Al-Jāḥiẓ:
A Muslim Humanist for our Time

Edited by Arnim Heinemann
John L. Meloy
Tarif Khalidi
Manfred Kropp



Orient-Institut Beirut

Beiruter Texte und Studien 119

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Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Sachsen-Anhalt
urn:nbn:de:gbv:3:5-92084/fragment/page=00000005

BEIRUTER TEXTE UND STUDIEN

HERAUSGEGEBEN VOM
ORIENT-INSTITUT BEIRUT

BAND 119

Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Sachsen-Anhalt
urn:nbn:de:gbv:3:5-92084/fragment/page=00000006

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BEIRUT 2009

ERGON VERLAG WÜRZBURG
IN KOMMISSION

Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Sachsen-Anhalt
urn:nbn:de:gbv:3:5-92084/fragment/page=00000007

Umschlaggestaltung: Taline Yozgatian; AUB Publication Office

Druckbetreuung: Sara Binay

Bibliothek der
Deutschen
Morgenländischen
Gesellschaft

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über http://dnb.d-nb.de abrufbar.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at http://dnb.d-nb.de.

ISBN 978-3-89913-676-0
ISSN 0067-4931

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Ergon-Verlag GmbH
Keesburgstr. 11, D-97074 Würzburg

Druck: PBtisk, Pribram
Gedruckt auf alterungsbeständigem Papier

Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Sachsen-Anhalt
urn:nbn:de:gbv:3:5-92084/fragment/page=00000008

Introduction

When Blaise Pascal wrote of Montaigne that he "felt the defects of a rigid method", he might as well have applied the same judgment to al-Jāḥiẓ. Like Montaigne, the intellect of al-Jāḥiẓ was unencumbered by dogma and, like Montaigne, al-Jāḥiẓ found in the essay or epistle form the perfect vehicle for the free and unconventional expression of his ideas and reflections on man, nature and society. Many parallels can indeed be drawn between the 16th century French aristocrat and the 9th century Basran polymath, foremost among which one might suggest the concept of "humanism" which the editors decided to be the subtitle of this conference. Why did we make that decision, and can this concept be fruitfully retrojected from the European Renaissance back to ʿAbbasid Iraq?

The term "humanism" has generally been used in two senses. The first originated with Protagoras: "Man is the measure of all things." Many of the world's religions were quick to adopt variations of this slogan and to make it their own. Eventually the Renaissance in Europe was to enshrine this sense of humanism in its art and literature and Shakespeare was of course to immortalize it in Hamlet's soliloquy "What a piece of work is a man!" Islam too had its own version of humanism, first expressed in the Qurʾanic view of man as God's "deputy" (*khalīfa*) on earth, and then in countless Qurʾanic passages that dissect the human psyche, praise man's spiritual and rational potentialities but warn against excessive human pride.

The second sense in which the term "humanism" has been used is that man's intellect can indeed measure and examine all things; that all matters fall within the purview of human investigation; that what makes man truly human is his/her infinite capacity to make sense of the world and to change it in any manner found suitable for human survival or happiness. This sense of humanism has often been associated with the natural sciences and the optimistic belief in intellectual progress. It is particularly in this latter sense, we believe, that al-Jāḥiẓ can be described as a "humanist." Endlessly curious about the human condition, and convinced that even the "wing of a gnat" was a subject fit for a lifetime of investigation, al-Jāḥiẓ consorted with all sorts and conditions of men, probing, recording, wondering, often ridiculing, but above all challenging the received wisdom of the world he inhabited. Little was taken for granted, and anything worth knowing must be reduced to its constituent parts and investigated as through a prism. The advice he gives to authors is typical of his view that knowledge advances through endless scholarly exchange:

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> He who writes a book should write it only if he keeps constantly in mind that all people are his enemies, that all are experts in his subject, that all are ready and willing to challenge him.[1]

When we began to plan this conference, we were struck by the fact that although the scholarly literature on al-Jāḥiẓ was extensive, no conference, as far as we know, had been devoted to him. We felt that a conference format was particularly suitable given the extensive spread of his intellectual interests and reflections. It was therefore our intention to bring together a number of distinguished Arabists who would collectively examine various aspects of his thought in the hope of throwing light on his achievement as a structured whole. We very much hope that this volume will serve that end.

The conference certainly aroused a great deal of public interest as evidenced by wide coverage in the Arabic press. Meanwhile, the spirit of al-Jāḥiẓ seemed to have hovered over the lively discussions that followed every presentation, unfortunately not included here. Indeed, his spirit was even more in evidence when a *ṭufaylī,* straight out of al-Jāḥiẓ, invaded our conference dinner, much to the amusement of those who sat next to him and reported his predilection for a minor English Victorian poet–just the sort of conversation stopper beloved by a Jahizian *ṭufaylī.*

***

It remains for us to thank the following who helped to organize this conference or helped to publish its proceedings. At the American University of Beirut, we would like to thank Dr. Khalil Bitar, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, for his enthusiastic support; Dr. Aliya Saidi, Assistant Director of CAMES, for her cheerful, patient and effective supervision of all aspects of the conference; Ms. Sally Kaya and her team at the publication office for their commitment and flexibility regarding the design of the poster and the book cover; Ms. Clare Leader for her superb editing of what were often very challenging texts. We were very fortunate indeed in having her as "the reader over our shoulders" as we prepared this volume for publication. At the Orient-Institut, we would like to thank Dr. Stefan Leder, the institute's director, for his encouraging support during the final phase of the publication process; Dr. Sara Binay for her cooperation as the institute's publication manager as well as Mr. Marcel Lippert and Ms. Samia Abdul Hamid who helped during their internships with editing the final versions of the texts.

The Editors April 30, 2008

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1 Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Hārūn (Cairo, 1965-9), I: 88.

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Opening Address

by Dr. Ezzeddin Ibrahim

(Cultural Counsellor to the President of the United Arab Emirates)

Dear Colleagues,

Warm greetings to you coupled with my thanks to the American University of Beirut, the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, the Shaykh Zayid Chair of Arabic and Islamic Studies and the German Orient-Institut-Beirut, for hosting this important international conference devoted to al-Jāḥiẓ, a towering figure of Arabic Islamic culture. I wish your conference the success it so richly deserves. I extend to you my deep apologies for my absence, it being necessary for me to remain in Abu Dhabi for the Aḍḥā feast, the celebrations of which will be presided over for the first time by H.E. Shaykh Khalifa b. Zayid, President of the UAE, following the death of his father, Shaykh Zayid (may God show him mercy) in the month of Ramadan past.

In these brief remarks I would like to offer three observations. The first has to do with the Shaykh Zayid Chair, one of the sponsors of this conference. The second concerns the English translation of the *Book of Misers* (*Al-Bukhalāʾ*), one of al-Jāḥiẓ's most important and wittiest works. The third observation is directed at the titles of some of the papers to be presented at your conference.

As regards the Shaykh Zayid Chair, now ably occupied by my friend, Professor Tarif Khalidi of Jerusalem, this was established some thirty years ago. At that time, Dr. Samuel B. Kirkwood was the President of the American University of Beirut and Dr. Burton Thurston was the Chaplain and Chairman of the Department of Religious Studies. The AUB, intent upon expanding its academic offerings, invited the UAE to be involved in that expansion and the UAE responded to that invitation. And so it was that Shaykh Zayid b. Sultan, the late President of the UAE, asked me to come to AUB to draw up the agreement establishing this Chair. This issued from Shaykh Zayid's own appreciation for the prestige of AUB among Middle Eastern universities and out of a desire to bolster Christian-Muslim dialogue, which in the sixties of the past century had been given strong support by such figures as Pope John XXIII, Pope Paul VI and the World Council of Churches in Geneva, and was actively endorsed by leading Islamic authorities.

The Chair was then founded alongside Christian religious studies. The founder, a Sunnite, agreed that the Chair would first be occupied by a Shiʿite scholar then on the AUB faculty, Dr. Syed Hosein Jafri, now at the Agha Khan University in Karachi. This structure, Christian-Muslim on the one hand, and Sunnite-Shiʿite on the other, highlighted the academic, objective and balanced orientation of the Chair and the research issuing from it. Following the tragedy of September 11, the world in general and universities in particular are in dire need of emphasizing

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this kind of orientation, especially in order to combat that erroneous theory of the clash of civilizations. It gives me pleasure to inform this conference that what took place in AUB has also taken place in other universities in the West through the personal concern of the UAE and its President Shaykh Zayid. Thus, equivalent Chairs were established in Lampeter (Wales), at Cambridge and at Harvard. In the very near future, a new Chair will be established at Oxford.

The question may then arise: Why not establish equivalent Chairs in Arab universities through Western initiatives? This in my view is both possible and appropriate. Conceivably the easiest and most acceptable way to start would be for these Chairs or Professorships to be devoted to the study of Western thought and culture, Christianity being of course one of the principal constituents of that culture. Egypt has already introduced into its curriculum a course in general education entitled "Origins of the Modern World", which seeks to introduce the Arab world to the dominant currents of Western thought and values, and to world thought in general.

Secondly, as regards the English translation of Al-Jāḥiẓ's *Al-Bukhalā'*, this was ably performed by the late Professor R.B. Serjeant of Cambridge, a translation sponsored and published by the Center for Muslim Contributions to Civilization in Doha, Qatar. I was privileged to be asked to review this translation, for I had been a student of Serjeant and had benefited much from his supervision. That translation appeared in England in 1997 under the title *The Book of Misers.* Barely two years later, in 1999, there appeared, also in England, another translation of the same work under the title *Avarice and the Avaricious,* done this time by Jim Colville for the Kegan Paul Arabic Series. Serjeant was not, of course, aware of the Colville translation, a fact confirmed to me by his widow, Dr. Marion Serjeant. Colville also does not refer to the Serjeant translation, and it may be that he was unaware of its existence. I glanced rapidly through this second translation, which came only recently into my hands, and had a good impression of it and of its elegant appearance.

These two translations, coupled with the earlier French translation by Charles Pellat, which appeared in 1951, and the partial translation into German by Oskar Rescher, mean that the work is now available to readers of English, French and German. I once checked the borrowing record of the Serjeant translation in the Library of SOAS, in London, and the Library of the Oriental Institute in Oxford, and found the book to be much in demand.

There is hardly any need to emphasize the value of translating world literature, but I simply wonder: Is it not useful to encourage students of literary classics to read these classics in their original languages? As an Arab, I had read the translations of William Shakespeare into Arabic and was well acquainted with them. Later, I read them in their abbreviated and simplified form in the versions of Charles and Mary Lamb and found myself coming nearer to them. But my true thrill at their literary merit came only when I read the original plays –

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though difficult for me – and my pleasure was truly fulfilled when I watched their stage performances.

My final point has to do with the titles of the papers submitted to your conference. Any one who examines them must feel proud of the fact that al-Jāḥiẓ (a pauper, not a miser!), who taught himself to read books in the shops of booksellers and then educated himself by contact with scholars and students in the lecture circles of mosques – the so called *masjidiyyūn* – would eventually become a man of letters, a philologist, a theologian, and a writer on biology, politics, music, as well as a storyteller and marvelous anecdotist.

I have no doubt that the papers presented at your conference will be of great help to a historian who seeks a comprehensive understanding of the social and cultural realities of Arab and Muslim history across time. Most histories have devoted themselves to political and religious affairs, and it was left up to a social and cultural historian like Adam Mez to fill part of the gap with his classic work *The Renaissance of Islam*, in which he made extensive use of *adab* works to construct his social and cultural history.

This being the case, it is necessary to turn our attention to such works as the *Amthāl* genre by authors like al-Mufaḍḍal al-Dabbī, Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī and al-Maydānī, as also to the stories of the *ṭufayliyyūn* in the *Maqāmāt* of Badīʿ al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī, al-Ḥarīrī and al-Zamakhsharī, in addition to the poems of *Naqāʾid* with their rich stock of personal and tribal disputation, among others. And yet, should the social historian wait until these works are translated? And when will that be, I wonder? Should not the professors of Arabic and Islamic studies bring students and scholars closer to the original versions of these works? My guess is that they indeed should. Perhaps the AUB will contribute to this endeavor by organizing conferences and seminars devoted to such luminaries as Badīʿ al-Zamān, for instance, and his hero, ʿIsā b. Hishām, or to al-Ḥarīrī and his hero al-Ḥārith b. Hammām.

Nevertheless, let us be content this time round with the calm and wonderful moments to be spent in the company of al-Jāḥiẓ, the great *adīb* of Basra and Baghdad, a writer of both sober gravity and marvelous irony. This comes at a time when most people think of these two glorious cities as producing only the explosions of bombs in their quarters and alleyways, while foreign planes screech over their roofs. The message of this conference is surely this: that Basra and Kufa were the Oxford and Cambridge of their age, the home of scholarship and the meeting place of jurists, mystics and theologians. It is a fitting tribute to Basra and Baghdad that they produced a man who succeeded in attracting some twenty scholars from all over the world to spend a few days in Beirut, studying his works and thought. It is an equally fitting tribute to Basra and Baghdad to have produced their finest *adīb*, the man honored at this conference, Abū ʿUthmān ʿAmr b. Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ.

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Part One
Intellectual History: Critical Concepts

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Al-Jāḥiẓ and Early Muʿtazilī Theology

Josef van Ess (Tübingen)

1

Is al-Jāḥiẓ a humanist? He himself would have been unable to answer this question; "humanism" is a term of our age. What is worse: we are obviously not yet able to agree on what we mean by it. Marco Schöller, a young German Islamic scholar, has shown in a recent article that in Orientalist secondary literature the word has been used in four different ways, the only aspect common to all of them being their positive connotation.[1] Schöller quotes examples from the work of George Makdisi, Joel Kraemer, Marc Bergé, and Mohammed Arkoun (who recently wrote a new book on this topic).[2] The caveat has to be taken seriously. But it is not necessarily a warning against using the term at all; it is rather a plea for clarity. *Li-kulli zamānin Jāḥiẓ,* says Badīʿ al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī in his 15th *Maqāma,*[3] and we may be allowed to misunderstand him a bit and translate: Every generation has a Jāḥiẓ of their own, their own way of adopting him for their cultural memory.[4] We then have only to ask whether "humanism" is a category which fits al-Jāḥiẓ's world, for it seems that medieval Arabs were mainly God-oriented, not man-oriented. Moreover, Ibn al-Nadīm who, in his *Fihrist,* devotes several pages to the life and the works of our author, does not list him among the *udabāʾ* where we would expect to find him, in the third *maqāla,*[5] but under the theologians, the *mutakallimūn,* in the fifth *maqāla.*[6] Can a medieval theologian be a humanist?

2

Before dealing with this question I would like to make a few remarks concerning the sources with which we are working. Al-Jāḥiẓ was a prolific writer, and a con-

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1 M. Schöller, "Zum Begriff des 'islamischen Humanismus'," *ZDMG* 151 (2001): 275-320.

2 *Maʿārik min ajli l-ansana fī l-siyāqāt al-islāmiyya* (London 2001); the French version is *Combats pour l'humanisme en contextes islamiques* (Paris 2002).

3 *Li-kulli dārin sukkān * wa-li-kulli zamānin Jāḥiẓ,* in *Maqāmāt,* ed. Muḥammad ʿAbduh (Beirut 1889), 71, ult. f./trs. Prendergast 70 ff. The text is reproduced by Ibrāhīm b. ʿAlī al-Ḥuṣrī in his *Zahr al-ādāb;* for the verse quoted, cf. the edition by Muḥammad Muḥyī l-dīn ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd (Cairo 1372/1953) II: 509, 17.

4 What Hamadānī really wanted to say is: "Every generation has an outstanding writer like Jāḥiẓ just as every house has its own inhabitants."

5 *Fihrist,* ed. R. Tajaddud, 101 ff. and 157 respectively.

6 Ibid., 201 ff. (cf. 208, 16 - 212, 3).

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siderable part of his literary production is still preserved, although not within the field of theology proper. Even Ibn al-Nadīm's list, which starts with a few titles that refer marginally to theological problems,[7] quickly reverts to *adab* literature.[8] Al-Jāḥiẓ obviously did not lose much time with the central issues of Muʿtazilī thought. Above all, his style did not tally with that of the *mutakallimūn*. What we are confronted with, therefore, is primarily a change of perception which took place after his death, and we have to formulate our question accordingly: When did al-Jāḥiẓ cease to be regarded as a *mutakallim* and start being praised as an *adīb*?

Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī, a contemporary of Ibn al-Nadīm, comes to mind; he wrote a *K. Taqrīẓ al-Jāḥiẓ*, where he compared al-Jāḥiẓ to Abū Zayd al-Balkhī and Abū Ḥanīfa al-Dīnawarī.[9] The reasons why he did so (and just with these two persons) are not easy to grasp, but the *punctum saliens* was certainly not al-Jāḥiẓ's proficiency in theology. It is true that Abū Ḥayyān was still close to Muʿtazilism himself, but he abhorred the *takfīr* resorted to by most Muʿtazilī theologians of his time, and he had been influenced early on, when living in Shiraz, by the Iranian mystic, Ibn Khafīf (died 371/982). Anyway, the decisive step away from theology had already been made by Ibn Qutayba, who was not a Muʿtazilite at all, and focussed on al-Jāḥiẓ's style, which he admired and tried to imitate. Ibn al-Nadīm, on the contrary, followed the Muʿtazilī school tradition; in the chapter where he mentions al-Jāḥiẓ he takes up the historical outline sketched by al-Kaʿbī in his *K. al-Maqālāt*. Abū l-Qāsim al-Kaʿbī, who had been working in the Sāmānid administration at Balkh as a colleague of Abū Zayd al-Balkhī,[10] was the first person to write about the Muʿtazila in the form of *ṭabaqāt*. He had found this necessary because he viewed the school, which was an Iraqi phenomenon, from the periphery; his Central Asian students needed information about how Muʿtazilī thought had come about and how the persons who belonged to the Muʿtazilite "Geschichtsbild" might be ordered into a coherent sequence.

The Iraqis themselves had, at that time, only a vague idea in this respect; Yaḥyā b. ʿAlī Ibn al-Munajjim, a member of an influential family at the ʿAbbasid court and a cultivated *adīb* of Muʿtazilī leanings, still felt the need to ask al-Kaʿbī for a chronological list of the Muʿtazilī masters, obviously when al-Kaʿbī lived at Baghdad and had not yet finished his book.[11] What *was* available to the Iraqis at that moment was a fairly elaborate heresiographical literature: Jaʿfar b. Ḥarb's *K.*

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7 *Fihrist*: 210, 22-28.

8 Cf. the bibliography of al-Jāḥiẓ's known works by Ch. Pellat, "Nouvel essai d'inventaire de l'œuvre ǧaḥiẓienne," *Arabica* 31 (1984): 117-164. A selection of it restricted to titles of theological relevance can be found in my *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra* (Berlin 1991-97), VI: 313-316.

9 Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-udabāʾ*, ed. Margoliouth, I: 124, 8 ff.; translated by Ch. Pellat in his article "Al-Ǧāḥiẓ jugé par la postérité," *Arabica* 27 (1980): 37 f.

10 Cf. the entry about him in *Enc. Iranica* I: 359-362.

11 This list was taken over by Ibn al-Nadīm (*Fihrist* 220, note; cf. J. Fück in *ZDMG* 96 (1935): 307 f.).

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al-Uṣūl[12] or Zurqān's *K. al-Maqālāt.*[13] But this was something else. In these books the material was structured according to systematic criteria; there were no personal data, and anecdotes were only told when there was nothing else to mention.[14] Doxographical or heresiographical information was important when one had to engage in disputations; the history of the school, on the other hand, remained in the dark as long as the school did not have to define its identity. This was the case in those happy days up to the period of the *miḥna* when the Muʿtazilites were almost the only theologians on the scene and could afford to indulge in fierce debates among themselves without having to fear any loss of prestige.

Al-Jāḥiẓ lived at the end of this phase. He was the first Muʿtazilite to explicitly praise the merits of his school in his *K. Faḍīlat al-Muʿtazila,* and he promptly became the target of Ibn al-Rewandī's famous attack – an Iranian attacking an Iraqi.[15] But there was already an opposition inside Iraq, though from outside the school, represented by people like Ibn Kullāb; al-Jāḥiẓ labeled them *nābita,* ignorant greenhorns.[16] He felt that he had to prove the legitimacy of the Muʿtazilī approach; therefore he presented in his *K. al-Amṣār* a list of early *muḥaddithūn* who, by adopting a Qadarī position, had implicitly attested the truth of what had been publicly propagated by Wāṣil b. ʿAṭāʾ and his group. Al-Kaʿbī, who quotes this list (because it was the only one he could get hold of)[17] takes al-Jāḥiẓ to be the last Muʿtazilite deserving an individual treatment.[18] The passage is short, only seven lines in print,[19] but exerted an enormous influence. ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī who, when writing his *Farq bayna l-firaq* had al-Kaʿbī's text in front of him, interpreted the doctrines enumerated by al-Kaʿbi as heresies and turned al-Jāḥiẓ into the founder of a school.[20] Both assumptions are evidently wrong. For al-Kaʿbī, al-Jāḥiẓ simply represented the last phase of Muʿtazilī thinking at Basra worth being taken into account; the *maqālāt* he mentions in connection with him were the few controversial issues of which the experts had become aware and which had been sifted out from an unusually vast amount of material never presented in any logical order by al-Jāḥiẓ himself.

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12 Edited by myself under the title of *Frühe mu'tazilitische Häresiographie* and erroneously attributed to al-Nāshiʾ al-Akbar (Beirut 1971).

13 Not preserved, but quoted by Ashʿarī in his *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn* and by other authors (cf. *Theologie und Gesellschaft,* IV: 120).

14 For instance, with regard to the two founding fathers, Wāṣil b. ʿAṭāʾ and ʿAmr b. ʿUbayd.

15 Cf. *Theologie und Gesellschaft* IV: 300 f.

16 Ibid., III, 467 f.; also W. al-Qadi in *Studia Islamica (henceforth SI)* 78 (1993): 27 ff.

17 *Maqālāt,* ed. Fuʾād Sayyid in *Faḍl al-iʿtizāl* (Tunis 1393/1974), 106, 6 ff.

18 So, at least, in the fragment of the *K. al-Maqālāt,* which is the only part of the book edited up to now.

19 Ibid., 73, 9-15.

20 *Al-Farq bayna l-firaq,* ed. Muḥammad Muḥyī l-dīn ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd (Cairo n.d.), 175, 13 ff.

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To us, al-Kaʿbī's report is a little puzzling, not so much because he deliberately omits telling us something about al-Jāḥiẓ's "normal" ideas, but because al-Jāḥiẓ was far from being the only outstanding figure among the Basran Muʿtazilites of his period. In vain do we look for any mention of ʿAbbād b. Salmān,[21] al-Jāḥiẓ's younger contemporary, who nevertheless gets full attention in Ashʿarī's *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn*; Ashʿarī composed his book at roughly the same time as al-Kaʿbī. For reasons unknown to us, ʿAbbād was not much liked among the Basran Muʿtazilites; Ibn al-Nadīm lists him among those members of the school who "brought up innovations and stood apart" (*abdaʿū wa-tafarradū*).[22] Jubbāʾī, the great master of the next generation and the teacher of Ashʿarī, found ʿAbbād a little bit crazy.[23] But Jubbāʾī did not have particularly strong feelings for al-Jāḥiẓ's theology either; he rather conceived his own system as a nostalgic return to Abū l-Hudhayl. So why did al-Jāḥiẓ retain his prestige as a theologian, and who was responsible for this?

Al-Jāḥiẓ seems never to have engaged in disputations, and it is difficult to get hold of any disciple of his in theology. We may doubt whether he ever gave regular courses; he traveled too much for this. He commuted between Basra and Baghdad, and his fame rested on his books. He made money from them, and he may have become, in the end, the prototypical venal intellectual. His books won him great praise among upper-class people in the capital as well as in Basra; in his hometown the *K. al-Ḥayawān* and the *K. al-Bayān wal-tabyīn* were remembered, together with Sībawayh's *Kitāb* and Khalīl's *K. al-ʿAyn,* as the four great scholarly achievements of better days.[24] This had nothing to do with al-Jāḥiẓ's competence in theology; rather both books testified to his originality and the breadth of his horizon. In the same vein, the Muʿtazilites living in Basra were not primarily proud of their man because he had shaped the doctrinal profile of their "school", but rather because his renown had exceeded the borders of their community; what instigated their curiosity were primarily his connections with the VIP's at the court. This is why two Basran Muʿtazilites, Muḥammad b. Yazdād and Ibn Farzawayh/Farzōya, shadowy figures as such but persons of antiquarian inclination, collected material about him independently of al-Kaʿbī. Al-Kaʿbī had never thought of going to Basra anyway; he had obtained all his information in Baghdad, mainly from his teacher al-Khayyāṭ. We are therefore dealing with two different local traditions. The strings were pulled together later on by the Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār in his *K. Faḍl al-iʿtizāl,* a book which he wrote late in his life for a high official in Khwārazm when the Muʿtazilites had their last

21 Or Sulaymān. On him *vide* W. Madelung in *Enc. Iranica* I: 70 f.; *Theologie und Gesellschaft* (see above n. 8; henceforth quoted as *TG*), IV: 15 ff.

22 *Fihrist,* 214, 2 and 215, 19 ff.

23 Ibid., 215, 21 f.

24 *Taʾrīkh Baghdād* II: 177, 3 ff.

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chance of winning over an entire, though remote, province to their cause. The picture created by this missionary tract dominates our research until today.[25]

In the beginning, some people still attempted to check this image against al-Jāḥiẓ's own writings, but such an enterprise was by no means easy. Al-Jāḥiẓ had dedicated many of his treatises to persons who had paid for them and consequently kept them in their own libraries; these publications were not available in Basra. Ibn al-Ikhshīd (270/884 - 326/938), for some time the master of a separate Muʿtazilī circle,[26] tried in vain to find a copy of al-Jāḥiẓ's *K. al-Farq bayna l-nabī wal-mutanabbī*. He even hired a town-crier in Mecca during the *ḥajj* when pilgrims from all parts of the world had gathered at ʿArafāt – something comparable to a search on the internet in our days – but to no avail.[27] Ibn al-Ikhshīd was an outsider, a man of Eastern Iranian origin, as is shown by his name; Basra as well as Baghdad were foreign to his cultural memory. He never managed to make friends with the Muʿtazilī establishment in Iraq.[28] Outside the mosques and their libraries (which were probably not accessible to everybody) a reading public was just on the point of emerging, but there was obviously not yet much of an international exchange.[29] The situation was somewhat complex. Al-Jāḥiẓ was admired in Basra, but he had not created a theological tradition. Jubbāʾī had no use for him; he wanted to go back to Abū l-Hudhayl, whereas al-Jāḥiẓ had been a pupil of al-Naẓẓām. It is true that al-Jāḥiẓ was quite original in transforming al-Naẓẓām's ideas, but this was quickly understood as an idiosyncrasy – or rather as one idiosyncrasy piled upon another, since al-Naẓẓām's thinking was no longer up-to-date either and had lost much of its fascination. In al-Kaʿbī's perspective, though, idiosyncrasies were not yet predominantly negative, as we have seen. Uniformity in the sense of a closed Muʿtazilī system, no significant aberration being tolerated, became an ideal only in al-Kaʿbī's own generation, i.e., with Jubbāʾī, when the school had to be defended against increasing criticism from outside. With this we are entering a new period, a period of heavily armed scholasticism, which began to replace the experimental spirit characteristic of the beginnings.

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25 Via Ibn al-Murtaḍā, Shahrastānī, etc.; the Qāḍī mentions Ibn Yazdād and Ibn Farzūya as his sources.

26 For him *vide* D. Gimaret in *Enc. Iranica* VIII: 15 f.

27 Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-udabāʾ* VI: 73, 1 ff.

28 He became the main opponent of Jubbāʾī's son, Abū Hāshim, in Baṣra. Ibn al-Nadīm finds him important (*Fihrist,* 220, 10 ff.); in the later Baṣran tradition, however, he is barely mentioned.

29 The Zaydīs in Yemen had a copy of al-Jāḥiẓ's book. The imam al-Muʿayyad billāh (died 411/1020) used it for his *K. Ithbāt nubuwwat al-nabī* (ed. Ḫalīl Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Ḥājj, Beirut n.d.); cf. ibid., 27, 1.

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This is the moment where, concerning al-Jāḥiẓ with whom the old Muʿtazila seems to have come to an end, we may ask whether al-Jāḥiẓ's idiosyncrasies – not all, of course, but perhaps some of them – had anything to do with "humanist" tendencies. Let us define "humanist" here in as simple and down-to-earth a manner as possible: to denote a way of doing theology in permanent awareness of the human condition, theology from below as it were, which avoided a vocabulary imposed from above by revelation. We can amplify this approach with the following five points:

a) *The importance of human will.* Al-Kaʿbī puts much emphasis on al-Jāḥiẓ's doctrine of human will (*irāda*). But why should this be an idiosyncrasy? Wasn't free will an axiom common to all Muʿtazilites since the early days? Certainly; but we have to beware of the pitfalls of language. "Free will" is not *irāda,* it is *ikhtiyār,* and *ikhtiyār* means "choice". All Muslims agreed that this choice was granted by God, as a decision between good and bad, and most of them, the Muʿtazilites included, said that it requires a capacity to act. This capacity to act (*istiṭāʿa, qudra*) became the key notion in Basran theology, the nucleus of what we would call a theory of action ("Handlungstheorie").[30] Compared to this, *irāda* was something else: a psychic impetus, an intention; al-Jāḥiẓ started from there. It is this will that is free, not so much the action; the action comes afterward as its result, and we may doubt whether it is free since it is produced by the inborn capacities of human nature. Here was the point where al-Jāḥiẓ's originality came to the fore. Nevertheless he understood this *irāda* as an instantaneous event, in agreement with the atomistic structure of Muʿtazilī thinking, i.e., as a moment where a person wanted to do something, not as a permanent quality, such as will in the sense of Schopenhauer's *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung.*[31]

This approach was not entirely new. The Muʿtazilites had never completely ignored the importance of will;[32] it only needed somebody to shift the balance. Thumāma b. Ashras, a theologian who had been quite influential at the court of al-Maʾmūn, had done that already; al-Kaʿbī says so explicitly, and we are inclined to believe it.[33] But when al-Jāḥiẓ took over the idea, he may have received it from al-Naẓẓām rather than from Thumāma, with whom he probably never had any personal contact. The point was that originally the act had been the bet-

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30 See now the article by Cornelia Schöck, "Möglichkeit und Wirklichkeit menschlichen Handelns. 'Dynamis' (*qūwa/qudra/istiṭāʿa*) in der islamischen Theologie," in *Traditio: Studies in Ancient and Medieval History, Thought, and Religion* 59 (2004): 79-128.

31 If we want to find some figure in Western philosophy who, unlike Schopenhauer, might be compared to al-Jāḥiẓ, it is Spinoza for whom human beings simply dispose of specific acts of will, i.e., a capacity of saying Yes or No, instead of an absolute and free will (*vide* his *Ethics*, part II, tenet 48 f.).

32 And certainly not with regard to God, but this is not our topic.

33 Cf. *TG* III: 165; also Schöck, 111.

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ter basis of argumentation. The act was visible and could be perceived as a phenomenon of sensual reality. Human will was not; it was located in the soul, and the existence of a soul inside human beings had not been regarded as a *conditio sine qua non* in early Muslim theology. Abū l-Hudhayl, for instance, had in many ways done without assuming a soul, and it was only al-Naẓẓām, Abū l-Hudhayl's nephew, who, one generation later, proved its existence with arguments established long ago by Plato.[34] The existence of something which could be called human will therefore remained a mere hypothesis; the existence of human capacity, on the contrary, seemed to be a fact belonging to everyday knowledge. Similarly, nobody had any doubts about human capacity being given by God; in using it, man showed his responsibility before the Law (*taklīf*), and this was enough for salvation. In contrast to this, talking about *irāda* came close to a change of paradigm because the question of the origin, of the "originator" rather, the *muḥdith* (who is God), seemed suspended; will disappeared, so-to-speak, in the depth of the human psyche. This is why most Muʿtazilī theologians used the word rather casually; they were jurists, and for jurists the act was more important than will. We may therefore venture to say that by insisting on human will al-Jāḥiẓ was more "humanist" than most of his contemporaries. Yet this may also have been the reason why his theology was a failure.

b) *Psychology*. How do we need to conceive the relationship between will and nature? The German classicist Albrecht Dihle has shown that human will was not a decisive and independent category in Greek philosophy either; the change came with Christianity.[35] But for the Arabs this was a matter of the past, and al-Jāḥiẓ was not obliged to vote for or against antiquity. His "humanism", if it ever existed, was not Greek nor was it Christian; it corresponded rather to the spirit of his age. He combined his concept of human will with a theory of decision-making. He did his best to explain what is going on in the human soul before man decides for a specific action, and it is interesting to note that again he did not introduce the notion of "freedom" at this point. By itself this abstention was far from astonishing. There was no word for "freedom" in Arabic with respect to the intended sense; *ḥurriyya* meant something completely different.[36] Above all, however, "freedom" would not have been an unambiguous term either; we are strongly aware of that ourselves, with regard to what is going on in our own time. The point is that decisions are not necessarily free. What happens, according to al-Jāḥiẓ, is rather that "motives" (*dawāʿī*), i.e., motivating forces, are opposing each other, and only when they hold the balance is freedom ensured; otherwise man succumbs to his desires and inclinations.[37] This kind of anthropology reminds us of modern neurobiology (Wolf Singer, John Searle and oth-

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34 *TG* III: 370 ff.
35 *Die Vorstellung vom Willen in der Antike* (Göttingen 1985).
36 Cf. F. Rosenthal, *The Muslim Concept of Freedom* (Leiden 1960).
37 *TG* IV: 103 f.

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ers); it would fit into our contemporary discussions about free will.[38] Al-Jāḥiẓ never would have said, though, that free will is an illusion; what he had in mind rather was the medical theory of his time. *Ṭibāʿ*, "nature, natural disposition" evoked the *ṭabāʾi*, the "humours" typical of the Galenic system, and their mixture, which tends to determine our passions and reactions. By the same nature, however, we also possess reason, and reason may serve as a corrective force.

At this point al-Jāḥiẓ comes close to another group among his contemporaries: the mystics. Muḥāsibī, for instance, who died only one decade before him (in 243/857), explained man's inner life, his struggle for salvation, as the antagonism between two parts of his soul, *nafs* and *qalb*. What al-Jāḥiẓ called *dawāʿī*, the mystics called *khawāṭir*.[39] Mysticism was much more individualistic than was normal Muʿtazili theology. Mystics conceived the relationship between man and God as based on individual experience rather than on juridical obligation or rational argumentation. It is certainly not fortuitous that al-Jāḥiẓ used experience (*tajriba*) as another of his innovative terms; in an epistemological treatise he describes how a baby comes to know the world by experience before consciously using the intellect.[40] Even as adults, human beings rely on experience rather than on rational deliberation; it is their instinct that tells them for instance whether somebody who pretends to be a prophet is a swindler or performs real miracles.[41] This is how al-Jāḥiẓ solved the problem of the *farq bayna l-nabī wal-mutanabbī*, which Ibn al-Ikhshīd wanted to analyze afterwards. We do not know how al-Jāḥiẓ proceeded in the book Ibn al-Ikhshīd was trying to get hold of. If he did so in the way he did here, taking the subjective side as his point of departure, his approach was original and worth consideration. For in the past the theologians had tried to solve the problem of distinguishing between real and false prophecy by appealing to objective criteria: the number of witnesses present during the prophetic miracles, the reliability of the manner these were reported, and so forth.

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38 I am, of course, totally unaware of the literature which is, for the moment, relevant in this field, especially as far as English is concerned. Let me quote only Searle's *Intentionality. An essay in the philosophy of mind* (Cambridge, Mass. 1983) and, more recently, *Rationality in Action* (Cambridge, Mass. 2001). In German, cf. Alfred Gierer, *Willensfreiheit aus neurowissenschaftlicher und theologiegeschichtlicher Perspektive. Ein erkenntniskritischer Vergleich*, (Max-Planck-Institut für Wissenschaftsgeschichte, Tübingen, Preprint 285 [2005]). As for the theological discussion, it might be useful to consult the entry "Willensfreiheit," in *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Tübingen 1998 ff.), VIII: 1567 ff.

39 *TG* IV: 501.

40 I am referring to al-Jāḥiẓ's *Masāʾil wa l-jawābāt fī l-maʿrifa*, ed. Ch. Pellat, *Al-Mashriq* 63 (1969): 315 ff. = ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn, *Rasāʾil al-Jāḥiẓ* IV (Cairo 1399/1979), 45 ff. The passage quoted is found there on p. 325, 2 ff. = 62, 7 ff.; for a German translation cf. *TG* VI: 326 f. The usage of *tajriba* and the pragmatical turn in al-Jāḥiẓ's thought have already been noted by T. Khalidi in the *Arabic and Islamic Garland: historical, educational and literary papers presented to Abdul-Latif Tibawi by colleagues, friends and students* (London 1977), 144 f. and by M. Bernand in *SI* 39 (1974): 25 ff.

41 Ibid., 324, 1 ff. = 60, 13 ff.; trs. 325 f.

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c) *Epistemology*. Since al-Jāḥiẓ's anthropology was the brain-child of a Muʿtazilite, it focussed mainly on epistemology: How does reason work, and how does it express itself in human speech? The axiom was that prophets spoke the truth and that tricksters lied, but this was, of course, a moral decision available to every human being. Moreover, the alternative was not as clear-cut as it looked. Something may be said by us which is objectively true, and nevertheless we do not believe in it; conversely we may believe in something which is objectively false. Knowledge has a subjective and an objective side, and obviously human will is involved in the matter. The alternative "true/false", so dear to the logicians, was not enough; between both poles there was a zone of "clair-obscure" where the subjective and the objective elements of the speech-act intersected. The book in which al-Jāḥiẓ explained the situation, his *K. Ṣināʿat al-kalām,* is not preserved; we have only later repercussions.[42] The problem was aggravated by the fact that in Arabic (as in Greek) the "untruth" and the "lie" could not be easily differentiated; *kadhabta* could mean "you are wrong" as well as "you are a liar".

Again, the debate had been opened by al-Jāḥiẓ's teacher al-Naẓẓām. Al-Naẓẓām had defined reflection as a "movement" (*ḥaraka*) of the heart, and had also discovered that this movement could go in a direction different from what was confided to the tongue. The best example is that of the *munāfiqūn*; al-Naẓẓām used Sūra 63 v. 1 in order to analyze the character of their deceitfulness and dissimulation.[43] Reliable knowledge had to stand the test of the outer as well as the inner forum; it could therefore be described in the somewhat convoluted language of *kalām* as "a movement (which originates) in the heart when something (i.e., the knowable object) is found the way it exists (in the outside world) and the way it has been recognized". The formulation is quoted anonymously in Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār's *Mughnī,* i.e., in a much later source, but it fulfils the conditions set up by al-Jāḥiẓ [44] Yet how do we recognize that we have hit upon the truth? The answer was: by feeling that this movement has come to an end, by reaching "quietude of the heart" (*sukūn al-qalb*), as al-Naẓẓām had argued. As long as you are not sure of something, you are nervous, but when you have come to a clear conclusion you feel relaxed; you are in a state of ἀταραξία as the Greek expression had it.[45] This was still a rather subjective criterion; every-

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42 *Vide* the texts translated in *TG* VI: 318 ff. (nr. 1-4) and the analysis, ibid., IV: 97 ff.; also *Ḥayawān* I: 77, 12 ff. For the *K. Ṣināʿat al-kalām*, cf. *TG* VI: 313 f. nr. 10.

43 *TG* III: 381.

44 *ʿIlm = ḥaraka fī l-qalb ʿinda wujūd al-shayʾ kamā wujida wa-ʿurifa; Mughnī,* XII: 22, 3 f. The usage of *wujūd* shows how "finding", "being found" and "existing" (which is the meaning in later philosophical terminology) are slowly amalgamated.

45 Ἀταραξία was understood to be the ideal attitude of the wise man in late antiquity. The idea was common to most Hellenistic schools of philosophy, the Epicureans and the Stoics as well as the Pyrrhonian Sceptics. Ἀταραξία could occasionally be replaced by ἡσυχία; in Latin it was *tranquillitas animi* (see *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* IX: 94 f. s. v. "Seelenruhe"; also *Der Neue Pauly* II: 146 f. s. v. "Ataraxia"). I do not want to say that

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body knows that even idiots can be sure of themselves and that, on the other hand, intelligent people change their opinion all the time.[46] It was therefore wise to add that "the thing" has to exist in the heart "the way it exists". Yet how can this be checked? In spite of all his intellectual sharpness, al-Jāḥiẓ was about to end up in fideism.

d) *The fortuitousness of knowledge.* However al-Jāḥiẓ was not interested in *fides*, i.e. belief (*īmān*); he never wrote about it. His concern was knowledge, and what bothered him was the fact that knowledge, in a way, was uncertain. Only in a way, for he did not deny that theological arguments can be trusted. Man is able to prove God's existence and to deduce, on this basis, some of God's attributes, for God Himself has "set up" the proofs (*naṣaba l-adilla*) in this respect, in an overall context which attracts our attention (*ḥāl dālla*) so that we do not miss them. In a famous passage about the different ways of communication[47] he calls this epistemic link-up a *niṣba* – a term which he himself seems to have launched, but which was never definitely accepted into the theological vocabulary.[48] The fact itself was not new; al-Jāḥiẓ simply pinned down what had been said about God's "signs" so many times in the Qurʾan. But he added one element, namely that these proofs are not the *origin* of our theological knowledge or of our belief; they merely corroborate it *a posteriori*.[49] Knowledge as such comes about by "nature", i.e., as the result of a mental action, which – like any other action – is unpredictable and a matter of chance. Al-Kaʿbī, in his report, dwells on this peculiarity longer than on anything else; it was what struck him most. Al-Jāḥiẓ here contradicted the prevailing Muʿtazilī model, namely that knowledge is generated (*tawallada*) by systematic thinking (*tafakkur*). To be clear: al-Jāḥiẓ had nothing against systematic reflection (although he himself was not particularly good at

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Arabic *sukūn al-qalb* is derived from there; perhaps we should rather start from *ḥaraka* = κίνησις and refer to Aristotle's *Metaphysics* as does C. Schöck (see above fn. 30, p. 99).

46 *Al-Masāʾil wal-jawābāt*, 320, 1 ff. and 321, 12 ff. = 53, 8 ff. and 55, 13 ff. / trs. *TG* VI: 320 ff., sentences c-h and p-t.

47 *Al-Bayān wal-tabyīn*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn (Cairo 1380/1960), I: 76, 9 ff.; compare the parallel in *Ḥayawan* I: 33, ult. ff.

48 *Bayān* 76, 10 and *Ḥayawān* I: 35, 3; the latter passage (which is not as clear as the one in *Bayān*) has been translated in L. Souami, *Jāḥiẓ: Le cadi et la mouche* (Paris 1988), 97 ff. – *Niṣba* is an *ism nawʿ*, "the way the signs are set up"; therefore Souami's reading *nuṣba* is to be rejected. The last comment on this typical expression is by Katia Zakharia: "C'est cela qui entre 'nous' et 'eux' fait la différence": Le concept de niṣba dans *Kitāb al-Bayān wa-l-Tabyīn*, in *Identidades marginales*, ed. C. de la Puente (Madrid 2003), 15-51, a long article written in blissful ignorance of what had been published about this topic before, for instance N. Shehaby, "The Influence of Stoic Logic on Al-Jaṣṣāṣ's Legal Theory," in *The Cultural Context of Medieval Learning*, ed. J. E. Murdoch and E. D. Sylla, (Dordrecht / Boston 1975), 65 ff.; I. Geries, *Un genre littéraire arabe: al-Maḥāsin wal-masāwī* (Paris 1977), 38; R. M. Frank, *Beings and their Attributes* (Albany 1978), 31, n. 13; S. Enderwitz, *Gesellschaftlicher Rang und ethnische Legitimation* (Freiburg 1979), 166 ff. – *Naṣb al-adilla* is found in ʿAbd al-Jabbār's *Mughnī* (XI: 408, 6) and in Shahrastānī (*Milal*, ed. Badran, 129, 2), but not *niṣba*.

49 *Masāʾil* 323, 19 ff. = 60, 5 ff. / trs. *TG* VI: 325, sentence b.

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that); he merely doubted its causal and one hundred percent efficiency. Knowledge is ultimately a result of fortunate intuition (*ḥads*).[50]

e) *The status of the unbeliever.* A person who is not sure of having hit upon the final truth has a serious chance of being tolerant with regard to other people's convictions. It is true that al-Jāḥiẓ does not leave the impression of having been particularly tolerant, but at least he realized and openly conceded that, subjectively, the unbelievers are also convinced that they are right. We would perhaps conclude from such a perception: Let them live with their unbelief! But our tolerance is a tolerance of people whose religious feelings are not overwhelmingly strong; in politics (where we still have strong convictions) it quickly reaches its limits. Al-Jāḥiẓ simply made a distinction. He concluded that as long as an unbeliever does not know that he is an unbeliever he is innocent indeed; if, however, he is stubborn (*muʿānid*), inconvertible so-to-speak, i.e., after he has been admonished by a Muslim or by a prophet sent expressly to his community, he is bound to be condemned.[51] This amounts to saying that the "People of the Book" are normally not "excused" (*maʿdhūr*).

But what about the Muslims themselves; do we not have to draw certain consequences in their case? It is true that they usually grow up in an environment where they learn how to read the Qurʾan or hear about it at least; therefore they are obliged to follow God's commandments and can justly be called to account for this in God's final judgment. But let us assume, in a kind of thought-experiment, that one of them finds himself in a situation where nobody has told him anything: Would he be innocent like the ignorant unbeliever or would he not nevertheless be obliged? Most Muʿtazilis would have adopted the second position; others might have pointed to the *fiṭra,* i.e., the assumption that Islam is implanted into everyone's heart, as was attested by a famous *ḥadīth.* Al-Jāḥiẓ, however, reacted differently: A human being cannot be obliged to know God as long as he or she does not know what "God" is. Hence, there would be no basis for any obligation, at least not in the first moment of reflection when the ground for all further obligations is prepared.[52] The argument reminds us of the famous dilemma developed by Plato in his dialogue *Meno*: We cannot search for something without having found it already. While the problem itself was old in Islamic theology, – Can we get to know God by reason alone, or do we have to assume that God is "nicht hinterfragbar"? – al-Jāḥiẓ's answer was new, insofar as he no longer thought in terms of reason vs. revelation, but rather reason vs. experi-

50 Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *Mughnī* XII: 324, 3 ff. / trs. *TG* VI: 331, text XXX, 15; Jubbāʾī criticized this doctrine in his refutation of al-Jāḥiẓ's *K. al-Maʿrifa* (ibid., 107, 4 ff.).

51 *TG* IV: 99 f. with references to the relevant passages. This point has been stressed by most later commentators, al-Kaʿbī being the first of them (*Maqālāt* 73, 13 ff. / trs. *TG* VI: 329 = text XXX, 11, sentence e).

52 *TG* IV: 101.

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ence. You can base a universal obligation on revelation as well as on reason, but you cannot base it on mere subjective experience.

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I will not go into further detail here; I have written about this several times, and I do not wish to repeat myself.[53] Suffice it to say that most later theologians were not happy with al-Jāḥiẓ's approach. They were concerned with ultimate truth and intellectual certainty, whereas he relied on intuition. Al-Jāḥiẓ saw doubt as something positive since it represented the state of mind where the *dawaʿī,* the irrational forces, neutralized each other and left room for a free and possibly rational decision.[54] He quoted al-Naẓẓām for having maintained the same position,[55] but al-Naẓẓām had not yet developed it into a fully fledged theory and it was only the scepticism of the heretics (*mulḥidūn*) that he had focussed on in the quoted passage. It was the theory that made the difference; only when al-Jāḥiẓ had taken this step were the *mutakallimūn* forced to decide whether they could afford such a radical turn. Their answer was "No." Jubbāʾī responded with another theory, equally ingenious though slightly more complicated, a theory which started from where we broke off and which managed to make acquiring the notion of God obligatory again. In order to achieve this he had to postulate a primary existential impetus, which set off the first act of *tawallud,* i.e., the first stage of cognition.[56] From this perspective, al-Jāḥiẓ had simply fallen victim to a fallacy for which he was not the only person to blame. Jubbāʾī included him among the so-called *aṣḥāb al-maʿārif,* somewhat mysterious people who were supposed to take the cognition process for something that cannot be steered or directed but originates by itself and is given in advance.[57] He even thought that al-Jāḥiẓ had been the first to make their doctrine explicit.[58] But this is no longer my topic. It is relevant only insofar as, according to Jubbāʾī's definition, the existential impetus consisted of man's permanent awareness of his being dependent on God, even at a stage where God is not yet rationally known and presents Himself merely as a numinous, undefined entity.

This way of getting out of the epistemological impasse would perhaps even have been appreciated by al-Jāḥiẓ, since conceiving the awareness of permanent

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53 Cf., for instance, my article "Early Islamic Theologians on the Existence of God," in K. I. Semaan (ed.), *Islam and the Medieval West* (New York 1980), 64 ff.

54 *TG* IV: 105.

55 *Ḥayawān* VI: 35, 12 ff. / trs. *TG* VI: 131 = text nr. 167.

56 *TG* IV: 669 f.

57 Cf. my article "Ǧāḥiẓ und die aṣḥāb al-maʿārif" in *Der Islam* 42 (1966): 169 ff.; also G. Vajda, "La connaissance naturelle de Dieu selon al-Ǧāḥiẓ critiquée par les Muʿtazilites" in *SI* 24 (1966): 19 ff.

58 Al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā, *al-Shāfī fī l-imāma* (lith. Teheran 1301), 12, 7.

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and initial dependence as the ultimate root of religious feeling, comparable to Schleiermacher's "schlechthinnige Abhängigkeit", suited his "humanist" categories. Unfortunately, Jubbāʾī's theory was not accepted either in the long run. The *mutakallimūn,* whatever their provenance, wanted to do *theo*-logy and not *anthropo*-logy. Nevertheless, Jubbāʾī's theory at least survived as an object of astonishment and criticism in the scholastic compendia of the future. Through this scholastic tradition (and thanks to a few preserved original texts), we are still given an echo of what al-Jāḥiẓ had tried to say before. Jubbāʾī became the founder of the "Basran" school; al-Jāḥiẓ, on the other hand, was forgotten as a *mutakallim* and survived as *adīb*. What he had wanted to achieve, in true *adab* spirit, can be defined as finding a place for psychology in everyday *kalām*. But would it help to call this "humanism"?

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Al-Jāḥiẓ and the Poetics of Teaching – A Ninth Century Muslim Scholar on Intellectual Education

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Al-Jāḥiẓ's prolific life and scholarship very much reflect the ideal of a lifelong pursuit of learning. This ideal is a characteristic of Islamic piety and underlies the concept of education in Islam in general.[1] At the same time, al-Jāḥiẓ's literary and scholarly work is a sophisticated and elegant embodiment of the humanist concerns of classical Arabic-Islamic education as epitomized by the term *adab*,[2] that is, the expression which signifies the very notion of a general or 'liberal' education within the framework of Islam.[3]

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1 In the classical European tradition, Socrates (469-399 BCE), "the model teacher in European thought," is credited with making a lifelong pursuit of learning pivotal to the philosophy of education [see also Rorty, Amélie Oksenberg (ed.), *Philosophers on Education* (London: Routledge, 1998), 15 and 27].

2 Initially, the concept of *adab* related to the customs and codes of conduct as inherited from one's ancestors. From about the 8th century CE on, it stood for the ethical and practical rules of proper conduct deemed praiseworthy in the medieval Muslim world. Additional connotations of *adab* included the knowledge necessary for a certain profession; good breeding (proper upbringing of children, their morals, and their good behavior); courtesy; etiquette, and refined manners; aristocratic learning; and urbanity. *Adab*, however, also designates the main form of classical Arabic *belles-lettres*, which explicitly aims at both the education and the entertainment of the reader. See I. Lapidus's important article on this topic [Lapidus, I. M., "Knowledge, Virtue, and Action. The Classical Muslim Conception of *Adab* and the Nature of Religious Fulfillment in Islam" in *Moral Conduct and Authority*: *The Place of* adab *in South Asian Islam*, ed. B. D. Metcalf (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984)] and, furthermore, P. Heath's contribution to this volume.

3 The term 'education' refers to both (a) the action and process of educating or of being educated (including a stage of such a process), and (b) the knowledge and development resulting from an educational process. The term 'liberal' here is meant to allude to the *artes liberales* with the double meaning inherent in this term. The *septem artes liberales* or canon of seven topics to be taught dates back to antiquity. There, however, *ars* did not mean 'art' in the modern sense of the word. Instead, it referred to the 'technique,' 'ability,' or 'branch of knowledge' and 'scholarship.' The *artes* were qualified as *liberales*, because they were appropriate of the "free man's" (*homo liber*) attention and efforts. In the Middle Ages, *liberalis* was also derived from *liber*, book, thus implying the meaning of 'book knowledge' in general.
The *septem artes* of antiquity include three branches of scholarship dealing with language (the *trivium*, triple path), and four dealing with numbers (the *quadrivium*, quadruple path), thus aiming to represent the harmonic order of God's creation. The *trivium* consists of (1) grammar, (2) rhetoric, and (3) logic and dialectic; the complimentary *quadrivium* comprised (4) arithmetic, (5) music, (6) geometry (including geometry in its modern understanding, but also drawing and representation of the earth in maps, along with description of countries and people; in other words, what we call geography today), and (7) astron-

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Al-Jāḥiẓ did not leave behind a philosophy of education as such or any definite outline of his educational concepts. Rather, we find issues in intellectual, moral, and religious education discussed at numerous places in the works of his encyclopedic literary and scholarly *œuvre*.[4] These issues are to be found therein in diverse thematic contexts which, for al-Jāḥiẓ, constitute the framework of the complex question of education. Particularly noteworthy in this regard are the prominent sections in his *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān* (*The Book of Animals*)[5] and *Kitāb al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn* (*The Book of Eloquence and Exposition*), which impressively promote 'the book' as an indispensable tool of learning.[6] Several more passages in these and other of his writings deal with the education of princes, the social status of educators and tutors, virtues, character and habit formation, and even with the etiquette to be observed when attending literary salons, to mention just a few topics. One of al-Jāḥiẓ's literary essays, however, is expressly devoted to pedagogical and didactic issues: it is his *Kitāb al-Muʿallimīn* (*The Book of Teachers*). This essay offers much insightful information on the means and ends of Islamic education, the order of studies, the nature of learning and teaching, and the curriculum. It is an important source for our knowledge of al-Jāḥiẓ's views on intellectual or 'liberal' education, with the latter taken here to mean its humanist definition as propounded by Plato (427-347 BCE): the improvement of the mind through the acquisition of knowledge and skills, which is accomplished through a lifelong process that begins in youth and continues in later years.[7]

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omy. As will be shown later, al-Jāḥiẓ indicates these topics also as components of the course of study within an Islamic framework.

4 The difficulties in studying al-Jāḥiẓ's educational views within the framework of his encyclopaedic *œuvre* are pointed out by al-Qazzāz [al-Qazzāz, Muḥammad Saʿd. *Al-Fikr al-tarbawī fi Kitābāt al-Jāḥiẓ* (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-ʿArabī, 1415/1990), 9]. For certain works on moral education, which appear, however, to have been wrongly attributed to al-Jāḥiẓ, see Pellat, Charles, *The Life and Works of Jāḥiẓ: Translation of Selected Texts*, transl. from French D. M. Hawke (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), 23-24.

5 For the view of *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān* as a 'religious' book, see Pellat, *The Life*, 21-22. Manṣūr suggested rendering this title as "The Book of Life" [cf. Manṣūr, Saʿīd, *The World View of Al-Jāḥiẓ in Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, Ph.D. thesis, Montreal (Alexandria: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1977), 300-301].

6 On this issue, see also al-Jāḥiẓ's insightful passage on "The Best Way of Preserving Documents" [trans. in Pellat, *The Life*, 209-211]. See also my article "*Praise to the Book!* Al-Jāḥiẓ and Ibn Qutayba on the Excellence of the Written Word in Medieval Islam" in *Franz Rosenthal Memorial Volume, Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 31 (2006).

7 In more general terms, Plato's ideal of (higher) learning includes also religious education, along with education in the arts and sciences, both for youth and older people;" see Jowett's remarks in the introduction to his translations of Plato's *Republic*, a work Jowett calls "the first treatise on education" [Jowett, B. *The Republic of Plato* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941), iv-v; furthermore, see Shrivastava, K.K., *Philosophical Foundations of Education* (New Delhi: Kanishka Publishers, 2003), 9-11].

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1. The teachers

It seems that al-Jāḥiẓ was compelled to write the essay about teachers by the often unfair treatment of professional teachers which he both observed and may even have experienced firsthand when working as a teacher in Baghdad.[8] This might help us to understand why, in this work, al-Jāḥiẓ not only defends, but champions schoolteachers and stresses their superiority over all other categories of educators.

In the introductory passage of the *Kitāb al-Muʿallimīn*, he emphasizes the fundamental impact writing has had on human civilization as a means of preserving and communicating knowledge.[9] Without writing, we would have "lost track of the happenings of the past and not have known much about the generations preceding us."[10] Al-Jāḥiẓ points to the key role that teachers have played in providing humankind with the knowledge of writing. Writing and calculation, he says, are God-given, as are the teachers themselves, for God made them available to us, and entrusted them with teaching the knowledge we have today. He argues that our gratitude to our teachers should be exceeded only by our gratitude towards God, who brought the written word into existence. By means of this powerful metaphor, al-Jāḥiẓ projects in the reader's mind the image of teachers acting as God's tools. Thus, he is creating an appreciative attitude towards the teaching profession. The grounds for this appreciation are then developed in the *Kitāb al-Muʿallimīn* in various ways. Teachers are described as knowledgeable, diligent and hardworking people. Moreover, they are characterized as passionate about their profession and as people who suffer along with their students when the students do not progress as expected. Parents should not, therefore, blame teachers when a child is slow in education. Instead, parents should look at the intellectual capacities of their offspring.[11] Yet, al-Jāḥiẓ does not praise all teachers alike. In the *Kitāb al-Bayān*, for example, the image of teachers who do not meet the stan-

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8 Al-Jāḥiẓ was a teacher in the broad sense of the word, despite the fact that he himself reports that the caliph al-Mutawakkil (r. 847-861) wanted to entrust him with the education of his children, but later changed his mind apparently because of al-Jāḥiẓ's ugliness [Pellat, Charles, "al-Djāḥiẓ", in *EI*^{2} = *Encyclopaedia of Islam,* new edition, II: 385-388, here 385; Qazzāz, 27].

9 This idea is also evident in al-Jāḥiẓ's *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān* [Manṣūr, 286]. For al-Jāḥiẓ's view on the significance and merits that the Qur'an grants to writing and to the written word, see al-Jāḥiẓ, Abū ʿUthmān ʿAmr b. Baḥr al-Fuqaymī al-Baṣrī, *Kitāb al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Hārūn, IV parts in two vols., 5th ed. (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Khānjī, 1405/1985), I: 79-80; and Pellat, *The Life*, 103.

10 Kitāb al-Muʿallimīn in Kitābān li-l-Jāḥiẓ: Kitāb al-Muʿallimīn wa-Kitāb fī l-radd ʿalā al-mushabbiha. Two Essays by al-Jāḥiẓ: "On Schoolmasters" and "Refutation of Anthropomorphists", ed. Ibrahim Geries (Ibrāhīm Jiryis), 57-87. First edition, (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, Department of Arabic Language and Literature, Srugy-Acco (also: ʿAkkā: Maṭbaʿat al-Surūjī), 1980), 59-60.

11 *Muʿallimīn*, 60, 63; Qazzāz, 228.

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dards of knowledge and performance expected of them serves him as a topic to entertain the reader. There, bad schoolteachers are portrayed as foolish and stupid; they are comic figures, of the sort found in most Greek comedies.[12]

2. *The curriculum*

The curriculum is a key issue in intellectual education, and al-Jāḥiẓ is well aware of it. In the *Kitāb al-Muʿallimīn* he suggests an impressive variety of topics to be taught. These include both topics to be studied within the framework of formal school instruction and also subjects to be studied informally. This conclusion can be drawn despite the fact that al-Jāḥiẓ does not make a clear-cut distinction between curricular and non-curricular topics; nor does he specify the places where education is to take place. He does, however, determine, for example, that children of the lower classes need to be instructed in certain crafts, including farming, trading, construction, goldsmithing, sewing, weaving, and dyeing.[13]

For the primary level of education, al-Jāḥiẓ specifically enumerates the obligatory topics to be taught in the following sequence: writing, arithmetic, law, the religious duties, the Qurʾan, grammar, prosody, poetry, and history. He stresses that priority is to be given to teaching the essentials of these topics. In particular, this is true in the case of grammar, of which pupils must know only what is necessary for correct verbal communication and for writing.[14] Arithmetic, however, requires special attention, because accuracy is even more important here than it is for writing.

At a more advanced level, al-Jāḥiẓ recommends physical training and exercise by suggesting the involvement of adolescents in hunting and sports, including instruction in the use of light arms. These areas are mentioned next to astronomy (that is "the knowledge of the stars"), music (*luḥūn*; including how to play various musical instruments), medicine, and geometry.[15]

Al-Jāḥiẓ puts great emphasis here and in several other places on teaching advanced students to express themselves in a way that is understandable to people without the need for additional interpretation and comment. Teachers, therefore, should make their students familiar with the arguments of good writers and their

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12 *Bayān* I: 248-249; Mez, Adam, *Die Renaissance des Islams*, Repr. (Hildesheim: Olms, 1968), 177.

13 *Muʿallimīn*, 66.

14 This may sound surprising since al-Jāḥiẓ's hometown, Basra, is considered to be the birthplace of both the Muʿtazila (one of the earliest and most important schools of speculative theology in Islam, which placed reasoning and dialectic at the center of its doctrine) and Arabic grammar [Pellat, *The Life*, 1-2].

15 *Muʿallimīn*, 66. An interesting note of al-Jāḥiẓ's on practicing music and playing various instruments, even in the strict society of Medina, is translated in Pellat, *The Life*, 53. For more detailed information on al-Jāḥiẓ's views on music, see H. Kilpatrick's contribution to this volume.

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eloquent use of clear words. Moreover, they are obliged to make students understand that content has priority over style.

Furthermore, it is advisable that the students should also be taught what "the well-trained government clerks and the scribes in chancelleries" (*kufāt al-sulṭān wa-kuttāb al-dawāwīn*) need to know; this knowledge "is more useful" for them than that of "editors and penmen".[16] The two main goals of learning, however, are that the students acquire a broad, general education and specialize in two or three branches of knowledge.[17]

3. Education as a process and the methods of learning

Al-Jāḥiẓ is highly interested in the nature of learning and in the methods and means of imparting and absorbing knowledge. While he advances some of his pedagogical principles in this regard in a plain and straightforward manner, he communicates others in a more subtle, literary way, that is, via anecdotes or stories, for example, through which he invites his readers to draw their own conclusions.

In *The Book of Animals*, for instance, al-Jāḥiẓ generally notes that learning at school emerges from the interaction between teacher and student. More specifically, he suggests that for learning to take place, the teacher, as a rule, must ensure that his students are both motivated and dedicated to learning. This is because only "the one whose heart is exclusively preoccupied with learning will [actually] learn".[18] On a different note, in his treatise *On Jest and Earnestness* (*Fī l-jidd wa-l-hazl*), his fondness for humor and irony is obvious when he says that studying is an "advantageous enterprise," because "it keeps people from gossiping, frivolous amusements, scandal-mongering and coveting other people's goods. [This alone is already] of great value and prime importance in the realm of religion and religious duty." Then, speaking more seriously, he maintains that studying is also "of great significance for improving character and inculcating good habits."[19] Therefore, learning should be a pleasant experience, because when it becomes a burden, "the soul grows weary and nature shrinks from it."[20]

As for methods of teaching, one can deduce from al-Jāḥiẓ's *Kitāb al-Muʿallimīn*, first, that it is part of the teachers' duties to introduce the students

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16 *Muʿallimīn*, 73-74.

17 Al-Jāḥiẓ, Abū ʿUthmān ʿAmr b. Baḥr al-Fuqaymī al-Baṣrī, *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Hārūn, 7 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1938), I: 59-60; Pellat, *The Life*, 132.

18 *Ḥayawān* V: 542.

19 *Majmūʿ Rasāʾil al-Jāḥiẓ, wa-hiya rasāʾil lam tunshar li-Abī ʿUthmān ʿAmr b. Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ*, ed. Bāwl Krāws (Paul Kraus), Muḥammad Ṭāhā al-Ḥājirī (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Lajnat al-Taʾlīf wa-l-Tarjama wa-l-Nashr, 1943), 75; Pellat, *The Life*, 211.

20 Ibid.

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properly to the topics discussed in class;[21] second, the teachers should choose topics for teaching which are of major relevance to the students;[22] and, third, select ideas that are not shrouded in complexities or scattered throughout a long discourse.[23]

Al-Jāḥiẓ repeatedly advocates that words need to be used carefully in class. They must be chosen in due consideration of both the situation of teaching and the audience to be addressed.[24] In addition, teachers must take the intellectual capacities of their students into account and use a language understandable to them. It should be language that is neither too complicated nor too simple, and by no means vulgar.[25]

More key issues in education are insightfully illustrated in a short account given in the *Bayān*. This account lets us picture a father who gives his son's instructor directions regarding the ways in which he wishes his child to be educated. As for the emotional and moral dimensions of the teacher-student relationship, we learn from this text, first, that children tend to imitate their teachers in terms of their habits, behavior, and character. Teachers, therefore, need to be very careful about what they say and do. Moreover, they should pay due attention to their own appearance, cleanliness, and the gestures they make. This is because taking care of yourself is the first step towards taking care of the child entrusted to you. Second, as regards the nature of teaching and learning, teachers must know that they should not move too quickly from one subject to another. A topic first needs to be adequately understood by the students and given time to take roots in their minds before another is begun. "Be [to your students] like a physician who does not hasten to give treatment before knowing the [nature of the] ailment," al-Jāḥiẓ says. Finally yet importantly, teachers and educators should know as well that the more the student learns, the greater their financial reward will be.[26] It is also in the *Bayān* that the teachers are given two more particularly remarkable pieces of advice: "teach ... and learn at the same time" and "make your teaching a studying lesson [for yourself]".[27] This idea seems to echo the Qurʾanic command which reminds the "masters [in the Scripture]" and "followers of the Lord" of their twofold obligation: to teach and to continue studying.[28]

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21 *Muʿallimīn*, 75.
22 Ibid., 73-74.
23 Ibid., 74-75; see also Qazzāz, 239, 275.
24 *Bayān* I: 138-39.
25 Ibid. I: 136, 144.
26 See the detailed instructions that ʿUtbā b. Abī Sufyān, a member of the élite in early Islamic society, gave to his son's tutor [*Bayān* II: 73-74].
27 *Bayān* I: 273-274.
28 *Kūnū rabbāniyyīna bimā kuntum tuʿallimūna l-Kitāba wa-bimā kuntum tadrusūna* [*Qurʾan*, 3:79]. For a discussion of this verse in an educational context, see my article "Teaching", in *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, 6 vols., ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2001-2006), V.

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Liberal education, in general, is characterized by such distinct ideas as the instruction of students in critical thinking (for example, by having them examine apparent contradictions in literature); training them in correct, effective and persuasive verbal expression; and having them acquire skills in ways of reasoning that make good judgment possible.[29] In the *Kitāb al-Muʿallimīn*, al-Jāḥiẓ deals in various ways with questions of this kind. He does so, for example, in a lengthy discussion of memory and memorization, topics of principal concern to education, including the methods of teaching. Interestingly enough, al-Jāḥiẓ stresses that the independent thinkers and researchers of the past disliked memorization. Relying on it makes "our minds disregard distinction" and neglect thinking. People with good memories are tempted to rely simply on what their predecessors achieved, without attempting to reach conclusions of their own. He says:

> The leading sages, masters of the art of deductive reasoning and [independent] thinking (*aṣḥāb al-istinbāṭ wa-t-tafkīr*) used to be averse to excellence in memorization, because...the one engaged in memorization is only an imitator, whereas deductive reasoning is that which brings the one engaged in it to calculated certainty and great confidence.[30]

Still, he also says that a good memory is needed and valuable for the process of studying. Otherwise, the results of any study would be lost and the fruits of research would not last.

> ... when (the student) neglects rational reflection, ideas do not come quickly to him, and when he neglects learning by memorization, [these ideas] do not linger in his mind or remain long in his heart.[31]

Naturally, ideas of this kind are very significant in the context of learning and intellectual inquiry. They clearly display al-Jāḥiẓ's Muʿtazilism and may be a reference to his great work *Kitāb al-Tarbīʿ wa-l-tadbīr* (*The Circle and the Square*), in which he campaigns against mere servile imitation and makes great "efforts to stimulate thought and win the reader for the Muʿtazilite cause," as Charles Pellat stated.[32]

4. Care for the students facilitates learning

In several of his writings, al-Jāḥiẓ emphatically calls upon teachers to treat students gently and in a most loving manner. In the *Kitāb al-Muʿallimīn*, for example, he advises them to reach their students' hearts when it comes to the subject matter taught, since learning is greatly facilitated by love. In fact, he concludes

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29 I am referring here, in particular, to the ideas promulgated in the late fifth century BCE by the Sophists, especially those of Protagoras (480-411 BCE) [Rorty, *Philosophers*, 25-26].

30 *Muʿallimīn*, 62-63.

31 Ibid.

32 Pellat, *The Life*, 21.

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this book with a moving passage on the merits of treating students kindly and responsibly:

> I am of the opinion that you should not force (the student) [to learn] and so make him dislike good manners and education. [Also,] do not neglect him, lest he get used to wasting [time] in amusing activities.... Devise artful means to make yourself more lovable to him than his mother; ... bring out his innate affection with righteous words and the offer of financial [assistance].[33]

Finally, he strongly advocates the idea that the students are our future. He addresses the teachers – and us readers – directly, saying that the students are those

> [who] will take your place amongst your people and will take care of [and continue] what you have left behind....[34]

5. Conclusion

Ample evidence in several of al-Jāḥiẓ's works suggests, first, that for this ninth century Muʿtazilite theologian and man of letters, education is generally concerned with the vocation of the human being. It aims at preparing humans in thought and action for their purpose and station in life so that they are properly equipped in this life to decide their future lot in the hereafter.[35] Put differently, for al-Jāḥiẓ, education is a means to an end, rather than an end in itself.

Second, al-Jāḥiẓ's views on intellectual education profoundly reflect both his Muʿtazilite stances and his essentially dialectical intellect. This is why for him learning means not merely training the mind, but also applying it.

Third, for al-Jāḥiẓ education is not a process that (certain, privileged) humans are born to undertake. Rather, it refers to the achievements and results of the individual efforts of human beings. This makes al-Jāḥiẓ's philosophy of education an inclusive rather than exclusive one, with its perhaps most noticeable feature being al-Jāḥiẓ's stance towards the social classes and groups in society that he considers to be in need, worthy and capable of formal instruction. In fact, much of his educational advice seems to be directed to the general Muslim public, expressly including to some degree the lower classes. Yet, the proposal to instruct certain social groups in various crafts or professions also indicates that al-Jāḥiẓ, like Plato,[36] believed that society is best served when its citizens have been educated in accordance with their needs and interests so that they eventually be-

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33 *Muʿallimīn*, 86; Günther, Sebastian, "Advice for Teachers: The 9th Century Muslim Scholars Ibn Saḥnūn and al-Jāḥiẓ on Pedagogy and Didactics", in *Ideas, Images, and Methods of Portrayal: Insights into Classical Arabic Literature and Islam*, ed. S. Günther (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 89-128, here 124-25.

34 Ibid.

35 Gimaret, D., "Muʿtazila," in *EI*^{2} VII (1990): 783-793.

36 Ellis, Arthur K., John J. Cogan and Kenneth R. Howey, *Introduction to the Foundations of Education* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1991), 67.

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come engaged in endeavors meaningful to them. If this notion were seen from a different perspective, it would also mean that, although al-Jāḥiẓ understands learning as a private endeavor and a matter of making personal effort, he also recognizes and stresses its public purpose and far-reaching impact on Muslim society.

Fourth, a number of al-Jāḥiẓ's pedagogical premises and principles are particularly striking. They include:

(a) the key role teachers and educators play in the process of efficiently transferring a well-defined body of knowledge to students, and in facilitating their quest for intellectual development and the acquisition of certain useful skills;
(b) the virtues teachers need in their profession, such as modesty, patience, and a passion for working with youth;
(c) education understood as 'guidance' rather than 'correction' of youth; and
(d) the teacher-student relationship viewed as an attentive, caring, and even loving one.

The latter is an educational concept that is known from the Greek philosophers, especially Aristotle (348-322 BCE), with whose works al-Jāḥiẓ was particularly familiar. Yet it also seems to anticipate the idea of the father-son relationship between teacher and student, which becomes an issue of major significance in the mystical writings of al-Ghazālī (d. 1111 CE) and in educational books of later medieval Muslim scholars such as Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 1274), Ibn Jamāʿa (d. 1333) and al-ʿAlmawī (d. 1573).[37]

In addition, the preceding points indicate, first of all, that in al-Jāḥiẓ's opinion intellectual education is more than merely the sum of its occupational parts, such as following a certain curriculum, managing the educational environment, assessing students' learning, etc. In fact, he seems to view education in a holistic way that draws together intellectual, aesthetic, and moral dimensions, and that brings to the fore how much the educational process is an endeavor that can enrich the life of both the student and the teacher. Second, they also show that al-Jāḥiẓ's refined and highly aesthetic-literary pursuit of several essential qualities of learning not only allows him to engage in questions of the structure and nature of teaching, but also to actually communicate these insights to his readers and, thus, to encourage them to learn. Hence al-Jāḥiẓ presents himself as a scholar who not only promotes learning and teaching but also actually advances an idea

[37] See my article "Education: Islamic Education", in *New Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, ed. Maryanne Cline Horowitz (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2005), II: 640-645, here 644. In the Western literary tradition, it is above all the courtesies between the Roman poet, Virgil, an epitome of human knowledge, and Dante (d. 1321) in the *Divine Comedy*, which present the most eloquent picture of affection between teacher and student, master and disciple.

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that one could call, in the Aristotelian sense, a 'poetics of education.' He does so, for example, when he aims at human development by drawing together aspects of 'art' and 'inquiry,' and by fusing 'reason' and 'emotion' to make education become a kind of "interpretive lens of human conduct."[38] He further achieves this when addressing in his different literary and scholarly works issues pertinent to the main fields of learning, which are commonly known as the "three broad constituents" of Aristotelian education; that is: (a) training for the body, (b) habituation for the appetites and emotions, and (c) instruction or "education through reason."[39]

While some of these latter aspects are certainly worthy of further exploration, we need no further inquiry to appreciate al-Jāḥiẓ as one of the very earliest Muslim scholars theorizing on education and, importantly enough, a 'liberal' Muslim educator whose pedagogical ideas indeed have universal appeal and significance.

38 Hansen, David T. "A Poetics of Teaching", in *Educational Theory* 54/2 (2004): 119-142, here 122.

39 Rorty, *Philosophers*, 54.

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Al-Jāḥiẓ and World Music[1]

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Al-Jāḥiẓ is well known for his comprehensive interest in human behaviour and in forms of communication. Music being a form of communication through organised sound which occurs in the human and animal worlds, it comes as no surprise that he wrote about it. He is not a significant contributor to the corpus of writings on Arabic music, unlike his contemporary, the philosopher, al-Kindī. Yet his wide-ranging interests led him to observe musical facts and reflect on the place of the art of music in his society, and his findings are to be found scattered throughout his writings. Music is a complex phenomenon, and attitudes to it are often ambiguous. This was true of early ʿAbbasid society, and it is still true today. What did al-Jāḥiẓ record about music and musicians? What attitude did he take to them? And is anything that he wrote on the subject relevant to the 21st century? In this contribution I will attempt to answer these questions.

Al-Jāḥiẓ's writings on music[2] and musicians fall into two categories: independent texts and passages in books on other subjects. In the former category, two short epistles on music are associated with al-Jāḥiẓ's name, the *Risāla fī l-qiyān* and the *Ṭabaqāt al-mughannīn*.[3] The attribution of the second of these titles to him appears, however, to be wrong. The main argument advanced against al-

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1 I would like to thank the participants at this conference for their comments. I am very grateful to Dr. Lale Behzadi and to Dr. Eckhard Neubauer (Frankfurt) for the additional references they gave me.

2 Al-Jāḥiẓ's discussions concern *ghināʾ* (performed music) and *mūsīqī* (music theory), which do not include the central Islamic musical expressions of Qurʾan recitation (*tartīl*, *tajwīd*) and the call to prayer (*adhān*). He himself distinguishes *al-ghināʾ* from *al-ḥudāʾ* (the simple singing of the camel-drivers), *al-taghbīr* (chanting during *dhikr* ceremonies) and *al-qirāʾa bi-l-alḥān* (Qurʾan cantillation) in a passage in *Kitāb al-bayān wa-l-tabyīn* where he talks of the different ways in which people are gifted (Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-bayān wa-l-tabyīn* (referred to henceforth as *Bayān*), ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1367/1948), I: 208. This meaning of *taghbīr* is explained p. 208, note 2.)

3 A list of writings by or attributed to al-Jāḥiẓ which mention music is given in Amnon Shiloah, *The Theory of Music in Arabic Writings (c. 900-1900): Descriptive Catalogue of Manuscripts in Libraries of Europe and the USA* (Répertoire Internationale des Sources Musicales B X) (Munich: G. Henle Verlag, 1979), 89-95. Shiloah lists six texts incontrovertibly by al-Jāḥiẓ: *Kitāb al-ḥayawān*, *Kitāb fakhr al-sūdān ʿalā l-bīḍān*, *Risāla fī manāqib al-atrāk*, *Risāla fī l-ʿishq wa-l-nisāʾ*, *Risālat al-qiyān*, *Kitāb al-tarbīʿ wa-l-tadwīr*. The other writings of his in which I have found useful remarks on music or musicians are *Kitāb al-bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, *Kitāb al-qawl fī l-bighāl*, *Kitāb al-burṣān wa-l-ʿurjān wa-l-ʿumyān wa-l-ḥūlān*, *Kitāb al-muʿallimīn* and *Kitāb al-shārib wa-l-mashrūb*.
The *Kitāb al-Tāj*, which has an interesting section on court music and musicians, has long been recognised as falsely attributed to al-Jāḥiẓ; see Ch. Pellat (introd. and tr.), *Le livre de la couronne. Kitāb at-tāj (fī akhlāq al-mulūk) attribué à* Jāḥiẓ (Paris: Société d'édition « Les Belles Lettres », 1954); translator's introduction, 11-17.

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Jāḥiẓ's authorship is that the *Ṭabaqāt* evidently approves of al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad's pioneering efforts in the theory of music, whereas in the *Kitāb al-ḥayawān* al-Jāḥiẓ labels them worthless.[4] There are other reasons for doubting al-Jāḥiẓ's authorship of this text, too. The fluent but rather bland style of the introduction to the *Ṭabaqāt*, which is all that survives of it,[5] contrasts with al-Jāḥiẓ's usual vivid dialectical manner, while the procedure of organising any phenomenon tidily according to classes, *ṭabaqāt*, is otherwise unknown in his œuvre. The author of the *Ṭabaqāt* has consorted with the finest singers in Baghdad whose glory he seeks to immortalise, mentioning their salient traits, the traditions they belonged to, the instruments they played and so on. Moreover, these *Ṭabaqāt* are a work in progress; the author leaves open spaces for the names of other contemporary singers to be added and for their ranking to be altered if they advance or fall back. And fearful of hostile reactions from some readers, he has deposited copies of his text with three friends whom he names.[6] Ibn al-Nadīm does not list this title in his (admittedly incomplete) inventory of al-Jāḥiẓ's works; he does, however, mention a *Ṭabaqāt al-mughannīn* written by Abū Ayyūb al-Madīnī, and it may be that the preface to this book was later falsely ascribed to al-Jāḥiẓ.[7]

The undoubtedly genuine *Risāla fī l-qiyān*,[8] when examined attentively, turns out to contain only a handful of references to music. As is well known, this text treats of singing-girls (*qiyān*), not musicians (*mughannīn/mughanniyāt*). *Qiyān* were performers of other people's songs; they did not rank high in the musical hierarchy. And al-Jāḥiẓ concentrates on their social role and significance. His valuable observations about them may be compared with the discussion in a book on footballers of the relationship between players and managers and between players and fans, while the game itself is hardly mentioned.

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4 Eckhard Neubauer, "Al-Ḫalīl b. Aḥmad und die Frühgeschichte der arabischen Lehre von den 'Tönen' und den musikalischen Metren. Mit einer Übersetzung des *Kitāb al-naġam* von Yaḥyā b. ʿAlī al-Munaǧǧim", *Zeitschrift für Geschichte der arabisch-islamischen Wissenschaften* 10 (1995/6): 257-9. The passage mentioned is in al-Jāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-ḥayawān*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn, 2nd ed., 8 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1385/1965-1389/1969), VII: 165-166 (This text will be referred to henceforth as *Ḥayawān*). A similar dismissal of al-Khalīl's efforts in the field of rhythmics occurs in *Kitāb al-muʿallimīn* (Ibrāhīm Khalīl Jiryis (ed. and introd.), *Kitābān li-l-Jāḥiẓ: Kitāb al-muʿallimīn wa-Kitāb fī l-radd ʿalā l-mushabbiha* (Tel Aviv/Acre: Jāmiʿat Tal Abīb/Maktabat al-Surūjī, 1980), 80.

5 ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn, *Rasā'il al-Jāḥiẓ*, 4 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1399/1979), III: 129-136. (This work will be referred to henceforth as *Rasā'il*.)

6 *Rasā'il* III: 133, 134-135, 135-136. As the editor remarks, none of these names occur anywhere else in al-Jāḥiẓ's works. And the circles in which the author moved are not those with which al-Jāḥiẓ is associated.

7 Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-fihrist*, ed. Riḍā Tajaddud, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-masīra, 1988), 165. The titles of Abū Ayyūb's other works quoted in the *Fihrist* show that he was evidently very knowledgeable about Umayyad and early ʿAbbasid singers. The preface of the *Ṭabaqāt* is an interesting document, whoever its author was.

8 [Al-Jāḥiẓ], *The Epistle on Singing-girls by Jāḥiẓ*, tr. and ed. by A.F.L. Beeston (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1980).

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In the second category, several works by al-Jāḥiẓ mention music and musicians. His remarks on these subjects, which are often made *en passant* or by way of comparison, are scattered through his texts like needles in haystacks; I doubt whether I have identified all of them. What follows is a systematic presentation of those of his observations which I have found.

First, al-Jāḥiẓ mentions what may be termed "natural music" – musical sounds produced by birds and animals. When discussing different creatures in the *Kitāb al-ḥayawān*, he remarks on the noises they make, such as the cock's crowing and the donkey's braying. The sounds some creatures utter qualify as music, as can be seen from the terms he employs. First, speaking in general terms of the instinctive knowledge God has given animals and birds, he notes that the throats of some of them can bring forth rhythmic tones (*al-nagham al-mawzūna*) and melodious sounds (*al-aṣwāt al-mulaḥḥana*). Their articulation moves the hearer (*al-makhārij al-shajīya*) and their songs cause delight (*al-aghānī l-muṭriba*).[9] Certain species of birds and insects sing – among the insects, al-Jāḥiẓ mentions mosquitoes, wasps, hornets, bees and gadflies, and among the birds, starlings, falcons, and turtledoves. He believes that some songbirds will imitate other members of their own or a related species which have a more beautiful voice, and that they are capable of singing tunes which no musician has thought of.[10] Doves in particular are musically gifted; poets compare them to singing-girls or keening women, dwelling on the mournful sound of their cooing and the way they answer one another.[11] In a lexicographical aside, al-Jāḥiẓ notes that *taghrīd* (warbling) is used for both humans and doves, but originally it denotes the warbling of birds.[12] Among animals, the elephant is singled out because of his trunk, which is both his nose and his hand and through which he sings (*yughannī*), producing sound with it as a flute player does by blowing through a reed.[13] The cheetah is not a music-maker, but it will listen attentively to beautiful singing; so enthralled does it become that it allows itself to be caught.[14]

When al-Jāḥiẓ speaks of music, however, he is usually referring to the music of mankind. One series of remarks distinguishes types of music and musical gifts associated with certain peoples or social groups; it reflects the fondness for ethnic typologies to be found in several of al-Jāḥiẓ's texts.[15] Thus Africans have a strong instinctive sense of rhythm and are natural drummers; they also have fine

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9 *Ḥayawān* I: 35.

10 *Ḥayawān* III: 390, 339.

11 *Ḥayawān* III: 197-199, 241-242, with the doves' cooing designated as *ghinā'*, *iṭrāb* and *nawḥ*.

12 *Ḥayawān* III: 243.

13 *Ḥayawān* III: 316.

14 *Ḥayawān* VI: 471.

15 To what extent the following remarks are based on al-Jāḥiẓ's own observations, the information he derived from contemporary musicians, his theories about the influence of climate on the inhabitants of different regions, or the geographical tradition going back to Ptolemy is not clear.

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voices.[16] Indians have a most pleasing kind of music, and they play a one-stringed instrument, the *kankala*; they also perform different types of dance. Singing-girls from Sind have voices as good as the Africans'.[17] The Turks make use of great drums to strike fear into the enemy and also of bells.[18] The ancient Greeks were noteworthy inventors, and among their inventions al-Jāḥiẓ mentions various kinds of wind and stringed instruments.[19] Concerning the origins of the melodic modes (*luḥūn*), he hesitates between ascribing them to the ancient Greeks (*al-yūnāniyyīn*) and to their descendants, the Byzantines (*al-rūm*).[20] He also refers to work-songs; in a passage praising his native city and listing its attractions, he says that the visitor to Basra will hear the sailor singing at his rudder and the camel-driver chanting to urge his beasts along.[21]

Music is transmitted by imitation and teaching. Apart from songbirds imitating and "learning" from each other, as mentioned above, birds can be trained to sing; al-Jāḥiẓ mentions the case of a singing-teacher being hired for a nightingale.[22] Among the qualities which earn man the title of "microcosm" is the ability to imitate any sound, but music is also a subject taught in the curriculum of court education, along with the playing of wind, stringed and percussion instruments.[23] Singing-girls acquire an extensive repertoire, and they continue to train their voice and learn new songs in order to preserve their skill and professional reputation and keep their admirers.[24]

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16 *Rasā'il*, I: 195 (*Kitāb fakhr al-sūdān ʿalā l-bīḍān*).

17 *Rasā'il*, I: 223, 224 (*Kitāb fakhr al-sūdān ʿalā l-bīḍān*). The *kankala* was a one-stringed plucked instrument with a gourd box (George D. Sawa, *Music performance practice in the early ʿAbbāsid era 130-320 AH/750-932AD*. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1989), 207). It is also mentioned and described in the fragment of the *Kitāb fī l-akhbār wa-kayf taṣiḥḥ* published by Charles Pellat: "Al-Jāḥiẓ: Les nations civilisées et les croyances religieuses," *Journal Asiatique* CCLV (1967): 97).

18 *Rasā'il*, I: 19 (*Risāla fī manāqib al-atrāk*). Al-Jāḥiẓ does not observe that they have a characteristic type of music for peacetime.

19 *Rasā'il*, I: 68 (*Risāla fī manāqib al-atrāk*).

20 For the attribution to the ancient Greeks, *Rasā'il*, I: 68; for the attribution to the Byzantines, the *Kitāb fī l-akhbār wa-kayf taṣiḥḥ* (Pellat: "Al-Ǧāḥiẓ: Les nations civilisées", 98). The differences in attribution may reflect the fact that Arabic musical theory started out from classical Greek writings, whereas musical practice borrowed elements from Byzantine music, especially in the Umayyad period, as the presentations of Ibn Misghaḥ and Ibn Muḥriz in the *Kitāb al-aghānī* show.

21 *Rasā'il*, IV: 139 (*Al-awṭān wa-l-buldān*). In another passage (*Ḥayawān* III: 211), al-Jāḥiẓ argues that doves of different origins can be distinguished just as easily as people from Basra, Kufa, Syria, Yemen and Medina, who each have their own physiognomy, character traits, build and *nagham*. If *nagham* here has the sense of tones, he would appear to be distinguishing regional traditions of singing.

22 *Ḥayawān* III: 339.

23 Jiryis, *Kitābān*, 68, 66. The other subjects mentioned, including chess, mathematics and martial arts, make clear that al-Ǧāḥiẓ has in mind an education for courtiers, going back to the *awā'il*, here the representatives of Persian traditions.

24 *The Epistle on Singing-girls*, 53.

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Concerning practitioners of élite Arabic music in his time and shortly before, al-Jāḥiẓ sometimes makes casual remarks *en passant*. He excuses himself for not reproducing fishermen's tales about sea-creatures, because they are so long-drawn-out that "you could not stand them even if they were sung by Mukhāriq and he were accompanied by Zalzal on the lute and Barṣawmā playing the flute".[25] In his survey of those suffering from various physical infirmities, al-Jāḥiẓ mentions ʿAllūya and Maʿbad. Maʿbad was the best singer in Medina in his day until he became partly paralysed after a stroke and could no longer move his tongue properly. ʿAllūya, whom al-Jāḥiẓ knew and appreciated, was left-handed, yet he played the lute as well as any right-handed player. He was both one of the greatest musicians of his age and a brilliant raconteur. The leprosy-like skin disorder he suffered from was on his neck, hidden by his beard.[26]

Al-Jāḥiẓ's more detailed observations on contemporary élite music and musical practice are usually found embedded in discussions on nonmusical subjects. In the course of his defence of wine-drinking, he lists some famous singers who performed in Medina, reputed to be the centre of prohibitionism. He goes on to regret that the argument about allowing or prohibiting wine is not as easy to settle as differences of opinion about songs and their performance, of which he gives examples: disagreements about [songs'] characteristics and rhythmic modes, their various origins, their modes and developments; disputes about which songs can be incorporated into or linked to one another, and about the contribution of the throat, the hard and soft palate, the respiration and the lower jaw to the sound; arguments about which frets make the greatest emotional effect, and which are most apposite; debates about when a glottal stop should be used at the beginning of a song, or when the short vowel "u" is employed; quarrels over whether the *hazaj* metre sounds better with the course of the mode in the fourth finger or the middle finger, whether the *sarīʿ* metre is more delightful when the melody is based on the fourth string or the second and whether the hearer is more affected by a rising melody performed gently or a falling one performed with force.[27] As can be seen, these controversies relate to performance practice and aesthetic effect.

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[25] *Ḥayawān* VI: 16-17. Mukhāriq was one of the leading singers at court under al-Rashīd and his successors, famed for his beautiful voice; he died c. 231/845 (*EI*^{2} art. "Mukhāriḳ" (H.G. Farmer)). Manṣūr Zalzal (d. c. 190/806) and Barṣawmā (d. after 188/804) were the best lutenist and flautist of their day (*EI*^{2}, art. "Zalzal" (H.G. Farmer [E. Neubauer]) and *EI*^{2} Suppl., art. "Barṣawmā al-Zāmir" (E. Neubauer)).

[26] Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-burṣān wa-l-ʿurǧān wa-l-ʿumyān wa-l-ḥūlān*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1410/1990), 450, 169-70. Maʿbad died c. 125/743 (*EI*^{2}, art. "Maʿbad b. Wahb" (H.G. Farmer [E. Neubauer])). ʿAllūya, a pupil of Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī, sang before caliphs from al-Amīn to al-Mutawakkil; he died in or soon after 236/850 (*EI*^{2} Suppl., art. "ʿAllawayh al-Aʿsar" (E. Neubauer)). Al-Jāḥiẓ's presentation of him here, while highly appreciative, is far from the type of description proposed by the author of the *Ṭabaqāt al-mughannīn*, as mentioned above.

[27] *Rasāʾil*, IV: 277-278, 279 (*Kitāb al-shārib wa-l-mashrūb*). Those named are the Hijazi singers of the Umayyad period Maʿbad, al-Gharīḍ, Ibn Surayj, Daḥmān and Ibn Muḥriz, and

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The *Kitāb al-tarbīʿ wa-l-tadwīr*, that inventory of controversial issues and provocative questions about the lore of pre-Islamic Arabia, the Mesopotamian and Iranian worlds, Greek scientific knowledge and emerging rational thought in early ʿAbbāsid culture, also includes paragraphs of unsolved problems connected with music which presumably reflect contemporary disputes. The tone here is far more aggressive than in *Kitāb al-shārib wa-l-mashrūb*. Al-Jāḥiẓ fires at his unfortunate target, Aḥmad b. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, questions about the relative contributions of various Greek and Persian masters to musical knowledge; the distinctive traits of famous, and sometimes semilegendary, women singers of the pre-Islamic and Umayyad periods; the origin of different genres of Arabic music; the reason for linking the four strings of the lute with the humours; the reason why certain sounds are claimed to be deadly; and the identity of the inventor of the *barbaṭ*, or two-stringed lute.[28] Another dispute, referred to in the *Kitāb al-ʿaṣā*, concerns marking musical rhythm. According to al-Jāḥiẓ the supporters of Persian culture advocate the use of wands to beat time, whereas those knowledgeable about music argue that a singer whose performance has a rhythmic accompaniment is inferior to one who performs unaccompanied.[29]

These questions (except the last) accord with thinking on the theory and history of music in the early 3rd/9th century, as it has been transmitted in writings on music and *adab* works. In the field of theory, al-Kindī (d. after 252/865) wrote on the origin of the lute, linking it to the Old Testament figure of Lamekh; he is also an author of a short treatise on stringed instruments which associates the four strings with the humours.[30] As for history, an awareness that Arabic music was influenced by the Greek and Persian traditions is found, for instance, in the accounts of the early Umayyad musicians Ibn Muḥriz and Ibn Misjaḥ, both of whom, having familiarised themselves with the singing of Mecca and Medina, are said to have travelled to Iran and then Syria to learn the Persian and Byzan-

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from the ʿAbbāsid period Ibn Jāmiʿ, who moved from the Hijaz to Baghdad, and the Baghdadis ʿAllūya and Mukhāriq. The terminology al-Jāḥiẓ employs in this technical passage is somewhat idiosyncratic.

28 Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-tarbīʿ wa-l-tadwīr*, ed. Ch. Pellat. (Damascus: Institut Français d'Etudes Arabes, 1955), 82-4; French translation by Maurice Adad, "Le *Kitāb al- tarbīʿ wa-l-tadwīr* d'al-Ǧāḥiẓ", *Arabica* XIV (1967): 298-301.

29 *Bayān*, III, 12. The implication is that the singer needs the accompaniment in order to keep the rhythm true. This remark applies to a percussion accompaniment; stringed and wind instruments, notably the lute and the flute, were regularly used to enrich the performances of leading singers at the ʿAbbasid court. See, for details of accompanying instruments, Sawa, *Music performance practice*, 145-151. This argument between practitioners of ʿAbbasid court music and representatives of a Persian tradition about beating the rhythm does not seem to be mentioned elsewhere in mediaeval Arabic texts on music.

30 Abū Yūsuf Yaʿqūb al-Kindī, "Kitāb al-muṣawwitāt" in *Muʾallafāt al-Kindī al-mūsīqīya*, ed. and comm. Zakarīyā Yūsuf (Baghdad 1962), 67-92; "Risāla fī ajzāʾ khabarīya fī l-mūsīqī" in *Muʾallafāt al-Kindī al-mūsīqīya*, 100-106. Parallels between al-Kindī's and al-Jāḥiẓ's musical interests have been noted by Fadlou Shehadi in his *Philosophies of Music in Medieval Islam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), 16, 27-28.

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tine traditions of music.[31] Many anecdotes in the *Kitāb al-aghānī* testify to discussions about the qualities and relative merits of singers, which seem to have been as commonplace as discussions about poets.[32] Various styles of singing, including *rukbānī*, *hazaj* and *naṣb*, were distinguished in the early period and their origins debated.[33]

In the passages presented so far, al-Jāḥiẓ's point of view is that of a neutral observer recording facts. As the discussion moves closer to the ethical and moral sphere, his own attitude becomes clearer. He notes that the Greeks invented musical instruments (*malāhī*) along with other implements "to fortify the soul, offering relaxation after toil and joy to heal care's wounds".[34] Some rulers drink wine and listen to fine music "to increase their vigour and strengthen them"; admittedly, they do so at night, so as not to shock the common people, who do not drink or appreciate this kind of music.[35] Music has therapeutic qualities, being especially effective in cases of mental illness.[36]

Al-Jāḥiẓ devotes considerable attention to the emotional effect of singing on its hearers.[37] He admits that men who are models of self-control and respected senior citizens can go into a frenzy when hearing a good singer perform a song which induces ecstasy (*ṭarab*); they tear their clothes, break into a dance and generally behave like callow youths. Unlike passionate love (*ʿishq*), however, this ecstasy induced by music passes off quite quickly. When beautiful singing comes from a performer with a beautiful face and body, the effect is even more ravishing. Indeed, in his view, women are the original singers, and men are intruders in

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31 Abū l-Faraj ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn al-Iṣbahānī, *Kitāb al-aghānī*, 24 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-kutub / Al-hay'a al-ʿāmma al-miṣriyya li-l-kitāb, 1927-74), I: 378 (Ibn Muḥriz); III: 276 (Ibn Misjaḥ). It is unlikely that both men followed the same itinerary, but there is nothing strange in musicians travelling *fī ṭalab al-ghinā'*, as the biographies of many European composers show.

32 See for instance anecdotes evaluating singers in the articles on Maʿbad, Ibn Surayj and Ibn Muḥriz: *Kitāb al-aghānī*, I: 39, 41, 249, 250, 251, 252; II: 378, 380.

33 For these terms, which remain obscure, see Owen Wright, "Music and Verse", in A.F.L. Beeston et al. (eds), *Arabic literature to the end of the Umayyad period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 435-437.

34 *Rasā'il*, I: 68 (*Risāla fī manāqib al-atrāk*).

35 *Ḥayawān* I: 285.

36 *Ḥayawān* I: 286. Music had been a recognised means of treating mental illness since antiquity (Michael Dols, *'Majnūn': the madman in medieval Islamic society* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1992), 166). Interestingly, al-Jāḥiẓ ascribes this method to "*mulūk al-ʿajam*" (normally understood to mean the rulers of Persia), from whom "*mulūk al-ʿarab*" (Arab rulers) adopted it; he may have had in mind the practice of Christian physicians at the Sassanian court and the establishment of the first Islamic hospital in Baghdad by the Barmakids (Dols, *'Majnūn'*, 43-45).

37 This subject has already been mentioned in the passage from the *Kitāb al-shārib wa-l-mashrūb* on questions of performance practice and aesthetic effect which has been summarised above.

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this art, just as they are in keening (*al-nawḥ*), another activity which was formerly the preserve of women.[38]

The subsequent statement, however, makes clear that it is not only the performer's skill and appearance which contribute to a song's emotional effect, but also the lyrics. The comparison between men and women singers extends to the genres with which they are associated. A man in the prime of life with a full, thick beard and whiskers may sing Warqāʾ b. Zuhayr's verse lamenting his father's death and his own powerlessness to protect him:

"Seeing Zuhayr fall below Khālid's helm I ran forward
distraught, like a mother robbed of her child by death"

thus transporting his audience to the stirring world of the pre-Islamic epic narratives, the *ayyām al-ʿarab*.[39] A girl like a bouquet of narcissus or jasmine, radiant as polished silver, by contrast, may sing ʿUkkāsha al-ʿAmmī's couplet:

"from the hand of a maiden with fingers of silver,
tipped with the red of jujubes....
as if, when she taps with her right hand, it marks the tally in her left"[40]

with her own beauty, desirability and flirtatiousness mirroring the words of her song; she will consequently have a far greater effect than her male colleague. In a song such as ʿUkkāsha's, lyrics and setting together produce both aesthetic enjoyment and entertainment, and they may communicate an emotional message.[41] Indeed, al-Jāḥiẓ goes so far as to claim that love songs which induce extreme emotion should be sung by women alone; after all, the lyrics were composed about them and for them.[42]

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38 *Rasāʾil*, III: 143-144 (*Kitāb al-nisāʾ*). This remark of al-Jāḥiẓ's accords with the little information available about pre-Islamic Arab music; the earliest performers of what later developed into elite music were women, and usually slave-girls (Hilary Kilpatrick, "*Mawālī* and Music," in Monique Bernards and John Nawas (eds.), *Patronate and Patronage in Early and Classical Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

39 The song is quoted in *Kitāb al-aghānī* XI: 74, 89, 93, together with the account of Zuhayr b. Jadhīma's death at the hands of Khālid b. Jaʿfar. The setting was composed by Kardam, the son of Maʿbad. Such songs were calculated to evoke a nostalgic mood in their hearers (Sawa, *Music performance practice*, 133-134).

40 *Rasāʾil*, III: 144-145 (*Kitāb al-nisāʾ*). This song, one of the Top Hundred, is quoted in *Aghānī* III: 256; I have followed the text given there. The poet is the late 2nd/8th century ʿUkkāsha b. ʿAbd al-Ṣamad al-ʿAmmī, who specialised in wine- and lovesongs; the composer is ʿAbd al-Raḥīm al-Daffāf. The poem from which the song is taken is given on p. 260; it celebrates a gathering of drinkers, their wine, the girl who pours it and the singer who accompanies them. Part of the difficulty with the text as given in the *Kitāb al-nisāʾ* stems from the fact that originally the two lines are not consecutive; one describes the wine-server, the other the singing-girl. Al-Jāḥiẓ ascribes this poem to ʿUkkāsha b. Miḥṣan. He was a Companion of the Prophet and is not recorded to have composed poetry (*Rasāʾil*, III: 144, n. 7). Is this a scribal error, an oversight, or al-Jāḥiẓ's surreptitious attempt to depict a respected early Muslim as the author of wine- and love-poetry?

41 Sawa, *Music performance practice*, 132-135.

42 *Rasāʾil*, III: 145.

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In the *Risāla fī l-qiyān*, considerations about the emotional effect of music are taken further. The attraction of singing-girls lies in the fact that they appeal to three senses and through them to the heart: to sight through beauty, to hearing through singing, and to touch, when the messages transmitted by the ear and eye reach the heart. This triple appeal is unique, and explains the devastating impact *qaynāt* can have. Moreover, the songs they sing contribute greatly to maintaining their admirers' interest.[43]

Although al-Jāḥiẓ condemns the immoral practices of singing-girls, and even more those of their owners,[44] he defends singing itself as not forbidden by Islamic law. He maintains that a song is simply a poem clad in music. A poem should be judged according to the content of the text; what is true is good, and what is false is bad.[45] The fact that it is metrical and rhymes is neither here nor there. Since metre and rhyme in poetry are not forbidden and since musical metres fall into the same category as poetic ones, they too are permissible. And performing a text with parts of it being repeated (*tarjīʿ*)[46] is not a prohibited act either. In support of poetry, al-Jāḥiẓ quotes the Prophet Muḥammad and ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb; to give his views on the practice of singing respectability, he affirms that it was considered as an art among the ancient Persians and Greeks, and he cites several caliphs as listeners or performers. His most telling examples are those of ʿAbdallāh b. Jaʿfar b. Abī Ṭālib, the nephew of ʿAlī, who kept singing-girls, and ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, who himself composed songs before he became caliph.[47]

Typically, al-Jāḥiẓ also defends music elsewhere in a back-handed way by quoting in condemnation of it a remark by the *mukhaḍram* al-Ḥuṭayʾa: "Don't let me hear singing. For music excites to fornication!"[48] Al-Ḥuṭayʾa was an itinerant extortionist poet who is reported to have composed an antitestament recom-

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43 [Al-Jāḥiẓ], *The Epistle on Singing-girls*, 37, 48, 49.

44 [Al-Jāḥiẓ], *The Epistle on Singing-girls*, introduction, 4.

45 The evaluation of poetry according to its veracity is a recurrent theme in mediaeval Arabic poetic criticism; see *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature* (London: Routledge, 1998), art. "Truth and poetry" (J.S. Meisami) and the references given there.

46 I adopt the explanation given by Sawa (*Music performance practice*, 185) for this somewhat ambiguous term.

47 [Al-Jāḥiẓ], *The Epistle on Singing-girls*, 28-31. Similar arguments in favour of singing are found in anecdotes in the *Kitāb al-aghānī*, for instance VI: 291-293, where Ibn Jāmiʿ demonstrates to the *qāḍī* Abū Yūsuf that singing is simply a superior form of recitation, and VI, 339-340, where Ibn Jurayj has Ibn Tayzan sing before some po-faced Iraqis and asks them to explain the difference between his performance and the camel-drivers' chanting in *rajaz* which they approve of. ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz's activity as a composer and singer serves in the *Aghānī* to buttress the promusic position.
The passage in *Bayān* II, 322 which has sometimes been taken to list supporters and opponents of singing (three of each), in fact refers to attitudes to transmitting *ḥadīth* either word for word or according to the sense, as the editor points out (note 1). Moreover, of the six traditionists mentioned, only one, al-Shaʿbī, is recorded in the *Aghānī* as expressing any attitude to singing (*Kitāb al-aghānī*, II, 228).

48 *Ḥayawān* III, 293. This anecdote comes in a small group of jokes with sexual connotations.

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mending unethical behaviour to his children and to have prepared for death in a blatantly irreligious fashion.[49] No straight-laced moralist would dream of appealing to his authority.

What conclusions can be drawn from these statements of al-Jāḥiẓ about music? To begin with, it was not one of his main interests. A considerable number of his works have been preserved, yet about music they only yield the meagre harvest set out above. Politico-religious issues such as the imamate, aspects of linguistics and rhetoric, and topics like avarice, dogs and teachers are all treated more extensively than music.

Yet it would be wrong to conclude that this relative silence on the subject of music springs from ignorance. As evident from the passages from the *Kitāb al-tarbīʿ wa-l-tadwīr* and the *Kitāb al-shārib wa-l-mashrūb*, to which I have referred, al-Jāḥiẓ well understood the issues being discussed by contemporaries concerned with the history, theory and performance of music. The passing reference to eminent singers and instrumentalists of his time and his acquaintance with one of them –ʿAllūya – indicate that the world of musicians was not closed to him. Given that he was not very interested in the subject, his familiarity with musical issues and practice is impressive.

Although al-Jāḥiẓ uses the same terminology throughout, he treats two distinct categories of music. One is the music produced by animals and humans worldwide: bird-song, ethnic music, work-songs. His remarks about this kind of music are often made in passing, for instance when he identifies the specific music of a people along with their other salient characteristics. When speaking of the cooing of doves, however, he goes into more detail; he views their song as very close to the music of mankind and capable of stirring profound emotions in its human listeners. This kind of music is a fact of life and morally neutral. Indeed, when it is used for relaxation after work and for healing, it is beneficial.

The second type of music is art music as it developed in Umayyad and early ʿAbbāsid times. The songs of the *qiyān* belong to it, as do the performances of the great musicians of the time. It is vocal and employs sophisticated forms of composition and techniques of performance. It is capable of moving its hearers profoundly and inducing ecstasy in them. Depending on who performs it, it appeals not only to the ear, but also to the eye, and even to the sense of touch; the effect it has on its audience depends partly on what lyrics are being sung. Al-Jāḥiẓ rejects the global condemnation of music as encouraging immorality; he takes the overwhelming emotional effect it can have on its hearers (*ṭarab*) for granted.[50] His

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[49] ʿAbdallāh b. Muslim B. Qutayba, *Al-shiʿr wa-l-shuʿarāʾ*, ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1904), 180-181.

[50] Near Eastern cultures have traditionally associated music with extraordinary transformational powers (A.J. Racy, *Making Music in the Arab World. The Culture and Artistry of Ṭarab* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 4.

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criticisms are directed not at music, but at the *qiyān* and their owners who exploit it for economic gain.[51]

It is perhaps because al-Jāḥiẓ was not very interested in music that he did not try harder to analyse its effect. His argument that it is simply poetry with an extra something added may have been adequate to defend it against its critics, but it is not convincing as an explanation of the extreme emotional effect he describes it as exerting. With his concern for types of communication, his fine sense of observation and his awareness of psychology, one feels that he could have contributed more to the understanding of mediaeval *ṭarab*.[52]

Despite this, al-Jāḥiẓ's approach to music can still be useful today for three reasons. First, he is an example of an eminent Muslim thinker who does not condemn music. Admittedly, sustained attacks on music were not launched until after his death,[53] but as the passages in the *Qiyān* referred to above show, it was already controversial in his time. Given his view that a continuum exists between the music of animals and birds and that of mankind, a global condemnation of music is impossible, since it would involve rejecting something created by God. And because his approach embraces music in all its forms and ethnic expressions, he can point to its benefits for therapy and necessary relaxation and its usefulness in warfare. As a Muʿtazilī, he believed in man's free will and his capacity to make the right choices; it is therefore up to individuals to decide for themselves how they will use music.[54]

Second, al-Jāḥiẓ integrated music into his vision of different cultures. It has been remarked that today's anthropologists tend to ignore the musical expressions of the cultures they study, and conversely that, according to a wide-spread view, only professional musicologists who have the appropriate technical knowledge can properly comprehend music.[55] How many departments of area studies offer courses on music along with the other cultural expressions of their areas?

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51 His view that the problem lies with the listeners, not with music, parallels his attitude to *ʿishq* (passionate love), where he denies that a moral dilemma is involved in the emotion itself (Lois Giffen, *The Theory of Profane Love among the Arabs: the Development of the Genre* (London: University of London Press Ltd, 1972), 118).

52 A passage where his thoughts might have moved in this direction concerns the role of the voice (*ṣawt*) in conveying speech, turning the tongue's movements into utterances and achieving the division (*taqṭīʿ*) and combination (*taʾlīf*) of sounds into meaningful speech (*Bayān*, I, 79); *ṣawt* also means « song », while the two other terms are also used in a technical sense in musical composition. But he does not pursue this.

53 The first text devoted to condemning music is *Fī dhamm al-malāhī* by Ibn Abī l-Dunyā (208/823-281/894).

54 Interestingly, the recent law governing musical performance in Iran comes close to this position. It represents a radical change from official policy in the first years of the Islamic Republic. See Ameneh Youssefzadeh, "Singing in a theocracy: female musicians in Iran" in Marie Korpe (ed.), *Shoot the singer! Music censorship today* (London: Zed Books, 2004), 133.

55 Bruno Nettl, *The Study of Ethnomusicology. Twenty-Nine Issues and Concepts* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 135.

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Although he was not greatly interested in music, al-Jāḥiẓ recognised it as being one of the defining characteristics of a culture; this insight deserves to be taken seriously. And he took the trouble to inform himself about the technical issues and controversies discussed by performers in his day. His inclusive approach to music in cultural studies is something to learn from.

Third, al-Jāḥiẓ realised that music lends itself to exploitation for commercial purposes. In his day, singing was used as bait by *qiyān* and their owners to attract and keep admirers (or customers), and he recognised clearly that they had understood the potential of singing in this respect. Nowadays music may be exploited more insidiously. Supermarket chains play background music to induce a mood in which customers are more inclined to spend money. Unscrupulous record companies promote mediocre bands merely to make money; music, now often spoken of as an industry, has its own mass production plants and assembly lines. Were al-Jāḥiẓ alive today, he would no doubt use his penetrating gifts of observation to discover the uses to which music is put and reflect critically on his findings. It is an example worth following.

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Al-Jāḥiẓ and the Critique of Aristotelian Science

George Saliba (Columbia University and Kluge Center / Library of Congress)

Introduction

My interest in al-Jāḥiẓ's critique of Aristotelian science has its roots in a much larger project, namely, the project of studying the reception of Greek science in Islamic civilization. This project started some forty years ago when I was still a student of mathematics at AUB and when I was lucky enough to be advised by Professor Nicola Ziadeh, to add to my knowledge of mathematics the historical study of the transmission of Greek mathematics into Arabic. At the time, the idea seemed seductive enough to be taken seriously. But I felt that it could not be pursued without mastery of Syriac, of which I knew nothing at the time. The need for the acquisition of that language was naturally dictated by the then prevailing narrative which explained the passage of Greek science into Arabic in two stages. It held that those sciences were first translated into Syriac, mostly in pre-Islamic and early times, and at a second stage they were translated from Syriac into Arabic during the ʿAbbasid period, and particularly during the reign of the sixth ʿAbbasid caliph, al-Maʾmūn (813-833).

In the years that followed, I spent a good six years learning Syriac just so that I could properly pursue the details of that project, only to find out at the end that most of the important scientific Greek texts that were translated into Arabic, mainly during the early part of the ninth century, never made it into Syriac in the first place. I looked in vain for Syriac versions of Ptolemy's *Almagest*, Euclid's *Elements*, or Theon's rendition of the *Handy Tables*, or even for the major medical works of Galen and Hippocrates, and always came back empty-handed. There was no credible evidence that such major works were ever translated into Syriac. Instead there was considerable evidence that elementary logical treatises, such as the elementary books of the Aristotelian *Organon* and some elementary astrological and folk medicine, had indeed passed to Syriac, as can be documented still in the works of Sergius of Rasʿaina (d.c. 536), Severus Sebokht (c. 661) and George the Bishop of the Arabs (d.c. 724).[1] Luckily for me, and without wasting more time, I quickly realized that my project had reached a dead end, and that it might be much more profitable to abandon the classical narrative that led me astray in the first place.

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1 For a sample of the Greek material that has survived in pre-Islamic and early Islamic Syriac and Arabic, see George Saliba, "Paulus Alexandrinus in Syriac and Arabic," *Byzantion*, 65 (1995): 440-454.

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But believing that every dark cloud has a silver lining, the failure to find any evidence of pre-Islamic Syriac sources that could act as intermediaries between the sophisticated Greek and Arabic sciences led me naturally to reorient my project and to seek a more realistic explanation of the role of Syriac in the story of transmission.[2] Once more I was also lucky to realize that the six years I spent studying Syriac were not at all wasted. For by devoting so much time to the Syriac sources I could not only determine more definitively the role of Syriac in the story of transmission, but I could, more importantly and inadvertently, open up a whole new field of inquiry. In other words, I could then raise the question: if the classical narrative was so obviously wrong about such well-known sources, where else was that narrative also misleading if not outright false?

It was then that I began to doubt the other end of the narrative, despite the fact that the same narrative had been reigning for a couple of centuries by then. And I am sorry to say that its remnants are still with us today. The same narrative that stipulated the Syriac intermediary in pre-Islamic times also told us that Arabic science went through three major periods: firstly a period of translation from Greek and other languages, either directly or through Syriac as indicated above. This was followed by a second period of creativity, usually called a Golden Age, which stretched from the ninth to the twelfth or early thirteenth centuries. With al-Ghazālī's (d. 1111) text, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* (*Incoherence of the Philosophers*), the classical narrative told us that Arabic science reached its third period, that is when it came to an end, and when scientific creativity was snuffed out by the overpowering religious thought that was inaugurated by the same al-Ghazālī. That age of decline was supposed to have started right after al-Ghazālī's time and continued to our own time.

That was the prevailing historiography of Arabic science in the early sixties of the last century. Luckily for us, doors began to open as a result of the accidental findings of historians of astronomy, like Edward Kennedy, now emeritus Professor of AUB's mathematics department, and his spiritual mentor, the late Otto Neugebauer of Brown University and the Institute of Advanced Study at Princeton. By 1957 those two historians of science had already established that there was a possible direct relationship between the astronomical works of Renaissance scientists and the works of astronomers who wrote in Arabic after the thirteenth century. That research naturally pricked my curiosity. And since it demonstrated the existence of a vibrant Arabic astronomy after the thirteenth century that was directly related to Renaissance Science, it also naturally urged me to check the validity of the other end of the classical narrative, namely that segment that detailed the death of Arabic science and the causes of that death. All that conspired

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2 For the latest assessment of this role, see George Saliba, "Revisiting the Syriac Role in the Transmission of Greek Sciences into Arabic," *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies*, 4 (2004): 27-32.

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to lead me to spend the next 30 years or so uncovering one astronomical text after another, all written after the thirteenth century, that is, in the period which was supposed to have witnessed the decline and eventual death of Arabic science.

It was not too long before I began to realize that I was faced with a rich set of unparalleled first-rate mathematical and astronomical texts which spoke explicitly and quite clearly about the problems that plagued Greek astronomical theory and about the need to reject that astronomy and build a new one. And in the same spirit of the research then followed by Kennedy and Neugebauer, my own pursuit of that end project led to the establishment of unquestionable connections between these later phases of Arabic science and what later came to be known as Renaissance science.[3]

Once I could establish that the Arabic astronomical theory that was produced during the age of decline of Arabic science was indeed one of the most sophisticated chapters in the history of Arabic astronomy,[4] I felt safe to conclude that the end story of the classical narrative was just as deceptive as its earlier assertion that Greek science had reached Islamic civilization through the intermediary of pre-Islamic Syriac texts. This relatively negative conclusion left me no option but to abandon that whole narrative, and underlined the urgency of seeking an alternative understanding of the manner in which Greek science was incorporated into Islamic civilization.

While pursuing that general project, I began to wonder about the conditions that gave rise to those brilliant texts that one encountered from the later "age of decline." When did those texts begin to appear for the first time? What were the conditions that led to their composition? Who were the people who produced those texts? Who gave those scientists the confidence to tackle the authoritative Greek science in the manner they did?

Seeking the origins of this creative impulse that matured after the thirteenth century began to be an important pursuit by itself. And when Ibn al-Haytham's (d.c. 1040) book, *al-Shukūk ʿalā Baṭlamyūs* (*Doubts Against Ptolemy*), was published in the early seventies, it became clear that one had to seek those ideas in such radical works as those of Ibn al-Haytham.[5] In that context, Abū Bakr al-Rāzī's (d. 925) work, *al-Shukūk ʿalā Jālīnūs* (*Doubts Against Galen*),[6] composed a century ear-

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3 For a statement of that connection, see George Saliba, *Rethinking the Roots of Modern Science: Arabic Manuscripts in European Libraries*, Occasional Paper (Washington DC: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 1999), and Idem, "Whose Science is Arabic Science in Renaissance Europe?," posted in 2000, at: http://www.columbia.edu/~gas1/project/visions/case1/sci.1.html.

4 See G. Saliba, *A History of Arabic Astronomy: Planetary Theories During the Golden Age of Islam* (New York: New York University Press, 1994, paperback, 1995).

5 A. I. Ṣabra and Nabīl Shihābī (eds), *al-Shukūk ʿalā Baṭlamyūs* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub, 1971).

6 Mahdī Muḥaqqiq (ed.), *Kitāb al-Shukūk ʿalā Jālīnūs*, li-Muḥammad b. Zakarīya al-Rāzī (d. 925) (Tehran: Muʾassasat Muṭālaʿāt Islāmī, 1993).

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lier than Ibn al-Haytham's, and *Kitāb al-istidrāk [ʿalā Baṭlamyūs]* by the eleventh-century Andalusian anonymous astronomer,[7] were further confirmation that the critical spirit, which is in itself a prerequisite for any creative scientific enterprise, did not start with Ibn al-Haytham, nor was it restricted to the "age of decline." So it was natural that one had to look backwards and to start from the beginning, that is, return to the very early conditions that gave rise to Islamic science in the first place.

Starting with a clean slate, without any preconceived ideas inherited from the classical narrative just dismissed, I began to reread the early sources like the *Fihrist* of al-Nadīm[8] that had already dealt with the phenomenon of the rise of Islamic science. And it was this close reading of those sources that led me to the formulation of a new thesis, already detailed in my book, *al-Fikr al-ʿilmī al-ʿArabī*, published in 1998.[9] The gist of that thesis affirms that the earliest translations of scientific texts into Arabic must have started towards the end of the Umayyad period, and in particular, as a consequence of the Arabization reforms that were introduced by the caliph ʿAbd al-Malik b. Marwān (685-705). Furthermore, it also asserted that it was the early translators of the *dīwān* who must have been responsible for the creation of the sophisticated Arabic technical terminology that we find so easily and naturally employed by the early ʿAbbasid translators, such as al-Ḥajjāj b. Maṭar (d. 829), Ḥunayn b. Isḥāq (809-877) and their contemporaries.

Paying close attention to the social ramifications of the Arabization reforms allowed me to trace the beginnings of the *shuʿūbīya* sentiments to this early period, and to detect the beginnings of the split between the foreign and Arabic sciences, which expressed itself in various shapes and forms as *al-ʿulūm al-ʿaqlīya* versus *al-ʿulūm al-naqlīya*, and such similar polarities. And it was in this context that I began to realize that the importation of the foreign sciences into Arabic was achieved against all sorts of hurdles and that it was not a simple process of passive translation, as the classical narrative imagined it to be.

Translators undertook their task of translation, as well as composed their own scientific works, for the purpose of proving themselves worthy of employment in the newly arabized bureaucratic offices of government. This was achieved at a time when their disciplines and services were contested at every juncture by those who were insistently arguing that access to authority and to government must come through a mastery of the Arabic language, the language of the new bureaucracy and the Qurʾan, and not through the foreign sciences that were being imported from as far as India and the Hellenistic world.

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7 For more details on the work of this anonymous author, see George Saliba, "Critiques of Ptolemaic Astronomy in Islamic Spain," *Al-Qanṭara* 20 (1999): 3-25.

8 Al-Nadīm, Muḥammad b. Isḥāq (c. 987), *al-Fihrist* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿilmīya, 1996).

9 Balamand University, Center for Christian Islamic Studies.

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Thus, these early ʿAbbasid translators, who were already benefiting from the works of the earlier *dīwān* translators, had to struggle against two main rivals: 1) their own fellow scientists who were competing with them for the same bureaucratic jobs and who had the minimum scientific requisite to run the affairs of the *dīwān*,[10] and 2) the group that I call religiously oriented, who argued for the superiority of the religious sciences in the first place and the non-reliability of the foreign sciences that were being brought into the newly defined civilization, whose roots were being anchored in what they claimed to be the sufficiently rich Qur'anic and Arabic sciences.

The evidence for this dynamic relationship comes from the early texts themselves. On the one hand, we see that even the earliest translations that we still possess, like al-Ḥajjāj's translation of Ptolemy's *Almagest*,[11] were correcting the original texts as they were translating them. This happened when al-Ḥajjāj apparently double-checked the original mathematical operations in the original Greek text that dealt with the determination of the length of the lunar month and discovered what he perceived to be a mistake in the original Greek. That discovery led al-Ḥajjāj to correct the text in the resulting Arabic translation, as can be easily determined from the manuscript.

But the fact that he did so must mean that al-Ḥajjāj was aware that other scientists of his time, i.e., his competitors for the *dīwān* jobs, could have discovered these mistakes on their own and thus could undermine his own competence in the science he was translating if he did not correct what he saw as a mistake. But then it should also mean that we can no longer assume that the translation process was primarily passive in the first place, as is sometimes implied.

On the other hand, the scientific works that were produced during the translation period, such as the works of Muḥammad b. Mūsā al-Khwārizmī (c. 830),[12] which reformulated the field of algebra,[12] a discipline with no Greek parallel as such; Ḥabash al-Ḥāsib (c. 850),[13] who recreated the field of trigonometry, again on grounds unknown in Greek or Sanskrit; as well as the works of people like

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10 For a glimpse of such competition among the bureaucrats themselves and the scientists, see the description of the competition that the translator Ḥunayn b. Isḥāq was exposed to in George Saliba, "Competition and the Transmission of the Foreign Sciences: Ḥunayn at the Abbasid Court," *Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies*, 2 (2000): 85-101.

11 A complete copy of which is still preserved at Leiden University, Or. 680.

12 See Muḥammad b. Mūsā al-Khwārizmī (d.c. 846), *Kitāb al-jabr wa-l-muqābala*, ed. and tr. by Frederic Rosen (London: Oriental Translation Fund, 1831).

13 This author's works are not yet edited and published. For more information on him and his works, refer to the standard biblio-biographical works of Qifṭī, *Taʾrīkh al-ḥukamāʾ*, ed. Julius Lippert (Leipzig: Dieterich'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1903), 170, and Heinrich Suter, *Die Mathematiker und Astronomen der Araber und ihre Werke*, (Leipzig: Teubner, 1902), 12, 206 on Persian scientists in Islam; and Fuat Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums* (Leiden: Brill, 1978), VI: 173-175.

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Ibn Kathīr al-Farghānī (c. 860),[14] who tried to reformulate Greek astronomy in his *Jawāmiʿ ʿilm al-nujūm*; or Qusṭā b. Lūqā (c. 870), who tried to do the same by composing his book on *Hayʾa*,[15] a term also unknown in Greek, are all illustrations of the kind of sophisticated science the translators had to compete against. In this environment, it should not be surprising that we find scientific attacks against those Greek works as soon as they were translated, as we shall soon see.

The work of Muḥammad b. Mūsā b. Shākir (d. 879)[16] directed against the Ptolemaic doctrine of the movement of the ninth sphere is a clear indication of that creativity. More importantly, one should note that this creativity was taking place at a period when the first translation of the Ptolemaic text had just been finished in 829 by al-Ḥajjāj, while the second translation of Isḥāq b. Ḥunayn (910) and Thābit b. Qurra (901) had yet to come in the 870's.

Those were some of the scientists whose critical judgment someone like al-Ḥajjāj had to fear. And those were the scientists who did indeed subject the most sophisticated of the Greek scientific texts, namely, the *Almagest* of Ptolemy itself, to close scrutiny, and found it wanting on almost every factual ground that one could name. Neither the inclination of the ecliptic, nor the rate of precession, nor the position of the solar apogee, nor the eccentricity of the solar orbit – and by extension the equation of the sun and its apogee, – nor the positions of the planetary apogees were to remain as Ptolemy had established them in the original Greek text.

These concepts may all be alien to the general reader, but I am sure the same reader is aware of the common knowledge that the change of seasons that we all experience is in fact due to the inclination of the earth's axis by 23;30°.[17] This value itself was actually determined in Baghdad during this same period of translation and was not left at 23;51,20°, as was recorded in Ptolemy's *Almagest*, or 24°, as reported in the Sanskrit texts.

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14 Muḥammad b. Kathīr al-Farghānī, (d.c. 861), *Elementa Astronomica* (Amsterdam, 1669), reprinted in Golius, Jacob [Ed., Transl.]: *Muhammedis Fil. Ketiri Ferganensis, qui vulgo Alfraganus dicitur, Elementa Astronomica, Arabice et Latine. [al-Farghânî* (c. 850): *Jawâmi' 'ilm al-nujûm wa-usûl al-harakât al-samâwîya.]* I. Edition and Latin translation. II. Commentary. (Amsterdam, 1669). 238 + 288 pp. Repr. Institute for the History of Arabic-Islamic Science, (Frankfurt, 1997).

15 This book is still in manuscript form (Bodleian Seld, 3144/2, fols. 38b-85a), currently being edited by the present author and Dr. Regis Morelon of the CNRS (Paris: forthcoming). For Qusṭa and his works see, Qiftī, p. 262, and Sezgin, *Geschichte*, VI: 180-182.

16 Now published in George Saliba, "Early Arabic Critique of Ptolemaic Cosmology: A Ninth-Century Text on the Motion of the Celestial Spheres," *Journal for the History of Astronomy* 25 (1994): 115-141.

17 I use the convention already developed by O. Neugebauer, where the semicolon indicates the equivalent of the decimal point in the decimal system. Thus 23;30 means 23 degrees + 30/60 degrees, and 23;51,20 means 23 degrees, 51/60 degrees (or 51 minutes), 20/3600 (or 20 seconds).

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The second group the translators had to fear, the religiously oriented group, undertook a different project of their own. They had neither the desire nor the necessary competence to challenge the scientific results that were being translated into Arabic as the scientists were doing. But they must have allied themselves with the employees of the newly arabized bureaucracy who achieved their positions by virtue of their knowledge of Arabic and not necessarily by their excellence in the various sciences required in the bureaucracy. Those were the people who gave wide currency to the approximative methods for the calculation of the *qibla* direction, and must have shunned the very demanding spherical astronomical solution that was proposed by the likes of Ḥabash al-Ḥāsib.[18] This group also found it sufficient to learn of the stars what could "guide them in their travels" as they claimed the prophetic *ḥadīth* required. As a result they produced those *anwāʾ* texts, the most famous of which was that of Ibn Qutayba (d. 888), which attempted to preserve an iconography of the fixed stars quite at variance with that which was purported in the Greek texts of Aratus and Ptolemy.[19] Their main sources for that ancient native Arabian reconstruction were the same sources as the Qurʾanic studies, namely pre-Islamic poetry and the material from which the early lexicographers collected their examples. They were also the same people who collected all the prophetic pronouncements regarding medical issues in what later became codified as prophetic medicine, obviously in contradistinction to Galenic or Hippocratic Greek medicine.[20]

One does not have to search too far to find this bifurcation taking place almost as soon as Arabic science was beginning to lay down its own foundations. Nor should one be surprised to find out that under such conditions and pressures, the resulting Arabic scientific enterprise had to emerge in a garb necessarily quite different from that of the Greek or Sanskrit. Only creative thought that could be verified by undeniable evidence could survive under those conditions. And that indeed seems to be what happened.

Al-Jāḥiẓ and his Ḥayawān

Following this admittedly lengthy introduction, I would like to turn now to the work of al-Jāḥiẓ himself. As I have said before, the reason for my interest in him is not solely for the pleasure of being in his company, but the sincere desire to test this thesis of mine about the dynamic conditions that I claim must have

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18 For a recent study of the work of Ḥabash on the subject, see E. S. Kennedy and Y. ʿĪd, "A Letter of al-Bīrūnī. Ḥabash al-Ḥāsib's Analema for the Qibla," *Historia Mathematica* 1 (1974): 3-11.

19 See Ibn Qutayba, *Kitāb al-anwāʾ* (Hyderabad: Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif al-ʿUthmānīya, 1956); and the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, new edition, s.v. "*anwāʾ*".

20 See, for example, the work of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīya on the subject, *al-Ṭibb al-Nabawī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1985).

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prevailed in early Islamic times. Furthermore, I also need to check this thesis in texts – such as the works of al-Jāḥiẓ – that were not directly related to the purely scientific ones in order to determine how widely this thesis might be applied.

As stated above, one can cite one scientific text after another in which one can easily quote disagreements with the inherited Greek or Sanskrit sciences. However, for this spirit of criticism to be documented properly, I needed to establish its existence on a wider social scale and in domains not necessarily related to the sciences proper.

In a different context, I had already demonstrated some of those echoes in the works of someone like Abū Maʿshar al-Balkhī (d.c. 886), a man who was sufficiently persuaded by Aristotelian philosophy to shift his allegiance from the field of *ḥadīth* to that of astrology.[21] The great difficulties he faced in this transition were vividly recorded in his *Great Introduction to Astrological Sciences*. But one can argue that Abū Maʿshar was really an insider and thus does not represent the general cultural environment of the time.

For that reason the works of al-Jāḥiẓ become much more relevant. With him, we are not only dealing with a major intellect of the time, a superb belletrist, as I am sure we will continue to hear, but also a *Muʿtazilite* whose temperament would have required him to defend the science that he was relying on for his general philosophy. Moreover, had it not been for his personal appearance, he would probably have been one of the most formidable competitors for bureaucratic jobs that would have placed him at the highest echelons of government; somewhere as close as a personal advisor to the caliph, like Ḥunayn, Muhammad b. Mūsā b. Shākir or any of their companions.

Al-Jāḥiẓ's purely literary works do not help much in this regard since they were geared towards proving his credentials vis a vis the religiously oriented group. Thus only his *Ḥayawān* would fall in-between the scientific and the religious texts, and would be much more fitting for my current investigation.

The way I read it, the *Ḥayawān* is close to what I would call an encyclopedic work.[22] In it al-Jāḥiẓ details almost everything he knew about animals, slightly disorganized, but at the same time extremely eclectic in his choice of material. He is obviously quite aware of earlier specialized works on camels, horses, and the like, which were probably gathered by the same lexicographers we mentioned before. But he had not read before a work devoted to animals in general, except of course that which came to him as the work of Aristotle on animals. The history of the transmission of the Aristotelian works on animals into Arabic is quite

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21 See "Islamic Astronomy in Context: Attacks on Astrology and the Rise of the *Hay'a* Tradition," *Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies* 4 (2002): 25-46.

22 I used for this study the edition of ʿAbd al-Salām Hārūn, 2nd ed. (Cairo: al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1966-69).

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involved and does not concern me much here, for it already has been treated by others.[23]

My own concern was to determine the manner in which al-Jāḥiẓ dealt with the Aristotelian material, if he dealt with it at all. And since my final purpose is to detail the fate of Greek science in the early Islamic environment, as I described before, what I thought I would do was to go through every citation of the Aristotelian work in al-Jāḥiẓ's *Ḥayawān* and try to read, in-between the lines if necessary, the manner in which he negotiated the Aristotelian ideas.

Luckily for me, someone else had already collected all the Aristotelian citations in al-Jāḥiẓ's *Ḥayawān*. Here I refer to the work of Wadīʿa Ṭāhā al-Najm of Kuwait University in her *Manqūlāt al-Jāḥiẓ ʿan Aristū fī kitāb al-ḥayawān*.[24] In her introduction, Dr. al-Najm had her own characterization of how al-Jāḥiẓ dealt with the material. I found her comments to be very useful, and in most cases could answer the questions I needed to answer, but I continue to feel that they lack the context within which I am trying to place them.

Al-Najm was mostly concerned with trying to demonstrate that al-Jāḥiẓ leaned heavily on the works of Aristotle. She was also interested in determining which statements of Aristotle he borrowed fully, which he modified, which ones he missed, and which ones had no parallel in Aristotelian works. Furthermore, and of great importance to my thesis, she devoted some twenty pages of the introduction, pp. 68-88, esp. pp. 77f, to a discussion of the disagreements between the works of al-Jāḥiẓ and Aristotle.

So too does ʿAbd al-Salām Hārūn, in the introduction of his own edition of al-Jāḥiẓ's *Ḥayawān*.[25] In it he too lists some of the examples where al-Jāḥiẓ found himself in disagreement with Aristotle. It is these disagreements, as well as those that were listed by al-Najm, that I need to contextualize.

A full treatment of that contextualization would require a lot more space than the space I am allowed here. In lieu of that I can only resort to the next best alternative and try to illustrate those disagreements with a few examples. But I will try to select those examples in such a fashion as would allow the reader to appreciate the full scope of the kind of debate in which al-Jāḥiẓ was engaged.

For example, in the discussion of some animals' frequency of intercourse, al-Jāḥiẓ reports the following statement on the authority of the 'master of logic', as Aristotle was often called:

> "The master of logic claimed, in his book *On Animals*, 'that there was a bull, in the old times, who had intercourse and could impregnate immediately after it was castrated.'

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23 See the works of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Badawī, *Ṭibāʿ al-Ḥayawān* (Kuwait: Wikālat al-Maṭbūʿāt, 1977), idem, *Ajzāʾ al-Ḥayawān* (Kuwait: Wikālat al-Maṭbūʿāt, 1978).

24 Kuwait: Maʿhad al-Makhṭūṭāt al-ʿArabīya, 1985.

25 I: 20f.

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> When praise passes the limit, and amazement surpasses its bound, its reporter would need to prove it by actual observation (*bi-l-ʿiyān*), or by a reference to an irrefutable source. Otherwise he would be subject to refutation (*takdhīb*)."[26]

In the same volume, al-Jāḥiẓ goes back to the same story and says:

> "Aristotle had mentioned in the book *On Animals*, that there was a bull who, after it had been castrated, mounted a cow and impregnated it. But he did not report that from observation.
> One's heart can be distressed when disagreeing with people of learning (*aṣḥāb al-naẓar*), and is also distressed to believe such things."[27]

In fact, al-Jāḥiẓ was not making up this story, for it was indeed reported by Aristotle in the *Generation of Animals*, book I, chap. 4. And although Aristotle gave there the justification for it since he himself had thought that it may be unbelievable, Aristotle, as far as al-Jāḥiẓ was concerned, should not have reported it without observing it himself, – i.e., he would have wanted him to double-check his account before recording it in his book.

In the same vein, and in the same volume, while reporting about the croaking of frogs, al-Jāḥiẓ says the following:

> "As for the account of the master of logic that frogs do not croak until they insert their lower jaw into the water, for they cannot muster voice until their jaw is in the water, he indeed had said that and several learned people have agreed with him in that regard. They also claimed to have observed it.
> As for his claim that the fish would not swallow anything of the bait without some water with it, what kind of observation would have verified that? That is difficult [to believe]".[28]

In the following volume, al-Jāḥiẓ returns to the same account and says:

> "I once asked a fisherman: 'Aristotle has claimed that the fish does not swallow the bait unless there is some water with it, despite the width of its opening and its great hunger.' He answered me by saying: 'No one would know that unless he was at one point a fish, or was informed by a fish, or was told about it by the disciples of Jesus who were themselves fishermen.'"[29]

But despite the seeming contradictions, al-Jāḥiẓ does not give up in the face of such difficulties. When he finds another occasion to return to the same story, he says:

> "As for their account about the fish that does not enjoy its bait except with water, no human other than me, nor I myself have anything to add except what was already said by the master of logic. People have wondered about its refusal to swallow the bait which would be already soaked in water despite the width of its opening."[30]

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26 Ibid., V: 220.
27 Ibid., V: 502-503.
28 Ibid., V: 541.
29 Ibid., VI: 17.
30 Ibid., VI: 442.

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The account of the fish may have been confused, for I could not locate the exact story in any of the received texts of Aristotle. The only account that resembles it is the one given in Aristotle's *History of Animals*, Bk IV, chap.8, where he says:

> "There is no doubt but that fishes have the sense of taste, for a great number of them delight in special flavors; and fishes freely take the hook if it be baited with a piece of flesh from a tuna or from any fat fish, obviously enjoying the taste and the eating of food of this kind."

It matters little which story al-Jāḥiẓ may have come across. The fact remains that he was willing to believe that Aristotle had indeed said what he claimed he said, had checked his statement with the local fishermen, and had found the Aristotelian account difficult to believe.

On the subject of cross-breeding, especially between dogs and other wild animals like wolves and jackals, al-Jāḥiẓ quotes Aristotle's several reports on the subject, and concludes that section with the following statement:

> "And we have heard what the master of logic has already said [on the matter] before. But we do not think that someone like him ought to have immortalized in his books testimonies that have not been verified by examination, nor has their truth been established by his peers from among the men of learning. All that we have of his claims is simply his statement."[31]

Here is one last example before I draw some conclusions from this investigation. While discussing the crow's lack of care (*ʿuqūq*) for its own chicks, al-Jāḥiẓ simply reports:

> "This is the statement of the master of logic in regard to the crow's lack of care for its chicks and its harsh treatment. But the poems of the Arabs testify to the exact opposite, as illustrated by a poem by Durayd b. al-Ṣimma."[32]

Conclusion

With these few examples, I hope I have illustrated al-Jāḥiẓ's attitude towards Aristotelian science. Just like others in his environment, especially the scientists we mentioned above, he too was probably subjected to the same kinds of pressures mentioned before. And thus he was not willing to take the received wisdom of the Greeks at face value. He would accept it when he felt it was supported by his own experience or by the received experience of the ancient Arabs. But he would not hesitate to refute it if he found it wanting.

The most important aspect, though, was his willingness to refute Greek thought only after subjecting it to specific criteria that he thought were essential for scientific discourse. He had to see for himself that a certain quality was in-

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31 Ibid., I: 185.

32 *Wa-kullu lajūjin fī-l-ʿināqi ka-annaha, idhā-ghtamasat fī-l-māʾi fatkhāʾu kāsiru lahā nāhiḍun fī-l-wakri qad mahadat lahu, kamā mahadat li-l-baʿli ḥasnāʾu ʿāqiru. Ḥayawān* VII: 37-38.

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deed as Aristotle said it was, or he would require that the quality be reported by a reliable person, or that the said quality was already known to the ancient Arabs as preserved in their poetry.

In the last instance, one can see that he used ancient Arabic poetic literature in a manner quite different from the manner in which it was used by people like Ibn Qutayba and others. As we have already said, the latter had collected the ancient wisdom in order to set it against the incoming Greek wisdom, and as an alternative to it, and not as corroboration for it. And thus unlike Ibn Qutayba, al-Jāḥiẓ tried to use both the Greek as well as the ancient Arabic, in order to verify the facts, and thus was not in the process of setting one tradition against the other.

His project seems to me to have been the creation of a new science that could be characterized as a synthesis of the incoming Greek science, after having been corrected and modified, together with an older native Arabic tradition from which he also dispels all the animal stories that al-Jāḥiẓ himself had already classified as folktales and fantasies. In a real sense the project he seemed to be pursuing was not anywhere different from that of his contemporary scientists, who were also creating a new independent science of their own, although it was a science that was securely based on results already established in ancient Greek times.

The closest example to compare al-Jāḥiẓ with in that respect is the astronomer ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ṣūfī (d. 986), the author of *Ṣuwar al-kawākib*, who lived a century and a half later, and who also would give the Greek account of the constellations, and follow that by what he called the old Arab account. He too would not spare Ptolemy from criticism whenever his own observations would disagree with the results recorded in the Ptolemaic texts. In that regard he was also creating a new synthesis of the two traditions, and was participating in the construction of what could be genuinely called an original Arabic science. Whatever we want to think of those activities, they most certainly could not be called a passive translation or preservation of Greek science, as we are often told.

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Writing for a Reading Public: The Case of al-Jāḥiẓ*

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From the 3rd/9th century on, a rapidly growing number of authors in the Arabic-Islamic cultural area were writing proper books,[1] and a broad audience of readers[2] arose. This had not been the case in the previous century. In the 2nd/8th century, the normal dissemination of science (and also poetry) was by means of oral recitation. The teacher (*shaykh*) or the transmitter (*rāwī*) recited the material, based mostly on written records, while the students listened and generally took notes.[3] However, the book for a reading public, the literary book, had already come into existence in the 2nd/8th century, namely in the circle of scribes or chancellery secretaries (*kuttāb*). The oldest writings meant for a reading public are in the form of letters or epistles (*rasā'il*), as is the case with all of the works of ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd al-Kātib (d. 132/750). They are meant, without exception, for courtiers, rulers, princes or secretaries. Some – *The Epistle to the Crown Prince* and *The Epistle on the Game of Chess* – were written by ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd, not in his own name, but in the name of his patron, the caliph.[4] Likewise, at least one writing of Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ (d. ca. 139/756) is an epistle, the *Risāla ilā l-ṣaḥāba* (*Epistle on the Companionage*). Not to be reckoned as epistles, of course, are his translations from Middle Persian, e.g., the *Kalīla wa-Dimna* (*Mirror for Princes*).[5]

In the 3rd/9th century, both instruments of mediating knowledge – recitation for listeners and the book for a reading public – existed side by side.[6] The representatives of the Arabic-Islamic sciences (*ahl al-ʿilm*) disseminated their (transmitted) knowledge mainly, but no longer exclusively, through lectures to students.

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* I would like to thank Dr. Bert Thompson for his excellent English translation.

1 Cf. Gregor Schoeler, *Ecrire et transmettre dans les débuts de l'islam* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2002 (Islamiques)), 109ff.; Shawkat M. Toorawa, *Ibn Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfūr and Arabic Writerly Culture* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005).

2 "The new readership expanded to include landlords and landowners, merchants and entrepreneurs, judges and jurists, physicians, poets and littérateurs, teachers, and of course, other scholars." (Toorawa, *Ibn Abī Ṭāhir*, 1f.)

3 Gregor Schoeler, "Die Frage der schriftlichen oder mündlichen Ueberlieferung der Wissenschaften im frühen Islam," *Der Islam* 62 (1985): 201-229; cf. 208ff. (= idem, *The Oral and the Written in Early Islam*, transl. Uwe Vagelpohl, ed. James Montgomery (London / New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2006), 28-44; cf. 32ff.) See *infra*, 3.

4 Iḥsān ʿAbbās, *ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd ibn Yaḥyā al-Kātib wa-mā tabaqqā min rasā'iliḥī* (Amman: Dār al-sharq wal-nashr wal-tawzīʿ, 1988), 215-265 and 265- 268.

5 Possible models for the proper book in Arabic (apart from the epistle) are, for one, the *Qur'an*, and for the other, books translated from a foreign language (from Middle Persian or from Greek, via Syriac intermediate translations).

6 Cf. Schoeler, *Ecrire*, 113f.

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The secretaries, on the other hand, wrote for a reading public. This difference and the consequences that arose thereby for the style of the authors have been recognized most clearly by al-Masʿūdī (d. 345/956). In one place in his work, *Murūj al-dhahab*,[7] he juxtaposes the two contemporaries, al-Madāʾinī (d. ca. 235/850) and al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/868-9), as prototypes of the two types of scholars. He writes:

> None of the transmitters (*ruwāt*) nor any of the scholars (*ahl al-ʿilm*) is known to have written more books than he (sc. al-Jāḥiẓ)...; Abū l-Ḥasan al-Madāʾinī was also a prolific writer (*kāna kathīr al-kutub*), but he used to pass on what he had heard (*kāna yuʾaddī mā samiʿa*), whereas the books of al-Jāḥiẓ ... remove the rust from the mind and bring clear proofs to light, because he has composed them in the best order (*naẓamahā aḥsana naẓm*)...

A comparison of the beginning of any book or epistle of al-Jāḥiẓ, e.g., the *K. fakhr al-sūdān ʿalā l-bīḍān* (*Epistle on the Glory of the Blacks Over the Whites*)[8] and the beginning of one of the two extant works of al-Madāʾinī, the *K. al-murdifāt min Quraysh* (*Book on the Women of the Quraysh Who Were Married More Than Once*)[9] confirms this remark by al-Masʿūdī:

Al-Jāḥiẓ, *K. fakhr al-sūdān*

tawallāka Allāh, wa-ḥafiẓaka wa-asʿadaka bi-ṭāʿatih, wa-jaʿalaka min al-fāʾizīn bi-raḥmatih, dhakarta ... annaka qaraʾta kitābī ... wa-annī lam adhkur fihi shayʾan min mafākhir al-sūdān...

Al-Madāʾinī, *K. al-murdifāt min Quraysh*

ḥaddathanā Abū l-Qāsim ʿAbd Allāh ibn Muḥammad, qāla, anbaʾanā Abū Jaʿfar Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥārith al-Khazzār, anbaʾanā Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad [al-Madāʾinī, qāla: tazawwaja Umm Kulthūm ...

While al-Jāḥiẓ begins his writing with a blessing upon the orderer-addressee and continues with the repetition of the criticism of one of his books expressed by the latter, al-Madāʾinī's work, with no preface or introduction whatsoever, starts with an *isnād*, a chain of sources, indicating the transmission of the subsequent report all the way back to al-Madāʾinī. The text had therefore not been fixed in its present form until three generations after al-Madāʾinī. He had originally presented the text in a lecture (*anbaʾanā*); one of his students (al-Khazzār) and a transmitter in each of the following two generations recorded it and passed it on. The first report is again followed by an *isnād* leading back to al-Madāʾinī, and then by the second report, and so forth.

Moreover, another fact is explained by the different methods of transmission employed by the two authors: namely, numerous works of al-Jāḥiẓ have sur-

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7 Ed. Charles Pellat, vols I-VII (Beirut: Manshūrāt al-Jāmiʿa al-Lubnāniyya, 1965-1979); cf. V: 104 [VIII: 34].

8 Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Rasāʾil*, vols I-II, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Hārūn (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī 1964-1965); cf. I: 177.

9 Ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Hārūn, in *Nawādir al-makhṭūṭāt*, (Cairo, 1951) I: 57-80.

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vived, while only very few of the *kutub* (i.e., lecture papers, notes) of al-Madāʾinī still exist, and these in the form of further transmitted texts edited by a later generation of scholars. A large part of the transmissions collected and passed on by this scholar have nonetheless not been lost; they have gone into later compilations.[10] On the other hand, the writings of al-Jāḥiẓ which were meant for a reading public, were passed on from the start by normal written transmission, i.e., through the copying of manuscripts.

But let us return to the starting point of our considerations. We have discovered that in the 3rd/9th century a wide public of *readers* had come into being. Al-Jāḥiẓ claims that the caliph al-Maʾmūn said of his book on the imamate (caliphate) that "This is a book that requires neither the presence of the author nor does it need any explanators."[11] In other words, unlike the "books" and transmissions of the scholars (*ahl al-ʿilm*), it does not need, to be recited and explained by the author or his transmitter to his pupils.

The sources inform us of a certain number of passionate readers. Al-Jāḥiẓ himself was one of them. Ibn al-Nadīm reports:[12]

> "If a book fell into the hands of al-Jāḥiẓ, he read it from beginning to end, no matter what book it was. He would even rent the shops of the booksellers and spend his nights there, poring over them."

Another passionate reader was the secretary, al-Fatḥ b. Khāqān (d. 247/861). Ibn al-Nadīm says[13] that al-Fatḥ always had a book with him in his boot, and when in the company of the caliph al-Mutawakkil (r. 232/847-247/861), he had occasion to go to prayer or to the toilet, he took the book out and read it. This secretary held the works of al-Jāḥiẓ in high esteem.[14]

Some writers, among them al-Jāḥiẓ and Ibn Abī l-Dunyā (d. 281/894), wrote a veritable mass of books. It is thus understandable that al-Jāḥiẓ also had copyists (*warrāqūn*); two of his copyists are known by name.[15]

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10 See Ursula Sezgin "al-Madāʾnī," in *EI*^{2} V: 946-948; cf. 947, especially 948.

11 Al-Jāḥiẓ, *K. al-bayān wal-tabyīn*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Hārūn, 2nd ed., vols I-IV (Cairo: Muʾassasat al-Khanjī, 1948-1950), cf. III: 375; Muḥammad b. Isḥāq al-Nadīm (= Ibn al-Nadīm), *K. al-fihrist*, ed. Riḍā Tajaddud, 2nd ed. (Tehran: Marvi Offset Printing, 1971), 209; transl. Charles Pellat, *Arabische Geisteswelt. Ausgewählte und übersetzte Texte von al-Ǧāḥiẓ* (Zürich / Stuttgart: Artemis Verlag, 1967), 175.

12 *K. al-fihrist*, 130, 208.

13 Ibid.

14 See the letter of al-Fatḥ, quoted *apud* Pellat, *Geisteswelt*, 21, and *infra*.

15 Abū Yaḥyā Zakariyyāʾ b. Yaḥyā b. Sulaymān (see Ibn al-Nadīm, *K. al-fihrist*, 209, -2) and Abū l-Qāsim ʿAbd al-Wahhāb b. ʿĪsā b. Abī Ḥayya (see ʿAbd al-Karīm b. Muḥammad al-Samʿānī, *K. al-ansāb*, ed. Abdul Muʿid Khān, vols. I-XIII (Hyderabad 1962-1982), XIII: 303ff. and Josef van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra: eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam*, vols. I-VI (Berlin / New York: Walter de Gruyter), cf. vol. IV: 225.)

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The catalogue of the works of al-Jāḥiẓ compiled by Ch. Pellat[16] comprises over 200 titles of which some 30 are preserved in full or in part. In addition there are approximately 50 fragments. Of the numerous works of Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, about 60 have survived.[17]

These proper books and, when of smaller size, epistles or treatises (*rasā'il*) almost always have a title, are generally provided with a preface or introduction, and are often dedicated to a high-ranking person.

Rasā'il (Epistles)

The three most important and most comprehensive works of al-Jāḥiẓ are the *K. al-ḥayawān* (*The Book on Animals [or living creatures]*) (7 volumes in Hārūn's edition, and it wasn't even completed by the author!),[18] the *K. al-bayān wal-tabyīn* (*The Book on Eloquence and Exposition*) (4 volumes in Hārūn's edition),[19] and the *K. al-bukhalā'* (*The Book of Misers*) (1 volume).[20] Many writings or treatises of al-Jāḥiẓ, mostly of smaller size, are called *risāla* (letter, epistle).[21] Although the term need not necessarily indicate a proper letter, but can simply mean 'treatise,'[22] the *rasā'il* of al-Jāḥiẓ are generally in the form of letters addressed to particular persons. However, as in the larger works (cf. *infra*), the addressees in the epistles, too, usually remain anonymous,[23] and when we nonetheless find out who the addressee of a specific letter is, it is generally given in the title: *Risāla fī ... ilā ...* (whereby the correctness of this information is to be checked in each individual case). The famous *Risāla fī manāqib at-Turk* (*Epistle on the Virtues of the Turks*) is, according to the title[24] and also in fact[25] addressed to the secretary al-Fatḥ b. Khāqān (d. 247/861) (who happened to be of Turkish extraction); the *Risāla fī l-jidd wal-hazl* (*Epistle on Earnestness and Jesting*)[26] to the vizier Ibn al-Zayyāt (d. 233/847). The prefaces to the epistles are where the particular persons are addressed (to reiterate, generally anonymously). Rarely does al-Jāḥiẓ say that an or-

16 "Nouvel essai d'inventaire de l'œuvre ǧāḥiẓienne," *Arabica* 31 (1984): 117-164; *idem*, "al-Djāḥiẓ," in *EI²* II: 385-387.

17 See Reinhard Weipert and Stefan Weniger, „Die erhaltenen Werke des Ibn Abī d-Dunyā," *ZDMG (Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft)* 146 (1996): 415-455.

18 Ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Hārūn (Cairo: Maktabat al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1965).

19 See fn. 11.

20 Ed. Muḥammad Ṭāhā al-Ḥājirī (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1982).

21 But note that the terminology is not consistent: some *kutub* ("books") enumerated by Ibn al-Nadīm in *al-Fihrist*, 210f. are elsewhere called *rasā'il* ("epistles").

22 Cf. A. Arazi, H. Ben-Shammay, "Risāla", in *EI²* VIII: 532-539.

23 Cf. Abdallah Cheikh-Moussa, "La négation d'Eros, ou Le *ʿishq* d'après deux épitres d'al-Ǧāḥiẓ," *SI* (*Studia Islamica*) 72 (1990): 71-119; cf. 83 and 84.

24 *Rasā'il* I: 1.

25 Cf. Pellat, *Geisteswelt*, 148.

26 *Rasā'il* I: 227; cf. Pellat, *Geisteswelt*, 330.

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der was placed by the addressee. This is explicitly noted by him in *Risālat fakhr al-sūdān ʿalā l-bīḍān* (*Epistle on the Glory of the Blacks Over the Whites*):[27]

> "You have said ... that you have read my book ... and that I have said nothing therein about the glory of the Blacks. Rest assured ... that I have postponed this intentionally. And you have also said that you would like me to write for you about the glory of the Blacks, and I have thus written for you what I have at hand concerning their titles of glory."

Similar formulations also characterize the preface of the *K. al-bukhalāʾ* (*The Book of Misers*).

This pattern, which may have made its first appearance with al-Jāḥiẓ, will become a topos in the 4th/10th century at the latest.[28] Innumerable epistles and books of the 10th and 11th centuries and beyond start with the author's assertion that a client or friend or pupil has asked him to write a book or a treatise on one or another subject.[29] One finds, e.g., the following formulation:

> "You have asked me – may God grant you support – that I write a book on... for you; and I am striving to fulfill your wish"

Often it cannot be decided whether such an order was real or whether this information is purely fictitious, i.e., a topos.[30]

Dedication

The two most comprehensive works of al-Jāḥiẓ, the *K. al-ḥayawān* and the *K. al-bayān wal-tabyīn* are, if Ibn al-Nadīm[31] is to be believed, dedicated to the vizier Ibn al-Zayyāt (d. 233/847) and the qadi Ibn Abī Duʾād (d. 240/854), respectively.

"The dedication consisted of the prince's [vizier's, qadi's, etc.] being presented with the first fair copy of the work."[32] The authors expected rewards from the persons to whom their works were dedicated, much like the poets for their laudatory poems. Al-Jāḥiẓ says this quite explicitly in one place in *K. al-ḥayawān*:[33]

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27 *Rasāʾil* I: 177.

28 Subsequent to al-Jāḥiẓ, this topos is employed by Ibn Qutayba in the introduction to his *K. taʾwīl mukhtalif al-ḥadīth*: "You have written to inform me how you noticed the attacks carried out by the theologians (*ahl al-kalām)* against the traditionists (*ahl al-ḥadīth*)... you have requested that I undertake this task..., and I have thus proceeded to do so to the extent of my knowledge and means." Gérard Lecomte, *Le Traité des Divergences du ḥadīth d'Ibn Qutayba*, traduction du *Kitāb taʾwīl mukhtalif al-ḥadīth* (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1962), 1 (2) and 12 (15).

29 Cf. Peter Freimark, *Das Vorwort als literarische Form in der arabischen Literatur*. (Phil. Diss., Münster, 1967), 36ff., 115.

30 Ibid., 37.

31 *K. al-fihrist,* 210.

32 Johannes Pedersen, *The Arabic Book*, transl. G. French, ed. R. Hillenbrand (Princeton: University Press, 1984), 40.

33 V: 156.

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"That is why I have written it for you, hand it over to you and count on you for my reward." (The addressee is not named!) The rewards amounted to the author's honorarium. Al-Jāḥiẓ is said to have said that he received for his books *al-ḥayawān*, *al-bayān wal-tabyīn* and *al-Zarʿ wal-nakhl* (*The Plantation and the Date Palm*) 5000 dinars each.[34] If this is true, it was a comparatively very high payment; Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī is said to have received from Sayf al-Dawla for his monumental *K. al-aghānī* (*Book of Songs*) only 1000 dinars.[35]

The name of the person to whom the book (or epistle) is dedicated is in fact *not* usually mentioned in the text of the work itself,[36] as is the case with the three works of al-Jāḥiẓ mentioned above. While in the place just cited from the *K. al-ḥayawān* (V: 156), the dedicatee is obviously meant, this certainly does not hold for other passages in the same work. At times al-Jāḥiẓ addresses the reader directly,[37] e.g., in III: 298: "Know, O intelligent readers and attentive listeners."

In the first part of the (extremely long) introduction of *K. al-ḥayawān*, an anonymous person is constantly addressed. After the *basmala*, best wishes and so forth, al-Jāḥiẓ presents a long list of his previously written books, all of which the addressee is said to have criticized (I: 3ff.). Our author reports the objections of the addressee and subsequently presents his own defense. It is highly improbable that the dedicatee is directly and primarily addressed here, namely the vizier Ibn al-Zayyāt, who in this case must have criticized practically all of al-Jāḥiẓ's books. It seems rather to be the case that our author here too is turning to 'the reader(s)' of his books as such, that is to say, his audience. The oft-repeated criticism that has been asserted is probably a fiction; al-Jāḥiẓ is concerned with calling his earlier books to his readers' minds, informing them about their content and guarding his works against possible objections.

The relationship between the dedicatee and the intended audience is clear in Ibn Qutayba's (d. 276/889) introduction to *K. adab al-kātib*,[38] a manual for secretaries. According to the commentaries, the book is dedicated to the vizier Abū l-Ḥasan ʿUbayd Allāh b. Yaḥyā b. Khāqān (d. 263/877);[39] on p. 6 at any rate, Ibn Qutayba addresses an Abū l-Ḥasan. It ensues from the overall work, and is also

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34 Ibn al-Nadīm, *K. al-fihrist*, 210.

35 Yāqūt b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥamawī, *Irshād al-arīb ilā maʿrifat al-adīb*, vols. I-VII, ed. D. S. Margoliouth (London, 1907-1926); cf. V: 150. The reliability of this report, however, must be questioned; see Hilary Kilpatrick, *Making the Great Book of Songs. Compilation and the author's craft in Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī's Kitāb al-aghānī* (London / New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 19f. If the information is correct, the orderer of the work and the dedicatee would not be identical, for Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī says in the introduction to his *Book of Songs* (*K. al-aghānī*, I-XX (Būlāq, 1868): cf. I: 4. Cf. Kilpatrick, 28) that the impetus to write the book was an order by an unnamed, high-ranking personality (*raʾīs*). That the orderer and dedicatee are not identical, however, is rather unlikely.

36 Cf. Cheikh-Moussa, "La négation", 83.

37 Transl. Pellat, *Geisteswelt*, 245.

38 Ed. Max Grünert (Leiden: Brill, 1900).

39 Ibid., 6, fn. *b*.

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stated explicitly by Ibn Qutayba in the introduction,[40] that the book is meant in particular for the uneducated *kuttāb* whose deficit in education should be remedied by this and others among the author's works. The *kuttāb*, however, are not directly addressed in the introduction; mention is always made in the third person.

Thus, Cheikh-Moussa is, in principle, certainly right in claiming:[41]

> "All of these medieval texts that have come to us with the identification of their orderer-dedicatee are not directed exclusively to this personality, nor to the community at large, but to a small group, a class of privileged persons, the *Khāṣṣa*, who were alone capable of reading and understanding these written texts, which are often of a very high caliber."

When and under what conditions does an author dedicate a work to a higher-ranking personality? According to the statement of al-Jāḥiẓ cited above,[42] it seems fair to assume that authors dedicated their books to such (preferably financially strong) persons to whom it was assumed that the content of their work would particularly appeal and from whom they could accordingly expect a reward. Al-Jāḥiẓ's *K. al-ḥayawān*, as everyone knows, did indeed have a strong Muʿtazilī tendency,[43] and the vizier Ibn al-Zayyāt, himself a Muʿtazilī, to whom the book was probably dedicated, "contributed to the direction of the general policy of the empire"[44] under the Muʿtazilī caliphs al-Muʿtaṣim and al-Wāthiq. On the other hand, Ibn Qutayba could be sure that the vizier ʿUbayd Allāh b. Yaḥyā b. Khāqān – himself formerly a secretary – had the same interest as his own in remedying the dire educational deficit of the secretaries. Their religious allegiance was also in agreement: both were orthodox Sunnīs with an anti-Muʿtazilī bent. G. Lecomte[45] even considers it probable that the *K. adab al-kātib* was a work commissioned by the vizier and that it gained Ibn Qutayba the job of qadi in Dīnawar.

In assessing a work and gauging the amount of the fee for a dedication, the dedicatee will certainly have also given thought to the value of the book and its scope of dissemination. After all, a superior and widespread work could contribute to the fame of the one to whom the work is dedicated.[46]

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40 Ibid., 2ff.

41 Cheikh-Moussa, "La négation", 84. But see *infra*, 13f.

42 *K. al-ḥayawān* V: 156.

43 "The main concern of the author is to show that everything in nature has its use and thus provides proof of the presence and wisdom of God" (Pellat, *Geisteswelt*, 40f., based on *K. al-ḥayawān* II: 109f.; transl. Pellat, *Geisteswelt*, 228f.).

44 D. Sourdel, "Ibn al-Zayyāt", in *EI*^{2} III: 974-975.

45 Gérard Lecomte, *Ibn Qutayba (mort en 276/889), l'homme, son oeuvre et ses idées* (Damascus, 1965), 32f.

46 "... with this procedure the client attempts to augment his prestige or to instruct the social and political milieu, of which he is the center, in the sense of the ideology that he represents." (Cheikh-Moussa, "La négation", 84)

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Continued interest in the writings of al-Jāḥiẓ

The writings of al-Jāḥiẓ enjoyed great popularity during the Muʿtazilī era (827-849). In this period his patrons (the caliph al-Maʾmūn, the vizier Ibn al-Zayyāt and the qadi Ibn Abī Duʾād and his son Muḥammad) and his readers, too, must have been Muʿtazilīs or, at least, infused with Muʿtazilī ideas. Even in the time after the abolition of the Muʿtazilī state dogma, al-Jāḥiẓ still had a lot to offer clients and the reading public. His pro- ʿAbbassid and anti-Shuʿūbī stance and his treatment of many subjects that were still topical assured him, as before, the favor of even the highest ranked clients. The orthodox Sunnī caliph al-Mutawakkil (r. 232/847-247/861) and his secretary al-Fatḥ b. Khāqān, who was also an orthodox Sunnī, held him in high esteem,[47] as had formerly the Muʿtazilī caliph al-Maʾmūn (r. 136/754-158/775)[48] and the Muʿtazilī viziers and qadis; al-Mutawakkil, who pursued an anti-Christian policy (starting 235/850), was enthusiastic about al-Jāḥiẓ's treatise *al-Radd ʿalā l-Naṣārā* (*Refutation of the Christians*), for which he is said to have paid him a monthly pension.[49] For the secretary of Turkish descent, al-Fatḥ b. Khāqān, our author, as is generally known, wrote his *Risāla fī manāqib al-Turk* (*Epistle on the Virtues of the Turks*), and for the Sunnī vizier ʿUbayd Allāh b. Yaḥyā b. Khāqān (d. 263/877),[50] he composed his *K. faṣl mā bayna l-ʿadāwa wal-ḥasad* (*Book on Distinguishing the Difference Between Enmity and Enviousness*).[51] In light of the fact that al-Jāḥiẓ had still authored a theological-political treatise during this period, Pellat's assumption that, following the victory of Sunnī reaction, al-Jāḥiẓ "restricted himself to purely literary activity" and that "he wrote *K. al-bukhalāʾ* in the latter part of his life supports this hypothesis," cannot be upheld in full.[52]

Content and target audience of al-Jāḥiẓ's writings

Adam Mez, the first European scholar to delve into the Islamic intellectual and cultural history of the 3rd/9th and 4th/10th centuries, already was impressed by the thematic diversity of al-Jāḥiẓ's prose, which had previously not been present in Arabic literature:[53]

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47 See the letter of al-Fatḥ b. Khāqān, quoted *apud* Pellat, *Geisteswelt*, 21.
48 See *K. al-ḥayawān* III: 375; Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 209; transl. Pellat, *Geisteswelt*, 175.
49 Pellat, *Geisteswelt*, 21.
50 Ibid., 46, fn. 52. – D. Sourdel, 'Ibn Khâqân,' in *EI*^{2} III: 824.
51 *Rasāʾil* I: 335.
52 Ch. Pellat, "al-Djāḥiẓ," in *EI*^{2} II: 385-387, cf. 386.
53 *Die Renaissance des Islams* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1922), 229.

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"Ǧāhiz writes about everything: from the schoolmaster to the Banū Hāshim, from thieves to lizards, from the attributes of God all the way to ribaldry on the wiles of women," and[54] .

"He was a real street child, his literature went to the streets[55] as philosophy had once done with the equally ugly[56] Socrates. That is where it (i.e., his literature) got red cheeks and warm blood for the literary language."

The contents of the works of al-Jāḥiẓ are of a truly great diversity and variety. While the epistles of ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd and Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ in the 2nd/8th century were still concerned exclusively with the sphere of the court and secretaries, our author takes an interest in *all social classes.* However, al-Jāḥiẓ is interested not only in human beings, but also in plants, animals and indeed in the entire cosmos and its laws.[57]

Such an extension of theme is naturally not to be attributed solely to the interest of the author, but also to a new composition of the audience or to new tendencies and interests among the public at large.[58]

Al-Jāḥiẓ was an extremely popular writer; his works were coveted and his audience extended all the way from the East to al-Andalus.[59] For which audience did he write? While ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd al-Kātib and Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ in the 2nd/8th century still wrote exclusively for courtiers and secretaries, and while Ibn Qutayba would later write only for the *khāṣṣa* (elite),[60] al-Jāḥiẓ expressly mentions several

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54 *Abulḳāsim, ein bagdāder Sittenbild von Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Abulmuṭahhar Alazdī*, ed. A. Mez (Heidelberg: Carl Winter's Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1902), XI.

55 The "street" in Basra was mainly the Mirbad, the celebrated public place outside the town, but also the vicinity of the mosques where the group of *masjidiyyūn* would gather; cf. *infra,* 15.

56 Al-Jāḥiẓ is said to have been extremly ugly; see Pellat, "al- Djāḥiẓ," in *EI*^{2} II: 385-387; cf. 385b.

57 By comparison, the horizon of Ibn Qutayba, the orthodox Sunnī antipode of al-Jāḥiẓ, was more restricted. He is not at all as many-sided as al-Jāḥiẓ nor does he write about as many things, yet his scope is nonetheless wide. In the ten chapters of his encyclopaedic work *K. ʿuyūn al-akhbār* (The Wellsprings of Reports) he deals with: 1. rule; 2. war; 3. sovereignty; 4. human qualities; 5. knowledge/science and eloquence; 6. asceticism; 7. friends; 8. needs and desires; 9. food; and 10. women. But he writes about all of these things from a different perspective than al-Jāḥiẓ and with another orientation. As he says in the introductions to *K. ʿuyūn al-akhbār* (Vol. I-IV (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Dār al-Kutub, 1925-1930). Cf. I: p. XI) and *K. al-maʿārif* (Ed. Tharwat ʿUkāsha, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1969), 1), he wants to impart to the educated people (*khāṣṣa*) (cf. F. 60) the knowledge that is useful for them and to inform them regarding correct behavior. With Ibn Qutayba the moral aspect comes clearly to the fore. At the beginning of the *K. ʿuyūn al-akhbār* (p. X) he says: "This book, though not dealing with the Qur'an, sunna, religious laws and the science of the allowed and prohibited, does indeed point out lofty things, guide to noble morals, discourage lowliness, guard against ugliness, and so forth."

58 Cf. *infra*, 14, 16.

59 Cf. Yāqūt, *Irshād* VI: 72 und 75.

60 Ibn Qutayba – who only wrote for such readers "on whom high rank had been conferred, who through educational assiduousness had been singled out of the underclass and raised

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times the ʿāmma (literally, *the common folk)* as his target audience in addition to the *khāṣṣa*. This is seen most clearly at the place in *K. al-bayān*[61] where he has the caliph al-Maʾmūn say the following about his book on the imamate: "(It addresses itself to) the people of the market (the merchants) and to the kings (i.e., caliphs), to the common folk and to the elite (*sūqī mulūkī ʿāmmī khāṣṣī*)."

It goes without saying that the term ʿāmma here cannot mean the fully uneducated populace. Happily, we have a remark by al-Jāḥiẓ himself as regards his understanding of ʿāmma in such cases:[62]

> When you hear me refer to the common folk (*ʿawāmm*), I do not mean the peasants, the rabble, the artisans, and the sellers, nor do I mean the mountain Kurds... The common folk from among our people... are a class whose intellectual faculties and personal qualities are superior to those of other peoples, even if they do not attain the level of our own elite (*khāṣṣa*).

Understood by al-Jāḥiẓ here under ʿāmma is a stratum that has been described as "sub-elite",[63] a group which, as recently determined by Sh. M. Toorawa in his book on *Ibn Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfūr*,[64] "would include, but would not be limited to, merchants, lawyers, aspiring littérateurs, the wealthy, and foreign and visiting scholars: in short, the literate, or would-be literate, bourgeoisie, and the intellectuals."

From lectures in the majlis *to reading material for educated people: On the genesis of* "adab of the *Jāḥiẓian type*"

Al-Jāḥiẓ wrote for a wide audience extending from the caliph to the merchant, from the upper class to the sub-elite. He accommodated their needs and expectations by means of the new genres of *adab* (literature for refined learning; belles-lettres) that he himself created. On the one hand this is the genre that Ch. Pellat has termed "literary *adab* of the Jāḥiẓian type".[65] Its aim, like that of the earlier *adab* too, is not only to inform, but also to entertain; contrary to the latter, however, it draws less from an Iranian heritage (from which his predecessors Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ and Sahl b. Hārūn all but exclusively drew their topics) than from the

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above the general masses through the privilege of (scientific) knowledge" (*K. al-Maʿārif*, 1) – had even accused al-Jāḥiẓ of wishing to address "the clientele of the young, immature folk and date-wine drinkers with his stories and jokes" (Lecomte, *Le Traité des Divergences,* 66 (72)).

61 *K.* al-*bayān* III: 375; Ibn al-Nadīm, *K. al-fihrist,* 209; transl. Pellat, *Geisteswelt*, 175.

62 *K.* al-*bayān,* I: 137; cf. Toorawa's translation, *Ibn Abī Ṭāhir*, 10f.

63 Roy P. Mottahadeh, *Loyalty and Leadership in Early Islamic Society* (Princeton: University Press, 1980); quoted following Toorawa, *Ibn Abī Ṭāhir*, 54.

64 Toorawa, *Ibn Abī Ṭāhir*, 54.

65 Pellat, *Geisteswelt*, 36f.

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autochthonous Arab heritage.[66] Originally from Baṣra, our author had heard, at the Mirbad,[67] the itinerant Bedouins, who imparted to the inquisitive scholars tribal traditions, stories and rare words; also the *masjidiyyūn*, those dalliers at the mosques who discussed and had explanations for all and sundry but hardly for religious things.[68] He had listened to the lectures of the philologists of his hometown, al-Aṣmaʿī and Abū ʿUbayda, and to those of the "learned transmitters" (*rāwiya*, in the singular) of Baṣra and Kūfa, later also from Baghdād.[69] He was thus very familiar with the autochthonous Arab heritage. What this tradition lacked until then was, so to say, its own literary life; it had only been cultivated and passed on in gatherings and in academic circles (*majālis, mujālasāt; ḥalaqāt)* – in talks, lectures or discussions. This is not to say that none of it would have been committed to writing; but what was written down was found in the lecture notebooks of the philologists and in the notes of their students and was only intended for private use.[70] Al-Jāḥiẓ gleaned from this tradition the material that appeared to him to be useful. What interested him and was supposed to fascinate his readers were less the special grammatical and lexical questions discussed by his teachers in detail than the *artistic* aspect of this tradition[71]. From the material al-Jāḥiẓ collected, he selected the most interesting reports and most amusing anecdotes in order to fit them into his works, both the literary and the "(para)scientific". And of course he gave this material a new design: he put it in a suitable framework, added commentary in his witty and ironical way, and, above all, presented it in a brilliant style,[72] to wit: he prepared it *for a reading public.*

Al-Jāḥiẓ accommodated not only the aesthetic, but also the "scientific" interests of his audience; this he did with the other genre of *adab* he created, which has been described by Pellat as "(para)scientific"[73] (whereby the borders between this genre and the one treated above are often fluid.)

During the lifetime of our author, the intellectual horizon of the educated people in the Islamic cultural sphere had expanded enormously, owing among other things to translations of the antique heritage, the rise of mysticism and, above all, the ideas of the theological-political Muʿtazila sect, the faction to which al-Jāḥiẓ himself belonged.

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66 Cf. Pellat, *Geisteswelt*, 27f.

67 For the Mirbad, the celebrated public place (caravan stopover and market) outside the town, cf. Charles Pellat, *Le Milieu Baṣrien et la Formation de Ǧāḥiẓ* (Paris: Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1953), 244f; and *idem*, Geisteswelt, 15f.

68 For the group of *masjidiyyūn* in Basra, cf. ibid.

69 *K. al-bayān* IV: 23f. ; transl. Pellat, *Geisteswelt*, 175f.; cf. ibid. 15f.

70 Cf. Gregor Schoeler, "Weiteres zur Frage der schriftlichen oder mündlichen Ueberlieferung der Wissenschaften im Islam," *Der Islam* 66 (1989): 38-67, especially 38, 55-56 (= idem, *The Oral and the Written in Early Islam*, 45-61, especially 45, 53-54).

71 *K. al-bayān* IV: 24; transl. Pellat, *Geisteswelt*, 176.

72 Cf. Pellat, *Geisteswelt*, 36.

73 Ibid., 39f.

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The Muʿtazilīs, as everybody knows, were not solely interested in theological and political problems, but also in the entire cosmos, the real world and the laws of nature.[74] They had formulated "a substantial system for explaining the world and mankind," a system which included, inter alia, the conception of bodies as agglomerates of atoms, the distinction between substance and accident, the nature of fire, and considerations on the definition of man.[75] Less often were literary and rhetorical questions also of interest.[76] However, until that time this knowledge had only spread in scholarly circles.[77] Like the other Arabic-Islamic scholars, the Muʿtazilīs for a long time did not write books for a reading public; the "books" (*kutub*) and booklets (*ṣuḥuf*) they wrote and used were "writings of the school for the school."[78] They were not intended for written publication, but for oral recitation. This is why – prior to al-Jāḥiẓ – hardly a Muʿtazilī work is extant in the original form.[79]

A famous Muʿtazilī and teacher of al-Jāḥiẓ, al-Naẓẓām (d. 220/835 or later), is said to have written 38 "books."[80] Only a few fragments of his work remain, most of them from his *K. al-nakth*. The earliest author to quote from it is al-Jāḥiẓ in his *K. al-futyā*.[81]

The Muʿtazilī Bishr b. al-Muʿtamir (d. 210/825 or later)[82] is said to have written over 20 "books"; of these as well not one independent work has survived. Only a few fragments have come to us, including the text of a *ṣaḥīfa* (i.e., booklet, aide-mémoire) on rhetoric.[83] It is cited in different works of later authors in versions sometimes greatly divergent from one another.[84] The earliest source is again al-Jāḥiẓ.[85]

In the following, the narrative framework in which our author sites the *ṣaḥīfa* is reproduced. The text shows on the one hand that al-Jāḥiẓ does not simply string together excerpts and quotes from earlier works, but rather, puts them in

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74 *K. al-ḥayawān*, II: 109.

75 Cf. D. Gimaret, "Muʿtazila", in *EI*^{2} VII: 783-793, cf. 792.

76 Cf. *infra*, 17f.

77 On theological lectures in the 2nd/8th and 3rd/9th centuries, see van Ess, *Theologie* IV: 718-730.

78 Cf. Schoeler, *Ecrire*, 82ff.

79 Professor Josef van Ess has kindly brought to my attention that one work by Ḍirār b. ʿAmr (d. ca. 180/795), the *K. al-taḥrīsh*, seems to have survived in a Yemeni collection copied in 540 h.: cf. Ḥasan-i Anṣārī-yi Qummī, "Kitābī kalāmī az Ḍirār b. ʿAmr," in *Kitāb-i māh-i dīn* 89 (1383-4 H.Sh.), 4-13, cf. 6.

80 Ibn al-Nadīm, *K. al-fihrist*, 206; van Ess, *Theologie* III: 296-418; idem, "al-Naẓẓām", in *EI*^{2} VII: 1057-1058.

81 van Ess, "al-Naẓẓām", in *EI*^{2} VII: 1058; idem, *Das Kitāb an-Nakth des Naẓẓām und seine Rezeption im Kitāb al-Futyā des Ǧāḥiẓ* (Göttingen: Vandenhoek und Ruprecht, 1972).

82 Ibn al-Nadīm, *K. al-fihrist*, 184f. and 205; cf. van Ess, *Theologie* III: 107-131.

83 van Ess, *Theologie* III: 112-114.

84 Ibid., 113.

85 *K. al-bayān* I: 135, 136.

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their context. He also interrupts the account with commentaries. On the other hand and above all, the text gives us an idea of how we are to picture the "publication" of books and booklets in the generations *before* al-Jāḥiẓ.

According to our author

"Bishr b. al-Muʿtamir passed by the *khaṭīb* Ibrāhīm b. Jabala... while he was instructing the young people of their tribe in rhetoric. Bishr stopped, whereby Ibrāhīm thought he had done this to learn (from his lecture) or that he was a spy... Bishr thereupon gave them a booklet (*ṣaḥīfa*) he himself had composed and stylized. The beginning of this treatise was: ... (a part of the text follows) Bishr reported: When it (the booklet) was read to Ibrāhīm, he said to me: I need this (what you said) more than these young fellows!" (A commentary of al-Jāḥiẓ follows.)

The "publishing" of a writing, in the generation of scholars before al-Jāḥiẓ, consisted in its having been presented in the *majlis* – mostly, as was probably the case here too, by a student. Al-Jāḥiẓ – and not only him – will have written down the text during the lecture or borrowed the manuscript of the author or student to copy it. This treatise – and many others besides – was made accessible for the first time to a reading public by al-Jāḥiẓ, in that he included it in his *K. al-Bayān*.

One important and as yet unconsidered reason for the success of al-Jāḥiẓ's books may have been the fact that he made many topics and ideas – aesthetic, theological and (para)scientific – that had heretofore only existed in academic circles in the form of lectures and discussions, accessible *for the first time* to a wide reading public, *khāṣṣa* and *ʿāmma*, and this in a brilliant style and in an exciting, entertaining form.

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Part Two
Language, Literature and Communication

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Language as a Component of Arab Identity in al-Jāḥiẓ: The Case of Ismāʿīl's Conversion to Arabhood

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I. Theoretical and Methodological Parameters

Both the subtitle of this conference ("a Muslim *humanist* for our time") and the main title of this paper ("*Language as a component of* Arab *identity* in Jāḥiẓ") appear to call for some theoretical definitions. I do not propose to indulge in a protracted philosophical discussion, but a minimal delineation of the three concepts (*Humanism*, *Identity*, and *Language as a component of identity*) might be necessary. Only the simplest, almost lay, delineations will be sought.

Humanism (in some respects almost congruent to the concept of modernity, in other respects almost congruent with the medieval Arabian concept of *adab*):

> [...] humanism is understood more as a method and a series of loosely connected questions about the nature and character of human persons.
> From the fourteenth century to the end of the nineteenth century, humanism minimally meant: (1) an educational programme founded on the classical authors and concentrating on the study of grammar, rhetoric, history, poetry and moral philosophy; (2) a commitment to the perspective, interests and centrality of human persons; (3) a belief in reason and autonomy as foundational aspects of human existence; (4) a belief that reason, skepticism and scientific method are the only appropriate instruments for discovering truth and structuring the human community; (5) a belief that the foundations for ethics and society are to be found in autonomy and moral equality.[1]

Identity: (A simple dictionary definition has it as "the condition of being oneself or itself, and not another" (*American College Dictionary*).) As simple, even though a little more elaborate, is the following representation:

> [...]There [is always] a sense of 'we' and 'them' [...] While always expressing itself through the most tangible dimension of [a] conflict [...], it almost always transcend[s] this dimension by realizing that the ultimate [antithesis] is the 'other'. Religion is only one component of peoples' awareness of their distinct collectivities. It may even be argued that, depending on temperament, outlook, geographical environment, and countless other factors, religion might be [...] less than the most important such component. Race, language, culture, shared history, native territory, normative experiences, and other factors might, severally or combined, take precedence.[2]

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1 John C. Luik, "Humanism", in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward Craig (London / New York: Routledge, 1998) 528-532, cf. 528.

2 Saleh Said Agha, *The Revolution Which Toppled the Umayyads: Neither Arab nor ʿAbbāsid* (Leiden / Boston: Brill, 2003), 167-68.

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Language as a component[3] *of identity*: The simplest exposition I know is the following apt characterization:

> A people and their language–what could be more straightforward? In the ideal case, it really is straightforward. There is a particular place where a certain group of people live, and in that particular place they speak a certain language. They have a name for themselves and their language, and no other people goes by that name or claims to speak that language as a mother tongue. If you seek them out, they will tell you who they are and what language they speak; and if they see that you are really interested in them, they will teach you about themselves and their language, perhaps even help you learn to speak their language if you desire.[4]

But, we may wonder, would your learning their language, to the point where it becomes your mother tongue, make you one of them? Does al-Jāḥiẓ offer an answer to this query? Before we turn our attention to what al-Jāḥiẓ may have to say on this specific issue, a few more defining disclaimers and restraining methodological parameters may be in order.

In our contemporary milieu, Yasir Suleiman[5] and others speak of *national* identity. In this paper, the concept of nationalism is avoided–if only to avoid the debate over anachronism, i.e., the retrojection of nineteenth century concepts back to a medieval situation.[6] Even at the cost of being repetitive, "iden-

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3 "It is not always clear what the nature of [the] interaction [between language and national identity] is. Some scholars treat language as an *ingredient* in a mixture of factors that make up the national self. Others treat it as a *component* in a set of features that define this self. There are also those who talk of language as a *marker* or *attribute* of national identity, rather than an ingredient or component of it. Scholars of this persuasion sometimes employ the alternative terms 'badge' or 'emblem' to signify this relationship. This multiplicity of terms indicates a lack of clarity in the study of nationalism." (Yasir Suleiman, *The Arabic Language and National Identity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), 9) "Rather than making tenuous distinctions between these terms," Suleiman decides to "utilize them with little distinction." Without subscribing to any of the above persuasions, the contention in this paper is that the term 'component' is more appropriate in the Jāḥiẓian context. For while we do not ascribe to Abū ʿUthmān an organic view of identity, and while–as will unfold–language in his view is an element, it is nevertheless an element in a concoction which requires the passage of time in order to mature.

4 Nancy C. Dorian, "Linguistic and ethnographic fieldwork," in *Handbook of Language and Ethnic Identity*, ed. Joshua A. Fishman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 25-41, cf. 25.

5 See above note 3.!

6 This is a redundant contention over a non-issue. It probably arose from the unnecessary association between the adjective *national* (which, arguably, may be ascribed to the nineteenth century) and the noun *identity* (which is nothing more, but not less either, than a signifier of a human feeling which has been in perpetual genesis since the "first" two individual human beings set sight on one another). Some modern scholars capitalized on this unnecessary association, transforming the non-issue into an issue, a self-serving critique of Wellhausen's and van Vloten's interpretation of the historical and demographic background of the ʿAbbasid revolution, or Goldziher's interpretation of the *Shuʿūbiyya*. See Farouk Omar, *The ʿAbbāsid Caliphate 132/750-170/789* (Baghdad: The National Printing and Publishing Co., 1969), 57; Roy Mottahedeh, "The Shuʿûbîyah controversy and the social history of early Islamic Iran," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 7 (1976): 161-182,

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tity" is utilized here in its simplest form: a feeling of togetherness, of belonging to a communal or collective circle which always transcends the individual, but which is also always liable to contraction and expansion. This process occurs pursuant to the dynamics of inclusion-exclusion that happen to be expedient at a specific point in the fluid history of the contracting or expanding community.[7]

Worthy as it is and necessary as it may appear in the foregoing sequence, the historical dimension of the question is also avoided in this paper. Of course, the question is pertinent:[8] where did al-Jāḥiẓ stand, in that specific historical era, vis-à-vis the Arab/*Shuʿūbiyya* strife? Was he an Arab or a non-Arab? And, how did his extraction, or his perception of it, affect his intellectual endeavor and position? These are indeed legitimate questions; but, as yet, we have no definitive answers to them.[9] Every one of them merits renewed investigation. But unless and until we are presented with answers which may convincingly bear on the present issue, in one direction or the other, these questions fall outside the parameters of this modest and restricted study.

The remainder of this study will, therefore, be conducted in a virtual theoretical and historical void. Its viability rests on a claim of microtextual (*not macro*) solvency presumed in the Jāḥiẓian texts: al-Jāḥiẓ within his own immediate and localized context–no extratextual strings attached, not even from other Jāḥiẓian contexts. This approach, however, presents problems or difficulties of a different

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cf. 161, 163; Jacob Lassner, *The Shaping of ʿAbbāsid Rule* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), 3; Moshe Sharon, *Black Banners from the East: The Establishment of the ʿAbbāsid State–Incubation of a Revolt* (Jerusalem / Leiden: The Magnes Press-Brill, 1983), 232. Cf. Elton Daniel, *The Political and Social History of Khurasan under Abbasid Rule, 747-820* (Minneapolis and Chicago: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1979), 60; Agha, *The Revolution*, 168 and n. 112.

7 Cf. Saleh Said Agha and Tarif Khalidi, "Poetry and Identity in the Umayyad Age," *Al-Abhath* 50-51 (2002-3): 55-120 ; Tarif Khalidi, "Al-qawmiyya wa al-huwiyya: asʾila kathīra wa ajwiba qalīla." *Al-Safir* (Beirut). 20 July 2005.

8 Indeed, a number of my interlocutors within this conference did pose the question.

9 The ethnic extraction of al-Jāḥiẓ is a subject of contention in medieval and modern scholarship. A review of the contradictory accounts has been undertaken by almost every modern study on Abū ʿUthmān. Charles Pellat, *Al-Jāḥiẓ fī al-Baṣra wa Baghdād wa Sāmarrāʾ*, transl. Ibrāhīm al-Kīlānī (Damascus: Dār al-Yaqẓa al-ʿArabiyya li-l-Taʾlīf wa al-Tarjama wa-l-Nashr, 1961), 93-8, reviews the issue and argues for an interesting proposition which he later articulates as follows:

"The information available is vague and contradictory, but it seems clear that his family was of African origin and that his ancestors had been slaves. In his own estimation, however, Jāḥiẓ was very much a member of the Arab community."

(Charles Pellat, *The Life and Works of Jāḥiẓ*, transl. D.M. Hawke (Berkeley / Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969), 3)

On the other hand, Lassner (*The Shaping*, 120-21) proceeds from a definitive conviction that: "Al-Jāḥiẓ, who was a *mawlā*, was also part black." But while Pellat views Abū ʿUthmān's perception of himself to be that of a comfortable "member of the Arab community," Lassner realizes that it is difficult to establish al-Jāḥiẓ's real attitude.

See below, note 12.

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order that arise from the very nature of al-Jāḥiẓ's style, and we will attempt to deal with them by adhering to the three following parameters:

Parameter 1.
This is an attempt to examine the validity of a proposition from the very *narrow* perspective of a *limited* number of texts, within their immediate contexts.

Parameter 2.
There is *no* claim here that al-Jāḥiẓ will be viewed as a *uniform thinker*. Actually, the way he wrote is not always conducive to mapping definitive positions on specific issues. Yet, it is the way he wrote that is more interesting than what he had to say, especially where he does not appear to claim a monopoly on truth.

Parameter 3.
Abū ʿUthmān made it very difficult for those who may want to claim that he had *final positions* on issues to prove their theses beyond contention–the *provisional* conclusions in this paper not exempt.

II. Difficulties in Reading al-Jāḥiẓ

Trying to make full sense out of what Abū ʿUthmān wrote presents the modern reader with a number of difficulties. Lacunae in his extant texts and other inexplicable opacities in his otherwise crystalline style are obvious difficulties. More important and more relevant are structural ambiguities which sometimes arise from the way he transforms into text the machinations of his polemic mind. These structural ambiguities may arise from some phenomena which characterize Abū ʿUthmān's style, such as:

(1) In many cases, Abū ʿUthmān gets so absorbed in his polemics that he exhausts himself in delineating the positions of the adversaries, neglecting–sometimes more intentionally than unintentionally–to tell us where he himself stands on the issue.
(2) In some discourses he neglects to tell us who the discourse master is (herein and *passim*, the term "discourse master" refers to the party to whom the speech belongs), and where he himself stands on the issue.
(3) Even where there is no third-party discourse master to be sought, i.e., where it appears that Abū ʿUthmān himself owns up to the authorship of the text, he sometimes remains adamant to avoid committing himself to a clear stand for or against what a straightforward reading of his text may yield.

It is not the norm for Abū ʿUthmān, when he relates a tradition or an anecdote, to append a commentary stating his own position vis-à-vis its import. In one instance, he crowns a preposterous tale (about tigresses giving birth to their cubs with snakes around their necks) with the following commentary. Addressing his reader he says:

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"I did not write down this [allegation] for you to accept [as veracious]. It is only an account which I liked you to hear <34: 7>. I do not like to accept this report [as valid]. Likewise, I do not like to deny [its veracity] <34: 8>. But, let your heart be more inclined to refuse it <34: 8-9>. [...] Furthermore, get to know which the objects of doubt are, and which of their modalities mandate doubt. It is through this [knowledge] that you would recognize the objects of certainty and their modalities which make certainty mandatory <35: 2-3>. And study the object of doubt with [unrelenting] scrutiny <35: 3>. Even if this [exercise] yields nothing more than the realization of the [necessity of] suspension [of belief], followed by ascertainment, [such yields] are certainly needed <35: 4-5>. Moreover, you should know that they [the scholars and theologians] are unanimous that there are grades of doubt. They have not been unanimous on whether certainty exists in different degrees of strength and weakness <35: 6-7>".

(T 7.)[10]

This passage may be regarded as a cogent presentation of Abū ʿUthmān's methodology in distinguishing objects of doubt from objects of certainty. But, while commendable, it is not of much use to the reader who may want to determine what the author's exact position might be on the import of any other specific tradition or anecdote that he may transmit without appending to it a similar commentary. If he is so restrained and reserved in expressing his outright rejection of a preposterous tale about such a profane matter as the tiger cubs, how much more would he be vis-à-vis a sacred or quasi-sacred matter such as the tradition claiming that Ismāʿīl learnt the Arabic language instantaneously through direct divine intervention!

Of course, the above exclamatory remark may be easily countered. It may be said, and not without merit, that: (1) Abū ʿUthmān's reserve and restraint in this specific case are not meant to give the tigers' tale the benefit of the doubt; (2) that, instead, he meant to use them in an extreme pedagogic example to illustrate the indispensability of utmost scrutiny and ascertainment before reaching conclusions; (3) and that, by extending this rule, one can determine by inference what Abū ʿUthmān's rational position would be on the import of any anecdote or tradition he transmits, even where he does not append to it an explicit commentary.

While in full agreement with the foregoing reasoning, one may still sense two stumbling blocks. The first is that inferential reasoning must be applied on a wide scale, since Abū ʿUthmān elected to be stingy with his explicit commentaries. The second is that it is not always easy and it is sometimes impossible for the reader to determine, in every specific instance, which of al-Jāḥiẓ's "epistemological moods" he is encountering: (a) the cynic, (b) the skeptic, (c) the seasonal gnostic, (d) the perpetual agnostic, (e) the pedagogue, (f) the stylist/polemicist, (g) the sophist/exhibitionist intent on playing around with minds he deemed to be inferior to his own superior intellect, (h) the opportunist, (i) the rationalist, or (j) the sarcast.

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[10] That is, Text 7 in the appendix below.

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If oblivious to the above, one can easily accuse al-Jāḥiẓ of more contradictions than he is probably guilty of. But, if one is alert, the exercise becomes much more demanding. Reading al-Jāḥiẓ, one would always have to ask: Who said what, in which context, to which end, and where does Abū ʿUthmān stand on the issue? Even then, one cannot be sure that one will easily find clear-cut answers.

Depending on where one stands on the methodological issue, one may assess the foregoing discussion as an attempt to present the above difficulties either as insurmountable problems or as windows of opportunity. This paper aims to take the middle ground, where problem and opportunity abound.

Within the constraints of the foregoing disclaimers and restraining methodological parameters–self-conceived and self-imposed as they may be–it would be pretentious to propose to pronounce on al-Jāḥiẓ as a systematic theoretician, or even as a thinker inspired by self-testing and self-correcting hypotheses. It is not the intention in this study to seek to discover, document, or articulate a universal Jāḥiẓian position on the issue at hand (or, for that matter, on any other issue).

III. Between Synthesis and Analysis

On the present issue (language/identity, Arabic/Arabhood), al-Jāḥiẓ offers abundant material. Heaps of relevant accounts and statements may be collected from his works and readily, albeit painstakingly, classified under rubrics which claim to represent al-Jāḥiẓ's positions on the issue. Indeed, some scholars have done just that.[11] The problem with this approach is as grave as it is obvious. In a context which calls for microanalysis, this approach heavily relies on macrosynthesis. It neglects to seek who–in every single statement, comment, or account–the discourse master is. Even while almost every utterance is thus indiscriminately, and probably inadvertently, assumed to be Abū ʿUthmān's own, this approach neglects to investigate the contextual environment, Abū ʿUthmān's vantage point within the context, and which of his "epistemological moods" he was "riding" at that particular instance.[12] One clear example is the simplistic transmuting (by a

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11 Jamāl ʿAṭṭār, *Ārāʾ al-Jāḥiẓ fi manāqib al-umam wa mathālibihā: ʿarḍ wa taḥlīl* (Master's thesis, American University of Beirut, 1989); Jamāl ʿAṭṭār, "Al-Jāḥiẓ's Original View of 'Arabic' in Relation to the Holy Qurʾān," in *Democracy in the Middle East*, Proceedings of the annual conference of the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies (St. Andrews, 1992).

12 Aside from being in full or partial agreement or disagreement with Jacob Lassner's arguments and conclusions, one must recognize his perceptive comment regarding the difficulties in reading al-Jāḥiẓ:
"With a writer of al-Jāḥiẓ's skill and subtle sense of humor, the problem of establishing his real attitude toward race and color is likely to be difficult. One has the impression that the interests of individuals on the lower end of client-patron relationships were best served by their masking their intentions. This was true even for those of marginal background who gave every indication of being fully adapted to the society of their patrons. Moreover, it is

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modern scholar) of a polemical and rather sarcastic statement *in* al-Jāḥiẓ into an affirmative statement *by* al-Jāḥiẓ claimed to represent his own position on the sacredness of Arabic.[13] Not that one must necessarily contradict this characterization of al-Jāḥiẓ's position. It is only the way the inference is made which is unacceptable.

A strictly focused and close textual analysis of a limited corpus of materials *in* al-Jāḥiẓ, which revolves around one single subject relevant to the issue, may lead to more modest, but potentially more accurate, conclusions. Such a corpus may be found in the materials where Abū ʿUthmān mentions or uses, briefly or at some length, the tradition regarding Ismāʿīl's purported conversion into Arab identity, pursuant to a direct, micro-, and localized, almost surgical, intervention by the Almighty.

IV. The Ismāʿīl Tradition

Taken together, the variations of the tradition subsume two fundamental claims. They are: (1) the genealogical (along with its religious implications), which claims that Ismāʿīl is the ancestor of the ʿAdnānī Arabs;[14] and (2) the lingual, which comes in three varieties: (a) the claim that Ismāʿīl learnt Arabic from the Jurhumites;[15] (b) the allegation that he was the first to speak Qurʾānic Arabic;[16] and,

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not always clear, in these delicate relationships, whether the author is himself emotionally prepared to declare in favor of a specific reality. Al-Jāḥiẓ can thus devote a treatise to praise the blacks, while he elegantly pokes fun at them. Who is to say what the author's true intentions are –perhaps not even the author himself."
(Lassner, *The Shaping*, 121)

13 The statement (in Abū ʿUthmān ʿAmr b. Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ. *Manāqib al-Turk*, in *Rasāʾil al-Jāḥiẓ*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn, 4 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1979) (later on *Manāqib-b*), I: 5-86, cf. 33: 1-2; Abū ʿUthmān ʿAmr b. Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn, 8 vols., Repr. from the Cairo edition (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1996), cf. IV: 82: 13-15) is: "The moment they enter paradise, believers of all nations, as well as their children and the insane amongst themselves, speak the language of the inhabitants of paradise [...]" ʿAṭṭār ("Al-Jāḥiẓ's", n. 12) ascribes the statement to al-Jāḥiẓ and specifies Arabic as the language of paradise: "Believers from all nations of the world, *al-Jāḥiẓ says*, will equally speak *Arabic* without prior learning" (italicization is mine).

14 This genealogical claim permeates the classical Arabic sources. Some sources intentionally refrain from claiming knowledge of the chain of patriarchal ancestors leading down from Ismāʿīl to his great grandson ʿAdnān (e.g. Abū Muḥammad ʿAlī b. Aḥmad b. Saʿīd b. Ḥazm al-Andalusī, *Jamharat Ansāb al-ʿArab*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1962), 7; others boldly list a number of such patriarchs (e.g. Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Muṣʿab b. ʿAbd Allāh b. al- Muṣʿab al-Zubayrī, *Kitāb Nasab Quraysh*, ed. E. Levi-Provençal, 4th ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1999), 3).

15 Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl b. Ibrāhīm b. Mughīra al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Repr. from the Cairo ed. (Beirut: ʿĀlam al-Kutub, n.d.), IV: 284/Anbiyāʾ: 9 (*wa shabba al-ghulām* [i.e., Ismāʿīl] *wa taʿallama al-ʿarabiyya minhum* [i.e., Jurhum]); Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab al-Īmān*, ed. Muḥammad al- Saʿīd b. Basyūnī Zaghlūl (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1990), II: 234, no. 1621 (*nazalū* [i.e., Jurhum] *bi-Makka ḥattā kā-*

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(c) the claim that he received the language instantaneously through direct divine intervention.[17] The majority of texts in al-Jāḥiẓ, where the tradition is cited, appear to incorporate this last claim at face value. But there is much more to it than meets the eye.

We shall not be detained here by discussions of the veracious or apocryphal quality of the alleged genealogy, or by the historicity of the tradition or when, by whom, and for what purposes it was concocted.[18] Actually, the tradition itself does not concern us, except inasmuch as al-Jāḥiẓ utilized some of its elements in different contexts, relevant to the question of identity and its language dimension.

Aside from the genealogical claim, the first variety of the lingual claim (variety "a" above) sounds like a perfectly secular account which, at least, does not rub against the "humanist", i.e., rational, natural, and "anthropological" grain. One would expect al-Jāḥiẓ to have cited this variety rather than elements from the other two, which may imply not only that Ismāʿīl was miraculously inspired with

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na bihā ahl al-bayān minhum, wa shabba al-ghulām–yaʿnī Ismāʿīl–wa takallama bi-al-ʿArabiyya minhum). A further tradition explicitly identifies the Qurʾanic "*lisānun ʿarabiyyun mubīn*" with "*lisān Jurhum*" (Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab* II: 234, no. 1622).

16 Hishām b. Muḥammad b. al-Sāʾib al- Kalbī, *Kitāb Nasab al-Khayl fī al-Jāhiliyya wa al-Islām wa Akhbārihā*, in *Kitābān fī al-Khayl*, ed. Nūrī Ḥammūdā al-Qaysī, and Ḥātim Ṣāliḥ al-Ḍāmin (Beirut: ʿĀlam al-Kutub and Maktabat al-Nahḍa al-ʿArabiyya, 1987), 28 (*Ismāʿīl b. Ibrāhīm… awwal man takallama bi-al-ʿarabiyya al-ḥanīfiyya allatī anzala Allāh Qurʾānahu ʿalā Rasūlihi bihā*); Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab*, II: 233, no. 1617 (*awwal man naṭaqa bi-al-ʿArabiyya fawaḍaʿa al-kitāb ʿalā lafẓihi wa manṭiqihi thumma jaʿalahu kitāban wāḥidan* […] *Ismāʿīl b. Ibrāhīm*); ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn al-Muttaqī b. Ḥusām al-Dīn al-Hindī, *Kanz al-ʿUmmāl fī Sunan al-Aqwāl wa al-Afʿāl*, ed. Bakrī Ḥayyān (Aleppo: Manshūrāt Maktabat al-Turāth al-Islāmī, 1974), XI: 490, no. 32309 (*awwal man futiqa lisānuhu bi-al-ʿArabiyya al-mubīna Ismāʿīl wa huwa ibn arbaʿa ʿashrata sana*).

17 This version of the tradition, despite slight variations, is formulaic: "*ulhima Ismāʿīl* (or *Ibrāhīm*) *hādhā* (or *badʾa*) *al-lisān (al-ʿarabiyy) ilhāman*." (Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī, *Al-Mustadrak ʿalā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn* (Hyderabad: Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif al-Niẓāmiyya, 1340 H), II: 343-44; Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab*, II: 233, no. 1618, 234, no. 1620; Muttaqī, *Kanz*, XI: 490, no. 32311; cf. Suliman Bashear, *Arabs and Others in Early Islam* (New Jersey, Princeton: The Darwin Press, Inc., 1997), 49-50, n. 33). "*Ulhima ilhāman*" I translate as: "he was inspired by way of revelation," i.e., by direct divine intervention, as in a tradition ascribed to the Prophet: "*inna al-ʿArabiyyata indarasat fa-jāʾanī bihā Jibrīl ghaḍḍatan ṭariyyatan kamā shuqqa ʿalā lisān Ismāʿīl*". (Muttaqī, *Kanz*, XI: 490, no. 32313, cf. no. 32314).

18 Aspects of these questions have been addressed in modern scholarship, from a variety of perspectives, based on a selected body of sources. Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism: the Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), vi, based their overarching study "on the intensive use of a small number of contemporary non-Muslim sources." Israel Ephʿal, "'Ishmael' and 'Arab(s)': a Transformation of Ethnological Terms," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 35/4 (1976): 225-235, visited the Arab/Ishmaelite connection from a Biblical perspective. René Dagorn, *La geste d'Ismaël d'après l'onomastique et la tradition arabe* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1981), based his study of the issue on a probe of the Arab nomenclature as represented in the medieval Arabic sources; cf. C.H.M. Versteegh, Review of "La geste d'Ismaël d'après l'onomastique et la tradition arabe," by René Dagorn, *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 39/ 5-6 (1982): 720-726.

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the language, but also that that instance witnessed the inception of Arabic (and probably Arabhood), which had not existed before. Why al-Jāḥiẓ did not is puzzling. An obvious and simple explanation might be that this variety of the tradition was not in currency at the time, and that it was a later rationalization of the supernatural elements of the varieties known to al-Jāḥiẓ. But even if this secular (or *humanist*) variety was known to him, it probably would not have satisfied Abū ʿUthmān's appetite for the uncanny which packs potential "truths", especially when a variety rich in such potential is available to him. Abū ʿUthmān, we propose, uses the supernatural elements of the two varieties ("b" and "c") of the lingual claim in much the same way modern poets use ancient myths to articulate their own poetic "truths".

Modern poets (and classical men of letters), obviously less than avowed believers in either the literality or the overall plot of a myth, a legend, or a parable, use it, nevertheless, as a rich, enriching, and enrichable symbolic vehicle capable of carrying their intellectual and poetic themes and "truths". From Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" to Khalīl Ḥawī's employment of "Lazarus", and beyond,– legends, myths, and folk traditions of all varieties have been utilized as tools of or subjects for interpretation. Therefore, admitting al-Jāḥiẓ into this humanist tradition should not be branded as anachronistic.

The question, however, remains: Did al-Jāḥiẓ intend to employ the Ismāʿīl tradition in any way similar to the above? Since questions of intent cannot be entertained, one must move to another level of inquiry: Does the corpus of texts under investigation lend itself to an interpretation along similar lines? We shall see.

V. A Review of the Six Relevant Texts in al-Jāḥiẓ

The tradition is cited or invoked, briefly or at length, in numerous locations in the corpus of al-Jāḥiẓ's works.[19] Of these, six locations feature the tradition as an ethos fraught with potential implications for the question at hand. These are the first six texts in the appendix below;[20] and the following analysis of these texts is the crux of this paper.

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19 Abū ʿUthmān ʿAmr b. Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ, *Al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn, 2nd ed., 4 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1960-61), I: 310, 383; III: 290-2; idem., *Kitāb al-Burṣān wa al-ʿUrjān wa al-ʿUmyān wa al-Ḥūlān*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1990), 486; idem., *Risāla fī al-Ḥanīn ilā al-Awṭān*, in *Rasā'il al-Jāḥiẓ*, IV: 380-412, cf. 410-11; *Ḥayawān*, I: 163; IV: 84, 476; VII: 57-8, 236; Abū ʿUthmān ʿAmr b. Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ, *Manāqib al-Turk wa ʿĀmmat Jund al-Khalīfah*, in *Rasā'il al-Jāḥiẓ* (later on *Manāqib-a*), III: 163-220, cf. 170, 191, 193; *Manāqib-b*, 11, 31, 33, 74, 75; idem., *Risāla fī al-Nābita*, in *Rasā'il al-Jāḥiẓ*, II: 7-23, cf. 21, 22; idem., *Al-Radd ʿalā al-Naṣārā*, in *Rasā'il al-Jāḥiẓ* , III: 303-51, cf. 331; idem., *Fakhr al-Sūdān ʿalā al-Bīdān*, in *Rasā'il al-Jāḥiẓ*, I: 177-226, cf. 218.

20 Texts 1 thru 6 in the appendix below.

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Anticipating the detection of signs of evolution in al-Jāḥiẓ's view of the issue, the six texts in the appendix were arranged as closely as possible to a chronological sequence. Thus, the two texts from *Manāqib al-Turk* (written between 218-227/833-842)[21] are earmarked as texts "1" and "2"; the text from *Risāla fī al-Nābita* (written around 225/840) is given number "3"; the two texts from *al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn* (written before 232/847) are numbers "4" and "5"; and the text from *al-Ḥayawān* (written before 240/855) is number "6".

1. The discourse masters in context

The discourse masters to whom al-Jāḥiẓ ascribes the responsibility of citing and activating the tradition in each of the six locations are different:

- In Text 1, it is al-Fatḥ ibn Khāqān, responding to his opponent's hypothetical erotesis (leading question) regarding whether it is sound to consider the Qaḥṭānīs and the ʿAdnānīs as Arabs despite their different ancestries. Al-Jāḥiẓ himself does not comment on either the argument or the tradition.
- In Text 3, it is the *mawālī*, corroborating their argument that through clientship they have become Arabs. Al-Jāḥiẓ does not comment on the tradition itself, even though the general context explicitly expresses his disapproval of the *mawālī*'s claim to superiority over both Arabs and *ʿAjam*.
- In Text 6, the tradition is cited five times: twice ascribed to traditionists (to Muḥammad al-Bāqir, T6: 290: 9-11; and to Ibn ʿAbbās, T6 291: 1-2);[22] and twice ascribed to the elite of the Nizārīs (T6: 292: 3-11; T6: 295: 1-5), explaining and corroborating their position in favor of the preponderance of elements other than common ancestry in the formation of Arab identity (elements such as territory, manners and moral characteristics, language, intermarriage, environment, and so forth).[23] Abū ʿUthmān does not make any direct comment in these four locations, either on the tradition itself or on the arguments that the tradition is cited to corroborate. One may, however, detect Abū ʿUthmān's indirect approval of the Nizārī view through his depiction of their spokespeople as "*al-khawāṣṣ al-khullaṣ* = crème de la crème".[24] Furthermore, an evolution of sorts may be detected in Abū ʿUthmān's paraphrasing of the Nizārī argument. In an earlier text, where he had talked of the stages of Ismāʿīl's conversion, he used emphatic phraseology to describe the ethno-

21 For dating al-Jāḥiẓ's works, see Charles Pellat, "Ǧāḥiẓiana III. Essai d'inventaire de l'œuvre Ǧāḥiẓienne," *Arabica* 3 (1956): 147-180.

22 These internal references, here and elsewhere, are to the texts in the appendix. They comprise: text no. (e.g., T6=Text 6): page no. : line no.

23 *Bayān* III: 291: 11-13; cf., *Manāqib-a*, 170: 5-7; *Manāqib-b*, 11: 4-6, as translated in Robert G. Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs from the Bronze Age to the Coming of Islam* (London / New York: Routledge 2001), 229-30.

24 *Bayān* III: 291: 10.

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graphic transformation of Ismāʿīl's character after the conversion of his language: "He [God] *tore* away [...]" (T2:191:6). Now, in this chronologically most recent text, Abū ʿUthmān uses more reserved and less emphatic phraseology: "*it may have* been that [...]" (T6:292:3). It is only in the fifth of the five locations, in this Text 6, that al-Jāḥiẓ speaks for himself without ascribing his statements to others. Even then, it is nothing more than a neutral formulation of the issue (through the subtitle "*al-qawl fī inṭāq Allāh... Ismāʿīl bi-al-ʿArabiyya*") promising a discussion thereof (T6:290: 1-3). But the promise was never to be fulfilled in this context.

- Similarly promising and neutral is Text 5, where Abū ʿUthmān, towards the end of volume one of *al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn*, introduces his agenda for volume two. The Ismāʿīl issue figures prominently on this agenda; but al-Jāḥiẓ does not volunteer a straightforward statement of his position. He does not say what it is. He does not say what it will be (T5:383: 12-16).
- Text 2 comes from the conciliatory environment of the second stage of Abū ʿUthmān's presentations, in *Manāqib al-Turk*, of the views of the various ethnic groups that comprised the Caliphal army (*jund al-khilāfah*). In the first stage he presented in a confrontational manner the arguments of each group. Now, in this second stage, he proposes to reconcile their differences and to expound their harmony.[25] He himself takes the floor, not to make any statement of his own, but only to synthesize what he has seen and heard.[26]
- It is only in Text 4 that al-Jāḥiẓ comes clean with a statement of the issue as close to reflecting his own view as he would allow himself to get. We shall see that presently.

2. Elements of the tradition

The elements of the tradition which may be deduced from these texts are the following:

(1) Ismāʿīl had been a non-Arab, descended from non-Arab parents.
(2) Then, when he was fourteen years of age, God taught him (or inspired him, or revealed to him) the Arabic language, through direct and instantaneous divine intervention. God ripped open his uvula and injected Arabic into his tongue. This happened outside the natural scheme of things, i.e., on a basis other than instruction, tutoring, contraction of habit, proper sequence, and genesis.
(3) Arabic and the Arabs had existed before Ismāʿīl came into the picture: he was inspired with *their* language; and he bested *them*. He was converted to something which already *existed*.

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25 *Manāqib-a*, 189: 5-6.
26 *Manāqib-b*, 189: 12-13, 190: 5-6.

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(4) Thus, he became an Arab, while his parents and his brother Isḥāq remained non-Arab.

(5) God made him forget his original language, and He endowed him with wondrous eloquence, free from all kinds of impurities, and superior to the Arabic of other Arabs.

(6) The process of completely Arabizing Ismāʿīl (and it was, indeed, a process) still required other transformations. God tore away from their original non-Arab roots Ismāʿīl's "character and innate disposition [...] To his corpus He transplanted those necessary parts, and He reinvented him in that fashion" (T2:191: 6 ff.).

(7) Once the transformation in this supernatural (or, yet better, "supranatural") fashion was complete–lingually, morally, and corporeally–Ismāʿīl became the noblest Arab and the most deserving of Arab *lineage*. God made his father, Ibrāhīm, "the father of descendents not of his own offspring," (that is the ʿAdnānī Arabs) "just as he had made him the father of his own offspring," i.e., the Banū Isḥāq (T3:22: 3-4).

(8) But the descendants of the two sons of Ibrāhīm (the Banū Isḥāq and the Ismāʿīlite Banū ʿAdnān) were not made brothers. There are other factors more effective than blood in the formation of the sense of communal cohesion–or identity, if you will:

> "[...] the Arabs have come to constitute a unity assimilated to one norm in regard to their native soil, language, temperament, ambition, pride, zeal, manners and disposition, fused into a single body and all cast alike into a single mould. And the parts of that unity are so concordant and the constituent elements so harmonious that, whether one considers broad outline or detail, similarities or dissimilarities, the resultant entity is more integrated than are, in some cases, groups which have real genealogical affinity".[27]

(9) The Ismāʿīlite Banū ʿAdnān and the non-Ismāʿīlite Banū Qaḥṭān (who do not have a common ancestor) share all these other factors in which the Banū Isḥāq do not partake. Therefore the first two groups (who do not share a common ancestor) are Arabs, the third (who have a blood connection with the first) are outside the loop. Hence "the ʿAdnānīs refrained totally from intermarriage with the descendants of Isḥāq," while "they have always been permissive of intermarriage with the descendants of Qaḥṭān [...] This is a proof that they considered those other factors [language, environment, etc.] as a substitute for common ancestry" (T1; cf. T6:295: 1-5).[28]

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[27] *Manāqib-b*, 11: 4-8, tr. Hoyland (*Arabia*, 229-30); cf. *Manāqib-a*, 170: 5-9; *Bayān* III: 291: 11-15.

[28] Despite a grave misunderstanding, and a consequently erroneous translation of the last two lines in the extract he translated from al-Jāḥiẓ's text (*Manāqib-b*: 11: 13-4= Jan Retsö, *The Arabs in Antiquity: Their History from the Assyrians to the Umayyads*, London / New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003, 22: 7-10), Jan Retsö, somehow, reaches the sound conclusion

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VI. Al-Jāḥiẓ's View on the Issue – Tentative Conclusions

What then is Abū ʿUthmān's *own* position on the issue? Perhaps the best place to start is from where we left our review of Text 4, the text we characterized as the closest to reflecting al-Jāḥiẓ's own view:

> "God taught Ismāʿīl the speech of the Arabs after he was fourteen years of age. Since this [transpired] not on the basis of instruction, tutoring, contraction of habit, [proper] sequence, and genesis, it became a proof, a token, a miracle, and a prodigy <13-15>".
>
> (T4.)

It is this delicate use of the language that dilutes the occasionalist (or proto-occasionalist)[29] overtones that may be detected in this text and in the logic governing Abū ʿUthmān's *Ḥujaj al-Nubuwwa*. Here, al-Jāḥiẓ appears to accept the logic of miracles, which contradicts the rationalist "law of causality".[30] The historicity of ideas[31] aside, and the contention that an essential difference exists between our post-Enlightenment rationalism and that of premodern times[32] notwithstanding; but also summoning my foregoing reservations regarding the "epistemological moods" of al-Jāḥiẓ,[33] I wish to advance–or venture–the following reading of this Text 4 within its immediate context (appended hereto as Text 8).

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that "al-Ǧāḥiẓ seems to be aware of the fact that [...] the incitement to [the] formation [of the 'nation of the 'arab'] was *largely cultural and environmental.*" (Retsö, *The Arabs* , 22: 16-18) (italicization is mine).

29 Between "occasionalist" (my original terminological choice) and "proto-occasionalist" (the compromise I adopted), stands the reservation advanced by Prof. J. van Ess. Prof. van Ess questioned the historical viability of my usage of the term "occasionalist" in the Jāḥiẓ context. I must admit that I may be guilty here and elsewhere (e.g., my introduction of the issue of myth in modern poetics) of anachronism. For lack of a better terminological choice, I may yet find myself driven to commit more anachronisms. In deference to Prof. van Ess' historically vindicated reservation, I advance "proto-occasionalist" as a cautious alternative term.

30 Similarly, my use of the phrase "law of causality" met with Prof. M. Jarrar's reservations. Once again, I elect to heed my colleagues' reservations. Even though the concept is too clear to be clouded by a disagreement over terminology and the historicity thereof, I elected to qualify the phrase by placing it between quotation marks. !

31 Especially, "Occasionalism" (see note 29 above), "Law of Causality" (see note 30 above), and some early Muʿtazilite positions on miracles as advanced in al-Jāḥiẓ's own *Ḥujaj al-Nubuwwa*, in *Rasāʾil al-Jāḥiẓ*, III: 221-81, esp. 259-281.

32 In a particularly inspiring private discussion with Professor Tarif Khalidi, he conjured up two drastically different views of the universe: the one before, and the other after the human race was flooded by the lights of the Renaissance and the Age of Enlightenment. Two qualitatively different types of rationalism would thus exist. Truly compelling as it is, I do not fully agree with Professor Khalidi's proposition. To counter it, it may be sufficient to recall Abū ʿUthmān's mercurial "espitemological moods", to enlist a couple of his numerous strict rational texts (cf. Jāḥiẓ, *Ḥayawān*, IV: 206-7; V: 223), and to toy with some modern approaches to textual analysis, as will follow.

33 See above, "II. Difficulties in Reading al- Jāḥiẓ", pp. 70-72.

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While appearing to subscribe to the miraculous aspect of Ismāʿīl's learning Arabic, Abū ʿUthmān offsets the miraculous by highlighting its exceptionality. He is fully aware of the anomaly; and if he is to accept it, he wants to make sure that this acceptance is not understood as succumbing to a counterrationalist position. For even while the crescendo of the lingual claim escalates at his hands to reach a complete and miraculous ethnographic transformation of identity of mythological proportions,[34] it remains restricted to a one-time occurrence–individual, localized, and isolated. It does not interfere with, nor claim to alter "anthropological" normalcy. The natural system still works. If the occurrence took place, it did so outside the natural sequence of things; the natural sequence of things is the norm and it is *the* law, and that violation is the exception. But this is only incidental, elicited by elucidating the foregoing couple of lines. More vital is the fact that this text (Text 4) is an integral part of an intensely rational and secular context (T8, "The Speech of Birds") which stresses the natural teachability of languages, and the natural ability of birds and human beings to learn phonetic articulations and full-fledged languages.

This is as far as I intend to go with the "documentary" approach. Reading al-Jāḥiẓ, one cannot claim to be "right", nor does one need to. Viability should suffice. One should sail parallel to Abū ʿUthmān's changing and elusive "epistemological moods", and hunt for occasional convergencies. This entails a shift from an objective scholarly approach to a rather subjective literary critical mode, and it is tantamount to dealing, as an interpreter, with al-Jāḥiẓ as someone closer to a poet than to a thinker–let alone a systematic thinker. Al-Jāḥiẓ was none of the above. A slightly (and sometimes gravely) bemused (and sometimes bemusing) mind and soul is what he most probably was.

Audacious as it may be, I propose the following as my own systemization of al-Jāḥiẓ's use of (or investment in) the Ismāʿīl episode (legend or myth). Of course, I am not suggesting that Abū ʿUthmān intended to relay this specific reading. I am only proposing that my selection of the appended texts lends itself to such a reading, and that Abū ʿUthmān would not have much to say against it. All said, his "universalist" spirit may even celebrate this systematized synopsis.

Across his long years of authorship, Abū ʿUthmān amassed, assimilated, and supplied a generous array of the versions of the legend–complete with some truly wild accounts. He also diminished the stature of the episode by lending it nothing more than a passing mention. In Text 4, he condensed the episode; and, by placing this Text 4 as the crowning piece of an austere rationalist textual environment (Text 8), he virtually stripped the legend of its supernatural (divine/mythological) aspect. Portraying the sacred alongside the secular, the divine

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[34] *Manāqib-a*, 191: 5-6; *Bayān* III: 291: 3-6. See these texts and my translations thereof in the appendix below, Texts 2 and 6.

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alongside the anthropological, opens wide these texts for imaginative but controlled interpretive readings.

Reducing the mythological episode to its basic significance entailed embracing the supernatural in order to "explain it away" by confirming the natural course of things. Thus, a rationalist used the irrational (mythology or episodology) to confirm the rational. What we propose to retain from these Jāḥiẓian texts are the bare threads of a fairy tale, of an allegory that still retains its fundamental significance:[35]

- Did Ismāʿīl learn Arabic? Yes; and why not? Even birds can learn articulate voices, and children and foreigners can learn tongues.
- Was it God who taught him? Yes; and what is wrong with that? God is the ultimate Lord of the human domain, even if only as a euphemism.
- Did he learn it when he was fourteen? Well, it is never too late; people can learn any language, whether they be youths or foreigners.

The gist of the foregoing "Jāḥiẓiana" is that a non-Arab learnt the language of the Arabs at an adolescent age, went through the motions of Arab life (living in their territory; acquiring their temperament, manners, etc.; marrying into them), and thereby became a full-fledged Arab, superseding genealogy and racial considerations. What concerns us here is that Arabic is viewed as an entry into Arab identity. It is not only Ismāʿīl who stepped in. Abū Nuwās did;[36] so did al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī,[37] and, undoubtedly, countless numbers of people, probably including al-Jāḥiẓ himself. And if the "virtue of poetry" is an exclusive virtue, it is not reserved for the Arabs alone, but also for those who speak their language.[38] Thus, it is a distinction of language, not of race.

Arabic is a necessary, but not sufficient, component of Arab identity. Genealogy by itself is neither necessary nor sufficient in the process of forming identities. Arabhood is not an exclusive identity, not a monopoly of a race; it is admissive of others. But Arabic and the Arabs predated Ismāʿīl. His conversion was just that, a conversion–albeit miraculous–to an existing language and an existing identity. Divine intervention did not initiate a new language, a new nation, or a

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35 Likewise, even though towards different ends, Lassner, without much ado, neutralizes the supernatural: "With or without God's intervention, al-Jāḥiẓ, like Ismāʿīl before him, was living proof that [...]" (Lassner, *The Shaping*, 121). "Living proof" of what, is where we part ways with Lassner. He elects to see it as living proof of excellence within racial strife. We elect to see it as a living proof of *natural* inclusivity. See also notes nos. 9 and 12.

36 *Ḥayawān* II: 27: 2-8.

37 *Bayān* I: 204-5, where an *aʿrābī* testifies to the genuine Arabian eloquence of the Arabized al-Ḥasan, which surpasses that of an eloquent Arab storyteller. The point is that the *aʿrābī* (the cultural keeper of the litmus test of Arabian eloquence/Arabhood) failed to distinguish–ethnically–between an eloquent Arab and an eloquent Arabized non-Arab. On the contrary, he mistook the Arab for a merely good storyteller (*qaṣṣāṣ mujīd*); and he mistook the non-Arab for an ethnically experienced, tested and proven Arab (*ʿarabiyyun muḥaqqak*). !

38 *Ḥayawān* I: 74-5.

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new identity. Thus, al-Jāḥiẓ introduces Ismāʿīl to the Arabs, as if anticipating and countering a scholarly trend which would, twelve centuries after his time, interpret the tradition as an Arab wish to change their roots.

If the ingredients of the "series" we call "humanism" are as follows: tolerance, inclusivity, rationalism, secularism, exercising the belief in the relativity of truth, allowing oneself to doubt ones own views, to change them, to waiver, and to evolve; then I am inclined to see Abū ʿUthmān as a humanist of his own time, as well as of ours.

Appendix

The following are the eight texts from al-Jāḥiẓ which constitute the basis of the present analysis. The parenthetical references within the article refer to these texts. The following texts are interspersed with numbers indicating <page: line> or as sufficient for clarity <line>. The parenthetical reference within the article usually comprises three elements: (1) The text number which refers to the number of the text assigned to it in this appendix (thus T1: means Text 1); (2) page number; and (3) line number.

The English texts are my intentionally literal translations.

*Text 1.**
(*Manāqib-a*: 170: 11-15; cf. *Manāqib-b*: 11: 10-14)

... وامتنعت عدنان قاطبة من مناكحة بني إسحاق، وهو أخو <11> إسماعيل، وجادوا بذلك في جميع الدهر لبني قحطان. <12> ففي إجماع الفريقين على التناكح والتصاهر، ومنعهما ذلك جميع <13> الأمم، ككسرى فمن دونه، دليل على أن النسب عندهم متّفق <14> وأن هذه المعاني [التربة واللغة والشمائل والهمّة والأنف والحميّة والأخلاق والسجيّة (170:5-6)] قد قامت عندهم مقام الولادة والأرحام الماسّة <15>.

The ʿAdnānīs refrained totally from intermarriage with the descendants of Isḥāq, [even though] Isḥāq is Ismāʿīl's brother. [Conversely,] they have always been permissive of intermarriage with the descendants of Qaḥṭān <11-12>. Thus, the two parties' consent to intermarriage amongst themselves, while prohibiting all other nations, the Persians and beyond, from marrying into them, is proof that they deemed the relationship between them as concordant, and that they considered these factors [i.e., the unity of their native soil, language, temperament, ambition, pride, zeal, manners and disposition <170: 5-6> tr. Hoyland, (2001: 230),] as a substitute for common ancestry <13-15>.

* Cf. Hoyland, *Arabia*, 229-30; and Retsö, *The Arabs*, 21-2, for parallel translations of and commentaries on parts of the wider context of which this text is only a part.

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Text 2.
(*Manāqib-a*: 191: 4-12; cf. *Manāqib-b*: 31: 4-11)

وقد جعل الله إسماعيل وهو ابن أعجميّين عربيًا، لأنّ الله تعالى لمّا <4> فتق لهاته بالعربيّة المبينة على غير التلقين والترتيب، وفطره على <5> الفصاحة العجيبة على غير النشوء والتمرين، وسلخ طباعه من طبائع <6> العجم، ونقل إلى بدنه تلك الأجزاء، وركّبه اختراعًا على ذلك التركيب <7>، وسوّاه تلك التسوية، وصاغه تلك الصيغة، ثمّ حماه من طبائعهم <8>، ومنعه من أخلاقهم وشمائلهم، وطبعه من كرمهم وأنفتهم وهممهم <9> على أكرمها وأسناها، وأشرفها وأعلاها، وجعل ذلك برهانًا على رسالته <10>، ودليلاً على نبوّته، وصار أحقّ بذلك النسب، وأولى بشرف ذلك <11> الحسب <12>.

They deemed (or: God transformed) Ismāʿīl–who is the offspring of two non-Arabs–to be an Arab, because God initiated (literally: nipped open his uvula) into pure and clear Arabic, on a basis other than instruction and [proper natural] sequence. Then He brought him into being endowed with natural wonderous eloquence, on a basis other than genesis and graduation; And his character and innate disposition He tore away from [its original roots in] the non-Arab disposition and characteristics <4-7>; To his corpus He transplanted 'those' [necessary] parts. And [God] reinvented [Ismāʿīl] in that fashion; and He formulated him in that formation; then He safeguarded him from partaking in their [i.e., the Arabs'] natural characteristics, and He held him back from joining them in their norms and practices; [yet] He endowed him with the best and most luminous of their qualities: their generosity, sense of honor, and high-mindedness. God employed this entire process to be a token of Ismāʿīl's mission, and a proof of his prophetic status. It is through this [process] that Ismāʿīl became most entitled to the honor of this progeny <7-12>.

*Text 3.**
(*Nābita*, 21: 10-13; 22: 1-4)

وقد جعل الله المولى بعد أن كان عجميًا عربيًا بولائه، كما جعل حليف <21:10> قريش من العرب قرشيًا بحلفه. وجعل إسماعيل، بعد أن كان أعجميًا <21:11>، عربيًا. ولولا قول النبي (صلعم) إنّ إسماعيل كان عربيًا ما كان <21:12> عندنا إلاّ أعجميًا؛ لأنّ الأعجم لا يصير عربيًا، كما أنّ العربيّ لا يصير أعجميًا <21:13>.

tفإنّا علمنا أنّ إسماعيل صيّره الله عربيًا بعد أن كان أعجميًا بقول النبيّ <22:1> (صلعم)، فكذلك حكم قوله: "مولى القوم منهم"، وقوله: "الولاء <22:2> لُحمة". قالوا: وقد جعل الله إبراهيم عليه السلام أبًا لمن لم يلِد كما جعله أبًا لمن <22:3> ولد...

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God made the *mawlā*, after he had been an *ʿajamī*, an Arab by virtue of his affiliation [to an Arab tribe], as He made the Arab ally of Quraysh a Qurashite by virtue of his alliance; and He made Ismāʿīl an Arab after he had been an *ʿajamī* <21: 10-12>. Had it not been for the Prophet's (pbuh) saying that Ismāʿīl was an Arab, he would only be an *ʿajamī* in our eyes, for the *ʿajamī* cannot become an Arab, and the Arab cannot become an *ʿajamī* <21: 12-13>.

Thus, it is only through the Prophet's saying that we came to know that God made Ismāʿīl an Arab after he had been an *ʿajamī*. The same principle applies to the Prophetic traditions: "The *mawlā* of a tribe is one of its number," and "Clientship is a bond" <22: 1-3>. They [i.e., the *mawālī*] said: God made Ibrāhīm the father of descendents not of his own offspring, just as He made him the father of his own offspring <22: 3-4>.

* Cf. D.M. Hawke's translation in Pellat, *The Life*, 86.

Text 4.
(*Ḥayawān* VII: 58: 13-15)

وقد علّم الله إسماعيل منطق العرب بعد أن كان ابن أربع عشرة سنة <13>، فلمّا كان ذلك على غير التلقين والتأديب والاعتياد والترتيب والمنشأ <14>، صار ذلك برهانًا ودلالة وأعجوبة وآية <15>.

God taught Ismāʿīl the speech of the Arabs after he was fourteen years of age. Since this [transpired] not on the basis of instruction, tutoring, contraction of habit, [proper] sequence, and genesis, it became a proof, a token, a miracle, and a prodigy <13-15>.

Text 5.
(*Bayān* I: 383: 12-16)

ولا بدّ من أن <12> نذكر فيه شأن إسماعيل صلعم وانقلابَ لغته بعد أربع عشرة سنة <13> وكيف نسي لغته التي ربي فيها، وجرى على أعراقها، وكيف لفظ بجميع حاجاته <14> بالعربيّة على غير تلقين ولا ترتيب، وحتّى لم تدخله عجمة ولا لُكنة ولا حُبسة <15> ولا تعلّق بلسانه شيء من تلك العادة، إن شاء الله <16>.

In it [i.e., volume two], God willing, we shall mention the case of Ismāʿīl (pbuh), the conversion of his language fourteen years after [he had been born], how he forgot his [original] language, in the milieu of which he had grown up and the stylistics of which he had followed, and how he communicated all his needs in Arabic, without instruction or preparation, and without being handicapped by ambiguity, accent, or aphasia; nor has his tongue been afflicted by any [similar] speech habits <12-16>.

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*Text 6.**
(*Bayān* III: 290: 1-3, 9-11; 291: 1-2; 292: 1-11; 295: 1-5)

القول في إنطاق الله عزّ وجلّ <290:1> إسماعيلَ بنَ إبراهيم عليهما السلام، بالعربيّة المبينة على غير التلقين <2> والتمرين، وعلى غير التدريب والتدريج، وكيف صار عربيًّا أعجميّ الأبوين <3>.

... ...

قال أبو عبيدة: حدثنا مسمع بن عبد الملك عن أبي جعفر محمد بن علي بن <290:9> الحسين عن آبائه قال: أول من فُتِقَ لسانُه بالعربيّة المبينة إسماعيل وهو ابن <10> أربع عشرة سنة <11>.

... ...

وروى قيس بن الربيع، عن بعض أشياخه عن ابن عبّاس: أنّ الله ألْهَمَ <291:1> إسماعيل العربيّة إلهامًا <2>.

قالوا [أي الخواصّ الخلّص من النزاريّة]: والمشاركة من جهة الاتفاق في الطبيعة والعادة ربما كانت أبلغ <292:1> وأوغل من المشاكلة من جهة الرحم. نعم حتى تراه أغلب عليه من أخيه لأمّه <2> وأبيه. وربّما كان أشبه به خَلْقًا وخُلُقًا وأدبًا ومذهبًا. فيجوز أن يكون الله <3> تبارك وتعالى حين حوّل إسماعيل عربيًّا أن يكون كما حوّل طبع لسانه إلى <4> لسانهم، وباعده عن لسان العجم، أن يكون أيضًا حوّل سائر غرائزه، وسلخ <5> سائر طبائعه، فنقلها كيف أحبّ، وركّبها كيف شاء. ثمّ فضّله بعد ذلك بما <6> أعطاه من الأخلاق المحمودة، واللسان البيّن، بما لم يخصّهم به. فكذلك يخصّه <7> من تلك الأخلاق ومن تلك الأشكال بما يفوقهم ويروقهم <8>. فصار بإطلاق اللسان على غير التلقين والترتيب، وبما نُقل من طباعه ونقل <9> إليه من طبائعهم، وبالزيادة التي أكرمه الله بها، أشرف شرفًا وأكرم <10> كرمًا <11>.

... ...

ولولا أن الله عزّ وجلّ أفرد إسماعيل من العجم، وأخرجه بجميع معانيه <295:1> إلى العرب، لكان بنو إسحاق أولى به. وإنّما ذلك كرجلٍ قد أحاط علمه بأنّ <2> هذا الطفل من نجل هذا الرجل، ولكن لمّا كان من سفاح لم يُجُز أن يضيفه <3> إليه ويدعوه أباه. وقد جعل الله نسب ابن الملاعَنَة نَسب أمّه وإن كان <4> ولد على فراش أبيه <5>.

On the issue of God's (The Almighty, the Exalted) making Ismāʿīl ibn Ibrāhīm (pbuh) speak pure and clear Arabic, not on the basis of instruction and training, nor practice and gradual progress; and how he became an Arab, son of non-Arab parents <290: 1-3>.

... ...

Abū ʿUbayda said: Mismaʿ ibn ʿAbd al-Malik told us, on the authority of Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn [who received the tradition] from his fathers, he said: "The first to have his tongue initiated into pure and clear Arabic was Ismāʿīl, when he was fourteen years of age" <290: 9-11>.

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… …

Qays ibn al-Rabīʿ transmitted, on the authority of some of his professors, according to Ibn ʿAbbās, that God inspired Ismāʿīl with the Arabic language by way of revelation <291: 1-2>.

… …

They [i.e., the Nizārī elite] said: the resemblance which [emanates] from agreement of character and norm is perhaps more thorough and profound than the resemblance which [emanates] from kinship. Indeed, so much so, that [the analogue] may come across as more prevalent over [his counterpart] than the [counterpart's] brother descending from the same parentage. He may even resemble him more, even in physique and disposition, and in manners and conviction <292: 1-3>.

Therefore, it may have been that, when God (Blessed and Exalted may He be) converted Ismāʿīl into an Arab, He [extended the exercise to affect his other characteristics]. As He converted his natural tongue to theirs, and distanced it from the tongue of the *ʿajam*, He may have also converted the rest of his instincts; and the rest of his characteristics He may have torn away, then transformed them the way He wished, and constructed them the way He willed. Thereafter, He [may have] favored him with what He did not specifically bestow on them: commendable morality and an eloquent coherent tongue. By the same token, He [is expected to have] favored him by singularly conferring upon him [a measure] of those moral dispositions and [other] modes that would excel and [at the same time] please them <292: 3-8>.

Thus, by releasing [his] tongue on basis other than instruction and [proper natural] sequence; and by virtue of what of his [natural] characteristics were transformed, and of what of theirs [i.e., the Arabs'] were transplanted into him; and by virtue of the increment God graced him with; Ismāʿīl became the noblest and the most honorable <292: 9-11>.

… … …

Had it not been that God [The Almighty, The Exalted] singled Ismāʿīl out from amongst the *ʿajam*, and brought him, [complete] with all his [formative] constituents, to [become one of] the Arabs, the Banū Isḥāq would have been more entitled to [have] him [as one of their number] <295: 1-2>. However, this is [a situation] similar to [the situation of] a man who is given to know that a specific certain child is the natural offspring of a specific certain man, but, because the child is the fruit of an unlawful sexual union, the man does not find it permissible to trace the child back to him [his natural father], and to call him his father <295: 2-4>. [In the same vein,] God has ordained that the pedigree of a child, whose true fathering is contested, should be that of its mother, even though he may have been delivered on his legal father's bed <295: 4-5>.

* Cf. Bashear, *Arabs*, 40-50.

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*Text 7. ("Doubt and Certainty")**
(*Ḥayawān* VI: 34: 7-9; 35: 2-7)

ولم أكتب هذا لتُقِرَّ به، ولكنّها رواية أحببت أن تسمعها <34:7> ولا يعجبني الإقرار بهذا الخبر، وكذلك لا يعجبني الإنكار له. ولكن <8> ليكن قلبك إلى إنكاره أميل <9>.

... ...

وبعد هذا فاعرف مواضع الشكّ، وحالاتها الموجبة له، لتعرف بها <35:2> مواضع اليقين والحالات الموجبة له. وتعلّم المشكوك فيه تعلّمًا <3>. فلو لم يكن في ذلك إلاّ تعرّف التوقّف ثمّ التثبّت، لقد كان ذلك <4> ممّا يُحتاج إليه <5>. ثمّ اعلم أنّ الشكّ في طبقات عند جميعهم. ولم يُجمعوا على أنّ اليقين <6> طبقات في القوة والضعف <7>.

I did not write down this [allegation] for you to accept [as veracious]. It is only an account which I liked you to hear <34: 7>. I do not like to accept this report [as valid]. Likewise, I do not like to deny [its veracity] <34: 8>. But, let your heart be more inclined to refuse it <34: 8-9>.

...

Furthermore, get to know which the objects of doubt are, and which of their modalities mandate doubt. It is through this [knowledge] that you would recognize the objects of certainty, and their modalities which make certainty mandatory <35: 2-3>. And, study the object of doubt with [unrelenting] scrutiny <35: 3>. Even if this [exercise] yields nothing more than the realization of the [necessity of] suspension [of belief], followed by ascertainment, [such yields] are certainly needed <35: 4-5>. Moreover, you should know that they [the scholars and theologians] are unanimous that there are grades of doubt. They have not been unanimous on whether certainty exists in different degrees of strength and weakness <35: 6-7>.

* Cf. D.M. Hawke's translation in Pellat, *The Life*, 174-5.

*Text 8. ("The Speech of Birds")**
(*Ḥayawān* VII: 56: 4-6; 57: 4-17; 58: 1-4, 13-15)

ولها منطقٌ تتفاهم بها حاجاتِ بعضها إلى بعض. ولا حاجة بها إلى <56:4> أن يكونَ لها في منطقها فضلٌ لا تحتاج إلى استعماله. وكذلك معانيها <5> في مقادير حاجاتها <6>.

... ...

فإن قال قائل: ليس هذا بمنطق، قيل له: أما القرآن فقد نطَق بأنّه <57:4> منطقٌ، والأشعار قد جعلته منطقًا، وكذلك كلامُ العرب، فإن كنتَ <5> إنما أخرجتَه من حدّ البيان، وزعمتَ أنّه ليس بمنطِقٍ لأنّك لم تفهم عنه <6>، فأنتَ أيضًا لا تفهم كلام عامّة الأمم؛ وأنتَ إن سمّيتَ

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كلامَهم رطانةً <7> وطَمْطمة فإنّك لا تمتنع من أن تزعُم أنّ ذلك كلامهم ومنطقهم، وعامّة <8> الأمم أيضًا لا يفهمون كلامك ومنطِقَك، فجائزٌ لهم أن يُخرجوا كلامَك <9> من البيان والمنطِق. وهل صار ذلك الكلامُ منهم بيانًا ومنطقًا إلاّ <10> لتفاهمهم حاجةَ بعضهم إلى بعض، ولأنّ ذلك كان صوتًا مؤلّفًا خرج <11> من لسان وفم، فهلاّ كانت أصوات أجناس الطير والوحش والبهائم بيانًا <12> ومنطقًا إذ قد علمتَ أنّها مقطّعة مصوّرة، ومؤلّفة منظّمة، وبها تفاهموا <13> الحاجات، وخرجت من فمٍ ولسان، فإن كنتَ لا تفهم من ذلك <14> إلاّ البعض، فكذلك تلك الأجناس لا تفهَمُ من كلامك إلاّ البعض <15>. وتلك الأقدار من الأصوات المؤلّفة هي نهاية حاجاتِها والبيان عنها، وكذلك <16> أصواتك المؤلّفة هي نهاية حاجاتك وبيانك عنها. وعلى أنّك قد تعلّم الطيرَ <17> الأصوات فتتعلّم، وكذلك يُعلِّم الإنسان الكلام فيتكلّم، كتعليم الصبيّ <58:1> والأعجميّ. والفرق بين الإنسان والطير أنّ ذلك المعنى معنًى يُسمّى منطقًا <2> وكلامًا على التشبيه بالنّاس، وعلى السبب الذي يجري، والنّاس ذلك <3> لهم على كلّ حال <4>.

... ...

وقد علّم الله إسماعيل منطق العرب بعد أن كان ابن أربع عشرة سنة <58:13>، فلما كان ذلك على غير التلقين والتأديب والاعتياد والترتيب والمنشأ <14>، صار ذلك برهانًا ودلالةً وأعجوبة وآية <15>.

They (birds) possess speech through which they communicate their mutual needs. They don't need to be endowed with extra speech capacity which they don't need to use. Likewise, the significations [they are capable of imparting] are in the range of their requirements <56: 4-6>.

... ...

Should someone say: "this is not speech," it would be said to him: "as for the Qur'ān, the Qur'ān [explicitly] stated that it is speech; and poetry deemed it to be speech; and so does the Arabic jargon (convention). Therefore, if your only reason for excluding it from the definition of eloquence, and for claiming that it is not speech, is that you don't understand it, then [it would be said to you] you similarly do not understand the speech of all [other] nations; and even if you call their speech gibberish <57: 4-7>, you wouldn't refrain from asserting that it is their speech and utterance. Likewise, all [other] nations do not understand your speech and utterance; [it, therefore, follows from your logic that] it is permissible for them to exclude your utterance from the definition of eloquence and speech. [Moreover,] has it not been due to their [ability] to communicate [through it] their mutual needs, and due to its being synthesized sounds uttered through mouth and tongue, that the utterances of [the other nations] came to be speech and eloquence? [By the same token,] why wouldn't the sounds of birds, beasts, and cattle be [considered] speech and eloquence, once you have known that they are sounds comprised of [phonetically] describable units, and which are systematically synthesized, and that through these sounds they communicate

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[to one another their] needs, and that they are uttered through mouth and tongue <57: 8-14>?

If [as it were] you don't understand of [their speech] except some, similarly, those species do not understand of your speech except some. Those ranges of synthesized sounds are the limit of their requirements and [of their capacity to] express them. Likewise, your [own] synthesized sounds are the limit of your requirements and of your [capacity] to express them. Furthermore, you may teach sounds to birds <57: 14-17>, and they do learn [them]. Likewise, the human being is taught speech, so he speaks; as in teaching the boy and the foreigner (*al-ʿajamī*) <58: 1-2>.

The difference between man and bird [however] is that the import [in the case of birds] is characterized as speech and utterance [only metaphorically], by comparison to humans, and in accordance with uniform causality; while, in [the case of] human beings, those [import and characterization] are [truly] theirs in all cases" <58: 2-4>.!

...

And God taught Ismāʿīl the speech of the Arabs after he had been fourteen years old. Since this [transpired] not on the basis of instruction, tutoring, contraction of habit, [proper] sequence, and genesis, it became a proof, a token, a miracle, and a prodigy <58: 13-15>.

* Cf. D.M. Hawke's translation in Pellat, *The Life*, 180-1.

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The Place of al-Jāḥiẓ in the Arabic Philological Tradition

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It is undeniable that the works of al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/869) reveal a keen insight into philological issues. In particular, his *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn* includes lengthy chapters in which he studies various aspects of philology that were largely ignored by earlier linguists such as al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad (d. 175/791), Sībawayhi (d. 180/796), al-Farrāʾ (d. 207/822), and al-Akhfash (d. 215/830). The novelty of al-Jāḥiẓ's philological contribution reflects not merely the novelty of the issues which he raised, but is more significantly a function of his novel analytical methods, of the general context in which these issues are presented, and of the ultimate purpose which they are meant to serve. Nonetheless, al-Jāḥiẓ was not commonly recognized by his contemporaries or by later authors as a philologist in the most general sense of the term. He was understandably not identified with the *naḥwiyyūn* (grammarians) since his contribution to the grammatical tradition, let alone his adherence to the methods of the grammarians, was minimal. But it is quite puzzling why very little of his contribution to philology is acknowledged in the sources, to the extent that he was not even considered to belong to the loosely defined group of scholars who are called *lughawiyyūn* (philologists or lexicographers), and who, apart from grammatical study *per se*, explored issues related to lexicology, including the collection of linguistic data, word meanings in attested material, and dialectal variations particularly in the realm of "strange usage" (*gharīb*). This paper attempts to explain why al-Jāḥiẓ, in spite of his valuable contribution to philology, was not recognized in the sources as part of the mainstream philological tradition. In so doing, we will try to highlight the differences between al-Jāḥiẓ on the one hand, and the *naḥwiyyūn* and *lughawiyyūn* on the other, and to interpret the purpose of his philological study as opposed to the model proposed by the traditional authors.[1]

That al-Jāḥiẓ was groomed in the grammatical and philological traditions is evident in the fact that his teachers included Abū ʿUbayda (d. 209/824), al-Aṣmaʿī (d. 216/813), Abū Zayd al-Anṣārī (d. 215/830), and al-Akhfash, among others.[2] His nephew, Yamūt b. al-Muzarrāʿ (d. 304/916), who was his student, is

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1 In my study *The Legacy of the* Kitāb: *Sībawayhi's Analytical Methods Within the Context of the Arab Grammatical Theory* (Leiden: Brill 2008), some of the issues raised here are examined in light of the development of linguistic study after Sībawayhi, particularly with regard to the prevalence of formal considerations over meaning in the study of syntax and the attempt of some authors to redress this imbalance by demonstrating the central role of meaning in grammatical analysis.

2 Shihāb al-Dīn Abū ʿAbdallāh Yāqūt b. ʿAbdallāh al-Rūmī al-Ḥamawī, *Muʿjam al-udabāʾ, Irshād al-arīb ilā maʿrifat al-adīb*, ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās, 7 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī,

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referred to in several sources as *naḥwī*.[3] It is also significant that al-Jāḥiẓ was the first author, as far as we know, to refer to the famous encounter between Sībawayhi and al-Kisāʾī (d. 189/805) known as the *masʾala zunbūriyya*.[4]

In an attempt to show the far-reaching influence of al-Jāḥiẓ, Yāqūt quotes Ibn al-ʿAmīd's (d. 360/970) assertion that, just as Abū Ḥanīfa and Abū l-Hudhail are the most prominent scholars in *fiqh* and *kalām* respectively, al-Jāḥiẓ is likewise the most prominent scholar of *balāgha* (rhetoric), *faṣāḥa* (eloquence), *lasan* (language, speech), and *ʿāriḍa* (style, redaction).[5] This statement is particularly sig-

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1993) V, 2101. Cf. Abū l-Ṭayyib ʿAbdalraḥmān b. ʿAlī al-Lughawī, *Marātib al-naḥwiyyīn*, ed. Muḥammad Abū l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Dār Nahḍat Miṣr, 1974), 118, where Jāḥiẓ reports a view which he ascribes to the first three scholars mentioned above. It is noteworthy that these three scholars are collectively referred to by Suyūṭī (Jalāl al-Dīn Abū l-Faḍl ʿAbdalraḥmān b. Abī Bakr al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Muzhir fī ʿulum al-lugha wa-anwāʿihā*, ed. Muḥammad Aḥmad Jād al-Mawlā, ʿAlī Muḥammad al-Bajāwī & Muḥammad Abū l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, 2 vols. (Cairo: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, n.d.) II, 401) as the unprecedented and unsurpassed masters (*aʾimma*) of their fields. It should also be noted that, if we are to accept Zubaydī's distinction, in his *Ṭabaqāt*, between *naḥywiyyūn* and *lughawiyyūn*, then the first three of these scholars are *lughawiyyūn*, whereas only the fourth, Akhfash, is *naḥwī* (Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Zubaydī al-Andalusī, *Ṭabaqāt al-naḥwiyyīn wa-l-lughawiyyīn*, ed. Muḥammad Abū l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1973), 175, 167, 165, 72 respectively). This distinction, however, is highly superficial, particularly since a large number of scholars straddled the boundaries between *naḥw* and *lugha*. Consider, for example, Qifṭī's reference, in his *Inbāh* (Jamāl al-Dīn Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Yūsuf al-Qifṭī, *Inbāh al-ruwāt ʿalā anbāh al-nuḥāt*, ed. Muḥammad Abū l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, 4 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-ʿArabī, 1986)), to the three above scholars whom Zubaydī identifies as *lughawiyyūn*: He refers to Abū ʿUbayda as *naḥwī* (III, 276), to Aṣmaʿī as *ṣāḥib al-lugha wa-l-naḥw* (II, 198), and to Abū Zayd as *ṣāḥib al-naḥw wa-l-lugha* (II, 30). Among the three, Abū Zayd is said to have been the one most versed in *naḥw*; see Abū Saʿīd al-Ḥasan b. ʿAbdallāh al-Sīrāfī, *Akhbār al-naḥwiyyīn al-Baṣriyyīn*, ed. Fritz Krenkow (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1936), 52, and Charles Pellat, *Le milieu baṣrien et la formation de Jāḥiẓ* (Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1953), 134. See also Abū ʿUthmān ʿAmr b. Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ, *Al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn, 4 vols., 4th ed. (Cairo: Lajnat al-Taʾlīf wa-l-Tarjama wa-l-Nashr, 1948-50), IV: 23ff. where he mentions several of the *ruwāt* whom he encountered, including Yaḥyā b. Najm, Abū Mālik ʿAmr b. Kirkira, and Abū ʿAmr al-Shaybānī.

3 Yāqūt, *Irshād* VI: 2845 and Jalāl al-Dīn Abū l-Faḍl ʿAbdalraḥmān b. Abī Bakr al-Suyūṭī, *Bughyat al-wuʿāt fī ṭabaqāt al-lughawiyyīn wa-l-nuḥāt*, ed. Muḥammad Abū l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, 2 vols., 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1979), II: 353. See also Zubaydī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 215; Qifṭī, *Inbāh*, IV: 80; Shams al-Dīn Abū ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ*, ed. Shuʿayb al-Arnaʾūṭ et al., 25 vols., 9th ed. (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1993), XI: 526; and Abū l-Ṭāhir Majd al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Yaʿqūb al-Fayrūzābādī, *Al-Bulgha fī tārīkh aʾimmat al-lugha*, ed. Muḥammad al-Miṣrī, (Damascus: Wizārat al-Thaqāfa, 1972), 289.

4 See his cursory reference to this encounter in Abū ʿUthmān ʿAmr b. Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn, 8 vols., Repr. from the Cairo edition (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1992), VII: 7. Cf. Rafael Talmon, *Eighth-Century Iraqi Grammar: A Critical Exploration of Pre-Ḫalīlian Arabic Linguistics*, Harvard Semitic Studies 53 (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 29, n.1.

5 Yāqūt, *Irshād* V: 2116. Our translation of these four terms is approximate, and the last two of them are particularly difficult to render because their meaning in Arabic is quite obscure.

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nificant because it claims that all people (*al-nās kulluhum*), i.e., all students of the above disciplines, are dependent on these three scholars in their knowledge of their respective fields. It is, however, astonishing to see how little credit al-Jāḥiẓ is given in the grammatical and philological sources in spite of the praise which he receives in sources outside these two traditions, and in spite of the philological insight which his works so vividly display. The study of the essential sources of the grammatical and philological traditions reveals the following facts:

1. Among the host of biographical sources devoted to grammarians and philologists, only three include an entry on al-Jāḥiẓ. The earliest of these sources is al-Marzubānī's (d. 384/994) *Muqtabas* as preserved in the abridgment of the seventh century scholar, al-Yaghmūrī (d. 673/1274),[6] and the second is Ibn al-Anbārī's (d. 577/1181) *Nuzha*.[7] Both sources include only anecdotal material about al-Jāḥiẓ with no reference to his contribution to linguistic study. It is interesting to note that Ibn al-Anbārī, in the beginning of his biography of al-Jāḥiẓ, refers to him as *ʿālim bi-l-adab, faṣīḥ* and *balīgh*, but does not use the terms *naḥwī* or *lughawī*. The third biography is the one by Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) in his *Bughyat al-wuʿāt* and occupies no more than three lines. It is remarkable indeed that al-Jāḥiẓ has no biography in the other major linguistically-oriented biographical sources, including Abū l-Ṭayyib's (d. 351/962) *Marātib al-naḥwiyyīn*, al-Sīrāfī's (d. 368/979) *Akhbār al-naḥwiyyīn al-Baṣriyyīn*, al-Zubaydī's (d. 379/989) *Ṭabaqāt al-naḥwiyyīn wa-l-lughawiyyīn*, al-Tanūkhī's (d. 442/1050) *Tārīkh al-ʿulamāʾ al-naḥwiyyīn*,[8] al-Qifṭī's (d. 646/1248) *Inbāh al-ruwāt ʿalā anbāh al-nuḥāt*, and al-Fayrūzābādī's (d. 817/1415) *al-Bulgha fī tārīkh aʾimmat al-lugha*. These sources, as their contents and as the titles of some of them indicate, do include biographies of scholars who were not *naḥwiyyūn* as such, but were philologists in the broadest sense of the word. They, nevertheless, do not have a biographical entry on al-Jāḥiẓ. Also noteworthy is that Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 380/990), in his *Fihrist*, places al-Jāḥiẓ's biography in the section which he dedicates to *mutakallimūn*, and not under the section of *naḥwiyyūn* and *lughawiyyūn*.[9]

2. There is hardly any mention of al-Jāḥiẓ in the grammatical or philological works of his contemporaries or of later authors. Major works of the third and fourth centuries A.H., like Ibn al-Sikkīt's (d. 244/858) *Iṣlāḥ al-manṭiq*,[10] al-

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6 Abū l-Maḥāsin Yūsuf b. Aḥmad al-Yaghmūrī, *Nūr al-qabas al-mukhtaṣar min al-Muqtabas*, ed. Rudolph Sellheim (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1964), 230-31.

7 Abū l-Barakāt ʿAbd-al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad al-Anbārī, *Nuzhat al-alibbāʾ fī ṭabaqāt al-udabāʾ*, ed. Ibrāhīm al-Sāmarrāʾī (Baghdad: Maktabat al-Andalus, 1970), 148-51.

8 Abū l-Maḥāsin al-Mufaḍḍal b. Muḥammad b. Misʿar al-Tanūkhī, *Tārīkh al-ʿulamāʾ al-naḥwiyyīn*, ed. ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Muḥammad al-Ḥulw (Riyad: Maṭābiʿ Dār al-Hilāl, 1981).

9 Abū l-Faraj Muḥammad b. Abī Yaʿqūb Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, ed. Riḍā Tajaddud (Tehran: 1971), 208-12 and 45 f. See, further, the contribution of Josef van Ess to this volume.

10 Abū Yūsuf Yaʿqūb b. Isḥāq Ibn al-Sikkīt, *Iṣlāḥ al-manṭiq*, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir and ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1956).

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Mubarrad's (d. 285/898) *Muqtaḍab*,[11] Thaʿlab's (d. 291/904) *Majālis* and *Faṣīḥ*,[12] Ibn al-Sarrāj's (d. 316/929) *Uṣūl*,[13] al-Zajjājī's (d. 337/949) *Jumal*,[14] are totally neglectful of al-Jāḥiẓ and do not report any of his linguistic views. Similarly, later authors, and in particular the *Alfiyya* commentators and authors of lengthy works such as Ibn Yaʿīsh (d. 643/1245) in his *Sharḥ al-Mufaṣṣal*, do not refer to his works or cite any of his views. In al-Baghdādī's (d. 1093/1682) encyclopedic work, *Khizānat al-adab*, which blends grammatical issues with biographies and anecdotal material, there are about fifty references to al-Jāḥiẓ.[15] However, only one of these is relevant to a syntactical issue, and then only included by Baghdādī to accuse him of being ignorant of the point under discussion, as we shall see in Section 4 below. The other references are not related to grammar or philology: three relate to meanings of words, four are of a biographical nature, and the rest are anecdotes and poetry narrations. As for Ibn Manẓūr's (d. 711/1311) voluminous dictionary *Lisān al-ʿArab*, al-Jāḥiẓ is mentioned twenty-eight times, almost half of which concern terminology related to animals and the other half is of an anecdotal nature.[16] Only one instance in which al-Jāḥiẓ is quoted in *Lisān* concerns a morphological point, the derivation of the word *dawwiyya*. Here also, he is ridiculed, this time for proposing what is allegedly a wrong etymology (see Section 4 below).

3. Al-Jāḥiẓ openly criticized the grammarians on several occasions, and his critical views of several aspects of the grammatical tradition will be discussed in the latter part of this paper. What should be pointed out here, however, is that he often directed his criticism at particular grammarians. Most striking is his criticism of al-Khalīl, who was held in very high esteem by grammarians and philologists across the Basran-Kufan divide. In three separate texts,[17] al-Jāḥiẓ attacks al-Khalīl

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11 Abū l-ʿAbbās Muḥammad b. Yazīd al-Mubarrad, *Al-Muqtaḍab*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Khāliq ʿUḍayma, 4 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Taḥrīr, 1965-68). Mubarrad's other major work, *Kāmil*, is not a work of grammar or philology, and it does contain several references to Jāḥiẓ, mostly in anecdotes and poetry narration. (Idem., *Al-Kāmil*, ed. Muḥammad Abū l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm and al-Sayyid Shiḥāta, 4 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat Nahḍat Miṣr, 1956).)

12 Abū l-ʿAbbās Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā Thaʿlab, *Majālis Thaʿlab*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1960); idem., *Faṣīḥ Thaʿlab*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Munʿim al-Khafājī (Cairo: Maktabat al-Tawḥīd, 1949).

13 Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Sahl Ibn al-Sarrāj, *Al-Uṣūl fī l-naḥw*, ed. ʿAbd al-Ḥusayn al-Fatalī, 3 vols. (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1985).

14 Abū l-Qāsim ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Isḥāq al-Zajjājī, *Al-Jumal*, ed. Muḥammad b. Abī Shanab (Paris: Klincksieck, 1957).

15 See ʿAbd al-Qādir b. ʿUmar al-Baghdādī, *Khizānat al-adab wa-lubb lubāb lisān al-ʿArab*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn, 13 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Kātib al-ʿArabī, 1967-86), XIII (indices): 289 and the various references there to other parts of that volume.

16 Aḥmad Abū l-Hayjāʾ & Khalīl Aḥmad ʿAmāyira, *Fahāris Lisān al-ʿArab*, 7 vols. (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1987), III: 153-54; 432. His quotations include, for example, material on animals such as *layth, faʾra, yāmūr, naqqāz, ṭabbūʿ, yarāʿa, shalaqa, ḍabb*, and so forth.

17 Two of these texts are in Jāḥiẓ, *Ḥayawān* I: 150; VII: 165-66, and the third is in Abū ʿUthmān ʿAmr b. Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-Muʿallimīn*, in *Rasāʾil al-Jāḥiẓ*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn, 4 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1979), III: 27-51, here 44.

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on grounds of his arrogance and presumptuousness (*ʿujb; ghurūr*). His main argument is that al-Khalīl, because he was skilled in grammar and prosody (*aḥsana fī-l-naḥw wa-l-ʿarūḍ*), thought that he could excel in theology (*kalām*) and music composition (*taʾlīf al-luḥūn; awzān al-aghānī*). Al-Jāḥiẓ's use of the words *jahl* (ignorance), *khidhlān min al-Lāh* (being forsaken by God), and *junūn* or *ikhtilāṭ* (lunacy, insanity)[18] to describe the alleged delusions of al-Khalīl attests to his uncompromising stance in this matter, and to his firm belief that grammar is not conducive to the acquiring of more "appropriate skills" and "valuable accomplishments",[19] as will be elaborated later.[20] In addition to his criticism of al-Khalīl, al-Jāḥiẓ ridicules ʿĪsā b. ʿUmar (d. 149/766), one of the most esteemed early grammarians and a teacher of both al-Khalīl and Sībawayhi. He reports, on the authority of al-Aṣmaʿī, that ʿĪsā and an adversary of his appeared before Bilāl b. Abī Burda to seek a legal verdict. When the adversary began to speak and did not use case endings (*iʿrāb*) in his speech, ʿĪsā seems, according to Bilāl, to have become more concerned about this fact than about the right which he was claiming for himself.[21] This is generally in line with al-Jāḥiẓ's criticism of the grammarians for laying emphasis in verse solely on matters of *iʿrāb*,[22] but the anecdotal reference to ʿĪsā is particularly sarcastic and indicates al-Jāḥiẓ's dissatisfaction with the very early stage of grammatical activity when *iʿrāb* became the predominant concern of the grammarians. It is in this context that we propose to interpret another sarcastic remark by al-Jāḥiẓ, also directed against another early grammarian, Ziyād al-Nabaṭī. He is described as having had a strong accent and, at the same time, as having been a grammarian (*kāna ... shadīd al-lukna wa-kāna naḥwiyyan*).[23] The gravity of this remark can be best appreciated if taken in the more general context of al-Jāḥiẓ's ridicule of various types of *lukna* as detailed in his *Bayān*.[24] It is also significant that he quotes ʿĀmir al-Shaʿbiyy (d. 103/721) who, having seen some *mawālī* discussing grammar (*yatadhākarūna l-naḥw*), ad-

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18 Ibid., 44 and *Ḥayawān* I: 150 and VII: 166, respectively. Cf. also Abū ʿUthmān ʿAmr b. Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ, *Ṭabaqāt al-mughannīn*, in *Rasāʾil al-Jāḥiẓ*, III: 131-36, here 132, where he gives Khalīl credit for laying the foundations of prosody, but shows how Isḥāq b. Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī has surpassed him in musicology. For further discussion of Jāḥiẓ's attack on Khalīl, see Rafael Talmon, *Arabic Grammar in its Formative Age: Kitāb al-ʿAyn and its Attribution to Ḫalīl b. Aḥmad* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997), 63-66; 72-74. See also Iṣfahānī's defense of Khalīl against the charge that his intellect failed to go beyond grammar and prosody (Abū ʿAbdallāh Ḥamza b. al-Ḥasan al-Iṣfahānī, *Al-Tanbīh ʿalā ḥudūth al-taṣḥīf*, ed. Muḥammad Asʿad Ṭalas (Damascus: Majmaʿ al-Lugha al-ʿArabiyya, 1968), 120).

19 *Muʿallimīn* 38. The two expressions are borrowed from Hawke's translation of Pellat's own rendering of the Arabic text; see Charles Pellat, *The Life and Works of Jāḥiẓ: Translations of Selected Texts*, transl. D.M. Hawke (Berkeley / Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969), 113.

20 See below, p. 102f.

21 *Bayān* II: 218.

22 See, for example, his statement in *Bayān* IV: 24, and cf. below, p. 100.

23 *Bayān* II: 213.

24 Ibid., I: 39-40; 69f.

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dressed them by saying: *la-in aṣlaḥtumūhu innakum la-awwal man afsadahu*[25] (Well might you mend it, since you were the first to corrupt it). The link which al-Jāḥiẓ makes between early grammatical activity, particularly its concern for *iʿrāb* on the one hand, and *mawālī* and their *luknas* on the other, is by no means coincidental. Rather, it shows that grammar, in his view, was founded as a reaction to the spread of solecism (*laḥn*) and that it could not later disengage itself from the purely scholastic approach whose aim is to suppress solecism and ensure the observance of *iʿrāb*. It is specifically because of this approach that an *alkan* like Ziyād al-Nabaṭī could be a grammarian! Al-Jāḥiẓ's own contribution to linguistic study, as we shall see later, lay largely in the attempt to transcend the limitations which characterize the approach of earlier scholars.

4. The grammarians themselves have not spared al-Jāḥiẓ their own criticism. Ironically, their harshest stand against him is the exclusion of his contribution to philology from their writings, as we have seen in Section 2, above. However, there are several instances in which they openly criticize him. One of the earliest examples is the charge laid against him by the Kufan grammarian Thaʿlab (d. 291/904) of being unreliable and untrustworthy (*laysa bi-thiqa wa-lā maʾmūn*).[26] Although this statement appears in the sources which appraise the transmitters of *ḥadīth*, the fact that it is attributed to Thaʿlab, first and foremost a grammarian, raises the possibility that it also refers to the philological aspect of al-Jāḥiẓ's scholarship, particularly in the context of the then raging Basran-Kufan debates and the mutual defamation between the two groups. Whatever the case may be, al-Jāḥiẓ was criticized for having allegedly failed to comprehend certain morphological and syntactical issues. In morphology, for example, he was accused of a derivational error (*ghalaṭ; fasād qawl*) by Ibn Barrī (d. 582/1187), who quotes al-Jawharī (d. 393/1003) as saying that *dawwiyya* (desert) owes its name (i.e., is derived) from *dawwī*, which Ibn Barrī explains as *ʿazīf al-jinn* (the faint sound of the jinn heard in the desert at night).[27] Ibn Barrī rightly attributes this view to al-Jāḥiẓ, who proposes *dawwī* as the origin from which *dawwiyya* (as well as *dāwiya* and *daww*, both of which mean desert) is derived.[28] His criticism of al-Jāḥiẓ is

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25 Ibid., II: 69.

26 Shams al-Dīn Abū ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Dhahabī, *Mīzān al-iʿtidāl fī naqd al-rijāl*, ed. ʿAlī Muḥammad, 4 vols., repr. from the Cairo edition (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifa, 1963), III: 247 and idem., *Tārīkh al-Islām wa-wafayāt al-mashāhīr wa-l-aʿlām*, ed. ʿUmar ʿAbd al-Salām Tadmurī, 51 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1987-2004), 372 (events of 241-50); Abū l-Falāḥ ʿAbdalḥayy b. Aḥmad Ibn al-ʿImād al-Ḥanbalī, *Shadharāt al-dhahab fī akhbār man dhahab*, 8 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Qudsī, 1350-51 A.H.), II: 122.

27 Jamāl al-Dīn Abū l-Faḍl Muḥammad b. Mukram Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, 20 vols. (Būlāq, 1300-07 A.H.), (*dwy*); cf. Also Abū Naṣr Ismāʿīl b. Ḥammād al-Jawharī, *Al-Ṣaḥāḥ*, ed. Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Ghafūr ʿAṭṭār, 6 vols., 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-ʿIlm lil-Malāyīn, 1979), (*dwy*).

28 Jāḥiẓ, *Ḥayawān* VI: 248. Ibn Barrī's criticism is based on the reading *dawwiyy*, with a doubled *wāw*, in Jāḥiẓ's text. The editor of *Ḥayawān* does point out in the margin Ibn Barrī's position and defends Jāḥiẓ, but still does not indicate the doubling of the *wāw* in the text. This is confusing because Ibn Barrī quotes ʿAjjāj's line **dawwiyatun li-hawlihā dawiyyu** to

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that *ʿazīf al-jinn* is *dawī*, with a single *wāw*, and not *dawwī*, with a doubled *wāw*. The correct explanation of *dawwiyya*, which al-Jāḥiẓ missed, according to Ibn Barrī, is that it is the relative noun or *nisba* form of *dawwa*. He further explains that the truth of the matter for the *naḥwiyyūn* (*wa-ḥaqīqat hādhihi l-yāʾ ʿinda l-naḥwiyyīna*) – that is, what al-Jāḥiẓ has not grasped – is that the *yāʾ* is otiose (*zāʾida*), as is the *yāʾ* of *aḥmarī* (red), which is derived from *aḥmar*.

The other example is from the realm of syntax and has caused widespread criticism of al-Jāḥiẓ's perceived inability to comprehend the position of the *naḥwiyyūn* vis-à-vis the matter under discussion. Ibn Jinnī (d. 392/1002) reports that al-Jāḥiẓ cites Aʿshā's line:

fa-lasta bi-l-akthari minhum ḥaṣan
wa-innamā l-ʿizzatu li-l-kāthiri

"You are not more copious [lit. richer in pebbles] than they are...
Might belongs to him who is more copious."

to prove that *naḥwiyyūn* are wrong to have claimed that the comparative pattern *afʿal*, the feminine of which is *fuʿlā*, may be either preceded by the definite article *al-* or followed by comparative *min*, or *min al-tafḍīliyya*, but that *al-* and *min* are mutually exclusive. Thus, the grammarians, according to al-Jāḥiẓ, allow *al-afḍalu* and *afḍalu minka*, and *al-aḥsanu* and *aḥsanu min Jaʿfarin*, but not *al-aḥsanu minka*, contrary to the usage in Aʿshā's line.[29] Ibn Jinnī, however, dismisses al-Jāḥiẓ's criticism of the grammarians and denies that *min* in this line is *tafḍīliyya*. He apologetically says that had al-Jāḥiẓ known that this *min* is not like *min* in *aḥsanu minka* or *akramu minka*, he would have refrained from expressing that view. The correct interpretation of the line, according to Ibn Jinnī, is that *min* serves as a circumstantial accusative (*ḥāl*) whose subject is the *tāʾ* in *lasta*. In other words, Aʿshā's first hemistich is similar in construction to *lasta min baynihim bi-l-kathīri l-ḥaṣā* or *lasta fīhim bi-l-akthari ḥaṣan*, both of which are equivalent to a sentence like *wa-mā anta minhum bi-l-ḥasani wajhan*, where *min* is circumstantial and not comparative. In this case, the first hemistich may be translated as follows: "Amongst them, you are not the most copious." But in spite of Ibn Jinnī's apparent courtesy in referring to al-Jāḥiẓ in this matter, he does not fail to show the seriousness of al-Jāḥiẓ's charge against the grammarians. This is evident in the fact that Ibn Jinnī's discussion of this issue is part of his chapter entitled "*Bāb fī l-radd ʿalā man iʿtaqada fasād ʿilal al-naḥwiyyīna li-ḍaʿfihi huwa fī nafsihi ʿan iḥkām al-ʿilal*"[30] (*The refu-*

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prove that *ʿazīf al-jinn* is *dawiyy*, with a single *yāʾ*, and not *dawwiyy*, with a doubled *yāʾ*, as Jāḥiẓ claims. Neither form, however, is the origin of *dawwiyya*, according to Ibn Barrī. Note also that the editor of Ibn Manẓūr's *Lisān* makes the same mistake of not doubling the *wāw* (p. 278, l.10), thus rendering the text inconsistent.

29 Abū l-Fatḥ ʿUthmān Ibn Jinnī, *Al-Khaṣāʾiṣ*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAlī al-Najjār, 3 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, 1952-56), I: 185; cf. III, 234. Ibn Jinnī's two texts are also partially quoted by Baghdādī in *Khizāna* VIII, 253-54.

30 Ibid., I: 184.

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tation of the one who believes that the grammatical causes are corrupt, due to his own failure to master these causes). The seriousness of the charge made against the grammarians by some authors – including al-Jāḥiẓ according to Ibn Jinnī – most probably stems from the fact that it tries to wreck one of the most essential pillars of grammatical theory, that of *ʿilla*, and thus to undermine the rational backbone of grammatical analysis. It is also significant that al-Jāḥiẓ is the only scholar whom Ibn Jinnī mentions by name in this chapter, since all other references are impersonal, as in *qawluhum* (their view), *hādhihi l-ṭāʾifa* (this group [of scholars]), and so forth. Later grammarians who refer to al-Jāḥiẓ's interpretation of Aʿshā's line are equally critical of him. Some of them accuse him of not going beyond the apparent (*ẓāhir*)[31] syntactical relations in the construction under discussion, while others refer to his *wahm*[32] (here, error) in failing to understand the correct meaning of the construction. This serious allegation is suggestive of how sensitive most grammarians were to any challenge to the validity of their interpretations if it undermines a general principle of grammatical analysis. In his criticism, al-Jāḥiẓ seems to have enraged the grammarians by sticking to the more immediate or apparent syntactical relations and hence denying the validity – at least in this case – of a basic grammatical technique, namely, the postulation of an underlying level or structure for the purpose of preserving a grammatical rule[33] (here, the incompatibility of comparative *min* with the definite article). It is not surprising, after all, that Ibn al-ʿAmīd's list of the linguistic branches in which al-Jāḥiẓ excelled[34] does not include morphology (*ṣarf*) or syntax (*naḥw*)!

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The fact that al-Jāḥiẓ criticized some grammarians or that he was at variance with certain interpretations of theirs is, by itself, not sufficient to account for his virtual exclusion from the philological tradition. To be more precise, al-Jāḥiẓ was not a *naḥwī* in the sense which the term has acquired in the tradition, since *naḥw*

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31 Muwaffaq al-Dīn Yaʿīsh b. ʿAlī Ibn Yaʿīsh, *Sharḥ al-Mufaṣṣal*, 10 vols. (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Munīriyya, n.d.), VI: 103 and ʿ Abū Muḥammad Maḥmūd b. Aḥmad al-ʿAynī, *Al-Maqāṣid al-naḥwiyya fī sharḥ shawāhid al-Alfiyya*, [In the margin of Baghdādī's *Khizāna*, 4 vols. (Būlāq, 1299 A.H.)], IV: 40.

32 Jamāl al-Dīn Abū Muḥammad ʿAbdallāh b. Yūsuf Ibn Hishām, *Mughnī l-labīb ʿan kutub al-aʿārīb*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥyī l-Dīn ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd, 2 vols. (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Tijāriyya, 1959), II: 572; cf. ʿAynī, *Maqāṣid* IV, 39.

33 An example of this technique is the underlying structure which the grammarians propose, by inserting *an*, to explain the subjunctive after *fāʾ*. By doing so, they preserve a grammatical principle which stipulates that unspecialized particles, such as *fāʾ*, cannot cause the subjunctive. For a detailed study of this technique in the case of constructions with *fāʾ* and the subjunctive, see Ramzi Baalbaki, "*Bāb al-fāʾ* [*fāʾ* + subjunctive] in Arabic Grammatical Sources," *Arabica* 48 (2001): 186-209, here 187ff. Although the grammarians do not restore a "missing" element in Aʿshā's line, their position is grounded upon an interpretation which similarly proposes an underlying structure different from the construction at face value.

34 See above, p. 92.

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largely refers to the variety of both syntactical (*naḥwī*) and morphological (*ṣarfī*) subjects which Sībawayhi had to a large extent exhausted in his *Kitāb*. As such, al-Jāḥiẓ was not part of the mainstream *naḥwī* tradition. But al-Jāḥiẓ was surely a *lughawī* whose contribution to the realm of philology, as defined at the beginning of this study, has been generally overlooked by the biographers of both the *naḥwiyyūn* and the *lughawiyyūn* as well as by later authors in the fields of *naḥw* and *lugha*. The following sections of this study will try to determine the reasons for the astonishing disregard of al-Jāḥiẓ's contribution to philology by these authors.

The novelty of the philological subjects discussed by al-Jāḥiẓ could theoretically have been considered as complementary to the issues with which al-Khalīl, Sībawayhi, and other grammarians have dealt. That this was not the case prompts one to look into the position of al-Jāḥiẓ vis-à-vis the traditional grammatical theory. Here lies the key to the puzzling question of his exclusion, not only from that tradition, but also from the more general philological tradition. Indeed, there is compelling evidence that al-Jāḥiẓ had in fact challenged some of the most fundamental principles of the *naḥwiyyūn*, resulting in their widespread disregard and lack of acknowledgment of his contribution, even in *lugha*, let alone *naḥw*. The most essential elements of this challenge may be examined from the following three aspects:

1. Case-endings (*iʿrāb*): In several passages,[35] al-Jāḥiẓ expresses the view that, in reporting anecdotal material, *iʿrāb* is appropriate only for the speech of the bedouins (*kalām al-aʿrāb*), but not for the speech of the *mawalladūn* (post-classical speakers) and the *ʿawāmm*[36] or *baladiyyūn* (commoners). The gist of his argument is that *iʿrāb* spoils the anecdotes of the *mawalladūn* and *ʿawāmm* because its introduction is contrary to the funny (*muḍḥik*) and amusing (*mulhin*) nature of these anecdotes. Contrarily, anecdotes of the *aʿrāb* should be reported by mirroring their *iʿrāb* and proper articulation points (*makhārij alfāẓihā*), and by avoiding *laḥn* (solecism; for which see Paragraph 2 below) since it spoils them and changes their nature (*ṣūra*). Obviously, the philological interest of al-Jāḥiẓ extends beyond that of the grammarians' since it embraces the speech of the *muwalladūn* and the *ʿawāmm*. By demonstrating that *iʿrāb* is appropriate in some but not all speech contexts, and that in this regard it is a virtual analogue of *laḥn*, he has largely undermined the deep conviction of the grammarians that *iʿrāb* is the backbone of correct speech. The grammarians, of course, were concerned with the *fuṣḥā* and the reason for the centrality of *iʿrāb* to their system of analysis could not have possibly escaped al-Jāḥiẓ, who acknowledges the relevance of *iʿrāb* to what he calls bedouin speech. The major schism, however, between him and the grammarians in this matter is that he did not accept their emphasis on *iʿrāb* to

35 *Bayān* I: 145-46 and *Ḥayawān* I: 282; III: 39.
36 See *Bayān* I: 137 for his definition of the term *ʿawāmm*.

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the exclusion of speech which does not fully observe its rules. To al-Jāḥiẓ, this has led to a serious imbalance in the grammarians' focus, because their interest in poetry – which is the largest component of their corpus – was totally restricted to material illustrative of *iʿrāb* (*wa-lam ara ghāyat al-naḥwiyyīna illā kull shiʿr fīhi iʿrāb*).[37] Al-Jāḥiẓ's attempt to widen the scope of philology beyond the confines set by the grammarians may be explained as a reaction to this perceived imbalance in their corpus. Furthermore, he does not hesitate to give verbatim accounts of linguistic material which lacks *iʿrāb*. The justification he gives for such accounts distinctly reveals his belief that *iʿrāb* adversely affects some forms of speech, such as the anecdotes of the misers, and that to adhere to it indiscriminately in his *Bukhalāʾ* "makes this kind (of story-telling) obnoxious and removes it from its own sphere" (*li-anna l-iʿrāb yubaghghiḍ hādhā l-kitāb wa-yukhrijuhu ʿan ḥaddihi*).[38] Such verbatim accounts are by no means restricted in al-Jāḥiẓ's works to the speech of the *ʿawāmm*. In fact, he quotes none other than al-Naẓẓām al-Muʿtazilī (d. 231/845), when attacked by a dog, as saying: *in kunta sabuʿ fa-idhhab maʿ al-sibāʿ* [39] (If you are a beast of prey, then join beasts of prey), where *sabuʿ*, with final quiescence (*sukūn*) appears instead of *sabuʿan*. Unavoidably, al-Jāḥiẓ's conception of the role of *iʿrāb* and his tolerance of utterances which lack it did not go well at all with the proponents of post-Sībawayhian grammar and must have contributed to his exclusion from their grammatical discussions as well as from their biographical sources.

2. Solecism (*laḥn*): Although this term is often used by al-Jāḥiẓ as the contrary of proper *iʿrāb*, its range of meanings is much larger that the mere omission of case-endings. In addition to the numerous examples in which some of the most basic rules of *iʿrāb* and syntactic relations are horribly shattered, the *bāb al-laḥn* in al-Jāḥiẓ's *Bayān* abounds with examples from the realms of semantics (e.g., *iftaḥū suyūfakum*, instead of *sullū suyūfakum*,[40] "unsheathe your swords"), phonology (e.g., *Ḍamyāʾ*, instead of *Ẓamyāʾ*,[41] proper noun), and morphology (e.g., *ʿaṣātī*, instead of *ʿaṣāya*,[42] "my rod"). Due to the wide range which *laḥn* covers, to tolerate it would be, from the grammarians' point of view, even more unforgivable than to tolerate one of its many constituents, namely the omission of *iʿrāb*. As far as al-Jāḥiẓ is concerned, there is strong evidence that, in certain contexts, he

37 Ibid., IV: 24.

38 Abū ʿUthmān ʿAmr b. Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-Bukhalāʾ* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.d.), 61. (See English translation by R.B. Serjeant, *Al-Jāḥiẓ: The Book of misers* (Center for Muslim Contributions to Civilization, Reading: Garnet Publishing Limited, 1997), 32.) See also Ḥilmī Khalīl, *Dirāsāt fī l-lisāniyyāt al-taṭbīqiyya* (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿrifa l-Jāmiʿiyya, 2000), 179-80, for a list of twenty quotations, from *Bukhalāʾ*, which do not conform to norms of *fuṣḥā*.

39 *Ḥayawān* I: 281-82.

40 *Bayān* II: 210.

41 Ibid., II: 211. Other examples of a phonological nature are found in Jāḥiẓ's discussion of the various types of lisps and accents; e.g., ibid., I: 70ff.

42 Ibid., II: 219.

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regarded *laḥn* as admissible, or even desirable. Other than anecdotal material referred to in paragraph 1 above, he asserts that *laḥn* is more easily acceptable (*aysar*) if it occurs in the speech of charming maids or pretty young women (*al-jawārī l-ẓirāf ... al-shawābb al-milāḥ*).[43] He also points to the fact that *laḥn* may well be a natural disposition in a speech community (*ʿalā sajiyyat sukkān al-balad*), as in the case with the *ʿawāmm* of Medina, who had no training in *naḥw*. Al-Jāḥiẓ's difference with the grammarians on the issue of *laḥn* is hence twofold: his admission of its prevalence, and his readiness to handle it as a natural phenomenon which deserves study and which can even gain legitimacy. His keen perception of this intricate sociolinguistic question is diametrically opposed to the intolerant approach of the grammarians who could only consider *laḥn* as the antithesis of their grammatical teaching, particularly since *laḥn* is regarded in the grammatical tradition as the major trigger of the early grammatical activity which had as its first priority the combating of *laḥn*.[44] Through his views on such a basic issue as *laḥn*, al-Jāḥiẓ placed himself firmly outside the sphere of the grammarians. It is within this context that we propose to examine the controversy which surrounded his citation of Mālik b. Asmāʾ's line:

manṭiqun ṣāʾibun wa-talḥanu aḥyā/nan
wa-aḥlā l-ḥadīthi mā kāna laḥnā[45]

"(She has) correct speech, but she sometimes commits *laḥn*;
and the sweetest utterance is the one with *laḥn*".

Although al-Jāḥiẓ cites Mālik's line to prove that *laḥn* may be deemed pleasant (*istimlāḥ al-laḥn*), he is reported by ʿAlī b. Yaḥyā al-Munajjim (d. 275/888) to have been convinced later that he misinterpreted the line and that he was not aware of the fact that its correct meaning here is allusion (*taʿrīḍ*; cp. *li-tastur maʿnāhu wa-tuwarrī ʿanhu*).[46] When asked by Ibn al-Munajjim to correct this error, al-Jāḥiẓ

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43 Ibid., I: 146.

44 It should be noted that most of the *riwāyas* which justify early grammatical activity have to do with *laḥn*. These feature prominently in the introductory parts of sources specialized in biographies of grammarians (e.g., Abū l-Ṭayyib, *Marātib* 23 f.; Sīrāfī, *Akhbār* 15f.; Zubaydī, *Ṭabaqāt* 21f.). Moreover, most of the issues which are said to have aroused early grammatical interest are specifically those that are most liable to *laḥn*. Among these are the particles which govern *naṣb* (accusative and/or subjunctive), *raf* (nominative and/or indicative), *khafḍ* (genitive) and *jazm* (jussive), subject and object, admirative constructions and the construct state; see Ramzi Baalbaki, "The Book in the Grammatical Tradition: Development in Content and Methods," in *The Book in the Islamic World*, ed. George N. Atiyeh (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), 123-39, here 124-25.

45 *Bayān* I: 147.

46 Abū l-Faraj ʿAlī b. Ḥusayn al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, ed. ʿAbd al-Sattār Aḥmad Farrāj et al., 25 vols., 8th ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfa, 1990), XVII: 164. Cf. Abū ʿUbaydallāh Muḥammad b. ʿImrān al-Marzubānī, *Muʿjam al-shuʿarāʾ*, ed. ʿAbd al-Sattār Aḥmad Farrāj (Cairo: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyya, 1960), 266; Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. ʿAlī al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādi, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, 14 vols. (Cairo, 1931), XII: 214-15; Yāqūt, *Irshād* V: 2110; Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān* (*lḥn*).

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allegedly did not find it convenient to do so because his *Bayān* was already in circulation. This exchange between al-Jāḥiẓ and Ibn al-Munajjim, which al-Iṣfahānī reports on the authority of the latter's son, Yaḥyā b. ʿAlī (d. 300/912), is extremely doubtful. It should be remembered that al-Jāḥiẓ's citation of Mālik's line is part of a wider context in which he defends the suitability of *laḥn* to certain speech forms and its association with certain groups of speakers including whole speech communities. In fact, the alleged acceptance by al-Jāḥiẓ of Ibn al-Munajjim's interpretation of Mālik's line would be highly incompatible with the whole perspective from which al-Jāḥiẓ approaches the question of *laḥn*, and with his professed tolerance of lack of *iʿrāb* in the right context. The gravity of Mālik's line, from the point of view of those who oppose al-Jāḥiẓ's arguments concerning *laḥn*, is that it goes beyond the tolerance of *laḥn* by claiming that it is characteristic of the most pleasant speech. Ibn al-Munajjim was evidently trying to negate this possibility and to restore the traditional divide between correct and incorrect speech, hence his sweeping statement that no error of speech by anyone can be deemed nice (*wa-l-khaṭaʾ lā yustaḥsan min aḥad*), and his suggestion to al-Jāḥiẓ that he should correct the text. It is significant indeed that Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī (d. 400/1010), according to Yāqūt,[47] defended al-Jāḥiẓ's interpretation of Mālik's line and argued that even if Ibn al-Munajjim's own interpretation were correct, it surely would not disprove al-Jāḥiẓ's. Tawḥīdī's assertion that *laḥn* is regarded favorably (*yustaḥabb*) in the speech of pretty women and of girls (*al-ghawānī wa-l-fatayāt*) due to social factors is fully in line with the views of al-Jāḥiẓ. In short, Ibn al-Munajjim's allegation that al-Jāḥiẓ had second thoughts on Mālik's line, and consequently on the whole issue of *laḥn*, is most probably an attempt to reverse the damage which al-Jāḥiẓ's views on *laḥn* could potentially cause to the very foundations of grammatical theory.

3. Grammatical methods: Under this heading, we propose to bring together a number of al-Jāḥiẓ's views and comments which express his dissatisfaction with the methods of the grammarians, and to examine how his own approach to some of the basic issues of philology may well be a reaction to these methods and, more generally, to the limited scope of traditional grammar.

In his *Kitāb al-Muʿallimīn*, al-Jāḥiẓ discusses the usefulness of *naḥw* for pupils and confidently expresses the view that the study of *naḥw* is beneficial only if does not extend beyond certain prescribed limits. Addressed to teachers, his opening remarks in chapter eight of this work are as follows:

> "As regards grammar, do not encumber your pupil's mind with more than is necessary to save him from serious solecisms and preserve him from the ignorance of the mob when it comes to drafting a letter, reciting verses or giving a description of something. Anything more may prevent him acquiring more appropriate skills and make him neg-

47 Yāqūt, *Irshād* V: 2110.

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lect more valuable accomplishments, such as a knowledge of current proverbs, accepted traditions and praiseworthy poems."[48]

The distinction which al-Jāḥiẓ draws between what is necessary and what is unnecessary (i.e., superfluous) in grammar should be viewed in connection with the dispute between al-Khalīl and the Basran Murji'ite theologian (*mutakallim*) Abū Shamir,[49] as preserved in several sources[50] and as alluded to by al-Jāḥiẓ himself.[51] When asked why anyone should study grammar, al-Khalīl is reported to have made his famous comment, "No one learns the necessary in grammar until he learns the unnecessary." Abū Shamir seizes the opportunity and argues that if what is necessary is conditional upon what is unnecessary, then the latter surely becomes necessary. The sources differ on certain aspects of this dispute, and particularly whether al-Khalīl or his Muʿtazilite interlocutor – sometimes identified as Abū l-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf (d. 235/850) or al-Naẓẓām al-Muʿtazilī (d. 231/845)[52] – won the argument and had the last word. Nevertheless, as Talmon observes, the fact that the dispute "is told by al-Jāḥiẓ and adds to his criticism of Khalīl in other cases ... proves that before the mid-9th century Khalīl was identified by Muʿtazilites as an opponent of their teaching."[53] Al-Jāḥiẓ's criticism of the grammarians and his belittlement of the usefulness of grammar beyond the basics may hence be part of a larger Muʿtazilite tradition. His own contribution to the dispute concerning the essentials and trivia in grammar lies in his attempt to utilize this schism and restrict the teaching of grammar to the essentials. Unlike Abū Shamir who, in order to dumbfound al-Khalīl in an immediate dispute, argued that the unnecessary would become necessary if al-Khalīl's argument was to be held valid, al-Jāḥiẓ shifted the issue away from its purely logical bounds to its practical dimensions and argued forcefully that the study of grammar should be a function of the user's requirements, based on the assumption that the essentials and the trivia are indeed separable.

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48 *Muʿallimīn*, 38. For the English translation, see Pellat, *The Life*, 113.

49 On Abū Shamir, see Joseph van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft in 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra: Eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam* (Berlin / New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1992), II: 174-80. See also Michael G. Carter, "Another Khalīl, Courtier, Teacher, and Sage," in *Early Medieval Arabic: Studies on al-Khalīl Ibn Aḥmad*, ed. Karin C. Ryding. (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1998), 16-43, here 29 and 41, n. 55.

50 See Abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad Ibn Abī ʿAwn, *Al-Ajwiba al-muskita*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Qādir Aḥmad (Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahḍa al-Miṣriyya, 1985), 85; Abū ʿUmar Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi, *Al-ʿIqd al-Farīd*, ed. Aḥmad Amīn et al., 7 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1991), III: 25-26; Iṣfahānī, *Tanbīh* 121f.; Abū ʿUmar Yūsuf b. ʿAbdallāh Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *Bahjat al-majālis wa-uns al-mujālis wa-shaḥdh al-dhāhin wa-l-hājis*, ed. Muḥammad Mursī al-Khawlī, 2 vols. (Cairo: al-Dār al-Miṣriyya li-l-Ta'līf wa-l-Tarjama, 1962), I: 67.

51 *Ḥayawān* I: 37.

52 Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *Bahja* I: 67. Note, however, that 'Allāf and Naẓẓām died more than half a century after Khalīl's death in 175/791.

53 Talmon, *Arabic Grammar*, 64.

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Once the above separability is established, al-Jāḥiẓ swiftly turns to those who "wish to make an exhaustive study of grammar or go beyond the stage of a reasonable knowledge of it" (*yarghab fī bulūgh ghāyatihi wa-mujāwazat al-iqtiṣār fīhi*).[54] He accuses such individuals of lacking both the ambition to learn about important matters and the capacity for complex induction (*al-istinbāṭ li-ghawāmiḍ al-tadabbur*). That this harsh criticism is directed against the grammarians, and not merely those who learn the intricacies of grammar, is saliently supported by his depiction of the ones under attack as having no mastery of anything other than grammar and no means of livelihood without it (*wa-man laysa lahu ḥaẓẓ ghayruhu wa-lā maʿāsh siwāhu*). The latter part of this statement is obviously a collective reference to those who have become "professional grammarians", whereas the former part probably has more subtle connotations since al-Jāḥiẓ, as previously mentioned,[55] frequently alludes to al-Khalīl's incompetence outside the realm of grammar. If this interpretation is correct, we may conclude that al-Jāḥiẓ portrays all grammarians not only as incompetent outside the area of their specialty, but also as a group of scholars the measure of whose usefulness is, by definition, a measure of the essentials versus the trivia in their discipline. With that in mind, and given that grammar, since its early days, had amassed a large number of issues, details, and dialectal variants which could hardly have fulfilled al-Jāḥiẓ's criteria for what is necessary, and in particular the grammarians' attempt to find logical justification for every usage and their keen interest in the purely mental exercises or drill problems known as *masāʾil al-tamrīn*,[56] al-Jāḥiẓ must have had little reason to be convinced of the usefulness of the grammarians' methods beyond the basic rules of correct usage which guard against flagrant solecism.

Of paramount importance to al-Jāḥiẓ in his criticism of the grammarians is the characteristic complexity of their methods. In fact, his distinction between what is necessary and what is superfluous in the teaching of grammar is largely

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54 *Muʿallimīn*, 38. The English translation is in Pellat, *The Life*, 113.

55 See above, p. 94f.

56 A representative type of these drill problems in syntax is the complex process of predication or rhematization (*ikhbār*) which yields, against normal usage, hypothetical sentences of the type *al-ẓānnu anā fīhā Zaydan al-dāru* and *al-laḏī kāna Zaydun abūhu huwa munṭaliqun* (Mubarrad, *Muqtaḍab* III: 96 and 101 respectively; see also Michael G. Carter, "The Use of Proper Names as a Testing Device in Sībawayhi's *Kitāb*," *Historiographia Linguistica* 8, no. 2/3 (1981): 345-56, here 353, and Gideon Goldenberg, "Subject and Predicate in Arab Grammatical Tradition," *Zeitschrift der deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 138 (1988): 39-73, here 67-69.) In morphology, such drills "are not only intended as pedagogical devices to train students and examine their grasp of the concepts involved. More essentially they test the applicability of these concepts through increasingly difficult questions, the answers to which should be in compliance with the theoretically permissible structures of Arabic words and patterns;" see Ramzi Baalbaki, "*Ilḥāq* as a Morphological Tool in Arabic Grammar," *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 4 (2002): 1-25, here 21 (published electronically at http://www.uib.no/jais), and a list of hypothetical morphological formations used by Sībawayhi in Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Khāliq ʿUḍayma, *Fahāris Kitāb Sībawayhi* (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1975), 619-21.

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based on the complexity of the material involved. Although he only briefly refers to *ʿawīṣ al-naḥw*[57] (complex grammar), it is clear that the level of complexity is a major factor, in his view, of what students should be taught. Since he asserts that the need for *ʿawīṣ al-naḥw* never arises, it obviously follows that it characterizes what is not necessary in learning the discipline. In this respect, he concludes, it is as useless as Indian arithmetic, geometry, and complex problems of surveying. Al-Jāḥiẓ, like many of his contemporaries,[58] ascribes the complexity of grammar to the grammarians' methods of analyzing morphological and syntactical material and not to any intrinsic factor in the language itself. His praise of al-Kisāʾī for having written comprehensible and well-elucidated works (*kutub mafhūma ḥasanat al-sharḥ*)[59] is a strong reminder of the fact that many grammar works had become, by the time of al-Jāḥiẓ, hardly comprehensible and thus belonged to the pedagogically useless realm of *ʿawīṣ al-naḥw*. Of equal significance is the fact that it is perfectly possible for the Arabic grammatical corpus to be accessible to the learner if authors decide to simplify their approach and abandon the deliberately complicated techniques which plagued grammatical works at an early stage of their development. Of great interest in this respect is the encounter which al-Jāḥiẓ himself reports that he had with Abū l-Ḥasan al-Akhfash.[60] Al-Jāḥiẓ wondered why al-Akhfash's books were only partially comprehensible and why he gave precedence to what is complex (*ʿawīṣ*) over what is comprehensible (*mafhūm*). The response of al-Akhfash, as reported by al-Jāḥiẓ, is most unexpected. Far from dispelling this accusation, al-Akhfash defended his deliberate and profitable method of authorship which ensures that people would feel the need for his expertise. As for the comprehensible parts of his books, he admits that their inclusion is merely a snare intended to make people experience a sweetness (*ḥalāwa*) which will urge them to seek it again, but this time through the author's own elucidation of what was previously incomprehensible.

The above criticism of the grammarians notwithstanding, one can argue that the schism which developed between al-Jāḥiẓ and scholars of the grammatical tradition is mainly due to what he must have considered to be their shortcomings in the study of their discipline. His valuable, albeit unsystematic, study of phonological, morphological and syntactical/stylistic issues has completely shifted the focus away from the parameters prescribed by the grammarians, and to areas upon which they have hardly touched. By concentrating on areas that are both important and largely unexplored, he has indirectly exposed the defi-

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57 *Muʿallimīn*, 38-39.

58 A striking example is Rufayʿ b. Salama who, as early as the 2nd/8th century, composed a poem to ridicule the methods of the grammarians and to complain about their complexities in every topic (*bi-ṭūli l-masāʾili fī kulli fann*). He particularly criticizes the restoration of *an* before subjunctive verbs preceded by *wāw* or *fāʾ*; see Sīrāfī, *Akhbār*, 77-78 and Qifṭī, *Inbāh* II: 5-6, and cf. Baalbaki, *Bāb al-fāʾ*, 192.

59 Qifṭī, *Inbāh* II: 272.

60 *Ḥayawān* I: 92.

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ciencies of grammatical study. The following points try to identify the fields in which al-Jāḥiẓ departed from the traditional methods of grammatical enquiry and introduced new perspectives which are significantly different from those adopted by the grammarians:

a. The grammarians were little interested in phonetics, and apart from Sībawayhi's brief section on the points of articulation of the consonants,[61] they were not concerned with "changes in words that were completely independent of morphology."[62] As far as their study of phonology is concerned, it was part of their study of morphology and thus was restricted to the phonological processes which had direct bearing on morphology. Al-Jāḥiẓ, on the other hand, was interested primarily in sound (*ṣawt*) as the first of five means of communication (see Section c below), and alluded to its acoustic and articulatory aspects.[63] His most significant contribution to the study of speech processes, however, is his lengthy discussion of speech defects, particularly lisping (*luthgha*),[64] and his investigation of the effects of teeth and tongue deformities on the nature of the sounds produced.[65] At the social level, furthermore, he tried to identify the different accents (*lukna*)[66] which phonetically characterize various social and ethnic groups. Al-Jāḥiẓ pioneered these topics which were hitherto alien to the grammarians, but which remained excluded from the later grammatical tradition as well.[67]

b. At the level of morphology (*ṣarf*), the various topics which preoccupied the grammarians up to the time of al-Jāḥiẓ – as represented, for example, in the book of *Taṣrīf* by al-Māzinī (d. 249/863) – were of very little concern to him. As such, he certainly can lay no claim to any contribution in this line of linguistic enquiry. Moreover, his views on the essential question of the relationship between morphology and the two other major areas of linguistic enquiry – phonology and syntax – are very much out of line with traditional grammar. It may

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61 Abū Bishr ʿAmr b. ʿUthmān Sībawayhi, *Al-Kitāb*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn, 5 vols. (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-ʿĀmma, 1977), IV: 431f. See also the introduction of Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī, *Kitāb al-ʿAyn*, ed. Mahdī al-Makhzūmī & Ibrāhīm al-Sāmarrā'ī, 8 vols. (Baghdad: Dār al-Rashīd, 1980-85) I: 47f.

62 Kees Versteegh, *Landmarks in Linguistic Thought III: The Arabic Linguistic Tradition* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 43.

63 See *Ḥayawān* III: 316 and al-Jāḥiẓ, *Risāla fī l-nābita,* in *Rasā'il al-Jāḥiẓ*, II: 7-23, here 19; cf. Khalīl, *Dirāsāt*, 163f.

64 *Bayān* I: 15 f.; 34f. See also I: 39-40 for other types of speech defects, and cf. al-Shāhid al-Būshīkhī, *Muṣṭalaḥāt naqdiyya wa-balāghiyya fī Kitāb al-Bayān wa-l-tabayyun li-l-Jāḥiẓ* (Beirut: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadīda, 1982) under the entries *ḥubsa, ḥukla, ʿajz* and *ʿujma.*

65 *Bayān* I: 57f.; 71f.

66 Ibid., I: 40; 69; 71; II: 213.

67 It is interesting to note the close resemblance between some of Jāḥiẓ's comments on acoustics and speech defects and the tenth century A.D. writings of *Ikhwān al-ṣafā'*. See especially the chapter on the difference between *ṣawt* and *kalām* in the seventeenth epistle of *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-ṣafā' wa-khullān al-wafā'*, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1957) III, 114; 118-19; cf. Versteegh, *Landmarks*, 89; 93-94). The terms *muqaṭṭaʿ* and *muʾallaf* are also used in *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-ṣafā'* III: 114 and *Ḥayawān* VII: 57.

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be argued that al-Jāḥiẓ took issue with the order in which the grammarians arranged their material. As in Sībawayhi's *Kitāb*, grammar books typically start with syntactic issues, followed by derivational morphology with phonology as its ancillary, and very briefly touch upon phonetics. Although al-Jāḥiẓ, as far as we are able to determine, does not directly comment on this arrangement, his own presentation of the constituents of speech (*kalām*) shows that it is diametrically opposed to the grammatical tradition. In a remarkable observation on these constituents, al-Jāḥiẓ proposes three processes, namely *ṣawt* (sound), *taqṭīʿ* (articulation) and *taʾlīf* (synthesis).[68] The phonetic aspect is therefore the first element of *kalām*, and the two other processes represent the formation of words (hence morphology) by segments which probably represent syllables, and ultimately the synthesis of words (hence syntax), which yields intelligible *kalām* that can then be identified as *mawzūn* (poetry) or *manthūr* (prose). Unquestionably, the grammarians' arrangement of the three constituents of *kalām* shatters the stages which al-Jāḥiẓ considers to be the logical sequence upon which the whole concept of *lafẓ* (utterance) – which is the first and foremost of the five means of communication – is predicated in order to achieve meaning.

c. The grammarians were largely preoccupied with the formal aspects of structure, particularly the syntactic relations between the different parts of an utterance. Their elaborate theory of regimen, according to which operants cause various formal changes (e.g., in case-endings), shifted their attention away from the study of meaning, not only as a function of syntactic order, but also as a process which transcends speech and involves the context of situation and body semantics. It was primarily al-Jurjānī (d. 471/1078) who challenged the grammarians' lack of concern for meaning and demonstrated that the study of meaning belongs to the domain of *naẓm*.[69] In many ways, al-Jāḥiẓ is a forerunner of al-Jurjānī in criticizing the grammarians' emphasis on formal considerations at the expense of studying meaning. As previously mentioned,[70] he blames the grammarians for their interest in verse solely from the limited perspective of *iʿrāb*, that is, merely from the formal point of view, rather than from the viewpoint of meaning. In contrast, he highlights the centrality of meaning by proposing the concept of *bayān*, which is a collective term for anything which discloses meaning (*ism jāmiʿ li-kull shayʾ kashafa laka qināʿ al-maʿnā*).[71] Under this term, he distinguishes between

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68 *Bayān* I: 79. Note that *taʾlīf* is often used by Jāḥiẓ as a synonym for *naẓm* (e.g., *Bayān* I: 383; IV: 30), and hence belongs to the realm of syntax.

69 For a detailed study of Jurjānī's position vis-à-vis the grammarians, see Ramzi Baalbaki, "The Relation Between *naẓm* and *balāġa*: A Comparative Study of the Methods of Sībawayhi and Ǧurǧānī," *Zeitschrift für arabische Linguistik* 11 (1983): 7-23.

70 See above, p. 95.

71 *Bayān* I: 76. For more on Jāḥiẓ's theory of *bayān* and its relation to *balāgha*, see Frédérique Soudan, "L'Éloquence arabe aux premiers temps de l'Islam d'aprés le *Kitāb al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn* d'al-Jāḥiẓ," *Annales Islamologiques* 26 (1992): 19-46. See also D.E. Kouloughli, "A propos de *lafẓ* et *maʿnā*," *Bulletin d'études orientales* 35 (1985): 43-63, for the interrelatedness

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five different types of signification (*aṣnāf al-dalālāt*), namely, *lafẓ* (utterance), *ishāra* (gesture), *ʿaqd* (computation), *khaṭṭ* (writing), and *niṣba* (posture, in inanimate beings).[72] Most interesting in al-Jāḥiẓ's discussion of *bayān* is the argument that *lafẓ* and *ishāra* go hand in hand (*wa-l-ishāra wa-l-lafẓ sharīkāni*),[73] and that were it not for *ishāra* – which includes bodily gestures of the hands, head, eyes, eyebrows, shoulders, and so forth, as well as gestures which make use of objects such as garments, swords, whips, and so forth – interlocutors would not be able to communicate the minutest details of meaning (*maʿnā khāṣṣ al-khāṣṣ*). This aspect of *ishāra*, which al-Jāḥiẓ incorporates into the core of the communication process, is totally absent from traditional grammar. Its introduction by al-Jāḥiẓ as a crucial factor in expressing intelligible meaning is an attempt to transcend a basic limitation of the grammarians, namely their study of meaning solely through the medium of *lafẓ*, and then only as a subsidiary to formal considerations which make up the bulk of their theory. The title which al-Jāḥiẓ chose for his book, *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, and his comment that the chapter on *bayān* should have been placed in the forefront of the book were it not for technical reasons,[74] clearly show the importance which he attaches to the study of *bayān* and his implicit dissatisfaction with the grammarians' record in this regard.

d. At a more general level, al-Jāḥiẓ ridicules the grammarians for having mostly ended up as "tutors of adults and teachers of youngsters" (*la-wajadta aktharahum muʾaddib kibār wa-muʿallim ṣighār*).[75] As a group, they share this fate with the prosodists (*ʿarūḍiyyūn*), specialists in statutory portions (*faraḍiyyūn*), arithmeticians (*ḥisābiyyūn*), and calligraphers (*khaṭṭāṭūn*), all of whom rarely become narrators (*ruwāt*), judges (*quḍāt*), or wise men (*ḥukamāʾ*), let alone governors (*wulāt*) and leaders (*ruʾasāʾ*). Of these groups under attack, al-Jāḥiẓ specifically has the grammarians in mind when he compares their level as teachers with the level attained by prominent writers, poets, men of letters, orators, and masters of style. In another passage, al-Jāḥiẓ quotes a certain Ibn ʿAttāb as making a strikingly similar comparison in which he mentions all of the above five groups and in almost the same arrangement as in the previous text (*yākūn al-rajul naḥwiyyan, ʿarūḍiyyan, wa-qassāman faraḍiyyan, wa-ḥasan al-kitāb, jayyid al-ḥisāb*).[76] Someone who is knowledgeable in all this and more is said to accept gladly teaching children for sixty dirhams, whereas someone who is merely proficient in *bayān* or in interpretation of meaning (*ḥasan al-bayān ḥasan al-takhrīj li-l-maʿānī*) would not accept even a thousand dirhams. The grammarians are again singled out here

between *lafẓ* and *maʿnā* according to Jāḥiẓ, and al-Būshīkhī, *Muṣṭalaḥāt*, 112-38, for various terms derived from the root (*ḥyn*) in *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*.

72 *Bayān* I: 76-83, and *Ḥayawān* I: 35; 44-46.

73 Ibid., I: 78.

74 Ibid., I: 76.

75 *Muʿallimīn*, 31.

76 *Bayān* I: 403; cf. Yāqūt, *Irshād* I: 32. Note that *kitāb* in the quoted text means "writing" and the reference is hence to the calligraphers.

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through a rather cruel comparison: a grammarian who lacks *imtāᶜ* (ability to engage and entertain) is like a carpenter who may well be the most skillful man there is, but who, after being summoned to install a door, is asked to leave as soon as he finishes his job, whereas the one who possesses *imtāᶜ* is sought after at all times. Evidently, the close proximity between Ibn ᶜAttāb's text and that of al-Jāḥiẓ leaves no doubt that the latter subscribes to the views of the former concerning the grammarians' lack of *imtāᶜ*.

Apart from the particular issues which were discussed above and which relate to phonology, morphology, *laḥn*, *iᶜrāb*, and so forth, it is most likely that al-Jāḥiẓ's remarks about the grammarians and their failure to stand comparison with proficient writers, orators, and so forth – or, in Ibn ᶜAttāb's words, their want of *imtāᶜ* – are due to their perceived inability to widen the scope of their discipline and show its relevance within a broader social context. Just like a carpenter who has mastered the skills pertaining to carpentry, but who is unable to contribute to anything that lies beyond the confines of his profession, the grammarians, according to al-Jāḥiẓ, were unable to see the wider implications of philological study. The novel subjects of inquiry which al-Jāḥiẓ introduced to philological study may be seen, in a wider context, as an attempt at rectifying the work of the grammarians. Nowhere is this more evident than in his ambitious attempt to probe the social and human dimensions of language. In reaction to the total silence of the grammarians at these two levels, he proposed *bayān* as the focal point of linguistic enquiry and strived to demonstrate how its study can promote our appreciation of the relationship between language and society. Subjects such as language variety due to social class[77] and profession,[78] the role of the ethnic background in speech,[79] the mutual influence between native and regional dialects,[80] what characterizes usage by native speakers,[81] and so forth are most likely to represent what he considers to be the source of *imtāᶜ* which he missed in traditional grammar. Furthermore, his approach to *bayān* as a universal issue applicable to Arabic and other languages, as well as his various hints at the universal aspects of language,[82] are meant to bring into philological study a di-

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77 *Bayān* I: 144f. For further details on this and other sociolinguistic aspects in Jāḥiẓ's work, see Khalīl, *Dirāsāt*, 169f.

78 See his *risāla* entitled *Risāla fī ṣināᶜāt al-quwwād*, in *Rasāʾil al-Jāḥiẓ*, I: 379-93, in which he shows how people of different professions use their own jargon even in an unrelated context such as love poetry. Cf. also Jāḥiẓ's statement about the relationship between a profession and its jargon (*wa-li-kull ṣināᶜa alfāẓ...*) in *Ḥayawān* III: 368. See also Rashīda ᶜAbd al-Ḥamīd Aḥmad al-Laqānī, *Alfāẓ al-ḥayāt al-ijtimāᶜiyya fī adab al-Jāḥiẓ* (Riyad: Jāmiᶜat al-Malik Saᶜūd, 1993), 279f.

79 *Bayān*, I: 40; 69f.; 384.

80 Ibid., I: 18-20.

81 Ibid., I: 145; 162; II: 7.

82 Jāḥiẓ proposes his theory of *bayān* without reference to Arabic or any other specific language, and his discussion of the five means of communication clearly shows that they have universal application. In his discussion of *niṣba* (posture), for example, he explains

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mension that can transcend its restriction to the study of a particular language and thus – to use Ibn ʿAttāb's metaphor – elevate the grammarian from a level comparable to that of a carpenter to a qualitatively different level marked by *imtāʿ*, so that he becomes "sought after at all times."

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that a thing can indicate a significant meaning even if it is silent, and that statements to this effect are widespread in all languages (*wa-hādhā l-qawl shāʾiʿ fī jamīʿ al-lughāt; Bayān* I: 82). Other examples of significant comments of his are that *faṣāḥa* (eloquence) can be manifest in Fārisiyyā, Hindiyya or Rūmiyya, and that the barbarousness (*ṭamṭama*) of the Rūmī is as unintelligible to the ʿArabī as is the *bayān* of the ʿArabī to the Rūmī (*Ḥayawān* I: 32); that God has enabled man to produce all the sounds from the various points of articulation used by all nations (*Bayān* I: 69-70); and that /m/ and /b/ are the first two sounds that children universally produce (*awwal mā yatahayyaʾ fī afwāh al-atfāl*), as in the words *māmā* and *bābā* (ibid., I: 62).

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The Impact of al-Jāḥiẓ on the Genesis of the *Maqāma* Genre

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The development of Arabic prose as literary art form in the first half of the 3rd century of *hijra* is associated, to a large extent, with the pioneering accomplishments of Abū ʿUthmān ʿAmr b. Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255). Following the achievements of his two prominent predecessors, ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd al-Kātib (d. 132) and Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ (d. 142), al-Jāḥiẓ succeeded in establishing, stylistically and thematically, a new and progressive style in Arabic prose which removed many of the barriers that distanced literature from the common people. In his numerous works, al-Jāḥiẓ was able to accurately portray Iraqi society in the first century of the ʿAbbasid era. The innovative and diversified nature of al-Jāḥiẓ's literary accomplishments paved the way for his successors in the following two centuries to introduce further innovations into their Arabic prose.[1]

A few decades after the death of al-Jāḥiẓ, when the political and social structure of the ʿAbbasid caliphate was undergoing significant changes, a vizier of the Buyids in Shiraz, Abū al-Faḍl Muḥammad Ibn al-ʿAmīd (d. 360), reknowned as "the latter al-Jāḥiẓ",[2] contributed to the emergence of a new style in classical Arabic prose which is characterized as excessively artistic and sophisticated in form and diction. It may be suggested, therefore, that by the 4th century two major literary 'schools' of Arabic prose with distinct, but not disconnected characteristics that pertain to two different cultural and social zones, were already in existence in the eastern parts of the Islamic Empire; one associated with al-Jāḥiẓ and the other with Ibn al-ʿAmīd.

Al-Hamadhānī – Inspiration and Aspiration

An outstanding figure in the annals of Arabic literature, whose achievement reflects the stylistics of Ibn al-ʿAmīd's literary trend, was Badīʿ al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī (d. 398), who is acclaimed as the real founder of the *maqāma* genre. Al-Hamadhānī's *Maqāmāt*, nevertheless, was the culmination of a process of literary evolution that is indebted, to a large extent, to the pioneering role of al-Jāḥiẓ for introducing what can be termed as "folk literature" in the form of an-

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1 For a detailed study of the stylistics of al-Jāḥiẓ, see Shawqī Ḍayf, *al-Fann wa-madhāhibuhu fī al-nathr al-ʿarabī* (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1965), 160–177.

2 Abū Manṣūr al-Thaʿālibī, *Yatīmat al-dahr fī maḥāsin ahl al-ʿaṣr*, ed. Mufīd Muḥammad Qamīḥa (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1983), III: 183.

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ecdotes where humorous, absurd and even trivial themes are often used as a witty framework for a serious content.

In the annals of Arabic literature one of al-Jāḥiẓ's significant contributions lies in his promoting Arabic prose to a position that brought it close to the prestigious rank which poetry had for so long occupied in the Arabic literary tradition. It can be assumed that just as al-Jāḥiẓ was, at that stage of the development of Arabic literature in the eastern parts of the Caliphate, a source of inspiration for contemporary and later writers, he was also an object of aspiration by many men of letters. Thus, the name 'Jāḥiẓ' itself became an honorary designation for a perfect litterateur.

Like many writers of his time and society, al-Hamadhānī was of course inspired by al-Jāḥiẓ, and also aspired to reach his rank among writers. Although he was never given the title 'Jāḥiẓ' like Ibn al-ʿAmīd, al-Hamadhānī seems to have considered himself a 'Jāḥiẓ' of his own time. This can be concluded from a statement in one of his *maqāmas* where he says: "Every work hath its men, every situation its saying, every house its occupants and every age its Jāḥiẓ."[3] In view of al-Hamadhānī's proud and arrogant character, it is very likely that he did not consider any of his counterparts deserving of being called the "Jāḥiẓ" of his own age. If this is granted as al-Hamadhānī's true conviction, it is natural to assume that al-Jāḥiẓ had become a model for him, and that he aspired, through his literary output, to equate or match al-Jāḥiẓ's Arabic prose. He tried to achieve this objective while maintaining the essential literary standards upheld by the advocates of the trend of Ibn al-ʿAmīd, which were adopted by the majority of men of letters in the Iranian courts frequented by al-Hamadhānī.

Stylistic Impact

Al-Hamadhānī is categorized, as noted above, among the adherents of the literary trend of Ibn al-ʿAmīd, which differs in many stylistic respects from that of al-Jāḥiẓ. This may explain why, in the *Maqāma* of al-Jahiz, al-Hamadhānī criticizes several stylistic aspects of al-Jāḥiẓ's prose.[4] Abū al-Fatḥ al-Iskandarī, the hero of the *Maqāmāt* and al-Hamadhānī's mouthpiece, claims that "Jāḥiẓ limps in one

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3 Al-Hamadhānī, *Maqāmāt*, trans. William Joseph Prendergast (London, 1973), 72.

4 In his analytical article on the *Maqāma* of al-Jāḥiẓ, M. S. Omri notes the following: "Close reading of the text [of the *Maqāma* of al-Jāḥiẓ] suggests that al-Hamadhānī's relationship to his predecessor [i.e., al-Jāḥiẓ] is more complex and more playful than previously understood. It reveals an elaborate narrative scheme by means of which al-Hamadhānī simultaneously sets himself off from his character, al-Iskandarī, and his predecessor, al-Jāḥiẓ. Al-Jāḥiẓ is not 'discredited' on the basis of a sound theory of rhetoric, but by means of an artful narrative that implicitly situates itself within al- Jāḥiẓ's legacy even as it explicitly denigrates it." (Mohamed-Salah Omri, "'There is a Jāḥiẓ for Every Age': narrative construction and intertextuality in al-Hamadhānī's *Maqāmāt*", *Arabic and Middle Eastern Literatures* 1 (1998): 31.

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department of rhetoric and halts in the other".[5] Al-Iskandarī proceeds to elaborate on this judgment by saying that the truly eloquent man is the one "whose poetry does not detract from his prose and whose prose is not ashamed of his verse".[6] This definition of the truly eloquent litterateur reflects the viewpoint of Ibn al-ᶜAmīd's followers who combined, in their literary careers, verse and prose. This was, indeed, the first step towards demolishing the barriers between poetry and prose, and it could not have happened, of course, if al-Jāḥiẓ had not paved the way for this development in Arabic literature.

Before al-Hamadhānī's *Maqāmāt*, no work in Arabic literature had ever been composed of prose and poetry in an interwoven manner by a single author. This style may be regarded as a peculiar feature of the *maqāma* genre. Even al-Hamadhānī himself did not apply this theory to his letters and set it aside as a distinctive aspect of his *Maqāmāt*. *The Maqāma of Exhortation* is the most illustrative in this respect,[7] where al-Iskandarī, playing the role of a preacher, gives a sermon in verse and prose in an intersecting form, while maintaining a relative balance between the number of verses and the number of sentences in the interposing prose. This novel verse-prose style of the *maqāma* genre is missing in the works of al-Jāḥiẓ. The works of al-Jāḥiẓ, of course, do not lack verse; nevertheless, they are not his own composition.

Another difference between the literary performance of al-Jāḥiẓ and that of Badīᶜ al-Zamān is the fact that the stories narrated in the *Maqāmāt* are mere fiction and are intended to be received as such, whereas the anecdotes composed by al-Jāḥiẓ are presented as true stories, and the author himself wants his readers to consider them as factual. Unlike al-Hamadhānī, al-Jāḥiẓ never intends to present his stories as fiction, but tries hard to give the impression to his readers that all the events and characters in his narratives are real, although many of those narratives may have been fictional.

In addition to the above two points of variance between the two writers, the prose of al-Jāḥiẓ usually does not contain any rhyme, while rhyme constitutes a major element in the composition of the *maqāma*. This suggests that, from a formative perspective, al-Hamadhānī did not follow the style of al-Jāḥiẓ in the composition of anecdotal literature.

Alongside the aforementioned criticism of al-Jāḥiẓ's shortcoming in the composition of verse, al-Iskandarī, in regard to his prose, shows no reservation in expressing his criticism of al-Jāḥiẓ's selection of language in his composition. These defects in al-Jāḥiẓ's prose, according to al-Iskandarī, consist of "far-fetched allusions, a paucity of metaphors and simple expressions. He is tied down to the simple language he uses, and avoids and shirks difficult words."[8] Al-Iskandarī

5 Al-Hamadhānī, *Maqāmāt*, 72.
6 Ibid., 72.
7 Ibid., 104-110.
8 Ibid., 72.

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pursues his argument by asking ʿĪsā: "Have you ever heard of a rhetorical expression of his or of any recondite words?"[9]

In the above statement, al-Hamadhānī is referring to several rhetorical features which he regards as defects, and which, according to al-Hamadhānī, expressing himself through al-Iskandarī, exist in the prose of al-Jāḥiẓ.[10] This is due to the fact that the over-ornamented Arabic prose that evolved in Iranian domains in al-Hamadhānī's age considered simplicity as a flaw or an artistic frailty. It can be suggested that the reason behind this phenomenon was the confinement of Arabic literature in Iran within the intelligentsia while the rank and file had no knowledge of Arabic. Thus, the Arabic literature of Iran was not initially addressed to them. That is why the literature of al-Hamadhānī belongs to what is described as "Court Literature". Consequently, the use of intricate and complicated forms of speech, which befitted the intellectual pride of learned men and officials, was increasingly appreciated by men of letters. In other words, recipients of al-Jāḥiẓ's prose were completely different from those of al-Hamadhānī. In al-Jāḥiẓ's case, they were primarily the Arabic-speaking rank and file of Iraq, whereas the audience of al-Hamadhānī was the learned men of Iran. This fact was decisive in directing the patterns of speech by the two authors under consideration.

It may be suggested that al-Hamadhānī, by criticizing the language and style of al-Jāḥiẓ, was indirectly, or ironically, presenting and defending the literary values of the school of Ibn al-ʿAmīd.[11] It is possible also that al-Hamadhānī was

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9 Ibid., 72.

10 J. Monroe interprets this criticism by al-Hamadhānī of the style of al-Jāḥiẓ in a way that implies the opposite of what al-Iskandarī actually says. Monroe states: "In his *Rasāʾil* al-Hamadhānī speaks with admiration of his illustrious predecessor, and even cites an anecdote from the latter's *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*. In contrast, in the *Maqāma* of al-Jāḥiẓ, al-Iskandari succeeds in convincing his foolish listeners that al-Jāḥiẓ was a second-rate writer because he composed no poetry, and employed starkly plain diction in his prose – as though we were to condemn Shakespeare for having failed to try his hand at the novel, or Cervantes for not writing good poetry. As one might expect, after impressing his naïve audience with the 'profundity' of his totally anachronistic literary opinions, the rogue, who is initially introduced as a glutton, manages to capitalize on the situation by taking up a collection among them. Thus, once again, the views defended by the author in his private correspondence are diametrically opposed to those espoused by the rogue in the *Maqāmāt*. This in turn suggests that the modern authors quoted above seem to be unaware of the function of *point-of-view* as a literary technique in fiction, and consequently to confuse the opinions expressed by a literary character with those of the author. Such confusion can, of course, only lead to serious distortions in the interpretation of a literary work." James T. Monroe, *The Art of Badīʿ az-Zamān al-Hamadhānī as Picaresque Narrative* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1983), 91–2.

11 The major aspects of what may be called Ibn al-ʿAmīd's prose style can be summarized in the following seven features: adherence to rhyme, rhythmic balance (*muwāzana*), extensive use of figures of speech (*badīʿ*), synonymity and prolixity (*al-tarāduf wal-iṭnāb*), making use of historical, linguistic and scientific references, adaptation and inclusion (*al-iqtibās wal-taḍmīn*), and innovation in openings of letters (*khuṭba*). Cf. ʿUmar Farrūkh, *Al-Rasāʾil wal-*

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trying to claim that, unlike other eminent literary figures of his age, he was not indebted to al- Jāḥiẓ. Whatever the case may have been, al-Hamadhānī, merely by virtue of highlighting his critique of al-Jāḥiẓ, unconsciously disclosed that he could not escape the 'ghost' which haunted writers for several centuries, whether he was being genuine in his criticism or ironical.[12]

Thematic Impact

Turning to the themes of al-Jāḥiẓ's anecdotal works and al-Hamadhānī's *Maqāmāt*, a comparative study between what survived from the popular anecdotes of al-Jāḥiẓ on men of wiles and al-Hamadhānī's stories about the wiles of al-Iskandarī, strongly suggests that the roots of the *Maqāmāt* lie in the popular writings of al-Jāḥiẓ, who was the first writer in the history of Arabic literature to compose humorous and entertaining literature portraying the life and practices of such social groups as thieves, vagabond mendicants and misers.[13] His three works, *Kitāb al-bukhalāʾ* (The Book of Misers),[14] *Ḥiyal al-mukaddīn*[15] (*The Wiles of Mendicants*) and *Ḥiyal al-luṣūṣ*[16] (*The Wiles of Thieves*) deal with such themes. It is believed that "these texts could be considered forerunners of the *maqāma* and of *Ḥikāyat Abī al-Qāsim* by Abū al-Muṭahhar al-Azdī, and bear an affinity to the later genre of the *qaṣīda sāsāniyya*."[17]

Maqāmāt. Beirut, 1950: 18–9. Of course, these features existed before Ibn al-ʿAmīd, but what distinguished the writings that belonged to this trend was the intensity in which the aforementioned features were applied. There were other minor decorative elements that distinguished one author from another.

12 A similar attack on al-Jāḥiẓ was made by Abū Jaʿfar al-Iskāfī, the founder of the Iskāfiyya Muʿtazilite sect. In *Naqd al-ʿUthmāniyya*, his refutation of al-Jāḥiẓ's *Kitāb al-ʿUthmāniyya*, al-Iskāfī says: "Making claims is easy, especially for someone like Jāḥiẓ ... His concepts are insignificant, his utterance is nonsense, his topics are mere cooing, and his speech is jokes and distraction. He says one thing and its opposite... He has no admonisher in his own self, and there is no existing limit for his false claims." ʿIzziddīn al-Madāʾinī Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāgha* (Beirut: Dar al-Andalus [facsimile edition], [n.d.]), III: 276.

13 Cf. Ḥasan al-Sandūbī, *Adab al-Jāḥiẓ* (Cairo, 1931), 200; Mārūn ʿAbbūd, "Badīʿ al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī", in *The Complete Works* (Beirut, 1975), IX: 493; Victor al-Kik, *Badīʿāt al-Zamān* (Beirut, 1961), 55.

14 In this study, the *Bukhalāʾ* edition of Ṭāhā al-Ḥājirī (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1981) is used for references to the work. For the English translation of the work, see Abū ʿUthmān al-Jāḥiẓ, *The Book of Misers: A Translation of al-Bukhalāʾ*, trans. Robert Bertram Serjeant (Centre for Muslim Contribution to Civilization, UK, 1997).

15 Al-Jāḥiẓ mentions this book in *Kitāb al-burṣān wal-ʿurjān wal-ʿumyān wal-ḥūlān*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Harūn (Baghdad: Dār al-Rashīd, 1982), 382.

16 Al-Jāḥiẓ mentions this book in *al-Ḥayawān*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Harūn (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1996), I: 3.

17 Charles Pellat, "Jāḥiẓ" in *ʿAbbasid Belles-Lettres*, ed. Julia Ashtiany et al. (Cambridge University Press, 1990), 91. Cf. Clifford Edmund Bosworth: *The Mediaeval Islamic Underworld*, (Leiden, 1976), I: 20.

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(A) Al-Jāḥiẓ's Anecdote of the mukaddī *Sheikh*

In his book *al-Maḥāsin wal-masāwi'*, Ibrāhīm al-Bayhaqī (d. 320) quotes an anecdote about a *mukaddī* (mendicant) that he attributes to al-Jāḥiẓ.[18] This is followed by an elaboration of the categories and deeds of beggars.[19] Many of the terms mentioned in this latter part of *al-Maḥāsin* are found in some of the works of al-Jāḥiẓ. This suggests that al-Bayhaqī gleaned this part from one or more of al-Jāḥiẓ's works. Most probably, the anecdote in *al-Maḥāsin* is quoted from al-Jāḥiẓ's lost work *Ḥiyal al-mukaddīn*.

In the anecdote, as found in al-Bayhaqī's *al-Maḥāsin*, al-Jāḥiẓ narrates that he had heard of a sheikh of mendicants who met a mendicant lad who was still a novice in the profession of *kudya*. The lad curses his profession and expresses his dissatisfaction with it. The sheikh responds angrily and explains that the profession of a mendicant is a profitable one, and narrates his personal experience to the lad. The sheikh tells a story about himself when he once preached to a group of people, and introduced himself as one of the heroes of Islam who was captured by the infidels, but finally succeeded in escaping from captivity. Then the sheikh asked the congregation to assist him with a donation to aid him in returning to his homeland. The congregation that was listening to his eloquent speech responded immediately by donating to him more than a hundred *dirhams*. When the lad heard the story, he rose, kissed the head of the sheikh and said: "I swear by God that you are truly the teacher of goodness. May God bless you and your brothers!"

The structure and theme of the above anecdote, which is attributed to al-Jāḥiẓ, are almost identical to the typical Hamadhānian *maqāmas* of *kudya*. The verbal ornamentations and the pattern of narratology clearly fall short of the *Maqāmāt*. Thus, it is noteworthy that, in the entire anecdote, there is no more than one single rhymed sentence, and this is, of course, a major variance from the stylistic nature of the *maqāma* genre, which concentrates on maintaining rhyme throughout.[20]

What is attributed to al-Jāḥiẓ in *al-Maḥāsin* suggests that he was the earliest writer in Arabic to compose anecdotes which, thematically speaking, resemble the *maqāma* genre in the Hamadhānian pattern and which were defined by later biographers as *maqāmas* on *kudya*.[21] In other words, the motif of *kudya* in Arabic

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18 Ibrāhīm al-Bayhaqī, *al-Maḥāsin wal-Masāwi'* (Beirut: Dār Bayrūt, 1979), 580–81.

19 Ibid., 582–584.

20 The similarities between the anecdote attributed to al-Jāḥiẓ in *al-Maḥāsin* and some parts of the *Maqāmāt* have been studied and analyzed by John N. Mattock in his article "The Early History of the *Maqāma*," *Journal of Arabic Literature* XV (1984): 1–18, and also by Alfred Beeston, "The Genesis of the *Maqāmāt* Genre," *Journal of Arabic Literature* II (1971): 8.

21 See Thaʿālibī, *Yatīmat al-dahr*, IV: 294 and Abū Isḥāq al-Ḥusārī, *Zahr al-ādāb wa-thamar al-albāb*, ed. Zakī Mubārak (Cairo: Al-Maktaba al-tijāriyya, 1925), I: 235.

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literature can be attributed to al-Jāḥiẓ as the pioneering author of this theme, rather than to al-Hamadhānī or any of his contemporaries.

(B) The Story of Khālid b. Yazīd in al-Bukhalāʾ

Another example of resemblance between a work by al-Jāḥiẓ and al-Hamadhani's *Maqāmāt*, in general, is *ḥadīth Khālid bin Yazīd* in *Kitāb al-bukhalāʾ*.[22] M. ʿAbbūd notes that al-Jāḥiẓ, in the *ḥadīth*, was the first writer to mention anecdotes on mendicants.[23] He argues that al-Hamadhānī has taken the proposed *ḥadīth* (tale) and developed it into the three *maqāmas* of Advice, Ruṣāfa and Sijistān.[24] ʿAbbūd does not provide any evidence or undertake any analysis in support of such a conclusion. However, a comparative analysis of *ḥadīth Khālid*, on the one hand, and most of the narratives in the *Maqāmāt* in general, on the other, suggests that al-Hamadhānī made use of this piece of work by al-Jāḥiẓ only as raw material when he was contemplating the creation of his *maqāmas* and that therefore it is unjustified to assume that al-Hamadhānī was not inspired by *ḥadīth Khālid* in *al-Bukhalāʾ*.

The *ḥadīth*, according to Beeston's summary of it, goes as follows: "An individual named Khālid b. Yazīd, on being approached by a beggar, fumbles in his pocket for a small coin, but by mistake hands out a silver dirham; on discovering his error he demands the coin back, and, when the by-standers expostulate at this as unfair, he says, 'I know this kind of fellow, he's only a farthing-beggar, not a sixpenny-beggar', and goes on to explain that his knowledge is due to the fact that he himself had formerly belonged to the Banū Sāsān and was practicing mendicancy in various guises. The anecdote continues, "and he was the person who gave a recommendation to his son to follow the same path".[25]

In order to find the parallel lines between the *ḥadīth* and the *Maqāmāt*, the personality of Khālid b. Yazīd should be considered. Khālid b. Yazīd is portrayed in *al-Bukhalāʾ* as a stingy and rich mendicant (*mukaddī*). He is a storyteller and an eloquent speaker. In his long advice to his son, Khālid describes himself as a globetrotter who traveled as far as Sarandīb (Ceylon). In the course of his journeys, he became acquainted with different people, from kings and saints to mendicants and needy people. At times he was taken to prison, at others he attended prayer assemblies. He had knowledge of alchemy, which was a great source of wealth. One significant statement that Khālid mentions about himself is that he, despite being a mendicant, did not accumulate his fortune from it or from storytelling and stratagems. He maintains that traveling across the seas, working for kings and the

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22 See *al-Bukhalāʾ*, 46–53. For the English translation of the "Narration of Khālid b. Yazīd", see al-Jāḥiẓ, *The Book of Misers*, 36–48.

23 ʿAbbūd, "Badīʿ al-Zamān", in *The Complete Works*, IX: 493.

24 Ibid., 493.

25 Beeston, "Al-Hamadhānī", in *ʿAbbāsid Belles-Lettres*, 129, 130.

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practice of alchemy were the sources of his wealth. Besides, Khālid was not a genuine Arab, but a *mawlā* with the nickname Khālawaih al-Mukaddī.

A comparison of the personality of Khālid with that of Abū al-Fatḥ al-Iskandarī results in the following conclusions:

1. Khālid is supposed to be a real historical figure[26] who was known to al-Jāḥiẓ and had, among his servants, two storytellers: Abū Sulaymān al-Aʿwar and Abū Saʿīd al-Madāʾinī.[27] Al-Iskandarī, on the other hand, is a fictional figure who, due to his fictional nature, can serve as a symbol of many real figures, whereas Khālid cannot be studied symbolically.
2. Khālid confirms that he did not make his wealth through mendicancy and stratagems, whereas those were the only means for al-Iskandarī to make money out of the naivety of simple folk. What is mentioned in *ḥadīth* Khālid does not portray an actual mendicant, which implies that there is little similarity between the personalities of Khālid and al-Iskandarī. The fact that Khālid was a *mukaddī* does not necessarily mean that his image created the personality of al-Iskandarī because Khālid was not unique in this respect. Mendicants were a well-known group of people in al-Hamadhānī's times, even more so than in the days of al-Jāḥiẓ. It was necessary for al-Jāḥiẓ, as well as for Khālid, to mention explicitly that he was a *mukaddī*; otherwise it is not immediately clear from what he says that he actually belonged to that group. Al-Iskandarī's personality, on the other hand, identifies him as a *mukaddī* without further elaboration.
3. Khālid is a person with his own individual characteristics whereas al-Iskandarī is a man with multiple personalities.
4. In the first part of the *ḥadīth*, Khālid is not presented as a beggar, but rather as a man who was approached by a beggar. In the *Maqāmāt*, al-Iskandarī is usually the one who begs for money.

The above points reveal several differences between the two figures of Khālid and al-Iskandarī. However, a few points do show some resemblance between the two. Both are globe-trotters and eloquent speakers, and both are aware of the various types of people with whom they come in contact. Nevertheless, these points of conformity do not necessarily imply that al-Hamadhānī made use of the one example of Khālid to create his own hero. Being a globe-trotter, an eloquent speaker and possessing knowledge about various types of people are common characteristics of many heroes or central characters, in classical popular literature, whether they were mendicants or not.[28]

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26 Yaqūt al-Ḥamawī records his biography in *Irshād al-Arīb*, ed. David Samuel Margoliouth (London, 1907–1927), XI: 42, 43.

27 Al-Bukhalāʾ, 47.

28 It is possible that the archetype of Khālid and the mendicant sheikh in al-Jāḥiẓ's works, and al-Iskandarī in al-Hamadhānī's *Maqāmāt*, goes back to the 'man of many wiles' or the

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By turning to the two parts of the *ḥadīth,* thematically speaking, one can reach more conclusions that clarify the hypothetical relationship between *ḥadīth Khālid* and the *Maqāmāt.* In the first part of the *ḥadīth,* where *Khālid* is approached by a beggar, there is clear parallelism between the sequence of events in the story of *Khālid* and in the general sequence of events in the *Maqāmāt.* Primarily, the whole event occurs in one place. In the beginning, the identity of *Khālid* is unknown, but finally, and due to emerging circumstances, he introduces himself in a language which sounds obscure to his audience.

These three steps, in which the first part of the *ḥadīth* develops, are typical of the *maqāma.* However, one essential difference exists between the speech of Khālid and al-Iskandarī's addresses to his audience. There is a clear dissonance between the words of Khālid and his audiences. who were from Banū Tamīm and naturally were not supposed to be mendicants and, thus, could not be expected to understand the special terms and expressions of the people of *kudya.* Al-Iskandarī, on the other hand, is always comprehensible to his audience and speaks to them in a language that they understand and with which they can interact. It is noteworthy that on one single occasion in the *Maqāmāt,* namely in the *Maqāma* known as *Ruṣāfiyya,* where the terminology of Banū Sāsān is used, the speaker becomes ʿIsā b. Hishām and not Abū al-Fatḥ al-Iskandarī, whereas in the *maqāma* known as *Sāsāniyya,* al-Iskandarī, who is portrayed as the chief of Banū Sāsān, addresses his audience in a language comprehensible to them without making use of any of the special terms of Banū Sāsān. In fact, he was speaking in the ordinary language of *ahl al-kudya,* and not in the language of Banū Sāsān. The difference between the rhetoric of *ahl al-kudya* and that of Banū Sāsān is essential for the identification of the genre to which al-Hamadhānī's *Maqāmāt* belongs.[29]

'sacker of cities' in Greek literature. This important issue, of course, requires further investigation in order to establish the extent of al-Jāḥiẓ and al-Hamadhānī's awareness of the Greek hero of wiles. For the relation between the Greek man of wiles and Arabic popular literature, see Malcom Cameron Lyons, *The Arabian Epic* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), I: 118–127.

29 The Banū Sāsān were a group among the mendicants of the 4th century, many of whom were talented poets, and they used this in their mendicant careers. The literature of the Banū Sāsān was already a significant feature of Arabic literature during al-Hamadhānī's age. "The *maqāma*", according to C. Bosworth, "developed at the same time as other early literature on the Banū Sāsān." (Bosworth, *The Mediaeval Islamic Underworld,* I: 97.) However, the *Maqāmāt* cannot be classified within the literature of the Banū Sāsān, except for the one known as *Sāsāniyya.* The reason for which the *Maqāmāt* cannot be put in that category is the difference between the language of the *Maqāmāt* and the terms and expressions of the Banū Sāsān. *Al-Qaṣīda al-Sāsāniyya* by Abū Dulaf al-Khazrajī (See *Yatīmat al-Dahr,* III: 416–436), some poems by Ibn al-Ḥajjāj (ibid., III: 66–74) and those by al-Aḥnaf al-ʿUkbarī (ibid., III: 137–139) are genuine examples of the literature of the Banū Sāsān. Comparing the language of these poems with that of the *Maqāmāt* suggests that the latter work can be regarded as a descriptive work of mendicants (*ahl al-kudya*), among whom the Banū Sāsān are considered, and not a part of the literature of the Banū Sāsān. In fact, the *Maqāmāt* can be classified within the same category of *al-Bukhalā'* by al-Jāḥiẓ and the story by al-Jāḥiẓ of the mendicant sheikh in *al-Maḥāsin.*

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The second part of the *ḥadīth*, which is Khālid's advice to his son, might be regarded as the origin of the *Maqāma* of Advice. Nevertheless, the single common factor between the two is the fact that a father is giving a piece of advice to his son. This part of the story does not constitute sufficient evidence to prove that *ḥadīth Khālid* is the origin of the *Maqāma* of Advice. Before going into details, it should be made clear that the *Maqāma* of Advice, as it exists in the *Maqāmāt*, is a part of a longer story narrated by al-Hamadhānī and recorded in one of his letters.[30] Therefore, in order to underline the similarities between the story of advice in al-Hamadhānī's letters and the Advice of Khālid to his son in *al-Bukhalā'*, the proper comparison should be made between the story as it occurs in the *Rasā'il* and the *ḥadīth*.

The story of Khālid's advice consists of the three following stages:

1. Khālid advises his son upon his death-bed.
2. Khālid dies and is buried by his son.
3. The son returns home and proves to be stingier than his late father.

On the other hand, al-Hamadhānī's story of advice, according to the *Rasā'il*, proceeds as follows:

1. The merchant advises his son when sending him to engage in commerce.
2. The son returns to his father empty-handed, but with a stock of learning.
3. The father proves that his son has failed because he succeeded in acquiring learning, but failed in gaining wealth.

The above two outlines show that, with the exception of the advice (1) in both stories, al-Jāḥiẓ's story of Khālid's advice to his son is not identical to al-Hamadhānī's story of the merchant's advice, which means that the *Maqāma of Advice* could not have originated directly from *ḥadīth Khālid*, but had a broader background in the general literature of advice – *naṣā'iḥ* – from which the story in al-Hamadhānī's letters had originated.

As for the relation between the two *maqāmas* of Sijistān and Ruṣāfa, on the one hand, and *ḥadīth Khālid*, on the other, it is obvious that both Khālid and al-Iskandarī mention certain characteristics and expressions of mendicants. However, not a single expression is common to them both. This shows that al-Hamadhānī derived his expressions in the above two *maqāmas* from the current language of the Banū Sāsān, of which he was well aware, and he did not need to turn to *ḥadīth Khālid*, which was written long before the final development of the terminology of Banū Sāsān in the 4th century.

30 *Rasā'il Badī' al-Zamān* (Beirut, [n.d.]), 393–396.

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(C) Portrayal of the Common Folk

Another point that needs to be considered, comparing the *kudya* motif in the works of al-Jāḥiẓ, on the one hand, and al-Hamadhānī's *Maqāmāt*, on the other, is the manner in which they illustrate particular features of society in an anecdotal manner. In his description of *Kitāb al-bukhalā'*, D. Thomas notes that "the book teams with stories of ordinary people. The nobility are absent, and the men and women brought to life here appear, not because of their rank, learning or power, but through their quirks of character. Their brief lives are epitomized in single traits, and they fascinate because they could step into the present with ease. All too frequently, readers will glimpse something of themselves in the accurate little sketches amassed by this master of observation [i.e., al-Jāḥiẓ]."[31]

According to Pellat, "unlike middle-class intellectuals, al-Jāḥiẓ remained in contact with people of his own background, the lower classes, artisans and seamen, still mixed with idlers, and even took an interest in the activities of the underworld."[32] The personality and life of al-Jāḥiẓ made his works on the underworld society of Iraq in the ʿAbbasid era a genuine portrayal of personal experience rather than mere fiction, although the ingredients of these social portrayals were intended to appear as being real. The case was different, however, with al-Hamadhānī, who was involved in high-society and lived for several years under court patronage. Thus, the ambience of his *Maqāmāt* cannot be regarded as a portrayal of direct personal experience but rather the product of imagination which makes it closer to fiction and which he presented as such. This does not imply, however, that personal experience or factual connotations did not exist in the *Maqāmāt*. They were presented by al-Hamadhānī in the framework of fiction without being distanced from real life.

One of the classes of society which al-Jāḥiẓ mentions in his works is the class of intelligent and eloquent poets and preachers who misuse their profession in deceiving ordinary people. Such mendicants exploit the naive with their eloquent words before finding the best trick for robbing them of their money.[33] This rhetorical method of mendacity that al-Jāḥiẓ talks about is portrayed in more than one instance in Hamadhani's *Maqāmāt*. In fact, the hero of the *Maqāmāt*, Abū al-Fatḥ al-Iskandarī, is more than anything else an eloquent man of wiles who makes use of his outstanding rhetorical talents in practicing his deceit. He is almost identical to the sheikh of mendicants that al-Jāḥiẓ talks about in the narrative quoted in *al-Maḥāsin*, as mentioned above. In fact, one can say that al-Jāḥiẓ supplied al-Hamadhānī and other writers of popular or folk litera-

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31 David Thomas, review of "Al-Jāḥiẓ: the Book of Misers", transl. R.B. Serjeant, *Islam & Christian-Muslim Relations* 10/1 (March 1999): 92.

32 Pellat, "al-Jāḥiẓ," in *ʿAbbāsid Belles-Lettres*, 79.

33 See Jamīl Jabr, *Al-Jāḥiẓ wa-mujtamaʿ ʿasrihi fī Baghdād* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 2004), 28, 29.

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ture with what may be described as 'raw' material which was developed and expanded by al-Hamadhānī and others.

Conclusion

The above comparative survey suggests that the presence of al-Jāḥiẓ in al-Hamadhānī's subconscience while composing the *Maqāmāt* is a fact that cannot be easily challenged or ignored. However, al-Jāḥiẓ could not have had a direct impact on al-Hamadhānī's style. What al-Jāḥiẓ primarily did was to pave the way for the appearance of the *maqāma* genre with regard to themes without determining its final formative aspects. It is entirely reasonable to assume that al-Jāḥiẓ's contribution to the evolution of the *maqāma* genre in the 4th century, as a depository of themes that pertain to the psyche and the nature of human beings, is unmatched by any other writer.[34]

On the other hand, despite being the first author to write on mendicants in Arabic literature, al-Jāḥiẓ could not have had a great influence on the genesis of several major and specific features that distinguish the *maqāma* genre from other literary genres. This is due to the fact that those specific aspects of the *maqāma*, such as artistic form, are missing in al-Jāḥiẓ's popular works. One of the major features of the *Maqāmāt* is the unity of the hero in identity and characteristics. Al-Hamadhānī describes his *Maqāmāt* as being the *maqāmas* of *kudya* and also as the *maqāmas* of al-Iskandarī.[35] He thus combines the identity and character of his hero although he remains a man of many wiles. This major aspect of the *Maqāmāt* is missing in al-Jāḥiẓ's anecdotes, where diverse characters with different characteristics appear in each of his anecdotes.

It is true that al-Jāḥiẓ established the edifice of the popular anecdote in Arabic literature, but it is also true that al-Hamadhānī was a major contributor to the final refurbishment and refinement of the same literary edifice with regard to the techniques of sequential interpretative anecdotes.

The evolutionary process of Arabic prose and also the impact of audience on the nature of a literary work are major factors that contributed to the existence of the differences that one notices between both styles, even when the content is similar. As a matter of fact, in his anecdotal works, al-Jāḥiẓ was presenting folk

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34 The works of al-Jāḥiẓ show that he paid special attention to the nature of human beings in the most detailed manner. His book *al-Ḥayawān* can be considered 'the book of life' instead of 'the book of the animal'. *Ḥayawān*, in its Qur'anic usage refers to life rather than to animals, and it is reasonable to suggest that al-Jāḥiẓ's primary interest in writing his book was life rather than animals. His epistles that deal with social groups such as dancers, singers, misers, thieves, sodomists, blacks and others are evidence of al-Jāḥiẓ's interest in portraying and analyzing the nature of society and the human psyche. This, of course, requires a separate study, which falls beyond the scope of this one.

35 *See Rasā'il Badī' al-Zamān*, 389, 390.

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literature in the patterns of speech common among and comprehensible by the folk of his age and society. On the other hand, al-Hamadhānī was presenting, in his *Maqāmāt*, folk literature in the sophisticated language of the court and circles of learning. The Arabic proverb: *li-kulli maqāmin maqāl* (There is an utterance for every setting) can summarize one of the major causes of difference and similarity between al-Jāḥiẓ's pioneering anecdotes of the people of *kudya* and al-Hamadhānī's *Maqāmāt*.

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Al-Jāḥiẓ and his Successors on Communication and the Levels of Language

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Al-Jāḥiẓ is one of the earliest Arab scholars (if not the first) to deal with several aspects of the communication process beyond the rating of poetry. In order to analyse the structure of interaction – be it between human beings or between God and man, – al-Jāḥiẓ was interested primarily in modes of understanding: the points at which the transmitter and the receiver meet one another, the exchange of signs and signals, and the possibility and consequences of decoding. Of course this subject requires a detailed analysis. The focus of this article is on some of the basic concepts al-Jāḥiẓ advanced in this respect and also on the manner in which they were received by his successors.[1] Al-Jāḥiẓ did not reduce the act of communication to merely language, although this subject received his concentrated attention.[2] Here, he had to engage in the then current discourse on *lafẓ* and *maʿnā,* but contributed far more to the debate than the pithy definitions that thus far have been attributed to him.[3]

The dualism of content and form seems to be a characteristic feature of early Arabic literary theory. *Maʿnā,* connoting *meaning* or *idea,* on the one hand and *lafẓ,* connoting speech and wording, on the other, represent two poles between which we find a broad discussion about the function of language in that period. Scholars in the fourth and fifth Islamic centuries even tended to categorize their predecessors according to their real or supposed attitudes towards the main lin-

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1 Lale Behzadi, *Sprache und Verstehen: al-Ǧāḥiẓ über die Vollkommenheit des Ausdrucks* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2008). In this study, al-Jāḥiẓ's theoretical approach to levels of linguistic and literary means is connected with its epistemological ambitions, based especially on his *Kitāb al-bayān wal-tabyīn*. ʿAmr b. Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ: *Kitāb al-bayān wal-tabyīn*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn, 4 vols. (Cairo 1968).

2 See those passages in *Bayān* I where he distinguished between various levels of communication – for example the gesture (*al-ishāra*), 76ff.
As M. Zakiy Ibrahim pointed out ("Models of Communication in the Qurʾan: Divine-Human Interaction", *American Journal of Islamic Sciences* 22/1 (2005): 70-95), modern communication theories of the 20th century have received little attention from Muslim scholars. But we can declare the same vice versa. Neither modern literary theories nor communication theories have included any reference to their Arabic counterparts some one hundred years ago. This desideratum will hopefully be filled out gradually in forthcoming studies.

3 A short survey on the subject can be found in Sulaymān Ḥasīkī, "al-ʿAlāqa bayna l-lafẓ wal-maʿnā: dirāsa fi abniyat al-kalima al-ṣautiyya wal-ṣarfiyya", *al-Fikr al-Arabī* 21/1 (Hiver 2000): 189-208, although the focus here is on the morphological and phonetic sides. Al-Jāḥiẓ once more is present only with his "meanings thrown on the street" (Al-Jāḥiẓ: *Kitāb al-ḥayawān*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn (Cairo 1965-69), III: 131f.), and nothing more (see further in the article).

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guistic levels; either someone was described as a supporter of *maʿnā* or he was said to be an advocate of *lafẓ*. Each contradicted the other, and this dichotomy may have been the reason for their overlooking more complex and ambivalent positions, even through the second and third centuries of *hijra*.

Al-Jāḥiẓ of course dealt with linguistic phenomena, not only as one topic among others, but as a central pillar of his science. In his final work, *Kitāb al-bayān wal-tabyīn*, in several essays and in the *Kitāb al-ḥayawān*, he focused on the heart of human life: how do human beings come in contact with each other? And how do they make use of the greatest gift given them by their creator – the faculty of speech, or the communication through various kinds of signs?

There are so many judgements about al-Jāḥiẓ and so many commentaries on his texts that the voice of the author himself almost disappears. Al-Jāḥiẓ said and wrote too much – and in too many fields – to be considered serious enough for linguistic theories! This attitude could be the result of listening only to his critics.

Let us now look at the commentaries of two of the most famous scholars in the field of literary theory: Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī and ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī. Both refer to al-Jāḥiẓ and at the same time disassociate themselves from him. The images of him that have developed over time are of the great genius and of the confused scribbler, respectively. We find this assessment in Western and Eastern scholarly works up to the present, and unfortunately we miss other potential approaches to al-Jāḥiẓ while arguing for one position or the other.

Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī (d. 1005) has influenced generations of later al-Jāḥiẓ-readers with his famous judgement of al-Jāḥiẓ as unsystematic. In his introduction of *Kitāb al-ṣināʿatain*, he criticizes al-Jāḥiẓ's remarks on *al-balāgha*, *al-bayān* and *al-faṣāḥa* in the *Kitāb al-bayān wal-tabyīn*, claiming that since they are scattered throughout the book, they are therefore not very useful for any reader.[4]

The view of al-Jāḥiẓ as an unsystematic writer, incapable of stringency and, moreover, failing to put concise ideas into words, is a lasting image that has its origins, among others, in this dictum of al-ʿAskarī. But what did al-ʿAskarī himself do? In the aforementioned introduction, he states that there are few books which deal with figures of speech and classify them in a substantial way. The only one he names is the *Kitāb al-bayān wal-tabyīn* by al-Jāḥiẓ. But he declares that he benefited more from the material collected (sermons, letters, and quotations) than from theoretical results or categories. Despite his criticism, the work of al-Jāḥiẓ seems to represent a model for al-ʿAskarī, though he does not mention or quote him in *Kitāb al-ṣināʿatain* directly, except in the preface. Instead, he declares that he will take into consideration the applicability and systematic order of his analysis. Al-ʿAskarī raises one of al-Jāḥiẓ's central ideas when he says:

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4 Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī, *Kitāb al-ṣināʿatain al-kitāba wa-l-shiʿr*, ed. ʿAlī Muḥammad al-Bahjāwī and Muḥammad Abū l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Cairo 1952), 5.

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"If somebody claims that *al-balāgha* consists of making someone understand a meaning (*ifhām al-maʿnā*), he equates between purity of language (*faṣāḥa*), stammering (*lukna*), incorrect talking, proper language (*ṣawāb*), indistinct diction (*ighlāq*) and clear speech (*ibāna*)."[5]

There is no artistic value in the pure exchange of words and information, because everybody is able to speak or at least to send out a set of signs, faulty though they may be. We already have read in al-Jāḥiẓ's works the examples al-ʿAskarī mentions, especially the portrayals of linguistically perfect Bedouins who choose not to understand phrases that contain little mistakes or inaccuracies.[6] Al-ʿAskarī seems to be content with defining perfect speech as the clear imparting of meaning (*īḍāḥ al-maʿnā*), while making use of beautiful language (*taḥsīn al-alfāẓ*).[7] But what does "beautiful" mean here? Al-Jāḥiẓ goes far beyond that; he not only wants to set up the criteria for beautiful and faultless speech, but addresses the rules of communication. Theories about linguistic phenomena are not restricted to poets and rhetoricians, but throw light upon every human expression – al-ʿAskarī does not recognize these aspects of al-Jāḥiẓ's works, but confines himself to quoting al-Jāḥiẓ's witty examples of phonetic blunders.

In the discussion of *lafẓ* and *maʿnā,* al-ʿAskarī is pragmatic. He compares words with a cover (*kuswa*) and meanings with a body (*badan*), a notion we also find in *al-Bayān wal-tabyīn*.[8] Despite his acknowledgement of the interdependence of these two entities, he does not take a philosophical approach. Proceeding on the assumption that human beings can be creative only in relation to words, he considers that critics have to focus on the poetic language.[9] Nevertheless, in his *Dīwān al-maʿānī*, he divides meanings into different classes and classifies motives and themes for poets. His approach is guided by his concern about the debates on plagiarism. No one, he asserts, can blame a poet if he adopts the same motif as his colleague. You cannot avoid the repetition of themes, because "they are thrown on the street," al-ʿAskarī states, referring to the famous sentence of al-Jāḥiẓ.[10] Therefore he concentrates on the *alfāẓ*, and the individual forming of *maʿanī* as an indicator of poetic mastery. While al-ʿAskarī is absorbed in weakening the charges of plagiarism, he does not comment on the epistemological dimension that al-Jāḥiẓ had recognized. He argues, for instance, that a poet can be called a plagiarist only if he takes over a motif (*maʿnā*) verbatim, or spoils it by

5 Al-ʿAskarī, *K. al-ṣināʿatain*, 10.

6 Ibid., 11, and *Bayān* I: 163f.

7 Al-ʿAskarī, *K. al-ṣināʿatain*, 12.

8 *Bayān* I: 63, 254; idem., *Risāla fī l-jidd wal-hazl* in *Rasāʾil al-Jāḥiẓ*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn, 2 vols. (Cairo 1964/65) I: 262; al-ʿAskarī, *K. al-ṣināʿatain*, 69.

9 Ibid.

10 *Ḥayawān*, III, 131. In this quotation, al-Jāḥiẓ is not arguing that everyone has access to all ideas, meanings and motifs. In another passage of his work (*Bayān* I, 76f.) we read that *maʿānī* can be understood and recognized only if certain conditions are fulfilled (such as the clarity of signs, the appropriate gesture, and so forth).

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using bad and faulty words and phrases. In contrast, al-Jāḥiẓ considers the possibility that bad words can ruin meaning, and concludes that "language" as a system is divided into *ṭabaqāt*, as are human beings; there are fine and pleasing phrases next to ugly and disgusting words – all of them are Arabic and thus possess their own raison d'être.[11]

Of course al-Jāḥiẓ's texts are not without contradictions. He warns against thoughtlessness, because bad speech can have an influence on character. On the other hand he clearly recognizes that the problem is not an aesthetic one, but that the crucial point is the equivalence itself. Al-Jāḥiẓ is talking about *fahm* and *ifhām*, about understanding and making oneself understood by others.[12] Going beyond the traditional discussions about the best verse and the detailed schedules with poetic criteria, al-Jāḥiẓ tries to understand and to show how the act of communication works. Later scholars such as al-ʿAskarī have quoted mainly his sharp comments on incorrect pronunciation and phonetic mistakes, and have pushed al-Jāḥiẓ into the corner of the *lafẓ*-defenders.

It is true that al-Jāḥiẓ denounced, often in a sarcastic manner, his contemporaries and the self-satisfied literary critics of his time, but at the same time he was not content with comparisons of poems and verses. If we read his texts carefully, we find a great interest in communication processes, in communication gaps, as well as in communication mediums – including nonlinguistic signs. He does not stop at poets' competitions, or defending the leading role of the Arabic language, although his anti-*shuʿūbī* motivation has to be taken into consideration. All the examples of perfect Bedouins, fallible grammarians, and funny misunderstandings lead us to the central issue that al-Jāḥiẓ explores: can we – as God's creatures – find terms and expressions for creation? And if we find them, how do we know that we have found the right names? Are there right names, or are there only signs as a function of a variable context? Al-Jāḥiẓ insists on the responsibility of men with regard to their faculty of speech, not in the simple sense that incorrect words and phrases are going to blemish their speakers, but rather that relinquishing this responsibility will mean the doom of creation.[13]

ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d. 1078), one of the most famous literary theorists of his time, refers very often to al-Jāḥiẓ and is said to be much more systematic than his predecessor. We will see that intertextual reading can show us not only how al-Jurjānī adopted important ideas of al-Jāḥiẓ, but also how to read al-Jāḥiẓ in a new light.

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11 *Bayān* I: 145.

12 Ibid., I: 11.

13 Ibid., IV: 30; I: 75-87, *Ḥayawān* II: 97. With respect to the human-divine interaction in the Qurʾan, M. Z. Ibrahim states that God does not need any response from mankind (91). Al- Jāḥiẓ's linguistic and philosophical approaches to language and communication suggest rather that God – as the primary source of creation and as a part of a communication process – is, indeed, in need of a response.

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Like al-Jāḥiẓ, al-Jurjānī emphasizes not just certain qualities of language, but language as a system. He stresses the omnipresent relationship to context, meaning the interplay of words within a phrase, and above all the interaction of the communication partners. This idea (al-Jurjānī called it *al-naẓm*), was already present in al-Jāḥiẓ, who always took the recipient into consideration. Al-Jāḥiẓ constantly writes of the speaker (*al-qā'il*) and the listener (*al-sāmiᶜ*).[14] The acts of understanding (*fahm*) and making understood (*ifhām*) cannot be conceived independently of each other. According to al-Jāḥiẓ, clear expression (*al-bayān*) may be found at this interface. This idea is also reflected in the dichotomy of *qirā'a* and *samāᶜ*, which describes the interaction of reciter and listener at a Qur'an recitation. So we find the reciprocal action of every communication in an ideal form in the revelation act and in its endless repetitions.

In his work *Dalā'il al-iᶜjāz*, al-Jurjānī quotes al-Jāḥiẓ quite often. He functions sometimes as an authority in order to support the author, and in other passages he is merely the transmitter of poems and anecdotes. Al-Jurjānī's opinion of his work seems to be ambivalent. Early on, al-Jāḥiẓ's work possessed a certain importance, so al-Jurjānī can quote him, omitting further explanation. In order to define the association of wording with facts and circumstances, he refers to intention (*al-qaṣd*): "Order can only exist where an intention to build an image (*ṣūra*) and a quality (*ṣifa*) exists."[15]

It is with the aforementioned existential dimension in mind that al-Jāḥiẓ describes the process as the constant search for adequate wording.[16] Interestingly, both scholars achieve different results in the course of this endeavor. Al-Jurjānī sees the necessity of intention and at the same time insists upon caution and restraint because it would be best not to interfere with the natural flow of the meanings (*al-maᶜānī*) which aim at certain words (*al-alfāẓ*).[17] Obviously, the best expressions arise without human participation. Al-Jāḥiẓ had dealt before with that topic. He requires effort and consciousness, but always warns against the danger of affectation. For him, a mannerist language (*takalluf*) is much worse than a false pronunciation or grammatical error. It is necessary to avoid any disturbing vanity to reach or to approximate the perfect expression.[18] But without attention and watchfulness our language will perish. The method favoured by al-Jurjānī (to let things go) has the contrary effect here.[19] Human beings do have

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14 ᶜAbd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī, *Kitāb dalā'il al-iᶜjāz*, ed. Muḥammad Shākir (Cairo 1955/56), 417, and *Bayān* I: 76.

15 Al-Jurjānī, *K. dalāᶜil al-iᶜjāz*, 364.

16 *Bayān* I: 86.

17 Al-Jurjānī, *Kitāb asrār al-balāgha*, ed. Hellmut Ritter (Istanbul 1954), 13f.

18 *Bayān* I: 12f., 86.

19 Al-Jurjānī, *Kitāb asrār al-balāgha*, 13f. This determination or "nature" of the words and their meanings leads us to the modern concept of the initial trace (Jacques Derrida, "Die difference," in *Postmoderne und Dekonstruktion*, ed. Peter Engelmann (Stuttgart: Reclam 2004), 91), which will be elaborated in a forthcoming study.

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the obligation to keep up and cultivate the mechanisms of language, because only this care will guarantee the existence of the world. If we relax our efforts (that means also with regard to learning, studying, trying to understand, and so forth), linguistic rules will decay, and therefore the act of naming the creation will fail.[20]

Ibn Qutayba had previously written about the gifted poet (*al-maṭbūʿ*) who lets words and meanings have their way.[21] This poet seems to be the medium through which the signifier and the signified find each other automatically. Some of these ideas are found in al-Jurjānī's thinking, but he does not offer a solution for the problem of determination. If it would be best not to interfere, what would the responsibility of men look like? Al-Jāḥiẓ studied this problem very closely, perhaps not in a very systematic manner, but sometimes with more *esprit* and logical conclusions than either al-Jurjānī or al-ʿAskarī.

In the *Dalāʾil al-iʿjāz*, one can feel the anger of the author when he condemns the fixation of former scholars on linguistic forms without looking at the composition of wording and meaning. Despite his general high esteem for al-Jāḥiẓ, al-Jurjānī refers mainly to his description of linguistic blunders. His defence of al-Jāḥiẓ against his critics follows a theological line of reasoning:

> "The reason why they [i.e., al-Jāḥiẓ and other defenders of *lafẓ*] are against this movement [i.e., the emphasis on *maʿnā*] is that it brings its followers to the denial of the inimitable (*al-iʿjāz*) ... if we suppose that only the meanings are to be praised, all knowledge about *al-faṣāḥa*, *al-balāgha*, *al-naẓm* and *al-taʾlīf* would be insignificant ... and then the idea that in speech and language (*kalām*) there could be a miracle (*muʿjiz*) would be invalid."[22]

Iḥsān ʿAbbās claimed that al-Jurjānī recognized al-Jāḥiẓ's rejection of the importance of meaning and motif only because of this danger and his concern. In addition, they used the term *maʿnā* in different ways. While al-Jurjānī understood it as the complete repertoire of signs, al-Jāḥiẓ took it as primary material (*mādda awwaliyya*).[23]

We should not underrate al-Jāḥiẓ's analytical abilities. Of course he did not disparage meanings in his aforementioned remarks. The fact that everybody (as a first step) can have access to the various motifs and impressions of the world does not at all mean that he one-sidedly favoured the wording (as explained above). Moreover, he prepared the ground for al-Jurjānī's composition theory. In nearly every chapter in *al-Bayān wal-tabyīn* he stresses balance as an essential

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20 Human beings have to use their abilities, see *Ḥayawān* V: 543f.

21 Ibn Qutayba, *Kitāb al-shiʿr wal-shuʿarāʾ*, ed. Muḥammad Shākir, 2 vols., 2nd ed. (Cairo 1967), 17, 34f.

22 Al-Jurjānī, *K. dalāʾil al-iʿjāz*, 257.

23 Iḥsān ʿAbbās, *Taʾrīkh al-naqd al-adabī ʿinda l-ʿArab: Naqd al-shiʿr min al-qarn al-thānī ḥattā l-qarn al-thāmin al-hijrī*, 3rd ed. (Beirut 1981), 427. The reference here is once more the "meanings thrown on the street" (*Ḥayawān* III: 131f.)

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value, not in the sense of a nervous vagueness, but in the sense of a permanent search for difference:

> "You should avoid the vulgar and raw, and your main interest should not only be directed to the correction of words (*tahdhīb al-alfāẓ*), nor should you exclusively look on peculiarities with regard to the contents (*gharā'ib al-maʿānī*). The best communication (*balāgh*) will be achieved through keeping within bounds (*al-iqtiṣād*), and through balance (*al-tawassuṭ*) you will overcome the difficulties ..."[24]

Although al-Jāḥiẓ described words, among other things, as clothes and covers that decorate and embellish a meaning, he was always aware of the connection and the interdependence of these two entities. He declares firmly that names are not able to enlarge meanings, and thus he anticipated the exemplifications of al-Jurjānī, who states that one cannot think of a literal expression per se.[25] This innovation, credited to al-Jurjānī, has its roots in the preliminary work of al-Jāḥiẓ. When we read how the latter tried to circumscribe the essence of human ideas, of meanings, and of the different levels of perception, we find him to be a philosopher in the form of a critic and a true searcher for understanding and insight.[26]

In one sense, al-Jāḥiẓ went far beyond his successors when he argued about the interaction of human activity and the divine given. He kept a clear view of the practicability of his statements, be it in writing a letter, making a speech or composing a poem. But in addition to that, he was interested in the mechanisms of naming, understanding, and handling the various elements of language. Since not everyone has the talent and the opportunity to engage themselves with these matters, he appeals to those who are gifted with a particular insight. They are obliged to study and to propagate their results, though a certain distance is necessary, since they themselves are also fallible.[27]

According to al-Jāḥiẓ there is a special criterion for dealing with language, a criterion the nature of which can only be apprehended approximately. To exceed this measure is forbidden – likewise we have to try not to fall below it (for example, incompetence because of carelessness). Al-Jāḥiẓ states that in the field of language, as in all fields, there is no good and evil in itself, but the measure lies only in the manner in which we estimate and feel a phrase, a term or a word.[28]

We have seen that linguistic phenomena are closely connected with theological questions. This can be seen as an advantage because of the eventual consolidation of philology and linguistics in the field of the established sciences. How-

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24 *Bayān* I: 255.
25 Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Risāla fil-jidd wal-hazl*, in *Rasā'il* I, 262.
26 It is impossible to give all the references here. As an example, see *Bayān* I: 80, 85f., 136f., 191, 254, *Risāla fī l-jidd* I: 262, *Ḥayawān* VI: 8.
27 *Bayān* I: 200.
28 Ibid. I: 202f.

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ever, later on, this interrelationship proved to be an obstacle as the increasing strictness of theological reasoning placed restrictions on linguists and grammarians as well. Involved in discussions about the possibility of knowledge, they had to provide their judgements of certain exegetical problems.

More than once al-Jāḥiẓ stresses the divine origin of linguistic instruments, which human beings have to use in this life. On the one hand, he wants to achieve the utmost clarity to make the fullness of commentaries and interpretations unnecessary. On the other hand, he is convinced of the necessity of discussions, debates and different criteria. Different versions, even disagreements, are part of our linguistic activity and are not to be condemned.[29] Al-Jāḥiẓ is still capable of feeling surprised and impressed at the unbelievable richness of human language.[30]

The humanism of al-Jāḥiẓ appears in his confidence in human ability and, moreover, in the responsibility of the individual. We must not overestimate ourselves and we have to accept certain bounds, but within these boundaries, we are obliged to use our capacities. Heterogeneity and diversity on all levels of life are genuine qualities of the creation, – therefore also in the field of language. Al-Jāḥiẓ formulates that idea with the words of al-Ma'mūn:

> "If God had wished to send His books and the words of His prophets in a way that does not need any commentary, He would have done it! But we neither see in the field of religion nor in this life anything given to us in a complete form; ... had this been so, rivalry, competition or striving to improve would not exist – but God did not create the world in this way."[31]

Al-Jāḥiẓ detested dependence on commentators other than himself. On the other hand, he himself was not free from such ambitions; he wanted to teach and to fix standards. At least on a theoretical level, he pleaded for the utilization of the human milieu: take your language, talk and write and be fully conscious of your responsibility, name things and don't be afraid to make mistakes.

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29 Ibid. III: 376.

30 He would have subscribed to the following statement by a five-year-old girl participating in a research study on children's language, perhaps knowing that children are sometimes the true philosophers:
"If there wouldn't be letters, there wouldn't be sounds, and if there wouldn't be sounds, there wouldn't be words, and if there wouldn't be words, we couldn't think, and if we couldn't think, there wouldn't exist the world." G.B. Matthews, *Die Philosophie der Kindheit – Wenn Kinder weiter denken als Erwachsene* (Weinheim/Berlin 1995), 29f.

31 *Bayān* III: 376. After these words the man who was spoken to converted from the Christian faith to Islam.

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Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Adab*, and the Art of the Essay

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Introduction

Abū ʿUthmān ʿAmr b. Bahr al-Jāḥiẓ (160/776-255/868) is one of those authors more admired than studied. This is a remarkable state of affairs given that he is widely – perhaps unanimously – considered the greatest writer of Arabic literary prose, praised as such not only by literary historians and critics, but by his fellow writers as well. Many are the Arab writers who would like to be considered the al-Jāḥiẓ of their age; few would dare to compare themselves to him, fewer would claim superiority.[1] Given that we make this statement in the context of an Arabic literary tradition that stretches across fourteen centuries of continuous activity, this combination of wide aesthetic appreciation and lack of critical study is astonishing. This situation is, however, not completely distressing since it leaves us with plenty to do. Furthermore, I do not intend to imply that we start at point zero. Textual scholars and literary historians have laid basic foundations for critical analysis. Let us begin by considering what has been done so far.

Most of al-Jāḥiẓ's extant texts now exist in reasonably decent critical editions. By using the qualifier "reasonably," I intend no disrespect for the intense labors or necessary erudition that editors of al-Jāḥiẓ's works must bring to bear. Rather, it is that texts of such volume and complexity require a sustained tradition of critical editing, one that takes place over several generations during which each new editor builds on the accomplishments of his or her predecessor. We are still at the beginning of this process in regard to most premodern Arabic literary texts. Much has been accomplished, but much work remains.[2]

We also have several historical studies of al-Jāḥiẓ of the "life, times and influences" type, as well as vital bibliographical surveys. As with critical editions, historically and bibliographically oriented scholarship is both important for elucidation of literary and cultural history and provides essential groundwork for critical analysis. In regard to all three scholarly activities mentioned above, the unique pioneering efforts of Charles Pellat deserve special recognition and esteem.[3] It is neither editors nor literary historians that one must fault with the

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1 Charles Pellat, "Al-Ǧāḥiẓ jugé par la postérité," *Arabica* 27/1 (1980): 1-67; Mohammed-Salah Omri, "'There is a Jāḥiẓ for Every Age': narrative construction and intertextuality in al-Hamadhānī's *Maqāmāt*," *Arabic and Middle Eastern Literatures* 1/1 (1998): 31-46.

2 For al-Jāḥiẓ's works, see Charles Pellat, "Nouvel essai d'inventaire de l'œuvre Ǧāḥizienne," *Arabica* 31/2 (1984): 117-64.

3 Cf. Charles Pellat, *Le Milieu basrien et la formation de Ǧāḥiẓ* (Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1953), also Ṭāhā al-Ḥājirī, *Al-Jāḥiẓ: Ḥayātuh wa-āthāruh* (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1962);

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lack of critical analysis of al-Jāḥiẓ's corpus; rather one must blame the literary critics. With a few exceptions, notably Fedwa Malti-Douglas's study of the *Bukhalā'*, hardly any critic has brought to bear the considerable weight of modern literary analysis on elucidating three rather basic questions of criticism and aesthetics: What is al-Jāḥiẓ doing? How is he doing it? And why do we tend to believe that he is doing it better than any other practitioner of his craft? To frame the question in the terminology of Aristotelian physics, we know who the efficient cause is: it is al-Jāḥiẓ. We still need to clarify, however, the nature of the material, formal, and final causes. And we need better to understand and to evaluate aesthetic dynamics, creative strategies of technique and implementation, and personal artistic contributions.

To answer the first of these questions (What is al-Jāḥiẓ doing?), and to begin to answer the second (How is he doing it?), I must make two excursions. The first is to offer some observations regarding the premodern literary activity known as *adab*. I have purposely chosen the phrase "literary activity" here rather than the more specific term "genre." Although I believe that we can refer to *adab* as a genre, we can do so only after discussion of what this termination entails. Once we have a clearer idea of what the literary activity that al-Jāḥiẓ and others are engaged in, we should be better able to see when and how we can use the term genre as well as determine what works fall within its purview.

The second excursion is more daring. Following a brief discussion of *adab*, I propose to make an equally brief detour to compare it with the modern western literary activity known as the "familiar essay." I stress that such a foray is for purposes of comparison not identification. I do not claim that *adab* is the same as the essay, only that some introduction to the parameters of the latter may help us better understand the nature of the former (and I dare say, vice versa). I realize that drawing in the seemingly extraneous topic of the western essay into this study may appear wrong-headed. It may appear to be like driving from Beirut to Baghdad by way of Paris. I can only say in my initial defense that in this age of air travel, the shortest route in terms of distance is not always that in terms of time. Sometimes booking through a distant hub airport gets the traveler to his or her destination faster than taking the shortest route. One may only judge the journey by its end; however, I ask that judgment be withheld until then.

Following these two excursions, I will return to al-Jāḥiẓ himself and his writings and turn toward answering, in part at least, portions of my second and third questions: how is al-Jāḥiẓ doing what he does, and why is he so good at it?

Wadīʿa Ṭāhā al-Najm, *Al-Jāḥiẓ wa-'l-ḥāḍira al-ʿAbbāsiyya* (Baghdad: Maṭbaʿat al-Irshād, 1965); Muḥammad Khafājī, *Abū ʿUthmān al-Jāḥiẓ* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnānī, 1973); Jamīl Jabr, *Al-Jāḥiẓ: fī ḥayātih wa-adabih wa-fikrih* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnānī, 1974).

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Adab

It is widely agreed that al-Jāḥiẓ worked in, and indeed was a seminal creator of, an area of literary production that is termed "*adab*," a form of literature that is sometimes translated as *belles-lettres*.[4] Unfortunately, we apparently have as little idea of how to define *adab* as a form of literature and describe those works that fall within or outside of its boundaries as we have of explaining precisely why al-Jāḥiẓ should be termed a literary genius. In both cases, we believe strongly that we know the truth of the matter, but in both cases we seem to have difficulty describing what exactly it is that we are talking about. This is not an ideal state of affairs. Intuition is the beginning of analysis but should not be its end. However, if we literary scholars have not been able precisely to define *adab*, we have made some good attempts to describe it, or perhaps one should say, circumscribe it. Since it seems proper that we should have some general idea of what kind of literary activity al-Jāḥiẓ was pursuing, or what he created when he helped to create *adab*, I offer a brief review of the present state of play.[5]

In a 1990 article titled "*Adab* and the Concept of *Belles-Lettres*," Seeger A. Bonebakker has done an admirable job of reviewing and evaluating earlier attempts at defining *adab* as a literary activity. Justly acknowledging in particular the

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4 Cf. F. Gabrieli, "Adab," *EI*^{2} I: 175-76; E. W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1984), I: 34-35, defines *adab* as, *inter alia*: "Discipline of the mind," "good qualities and attributes of the mind or soul," "every praiseworthy discipline by which a man is trained in any excellence," "good discipline of the mind and manners; good education; good breeding; good manners; politeness; polite accomplishments," "the practice of what is praiseworthy in both words and actions," "holding, or keeping, to those things which are approved, or deemed good."

5 On literary *adab*, see Carlo-Alfonso Nallino, *La litérature arabe des origines à l'époque de la dynastie umayyade*, transl. Charles Pellat (Paris: Editions G. P. Maisonneuve et Cie, 1950), esp. 7-34; the original Italian version is *La Letteratura araba degli inizi all'epoca della dinastia umayyade* (Rome, 1948); Charles Pellat, "Variations sur le thème de l'adab," *Correspondance d'orient* 5-6 (1964): 19-37; reprinted in Charles Pellat, *Études sur l'histoire socio-culturelle de l'Islam* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1976); Franz Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant: The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam* (Leiden: E.J Brill, 1974); Barbara Metcalf, ed., *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Seeger Bonebakker, "Early Arabic Literature and the Term *Adab*." *JSAI* 5 (1984): 389-421 and idem., "Adab and the Concept of belles-lettres," in *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: ʿAbbasid Belles-Lettres*, ed. Julia Ashtiany et al. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990), 16-30; Hartmut Fähndrich, "Der Begriff 'adab' und sein literarischer Niederschlag," in *Neues Handbuch der Literaturwissenschaft: Orientalisches Mittelalter*, ed. Wolfhart Heinrichs (Wiesbaden: AULA Verlag, 1990), 326-45; Tarif Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), esp.84-130; George Makdisi, *The Rise of Humanism in Classical Islam and the Christian West, with Special Reference to Scholasticism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990); Stefan Leder and Hilary Kilpatrick, "Classical Arabic Prose Literature: a Researcher's Sketch Map," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 23/1 (1992): 2-26; and Roger Allen, *The Arabic Literary Heritage: The Development of its Genres and Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), esp. 228-78.

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seminal contribution of C. A. Nallino, Bonebakker's survey is not the last word on this subject – in fact, the article consists of a remarkably open struggle to describe or define a difficult and "polysemous" concept.[6] Because of this, it serves as a good point of departure. Summarizing his discussion, there appears to be consensus that the basic early meaning of *adab* is "proper behavior or conduct." From here, it is an easy step toward the connotation of "education for proper behavior." Next, one moves from process to content, in other words, to "areas of knowledge necessary to master in order to engage in proper conduct." Consequently, *adab* comes to imply the "creation of texts used to educate for proper behavior." Although Bonebakker surveys this set of meanings as they appear in early Arabic texts, he is at a disadvantage in that as a scholar of literature he is forced to focus on the last sense of the term, literary creation, noting that "*adab* in a literary context may refer either to literary creativity, or else to literature as an object of philological study or to knowledge of literature as a mark of erudition."[7] It helps, however, if one keeps primary the socially operational meaning of *adab* (proper behavior, thereafter proper inculcation of such) in mind and the implications that follow. The goal of *adab*, I would submit, is edification (*Bildung*); how one defines this process, of course, is a more open-ended question.

Bonnebakker, following Nallino, distinguishes between two levels of training: custom and education. "*Adab*" can result from either, and both terms naturally interrelate and overlap. Custom, however, has more the sense of informal absorption of values and modes of behavior while education has more the connotation of formal training based on certain methods of training and identifiable stages of study.[8]

It is at this point that purely textually oriented scholars sometimes move too quickly toward trying to define the precise scope of materials used to train participants of literary *adab* (texts), as well as to engage in the study of their creators (authors). I prefer to emphasize instead two other basic but essential points: first, the broader social implications of the idea of proper education, and second, the fact that in addition to creating texts (being an author) or studying them (being a literary scholar), *adab* also has important corollary didactic and performative dimensions.

First, we must keep in mind a broad view of the concept of "proper education" and remember that it depends directly on that for which one is being trained. In other words, the term *adab* must be socially grounded in a context broader than that of literary study. Each craft, profession, or area of social activity has its own normative determinations of what proper behavior or *adab* is. In fact, one tends to define one's own allegiance to or identification with a certain

6 Fedwa Malti-Douglas, *Structures of Avarice: The Bukhalā' in Medieval Arabic Literature* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1985) 17.
7 Bonebakker, "Adab", 19-20.
8 Ibid., 18.

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profession or class by following its "*adab*," by adopting and awarding priority to certain forms of dress, behavior, diction, assumed shared knowledge, and social attitudes. Hence; religious scholars, mystics, poets and artists, scribes and bureaucrats, philosophers and physicians, and courtiers and nobles – even scholars – may each have their own prescribed standards of expected behavior. Nor are such distinctions typical only of the "cultured classes;" bedouins, farmers, craftsmen, merchants, and – as al-Jāḥiẓ recognized – tricksters and thieves can each have their mutually accepted and recognized codes of behavior, and this is without going into social dimensions of gender and age or distinctions of wealth and class. Moreover, concepts of what entails proper conduct for each of these and other groups are not historically static. They evolve or shift radically as new cultural influences, political forces, or social movements – internally or externally induced – appear.

What is considered *adab* among villagers in the countryside, merchants in the city, religious scholars in mosques and *madrasas*, mystics in *khalwās* and *ribāts*, and among officials, courtiers, and savants at exclusive soirées and courtly *majālis* differs dramatically.[9] Each venue upholds its own standards of "proper conduct" and has its own representative anecdotes about those individuals or situations that ideally fulfill or fall shamefully short of what the particular group currently considers to be appropriate behavior, *adab*.

Attaining a clear meaning of a particular use of the term *adab* thus requires more than a philological examination of individual uses of the word. It demands inquiry into the details of the specific social contexts and the historical periods that produce the particular situations to which the word refers. In other words, once we attain a general sense of the word, we must thereafter look at social practice and ask who uses the term, in which context, and for which audience in order to comprehend its precise connotations.[10] The immediate conclusion that one draws is that, to the extent that individual groups express their specific conceptions of *adab* in written form, then there is not one *adab* but many. There is, for example, the *adab* literature of Islamic ritual, namely, the branches of *ḥadīth*

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9 Moreover, it is probable that definitions of *adab* even among similar social groups might sometimes have geographical delimitations, Khurāsān vs. al-Jazīra vs. al-Andalus. Nallino acknowledges this potential diversity of meanings for *adab* as meaning "knowledge needed by certain professions, or by people in certain situations (eating, marriage, teaching, learning)," cf. Bonebakker, "Early Arabic Literature", 392; Nallino, *La litérature*, 18-19. Bonebakker mentions Nallino's point but does not himself pursue its implications. Implicit in the concept of *adab* as good conduct is the concept of poor conduct, i.e. "bad manners."

10 Useful in this context are the studies of Raymond Williams, *The Sociology of Culture* (New York: Schocken Books, 1981); Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, transl. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York, San Francisco, London: Harper Torchbooks, 1972); Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, transl. Richard Nice (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984); and Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: the History of Manners and State Formation and Civilizations*, transl. Edmund Jephcott (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

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and *fiqh* that set out normative standards of behavior that prescribe how a believer should behave within the context of personal and communal devotion.[11] In a similar vein, there is the *adab* literature of Sufism, which treats matters of external etiquette and internal devotion among mystics.[12] And so it goes. Princes and scribes, warriors and tradesmen, even professional hoodlums each have their own standards of what constitutes "proper behavior." Hence, they each create their own literatures of *adab*.[13]

Nor are concepts of proper behavior mutually exclusive: one can be a religious scholar who either deplores or enjoys reading Abū Nuwās, for example, or a licentious poet who either disdains or valorizes memorizing *ḥadīth*. Human behavior is often more complex and paradoxical than literary taxonomists would wish.

This sociological and historical caveat is important to keep in mind, since one of the weaknesses of primarily textually focused analyses is that they tend to give insufficient weight to issues of agency, change, and time. Bonebakker recognizes of course that the concept of literary *adab* changes and develops over time and that the basic concept has different social connotations.[14] Nonetheless, he declines to explore the broader social contexts of which the form of literary activity he terms *adab* is a part and within which it is subsumed. In his words "*adab* should be interpreted according to its immediate social or intellectual terms of

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11 From this perspective most of *ḥadīth* and all of *fiqh* that deals with personal, family, and communal laws represents a kind of *adab* literature; on the historical interaction between *fiqh*-oriented *madrasa* curriculum and court-centered *adab*, see Makdisi, *The Rise of Humanism*. Al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* is a later attempt at a comprehensive reform of the ideals of Islamic *adab*.

12 Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj (d. 378/988) has a chapter on *adab* in his *Kitāb al-lumaʿ*, by the time Abū Ḥafṣ ʿUmar b. Muḥammad as-Suhrawardī (d. 631/1234) wrote his *ʿAwārif al-maʿārif*, much of what he had to say about Sufi life involved discussing normative rules of conduct (*adab*). In English, see Gerhard Böwering, "The Adab Literature of Classical Sufism: Anṣārī's Code of Conduct," in Metcalf et al., *Moral*, 62-89; Abū al-Najīb al-Suhrawardī, *A Sufi Rule for Novices: Kitāb Ādāb al-Murīdīn of Abū al-Najīb al-Suhrawardī*, abridged transl. and intro. Menahem Milson (Cambridge. Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975), and William C. Chittick's translation of Ibn al-ʿArabī's chapter on *ṣūfī adab*, William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-ʿArabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany.: State University of New York Press, 1989), 174-79.

13 The "Mirrors for Princes" genre is relevant here. For princes, see Ann K. S. Lambton, "Islamic Mirrors for Princes," *Quaderno dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei* 160 (1971): 419-42; and C.E. Bosworth, "Administrative Literature," in *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: Religion, learning, and science in the ʿAbbasid period*, ed. M.J. L. Young, J.D. Latham, and R.B. Sergeant (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 155-67, here 165-67, and sources cited therein. For an example of *adab* for warriors, see, J. F. Richards, "Norms of Comportment among Imperial Mughal Officers," in Metcalf et al., *Moral Conduct*, 255-89. Princes, warriors, and artisans were all involved in the development of codes of *futuwwa* in certain periods of Islamic history. Fictional representations of urban *ʿayyār* standards of behavior may be found in such popular narratives as *Qiṣṣat ʿAlī Zaibaq*, *Sīrat Aḥmad al-Danaf*, and examples of these kinds of stories in *The Thousand and One Nights*.

14 For important survey articles on *adab* see fn. 5.

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reference, and for this finer categories are needed than those established by Nallino – if, indeed, such categories can be established at all."[15] Rather than ending with this negative conclusion, I would propose that we assume the diverse social connotations of the concept of *adab* as the proper point of departure, at least heuristically; that is, we should begin with this frame of social reference and keep it in mind during analysis, even if we rarely have time to do it full justice in discussions whose focus is literature. The disagreement is a matter of emphasis, but the distinction is important.[16]

Similarly, identification of authors and texts important for the field of literary *adab* is crucial, but so is keeping in mind the didactic, curricular, and emulative functions of this activity. Inculcation of "proper behavior" through cultural transmission based on textual traditions is a more complex operation than Bonebakker's description implies. There arise questions of not only who creates these requisite areas of knowledge (authors), but who determines that they are indeed requisite (audiences, i.e., other authors, the educated public, educators, specialists). Then there are the issues of how such materials are transmitted to those requiring training (formal instruction, personal study), who the qualified transmitters are (teachers, scholars), and finally who in practice becomes a representative model for emulation.[17] This last category should not be overlooked or undervalued. Authors may compose socially acceptable texts that then become used by teachers to instruct students, but the final goal of this activity is presumably operational, i.e., the actual social performance of ideals of "proper behavior." Such performance may be enacted or represented by an author, a teacher, a student, or by someone who has mastered the curriculum and who is a real-life model for this activity, even if he does not create its literary representation. Bonebakker is aware of this point, noting that "the student must practice the good conduct he has learned, it is not enough to simply know the correct answers" but again he gives it less emphasis then it deserves.[18] In other words, it must be remembered that the social embodiment and active performance of educated, refined, and cultured behavior is the desired *telos* of the study of *adab* in the same way that political success is presumably the aim of the study of politics or that religiosity is the desired result of religious education. The proper result of *adab* is to produce the *adīb* (pl. *udabā'*), the person imbued with *adab* (ho-

15 Bonebakker, "Early Arabic Literature", 27-30.

16 F. Gabrieli, on the other hand, asserts that *adab* started with the wide definition of "the 'necessary general culture' expected of any man of superior education," but was reduced in early ʿAbbasid time to "knowledge necessary for given offices and social functions." Gabrieli, "Adab" *EI*^{2} I: 175-76. H. Fähndrich, "Der Begriff 'adab'", begins his survey of *adab* by noting that it is the production of a certain social class and maintains awareness of this social dimension throughout his discussion.

17 As determined by continuing public acclaim and enduring positive evaluation by future generations of authors and their publics.

18 Bonebakker, "Adab", 24 and 22.

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wever that may be defined by social context in a particular time and place), but *adab* is a participatory activity that includes both the training of the desired social model of behavior as well as the formulation of the materials needed to teach it. One may be a model of proper social grace without writing a word (cf. the concept of the *ẓarīf*), or participate in the activity of producing texts highly esteemed by ensuing generations, as al-Jāḥiẓ did, without necessarily being considered a model of such behavior in person. Both roles are encompassed by the activity of *adab*, but they differ in intent and function. The *adīb* is thus either someone who composes *adab* literature or whose practice embodies the ideal of proper conduct.[19]

If the concept of *adab* is socially and historically permutative, how do we identify its scope or circumscribe the nature of the literary activity that we are treating here? Bonebakker struggles with this issue throughout his article, and he equitably reviews and evaluates the similar struggles of other scholars. In the end he offers a general definition of *adab* as "the literary scholarship of a cultivated man." He remains dissatisfied and immediately adds that "such a definition still raises difficulties."[20] Nonetheless, to give Bonebakker his due, this may be as good a short definition as any other. To this may be added Pellat's formulation that "We may assume *adab* to be of three basic types, according to whether it aims to instill ethical precepts, to provide its readers with a general education, or to lay down guiding principles for members of various disciplines."[21]

So far, we have emphasized the performative aspects of *adab*. Such external social activity, if it is to be creative, must be based on internally founded ideals and attitudes. The notional idealism of *adab* should not be ignored. The concepts of an internally embraced or inculcated worldview may be difficult to pin down and will shift with changes of historical and social context, but that does not mean that they do not exist. Without such ideals *adab* is reduced to a display of external manners and mannerisms rather than flexible and vital internally generated standards of emulative behavior. In *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period*, Tarif Khalidi contrasts the worldview of early *adab* with that of *ḥadīth* in terms that seem to me to reflect a distinct Jāḥiẓian tone:

> "It might be possible for us to draw a distinction between two spirits, two intentions, two attitudes to the function and propagation of learning in society. For while the *Ḥadīth* scholar of the second or third centuries of Islam was occupied with the collection, assessment and arrangement of his materials for the sake of incorporating them into a system of belief and action, the *adīb* would be more typically occupied in the pursuit of such materials for their own sake and wherever they might lead him. Where a

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19 The concept of *ẓarīf* is mentioned by Nallino, *La litérature*, 20, but this is only one example from a particular time.

20 Bonebakker, "Adab", 30.

21 Charles Pellat, "Al-Jāḥiẓ" in *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: ʿAbbasid Belles-Lettres*, ed. Julia Ashtiany et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 78-95, here 83.

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> *muḥaddith* would be likely to regard Islam as a complete and completed cultural system, an *adīb* would be more likely to regard Islam as a cultural beginning, a constant invitation to examine the world of man and nature."[22]

Khalidi focuses on intellectual tendencies within the first centuries of Islamic culture. In *Knowledge Triumphant*, Franz Rosenthal ranges across numerous centuries and many texts to review the use of the terms "knowledge" (or science, *ʿilm*), "praxis" (*ʿamal*), and *adab*, which he translates as "general education."[23] He notices a growing social consensus among writers by around the 11th/12th centuries that religious knowledge is superior to intellectual knowledge and that the former should determine general ideals of praxis. In regard to *ʿilm* and *adab*, he states that "*Adab* here is clearly the wider term, as it includes matters of ethics, morals, behavior, and custom, in addition to those of learning." Rosenthal continues that since *ʿilm* assumed increasingly denoted religious certitude "somehow, *adab* had to join forces with it."[24] Focusing as it does on concepts in the abstract, Rosenthal's survey has a Hegelian spirit to it, and as with the articles of I. Goldziher and F. Gabrielli,[25] there is a tendency to identify *adab* with a general concept of *humanitas* that probably has more to do with Enlightenment ideals as expressed in 19th and early 20th century European culture than with those of the premodern Islamic world. Nonetheless, the early tension that Khalidi identifies between proponents of the *adab* of religiosity and the *adab* of a worldly life that focuses on the profane concerns of power and wealth appears to remain a cultural constant throughout Islamic culture (and other cultures where monotheistic religions predominate).

The discussion so far should help to identify the general concept of *adab* as a social activity and/or intellectual impulse. Are there further guidelines that would enable us to identify a given text as either belonging to or falling outside of the literature of *adab*? Are there defining textual signals or sets of characteristics? This is not an easy question to answer. As Rosenthal observes, "*Adab* works are hard to classify."[26] Nonetheless, scholars have offered useful sets of qualifiers that can help to guide our path. Bonebakker suggests the broad definition of a literary education that excludes neither philology nor even perhaps poetry by itself.[27] Roger Allen has offered a set of three initial parameters that, he proposes, can serve as constants:

> "Firstly, audience: *adab* grew out of the environments of a cultured, 'literate' élite and was addressed to and reflective of the moral and cultural values of such an audience. Secondly (and derivative of the first), there is the matter of language: *adab* works were

22 Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought*, 85.
23 Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, 240-77.
24 Ibid., 252.
25 In the first and second editions of the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, respectively.
26 Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, 252.
27 Bonebakker, "Early Arabic Literature", 400-3.

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> composed in the written Arabic language (*al-ʿarabiyyah al-fusḥa*) of which the Qur'an was the (inimitable) model. Thirdly, textual medium: following the transfer, exemplified by the Qur'an itself, from a culture that relied to a large extant on oral transmission of information and opinion to one that adhered to a system of laws and norms developed by generations of scholars working with textual sources, *adab* came to focus on texts, the written word – a process much enhanced by the introduction of paper to the region in the late eighth century, and chose not to concern itself with those forms of creativity that were not composed in or consigned to written form. Many *adab* works were, of course, a faithful record of the kinds of verbal debate and erudite exchanges that would characterize the variety of occasions [...] at which intellectuals and wits were gathered together. However, [...] *adab*, elevated language, and the texts come to be closely associated with each other."[28]

Allen intends these formal criteria of audience, language, and mode of transmission as a first cut, not the final word. After all, they equally describe other fields of textual activity, *ḥadīth*, for example, the Qur'anic sciences, or historiography. Nonetheless, his parameters provide a first delimitation and as such are useful. Restricting ourselves to the age in which al-Jāḥiẓ lived, prospective audiences who fulfilled these qualifications include specialists in Arabic language and linguistics; experts in early Arab and Islamic poetry (including poets themselves of course), tribal genealogy, and history; authorities in the study of Islam as a religion (*ḥadīth*, Qur'anic studies, *fiqh, kalām*); and interested members of the political elite, such as scribes, bureaucrats, courtiers, and scholars, and political notables. In this and in latter eras, these groups were interwoven or could easily overlap, but it is important to recognize that they also exclude large portions of the population who were illiterate, semiliterate, or non-intellectual: peasants, soldiers, craftsmen, merchants, and so forth. This categorization also excludes those who do not know Arabic, an increasingly significant group over the ensuing centuries as members of ruling political dynasties became non-Arabic speaking and hence less willing to invest in the project of "Arabic letters" (even though they remained willing to invest in Islamic scholarship, institutions and activities).

Adab can also be adumbrated by topic or fields of intellectual activity. In a previous study, I distinguished among three general categories of cultural and literary production in Muslim Andalusia: sacred, profane, and scientific.[29] *Adab* falls into the second grouping, although not exclusively so since profane literature also includes poetry, the linguistic sciences, and a firm grounding in the religious sciences. *Adab*, after all, also draws materials from both sacred and scientific texts. I based the classification less on writer or text, however, than on the main social and professional spheres of activity of the audience:

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28 Allen, "Arabic Heritage", 221-22.

29 Peter Heath, "Knowledge," in *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature 4: The Literature of Andalus*, ed. Maria Menocal, Michael Sells, and Raymond Scheindlin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 96-125.

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> "Being a successful member of the court required sharp intelligence, personal charm, wit and charisma, good political instincts, and a fair measure of luck. A courtier also needed fluency in classical Arabic for purposes of sophisticated and cultivated conversation and the delivery of formal orations, a refined and elegant prose style for compositions and epistles, and ready access to a store of cultural knowledge based on the body of literary traditions and cultural norms that came to be termed *adab*, a realm of practical knowledge that Ibn Khaldūn defines as "expert knowledge of the poetry and history of the Arabs as well as the possession of some knowledge regarding every science."[30]

From this perspective, *adab* represents the cultural capital and educational curriculum that qualifies one for participation in the worldly arenas of politics and the court, whether as ruler, courtier, bureaucrat, boon companion, scholar, jurisprudent, scientist, or aspirant. These were realms of intense competition for position, status and patronage among the political elite, for which the adornments of *adab* served as a necessary, or at least supportive, key for admittance. Ibn Ḥazm's career represents an apt example of this point. Early in his life, when he entertained political ambitions, he wrote poetry and the *Ṭawq al-ḥamāma*. After his courtly ambitions were frustrated, he concentrated on theology and religion.

In his book on *The Rise of Humanism in Classical Islam and the Christian West*, George Makdisi divides fields of knowledge into similar categories: "(1) the Arabic literary arts, (2) the Islamic religious sciences, (3) the 'foreign sciences' or 'the sciences of the Ancients', especially the Greeks."[31] Like Rosenthal, Makdisi equates the first category in a broad sense with "humanism," yet most of the definitions that Makdisi cites from Arab authors regard *adab* as one of the sciences (*ʿilm*), in particular that dealing with fields of philology and literature – grammar, lexicography, rhetoric, metrics, poetry, and to a certain extent history.[32] Makdisi's book has much to offer for the study of what might be termed "scholastic *adab*;" it is especially pertinent for understanding the concept after the 12th century, after the *madrasa* had begun to rival and even supplant the court as the main center for producing and supporting practitioners of *adab* writing. Even from the 11th century, the term *adab* became increasingly used to designate a technical science based on fields of linguistic, philological, and literary study. The tension between *adab* as general education and *adab* as technical philological study can be witnessed in Yāqūt's (d. 626/1229) introduction to his *Dictionary of*

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30 Ibid., 107; see also Ibn Khaldūn, *Al-Muqaddima*, ed. E. Quatremère (Paris, 1858), III: 295; *The Muqadimmah: An Introduction to History*, transl. Franz Rosenthal, 3 vols. (Princeton: Pantheon Books, 1958), III: 340.

31 Makdisi, *The Rise of Humanism*, 88; for an interesting counter-positioning of *adab* and religious knowledge as a contest of professional rivalry, see Angelika Neuwirth, "Adab Standing Tall – Whose Norms Should Rule Society: The Case of al-Harīrī's al-Maqāmah al-Ramlīyah, " in *Myths, Historical Archetypes and Symbolic Figures in Arabic Literature: Towards a New Hermeneutic Approach*, ed. A. Neuwirth, B. Embaló, et al. (Beirut, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1999), 205-24.

32 Makdisi, *The Rise of Humanism*, 90, also 88-96.

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Learned Men (Muʿjam al-udabāʾ). He concludes his introduction to his biographical dictionary with this passage:

> "Know [...] that this category of learning (*ʿilm*) is not for those who seek it to earn a living, or to acquire ornaments and fine clothing, nor is it of that sort that provides profit in the *madrasa* or that one can use in scholastic disputations in sessions attended by religious scholars. It is rather the learning of kings and ministers, of people of eminence and greatness who make it a springtime for their hearts and an entertainment for their souls, whose spirits relax with it and find joy in it. It is a springtime for refined souls and a necessary investment for learning the important sciences."[33]

For Yāqūt this was the aspect of *adab* that focused on an entertaining general education, yet earlier in his introduction and in his choice of biographical subjects, the biographer makes it quite clear that for him *adab* authors are primarily experts in the linguistic and literary sciences, such as grammar, lexicography, rhetoric, prosody, poetry, and whatever background knowledge, such as the genealogy and history of the pre-Islamic Arabs, as is needed to understand poetry. Yāqūt's first chapter after his introduction, titled "On Praise of *Adab* and its Folk and Blame of Ignorance and its Bearers," confirms this impression, since it focuses on the linguistic dimension of correct and elegant use of formal Arabic and the avoidance of solecism (*laḥn*).[34] *Adab* has here lost its intellectual or ethical orientations and has predominantly come to mean linguistic and literary training.

Another possible point of departure for the study of *adab* literature is proposed by Fedwa Malti-Douglas in her study of al-Jāḥiẓ's *al-Bukhalāʾ*. After reviewing the writings of Nallino, Bonebakker and others, she suggests a strategy based on literary and structural analysis of the texts themselves.

> "The meaning of *adab* as literature might best be served by a detailed examination of the *adab* works themselves. In this regard, it would seem to be useful initially to make the distinction between an *adīb*, a person imbued with *adab*, and *adab* itself. This would eliminate the pitfalls of defining a literary work through the ideal which the literature is said to serve. Once this distinction between the goals of an *adab* work and its actual structure has been set, an objective approach to *adab* becomes possible."[35]

I am sympathetic to this approach, but it does appear to me to present the logical challenge that one would initially have to declare one or more works or authors as representing *adab*, and then use any resulting definitions to include or exclude other works. Where this process might lead would be interesting, but I am not sure what the results would be. One might start with the works of al-Jāḥiẓ and define *adab* as "texts written by al-Jāḥiẓ," but even this presents problems. Charles Pellat, for example, who clearly knows his al-Jāḥiẓ, divides the

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33 Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-udabāʾ*, 20 vols. (Beirut: Dar Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, n.d.), I: 63; trans. Makdisi, *The Rise of Humanism*, 91-92 with my modifications.

34 Yāqūt, *Muʿjam*, I: 66-91.

35 Malti-Douglas, *Structures of Avarice*, 12.

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writer's corpus into "political and religious works," "scholarly works," and "*adab*." Already we have distinctions among a single author's textual production.[36] Even if one were prepared to accept Pellat's classification as a starting point for the study of al-Jāḥiẓ, the works of other acknowledged pioneers of *adab* literature, such as Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ and Ibn Qutayba, are different significantly in style, structure, and tone, both from those of al-Jāḥiẓ and from each other. I sense a circular argument here. In the best of all worlds, one should complement Fedwa Malti-Douglas' proposal to base a definition of *adab* on its texts with a recommendation that one read through Yāqūt and use inclusion in his biographical dictionary of *udabāʾ* as an additional basis for categorization.[37]

Finally, there is the approach of assuming a definition of *adab* without explicitly asking what it is. This is the predominant tendency among literary historians who write in Arabic. They equate *adab* in its singular form with *ādāb* in its plural form and adopt the modern meaning of "literature," "belles-lettres," or "the humanities." Assuming this definition allows one to focus thereafter on a historical succession of individual authors who have become famous for their literary artistry, with consideration for regional distinctions, or on studying formal dimensions or smaller structural units. Shawqī Ḍayf's histories of Arabic literature are a good example of the traditional format of historically-oriented author-based organization. Alternatively, in one of his studies, *al-Fann wa-madhāhibuh fī l-nathr al-ʿarabī* (*Art and its Schools in Arabic Prose*), Ḍayf moves beyond this approach to adopt style as an analytic criterion. He distinguishes four stylistic stages in premodern Arabic literature: *al-ṣanʿa* (natural stylistic artistry; examples, Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ or al-Jāḥiẓ), *al-taṣnīʿ* (embellished stylistic artistry; examples, Ibn al-ʿAmīd and al-Ṣāḥib b. ʿAbbād), *al-taṣannuʿ* (artificially embellished stylistic artistry; examples, al-Khawārizmī, Badīʿ al-Zamān al-Hamadānī), and *al- taṣannuʿ wa-ʾl-taʿqīd* (artificially complex stylistic artistry; examples, Abū ʾl-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī and al-Ḥarīrī).[38] Using another approach, in "Classical Arabic Prose Literature: A Researcher's Sketch Map," Stefan Leder and Hilary Kilpatrick (1992) survey smaller structural and generic units, such as speeches, sermons, proverbs, and

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36 Pellat, "Al-Jāḥiẓ".

37 Such studies would entail not only examining individual authors, but also issues of literary discipleships, circles, and patronage. Good examples of this useful approach are Everett K. Rwoson, "The Philosopher as Littérateur: al-Tawhīdī and His Predecessors," *Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Arabisch-Islamischen Wissenschaften* 6 (1990): 50-92, and Joel L. Kraemer, *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam: The Cultural Revival during the Buyid Age* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986). For a study of *adab* in "division of the sciences" treatises, see Wolfhart Heinrichs, "The Classification of the Sciences and the Consolidation of Philology in Classical Islam," in *Centres of Learning: Learning and Location in Pre-Modern Europe and the Near East*, ed. J. W. Drijvers and A. A. MacDonald (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), 119-39.

38 Shawqī Ḍayf, *Taʾrīkh al-adab al-ʿarabī 4: al-ʿAṣr al-ʿAbbāsī al-thānī* (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1975); for al-Jāḥiẓ see 587-610 and idem., *Al-Fann wa-madhāhibuh fi al-nathr al-ʿarabī* (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1965), esp.154-88; in this work, Ḍayf notes the literary elements of realism, digression (*istiṭrād*), sonorous style, and rationalism.

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governmental correspondence. They are acutely aware that all of these forms become incorporated piecemeal into larger compilations, but they refrain from examining or attempting to define these larger entities.

These approaches appear to assume a definition of *adab* rather than question it. This might suffice, yet I still believe that there is some utility in posing the larger query of how authorial intent relates to form, structure, and result, in the context of working in a self-conscious tradition of literary creation. One may study any single element of this complex equation, yet there is still some benefit in providing a synthetic overview. It is difficult to evaluate parts without a conception of the whole.[39]

Where does all of this leave us with regard to *adab*? Back with intuition, I fear, rather than definition. In general, I believe that I recognize *adab* when I see it, in the same way that I know that *belles-lettres* consists of all *lettres* that are *belles* – however I might define that term. It may well be that if we cannot really define *adab* as a literary genre, we should strive to surround it. To further delimit the concept of literary *adab*, one could propose a set of notional indicators that also reflect aspects of textual presentation. These indicators are difficult to delimit because they indicate tendencies rather than absolutes; nonetheless, in their aggregate they may be accurate as descriptors of general attitudes and handling of materials.[40] On a notional level, therefore, *adab*

(1) is written in formal Arabic, although it may cite examples of solecism, and has a self-reflexive concern with the use of proper grammar and style and an awareness of the stylistic potential of the previous literary tradition;
(2) is didactic in intent, either explicitly or implicitly, and educates by disseminating the cultural capital requisite for participation in the elite, either in the form of necessary general background knowledge (as socially and historically determined), or in the form of practical ethical values, or by exploring the vagaries of social interaction and mysteries of human nature;
(3) is profane rather than sacred in general inclination, although it not infrequently includes religious citation to justify, preface, or amplify its statements;
(4) is concerned with what one would today term interdisciplinary and general education rather than specialized or technical investigation, although it is often based on the work of specialists, quotes from technical treatises, and may be written by individuals who are also recognized specialists in their own right in one or more other fields;

39 This is the advantage of attempting to trace the configurations of individual genres; see, for example, Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila, *Maqama: A History of a Genre*, Diskurse der Arabistik 5 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2002), on the *maqāma* genre.

40 On difficulty of even defining the concept of literature, see Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 1-19.

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(5) uses prose rather than poetry as its basic medium of discourse, although its texts can be filled with poetic citations of sometimes significant length;
(6) is informal in spirit and structure – not inclined to rely on formal scholarly apparatuses and methodologies (such as strict use of *isnād*) – and is willing to experiment in regard to aspects of subject matter, form, style, and literary expression;
(7) is interested in particular incidents of personal experience or examples of individual expression rather than in the systematic presentational methodologies of, for example, historiography, biography, or philosophy;
(8) has a bias toward realism, that is, it prefers to use the words and deeds of past or present individuals, of examples drawn from "real life," whether past or present, or at least purporting to be drawn from real life;
(9) is more likely to introduce the explicit or personal voice of its author than use the neutral voice of scholarship;
(10) tends to organize its choice and presentation of materials around topics;
(11) has a strong structural inclination toward open-ended compilation that interweaves short citations from previous textual or oral materials, usually presented in the form of a series of *akhbār*, rather than relying on discursive prose;
(12) does not rely on, and in fact even avoids, plot as a major structuring device, often instead moving from topic to topic so as not to "bore" the reader;
(13) is flexible in regard to size, ranging anywhere from a treatise (*risāla*) consisting of a few pages, a monograph (*risāla*, *kitāb*), or an encyclopedia or anthology encompassing many topics over hundreds or even thousands of pages;
(14) relies on and encourages a sense that by reading it one participates in a prestigious endeavor of elite culture of broad historical and geographical scope;
(15) is collegial and interpersonal in nature, i.e., relies on citing specific words and actions of representative, often iconic, individuals; this accounts for its fondness and even obsession with biographical identification (and hence with the biographical dictionary as an ancillary literary form; one always wants to know more about past sources or peers);
(16) is public rather than private, that is, it focuses on representation of external action or socially oriented statement rather than internal psychological analysis, personal introspection, or disclosure of private life (no portrayals of the inner dramas of family life here);
(17) represents an aesthetic activity in two senses, (a) a propensity for artistry of language and organization, and (b) belief in the truth-value of its message independent of any factual or logical veracity (in this way it resembles poetry or fictional narrative);
(18) seeks to entertain and amuse as well as to edify;

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(19) is a socially competitive endeavor; writers of *adab*, whatever their intent to be artful, entertaining, or instructive, are engaged in a public enterprise in which they seek popularity, prestige and, not infrequently, position. *Udabā'* compose texts for the social, intellectual, and political elite; they compete with their contemporary professional rivals and they strive to outstrip the achievements of past masters. As members of elite professional classes, they are acutely aware of the literary tradition that they pursue and that they aim to improve, modify, update, or surpass.

Additional characteristics can no doubt be enumerated. It must be noted that *adab* also shares a number of these characteristics with other forms of writing. *Ḥadīth* scholarship, for example, overlaps with elements 1, 2, 5, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 18, and in some of its forms, with element 9. Still, the differences comprised by the remaining elements mentioned above distinguish *adab* from *ḥadīth*, while others, such as its disinterest in plot, its use of formal Arabic, or its topicality, distinguish *adab* from popular literary forms, such as *The Thousand and One Nights*.

Although enumerating typical characteristics of *adab* is helpful, it still leaves us in our initial quandary of lacking a convenient definition of the genre, assuming that such a genre even exists. Hence, with al-Jāḥiẓ we are left with an author whose greatness we have not yet accounted for and who is generally acknowledged to write in a genre we are unable precisely to define. It is time, therefore, to make our second detour and move to a brief discussion of the essay, in the hope that such a lateral move may resolve our predicament.

The Essay

Literary historians trace the origins of the modern literary essay to two near contemporaneous authors, the Frenchman Michel de Montaigne (1533-92) and the Englishman Sir Francis Bacon (1561-1626). For both men writing and rewriting essays was a lifetime occupation. Montaigne published Books I and II of his *Essays* in 1580 and Book III in 1588; all went through several printings, with the final edition published posthumously in 1599. With each new printing, the author reworked and expanded his material.[41] Similarly, Bacon initially published ten essays in 1597 (reprinted in 1598, 1604, and 1606), expanded these to thirty-eight essays in a second edition in 1612, and produced fifty-eight essays, including expansions and revisions of previous ones, in the final edition of 1625.[42]

The style and attitudes of the two authors differ. Montaigne, the country gentleman, writes informally, as if for himself, and is both more personally intro-

41 Graham Good, *The Observing Self: Rediscovering the Essay* (London / New York: Routledge, 1988), 26.

42 Ibid., 43.

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spective and extrovertly curious about the surrounding world. He creates an inimitable style that appears to ramble artlessly even as it effortlessly hits its mark time after time. Bacon, the courtier, develops a more public, rhetorical style. His forte is the trenchant observation formulated in memorably pithy phrases. Despite these differences, both men share a rational, sardonically realistic, and experimental attitude toward the world of human affairs. Nothing about humanity surprises them except its illusions. Montaigne is the greater writer due to his remarkable ability to include self-examination in the equation. His proclivity for uncensored self-analysis was revolutionary, while the elegance with which he executed it remains unequalled. His motto, "What do I know?" (*Que scay-je?*), has continued to resonate in modern Western thought since his time.

Despite their differences, Montaigne and Bacon both display a marked skepticism toward any authority based on the past judgments of philosophy, science, social custom, and – although they are very careful here – religion. Both reverse the standard approach toward received wisdom; rather than using experience to substantiate accepted formulations of past doctrine, they test received ideas by recourse to personal experience.[43] Experience rather than tradition becomes the touchstone of reality. On the technical level, just as the importation of papermaking expanded the reading public for al-Jāḥiẓ and other early *udabā'*, the invention of printing facilitated the great popularity that Montaigne and Bacon's essays enjoyed. Needless to say, both wrote for the elites of their age and both were pleasantly gratified by the popular success of their essays.

Since the time of these two progenitors, the familiar essay, which retains its verbal senses of "to try, to attempt, to test," has been a constant of Western literature. Historians of each European literary tradition can name a series of eminent practitioners of the genre through the centuries.[44] In English literature, for example, one customarily mentions as masters Joseph Addison, Richard Steele, Samuel Johnson, William Hazlitt, Thomas Carlyle, Charles Lamb, Thomas Arnold, Lord Chesterton, Robert Louis Stevenson, Virginia Woolf, and George Orwell – and this is the short list since almost every major and minor prose writer, and many poets, experimented with the essay at one time or another.

This is all very well, the student of premodern Arabic literature may ask, but what does it have to do either with al-Jāḥiẓ or with *adab* as a literary pursuit? The similarity is this: although the essay is a much practiced and highly recognized prose art form, whose eminent practitioners in European languages receive just attention in their national literary histories, few literary critics have actually studied it as a literary form or genre, and none are quite sure how to define it. Alexander J. Butrym observed that looking up "essay" in Princeton University's on-

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43 Ibid., 43-44.

44 Claire De Obaldia, *The Essayistic Spirit: Literature, Modern Criticism and the Essay* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 60-61, notes 260-63.

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line catalogue produced around 30,000 hits for the years 1980-88 alone. So many of these were scholarly articles, however, that it was almost impossible for Butrym to winnow down citations of essays that could be considered literary.[45]

Even when one focuses on the subject of the literary essay, the lack of secondary analysis of the genre is astonishing. Several visits to major American bookstores that I undertook produced a score or so of individual books of essays. All, however, consisted of collections of individual writers or, more likely, anthologies of works by different writers. No literary study of the essay was to be found. Although there are abundant secondary studies of individual authors – hundreds of articles and books on Montaigne, Samuel Johnson or Virginia Woolf – hardly any exist that analyze the genre per se. In the last century, such general studies, whether books or influential articles, number fewer than a dozen in all Western languages put together.

It is true that there are plenty of textbooks on how to write essays intended for courses of English composition and many anthologies and readers for English literature courses; but authors of such textbooks do not seek to define the essay, and they classify them in ad hoc fashion. In *The Essay: An Introduction*, Robert DiYanni "in a rough way" offers the following classification: speculative, argumentative, narrative, and expository, but then sensibly notes that "essays rarely appear in such pure forms."[46] In *The Observing Self: Rediscovering the Essay*, Graham Good suggests four "principle" types of essay: "the travel essay, the moral essay, the critical essay, and the autobiographical essay" adding that these are "not mutually exclusive categories."[47] In *Elements of Literature*, Carl H. Klaus adopts the categories of "Essay as Argument: Persuasion," "Essay as Story: History," "Essay as Poem: Meditation," "Essay as Play: Dialogue," and provides a single example of each tendency.[48] He then abandons such classification and offers his readers a broad sampling of eighteen examples chosen, it appears, more or less at random. Moreover, even with his proposed categories, he must resort to metaphorical reliance on other generic terms – story, poem, play. In adopting terms drawn from other genres, he provides analogies rather than definitions.

With the essay form, therefore, we are in the happy position that scholars of Western literatures are just as clueless about how to define the genre as we are in regard to *adab* in Arabic or Islamic literatures (for let us remember that *adab* exists in premodern Persian, Turkish, and other Islamic literatures as well). Misery loves company.

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45 Alexander J. Butrym, *Essays on the Essay: Redefining the Genre* (Athens, Georgia / London: The University of Georgia Press, 1989), 1-2.

46 Robert DiYanni, *The Essay: An Introduction*, (Boston, Mass.: McGraw Hill, 2002), 25-27.

47 Good, *The Observing Self*, xii.

48 Robert Scholes, Carl H. Klaus, et al., eds., *Elements of Literature: Essay, Fiction, Poetry, Drama, Film*, 4th ed. (Oxford / New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 9-36.

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Nonetheless, the past century did produce two influential "essays" on the essay that help situate the endeavors of al-Jāḥiẓ and his colleagues. The first is "On the Nature and Form of the Essay," written by the Hungarian intellectual, Georg Lukács, in 1910, when he was still in his Hegelian phase prior to his embrace of Marxism. The second is "The Essay as Form," published in 1956 by Theodor W. Adorno, a prominent member of the Frankfurt school of philosophy who knew Lukács' writings intimately. There is little need to analyze these essays in detail, but understanding the general argument of each is valuable. Both writers situate the essay as an activity that falls in a median position between art – here the literary arts of poetry, drama and narrative fiction are intended – and science (including technical philosophy). Lukács focuses on the relationship between art and the essay, Adorno on that between the essay and science.[49]

Lukács' piece is the work of a young man, passionate, idealistic, incandescent. Having just completed a book of nine essays, he queries the form he has been pursuing and asks whether it has any unity: "To what extent have the really great writings which belong to this category been given literary form, and to which extent is this form of theirs an independent one." Can writing about art or about life also be considered art? How is it distinguished from the "icy, final perfection of philosophy?"[50] He immediately answers in the affirmative; after admitting that criticism can aspire to science, he continues:

> "There is, then, a science of the arts, but there is also an entirely different kind of expression of the human temperament, which usually takes the form of writing about the arts. Usually, I say, for there are many writings which are engendered by such feelings without ever touching on literature or art – writings in which the same life-problems are raised as in the writings which call themselves criticism, but with the difference that here the questions are addressed directly to life itself; they do not need the mediation of literature or art."[51]

Lukács predicates three categories of experience: life, art, and the "formative" expression of and meditation on the first two, which is the domain of the essay. In his words, "poetry takes its motifs from life (and art); the essay has its models in art (and life)."[52] He illustrates this with his insightful metaphor of the portrait. Standing before a great artist's portrait of an individual somehow provides an insight into the subject's character, or to the artist's understanding and portrayal of character, that transcends any concern for the subject himself. Such a painting is only one of many possible portrayals, even by a single artist, much less other possible depictions by other artists. Why then is such a portrait great? One does not

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49 Georg Lukács, "On the Nature and Form of the Essay," in *Soul and Form*, transl. Anna Bostock (London: Merlin, 1974), 1-18; Theodor W. Adorno, "The Essay as Form," in *The Adorno Reader*, ed. Brian O'Connor (Oxford. Blackwell, 2000), 91-111.

50 Lukács, "On the Nature", 1.

51 Ibid., 3.

52 Ibid., 10.

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personally know the person, with all of his hopes, fears, and experiences. Even if one did, this is just one moment drawn from countless moments from life. Yet when gazing on a portrait painted by a great artist, one becomes indifferent to the issue of empirical verisimilitude or familiar knowledge. This is because the artist has managed to capture an essence, given the individual a particular form, expressed a truth about human character that illuminates the painting in a way that makes concerns about realistic representation extraneous. This, Lukács states, "is more or less how I imagine the essay to be. Here too there is the struggle for truth, for the incarnation of a life which someone has seen in a man, an epoch or a form."[53] This is why great essays transcend time and fashion, because a great essayist "dreams our longing" and thereby shapes a particular apprehension of reality.[54] To the extent that like a great portrait a brilliant essay translates experience into a formulation of truth, it transcends time, even if its style or worldview becomes dated. Nor is the essay necessarily confined to single or limited topic; it can extend to cover, or even to create, broad historical periods.

> "Facts are always there and everything is always contained in facts, but every epoch needs its own Greece, its own Middle Ages, and its own Renaissance. Every age creates the age it needs."[55]

As a social or artistic process, therefore, the essay is always in the state of becoming. Life and art continually need mediation and interpretation; the last word on the matter is never said. Great essays have permanence, but writing essays is always a "penultimate" activity.[56]

Adorno wrote half a century later than Lukács and, having survived the Second World War and living in the U.S. at the height of the Cold War, he has a considerably bleaker view of life. For him the main challenge of modern life is that society has enfolded itself in a terrifying interlacing of mass consumerism, hollow art, scholastic aestheticism, rigid ideology, and positivistic science. The goal of authentic philosophy, therefore, must be to keep open a "humanistic space," an area of activity that can critique and counter the mindless positivism that he sees permeating contemporary philosophy and life. For him, the essay provides this "space." Yet for that very reason, expositing a precise definition of the essay in a systematic format is difficult, even contrary to his intent. His essay itself consists more of a series of gnomic assertions ("the essay is . . . ") than organized exposition.

One may more fruitfully understand Adorno's ideas by inquiring what the essay is not. It is not primeval emotion, nor art for art's sake, nor the learning of the schoolmen with their vapid logic and timid adherence to method; nor is it

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53 Ibid., 11.
54 Ibid., 13.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid., 17.

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the structured analysis of science with its conviction that it can provide all-encompassing truth. "As the essay denies any primeval givens, so it refutes any definition of its concepts."[57]

What then in Adorno's view is the function of the essay? It is an open-ended meditation by a sophisticated mind on humanity's present and past experience. Examining human experience, it queries and tests possible conclusions rather than assume them. The process is itself the goal. "In the essay, concepts do not build a continuum of operations, thought does not advance in a single direction, rather the aspects of the argument interweave as in a carpet. The fruitfulness of the thoughts depends on the density of this texture."[58] As with Montaigne, who though never mentioned clearly exerts influence here, such meditation is an endless activity, since the variables of experience are infinite. "It is not that the essay ignores indisputable certainty, as that it abrogates the ideal."[59] In Adorno's view, this exercise is not solipsistic but rather based on a wide appreciation of human experience. "The relation to experience . . . is a relation of all of history; merely individual experience . . . is mediated by the all-encompassing of historical humanity."[60] Yet although Adorno valorizes experience, he warns against its reification, the presumption that "all knowledge can potentially be converted into science."[61] In the relationship between the particular and the universal, he insists that "the desire of the essay is not to seek and filter the eternal out of the transitory; it wants, rather, to make the transitory eternal."[62]

What Lukács and Adorno share with Bacon and Montaigne, and with all great masters of the essay, is a healthy distrust for system and an intuitive faith in the importance of the particulars of experience, whether present or past, whether immediate or mediated by art, thought, or history. Rather than reduce the sum of human experience to set precepts, they seek to scrutinize experience in all of its variety and thereby to discover what meaning there is to be had. If this project does not lend itself to easy categories of form and content, then that is its very point! This planned indeterminacy explains why the essay is difficult to define as a literary form, since by definition it is bound only by the skill and insight of its practitioner; by "the unique, unpredictable configuration of self and observation, subject and object."[63]

In addition to the seminal essays of Lukács and Adorno, two critical studies of the essay have appeared relatively recently, Good's previously mentioned *The Observing Self* (1988) and Claire De Obaldia's *The Essayistic Spirit: Literature, Modern*

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57 Adorno, "The Essay", 100.
58 Ibid., 100.
59 Ibid., 101.
60 Ibid., 99.
61 Ibid., 96.
62 Ibid., 99.
63 Good, *The Observing Self*, 60.

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Criticism, and the Essay (1995). While both excellent, they both struggle with the same problem of definition of the form. After learned but fitful introductory analyses, both scholars shift to examination of individual essayists. The essay, they appear to conclude, is best studied by means of the activities of its writers. Both draw attention to the open-ended nature of the form as being one of its defining characteristics, and yet it is this very characteristic that makes the essay innately difficult to define. In addition, De Obaldia makes an insightful connection when she refers to Ian Watt's observation in his *The Rise of the Novel* that the "transformation of Western civilization at the time of the Renaissance lies mainly in a philosophical shift from universals to particulars."[64] This is a substantial generalization, yet its echo of Adorno's position regarding the essay is interesting. The relationship of particular and universal is something to keep in mind in regard to the study of *adab* literature. Critics of the novel, by the way, face similar difficulties in defining the genre.

Adab and Essay

Does this review of the essay help in understanding first *adab* and then al-Jāḥiẓ's writings? Let us begin with some similarities between the two forms. Both are produced by educated individuals for an educated public and both tend to adopt a style that, in the context of the age, is literary rather than merely literate. Both are topical and open-ended in choice of topic. Both eschew plot, although they can rely on shorter narrative units. Both tend to be the province of the generalist rather than the specialist. Both discard the inconvenience of scholarly methods and technical apparatuses. Both focus on the domain of the particulars of human experience rather than conceptual universals and therefore decline to create overarching theories. Both fall within the arena of human endeavor that falls between art, on the one hand (i.e., poetry in the Arabic context), and doctrines of science or technical philosophy on the other. Both occupy the domain of what medieval philosophy terms the "practical intellect," the area of practical deliberation, judgment, and action that focuses on particulars of social activity – the operational textures of morality and politics in real life – rather than on universals of theory. Both maintain a healthy respect for religion and – to the extent possible – an even healthier distance from it. Both share an aesthetic dimension. Both forms originated during exciting periods of cultural transformation when one world view was displacing another.

Yet the differences between the two forms should also not be underestimated. Cultural context, historical reference points, and textual traditions differ. Aspects of presentational format differ as well. The predominant structural tendency of

[64] De Obaldia, *The Essayistic Spirit*, 13; Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel, Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1974), 34.

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the essay is narrative exposition interspersed with quote and observation; that of *adab* is a series of *akhbār* (anecdotes or reported statements) strung in succession. If the customary form of essay is like the short documentary, then that of *adab* more resembles the slide show, a series of views on a subject, each presenting its own perspective. Finally, equally important as issues of culture are those of historical period. One can argue that the world views of premodern inhabitants of the Islamic world and of medieval Europe have more in common with each than either has with the modern western era that begins with the Reformation. The magnitude of such differences must be remembered.

Despite such differences of time, culture, and literary tradition, there is one final similarity between the practitioners of *adab* and the essay that deserves mention. In general, one may observe that analysis of both types of texts can be divided into three levels. First and most basic is the level that consists of particulars of textual and cultural reference, that is, the *materials* of the literary tradition that each writer draws on as a common touchstone with his or her audience, the presumed fund of shared knowledge and interests that it is the task of the *adīb*, writer or audience, to cultivate. Second, what external *persona*, what tone, voice, or style, does the writer bring to his/her task: straightforward, highly rhetorical, ironic, sarcastic, magisterial, neutral? Is this persona an actively present voice in the text or hidden within it? Third, there is the internal attitude, mindset, or belief structure – one could say *ideology* – that writers individually bring to their task. Are they conservative; seeking to affirm traditional forms and values with their writings? Are their attitudes toward inherited tradition neutral; do they want to work within received doctrines or literary format? Or is the writer radical in viewpoint, someone who aspires to transform or overturn the tradition s/he has inherited?[65]

Of course, individual authors can shift boundaries either in regard to tradition, persona, or ideology as they move from one work to another. Nevertheless, it is my impression that substantial shifts are more difficult to effect than one might initially think. Masters of *adab* or the essay share the characteristic that they in fact develop and are remembered for a unity in regard to these three levels. In fact, it is the commonality of these levels that leads readers to offer general characterizations of authors. Few commentators on al-Jāḥiẓ omit the phrases "humorous" and "curious" from their descriptions of him. Ibn Qutayba attracts the adjective "conservative," with which I do not believe he would be unhappy.

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[65] Compare this adumbration of materials from literary tradition, mindset or ideology, and voice/persona with an analytic framework for plot-based narratives, structure, semantics, and style. Cf. Tvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre,* transl. R. Howard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1973), and Peter Heath, "Romance as Genre in *The Thousand and One Nights*, Part I," *Journal of Arabic Literature.* 18 (1987): 1-21; idem., "Romance as Genre in *The Thousand and One Nights*, Part II," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 19/1 (1988): 1-26.

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Similarly, in regard to the essay, Samuel Johnson excels in tone, style, and ability, yet his affirmation of the conservative social attitudes that made him so popular in his day now render him – despite his wit – less central for a general curriculum; his remaining readers tend to be students specializing in English literature. Such is not the fate of other essayists. Even today, one enjoys Jonathan Swift for his biting social satire that still resonates two and a half centuries after his death. As for the inimitable Montaigne – well, he is inimitable.

Al-Jāḥiẓ

It is time now to turn to another inimitable writer, al-Jāḥiẓ, who is, after all, the real focus of this essay.

The Book of Eloquence and Clear Exposition (*Kitāb al-bayān wa-'l-tabyīn*) is a good starting place since in its sum it represents al-Jāḥiẓ's ideas on clear speech. The work is relatively long, over 1200 pages in ʿAbd al-Salām Hārūn's edition (four parts in two substantial volumes). It draws its *materials* from aphorisms, poetry, incidents, orations from pre-Islamic Arab tribal life and from similar examples from noted figures of Islamic culture – poets, scholars, politicians and leaders, religious leaders, and so forth – with the addition of selections from sermons, political speeches, samples from letters and epistles, as well as some material of Persian, Byzantine, or Indian origin. The treatise is organized along three principles: first, materials are grouped around key words representing central concepts connected to the overall topic of eloquence. Second, examples of speeches and epistles that represent eloquent praxis are presented. Third, especially in the latter half of the book, al-Jāḥiẓ adds a miscellany of supplemental materials connected with the overall subject. The book thus combines investigation into the nature of eloquence while at the same time serving as a sourcebook for sample texts and a resource for additional information.

There is not time to engage in a detailed examination of all of al-Jāḥiẓ's keywords, but the sequence of the initial ones is as follows: poor diction (*ʿiyy*, stammering, and *ḥasr*, being tongue-tied), speech defects (*luthgha*), eloquence (*bayān*), rhetorical speech (*balāgha*), silence (*ṣamt*), stupidity (*ḥumq*), verbal affectation (*tashadduq*), and rhymed prose (*sajʿ*). These subjects consume one fourth of the text. The second fourth of the book consists of examples of famous speakers and speeches drawn mainly from early Islamic religious and political figures. Al-Jāḥiẓ then turns to examples of the defective use of classical Arabic, that is, examples of colloquialisms, solecisms, or ignorant use of speech (*laḥn*). Since an essential principle of *adab* is that one knows how to use classical Arabic properly, examples of prominent persons' linguistic errors are a favorite topic of many *adab* authors, who usually offer examples of such mistakes with undisguised glee. The book then turns to a section on use of the staff (or sword) as an accoutrement in oration, the sayings of fools and idiots, and thereafter the miscellany of

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anecdotes, sayings, and speeches on various subjects related to issues of eloquence and proper speech. Although framed in prose, the book, as is common in *adab*, is replete with poetic citations, ranging from a single to a dozen lines of verse. This is not a poetic anthology, however; poetry serves to emphasize or elaborate the points being made.

The display of sheer erudition here is extraordinary. One comes to expect mastery of text and context with al-Jāḥiẓ, but the vast scope of his learning is truly remarkable. Comparison with other *adab* works on eloquence, the chapter in Ibn Qutayba's *ʿUyūn al-akhbār*, for example, quickly reveals that in regard to fluency in the Arabic literary tradition of his day al-Jāḥiẓ exhibits a completely different caliber of sophistication and depth of knowledge. Al-Jāḥiẓ's immersion in the sources, pre- and post-Islamic, and his effortless ability to marshal them to make his points and punctuate his arguments is nothing short of astonishing.

Does one need, one may ask, 1200 pages to describe what eloquence is? Cannot al-Jāḥiẓ summarize his conception of clear exposition in a line or two? Of course this is possible. Here is one of his definitions of eloquence: it is "a word that encompasses every activity that lifts from meaning the veil (of language) and snatches away from one's consciousness its cloak, so that the listener perceives meaning accurately."[66] In other words, eloquence consists of the perfect union of language and meaning, diction and definition, sound and sense. Aspects of eloquence, al-Jāḥiẓ points out, transcend reliance on language alone; they may also involve gestures, signals, and posture. Providing concise definitions of eloquence is in fact easy; in the course of the book al-Jāḥiẓ provides scores, perhaps hundreds, of such definitions, all agreeing with the principle that proper speech is that which leads to clear meaning. Compare, for example, the epigram that al-Jāḥiẓ cites from Sahl b. Hārūn: "Intellect is the guide of the soul, knowledge the guide of intellect, eloquence is the translator of knowledge."[67] Producing a single definition is not, however, the point of al-Jāḥiẓ's book. He does not seek to provide his own designation of what eloquence is, at least not directly. Rather he offers a wide survey of the literary and cultural tradition that he has inherited – and that he is himself shaping – to discover what participants in this tradition have contributed in regard to understanding and judging eloquence. Al-Jāḥiẓ certainly has his own point of view, but he is more engaged in experientially exploring the cultural geography that he has inherited in order to delineate the details of its mountains, rivers, valleys, and boundaries and in this way to immerse his audience in its textures, the warp and woof of its fabric. It would be simple to define a forest as a bunch of trees, but the experience of actually walking in one differs. Al-Jāḥiẓ's approach induces the emotional and notional experiences that

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66 Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Al-Bayān wa'l-tabyīn*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn, 4 parts in 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1948-50), I: 76.

67 Ibid., I: 77.

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personal engagement with literary texts creates rather than reducing such encounters to a set of dry conceptual definitions.

Unmistakable for a reader in any of al-Jāḥiẓ's writings is the sense that one is being guided by the author's textual *persona*, but such guidance can be either implicit or explicit. In the *Book of Eloquence* such direction is tacit. Subject matter takes priority over authorial voice. Like a tour guide, al-Jāḥiẓ provides the itinerary, leads the way, and supplies necessary information. Yet he determines the nature of the experience by means of the pathways he chooses and the monuments he brings into sight rather than through overt running commentary. This is the quandary of every teacher: to what extent does one insert one's own personality into the learning experience. In this book, al-Jāḥiẓ lets his materials speak for themselves. Al-Jāḥiẓ is noted for his dazzling introductions, but in this work – whose subject is eloquence and exposition – the exordium is stunningly succinct:

> "Lord, we seek refuge in you from discord in speech, just as we seek refuge in you from discord in act. And we seek refuge in you from being given a task in which we cannot excel, just as we seek refuge in you from excessive pride for that in which we excel. We seek refuge in you from engaging in arrogant speech and unjust taunts, just as we seek refuge in you from stammering and being tongue-tied. From ancient times folk have sought refuge in God from this latter evil and entreated God for salvation from it."[68]

These final sentences pave the path for citations of single lines from four different early poets on the subject of being tongue-tied, one of al-Jāḥiẓ's keywords for this chapter. Then follow six quotes of verse dealing with stammering, another keyword, moving toward the idea that hesitancy in action is just as bad as stammering in speech. Al-Jāḥiẓ then cites three sets of verses dealing with silence before returning to four more quotes on stammering. He next offers a quote from the pre-Islamic Persian minister, Buzurgmehr, noted for his wisdom, who was asked:

> "What compensates for a stammer? He replied, 'Intelligence beautifies it.' And if there is no intelligence? 'Wealth conceals it.' And if there is no wealth? 'Close companions who express the ideas instead.' And if there are no close companions? 'Then silence.' And if he does not keep silent? 'Then death and resurrection are preferable than life in this world.'"[69]

Al-Jāḥiẓ then turns to the story of Moses who when called by God to become His prophet initially refused because he was tongue-tied. Thereafter follow other Qur'anic quotes on the importance of eloquence before al-Jāḥiẓ quotes additional verse citations.

At this point we are only seven pages into the text. Yet this synopsis should give some indication of the range of al-Jāḥiẓ's knowledge and the scope of his

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68 Ibid., I: 3.
69 Ibid., I: 7.

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mastery. All the above-mentioned examples of verse that he cites stem from different poets. And he gives the impression that even these represent merely the tip of the iceberg, that he could provide innumerable other quotes if he so desired. To a reader uninitiated into premodern Arabic literature, such rapid succession of citations can create aesthetic culture shock. Even Charles Pellat, no neophyte, characterizes al-Jāḥiẓ's approach as "digressive and untidy; he switches from topic to topic by simple association."[70] I believe that Pellat expresses himself poorly here. Topical keywords exert logical control by providing notional points of reference. By means of them, al-Jāḥiẓ guides his readers through his numerous citations of verse, statement, and anecdote. Once al-Jāḥiẓ moves to his miscellany of quotes in the latter part of the book, for example, readers have so absorbed these topical reference points and learned al-Jāḥiẓ's conceptual geography that they intuitively recognize why the writer generates each excerpt. Moreover, when overall narrative cohesion is not the aesthetic goal, how can one criticize a text for not having it? The premodern Arabic literary and intellectual traditions had a healthy respect for primary sources and an equally nervous attitude toward synthetic summary. If one knows the sources, then quote them! Otherwise the reader cannot vouch for the authenticity of your presentation nor judge the true degree of your expertise.

Pellat'sf reference to moving from one topic to another by "association" is more apt, although even here one must ascertain the underlying aesthetic principle that the author espouses. The principle that guides an annotated anthology of eloquent texts, such as al-Mubarrad's *al-Kāmil*, differs from al-Jāḥiẓ's exposition on eloquence, which consists of a combination of inquiry and sample texts but which is not really intended primarily as an anthology. While al-Mubarrad's principle is to assemble and provide linguistic glossses on a choice series of texts worthy of study, al-Jāḥiẓ's composition is guided by its core concepts as reflected by what we have termed "keywords." Portraying the complexities of social interaction and the variety of human behavior is best carried out, according to this method, by revealing their diverse aspects, by laying out examples of them rather than reducing them to formulas. To accomplish this requires that al-Jāḥiẓ arrange and display his examples for inspection. Of course, there is a degree of authorial ego at work here. If the reader leaves his or her inspection edified while simultaneously dazzled by the author's learning and competence, then so much the better.

The pedagogic tradition in which al-Jāḥiẓ was raised encompassed the method of didactic transmission of material. He learned from some of the most erudite authorities of early Arab poetry, history, and lore who ever lived, such foundational figures as al-Aṣmaʿī, Abū ʿUbayda, and Abū Zayd al-Anṣārī.[71] No doubt a large part of his lessons consisted of teachers lecturing while students took notes and

70 Pellat, "Al-Jāḥiẓ", 86.
71 See Pellat, *Le Milieu basrien*, 123-71; al-Ḥājirī, *Al-Jāḥiz*, 58-63.

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memorized. Yet the study of theology (*kalām*), a field in which al-Jāḥiẓ also excelled, relied on a parallel tradition in which intense scholarly debate and logical disputation were standard practice. This approach to addressing one's audience was also open to al-Jāḥiẓ. He is not always the silent guide quietly leading the way.

More of al-Jāḥiẓ's stylistic persona and unique turn of mind are revealed in introductions to several of his works. One example is his introduction to his *Book of Misers* (*Risālat al-bukhalāʾ*). Al-Jāḥiẓ begins by addressing a presumed reader (a trope common in premodern Arabic writing in many fields) who, having read and benefited from the author's treatise on the tricks and snares of thieves and robbers, requests that al-Jāḥiẓ compose a similar book of anecdotes (*nawādir*) about misers and the self-justifications of the stingy, whether humorous or serious. This request stems from the fact that the imputed inquirer fails to understand the behavior of such individuals. He inquires:

> "Why do they term miserliness prosperity and stinginess economy? Why do they defend abstinence and ascribe it to prudence? Why do they criticize beneficence and compare it to dissipation? Why do they term generosity extravagance and liberality ignorance? Why do they discount praise and care little about blame? Why do they consider weak someone who seeks good repute and is open-handed while they regard as strong someone who does not aspire to praise and does not avoid ridicule? Why do they argue for constraint rather than ease in life, for bitterness rather than sweetness? Why are they neither ashamed of refusing to provision their travels with delicious rations nor of showing their disdain for those who do? Why do they embrace miserliness and why do they adopt the characteristics of that attribute even though they reject its application to themselves? Why do they wish to profit from their restraint in expenditure? Why do they treat wealth as if they fear its disappearance and hope for its continuance yet exaggerate their fears while minimizing their hopes, despite living in times of lasting security and universal well-being when one is generally free from tribulation and when favorable conditions exceed calamities? Indeed, how can someone claim happiness while devoting oneself to hardship? How can someone who begins by deceiving the elite claim to advise common folk? Why do they argue for – despite their intelligence – that which the community unanimously censures, and why do they praise – despite their wide knowledge – that which the community deems completely shameful?"[72]

Once again we have a central concept, a topical keyword: "miserliness." Once again al-Jāḥiẓ promises to provide representative accounts (*qiṣaṣ*) of such behavior that he has "on hand." (p. 5, *mā ʿindī*) Unlike the *Book of Eloquence*, however, in this introduction we have a sustained sample of al-Jāḥiẓ's personality evoked in his distinct literary style. We hear his "voice" and gain direct acquaintance with his persona and turn of mind. Al-Jāḥiẓ's style comes across as rhetorically brilliant and his personality as refreshingly direct and intelligent. This passage (of which we only quote part) piles question on question, each of which poses a conundrum. Through this iteration, al-Jāḥiẓ exploits the power of repetition to reflect an increasing intensity of psychological perplexity. Why indeed do misers

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72 Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-bukhalāʾ*, ed. Ṭāhā al-Hājirī (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1958), 1-2.

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act so irrationally? Seeking to answer this question in all of its ramifications justifies and organizes the book that follows.[73] Simultaneously, in this passage al-Jāḥiẓ provides in miniature a portrait of what a miser or skinflint is. He employs his succession of contradictory interrogatives to adumbrate the diverse characteristics and innate inconsistencies of this personality type.

Reliance on linguistic parallelism is obvious in this passage, as is the sustained employment of antithesis. Al-Jāḥiẓ's language takes full advantage of the substantial linguistic resources of Arabic; yet although his vocabulary is rich, its economy is notable. He seldom stretches beyond the bounds of common expression or dives into the vast linguistic oceans that his training in philology and early poetry offers. When speaking in his own "voice," employing rare or archaic language to demonstrate erudition is not an aesthetic goal. On the contrary, he combines stylistic vibrancy with linguistic thrift. A rhetoric of restraint is his artistic aim. Al-Jāḥiẓ's *The Book of Eloquence* has demonstrated his mastery of the cultural heritage of his age. There is little doubt that he could easily produce hundreds of lines of verse on miserliness, for example. Yet aesthetic effect would be altered if he did. Here self-discipline is essential to artistry. Al-Jāḥiẓ is not a stylistic miser but he is no spendthrift.

Nor is this passage a set piece, a prepared *tour de force* created to initiate the work. A *tour de force* it may be, but no more than the rest of the introduction of which it forms a short part or of the complete text of the work. This passage is merely a typical example of the type of rhetorical expressiveness that al-Jāḥiẓ is able to produce at will. Like any performer, he does not continually have to play at full intensity; like any maestro, he is able to modulate the power of his performance as he deems necessary.

The animating principle that drives the passage springs from trying to describe a type of behavior that is contradictory, both in terms of the normal expectations that define individual well-being as well as the widely accepted standards that shape social interaction. Being a miser is potentially harmful to oneself and damaging to one's status in society. Nevertheless, there exist educated and intelligent individuals who embrace the practice. Focusing on the attribute of stinginess in an individual creates a character portrait; extending such attention to a class of individuals generates an anatomy.[74] To create such an anatomy, al-Jāḥiẓ must present many different types of this behavior to provide a rounded picture of the phenomenon. To this end, the author offers numerous examples of the diverse ways that misers express their obsession and how it evinces itself in different types of social interaction.

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[73] Whether the last chapter of the work is intrinsic to it has been a matter of dispute, see Malti-Douglas, *Structures of Avarice*, 42-45.

[74] On the literary form of anatomy, i.e. the dissection of character types or emotions, see Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990, first printed 1955), 308-14. See also Fähndrich, "Der Begriff 'adab'", 336.

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The passage juxtaposes three registers, semantic, psychological, and social, all three of which interact constantly throughout the passage and in the rest of the book. The quote begins with the issue of semantic inversion, misers misuse language by calling an attribute its opposite. Hence, abstinence becomes prudence while generosity becomes profligacy. By embracing such mental distortions, misers create for themselves a world where meaning loses its reliability. Such inversion of normal usage is equally reflected in their social interaction. Semantic inversion stems from psychological perversion, which causes misers to lose touch with social reality. Their obsession leads them to evaluate others wrongly, to deem normal conceptions of proper values as perverse, to discount the importance of others' opinions. Loss of contact with semantic reality is just a reflection, therefore, of a loss of psychological balance, and thereafter of social perspective. Yet external society has not disappeared and, as the passage proceeds, its presence is increasingly felt. By the quote's end, focus has shifted to foreground the miser's inversion of language and loss of psychological equilibrium against the larger perspectives of societal expectations. Literary viewpoint moves to focus on how society perceives misers as it realizes that they have consciously undermined their social position as members of the elite and purposely cast aside the benefits of both education and intelligence. There are three possible social responses, anger, censure, or ridicule. Al-Jāḥiẓ opts for the third mode, ridicule, which is a socially safer (and more enjoyable) route. Laughter softens censure and assuages anger.

Creating such a psychological and social anatomy is not a conclusively deductive exercise. Al-Jāḥiẓ does not seek to analyze examples drawn from life so as to establish logically deduced principles that delineate a comprehensive portrait that one can thereafter use to derive prescriptions of normative behavior. At any rate, he cannot do this because such conduct is intrinsically irrational. Why seek logic when the principles that motivate misers' actions are in their very essence illogical? Logical proofs may be conclusive and their derived ethical precepts definitive, yet human experience demonstrates that in the face of rational ethical precepts, or even those of everyday common sense, human beings are remarkably persistent in ignoring what they know to be true and uniquely determined to act against their own best interests. When rationality fails to explain others' behavior, one turns to experience to at least describe it. This is why al-Jāḥiẓ enumerates individual examples of miserly behavior and surveys the diverse aberrations of miserly conduct. Since human idiosyncrasies are infinite and examples of eccentricities are endlessly varied, such enumeration of individual specimens of specific types of behavior remains one's sole recourse.

In fact, the proper analogy here is not logic but rather medicine. One may not understand the workings of a particular disease, but one can learn to recognize its symptoms and by this means be able to counteract the illness when they appear. Hence al-Jāḥiẓ's interlocutor asks: "Elucidate for me what has confounded

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their intellects, corrupted their minds, blinded their visions, and destroyed their judgments. What causes them to oppose truth stubbornly and to contradict the rules of society?"[75] The response follows, although it is perforce inconclusive. Al-Jāḥiẓ cannot explain why individuals become misers; he cannot identify the ailment's cause. All he can do is to recommend preventative action by saying that, "Reviewing such behaviors will alert you to a fault you may have overlooked. If you recognize its occurrence, you may thereafter be able to avoid it."[76]

From the vantage point of comparative narrative practice, it is helpful to view al-Jāḥiẓ's endeavors, and those of his fellow *udabā'*, within the context of several of Aristotle's key poetic concepts: *mythos* (plot), *dianoia* (thought, theme), and *ethos* (characterization, setting). Modern realistic narrative prioritizes first plot, then characterization, then thought or theme. The better an author balances among the three, the more critics praise the work. Yet the ranking of these three is based on clear aesthetic expectations. Modern critics generally value plot's progressive and developmental dynamism and hence disapprove of weak plot development as being "static." Al-Jāḥiẓ's aesthetic priorities reverse this order. For him most important is *dianoia*, the organizing intelligible that is his focus and is usually expressed by means of the shorthand of keywords. Thereafter comes *ethos*, exempla of individual conduct or behavior that embody an aspect of the concept. Finally, plot remains a possibility, but here plot's imaginative narrative structuring would for al-Jāḥiẓ threaten to undermine the psychological realism of his insights into the praxis of human society. It would "fictionalize" it. Hence plot, in general, must be avoided. Instead we are presented with a portrait gallery of types, aspects, and visages, or a library of *sententia*, aphorisms, and wise sayings, that can make the desired point in actually a more "realistic" fashion.[77]

Here then we are in the realm of *adab*, the delineation of proper behavior by reviewing representative examples of social action, whether good or ill. All humans live with the tension that exists between the impulses of individual desire and pressures of social convention. Correctly distinguishing among the two thereafter should enable apt students to adjust their behaviors accordingly and navigate this tension successfully, although it will never save the foolish from their innate attachment to folly. Yet to understand a particular phenomenon, it is insufficient for the *adab* writer to present only one or two examples. Rather, a broad spectrum of situations that have arisen or may occur in the course of social interaction must be portrayed. This is because *adab's* perspective is descriptive as well as prescriptive. In the fluxes of elite social interaction, neither the dry precepts of rationalist ethics nor the general ordinances of revealed religion are of much help. Although strictures of philosophical ethics or religious morality

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75 *Bukhalā'*, 2.
76 Ibid., 3.
77 Cf. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 73, 243.

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may provide general guidelines for what is commended or prohibited, they can offer little insight into the fluid interplay of social interaction or the subtle nuances of personal demeanor that one needs to advance, or even survive without shame, the infinitely varied and highly competitive circumstances of elite society, where one's peers are highly inquisitive about each others' social successes and failures and are equally eager to allot praise or blame accordingly. To guide oneself through the intricate pathways of a sophisticated court society whose standards of conduct are determined by the whims of the powerful and the transitory fashions of the fickle, rounded examples of words to cite and behaviors to emulate or avoid were avidly sought after. Providing them is the task of *adab*.

Fortunately, *adab's* lessons, when adroitly transmitted, need be neither dreary nor tiresome. As al-Jāḥiẓ says, "Every occasion has its proper expression" (*li-kull maqām maqāl*).[78] Here he intends the congruence of topic and language. As he states elsewhere, "For every type of speech there is a corresponding mode of expression. For every subject, a corresponding vocabulary: ridiculous for the ridiculous, amusing for the amusing, lucid for the lucid, eloquent when the occasion calls for eloquence, metaphoric when it calls for metaphor, expository when it calls for exposition."[79] Al-Jāḥiẓ is here defending the use of vocabulary referring to sexual organs and relations, as he does in similar terms in his "Epistle on the Merits of Slavegirls versus Slaveboys" (*Mufākharat al-jawārī wa-l-ghilmān*). The Arabic language, he believes, is blessed with a wide expanse of vocabulary that aptly describes all types of human activity. To strip language of certain words for the sake of superficial religious sensitivity or fatuous social propriety is folly. Rather, just use the words, al-Jāḥiẓ contends, in their proper place and in a suitable social context.[80]

Al-Jāḥiẓ's thinking here, however, extends further than to questions of appropriate linguistic usage, for his theory of writing is founded on his theory of knowledge. "Every branch of knowledge has individuals who pursue and favor it, for the branches of knowledge are countless." When one is qualified because of long study, deep reflection, and broad experience, "then it is not harmful to explore any field of knowledge, whether serious or humorous, or to move from one to the other."[81] We see here that for al-Jāḥiẓ every aspect of human activity lies open to investigation. Each deserves due consideration, although each should also be placed in its proper context. And who judges what proper context

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78 Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-ḥayawān*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn, 8 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1938-45), III: 43; idem., *Al-Rasā'il*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn, 4 parts in 2 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1964-79), II: 94; cf. Omri, "There is a Jāḥiẓ," 35-37.

79 *Ḥayawān*, III: 39.

80 Ibid.; *Rasā'il*, II: 92ff.

81 Ibid., II: 91; see also Tarif Khalidi, "A Mosquito's Wing: Jāḥiẓ on the Progress of Knowledge," in *Arabic and Islamic Garland: The Tibawi Festschrift*, ed. R. el-Droubie (London: Islamic Cultural Center, 1977), 141-46.

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is? The intelligent, mature, and educated cosmopolitan, well-versed in all fields of knowledge and all types of past and present experience: the *adīb*. Study of the dynamics of human interaction is not based, however, on egoistic curiosity and vain presumption. Rather it is an inquiry that corresponds to the nature and structure of the world that surrounds us. As al-Jāḥiẓ states, "God (may He be magnified and glorified) has given to every thing its allotted measure, to every object its proper place, just as he has given to each age its appropriate quality of men, and to every occasion its proper expression."[82] By studying humanity and the world around us, al-Jāḥiẓ believes, we are only delineating God's plan.

Universality and cosmopolitanism are attitudes that permeate al-Jāḥiẓ's writings to the extent that it is clear that they are a major ingredient of what one could term his *ideology*. Yet to understand fully al-Jāḥiẓ's intellectual principles, the ideal of universality must be viewed in combination with two other ingredients. The first is his favored organizational method, which we have termed the "anatomy." This approach is founded on the assumption that understanding a particular phenomenon entails rational review of its major characteristics in action rather than stasis. We must look at an entity or a behavior from the perspective of how it acts and functions in all of its diverse manifestations rather than try to capture its essence in stasis, as the philosophers wish to do. This approach is the structuring principle of al-Jāḥiẓ's voluminous masterpiece, *The Book of Animals* (*Kitāb al-ḥayawān*), which may be best described as an attempt (an essay) at a literary natural history. Critics tend to emphasize the digressions that fill this work, and it is true that these are numerous. Yet more powerful is the underlying unifying principle that stems from al-Jāḥiẓ's belief that each phenomenon in nature can be studied by assembling such knowledge of its shape and activities as is possible or necessary. By means of creating a collage of mini-portraits, which embody whatever knowledge (including poetic knowledge) one can gather about an entity, one generates an overview that although perhaps not integrated – because this is neither realistic nor possible – at least strives for such cognitive totality as humans, with their limited capabilities, can attain.

In this endeavor, al-Jāḥiẓ's sense of humor is not to be denied. In all probability, it is not by oversight that his first choice of topic – his first anatomy – in the *Book of Animals* is ironic in nature: the eunuch, the castrated animal, the gelding. His account focuses on the human eunuch but also includes references to domestic animals. He begins with description of typical physical characteristics of the eunuch (voice, hair, gait, intelligence), moves on to the role of eunuch in different historical societies (Sind, sub-Saharan Africa, Byzantium, and so forth), and concludes with attention to characteristic behavioral traits (feminine, puerile).

In choosing this subject to begin the main part of his work, al-Jāḥiẓ reveals the artistic intuition of a born entertainer who believes that writing is a performance

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82 *Bukhalāʾ*, 12.

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art. The reader has just completed a hundred page introduction, in which the author defended his writings and underscored the importance of learning and books. As a gifted performer, al-Jāḥiẓ has a clear idea of the limits of his audience's attention span and he acts accordingly. Just as Shakespeare uses fools and clowns to break dramatic tension or enhance comedic effect, and just as modern films use action scenes or vast spectacles to entice and hold audience attention, so al-Jāḥiẓ uses humorous interludes (*al-hazl*) to break-up any threat of monotony emerging from too much attention to serious subjects (*al-jidd*).[83] Despite this function, humor has its serious side. Al-Jāḥiẓ uses it to defend the principle that everything in the cosmos lies open to investigation. No phenomenon is too minor, no behavior too ludicrous; nothing is off-limits.

If the first ingredient in al-Jāḥiẓ's mindset is universality, and the second a belief in the methodological efficacy of the anatomy as an approach to understanding, the third is a deep-seated and profound love of knowledge for itself. He is intensely aware that the fund of contemporaneous knowledge is the product of generations of toil from all societies, and that it is his responsibility to preserve and increase it. "It is proper that behavior toward those who come after us be like that of those who preceded us. It is incumbent that just as we found useful knowledge increased (for our benefit), that those that succeed us should also find it increased." Essential to this project is the role of books. "A person does not always find a teacher to instruct him ... but a student can always find a book."[84]

We have seen that anatomies can focus on character types, such as the miser. They can also focus on professional categories, the scribe, the gatekeeper or chamberlain, the slave girl. Or they can be directed at national types, the Turk, for example. And just as one type can be analyzed, two can be compared. Immersed as he was in the environment of religious dispute and polemic, it is natural that al-Jāḥiẓ transfers this disputative model to evaluate the respective virtues and faults of social and national groups. Hence he writes on the comparative merits of "Slave-girls versus Slave-boys," or "Blacks versus Whites." Moreover, emotions or behaviors can be analyzed as well, "Distinguishing between Enmity and Envy," "On Secrecy and Holding One's Tongue," or "On Homesickness." It is noteworthy that although al-Jāḥiẓ can tend toward relying on textual evidence from the past or accounts or anecdotes drawn from his age, he gives equal weight to both types of knowledge. Information is universal; the task is to select the best examples of it. "Every occasion has its own expression."

In most cases, literary persona evinces itself in al-Jāḥiẓ's writings in the two general fashions that we have so far described. Many of his treatises resemble his

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83 Cf. Pellat, „Al-Jāḥiẓ", 94, and idem., "Al-Djidd wa 'l-hazl," *EI*^{2} II: 536-67; *Bukhalāʾ*, 1; and G. J. H. van Gelder, "Mixtures of Jest and Earnest in Classical Arabic Literature, Part I.," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 23/2 (1992a): 83-108; idem., "Mixtures of Jest and Earnest in Classical Arabic Literature, Part II," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 23/3 (1992b): 169-90.

84 *Ḥayawān*, I: 87-88.

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book on eloquence and consist of loose compilations of assembled materials focused on a specific topic that represent the best insight that previous literature provides. In such works, al-Jāḥiẓ remains in the background, the arranger and director of the play, but not its actor or master of ceremony. Just as frequently, however, al-Jāḥiẓ does explicitly appear in his texts, whereupon he plays the role of gentle interlocutor and benevolent guide, someone who responds to the call of a friend for help and direction, who clarifies complexities and resolves difficulties. Here al-Jāḥiẓ's tone is supportive and his persona overt, as he generously places his counsel and knowledge at the disposal of his questioner. An example of this approach is *The Book of Misers*, in the introduction to which al-Jāḥiẓ acts and sounds the part of the learned advisor and the concerned friend.

Yet al-Jāḥiẓ has a third literary persona. He sometimes adopts the role of the veteran contrarian. In these cases, he tends to assume the character of the falsely accused victim of unjust and malicious attacks. Here, more with regret than with anger, he must defend himself and his writings against those who have mistakenly found fault in them. The first half of his lengthy introduction to the *Book on Animals*, for example, consists of al-Jāḥiẓ's enumeration of the litany of unfair attacks that the unnamed antagonist has directed against his previous books. His epistle on the "On the Serious and the Humorous," (*Fi-'l-jidd wa-'l-hazl*) is in reality a gracefully gentle exposition on anger written for the minister Ibn al-Zayyāt, in which al-Jāḥiẓ seeks to assuage his patron's anger so that he return the writer to favor. However, al-Jāḥiẓ's persona can also take a more directly confrontational turn. In his treatise on "Squaring and Circling" (*al-Tarbīʿ wa-'l-tadwīr*), the writer launches into a full-fledged attack on the intelligence and integrity of his critic, Aḥmad b. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, a friend of his patron Ibn al-Zayyāt, accusing him in great detail and citing numerous examples of his envy, stupidity, and ignorance.[85] The work is a minor *tour de force* of gleeful venom and cheerful rancor. Just as the miser has perverted concepts of generosity and prudence, so al-Jāḥiẓ's accuser, with his delusions of being more knowledgeable than the author, has fallen into pitiful error. Al-Jāḥiẓ displays great zest in pointing out in elaborate detail the errors of his way.

Concluding Remarks

I have proposed that despite all of their differences – and these are considerable – *adab* shares with the modern literary essay several traits, its topicality, its diversity of subject matter, its formal open-endedness, its propensity for elegant prose, its mistrust of plot as a principle of structure, its preference for dealing with (allegedly) empirical reality, to name a few major similarities. Moreover, both forms

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85 Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Al-Tarbīʿ wa-'l-tadwīr*, ed. Charles Pellat (Damascus: al-Maʿhad al-Faransī, 1955); Cf. also Ḍayf, *Al-Fann wa-madhāhibuh*, 177-180, and *Rasāʾil*, III: 55-109.

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fill the literary "space" between technical and scholarly writing on the one hand and acknowledged forms of imaginative literature (poetry, drama, narrative fiction) on the other. The two types of literary activity also share the trait that they can be analyzed from the tripartite perspective of the basic fund of literary materials and cultural reference points that the writer uses, the author's attitude or ideology, and a sense of a clearly identifiable literary style/persona/voice.

Designating a particular intellectual and aesthetic "space" to this interval between fine art and the systematic sciences (however defined) relieves the literary scholar of the fruitless struggle of striving to pigeon-hole either the literary essay or the broad group of literary endeavors that constitute premodern Arabic *adab*. Diversity of topic, flexibility of approach, resistance to system and to the restrictions of method, and variety in literary register and artistic voice now become defining characteristics instead of being considered signs of generic vagary, inexplicable mental disorganization, or an awkward penchant for digression that the critic must somehow explain away. One should not, after all, have to justify characteristics that are defining marks of the genre. Indeed, the best way to describe *adab* is to rely on the very form of "anatomy" that typifies its own modality. One seeks to encompass its practices rather than circumscribe them through definition.

It has been argued in genre studies that the notion of family kinship and genealogy provide a more accurate conceptual approach than does essentialist definition. If this is the case, then in regard to the literary essay and *adab* we should also accustom ourselves to thinking in terms of extended rather than nuclear families.[86] And we should remember that "family" is a concept that is both biologically and socially constructed. The writers of *adab* are influenced by their inherited literary tradition *and* by the immediate social context in which they live. One only has to examine the Arabic *nahḍa* period of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to understand the power that contemporary audience expectations can exert. During this period, Arab intellectuals and writers both strove to canonize the "classical" authors of *adab* and poetry while they worked equally hard to disenfranchise the cultural value of pursuing these literary forms as a contemporary activity and urged that they be replaced with "modern" genres then in use in the West: the short story, the novel and free verse.

Adopting this broad approach to the genre of *adab* has advantages when treating an author such as al-Jāḥiẓ. Let us begin by reviewing the nature of al-Jāḥiẓ's fund of literary materials.

In his *Book of Animals*, al-Jāḥiẓ remarks:

> "I am completely infatuated with two things, listening to the accounts of the Bedouins (*ḥadīth al-Aʿrāb*) and to the contending arguments of two opponents in theological disputation (al-*kalām*). Nothing is better than these two; for both arouse amazing stores of

[86] For the metaphor of family relationships in terms of genre studies, see Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, 37-44, where further sources are cited.

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> good spirits that can hearten a bereaved person even in the extremities of sorrow, or cheer up an angry person even as flames of rage consume him. And if these two activities do not offer themselves, then one can find in all subjects sufficient types of entertainment, humor, pleasure, leisure, and distraction."[87]

Al-Jāḥiẓ was an immediate heir to the intense retrieval of poetry, proverbs, traditions and history related to pre- and early Islamic tribal life that was a foundational cultural activity of the Umayyad and early ʿAbbasid periods. Tarif Khalidi has aptly called the collection of these materials by early Arab philologists the "rediscovery of the *Jahiliyya*" that became the "greatest achievement of early Adab."[88] Al-Jāḥiẓ's teachers were the last generation who would engage directly in extensive field research among bedouins to amass this store of information. The question that was posed for al-Jāḥiẓ's generation was what to do with this fund other than preserve it as an antiquarian archive of increasingly arcane and socially irrelevant folklore? Proponents of the *Shuʿūbiyya* movement argued that this is what Arab lore indeed was and that it should therefore be discarded and replaced with "wisdom" from Sassanian and Hellenistic culture. Al-Jāḥiẓ offered an alternative approach. Rather than discard this body of Arab knowledge as *Shuʿūbiyya* exponents favored, or argue that it was the only "valid" cultural fount of information, as Arabophones urged, he opened up to both. He combined Arab knowledge with other sources – Sassanian or Byzantine – so as to create a new cultural synthesis. He could only succeed in this endeavor, however, if he found new ways of making tribal information socially and culturally relevant. He had to find practical uses for the Arab heritage that early philologists had worked so hard to collect and preserve. Ibn al- Muqaffaʿ had sought to demonstrate the social and political utility of Sassanian/Hellenistic wisdom and praxis in his works. Al-Jāḥiẓ did not so much contend with Ibn al- Muqaffaʿ as to subsume him. I believe that he did this naturally rather than as part of either a pro- or anti-*Shuʿūbiyya* program. Although al-Jāḥiẓ formally disputed proponents of *Shuʿūbiyya*, on the practical level of his use of sources he incorporated them.[89] The fact is that he simply loved knowledge – all of it! And the results of these practical efforts became the intellectual patronage that guided his literary successors. Philologists still immersed themselves in *al-ʿArabiyya* and scribes and courtiers needed a basic level of linguistic and cultural fluency in it, but *al-ʿArabiyya* forever after shared the spotlight with non-Arab intellectual traditions.

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87 *Ḥayawān*, III: 6.

88 Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought*, 87.

89 H. A. R. Gibb, "The Social Significance of the Shuʿūbiyya," in *Studies in the Civilization of Islam* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962), 62-73, here 71-72, suggests a similar idea; according to Bonebakker, "Adab", 22-23, Gibb "tentatively" suggests that al-Jāḥiẓ used the term *adab* to co-opt its use by exponents of the *Shuʿūbiyya* who dominated the secretary class, an idea that Bonebakker rejects. It may be true that Gibb simplifies the strict division between *Shuʿūbiyya* secretaries and their Arabophone opponents, yet I do not feel that his reading of the situation is as rigid as Bonebakker implies.

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Al-Jāḥiẓ could only establish the cultural relevance and validity of any body of knowledge by demonstrating its utility as a concrete contribution to social praxis. His achievement was to intertwine the various sources of knowledge, wisdom and literature, whether of Arab, Sassanian, or Byzantine origin, into a new synthesis of cultural capital that his audience believed was actually beneficial to know. I do not argue here that al-Jāḥiẓ was the first or the only writer to do this, he was merely the best.

Nor did al-Jāḥiẓ limit his literary attention only to knowledge from past cultures. Since a guiding principle of his interest was intellectual universality, contemporary experience was just as crucial and worthy of inquiry. While his *Book of Eloquence* focuses on the speeches of orators and writers from the past, his *Book of Misers* centers on contemporary evidence. This inclusion of present-day materials was essential for the success of *adab* as a literary activity, since it both underpinned its continued cultural relevance and provided a sustained supply of new subjects and information. *Adab* after al-Jāḥiẓ becomes a mixture of the best of past and present experience; Arab philology, on the other hand, although remaining a continuing source for *adab*, becomes rooted in the past until with Ibn Qutayba it reconnects with contemporaneous poetry and includes such activities as criticism and literary biography.[90]

By noting al-Jāḥiẓ's universalistic approach to his selection of materials and his presentation of them as serving the combined purposes of conveying socially useful and personally entertaining knowledge, we already have moved to the subject of al-Jāḥiẓ's mindset or "ideology." The writer is an extraordinary example of how someone of intellectual brilliance and immense artistic talent can succeed against all odds of economic background and physical appearance. But one has little doubt how this came about. A major attraction of reading al-Jāḥiẓ is simply being in the company of his amazing mind. One of my personal criteria for evaluating prose writers is to ask how I would enjoy being on a train ride with them. I suspect that with al-Jāḥiẓ no such travel would prove too long. The breadth of his curiosity is matched only by the extensiveness of his good humor. Al-Jāḥiẓ is not a wit, the creator of memorable *bon mots*, nor is he the clown or buffoon like the Abū Nuwās of folklore. His is a mature and highly intelligent mind that consistently sees both the seriousness and the humor in almost all situations. He is passionate in his love of knowledge, but he is equally infatuated with the limitless eccentricities of human nature as displayed in social interaction. He is a humanist, but in an experiential rather than an intellectual sense of the term. The panorama of society, its vanity fair, whether past or present, is his sphere of attention and his source of artistry. As a writer, his company is consistently informative and often humorous, but also remarkably exhilarating and truly unique.

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90 Cf. Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought*, 97-104.

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Al-Jāḥiẓ conveys his intellectual and aesthetic mindset through his style. We have noted three registers of Jāḥiẓian *adab* personas, neutral, gently guiding, and disputative. With all three, however, he does not himself personally take center-stage. He offers no extended citations of personal opinion or lengthy iterations of individual belief.[91] Al-Jāḥiẓ "shows" us his intentions through the structure of his presentation and the tone of his rhetoric rather than resorting to "telling" us them directly. He combines astonishing stylistic talent with an acute sense of audience. He is always writing for everybody, for present readers and future posterity, even when he directs a treatise to an individual. There is no private introspective persona; there is only public social address.

In his didactic format, when presentation of materials takes precedence, al-Jāḥiẓ's persona appears in the odd comment and in the choice and organization of quotes. The aesthetic and organizational challenges that such selection poses should not be discounted. As Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih notes in the introduction to his own *adab* work, *al-ʿIqd al-farīd*, "Selecting speech is more difficult than composing it. As they have said, 'A person's selection is the envoy of his intellect.'"[92] Nonetheless, persona is obviously clearer when the author himself speaks. In these cases, al-Jāḥiẓ takes advantage of the interactive petition/disputation format of the *risāla* form, in which one writes either in reply to a request for information or against an argument put forward by others. In these situations al-Jāḥiẓ takes advantage of the fact that the reader overhears his remarks. Whether as a reaction to petition or attack, the structure of the text is based on the dynamic interchange of point/counterpoint: "You ask ..., I answer ...," or "you claim ..., I reply ..." This format naturally structures the text into shorter sections in which al-Jāḥiẓ then uses the rhetorical tropes of antithesis and internal contradiction to organize his style, as we have seen in the passage quoted above from the *Book of Misers*. The structure of *munāẓara*, the counterpoint of assertion and reply in the course of debate forms the basis of much of al-Jāḥiẓ's style. How he uses this format to write as brilliantly as he does, however, remains a mystery of art.

Al-Jāḥiẓ's achievements, and his legacy, are numerous. From the point of view of content, he provided a number of socially useful intellectual bridges. The first of these linked the systematic endeavors of Arabic grammar and philology to the pursuit of more open-ended and practical general knowledge. By integrating the results of earlier grammarians and philologists into more accessible literary for-

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91 This statement refers works or sections of works not overtly theological; in this latter case, al-Jāḥiẓ, as a polemicist, can be very direct and combative.

92 Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *Al-ʿIqd al-farīd*, ed. Aḥmad Amīn, Aḥmad al-Zayn, and Ibrāhīm al-Abyārī, 8 vols. (Lajnat al-taʾlīf wa-ʾl-tarjama wa-ʾl-nashr, 1948-67), I: 2. Compare the comment of a modern editor of essays, "Too few people understand what is involved in compiling an anthology, most of them seeming to think it is chiefly a matter of a certain amount of clerical work. Those who have tried their hand at the task, thinking that it is a simple one, have usually been unpleasantly surprised by its complexity." Charles Neider, *Essays of the Masters* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 1956), xii.

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mats, al-Jāḥiẓ (among others) guaranteed these disciplines continued social relevance at a time when they were becoming increasingly technical. Although both would remain specialized scholarly disciplines, the domain of experts, al-Jāḥiẓ promoted their role as essential educational prolegomena some mastery of which was requisite for participation in elite life. Likewise, al-Jāḥiẓ bridged "Arab" and "foreign" knowledge and wisdom. In the process, he opened the possibility of synthesis rather than an opposition. This strategy, which was continued by such successors as Ibn Qutayba, forged a pathway for the continued interaction and mutual stimulus of these two major cultural streams. Finally, al-Jāḥiẓ provided a literary venue through which writers could fruitfully bridge past events with present experience. By making each equally relevant to the other, he offered the possibility of a unified and coherent vision of human social activity whose parameters encouraged continued artistic exploration.

With his cosmopolitan "mindset" or "attitude," al-Jāḥiẓ through his writings embodied a new formulation of the ideal of the worldly sophisticate, the *adīb*, that was broader, more culturally relevant, and more amusing than that offered by his predecessor Ibn al- Muqaffaʿ. This new ideal proved to be a lasting model for courtiers, writers, and artists. Courtiers are not required to be sophisticated, but by making available the fruits of the professions in formulations that were difficult to resist, al-Jāḥiẓ's writings discouraged the elite from choosing either pedantry or ignorance.

Finally, al-Jāḥiẓ's mastery of style, along with that of Ibn al- Muqaffaʿ (and perhaps ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd), provided a potent standard of excellence for composing fluent and vibrant artistic prose. How inimitable this prose style at its best can be may be demonstrated by how difficult al-Jāḥiẓ's successors found imitation. Their "anxiety of influence" pushed them in other directions: toward the mannerisms of the *badīʿ* style initiated by the poets, for example. Like all great writers, al-Jāḥiẓ could stimulate successors to aspire to his stylistic artistry or force them to work toward other directions. They could not, however, ignore the corpus of writings that he created.

It is telling of al-Jāḥiẓ's originality that although he immediately reshaped and became essential for the evolving canon of Arabic elite writing, his artistry, like that of Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, was so unique that he had few imitators. The choice was to simplify, as occurred with Ibn Qutayba; to suffer from anxiety of influence, as did al-Tawḥīdī; or to create new forms and styles, as transpired with the creation of the *maqāma* by Badīʿ al-Zamān al-Hamadānī. Nevertheless, perhaps most important is the fact that the literary and intellectual "space" that al-Jāḥiẓ opened with his originality and his development of new literary formats remained a lasting resource that his many successors cultivated to great effect. This literary space, and the corpus he created to fill it, to show the way, so to speak, is both his great achievement and his formative legacy.

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Part Three
Texts and Works

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Lessons from the Past: Piety, Leadership, and Good Governance in the *Risālat al-ʿUthmāniyya*

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Introduction

History, they say, should be studied so that one may not be condemned to repeat it. In the Islamic context, there is arguably a great deal of justification to state the opposite: "History," we may say instead, "should be studied so that one may repeat at least selective parts of it." This mimetic injunction may well apply when scouring the early Islamic landscape for pointers on how to govern the polity, a topic that is the subject of continuing debate at the present time and had been so even earlier among the Muslims of the first and subsequent generations.

One of the oldest and most extensive political treatises to come down to us from the early period, which has a considerable bearing on the topic of good governance, is the *Risālat al-ʿUthmāniyya* of famed belle-lettrist ʿAmr b. Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/868-69). The book contains valuable nuggets of information which offer unique insights into the political culture of the early period. Its importance for reconstructing some of the earliest debates regarding the caliphate/imamate between the Sunnis and the Shiʿa cannot be overestimated and has recently been studied extensively from this angle.[1] There is strong evidence that the *ʿUthmāniyya* was composed during the time of al-Maʾmūn (d. 218/833) and was part of the corpus of literature on the *imāma* that was brought to the caliph's attention by his courtier al-Yazīdī (d. 202/817-8).[2] This early dating (which I am inclined to accept) makes the *ʿUthmāniyya* an invaluable, contemporary record of Sunnī-Shīʿī dialectical engagements on the question of legitimate leadership at a time when what we take for granted now as classic Sunnī and Shīʿī thought was still in considerable flux. The work remains a prime example of the evolving Sunnī literature

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1 See my monograph *Excellence and Precedence: Medieval Islamic Discourse on Legitimate Leadership* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

2 For a persuasive case in favor of this chronology, see Mathias Zahniser, "Insights from the *ʿUthmāniyya* of al-Jāḥiẓ into the Religious Policy of al-Maʾmun," *The Muslim World* 69 (1979): 8-17. Zahniser takes issue with Ṭāhā al-Ḥājirī, who in his *Al-Jāḥiẓ: ḥayātuhu wa-āthāruh* (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif bi-Miṣr, 1969), 187, maintains that the *ʿUthmāniyya* dates rather from the caliphate of al-Mutawakkil (d. 247/861), since the anti-ʿAlid policies of his reign would accord well with the overall tenor of the work. I would add that the discernible Muʿtazilī cast of al-Jāḥiẓ' work is also a strong argument in favor of dating it to al-Maʾmūn's time.

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of advocacy composed during the early ʿAbbasid period on the issue of the caliphate.[3]

Refutations of the ʿUthmāniyya

The significance of al-Jāḥiẓ's *Kitāb al-ʿUthmāniyya* finds attestation in the number of refutations that were written of it. During al-Jāḥiẓ's lifetime, a fellow Baghdadi, Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Iskāfī (d. 240/858-59), a pro-ʿAlid Muʿtazilī, was the first to compose a refutation against the *ʿUthmāniyya*. His *Naqd maqālat al-uthmāniyya* survives only in excerpts scattered throughout the *Sharḥ Nahj al-balāgha* of Ibn Abī 'l-Ḥadīd. These excerpts were collected by ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn and conveniently placed in an appendix to his edition of the *ʿUthmāniyya*.[4] The *Kitāb al-ʿUthmāniyya* provoked sharp reactions from other Muʿtazilī scholars, as it did from Shīʿī scholars as well. From the third/ninth century, we have *al-Radd ʿalā 'l- ʿUthmāniyya* by Abū 'l-Aḥwaṣ al-Miṣrī,[5] who was a student of Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan b. Mūsā al-Nawbakhtī, (d. between 300-310/912-22), author of the *Firaq al-shīʿa* and a well-known Shīʿī theologian. In the 4th/10th century, the Imāmī theologian al-Muẓaffar b. Muḥammad al-Khurasānī (d. 367/977-78), known as Abū 'l-Jaysh, wrote a *Kitāb naqd kitāb al-ʿUthmāniyya li-(ʿalā) 'l-Jāḥiẓ*.[6] The historian al-Masʿūdī (d. 346/957-58), who had strong Shīʿī leanings, confessed to having written a refutation of the *ʿUthmāniyya* himself.[7]

And there were others as well. The best preserved refutation of it was composed by the seventh/thirteenth century Shīʿī theologian Aḥmad B. Ṭāwūs (d. 673/1274-5) entitled *Binā' al-maqāla fī naqd risālat al-ʿUthmāniyya*. This work provides almost a point-by-point rebuttal of al-Jāḥiẓ's arguments (with a good measure of *ad hominem* remarks thrown in). Taken together, these two works provide us with an excellent, detailed survey of what kinds of issues were at stake in the early medieval period on the topic of legitimate leadership and proper governance of the polity.[8]

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3 For a list of works which al-Jāḥiẓ composed specifically in defense of the ʿAbbasids against their critics, see Charles Pellat, *The Life and Works of Jāḥiẓ*, transl. D. M. Hawke (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969), 16-18.

4 *Al-ʿUthmāniyya*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Hārūn (Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī bi-Miṣr, 1474/1955), 282-343.

5 Muḥammad b. ʿAlī Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Maʿālim al-ʿulamā'* (Tehran: Maṭbaʿat Fardīn, 1353/1934), 127, #937, where his *nisba* is given as al-Baṣrī; Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, *al-Fihrist*, ed. Maḥmūd Ramyār (Mashhad, n.d.), 369, #813.

6 Al-Ṭūsī, *Fihrist*, 198; Aḥmad b. ʿAlī al-Najashī, *Kitāb al-Rijāl* (Tehran, n.d.), 330-31; Martin J. MacDermott, *The Theology of al-Shaikh al-Mufīd* (Beirut, 1978), 11f.

7 Al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab wa-maʿādin al-jawhar*, ed. Yūsuf Asʿad Dāghir (Beirut, 1965-66), III: 238.

8 These arguments and counter-arguments are extensively discussed in my *Excellence and Precedence*.

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In this essay, we will focus on how legitimate political authority is constructed in the *Risālat al-ʿUthmāniyya* on the basis of two key Qurʾanic concepts: "excellence" and "precedence." We will further briefly dwell on three distinctive features of what we may term al-Jāḥiẓ's hermeneutics of history, which becomes apparent in this particular work.

Piety and Good Governance

It is clear that the Qur'an does not explicitly mandate a specific form or mode of "Islamic" government. However, the Qur'an does espouse certain moral concepts that may be understood to have considerable socio-political implications as well. These concepts and their role in shaping the early Muslim polity often find clear reflection in *ḥadīth* works which deal with the moral excellences of the Companions of the Prophet, as well as individual monographs which deal with the same topic. To this one must add the biographical works compiled in the medieval period, such as the famous *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* of Muḥammad Ibn Saʿd (d. 845), and also the major exegetical works of the classical period.

It becomes abundantly clear from these works that the early Muslims remembered the discourse on legitimate leadership of the Muslim polity as having been cast in terms of two key Qur'anic concepts: *sābiqa* and *faḍl/faḍīla. Sābiqa* may be translated as "precedence" or "priority," particularly in conversion to Islam; and *faḍl* or *faḍīla* may be translated as "virtue" or "moral excellence." These two terms were key concepts in the early socio-political history of Islam, invoked to "rank" the faithful according to their excellences.[9]

In addition to early conversion, precedence in emigrating (both to Abyssinia and to Medina) and in participation in the early battles of Islam conferred great merit. Qurʾanic warrants that point to the greater moral prominence of the earliest and most committed believers constitute for the Muslim a divinely ordained vision of a hierarchy of moral excellence, both in this world and the next. The two concepts of "precedences" (*sawābiq*) and "merits" or "excellences" (*faḍāʾil*) became conjoined to create a paradigm of the most excellent leadership. Such a paradigm finds scriptural sanction in Qur'anic verses such as "God is satisfied with those who preceded foremost (*al-sābiqūn al-awwalūn*) from among the Muhājirūn and the Anṣār and those who followed them in charity and they are pleased with Him, and He has prepared for them gardens, below which flow rivers, where they will dwell forever; that is the great victory;" (Sūrat al-Tawba, 9:100); "Those who precede(d) are the ones who precede (*al-sābiqūn al-sābiqūn*); they are those who will be brought near [to God] in the gardens of bliss" (Sūrat al-Wāqiʿa, 56:10-12); "Those among you who spent and fought before the victory are not of the same rank [as others], but greater in rank than those who

9 Ibid., Chapter One.

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spent and fought afterwards" (Sūrat al-Ḥadīd, 57:10); and "Those who believed and emigrated and struggled in the path of God with their property and selves are of a higher status (*aʿẓamu darajatan*) before God and they are the victorious ones" (Sūrat al-Tawba, 9:20).

These verses are quoted in both Sunnī and Shīʿī sources in support of a divinely mandated hierarchy of moral excellence in Islam, which also had considerable political ramifications. Sunnī sources uniformly assign the greatest excellence to the Prophet's Companions from among the Muhājirūn and the Anṣār, but recognize as well a certain order of precedence among them. In his influential biographical work arranged according to the principle of *sābiqa*, Ibn Saʿd takes special note of the earliest [Meccan] Muslims, who secretly accepted Islam before the Prophet entered the house of Arqam in roughly 616 CE; their merit in doing so is occasionally highlighted by the application of the phrase *qadīm al-islām* to them.[10] Among the Medinan Muslims, the pride of place goes to the twelve men (*al-nuqabāʾ*) who took the first pledge at ʿAqaba in 621 CE, during which they expressed their fealty to Islam. They were followed by seventy men and women from among the Anṣār who took the second pledge at ʿAqaba the following year.[11] The Shāfiʿī exegete and jurist al-Bayḍāwī (d. 685/1286 or 692/1293; other death dates given) includes those among the Anṣār who took both the first and second pledges of ʿAqaba among the *sābiqūn* referred to in Qurʾan 9:100.[12]

The Qurʾan's assignment of a privileged status to the believer on the basis of *sābiqa* and *faḍl/faḍīla* is at the core of al-Jāḥiẓ's views on political legitimacy as developed in the *Risālat al-ʿUthmāniyya*. His entire treatise is based on establishing the primacy of these considerations in evaluating the legitimacy of Abū Bakr's caliphate and its moral superiority vis-à-vis that of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib. In an earlier monograph I have dealt at great length with al-Jāḥiẓ's arguments on this issue as found principally in his *al-ʿUthmāniyya* and will not recapitulate them here to any considerable extent. I will however give a brief overview of some of the main arguments developed by him to prove Abu Bakr's superiority (*tafḍīl*) or precedence over ʿAlī. I will then proceed to discuss three distinctive features of al-Jāḥiẓ's political thought, theology, and historiography as evidenced in the *ʿUthmāniyya* that have not received adequate attention before and which have contemporary resonance for Muslims. By providing us a rare and unique win-

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10 Muḥammad Ibn Saʿd b. Manīʿ al-Hāšimī al-Baṣrī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAṭā (Beirut, 1418/1997), III: 40, 72, etc.; cf. Miklos Muranyi, *Die Prophetengenossen in der frühislamischen Geschichte* (Bonn: Orientalisches Seminar der Universität, 1973), 35. Even the difference of an hour in submission between two Companions has been noted by Ibn Saʿd in his *Ṭabaqāt*, III: 454.

11 Ibid., III: 321, 454. According to Ibn Isḥāq, the ʿAqabiyyūn consisted of seventy-three men and two women and the pledge took place in a ravine in ʿAqaba; see Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawiyya*, ed. Suhayl Zakkār (Beirut, 1412/1992), I: 299-300.

12 Al-Bayḍāwī, *Anwār al-tanzīl wa-asrār al-taʾwīl* (Beirut, 1408/1988), I: 419.

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dow into the earliest discussions on legitimate leadership of the Islamic polity, many details of which challenge our conventional thinking on this topic, the continuing importance of this treatise will become clear.

Main Arguments in Favor of Abū Bakr in the ʿUthmāniyya

Sābiqa, as mentioned above, refers primarily to precedence or priority in conversion to Islam but also refers more broadly to precedence in the commission of meritorious activities. Thus, al-Jāḥiẓ dwells on whether Abū Bakr embraced Islam before ʿAlī and what their respective ages were at the time of their conversion. He lists several *ḥadīth*s in support of the contention that Abū Bakr preceded ʿAlī in accepting Islam. One of the traditions he cites without an *isnād* relates the following prophetic statement: "There is no one whom I summoned to Islam who did not react with hesitation and foot-dragging – except for what I encountered from Abū Bakr. For indeed he did not hesitate."[13] He further points to acceptable reports "from the authors of biographies, poetry, and historical accounts" to confirm Abu Bakr's primacy in accepting Islam.[14] Among these people are Ḥassān b. Thābit,[15] the famous poet of early Islam favored by the Prophet; Abū Miḥjan,[16] a

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13 *ʿUthmāniyya*, 137; cf. Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, I:170; al-Muḥibb al-Ṭabarī, *al-Riyāḍ al-naḍira fī manāqib al-ʿashara*, ed. Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Abū 'l-ʿAlā' (Cairo, n.d.), I: 97. See also al-Suyūṭī, *Taʾrīkh al-khulafāʾ*, where a similar tradition is recorded on the authority of Ibn Isḥāq, while a variant account on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās states, "The Messenger of God, peace and blessings be upon him, said, 'There was no one I spoke to regarding Islam who did not reject me and repudiate my speech except for Ibn Abī Quḥāfa. Indeed were I to speak to him regarding something he would accept it and follow it.'" A similar tradition is found in ʿIzz-ad-Dīn Abu-'l-Ḥasan ʿAlī Ibn al-Athīr, *Usd al-ghāba fī maʿrifat al-ṣaḥāba*, ed. Shihāb al-Dīn al-Najafī (Tehran, n.d.), III: 206.

14 *ʿUthmāniyya*, 110.

15 For whom see Fuad Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*, II: 289-92; *EI*[1], II: 288-9. According to one report, ʿĀ'isha related that she had heard the Prophet say, "Indeed God has strengthened Hassan with the holy spirit in his defense of the Messenger of God, peace and blessings be upon him;" see, for example, al-Suyūṭī, *Sharḥ shawāhid al-mughnī*, ed. Muḥammad Maḥmud b. al-Talāmīd al-Tarkazī al-Shanqiṭī (n.pl., n.d.), I: 333. A similar report from Abū Hurayra is contained in ʿAbd al-Razzāq b. Ḥammām al-Ṣanʿānī, *al-Muṣannaf*, ed. Ḥabīb al-Raḥmān al-Aʿẓamī (Beirut, 1392/1972), XI: 267, #20509. For the complete poem see *Dīwān Ḥassān b. Thābit* (Beirut, 1381/1961), 174.

16 He is Abū Miḥjan ʿAbd Allāh b. Ḥabīb, one of the *mukhaḍramūn*. He became a Muslim in 9/631-32 and took part in the Battle of al-Qādisiyya. He died shortly after 16/637. Among his surviving poetry are several *khamriyyāt* (bacchic verses), a short elegy, and battle songs. He was banished by ʿUmar several times for his free-wheeling attitude towards drinking; see *EI*[2], I: 140; *GAS*, II: 300-1; *GAL*, I: 35-36; al-Jumaḥī, *Ṭabaqāt fuḥūl al-shuʿarāʾ*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Shākir (Cairo, n.d.), I: 268-69. In his eulogy on Abū Bakr, Abū Miḥjan is quoted as saying, "You preceded [others] into Islam while God was a witness" (*sabaqta ilā 'l-Islām wa-llāhu shahīd*); quoted in Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *al-Istīʿāb fī maʿrifat al-aṣḥāb*, ed. ʿAlī Muḥammad al-Bajawī (Cairo, n.d.), III: 965.

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poet from the Thaqīf tribe; and Kaʿb b. Mālik,[17] the Prophet's Companion and bard, all of whom had stated that Abū Bakr was the first to accept Islam and eulogized his close relationship with Muḥammad.[18]

Al-Jāḥiẓ shows no hesitation in conceding that ʿAlī was among the first group of males who responded favorably to the Prophet's call, but he remarks that the significance of ʿAlī's conversion is diminished by his minority.[19] He emphasizes those reports that depict ʿAlī as being well below puberty[20] and expresses his opinion based on these reports that ʿAlī could not have been more than seven years of age when he embraced Islam.[21] By contrast, Abū Bakr, by all accounts, was well into middle age when he accepted Islam. This discrepancy allows al-Jāḥiẓ to make the case that the submission of a mature man to Islam prompted by his own volition and reason is far superior to the submission of a prepubescent boy who is merely following the directives of one older and more learned.[22] This position is consonant with the general, majoritarian view in Islam favoring age over youth and with the legal and theological premise that knowledge (*ʿilm*) acquired at maturity is a prerequisite for proper worship.[23]

As a mature, distinguished member of the community, al-Jāḥiẓ continues, Abū Bakr could serve as an effective "summoner" (*dāʿiya*) to Islam, and in fact did play a crucial role in attracting converts to Islam.[24] Al-Jāḥiẓ even implies that, after the Prophet, Abū Bakr was subjected to the greatest persecution by the Meccan elite, which he faced with exceptional courage for the sake of the fledgling Muslim community.[25]

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17 *EI*[1], II: 583-84; *GAS* II: 293-94. His poetry was regarded highly but as a satirist he appears to have been surpassed by Ḥassān b. Thābit; cf. al-Suyūṭī, *Sharḥ*, I: 333-34; al-Isbahānī, *Aghānī*, IV: 147.

18 *ʿUthmāniyya*, 110-12.

19 "Wa-bayna qawl al-qāʾil aslama fulān awwal al-nās wa-bayna an yaqūla aslama fi awāʾil al-nās farq;" ʿUthmāniyya, 19.

20 Puberty (*bulūgh*) is an important concept in Islam; cf. for example, Joseph Schacht, *An Introduction to Islamic Law* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 124-27; *EI*[2], art. "Bāligh," I: 993; cf. Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfiʿi, *Kitāb al-Umm* (Bulaq, 1321/1903), I: 147.

21 *ʿUthmāniyya*, 5. Ibn Isḥāq is quoted by Ibn Hishām, *Sīra* I: 167-8, as having stated that ʿAlī was ten; Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, III: 15, records reports which relate that ʿAlī was either nine or below nine years of age. Abū 'l-Faraj al-Isbahānī, *Maqātil al-ṭālibiyyīn*, ed. Aḥmad Ṣaqr (Cairo, 1368/1949), 14, says that the highest age posited for ʿAlī was fifteen and the lowest seven. A report from Qatāda states that ʿAlī's age may have been as high as sixteen when he accepted Islam; cf. ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaf*, V: 325.

22 *ʿUthmāniyya*, 20.

23 See my *Excellence and Precedence*, Chapter Three, where I discuss in detail the concept of *ʿilm* and its relevance to the issue of the caliphate/imamate.

24 See Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, I: 170, where it is stated that Abū Bakr proclaimed his conversion to Islam openly and began to "invite (*yadʿū*) people to God and to Islam," and that a number of people accepted Islam at his bidding, including ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān, al-Zubayr b. al-ʿAwāmm, and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. ʿAwf, among others.

25 *ʿUthmāniyya*, 28. One report from ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr contained in Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, I: 191, relates that he asked ʿAbd Allāh b. al-ʿĀs about the worst attack to befall the Prophet

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Abū Bakr's exceptional courage became further manifest during the *ghār* (cave) incident, which occurred during the emigration to Medina. As the biographical literature informs us, Muḥammad and Abū Bakr pursued by the pagan Meccans took refuge for three nights in a cave to escape detection. In addition to courage, the *ghār* incident highlights the *ṣuḥba* ("companionship") of Abū Bakr with the Prophet as one of its central themes. In al-Jāḥiẓ's opinion, the role of Abū Bakr in this critical event confirms his status as the closest and most excellent Companion of the Prophet, for it was "God who called him [sc. Abū Bakr] a companion (*ṣāḥiban*) in His book."[26]

The incident of the *ghār* represents one of the events in which Abū Bakr was the "second of two" (*thānī ithnayn*), sc. second only to Muḥammad in station in Islam, a phrase that becomes a common refrain in the literature of praise concerning Abū Bakr. The expression *thānī ithnayn* occurs in Qur'an 9:40, which alludes to the incident of the *ghār*. The verse states, "If you do not support him, yet God has already supported him when those who disbelieved expelled him as the second of two, when they were both in the Cave, and he told his companion, 'Do not grieve, for God is with us.'" Sunnī exegetical tradition uniformly maintains that Abū Bakr is the referent in this verse. In Sunnī-Shīʿī dialectics, the *ghār* incident is contraposed to the *mabīt* incident which refers to ʿAlī sleeping in the Prophet's house as his decoy on the night of Muḥammad's departure for Medina. This ruse delayed discovery of the Prophet's escape until the following day. Al-Jāḥiẓ points out that in contrast to the *ghār* episode, the *mabīt* is reported only in the *ḥadīth* literature, biographical narratives, and in poetry. He emphasizes that this is an important distinction between the two events. Since the Qur'an mentions the incident of the *ghār* and its reality is affirmed by communal consensus (*ṣāḥḥa bihi 'l-ijmāʿ*), it is transformed into an event that all must believe in just as one believes in the performance of the five prayers, the offering of the *zakāh*, and bathing after a major impurity as canonical obligations. One who denies the occurrence of this event is thus regarded as "a madman or an unbeliever by the *umma*."[27] The two events are, therefore, not equal in importance.

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and he said, "I saw ʿUqba b. Abī Muʿīṭ come up to the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, while he was praying and he placed his cloak on his [sc. the Prophet's] neck and began to choke him severely. Abū Bakr arrived and thrust him away and said, 'Are you trying to kill a man who says, 'My Lord is God,' and he has come to you with clear proofs from your Lord?'" Cf. also al-Muḥibb al-Ṭabarī, *Riyāḍ*, 108-9.

26 ʿ*Uthmāniyya*, 51.

27 Ibid., 43-44; also 110-12, where he states that "the composers of biographical narratives, poetry, and of traditions" also praise Abū Bakr's role in the *ghār* episode; among them are Ḥassān b. Thābit, Abū Miḥjan, and al-Najashī.

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Moral Excellences

In addition to *sābiqa*, al-Jāḥiẓ singles out and praises the following moral excellences (*faḍā'il* or *manāqib*) prodigiously displayed by Abū Bakr. These are: a) truthfulness; b) generosity; c) courage; and d) possession of knowledge. That these specific traits should have been invoked by al-Jāḥiẓ and in the *manāqib* literature on the Companions in general comes as no surprise since they constitute a major part of the constellation of moral attributes identified in the Qur'an as marking the righteous person. For example, *Sūrat al-Baqara*, 2:177, says,

> "Righteous is he who believes in God and the Last Day and the angels and the Book and the prophets; and gives his wealth, for love of Him, to kinsfolk and to orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and to those who ask, and to set slaves free; and observes proper worship and pays the poor-due; and those who keep their promise when they make one, and are patient in trial and adversity and in times of stress. These are the true believers and these are the Godfearing."

The pre-Islamic Arabs are also known to have had a high regard for individual generosity and valor, particularly in the *sayyid*, the tribal leader.[28] The Qur'anic ascription of the above attributes to the righteous believer, in conjunction with the Jāhilī valorization of a number of these attributes, clearly helped launch this discourse on moral excellence and facilitated its linkage with the concept of the leadership of the most excellent Muslim.

In his *ʿUthmāniyya*, al-Jāḥiẓ dwells at length on the trait of generosity traditionally attributed to Abū Bakr. Before his acceptance of Islam, Abū Bakr, according to standard Sunnī accounts, was a prominent, wealthy merchant in Mecca who provided for many dependents. Such accounts place Abū Bakr's fortune at forty thousand dirhams (some say forty thousand dinars) which, due to his generosity towards others, had dwindled to about five or six thousand dirhams around the time of the *hijra*.[29] Al-Jāḥiẓ stresses that Abū Bakr had labored hard to amass this large fortune, yet he was not reluctant to spend it liberally in the service of Islam, particularly for the manumission of slaves, such as Bilāl and Abū Furayḥa.[30] At the time of his death, Abū Bakr is said to have had nothing in his possession except "wet barley and a whet-stone," having exhausted his wealth through incessant almsgiving.[31] He contrasts this situation to that of ʿAlī, who according to most accounts, had "died the owner of [vast] wealth and endow-

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28 See Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'ān* (Montreal: McGill University, Institute of Islamic Studies, 1966), 54, where he refers to the term *karīm* as as "one of the highest value-words, meaning roughly both nobility of birth and generosity" during the Jāhilī period.

29 See, for example, Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, III: 128; al-Fasawī, *Kitāb al-Maʿrifa wa-'l-ta'rīkh*, ed. Akram Ḍiyā' al-ʿUmarī (Baghdad, 1396/1976), 3:254; and Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *al-Istīʿāb*, III: 966.

30 *ʿUthmāniyya*, 36.

31 Ibid., 97.

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ments," the value of which was equivalent to Abū Bakr's entire original fortune.[32] The point is thereby made that ʿAlī is to be considered morally deficient in comparison with Abū Bakr in regard to a moral excellence – generosity – that is essential in the legitimate leader of a righteous polity.

Veracity is another quintessential virtue defining Abū Bakr in Sunnī tradition. His truthfulness finds ample documentation in the *laqab* ("title" or "sobriquet") *al-Ṣiddīq* ("the Veracious One") given to him by the Prophet, according to traditional accounts. The *ʿUthmāniyya* pointed to the application of this *laqab* to Abū Bakr as evidence of his greater moral excellence vis-à-vis ʿAlī.[33] In contrast, the Prophet did not confer such a *laqab* upon ʿAlī by which he would be customarily addressed; evidence for such a sobriquet does not exist.[34]

Al-Jāḥiẓ then goes on to cite "old, authentic poetry" to corroborate his statement, for according to him, "there is no difference between poetry and traditions if they are used as proof-texts (*ḥujaj*)."[35] Among the poets he mentions who refer to Abū Bakr as "al-Ṣiddīq" in their poetry are Shurayḥ b. Hāniʾ al-Ḥārithī,[36] a Shiʿi poet al-ʿAjjāj b. Ruʾba (fl. 1st/7th century),[37] an Arab who held no sectarian views and was not inclined to polemics; al-Ḥārith b. Hishām b. al-Mughīra (fl. 1st/7th century),[38] who used "al-Ṣiddīq" to refer to Abū Bakr immediately after

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32 See Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, I: 212, where Ibn Isḥāq is quoted as saying that these verses (up to verse #21) were revealed in regard to Abū Bakr's manumission of slaves.

33 *ʿUthmāniyya*, 122.

34 Ibid., 122-23; cf. Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, III: 137, 224; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, ed. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid (Damascus, 1951), I: 511. See also Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥamīd Allāh (Cairo, n.d.), I: 529, where Ibn Abī Mulayka relates that Abū Bakr was addressed as *Khalīfat Allāh* ("God's deputy/representative"), to which Abū Bakr responded, "I am the successor of Muḥammad (*khalīfat Muḥammad*), peace and blessings be upon him, and I am satisfied with that."

35 Ibid. This equation is not surprising since the Muʿtazila in general tended not to assign much probative value to *ḥadīth*s. On this tendency of the Muʿtazila, see Joseph Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), 258-59; ʿAbd al-Majīd, *al-Ittijahāt al-fiqhiyya ʿinda aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth* (Cairo, 1979), 94.

36 For whom see Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb*, ed. Khalīl Maʾmūn Shīḥā (Beirut, 1417/1996), II: 162-63; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, (Beirut, 1415/1995), XXIII: 64-69. His father, Shurayḥ b. Hāniʾ b. Yazīd, was one of the *tābiʿūn*; Shurayḥ, the son, related traditions from Wahb b. Munabbih.

37 This is Abū 'l-Shaʾthāʾ ʿAbd Allāh b. Ruʾba b. Labīd, who, according to al-Jumaḥī, was so well known that he did not have to supply his *nisba*, for he was better known simply as al-ʿAjjāj. He is believed to have been born during the reign of ʿUthmān and to have died during the caliphate of al-Walīd b. ʿAbd al-Malik (r. 86/705-96/714). He is particularly known for his *rajaz* poetry, and his panegyrics were addressed to the powerful personages of his time, among them Yazīd b. Muʿāwiya, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Marwān, al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf, and Musʿab b. al-Zubayr; see *EI*^{2}, I: 207-8; *GAS* II: 366-37; al-Jumaḥī, *Ṭabaqāt*, II: 753-54. In his poetry, al-ʿAjjāj refers to Abū Bakr as al-Ṣiddīq; see his *Dīwān*, ed. and tr. Wilhelm Ahlwardt, *Sammlungen alter arabischer Dichter* (Berlin: Reuther & Reichhard, 1903), 2:15.

38 For whom see Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, XI: 491-506; Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusī, *Jamharat ansāb al-ʿarab*, ed. E. Lévi-Provençal (Cairo, 1948), 135, where the author remarks

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the incident of the Saqīfa; Abū Miḥjan,[39] Ṭarīf b. ʿAdī b. Ḥātim,[40] Ḥassān b. Thābit, Ṭulayḥa al-Asadī,[41] and al-Bāriqī.[42] None of these poets, al-Jāḥiẓ asserts, took part in polemical disputations, nor was any of them involved in the debate concerning the most qualified candidate for the caliphate (*al-fāḍil wa-'l-mafḍūl*). The occurrence of the honorific "al-Ṣiddīq" in their poetry indicates that it must already have been in wide contemporary circulation, and constitutes admissible proof of its existence.[43]

With regard to valor, al-Jāḥiẓ concedes that Abū Bakr was not distinguished by extraordinary military skill. Nevertheless, he had exercised considerable influence during the battles in which he had accompanied Muḥammad. Al-Jāḥiẓ chronicles the events in which Abū Bakr showed exceptional bravery in confronting the enemy, in word and in deed. During the Battle of Badr, for example, Abū Bakr was the first to speak out and encourage the Muslim forces to strike at the enemy.[44] His admirable courage, however, was more effectively showcased during non-militant events like the *ghār* episode. Al-Jāḥiẓ in fact adumbrates a somewhat unique "theology of suffering," according to which patient forbearance in the face of practically unbearable tribulations confers greater merit on the believer than heroic battle exploits, as will be discussed below.

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that al-Ḥārith submitted to Islam sincerely (*wa-ḥasuna islāmuh*) and that his only son ʿAbd al-Raḥmān was one of the virtuous Successors.

39 See Ibn al-Athīr, *Usd al-ghāba*, III: 206, and Aḥmad al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab fī funūn al-adab*, ed. Muḥammad Abū 'l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Cairo, 1395/1975), XIX: 9, where the following verses by Abū Miḥjan in praise of Abu Bakr's precedence are given:
"wa-summīta ṣiddīqan wa-kullu muhājirīn
siwāka yusammā bi-'smihi ghayra munkari
sabaqta ilā 'l-Islāmi wa-'llāhu shahīdun
wa-kunta jālisan fī 'l-ʿarīshi al-mushhar"i
"You were called 'a Veracious One' and every Emigrant
except you was called by his [given] name [and that] is not objectionable
You preceded [others] into Islam, as God is witness,
and you were the seated companion in the exposed booth."

40 See Werner Caskel, *Ǧamharat an-nasab : das genealogische Werk des Hišām Ibn Muḥammad al-Kalbī* (Leiden: Brill, 1966), II: 402, where Ṭarīf b. ʿAdī b. Ḥātim from the clan of Banū ʿAdī b. Akhzam is said to have been killed along with the Khawārij. His father, ʿAdī b. Ḥātim, was a Companion; for whom see Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Iṣāba fī tamyīz al-ṣaḥāba* (Beirut, 1417/1996), IV: 228-29.

41 He is the false prophet Ṭulayḥa b. Khuwaylid b. Nawfal al-Asadī, for whom see Ibn Ḥazm, *Jamhara*, 185.

42 This *nisba* is said to be derived from Bāriq, the name of a mountain in Yemen where the Banū Azd settled, and is most frequently applied to one Abū ʿAbd Allāh ʿAlī b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Saʿd b. ʿAdī al-Bāriqī al-Azdī, who related from Ibn ʿUmar, although a host of other people were known by this *nisba*. For other explanations of this *nisba*, see Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Lubāb fī tahdhīb al-ansāb*, (Beirut, 1414/1994), I: 107-8.

43 *ʿUthmāniyya*, 124-28. By the Umayyad period, this *laqab* is used quite frequently; for example, al-Farazdaq refers to Abū Bakr as al-Ṣiddīq and to ʿUmar and ʿUthmān as the two martyrs; see *Sharḥ Dīwān al-Farazdaq*, ed. ʿAbd Allāh Ismāʿīl al-Ṣāwī (Cairo, 1936), I: 264.

44 Cf. Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, I: 459; al-Muḥibb al-Ṭabarī, *Riyāḍ*, I: 164-67.

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With regard to knowledge (*ʿilm*), al-Jāḥiẓ asserts that in this regard as well Abū Bakr far outstripped the younger ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib. In the *ʿUthmāniyya*, al-Jāḥiẓ conceives of *ʿilm* primarily as acquired knowledge that aids the legal major (*mukallaf*) in discharging the duties incumbent upon him or her. It is an important component of religion (*dīn*), for without this kind of knowledge, one cannot accept nor practice religious obligations correctly. *ʿIlm* is a function of the intellect (*ʿaql*), but possession of the intellect alone does not confer on one the ability to comprehend and carry out religious precepts; it is simply a starting point. As a consequence, al-Jāḥiẓ considers the attainment of majority and the attendant faculties of mature discernment and resoluteness of purpose as necessary prerequisites for rendering one's innate knowledge regarding God into valid acts of worship.[45] Thus Abū Bakr's decisive role in the *ridda* wars and resolute control over the Muslims in the immediate aftermath of the Prophet's death confirm his superior qualifications for the office of the caliph.[46] Furthermore, Abū Bakr was the most knowledgeable among the Companions regarding the genealogy of the Arabs and "the most quoted concerning their virtues and their vices."[47] This is another example of the practical knowledge of Abū Bakr and his pragmatism that stood the Muslims in good stead during the *ridda* wars.[48]

Historical Memory and the Present

In the debate that ensued between the supporters of Abū Bakr and the supporters of ʿAlī over the issue of who should succeed the Prophet, *sābiqa* and the four moral excellences mentioned above were (and remain) a constant refrain in the literature which documents the merits of these two Companions in particular. Given its early provenance, the *ʿUthmāniyya* however presents this debate in a less tropic, formulaic manner when compared to later works. There are therefore moments of genuine insight into the intellectual and theological ambience of this early period, that is, before 203/819 when the work almost certainly was composed. This was al-Shāfiʿī's era (he died in 204/820), but at this time his legal thought, which would prove to be seminal in a generation or two, was still relatively unknown. Political

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45 Al-Jāḥiẓ, "Istiḥqāq al-imāma," *Rasāʾil al-Jāḥiẓ*, ed. ʿAlī Bū Mulḥim (Beirut, n.d.), 158.

46 Cf. ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī fī abwāb al-tawḥīd wa-ʾl-ʿadl* (Cairo, 1960-69), XII: 66-68; George Hourani, *Islamic Rationalism: the Ethics of ʿAbd al-Jabbār* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1971), 20-23; Marie Bernand, "La notion de *ʿilm* chez les premiers Muʿtazilites," *Studia Islamica* 36 (1972): 23-45.

47 Ibid., 24.

48 Among modern historians who have emphasized the relevance of this aspect of Abū Bakr's knowledge, especially his prominence as a genealogist, are M. A. Shaban, *Islamic History: A New Interpretation* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1971), I: 18-19; Fred Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 84-85; Khalil Athamina, "The Pre-Islamic Roots of the early Muslim Caliphate: the Emergence of Abū Bakr," *Der Islam* 76 (1999): 27.

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and legal concepts were still in flux. A contemporaneous work like the *ʿUthmāniyya* testifies to a more fluid situation and points to certain noteworthy features. Three of these noteworthy features are further explored below.

A. A Theology of Suffering

We detect what we could provisionally call a "theology of suffering" articulated in the *ʿUthmāniyya*. This occurs in the context of al-Jāḥiẓ's discussion of the respective merits of Abū Bakr's and ʿAlī's quality of submission and the suffering they had to endure as a consequence of their conversion. Going against the grain, at least from the vantage point of later scholars, al-Jāḥiẓ values the depth and extent of Abū Bakr's suffering in Mecca higher than the tribulations faced by ʿAlī in Medina. The main reason for this higher evaluation rests on the fact that during the Meccan period, "Abū Bakr was persecuted and isolated, banished and expelled [from polite society], beaten and punished in an age when Islam and its adherents were inactive and powerless." Al-Jāḥiẓ further adds that during the days of Islam's weakness and paucity of adherents, being a faithful Muslim was a "greater [matter] on account of the excessive forbearance [one had to practice], the more severe trials [one had to face], and the greater exertion [one had to make]." Under such circumstances, "faithfulness was more meritorious and resoluteness was stronger."[49] Al-Jāḥiẓ is echoing here, at least partially, a Muʿtazilī belief that the commission of good deeds under adverse circumstances is worth more than similar acts carried out under less stressful conditions.[50]

In the Meccan period, adult Muslims, and prominent ones in particular like Abū Bakr, were exposed to severe aggravations and constant humiliation, which ʿAlī as a young and unknown boy was spared. These hardships were endured by these earliest Muslims not just for a year or two but for thirteen long years, al-Jāḥiẓ stresses. The Qurʾan itself assigns greater merit to the earlier Muslims who had struggled on behalf of Islam during its darkest days. Qurʾan (57:10) states, "Those who spent and fought before the conquest [of Mecca] (*al-Fatḥ*) are those who have been given the highest status over those who spent and fought afterwards. But to each God has promised a fair compensation." Al-Jāḥiẓ then remarks that if Muslims who spent and fought before the *Fatḥ* were given the highest status in this verse, how much more deserving of it are Muslims who carried out these meritorious acts before the Emigration, since the time "from the sending of the Prophet, blessings be upon him, up to the Emigration was greater" than the subsequent periods of time.[51] To the ʿAlid partisans who would remonstrate that

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49 *ʿUthmāniyya*, 40.

50 Cf. Ibn Ḥazm, *Kitāb al-fiṣal fī 'l-milal wa-'l-ahwā' wa-'l-niḥal*, ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Khalīfa (Cairo, 1928), IV: 114.

51 *Uthmāniyya*, 38-39.

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ʿAlī's heroic military exploits in defense of Islam during the Medinan period were far more meritorious, al-Jāḥiẓ retorts that the totality of the indignities and suffering undergone by Abū Bakr during the thirteen year Meccan period outstripped twenty such heroic incidents in the Medinan period.[52]

Here we have an articulation of a theology of suffering according to which patient, non-militant forbearance in the face of persecution and humiliation is far superior, morally speaking, than physical resistance in more propitious circumstances. Al-Jāḥiẓ imagines the terror and despair that the earliest Muslims in Mecca, including Abū Bakr, had faced continuously for thirteen years in a situation fraught with extreme danger and contrasts that to the relative self-confidence and security of the Muslim community in Medina. This evaluation runs contrary to the general later tendency to value the Medinan period higher than the Meccan, since, among other reasons, it was in the Medinan period that the Muslim community was formed which ultimately prevailed over the pagan Meccans. Al-Jāḥiẓ's perspective provides a refreshingly different prism through which to view the early Islamic period.

B. Of Political Authority and Authoritarianism

By al-Jāḥiẓ's time, the Shīʿī doctrine of explicit designation of the Imam (*naṣṣ*) by his predecessor, who was usually the father, was already widely known since he refers to it and seeks to refute it. Al-Jāḥiẓ takes strong exception to this doctrine on the basis that it is a violation of the Qur'anic vision of righteous leadership based on personal piety and not on kinship. He points to the fact that God addresses Abraham, "the tree of apostlehood and the intimate friend of the Almighty," in the Qur'an and says to him,

> "I will make of you a leader (*imām*) over the people." Abraham asked, whether out of a desire to know or as a request, "And of my progeny?" He said, "My promise does not extend to those who do wrong" (*Sūrat al-Baqara*, 2:124). Thus he learned that the covenant of his leadership and successorship (*ʿahd imāmatihi wa-khilāfatih*) did not extend to the wrong-doer, even though he may be from the best stock of God's creation. In this is proof that leadership (*al-riyāsa*) is concerned with religiosity (*dīn*) and does not extend beyond religiosity."[53]

The concept of the *imām* in this verse, as al-Jāḥiẓ affirms, categorically restricts succession to the prophets to those who are pious and discounts the relevance of lineal descent in itself.[54]

Al-Jāḥiẓ further devalues the notion of kinship as having any bearing on religious merit and political authority by discussing the organization of the *dīwān*

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52 Ibid., 39.
53 Ibid., 210.
54 Interestingly, a similar interpretation is given in al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī* (Beirut ed.), II: 229-30.

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(register of pensions) set up by ʿUmar. He painstakingly establishes that the principles of *sābiqa* and *faḍl faḍīla* guided its organization and not any consideration of lineage.[55] He points out that ʿUmar made equal provisions for all those who had witnessed the Battle of Badr from among the Muhājirūn and their clients and the Anṣār and their clients; thus, according to this stipulation, the stipends (6,000 [dirhams]) of ʿUmar, ʿAlī, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, Ṭalḥa, al-Zubayr, and Abū ʿUbayda b. al-Jarrāḥ among the Arabs were identical to the stipends awarded to ʿAṭāʾ, Bilāl, Salīm, the *mawlā* of Abū Hudhayfa, among the non-Arab *mawālī*. The fact that ʿUmar granted Usāma b. Zayd a larger pension than to his own son is "proof that the people acknowledged only religiosity, precedence (*al-sābiqa*), and indispensable service to Muslims," as cardinal virtues.[56] In his extensive analysis of the organization of the *dīwān* in the *ʿUthmāniyya*, al-Jāḥiẓ thus demonstrates that it was not kinship nor ethnicity nor tribal affiliation that determined its function. It is worthy of note that this early ʿAbbasid work, in contrast to others from more or less the same period, does not single out al-ʿAbbās as having been favored by ʿUmar over others in drawing up the list of pensions.

We know that in both the medieval and modern Muslim imagination, the era of the four caliphs, the righteous Companions of the Prophet, became glorified as representing a golden era. It was for very good reason that most Muslims came to call the four caliphs "the Rightly-Guided Successors" (*al-khulafāʾ al-rāshidūn*), for they were above all understood to have implemented the Qurʾanic dictum of grounding leadership in individual moral excellence and precedence. The historical tradition also informs us that the Rāshidūn caliphs did not impose their will on the people against their wishes but sought their allegiance by proving to them that they were worthy of their loyalty. Abū Bakr's inaugural address, as recorded by al-Jāḥiẓ, remains a model of humility and accountability to the people. In this key address, Abū Bakr is quoted as counseling the people gathered before him,

> "You must be Godfearing, for piety is the most intelligent practice and immorality is the most foolish. Indeed I am a follower, not an innovator; if I perform well, then help me, and if I should deviate, correct me. ... O gathering of the Anṣār, if the caliphate [lit. "this matter"] is deserved on account of *ḥasab* and attained on account of kinship (*bi-ʾl-qarāba*), then Quraysh is more noble than you on account of *ḥasab* and more closely related than you [to the Prophet]. However, since it is deserved on account of moral excellence (*bi-ʾl-faḍl*) in religion, then those who are foremost in precedence (*al-sābiqūn al-awwalūn*) from among the Muhājirūn are placed ahead of you in the entire Qurʾan[57] as being more worthy of it compared to you."[58]

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55 *Uthmāniyya*, 211ff.

56 Ibid., 216.

57 Al-Jāḥiẓ thus understands the Qurʾanic collocation "al-Muhājirūn wa-ʾl-Anṣār" to indicate the former's precedence in Islam in general since they were placed before the Anṣār (*wa-innamā quddimū fi ʾl-Qurʾān li-taqaddumihim fi ʾl-islām*); *Uthmāniyya*, 203.

58 Ibid., 202.

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The assembly of people, according to al-Jāḥiẓ, was swayed by the cogency of Abū Bakr's arguments and proceeded to express their loyalty to him.[59] As our author points out, Abū Bakr's sentiments expressed in this speech identify him as belonging to the egalitarian camp (*aṣḥāb al-taswiya*), which looked to Qur'anic warrants to undermine the pre-Islamic valorization of noble descent and lineage.

Another Qur'anic verse adduced by al-Jāḥiẓ as a strike against dynastic leadership is 4:59 which states, "O ye who believe! Obey God, and obey the Apostle, and those possessed of authority among you." Al-Jāḥiẓ criticizes the "Rāfiḍa" for claiming that the phrase "those possessed of authority among you" (*ulū 'l-amr*) refers to ʿAlī and his offspring, so that "obedience to ʿAlī was obligatory for all."[60] Al-Jāḥiẓ rejects this interpretation, saying that the vast majority of Qur'an interpreters (*aṣḥab al-ta'wīl*) say that the verse was revealed with regard to the agents (*ʿummāl*) of the Prophet and his governors (*wulāh*), to the Muslims in general, to the commanders of his armies such as al-ʿAlā' b. al-Ḥaḍramī, and Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī, as well as to his Companions.[61] ʿAlī, as one of the Prophet's Companions, is included in this group, but only as one of many and is not singled out. The traditions which the "Rafiḍa" cite in favor of their interpretation emanate from very few people and, therefore, should be classified as *shādhdh* ("anomalous" or "irregular"). Since the large majority of exegetes favor a different interpretation, al-Jāḥiẓ maintains, the interpretation of the "Rafiḍa" is clearly based on weak traditions and to be discounted. Al-Jāḥiẓ' commentary on 4:59 based on the exegeses of other commentators up to his time reveals the broad and nonauthoritarian understandings of this verse, which includes understanding *amr* in an apolitical sense as well as understanding political authority to emanate from the Muslims altogether rather than from a privileged elite.[62] These interpretations are in marked contradistinction to the views of later political theorists like al-Māwardī (d. 1058), who understood *ulū 'l-amr* to refer exclusively to the political leaders of Muslims, particularly the caliph, to whom obedience was due, usually as long as they obeyed God's law.[63]

In our next and final section, we discuss al-Jāḥiẓ's attitudes toward *ḥadīth* in general as probative texts.

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59 Ibid.

60 See, for example, al-Qummī, *Tafsīr*, ed. Ṭayyib al-Mūsāwī al-Jarā'irī (Najaf, 1386/1966), I:141.

61 *ʿUthmāniyya*, 115 ff.

62 For the range of exegeses associated with this verse, see my article "Obedience to Political Authority: An Evolutionary Concept," in Muqtedar Khan, ed., *Islamic Democratic Discourse: Theory, Debates, and Philosophical Perspectives* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2006), 37-60.

63 *Al-Aḥkām al-Sulṭāniyya wa 'l-Wilāya al-Dīniyya* (Beirut, 1996), 13.

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C. Status of Ḥadīth *vs. Historical Reports*

In his dialectics with the Shīʿa, al-Jāḥiẓ in the *ʿUthmāniyya* is just as likely to appeal to poetry and historical accounts as to *ḥadīth* to establish the historicity of certain events. We have already seen an instance of this when we referred to al-Jāḥiẓ's appeal to early poetry as corroboration of the widespread use of the sobriquet *al-Ṣiddīq* for Abū Bakr. Like many among the Muʿtazila, al-Jāḥiẓ regarded *ḥadīth* critically and invoked stringent criteria, not necessarily those of the *ahl al-ḥadīth*, to judge its admissibility as a proof-text. We see his methodology illustrated in the following examples drawn from the *ʿUthmāniyya*.

In order to provide powerful documentation of Abū Bakr's closeness to the Prophet and his aptitude for leadership, al-Jāḥiẓ refers to the prayer (*ṣalāh*) tradition. According to this *ḥadīth*, the Prophet designated Abū Bakr to lead the prayers in his place during his last illness. This is an event that Abū Bakr's supporters single out as confirmation of Muḥammad's tacit approval of Abū Bakr as his successor. According to several reports, when Muḥammad designated Abū Bakr as the prayer leader, ʿĀʾisha and Ḥafṣa are said to have remonstrated that it would be preferable to designate the more psychologically robust ʿUmar as the prayer leader. The Prophet replied disapprovingly, "You are to me like the companions of Joseph. God and His messenger have decreed that Abū Bakr will pray."[64]

Al-Jāḥiẓ evaluates the significance of this event in the following manner:

> "No one can say that anyone other than he [sc. Abū Bakr] led the people in prayer during those days, and no one can say that anyone other than he was commanded to lead in prayer, so that all of them together said, "The Messenger of God has chosen him for our religion and we have chosen him for our [affairs of this] world;" and so that they (also) said, "The Messenger of God has appointed him over our prayers, and our *zakāh* follows our prayers" – and they are two of the great matters of religion. And no one can say that, when Abū Bakr went in front of the people to lead the prayers while the Prophet, God's blessings be upon him, was bed-ridden, anyone said to him, "What has possessed you to pray before us without being charged to do so or without cause?" No man said anything similar to that behind his back; and no man from among the Anṣār said, "From among us there will be a prayer leader and from among you another," like they said, "From among us there will be a leader and from among you another."[65]

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64 *ʿUthmāniyya*, 130-31, 163; cf. Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, III: 133-34; Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, II: 1065; al-Fasāwī, *Maʿrifa*, I: 446 ff.; ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, V: 433. Al-Bāqillānī in his *Kitāb al-Tamhīd fī 'l-radd ʿalā 'l-mulḥida al-muʿattila wa 'l-rāfiḍa wa 'l-khawārij wa 'l-muʿtazila*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad al-Khuḍayrī and Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Hādī Abū Riḍā (Cairo, 1947), 190, explains the importance of this *ḥadīth* by saying that ʿĀʾisha and Ḥafṣa (the latter does not figure in all versions of this tradition) were thus reproached because they attempted to undermine Abū Bakr's precedence by suggesting a substitute prayer leader.

65 *ʿUthmāniyya*, 131; 173-76. This is a reference to the events at the *saqīfa* ("portico") of the Banū Sāʿida, immediately after the Prophet's death, when the Anṣār recommended that the Muslims choose one leader from among themselves and one from among the Muhāji-

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Al-Jāḥiẓ, therefore, clearly suggests that popular acquiescence in Abū Bakr's leadership during the communal prayers during Muḥammad's last illness amounted to a general recognition of his leadership in all matters after the Prophet's death. Since it was Muḥammad himself who had selected Abū Bakr to lead the prayers, this selection should be regarded as having been prompted by "divine inspiration" (*min qibal al-waḥy*).[66] This issue, therefore, could not be subject to dispute among the general populace.

Al-Jāḥiẓ emphasizes that Abū Bakr led the prayer not only on one occasion, but for several consecutive days while the Prophet remained confined to bed until his demise.[67] This fact should appease those who doubt whether the Prophet himself had commanded Abū Bakr to lead the prayers – the implication being that Abū Bakr could not have discharged such an important function for so long without it being known that Muḥammad himself had issued such a directive. The selection of Abū Bakr was even more remarkable since he was not known for distinction on the battlefield or great wealth (after his acceptance of Islam), nor could he claim a particularly noble lineage or blood-kinship with the Prophet as ʿAlī could; yet he was chosen to discharge this crucial function.[68]

Al- Jāḥiẓ then goes on to adduce as proof-texts specific *ḥadīth*s which, according to the criteria invoked by him, irrefutably establishes the special status of Abū Bakr vis-à-vis the Prophet. According to al-Jāḥiẓ, the wide dissemination of certain reports adduced as proof-texts does not necessarily attest to their soundness. Those who advance *ḥadīth*s which do not conform to known biographical and historical facts are merely transmitting reports uncritically and are not to be taken seriously.[69] In contrast, the ʿUthmāniyya, who "are more learned in jurisprudence and in *ḥadīth* than the Rāfiḍa" report that the Prophet said the following:

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rūn to please both factions (*minnā amīr wa-minkum amīr*); see, for example, Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, II: 1074; Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, III: 135; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, VI: 85-87.

66 *ʿUthmāniyya*, 164.

67 Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, II: 1065-68; Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, III: 135, where it is stated that the Prophet was ill for thirteen days; "when he felt in himself a lightness, he would pray; when he felt in himself a heaviness, Abū Bakr would pray;" similarly in al-Fasāwī, *Maʿrifa*, I: 450. Al-Ṭabarī in his *Taʿrīkh*, II: 231, reports from ʿIkrima that Abū Bakr led the prayers for three days, while al-Suyūṭī in his *Taʾrīkh al-khulafaʾ*, 58, states that Abū Bakr led the prayer for eight days. The Shīʿī scholar al-Nawbakhtī in his *Kitāb firaq al-shīʿa*, ed. Hellmut Ritter (Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1931), 15, states that Abū Bakr was appointed the prayer leader only on the night the Prophet died.

68 *ʿUthmāniyya*, 132, 170. Ibn Taymiyya points to the historical fact of Abū Bakr having served as the prayer leader and affirms that this testifies to his qualification for leadership, for, he says, "there is a difference between the [actual] *imām* and one who should be *imām* and this [fact] is not obscured from the common people;" see his *Minhāj al-sunna al-nabawiyya fī naqd kalām al-shīʿa al-qadariyya*, ed. Muḥammad Rashād Salīm (Cairo, 1382/1962), I: 385.

69 *ʿUthmāniyya*, 134-35.

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> "There is no one more gracious towards us with his companionship and his wealth than Abū Bakr. If I were to take a bosom friend (*khalīl*) from this community, then I would take Abū Bakr as such, out of affection and the brotherhood of faith."[70]

According to this *ḥadīth*, it would not be possible for the Prophet to take anyone for his brother who was not also his intimate friend, and "we only know an intimate friend as (one enjoying) a most distinguished position and the closest of affection."[71] Al-Jāḥiẓ is thus implying that this *ḥadīth* is not at variance with what we know about the close relationship between Muḥammad and Abū Bakr, as demonstrated, for example, during the *ghār* episode attested to by the Qurʾan. Thus we can be assured of its essential soundness.

Al-Jāḥiẓ goes on to compare the above tradition with the *muʾakhāh* or "brothering" tradition, favored by the ʿAlids, which states that the Prophet chose ʿAlī as his brother in Medina. Al-Jāḥiẓ claims that the scholars of tradition (*aṣḥāb al-āthār*) affirm that the Prophet had paired ʿAlī with an Anṣārī, Sahl b. Ḥunayf, and that this is a well-known fact.[72] This would be more consistent with the purpose of the pairing since the objective was to match a Meccan emigrant with a Medinan helper. The Shīʿa are prepared to concede this, saying that ʿAlī was paired both with the Prophet and with Sahl, thus winning a brother from among both the Muhājirūn and the Anṣār. To this, al-Jāḥiẓ replies by saying that the *ḥadīth* referred to by the Shīʿa which affirms the "brothering" between the Prophet and ʿAlī lacks a reliable *isnād* and is not acceptable to the scholars of *ḥadīth*. But if, for argument's sake, he was to accept it, then, based on the premise that ʿAlī was paired with the best among the Muhājirūn, namely the Prophet, why, al-Jāḥiẓ asks, was ʿAlī also not paired with the best among the Anṣār, who would be Saʿd b. Muʿādh? If the Shīʿa insist that Sahl was better than Saʿd, then al-Jāḥiẓ believes they are simply ignorant.[73] If, on the other hand, they state that it was not necessary that ʿAlī be paired with someone of similar or greater excellence, then they have destroyed their own case, for that would mean that ʿAlī was being shown no special preference in being paired with the Prophet, if indeed such an event actually took place.[74]

Next, al-Jāḥiẓ refers to the *manzila* tradition in which the Prophet tells ʿAlī, "Your position (*manzila*) with regard to me is like that of Aaron with regard to

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70 For similar and variant reports, see, for example, al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, VI: 78-9, #3266; VI: 80, #3267; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, IV: 1478-79; Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, VI: 348, #31923, #31924, #31926; Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, III: 131; al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II: 227-28.

71 *ʿUthmāniyya*, 135.

72 See, for example, Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, III: 16.

73 For whom, see Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, III: 320-33; Ibn Ḥajar, *Iṣāba*, II: 86-87, #3527. It is noteworthy that Ibn Saʿd begins his first *ṭabaqa* of the Anṣār with Saʿd b. Muʿādh.

74 *ʿUthmāniyya*, 161-63.

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Moses, except that there is no prophet after me."[75] Al-Jāḥiẓ remarks that he is hard put to take this report seriously because it is known that Aaron predeceased Moses and, therefore, could not have been his successor. Comparing ʿAlī's position to that of Aaron thus has no bearing on the question of succession to Muḥammad. Al-Jāḥiẓ suggests that either the Shīʿa were attributing a statement to the Prophet which he never uttered, or that the meaning of the *ḥadīth* in question is drastically different from what they intended. Indeed, if the Prophet wished to indicate that ʿAlī was his successor, he should have said, "Your position with regard to me is like the position of Joshua except that there is no prophet after me," for Joshua was Moses' successor and was a prophet before and after the death of Moses.[76]

On the other hand, the Rāfiḍa choose to ignore accounts which testify to the elevated status of Abū Bakr and his family. According to al-Jāḥiẓ, Abū Bakr and the people of his house (*ahl baytih*) were known to have constituted the "people of a house of Islam (or of submission)" (*ahl bayt islām*), for not only was Abū Bakr himself a Muslim, but his wife, parents and daughters had all accepted Islam as well.[77] Al-Jāḥiẓ appears to be underscoring the fact that by contrast, Abū Ṭālib, ʿAlī's father, had not converted to Islam.[78]

Al-Jāḥiẓ marshals prophetic statements which indicate that Abū Bakr was to succeed Muḥammad as incontrovertible proof-texts. According to one such tradition, the Prophet counseled the Muslims, "Follow those who are after me – Abū Bakr and ʿUmar." Another tradition reports that the Prophet looked at Abū Bakr and ʿUmar and said to ʿAlī, "These two are the masters of all the middle-aged people, from the first of times till the last of times, except for the prophets and the messengers. O ʿAlī, will you not inform them [of this]?"[79]

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[75] *ʿUthmāniyya*, 134. See, for example, al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, VI: 117; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, IV: 1490-91; al-Nasāʾī, *Khaṣāʾiṣ amīr al-muʾminīn*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥāwī al-ʿAynī (Najaf, 1388/1969), 50, III: 17.

[76] *ʿUthmāniyya*, 155-56. I have given here in brief al-Jāḥiẓ's long remonstration against the Shīʿī understanding of this *ḥadīth* as vouchsafing the *khilāf al-imāma* to ʿAlī. He also takes issue with the continuation of the *ḥadīth*, "except there is no prophet after me," saying that the Prophet could not except something in ʿAlī that the latter never possessed to begin with; ibid., 156ff.

[77] Ibid., 113. This statement implies that some proto-Sunnī attempts were made to ascribe a certain amount of religious significance to Abū Bakr's family in tandem with the development of the notion of a sacralized *ahl al-bayt* centered around ʿAlī and Fāṭima. For this discussion, see my article "In Praise of the Caliphs: Re-creating History from the *Manāqib* Literature," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 31 (1999): 336-38.

[78] For accounts referring to Abū Bakr's father, Abū Quḥāfa's acceptance of Islam, see Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, II: 856-57.

[79] Cf. Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, VI: 350, #31941; Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, I: 130, etc. Again, we notice a certain irenic proclivity for combining these various reports in some sources. One such report from Ismāʿīl b. Abī Khālid states that ʿĀʾisha once addressed the Prophet as "master of the Arabs" and the Prophet said, "I am the master of the sons of Adam, your fa-

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According to another report,

> "When the Prophet, the blessings of God be upon him, laid the foundations for the mosque in Medina, he brought a stone and laid it down. Then Abū Bakr came with a stone and laid it down; after him, ʿUmar came with a stone and laid it down. The Prophet was asked about this and he said, "They represent the caliphate after me."[80]

Such reports confirm that Abū Bakr enjoyed a special status with regard to the Prophet and that the latter had *de facto* designated him as his successor. Al-Jāḥiẓ thereby seeks to demonstrate that for every *ḥadīth* put forth by the Shīʿa to prove ʿAlī's elevated station with the Prophet, the *ʿUthmāniyya* could produce another in Abū Bakr's favor. This has, therefore, led to partisan bickering over the meaning of the words of the traditions because

> "the narrators have related them from the Pious Forbears (*al-salaf*) in their pristine form without interpretation of their meanings, and conveyed them, couched in general expressions. Thus, those who listened [to the traditions] began to contradict each other for they compared parts of them with others due to their ignorance of their provenance – and look at what the consequences of that are!"[81]

As an example, al-Jāḥiẓ describes the circumstances that led to Muhammad's utterance of the famous Ghadīr Khumm tradition:

> "Of whomever I am the *mawlā* (understood especially by the Shīʿa as "master or patron" in this context), ʿAlī is also his *mawlā*. So, O God, oppose those who oppose him and befriend those who befriend him."[82]

Al-Jāḥiẓ explains the occasion (*sabab al-wurūd*) for this tradition. ʿAlī at one time had reproached the Prophet's freedman, Zayd b. Ḥāritha, for having done something remiss, at which Zayd took offense and responded sharply. ʿAlī asked, "Do you say this to your master (*mawlā*)?" Zayd replied that only the Prophet was his master. ʿAlī complained to Muḥammad regarding this matter and he responded with the above statement. Thus, the statement simply affirms that ʿAlī was Zayd's master as were other Companions of the Prophet such as al-ʿAbbās, al-Faḍl, ʿAbd Allāh b. Masʿūd, Quthām, Tammām, and Maʿbad.[83] Al-Jāḥiẓ is thus highly critical of the Shīʿī inclination to rely on reports which are subject to partisan interpretation, such as the Ghadīr Khumm and *manzila* traditions, as proof-texts to be marshalled in support of ʿAlī's greater excellence and thus his designation as the Prophet's successor. In contrast, the *ʿUthmāniyya* can point to a historical fact such as Abū Bakr's appointment as the prayer leader by the Prophet

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ther is the master of the mature men from among the Arabs, and ʿAlī is the master of the youth of the Arabs," contained in al-Muḥibb al-Ṭabarī, *Riyāḍ*, I: 163-64.

80 *ʿUthmāniyya*, 135-36; cf. al-Suyūṭī, *Khaṣā'iṣ*, II: 324-25.

81 *ʿUthmāniyya*, 137-38.

82 Ibid., 134. This report is recorded, for example, by al-Tirmidhī, *Saḥīḥ* (Cairo, 1353/1934), XIII: 165; Ibn Māja, *Sunan* (Riyad, 1983) I: 24-25, #108; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnād*, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shakir (Cairo, 1366/1947), V: 27, but not by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

83 *ʿUthmāniyya*, 145.

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during his last illness as unambiguous proof of his higher standing with the Prophet and, consequently, his greater qualification for the caliphate.

Al-Jāḥiẓ, as we can see, was more concerned with analysis of the text (*matn*) of the *ḥadīth* than with its *isnād*, although the latter was also of some concern. But primarily he is concerned with determining the veridicality of *ḥadīth* texts based on their historicity as far as that can be established, particularly by their corroboration through supplementary sources such as poetry and historical and biographical sources. Al-Jāḥiẓ's skepticism towards *ḥadīth* alone used as proof-text strikes us as evidencing a rather critical "modern" sensibility. More importantly, it indicates the nature of the early debates regarding the reliability of *ḥadīth* and its hierarchical relationship to the Qurʾan.

Conclusion

Our discussion above by no means exhausts the contents of the *ʿUthmāniyya* nor their richness. This late second/eighth century text is the oldest Islamic political treatise available to us composed by one of the best Arab litterateurs that ever lived. The variant accounts preserved in this early work of key events associated with the formative period of the Muslim polity, such as Abū Bakr's inaugural speech or ʿUmar's *dīwān* and its organization, deserve further close scrutiny to tease out the wealth of historical details buried in them. Since we are not exactly blessed with an overabundance of texts from before the mid-third/ninth century, the *Risālat al-ʿUthmāniyya* remains a valuable source for supplementing and nuancing our current knowledge concerning early Islamic political thought and culture.

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Al-Jāḥiẓ, the Misers, and the Proto-Sunnī Ascetics

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Introduction

It has been customary to divide the works of Abū ʿUthmān ʿAmr b. Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/869) into polemics and *belles lettres*. In some ways, of course, the distinction is artificial. In works of both kinds, he constructs counterintuitive but maddeningly persuasive arguments, adduces speeches by real or invented figures, and cites aphorisms and lines of verse. There are, nevertheless, works that seem to fall squarely into one or the other category. Among these is the *Kitāb al-bukhalāʾ*, "a purely literary work," as Ṭāhā al-Ḥājirī has called it.[1] The *Bukhalāʾ* contains few if any allusions to contemporary events and controversies, and hardly any explicit discussion of theology or politics. Most modern studies of it have consequently been rhetorical or narratological in nature. Of course, there have been attempts to read it as a product of its social and economic milieu. Nevertheless, there have been only a few attempts to read *bukhl* as symbolic of something besides tightfistedness and the *Bukhalāʾ* as religious rather than socioeconomic in its concerns. Of these attempts, the most stimulating is a 1994 study by Daniel Beaumont. Beaumont argues that the *Bukhalāʾ* parodies at least four sorts of writing: works of advice, philosophy, mystical exegesis, and Ḥadīth-study. By extension, he argues, the book satirizes the groups of people associated with those discourses.[2]

On formal grounds alone, it appears indisputable that al-Jāḥiẓ is parodying advice-texts (even if it remains unclear what group is thereby being satirized). For historical reasons, I am less persuaded by Beaumont's arguments that the discourses of philosophy and mysticism are also being parodied. As for Ḥadīth-study, I fully agree that al-Jāḥiẓ intends to mock it. But I would like to take the argument in a new direction. Beaumont writes that when they trade "examples of thrifty behavior," al-Jāḥiẓ's Basran mosque-sitters

> "mimic the traditionists or the *Ahl al-Sunna*, those people who argued for only the Qurʾan and the examples of the Prophet's behavior as related in tradition as the basis for their behavior and beliefs. These people were at odds with the rationalizing Muʿtazilî thinkers with whom Jahiz is usually associated."[3]

If I understand him correctly, Beaumont is arguing that the misers resemble the Ḥadith-men in that both are slavishly devoted to carrying out the letter of par-

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1 Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Al-Bukhalāʾ*, ed. Ṭāhā al-Ḥājirī, 5th ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1990), introduction, 18.

2 Daniel Beaumont, "Parody and Lying in al-Bukhalāʾ," *Studia Islamica* 79 (1994): 27-49.

3 Ibid., 33.

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ticular texts. As I will argue, al-Jāḥiẓ may well have been thinking along those lines; but as I will also argue, he found another, more invidious similarity between the two groups: one that arises from the nature of *bukhl* itself. Here I follow in the footsteps of a second astute reader, James Montgomery, who in a recent survey of the life and works of al-Jāḥiẓ suggests that *bukhl* "belongs to the cluster of notions expressed in the concept of *kufr* (unbelief), ranging from downright rejection of Islam to ingratitude to God for his blessings."[4] Taking this figurative understanding of *bukhl* as a starting point, the present essay will attempt to identify the specific doctrines and practices being ridiculed in the *Bukhalāʾ*.

Before proceeding any further, it may be helpful to pick apart the most commonly encountered social and economic readings of the *Bukhalāʿ*. Practically all such readings can be traced back to Charles Pellat, who describes the misers as members of a non-Arab bourgeoisie:

> "Face à l'arabe, aristocrate né, chez qui le gout et le besoin social du faste entraînent souvent la ruine, face au Bédouin qui ne sait pas retenir son argent et épouve un penchant inné pour la générosité spectaculaire, se dresse le non-Arabe qui, plus prévoyant et plus économe, fait usage de la raison et de la logique, limite sciemment ses dépenses au point de côtoyer l'avarice, sinon de la cultiver, mais constitue un capital, ou, si l'on préfère, des réserves caractéristiques de l'état bourgeois."[5]

Following Pellat, many scholars have read al-Jāḥiẓ's interest in the misers as a response to the materialism of the merchant classes of Basra,[6] which, it is often assumed, consisted of non-Arabs, specifically Persians, whose supposed stinginess al-Jāḥiẓ ridicules by comparing it with the Arabs' proverbial liberality.

Despite its frequent recurrence in the secondary literature, the identification of the misers as Persians is overstated at best. Some of the misers in the *Bukhalāʾ* can indeed be identified as Persians, but at least some are Arabs, among them the caliph Hishām,[7] the philologist al-Aṣmaʿī,[8] and several unnamed members of the Banū Tamīm.[9] Many misers cannot be identified and many are anonymous. The only groups of people collectively identified as misers are the people of Khurāsān, specifically Marv,[10] and the Byzantines.[11] Al-Ḥājirī, whose critical edi-

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4 James Montgomery, "Al-Jāḥiẓ," in *Arabic Literary Culture, 500-915 (The Dictionary of Literary Biography, 311)*, ed. Michael Cooperson and Shawkat M. Toorawa (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2005), 231-242, here 235.

5 Charles Pellat, *Le Milieu baṣrien et la formation de Ǧāḥiẓ* (Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1953.), 229; cf. idem, "al-Djāḥiẓ," in *EI²*, II (1965): 385-87, here 386, where he calls the *Bukhalāʾ* "an attack on non-Arabs."

6 See, e.g., al-Ḥājirī in *Bukhalāʾ*, introduction, 35-36, and Muḥammad al-Juwaylī, *Naḥw dirāsa fī sūsyūlūjiyyat al-bukhl: al-ṣiraʿ al-ijtimāʿī fī ʿaṣr al-Jāḥiẓ min khilāl Kitāb al-bukhalāʾ* (Tunis: al-Dār al-ʿArabiyya li l-Kitāb, 1990).

7 *Bukhalāʾ*, 150.

8 Ibid., 202-203.

9 Ibid., 201-202.

10 Ibid., 17ff.

11 Ibid., 195.

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tion collects the available biographical data on the persons named in the text, concludes that it is impossible to identify any particular group as the object of al-Jāḥiẓ's ridicule.[12] More recently, Fedwa Malti-Douglas has found that "in only about ten percent of the anecdotes, including all those in the chapter on Khurāsānians, is there any mention of Khurāsānians or other Persians."[13]

In this connection it should be noted that al-Jāḥiẓ's supposed anti-Shuʿūbī sentiments, which are sometimes cited as evidence for the ethnic interpretation, are less straightforward than they appear. A key passage appears in one of his essays where, in a discussion of the *Shuʿūbiyya*, he attacks the arguments of those *mawālī* who use specious logic to claim that they are superior to Arabs and Persians both. He also describes ethnic chauvinism as "corrosive and pernicious." Finally, he hopes that certain writings of his on the subject will serve "to arbitrate fairly between [the two sides] and reconcile them."[14] If these remarks reflect his convictions, he is unlikely to have written an entire book in order to mock Persians. And if, despite these convictions, he did write such a book, one would expect it to foreground Persians and their supposed vices, including – but not limited to – avarice. Instead, what we have is a book full of misers, only some of whom are Persians.

As for the economic part of Pellat's interpretation, it partakes of a certain degree of circularity. Pellat and his successors cite evidence from historical sources to show that certain 3rd/9th century individuals accumulated great wealth. But all the evidence for a specifically miserly "bourgeoisie" seems to come from the *Bukhalāʾ* itself. More broadly, as Malti-Douglas has pointed out, the search for real misers naively assumes the existence of a one-to-one correspondence between representation and reality. Citing the example of an 5th/11th century collection of anecdotes about fools, she asks: "Does Ibn al-Jawzī's *Kitāb al-ḥamqāʾ wa l-mughaffalīn* [...] indicate a new surge (or dearth) of stupidity and gullibility?"[15] In her critique of the economic interpretations, Malti-Douglas does not exclude the possibility of a historical reading of the *Bukhalāʾ*; she merely insists that it proceed in full awareness of the literary nature of the evidence. Her critique poses the toughest challenge to any proposed historical reading of the text, and it will be necessary to revisit it at the conclusion of this essay. For the moment, suffice it to note that while I share her reservations about the ethnic and economic interpretations, I will join Beaumont in arguing against her claim that "a consistent satirical intent" is "lacking" in the *Bukhalāʾ*.[16]

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12 Ibid., introduction, 33.

13 Fedwa Malti-Douglas, *The Structures of Avarice: The* bukhalāʾ *in Medieval Arabic Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 156, to which one might add that some Khurāsānīs were or were considered to be Arabs.

14 Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Rasāʾil al-Jāḥiẓ*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Hārūn, 4 vols. in 2 (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1991), II: 20-23.

15 Malti-Douglas, *Structures*, 154.

16 Ibid.

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In the present essay, I will argue that the *Bukhalā'* contains a concealed polemical element. Specifically, it is to be understood as part of the author's long and well-attested campaign against the *ahl al-sunna wa l-jamāʿa* ("the people of Sunna and community" or "proto-Sunnīs,")[17] and their foremost representatives, the literalist scholars of Ḥadīth (*ahl al-Ḥadīth*). By "literalist" I mean those Ḥadīth-scholars who rejected metaphorical, analogical, and hypothetical arguments in matters of *fiqh* and (unlike the "semi-rationalists," on whom see Melchert)[18] refused to engage in theological or philosophical debate. (Camilla Adang has suggested that I use a different term in order to avoid confusion with the Ẓāhirī school. Unfortunately, however, I have not been able to find a better term than "literalist" to capture this group's distinctive positions in both law and theology. "Rigorists"[19] captures their spirit, certainly, but might be misunderstood as implying a lack of rigor in the thought of their rationalist opponents.) Al-Jāḥiẓ harbored the liveliest antipathy for this group.[20] He calls them *nābita*, "weeds," as well as *ḥashwīya*, a term of abuse that echoes *ḥashw al-raʿiyya*, "the vulgar mob", and *ḥashw*, "useless learning." In his surviving *rasā'il*, he pillories their attachment to Muʿāwiya, attacks their belief in the uncreated Qurʾan, accuses them of anthropomorphism, and denounces their leaders as rabble-rousing heretics largely ignorant of *kalām*. He also expresses his support for the *miḥna*, in which their leaders were tried and punished.

Although the *Bukhalā'* contains no explicit references to the *nābita* or the *ḥashwīya*, it appears nevertheless to contain an implicit critique of one of their characteristic traits: their asceticism (*zuhd*). The conspicuousness of this attribute is attested in the writings of the proto-Sunnīs themselves. For some Ḥadīth-scholars and their associates, *zuhd* was the natural consequence of *waraʿ*, the circumspect avoidance of possible sources of illegality. This kind of prophylactic renunciation – what Nimrod Hurvitz calls "mild asceticism"[21] – is associated with Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) and his circle. For other proto-Sunnīs, *zuhd* was a matter of disciplining the soul to reject the world. A few, indeed, carried *zuhd* so far that they renounced even the transmission of Ḥadīth. This more

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17 Following Muḥammad Qāsim Zaman, *Religion and Politics Under the Early ʿAbbāsids: the Emergence of the Proto-Sunnī Elite* (Leiden: Brill, 1997).

18 Christopher Melchert, "Religious Policies of the Caliphs from al-Mutawakkil to al-Muqtadir, A.H. 232-295 / A.D. 847-908," *Islamic Law and Society* 3/2 (1996): 316-342, here 318.

19 [On which, see ibid., 317].

20 See Wadād al-Qāḍī, "The Earliest *Nābita* and the Paradigmatic *nawābit*," *Studia Islamica* 78 (1993): 27-61, which does not explicitly identify the *nābita* with the *ahl al-sunna*, but the synonymity of *nābita* and *mushabbiha* in *Rasā'il*, II: 15 makes it clear that the two groups are the same; see also Josef van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra. Eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam*, 6 vols. (Berlin / New York: de Gruyter, 1991-1997), III: 467-68.

21 Nimrod Hurvitz, *The Formation of Ḥanbalism: Piety into Power* (London / New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002). 59ff.

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rigorous form of self-denial is associated with al-Fuḍayl b. ʿIyāḍ (d. 187/803)[22] and Bishr b. al-Ḥārith, called al-Ḥāfī (d. 227/842).[23] The "mild ascetics" and the "extreme ascetics" seem to have constituted distinct communities. Yet extreme asceticism was held up as an ideal even among the Ḥadīth-men, as is evident from their works. And, whatever the degree of conformance to this ideal, the appeal of proto-Sunnīsm doubtless had something to do with the formidable asceticism of certain of its representatives, particularly Ibn Ḥanbal, who not coincidentally was also famous for his defiance of the *miḥna*.

Predictably, al-Jāḥiẓ was not impressed by *zuhd*, at least not as practiced by his enemies. To judge by his comments in the *Bukhalāʾ*, he considered renunciation of any kind to be a perverse refusal to enjoy the "good things" (*al-ṭayyibāt*)[24] provided for humankind. By mocking the misers, who deprive themselves of pleasure in order to save money, he simultaneously mocks the *zuhhād*, who deprive themselves of pleasure in order to live according to the strictest interpretation of the law. This does not mean that the misers named in the book are Ḥadīth-scholars in disguise; such is manifestly not the case, as will be evident. Rather, al-Jāḥiẓ is proposing that a striking similarity exists between one group (misers) and another (ascetics). For the satire to be effective, the misers have to be real, or at least realistic. At the same time, they must be represented in such a way that their resemblance to the *zuhhād* – and more to the point, the *zuhhād*'s similarity to them – gradually becomes evident.

To substantiate this argument, I will briefly review al-Jāḥiẓ's polemic against the proto-Sunnīs. Next, I will draw on Abū Bakr al-Marrūdhī's *Kitāb al-waraʿ* and related works to describe the *zuhd* of the *ahl al-Ḥadīth* as they themselves saw it. After these prolegomena, I will compare the biographies of leading renunciants with passages from the *Bukhalāʾ* to argue that al-Jāḥiẓ, even as he dissects the misers, intends at the same time to ridicule the asceticism of the literalist Ḥadīth-men. In one case, at least, he seems to be writing parodies of particular *akhbār* well known in proto-Sunnī circles. By way of conclusion, I will address a formal question raised by this interpretation. The *Bukhalāʾ*, I will argue, is neither a *satire à clefs* nor an allegory. That is to say, al-Jāḥiẓ did write a book about misers (and to that extent the socioeconomic readings of the text remain valuable). In ridiculing the misers, however, he intended also to ridicule the values of the *ahl al-zuhd*, which struck him as similar in effect if not in motivation. The work is therefore an extended comparison, similar perhaps to that designated by the later rhetorical term *istiʿāra tamthīliyya*.

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22 See Jacqueline Chabbi, "Fuḍayl b. ʿIyāḍ, un précurseur du Hanbalisme," *Bulletin d'Études orientales* 30 (1978): 331-345.

23 See Michael Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography: the Heirs of the Prophets in the Age of al-Maʾmūn* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000), 154-87.

24 *Bukhalāʾ*, 1; cf. Qurʾan 2: 267; 23: 51.

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Al-Jāḥiẓ and the proto-Sunnīs

The first part of al-Jāḥiẓ's career coincides with the period of the Inquisition (*miḥna*), during which three successive ʿAbbasid caliphs persecuted members of the self-proclaimed *ahl al-sunna wa l-jamaʿa*. As we know from other sources, the *ahl al-sunna* refused to interpret away the references to God's face, hand, and the like in the Qurʾan and the Ḥadīth. God, they believed, had a body, albeit an uncreated one. Consequently, the speech that issued from that body – including His best-known speech, the Qurʾan – was not created either. For the caliph al-Maʾmūn, who launched the *miḥna* in 218/833, such a conclusion amounted to anthropomorphism (*tashbīh*) because it assumed an essential similarity between God and mankind. In keeping with his self-declared role as the imam of right guidance, the caliph insisted that the proto-Sunnīs renounce their heresy by affirming that the Qurʾan was created. The persecution of the *ahl al-sunna* continued intermittently until 237/851-52, when the *miḥna* came to an end under al-Mutawakkil.[25]

Modern scholarship has brought us to a clearer understanding of why the *miḥna* took place and why it assumed the form it did. Al-Maʾmūn, who had seized the caliphate by claiming to be the *imām* of right guidance, feared the power of those scholars whose literalism left him with no role to play in the interpretation of the law. In his *miḥna*-letters, he declares that the self-styled *ahl al-sunna* have achieved leadership (*riʾāsa*) among the common people – a leadership he clearly perceives as threatening. As to why he chose the createdness doctrine as the pretext for the crackdown, the reason seems to be that neither the Qurʾan nor the Sunna contains an explicit statement about the ontological status of God's speech. Forced to defend their position, the *ahl al-sunna* would have little opportunity to use their favorite (and, in most cases, their only) means of argument: the citation of texts. Instead, they would have to use *kalām* (dialectical theology) – something that most of them refused to do.[26]

The attitudes expressed by the caliph in his *miḥna*-letters are echoed and amplified in the four surviving polemics against the proto-Sunnīs composed by his protégé, al-Jāḥiẓ.[27] As al-Qāḍī has shown, the latter's attitude toward the *nābita* partakes of surprise, contempt, anger, fear, and a certain degree of self-criticism.[28] In his essay on the *nābita*, he excoriates them in uncharacteristically direct and

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25 Melchert, "Religious Policies," 320-330.

26 See further Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography*, 117-138, and references cited, to which should be added Melchert, "Religious policies," and Wesley Williams, "Aspects of the Creed of Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal: a Study of Anthropomorphism in Early Islamic Discourse," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 34/3 (2002): 441-463.

27 *Rasāʾil*, I: 278-308; II: 3-23; III: 283-300; IV: 5-16; see further Van Ess, *Theologie*, III: 465-69.

28 Al-Qāḍī, "Earliest *Nābita*".

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emotional language for taking a sentimental view of the Umayyads, whom he characterizes as impious, bloodthirsty, and oppressive. He adds that, as bad as the Umayyads may have been, the latter-day *nābita* are worse because they deny free will and profess anthropomorphism. By the latter he means the idea that God has a delimited physical body that can be seen, and that his speech – like ours – results from "the emanation of sound from a bodily cavity, punctuated by the tongue and teeth."[29] Since, according to the *mushabbiha*, God's body is uncreated, His speech, including the Qurʾan, is uncreated too. In his essays on *Khalq al-Qurʾān* and *Nafy al-tashbīh*, al-Jāḥiẓ reproaches the leaders of the *nābita* for refusing to subject this doctrine to rational critique. He also blames their followers for believing whatever they are told. "Ḥadīth-scholars and commoners," he says, "adopt the opinions of their leaders without study or examination," even though "unquestioning adherence to the opinions of others is frowned upon in rational inquiry and forbidden by the Qurʾan."[30] He insists that the only path to right belief is through *kalām*, without which "God's religion would not exist." He admits that a few proto-Sunnīs have adopted the forms of rational argument. "Some of them are *mutakallimūn*," he says, "or storytellers with a smattering of *fiqh*. If not for such persons, who are slightly better informed than the rest, civilized discussion would be impossible. Even though we fear them, we have hope of saving them."[31] Unfortunately, most of the *ahl al-sunna* do not fall into this category. For this reason, he says, the state was justified in its adoption of coercive measures against them.

When he speaks of the *miḥna*, al-Jāḥiẓ adopts a first-person voice, as if proud to associate himself with the policy of putting the Ḥadīth-men on trial. In one passage, for example, he says that "we did not declare anyone an unbeliever without first trying to talk him out of his position, nor did we put anyone on trial except on the basis of reasonable suspicion."[32] The result, he says, was gratifying: "Some of their leaders came over to our side, while others were shaken in their faith."[33] Among those who reportedly "came over" was Ibn Ḥanbal, who according to al-Jāḥiẓ, proved himself a fool during his appearance before al-Muʿtaṣim. In his partisan account, al-Jāḥiẓ mocks the imam's inability to appreciate even the simplest rational arguments. He adds that the caliph gave Ibn Ḥanbal every possible chance to recant and escape chastisement but was forced to flog him when the latter stubbornly refused to admit defeat. Apparently in response to the proto-Sunnī claim that feigned capitulations were justifiable under duress, al-Jāḥiẓ makes a point of arguing that Ibn Ḥanbal capitulated "without

29 *Rasāʾil*, II: 14-15, 18-19.
30 Ibid., III: 298.
31 Ibid., I: 285.
32 Ibid., III: 292.
33 Ibid., I: 285.

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seeing a drawn sword, or being beaten severely; in fact, he was flogged no more than thirty times, and even then with an unbarbed whip."[34]

Like the caliph, al-Jāḥiẓ considers the proto-Sunnīs dangerous because they command a popular following: "Their guile is great, and their power is formidable; the common people stand with them, and the mob obeys them."[35] Regarding the precise identity of this "mob," he is slightly more forthcoming than al-Maʾmūn. In his *Nafy al-tashbīh*, he quotes Wāṣil b. ʿAṭāʾ to the effect that popular controversies cause plasterers, weavers, boatmen, goldsmiths, and other craftsmen to leave their trades, presumably for the purpose of rallying around their leaders and threatening the advocates of *kalām*. He also cites verses in which the poet al-Khuraymī describes the "rabble" that had fought for al-Amīn during the siege of Baghdad.[36] It is tempting to imagine that these references amount to a profile of the "mob" that rallied around the Ḥadīth-men. In context, however, they appear to be condemnations of popular agitation in general and not necessarily descriptions of the "anthopomorphist rabble" in particular. Nevertheless, it is clear that al-Jāḥiẓ associates the anti-creationists with violence and popular unrest.

Al-Jāḥiẓ appears to have written the last of his anti-*nābita* essays before 232/847.[37] Thereafter, he seems to have stopped writing polemics. Even before the end of the *miḥna* in 237/850-51, he was evidently fearful of persecution by his enemies. In one essay, he claims that the only thing preventing the literalists from lynching their persecutors is the fact that the authorities will not allow it: "The only thing standing between us and them [= the literalists] is the state, which they regard with a mixture of longing and fear."[38] If the advocates of *tashbīh* find a strong leader, the days of the *mutakallimūn* will be numbered: "All hope will be lost; truth will die, and those who stand for truth will be killed."[39]

To all appearances, al-Jāḥiẓ composed the *Bukhalāʾ* during the latter part of his career, perhaps during what Bāsim Musallam aptly calls his "long deathbed." In one of the *Bukhalāʾ* anecdotes, the miser al-Naqqāsh refers to al-Jāḥiẓ as "an aged man suffering from hemiplegia."[40] Based on past-tense references to Abū Yūsuf Yaʿqūb al-Kindī, who died before 253, Muṣṭafā ʿAbd al-Rāziq gives a conjectural date of 254 for the work, meaning that it was written in the year before the author's death.[41] Whatever the accuracy of these conjectures, it seems safe to as-

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34 Ibid., III: 295; and further Van Ess, *Theologie*, III: 464-65; Michael Cooperson, "Two Abbasid Trials: Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal and Ḥunayn b. Isḥāq," *Al-Qantara. Revista de estudios àrabes* 22/2 (2001): 375-393.

35 *Rasāʾil*, III: 300.

36 Ibid., I: 283-84.

37 Van Ess, *Theologie*, III: 469.

38 *Rasāʾil*, III: 300.

39 Ibid., I: 284-85.

40 *rajulun qad ṭaʿanta fī s-sinni wa-lam tazal tashkū mina l-fāliji ṭarafan*; *Bukhalāʾ*, 123.

41 Ibid., introduction, 37.

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sume that the work was composed after the end of the *miḥna*. It is equally reasonable to suppose that it was written for public consumption: it is a humorous tract containing no appeal to specialist knowledge of any kind. If, therefore, it contains criticism of the so-called *nābita,* that criticism would have to be well-concealed. To coax it out of hiding, it will be necessary to understand the phenomenon that al-Jāḥiẓ intended to criticize: namely, the proto-Sunnī practice of renunciant asceticism.

Proto-Sunnī renunciant asceticism

The most detailed information we have on the theory and practice of *zuhd* comes from the writings of the Ḥadīth-men and ascetics associated with the proto-Sunnī movement. As these documents make clear, proto-Sunnī renunciant asceticism took two forms. The first arose as a consequence of the practice of *waraʿ*, 'circumspection' or 'scrupulosity.' When confronted with several possible courses of action, believers were urged to choose the one that minimized the possibility of transgressing the law. Asked, for example, whether girls should be allowed to play with dolls, Ibn Ḥanbal answered in the negative, evidently on the basis that the Prophet had objected strongly when he saw figural decorations on a curtain in ʿĀʾisha's room. There were, admittedly, reports saying that ʿĀʾisha had played with dolls as a child, as well as reports that the Prophet did not object when she used the offending curtain to make a pillowcase. But the safest course of action was the one that excluded the possibility of transgression: namely, to avoid images (*ṣuwar*) altogether.[42] In effect, then, to practice *waraʿ* was to build "a barrier of ḥalāl" (*ḥājiz mina l-ḥalāl*) between the clearly permitted and the possibly forbidden.[43] As Ibn ʿUyayna put it:

> "A slave [of God] does not attain true faith until he builds a barrier of permitted things between himself and forbidden things, and abandons sin and anything that resembles it."[44]

As Leah Kinberg has pointed out, the natural consequence of *waraʿ* is *zuhd*, 'self-denial'.[45] By keeping their needs and wants to an absolute minimum, and partaking only of goods and services they provided for each other, the practitioners of *waraʿ* could be sure of obeying the law. In accordance with these principles, Ibn Ḥanbal urged his companions to consume only what they produced themselves and to shun money, goods, and services proffered by outsiders (*man tukrah nāhiyatuhu*). The *Kitāb al-waraʿ* , compiled by his disciple Abū Bakr al-Marrūdhī, is

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42 Abū Bakr al-Marrūdhī, *Kitāb al-Waraʿ*, ed. Samīr b. Amīn al-Zuhayrī (Riyāḍ: Dār al-Ṣumayʿī, 1997/1418), 154-57.

43 Ibid., 53, 59.

44 Ibid., 146.

45 Leah Kinberg, "What is Meant by *zuhd*," *Studia Islamica* 61 (1985): 27-44.

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full of reports about how the exemplars of *waraʿ* put these principles into practice. Yazīd b. Zurayʿ, for example, turned down an inheritance of 500,000 dirhams and earned his living by weaving palm fibers.[46] When Ibrāhīm b. Adham ran out of money in Mecca, he ate sand rather than accept charity;[47] he also refused to drink from the well of Zamzam because he did not have his own bucket.[48] For similar reasons, Ibn Ḥanbal himself refused to break the Ramadan fast during his imprisonment in the palace of al-Muʿtaṣim.[49] In all these cases, the point of the story is that one should suffer discomfort and deprivation rather than avail himself of goods and services provided by persons whose standards are laxer than one's own.

This, in any case, was one kind of *zuhd*. A second kind, usually associated with figures on the margins of the Ḥadīth-community, sought to eradicate desire altogether. "Whenever I find my soul wanting a thing," Bishr al-Ḥāfī is supposed to have said, "I deny it what it wants."[50] Renunciants like Bishr regarded life in this world as a necessary evil. Desire – even for things that are legally permissible – distracts one's mind from God and the afterlife and should therefore be suppressed. This position may have been a bit much for the Ḥadīth-men, who represent the exemplars of this kind of *zuhd* in terms more familiar to themselves. In the *Kitāb al-waraʿ*, Bishr is thus depicted merely as one who carried the principle of *waraʿ* to (praiseworthy) extremes. In other sources, however, we find that his self-denial transcends mere scrupulosity. In the *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, for example, a neighbor reports that Bishr refused to grant himself any kind of pleasure, even if it was permitted:

> "One day, Bishr came in after I had made sauteed eggplant. He looked at it, and I realized he was craving it. I followed him outside and said: 'That's a dish my daughter makes from eggplants she buys with the profits from her own weaving. So please take as much of it as you want.' He said: 'God bless you! Please go back inside.' As I watched him walk away, I heard him address his soul, saying: 'What a scandal! So you crave sauteed eggplant, do you? Well, I will never let you have it as long as I live!"[51]

For Bishr, *zuhd* was evidently a matter of self-surveillance and self-denial. For others, it seems to have been a communal practice, carried out in the company of like-minded associates. In Ibn Ḥanbal's circle, it was a subject of discussion and mutual exhortation. As Hurvitz has argued, this "mild asceticism" served to create a bond of solidarity among the members of the proto-Sunnī commu-

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46 Al-Marrūdhī, *Waraʿ*, 9.
47 Ibid., 15.
48 Ibid., 8.
49 Ṣāliḥ b. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Sīrat al-Imām Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal*, ed. Fuʾād ʿAbd al-Munʿim Aḥmad (Alexandria: Muʾassasat al-Jāmiʿa, 1981/1401), 59-60.
50 Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, ed. Muṣṭafā ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAflā, 24 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1417/1997), VII: 73 = entry no. 3517.
51 Ibid., VII: 78-79.

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nity.[52] One might add that it made the most self-mortifying of the *zuhhād* into objects of popular veneration. According to a report in the *Kitāb al-zuhd*, Bishr was once seen climbing on top of a water conduit to escape a crowd of admirers.[53] In reports such as this, we catch a glimpse of what al-Maʾmūn and al-Jāḥiẓ may be referring to when they insist that the exemplars of proto-Sunnīsm had a ragged mob of troublemakers at their beck and call.

The final point to be dealt with before turning to the *Kitāb al-bukhalāʾ* is the question of whether the *mutakallimūn* were aware of the role played by *zuhd* in the proto-Sunnī movement. This is important because it will hardly do to argue that al-Jāḥiẓ set out to mock the *ahl al-sunna* by alluding to a practice that was obscure, marginal, or unknown to outsiders. As it happens, al-Maʾmūn's first *miḥna*-letter states explicitly that the *ahl al-sunna* number among their followers certain figures known for their asceticism. The caliph calls them "adherents of the false way, who display submissiveness to someone other than God and who lead an ascetic life, but for a cause other than the true faith." These ascetics, he says, "have agreed with [the pro-Sunnīs] and joined them in advocating their noxious opinions... in order to carve out positions of leadership and moral authority."[54] The vagueness of these claims makes it difficult to identify the ascetics in question. A likely guess is that the caliph had in mind renunciants such as al-Fuḍayl and Bishr, who were not themselves Ḥadīth-men but shared their proto-Sunnī orientation. Such renunciants appear to have been threatening to the caliph because their conspicuous self-denial lent an air of pious rectitude to the proto-Sunnī movement. In another context, al-Maʾmūn is quoted as saying of Bishr: "There is no one left in this town before whom one need be abashed except that old man Bishr b. al-Ḥārith."[55]

One might be forgiven for thinking that al-Jāḥiẓ respected the *zuhhād*: In *al-Bayān wa al-tabyīn*, he devotes a long section to their poems and aphorisms.[56] But the men and women he cites are either the figures of an earlier age, or poets such as Abū al-ʿAtāhiya; the ascetic Ḥadīth-men of his own day and age are absent. His attitude toward the latter is evident from the *Khalq al-Qurʾān*, where he quotes *ahl al-sunna* as saying that "the ascetics and pietists are ours." (*minnā l-nussāku wa l-ʿubbād*) He replies by saying that there are more ascetics among the Khawārij despite the sect's relatively small size.[57] In this passage, he does not call the validity of asceticism itself into question. Elsewhere, however, he does. In the

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52 Hurvitz, *Formation*.

53 Al-Marrūdhī, *Waraʿ*, 41.

54 Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh al-rusul wa al-mulūk*, ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, 10 vols, 3rd ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1979), VIII: 632.

55 Al-Khaṭīb, *Taʾrīkh*, VII: 75.

56 Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Al-Bayān wa al-tabyīn*, ed. Muwaffaq Shihāb al-Dīn, 4 parts in 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1998/1419), III: 81-129.

57 *Rasāʾil*, III: 298.

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Nafy al-tashbīh, he mentions an anonymous argument that "virtue, leadership, reputation, and nobility of character are proportional to roughness of skin, shabbiness of dress, frequency of fasting, and a preference for solitary rambling." He rebuts this claim by arguing that if it were true, the ascetic companions of the Prophet would have succeeded as caliphs instead of Abū Bakr and ʿUmar. He concludes the discussion by quoting Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī to the effect that "an ascetic (*nāsik*) is merely someone who lets prohibition take the place of fortitude, and legality the place of gratitude," that is, a follower of the letter rather than the spirit of the law.[58] On the basis of these passages, it is reasonable to conclude that al-Jāḥiẓ was aware of the importance of *zuhd* among the proto-Sunnīs and that he held the practice in low esteem.

External parallels

The most obvious external similarity between the proto-Sunnīs and al-Jāḥiẓ's misers is that both place a value on self-denial. The following examples all come from al-Marrūdhī's *Kitāb al-waraʿ*. "The less you have of the world," says Ibn Ḥanbal, "the less you will have to answer for on the Day of Judgement."[59] According to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and Qatāda, a believer requires only three possessions: "a cloth to hide his nakedness, a crust to keep him alive, and a refuge from the heat and cold."[60] Anything beyond that is *naʿīm*, meaning comfort, luxury, or self-indulgence. The Qurʿan warns that on Judgement Day believers will be asked to account for all the *naʿīm* they have enjoyed. When a companion brings him a cup of water, the ascetic Saʿīd b. Jubayr reportedly said: "You will be questioned about this ... because I drank it and enjoyed it."[61] Like the misers, the proto-Sunnīs speak approvingly of those who know how to limit their expenditures. Ibn Ḥanbal, for example, praises those who "could travel from Mecca to here [=Baghdad] on fourteen dirhams."[62] In extreme cases, ascetic exemplars appeared to have lived in squalor and near starvation. The ascetic Abū Dāwūd, for example, reportedly subsisted on bread, greens, and vinegar, occasionally supplemented by chaff.[63] If the proto-Sunnīs actually behaved like this – or merely told stories about those who did – it is easy to see how the comparison with the misers might have suggested itself.

A second external similarity is the penchant for citing exemplary texts (as Beaumont points out). For the proto-Sunnīs, salvation required living according to the Sunna, and the Sunna could only be known by studying the Ḥadīth. In

58 Ibid., I: 301.
59 Al-Marrūdhī, *Waraʿ*, 198.
60 Ibid., 200.
61 Ibid., 201.
62 Ibid., 136.
63 Ibid., 135-36.

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the *Kitāb al-waraʿ*, Ibn Ḥanbal and al-Marrūdhī can almost always find a Ḥadīth that explains what to do in a given situation. As it happens, the misers are also adept at defending their choices by quoting authorities. In the *Bukhalāʾ*, the miser Sahl b. Hārūn cites Abū Bakr, Abū l-Aswad al-Duʾalī, and al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī to support his condemnation of extravagance.[64] To justify his avoidance of meat, the miser Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān mobilizes an equally impressive set of authorities, including ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, Jesus, Harim b. Qutba, and al-Muhallab b. Abī Ṣufra.[65] Most strikingly, he asks: "Why did the Prophet call fasting a deterrent, except to indicate that it was a barrier against desire?"[66] The expression *ḥijāz dūn al-shahawāt* is reminiscent of *ḥājiz min al-ḥalāl*, the "barrier of *ḥalāl*" beloved of the proto-Sunnīs. Of course, the citation of proof texts is not as frequent among the misers as it is among the *ahl al-Ḥadīth*, nor does it serve as the characteristic element of their self-presentation. But to the extent that al-Jāḥiẓ draws attention to it, the point would seem to be that nearly any opinion, no matter how absurd, can be supported by reports delivered on the authority of the ancients.

A third and possibly coincidental similarity is the fact that the most famous misers, like the most famous proto-Sunnīs, hail from Marv. According to al-Jāḥiẓ and his informants, the people of Marv are renowned for their stinginess. Reportedly, they walk on their heels for three months and on their toes for another three, all to avoid wearing down the soles of their shoes. Even the roosters there are stingy: instead of collecting grain for their hens, they keep it for themselves.[67] As it happens, Marv was also the hometown of many notable proto-Sunnī exemplars, including Ibn Ḥanbal and Bishr. One Marwazī went so far as to say that men from his town were the only ones to defy the Inquisition.[68] But this parallel is probably coincidental. For one thing, many misers and many Ḥadīth-men came from other places. For another, al-Jāḥiẓ was hardly responsible for the town's bad reputation (although he may have been happy to exploit it).

I have minimized the importance of these external parallels because I want to avoid any suggestion that the misers are intended to represent particular Ḥadīth-men. As we have seen, no such claim could be sustained. Most of the misers have no distinguishing characteristics besides their *bukhl*. In the case of those few who are identified by their theological affiliation, no pattern can be discerned. Laylā al-Nāʿiṭiyyah, for example, is an extreme Shiite;[69] Walīd al-Qurashī is described as *ʿalā ṭarīqinā* ;[70] and the *mutakallim* and miser Abū l-Hudhayl[71] is as far

64 *Bukhalāʾ*, 16.
65 Ibid., 108-9.
66 Ibid., 110.
67 Ibid., 17ff.
68 Van Ess, *Theologie*, III: 448-449.
69 *Bukhalāʾ*, 37.
70 "one of us," that is, a *mutakallim*; ibid., 38.
71 Ibid., 135-136.

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from being a Ḥadīth-scholar as anyone could be. These people are not stand-ins for the *ahl al-Ḥadīth*, and I do not believe that any of the other misers are either. Rather, it the entire category of misers that is intended to suggest the entire category of ascetic Ḥadīth-men. The *wajh al-tashbīh*, as a rhetorician might put it, is their shared attitude toward the world, not the contingent attributes (poverty, textualism, or geographic origin) they may have in common.

Binary self-restraint

I have called the preceding three parallels "external" because none of them gets at the essential similarity between the misers and the *zuhhād*. To discover what this might be, we may begin with the questions al-Jāḥiẓ asks at the beginning of the book:

> "Why do [the misers] argue that comfort is worse than discomfort? Why do they claim that life should be bitter instead of sweet? Are they not ashamed to spurn 'the good things' of the earth so long as they must provide them, while making free with the good things provided for them by others?"[72]

The reference to 'the good things' (*al-ṭayyibāt*) invokes the Qurʾanic injunction to eat of the bounty God has provided to mankind (2: 267; 23:51). As al-Jāḥiẓ may have known, the proto-Sunnī community had defined *ṭayyib* as *ḥalāl*, thereby subjecting it to the rules of prophylactic avoidance.[73] In the *Bukhalāʾ*, al-Jāḥiẓ suggests that the small-minded rejection of God's bounty for any reason amounts to ingratitude, that is, *kufr* in the literal sense of the term. He does not press this implication, which may have been too obvious to require elaboration. Rather, he draws attention to the intellectual moves required to justify this attitude and apply it in practice.

First among these is the principle that any act of self-indulgence, no matter how trivial in itself, will open the door to profligacy. "O my son!" says the miser Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Thawrī, "spending qīrāṭs leads to spending dāniqs; dāniqs lead to dirhams; and dirhams lead to dīnārs. Spending ten opens the door to spending a hundred, and a hundred to a thousand, until all the money's gone."[74] This statement expresses what might be called the binary principle of self-restraint: the moment one spends even a tiny sum, all is lost. Some expenditures are obviously more ruinous than others, but all belong to the same category – namely *isrāf* (extravagance). One cannot be just a little bit *musrif*. One is either a member of *al-ʿuqalāʾ al-ṣāliḥūn*, who never spend, or one is not. If he is

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72 Ibid., 1.

73 Al-Marrūdhī, *Waraʿ*, 15, where a Ḥadīth report is used to establish a contrast between *ṭayyib* and *ḥarām*.

74 *Bukhalāʾ*, 106.

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not, he may as well throw all his money away – as indeed he is doomed to do eventually. Structurally, this is the precise equivalent of the principle of *al-ḥājiz min al-ḥalāl*, according to which one should avoid any substances or activities that bear even the remotest resemblance to *ḥarām*. Once the line is crossed, the game is lost; one is therefore advised to err on the side of self-restraint.

Fighting the nafs

For proto-Sunnīs and misers alike, the decision to remain on the right side of the line is represented as a constant battle against the base promptings of the soul. We have seen the *zāhid* Bishr rebuke his *nafs* after it reveals his longing for eggplant. (Ghada Jayyusi-Lehn has drawn my attention to a (spurious?) Ḥadīth (which I have been unable to find in any of the standard collections) in which the Prophet warns against eating eggplant and declares that the only good thing about it is the broth. If Bishr knew of this Ḥadīth, he might have had another good reason to refuse the grocer's offer. Yet the *khabar* appears most interested in conveying that Bishr was not only scrupulous about the purity of his food but also determined to mortify his soul. The identity of the food in question seems less important than the fact that his *nafs* desires it.) Had he wished to explain himself further, Bishr could have quoted the exhortation that al-Jāḥiẓ attributes to the miser al-Kindī:

> "Resist eating dates and first fruits from the moment they appear! The soul inclines to everything new and longs after anything novel. But if you fight your soul, it will submit. It is like a beast that can either run wild or be tamed. If you compel it to obey you, it will, but if you give it free rein, it will grow corrupt. Unless you crush its inclinations the moment they appear, your soul will become weak and easily swayed."[75]

If the first line is omitted, al-Kindi's speech might be mistaken for a passage from the *Kitāb al-waraʿ*. Even with the first line retained, the speech might still have made sense to Bishr, of whom al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī reports the following.

> "...Bishr's nephew Abū Ḥafṣ reported that Bishr, during his final illness, had a craving for quinces. 'My mother told me to go find one, and I did. Bishr took it and began smelling it, and then he put it down. My mother begged him to eat it. He said 'How nice it smells!' but all he did was smell it without tasting it until he died.'"[76]

Here one cannot but think of the story of the miser who is shocked to discover that his recently deceased father would eat his bread after wiping it across a piece of cheese. The right thing to have done, says the son, would have been simply to wave the bread in the direction of the cheese.[77] Evidently, the most case-hardened misers, like the most accomplished *zuhhād*, scorn the weak-minded

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75 Ibid., 92.
76 Al-Khaṭīb, *Taʾrīkh*, VII: 78.
77 *Bukhalāʾ*, 132.

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policy of avoiding temptation. The true miser, like the true *zāhid*, proves his mettle by deliberately provoking desire and then savoring the agony of his own virtuous refusal to gratify it.

Material obsessions

To guard against inadvertent transgression of the limits they set for themselves, the misers cultivate a heightened (not to say obsessive) awareness of their physical environment. This impulse accounts for the "thick description" characteristic of their verbal productions – or at least of the verbal productions al-Jāḥiẓ attributes to them. A commonly cited example is their argument about how to save money by manipulating the components of an oil lamp.[78] As it happens, very similar texts appear in the writings of the Ḥadīth-men. Here, for example, is a discussion between Ibn Ḥanbal and al-Marrūdhī about how to avoid inadvertent consumption of fermented drinks:

> "I asked [Ibn Ḥanbal] about mustard with raisins. He said: 'If it's been boiled, it should not be eaten. But you can pour vinegar into it to stop it from boiling.'
> I asked him about putting raisins into mustard and he said: 'It may be eaten for up to three days.'
> I said: 'It isn't boiled, so what do you find hateful about it?'
> 'Juices,' he said, "may be consumed for three days, and afterwards may not be consumed; but if they aren't boiled then they can be consumed, according to Ibn 'Umar.'
> 'So you count mustard as a juice?'
> 'Well, it has raisins in it, doesn't it? So it can't be consumed past three days, unless you pour vinegar into it.'
> 'What about turnip juice with elecampane [*rāsin* = a plant resembling ginger] in it?'
> 'Not if it's boiled, but you can pour vinegar into it to stop it from boiling.'[79]

Passages like this enjoy literary-critical immunity from being treated in the same manner as miser-speeches, which are intended to be funny. But there is no reason to think that Ḥanbalī *fiqh* would have inspired any reverential deference on the part of al-Jāḥiẓ. He had no patience for "unquestioning adherence to the opinions of others",[80] which was the ostensible basis of Ibn Ḥanbal's *fiqh*, and the temptation to parody discussions like the one above must have been irresistable. As we have seen, too direct a parody would not do; the subjects being discussed were (and in some cases still are) a matter of great seriousness for the people involved. On the other hand, transforming the whole debate into a discussion of oil lamps might do the trick nicely.

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78 Ibid., 19-21.
79 Al-Marrūdhī, *Waraʿ*, 173.
80 *Rasāʾil*, III: 298.

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Universal mistrust

For the proto-Sunnīs, the point of careful observation was to make sure that one did not inadvertently cross the line that separated *ḥalāl* from the *ḥarām*. The assumption, as they explain it, was that dubious cases (*shubuhāt*) [81] were best avoided; one could never tell where an innocent mistake might lead. In keeping with this premise, they urge each other to regard even the most innocent of objects with suspicion. In the *Kitāb al-wara'*, Ibn Ḥanbal warns against eating food of uncertain origin (that is, paid for with money from unknown sources), even if the food in question has been prepared by one's parents.[82] In another connection, the story is told of how Bishr accepted some dates from his mother, but then ran up to the roof of the house to spit them out. Because he could not be sure of their point of origin, he preferred not to consume them at all.[83] By spitting them out on the roof, he also managed to avoid offending his mother, a choice of which Ibn Ḥanbal approved.

This generalized attitude of mistrust would have made perfect sense to the miser al-Ḥizāmī, who is described as refusing a gift of molasses on grounds that would do credit to the most suspicious of the ascetics. His argument runs as follows: If he accepts the gift, he will have to hire a porter to carry it. If the porter drops the bag, the money will be wasted. If the porter does not drop the bag, the molasses will arrive, at which point his (al-Ḥizāmī's) wife will want to make a pudding. Since this would entail the purchase of additional ingredients, he will suggest making wine instead. But even then he will have to pay for pots, water, and firewood; and unless he wants to buy soap to clean his servants' clothes, he will also have to hire someone to superintend the fermentation. If something goes wrong, all his outlay will be lost, since fermented molasses, unlike grape wine, cannot be used as vinegar. If nothing goes wrong, he will have to drink the wine, which means inviting guests. He thus concludes that the gift of molasses is a trick of the devil and wonders what he has done to offend the prospective donor, who must have some reason for wanting to ruin him.[84] This sort of *fiqh* (the best name I can think of for this sort of mental exercise) may not have been congenial to Ibn Ḥanbal, who was more interested in where things had come from than in where they were going. For al-Jāḥiẓ, nevertheless, the point seems to be that misers and Ḥadīth-men share a passion for pointing out the dangers that lurk behind even the most innocent-seeming objects and activities.

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81 Al-Marrūdhī, *Wara'*, 55.
82 Ibid., 56-57.
83 Ibid., 97-98.
84 *Bukhalā'*, 62-64.

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Policing the community

Along with keeping a close watch on themselves and their environment, many proto-Sunnīs felt it was their duty to monitor the activities of others. Those who had mastered the rules offered advice and encouragement to those who were still struggling. As we have seen, they appear to have been constantly reminding each other of the benefits of self-denial. After visiting a colleague who sat on a carpet, Bishr exclaimed to his associates: "That's not how a scholar should live!"[85] When a member of the community knowingly crossed the line, the only appropriate response was disassociation. Ibn Ḥanbal, for example, refused to eat a gourd baked for him by his son Ṣāliḥ, who had accepted money from the caliph al-Mutawakkil.[86] By relaxing their standards, offenders joined the mass of misguided outsiders, who are referred to as *man tukrah nāḥiyatuhu*, "those whose proximity is repulsive".[87] Although such persons could be rebuked according to the principles of *al-amr bi l-maʿruf wa l-nahy ʿan al-munkar*, it was best to leave them alone.[88] The proto-Sunnī community thus defined itself not only by its characteristic pursuit of Ḥadīth-based piety but also by its deliberate severing of relations with individuals who did not share its ideals.

As al-Jāḥiẓ represents them, the misers behave in much the same way. When the Marwazis argue about saving oil and the Basrans regale each other with stories about exemplary cost-cutters, we see the same spirit of collective self-monitoring and mutual exhortation that characterizes the *ahl al-Ḥadīth*. After hearing the story of Muʿādh al-ʿAnbariyya, who managed to use every last scrap of her slaughtered sheep, one of the Basrans exclaims: "You never realize what a *musrif* you are until you hear of the feats of the virtuous!"[89] When the misers suspect each other of slipping up, they lash out mercilessly. In their discussion of various methods for saving lamp oil, one Marwazī says to another: "Once I was stupid, like you"; yet another tells his friend that when he wastes oil he is "feeding the fire" and thus deserves to burn in Hell.[90] Like the proto-Sunnīs, too, the misers divide their fellow human beings into classes based on the degree to which they exemplify the community's standard of right conduct. "If I see someone buying a goat," says the miser Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, "I feel sorry for him; if I see him buying chickens, I despise him; and if I see him buying partridges, I refuse to deal with him, or speak to him at all."[91] In the most extreme

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85 Al-Khaṭīb, *Taʾrīkh*, VII: 72.
86 Ḥanbal b. Ishāq b. Ḥanbal, *Dhikr miḥnat al-imām Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal*, ed. Muḥammad Naghsh (Cairo: Dār Nashr al-Thaqāfah, 1977/1398), 113.
87 See, e.g., Marrūdhī, *Waraʿ*, 32, 45.
88 Ibid., 165-68.
89 *Bukhalāʾ*, 34.
90 Ibid., 19, 20.
91 Ibid., 104.

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cases, an offender may even be excluded from the community of believers. "Had I known my father was so extravagant," says one miser after his father's death, "I would never have prayed over him."

Family matters

As this last outburst suggests, the misers were by no means inclined to relax their standards when the well-being of their kin was at stake. This, too, was a characteristic of the proto-Sunnī *zuhhād*. Ibn Ḥanbal insisted that his son Ṣāliḥ refuse to accept money from the caliph al-Mutawakkil, even though Ṣāliḥ was poor and had a family to feed. When Ṣāliḥ accepted the money anyway, the imam walled up the door that connected their houses and refused to eat anything cooked in his son's house.[92] Bishr, similarly, expected his family to join him in abstaining from meat, to the point that his mother complained that even dogs ate better than she did on ʿId al-Aḍḥā. He eventually relented and bought her some meat, but refused to eat any of it himself.[93] Of course, the proto-Sunnīs – drawing, as usual, on the Qurʾan and the Sunna – insisted that one fulfill one's duties to his parents and dependents. But this did not include keeping them in luxury. Ibn Ḥanbal, who professed great discomfort with any form of material gain, even allowed his wife to support the household by spinning cloth.[94] One of Bishr's sisters reportedly used to "buy cotton, spin it, sell it for half a dirham, and make it through the week on one dāniq,"[95] apparently without help from her brother.

The misers, of course, treat their families in much the same way. One divorces his wife after he finds her washing a table with hot water,[96] another refuses to lend money to his brother,[97] and another agrees to fill a jar with cool water for his mother to drink from only on condition that she send him a full jar of water for his own cistern first.[98] Servants, not surprisingly, fare even worse. Beaten for eating up all their master's digestive medication, the servants of Zubayda b. Ḥumayd explain that there was nothing else to eat in the house, adding that their master, who never has a full stomach, has no need of digestive medicines anyway.[99]

An extended example, one with direct parallels in the annals of the *zuhhād*, is that of Abū Yaʿqūb al-Dhaqnān. Every Friday, he says, he makes a stew of beef,

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92 Ḥanbal, *Dhikr*, 113.
93 Al-Khaṭīb, *Taʾrīkh*, VII: 78.
94 Sāliḥ, *Sīra*, 40.
95 Ibn Abī Yaʿlā al-Farrāʾ, *Ṭabaqāt al-ḥanābilah*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥāmid al-Fiqī, 2 vols. (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Sunna al-Muḥammadiyya, 1371/1952), I: 427.
96 *Bukhalāʾ*, 23-24.
97 Ibid., 195.
98 Ibid., 113; see further al-Juwaylī, *Naḥw dirāsa*, 71-77.
99 *Bukhalāʾ*, 29.

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onions, eggplant, gourd, and carrots, but allows his family to eat only the items that float to the top of the pot. On Saturday, he lets them dip into the broth. On Sunday, they eat the onions; on Monday, the carrots; on Tuesday, the squash; on Wednesday, the eggplant; and on Friday the beef.[100] Strikingly, a similar approach was taken by Bishr, who even after buying a piece of meat to satisfy his mother would only drink the broth. It is of course true that the proto-Sunnīs impose restraint on themselves and their families for the good of their souls, while Abū Yaʿqūb buys inferior meat and makes it last a week because he is a miser. But the effect on their families is the same, or so at least al-Jāḥiẓ wants us to realize. Because Bishr refuses to eat meat, his mother and sisters (usually) have to do without. Similarly, Abū Yaʿqūb forces his children to subsist on broth or boiled vegetables six times a week. In both cases, the protagonist's conduct may be explained by reference to his presumed or stated beliefs about the proper way to live one's life. In Bishr's biography, the account of how the protagonist puts his beliefs into practice is intended to provoke the reader's admiration. In the *Bukhalāʾ*, the account of a similar case provokes incredulity, pity, and laughter. There is no way to know whether al-Jāḥiẓ was aware of the report about Bishr and the broth, but his report about Abū Yaʿqūb inverts it so precisely as to suggest the possibility of a deliberate parody.

Conclusions

Al-Jāḥiẓ's misers live in self-imposed squalor, and constantly wonder what they can do to make themselves even more uncomfortable. They can quote authorities in support of the most absurd positions, and they have a penchant for enumerating the possibly unpleasant consequences of any given course of action. They pay close attention to the details of their physical environment, and they keep a close watch on the conduct of their associates. They evince a general attitude of suspicion and mistrust, and they are quick to rebuke and condemn colleagues whom they perceive to be insufficiently strict. Finally, they subject their own families to deprivation and other kinds of cruelty. All of the same kinds of behavior can be found among the proto-Sunnī *zuhhād*. This we know not from al-Jāḥiẓ, but from the writings of the proto-Sunnīs themselves. The latter, of course, saw nothing wrong with their behavior; in their view, it was how God wanted them to act. Even so, an outside observer – especially one as hostile as al-Jāḥiẓ – might be forgiven for thinking that the two groups behaved in much the same way. The comparison is of course invidious as far as the *zuhhād* are concerned, and may indeed be exaggerated or otherwise inaccurate. For our purposes, it is enough to say that al-Jāḥiẓ found, imagined, or invented enough similarities to serve as the basis of his satire. With his characteristic delight in cle-

[100] Ibid., 121-22.

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ver reasoning, he deliberately overlooks the radical differences between the misers and the ascetics (as well as the differences among the ascetics themselves) in order to highlight what he perceives to be their essential similarity.

This interpretation should not be understood to imply that the figures who appear in the *Bukhalā'* are thinly disguised versions of individual Ḥadīth-scholars. As we have seen, they are in some senses too individualized, and in another sense not individualized enough. For this reason, Malti-Douglas pronounces herself disinclined to accept the argument that the *Bukhalā'* represents satire of any particular group. It is, she says, not even a satire of misers; a satire, she says, requires the author to talk about one thing while having in mind something else altogether.[101] As it happens, my proposed reading satisfies this condition. The *Bukhalā'*, I contend, anatomizes avarice in such a way that perceptive readers cannot have failed to notice the implied critique of proto-Sunnī *zuhd*. That is, al-Jāḥiẓ is talking about one real group (the misers) in order to ridicule another real group (the *zuhhād*). The misers, therefore, are not figures of fantasy – or at least, they need not be. Indeed, the more persuasive they are in their own right, the more biting the satire becomes, since little would be gained by comparing the *zuhhād* to an entirely imaginary group of malefactors. The point is, rather, that the ascetics, despite their aura of sanctity, are unexpectedly similar to a certain well-known set of people who inspire nothing but amused contempt.

Malti-Douglas also has reservations about the usefulness of applying a term from the Western literary tradition and applying it to a work of third/ninth-century Arabic literature. Since I share her reservations, it behooves me to look for a better term than "satire" to designate what I think al-Jāḥiẓ is doing. One promising term is *istiʿāra tamthīliyya*, defined in a modern handbook of rhetoric as "a construction used in a sense other than its original meaning by virtue of a similarity" between the original situation and the new one the speaker has in mind. An example is "You're writing on water" to mean "You're wasting your time."[102] Formally, the *Bukhalā'* might be described as an extended example of *istiʿāra tamthīliyya*, where the discussion of misers serves as a discussion of the *zuhhād*, the similarities being all the items detailed above (self-denial, hairsplitting, and the like). Another possibly relevant term is *taʿrīḍ*, which includes the notions of allusion, intentional vagueness, and deniable reference. The Prophet, for example, is supposed to have said to ʿAdī b. Ḥātim: "Your pillow is wide," meaning "You sleep too much."[103] As a communicative act, the *Bukhalā'* might be thought of as a *taʿrīḍ*, that is, as a covert and mischievous reproach. In any event, and apart

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[101] Malti-Douglas, *Structures*, 158ff.

[102] ʿAlī and Muṣṭafā Amīn al-Jārim, *Al-Balāgha al-wāḍiḥa* (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1961/1381), 97-99.

[103] Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿarab*, ed. ʿAbd Allāh ʿAlī al-Kabīr, Muḥammad Aḥmad Ḥasb Allāh, and Hāshim Muḥammad al-Shādhilī, 6 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, n.d.), IV: 2895, s.v. *ʿaraḍ*.

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from the applicability of these particular terms, it is noteworthy that talking about one thing and meaning another is a device by no means unknown in the Arabic literary tradition – as illustrated, most notably, in *Kalīla wa-Dimna*.

There is, of course, a danger in talking about one thing and meaning another: namely, that the ostensible subject may free itself from the constraints imposed on it by its role as a stand-in for another, supposedly primary subject. As I argued many years ago in an article on Freud, Dora, and the *Bukhalāʿ*, al-Jāḥiẓ's misers – like Dora, Freud's ostensibly neurotic patient – often wriggle free of the diagnosis that he uses to frame and overwrite the accounts they give of themselves. To the extent that an analyst records such acts of verbal resistance, a "case history" undermines the master narrative that it is supposed to be illustrating.[104] Reading the *Bukhalāʾ* as a whole with this idea in mind, one might suggest that al-Jāḥiẓ cannot entirely prevent the book from becoming a book about misers. Hence, perhaps, the presence of elements that have no obvious role to play in a polemic against the *zuhhād* – for example, the discussion of Bedouin generosity. (I thank Camilla Adang for pressing me to explain the presence of these elements. In response to another question she has raised – this time about why such concomitants of *zuhd* as shabby clothing and dilapidated living quarters seem less important than food in al-Jāḥiẓ's account of the misers – I can only reply that, while shabbiness is not foregrounded as an attribute of the misers, it is certainly implied by their much-ridiculed unwillingness to spend money on such items as new clothes and utensils.)

This line of argument of course generates another problem: it implies a claim of the form "al-Jāḥiẓ is writing about ascetics except when he isn't". This claim cannot be falsified, and is therefore meaningless. One way around the problem is to ask (as Hilary Kilpatrick helpfully did, at the session where this paper was first presented) whether there is any evidence that al-Jāḥiẓ's contemporaries read the *Bukhalāʾ* as an attack on the *zuhhād*. As far as I know, there is no direct evidence that they did. There is, however, a passage, brought to my attention by Daniel Beaumont that bears on the problem. In his *Taʾwīl mukhtalaf al-Ḥadīth*, Ibn Qutayba writes of al-Jāḥiẓ that "he mocks Ḥadīth in ways that are hardly lost on knowledgeable readers" (*yastahziu mina l-ḥadīthi stihzaʾan lā yakhfā ʿalā ahli l-ʿilm*). The mockery takes the form of repeating – or perhaps inventing – foolish legends about such items as "the whale's liver, the Devil's horn … the frog's prayer, the dove's neck-ring, and the like." For having put such stories in his books, al-Jāḥiẓ is "among the most mendacious, Ḥadīth-fabricating, falsehood-promoting people in this community."[105] For Beaumont, the important thing about this dia-

[104] Michael Cooperson, "Al-Kalām niyābatan ʿan al-ākhar," *Majallat al-Qāhira* 124 (1993): 58-65; Charles Bernheimer and Clare Kahane, eds., *In Dora's Case: Freud – Hysteria – Feminism* (New York: Columbia, 1985).

[105] Ibn Qutayba, *Taʾwīl mukhtalaf al-Ḥadīth* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Kulliyāt al-Azhariyya, 1966), 60; cited and discussed in Beaumont, "Parody," 48-49.

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tribe is that it accuses al-Jāḥiẓ of writing fiction – the result of taking parody too far. For me, the important thing is the claim that al-Jāḥiẓ mocked Ḥadīth by saying things that were funny but not necessarily clear in their implications to all readers. Admittedly, though, al-Jāḥiẓ is not described as mocking ascetics. Furthermore, he is not described as writing about any one group in order to ridicule another. Therefore, I cannot adduce Ibn Qutayba's remark as direct support for my thesis. Certainly, the combination of elements – invention, humor, and disguised hostility to Ḥadīth – is consistent with the project I have tried to reconstruct. But, like al-Jāḥiẓ and Freud, I am forced to admit that my subject resists the interpretation I am trying to impose. The *Bukhalā'* may well be a polemic against *zuhd*, but it would be perverse to deny that it also operates perfectly well as a collection of stories about misers. Even so, one may be permitted to wonder whether the obvious, "literalist" reading is a product of historical perspective. The polemical subtext I have proposed would have been bound up with the interests of a particular community at a particular moment in history. After the end of the *miḥna*, al-Jāḥiẓ and other Muʿtazilī theologians feared for their own safety as well as for the integrity of the faith, and several of them are on record as speaking of the *ahl al-sunna* in the most derogatory terms. For readers of subsequent generations, these concerns were no longer urgent, and may well have been forgotten. Stories about misers, on the other hand, were still funny, and so the *Bukhalā'* survived. For this, we should perhaps thank the proto-Sunnī ascetics, without whose spectacular feats of *zuhd* the work might never have been written.

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A New Manuscript of al-Jāḥiẓ's Works and its Importance for their Transmission

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The edition of the Opera Minora by al-Jāḥiẓ is not yet complete and the transmission of his works is not yet fully explained. This is already evident from a first glance at the inventory by Charles Pellat, which he published in 1956[1] and completely revised in 1984.[2] Since that time several editions of al-Jāḥiẓ's *Rasā'il* have appeared without adding new material or attempting to compare all available manuscripts.[3]

The most complete edition for the time being is that by ʿAbd al-Salām Hārūn, which appeared in four volumes in 1965 in Cairo and was reprinted in 1991 in Beirut. However, that edition does not compare all of al-Jāḥiẓ's manuscripts. Hence, the reader should not be surprised if he finds in Hārūn's edition[4] al-Jāḥiẓ's *Kitāb al-tarbīʿ wa-l-tadwīr* in a version different from that published previously, e.g., in the *Rasā'il al-Jāḥiẓ* published in 1972 in Beirut.[5] As Pellat noticed,[6] Hārūn did not completely compare the Istanbul manuscripts. Moreover, Hārūn's edition does not include two short texts related to Abū Ḥarb al-Ṣaffār al-Baṣrī and Muḥammad b. al-Jahm al-Barmakī, edited by Ṭāhā Hājirī in 1946 and 1947,[7] and one short text on al-Aḥnaf b. Qays, edited by Charles Pellat in 1969,[8] who

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1 "Ǧāḥiziana III. Essai d'inventaire de l'oeuvre Ǧāḥizienne," in *Arabica* 3 (1956): 147-180. An Arabic translation ("Kashshāf āthār al-Jāḥiẓ") appeared in *Rasā'il al-Jāḥiẓ al-kalāmiyya*, ed. ʿAlī Abū Malḥim (Beirut 1987), 37-109 (in the second part which has a separate pagination).

2 "Nouvel essai d'inventaire de l'oeuvre Ǧāḥizienne," in *Arabica* 31: 117-164.

3 I refer to the *Rasā'il al-Jāḥiẓ*, ed. by ʿAlī Abū Malḥim (Beirut 1987), includes 3 vols., one with the subtitle *ar-Rasā'il al-kalāmiyya*, the second with the subtitle *ar-Rasā'il al-siyāsiyya*, and the third without subtitle; *Rasā'il al-Jāḥiẓ*, ed. ʿAbd al-Āmīr ʿAlī Mahannā, 2 vols. (Beirut 1988); *al-Muntakhabāt min Rasā'il al-Jāḥiẓ*, ed. Riḥāb Khiḍr ʿAkkāwī (Beirut 1992).

4 Here vol. III, 55-109.

5 85-134. Other editions: see Pellat, "Nouvel essai," 159, nr. 216f (Pellat did not notice the difference of the editions). In the edition by Hārūn, the beginning (see edition by Ch. Pellat, Damascus 1955, 5-11, 7) is missing. Hārūn seems to follow the modern copy (dated 1294/1888) in the British Museum, with which he shares the slightly differing end.

6 "Nouvel essai," 122, nr. VII.

7 In *al-Kātib al-miṣrī* (1946), III: 38-44 (*Risāla lam tunshar li-l-Jāḥiẓ*, containing a funeral oration, apparently the *Risāla fī mawt Abī Ḥarb aṣ-Ṣaffār al-Baṣrī*, mentioned by Yāqūt) and in *al-Kātib al-miṣrī* (1947), V: 55-62 (*Fuṣūl lam tunshar min āthār al-Jāḥiẓ*, containing the satire on a person, who can be identified as Muḥammad b. Jahm al-Barmakī). Both texts are mentioned in Pellat, "Nouvel essai," 148f., nr. 139 and 146.

8 "Al-Jāḥiẓ wa-l-Aḥnaf b. Qays," in *al-Mashriq* 63 (1969): 661-672; mentioned in Pellat, "Nouvel essai," 163, nr. 238.

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considered it part of al-Jāḥiẓ's lost *Kitāb al-Wuzarāʾ* or *Kitāb Akhlāq al-Wuzarāʾ*[9] or ultimately belonging to al-Jāḥiẓ's *Risāla fī l-Quḍāt wa-l-Wuzarāʾ wa-l-wulāt,* which too is lost.[10]

Both editors had used one single manuscript with the title *al-Mukhtār min kalām Abī ʿUthmān al-Jāḥiẓ*, which was copied during Shaʿbān 1060/July 1650 and is preserved in the Library of Berlin (nr. 5032). As the description by Wilhelm Ahlwardt in his catalogue of the Berlin manuscript is very short and does not give a list of the texts included in the manuscript, Pellat, with good reason, published in 1954 a short list of the texts and excerpts from al-Jāḥiẓ's works. However, he did not encourage further research, apparently because of his remark that the manuscript "is not of great value, as the copyist used the originals in a free manner."[11]

Pellat changed his opinion of the Berlin manuscript in his article on "Al-Ǧāḥiẓ jugé par la postérité," published in 1980;[12] he emphasized the possibility that the Berlin anthology could have used manuscripts which are lost, or authors who used al-Jāḥiẓ's works in their compilations. As an example, Pellat mentioned Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī who, in his anthology *al-Baṣāʾir wa-l-dhakhāʾir*, compiled between 350/961 and 365/975-6, reproduces the same text as the Berlin manuscript.[13] Pellat did not cite the exact passage of the Berlin manuscript, but we can identify it with a section giving a humorous description of a would-be and anonymous philosopher.[14] The text in Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī has two lacunas, which can be supplemented from the Berlin manuscript.[15]

This observation already excludes the possibility that the copyist of the Berlin manuscript could have used Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī's text. However, the identical text in the Berlin manuscript and in Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī, a text which can be found nowhere else, indicates the importance of the Berlin manuscript.

The importance of the Berlin manuscript as a source of new and unknown texts, and deriving from an anthology already available in the 10th century, can be confirmed by the happy discovery of a second manuscript copy of the *Mukhtār min kalām Abī ʿUthmān al-Jāḥiẓ.* Some twenty years ago I found in an Indian library in Hyderabad, at the Andhra Pradesh Government Oriental Manuscripts Library and Research Institute, a second copy of the same text which, however, contains many lacunas due to the loss of folios while several folios are mis-

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9 Ibid., 163, nr. 238.
10 Ibid., 154, nr. 179.
11 Charles Pellat, "Notice sur un manuscrit arabe de Berlin," in *Oriens* 7 (1954): 85-86, here 85.
12 In *Arabica* 27 (1980): 1-67, here 6.
13 Ed. Ibrāhīm al-Kaylānī (Damascus 1964), III: 606, 10 - 608, 10.
14 MS Berlin, fol. 94r, 12-96, 9.
15 MS Berlin, fol. 95r, 10-95v, 10, is missing in ed. Kaylānī 608, 1 (after *ʿaqliyya*), and the end fol. 96r, 4-9, is missing in ed. Kaylānī 608, 10 (which ends with a passage different from fol. 96r, 4).

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placed.[16] This manuscript copy from the 17th century with the exact title *al-Fuṣūl al-mukhtāra min kutub Abī ʿUthmān ʿAmr b. Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ* adds on the title page the following statement: *ikhtiyār al-shaykh al-imām Ḥamza b. al-Ḥasan al-Iṣfahānī.* Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī, who lived from 280/893–360/970, is well known as a historian[17] and as a compiler or redactor of the poetry of Abū Nuwās and Ibn al-Muʿtazz.[18] In his *al-Tanbīh ʿalā ḥudūth al-taṣḥīf*,[19] Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī quotes from al-Jāḥiẓ's *Kitāb al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*[20] and for chronological reasons we have no cause to doubt the attribution of the anthology of al-Jāḥiẓ's works to him. The quotation in Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī's *al-Baṣā'ir wa-l-dhakhā'ir*, which was compiled between 350/961 and 365/975-6, provides us with a *terminus ante quem* of the anthology; if we accept Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī as author of the anthology, he must have compiled it in the period before 961 until his death in 970. The anthology apparently is the oldest one; it is older than that by ʿUbayd Allāh b. Ḥassān who is identified by Pellat as Abū l-Qāsim ʿUbayd Allāh b. ʿAlī b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Raqqī, who lived from 371/981–450/1058.[21]

In light of these facts, the excerpts from al-Jāḥiẓ's works in the manuscripts of Berlin and Hyderabad will be extremely important and interesting for the reassessment of the available texts. Pellat, in his short description of the Berlin manuscript, had already pointed out that some excerpts, especially from al-Jāḥiẓ's *Kitāb al-Tarbīʿ wa-l-tadwīr*, differ from the printed version. A thorough comparison of all excerpts with the printed version will surely reveal more details. Besides the *Kitāb al-Tarbīʿ wa-l-tadwīr*,[22] Pellat had identified the following texts in the Berlin manuscript: *Risāla fī istinjāz al-waʿd*,[23] *Kitāb Kitmān al-sirr wa-ḥifẓ al-lisān*,[24] *Risālat al-Maʿāsh wa-l-maʿād*,[25] *Risāla ilā Abī l-Walīd Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Abī Du'ād fī nafy l-tashbīh*,[26] *Risāla fī l-jidd wa-l-hazl*,[27] *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*,[28] *Kitāb Ḥujaj al-nubūwa*,[29] *Risāla fī madḥ al-nabīdh*.[30]

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16 Mentioned in Hans Daiber, "New Manuscript Findings from Indian Libraries", *Manuscripts of the Middle East* 1, (Leiden, 1986), 26-48, here 32, nr. 70.

17 Cf. F. Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums* [*GAS*] (Leiden 1967), I: 336.

18 See *GAS* II: 547 and 570.

19 (Damascus 1968), 91f.

20 See Pellat, "Nouvel essai," 133, nr. 52 b.

21 Ibid., 119.

22 MS Berlin, fol. 1v-10v; 17r-17v; 55v-57r; 87v-89r; cf. 53r-54v. The Berlin MS is not mentioned in Pellat, "Nouvel essai," 159, nr. 216 d.

23 MS Berlin, fol. 10v-11r; 11v-14r. Mentioned in Pellat, "Nouvel essai," 162, nr. 233.

24 MS Berlin, fol. 11r-11v; 14r. Mentioned in Pellat, "Nouvel essai," 157, nr. 203.

25 MS Berlin, fol. 14v-17r. Mentioned in Pellat, "Nouvel essai," 146, nr. 128.

26 MS Berlin, fol. 17v-46v. Mentioned in Pellat, "Nouvel essai," 160, nr. 219. The text should not be confused with the *Risāla fī nafy l-tashbīh* = *Kitāb al-Radd ʿalā l-Musḥabbiha* (= Pellat, "Nouvel essai," 159, nr. 218).

27 MS Berlin, fol. 89r-94r. Mentioned in Pellat, "Nouvel essai," 137, nr. 73.

28 MS Berlin, fol. 98v-100v. Not mentioned in Pellat, "Nouvel essai," 139, nr. 85.

29 MS Berlin, fol. 100v-101v; 113v-115v. Mentioned in Pellat, "Nouvel essai," 153, nr. 170.

30 MS Berlin, fol. 111r-113v. Mentioned in Pellat, "Nouvel essai," 151, nr. 161.

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In addition to these already known texts we have a lot of excerpts or chapters which are new, unidentified, and with the exception of the sections on Abū Ḥarb al-Ṣaffār, Muḥammad b. al-Jahm al-Barmakī and al-Aḥnaf b. Qays,[31] still await an edition and identification on the basis of the two manuscripts in Berlin and Hyderabad. Some of the unidentified texts Pellat subsumed under the title *Fuṣūl fī l-adab*,[32] without giving the pages of the Berlin manuscript. Others[33] he tentatively considered as belonging to al-Jāḥiẓ's lost *Kitāb al-Wuzarāʾ*, possibly with the alternative titles *Kitāb Akhlāq al-wuzarāʾ* [34] or *Risāla fī l-Quḍāt wa-l-wuzarāʾ wa-l-wulāt*.[35] It includes sketches of Yaḥyā b. Khālid b. Barmak,[36] Aḥmad b. Abī Duʾād,[37] Muḥammad b. al-Zayyāt,[38] Ibrāhīm b. al-Sindī,[39] an anonymous figure,[40] al-Naẓẓām,[41] al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf,[42] al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī,[43] al-Muhallab and his family,[44] Qays b. ʿĀṣim,[45] and finally a chapter on al-Aḥnaf b. Qays,[46] which is already published from the Berlin manuscript (see above).

This collection of sketches is preceded by another group of extracts, apparently from a historical work on the ʿAbbasids, the *Kitāb fī (masāʾil) al-ʿAbbāsiyya*.[47] After an introduction, which shares a passage with al-Jāḥiẓ's *Kitāb al-Bayān wa-t-tabyīn*,[48] it gives sketches of the ʿAbbasids Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Saffāḥ,[49] al-Manṣūr,[50] al-Maʾmūn,[51] al-Muʿtaṣim[52] and al-Wāthiq.[53] The introduction is in some cases more complete, it has additional names and is really an introduction to the following sketches on the ʿAbbasids. However, the text of *al-Bayān* is not as coherent as that of our historical work, does not have such notes on the ca-

31 MS Berlin, fol. 46v-53r; 57r-64v; 81v-86v. See above nrs. 7 and 8.
32 See Pellat, "Nouvel essai," 136, nr. 63.
33 MS Berlin, fol. 73r-86v.
34 Pellat, "Nouvel essai," 163, nr. 238.
35 Ibid., 154, nr. 179.
36 MS Berlin, fol. 73r.
37 Fol. 73r.
38 Fol. 73r-v.
39 Fol. 73v-74r.
40 Fol. 74v.
41 Fol. 74v-76r.
42 Fol. 76r-77r.
43 Fol. 77r-77v.
44 Fol. 77v-80r.
45 Fol. 80r-81v.
46 Fol. 81v-86v.
47 MS Berlin, fol. 64v-72v. In his "Nouvel essai," (127, nr. 1: *Kitāb fī (masāʾil) al-ʿAbbāsiyya*) Pellat did not refer to the Berlin MS.
48 Cf. MS Berlin, fol. 64v, 9-65v, 3 with, *Kitāb al-Bayān*, ed. by ʿAbd al-Salām Hārūn, 2nd ed. (Cairo, n.d.) III: 366, 6 - 367, 6.
49 Fol. 65v-66r.
50 Fol. 66r.
51 Fol. 66r-68r.
52 Fol. 68r-71v.
53 Fol. 71v-72v.

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liphs, and does not mention al-Muʿtaṣim and al-Wāthiq at all. From this we might conclude that *al-Bayān,* a book on rhetoric and poetry and not on history, was compiled later and has used our historical work on the ʿAbbasids.

The two groups of sketches mentioned look like a preliminary study and a collection of notes on remarkable persons. If we examine the group of texts perhaps belonging to al-Jāḥiẓ's *Risāla fī l-Quḍāt wa-l-wuzarāʾ wa-l-wulāt*, we can again detect parallels with the *Bayān*. For example, the section on al-Muhallab has a passage containing sayings by al-Muhallab and introduced by *wa-min kalāmihī.*[54] It can be literally found in *al-Bayān*,[55] without the first passage. More sayings attributed to al-Muhallab, which can not be found in *al-Bayān*, are found in the manuscript of the *Risāla fī l-Quḍāt wa-l-wuzarāʾ wa-l-wulāt.* This too confirms the independence of the *Risāla* from *Bayān.*

If we assume that the *Risāla fī l-Quḍāt wa-l-wuzarāʾ wa-l-wulāt* and the *Kitāb fī (masāʾil) al-ʿAbbāsiyya* preceded *al-Bayān,* both texts must have been written by al-Jāḥiẓ before 237/851-2, the *terminus post quem* of *al-Bayān.*[56]

In confirmation of this conclusion a further observation might be made. The article on al-Aḥnaf b. Qays in the *Risāla fī l-Quḍāt wa-l-wuzarāʾ wa-l-wulāt*, which – as already argued – was edited by Pellat (see above) on the basis of the Berlin manuscript, consists of two sections. In the first section,[57] he criticizes in a satirical manner the self-control, – or the *ḥilm* – of al-Aḥnaf b. Qays, the virtue which made him famous; al-Aḥnaf is said to be, in fact, unstable, contradictory and misleading in his behaviour. In the second half of the Aḥnaf article[58] we find the opposite, an appraisal of a personality which, only because of the envy (*ḥasad*) of his enemies, is portrayed in negative terms.[59] Al-Jāḥiẓ mentions as an example the defamation by al-Ḥutāt b. Yazīd al-Mujāshiʿī, who said to al-Aḥnaf: "You are weak and your mother is stupid!" (*innaka la-ḍaʿīlun wa-inna ummaka la-warhāʾ*).[60] This is a moderating variant of what we find in the first section,[61] where Aḥnaf is said to have disputed with al-Ḥutāt, to whom he said: "Do you address *me*, you man with scrotal hernia (*ādar*)?!" Whereupon al-Ḥutāt uncovered his penis and said: "I ask you (people), to look and to discover his (Aḥnaf's) lie, as you have heard his shamelessness!"

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54 MS Berlin, fol. 78r, 10-78v, 1.

55 Ed. Hārūn, II: 188, 17 - 189, 4.

56 On the date of *al-Bayān,* which was dedicated to Aḥmad b. Abī Duʾād (237/851-240/854), see Pellat, "Nouvel essai," 133, nr. 52.

57 Ed. Pellat, 663-666.

58 Ed. Pellat, 667-672.

59 Ed. Pellat, 669, 12f.: *fa-innā lā nashukku anna l-ḥasada [huwa] lladhī qad akhraja min aʿdāʾihī hādhihi l-umūr.*

60 Ed. Pellat, 669, 10.

61 Ed. Pellat, 665, 8f.

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Before I discuss what Pellat called "démythification",[62] – the destruction of the myth of Aḥnaf's *ḥilm*, – the following point ought to be mentioned. The quoted saying, attributed to al-Ḥutāt, *innaka la-ḍaʾīlun wa-inna ummaka la-warhāʾ*, occurs verbatim in *al-Bayān*.[63] Moreover, the same sentence can be found in al-Jāḥiẓ's *Kitāb al-Burṣān wa-l-ʿurjān*,[64] which was written before the *Bayān*.[65] In the *Kitāb al-Burṣān* it is part of a long chapter on al-Aḥnaf b. Qays;[66] he is reckoned among the distinguished chiefs who had a limp because of a deformity of his feet (*aḥnaf min rijlayhi jamīʿan*), had only one testicle, and one of his eyes secreted liquid after he was beaten on his head.[67] The same text, with some deviations and without the classification of al-Aḥnaf as a person belonging to the group of distinguished chiefs who limped, exists in the *Risāla fī l-Quḍāt wa-l-wuzarāʾ wa-l-wulāt*.

In this *Risāla fī l-Quḍāt wa-l-wuzarāʾ wa-l-wulāt*, two different Aḥnaf sketches are combined, of which the positive version forms part of the *Kitāb al-Burṣān*. Is this positive report based on the *Risāla fī l-Quḍāt wa-l-wuzarāʾ wa-l-wulāt*, or did the *Risāla*, on the contrary, use the *Burṣān*? The answer must come from a comparison of both texts. We can detect in the *Burṣān* version[68] an insertion which has only a loose connection with the surrounding context. It is shorter than the version found in the satiric first part of the Aḥnaf-article. It clearly belongs originally to the satiric part and was inserted in the Aḥnaf article of *al-Burṣān*. As the correct insertion is missing in the positive report on al-Aḥnaf in the *Risāla fī l-Quḍāt wa-l-wuzarāʾ wa-l-wulāt*, we can exclude the possibility that the *Risāla* used *al-Burṣān*. It must have been written before the compilation of *al-Burṣān*, which in turn precedes *al-Bayān*.

Now, we have the year 237/852 as a *terminus ante quem* of the compilation of the sketches. The *terminus post quem* reveals the mention of Muḥammad b. al-Zayyāt in the *Risāla fī l-Quḍāt wa-l-wuzarāʾ wa-l-wulāt*. The text must have been written after the death of Muḥammad b. al-Zayyāt in 233/847. This allows us to conclude that the text was written between 233/847 and 237/852. In confirmation is the quotation from al-Jāḥiẓ's *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān* in the *Risāla fī l-Quḍāt wa-l-wuzarāʾ wa-l-wulāt*, in the article on the Muʿtazilite al-Naẓẓām.[69] The *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān* was written for Muḥammad b. al-Zayyāt, thus before 233/847.

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62 In the introduction to his edition of the Aḥnaf-article, 662.

63 Ed. Hārūn, I: 59, 13.

64 Ed. Muḥammad Mursī al-Khūlī (Beirut 1972), 204, 9; ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Hārūn (Beirut 1990), 314, 7.

65 Al-Jāḥiẓ refers to the *Bayān* at the end of his article on al-Aḥnaf (ed. al-Khūlī, 207, 16; ed. Hārūn, 318, 11) as a book being planned and containing more sayings by al-Aḥnaf. In *al-Bayān* (ed. Hārūn I: 74, 9) he refers to *al-Burṣān*.

66 Ed. al-Khūlī, 201, 9 - 207, ult.; ed. Hārūn, 311, 2 - 318, ult.

67 Ed. al-Khūlī, 204, 7f.; ed. Hārūn, 314, 5f.

68 Ed. al-Khūlī, 205, 14 - 206, 2; ed. Hārūn, 315, 11 - 316, 2.

69 Compare *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Hārūn, 2nd ed. (Cairo, 1968), VIII: 165, 13-166, 2 = MS Berlin, fol. 75r, 10-15; 75v, 1-7.

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So far we have not yet explained why al-Jāḥiẓ intended to destroy the myth of Aḥnaf's *ḥilm* and why he has combined two contradictory sketches in one text, which is claimed to be part of the *Risāla fī l-Quḍāt wa-l-wuzarā' wa-l-wulāt*. I think that the combination of both sketches is not due to a later transmitter. Rather, it was the work of al-Jāḥiẓ himself, who on the basis of such a combined text was able to insert in his positive sketch of *al-Burṣān* a passage from the negative report on al-Aḥnaf. He had combined both sketches, perhaps in some kind of notebook, in which he put together notices from different and even contradictory sources.

Al-Jāḥiẓ did this not only because he had a special liking for contradictory ideas, to which Ibn Qutayba alluded in his *Kitāb Ta'wīl mukhtalif al-ḥadīth*,[70] or because of his relativist conception of good and evil, of merits and faults – *al-maḥāsin wa-l-masāwī*.[71] Moreover, especially in the case of al-Aḥnaf b. Qays, Qays b. ʿĀṣim and al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf, al-Jāḥiẓ was dependent upon sources that defended the superiority of the ʿAbbasids over the Umayyads and strengthened his pro-ʿAbbasid tendency.[72] He considered the *faḍā'il* of the Banū Hāshim and of the ʿAbbasids to be superior to the *faḍā'il* of the Umayyads, who descended from ʿAbd Shams.[73] Consequently, al-Jāḥiẓ favoured those sources which present a negative evaluation of personalities in early Islam; in *al-Bayān*[74] he quotes the Kufan historian al-Haytham b. ʿAdī (d. 206/821 or 207/822), reporting the defects of al-Aḥnaf b. Qays, which al-Haytham might have collected in one of his lost books on *mathālib*.[75] Typical of Kufan historiography, e.g., of Abū ʿAmr ʿĀmir b. Sharāḥīl al-Shaʿbī (d. 103/721),[76] is the anti-Umayyad and pro-Alid destruction of the legend of the *ḥilm* of the first Umayyad caliph, Muʿāwiya.[77] Muʿāwiya's *ḥilm* is praised by Umayyad historians.[78]

However, in the footsteps of Kufan historiography, al-Jāḥiẓ declared that neither Muʿāwiya nor al-Aḥnaf was a *ḥalīm*.[79] According to him, both lack the nec-

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70 Ed. Muḥammad Zahrī al-Najjār (Cairo 1966), 59, 5ff.; transl. G. Lecomte, *Le traité des divergences du Ḥadīṯ d'Ibn Qutayba (mort en 276/889)* (Damascus 1962), 65.

71 Cf. Ibrahim Geries, *Un genre littéraire arabe: Al-Maḥāsin wa-l-masāwī* (Paris 1977), ch. II and III; idem., "al-Maḥāsin wa-l-masāwī," in *EI²* V (1986): 1224.

72 Cf. Ch. Pellat, "L'Imamat dans la doctrine de Ǧāḥiẓ," in *Studia Islamica* 15 (1962): 23-52.; idem., "La Nābita de Djāḥiẓ un document important pour l'histoire politico-religieuse de l'Islam," in *Annales de l'histoire des études orientales* 10 (Algiers 1952): 303-325.

73 Cf. e.g., al-Jāḥiẓ's *Faḍl Hāshim ʿalā ʿAbd Shams*, ed. ʿUmar Abū l-Naṣr (Beirut 1969), 193-240.

74 Ed. Hārūn, I: 56, 1ff.

75 Cf. the article on al-Haytham in *GAS* I: 272.

76 See *GAS* I: 277.

77 Cf. Erling Ladewig Petersen, *ʿAlī and Muʿāwiya in Early Arabic Tradition* (Copenhagen 1964), 49.

78 Cf. Ibid., 141.

79 Cf. *Faḍl Hāshim ʿalā ʿAbd Shams*, 228, -4ff.; transl. Charles Pellat, *The Life and Works of al-Jāḥiẓ* (London 1969), 61f.

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essary combination of all good human qualities, as he described it in his *Kitāb Kitmān al-sirr*.[80] Jāḥiẓ pleads for critical moderation and is against exaggeration and transgression of the right "measure" (*miqdār*),[81] even in doing good.[82] Moreover, in his critique of the *ḥilm* of famous personalities in the past, al-Jāḥiẓ criticized the predominant position of the ancestors, the *salaf*. In this regard he seems to sympathize with Rafidite-Shiite circles[83] who protested against the dominance of the *ṣaḥāba*, the Companions of the Prophet who were glorified in the oldest collections of the history of the early caliphs. Here, al-Jāḥiẓ's critical attitude towards famous personalities of the past, like al-Aḥnaf, Qays or al-Ḥajjāj, appears, in addition, to be an interesting variant of the historiography on the ʿAlī-Muʿāwiya-conflict.[84]

Al-Jāḥiz's sensitiveness and ability to see and describe human faults are again exemplified in small texts which until today are unpublished and of which an edition and translation on the basis of the Berlin and Hyderabad manuscripts is being prepared in Frankfurt.[85] The unpublished texts include al-Jāḥiẓ's *Risāla fī l-Quḍāt wa-l-wuzarāʾ wa-l-wulāt* with the alternative titles *Kitāb al-Wuzarāʾ* or *Kitāb Akhlāq al-wuzarāʾ*, which most probably was compiled between 233/847 and 237/852 and was used by the author in his subsequent books, such as *Kitāb al-Burṣān wa-l-ʿurjān* and *Kitāb al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*.

The unpublished texts belong to the oldest known anthology so far, which in the Hyderabad manuscript is attributed with good reasons to Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī from the early 10th century. Therefore, it is important to compare the excerpts from the known texts with the printed versions and to edit the unpublished sketches of well-known personalities. The manuscripts in Berlin and Hyderabad will be a sufficient basis for this task. Although the Hyderabad manuscript is defective, it is helpful as it derives from an archetype different from that of the Berlin manuscript.

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80 Ed. Hārūn, *Rasāʾil*, I: 142, 16-143, 5; transl. Pellat, *Life*, 223f.

81 Cf. *Bayān*, ed. Hārūn, I: 202, 15ff.

82 Cf. *Bayān*, ed. Hārūn, I: 202, 10ff.; Ignaz Goldziher, *Muhammedanische Studien* (Halle 1888; repr. Hildesheim / New York 1971), II: 399 mentions this passage.

83 Cf. G. Lecomte, *Ibn Qutayba (mort en 276/889)* (Damascus 1965), 310, n. 4.

84 On this conflict compare Petersen, *ʿAlī and Muʿāwiya* (see n. 73); idem., "Studies in the Historiography of the ʿAlī-Muʿāwiya Conflict," in *Acta Orientalia* 27 (1963): 83-118.

85 By Jens Ole Schmitt, M.A.

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Culture, History and Religion: À propos the Introduction of the *Kitāb al-ḥayawān*

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One can safely assert that al-Jāḥiẓ is one of the best-known of unknown writers in classical Arabic literature. He is one of the authors who are widely quoted for different purposes, but rarely read in full. The reason why so few people (in the East as well as in the West) are familiar with details of his work can only partly be explained by the difficulty of his style. In a way the neglect represents what I would like to call the "Ibn Khaldūn-effect". By this I mean a writer who is not so much ahead of his time, but rather somewhat less mysterious, too contradictory, too complex and too much outside the mainstream of his contemporaries to be widely understood and appreciated. This seems particularly true for the "Book of Animals" (*Kitāb al-ḥayawān*),[1] a work of seven volumes, which contains a hidden and hitherto undiscovered treasure.

At first glance, the *Kitāb al-ḥayawān* appears to be a zoological work in the tradition of Aristotle's "Animal history" (*Historia animalium*), which al-Jāḥiẓ knew from the translation of Yaḥyā b. al-Biṭrīq.[2] The *Kitāb al-ḥayawān* was, however, followed by only a few works of comparable aim or scope. Zoology as a science remained outside the canon, as determined by al-Fārābī and al-Khwārizmī in the 10th century and was not carried on by many other writers.[3] In the 8/9th centuries a number of monographs on animals were written, but they centered mainly on domesticated animals. In the 9/10th centuries Ibn Qutayba and Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī added stories about animals; they did this, however, in an accidental way. Only the Ikhwān al-ṣafāʾ in the 10th, al-Marwazī in the 11th, al-Qazwīnī in the 13th and al-Damīrī in the 14th century can in one way or another be considered followers of al-Jāḥiẓ.[4]

The scientific indifference towards the world of animals to which man also belongs, standing out as the only "speaking animal" (*ḥayawān nāṭiq*), is all the more surprising as religion, religious law and the existence of zoological gardens betray a general interest of the Middle Ages in rare and exotic as well as domesticated animals. In order to explain this paradox, Charles Pellat maintains that al-Jāḥiẓ already served as a signpost: "The innocent cause of this deficiency is very

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1 Abū ʿUthmān al-Jāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-ḥayawān*, 7 vols., ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Hārūn (Beirut, 1988), 1938-45.

2 Françoise Micheau, "Yaḥyā B. al-Biṭrīḳ," in *EI²* XI (2000), 246.

3 Charles Pellat, "Ḥayawān" (7. Zoology among the Muslims), in *EI²* III (1971), 311-313, here 311.

4 Ibid.; Herbert Eisenstein *Einführung in die arabische Zoographie. Das tierkundliche Wissen in der arabisch-islamischen Literatur* (Berlin 1990), 121.

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probably al-Djaḥiẓ." The reason for al-Jāḥiẓ's obstructive rather than encouraging role Pellat sees in the fact that the author himself had in mind not so much a study of the animal species or a zoology proper, but rather wanted to prove and demonstrate the existence of the Creator and thus glorify his divine wisdom.[5] Was al-Jāḥiẓ, then, the unintentional point man of Arab-Islamic culture or, perhaps more likely, its true representative, although in a unique garb and with an unusual acumen?

As mentioned above, al-Jāḥiẓ drew much inspiration from the Greeks and especially Aristotle,[6] so much so that al-Baghdādī accused him of having plagiarized the venerable Greek teacher.[7] But the Greeks and Aristotle were not the sole informants for the *Kitāb al-ḥayawān*: On the scientific level, al-Jāḥiẓ added examples of animal psychology, an outline of a climate theory, an embryonic theory of evolution, Muʿtazilī insights, results of experimental studies, findings of contemporary scientists and excerpts from the libraries, all of which cannot be found in former works.[8] As for the literary level, he included Qurʾan and *ḥadīth*, Arabic poetry, wisdom literature, folktales, anecdotes and topics of intellectual circles, whatever he found useful for his extensive discussion of about three hundred and fifty different animals.[9] Therefore, not only with regard to its content, but also and even more so with regard to its form, the book differs from the Greek models. Al-Jāḥiẓ did not write a scientific treatise, but rather a work of Adab, an unsystematical, associative and literary work which included lengthy digressions into questions of a more sociological, theological or metaphysical nature.[10] This observation leads me to the third and most important characteristic of the *Kitāb al-ḥayawān* which lies in the fact that its content as well as its form were designed to serve none other than a religious purpose. The aim of the author is to present ample evidence for the fact that every single being points to the Creator, that we live in the best of all possible worlds, and that even dangerous, malicious or tiny animals (as in the famous anecdote about the qadi and the mosquito) have their well-defined place among creatures.[11]

Turning our attention now to the so-called "Introduction" of the *Kitab al-ḥayawān*, which is not clearly set off against the rest of the text either by a head-

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5 Pellat, "Ḥayawān," 312; Eisenstein, *Einführung*, 123.

6 Al-Jāḥiẓ quotes his sources sometimes without mentioning the author or the title, but sometimes he explicitely refers to Aristotle (= *ṣāḥib al-manṭiq*). Cf. M. Ṭāhā al-Ḥājirī, "Takhrīj nuṣūṣ arisṭaṭāliyya fī Kitāb al-ḥayawān li al-Jāḥiẓ," *Majallat kulliyyat al-ādāb* (Jāmiʿat al-Iskandariyya) 6-7 (1952/3): 15-35; bid., 8 (1954): 69-90; M. Asín Palacios, "El 'Libro de los animales' de Jâḥiẓ," *Isis* 14 (1930): 20-54; Eisenstein, *Einführung*, 150/49.

7 Palacios, „Libro", 23.

8 Charles Pellat, "al-Djāḥiẓ," *EI*[2] II (1965), 385-387, here 386; Eisenstein, *Einführung*, 121-122, 127, 150, nn. 53, 57.

9 Pellat, "Ḥayawān," 312.

10 Pellat, "al-Djāḥiẓ," 385.

11 *Ḥayawān* III: 343-345 (anecdote about the Qāḍī), III: 300 (usefulness of all kinds of animals), and II: 109 (proof of the existence of God).

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ing or by any other marker and comprises roughly the first hundred pages, I will try to show that the three aforementioned characteristics of the book – its content in the form of knowledge, its form as an Adab compilation, and its aim as a glorification of God – are indeed important. At a first glance, however, it seems that the introduction refers mainly to other books, praises books in general and the books of al-Jāḥiẓ in particular. The author starts by defending himself against an unnamed enemy of his writings, mentioning some thirty titles, much to the pleasure of the modern al-Jāḥiẓ-researchers who are thereby enabled to fill some of the gaps in the long list of his missing works.[12] Al-Jāḥiẓ ends his introduction by recommending himself as an erudite scholar and, even more, as a prolific writer who knows how to deal with the vast material in question. Even in the text which follows the long introduction to the introduction, the discussion of the merits of books is crucial, thus reminding the reader of the many anecdotes which refer to al-Jāḥiẓ's fondness for books. The logic of al-Jāḥiẓ's preoccupation with books is, in my view, the following. As in the "Great Chain of Being" which resulted from a marriage of Plato's idea of the Good with Aristotle's "Ladder of nature" (*scala naturae*), there is an ascending order of reflection in the species of God's creation which culminates, in the last resort, in unanimous praise of the perfection of the Creator's work. At the bottom of the hierarchy we find the wholly passive testimony of inanimate beings via their specific "location in the universe" (*mawḍūʿ*). This is followed by the spontaneous self-expression of the animals through "instinctive articulation" (*dalīl*), then leads to the articulate reasoning of human beings aiming at an "argument from design" (*istidlāl*), and culminates in the "communicable appropriation" of nature, which is the fulfillment of the commission appointed to man (*bayān*).[13] The most reflexive, communicable, and durable form of *bayān* is to be found not in the eloquent speech of man, but in the written word of books, ancient and modern, which therefore represent the highest form of human culture and thus mark the opposite end of the aforementioned hierarchy comprising the divine order of creation.[14]

After having presented himself as a polymath to his readers and after having defended his method against his adversary, al-Jāḥiẓ goes on to classify his subject in a definitely zoological spirit. Creation is divided into two classes, the "animate" (*nāmiʾ* – "growing") and the "inanimate" (*jamād* – "inert"),[15] the former being much better known to man by its names than the latter. Animate beings, again, are divided into two classes, "animals" (*ḥayawān*) and "plants" (*nabāt*), whereas the former can be divided into four classes: "walking" (*mā yamshī*), "flying" (*mā yaṭīr*),

12 Ibid., I: 3-21.
13 Ibid., I: 33-35.
14 Ibid., I: 85. Paragraphs in praise of the book are scattered throughout the text, cf. I: 38-42, 50-52.
15 Ibid., I: 26.

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"swimming" (*mā yasbaḥ*), and "crawling" (*mā yansāḥ*).[16] Among the walking animals, "man" (*al-nās*) finds himself in rather mixed company together with "non-carnivorous quadrupeds" (*bahā'im*), "fierce carnivores" (*sibāᶜ*) and "insects without wings" (*ḥasharāt*). This sort of arrangement comes along with a lot of problems, of which al-Jāḥiẓ himself is aware,[17] but he presents another, and for our purposes much more interesting distinction. Disregarding his former classification of man as an animal walking upright on the ground, which sets him at the same rank as both highly and lowly developed creatures, al-Jāḥiẓ [resumes his classification], distinguishing between "articulate" (*faṣīḥ*) and "inarticulate" (*ᶜajam*) speaking animals. He chooses this wording in order to avoid the inapplicable opposition of "speaking" (*nāṭiq*) and "mute" (*ṣāmit*) animals, as most animals do indeed have a voice by which they articulate themselves. The terms *faṣīḥ* and *ᶜajam*, in this sense, do not correspond to their ordinary use as referring to Arabic-speaking and non-Arab peoples, especially Persians. On the contrary, *faṣīḥ* denotes human beings in general, including those who speak Persian and other foreign languages, and *ᶜajam* points to animals in toto, referring to all kinds of articulation like barking, crowing, neighing, bellowing, howling and the like. This distinction implies that man is able to communicate with animals to an extent, not much inferior to his ability to communicate with foreigners. In fact, al-Jāḥiẓ points out that man understands the emotional outbursts of his (domesticated) animals as an adult understands the crying of a baby. The conclusion imposes itself that neither man's bodily features nor his organ of articulation are sufficient to distinguish a human being from an animal; the only remaining hallmark of man is "reason" (*ᶜaql*).[18]

Like the two aforementioned characteristics (man as a walking and a speaking animal), however, reason does not mark a clear rupture in the continuous flow of al-Jāḥiẓ's version of the Great Chain of Being. Reason, too, links human beings to the rest of nature as much as it separates them from it. This is because man is embedded in God's creation alike as an active and passive sign or witness for God's greatness, and even if man refuses to praise the Almighty he cannot but praise Him by his very existence. "We find that wisdom rules the world, but wisdom is of two kinds: one that is rational and one that is not. With regard to the indicator (*dalāla*) of wisdom, the rational and the non-rational are alike. They differ because one is an indicator devoid of rational argument (*dalīl lā yastadill*) and the other an indicator capable of rational argument (*dalīl yastadill*). [Now] every rational argument implies an indication, but not every indication implies a rational argument. With the exception of man, the animals and inanimate things

16 Pellat, "Ḥayawān," 312, points to the fact that this classification is based simply on current observation and can be found even in the Bible (I Kings, IV, 33): Solomon "spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes."

17 In *Ḥayawān* I: 30, al-Jāḥiẓ himself questions this classification, as it forces him to exclude the ostrich from the class of birds and to include the bat instead.

18 Ibid., I: 31-33.

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share in being an indication devoid of rational argument. Man is both at the same time, indication and rational argument."[19]

The instrument that is at man's disposal and singles him out, since it enables him to fulfill both kinds of *dalāla*, are the means by which "clarity" is achieved (*bayān*). The term is often used synonymously with "eloquence" (*balāgha*), but in our case this is more than just a question of words. *Bayān* has four or, rather, five different meanings: "word" (*lafẓ*), "writing" (*khaṭṭ*), "counting on fingers or knuckle" (*ʿuqad*), "indication or gesticulation" (*ishāra*) and "posture or attitude" (*mawḍūʿ, niṣba*).[20] Many other Arabic writers of the Middle Ages have adopted this fivefold division of human capacity which al-Jāḥiẓ develops not only in the *Kitāb al-ḥayawān*, but also in his *al-Bayān wa al-tabyīn*.[21] From both books it becomes clear that the first and most important application of *bayān* is its use as a means of reciprocal communication, information and learning among human beings, as they – like all other species on earth – prefer to deal with their own kind. At this point, (i.e., after some thirty pages), al-Jāḥiẓ drops this theme, namely the place of man in the Great Chain of Being, as he also stops discussing the world of animals, plants and matter in general. Instead, he enters the realm of human culture and will remain there for the coming sixty pages until the end of the introduction.[22]

Although God, as al-Jāḥiẓ argues, has created the world to be at man's disposal, the individual outside the community of his species is unable to make full use of it. Taking up Aristotle's idea of man as a "social animal" (*zoon politikon*), he goes on to say that human beings are not simply inclined to rely upon each other; they need each other's company and help in order to survive as individuals: "The need of human beings for one another is a necessary condition of their nature (*ṣifa lāzima fī ṭabāʾiʿhim*), a fixed trait in their essence (*khilqa qāʾima fī jawāhirihim*), inseparably bound to and encompassing the whole of their community (*thābita lā tuzāyiluhum wa muḥīṭa bi-jamāʿatihim*)."[23]

Ibn Khaldūn, who lived five hundred years after al-Jāḥiẓ, also wrote about the social nature of man, but he emphasized man's material needs, that is, division of labour and self-defense against wild beasts.[24] Al-Jāḥiẓ, for his part, is only concerned with the upper-class and the leading nations, as he focuses on man's

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19 Ibid., I: 33.

20 Ibid., I: 33, 35. I have adopted G.E. von Grunebaum's rendering of the roots *ʿ-q-d* and *n-ṣ-b*. See his "Bayān" in *EI*^{2} I (1960), 1114-1116, here 1114.

21 For a discussion of the Arabic terms see von Grunebaum, "Bayān," and Yusuf Abu'l-Addus, "Rhetorical Criticism in Al-Jahiz's Al-Bayan Wa Al-Tabyin and Al-Hayawan", in Mohamed Taher (ed.), *Encyclopaedic Survey of Islamic Culture*, vol. 4: Arabic Literature and Thought (New Delhi, 1997), 138-153, 141.

22 However, he inserts a short passage of about two pages (I: 35-37) about animals following their instinct.

23 Ibid., I: 42.

24 ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-ʿibar*, 7 vols. (Beirut 1967), 69-73.

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cultural needs, i.e, the transmission of knowledge. I summarize his logic as follows: People differ according to their natural or social background, and this axiom leads of course to the idea of a division of labour. However, it is regarded in terms of hierarachy, as al-Jāḥiẓ assumes from the outset of his argument a subordination of the "lower" to the "higher" people. The "lower" people, whose interests and capacities – according to al-Jāḥiẓ – concern only material culture in the form of making a living, are much less interesting for him. He concentrates much more on the "higher" ranks of human beings, those who strive for what is from their viewpoint remote in space and hidden from them by history.

Al-Jāḥiẓ's interest in the world and its history was in line with those of his contemporaries in the Iraq of the 8/9th centuries, when under the ʿAbbasids and especially under al-Maʾmūn b. Hārūn al-Rashīd the study of foreign cultures was encouraged. Nevertheless, the heyday for geographers and travellers was yet to come. Al-Masʿūdī, about a hundred years after al-Jāḥiẓ, criticized his predecessor's intention to write a geographical handbook without having travelled enough.[25] Al-Jāḥiẓ himself was sometimes sceptical concerning his informants about life in far-off countries, namely the sailors, whose stories he knew from his formative years in Basra and the nearby port of Ubulla and whom he suspected of spinning sailors' yarns.[26] Furthermore, ethnographic information pleased his intellectual curiosity but did not touch his cultural interests, which becomes clear from his ranking the historical and not the geographical science as "royal."[27]

On the other hand, in the view of al-Jāḥiẓ, the concern for foreign peoples and the concern for ancient cultures were not necessarily exclusive. This can be easily deduced from the introduction as well from other writings where he judges the value of contemporary peoples according to the historical output of their cultures. In his ranking, the highest cultures are the Greek/Byzantine, the Indian, the Persian and the Arab cultures, all of which have their representatives in legitimate contemporary heirs within the universal Islamic empire. As an *adīb*, al-Jāḥiẓ did not share the pessimistic outlook of the *ʿulamāʾ* and more especially the *muḥaddithūn* who considered the scope of Islamic knowledge to be a comprehensive, but limited and perhaps even declining system.[28] On the contrary, he seems to have prefigured the image of the "dwarfs standing on the shoulders of giants," an expression which has been traced back to John of Salisbury in the 11th century but is possibly much older. Anyhow, we read in the introduction that the books of the ancients are indispensable for us, because our achievements are of little

25 Alī b. al-Ḥusayn al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab wa maʿādin al-jawhar*, 7 vols., ed. Charles Pellat (Beirut 1965), I: 113.

26 *Ḥayawān* VI: 16.

27 Joseph de Somogyi, "The Development of Arabic Historiography", *Journal of Semitic Studies* 3 (1958): 373-387, 374. Somogyi refers to a passage of Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī in his *al-Muzhir fī ʿulūm al-lugha wa anwāʿihā* which I was unable to verify from my edition by Muḥammad Abū Jād Mawlā, 2 vols. (Cairo, n.d.).

28 Tarif Khalidi, *Arabic historical thought in the classical period* (Cambridge, 1994), 85.

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account in comparison with the bulk of theirs. The same, however, is true for future generations, as every generation is in need of what its predecessors have already achieved. Notwithstanding the history of salvation, there seems to be a continuous flow, an accumulation of knowledge for all mankind in the course of history. "It is essential that our path reaches our successors just as the path of our predecessors has reached us. In fact, we have found more of relevance (*ʿibra* – the warning example) than they have [but also the reverse is true]. Those following us will also detect more relevant things than we were able to achieve."[29]

Among the four outstanding cultures, the Arabs are a particularly interesting but also a particularly ambivalent case. We know that al-Jāḥiẓ felt the need to defend the culture of the pre-Islamic Arabs against the accusations of the *Shuʿūbiyya*, and he did this quite explicitly in the third volume of *al-Bayān wa al-tabyīn*, the so-called *Kitāb al-ʿaṣā* (Book of the stick).[30] There he defends the Arabs as bearers of a high culture of language, oratory, and poetry, in particular.[31] If we follow his line of argument in the introduction, his partisanship with regard to the Arabs seems less consistent. Upon closer inspection, however, this is perhaps only because he (re)constructs a special dynamic between ancient Arab culture on the one and contemporary Arab Islamic culture on the other side.

Looking at ancient Arabic culture, al-Jāḥiẓ admits that it is a comparatively young culture which cannot compete with Greek culture, for example. It starts only with Imruʾ al-Qays in the 6th century,[32] not much before the advent of Islam. And the fact that it is not very old, i.e., not deeply rooted in history, is not the only pecularity, or rather: deficiency of Arab culture, but it is accompanied by its "bedouinness". The question of bedouin versus sedentary culture has of course much to do with the book, and at this point I come back to the main subject of the introduction, i.e., culture and its transmission through the book.

Al-Jāḥiẓ discusses at length the question of the best means for the preservation of cultures, deducing the superiority of handwriting (*khaṭṭ*) from its durability over the more fleeting modes of expression (*lafẓ, ʿuqad, and ishāra*). Starting with graffiti on stone, early [cuneiform] examples of scripture and, in later times, inscriptions on buildings, he comes to the conclusion that all these are no match for the book, as buildings are more deliberately and easily destroyed than circulating and widespread copies of manuscripts.[33] Writing, however, is by definition connected with sedentary cultures; the Bedouins possess only oral transmission of culture, which can be easily altered, distorted or forgotten. In order to become

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29 *Ḥayawān* I: 86.

30 Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-bayān wa al-tabyīn*, 4 vols., ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Hārūn (Beirut, n.d.).

31 Susanne Enderwitz, *Gesellschaftlicher Rang und ethnische Legitimation. Der arabische Schriftsteller Abū ʿUṯmān al-Ǧāḥiẓ (gest. 868) über die Afrikaner, Perser und Araber in der islamischen Gesellschaft* (Freiburg, 1979), 93-135.

32 *Ḥayawān* I: 74.

33 Ibid., I: 73.

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accessible for posterity, the books of the ancients have to be carefully translated into the languages of those who wish to make use of their contents.[34] Again al-Jāḥiẓ inserts an extensive and detailed digression on the qualifications of the translator which reveals his intimate knowledge of and close aquaintance with the Bait al-Ḥikma and other centres of translation of his time. But the Bedouins maintain that their poetry is intranslatable and, al-Jāḥiẓ agrees; poetry has its intrinsic aesthetical value, but once it has been translated into another language or into prose it contains not a single thought (*maʿnā*) for which a better alternative in prose does not already exist.[35] Enumerating a list of the things that are worthy of being written down, preserved and emulated, al-Jāḥiẓ restricts his attention almost entirely to its juridical, scientific and technical use, such as for treaties, arithmetic and engineering. But this is not part of Bedouin culture; the ancient Arabs, on the contrary, had to employ people who were able to write down for them their treaties, armistices and war reports.[36]

So far, al-Jāḥiẓ seems to hold the same ambivalence towards the Bedouins which is discernable everywhere in urban Arab-Islamic culture and particularly among the jurists.[37] Seen from this view, the Arabs are nothing but parvenus among the community of the advanced cultures. But if we look at our results from another point of view, we are able to draw a wholly different picture. True, the culture of the ancient Arabs was not deeply rooted in history, but it had a deep knowledge of the nature of the Arabian Peninsula. Although al-Jāḥiẓ does not explicitly mention it in the introduction, in part III of his *Kitāb al-ḥayawān* he displays a high opinion of the Bedouins' practical, lexicographical and literary knowledge of the animals, the very subject of his book.[38] With regard to this passage, Charles Pellat asserts: "[al-Djāḥiẓ] is convinced that he has no need of recourse to Greek ideas, given that practically all that is found in the zoological works of the 'philosophers' is known already to the Bedouins."[39]

Starting with the assumption that Arab poetry is intranslatable into any other language, as well as into prose, it follows that it can only be made accessible for non-Bedouins through that medium in which al-Jāḥiẓ is a master: Adab. Adab, by definition a mixture of prose and poetry (in its original form) in Arabic, is able to absorb both cultural ideas and cultural forms without destroying the latter. Adab is capable of integrating all sorts of cultural elements and expressions, not for their own sake but for Adab's own purpose, which is to create a universal culture.

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34 Ibid., I: 76.
35 Ibid., I: 75.
36 Ibid., I: 69.
37 Fritz Steppat, "Those who believe and have not emigrated': the bedouin as the marginal group of Islamic society", in Adel Sidarus (ed.), *Islao Europeia de Arabistas e Islamólogos* (Évora, 1986), 403-412.
38 *Ḥayawān* III: 268.
39 Pellat, "Ḥayawān," 312.

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Urban Adab aims at the creation of a universal culture under the linguistic and religious umbrella of Arab Islam. If this is true, urban Arab culture is not only the legitimate heir of bedouin Arabic culture, but also the active agent for its future use via utilization, preservation and scripturalization. This achievement is unthinkable without or apart from the religion of Islam, because for al-Jāḥiẓ Islam is the only guarantee for a universal culture reflecting the unity of the creation. From this we may conclude that between the books of ancient cultures, which rank highest among the historical forms of human expression, and the books of religion containing the word of God, which rank highest among the forms of expression in general,[40] a third species of book has emerged under Islamic rule, of which the *Kitāb al-ḥayawān* – in the eyes of its author – is an outstanding example. The book merges and integrates the knowledge of ancient cultures with the Arabic language and its wisdom and does this not for any worldly but solely for religious reasons, to glorify God and his creating power. It presents itself as a synthesizing Adab book, thus giving the achievements of ancient cultures, of Arabic poetry and of God's power their due share.

40 *Ḥayawān* I: 85-86.

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Kitāb al-Burṣān: Al-Jāḥiẓ on Right- and Left-Handedness

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Al-Burṣān, "The Leprous", is a shorthand title of a book by al-Jāḥiẓ. The title pages of the modern editions, one by Muḥammad Mursī al-Khawlī and the other by ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn, both have *al-Burṣān wa-l-ʿurjān wa-l-ʿumyān wa-l-ḥūlān*, "The Leprous, the Lame, the Blind, and the Squint-Eyed".[1] This, however, does not exhaustively describe the contents. Al-Jāḥiẓ, himself, who elsewhere refers to it as *Kitāb al-ʿUrjān* ("The Lame"),[2] adds one more term when he speaks in his introduction (4/30) of "a book mentioning the lame, the leprous, the blind, the deaf and the squint-eyed" that he has been asked to compose, and there are in fact far more categories present in the book: it also discusses hunchbacks, those with a scrotal hernia, those missing a limb, those with a fractured skull, those struck by lightning, those suffering from facial hemiplegia or from dropsy, those having a very big or a very small head, or very long necks, or ears like those of animals, and those suffering from baldness. Incidentally, not included are people with protruding eyeballs.[3]

The book thus presents a motley collection of people (as well as some animals), all being in some way or other marked by a physical abnormality or defect, some more serious than others, either congenital or acquired through a disease or an accident. The book is by no means a medical treatise; rather, it is an offshoot of biography, an elaboration of earlier works such as the very brief treatise by al-Haytham b. ʿAdī, and in fact nothing but a list of prominent people who were blind, one-eyed, squint-eyed, "blue-eyed",[4] or having irregular teeth (*afqam*).[5] Similar lists are found elsewhere, notably in Muḥammad b. Ḥabīb's *al-Muḥabbar*

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1 *Al-Būrṣān wa-l-ʿurjān wa-l-ʿumyān wa-l-ḥūlān*, ed. Muḥammad Mursī al-Khawlī (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, [1]1971, [2]1981); ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn (Baghdad-Beirut: Wizārat al-Thaqāfa, 1982), revised edition, (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1990). Hereafter, Kh and H refer to the editions of al-Khawlī (1981) and Hārūn (1990), respectively; in page references these two editions are given without sigla, with a slash.

2 Al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1986), III: 74.

3 Only in passing is someone (ʿUyayna ["Little Eye"] b. Ḥiṣn) described as goggle-eyed (276/432; I owe this reference to Ms. Kristina Richardson, University of Michigan).

4 *zurq*, sing. *azraq*, does not simply mean "having blue eyes". Al-Fīrūzābādī, *Qāmūs*, equates it with *aʿmā*, "blind", and other lexicographers (see Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*) speak of a "whiteness" or "darkness" (*khuḍra*, here not meaning "greenness") of the eye.

5 It is included as an appendix in the two editions of *al-Burṣān*, 362-364/565-570.

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and Ibn Qutayba's *al-Maʿārif*.[6] Fascinating though lists are,[7] al-Jāḥiẓ's book is far more interesting, as it presents anecdotes, poetic quotations and snippets of relevant and, of course, irrelevant information, as we are accustomed when reading his works.

The style is not untypical of al-Jāḥiẓ, and the topic is very typical of him, with its interest in the odd, the abnormal, and the paradoxical; for the paradox is noticeable on several occasions, where people take pride in a particular defect. Thus al-Jāḥiẓ, in his introductory section, quotes a scrawny and stunted individual who argues that this proves his noble lineage, equating good breeding with inbreeding (15-16/43-44).[8] In the chapter on the lame and the crooked he explains that crookedness (*iʿwijāj*) is in itself not bad, and even useful when it concerns, for instance, ribs, palm leaves, hooks, spurs, claws, horns, tusks and fangs (167-168/256-257). In these cases, the defence of stuntedness and crookedness does not look very serious, and there are other instances where al-Jāḥiẓ is obviously satirical. However, the general drift of the book, insofar as one may be discerned, is that a disability should not stand in the way of greatness or fame. It is a book that could now be called politically correct.

One other physical trait not found in the lists by al-Haytham b. ʿAdī, Ibn Ḥabīb or Ibn Qutayba, is dealt with in al-Jāḥiẓ's book, in the concluding two sections (331-359/522-563). It is handedness; not just left-handedness, the statistically "abnormal" version, as one might have expected, but handedness in general, judging by the chapter heading of the penultimate section: *Fī l-ayman wa-l-aʿsar wa-l-aḍbaṭ wa-fī kull aʿsar yasar*, "On the right-hander, the left-hander, the 'both-hander'(?) and the ambidextrous" (331/557).[9] Nevertheless, the left-hander, the *aʿsar*, receives rather more attention than the right-hander, *ayman*. A special

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6 Muḥammad b. Ḥabīb, *al-Muḥabbar*, ed. Ilse Lichtenstädter (Hyderabad, 1942; repr. Beirut: Dār al-āfāq al-jadīda), 296-305; Ibn Qutayba, *al-Maʿārī*, ed. Tharwat ʿUkasha (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿarif, 1981), 578-589. Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, ed. Yūsuf ʿAlī Ṭawīl (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 2002), 296, and Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-udabāʾ* (Cairo, 1936-1938; repr. Beirut: Dār iḥyāʾ al-turāth al-ʿArabī, n.d.), XVI: 110, ascribe to al-Jāḥiẓ, in addition to *al-Burṣān*, a *Kitāb dhawi l-ʿāhāt*, "Book of Those with Defects", and a *Kitāb Khuṣūmat al-ḥawal wa-l-ʿawar* (or possibly *al-ḥūl wal-ʿūr*), "Book of the Dispute of Squinting (or Cross-Eyedness) and One-Eyedness", both of which are lost (unless the former is merely another title of *al-Burṣān*). See Charles Pellat's "Nouvel essai de classification de l'oeuvre Ǧāḥizienne", *Arabica* 3 (1956): 147-180, nos. 57, 18, and 92, on *al-Burṣān*, *Dhawū l-ʿāhāt*, and *Khuṣūmat al-ḥawal wa-l-ʿawar*, respectively.

7 See, e.g., Julia Bray, "Lists and Memory: Ibn Qutayba and Muḥammad b. Ḥabīb," in Farhad Daftary and Josef W. Meri, eds., *Culture and Memory in Medieval Islam: Essays in Honour of Wilferd Madelung* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003), 210-231.

8 See Geert Jan van Gelder, *Close Relationships: Incest and Inbreeding in Classical Arabic Literature* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 15-16, and *idem*, "Beautifying the Ugly and Uglifying the Beautiful: The Paradox in Classical Arabic Literature," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 48 (2003): 321-351.

9 The only purpose of the word *kull* in the title is, I believe, to obviate the awkward use of the article with a compound.

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case is the *aʿsar yasar*, the ambidextrous. For the time being, I shall disregard the fourth category found in al-Jāḥiẓ's title, *al-aḍbaṭ*, for it is problematical.

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The discussion begins with an enumeration of left-handers known from history. In al-Khawlī's edition, the opening is "*qāla: fa-min al-ʿusr ...*", where it is not clear who is the subject of *qāla* "he said"; in ʿAbd al-Salam Muḥammad Hārūn's 1982 edition, it is "*qāla l-ayman: fa-min al-ʿusr ...*", "The right-hander says: among the left-handed are ...", which in the revised edition of 1990 is corrected into *qāla l-aʿsar ...*, where the left-hander speaks. Thus the left-hander speaks in the first section and the right-hander, *al-ayman*, in the second. These two speakers are not specific persons, for they represent those who argue for the superiority of left- and right-handedness. They are thus a pair of the several fictional or semifictional representatives of opinions found in al-Jāḥiẓ's works: one thinks of the *ṣāḥib al-kalb* (the champion of the dog) and the *ṣāḥib al-dīk* (the champion of the cock) in *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, or the girl-lover and the boy-lover in his *Mufākharat al-jawārī wa-l-ghilmān*. In the rest of *al-Burṣān*, such abstract personages are lacking, except in a brief passage where "*al-Ṣaḥīḥ*", Sound, argues with *al-Aʿraj*, Lame (222/341).

In the first section, the left-hander boasts of counting, among his likes, some more or less prominent names. None of them are particularly famous,[10] but at least some heroic feats are mentioned. Zuhayr b. ʿAmr b. Muʿāwiya al-Ḍibābī led his side in battle, "grasping with his right hand the tail of a one-eyed stallion and with his left hand a sword", while exclaiming in *rajaz* (332/523):

"I'm that left-handed lad
There's good in me and bad
But there's more *bad*, begad!"[11]

I am not sure if the fact that the steed lacks one eye is relevant, but it seems to add to the general oddity and asymmetry, further enhanced by the unequal measures of good and bad. Needless to say, a preponderance of bad is paradoxically a good thing in martial contexts. Another left-hander, this time no Arab

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10 And the first one mentioned, Yazīd b. Ḥudhayfa al-Uʿaysir, "Little Left-Hand", is not only an obscure, but also a dubious candidate, for elsewhere (Ibn Durayd, *al-Ishtiqāq*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salam Muḥammad Hārūn (Baghdad: Maktabat al-Muthannā, 1979), 249) he is called al-Aʿyas, a term explained as "ruddy" and often applied to camels; it seems obvious to me that one of these epithets is a corruption of the other since the written forms are easily confused.

11 *Ana l-ghulāmu l-aʿsar / wa-l-khayru fiyya wa-l-sharr / wa-l-sharru fiyya akthar*; cf. al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Ḥayawān*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn (Cairo: Maktabat Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1965-1969), II: 90; *Naqāʾid Jarīr wa-l-Farazdaq*, ed. A. A. Bevan (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1905-1912), 661; Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *al-ʿIqd al-farīd* (Cairo, 1948-1953; repr. Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1983), V: 142-143; al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Aghānī* (Cairo: Dār al-kutub, 1927-1974), X: 140; al-Tawḥīdī, *al-Imtāʿ wa-l-muʾānasa* (Cairo: Lajnat al-taʾlīf, 1939-1953), I: 46 with various attributions. The last word of my translation is not in the Arabic.

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but an Indian named Kardawayh al-Aqṭaʿ ("the Amputee"), originally a right-hander until he lost his hand in battle, "could strike with his left hand like he used to [scil. with his right hand], crushing everyone he would strike and killing him" (333/524).

Another fact that the left-hander adduces in favour of the left side is a piece of biological folklore: "A boy is only engendered by the left testicle" (335/527).[12] This opinion sounds strange in linking left with male, since one would expect the opposite in male-dominated Arabic discourse[13]; perhaps it is connected with the fact that, also somewhat paradoxically, the Arabic for testicles is *al-unthayān*, literally "the two female ones", rather in the way the product of two "negatives" (female and left) makes a "positive" (male).[14] Predators *(sibāʿ)* are also said to be left-handed, lions as well as domestic cats; a line of poetry on a lion is quoted in support (336/529), even though modern science does not support this assertion.[15] All babies are said to be left-handed, except that most of them reach for the breast with the right hand; when they grow up most will be right-handed (337/530).[16] Observations on shooting with bow and arrow and playing the lute aim to show that left-handed and right-handed do not always necessarily correspond with "gauche" and "adroit", respectively. Thus the section generally contains facts or pseudofacts intended to boost the case of the left-hander.

There are, however, some passages that contradict this – no doubt because al-Jāḥiẓ could not refrain from inserting interesting bits: we know that he is easily carried away by any opportunity for digression. There is a passage on breathing, which is evenly divided through the left or right nostril, often alternatingly rather than simultaneously (335/528), and a remark that when a left-hander confronts a right-hander in single combat with sword or stick, the latter has the psychological

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12 Cf. *Ḥayawan*, I: 123; *Bayān*, I: 330.

13 Al-Qazwīnī, *ʿAjāʾib al-makhlūqāt* (ed. with al-Damīrī, *Ḥayāt al-ḥayawān al-kubrā*) (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Halabī, 1970), II: 109-110 and 146, mentions several theories, but those that link the sex with left and right associate male with right and female with left, contrary to the opinion quoted by al-Jāḥiẓ. It was Anaxagoras, among others, who suggested, unlike al-Jāḥiẓ, that male children came from the right testicle and female children from the left (mentioned, but rejected, by Aristotle, *De Gener. Anim*, IV: 1 = 763b-764a, cf. 765a-765b; Arabic translation ascribed to Yaḥyā b. al-Biṭrīq, ed. J. Brugman and H.J. Drossaart Lulofs (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 134, 137-138).

14 Al-Jāḥiẓ uses the word *bayḍa*, perhaps because it is said that *al-unthayān* is only used in the dual, not in the singular (ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Baghdādī, *Khizānat al-adab*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn (Cairo: al-Kātib al-ʿArabī, 1967-1986), II: 527).

15 Chris McManus, *Right Hand, Left Hand: The Origins of Asymmetry in Brains, Bodies, Atoms and Cultures* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2002), 213: cats show a preference for one limb, but half prefer the right and half the left.

16 In the second section al-Jāḥiẓ will come back to the origin of handedness. Some say it is caused by the preponderant force of the liver (for right-handers) or the spleen (for left-handers). Others claim that handedness arises fortuitously after early childhood depending on what they get used to. This, says al-Jāḥiẓ, is obviously false for it does not explain why right-handedness is so prevalent in all peoples in all epochs (354/554-555).

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advantage (337/530).[17] Animals are said to lie usually on their left side, to spare their liver; and fleeing humans tend to swerve to the left, except when they stick out their tongue (338/531).[18] One supposes the swerving to the left is a result of the fact that most people are not only right-handed, but also right-legged, the right leg being slightly stronger and making slightly larger strides, so that unconsciously, especially when panicking and not consciously adjusting for this bias, one turns to the left.[19] In his various digressions from handedness, al-Jāḥiẓ sticks, on the whole, with concrete facts and does not indulge in more esoteric and cosmological aspects of laterality and symmetry, unlike, for instance, the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, who mention laterality as a characteristic of all higher animals, and who connect human laterality with that of the cosmos.[20]

The section continues with a number of *ḥadīth*s and *ḥadīth*-like reports, some of which seem to imply equality between left and right. Abū Hurayra is quoted (340/535) as saying that the Prophet began with his right side (when performing the *wuḍūʾ*), but ʿAlī began with his left side, and is reported to have said: "I declare the ḥadīth of Abū Hurayra to be a lie!". The rules of indemnity for the loss of limbs (hands, fingers, feet, ears, etc.) in Islamic law do not differentiate between right and left. "If you argue that the liver lies on the right side and the spleen on the left, and maintain that the liver has a higher status than the spleen [and that the right side is therefore nobler than the left], then [I say] the heart, which is the master of the body, is set in the body cavity towards the left rather than the right. This is also a token of the superiority of the left over the right." (341/536)[21]

Finally, it is noted that both scholars (*fuqahāʾ*) and the populace wear their signet rings on the left hand, and the section concludes with a report that the

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17 This, again, is questionable. In tennis, a left-hander is at a slight advantage when playing a right-hander, as is what is called a "switch hitter" in baseball, I am told. In recent times [December 2004] there have been newspaper reports about research allegedly showing that cultures with a high rate of murder have a high percentage of left-handers, which could mean that left-handers are more aggressive, or at least better at killing. Statistically and methodologically, the research seems open to doubt.

18 Cf. *Ḥayawān*, V: 512-514.

19 One also wonders if this has anything to do with the familiar motif in adventure stories, when our hero or heroes have lost their way and wander about: invariably, they find themselves back at the same place where they had been before. Incidentally, I cannot explain the detail of the tongue that sticks out. Perhaps it helps to restore the balance if it lolls out on one side. In *Ḥayawān*, V: 512-514, the swerving and the tongue-lolling are mentioned independently, not as neutralising each other. Interestingly, elsewhere we find the opinion that animals, when startled, swerve to the right (al-Baghdādī, *Khizāna*, VI: 490).

20 e.g., al-Jāḥiẓ, *Rasāʾil*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1964-1979), II: 197, 202-203, 464, 466.

21 Cf. al-Tawḥīdī, quoting from an unidentified *risāla* by al-Jāḥiẓ (*al-Baṣaʾir wa-l-dhakhāʾir*, ed. Wadād al-Qāḍī (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1988), III: 133) in which al-Jāḥiẓ silences a quarrelsome person who argues that *Munkar* is better than *Nakīr*, *Yājūj* better than *Mājūj*, and Right better than Left, because the liver lies on the right side of the body. Al-Jāḥiẓ then points out that since the heart tends towards the left side one could say that the left is better. See also e.g., al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr* (Būlāq, AH 1278 (1861-1862)), VI: 188 (on Q 56:8).

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Prophet, when departing, would turn away [from prayer] either towards the left or the right. Besides what one might call proper arguments for the superiority of the left-hander, one finds improper or strictly irrelevant arguments based on association, just as in other debates by al-Jāḥiẓ; for instance, on the blacks and the whites, belly and back, girls or boys, many improper and even jocular arguments are given by both sides. It would be wrong to say that this always points to a somewhat frivolous attitude towards the art of debating, although this is often the case in al-Jāḥiẓ. It is also the result of his tendency to see things in a broader perspective, to extend, for instance, the topic of being left-handed as a kind of handicap to handedness in general, or even to laterality and directionality in general. After all, these are concepts that are occasionally baffling and confusing, as we all know, which may be why al-Jāḥiẓ was attracted to the topic. Typical occasions for confusion are expressions such as "on her left/to the left of her is So-and-so", when speaking about a picture of persons facing us; or drinks passing round to the right (in a circle this means anti-clockwise, which one is tempted to call "turning to the left"); or animals as omens: are they unlucky because they go towards the left, or because they come from the left? Arabic idiom and beliefs show similar confusions, e.g., concerning the terms *sāniḥ* and *bāriḥ*, or *waḥshī* and *insī*. That Arabic is written from right to left could be used to argue the superiority of right (since it comes first) or of left (since, like a favourable omen, it comes from the right and goes to the left).

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The second and final section is entitled, as mentioned above, "Chapter on what is said on the superiority of the right-hander over the left-hander", and the speaker is identified as the right-hander. The chapter is in some aspects an oddity in the book, for being right-handed is neither a defect nor a rarity; there is obviously no point in listing prominent right-handers. Again, by no means is what the speaker says a straightforward argument in favour of right-handedness. The section opens in fact with a passage on ambidexterity, which I shall quote because it contains a problem that I have been unable to solve yet (342-343/538).

> "The right-hander says: All people may be divided in this regard into four categories: the right-handed (*ayman*), who do most things with their right hand; the left-handed (*aʿsar*), who do most things with their left hand (*bi-yasārihī*) ...;"

I shall not dwell here on the interesting vocabulary of handedness, such as the use of the antonymic roots *ʿSR* and *YSR* both for the left hand (in addition to the root *ShML*).[22]

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22 Nor shall I discuss the wider semantics of laterality in Arabic and its connotations in folklore, augury, or divination, such as the roots *BRḤ* and *SNḤ*, the relationship between the roots *ShML, ShʾM, ShMʾL*, etc., on which see, e.g., J. Chelhod, *Les structures du sacré chez les Arabes* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1964), 209-245; Toufic Fahd, *La divination arabe* (Leiden: Brill, 1966), 209, 440-446, 463.

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"... the both-handed (*aḍbaṭ*), who do things with both (hands); ..."

I have coined the term "both-handed" especially for this occasion; it is this term, *al-aḍbaṭ*, that I find intriguing.

"... and the ambidextrous (*aʿsar yasar*), who can use their right hand equally well as they can use their left hand. ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb was ambidextrous."

Note the interesting form *aʿsarᵘ yasarᵘⁿ*, which the lexicographers tell us is the correct form, to be preferred to *aʿsar aysar*; the feminine is *ʿasrāʾᵘ yasaraᵗᵘⁿ*. Interesting is not only the form, but also the oxymoronic ring of the two roots with originally opposite meanings. The ambidexterity of ʿUmar is often mentioned, although it is not clear how this showed itself, apart from one thing that will be mentioned later. Going by what we know about him, it would have been mostly in whipping people that he showed his manual versatility.

"Al-Aṣmaʿī said, on the authority of one of his informants: A Bedouin once saw ʿUmar, and then said to the people: I have never seen an ambidextrous man taking on another man who did not wipe the floor with him.[23] He is either the best of men or the worst of men. People have transmitted on the authority of al-Aḥnaf[24] that ʿUmar was ambidextrous. People have nicknamed many[25] individuals 'Both-handed' (al-Aḍbaṭ), such as ʿĀmir al-Aḍbaṭ,[26] he who [538] was killed by Muḥallim b. Jaththāma:[27] the most 'Both-handed' of all people, just as they have called al-Aḍbaṭ b. Qurayʿ this."

I am not wholly sure of the function and meaning of the words *aḍbaṭ al-nās* in our passage: do they qualify (Abu) ʿĀmir? And am I right in considering it a superlative, even though this would be a solecism, since *aḍbaṭ* functions like *aḥmar* and *aʿmā* and cannot be used as comparative or superlative?

"Now if his proper name were Aḍbaṭ, their proof would not be valid, unless he had a proper name other than al-Aḍbaṭ."

I do not know with certainty who al-Jāḥiẓ means with "their": presumably "people" of the preceding passage. No other *ism* of al-Aḍbaṭ b. Qurayʿ is known.

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23 Instead of Kh's *kaddasa* the reading of H, *kadasa*, seems better. The dictionaries give the idiom *kadasa bihi l-arḍ*, meaning "to floor someone and press him to the ground (*ṣaraʿahu waalṣaqahu bihā*). Apparently, this anecdote is part of Ḥadīth, for the *Lisān al-ʿArab* says: *Wa-fī l-Ḥadīth: kāna lā yuʾtā bi-aḥadin illā kadasa bihi l-arḍ*. I have not found it in the *Concordances*.

24 The transmitter is the famous al-Aḥnaf b. Qays, the Tamīmī leader who presented himself to ʿUmar upon his tribesmen's conversion.

25 Kh's *kabīran* does not seem to make much sense, and I follow H in reading it as *kathīran* (he mentions in a note that the manuscript seems to read *kaʿbar* or *kaʿtar*).

26 Where Kh has Abū ʿĀmir, H has only ʿĀmir.

27 Caskel's edition of al-Kalbī's *Jamhara* has "Muḥallim b. Yazīd (Ǧaṯṯāma)" (Tab. 36, wrongly "Ġattāma" in Index p. 421). I shall omit details about ʿĀmir and Muḥallim. Al-Aḍbaṭ b. Qurayʿ was famous as *sayyid* of Saʿd Tamīm and as a poet, one of the first to make long poems, and as one of the *muʿammarūn*, long-lived men. The shortish section on him in *al-Aghānī* has an interesting anecdote on a certain part of his body, to which the reader is referred, but unfortunately there is nothing on his name or his handedness.

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"The same can be said of the verse on a she-camel that they recite, when the poet says:

A sturdy one, both-handed(?), pacing swiftly,[28] like an excellent
stallion-camel ...

ʿudhāfiratun ḍabṭāʾu takhdī ka-annahā
fanīqun ...

Perhaps the poet means (with the adjective *ḍabṭāʾ* here that the animal possesses) strength and hardiness; or else that she used to put her right foreleg in front first one time and another time her left foreleg; but this is not known to be the case."

The point seems to be that camels do not normally demonstrate any kind of handedness and therefore it is pointless to speak of a camel being "both-handed" or ambidextrous. Therefore the poet may have intended another meaning: *ḍabṭāʾ*, masc. *aḍbaṭ*, in the sense of *ḍābiṭa/ḍābiṭ* "strong, hardy, firm".

In what follows, al-Jāḥiẓ, or his right-handed spokesman, speaks about a horse called "left-handed" in the sense of not being able to swim in the true sense;[29] a Jāḥiẓian digression on swimming ensues. My problem with the passage that I have translated is the meaning of *aḍbaṭ* and the question of how it differs, in al-Jāḥiẓ's view, from *aʿsar yasar*. He seems to be alone in making a difference, for the lexicographers all equate the two terms.[30]

Al-Jāḥiẓ is not committing a passing error, being momentarily confused, for he consistently presents *aḍbaṭ* as being different from *aʿsar yasar*. At the beginning of his book (8-9/36) he announces the topic as follows:

"*thumma adhkuru mā qālū fī l-ayman wa-l-aʿsar wa-fī l-aḍbaṭ wa-fī kull aʿsar yasar.*"

And in another of his works, *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*,[31] he does the same, in a passage about the pronunciation of the *ḍād* :

"The *ḍād* is articulated only from the right side of the mouth (*laysat takhruju illā min al-shidq al-ayman*), except when the speaker is ambidextrous (*aʿsar yasar*), like ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, God have mercy on him, for he pronounced the *ḍād* from whichever side of the mouth he wished.[32] But the right-hander, the left-hander and the *aḍbaṭ* can do this only with strong aversion."

The pronunciation of the *ḍād* was peculiar to the Arabs, to the extent that their language was and still is called *lughat al-ḍād*, as an honorific name, even though the

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28 The reading *takhdhā* in Kh is wrong; read *takhdī*, as in H. The line is by Maʿn b. Aws (d. *c.* 64/684 or somewhat later) according to the lexicographers. See also note 30.

29 Cf. *al-Ḥayawān*, II: 180; VII: 119.

30 e.g., *Lisan al-ʿArab* s.v. *ḌBṬ*: *rajulun aḍbaṭu: yaʿmalu bi-yadayhi jamīʿan, wa-asadun aḍbaṭu: yaʿmalu bi-yasārihi ka-ʿamalihi bi-yamīnihi; Qālat muʾabbinatu Rawḥ b. Zinbāʿ fī nawḥihā: asadun aḍbaṭu: yamshī bayna qaṣbāʾa wa-ghīlin. Wa-l-unthā ḍabṭāʾu, yakūnu ṣifatan li-l-marʾati wa-l-labuʾati... Wa-laysa lahu fiʿl. Wa-fī l-Ḥadīthi annahu suʾila ʿan al-aḍbaṭ; qāla Abū ʿUbayd: huwa lladhī yaʿmalu bi-yadayhi jamīʿan yaʿmalu bi-yasārihi kamā yaʿmalu bi-yamīnihi, wa-ka-dhālika kullu ʿāmilin bi-yadayhi jamīʿan. Wa-qāla Maʿn b. Aws yaṣifu nāqatan: ʿUdhāfiratun ḍabṭāʾu takhdī ka-annahā / fanīqun ghadā yahmī l-sawāma l-sawāriḥā. Wa-huwa yuqālu lahu aʿsaru yasarun.*

31 *Bayān*, I: 62.

32 See also *Burṣān*, 353/554.

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original pronunciation has long disappeared. It was a lateral, or, as Fleisch says, most probably a "voiced lateralized velarized interdental fricative".[33] Fleisch's description is not even complete, for laterals are not rare: our *l* and the Welsh *ll* are also laterals, but as far as I know both are bilaterals, the air escaping on both sides of the tongue. The *ḍād*, on the other hand, is an unilateral; and, oddly, the grammarians tell us that the right side is favoured, or is to be favoured. Incidentally, what al-Jāḥiẓ says here seems to contradict Sībawayh's description of the *ḍād*,[34] because he maintains that it is easier to articulate on the left side, although it should be pronounced on the right side.

This is one unsolved problem, but I should like to return to the problem of what al-Jāḥiẓ could have meant with the term *aḍbaṭ*. From the passage just quoted it is obvious that to him *aḍbaṭ* differs from *aʿsar yasar*. As we have seen, he defines the term *al-aḍbaṭ* in *al-Burṣān* as "he who does things with both hands", *alladhī yaʿmalu bihimā* [i.e. *bi-yadayhi*] *jamīʿan*, and this phrase recurs very often in various forms in the dictionaries and elsewhere: *rajulun aḍbaṭu: yaʿmalu bi-yadayhi jamīʿan* (Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisan*, al-Zabīdī,*Tāj al-ʿarūs*), *al-rajulu l-aḍbaṭu ... huwa lladhī yaʿmalu bi-yadayhi jamīʿan* (al-Aṣmaʿī, *Khalq al-insān*, 207), *rajulun aḍbaṭu: yaʿmalu bi-kiltā yadayhi* (*Tāj al-ʿarus*, quoting al-Jawharī, *Ṣiḥāḥ*), *rajulun aḍbaṭu ay aʿsaru yasarun: yaʿmalu bi-yadayhi maʿan* (al-Khalīl, *al-ʿAyn*).

The use of *jamīʿan*, and even more of *maʿan*, might suggest that "working with both hands together" does not mean "ambidextrous" in the sense of being able to work with either hand equally deftly (or dexterously), but literally using two hands at the same time, for instance when a sword fighter or a tennis player prefers to use both hands, rather than one, for better control and a stronger impact. Obviously, this is not what the lexicographers think, for the definitions of *aʿsar yasar* use the same idiom, and more than once the two terms are explicitly equated in meaning. Perhaps al-Jāḥiẓ, alone, thought it had this meaning, even though it is difficult to imagine that a special word of the *afʿal* pattern would exist for such incidental acts.

Of course it is easy to make a fourfold subdivision: next to the right-hander, the left-hander and the ambidextrous, I should myself have put the ambisinistrous, if I may coin another term: someone who in Dutch is called "one with two left hands" (in English, such persons are said to have two left feet, or perhaps ten

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33 *EI*^{2} II: 75. See, e.g., F. Corriente, "Ḍ-L doublets in Classical Arabic as evidence of the process of de-lateralisation of *ḍād* and development of its standard reflex," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 23 (1978): 50-55.

34 Sībawayhi, *Kitāb* (Būlāq, AH 1316 (1898-1899)), II: 404-5; cf. G. Jahn's German translation, *Sîbawaihi's Buch über die Grammatik, übersetzt und erklärt* (Berlin, 1900), II: i, 853, notes II: ii, 533. On the pronunciation of the *ḍād*, see also Naphtali Kinberg, "Treatise on the pronunciation of the *ḍād*", in *Studies in the Linguistic Structure of Classical Arabic* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 197-267 (with edition and translation of *Risāla fī kayfiyyat al-nuṭq bil-ḍād* by ʿAlī b. Sulaymān al-Manṣūrī, d. 1134/1722); this study mentions laterality, but pays no attention to the matter of right vs. left.

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thumbs). It is impossible that *aḍbaṭ* has this meaning in al-Jāḥiẓ's usage, for then he would have defined the word as "those who do things clumsily with both hands" or something equally negative. Thus a problem remains. Terms for handedness are slippery. A term that should be wholly positive like ambidextrous has acquired some negative connotations: underhandedness, double-dealing, shiftiness. Of the earliest left-hander in recorded history, Ehud ben Gera, we do not know exactly whether he was a true left-hander or ambidextrous: the *Lexicon* of Koehler and Baumgartner cannot decide on the precise meaning of the Hebrew word *iṭṭēr*, applied to Ehud (Judges 3:15) and (Judges 20:16) to seven hundred anonymous Israelite warriors. The Hebrew root seems to imply "bending" or "being crooked", not unlike the corresponding Arabic root *ʾṬR*; but this root is not connected with handedness.

I should add that I have looked for the word *aḍbaṭ* in many glossaries of editions of *dīwān*s and works by philologists, but to no avail. We may have to conclude that, for once, al-Jāḥiẓ was confused. Or did he speak with tongue in cheek? If so, which cheek?

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Leaving the unsolved problem of the meaning of *al-aḍbaṭ*, let us look at the rest of the chapter. Again, it is obvious that sometimes it is not the "right-hander" who is speaking, but al-Jāḥiẓ himself, as in the passage (343/539) on the popular belief that a horse that is unable to swim puts his left foot forward first when trotting, and is therefore called *aʿsar.* Al-Jāḥiẓ has observed that left-handed people swim just as well as right-handers, and thinks that the term *aʿsar*, when applied to a non-swimming horse, has nothing to do with handedness and merely means "unable to do something", in this case swimming. People allege that ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ was ambidextrous (*aʿsar yasar*) because he fought with two swords at the battle of Ṣiffīn; but al-Jāḥiẓ does not agree: one does not fight with two swords simultaneously, and if one goes into battle with two or more swords, it is because one sword may get broken; it does not necessarily mean that one is ambidextrous (344/540). When someone is praised in an elegy with the phrase "He used to strike with two hands or with one" (*wa-kāna ḍarūban bi-l-yadayni wa-bi-l-yadī*), this is said to mean that he fought with sword (using one hand) and bow and arrow (using two hands), although it is added that one may wield a sword using two hands for certain occasions, such as a beheading (344-46/541).[35]

It is after a digression of several pages on using both hands that a real argument is given for the superiority of the right hand: in the Qur'an, the people who go to heaven or hell are described as "those on the right hand" and "those on the left hand", respectively;[36] at the Last Day the heavens will be "folded up in His right

[35] The verse is by Dakhtanūs on her cousin ʿUmayr b. Maʿbad b. Zurāra.

[36] Q 56:27 *aṣḥāb al-yamīn*, 56:41 *aṣḥāb al-shimāl,* cf. 56:8-9: *aṣḥāb al-maymana* and *aṣḥāb al-mashʾama.*

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hand".[37] When one swears one may say, like Imruʾ al-Qays,[38] "*yamīna llāh*", where the word *yamīn* wavers between the meaning "right hand" and the metonymically derived meaning "oath". Such religiously loaded arguments may be strong, but in the context of Bedouin-style boasting contests the following argument may be felt to be rather more damning, even though the *isnād* is rather weak:

> "They say: we have seen among kings and nobles those who were squint-eyed, 'blue-eyed', or lame, and also among scholars; but we have never seen a left-handed scholar or king. When a left-handed person wraps himself[39] in his cloak and walks, he looks distorted (*mukhabbal*) and it shows up his defect and disfigurement. Left-handedness is ugly in men; in a woman it is even uglier. We have never seen a left-hander who was not a weaver or some (other) lowly and despicable person." (350/549-550)

Of course it is also remarked that the left hand is used for ignoble things such as cleaning one's nether parts or one's nose (351/551). We read that the left side of an animal (*dābba*) is called the "wild side" (*al-jānib al-waḥshī*) – the lexicographers seem to disagree among themselves about this, some saying that it is the right side that is called *waḥshī*. It has to do with the side from which animals are mounted or milked, which is usually the left, therefore called the "human" (*insī*) side.[40] Incidentally, it is strange that al-Jāḥiẓ does not mention the terms *bāriḥ* and *sāniḥ*, used for the auspicious or inauspicious direction of animals and birds in the contexts of hunting and augury.

Then it is argued, rather implausibly, that the adjective *ʿasīr*, "difficult", is derived from *aʿsar*, "left-handed";[41] it is more likely the reverse. The right-hander rejects some potential arguments of his opponent:

> "If you were to mention the fact that one inclines on one's left side[42] [when sitting in company, eating or drinking for instance],[43] or that quadrupeds rest on their left side,[44] then this is an argument against you, for this is done by humans and animals only to protect their liver [which lies on the right side of the body]. They say that if a soldier loses his right eye he is struck from the payroll, because when protecting himself with his shield his left eye is covered by it and, having lost his right eye, he is as good as blind." (352-353/553)

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37 Q 39:67.

38 In his long *qaṣīda* rhyming in *-ālī*.

39 The apparent pun in the use of the verb *ishtamala* is, I suppose, fortuitous: there is no connection, real or suggested, with *shimāl* here.

40 e.g., Ibn al-Anbārī, *Sharḥ al-qaṣaʾid al-sabʿ al-ṭiwāl al-jāhiliyyāt* (Cairo: Dār al-maʿarif, 1969), 325-326; al-Baghdādī, *Khizāna*, VI, 489-490; Dhū l-Rumma, *Dīwān*, ed. C.H.H. Macartney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1919), 24; ed. ʿAbd al-Quddūs Abū Ṣāliḥ (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Īmān, 1982), (I), 101; and see the dictionaries *s.v.* *ʾNS* and *WḤSh*.

41 Also *Ḥayawān*, V: 516.

42 Reading with H *ʿalā l-yasīr* instead of Kh's *ʿalā l-misādd* [*sic*, for *masādd*] "on pillows".

43 Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab* speaks of *ittikāʾ* as *al-mayl fī quʿūdihi muʿtamidan ʿalā aḥad shiqqayhi* ; but that the left is favoured may appear from the definition of the derived form *atkaʾahu* as *alqāhu ʿalā jānibihi l-aysar* (cf. al-Fīrūzābādī, *al-Qāmūs*). Inclining when eating is disapproved in Islam on the basis of the Ḥadīth.

44 Cf. *Ḥayawān*, V: 512. I do not know if there is any truth in this observation.

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At this point the left-hander interrupts by saying that some prominent military leaders had lost their right eyes: al-Ḥajjāj b. Bāb, who fought the Azāriqa, Hāshim b. ʿUtba al-Mirqāl, who fought at Ṣiffīn, and others.[45] His point is refuted (somewhat oddly not by "the right-hander", but by "the people", *al-qawm*): We are talking about rank-and-file soldiers, not about men who lead with their strategic insight and the charisma of their person and their name.

A story is then told, apparently by the left-hander to further his case: Two brothers, a left-hander and a right-hander, had their right hands cut off on account of a theft. The right-hander was quite helpless, unlike his brother. The text continues,

> "The left-hander boasted about this to the right-hander. Then the right-hander said: I know of no virtue of the left-hander, except when he steals, is caught and has his hand cut off!" (353/554)[46]

The wording does not make it clear whether "the left-hander" and "the right-hander" in this passage refer to the two brothers or to the anonymous opponents in the general debate.

The fact that the consonant *ḍād* is articulated on the right side of the mouth, unless one is ambidextrous like ʿUmar, as mentioned above, is also called a point in favour of the right-hander (353/554). The alleged left-handedness of Satan, who eats with his left and accosts people from the left, would in itself be sufficient to condemn left-handedness in general (354-356/555-557). That the Prophet Muḥammad had strong feelings about eating with the right hand is well known; al-Jāḥiẓ, or his right-hander, gives only one *ḥadīth* to this effect and adds another in which he passes a beaker of milk to a Bedouin on his right, even when Abū Bakr is on his left (357-358/560-561).[47]

The final pages of the section and the book try to reconcile the reports of the Prophet recommending lying on one's right side with the advice of the physicians to lie on the left so that the liver is not oppressed by a heavy stomach. "I have seen countless people", says al-Jāḥiẓ – for this is obviously him speaking ra-

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45 In this connection it should be noted that *al-Burṣān* does not have a section on *ʿūr*, "one-eyed people", unlike, e.g., the lists of al-Haytham b. ʿAdī (in *Burṣān*, 362-364/566-569), Ibn Qutayba (*Maʿārif*, 585-587) and Ibn Ḥabīb (*Muḥabbar*, 302-303).

46 The names of the brothers, Kallās and Miqlās are rather unusual. Hārūn points at *Ḥayawān*, VI: 28, where "Miqlās wa-Kaylās (MS variant Klāsī)" are given among names by monkey-trainers and the like to their animals. They sound vaguely Greek (Callias, Nicolas?).

47 Cf. e.g., al-Bukhārī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, chapter *al-Ashriba*. Wine, too, is customarily passed round anti-clockwise, to one's right neighbour, see, e.g., Ibn al-Muʿtazz, *Fuṣūl al-tamāthīl* (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-ʿArabiyya, 1925), 73 ff.; Kushājim, *Adab al-nadīm* (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Amīriyya, AH 1298 (1880-1881)), 28-29. Al-Jāḥiẓ reports that some Arab tribes such as Bāhila b. Aʿsur do the reverse (*Burṣān*, 339/567), Al-Akhṭal (*Naqāʾid Jarīr wa-l-Akhṭal*, ed. Anṭūn Ṣāliḥānī (Beirut: al-Maṭbaʿa al-kāthūlikiyya, 1922), 51). *Dīwān*, ed. Mahdī Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 1994), 224), speaks in a poem of wine passed round "from right and left (*sanīḥan wa-bāriḥan*)".

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ther than the right-handed spokesman – "who slept on their right side without ever feeling the slightest harm." He suggests that the Prophet merely recommended lying down first on one's right side, after which one could turn over if one wishes (358-359/562-563).

* * *

Thus the section ends, petering out without a proper conclusion or an explicit verdict on the outcome of the debate. It is as if al-Jāḥiẓ could not make up his mind what to do: write a collection of anecdotes and interesting pieces of information on left- and right-handedness, or compose a debate on the virtues of either, carried out by fictional opponents, just as he did in the case of the boy-lover and the girl-lover, or perhaps compose a more one-sided argumentation in favour of one, as he did in *The Boast of the Blacks over the Whites*.[48] In the debate between boy-lover and girl-lover, it is clear that al-Jāḥiẓ is on the side of the latter, but the debate is lively in that the two opponents are in direct dialogue, alternating with short speeches. In *al- Burṣān*, al-Jāḥiẓ lets the left-hander speak at length first, and then gives the bulk of the second section to the right-hander. Normally the last speaker wins the debate, if there is a clear winner, and this is obviously the case here. The clarity of the basic structure is obscured and undermined repeatedly, not only because there are occasional interruptions by the other opponent, but particularly by the intrusions of al-Jāḥiẓ himself, who cannot resist a little digression or comment.

It is perhaps slightly disappointing that al-Jāḥiẓ lets the right-hander have a fairly clear victory, knowing that he usually likes to defend paradoxical or unfashionable opinions, or at least gives them ample opportunity to be vented. In an Islamic environment, even more than in traditional Western civilization, it is almost unavoidable to favour the Right over the Left. The true winner is perhaps not the left-hander, but the ambidextrous, for which he uses two terms, *aʿsar yasar* and *aḍbaṭ*, strangely and obscurely distinguishing between the two. He quotes the opinion that in the Hereafter, when people are perfect, they all ought to be ambidextrous (he uses the term *aʿsar yasar*), and comments:

> "We have not come across this. The words 'left-handed' or 'right-handed' do not apply to the people in Paradise. There is no hardship (*muʿānāh*) there, for all things are perfect there." (354/555)

I do not see why this could not imply that people are ambidextrous in Paradise. Al-Jāḥiẓ seems reluctant to accept this idea. Perhaps he feels that, like all the other categories discussed in *al-Burṣān*, the blind, the lame, the squint-eyed and the rest, any bodily characteristic designated with the linguistic pattern *afʿal* de-

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48 Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Rasāʾil*, I: 173-226; translated into English by Tarif Khalidi, *Islamic Quarterly* 25 (1981), 3-51; also translated in Jim Colville, *Sobriety and Mirth: A Selection of the Shorter Writings of al-Jahiz* (London: Kegan Paul, 2002), 25-51.

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notes an imperfection, to the point of including *ayman*, "right-handed", and perhaps even *aʿsar yasar* or *aḍbaṭ*. It is not clear to me why al-Jahiz decided to add the *aʿsar* and the *ayman* as categories of the lists with bodily "defects" as given by al-Haytham b. ʿAdī, while leaving out many possible other candidates: one thinks of *aflaḥ, aʿlam, akhram, aṣlam, aʿshā, abkhar, adrad* and many others.[49] I suppose he first added *aʿsar* because it has the *afʿal* form and is (or certainly was) a kind of handicap. Subsequently he added a separate, final section on its counterpart *ayman*, turning it half-heartedly into a kind of debate, because it gave him the opportunity to ride his hobby-horse, seeing things from two sides. It is this trait that makes him so attractive to us and so different from the bigots and fanatics found in his and our days; it is what makes him a "humanist" of sorts.

[49] See, e.g., al-Tawḥīdī, *Baṣāʾir*, VI: 145-147 for a list of terms denoting physical defects and characteristics (which, incidentally, includes *jāḥiẓ* "goggle-eyed").

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Yearning and Disquiet: Al-Jāḥiẓ and the *Risālat al-qiyān*[1]

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I

Charles Pellat remarks in passing on a letter sent ostensibly by al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/868-869) to Ibrāhīm b. al-Mudabbir (d. 279/892-893), the poet and ʿAbbasid finance official. The letter occurs in a short *khabar* preserved by Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī in his entry on al-Jāḥiẓ in the *Muʿjam al-udabāʾ*. Pellat, leaving open the question of the letter's authenticity, finds it "très curieuse."[2] He refers to Ibn al-Mudabbir as among the members of elite ʿAbbasid society with whom al-Jāḥiẓ was closely associated. Pellat is careful to signal doubt as to when the relationship was formed, suggesting only that it occurred late in al-Jāḥiẓ's life.[3] The report and the enclosed letter read as follows:

> "Abū ʿAlī al-Tanūkhī reported – Abū al-Ḥasan Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Akhbarī – Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī – al-Ḥasan b. al-Qāsim b. Mihrawayh –ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar al-Wakīl who said:
>
> One day, while in the company of Ibrāhīm b. al-Mudabbir, I saw that he held a note from which he could hardly look away. I asked: 'What is it about that note? It is as if something in it escapes you.' He replied: 'It is a letter from Abū ʿUthmān al-Jāḥiẓ. His words are so deeply pleasing that I cannot help but repeat them to myself.' I said: 'Might I have a look?' He agreed and handed it to me. It read:
>
> "Since I left you, no day has broken nor night fallen that my longing for you has not torn me apart [and left me] unable to overcome my grief over you. Yearning for you has so overwhelmed me physically that my innards heave, [my] tears splash, [my] soul struggles with the effort, and [my very] bones creak from the demands made upon them. Distressed to the point of sleeplessness and deprived of the pleasure of rest, I cannot help but remember the words of Bashshār:[4]

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1 I am grateful for the responses to this paper from other participants in the al-Jāḥiẓ conference and, in particular, Hilary Kilpatrick and Peter Heath. I have also learned a great deal from correspondence with James Montgomery to whom I owe much thanks.

2 "Ǧāḥiẓ à Bagdād et à Sāmarrā," *Revista degli studi orientali*, 27 (1952): 58. Pellat adds no explanation.

3 Ibid., 54-59. On the closely related question of the patronage enjoyed by al-Jāḥiẓ, see S.M. Toorawa, "Ibn Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfūr versus al-Jāḥiẓ, or: Defining the *Adīb*," in *Occasional Papers of the School of ʿAbbasid Studies, Cambridge 6-10 July 2002* (*Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 135*), ed. James E. Montgomery (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), 257-259.

4 A reference presumably to Bashshār b. Burd (d.c. 167/783), a prominent poet of the late Umayyad and early ʿAbbasid periods. See Geert Jan van Gelder, "Bashshār b. Burd," in *Arabic Literary Culture, 500-925*, ed. Michael Cooperson and Shawkat M. Toorawa (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2005), 91-97 and *EI*^{2}, s.v. Bashshār b. Burd (Blachère).

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When the turtledove sounded, passion's yearning
Contended with me – no longer could I hold back love's weeping
God has determined we should be parted
We, who were as pure water in honey stirred
For a time, she and I were as close
As musk [ground?] with the choicest saffron

Truly he [al-Bashshār] describes the intimacy we feel when together, and in our affection, we resemble [that to which he gives voice] in his verse. So too did I recall the blows, which fate dealt me, of separation from my cherished friends, of whom none is more dear than you; how it tests me with the distance of my companions, beloved and true, of whom you are the most beloved, most true; and how it makes me drink deep of the bitter taste of their absence and our reunion's far-off appointment. With God have I pleaded that He conjoin the signs of happiness [in my life] with proximity to you, and that which is tender in my life with your hasty return. Verses I have composed only fall short of describing the extent of my affection, the full measure of what my heart contains:

There, upon my cheek, the furrows of tears spilled
And, since you vanished, the pounding of my heart
Sobs wrench my stomach until night itself
And the return of grief wearies my heart
[These signs] testify to the pain of my soul in sickness,
Making plain that I am broken-hearted
You would think the departure of no other companion
Had moved me, that no other, save you the beloved,
Had disappeared from my sight

I said to Ibn al-Mudabbir: 'This is the letter of a lover, and not that of the devoted servant [or inferior?],[5] the letter of one who has departed, hardly that of one who is on hand!' He laughed and said: 'Abū ʿUthmān and I amuse ourselves even more elegantly and subtly than that! As for [this business] of absence, normally we meet up every three days but [our last meeting] was delayed by a task that occupied me, so he addressed me as you would one who had vanished, thus turning the interruption of our routine into a long absence.'"[6]

No effort was made here to assess the letter's attribution to al-Jāḥiẓ. On its face, the claim seems dubious. Ridden with clichés, and composed in good part of transmitted verse, the letter mostly functions to support the anecdote that surrounds it. It is worth reading, nonetheless, for its close thematic relationship to two further texts (one of which is composed of several distinct parts but is treated here as a single text). These are the *Risālat al-qiyān* ('Epistle on the Singing Girls'), generally agreed to have been written by al-Jāḥiẓ,[7] and the material de-

5 *Hādhihī ruqʿa ʿāshiq lā ruqʿa khādim.*

6 Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Muʿjam al-udabāʾ*, ed. Iḥsan ʿAbbās (Beirut: Dar al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1993), V: 2110-2111. Ḥasan al-Sandūbī includes the letter in his *Rasāʾil al-Jāḥiẓ* (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Raḥmānīya, 1352/1933), 313-315. I am grateful for the comments of James Montgomery and Everett Rowson on an early version of this translation.

7 Two versions of the essay were used here: (1) that contained in *Rasāʾil al-Jāḥiẓ*, 4 vols., ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1384/1965), II: 143-182

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voted to the third/ninth century singer, ʿArīb al-Maʾmūniyya, in the *Kitāb al-aghānī* ('Book of Songs') of Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī (d. c. 363/972-973).[8] This third, multipart text is one of a small number of sections in the *Aghānī* on women singers, poets, and musicians who plied their craft in the palatine centers of the third/ninth century ʿAbbasid caliphate.[9]

The following discussion treats evidence extracted from these texts on the history of the women performers and the palace culture in which they flourished. It is guided by two questions. First, what did al-Jāḥiẓ think of the *qiyān* and of the larger "caste," the *jawārī* (sing. *jāriya*), of whom he writes?[10] The answer provided below relies, in good part, upon the fine analysis of the *Risalat al-qiyan* (henceforth: *Risala*) by Abdallah Cheikh-Moussa.[11] Like other Arabic authors of the ʿAbbasid period, al-Jāḥiẓ makes frequent mention of the *jawārī* in his writings. Nearly alone among them, however, he produced in the *Risāla* an extended and particular comment on the singers. His largely negative assessment is to be contrasted with that of Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī. The parting of opinion, in turn, reflects a contemporary debate, that is, in third/ninth century urban Iraq, over the presence and activity of the singers and other performers. The second and more ambitious question concerns the shared nature of the three texts. Each, in its way, falls under the broad, elastic rubric of *adab* or, as the term is usually translated, Arabic belles-lettres. Do the three texts, as such, contribute to the writing of social history?

The argument that they do – that in this case they reveal a good deal of the lives and careers of the women performers – will be met with some skepticism. One colleague, on hearing the idea, smiled broadly and recalled having seen these same singers portrayed on Lebanese television.[12] The comment, as I took it, reflects a perhaps preponderate view that *adab* is best, and probably, for some number of scholars, only approached with literary or textual concerns in mind.[13] That is, the

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and (2) in *The Epistle on Singing-Girls of Jaḥiẓ*, ed. and transl. A.F.L. Beeston (Warminster, England: Aris & Phillips, 1980). References are to the latter version, which uses numbered paragraphs for the translation and Arabic text alike. The paragraph numbers are used in the citations below.

8 Ed. ʿAbd Allāh ʿAlī Mahannā and Samīr Jābir (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīya, 1412/1992), XVI: 5-20. On the editions of the *Aghānī*, and their relationship to those of Cairo and Bulaq, see Hilary Kilpatrick, *Making the Great Book of Songs* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 1-4, 280.

9 Kilpatrick's study (see the preceding note) is an essential introduction to these entries, and, indeed, to the *Aghānī* as a whole.

10 For an introduction to the term *qayna* (pl. *qiyān*), normally translated as "singing girl," see *EI*^{2}, s.v. Kayna (Pellat). An appreciation of the article on this author's part is in preparation.

11 "La negation d'Eros ou le *ʿišq* d'apres deux epitres d'al-Ǧāḥiẓ," *Studia Islamica* 72 (1990): 71-119.

12 An apparent reference to a series broadcast around 1990 on Syrian State Television based on the *Aghānī* and entitled, it appears, "al-Mughannūn." See ö, *Great Book of Songs*, vii.

13 A good introduction to *adab*, that is, as a body of written work, is S.A. Bonebakker, "*Adab* and the concept of *belles-lettres*," in *ʿAbbasid Belles-Lettres*, ed. Julia Ashtiany et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 16-30. On the relationship of *adab* and histori-

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three texts, like the works of *adab* in general, may speak volumes about literary, intellectual, and even cultural currents of the premodern Islamic Near East. They are not to be used, however, to discern sociopolitical developments in any consistent or even notable fashion in the manner of, in particular, the medieval chronicles (themselves subject, in some circles, to a "skeptical" reading of a similar sort).[14] The following comments are not intended to negate that view. To ignore the imaginative element at work in such texts would be not simply naïve but also destructive of much of what makes the reading of them pleasurable. Rather, these comments are intended to suggest ways in which the "documentary" value of the texts might be better appreciated. They are read here, in sum, as yielding much on the history of ʿAbbasid urban culture and its female denizens.

II

Again, the first text, the letter of feigned longing and the material that it supports, treats at least two of the themes that occur in the *Risāla*. It does so with a light and affectionate touch which might explain its inclusion in a generally respectful profile of al-Jāḥiẓ. A sharper aim and Yāqūt might not have thought to include it in his *tarjama*. The themes are, first, the all-consuming nature of passion and, second, the suitability of the rules that govern the refined male social sphere, one in which women either have no place or are permitted entry solely at the behest of their male hosts, patrons, and owners.

Its treatment of passion and its effect is twofold. The text first poses the tantalizing question of the relationship between the two men (Ibn al-Mudabbir and al-Jāḥiẓ). The question is resolved, of course, and in an abrupt, even mundane fashion with Ibn al-Mudabbir's description of his actual relationship with al-Jāḥiẓ. The resolution also acknowledges, in effect, that al-Jāḥiẓ was given to written gestures of this sort. The intent, it seems, is to caution against reading too much into the purported letter. The reader is drawn, nonetheless, to ask after al-Jāḥiẓ's sexual orientation (the source of Pellat's discomfort with the letter?). It seems unlikely that the matter could ever be settled. The fact that al-Jāḥiẓ produced at least three works in which he takes homosexuality to task only complicates the question.[15] To date, in any case, modern scholarship has not broached the topic.

The letter might also be poking fun at a topic that, in various Jāḥiẓian writings, takes on darker import.[16] Perhaps, then, it pokes fun at al-Jāḥiẓ himself. As

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cal writing, see Tarif Khalidi, *Arabic historical thought in the classical period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), esp. chap. 3.

14 See Tayeb El-Hibri, *Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

15 Pellat, "al-Jāḥiẓ," in *ʿAbbasid Belles-Lettres*, ed. Ashtiany et al., 92.

16 James Montgomery, "al-Jāḥiẓ," in *Arabic Literary Culture*, ed. Cooperson and Toorawa, 231-242, here 239.

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Cheikh-Moussa indicates, al-Jāḥiẓ made much of the destructive effect wrought upon persons and the moral fabric of society alike by passion and lust on the one hand and carnality and illicit sexual conduct on the other. In his *Risāla fī'l-ʿIshq wa'l-nisā'* ('The Epistle on Carnal Love and Women'), al-Jāḥiẓ juxtaposes *ḥubb* ('love') and *ʿishq*: the one constitutes "la measure, le juste milieu et la perfection," the other an obvious moral imbalance. Passion, inevitably it seems, threatens the individual's [read: male's] physical and emotional stability and, thus, his ability to interact appropriately with women and, by extension, society at large.[17] Al-Jāḥiẓ took this all very much to heart so, to those seeking a lighter touch, it was no doubt appropriate to have him fall off the wagon as it were, this all very much in the spirit of *adab*. Perhaps, given al-Jāḥiẓ's frequent turn to irony and the satirical thrust, he might well have taken the jest in stride.

But a further aspect of the text is that it is without women. The *akhbār* of classical Arabic writings, of which this is a minute example, reflect the demarcation in elite urban homes of the private and public spheres. The latter, of course, included reception areas in which the host received even the closest of companions. In al-Jāḥiẓ's day, as in subsequent periods, these were largely barred to all but a certain "class" of women, to wit, the *jawārī*. These elements of the text, the physical setting and the all-male company – in this case, no *jawārī* were invited – are unremarkable. But the *khabar* does not simply dispense with women. Rather, it renders them unnecessary.[18] The text does not just assume, in other words, a predominately if not strictly male social setting, but goes on to celebrate its ability to provide for the range of social, intellectual, and emotional needs of its cohort. These are not only fully met, but also expressed openly and freely, as well. Female company in this way becomes redundant. This too is likely to have met with al-Jāḥiẓ's approval, a point explored below. The letter is true, at any rate, in this sense.

III

The second text is the *Risāla* itself. It is only fully appreciated, as Cheikh-Moussa makes clear, when read alongside two others of al-Jāḥiẓ's essays. These are the *Mufākharāt al-jawārī wa'l-ghilmān* ('Epistle on the boasting contest of slave-girls and slave-boys')[19] and the epistle on carnal love, *Risāla fī'l ʿIshq*, mentioned briefly above. Only the *Risāla*, however, is treated here. A brief description of the essay is hardly straightforward. Relative to most of al-Jāḥiẓ's other surviving

17 Cheikh-Moussa, "La negation d'Eros," 73-74, and 85, note 39.

18 Ibid., 72-73, 103-104 and Frédérique Sicard, "L'Amour dans la *Risālat al-Qiyān* – Essai sur les Esclaves-Chanteuses – de Ǧāḥiẓ," *Arabica* 34/3 (1987): 333.

19 See Hārūn (ed.), *Rasā'il al-Jāḥiẓ*, II: 87-137. I have not yet seen the French translation by Maati Kabbal: *Éphèbes et Courtisanes*, with commentary by Malek Chebel (Paris: Editions Payot & Rivages, 1997).

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"minor" works, it has received a good degree of attention, notably in A. F. L. Beeston's annotated English translation, and, again, Cheikh-Moussa's masterful discussion.[20] The latter takes Beeston to task on points of analysis and translation. In part, as a result, Cheikh-Moussa offers a richer and often more convincing set of comments.[21] The following draws on the efforts of both scholars.

The dating of the *Risāla* cannot be fixed. There is, for example, no direct indication of the person to whom it was dedicated. This is a problem with many Jāḥiẓian texts, and pertains, as well, to the questions surrounding the part played by patronage in al-Jāḥiẓ's busy career.[22] Cheikh-Moussa suggests in passing that it might have been written to, or on behalf of, Aḥmad b. Abī Duʾād (d. 240/854). The Muʿtazilī *qāḍī*, it is generally agreed, became al-Jāḥiẓ's chief patron following the demise of the highly controversial *wazīr*, Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Malik al-Zayyāt (d. 233/847) with whom al-Jāḥiẓ had previously been associated.[23] The two men, that is, Ibn Abī Duʾād and Ibn al-Zayyāt, said to have been bitter rivals,[24] were both driven from office on different charges by al-Mutawakkil (r. 232/847-247/861).[25] If this rough dating of the *Risāla* is sound, it would indicate that al-Jāḥiẓ produced the essay late in his career.

As for its content and aim, the *Risāla* is both multivalent and polyphonic, and requires repeated reading. At an explicit level, it deals with singing girls and, in particular, their male handlers, that is, the urban aristocrats that employed and owned the singers; the "gate-crashers" (*ṭufayliyyūn*) and others that frequented the *majālis* of high society; and the slave-merchants who trafficked in the *jawārī*.[26] To the early ʿAbbasid urban historian, the intricate, variegated web of relations in which gender, cultural production, social mobility, patronage, and slavery overlap is of immense interest.[27] The essay also contains the elements of a discussion

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20 Pellat has published a French translation of the essay: "Les Esclaves chanteuses de Ǧāḥiẓ," *Arabica* 10/2 (1963): 121-147. It contains almost no commentary.

21 See for example, Cheikh-Moussa's comments in "La negation d'Eros," 88-89, on the proper definition of *muqayyin* ("those who traffic in *qiyān*").

22 Ibid., 83-84 (with another comment on Beeston). The impact of patronage on al-Jāḥiẓ's oeuvre – too little discussed at the al-Jāḥiẓ conference in Beirut – needs much work.

23 Ibid., 95, n. 82. On the relations between al-Jāḥiẓ and the two government figures, see Montgomery, "al-Jāḥiẓ," 237-238 and Pellat, "Ǧāḥiẓ à Bagdād," 55-59.

24 Pellat, "Ǧāḥiẓ à Bagdād," 55.

25 Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*, 2nd ed. (London: Pearson, 2004), 167-168.

26 A description of the text rendered effectively by Cheikh-Moussa, "La negation d'Eros".

27 It would be unfortunate were mention not made of a modern *ṭufaylī* who appeared at a dinner given for the participants in the al-Jāḥiẓ conference. Quizzed briefly (by a discerning native of Beirut), this following the dinner and after much whispering among the guests as to his identity and presence, he identified himself as "ʿUmar ʿItānī," a likely stage name. He appeared utterly comfortable, during the meal, despite the fact that no one appeared to know him, and the brief questioning that occurred thereafter outside the residence of our host. He stepped away into the Beirut night well-fed and, one suspects, grateful for the addition to his store of anecdotes.

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on moderation as a guiding principle of human conduct; reflections on Traditionalism and Arab history;[28] a discourse, supported by a series of *akhbār*, on the permissibility and dynamics of public interaction between men and women;[29] and, it seems, a coded attack on the Iranian nobility, a significant component of contemporary society (in Baghdad and Samarra alike).

This last aspect of the *Risāla* concerns the list of eleven names that appears in its introductory clauses. The apparent aim was to have the essay produced by these men: they were, as the logic of the text would have it, the authors of the *Risāla*. It is, in fact, but one of several devices used by al-Jāḥiẓ, its writer, to advance his arguments. As Cheikh-Moussa demonstrates, all eleven men were high-level members of the ʿAbbasid bureaucracy, members of the circle of Ibn al-Zayyāt, and, again, of Iranian descent.[30] They might be presumed, for these last two reasons, to have been affiliated with the Shuʿūbī movement. The suggestion is that al-Jāḥiẓ, in drawing attention to them in this fashion, was voicing his "anti-šuʿūbite" opposition.[31] It is a further indication of the essay's busy fabric and its value as a document.

The method al-Jāḥiẓ adopts in the essay is that of polyphony: he employs overlapping, interacting "voices" (read: perspectives) on the question of the *qiyān* and the passions to which they give rise among their male associates and handlers.[32] One such voice is that of the enlightened aristocrats (the eleven named individuals). It is they who press the argument that their ownership of, and variety of forms of intercourse with, the *jawārī* fall within accepted boundaries of morality, custom, and law. They do so with reference to a mixed bag of authority, namely, the Qurʾan, Ḥadīth, Law (*sharīʿa*), and social praxis (pre-Islamic Arab and early Islamic). The essay's genius lies in the Jāḥiẓian technique of having these voices cancel themselves out in the wielding of specious and contradictory evidence. The arguments advanced by the aristocrats in self-defense amount to nothing less than an indictment: their pleas of innocence, to any but the most gullible reader, are quickly understood as an admission of reprehensible behavior.[33] In absurd fashion, the aristocrats and their partisans turn, for example, to the Qurʾan in order to sponge clean the intent of their gaze upon the singing girl and their fondling of her.[34] The technique relies, of course, on the acuity of the reader: the essay was composed for a select audience, one in possession of the resources and standing, after all, to avail itself of elite singers.

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28 Cheikh-Moussa, "La negation d'Eros," 100, 102-103.

29 That is, specifically, on contemporary elite mores on which al-Jahiz comments with an appeal to an idealized Arab past (thus, in turn, it seems, showing his anti-Shuʿūbī hand again). See Cheikh-Moussa, "La negation d'Eros," 85-86, 105-111.

30 Ibid., 85-95 (perhaps his chief argument with Beeston).

31 Ibid., 86.

32 Ibid., 97-101.

33 Ibid., 101-102.

34 *Risāla* = *Epistle*, par. 36.

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At its heart, then, the *Risāla* is an intricate work of polemic directed against a sector of ʿAbbasid palace society – one substantial in number and influence – and its devotion to a deeply rooted social custom.[35] The concern in this paper lies with al-Jāḥiẓ's treatment of the singers themselves. If aimed ostensibly at these women, the *Risāla*, in fact, never addresses them directly. They occur always in the third person and as the subject of usually damning comments. Rather, the essay is directed to an all-male readership, as Cheikh-Moussa makes clear in his treatment of its principal topic, the form of passion inspired by the slave women (*ʿishq*). In this regard, it is of a piece with the text concerning Ibn al-Mudabbir and the letter of feigned yearning. More to the point is the shared aim of both texts, the isolation of women from the public sphere. Most telling, in this regard, is the attention devoted by al-Jāḥiẓ to the anecdotes wielded by the hapless nobles to counter criticism of their public mingling with the singers and other women of their ilk.[36]

The *Risāla*, in sum, is not about the singers, but rather the impact of their employment and social intercourse. In al-Jāḥiẓ's view, these amount to nothing less than *fitna*, to which he appears to attach a twofold sense.[37] The women singers are, first of all, a source of pronounced physical and emotional temptation. It was a matter, to al-Jāḥiẓ, of the "charms [of the singing girl, her] insidious and infernal seduction."[38] But, more critical to his scheme is the impact of the singer's conduct on the sociomoral order. It represents a gross transgression, a breakdown of the hierarchies of rank, gender, age, and knowledge on which a healthy society flourishes – it is, in sum, a source of pernicious subversion and collapse.[39] The point, to use Beeston's translation, could not be clearer: "Had the Devil no other snare with which to slay, no other banner to rally [men] to, and no other temptation[40] wherewith to seduce, than singing-girls, that would still be ample for him." Al-Jāḥiẓ clearly finds it pointless to address the singers on this score; it might be added that it would blunt his point to do so. They were not simply women, and thus by their nature lacking strength of purpose and agency,[41] but, as members of their professional caste, they were beyond redemption. Not so, apparently, their male consorts and handlers to whom al-Jāḥiẓ turns the most direct set of comments in the essay, those advocating moderation and circumspection.[42] Thus, the singers are not only without a voice, they in fact constitute a wholly dispensable feature of the social fabric. Their disfranchisement is the essay's unstated, but obvious intent.

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35 See Montgomery, "al-Jāḥiẓ," 239.
36 *Risāla* = *Epistle*, pars. 10-37.
37 Ibid., par. 51.
38 Cheikh-Moussa, "La negation d'Eros," 118.
39 Ibid., 115-118.
40 That is, *fitna*.
41 Cheikh-Moussa, "La negation d'Eros," 115.
42 *Risāla* = *Epistle*, pars. 33-35.

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To raise the question once more: how much further is an intricate and deliberate composition of this sort to be put to use in writing a social history of the *jawārī*? An argument for the essay's value rests, in good part, on three considerations.

Since there is little reason, first of all, to question the dating and attribution of the *Risāla*, the essay is to be joined to the sources of evidence regarding the participation of slave women in elite Arabic-speaking culture from Late Antiquity into the ʿAbbasid period. The indications on this general point are many and need no particular elaboration. Garth Fowden, in his recent book on Qusayr ʿAmra, adds new and useful evidence.[43] Regarding singers in the early ʿAbbasid period, in particular, and alongside a hefty body of other evidence, there is the episode concerning the caliph al-Muhtadī (d. 256/870). Shortly upon assuming the throne, the "good ʿAbbasid caliph" swept Samarra's palaces clean of all trappings of luxury and decadence, notably among these, singers and eunuchs.[44] The episode bears mention here as it may well have been driven by a worldview – Muʿtazilī in meaning, pietistic in impulse – that was shared by al-Jāḥiẓ (who died only a year or two earlier).[45]

In addition, al-Jāḥiẓ's views on women appear to have been widely held in contemporary society. Cheikh-Moussa argues persuasively against the idea that al-Jāḥiẓ was in any sense addressing the role and rights of women, that is, by questioning the restrictions placed upon them, of dress, social intercourse, and so on. His position on women, whether free Muslim or slave singer, cannot have been modern (a seemingly obvious point). In the essay cited earlier, *al-ʿIshq wa-'l-Nisi'*, he routinely employs language that takes the passivity of women for granted (a point made above regarding the *Risāla*).[46] There is, as well, little reason to query the conclusion that al-Jāḥiẓ was largely the product of his urban origins.[47] It seems fair, in sum, to relate his views on women's access to the public arena to the predominantly mercantile culture in which important strides were taken in the formation of the Islamic tradition, and Islamic law in particu-

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43 *Qusayr ʿAmra: Art and the Umayyad Elite in Late Antique Syria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 64-84.

44 Al-Ṣūlī, *Kitāb al-awrāq*, ed. and transl. V.I Beliaev and A.B. Khalidov (St. Petersburg: Tsentr Peterburgskoe Vostokovedenie, 1998), 383 (no. 425), and al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, ed. M.J. de Goeje et al. as *Annales* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1879-1901), III: 1736 (= *The History of al-Ṭabari*, vol. 36, *The Revolt of the Zanj*, transl. D. Waines (Albany: The State University of New York Press, 1992), 24).

45 On al-Jāḥiẓ and Muʿtazilism, see Montgomery, "al-Jāḥiẓ," *passim*.. On the anti-traditionalist and, perhaps, Muʿtazilī backdrop to al-Muhtadī's brief and violent caliphate, see Christopher Melchert, "Religious Policies of the Caliphs from al-Mutawakkil to al-Muqtadir, A.H. 232-295/A.D. 847-908," *Islamic Law and Society*, 3/3 (1996): 19-23.

46 Cheikh-Moussa, "La negation d'Eros," 78-82.

47 Ibid., 80.

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lar, in the 3rd/9th and 4th/10th centuries.[48] There is also little in the *Risāla* that suggests that al-Jāḥiẓ thought to question the practice and legitimacy of slavery. These were matters he and his peers took for granted.

Finally, in his assessment of the *qiyān*, al-Jāḥiẓ, in effect if not intent, lists the attributes of the singers.[49] For the concerns of this paper, the essay takes on its greatest value precisely in this regard. In Cheikh-Moussa's scheme, these passages reflect the "voice" of the slave dealer (*muqayyin*).[50] These attributes are to be summarized as follows: the appeal of the *qayna* reaches each of her male interlocutor's senses, including that of the heart, concurrently;[51] her skill in seduction and emotional entrapment is both subtle and well-honed;[52] she wields, with great finesse, skills in music, poetry, and rhetoric;[53] she is, at least potentially, as much a sexual partner as social companion;[54] her relationships number, as often as not, three or four at a given time;[55] she might well develop an impressive repertoire of songs, that is, alongside her skills of performance and rhetoric, through dint of practice and devotion;[56] she is (and here a shift in the discourse occurs) entirely subject to the norms, attitudes, and tastes of the elite, all-male society in which she is immersed;[57] and, finally, she is a product to be assessed, promoted, and exchanged as dictated by the demands of the (slave) market.[58]

The discursive shift, just noted, occurs in passing, but is nevertheless significant. Al-Jāḥiẓ, taking cover, as it were, behind one of his character types (the slave dealer), is at first happy to attribute agency to the singers (they take on many partners, they work hard to achieve distinction, and so on). Then, inserting the single phrase, he turns suddenly dismissive: the singers become little more than creatures of the (grim) social pressures that engulf them.[59] Again, quoting Beeston, "[how] indeed could a singing-girl be saved from falling a prey to temptation...? It is in the very place where she is brought up that she acquires unbri-

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48 A view expressed most recently by Jonathan Berkey, *The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the Near East, 600-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 120-123.

49 In Beeston's translation, the "list" of characteristics takes up eight (nos. 47-54) of the sixty paragraphs that make up the essay.

50 Cheikh-Moussa, "La negation d'Eros," 101.

51 *Risāla* = *Epistle*, par. 47.

52 Ibid., pars. 48-49.

53 Ibid., pars. 49-50.

54 Ibid., pars. 50 and 52.

55 Ibid., par. 51.

56 Ibid., par. 53.

57 Ibid., par. 52.

58 A topic addressed directly at various points in the *Risāla*. See *Epistle*, pars. 33, 38, 50, 55, and 59.

59 Cheikh-Moussa, "La negation d'Eros," 116, citing J.E. Bencheikh, "Les musiciens et la poésie: Les écoles d'Ishaq al-Mawsilī (m. 225 H.) et d'Ibrāhīm Ibn al-Mahdī (m. 224 H.)," *Arabica* 22/2 (1975): 149-150.

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dled desires and learns her modes of speech and behaviour."[60] Rendering them passive, unwitting, the gesture is entirely in keeping with al-Jāḥiẓ's attitude towards this class of women, and, it seems fair to argue, towards women who deign to step forth as a category. The gesture, however, fails to diminish the value of his description.

Generations of scholars, from near-contemporaries to those of the present-day, have applauded al-Jāḥiẓ's keen sense of observation. This is very much on display in the list of attributes. To treat his description, in other words, simply in list form is to do it insufficient justice. Consider, for example, his picture of the *qayna* as temptress at work: referring to the clandestine correspondence that she uses to entangle her prey, al-Jāḥiẓ speaks of the "sixth of a sheet of paper, [sealed] with saffron and [tied] with a piece of lutestring."[61] There are the makings here, in other words, of a careful portrait. To make the point clearer, as it is central to the present argument, consideration turns now to the material on the singer ʿArīb.

IV

Mention of ʿArīb al-Maʾmūniyya (d. 277/890-1), perhaps the leading female performer of her day, occurs throughout the *Aghānī*. Of chief interest are two "articles," one devoted to ʿArīb herself, the second to her relationship with Ibrāhīm b. al-Mudabbir (the recipient, of course, of al-Jāḥiẓ's unlikely letter).[62] Like Ibn al-Mudabbir, ʿArīb was a younger contemporary of al-Jāḥiẓ; he was roughly twenty years their senior. The *Aghānī*, as Kilpatrick shows, is organized on various levels.[63] The entire work is divided at the first level into three parts, each devoted to a particular set of songs. The second level is composed of individual "articles," each dealing with a different singer, musician, or poet; the third and final level comprises the *akhbār* and poetry of which the entire book is composed. The two sections on ʿArīb occur at the second level. Like the *Risāla*, these related texts reward repeated readings.

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60 *Risāla* = *Epistle*, par. 52 (34/21).

61 Ibid., par. 48 (32/18-19).

62 *Aghānī*, XXI: 61-103 (ʿArīb) and XXII: 160-188 (the relationship). Of other passages concerning ʿArīb, the most valuable include a pair of anecdotes, ibid., XIV: 210-211 and XVI: 17, that treat the rift between ʿArīb and Shāriyya (another prominent singer) and their respective circles of students and partisans. See Matthew S. Gordon, "The Place of Competition: The Careers of ʿArīb al-Maʾmūniya and ʿUlayya bint al-Mahdī, Sisters in Song," in *Occasional Papers*, ed. J. E. Montgomery, 61-81. The present discussion builds on idem, "ʿArīb al-Maʾmūniyah," in *Arabic Literary Culture*, ed. Cooperson and Toorawa, 85-90 (see 87-89) and "ʿArīb al-Maʾmūniya: A Third/Ninth Century ʿAbbasid Courtesan," in *Views from the Edge, Essays in Honor of Richard W. Bulliet*, ed. Neguin Yavari et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 86-100.

63 *Great Book of Songs*, viii.

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In treating this material alongside the *Risāla*, it is to be recalled that the *Aghānī*, a late fourth/tenth century work, relies heavily on information gathered from a number of sources that date precisely to al-Jāḥiẓ's lifetime. They include a book, no longer extant, by ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Muʿtazz (d. 296/908), the ʿAbbasid prince, poet, and caliph for a day.[64] Kilpatrick speaks of it as "a book of [ʿArīb's] *akhbār* compiled by Ibn al-Muʿtazz, which the singer Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Quraysh passed on to Abū al-Faraj."[65] Ibn al-Muʿtazz also mentions ʿArīb in his *Ṭabaqāt al-shuʿarāʾ*, where she is only one of five women to be so honored. There he identifies her as one of al-Maʾmūn's *jawārī*, and remarks that she was "among the most physically striking of women, of them the most polished in speech, by far the most eloquent, and of them the most accomplished performer."[66] The point, simply, is that much of the information in the *Aghānī* concerning ʿArīb is roughly contemporaneous with al-Jāḥiẓ's essay.

In style, content, and aim, the *Risāla* and the material of the *Aghānī* differ sharply. To consider the latter (multipart) text as polemical in the manner of the *Risāla* seems forced, that is, in any sense, that it carries on a tradition of polemic along the lines of al-Jāḥiẓ's essays. There is little to suggest, in any case, that Abū al-Faraj meant to fashion a defense of the singers, and ʿArīb in particular, *against* an attack of the sort contained in the *Risāla*, or that the material in question represents a direct response to al-Jāḥiẓ. It is clear, nonetheless, that Abū al-Faraj admired ʿArīb and her achievements as musician and composer. Again, relying on Ibn al-Muʿtazz and others of his sources, Abū al-Faraj begins the one "article", that concerning the singer and her career directly, with a strong endorsement of her abilities, and, in an extended passage, comes explicitly to her defense as regards the size and value of her repertoire.[67] He goes on to include, it is true, reports of conduct and language on ʿArīb's part that contemporary society no doubt found offensive.[68] One can well imagine al-Jāḥiẓ's indignation over ʿArīb's ripe exchanges with interlocuters. There is nothing to suggest that Abū al-Faraj sought to cast such material in a favorable light *per se*. Rather, it appears, he attempts to set out and, indeed, celebrate, the terms by which the one singer pursued her career. The contrast with the treatment accorded the singers in the *Risāla* could not be sharper. Al-Jāḥiẓ exhibits little patience with the professional activity of the *qiyān* as other than facets of a noxious presence. The *Risāla* pays little heed, in other words, to the singers' music, their approach to composition and its relationship to well-established norms, and their way with performance.

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64 See Wolfhart P. Heinrichs, "Ibn al-Muʿtazz" in *Arabic Literary Culture*, ed. Cooperson and Toorawa, 164-171 and *EI*^{2}, s.v. Ibn al-Muʿtazz (Lewin).

65 *Great Book of Songs*, 96-97 (also see p. 39). See, among many indications, *Aghānī*, XXI: 67.

66 Ibn al-Muʿtazz, *Ṭabaqāt al-shuʿarāʾ*, 2nd ed., ed. ʿAbd al-Sattār Aḥmad Faraj (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1968), 425-426.

67 *Aghānī*, XXI: 61-66. Kilpatrick, *Great Book of Songs*, 53-54, translates a long section of the passage.

68 See Gordon, "Place of Competition," 65, 78.

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Abū al-Faraj, on the other hand, begins and ends with detailed consideration of this sort.[69] As a historian of a particular sector of ʿAbbasid culture, he is clearly drawn to his topic and presents it with immense care.[70]

The two writers part ways not simply in the manner in which they approach the singers, but as well in their treatment of the setting in which the singers ply their craft. If al-Jāḥiẓ seeks to lay bare the dark character of palace culture, Abū al-Faraj treats it in terms of a certain ethos, that of a lay, secular culture in which the women singers played a cherished part. He does so with a certain sadness and anxiety; a pathos pervades his treatment. In an oft-cited and extended passage concerning Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī (d. 224/839) – the singer, musician and, briefly, counter-caliph to al-Maʾmūn[71] – Abu al-Faraj is gloomy on the state of contemporary music, seeing a near collapse in the standards established by past and, probably, highly idealized generations of performers.[72] The debates in which his sources took part cannot be weighed here in full. But, on the point that the *Aghānī* reflects and is sensitive to such tensions, the following is helpful:

> "A beautiful and cultivated slave-singer displays herself before the caliph and his guests in performance of an erotically suggestive song: this is the usual image of musical society at the court in Baghdad. Music of the ʿAbbasid period, however, was an activity that was both artistically and intellectually demanding, and in which princes and high officials participated not simply as patrons but also as composers, as performers, indeed as theoreticians. Music, as both art and science, was among the intellectual preoccupations of the court. Thus the musicians, who gave themselves over to an activity independent of the religious domain, developed the means altogether suitable to the transmission of knowledge. In sum, song as well as music theory were the manifestations of a 'lay' culture, but a culture that could only be cultivated at the court."[73]

It is in regard to the question posed here – concerning the reconstruction of the singers' lives and the milieu in which they pursued their careers – that the contrasting aims of the two writers take on particular weight. Simply put, one would hardly expect their respective texts to share ground of any sort insofar as the singers are concerned. But in their representation of the singers, and for all their differences, the texts converge in striking fashion. The *Risāla*, as seen earlier, contains a useful picture of the singers' public conduct from which a set of attributes has been extracted here. A careful reading of the *akhbār* concerning ʿArīb yields a similar list; and it bears repeating that, in formal terms, this is material of quite a

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69 Kilpatrick, *Great Book of Songs*, 48.

70 The point, in effect, of Kilpatrick's book.

71 See Kennedy, *Age of the Caliphates*, 150-155.

72 *Aghānī*, X: 85-87. See Kilpatrick, *Great Book of Songs*, 22 and 48. The passage is loosely transl. by M.C. Barbier de Meynard, "Ibrāhīm, fils de Mehdī, fragments historiques," *Journal Asiatique*, series 6, 13 (1869): 201-342 (see pp. 327-329).

73 "Princes, musiciens et musicologues à la cour Abbasside," in *Les intellectuals en Orient musulman, statut et function*, ed. Floréal Sanagustin (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1999): 1-15 (see p. 1). Also see Gordon, "Place of Competition," 81.

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different sort than that of the *Risāla*. Of ʿArīb, in other words, the following can be said: she attracted men with an appeal to the range of senses;[74] she was wily and seductive;[75] she was not only active sexually, but knew to wield sexuality to her advantage;[76] she practiced music, poetry, language, along with sundry other skills, with confidence and wit;[77] her relationships with men, including caliphs, officials, and soldiers, ran to three or four at a time;[78] she is reported to have had a large repertoire as well as extraordinary skills as a singer, composer, and player of the oud;[79] and, lastly, at several turns early in her career, she was passed from one owner to the next, only, finally, to be manumitted by al-Muʿtaṣim.[80] On two separate occasions, both involving the discovery of illicit affairs on her part, she is reported to have sharply objected to her standing and treatment as a slave.[81]

Most of these attributes reflect wider cultural patterns; each, as such, deserves close assessment with the question posed earlier in mind. Limited comments on three of the attributes will have to suffice. Consider, for example, the sexual activity of which al-Jāḥiẓ appears so wary and in which, apparently, ʿArīb so confidently and frequently took part. Is it possible to come to a detailed picture of sexual behavior and patterns in medieval Baghdadi society? What was the nature and extent of the sex trade there and in Samarra? For all social groups there is too little evidence on hand. For elite ʿAbbasid society, however, at least a tentative picture might be drawn and, in this case, the many references to *jawārī*, and the *qiyān* in particular, cannot be ignored.

On the question of the women as slaves, that is, coveted goods fully subject to the demands of the marketplace,[82] the texts read together yield fine evidence. Al-Jāḥiẓ offers pointed remarks on the slave merchants (*muqayyinūn*) and their un-

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74 Introductory comments of the one section regarding ʿArīb herself are easily read in this fashion. *Aghānī*, XXI: 61. Again, see Kilpatrick, *Great Book of Songs*, 53.

75 Her first owner, al-Marākibī, is described, when obliged to sell her, as soon falling dead, his spirit shattered, such was her hold upon him. *Aghānī*, XXI: 77. Al-Amīn is so smitten, upon hearing her for the first time, that he insists on acquiring the young singer (ibid., XXI: 75). Ibn al-Muʿtazz is the source for an intricate report on her flirting with members of al-Maʾmun's entourage (ibid., XXI: 80-82).

76 Ibid., 90-91. Several reports have her wield sexual discourse to humiliate younger men: *Aghānī*, XXI: 73-74, 83-84, and, possibly, 85 (on exotic foodstuffs).

77 Gordon, "Third/Ninth Century Courtesan," 91-92, 96.

78 Ibid., 94-96.

79 Ibid., 91-93.

80 *Aghānī*, XXI: 76-77.

81 Gordon, "Third/Ninth Century Courtesan," 87-89.

82 That is, the sector of the market catering to elite tastes. Thus, for example, the evidence indicates that commerce in "esclaves de luxe" took place in private homes, often without recourse to slave merchants. See the useful, albeit sweeping, comments of Yusuf Rağib, "Les marches aux esclaves en terre d'Islam" in *Mercati e Mercanti nell'alto medioevo: l'area Euroasiatica e l'area Mediterranea* (Spoleto: Presso la sede del Centro Italiano di Studi Sull'alto Medioevo, 1993), 721-763 (see p. 724).

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derhanded conduct.[83] The charge, for the most part, is that of engaging in barely disguised prostitution: "[so] what profession on the face of the earth is nobler than this? If those [critical] people could only realize the true distinction between permitted and prohibited, they would not charge the practitioners of this profession with pimping."[84] Comments of the sort sit well with wider evidence concerning the many abuses characteristic of slave dealing in the early Islamic period.[85] In a striking moment of convergence between the *Risāla* and the material on ʿArīb, al-Jāḥiẓ complains that one trick of the singing girl – in this case, one who seeks to be purchased by her lover and, thus, sold by her rightful owner – is to insist that she is a free woman.[86] As noted earlier, two reports in the *Aghānī* have ʿArīb making precisely that claim. Al-Jāḥiẓ uses the charge to illustrate the perfidy of the singing girl, that is, as further indication of their threat to the social order (they would question the "natural" relations of owner and owned). Sympathetic as he appears to be to the women performers, Abū al-Faraj likely includes the reports to illustrate the trials forced upon them; it becomes a matter of the perfidy of ʿArīb's male handlers and, perhaps, an illustration of her way with the verbal gesture.

The point, however, is that such material is likely an indication of a highly fluid situation insofar as slavery, in general, and the treatment of coveted female slaves, in particular, were concerned. Given that the early ʿAbbasid period was one in which the law on slavery, as on many other topics, was very much in flux, then are such reports not best understood as an echo of debate, polemic, uncertainty among circles of the third/ninth and fourth/tenth century *fuqahāʾ*, coming to terms as they were with the extent and details of the law? Much remains to be understood, however, of the absence and outright disregard of legal constraints as well. The male players in the dramas of both texts, after all, are figures of enormous wealth and influence; ʿArīb's companions, on any given night, included caliphs and their immediate male kin. They were, in sum, positioned simply to flaunt the law when it suited them. A second and particularly difficult text – part of the "article" in the *Aghānī* concerning Shāriyya, ʿArīb's chief rival and perhaps Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī's chief protégé – offers yet further evidence of this sort.[87] Al-Jāḥiẓ directs his essay at given circles of nobles, making no mention of the caliphal house, but, in effect, his lament is that persons wielding

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83 *Risāla* = *Epistle*, pars. 55-59, and see Cheikh-Moussa, "La negation d'Eros," 117-118. Again, al-Jāḥiẓ uses a deceptive discourse of praise.

84 *Risāla* = *Epistle*, par. 59.

85 Rağib's study is particularly valuable in this regard. See ibid., 731-734, for example.

86 *Risāla* = *Epistle*, par. 50.

87 *Aghānī*, XVI: 5-20. The "article" is largely concerned with Shāriyya's origins, her standing as a slave, and her rather tangled relationship with Ibn al-Mahdī. As in ʿArīb's case, Shāriyya is depicted, in large part, as subject to the demands made upon her by Ibn al-Mahdī, on the one hand, her mother (?), on the other.

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"royal" influence should comport themselves with such disregard for law and society's norms alike.

There is, as well, the question of the simultaneous relationships of the singers and other women performers. Neither of the two writers considers these relationships in terms of patronage, social mobility, and the acquisition of prestige, security and wealth; these are questions posed by the modern historian. For al-Jāḥiẓ, the pursuit of simultaneous relationships was but the stuff of *fitna*; he evinces no interest in pursuing the matter further. Abū al-Faraj, for his part, carefully records the shaping and vicissitudes of close relationships – that between ʿArīb and Ibn al-Mudabbir is a case in point – as if to acknowledge, in this case, the social achievements of the *qiyān*. There is nothing, of course, that is surprising about this aspect of the careers of the women performers: as slaves, from an early age, they were at the disposal of their male handlers, and the profession for which they were trained required endless hours of interaction with male counterparts. The dynamics of their careers, however, pose any number of further questions. There is, for example, the matter of their success: for every one of the women to whom Abū al-Faraj devotes a section of the *Aghānī*, there was surely some multiple of their peers – purchased, trained, and employed as they were – who, one must assume, achieved a good deal less. Of them, the sources are mostly silent. The question is one of social mobility (on the part of female slaves no less). Their success was built in good part, no doubt, on talent and luck, but certainly also on each woman's ability to make the most of her web of contacts.

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"It Stinks in Basra!" Al-Jāḥiẓ on Odors

Maher Jarrar and Nisrine Jaafar (American University of Beirut)

> "We are all constantly emitting and perceiving odors, smelling and being smelled; and these odors play important roles in virtually every area of social interaction."[1]

If odors permeate our lives to such an extent, and do so by performing the function of social catalysts, why is it then that they are too rarely researched? Why are they granted little significance and thus remain confined to the realm of the "lower senses" – also, formerly described as the "animal senses" in Aristotle's established hierarchy of the sensorium?[2] A close examination of the Arabic-Islamic tradition raises a major issue with the position allotted to smell within the hierarchy of senses.

In the *Epistle on singing-girls*, al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/868) asserts that the presence of these singers causes "hearing and sight [to] race each other to see which of the two can transmit its message about [the singing girl] to the heart before the other, and they arrive simultaneously at the heart's core and pour out what they have observed."[3] In fact, Helmut Ritter contends[4] that while "counting the five senses in Arabic [literature], hearing precedes sight. [Similarly], when God's attributes are mentioned, it is more usual to say *al-samīʿ al-basīr*, and not vice versa."

Ritter then refers to the Old Testament, where hearing ranks first again among the senses. Such an assertion might eventually require further investigation; yet it is worth noting within the same framework that in the Qurʾan, God refers solely to his own attributes as "*al-samīʿ al-basīr*" rather than alluding to any human ones.

A tradition attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad and widely circulated as a proverb, situates sight at a higher rank than orality when by comparing their respective authenticity as potential sources of knowledge: "*laysa ʾl-khabaru ka ʾl-ʿayān*."[5]

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1 Anthony Synnott, *The Body Social: Symbolism, Self and Society* (London: Routledge, 1993), 182.

2 Ibid., 185.

3 Translation and commentary by A.F.L. Beeston (Warminster, Wilts.: Aris & Phillips, 1980), 31.

4 Hellmut Ritter, *Das Meer der Seele. Mensch, Welt und Gott in den Geschichten des Farīduddīn ʿAttār* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978), 439-440. We would like to thank Professor Josef van Ess for this valuable hint.

5 Al-Mīdānī, *Majmaʿ al-amthāl* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1988), II: 217, no. 3270; al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Mustaqsā fī amthāl al-ʿArab* (Hyderabad: Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif al-ʿUthmāniyya,

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This said, an inquiry into the process of ranking senses and their perceptions in Arabo-Persian Islamic culture is a complex endeavor that transcends this paper's scope. It will suffice here to highlight some examples from different literary genres to reveal the difficulty of such an attempt and to subsequently introduce the theme of odors in al-Jāḥiẓ's *opus*.

The Brethren of Purity (last quarter of the third/ninth-tenth century),[6] for instance, distinguish between the sensory tools/organs (the eye, ear, tongue, nose and hands) and the sensory faculties, which possess a psychological nature (*rūḥānī*, *nafsānī*)[7] – a concept that Muslim philosophers must have derived from the Greek and Syriac commentators[8] on Aristotle's *De Anima* (Book II, chapters 1 & 2).[9] The established distinction between sensory tools and sensory faculties – and the intimate relationship between them – was actually already known to early theologians. It was also discussed, among others, by both al-Naẓẓām and his disciple al-Jāḥiẓ.[10] Indeed, while discussing the processes of perception respectively fulfilled by different faculties, the *Rasā'il* of *The Brethren* first address touch, since its perception is acquired through the body. The faculty of sight, on the other hand, is the last to be approached, given the spirituality (*rūḥānī*) of its nature. This incidental observation may serve to confirm the fact that sight ranks highest through heading the hierarchy of the sensorium.

Ibn Sīnā adopts a similar demarcation;[11] however, he suggests that "the efficacy (*manfaʿa*) of the hearing faculty among human beings surpasses those of taste, smell and sight."[12]

1960), II: 303 ; and see the comments of al-Bīrūnī on this tradition in *Taḥqīq mā lil-Hind min maqūla* (Hyderabad: Dā'irat al-Maʿārif al-ʿUthmāniyya, 1957), 1-3. Edward Sachau translates this proverb as "hearsay does not equal eyewitness," *Alberuni's India* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1914), I: 3.

6 Ian R. Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists: An Introduction to the Thought of the Brethren of Purity* (London, 1982).

7 *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Safā'* (Beirut: Dār Sādir, 1956), II: 401-403.

8 H.J. Blumenthal, *Aristotle and Neoplatonism in Late Antiquity: Interpretations of De Anima* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1996), 56.

9 Aristotle, *De Anima* in *Focus*, ed. Michael Durrant (London / New York: Routledge, 1993), 21-26.

10 Cf. al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn wa 'khtilāf al-musallīn*, ed. Hellmut Ritter (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1963), 340-341; Josef van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra. Eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam* (Berlin / New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1992), III: 353.

11 Deborah L. Black studies the reception of Aristotle's *De Anima* in the Moslem philosophic tradition, "Psychology: soul and intellect," in *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, ed. Peter Adamson and Richard C. Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 308-326. Dimitri Gutas states that Ibn Sīnā was using the translation of Isḥāq b. Ḥunayn (cf. as well, F.E. Peters, *Aristotle and the Arabs: the Aristotelian Tradition*. New York / London: New York University Press / University of London Press, 1968, 62, 119). Gutas argues that Ibn Sīnā must have used an Arabic translation of Philoponus's commentary on *De Anima*; D. Gutas, "Philoponus and Avicenna on the Spirituality of the Intellect: A

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For his part, al-Ghazālī perceives sight as "the most powerful sense," but not necessarily the uppermost in the overall hierarchy.[13] Having lost faith in sensory perception, al-Ghaẓālī elects to undertake an inward search for an alternative sort of 'visual' perception: a light cast by God into the mystics' hearts.[14] Conversely, in Ṣūfī literature, hearing and sight are depicted as merging together throughout the mystical *samāᶜ* sessions to ensure a state of trance.[15]

It might also prove significant in this regard to highlight the superiority of hearing over sight in the frame-story of *Alf layla wa layla*. In the latter context, as Fedwa Malti-Douglas argues, "male knowledge before Shahrazād's arrival on the scene was aggressively visual. Shahrayār's act is, in effect, a voyeuristic one." It is Shahrayār's desire for "illicit sight" that sets in motion drastic narrative events. "Shahrazād's path is clearly the opposite. She narrates a text. Hers is the oral approach, in which the male becomes the auditor and passive partner. Sight and hearing are cast in the frame of *The Nights* as alternative ways of acquiring knowledge." Malti-Douglas addresses the debate which has been "well entrenched in medieval Islamic mentalities: that of the relative value of the senses, specifically the oral versus the visual."[16]

Unlike the visionary and acoustic acuity inherent to the aforementioned currents of thought as well as to other Ṣūfī traditions, Farīd al-Dīn ᶜAṭṭār's mystical theory is centrally constructed around the sense of smell (ca. 627/1229). According to ᶜAṭṭār, humans acknowledge their need for a Godly sovereign; hence, the deep yearning for *Him* within their souls. Yet, they do not find *Him* through reflection, but in the relationship of the slave to his master. To further illustrate this relationship, ᶜAṭṭār (whose name means *the perfumer*) builds on the Qurʾanic verse (12:94), concerning Jacob's recognition of his lost son Joseph's presence {And when the caravan set out, their father said, "I find Joseph's scent, though you may deny it}. ᶜAṭṭār explains that "he who does not have a lost Joseph, has no faith. You have a Joseph inhabiting the Egypt of your soul. There is always a breeze of fragrance that he sends to you," in the same manner that the morning breeze brings Joseph's scent to his blind father.[17]

Case of Christian-Muslim Argument," in *Greek Philosophy in Arabic Translation* (Aldershot, GB / Burlington, USA: Ashgate Variorum, 2000), XI: 122-129.

12 *Kitāb fī 'l-nafs ᶜalā sunnat al-ikhtiār wa muqtadā tarīqat al-mantiqiyyīn*, ed. Edward Van Dyck (Cairo: Matbaᶜat al-Maᶜārif, 1325), 37.

13 *Deliverance from Error*, in W. Montgomery Watt, *The Faith and Practice of al-Ghazālī* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1951), 23.

14 Ibid., 26.

15 Navid Kermani, *Gott ist Schön: Das ästhetische Erleben des Koran* (München: C.H. Beck Verlag, 2000), 373.

16 *Woman's Body, Woman's Word: Gender and Discourse in Arabo-Islamic Writing* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1992), 23-24.

17 Ritter, *Das Meer*, 336; and see p. 276, below.

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In his *Mathnawī*, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Rūmī (d. 672/1273) constructs manifold variations on this theme.[18] Anne-Marie Schimmel notes that, "just as the relation between Prophet Moḥammad and Uways al-Qarni[19] was established by the 'breath of the Merciful', the scented breeze which came from Yemen and informed Moḥammad about his friend's saintliness (although he had never seen him), so the very scent of Shamsoddin's love inspired Rumi to write."[20]

If ʿAṭṭār and Rūmī somewhat restore the viability of smell, their endeavor only skims the surface of the realm of "Heavenly Scents" and "Scents of Sanctity." It is thus our task to relocate the search for this seemingly undervalued sense by examining the various smells inhabiting Basra – al-Jāḥiẓ's arena. Undoubtedly, al-Jāḥiẓ possessed a sharp nose, sensitive to the agglomeration of diffused stimuli within his social milieu. In fact, cities enjoy distinctive and ever-changing smells that Classen, Howes and Synnott underline in *Aroma*, by arguing that "cities and towns of the ancient world did indeed offer a rich mélange of olfactory and other sensations."[21] The authors provide literary examples of smells in Thebes, Rome, and other medieval and premodern European cities:[22]

> "Walking through the streets of Nero's Rome in the first century AD, one would encounter the stench of refuse rotting by the wayside, the piercing fragrance of burning myrrh emanating from temples, the heavy aroma of food being cooked by street vendors, the sweet, seductive scents of flowering gardens, the malodor of rotting fish at a fish-stand, the sharp smell of urine from a public latrine and perhaps incense trail of a passing procession honoring a god or a hero."[23]

Similarly, Patrick Süskind's novel *Perfume* depicts eighteenth century Paris as a city in which "streets stank of manure, the courtyards of urine, the stairwells stank of moldering wood and rat droppings, the kitchens of spoiled cabbage and mutton fat. People stank of sweat and unwashed clothes; from their mouths came the stench of rotting teeth, from their bellies that of onion, and from their bodies, if they were no longer young, came the stench of rancid cheese and sour milk and tumorous disease."[24] In his novel, Süskind validates many of our most cherished olfactory and stereotypical associations with moral and mental degeneracy.[25]

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18 *The Triumphal Sun: A Study of the Works of Jalāloddin Rumi* (London / the Hague: East-West Publications, 1980), 44, 178, 190, 198.

19 The legendary Uways is considered by the Ṣūfi's as a forefather, see: J. Baldick, *E.I.²*, X (2000), 958.

20 Ibid., 44.

21 Constance Classen, David Howes, Anthony Synnott, *Aroma: The Cultural History of Smell* (London / New York: Routledge, 1994), 17.

22 Ibid., 17-18, 54-58.

23 Ibid., 17.

24 *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer*, tr. John E. Woods (London: Penguin Books, 1986), 3.

25 Classen et al., *Aroma*, 4.

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If such was the case for first-century Rome and eighteenth-century Paris, how could it have smelled in ninth-century Basra – notwithstanding the fact that the latter was a "complète metropolis", as Charles Pellat describes it,[26] a major harbor city and link to the trade route with the Indian Ocean and China.[27]

At its onset, this paper took on the ambitious task of closely examining "smell" in al-Jāḥiẓ's *Kitāb al-ḥayawān*, in an attempt to detect how the author handles it as a theme and how he finally situates olfaction through its relationship to the "body social."[28] Nevertheless, the process of tracking al-Jāḥiẓ's itemization of smells and their emitters yielded a striking conclusion. That is, while al-Jāḥiẓ resorts to mentioning the much undervalued sense of smell under various rubrics, he only does so in a scattered and sporadic fashion throughout his voluminous *Kitāb al-ḥayawān*; hence, the necessity of including al-Jāḥiẓ's *Rasā'il* within the same research scope.[29] Nonetheless, an identical pattern was identified in the *Rasā'il*, whereby al-Jāḥiẓ refrained here too from fully developing his material on the overall olfactory mechanism and so, failed to furnish our research with detailed information. Having said this, sixty-eight quotations were collected for the purpose of this paper, in all of which al-Jāḥiẓ generally addresses odors. These quotations range in length from a single sentence, briefly introduced in the body of the text, to a full-fledged descriptive paragraph about a given smell.

By necessity, our paper needed to weigh various alternatives before it finally opted to sketch al-Jāḥiẓ's multiple categorizations of smell, as a token of his curiosity and extensive knowledge of humans and things alike. In addition, a major concern of this paper consists in unraveling the relationship between al-Jāḥiẓ's *iʿtizāl*[30] and the notion of *kumūn*, or Theory of Latency, embraced by al-Naẓẓām.

Due to the scarcity of material and the ensuing shortage in determining al-Jāḥiẓ's reflection on the functionality of smell, our project is probably unable to establish a satisfactory understanding of the link between olfaction at his time, and intimacy, presentation of self, aesthetics, spirituality, power, culture or sexuality. Yet, the present research still aspires to establish some suggestive grounds for further research on the subject. After all, it is intriguing that even an author like Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusī (d. 456/1063), who 'wrote love out' in his *Ṭawq al-ḥamāma*

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26 Ch. Pellat, "al-Basra," in *E.I.²*, I (1971), 1086.

27 Ch. Pellat, *al-Jāḥiẓ fī 'l-Baṣra wa Baghdād wa Sāmarrā'*, tr. Ibrāhīm al-Kīlānī (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1958), 52-53, 318-321; George Fadlo Hourani, *Arab seafaring in the Indian Ocean in Ancient and Early Medieval Times* (Princeton, NJ : Princeton University Press, 1951), 64-70; Sālih Ahmad al-ʿAlī, *Khiṭaṭ al-Baṣra wa mantiqatihā* (Baghdad: al-Majmaʿ al-ʿIlmī al-ʿIrāqī, 1986), 34-36, 250-252.

28 A. Synnott, *The Body Social*, 185.

29 *Rasā'il al-Jāḥiẓ: al-Fuṣūl al-mukhtāra min kutub al-Jāḥiẓ*, ikhtiyār al-Imām ʿUbayd Allāh bin Ḥassān, 4 vols., ed. Muḥammad Bāsil ʿUyūn al-Sūd (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2000).

30 Van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, IV: 97-118.

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(*The Dove's Neck-Ring*),[31] failed to devote a single section to smell and its potency in animating love and sexuality, whereas older Arabic poetry was already filled with explicit allusions to the captivating charm of odors,[32] and is worthy of comprehensive and theoretical treatment.

While al-Jāḥiẓ provides ample material which transcends the confines of his personal spatial-temporal framework, the focus of the present paper shall not deviate from that narrower framework. Al-Jāḥiẓ outlines some interesting findings about smells in the city of Basra and its vicinity during his own time. It is noteworthy here that both Greeks and Romans believed "that hot, dry lands, such as Arabia should be the source of fine aromatics, and that the cold, wet sea should be a source of foul odours."[33]

Basra as a whole is in fact not dealt with; rather, the different locales that actually make up the city have their individual smells on display in *Kitāb al-ḥayawān*, by way of constructing the general ambiance that al-Jāḥiẓ is trying to build. For instance, a river, chosen as a haven by al-Ziyādī, is reported to be stinking on hot, humid days in Basra (3:29-30); so too is the rotten or foul air mounting from a deep well which instantly overwhelms those who descend into it (2:311-12).

Even though the Basrans are disparaged by their fellow Baghdādīs for their use of animal dung in fertilizing gardens and palm orchards, subsequently making Basra smell like animal dung,[34] al-Jāḥiẓ reminds the Baghdādīs of their own investment in human refuse as dung.[35] Only al-Madina, the Prophet's arena, possesses an indisputably beautiful odor, "naturally" springing from the divine grace bestowed upon both its vicinity and people (3:142-3). The aura around Madīna culminates in an "Odor of Sanctity", which can be smelled in the air as well as in the soil, a remarkable symbolism that the author refrains from exploring further, but suggests as a criterion for the establishment of interurban olfactory comparisons.[36] For example, Antioch could not constitute a sanctuary for al-Rashīd due to the starkness of its fetid smells as opposed to Madīna's entrancing scents. Similar pejorative attributes are allegedly observed in the entire Iraqi area, to be justified by the fact that 'God alone can possibly grant' (3:143-4). While comparing the most awful smell to the most pleasant, al-Jāḥiẓ contrasts "a toilet pitch daubed with tar, in which castrates urinate" to the pleasant smell of al-Madina that can solely be surpassed by that of paradise.[37]

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31 Only a sporadic mention is made of odors, *Rasā'il Ibn Ḥazm*, ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās (Beirut: al-Muʾassasa al-ʿArabiyya lil-Dirāsāt wa 'l-Nashr, 198), I: 138, 214; compare with al-Jāḥiẓ in his *Epistle on singing-girls*, 26, 32.

32 See ʿAlī Shalaq, *al-Shamm fī 'l-shiʿr al-ʿArabī* (Beirut: Dār al-Andalus, 1983).

33 Ibid., 48-49.

34 Pellat, *al-Jāḥiẓ fī 'l-Baṣra*, 46; ʿAlī, *Khiṭaṭ al-Baṣra*, 32.

35 "Al-Awṭān wa 'l-buldān," in *Rasā'il*, IV: 107.

36 Concerning the "Odor of Sanctity," cf. Classen et al., *Aroma*, 52-54.

37 *Kitāb al-ḥayawān*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn, 7 vols. (Cairo: al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1938-1945), I: 246-247; see as well his, "al-Awṭān wa 'l-buldān," in *Rasā'il*, IV:99-97.

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Al-Jāḥiẓ does not only speak of cities; he also incorporates humans and animals in his portrayals. According to him, life begins with the nose. At a given point inside the mother's womb, a fetus requests to be released by stuffing its nose into the exit hole to seek fresh air, and hence life (4:403-4). Despite this commonly shared feature among fetuses, individuals develop their faculties of olfaction differently. In addition, they acquire distinct smells that keep shifting with the stages of their bodily development,[38] before finally stamping their respective personal identities. In his epistle, *Mufākharat al-jawārī wa l-ghilmān*, al-Jāḥiẓ notes the pleasant scent of girls, which he prefers to the smell of boys.[39] The imaginary opponent, who prefers boys, replies that married men acquire a foul odor from the long company of their wives.[40] It is worth noting that an individual's identity seems to be fused in a larger communal identity based on gender, race, color and sometimes ethnicity. This said, al-Jāḥiẓ portrays in general terms the reeking perspiration common to all black men that emits an appalling stale rancid smell, thus resembling that of a male goat (5:466), – a depiction already used by Greek and Roman writers to portray smelly persons.[41] The authors of *Aroma* argue that such ethnic prejudices were "normally invoked to justify avoidance behavior." They actually assert that "no matter how imaginary the racial odor ascribed to blacks by whites might have been, it nonetheless had a profound effect both on how blacks were perceived by others and on how they perceived themselves."[42] Yet, in spite of the reeking perspiration which he attributes to the black race, al-Jāḥiẓ notes their particularly pleasant breath.[43]

By the same token, al-Jāḥiẓ disparages the castrated populace for the grimy nature of certain smells they produce, either during ejaculation (1:159, 166-7) or while farting (1:106).

More restrained sections of the book are devoted to illustrating the potentially beautiful scents that can be credited to human beings. Even so, al-Jāḥiẓ's findings indicate that the voluptuous nature of these scents is not engendered by the human body itself, but rather instilled through gratifying agents like the traditionally cherished *ʿanbar* or musk (5:309; 3:32-33).

While jumping from one limb to the other, al-Jāḥiẓ almost addresses every bodily function, even when directly or traditionally linked to the notions of 'shame' and 'scandal'. For instance, one particular anecdote he reports revolves

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38 Al-Jāḥiẓ observes that one of puberty's signs for boys is the change in their armpits odor (*Ḥayawān*, II: 32). An observation already made by the first century Roman epigrammatist, Martial, Classen et al., *Aroma*, 31.

39 *Rasāʾil*, II: 77, 82, 97.

40 Ibid., 2:81.

41 Classen et al., *Aroma*, 30, 31, 34, 36.

42 Ibid., 167.

43 *Ḥayawān*, II: 154, 176, V: 238; idem., "Fakhr al-sūdān ʿalā 'l-bīdān," in *Rasāʾil*, I: 155; idem., *The Book of the Glory of the Black Race*, transl. Vincent J. Cornell (Los Angeles, CA: Preston Publishing Company, 1981), 55.

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around the horrendous fart of a preacher in a mosque (3:224-225); another remarkable story tells of an individual who undertakes a certain diet and a purification ritual in order to distil his bodily odors and hence become able to invite the "*jinn*" or spirits to inhabit his body (6:199). On a filthier note – and these are quite numerous – al-Jāḥiẓ draws a graphic picture of locations where man fulfills his smelly yet indispensable duty of defecation (1:333, 2:112, 3: 13-15, 332, 348).

From sweating (1:166-170, 239-242), to defecation, to menstruation (2:140),[44] and even ejaculation (1:106, 159), the author accounts, albeit sporadically, for a range of human smells that he often compares with those of animals; hence, the resemblance he establishes between the enchanting breath of dogs and that of drooling individuals – specifically black people in this context, whose 'luscious nature' and pleasant breath are vividly evoked (2/154). In order to depict the enchanting breath of dogs, al-Jāḥiẓ relies on a 'trustworthy' authority; namely, a night watchman who indulges in bestializing bitches.[45] In fact, al-Jāḥiẓ contends that men who engage in bestial sexual acts develop a vigorous passion that animates them while aging (1:370-372).

It is intriguing how, throughout his profuse descriptions of distinct animal smells, al-Jāḥiẓ manages, again periodically, to highlight their respective connection and/or relevance to the human realm. For instance, he emphasizes the importance of pigeon dung in baking and planting and in curing illnesses (3:253). On the other hand, al-Jāḥiẓ concludes that the atrocious vomit of a certain fish inflicts a considerable amount of pain on sea travelers; so too the vomit, deliberately thrown up, by a disenchanted camel that wishes to enrage its rider (3:157).

Such observations are nevertheless absent when it comes to the interchange between human beings. In other words, the author does not resort to a direct or detailed explanation of the way in which the relevant individuals' smells shape their social interactions and impinge on their affiliations or daily contacts with others. When referring to al-Sindī's strong sense of smell that gives him knowledge of things hidden to the eye, al-Jāḥiẓ appeals to the Qur'anic story of Jacob and his son Joseph (Qur'an, 12:94), already noted above. Al-Jāḥiẓ seems to advance a conclusive though theoretical explanation for the scarcity of establishing human interaction through olfaction, whenever physical distance tears individuals apart, even if parents and children happen to be the subjects in question. Therefore, while some 'modern' visions of human relationships consider smell to

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44 "The smell of a woman in menstruation spoils the yoghurt as some of the physicians among the theologians assert."
For the olfactory stimuli of menstrual odors, cf., Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, transl. James Starchey with a biographical introduction by Peter Gay (New York / London: W.W. Norton & Company), 54. Menstrual odors are considered polluting in Islam and in many cultures around the world, cf. Classen et al., *Aroma*, 135-138; *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York / London: MacMillan Publishing Company & Collier MacMillan, 1987), XVI: 326 (index).

45 Al-Jāḥiẓ repeatedly relies in his accounts on ordinary, lower-class informants.

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be a decisive and intrinsic element of intimacy, naturally embedded in one's psychological make-up, al-Jāḥiẓ opts for a different perspective. He justifies his standpoint by simply relating Jacob's aptitude to detect his son's scent to divine grace (4:426), thus conforming to the Qur'anic exegesis of the text.[46] The late Ṣūfi author, quoted earlier, Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār, elaborates on the same notion and labels it the "Odor of Acquaintance" *(der Geruch der Bekanntschaft)*;" i.e., an inner and potentially reachable intimacy triggered by the fragrance of the lost "Joseph" within our souls.[47]

On another level of perception, the Bororo of Brazil and the Desanan of Ethiopia believe that "bodily odors, emanating as they do from the interior of a person, give the impression of conveying the person's essence, or essential being. Odors also tend to have a forceful physical and emotional impact. Thus, smelling an article of clothing belonging to a person will give a much stronger impression of that person's presence than seeing the piece of clothing would."[48]

Most delineations of human-generated smells fall under a major rubric, that of cleanliness, – a notion directly derived from the Qur'an and Islamic religious teachings. Apart from this moralistic aspect, the functionality of smell is strictly limited in al-Jāḥiẓ's work. Consequently, the world of animal olfaction appears to be wider and even more vividly described, seeing that twenty-six animals from all species are thoroughly analysed; some of course, more thoroughly than others.[49] This is not to imply however, that al-Jāḥiẓ is more concerned with odors emanating from animals than with the ones that humans, mainly in Basra and its vicinity, are known to generate. On the contrary, if al-Jāḥiẓ had a nose for anything peculiar, it would primarily be for the "stinky" in all respects: from defective house-toilets to stanching household water-refuses, from the nasty smell of human and animal "unwasted" defecation polluting the city's air to appalling sweat that only spares elephants (elephants' sweat is depicted as an aromatic secretion, *Ḥayawān* VII: 229). Indeed, with regard to sweat, al-Jāḥiẓ delicately alludes to an early "deodorant" of his time. He advises the person with stinky sweat to shave his/her armpits and use litharge lead oxide (*martak*) to mask the unpleasant body odor, or else avoid public places altogether. The same is recommended for one whose feet emit an abhorrent odor.[50]

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46 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 30 vols. (Cairo: Būlāq, 1330), XIII: 38-39.

47 Ritter, *Das Meer*, 510-511. One might compare ʿAṭṭār's "Odor of Acquaintance" with the "Odor of Sanctity," attributed to saints in the early Christian tradition (fn. 36, above).

48 Classen et al., *Aroma*, 116.

49 See examples on dogs, *Ḥayawān* I: 222, 225-226, 370, II: 131, 176; cats, V: 337; musk mouse, V: 301, VII: 210; foxes, VI: 312; male goats, I: 229, V: 460; skunks, V: 447, VI: 48, 371, 468; hyrax, VI: 369; hedgehogs, VI: 461; hoopoe, I: 238, III: 510; other birds, II: 241, 264, 318, VI: 373; scorpions, V: 356; snakes, IV: 170, 191, V: 257.

50 e.g. verses by Kuthayyir ʿAzza on the abhorring smelly shoes of one of the notables, *Ḥayawān* I: 266

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Despite a cluster of sporadic advice, al-Jāḥiẓ does not offer his reader a coherent typology of smells.

The obvious question that comes to mind when approaching smell in the age of al-Jāḥiẓ revolves around the disciplinary perspective to be used in approaching such a delicate topic. From a variety of medical, theological and philosophical interpretations, the present paper chooses to deal with smell from a Muʿtazilite perspective.

In an effort to maintain God's supremacy over natural processes, al-Naẓẓām argues that "substances have their potentialities present but concealed within them (*kāmina*)."[51] Al-Naẓẓām advocates the theory of *kumūn* (latency), which stipulates that "all things were created simultaneously; they contained in themselves all the variety of things that were ever to come into existence in the future. Since all things are "hidden" in things created at the world's inception, the emergence of any single thing from its hiding place is deemed an "appearance" rather than the outcome of an act of creation and production."[52] Al-Naẓẓām also advocates that colors, heat, cold, voices and smells are likewise considered to be delicate bodies with an inherently latent nature. He accounts for five senses and considers each to exist distinctly as a kind (*jins*) on its own.[53]

In a subtle analysis of the theory of latency advanced by al-Naẓẓām,[54] Josef van Ess points to al-Jāḥiẓ's disagreement with his mentor on this matter.[55] In point of fact, al-Jāḥiẓ considers all five senses to be of the same kind. Speaking of the relationship between *kumūn* and the senses, one would have expected to detect in *Kitāb al-ḥayawān* a clearer explanation of this concern, especially since al-Jāḥiẓ devotes around forty pages in volume five to delineating al-Naẓẓām's theory.

The theory of latency that both al-Naẓẓām and al-Jāḥiẓ outline focuses mainly on fire and colors, rather than on smell, sound and taste. Nevertheless, smells are mentioned twice *en passant*. This window of opportunity in the book might have served as an occasion to elaborate on al-Naẓẓām's theory in order to provide the reader with additional illustrative examples and then to possibly carry al-Jāḥiẓ's teacher's doctrine further. The probable explanation for this shortcom-

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51 William M. Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Oxford: One World Publications, 1998), 194.

52 Van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, III: 334; the quotation above is from: Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*. (Cambridge, MA / London: Harvard University Press, 1976), 499-501; see al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa'l nihal* (Beirut: Muʾassasat Nāsir lil-Thaqāfa, 1981), 25.

53 *Ḥayawān*, V: 10-16, 40-42; al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt*, 327, 339, 346, 351, 362, 369, 382, 404; al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal*, 25; al-Khayyāṭ al-Muʿtazilī, *Kitāb al-intiṣār wa 'l-radd ʿalā ibn al-Rawandī al-mulḥid*, ed. Nyberg (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Misriyya, 1925), 36.

54 *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, III: 331-369; and see his article, "Kumūn," in *E.I.²*, V (1986), 384-385.

55 Van Ess notes that the material in *Kitāb al-ḥayawān* is chaotic and at times difficult to comprehend: *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, III: 332.

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ing might be linked to the writer's old age, illness and lack of assistance throughout his career as a writer.

Therefore, as this paper nears its conclusion, the focal question it raises remains subject to additional research. It is from al-Jāḥiẓ himself that the power of smell was rediscovered, even if the author did not explicitly explore it. If one "breathe[s] the aromas which surround him/her" or even the foul or fabricated odors that seem to have irritated al-Jāḥiẓ's nose, then one needs to be aware of their importance to daily life as binding catalysts in individuals' relationships to their cities, fellow humans and inanimate objects.

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* Vergriffen

Die Unterreihe „Türkische Welten" geht in die unabhängige Publikationsreihe des Orient-Instituts Istanbul „Istanbuler Texte und Studien" über.

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Rue Hussein Beyhum, Zokak el-Blat,
P.O.B. 11-2988, Beirut - Lebanon
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e-mail: oib-bib@oidmg.org
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D-97074 Würzburg
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e-mail: service@ergon-verlag.de
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Stand: November 2008

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From the Introduction:

"When Blaise Pascal wrote of Montaigne that he 'felt the defects of a rigid method', he might as well have applied the same judgment to al-Jāḥiẓ. Like Montaigne, the intellect of al-Jāḥiẓ was unencumbered by dogma and, like Montaigne, al-Jāḥiẓ found in the essay or epistle form the perfect vehicle for the free and unconventional expression of his ideas and reflections on man, nature and society. Many parallels can indeed be drawn between the 16th century French aristocrat and the 9th century Basran polymath, foremost among which one might suggest the concept of "humanism" which the editors decided to be the subtitle of this conference. Why did we make that decision, and can this concept be fruitfully retrojected from the European Renaissance back to 'Abbasid Iraq?"
The papers gathered in this volume were originally presented at a conference entitled "Al-Jāḥiẓ: A Muslim Humanist for Our Time", held in Beirut in January 2005 and convened under the auspices of the American University of Beirut and the Orient-Institut Beirut. The authors examine diverse aspects of the intellectual range and literary achievements of al-Jāḥiẓ, one of the most famous writers of classical Arabic prose, who died in 255 AH/ca. 868 CE, offering a heretofore unmatched assessment of his works as an expression of humanism.

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ISBN 978-3-89913-676-0
ISSN 0067-4931

Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Sachsen-Anhalt
urn:nbn:de:gbv:3:5-92084/fragment/page=00000324