions are according to intentions, and to the person is what he intended," and "Verily, actions are according to intentions." <sup>156</sup>

The first *ḥadīth* and the *āya* both include the categories of error and forgetting. Al-Bāqillānī interprets these sources, over the course of a detailed explanation, to indicate that the punishment for a misdeed has a different signification depending on whether the actor intended the misdeed or not. Al-Bāqillānī situates this legal question in terms of an argument about the signification and language use rather than a larger discussion of the status of actions as such. This move is another example of al-Bāqillānī drawing interpretation and its basis in knowledge into the realm of language. Regarding the first *ḥadīth*, al-Bāqillānī claims its correct interpretation is based on a customary usage. He writes:

What is understood [from that *ḥadīth*], according to dominant custom, is a *majāz* of this utterance [*lafẓ*] which is the ruling on error and forgetting, because it is known by the customary usage that what is intended by the saying of the speaker before the proffering of the law is [as follows]: 'Lifted from you is error and forgetting and what you have committed yourself,' [signifying] the lifting of that law without its source being lifted, and the Prophet (PBUH) informs by the lifting of an extant law, and it is far greater than that.

<sup>153</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 371.

<sup>154</sup> Cited in al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 371, 376, 377, and 378. Some versions of the *ḥadīth* include an additional phrase at the end: 'and what was despised' [*wa-mā ustukriḥū 'alayhi*]. The *ḥadīth* was narrated by Ibn Mājah and others; it is ranked as good-quality [*ḥasan*].

<sup>155</sup> The part of the verse marked in bold here is the part al-Bāqillānī quotes, though he can count on the educated reader to call the rest of the verse to mind. Cited in al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 373.

<sup>156</sup> Cited in al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 378.



It is also known through the predominance of usage that the ruling lifted by this saying before the proffering of the law and when it was proffered is the lifting of shame, sin [*ma 'tham*], humiliation, and punishment without the lifting of the debt [*ghurm*] and liability [*dimān*]. For if the Messenger (PBUH) intended to raise that, too, it would be a legal ruling taken by his indication [*bi-tawqīfihī*], without language necessitating it, and that does not continue except with the saying that the law is linguistic terms [*alfāz*] transferred to legal meanings, and this is false.<sup>157</sup>

If a legally responsible person [*mukallaḥ*] fails to perform a duty due to forgetting or error, the person still receives the punishment associated with not performing the duty correctly. But the punishment does not mean the same thing as it would if the failure to perform the duty had been intentional. If it is an intentional failure, the punishment comes with shame, sin, and humiliation. If the failure is due to a mistake, there is still a recompense and a punishment, not for a sin (since there is no sin in forgetting), but rather as a means of trial and tribulation for the person, through which reward may be gained.<sup>158</sup> Thus, one action may have two different significations depending on the intention behind it, similarly to how one verb may signify two different actions in an *āya*.

Al-Bāqillānī still allows that it is possible for God not to punish a person for failing to fulfill an obligation as part of Divine justice, whereas the Qadariyya do not accept this possibility, which they claim is not in accordance with God's wisdom and justice.<sup>159</sup> This situation is an example of where al-Bāqillānī's Ash'arī tenet of absolute Divine transcendence leads to a disagreement with the Mu'tazilī prioritization of Divine justice under the rubric of reward and punishment. In fact, it is noteworthy that al-Bāqillānī theorizes different significations for the punishment of one who sins intentionally versus one who sins by mistake, rather than simply accepting that sinning leads to punishment regardless of intention, though the human '*aql*' may protest. Instead, he is making a concerted effort to reconcile human intention with divine punishment in order to preserve God's justice. Additional *aḥādīth* are used as supporting proof that the intention of the actor rather than the product (i.e. the resultant action itself) determines the value of the act. What is understood from the *ḥadīth* "Verily, actions are according to intentions" is that actions are accounted for according to the intention of the actor.<sup>160</sup> This is understood to mean, "There is no action except with intention."<sup>161</sup> But this could mean two different things: either that there is no action that is beneficial (*nāfi'*) from any aspect except with the presence of intention by which benefit (*naf'*) is lifted altogether; or that there is no beneficial (*nāfi'*) action *like* the benefit (*naf'*) of action accompanied by intention, and action without *niyya* has less benefit (*naf'*). Again, al-Bāqillānī takes the discussion in the direction of linguistic explanation. He has recourse to other *aḥādīth* that also have the linguistic construction of 'There is no x for y except [given] z.' For example, "There is no prayer for the mosque's neighbor except inside the mosque," meaning there is no full, complete prayer that enjoins reward like the reward for

<sup>157</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 371-72.

<sup>158</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 377-78.

<sup>159</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 375.

<sup>160</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 379.

<sup>161</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 379-80.

prayer inside the mosque. Other examples follow.<sup>162</sup> All these examples share a grammatical ambiguity: the explicit meaning indicates the act does not count at all if the provision in the second part of the statement is not met, but a *majāz* interpretation has it that the act counts but is not as great as if the provision in the second half of the statement had been met.

Al-Bāqillānī differentiates between utterances that have this type of ambiguity and utterances that may seem similar but that are actually immediately clear because they include an exception (*istithnā*) explicitly. The ambiguity present when there is no explicit *istithnā* is only on a linguistic level, though, because there is scholarly agreement about the presence of an implicature.

There is a difference and a distinction between the Prophet's (PBUH) saying "There is no [credit given for] fasting to him who has not spent the night fasting," and his (PBUH) saying, "There is no prayer except with *umm al-kitāb*," and [his saying] "[There is no marriage] except in purity," and "There is no marriage except with a guardian." [The difference] is that the Prophet's saying "There is no [credit given for] fasting to him who has not spent the night fasting" explicitly [says] that there is no [credit given for] fasting to him who has not spent the night [fasting] intentionally. It does not [say] explicitly that [the person can be given credit for] fasting if he did spend the night intending [to fast]. For proponents of the signifying capacity of the speech, that [signification] is established on the basis of the speech even without it being explicit, while for others [that is established] by the specific speech and usage. For them, it is as if he had said: "If [a person] has spent the night [intentionally fasting], he [gets credit for] fasting, for that is implicit in the utterance, though it is elided. The utterance, in negating what is indicated by the speech, must establish [that credit for] fasting [is given] to him who has spent [the night fasting] intentionally, to make it known via an indicant [*dalīl*] other than his saying, "There is no fasting."<sup>163</sup>

This grammatical ambiguity is present in the first *ḥadīth* because it says that the fast of someone who did not spend the night intentionally fasting does not count as fasting, but it does not explicitly say that the fast of someone who did spend the night intentionally fasting does count.<sup>164</sup> However, both groups of interpreters that al-Bāqillānī mentions agree on the presence of an implicature in the *ḥadīth* according to which intentional fasting is valid. The *ḥadīth* establishes that to be the case by means other than stating it explicitly. In the second set of utterances that include the word 'except' (*illā*), there are two explicit judgments, the general negation and the particular exception. Both cases are explicitly expressed in the utterances. In effect, none of the *ahādīth* he discusses here are ultimately excluded from legal application because scholars agree on their intended meanings. The two ways of establishing both propositions in these grammatical constructions—explicitly or by implicature—have equal

<sup>162</sup> "There is no fasting for he who did not spend the night fasting," "there is no marriage without a guardian," "there is no prayer without purity," "there is no ablution for he who has not mentioned the name of God upon [doing] it." Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 382.

<sup>163</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 385.

<sup>164</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 386.

validity and legal weight. Circling back to the matter of intentionality raised in the *ḥadīth* covering all actions, al-Bāqillānī's explanation indicates he holds the *ḥadīth* to mean both that actions are judged according to the actor's intention, and that no credit is given for an action done unintentionally.

It is in line with al-Bāqillānī's thesis of linguistic (particularly Qur'ānic) clarity that he defines both *muḥkam* and *mutashābih* as clear but in different ways. Neither one is vague or unclear; utterances beyond the Qur'ānic audience's ability to comprehend are not found in the Qur'ān, according to al-Bāqillānī's thesis. Non-Qur'ānic language use is also capable of these same properties. However, al-Bāqillānī does not eliminate ambiguity altogether in his theory of language. Rather, he uses the term *mujmal* to refer to vague expressions. Scholars who took the more normative approach and explained '*mutashābih*' as 'ambiguous' equated it with the category of '*mujmal*,' which can be translated as 'vague'<sup>165</sup> language or 'ambiguous expression.'<sup>166</sup> The category of '*mujmal*' was not as deeply theorized or explicated in Islamic religious scholarship as its antonym, '*mubayyan*' (which comes from al-Bāqillānī's favorite root denoting clarity: B-Y-N).<sup>167</sup> This imbalance in development of the concepts is certainly true in al-Bāqillānī's work: *bayān* is a highly developed concept on which he relies, while the term *mujmal* and its contents remain at the margins. Still, it was standard among scholars interested in language to theorize a category of ambiguous language.

By separating the term *mujmal* from the terms *mutashābih* and *muḥtamal*, terms which many scholars considered close synonyms, al-Bāqillānī can maintain that there is no ambiguity in the Qur'ān. He does not allow that the Qur'ān contains any *mujmal* material, and even when discussing Prophetic *ḥadīth* he shies away from this categorization, twice designating a *ḥadīth* as "connected to the *mujmal* but not of it; rather, its meaning is understood."<sup>168</sup> Only after explaining the correct meaning of the *ḥadīth* does he return to the issue of its connection to the *mujmal*: the presence of a knowable correct meaning does not prevent the *ḥadīth* from having "an aspect of multivalence [*wajh min wujūh al-iḥtimāl*]."<sup>169</sup> The *ḥadīth* is not truly *mujmal*: rather than being 'vague,' a designation that would exclude it from the realm of sound and clear communication, it is instead multivalent, carrying multiple legitimate meanings. Another *ḥadīth* that is, likewise, "connected to the *mujmal* but not of it"<sup>170</sup> turns out to be understandable too, because "the meaning of this speech [*kalām*] is understood in the custom of *ahl al-lughā* and usage prior to the Law [*al-sharʿ*] and the Message."<sup>171</sup> Recourse to language experts allows al-Bāqillānī to defend the ultimate clarity (and thus understandability, and in turn, applicability) of the corpus of *ḥadīth*. Like Qur'ānic speech, the terminology used in the *ḥadīth* has to have been understandable to the Prophet's audience, for otherwise making *aḥādīth* available would not have resulted in the capability to follow their directions. On this logic, the wording of the *ḥadīth* (as a body of text) was necessarily in the idiom of the Prophet's

<sup>165</sup> Eric Chaumont, "Ambiguity," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., ed. Kate Fleet et al. Brill Online, 2014. [http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/ambiguity-COM\\_23675](http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/ambiguity-COM_23675).

<sup>166</sup> Ahmed El Shamsy, "The Wisdom of God's Law: Two Theories," in *Islamic Law in Theory: Studies on Jurisprudence in Honor of Bernard Weiss*, ed. A. Kevin Reinhart and Robert Gleave (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 22.

<sup>167</sup> E.g. al-Shīrāzī's (d. c. 476/1083) *al-Lum'ā*. Cited in Chaumont, "Ambiguity."

<sup>168</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 378.

<sup>169</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 379.

<sup>170</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 381.

<sup>171</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 381.

Arabic-speaking audience. The relevant lens for understanding the *ḥadīth* is thus the ‘custom of usage’ (‘*urf al-isti‘māl*’) of the Arabs at the time of the Prophet.<sup>172</sup> Al-Bāqillānī understands both the Qur’ān and the *ḥadīth* in this way. When an indicant is needed in order to understand the meaning of an utterance contained therein, it must be one that sheds light on how that first audience would have understood the utterance. What may have at first seemed vague or obscured is revealed to be understandable and to have a definite meaning, or more than one meaning if the utterance is multivalent.

Thus, al-Bāqillānī theorizes that the Qur’ān contains univocal and multivalent utterances, both categories of clear language.<sup>173</sup> Speaking of Divine and Prophetic meanings and the utterances through which they reach peoples (*umam*), al-Bāqillānī writes that for explicit utterances whose meaning is laid out in the utterance itself, there is no need for speculation and recourse to external indicants. A second category of utterances includes those which are *mujmal* and those which are *muḥtamal*, and *mutashābih*. We have seen that utterances that are purportedly *mujmal* can turn out to be *muḥtamal* and *mutashābih* rather than ultimately inconclusive in meaning. In the case of this second category of utterances, there is a need for recourse to an external indicant (whether emanating from the intellect or revelation) in order to understand the utterance. The intention of this type of utterance is correctly understood through recourse to an indicant (*dalīl*) connected to the speech. Even given the existence of non-*naṣṣ* utterances in Qur’ān and *ḥadīth*—utterances that need an external *dalīl* to be brought to bear upon them in order for their meaning to be brought to light—these utterances are not unintelligible or outside the bounds of human understanding; rather, they are merely not *independently* understandable. The two factors that may be misunderstood as opacity are multivalence and intertextuality.

The category of *mujmal* may be the only item in his typologies of language for which al-Bāqillānī does not provide a single example. *Aḥādīth* he provides that at first seem to be *mujmal* are shown not to be. Given a clarifying *dalīl* and an understanding of how Arabic was used at the time of the Prophet, these utterances are clear, as well they should be: God, who is just and benevolent, provided the *umma* with clear rules in the Qur’ān and (indirectly) the *ḥadīth*, so it would be nonsensical for these utterances to be inaccessible to the *umma*. Thus, although al-Bāqillānī includes the category of *mujmal* in his theory of language, his text does not convey a willingness to acknowledge real, ultimate ambiguity that cannot be resolved by access to the right outside information. This certainty that utterances are globally interpretable may be explained by al-Bāqillānī’s systematic view of language as necessarily reliable. Another way of approaching al-Bāqillānī’s marginalizing of the *mujmal* is through the framework of Gricean pragmatics, which posits in the Communicative Principle that speakers have the intention of communicating a definite meaning when they speak.<sup>174</sup> If speakers have the intention of contributing a meaning to a conversation, that meaning exists, and it is up to the interpreter to determine what it is. The underlying assumption is that within the realm of communicative utterances, clearly thought out meanings are expressed in logical ways. Speakers who do not act in this way, it seems, would have their utterances categorized under the rubric of the non-

<sup>172</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 383.

<sup>173</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 431, 434.

<sup>174</sup> Grice, “Logic and Conversation.”

communicative for al-Bāqillānī (or, in Gricean terms, they would violate the cooperative principle).

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Whether a homonym with non-opposing meanings carries both possible meanings in a given utterance is, for al-Bāqillānī, a matter of intention, just as actions' meanings are determined by intention. He says it is sound for the speaker to intend both possible meanings of an utterance. As is often the case, al-Bāqillānī argues this point against Mu'tazilī opponents; in this case, it is against al-Jubbā'ī, the Qadariyya, and 'some of Abū Ḥanīfa's supporters' who maintain that if the speaker intends two meanings, s/he must express each one separately.<sup>175</sup> There must be an indication (explicit or not) that one or both of the meanings of the homonymous word is intended.<sup>176</sup> Speakers must intend both meanings separately, even if they are expressed together. However, God is an exception, claims al-Bāqillānī: if God is the speaker, God intends all the meanings at once (*bi-irāda wāḥida*).<sup>177</sup> Speaking is one of God's eternal attributes (an Ash'ārī idea), and it is impossible for God to intend one meaning to the exclusion of the other(s).<sup>178</sup> This last declaration is interesting because it seems to place a limitation on God's speech, despite al-Bāqillānī's upholding God's speech (*kalām Allāh*) as an eternal divine attribute, never dissociated from God, on whom there are no limits.<sup>179</sup> While conceiving of *kalām Allāh* as meaning all of its legitimate possible meanings allows for a wider scope of interpretation (still limited by methods like *tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi-l-Qur'ān*, bringing one Qur'ānic passage to bear on another), and avoids the problem of humans imposing limits on the meanings of God's speech, one wonders whether this approach might dilute the force of any particular one of these meanings and preclude the practice of law, or at least make it difficult and confusing.

This emphasis on the speaker's intention raises the important question of how it is possible to know God's intention at all. Some would say it is not possible, even that it is disrespectful to think humans could.<sup>180</sup> Al-Bāqillānī takes the opposing view, as explained earlier, in connection with his argument that sincerely-expressed utterances reliably and systematically convey the speaker's intended meaning. One way is without an intermediary, as in the case of God's direct speech to Moses. The other way is through an intermediary, as in God's speaking to Muḥammad through an angel. Unlike human speakers, the Divine speaker makes itself, its intention, and its meaning known to the direct addressee *necessarily* (*ḍarūratan*), in the moment of hearing itself.<sup>181</sup> The recipient of this necessary knowledge is actually forced to know it, unlike in the case of regular knowledge people can come to know through a process wherein God makes the person capable of knowing, and the person takes up this capability and fulfills it. The other, indirect way that people come to know God's message

<sup>175</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 425.

<sup>176</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 427.

<sup>177</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 427-28.

<sup>178</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 428.

<sup>179</sup> L. Gardet, "Kalām," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. P. Bearman et al. Brill Online, 2014. [http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/kala-m-COM\\_0421](http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/kala-m-COM_0421).

<sup>180</sup> L. Gardet, "Allāh," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. P. Bearman et al. Brill Online, 2014. [http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/allah-COM\\_0047](http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/allah-COM_0047).

<sup>181</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 430.

is through acquired knowledge (*istidlāl*). God sends signs (*āyāt*) and ‘dazzling miracles’ (*bāhir al-mu’jizāt*) that indicate God’s truthfulness in claiming the Message.<sup>182</sup> Al-Bāqillānī does not refer to specific contents of the Qur’ān here but rather the ontological status of the revelation.

Here, again, clarity and interpretability are revealed as being the driving points behind al-Bāqillānī’s argument. Revelation is only ever in the language of the audience, which, as we have seen in past sections, is for the benefit of the audience being able to understand the revelation.<sup>183</sup> Revelation that was not accessible to the audience’s comprehension would not be in accordance with Divine justice. In the case of revelation being communicated by God to an angel, and from the angel to a messenger, the revelation is in the language that the messenger already knew, as an expression of God’s message in the medium of indicants that had been set down by convention.<sup>184</sup> For Ash‘arīs like al-Bāqillānī, this expression is not the essence of Divine speech itself but rather a separate manifestation of it. God’s internal speech (*kalām nafsī*) is eternal, but its expression in words through the angels to the prophets to the people in the form of revelation is separate from that and temporal. In contrast to direct communication from God, this indirect revelation is not necessary knowledge but rather subject to acquisition (*al-naẓar wa-l-istidlāl*). Humans are not forced to know it but commanded to and responsible for doing so.<sup>185</sup>

Multivalent utterances in revelation have an intention (*al-murād minhu*) that is known by an indicant that ‘joins’ the speech (*yaqtarin bi-l-khiṭāb*), meaning another piece of knowledge or text that is brought to bear on the utterance in order to shed light on its meaning. This indicant can be either ‘aqlī or set down (*tawqīf*) by a term (*lafẓ*). An ‘aqlī indicant, which is an indicant that emanates from the intellect rather than scripture, is transferred from the angel to the messenger, and then from the messenger to the nation, in order for the intention (*al-murād bihi*) to be conveyed.<sup>186</sup> The intention (*al-murād*) of the utterance that carries multiple meanings (*muḥtamal*) is clarified (*yubayyan*) by “terms, signs, confirmations, and indications” that direct the listener toward the intention of the multivalent speech.<sup>187</sup>

In the absence of an ‘aqlī indicant to specify what is intended, the transmission of the Message proceeds from the angel to the prophet to the people “with types of terms, confirmations, indications, symbols, and signs that force the messenger, when he sees them from the angel, and the nation when it sees them from the messenger, to want them.”<sup>188</sup> It is a communicative, linguistic chain of transmission. The one who is seeing it does so according to his ability, al-Bāqillānī tells us. This statement may account for the amount of contextual information at a given person’s disposal or varying mental capacities.

Speakers’ intentions are expressed in utterances, and even God’s intentions are knowable through revelation. The idea of the speaker’s intention determining the meaning of an utterance was standard in al-Bāqillānī’s milieu; his contribution here is to emphasize that many meanings can be intended and expressed in one utterance. This condition does not lead

<sup>182</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 431.

<sup>183</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 431.

<sup>184</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 431.

<sup>185</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 431.

<sup>186</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 432.

<sup>187</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 435.

<sup>188</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 432.

to ambiguity in the sense of hazy, unclear, obscured signification but rather in the root sense of dual (or more) meanings.

Al-Bāqillānī's establishment of a thorough conveyance of ideas and intended meanings between God and people is important to his theory of reliably-communicated content. It is important for al-Bāqillānī to establish that communication is speech between an addresser and an addressee particularly because revelation is evidence of a God that has spoken to a human audience.<sup>189</sup> He specifies that God's speech (*kalām Allāh*) falls into this category even despite God's removal from humankind, because the Prophet serves as an intermediary who communicates the message to other people directly.<sup>190</sup> The communication goes both ways, as signified by the *wazn* (root pattern) *mufā'ala*, which is the form of terms like *mukālama*, *muqāwala*, and *mukhāṭaba*, all of which signify speech back and forth between speakers and listeners. God is also an exceptional addressee: whereas usually an addressee requires an indicant (*dalīl*) in order to discern the content of a subject's inner thoughts (*al-kalām alladhī fī nafsihī*), God does not need 'expressions and indications' (*'ibārāt wa-dalā'il*) to understand the inner thoughts of creation.<sup>191</sup> This separation between thoughts within the mind and expressions in language is consistent with the normative Ash'arī view of language.<sup>192</sup>

## Conclusion

This chapter has explored the contours of al-Bāqillānī's theory of language in his extant *uṣūl al-fiqh* work, the *Taqrīb*. Four principal features of language emerge over the course of this book, resurfacing in various forms and showing al-Bāqillānī's thought on these matters to be generally consistent throughout. The overarching theme of clarity runs through his theorizing of language, reflecting an overall vision of language—both as it is used in sources of law (Qur'ān, *ḥadīth*) and ordinary human speech—as clear and systematically interpretable. Al-Bāqillānī makes the intellectual contribution of distinguishing between opacity and clarity present with multiple meanings in an utterance. The first distinction we explored is between utterances that are understandable on their own, those that are not, and those that have one or more aspects from each of the first two categories. If an utterance has one or more aspects that are not understandable on their own, al-Bāqillānī says, the listener/reader can bring the right piece of context to bear on the utterance in order to clarify it. Thus, all the categories of

<sup>189</sup> In pre-modern Arabic logic texts, it is standard to define *ifāda* as communication in language (where as the speaker, you carry forth your meanings), and *istifāda* as meaning you get from someone else's communications (the listener's receiving end). The semantic field in which these terms function in the context of *'ilm al-lughā* (lexicography), however, can be traced back to the main meaning of the root F-Y-D: to be beneficial or useful. Al-Bāqillānī does not seem to be employing the *ifāda/istifāda* dichotomy, but rather to be using the term *ifāda* to refer to meaningful communication in either direction, while he does not usually use the term *istifāda*. On *ifāda*, see al-'Ajam, *Mawsū'at muṣṭalahāt*, 1520.

<sup>190</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 335-36.

<sup>191</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 336.

<sup>192</sup> "This dichotomy between the speech that exists in the mind (*al-kalām al-nafsī*) and its linguistic expression (*al-kalām al-lisānī/al-lafẓī*) implies the dissociation of meanings (*ma'ānī*) from linguistic forms (*ṣiyagh al-alfāẓ wa-ṣuwaruhā*), or of semantics from morphology and syntax." Gregor Schwarb, "Capturing the Meanings of God's Speech: The Relevance of *Uṣūl al-Fiqh* to an Understanding of *Uṣūl al-Tafsīr* in Jewish and Muslim *Kalām*," in *A Word Fitly Spoken: Studies in Medieval Exegesis of the Hebrew Bible and the Qur'an Presented to Hagga Ben-Shammai*, ed. Meir M. Bar-Asher, Simon Hopkins, Sarah Stroumsa, and Bruno Chiesa (Jerusalem, 2007), 131.

speech, divided along the lines of independently-understandable and context-dependent meanings, are clear and cogent.

Another dimension of al-Bāqillānī's defense of linguistic clarity is his marginalizing of the idea of ambiguous or opaque (*mujmal*) language. Language is a reliable, stable tool for him, and when an utterance's meaning (as determined by the speaker) is not evident, the right piece of context can clarify it. In other words, a lack of understanding is not the fault of language or even the speaker (who must have had a coherent intent in voicing the utterance), but rather the audience's need to take the right information into account. Ambiguous utterances are theorized but never exemplified; what appears to be ambiguous in the *ḥadīth* is actually not ambiguous or opaque once the meaning of their grammatical constructions at the Prophet's time is explicated; the Qur'ān contains nothing unclear whatsoever. Given that by its own account the Qur'ān contains both *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt*, the term *muḥkamāt* is deployed to mean clear and/or consistent utterances, and *mutashābihāt* to mean multivalent utterances. A single utterance can belong to both of these categories, and non-Qur'ānic language is encompassed by them too. Multivalent utterances can include more than one meaning intended by the speaker at one time, and if God is the utterance's author, all meanings are simultaneously intended.

We have seen that al-Bāqillānī is typically a systematic thinker who tries to account for means and methods of interpretability for many dimensions of language. In some cases, his examples are relatively straightforward and seem to put theory, and an intuition about how language functions, before particular utterances and examples. When al-Bāqillānī uses Qur'ānic examples, sometimes his choices seem driven by a larger theoretical or doctrinal vision of, for instance, the divine. His overall theological vision is informed by a variety of sources, including the Qur'ān, *ḥadīth*, the influences of Greek philosophy on Islamic thought, and other cultural knowledge. In these cases, we can see where al-Bāqillānī's larger 'composite' theological vision reflects back on his interpretation of key texts like Qur'ānic *āyāt* and individual *aḥādīth*. This interplay of interpreting particular utterances and the influence of a global vision is not unique to al-Bāqillānī, but it does tell us about his theological and interpretive priorities. Based on the text this chapter has analyzed, we can conclude that al-Bāqillānī tried to balance particular interpretations of *āyāt* and *aḥādīth* with a systematic view of language in order to establish it as a reliable and stable resource. This systematic view of language, including Qur'ānic language (as implied by reliance on the Qur'ān as a source of law), is a cornerstone of the *uṣūl al-fiqh* genre, and it is only in light of al-Bāqillānī's other work that we can better contextualize and understand his awareness of the tension between views of Qur'ān-as-unique and Qur'ān-as-systematic with regard to its language use.



## Chapter Three: Shifting Boundaries of Meaning: *Majāz*, Technical Usage, and *Qiyās* of Names in the *Taqrīb*

### Introduction

This chapter examines al-Bāqillānī's theory of figurative language in his *uṣūl al-fiqh* work *al-Taqrīb wa-l-irshād fī uṣūl al-fiqh*. The previous chapter examined some general ways in which al-Bāqillānī's text engages with the question of how language functions. It then analyzed several important aspects of how al-Bāqillānī understood language to function, including explicit and implicit expressions of meaning, the clarity and consistency of utterances, and the possibility for multivalence in a single utterance. The focus of this chapter is one specific dimension of language in al-Bāqillānī's thought, namely the boundaries of literal meaning (*ḥaqīqa*) and the legitimacy of conveying meanings in ways that rely on that which does not conform to these boundaries. He describes *majāz* (roughly, 'figurative language') as the 'widening' or 'transfer' of meaning from the set-down (posited) meaning of a word. While *majāz* conveys meaning based on what is outside the boundary of a *ḥaqīqa* usage, technical vocabulary items construct a meaning within a stricter, smaller boundary than the *ḥaqīqa* usage. In discussing the issue of whether it is legitimate to perform *qiyās* (analogy) of a name, al-Bāqillānī provides a theoretical framework for understanding the boundaries of word meanings according to the internal logic of any given language. I discuss the difference between al-Bāqillānī's allowance of *majāz* and prohibition of *qiyās* of an *ism* (name, noun). His explanations of these three issues pertaining to the boundaries of the meanings of lexical items and utterances show a developed understanding of the logical and pragmatic construction of meaning.

As is the case with regard to al-Bāqillānī's discussion of other sorts of language (analyzed in Chapter Two), his approach to theorizing the boundaries of meaning depicts language as systematic and internally consistent. The examples of boundary-crossing uses of words and constructions examined in this chapter show how al-Bāqillānī defends methodical and reliable interpretation of utterances that contain figurative language. Investigation into the discourses with which al-Bāqillānī interacts (though usually without alerting his reader explicitly) indicates that he takes on important exegetical and doctrinal issues and draws them into the domain of the discussion of language. In this way, he frames complex and multifaceted questions as being rightly approached through the lens of language interpretation. In the context of his trying to persuade his audience that all utterances and uses of terms can be systematically and methodically interpreted, claiming that scriptural and theological issues are grounded in the domain of language allows him to use his *uṣūl* text as a platform for defending his own position on these matters of larger religious importance that are not, strictly speaking, matters of legal theory. Primary examples of this phenomenon included in this chapter relate to the nature of God and the divine justice system, and the meanings of contentious terms that were the focus of sectarian debate during Islam's formative period.

## Ḥaqīqa and Majāz: Meaning beyond Set-Down Boundaries

*Majāz* (typically translated as ‘figurative language’) is an archetypal way in which meanings can be extended in language, as I described in the Introduction. The main issue in al-Bāqillānī’s extended discourse on *majāz* in its various forms is how far it can extend, and in what directions. Determining the bounds of *majāz* is important because the legal implications of an utterance change depending on what the utterance signifies, which in turn depends on what is rightly understood to be figurative. Al-Bāqillānī’s identity as a *mutakallim* has left its mark on the *Taqrīb*, notably in use of terminology, its pointed debunking of arguments made by the Mu‘tazila and other groups, and its view of Islamic texts and doctrines beyond the immediate concerns of *uṣūl al-fiqh*. Al-Bāqillānī’s methodical treatment of *majāz* is an integral part of his theory of how language works. It situates him in relation to other thinkers in *uṣūl al-fiqh* and related discourses, and it is an extensively-treated topic within the *Taqrīb* that sheds light on al-Bāqillānī’s methodology and theoretical priorities.

Al-Bāqillānī defines *majāz* in contrast to *ḥaqīqa*, a distinction that arose by the 3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> century, when, however, earlier definitions of *majāz* (described in Chapter One) were still at play.<sup>1</sup> Al-Bāqillānī declares that describing an utterance as *ḥaqīqa* has two meanings: the first of which consists of “describing a thing’s circumscribing limit and the idea for which the description is fitting” (*waṣf al-shay’ allatī hiyya ḥadduhu wa-l-ma’nā alladhī lahu istaḥaqqā al-waṣf*), citing the example of “the reality [*ḥaqīqa*] of a knower [*‘ālim*] being his having knowledge [*‘ilm*].”<sup>2</sup> In *kalām* (theology), describing someone who knows as a knower is an example of an entitative accident: knowing is the characteristic that defines someone as a knower insofar as that person has the accident of knowledge. Al-Bāqillānī provides other examples of *ḥaqīqa* that fit this model in his discussion of the difference between *ḥaqīqa* and *majāz*: “saying hitter [*ḍārib*] and knower [*‘ālim*] and capable [*qādir*] applies to anyone who has hitting [*ḍarb*], knowing [*‘ilm*], and ability [*qudra*].”<sup>3</sup> Given the ontologically- and grammatically-determined relationship between the terms, he is saying, there is an essential connection that does not leave room for *majāzī* usages. In defining these entities as such, al-Bāqillānī says this kind of *ḥaqīqa* applies to *all* of (*jamī‘*) what was set down for communication (*mā wuḍi‘a li-ifādatihi*).<sup>4</sup> His use of the term *jamī‘* implies a collection of singular entities, not a conceptual category.

The second meaning of *ḥaqīqa* is “describing a thing as what is particular to it.” The example al-Bāqillānī provides is of the created thing (*al-muḥdath*) being extant (*mawjūd*), [created] out of nonbeing (*‘an ‘adam*).<sup>5</sup> This same example is given along with others in al-Bāqillānī’s description of one category of words that cannot be used as *majāz*—extant (*mawjūd*), non-extant (*ma’dūm*), eternal (*qadīm*), temporal (*muḥdath*)—general nouns “above which there is no [level of] generalization,” in other words, terms of the widest-possible category.<sup>6</sup> Either a thing is extant or it is not, says al-Bāqillānī, and on a logical level, there is no category beyond these that could comprise beings that are neither extant nor not-extant, thus precluding

<sup>1</sup> Heinrichs, “On the Genesis,” 115.

<sup>2</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 352.

<sup>3</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 355.

<sup>4</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 355.

<sup>5</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 352.

<sup>6</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 358.

*majāzī* usage. Al-Bāqillānī relies on this category of ‘general nouns’ as one of the cornerstones of his theory of language. It is based on an entitative accident, and indeed it is one example of how al-Bāqillānī ties his ontology very closely to entitative accidents. Al-Bāqillānī frames his references to them in terms of the linguistic properties attributed to the words (and indeed grammatical patterns) that are assigned to entitative accidents. Al-Bāqillānī discusses general nouns in terms of their linguistic properties and highlighting their grammatical forms, drawing on the ontological relationships between entities that the Arabic language system reflects.

These are the two ways in which *ḥaqīqa* works. As for *majāz*, al-Bāqillānī says it can be an addition (*ziyāda*), an elision (*ḥadhf*), or a lack (*naqṣ*). Any of these types of *majāz* are uses of language that fall outside the bounds of meaning for which that language was set down, for the purpose of communication, i.e., as a pragmatic function of language.<sup>7</sup> As he writes:

I described addition [*ziyāda*] as *majāz* because it is employed without being communicative [*mufīda*], though it was originally set down for communication. It became used for other [meanings] than what it was set down for. Likewise, the absence of what was elided from its place becomes tantamount to speech being modified from what it was set down to communicate.<sup>8</sup>

Al-Bāqillānī’s account of *majāz* is, like the rest of his account of language, focused on providing a systematic account of how it functions and how it conveys meaning, so that all instances of it can be reliably and consistently interpreted. Al-Bāqillānī writes:

*Majāz* is used where appropriate, and the category for which it is used cannot be expanded or extended by analogy. *Ḥaqīqa* applies to everything it was set down to convey, either by outright reference or by association, and even if [*ḥaqīqa*] is not customarily used for [something], it does not negate the conventional language use, such that a signification is nullified. This is what they mean when they say that *majāz* is limited to its proper place, while *ḥaqīqa* can be applied to all of that in which it is meaningful. When we say that *majāz* does not extend beyond its place, we mean that it does not go beyond its own category, not that it is not used except for the thing itself the language specialists used it for. For one can say ‘ask the residence’ and ‘[ask] the ruins’ instead of their saying ‘ask the abodes,’ because it is of the same category, and one cannot say ‘ask the beasts’ and ‘[ask] the donkey’ by way of analogy to this category.<sup>9</sup>

Al-Bāqillānī theorizes the versatility of literal speech and its ability to be extended to other usages, while by contrast, figurative speech is limited in usage to the particular category in which it first occurs. What is included in this category is determined by the ‘original’ metaphorical usage, i.e. the first identified creation of a metaphorical mapping.<sup>10</sup> Al-Bāqillānī’s

<sup>7</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 352-53.

<sup>8</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 353.

<sup>9</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 353-54.

<sup>10</sup> For an explanation of the concept of metaphorical mapping, see George Lakoff, “The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor,” in *Metaphor and Thought*, ed. Andrew Ortony (1993; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 202-51.

example is ‘ask the residence’ or ‘ask the ruins,’ a metaphor known from pre-Islamic poetry, where these phrases are always employed in the same type-scene.<sup>11</sup> In a widespread trope, the *nasīb* section of an ode has the poem’s speaker stop at the ruins of abodes where a beloved’s tribe once camped and recollect the beauty of the beloved and memories shared with her. The remembrance of the beloved and her onetime relationship with the speaker is triggered by the ruins, and the ruins become the laden sign that imports the story of the former beloved and their relationship.

This mapping is *majāz*, as al-Bāqillānī indicates—an intertextual trope that calls a whole scene to the mind of the reader, in a shorthand means of referencing a culturally significant meaning. In later post-Jāhilī poetry, most famously in Abū Tammām’s verse,<sup>12</sup> the topos of the ‘ruins of the abode’ was reworked and deployed in order to reflect and comment on the changed circumstances in which the poets now lived, far from actual desert ruins (though even by late pre-Islamic times, the ruined abodes was a hackneyed theme).<sup>13</sup> The phrase ‘ask the ruins’ and wording close to it had a history that carried with it a particular cultural and literary context, confirming the saliency of that ancient scene. Al-Bāqillānī’s ‘rules’ for *majāz* allow the idea of asking ruined abodes to extend to other entities that are like abodes within the context of the phrase’s usage (such as residences and ruins), but not beyond these bounds. This is why al-Bāqillānī concludes that “it is not permitted to say ‘ask the beasts’ and ‘[ask] the donkey’ as analogies within this category.”<sup>14</sup> There is no way a speaker could talk about a beast or a donkey in a way analogous to the ruined abode of poetic fame, or at least this is what al-Bāqillānī claims. Looking back at ‘Abbasid-era poets Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī, both used the idea of the abodes to talk about new contexts in which new triggers reminded them of lost love in different forms. Within the Arabic literary tradition, it is ruins of abodes that recall a past golden age, whether of a romance or a city’s heyday. The metonymy of the abode, its ruins, cannot be reimagined as a donkey or a beast. Or could it? Could one imagine a feasible communicative utterance in which a donkey triggers memories of a past relationship, and could a speaker say “ask the donkey” when reminiscing? In a way, this situation seems theoretically possible; all sorts of objects can be reminders of past loves. A donkey cannot be in a state of ruin like abodes can, but it can leave traces (in the form of footprints, droppings, and the like), perhaps at the remains of a campsite, that could serve as the same kind of trigger for memories. If in this context a speaker said ‘ask the donkey,’ could this be an *isti‘āra badī‘a* (novel or marvelous metaphor) of the type al-Bāqillānī discusses in the context of Qur’ānic

<sup>11</sup> I am borrowing the term ‘type-scene’ from Robert Alter in his analysis of the literary style of the Bible, where it refers to a repeated piece of narrative, with each iteration of the narrative sharing a common structure and other elements (such as wording and interactions between analogous characters). Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 47-62. Poems that use the phrase ‘*sal al-diyār*’ [ask the abodes] include Ibn al-Zayyāt’s (d. 233/847) “*Sal diyār al-ḥayy man ghayyarahā*,” and Ibn Ma’sūm al-Madanī’s (d. 1119/1707) “*Sal al-diyār ‘an ahīl Najd*.” The phrase ‘*sal al-aṭlāl*’ appears in the Umayyad poet Tuwayt al-Yamāmī’s (d. 100/720) “*Sal al-aṭlāl in nafa’a al-su’āl*” and the Abbasid poet Abū Ḥayya al-Numayrī’s (d. c. 143/760-210-825) “*Sal al-aṭlāl bayna burāq sallī*.” The variant ‘*sal al-rab*’ is found in the Umayyad poet Ḥamīd b. Thawr al-Hilālī’s (d. c. 86/705-97/715) poem “*Sal al-rab ‘annī yamamtu am ṭāriq*” among others, and Ibn ‘Arabī’s poem that begins with the line “*Qif bil-manāzil windub al-aṭlālā / wa-sal al-rubū’ al-dārisāt su’ālā*.”

<sup>12</sup> M. M. Badawi, “The Function of Rhetoric in Medieval Arabic Poetry: Abu Tammām’s Ode on Amorium,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 9, no. 1 (1978): 43-57.

<sup>13</sup> Richard A. Serrano, “Al-Buḥturī’s Poetics of Persian Abodes,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 28, no. 1 (1997): 72.

<sup>14</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 354.

inimitability?<sup>15</sup> Perhaps it is not possible to talk about an animal like a donkey in this way because the word ‘donkey’ has a connotation that clashes with the communicative goal at hand, or because animals’ footprints and droppings serve a different function in the *nasīb* section of classical Arabic odes, namely marking the passage of time since the beloved resided there. Or is the boundary of ‘category’ (*bāb*) that has been transgressed here one that then precludes relevance, communicability, or salience? What exactly is the *bāb* that delimits appropriate or possible extensions of a *majāz*? Genus (*jins*) and species (*nawʿ*) have technical meanings in the Arabic philosophical tradition, following from the Greeks’ usage (and employed by al-Bāqillānī elsewhere), but the term *bāb* is vaguer. In the case of the ruined abodes that are to be (rhetorically) asked, the term *bāb* operates as a category-marker based on the most relevant feature of the abodes in the context of the *majāzī* usage. In a similar vein, ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d. 1078), writing years after al-Bāqillānī, theorized that the salience of the feature of the vehicle chosen as the basis of a metaphor must be high for the sake of making the meaning of the metaphor clear and comprehensible. The basis of comparison must be clear and known widely, like sweetness in honey and courage in a lion. Thus, it does not make sense to build a metaphor on the basis of roundness and use the sun as the vehicle; rather, a ball is an appropriate vehicle in this situation.<sup>16</sup> Al-Bāqillānī’s and al-Jurjānī’s thought on this topic relies on an understanding of the language community’s cumulative connotations of words.

Al-Bāqillānī’s insistence on the so-called original usage of a metaphor determining subsequent metaphorical mapping is based on the idea that knowledge of the original metaphor renders subsequent uses based on it clear by extending its metaphorical mapping in a consistent way. It relies on the idea that there is an identifiable original instance of a metaphor that is known to the language community at large. Al-Bāqillānī applies this idea directly in tracing all uses of the metaphor ‘*qayd al-\_\_\_\_\_*’ to Imru’ al-Qays’s ‘*qayd al-awābid*’ in his *Kitāb Iʿjāz al-Qurʾān*, demonstrating a consistent idea of originality in expressions across these two texts.<sup>17</sup> This conception reflects a highly centralized canon of language use and its basis in widely circulated texts (whether written or oral), a phenomenon that can be connected to the presence of highly conventionalized aspects of language use (particularly in literature) at the time.<sup>18</sup> It also reflects the attachment of a high degree of value to the ‘original’ articulation of a metaphor that then becomes the source text for extensions of this metaphor in new incarnations that must, however, build consistently on the ‘original’ metaphor.<sup>19</sup> It is only within a cohesive and agreed-upon literary canon that a critic can deem all variations on one metaphorical image to trace back to one ‘original’ metaphor. The author of the source metaphor is lauded by critics for the quality of the line of poetry and its striking image; subsequent poets are judged based on their adaptations of the image in question. The

<sup>15</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Iʿjāz*, 430.

<sup>16</sup> ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī, *Asrār al-balāgha*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Shākīr (Cairo: Dār al-Madānī bi-Jidda, 1991), 230-31.

<sup>17</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Iʿjāz*, 106-08.

<sup>18</sup> See A. Hamori, “Examples of Convention in the Poetry of Abū Nuwās,” *Studia Islamica*, no. 30 (1969): 5.

<sup>19</sup> Recent scholarship has interrogated the implications of theories of originality and influence. See Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein, “Figures in the Corpus: Theories of Influence and Intertextuality,” in *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History*, ed. Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 3-36.

emphasis on tracing individual poets' usages back to a single instance of a predecessor's ingenuity is characteristic of theories of influence.<sup>20</sup>

Al-Bāqillānī's restrictions on metaphor here reflect a prescriptive tendency that complements his descriptive tendency in his treatise on *i'jāz al-Qur'ān*, where he praised *badī'* (marvelous, original, innovative) metaphors that participate in *i'jāz*, a designation that for al-Bāqillānī is integrally connected with the expression of meaning. In that text, he emphasized the unbounded quality of metaphor, saying there is no upper limit to its potential level of rhetorical excellence, and that it cannot be learned by rote.<sup>21</sup> Al-Jurjānī later developed the idea that the relationship of tenor and vehicle in a metaphor affect the character and accessibility of the resultant image.<sup>22</sup> His thought is more in line with al-Bāqillānī's praise of innovative/marvelous metaphor in the *i'jāz* context. Al-Jurjānī argued that great metaphors often call upon the reader to reflect, occasioning a thought process due to the innovativeness of the metaphor, the ingenuity in bringing new elements together.<sup>23</sup> He also considered metaphors to be typologically different, depending on whether the tenor and the vehicle were of the same genus, drawing a distinction between metaphors based on the dominant trait of the terms. In one type of *isti'āra*, both terms are of the same genus and the difference is one of degree (such as 'running quickly' and 'flying'). Here, not much interpretive thought (*ta'awwul*) is needed on the reader's part in order to understand the *isti'āra*.<sup>24</sup> The second type of *isti'āra* uses items of different genera, like 'I saw a lion' in reference to a courageous person, because 'person' and 'lion' are not of the same genus. The third type of *isti'āra* in this typology involves a tangible term and an intellect-based one (*'aqlī*), as in 'light' for 'clear understanding.' This last type of *isti'āra* is based on acquired knowledge, and it requires mental reasoning in order for the metaphor to be successfully understood. The basis for the metaphor (i.e. the similarity between the two terms) may mean ignoring a main characteristic of one of the terms; for example, in using the word 'dead' to refer to a very ignorant person, it is necessary to think of ignorance as being the salient characteristic of a dead person (rather than lifelessness, for instance). Western approaches to metaphor have also distinguished between metaphors that do and do not call on the listener to undertake mental processing in order to understand. However, while there is a range of views in Western metaphor theory about what characteristic of metaphor determines the necessity of construal, to adopt the terminology of Kronfeld and others writing in this tradition, it is normative in that tradition to deem construal to be required in cases of non-lexicalized metaphors.<sup>25</sup> This distinction results from a very different type of classification of metaphors than the one al-Jurjānī theorizes.

Both al-Bāqillānī (in his discussion of metaphorical extension) and al-Jurjānī (in his typology of metaphors) prioritize clarity of communication in their thought on the logic of the construction of metaphors. Reflecting on the differences between the two thinkers' ideas on this subject, al-Jurjānī's schema allows for more diverse types of relationships between the

<sup>20</sup> Clayton and Rothstein, "Figures," 4-6.

<sup>21</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I'jāz*, 430.

<sup>22</sup> Larkin, *Theology of Meaning*, 77-83.

<sup>23</sup> Al-Jurjānī, *Asrār*, 263-95.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Kamal Abu Deeb, "Al-Jurjānī's Classification of *Isti'āra*, with Special Reference to Aristotle's Classification of Metaphor," *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 2 (1971): 66.

<sup>25</sup> Chana Kronfeld, "Aspects of Poetic Metaphor" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1983; ProQuest order no. 8413459), 11.

tenor and vehicle of a metaphor. Assuming the metaphor has a sound basis, readers might need to use their intellects in order to understand the meaning the metaphor conveys, but this process results in the mapping of the tenor onto a new domain, resulting in the conveyance of complex meanings in a novel ways. Discussing ‘marvelous metaphors’ in his *Kitāb I’jāz al-Qur’ān*, al-Bāqillānī likewise champions novel thought in metaphor construction, perhaps in a kind of precursor to what al-Jurjānī was to explain fully. In this passage of the *Taqrīb*, however, al-Bāqillānī’s approach sounds more conservative, placing a restriction on the extension of the bounds of legitimate metaphorical mapping. It may reflect his competing concern for showing language to be systematic in its expression of meanings, a systematicity that would allow language to be a reliable means of communication for such significant activities as Qur’ānic interpretation and legal judgment. The underlying tension is between language as systematic framework of expression and language as a flexible, expandable medium that has the inherent potential to bend in the service of communicating new, innovative meanings. The question is whether even within the bending of language to express new meanings there is a reliable system that promises consistent interpretation. Al-Bāqillānī argues in favor of reliable interpretability in such cases through detailed discussions of phenomena like *majāz* in which meaning is constructed from outside the set-down boundaries of vocabulary and grammar items.

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Al-Bāqillānī describes *majāz* as being more limited than *ḥaqīqa* both in his general explanation of the terms and in his diagnostic criteria explaining how to identify whether a usage is *ḥaqīqa* or *majāz*. In addition to the initial definition of *majāz* as a modification of *ḥaqīqa* usages of language (addition, subtraction, or elision) described above, he outlines a typology of four ways in which *majāz* is distinguished from *ḥaqīqa*. The first, definitional property of *ḥaqīqa* is that a *ḥaqīqa* usage conforms (by definition) to the meaning ‘set down for it.’ Second, a *ḥaqīqa* usage is also able to be the basis for *ishtiḳāq*, or deriving a new word from an Arabic root based on an available grammatical pattern. Al-Bāqillānī gives the example of the word *amr*: the *ḥaqīqa* meaning of it is ‘a command,’ so using it to refer to a matter or a concern is a *majāzī* extension of meaning, an extension or ‘widening’ (*ittisā’*), as al-Bāqillānī also calls it, following standard use of this term in technical discussions of *majāz*.<sup>26</sup> In the Qur’ānic verses “and Pharaoh's order [*amr*] was not rightly-guided” [Q 11:97] and “[Until] when Our command [*amr*] came, and the furnace boiled over” [Q 11:40] as well as the human usage “What is so-and-so’s matter [*amr*], and what is his condition?” (i.e. ‘What’s the matter with him?’), the word *amr* is already used in a way divergent from the ‘core’ meaning of ‘command,’ and doing *ishtiḳāq* (derivation of a word from a linguistic root) based on this divergent meaning is not possible. This rule is in accordance with al-Bāqillānī’s earlier pronouncement that extension of a *majāz* is prohibited. A third way of distinguishing between *ḥaqīqa* and *majāz* usage is when the two use different plurals of a single word: one must be *majāz*. In other words, when a word has two possible plural forms, one is literal and the other is figurative. Taking the example of *amr* again, al-Bāqillānī says the plural form *awāmīr* means ‘commands’ whereas the plural form *umūr* means ‘matters’ or ‘concerns.’

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<sup>26</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 355.

The fourth way of distinguishing a *majāz* usage of a term is by recognizing that its usage is other than its *ḥaqīqa*.<sup>27</sup> For example, knowledge (*‘ilm*) has to do with that which is known (*ma ‘lūm*), and when it is used in this connection it is a *ḥaqīqa* usage. But in usages such as saying that God’s knowledge (*‘ilm*) came from rain and locusts to mean that what is known of God and God’s ability and action came from these things,<sup>28</sup> the term ‘knowledge’ is *majāz*, because it is not used to refer to what God knows but rather *the means* by which God is known—signs (*āyāt*) of God. The *majāz* relies on a causal link between God’s ability and the particular *āyāt* through which it is known. Embedded within this point is the issue of defining the attributes of God that are not essential.<sup>29</sup> Likewise, using the word ‘ability’ (*qudra*) to refer to something decreed (*maqdūr*),<sup>30</sup> or the term ‘command’ (*amr*) to refer to something commanded (*ma ‘mūr*), is a *ḥaqīqa* usage. But saying that a strange matter (*amr*) that goes against custom is God’s ability [*qudra*] or God’s command (*amr*) is a *majāz* usage. This particular example is complicated by the fact that al-Bāqillānī has just discussed the term *amr* (command/matter) as having other types of *majāz* in its usage. However, the point here is a matter of attribution: a term is used to refer metonymically to something as its essential attribute rather than by its own name. The Qur’ān is not *literally* God’s ability in literal terms. Al-Bāqillānī’s point is clear, but he does not use precise, technical language to discuss the type or dynamics of the metaphor at play in his examples.

I analyze al-Bāqillānī’s approach to this last type of *majāz* in Qur’ānic usage by looking at the catalogue of verses he lists as containing this type of *majāz* and the ways *majāz* functions in them, with reference to the interpretations of these *āyāt*, or verses of the Qur’ān, provided by the canonical exegete Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923). Al-Ṭabarī is an ideal reference point here because he is known for his mainstream, widespread Qur’ānic interpretation which anthologized various transmitted interpretations and contextualizations

<sup>27</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 356.

<sup>28</sup> This example is drawn from the ten plagues; floodrains and locusts are mentioned as the first two items in the listing of the plagues in the Qur’ān, though al-Bāqillānī does not cite the verse directly: “So We sent upon them the flood and the locusts and the vermin and the frogs and the blood, distinguished signs [*āyāt*]. But they were arrogant and were a sinning people” [Q 7:133].

<sup>29</sup> Al-Bāqillānī’s allowing of Scriptural descriptions of God to yield a Divine Name “according to the rules of language” is a “middle” position in medieval Ash’arism that corresponds to his position on the present issue. See L. Gardet, “al-Asmā’ al-Ḥusnā.”

<sup>30</sup> The example of *qudra*/*maqdūr* (both words being from the root Q-D-R) is notable due to its participation in a contentious theological debate about agency. The question is who is the agent of a human being’s actions, God or human beings. Connecting the *maqdūr* (that on which power is enacted) so strongly to the *qudra* (ability of an actor), which al-Bāqillānī also attributes to God here, suggests that all agency is attributable to God. This linguistic explanation of attribution (which al-Bāqillānī bases in Arabic grammar) supports the Ash’ari theory of occasionalism, according to which God intervenes in events at every moment, and it is only at the precise moment of action that God gives human actors the agency to decide to do the action that God has made available. See W. Montgomery Watt, *Formative Period*. The relationship between *qudra* and *maqdūr* is difficult to render using etymologically-related words in English. The term *maqdūr* has been glossed into English in this context as ‘an outcome of power’ in Livnat Holtzmann, “Debating the Doctrine of *jabr* (Compulsion): Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya Reads Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī,” in *Islamic Theology, Philosophy, and Law: Debating Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya*, ed. Birgit Krawietz, Georges Tamer, and Alina Kokoschka (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2013), 70.



(*asbāb al-nuzūl*) of Qur'ānic verses.<sup>31</sup> It is one of the first major commentaries on the Qur'ān to have survived, having become popular during al-Ṭabarī's lifetime, though the extant versions are not as lengthy as early ones. It is known as the *tafsīr par excellence*, and it focuses on lexical and grammatical issues, with attention to theological and legal implications of Qur'ānic verses, but without interest in aesthetic or literary dimensions of the text.<sup>32</sup>

Al-Bāqillānī provides the following Qur'ānic examples of his fourth type of *majāz* in the category in the order listed here:<sup>33</sup>

1. "A wall that wants to fall" [Q 18:77]<sup>34</sup>
2. "Ask the town" [Q 12:82]<sup>35</sup>
3. "There would have been destroyed cloisters and churches, prayers and mosques" [Q 22:40]<sup>36</sup>
4. "Or if any of you comes from the privy [*al-ghā'it*]" [Q 5:6] (lit. depressed place)<sup>37</sup>
5. "God is the light of the heavens and the earth" [Q 24:35]<sup>38</sup>
6. "Those who hurt God" [Q 33:57]<sup>39</sup>
7. "Whoso commits aggression against you, commit aggression against him" [Q 2:194]<sup>40</sup>
8. "And the recompense of evil is evil the like of it" [Q 42:40]<sup>41</sup>
9. "God is mocking them" [Q 2:15]<sup>42</sup>
10. "But they devise, and God devises" [Q 8:30]<sup>43</sup>

These examples can be split into two groups: those that are highly charged theologically, and those that are not. The first set comprises examples that do not refer to God or the issue of just recompense, and they can be considered clearly marked *majāz*: a wall cannot literally *desire*, prayers themselves cannot be destroyed, and asking a town itself (the entity as opposed to its inhabitants) will elicit no response.<sup>44</sup> These *āyāt* (and these alone) were cited in al-Bāqillānī's

<sup>31</sup> Classical *tafsīr* proceeds *āya* by *āya*, *sūra* by *sūra*. For more on al-Ṭabarī, see Tarif Khalidī, "Al-Ṭabarī: An Introduction," in *Al-Ṭabarī: A Medieval Muslim Historian and His Work*, ed. Hugh Kennedy (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 2008), 1-9.

<sup>32</sup> Khalidī, "Al-Ṭabarī," 3; C.E. Bosworth, "al-Ṭabarī," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. P. Bearman et al. Brill Online, 2015. [http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/al-tabari-COM\\_1133](http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/al-tabari-COM_1133).

<sup>33</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 356-357.

<sup>34</sup> "Jidāran yuridu an yanqadda."

<sup>35</sup> "Wa-s'il al-qarya."

<sup>36</sup> "La-huddimat ṣawāmi'u wa-biya'un wa-ṣalawātun wa-masājid."

<sup>37</sup> "Aw jā'a aḥadun minkum min al-ghā'it."

<sup>38</sup> "Allāhu nūr ul-samawāti wa-l-arḍ."

<sup>39</sup> "Alladhīna yu'dhūna Allāh."

<sup>40</sup> "Fa-man i'tadā 'alaykum fa-'adadū 'alayhi."

<sup>41</sup> "Wa-jazā'u shay'atin shay'atun mithluhā."

<sup>42</sup> "Allāhu yastahzi'u bihim."

<sup>43</sup> "Wa-yamkurūna wa-yamkuru Allāh."

<sup>44</sup> It is notable, however, that classifications of the phrase "ask the town" have varied. Some saw it as an exaggeration rather than *majāz* by omission or elision. Later scholars of *majāz* theorized utterances like this one differently, distinguishing between what Modarressi has termed 'literal *majāz*' (borrowings) and *majāz* of attribution (variously called *majāz ḥukmī* by al-Jurjānī, *majāz fī al-isnād*, and *isti'āra bi-l-kināya* by al-Sakkākī). The attribution is *majāzī* in the sense that the asking does not refer to the town itself but to a different referent, the people of the town. Despite this interesting disagreement over classifying the literary feature of the phrase "ask

initial definition of *majāz*.<sup>45</sup> In Example 3, the *majāz* is due to the fact that prayers themselves cannot be destroyed; rather, it is the places associated with praying that can be destroyed, al-Ṭabarī explains.<sup>46</sup> Al-Bāqillānī agrees with this interpretation of the phrase as metonymic, reasoning:

[It] is [modeled] on the saying of him who said, it [i.e. the Qur'ān] intended the gathering-place mosques and the places of prayer,<sup>47</sup> glorifying and revering them and those who attend them. What supports this interpretation [*ta'wīl*] is [the Qur'ān's] saying: “nor if you are in a state of major ritual impurity—though you may pass through the mosque—not until you have bathed” [Q 4:43], and the ‘passing through’ is not in prayers [themselves] but in places of prayer.<sup>48</sup>

Example 4 is commonly understood to include the use of a euphemism. Al-Bāqillānī explains this *majāzī* meaning of *ghā'it* in another section of his treatise where he explains the properties of customary language usage (*isti'māl 'urfī*, discussed below). For al-Bāqillānī, customary usage is a category of terms that conventionally refer to a subset of the referents of the term set down in language. He classifies customary language as a sub-category of *majāz*, because the intended referent does not have the same parameters as the referent(s) set down for it in language.<sup>49</sup> He gives the example of the term *ghā'it* (a place of low ground), explaining that it has come to take on the *majāzī* meaning of ‘excrement’ “because *al-ghā'it* in language [i.e. what was set down for it] is a calm, lowered place in which needs are fulfilled.”<sup>50</sup> This (already figurative) usage of the term as the place where voiding excrement occurs is thence applied to the excrement itself.<sup>51</sup> The example of using the word *al-ghā'it* to refer to excrement has a known reason: it is a periphrasis (*kināya*) “for what is considered improper to mention by name.”<sup>52</sup> The example of *al-ghā'it* coming to refer to the place of excrement, and then excrement itself, is an example of a *majāz* upon a *majāz* being allowed because the metaphorical mapping of the second *majāz* is in accordance with the mapping of the ‘original’ one. Al-Bāqillānī also cites Examples 1, 2, and 4 in his general section introducing the difference between *ḥaqīqa* and *majāz* (mentioned above), reinforcing the idea that these

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the town,” for the purposes of our current discussion, the important feature of the phrase is that it is not theologically charged or descriptive of the divine. Modaressi has shown that al-Jurjānī's and al-Sakkākī's theories of *majāz* influenced later Shī'ī jurisprudence. Hossein Modarressi, “Some Recent Analyses of the Concept of *majāz* in Islamic Jurisprudence,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 106, no. 4 (October-December 1986): 787-91.

<sup>45</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 352-53.

<sup>46</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān*, vol. 17 (Cairo: Sharikat Maktabat wa-Maṭba'at Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Halabī wa-Awlādihi, 1954), 172-73.

<sup>47</sup> Abū Zunayd notes that al-Zamakhsharī copied this interpretation in his *Kashshāf*. Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 351 fn 76.

<sup>48</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 351.

<sup>49</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 367-69.

<sup>50</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 369.

<sup>51</sup> Edward Lane's dictionary of classical Arabic provides the same explanation as al-Bāqillānī, i.e., that it means “a wide, depressed piece of ground or land. . . [h]ence a place where one satisfies a want of nature.” Lane, *Lexicon*, 2309.

<sup>52</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 370.

examples are straightforward and expected, and that they fit into the known definition of *majāz* without posing any challenge to it.<sup>53</sup>

The remaining set of examples can be said to form a group of a different nature, because upon closer look, they all espouse theological positions on the issues of Divine attributes and justice, as enacted by humans and by God. To begin with, Example 5 is part of a different canon, having received much attention in exegetical literature (particularly allegorical and mystical commentaries on the Qur'ān), and it is the focal point of an argument over whether God *is* light or merely *emits* light. By including it in this list of verses containing *majāz*, al-Bāqillānī positions himself in opposition to the mystical reading of Divine Light.<sup>54</sup> This rejection of the mystical interpretation is representative of his rejection of *ta'wīl* (the allegorical interpretation often associated with Sufism), a practice that operated in opposition with al-Bāqillānī's emphasis on straightforward meaning. Al-Ṭabarī provides various commentators' opinions of what the Qur'ān means by saying 'God is the light of the heavens and the earth,' confirming the *majāz* in it: God is the guide of those in heaven and on earth; God is the arranger of heaven and earth and all that is in them. Other commentators say the verse really means God is the light (*ḍiyā'*) of the heavens and the earth.<sup>55</sup> This verse became the

<sup>53</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 352-53. These are the only three Qur'ānic verses cited in this general definition; al-Bāqillānī also includes examples from everyday speech ("saying about the dull-witted man that he is a bull and a donkey, and about the steadfast [man] that he is a lion [two synonymous words for lion are used here], and the like").

<sup>54</sup> The *ta'wīl* (allegorical interpretation) of God as light was present at least since the time of Ja'far al-Šādiq (d. 765), whose exegesis of this verse expounds on the idea of Divine light as follows:

The lights are different. The first is the light of the guarding of the heart [*ḥifẓ al-qalb*], then the light of fear, then the light of hope, then the light of remembrance, then looking into the light of knowledge [*al-naẓar bi-nūr al-'ilm*], then the light of modesty, then the light of the sweetness of faith, then the light of surrendering [*al-islām*], then the light of making good, then the light of grace, then the light of merit [*faḍl*], then the light of favor [*al-ālā'*], then the light of generosity, then the light of affection, then the light of the heart, then the light of comprehension, then the light of prestige, then the light of confusion [*al-ḥayra*], then the light of life, then the light of friendship, then the light of integrity, then the light of submissiveness, then the light of calmness, then the light of greatness, then the light of majesty, then the light of ability, then the light of majesty, then the light of divinity, then the light of oneness, then the light of individuality, then the light of past eternity [*al-'abadiyya*], then the light of future eternity [*al-sarmadiyya*], then the light of continuity [*al-daymūmiyya*], then the light of sempiternity [*al-'azaliyya*], then the light of remaining [*al-baqā'*], then the light of totality, then the light of identity. Each one of these lights has a people and it has a circumstance and a place; and they are all from among the lights of truth [*al-ḥaqq*] that God Almighty mentioned in saying: "Allahu nūru l-samāwāti wal-'arḍ." Ja'far al-Šādiq, *Kāmil al-tafsīr al-šūfī al-'irfānī li-l-Qur'ān: Bi-ḥasb ḥaqā'iq al-tafsīr wa-ziyādāt ḥaqā'iq al-tafsīr li-l-Sulamī al-shāfi'ī* (Beirut: Dār al-Burāq, 2002), 125-26.

Later mystical commentaries followed suit in interpreting this verse to refer to Divine light and the so-called Muḥammadan Light. For examples, see Kristin Zahra Sands, *Sufi Commentaries on the Qur'ān in Classical Islam* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 110-35.

<sup>55</sup> Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān*, vol. 1, ed. 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī (N.p: Dār Hijr li-l-Ṭabā'a wa-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī' wal-I'lān, n.d.), 135. Though some lexicographers have tried to distinguish the terms *nūr* and *ḍiyā'* from one another, they are usually taken to be synonyms, and that is what is suggested by the interpretation al-Ṭabarī cites. For interpretations of these two terms' relationship, see Lane, *Lexicon*, 1809.

center of theological debate because the verse itself includes evocative vocabulary that has inspired interpreters' imaginations, and these interpretations have included glosses on the theme of light and darkness that equate them with central issues like belief and unbelief.<sup>56</sup> Many commentators provided interpretations of 'light' that avoided identifying it with God's self.<sup>57</sup> By including *Āyat al-Nūr* in his list of Qur'ānic *majāz*, al-Bāqillānī positions himself in relation to extant exegesis on this verse. It is not at all surprising that a shaper of the Ash'arī theology would treat this verse as *majāz*, precluding the idea of a timeless divine light or Muḥammadan light.<sup>58</sup> Example 6, when interpreted without the aid of *majāz*, implies God is passible (susceptible to emotion, suffering, and change); the use of figurative interpretation allows the verse to reflect on human misdeeds rather than suggest that God can be hurt by mortals. Example 8 is also what al-Ṭabarī explains to be 'agreement of the term and difference of the meaning' (*ittifāq al-lafẓ wa-ikhtilāf al-ma'nā*).<sup>59</sup> Commentators were clearly troubled by the suggestion that a bad deed should be repaid with another bad deed; al-Ṭabarī says this phrase falls into the category of the mutually-similar, i.e. indistinct (*bāb al-mushākala*). Some say the first misdeed justifies a response in kind, but others say this verse was later abrogated (a claim al-Ṭabarī refutes). By including this verse in the list of those containing *majāz*, al-Bāqillānī suggests he agrees with al-Ṭabarī that the two uses of the term *sayyi'a* (bad) do not mean the same thing (even despite the presence of the word *mithluhā*, 'like it,' which one might think would emphasize the identity). A misguided deed cannot justify a misdeed by those who are not misguided.

Literal interpretations of Examples 9 and 10 would also have troubled an Ash'arī scholar like al-Bāqillānī whose conception of God was incompatible with the idea that God would condescend to humans' basest level by mocking people or conspiring against them. Al-Ṭabarī's *tafsīr* gives some insight into different interpretations of these verses. In discussing Q 2:15 (Example 9), he notes that scholars differ regarding whether the act of 'mocking' is attributable to God. He lists some interpretations according to which God literally mocks hypocrites, showing which other verses are cited to support this interpretation and the idea that God will mock and ridicule hypocrites on the Day of Judgment as just recompense for their own mocking.<sup>60</sup> He then lists other interpretations that claim God does not literally mock but rather, alternatively, say the verse means 'the matter turned out to God's advantage' (though God was not the one mocking) or 'God will punish them for their mocking.'<sup>61</sup> In the interpretation that has the matter turning out to God's advantage, one of the Qur'ānic verses listed as a parallel example of the same dynamic is Q 3:54, which is almost identical to Q 8:30 (Example 10).<sup>62</sup> In both cases, al-Ṭabarī explains, God's rejoinder is not God stooping to the level of misguided humans; "God does not devise and mock; [the verse] means that devising

<sup>56</sup> See Gerhard Böwering, "The Light Verse: Qur'ānic Text and Sūfī Interpretation," *Oriens* 36 (2001): 113-44.

<sup>57</sup> See Sands, *Sufi Commentaries*, 110-36.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. U. Rubin, "Nūr Muḥammadī," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. P. Bearman et al. Brill Online, 2015. [http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/nur-muhammadi-SIM\\_5985](http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/nur-muhammadi-SIM_5985).

<sup>59</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, vol. 25 (Turkī ed.), 38.

<sup>60</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, vol. 3 (Shākir ed.), 312-13.

<sup>61</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, vol. 3 (Shākir ed.), 314.

<sup>62</sup> Compare: "Then they devised [*makarū*], and God devised, and God is the best of devisers" [Q 3:54]; "But they devise, and God devises" [Q 8:30]. Both verses use the verb 'devise' [*makara*] to refer to a group of people and then to God.

and mockery rebound on them.”<sup>63</sup> Further, al-Ṭabarī’s explanation of the interpretation of God’s mocking meaning ‘God will punish them for their mocking’ cites Q 2:194 (Example 7); both verses are seen as examples of verses where God’s rejoinder to human behavior is called by the same name as the human behavior but has a different signification. In Q 2:194, “the first aggression is unjust, but the second is a requital and not unjust, but rather just, for it is a punishment for the aggressor’s injustice, although it is expressed by the same word as the first.”<sup>64</sup> Al-Ṭabarī cites additional Qur’ānic verses that follow the same pattern of misguided humans doing an action that God is then said to do to them.<sup>65</sup> According to the interpretations he cites, all of these verses share in using the same word for the humans’ and God’s actions, though their significations differ.<sup>66</sup> Al-Ṭabarī briefly notes the same point in his commentary on Q 2:194 (Example 7), relating that some commentators interpret the phrase ‘commit aggression’ to mean ‘punished’ when it is applied to God.<sup>67</sup>

Many of the examples al-Bāqillānī provides are verses about God, and the *majāz* is a figurative way of describing the Divine. These examples are interesting because they may not seem on the surface to be figurative usages. The fact that al-Ṭabarī cites Q 3:54 (which has almost the same wording as Q 8:30, i.e. Example 10) and Q 2:194 (Example 7) twice in his section on interpretations of Q 2:15 (Example 9) indicates these verses were seen as part of a catalogue of verses that used the same word twice with two different meanings, as a way of aligning their content about God with normative notions of Divine impassability and perfect justice. While the Qur’ān consistently condemns misguided human behavior of various sorts, Ash‘arī theologians emphasized that God is not subject to the same flaws and temperamental nature as humans.<sup>68</sup> Though in a sense, giving sinners a ‘taste of their own medicine’ would merely be reflecting their offense and punishing them in kind, committing these injustices does not befit God. The verbal but not actual reciprocity of human and divine actions covers Examples 7, 9, and 10. The impassability of God covers Example 6. Example 8 deals with God commanding humans to commit misdeeds in response to others’ misdeeds, an idea that also seems to conflict with God’s always ‘commanding the right.’<sup>69</sup> Considering these verses, whose surface, literal meanings seem theologically problematic, to be *majāz* allows expansion in meaning that changes what they indicate God does or asks of people. This section of al-Bāqillānī’s text, when read in this way, qualifies Vishanoff’s assertion that al-Bāqillānī “did not seek to justify extravagant interpretive moves such as metaphorical readings of the Qur’ān.”<sup>70</sup> My implication is not that al-Bāqillānī’s classification of these verses is extravagant, but rather that a consequence of al-Bāqillānī’s interest in systematizing and harmonizing discourses is

<sup>63</sup> Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Commentary on the Qur’ān*, trans. J. Cooper, ed. W. Madelung and A. Jones (1987; repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 133.

<sup>64</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Commentary*, 133.

<sup>65</sup> Q 4:142, 3:54, 9:79, and 9:67.

<sup>66</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Commentary*, 132–33.

<sup>67</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān*, vol. 3 (Shākir ed.), 581–82.

<sup>68</sup> Toby Mayer, “Theology and Sufism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, ed. Tim Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 263.

<sup>69</sup> The formula of ‘commanding the right and forbidding the wrong’ is taken from a Qur’ānic verse and came to encapsulate the idea of the divine call to just behavior. For an in-depth account of the genealogy of the concept, see Michael Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>70</sup> Vishanoff, *Formation*, 162.

metaphorical readings like those discussed here, in which he negotiates theological discourses through interpretation of language in ways indicated by his conception of God and just recompense. This passage highlights a tension in al-Bāqillānī's thought between his efforts to theorize and lay out a comprehensive theory of language and meaning that yield consistently sound interpretations, and his commitment to a wholly transcendent and immutable conception of the divine.

Although the list format in which al-Bāqillānī mentions these verses structurally puts all the examples of *majāz* on the same plane, my investigation suggests there are different types of *majāz*-based interpretation at work. The first set of examples follow al-Bāqillānī's rule of recognizing *majāz* on the basis of the *ḥaqīqa* meaning of the utterance not making sense in logical terms: a wall, being inanimate, cannot 'want,' addressing a question to a physical inanimate noun, town, would also not make sense, and so on. The second set of examples seems more theologically driven. Given a particular conception of the divine according to which God does not behave in certain ways, these verses must be *majāz* rather than *ḥaqīqa*. Perhaps al-Bāqillānī would not have wanted to describe his hermeneutic in this way, however: he ostensibly places the Qur'ān at the center of his framework of interpretation, so suggesting that an understanding of God drives Qur'ānic interpretation rather than the other way around would have been objectionable. Rather, if asked, I imagine al-Bāqillānī would have maintained the similarity of all the *majāzī* verses he lists. Acquiring knowledge about the nature of the divine may differ from acquisition of knowledge about the visible world, but the same system of signification is, theoretically at least, operative in both cases.

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In addition to the typologies and associated examples discussed above, al-Bāqillānī makes some interesting and noteworthy observations about *majāz* and its properties in the remainder of his lengthy section on the subject. These observations can be globally characterized as part of the conceptual apparatus through which al-Bāqillānī constructs the idea of language and its workings as being reliable and systematically understandable and interpretable. He writes that every *majāz* has a *ḥaqīqa*—that is, every figurative utterance has its basis in the literal meaning of the words in the utterance—but not every *ḥaqīqa* has a *majāz*.<sup>71</sup> In her discussion of possible types of paradigmatic examples of metaphor, Chana Kronfeld has effectively pointed out that claiming every metaphor has a literal equivalent amounts to the belief that every metaphor can be rephrased as a literal utterance without losing cognitive value.<sup>72</sup> Al-Bāqillānī does not appear to have a problem with this implication of his theory here, and even in his *i'jāz* work I later show that he does not suggest that metaphors have their own irreducible content.

Some types of words cannot have *majāz* meanings: the most general category of words, and proper names. The most general category of words (e.g. 'known,' 'doubted,' 'extant,' etc.) cannot logically take on a *majāz* meaning because there is no larger category to which it can be figuratively used to refer. Everything fits into one of these categories, so referring to a thing by one of these names is never figurative. Something is either known or not known, doubted or

<sup>71</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 358.

<sup>72</sup> Chana Kronfeld, "Novel and Conventional Metaphors: A Matter of Methodology," *Poetics Today* 2, no. 1b (Winter 1980-1981): 15.

not doubted, and so on, so these terms cannot be borrowed to refer to something that does not have to do with the thing being referred to.

As for proper names, al-Bāqillānī asserts that they cannot be *majāz* because they are “set down to distinguish between individual entities [*dhawāt*] and people,” and using them figuratively, i.e. extending their signification to include all members of a category, would negate the words’ distinguishing purpose.<sup>73</sup> There are some instances where a word is also a proper name (like the name of the grammarian Aswad b. Ya‘fur, where *aswad* means black), but in cases like this, the proper name removes the property of the ordinary word (so the grammarian is not named due to sharing the property of blackness—it’s just his name). Another exception is metonymy: saying ‘This is Sibawayh’s knowledge,’ to refer to his books is a type of *majāz* because his knowledge is contained in his books, and ‘I memorized Sibawayh’ means ‘I memorized Sibawayh’s books’ in a similar *majāzī* usage.<sup>74</sup> Technically, these are *majāz* usages of proper names, so al-Bāqillānī is right to point out how they are exceptions in this regard. However, they are not exceptions in widening the use of a proper name to apply to other members of that category, but rather in attributing items attached to a person to their name.

On the other hand, there are some linguistic constructions that seem to yield *majāz* regularly. Al-Bāqillānī mentions verses that prohibit and permit:<sup>75</sup> “Forbidden to you are your mothers and your daughters,” “forbidden to you are dead things,” “permitted to you are grazing beasts” [Q 5:1], “forbidden to you is game-animals on land as long as you are in the state of pilgrim sanctity” [5:96]. “What is understood from them is the *majāz* in it, not the *ḥaqīqa*.”<sup>76</sup> There is an agreement that what is intended is a *majāz* meaning of the utterance because the objects of the verbs are bodies, and it does not make sense for people to be ‘permitted’ or ‘forbidden’ to them. This type of grammatical construction leads to *majāz*. Instead, there must be an elided verb, indicating what action is forbidden or permitted with regard to the mentioned objects. The indication that such utterances are *majāz* is that their *ḥaqīqa* meanings do not make sense. Although al-Bāqillānī does not mention it directly, his classification of these verses conflicts with that of some other *uṣūlīs* who held that these verses are taken as *ḥaqīqa* because understanding of them happens immediately, and with others who maintained that further context was needed in order to understand the meanings of these verses due to their ambiguity.<sup>77</sup> Al-Bāqillānī’s position is comparably moderate, in recognizing *majāz* in the utterances’ grammar but considering the verses to have clearly indicated meanings.

### Idiomatic Language: *Majāz* through Established Limiting of Word Use

Another category of nouns that al-Bāqillānī considers to be *majāz* is ‘customary nouns’ (*asmā’ ‘urfīyya*), i.e., conventional or idiomatic uses of nouns. Al-Bāqillānī defines them as terms that are customarily used to refer only to a subset of the meanings set down for them in

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<sup>73</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 359.

<sup>74</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 359–60.

<sup>75</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 370.

<sup>76</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 370.

<sup>77</sup> The first position is held by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209). The second position is attributed to Abū al-Ḥasan al-Karkhī (d. 340/951), whose *uṣūl* text is lost. Gleave, *Islam and Literalism*, 12.

language. They are considered *majāz* because the usage is of a meaning that has been limited and thus does not have parameters identical to those set down for these terms.<sup>78</sup> For example, the word ‘*dābba*’ was set down in language to signify anything that creeps and crawls, but language experts came to use it predominantly to refer to beasts that stand on four legs.<sup>79</sup> He also provides the example is the term *faqīh*, explaining that the verb *faqīha* was set down with the meaning of knowing anything, but its usage is limited to a subset of knowledge, legal knowledge, and not other types of knowledge.<sup>80</sup> Another example is the term *ghā’iṭ* explained above, which is idiomatically used to refer to excrement, based on a *majāz* on a *majāz* of the literal meaning (a low place). In fact, al-Bāqillānī maintains, many words are used primarily to refer to a specific part of the meaning set down for the word. He takes a set of Qur’ānic examples: “[God] created the human and taught him communication [*allamahu al-bayān*]” [Q 55:2]; “and [God] taught [*allamaka*] you what you did not know” [Q 4:113]; “and what are those people who hardly know [*yafqahūn*] a happening” [Q 4:78], meaning ‘know’ (*ya lamūn*).<sup>81</sup> Al-Bāqillānī explains that the verb ‘*alima*’ was set down to mean ‘to know,’ but in actual usage, it refers to a particular being’s knowledge of particular things.<sup>82</sup> He lists examples of idiomatic usages taken from Arabic, but he also goes further in theorizing the literal and idiomatic meanings of idiomatic words and phrases as a category. He does so through beginning his set of chapters on idiomatic usages with general definitions before citing specific examples in Arabic. Moreover, he is not only concerned with the legal force of idiomatic language in a narrow sense, but rather with the general relationship between the posited meaning of a word and the conventional meaning a language community gives it.

Let us turn to a brief comparison in order to bring into relief al-Bāqillānī’s systematic approach to idiomatic language. The example comes from *Uṣūl al-Shāshī*, an early work attributed to al-Bāqillānī’s fellow legal theorist al-Shāshī.<sup>83</sup> This text provides an apt basis for comparison in the form of a section that also deals with the question of idiomatic utterances in his *uṣūl al-fiqh* text, which has been taken to be characteristic of this genre, even perhaps read as an introductory text explaining the basics of legal theory.<sup>84</sup> Like al-Bāqillānī, he also deals with the question of the legal implications of an utterance known to be idiomatic. However, as this comparison shows, *Uṣūl al-Shāshī* stops short of providing a systematic framework for understanding idiomaticity. Al-Shāshī’s section begins with examples of idiomatic language and answers scholars’ questions about the legal status of these utterances:

<sup>78</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 368.

<sup>79</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 368.

<sup>80</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 368-69.

<sup>81</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 369.

<sup>82</sup> In contrast, al-Ṭabarī does not pay attention to the verb used in this verse. Al-Zamakhsharī glosses *yafqahūn* as *ya lamūn*. Al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf*, vol. 2, 113. In his linguistic *tafsīr*, al-Gharnāṭī (d. 745/1344) equates the verb *faqaha* with *fahm* (understanding) and *ta’aqqul* (cognizing). He does not discuss a difference in words’ scope or the presence of any *majāz*. Abū Ḥayyān al-Gharnāṭī, *Al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ*, vol. 3, ed. ‘Ādil ‘Abd al-Mawjūd (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1993), 312.

<sup>83</sup> The authorship of *Uṣūl al-Shāshī* has been situated as early as the 4<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> (AH/CE) century by some scholars, the 5<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> century by others, and even as late as the 7<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> century. The identity of the author remains unknown. Bedir, performing a comparative analysis with four early *uṣūl* works, characterizes *Uṣūl al-Shāshī* as being mature in style and thus probably a relatively late text. Murteza Bedir, “The Problem of *Uṣūl al-Shāshī*,” *Islamic Studies* 42, no. 3 (2003): 415-36.

<sup>84</sup> Suggested in Bedir, “Problem,” 435.



Question: If [a language speaker] says: If [someone] swears not to set foot in so-and-so's house, [does] he violates the oath if he enters it on foot or riding [an animal]?

Another question: Likewise, if he swears not to live in so-and-so's house, [does] he violate the oath if the house is so-and-so's property [versus] rental or borrowing? This is a joining of literal speech and figurative speech.

Another question: Likewise, if he says his slave is free on the day so-and-so arrives, and so-and-so arrives during nighttime or daytime, does he violate the oath?

The answer to the first question: We said: 'Setting down the foot' is figurative speech [*majāz*] for entering, according to the ruling of custom, and entering does not carry more weight among the two kinds [i.e. on foot or riding].

The answer to the second question: 'The house of so-and-so' is figurative speech [*majāz*] for a house inhabited by him, and that does not vary, whether it is possessed by him or rented by him.

The answer to the third question: 'The day' in the question of advancing is an expression of absolute time, because day, if it is added to a verb that does not extend, is an expression of absolute time, as is known. So violating the oath happens in this manner, not by way of joining literal speech [*ḥaqīqa*] and figurative speech [*majāz*].<sup>85</sup>

In all three cases, al-Shāshī rules in favor of recognizing idiomatic meanings of utterances along with the literal meaning. Both meanings carry legal weight, and the person who has sworn one of these oaths violates it by going against the literal or the figurative meaning. He clearly recognizes the legal and semiotic weight of idiomatic, figurative meaning, but he confines this acknowledgement to what the reader can conclude based on a few examples rather than providing a general framework for understanding on this topic.

When we compare al-Shāshī's and al-Bāqillānī's discussions of idiomatic language, we notice al-Bāqillānī's explanation is more explicitly systematic than al-Shāshī's. Both scholars are concerned with the legal weight of idiomatic speech, and both determine the idiomatic meaning to be legally binding even though it depends on the conventions of a particular linguistic community. However, al-Shāshī merely provides examples from a specific language community where 'setting down the foot' happens to mean 'entering' and 'the house of so-and-so' means any house that person inhabits, as is typical of legists. Al-Shāshī also only looks at idiomatic usage as set phrases, not individual vocabulary words or grammatical structures that have a pattern of producing idiomatic meanings. Al-Bāqillānī, too, provides specific examples from spoken language and Qur'ānic verses. However, by contrast, he also provides a systematic approach, stating that different language communities can have different scopes of meaning for a given word. He was concerned with the ways language expresses and signifies in general, not simply in a specific language community. This concern with the abstract level of

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<sup>85</sup> Al-Shāshī, *Uṣūl al-Shāshī*, 43-44.

thought about idiomatic language may be an influence of his identity as a participant in the discourse of the rhetoricians, albeit not a specialist in that field, or an influence of the now multilingual Islamic empire.

This systematic approach, with its distinction between how languages in general function and the particularities determined by those who set down individual languages, shows an awareness of how vocabulary items and grammatical constructions work in utterances. He does not just address one language community's rules, but rather the general guidelines for understanding utterances in any language community. In al-Bāqillānī's example of 'there is no x without y,' examined in Chapter Four, he provides several instances of the same grammatical structure in verses and utterances, noting that the meaning of these utterances is determined according to the conventional meaning of this type of utterance at the time of the Prophet and Qur'ān's revelation. In the case of al-Shāshī's text, the reader is left with the impression that the literal content of idiomatic utterances is at least sometimes binding, but it is not clear if it is in all cases. And what of language communities where the utterances al-Shāshī lists do not have the idiomatic meaning he mentions? Al-Bāqillānī's framework of interpretation does not leave these questions hanging, because he accounts for the arbitrary idiomatic usages operative in different language communities, as I show in my discussion of *qiyās* in al-Bāqillānī's work, below. The important underlying principle for al-Bāqillānī is that languages work consistently based on an internal logic.

### **Majāz vs. Technical Vocabulary**

Al-Bāqillānī's discussion about technical vocabulary suggests that some of his contemporaries and interlocutors considered technical vocabulary to be a type of *majāz*. The question is whether the technical meaning of a word that is not identical to the meaning that was set down for that word in language is considered a case of *majāz*. The question of technical vocabulary in the Qur'ān is at the center of al-Bāqillānī's discussion of this topic. If the Qur'ān uses words that came to have a technical meaning in religious discourse, are these Qur'ānic usages then to be understood in light of these technical meanings? Al-Bāqillānī's answer is that God did not 'transfer' any word usages to specialized or legal meanings—rather, God "did not address the *umma* except in the Arabic tongue; nor did [God] provide the rest of the terms and the address except as they had been applied in the setting-down of language."<sup>86</sup>

The Mu'tazila, the Khawārij, and another group of would-be *fiqh* experts, *mutafaqqiha*, as al-Bāqillānī disparagingly refers to other opponents, disagree with this stance.<sup>87</sup> The Mu'tazila and Khawārij, for their part, claimed there were three types of word usage: linguistic, religious, and legal. Linguistic usages are general usages, while religious and legal usages are technical usages that carry a narrower, more precise meaning within these discourses. Religious usages, they claim, included terms like 'faith,' 'unbelief,' 'believer,' 'unbeliever,' and 'sinner,' which al-Bāqillānī considered to have non-technical meanings in the Qur'ān but that the Qadariyya claimed the Qur'ān uses in technical, specialized ways not previously used in language. For example, 'unbeliever' was applied in religion to those who deserve punishment, and 'believer' to those deserving of a great reward (rather than merely referring to people who do or do not

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<sup>86</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 387.

<sup>87</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 387-88.

believe in something), while ‘sinner’ is applied to apostates and deniers of religious truth (rather than someone who does any wrongdoing).<sup>88</sup>

Al-Bāqillānī dismisses these definitions, noting that the Qadariyya disagreed amongst themselves regarding what exactly ‘belief’ included. This issue, which al-Bāqillānī frames as concerning the meanings of words, can also be understood as forming one of the foundational issues of early Islam, when thinkers argued over what the correct Islamic position was regarding central theological tenets.<sup>89</sup> Terms such as *īmān* and *islām* were at the center of debates about what constituted correct Islamic doctrine. Al-Bāqillānī draws this central theological issue into the realm of the lexical and the linguistic, allowing him to argue his point based on his systematic view of language and his assertion that terms used in the Qur’ān are not technical vocabulary. The effect of discussing this theological issue in terms of language use, in light of al-Bāqillānī’s thesis of Qur’ānic and linguistic clarity, is the argument that key Islamic terms are in continuity with pre-Islamic usages. Rather than being assigned technical definitions and usages by religious authority, these words are rooted in ordinary, common understandings of their meanings.

Al-Bāqillānī’s defense against his opponents’ positions rests on his prooftexting of the Qur’ān’s own proclamations of its own clarity and its use of language familiar to its (first) audience, as mentioned in Chapter Two. He cites three verses to this effect: “Verily, we have made it an Arabic Qur’ān” [Q 12:2], “In a clear Arabic tongue” [Q 26:195], and “And We have sent no Messenger save in the tongue of his people” [Q 14:4]. These verses’ plain meanings necessitate the whole Qur’ān being in the Arabic that was understood by the Arabs when the Qur’ān was revealed, al-Bāqillānī argues.<sup>90</sup> If the Qur’ān had applied technical definitions of words, these usages would be neither *ḥaqīqa* nor *majāz*, al-Bāqillānī says, but rather unfamiliar usages; they would simply not be of the Arabic spoken by the Arabs (before and concurrently with the Qur’ān’s revelation).<sup>91</sup> If it were the case that the Qur’ān included new meanings of words, the Prophet would have had to explain the new meanings so that the Qur’ān would be clear to its audience (as it announced it was), and despite accurate transmission, we do not have sound *aḥādīth* that explain Qur’ānic vocabulary to be mean what al-Bāqillānī’s opponents claim it did. Moreover, if *some* Qur’ānic usages were technical while others were not, people would not know which was which, a situation that would reflect a lack of textual clarity.<sup>92</sup> These are al-Bāqillānī’s arguments in favor of the Qur’ān using accessible terms that are accurately understood separately from the later technical meanings that Islamic scholarship attached to them or imposed upon them.

Al-Bāqillānī maintains that the terms others claim are used in specialized, technical ways in the Qur’ān are actually more general and not limited to the legal usages his opponents described. He addresses the objection that technical uses of words come about precisely because there is a specific concept that has no name in language, so that assigning a new, technical meaning to an extant term is easier than inventing an altogether new word. This

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<sup>88</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 389.

<sup>89</sup> For more on early Islamic boundary-forming polemics, see Wilferd Madelung, *Religious Schools and Sects in Medieval Islam* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1985), and Watt, *Formative Period*.

<sup>90</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 391.

<sup>91</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 392.

<sup>92</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 393-94.

explanation of technical language is given by other scholars, including al-Bāqillānī's predecessor al-Fārābī (d. 950/951), who gave conjectured accounts about how new meanings entered language.<sup>93</sup> He hypothesized that human language arose through convention and agreement within any given language community, and that technical terms could later be designated (once a language had already been developed and groups of specialists emerged) either by borrowing a word from another language or by redefining an extant word to have a technical definition. Al-Bāqillānī argues against the religious terms mentioned by his opponents being examples of this phenomenon, since he considered it inaccurate to limit the meanings of these words to the narrow significations described by the Qadariyya, Khawārij, and others.

Al-Bāqillānī's examples of this phenomenon draw on what turns out to be a commonly cited set of Islamic religious keywords. He argues that the Qur'ān uses the word *ṣalāt* (prayer) not only for the prescribed daily prayers (with the rules and regulations that render them sound and in fulfillment of the duty of prayer) but also for any other deeds that follow the lead of the *imām* as well as *du'ā'*, supplications that do not include the requirements of formal *ṣalāt* (like kneeling and *rukū'*).<sup>94</sup> For instance, one verse says: "And some of the Bedouins believe in God and the Last Day, and take what they expend for offerings bringing them near to God, and the prayers of the Messenger" [Q 9:99], even though this prayer did not involve the ritual obligations of Islamic worship.<sup>95</sup> Some thinkers, on the contrary, saw terms like *ṣalāt*, *ḥajj*, and other words having specific meanings in Islamic law and practice as belonging to the special class of *ḥaqīqa shar'iyya* (revealed truth).<sup>96</sup> These words have distinctive meanings and are not included in 'Lugha,' to use Bernard Weiss's name for the institution of language, but rather form the special idiom of *sharī'a* (though some scholars rejected this position because it would indicate there are non-Arabic Lugha elements in the Qur'ān).<sup>97</sup> Al-Bāqillānī's insistence that the Qur'ān does not use these words in a technical way is unusual and significant. His position on this category of words is consistent with his thesis that the reference point for understanding the meanings of the Qur'ān's language is the usage of the Prophet's community. It does not allow later interpreters to read or project authoritative limitations on the Qur'ān's utterances based on their own interpretation of what a word such as *ṣalāt* or *ḥajj* meant. The authority of the interpreter is always mitigated by the stable, fixed lexicon of the Prophet's community. In this way, al-Bāqillānī prioritizes direct engagement with the Qur'ān at any point in time rather than reliance on later generations' specifications of word meanings. This concern for direct engagement is also an emphasis of his thought on the Qur'ānic miracle, as I discussed in Chapter One.

### A Case of Limiting Language's Signification: Rejecting *Qiyās* of a Name

One way in which al-Bāqillānī limits the ability of language to signify ideas beyond the literal meanings set down for words is in the realm of *qiyās*. In his theorizing of *qiyās*, as in his

<sup>93</sup> Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Ḥurūf* (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 2004), 134-61.

<sup>94</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 397.

<sup>95</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 397.

<sup>96</sup> See Robert Gleave, *Inevitable Doubt: Two Theories of Shī'ī Jurisprudence* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 156.

<sup>97</sup> Weiss, *God's Law*, 142-43.

previously discussed explanations of aspects of language, al-Bāqillānī shows himself to be a systematic thinker invested in presenting language to be systematic as well. *Qiyās* means ‘measurement,’ and hence ‘comparison,’ but it is a more particular technical definition that concerns us here. In the context of Islamic law, it is usually translated as ‘analogy,’ and it came to refer specifically to analogical reasoning, being accepted as one of the four normative Sunni ‘roots,’ or sources, of law-derivation (in addition to the Qur’ān, *ḥadīth*, and *ijmā* ‘or consensus’). The scope of a known law can be extended to parallel situations through the application of *qiyās*, given the presence of an ‘illa, or causal basis, for such extension. As one scholar has summarized it, “In the classical jurisprudence there is agreement on the fact that *qiyās* operates to discover, to reveal, or to bring out a law already established by the text (*naṣṣ*) or by consensus (*ijmā*).”<sup>98</sup> However, the legitimate conditions for applying *qiyās* were a matter of debate. One of the disputed locations was the *ism*—a term that can mean both ‘noun’ and ‘name’ in Arabic, as in many other languages. Here, *ism* refers to a name applied to an entity (e.g. calling something or someone ‘Black/black’). It appears that lexicographers generally allowed for the application of *qiyās* in names, while legal scholars from the Shāfi‘ī and Ḥanafī schools tended not to.<sup>99</sup> There was agreement among all scholars that proper names were not subject to *qiyās* because there is no systematic correlation between the proper name and the characteristics of the named entity. Some other categories of nouns were equally outside the realm of *qiyās* because they are like the category of ‘general nouns’ (such as *mawjūd*, etc.) that al-Bāqillānī describes as being exempt from *qiyās*.

Theorizing his prohibition on *qiyās* of names, al-Bāqillānī lays out two kinds of names: The first is a name that is given merely as a way to distinguish people and not based on a particular characteristic of its holder, while the second type is a name based on such a characteristic. For the first type of name that is given with no correlation to the holder’s characteristics, it is agreed, he says, that language was set down soundly, with each word set down to communicate a meaning. There would be no logic in doing *qiyās* on this type of name because there would be no reason to call other members of the category by that name, or indeed the original party named.

For the second category of names, which are given based on a characteristic of the person holding the name, the name is only applied to those people who have that characteristic. As he writes:

If [a language community] set down a name to communicate a characteristic, either directly or by association, in order to indicate by it that particular idea, then that name must be applied to everything in which that trait exists. Otherwise, signification would be corrupted and the conventional system would be violated. When they set down the name to communicate a characteristic, either directly or by association, it must be taken to apply to everything in which that characteristic exists. Their setting-down of the name for [the

<sup>98</sup> Ahmad Hasan, “Subject Matter of *Qiyās*,” *Islamic Studies* 21, no. 4 (1982): 97.

<sup>99</sup> The proponents of *qiyās* of names included Abd al-‘Abbās, Abū ‘Alī b. Abū Hurayrah, al-Qāḍī Abū Bakr [ibn ‘Arabī], Ibn Surayj, Abu Ishāq, al-Shīrāzī, and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, as well as the lexicographers al-Māzinī, al-Fārisi, and Ibn Jinnī. Opponents included “Imām al-Ḥaramayn [al-Juwaynī], al-Ghazālī, [the] majority of the Shāfi‘ī jurists and the Ḥanafis. This view is also held by al-Āmidī, Ibn al-Ḥājib and Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī.” Hasan, “Subject Matter,” 102.

characteristic] and, not establishing for us the notion that it is limited to some of which those characteristics exists, is like their saying that they have set down the name for everyone that has that characteristic, so that knowledge of the soundness of their setting down is established.<sup>100</sup>

As al-Bāqillānī has already shown, for ‘general nouns’ of the highest category of generality, entities either fit into the group or do not, so applying that name to them results either in a truth or an untruth, and *qiyās* is not a logically viable characteristic of such categories. This category of general nouns is a recurring one in the *Taqrīb*, as previous references to them have indicated.

There are four indicants that announce a prohibition on *qiyās* in an utterance, which al-Bāqillānī explains by way of the example of calling someone ‘black’ because “of the presence of blackness in him.”<sup>101</sup> This typology amounts to a systematic exposition of the different possibilities of the extension of a term. The underlying tenet is that these extensions in language work systematically.

1. They [i.e. users of a given language] informed us that calling someone black applies in their language to everyone in whom blackness is found, in the past, present, and future;
  2. Or they informed us that they limited the name to that person alone due to the presence of blackness in him;
  3. Or they informed us that it is applied to the species of that type of animal to the exclusion of others;
  4. Or they informed us that they called him black due to the presence of blackness in him, and they did not inform us that it is limited to him or his type of animal, nor that it is applied to a type of that animal, nor anything else.
- Having this division is necessary.<sup>102</sup>

If a group of language users said they called only a single person black (Black),<sup>103</sup> then calling anyone else black would violate the rules of their language. If they said it was a name applied to a type of that animal only, calling other animals by that name would violate the conventions of their language. If they said they call everyone in whom blackness is found by that name, it means that word was set down for that purpose in language, and it is not a case of *qiyās* at all. If they called the person black due to blackness in him, one of the three substantive cases above must be present. (The fourth case does not provide a reason for calling someone black, merely ruling out the other three cases.)

In dismissing the three methodologically possible cases for calling someone black due to the entitative accident of his having blackness as a characteristic, al-Bāqillānī concludes that *qiyās* is prohibited in names. If the name black were applied to others outside the designated category (i.e., the black person in question, all black members of his species, or all

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<sup>100</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 362.

<sup>101</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 363.

<sup>102</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 363.

<sup>103</sup> The two possibilities (black/Black) are expressed singularly in Arabic, which has no capital letters.

black animals), there would be no analogical basis for doing so, and the name would be merely inaccurate.

The emphasis on informing, either by direct speech or its substitute, is so that it is clear how the language in question works, “in order to remove ambiguity [*ilbās*], and so that they know how their [language was] set down.”<sup>104</sup> If the internal logic and rules of a language are clear to the language community, the potential ambiguity of the scope of lexical items or grammatical constructions is removed. The basis of communication lies in knowing the internal logic of a language. Not every language calls all members of a category by the name of that characteristic. As al-Bāqillānī explains:

The basic point of the detractors in this category is that the name, if it was set down for a meaning [*ma ‘nā*], must be applied wherever that meaning is found, or else its communicative value is nullified. This [position] is wrong, because its communicative value may be limited to something to the exclusion of other [things], as we have clarified, and a people’s setting down their language based on meanings is not the setting-down of rational rules that are required by their causes. Rather, setting-down is by agreement and following their intention and choice, and they may choose to set down the name for a meaning if it is found in something particular, as we have clarified [. . .]<sup>105</sup>

Al-Bāqillānī affirms that language is not based on objective, rational rules but rather on the intention of the ones who set down the language. The intention of using a word may be due to its applicability for a specific entity, or all entities of its species, or all entities, as long as they have a specific characteristic (like blackness). Which of these cases a language community applies is decided by those who set down that language. There is no universal rule that determines the parameters of applying a name. One language may call every black person black, while another might call every black entity (person, animal, object) black, and yet another may just use the name black for one black person. The cause of a particular community’s choice to limit the application of a term is not relevant for interpretation. Arabic is not singled out in this section, and the legal implications are relevant for any language community in which Islamic law is applied. The overarching point is that there is an internally consistent logic to how languages work.

This systematic view of how names function in language affects legal reasoning. What determines the scope of a term is the particular language community’s agreed-upon bounds of that term in language use. Al-Bāqillānī elucidates the legal applications of prohibiting *qiyās* of nouns in the following passage:

The goal of speaking about this category is naming *nabīdh ‘khamr’* due to the presence of the effect in it, and [calling] the associate ‘neighbor,’ and intercourse with a beast ‘adultery,’ and extracting the shroud from the grave ‘robbery,’ and the likes of these. If the name is applied to that in the way of *qiyās*, it enters under the [category] of generalities and explicit mentions in the Qur’ān [*ṣawāḥir*], like the Almighty’s saying: ‘And the [male] robber and the

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<sup>104</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 365.

<sup>105</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 365.

[female] robber,’ and ‘the [female] adulterer and the [male] adulterer,’ and the Prophet’s (PBUH) saying ‘the neighbor has more right to the property that is near.’ And this is far from what we have said [*ba ‘īd li-mā qulnāhu*].<sup>106</sup>

Performing *qiyās* on individual words naming categories is prohibited. Picking a word out of an utterance and extending its meaning analogically is unsound. Three of the examples given here are prototypical in Islamic legal discourse. The first example of *nabīdh* and *khamr* is notably contentious because the Qur’ān ultimately prohibits consuming *khamr* (e.g. Q 5:90), but scholars debated the boundaries of this prohibition. If the basis for prohibiting *khamr* was its intoxicating effect, should other substances whose effect was intoxication also be prohibited? *Nabīdh* is one such example: it is not the same as *khamr* but could also have an intoxicating effect. Moreover, there was argument over what *khamr* meant in Muḥammad’s day (an example of religious law affecting lexical items’ meaning),<sup>107</sup> and there were related disagreements about when exactly preserved drink grew strong enough to be intoxicating.<sup>108</sup> The examples of calling a body-snatcher ‘thief’ is due to the common characteristic of stealing, and calling anyone who has illicit sexual intercourse (some list sodomizers, al-Bāqillānī mentions those who engage in bestiality) ‘adulterer’ is due to that common activity. Some argued against *qiyās* of nouns on the basis that the Arabs did not have a habit of doing so, citing examples such as that of calling a black horse ‘black’ but not every black thing ‘black.’<sup>109</sup> Al-Bāqillānī goes further, theorizing that some languages may call only one black body ‘black,’ or all black bodies black (horse or not), and though this decision is arbitrary and operates according to the choice of the setters-down of the language, the fact that the application of the word ‘black’ or any other name is rule-governed is important. As we saw above, his argument against *qiyās* of a name is based on an example of a highest-order general category. Qur’ānic examples he gives (*khamr*, neighbor, robbery) are not, however, based on these most general categories. He does not permit using the ‘*illa* of these terms’ prohibition to extend the scope of the prohibition to additional items. At least in the case of prohibitions, al-Bāqillānī’s theory of language supports a limited scope of law.

As it is, al-Bāqillānī’s point about *qiyās* on names being invalid comes across as about the way language works rather than strictly about the manner in which laws are legitimately derived. At first, the prohibition on *qiyās* of a name might seem to contradict the *majāz* of a noun, which al-Bāqillānī allows. They are both cases in which a meaning is extended along systematic lines in order to understand non-explicit meanings located within a text, but the highest order of general nouns and proper nouns is excluded from both categories. The difference is that *majāz* denotes a non-literal usage wherein a word’s meaning goes beyond that which was set down for that word, while a *qiyās* is a logic-based extension of the literal meaning itself.

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<sup>106</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 365-66.

<sup>107</sup> See Kopf, “Religious Influences.”

<sup>108</sup> Sadan, “*Khamr*.”

<sup>109</sup> Hasan, “Subject Matter,” 105-06.



## **Qur'ān: Exception or Prototype? *Majāz* as a Test Case**

At this point I bring our discussion back to one of the key tensions in al-Bāqillānī's thought. *Uṣūl al-fiqh* discourse tended to treat the language of the Qur'ān as being in agreement with other uses of language insofar as they worked according to the same rules, which allowed for the systematic and consistent interpretation of all legally-relevant utterances. Al-Bāqillānī's work shows how aware he was of the importance of this tension and its implications. On the other hand, according to normative conceptions of *i'jāz al-Qur'ān* discourse, he maintains the uniqueness and inimitability of the language of the Qur'ān. Al-Bāqillānī cleverly resolves this tension by holding both of these positions to be true: the Qur'ān's rhetorical excellence is due to its uniquely clear and guiding language, a resolution we have explored in earlier chapters. As such, humans can interpret it and use it as a source for law, and it constitutes an understandable miracle. As I suggested in the context of al-Bāqillānī's *i'jāz al-Qur'ān* writing, figurative language holds a special status within this dynamic. In the discourse of Qur'ānic inimitability, figurative language is important because it allows for the expression of new meanings not previously conveyed in a given language. Even though there is (necessarily) not already a specific word or way of expressing this new thought, familiar terminology can be put to use in order to convey the new idea through tools like metaphor. This property is particularly important in the Qur'ān because the Qur'ān conveys ideas not indigenous to Arabic expression, like knowledge about God, and scriptural content that had previously not been revealed in Arabic. The mechanism of figurative language does not depend on previously-garnered technical understandings of terms.

Al-Bāqillānī's examples of *majāz* mainly derive from the Qur'ān: "There is none like unto him" [*laysa ka-mithlihi shay'*] as an example of an addition, because in the term *ka-mithlihi* both *ka* and *mithl* mean 'like'; "ask the town" [*is'al al-qarya*] for a subtraction.<sup>110</sup> Thinking back to early investigations into *majāz al-Qur'ān*, we recall that examples of unusual or 'difficult' Qur'ānic language were sometimes explained as unique expressions in language (as in Abū 'Ubayda and Ibn Qutayba). While some of these early writings on *majāz al-Qur'ān* have a defensive, polemical tone, there is also an effort to explain Qur'ānic language use in order to resolve difficulties.<sup>111</sup> *I'jāz al-Qur'ān* discussions then drew on this view of unusual Qur'ānic linguistic formulations to demonstrate that the Qur'ān's use of language is inimitable and miraculous, as in Ḥāmid b. Muḥammad al-Khaṭṭābī's (d. 388/996) treatise on the subject, where the author shows the wording of particular *āyāt* that had evidently been disparaged or

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<sup>110</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, 353.

<sup>111</sup> There is a range of opinions on how much early *tafsīr* was interested in lexical explanations in the service of elucidating difficult words and phrases. There were certainly lexical difficulties to be explained, especially as the Qur'ān's audience expanded far beyond native Arabic-speaking world, as C. H. M. Versteegh elucidates. On the other hand, Herbert Berg has problematized understandings of lexical explanations on the basis that they may not be merely for the purpose of defining a word as much as glosses or conceptual theological explanations. Meanwhile, Ibn Qutayba's *Ta'wīl mushkil al-Qur'ān* is a good example of a text that explains linguistic and grammatical difficulties in the Qur'ān with the polemical aim of defending Qur'ānic comprehensibility. C. H. M. Versteegh, *Arabic Grammar and Qur'ānic Exegesis in Early Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 81-84. Herbert Berg, *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam: The Authenticity of Muslim Literature from the Formative Period* (Surrey: RoutledgeCurzon, 2000), 150.

questioned was actually perfectly appropriate for expressing the idea in the verse at hand.<sup>112</sup> Still, these scholars' work is based on enumerating examples and explanations of the ways in which particular verses are worded, and they do not develop the kind of theory al-Bāqillānī does to explain systematically the ways that expressions in language (particularly those identified as *majāz*) signify.

An investigation of whether al-Bāqillānī is using Qur'ānic quotations to exemplify additions and subtractions in language in general suggests he is trying to use the Qur'ān as a prototype of language usage in general here, rather than championing it as a singularity in the vein of *i'jāz* writing. Whereas I show below that *isti'āra* is generally treated as the archetypical example of *majāz* in *majāz al-Qur'ān* and *balāgha* texts, al-Bāqillānī uses a different definition of *majāz* here. Qur'ānic verses are cited as examples of *majāz*, but instead of being cited for their uniqueness, they are used here as part of a descriptive explanation of how language functions. *Uṣūl al-fiqh* texts are ostensibly intended for the primary use of systematizing the derivation of laws, and their pervasive focus on language as a system is based on the goal of describing rules for how language acts. The *muṣṣḥaf*, the closed corpus of the Qur'ān, comprises a finite amount of text, but *uṣūl al-fiqh* texts must explain and account for the legal force not only of the *muṣṣḥaf* but also of the entirety of potential human language usage. Characterizing the Qur'ān as containing lexically or grammatically exceptional language usage would raise the problem of language not following predictable rules conducive to legal systems. For example, if the Qur'ān contains a verse having legal content, but it is considered an exception, in accordance with the idea of the Qur'ānic language being part and parcel of its status as a singularity, how are legists to treat a nearly identical utterance of human origin? On what basis can it be said to have analogous or very different legal force than the similar verse in the Qur'ān?

Perhaps al-Bāqillānī and his jurisprudential peers had this kind of consideration in mind when trying to pin down extensions in language. Indeed, the desire to define the types of implications a given utterance can have seems to be a driving force behind the setting down of legal theory. Those scholars who considered themselves to have the authority to derive legal theory set limits that allowed for the types of extensions in language they wanted while cutting off other less desirable paths of thought. Among these scholars, al-Bāqillānī maintained a wide sphere of ways of meaning in language, as we have seen. He often maximizes the capacity of language to signify, maintaining that language conveys meaning clearly, whether there are multiple meanings expressed in one utterance or not, and even in cases that at first might seem ambiguous. Still, he described an orderly and methodical process by which extensions of meaning follow from an utterance.

## Conclusion

This chapter has investigated an important dimension of language in al-Bāqillānī's thought, namely the validity of extension of meanings, whether as expansions or limitations of words' set-down meanings. When a word is used in a *majāzī*, or figurative, sense, it signifies something beyond the meaning set down for that word in language. But *majāz* is more limited than *ḥaqīqa* in that it must follow certain rules: once a *majāz* usage is established, subsequent

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<sup>112</sup> Abū Sulayman Ḥamd ibn Muḥammad al-Khaṭṭābī, *Bayān i'jāz al-Qur'ān*, in *Thalāth rasā'il fī i'jāz al-Qur'ān*, ed. Muḥammad Khalaf Allāh and Muḥammad Zaghlūl Sallām (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1968), 19-65.

uses of this *majāzī* meaning must follow (and be consistent with) the metaphorical mapping of the initial *majāz*. Al-Bāqillānī argues that technical meanings are not *majāz*; rather, they are specialized uses that lie within the set-down meanings of words. Understanding Qur'ānic vocabulary does not rely on special knowledge of technical meanings; rather, the Qur'ānic usage was known and familiar to the Qur'ān's first Arabian audiences. *Qiyās* of a name is invalid, because the scope of a name's application is determined by the language community, and extending it past those agreed-upon boundaries would violate the logic of that language. The naming al-Bāqillānī discusses in relation to *qiyās* is the application of general nouns, so a given entity either belongs to that category or does not. When discussing the legitimate bounds of *majāz*, al-Bāqillānī also excludes *majāz* of general nouns for the same reason. *Majāz* and *qiyās* of proper names is also prohibited. Al-Bāqillānī's framework of interpretation is consistent with regard to *majāz* and *qiyās*.

In all of these cases, al-Bāqillānī provides a systematic theory of how language works that is consistent in its applicability to the Qur'ān and human-authored utterances. This systematic view of language sets the groundwork for consistent and methodical legal interpretation, but al-Bāqillānī's examples of the types of language use enumerated and examined above show that he is not only interested in the legal implications of theorizing the ways in which language works and how to interpret it. Rather, he uses the *Taqrīb* as a platform for theorizing how all language is clear and able to be reliably and systematically understood. In the case of *majāz* and other types of word usage that do not operate in accordance with the boundaries set down for those words, there are nevertheless rules that determine how these usages are to be understood and interpreted. These rules also apply to poetic uses of language, and they are grounded in the idea that the use-based parameters of a word's meaning vary between languages. This wider view of idioms and the bounds of lexical meaning as being determined by the internal logic of a given language renders al-Bāqillānī's thought more universally applicable.

However, examination of al-Bāqillānī's Qur'ānic examples of *majāz* raises the question of whether his interpretation is really a straightforward application of his theory-based rules or an effort to render his philosophy of God and justice with particular Qur'ānic verses. Investigation into this tension shows al-Bāqillānī to be weighing in on an issue also present in *tafsīr* of the classical period. The verses he cites as examples are sometimes revealed, upon further study, also to be attached to other sorts of debates about the nature of God and the justice of certain types of recompense. Likewise, in the case of whether terms that gained technical meanings in Islam (like *ṣalāt* and *ḥajj*) are imbued with these meanings in their Qur'ānic usages, further investigation shows that the meanings of these words was a matter of sectarian debate and general contention in the formative period of Islam. In both of these instances, al-Bāqillānī grounds his responses to these philosophical matters in his theory of language and interpretability. The *Taqrīb* is thus marked by al-Bāqillānī's drawing doctrinal and exegetical matters into the realm of analysis of language. By framing his contributions to formative debates as being the logical results of general analysis of the workings of language, he justifies his views with recourse to linguistic analysis. The fruits of investigation of al-Bāqillānī's theory of language show his discussions in this realm to be integral to his scholarly work and an important site of theological thought.

## Chapter Four: *Badīʿ* in *Kitāb Iʿjāz al-Qurʾān*: Figurative Language with a Purpose

### Introduction

This chapter is the first of two that examine al-Bāqillānī's *Kitāb Iʿjāz al-Qurʾān* [Book on the Inimitability of the Qurʾān]. This treatise discusses many different aspects of Qurʾānic inimitability, focusing on analysis of the Qurʾān's use of language. Scholarship on the text has singled out some sections of it as contributions to literary critical history: first, a lengthy section of al-Bāqillānī's text devoted to rhetorical and stylistic features of language, and second, sections where al-Bāqillānī analyzes well-known poems and compares their quality of language use with the Qurʾān's. These parts of al-Bāqillānī's treatise engage the most important debate over literary style in his historical period, which was over *badīʿ*, a term that can refer both to the ample use of rhetorical figures in a text and to marvelous, eloquent style. They have garnered a relatively large amount of scholarly interest, thus contributing to a conception of al-Bāqillānī as a figure primarily interested in literary analysis. Though these parts of al-Bāqillānī's treatise deserve the attention they have gotten, I show how their larger significance lies in their contribution to al-Bāqillānī's theory of figurative language. *Istiʿāra* (metaphor, lit. 'borrowing') is the prototypical example of *badīʿ*, and it is through his discussions of *badīʿ* and particular poems that al-Bāqillānī lays out crucial aspects of his thought on *istiʿāra* and other types of figurative language (*majāz*). Having already examined al-Bāqillānī's theory of language and particularly *majāz* in his *uṣūl al-fiqh* work, it is now possible to investigate his treatment of figurative language in his *iʿjāz al-Qurʾān* text in order to develop a multifaceted understanding of al-Bāqillānī's theory of language and its ways of expressing meaning (*maʿnā*).

*Badīʿ* was the major subject of controversy and discussion during al-Bāqillānī's lifetime, and analyzing and situating al-Bāqillānī's discourse on it in light of this contentious history is essential to a nuanced understanding of al-Bāqillānī's conception of rhetoric and *iʿjāz al-Qurʾān* (the Qurʾān's miraculous inimitability). Moreover, the *badīʿ* debate is inextricably tied to the history of the ways in which figurative language was theorized in al-Bāqillānī's cultural milieu and thus informs a central topic of this dissertation. I argue that it is only by strongly contextualizing al-Bāqillānī's writing on *badīʿ* within this contentious history that the significance of his work on rhetoric and specifically figurative language can be illuminated. Specifically, this type of reading sheds light on the stage in the development of the term *badīʿ* al-Bāqillānī's work reflects, al-Bāqillānī's relationship to the rhetorical tradition, and the role of al-Bāqillānī's writing on *badīʿ* within his thought on *iʿjāz*. Uncovering al-Bāqillānī's theory of figurative language in these sections of his book incidentally sheds light on his work in literary criticism, though he does not present himself as a professional scholar in this field, and ultimately my study of his thought on language reveals his interest in synthesizing diverse fields of Islamic thought.

Metaphorical interpretation of the Qurʾān was a divisive theological issue during the period in which al-Bāqillānī lived, especially in the case of verses about God that could alternatively be read metaphorically or not; the latter interpretations were sometimes accused of personifying the divine. The identification and interpretation of the Qurʾān's figurative verses was thus tied to the major theological debates of the classical period of Islam, and the

discourse of the Qur'ān's inimitability was implicated in both aesthetic and doctrinal discourses. More generally, discussion of the Qur'ān's literary inimitability can best be understood within the context of the literary sensibilities and debates of the time at which this discussion arose and developed. This chapter looks specifically at the ways al-Bāqillānī situates himself within the discourse of literary criticism through examining his chapter on *badī'*. However, while that section and others directly concerned with literary criticism have received the most scholarly attention, reading these sections independently from the rest of the treatise stops short of understanding their role within the treatise and the overarching ideas al-Bāqillānī communicates in the text. More specifically, I show that the way in which al-Bāqillānī understands *badī'* is an important context for understanding how he theorizes figurative language and its role in the conveying of meaning in his *i'jāz* work. Through these discussions, this chapter lays the groundwork for Chapter Five, which deals with less-studied sections of *Kitāb I'jāz al-Qur'ān*, using a more comprehensive reading of the treatise to discuss the themes and theses of the book that are not apparent from reading discrete sections alone. That chapter focuses on the centrality of the Qur'ān's expressive clarity of language within al-Bāqillānī's writing on *i'jāz*.

I begin this chapter with an account of the scholarly debate about *badī'*, providing the necessary background for understanding al-Bāqillānī's engagement with poetry and literary critical terms. I then introduce al-Bāqillānī's treatise with particular consideration of his writing on *badī'* and its status in secondary scholarship. Turning my attention to *Kitāb I'jāz al-Qur'ān* itself, I characterize his work on *badī'* and poetry. In order to investigate and characterize al-Bāqillānī's views on figurative language, I focus my analysis on his sections on *isti'āra* and *tashbīh* within his chapter on *badī'*. My subsequent discussion examines how al-Bāqillānī's writing conceives of *badī'* and what role poetry plays in his treatment of the Qur'ān's literary devices. I demonstrate that al-Bāqillānī's text reflects how the concept of *badī'* attained a general meaning of marvelous, eloquent speech among educated non-specialists by his era, with metaphor retaining the status of the prototypical *badī'* figure. Al-Bāqillānī effectively inserts himself into the debate between Ancient (pre-'Abbasid) and Modern ('Abbasid era), or *muḥdath*, poets by evaluating Ancient poets' verse as being of higher quality in comparison to Modern poets' verse. Taking a closer look at al-Bāqillānī's justification for this preference, it becomes apparent that he praises the Ancient poets' use of what he later classifies as meaning-based figures, while the Modern poets merely use *badī'* to embellish the surface of their verse. This distinction foreshadows a key point in al-Bāqillānī's theory of Qur'ānic language. His privileging of metaphor within the catalogue of *badī'* figures leads me to a discussion of the reasons for this figure's salience.

I conceive of al-Bāqillānī's treatment of *badī'*, investigated in this chapter, as his preparatory discussion of literary and rhetorical features that sets the groundwork for his subsequent theory of *isti'āra* and demarcation of an innovative distinction between those types of *badī'* that contribute to *i'jāz* and those that do not. That division, discussed at length in Chapter Five, is between what al-Bāqillānī sees as rhetorical figures that are involved in expressing meaning and those he deems to be merely ornamental embellishments on the surface of an utterance. Within this distinction, he elaborates a theory of figurative language that is consistent and complementary to his discussions of *majāz* in the *Taqrīb*, with interesting areas of overlap between the two.

This distinction between types of *badīʿ* is an early articulation of a trend usually associated with a later investigation of the connection between form and content in Arabic literary critical history, one that was more maturely and quite differently theorized by the later scholars ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī and Muḥammad al-Khaṭīb al-Qazwīnī (d. 739/1338).<sup>1</sup> Al-Qazwīnī’s works on rhetoric (*Talkhīṣ al-miftāḥ* and *al-īdāḥ*) are explanations of al-Sakkākī’s *Miftāḥ al-ʿulūm* [*The Key to Knowledge*], which was in turn a clarification of al-Rāzī’s summary (in *Nihāyat al-ījāz fī dirāyat al-iʿjāz* [*The Ultimate Conciseness Regarding Knowledge of Inimitability*]) of al-Jurjānī’s two famous works (*Asrār al-balāgha* [*Secrets of Eloquence*] and *Dalāʾil al-iʿjāz* [*Indications of Inimitability*]).<sup>2</sup> William Smyth has shown that rather than being merely an exercise in summary upon summary, this chain of works was a location of innovation and creativity through reorganizations, reframing, and individual explanations.<sup>3</sup> For example, al-Sakkākī created a division between *ʿilm al-bayān* and *ʿilm al-maʿānī*, a classification that would have seemed alien and counterintuitive to the likes of al-Bāqillānī, for as I have argued, he considered *bayān* to be important because of its indication of meanings (*maʿānī*). Smyth traces the division back partially to al-Jurjānī and partially to al-Zamakhsharī, summarizing the distinction as being between literal and figurative speech.<sup>4</sup> Al-Qazwīnī added *ʿilm al-badīʿ* to al-Sakkākī’s two components of *balāgha*, which is where he distinguishes between types of *badīʿ* that concern sound and those that concern meaning.<sup>5</sup> Smyth notes that al-Sakkākī considered *badīʿ* to be only ornamentation and thus not of a high rank in his work. Al-Jurjānī did not uphold al-Bāqillānī’s distinction between ornamental and meaning-based figures, but his successors followed al-Bāqillānī more closely in this respect. Al-Bāqillānī’s contribution to this current in the history of thought on language and rhetoric has yet to be accounted for and integrated into accounts of the subject.

### ***Badīʿ*: Background and Context**

There has been much scholarly debate about the origins of the concept of *badīʿ* in classical Arabo-Islamic history. While the term *badīʿ* came to refer to the use of rhetorical figures in a text, it has a rich history that encompasses an array of uses in both common and technical meanings. As I suggested in Chapter One, Arabic language discourses and individual authors may draw on various general and technical meanings of a given vocabulary word in their texts, moving back and forth within the range of meanings that the word’s root yielded. A given word may invoke and play on the core meaning of its linguistic root, or on a technical meaning the word garnered within a particular discipline, or somewhere in between. A single text may use a word in ways that vary across this spectrum. *Badīʿ* is one such word. The root (B-D-ʿ) in classical Arabic includes the meanings ‘to become superlative in its kind’ (in Form I), and ‘to invent, originate, produce’ as well as ‘to bring into existence, newly, for the first time, it not having been or existed before, and not after the similitude of anything preexisting’ (in

<sup>1</sup> W. Heinrichs, “al-Khaṭīb al-Qazwīnī (666-739/1268-1338),” in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, ed. Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey (1998; repr., New York: Routledge, 2010), 439-40.

<sup>2</sup> William Smyth, “The Making of a Textbook,” in *Studia Islamica*, no. 78 (1993): 100.

<sup>3</sup> Smyth, “Textbook,” 99.

<sup>4</sup> Smyth, “Textbook,” 108-09.

<sup>5</sup> Smyth, “Textbook,” 112.

the causative Form IV).<sup>6</sup> The also-causative Form II has the meaning of accusing someone of, or attributing to that person, *bid'ā*—innovation, a highly charged term that carried negative connotations in normative Islamic discourse, suggesting a deviation from the straight path of the *sunna*, though Lane also notes the more neutral meaning of any novelty.<sup>7</sup> Technically, *bid'ā* can be positive or negative, depending on whether it is in conflict with Qur'ān and *sunna*, and there is an interplay between what is judged to be *bid'ā* and what is deemed *ijmā'*, or scholarly consensus regarding an issue on which the Qur'ān and *sunna* have no clear ruling.<sup>8</sup> While the word *bid'ā* developed a negatively charged connotation and association with illegitimate and misguided innovations, the phrase *abda' al-shā'ir* signifies a poet producing amazing verse or creating new poetry that was unlike any extant verse; thus the term *badī'* meaning poetry of a 'new' style, discussed below.<sup>9</sup> While these are the most salient of the uses of the root B-D- that Lane lists, there is a diverse range of other words and expressions that make use of the root. Lane says the term *badī'* deriving from this root can refer to the one who brings about a novel thing, and it can also signify anything new, original, 'wonderful,' 'marvelous,'<sup>10</sup> and 'not seen before.' This valence of the root is at play in the word *al-Bādi'* (a term on the *fā'il* form which denotes an actor; thus, 'the Originator'), considered to be one of God's names, since God is the Originator of creation.<sup>11</sup> Von Grunebaum notes that throughout the 3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> century, the term *badī'* was used both in the non-technical sense of "new, worthy of notice, original," as well as in the sense of the 'new style' of poets' use of rhetorical figures.<sup>12</sup> As I show, al-Bāqillānī also uses the term in both of these ways though he was writing at a later period, in the 4<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup>. Because al-Bāqillānī draws on different valences of the term *badī'* and its root meanings throughout his body of work, any given usage should be read in light of its context in order to determine which of these meanings is (are) at play; my translation of the term varies throughout according to my reading of the passage in question in order to shed light on the range of usages.

While the term *badī'* can be used with reference to any rhetorical figures in a text, its origins as a technical term coincide with the new style of poetry developed by the 'modern' poets (*muḥdathīn*) during the Abbasid era, in a style that cultivated the rhetorical figure and used it plentifully.<sup>13</sup> Rhetorical figures had, of course, been used in previous poetry, but what is generally referred to as *badī'* poetry departed from the previous eras' style, developing a more

<sup>6</sup> Lane, *Lexicon*, 166.

<sup>7</sup> Lane, *Lexicon*, 167.

<sup>8</sup> J. Robson, "Bid'ā," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. P. Bearman et al. Brill Online, 2014. [http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/bida-SIM\\_1393](http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/bida-SIM_1393).

<sup>9</sup> Lane, *Lexicon*, 166.

<sup>10</sup> However, in translating *badī'* as 'wondrous' or 'marvelous,' I do not intend to call to mind the medieval discourse of wonders and marvels but rather the non-technical meanings but rather a more pedestrian meaning that refers to the reaction of amazement that an object (of great beauty or novelty or the like) inspires in its audience. See Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature 1150-1750* (Cambridge, MA: Zone Books, 2001).

<sup>11</sup> See Daftary, *Short History*, 85.

<sup>12</sup> Gustave E. von Grunebaum, *A Tenth-Century Document of Arabic Literary Theory and Criticism: The sections on poetry of al-Bāqillānī's I'jāz al-Qur'ān translated and annotated* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950), 2 fn 2.

<sup>13</sup> W. P. Heinrichs, "Badī'," in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, ed. Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey (1998; repr., New York: Routledge, 2010), 122-23.

ornate style that according to its critics took on a quality of being contrived and artificial (*maṣnūʿ*) in its far-fetched use of language, in contrast with the ‘natural’ (*maṭbūʿ*) style of poetry not marked with heavy uses of *badīʿ*.<sup>14</sup> As a conscious use of artistry that stood in contrast with traditionalism, it constituted a major turning point in the history of Arabic poetry.<sup>15</sup> The prevalent idea that the Ancient poets had already said everything there was to say in poetry meant that *muḥdath* poets understood their contribution to be in perfecting and cleverly manipulating the expression of these ideas.<sup>16</sup> Contrary to popular belief, *badīʿ* was already being composed in 2<sup>nd</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> century (not only in the 3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> century) Baṣra and Baghdad; it reached its peak during the Abbasid period.<sup>17</sup> However, it was the site of a controversy between those who welcomed such stylistic innovations within the confines of long-established genres and conservatives who did not want to depart from the style of the ‘ancients’ (i.e. pre-Islamic poets). These detractors criticized *badīʿ* poetry for using awkward jargon (in referring to rationalist philosophical concepts) and for its quality of sounding artificial and constructed. The controversy over Abū Tammām’s poetry (and, later, al-Mutanabbī’s) was largely based on this disagreement of style and taste.

The poet, critic, and caliph ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s (d. 296/908) treatise *Kitāb al-Badīʿ* (272/886) is the first known book that is devoted to the topic,<sup>18</sup> and it includes the first explicit definition of it that we know of, but it is clearly a response to a debate that was well underway.<sup>19</sup> Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s book may seem on the surface to be merely expository, listing and exemplifying what he defined as five figures of *badīʿ*: *tajnīs* (paronomasia), *muṭābaqa* (antithesis), *isti‘āra* (metaphor), *radd a ‘jāz al-kalām ‘alā mā taqaddamahā* (epanalepsis: repeating the initial word or a word that occurs early in a sentence/line at the end), and *al-madḥhab al-kalāmī* (logical or rational argumentation). He also includes 12 additional *maḥāsīn* (good qualities), bringing the total number of literary devices he lists to 17.<sup>20</sup> Ibn al-Mu‘tazz gives examples of each rhetorical figure, citing both poetry and classical Islamic sources (pre-Islamic

<sup>14</sup> For more on the controversy over the *maṭbūʿ* and *maṣnūʿ* styles, see W. P. Heinrichs, “Maṭbūʿ and Maṣnūʿ,” in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, ed. Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey (1998; repr., New York: Routledge, 2010), 516.

<sup>15</sup> Wolfhart Heinrichs, “Literary Theory: The Problem of Its Efficiency,” in *Arabic Poetry: Theory and Development*, ed. G.E. von Grunebaum (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1973), 19-70.

<sup>16</sup> Margaret Larkin, *Al-Mutanabbī: Voice of the ‘Abbasid Poetic Ideal* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2008), 10-11.

<sup>17</sup> M. M. Badawi, “‘Abbasid Poetry and its Antecedents,” in *‘Abbasid Belles-Lettres*, ed. Julia Ashtiany et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 158.

<sup>18</sup> ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Mu‘tazz was the son of the 13<sup>th</sup> Abbasid caliph, al-Mu‘tazz. Ibn al-Mu‘tazz was not interested in political power and was, rather, considered a master of *adab* and poetry. He got pulled into the dispute over his father’s succession and was made caliph for one day before being assassinated. He was educated by al-Mubarrad (see Chapter One). In addition to defending the *badīʿ* style, Ibn al-Mu‘tazz composed poetry characterized by it. R. Jacobi, “Ibn al-Mu‘tazz (247-96/861-908),” in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, ed. Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey (1998; repr., New York: Routledge, 2010), 354-55.

<sup>19</sup> He says the goal of his book is to show people that the Modern poets do not use any kind of *badīʿ* that the Ancient poets did not already have. ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Mu‘tazz, *Kitāb al-Badīʿ*, ed. Ignatius Krachkovsky (Beirut: Dār al-Masīra, 1982), 3. Heinrichs and others have seen this pronouncement as indicative of the parameters of the debate into which Ibn al-Mu‘tazz was entering with this treatise. Heinrichs, “*Isti‘ārah* and *Badīʿ*,” 188.

<sup>20</sup> Bonebakker is of the mind that Ibn al-Mu‘tazz added the 12 *maḥāsīn* later, so that he would not be accused of neglecting those literary features. Seeger A. Bonebakker, “Poets and Critics in the Third Century A.H.,” in *Logic in Classical Islamic Culture*, ed. G. E. von Grunebaum (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1970), 93.



poetry, Qur'ān, and *hadīth*), despite the etymology of the term. Rather than being simply an expository taxonomical work, *Kitāb al-Badī'* argues that *badī'*-style poetry cannot be condemned on the grounds that it was new, because it can in fact be found in earlier sources as well, including in the pre-Islamic poetry and religious sources whose literary merit Ibn al-Mu'tazz's critics acknowledged. Ibn al-Mu'tazz's contribution was not the description of rhetorical devices, for that is already attested in earlier works, but rather the argument that the use of rhetorical devices was not new, a thesis that arose out of the 'Abbasid literary milieu.<sup>21</sup> Ibn al-Mu'tazz also broke with convention in citing *muḥdath* (Modern) poets to exemplify rhetorical devices.<sup>22</sup>

Some scholars attribute the rise of the 'new style' to a development in *isti'āra*, claiming the term *badī'* originally referred to analogy-based metaphors,<sup>23</sup> while others see *badī'* as an outgrowth of the Mu'tazili-leaning culture of Baṣra, where there was an emphasis on metaphorical understanding in interpreting the Qur'ān and *hadīth*.<sup>24</sup> Still other scholars focus on the development of *badī'* from a catalogue of individual rhetorical figures to a structurally unifying principle.<sup>25</sup> This debate revolves around the poetry of the late Umayyad and Abbasid periods and is reflected in the literary critical writings of the Abbasid period, where we find discussion of *badī'* in the context of both poetry and Islamic sources (Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*). With the development of the *i'jāz al-Qur'ān* discourse, scholars asserted and defended the idea that the Qur'ān manifests the highest possible level of eloquence, and the genre of writings defending and explaining the Qur'ān's literary and rhetorical eloquence developed elaborate taxonomies of rhetorical figures, citing examples for each one taken from both poetry and the Qur'ān.

The scholar of Arabic literary theory Wolfhart Heinrichs uses Ibn al-Mu'tazz's treatise to examine the way the term *badī'* was first used. He puts forward a theory of the origins of *badī'* that is based on the observation of changes that took place in literary terminology, with less of an emphasis on theological developments, though as will become clear, the two discourses were inextricably intertwined. Heinrichs shows how examples of *badī'* provided by Ibn al-Mu'tazz and other early literary critics are heavily dependent on metaphor, also noting that *isti'āra* is the first example of *badī'* given in the book. He points to Ibn al-Mu'tazz's initial definition of *badī'*, which actually describes metaphor, with only a corrective note at the end to include other types of literary figures. I cite Heinrichs' translation of Ibn al-Mu'tazz's definition of the term *badī'* in full, due to the relevance of this definition for al-Bāqillānī's:

An instance of prose containing *badī'* is the word of God Most High: "it is in the Mother of the Book with us exalted and wise." And an instance of poetry

<sup>21</sup> Abu Deeb cites Qudāma's earlier work that claims to invent names for literary devices in order to write about them in an inaugural work of literary criticism. Earlier, texts like Abū 'Ubayda's *Majāz al-Qur'ān* had arguably dealt with aspects of eloquence, but not in the context of poetry. K. Abu Deeb, "Literary Criticism," in *'Abbasid Belles-Lettres*, ed. Julia Ashtiany et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 339-40.

<sup>22</sup> Bonebakker, "Poets and Critics," 93.

<sup>23</sup> Heinrichs, "*Isti'ārah* and *badī'*," 180-211.

<sup>24</sup> Suzanne Pinkney Stetkevych, "Toward a Redefinition of 'Badī' Poetry," in *The Journal of Arabic Literature* 12 (1981): 1-29.

<sup>25</sup> Badawi, "Function of Rhetoric," 43-57.

containing *badīʿ* is the word of some poet: “. . . while the morning was stabbed by the brilliant (morning-)star”. This is, in fact, the borrowing (*istiʿārah*) of a concept, for something in connection with which it has not been known, from something in the Book” and “the wing of humility” and the like saying “Thought is the marrow of action” (*al-fikr mukhkh al-ʿamal*). If you were to say “. . . the quintessence of action” (*lubb al-ʿamal*), it would not be *badīʿ*. . . . *Badīʿ* is also the paronomasia and the antithesis – the ancient poets had them first and the “modern” poets did not invent them – and likewise the fourth and fifth category of *badīʿ*.<sup>26</sup>

*Istiʿārah* seems to have a particularly strong connection to the referent of the term *badīʿ*, and Heinrichs points out that even the sections of the book that deal with figures other than *istiʿārah* cite examples that often have metaphor in them.<sup>27</sup> In other words, *istiʿārah* was the prototypical figure of *badīʿ*. Chana Kronfeld has theorized the concept of the prototype in another context, following Eleanor Rosch and others, using the word ‘prototypical’ to refer to a term in a category that may not share many characteristics with other members of this category but is, for conceptual or historical reasons, the ‘best example’ of the category and most closely associated with it. Prototypes are the most salient items in the category within a particular context or community.<sup>28</sup> Heinrichs distinguishes between different types of metaphor recognized in the development of Arabic poetics: ‘old’ metaphor, later called *istiʿārah takhyīliyya*, is an imaginary ascription like ‘the claws of death,’ and ‘new’ metaphor (theorized later) is based on comparison and substitution as in the phrase ‘the dawn in its white gown.’<sup>29</sup> In this movement, Heinrichs observes a development in use of the term *istiʿārah* from its early reference to ‘old metaphor’ to later positioning of *istiʿārah* in relationship with *tashbīh*.<sup>30</sup>

Arabic literature scholar Suzanne Stetkevych has suggested that Ibn al-Muʿtazz’s treatise puts forth an inadequate definition of *badīʿ*.<sup>31</sup> She searches for the origins of the term in 2<sup>nd</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> century Baṣra where it was first used, looking at texts that use the term in that milieu. Based on these texts, she proposes that the key to understanding the phenomenon of *badīʿ* lies in the Muʿtazilite-dominated atmosphere that was prevalent in Baṣra at the time that *badīʿ* arose, where metaphorical understandings of God were emphasized in interpreting the Qurʾān and *hadīth*. She interprets the discussion of *badīʿ* in the famous treatise *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn* by al-Jāhiz (d. 255/869), who was Muʿtazilite, to be essentially about the use of metaphor and metonymy, which were not new to Arabic sources and which were in fact obligatory in Muʿtazilite interpretations of personifications of the Divine in the Qurʾān. Taking her cue from this extra-poetic use of language, Stetkevych concludes “that the *badīʿ*-style is nothing less than the expression in poetry of the entire scope of the metaphorical and analytical processes that characterized Muʿtazilite speculative theology (*kalām*) and, in a broader sense, the whole

<sup>26</sup> Ibn al-Muʿtazz, *Kitāb al-Badīʿ*, 2. Cited and translated in Heinrichs, “*Istiʿārah* and *Badīʿ*,” 190.

<sup>27</sup> Heinrichs, “*Istiʿārah* and *Badīʿ*,” 191.

<sup>28</sup> Kronfeld, *Margins of Modernism*, 29-30; George Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987), 39-46.

<sup>29</sup> Heinrichs, “*Istiʿārah* and *Badīʿ*,” 181-85.

<sup>30</sup> Heinrichs, “*Istiʿārah* and *Badīʿ*,” 182.

<sup>31</sup> Stetkevych, “Toward a Redefinition,” 2.

cultural and intellectual framework of the era of Mu‘tazilite hegemony.”<sup>32</sup> Theological discourse and poetic production happened in the same circles of intellectual activity, a configuration that is important to understanding her theory of how *badī‘* came about. The founders of the Baṣran school of Mu‘tazila traveled in the same circles as the famous *zindīq* (apostate) Bashshār ibn Burd, for example, one of the first writers of *badī‘*. When *kalām* argumentation became prevalent in Islamic discourse, this style of speculative philosophical thought also influenced the composition of literature, and *badī‘* poetry flourished during the political reign of the Mu‘tazilites. In this way, Stetkevych maintains, the particularities of theological discourse had a direct effect on poetic production, both in the nature of its imagery and style and in the technical and philosophical terms that began to appear (to some critics’ consternation) in poetic verse (a feature known as *al-madhhab al-kalāmī*).<sup>33</sup> Badawi, too, makes a connection between the Mu‘tazilite methods of argumentation in theological discourse and the philosophical terms in Abū Tammām’s (d. 231/846) poetry, culminating in a style that Badawi likens to that of the English Metaphysical poets.<sup>34</sup> Heinrichs, however, does not find the argument that *badī‘*’s origins are in Mu‘tazilite theological discourse to be convincing.<sup>35</sup>

The theological and literary critical discourses of the time were not the only places to search in order to locate the rise of *badī‘*, however; social realities also influenced the direction of the development of poetry. The Abbasid caliphate supported a system of court poetry wherein poets earned a living by writing panegyrics (*madḥ* poetry) to wealthy patrons and rulers. The new urban environment and social structure made the style and themes of the Ancient poets (*qudamā‘*) seem like relics of a distant past and, to some, hackneyed repetitions of the same old scenes. Among some poets and audiences, there was a thirst for expanding the boundaries of known genres and conventional images, leading to the style of the so-called Modern poets (*muḥdathūn*).<sup>36</sup> At the same time, the potentially narrow confines of the *madḥ* genre that focused on praise of a powerful individual led to an effort to expand the creative possibilities of *madḥ*, including increased usage and diversity of rhetorical devices, thus leading to the development of *badī‘* poetry. However, the poets had to carefully balance their own ideas with the tastes and demands of their audiences. Their wealthy patrons’ desire for entertaining and exuberant verse did not always coincide with those of the literary critics, who often had reactionary tendencies that favored the canonical pre-Islamic poetic style.<sup>37</sup> These two stylistic preferences ultimately led to a continued production of consciously Ancient-style poetry alongside other poets’ creative changes in the *qaṣīda* (ode) and *qit‘a* (fragment) forms. One development that has been seen as a new innovation was a principle of composition on which poems’ unity could rely. To cite a prominent example, M. M. Badawi explores the ways Abū Tammām’s *badī‘*-influenced Ode at Amorium builds on the sustained

<sup>32</sup> Stetkevych, “Toward a Redefinition,” 2.

<sup>33</sup> For more on *al-madhhab al-kalāmī*, see W. Heinrichs, “al-Madhhab al-Kalāmī,” in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, ed. Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey (1998; repr., New York: Routledge, 2010), 482.

<sup>34</sup> Badawi, “‘Abbasid Poetry,” 161-62.

<sup>35</sup> Heinrichs, “Badī‘,” 122.

<sup>36</sup> For more on the Ancients and the Moderns, see W. P. Heinrichs, “Ancients and Moderns,” in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, ed. Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey (1998; repr., New York: Routledge, 2010), 90-91; and Stetkevych, *Abū Tammām*, 20-37.

<sup>37</sup> See M. M. Badawi, “From Primary to Secondary *Qaṣīdas*: Thoughts on the Development of Classical Arabic Poetry,” in *Journal of Arabic Literature* 11 (1980), 7-10.

use of particular rhetorical figures, *muṭābaqa* (antithesis) and *isti'āra*.<sup>38</sup> He shows how the stark contrasting of opposites and extended metaphor cumulate in a forceful and evocative poem.<sup>39</sup> These different factors in the rise of *badī'* show how the phenomenon can be seen as more or less tied to theological, social, and literary developments. Ibn al-Mu'tazz's treatise, which is not just a manual but rather inserts itself into the *badī'* debate, set the groundwork for classifying the Qur'ān's literary devices and considering them to be in the same system as other texts' literary devices.<sup>40</sup>

### The Role of *Badī'* in Qur'ānic Inimitability

By al-Bāqillānī's time, roughly a century after Ibn al-Mu'tazz's era, the literary scene had changed, so the contribution of al-Bāqillānī's text to the history of *badī'* provides insight into how the term was understood and used a couple of generations after Ibn al-Mu'tazz. Al-Bāqillānī's treatment of *badī'* is especially interesting from a few angles. First, he was an educated non-specialist who writes at length on *badī'* in *Kitāb I'jāz al-Qur'ān*, and his conception of *badī'* is a source for insight into non-specialists' use and understanding of it. Second, characterizing the nature and contribution of al-Bāqillānī's sections on *badī'* is an important component in a larger analysis and contextualization of his *i'jāz* writing and his scholarly identity. Lastly, he was an influential Ash'arite theologian who claimed to be responding to Mu'tazilites (among others) in his work. Texts like his on *i'jāz al-Qur'ān* provide further insight into an aspect of the debate between the Ash'arites and the Mu'tazilites, whose beliefs about the nature of *i'jāz* differ in some respects, following from the larger theological issues they disputed.<sup>41</sup> Margaret Larkin emphasizes the importance of *i'jāz* to a theological school's definition of its identity and core doctrines: "How the various theologians dealt with the notion of the *i'jāz*. . . was directly tied to their treatment of the subject of the divine Essence. It was not a matter of detail, but rather an issue that went right to the heart of their view of the relationship of God to His Revelation and to His attributes in general."<sup>42</sup> It is difficult to state the Ash'arite stance on *i'jāz* separately from al-Bāqillānī's work because he was one of the principal formers of the Ash'arite tradition and doctrine and his work on *i'jāz* was so influential. For example, he developed the idea of *kalām nafsī*, 'internal speech,' which is contrasted with *kalām lafẓī*, the letters and sounds that articulate a temporally bound instance of the Qur'ān's recitation. This distinction allows for the Ash'arite doctrine of the Qur'ān's uncreatedness, maintaining that speech exists in God internally, and eternally, without being bound to created sounds and letters.<sup>43</sup> In contrast, Mu'tazilites held that the Qur'ān itself was *created in time*, and as such was temporally composed of the letters and sounds of human

<sup>38</sup> Badawi, "Function of Rhetoric."

<sup>39</sup> Badawi, "'Abbasid Poetry," 161.

<sup>40</sup> For more on Ibn al-Mu'tazz and the origins of discourse on *badī'*, see K. Abu Deeb, "Literary Criticism," and S. A. Bonebakker, "Ibn al-Mu'tazz and Kitāb al-Badī'," in *Abbasid Belles-Lettres*, ed. Julia Ashtiany et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 388-411.

<sup>41</sup> Vasalou, "Miraculous Eloquence," 29.

<sup>42</sup> Margaret Larkin, "The Inimitability of the Qur'an: Two Perspectives," in *Religion and Literature* 20, no. 1 (1988): 32.

<sup>43</sup> Gardet, *Kalām*.

language.<sup>44</sup> The Mu‘tazilites and Ash‘arites both held that there were two types of divine attributes, those of essence (*dhāt*) and those of act (*fi‘l*).<sup>45</sup> The Ash‘arites considered God’s speech to be an essential attribute, but the Mu‘tazilites saw speech as an act (*fi‘l*) and thus held that God’s speech was not an attribute of essence.<sup>46</sup> Further characterization of views that arose in contradistinction to the Mu‘tazilite positions emerge from detailed study of al-Bāqillānī’s work.

Some brief remarks on the Mu‘tazilite perspectives will bring the Ash‘arite views into sharper relief and indicate their opponents’ differences of opinion. The privileging of the ‘*aql*’ (intellect), the distinguishing characteristic of the Mu‘tazilites, also characterizes the Mu‘tazilites’ approach to *i‘jāz*. For al-Jāḥiẓ, whose Mu‘tazilism was a prominent part of his identity, *badī‘* was not simply a rhetorical style but “a method of interpretation, a way of thinking, that was obligatory upon the faithful for the proper understanding” of scripture.<sup>47</sup> The Baṣran Mu‘tazila, interested in preserving the rationality of the prophetic miracle, argued against the popular belief that contemporary figures could perform real miracles like *i‘jāz al-Qur’ān*.<sup>48</sup> Martin notes the similarities between al-Bāqillānī’s doctrine of *i‘jāz* and that of the Baṣran Mu‘tazilites (in contrast to the Baghdad Mu‘tazilites and Imāmī Shi‘ites).<sup>49</sup> The Mu‘tazila are often characterized by their emphasis on metaphorical readings of the Qur’ān (*ta’wīl*). Following from their strong rationalism, the Mu‘tazila did not accept the idea that God could have human characteristics, so they interpreted anthropomorphic descriptions of God in the Qur’ān as being metaphorical. This interpretive principle inspired further interpretation of Qur’ānic verses and images as metaphorical. The development of discourse on *i‘jāz al-Qur’ān* developed in a milieu marked by debates over rhetorical features of texts, theology (intra-Islamic and inter-religious), and the status of Arabic culture and language. The multi-volume *Mughnī* of ‘Abd al-Jabbār (d. 1025), a Mu‘tazilite contemporary of al-Bāqillānī, also includes sections on *i‘jāz al-Qur’ān*. He rejects *ṣarfā*, the idea that God prevented the Arabs from being able to meet the Qur’ān’s challenge to present something like it, in part because he considered that idea to be in conflict with *āyāt* that state humans and *jinn* cannot rival the Qur’ān. More specifically, he thought the idea of a challenge would be invalidated if God turned people away from the challenge, and furthermore, the implication would be that *ṣarfā* was in itself a miracle rather than actually supporting the Qur’ān’s inimitability.<sup>50</sup> His teacher Abū Hāshim held that *jazāla* (purity of style) and beautiful meanings were the criteria of eloquent speech, but ‘Abd al-Jabbār argued that the arrangement (*tartīb, ḍamm*) of speech was also an essential aspect.<sup>51</sup> He considered speech to be an art and a craft, the pleasing construction and arrangement of

<sup>44</sup> Larkin, “The Inimitability of the Qur’an,” 32. See also Larkin, *Theology of Meaning*, 29.

<sup>45</sup> See Ebrahim Moosa, “Allegory of the Rule (*Hukm*): Law as Simulacrum in Islam?” *History of Religions* 38, no. 1 (August 1998): 11.

<sup>46</sup> Larkin, *Theology of Meaning*, 30-31.

<sup>47</sup> Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, *Abū Tammām and the Poetics of the ‘Abbāsīd Age* (New York: Brill, 1991), 8.

<sup>48</sup> Richard Martin, “Inimitability,” in *Encyclopedia of the Qur’ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe. Brill Online 2011. See the section “Classical theories of *i‘jāz al-Qur’ān*.”

<sup>49</sup> Richard Martin, “The Role of the Baṣrah Mu‘tazilah in Formulating the Doctrine of the Apologetic Miracle,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 39, no. 3 (1980): 175, 181.

<sup>50</sup> Rahman, “Miraculous Nature,” 415.

<sup>51</sup> Rahman, “Miraculous Nature,” 416.

which is a skill “like building, weaving and jewelry-making.”<sup>52</sup> A speaker chooses excellent wording, but the only explanation for the basis of this selection is the speaker’s experience.<sup>53</sup>

Indeed, classical discourse on *i’jāz al-Qur’ān* is closely related to the literary-critical writings that demonstrate how *badī’* was conceived. Both ideas were developed within the same discussions to define and typologize literary devices in Arabic and narrate the history of these figures’ usage within the tradition. In the canonical 10<sup>th</sup>-century treatments of *i’jāz al-Qur’ān*, those of ‘Alī ibn ‘Īsa al-Rummānī, al-Khaṭṭābī, and al-Bāqillānī, authors define the inimitability of the Qur’ān based on several aspects. They included *ṣarfa*, the general unmet Qur’ānic challenge to produce something like itself, the Qur’ān’s talk of *al-ghayb* and future events, the Prophet Muḥammad’s *ummiyya* (generally translated as ‘illiteracy’ but also referring to his lack of access to knowledge of the Abrahamic religious traditions), and the so-called Mysterious Letters (*al-ḥurūf al-manzūma*) that appear at the beginning of some *sūras* of the Qur’ān). But the real focus of these books was on demonstrating the inimitability of the Qur’ān’s superior use of language in contrast to the compositions humans had the ability to produce. One important element of the backdrop was poetry, which Arab culture held in high regard as *dīwān al-‘Arab*, a status that had to be reconciled with the Qur’ān’s literary merit. However, of these three canonical early century *i’jāz* theorists (al-Rummānī, al-Khaṭṭābī, and al-Bāqillānī), only al-Bāqillānī devotes sustained attention to poetry. In the case of al-Khaṭṭābī, his marveling at the wording of the *āyāt* he cites aims to defend their wording against the possible claim that they were imprecise or did not use the best word for a given context or meaning, an aim reminiscent of Ibn Qutayba’s explanation and championing of ‘difficult’ Qur’ānic verses.<sup>54</sup> For al-Khaṭṭābī, the emotive effect and wisdom of the Qur’ān is seen to be a separate testament to its miraculousness, and it does not connect in any direct way to the sound and eloquent wording of particular verses.<sup>55</sup> The use of rhetorical figures is one aspect of this superior language (the one on which al-Rummānī bases his categories of eloquence in his treatise *al-Nukat fī i’jāz al-Qur’ān*), so that lines of poetry are never awarded the highest rank of eloquence in al-Rummānī’s text, whereas the Qur’ān’s verses are always of the highest rank.<sup>56</sup> These writers on *i’jāz* deem the Qur’ān and human language (including poetry) to be assessable using the same criteria of excellence in rhetoric (*balāgha*) and semantics, with the Qur’ān necessarily always holding the place of the highest possible level of eloquence, clarity of expression (*bayān*), and rhetorical excellence (*ḥusn al-bayān*).

The focus on language was in part a result of the idea that the Qur’ān’s inimitability must lie in its very being, and in all of it instead of just parts of it. Other aspects of inimitability that are only located in some verses, like talk about the unseen and the future, and the general idea of the Prophet’s *ummiyya* (“unletteredness”), were not adequate.<sup>57</sup> A related cause was the belief that the Qur’ān was revealed in an Arabic understandable and recognizable to a people who cultivated a consciousness of linguistic qualities, and that the language of the Qur’ān thus

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<sup>52</sup> Larkin, *Theology of Meaning*, 42.

<sup>53</sup> Larkin, *Theology of Meaning*, 42.

<sup>54</sup> Al-Khaṭṭābī, *Bayān i’jāz al-Qur’ān*, 38–54.

<sup>55</sup> Al-Khaṭṭābī, *Bayān*, 70.

<sup>56</sup> Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī ibn ‘Īsa al-Rummānī, *al-Nukat fī i’jāz al-Qur’ān*, in *Thalāth rasā’il fī i’jāz al-Qur’ān*, ed. Muḥammad Khalaf Allāh and Muḥammad Zaghlūl Salām (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1968), 95, 100.

<sup>57</sup> Martin, “Inimitability.”

held a special power, as described in Chapter One. The Qur'ān self-referentially emphasizes this aspect of its own language usage, especially in the so-called Challenge Verses (including Q 17:88, 2:23, 10:37-38, 11:13, and 52:33-34), which dared people to try to come up with the likes of the Qur'ān. This challenge, as mentioned above, was taken to refer specifically to the Qur'ān's linguistic properties. Humans' failure to meet that challenge was to be seen to be a demonstration of the Qur'ān's divine source.<sup>58</sup>

### Extant Scholarship on al-Bāqillānī's *I'jāz al-Qur'ān*

Al-Bāqillānī's text known simply as *Kitāb I'jāz al-Qur'ān* is considered a classic work on the subject.<sup>59</sup> Past scholarship has focused on selected sections and themes of his text entitled *Kitāb I'jāz al-Qur'ān*, bringing to light some of its most influential aspects. However, as I argue here, these studies have focused disproportionately on some parts of the text to the exclusion of others. This selective emphasis and decontextualization has led to a skewed representation of al-Bāqillānī's main points and has indeed skewed our understanding of his view of the phenomenon of *i'jāz al-Qur'ān*.

In general, existing scholarship on al-Bāqillānī's work on *i'jāz al-Qur'ān* highlights the broadest contours of his project and focuses on his treatment of rhetorical figures and poetry.<sup>60</sup> This scholarship often summarizes points that have long been considered the central tenets of *i'jāz al-Qur'ān* doctrine, such as that the Arabs were all unable to meet the Qur'ān's so-called Challenge Verses (*āyāt al-taḥaddī*). Only true experts in Arabic, of whom there are only a few in each generation, can fully appreciate the extent of this Qur'ān's linguistic superiority. For example, in order to appreciate the Qur'ān's perfect word choice in any specific instance, the reader must be aware of the minute differences between this word and other similar ones.<sup>61</sup> The Qur'ān's genre also falls outside of what was previously known to people, as it is neither poetry nor prose, and certainly not *saḥ* (rhymed prose).

Sophia Vasalou tries to contextualize al-Bāqillānī's thesis within current debates of his day and draw his argument out of his text. She writes:

It is possible, if one expects a reiteration of familiar opinions present in other works on the topic, to miss what Bāqillānī is actually saying because of the singularity of his argument: his main point is not that the Qur'ān broke the

<sup>58</sup> Claude Gilliot and Pierre Larcher, "Language and Style of the Qur'ān," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe. Brill Online, 2014. [http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-quran/language-and-style-of-the-quran-EQCOM\\_00104](http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-quran/language-and-style-of-the-quran-EQCOM_00104).

<sup>59</sup> Sophia Vasalou, for example, includes his in the "seminal works" on *i'jāz* composed in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Vasalou, "Miraculous Eloquence," 24. Abdul Aleem says "Bāqillānī's book is reported to be the best ever written on the subject." Abdul Aleem, "Ijazu'l-Qur'an," 75. He also claims it was "the basis for all those who wrote on the subject later." Abdul Aleem, "Ijazu'l-Qur'an," 77.

<sup>60</sup> See, for example, the following sources: Muḥammad Muḥammad Abū Mūsā, *Al-I'jāz al-Balāghī: Dirāsa taḥlīliyya li-turāth ahl al-ilm* (Cairo: Maktabat Wahba, 1984); 'Abd al-'Azīm Ibrāhīm al-Mat'anī, *Al-Majāz fī al-lughā wa-fī al-Qur'ān al-karīm bayn majūzīhi wa-mānī'ihī: 'Arḍ wa-taḥlīl wa-naqd*, vol. 1 (Cairo: Maktabat Wahba, 1985), 275-83.

<sup>61</sup> Abū Mūsā quotes a portion of al-Bāqillānī's text that uses the word *kalima*, which, it is important to note, al-Bāqillānī uses to mean 'phrase' in other portions of his book. However, al-Bāqillānī emphasizes the Qur'ān's nuanced usage on the level of the individual word (*lafẓa*) elsewhere, so the point still stands.

custom by an extraordinary degree of eloquence, but that it broke the custom of the existing literary forms. That is, its miracle was the creation of a new, unidentifiable and inimitable genre of expression.<sup>62</sup>

It is true that al-Bāqillānī's treatise unfolds over the course of discussions spread over several chapters, resulting in overarching themes and theses. One of these points, as Vasalou notes, is the literary form of the Qur'ān. Al-Bāqillānī devotes lengthy chapters to arguing that the Qur'ān is not poetry, not *saḥ*, and not prose. However, as I explore below, al-Bāqillānī's attention to the issue of literary form can productively be understood as contributing to a more particular theological thesis, but in and of itself it is questionable whether the issue of classifying the Qur'ān's literary form is accurately identified as al-Bāqillānī's "main point."

Scholars writing about al-Bāqillānī's *I'jāz al-Qur'ān* tend to go into the most detail about his treatment of literary devices, reflecting al-Bāqillānī's inclusion in genealogies of rhetorical study. In his article "Arabic Literary Criticism in the 10th Century A.D.," G. E. von Grunebaum mentions the uniqueness of al-Bāqillānī's sections on rhetorical devices in the Qur'ān and on the analysis of poems. He characterizes al-Bāqillānī's achievement as follows: "[f]or the first time aesthetic investigation and evaluation have been made the leading aspect in literary criticism of a work of considerable scope."<sup>63</sup>

Abū Mūsā writes that al-Bāqillānī's study revolves around two axes: the first is the identification of literary devices that the Qur'ān uses, and the second is a detailed examination of Qur'ānic verses and *sūras* in order to derive hidden meanings. In one of the sections that gets significant scholarly attention, al-Bāqillānī includes al-Rummānī's ten categories of Qur'ānic inimitability contained in literary devices (though without mentioning al-Rummānī by name) but holds back from agreeing with al-Rummānī's typology. The modern Egyptian scholar 'Abd al-Azīm Ibrāhīm al-Maṭ'anī rightly points out that rather than explaining and commenting on al-Rummānī's typology directly or even analyzing identified examples of *isti'āra* in the Qur'ān, al-Bāqillānī notes in a remark that may be directed at al-Rummānī himself that listing *balāgha* in terms of ten aspects only identifies a small amount of the extant *balāgha*.<sup>64</sup> For al-Bāqillānī, according to these summarizing sources, *naẓm* is farther-reaching than particular images in the form of *isti'āra* or *tashbīh*. *Balāgha* is not limited to such images but is rather found in the entirety of the Qur'ān.

Al-Maṭ'anī goes farther than other scholars in recognizing the nuances of al-Bāqillānī's treatment of literary devices when he notes that al-Bāqillānī does not allow for every instance of *isti'āra* having a part in *i'jāz*: a kind of metaphor that al-Bāqillānī designates "*isti'āra badī'a*" (marvelous or novel metaphor) alone does, a formulation that excludes the likes of dead metaphor and imitative speech. Al-Maṭ'anī takes al-Bāqillānī to mean that he disagrees with the famous saying that figurative language is more expressive than literal language and allusion or periphrasis more expressive than explicit speech, seeing the two modes of expression rather as equal.<sup>65</sup> In this way, al-Bāqillānī ties *i'jāz* and *balāgha* together in a way

<sup>62</sup> Vasalou, "Miraculous Eloquence," 34.

<sup>63</sup> G. E. von Grunebaum, "Arabic Literary Criticism in the 10th Century A. D.," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 61, no. 1 (1941): 52.

<sup>64</sup> Al-Maṭ'anī, *Al-Majāz*, 278.

<sup>65</sup> Al-Maṭ'anī, *Al-Majāz*, 278-79.



that encompasses the whole Qur'ān rather than just select verses where a reader could identify a particular instance of a literary device. Al-Maṭ'anī also claims al-Bāqillānī only theorizes one type of *majāz* (figurative language), which is *isti'āra* (metaphor), as he subsumes some *kināyāt* (allusions) and *tamāthīl* (similes) under its heading, thus coming up with many instances of *isti'āra* in the Qur'ān. He notes that al-Bāqillānī employs the term *badī'* to refer to innovative language use, in the style of his predecessor Ibn al-Mu'tazz. William Thomson also makes note of al-Bāqillānī's distinction between forms of *badī'* that are miraculous and those that can be learned in the context of his summary of the contents of the treatise, but his goal is to review von Grunebaum's translation (see below) rather than analyze al-Bāqillānī's work.<sup>66</sup> Al-Maṭ'anī and Thomson's accounts of al-Bāqillānī's views on literary inimitability reflect a more comprehensive reading of *Kitāb I'jāz al-Qur'ān* than much other secondary scholarship does, but they stop short of providing an analysis of these contents or investigating the logic or ultimate goals of these sections of al-Bāqillānī's treatise. Rather, they present important accounts that should pique the interest of anyone interested in qualitative analyses of types of *badī'* and particularly of figurative language.

Kamal Abu Deeb provides a brief account of al-Bāqillānī's writing on literary *i'jāz*, including several of the points made above.<sup>67</sup> He emphasizes al-Bāqillānī's analysis of poetry aimed at showing poetry's deficiencies, the Qur'ān's invariable eloquence, reliance on the Qur'ān's emotional effect (following Ihsān 'Abbās), and the differentiation of the Qur'ān's form from poetry and *saj'*. He says al-Bāqillānī dismisses the role of *badī'* in Qur'ānic inimitability and that *badī'* can be learned, a view I show requires more nuance in order to be accurate.

Al-Bāqillānī's chapter on *badī'* has indeed garnered the most attention of any part of his book in English-language scholarship. Gustave von Grunebaum's volume, which comprises an introduction and translation of this seventy-page-long section of al-Bāqillānī's book, is an important milestone in the study of *i'jāz al-Qur'ān*, making sections of al-Bāqillānī's treatise available to English-speaking audiences and providing a brief contextualization and analysis of the excerpts he translates.<sup>68</sup> In the chapter of al-Bāqillānī's book that von Grunebaum translates, al-Bāqillānī enumerates dozens of different literary devices, giving examples of each that are sometimes from the Qur'ān and often from poetry and prose. In so doing, he is following the conventions of the genre of typology-based handbooks of literary criticism of the type initiated by Ibn al-Mu'tazz's *Kitāb al-Badī'*.<sup>69</sup>

Von Grunebaum characterizes the tenth century as being distinguished by arguments solidifying the central position of rhetorical excellence in the doctrine of the Qur'ān's inimitability. He argues that what distinguished al-Bāqillānī's contribution among his peers' writings was how complex and methodical it is.<sup>70</sup> He shows that al-Bāqillānī's catalogue of literary figures is not dependent on any single author but bears the most similarity to that of his teacher al-'Askarī, followed by Qudāma b. Ja'far and Ibn al-Mu'tazz, though al-Bāqillānī's

<sup>66</sup> William Thomson, Review of *A Tenth Century Document of Arab Library Theory and Criticism* by Gustave E. von Grunebaum, *Speculum* 28, no. 3 (1953): 622.

<sup>67</sup> Abu Deeb, "Literary Criticism," 363-66.

<sup>68</sup> Von Grunebaum, *Tenth-Century Document*.

<sup>69</sup> This convention developed over time to result in longer and longer lists of literary devices. Heinrichs, "Badī'," 123.

<sup>70</sup> Von Grunebaum, "Introduction," *Tenth-Century Document*, xviii.

treatment of them is more extensive.<sup>71</sup> Von Grunebaum sums up his interpretation of al-Bāqillānī's attitude toward *i'jāz al-Qur'ān* as follows:

[H]e felt the indubitable preeminence of the Koranic style to be no argument in favor of its theological uniqueness. He repeatedly insists on the inability of man to reach the stylistic accomplishment of the Book but he does not propose to erect the *i'jāz* of the Koran on an aesthetic foundation. It would appear that his philosophical training made him uneasy about putting the *i'jāz* in any respect on an empirical basis.<sup>72</sup>

Von Grunebaum also notes the unconventionality of al-Bāqillānī's inclusion of extensive criticism of particular Arabic poems in his effort to show that even the most renowned poetry could not match the level of Qur'ānic style. However, in the realm of literary criticism al-Bāqillānī is "an educated layman" and not a specialist, a classification with which Vasalou also agrees.<sup>73</sup> His approach to Arabic poetry stands out among those of other medieval writers because he undertakes a detailed analysis of particular poems rather than performing criticism only on individual lines or short sections.<sup>74</sup> Analysis of whole poems is important to al-Bāqillānī's argument that the Qur'ān's style is distinguished from human literary production in that it maintains a consistent, unwavering level of excellence in contrast to poetry authored by people, which may have a great line or two but inevitably cannot maintain a very high level of language usage. Nonetheless, von Grunebaum concludes that "Bāqillānī's defective training is visible" in his list of rhetorical figures.<sup>75</sup> Von Grunebaum's translation is both competent and accessible, and it stands as a significant contribution to scholarship on medieval Arabic literary criticism.

While von Grunebaum's focus is clearly on al-Bāqillānī's contribution to literary critical history, other scholars have aimed to summarize and describe his theological positions. J. Bouman in his important work on this aspect of al-Bāqillānī's work sees *Kitāb I'jāz al-Qur'ān* as a response to Mu'tazilite *mutakallimīn* (theologians) and their doctrines concerning the Qur'ān.<sup>76</sup> He draws attention to the debates surrounding the eternity of God's speech and the createdness of Qur'ān in particular.<sup>77</sup> A.S. Tritton, in a larger work on Islamic theology, sums up his conclusions about al-Bāqillānī's bottom line, noting only the following:

The division of the verses and arrangement of the chapters is the work of men. Less than one chapter is not a miracle. Its miraculous character resides in the

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<sup>71</sup> Von Grunebaum, "Introduction," *Tenth-Century Document*, xix and xxi. The polymath Qudāma b. Ja'far al-Kātib al-Baghdādī (d. 922) was from a Baṣran Christian Syriac family and converted to Islam. His writings on figures of speech are found in the introduction to his *Kitāb al-Alfāz* and in his book *Kitāb Naqd al-Shi'r*. S.E. Bonebakker, "Qudāma b. Dja'far al-Kātib al-Baghdādī, Abu 'l-Faradj," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. P. Bearman et al. Brill Online, 2014. [http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam\\_SIM-4478](http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_SIM-4478).

<sup>72</sup> Von Grunebaum, "Introduction," *Tenth-Century Document*, xviii.

<sup>73</sup> Von Grunebaum, "Introduction," *Tenth-Century Document*, xx; Vasalou, "General Trajectories," 36.

<sup>74</sup> Von Grunebaum, "Introduction," *Tenth-Century Document*, xxi.

<sup>75</sup> Von Grunebaum, "Introduction," *Tenth-Century Document*, xxi.

<sup>76</sup> Bouman, *Conflit*, 7-34.

<sup>77</sup> Bouman, *Conflit*, 12-15.

wonderful composition and high degree of eloquence. There is a limit to the excellence of the Koran which God can compose.<sup>78</sup>

This short account of al-Bāqillānī's views on the perceptibility of the miracle takes its content from another particular section of al-Bāqillānī's text, and it sums up only a limited part of al-Bāqillānī's discourse.

Reviewing the secondary scholarship on *Kitāb I'jāz al-Qur'ān* thus reveals the complexity of the text and the inability of a reading limited to one or two sections to convey a global understanding of al-Bāqillānī's contribution to thought on *i'jāz al-Qur'ān*. The accounts of al-Bāqillānī's treatise reviewed here show that there is a widespread perception that the most notable parts of the text are the chapter summarizing *badī'* and analyzing poems at length, because they are new types of inclusions in *i'jāz* discourse. Indeed, the secondary scholarship has recognized the importance of these sections of the text, and this chapter builds on extant work on them in addition to the insightful scholarly work available on the histories of *badī'* and forms of figurative language in medieval Arabo-Islamic culture. These studies largely point to al-Bāqillānī's role in the development of literary criticism, which is an important aim in and of itself, but they should not be taken as accounting for al-Bāqillānī's theological contribution. Nor do they relate his theology to his stylistics, either of these aspects of his thought to his oeuvre at large. Chapter Five draws into the larger context of the book observations made on the basis of these famous sections of *Kitāb I'jāz al-Qur'ān*, in order to reframe and nuance understandings of al-Bāqillānī's scholarly contribution. Based on the sections that have received the most attention, one might conclude that to al-Bāqillānī, rhetoric "seems an adornment of poetical criticism rather than a fundamental viewpoint,"<sup>79</sup> or that *Kitāb I'jāz al-Qur'ān* was a work of literary criticism.<sup>80</sup> I show that when the global perspective of the book is taken into consideration, his thought emerges as much more complex and insightful.

### Al-Bāqillānī's Chapter on *Badī'*

As we have seen, al-Bāqillānī's chapter on *badī'* has been a focal point of scholarly attention on al-Bāqillānī's work, and that chapter has been singled out for translation into English, reflecting and perpetuating the perception that it is a core part of al-Bāqillānī's treatise. That section shows the influence of al-Bāqillānī's predecessor Ibn al-Mu'tazz, but while the latter's goal was to show the extent of the similarities *badī'*-poetry shared with pre-Abbasid poetry and the Qur'ān in their uses of rhetorical figures, scholars of *i'jāz* like al-Bāqillānī have the goal of demonstrating the Qur'ān's superiority in every way that it could be compared to poetry. In his book *Kitāb I'jāz al-Qur'ān*, al-Bāqillānī presents himself as an educated non-specialist in literary theory, as von Grunebaum observed, often referring to 'the experts' in literary studies whose opinions he recounts.<sup>81</sup> Unlike the Mu'tazili theorists of *i'jāz*

<sup>78</sup> A.S. Tritton, "Orthodoxy," *Muslim Theology* (Bristol, UK: Luzac & Company Ltd, 1947), 181.

<sup>79</sup> Von Grunebaum, "Arabic Literary Criticism," 56.

<sup>80</sup> Rahman, "Miraculous Nature," 410.

<sup>81</sup> The first instance of al-Bāqillānī's citing experts of literary criticism occurs at the very beginning of the chapter, and he continually cites them. Al-Bāqillānī, *I'jāz*, 101. See also Martin, "Inimitability."

such as al-Rummānī (whose *risāla* on *i'jāz al-Qur'ān* al-Bāqillānī read and addressed in his *Kitāb I'jāz al-Qur'ān*),<sup>82</sup> however, al-Bāqillānī ultimately denied that the theological ground of *i'jāz* can be established by its linguistic superiority. This conclusion becomes apparent in the last pages of al-Bāqillānī's chapter on *badī'*, as Von Grunebaum notes.<sup>83</sup> Despite this conclusion, al-Bāqillānī still devoted a substantial chapter to *badī'* and long sections to pre-Islamic and Islamic-era poetry, and a full understanding of what role they play in his book can only result from reading sections of the treatise not included in the chapters Von Grunebaum translates.

Al-Bāqillānī's book *Kitāb I'jāz al-Qur'ān* is divided into 19 chapters, in addition to an introduction and conclusion. Though von Grunebaum finds al-Bāqillānī's treatise to be more "elaborate and systematic" than his predecessors' writing on the topic, the book's table of contents shows that al-Bāqillānī's treatment of any given subject is scattered throughout different sections of his various chapters, while at some points he seems to cover the same terrain more than once, albeit from different angles. While it is difficult, for these reasons, to provide an overview of al-Bāqillānī's book, it is still useful to keep in mind the general course that his writing takes. Therefore, I have provided a list of the chapter titles al-Bāqillānī's editor uses in lieu of a summary of the topics he covers, with the reservation that many chapters contain sections on subjects not alluded to in the chapter headings.

#### Author's introduction

1. Chapter on the Qur'ān as the prophetic miracle of Muḥammad (PBUH)
2. Chapter clarifying the nature of indications of the Qur'ān being miraculous
3. Chapter on all aspects of the inimitability of the Qur'ān
4. Chapter explaining the aspects of the inimitability of the Qur'ān that have been presented
5. Chapter negating [the presence of] poetry in the Qur'ān
6. Chapter negating [the presence of] *saj'* in the Qur'ān
7. Chapter mentioning rhetorical figures [*badī'*] in speech
8. Chapter on how to contemplate the inimitability of the Qur'ān
9. Section clarifying whether poetry is more eloquent than speeches and more formidable than treatises
10. Chapter responding to those who claim that the inability of the people of the age of prophecy to produce a likeness of the Qur'ān [*mu'āraḍat al-Qur'ān*] and come up with something like it does not entail the inability of the people of subsequent eras
11. Chapter on the Challenge, clarifying that it may be necessary knowledge about the Qur'ān's being inimitable, and it may be acquired knowledge
12. Chapter on the [minimum] amount [in which] the inimitable [is perceptible] in the Qur'ān, and clarification of the difference between the Ash'arites and Mu'tazilites in that regard
13. Chapter on whether knowledge of the inimitability of the Qur'ān is necessary or acquired

<sup>82</sup> Al-Bāqillānī summarizes al-Rummānī's ten categories of *balāgha*. Al-Bāqillānī, *I'jāz*, 396-429.

<sup>83</sup> Von Grunebaum, "Introduction," xviii-xix.

14. Chapter on whether the inimitability is related to the Mysterious Letters, or eternal internal speech, or something else, and controversy about this [subject]
  15. Chapter describing the aspects of eloquence [*balāgha*], with examples of it
  16. Chapter clarifying the reality of the inimitable, and the exclusiveness of God Almighty's unique capacity for the inimitable, which indicates the Prophet's veracity, and that he went beyond the customs of humans
  17. Chapter on the speech of the Prophet (PBUH), and matters related to inimitability
  18. Chapter clarifying that a condition of inimitability is for it to be known that the one to whom it appeared brought it
  19. Chapter clarifying that what preceded in the way of making clear that the Qur'ān's being inimitable suffices and convinces despite its conciseness, and that elaborating on it is a type of weakness that has no benefit
- A concluding word by al-Bāqillānī, including a description of the Holy Qur'ān, and narrative on the types of eloquence and *badī'* that are realized in it, and then description of poetry and the difference between them [i.e. Qur'ān and poetry]

Within these chapters, al-Bāqillānī's book introduces and then continually returns to important issues over the course of the book, focusing on the Qur'ān's stylistic aspects with extended references to poetry and prose, including *saj'* (rhymed prose) and stylistic analyses of particular poems. He often cites his contemporaries' understandings of the Qur'ān's inimitability, while sometimes taking a position about these arguments' plausibility.<sup>84</sup>

As al-Bāqillānī's phrasing implies, he considers himself to be an outsider to literary critical discourse. If he was not an expert in the field, and his ultimate point was (as I argue) not the identification of *badī'* in the Qur'ān, we must address the question of why he included a lengthy chapter on *badī'*. I suggest that one important effect of this chapter was the demonstration that al-Bāqillānī was competent to participate in *badī'*-related discourse and make educated, trustworthy analysis of the relationship of Qur'ānic language to literary features of language. Abu Deeb notes that as early as Ibn Sallām (d. c. 232/847), there is evidence that the literary critic in Arab culture "was seen as a special kind of agent, performing an act which required a special kind of knowledge."<sup>85</sup> The critic's role was considered to be like "the role of any other professional master in any other profession or craft (*ṣinā'ah*)," and voicing this dominant attitude, al-Āmidī later suggested non-specialists leave evaluation and judgment of poetry to the specialists.<sup>86</sup> Prefacing analysis of particular literary figures with a chapter that enumerates and exemplifies *badī'* ensures his audience is familiar

<sup>84</sup> The logic of the various opinions that al-Bāqillānī maintains has been critiqued by some scholars. The modern Egyptian intellectual Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, for instance, points out that al-Bāqillānī rejects the doctrine of *ṣarfā*, but this position is in tension with the fact that as an Ash'arī, al-Bāqillānī also holds that the Qur'ān is eternal (*qadīm*) and that people cannot understand it through the use of logic alone, so people cannot know how to understand the secret of its inimitability, and the Qur'ān is thus essentially unlike humans' discourse. In this way humans are prevented from knowing how to 'come up with something like' the Qur'ān or its *sūras*. See Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-naṣṣ* (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-ʿArabī, 1994), 142.

<sup>85</sup> Abu Deeb, "Literary Criticism," 348.

<sup>86</sup> Abu Deeb, "Literary Criticism," 348. See especially the section entitled "The authority of the critic."

with this subject matter, regardless of its background, and at once demonstrates al-Bāqillānī's competence to write about rhetorical and literary technical matter and to evaluate poetry. His participation in rhetorical discourse best understood not as an isolated undertaking but as one integral component of his multifaceted intellectual project of bringing together separate disciplines and synthesizing Islamic thought. Even though he does not claim to be a complete insider to the profession, he shows his understanding of the critics' methods and criteria for literary judgments and legitimizes his authority to participate in literary critical judgment. It is through participation in this discourse that al-Bāqillānī theorizes the important difference he sees between rhetorical devices that participate in Qur'ānic inimitability and surface-level ornamentation that does not. Discourse on the literary and rhetorical aspect of the Qur'ān's inimitability is framed as a response to literary critical discussion about *badī'*, and al-Bāqillānī's chapter on *badī'* provides a foundation for the sections of his book concerned with expounding on the Qur'ān's literary and rhetorical inimitability.

Another indication of the purpose of the chapter on *badī'* is its placement in *Kitāb I'jāz al-Qur'ān*. It follows earlier chapters on the issue of the Qur'ān's miraculousness and proofs of this status, as well as chapters denying the presence of poetry and *saj'* in the Qur'ān. It comes before al-Bāqillānī's nuanced analysis of, and differentiation between, rhetorical figures, which is one part of the text that includes unprecedented ideas in *i'jāz* discourse. Near the beginning of the chapter on *badī'*, al-Bāqillānī writes: "There are many kinds [*turuq*] of *badī'* in poetry, and we have transmitted all of them, so that you may be guided by them in what follows."<sup>87</sup> This stated purpose suggests that the cataloguing of *badī'* is a guide, a manual to prepare readers for later references to the rhetorical figures laid out in the chapter on *badī'*. These suggestions about the role of the chapter on *badī'* in the treatise indicate it was not intended as an original contribution by itself. It should thus be studied in the context of the entire treatise and with its placement in mind.

Al-Bāqillānī begins his "Chapter mentioning rhetorical figures [*badī'*] in speech" with a brief description of the chapter's contents and a definition of *badī'* that bears some similarity to the one by Ibn al-Mu'tazz cited earlier:

If someone asks: "Can the Qur'ān's inimitability be known by way of the *badī'* [rhetorical figures] it contains?" It is said [in response]: The experts [*ahl al-ṣan'a*] and those who have written on that topic mentioned as being among *badī'* phrases we will mention. Then we will elucidate what they asked about, so that the discourse will proffer a clarified matter and a firmly illustrated topic.

The [experts] mentioned that among the *badī'* in the Qur'ān [are the following verses] said by God Almighty: "Lower to them the wing of humility" [Q 17:24], "Indeed, it is in the Mother of the Book, in Our presence, exalted, wise" [Q 43:4], "and the head lit up with white" [Q 19:4], "A sign for them is also the night. We strip the day from it, and behold, they are in darkness" [Q 36:37], "or the

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<sup>87</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I'jāz*, 106.

punishment of a barren day comes to them” [Q 22:55], and “light upon light” [Q 24:35].<sup>88</sup>

The chapter begins in the classic *jadāl* (argument) style that reflects the debate culture of al-Bāqillānī’s intellectual environment. Al-Bāqillānī continues with a number of further examples of *badī’*, using that term to refer to instantiations of literary devices, prefacing each set with a phrase to the effect of: “They [i.e. the experts] record figurative speech . . .,” emphasizing that in this part of the chapter he is merely compiling what has been said about *badī’* and where it is found; he is not one of these experts. The categories of discourse where *badī’* is found are as follows: the Qur’ān; Qur’ānic sections on “comprehensive words of wisdom” (*al-kalimāt al-jāmi’a al-ḥakīma*); prophetic *ḥadīth*; *ḥadīth* of the Companions; Umayyad political discourse; Bedouin speech; and poetry. These examples are all given before al-Bāqillānī begins his taxonomy of different types of rhetorical figures and giving particular examples of them; the aim of this beginning section thus appears to be introducing *badī’* in general and locating it in various discourses. It also makes clear that *badī’* is not found only in the Qur’ān and literature but in ordinary speech as well. This definition expands the meaning of the term beyond Ibn al-Mu’tazz’s usage in *Kitāb al-Badī’*, where it refers specifically to rhetorical devices being used in poetry and texts of an elevated register.<sup>89</sup> Al-Bāqillānī thus uses the term *badī’* according to its later, reified technical meaning of ‘rhetorical/literary figures’ in this introductory section.

Taking a closer look at what rhetorical figures are exemplified in these initial examples, we find that all of them include metaphors: the wing of humility, the Mother of the Book, a head lit up with white, stripping the day of night, a barren day, and light upon light. The last example is so abbreviated as to exclude the context of the phrase provided in the rest of the verse, known within the exegetical tradition as Āyat al-Nūr (‘the light verse’), which is based on an extended string of similes.<sup>90</sup> The author may be evoking the whole *āya*, citing only one phrase from it in order to bring the whole verse to the reader’s mind, or he may have in mind that specifically this part of Āyat al-Nūr contains *badī’*, suggesting that only figuratively can one light be *upon* another light.

Al-Bāqillānī follows this list with other Qur’ānic verses that he says “may have *badī’*.”<sup>91</sup> The first location where *badī’* may be is “comprehensive words of wisdom” (*al-kalimāt al-jāmi’a al-ḥakīma*). The example he provides is “in retaliation is life for you” [Q 2:179],<sup>92</sup> and which al-Rummānī cites as an example of *ījāz* (economy),<sup>93</sup> but is also an example of figurative speech (and later cited by al-Bāqillānī as *muṭābaqa*, or antithesis, too). This verse may be a particularly clear example because it contains striking rhetorical eloquence in a juridically-relevant context. At first glance it might seem enigmatic for retaliation to contain ‘life,’ and not to be literally true in a straightforward way; the phrase invites contemplation and opens up a

<sup>88</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I’jāz*, 101.

<sup>89</sup> Stetkevych, “Toward a Redefinition,” 2.

<sup>90</sup> Q 24:35 reads as follows: “God is the light of the heavens and the earth. The likeness of God’s light is like a niche within which is a lamp, the lamp is within glass, the glass as if it were a pearly star lit from a blessed olive tree, neither eastern nor western, whose oil would almost glow even if untouched by fire. Light upon light. God guides to God’s light whomever God wills. And God gives examples to the people, and God is knowing of all things.”

<sup>91</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I’jāz*, 102.

<sup>92</sup> “*Wa-lakum fī al-qīṣāṣ ḥayāt.*”

<sup>93</sup> It is specifically cited as an example of “brevity without elision.” Al-Rummānī, *Nukat*, 77.

deeper meaning. Al-Ṭabarī says there is dispute about the interpretation of the phrase, and he cites reports that interpret it to be referring to the category of *qiṣāṣ* punishment as an ‘exemplary punishment’ that serves as a deterrent (*nakāl*) that inspires fear in would-be criminals, thus preserving life.<sup>94</sup> ‘Eloquent wordings’ (*al-alfāz al-faṣīḥa*) may also contain *badī‘*, as in the verse phrase “So when they despaired of him, they withdrew [to confer] privately” [Q 12:80]. The designation ‘eloquent wordings’ is vague, and al-Bāqillānī does not cite it as an example of a rhetorical device anywhere else in the treatise, but one could consider this verse to be an example of conciseness (*ījāz*), perhaps since it expresses the actions taken in it swiftly. Lastly, *badī‘* may be perceived in “the utterances of the divine” [*al-alfāz al-ilāhiyya*]. This phrase may appear grammatically ambiguous, because the entire Qur’ān is, after all, divine speech. Al-Bāqillānī clarifies the category with *āyāt*: “And to [God] all things [belong]” [Q 27:91], “And what grace you have is from God” [Q 16:53], and “To whom does sovereignty [belong] on this day? To God, the One, the Vanquishing” [Q 40:16]. These are all utterances *about* the divine. They do not contain any apparent metaphors, but they are all short phrases that concisely express the greatness of God’s power in syntactically elliptical form. The types of *badī‘* he cites are not standard *badī‘*-related terms or designations of literary devices. In this sub-section the term *badī‘* does not mean ‘literary/rhetorical devices’ but rather ‘marvelous wording.’

Next, al-Bāqillānī lists a variety of *aḥādīth* (prophetic reports) that contain *badī‘*, with no accompanying designation of types of *badī‘* or explanations of the *aḥādīth*.<sup>95</sup> Figurative language can be identified in most or all of these examples, and some include additional rhetorical figures. Perhaps it is this presence of multiple rhetorical figures that led al-Bāqillānī to consider them good examples. While ‘the path of God’ was a dead metaphor, pairing it with the idea of holding onto the reins of one’s horse on this path revitalizes its power and extends the mapping of a life guided by God onto the domain of a road or journey.<sup>96</sup> The idea of washing off one’s sin is also a metaphor wherein virtue is mapped onto bodily cleanliness, though one that is common to religious thought and ritual, and the line also includes a trait al-Rummānī would place in *bāb al-fawāṣil* (section on verse-endings) since its endings are alike in sound (*tawbatī* ‘repentance’ and *ḥawbatī* ‘sin’).<sup>97</sup> The ‘sickness of the nations’ *ḥadīth* includes another metaphor: “these are the ‘shavers’ of religion, not the shavers of hair.”<sup>98</sup> The next example is a simile: “People are like 100 camels among which you do not find one riding-beast.”<sup>99</sup> In Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq’s saying “Cling to death, so you will be granted life” is *muṭābaqa* (antithesis), but the utterance also includes a figurative image that concretizes death,<sup>100</sup> and “Flee from honor, honor will follow you” can be said to have *ījāz* and *takrār* (repetition) as well as figurative language.<sup>101</sup> “Deal kindly with those who petition (*arḡhib rāḡhibahum*), and untie

<sup>94</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān*, vol. 3 (Shākir ed.), 382-83.

<sup>95</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I‘jāz*, 102.

<sup>96</sup> The line is from a *ḥadīth* (prophetic report): “The best of people is the man who holds onto the reins of his horse in the path of God; whenever he hears a cry, he hastens to it.” Cited in al-Bāqillānī, *I‘jāz*, 102.

<sup>97</sup> This line is also a *ḥadīth*: “May our Lord accept my repentance and wash away my sin.” Cited in al-Bāqillānī, *I‘jāz*, 102.

<sup>98</sup> He cites from another prophetic *ḥadīth*: “The sickness of the nations before you has come to you: jealousy and hatred; these are the ‘shavers’ of religion, not the ‘shavers’ of hair.” Cited in al-Bāqillānī, *I‘jāz*, 103.

<sup>99</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I‘jāz*, 103.

<sup>100</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I‘jāz*, 103-04.

<sup>101</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I‘jāz*, 104.



the knot of fear for them” has *taṣrīf* (transformation of a root into various *awzān*, or word-forms) and a genitive metaphor (‘knot of fear’).<sup>102</sup> The examples cited in al-Bāqillānī’s introductory explanation of *badī‘* are clear cases of literary and rhetorical effects and do not raise the question of polemical inclusions like al-Bāqillānī’s list of *āyāt* containing *majāz* in his *Taqrīb* (see Chapter Three).

The preponderance of metaphor in this set of examples lends support to Heinrichs’ assertion that there is an especially close connection between *badī‘* and *isti‘āra*. As in the case of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s examples, metaphor is the archetypical example of *badī‘*. This is interesting to observe because prototypes of a category do not necessarily stay the same over time; what is salient in one cultural milieu may not be in a different context. In this case, metaphor seems to have remained strongly tied to the idea of *badī‘*. Recall, however, that al-Bāqillānī was directly influenced by Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s treatise, both in his general thought and in his use of examples: almost all of the examples cited in al-Bāqillānī are also used by Ibn al-Mu‘tazz. Therefore, it is important to consider the possibility that al-Bāqillānī’s examples reflect an earlier conception of *badī‘* and do not reflect the conception current at his time. However, other components of al-Bāqillānī’s treatment of *badī‘* still support the notion that *badī‘* and *isti‘āra* were connected for him, and Chapter Five demonstrates the ways in which he furthers the intertwining of these two concepts.

Al-Bāqillānī’s self-designated status as a non-expert on literary theory allows him to cite examples of *badī‘* in the Qur’ān that reflect a broader, more intuitive sense of what the term signifies—senses that cover both the connotations of ‘marvelous, innovative speech’ and ‘literary devices.’ Many of these examples are pithy, aphoristic phrases. They demonstrate ‘beautiful speech’ in general without including particular figures that fit into al-Bāqillānī’s subsequent typology. This observation indicates an understanding of *badī‘* among educated non-specialists as designating a general super-ordinate category of eloquent speech. Al-Bāqillānī does not label the sentences here as belonging to particular categories of *badī‘*, which has the effect of framing this section as presenting generally eloquent and pithy phrases from the Qur’ān instead of emphasizing the technical differences between different rhetorical figures. This non-technical usage of *badī‘* has the sense of ‘excellent phrasing,’ in which metaphor is prominent but not necessarily always present.

Al-Bāqillānī’s chapter proceeds to list a large number of categories of *badī‘* that are found in poetry and give examples of each. Von Grunebaum counts 34 in all, showing that most of al-Bāqillānī’s categories overlap with those delineated by al-‘Askarī’s taxonomy and some with Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s. The section begins with *isti‘āra*, another mark of metaphor’s status as prototype:

There are many kinds [*turuq*] of *badī‘* in poetry, and we have transmitted all of them, so that you may be guided by them in what follows. Among them is Imru’ al-Qays’ saying:

“I went out in the morning, while the birds [still] were in their nests, on a short-haired [riding beast], a shackler of wild animals, and huge

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<sup>102</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I‘jāz*, 104.

His phrase ‘shackler of wild animals’ is, for [the critics], *badī‘* and *isti‘āra*, and they see it as being among the honorable phrases. He meant by that [phrase] that when he sent this horse to hunt, [the horse] became a shackle for [the animals], and they were like the shackled in terms of the speed of [the horse’s] fetching them.<sup>103</sup>

In this usage of the term *badī‘*, the sense of ‘rhetorical device’ is present with the close association with *isti‘āra* (again). The basis of metaphor is implicitly theorized as a salient likeness (i.e., the speed of the horse is like a shackle). However, the more general sense of the word *badī‘* (marvelous, innovative) is also pronounced here, as the second part of the sentence reinforces. Al-Bāqillānī then provides several examples of poets’ imitations of this phrase (‘the shackle of x’), demonstrating the intertextual tradition through which the famous line became the basis for extensive metaphorical mapping. In this sense, Imru’ al-Qays’ line is original and wonderfully eloquent, and the poets’ recognition of this status led to its use as a basis for later variations on the originary poetic metaphor in tribute to its image.

Al-Bāqillānī recounts that the critics cite Imru’ al-Qays’ line of poetry as an instance of metaphor, but he adds:

[S]ome of the experts [*ahl al-ṣan‘a*] called it by another name, and put it in the chapter on implication [*irdāf*, lit. ‘causing to follow’], which is when the poet wants to indicate an idea, and he does not provide the word [*lafẓ*] that indicates that idea, but rather a word that follows from it [i.e. is related by association: *tābi‘ lahu wa-irdāf*].<sup>104</sup>

By explaining the link between *isti‘āra* and *irdāf*, al-Bāqillānī hints at the logic behind stylistic classifications in a way that opens up an account of entailment. Al-Bāqillānī only discusses this other category, *irdāf*, here in relation to *isti‘āra*. The fact that he does not list it as a type of *badī‘* or include all of his predecessors’ categories of *badī‘*, without taking issue with the categories he does not include, may indicate his own subjective judgment about legitimate types of *badī‘* or may simply be a result of al-Bāqillānī’s stated disclaimer that he did not aim to be meticulously comprehensive in his list.

Before ending the section on *isti‘āra*, al-Bāqillānī gives a few more examples of lines of poetry “like it” [*mithlahu*], presumably metaphors that share in possessing the quality of intimation, starting with another line by Imru’ al-Qays:

“*She sleeps late in the morning, not girding herself in work-clothes.*”<sup>105</sup>

Explaining this line, which is also very famous and widely cited, al-Bāqillānī says: “The poet intends [to show] her affluence by saying ‘sleeping in the morning.’”<sup>106</sup> It may be literally true that she sleeps in and does not wear working-clothes, but the point is to indicate the woman’s social status eloquently, indicating her wealthiness through telling details. Some scholars, like

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<sup>103</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I‘jāz*, 106-07.

<sup>104</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I‘jāz*, 108.

<sup>105</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I‘jāz*, 108.

<sup>106</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I‘jāz*, 108.

al-Jurjānī, would not classify this usage as metaphor of either the ‘old’ or ‘new’ type at all, because it does not include any image that is not literally true. Rather, they would label it a *kināya*: a statement that is literally true but whose importance lies in its indication of a larger idea.<sup>107</sup> Sleeping late and not wearing work clothes are important characteristics because they speak to the woman’s affluence. However, the presence of several examples like this line and al-Bāqillānī’s comment that critics disagreed about how to categorize this type of image may be a sign that the boundaries of the category of *isti‘āra* were still somewhat unstable or malleable. In the sections where al-Bāqillānī gives examples of it, he cites metaphors that are both ‘borrowings’ and ones that are based in a comparison. It was al-Jurjānī who later theorized and elaborated on the distinction between the categories of metaphor with great precision.<sup>108</sup>

The section ends: “The [experts] put in this category what we previously mentioned from the Qur’ān: ‘And my head is lit up with white’ [19:4], and ‘Lower to them the wing of humility out of compassion’ [17:24].<sup>109</sup> It is interesting that in comparison to the plethora of lines of poetry al-Bāqillānī cites, there are only two verses from the Qur’ān added at the end of his exposition of *isti‘āra*. In contrast, al-Rummānī’s section on *isti‘āra* in the Qur’ān is lengthy, a feature it is tempting to connect to his Mu‘tazilite identity and the Mu‘tazilite emphasis on reading the Qur’ān metaphorically. Al-Bāqillānī’s Ash‘arite identity, however, does not stop him from identifying verses containing *isti‘āra* here and *majāz* in his *Taqrīb*, where even Qur’ānic descriptions of God’s actions are cited as having a *majāzī* aspect (see Chapter 3). Al-Bāqillānī does not repeat here the other Qur’ānic examples cited at the beginning of the chapter (such as ‘the Mother of the Book’). However, in all these instances, he does not explain the examples, again in contrast to al-Rummānī, who in the case of the first one cited here, spells out the metaphorical nature of the verse explicitly:

The origin of being lit up [*ishti‘āl*] is fire, and in this place it is more eloquent [than simply saying the hair was white]. Its [i.e. the situation’s] truth [*ḥaqīqatuhu*, i.e. the literal meaning] is the abundance of whiteness on the head [*kathrat shayb al-ra’s*] except that the abundance, when it increased quickly, became in its spreading and quickness like the lighting up of fire.<sup>110</sup>

Al-Bāqillānī’s placement of *isti‘āra* as first in his list of rhetorical figures could be due to convention (a ‘trace’ of earlier critics’ connection of *isti‘āra* with *badī‘*) or to a felt connection (by al-Bāqillānī himself) between *badī‘* and *isti‘āra* like the one Heinrichs describes. Al-Bāqillānī does not broach the subject of anthropomorphism here or in other parts of his treatise that deal with figurative language in the Qur’ān (as I show in Chapter Five), though anthropomorphism of the divine was generally a topic of concern for Ash‘arīs and other non-Mu‘tazilī groups that did not have recourse to a heavy emphasis on metaphorical and

<sup>107</sup> ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī, *Dalā’il al-i‘jāz*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Shākir (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 1995), 66. See also Larkin, *Theology of Meaning*, 86-87.

<sup>108</sup> Larkin, *Theology of Meaning*, 77-83.

<sup>109</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I‘jāz*, 109.

<sup>110</sup> Al-Rummānī, *Nukat*, 88.

allegorical understandings of Qur'ānic verses that seem to anthropomorphize the Divine.<sup>111</sup> I also noted in Chapter Three that al-Bāqillānī avoided addressing the question of anthropomorphism in the *Taqrīb* when he theorized *majāz* and gave Qur'ānic examples of it. Elsewhere, al-Bāqillānī supports the doctrine of *bi-lā kayfa* ('without [knowing] how'), which is a way of avoiding this conundrum (as al-Bāqillānī also does here, by remaining silent on the topic). The so-called *bi-lā kayfa* doctrine, associated most strongly with Ḥanbalism but also espoused by other theologians, held that humans must accept the Qur'ān's pronouncements on God without knowing in what way (literally or metaphorically) they are true.<sup>112</sup> Though this issue is not discussed here, understanding the Qur'ān as being uncreated and coeternal with God may necessitate a special explanation of the concept 'the Mother of the Book,' which could otherwise be read as a personification of the Qur'ān. Can the Qur'ān have a mother if it was never created? Can something that was never 'born' have a mother? It is characteristic, though disappointing, that al-Bāqillānī does not explain the metaphor and explore such questions. Considering the term *umm al-kitāb* to be a metaphor (in the way of the Mu'tazilites, and as al-Bāqillānī does here) excludes a literal reading but does not explain the specific sense in which it should be understood. The examples of *isti'āra* al-Bāqillānī gives here do not overlap at all with the examples of *majāz* he lists in *al-Taqrīb* (see Chapter Three), but they do not seem to differ in any respects with regard to the literary devices they include. As suggested above, this chapter on *badī'* does not appear to be a platform for al-Bāqillānī's own intellectual arguments but rather a rote explanatory listing of rhetorical and literary devices, so it is not the place for making risky new assertions about which Qur'ānic verses contain figurative language. Rather, the list here is straightforward. His goal is not to challenge which Qur'ānic utterances are figurative.

The next type of *badī'* al-Bāqillānī mentions is *tashbīh* (simile, likening), and he ties it to *isti'āra*, suggesting that like al-Rummānī he considered there to be a relationship between *isti'āra* and *tashbīh*. Al-Bāqillānī opens with two lines of poetry by Imru' al-Qays (again), and this explanation:

They [i.e. the experts] consider marvelous [*istabda'ū*] the comparison of two things with two other things, in terms of the quality of its division [*taqṣīm*]. They claim that the best of this [*tashbīh*] that exists by the Moderns is Bashshār's saying:

“As if the dust ploughed up above their heads and our swords were a night whose stars were thrown down.”<sup>113</sup>

Al-Bāqillānī goes on to rank Imru' al-Qays' sound 'division' (i.e., the arrangement of pairs of items to liken to each other in a two-part simile) as being superior to that of the pioneer of the *badī'* movement Bashshār ibn Burd.<sup>114</sup> By consistently championing Imru' al-Qays as the most

<sup>111</sup> Livnat Holtzman, "Anthropomorphism," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., ed. Kate Fleet et al. [http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=ei3\\_COM-23759](http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=ei3_COM-23759).

<sup>112</sup> Binyamin Abrahamov, "The 'Bi-lā Kayfa' Doctrine and its Foundations in Islamic Theology," *Arabica* 42, fasc. 3 (November 1995): 367.

<sup>113</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I'jāz*, 110.

<sup>114</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I'jāz*, 110.

revered poet and criticizing Bashshār ibn Burd in comparison, al-Bāqillānī is inserting himself into the contemporary debate about whether the Ancient or Modern (*badīʿ*) poets were preferable, siding with the Ancients. His ultimate point, though, is that neither the Ancient nor the Modern poets were capable of composing poetry of a *consistently* superior level.

Each example of *tashbīh* that al-Bāqillānī cites includes the particle ‘*ka*’ (‘like,’ ‘as’), but like al-Jurjānī after him, he does not distinguish between *istiʿāra* and *tashbīh* on the basis of whether ‘*ka*’ is used. The first observation of note is that here *badīʿ* refers to the use of a simile by an Ancient poet. This usage accords with an understanding of the term as neither an *istiʿāra* nor an ‘innovation’ per se since it is found among the pre-Islamic poets, but rather in accordance with the ‘technical’ meaning of a rhetorical figure. Al-Bāqillānī provides two examples of *tashbīh* from the Qurʾān and then returns to give more examples that he says are *al-badīʿ fī al-istiʿāra*, an interesting usage that, like one discussed above, ties *istiʿāra* to *badīʿ* (in the technical sense) and uses *badīʿ* in both of the different senses I have been discussing, ‘marvelous’ and ‘innovative.’ Some of the examples here include the particle ‘*ka*’, and he does not indicate any distinction between those that have ‘*ka*’ and those that do not.<sup>115</sup> Thus, al-Bāqillānī does not seem to have a sharp differentiation between *istiʿāra* and *tashbīh* in the way that the words ‘metaphor’ and ‘simile’ are normatively distinguished in English. Lastly he says that *istiʿāra* in the Qurʾān is plentiful, providing a few more cases of it. The mixing of what was previously labeled *istiʿāra* with what had been called *tashbīh* earlier in the section is notable, and it is a good example of Heinrichs’ observation that *istiʿāra* was being pushed in the direction of *tashbīh*.<sup>116</sup> Particularly relevant is Heinrichs’ observation that *istiʿāra* was used in previous Qurʾānic hermeneutics “to denote any figurative use of a word, whether metaphor or metonymy,” and al-Rummānī narrowed it down to metaphor alone.<sup>117</sup> It is interesting that *istiʿāra* and *tashbīh* are among the only sections for which al-Bāqillānī does not give a definition. Perhaps this is due to widespread understanding of them, also a reason to place them at the beginning of his list of *badīʿ* terms. There is a marked change from the way Ibn al-Muʿtazz sometimes uses the word *istiʿāra* to mean ‘a borrowing,’ which was akin to the usage of the verbal noun (*maṣḍar*) of the verb ‘to borrow’ in ordinary (non literary-critical) language. In his introduction to *Kitāb al-Badīʿ*, following a line of what he calls *al-shiʿr al-badīʿ*, Ibn al-Muʿtazz calls it “the borrowing (*istiʿārah*) of a concept, for something in connection with which it has not been known,”<sup>118</sup> and to read the first phrase more literally, “the borrowing of a word for something. . . [*istiʿārat al-kalima li-shayʾ*].”<sup>119</sup> The latter part of Ibn al-Muʿtazz’s definition, “for something in connection with which it has not been known,” is relevant to the verse as *badīʿ* in the sense of ‘new, innovative,’ a sense which is still operative in Ibn al-Muʿtazz’s adjectival usage of it. In al-Bāqillānī, writing a century later but still under the

<sup>115</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Iʿjāz*, 110-17.

<sup>116</sup> He cites three reasons for this development at this point in history: the new understanding of all metaphor as being based on comparison and similarity, the initial use of the term *istiʿāra* within the vocabulary of Qurʾānic hermeneutics to mean ‘metaphor’ and ‘metonymy’ until al-Rummānī associated *istiʿāra* with *tashbīh*, and ‘Abbasid poetry’s shorthand references to common metaphors, like that of ‘rose’ standing for ‘cheek.’ See Heinrichs, “*Istiʿārah* and *Badīʿ*,” 184-87.

<sup>117</sup> Heinrichs, “*Istiʿārah* and *Badīʿ*,” 186.

<sup>118</sup> Heinrichs, “*Istiʿārah* and *badīʿ*,” 190.

<sup>119</sup> Ibn al-Muʿtazz, *Kitāb al-Badīʿ*, 2.

influence of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz, *isti‘āra* is no longer a word that directly evokes the sense of ‘borrowing.’ The term *badī‘*, too, is now used in a reified nominal way rather than adjectivally; we find it in phrases like ‘the quality of *badī‘*’ (*ṣifat al-badī‘*), ‘among the *badī‘* in the Qur’ān’ (*min al-badī‘ fī-l-Qur’ān*), and ‘they mention as [examples of] *badī‘*’ (*yadhkurūn min al-badī‘*).<sup>120</sup> Al-Bāqillānī’s work attests to a more general usage than what Ibn al-Mu‘tazz claimed: that the term *badī‘* in the sense of a literary style was only known to specialists in literary criticism.<sup>121</sup> The two terms have become reified, now being used as a technical label for poetry and prose having particular characteristics, though this does not mean the definitions of the terms have necessarily become clear and consistent. Al-Rummānī, writing slightly earlier, also uses the term *isti‘āra* in a way that reflects a conception of it as a reified concept, and he does not use the word *badī‘* at all, referring to his sections on rhetorical devices as encompassing different types of *balāgha*, emphasizing their overall role in the absolutely elevated level of the Qur’ān’s style. In contrast to the positive connotations that *balāgha* (rhetoric, eloquence) and *ḥusn al-balāgha* (good rhetoric) have, and the sense they have of being attached to a text having an overall quality of stylistic excellence (illustrated by the examples al-Rummānī provides), the word *badī‘* can be used either positively or negatively (though always positively when al-Bāqillānī applies it to the Qur’ān) and moves between general usage and that of a more technical term referring to precisely located characteristics that a particular phrase in a text can have.

Al-Bāqillānī goes on to discuss *mumāthala* (which van Grunebaum translates as ‘similization’), which he classifies as a type of *isti‘āra*. In *mumāthala*, the author chooses words that ‘point to’ an idea by way of a *mathal*. The word *mathal* came to mean ‘likeness’ (and elsewhere means ‘parable’ or ‘aphorism’), but al-Bāqillānī’s application of the term echoes the early use of the term *mathal* to denote metaphor, in a surprisingly late usage of this early meaning.<sup>122</sup> One of the manuscripts of al-Bāqillānī’s text adds: “It is the opposite of *irdāf* (the ‘intimation’ we encountered earlier), because *irdāf* is based on elaboration and expansion [*al-ishāb wa-l-baṣṭ*], while [*mumāthala*] is based on brevity and summing up [*al-ījāz wa-l-jam‘*].”<sup>123</sup> However, the examples given in this regard are based on opposition and some additionally on metonymy (‘compose no more poetry after you have buried the rhymes. . .’; saying ‘my clothing’ when one means to refer to himself).<sup>124</sup> This conflation of metaphor and metonymy under the rubric of *isti‘āra* suggests that al-Bāqillānī was influenced by early Qur’ānic hermeneutics, where *isti‘āra* signified both metaphor and metonymy, rather than following al-Rummānī in narrowing *isti‘āra* to metaphor alone as Heinrichs says writers in the field of poetics did up until al-Jurjānī.<sup>125</sup> The next type of *badī‘* to which al-Bāqillānī turns is *muṭābaqa*

<sup>120</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I‘jāz*, 101-02.

<sup>121</sup> Bonebakker, “Ibn al-Mu‘tazz,” 404.

<sup>122</sup> See Heinrichs, “Metaphor,” in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, ed. Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey (1998; repr., New York: Routledge, 2010), 523.

<sup>123</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I‘jāz*, 119. This explanation is excluded from von Grunebaum.

<sup>124</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I‘jāz*, 122.

<sup>125</sup> Heinrichs, “*Isti‘ārah* and *Badī‘*,” 186-87. It is also noteworthy here that while al-Bāqillānī retained *isti‘āra*’s archetypical position in placing it first in his list of *badī‘*, al-Rummānī diverges again and places it third in his listing. He instead puts *ījāz* (economy) first; later evidence of a privileging of *ījāz* is found in the likes of al-Tha‘ālibī’s (d. 429/1038) book *al-ījāz wa-l-i‘jāz*. An interesting avenue for future research is whether the status of

(opposition), which the examples of *mumāthala* seem to exemplify.<sup>126</sup> The examples of *mutābaqa* that al-Bāqillānī gives are mostly sentences with parallel parts whose terms are opposites: “It is God who brings out the living from the dead and brings out the dead from the living” [Q 30:19]<sup>127</sup> and “[God] merges night into day and merges day into night” [Q 22:61].<sup>128</sup>

The remaining types of *badī‘* are less relevant to the debate over the term’s meaning and origins, but some general observations about how al-Bāqillānī proceeds are in order. For each type of *badī‘*, he offers a prose example or two (sometimes), then several individual lines of poetry (sometimes two consecutive ones), some from Ancient poets and some from Modern poets, whether known for their *badī‘* or not, without any apparent discrimination. On occasion he gives the experts’ opinion of a poet’s skill. Al-Bāqillānī then provides two or three examples from the Qur’ān. There is sometimes no definition of the type of *badī‘* nor explanation of why the examples listed qualify as being under this heading. There is no comparative commentary of the type that we find in al-Rummānī which continually emphasizes the Qur’ān’s superiority in every respect. For the most part, each type is discrete, with the exception of the abovementioned ‘types of *isti‘āra*.’ Sometimes two types are mentioned as being each other’s opposite (e.g. *tadhyīl* and *ishāra*), while others are described as being close to one another. Al-Bāqillānī’s attention to these relationships demonstrates his understanding of a dynamic field of types of *badī‘* rather than a mere list of discrete terms with no indication of their relationships to each other. This understanding foreshadows his later analysis of rhetorical figures and distinction among members of the catalogue of *badī‘* presented here.

There are several briefly-mentioned categories that have no Qur’ānic examples provided: ‘correctness of explanation’ (*ṣiḥḥat al-tafsīr*),<sup>129</sup> *taṣrī‘*, wherein the first hemistich of a line of poetry rhymes with the second,<sup>130</sup> ‘negation and affirmation’ (*al-salb wa-l-ījāb*), metonymy/euphemism and allusion (*al-kināya wa-l-ta‘rīd*),<sup>131</sup> self-correction (*al-rujū‘*, returning to correct what one previously said),<sup>132</sup> and exception (*istithnā‘*). There is not a surprising amount of metaphor in the non-*isti‘āra* categories, marking a difference from what Heinrichs notes is the case in Ibn al-Mu‘tazz, who says of many *shawāhid* (examples of poetic lines) in his *Kitāb al-Badī‘* that the rhetorical figure exemplified has been combined with *isti‘āra*.<sup>133</sup> Some of these other categories, though, fall outside what would strictly speaking be considered literary devices. For example, correctness of explanation is only *badī‘* in the more general sense that Ibn al-Mu‘tazz considers *al-madhhab al-kalāmī* (logical or rational argumentation) to be *badī‘*. It

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*isti‘āra* versus *ījāz* as archetypal represents two schools of thought that correlate with other significant features of thinkers’ work.

<sup>126</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I‘jāz*, 122.

<sup>127</sup> Quoted in al-Bāqillānī, *I‘jāz*, 122.

<sup>128</sup> Quoted in al-Bāqillānī, *I‘jāz*, 122.

<sup>129</sup> Though some scholars have viewed passages of the Qur’ān as interpreting others, in accordance with the privileged method of exegesis *tafsīr al-Qur’ān bi-l-Qur’ān*, perhaps in the context of eloquence it would not be appropriate to suggest that the Qur’ān is *tafsīr* in terms of *badī‘*.

<sup>130</sup> Heinrichs, “Rhetorical Figures,” 661.

<sup>131</sup> Al-Bāqillānī seems to mean the two specifically in conjunction with each other. See von Grunebaum, *Tenth-Century Document*, 38 fn 297.

<sup>132</sup> It would also be blasphemous to imply the Qur’ān needs to ‘correct’ itself, though perhaps the concept of *al-nāsikh wa-l-mansūkh* (abrogation) seems not to be far from this.

<sup>133</sup> Heinrichs, “*Isti‘ārah* and *Badī‘*,” 190-91.

is a feature of a text's style and way of communicating, but not a literary device proper. Al-Bāqillānī writes that he has listed only some of the many categories of *badī'*, and that he does not intend this chapter as a full treatment of the subject.

On the topic of al-Bāqillānī's understanding and usage of the keyword *badī'*, it is important to add that outside of the chapter discussed here, al-Bāqillānī often uses the word *badī'* in the exclusively non-technical adjectival meaning of 'marvelous,' 'wondrous,' 'innovative,' and 'original.' Thus, it carries both descriptive and evaluative senses—descriptive when it refers to the abundant use of rhetorical figures in a text, and evaluative when it is applied in declaring an utterance wonderful. However, he does not make any explicit distinction between instances when he uses it in the technical and non-technical ways (or somewhere in between, as seen above), even when the usages are in close proximity to one another. Soon after his explanatory catalogue of literary devices, he uses the phrase *badī' nazm al-Qur'ān*, which can be translated 'the Qur'ān's marvelous arrangement.'<sup>134</sup> A couple of paragraphs later, he uses the term *anwā' al-badī'* (types of *badī'*) to refer to varieties of literary devices.<sup>135</sup> These usages indicate a dynamic continuum of meanings that make the term *badī'* in al-Bāqillānī's treatise a prime example of the phenomenon (discussed in Chapter One) of semantic sliding between meanings of a word that draw variously on its root, general uses, and technical definitions from various disciplines.

Al-Bāqillānī's status as an intellectual who contributed to many discourses but was not a literary critic is one explanation for his liberal variation in uses of the term *badī'*. His lack of concern for limiting its meaning to 'literary devices,' even when introducing his catalogue of literary devices, hints at a point that will be made clear later: the importance he attaches to the Qur'ān's use of literary devices is not simply a delight in marveling at their presence but rather their excellent expression of excellent meanings and novel ideas. It is this emphasis that renders al-Bāqillānī's treatment of *badī'* an important cite of linking stylistics and theology. The subcategories of *badī'* al-Bāqillānī initially listed emphasized that *badī'* may be found in "comprehensive words of wisdom" [*al-kalimāt al-jāmi'a al-ḥakīma*], "eloquent wordings" [*al-alfāz al-faṣīḥa*], and "utterances about the divine" [*al-alfāz al-ilāhiyya*]. These designations do not indicate a type of rhetorical figure or literary device but rather can together be summed up in identifying eloquent expressions of meaningful ideas. The examples show the Qur'ān's marvelously pithy, succinct expressions of wisdom and the utterances that express God's omnipotence and might. It is the ways of expressing these meanings that makes *badī'* important.

### ***Badī'* and Figurative Language in al-Bāqillānī's Analysis of Poetry**

In addition to the chapter on *badī'*, secondary scholarship on *Kitāb I'jāz al-Qur'ān* has drawn attention to al-Bāqillānī's extensive poetry analysis, as I noted above. The most prominent characteristic of these two sections is al-Bāqillānī's participation in literary critical discourse, both through his cataloguing of literary and rhetorical figures and through his analysis and evaluation of poems. Through this extensive literary analysis that differentiates

<sup>134</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I'jāz*, 167.

<sup>135</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I'jāz*, 168.



him from his contemporaries in *i'jāz* studies, he can argue that while one or two lines of human poetic composition may be marvelous and most eloquent, humans cannot sustain this level, and other lines of the poem will inevitably fall short; the Qur'ān is differentiated by its unwaveringly excellent quality. Looking at these sections alone suggests that the nature of al-Bāqillānī's contribution in this treatise is to literary criticism. I argue in Chapter Five that a more comprehensive reading of *Kitāb I'jāz al-Qur'ān* undermines this suggestion and instead points to a complex thesis that ties aesthetic and literary features of the Qur'ān to a theologically-minded argument in favor of the Qur'ān being eminently clear and understandable to humans. Nonetheless, a careful reading of the most famous sections of al-Bāqillānī's treatise still sheds light on al-Bāqillānī's position on the one of the most contested literary issues of his day. What is important is to read these sections as part of the whole texts rather than drawing conclusions from them alone. I argue that al-Bāqillānī frames his thesis of Qur'ānic clarity as having enduring and universal truth, but his attention to the most contested aspects of poetic production in his own historical era gives some parts of his treatise the flavor of his own circumstantial situatedness.

To be more specific, throughout the chapter on *badī'*, as well as in other sections of his treatise, al-Bāqillānī consistently positions himself in favor of the Ancient poets' superiority in contrast to the Modern poets. Preference for the Ancient poets was associated with conservative attitudes, especially in religious contexts where only this old poetry could be used for the purpose of determining word usage and meanings. The rise of Modern poetry was also associated with the new urban culture of the 'Abbasid era, where poets who were not ethnically Arab flourished and brought changes to poetic style.<sup>136</sup> The plentiful use of rhetorical figures and indeed the rhetorization of poetry (to use Heinrichs' term) were the hallmarks of this Modern-style poetry.<sup>137</sup> Here is one of al-Bāqillānī's direct statements on the matter:

Many of the Modern poets [*al-muḥdathīn*] loaded their poetry with types of artificiality, until all of their poetry was filled with it, trying not to let a line pass by without filling it with this fabrication [*ṣan'a*], as Abū Tammām crafted in his poem in *lām*.<sup>138</sup>

Al-Bāqillānī quotes Abū Tammām's poem, showing that it is indeed replete with various plays on words and especially sound (such as *tajānus/tajnīs*). He complains about Abū Tammām's *taṣannu'* (artificial, affected manner) in using *tajnīs* in comparison to his colleague al-Buḥturī.<sup>139</sup> This preference represents a bias toward the 'natural' (*maṭbū'*) style rather than the 'artificial'

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<sup>136</sup> In this way, the Modern poetry movement was also tied to the 'Abbasid-era *Shu'ūbiyya* movement, which objected to the idea of Arab ethnic superiority and incorporated non-Arab cultural and literary elements from the expanded Islamic empire. C. E. Bosworth, "Shu'ūbiyya," in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, ed. Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey (1998; repr., New York: Routledge, 2010), 717.

<sup>137</sup> Heinrichs, "Ancients and Moderns," 90.

<sup>138</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I'jāz*, 162.

<sup>139</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I'jāz*, 166.

(*maṣnū* ) one.<sup>140</sup> It is no accident that he has chosen the poet most associated with *badī* , one of the central figures of controversy in this regard, and al-Bāqillānī notes that Abū Tammām has been reproached for his overuse of these figures, even providing an example of one such ‘bad’ poem and an excursus on the qualities of artificiality and excessiveness associated with distasteful *badī* . G. E. von Grunebaum, discussing literary criticism in the 4<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> century, highlights disparagement of Abū Tammām’s verse as a way of criticizing the general trend of ‘artificial’ language use in poetry, connecting this attitude with critics’ desire for clarity.<sup>141</sup> Al-Bāqillānī compares Abū Tammām with other poets in general terms, before returning to the issue of *badī* and the Qur’ān. Speaking of the *badī* he found in poets’ work, he says this ‘art’ (*fann*) is not inimitability because it does not ‘disrupt the habit’ (*yakhruqu al-‘āda*).<sup>142</sup> Later, al-Bāqillānī specifies this distinction further, but considering at least some forms of *badī* not to be a measure of inimitability or miraculousness positions al-Bāqillānī in opposition to other *ījāz al-Qur’ān* writers who emphasized the presence of literary characteristics *in toto* as an aspect of the Qur’ān’s inimitability. The verses of poetry that al-Bāqillānī provides (without commentary up until this point) from both before and after the revelation of the Qur’ān are meant to substantiate this claim. For al-Bāqillānī, these rhetorical devices are part and parcel of the Qur’ān’s eloquence and are always used with utmost elegance in the Qur’ān, but they do not encompass the Qur’ān’s inimitability.<sup>143</sup>

In contrast, al-Bāqillānī shows the Ancient poets to be praiseworthy in their use of rhetorical devices. In another section of his book that is labeled in the table of contents “Innovative [*badī* ‘a] Lines Describing the Pleiades” within the “Chapter on the Nature of Comprehending the Inimitability of the Qur’ān,” al-Bāqillānī evaluates lines on this subject. In it, al-Bāqillānī looks at the verses of Imru’ al-Qays, and al-Bāqillānī writes that no other description of the stars exceeded the quality of Imru’ al-Qays’ verses on the Pleiades, though many have written good lines about it: “They all crafted innovatively [*abda* ‘a] and well [*aḥsana*]. . .”<sup>144</sup> This usage of the verb *abda* ‘a (form IV of the root B-D-‘) is non-technical, only indicating the creation of something new and marvelous, and not metaphor in particular—a meaning reinforced by pairing the verbs *abda* ‘a and *aḥsana* (to do [something] well). However, every single one of the verses quoted as illustrations of star-related description uses the simile particle ‘*ka*,’ with only one having a metaphor instead. He says this list is only a sampling of what poets composed “of *badī* ‘ in describing the Pleiades”; reproducing all such lines would render al-Bāqillānī’s book exceedingly long.<sup>145</sup> This surprising specificity of the connotation of *badī* , again alerts the reader to the possibility that this situation can be taken as an indication that the mention of ‘rhetorical devices’ in general led the literary critic of al-Bāqillānī’s time to think first of metaphor and simile, as the most ‘famous’ or ‘typical’ rhetorical devices. It is also possible that in the case of the stars in particular, finding an adequate description necessitates

<sup>140</sup> Al-Buḥturī and Abū Tammām were famously contrasted as representing ‘natural’ and ‘artificial’ composition respectively. J. S. Meisami, “al-Buḥturī (206-84/821-97),” in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, ed. Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey (1998; repr., New York: Routledge, 2010), 161.

<sup>141</sup> Von Grunebaum, “Arabic Literary Criticism,” 55.

<sup>142</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I’jāz*, 168.

<sup>143</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I’jāz*, 170.

<sup>144</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I’jāz*, 264.

<sup>145</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I’jāz*, 266.

the use of metaphor and simile, because the astounding and awe-provoking cosmic scale and heavenly beauty seemed too great for mundane human language.

It is not an insignificant detail that al-Bāqillānī highlights sound and wordplay in the Modern poetry but figurative language in Ancient poetry. As I show in Chapter Five, al-Bāqillānī makes an essential distinction between these types of figures. My interpretation suggests that al-Bāqillānī separated meaning-based rhetorical devices from those he considered to operate only on a surface level. He gives *isti'āra* as a prime example of the former and *tajnīs* of the latter. In light of that later section, depicting the Ancient poets as excelling in *isti'āra* suggests their use of literary devices was meaningful and contributed significance to their poetry. In contrast, the Modern poets fill their verse with artifice, overloading and “padding” their every line with wordplay, regardless of the content. These two ways al-Bāqillānī distinguishes between types of *badī'* (i.e., their connection to meaning and which group of poets is characterized by their use) add another layer to his characterization of literary devices. Ultimately, though, the Qur'ān is not unique merely because it uses types of *badī'* that contributes to *i'jāz* in meaningful ways; it is the Qur'ān's sustained level of excellence in rhetoric and language.

The Qur'ān's consistent use of certain rhetorical devices with elegance and beauty is exactly what al-Bāqillānī sees as separating it from poetry and other human composition. Humans may have a moment of brilliance or a stroke of luck in composing a fine phrase, and through striving to perfect their diction they can unlock these rare treasures. Ultimately, though, even the best poems and their works have errors and poor-quality phrases. In this light, it is clear why al-Bāqillānī devoted a large section of his book to criticizing the famous poems of Imru' al-Qays and al-Buḥturī, thus covering both Ancient and Modern poetry.<sup>146</sup> Whichever group of poets al-Bāqillānī's readership favored, his analysis aims to show them to be of inferior quality to the Qur'ān. The Qur'ān is alone in its superior *naẓm* (arrangement, structure), and there is no prescribed path to copy it or reach that quality of arrangement.<sup>147</sup> Is the overall *naẓm* related to the sustained use of eloquent language that includes excellent examples of rhetorical figures? Al-Bāqillānī does not appear to suggest that this is the case, but on the other hand, some examples of *badī'* in al-Bāqillānī's classification are not rhetorical figures proper, as Chapter Five shows. Notably, he includes in his coverage of literary merit the broad category of *bayān* (roughly translatable as ‘clear language’), which can describe text that is eloquent and well-worded without specifically using literary or rhetorical devices. Similarly, al-Rummānī included a very general last section on *bayān*, where he says the entirety of the Qur'ān is classified as beautiful *bayān* of the highest rank.<sup>148</sup>

Bringing together theories of *badī'* and *i'jāz* raises the question of where the Qur'ān's enduring form (whether it is considered eternal or not) fits into this development in the nature of *badī'*. It is useful here to recall Badawi's point about *badī'* developing from a tool (in the pre-*muḥdath* poets) to a principle (in good *muḥdath* poetry). Al-Bāqillānī cites small segments of Qur'ān as illustrations of each type of *badī'*, following the generic conventions of literary criticism, but this is a method that based on this section of al-Bāqillānī's book alone

<sup>146</sup> G. J. H. van Gelder also made this observation in *Beyond the Line: Classical Arabic Literary Critics on the Coherence and Unity of the Poem* (Leiden: Brill, 1982), 6.

<sup>147</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I'jāz*, 169.

<sup>148</sup> Al-Rummānī, *Nukat*, 107.

might lead the reader to understand these instances of *badīʿ* as being localized. Bringing another part of the treatise to bear on the chapter about *badīʿ*, though, suggests rather that Qurʾānic composition for al-Bāqillānī is a matter of each local part being excellent so that the total is excellent through and through, an understanding akin to small pieces of the text forming links in a chain that, because each link is strong, the whole chain is strong. Each example becomes a synecdochic sign of the whole Qurʾān's excellence. Elsewhere (see Chapter Five), al-Bāqillānī explains that some verses' excellence is easier to explicate than others, but the difference is based in humans' own capacities to explain rather than any quality inherent in the Qurʾān. Al-Bāqillānī's account depicts *badīʿ* in the Qurʾān neither like the early critics' understanding of rhetorical devices as confined to local ornamentation and beauty within a line, nor like Abū Tammām's Ode on Amorium use of *badīʿ* as a structural principle. Rather, as the next chapter shows in more detail, according to al-Bāqillānī's analysis of *badīʿ* in the Qurʾān, *badīʿ* is split into types that are surface ornamentation and types that are integral to the eloquent and clear expression of ideas.

At the end of his chapter on *badīʿ*, al-Bāqillānī famously asserts that “the Qurʾān should not be measured [yūwāzin] by poetry.”<sup>149</sup> For all of al-Bāqillānī's praise of Imruʾ al-Qays, especially compared to the *muḥdath* poets, he concludes by saying:

We have explained the poetry of Imruʾ al-Qays—and he is the best of [the poets] whose precedence is attested, their master whose excellence they admit, their leader whom they consider perfect, and their *imām* to whom they return—its way, the manner in which its status falls short [compared] to the status of the Qurʾān's arrangement [*naẓm*], and how [even] traces of that [superior] arrangement are not perceptible in his poetry.<sup>150</sup>

Al-Bāqillānī has built up the prestige and quality of Imruʾ al-Qays' poetry only to show how even at its very best, poetry falls short of the Qurʾān. Even though the Ancient poets are adept at *badīʿ* to convey meanings concisely and evocatively, they do not do so as the Qurʾān does, that is to say consistently and without wavering.

### Characterizing al-Bāqillānī's Thought on *Badīʿ*

Al-Bāqillānī's chapter on *badīʿ* is important for several sets of questions about the development of both *badīʿ* and *iʿjāz*. It stands as a prominent and elaborate example of how a tenth-century critic understood the meanings of important terms like *badīʿ* and *istiʿāra* as more reified than Ibn al-Muʿtazz's earlier usages of them; how an Ashʿarī writer on *iʿjāz* handled metaphor (partially by ignoring the issue of anthropomorphism in the Qurʾān); and how an influential *mutakallim* maintained the importance of *balāgha* while not condemning all poetry to mediocrity. *Kitāb Iʿjāz al-Qurʾān*'s chapter is not best read as a standalone account of al-Bāqillānī's views on *badīʿ* or literary-rhetorical inimitability. Rather, it is an interesting excerpt that establishes al-Bāqillānī's competence in discussing *badīʿ* despite not being a

<sup>149</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Iʿjāz*, 328.

<sup>150</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Iʿjāz*, 328.

professional literary critic and introduces the audience to this field of study. In this capacity, it provides a general catalogue of rhetorical figures' use, even in cases that are apparently relevant to poetry to the exclusion of the Qur'ān itself. For all of his pointed criticism of Ancient and Modern poetry and despite his goal of proving poetry's inconsistent level of quality, al-Bāqillānī still finds moments of true brilliance in human poetry. He does not allow the Qur'ān's inimitability to be threatened by these rare instances of human inspiration or limit his ranking of poetry to less-than-superior stations as his colleague al-Rummānī did. This line of thought also represents a different model for reconciling the Qur'ān's relationship to poetry than we find in al-Rummānī and al-Khaṭṭābī, who do not develop their theories of the relationship between the Qur'ān's and poetry's language into a detailed position on this issue.

Al-Bāqillānī's Ash'arite identity does not make him shy away from providing instances of metaphor in the Qur'ān. His usage of the term *badī'* shows a strong connection to metaphor, and *isti'āra* is sometimes not rigorously distinguished from *tashbīh*, which is a mark of the convergence between the two that Heinrichs observes. Because al-Bāqillānī was writing around the same time as al-Rummānī, it is possible that each one reflected current perceptions of metaphor as being based on the comparison of the metaphor's vehicle and tenor. Al-Bāqillānī's chapter on *badī'* raises some interesting questions about comparative understandings of the workings of the Qur'ān and human literary production, among which is the issue of local usage of *badī'* in the Qur'ān in relation to the neighboring parts of the *sūra* and the *sūra*'s general structure. These questions call for a critical reading of al-Bāqillānī's writing on *naẓm* and *ta'līf*, and provide a basis for (re-)interrogating his peers' theories of *i'jāz* as well.

A question this discussion raises is why metaphor holds the status of prototype of the entire *badī'* category. In Chapter Five, I explore what has made it more salient than other literary devices, showing al-Bāqillānī's answer lies in the close relationship between figurative language and expression of meaning. In the wider context of al-Bāqillānī's milieu, the importance of figurative language was highlighted in the contentiousness of metaphorical interpretation of the Qur'ān in debates between Mu'tazilite and Ash'arite thought. Theologians contrasted *ḥaqīqa* (literally 'truth,' used to mean 'literal speech') with *majāz* ('figurative speech') in various genres, including *uṣūl al-fiqh* (legal theory). Interpreting the Qur'ān—or other texts, such as *aḥādīth* (Prophetic reports)—has implications not only for understanding the Divine but also for ritual and legal practice. Construing an utterance as metaphorical changes its meaning, and metaphorical expression allows for the communication of the idea at hand in a way that literal expression may not be able to accomplish. When the subject of the utterance is the transcendent, figurative speech allows the idea to be described in terms understandable to humans. As I explore further in Chapter Five, these 'singularities' not already incorporated into human language's vocabulary cannot be described in the conventional ways made available by literal language. Metaphor, as the *i'jāz* text conceives of it, encompasses various forms of figurative expression, all of which form a group of ways of expressing that which cannot be explained in known, conventional ways.

The Light Verse (Q 24:35) has often been seen as an obvious instance of this apophatic type of expression, as it describes Divine activity and presence in tangible images, but other verses have more frequently been subject to both figurative and literal interpretations. Returning to the other initial examples of *badī'* al-Bāqillānī cited, the compound term 'Mother

of the Book' has often been taken as a way of describing the origins or source-text of the unique singularity of the Qur'ān, whose transcendence and uniqueness render it beyond the realm of known texts or creations that can be described in ordinary human terms. Q 36:37 reads: "A sign for them is also the night. We strip the day from it, and lo, they are in darkness," a figurative way of describing God's power over changes in the universe, changes so beyond the realm of human experience and knowledge that the only accessible way of explaining them is through figurative language where the vehicle is an activity or object familiar to humans. In Jāhili poetry too we find that some of the metaphors highlighted in Ibn al-Mu'tazz are descriptions of cosmic forces which are difficult to grasp in familiar human terms and are more evocatively portrayed through poetic metaphor, such as "while the morning was stabbed by the brilliant (morning-)star,"<sup>151</sup> and Imru' al-Qays' famous line, "How many nights have let down their veils like the wave of the sea / upon me, with all types of fears, to afflict me."<sup>152</sup>

Of course, some classic examples of metaphor have the mundane rather than the larger-than-life or transcendent as their subject matter: "and my head is lit up with white" (Q 19:4) portrays the state of old age, and Imru' al-Qays' much-emulated phrase "a shackle for the wild game" [*qayd al-awābid*] describes a fast steed. Perhaps these images are cited so often because they are unusual constructions that bring to mind vivid images. Figurative language, whether in the form of metaphors or similes, allows for the creation of compelling constructions where two disparate things or ideas are juxtaposed, compared, or attributed in an unconventional way. Literary devices that work based on sound instead of meaning, like paronomasia (*jinās*) and rhyme, also draw attention to relationships between terms, but not in a way that formed an integral part of a system of thought in Arabo-Islamic history. The *fawāṣil* (verse-endings) in Qur'ānic *ayāt* have been analyzed for the connections they make in content, but the disagreement over metaphorical interpretation was what took center stage in theological disputes about Qur'ānic language. It may be this sensitivity to metaphor's value as well as its risks that account for its status as the prototypical *badī'* figure and hence its place in *i'jāz al-Qur'ān* texts. In other words, metaphor was at once a valuable way of conveying complex ideas and drawing attention to marvelous meanings, and also a mode of discourse susceptible to misunderstanding and deviant interpretations. Thus, metaphor deserved careful explanation.

Despite this clear privileging of *isti'āra* and figurative language in general, it is noteworthy that al-Bāqillānī includes types of *badī'* that have no place in the Qur'ān in his chapter about *badī'*. Putting them in his chapter on the subject is not an obvious choice, because the book is after all about *i'jāz al-Qur'ān*. These additional inclusions do not detract from his ultimate conclusion that the Qur'ān's inimitability is not tied to the use of rhetorical devices. By contrast, a *mutakallim* who relied on the Qur'ān's stylistic features as an important aspect of inimitability might be less apt to draw attention to types of *badī'* that are not found in the Qur'ān. For al-Bāqillānī, the presence of 'extra' rhetorical devices that only occur in literary and conversational contexts is not problematic and even shows the flourishing of *badī'* quite independently of the Qur'ān. Their presence, however, draws us back to the question of what role the chapter on *badī'* plays in al-Bāqillānī's treatise.

<sup>151</sup> Ibn al-Mu'tazz, *Kitāb al-Badī'*, 2; cited and translated in Heinrichs, "Isti'ārah and Badī'," 190.

<sup>152</sup> Cited in Ibn al-Mu'tazz, *Kitāb al-badī'*, 7; my translation.

As I have suggested, al-Bāqillānī's chapter on *badī'* positions him within a key debate of his day. It acts as a self-contained introduction to rhetorical devices, ensuring that the reader has a precise knowledge of this material so that al-Bāqillānī can later refer back to particular technical terms in his discussion of which rhetorical figures participate in *i'jāz*. That distinction, discussed in Chapter Five, is unique to al-Bāqillānī, as far as I have seen. Al-Bāqillānī's inclusion of the chapter on *badī'* also shows that he can competently participate in discourse about *badī'* (where the term is meant in the technical sense of rhetorical devices), which thereby demonstrates his knowledge of the subject matter. This demonstration serves as a basis for his authority in later distinctions between the rhetorical devices that do and do not participate in *i'jāz*. Thus, reading al-Bāqillānī's chapter on *badī'* without the subsequent analysis of Qur'ānic use of *badī'* can result in a misleading portrayal of al-Bāqillānī's thought on Qur'ānic inimitability and the status of literary and rhetorical elements in the miracle. The value of studying al-Bāqillānī's sections on *badī'* and poetry analysis lies in the opportunity to characterize his use of important terms like *badī'* and *isti'āra*, terms that Heinrichs and others have shown to have rich and telling histories of development. In the chapter on *badī'*, al-Bāqillānī famously presents a catalogue of rhetorical features that texts can incorporate, with examples drawn from poetry, speeches, and Qur'ān, but it is not until after this exposition of *badī'* that he makes his own intervention in the discourse of Qur'ānic literary inimitability. His is also a contribution to understandings of the nature of *badī'*, though as Chapter Five shows, this contribution can only be accurately characterized when other sections of al-Bāqillānī's treatise are taken into account.

## Chapter Five: The Thesis of Guiding Clarity in *Kitāb I'jāz al-Qur'ān*

### Introduction

This chapter comprises the second part of my investigation of al-Bāqillānī's thought on *i'jāz al-Qur'ān*. Chapter Four focused on canonically-recognized sections of *Kitāb I'jāz al-Qur'ān* with the goal of characterizing al-Bāqillānī's purpose and contributions in those sections, giving particular attention to *badī'*, both his use of the term and his view of the concept. In this chapter, I turn to less-studied sections of this treatise, ones that extant studies have not generally analyzed in drawing conclusions about al-Bāqillānī's views of Qur'ānic inimitability and its underlying assumptions. In doing so, I aim to present and analyze al-Bāqillānī's theses about the Qur'ān and the expressivity of language. My contention is that the main ideas expressed are differ significantly from those gleaned from a decontextualized reading of the sections on *badī'* and poetry. They also set al-Bāqillānī apart from other thinkers' work on Qur'ānic inimitability. A consistent logic links the disparate sections of al-Bāqillānī's *i'jāz* text, cumulatively amounting to a developed theory of language and its features. Taken together with my analysis of al-Bāqillānī's *uṣūl al-fiqh* text, the ideas most important to his theological and scholarly identity become clearer.

A comprehensive reading of *Kitāb I'jāz al-Qur'ān* shows that an overarching view emerges from the text: that the Qur'ān is clear in its entirety even announces itself as a guide to humans, and as such is necessarily interpretable. His treatise on Qur'ānic inimitability argues for the importance of language as a means of communication; aesthetic features of language are only significant insofar as they contribute to the best expression of meanings and ideas. Even the literary-rhetorical miracle of the Qur'ān is not located in the beauty and excellence of the aesthetic features of the text as such. This dimension of the miracle lies in the high quality of communicative excellence that inheres in some rhetorical and literary features of speech, like figurative language and versification. Al-Bāqillānī's thesis of the guiding clarity of the Qur'ān is laid out over the course of his treatise, and he approaches it from several aspects without announcing it as his text's thesis as such. In this chapter, I identify key aspects of this thesis of the guiding clarity of the Qur'ān and investigate how this idea supports the Qur'ān's status as understandable, and hence, interpretable, by humans. Understandability and interpretability are, in turn, centered around several central concepts: *bayān* (clear language), *barā'a* (competence), *mutashābih* (mutually similar) verses, and *aḥkāmiyyāt*, a term al-Bāqillānī coins to refer to some verses and will be explained below. Together, these aspects of Qur'ānic language emphasize its ultimately excellent *balāgha* (clear communication; eloquence). Each of these words has a wide history of usage; the translations used here are approximations that attempt to follow al-Bāqillānī's ways of employing them, but the more precise semantic and pragmatic features of this particular use will become clear over the course of this chapter. It is possible to organize a discussion of al-Bāqillānī's thesis of the Qur'ān's guiding clarity around keywords such as these because his discourse is marked by pointed usages of them to fit the meaning he is trying to communicate, usages whose distinctiveness is made clear by attention to the development of technical terms. As I suggested in Chapter One, and as Chapter Four explored with reference to the term *badī'*, al-Bāqillānī's word usage often reflects connections to a term's etymological roots rather than in



its independent, reified form as a technical term. This dynamic word usage, as I have explained, is not unique to al-Bāqillānī, but the particular valences of keywords on which he draws in his usages are indications of the meanings he emphasizes in service of his ideas. This dynamic means of signifying allows him to draw on core meanings of a given word's root in building his own semantic field around Qur'ānic eloquence, clarity, and communication. This thesis gives rise to the need to defend *all* of the Qur'ān as clear, even features and verses that readers and listeners have often found puzzling. The so-called Mysterious Letters are an example of how al-Bāqillānī responds to this challenge. The result of this investigation leads to a reconsideration of al-Bāqillānī's ultimate views on Qur'ānic inimitability and its relationship to miracles, aesthetics, and the human capacity to interpret the Qur'ān. Reading these neglected sections of the treatise, and examining the text as a whole within the context of al-Bāqillānī's oeuvre, sheds light on parts of al-Bāqillānī's thought that can ultimately contribute to a greater understanding of the *i'jāz* discussion and its development within Islamic history, as well as the thought of one of medieval Islam's most influential scholars.

One of the questions that I investigate in this chapter is what eloquence means in this context. As I indicated in Chapter Four, al-Bāqillānī was not primarily concerned with literary devices in the Qur'ān and literary analysis tout court, with the goal of showing that the Qur'ān is better than poetry in terms of its arrangement and use of literary devices; he does not allow these devices to be a basis for the proof of Qur'ānic inimitability. But these points do not account for the full multidimensional explanations that al-Bāqillānī's book provides throughout. By picking out points of discussion out of context, scholars have often missed the recurring themes al-Bāqillānī drives at, which explain his interest in elaborating on the points he does. This chapter aims at rectifying this atomistic approach in order to achieve a fuller reading of the text and thus contextualize the well-known parts of the book within its overall theses.

## Neglected Parts of the Book

The winding structure of al-Bāqillānī's book allows him to revisit certain issues and arguments repeatedly. Sometimes, this circling back takes the form of a summary of topics that are treated in more detail later, sometimes it serves for emphasis and summing up, and in some cases seems it points to arguments he considered central enough to bear repeating, perhaps as a polemical reinforcement of points detractors had argued against. This non-linear approach may have allowed some parts of the text to be eclipsed in later scholars' summary of its key points.<sup>1</sup> My goal in this chapter is not to detail the full range of contents of *Kitāb I'jāz al-Qur'ān*, but rather to draw out those sections that demonstrate al-Bāqillānī's thesis of the guiding clarity of the Qur'ān. Extant scholarship has overlooked this crucial message of the treatise, embedded as it is; ironically, this may actually be a sign of how successful al-Bāqillānī was in subtly incorporating clarity into the definitions of his key terms). My analysis touches

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<sup>1</sup> To make matters more confusing, the *fihris* (index) of topics at the end of the Saqr edition is quite detailed but sometimes does not account for the text's own logic in the way one discussion leads into another. Likewise, section breaks that the editor has added in the text sometimes seem to interrupt a train of thought rather than guide the reader toward changes of topic.

on a variety of debates that al-Bāqillānī brings into his discussions without delving into them beyond the point to which they are relevant to the thesis of guiding clarity.

It is important to note that al-Bāqillānī is distinct from other *i'jāz* writers in emphasizing clarity in the ways I show below. Al-Khaṭṭābī, discussing the Qur'ān's rhetorical eloquence, writes: "the meanings [of the Qur'ān] are not hidden from [whoever] has an intellect."<sup>2</sup> Human speech does not yield great meanings in combination with eloquent wordings (*alfāz*) and excellent arrangement (*naẓm*) in the way that the Qur'ān does. The Qur'ān is distinguished in rhetorical greatness because it has all three of these qualities.<sup>3</sup> Al-Rummānī specifically separates *balāgha* from a text's ability to instill understanding, because even inarticulate people can make themselves understood; he also separates *balāgha* from applying wording to ideas, because those ideas may be ugly or hackneyed.<sup>4</sup> All three of these foundational *i'jāz* writers connect the Qur'ān's rhetorical miracle with its combination of excellent meanings and excellent wording of these ideas, but al-Bāqillānī theorizes this idea much more fully, as I show in this chapter. He develops his own particular usages of keywords in his discourse to describe his own theory of the dynamics of Qur'ānic excellence of expression, much as Larkin describes al-Jurjānī doing later on when he redefines the terms *faṣāḥa* and *balāgha*, responding to the literary critical tradition in general and to 'Abd al-Jabbār in particular.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Bayān, Balāgha, and Communicative Aspects of Discourse***

The first keyword I examine is *bayān* (roughly, 'clear/clarifying indication'), which we have already seen al-Bāqillānī defined and explained in the *Taqrīb*, recasting the term in contrast to the explanations other scholars had given it (see Chapter Two). In that context, al-Bāqillānī explained the term *bayān* in general usage to be connected to distinguishing and making apparent (meaning but also other items), and he declared that *bayān* in technical *uṣūlī* (legal theoretical) usage has the following meaning: "It is the indicant [*dalīl*] that is connected, by sound reflection [*naẓar*] on it, to the knowledge [*ilm*] to which it is an indicant."<sup>6</sup> The meaning in general language usage is 'making apparent' and 'making distinct.'<sup>7</sup> Whereas other scholars saw *bayān* as an utterance clarifying another unclear utterance, al-Bāqillānī saw any utterance that indicates knowledge soundly as an instance of *bayān*.

As I explained in Chapter Two, the presence of common and increasingly specific technical meanings of the word *bayān* reflects the development of the term. Kees Versteegh speaks to the use of the term *bayān* and how it changed over the centuries of writing about *i'jāz al-Qur'ān* in particular when he says:

The science of *bayân* is the finishing touch to the conveying of information and cannot be separated from the science of meaning. [Earlier in the development of Arabic thought], *bayân* was often used to indicate the "plain meaning" of the

<sup>2</sup> Al-Khaṭṭābī, *Bayān i'jāz al-Qur'ān*, 24.

<sup>3</sup> Al-Khaṭṭābī, *Bayān*, 24-25.

<sup>4</sup> Al-Rummānī, *Nukat*, 69.

<sup>5</sup> Larkin, *Theology of Meaning*, 44.

<sup>6</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 3, 370.

<sup>7</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 3, 370-71.

text, or its explication by the exegetes. But in the context of al-Sakkâkî's new classification of sciences *bayân* has come to mean metaphorical usage of the language. In this section of his work he deals with subjects such as similes, metaphors, figurative speech, anaphora.<sup>8</sup>

Al-Bāqillānī's work represents an important nexus in this development. As I will show, the term *bayân* is a focal point in his attempt to describe the Qur'ān as wholly clear. He uses the term to signify clear, or clarifying, speech which may include figurative language as a medium of conveying ideas clearly. This usage allows us to understand how a term that once meant 'plain meaning' came to refer to a metaphorical use of language. These two modes of expression are not opposing poles for al-Bāqillānī, or at least, not necessarily: a literal or figurative way of phrasing an idea may evidence the most *bayân* depending on the circumstance.

I argue that al-Bāqillānī developed the concept of *bayân* in his *i'jāz al-Qur'ān* work more fully than his contemporaries did, and that he emphasized the word's association with clarity and clarifying rather than seeing it merely as having an aesthetic function, as part of his semantic field of terms related to clarity and clarifying. Al-Khaṭṭābī, in his *Bayān i'jāz al-Qur'ān*, does not use the term *bayân* widely, but when he does, it is often in the general sense of 'explanation, exposition,' as in the title of his treatise, which Issa Boullata has recently translated under the title "Elucidation of the Qur'ān's *I'jāz*."<sup>9</sup> Al-Khaṭṭābī responds to a potential claim from an opponent that the Qur'ān is not fully clarified (*mubayyan*) that he has "presented the explanation [*bayân*] of the descriptions of *balāgha* [rhetorical excellence] in the Qur'ān."<sup>10</sup> He also occasionally uses the word *bayân* to refer to the excellent rhetorical quality of utterances, as when he says that the Qur'ān's expressions are "located in the most eloquent and best aspects of rhetorical excellence [*bayân*]."<sup>11</sup> Still, Al-Khaṭṭābī relies on words like *faṣīḥ* (eloquent) and *balāgha* (excellent rhetoric) to describe the qualities of the Qur'ān's language.

In later works, especially in the fields of rhetoric and literary criticism, these words—particularly *balāgha*—were used in a technical sense, to refer to eloquence and the aesthetic quality of elegant wording. Al-Bāqillānī was clearly familiar with this reified usage, and he sometimes applies it, often in conjunction with other words the field of literary criticism used in technical ways. He often uses phrases like "the *faṣāḥa* of the Qur'ān, the location of its *balāgha*, and its astonishing *barā'a*," which reflect the configuration of the semantic field of reified literary critical vocabulary.<sup>12</sup> However, al-Bāqillānī's technical application of the term exists alongside more dynamic, etymologically conscious usages. The word *balāgha* comes from a root whose basic (Form I) verb has the meaning 'to reach,' 'to attain,' in a variety of senses, whose object may relate to information, heights, growth, time, goals, etc.<sup>13</sup> With regard to speech, this root came to yield terms relating to its 'reaching' and 'conveying' well; Lane

<sup>8</sup> Kees Versteegh, *Landmarks*, 124-25.

<sup>9</sup> Abū Sulayman Ḥamd ibn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Khaṭṭābī, "Elucidation of the Qur'ān's *I'jāz*," in *Three Treatises on the I'jāz of the Qur'ān: Qur'ānic Studies and Literary Criticism*, ed. Muḥammad Khalaf-Allāh Aḥmad and Muḥammad Zaghlūl Sallām, trans. Issa J. Boullata (Reading, UK: Garnet Publishing Limited, 2014).

<sup>10</sup> Al-Khaṭṭābī, *Bayān i'jāz al-Qur'ān*, 35.

<sup>11</sup> Al-Khaṭṭābī, *Bayān*, 37-38.

<sup>12</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I'jāz*, 190.

<sup>13</sup> See, for instance, Lane, *Lexicon*, 250-51.

explains the word *balīgh* as signifying someone who is eloquent and “sharp, or penetrating, or effective in tongue; attaining, by his speech, or diction, the utmost scope of his mind and desire.”<sup>14</sup> Al-Bāqillānī often uses the word *balāgha* in the ‘literal’ root sense of ‘reaching’ and ‘attaining’ rather than operating solely within the reified technical definition of eloquence and rhetorical excellence. His usage of the terms *balāgha* and *balīgh* bridges the general and technical meanings. For example, in defining the smallest unit of discourse in which *i j̄āz* is perceptible, he writes:

[*Balāgha*’s] ultimate meaning is clarification in conveying [*iblāgh*] what is in the soul with the best meaning and the most elegant wording, and reaching the intended goal of the speech.

When the speech reaches [*balāgha*] its goal in this sense, it is conveying [*bālīgh*] and eloquent [*balīgh*].<sup>15</sup>

This account creates a connection between the general meaning of ‘reaching’ and the technical meaning of ‘eloquence’ as linguistically predicated. It is important to notice that in this passage, al-Bāqillānī ties the property of *balāgha* firmly to its etymological root’s sense of conveying meaning. Employing the word in this way can be seen as a product of al-Bāqillānī not being fully an insider within the realm of literary criticism, but it is also indicative of the role *balāgha* plays in al-Bāqillānī’s theory of language. For him, *balāgha* involves *reaching* a meaning, and the aesthetic alone is not a true understanding of this attainment in which *i j̄āz* lies. Language that has *balāgha* is communicative, and its merit is in conveying an idea well.

Returning to the term *bayān*, I note by way of comparison to al-Bāqillānī’s usage that al-Rummānī, in his *al-Nukat fī i j̄āz al-Qur’ān*, declares *bayān* to be the last of his ten sections on aspects of the Qur’ān’s literary excellence. He writes: “*Bayān* is supplying that which makes apparent the distinction of a thing from everything else perceived.”<sup>16</sup> He posits that *bayān* has four parts: speech, state, indication, and sign; within this classification, speech has two types: “speech that manifests the distinction of a thing from all else, which is *bayān*; and speech that does not manifest the distinction of a thing from all else, which is not *bayān*, like mixed-up speech and impossible speech from which meaning is not understood.”<sup>17</sup> For al-Rummānī, the term *bayān* is only used for speech that expresses beautifully, not for clumsy, ugly expressions, and he provides numerous Qur’ānic verses as examples.<sup>18</sup>

From the standpoint of al-Bāqillānī’s contribution to *i j̄āz al-Qur’ān* discourse, one of the most vital points that has been overlooked is his distinction between those features of the text’s language and structure that have a bearing on the Qur’ān’s inimitability and those that do not. There are many conditions that al-Bāqillānī stipulates must be fulfilled for *i j̄āz* to occur, a topic treated in several discussions throughout the text. Even within the literary dimension of inimitability, there is a key distinction. Some participate in *i j̄āz* and some do not. One of the meta-categories of textual features where *i j̄āz* is found is *bayān*.

<sup>14</sup> Lane, *Lexicon*, 251.

<sup>15</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I j̄āz*, 433.

<sup>16</sup> Al-Rummānī, *al-Nukat fī i j̄āz al-Qur’ān*, 106.

<sup>17</sup> Al-Rummānī, *Nukat*, 106.

<sup>18</sup> Al-Rummānī, *Nukat*, 106-09.

For al-Bāqillānī, the point of *bayān* overall and particular features like *isti'āra* is to communicate ideas clearly. In the introductory chapter, al-Bāqillānī states this thesis directly, using the root *b-y-n* repeatedly in phrases such as “the Almighty clarified in it [i.e. the Qur’ān] that its proof is sufficient and guiding, and with its lucidity [*wuḍūh*], not needing a clarification to exceed it.”<sup>19</sup> He closes the chapter with Qur’ānic verses that emphasize clarity: “a Scripture whose verses are made distinct as a Qur’ān in Arabic for people who understand” [Q 41:3],<sup>20</sup> and “We have made it a Qur’ān in Arabic so that you [people] may understand” [Q 43:3].<sup>21</sup> This method of proof-texting the Qur’ān through which al-Bāqillānī scripturally supports his point allows him to locate his thesis strongly in the Qur’ānic text.

Al-Bāqillānī’s method of grounding his exposition of *bayān* in Qur’ānic language allows him to use proof-texts to characterize the Qur’ān as declaring its own clarity and interpretability. He interprets the verses he cites in discussions that support his point, in a type of implicitly exegetical move. Rather than framing his own take on the verses and their terms as exegesis proper, he smoothly integrates his own gloss on a given verse so that it reads as less ideological or polemical than it might actually be in the context of al-Bāqillānī’s milieu. I analyze a prominent example in examining al-Bāqillānī’s treatment of the terms *muḥkam* and *mutashābih* from Q 3:7.

In the case of the term *bayān*, it is no accident that al-Bāqillānī cites three out of the four Qur’ānic verses in which the term is used, in addition to other verses that contain words from the same root. The verse “in a clear Arabic tongue” (Q 26:195) is one of al-Bāqillānī’s favorite ones to cite; in fact, he quotes it five times in *Kitāb I’jāz al-Qur’ān*, making it his most oft-cited verse (tied with Q 17:88, one of the famous Challenge Verses).<sup>22</sup> The word translated here as ‘clear,’ *mubīn*, is from the same root as *bayān* and can more accurately be explained as meaning ‘clarifying.’ Using this verse, al-Bāqillānī ties together the themes of the Qur’ān’s divine origin and its accessibility to human understanding: it is of the highest level of clarity, raised above other languages,<sup>23</sup> and a proof (*ḥujja*) of its divine source.<sup>24</sup> Another Qur’ānic verse that uses the term *bayān* itself says the Almighty bestowed *bayān* upon creation, and al-Bāqillānī cites: “God created the human and taught him to communicate [*bayān*]” [Q 55:3-4].<sup>25</sup> Did humans thus learn how to produce *bayān* or simply how to recognize it? How to understand it? For al-Bāqillānī, the answer is that humans, properly trained, can recognize and even understand *bayān* even in its most exalted Qur’ānic form, yet they cannot produce the highest level of it. Al-Bāqillānī lists several Qur’ānic verses and tells his reader to ponder them: each one displays *bayān* in some way, and many are at ‘the utmost degree’ [*fī nihāyat*] of some mode of discourse (or type of speech act), such as warning or forbidding or threatening.<sup>26</sup> However, there is no reason to go on listing verses in this way, “for the *bayān* of all [verses] is

<sup>19</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I’jāz*, 3.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in al-Bāqillānī, *I’jāz*, 9.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in al-Bāqillānī, *I’jāz*, 9.

<sup>22</sup> Q 26:195 is cited in al-Bāqillānī, *I’jāz*, 12, 45, 298, 314, and 418; Q 17:88 is cited in al-Bāqillānī, *I’jāz*, 23, 31, 57, 281, 381, and 387. Q 17:88 declares: “Say: ‘If people and jinn joined together to bring forth the likes of this Qur’ān, they would never produce the likes of it, even if they backed one another.’”

<sup>23</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I’jāz*, 45.

<sup>24</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I’jāz*, 12.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in al-Bāqillānī, *I’jāz*, 426.

<sup>26</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I’jāz*, 427-428.

equal in height and greatness of rank.”<sup>27</sup> This level of *bayān* is miraculous and inimitable.<sup>28</sup> *Bayān* is connected to the production of understanding in a text’s audience; al-Bāqillānī is in agreement with his fellow *i’jāz* writers in using this term to emphasize the soundness of Qur’ānic expression, but he develops this point much more fully than al-Rummānī or al-Khaṭṭābī.

Al-Bāqillānī writes that *bayān* is ‘correctly connected to *i’jāz*,’ and then proceeds to classify literary devices into those he considers to fit into this category and those that do not.<sup>29</sup> He writes:

*Bayān* occurs on different levels. We have already said: We have related that there are some people who want to take [as the basis of] *i’jāz al-Qur’ān* some of those aspects of eloquence [*balāgha*] called *badī’* that we have mentioned at the beginning of this book, and of which poetic examples have been given. There are those people who claim that [*i’jāz*] is apprehended from the aspects that we have enumerated in this chapter. Know that what we have clarified before this, and what we have claimed, is correct, which is that these matters are divided up:

Some of them [i.e. types of *badī’*] can be attained, labored over, and reached through learning. Such as these cannot serve as a means for appreciating *i’jāz*. Those features of eloquence that cannot be reached through learning and hard work are what indicate [the Qur’ān’s] *i’jāz*. We will give examples of that so you can appreciate what we are claiming.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, one criterion of *i’jāz* for al-Bāqillānī is a style so excellent that it cannot be learned or acquired through practice. Features of this clear and clarifying style can be identified and associated as such with *i’jāz*. Al-Bāqillānī goes on to list some of these features. *Bayān* includes rhyming verse endings (*fawāṣil*), breaks (*maqāṭi’*), beginnings (*maṭāli’*), and suitable wording (*talā’ūm al-kalām*).<sup>31</sup> These categories concern versification and word choice, not literary devices that are features of language of the type that the doctrine of Qur’ānic linguistic inimitability is usually associated with. Indeed, it is striking that these categories are not included in al-Bāqillānī’s chapter on *badī’*, perhaps because they are not normatively considered types of *badī’* in taxonomies of literary devices. In that chapter, he lists 29 categories of literary *badī’* in discourse, but none of them concern versification. Suitable wording (*talā’ūm al-kalām*) is not listed as a particular type of *badī’* either, probably since it describes the sound relationship between wording and ideas rather than a specific literary device. Rather, meta-linguistic features of versification and accurate wording concern how the text is structured and built, *bayān* of ideas as expressed through textual construction rather than individual words. Al-Bāqillānī eschews conventional general terminology to describe textual arrangement, like *tartīb* and *naẓm*, in favor of specific designations of the features of

<sup>27</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I’jāz*, 429.

<sup>28</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I’jāz*, 429.

<sup>29</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I’jāz*, 429.

<sup>30</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I’jāz*, 416-18.

<sup>31</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I’jāz*, 429.

versification and wording. The result is a highly nuanced account of the features of speech that contribute to rhetorical inimitability.

These types of *bayān* may seem relatively straightforward, at least in the context of *i'jāz* discourse. The next items al-Bāqillānī lists as aspects of *bayān* are more opaque: *isti'āra badī'a* (marvelous or novel metaphors) and *ḥaqā'iq al-kalām* [lit., 'the truths of discourse'], "because *balāgha* in each of these two sections takes a singular way and a particular starting point."<sup>32</sup> Neither *isti'āra* nor *bayān*, he writes, has a limit that can be fixed, nor can an ability to create them be brought about through learning and preparation. They have no maximum level that can be reached, and excellence of *isti'āra* or *bayān* cannot simply be taught and practiced to perfection. These criteria—having no maximum level and the inability attain them through learning and practice—are integral to the status of *isti'āra* and *bayān* as *i'jāz*: anything that can be learned cannot be *mu'jiz*, by definition. Conciseness (*al-ijāz*) and simplicity (*al-baṣṭ*) are also correctly connected to *i'jāz*, "as they are connected to truths."<sup>33</sup> These are all manners and modes of expressing meaning that contribute to rhetorical inimitability.

These two uses of the word *ḥaqīqa* in connection with *i'jāz* should draw the reader's attention. In a section of the text concerned with qualitative features of texts, what role does 'truth' play? Though al-Bāqillānī does not offer us anything in the way of explanation beyond the cryptic phrase about *balāgha* having the same starting point in both the case of innovative *isti'āra* and 'the truths of discourse,' the mutual implication of content and the rhetorical aspect of the discourse seems to be the key. *Ḥaqīqa* is not the contrary of *majāz* here; innovative *isti'āra* and *ḥaqīqa* in discourse go together in expressing the wise and exalted ideas contained in the Qur'ān. *Isti'āra badī'a* is not a conventional designation, and in the absence of examples it is only possible to speculate on precisely what al-Bāqillānī intended by the term. The range of probable options hinges on the sense in which he is using the term *badī'a*. As noted in Chapter Four, his applications of the term are marked by a semantic sliding among its technical meaning and senses that are closer to the dominant senses of the root B-D-'. Perhaps he means novel metaphors of the type Kronfeld has examined, in contrast to conventional or dead metaphors; al-Bāqillānī may also have in mind metaphors that are amazing in the creative ways they elucidate meaning.<sup>34</sup> Al-Bāqillānī is indeed concerned with the level of eloquence of a text, but this eloquence is not a way of describing the text's aesthetic qualities alone. Rather, it concerns the conveyance of meaning, and specifically the level of clarity with which meaning is expressed. As such, the miracle of *bayān* involves features of the text including versification and metaphors that are uniquely able to convey meaning.

Al-Bāqillānī differentiates some other aspects of discourse construction that are the contrary of *i'jāz*-related *bayān*. This is why these features of discourse do not participate in *i'jāz*: "*saj'* is limited and the path to it is proffered," namely, people can learn it without difficulty.<sup>35</sup> Thus, al-Bāqillānī's discussions of *saj'* (rhymed prose) and poetry are not only a defense of the uniqueness of the Qur'ānic genre but rather a way of explaining what the meaning of the Qur'ānic miracle actually is. Humans can learn and imitate *saj'* and poetry, but

<sup>32</sup> "... li-anna al-balāgha fī kull wāḥid min al-bābayn tajrī majra wāḥidan, wa-ta'khudh ma'khadhan mufradan." Al-Bāqillānī, *I'jāz*, 430.

<sup>33</sup> "Kamā yata'allaq bi-l-ḥaqā'iq." Al-Bāqillānī, *I'jāz*, 430.

<sup>34</sup> Kronfeld, "Novel and Conventional Metaphors," 13.

<sup>35</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I'jāz*, 430.

the Qur'ān's genre, in being inimitable, is by definition miraculous. Likewise, punning wordplay (*tajnīs*) and parallelism (*taṭbīq*)—and here al-Bāqillānī takes a jab at the Modern poets Abū Tammām and al-Buḥtūrī—as well as the use of emphatic letters (*iṭbāq*) are features that do not contribute to the Qur'ān's miraculousness. Those literary devices that can be reproduced through learning the mechanics of poetry composition without building meaning do not count as miraculous.

*Saj'* was strongly associated with the pre-Islamic sooth-sayers (*kuhhān*; sing. *kāhin*), and it was in contrast to their false pronouncements of wisdom that the Qur'ān was defended, including in al-Bāqillānī's own chapter differentiating the Qur'ān from *saj'*. Abdul Aleem writes of the *kāhin*: “By his very nature he was bound to use ambiguous language and *Saj'* provided him with a handy material. Small compact sentences sounding very grandiose but devoid of any sense, or capable of being interpreted in innumerable ways, form the bulk of these sayings which are, to a very small extent, still preserved.”<sup>36</sup> The idea is that the *kuhhān* used intentionally ambiguous utterances, in the sense of those that could be interpreted to mean many different things, as a way of shrouding the vacuous nature of their predictions in vagueness. The Qur'ān, of course, had to be defended from such uncertainty of meaning, and al-Bāqillānī focused his energy on exactly this point.

*Saj'* is also marked in *i'jāz* discussions for stereotypically being mechanically reproducible, a style that marks genre by playing to the conventionally recognizable lilt and predictable meters. In contrast, Qur'ānic verses are noted for their use of an innovative range of verse lengths, types of slant-rhyme, and other such sound-based features that Michael Sells labels ‘sound-figures.’<sup>37</sup> Of course, the polemical history of Qur'ānic style is at play here, and my aim is not to explain actual differences between these styles but rather only to clarify the distinction al-Bāqillānī may have been drawing between rhetorical devices that do or do not participate in *i'jāz*. The conventional narrative tells us that *saj'* is produced according to known patterns of speech, including rhyme and cadence; Qur'ānic versification defies it.

It is worthy of note that during al-Bāqillānī's time, both *saj'* and *tajnīs* were enjoying an era of popularity in prose.<sup>38</sup> It is possible that those who championed the instantiations of *saj'* and *tajnīs* in human literary production may have offended al-Bāqillānī's sensibilities and taste. It is not unusual for him to make jabs at contemporary trends in thought without naming his targets explicitly. Al-Ṣāhib ibn 'Abbād (d. 995), the Zaydī (Shī'ī) Mu'tazilite vizier of Rayy, was particularly fond of a style that included *saj'* and abundant use of literary devices.<sup>39</sup> He was of Persian descent and composed literary compositions in Arabic and Persian, but he also had an interest in theology and was eager to use his influence to spread Mu'tazilism. He also referred frequently to Mu'tazilite tenets in his literary compositions.<sup>40</sup> His use of *saj'* in particular led to

<sup>36</sup> Abdul Aleem, “Ijazu'l-Qur'an,” 66.

<sup>37</sup> Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur'ān: The Early Revelations* (Ashland, OR: White Cloud Press, 1999), 25.

<sup>38</sup> I am grateful to Everett K. Rowson for this observation, brought to my attention when I presented a section of this chapter at the Middle Eastern Studies Association annual conference (Nov. 25, 2014).

<sup>39</sup> “In prose especially, al-Sahib was among the first exponents of the artistic prose style named *inshā'*, whose main mark was the use of rhyme (*saj'*) and rhythmical balance, and on top of that, poetical artifices.” Erez Naaman, “Literature and Literary People at the Court of Al-Ṣāhib ibn 'Abbād” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2009; ProQuest order no. 3385436), 6. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/304891461?accountid=14496>.

<sup>40</sup> Naaman, “Literature,” 7, 72.



al-Tawḥīdī excoriating him. To al-Tawḥīdī, the Ṣāḥib’s use of *saġ* “only disguises a lack of natural talent, skill, and knowledge. The concentration on formal aspects is at the expense of meaning.”<sup>41</sup> Given that al-Bāqillānī spent time in Rayy, and Ibn ‘Abbād spent time in Baghdad, al-Bāqillānī was likely aware of this exchange.<sup>42</sup> As I argue, al-Bāqillānī’s interest in language usage was meaning-focused rather than aesthetically-minded. Al-Tawḥīdī’s account of the Ṣāḥib’s style encapsulates exactly what would have been annoying and pointless literary composition for al-Bāqillānī, especially when it came from a Mu‘tazilite litterateur.

Some other categories of literary devices may or may not participate in *i’jāz*, depending on how they are used. Hyperbole (*mubālagha*) of a *lafẓ* (word) is not miraculous, but exaggeration of intended sense and description (*al-ma’nā wal-ṣifa*) does yield *i’jāz*. Privileging of idea-level exaggeration over word-level exaggeration is a distinction that is consistent with al-Bāqillānī’s emphasis on structures of conveying meaning and ideas within the text. Quotation (*taḍmīn*) may be connected to *i’jāz* when it concerns meanings (*ma’ānī*) if its *balāgha* is of the highest rank.<sup>43</sup> He does not provide any examples or elaboration on this classification, unfortunately. In both of these cases, the difference between usage that participates in *i’jāz* and that which does not is the extent which the usage is tied to meaning. Al-Bāqillānī’s inclusion of ‘marvelous *isti’āra*’ as participating in *i’jāz* also points to a construction of language whose borrowing is of an idea, not merely a word. The rhetorical figure must be intimately tied to the expression of meaning in order to contribute to Qur’ānic inimitability.<sup>44</sup> In another passage, al-Bāqillānī outlines a second basis for differentiation between the two types of literary devices he has described: some can have varying levels of quality, while others simply are present or absent. Those ‘form-based’ ones like punning (*tajnīs*) are not taken to occur in instances of varying quality, whereas those connected to meaning, like *isti’āra* and *tashbīh*, attain different levels of excellence.<sup>45</sup>

Is the ingenious connection of language’s features to content and meaning the key to *i’jāz*, the distinction of superior *balāgha* to which humans have fleeting access at best? In other words, does al-Bāqillānī’s distinction between rhetorical devices that do and those that do not participate in literary *i’jāz* exhibit any discernible logic that ties together the different items in these categories? Al-Bāqillānī suggests one of his own answers in another passage about the rhetorical device *tashbīh* (likening, analogy). *Tashbīh* may participate in *i’jāz*, but just the

<sup>41</sup> Naaman continues with a variety of anecdotes attesting to the Ṣāḥib’s obsession with *saġ* and other formal aspects of speech. One includes “an overt allusion to al-Sahib’s Persian descent as an obstacle to eloquence, commensurate with al-Tawḥīdī’s own critique of non-Arabs’ deficient linguistic sensitivities.” Naaman, *Literature*, 262-63.

<sup>42</sup> Maurice A. Pomerantz, “A Political Biography of al-Ṣāḥib Ismā’il b. ‘Abbād (d. 385/995),” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 134, no. 1 (2014): 1-23.

<sup>43</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I’jāz*, 429.

<sup>44</sup> I refer to the distinction between meaning-based *badī‘* and that which merely adorns the surface of an utterance as a shorthand way of writing about the distinction that al-Bāqillānī draws, without intending to imply agreement with the validity of such a distinction. More recent critics and theorists have effectively challenged the dichotomy between form and content, leading to acceptance of meaningful interplay between the two, if they can even truly be distinguished as separate terms. Jaroslav Stetkevych has discussed the particular relationship of classical Arabic poetry to this perceived dichotomy and attempts at its deconstruction. Jaroslav Stetkevych, “The Arabic *Qaṣīdah*: From Form and Content to Mood and Meaning,” *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 3/4, part 2 (1979-1980): 774-85.

<sup>45</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I’jāz*, 431.

presence of *tashbīh* in a text does not make it *muʿjiz* (miraculous or inimitable). In an elucidating passage, al-Bāqillānī suggests the distinction of an instance that is associated with *iʿjāz* is its connection to the meaning of the text. Even the aspects of discourse that participate in *iʿjāz* are not the location of *iʿjāz* in and of themselves. He writes:

We have said [. . . that] *balāgha* may be known by way of likening [*tashbīh*], and that is a given. If we said the *tashbīh* located in the Qurʾān is *muʿjiz*, [an opponent] would reply by mentioning *tashbīhāt* that are commonly used in poetry, [examples of which] have been shown to us, of which you are well aware. You find marvelous [*badīʿ*] *tashbīh* in ibn al-Muʿtazz’s poetry that resembles magic, and in that [category] he pursued that which nobody else produced, and he succeeded in that at which other poets were not successful.

Likewise for many aspects of *balāgha*, we have made clear that learning them is possible, while *balāgha* is not located in one aspect to the exclusion of another. If [someone] means [to say] that if he produces every idea that occurs in his speech at the highest level, and if the way he connects the parts of his speech together and ends up with his means of expressing has the most perfect *balāgha* and most marvelous excellence [*abdaʿ barāʿa*], this is something we would not refute, but rather affirm.

But we reject his saying that *iʿjāz* inheres some of these aspects by themselves without its being linked with the discourse that is connected to it and leads to it, like his saying that the thing that I swear on by itself is miraculous [*muʿjiz*], and that analogy [*tashbīh*] is miraculous, and that punning [*tajnīs*] is miraculous, and that antithesis [*muṭābaqa*] is miraculous in and of itself.

Rather, [regarding] the verse in which there is *tashbīh*, if he claims that its inimitability [*iʿjāz*] is due to its terms [*alfāẓ*] and arrangement [*naẓm*] and composition [*taʿlīf*], I do not reject or correct it but would not claim its *iʿjāz* due is to the placement of the *tashbīh*.

The author of the statement that we have recounted attributed the [idea mentioned above] to the placement of *tashbīh* and other similar aspects. We have made clear that among these aspects are those, such as *bayān*, that *iʿjāz* is connected with. That [*bayān*] is not particular to the type of thing that is clarified [*al-mubayyan*] to the exclusion of another type. Thus God said: “This is a clear lesson to people” [Q 3:138],<sup>46</sup> and God said “explaining everything” [Q 16:89],<sup>47</sup> and God said, “in a clear Arabic tongue” [Q 26:195]. And God, whose

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<sup>46</sup> The whole verse reads: ‘This is a clear lesson to people, and guidance and teaching for those who are mindful of God.’

<sup>47</sup> The whole verse reads: “The day will come when We raise up in each community a witness against them, and We shall bring you [Prophet] as a witness against these people, for We have sent the Scripture down to you explaining everything, and as guidance and mercy and good news to those who devote themselves to God.”

mention is glorified, repeated in [other] places that [the Qur'ān] is clarifying [mubīn].<sup>48</sup>

In this passage, al-Bāqillānī further nuances his demarcation of where the Qur'ān's literary inimitability is located. Here, he questions whether rhetorical devices like *tashbīh* can contain *i'jāz* at all. Whereas some interpreters might think so, he responds that a Qur'ānic passage's *i'jāz* is not due to the *tashbīh* in it. This distinction seems to be at least in part a response to taxonomical models of *i'jāz* (like al-Rummānī's). For al-Bāqillānī, the presence of a rhetorical device like *tashbīh* might be the clearest way for an idea to be conveyed, in which case the Qur'ānic verse expresses it in that manner. However, the use of the device itself is the cause of *i'jāz*. It is noteworthy that the first two verses cited here (Q 3:138 and 16:89) both reference the Qur'ān's providing guidance after the clause that al-Bāqillānī cites. He would rely on his audience to know these verses by heart, so he does not need to cite verses in their entirety for this message of clarity to echo in the minds of his educated readership.

Taking these various passages about rhetorical devices and *i'jāz* together, we can see that al-Bāqillānī has a complex idea of the relationship between the two. The type of rhetorical device contained in a section of text remains but one criterion of *i'jāz*. The Qur'ān's sustained excellent *balāgha*, which humans are incapable of learning or achieving through practice, is key. A poet may have excellent *bayān* in a line or two, but this is the limit of what humans can produce. What separates the miracle of the Qur'ān from this human production is the consistently excellent level of *bayān*, a distinction al-Bāqillānī repeatedly emphasizes. When he defines the basic unit of *i'jāz* as a *sūra*, whether it is long or short, or even a long verse, he says *balāgha* is not clear in anything shorter than that such that *i'jāz* can be judged, which allows for differentiating the Qur'ān's *balāgha* from a brief moment of human literary excellence.<sup>49</sup> This designation of length is not tied to the division of particular verses and *sūras* but rather to the general size of a section of text that is longer than the sporadic line or two of poetry for which humans can sustain an excellent level of language use. The entirety of the Qur'ān is miraculous, not just the verses that have literary devices. The verses that do contain identifiable literary devices do so because the devices at hand happen to be the most suitable ones for conveying the ideas at hand. Contrary to what al-Bāqillānī's chapter on *badī'*, read independently of the rest of the treatise, might lead a reader to believe, the importance of recognizing the location of rhetorical aspects of language in the Qur'ān is not merely a matter of taxonomy and classification but rather of knowing what the utterance communicates.

This conception of language presupposes the idea that content comes about form in the sense that ideas come about in the mind before they are expressed in words. Eloquence is understood to occur when perfectly suitable wording is found to express an (extant) idea. It seems to draw a distinction between formal features of language that truly affect content (like innovative *isti'āra*) and those that don't, according to him (like punning wordplay [*tajnīs*] and parallelism [*taṭbīq*]). On an intuitive level, at least, this distinction is coherent, and al-Bāqillānī explains it in terms of which features are learnable and acquirable through practice.

The centrality of the Qur'ān in literary and theological thought is a distinguishing feature of the system in which al-Bāqillānī was writing (and that he in fact contributed to

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<sup>48</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I'jāz*, 417-18.

<sup>49</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I'jāz*, 433.

creating). Al-Bāqillānī was, as we have seen, interested in reconciling the Qur'ān's use of language recognizable and comprehensible to its human audience while at once using this language to express unique meanings that are, in and of themselves, also part of the Qur'ān's miracle (e.g. knowledge of the unseen and of future events). This expressivity is important to the doctrine of the Qur'ān's inimitability because according to Muslim tradition, the Qur'ān communicated different meanings from the Arabic-language texts that came before it, such as pre-Islamic poetry and the rhymed prose (*saq'*) of the soothsayers. However, the Qur'ān also insists that it uses clear Arabic to repeat God's message, delivered in previous Scriptures, to bring revelation to the Arabs in their own language. The question is how old, familiar words and terminology can articulate these ideas that claimed to be essentially different from the poetry, speeches, and rhymed prose of the pre-Islamic Arabs (*saq'*).<sup>50</sup> The crux of the issue is that language operates based on shared concepts, and it is that condition under which words and utterances communicate. The speaker and the audience must have a shared idea of the meaning of the words in the utterance in order for the utterance to be conveyed. But the Qur'ān communicates meanings that are new and not known through other texts. How can this be achieved using familiar words assigned to familiar meanings? Here is where figurative language is uniquely useful. A figurative expression can build on already-available meanings to describe a new meaning. Innovative *isti'āra*, as al-Bāqillānī would have it, shakes the audience with its unique construction of meanings to produce a new understanding.<sup>51</sup> It does not just 'enhance' language but deeply affects the way readers understand a given idea, like the conceptual metaphors described by Lakoff and Johnson.<sup>52</sup> Jan Assmann has explored the untranslatability of a singularity with reference to the monotheistic God,<sup>53</sup> and Michael Sells has written about apophatic language and its indirect ways of expressing that which is beyond language.<sup>54</sup> The aspects of *balāgha* that al-Bāqillānī describes as participating in *i'jāz* are

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<sup>50</sup> This point might seem to bring forth a tension between the newness of the Qur'ān's message and its emphatic claims to be repeating the message God previously brought to other peoples. Al-Bāqillānī considers *naẓm* and *ta'līf* (terms that refer to the ordering, arrangement, and structure of any composition) to be among what distinguishes the Qur'ān from earlier Abrahamic Scriptures, which are not inimitable (*mu'jiz*) despite sharing some miraculous characteristics with the Qur'ān, specifically their speaking of the future and the unseen (*al-kalām 'an al-mustaqbal wa-l-ghayb*). See al-Bāqillānī, *I'jāz*, 19-20 for example; this issue is also discussed in Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ*. Biblical usage of metaphor in particular was also studied by St. Augustine (who even read the Genesis story as allegorical in his *City of God*), and regardless of al-Bāqillānī's knowledge of the Bible, claiming the Qur'ān's uniqueness among Scriptures is tied to its use of rhetorical devices would not be straightforward, because the Bible does make use of many figures that al-Bāqillānī identifies; in addition, al-Bāqillānī considers *naẓm* separate from *badī'*.

<sup>51</sup> This describes what is unique about fresh, 'innovative' figurative language, which Kronfeld discusses in terms of the construal of novel metaphors. Kronfeld, "Novel and Conventional Metaphors," 13-15. In a contrast that draws out the particular quality of new metaphors, Charles E. Winquist describes hackneyed metaphors as follows: "Through common usage the metaphor is effaced as metaphor. If the signs in the metaphorical construction are images used as signs and the metaphor is effaced, the images become reality. The vitality of the metaphor is lost when it masquerades as reality. . . The image is now the reality and it is the image that is valued." Charles E. Winquist, *Desiring Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 32-33.

<sup>52</sup> George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

<sup>53</sup> Jan Assman, "Translating Gods: Religion as a Factor of Cultural (Un)Translatability," in *The Translatability of Cultures*, ed. Sandra Budick and Wolfgang Iser (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 25-36.

<sup>54</sup> Sells, *Mystical Languages*.

integral to the Qur'ān's expression of new meanings. The Qur'ān 'broke the custom' of familiar language usage so that it could 'break the custom' of familiar meanings.

### Understanding versus Ability: *Barā'a* as Superiority in Qur'ānic Style

Why is Qur'ānic clarity so important? It allows insight into religion even while its level of discourse is superior to anything humans could produce. Al-Bāqillānī emphasizes this aspect of the importance of understanding the Qur'ān through repetition of a key term: *aṣl al-dīn*, 'the root of religion.' Al-Bāqillānī uses this term several times to explain why the understandability of the Qur'ān is of fundamental importance. It provides the foundation of Islamic thought, the 'root' knowledge that is the starting point for human comprehension of religious truths: "Among what is most important of what is necessary for the people of religion to discover, and most deserving of what requires searching, is what foundations the root of their religion [*aṣl al-dīn*] has."<sup>55</sup> The miraculousness of the Qur'ān is not so mystifying or other-worldly as to be beyond human grasp; rather, it is ultimately a guide communicated excellently through comprehensible language. Recognition of the Qur'ān's status as miracle allows it to be a place of trust and guidance. The Qur'ān's role as guide, which al-Bāqillānī prooftexts extensively, can only work if people know what it is saying:

"*Al if Lām Rā* This is a book that We have sent down to you [that is, the Prophet] so that, with their Lord's permission, you may bring people from the depths of darkness into light, to the path of the Almighty, the Praiseworthy" [Q 14:1]. So [God] has informed that [God] brought it down to effect guidance by it, and that cannot be the case except if it is a proof, and it is not a proof if it is not a miracle."<sup>56</sup>

This theme recurs many times in the course of Bāqillānī's text. In his summary of all reasons for *i'jāz*, the tenth one is "that [God] eased its path," making the Qur'ān free of strange unknown vocabulary as well as artificiality. "[God] brought it close to comprehension, its meaning [*ma'nāhu*] bringing its wording [*lafẓuhu*] into the heart, the expression of its sense racing to the soul."<sup>57</sup> The contrast that al-Bāqillānī references here, between language that was 'artificial' or 'crafted' (*maṣnū'*) and that which was 'natural' (*maṭbū'*), was a conventional distinction in literary criticism starting in the 'Abbasid era, specifically in connection with the *badī'* movement. It is not surprising that al-Bāqillānī distances the Qur'ān from the *maṣnū'*, which was associated with literature composed and perfected through a process of exertion, leading to what critics saw as overworked lines loaded with the overuse of literary devices. Its contrary, *maṭbū'*, was supposedly style achieved through a naturally flowing sense of style and expression.<sup>58</sup>

The key for al-Bāqillānī is that the ease with which humans, properly equipped, can understand the Qur'ān does not mean humans can imitate or replicate it. He follows up his

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<sup>55</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I'jāz*, 4.

<sup>56</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I'jāz*, 11.

<sup>57</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I'jāz*, 69.

<sup>58</sup> Heinrichs, "Maṭbū' and maṣnū'," 516.

comments about accessibility by saying: “It does not cause covetousness, despite its proximity to the soul, nor cause the belief, despite its closeness, that one is capable of it or can gain control over it.”<sup>59</sup> Al-Bāqillānī has opened up a space between understanding the Qur’ān’s language and being able to reproduce the likes of it. It is al-Bāqillānī’s emphasis on this space that distinguishes his approach to the Qur’ān in large part. This creative way of understanding the Qur’ān allows humans full interpretive range over the Qur’ān’s verses, a degree of access that is important for the maintenance of the Qur’ān as a central basis for religious understanding, while still preserving the doctrine of linguistic excellence and inimitability.

Al-Bāqillānī also introduces another distinction to the realm of the human capacity to understand the Qur’ān. People can understand but not reproduce the Qur’ān, as we have seen, but they may also be unable to explain the *barā’a* of some verses. *Barā’a* is another difficult term to translate; it relates to proficiency, skill, and capability, and it comes from the verb *bara’a*, which can be rendered as ‘surpass, excel.’ In classical Arabic, the phrase *bara’a al-jabal* meant “he ascended, or ascended upon, the mountain,” and the phrase *bara’a ṣāhibahu* meant “he was, or became, superior to his companion; he excelled over him; he overcame him.” A more general meaning of the verb *bara’a* was “to excel” in a quality.<sup>60</sup>

Al-Bāqillānī does not want to say that *barā’a* is not present in the verses, but rather to open up room to support the assertion that the whole Qur’ān is unwaveringly eloquent while explaining why in some cases interpreters may still be at a loss as to how to parse or explicate this eloquence. If an opponent claims he can find verses in the Qur’ān whose *naẓm* (arrangement) is contrary to the superior *naẓm* and *barā’a* al-Bāqillānī had described, due to individual words not meeting the standard of *barā’a*, what should one say to counter this opponent’s assertion? Al-Bāqillānī responds by giving an example of a verse that exemplifies the challenge of explaining *barā’a*. He writes:

It is said to him: We know that [God’s] saying, “You are forbidden to take as wives your mothers, daughters, sisters, paternal and maternal aunts” [Q 4:23], until the end of the verse,<sup>61</sup> is not of the type in which the *barā’a* can be shown or the eloquence [*faṣāḥa*] clarified. That works in the same way as what must be mentioned of names and titles, for it is not possible to show *balāgha* in them. Seeking it in the likes of these is a type of ignorance. Rather, what can be considered in the likes of these is the way the speech is produced, and showing the wisdom in the arrangement [*tarṭīb*] and the meaning [*ma’nā*], and that is present in this *āya*—if you ponder it.

Don’t you see that it begins by mentioning the mother, due to the greatness of her sanctity, and her giving of herself, and her being a constituent part

<sup>59</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I’jāz*, 69.

<sup>60</sup> Lane, *Lexicon*, 189.

<sup>61</sup> The whole verse reads as follows: “You are forbidden to take as wives your mothers, daughters, sisters, paternal and maternal aunts, the daughters of brothers and daughters of sisters, your milk-mothers and milk-sisters, your wives’ mothers, the stepdaughters in your care—those born of women with whom you have consummated marriage, if you have not consummated the marriage, then you will not be blamed—wives of your begotten sons, two sisters simultaneously—with the exception of what is past: God is most forgiving and merciful—”

[ba ʿdiyya], for she is the origin among them, for everyone who gives of himself, and because in genealogies there is no relation closer than her.

And then [God] came to the nature of the connections, joining to her the rule [that governs] the weaning-mother, for her flesh distributes milk to whomever it feeds, and that also results in her constituting part [of others], and [God] extended sanctity in this way, and associated her with the mother.

And [the verse] mentions weaning-sisters, for by them it indicates others to which they are related, so it makes them follow the weaning-mother [in their inclusion in the verse's prohibition].<sup>62</sup>

Al-Bāqillānī indicates that the verse continues following this logic. In this passage, he has just explained the Qur'ān's excellent arrangement in the very verse that he provided as an example of a verse where it is difficult to explain the *barā'a* inherent in its expression. It seems his interest in defending the Qur'ān's excellent *barā'a* and its logic have trumped his point that not all verses' *barā'a* can be explained though they surely have *barā'a*. Qur'ānic verses have *barā'a* regardless of whether a human interpreter can explain its functioning, an idea that can be likened to al-Bāqillānī's assertion that *bayān* is an inherent characteristic of a thing and is not dependent on a competent person to recognize and understand the way in which it is *bayān*.

The fact that Qur'ān has this *barā'a* that humans could never produce is also proof that the Qur'ān has been soundly transmitted. If humans had been unfaithful or unreliable in transmitting the Qur'ān, according to al-Bāqillānī's logic, it would not have the perfectly clear and proficient language that it does, and there would be different versions circulating. And how could "they agree on change, substitution, and concealment" of meanings?<sup>63</sup> The *taḥaddī* (challenge) is proof of humans' inability to do so.

Al-Bāqillānī builds the term *barā'a* into his semantic field of Qur'ānic clarity. What he intends by this term, which in other texts about rhetoric and style might be a vague way of describing a well-crafted text, is quite particular. It refers, for al-Bāqillānī, to the Qur'ān's unmatched linguistic and rhetorical *capacity* and *mastery*, which humans can only understand and recognize—not produce. Therefore, *barā'a* functions as a terminological way of emphasizing the gap between the Qur'ān's rhetorical ability and humans' limitation to appreciating and understanding this ability. This gap allows al-Bāqillānī to maintain that the Qur'ān is at once clear and accessible in meaning while being inimitable at the same time.

### Consistency in Level and Meaning: The Mutual Similarity of Qur'ānic Verses

In Chapter Two, I demonstrated the ways in which al-Bāqillānī redefined the terms *muhkam* and *mutashābih*, contentious keywords from Q 3:7, to support his thesis of linguistic clarity and understandability in the context of legal theory. Q 3:7 is not mentioned directly in his book *I'jāz al-Qur'ān*, but al-Bāqillānī does deal with the contentious terms in this verse at

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<sup>62</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I'jāz*, 316.

<sup>63</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I'jāz*, 35.

different points in his text, allowing the reader to discern his interpretation of it. This weaving of a theological and exegetical debate into *i'jāz* discourse is a striking feature of the text that sets it apart from other treatises in this genre and reflects al-Bāqillānī's multifaceted scholarly identity. Elaborating on these contentious key terms here, as al-Bāqillānī also does in his *uṣūl al-fiqh* work, creates a point of intersection between the two realms of thought and implies the consistency of these disciplines while also showing how the concepts of *muḥkam* and *mutashābih* fit into each discourse. Al-Bāqillānī's creative reassignment of meanings to the terms *muḥkam* and *mutashābih*, in the context of the Qur'ān's linguistic inimitability, supports his thesis that the Qur'ān's level of linguistic excellence is consistent and does not waver or fluctuate (*yatafawwat*) specifically with regard to its level of clarity. He argues that the Qur'ān's language usage is distinguished from that of humans because the Qur'ān always maintains a level of excellence that humans cannot uphold for more than a line or two. Thus, in content as well as form, the Qur'ān is consistent, unwavering, and cogent. He ties this *mu'jiza* (miracle) of consistency to the term *muḥkam*, thereby asserting that this contentious term actually refers to the Qur'ān's verses' similarity to each other in terms of their level of clarity. He ties together key *āyāt* to support his point, saying:

The arrangement of the Qur'ān [. . .] does not vary [in quality], as [God] said: "If it had been from anyone other than God, they would have found much inconsistency in it" [Q 4:82]. It does not deviate from its uniformity [*tashābuhīhi*] and internal consistency [*tamāthulīhi*]<sup>64</sup>—as [God] said: "an Arabic Qur'ān without any distortion" [Q 39:28], and "a Scripture that is consistent [*mutashābihan*]" [Q 39:23]—and does not cease elucidating [*ibānatīhi*], as [God] said: "in a clear Arabic tongue" [Q 26:195].<sup>64</sup>

This passage emphasizes the clarity of the Qur'ān in its entirety, leaving no room for viewing any type of verses as an exception that is clear only to God and/or the Prophet. As in the case of some verses cited earlier, the second proof-text here (Q 39:23) makes reference to the Qur'ān's clarity later in the verse, something al-Bāqillānī could expect his readers to be aware of.<sup>65</sup> Al-Bāqillānī's explanation complements the verses he cites, explaining how he reads the verses in question, and his combination of cited verses is a kind of *tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi-l-Qur'ān*—explaining a passage using another passage from the Qur'ān. In particular, he links the fraught term *mutashābih* with the term *mutamāthil* in a construction that suggests they are near synonyms for him. The root SH-B-H, from which the term *mutashābih* derives, yields words having to do with similarity and resemblance as well as doubt and confusion.<sup>66</sup> The root of the word *mutamāthil*, M-TH-L, has a wide range of meanings, including those that concern likeness and comparison.<sup>67</sup> The morphological form of both words signifies mutuality. Pairing these two terms highlights the prominent area of overlap between their respective meanings—that of

<sup>64</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I'jāz*, 314.

<sup>65</sup> The entire verse reads as follows: "God has sent down the most beautiful of all teachings: a Scripture that is consistent and draws comparisons; that causes the skins of those in awe of their Lord to shiver. Then their skins and their hearts soften at the mention of God: such is God's guidance. [God] guides with it whoever [God] wills; no one can guide those God leaves to stray."

<sup>66</sup> Lane, *Lexicon*, 1510.

<sup>67</sup> Lane, *Lexicon*, 3017.



mutual similarity. Thus, al-Bāqillānī is obliquely entering into the debate over the meaning of the terms *muḥkam* and *mutashābih* without announcing a cohesive interpretation of Q 3:7. His usage of the term *mutashābih* shows he interprets it to mean ‘mutually similar,’ supporting his view with a verse about how the Qur’ān has no discrepancies in it. Al-Bāqillānī also links these terms in another passage, writing about the Qur’ān that God “clarified its light, brought its path close, eased its way, and in that made it mutually similar [*mutashābih*], like unto itself [*mutamāthil*], and despite that [sustained clarity], clarified [humans’] inability to [produce] it.”<sup>68</sup> Using these two terms together emphasizes their shared meaning of ‘similarity.’ Its verses support and confirm each other rather than being contradictory, as (the verse says) they would be if the source of the Qur’ān were not God. Even if not all verses are equally easy to explain, holding that Qur’ānic style never fluctuates allows al-Bāqillānī to demonstrate the communicative excellence of some verses and proclaim that the same excellence obtains in *all* verses. This synecdochic understanding of eloquence underpins al-Bāqillānī’s approach to the Qur’ān as a text whose very clarity is a testament to its miraculousness.

Positioning the Qur’ān as inherently and definitely comprehensible by humans has important implications for theological doctrine. Perhaps most importantly, holding that the Qur’ān’s human interpreters can understand its meanings strengthens the basis for the Qur’ān’s status as the starting point of religious knowledge and law. If the Qur’ān were outside the realm of human comprehension, how could it be the basis of Islamic law and doctrine? How could anyone declare its words and ideas to be perfectly suited to one another if the ideas were not available to humans? Al-Bāqillānī’s philosophy of language underpins a system in which a clear understanding of the Qur’ān allows that text to serve as a stable foundation of legal theory and theology. Al-Bāqillānī writes, in his chapter summarizing all aspects of Qur’ānic inimitability, that the seventh aspect is as follows:

The meanings [*ma’ānī*] that it includes—in [the realm of] the setting down of *sharī’a* and its prescriptions, proofs of the source of religion, response to the unbelievers regarding marvelous expressions, its internal consistency [*muwāfaqat ba’dihā ba’d<sup>an</sup>*] in subtlety and superiority [*barā’a*—all of these are among that which is difficult and even impossible for humans. This is because it is known that selecting wording for familiar, current ideas [*ma’ānī*] and associations [*asbāb*] in circulation among people is easier and more accessible than selecting wording for original ideas and newly established connections. If the wording of an exalted idea is outstanding, it is finer and more amazing than when the wording is superior for a well-established, [already] conceived-of matter. When these aspects that bolster what it is originating and that it seeks to establish for the first time and affirmation is intended, relative merit in excellence and eloquence become apparent. If the wording is in agreement with ideas, and the ideas in accordance with them [i.e. the utterances], such that one of these categories is more than the other, then the excellence is more apparent and the eloquence is more perfect.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I’jāz*, 69.

<sup>69</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I’jāz*, 63.

In this passage, al-Bāqillānī describes the verses’ *tashābuh* (in his sense of mutual similarity in level of clarity) using a different wording, *muwāfaqat ba ‘dihā ba ‘dan* (‘internal consistency’) which avoids the contentious term in Q 3:7 while expressing a similar idea. Meanwhile, he includes the perfect mutual suitability of meanings with expression, allowing the Qur’ān to be a comprehensible basis for law. This is one instance of how *i ‘jāz* fits into al-Bāqillānī’s larger theological project.

### ***Al-Āyāt al-Aḥkāmiyyāt***

Al-Bāqillānī does not provide a direct exegesis of Q 3:7 and its key terms in his *Kitāb I ‘jāz al-Qur’ān*, as we have seen, preferring to enter obliquely into the debates the verse has sparked, specifically the understandability of the Qur’ān and the meanings of the terms *muḥkam* and *mutashābih*. In addition to discussing the term *muḥkam* proper, he derives another word from its root (Ḥ-K-M) to describe a category of verses he calls *āyāt aḥkāmiyyāt*, a neologism that appears to be unique to his thought. There are only two passages in *Kitāb I ‘jāz al-Qur’ān* in which al-Bāqillānī uses the term *aḥkāmiyyāt*, and neither one provides a definition of the term; al-Bāqillānī refers readers to another book, entitled *Ma ‘ānī al-Qur’ān* (which is not known to be extant anymore, unfortunately), in which he discussed this designation of verses (presumably much more fully). However, judging from the available material in *Kitāb I ‘jāz al-Qur’ān*, the category appears to be comprised of verses that contain or concern legal judgments (*aḥkāam*).<sup>70</sup> It bridges legal and rhetorical discourses through tying together the Qur’ān’s inclusion of legal content with *balāgha* in its root sense of conveying meaning through excellent arrangement (*naẓm*) of verses’ wording.

In the first relevant passage on *āyāt aḥkāmiyyāt*, al-Bāqillānī describes his designation of this term, drawing on the core meaning of the root Ḥ-K-M, which relates to wisdom and legal judgment.<sup>71</sup> Al-Bāqillānī writes:

We mention regarding the *aḥkāmiyyāt* and other verses: “They ask you [Prophet] what is lawful for them. Say, ‘The good things are lawful for you.’ [This includes] what you have taught your birds and beasts of prey to catch, teaching them as God has taught you, so eat what they catch for you, and pronounce God’s name over it. Fear God: God is swift to take account” [Q 5:4].

In this verse, you find wisdom [*ḥikma*], and an amazing articulation [*taṣarruf*], and superior arrangement, which point you—if you will—to the inimitability, with this [word] selection and conciseness. How [much more so] if that reached [to the point of multiple] verses or a *sūra*? Like that verse is [God’s] saying: “[Those] who follow the Messenger, the unlettered prophet they find described in the Torah that is with them, and in the Gospel, who commands them to do right and forbids them to do wrong, who makes good things lawful to them and bad things unlawful, and relieves them of their burdens, and the iron collars

<sup>70</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I ‘jāz*, 317.

<sup>71</sup> Lane, *Lexicon*, 616-17.

that were on them. So it is those who believe him, honor and help him, and who follow the light that has been sent down with him, who will succeed” [Q 7:157].

And like [it is] the verse after it about unity and affirming prophethood,<sup>72</sup> and like the three verses about inheritance.

What skilled person is able to gather the rulings concerning duties [*aḥkām al-farā'id*] in these verses' level of speech? And how could he be capable of the marvelous arrangement [*badī' al-naẓm*] in them?<sup>73</sup>

The way the term *aḥkāmīyyāt* is used here encompasses verses that contain legal content as well as expressions of wisdom. Al-Bāqillānī emphasizes the root *H-K-M* by using other words derived from it (*aḥkām*, rulings, and *ḥikma*, wisdom) in his explanation and thus pointing the reader to the meaning he intends. The form *alone* is not the location of excellence; rather, it is the superb conveying of genuine wisdom. The verse makes its inimitability clear to the audience by way of the verse's fine wording and arrangement. Al-Bāqillānī rhetorically asks his audience to consider how even a skilled human being would fall short of expressing wisdom and judgments in such an astonishing and excellent way. From this passage, it appears that what al-Bāqillānī means by *aḥkāmīyyāt* is the category of verses that have uniquely expressive means of conveying wisdom and legal content.

The term *aḥkāmīyyāt* is used a second time in a section where al-Bāqillānī marvels at the subtle eloquence and arrangement of *āyāt* that contain *aḥkām* (legal judgments), including the marvelous logic behind the arrangement of Q 4:23, discussed above. He writes:

The words of *al-āyāt al-aḥkāmīyyāt*, which must involve expressivity [*balāgha*], are considered as they, and what may be in them, are considered in other than them [i.e., *al-āyāt al-aḥkāmīyyāt*]. Everywhere that [*balāgha*] is possible, it is found in the Qur'ān in its section in the best possible way, which is unsurpassable in eloquence [*balāgha*] and astonishing arrangement [*naẓm*]. In all the *āyāt*, [even] if you do not observe the expressive marvelousness [*al-badī' al-baligh*] in the individual words and discrete phrases [*al-alfāẓ al-āḥād*], you find it in the way two or three words are put together. That obtains at the beginning [of verses], and the ending, and the segmentations, and the middle-portion that lies between the beginning and the conclusion, or in the way all this comes together or in some part of it—all of which is in contrast to marvelousness in individual words, even if all or most of it is as we have previously described.<sup>74</sup>

In this passage, al-Bāqillānī uses the term *balāgha* in the root sense of 'reaching' described earlier, while connecting it to the particular reaching of *meaning* that characterizes the term's signification in the field of rhetoric. Utterances that have *balāgha* 'reach,' i.e., convey, a clear

<sup>72</sup> The verse reads: “Say [Muhammad], ‘People, I am the Messenger of God to you all, from the One who has control over the heavens and the earth. There is no God but God, who gives life and death, so believe in God and God’s Messenger, the unlettered prophet who believes in God and God’s words, and follow him so that you may find guidance’” [Q 7:158].

<sup>73</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I'jāz*, 305-06.

<sup>74</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I'jāz*, 318.

meaning. It is these verses' excellent structure and arrangement that allow for such eloquent expression of legal judgments and wisdom. In describing these verses, al-Bāqillānī uses the terms *balāgha* and *balīgh* repeatedly, emphasizing eloquence that is the result of meaning conveyed well. It is not individual words that contain excellence but rather the way expressions and verses come together to convey ideas.

Another notable feature of this passage is the location of *balāgha* in features of versification ('at the beginning, and the ending, and the verse-breaks, and what middle-portion lies between the beginning and the conclusion'). Earlier, as we saw, al-Bāqillānī identified versification as a metalinguistic feature that participates in *i'jāz*, since it contributes to the *bayān* of the text. The connection of versification to *balāgha*, which is in turn connected to clarity, is reinforced here. Excellent wording and arrangement in conveying verses' content—specifically, legal content and expressions of wisdom—are demonstrations of the Qur'ān's inimitability. Passages like this one show the interconnectedness of different sections of al-Bāqillānī's treatise, which culminate in the expression of the text's key ideas, as well as the impact of al-Bāqillānī's interdisciplinary oeuvre on individual parts of his thought. This is not to say that he is entirely systematic but rather to emphasize the importance of reading the text holistically with the expectation of various points returning in different guises and reinforcing key points using different approaches.

### The Mysterious Letters: A Sign of the Qur'ān's Announcement of Clarity

Al-Bāqillānī's thesis that the Qur'ān is clear and available to human interpretation leads him to deal with difficult passages of the Qur'ān that were often understood to be outside the realm of human knowledge and comprehension. Al-Bāqillānī must hold that even these mysterious parts of the Qur'ān are available to human understanding in order to stand by his thesis of Qur'ānic comprehensibility. Perhaps the most prominent example of this is his treatment of the so-called Mysterious Letters [*al-ḥurūf al-muqatta'a*, lit. 'the broken/cut off letters']. These letters are found at the beginnings of 29 sūras of the Qur'ān and have long been a source of puzzlement and speculation for interpreters.<sup>75</sup> Islamic tradition has typically considered them to be *mutashābihat*, open to a multiplicity of interpretations, "but no definitive solution or explanation has ever risen to widespread acceptance."<sup>76</sup> There are no *aḥādīth* indicating how the Prophet or Companions explained these letters, indicating that they were not a matter of curiosity at the time and were probably clear to the Qur'ān's first audiences. The Qur'ān itself often follows these letters immediately with verses proclaiming the Qur'ān's clarity, fueling speculation about their meaning. Eventually they became one of the paradigmatic instances of the category of the *mutashābih*. As such, some scholars took the position of 'consignment,' that is, they viewed these verses as secrets known only to God. Others treated the *mutashābihāt* as being open to a multiplicity of interpretations by human audiences. However, even scholars who espoused the theory of consignment put forth lists of interpretations (e.g. al-Tha'labī, al-Wāhidī, and al-Qurṭubī).<sup>77</sup> Exegetes interested in defending

<sup>75</sup> Martin Nguyen, "Exegesis of the *Ḥurūf al-Muqatta'a*: Polyvalency in Sunnī Traditions of Qur'ānic Interpretation," *Journal of Qur'ānic Studies* 14, no. 2 (2012): 1-28.

<sup>76</sup> Nguyen, "Exegesis," 6.

<sup>77</sup> Nguyen, "Exegesis," 9.

the Qur'ān's inimitability, such as Quṭrub and al-Farrā', tended to argue that the letters reinforce the idea that the Qur'ān is made of ordinary letters and yet was never matched in level by human composition. (This point feeds into a larger debate over whether the *taḥaddī*, or challenge, to produce a *sūra* like those in the Qur'ān necessitated the Challenge being accessible to humans.)

Al-Bāqillānī follows in his predecessors' steps by arguing that the letters are meant to show that the Qur'ān is made from ordinary Arabic letters. The Challenge is not impossible for humans to meet not because the units of Qur'ānic speech are unknown or unavailable to humans, but rather because the Qur'ān's speech is at such a high level that even though its units – Arabic letters – are also the units of its (first) audiences' speech, it is *still* inimitable. Al-Bāqillānī begins his discussion of the Mysterious Letters directly after one of the instances where he quotes Q 26:195 ('in a clear Arabic tongue'). He writes:

If it were not in this tongue as a proof, the first [part of its] discourse would not be followed by it.

There is no *sūra* that is opened with the mention of the Mysterious Letters but the clarification of what we have said is fulfilled in it. We will mention some of them in order for them to be indications of what comes after it.

Many of these *sūras*, if you contemplate them, are from beginning to end built upon the necessity of the proof of the Qur'ān, and calling attention to the aspect of its miracle.

Among them is Sūrat al-Mu'min, [where] the Almighty said: "*Ha Mīm* This Scripture is sent down from God, the Almighty, the All Knowing" [Q 40:1-2]. Then [God] described [God]self by what [God] was, from the Almighty's saying: "Forgiver of sins and Acceptor of repentance, severe in punishment, infinite in bounty. There is no god but God; to God is the ultimate return. It is only the disbelievers who dispute God's revelations. [Prophet], do not be dazzled by their movements back and forth across the land" [Q 40:3-4], thus indicating that disputation about [God's] revelation is unbelief [*kufr*] and apostasy [*ilhād*].<sup>78</sup>

This *sūra* is full of indications that the Qur'ān is an authentic proof, al-Bāqillānī continues. The *sūra* tells of the nations' accusing their messengers of lying, refutes the faulty proofs (*barāhīn*) by which they did so, and promises their fate will be in hell. It heightened the cause of the believers with a (real) proof [*ḥujja*] and calls the angels to the believers' cause, saying "It is God who shows you [people] God's signs" [Q 40:13]. It cites the parable of those who denied the indications and miracles [*al-dalālāt wal-mu'jizāt*] and their punishment, "for their messengers used to come to them with clarifications [*bayyināt*], and they would not accept them from [the messengers]."<sup>79</sup> It tells the story of Moses' and Joseph's bringing forth clarifications [*bayyināt*]. It mentions many proofs [*iḥtijāj*] for divine unity [*tawḥīd*].<sup>80</sup> All these proofs and clarifications

<sup>78</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I'jāz*, 12-13.

<sup>79</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I'jāz*, 14.

<sup>80</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I'jāz*, 15.

are *āyāt*, in the double meaning of Qur'ānic verses and signs from God.<sup>81</sup> As we have seen with other keywords al-Bāqillānī uses to build his argument, al-Bāqillānī here plays on two meaningfully connected senses of the word *āya*: 'sign' and 'verse of the Qur'ān,' a particular type of divine sign. A sign is a proof and a clarification; the Qur'ān itself enjoins its audience time and again to listen closely to these signs which have been clarified.

Approaching the issue of the Mysterious Letters from another angle, al-Bāqillānī turns to the type of numerical 'proofs' popular among some scholars through the ages. This method finds patterns among the letters' usage rather than looking for a content-value for them. Al-Bāqillānī writes:

The letters on which the Arabs' speech is based are 29 letters, and the number of *sūras* that open with the mention of the letters is 28, and all of the letters that are mentioned at the beginnings of *sūras* are half of the entirety of the letters of the alphabet, which is 14 letters, in order to indicate the others by their mention, and so they may know that this speech is arranged [*muntaẓam*] from the letters with which they arrange their speech. These letters are divided according to how *ahl al-'arabiyya* divided them and built divisions among them by aspect, which we will mention.<sup>82</sup>

Al-Bāqillānī sees the letters as a synecdoche of the entire Arabic alphabet and thus ties the most mysterious of Qur'ānic features to human speech. These letters are meant to point to the familiarity and accessibility of the Qur'ān's units of discourse. The patterns perceptible among the Mysterious Letters even accord with how language experts divide up the letters. Al-Bāqillānī continues, listing these distinctions: half the letters are voiced and half are unvoiced (in terms of their phonetic articulation), half are produced in the throat and half are not, half are 'strong' letters and half are not, half are emphatic and half are not.<sup>83</sup> Human knowledge of these distinctions is not erratic or arbitrary, as al-Bāqillānī notes concerning the first item he introduces: "that is among what must be known in order to base upon it the roots of Arabic."<sup>84</sup>

What makes al-Bāqillānī's approach to the hackneyed matter of numerological proofs of the Mysterious Letters unique is that he ties the patterns found in them to human understanding rather than seeing them as yet another way by which the Qur'ān affirms its own accessibility via linguistic units known to humans and specifically the Arabs to whom it was most immediately revealed. But the Mysterious Letters still participate in *i'jāz al-Qur'ān*, and their comprehensibility does not take away from their miraculousness but rather confirms it:

If the people [of language], who made these divisions among the letters for reasons of their own regarding the arrangement of Arabic and its revelation long after the time of the Prophet (PBUH), saw the structures of language in this way—and what is not mentioned [at the beginning of the *sūra*] signals what is mentioned at the beginnings of the *sūras*, according to the sectioning [*taṣnīf*] we

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<sup>81</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I'jāz*, 15.

<sup>82</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I'jāz*, 66.

<sup>83</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I'jāz*, 66-67.

<sup>84</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I'jāz*, 67.

have described—that indicates that their occurrence in the position upon which there was conventional agreement after a long era has passed could not happen except from God Almighty, because that would be tantamount to knowledge of the unseen [ *ilm al-ghuyūb* ].

If they had, rather, taken notice of the language constructed originally and had not had anything to do with the divisions [in it] was attributable to the one who had set down the origins of language, then that too is one of the wonders [*badi*'] that indicates that its original establishment [*waḍ' ihi*] occurred in the most judicious way, which the language system does not account for.<sup>85</sup>

The letters, in other words, are placed at the beginning of *sūras* according to the logic of Arabic as the Arabs themselves eventually understood it after 'a long era' of studying the matter. Their significance lies in pointing to the miracle through evidencing the wisest arrangement. Al-Bāqillānī continues:

The opening of each *sūra* can be considered to be for a purpose particular to its *naẓm* [arrangement], if it is [Mysterious] Letters, like 'Alif Lām Mīm,' because the *alif* with which it starts is the farthest beginning, and the *lām* is in the middle, and the *mīm* is at the very end, because [this letter] takes hold of the lip. It [i.e. the *sūra*] begins [*nabaha*, lit. 'calls to attention,' 'awakens'] by mentioning these letters to the exclusion of others, and clarified [*bayyana*] that it, rather, came to them with speech [*kalām*] arranged [*manẓūm*] from letters they were acquainted with that exist between these two extremities.<sup>86</sup>

In this example, which takes one of the most common combinations of Mysterious Letters, al-Bāqillānī spells out the logic of their arrangement, using the linguistic place of articulation of the three letters mentioned (*alif*, *lām*, and *mīm*).<sup>87</sup> Again, the letters synecdochically indicate the entirety of the Qur'ān, all its letters from furthest back in the throat to the labial ones produced at the far front of the mouth, and everything in between. These letters are hence an announcement that the Qur'ān uses all letters known to its Arabic-speaking audience. Hence, they are not 'mysterious' letters at all but quite the opposite: they are signs that draw attention to the familiar elements of words and language in the Qur'ān, known quantities that serve as building blocks for Qur'ānic discourse. They announce the Qur'ān's logical knowability and comprehensibility to all who understand these letters.

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<sup>85</sup> Al-Baqillani, *I'jāz*, 68.

<sup>86</sup> Al-Baqillani, *I'jāz*, 68-69.

<sup>87</sup> Arab linguists described sounds by their place and manner of articulation much earlier than European linguists did. Tradition says that al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad's *Kitāb al- 'Ayn*, the first Arabic dictionary, was the first to order the letters in this way, but even if al-Khalīl was not the first one to come up with this phonetic classification, it was most likely someone of his generation or soon thereafter. See Versteegh, *Landmarks*, 24-5.

## Emotional and Visceral Reactions to the Qur'ān: Confirmation beyond Explanation

Al-Bāqillānī's bottom line is that the whole Qur'ān contains equally superior language usage to express meanings. A recurring problem at the edges of his thought is that not all Qur'ānic verses strike the reader as being equally excellent in their use of language. In response to this issue, we see al-Bāqillānī using the idea of a synecdoche in many ways to convince his audience that what they find evident in some verses is true of all the rest of the verses. For verses whose rhetorical communicative excellence is difficult to parse and explain, what should make the audience certain of their quality is the experience of understanding those verses whose explanations are more accessible. By synecdoche, readers will know that *all* verses are as excellent as the ones that can be best explained. Even if some verses' excellence is difficult or impossible to explain didactically, there is another, non-discursive way in which the Qur'ān's audience receives its excellence. He writes:

Raise the eyelid of your heart, look with the eye of your mind [*'aql*], and examine the sureness of your discernment when you reflect on each word of what we have transmitted to you and presented to you, and then the way the words are arranged [*intaẓama*], until each section and narrative, and each story and *sūra*, is perfectly completed. Actually, think about the whole Qur'ān on this arrangement, and contemplate its ordering as set down, for we did not claim what we have claimed for [only] some of it, and we did not describe what we described except for all of it, even if the indication [*dalāla*] in some of it is clearer and more apparent, and the sign [*āya*] more manifest and more dazzling.

If you contemplate what we have guided you to and stopped you at, look: do you find that this light has come into your heart, encompassed your core, spread through your senses, pierced your veins, filled you and surrounded you with surety, and led you to belief and sight? Or do you find a kind of fear taking you over, a sort of trembling in your sides, a sense of pleasure [*aryāḥiyya*] taking you over from some direction?

And do you find rapture rousing you to the subtlety of what you have discerned, and happiness moving you due to the marvelousness of what you have encountered, and do you find in yourself the knowledge that created strength in you, and serenity and joyous excitement in your whole body, and see yourself advancing in clear merit, and in achieving certainty? And do you find the ignorant ones cast under the feet of foolishness, and their caprices thrown into the darkness of insignificance and baseness, and their worth with the eye with which it must be seen, and the stations as they should be judged?

All this comes from contemplating the discourse and its arrangement [*nizāmihi*], and astonishing ideas [*ma'ānī*] and judgments [*aḥkām*].<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I'jāz*, 307-09.



Thus, understanding the Qur'ān's excellence is not just intellectual but upon contemplation fills the whole body—its heart, its core, its senses, its veins. It is sublime, having “subtle ways to the soul and fine inroads to the heart.”<sup>89</sup> The language al-Bāqillānī uses to describe a true understanding of the Qur'ān's excellence is sensory, bodily, and holistic. Larkin has related the term translated above as ‘pleasure’ (*aryāhiyya*) to the Mu'tazilite concept of *sukūn al-nafs*, the internal serenity of certainty that comes from *ilm* (knowledge).<sup>90</sup> This understanding of the Qur'ān is integral to the character of al-Bāqillānī's theology. At the same time that it relegates the *'aql* (the human intellect so championed by his Mu'tazilite opponents) to one aspect of approaching the Qur'ān, it reinforces his argument that the Qur'ān is ultimately understandable for humans, even if the exact content of this understanding cannot always be easily conveyed through the language of exegesis and theological debate. Rather, the understanding runs much deeper for those who take al-Bāqillānī's explanations to heart. While human language sometimes fails to explain verses (due to humans' own intellectual and other limitations, as previously mentioned), human understanding is still there. The physical and emotional reaction a person has to the Qur'ān is a sign, a telling indication of the Qur'ān's marvelousness.<sup>91</sup>

This relegation of the *'aql* (intellect) is not incidental. Even as al-Bāqillānī argues that humans can understand the Qur'ān, he distinguishes between this human capability to comprehend the Qur'ān and bringing the Qur'ān within reach of human intellectual reason. The Mu'tazilites and their focus on championing the *'aql* are the target of many of al-Bāqillānī's polemical diatribes, as are other Asharites who lean too much toward privileging the *'aql*. Al-Bāqillānī complains that his peers from Khorasan were enamored of the idea that the Qur'ān's rulings were “in agreement with reasonings that accord with the requirements of the *'aql*, making that an aspect of Qur'ānic inimitability, and making this method an indication of it, like that with which they justify prayer and most of the duties and their sources.”<sup>92</sup> However, their basis for making these ‘justifications’ was unsound as far as al-Bāqillānī is concerned.

But is the ability to understand the Qur'ān's clarity truly available to all? Or is it limited to an intellectual, linguistic, or scholarly elite? In other words, does al-Bāqillānī truly wish to convey that the Qur'ān's guiding clarity is universally comprehensible—or is his audience more specific? Scholars have parsed the meanings of the Qur'ān in books before, al-Bāqillānī tells us, and the problem is only that they should have done so more clearly so that readers could understand better.<sup>93</sup> The implication here is that the Qur'ān's clarity may only be accessible to scholars trained in Arabic, and it is their job to convey this clarity, as it were, to the masses. It turns out to be a limited group who can truly understand the Qur'ān's linguistic and rhetorical miracle. Non-Arabs must infer it by way of Arabs' inability to produce the likes

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<sup>89</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I'jāz*, 419.

<sup>90</sup> Larkin, *Theology of Meaning*, 46.

<sup>91</sup> Navid Kermani has written about the importance of physical, visceral, and emotional reactions to the Qur'ān as proofs of the Qur'ānic miracle in early Islam. Navid Kermani, *Gott ist Schön: Das Ästhetische Erleben des Koran*, rev. ed. (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2011), 15-18.

<sup>92</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I'jāz*, 70.

<sup>93</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I'jāz*, 6.

of it, and even Arabs' whose linguistic abilities are only mediocre do not know it directly.<sup>94</sup> This is why knowledge of the miracle is not necessary knowledge:

Knowledge of the difference between poetic meters, or other measures of discourse, does not happen necessarily; it requires knowledge of poetic taste and meter. The difference between [one meter] and another requires thought and pondering, consideration, deliberation, and acquisition. Even though distinctive and exceptional arrangement [*naẓm*], when it exists, is known by feel, still, when we want to distinguish one meter or the like from another, we must have recourse to thought and consideration.<sup>95</sup>

Those who are properly educated and undertake the proper reflection are able to ascertain the meaning of the rhetorical miracle of the Qur'ān. For Arabic-speakers well-educated in language and rhetoric, the Qur'ān is a clear guide whose meanings are all available upon reflection and thought. For everyone else, confirmation by this elite group serves as confirmation of the Qur'ān's linguistic and rhetorical miracle. Even keeping this limitation in sight, the contours of al-Bāqillānī's explanation of the way (certain) humans can perceive the Qur'ān's inimitability remain interesting, particularly in their bringing together intellectual and emotional aspects of human comprehension.

### **Conclusion: Miracles, Signs, Indications**

As a theologian with a multifaceted identity rather than a literary critic proper, al-Bāqillānī draws *i'jāz al-Qur'ān* discourse away from the domain of the literary by rejecting the claim that the Qur'ān's uniqueness can be captured in literary theoretical terms. Al-Bāqillānī's project limits the importance of literary analysis and rhetorical devices, insisting that their significance is limited to the context of mechanisms of Qur'ānic clarity. He provides extensive literary analysis of classical Arabic poems in order to show the Qur'ān's linguistic superiority in comparison to human-authored texts, only to conclude that although the Qur'ān is in 'clear Arabic' understandable to humans, it has a unique quality that cannot be described in terms of human-made categories such as particular literary devices and rhetorical figures. While such categories may be able to describe in technical terms what figures of speech and thought are found in the Qur'ān, they cannot account for the miraculous inimitability of the text. In emphasizing the ineffable quality of the Qur'ān, al-Bāqillānī is making a theological point that inherently limits its applicability in the realm of literary analysis. This positions his treatise in contrast to those of some of his contemporaries who engage wholeheartedly in taxonomical interpretations of the Qur'ān's literary devices. The miracle of the Qur'ān's inimitability is, rather, its perfect correspondence between meaning and expression, though al-Bāqillānī does not develop a robust theory of causality between idea and wording in the way his successor al-Jurjānī does.

The thesis of Qur'ānic clarity may not present itself as the most obvious bottom line in al-Bāqillānī's *I'jāz al-Qur'ān*, because like the other points he continually returns to, it recurs in

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<sup>94</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I'jāz*, 35.

<sup>95</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I'jāz*, 446.

different guises in several chapters rather than taking the form of a single discussion with an explicitly stated thesis. However, a careful analysis of his text shows a consistent interest in propounding the notion of the Qur'ān as a clear and comprehensible guide. Rather than presenting this idea as a thesis to be argued and proven, al-Bāqillānī incorporates it into his writing so that the unsuspecting reader might end up taking it as a given, a basis upon which al-Bāqillānī can expose and explicate particular aspects of the Qur'ān's inimitability. An important mechanism by which al-Bāqillānī effects this rhetorical feat is building up a semantic field of terms describing the Qur'ān's rhetorical clarity. Al-Bāqillānī's text pulls these terms together to construct a robust idea of Qur'ānic clarity. As this chapter has shown, particularly central terms drawn into the orbit of *i'jāz* are *bayān* (the Qur'ān's clear mode of expression), *barā'a* (the Qur'ān's unique ability to express in this way), and *mutashābih* (consistently high level of expression in verses), while al-Bāqillānī employs the vocabulary of *āyāt* (signs/verses), proofs and indications, and miracles to reinforce the idea of the Qur'ān's own demonstration of its clarity. Linguistic elements and aspects of rhetoric (such as figurative language and versification) in Qur'ānic usage are notable insofar as they contribute to the guiding clarity in expressing *ma'ānī* (meanings). Al-Bāqillānī's book *Kitāb I'jāz al-Qur'ān* foregrounds language use within the context of *ma'ānī* in the widest sense of ideas, meanings, signification, and expression. Qur'ānic language is not a phenomenon to be admired as such but rather because it expresses truths in a consistently outstanding way.

Within this semantic field, *dalālāt* (indications) point to God's *āyāt* (signs), and *mu'jizāt* (miracles) constitute such signs. Al-Bāqillānī writes that if speech "exceeds the limit of *balāgha* such that specialists of the craft are incapable of it, and reaches a matter that someone with complete competence [*barā'a*] is incapable of—it is correct for it to have the ruling of miracles [*mu'jizāt*], and it is permitted to be located in the position of the indications [*dalālāt*]."<sup>96</sup> In other words, a level of eloquence that exceeds what humans can produce should be placed in the category of those things ruled to be miracles, *dalālāt* pointing to the Divine. What constitutes a miracle? "Breaking with custom is located in miracles [*mu'jizāt*] in the way it is undertaken in the proof of prophecy," guiding perfectly and clearly.<sup>97</sup>

In this focus on miracles, al-Bāqillānī's theological, polemical, explanatory project is clear. The doctrine of *i'jāz al-Qur'ān* is not to be developed and explained simply as an independent aesthetic project but is rather to be understood within the vision of Divine activity observable by educated humans. This differentiates al-Bāqillānī from the likes of al-Khaṭṭābī, al-Rummānī, and later *i'jāz* scholars who use taxonomies of literary devices as demonstrations of Qur'ānic inimitability, and indeed we have already seen al-Bāqillānī's objection to al-Rummānī's overall approach. While the roots of concern for the place of meaning in conceptions of the Qur'ān's rhetorical inimitability are perceptible in al-Khaṭṭābī and al-Rummānī, al-Bāqillānī is unique among these early scholars in developing a theory of the relationship between rhetorical figures, wording, and meaning to such an extent. While the compilation of catalogues of literary figures as demonstrations of *i'jāz* continued long past al-Bāqillānī's own lifetime, the analytical and theoretical currents in his thought were furthered by successors such as al-Jurjānī, al-Sakkākī, and al-Qazwīnī.

<sup>96</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I'jāz*, 433.

<sup>97</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I'jāz*, 435.

The reason this project is so important, al-Bāqillānī writes, is because the Qur'ān is the everlasting, universally witnessable miracle of Islam: “What necessitates complete interest in knowing the inimitability of the Qur'ān is that the prophecy of our Prophet is built on this miracle (*mu'jiza*), even if he was supported by many miracles after that. Those miracles happened at particular moments under particular conditions to particular people. Some were transmitted through many chains of transmission (*mutawātir*) and contain knowledge (*ilm*), others were transmitted with especially many witnesses, and if the matter were contrary to what was narrated, they would have denied it. . . But the indication [*dalāla*] of the Qur'ān is a general miracle that has remained for the ages.”<sup>98</sup>

The basis for differentiating between the miraculous divine use of language and human linguistic production is not just a matter of personal taste, as Bouman suggests.<sup>99</sup> It is true that al-Bāqillānī's analysis of particular poems seems to rely on his own (or his culture's) stylistic judgments. But his theological mindset may have a more convincing answer to offer. The contemporary scholar Abū Mūsā makes the astute observation that al-Bāqillānī seems to be getting at an ultimate reason behind the limitations of human language at large:

Al-Bāqillānī contemplated humans' self-expression in speech and found it limited by the limits of these selves [. . .] in the field of poetry and [modes] other than poetry in terms of the limitations of the range of their competence [*barā'ā*]. Then [al-Bāqillānī] looked around the Qur'ān and found [those limitations] absent there. It is as if he was turned toward that—I mean toward discovering the Qur'ān's total devoidness of the soul [or: self] of the human being, in order to establish its emanating from other than that [human] source.”<sup>100</sup>

In more straightforward terms, Abū Mūsā is interpreting al-Bāqillānī's distinction between human and divine uses of language as essentially different due to the limitations of humans' own selves. People can only do with language as much as their own composition and experience allow, so human language is necessarily constricted and limited, whereas God's is not, by virtue of God's ultimate transcendence, omniscience, and omnipotence. If al-Bāqillānī, the most theologically-minded of his generation of *i'jāz* scholars, ultimately drew *i'jāz* discourse away from human-made designations of the literary and toward the doctrinally-significant notion of meaningful clarity, we must return to the question of how firmly agreed upon the doctrine of the Qur'ān's literary inimitability is.

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<sup>98</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, *I'jāz*, 10.

<sup>99</sup> Bouman writes: “L'objection de Khattābī, suivant laquelle la démonstration en faveur de la nature miraculeuse du style n'est en effet que le goût personnel, n'est pas invalidée par Bāqillānī.” Bouman, *Conflit*, 88.

<sup>100</sup> Abū Mūsā, *Al-I'jāz al-balāghī*, 207.

## Chapter Six: Conclusion

Studying al-Bāqillānī's work on *uṣūl al-fiqh* and *i'jāz al-Qur'ān* has brought to light interesting areas of intersection and overlap. It has shown how al-Bāqillānī used both genres to assert and advance ideas that are part and parcel of his larger contribution as a theologian. Al-Bāqillānī expresses his views on issues including language and Qur'ānic understandability in both of the discourses I have investigated, despite the different goals of the fields of *uṣūl* and *i'jāz*. Through my examination of al-Bāqillānī's writings in these genres, I have drawn out al-Bāqillānī's views on language and its ways of expressing and making clear, showing that discussion of these views is central to a coherent account of al-Bāqillānī's texts.

I have argued that *Kitāb I'jāz al-Qur'ān* and *al-Taqrīb wa-l-irshād fī uṣūl al-fiqh* put forth the shared thesis that language is clear and its utterances are understandable given the right information, and that the Qur'ān in particular is wholly understandable by humans because it uses clear language that is measurable and understandable by the same means that allow audiences to know the meanings of human-authored language. This focus on meanings conveyed through language orients al-Bāqillānī's contributions to both *uṣūl* and *i'jāz* discourses and is a distinguishing characteristic of his body of thought. His focus on language and the way it communicates does not constitute merely a thematic study but rather a contribution to what Gregor Schwarb has in another context called "the most basic semiotic and hermeneutic questions, i.e. how God's speech signifies and how it may be understood."<sup>1</sup> I have argued that the clarity and communicativity of language, particularly Qur'ānic language, is important to al-Bāqillānī because it is the theoretical basis for the Islamic tradition relying on commentary and interpretation with the confidence of a community that has methodical and reliable means of understanding language. Al-Bāqillānī maintains that God only revealed the Qur'ān to its human audience in words known to this audience, and according to the meanings of those words that were known to them. This position allows al-Bāqillānī to tie a correct understanding of the Qur'ān to the known methods of understanding human-authored utterances, and specifically to the vocabulary usage of the Arabs at Muḥammad's time. Confidence in understanding of scripture is a foundation for considering interpretation of it to be trustworthy, which in turn allows for theoretically-sound development of discourses based on this interpretability. Such discourses are not limited to exegesis proper. My study of al-Bāqillānī's work has provided examples of how other genres can be sites of scriptural interpretation as well, as in his interpretations of Qur'ānic verses that are interspersed in his discussions. Schwarb has also shown how different discourses, particularly within *uṣūl*-type disciplines of the 3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> centuries, were fruitful loci of exegesis in the Islamic milieu.<sup>2</sup> This observation is a testament to the centrality of scripture in Islamic scholarship at large during those important eras of theological and cultural development.

Al-Bāqillānī's argument of Qur'ān's eminent understandability and status of sharing in the language of human-authored utterances does not, however, mean that the Qur'ān's rhetorical level is like that of people's compositions. The Qur'ān, for al-Bāqillānī as for his fellow *i'jāz* writers, can accurately be measured and evaluated according to the rhetorical

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<sup>1</sup> Gregor Schwarb, "Capturing the Meanings," 114.

<sup>2</sup> Schwarb, "Capturing the Meanings," 112-14.

standards applied to any other composition, but it is always shown to be superior to human-authored compositions. Eloquence is not measured in individual words, for those are shared among the Qur'ān and human utterances, or even in utterances smaller than a long verse or *sūra*, for humans can also produce one or two excellent lines of poetry at a time, al-Bāqillānī argues. Rather, he says, it is in larger sections of text that the Qur'ān's quality of unwaveringly excellent language use is apparent. He differentiates himself by engaging in the extended poetry analysis that shows the inconsistent quality of humans' literary composition. However, it is this tension between the Qur'ān's understandability (emphasized in the discipline of *uṣūl al-fiqh*) and its inimitability (emphasized in *i'jāz al-Qur'ān*) that makes al-Bāqillānī's thesis of Qur'ānic clarity even more intriguing. He resolves this tension by seeing the Qur'ān as eminently clear and expressive of excellent ideas, thereby locating both its understandability and its miraculousness in its clarity and tying those two key properties together.

The important insights that emerge from reading of al-Bāqillānī's work in any single discipline come into clearer focus when considered in light of multiple parts of the scholar's oeuvre. A language-centered thesis might seem like one of many main ideas in his *i'jāz* work or his *uṣūl al-fiqh* work, but reading both of those texts together shows that an interest in characterizing language as a basis for interpretive work cuts across his work in these disciplines. It is not a concern limited to the parameters of a discipline, but the core of his identity as a scholar and theologian. One way in which al-Bāqillānī focuses his discussion is through the pointed redefinition of keywords in a way that creates a semantic field centered on the notion of clarity and understandability of meanings. I have argued that among the most important keywords he manipulates and uses to support his theological outlook are *bayān* (clarifying text), *muḥkam* (expressions that are overt or consistent), *mutashābih* (multivalent), *badi'* (marvelous wording, rhetorical devices), *barā'a* (competence/superiority), and *balāgha* (communication/eloquence), where the parenthetical translations reflect al-Bāqillānī's own usage. In his *i'jāz* writing, the effect of this semantic cluster of keywords is the reorientation of *i'jāz* discourse, shifting its focus from aesthetics in and of itself to the system of signification and the role rhetoric plays in conveying meaning. Some of the terminology al-Bāqillānī uses to distinguish his ideas in these texts is emphasized in both texts, and other terms' use is limited to one text or the other. Examining both sets of key terms together sheds light on the contours of his thought on language.

The term *bayān* is a keyword in both al-Bāqillānī's *uṣūl* and *i'jāz* texts. In his *Taqrīb*, he provides a general and a technical *uṣūlī* definition of it. Though *bayān* as he describes it is relevant to *uṣūl* and *i'jāz* in its text-related valence, al-Bāqillānī provides several examples of the term *bayān* and other words from the same root in contexts, including those not related to language use, with glosses on them that show that *bayān* is identified with clarity, clarifying, and distinguishing. Necessary knowledge does not have *bayān* because it is known directly. According to his technical definition, *bayān* is an indicant that is connected to knowledge. Unlike other scholars, he does not hold that *bayān* must clarify another, unclear text, but rather that its object is knowledge. In his *i'jāz* work, al-Bāqillānī discusses *bayān* as a property of the Qur'ān's language, prooftexting the verses that say the Qur'ān is clear or clarifying. He says *bayān* is a feature connected to the Qur'ān's inimitability, and his explanation indicates that it is a characteristic of style that can serve as a metric for a text's excellence. Humans cannot produce a text that maintains the highest level of *bayān*.

The *Kitāb I'jāz al-Qur'ān* and the *Taqrīb* examine *bayān* from two disparate vantage points, but the conception of *bayān* that lies behind both is consistent. The *i'jāz* treatise describes *bayān* as a feature of the Qur'ān that is consistently excellent there but not in human speech; this account does not suggest that an utterance that is a *bayān* is identified as such because it clarifies some other utterance (though it may also do that), but rather that it constitutes *bayān* because it communicates meanings and ideas clearly. Whereas some of al-Bāqillānī's *uṣūlī* peers would identify *bayān* as that which clarifies a separate utterance, and al-Bāqillānī does hold that some utterances that have meanings that are not externally apparent are clear only given the correct additional knowledge, al-Bāqillānī does not have a special word for utterances that clarify other utterances. We have seen that the field of *uṣūl al-fiqh* had an internal discourse about *bayān*, and al-Bāqillānī was not the first *i'jāz* writer to include the concept of it in his work, though his peers in the realm of *i'jāz* did not consider it a keyword or focus on it to the extent al-Bāqillānī did. Al-Bāqillānī may have imported his idea of *bayān* taken from *uṣūl al-fiqh* discourse to his *i'jāz* work. What is interesting is to see how taking al-Bāqillānī's work in both of these fields into account sheds light on different aspects of al-Bāqillānī's thought on a single key concept.

Al-Bāqillānī also weaves his reinterpretation of the Qur'ānic keywords *muḥkam* and *mutashābih* into both his *i'jāz* and *uṣūl* work. His strategic ways of defining of these words and the concepts for which they stood is a contribution to the historical debate over these terms. As al-Bāqillānī's and other scholars' views on Q 3:7 have shown, this verse was a locus of the debate on humans' ability to interpret the Qur'ān. The terms *muḥkam* and *mutashābih* were a key site of argument, garnering a variety of interpretations by scholars. One common interpretation of them was that *muḥkamāt* were verses understood to be clear and not in need of interpretation (thus not open to alternative readings), while *mutashābihāt* were ambiguous verses open to multiple interpretations. For some commentators, as we have seen, these verses should be interpreted by humans, while other commentators said only God could understand such verses, and trying to understand them could mislead people.

Al-Bāqillānī explains his own definitions of *muḥkam* and *mutashābih* in both his *i'jāz* and *uṣūl* texts, and his pointed ways of situating and applying these terms are consistent across these texts. He takes the word *muḥkam* to refer to an utterance whose meanings are expressed overtly and an utterance that is internally consistent and non-contradictory, either in meaning or in arrangement (structure). Al-Bāqillānī suggests that these terms' applicability is not limited to Qur'ānic *āyāt* but rather covers any utterance, in a departure from the standard definitions of these terms. All language, for him, is understandable using one unified set of criteria and categories. In redefining *mutashābih* the way he does, he removes the category of unclear or opaque verses from the Qur'ān and casts the whole Qur'ān as understandable and clear. The debate over *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt* is most often associated with the *tafsīr* (exegesis) and *uṣūl al-fiqh* genres, and it is interesting to see how al-Bāqillānī includes them in his *i'jāz* text as well, implicitly bridging the two disciplines at this juncture. He weaves his reading of Q 3:7's contentious terms into his assertion that the Qur'ān's level (of language use, rhetorical excellence, and clarity) does not waver at all but is rather consistent, so that verses are 'mutually-similar' to each other in their level of clarity and excellence. Al-Bāqillānī's explanations of this terminology are exemplify his *uṣūlī* thought and broader scholarly identity as they inform his choice of topics for his *i'jāz* work. The term *āyāt aḥkāmīyyāt*, which appears

to be unique to his work, is explained briefly in *Kitāb I'jāz al-Qur'ān*, but al-Bāqillānī indicates that he elaborated on the concept more elsewhere. Al-Bāqillānī uses it to highlight the *balāgha*—both in the technical sense of eloquence and in the common sense of conveying meaning—of verses with legal content, thus tying his interest in legally-significant content of the Qur'ān with the Qur'ān's miraculous eloquence and expressivity.

While *badī'* is a term whose centrality is limited to al-Bāqillānī's *i'jāz* work, it too positions him in relation to his predecessors and contemporaries who argued over the concept and its significance. I have argued that al-Bāqillānī uses the term *badī'* for a range of meanings encompassing both the general root meaning of 'innovative, original,' the related meaning 'marvelous, wonderful,' and the technical meaning 'literary devices' as it had developed by his time. He evokes each of these meanings at different times. Taken cumulatively, al-Bāqillānī's usages of the word *badī'* strongly suggest that for him, the concept of *badī'* is closely connected with *isti'āra* and figurative language in general, though it is also a name for the category of rhetorical and literary devices. The word's strong association with figurative language is doubly significant, in that from one angle it reflects the historical connotative connection between *badī'* and *isti'āra*, and from another angle it foreshadows al-Bāqillānī's own determination that *isti'āra* and other types of meaning-based rhetorical figures are truly *badī'* in the sense of wonderful and original writing, because they participate in *i'jāz* (unlike merely word-based figures): they convey new, excellent meanings in clear, excellent ways. Kamal Abu Deeb writes of the *badī'* style of poetry that it

represents a system of relations, a type of poetry which explores the complex network of relationships between signifier and signified, creating a high degree of intensity and fullness on the level of the code, rather than that of the message conveyed. Ibn al-Mu'tazz's perception of it can thus be seen as a first criterion of modernism: that modernism shifts the emphasis in the text from the level of the message to the level of the code.<sup>3</sup>

Al-Bāqillānī's thought represents a shift from Ibn al-Mu'tazz's conception of *badī'*. In al-Bāqillānī's view, the 'code' and the 'message' are inextricably tied, and the significance of the code is only in the excellent communication of the message. Aesthetic excellence is a function of clear and clarifying expression of meanings and ideas.

Al-Bāqillānī discusses figurative language in *Kitāb I'jāz al-Qur'ān* under the rubric of *badī'*, *isti'āra*, and other figures like *tashbīh*. In the *Taqrīb*, he approaches figurative language from the angle of *majāz*. Both of these angles are conventional within the respective discourses in which al-Bāqillānī is writing. What is unique is that he characterizes innovativeness in expressing new ideas as a principal characteristic of *isti'āra*. We have seen that his explanation of *isti'āra* is unconventional in its status of standing in opposition to literary devices that do not contribute to *i'jāz*, though the examples of *isti'āra* that al-Bāqillānī gives are unremarkable and sometimes not innovative. In contrast, when al-Bāqillānī explains *majāz* in the *Taqrīb*, he includes contentious verses whose categorization as including figurative language is a marked commentary on their contents. In this way, al-Bāqillānī uses the platform of his *uṣūl al-fiqh* texts to insert his own readings of Qur'ānic verses, as he also did in his redefinition of the

<sup>3</sup> Abu Deeb, "Literary Criticism," 348.



Qur'ānic terms *muḥkam* and *mutashābih*. The terms *isti'āra* and *majāz* are kept completely separate as per their respective disciplinary boundaries. In both cases, al-Bāqillānī concerns himself with the proper identification and understanding of figurative language. Heinrichs has commented that for the medieval critic, “the problem of figurative language as a misinterpretable non-direct channel of communication would necessarily arise,” and in the *Taqrīb* al-Bāqillānī devotes a detailed explanation to the correct identification and understanding of *majāz* in utterances. In the *Kitāb I'jāz al-Qur'ān*, his attention is not to the process of figuring out which verses contain types of *isti'āra* but rather, ultimately, to the effect and importance of those utterances that do contain *isti'āra* in the Qur'ān.

*Balāgha* is a thematically significant term in the *Kitāb I'jāz al-Qur'ān* that takes on technical valences from the field of rhetoric while also often staying close to the root-based meaning of the word. The non-technical definition derives from the meaning of the root B-L-GH, meaning ‘to reach, to arrive, to achieve a high degree of something,’ and it is easy to see the connection to the technical evaluative meaning of *balāgha*, ‘eloquence’ and ‘good rhetoric.’ Al-Bāqillānī’s usage of the term *balāgha*, expected in the type of technical discourse in which he engages, maintains a close connection to the idea of reaching and attaining. This type of usage emphasizes the result of good wording in an utterance: it is eloquent insofar as it is a good-quality conduit for conveying its message. Excellent communication has the quality of causing the audience to attain understanding of meaning. Similarly, al-Bāqillānī uses the term *barā'a* in a pointed way that contributes to the communication of his message. While in the field of rhetoric at large it meant ‘skill, proficiency,’ he uses it to refer to excellence in expression, hearkening back to the root’s meaning of ‘to excel, surpass in excellence.’

In both the *Kitāb I'jāz al-Qur'ān* and the *Taqrīb*, al-Bāqillānī explains his interpretation of the Mysterious Letters as a way of bolstering his argument that the whole Qur'ān is understandable to humans. The Mysterious Letters have, as this conventional translation of their name suggests, long been a source of puzzlement to readers and listeners, and a range of speculative explanations have proliferated by way of explanation. Al-Bāqillānī finds some of these explanations to be dubious; his own account culminates in the argument that the Mysterious Letters are synecdochic references to the whole Arabic alphabet, a sign that the Qur'ān is composed of the very Arabic letters known and understood by its audience. As such, the Mysterious Letters are announcements and indications of the Qur'ān’s clarity and understandability, characteristics located in the Qur'ān’s use of language. He gives an example of the ways in which these Mysterious Letters are actually clear signs: many *sūras* that start with Mysterious Letters are filled with other ‘proofs’ of the Qur'ān’s miraculous nature and authenticity as a divine message.

In his *i'jāz* text, al-Bāqillānī also affirms the status of the Mysterious Letters as linguistically-significant indications by saying that long after the time of the Prophet, linguists of the Arabic language independently discovered the properties of the letters of the alphabet (e.g. whether each letter is voiced or emphatic, and its place and manner of articulation), and there are significant patterns in the presence of Mysterious Letters based on these properties. This loaded explanation of the Mysterious Letters appears in both the *i'jāz* text and the *uṣūl* text studied here; it is a standard ‘aspect’ of Qur'ānic inimitability found in texts on that phenomenon, but it is more surprising to find in a text on legal theory. This focus on the clarity and understandability of language, particularly Qur'ānic language, is thus a theme of al-

Bāqillānī's work that cuts across genres. In both texts studied here, al-Bāqillānī often cites the authority of *ahl al-ʿarabiyya* (Arabic experts) in questions of how to interpret utterances, thus anchoring his approach in language and its nature. Even the affirmation of the distribution of Mysterious Letters relies on Arabic linguists' findings during the Islamic era. 'Mathematical' defenses of the Mysterious Letters have persisted in the history of exegesis, but this 'proof' might nonetheless strike readers as being based in circular reasoning, an unsatisfying demonstration of the Mysterious Letters' indication of the miracle.

Positioning the Qur'ān as inherently and definitely comprehensible by humans has important implications for any theological doctrine. Perhaps most importantly, holding that the Qur'ān's human interpreters can understand its meanings strengthens the basis for the Qur'ān's status as the starting point of religious knowledge and law. If the Qur'ān were outside the realm of human comprehension, how could it be the basis of Islamic law and doctrine? How could anyone declare its words and ideas to be perfectly suited to one another if the ideas were not available to humans? Al-Bāqillānī responds to such questions by placing interpretation of the Qur'ān (in which people were already taking part) on sound theoretical footing. He reinterprets key terms to refer to verses' perfect mutual suitability of meanings, allowing the Qur'ān to be at once a comprehensible basis for law and a miraculous text. Al-Bāqillānī's scholarly identity can be described as that of a systematizer attuned to how discourses interact to produce a cohesive vision of Islamic theology. By arguing and proof-texting the idea that the whole Qur'ān is subject to sound interpretation by humans, al-Bāqillānī provides a textual basis for basing Islamic law and doctrine on the Qur'ān.

The argument for clarity and understandability also minimizes and even excludes the dangers of misinterpretation from the framework of reading and interpretation of scripture. Aron Zysow has shown that this type of argument is characteristic of the legal theory of the Ḥanafī and Ṣāḥirī schools of law, the former being the focus of his study.<sup>4</sup> Al-Bāqillānī's theory of language shares with those schools the desire to deny, exclude, or eliminate the dangers of misinterpretation, since language is clear to the general educated readership. Al-Bāqillānī does not highlight the possibility of 'misinterpretations' of Qur'ānic verses in his theory of language, and that theory is never put into direct opposition or discussion with his occasional suggestions of opponents' interpretations that differ from his own. These instances include the Mysterious Letters, the terms *muḥkam* and *mutashābih*, and verses al-Bāqillānī pointedly labels *majāz*, though al-Ṭabarī shows that labeling to be disputed among interpreters. On the level of defensible theory, al-Bāqillānī maintains that methodical understanding of language leads to sound communication, but the question of divergent interpretations remains. He says the presence of *majāz* in an utterance is known due to an indication that the *ḥaqīqa* meaning does not make sense. Consideration of the subjective quality of the judgment of when *majāz* is present is not developed. The veneer of straightforwardness in al-Bāqillānī's method for labeling verses literal or figurative as a basis for understanding is not borne out in the practice of exegesis. This unresolved tension between theory and practice highlights al-Bāqillānī's interest in the former over the latter. He is committed to a consistent vision of theology, but interpretations of particular verses and Qur'ānic phrases are only called upon, within his

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<sup>4</sup> Aron Zysow, "The Economy of Certainty: An Introduction to the Typology of Islamic Legal Theory." (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1984; ProQuest order no. 8419463), 98.  
<http://search.proquest.com/docview/303301509?accountid=14496>.

scheme, to support his larger theories of linguistic understandability, Qur'ānic inimitability, etc. His citations of these verses often serve as pointed examples of proof-texting. In light of this prioritization of theory, it is not surprising that al-Bāqillānī did not author a *tafsīr* (line-by-line exegesis) or other work that would include a detailed analysis or explanation of particular *sūras*. Prioritizing theory over the practice of scriptural interpretation leads to instances of questionable reasoning or unconvincing explanations. These instances draw attention to the unresolved tension between al-Bāqillānī's theory and the practice of interpretation.

Still, highlighting the Qur'ān's clarity and constructing a multifaceted explanation of it affords interpreters and their activities a place in the religious and intellectual life of the community. Describing the Qur'ān as wholly clear and understandable to human interpreters legitimizes the communities of readers who base Islamic thought on the text. It also allows for educated speakers of Arabic to have direct engagement with the meanings in the text. Specifying that the Arabic of the Qur'ān is that of the Prophet's own community not only serves the practical function of limiting what resources are used to define vocabulary items and explain idiomatic structures, but it also reconstitutes the language of the Prophet's generation, preserving the strong link to the Prophet and the Qur'ān's revelation. The miracle of the Qur'ān is available directly to every generation, and the guarantee that it has been faithfully transmitted (an idea al-Bāqillānī defends in *Kitāb I'jāz al-Qur'ān*), is another way of defending the direct access every audience has to the text. In this way, al-Bāqillānī avoids the issue of authenticity that has defined the corpus of *aḥādīth* (Prophetic reports).<sup>5</sup> Even aside from the particularly fraught discourse of the authenticity of *aḥādīth*, the focus on the directly-available Qur'ānic text in all its clarity responds to the threat of misinterpretation by dismissing what Travis Zadeh has called "anxieties of mediation."<sup>6</sup> The Qur'ān is clear, so it is not in need of mediation in forms such as translation or decoding. Even in the case of verses whose eloquence and logic is more difficult for human audiences to explain, the clarity of these verses is still known because they are still understandable. In this way, al-Bāqillānī opens up a space between understanding and explanation, like the one he also theorizes between humans' ability to understand the Qur'ān and their inability to produce language at its level. Verses whose verbal explanation is more out of reach are still part of the whole of the Qur'ān, which as an entirety can rely on metonymies to point to its clarity. The so-called Mysterious Letters are, for al-Bāqillānī, a form of metonymy that indicates the clarity of the whole text by announcing and reminding that the Qur'ān is made up of familiar Arabic letters. The emotional effect of the Qur'ān that al-Bāqillānī describes in *Kitāb I'jāz al-Qur'ān* does not rely on particular verses but rather the Qur'ān as a whole.

This clarity is balanced out by the limits of Arabic language knowledge. Emphasizing the Qur'ān's Arabicness, and its particular usages that are tied to the Prophet's community's own usages, also determines the type of interpretive community al-Bāqillānī allows. The interpreter must be an expert of Arabic, knowledgeable about the meanings that words, structures, and idioms had at the Prophet's time. At al-Bāqillānī's time, the Islamic empire was changing in response to its recent expansion to include powerful contingents who were not

<sup>5</sup> For an analysis of approaches to the authenticity of *aḥādīth*, see Berg, *Development of Exegesis*.

<sup>6</sup> Travis Zadeh, "Translation, Geography, and the Divine Word: Mediating Frontiers in Pre-Modern Islam" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2007; ProQuest order no. 3265135), 612.  
<http://search.proquest.com/docview/304852116?accountid=14496>.

native speakers of Arabic, especially in Khurasan and Transoxania. Most immediately for al-Bāqillānī, the Buyid rulership of Baghdad at his time was non-Arab in origin, descendants of Zoroastrian converts to Islam from the region of Fars, probably Daylamites. During this same time, translation and exegesis of the Qur'ān in other languages were gaining legitimacy in some circles, provoking a reaction from those scholars who maintained the cultural and religious priority of Arabic.<sup>7</sup> Suggesting that sound knowledge of the Qur'ān's meanings relied on methodical and language-based exegesis limits the community of legitimate interpretation to those with deep knowledge of Arabic, as I have argued. Al-Bāqillānī's continual recourse to experts of language and literary criticism grounds his understanding of the Qur'ān in the scholarship of the Arabic heritage. At the same time as this focus on the Arabic of the Prophet's time gives al-Bāqillānī's work historical depth, it privileges one single layer of the development of the language.

Thus, al-Bāqillānī makes comprehension of the whole Qur'ān available, but he limits the ways it can be interpreted to those that are grounded in known linguistic usage from the Prophet's time. This interest builds on a cultural value that was widely felt to be important, and not just for understanding the Qur'ān, but for keeping alive Arabic heritage and the lexical keys to understanding Arabic literary history. Collecting knowledge of that usage was a widespread activity among scholars of the Abbasid age, and it resulted in genres such as *gharā'ib* (lit. 'peculiarities, strange [things]'), collections of unusual vocabulary and their attested meaning among Bedouins, who were perceived as speaking 'pure' Arabic and thus linking current usages to those of the Prophet's time.<sup>8</sup>

The emphasis on clarity of language, shared among the *Taqrīb* and *Kitāb I'jāz al-Qur'ān*, shows surprising areas of overlap in al-Bāqillānī's thought across genres. Aspects of the thematic overlap, in fact, are also found in other books al-Bāqillānī composed, and these sources add further depth to the portrait of al-Bāqillānī's holistic scholarly identity and core theses. Al-Bāqillānī's oeuvre can be characterized as Qur'ān-centric and language-centric in a broad sense that includes rhetorical and interpretive aspects. We saw in Chapter One how his treatise on miracles is suggestive of the rich backdrop of his defense of the Qur'ānic miracle, and hints of his political doctrine indicate the nature of the opponents to whom he was responding. In *Nukat al-intiṣār li-naql al-Qur'ān* [Remarks on the victory of the Qur'ān's transmission], al-Bāqillānī covers many of the topics we have seen in his *i'jāz* and *uṣūl* works, including *bayān*, *balāgha*, *kināya*, the Arabic-ness of the Qur'ān, and the genre of the Qur'ān, in addition to topics particular to the *Nukat*. Considering the theoretical underpinnings and claims of works in the genres of *uṣūl al-fiqh* and *i'jāz al-Qur'ān* uniquely exposes the tension between the Qur'ān's understandability and miraculousness. Analysis of al-Bāqillānī's arguments and ways of framing them sheds light on a clever resolution to the tension, though al-Bāqillānī never phrases it as such directly. Johan Bouman, writing in the 1950s, summarized al-Bāqillānī's Qur'ān-centric focus in the three texts to which Bouman had access (*Kitāb I'jāz al-Qur'ān*, *al-Tamhīd*, and *al-Inṣāf*), showing how the latter two works use the genre of *kalām* (speculative theology) to defend the Qur'ān and its status as miracle.<sup>9</sup> Current access to more works from al-Bāqillānī's oeuvre allows us to a return to this topic with increased perspective.

<sup>7</sup> Zadeh, *Translation*, 52-59.

<sup>8</sup> Kopf also complicates this argument; see Kopf, "Religious Influences," 48-50.

<sup>9</sup> Bouman, *Conflit*, 57-66.

In future research, I aim to include the other extant texts al-Bāqillānī composed in order to conceptualize al-Bāqillānī's scholarly identity and the contours of his doctrines of the Qur'ān more fully, and to investigate the ways in which the focus on language's clarity and understandability extends to other genres of al-Bāqillānī's writing. I will also attempt to situate al-Bāqillānī in the history of the division of rhetorical devices into those based in meaning and in wording, outlined in Chapter Four, tracing the impact his ideas had on later theorists of rhetoric and Qur'ānic inimitability such as al-Jurjānī and al-Sakkākī. This investigation of al-Bāqillānī's legacy will also contextualize and locate his contributions in the academic discourses on which they have a bearing, including literary theory, philosophy of language, metaphor theory, and prototype theory. In another vein, it would also be interesting to explore whether issues important to scholarly and theological identities take shape in unexpected discursive settings in other thinkers' work, particularly those who had interests as diverse as al-Bāqillānī's.

Al-Bāqillānī's concern for language and its communicative nature, as well as the importance of its rhetorical and literary dimensions, privileges a larger theological vision over the practices of understanding and interpreting language. His participation in many disciplines and interest in synthesizing results in a unified and consistent theological vision expressed over multiple genres of his writing, though some interesting tensions remain unresolved. Exploring al-Bāqillānī's concern with language has uncovered the stakes of theories of language in the context of scriptural interpretation and its authority in religious disciplines. His theory of figurative language is one component of a more comprehensive approach to communication and understanding, a multifaceted argument for the clarity of language. His insistence on the availability of systematic and methodical understandability of *majāz*, and his focus on novel metaphors as a theoretically significant category, either solves or denies what Kronfeld has called 'the puzzle of metaphor' that underlies many theories of metaphor, the mechanism(s) by which metaphor is communicated and understood.<sup>10</sup> Al-Bāqillānī aims to lay out a comprehensive rule-based guide to the ways in which figurative language signifies and is identified, so that the 'puzzle' is gone along with any ambiguity and freewheeling interpretation of utterances it might legitimize.

Al-Bāqillānī was an intellectual precursor to literary critics, legists, and theologians that academic consensus has deemed to be some of the greatest thinkers in Islamic history and in their respective disciplines. His work is so disparate and spans so many different disciplines that it has proved challenging for scholars to take full account of his contribution to Islamic thought. In this dissertation, I have tried to bring to light al-Bāqillānī's influence on later developments in *i'jāz al-Qur'ān* and *uṣūl al-fiqh* through investigating central issues in his thought and exposing significant areas of intersection and overlap in two seemingly disparate genres. This bridging of disciplinary boundaries sheds light on the importance of his writing in the 4<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> century Arabo-Islamic scholarly universe.

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<sup>10</sup> Kronfeld, "Novel and Conventional Metaphors," 14.

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