

**IBN QUTAYBAH'S CONTRIBUTION TO QUR'ĀNIC  
STUDIES**

**By**

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*IN THE NAME OF ALLĀH,  
THE MOST BENEFICENT, THE MOST MERCIFUL.*

*TO MY FAMILY*

## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis has been written by me (undersigned) and does not represent the work of any other person.

M.K. al-Majali.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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## ABSTRACT

In this present thesis, we are concerned with the distinguished scholar Ibn Qutaybah al-Dīnawarī who wrote on several fields of knowledge, such as Qur'ānic studies, Traditions of the Prophet, Theology, and Arabic literature and language. The field of Ibn Qutaybah's Qur'ānic studies (exegesis and the other Qur'ānic sciences) has not received much attention from modern scholars. There is therefore a need to investigate this, especially those points which may have been discussed by him for the first time in Islamic scholarship.

Thus this thesis will be concerned with Ibn Qutaybah's contribution to Qur'ānic studies. He wrote two books concerning the interpretation of the obscure passages of the Qur'ān (*Ta'wīl Mushkil al-Qur'ān*) and the difficult words of it (*Tafsīr Gharīb al-Qur'ān*). Other books which have a bearing on this matter are *al-Ikhtilāf fī al-Lafz wa-al-Radd 'Alā al-Jahmiyyah wa-al-Mushabbihah*, in which he gives a clear account of the dispute concerning the creation of the Qur'ān and its utterance; *al-Masā'il wa-al-Ajwibah* and *Ta'wīl Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth*, in which he generally discusses some of the Qur'ānic verses. He also wrote other books on Qur'ānic sciences which have been mentioned in early sources; these are: *Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān*; *I'rāb al-Qur'ān*; *al-Qirā'āt*; and *Ādāb al-Qirā'ah*.

In this thesis we shall discuss these works in general, and in particular we will give a general account of Ibn Qutaybah's life and works, and an investigation of certain subjects to which he pays particular attention. These will include the science of the obscure and ambiguous verses of the Qur'ān; exegesis by relation; Arabic grammar, philology and figures of speech (including *i'jāz al-Qur'ān*); the readings of the Qur'ān; the Qur'ānic sciences; and finally the issue of the creation of the Qur'ān and its utterance. In the course of his discussion, Ibn Qutaybah details most of the accusations against the Qur'ān in these areas, gives a clear account and refutes them all. The thesis

will investigate all these matters in detail in order to elucidate his views and his contributions to Qur'anic studies.

## A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

The present thesis follows the system of transliteration of the United States Library of Congress as outlined in the Cataloguing Service Bulletin No. 49, November 1958.

The transliterated Arabic words have been in *Italic* Formatting.

## A NOTE ON THE TRANSLATION OF THE QUR'ĀN

In this present thesis, we are following the translation of the Qur'ān by Muḥammad Marmaduke Pickthall, entitled: *The meaning of the Glorious Qur' ān*.

## ABBREVIATIONS

- Al-Mushkil.* \_ *Ta'wīl Mushkil al-Qur'ān.*
- Al-Gharīb.* \_ *Tafsīr Gharīb al-Qur'ān.*
- Al-Ikhtilāf fī al-Lafz.* \_ *al-Ikhtilāf fī al-Lafz wa-al-Radd 'alā al-Jahmiyyah wa-al-Mushabbihah.*
- Mukhtlif al-Ḥadīth.* \_ *Ta'wīl Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth.*
- Al-Ṭabarī.* \_ *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān.*
- Ibn Kathīr.* \_ *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm.*
- Al-Rāzī.* \_ *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr or Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb.*
- Al-Bayḍāwī.* \_ *Anwār al-Tanzīl wa Asrār al-Ta'wīl.*
- Al-Qurṭubī.* \_ *al-Jāmi' li Ahkām al-Qur'ān.*
- Al-Burhān.* \_ *al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān.*
- Al-Itqān.* \_ *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān.*
- Majmū' al-Fatāwā.* \_ *Majmū' Fatawā Ibn Taymiyyah.*
- Al-Nashr.* \_ *al-Nashr fī al-Qirā'āt al-'Ashr.*
- E.I.<sup>2</sup>.* \_ *Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2nd edition.*

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### IBN QUTAYBAH'S LIFE AND WORKS

In this introductory chapter, we shall concentrate on certain particular aspects of Ibn Qutaybah's life and works, from which we may obtain a general idea about the man and the era in which he lived. To start with we shall investigate his name, lineage, early life and career, and then give some details of his culture and knowledge; after that we shall investigate the scholars' opinions on Ibn Qutaybah, and finally give a general description of his era.

This will be followed by a general discussion of his works, after which they will be reviewed individually, including his books on Qur'ānic studies.

#### 1.1. IBN QUTAYBAH'S LIFE:

First of all, we shall draw attention to the previous works written on Ibn Qutaybah. In fact there are some general books about him such as: *Ibn Qutaybah*, by Ishāq Mūsā al-Ḥusaynī, which deals with his life and works in general; *Ibn Qutaybah*, by Muḥammad Zaghlūl Sallām, which is similar to the previous one; and *Ibn Qutaybah, al-‘Ālim al-Nāqid al-Adīb*, by ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Sanad al-Jundī, which discusses his life and works with more details. Also there are two theses about certain aspects of his work, the first a Master Thesis in Cairo University under the title: *Ibn Qutaybah wa Atharuh fī ‘Ilm al-Ḥadīth*, (Ibn Qutaybah and his Influence on the Science of Tradition), the second a Ph.D Thesis in Umm al-Qurā University under the

title: *Ibn Qutaybah wa Mawqifuhu min 'Aqīdat al-Salaf*, (Ibn Qutaybah and his Position with Regard to Ancient Dogma) by 'Alī b. Nafī' al-'Ulayyānī.<sup>1</sup>

### 1.1.1. His name, lineage, early life and career:

Most of the references concerning Ibn Qutaybah indicate that his name is Abū Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh b. Muslim b. Qutaybah al-Dīnawarī<sup>2</sup> (Some add: al-Kūfī, which refers to his place of birth, and al-Marwazī, which is the name used to denote the origin of his father). Sometimes he is given a *nisba* derived from his grandfather, and is known as al-Qutabī or al-Qutaybī.<sup>3</sup>

He seems to have been descended in the second or the third generation from an Arabicized Persian family from Khurāsān which was connected on the female side with the Bāhilīs of Baṣra and may have come to Iraq in the wake of the 'Abbāsīd armies during the second half of the 2nd/8th century.

He was born at Kūfā in 213/828 according to Ibn al-Nadīm, Ibn al-Anbārī, Ibn al-Athīr and others.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, some historians such as al-Sam'ānī and al-Qiftī maintain that he was born at Baghdad.<sup>5</sup> Little is known about his childhood and adolescence, but all historians confirm that he grew up in Baghdad, which was at that

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<sup>1</sup> This thesis has been recently published under the title: *'Aqīdat al-Imām Ibn Qutaybah*, (Maktabat al-Ṣiddīq, al-Ṭā'if, Saudi Arabia, 1st ed, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> Al-Dīnawarī is derived from Dīnawar, a city in north Iraq near the city of Qarmīsīn, see al-Ḥamawī, Yāqūt, *Mu'jam al-Buldān*, (Beirut, 1955), 2/545.

<sup>3</sup> See al-Sam'ānī, 'Abd al-Karīm b. Muḥammad, *al-Ansāb*, ed. by A. al-Bārūdī, (Dār al-Jinān, Beirut, 1st ed, 1988), 4/452; Ibn al-Athīr, 'Izz al-Dīn Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Muḥammad, *al-Lubāb fī Tahdhīb al-Ansāb*, (Maktabat al-Qudsi, Cairo, 1949), 2/242; Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb in his introduction to *Adab al-Kātib*, p. 6; and al-'Ulayyānī, *'Aqīdat al-Imām Ibn Qutaybah*, p. 46.

<sup>4</sup> See Ibn al-Nadīm, Muḥammad b. Ishāq, *al-Fihrist*, (Dār al-Ma'rifah, Beirut, s.d), p. 115; Al-Anbārī, Abū al-Barakāt 'Abd al-Rahmān b. Muḥammad, *Nuzhat al-Alibbā' fī Ṭabaqāt al-Udabā'*, ed. by I. al-Sāmarrā'ī, (Maṭba'at al-Ma'arif, Baghdad, 1959), p. 143; Ibn al-Athīr, 'Alī b. Muḥammad, *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārikh*, (Leiden, 1899), 7/305; and al-Ḥusaynī, Ishāq Mūsā, *Ibn Qutaybah*, (al-Mu'assasah al-'Arabiyyah li al-Dirāsāt wa-al-Nashr, Beirut, 1st ed, 1980), p. 17.

<sup>5</sup> See al-Sam'ānī, *al-Ansāb*, 4/452; and al-Jundī, 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Sanad, *Ibn Qutaybah al-'Ālim al-Nāqid al-Adīb*, (al-Mu'assasah al-Miṣriyyah al-'Āmmah, Egypt, s.d), p. 44-95.



time at the height of its grandeur; it was the centre for culture, science and civilization in every field of knowledge.

Ibn Qutaybah seems to have been very interested in knowledge, and was able to attend the sessions and circles of leading scholars. From the meagre information we have about his life at this period, we can deduce that he had a great interest in learning and travelled to other cities to visit scholars. Most historians indicate that he spent his youth in collecting knowledge and listening to the scholars, as most of the famous scholars used to do.

About his career, most references give roughly the same details, a brief summary of which can be given as follows:

In 232/846 al-Mutawakkil came to power. This brought a change in religious policy as the Mu'tazilites lost their influence and their principal opponents in Islam gained a stronger position. By about 236/851 Ibn Qutaybah was appointed *qāḍī* over Dīnawar. Perhaps he owed this appointment to Abū al-Ḥasan 'Ubayd Allāh b. Yaḥyā b. Khāqān, the *wazīr*, but certainly he was much more sympathetic to the current religious policy of the 'Abbāsids. He seems to have remained *qāḍī* there until 256/870. He may have been inspector of *mazālim* in Baṣra for a short time after that. However, from 257/871 he devoted himself to teaching his own works in Baghdad where he remained until he died in 276/889.<sup>6</sup>

### 1.1.2. His culture and knowledge:

As has already been stated, Ibn Qutaybah was interested in most fields of Islamic and Arabic studies. This can be inferred from his choice of subjects in his works and from the teachers (*shuyūkh*) under whom he studied. When he, himself, became a

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<sup>6</sup> See *E.I.*<sup>2</sup>, 3/844-5.

teacher, unlike some men of letters he was particularly generous in giving his students an *ijāza* to teach his works, even the literary ones.<sup>7</sup>

His main interests seem to have been *adab*, poetry, philology, Qur'ān, Tradition and theology. He also knew about philosophy and could use some of its logical techniques.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to that, he knew Persian.<sup>9</sup> This enabled him to refer to Persian literature, and the influence of Persian literature on him is very clear in his book '*Uyūn al-Akhhbār*.

As for his *Shuyūkh*, he studied under some of the leading scholars of his time, and we can give a brief account of them as follows:

In the field of Exegesis and Tradition, his most famous teacher was Abū Ya'qūb, Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm b. Rāhawayh al-Ḥanzalī (d. 238/ 852). He was a contemporary of Ibn Ḥanbal, and the teacher of al-Bukhārī and other traditionists; he was from Nīsābūr and travelled to Iraq, Ḥijāz, Yaman and al-Shām. Like most scholars of that period, he was interested in several subjects, but the most important two were Tradition and Exegesis. He has been commended by most contemporary and subsequent scholars.<sup>10</sup> Ibn Qutaybah went to Nīsābūr to visit him in order to be his disciple. There is no doubt that Ibn Qutaybah was influenced by Ibn Rāhawayh in Tradition, theology, exegesis and the readings of the Qur'ān.

He also studied Tradition under Aḥmad b. Sa'īd al-Liḥyānī, an important scholar who was interested in the science of Tradition, especially the subject of the obscure traditions (*gharīb al-ḥadīth* and *mukhtalif al-ḥadīth*). He was a friend of Abū 'Ubayd

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<sup>7</sup> Some scholars were not generous with their students, and used not to allow any student to attach themselves to their study circles until they give them their allowances in advance, as al-Mubarrid used to do; see Ṣaqr in his introduction to *al-Mushkil*, p. 38.

<sup>8</sup> Ibn Qutaybah himself mentions his interest in philosophy in his *Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth*, see p. 67.

<sup>9</sup> See Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, (Cambridge University Press, 1988, reprinted in USA, 1989, 90, 91), pp. 92-3

<sup>10</sup> See al-Jundī, *Ibn Qutaybah*, p. 116-20; and al-'Ulayyānī, pp. 50-1.

al-Qāsim b. Sallām and taught Ibn Qutaybah the book *Gharīb al-Hadīth*, written by Abū 'Ubayd.<sup>11</sup>

However, from his works which will be discussed later, it seems clear that his main academic interests were, in fact, literary. This is also reflected in the number of *shuyūkh* under whom he studied, whose main concerns seemed to have been of a literary nature. He studied literature, syntax, prosody and Qur'ānic readings under Abū Ḥātim Sahl b. Muḥammad al-Sijistānī (d. 248/862). He was a philologist and traditionist and an authority for most scholars in Iraq who were interested in philology and Tradition.<sup>12</sup> He was one of the transmitters of the works of al-Aṣma'ī. Ibn Qutaybah was influenced by al-Sijistānī in those areas, particularly literary criticism, syntax,<sup>13</sup> prosody and the readings of the Qur'ān.<sup>14</sup>

Another of his teachers in those subjects was Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. Sufyān al-Ziyādī (d. 249/863). He was a disciple of Sibāwayh, al-Aṣma'ī and Abū 'Ubaydah, and his main field of study was syntax and literature.<sup>15</sup>

As far as poetry is concerned, his principal teachers appear to have been Abū Sa'id Aḥmad b. Khālid al-Ḍarīr and Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Sallām al-Jumaḥī al-Baṣrī.

The main field of study of Abū Sa'id al-Ḍarīr was poetry and the narratives of the Qur'ān. Ibn Qutaybah met him in Nisābūr, and seems to have been influenced by him in poetry.<sup>16</sup>

As for Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Baṣrī (d. 231/845), he was interested in poetry and literature, and was the author of the famous book *Ṭabaqāt al-Shu'arā'*; Ibn Qutaybah

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<sup>11</sup> See Ṣaqr, the introduction, p. 3; and al-'Ulayyānī, pp. 61-2.

<sup>12</sup> *E.I.*<sup>2</sup>, 3/844.

<sup>13</sup> See al-Ḥusaynī, *Ibn Qutaybah*, p. 39.

<sup>14</sup> See al-Jundī, *Ibn Qutaybah*, p. 113; and al-'Ulayyānī, pp. 51-2.

<sup>15</sup> See Ṣaqr's Introduction, *al-Mushkil*, p. 4; and al-'Ulayyānī, pp. 52-3.

<sup>16</sup> See Ṣaqr in his introduction to *al-Mushkil*, p. 6; and al-'Ulayyānī, p. 58.

seems to be influenced by him in this field, especially since we bear in mind that Ibn Qutaybah himself wrote the book *al-Shi'r wa-al-Shu'arā'*.<sup>17</sup>

In philology he studied under Abū al-Faḍl al-'Abbās b. al-Faraj al-Riyāshī (d. 257/871), another of the leaders of philological studies in Iraq, and the transmitter of the works of al-Aṣma'ī, Abū 'Ubayd and other pioneers of the 2nd/8th century.<sup>18</sup>

Most interestingly, he also studied literature with al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 254/868), one of the most important scholars of the Mu'tazilites and the author of many books.<sup>19</sup> He allowed Ibn Qutaybah to transmit his books as Ibn Qutaybah has stated in more than one place in his books.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand though, Ibn Qutaybah clearly was not influenced by al-Jāḥiẓ in his theological opinions.<sup>21</sup>

These were his most important *Shuyūkh*.<sup>22</sup> However, we should also mention some of his most important references in his works on Qur'ānic studies; these include Abū 'Ubaydah (d. 209/824), the author of *Majāz al-Qur'ān*; Sibawayh (d. 180/796), the author of *al-Kitāb*; al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad (d. 175/791), the founder of the science of Prosody; al-Kisā'ī (d. 189/804); al-Aṣma'ī (d. 216/831); and al-Farrā' (d. 207/822) the author of *Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān*.

As for his disciples, some of them are mentioned in historical books, though other sources mention 17 of them;<sup>23</sup> his important disciples were:

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<sup>17</sup> See Ṣāqir's Introduction, p. 3; and al-'Ulayyānī, p. 56.

<sup>18</sup> See *E.I.*<sup>2</sup>, 3/844; Ṣāqir's Introduction, p. 6; and al-'Ulayyānī, p. 52.

<sup>19</sup> Such as: *al-Bayān wa-al-Tabyīn*, *al-Bukhalā'* and *al-Ḥayawān*.

<sup>20</sup> See Ṣāqir's introduction, p. 5; and al-'Ulayyānī, pp. 57-8. Also see Ibn Qutaybah, *'Uyūn al-Akhhbār*, 3/199, 216, 249 where he relates from al-Jāḥiẓ.

<sup>21</sup> This can be seen from his declared opinion in his book *al-Ikhtilāf fī al-Lafẓ*, and also from his *Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth*, where in the introduction he criticizes all sects other than the Sunnīs, particularly mentioning al-Jāḥiẓ, see pp. 64-7.

<sup>22</sup> In fact some references mention many more than this in different fields of knowledge; for example, see Ṣāqir's introduction, pp. 2-6, where he mentions 25; and al-'Ulayyānī, pp. 50-63, where he mentions 44 of them, and so on.

<sup>23</sup> E.g. Ṣāqir in his introduction, pp. 35-8.

1. Ibn Qutaybah's son Aḥmad (d. 322/933), appears to have been his chief disciple. He is certainly responsible, as was his son 'Abd al-Wāḥid, for the transmission to Egypt, and indirectly to the West (especially through the intermediary of Abū 'Alī al-Qāli) of the greater part of the works of Abū Muḥammad.
2. In al-Andalus, the direct transmission of Ibn Qutaybah's works was ensured by the famous Qāsim b. Aṣḥagh (d. 340/951), who had come to study in Baghdad in 274/887, and in fact can be regarded as the transmitter of *Gharīb al-Ḥadīth* and *al-Ma'ārif*.
3. Among the eastern disciples, 'Ubayd Allāh b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sukkarī (d. 323/935) seems to have played a particularly important part, his name being found at the head of numerous *isnāds*, and is responsible for the transmission of *al-Masā'il wa-al-Ajwibah* and *Iṣlāḥ Ghalat Abī Ubayd*.
4. Abū Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh b. Ja'far Ibn Durastawayh (d. 355/965), the transmitter of *al-Ashribah*.
5. Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad b. Ayyūb al-Ṣā'igh (d. 313/925), who transmitted most of Ibn Qutaybah's books.
6. Aḥmad b. Marwān al-Mālikī (d. 298/910), who was responsible for transmitting *Ta'wīl Mukhtaliḥ al-Ḥadīth*.
7. Al-Haytham b. Kulayb al-Shāmī (d. 335/946), who transmitted some of Ibn Qutaybah's literary works.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> See *E.I.*<sup>2</sup>, 3/845; Ṣaqr's Introduction to *al-Mushkil*, pp. 35-8; and al-'Ulayyānī, pp. 97-101.

### 1.1.3. A brief account of his era:

Those who have written about Ibn Qutaybah have approached the subject from various aspects, particularly the political, social and cultural. We shall summarise here the main points of these accounts and in particular the main influences on Ibn Qutaybah.

#### a. The political view:

Ibn Qutaybah grew up when the 'Abbasid Caliphate was beginning to lose control over much of the Empire. Before he was born, there had been a damaging struggle for power between the brothers Amīn and Ma'mūn. The Empire was beginning to break up during his boyhood. Turkish soldiers had been introduced into the army and their leaders came to dominate the Caliphate. Ma'mūn and his immediate successors had tried to make acceptance of Mu'tazilite doctrines a mark of loyalty to the Caliphate, but shortly after Ibn Qutaybah reached manhood, these policies were reversed. However the Caliphate no longer had the political power that it once had.

The most important issue before and during Ibn Qutaybah's time was thus the dispute between Sunnis and Mu'tazilites symbolised by the issue of the creation of the Qur'ān, a schism which was adopted by al-Ma'mūn, al-Mu'taṣim and al-Wāthiq, and eventually ended officially by al-Mutawakkil in 232/846. This caused al-Mutawakkil to make huge changes in the appointments of the state, among these changes being the employment of new advisers, such as 'Ubayd Allāh b. Yaḥyā b. Khāqān who was appointed as *wazīr* in place of Ibn al-Zayyāt. On the other hand new groups were encouraged to join the army to counterbalance Turkish influence.<sup>25</sup> These changes caused Ibn Qutaybah to write *Adab al-Kātib* as a present for the *wazīr*

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<sup>25</sup> See *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*, by Hugh Kennedy, (Longman, Singapore Publishers, 1st ed, 1986), pp. 168-9.

Yaḥyā b. Khāqān during the rule of al-Musta'in (and not al-Mutawakkil),<sup>26</sup> and *al-Ikhtilāf fī al-Lafẓ wa-al-Radd 'alā al-Jahmiyyah wa-al-Mushabbiha* as a declaration of the Sunnī opinion regarding the creation of the Qur'ān and its utterance.<sup>27</sup>

b. The social view:

The loosening of central control and the emergence of new social groups seems to have led to a rejection of the old traditions and a breakdown of the old moral norms, aided by a serious inflation and rise in prices seems to have caused Ibn Qutaybah a great deal of concern, if we are to judge by such books as *al-Ashribah*, *al-Maysir wa-al-Qidāh* and *al-Shu'ūbiyyah* or *Tafḍīl al-'Arab 'alā al-'Ajam*.<sup>28</sup>

c. Cultural life in Baghdad:

Baghdad at this period was at the height of its cultural and intellectual fame, and was the centre of opinions and schools devoted to every subject of importance then; for instance, in theology, there were the Ancients (*al-Salaf*), Mu'tazilites, Māturīdiyyah and other sects. In syntax, there were the two famous schools or opinions attributed to al-Baṣrah and al-Kūfah. In jurisprudence, there were the four schools of Abū Ḥanīfah, Mālik, al-Shāfi'ī and Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal. And generally in culture there were many new influences coming in from Greece, Iran and India, and as we have seen Ibn Qutaybah was himself acquainted with the Persian language.

Among the most important scholars at that time were the traditionists, such as Ibn Ḥanbal, al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Yaḥyā b. Ma'in, Yaḥyā b. Sa'id al-Qaṭṭān, al-Tirmidhī,

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<sup>26</sup> Some think that Ibn Qutaybah wrote this book during the rule of al-Mutawakkil. Ṣaqr makes it clear that this happened during the reign of al-Musta'in and not al-Mutawakkil, see his introduction to *al-Mushkil*, pp. 41-2.

<sup>27</sup> For more details about this view, see Ṣaqr's introduction to *al-Mushkil*, pp. 40-2; al-'Ulayyānī, pp. 21-8; al-Jundī, pp. 45-70; Sallām, pp. 5-9; Hugh Kennedy, pp. 166-70; and Lapidus, pp. 128-9.

<sup>28</sup> For more details see Ibn Kathīr, Ismā'il b. 'Umar, *al-Bidāyah wa-al-Nihāyah*, (Maktabat al-Ma'ārif, Beirut, 1st ed, 1966), 11/49; Shawqī Ḍayf, *al-'Aṣr al-'Abbāsī al-Thānī*, (Dār al-Ma'ārif, 2nd ed, 1975), pp. 54-100; al-Jundī, pp. 71-80; Sallām, pp. 10-4; and al-'Ulayyānī, pp. 38-42

Abū Dāwūd and others. This is in addition to Ibn Qutaybah's *Shuyūkh* mentioned above.

The 'Abbāsīd era is known as the era of knowledge, writing and translation, and the scholars aimed to acquire exhaustive information in every field of knowledge. Scholarship was encouraged and supported by the Caliphs and their ministers, and Ibn Qutaybah composed *Adab al-Kātib* as a present to the Minister Yaḥyā b. Khāqān.<sup>29</sup>

#### 1.1.4. The scholars' opinions about Ibn Qutaybah:

Not all scholars have agreed about the importance of Ibn Qutaybah. Among those who take a less favourable view are al-Ḥākim, al-Dāraqūṭnī, al-Bayhaqī, al-Anbārī and al-Juwaynī. Some of their criticisms concern his theological opinions, and they accuse him of inconsistency insofar as he did not adhere to one particular school of theology but adopted the views which he considered appropriate from a variety of sources. Also they allege that he reported unjust criticisms of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, and that he said about him: "he entered his tomb without having memorised the Qur'ān."<sup>30</sup> Here are some of their expressions:

a. Al-Ḥākim says: "The Muslim community have agreed that Ibn Qutaybah is a liar."

b. Al-Dāraqūṭnī says: "Ibn Qutaybah always tends (*yamīl*) to *tashbīh* and hostility to the *'Itrah* (the Prophet's family)."

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<sup>29</sup> For more details see Ḍayf, pp. 164-6; Muḥammad Abū Zahrah, *Tārīkh al-Madhāhib al-Islāmiyyah*, (Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, Beirut, s.d), 1/31-51; al-Jundī, pp. 80-92; Sallām, pp. 14-20; and al-'Ulayyānī, pp. 29-37.

<sup>30</sup> *Al-Mushkil*, p. 234. For more details see Ṣaqr's comment in his introduction of *al-Mushkil*, pp. 58, 61; *al-Ikhtilāf fī al-Lafẓ*, p. 44; and Aḥmad Shākir's introduction of *al-Shi'r wa-al-Shu'arā'*, pp. 40-3. In fact some other scholars mention the same words as Ibn Qutaybah; for instance see anon., *Muqaddimat Kitāb al-Mabānī*, ed. by A. Jeffrey, (Maktabat al-Khānji, Cairo, 1972), p. 25.



c. Al-Bayhaqī says: "Ibn Qutaybah adopts the Karrāmiyyah's opinion (i.e. *tashbīh*)."

d. Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī says: "Ibn Qutaybah is usually attacking and involving himself in things which he does not know."

Other scholars have defended Ibn Qutaybah, such as al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, Ibn Ḥazm, al-Dhahabī, Ibn al-Jawzī, Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Kathīr, Ibn Khallikān and many others of those who wrote about Ibn Qutaybah or mentioned him in their different writings; for instance, al-Dhahabī suggests that what al-Ḥākim, al-Dāraquṭnī and al-Bayhaqī have said is due to a kind of envy.<sup>31</sup> Likewise Ibn Taymiyyah rejects al-Anbārī's criticisms against Ibn Qutaybah saying that what caused al-Anbārī and others to make their accusations is the fact that Ibn Qutaybah wrote a book in which he rejects some of Abū 'Ubayd's explanations of Traditions.<sup>32</sup> Other scholar, Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, rejects al-Juwaynī's claim, commenting that Ibn Qutaybah's criticisms are directed against *ahl al-kalām* (philosophers).<sup>33</sup>

More recently, those who have devoted special studies to Ibn Qutaybah have refuted all the claims and criticisms against him; for instance, Ṣaqr and 'Ukāshah have detailed all the criticisms and refuted them, among their refutations being al-Dāraquṭnī's claim, which they easily answer by asking how we can believe it since we know that Ibn Qutaybah himself has devoted a book to refuting the Jahmiyyah and Mushabbiha, i.e. *al-Ikhtilāf fī al-Lafz wa al-Radd 'alā al-Jahmiyyah wa-al-Mushabbiha*.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> See al-Dhahabī, Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad, *Mizān al-'itidāl fī Naqd al-Rijāl*, ed. by A.M. al-Bijāwī, (Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah, Cairo, 1st ed, 1966), 2/503.

<sup>32</sup> See Ibn Taymiyyah, Aḥmad b 'Abd al-Ḥalīm, *Majmū' Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyyah*, ed by. 'A.M. Qāsim, (Maṭābī' al-Riyād, 1st ed, 1962), 17/411.

<sup>33</sup> See *Lisān al-Mizān*, (Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-'Uthmāniyyah, Ḥaydarābād, 1st ed, 1911), 3/359.

<sup>34</sup> See Ṣaqr in his introduction to *al-Mushkil*, pp. 55-76; and Tharwat 'Ukāshah in his introduction to *al-Ma'ārif*, pp. 57-61. Also see A.M. Shākīr in his introduction of *al-Shi'r wa-al-Shu'arā'*, pp. 51-2.

An important thing to bear in mind is that most scholars have commended Ibn Qutaybah as one of the well-known Islamic scholars, and in particular the people of the western half of the Islamic world respected him very highly, and used to censure anyone who did not have any of his books in their homes, accusing anyone who criticised Ibn Qutaybah as being blameworthy.<sup>35</sup>

## 1.2. HIS WORKS:

There is considerable disagreement among the scholars about the number of books which Ibn Qutaybah wrote. Şaqr gives it as 46,<sup>36</sup> while al-'Ulayyānī makes it 53.<sup>37</sup> This is considerably more than any of the other scholars claim. Ishāq al-Ḥusaynī explains this huge total as being due to the fact that the early biographers of Ibn Qutaybah have frequently given the same book different names.<sup>38</sup> He gives one example regarding the book *al-'Arab*, which was mentioned with such different

<sup>35</sup> See *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, 17/391. For details of Ibn Qutaybah's biography see Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, pp. 115-6; al-Dhahabī, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad, *Mizān al-I'tidāl fī Naqd al-Rijāl*, 2/503; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar A'lām al-Nubalā'*, ed. S. al-Arnā'ūṭ and 'A. Abū Zayd, (Mu'assasat al-Risālah, Beirut, 1st ed, 1983), 13/296-302; Al-Dhahabī, *al-'Ibar fī Khabar man Ghabar*, ed by Ṣ. al-Munajjid, (Dā'irat al-Maṭbū'āt wa-al-Nashr, Kuwait, 1960), 2/56; Abū al-Fidā' 'Imad al-Dīn Ismā'il, *al-Mukhtaṣar fī Akhbār al-Bashar*, (al-Maṭba'ah al-Ḥusayniyyah, Cairo, 1st ed, s.d), 2/54; Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, Aḥmad b. 'Alī, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, (Maktabat al-Khānjī, Cairo, 1st ed, 1931), 10/170-171; al-Sam'ānī, *al-Ansāb*, 4/452; al-Anbārī, Abū al-Barakāt 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad, *Nuzhat al-Alibbā' fī Ṭabaqāt al-'Udabā'*, pp. 143-4; Ibn al-Jawzī, Abū al-Faraj 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Alī, *al-Muntaẓam fī Tārīkh al-Mulūk wa-al-Umam*, (Ḥaydarābād, 1940), 5/102; Ibn al-Athīr, 'Alī b. Muḥammad, *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, 7/305; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Lubāb fī Tahdhīb al-Ansāb*, 2/242; Ibn Khallikān, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad, *Wafayāt al-A'yān wa Anbā' Abnā' al-Zamān*, ed. by I. 'Abbās, (Dār Ṣādir, Beirut, s. d), 3/42-4; *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, 17/391-2, 411; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāyah wa-al-Nihāyah*, 11/65; Ibn Ḥajar, *Lisān al-Mizān*, 3/357-9; al-Dāwūdī, Muḥammad b. 'Alī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Mufasssīrīn*, ed. 'A.M. 'Umar, (Maktabat Wahbah, Cairo, 1st ed, 1972), 1/245-6; Ibn al-'Imād al-Ḥanbalī, 'Abd al-Ḥayy, *Shadharāt al-Dhahab fī Akhbār man Dhahab*, (Maktabat al-Qudsī, Cairo, 1930), 2/169; al-Ziriklī, Khayr al-Dīn, *al-A'lām*, (Dār al-'Ilm li al-Malāyīn, Beirut, 6th ed, 1984), 2/568; Kaḥḥālah, 'Umar Riḍā, *Mu'jam al-Mu'allifīn*, (Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, Beirut, s.d), 6/150; Brockelmann, Carl, *Tārīkh al-Adab al-'Arabī*, trans into Arabic by. 'A. al-Najjār, (Dār al-Ma'ārif, Cairo, 4th ed), 2/221-30; al-Ḥusaynī, Ishāq Mūsā, *Ibn Qutaybah*; Muḥammad Zaghlūl Sallām, *Ibn Qutaybah*; al-Jundī, 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Sanad, *Ibn Qutaybah al-'Ālim al-Nāqid al-Adīb*; Clement Huart, *A History of Arabic Literature*, (Khayats, Beirut, 1966), p. 154; Şaqr, Introduction to *al-Mushkil*, pp. 3-67; 'Ukāshah, Introduction to *al-Ma'ārif*, pp. 31-62; A.Z. al-'Adawī, Introduction to *'Uyūn al-Akhbār*, 1/16-42; M.M. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd, Introduction to *Adab al-Kātib*, pp. 6-9; and al-'Ulayyānī, pp. 43-125.

<sup>36</sup> See his Introduction to *al-Mushkil*, pp. 7-31.

<sup>37</sup> See al-'Ulayyānī, pp. 69-87.

<sup>38</sup> See al-Ḥusaynī, P. 73.

names as *Dhamm al-Ḥasad*, *Kitāb al-‘Arab aw al-Radd ‘alā al-Shu‘ūbiyyah*, *Tafdīl al-‘Arab*, *al-Taswiyah bayn al-‘Arab wa-al-‘Ajam* and *Tafdīl al-‘Arab ‘alā al-‘Ajam*.<sup>39</sup> He also states that frequently chapters from an individual book are listed as separate books.<sup>40</sup> Husaynī himself gives their number as 23 while Brockelmann makes them 22, Sallām counts 19 and al-Jundī limits the number to 15.<sup>41</sup> *E.I.*<sup>2</sup> agrees with Husaynī that there are probably 23 books correctly or questionably attributed to Ibn Qutaybah, of which 14 have been published and two are known to be extant in manuscript (these two have since been published), while other four published works have been attributed to him.<sup>42</sup> As for other books attributed to him, it seems that they are lost.

Among the works attributed to Ibn Qutaybah on Qur’ānic studies are *al-Tafsīr*, *Ma‘ānī al-Qur’ān*, *Ādāb al-Qirā’ah* and *al-Radd ‘Alā al-Qā’il bi Khalq al-Qur’ān*. In the case of *al-Tafsīr*, it seems that this book is probably *Tafsīr Gharīb al-Qur’ān*. Ibn Qutaybah never refers to the former but frequently refers to the latter. *Ma‘ānī al-Qur’ān* seems likely also to be *Tafsīr Gharīb al-Qur’ān*, as the titles seem to indicate that they deal with the same subject. Nor did Ibn Qutaybah ever refer to *Ma‘ānī al-Qur’ān*.<sup>43</sup> As for *Ādāb al-Qirā’ah*, the only authority for it is Ḥājī Khalīfah<sup>44</sup> and Ibn Qutaybah never mentioned it himself; probably the book was not written by Ibn Qutaybah. In the case of the last one, *al-Radd ‘alā al-Qā’il bi Khalq al-Qur’ān*, in fact the subject of this topic was discussed in the book *al-Ikhtilāf fī al-Lafz*. Thus it seems probable that the first work is a part of the second one.

<sup>39</sup> See al-Ḥusaynī, P. 71. Also see Brockelmann, 2/226-7.

<sup>40</sup> For example, *Taqwīm al-Lisān* which was claimed to be a separate book while in fact it is one chapter of *Adab al-Kātib*.

<sup>41</sup> See Brockelmann, 2/223-30; Sallām, *Ibn Qutaybah*, pp. 35-67; and al-Jundī, pp. 129-167.

<sup>42</sup> See *E.I.*<sup>2</sup>, 3/845.

<sup>43</sup> See ‘Ukāshah who confirms this in his introduction to *al-Ma‘ārif*, p. 43.

<sup>44</sup> See Ḥājī Khalīfah, *Kashf al-Zunūn ‘an Asāmī al-Kutub wa-al-Funūn*, (Maktabat al-Muthannā, Baghdad, s.d), 1/43. Also some editors of Ibn Qutaybah’s books mentioned it, e.g. Ṣaqr, p. 28 and ‘Ukāshah, p. 44.

In addition to the list of books that *E.I.*<sup>2</sup> suggests were written by Ibn Qutaybah, there are two Qur'ānic titles which the author of the article (G. Lecomte) has some doubt about. The first, *I'rāb al-Qur'ān*, has Ibn al-Nadīm and Ismā'il al-Baghdādī as its authorities.<sup>45</sup> However, Ibn Qutaybah does not mention it himself. Perhaps it is a chapter from another book by Ibn Qutaybah's *Ta'wīl al-Mushkil*. However, in the case of the second, *al-Qirā'āt*, there is no doubt that this book was definitely written by Ibn Qutaybah. In fact, Ibn Qutaybah mentions it by name on four occasions, the first and second in *al-Mushkil*, pages 64 and 531; the third in *al-Gharīb*, page 16; and the fourth in *al-Masā'il wa-al-Ajwibah*, page 225.<sup>46</sup> Ṣaqr quibbles about whether Ibn Qutaybah had actually finished the book,<sup>47</sup> but Ibn Qutaybah specifically says: "We have mentioned it in our book written about the *qirā'āt*",<sup>48</sup> making it clear that the book has been written.<sup>49</sup>

By combining the information given by Brockelmann, the *E.I.*, King Faisal Centre for Research and Islamic Studies and other books written about Ibn Qutaybah, we can arrive at the following list of published books:

1. *Adab al-Kātib*, ed. Grünert, (Leiden 1900, also published at Cairo many times: 1882, 1892, 1910, 1928 and 1936), the main editions these days are these by M.M. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd, (Cairo, 1957); M. al-Khaṭīb, (Cairo, 1948); and M. al-Dālī, (Beirut,

<sup>45</sup> See Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, p. 115; and al-Baghdādī, Ismā'il Bāshā, *Hadiyyat al-'Ārifin: Asmā' al-Mu'allifin wa Āthār al-Muṣannifin*, (Maktabat al-Muthannā, Baghdad, s.d), 1/441. Also some of the editors of Ibn Qutaybah's books mention it, such as Ṣaqr in *al-Mushkil*, p. 28; Shākir, in *al-Shi'r wa-al-Shu'arā'*, p. 49; and 'Ukāshah, in *al-Ma'ārif*, p. 43. In fact, they also mention other two books of *al-Naḥw al-Ṣaghīr* and *al-Naḥw al-Kabīr*, which seem to be lost.

<sup>46</sup> Also, mostly when Ibn Qutaybah refers to any of his books he means that he has already completed it, this is one of his methods in general, and in particular in his exegesis.

<sup>47</sup> See his comment, in *al-Gharīb*, p. 16.

<sup>48</sup> *Al-Gharīb*, p. 16; and he uses similar expressions in *al-Masā'il wa-al-Ajwibah*, p. 225. In addition to that, Ibn Qutaybah indeed is skilled in the *qirā'āt* as we shall see later in Ch. 5.

<sup>49</sup> In addition to this, this book is mentioned by some ancient historians who discuss Ibn Qutaybah; such as Ibn al-Nadīm, al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī and Ibn al-'Imād al-Ḥanbalī, in their accounts of his life.

1982). A manual of philology for the use of scribes, with a famous introduction which may be regarded as his politico-cultural profession of faith.<sup>50</sup>

2. *Al-Anwā'*, ed. Pellat-Hamidullah, (Ḥaydarābād, 1375/1956), a treatise on practical astronomy and meteorology.

3. *Al-'Arab*, ed. Muḥammad Kurd 'Alī, in *Rasā'il al-Bulaghā'*, (Cairo, 1331/1912), a treatise in the anti-Shu'ūbi tradition on the relative merits of the Arabs, the Persians, and the inhabitants of Khurāsān.

4. *Al-Ashribah*, ed. Muḥammad Kurd 'Alī, (Damascus 1366/1947), also another edition by M.S. Jāsīm, (Baghdad, 1985), a *fatwā* on fermented drinks written in *adab* style.

5. *Gharīb al-Ḥadīth*, ed. 'A. al-Jabbūrī, (Ministry of Religious Affairs, Baghdad, 1976), a philological commentary on *ḥadīth*, in the broadest sense, from the Prophet to Mu'āwiyah.<sup>51</sup>

6. *Al-Ikhtilāf fī al-Lafz wa-al-Radd 'alā al-Jahmiyyah wa-al-Mushabbihah*, ed. Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī, (Cairo, 1349/1930), a theological pamphlet refuting the position of the Mushabbihah on attributes and that of the Mu'tazilites with Jahmiyyah tendencies on the pronunciation of the Qur'ān.

7. *Iṣlāḥ al-Ghalaṭ fī Gharīb al-Ḥadīth li Abī 'Ubayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām*, ed. 'A. al-Jabbūrī, (Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, Beirut, 1983); this book is concerned with Abū 'Ubayd's errors of interpretation.

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<sup>50</sup> It is worth mentioning that many scholars were interested in this book, and thus there are many commentaries on it such as those by al-Zajjājī, al-Jawālīqī and al-Baṭalyawsī; also there is a summary of it by Ṭ.Ṣ. al-Jazā'irī, (edited in Cairo, 1920), see Brockelmann, 2/226.

<sup>51</sup> This book and no 7 below are mentioned by Brockelmann and the *E.I.* as existing in manuscript.

8. *Ma'ānī al-Shi'r*, known also as *al-Ma'ānī al-Kabīr: Sharḥ Abyāt al-Ma'ānī*, (2 vols., Ḥaydarābād 1358/1949; also a new edition at Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, Beirut, 1984), a long work on the themes of poetry.

9. *Al-Ma'ārif*, ed. Tharwat 'Ukāshah, (Cairo 1960), a historical manual with encyclopaedic appendices on very varied subjects.

10. *Al-Masā'il wa-al-Ajwibah*, ed. Marwān al-'Aṭiyyah and Muḥsin Kharābah, (Dār Ibn Kathīr, Damascus and Beirut, 1st ed, 1990), a work concerned with different matters particularly exegesis, Traditions and theology.

11. *Al-Maysir wa-al-Qidāh*, ed. Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb, (al-Maṭba'ah al-Salafiyyah, Cairo, 1924), a juridico-philological study on games of chance.

12. *Al-Shi'r wa-al-Shu'arā'*, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir, 2 vols., (Cairo 1945-50), there is also another edition by M. al-Saqqā, (al-Maktabah al-Tijāriyyah al-Kubrā, Cairo, 1932), a poetical anthology arranged chronologically, devoting a large section to the "modern" poets. The introduction, somewhat overrated, is often considered as a manifesto of neo-classicism.

13. *Tafsīr Gharīb al-Qur'ān*, ed by S.A. Ṣaqr, (Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, Beirut, 1978).

14. *Ta'wīl Mukhtaliḥ al-Ḥadīth*, ed. Faraj Allāh Zakī al-Kurdī, Maḥmūd Shukrī al-Ālūsī, and Maḥmūd Shabandar-zāde, (Cairo 1326); also there are other three editions by M.M. al-Aṣfar, (al-Maktab al-Islāmī, Beirut, 1st ed, 1989); M.Z. al-Najjār, (Dār al-Jil, Beirut, 1973) and 'A.A. 'Aṭā, (Mu'assasat al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyyah, Beirut, 1988). This is Ibn Qutaybah's most important theological work, in which are clearly set out his religious, heresiographical and political ideas (Fr. tr. by G. Lecomte, Damascus 1962).

15. *Ta'wīl Mushkil al-Qur'ān*, ed by S.A. Ṣaqr, (al-Maktabah al-'Ilmiyyah, Beirut, 3rd ed, 1981). This book and *Tafsīr al-Gharīb* are the main books remaining on Qur'ānic studies, and our study will be concentrated on them in addition to other books which include certain Qur'ānic studies, such as *al-Masā'il wa-al-Ajwibah*, *al-Ikhtilāf fī al-Lafz* and *Ta'wīl Mukhtaliḥ al-Ḥadīth*. It is worth mentioning that those two books have been combined together in one book by Ibn Muṭarrif al-Kinānī, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad (d. 454/1062), this new book being known as "*al-Qirṭayn*", in two volumes. Al-Kinānī made it his task to arrange the verses discussed by Ibn Qutaybah in accordance with the order of the Qur'ān, and then to detail all information mentioned by Ibn Qutaybah and put them under each verse, as a result of which every verse is mentioned once only.<sup>52</sup>

16. *'Uyūn al-Akḥbār*, ed. Aḥmad Zakī al-'Adawī, (4 vols, Cairo 1343-8/1925-30), a large compendium of *adab*, on a number of apparently secular subjects; important introduction.

The King Faisal Centre for Research and Islamic Studies at Riyadh adds the following books:

17. *Al-Awā'il*, ed. M.B. al-Qahwajī, (Dār Ibn Kathīr, Damascus, 1987).

18. *Al-Jarāthīm*, ed. 'A. Mrīdin, (Damascus, 1985), edited also by M.J. Ḥusayn, (Damascus University, 1983).<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> For more details see *al-Qirṭayn*, (Maṭba'at al-Khānjī, Cairo, 1st ed, 1936). In fact, many scholars blame al-Kinānī for writing this book, on the grounds that there is no necessity for what he has done; for example, Ṣaqr accused him in this matter and for changing Ibn Qutaybah's words or dropping some of them, although he promised in his introduction not to do so; see Ṣaqr's introduction to *al-Mushkil*, pp. 84-5.

<sup>53</sup> This work is described by *E.J.* as apocryphal.

19. *Al-Rahl wa-al-Manzil*, ed. Luwīs Shīkhū, (Maṭba‘at al-Ābā’ al-Yasū‘iyyīn, Beirut, 1908). al-Ḥusaynī suspects that this should also be attributed to Ibn Qutaybah.<sup>54</sup>

20. *Waṣiyyat Ibn Qutaybah ilā waladih*, ed. I.M. al-Ḥusaynī, (an article in the periodical: *Majallat al-Abḥāth*, Beirut, 1954). In fact Ṣaqr only suspects this to have been written by Ibn Qutaybah.<sup>55</sup>

As stated above, there are only two extant books on Qur’ānic studies, though others are lost, such as *al-Qirā’āt*, *I’rāb al-Qur’ān* and *Ādāb al-Qirā’ah*.

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<sup>54</sup> See pp. 78-9, where he says that there is a confusion between this book and *al-Jarāthīm* mentioned above, see pp. 78-9.

<sup>55</sup> For more details see his introduction of *al-Mushkil*, pp. 32-5.



**THE SCIENCE OF THE OBSCURE AND THE AMBIGUOUS  
AS TREATED BY IBN QUTAYBAH AND OTHER  
SCHOLARS:**

In this chapter we intend to throw light on this particular subject; the most important points to be discussed are to give a general idea about how the scholars discuss it, Ibn Qutaybah's treatment of it and some other books which have been written on this subject.

**2.1. THE SCIENCE OF THE OBSCURE AND THE AMBIGUOUS AS  
ONE OF THE QUR'ĀNIC SCIENCES.**

**2.1.1. The linguistic meaning of the obscure and the ambiguous.**

First of all, we must analyse the equivalents of these two words in the Arabic Language, and what the scholars have said on this subject.

With respect to the word *Mushkil* (the obscure), Ibn Manzūr derives this word from the trilateral root *shakal*, which means resemblance, similarity and likeness. He continues: "When we say: *ashkala al-amr* it means that *al-amr* (the matter) became obscure, if it is unknown or cannot be distinguished from another thing; also we say that obscurity and darkness are the same." He adds that the adjective *ashkal* refers to a colour which is a mixture of red and white, or others, such that one cannot distinguish between the two. Hence also *mushkil* can mean *mushtabih* (obscure).<sup>1</sup>

Another meaning of the verb *ashkala* is given by al-Jawharī, Ibn Fāris and al-Rāzī:

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<sup>1</sup> Ibn Manzūr, Muḥammad b. Mukarram, *Lisān al-'Arab al-Muḥīṭ*, (Dār Ṣādir, Beirut, s.d), 11/365.

*Ashkalta al-kitāb*, if you use the marks of inflection ('*alāmāt al-i'rāb*: *dammah, fathah, kasrah and sukūn*) then there will be no doubt in it.<sup>2</sup>

Here we see the common Arabic phenomenon whereby a single word can have two opposite meanings.

As for *al-Mutashābih* (the ambiguous), Ibn Manẓūr says that *mutashābih* is derived from (*shabaha*) \_to make similar. We can say that if there is a similarity between two things, then there is a likeness between them. Therefore, because of this likeness, it is difficult to distinguish between them. Thus they become ambiguous or doubtful. Also we can say: the thing is ambiguous or obscure if there is similarity among them, so if one thing becomes similar to another, then there is a lack of distinction between them, so that it becomes ambiguous or obscure.<sup>3</sup>

From these definitions, we can note two things:

- a. The ambiguous and the obscure have the same meaning according to the original meaning of each word, which is derived from a similarity that causes a lack of clarity or a doubtfulness between the things.
- b. Some scholars differentiate between similar things and the suspect things (doubtful things).<sup>4</sup> According to them, we can say that suspect things equal ambiguous things, but similar things equal like things.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See al-Jawhārī, Ismā'il b. Ḥammād, *al-Ṣiḥāḥ: Tāj al-Lughah wa Ṣiḥāḥ al-'Arabiyyah*, ed. by A.A. 'Aṭṭār, (Dār al-'Ilm li al-Malāyīn, Beirut, 2nd ed, 1979), 5/1736; Ibn Fāris, Abū al-Ḥusayn Aḥmad, *Mujmal al-Lughah*, ed. by Ḥ.Ḥ. Ḥammūdī, (Arab League Educational Cultural & Scientific Organization, s.d), 3/171; and al-Fakhr al-Rāzī, *Mukhtār al-Ṣiḥāḥ*, ed. by M. Khāṭir, (al-Maṭba'ah al-Amīriyyah, Cairo, 1926), p. 344.

<sup>3</sup> See *Lisān al-'Arab*, 13/503.

<sup>4</sup> See *al-Ṣiḥāḥ*, 5/1736; and *Mukhtār al-Ṣiḥāḥ*, p. 344.

<sup>5</sup> To find the meaning of the words (*mushkil* and *mutashābih*) respectively, see *Lisān al-'Arab*, 11/356 & 13/503; al-Zabīdī, Muḥammad b. Murtaḍā, *Tāj al-'Arūs min Jawāhir al-Qāmūs*, ed. by A.A. Farrāj, (Kuwait, 1965), 7/392 & 9/393; al-Fayrūzabādī, Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb, *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*, (Dār al-Jil, Beirut, s.d), 3/412 & 4/288; *al-Ṣiḥāḥ*, 5/1736 & 6/2236; Some scholars at the Academy of the Arabic language in Cairo, *al-Mu'jam al-Wasīf*, (Cairo, s.d), 1/493 & 1/474; *Mujmal al-lughah*, 3/171; *Mukhtār al-Ṣiḥāḥ* pp. 344, 328; al-Aṣfahānī, al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad, *al-Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qur'ān*, (Dār al-Ma'rifah, Beirut, s.d), p. 254; and al-Yāzījī, Ibrāhīm, *Nuj'at al-Rā'id wa Shir'at al-Wārid fī al-Mutarādif wa-al-Mutawārid*, ed. by N. Nāṣir al-Dīn, (Maktabat Lubnān, Beirut, 2nd ed, 1970), 2/197.

For the purposes of this thesis, the word "obscure" will be used instead of "*mushkil*", and the word "ambiguous" instead of "*mutashābih*".

### 2.1.2. The importance of the science of the obscure and the ambiguous among the Qur'ānic sciences.

This science is very important because:

1. It deals with the most difficult words and verses of the Qur'ān, which is the main reason why most of the exegetes tried to explain the Qur'ān.
2. These kinds of words and verses of the Qur'ān are the cause of most accusations against the Qur'ān.
3. As far as one kind of ambiguous verse is concerned, some Islamic scholars have been drawn into disputes, and the community of Islam has become divided, because of different understandings of these verses.

Because of this importance, most of the exegetes and other Islamic scholars explain these kinds of verses in their exegeses, or their books of Qur'ānic sciences, or in separate books specialising in them, as we shall see later.

We can say, therefore, that most of the books on Qur'ānic sciences include one chapter or more about the obscure and the ambiguous, and discuss it in general,<sup>6</sup> and sometimes in detail.<sup>7</sup> Most of the exegetes have also discussed this subject, especially when they explain verse [3/7], which says:

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<sup>6</sup> For instance, see al-Zamlakānī, 'Abd al-Wāḥid b. 'Abd al-Karīm, *al-Burhān al-Kāshif 'an I'jāz al-Qur'ān*, ed. by K. al-Ḥadīthī and A. Maḥlūb, (Baghdad, 1st ed, 1974), p. 93; and Kifāhī, Muḥammad 'Abd al-Salām, *Fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, (Dār al-Nahḍah al-'Arabiyyah, Beirut, 1972), p. 121.

<sup>7</sup> E.g. al-Zarkashī, Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh, *al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, (Maṭba'at 'Īsā al-Ḥalabī, Cairo, 1st ed, 1957), 1/112-154; and Ibn al-Jawzī, *Funūn al-Afnān fī 'Ajā'ib 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, ed. by R.A. al-'Ubaydī, (al-Majma' al-'Ilmī al-'Irāqī, Baghdad, 1988), pp. 210-309.

He it is who hath revealed unto thee (Muḥammad) the Scripture wherein are clear revelation\_They are the substance of the book\_and others (which are) allegorical.<sup>8</sup> But those in whose hearts is doubt pursue, forsooth, that which is allegorical seeking (to cause) dissention by seeking to explain it. None knoweth its explanation save Allāh.<sup>9</sup> And those who are of sound instruction say: We believe therein, the whole is from our Lord; but only men of understanding really heed.

This verse obviously indicates that some of the Qur'ānic verses are ambiguous, but scholars specialising in Qur'anic sciences distinguish the obscure from the ambiguous, because, according to them, each word has its own meaning.<sup>10</sup> On the basis of a study of the books of Qur'anic sciences, we may summarize their approach to the obscure and ambiguous as follows:

a. Obscure verses and words:

In their studies of the obscure the scholars discuss:

1. Other books written on these kinds of verses; without going into detail.<sup>11</sup>
2. The subject of this science, and its main aim, including the meaning of the obscure.<sup>12</sup>
3. Some examples of these verses, with a commentary.
4. The reasons for this obscurity.
5. The wisdom in the repetition of some words and verses in the Qur'ān.

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<sup>8</sup> Most of the translators used the word (allegorical) to indicate the meaning of "ambiguous", the exact Arabic word in the Qur'ān being (*mutashābih*).

<sup>9</sup> On this matter, there is a great difference between the scholars, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

<sup>10</sup> As al-Suyūṭī, Jalāl al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān has done in his *al-Itqān fi 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, (Maktabat al-Mashhad al-Ḥusaynī, Cairo, 1st ed, 1967), 3/3-9; *Funūn al-Afnān*, p. 210-309 and *al-Burhān*, 1/112-54 & 2/68.

<sup>11</sup> See *al-Itqān*, 3/9.

<sup>12</sup> See *Funūn al-Afnān*, p. 210; and Zarzūr, 'Adnān, *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, (al-Maktab al-Islāmī, Beirut, 1st ed, 1981), p. 172.

6. Some books deal with the obscure and the ambiguous without mentioning them separately, including both under the topic of *al-wujūh wa-al-naẓā'ir*, or *al-ashbāh wa-al-naẓā'ir*.<sup>13</sup> This involves several subjects: Arabic syntax, jurisprudence and others. We shall discuss these books in the last section of this chapter. However, it will be useful here to give a definition of the words: (*wujūh*, *ashbāh*, and *naẓā'ir*). Briefly we can say that: *al-wujūh* are distinct words, *al-ashbāh* are similar words and *al-naẓā'ir* are words which have the same structure but different meanings.<sup>14</sup>

If we ask what the scholars' basic concept of the obscure is, we can perhaps say that they use this term to indicate that some verses seem to have opposite meanings or contradictory meanings, so that they cannot be understood directly or quickly, unless a deep study of them has been made.<sup>15</sup>

b. Ambiguous verses and words:

Under this heading the scholars discuss:

1. The meaning of the word *mutashābih* and the divisions between the scholars in their opinions about its meaning and its various subdivisions.
2. The books written on this subject.
3. The difference between *muḥkam* (perspicuous) and *mutashābih* (ambiguous).<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> See *al-Burhān*, 1/102-11.

<sup>14</sup> In respect of the word *ashbāh*, see Ibn Taymiyyah, Aḥmad b. 'Abd al-Ḥalīm, *Daqā'iq al-Tafsīr*, ed. by M.A. al-Julaynid, (Dār al-Anṣār, 1st ed, 1978), 1/99; and in respect of the other words, see Yaḥyā b. Sallām, *al-Taṣārif*, ed. by Hind Shalabī, (al-Sharikah al-Tūnisīyyah lil-Tawzī', Tunisia, 1979), p. 11. Most other authors of this kind of books maintain the same categories and definitions.

<sup>15</sup> For instance, Ibn 'Abd al-Salām, 'Izz al-Dīn b. 'Abd al-'Azīz, *Fawā'id fī Mushkil al-Qur'ān*, ed. by S.R. 'Alī, (Dār al-Shurūq, Jeddah, 2nd ed, 1982); al-Farḥān, Rāshid 'Abd Allāh, *Tafsīr Mushkil al-Qur'ān*, (Kuwait, 1st ed, 1983); and al-Qaysī, Makkī b. Abī Ṭālib, *Tafsīr al-Mushkil min Gharīb al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, ed. by M. Ramaḍān, (Dār al-Furqān, Amman, s.d). Also see Zarzūr, 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān, p. 166.

<sup>16</sup> Most exegetes have discussed this matter, see for example al-Māwardī, 'Alī b. Ḥabīb, *Tafsīr al-Māwardī*, ed. by K.M. Khaḍr and 'A. Abū Ghuddah, (Kuwait, 1st ed, 1982), 1/304; al-Qāsimī, Muḥammad Jamāl al-Dīn, *Maḥāsīn al-Ta'wīl*, (Beirut, s.d), 4/751; and al-Khaṭīb, 'Abd al-Karīm, *al-Tafsīr al-Qur'ānī li al-Qur'ān*, (Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, s.d), 3/398. See also al-Shīrāzī, Muḥammad al-Ḥusaynī, *Tafsīr Taqrīb al-Qur'ān ilā al-Adhhān*, (Mu'assasat al-Wafā', Beirut, 1st ed, 1980), 3/51; *al-Burhān*, 2/68; *al-Burhān al-kāshif 'an I'jāz al-Qur'ān*, p/93; al-Mudarrīsī,

4. The difference between *tafsīr* (explanation) and *ta'wīl* (interpretation).<sup>17</sup>
5. Whether the scholars or those who are firmly grounded in knowledge know the interpretation of the ambiguous verses or not.<sup>18</sup>
6. The wisdom of the existence of these verses in the Qur'ān.
7. Some scholars deal with the parts of the ambiguous in greater detail.<sup>19</sup>

What, in turn, are the scholars' concepts about the ambiguous? We can say that there are two opinions about its definition:

a. Some scholars restrict this term to those verses which deal with God's attributes or qualities known as *āyāt al-ṣifāt*, which indicate that God has some attributes which seem like human ones. These attributes are also mentioned in the Traditions known as *aḥādīth al-ṣifāt*.

These verses presented problems of explanations for the exegetes, and as a result, they became divided in their understanding of them, as mentioned above. We shall return to this point later in this section.

b. According to others the term also applies to the verses which have a similarity to others, but with a small difference between them. Here the question is: Why are these verses repeated in the Qur'ān in this way? There must be at least one way of answering this question. However, in general we can say that all the scholars have given examples of this kind and explained them, either in the books of *i'jāz al-Qur'ān* (the

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Muḥammad Taqīyy al-Dīn, *Min Hady al-Qur'ān*, (al-Markaz al-Islāmī, Tehran, 1st. ed, 1983), pp. 19-21; Ibn Taymiyyah, *Daqā'iq al-Tafsīr*, 1/97; Ibn Taymiyyah, *al-Iklīl fī al-Mutashābih Wa-al-Ta'wīl*, (al-Maṭba'ah al-Salafīyyah, 1973); al-Darwish, Muḥyī al-Dīn, *I'rāb al-Qur'ān al-Karīm wa Bayānuh*, (Dār al-Irshād, Ḥimṣ, Syria, s.d), 3/456; al-Zajjāj, Ibrāhīm b. al-Sarī, *Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān wa I'rābuh*, ed. by A.A. Shalabī, ('Ālam al-Kutub, Beirut, 1st ed, 1988), 1/376; al-Namr, 'Abd al-Mun'im, *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, (Dār al-Kitāb al-Miṣrī, Cairo, 1st ed, 1979), p. 171; Kifāhī, Muḥammad 'Abd al-Salām, *Fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, pp. 121-2; and Zarzūr, *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, p. 163.

<sup>17</sup> See *Daqā'iq al-Tafsīr*, 1/109; and *al-Burhān*, 2/149.

<sup>18</sup> See all books mentioned under footnote (16).

<sup>19</sup> As *al-Burhān*, 1/112.

miraculous nature or the inimitable nature of the Qur'ān), or in more specialised works which seek to give reasons for this, or to reveal the wisdom of the repeated verses in the Qur'ān.<sup>20</sup>

These kinds of ambiguous verses are explained by the exegetes in a different way from that outlined in the preceding section.<sup>21</sup>

Before ending this discussion we may summarize what the scholars have said about the wisdom of the existence of the ambiguous and obscure verses in the Qur'ān, in the following points:

1. These verses are eloquent, in order to complete the challenge given in the Qur'ān to created beings to produce a book like the Qur'ān.
2. They are intended to urge people to study the Qur'ān, to search in it, and to be interested in it.
3. They are intended to show the superiority of the scholars over those who are ignorant.
4. They are intended to test the faith of the Muslims.<sup>22</sup>

Let us finally quote what Ibn Qutaybah says about the wisdom of these kinds of verses:

We are not allowed to say what is the wisdom of its revelation, because the Qur'ān contains all the Arabs' styles of speech, which have eloquence, rhetoric, allegory, etc. Among these are the obscure and the

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<sup>20</sup> As *Zāhirat al-Tikrār fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, by 'Abd al-Mun'im al-Sayyid Ḥasan, (Cairo, 1st ed, 1980).

<sup>21</sup> See Zarzūr, *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, p. 166.

<sup>22</sup> See al-Māwardī, *al-Tafsīr*, 1/305; *al-Burhān*, 2/75; Unknown author, *Muqaddimat Kitāb al-Mabānī*, p. 177; al-Darwish, *I'rāb al-Qur'ān wa Bayānuh*, 3/456; al-Durrah, Muḥammad 'Alī Ṭāhā, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm wa I'rābuh wa Bayānuh*, (Dār al-Ḥikmah, Beirut, s.d), 3/86; al-Ḥakīm, Muḥammad Bāqir, *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, (Maṭba'at al-Ittiḥād, Tehran, 1983), p. 152; Kifāhī, *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, p. 128; Zarzūr, *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, p. 178; and al-Ṣāliḥ, Ṣubḥī, *Mabāḥith fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, (Dār al-'Ilm li al-Malāyīn, Beirut, 3rd ed, 1964), p. 286.

ambiguous, which are known only by God and those who are firmly grounded in knowledge.<sup>23</sup>

### 2.1.3. The differences between the scholars concerning the ambiguous verses.

As mentioned above, the scholars have differed in their opinions about the definition, content and parts of the ambiguous verses. The following preliminary points need to be investigated before any further discussion can be undertaken:

1. The differences between the scholars in understanding verse [3/7].
2. The differences between them in determining the meaning of the phrase (ambiguous verses).
3. The correct definition of the ambiguous and its parts.

In general, there are three verses in the Qur'ān which discuss the nature of its verses. These verses seem to be contradictory in meaning.

The first one says:

This is a scripture the revelations whereof are perfected (*uḥkimat*) and then expounded, it cometh from One Wise, Informed; 11/1.

In this verse, the word (*uḥkimat*) indicates that all the Qur'ān is perspicuous.

The second verse says:

God hath revealed the fairest of statements, a Scripture consistent (*mutashābihan*); 39/23.

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<sup>23</sup> *Al-Mushkil*, p. 86.



This verse, however, presents an obvious difficulty in that the Arabic word (*nutashābihan*) could, at least theoretically, be taken as indicating that all the Qur'ān is ambiguous.

The third verse says:

He it is Who hath revealed unto thee (Muḥammad) the Scripture wherein are clear revelations (*muhkamāt*) -They are the substance of the Book- and others (which are) allegorical (*mutashābihāt*); 3/7.

This verse indicates that the Qur'ān includes both ambiguous and perspicuous verses. These three verses together give the qualities of the Qur'ān. As regards the linguistic meaning, all scholars are agreed that there is no difference or contradiction between these verses. They maintain that the first verse describes the verses and words of the Qur'ān as perfected, which means that there is no contradiction among them. The second verse describes the Qur'ānic verses as they resemble each other in truth, eloquence, and wonder. On the other hand, the third verse gives the main description of the Qur'ānic verses, as being perspicuous while others are ambiguous.

The scholars are agreed upon these interpretations.<sup>24</sup> However, there still remains the problem in the third verse about which verses are ambiguous, and which are perspicuous. This is one of the areas of dispute between the scholars. Another one is whether those who are firmly grounded in knowledge know the interpretation of the ambiguous verses or not. This arises from the verse [3/7] itself which says:

but those in whose hearts is doubt pursue, forsooth, that which is allegorical seeking (to cause) dissension by seeking to explain it. None knoweth its explanation save Allāh. And (*wa*) those who are well grounded in knowledge, they say: We believe therein, the whole is from our Lord.

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<sup>24</sup> See *al-Burhān*, 2/68; *al-Itqān*, 3/3; *al-Mufradāt*, p. 255; *Muqaddimat Kitāb al-Mabānī*, p. 176; Zarzūr, *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, pp. 163-165; Kifāhī, *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, p. 121; al-Namr, *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, p. 17; al-Šālih, *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, p. 281; al-Ḥakīm, *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, p. 134; al-'Aṭṭār, Dāwūd, *Mūjaz 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, (Mu'assasat al-A'lamī li al-Maṭbū'āt, Beirut, 2nd ed, 1979), p. 22; al-Zurqānī, Muḥammad 'Abd al-'Azīm, *Manāhil al-'Irfān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, (Maṭba'at 'Isā al-Ḥalabī, Cairo, 3rd ed, 1954), 2/167; Syed Anwer Ali, *Qur'ān: The Fundamental Law of Human Life*, (Syed Publications, Karachi, 1st ed, 1982), 1/88.

But first, what is the ambiguous? What is the perspicuous? The consensus of the early and later scholars maintains that the **perspicuous** is:

- \* Something which contains knowledge of which mankind is in need.
- \* Something which only has one obvious connotation.
- \* Something sufficient in meaning, requiring no further comments.

As for the **ambiguous**, they maintain that it is:

- \* Something known to God only.
- \* Something with more than one connotation.
- \* Something requiring further explanation.<sup>25</sup>

There was a considerable dispute among scholars concerning the latter part of verse [3/7], and the two different ways of understanding the syntax of the phrase (*wa-al-rāsikhūna fī al-'ilm*).

According to Arabic syntax, the particle *wa* is used as conjunction or as a particle for the continuation of the discussion with a new sentence (*isti'nāf*). But in this verse, there is disagreement about whether it is used as a conjunction, which would mean that the verse indicates that those who are firmly grounded in knowledge know the explanation of the ambiguous verses; or whether as a particle introducing a new

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<sup>25</sup> See Denffer, Ahmad Von, *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, (The Islamic Foundation, London, 1985), p. 80; and al-Qaṭṭān, Mannā', *Mabāḥith fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, (Mu'assasat al-Risālah, Beirut, 12th ed, 1983), p. 216. Also the earlier scholars, especially the exegetes, give further details about the kinds of the ambiguous and perspicuous verses; for instance, see al-Māwardī in his exegesis, 1/304-305; al-Fakhr al-Rāzī, Muḥammad b. 'Umar, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb or al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, (al-Maṭba'ah al-Ḥusayniyyah, Egypt, s.d), 2/394-401; and al-Ṭabarī, Muḥammad b. Jarīr, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān*, (Maṭba'at Muṣṭafā al-Ḥalabī, Egypt, 3rd ed, 1978), 3/170-181. It is worth mentioning that this matter was also discussed by Islamic jurists, who use the word *muḥkam* to mean the abrogating, and the word *mutashābih* to mean the abrogated verse, see al-Shāṭibī, Ibrāhīm b. Mūsā, *al-Muwāfaqāt fī Uṣūl al-Sharī'ah*, ed by 'A. Drāz, (Dār al-Ma'rifah, Beirut, 2nd ed, 1975), 3/85.

sentence in which case there would be in English a full stop before the particle *wa*, then the verse indicates that only God knows its reality.

In general, the scholars put forward three views on this subject:<sup>26</sup>

a. The Traditional view:

Traditional scholars maintained that only God knows the reality of the ambiguous words in the Qur'ān. Such words deal with God's attributes and other invisible things such as the nature of the day of resurrection, and life after death, etc. These are verses in which we should believe and leave their meaning to God.<sup>27</sup> Thus it is recorded that when Mālik b. Anas was questioned about the verse: [He mounted the throne (*istawā 'alā al-'arsh*); 20/5], he said: "*al-istiwā' ma'lūm, wa-al-kayf majhūl, wa-al-īmān bihi wājib wa-al-su'āl 'anhu bid'ah*"<sup>28</sup> = The meaning of *istiwā'* is known, and the how (of it) is unknown, and to believe in it is a duty, and to ask questions about it is an innovation (i.e. novelty, or a form of heresy through introducing new things). This is claimed to be the opinion of the Companions and the Successors.<sup>29</sup>

They support their opinion with evidences; first from Arabic syntax, that the particle (*wa*) in [3/7] must be used for *isti'nāf* (continuation of the discussion with a new sentence), otherwise there is no correct meaning for the next sentence. Their view was that if the phrase (*yaqūlūna āmannā bihi*) is a "*ḥāl*" clause (expressing the circumstances in which the action of the verb is taking place), as maintained by those who argue for the opposing view, then it would have to be preceded by a verb, since it is one of the rules of Arabic grammar that a *ḥāl* clause cannot be used without such a preceding verb. Accordingly the phrase should be *ya'lamūnahu qā'ilīna* (for

<sup>26</sup> See *al-Burhān al-Kāshif 'an I'jāz al-Qur'ān*, p. 75; *al-Burhān*, 2/72; *al-Itqān*, 3/5-10; Zarzūr, *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, p. 176; al-Ṣāliḥ, *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, p. 282; Ismā'il, Sha'bān Muḥammad, *al-Madkhal li Dirāsāt al-Qur'ān wa-al-Sunnah*, (Dār al-Anṣār, Egypt, 1st ed, 1980), p. 481; and *Qur'ān: the Fundamental Law*, 1/89.

<sup>27</sup> These words are mentioned in most books of dogma; e.g. *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, 4/162-7.

<sup>28</sup> Ibn Taymiyyah, *al-Iklīl*, p. 50. Also see *al-Itqān*, 3/8.

<sup>29</sup> See al-Zamlakānī, *al-Burhān*, p. 95; Ibn Taymiyyah, *al-Iklīl*, p. 10-20; and *Manāhil al-'Irfān*, 2/177.

*yaqūlūna) āmannā bihi* to be grammatically acceptable; and since there is no verb such as *ya'lamūnahu* here, the idea that the "wa" is a conjunction denoting 'atf must be incorrect. Indeed, according to al-Qurṭubī, it is impossible to have a *ḥāl* clause dependent upon a verb that has been omitted.<sup>30</sup> Thus the verse cannot be interpreted as meaning that any person except God is able to know the explanation of the ambiguous.

Other evidence is that the Prophet advised his Companions to avoid those who investigate the interpretation of the ambiguous verses.<sup>31</sup> Yet another is from the verse [3/7] itself, where God blames and criticizes those who follow the ambiguous verses by saying that there is a perversity (*zaygh*) in their hearts.<sup>32</sup>

b. The Rationalist view:

Scholars who take this view have maintained that those who have deep knowledge know the reality of the ambiguous verses, but that those verses which talk about supernatural matters are only known to God. So, according to their opinion, the verses of God's attributes can be understood by interpretation (*ta'wīl*).<sup>33</sup>

This group also support their opinion with evidences, and reply to that rule of Arabic grammar which we have discussed earlier by saying that the Arabs also used the kind of sentence in which the *ḥāl* can be used without a verb.<sup>34</sup> Another argument, they put forward is the following question: if God does not want anyone to know the meaning of the ambiguous verses, what is the wisdom in this kind of verse? Also, how can we link the meaning of verse [3/7] \_according to the traditional view\_ with other verses which indicate that God had explained everything clearly in the Qur'ān, and that He revealed the Qur'ān to the Prophet in order that he should explain what He

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<sup>30</sup> See al-Qurṭubī, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad, *al-Jami' li Ahkām al-Qur'ān*, (Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah, Cairo, 1938), 4/16.

<sup>31</sup> This is related by al-Bukhārī, Muḥammad b. Ismā'il, *al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. by some scholars, (Maktabat al-Nahḍah al-Ḥadīthah, Mecca, 2nd ed, 1984), 6/28; and al-Dārimī, 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān, *al-Sunan*, (Dār al-Fikr, Beirut, s.d), 1/55.

<sup>32</sup> See *al-Itqān*, 3/5-9; and al-Qurṭubī, 4/11.

<sup>33</sup> For example, the word "*istawā*" refers to God's majesty, see *al-Itqān*, 3/5.

<sup>34</sup> See al-Qurṭubī, 4/17; and *al-Mushkil*, p. 100.

had sent down to him?<sup>35</sup> A third argument is: How can we understand the Prophet's prayer to God to give Ibn 'Abbās knowledge in religion and interpretation if these verses cannot be understood? Or what Ibn 'Abbās himself said: "I am one of those who know the ambiguous"? This is also claimed by Mujāhid and al-Ḍaḥḥāk.<sup>36</sup>

c. The middle view:

This question of the understanding of the ambiguous verses and words in the Qur'ān and whether they can be understood by scholars caused a dispute which continues even to the present day, with many variations and modifications of the two extreme arguments. Thus many scholars accept the first opinion if the verse talks about the ambiguous meanings of God's attributes, while they can accept the other opinion if the verse talks about verbal ambiguities.<sup>37</sup> Thus for these scholars, it depends on the kind of verse.<sup>38</sup> However, the rationalists added one further thing, which is that the verses of God's attributes can be understood by interpretation. Some scholars go further than this; for example, Ibn Taymiyyah says:

In verse [3/7], God did not say that none can know their (the ambiguous verses) meaning except God, but He said that none can know its hidden meaning except God.<sup>39</sup>

He also maintains:

...There is no doubt that *al-Rāsikhūn fī al-'ilm* know what is regarded as ambiguous for others; this is according to the possible reading in verse [3/7] above, which has two possible readings provided that the word *ta'wīl* here is to mean *tafsīr*...<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> This is the meaning of verses: [17/12], [6/126], [41/3] and [16/44].

<sup>36</sup> See all books mentioned under the note (26).

<sup>37</sup> It seems that Ibn Qutaybah is the founder of this opinion, which can easily be observed from his treatment of this kind of verse in general, his opinion concerning the ambiguous and from his treatment of God's attributes as we shall see in the next section and in Ch. 7.

<sup>38</sup> See the previous books, it is clear from these that when any author says: "None knows the meaning of the ambiguous verse", he means the kind which talks about God's attributes.

<sup>39</sup> Ibn Taymiyyah, *Daqā'iq al-Tafsīr*, 1/97, see also the following pages, 98-131 where he discusses this matter in detail; he himself refers here to Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal when he speaks about the ambiguous which depends on the sequence of the verse. Also see *al-Iklīl fī al-Mutashābih wa-al-Ta'wīl*, all of which investigates this idea, especially p. 50; and *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, 17/390.

<sup>40</sup> *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, 17/385.

But in general of this kind of verse, he states:

The word *ta'wīl* has three meanings, the first is: *tafsīr* or the explanation of the speech, the second is the reality of the speech or the true nature of the speech, and the third is the interpretation of the speech, which indicates that the word or sentence has another possible meaning. Therefore, the ambiguous verses have been uttered in an allegorical manner.<sup>41</sup>

The first two meanings are accepted by the traditional scholars. The first indicates that the scholars can know the meanings of the ambiguous verses, but the second indicates that none can know its supernatural meaning or its reality except God. The third meaning is accepted by the rationalists who say that the meaning of this kind of verse can be understood by interpretation.

Similarly al-Aṣḥānī says:

The ambiguous verses are of three kinds. First: Those, the meaning of which is not at all possible for anybody at any moment whatsoever, e.g, the day of resurrection and its signs. Second: Those, the meaning of which a man knows from the resources which he possesses, e.g, extraordinary words. Third: Those, which are in between the two, some scholars being acquainted with them and some not; this is the kind which the Prophet Muḥammad taught Ibn 'Abbās and 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. Thus we can read verse [3/7] to indicate that the scholars know the interpretation of the ambiguous verses.<sup>42</sup>

However, as we mentioned before, there is a difference between the scholars in determining the kinds and meanings of the ambiguous verses. Thus there are two kinds of ambiguous verses:

a. The verbally ambiguous (*al-mutashābih al-lafzī*):

There are several categories of this kind:

1. Verses where words are used in a similar structure but with minor differences. This occurs in several ways: By adding some particles or words, or by changing the order in

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<sup>41</sup> Loc. cit. See also al-Qaṭṭān, pp. 218-9.

<sup>42</sup> *Al-Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qur'ān*, p. 255. However, many other scholars mention such opinions; for example al-Shāṭibi in his *al-Muwāfaqāt*, 3/94-6.

the sentences,<sup>43</sup> e.g, [*kulā minhā raghadan ḥaythu shi' tumā*; 2/35] and [*Kulū minhā ḥaythu shi' tum raghada*; 2/58], and: [*Mā uhillā bihi li ḡhayri Allāh*; 2/173] and [*Mā uhillā li ḡhayri Allāhi bihi*; 6/3]. There are separate studies of this category, as we shall see later. However, it is important here to mention that some scholars have discussed the reasons for the repetition of such verses.<sup>44</sup>

2. Sometimes apparent repetition must be examined carefully because the word in question may in fact has more than one meaning, though the sequence of the sentence will indicate the correct meaning.

3. Words which are difficult to explain because of the doubtful or contrary nature of the verse.

In general, we can say that verbal ambiguity lies in the structure of the sentence.

b. The ambiguous in meaning (*al-mutashābih al-ma'nawī*):

There are three kinds of verses which involve the ambiguous in meaning:

1. The kind which deals with God's attributes, especially those which seem like human ones.

2. The kind which refers to supernatural things, such as the time of the day of resurrection, the nature of life after death, etc. It is stated in the Qur'ān that only God knows these things.<sup>45</sup>

3. The mysterious letters which begin some sūras. This type, although its meaning is unknown to men, may involve them in guessing.

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<sup>43</sup> See *al-Burhān*, 1/154.

<sup>44</sup> See for example 'A.S. Ḥasan in his *Zāhirat al-Tikrār fī al-Qur'ān*, pp. 23-27, he says: "Some of the reasons for the repetition of these verses are: 1. This is the Arab style of speech. 2. To remind the people about the commands. 3. Repetition is one of the methods of education. 4. The Qur'ān was revealed during 23 years, so there must be repetition in it in order to link its subjects." Also there is another important reason which is: In each repetition, there is at least one rhetorical purpose or more, which is important to the main subject of that sūra.

<sup>45</sup> For example, see verse [31/34].

The scholars only deal with the first kind and the third one, the mysterious letters which begin some sūras. In the latter case they attempt to explain the wisdom of their existence in the Qur'ān. Many opinions are found to show this wisdom, although some scholars say that only God knows their meaning and wisdom.

It has been suggested by many commentators that the 14 mysterious letters represent all the letters in the alphabet (It has been explained that they are representative of the phonetic structure of Arabic letters).<sup>46</sup> Thus the challenge made in the Qur'ān for all mankind and Jinn to produce a book like the Qur'ān or ten sūras or even one *sūra*<sup>47</sup> implies that this must be based on the letters of the Arabic language, as represented by the 14 mysterious letters.

As for the type which deals with God's attributes, there are several verses which mention God, using physical attributes to describe Him, for example:

- a. [The Lord comes with the Angels, ranks by ranks; 89/22].
- b. [And there endures for ever the face of the Lord; 55/27].
- c. [And that thou mayest be brought up before My eye; 20/39].
- d. [The hand of God is above their hands; 48/10].

In these examples, we can see some physical attributes used to describe God. The problem was how those verses should be understood. We have mentioned above that the traditional scholars maintained that we must believe in God's description of Himself without investigating it and without rejecting its meanings, and also without

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<sup>46</sup> See Bint al-Shāṭi', 'Ā'ishah 'Abd al-Raḥmān, *Min Asrār al-'Arabiyyah fī al-Bayān al-Qur'ānī*, (Beirut, 1972), pp. 13-7; and *Fawā'id fī Mushkil al-Qur'ān*, pp. 61-3. See also *E.I.*<sup>2</sup>, 5/414, it gives, however, many explanations to these letters, 5/412-4, some of them according to western scholars' views.

<sup>47</sup> This according to *the Qur'ān*, the verses in sequence are: [17/88], [11/13] and [2/23].



comparison with human attributes,<sup>48</sup> because God says: [Nothing is as His likeness; and He is the Hearer, the Seer. 42/11].

As we have seen, the rationalists said: We also believe in this part, but we must understand its meanings, and we cannot accept these attributes in their physical meaning, because they resemble human attributes. Thus, we can explain them by interpretation (*ta'wīl*). Therefore, they would interpret the above examples in the following way:

- a. The coming of God means the revelation of His commands.
- b. The face of God means His personality.
- c. The eye of God means His blessings.
- d. The hand of God means His power.<sup>49</sup>

Thus according to this line of reasoning, we can say that the scholars can know the meanings, but they cannot know the reality or the hidden meanings, but that as far as the supernatural things are concerned, only God knows their meanings.

It seems clear that once we have understood the nature of the ambiguous verses and defined them, all other verses can be termed perspicuous (*muḥkamāt*).<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> See Ibn Taymiyyah's books of dogma (*'aqīda*), e.g. the first four volumes of *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, e.g. 4/162-7; and other books of dogma, such as 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Ḥasan Āl al-Shaykh, *Fath al-Majīd Sharḥ Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, ed. by M.Ḥ. al-Faqī, (Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, Beirut, 7th ed, 1957), pp. 512-3.

<sup>49</sup> See *al-Burhān*, 2/83-8 and *al-Itqān*, 3/11.

<sup>50</sup> Some scholars give many definitions for the perspicuous; for example see al-Māwardī in his exegesis, 1/304-5; al-Ṭabarī, 3/171-5; *Tafsīr al-Rāzī*, 2/296; and Denffer, pp. 80-1.

## 2.2. IBN QUTAYBAH'S TREATMENT OF THE OBSCURE AND AMBIGUOUS VERSES.

### 2.2.1. His opinion about them:

In order to appreciate the significance of this subject, we should remember that Ibn Qutaybah is one of the first scholars to write about it, and that many authors after him have depended on his knowledge and referred to his books.

His opinions are to be found in *al-Mushkil*, *al-Ikhtilāf fī al-Lafz* and *al-Masā'il wa-al-Ajwibah*. In the first book, he says:

The origin of resemblance lies in the similarity between words in outward form, although they have a different meaning. Thus, God said about the food of paradise: [..and it is given to them in resemblance; 2/25] which means that it has the same form but a different taste. Also God said about the unbelievers: [Their hearts are all alike; 2/118] which means that their hearts are the same in unbelief and hardness. A matter seems to be ambiguous if it resembles another one, so that one cannot distinguish between them. Thus we say: you made it ambiguous to me, if you associate the truth with the falsehood so that it becomes difficult to distinguish.

It can be said that everything which is difficult to understand (*ghamūda wa daqqa*) is ambiguous even if no doubt arises because of the likeness with other things, thus the separate letters at the beginning of (certain) sūras are called "ambiguous", although there is no doubt concerning them, and one cannot hesitate over them, because they resemble something else, or because they may be confused with something else.

Similar to the ambiguous is the obscure. It is called obscure (*mushkil*) because it *ashkala*; i.e, it enters into the form (*shakl*) of something else.... Thus, anything which is difficult to understand (*ghamūda*), even though its difficulty is not of this sort is called *mushkil*.<sup>51</sup>

From this definition we see that Ibn Qutaybah does not really distinguish between the obscure and the ambiguous as far as the original linguistic meaning of each word is concerned; each of them indicates the ambiguous, the obscure, and the doubtful.

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<sup>51</sup> *Al- Mushkil*, pp. 101-2.

This is his opinion according to the linguistic meaning. It is worth pointing out that Arabic dictionaries refer to his books with regard to the meaning of these two words.<sup>52</sup>

But what did Ibn Qutaybah mean by the word "obscure"? How did he deal with it in his *al-Mushkil*? Briefly we can say that he followed the broad meaning of the term, and therefore he investigated every obscure sentence, word and particle in order to make it clearly understood, whether the obscurity was in the language or in the different meanings of the same word or particle or of other kinds, as we shall see below.

Equally, what did he mean by the word "ambiguous"? In the above book he devoted a special chapter to it. Is this an indication that he believes that it has a different meaning from the "obscure"? No, because in this chapter he deals with the criticisms against the Qur'ān based on the view that there are ambiguous verses in it.<sup>53</sup> The important argument was: "If God wants guidance for His servants, then why has He revealed these kinds of verses?"<sup>54</sup> He replies that God revealed the Qur'ān using the allegory, eloquence, and rhetoric of the Arabic language as the Arabs understood it. Thus the Qur'ān is clear to scholars of the Arabic language but not to learners or the ignorant. Therefore, he used the word "ambiguous" with the same meaning as "obscure".

With regard to verse [3/7] which has been discussed earlier, what is Ibn Qutaybah's view of it? Can those who have a deep knowledge know the interpretation of the ambiguous verses or not? He says:

We are not among those who say that the scholars do not know the meanings of the ambiguous verses... They know them, because God revealed the Qur'ān only to benefit thereby all people and to indicate a meaning which He intended... Can we say that the Prophet did not know them? And if it is possible for the Prophet to have known them, despite God's words [None knoweth its interpretation save God], it is possible for the scholars among his Companions to have known it; for example, he taught 'Alī explanation (*tafsīr*), and he prayed to God for Ibn 'Abbās: "Teach him interpretation (*ta'wīl*) and teach him

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<sup>52</sup> See section 2.1.1 of this chapter.

<sup>53</sup> As verse [3/7] indicates.

<sup>54</sup> *Al-Mushkil*, p. 86.

jurisprudence."<sup>55</sup> It is related that Ibn 'Abbās said: "I know all of the Qur'ān but for four things: *ghislīn*, *ḥanānan*, *al-awwāh* and *al-raqīm*".<sup>56</sup> This is what Ibn 'Abbās said at one time; later on he knew that (too). If the *rāsikhūn* were only able to say concerning the ambiguous: [We believe in it, all the book is from our Lord], then they would have no superiority over the learned (*muta'allimīn*) or even over the ignorant Muslims because all of them say: "We believe in it...". We did not see any exegete stop at the ambiguous verse and say: Nobody knows it. Rather they explained every thing, even the mysterious letters which begin some sūras.<sup>57</sup>

Finally, Ibn Qutaybah seeks to make it clear from syntactical evidence that the particle (*wa*) in verse [3/7] is used as a conjunction.<sup>58</sup>

Thus we note that Ibn Qutaybah means by the ambiguous what is verbally ambiguous, which deals with the doubtful and difficult nature of some words. He did not investigate ambiguous repeated words and sentences, or the verses which resemble others. This is a subject on which many authors wrote, as we shall see later.

Also, we note that in *al-Mushkil* he does not deal with the ambiguous in meaning, the verses which talk about God's attributes. But he discusses some of them as a model in his *al-Ikhtilāf fī al-Lafz*. In addition to this, he discusses another kind of ambiguous in meaning, the mysterious letters at the beginning of some sūras of the Qur'ān in *al-Mushkil*.<sup>59</sup> In general, we can say that in this subject he follows the traditional scholars' opinion, which he mentions in *al-'Ikhtilāf fī al-Lafz*,<sup>60</sup> i.e. that

<sup>55</sup> See Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, Aḥmad b. 'Alī, *al-Iṣābah fī Tamyīz al-Ṣaḥābah*, (Maṭba'at al-Sa'ādah, Cairo, 1st ed, 1910, reprinted at Maktabat al-Muthannā, Baghdad, s.d), 4/91; al-Bukhārī, Muḥammad b. Ismā'il, *al-Jamī' al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, with *Fath al-Bārī Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, by Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, (al-Maṭba'ah al-Salafiyyah, Cairo, s.d), 1/155; Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, *al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, (al-Maṭba'ah al-Miṣriyyah, 1st ed, 1930), 4/1927; and Ibn Sa'd, Muḥammad, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, (Dār Beirut, Beirut, 1978), 2/365. Also Ibn Qutaybah mentions this in his *al-Masā'il wa-al-Ajwibah*, pp. 214-5.

<sup>56</sup> See *al-Masā'il wa-al-Ajwibah*, p. 213; and *al-Itqān*, 1/96.

<sup>57</sup> *Al-Mushkil*, pp. 98-9. See also *al-Masā'il wa-al-Ajwibah*, pp. 214-6. However, in pp. 208-16, there is a similar speech to what we have presented from *al-Mushkil*, where Ibn Qutaybah was answering one question concerning verse [3/7], he again confirms his opinion mentioned above.

<sup>58</sup> Loc. cit. Also see John Wansbrough in *Qur'ānic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*, (Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 151 where he quotes Ibn Qutaybah's statement.

<sup>59</sup> Pp. 299-310.

<sup>60</sup> The whole of this book concerns theological matters; for the verses talking about God's attributes, for instance, see pp. 46-7, where he makes his opinion clear.

we believe in all that God has said about Himself. We shall discuss this matter in a later chapter dealing with his treatment of theological matters in his exegesis.

It is worth mentioning that his opinion concerning the understanding of verse [3/7] was completely adopted by Ibn Taymiyyah, or rather that Ibn Taymiyyah treats it as the most acceptable opinion by saying it is the choice of most ancients.<sup>61</sup>

### 2.2.2. The kinds of obscurity studied by Ibn Qutaybah:

It should be remembered that Ibn Qutaybah uses the words obscure and ambiguous as synonyms, even though he uses the word obscure in the title of his book. He maintains that he wrote the book in response to criticisms of the Qur'ān in which the critics asked what God intended by revealing it. Much of this criticism was based on the obscure or ambiguous verses in the Qur'ān. Therefore, he used these verses as a starting point to refute the critics. In support of this view, he explains in his book:

Some people have opposed the Qur'ān by criticism. They are the heretics, those who attacked it and made errors in understanding it. They followed the ambiguous part of it, seeking the wrong path and the hidden meanings of it by a weak comprehension and by ill considered views. They said that there is a contradiction, error and variance in its verses. They investigated these things with weak evidence which can only be followed by those who do not have deep knowledge. If what they said is true, then the men who were with the Prophet during the revelation of the Qur'ān must have mentioned these things, but they did not. Therefore, I wish to refute what they have said about the Qur'ān, and to explain the doubtful interpretation which they made.<sup>62</sup>

After this chapter, he details these criticisms, which concentrate on the variance in readings of the Qur'ān, the claims that the original Qur'anic text was of a different length than the existing text, the ungrammatical speech in it, the claims that verses

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<sup>61</sup> See *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, 17/390-413 and *Dar' Ta'āruḍ al-'Aql wa-al-Naql*, ed by M.R. Sālim, (1st ed, Riyadh, 1979), 1/14-5, where Ibn Taymiyyah in the two books mentions Ibn Qutaybah's opinion and strongly defends it. In fact we can say that Ibn Taymiyyah was influenced by Ibn Qutaybah in this matter, even though some scholars find it strange for Ibn Taymiyyah to have been so; for example see al-'Ulayyānī, *'Aqīdat Ibn Qutaybah*, p. 242.

<sup>62</sup> *Al-Mushkil*, pp. 22-3 (summarised).

contradict each other, and that the presence of ambiguous verses seems to contradict God's purpose of communicating with mankind through the Qur'ān. In addition they have ridiculed the language, choosing to understand allegorical expressions as literal and therefore describing them as nonsense. They have also criticised the repetition in some verses, sentences and stories. It may be appropriate here to translate the short chapter concerning the critics' claims against the Qur'ān, which are the reason, according to Ibn Qutaybah, for writing this book, since it serves as an introduction to all of the points which will be discussed subsequently, and we have translated it in full.

### THE STORY OF THE CRITICS

Some of what we heard about them is that they argue by presenting the verses: [Had it (the Qur'ān) been from other than Allāh, they would surely have found therein much discrepancy; 4/82], and [Falsehood cannot come at it from before it or behind it. (It is) a revelation from the Wise, the Owner of Praise; 41/42].

*Qirā'āt:*

They say: We found the Companions and those who came after them differing in the way of reading a word or a sentence, for instance, Ibn 'Abbās reads [*wa iddakara ba'da amah*; 12/45] and others read [*ba'da ummah*], and 'Ā'ishah reads [*idh taliqūnahu*; 24/15] but others read [*idh talaqqawnahu*], also Abū Bakr reads [*wa jā'at sakrat al-haqqi bil-mawt*; 50/19] while others read [*wa jā'at sakrat al-mawti bil-haqq*].

Also, some reciters read [*wa a'tadat lahunna mutkan*; 12/31] and others read [*muttaka'an*], and Ibn Mas'ūd used to read [*in kānat illā zaqyatan wāhidatan*; 36/29],<sup>63</sup> and [*kal-ṣūf al-manfūsh*; 101/5],<sup>64</sup> with many similar matters wherein his copy differs from other old and new copies. He would omit from his copy the *sūrat Umm al-Qur'ān* (*al-Fātiḥah* or the Opening) and *al-Mu'awidhatān* (the last two chapters, *al-Falaq* and *al-Nās*), and he would say: Why do you add to the Qur'ān what it is not from it? Also Ubayy reads [*inna al-sā'ata 'ātiyatun akādu ukhfihā (min nafsī fa kayfa uzhirukum 'alayhā)*; 20/15],<sup>65</sup> and also adds to his own copy *du'ā' al-qunūt*, which he considers to be two other chapters of the Qur'ān.

And the reciters differ in their readings, and in marks of inflection, some put *ḍamma* instead of *fatha* and so on.

And you claim (they say) that all of these are God's speech: what do you want further than this dispute!? And what falsehood after this error and *lahn* (ungrammatical speech) do you seek!?

<sup>63</sup> The original word is *ṣayḥatan*, instead of *zaqyatan*.

<sup>64</sup> The original word is *kal-'ihn*, instead of *kal-ṣūf*.

<sup>65</sup> The words between the brackets are Ubayy's.

### *Lahn:*

And you have related from the way with which you are satisfied that 'Ā'ishah said: "Three words in the Qur'ān are errors made by the writer, Allāh's speech [*inna hādihāni lasāhirān*; 20/63], [*inna al-ladhīna āmanū wa-al-ladhīna hādū wa-al-sābi'ūn*; 5/69] and [*..wa-al-muqīmīna al-ṣalāta wa-al-mu'tūna al-zakāta*; 4/162]".<sup>66</sup> It was narrated by Ishāq b. Rāhawayh.

They said: You also have narrated about 'Uthmān, that he looked at the Qur'ān, then he said: "I see *lahn* among it, but the Arabs will correct it by their tongues".

### *Contradiction:*

And they said: Is contradiction anything other than as in the verse [On that day neither man nor jinni will be questioned of his sin; 55/39] although God says elsewhere [Them, by thy Lord, We shall question, every one of what they used to do; 15/92-93]. And such as: [This is a day wherein they speak not, nor are they suffered to put forth excuses; 77/35-36], while elsewhere God says: [Then lo! on the Day of Resurrection, before your Lord ye will dispute; 39/31]. And such as: [And some of them draw near unto others, questioning; 52/25] while He says: [..There will be no kinship among them that day, nor will they ask of one another; 23/101]. And like: [Say (O Muḥammad, unto the idolaters): Disbelieve ye verily in Him Who created the earth in two Days, and ascribe ye unto Him rivals? He (and none else) is the Lord of the Worlds; 41/9], after which He says: [Then turned He to the heaven when it was smoke, and said unto it and unto the earth: Come both of you, willingly or loth. They said: We come, obedient. Then He ordained them seven heavens in two Days; 41/11-12], those verses indicate that Allāh created the earth before the heaven, although, He says: [Are ye the harder to create, or is the heaven that He built?... And after that He spread the earth; 79/28 & 30], and this verse indicates that He created the heaven before the earth. And such as: [No food for them save bitter thorn-fruit (*dari'*); 88/6] while elsewhere He says: [Therefore hath he no lover here this day, nor any food save filth; 69/35-36], but we know that *dari'* is a kind of plant. Thus, can we imagine that there will be a plants and trees in the fire, while the fire eats them!? And such as: [But Allāh would not punish them while thou wast with them, nor will He punish them while they seek forgiveness; 8/33], but He immediately after that says: [What (plea) have they that Allāh should not punish them, when they debar (His servants) from the Inviolable Place of Worship; 8/34].

### *Relation between verses:*

They also said: What is the relation between: [And if ye fear that ye will not deal fairly by the orphans] and what He continues [then marry of the women, who seem good to you, two or three or four; 4/3]. Also, what is the relation between [Allāh hath appointed the Ka'bah, the Sacred House, a standard for mankind, and the Sacred Month and the offerings and the garlands] and what He continues [That is so that ye may know that Allāh knoweth whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth, and that Allāh is Knower of all things; 5/97]. Also, what is the relation between [Hast thou not seen how the ships glide on the sea by Allāh's grace, that He may show you of His

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<sup>66</sup> The underlined words are the three words concerning which 'Ā'ishah's account is suspect.

wonders?] and what He immediately says [Lo! therein indeed are portents for every steadfast, grateful (heart); 31/31], are these not matters in which the steadfast and the grateful are equal with the unsteadfast and the ungrateful?

*Linguistic matters:*

And what is the meaning of [...as the likeness of vegetation after rain, whereof the growth is pleasing to the disbelievers (*kuffār*); 57/20], why did He single out the disbelievers over the believers? Is not this something wherein equality may be supposed to be between both, and the believers' belief will not decrease if they are also pleased?

They also said of [Abiding there so long as the heavens and the earth endure save for that which thy Lord willeth]: that His exception the "willeth" from the "abiding" indicates the end or the extinction, since otherwise the exception have no meaning, while He says after that: [a gift unfailing; 11/108], which means non-extinction! Also, they said of [They taste not death therein (Paradise) save the first death; 44/56]: How does He except the death which was in life from their staying in Paradise? Is it accepted to say: I will not give you a (*dirham*) today except what I gave you yesterday? Also they said about [Lo! those who believe and do good works, the Beneficent will appoint for them love; 19/96]: Is it accepted to say: "Someone appoints love for you", to mean that he loves you? Also they said about [And have appointed your sleep for repose (*subāt*); 78/9]: The word (*subāt*) means sleeping, and therefore, how can it be accepted to say: He made your sleep sleeping? Also about [...And beakers (as) of glass, (bright as) glass but (made of silver); 76/16] and [That We may send upon them stones of clay; 51/33]: How can it be a glass from silver and stones from clay!?

And they said about [And if thou (Muḥammad) art in doubt concerning that which We reveal unto thee, then question those who read the Scripture (that was) before thee. Verily the Truth from thy Lord hath come unto thee. So be not thou of the waverers. And be not thou of those who deny the revelations of Allāh, for then wert thou of the losers; 10/95-6]: Was the Prophet in doubt about what Gabriel gives him? And how can he preach to doubtful people if he is in the same case as them? And how can he suspect what the True Spirit gives him, but be sure that what the People of the Book tell him is true, even though they deny him and what was revealed unto them and say what they know not?

They also said of [And therein they have food for morn and evening; 19/62]: You claim that in Paradise, there will be no sun nor night, but this verse indicates different times: sunshine, shadow, day and night, because the morn indicates the beginning of the day, and the evening indicates the end of it, and therefore, what has beginning and end means that it will be finished, and if it is finished then there will be a new day and night.

They also said about *sūrat al-Anfāl*, when God mentioned the spoils of war, then He described the believers and said: [They only are the (true) believers whose hearts feel fear when Allāh is mentioned, and when His revelations are recited unto them they increase their faith, and who trust in their Lord, who establish worship and spend of that We have bestowed on them, those are they who are in truth believers. For



them are gardens (of honour) with their Lord, and pardon, and a bountiful provision; 8/2-4] then He said: [as (*kamā*) thy Lord caused thee (Muḥammad) to go forth from thy home with the Truth; 8/5], but the particle as (*kamā*) used for comparison, while here there is no previous speech to be compared with causing Muḥammad to go forth.

They also said about [Whether We let thee see something of that which We have promised them, or make thee die (before its happening), thine is but conveyance (of the message), Ours the reckoning; 13/40]: How can he be ordered to convey the message after his death?

They also said about [A similitude of the Garden which is promised unto those who keep their duty (to Allāh); 13/35]: Where is that which the Garden put to be a similitude to? Can one say: a similitude of the house which I promised you to live in, a river runs through it, a tree shadows you in it; then the speaker stops? And they said: He elsewhere said: [O mankind! a similitude is coined (said), so pay ye heed to it; 22/73], but He did not say this similitude. And they said about [And hearts reached to the throats; 33/10]: How can this occur, when if the heart is removed from its position then its owner will die?

#### *Rhetorical matters:*

They also said about [So Allāh made it taste (made it experience) the garb of dearth and fear; 16/112]: How can the garb be tasted? Rather the speech must be: so He garbed it in the garb of dearth and fear; or: He covered it with the garb of dearth and fear; or: He made it taste dearth and fear, without the word "garb". And they said about [We shall brand him on the nose; 68/16]: What is this punishment? And where He will brand him: in this life or in the hereafter? And if it will be in this life, then there is no report to indicate that one of the polytheists was branded on his nose; and if this will be in the hereafter, then what has been prepared for the disbelievers from several kinds of doom is greater than branding on the nose!

And they said: What does Allāh want by revealing the ambiguous kind in the Qur'ān while He wants to guide and speak clearly to His servants?

And they clung to many examples of the ambiguous whose style was subtle, because of the figures of speech which it contained, for example allusion, ellipsis, adding words when omitting them would have made the meaning clear, bringing words forward when placing them later would have made the meaning clear, metaphor and inversion.

They also spoke about metonymy, for example [*Tabbat yadā Abī laḥab* (The power of Abū Lahab will perish); 111/1], and [*Laytanī lam attackhidh fulānan khalīlan* (Alas for me! Ah, would that I had never taken such an one for a friend!); 25/28].

And they dealt with the repetition of speech, such as in *sūrat al-Kāfirūn* and *sūrat al-Raḥmān*. Also they talked about the repetition of information and stories in the Qur'ān without any additional advantage, and about the fact that the meaning of the utterance is different from the outward meaning of the words.

I have mentioned the arguments for all their claims, and for other things which they have left out, which resemble those things to which they objected, in order that my book may include all of the subject which I have wished to investigate.

I have devoted a separate book to *al-gharīb*, in order that this book (*al-Mushkil*) will not be too long, and will be concentrated on its subject and be easy to whoever wants to read it, if Allāh will.<sup>67</sup>

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Elsewhere, he says:

I have explained what is unclear because of the similarity and obscurity between the words, and also because of the words with several meanings, and I have explained the obscure which caused the critics' claims that the Qur'ān had a faulty structure. I have prefaced this with [a discussion of] the kinds of allegory....<sup>68</sup>

Elsewhere, he states:

Speech sometimes is obscure and difficult to understand because of abridgment (*ikhtiṣār*) and concealment (*iḍmār*).<sup>69</sup>

It seems appropriate here to summarize the kinds of obscurity which have been mentioned by Ibn Qutaybah under the following headings:

1. The doubts caused by the Qur'anic readings and the differences between Muslims concerning them.
2. The doubts caused by alleged *lahn* (ungrammatical speech) in the Qur'ān.
3. The doubts created concerning the contradiction and variance in some Qur'anic verses.
4. The doubts about the figures of speech of the Arabic language and its style.
5. The doubts about seeming impossibility and odd arrangement in some verses.

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<sup>67</sup> *Al-Mushkil*, pp. 24-32.

<sup>68</sup> *Al-Mushkil*, p. 102.

<sup>69</sup> *Al-Mushkil*, p. 218. Also it is worth mentioning that some scholars copy some of these criticisms and their answers from Ibn Qutaybah as Yaḥyā b. Ḥamzah al-'Alawī al-Yamanī does in his *al-Tirāz al-Mutaḍammīn li Asrār al-Balāghah wa 'Ulūm Haqā'iq al-I'jāz*, (Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, Beirut, 1982), see 3/420-66.

6. The doubts concerning words which have different meanings.
7. The doubts about the difficulty in understanding the meaning of certain particles and other indeclinable words which vary from time to time and from one sequence to another.
8. The doubts because of *al-gharīb* (the difficult words in the Qur'ān). This point forms the subject of the second part of the book (i.e. *al-Gharīb*).

### 2.2.3. His method of presenting the obscure:

Ibn Qutaybah has a particular method of presenting the obscure, one which distinguishes between the specific and the general.

In discussing the subdivisions of the obscure, he grades them in different levels. He begins with the obscurity which is caused by external factors, not by any intrinsic obscurity in the sentence. This is found in the various readings of the Qur'ān and differences in the texts and also in *al-laḥn*, found in it. Then he discusses the obscurity caused by contradiction between verses in the Qur'ān. Next he devotes a long chapter to figures of speech, the area which accounts for the greatest number of criticisms, ~~belonged to~~. After that he discusses the obscurity caused by doubt about seeming impossibility, and the odd arrangement of some verses. Then he examines the obscure caused by doubt about words which have several meanings. He goes on to deal with the obscurity in particles in two stages, first with regard to their meanings and secondly with regard to the interchangeability between them. Finally he discusses the obscurity which is caused by the difficult words in the Qur'ān. He also grades this part into three levels: first he explains the meanings of God's names and attributes, because they are repeated many times in the Qur'ān; secondly he explains the most repeated words or

sentences in the Qur'ān, and thirdly he explains the difficult words in the Qur'ān according to the order in which they occur.

Ibn Qutaybah provides a background discussion of the Qur'ān and its style and wondrous nature. He starts his book with a chapter about the wondrous nature of the Qur'ān: its eloquence, and an explanation of the Tradition of the Prophet, in which he said: "I have been given the *jawāmi' al-kalim*"<sup>70</sup> which means that in the Qur'ān there are some words which have several meanings. Ibn Qutaybah supports this idea with evidences from the Qur'ān, Tradition and the Arabic language. He wrote this chapter to show the reader how to guard against error and talking about matters about which he does not know anything.

Also in this chapter he speaks about how God favoured the Arabs with fluency and eloquence, which is why the Prophet's miracle is the Qur'ān, which contains their style and their language. Then God challenges them, all mankind and the Jinn to bring a book or a chapter like it. However, the Arabs themselves agreed on its wonderful nature and the impossibility of producing a book like it. This also makes it clear that those who had eloquence and fluency at the time of the Prophet did not oppose the Qur'ān, but announced that it was not human speech, so that there is no meaning to any criticism or accusation against the Qur'ān made at a later period by people whose eloquence has decreased as time has passed.

After establishing these facts and fundamental principles, he presents the obscure according to the arrangement which we mentioned before, answering the accusations of the critics, and then presenting other accusations resembling them, involving places where the Qur'ān seems to include contradictions, difficulties, or weak structures.

Ibn Qutaybah aims in his presentation and explanation of the obscure to inform the reader not only about the subject of the Qur'ān, but other subjects and fields which are

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<sup>70</sup> See *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 6/90; and *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 1/371-2.

connected to the main subject. This is clearly discernible, so that his book is not only a book of exegesis, but also a book of language, literature, poetry, eloquence, history, tradition and Qur'anic sciences.

Ibn Qutaybah presents criticisms of the Qur'ān, or more generally questions about the Qur'ān, without mentioning the names of critics. He says at the beginning: "Some critics opposed the Qur'ān casting aspersions against it."<sup>71</sup> However, he does not mention their names. This fact indicates that these criticisms or doubts used to be discussed by the people in general and especially by the scholars, for example, those put to Ibn 'Abbās by Nāfi' b. al-Azraq.<sup>72</sup>

Ibn Qutaybah only follows the Qur'anic arrangement of the order of the sūras during his study of the second part of his book as we mentioned above. However, he discusses the verses about which there is doubt according to topics or verses. This seems to indicate that either he wanted the later subjects to depend on the earlier ones, or he was following the order of importance of the subjects; for instance, in his discussion about the accusations against the Qur'ān, he answers all of them according to an arrangement of subjects. Equally when he talks about figures of speech, he first establishes his intention, next forwards the bases of his argument, and then supports all of these with evidence from the Qur'ān, Tradition, the Arabic language and Arabic poetry.

In his study of the obscure verses which seem to be impossible (in its structure) or to have an odd arrangement, there is also no consistent arrangement. This indicates that

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<sup>71</sup> *Al-Mushkil*, p. 22, see also p. 24.

<sup>72</sup> The questions raised by Ibn al-Azraq are well-known, for greater detail see al-Mubarrid, Muḥammad b. Yazīd in *al-Kāmil*, ed. by M.A. Ibrāhīm and A. Shaḥātah, (Dār Nahḍat Miṣr, s.d), 3/222-31; al-Anbārī, Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim, *al-Addād*, ed. by M.A. Ibrāhīm, (al-Maktabah al-'Aṣriyyah, Beirut, 1987), pp. 33 & 44; *al-Itqān*, 2/55-88, 3/82; and *Mu'tarak al-Aqrān fi I'jāz al-Qur'ān*, by al-Suyūṭī, ed. by 'A.M. al-Bijāwī, (Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, Beirut, s.d), 1/94-6. Even the books of Islamic law discuss these questions, see for example *al-Muwāfaqāt*, 3/31-3. Furthermore, Darwīsh al-Jundī maintains in his *al-Naẓm al-Qur'ānī fi Kashshāf al-Zamakhsharī*, (Dār Nahḍat Miṣr, Cairo, 1969) that the opinion of Abū Ishāq al-Nazzām al-Mu'tazilī concerning the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān urged the unbelievers to criticise the Qur'ān; he also mentions Ibn Qutaybah as one of the first scholars to refute such criticisms, see p. 6.

these verses were known to most people. And therefore, he explains them according to their importance. It is possible that he himself suggested problems which might have occurred to him. Perhaps this is the reason why he discusses a verse of one *sūra* of the Qur'ān in this chapter and then another verse of another *sūra*, and then returns to the first *sūra* and discusses another verse of it .

Despite the apparently loose arrangement of his book (concerning the obscure) Ibn Qutaybah does not repeat the subjects or the problems he discusses. He makes this clear in several places in his books, and this fact hold true for this book and for others. This means that he was very specific and concise, while at the same time aiming to make everything clear.<sup>73</sup>

The final thing to be said about his method in presenting the obscure is that he also discusses other verses which are not obscure during the course of his study of the original obscure verses, this being a very noticeable feature of the book.<sup>74</sup>

In conclusion, Ibn Qutaybah's approach to the discussion of the various types of the obscure can be summarized as follows:

1. His interest in *al-tafsīr bi-al-ma' thūr*, or the explanation by transmission; this point will be discussed in chapter three, where many such examples will be discussed.
2. His interest in linguistic matters; this point will be discussed in chapter four, which will cover most of the types of the obscure which have been mentioned.
3. His interest in the readings of the Qur'ān; this point will be discussed in chapter five, where some of Ibn Qutaybah's attempts to refute claims regarding this subject will be discussed and analysed.

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<sup>73</sup> This matter is clearly discernible; he often says: "I have made this clear previously" or "I shall discuss this point latter" or "You can refer to the book (..) and there you can find the answer."

<sup>74</sup> For example, the verses he discussed in *al-Mushkil*, pp. 402-9, 419, 416-418 and others.

4. His interest in many kinds of Qur'ānic sciences; this point will be discussed in chapter six, together with the use he makes of them to refute certain criticisms.

5. His introduction of certain theological matters, of which some form one part of the ambiguous, which is the ambiguous in meaning, and others are presented to help in understanding certain allegorical matters; this point will be discussed in chapter seven.

Those are the main points, and others will be noted throughout the discussions of the previous points.

Most of these points have been raised briefly in the short introductory chapter translated above (pp. 40-4). In the following chapters, an attempt will be made to demonstrate the answers to some of these points, from which we can understand what Ibn Qutaybah's approach to the others will be, although for matters of detail it may be necessary to refer to the books themselves.

#### **2.2.4. Did Ibn Qutaybah discuss all the obscure verses and words of the Qur'ān?**

Clearly, in view of the fact that Ibn Qutaybah claimed to be dealing with all the accusations made against the obscure verses and words in the Qur'ān, he attempts to discuss them insofar as he considers them to be obscure. However, verses which may have seemed obscure to him, are perhaps considered to be clear by other writers, while other verses and words which he considered clear may be regarded as obscure by others.

In general, Ibn Qutaybah laid the basis for studying the obscure and attempted to study everything which seemed to be obscure, but if there are other verses which he did not discuss, we can study them according to the basis which he set down.

In addition he may have wanted to discuss only the most difficult matters and leave the others because they were not of the same importance as the difficult ones. This seems to be indicated in his book; for example, in the chapter about the words which have several meanings, where he discusses 44 words, while we can see that there are many separate books regarding this matter, wherein are words which are not mentioned by Ibn Qutaybah, or words which have more meanings than are discussed by Ibn Qutaybah; for example, in the case of the word *qadā'*, Ibn Qutaybah mentions 5 meanings,<sup>75</sup> whereas al-Dāmaghānī in his *Qāmūs al-Qur'ān: Iṣlāḥ al-Wujūh wa al-Nazā'ir fī al-Qur'ān* mentions 10,<sup>76</sup> and likewise Ibn al-Jawzī in his *al-Wujūh wa al-Nazā'ir* discusses some words which Ibn Qutaybah did not mention; e.g, the word *al-ittibā'* and *akhlada*,<sup>77</sup> also al-Tha'ālibī, in his *al-Ashbāh wa al-Nazā'ir* discusses the words: *istiṭā'ah*, *istighfār*, *asaf* and others, which are not mentioned by Ibn Qutaybah.<sup>78</sup>

In addition, in the chapter about the particles which have several meanings or contain some difficulty, he discusses 33 particles. Then in the chapter about the particles which have interchangeable meanings, there are 15 particles. But we see, for example, that al-Anbārī in his *al-Aḍḍād* discusses more than this number.

Finally in the second part of his book, which is about the difficult words in the Qur'ān, he does not discuss every verse and every word. He only explains what he considers to be difficult and to require further comments, while other words may be regarded as difficult by others.

<sup>75</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, p. 441.

<sup>76</sup> See al-Dāmaghānī, al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad, *Qāmūs al-Qur'ān: Iṣlāḥ al-Wujūh wa al-Nazā'ir fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, ed. by A. S. al-Ahl, (Dār al-'Ilm li al-Malāyīn, Beirut, 2nd ed, 1977), 1/5.

<sup>77</sup> See Ibn al-Jawzī, Abū al-Faraj 'Abd al-Raḥmān, *Muntakhab Qurrat al-'Uyūn al-Nawāzīr fī al-Wujūh wa al-Nazā'ir*, ed. by M.S. Ṭantāwī and F. Aḥmad, (Munsha'at al-Ma'ārif, Alexandria, s.d), 1/5-6.

<sup>78</sup> See al-Tha'ālibī, 'Abd al-Malik b. Muḥammad, *al-Ashbāh wa al-Nazā'ir fī al-Alfāz al-Qur'āniyyah Allatī Tarādafat Mabānihā wa Tanawwa'at Ma'ānihā*, ed. by M. al-Miṣrī, ('Ālam al-Kutub, Beirut, 1st ed, 1984), 1/40, 41 and 42.



### 2.3. OTHER WORKS ON THE OBSCURE AND THE AMBIGUOUS:

In order to give a clear picture of the importance of this science, and to appreciate the superiority of Ibn Qutaybah among the writers on this subject, we shall here review some of the books which have been written on this subject and to describe their characteristics and the dates of their composition.

However, because of the abundance of these books, it has not been practical to discuss every one or to analyse the materials of every book. It seems better, therefore, to classify these books according to the main subject on which the author concentrates, since as mentioned above the topic of the obscure and ambiguous includes many different types according to the author's approach, after which we shall study in brief one book from every category in order to give the reader a good background knowledge of these books.

A detailed study of these books allows us to categorize them into the following:

1. The books which discuss the obscure and the ambiguous caused by the repetition of Qur'ānic verses or sentences.
2. The books which discuss the obscure and the ambiguous caused by the difficult words in the Qur'ān.
3. The books which discuss the obscure and the ambiguous caused by contradictions between verses, or passages which contradict intellect or logic.
4. The books which discuss the obscure and the ambiguous caused by there being more than one meaning to one word, this being known as *al-wujūh wa-al-naẓā'ir* or *al-ashbāh wa-al-naẓā'ir*.
5. The books which discuss the ambiguous in meaning, or the ambiguous which deals with God's attributes mentioned in the Qur'ān.



The books, however, will be categorized in accordance with the date of death of the author, the books without any date are the modern, i.e. from the beginning of this century.

Ibn Qutaybah deals with four of these five categories in his books, the only one excluded being the first.

### 2.3.1. Books which concern the repetition of verses:

1. *Al-Mutashābih*, by Abū Manṣūr ‘Abd al-Malik b. Muḥammad b. Ismā‘il (d. 429/1037), ed. by I. al-Sāmarrā’i, (Maṭba‘at al-Ḥukūma, Baghdad, 1967).
2. *Al-Burhān fī Tawjīh Mutashābih al-Qur’ān*, by Maḥmūd b. Ḥamzah al-Kirmānī (d. 505/1111), ed. by ‘A.M. ‘Aṭā, (Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, Beirut, 1st ed, 1986).
3. *Baṣā’ir Dhawī al-Tamyīz fī Laṭā’if al-Kitāb al-‘Azīz*, by al-Fayrūzābādī, Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb (d. 817/1414), ed. by M.‘A. al-Najjār, 6 vols, (al-Maktabah al-‘Ilmiyyah, Beirut, s.d). Only the first volume discusses this kind of ambiguous and obscure verses.
4. *Aḍwā’ ‘Alā Mutashābihāt al-Qur’ān*, by Khalil Yāsīn, contains 1651 questions and their answers, in two parts, (Dār al-Hilāl, Beirut, 2nd ed, 1980).<sup>79</sup>

The book which we have chosen to discuss in detail is *al-Burhān fī Tawjīh Mutashābih al-Qur’ān*, since it deals with these questions with particular clarity.

<sup>79</sup>There are other books which were mentioned in historical books and seem to be lost, such as: *Durrat al-Tanzīl wa Ghurra al-Ta’wīl fī Bayān al-Āyāt al-Mutashābihāt fī Kitāb Allāh al-‘Azīz*, by al-Fakhr al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209), mentioned by al-Suyūṭī in *al-Itqān*, 3/339; Ḥajī Khalīfah, *Kashf al-Zunūn ‘an Asāmī al-Kutub wa-al-Funūn*, 2/1584. *Kashf al-Ma‘ānī ‘An Mutashābih al-Mathānī*, by Badr al-Dīn b. Jama‘ah, mentioned by al-Suyūṭī in his *al-Itqān*, 3/339; *Kashf al-Zunūn*, 2/1584. *Milāk al-Ta’wīl al-Qāṭi’ li Dhawī al-Ilḥād wa-al-Ta’wīl*, by Ibn al-Zubayr al-Gharnāṭī, a manuscript in the library of the Arab league, see *al-Itqān*, 3/339, where the editor M.A. Ibrāhīm maintains this. *Qaṭf al-Azhār fī Kashf al-Asrār*, by al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), this book also mentioned by al-Suyūṭī himself in *al-Itqān*, 3/339; and *Kashf al-Zunūn*, 2/1584. In addition to this al-Suyūṭī mentions al-Kisā’i and al-Sakhāwī as being among those who wrote books concerning this subject; see *al-Itqān*, 3/339-44.

The title given to this book by the author himself is *al-Burhān fī Mutashābih al-Qur'ān limā fīhi min al-Ḥujja wa-al-Bayān*. It is not clear why the editor has added the word *tawjīh* to the 1st ed., or indeed why the title of the 2nd. ed. has been changed to *Asrār al-Tikrār fī al-Qur'ān*, which describes the contents accurately but confuses the researcher. The book extends to 207 pages and also has a short introduction by the editor concerning the Qur'ān and other scriptures, and the importance of Qur'ānic studies. Then he gives a brief account of the author and his book, after which he maintains that this book has pointed out some aspects of the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān. Then the editor explains his method in editing the book.

The author starts his book by identifying the subject:

In this book I shall mention the ambiguous verses which are repeated in the Qur'ān in the same words but with addition or decrease, or advancing or delaying, or substitute some particles for another, or other things which cause difference between the two verses or the verses which are repeated without addition or decrease. And I will make clear the reason for this repetition, the advantage in repeating it, what caused the addition and decrease, the advancing and delaying and the substitution, the wisdom of specifying some verses with this repetition to the exclusion of other verses and whether what is in one *sūra* is advantageous in place of what is in another *sūra* which resembles it, or not.... I have restricted this book to the explanation of the ambiguous, [since others] have not concerned themselves with mentioning the various meanings (*wujūh*), their causes and the difference between one *āya* and its like.<sup>80</sup>

The author then presents the body of his book in the form of 590 problems and their answers; his method can be summarized in the following:

- a. He follows the order of the Qur'ān, all words or verses of which are discussed together, according to the position in which the first example occurs in the Qur'ān, after which they are not discussed again. Thus when he comes later on to the place where a similar word or sentence occurs, there is no mention of it.
- b. The author depends on rhetoric, in particular *'ilm al-ma'ānī*, which gives him a great advantage. He also makes great use of syntax, and is very concerned with the

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<sup>80</sup> Pp. 19-20.

words which are similar to others but differ by the addition of some letters, whereby the increase of letters means the increase in meaning. He also mentions philology and poetry.

c. The author does not depend on the Traditions too much, and if he does do so he is careful to explain the various meanings of the Tradition.

d. He often does not mention his references and sources.

e. He often discusses certain other matters in his book, such as the Qur'ānic order and the mysterious letters at the beginning of some sūras of the Qur'ān, and what has been said about them.<sup>81</sup>

f. He sometimes mentions the various readings of the Qur'ān.

g. His style is concise.

From this book we can discover what the author considers to be some of the reasons for the repetition of the Qur'ān, in particular: emphasis of the speech (*ta'kīd*).

### 2.3.2. Books which concern the difficulty of the words:

1. *Majāz al-Qur'ān*, by Abū 'Ubaydah, Ma'mar b. al-Muthannā (d. 209/824), ed. by M.F. Sezgin, (Mu'āssasat al-Risālah, Beirut, 2nd ed, 1981).

2. *Tafsīr Gharīb al-Qur'ān*, by Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. 'Azīz al-Sijistānī (d. 330/941), (Dār al-Turāth, Cairo, s.d).

3. *Tafsīr al-Mushkil min Gharīb al-Qur'ān*, by Makkī b. Abī Ṭālib al-Qaysī (d. 437/1045).<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> See p. 23.

<sup>82</sup> We did not give details about this book and others because they are mentioned before.

4. *Al-Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qur'ān*, by al-Rāghib al-Aṣḫānī, al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad (d. 502/1108), ed. by M.S. al-Kilānī, (Dār al-Ma'rifah, Beirut, s.d).
5. *Tafsīr Gharīb al-Qur'ān*, by Ibn al-Mulaqqin 'Umar b. 'Alī (d. 804/1401), ed by S.Ṭ. al-Majdhūb, ('Ālam al-Kutub, Beirut, 1st ed, 1987).
6. *Tafsīr Gharīb al-Qur'ān*, by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Ṭurayhī (d. 1085/1674), ed. by M.K. al-Ṭurayhī, (n.p, s.d).
7. *Tafsīr Mushkil al-Qur'ān*, by Rāshid al-Farḥān.
8. *Gharīb al-Qur'ān wa Mutashābihātuh*, by Nadīm al-Jisr, (al-Maktabah al-Ḥadīthah, Tripoli, Lebanon, 2nd ed, 1984).<sup>83</sup>

The book which we have chosen to discuss in detail is *al-Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qur'ān*, by al-Aṣḫānī.

This book consists of 554 pages, in one volume in al-Kilānī's edition. The editor prefaces the book with a short account of the author's life.

Al-Aṣḫānī also provides a short introduction, in which he explains the reason for writing the book, demonstrates the importance of the Qur'ān in the Muslim's life, and then states:

The first needed step regarding the Qur'ānic sciences is the verbal sciences, and one of these verbal sciences is the establishing of individual words and expressions. Thus, the obtaining of the meanings of Qur'ānic expressions is the first helping step to approach the meaning of the Qur'ān in general.... However, this is not a benefit for the science of the Qur'ān only; indeed, it is also a benefit in every science of Islam, because the words of the Qur'ān are the heart and the best of the speech of the Arabs, and on them jurists and wise men depend in their speech and judgements, and to it poets refer in writing their poems.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>83</sup> There is another book *al-Mushkil*, by Ibn al-Anbārī (d. 327/938) which was mentioned by al-Suyūṭī in *al-Itqān*, 2/3 and Ibn Khallikān in his *Wafayāt al-A'yān*, 4/342, in which he maintains that Ibn al-Anbārī started to write his book but he did not complete it. Also *al-Itqān* includes one chapter concerning this subject, see 2/3-88.

<sup>84</sup> *Al-Mufradāt*, pp. 6-7.

In fact, al-Aṣḫānī wishes this book to be an introduction to another major book concerning the different meanings of words and the subtle differences between them; e.g. (*qalb*, *fu'ād*, *ṣadr* = heart).

As for his method, we can say that he follows the alphabetical order in his book,<sup>85</sup> and therefore he discusses all difficult words with the same root in the same place, and, as a result, he generally explains the Qur'ān by the Qur'ān itself because all these words and expressions are linked in their origin. Further, this method allows him to explain the different meanings of the same word, which is the third category of this subject.

He depends, for his information, on the Arabs' speech and poetry, Traditions, the readings of the Qur'ān, and sometimes on rhetoric and other linguistic sciences.

We can say that al-Aṣḫānī has explained most of the Qur'ānic words. In addition, however, he comments on other easy words in so far as the difficulty arises from their having more than one potential meaning.

It is also worth observing that this book represents one of the most important references for exegetes and philologists, and that al-Aṣḫānī himself sometimes mentions what Ibn Qutaybah has said in his books.<sup>86</sup>

### 2.3.3. Books which concern the contradiction between words and verses of the Qur'ān:

1. *Ḥaqā'iq al-Ta'wīl fī Mutashābih al-Tanzīl*, by al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn (d. 406/1015), (Dār al-Muhājir, Beirut, s.d).

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<sup>85</sup> Some other authors of books dealing with this subject have followed the Qur'ānic order, e.g. Ibn Qutaybah and al-Sijistānī.

<sup>86</sup> E.g. the meaning of *mutashābih*, which has been discussed earlier.

2. *Tanzīh al-Qur'ān 'an al-Maṭā'in*, by al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār b. Aḥmad al-Hamadhānī al-Mu'tazilī (d. 415/1024), ed. by 'A. Zarzūr, (Dār al-Turāth, Cairo, s.d).
3. *Fawā'id fī Mushkil al-Qur'ān*, by 'Izz al-Dīn 'Abd al-'Azīz b. 'Abd al-Salām (d. 660/1261).
4. *Mushkilāt al-Qur'ān*, by Muḥammad 'Abduh, (Dār Maktabat al-Ḥayāh, Beirut, 1969).<sup>87</sup>

The book which we have chosen to analyse in detail is *Fawā'id fī Mushkil al-Qur'ān*, by al-'Izz b. 'Abd al-Salām.

This book consists of one volume in 282 pages. The editor starts the book with a long introduction, (pp. 7-30) concerning the importance of the book, the author's life, the description of the manuscript and the editor's work in his edition.

The title of the book is not that of the author himself, but is supplied by the editor who says: "The author's method is to raise the point which he wants to explain as a problem, and then to give a solution to it, so I gave myself the freedom to entitle the book, and eventually entitled it "*Fawā'id fī Mushkil al-Qur'ān*", which is the nearest title to the material of the book."<sup>88</sup>

The author discusses what he thinks to be obscure and contradictory, and from his methodology it is obvious that he depends on language, syntax, poetry, Tradition and the readings of the Qur'ān. He is also very interested in the different grammatical opinions of the Baṣrans and Kūfans; and in such rhetorical matters as *'Ilm al-Ma'ānī*.

His references are extremely varied, and he depends on many schools of thought, for instance, he refers to al-Zamakhsharī, Ibn 'Aṭīyyah, al-Kisā'ī, al-Farrā', al-Ṭabarī

<sup>87</sup> There is another book which is *Fīmā Sa'ala 'Anhu al-Muḥidūn min Āyi al-Qur'ān*, by Quṭrub, Muḥammad b. al-Mustanīr, (d. 206/821), mentioned by al-Suyūṭī in his *al-Itqān*, 3/79 and Ibn al-Nadīm in his *al-Fihrist*, p.41. Also al-Suyūṭī himself discusses this subject in one chapter of his *al-Itqān*, 3/79-89.

<sup>88</sup> Pp. 23-4.

and Abū 'Alī al-Fārisī. He also refers to certain unnamed philosophers.<sup>89</sup> He discusses the various opinions, and sometimes rejects them, as he does with al-Zamakhsharī.<sup>90</sup>

In the course of his explanation of the problems, the author mentions the different meanings of the word, which form another part of the obscure.<sup>91</sup>

In theology, he follows al-Ash'arī's opinion, in particular as regards the verses of God's attributes.<sup>92</sup>

He sometimes deals with other matters, such as the mysterious letters at the beginning of some sūras of the Qur'ān, since he considers them to be one of the obscure matters whose meanings and wisdom we can know, and gives a very important commentary on them.<sup>93</sup>

#### 2.3.4. Books which concern the different meanings of the word (al-ashbāh wa-al-naẓā'ir):

1. *Al-Ashbāh wa-al-Naẓā'ir*, by Muqātil b. Sulaymān al-Balkhī (d. 150/767), ed. by A.M. Shaḥātah, (al-Maktabah al-'Arabiyyah, Cairo, 1975).
2. *Al-Taṣārīf: Tafṣīr al-Qur'ān Mimmā Ishtabahat Asmā'uh wa Taṣarrāfat Ma'ānīh*, by Yaḥyā b. Sallām (d. 200/815).
3. *Mā Ittafaqa Lafẓuh wa Ikhtalafa Ma'nāh min al-Qurān*, by al-Mubarrid (d. 285/1037), ed by 'A. al-Maymanī, (al-Maṭba'ah al-Salafīyyah, Cairo, 1931).

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<sup>89</sup> See p. 83.

<sup>90</sup> See pp. 50 and 78.

<sup>91</sup> For instance see pp. 47, 244 and 245.

<sup>92</sup> See p. 206, he himself mentions what al-Ash'arī had said.

<sup>93</sup> See pp. 61-3.



4. *Al-Ashbāh wa-al-Nazā'ir fī al-Alfāz al-Qur'āniyyah Allatī Tarādafat Mabānīhā wa Tanawwa'at Ma'ānīhā*, by 'Abd al-Malik b. Muḥammad al-Tha'ālibī (d. 429/1037).
5. *Qāmūs al-Qur'ān aw Iṣlāḥ al-Wujūh wa-al-Nazā'ir fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, by al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad al-Dāmaghānī (died around 530/1135).
6. *Muntakhab Qurrat al-'Uyūn al-Nawāzīr fī al-Wujūh wa-al-Nazā'ir fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, by 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200).
7. *Baṣā'ir Dhawī al-Tamyīz fī Laṭā'if al-Kitāb al-'Azīz*, discussed above.
8. *Al-Ashbāh wa-al-Nazā'ir fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, by 'Abd al-'Azīz Sayyid al-Ahl, (Cairo, 1980).

The book *Qāmūs al-Qur'ān aw Iṣlāḥ al-Wujūh wa-al-Nazā'ir fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, will serve as a good example as a book of this type.

Sayyid al-Ahl's edition of this book consists of one volume, in 508 pages. The editor prefaces it with a short introduction, in which he discusses the author's life and the manuscript, and then he talks about this kind of books.

After this he talks about the mistakes committed by the author, one important mistake being, according to him, that he followed the alphabetical order, but did not refer the word to its triliteral root as in the dictionaries, so that the editor has had to do this job in order to allow the work to be used in conjunction with other books and dictionaries. In addition to that, the editor has corrected some errors found in the book.

The author himself describes his aim in writing the book as follows:

I have read the book *Wujūh al-Qur'ān*, by Muqātil b. Sulaymān and other books, and have found that they have forgotten many other words of the Qur'ān which have more than one meaning. Thus I intended to write a book which includes what they have mentioned and other things which they have forgotten, and I have written it according to the

alphabetical order, in order for it to be easy for the reader to read and for the learner to memorize.<sup>94</sup>

No significant points in his methodology need to be pointed out. However, we may remark that he is concerned only with the possible meanings of the word, or its *wujūh*, which are relevant to the Qur'ān. Thus he does not make use of linguistic scholarship in order to produce other possible meanings. Another point is that his style is very brief; he mentions the word according to the alphabetical order, then he mentions the other meanings with their evidence from the Qur'ān.

### 2.3.5. Books which concern the ambiguous in meaning:

Actually, there is no independent book concerning this subject, and most books combine this subject with others. However, the subject is fully discussed in the exegeses of whatever kind. However, the ancients submit the meanings to God, on the other hand rationalists interpret them. Theological books also discuss this subject, as Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn al-Qayyim have done in many of their books. The following may be mentioned here:

1. *Al-Radd 'alā al-Jahmiyyah wa-al-Zanādiqah fīmā Shakkū fihī min Mutashābih al-Qur'ān wa Ta'awwalūhu 'alā Ghayr Ta'wīliḥ*, attributed to Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855).<sup>95</sup> This book was published among many essays edited by M.Ḥ. al-Faqī, under the title *Shadharāt al-Blātīn min Ṭayyibāt Kalimāt Salafīnā al-Ṣāliḥīn*, (Maṭba'at al-Sunnah al-Muḥammadiyyah, Cairo, 1956), pp. 4-40.

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<sup>94</sup> P. 11.

<sup>95</sup> Some scholars suspect the attribution of this book to Ibn Ḥanbal; for example, see 'Adnān Zarzūr in his introducing to the *Mutashābih al-Qur'ān* of al-Qādī 'Abd al-Jabbār, p. 58, where he asserts that this book was definitely not written by Ibn Ḥanbal. On the other hand we find Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn al-Qayyim mention this book is by Ibn Ḥanbal, see *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, 17/363, 391, 414; *Dar' Ta'āruḍ al-'Aql wa-al-Naql*, by Ibn Taymiyyah, 1/18; and Ibn al-Qayyim, *A'lām al-Muwaqqi'in 'an Rabbi al-'Ālamīn*, ed. by M.M. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd, (Dār al-Fikr, Beirut, 2nd ed, 1977), 1/9

2. *Mutashābih al-Qur'ān*, by al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Mu'tazilī (d. 415/1024), ed. by 'A. Zarzūr, (Dār al-Turāth, Cairo, s.d).
3. *Ifhām al-Mutanābih fī Ifhām al-Mutashābih*, by 'Abd Allāh 'Umar al-Bārūdī, (Dār al-Jinān, Beirut, 1st ed, 1985).<sup>96</sup>

Also Ibn Qutaybah himself explains some of these verses in his book *al-Ikhtilāf fī al-Lafz*, in particular, pages: 28, 32 and 41-4.

A book which offers a good pattern for all these is *Mutashābih al-Qur'ān*, by al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār. The editor prefaces the book with a long introduction,<sup>97</sup> in which he discusses the author's life, his book and his contributions to this subject, his method in his book, the previous efforts in this subject, and finally the editor's method in his edition.

This book consists of one volume in 738 pages, following the Qur'ānic order. The author starts with a general introduction, wherein he talks about the ambiguous and its meaning, and exegesis and how to explain the Qur'ān.

He then discusses the problems involving ambiguity, presenting 905 problems and then solving them. However, not all of them are restricted to this subject, but seem in general to represent most theological questions.

As we know, the author was a member of the Mu'tazilite sect, who reject an anthropomorphic explanation of God's attributes as mentioned in the Qur'ān or in Tradition, since according to one chief item of their opinion, such an explanation makes

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<sup>96</sup> There are other books which have been mentioned in historical books or books of Qur'ānic sciences, such as *al-Radd 'alā al-Jabriyyah al-Qadariyyah fīmā Ta'allaqū bihi min Mutashābih Āy al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, by Ibn al-Khallāl al-Qāḍī, (d. 566/1170); this book is known to be extant in manuscript in al-Maktabah al-Mutawakkiliyyah, Ṣan'ā', Yaman, as 'Adnān Zarzūr states in his introduction to *Mutashābih al-Qur'ān*, where he also mentions that it consists of 98 folios; and *Radd Ma'ānī al-Āyāt al-Mutashābihāt ilā Ma'ānī al-Āyāt al-Muḥkamāt*, by Ibn al-Labbān Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Mu'min, (d. 749/1348), see al-Suyūṭī in his *al-Itqān*, 3/12-21, where he quotes some sections of this book.

<sup>97</sup> Pp. 1-70.

us think of God as having human attributes. Thus he rejected any such explanations in his book.<sup>98</sup>

His methodology depends on language, syntax and rhetoric; he sometimes mentions Traditions but without ascription, and sometimes also argues against the Traditions.<sup>99</sup> He argues very vigorously against his disputants, and answers their claims with evidence, taken particularly from Arabic linguistic sciences.

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<sup>98</sup> For instance, see pp. 120, 620 and 689.

<sup>99</sup> For instance, see p. 526.

IBN QUTAYBAH'S INTEREST IN *AL-TAFSĪR BI AL-MA'THŪR* (THE EXEGESIS BY TRANSMITTED ACCOUNT)

The main object of this chapter is to demonstrate that while Ibn Qutaybah uses reason to the full he by no means omits the basic sources of all Islamic studies, which are the Qur'ān and the Sunnah, rather that he is rooted in them, and depends on them in most fields of knowledge.

However, before dealing with his interest in exegesis by transmitted account, we need to examine his use of the words *Ta'wīl*, which we have translated as "interpretation" and *Tafsīr* which we have translated as "explanation" or "commentary",<sup>1</sup> since these terms occur in the titles of his two books *Ta'wīl Mushkil al-Qur'ān* and *Tafsīr Gharīb al-Qur'ān*.

In the previous chapter we have attempted to give a general picture of his approach to the obscure from a brief survey of the contents of his books. We can say with confidence that Ibn Qutaybah uses the word *Ta'wīl* in the same meaning as the word *Tafsīr*, as Mujāhid did before him, and al-Ṭabarī after him.<sup>2</sup> He does not claim to give an explanation of the reality of a thing which none can know except God, nor does he use either term in a third way, i.e. to suggest that the term may have an inner or esoteric meaning quite apart from the outer meaning.

However, Ibn Qutaybah uses the first word in the first book, and the second in the other; perhaps this is because in the first book he was investigating whether the obscure

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<sup>1</sup> It is realised that in English all these words have much the same meaning, but in order to be more specific in determining the meaning of the word, we have chosen the word "explanation" instead of "tafsīr" and the word "interpretation" instead of "ta'wīl".

<sup>2</sup> See Ibn Taymiyyah, *Daqā'iq al-Tafsīr*, 1/109.

has the same meaning as the ambiguous (*al-Mutashābih*), in a way which is known to God and may be known to the scholars. This word "*al-Mutashābih*" is mentioned in the Qur'ān in association with the word *ta'wīl*, and thus he may have used the same word for the same subject. We may also deduce from his use of the word *ta'wīl* in his title that he wishes to indicate that the scholars know the meanings of the obscure verses. On the other hand, it seems that he chooses the word "*Tafsīr*" for the second book because it deals with the difficult words (*al-gharīb*) which need further explanation.

In order to understand his interest in *al-tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* (the exegesis by transmitted account), it is first of all necessary to examine the meaning of the term. Many scholars have decided that the most important kinds of exegesis are exegesis by *ma'thūr* and exegesis by *ra'y*.

The first kind is also known as *al-tafsīr bi al-riwāyah*, which means in English explanation by reported account or transmission. These accounts are reported from the Prophet, or his Companions, or *al-Tābi'ūn* (the generation after the Companions), and also included within this term is the explanation of the Qur'ān by the Qur'ān itself. In this kind of explanation, the exegetes depend on the account alone without any further investigations except to judge which is the most appropriate account to explain the particular revelation in the Qur'ān.

The most important books on this subject are: *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, by al-Ṭabarī; *Baḥr al-'Ulūm*, by al-Samarqandī; *al-Kashf wa-al-Bayān 'an Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, by al-Tha'ālibī; *Ma'ālim al-Tanzīl*, by al-Baghawī; *al-Muḥarrar al-Wajīz*, by Ibn 'Aṭīyah; *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm*, by Ibn Kathīr; *al-Jawāhir al-Ḥisān li Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, by al-Tha'labī; and *al-Durr al-Manthūr bi al-Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr*, by al-Suyūṭī.

The other kind is known as exegesis by *Ra'y* or *dirāyah* (reasoning); this type depends on *ijtihād* (rational endeavour: the application of reason to solve a problem or give an explanation). Therefore, it depends on other sciences in order to explain the meaning of the Qur'ān. These sciences will be mentioned in the next chapter.

The most important books of this kind are: *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, by al-Rāzī; *al-Kashshāf*, by al-Zamakhsharī; *Anwār al-Tanzīl wa Asrār al-Ta'wīl*, by al-Bayḍāwī; *Madārik al-Tanzīl wa Ḥaqā'iq al-Ta'wīl*, by al-Nasafī; *Lubāb al-Ta'wīl fī Ma'ānī al-Tanzīl*, by al-Khāzin; *al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ* by Abū Ḥayyān al-Andalusī; *Gharā'ib al-Qur'ān wa Raghā'ib al-Furqān*, by al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad al-Nīsābūrī; *Irshād al-'Aql al-Salīm ilā Mazāyā al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, by Abū al-Su'ūd al-'Imādi; *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, by Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī; and *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī*, by Abū al-Faḍl Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ālūsī.

There are other subcategories of exegesis by *Ra'y* which deal with one subject, or concentrate on one science, such as the books written on jurisprudence, which are known as *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*. There are four important books of this kind: *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān* by Ibn al-'Arabī al-Mālikī; *al-Jāmi' li Aḥkām al-Qur'ān* by al-Qurṭubī al-Mālikī; *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān* by al-Jaṣṣāṣ al-Ḥanafī; and *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān* by al-Kiyā al-Harrāsī al-Shāfi'ī. Another kind is the exegesis according to Sūfī ideas, such as *Tafsīr Ibn 'Arabī*.<sup>3</sup> There are also modern books of exegesis which concentrate on social issues, such as *Tafsīr al-Manār* by Muḥammad 'Abduh and Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā. Yet another kind of exegesis concentrates on a literary approach, like *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān* by Sayyid Quṭb. Finally, there are books of exegesis which concentrate on physical science, such as *Tafsīr al-Jawāhirī*.

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<sup>3</sup> Not to be confused with bn al-'Arabī al-Mālikī mentioned above.

### 3.1. THE EXPLANATION OF THE QUR'ĀN BY THE QUR'ĀN:

This is regarded by Muslim scholars as the best method of explanation,<sup>4</sup> because the Qur'ān is regarded as containing all kinds of speech. Thus, in it are the difficult and easy words, the complicated and easy sentences, *khāṣṣ* (words used in a special sense) and *'āmm* (words used in a general sense). Also there is *al-mujmal* (sentences which are constructed in a shortened manner) and *al-muqayyad* (the clearly understood sentences).<sup>5</sup> Thus it is possible that the Qur'ān may in some cases contain the explanations of other parts of it.

Ibn Qutaybah uses this method in several ways:

a. By mentioning another verse which has a verbal association with the verse he wants to explain. The cited verse is clearer than the verse under discussion. This kind of explanation occurs frequently in his book, the following two examples serving to illustrate this point:

1. He says about the verse [And We eased thee of the burden; 94/2]:

Burden (*wizr*) means here your sin; the origin of the word *wizr* is the thing which the man bears on his back; God says: [But we were laden with burdens of ornaments of the folk; 20/87], so God compares sin with something laid on a man, and then he used the other word. God says in another verse: [But they verily will bear their own loads and other loads beside their own; 29/13]; He means their sins.<sup>6</sup>

2. About the verse: [Our Lord! Give unto us in the world that which is good (*ḥasanah*); 2/201], he says:

It means bounty or grace, because God said in another verse: [If good befalleth thee -O Muḥammad- it afflicteth them; 9/50], which means grace.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See Ibn Kathīr, Ismā'īl, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, (Dār al-Ma'rifah, Beirut, 1969), 1/3-5 where he maintains that the best way of *tafsīr* is this way; then he grades the other ways as follows: Traditions, Companions' explanation and the Successors' explanation.

<sup>5</sup> See al-Dhahabī, Muḥammad Ḥusayn, *al-Tafsīr wa-al-Mufasssīrūn*, (Maktabat Wahbah, Cairo, 3rd ed, 1985), 1/40.

<sup>6</sup> *Al-Mushkil*, p. 140.

<sup>7</sup> *Al-Gharīb*, p. 79.



Here it should be noted that there is a resemblance in words and meaning between the two verses. Also the manner in which he supports the meaning of the first verse by the other verse should be noted.

b. By quoting one verse to explain another through the resemblance in meaning between them, although there is no verbal resemblance. In his book there are many examples. Here two will be used to illustrate the method:

1. About the verse: [Couldst thou but see when they are terrified with no escape (*fawt*) and are seized from near at hand; 34/51], he says:

Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī said that this terror will be in the Hereafter when they rise from their graves. So God is saying: O. Muḥammad, if you see their terror when there is no escape to run to, nor shelter to go inside or to take refuge in. This meaning is roughly similar to what God says in another verse [And they cried out when it was no longer the time for escape (*manāṣ*); 38/3] which means that they cried in the time of no escape.<sup>8</sup>

We note how those two verses have the same meaning, but the words are different.

2. About the verse: [Allāh (Himself) doth mock them (*yastahzi'u bihim*); 2/15]; he says:

This verse means that God will punish them with the punishment of derision. This is the same as what God says about the hypocrites, in another verse [They forget God, so He hath forgotten them; 9/67] which means that God will punish them with the punishment of being forgotten, or with the same kind of punishment as their sin involved.<sup>9</sup>

c. By quoting another verse to explain the meaning of a difficult verse. These two examples will illustrate the method:

1. About the verse: [...Then let them ascend by ropes (*asbāb*)! 38/10] which means: Let them go to the sky by ropes, he explains the word "*asbāb*" as meaning "ropes", and then says:

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<sup>8</sup> *Al-Mushkil*, p. 33 and *al-Gharīb*, p. 41. See also *Tafsīr al-Baghawī*, al-Ḥusayn b. Mas'ūd, ed. by K. al-'Akk and M. Siwār, (Dār al-Ma'rifah, Beirut, 1st ed, 1986), 3/563.

<sup>9</sup> *Al-Gharīb*, p. 41. See also al-Qurṭubī, 1/208, where he mentions many other examples of such verses; and Ibn Kathīr, 1/51.

This meaning is roughly as God said in another verse [Or have they any stairway (unto heaven) by means of which they overhear decrees; 52/38].<sup>10</sup>

We note how he explains the meaning of the word *asbāb* by means of the word stairway.

2. He explains the meaning of the word (*ya'mahūn*) from the verse [Allāh (Himself) doth mock them leaving to wander blindly (*ya'mahūn*) on their contumacy; 2/15], and says:

*Ya'mahūn* means that they will follow their minds without any advice, so they are blind. The same meaning is found in the verse: [Is he who goeth groping on his face more rightly guided, or he who walketh upright on a straight road? 67/22].<sup>11</sup>

Thus the second verse makes the first one clear.

d. Ibn Qutaybah regularly warns the reader against assuming that a certain word or verse has a certain meaning simply because there is a verbal resemblance with some other word or verse, when this meaning is not required by the context. Examples in the first part of the book are very frequent, especially when he talks about words with several meanings, but where one will suffice here. Concerning the verse: [And if ye fear that ye will not deal fairly "*tuqsiṭū*" by the orphans...; 4/3], he says:

We say that the man *aqsaṭa* if he made it equitable. This is the meaning of the previous verse. But we also say *qasaṭa* if he made it wrong, as God said in the verse: [And as for those who are unjust (*qāsiṭūn*), they are firewood for hell; 72/15].<sup>12</sup>

In this case there is a great difference between the two words: *aqsaṭa* and *qasaṭa*.

e. Sometimes he mentions interpretations of other passages of the Qur'ān which support another opinion than his own. For example in the verse: [And He it is Who maketh night a covering (*libās*) for you; 25/47], he explains the word *libās* by the

<sup>10</sup> *Al-Mushkil*, p. 350.

<sup>11</sup> *Al-Gharīb*, p. 41.

<sup>12</sup> *Al-Gharīb*, p. 119. See also al-Ṭabarī, 4/236, where he mentions these meanings; and al-Qurṭubī, 5/12.

word (covering), and supports this meaning from Arabic poetry. Then he gives an alternative meaning held by some other scholars, who maintain that it means (rest):

Some exegetes say that the meaning of (*libās*) is: rest "*sakan*" as God said about wives, in the verse: [They are raiment for you and you are raiment for them; 2/187]. This meaning is because God said in another verse: [He it is who hath appointed for you the night that ye should rest therein...; 10/67]. And the verse: [He it is Who did create you from a single soul, and therefrom did make his mate that he might take rest in her; 7/189].<sup>13</sup>

This is his method in general, but the question arises: How does he deal with an obscure expression by using this method? Briefly we can say that he first refutes the accusations against the Qur'ān, of whatever kind. Then he discusses other ambiguous matters in other chapters as we shall see later.

As regards his disproving the accusations made against the Qur'ān, we can say that he uses the quotation of other verses to explain what seems to be obscure. Here are some examples to illustrate this method:

1. In respect of the claim that the verse: [On that day neither man nor Jinni will be questioned of his sin; 55/39] contradicts the verse: [Them, by the Lord, We shall question everyone of what they used to do; 15/92-93], Ibn Qutaybah explains that the day of Judgement is actually a great number of days in our understanding of the meaning of day, as God says: [The angels and the Spirit ascend unto Him in a Day whereof the span is fifty thousand years; 70/4], although it is only one in reality, and therefore, on some days (i.e. the equivalent of our days) they will be questioned, and on others they will not. He also maintains that Ibn 'Abbās gave the same answer.<sup>14</sup> Thus, there is no contradiction in the two verses.

2. In respect of the claim that the verse: [And some of them draw near unto others, questioning; 52/25 & 37/27] seems to contradict the verse: [...There will be no kinship

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<sup>13</sup> *Al-Mushkil*, p. 144.

<sup>14</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, p. 65. Also see Ibn Kathīr, 4/275; al-Qurtūbī, 17/171; and al-Baghawī, 3/58-9, where he mentions this discussion and gives the same answer as Ibn Qutaybah.

among them that day, nor will they ask of one another; 23/101], Ibn Qutaybah disproves this claim by referring to the beginning of the second verse which says: [And when the trumpet is blown there will be no...]. Thus, the second verse talks about the first blow, and therein people will be engaged with the new event, and no one will be free to know even his parents or sons. Therefore, there is no contradiction between the two verses; he also gives another piece of evidence from the Qur'ān, in the verse: [And the trumpet is blown, and all who are when the heavens and all who are in the earth swoon away, save him whom Allāh willeth. Then it is blown a second time, and behold them standing waiting! 39/68] and then the first verse applies when they draw near unto others, questioning. And they will also be: [Crying: Woe upon us! Who hath raised us from our place of sleep? This is that which the Beneficent did promise, and the messengers spoke truth; 36/52].<sup>15</sup>

3. As regards the claim mentioned in the previous chapter concerning the supposed contradiction between verses 8/33 and 8/34, Ibn Qutaybah answers this claim by referring to the verse before them which says: [And when they said: O Allāh! If this be indeed the truth from Thee, then rain down stones on us or bring on us some painful doom! 8/32], Ibn Qutaybah mentions that the man who said this prayer was al-Naḍr b. al-Hārith, who means by this prayer: "Destroy us and Muḥammad and those with us." Then God revealed: [But Allāh would not punish them while thou wast with them, nor will He punish them while they seek forgiveness; 8/33] then He said: [What (plea) have they that Allāh should not punish them (alone), when they debar His servants from the Inviolable Place of Worship...; 8/34].<sup>16</sup>

4. As for the objection to the verse: [...As the likeness of vegetation after rain, whereof the growth is pleasing to the *kuffār* (disbelievers); 57/20] which asks why it is

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<sup>15</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, pp. 66-7. See also al-Ṭabarī, 27/30, who suggests that verse [52/25] talks about the second blow; and al-Qurṭubī, 12/151. Also al-Baghawī mentions this claim in 3/318, during his discussion of verse [23/101] and gives another answer attributed to Ibn 'Abbās, which was mentioned in the previous point.

<sup>16</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, p. 71. See also al-Baghawī, 2/295-7.

not pleasing to others, the answer is that the word *kuffār* in this verse does not mean "disbelievers". This is not the place to go into all the meanings of this word, but briefly, it means here the husbandman, as God says in another verse, wherein He describes the Prophet and his Companions, after which He says: [delighting the sowers (*zurrā'*) that He may enrage the disbelievers with (the sight of) them; 48/29].<sup>17</sup>

5. In answer to the claim regarding the verse: [Lo! those who believe and do good works, the Beneficent will appoint for them love; 19/96], he says that this verse does not mean what the critics claim, but it means that this love will be appointed for them in the hearts of other believers; this is as God says in another verse: [And I (Allāh) endued thee (Moses) with love from Me; 20/39]. Indeed, he says, He loves him, but the verse does not mean this, it means that He appointed this love in the hearts of others and this is the reason why he was delivered from Pharaoh.<sup>18</sup>

As for his treatment of other questions connected with the obscure, it can be said that he frequently supports the meaning which he favours with another verse, this being particularly frequent in the later chapters. Here are two examples taken from one chapter dealing with verses claimed to be in an odd style:

1. Discussing the verse: [(It will be said unto them): Depart unto that (doom) which ye used to deny; depart unto the shadow falling threefold, (which yet is) no relief nor shelter from the flame; 77/29-31], he first explains the meaning of this shadow, and then supports this meaning with the verse: [And shadow of black smoke, neither cool nor refreshing; 56/43-44].<sup>19</sup>

2. Discussing the verse: [We know well how their talk grieveth thee, though in truth they deny not thee (Muḥammad) but evil-doers flout (*yajḥadūn*) the revelations of Allāh; 6/33] he explains the meaning of the word *yajḥadūn*, saying that it is done by

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<sup>17</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, pp. 75-6.

<sup>18</sup> Op. cit, p. 79. See also *al-Baghawī*, 3/210.

<sup>19</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, pp. 319-20. See also *al-Qurtubī*, 19/163.

those who know the thing but deny it, as God says: [And they denied them, though their souls acknowledged them for spite and arrogance; 27/14].<sup>20</sup>

Another chapter deals with words with several meanings, and many examples illustrate it, or rather we can say that he completely depends on the Qur'ān to produce the other possible meanings. One example is enough for this:

The first meaning of the word "*dalāl*", he says, is wandering. He supports this meaning with the verse: [Did He find thee wandering (*dāllan*) and direct (thee); 93/7]; the second meaning is forgetfulness, and he supports this with the verse: [...so that if the one forgets (*taḍill*) the other will remember; 2/282]; the third meaning is total loss or destruction, and he supports this by the verse: [And they say: When we are lost (*ḍalalnā*) in the earth, how can we then be re-created? 32/10].<sup>21</sup>

Another chapter deals with the difficult particles which have more than one meaning according to the sequence of the sentence. Here too the whole chapter depends on the Qur'ān itself; his discussion of the word "*kayfa*" is a good example.

The particle (*kayfa*), which means to ask an interrogative concerning the condition, is in common use in the Qur'ān and the Arabic language. Nevertheless, it has another meaning, which is astonishment, as Allāh says: [How disbelieve ye in Allāh when ye were dead and He gave life to you! 2/28].<sup>22</sup>

Finally, the chapter which deals with the interchangeability between some particles in their use in the Qur'ān, once again depends entirely upon the Qur'ān, for instance, in the case of the particle (*fī*) instead of (*'alā*); the widespread use of *'alā* is to mean "on"; nevertheless, the particle *fī* which means "in", can be used instead of *'alā* as God says:

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<sup>20</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, p. 322. See also al-Baghawī, 2/94.

<sup>21</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, pp. 457-8. See also al-Dāmaghānī, *Qāmūs al-Qur'ān*, pp. 292-3.

<sup>22</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, p. 520. See also Ibn Zakariyyā, Aḥmad b. Fāris, *al-Ṣāhibī*, ed. by S.A. Ṣaqr, (Maṭba'at 'Īsā al-Ḥalabī, Cairo, s.d), p. 243.

[..and I (Pharaoh) shall crucify you in the trunks of palm trees; 20/71] to mean "on the trunks".<sup>23</sup>

The above represent the main aspects of his method of explaining the Qur'ān by the Qur'ān.

### 3.2. THE EXPLANATION OF THE QUR'ĀN BY TRADITION:

This kind of *tafsīr* is also extremely important, because Muslim scholars regard the Tradition of the Prophet as being from God. God says: [Nor doth he speak of (his own) desire. It is naught save an inspiration that is inspired; 53/3-4]. Also the Prophet himself says: "Allāh has given me the Qur'ān, and something else like it."<sup>24</sup> All scholars regard it obvious that this refers to the Tradition.

Some Traditions give the meaning of some verses directly, and others implicitly indicate the meaning. Ibn Qutaybah has his own manner of using Traditions. In both parts of his book he uses 94 Traditions; there are 34 in the first part "*al-Mushkil*" and 60 in the other "*al-gharīb*" according to the editor. However, the editor counted only the Traditions which were direct utterances of the Prophet. However, Traditionists include under Tradition not only speech, but deeds, decisions and qualities of the Prophet (*qawl, fi'l, taqrīr* and *ṣifa*). There are 4 such Traditions regarding the Prophet's deeds, and another 5 Traditions of his speech omitted by the editor. Thus, the number of all Traditions is 103.

In general, his use of Traditions is in the following ways:

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<sup>23</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, p. 567. The translators M.M. Pickthall and 'A.Y. 'Alī used the particle (on) here, while it is (*fi*) in the Qur'ān. See also *al-Ṣāhibī*, p. 239; *al-Qurṭubī*, 11/224; and *al-Baghawī*, 3/224.

<sup>24</sup> Related by al-Imām Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, (al-Maktab al-Islāmī, Beirut, 4th ed, 1984), 2/129.

a. Sometimes he mentions a Tradition at the beginning, not to explain the Qur'ān, but to support other ideas which he is discussing; e.g, he mentions the Tradition in which the Prophet said: "I have been given all styles (*jawāmi'*) of speech",<sup>25</sup> to indicate the grandeur of the Qur'ān.<sup>26</sup>

b. Sometimes he mentions Traditions to support the meaning of the Qur'ān, or to support the meaning selected by the exegetes; e.g, about the verse: [Women who are divorced shall wait, keeping themselves apart, three (monthly) courses (*qurū'*); 2/228], he explains the meaning of the word *qurū'* as menstruation or purification,<sup>27</sup> each meaning having a slightly different application in Islamic Jurisprudence. Then he mentions the evidence for the first opinion, then the evidence for the other, which is the Tradition in which the Prophet says: "The menstruating woman must leave the prayer during her *qur'* (menstruation)". Thus, the Prophet explained the *qur'* as menstruation.<sup>28</sup>

c. Ibn Qutaybah relates the Traditions in most cases without ascription, but occasionally with ascription.<sup>29</sup>

d. Ibn Qutaybah relates most kinds of Traditions; here are some of them:

1. He relates sound (*ṣaḥīḥ*) Traditions, which are the most commonly found in his book.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>25</sup> See al-Bukhārī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, 6/90; Muslim, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1/371-2; al-Nasā'ī, Ahmad b. Shu'ayb, *al-Sunan*, ed. by H.M. al-Mas'ūdī, (al-Maktabah al-Tijāriyyah al-Kubrā, Egypt, s.d), 2/52-53; al-Tirmidhī, Muḥammad b. 'Īsā, *al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. by A.M. Shākir, (Maṭba'at Muṣṭafā al-Ḥalabī, Cairo, 1st ed, 1937), 1/293; and Ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, 2/172.

<sup>26</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, p. 4. See also Ibn Khaldūn, 'Abd al-Raḥmān, *al-Muqaddimah*, (Maṭba'at al-Taqaaddum, Egypt, s.d), p. 454.

<sup>27</sup> See *al-Gharīb*, p. 86.

<sup>28</sup> See *al-Gharīb*, p. 86. This Tradition was related by Abū Dāwūd, Sulaymān b. al-Ash'ath, *al-Sunan*, ed. by M.M. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd, (Maṭba'at al-Sa'ādah, Cairo, 2nd ed, 1950), 1/72-3; and Al-Nasā'ī, 1/149-50. See also Ibn Kathīr, 1/270.

<sup>29</sup> Many examples are to be found in both parts of his exegesis, for instance see *al-Mushkil*, pp. 292 & 429.

<sup>30</sup> For instance, in *al-Mushkil*, p. 33 he mentions the Tradition: (The Qur'ān has been revealed with seven ways of readings; all are acceptable and you can recite it in the way which is easy for you). This Tradition was related by al-Bukhārī in many places of *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, for example, 6/152 & 9/20; Ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, 1/24, 5/41 and other places; Abū Dāwūd, *al-Sunan*, 1/101 & 2/75; and al-Nasā'ī, *al-Sunan*, 1/150. See also *al-Itqān*, 1/78.



2. He relates weak (*da'if*) Traditions, but only very few.<sup>31</sup>
  3. He relates Traditions which are not established as sound but not weak (*hasan*).<sup>32</sup>
  4. He relates Traditions related by one of the Successors (*al-tābi'ūn*) directly from the Prophet, without mentioning the Companion.<sup>33</sup>
  5. He relates the kind which is not approved (*munkar*).<sup>34</sup>
- e. Sometimes, Ibn Qutaybah relates the meaning of the Traditions but not its original words. In some cases, this method is regarded as acceptable by the scholars.<sup>35</sup>
- f. He usually abridges the Tradition according to the aim he has in mind, so that he mentions only the part which he needs to support the point he is discussing.<sup>36</sup>
- g. He sometimes uses the Tradition to support his own opinion; e.g, during his explanation of the word (*ṣūr*) in the verse: [And (remind them of) the Day when the Trumpet (*ṣūr*) will be blown...; 27/87]; he firstly mentions Abū 'Ubaydah's opinion that it means the plural of *ṣūrah* (picture) to indicate the bodies of dead people, then Ibn Qutaybah mentions another meaning i.e. "trump", and comments: "This is better in my

<sup>31</sup> For instance, see *al-Mushkil*, pp. 277-8, where Ibn Qutaybah explains the verse [And one who attacketh you, attack him in like manner as he attacked you; 2/194]. He says: "The first attack is wrong, but the second is a penalty, and the penalty is never wrong, even if its structure as a word resembles the other. The Prophet said: "O God, that man attacked me with his poetry and he knows that I am not a poet, O God, curse him as he attacked me"". Most of the scholars talked about the weakness of this Tradition; see information collected by the editor; *al-Mushkil*, pp. 278-9.

<sup>32</sup> One example of this kind is the Tradition mentioned in *al-Mushkil*, p. 455, in which the Prophet said: "Any woman married without her patron's (father or brother) permission; then her marriage is invalid"; he mentions this Tradition to indicate that the word patron (*mawlā*) means guardian (*waliyy*). This Tradition is related by al-Tirmidhī, who describes it as *ḥadīth ḥasan*, see *al-Sunan*, 1/204; also it is related by al-Dārimī, *al-Sunan*, 2/137; Abū Dāwūd, *al-Sunan*, 2/209 and Ibn Mājah, *al-Sunan*, 2/650. Also it is worth mentioning that this kind of *ḥasan* is regarded as acceptable by the scholars in all Islamic matters except for theological ones.

<sup>33</sup> For instance, see *al-Mushkil*, p. 97. This kind of Tradition known as "*ḥadīth mursal*", see *Taysīr Muṣṭalaḥ al-Ḥadīth*, by Maḥmūd al-Ṭaḥḥān, (Maktabat al-Ma'ārif, Riyadh, 7th ed, 1985), p. 71.

<sup>34</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, p. 579.

<sup>35</sup> For example, see *al-Mushkil*, p. 232, where he relates the Tradition which means that the Prophet continually exhorted his Companions in order to protect their faith. This Tradition is related by al-Tirmidhī, 5/142 and Aḥmad, 1/377.

<sup>36</sup> For example, see *al-Mushkil*, p. 447, where Ibn Qutaybah mentions the Tradition (The fair covenant is from the faith); in fact this Tradition is a part of a long one which was related by al-Ḥākim, Abū 'Abd Allāh, Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh al-Nisābūrī, *al-Mustadrak 'alā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn*, (Dār al-Fikr, Beirut, 1978), 1/15.

opinion because the Prophet says: "How can I be in favour while the owner of the trump is ready and waiting to blow in it."<sup>37</sup>

This is the general range of the kinds of Traditions which he uses, but there are some points to be noted:

1. The reason why he does not relate more Traditions is that he wishes only to discuss the obscure verses of the Qur'ān. Therefore, his book does not deal with all the verses of the Qur'ān nor all the Qur'ānic sciences.

2. He relates some weak Traditions, but their number is very limited, only 3. Nevertheless, we note that when he relates them he indicates that they may not be sound by introducing them with passive verbs; in the science of Tradition this is called (*ṣiġhat al-tamrīd*) \_an indication of weakness of account like: *qīla* or *ruwiya*.<sup>38</sup>

3. He does not give too much importance to ascription, because he wishes his book to be very brief.<sup>39</sup> This is one of the features in his books.

However, we want to know how he deals with the claims and criticisms against the Qur'ān, and the other obscure matters with which he deals. We can say that he does not depend on Tradition, as he uses the Qur'ān itself or the Arabic language, particularly in this matter of disproving false accusations. Nevertheless, he mentions some Traditions, for example:

1. The criticisms regarding the variance in the Qur'ānic readings, which we have detailed previously. Thus he mentions the Tradition in which the Prophet said: "This Qur'ān was revealed in seven ways of readings (*aḥruf*)."<sup>40</sup> He explains the meaning of

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<sup>37</sup> *Al-Gharīb*, pp. 25-6. This Tradition was related by al-Tirmidhī, 5/372-3 and Aḥmad, 1/326.

<sup>38</sup> For example see *al-Mushkil*, pp. 257 & 579.

<sup>39</sup> He mentions this in his *al-Gharīb*, p. 3.

<sup>40</sup> To find this Traditions, see footnote 30.

this, which we shall explain later in the chapter dealing with his approach to Qur'ānic readings.<sup>41</sup>

2. He mentions the Tradition in which the Prophet said: "The prayer will not be accepted by God without reciting the *sūra* of "The Opening or *Sūrat al-Fātiḥah*",<sup>42</sup> to repudiate the claim that Ibn Mas'ūd maintained that this *sūra* is not part of the Qur'ān.<sup>43</sup>

3. During his discussion of the chapter devoted to the question of ambiguous expressions, which is intended to refute the claim of those critics who say: "What does God want by revealing this kind of utterance in the Qur'ān when He wants guidance for mankind?", he talks about the importance of this kind, and then maintains that the Arabs used to speak in this manner and gives examples of some of their speech, preceded by examples of some of the things of this kind which the Prophet himself said, which seem to be difficult for most Arabs of later generations to understand, citing 7 Traditions.<sup>44</sup>

Finally, we may mention the way in which he uses Traditions in his discussion of other aspects of the obscure. Briefly we can say that it is much the same as discussed above. However, some specific points may be mentioned:

1. As regards the verses which are claimed to be in an odd style, he supports the meanings for which he argues with certain Traditions, as for example in pp. 343, 404, 408 and 430 of *al-Mushkil*.

2. In the chapter concerning words with several meanings, he uses a few Traditions to support the meaning or even to give a meaning according to the Tradition; for instance, he mentions six meanings for the word *al-'ahd* (covenant), one of them being

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<sup>41</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, p. 33.

<sup>42</sup> Related by al-Bukhārī, 2/200 and Muslim, 1/295. Also see al-Suyūṭī, *al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḡīr fī Aḥādīth al-Baḥīr al-Nadhīr*, (Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, Beirut, s.d), 2/203.

<sup>43</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, p. 48. We shall discuss this matter in detail in Ch. 5.

<sup>44</sup> See these Traditions in *al-Mushkil*, pp. 87-8. Furthermore, he explains these Traditions at the end of *al-Mushkil*, see pp. 579-83.

"protection". Here he depends on the Tradition where the Prophet said: "The beauty of protection (*al-'ahd*) is from faith."<sup>45</sup>

The above represent the main aspects of his method of explaining the Qur'ān by Tradition.

### 3.3. THE EXPLANATION OF THE QUR'ĀN BY THE COMPANIONS:

This method also has its importance, since when the Companions explained the Qur'ān, they were reporting what they may have heard from the Prophet. In general, we can say that there were three main schools of exegesis going back to three Companions:

1. The school of Ibn 'Abbās in Mecca; his students were: Sa'īd b. Jubayr, Mujāhid, 'Ikrimah, Qatādah, Ṭāwūs and 'Aṭā' b. Abī Rabāḥ.<sup>46</sup>
2. The school of Ubayy b. Ka'b in Medina; his students were: Abū al-'Āliyah, Muḥammad b. Ka'b al-Quraẓī and Zayd b. Aslam.<sup>47</sup>
3. The school of Ibn Mas'ūd in Iraq; his students were: 'Alqamah b. Qays, Masrūq, al-Aswad b. Yazīd, Murrah al-Hamadhānī, al-Sha'bi and al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī.<sup>48</sup>

The most important points to note about Ibn Qutaybah's treatment of this source are:

- a. He relates from many companions, especially the three mentioned above, others include: Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, 'Uthmān, 'Alī, Abū Hurayrah, 'Ā'ishah and Anas b. Mālik. Thus, in terms of Traditions from the Companions, it is

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<sup>45</sup> Reported by al-Ḥākim, see *al-Mustadrak 'alā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn*, 1/15. For other examples see pp. 451, 455 and 461.

<sup>46</sup> See *al-Tafsīr wa-al-Mufasssīrūn*, 1/104.

<sup>47</sup> Op. cit, 1/116.

<sup>48</sup> Op. cit, 1/120.

difficult to say that Ibn Qutaybah belongs to any of the above-mentioned schools. This will be discussed more fully in the next section of this chapter. However, we can say here that in general he relates more from the school of Ibn ‘Abbās than from the others.

b. He relates from them without *isnād* (ascription) in most cases, and so he relates directly from the Companions. Many examples illustrate this point.<sup>49</sup>

c. Sometimes, however, he does give an ascription,<sup>50</sup> although he does this more frequently with sayings of the Companions than he does with utterances of the Prophet himself.<sup>51</sup>

d. He sometimes gives the sense of the Tradition which he relates. In such cases he gives the explanation, and then says: This is the meaning of what Ibn ‘Abbās, for instance, has said.<sup>52</sup>

e. Sometimes he chooses between accounts by saying: This account is more acceptable than this or that. For example, discussing one point he relates from ‘Ā’ishah, Mujāhid and Ibn ‘Abbās, after which he says: "All these accounts are acceptable, but the best is the one from ‘Ā’ishah."<sup>53</sup>

f. Sometimes he mentions the Companions' explanation from their copy of the Qur’ān, especially Ibn Mas‘ūd, because some Companions used to write comments together with the text of the Qur’ān in their own copies.<sup>54</sup> This is the reason why some scholars thought that there was a difference between copies of the Qur’ān. For instance, he explains the word *fūm*, in verse [2/61] as *thūm* (garlic) according to Ibn

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<sup>49</sup> For example, see *al-Mushkil*, p. 81 and *al-Gharīb*, p. 71.

<sup>50</sup> The transmission from a Companion by *isnād* (ascription) is known in the science of Tradition as (*ḥadīth mawqūf*), see *Taysīr Muṣṭalah al-Ḥadīth*, p. 130.

<sup>51</sup> For example see *al-Mushkil*, pp. 410-11 and *al-Gharīb*, p. 259.

<sup>52</sup> For example see *al-Mushkil*, P. 72.

<sup>53</sup> *Al-Mushkil*, pp. 410-12.

<sup>54</sup> See Ibn al-Jazarī, Muḥammad b. Muḥammad, *al-Nashr fī al-Qirā’āt al-‘Ashr*, ed by ‘A.M. al-Dabbā’, (Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, Beirut, s.d), 1/32.

Mas'ūd's copy of the Qur'ān,<sup>55</sup> but this reading is not one of the ten which are accepted as correct.<sup>56</sup> We shall discuss this matter in detail in Ch. 5.

In general, there are two points to be noted:

1. He does not relate from the Companions in *al-Gharīb* as much as he did in *al-Mushkil*.
2. Ascription by *isnād* (chain of witnesses) in *al-Gharīb* is limited, because this book is dealing with the difficult words. Therefore, it is very brief.

As stated above, we wish to investigate to what extent he depends on the Companions in order to refute the claims and criticisms made against the Qur'ān, and in discussing the other kinds of the obscure.

As regards refuting these claims, we can say in brief that he frequently uses this method in his book:

1. In respect of the claims that barbarous language is used in some verses, in particular in the readings of the Qur'ān, we intend to detail them in the chapter devoted to this subject. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning at this point that according to most scholars, the words attributed to 'Ā'ishah and 'Uthmān to the effect that there is *lahn* in the Qur'ān (see p. 40 above) are fraudulent attributions (*ḥadīth mawḍū'*).<sup>57</sup>

2. In respect of the so-called contradictory verses, Ibn Qutaybah refers to Ibn 'Abbās in particular to refute the claims about verses: [55/39] and [15/92] which we discussed previously; in fact the answer is that given by Ibn 'Abbās. Equally, as regards the claim about verses: [52/25] and [23/101] Ibn Qutaybah cites Ibn 'Abbās in answering

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<sup>55</sup> See *al-Gharīb*, p. 51. Also to find this reading see al-Sijistānī, Abū Dāwūd 'Abd Allāh b. Sulaymān b. al-Ash'ath, *Kitāb al-Maṣāḥif*, ed. by A. Jefferey, (Cairo, 1st ed, 1936), p. 54.

<sup>56</sup> See Ibn al-Jazarī, *al-Nashr*, 2/215. See also al-Qurṭubī, 1/425. For further examples see *al-Mushkil*, pp. 328 and 398.

<sup>57</sup> See *Kitāb al-Maṣāḥif*, by Abū Dāwūd, p. 33; *al-Itqān*, 1/312-5; and the editor's comments, p. 26. Nevertheless, Ibn Qutaybah gives the answer to these readings by referring to the grammarians, see *al-Mushkil*, pp. 50-8. More details will be given in the next chapter.

it. Another example concerns the claim that there is a contradiction between two verses talking about the creation of the heavens and the earth, and which one is first, (verses: [41/9-11] and [79/27-30]). Ibn Qutaybah takes the view that:

This is not a contradiction, because God did not say in the second verse: [..and after that He created the earth], but He said: [..and after that He spread (*daḥāhā*) the earth] which does not mean that He created the heavens before the earth, and therefore, there is no contradiction between them; this is the meaning of Ibn 'Abbās' words.<sup>58</sup>

3. In respect of the claim that there are ambiguous verses within the Qur'ān, he again mentions Traditions and the Arabs' speech, and gives some examples of the Companions' speech which seem very difficult to understand and mentions speeches of Abū Bakr, 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb and 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib.<sup>59</sup>

As for his treatment of the obscure expressions, we may summarize it as follows:

a. In the chapter concerning the verses claimed to be in an odd style, many of Ibn Qutaybah's references are to the Companions and the Successors, thus following the same method as previously.

b. In the chapter dealing with the words which have several meanings, he does not depend on the Companions too much, because this is essentially a matter of lexicography and the main reference is to the Qur'ān itself and the ancient poetry. However, he mentions just two Companions, Ibn 'Abbās twice,<sup>60</sup> and Zayd b. Arqam once.<sup>61</sup>

c. In the chapter dealing with the different meanings of some particles, Ibn Qutaybah mentions some statements by the Companions which support or explain the meaning which he thinks to be another meaning of the particle in this case. Nevertheless, as in the previous case, Ibn Qutaybah does not depend on the Companions so much as on

<sup>58</sup> *Al-Mushkil*, pp. 67-8. See also al-Ṭabarī, 30/45; al-Baghawī, 4/445; and Ibn Kathīr, 4/468.

<sup>59</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, p. 89. Also, Ibn Qutaybah explains these Traditions at the end of his *al-Mushkil*, see pp. 583-4.

<sup>60</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, pp. 450 & 493.

<sup>61</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 452.

the language itself or the Qur'ān itself, for the same reason as given previously. However, he does mention Ibn 'Abbās just once.<sup>62</sup>

### 3.4. THE EXPLANATION OF THE QUR'ĀN BY THE SUCCESSORS TO THE COMPANIONS (AL-TĀBI'ŪN):

In Ibn Qutaybah's treatment of this method, the following points may be noted:

- a. He relates from all schools of exegesis; from Ibn 'Abbās' school he relates from Sa'id b. Jubayr, Mujāhid, Qatādah, 'Ikrimah and Ṭāwūs; from Ibn Ka'b's school: Abū al-'Āliyah and al-Zuhri; from Ibn Mas'ūd's school: al-Sha'bī and al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. He also relates from other successors, who did not belong to any of these schools, such as Abū Ṣāliḥ, a student of Abū Hurayrah, and al-Kalbī.
- b. Occasionally, he relates from them by *isnād* (ascription).<sup>63</sup>
- c. Sometimes he relates without ascription, and relates directly from Ṭāwūs or Mujāhid.<sup>64</sup>
- d. Sometimes he relates according to the meaning of their words.<sup>65</sup>
- e. If, however, he regards the statement of a Successor as being weak, he will prefer a view derived from another source, for example linguistic arguments; thus when he explains the verse: [And we made it an example to their own and to succeeding generations, and an admonition to the God-fearing; 2/66], he says:

The verse means the Sabbath-breakers (of old time), and these things which happened to them are a lesson to the villages after them. Another

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<sup>62</sup> Op. cit, p. 526.

<sup>63</sup> For example, see *al-Mushkil*, pp. 100 & 127. In the science of Tradition, we call this kind "*ḥadīth maqtū'*", see *Taysīr Muṣṭalaḥ al-Ḥadīth*, p. 133. However, if the Successor relates directly from the Prophet without mentioning the Companion, then this kind is known as "*ḥadīth mursal*".

<sup>64</sup> For example, see *al-Gharīb*, p. 73.

<sup>65</sup> For example, see *al-Mushkil*, p. 323.



opinion is that these things happened to them because of their sins and because of their fishing on Saturday. This is Qatādah's opinion, but the first one is better.<sup>66</sup>

f. Here too, he sometimes decides between different accounts.<sup>67</sup>

g. In most cases, however, he accepts the accounts which he mentions without deciding between them. Sometimes he makes this clear by saying: "All these opinions are acceptable." Other times it is implicitly understood when he mentions all the opinions without indicating that he rejects all or some of them.<sup>68</sup>

The above represents his method in this particular issue, but there are some specific points which should be noted:

1. As noted in the previous section, he does not relate to a large extent from them in the second part of his book (*al-Gharīb*).

2. The account by ascription is also limited, the reason for this being the same as mentioned previously.

We now need to investigate how he refutes the criticisms against the Qur'ān by this method. Briefly we can say that he depends on certain Successors, such as Mujāhid, 'Ikrimah and Qatādah; here are some of these criticisms and their answers:

1. The criticism regarding the contradiction claimed to be in verses: [77/35] and [39/31] which we detailed before; Ibn Qutaybah gives another similar answer made by Qatādah when a man came questioning him about these verses. His answer was: "It is a matter of situations; in one situation they will speak and dispute, then God will seal

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<sup>66</sup> *Al-Gharīb*, p. 52. See also *al-Qurṭubī*, 1/444; and *Ibn Kathīr*, 1/107.

<sup>67</sup> For example, see *al-Mushkil*, pp. 410-2.

<sup>68</sup> As in *al-Mushkil*, p. 526.

up their mouths, and their hands and feet will speak out to Him, and then they will not speak."<sup>69</sup>

2. The claimed contradiction concerning the creation of the heavens and the earth, and which one is before the other, which we have discussed above; Ibn Qutaybah gives another answer to this problem, referring to Mujāhid where he says concerning the verse: [And after that He created (*daḥāhā*) the earth; 79/30]: "the expression *ba'da dhālika* (after that) in this position means during that (*ma'a dhālika*), because *ma'a* and *ba'da* in Arabic speech are the same."<sup>70</sup>

3. The claim concerning the verse: [..and beakers (as) of glass, (bright as) glass but (made) of silver; 76/15-16] and how it could be a glass of silver? After answering this claim by stating that this is a comparison, and that God means that there will be in Paradise beakers which look like silver ones, he supports this answer by quoting what Qatādah said about the verse which describes the women of Paradise as: [(in beauty) like the jacinth and the coral (stone); 55/58]; Qatādah said: "This verse means that those women have the limpidity of the hyacinth and the whiteness of the coral (stone)."<sup>71</sup>

As for his use of the Successors' words in explaining the other kinds of obscure expression, it can be said that the same points which have been mentioned in the previous section could be applied here.

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<sup>69</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, p. 66. See also al-Ṭabarī, 24/243 where he mentions this question and gives the same answer as Ibn Qutaybah, furthermore, he gives another argument from the Arabic language; and Ibn Kathīr, 4/275, where he absolutely mentions what Ibn Qutaybah has said.

<sup>70</sup> *Al-Mushkil*, p. 68. We have mentioned above the literal translation for *daḥā*, which is "spread" rather than create. See also al-Ṭabarī, 30/46; al-Baghawī, 4/345 where he mentions the meaning of what Mujāhid has said without mentioning his name; and al-Qurṭubī, 19/205 who did the same thing.

<sup>71</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, p. 80-1. Also see al-Ṭabarī, 29/215.

## IBN QUTAYBAH'S INTEREST IN LINGUISTIC MATTERS

We have noted in the previous chapter that Ibn Qutaybah has followed the two familiar methods of exegesis, exegesis by transmitted accounts (*riwāyah* or *ma'thūr*) and by reason (*ra'y* or *dirāyah*). The second method seems to be the most widely adopted among the exegetes of the Qur'ān. al-Dhahabī gives some definitions and conditions for this kind of exegesis:

The word *ra'y* (opinion) is used in many branches of Islamic thought; theology (*'aqīdah*), reasoning (*ijtihād*) and analogy (*qiyās*). In exegesis, however, *'aqīdah* and *qiyās* are not appropriate methods and *ra'y* comes to be synonymous with *ijtihād*. Before attempting to apply *ra'y* to the study of *tafsīr*, commentators have to know the Arabic language, figures of speech, and how they indicate the meaning. They must also be able to make proper use of pre-Islamic poetry, the reasons for the revelation of a passage in the Qur'ān (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), abrogating and abrogated verses of the Qur'ān (*al-nāsikh wa-al-mansūkh*), and the various other tools needed by anyone who wishes to explain the Qur'ān.<sup>1</sup>

Scholars have their own positions about this kind of exegesis. Most maintain that it is divided into two kinds, the first one blameworthy, because commentators of this kind used not to follow the rules of the Arabic language, their explanations are not in accord with religious evidences and finally because the exponents did not meet the conditions which scholars have agreed to be necessary for commentators. The second one is praiseworthy provided that the scholars meet the conditions necessary for this kind of exegesis. Al-Dhahabī details the tools or sciences necessary for the exegetes as follows:

lexicography; syntax; morphology; derivation; rhetorical sciences: (*bayān, ma'ānī* and *badī'*); Qur'ānic readings; theology; principles of Islamic jurisprudence; reasons for the revelation of a passage in the Qur'ān and the science of abrogation.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Al-Tafsīr wa-al-Mufasssīrūn*, 1/ 246.

<sup>2</sup> See *al-Tafsīr wa-al-Mufasssīrūn*, 1/ 255-7. See also al-Qaṭṭān, *Mabāḥith fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, p.331.

Sometimes, exegetes use other sciences which would normally be regarded as outside the scope of a work of Qur'ānic exegesis, as al-Rāzī has done in his exegesis.

We find that Ibn Qutaybah follows this second kind of exegesis, or rather that he gives it more attention than the first kind (*ma'thūr*). Perhaps the reason for this is his great interest in the Arabic language.

We note from the conditions for this kind of exegesis that five of them concern the Arabic language. This is hardly surprising, because the Arabic language cannot be separated from Qur'ānic studies, or even from Islamic studies in general.

In this chapter we shall discuss his interest in philology and lexicography, grammar and the figures of speech.

#### 4.1. HIS INTEREST IN PHILOLOGY AND LEXICOGRAPHY:

Ibn Qutaybah declares at the beginning that he depends on the study of the Arabic language. In *al-Mushkil* he states:

I have written this book gathering the interpretation of the obscure expressions in the Qur'ān, eliciting this from *tafsīr* with many comments and illustrations, and referring for those things which I have not found to a statement by a well-informed authority on the Arabic language.<sup>3</sup>

Ibn Qutaybah also writes an introduction concerning the Arabs and their language. In this introduction he mentions the Arabic letters, which are 28 in number, the distinctive features of the Arabic language, for example; *i'rāb* and *binā'* (declinable and indeclinable); derivation, which is very important in philology; poetry which is ordered by a specific set of rules known as *'arūd* (prosody); the figures of speech which

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<sup>3</sup> *Al-Mushkil*, p. 23.

include several kinds such as metaphor, proverbs, metonymy and others. He finally comments that the Qur'ān was revealed with all these aspects of language in it.<sup>4</sup>

From this introduction, it seems that Ibn Qutaybah indicates that he will depend on the Arabic language, and that most of the accusations against the Qur'ān were caused by misunderstanding these matters. Therefore, the answer to most claims and criticisms against the Qur'ān lies in the Arabic language.<sup>5</sup>

Elsewhere, in his book *al-Gharīb*, Ibn Qutaybah maintains:

This book is derived from the works of other exegetes and eminent linguists. We did not go beyond their opinions.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, in order to explain how Ibn Qutaybah depended on language, and in particular philology and lexicography, we can say that he employed the following methods:

a. Concentration on the derivation of words:

It is of course essential to know the meaning of a word, but a knowledge of its derivation greatly increases the clearness of the meaning of the word. Ibn Qutaybah uses both approaches in his exegesis.

Examples of this are abundant both in his exegesis and in the majority of his other works, whether literary or otherwise. We shall give a few examples here to make the distinction clear:

1. In the course of his discussion of the verse: [As the likeness of vegetation after rain, whereof the growth is pleasing to the husbandmen (*kuffār*) ; 57/20], he says:

He means by the word (*kuffār*) here the husbandmen; the single <sup>كافر</sup> is *kāfir*, and the husbandman is called *kāfir* because when he throws the grain on the land he covers it (*kafara*) with the soil, and anything you cover means that you (*kafara*) it, and from this meaning it is said: someone (*takaffara*) with his weapons if he covers himself with them,

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<sup>4</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, pp. 12-23.

<sup>5</sup> Op. cit, p. 103.

<sup>6</sup> *Al-Gharīb*, p. 4.

and it is also said of the night (*kāfir*) because it covers everything with its darkness.<sup>7</sup>

2. In his discussion of the verse: [He is indeed successful who causeth it to grow (*zakkāhā*); 91/9], he says:

The original meaning of (*tazkiyah*) is increase, and from it we say *zakā al-zar'u yazkū* (the plant grows) if we benefit more and more from it, and we also say: *zakat al-nafaqah* (the expense grows or increases) if it is blessed by Allāh, and from it the *zakāh* (alms) got its name because it causes a man's wealth to bear fruit and increases it.<sup>8</sup>

3. During his discussion of the verse: [...and He hath increased him (Saul) abundantly (*baṣṭah*) in wisdom and stature; 2/247], he comments:

The word (*baṣṭah*) means ampleness in knowledge and power; it is derived from the expression *baṣaṭta al-shay'* (i.e. you extended it) after it was gathered together, so that you open it and widen it.<sup>9</sup>

From these examples, we can understand some of his methods in derivation; we clearly see how he refers the word to its triliteral root, according to the practice of Arabic lexicography, as the second and third examples indicate, and how he refers the word to its literal meaning from which other words can be used in different meanings, as the first and second examples indicate.

We can say that Ibn Qutaybah uses this method of derivation wherever it is necessary to clarify the meaning, or when the word might be confused with other words, and in such cases he gives details of the word in order to amplify its meaning and to remove obscurity.

Furthermore, Ibn Qutaybah emphasises the importance of derivation in his discussion at the beginning of *al-Mushkil*, when he devotes a chapter to the Arabs and how God has favoured them in their language:

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<sup>7</sup> *Al-Mushkil*, p. 75-6. Also see al-Qurṭubī, 17/255; and al-Rāzī, 8/96.

<sup>8</sup> *Al-Mushkil*, p. 344. Also see al-Qurṭubī, 20/77 where he quotes Ibn Qutaybah's words verbatim; and al-Rāzī, 20/411.

<sup>9</sup> *Al-Gharīb*, p. 92.

Sometimes from the origin of the word we can derive many meanings, as the Arabs derive from (*al-baṭn*): the word *mubaṭṭan*, to mean a hungry man, and for the fat man if his aspect was originally by creation: *baṭīn*, but if it is because of eating too much he is called *mibṭān*, and for the one who is always hungry *baṭīn*, and finally for the one who has an illness of the stomach *mabṭūn*.<sup>10</sup>

Also as regards his method in using derivation, we may note that he employs all necessary sources of knowledge to make clear the derivation and its meaning, depending on the Qur'ān, the speech of the Arabs and poetry.<sup>11</sup>

b. Concentration on poetry:

He states the importance of poetry at the beginning of *al-Mushkil* during his review of the distinctive features of the Arabic language, one of these features being poetry.<sup>12</sup>

Ibn Qutaybah makes great use of poetry in his books in general and this applies also to his books of exegesis. Thus in *al-Mushkil* there are 384 verses, and in *al-Gharīb* there are 237 verses. This great quantity is a clear evidence of his interest in poetry. Here we may seize the opportunity to draw attention to what Iḥsān 'Abbās has said about Ibn Qutaybah's interest in poetry: "Ibn Qutaybah imitated al-Jāḥiẓ in using Arabic poetry as a resource of knowledge."<sup>13</sup> We say: What is wrong with this? Whether he imitated or he established this technique, it is the tradition of previous authors in their literary works.

In his use of poetry as evidence for supporting the linguistic meaning of a word, or the derivation of a word, or in coordinating the different syntactical opinions about one matter, or in elucidating figures of speech, or for any other purposes, he employs the following methods:

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<sup>10</sup> *Al-Mushkil*, p. 17.

<sup>11</sup> For instance see *al-Mushkil*, pp. 35 & 131.

<sup>12</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, pp. 17-20. See also Ibn Fāris in his *al-Ṣāḥibī*, p. 77, where he quotes some of Ibn Qutaybah's speech.

<sup>13</sup> See Iḥsān 'Abbās in his *Tārīkh al-Naqd al-Adabī 'ind al-'Arab (Naqd al-Shi'r)*, (Dār al-Shurūq li al-Nashr wa-al-Tawzi', Amman, 1986), p. 105.

1. Sometimes he mentions a whole verse of a poem, and sometimes he just mentions a hemistich (*ṣadr al-bayt*) for the first half or (*'ajz al-bayt*) for the second. Of the previous figures, there are 45 hemistichs in *al-Mushkil*, and 75 in *al-Gharīb*. Perhaps he did this because he just wanted the linguistic evidence, as he generally aims for brevity, though he sometimes mentions the hemistich in one position and the whole verse in another.<sup>14</sup>

2. Sometimes he names the poet, and at other times not, but just mentions the verse or verses; both methods are abundant in the two books, but the important thing to ask is why he does this? Possibly he does not know the poet, or is quoting from books which mention these verses without mentioning the poet, while in other cases he does not mention the poet if he repeats the verse,<sup>15</sup> or he refers the reader to another book for more details about this verse or poem.<sup>16</sup>

3. Sometimes he repeats verses, as the two points above indicate.

4. In his use of poetry Ibn Qutaybah aims to support the meaning which he prefers; this occurs frequently in his two books of exegesis. For instance, during his explanation of the verse: [And he (Solomon) said: "Lo! I have preferred the good things (of the world) (*al-khayr*) to the remembrance of my Lord"; 38/32], Ibn Qutaybah maintains: "God means by the word (*al-khayr*) (*al-khayl*) \_horse; He named it *al-khayr* because of its great advantages", and then he supports this meaning with the verse of poetry in which Ṭufayl indicates the pre-eminent importance of the horse.<sup>17</sup>

5. Sometimes Ibn Qutaybah mentions poetry to support another meaning which he does not choose; for example during his discussion of the verse: [Lo! we (Moses and

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<sup>14</sup> For instance, see *al-Mushkil*, p. 350, where he mentions one hemistich, and p. 464 where he repeats this verse in full.

<sup>15</sup> Many examples illustrate this hypothesis; for instance, he mentions the author of one verse in *al-Mushkil*, p. 186, and when he repeats that verse in p. 236 he does not mention the poet; other examples are in pp. 350 & 464, 245 & 304.

<sup>16</sup> As he does in *al-Mushkil*, p. 265.

<sup>17</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, p. 139; and *al-Gharīb*, p. 273.



Aaron) bear a message of the Lord of the Worlds (*innā rasūlu Rabbi al-‘Ālamīn*); 26/16], he says: "*al-rasūl* (the messenger) used as a plural, as the word (*ḍayf*) is used in verse: [He (Lot) said: Lo! they are my guests (*ḍayfī*). 15/68], where the word "guests" is originally single to mean plural, and as the word (*ṭifl*) is used in the verse: [...and afterward We bring you forth as infants (*ṭiflan*); 22/5], where the origin of the word "infants" is single but it used to mean the plural." After that Ibn Qutaybah gives another meaning for *rasūl*, i.e. *risālah* (the message), this being according to Abū ‘Ubaydah who supports this meaning with one verse of poetry, which he relates.<sup>18</sup>

6. Ibn Qutaybah mentions several kinds of poetry, both pre-Islamic, particularly by ‘Antarah, al-Nābighah al-Dhubayānī and Imru’ al-Qays; and Islamic, which is more numerous than the first.

7. On some occasions he mentions poetry to confirm the meaning of a Tradition which is used to support the meaning of a verse of the Qur’ān; for instance, during his discussion of the matter of the flame (from heaven) coming down to earth (as verse [72/9] indicates) he supports this meaning with a Tradition, then he mentions 3 verses of pre-Islamic poetry, which indicates that the Arabs before Islam also knew of that phenomenon.<sup>19</sup>

8. When Ibn Qutaybah mentions poetry to support the idea which he talks about, he sometimes explains even the verse itself if there is a difficulty in understanding it; examples are abundant in his two books.<sup>20</sup>

Before ending our discussion of Ibn Qutaybah's interest in poetry, it is necessary to say again that this interest is apparent in most of his books, while in addition he has devoted two books to the study of poetry in detail, i.e. *al-Shi‘r wa-al-Shu‘arā’* and *al-*

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<sup>18</sup> See *al-Gharīb*, p. 316. To find the origin see *Majāz al-Qur’ān*, 2/84.

<sup>19</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, pp. 429-30.

<sup>20</sup> For instance see *al-Mushkil*, pp. 50, 69, 74 and 173; and *al-Gharīb*, pp. 120 and 133.

*Ma'ānī al-Kabīr, al-Shi'r wa-al-Shu'arā'* being prefaced by an excellent introduction, to which most scholars refer when they talk about poetry and poets.<sup>21</sup>

c. Use of proverbs:

His use of proverbs follows the same methods and objectives as his use of poetry. Nevertheless, he depends on poetry more than proverbs, the reason for this being very clear, that Arabs use poetry more than proverbs, especially in classical Arabic, though on the other hand they use proverbs in the colloquial language as well.

Ibn Qutaybah mentions 26 proverbs in *al-Mushkil*, and 51 in *al-Gharīb*, this being according to the editor, but a more thorough investigation of this subject reveals that the editor has only mentioned the most important ones or the most generally recognised proverbs, and in fact, we counted another 20 in *al-Mushkil*. On the other hand, in *al-Gharīb*, the editor mentions among his 51 proverbs some well-known sayings of certain Companions and Successors or others.<sup>22</sup>

However, Ibn Qutaybah in his use of the proverbs uses these methods:

1. Sometimes he mentions the coiner of the proverb, though mostly he does not; for instance he mentions the proverbs attributed to 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb and 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib.<sup>23</sup>
2. On some occasions he explicitly states that this is a proverb, and sometimes he just says: "the Arabs say...", or names the coiner as noted above.

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<sup>21</sup> See for instance R.A. Nicholson in his *A Literary History of the Arabs*, (Cambridge Univ Press, 2nd ed, 1930), who states: "Ibn Qutaybah was the first critic of importance to declare that ancients and moderns should be judged on their merits without regard to their age...", p. 286; then he translates some of what Ibn Qutaybah says in his introduction; see also *al-Shi'r wa-al-Shu'arā'*, pp. 62-3; *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature, 'Abbasid Belles Letters*, ed. by Julia Ashtiany and others, (Cambridge Univ Press, 1990), pp. 343-4 and 401; *A History of Arabic Literature*, by Clement Huart, p. 10 and *al-Naqd al-Manhajī 'ind al-'Arab*, by Muḥammad Mandūr, (Dār Nahḍat Miṣr, Cairo, s.d), pp. 23-4.

<sup>22</sup> Some books talk about his interest in proverbs, for example see *Arabic Culture through its Language and Literature*, by M.H. Bakalla, (Kegan Paul International, "London, Boston...", 1984), p. 249.

<sup>23</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, p. 89.

3. When it is important, he repeats the proverb, as he does with the proverb: (*'asā al-ghuwayru ab'usā*), which was used by 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb. These words have been interpreted in three or more different ways, one interpretation being that it is used when a man comes with bad news and is blamed for being responsible for it. This proverb is repeated in other places in the same book. Also he repeats proverbs from one book to the other, as with the proverb: (*kamā tadīnu tudān*) which means: as you punish you will be punished in the same way; or as you do, others will do the same to you.<sup>24</sup> It is worth mentioning that some advantages could be obtained from this method, as for example that when he mentions the coiner on one occasion he does not do so when he repeats it, and when sometimes he repeats a proverb he gives it more explanation.<sup>25</sup>

He also explains at the end of *al-Mushkil* some of the proverbs mentioned in it, whether they are of the Prophet's utterance or his Companions or others.<sup>26</sup>

This is a discussion of his use of proverbs in his Qur'ānic works. Nevertheless, another important thing that he is very interested in is *amthāl al-Qur'ān*; thus wherever there is a verse including a proverb or which refers to a proverb, he is careful to comment on it and explain it. He often says: "This is a proverb which God coins in order to, or for..." and then explicates its aim.<sup>27</sup> Those Qur'ānic proverbs are of two types; sometimes the verse explicitly includes the word "*mathal*" and sometimes the

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<sup>24</sup> The first proverb is mentioned and explained in *al-Mushkil*, p. 89 and repeated in p. 222, see also *Majma' al-Amthāl*, by Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Maydānī, ed. by N.Ḥ. Zarzūr, (Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, Beirut, s.d), 2/21 where he gives its meanings. The second is mentioned in *al-Mushkil*, p. 453 and repeated in *al-Gharīb*, p. 38.

<sup>25</sup> As the previous example in *al-Mushkil*, pp. 89 and 222 indicates, in the first position Ibn Qutaybah mentions the coiner who is 'Umar, but in the other one he just says: "from the Arabs' proverbs...", but he explains this proverb on the second occasion only. Another example is in *al-Mushkil*, p. 467 and in *al-Gharīb*, p. 28.

<sup>26</sup> See pp. 579-91, there are 26 proverbs. At the beginning the scribe of the book says: "I have found at the end of *al-Mushkil* an explanation of some of what it includes of Traditions and proverbs, thus I subjoined them to it."

<sup>27</sup> Many examples are in *al-Mushkil*, see pp. 324-5, 326, 327-9, 357, 362, 369, 382, 384-5, 386 and 431-2; and *al-Gharīb*, pp. 247, 256, 257 and 414.

meaning implicitly indicates the proverb. In his discussion of this matter, Ibn Qutaybah implicitly gives the purposes of these proverbs, such as preaching and reminding.<sup>28</sup>

d. Detailed investigation in order to find the meanings of a word or a particle:

This method causes Ibn Qutaybah to devote two chapters, the first to words with several meanings, and the second one to other possible meanings of certain particles. This matter has been discussed previously, but nevertheless, it is important to point out here that new ideas arise from a consideration of the materials of these chapters, and that Ibn Qutaybah seems to be the first philologist to trace back the different meanings of the vocabulary to one common origin. Şaqr states:

The chapter on the one word with different meanings also has a great historical value, as Ibn Qutaybah refers different meanings of one word to one source, from which the other meanings are derived and branch. For instance, he mentions the word (*qaḍā'*) and the different meanings which refer to it and afterwards he ends by saying: "All these are branches which refer to one origin."<sup>29</sup> Also he says after explaining the meanings of the word (*qunūt*): "I cannot see the origin of this word to be anything else than obedience, because all these meanings of (*du'ā'*) and (*ṣalāh*) and others are in fact a result of obedience."<sup>30</sup> He also says after mentioning the meanings of the word (*amr*): "Despite the difference of these meanings, they are to be referred to one origin."<sup>31</sup> Thus, Ibn Qutaybah has the priority in referring the vocabularies of one word to their origin, because he was prior to Ibn Jinnī who died in (392/1001) and to his teacher Abū 'Alī al-Fārisī who died in (377/987) and to Ibn Fāris who died in (395/1004). Rather, I think that it is Ibn Qutaybah's idea which caused Ibn Fāris to write his book *Maqāyīs al-Lughah*, and I think also that this subject and others of *Ta'wīl al-Mushkil* caused him to write his book *al-Şāhibī*, or *Fiqh al-Lughah wa Sunan al-'Arab fī Kalāmihā*, and whoever compares the two books will find that Ibn Fāris had obviously depended on *al-Mushkil* and greatly benefited from it, quoting many paragraphs from it without any indication, and if he does, which he does very rarely, he indicates them in an ambiguous and obscure way, such as: one of our scholars said, or one of them said...<sup>32</sup>

<sup>28</sup> For more details regarding *amthāl al-Qur'ān* see *al-Qur'ān I'jāzuhu wa Balāghatuh*, by 'Abd al-Qādir Ḥusayn, (al-Maṭba'ah al-Namūdhajīyah, Cairo, s.d), pp. 44-8.

<sup>29</sup> *Al-Mushkil*, p. 442.

<sup>30</sup> Op. cit, p. 452.

<sup>31</sup> Op. cit, p. 515. In fact, there are many other clear examples to illustrate this point; for example, see his comments after and during his discussion of the words (*al-hudā*, p. 444; *al-kitāb*, p. 462; *al-rūḥ*, p. 485; *al-farah*, p. 491; *al-faṭḥ*, pp. 492-3; *al-karīm*, pp. 494-5; *al-rajm*, p. 508 and *al-sa'y*, pp. 509-10).

<sup>32</sup> The introduction of *al-Mushkil*, pp. 83-4.

It seems that Ibn Qutaybah in these two chapters aimed for two things, first: to show that some of the obscure matters could have arisen because of these different meanings of one word or particle, and secondly: to enrich the meaning of the verse by showing all its possible meanings.

e. He mentions some of the Arab's *lughāt* (dialects) when it is necessary to elucidate the matter which he is discussing; for instance, he mentions the *lughā* of Ḥimyar and Balḥārith, and sometimes he just says: "In one of the Arab dialects [we find] so and so."<sup>33</sup>

f. He sometimes comments that this word is an Islamic expression, i.e. that the Arabs did not use it before Islam; e.g. the word *nifāq* (hypocrisy), where after explaining its meaning Ibn Qutaybah says: "*al-nifāq* is an Islamic expression which the Arabs did not know before Islam."<sup>34</sup>

g. Use of philology and lexicography in refuting criticisms of the Qur'ān. Some of these criticisms concern linguistic matters, in particular the grammatical ones which will be discussed later. However, lexicographical matters are also very important because of the common factor which they share with many other types of criticism; for instance, Ibn Qutaybah uses it in explaining the Tradition in which the Prophet maintains that the Qur'ān was revealed with seven *aḥruf*, and uses lexicography to detail what this Tradition indicates.<sup>35</sup>

We shall, however, consider some of these criticisms here:

1. The claim that there are two verses [41/11] & [79/30] which give different accounts of the creation of the earth and the heavens, and the demand to know which has

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<sup>33</sup> About the dialect of Ḥimyar, see *al-Mushkil*, p. 527; as for Balḥārith, see also *al-Mushkil*, p. 50. For more examples, see *al-Mushkil*, pp. 519, 554 and 563; and *al-Gharīb*, p. 102.

<sup>34</sup> *Al-Gharīb*, p. 29.

<sup>35</sup> More details of this matter will be discussed below in chapter five. However, to find this Tradition in the books of Tradition see Ch. 3, footnote 30.

priority, he deals with by explaining the linguistic origin of the word (*daḥāhā*) in [79/30] which means extension, and that God extended or spread the earth.<sup>36</sup>

2. As regards the claim concerning verse [31/31], Ibn Qutaybah maintains that God means the believer by mentioning the words *ṣabbār* and *shakūr* (steadfast and thankful), since these are the best qualities of the believer. In a similar way God says in other verses: [Lo! therein is indeed a portent for believers; 15/77], [Lo! herein is indeed a portent for people who reflect; 16/99] and [..but only men of understanding heed; 13/19]; in all these verses He means the believers.<sup>37</sup>

3. As regards the claim concerning verse [57/20], which has been mentioned many times, in fact the sense of husbandmen (*zurrā'*) for the word (*kuffār*), he says, is according to the origin of the word, which is derived from the verb (*kafara*) meaning to cover.<sup>38</sup>

4. As for the verse [Lo! those who believe and do good works, the Beneficent will appoint for them love; 19/96], Ibn Qutaybah states that this verse does not mean that God loves them, though of course He does, but it means that He will appoint for them love in the hearts of His servants.<sup>39</sup>

5. About the claim regarding the verse [..and have appointed your sleep for repose (*subāta*) ; 78/9], Ibn Qutaybah says:

*Subāt* here does not mean sleeping so that one can claim that the verse then will mean: We have appointed your sleep for sleep, but *subāt* means relaxation and repose, and from it we say the day of *sabt* (Saturday), because God finished the creation of everything on Friday,

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<sup>36</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, pp. 67-8. See also al-Qurṭubī, 19/204-5, also he has in 1/255-7 a long discussion concerning this matter and maintains that if the heavens were really created before the earth they were not completed, but were in the form of smoke; see also al-Rāzī, 8/328.

<sup>37</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, p. 75. See also Abū al-Su'ūd, Muḥammad al-'Imādī, *Irshād al-'Aql al-Salīm ilā Mazāyā al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, (printed on the margin of *Tafsīr al-Rāzī*), 7/418; al-Rāzī, 6/550-1 and al-Qurṭubī, 14/79.

<sup>38</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, pp. 75-6.

<sup>39</sup> Op. cit, p. 79. See also al-Rāzī, 5/564; Abū al-Su'ūd, 7/9; al-Qurṭubī, 11/160; al-Tirmidhī in his *al-Jāmi' al-Ṣāḥiḥ*, 5/317-8, where he mentions one Tradition to support this meaning; and al-Khaṭṭābī, Ḥamad b. Muḥammad, *al-Bayān fī I'jāz al-Qur'ān*, ed. by 'Abd al-'Alīm, (Muslim University, India, 1953), p. 19, who often quotes from Ibn Qutaybah without mentioning his name.

then He asked the Children of Israel to relax on Saturday and to do nothing on it, and therefore it was called the day of *sabt*. However, the original meaning of *sabt* is extension, and if anyone extends, this means that he is relaxed, and also sleep is called (*subāt*) because it is accompanied by extension.<sup>40</sup>

6. Regarding the objection to the verse [... a similitude of the Garden which is promised unto those who keep duty to Allāh; 13/35], Ibn Qutaybah replies that the origin of *mathal* (similitude) here is *mithl* (like), as you say: "this thing resembles the other one", thus both *mithl* and *mathal* could be used to mean the quality and the picture of the thing. Thus, God means by saying (*mathal al-jannah*) "the picture or the quality of the Garden."<sup>41</sup>

7. Regarding the objection to verse [13/40] which seems to mean that the Prophet has to convey the message after death, Ibn Qutaybah replies that this verse does not mean this, but it means that [if We show you some of what We promise them \_the disbelievers\_ (of the doom) during your life, or make you die before you see that, it is only your duty to convey the message, and We will punish them]; then Ibn Qutaybah gives an example of a similar construction drawn from everyday Arabic.<sup>42</sup>

8. In respect of the question: why are there these kinds of ambiguous verses in the Qur'ān when God wants guidance for His servants? Ibn Qutaybah presents some of the Arabs' proverbs as evidence of the existence of this style even before the revelation of the Qur'ān.<sup>43</sup>

Finally, it is worth mentioning two things, first: the name itself of the book *al-Gharīb* indicates that its subject-matter deals with the meanings of words, and we

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<sup>40</sup> *Al-Mushkil*, pp. 79-80. See also *al-Gharīb*, p. 508; *al-Ṭabarī*, 30/3; *al-Qurṭubī*, 19/171, where he mentions exactly what Ibn Qutaybah has said; and *al-Rāzī*, 8/303-4, where he maintains that this is one of the accusations raised against the Qur'ān.

<sup>41</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, p. 83. Also see *al-Qurṭubī*, 9/324-5; *al-Rāzī*, 5/206-7 and *Abū al-Su'ūd*, 6/166. Furthermore, Ibn Qutaybah discusses this word in detail in the chapter on some words which have several meanings, one word is *al-mathal*. He gives 3 meanings for it, the two mentioned above, and *'ibrah* (admonition), as in verses [43/56 & 59], see *al-Mushkil*, p. 496.

<sup>42</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, pp. 84-5. Also see *al-Qurṭubī*, 9/333; *al-Rāzī*, 5/211 and *Abū al-Su'ūd*, 6/171.

<sup>43</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, pp. 89-93.

should quote here what 'A.S. Makram says about this book, which may clarify Ibn Qutaybah's contribution to the science of *gharīb al-Qur'ān*: "Another book of *al-Gharīb* is the one of Ibn Qutaybah, from which al-Ṭabarī benefited and borrowed his words literally without giving any clear indication."<sup>44</sup> And secondly, Ibn Qutaybah's use of philology is quite clear in his *Adab al-Kātib*, where he devotes three chapters out of four to a discussion of linguistic matters.

#### 4.2. HIS INTEREST IN GRAMMAR:

As we have seen from the first chapter, Ibn Qutaybah composed several books on syntax, although none of them are extant. However, Ibn Qutaybah's interest in syntax can be illustrated from his existing books in general and particularly from those on Qur'ānic studies.

In this discussion we shall concentrate on the following points:

- a. His method of using grammar in his books of Qur'ānic studies.
- b. His grammatical opinions and to which grammatical school he belongs.
- c. The types of criticism which Ibn Qutaybah uses grammar to refute.

Before dealing with these points, we may mention what Ibn Qutaybah has to say about Arabic grammar in his chapter on the Arabs and how God has favoured them in their language:

And it (Arabic) has *i'rāb*, which God appointed to be an embellishment for its words, a decoration for its order and a distinction in some cases between similar words and different meanings; such as the *fā'il* (subject) and the *maf'ūl* (object), which cannot be distinguished, where the verb could be applied to either, except by the

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<sup>44</sup> *Qaḍāyā Qur'āniyyah fī Ḍaw' al-Dirāsāt al-Lughawiyyah*, by 'Abd al-'Āl Sālim Makram, (Mu'assasat al-Risālah, Beirut, 1st ed, 1988), p. 96. We can add here another scholar who made great use of Ibn Qutaybah, namely al-Zarkashī in *al-Burhān*, where during his discussion of Arabic particles he copies some of Ibn Qutaybah's words, see 4/175-245.



use of *i'rāb*; for instance, if someone says: "*hādhā qātilun akhī*" (this one is killing my brother) using nunation (*tanwīn*), and another says: "*hādhā qātilu akhī*" using *idāfah* (genitive), then the nunation indicates that he has not yet killed my brother, but the omission of the nunation shows that he has killed him..., do you not see how the grammar distinguishes between those two meanings?<sup>45</sup>

On the importance of morphology, he says:

The Arabs may distinguish between meanings by changing the vocalisation of the word; for example, they say: "*rajulun lu'natun*" \_cursed man\_ with a silent or unvowelled (‘ = ‘*ayn*) if people often curse him, but if it is he who curses people then Arabs say: "*rajulun lu'anatun*" with a mark of *fathā* on the letter (‘)...

Also, Arabs may distinguish between two closely-allied meanings by changing one letter in the word in order that the closeness in form is in proportion to the closeness between the two meanings; e.g, they say for the salt water which is undrinkable except for necessity: "*sharūb*", but for other drinkable water: "*sharīb*".... Also, they say for catching something with the fingertips: "*qabṣ*", but with the palm of the hand: "*qabḍ*" ....<sup>46</sup>

#### 4.2.1. His method in using grammar:

The main points which may be noticed about his method are:

1. He does not discuss the grammatical details of every verse or word, and he does not analyse the sentence or talk about its construction; he only gives the applications which are of direct relevance to the meaning of the verse or the word. He mainly details some grammatical views during his refutation of the criticisms levelled against the Qur'ān, to the effect that some verses have an odd style; we shall discuss these points separately.
2. In most cases, Ibn Qutaybah does not mention the grammarians' names, and simply says: "the grammarians say" or "some grammarians say", thus indicating that the matter was known to most of them; but if there is consensus on it, he may mention their

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<sup>45</sup> *Al-Mushkil*, pp. 14-5. See also *al-Ṣāhibī*, p. 76; and John Wansbrough, *Qur'ānic Studies*, p. 107, who quote some of Ibn Qutaybah's speech concerning this matter.

<sup>46</sup> *Al-Mushkil*, pp. 15-7.

names. This is an aspect of his general approach, which tends strongly to brevity and conciseness.

3. He depends largely on morphology to further explain the meaning of the word or the sentence, and we have already given some examples of this. However, as regards exegesis itself, here are two examples:

a. During his discussion of the verse [Say (O Muḥammad): If the Beneficent One hath a son, then I shall be first among the worshippers; 43/81], he maintains that the word (worshippers) means monotheists, because whosoever believes in the oneness of God worships Him, and whoever associates with Him anything, then he is not among the worshippers.... Ibn Qutaybah then mentions many opinions concerning the morphology of the word (*'abada*) to give other possible meanings to the verse, and rejects all of them because of their weak evidences.<sup>47</sup>

b. During his explanation of the word *uḥṣirtum* (you were prevented) in verse [2/196], he says: "*uḥṣirtum* is from *al-iḥṣār*, which is used when the man faces some difficulties which prevent him in going on the pilgrimage (the verse generally talks about this matter) because of illness, lack of transport or enemy action, then one says of him: "*uḥṣira al-rajulu iḥṣāran fahuwa muḥṣar*"; but if he is jailed, in prison or house, one says of him: "*ḥuṣira fahuwa maḥṣūr*."<sup>48</sup>

4. Ibn Qutaybah mostly respects other opinions, and therefore he mentions many conceptions about one matter. Sometimes he judges between them, and other times he just presents the opinions; e.g, he gives two syntactical views regarding the first word of verse [6/143] (*thamāniyata*) and why it is with the mark *fatha*, and concludes that the best view is that it is governed by an omitted phrase which indicates these eight

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<sup>47</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, pp. 373-4. Also see al-Qurṭubī, 16/119-20; and Abū al-Su'ūd, 7/690.

<sup>48</sup> *Al-Gharīb*, p. 78. See also al-Qurṭubī, 2/371; and al-Ṣābūnī, Muḥammad 'Alī, *Tafsīr Āyāt al-Aḥkām*, (Maktabat al-Ghazālī, Damascus, 2nd ed, 1977), 1/238. Many other examples are on pp. 81 and 467 of this book *al-Gharīb* and on p. 124 of *al-Mushkil*.

[pairs].<sup>49</sup> To give another example, when he is discussing some particles which have the meaning of verbs, and comes to the particle "*halumma*", he says: "It means: come, and the people of Ḥijāz do not use it for dual or plural, while the people of Najd regard it as being from "*halmamt*", and therefore they use it for dual, plural and feminine.... Al-Khalīl says that its origin is *lumma* then they added at the beginning (*ha*), but al-Farrā' differs from him and says that its origin is (*hal*) then they added to it (*umma*)....<sup>50</sup> We note how he presents these opinions without offering any judgment or preference between them.

5. He also makes use of the readings of the Qur'ān to analyse and refute the claims against the Qur'ān, as we shall see below.

#### 4.2.2. His syntactical opinions and to which school he belongs:

According to 'Umar Farrūkh's description, Ibn Qutaybah was: "A jurist, litterateur, critic and grammarian, and was the head of the school of Baghdad in lexicography and syntax."<sup>51</sup>

On the other hand, Shawqī Ḍayf mentions the two main schools of al-Baṣrah and al-Kūfah and their scholars, and goes on to mention the other schools of Baghdad, al-Andalus and Egypt. However, at the beginning of his account of the school of Baghdad and its foundation, he says:

Grammarians of Baghdad in the fourth century (10th A.D) followed a new way in their studies and books, which depends on selected opinions from the schools of both al-Baṣrah and al-Kūfah. The most important thing which helped in founding this new approach is that the first of those grammarians were students of both al-Mubarrid (from Baṣra) and Tha'lab (from Kūfa). Thus, a new generation grew up carrying the opinions of the two schools who disseminated the new

<sup>49</sup> See *al-Gharīb*, p. 88. See also al-Qurṭubī, 7/113; and Abū al-Su'ūd, 4/306-7. Other such examples are in *al-Mushkil*, pp. 428-9.

<sup>50</sup> *Al-Mushkil*, p. 557.

<sup>51</sup> *Tārīkh al-Adab al-'Arabī*, by 'Umar Farrūkh, (Dār al-'Ilm li al-Malāyīn, Beirut, 2nd ed, 1975), 2/329-30.

syntactical opinions and works. Some of this generation mostly belong to the school of al-Baṣrah, others to that of al-Kūfah, and therefore, historians were confused how to classify them; some tried to classify them under the two schools, as al-Zabīdī has done in his *al-Ṭabaqāt*, while others refer them to a separate school, as Ibn al-Nadīm has done in his *al-Fihrist*, although he (Ibn al-Nadīm) mentioned others who made no significant contributions such as Ibn Qutaybah and Abū Ḥanīfah al-Dīnawarī.<sup>52</sup>

After this, Ḍayf discusses this school in detail, mentioning the most important grammarians such as Abū ‘Alī al-Fārisī and Ibn Jinnī. However, the main three celebrated grammarians who established this school, he says, were Ibn Kaysān (d. 299/911), Ibn Shuqayr (d. 315/927) and Ibn al-Khayyāṭ (d. 320/932).

As we see, Ḍayf denies that Ibn Qutaybah made any contribution to the founding of the new school of Baghdad, while seeming to contradict himself by maintaining at the beginning of this passage that this school was founded when some grammarians of Baghdad studied under al-Mubarrid and Tha‘lab. The question then arises: What about other scholars such as Ibn Qutaybah who was a contemporary of al-Mubarrid and a student of Abū Ishāq al-Ziyādī and Abū Ḥātim al-Sijistānī, who were disciples of Sībawayh, all of whom were from al-Baṣrah, while he at the same time transmits opinions from al-Farrā’ and al-Kaysānī who belonged to al-Kūfah? Indeed, there is one chapter of his *al-Mushkil* wherein he displays many of the opinions of the two schools.

In fact, Ibn Qutaybah's contribution to syntax will remain unknown because of the loss of his books of *al-Naḥw al-Ṣaghīr* and *al-Naḥw al-Kabīr*, but despite this, many of his books illustrate some of his ideas, for example *Adab al-Kātib* and *al-Mushkil*. In fact, his part in the founding of the school of Baghdad seems to be clear in *al-Mushkil*, and the following evidences may be adduced in support of this:

1. His scholarly activity took place in Baghdad, while many of his *Shuyūkh* were from both al-Baṣrah and al-Kūfah, as we have noted above.

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<sup>52</sup> *Al-Madāris al-Naḥwiyyah*, by Shawqī Ḍayf, (Dār al-Ma‘ārif, Egypt, 5th ed, s.d), p. 245.

2. He explicitly mentions the two schools or the opinions of their members; e.g. al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad, Sibawayh and al-Mubarrid from al-Baṣrah, while as for al-Kūfah, he mentions al-Kisā'i and al-Farrā'. In fact, Ibn Qutaybah depends on all of them, and from time to time quotes opinions taken from both schools as being the correct view in his opinion. If he had belonged to only one of these schools, he might have been expected to mention only the opinions of that school, which is not the case. Undoubtedly therefore, he is a product of both schools but belongs to another one which combines these two celebrated schools.

3. We should take into account what historians and other scholars have said about this school; for example, Ibn al-Nadīm maintains that Ibn Qutaybah is the first of those who combined the two schools.<sup>53</sup> Equally both al-Qiftī and Carl Brockelmann confirm Ibn al-Nadīm's view.<sup>54</sup> Also Muḥammad al-Ṭanṭāwī mentions the schools and the famous members of each one, after which he mentions some of those who combine the two schools; the first one to be mentioned is Ibn Qutaybah.<sup>55</sup>

In addition to this, Ṣaqr in his introduction to *al-Mushkil* reviews the contents of the book, after which he says:

It is worthy of note that the titles of the last two chapters, (*ḥurūf al-ma'ānī* and *ḥurūf al-ṣifāt*), are an example of Ibn Qutaybah's mixture of the two schools of al-Baṣrah and al-Kūfah, because (*ḥurūf al-ma'ānī*) is a Baṣrī expression, according to al-Mufaḍḍal b. Salamah..., on the other hand (*ḥurūf al-ṣifāt*) is a Kūfī expression according to al-Suyūṭī.<sup>56</sup>

Also on this point, H.A.R. Gibb states:

Throughout this period the rivalry of the philological schools of Baṣra and Kūfa continued unabated, but both were beginning to decline before the new school of Baghdad. The work of its founder, Ibn Qutaybah of Merv (d. 276/889), sufficiently indicates its aims....<sup>57</sup>

<sup>53</sup> See *al-Fihrist*, pp. 85-6.

<sup>54</sup> See *Inbāh al-Ruwāh 'an Anbāh al-Nuḥāh*, by al-Qiftī, 'Alī b. Yūsuf, ed by M.A. Ibrāhīm, (Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah, Cairo, 1950), 4/143-7; and Brockelmann, 2/221.

<sup>55</sup> See al-Ṭanṭāwī, *Nash' at al-Naḥw wa Tārīkh Ashhar al-Nuḥāh*, (Maṭba'at al-Sa'ādah, Cairo, 2nd ed, 1969), p. 151.

<sup>56</sup> Ṣaqr's introduction to *al-Mushkil*, p. 82.

<sup>57</sup> *Arabic Literature: An Introduction*, by H.A.R. Gibb, (Oxford Univ Press, 1926), p. 55.

Likewise I. Lichtenstadter says:

In the third century of Hijrah, however, both schools lost their importance. With the shift of political power from Damascus to Baghdad, these early centres had to cede their preeminence to the new capital, which developed into a new focus for scholarship, and the differences between the view of the ancient schools disappeared. Ibn Qutaybah is one of the outstanding representatives of the Baghdad school.<sup>58</sup>

Thus, we cannot deny the claim of Ibn Qutaybah to be among the first and most influential Baghdadi grammarians, especially when we know that he was prior to those who were mentioned by Ḍayf.

Indeed, many clear examples of Ibn Qutaybah's interest in this new school of grammar which combines the two other schools can be found in the chapter concerning the explanation of some "meaningful particles" (*ḥurūf al-ma'ānī*), wherein he mostly mentions opinions of al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī, Sībawayh, al-Mubarrīd, al-Farrā' and al-Kisā'i, who are from different schools. We have already mentioned some of these examples, and others may be mentioned later.

#### 4.2.3. His use of grammar to refute criticisms of the Qur'ān:

Among these criticisms is the claim that some verses have a faulty style which contradicts Arabic grammar, critics supporting this idea by quoting what 'Ā'ishah and 'Uthmān are alleged to have said about it, as we have seen above.

Ibn Qutaybah devotes a special chapter to this matter, in which he mostly depends on the readings of the Qur'ān to refute these claims, the main argument being that if this style is used in the speech of the Arabs, then these criticisms will be meaningless.

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<sup>58</sup> *Introduction to Classical Literature*, by Ilse Lichtenstadter, (Schocken Books, New York, 1st ed, 1976), pp. 92-3.

Ibn Qutaybah starts by discussing what 'Ā'ishah and 'Uthmān said about the Qur'ān, i.e. that there is a kind of error introduced by the scribes, and that there is a kind of *lahn* in it. He replies that grammarians have talked about these words, and given details of every one of them, and that Arabic poetry seems to provide good evidence for them. Then he discusses the verse [*inna hādhāni lasāḥirāni* (those are two wizards); 20/63] which according to Arabic grammar should be [*in hādhāni...*], lightening the particle *inna* to *in*, or to be [*inna hādhayni..*]. Ibn Qutaybah answers that to read the verse as [*inna hādhāni lasāḥirāni*] is one of the Arabs' manners of speech, which belongs to the tribe of Balḥārith, who say: *marartu bi-rajulāni, qabaḍtu minhu dirhamāni...* which are supposed to be *rajulayni* and *dirhamayni*. He then supports this argument with evidence from poetry, and maintains that reciters have differed in reading this verse; for instance, Abū 'Amr b. al-'Alā' and 'Īsā b. 'Umar read [*inna hādhayni lasāḥirāni*] and that they say that to read it as [*hādhāni*] is an error by the scribe, as 'Ā'ishah had said before. Ibn Qutaybah goes on to discuss other readings which were all mentioned by the *qurrā'* (reciters).<sup>59</sup>

The main study concerning the criticisms of the readings of the Qur'ān will be found in the following chapter, but we will detail here the purely syntactical matters. One accusation concerns the verse [*inna al-ladhīna āmanū...wa-al-Ṣābi'ūna*; 5/69], which is supposed to be [*wa-al-Ṣābi'īna*]; Ibn Qutaybah in his discussion maintains that the latter noun is in this form because it is in the same position as *al-ladhīna*, which is in the state of *mubtada'* (subject in a nominal clause), because the particle (*inna*) is used for beginning an utterance without giving it any further meaning, as do other particles of its group such as (*la'alla, layta...*). Thus we say: "*Zaydun qā'imun*", and when we say: "*inna Zaydan qā'imun*", then there is no difference in meaning (except the

<sup>59</sup> About this verse, most exegetes give the same answer as Ibn Qutaybah; for instance, al-Qurṭubī and al-Bayḍāwī maintain that this is a correct reading, and they give many answers for its being in this form. The most important one is Ibn Qutaybah's answer that it is according to the *lughah* of Balḥārith. See al-Qurṭubī, 11/2126-9; and al-Bayḍāwī, 'Abd Allah b. 'Umar, *Anwār al-Tanzīl wa Asrār al-Ta'wīl*, (Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, Beirut, 1st ed, 1988), 2/51. See also John Wansbrough, *Qur'ānic Studies*, p. 196.

confirmation); but when we say: "*la'alla Zaydan qā'imun*" then this particle causes a kind of doubt to arise concerning Zayd's *qiyām*. Another expression used by the Arabs which supports this argument is the fact that they say: "*inna 'Abda Allāhi qā'imun wa Zaydun*", which should perhaps correctly be "*wa Zaydan*", whereas they say: "*la'alla 'Abda Allāhi qā'imun wa Zaydan*", which is correct grammar, because of the meaning added by using the particle (*la'alla*). Ibn Qutaybah continues that al-Kisā'ī (from al-Kūfa) agrees that one may say both: "*Inna 'Abda Allāhi wa Zaydun qā'imāni*" and: "*inna 'Abda Allāhi wa Zaydun qā'imun*", and that the Baṣriyyūn also allow it, and also allow: "*inna Allāha wa malā' ikatuhu*" which should properly be (*malā' ikatahu*), supporting this with evidence from poetry.<sup>60</sup> We note, therefore, that this construction was used in the speech of the Arabs.

In another argument Ibn Qutaybah refutes the claims concerning verse [4/162], in which the word (*wa al-muqīmīna*) was mentioned, which it is claimed should be (*wa-al-muqīmūna*). Ibn Qutaybah maintains that the grammarians give answers to this problem, and offer four answers; the first is to say that the verse should be understood to mean: [..to believe in what was revealed upon you and upon the *muqīmīna*...]; the second is that it means [..in what was revealed before you and before the *muqīmīna*...]; the third which belongs to al-Kisā'ī, is that it means [..*yu'minūna bimā unzila ilayka wa bil-muqīmīna*...] and the last that mentioned by Abū 'Ubaydah, that the word (*al-muqīmīna*) is *manṣūbah 'ala al-madh*.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, other similar examples are discussed here, those are verses [2/177], [17/88] and [63/10].

<sup>60</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, pp. 52-3. Also al-Qurṭubī and al-Bayḍāwī support the first answer of Ibn Qutaybah, but the most acceptable one for them is the answer of al-Khalīl and Sibawayh, that there is an advancing and delaying in the speech, and that the sense of the verse is [*inna al-ladhīna āmanū wa-al-ladhīna hādū man āmana bi Allāhi wa-al-yawmi al-ākhirī wa 'amila ṣālihan falā khawfun 'alayhim walā hum yaḥzanūn, wa-al-Ṣābi'ūna wa-al-Naṣārā (kadhālik)*], see al-Qurṭubī, 6/246-7; and al-Bayḍāwī, 1/276-7.

<sup>61</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, p. 53. Actually these possible answers were presented by most exegetes; for example, al-Qurṭubī mentions all of them and others, while al-Bayḍāwī just gives two of them. The most accepted answer, however, is the last one mentioned by Ibn Qutaybah, that the word is (*manṣūbah 'alā al-madh*), i.e. that there is an omitted verb before the word which is (*a'nī*, or *akhuṣṣu*); in fact this answer belonged to Sibawayh and al-Khalīl as al-Qurṭubī maintains; see al-Qurṭubī, 6/13-5; and al-Bayḍāwī, 1/248.



Another claim concerns verses [11/107] and [44/56], which were mentioned in chapter two. However, for the first verse Ibn Qutaybah presents three answers, one of them being that the particle (*illā*) which is used for exception, really had in the meaning of (*siwā*) which adds more meanings, so that the verse will be [Abiding there so long as the heavens and the earth endure (save: *siwā*) for that which thy Lord willeth], the particle (*siwā*) being used to mean save what God could add to this.<sup>62</sup>

As for the second claim, the same answer was given, that they (the people of Paradise) taste not death therein save (*siwā*) the first death which happened to them previously.<sup>63</sup>

We can say generally that in this chapter Ibn Qutaybah discusses many other examples which resemble these ones, so that we can say that he has fulfilled what he promised, i.e. that he would answer all accusations raised by critics and indeed other matters which they left unraised and which resemble them.

Generally, we may summarize Ibn Qutaybah's answers to such syntactic accusations as follows. Either these passages will be in accordance with one of the grammarians' opinions, or they are surely an error by the scribe as 'Ā'ishah had said. Thus, if the explanation is as the grammarians say, then there will be no *lahn* here; but if they were really an error by the scribe, then the Prophet cannot be taken to task, and if this is a fault in the Qur'ān, then every error which occurs in the writing of the Muṣḥaf as regards pronunciation is equally so; because when the Companions wrote the word, they intended that it would be susceptible to many ways of reading (the seven *aḥruf*) which the Prophet himself read. More details will be given in the next chapter.<sup>64</sup> Another answer to what may be claimed to be *lahn* is that some of this may have originated with the readers (*qurrā'*), and that some later readers' *lahn* cannot be

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<sup>62</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, pp. 76-8.

<sup>63</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 78-9. We can say that many scholars quote Ibn Qutaybah's answers, for instance see *Muqaddimat Kitāb al-Mabānī*, pp. 104-116.

<sup>64</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, pp. 56-8; and to support this argument Ibn Qutaybah mentions many examples, where according to the rule of writing the Qur'ān its form can accept many other readings.

considered to constitute an argument against the Qur'ān, especially when we know that people used to read in their particular dialects, and that after that a new generation came who did not have the original Arabic style, and that these people caused many errors and were responsible for the isolated readings (*shādhah*).<sup>65</sup>

#### 4.3. HIS INTEREST IN THE FIGURES OF SPEECH:

The main field of his linguistic interests was the figures of speech, which dominate a large area of *al-Mushkil*, and form the great contribution of Ibn Qutaybah to this field, which subsequently led to the science of *i'jāz al-Qur'ān*.

Ibn Qutaybah from the beginning indicates the importance of this subject, and treats it in more detail than any other. In his introduction, he discusses several verses which have few words but an extraordinary style which expresses many meanings. Then in the chapter concerning the Arabs and that with which God has favoured them in their language, he speaks about the Qur'ānic miracle and the characteristics of the Arabic language. One outstanding quality, he says, is the figures of speech:

The Arabs have the figures of speech, which mean the ways and manners of speech, which include: *isti'ārah* (metaphor), *tamthīl* (comparison), *qalb* (use of words to mean the opposite), *taqdīm* and *ta'khīr* (advancing and delaying expressions), *hadhf* (omission), *tikrār* (repetition), *ikhfā'* (hiding), *izhār* (stating plainly), *ta'rīd* (hint), *ifshāh* (indication), *kināyah* (metonymy or indirect expression), *īdāh* (illustration), addressing an individual by using expressions which are used for a group, addressing a group by expressions used for an individual, addressing one person or a group by using a dual expression, intending general speech by using a specific one and intending specific speech by using a common one; with many other things which you will find in the chapter concerning them.<sup>66</sup>

In addition to this, most of the criticisms against the Qur'ān concern this subject, and Ibn Qutaybah answers these claims and other similar ones, when dealing with the subject in detail. This, therefore, may explain why he wrote 196 pages on it in the

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<sup>65</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, p. 58-64, where Ibn Qutaybah details many examples to illustrate this point.

<sup>66</sup> Pp. 20-1.

course of *al-Mushkil*, in addition to passages in other books, such as *al-Masā'il wa-al-Ajwibah* and *Adab al-Kātib*.

In this section we shall discuss the kinds of figures of speech with which Ibn Qutaybah has dealt and his method in studying them. Among the most important points to be investigated is whether he uses the same technical terms as other rhetoricians or not; this question arises when we bear in mind that Ibn Qutaybah regards the figures of speech as "kinds of allegory", although we know that he means the figures of speech, while allegory forms only a few parts of it, which were subsequently known as *'ilm al-bayān*. Ibn Qutaybah is not the first to mix together the figures of speech; Ṭāhā Ḥusayn maintains that early scholars used "allegory" as a general expression, which includes metaphor and other things, and that therefore the various expressions do not have a specific connotation until 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī came and founded this science.<sup>67</sup>

Before beginning his study of the parts of the figures of speech, Ibn Qutaybah has an introductory chapter concerning *majāz*. The main points discussed in this chapter are:

1. The misunderstandings of some people and nations about this kind of speech, in which the expression could have many meanings but only one is intended.
2. Examples from the Christian and Jewish Scriptures of such types of speech.
3. The fact that from misunderstandings in the interpretation of such verses some people produce strange new meanings, such as the transmigration (of souls), when they interpret the verse [Into whatsoever form He will, He casteth thee; 82/8], as meaning that God intended a particular man who can be changed to many forms, when

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<sup>67</sup> See Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, *Tārīkh al-Adab al-'Arabī*, (Dār al-'Ilm li al-Malāyīn, Beirut, 1971), 2/498. In fact there are some scholars after al-Jurjānī who use the same terms as Ibn Qutaybah, for example see Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah in his *al-Fawā'id al-Mushawwiq ilā 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān wa 'Ilm al-Bayān*, (Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, Beirut, s.d), pp. 43, 82 and 98.

in fact God intended all mankind, that He created them in many forms: beautiful, ugly, white, black..., as He says in another verse [And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the difference of your languages and colours; 30/32].<sup>68</sup>

4. On the other hand, some people say that God's speech is not real speech, but that it is the foundation of the meanings, and therefore they interpret everything according to allegory. Many examples can illustrate this, one of them concerning what they said about the verse [And when We said unto the angels: Prostrate yourselves before Adam; 2/34] that there is no direct speech, but it is inspiration, as God has said in another verse [And thy Lord inspired the bee, saying...; 16/68].<sup>69</sup>

5. Ibn Qutaybah sets out some basic criteria whereby we can distinguish allegorical speech from other types of speech; some of these basics are:

a. That some verbs cannot be used as allegorical speech, such as the difference between *qāla* (said) and *takallama* (spoke); in the case of *qāla*, it may accept allegory in its use because it has many other meanings such as *māla* "to bend", but in the case of the word *takallama* it has only one specific meaning. Therefore Ibn Qutaybah refutes the claim that "God's speech" refers to inspiration, maintaining that this is possible with the word *qawl*, but that with the word *kalām* it is impossible. However, Ibn Qutaybah presents many examples from the Qur'ān, in which critics denied the speaking of heavens, earth, hell, mountains and birds; and also some examples from the Traditions, that animals spoke to the Prophet.<sup>70</sup>

b. The allegorical verbs cannot produce infinitives or be confirmed by repetition, (i.e. cognate accusatives). This can be used only with literal speech and to exclude the possibility of allegory, as in the verse [Allāh spoke directly unto Moses (*wa kallama Allāhu Mūsā taklīman*); 4/164], this being a confirmation by using the infinitive

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<sup>68</sup> See pp.105-6.

<sup>69</sup> See pp. 106-10. However, many other examples are discussed, such as the ones concerning verses: [41/11], [50/30] and [70/17].

<sup>70</sup> See pp. 109-15.

(*taklīman*); and in the verse [And Our word unto a thing, when We intended it, is only that We say unto it: Be! and it is (*innamā qawlunā lishay' in idhā aradnāhu an naqūla lahu kun fayakūn*); 16/40], the confirmation of *qawl* is by repetition, and the meaning by using the particle (*innamā*).<sup>71</sup>

6. One of the things which these critics reject is the use of the word *siḥr* (magic), unless it be in the sense of contrivance. They also reject many supernatural things such as the torment in the grave, the interrogation of the angels, the martyrs' life with their Lord, etc.<sup>72</sup> Among the things which they also deny is predestination.<sup>73</sup>

7. At the end of this chapter, Ibn Qutaybah talks about the critics who say that allegory is a kind of falsehood, discussing some of their criticisms and giving brief answers to them. However, he gives the answers in greater detail in subsequent chapters, as we shall see later. At the end Ibn Qutaybah says: "we shall start with the category of metaphor, because most of allegory comes under this heading."<sup>74</sup>

In the light of this chapter, and in particular the last quotation, we may remark that Ibn Qutaybah uses the word "allegory" to cover all the figures of speech which he discusses.

Let us now summarize the types of figures of speech discussed by Ibn Qutaybah:

#### 4.3.1. *Isti'ārah* (metaphor):

This category is discussed by Ibn Qutaybah in 50 pages; he starts by discussing cases in which the utterance could be regarded as metaphor, in that the Arabs borrow

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<sup>71</sup> See p. 111. See also Muḥammad Badrī 'Abd al-Jalil in his *al-Majāz wa Atharuh fī al-Dars al-Lughawī*, (Dār al-Jāmi'āt al-Miṣriyyah, Cairo, 1975), where he points out this matter and shows that Ibn Qutaybah is the first scholar to give such conditions, see pp. 47-8.

<sup>72</sup> See pp. 115-23.

<sup>73</sup> See pp. 123-32.

<sup>74</sup> P. 134. In addition, see John Wansbrough, *Qur'ānic Studies*, pp. 228-31.

the word in place of another one if the original word is connected to the "borrowed" one or has some resemblance to it. He gives many examples from the speech of the Arabs; for instance, they call the rain: heaven, because rain comes down from the sky; another example that they say: "the earth laughed" if it produces its plants....<sup>75</sup> Two points could be noted; the first is that he mixes together under the heading of "metaphor" what others distinguish as *majāz mursal* and metaphor; and secondly, what he means by the word *isti'ārah* (borrowing) is *tashbīh* (comparison); whereas most later rhetoricians state that *majāz* is a general expression while metaphor is one part of *majāz*.<sup>76</sup>

After this, Ibn Qutaybah discusses some of the metaphorical verses of the Qur'ān, of which there are many; he mentions 60 verses, but we will choose here those verses which have been regarded as criticisms against the Qur'ān, in order to avoid any possible repetition.

1. With respect to the verse [We shall brand him on the nose; 68/16], a long discussion takes place; however, the main point is that when the Arabs want to ridicule someone they say something which will cling to him permanently, and it is said that this verse was revealed in respect of al-Walīd b. al-Mughīrah for this reason. Preceding verses attribute many bad qualities to him, which eventually indicate that this ridicule will be attached to him not only in this life, but also in the hereafter to be known to all people, and the brand on the nose serves the same purpose, the nose being the clearest thing on the face.<sup>77</sup>

2. With respect to the verse [...*fa adhāqahā Allāhu libāsa al-jū'i wa-al-khawfi bimā kānū yaṣna'ūn* (so Allāh made it experience the garb of dearth and fear because

<sup>75</sup> See pp. 135-7.

<sup>76</sup> For instance, see 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī, *Asrār al-Balāghah*, ed. by Hellmut Ritter, (Istanbul, 1954, reprinted in Baghdad, Maktabat al-Muthannā, 2nd ed, 1979), p. 368.

<sup>77</sup> See pp. 156-9. For more details see al-Zamakhsharī, Maḥmūd b. 'Umar, *al-Kashshāf 'an Haqā'iq Ghawāmiḍ al-Tanzīl wa 'Uyūn al-Aqāwīl fī Wujūh al-Ta'wīl*, (al-Maṭba'ah al-Sharafiyyah, Cairo, 1st ed, s.d), 2/480; al-Bayḍāwī, 2/515; Ibn Kathīr, 4/405; al-Qurṭubī, 18/236-7; and al-Baghawī, 4/379 wherein he mentions Ibn Qutaybah and his comment.

of what they used to do); 16/112], he says that the original sense of "taste" is that which is done by the mouth, and then it can be borrowed and be used in place of "test" or "try". This verse was revealed in respect of the people of Mecca, when they were at peace, but because they denied the Prophet, they were put to the test; also he discusses the word *libās* (garb) which means the fear and dearth which had happened to this town.<sup>78</sup>

3. In respect of the verse [And hearts reached to the throats; 33/10], this verse indicates how people feel when they are in case of worry and fear; they feel that their hearts are about to reach their throats. Alternatively it indicates that their hearts became convulsed because of fear, so that the person feels that this convulsion is happening in his throat.<sup>79</sup>

Let us now briefly present some other examples, or at least discuss some words which were used in metaphorical style. Among them are the following:

4. The word *sāq* (leg) in verse [68/42] means "earnest".<sup>80</sup>
5. The word *khayr* (good things) in verse [38/32] means "coursers".<sup>81</sup>
6. The words *maytan* (dead) and *aḥyaynāhu* (made him alive) in the verse [*Awaman kāna maytan fa aḥyaynāhu*; 6/122] mean respectively "a disbeliever" and "one whom we have guided".<sup>82</sup>

<sup>78</sup> See pp. 164-5. See also al-Bayḍāwī, 1/559, wherein he maintains what Ibn Qutaybah has said about the *isti'ārah* in this verse; and al-Qurṭubī, 10/194.

<sup>79</sup> See p. 171 and *al-Gharīb*, p. 348. See also *al-Kashshāf*, 2/208; Ibn Kathīr, 3/472; al-Qurṭubī, 14/145; and al-Baghawī, 3/516.

<sup>80</sup> See p. 137 and *al-Gharīb*, p. 481. See also al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Mutashābih al-Qur'ān*, p. 663; al-Bayḍāwī, 2/518; Ibn Kathīr, 4/407-8; al-Qurṭubī, 18/249; and al-Baghawī, 4/381-2, wherein he mentions Ibn Qutaybah and what he has said, al-Baghawī mentions Ibn Qutaybah more frequently than any other exegete for linguistic matters. However, there are many other explanations to this verse.

<sup>81</sup> See p. 139. Also see al-Ṭabarī, 23/154; al-Bayḍāwī, 2/312; Ibn Kathīr, 4/33; al-Qurṭubī, 15/194; al-Ṭabāṭabā'i, Muḥammad Ḥusayn, *al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, (Mu'assasat al-A'lamī li al-Maṭbū'āt, Beirut, 2nd ed, 1974), 17/202; and al-Khaṭṭābī, *al-Bayān fī I'jāz al-Qur'ān*, pp.19 & 25.

<sup>82</sup> See p. 140 and *al-Gharīb*, p. 159. See also al-Bayḍāwī, 1/319; and al-Qurṭubī, 7/78.

7. The word *rahmah* (mercy) in verse [3/107] means "Paradise".<sup>83</sup>
8. The word *qalb* (heart) in verse [50/37] means "brain".<sup>84</sup>
9. The word *lahw* (pastime) in verse [21/17] means "wife" or "son".<sup>85</sup>
10. The word *muttaka'an* (cushioned couch) in verse [12/31] means "food".<sup>86</sup>

It is worth mentioning that Ibn Qutaybah during his study of expressions of this kind raises the very important point that some philologists criticise poets for using such kinds of figures of speech; Ibn Qutaybah however declares his opinion that it is permitted and good according to their rhetorical style, and mentions some of their poetry and proverbs.<sup>87</sup>

#### 4.3.2. *Al-maqlūb* (reversal of meaning), or the use of opposite meanings to convey the sense:

Ibn Qutaybah seems to be the first philologist to single out this kind for a particular study, since other scholars mention it under the heading of metaphor. However, Ibn Qutaybah gives more details about it as we shall see.

<sup>83</sup> See p. 145. Also see al-Bayḍāwī, 1/174; al-Qurṭubī, 4/169; and al-Baghawī, 1/340. Another metaphorical meaning for this word is fertility and good thing. These are mentioned by Ibn Qutaybah during his discussion of verse [30/36], see *al-Mushkil*, p. 392, other examples are discussed there.

<sup>84</sup> See p. 152 and *al-Gharīb*, p. 419. See also Ibn Kathīr, 4/229; al-Qurṭubī, 17/23; and al-Baghawī, 4/226.

<sup>85</sup> See pp. 162-3 and *al-Gharīb*, p. 285. See also al-Bayḍāwī, 2/67, who mentions this meaning as a second one; similarly, Ibn Kathīr, 3/175; al-Qurṭubī, 11/276; and al-Baghawī, 3/240.

<sup>86</sup> See pp. 180-1 and *al-Gharīb*, p. 216. Also many exegetes mention this meaning among other possible meanings, see al-Bayḍāwī, 1/482; al-Rāzī, 5/123; and al-Qurṭubī, 9/178. However, in most of those examples translators just translate the meanings of the words without regard for the figures of speech in them; see for instance Pickthall in this example and all previous ones.

<sup>87</sup> See pp. 172-80. For more details about *isti'ārah*, see al-Jurjānī, *Dalā'il al-I'jāz*, (ed. by A.M. al-Marāghī, al-Maktabah al-'Arabiyyah, Cairo, 1st ed, s.d), pp. 44-51.



He does not give any definition of it, and instead of that he directly categorizes it into many parts and supports every part with examples from the Qur'ān and the speech of the Arabs. The following are the categories which he distinguishes:

1. Describing one thing with an opposite description which is done for many purposes such as optimism and pessimism, as when the Arabs say of the man who has been bitten by a snake: "*salīm*" (safe) in order to express optimism that he will recover, or pessimism as to the outcome of the illness. Another purpose of this figure of speech is exaggeration in description, as when the Arabs describe the crow as (*a'war*) (one eyed) because of his piercing sight; or mockery, as when God mentions what Shu'ayb's folk have said unto him [..Lo! thou art the mild, the guide to right behaviour; 11/87], but they mean mockery.<sup>88</sup>

2. Describing opposite things by a single name because there is a similarity between them in their origin, as when one says *ṣarīm* for both morning and night, because the root meaning of this word is "to leave", and therefore, each one leaves the other behind; another example is to say *sudfatun* for both darkness and light, the root meaning of this word being "covering" (*sutra*), and therefore, when light comes it covers, i.e. replaces, the darkness and when darkness comes it covers the light; also the word *ṣārikh* for both the one who is asking for help and the helper; the words *ẓann*, *'asā* and *la'alla* used for both truth and doubt; the word *warā'* for both behind and in front; the word *jalal* for both great and small things; and many other examples with their use in the Qur'ān and other types of speech.<sup>89</sup>

3. Advancing or delaying speech; here, however, the sequence can help us to understand the meaning of it. Many examples illustrate this category, as in the verse [*falā taḥsabanna Allāha mukhlifa wa'dihi rusulah* (So think not that Allāh will fail to

<sup>88</sup> See p. 185 and *al-Ṣāhibī*, p. 430. Also see al-Bayḍāwī, 1/466; al-Rāzī, 5/83; and Abū al-Su'ūd, 5/503. Also, there are other examples on p. 186. And in respect of the words (*salīm*, *a'war*) see *al-Addād* by al-Anbārī, pp. 105 & 366, wherein he mentions Ibn Qutaybah's remarks.

<sup>89</sup> See pp. 186-93, and for the word (*ṣarīm*) see *al-Gharīb*, p. 479. For the word (*warā'*), see Abū 'Ubaydah, *Majāz al-Qur'ān*, 1/337.

keep His promise to His Messengers); 14/47], this verse actually is [*fala taḥsabanna Allāha mukhlifa rusulihi wa'dah*]. There are another 11 verses which are discussed under this heading.<sup>90</sup>

4. Bringing forward or back a speech by error because of necessity; many examples are given from the speech of the Arabs. Ibn Qutaybah also discusses 4 verses [2/171], [28/76], [100/8] and [25/74] to be under this heading, and during a long discussion, he refutes the claim that there is error in them, and states the impossibility of God being subject to error or necessity, although such things may apply to poets because of the demands of prosody. He gives his answers to claims regarding these verses, and says that they are actually not among the *maqlūb*, but that there are omissions (ellipses) of words among them, this being in fact another kind of eloquence which we shall discuss later; for instance, in the verse [*wa innahu liḥubbi al-khayri lashadīd* (And Lo! in the love of wealth he is violent); 100/8], the critics thought that this should be: [*wa inna ḥubbahu lil-khayri lashadīd*], but in fact this is wrong, because the verse here is [*wa innahu liḥubbi al-khayri (al-māl \_wealth) lashadīd (bakhīl \_avaricious)*].<sup>91</sup>

#### 4.3.3. *Al-ḥadhf wa-al-ikhtiṣār* (ellipsis and abridgment):

Actually, this variety is mentioned in the books of rhetoric under '*ilm al-ma'ānī*, in particular when they talk about *al-ijāz* (concision).<sup>92</sup> However, the main difference between Ibn Qutaybah's study and the others is that he gives it more attention and classifies it into many parts such as:

<sup>90</sup> See pp. 193-209. For the example above, al-Bayḍāwī maintains the same thing as Ibn Qutaybah, see 1/523; also see al-Qurṭubī, 9/382, where he mentions Ibn Qutaybah and his opinion about this verse.

<sup>91</sup> See pp. 198-205 and *al-Gharīb*, p. 536. See also *al-Kashshāf*, 2/557; al-Bayḍāwī, 2/615; al-Qurṭubī, 20/162; and al-Baghawī, 4/518.

<sup>92</sup> For example, see al-Qazwīnī, Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān, *al-Īdāh*, pp.184-94; (ed. by. M.M. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd, Maṭba'at al-Sunnah al-Muḥammadiyyah, Egypt, s.d).

1. The omission of the *mudāf* (subjoined) in the construct state and the use of *mudāf ilayh* (governed noun of a genitive construction) instead of it, with verb governing it. Both the Qur'ān and the speech of the Arabs have examples in abundance; for instance, the verse [Ask the township where we were; 12/82] to mean: [ask the people of the township where we were], where the underlined word indicates the omission.<sup>93</sup>

2. Mentioning one verb for two objects, where the verb actually applies only to the first, while for the second object the verb is *mudmar* (ellipsed) or understood; for instance, the verse [*fa ajmi'ū amrakum wa shurakā'akum* (so decide upon your course of action you and your partners); 10/71], in this verse it seems that the verb *ajmi'ū* applies to both *amrakum* and *shurakā'a*, but it is [*fa ajmi'ū amrakum wa ud'ū shurakā'akum*], so that the hidden verb *ud'ū* is for the second object.<sup>94</sup>

3. The use of a conditional sentence which requires an apodosis (*jawāb*), but this clause is omitted for brevity because the hearer knows what it is, as in the verse [Had it been possible for a Lecture (Qur'ān) to cause the mountains to move, or the earth to be torn asunder, or the dead to speak (this Qur'ān would have done so)...; 13/31], where the speech between brackets is the omitted apodosis.<sup>95</sup> Also in the verse [Had it not been for the grace of Allāh and His mercy unto you, and that Allāh is Clement, Merciful; 24/20], here there is an omitted clause which can be understood from the whole verse, i.e. because of the grace of Allāh and His mercy He will not punish you....<sup>96</sup>

<sup>93</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, pp. 210-2. The above translation is Pickthall's; he does not even inform the reader about such Qur'ānic styles. Also it is worth mentioning that al-Qazwīnī mentions this category and this example absolutely as Ibn Qutaybah has done, see *al-Īdāh*, p. 185. In this matter also, see al-Bayḍāwī, 1/493; al-Rāzī, 5/155; al-Qurṭubī, 9/246; al-Bāqillānī, Muḥammad b. al-Ṭayyib, *I'jāz al-Qur'ān*, ed. by S.A. Ṣaqr, (Dār al-Ma'ārif, Cairo, 1963), p. 262; and *al-Ṣāhibī*, p. 337.

<sup>94</sup> See pp. 212-4 and *al-Gharīb*, p. 198. Also see al-Bayḍāwī, 1/442; al-Qurṭubī, 8/363; Abū al-Su'ūd, 5/350; and al-Baghawī, 2/362.

<sup>95</sup> See p. 214 and *al-Gharīb*, p. 227. This example is given by most of those who wrote about *balāghah*, e.g. see *al-Īdāh*, p. 187. See also al-Bayḍāwī, 1/507-8; al-Rāzī, 5/204; al-Qurṭubī, 9/319; al-Khaṭṭābī, pp. 20 & 32; and al-Bāqillānī, p. 262.

<sup>96</sup> See pp. 214-6. See also al-Ṭabarī, 18/100; and al-Baghawī, 3/333.

4. The omission of one or two words for brevity; for instance, in the verse [And when Abraham and Ishmael were raising the foundations of the house, (saying): Our Lord! Accept from us this duty; 2/127], the word between brackets is the omitted one. Actually, this type is abundant in the Qur'ān and the speech of the Arabs, but the translators add the word because the meaning is not clear without it.<sup>97</sup>

5. There is another important type of utterance where doubt may occur because of abridgment and ellipsis. Under this heading Ibn Qutaybah mentions some obscure verses, and discusses them carefully to point out the omitted word or words, sometimes mentioning several opinions about the matter, and judging between them, as he does in his explanation of verse [35/8], where he mentions al-Farrā's opinion, then rejects it because it is not correct, and then mentions his own opinion.<sup>98</sup> We shall discuss one example which was regarded as a criticism against the Qur'ān concerning verse [8/5] which was mentioned in chapter two. The claim concerns the relation or linkage between verse 5 and the previous ones, or in other words: what is the thing which resembles or is put as a comparison to the words after the particle "*kamā*"? Ibn Qutaybah answers that these words refer to the beginning of the *sūra*, which concerns the story of the Companions when they differed about the spoils of the battle of Badr, after which God revealed verses [1-4]; verse 1 talks about this dispute, ordering the believers to obey Him and His Messenger, then verses 2-4 describe the real believers, after which verse 5 comes with a particle of comparison to mean that their (the Companions) aversion to what you (Muḥammad) did with the spoils is the same as their aversion to going with you.... Ibn Qutaybah supports this interpretation with many examples taken from poetry and proverbs, and then mentions many other verses as examples of this kind of thing.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> See this example and others in pp. 216-8. And for this example see also al-Bayḍāwī, 1/87.

<sup>98</sup> See pp. 218-20.

<sup>99</sup> See pp. 218-23. See also al-Bayḍāwī, 1/375; al-Qurṭubī, 7/367-8; al-Baghawī, 2/230; and al-Khaṭṭābī, pp. 20 & 30.

6. Abridgment by omitting the *jawāb al-qasam* (main clause of the oath) if there is a later passage which indicates the meaning of this clause: Many examples from the Qur'ān illustrate this, for example in [50/1-2] and [79/1-6], where in each case, after the oath suddenly, a new sentence begins. This is to indicate that the *jawāb al-qasam* is clearly understood from the general context.<sup>100</sup>

7. The omission of the particle (*lā*) from the sentence when the context indicates that it should be presented, for instance the verse [*yubayyinu Allāhu lakum an taḍillū* (Allāh expoundeth unto you, that ye err not); 4/176] which is really [*yubayyinu Allāhu lakum an lā taḍillū*].<sup>101</sup>

8. The ellipsis of something which has not been mentioned before. Many examples are given, one of them concerning the verse [*Innā anzalnāhu fī laylat al-qadr* (Lo! We revealed it on the Night of Predestination); 97/1], but what is the thing which was revealed? There is no preceding speech, because it is the beginning of a new *sūra*; however, it is understood from the meaning itself that God means the Qur'ān.<sup>102</sup>

9. Finally Ibn Qutaybah mentions the omission of the preposition and the pronoun dependent on it, one example concerning the verse [*Wa idhā kālūhum aw wazanūhum yukhsirūn* (But if they measure unto them or weigh for them, they cause them loss); 83/3], which is really [*Wa idhā kālū lahum aw wazanū lahum yukhsirūn*].<sup>103</sup>

It is worth pointing out that some of these categories were studied by most rhetoricians, as al-Jurjānī did in *Asrār al-Balāghah*, which is concerned with 'ilm al-

<sup>100</sup> See pp. 223-4. Also for the first verse, see Ibn Kathīr, 4/221; and al-Qurṭubī, 17/3. As for the second one see al-Qurṭubī, 19/195-6. However, the *E.I.* says nothing about this kind of oath, see 5/421-2.

<sup>101</sup> See p. 225 and *al-Gharīb*, p. 137. See also al-Bayḍāwī, 1/252, wherein he maintains that this is the opinion of the Kūfans.

<sup>102</sup> See pp. 226-8. For this case, we can say that from the relationship between the previous *sūra* and this one we can know the implied word, because the *sūra* before it is the first one to be revealed to the Prophet. Also it begins with the word "read", then the next chapter talks about this thing whose revelation began on the Night of Predestination, in the month of Ramaḍān.

<sup>103</sup> See pp. 228-31 and *al-Gharīb*, p. 519, the underlined words indicate the omission. See also al-Ṭabarī, 30/91; *al-Kashshāf*, 2/530; al-Bayḍāwī, 2/577; Ibn Kathīr, 4/483; and al-Qurṭubī, 19/252.

*bayān*. He studied this subject to answer the question: Is omission regarded as a part of allegory or not? He subsequently states that omission itself is not a part of allegory, but it may be the reason for allegorical speech; he also talks about omission in *Dalā' il al-I'jāz*, which is concerned with *'ilm al-ma'ānī*. On the other hand, al-Qazwīnī studied it only under the section concerning *'ilm al-ma'ānī*.<sup>104</sup>

Also it is important to note that there are two main types of *'ijāz*; the first is *'ijāz ḥadhf*, which concerns the categories above, and the second is *'ijāz qaṣr* (brief); of which Ibn Qutaybah gives some examples at the beginning of *al-Mushkil* when he talks about the Qur'ānic style.

#### 4.3.4. *Tikrār al-kalām wa-al-ziyādah fih* (The repetition of the speech and the addition to it).

On this subject Ibn Qutaybah gives an outstanding discussion of the advantages of the repetition of words, sentences and subjects.

At the beginning, he talks about the wisdom of repetition:

As for repetition, surely God revealed the Qur'ān separately during 23 years, with one duty after another in order that it would be easy for His servants and a graduation for them to achieve the perfection of their religion; and [in order] with one preaching after another to rouse them from heedlessness and to practise their hearts in a new preaching; and as an abrogation after an abrogated (text) in order to cause them to worship Him and to test their faith; God says: [And those who disbelieve say: Why is the Qur'ān not revealed unto him all at once? (It is revealed) thus that We may strengthen thy heart therewith; and We have arranged it in right order; 25/32], the speech is directed to the Prophet, but the strength is intended to be also for his Companions.

The Prophet used to renew his preaching to his Companions in order to avoid any kind of weariness among them, which means that he always continued to preach to them and to renew this preaching especially when they were heedless...

However, if the Qur'ān had been revealed at one time, then it would precede the reasons according to which the Qur'ān (sometimes) was

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<sup>104</sup> For more details see *Asrār al-Balāghah*, p. 283-4; *Dalā' il al-I'jāz*, p. 44; and *al-Īdāh*, p. 184-92.

revealed! Also the duties would have been wearisome upon Muslims and others who wanted to be Muslims; also rousing and abrogating would be meaningless, because the abrogated applies for a limited period, then the abrogating verse becomes the valid one. Thus, how it could be permitted that the Qur'ān says: Do this thing and do not do it, at the same time!<sup>105</sup>

After that Ibn Qutaybah discusses the fact that God did not impose it as a duty upon His servants to memorize the whole of the Qur'ān, but rather to fulfil all His commands; many examples are given to indicate that the Companions were able to read it and to apply everything which they read, while many tribes who became Muslims, only read that part of the Qur'ān which was sufficient to them.

Then Ibn Qutaybah goes on to discuss another point, that of the complete repetition of utterances, such as that in *sūrat al-Kāfirūn* and *al-Raḥmān*. He gives a decisive answer, which is that repetition is one of the Arabs' stylistic methods of conveying confirmation and instruction; on the other hand, he says, they use abridgment for brevity and lightness.

Some of the examples discussed are ones which have been considered to be among the criticisms of the Qur'ān, one of them concerning *sūrat al-Kāfirūn*, where he gives two answers about this repetition (in addition to what we have mentioned above), the first being that it is repeated in order to confirm the impossibility in worshipping idols, and the second that there was a period of time between the two repeated verses: at the beginning they asked the Prophet to recognize their idols in order that they would recognize his God, then the first three verses were revealed, after that the disbelievers came again talking about another offer, that each side worship the idols and God alternately, and then God revealed the other verses to reject this offer.

As for *sūrat al-Raḥmān*, Ibn Qutaybah maintains that in this *sūra* God mentions many kinds of favours to remind His servants of His kindness, and therefore, He followed each kind of favour with the verse [Which is it, of the favours of your Lord,

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<sup>105</sup> *Al-Mushkil*, pp. 232-3.

that ye deny?]; this is absolutely the same as the repetition of the verse [*Fahal min muddakir* (but is there any that remembereth)] in *sūrat al-Qamar*.<sup>106</sup>

Another kind of repetition is to repeat the meaning in different words to give full expression to the meaning; for instance, in the verse [Be guardians of your prayers and of the midmost prayer; 2/238], although the midmost prayer is one among the others, He distinguishes it because of its importance.<sup>107</sup>

As for (apparently unnecessary) additions to a phrase (*ziyādah*), one aim of this is confirmation; for example, the verse [...they utter with their mouths a thing which is not in their hearts; 3/167], the underlined words are to confirm their uttering, because the word might have been used allegorically, as when one says: "I spoke to him" when one is referring to gesture or a letter.<sup>108</sup>

Sometimes, the particle (*lā*) may be added to a speech while the sense requires that it should be omitted; this particle represents the refusal or the denial of those to whom the speech is addressed. For example, the verse [*Mā mana'aka an lā tasjuda idh amartuka* (what hindered thee (the Satan) that thou didst not fall prostrate when I bade thee)? 7/12] means in its sense [*an tasjuda*]; the added particle is to make it clear that he did not fall prostrate.<sup>109</sup> On the other hand, on some occasions, this particle is used with oaths as a reply to the disbelievers' claims; for instance, in the verse [*lā uqsimu bi yawmi al-qiyāmah* (Nay: I swear by the Day of Resurrection); 75/1]. Here the particle (*lā*) is to reject their claims or offers, after which a new sentence begins (*uqsimu biyawmi al-qiyāmah*).<sup>110</sup>

<sup>106</sup> Op. cit, pp. 235-9. See also al-Ṭabarī, 30/330-1; and al-Qurṭubī, 20/226. For *sūrat al-Rahmān*, see al-Baghawī, 4/268 and al-Khaṭṭābī, p. 34.

<sup>107</sup> See p. 240. Also see *Majāz al-Qur'ān*, 1/211; al-Rāzī, 2/59; al-Qurṭubī, 3/209; and Abū al-Su'ūd, 2/59.

<sup>108</sup> See p. 241. See also al-Bayḍāwī, 1/189; Abū al-Su'ūd, 2/464; and al-Qurṭubī, 4/267.

<sup>109</sup> See pp. 243-6, and *al-Gharīb*, p. 165 where he says that it is *ṣilah* but that it is mentioned for the same purpose as stated in *al-Mushkil*. See also al-Bayḍāwī, 1/333; al-Qurṭubī, 7/170; al-Rāzī, 4/186; and Abū al-Su'ūd, 4/359.

<sup>110</sup> See pp. 246-7. Also see the *E.I.*<sup>2</sup>, 5/422. Many exegetes talk about this particle, for instance, see al-Bayḍāwī, 2/463 & 547; Ibn Kathīr, 4/447; al-Rāzī, 8/259; Abū al-Su'ūd, 8/303-4; al-Qurṭubī, 19/91-2; and al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī in *al-Mizān*, 20/103.



Finally Ibn Qutaybah mentions some particles often added in speech for many purposes according to Arabic style, in particular in the Qur'ān, such as (*alā, bi, min, li/la, ka, 'alā, 'an, inna, in, idh, mā* and *wa*), many examples being given from the Qur'ān and poetry.<sup>111</sup>

Although, long discussions are found in most of the rhetorical works or even in the exegeses about such added particles, some scholars do not accept this idea. Al-Jurjānī discusses both the omission and the adding of words at the end of *Asrār al-Balāghah*, but he cannot decide whether they come under the heading of allegory or not. al-Qazwīnī also discusses them in *al-Īdāh*, where he maintains that al-Jurjānī's opinion was against those who say that speech may be regarded as allegorical if there is omission from it or addition to it. al-Qazwīnī rejects al-Jurjānī's claim because he himself mentions these types at the beginning of his discussion of this subject as kinds of allegory.<sup>112</sup>

As for repetition, rhetorical works mentions it under the category of *'ilm al-ma'ānī*.<sup>113</sup>

#### 4.3.5. *Al-kināyah wa-al-ta'arīf* (metonymy and allusion \_saying one thing while you mean another):

As regards *kināyah*, Ibn Qutaybah puts many types under this heading, a simple example being to metonymise the man by paternity; i.e. to call him: "Abū Zayd", for instance, in order to increase the recognition, or to aggrandize the person to whom you are talking.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> See pp. 247-55. Also see al-Baydāwī who says absolutely the same thing about such particles, that they were added for many purposes according to Arab style.

<sup>112</sup> See *Asrār al-Balāghah*, pp. 283-9; *al-Īdāh*, pp. 317-8 and *al-Fawā'id al-Mushawwiq*, pp. 111-5.

<sup>113</sup> For example, see *al-Īdāh*, pp.197-9.

<sup>114</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, p. 256.

After that he discusses the claim that this kind of metonymy is a sort of falsehood unless the *kunya* is really the name of the son, and the claim that if this metonymy is used for aggrandization, then why did God speak of Abū Lahab in this way, although he was His enemy, while He called Muḥammad, who is His Messenger, by his given name? Ibn Qutaybah gives the answer to these questions that Arabs sometimes used a *kunya* as the name of a person, such as Abū ‘Amr b. al-‘Alā’, or that perhaps the person has the two, the name and the *kunya*, but the *kunya* is the celebrated one, and therefore the person is known by it, as were Abū Lahab (‘Abd al-‘Uzzā b. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib), Abū Sufyān (Ṣakhr b. Ḥarb), Abū Ṭālib (‘Abd Manāf b. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib), Abū Dharr (Jundub b. Junādah) and Abū Hurayrah (‘Abd al-Raḥmān. b. Ṣakhr). Thus, they sometimes put their names as e.g. ‘Alī b. Abū Ṭālib while according to Arabic grammar it should be ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, the reason for this being that the *kunya* comes to be regarded as a name.<sup>115</sup>

Then Ibn Qutaybah talks about the accusation made by the *shu‘ūbiyyah* (the anti-Arab party) that the Arabs took the names of animals, such as Kalb and Asad; he answers that this is done both to seek a good omen and to avoid a bad omen, since they used to give a person a good name in the hope of good fortune, and a bad name (as the case of giving names of animals) in order to avoid evil.<sup>116</sup>

Another type of metonymy is the use of a general expression which covers a number of names under it, as in the verse [Alas for me! Ah, would that I had never taken (*fulān*) such an one for a friend! 25/28], where the word (*fulān*) is a general expression which means someone; but who is he? Some Muslims went astray in determining him, so that some say that he is ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭab, and indeed this opens the door to other people to make attempts to give such general expressions specific by giving definite names, for example in verses before and after the previous one \_[25/27-9]. The clear

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<sup>115</sup> See p. 256-60. For this last example see al-Bayḍāwī, 2/629.

<sup>116</sup> See p. 260.

answer to such groups concerning this sort of verse is to say that here God utters an expression which represents the general category of all those to whom it may apply.<sup>117</sup>

As for *al-ta'riḍ* (allusion), Arabs use it frequently. However, it seems to them that allusion is better than saying something outright, as in the verse [Lo! this brother hath ninety and nine ewes while I had one ewe; and he said: Entrust it to me, and he conquered me in speech; 38/23], where actually the word "women" is intended, instead of ewes.<sup>118</sup>

Finally Ibn Qutaybah gives answers to the claim concerning verse [10/94], that the Prophet was in doubt about what was revealed to him. One answer is based on the principle of allusion, i.e. that the speech is directed to the Prophet while in fact it is those who are in doubt who are intended, while the second answer that the people in the Prophet's era were of three kinds: Believers, disbelievers and people in doubt. Thus, the speech is directed to the last group, and therefore, the verse will be as [And if ye (people in doubt) art in doubt concerning that which We revealed unto your Prophet, then question those who read the Scripture (that was) before you (as 'Abd Allāh b. Sallām, Salmān al-Fārisī and Tamīm al-Dārī)...]. However, Ibn Qutaybah concludes that the first answer is better than the second, taking into account the subject matter of the whole *sūra* and the subsequent verses.<sup>119</sup>

Turning to rhetorical works, al-Qazwīnī mentions metonymy after his study of *al-isti'ārah*, although he gives more details in comparison with Ibn Qutaybah. E.g, he

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<sup>117</sup> See pp. 260-3. Also see *al-Kashshāf*, 2/108; al-Bayḍāwī, 2/138; Abū al-Su'ūd, 7/248; and al-Rāzī, 6/332-4, they are all maintain the metonymy in this verse.

<sup>118</sup> See pp. 266-7. Also see al-Ṭabarī, 23/143; al-Bayḍāwī, 2310; Abū al-Su'ūd, 7/566; and al-Qurṭubī, 15/174. However, this kind is often not translated according to its rhetorical meaning, as with the example from Pickthall above. For more examples, see verses [18/72], [37/89], [39/30] and [21/63], also see *al-Mushkil*, pp. 267-9.

<sup>119</sup> See pp. 269-74; *al-Gharīb*, p. 199 and *al-Masā'il wa-al-Ajwibah*, p. 226. See also al-Bayḍāwī, 1/446, where he mentions this answer and others; al-Rāzī, 5/26; Abū al-Su'ūd, 5/372-3; al-Qurṭubī, 8/382; and al-Baghawī, 2/368, who details Ibn Qutaybah's two possible explanations. And for other examples about metonymy in *al-Gharīb*, see pp. 127 and 145.

talks about metonymy in adjectives, and agrees with Ibn Qutaybah that *al-ta'riḍ* is one part of it.<sup>120</sup>

#### 4.3.6. *Mukhālafat zāhir al-lafz ma'nāh* (the contrast between the outward expression and its meaning):

Ibn Qutaybah identifies many subdivisions of this category; for example:

1. Uttering an imprecation but using words which one does not want to happen, such as the word *qutila* in verse [51/10] and [80/17], which means not "killed" but "cursed".<sup>121</sup>

2. The use of two similar expressions, one of them mentioned as a punishment for the other, but with different meanings; e.g, the verse [The guerdon of an ill-deed is an ill the like thereof; 42/40].<sup>122</sup>

3. The use of the interrogative when really other things are intended, such as: confirmation (*taqrīr*), astonishment (*ta'ajjub*) and reproach (*tawbīkh*); many examples illustrate these three purposes.<sup>123</sup> Such types really belong to *'ilm al-ma'ānī*.

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<sup>120</sup> See *al-Īdāh*, pp. 318-28. Also see *Dalā'il al-I'jāz*, p. 44, where al-Jurjānī speaks about metonymy; and *al-Fawā'id al-Mushawwiq*, pp. 126-35.

<sup>121</sup> See pp. 275-7 and *al-Gharīb*, pp. 421 & 514. Also see *al-Kashshāf*, 2/408; and al-Bayḍāwī, 2/428 & 596.

<sup>122</sup> See pp. 277-9 and *al-Ṣāhibī*, p. 385. Other examples concern verses [2/194], [2/14-5], [3/54], [9/67] and [9/79].

<sup>123</sup> See pp. 279-80. In respect of the first case, see verses [5/116] and [21/42], and for the second one, see verses [78/1-2] and [77/12-3], as for the last one see [26/165]. From Ibn Qutaybah's applications on this matter in other parts of his book, we can demonstrate the particle (*hal*) which used for interrogative and then for rhetorical purposes it can also mean confirmation and reproach as the particle (ʾ = *hamzah*), see p. 538; and in p. 520 where also the particle (*kayfa*) is used for interrogative, but for rhetorical purposes it means here astonishment. Also *sūrat al-An'ām* abundantly includes such verses.

4. The use of the imperative mood, when really other things are intended, such as threat, discipline, permission and duty. Many examples also illustrate these kinds; for the first case the verse [...do what ye will; 41/40] serves as an illustration.<sup>124</sup>

5. The use of a general expression when a particular one is intended, as in the verse [The wandering Arabs say: We believe. Say (unto them, O Muḥammad): Ye believe not; 49/14] although just a group of them uttered those words.<sup>125</sup>

6. Other similar expressions to those mentioned above are the use of a plural number when one or two persons are intended, as in the verse [And let a party of believers witness their punishment; 24/2] when it is accepted that it refers to just two of the believers; or a singular to mean a group, as in the verse [He said: Lo! they are my guests (*ḍayfī*). Affront me not; 15/68], where the word (*ḍayf*) is a singular referring to a group of (*ḍuyūf*); or describing a group with a singular adjective, as in the verse [And if ye are unclean (*junuba*), purify yourselves; 5/6] where the word (*junub*) is a singular adjective referring to a group of (*ajnab*); or describing a singular with a group adjective, as when the Arabs say: "*Thawb ahdām*" (an old dress) when it should grammatically be (*hadam*); many other examples illustrate such usages.<sup>126</sup>

7. The use of a verb which properly only applies to one subject (*fā'il*) to refer to two subjects, as in the verse [O ye assembly of the jinn and humankind! Came there not unto you messengers of your own...; 6/130] while we know that messengers are only from mankind.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> See pp. 280-1; also see al-Bayḍāwī, 2/354; and Ibn Kathīr, 4/102. In respect of the second case, see verses [4/34] and [65/2], and for the third case see verses [24/33] and [62/10], as for the last case, see verses [2/43] and [2/282].

<sup>125</sup> See pp. 281-2. For further details see verses [26/214] and [3/173].

<sup>126</sup> See pp. 282-6 and *al-Ṣāhibī*, p. 349 where he quotes Ibn Qutaybah's words. Also in the case of verse [24/2] above, al-Zamakhsharī maintains that this is Mujāhid's opinion, while the best one is the opinion of Ibn 'Abbās, that the word (*tā'ifah*) means four people or more, see *al-Kashshāf*, 2/82. As for the words *ḍayf* and *junub*, see *al-Ṣāhibī*, pp. 348 & 351.

<sup>127</sup> See pp. 286-8.

8. The use of a verb or a pronoun in the singular when it refers to two or more subjects, as in the verse [...but Allāh, with His messenger, hath more right that they should please Him (*yurḍūhu*) if they are believers; 9/62], here the verb (*yurḍūhu*) should refer to both Allāh and His messenger, and therefore should end in *humā* not *hu*.<sup>128</sup>

9. Changing the verb from direct speech to past tense or passive voice, as in the verse [*Hattā idhā kuntum fī al-fulk* (direct speech) *wa jarayna bihim* (past speech)...; 10/22].<sup>129</sup>

10. Addressing one person or group, then directing the speech to another one or group, as in the verse [And if they answer not your prayer (the speech is directed to the Prophet), then know that it is revealed only in the knowledge of Allāh (this speech is for the disbelievers); 11/14]. Actually, this type and the above one are known in rhetoric as *al-iltifāt*, which is a part of '*ilm al-ma'ānī*.<sup>130</sup>

11. Commanding one person, two, three or more by using the dual tense, as with the word *alqiyā* (throw) in verse [50/24], which is in the dual, while the speech is addressed to all the angels of Hell.<sup>131</sup>

12. Addressing one person in the plural, as in the verse [*Rabbi irji'ūn* (My Lord! Send me back); 23/99]; the word *irji'ūn* is used for asking a group, but here it used to ask one, who is God. Ibn Qutaybah maintains that this method of speech is usually used for glorification.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> See p. 288 and *al-Ṣāhibī*, p. 362. Here, the translator was not aware of this rhetorical point.

<sup>129</sup> See p. 289 and *al-Ṣāhibī*, p. 356. Also see al-Bayḍāwī, 1/432; al-Qurṭubī, 8/324-5; Abū al-Su'ūd, 5/279; and al-Bāqillānī, p. 101.

<sup>130</sup> See pp. 290-1 and *al-Ṣāhibī*, p. 358. For more details about *al-iltifāt*, see *al-Īdāh*, pp. 68-74 and *al-Fawā'id al-Mushawwiq*, pp. 98-103.

<sup>131</sup> See pp. 291-3 and *al-Ṣāhibī*, p. 363. However, most exegetes maintain that the verb actually refers to two angels who were mentioned in verse [21]: The driver and the witness; see, for instance, al-Bayḍāwī, 2/423; and Ibn Kathīr, 4/225-6.

<sup>132</sup> See pp. 293-4 and *al-Ṣāhibī*, p. 353 where he gives the meaning of Ibn Qutaybah's words. About this example, see al-Bayḍāwī, 2/112; and al-Qurṭubī, 12/149.

13. A kind in which an utterance is connected to a previous utterance, so that it looks like one utterance when in fact they are two; this kind expects the reader to recognise the change of subject, as in the verse [She said: Lo! kings, when they enter a township, ruin it and make the honour of its people shame. Thus will they do; 27/34]. In this verse, the first speech is said by the queen, and the second by God.<sup>133</sup>

14. The use of a verb in the past tense when the present or the future are intended; one example which demonstrates the first case is in the verse [*Kuntum khayra ummatin* (Ye are the best community...); 3/110], here the verb (*kuntum*) is a past one, while the meaning is to be taken as present and the future, as the translator has made clear. As for the second case, the verse [*Atā amru Allāh...*(The commandment of Allāh will come to pass...); 16/1] gives a good example, since the verb (*atā*) is a past tense, but it means that *amru Allāh* (the day of Resurrection) will come in the future.<sup>134</sup>

15. In some cases the sense of the passive participle (*maf'ūl*) comes in the form of the active participle (*fā'il*), or the form (*fa'il*) is used to mean (*muf'il*), or other such changes occur. For the first case, the words [*'āsim*; 11/43] and [*dāfiq*; 86/6] are good examples, the first one to mean (*ma'šūm*), and the second (*madfūq*). As for the second case, one clear example is the word (*badī'*) in [2/117] to mean (*mubdī'*).<sup>135</sup>

Before ending this section, it is important to clarify that Ibn Qutaybah does not only discuss these figures of speech under these previous topics; rather, wherever such figures occur he discusses them and explains their rhetoric.<sup>136</sup> Furthermore, he gives

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<sup>133</sup> See pp. 294-5. In fact this is one possible explanation, the other being that the later words are her speech also; both explanations were mentioned by most exegetes; e.g, see al-Ṭabarī, 19/154; al-Qurṭubī, 13/195; and al-Bayḍāwī, 2/176. But on the other hand Ibn Kathīr maintains what Ibn Qutaybah has said, see 3/362. Many other examples may be found.

<sup>134</sup> See pp. 295-6 and *al-Ṣāhibī*, pp. 364-5. Other examples are to be found there.

<sup>135</sup> See pp. 296-8; *al-Gharīb*, pp 62 & 204 and *al-Ṣāhibī*, p. 366. Also see al-Rāzī, 5/62 & 8/374; and al-Qurṭubī, 9/39 & 20/4. Other changes are very few in the Qur'ān, for example using the subject (*fā'il*) in the sense of an object (*maf'ūl*), as in the word [*ma'tiyya*; 19/61] to mean (*ātiya*), see p. 298.

<sup>136</sup> For example, see *al-Mushkil*, where pp. 391-2, 417 include discussions of metaphorical expressions; pp. 392, 396 include discussions of metonymical expressions; pp. 393-5, 421 include examples of ellipsis; p. 432 includes allegorical expression; p. 320 includes one example of comparison; p. 425 includes example of advanced and delaying expressions and p. 415 includes one example of repetition.

attention to some particles, where by mentioning their meanings he talks about some types of 'ilm *al-ma'ānī*, such as *al-istifhām* (interrogative) and *al-idrāb* (leaving a preceding utterance and uttering a new one by using the particle "bal").<sup>137</sup>

It is also necessary to remind ourselves that Ibn Qutaybah at the beginning of his *al-Mushkil* talks about the eloquence of the Qur'ān, especially how it uses the speech which is suitable to the situation, which was eventually regarded as the best definition for the word (*balāghah*), and he also talks about some Qur'ānic sentences which have many meanings in a few words; many scholars have quoted his words, for example Abū Manṣūr al-Tha'ālibī, al-Qazwīnī and al-Ḥātimī.<sup>138</sup> Many other writers quote from Ibn Qutaybah's books, particularly *al-Mushkil*, as Aḥmad b. Fāris has done in his book *al-Ṣāhibī*, as we have seen in the previous examples.<sup>139</sup> Ibn Qutaybah also repeats some of the Arab styles during his discussion of the mysterious letters at the beginning of some sūras, the only thing being that he gives other examples.<sup>140</sup> He was also very careful in *al-Gharīb* to comment on any verse or word which contains such rhetorical styles, though mostly he refers the reader to *al-Mushkil*.

As a result of all this discussion, we may assert Ibn Qutaybah's superiority and priority in this particular subject, since we know that previous works are limited or lost. In fact these great accounts have been adopted by later rhetoricians as a basis for

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<sup>137</sup> In respect of the interrogative we have detailed some of these examples under footnote 123; as for the *idrāb*, see *al-Mushkil*, pp. 536-7 where he discusses the particle *bal* giving all its uses and some examples from the Qur'ān and poetry.

<sup>138</sup> See al-Tha'ālibī, 'Abd al-Malik b. Muḥammad, *al-I'jāz wa-al-Ījāz*, (Maktabat Dar al-Bayān, Baghdad, and Dār Muṣ'ab, Beirut, s.d), pp. 21-3. Also see *al-Īdāh*, pp. 182-4. As for Ḥātimī, see S.A. Bonebakker, *Materials for the History of Arabic Rhetoric from the Ḥilyat al-Muḥāḍarah of Ḥātimī*, (Napoli, 1975), p. 31 where the author shows how al-Ḥātimī depends on Ibn Qutaybah. And about the definition of *balāghah*, some of the modern writers quote his words; e.g. Faṭḥī Farīd in his *al-Madkhal ilā Dirāsāt al-Balāghah*, (Maktabat al-Nahḍah al-Miṣriyyah, Cairo, 1978), see p. 118.

<sup>139</sup> In this book, Ibn. Fāris imitates Ibn Qutaybah to a great extent, even in the topics of some chapters. In addition to *al-Mushkil*, 'Uyūn al-Akḥbār comes to be another great material for the scholars to quote and depend on, for example Aḥmad b. 'Abd Rabbih al-Andalusī in *al-'Iqd al-Farīd* imitates Ibn Qutaybah in the subject and the style of his book, see the introduction of the editor M.S. al-'Aryān, (al-Maktabah al-Tijāriyyah al-Kubrā, Cairo, 1st ed, 1940), pp. 9-10; also Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī in *al-Baṣā'ir wa-al-Dhakā'ir*, ed by A. Amīn and S.A. Ṣāqir, (Maṭba'at Lajnat al-Ta'lif wa-al-Tarjamah wa-al-Nashr, Cairo, 1st ed, 1953), see 1/6 where the author himself maintains that he depends on 'Uyūn al-Akḥbār.

<sup>140</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, pp. 302-9.



development, and most have depended on his work, as we have explained many times and many other scholars have maintained. Here we should like to draw attention to certain statements by some scholars, which, in addition to our own study, can make clear Ibn Qutaybah's contributions to the science of figures of speech. For example:

1. Şaqr states:

The chapters concerning the figures of speech which were studied by Ibn Qutaybah in this book (*al-Mushkil*) have a great historical value, because they will add to our knowledge new information about the development of rhetoric. It is generally accepted by specialists and others that Arabic rhetoric was founded with al-Jāhiz' works, and then jumped directly to the *Badi'* of Ibn al-Mu'tazz...and no one knows that Ibn Qutaybah has a large share in its formation and development. Thus, the appearance of these chapters in this book shows this missing link in the history of rhetoric, and will add to Ibn Qutaybah's glories another great glory, which will be remembered whenever people talk about the history of rhetoric and its foundation. It is impossible for any researcher to deny what Ibn Qutaybah has done in identifying many kinds of figures of speech from the Qur'an and classifying them in 154 pages, many years before Ibn al-Mu'tazz wrote his book in (274/887).<sup>141</sup>

2. Muḥammad M. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd has written an introduction regarding the history of Arabic rhetoric and the most important works in this field. He maintains that some exegetes have made a great contribution to rhetoric, whether in general or special works; among the oldest general works is *Majāz al-Qur'ān* by Abū 'Ubaydah, and among the oldest specialised works (which explains a special kind of verse such as the obscure) is *Mushkil al-Qur'ān* by Ibn Qutaybah<sup>142</sup>

<sup>141</sup> See Şaqr's introduction to *al-Mushkil*, pp. 82-3. In addition to this, other scholars confirm Şaqr's words, such as 'Abd al-Qādir Ḥusayn in his *Athar al-Nuḥāh fī al-Baḥth al-Balāghī*, (Dār Nahḍat Mişr, Cairo, s.d), see pp. 176-7 and Majīd 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Nāji in his *al-Athar al-Ighrīqī fī al-Balāghah al-'Arabiyyah min al-Jāhiz ilā Ibn al-Mu'tazz*, (Maṭba'at al-Ādāb, n.p, 1976), p. 196.

<sup>142</sup> See his introduction to *al-Īdāh*, p. 6. Furthermore see Muḥammad 'Abd al-Ghanī Ḥasan in his introduction to *Talkhīş al-Bayān fī Majāzāt al-Qur'ān*, by al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, (Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah, Cairo, 1st ed, 1955), pp. 6 and 17; *The Cambridge History of Islam*, ed. by P.M. Holt and others, (Cambridge Univ Press, 1970), 2/663; Badawī Ṭabānah, *Al-Bayān al-'Arabī*, (al-Maṭba'ah al-Fanniyyah, n.p, 4th ed, 1968), pp. 47, 29, 36, and 42; Ḥammādi Şammūd, *Al-Taḥkīr al-Balāghī 'Inda al-'Arab*, (al-Jāmi'ah al-Tūnisiyyah, Tunisia, 1981), pp. 341, 315, and 327-40; Aḥmad Maṭlūb, *Manāhij Balāghiyah*, (Wakālat al-Maṭbū'āt, Kuwait, 1st ed, 1973), pp. 58 and 52-7; Darwish al-Jundī, *Al-Naẓm al-Qur'ānī fī Kashshāf al-Zamakhsharī*, p. 6; and Maḥdī Şāliḥ al-Sāmarrā'i, *Tārīkh al-Fikr al-Dīnī fī al-Balāghah al-'Arabiyyah*, (al-Maktab al-Islāmī, Damascus, 1st ed, 1977), p. 28. Also, al-Sāmarrā'i in his *al-Majāz fī al-Balāghah al-'Arabiyyah*, (Dār al-Da'wah, Ḥamāh, Syria, 1st ed, 1974) shows Ibn Qutaybah's preponderance in *majāz* and *isti'ārah*, see pp. 70-5.

## CHAPTER FIVE

# IBN QUTAYBAH'S INTEREST IN THE QUR'ĀNIC READINGS

As a part of his interest in both methods of exegesis (i.e. *ma' thūr* and *ra'y*), Ibn Qutaybah was very interested in *al-qirā'āt* (Qur'ānic readings), and indeed he wrote a book concerning this, as mentioned in Chapter One.

His interest in Qur'ānic readings shows quite clearly in his works on exegesis, and he has his own style of using them in explaining the Qur'ān, and also has his own opinion about *al-aḥruf al-sab'ah* (the seven dialects of the Qur'ān), a subject which cannot be left aside when examining these readings of the Qur'ān.

In the course of this chapter, we intend to investigate the following points:

1. Ibn Qutaybah's concept of the seven *aḥruf*, and all matters related to it.
2. His method in using Qur'ānic readings in his exegesis.
3. His use of Qur'ānic readings to refute the accusations against the Qur'ān.

## 5.1. IBN QUTAYBAH'S CONCEPT OF THE SEVEN *AḤRUF* IN THE QUR'ĀN.

This subject actually arises from the Tradition from the Prophet which says: "The Qur'ān has been revealed in seven *aḥruf*, all are sufficient and wholesome, therefore recite in whichever will be easy for you."<sup>1</sup>

Under this topic, and in the light of this Tradition and others which are connected to the same subject, many points must be investigated in order firstly to clear up this complicated issue, and secondly, to demonstrate Ibn Qutaybah's contributions to the subject.

### 5.1.1. The meaning of this Tradition:

Ibn Qutaybah discusses this point and the subject of the seven *aḥruf* in general in *al-Mushkil*, in the chapter devoted to the refutation of the accusations made against the Qur'ān on the basis of the readings of the Qur'ān.

Before investigating the meaning of this Tradition, we may first note that Ibn Qutaybah starts this chapter by mentioning this Tradition as good evidence against the critics, after which he comments that some people misunderstood the meaning of this Tradition and say that the seven *aḥruf* mean (*wa'd, wa'id, ḥalāl, ḥarām, mawā'iz, amthāl, and ihtijāj*); another opinion is that they are seven dialects in every word and another is to say that they mean (*ḥalāl, ḥarām, amr, nahy, khabar mā kān, khabar mā huwa kā' in ba'd, and amthāl*); then he says: "Nothing of these opinions is accepted as an interpretation of this Tradition."<sup>2</sup>

After that Ibn Qutaybah gives his own opinion regarding this matter:

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<sup>1</sup> See al-Bukhārī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, 6/482 and other sources mentioned in Ch. 3, footnote 30. In fact most exegeses and books of Qur'ānic sciences mention it as al-Ṭabarī, 1/20-2 and *al-Itqān*, 1/136.

<sup>2</sup> *Al-Mushkil*, pp. 33-4.

The interpretation of this Tradition is that (the Qur'ān was revealed) in seven different *lughāt* (dialects) distributed through the Qur'ān. This is indicated by the Prophet's saying: "Recite it as you wish." 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb said: "I heard Hishām b. Ḥakīm b. Hizām reciting *Sūrat al-Furqān* in a way different from mine, which had been taught me by the Prophet, then I brought him to the Prophet and told him the story, then the Prophet asked Hishām to recite, and he recited in this manner. Then the Prophet said: "in this way it was revealed"; after that he asked me to recite, I recited, then he said: "in this way it was revealed, this Qur'ān has been revealed in seven dialects, and therefore, recite in whichever will be easy for you."<sup>3</sup>

In fact, Muslim scholars differ in determining the meaning of this Tradition, and there are 35 opinions about it.<sup>4</sup> However, Ibn Qutaybah's opinion is regarded as better than all the others, although he was not the first to declare this opinion; rather, Abū 'Ubayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām seems to be the first scholar to say that the seven *aḥruf* are really some of the dialects of the Arabs.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, Ibn Qutaybah is the scholar who defends this opinion and gives some important details, as we shall see later.

Many scholars quote this opinion of Ibn Qutaybah, particularly the statement which is regarded as a crucial point, i.e. that they are distributed through the Qur'ān,<sup>6</sup> rather than that every word has to be in seven dialects, which would create many difficulties.

In order to discuss Ibn Qutaybah's opinion about this Tradition in comparison with other scholars, we should mention what he adds after giving the literal meaning of the word *ḥarf*, which can be translated as "particle", "word", "sentence", or even "a whole speech", supporting every one with evidences from the Qur'ān,<sup>7</sup> after which he says:

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<sup>3</sup> Op. cit, pp. 34-5. Ibn Qutaybah has summarized this Tradition; however, further details may be found in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 6/482-3; and al-Ṭabarī, 1/24-5.

<sup>4</sup> See *Funūn al-Afḥan*, p. 77; *al-Itqān*, 1/138-41; al-'Akk, Khālid 'Abd Allāh, *Uṣūl al-Tafsīr wa Qawā'iduh*, (Dār al-Nafā'is, Beirut, 2nd ed, 1989), p. 422; and *Mabāḥith fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* by Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ, p. 103.

<sup>5</sup> See *Lisān al-'Arab*, 9/41; Ibn al-Athīr al-Jazarī, al-Mubārak b. Muḥammad, *al-Nihāyah fī Gharīb al-Ḥadīth wa-al-Athar*, ed. by Ṭ.A. al-Zāwī & M.M. al-Ṭanājī, (Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah, Cairo, 1st ed, 1963), 1/369; *al-Itqān*, 1/136; and al-Rāfi'i, Muṣṭafā Ṣādiq, *Tārīkh Ādāb al-'Arab*, ed by M.S. al-'Aryān, (Maṭba'at al-Istiḳāmah, Cairo, 2nd ed, 1940), 1/52-6.

<sup>6</sup> See *Muqaddimat Kitāb al-Mabānī*, pp. 215-7.

<sup>7</sup> Some scholars approximately quote this meaning presented by Ibn Qutaybah, such as al-Ṭabarī, 1/22; Ḥammūdāh, 'Abd al-Wahhāb, *Kitāb al-Qirā'āt wa-al-Lahjāt*, (Maṭba'at al-Sa'ādah, Cairo, 1st ed, 1948), p.11; and 'Abd al-Qādir Ḥusayn in *al-Qur'ān I'jāzuh wa Balāghatuh*, p. 27.

I have investigated all the different aspects of the readings, and eventually I found them to have 7 aspects:

1. A difference in the *i'rāb* of the word (the marks of inflection) or in the marks of *binā'* (indeclinable marks) provided that this does not cause a change in the written form and does not change the meaning, such as the word (*aṭharu*) in verse [11/78] which also can be recited as (*aṭhara*)....
2. A difference in the *i'rāb* and *binā'*, where the meaning changes but the form is the same, as [*rabbānā bā'id bayna asfārinā*] which can also be recited as [*rabbunā bā'ada...*; 34/19]....
3. A difference in the pointing of the word, but not in the *i'rāb* or *binā'*, which leads to a change in the meaning, though the general form is the same, as with the word [*nunshizuhā*; 2/259], which can be recited as *nunshiruhā*....
4. A difference in the word in which its form may be changed, but its meaning is the same, such as the word [*ṣayḥah*; 36/29], which also can be recited as *zaqyah*....
5. A difference in the word where both the meaning and the form are changed, as the word [*ṭalḥ*; 56/29], which can also be recited as *ṭal'*....
6. A difference in advancing or delaying the words, such as [*wa jā'at sakratu al-mawti bi al-ḥaqq*; 50/19], and [*wa jā'at sakratu al-ḥaqqi bi al-mawt*]....
7. A difference in the length of the utterance (i.e. adding or decreasing one particle or more), such as [*wamā 'amilat aydīhim*; 36/35] and [*wamā 'amilathu aydīhim*]....<sup>8</sup>

In fact, this commentary by Ibn Qutaybah on this Tradition was chosen by many scholars when they analysed the opinions regarding this Tradition. Nevertheless, some of them thought that Ibn Qutaybah was confused in his opinion, although it is quite clear as we mentioned above that these 7 points describe the aspects of variance between the readings of the Qur'ān. However, the confusion in the minds of such scholars arises from the fact that Ibn Qutaybah discusses the seven *aḥruf* and the seven types of difference in the same passage. However it should be clear that these are two separate issues and that the seven aspects of difference are not the same thing as the seven *aḥruf*, as some seem to have thought.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> *Al-Mushkil*, pp. 36-8.

<sup>9</sup> Among the scholars who were confused about Ibn Qutaybah's opinion are Ibn 'Aṭīyyah, 'Abd al-Ḥaqq b. Abū Bakr, in his *Muqaddimah fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, ed. by A. Jeffrey, (Maktabat al-Khānī, Cairo, 1972), pp. 266-7; the author of *Muqaddimat Kitāb al-Mabānī*, p. 215; Ibn al-Jawzī in his

It seems that Ibn Qutaybah is the first scholar who tried to determine the aspects of variance between the readings of the Qur'ān, although there are other opinions which have been given by al-Rāzī; al-Sijistānī and Ibn al-Jazarī which resemble Ibn Qutaybah's views,<sup>10</sup> especially Ibn al-Jazarī, who completely depends on Ibn Qutaybah. It is curious that he says:

I continued to be in doubt about this Tradition and thought about it for more than 30 years until God guided me to what may be regarded as truth. I have followed all the Qur'ānic readings, whether they are sound or not, and I have discovered that the variance between the readings refers to 7 aspects of difference, which are....<sup>11</sup>

Then he mentions them, the only two differences between him and Ibn Qutaybah being in the arrangement of these 7 aspects and the examples mentioned under them. It may be true that Ibn al-Jazarī is more precise in these examples, but the fact is that after many centuries, and after thirty years of thinking, Ibn al-Jazarī finds himself repeating Ibn Qutaybah's opinion concerning these 7 aspects, as he himself mentions: "...then I found a passage by Ibn Qutaybah in which he tried what I tried to do in another way, he said: ..."; at the end he comments that what Ibn Qutaybah says is good, but he omitted to illustrate it by using other examples, because some of his examples do not represent the variance in readings."<sup>12</sup>

Likewise al-Rāzī has mentioned 7 aspects,<sup>13</sup> but there are some differences between him and Ibn Qutaybah and Ibn al-Jazarī who rejects these aspects because of some errors among them; the author of *Muqaddimat Kitāb al-Mabānī* also mentions the opinion of Ibn Qutaybah, al-Rāzī and Abū Bakr al-Sijistānī, who directs his efforts to

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*Funūn al-Afnān*, pp. 82-4; al-Zarkashī in *al-Burhān*, 1/214; al-Suyūṭī in *al-Itqān*, 1/132; Rushdī 'Ulayyān, *al-Qur'ān al-Karīm wa-al-Aḥruf al-Sab'ah*, (an article in the periodical: *al-Mawrid*, Dār al-Jāhiz, Baghdad, 1981), Vol. 9, Part 4, p. 23; 'Abd al-Wahhāb Ḥammūdah, pp. 13-8; and Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ in his *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, pp. 109-16.

<sup>10</sup> See *al-Nashr*, 1/26-7.

<sup>11</sup> *Al-Nashr*, 1/26.

<sup>12</sup> See *al-Nashr*, 1/27-8.

<sup>13</sup> See *al-Nashr*, 1/27; and *Funūn al-Afnān*, pp. 80-4.

being more specific in determining these aspects.<sup>14</sup> However the main thing here is that al-Rāzī, Ibn al-Jazarī and al-Sijistānī imitate Ibn Qutaybah in this matter.<sup>15</sup>

As mentioned above, there are many opinions concerning the meaning of this Tradition; Ibn Qutaybah mentions some of them, but another celebrated opinion reported to have been adopted by al-Ṭabarī, al-Qurṭubī and other scholars, is the one which says that the 7 *aḥruf* are 7 different words with the same meaning, such as (*aqbil, ta'āla, halumma...*). The scholars who adopt this meaning support their opinion with the Tradition which says that once the Prophet was staying near the *adāt* (pond) of Banī Ghifār,<sup>16</sup> when the Angel Gabriel came and asked him to recite the Holy Qur'ān in one *ḥarf*; on the request of the Prophet, however, permission was given to recite the Qur'ān in two, three, and finally seven, it is as you say: *ta'āl, halumma, aqbil...*<sup>17</sup> We can refute this opinion by saying that these words are just meant to clear up the fact that there are no great differences between the readings, and that they are virtually synonyms.<sup>18</sup>

Another opinion mentioned by scholars is that the number (7) is not intended to be a specific one; the supporters of this opinion say that this number is according to the style of the Arabs who use this number to mean a large number, however most scholars refute this opinion because the Traditions explicitly maintain that this number is intended.<sup>19</sup> There are other opinions, but these are the most important ones.

<sup>14</sup> See *Muqaddimat Kitāb al-Mabānī*, pp. 215-8. On the other hand, we should remind ourselves that Ibn Qutaybah was known also as al-Qutabī (also al-Qutaybī; see chapter one); we mention this because the editor of *Muqaddimatān* (Arthur Jeffrey) incorrectly reads this name as "al-Qaynī", while the more recent editor (A.I. al-Ṣāwī) says: "it may be al-'Utabī", see p. 215.

<sup>15</sup> In fact there is another modern scholar who also directs his efforts to determine these aspects. He is Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ in *Mabāḥiṭh fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, pp. 109-16 where he accuses Ibn Qutaybah and al-Rāzī that they did not cover all aspects of differences. On the other hand, Muṣṭafā Ṣādiq al-Rāfi'i discusses the differences in the Arabic languages which mean three things, first: the different dialects which is the majority; secondly: the synonyms; thirdly: what some tribes differ the majority in pronouncing some words, this is the minority, see *Tārīkh Ādāb al-'Arab*, 1/130.

<sup>16</sup> A place near Medina, see *Faṭḥ al-Bārī*, 9/28.

<sup>17</sup> See al-Ṭabarī, 1/22-5.

<sup>18</sup> See Ibn Taymiyyah, *Daqā'iq*, 1/6; where he implicitly maintains this view.

<sup>19</sup> See *al-Nashr*, 1/22-6 where Ibn al-Jazarī strongly refutes this opinion; *al-Itqān*, 1/131-2; Zarzūr, p. 113; Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ, p. 104; Rushdī 'Ulayyān, pp. 23-4, where he maintains that it is the opinion of al-Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ; and 'Abd Allāh, A.A, *The Readings of the Qur'ān*, (Ph.D thesis at Edinburgh University, 1984), pp. 8-10.

We, however, can say that the most widespread opinion among the scholars is the first one mentioned by Abū 'Ubayd and Ibn Qutaybah.<sup>20</sup> It is important to mention that some scholars during their discussions of this matter go further and attempt to discover what those dialects were, and to which tribes they belonged. This is a matter in which Ibn Qutaybah does not become involved, but many opinions are presented, the best one being that they are 7 classical dialects, in which according to them the Qur'ān has been revealed.<sup>21</sup>

### 5.1.2. The reason for the seven dialects:

After mentioning the seven aspects of variety in the Qur'ānic readings, Ibn Qutaybah points out the wisdom in such differences:

All of these are God's speech, revealed to the Prophet by the Trusty Spirit, who used to come to the Prophet every year in Ramaḍān to review what had been revealed so far (from the Qur'ān), then God would renew to His Prophet what He wished, abrogate what He wished, and facilitate to His servants what He wished, and among His facilitations is that He ordered His Prophet to allow every folk (of the 7) to recite according to their dialect and traditions.

Thus, the person from Hudhayl would recite: [*'attā hīn*] meaning: [*hattā hīn*; 23/54] because he pronounced and used it in this way. And the person from Asad would recite: *ti'lamūna* and *ti'lam*, and [*tiswaddu wujūhun...*; 3/106] and [*alam i'had ilaykum...*; 36/60], (while he meant: *ta'lamūna*, *ta'lam*, *taswaddu* and *a'had*). And the person from Tamīm would pronounce the *hamzah* (one of the Arabic letters), while the person from Quraysh would not, (Thus, for instance, instead of reciting *yu'minūn*, they just say: *yūminūn*, without the *hamzah*)....

Thus, if every one of those had been ordered to leave his dialect and what he often used to read when he was a child, adult and middle-aged, then this would have been difficult and a great test to him, after which he would only recite well after long training of his tongue.... Thus God, by His mercy and kindness, intended to give them a concession to use other dialects..., as He made it easy for them in their religion when

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<sup>20</sup> For example see Ibn Taymiyyah, *Daqā'iq al-Tafsīr*, 1/10-7; *al-Nashr*, 1/24; and *Funūn al-Afnān*, p. 84-5 where Ibn al-Jawzi mentions 14 opinions and eventually chooses this one. See also *al-Nihāyah fī Gharīb al-Ḥadīth*, 1/369; and *Lisān al-'Arab*, 9/41.

<sup>21</sup> See *al-Nashr*, 1/24; *Muqaddimat al-Mabānī*, p. 211; and *al-Itqān*, 1/138-41.



He gave them permission through His Messenger to follow the different views of the Companions in different aspects of their jurisprudence.<sup>22</sup>

In fact, this kind of detailed discussion of the wisdom the use of these different dialects seems to be the first attempt among all the scholars, most of whom mention these details in this field of study and depend on them. The scholar who makes most use of them is Ibn al-Jazarī, who mentions these details in full.<sup>23</sup>

In addition, other scholars use this discussion as a point of departure and elaborate it for many other purposes, rhetorical, juristic and others. Ibn al-Jazarī details these purposes; for instance, he mentions the rhetorical ones and comments that every different reading represents a different verse or verses, but nevertheless this is only one verse recited according to two or more ways of recitation. Thus there are two purposes intended in a single verse. This is a concise method of expression which makes repetition unnecessary, and the meanings are thereby increased.<sup>24</sup>

It should of course be pointed out that all these points mentioned by Ibn Qutaybah and other scholars are derived from and depend upon the Traditions which we have mentioned previously.

We may also seize the opportunity to say that the passage quoted above confirms that when Ibn Qutaybah mentions the seven aspects, he does not mean that this is his explanation of the 7 *aḥruf*, because his discussion is more concerned with dialects than with aspects of variety.

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<sup>22</sup> *Al-Mushkil*, pp. 39-40.

<sup>23</sup> See *al-Nashr*, 1/23-4. See also *Muqaddimat Kitāb al-Mabānī*, p. 221 where the author quotes Ibn Qutaybah's words without mentioning Ibn Qutaybah; *al-Qirā'āt wa-al-Lahjāt*, p. 7 where Ḥammūdah also quotes Ibn Qutaybah's words; and Zarzūr, p. 112.

<sup>24</sup> See *al-Nashr*, 1/52-4; *Muqaddimat Kitāb al-Mabānī*, pp. 230-4; *al-Burhān*, 1/326-7; and *al-Itqān*, 1/226-8. In these books there are many examples which illustrate how the different readings increase the meanings which can be employed by jurists and philologists in their studies.

### 5.1.3. The areas of difference between the Qur'ānic readings:

After mentioning the wisdom of the existence of the different dialects in which the Qur'ān may be recited, Ibn Qutaybah puts a question and then gives his answer:

If anyone says: if this is permissible (to recite) in different expressions while the meaning is the same, is it also permitted if the meanings differ?

We answer him that difference (*ikhtilāf*) is of two types: *ikhtilāf taghāyur* (difference of diversity or multiplicity), and *ikhtilāf taḍādd* (opposite difference).

Thus, *ikhtilāf al-taḍādd* is not permitted nor found in the Qur'ān, except in the case of *al-nāsikh wa-al-mansūkh* (the abrogating and abrogated verses).... And *ikhtilāf al-taghāyur* is permitted, such as the verse [*wa iddakara ba'da ummah* (and now at length remembered); 12/45] which means: after a long time, but in another reading the verse is [...*ba'da amah*], to mean: after forgetting..., both meanings are correct despite the difference between them, because he remembered Joseph after a long time, and after forgetting him, thus God revealed the two meanings for two different purposes. And like [*idh talaqqawnahu bi alsinatikum*, (when ye welcomed it with your tongues); 24/15], to mean that you welcome and utter it (the slander). And in another reading [...*taliqūnahu*], which is derived from the verb *walaqa* meaning to lie, both meanings are correct in spite of the difference between them, because they welcomed that falsehood and uttered it while it was a lie.... Thus God revealed the two meanings for two purposes..., and everything of advancing or delaying, and adding or decreasing in the Qur'ān is in the same way.<sup>25</sup>

There are many other examples concerning the words [*rabbānā bā'id = rabbunā bā'ada*; 34/19], [*'alimta = 'alimtu*; 17/102], [*nunshiruhā = nunshizuhā*; 2/259], [*muttaka'an = mutkan*; 12/31] and [*fuzzi'a = furrigha*; 34/23].

Actually, this subject led other scholars to attempt to arrange the different readings including those mentioned above in order of priority. We can, however, say that Ibn Qutaybah by introducing this significant concept of variance seems to have taken the precedence over those later scholars who seek in their turn to establish further kinds of variances, which allowed scholars and followers of the different schools of jurisprudence to respect other opinions if they could be considered as a kind of difference of diversity.

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<sup>25</sup> *Al-Mushkil*, pp. 40-2.

Let us now examine how other scholars depend on Ibn Qutaybah in their studies of this type. Briefly we can say that Ibn al-Jazarī seems to be the scholar who has benefited most from Ibn Qutaybah's work, and we have already mentioned how he benefited from Ibn Qutaybah in demonstrating the wisdom behind such variances. We can add here that he also employs Ibn Qutaybah's methods to identify three specific areas of differences among the Qur'anic readings; these are:

1. The difference in the expression only.
2. The difference in both expression and meaning, though it is possible to unite them all in one general meaning.
3. The difference in both, though they do not contradict one another.

Then he mentions the word [*ṣirāṭ*; 1/5] as an example for the first kind, since this word can also be recited as [*sirāṭ*]; and for the second case, the word [*māliki*; 1/3] which can also be recited as [*maliki*], because the two words indicate God, and He is the Owner of the day of judgment and the King of it; as for the third case, the verse [*wa ḡannū annahum qad kudhhibū*; 12/110] which can also be recited as [...*kudhibū*], where the first meaning maintains that the word *ḡannū* does not imply a sort of doubt, rather it is a real thing that the Messengers were treated as liars, while on the other hand, the second reading maintains that the folk (of the Messengers) thought that their Messengers had lied to them. Thus, the word "*ḡann*" in the first case implies confirmation, and all the pronouns refer to the Messengers, while in the second case it means doubt, and all pronouns refer to the folks of the Messengers.<sup>26</sup>

We note here the obvious fact that these three points are the same ones mentioned by Ibn Qutaybah under the category of *ikhtilāf al-taghāyur*; and that all that Ibn al-Jazarī has done is to classify them in three categories.

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<sup>26</sup> See *al-Nashr*, 1/49-50, there are many other examples there.

Another scholar who benefits from Ibn Qutaybah is Ibn Taymiyyah, who also paraphrases Ibn Qutaybah, and presents some examples which have been detailed by Ibn Qutaybah and adopted by Ibn al-Jazarī.<sup>27</sup>

Yet another is the author of *Muqaddimat Kitāb al-Mabānī*, who also puts the same question as Ibn Qutaybah, and in his answer to it mentions what Ibn Qutaybah has said about the kinds of differences, followed by the advantages which can be produced by each of these differences, some of the examples being the same as Ibn Qutaybah's ones.<sup>28</sup>

One remarkable aspect of the difference between Ibn Qutaybah and the others, is that he was very concise, while the others detail everything connected to this matter, the reason for this being that Ibn Qutaybah discusses this matter to show the reader the fundamental issues arising from the different readings, while the others' original intention is to study this matter in detail. Nevertheless, Ibn Qutaybah provides the most important information required, which subsequently became the basis for most analysts of Qur'ānic readings.

#### 5.1.4. Do the 7 dialects exist in the Qur'ān?

This is another matter of dispute between the scholars, although many writers mention just two opinions, the first being that the 'Uthmānic copies contain all the seven *aḥruf*. The scholars who hold this opinion maintain that Muslims do not have the permission to deny or abandon any of these *aḥruf* in which according to them the Qur'ān has been revealed. They add that the Companions consented to the copying of the 'Uthmānic *maṣāḥif* from the *ṣuḥuf* which were written in the time of Abū Bakr,

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<sup>27</sup> See *Daqā'iq*, 1/6-7.

<sup>28</sup> See pp. 230-4. In fact there are some other modern scholars who approximately mention these types of differences, such as 'Abd al-Qādir Ḥusayn in *al-Qur'ān I'jāzuh wa Balāghatuh*, pp. 28-30; and John Wansbrough in *Qur'ānic Studies*, p. 165.

and to their being sent to different regions of the Islamic world. They are also said to have agreed to abandon anything which differed from this, and they also add that no one could prohibit anyone from reciting according to any of these 7 *aḥruf* nor abandon anything of the Qur'ān.

The second group maintain that the 'Uthmānic *maṣāḥif* do not contain the whole of the 7 *aḥruf* but only contain that part of them which is compatible with the written form, which represents the last review of the text by Gabriel with the Prophet.<sup>29</sup>

Generally speaking, the second view is more acceptable to most scholars, some of whom lay down certain conditions, which led eventually to the formation of a new opinion, which says that only one *ḥarf* exists in the Qur'ān.

Before dealing with these opinions, we need to know what Ibn Qutaybah's opinion on this matter is. In fact, there is no clear indication whether he supports any of the previous opinions or not, although we would suggest that he implicitly supports the second one, or rather that he seems to be the first scholar to draw attention to this opinion, which has been commented on by many other scholars. He says:

If anyone says: are we permitted to recite according to all these dialects? We say: whatever is compatible with our *muṣḥaf*, and does not depart from its written form, we are permitted to recite, but not anything else which differs from it, because the ancients from the Companions and their Successors recited according to their dialects and followed their habit and traditions.... Thus, it was permitted for them and for a number of reciters who came after them, those who were entrusted with the revelation and knew the interpretation..., as for us, those who have to follow others, God has united us upon the best of what the ancients have chosen to us, the *muṣḥaf* which is the last presentation (by the Prophet upon Gabriel), which we are not permitted to exceed....

Thus, if it is permitted to us to recite it in other ways than what has established in our *muṣḥaf*, then it is permitted for us to write it in variant ways, adding, decreasing, advancing and delaying, and then everything detested by our scholars will occur.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> See the two opinions in *al-Nashr*, 1/31; *Daqā'iq*, 1/12; and *Muqaddima* of Ibn 'Aṭīyah, p. 271.

<sup>30</sup> *Al-Mushkil*, p. 42.

We can say that Ibn Qutaybah intends here to draw attention to the main points concerning this subject, and we can single out four points from his statement:

1. Not all the 7 dialects exist in the text of the Qur'ān.
2. The permission to recite according to all 7 dialects was valid until the consensus was reached between the Companions to determine the written text.
3. Muslims are not allowed to go beyond the 'Uthmānic *maṣāḥif*.
4. If anything from the other dialects is compatible with this *muṣḥaf*, then we are allowed to recite it.

In fact these points were adopted by the next generations, those scholars who clearly maintain the four points above. Thus, we can say that Ibn Qutaybah without any doubt was the first to tackle this most complicated issue, before al-Ṭabarī and Ibn al-Jazarī and other scholars, and that this initiative can be regarded as one of Ibn Qutaybah's main contributions to Qur'ānic studies, because it provides the starting point for most other scholars who deal with this matter.

The scholars after Ibn Qutaybah base themselves on his statement, though they of course add more details, as do al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn 'Aṭīyyah, Ibn al-Jazarī and others. The only criticism which we can direct against Ibn Qutaybah is that he did not restrict the permitted recitation to being also a *mutawātir* (successive) recitation (i.e. it should have the authority of the Prophet) and specify that it should not contradict Arabic grammar. However, we can say that he implicitly intends the third one, as we shall see later.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> For more details about these conditions, see *al-Nashr*, 1/9-13. Indeed, the authenticity of the reading is sufficient in order to accept it, but the other two conditions are to be sure about the accuracy of the reading. For more details see *al-Nashr*, 1/13. Also to show that Ibn Qutaybah intends the third condition see footnote 64 of this chapter.

Let us now discuss these four points above in comparison with other scholars' opinions, in order to clarify all views about this complicated matter.

Actually, his opinion represents the most widespread one among the scholars with minor differences which can be easily observed.

As noted above, some scholars adopt this opinion, while others go further than this to say that only one dialect exists in the Qur'ān; this is the opinion of al-Ṭabarī, who adds that to recite according to the 7 *aḥruf* was just a permission, which accordingly means that it was not a command or a duty for Muslims to recite according to all of them.<sup>32</sup>

Ibn Taymiyyah also quotes al-Ṭabarī's words, and it seems that he agrees with his opinion.<sup>33</sup> Likewise Ibn al-Jazarī quotes al-Ṭabarī's view that to recite according to all of the 7 *aḥruf* was not a duty, although not necessarily agreeing with it.<sup>34</sup> al-Suyūṭī does the same.<sup>35</sup>

When we examine Ibn Qutaybah's statement, we cannot see any indication that he means that only one dialect remains; rather he takes a different view which was later adopted by Ibn 'Aṭīyyah and Ibn al-Jazarī, that the Companions during 'Uthman's rule agreed to write the *muṣḥaf* according to the last review, in a way which is compatible with many of the 7 dialects but not all of them.<sup>36</sup>

This is really the second opinion mentioned above, by adopting which we can avoid all the accusations which might be levelled against the other opinions.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> See al-Ṭabarī, 1/28; and *Muqaddimat Kitāb al-Mabānī*, p. 45. It seems that al-Zarkashī also adopts this opinion, see *al-Burhān*, 1/215.

<sup>33</sup> See *Daqā'iq*, 1/12-3; he also adds that the permission was just at the beginning of Islam, when it was too difficult to recite according to one dialect, but after their tongues were practical in reciting in one dialect, then they decided to recite in one dialect.

<sup>34</sup> See *al-Nashr*, 1/31-2.

<sup>35</sup> See *al-Itqān*, 1/141-2.

<sup>36</sup> See Ibn 'Aṭīyyah, p. 272; and *al-Nashr*, 1/31.

<sup>37</sup> We should draw attention here to the fact that al-Zarkashī in *al-Burhān*, 1/218 erroneously attributes a completely contrary opinion to Ibn Qutaybah when he says: Ibn Qutaybah rejects this view, and says: "The Qur'ān was revealed only in the language of Quraysh." As we have seen, this contradicts

Two objections can be made against the third opinion which was that of al-Ṭabarī and those who support him. The first is: if the other six dialects are no longer extant, how can we explain the different readings of the words [*fatabayyanū* = *fatathabbatū*; 49/6], [*ibād* = *inda*; 43/19] and others, since neither of these pairs can be derived from a single *ḥarf*? The second is: which is the *ḥarf* which remains? There are different opinions here, but most of those who support this opinion maintain that it is the *ḥarf* of Quraysh, although, as we shall see below, other dialects are also found.<sup>38</sup>

As for the first opinion which says that all the *aḥruf* remain in the Qur'ān, we can simply ask: what then was the work of 'Uthmān when Ḥudhayfah came to him warning of the disputes between Muslims in reciting the Qur'ān, which was followed by the selection of a committee consisting of Zayd b. Thābit and three other Companions to make copies of the *muṣḥaf* and send them to the main districts? Most of those who wrote about the 7 *aḥruf* mention this story and maintain that there was an agreement between the Companions about solving the problems arising from the dispute in reciting the Qur'ān, and therefore, if 'Uthmān's task was just to copy the *muṣḥaf* which was written during Abū Bakr's reign, there would have been no need to gather the Companions and consult them, and this is a clear indication that 'Uthmān did something different from what they claim.<sup>39</sup>

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everything Ibn Qutaybah has said, and there is no such statement in any of his works. Unfortunately this mistake is repeated by other scholars, such as al-Suyūṭī in *al-Itqān*, 1/135 where he attributes this speech to Abū Ḥātim al-Sijistānī, and it seems that he agrees with him; 'Abd al-Qādir Ḥusayn in *al-Qur'ān I'jāzūh wa Balāghatuh*, p. 32, where he makes more confusion when he quotes al-Zarkashī's words and mentions them among Ibn Qutaybah's statement quoted under footnote 30 above; and 'Abd al-Wahhāb Ḥammūdāh, p. 25.

<sup>38</sup> In fact, many scholars explain that when we say that the Qur'ān was revealed in the dialect of Quraysh we mean that it is firstly revealed in this dialect (at Mecca), see *Kitāb al-Qirā'āt wa-al-Lahjāt*, p. 9.

<sup>39</sup> For further details about the compilation of the Qur'ān by 'Uthmān see al-Ṭabarī, 1/26-8; al-Qurṭubī, 1/51-2; *al-Burhān*, 1/234-9; *al-Nashr*, 1/7-8; *Muqaddimat Kitāb al-Mabānī*, pp. 44-5; *al-Muqni' fī Rasm Maṣāḥif al-Amṣār*, by Abū 'Amr: 'Uthmān b. Sa'id al-Dānī, ed by M.Ṣ. Qamḥāwī, (Maktabat al-Kulliyāt al-Azhariyyah, Cairo, s.d), pp. 13-6; Ibn al-'Arabī, Abū Bakr, *al-'Awāṣim min al-Qawāṣim*, ed by M. al-Khaṭīb, (Dār al-Kutub al-Salafiyyah, Cairo, 1st ed, 1985), pp. 80-2; *E.I.*<sup>2</sup>, 5/404-5; Watt and Bell, *Introduction to the Qur'ān*, (Edinburgh University Press, 1991), pp. 42-3; John Burton, *The Collection of the Qur'ān*, (Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 117-60; and Drāz, Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh, *Madkhal ilā al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, translated from French into Arabic by M.'A. 'Alī, (Dār al-Qalam, Kuwait, 2nd ed, 1974), pp. 33-51.



This complicated question caused a degree of confusion among some scholars; for example, Ibn Taymiyyah says that Abū Bakr's writing of the Qur'ān was according to the last review by Gabriel with the Prophet, and 'Uthmān's task was simply to copy that *muṣḥaf* and send copies to different districts,<sup>40</sup> and that therefore, 'Uthmān did not do anything other than this. Nevertheless, in a previous passage he declares that the *muṣḥaf* of 'Uthmān is one of the 7 dialects,<sup>41</sup> and says that when the Companions were certain that the Muslims would be divided if they did not unite on one dialect, they all agreed to unite on one dialect, and this consensus was permitted, because the Companions could not agree on an error.<sup>42</sup> How, then, can we reconcile these two opinions?

Similarly al-Qurṭubī mentions the account of what happened between 'Uthmān and the Companions during his consultation with them, which eventually led to the agreement to unite all Muslims on one recitation, but nevertheless, he later says that the Companions agreed to rewrite the *muṣḥaf* according to those celebrated readings, considered to be sound and confirmed by the authority of the Prophet.<sup>43</sup> This means in effect that the Qur'ān includes all the 7 dialects, because all of them have the authority of the Prophet. Thus this second statement contradicts the first one.

In fact Ibn Qutaybah's view which caused other scholars to devote their efforts to clearing up this matter is precise and sufficient; it indicates that there was a final review, and an agreement between the Companions to select what was the best on behalf of all Muslims, and that the 7 dialects do not exist in their entirety in the *muṣḥaf*, though we can recite according to whatever of the 7 dialects can be applied to the written form of that copy. This statement does not indicate that 'Uthmān gathered the Qur'ān according

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<sup>40</sup> See *Daqā'iq*, 1/13.

<sup>41</sup> *Op. cit.*, 1/12.

<sup>42</sup> See 1/13. This last statement about the consensus is according to the Tradition: "*lā tajtami'u Ummatī 'alā ḍalālah* (my community will not agree on an error)", related by Ibn Mājah, Muḥammad b. Yazīd, *al-Sunan*, ed. by M.F. 'Abd al-Bāqī, ('Īsā al-Ḥalabī, Cairo, s.d), 2/1303; see also *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, 13/23.

<sup>43</sup> See al-Qurṭubī, 1/52.

to one particular dialect; but he may have gathered together the 7 dialects and chosen between them. Ibn 'Aṭīyah is the only scholar who clearly states that 'Uthmān selected the most rhetorical readings from among all the 7 dialects.<sup>44</sup>

In addition to Ibn Qutaybah and Ibn 'Aṭīyah, we can attribute this opinion also to Ibn al-Jazarī who adds that when the Companions wrote the *muṣḥaf* they left it without vocalisation or diacritics<sup>45</sup> in order that the copies might accept what was not of the last review but which was also regarded as sound.<sup>46</sup> He also suggests that when the committee wrote the *ṣuḥuf*, there was a slight difference between these copies (in adding a few particles to some words) in order to include other readings which the Prophet read;<sup>47</sup> however, these differences are not connected to the dialects themselves, but rather they were revealed in several ways. This supports what Ibn Qutaybah says at the beginning of his statement, that we are permitted to recite every dialect which may be applied to our *muṣḥaf*, provided it does not go beyond its scope. We may point out that most of the differences between the *qurrā'* (reciters) are according to this permission, and we cannot find anything which goes beyond this.

Subsequently, we can say that this second opinion may be regarded as the most acceptable, at least in so far as it creates the fewest problems or contradictions, and represents a compromise which covers all differences in the readings of the Qur'ān.<sup>48</sup>

In addition to the objections which may be raised against the first and third opinions, which have been discussed above, we may add the following:

1. What causes us to say that the Qur'ān contains more than one dialect is that there are many words which differ from the dialect of Quraysh; Ibn 'Aṭīyah mentions some

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<sup>44</sup> See *Muqaddimah*, p. 272.

<sup>45</sup> In this particular issue see *al-Muḥkam fī Naḥḥ al-Maṣāḥif*, by Abū 'Amr 'Uthmān b. Sa'id al-Dānī, ed by 'I. Ḥasan, (Dār al-Fikr, Damascus, 2nd ed, 1986), p. 2; and Zarzūr, p. 94.

<sup>46</sup> See *al-Nashr*, 1/7, 33; and *Daqā'iq*, 1/18.

<sup>47</sup> See *al-Nashr*, 1/11, he again strongly confirms this matter in 1/32. See also *Muqaddimat Kitāb al-Mabānī*, pp. 117-21; *al-Muḥni' fī Rasm Maṣāḥif al-Amsār*, pp. 96-103; *E.I.*<sup>2</sup>, 5/408.

<sup>48</sup> This is also the opinion of Makkī b. Abī Ṭālib, see *al-Nashr*, 1/13-4; and A.A. 'Abd Allāh eventually suggests that this opinion is the correct one, see pp. 104-5.

of them when he reports of Ibn ‘Abbās and ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb that they did not understand the meaning of [*fāṭir*; 42/11], [*takhawwuf*; 16/47] and [*iftah*; 7/89] until they heard others using them in their own dialects; these words remain in the Qur’ān.<sup>49</sup>

2. All references maintain that when ‘Uthmān chose the committee he ordered them to write the Qur’ān, and if they differed in anything to write it down in the dialect of Quraysh.<sup>50</sup> This is clear indication that there was more than one dialect, and also that not all of them still exist in full.

3. A number of scholars have devoted entire sections of their books to readings which represent various dialects.<sup>51</sup>

#### 5.1.5. Are the seven readings the same as the seven dialects?

This matter was not fully discussed by Ibn Qutaybah, but needs to be considered briefly because of the relationship between the two expressions. This question arises particularly from the coincidence that both involve the number seven. It is accepted by a consensus that they are different issues,<sup>52</sup> but there has been constant interaction between the two.

We need here only to say that the 7 dialects were part of the revelation, while the 7 readings were selected and gathered for the first time by Abū Bakr b. Mujāhid (d. 324/935).<sup>53</sup> In fact this number of readings is the invention of Ibn Mujāhid. Ibn al-Jazarī mentions that before Ibn Mujāhid there was Abū ‘Ubayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām (d.

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<sup>49</sup> See *Muqaddimah*, p. 272. In fact Ibn Qutaybah himself mentions the occasion of the last word [*iftah*], see *al-Mushkil*, p. 493.

<sup>50</sup> See al-Ṭabarī, 1/26; al-Qurṭubī, 1/51-2; *al-Burhān*, 1/240; *al-Nashr*, 1/7; Ibn ‘Aṭīyyah, p. 272; *al-Muqni’*, p. 16; and *al-Awāṣim min al-Qawāṣim*, p. 83.

<sup>51</sup> See *al-Itqān*, 1/89-104; and Makram, *Qaḍāyā Qur’āniyyah*, pp. 39-44. In addition to that, it should be remembered that we have discussed some of these dialects in chapter four, such as the dialect of Balḥārith, see section 4.2.

<sup>52</sup> For instance, see *al-Burhān*, 1/214; al-Qurṭubī, 1/52; *al-Itqān*, 1/141, 223-4; and *Uṣūl al-Tafsīr wa Qawā’iduh*, p. 432.

<sup>53</sup> See *al-Nashr*, 1/34; and *E.I.*<sup>2</sup>, 5/408.

224/838) who was the first scholar to collect the readings in one book, and mentions 25 reciters. Many other scholars did the same as Abū 'Ubayd, including Aḥmad b. Jubayr (d. 258/871), Ismā'il b. Iṣḥāq (d. 282/895), al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/922), Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Dājūnī (d. 324/935), and then Ibn Mujāhid. Each of these mentioned has mentioned many readings.<sup>54</sup>

The only thing which we can add here is that not only are the 7 readings sound and successive, but that the scholars have laid down the conditions according to which we can judge if the reading is accepted or not, as we have mentioned above. However, Ibn Qutaybah does not detail all of these conditions, demanding only that the reading should be compatible with the form of the *muṣḥaf* written by 'Uthmān.

In fact Ibn al-'Arabī and Ibn al-Jazarī have rejected the idea that only the 7 readings are acceptable. Indeed, Ibn al-Jazarī wrote the *al-Nashr fī al-Qirā'āt al-'Ashr* (the 10 readings), and further declared that these 10 are not the only accepted readings. He is clear when he points out the opinion of most scholars concerning the three conditions mentioned above.<sup>55</sup>

## 5.2. HIS METHOD IN USING THE QUR'ĀNIC READINGS IN HIS EXEGESIS:

In addition to what we have mentioned above, we may note, despite the loss of *Kitāb al-Qirā'āt*; that Ibn Qutaybah was concerned with these readings. This is quite clear from his other Qur'ānic works. A survey of his treatment of the Qur'ānic readings leads us to categorize his method as follows:

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<sup>54</sup> See *al-Nashr*, 1/34.

<sup>55</sup> *Op. cit.*, 1/9-17. Also see *al-Itqān*, 1/223-5 where al-Suyūṭī quotes Ibn al-'Arabī's words and says that this is also the opinion of Makkī, Abū al-'Alā' al-Hamadhānī and others.

1. He uses them to give a further explanation of the word or the verse: This occurs when he mentions several readings, when each reading gives one or more different meanings. We have discussed some examples of this above during our discussion of the kinds of differences in the Qur'ānic readings, but other examples are abundant in his works; here are some of them:

a. In the verse: [Nothing of our revelation (even a single verse) Do We abrogate or cause be forgotten (*nunsihā*), but We bring (in its place) one better or the like thereof; 2/106]; Ibn Qutaybah explains that the word *nunsihā* means "*nunsikahā*", where the pronoun (*ka*) refers to the Prophet; this word is derived from *al-nisyān*, but those who recite it as "*nansa'hā*" intend the meaning "delay it without abrogation for a limited period". Thus, these two meanings are from different readings.<sup>56</sup>

b. During his discussion of the verse: [And when We would destroy a township We send commandment (*amarnā*) to its folk who live at ease...; 17/16]; Ibn Qutaybah maintains that "*amarnā*" is the widespread recitation, but nevertheless, another possible reading is "*āmarnā*" which means "We increase".<sup>57</sup>

2. He uses them to support a view in choosing between exegetical opinions. This method is easily observed in his exegesis, and many examples illustrate it; here are two of them:

a. In the verse: [Again, We gave the Scripture unto Moses, complete for him who would do good (*tamāman 'alā al-ladhī aḥsana*), an explanation of all things, a guidance and a mercy, that they might believe in the meeting with their Lord; 6/154]; the word (*al-ladhī*) here refers to those who do good, Ibn Qutaybah gives another

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<sup>56</sup> See *al-Gharīb*, pp. 60-1. The first reading is the general one, while the second is the reading of Ibn Kathīr and Abū 'Amr b. al-'Alā', see *al-Nashr fī al-Qirā'āt al-'Ashr*, 2/220; Ibn Khālawayh al-Ḥusayn b. Aḥmad, *al-Hujjah fī al-Qirā'āt al-Sab'*, ed. by 'A.S. Makram, (Dār al-Shurūq, Beirut and Cairo, 4th ed, 1981), p. 86; and al-Qaysī, Makkī b. Abī Ṭālib, *al-Tabṣīrah fī al-Qirā'āt*, ed. by M. Ramaḍān, (Ma'had al-Makḥṭūṭāt al-'Arabiyyah, Kuwait, 1st ed, 1985), p. 153.

<sup>57</sup> See *al-Gharīb*, p. 253. As for the readings, the first one is the general, while the second is the reading of Ya'qūb, see *al-Nashr*, 2/306; and *al-Hujjah*, p. 214.

explanation whereby it refers to Moses himself; that *al-ladhī* here means "*mā*", and the good deeds are the cause for all these favours. After that Ibn Qutaybah says: "but the first explanation seems better to me, because we find in Ibn Mas'ūd's *muṣḥaf* [*tamāman 'alā al-ladhīna aḥsanū*]",<sup>58</sup> which supports this explanation.

b. During his explanation of the verse: [Say (O Muḥammad): None in the heavens and the earth knoweth the Unseen save Allāh; and they know not when they will be raised (again). Nay, but doth their knowledge reach to the Hereafter (*bal iddāraka 'ilmuhum fī al-Ākhirah*)? Nay, for they are in doubt concerning it. Nay, for they cannot see it; 27/65-6] Ibn Qutaybah maintains that the origin of the word (*iddāraka*) is "*tadāraka*" to mean that they imagine one thing after another about what will happen in the Hereafter, after which Ibn Qutaybah says: "Ibn 'Abbās recites it as: *balā addāraka 'ilmuhum?* (i.e. with the interrogative particle *a*) which gives more elucidation to the meaning that they know not when they will be raised again, but their assumptions reach to the knowledge of the Hereafter."<sup>59</sup>

3. He uses them to support his own opinion concerning the exegesis or anything related to it: Actually this method shows that Ibn Qutaybah uses reason wherever there is a possibility of reasoning, the majority of these matters being related to linguistic matters; there are many examples to illustrate this; here are some of them:

a. In the verse: [And those who believe say: If only a *sūra* were revealed! But when a decisive (*muḥkamah*) *sūra* is revealed and war is mentioned therein, thou seest those in whose hearts is a disease looking at thee with the look of men fainting unto death. Therefor woe unto them; 47/20], Ibn Qutaybah explains that the word "*muḥkamah*" as "*muḥdathah*" which means new, and it is named *muḥkamah* (perspicuous) because

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<sup>58</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, pp. 397-8. As for the readings; the first is the general one, while the second is an isolated reading, which is not reported by any of the celebrated ten reciters, for more details see al-Ṭabarī, 8/66.

<sup>59</sup> *Al-Mushkil*, pp. 354-5, this second recitation is not among the celebrated ten, and is thus an isolated one; see al-Ṭabarī, 20/5 where he rejects it.

when it is revealed it will be perspicuous until something is abrogated from it. After this Ibn Qutaybah supports this meaning with Ibn Mas'ūd's reading (*muḥdathah*).<sup>60</sup>

b. When Ibn Qutaybah discusses the meanings of the word (*sa'y*) he gives 3 approximated meanings for it. One of them is "*mashy* = walking", thus the word (*fas'aw*) in the verse [O ye who believe! When the call is heard for the prayer of the day of congregation, haste (*fas'aw*) unto remembrance of Allāh and leave your trading...; 62/9] means (*famshū*); he supports this meaning with one of the ancient's readings i.e. (*famḍū*), which means (*famshū*).<sup>61</sup>

c. In the course of his study of omission as a kind of allegory, Ibn Qutaybah cites the verse [*Wa nādaw yā Māli liyaqḍi 'alaynā Rabbuk* (and they cry: O master (*Mālik*)! Let thy Lord make an end of us); 43/77] as an example of elision, which is one of the Arabic types of omission, where here the letter (*k*) is elided according to one of the Qur'ānic readings.<sup>62</sup>

d. As an example of advancing and delaying expressions in the Qur'ān, Ibn Qutaybah gives the verse [Thus have their (so-called) partners (of Allāh) made the killing of their children to seem fair unto many of the idolaters...(*wa kadhālika zayyana li kathīrin mina al-mushrikīna qatla awlādihim shurakā'uhum*...); 6/137] which can also be recited as [*wa kadhālika zuyyina li kathīrin mina al-mushrikīna qatlu awlādahum shurakā'ihim*], in the second one there is advancing and delaying. Thus it really [...*qatlu shurakā'ihim awlādahum*].<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, p. 420; this reading by Ibn Mas'ūd is not among the famous ones, for further details see al-Ṭabarī, 25/34.

<sup>61</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, p. 509, where the editor maintains that this is the reading of Ibn Mas'ūd and 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb; this is according to *al-Qirā'āt al-Shādhḍah* of Ibn Khālawayh, p. 156.

<sup>62</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, p. 306; the general reading is (*Mālik*), but others such as Ibn Mas'ūd, 'Alī and al-A'mash recite with the elision (*māli*), see Abū Ḥayyān Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Andalusī, *al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ*, (Dār al-Fikr, Beirut, 2nd ed, s.d), 8/28.

<sup>63</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, pp. 207-8. In respect of the readings, the first one is the general one, while the second is Ibn 'Āmir's reading, see *al-Nashr*, 2/263 where Ibn al-Jazarī defends it and refutes al-Zamakhsharī's objection against this reading; see also *al-Hujjah*, p. 150; and *al-Tabṣīrah*, p. 199. For further details see al-Ṭabarī, 8/32-3; and *al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ*, 4/230.

4. Sometimes Ibn Qutaybah chooses between readings: In fact many exegetes do the same thing, and some of them even choose between the successive readings as does al-Ṭabarī, the most cautious exegete in this matter seeming to be Abū Ḥayyān al-Andalusī; perhaps the reason for this that these readings came to be regarded as successive after Ibn Qutaybah and al-Ṭabarī, because we know that the first scholar to collect the successive readings is Abū Bakr b. Mujāhid at the beginning of the 4th/10th century.

Ibn Qutaybah criticizes some reciters in some places in *al-Mushkil*, where he thinks that some of their readings go beyond Arabic grammar, some of them being attributed to Nāfi' and Ḥamzah who are among the seven reciters.<sup>64</sup> Indeed this is an indication that Ibn Qutaybah also considers Arabic grammar to be one of the conditions for the sound reading. However, other examples where Ibn Qutaybah chooses between different readings are the following:

a. He discusses the word (*wa ka'ayyin*) which means "and how many" which is repeated in many places in the Qur'ān such as [3/144] and [65/8], where he maintains that there are two readings, this one and (*wa kā'inin*); he comments that all are in the Qur'ān, but the widespread and most classical one is with lightening (i.e. the second form).<sup>65</sup>

b. In the verse [Till, when the messengers despaired and thought that they were denied (*kudhibū*), then came unto them Our help, and whom We would was saved...; 12/110] Ibn Qutaybah gives many explanations for the word *kudhibū* which depend on different readings; one of these readings is (*kudhhibū*) which is attributed to Qatādah, who explains the verse as (when the messengers despaired of their folk and firmly believed that they were denied, then Allāh's help came unto them); another explanation according to the same reading is the one by 'Ā'ishah who says that the meaning is that

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<sup>64</sup> For more details see pp. 61-4.

<sup>65</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, p. 519. The first reading is in fact the general one, while the second is that of Ibn Kathīr and Abū Ya'qūb, and thus Ibn Qutaybah was wrong to say that the second is the widespread reading, see *al-Nashr*, 2/242; *al-Hujjah*, p. 114; and *al-Tabṣirah*, p. 174.



when the messengers despaired of those who had denied them and thought that those who had believed in them had denied them, then Allāh's help came...; another explanation attributed to Mujāhid who recites it as (*kadhabū*), is that the messengers despaired of their folk becoming believers, and then the folk thought that the messengers lied in what they said on behalf of their Lord; the final explanation is attributed to Ibn 'Abbās who recites (*kudhibū*) and says that messengers were from mankind, and therefore, they may in their weakness have thought that they were not helped by Allāh..., eventually Ibn Qutaybah states: "These are different opinions, and the wording allows them all. We do not know exactly what God intends, but it seems that the best one with regard to God's Prophets is 'Ā'ishah's opinion."<sup>66</sup> Most exegetes agree with 'Ā'ishah's explanation as being the correct one.<sup>67</sup>

5. Despite Ibn Qutaybah's warnings about isolated readings (where he accuses some later reciters of departing from Arabic grammar),<sup>68</sup> he often mentions this kind of reading (*shādhah*). It seems, perhaps, that the reason for this depends on his tendency to accepting any reading provided that it is compatible with the written form of the word. This subject was discussed in detail in the previous section, where we also criticised Ibn Qutaybah for not imposing any further conditions, especially that of sound ascription to the Prophet. Indeed, this results in Ibn Qutaybah reporting many unsound readings which are found in many of his works. The editor of *al-Mushkil* and *al-Gharīb* has investigated most of these readings, explained them and traced most of them to their origins.

At this point, we should take the opportunity of giving a definition of the isolated reading (*shādhah*). Ibn al-Jazarī quotes what Makkī b. Abī Ṭālib al-Qaysī has said in his *al-Kashf*, when he says:

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<sup>66</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, pp. 410-2. The successive readings are (*kudhibū*) of Abū Ya'qūb, Ḥamzah, al-Kisā'i and 'Āṣim; and (*kudhdhibū*) which is the reading of the other reciters, see *al-Nashr*, 2/296; *al-Hujjah*, p. 199; and *al-Tabṣirah*, p. 230.

<sup>67</sup> This opinion can apply to both readings (*kudhibū*, *kudhdhibū*), see al-Ṭabarī, 13/57-8.

<sup>68</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, pp. 58-62.

If anyone asks: "What is the acceptable manner of reciting (the Qur'ān), and what is the unacceptable and not recited, and finally what is the acceptable but not recited?" The answer will be that all that has been narrated from the Qur'ān is in three categories:

1. What is recited today, where the 3 conditions are found: that it is related by a reliable authority (*thiqah*) from the Prophet, that it complies with Arabic grammar according to the manner in which the Qur'ān has been revealed and that it be in conformity with the written form of the *muṣḥaf*. If these three conditions are found in it, then we are allowed to recite it and to be sure that it is definitely sound because of the consensus to accept it.

2. What is correctly narrated by the individuals and is compatible with Arabic grammar, but at the same time differs from the written form of the *muṣḥaf*. This type is accepted but is not to be recited, because it is not narrated by consensus or many narrators (not a successive relation) and because it differs from the consensus which has been reached about it..., thus we are not sure that it is definitely sound and we cannot recite it....

3. What is related from an unreliable authority, or by a reliable authority but does not comply with Arabic grammar. These cannot be accepted even if they are in conformity with the written form of the *muṣḥaf*....<sup>69</sup>

Ibn Qutaybah mainly considers just the second type to be (*shādhah*),<sup>70</sup> though in fact the third is considered to be much the same, but in a better position, as mentioned above. However, the third type occurs in abundance in his works, and thus he is not as rigorous in demanding the application of only the first category as all later scholars who agree in demanding a successive reading.

Examples of all these are abundant in his Qur'ānic works, but to be brief and clear at the same time, we should refer the reader to some previous examples; for instance, in example (b) in point (1) above, Ibn Qutaybah mentions another recitation for the word (*amarnā*) i.e. "*ammarnā*" to mean that [We appointed those who live at ease to be leaders of the folk...]; this recitation is an isolated one, because the first condition is not achieved in it.<sup>71</sup> Also in the first three examples under point (3) above the readings are isolated, as we have noted.

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<sup>69</sup> *Al-Nashr*, 1/14.

<sup>70</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, p. 58. In fact we have mentioned above that he implicitly considers the condition regarding the Arabic grammar, see footnote 64 above.

<sup>71</sup> See *al-Gharīb*, p. 253.

As for the third type, we can say that when he mentions such readings he usually draws the reader's attention to warn him against reciting them; for example, during his explanation of the verse [...*salaqūkum bi alsinatin hidād* (they scald you with sharp tongues); 33/19] he comments: "There is also another dialect: *ṣalaqūkum*, but it is not recited."<sup>72</sup> This means that there is no permission to recite it.

6. Ibn Qutaybah does not mention all the Qur'ānic readings; by this we mean that he does not follow every verse and word to find if it has another recitation or not. We have to judge Ibn Qutaybah by his extant works, because we do not know if he details everything in his *al-Qirā'āt* or not, however we can easily establish whether or not he relates every one of these readings by comparing his books with other specialist books such as *al-Nashr*, *al-Hujjah* and *al-Tabṣirah*, since we believe that to find just one example of omission is sufficient to establish this point.

It seems, perhaps, that he does not give all details about Qur'ānic readings in his extant works because:

a. He may have discussed them in detail in *al-Qirā'āt*, and we can at the very least be confident that more attention is given to *qirā'āt* in this book, because after his discussion of some examples of isolated readings and the differences between some reciters, he comments: "To mention every recitation here will be too much, and it is not our intention to do so in this book; you may find all of them in our book written on *wujūh al-qirā'āt*."<sup>73</sup> Thus, as we know from his general method of brevity, he often refers the reader to the appropriate place where he can find what he needs, as the above quotation indicates; and therefore he does not discuss all the Qur'ānic readings in *al-Mushkil* or *al-Gharīb* or any other book because of what he has written on *al-Qirā'āt*.

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<sup>72</sup> *Al-Gharīb*, p. 349; this readings is not mentioned in books of the famous readings. Thus it is an isolated one.

<sup>73</sup> *Al-Mushkil*, p. 64.

b. He may mention them if there are further meanings of that word, otherwise he does not.

c. In the previous chapters, we have pointed out that Ibn Qutaybah does not discuss every verse, rather that he discusses the most important and difficult matters. Thus he may have left many verses which include more than one reading.

We may mention one obvious example as an evidence of the above claim, which concerns the first category of difference between the reciters, i.e. the word [*māliki*; 1/3], which also can be recited as "*maliki*"; nevertheless Ibn Qutaybah does not mention it despite the fact that it is so well known.<sup>74</sup>

7. If he intends to discuss the readings of a word he usually mentions the known possible readings, although sometimes he does not include them all; this point is quite different from that discussed in 6, because we are here discussing the readings of the verse which he mentions, to find whether he mentions all of them or not. Perhaps points a, b and c above can help to explain why he sometimes does not discuss them in detail.

We should mention one example to prove our claim; during his discussion of the verse [...*amman lā yahiddī* (...or he who findeth not the way of guidance); 10/35] Ibn Qutaybah mentions another reading for the word (*yahiddī*) which is "*yahdī*", but he does not mention the other celebrated reading which is "*yahaddī*".<sup>75</sup> There are many other such examples.

On the other hand it is quite clear that he sometimes gives other isolated readings, or sound readings which are not among those of the most acceptable ten.

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<sup>74</sup> See *al-Nashr*, 1/14; *al-Tabṣīrah*, p. 54; and *al-Ḥujjah*, p. 62.

<sup>75</sup> See *al-Gharīb*, p. 197. As for the readings: the first one is by Ḥafṣ and Ya'qūb, the second is by Ḥamzah, al-Kisā'ī and Khalaf, and the last one is by Ibn Kathīr, Ibn 'Āmir and Warsh; there are other ways of reciting it, see *al-Nashr*, 2/283; *al-Tabṣīrah*, p. 220; and *al-Ḥujjah*, p. 181.

8. Ibn Qutaybah does not usually mention the reciter; he often says: "It is also recited as..." or "And those who recite it as..." or "Another reading is...". It seems, perhaps, that it is not his intention to detail all the names, or may be he does not regard it as very important to mention them, or he may mention some of the names in one place and leave them in another in order to avoid repetition.

From our survey of his books we can say that he mentions the reciters if the subject requires this, for instance during his discussion of some isolated readings and some of the reciters' errors (according to his own concepts), he mentions al-A'mash, Yaḥyā b. Waṭṭhāb, Ḥamzah, and Nāfi'.<sup>76</sup>

However, we should not suppose that Ibn Qutaybah does not know the names of the reciters, because it is very clear from his books that he may mention all of them in one place or another, and in addition he wrote *al-Qirā'āt* in which he aimed to detail all matters of readings.<sup>77</sup>

9. Sometimes Ibn Qutaybah mentions a recitation and its different dialects; since it is very important to know the linkage between the readings and the dialects, and that the differences between readings really refer originally to the seven dialects and the manner in which they were transmitted to subsequent generations.

In such cases, it seems that Ibn Qutaybah mentions the original dialect if the reading may be regarded as very strange. We have mentioned some examples during our discussion of Ibn Qutaybah's interest in linguistic matters, especially in verse [20/63], where to recite [*inna ḥādhāni lasāḥirani*] is correct despite diverging from Arabic

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<sup>76</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, pp. 61-3; and for more examples see *al-Mushkil*, pp. 69, 83, 328 and 354; *al-Gharīb*, pp. 133, 197, 236 and 354; and *al-Masā'il wa-al-Ajwibah*, p. 225.

<sup>77</sup> In addition to what we have said concerning the book *al-Qirā'āt*, see also *al-Mushkil*, p. 531 where Ibn Qutaybah promises to give all different aspects of readings in his *al-Qirā'āt*, where he will explain everything. Furthermore, see *al-Ma'ārif*, pp. 528-33, where Ibn Qutaybah devotes a special heading to the reciters titled *Aṣḥāb al-Qirā'āt*, where he includes some of them.

grammar, because it is according to the dialect of Balḥārith.<sup>78</sup> Many other examples illustrate this method, for instance:

- a. The word [ḥūb; 4/2] which has the other readings [ḥawb, ḥāb].<sup>79</sup>
- b. The word [ṣaduqātihinna; 4/4], where the single is (ṣaduqah), another variant being (ṣudqah).<sup>80</sup>
- c. The word [qisṭās; 17/35], another dialect and recitation for which is (qusṭās).<sup>81</sup>

10. Sometimes Ibn Qutaybah mentions the Companion's dialect (*ḥarf*), which means the way of writing the word in the Companion's copy; this method is also very important to distinguish the isolated reading from others and to know the Companion's explanation of this word or expression. Actually we can say that to follow this method in mentioning such *ḥurūf* is an indication by Ibn Qutaybah that this is not a successive reading. We have discussed some examples above.<sup>82</sup>

11. Sometimes Ibn Qutaybah directs, or provides the *wajh* of the Qur'ānic readings (*tawjīh al-qirā'āt*); this means that he gives the meaning and the reason for the recitation, why it is recited in such way and differs from the others. Actually many scholars wrote books concerning this matter, such as *al-Ḥujjah* by Ibn Khālawayh, but it is worth remembering that in fact there is no need for such attempts, because the celebrated readings are adopted as successive and therefore there is no doubt that they have authenticity. Thus such attempts may be regarded as evidences from Arabic language and grammar intended to refute any claim against the Qur'ānic readings.

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<sup>78</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, pp. 50-1.

<sup>79</sup> See *al-Gharīb*, p. 118.

<sup>80</sup> Op. cit, p. 119.

<sup>81</sup> Op. cit, p. 254; the first reading is by Ḥamzah, al-Kisā'ī, Khalaf and Ḥafṣ, while the second is for the others, see *al-Nashr*, 2/307; *al-Ḥujjah*, p. 217; and *al-Tabṣīrah*, p. 244.

<sup>82</sup> See section 3.3 and example (a) in point (3) of this section.

Ibn Qutaybah seems to be among the first scholars to supply such "directions", and examples are abundant in his books; here are some of them, where Ibn Qutaybah makes every effort to give the meaning of every reading:

a. The word (*arḥām*) in the verse [*wa ittaqū Allāha al-ladhī tasā' alūna bihi wa-al-arḥāma* (be careful of your duty toward Allāh in Whom ye claim (your rights) of one another, and toward the wombs (that bare you)); 4/1], another reading for which is (*wa-al-arḥāmi*). In both readings, there is a conjunction, but the difference concerns the word by which this noun is governed. Ibn Qutaybah maintains that in the first reading the word has *fatha* because it is in apposition to the word Allāh [*ittaqū Allāha wa-al-arḥāma*], but in the second case it has *kasra* because it is in apposition to the pronoun (*hi*) in (*bihi*), where the letter (*b*) is a preposition, and thus both the pronoun (*hi*) and the conjuncted word (*wa-al-arḥāmi*) must be governed by the preposition.<sup>83</sup>

b. The word [*shaghafahā*; 12/30] which can also be recited as (*sha'afahā*). Here Ibn Qutaybah maintains that in the first reading the word means "to smite her to the heart", while in the second case it means "to fascinate her".<sup>84</sup>

### 5.3. HIS USAGE OF QUR'ĀNIC READINGS TO REFUTE ACCUSATIONS AGAINST THE QUR'ĀN:

It should be remembered that some of the accusations against the Qur'ān are made from this point of view, and indeed are among the first and most important accusations which seek to throw suspicion upon the immunity from error and the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān. Thus Ibn Qutaybah's first detailed chapter is that which concerns the

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<sup>83</sup> See *al-Gharīb*, p. 118; the first reading is the general one, and the second is that of Ḥamzah, see *al-Nashr*, 2/247; *al-Hujjah*, p. 118; and *al-Tabṣīrah*, p. 179.

<sup>84</sup> See *al-Gharīb*, p. 215-6; the second reading seems to be an isolated one because it is not mentioned in books of Qur'ānic readings.

refutation of the critics' accusations about the Qur'ānic readings by a discussion of the different aspects of *qirā'āt* and their validity.

The question which arises here is: How does Ibn Qutaybah refute these criticisms? To answer this question we need to divide these criticisms into three categories:

- a. Those which concern differences between Companions and Successors in reciting certain words and expressions.
- b. Those which concern the differences in the length of the text of the Qur'ān as between some Companions' copies, especially those of Ibn Mas'ūd and Ubayy b. Ka'b.
- c. Those which concern *lahn* (ungrammatical or corrupt speech) which are claimed to exist in certain words and expressions.

We have already discussed the first category in section (5.1) above, and thus the answers to all criticisms under the subtitle (*qirā'āt*) in section (2.2) are connected to the discussion in section (5.1), where Ibn Qutaybah starts his refutation by mentioning the Tradition concerning the seven dialects in the Qur'ān; therefore all accusations from this point of view are answered by the validity of intended differences in reciting the Qur'ān, as we have discussed in detail.

As for the third category, we have discussed it in the course of our study of Ibn Qutaybah's interest in grammar (section 4.2), and similar examples have been discussed there.

The only remaining category is the second, which we wish to discuss here:

The different lengths of the Companions' copies of the Qur'ān seems to be the most important accusation against the Qur'ān, and many regard it as a good opportunity to question the origin of the Qur'ān and whether it was written down during the life of the



Prophet or not. First of all, we want to discuss Ibn Qutaybah's answers to the main claims, and after that we may mention some other similar criticisms.

In respect of the accusation that the copies of Ibn Mas'ūd and Ubayy differ from the generally adopted text, Ibn Qutaybah says:

As for the reduction of 'Abd Allāh's *mushaf*, by his omission of *Umm al-Kitāb* (*al-Fātiḥah* or the Opening) and *al-Mu'awwidhatayn* (*al-Falaq* and *al-Nās*), and Ubayy's addition of the two sūras of *al-Qunūt*, we do not say that 'Abd Allāh and Ubayy were right and that the Muhājirīn and the Anṣār were wrong, rather we say that Ibn Mas'ūd thought like other scholars that *al-Mu'awwidhatayn* were as an amulet and charm (*'uwadhah* and *ruqyah*), and he used to see the Prophet using these sūras as a charm for al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn and others, as he did by reciting the invocation: *a'ūdhu bi kalimāti Allāhi al-tāmmah* (I seek protection in Allāh's perfect words) and other invocations. Thus he thought that they were not from the Qur'ān, and continued in his opinion and continued to differ from all the Companions.... Following the same approach, Ubayy considers *du'ā' al-qunūt*, because he saw the Prophet regularly praying with it, and thus he thought that it was from the Qur'ān, and continued to adopt this opinion and to differ from the Companions.<sup>85</sup>

In fact many scholars reject the attribution of any such view to Ibn Mas'ūd; for example al-Bāqillānī who strongly defends Ibn Mas'ūd against this and gives many evidences to disprove that he held such a view and to demonstrate the impossibility of believing such assertions about one of the most important Companions; one important evidence is that it is reported in many sound Traditions that the Prophet recited these sūras in the prayers, and this is a well-known matter, so how can we believe that Ibn Mas'ūd held separate view on such matters? Another argument is: If he really continued to maintain his opinion, how can we explain his position vis-à-vis the Companions in denying a part of the Qur'ān? This is actually a great sin and crime and the Companions could not have stood by and left him with his opinion without protest; however, as nothing of such a dispute is reported, this claim can simply be regarded as false....<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> *Al-Mushkil*, pp. 42-7.

<sup>86</sup> See *I'jāz al-Qur'ān*, by al-Bāqillānī, pp. 441-3. Many scholars adopt this opinion such as al-Qurṭubī, 20/255; and al-Zarkashī in *al-Burhān*, 2/127-8.

Al-Suyūṭī also discusses this matter, quoting what al-Rāzī had said about this matter, which is similar to the view of al-Bāqillānī, and he also quotes the views of al-Nawawī and Ibn Ḥazm, that what has been attributed to Ibn Mas'ūd is not true, although he also mentions the confirmation of this statement by Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, al-Ṭabarānī and al-Bazzār, eventually quoting Ibn Qutaybah's answer to this claim.<sup>87</sup>

As for the claim made about Ubayy, the same argument is presented by al-Bāqillānī, who maintains that there is no sound account to give any authenticity to this statement, and also advances other evidences.<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, the author of *al-Mabānī* maintains that if the relation that Ubayy regarded *du'ā' al-qunūt* as part of the Qur'ān was confirmed, we can only say that he wrote it but not as a part of the Qur'ān, rather to memorize it and to be sure not to forget it, because the Prophet often prayed with it in the prayer.<sup>89</sup>

Ibn Qutaybah continues his discussion concerning *al-Fātiḥah*, expressing his suspicion that this claim is falsely attributed to Ibn Mas'ūd, since he was among the best Companions concerned with the Qur'ān, and one of the six most knowledgeable Companions. Also the Prophet said: "Whoever wishes to recite the Qur'ān as fresh as it was revealed, let him follow the recitation of Ibn Umm 'Abd."<sup>90</sup> Also 'Umar commended him as full in knowledge. Ibn Qutaybah goes on to mention some of the distinguishing attributes of Ibn Mas'ūd, the most important thing being that he continually heard the Prophet reciting it in the prayer and saying: "The prayer will not be accepted without reciting *al-Fātiḥah*". He adds that this *sūra* is called *al-Sab' al-mathānī* and *Umm al-kitāb*, and is one of the oldest revealed *sūras*..., eventually Ibn Qutaybah states that Ibn Mas'ūd may have thought that the Qur'ān was collected to

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<sup>87</sup> See *al-Itqān*, 1/220-2. Also 'Abd al-Wahhāb Ḥammūdah quotes Ibn Qutaybah's answer, see his *al-Qirā'āt wa-al-Lahjāt*, pp. 64-5.

<sup>88</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, p. 47 in the footnote. Also see *al-Qirā'āt wa-al-Lahjāt*, pp. 66, where the author quotes the answers of Ibn Qutaybah and al-Bāqillānī.

<sup>89</sup> See p. 75.

<sup>90</sup> See Ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, 1/7; *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, 1/49. The name "Ibn Umm 'Abd" is another name for Ibn Mas'ūd, see *al-Iṣābah fī Tamyīz al-Ṣaḥābah*, 2/368-9.

avoid any suspicion, forgetting, adding or reduction, and thought that this would not apply to this *sūra* because it is short, well-known, and recited many times in every prayer, and no Muslim is allowed to neglect learning and memorizing it.... Thus for these reasons Ibn Mas'ūd did not write this *sūra* in his copy, although he knew that it is from the Qur'ān....<sup>91</sup>

We can say that Ibn Qutaybah's opinion about such statements made of Ibn Mas'ūd is a middle one among the scholars; he confirms the first one and justifies Ibn Mas'ūd's position, and he rejects the second where the position is clear to every Muslim. This is thus a compromise between the views of the two groups mentioned by al-Suyūfī above.

It is worth reminding ourselves that there were slight differences between the copies which 'Uthmān ordered to be written and distributed to the main cities, these slight differences being the adding of some particles intended to achieve the original dialects or some of them, and that all agree that they are successive readings.<sup>92</sup> We should mention here some examples:

1. The word [*tashtahīh* (to desire); 43/71] which is written in other copies as (*tashtahī*).<sup>93</sup>
2. The expression [*ashadda minhum* (mightier than these); 40/21] which is also written in other copies as (*minkum* = than you).<sup>94</sup>
3. The expression [*aw an* (or that he will...); 40/26] which written also in other copies as (*wa an* = and that...).<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, pp. 47-9. This justification and the previous one concerning *al-Mu'awwidhatayn* were adopted by many scholars such as the author of *Muqaddimat al-Mabānī*, pp. 35, 95-7 and Zarzūr, see his *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, p. 91.

<sup>92</sup> See *al-Nashr*, 1/11 and 32; *EJ*.<sup>2</sup>, 5/408; and Şubḥī al-Şāliḥ, p. 90. We have discussed this matter in section 5.1.4 above.

<sup>93</sup> The first is according to the *maşāḥif* of Mecca and Iraq, while the second is recited by Nāfi', Abū Ja'far, Ibn 'Āmir and Ḥafṣ, according to the *maşāḥif* of Medina and al-Shām, see *al-Nashr*, 2/370.

<sup>94</sup> The second is Ibn 'Āmir's recitation according to the *muşḥaf* of al-Shām, see *al-Nashr*, 2/365.

<sup>95</sup> The first is by the Kūfans ('Āṣim, Ḥamzah and al-Kisā'i) and Ya'qūb according to the *muşḥaf* of al-Kūfah, see *al-Nashr*, 2/365.

However these slight differences certainly do not extend to the addition or omission of entire verses.

In conclusion we may say that while Ibn Qutaybah does not reject the accounts concerning Ibn Mas'ūd and Ubayy out of hand, he does advance strong arguments for regarding them as highly improbable.

## IBN QUTAYBAH'S TREATMENT OF CERTAIN OTHER QUR'ĀNIC SCIENCES:

In previous chapters we have attempted to throw some light on Ibn Qutaybah's interest in certain specific Qur'ānic sciences, such as the obscure and ambiguous, the seven dialects in the Qur'ān, *gharīb al-Qur'ān*, *i'jāz al-Qur'ān*<sup>1</sup> and *qirā'āt*. We should, however, discuss some other sciences to which Ibn Qutaybah gives attention, in order to have a wider view of the range of his interests and method in Qur'ānic studies. Some of these sciences are discussed in detail, as we shall see below. These sciences include:

### 6.1. *AI-MAKKĪ WA-AL-MADANĪ* (THE MECCAN AND MEDINAN SURĀS OF THE QUR'ĀN):

Ibn Qutaybah does not discuss this matter separately, but he gives information about some sūras at the beginning of his discussion of them in *al-Gharīb*, where he often gives the name of the *sūra*, mostly one name, after which he mentions whether it is Meccan or Medinan.

Scholars who write on Qur'ānic sciences discuss many different subjects, but two of the most important are the definition of Meccan and Medinan and the method of determining which is which.

As to the first subject there are three main opinions, which are:

1. Meccan is what was revealed before the *hijra* (the Prophet's migration), and Medinan is what was revealed after the *hijra*.

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<sup>1</sup> Where the figures of speech dominate most of its subject.

2. Meccan is what was revealed at Mecca even if it was revealed after the *hijra*, and Medinan is what was revealed at Medina.

3. Meccan is concerned with theology and narratives, and the speech is usually addressed to all people, while Medinan is concerned with people's dealings with one another and jurisprudence, and the speech is usually addressed to the believers.<sup>2</sup>

The most acceptable opinion is the first, since many objections could be raised against the others; for example: what about verses or sūras which were revealed neither at Mecca nor at Medina? What can we say about the many exceptions to the third opinion, where in some Medinan sūras we find words addressed to all people (i.e. as: *yā ayyuhā al-nās*) in *al-Baqarah* and *al-Nisā'*. Furthermore some Medinan sūras include narratives as *al-Baqarah* and *Āl 'Imrān*.

As for the problem of determining which is Meccan and which is Medinan, this is best approached through our discussion of Ibn Qutaybah's study of it. In the course of this section, we intend to discuss his method in discussing this information and to investigate whether it is sound or not.

We can say that despite the simplicity of this subject in comparison with others discussed above, Ibn Qutaybah's interest in this subject provides a good background which may help in explaining the Qur'ān, since to know what is Meccan and what is Medinan may help in distinguishing between the earlier and the later revelation, which in turn may help to decide, in the case of abrogation, which is the abrogated verse, and also *takhṣīs* (specialization).<sup>3</sup>

In his treatment of this subject, Ibn Qutaybah employs the following methods:

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<sup>2</sup> See *al-Burhān*, 1/188-9; *al-Itqān*, 1/23; *al-Qaṭṭān*, *Mabāḥith fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, pp. 61-2; and *al-Qur'ān I'jāzuhu wa Balāghatuh*, p. 17-9.

<sup>3</sup> See *al-Burhān*, 1/187; *al-Itqān*, 1/22; and *al-Qaṭṭān*, pp. 59-60.

1. He generally indicates whether the *sūra* is Meccan or Medinan; among the 114 *sūras* of the Qur'ān, he gives information for 60 of them, since there are two *sūras* (*al-Kāfirūn* and *al-Nās*) which he does not discuss in *al-Gharīb*, so that there remain only 52 without indication. It seems that the *sūras* which are left without determination are in the following categories:

a. Most of them are well-known as being Meccan or Medinan, e.g. *sūras* 2, 3, 9 which are Medinan, and the *sūras* of the last part of the Qur'ān (*juz'* no. 30 which known as *Juz' 'Amma*), most of whose 37 *sūras* are Meccan (only *sūras* 98, 99 and 110 being Medinan).

b. Some of them are in doubt, and actually there are different views about whether they are Meccan or Medinan, these being *sūras* 1, 83, 87, 97, 100, 102, 107, 112, 113 and 114. In fact some add *sūras* 13, 16 and 55 to this number.<sup>4</sup>

2. When Ibn Qutaybah determines whether the *sūra* is Meccan or Medinan he mostly gives further information if there are any exceptions within the *sūra*, e.g. despite the fact that the *sūra* is Meccan (for example) there are one or more Medinan verses in it, or vice versa. Thus Ibn Qutaybah sometimes says: This is an entirely Meccan *sūra* except verse (...) or verses no... or 3 verses, etc. If there are no exceptions he sometimes confirms that it is a full Meccan or Medinan *sūra*. There are 6 *sūras* out of 60 where he mentions further information of this kind.<sup>5</sup>

3. Ibn Qutaybah discusses whether the *sūra* is Meccan or Medinan in *al-Gharīb* only, because in this book he arranges it in accordance with the Qur'ānic order and discusses whole *sūras*, while in other books such as *al-Mushkil*, he is discussing certain subjects, and thus the best place for this kind of discussion is in *al-Gharīb*.

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<sup>4</sup> See *Funūn al-Afnān*, pp. 184-5; *al-Itqān*, 1/24-7; and *Nāsikh al-Qur'ān wa Mansūkhuh*, by Ibn al-Bārīzī, Hibat Allāh b. 'Abd al-Raḥīm, ed by. Ḥ.Ṣ. al-Ḍāmin, (an article in the periodical of al-Majma' al-'Ilmī al-'Irāqī, Baghdad, January, 1982), Volume 33, Part 3, p. 317.

<sup>5</sup> Those are 6, 22, 26, 32, 39 and 64.

4. Ibn Qutaybah does not give any authority for his information; perhaps this is for the sake of brevity, since he declares at the beginning of *al-Gharīb* that he will omit ascriptions and such things in order that his book will be easy and small.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, we should bear in mind that in his introduction to *al-Gharīb* he declared his dependence on previous works, which is a general indication of his authorities.

To investigate whether his information is sound or not we need firstly to give a brief account of it. Accordingly we may say that in addition to what we have mentioned above, he mentions the following sūras as being Medinan: 4, 5, 8, 24, 33, 47, 48, 49, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 65 and 66. Other sūras are Meccan or there is no information about them.

A simple survey of this information leads us to say that most of his ascriptions are sound in the opinion of the scholars, although in some cases certain scholars differ from Ibn Qutaybah. We can categorize this information as follows:

a. Those sūras where the general view is quite different from that of Ibn Qutaybah; these include *al-Taghābun* and *al-Ḥajj*, which are regarded by many scholars as Medinan while Ibn Qutaybah regards them as Meccan.<sup>7</sup>

b. Those which are in doubt; Ibn Qutaybah gives information about some of them, i.e. *al-Ra'd*, *al-Raḥmān* and *al-Naḥl*; al-Suyūṭī suggests that all of them are Meccan, and this is exactly what Ibn Qutaybah has said about them.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand Qatādah suggests that they are all Medinan.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See *al-Gharīb*, p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> See al-Zuhri, Muḥammad b. Shihāb, *al-Nāsikh wa-al-Mansūkh*, ed by Ḥ.Ṣ. al-Dāmin, (an article in the periodical of al-Majma' al-'Ilmi al-'Irāqī, Baghdad, June, 1987), Vol. 38, Parts 2&3, pp. 332-3; and *Funūn al-Afnān*, pp. 184-5. Ibn Qutaybah excepts three verses at the beginning of *al-Ḥajj* as medinan.

<sup>8</sup> See *al-Itqān*, 1/25. On the other hand Ibn al-Jawzī in *Funūn al-Afnān* states *al-Ra'd* to be Medinan, *al-Naḥl* to be Meccan, and *al-Raḥmān* to be in doubt, see pp. 184-5.

<sup>9</sup> See Qatādah b. Di'āmah al-Sadūsī, *al-Nāsikh wa-al-Mansūkh fī Kitāb Allāh*, ed by Ḥ.Ṣ. al-Dāmin, (an article in the periodical: *al-Mawrid*, Baghdad, s.d), Vol. 9, Part 4, p. 503; and *al-'Aql wa fahm al-Qur'ān*, by al-Ḥārith b. Asad al-Muḥāsabī, ed by Ḥ. al-Quwwatī, (Dār al-Fikr, Beirut, 1st ed, 1971), pp. 394-7. Also al-Zuhri regards *al-Ra'd* and *al-Raḥmān* as Medinan, see *al-Nāsikh wa-al-Mansūkh*, pp. 332-3.



c. Those sūras which contain exceptions; here it seems that all his information is sound, if we are to judge them by some important exegeses such as *Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī*.

As for other Meccan sūras mentioned by Ibn Qutaybah, we can say that they are completely in agreement with other sources.

Actually we can regard the information given by Ibn Qutaybah as very important, particularly when we bear in mind the rarity of works on this topic before him.<sup>10</sup>

## 6.2. *ASBĀB AL-NUZŪL* (THE REASONS FOR CERTAIN REVELATIONS):

In the view of all scholars this science is very important for any exegete; since there are many useful points which we can gain from a knowledge of it. This has been discussed by scholars in depth, but the most important points are to know the reason for the revelation; to assist in explaining the verse; and finally to know if this verse is a special case or a general one which applies to all Muslims (*ma'rifat al-Khāṣṣ min al-'Āmm*).<sup>11</sup>

In general, we should remember that the Qur'ān may be divided into two parts; the first being that which was revealed for specific reasons, and the second that which was revealed without any specific reason.

Ibn Qutaybah is concerned to draw attention to this point, and often mentions it in both *al-Mushkil* and *al-Gharīb*. In order to understand his interest in this topic we need to examine his method in discussing it in comparison with other specialist

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<sup>10</sup> See *al-Itqān*, 1/22, where al-Suyūṭī mentions the books written on this subject, the most celebrated one being *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān* by Abū 'Ubayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām.

<sup>11</sup> Some examples regarding this point and the previous one may be found in *al-Itqān*, 1/83-4; and *Mabāhith fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, by al-Qaṭṭān, pp. 79-82.

books, and to establish whether or not he makes any new contribution to this branch of knowledge.

In his discussion of this subject, Ibn Qutaybah employs the following methods:

1. He usually does not give an ascription (*isnād*) for his account; we mention this point because it is so necessary, since ascription is very important in any discussion of reasons for revelation, and many scholars make it a necessary condition for it, as the only way to know the reason for a revelation is by authentic narratives. However Ibn Qutaybah does sometimes mention the ascription, and examples of both cases are abundant. In the former case he simply says: "it was revealed in...", or "the occasion for this verse is...", and similar general expressions,<sup>12</sup> and in the latter case he sometimes mentions the ascription in full and sometimes does so in brief, for example by mentioning the Companion or the Successor who narrated the account.<sup>13</sup>

It seems that the reason for this approach is the desire for brevity which is a prominent feature of his books of Qur'ānic studies. The question which arises here is why he sometimes does mention the ascription. In such cases we can say that they concern important matters related to the Companion who narrates the relation, or that they occur in cases of dispute between scholars.<sup>14</sup>

2. Ibn Qutaybah uses this branch of knowledge to assist the understanding of the meaning of the verse; this being a widespread method among the scholars. Here are two examples:

a. In order to explain the meaning of the verse [Unto Allāh belong the East and the West, and whithersoever ye turn, there is Allāh's Countenance. Lo! Allāh is All-Embracing, All-Knowing; 2/115]; Ibn Qutaybah maintains that this verse was revealed on an occasion where some of the Companions were on a journey. They

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<sup>12</sup> See some examples in *al-Mushkil*, pp. 184, 373; and *al-Gharīb*, pp. 66, 456.

<sup>13</sup> See some examples in *al-Mushkil*, pp. 262, 333; and *al-Gharīb*, pp. 75, 121.

<sup>14</sup> For instance see *al-Mushkil*, pp. 378-9, 450.

were not sure of the direction of prayer (*qiblah*) and differed in guessing where to direct themselves, some facing the east, and others the west. Ibn Qutaybah goes on to comment that this was before the *qiblah* was transferred to the Ka'bah.<sup>15</sup>

b. In order to explain why the word *lākin* (but) occurs in the verse [But Allāh (Himself) testifieth concerning that which He hath revealed unto thee; in His knowledge hath He revealed it...; 4/166] when the previous verses were speaking about the revelation which God revealed to Muḥammad in a similar way as to other Prophets, Ibn Qutaybah maintains that the disbelievers then said: we do not testify to this, and so who will testify for you in this? Then God revealed this verse.<sup>16</sup>

3. Ibn Qutaybah does not mention all reasons of revelation; and here we can say that as with many subjects we have discussed and others which we shall discuss later, he does not discuss every verse or word of the Qur'ān, but rather concentrates only on the ambiguous and the obscure, indeed in respect of this subject in particular, he may leave some verses without any comment regarding the reason for their revelation because this is quite clear, as with his treatment of *sūrat al-Anfāl*, which was revealed on the occasion of the battle of Badr, and many other examples.<sup>17</sup>

4. Sometimes Ibn Qutaybah uses the reason for the revelation to support his own opinion, or to judge between various opinions; many examples illustrate this method, of which the following are two:

a. He discusses the probable meanings of the word (*qunūt*), one of which is stopping talking during prayer; this is according to the verse [...*wa qūmū li Allāh qānitīn* (and stand up with devotion to Allāh); 2/238]; where Zayd b. Arqam reports

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<sup>15</sup> See *al-Gharīb*, p. 62; and *Lubāb al-Nuqūl fī Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, by al-Suyūṭī, printed on the margin of *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, (al-Maṭba'ah al-Sharafiyyah, Cairo, s.d) 1/18-9.

<sup>16</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, pp. 230-1; and *Lubāb al-Nuqūl*, 1/91.

<sup>17</sup> See *al-Gharīb*, pp. 177-8. Many other examples illustrate this second point, as with *sūrat Āl 'Imrān*, where the first 70 verses concern the Christians of Najrān who came and conversed with the Prophet, and verses 121-180 which were revealed on the occasion of the battle of Uḥud, see *al-Gharīb*, pp. 101-7, 109-16 respectively.

that we (the Companions) used to talk during the prayer till this verse was revealed, after which we were prohibited to speak and ordered to be silent.<sup>18</sup>

b. Ibn Qutaybah explains the meaning of the word (*naḥb*) as "vow"; this is according to the verse [Of the believers are men who are true to that which they covenanted with Allāh. Some of them have paid their vow (*naḥb*) by death (in battle), and some of them still are waiting...; 33/23]; Ibn Qutaybah maintains that the origin of this that some of the Companions promised that if they met the enemy they would fight them till they defeated them or were killed for the sake of God; eventually they were killed, and thus it was said of anyone who was killed that he had paid his vow (*qaḍā naḥbah*).<sup>19</sup>

5. Ibn Qutaybah uses the reason for the revelation to assist in refuting some of the accusations made against the Qur'ān, most of which have been discussed above; these concern: the repetition in *sūrat al-Kāfirūn*; the verse [We shall brand him on the nose; 68/16] and the allegory in the verse [so Allāh made it experience the garb of death and fear because of what they used to do; 16/112].<sup>20</sup>

6. Ibn Qutaybah maintains the view which has been adopted by many scholars that even when there is a reason for revealing a particular verse, it still applies to any similar circumstances. This is a celebrated basic principle which is expressed by the saying *al-'ibrah bi 'umūm al-lafẓ lā bi khuṣūṣ al-sabab* (one should follow the general expression and not limit oneself to the special reason).<sup>21</sup> Many examples illustrate this point; for instance, in his discussion of the verse [Alas for me! Ah, would that I had never taken such an one for friend; 25/28]; Ibn Qutaybah gives the reason for its revelation, i.e. that Ibn 'Abbās reports that 'Uqbah b. Abī Mu'ayt used

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<sup>18</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, p. 452; and *Lubāb al-Nuqūl*, 1/43. Another meaning for this word is "obedience".

<sup>19</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, pp. 183-4; *Lubāb al-Nuqūl*, 2/49; and *al-Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qur'ān*, p. 484, where al-Aṣfahānī gives the same meaning as Ibn Qutaybah.

<sup>20</sup> All these matters have been discussed in section 4. 3 (His interest in the figures of speech); for more details see *al-Mushkil*, pp. 237, 159 and 164.

<sup>21</sup> For more details about this matter, see al-Qaṭṭān, *Mabāḥith fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, pp. 82-5.

to come to the Prophet and listen to him, but another polythiest (Ubayy b. Khalaf) used also to prevent him from coming to the Prophet. Eventually Ibn Qutaybah comments that God revealed this verse as a general one, while those two men are just the reason for its revelation, as it is well known that a verse or verses may be revealed on a particular occasion, but apply to others as well.<sup>22</sup>

7. If Ibn Qutaybah discusses one verse which has a reason for revelation, and then discusses it again with respect to another subject, he does not repeat the reason. This is in accordance with his general method of brevity; examples are abundant, for instance: e.g. (a) in point (4) above is not mentioned in *al-Gharīb* during his discussion of that verse because he has already discussed it in *al-Mushkil*.

Subsequently we can say that a consideration of his interest in *asbāb al-nuzūl* leads us to point out that most of his information corresponds accurately to what we find in *Lubāb al-Nuqūl* and other works.

### 6.3. *AI-NASKH* (ABROGATION):

Ibn Qutaybah does not discuss this subject in detail or devote a special section to it, but he does mention it in a few places in wherever the word *naskh* or its synonyms are discussed. In addition to this, there are some verses where he comments on whether they are abrogated or not; all of them concern Islamic jurisprudence.<sup>23</sup>

Since his treatment is not a detailed one, there are many other subjects which he does not touch, or which are discussed in general works on the Qur'ānic sciences or specialised studies. The main topics studied by scholars of *naskh* include:

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<sup>22</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, p. 262; and *Lubāb al-Nuqūl*, 2/38.

<sup>23</sup> This is inevitably so, since abrogation concerns Islamic law only, see al-Qurṭubī, 2/65; and al-Qaṭṭān, p. 233.

a. The theories of abrogation, which include a discussion regarding the conditions for the recognition of abrogation; i.e. what are the things which abrogate the Qur'ān? Is it the Qur'ān only, or it is possible for Sunna also to abrogate the Qur'ān?<sup>24</sup>

b. The three modes of abrogation, which include:

1. *Naskh al-ḥukm dūn al-tilāwa* (the suppression of an earlier ruling without the suppression of the earlier wording).

2. *Naskh al-ḥukm wa-al-tilāwa* (the suppression of both a Qur'ān wording and the ruling it conveyed).

3. *Naskh al-tilāwa dūn al-ḥukm* (the suppression of a Qur'ān wording, but not of the ruling it conveyed).<sup>25</sup>

In fact, Ibn Qutaybah never involves himself in these subjects, and there are only three things which we can be sure that he intends to discuss: the meaning of the term *naskh*, the fact that abrogation is found in the Qur'ān, and the wisdom of abrogation. The second point seems to be the most important one, in that it accepts the legitimacy of abrogation, a matter which is of some importance since we know that some opinions suggest that abrogation is not found in the Qur'ān, some writers devoting entire books to this issue.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> It has been suggested that the abrogating thing (Qur'ān or Sunna) should be at the same level of authenticity; this means that just the successive Sunna may abrogate the Qur'ān or on the contrary. For this particular opinion see al-Qurṭubī, 2/65-6; and *al-Wajīz fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, by 'Abd al-Karīm Zaydān, (Mu'assasat al-Risālah, Beirut, 2nd ed, 1987), pp. 391-2. For further details about this point in general see John Burton, *The Sources of Islamic Law Islamic Theories of Abrogation*, (Edinburgh University Press, 1990), pp. 18-41; *al-Burhān*, 2/30-2; al-Qaysī, Makkī b. Abi Ṭālib, *al-Īdāh li Nāsikh al-Qur'ān wa Mansūkhuh*, ed by A.Ḥ. Farahāt, (Imām Muḥammad b. Su'ūd's University Press, Riyadh, 1st ed, 1976), p. 68; Muḥammad Maḥmūd Farghalī, *al-Naskh bayn al-Ithbāt wa-al-Nafy*, (Dār al-Kitāb al-Jāmi'ī, Cairo, 1976), pp. 60-80; *Maḥāsīn al-Ta'wīl* (or *Tafsīr al-Qāsīmī*), 1/32; and Watt & Bell, *Introduction*, pp. 87-9. It seems that al-Shāfi'ī is the first scholar to say that only the Qur'ān can abrogate the Qur'ān; see his *al-Risālah*, ed by A.M. Shākir, (Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, Beirut, s.d), pp. 107-11.

<sup>25</sup> See Burton, p. 41 and the next chapters. Furthermore see *al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'ān*, pp. 398-420; *al-Burhān*, 2/35-41; *al-Īdāh li Nāsikh al-Qur'ān wa Mansūkhuh*, p. 58; *al-Fawā'id al-Mushawwiq ilā 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, by Ibn al-Qayyim, pp. 163-4; al-Qaṭṭān, pp. 238-40; *al-Naskh bayn al-Ithbāt wa-al-Nafy*, pp. 33-53; and *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, by Aḥmad Denffer, p. 108.

<sup>26</sup> For example: *Lā Naskh fī al-Qur'ān* (there is no abrogation in the Qur'ān) by 'Abd al-Muta'al Jabrī, (Maktabat Wahba, 1st ed, 1980), where on pp. 11-26 the author discusses the nullity of the

As part of our study of this subject, we need to discuss questions which involve abrogation, and whether they involve verses or other matters, in order to examine what comment Ibn Qutaybah has to make on them:

1. During his discussion of the verse: [Nothing of our revelation (even a single verse) Do we abrogate or cause be forgotten (*nunsihā*), but We bring (in place) one better or the like thereof. Knowest thou not that Allāh is able to do all things; 2/106]; Ibn Qutaybah explains the word *nunsihā* as in the sense found in the translation above. He then gives another meaning related to the reading [*nansa' hā*] which, he says, means "delay it and keep it without abrogation". He supports this meaning with some evidences, after which he goes on to explain what the word (better) means, i.e. that it means "ease and lightening", i.e. that the abrogating verse is easier and lighter than the abrogated.<sup>27</sup>

2. In the verse: [Allāh effaceth (*yamhū*) what He will, and establisheth (what He will), and with Him is the source of ordinance; 13/39]; Ibn Qutaybah explains the word (*yamhū*) as "*yansakh* (abrogates)", and the word *yuthbit* (establishes) as "leaving without abrogation."<sup>28</sup>

3. In the verse: [And when We put a revelation in place of (another) revelation, \_and Allāh knoweth best what He revealeth\_ they say: Lo! thou art but inventing. Most of them know not; 16/101]; Ibn Qutaybah explains this replacement as the operation of abrogation.<sup>29</sup>

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allegation of abrogation in the Qur'ān. See also al-Qurṭubī, 2/63-4, where he mentions that some Muslim sects completely deny abrogation. For further details see *Nawāsikh al-Qur'ān* by Ibn al-Jawzī, (Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, Beirut, s.d), pp. 14-7.

<sup>27</sup> See *al-Gharīb*, p. 61. The same meaning is offered in *al-Masā'il wa-al-Ajwibah* during his explanation of this verse, see p. 274. Also al-Qurṭubī mentions the same meaning as Ibn Qutaybah, see 2/68-9. For further details see *Fath al-Bārī Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 8/167-8. We may take the opportunity to say that on the basis of this verse al-Shāfi'ī built his opinion that the abrogation of the Qur'ān can be performed only by the Qur'ān itself, see *al-Risālah*, p. 108.

<sup>28</sup> See *al-Gharīb*, p. 228. See also *al-Risālah*, p. 107.

<sup>29</sup> See *al-Gharīb*, p. 249.

4. In reply to one of the questions directed to him concerning the meaning of *al-nāsikh wa-al-mansūkh*, he says:

The abrogating (*al-nāsikh*) is the thing which, when it occurs, then another thing will be abandoned or become useless..., it is said that the shadow abrogates the sun (light) and the sun abrogates the shadow, because when each of them occurs then the other is abandoned....<sup>30</sup> Thus of the same kind are the abrogating and the abrogated verses of the Qur'ān, because when the abrogating verse is revealed the abrogated becomes invalid, and according to this view the expression *nasakhtu al-kitāb* means that by copying out the contents of the book you no longer need it, because you have the new copy.<sup>31</sup>

5. Ibn Qutaybah also mentions abrogation when he discusses the subject of the Qur'ānic readings and the fact that during the review between Gabriel and the Prophet Muḥammad which occurred every year in Ramaḍān, it may be that God has revealed new verses, abrogated others and facilitated what He wanted.<sup>32</sup>

6. During his discussion of the types of differences, he talks about *ikhtilāf al-taḍādd* (the contradictory difference) and comments that this type is not found in the Qur'ān except in the case of abrogation.<sup>33</sup>

7. When he talks about the repetition of the speech which we have discussed in Chapter 4, he explains the reason for it, and among the points which he makes is that the Qur'ān was revealed over 23 years in order that it would be easy for Muslims, and an abrogating after abrogated verses, and goes on to argue that if it had been revealed at one single time, then it would precede the reasons of the revelation according to which the Qur'ān (sometimes) was revealed, and urging and abrogating would be meaningless, because the abrogated verse applies for a limited period, and then the abrogating verse becomes the valid one.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> See al-Qurṭubī, 2/62 where he mentions this meaning.

<sup>31</sup> *Al-Masā'il wa-al-Ajwibah*, p. 45.

<sup>32</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, pp. 38-9.

<sup>33</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 40.

<sup>34</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 232. See also section (4. 3.4) above about *tikrār al-kalām wa-al-ziyādah fih*.



Having considered all these passages, we can simply state that Ibn Qutaybah supports the view that there is abrogation in the Qur'ān and that this has a clear purpose, which is to facilitate and ease the rules in jurisprudence, all happening in the knowledge of God.<sup>35</sup>

Let us now examine those matters of abrogation which Ibn Qutaybah discusses in greater detail, which comprise 7 verses. Ibn Qutaybah comments on them in different ways, so that only 4 of them are obviously indicated as being abrogated:

1. During his explanation of the verse: [Unto Allāh belong the East and the West, and whithersoever ye turn, there is Allāh's Countenance; 2/115]; Ibn Qutaybah gives the reason for its revelation, after which he adds: "This was before the transference of the *qiblah* to the Ka'bah."<sup>36</sup>

2. In his explanation of the verse: [It is prescribed for you, when death approacheth one of you, if he leave wealth, that he bequeath unto parents and near relatives in kindness. (This is) a duty for all those who ward off (evil); 2/180]; he maintains that it is abrogated by the verses of *al-mawārīth* (inheritance), which are verses [4/11-3].<sup>37</sup>

3. After explaining the meaning of the verse [(Fast) a certain number of days; and (for) him who is sick among you, or on a journey, (the same) number of other days; and for those who can afford it there is a ransom: the feeding of a man in need But whoso doeth good of his own accord, it is better for him: and that ye fast is better for you if ye did but know; 2/184]; Ibn Qutaybah maintains that the underlined part was

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<sup>35</sup> In fact points 1, 5 and 7 above indicate the wisdom of abrogation. For more details, see *al-Itqān*, 3/60; *Başā'ir Dhawī al-Tamyīz*, 1/121; *al-Naskh bayn al-Ithbāt wa-al-Nafy*, p. 54; and *al-Wajīz fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, p. 389, where the author concentrates on the points which are related to jurisprudence.

<sup>36</sup> *Al-Gharīb*, p. 62. See also *al-Nāsikh wa-al-Mansūkh* by Qatādah, p. 487; *al-Nāsikh wa-al-Mansūkh*, by Ibn al-Bārīzī, p. 282; *al-Nāsikh wa-al-Mansūkh* by al-Zuhri, pp. 314-5, *al-Nāsikh wa-al-Mansūkh* by Ibn Ḥazm, (printed with *Lubāb al-Nuqūl* on the margin of *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*), 2/133; *al-Risālah*, pp. 121-4; *al-Itqān*, 3/68; *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, 8/171-5, where Ibn Ḥajar explains many Traditions of *Ṣāḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* concerning the change of *qibla*; and Burton, pp.173-9, where he has a long discussion concerning the exegetes' views of the change of *qibla*.

<sup>37</sup> See *al-Gharīb*, p. 72. See also Qatādah, pp. 489-90; Ibn al-Bārīzī, p. 282; al-Zuhri, p. 316; Ibn Ḥazm, 2/134; al-Qurṭubī, 2/262; and *al-Itqān*, 3/65.

abrogated by the next verse [...and whosoever of you is present, let him fast the month; 2/185]; i.e. that in the first verse Muslims were having the choice to fast or not, but in the second it is prescribed for all to fast.<sup>38</sup>

4. In his explanation of the verse: [It is made lawful for you to go in unto your wives on the night of the fast...; 2/187]; Ibn Qutaybah maintains that (for a limited period) it was forbidden for those who fast Ramaḍān to go in unto their wives by night and by day, then God revealed this verse which allows them to go in unto their wives during the nights of Ramaḍān.<sup>39</sup> In fact we can consider this abrogation to be of the type of the abrogation of the Sunna by the Qur'ān, in that there is no verse to indicate this meaning, rather it is possible that the forbidding comes from the Tradition.<sup>40</sup>

5. Ibn Qutaybah explains the verse: [As for those of your women who are guilty of lewdness, call to witness four of you against them. And if they testify (to the truth of the allegation) then confine them to the houses until death take them or (until) Allāh appoint for them a way (through new legislation); 4/15], after which he maintains that it is abrogated by the next verse: [And as for the two of you who are guilty thereof, punish them both. And if they repent and improve, then let them be. Lo! Allāh is ever Relenting, Merciful; 4/16].<sup>41</sup>

6. After his explanation of verses [5/106-8] which talk about witness at the time of bequest, Ibn Qutaybah mentions two opinions regarding the abrogation, the first and widespread one that nothing was abrogated, or indeed that nothing of the whole *sūra* was abrogated because it was the last *sūra* to be revealed. As for the second opinion,

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<sup>38</sup> See *al-Gharīb*, p. 73. See also Qatādah, p. 491; Ibn al-Bārīzī, pp. 282-3; al-Zuhri, p. 315; Ibn Ḥazm, 2/134; al-Qurṭubī, 2/288; and *al-Itqān*, 3/65. Furthermore al-Bukhārī mentions many Traditions concerning this verse, see *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, 8/179-81.

<sup>39</sup> See *al-Masā'il wa-al-Ajwibah*, p. 159. See also al-Zuhri, p. 315; Ibn Ḥazm, 2/134; and *al-Itqān*, 3/65.

<sup>40</sup> See al-Qurṭubī, 2/314-5; and *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, 8/181-2.

<sup>41</sup> See *al-Gharīb*, p. 122. See also Qatādah, p. 493. Many other scholars maintain that the abrogating verse is [24/2] and not [4/16], see Qatādah, p. 493; *al-Risālah*, pp. 128-9; Ibn al-Bārīzī, p. 286; Ibn Ḥazm, 2/140, and *al-Itqān*, 3/66. It seems that the most acceptable opinion is al-Qurṭubī's one, that verse [4/15] was abrogated by verse [4/16], then the second itself was abrogated by [24/2], see 5/84-5.

some scholars suggest that some of it was abrogated by verse [2/282], and some suggest that it is abrogated by verse [65/2].<sup>42</sup>

7. During his explanation of the verse [Lo! thy Lord knoweth how thou keepest vigil sometimes nearly two-thirds of the night, or (sometimes) half or a third thereof, as do a party of those with thee. Allāh measureth the night and the day. He knoweth that ye count it not, and turneth unto you in mercy. Recite, then, of the Qur'ān that which is easy for you...; 73/20]; Ibn Qutaybah maintains that the underlined part indicates that God permits them to keep vigil for the period which they want, i.e. that it is not a duty. He continues that this was at the beginning of Islam, till the five prayers became a duty and abrogated this vigil.<sup>43</sup>

It seems, however, that he does not discuss other abrogated verses, either because he does not intend to do this in the first place, or because there is no agreement that they are abrogated. This latter situation arises since we know that some scholars claim many verses to be abrogated when they are actually matters of exception, or specification or involve some other kind of obscurity, as when the believers are commanded to be steadfast and to forgive in one verse and to fight in others,<sup>44</sup> according to the conventional meaning of abrogation we cannot regard these as abrogation at all.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, p. 381 and *al-Masā'il wa-al-Ajwibah*, pp. 165-7, where he strongly rejects the idea that it includes abrogation. As for those who support the idea that it is abrogated, see al-Zuhri who claims that it is abrogated by verse [2/282], p. 318. But for those who claim that it is abrogated by verse [65/2] see Ibn al-Bārizī, p. 289; Ibn Ḥazm, 2/144; and *al-Itqān*, 3/66.

<sup>43</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, pp. 364-5. See also Qatādah, pp. 501-2; Ibn al-Bārizī, p. 312; al-Zuhri, p. 326; Ibn Ḥazm, 2/162; al-Qurṭubī, 19/54-5; *al-Itqān*, 3/68; *Fath al-Bārī*, 8/676; *al-Risālah*, pp. 114-6; and Burton, pp. 186-8.

<sup>44</sup> See Ibn al-Bārizī, p. 316; and *al-Wajīz fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, p. 389, where the author maintains that some scholars confuse abrogation and specification of a general rule.

<sup>45</sup> See *al-Itqān*, 3/56-8, where al-Suyūṭī maintains that there are only 20 abrogated verses in the Qur'ān; and Denffer, pp. 111-2.

#### 6.4. TARJAMAT AL-QUR'ĀN (THE TRANSLATION OF THE QUR'ĀN):

In fact Ibn Qutaybah does not discuss this matter in detail, merely giving some comments during his explanation of certain verses.

In his discussion of the Arabic Language and some of its characteristics, and after mentioning the figures of speech; Ibn Qutaybah says:

The Qur'ān was revealed including all these features, thus no translator can translate it into any other language as the Gospel has been translated from Syriac into Ethiopic and Greek, also the Torah, Psalms and all God's Books into Arabic; this is because non-Arabs do not have the wide range of figures of speech which the Arabs do.<sup>46</sup>

After saying this he gives some examples, including 3 verses which it seems very difficult to translate word for word into any other language, the only way of translating being to translate their meaning. One of these examples concerns the verse [*wa immā takhāfanna min qawm khiyāna fa inbidh ilayhim 'alā sawā'*] (And if thou fearest treachery from any folk, then throw back to them (their treaty) fairly; 8/58]. Actually this verse means that if there is a treaty between you and another folk, and you fear a rejection or treachery of this treaty, then notify them that you have repudiated this treaty, and notify them that war is possible, that you and they will have the same knowledge of this repudiation.<sup>47</sup>

In another passage in *al-Mushkil*, discussing *majāz* and the fact that some people deny it, Ibn Qutaybah puts forward this argument:

If we were to say to the person who finds fault with the verse [*jidāran yurīdu an yanqadda*] (a wall upon the point of falling into ruin; 18/77), (i.e. that the word *yurīdu* is for animate only): "what would you say about a wall which you saw to be in this state?", he would have to say: "a wall which wished to fall" or "which was about to fall" or "was near to falling"; whatever he said, he would make the wall an agent (*fā'il*)..., I do not think you could express this in any of the languages of the non-Arabs without using a similar expression.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup> *Al-Mushkil*, p. 21.

<sup>47</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, p. 21.

<sup>48</sup> *Al-Mushkil*, p. 133.

Ṣaqr comments on Ibn Qutaybah's first statement that it is the final decision which we have to adopt and not to go beyond it.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, and to verify this, we can say that many scholars quote this statement or build their opinions on the conclusions which arise from it.<sup>50</sup> Other scholars and jurists, take this issue into account to discuss whether the prayer is accepted by reciting the Qur'ān in other languages or not, a matter in which Ibn Qutaybah was never involved in any of his Qur'ānic works.<sup>51</sup> Another issue in which jurists are concerned is the status, if any, of a translation of the Qur'ān.<sup>52</sup>

One important point arises from the jurists' discussion of the legal status of a translation of the Qur'ān, which is that they categorise various different types of translation, depending on the meaning of the Arabic word (*tarjamah*). Some maintain that if we choose the meaning "explanation", then it is lawful and permitted; others say that it means "translation", but nevertheless they have to say that to translate the Qur'ān literally into other languages is impossible for many reasons.<sup>53</sup> On the other hand they agree that to translate the meanings of the Qur'ān into other languages (provided that this is not a Qur'ān but the meaning of it) is permitted, and indeed is a duty for the sake of conveying the message of Islam.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>49</sup> See his introduction to *al-Mushkil*, p. 80.

<sup>50</sup> See al-Shāṭibī in *al-Muwāfaqāt*, 2/68, where he quotes Ibn Qutaybah's statement; Khālid al-'Akk in *Uṣūl al-Tafsīr wa Qawā'iduh*, pp. 468-9, where he quotes what al-Shāṭibī has quoted from Ibn Qutaybah; and 'Abd al-Qādir Husayn in *al-Qur'ān I'jāzuh wa Balāghatuh*, pp. 39-40, where he also quotes Ibn Qutaybah's statement. All of those agree with Ibn Qutaybah in his opinion.

<sup>51</sup> See *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* by al-Rāzī, 1/108-10; *Athar al-Ikhtilāf fī al-Qawā'id al-Uṣūliyyah fī Ikhtilāf al-Fuqahā'*, by Muṣṭafā al-Khinn, (Mu'assasat al-Risālah, Beirut, 3rd ed, 1982), pp. 381-5; and *E.J.*<sup>2</sup>, 5/429.

<sup>52</sup> See al-Khinn, pp. 385-8. Also we can say that al-Shāfi'i implicitly supports the ruling that any new Muslim should learn Arabic, otherwise he would not understand the Qur'ān or Islam in general, see *al-Risālah*, pp. 49-52.

<sup>53</sup> For example the figures of speech and its holy and miraculous nature; see al-Khinn, p. 385; *al-Tafsīr wa-al-Mufasssīrūn*, 1/23-6; *al-Qur'ān I'jāzuh wa Balāghatuh*, pp. 39-43; Sha'bān Muḥammad Ismā'il, *al-Madkhal li Dirāsāt al-Qur'ān wa-al-Sunnah*, 1/339; *E.J.*<sup>2</sup>, 5/429; and al-Qaṭṭān, pp. 313-5.

<sup>54</sup> See al-Khinn, pp. 385-8; *al-Madkhal li Dirāsāt al-Qur'ān wa-al-Sunna*, 1/339; *al-Tafsīr wa-al-Mufasssīrūn*, 1/29-30, where al-Dhahabī discusses some conditions for the permitted translation, the most important two (in addition to those mentioned above) being to select the best words and not to contradict the real meanings of the Qur'ān; al-Qaṭṭān, pp. 316-8; and Muḥammad al-Khaḍr Ḥusayn, *Balāghat al-Qur'ān*, ed by 'Alī al-Riḍā al-Tūnīsī, (No place, 1971), pp. 12-21.

We can say that Ibn Qutaybah's statement together with the examples quoted may be regarded as a starting point which eventually led to these opinions, because it includes both the declaration of the impossibility of the literal translation, and the permissibility of the translation of the meanings of the Qur'ān. These are two important principles which we find enunciated for the first time by Ibn Qutaybah.

#### 6.5. *AL-AHRUF AL-MUQAṬṬA 'AH FĪ AWĀ'IL AL-SUWAR* (THE MYSTERIOUS LETTERS WHICH BEGIN SOME SŪRAS):

The mysterious letters begin 29 sūras, and altogether include 14 letters out of the 28 which form the Arabic alphabet. As we mentioned in chapter 2, there are different views regarding them,<sup>55</sup> and here we shall examine Ibn Qutaybah's opinion and how he deals with this subject.

Ibn Qutaybah discusses this subject in *al-Mushkil*, where he devotes a chapter to the interpretation of some expressions which seem to contain some impossibility or odd arrangement, and he starts with the mysterious letters. He also considers them briefly during his discussion of the ambiguous, as again mentioned in Chapter 2, where we have concluded that Ibn Qutaybah supports the idea that those who are firmly rooted in knowledge know the ambiguous verses,<sup>56</sup> and that God does not reveal any meaningless words, as a result of which exegetes explain everything, even the mysterious letters.<sup>57</sup> We would suggest that he distinguishes between the meaning of the thing and its reality, as we shall argue in chapter 7.<sup>58</sup> In the same

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<sup>55</sup> See section 2.1.3, in our discussion of ambiguous in meaning.

<sup>56</sup> This is based on verse [3/7] which was discussed in details in Ch. 2.

<sup>57</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, p. 100. See also al-Ṭabarī, 1/89, where he supports this view; al-Rāzī, 1/151-2; *Tafsīr al-Bayḍawī*, (note: in this chapter the edition of *Tafsīr al-Bayḍawī* we referred to is different from the previous one; this edition is by (Dār al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah al-Kubrā, Cairo, 1911)), 1/44; and *al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ*, 1/35, where Abū Ḥayyān attributes this opinion to Ibn 'Aṭīyyah.

<sup>58</sup> This is very clear when we take into account God's attributes, that in *al-Mushkil* he maintains that exegetes have explained everything while in *al-Ikhtilāf fī al-Lafz* he explains these attributes according to the traditional view, i.e. that the meaning of such ambiguous attributes and other matters is known but its how or reality is unknown; see *al-Ikhtilāf fī al-Lafz*, pp. 42-6.

chapter he again mentions these letters as an example of ambiguous expressions caused by a doubtfulness in themselves, and not because of their resemblance to other words.<sup>59</sup>

Despite this last statement, Ibn Qutaybah (like other exegetes) gives some interpretations of these letters. Firstly he draws attention to exegetes' different views of these letters; some regard them as names of the sūras, others regard them as oaths, and finally some regard them as particles which indicate some of God's attributes.<sup>60</sup>

After this Ibn Qutaybah comments that all of these opinions are good, and he comments on every opinion; he says that if we consider them to be names of sūras then they represent specific things which are usually indicated by names. Thus if you say: I have read [Alif Lām Mīm Ṣād; 7/1], then you mean a specific thing, but if they are applied to a number of sūras, we can only distinguish between them by mentioning the other name of the sūra; for example, to say: "*Alif Lām Mīm, al-Sajdah.*"<sup>61</sup>

As for the second opinion, he maintains that it is acceptable that God may swear by these letters, and that God mentions some letters to mean all of them....<sup>62</sup> He maintains that God swears by the letters because of their nobility and superiority, since they form the Scripture, and they are the means by which people can identify everything in their life....<sup>63</sup> He goes on to say that God swears by many other things in the Qur'ān, as [*wa-al-fajr* (By the dawn); 89/1], [*wa-al-tūr* (By the mount); 52/1],

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<sup>59</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, p. 102.

<sup>60</sup> Op. cit, p. 299. For further details about these opinions and others see al-Ṭabarī, 1/86-93; *al-Kashshāf*, 1/21; al-Bayḍāwī, 1/41-44; al-Rāzī, 1/150-3; Ibn Kathīr, 1/35-6; *al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ*, 1/34; *Fawā'id fī Mushkil al-Qur'ān*, by al'Izz b. 'Abd al-Salām, pp. 61-3; *al-Taḥf al-Bayānī li al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, by 'Ā'ishah 'Abd al-Raḥmān, (Dār al-Ma'ārif, Cairo, 2nd ed, 1973), 2/41; and *E.I.*<sup>2</sup>, 5/412.

<sup>61</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, p. 300. In fact many scholars regard this opinion as the widespread one, see *al-Kashshāf*, 1/21; Ibn Kathīr, 1/36; and *Fawā'id fī Mushkil al-Qur'ān*, p. 63.

<sup>62</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, p. 300. See also *Gharīb al-Qur'ān* by al-Sijistānī, p. 3, where he quotes some of Ibn Qutaybah's words.

<sup>63</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, p. 301.

[*wa-al-‘aṣr* (By the declining day); 103/1], [*wa-al-qalam* (By the pen); 68/1]....<sup>64</sup>

The most important comment he makes is that most of these oaths concern the Qur’ān, i.e. that it is followed by a passage concerning its nobility and miraculous nature, for example, [Alif Lām Mīm. This is a Scripture whereof there is no doubt; 2/1-2].<sup>65</sup>

As for the third opinion, he says that this is one of many other Arabic styles. He gives many examples of figures of speech in general,<sup>66</sup> and then goes on to say that we still hear people saying: "*al-alif: ālā’ Allāh, al-bā’: bahā’ Allāh...*", after which he comments: "Those who choose this opinion take it to mean an oath by God's attributes."<sup>67</sup>

At the end, Ibn Qutaybah says that some exegetes regard these letters as abbreviations or signs of certain expressions; e.g. [Ṭā Hā; 20/1] to mean: (*yā rajul*); [Yā Sīn; 36/1] to mean: (*yā insān*)...etc. Subsequently he comments: "We should not be involved in such things, because we do not know what they are, or from what they are derived."<sup>68</sup>

In fact all these opinions have been adopted by some scholars, even the opinion which regards the mysterious letters as ambiguous.<sup>69</sup> Some further points arise from Ibn Qutaybah's statements, especially those which concern the second opinion, and we may select two of them in order to show how another celebrated opinion arises among some scholars. This opinion is that these letters are intended to show mankind and Jinn that the Qur’ān is formed from these letters, and to challenge them to produce a Qur’ān like it, or ten sūras like it, or even one sūra like it.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>65</sup> Op. cit, pp. 301-2.

<sup>66</sup> Which we have discussed above; these examples are from *al-Mushkil*, pp. 302-9.

<sup>67</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, p. 309. See also al-Ṭabarī, 1/87-8; and al-Rāzī, 1/152.

<sup>68</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, pp. 309-10. It can be seen from this statement that Ibn Qutaybah does not regard any non-authentic information as acceptable.

<sup>69</sup> See Ibn Kathīr, 1/35-6; *al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ*, 1/35 where Abū Ḥayyān adopts this opinion; and *E.I.*<sup>2</sup>, 5/412.

<sup>70</sup> This view has been discussed in Ch. 2, section 2.1.3, concerning ambiguity in meaning.



This opinion is mentioned by al-Zamakhsharī who adds that they are repeated in the Qur'ān in order to draw people's attention to them at all times. He continues that these 14 letters represent the other letters, because they include all the phonetic features which are found in the Arabic Language.<sup>71</sup> These views are enthusiastically adopted by al-Rāzī, Ibn Kathīr, al-Bāqillānī, and al-Bayḍāwī.<sup>72</sup>

In fact we can say that Ibn Qutaybah by indicating that these 14 letters represent the others together with which they form the Scripture, may intend to refer to this opinion which appears in al-Zamakhsharī, or may at least can be regarded as a starting point for it. This view may be strengthened when we bear in mind that these letters are mostly followed by a reference to the Qur'ān itself, this being a view which is strongly adopted by many exegetes. Ibn Kathīr attributes it to himself, though Ibn Qutaybah seems to have anticipated him by 5 centuries.<sup>73</sup>

Before ending this subject, we should say that there is another opinion mentioned by some scholars, i.e. that these letters indicate the numerical value of the letters (*ḥisāb al-jummal*), and that every letter indicates the number of years the community will last.<sup>74</sup> However, most of the scholars reject this opinion, because of the weakness of the Tradition on which it depends.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> See *al-Kashshāf*, 1/29-31.

<sup>72</sup> See al-Rāzī, 1/152-3, where he maintains that this is al-Mubarrid's opinion; al-Bayḍāwī, 1/43-4; Ibn Kathīr, 1/37-8; and *I'jāz al-Qur'ān* by al-Bāqillānī, pp. 66-9. See also *Fawā'id fī Mushkil al-Qur'ān*, pp. 63-4; *E.I.*<sup>2</sup>, 5/414; and *Min Asrār al-'Arabiyyah fī al-Bayān al-Qur'ānī*, by 'Ā'ishah 'Abd al-Raḥmān, pp. 13-7.

<sup>73</sup> See Ibn Kathīr, 1/38; and *al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī li al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, 2/42 where she also attributes it to Ibn Kathīr.

<sup>74</sup> See *E.I.*<sup>2</sup>, 5/412.

<sup>75</sup> Many exegetes relate this Tradition; see Ibn Kathīr, 1/38-9; al-Bayḍāwī, 1/44; and *al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī li al-Qur'ān*, 2/41.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### IBN QUTAYBAH'S TREATMENT OF THEOLOGICAL- QUR'ĀNIC MATTERS.

In this chapter, we intend to discuss certain theological-Qur'ānic matters which are discussed by Ibn Qutaybah in his Qur'ānic works. In addition to the subjects discussed in Ch.2 regarding the obscure and ambiguous verses, we need here to discuss his treatment of the following issues:

1. God's attributes.
2. The problem of the creation of the Qur'ān and its utterance.
3. *'Iṣmat al-Anbiyā'* (the Prophets' Infallibility).
4. *'Adhāb al-Qabr* (the punishment of the grave).

In the present chapter we shall concentrate on how Ibn Qutaybah explains the verses which discuss these issues, though we may exclude many other matters which are not relevant to the concerns of the present thesis.

#### 7.1. HIS TREATMENT OF GOD'S ATTRIBUTES:

It will be remembered that in Ch. 2 we have mentioned that many scholars regard this subject as one branch of *al-mutashābih al-ma'nawī* (the ambiguity in meaning), and that different views have been referred to on this matter. However, we promised there to give more details in this chapter.

Another important point to be remembered is that Ibn Qutaybah is one of those who say that nothing in the Qur'ān is meaningless, and that exegetes did not leave

anything without an explanation, at least of the literal meaning. The only problem which arises concerns the reality, the hidden meaning or the nature of some matters, such as God's attributes.

Actually Ibn Qutaybah discusses this particular subject in detail in *al-Ikhtilāf fī al-Lafz wa-al-Rad 'alā al-Jahmiyya wa-al-Mushabbiha* and *Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth*;<sup>1</sup> in the first book, (whose title can roughly be translated as: The Dispute concerning the Utterance (of the Qur'ān) and the Reply to the Jahmiyya and Mushabbiha),<sup>2</sup> he gives a clear account of certain issues such as the problem of the creation of the Qur'ān and how the Sunnīs themselves have differed concerning it, and the refutation of the claims raised by the Jahmiyya, Mushabbiha and Qadariyyah. During his refutation of these claims he discusses God's attributes, over whose understanding many Islamic sects dispute with one another.

It is now appropriate to show how Ibn Qutaybah deals with God's attributes by discussing some questions in detail:

1. Discussing the Jahmiyya's view of the verse: [The Jews say: Allāh's hand is fettered. Their hands are fettered and they are accursed for saying so. Nay, but both His hands are spread out wide in bounty; 5/63], he accuses them of distorting its interpretation when they say that His hands here mean *ni'mah* (favour). He replies that we do not deny that "yad" can have 3 interpretations, the first being *ni'mah*, the second *quwwah* (power) from God as in the verse [...men of parts (*aydī*) and vision; 38/45]..., and the third the hand itself, but nevertheless, he says, we cannot say that

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<sup>1</sup> *Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth* mainly discusses the question of ambiguity in Traditions, among them the sort known as *aḥādīth al-ṣifāt*, which deal with God's attributes.

<sup>2</sup> These are certain Islamic sects which appeared after the Prophet's death, the first attributed to al-Jahm b. Ṣafwān, whose main doctrine is to reject God's attributes by interpreting them in a different way from Sunnism; to say that the Qur'ān is created; and that fate is inescapable. As for the Mushabbiha, they liken God to His servants by making His attributes bodily (*tajsīm*). For more detail see for example, *Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth*, pp. 53-4; *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, particularly the first four volumes; *Ṭarīq al-Hijratayn wa Bāb al-Sa'ādatayn*, by Ibn al-Qayyim, (Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, Beirut, 1st ed, 1982), pp. 147-9; *Fath al-Bārī*, 13/344-6; and *al-Madkhal ilā Madhhab al-Imām Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal*, by Ibn Badrān, 'Abd al-Qādir b. Aḥmad, (Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, Beirut, s.d), pp. 13-14.

God here intends "*ni'ma*" because He said: [The Jews say: Allāh's hand is fettered] but *ni'ma* cannot be fettered, and He also said [Their hands are fettered] to be as an opposite to what they have said. Thus it cannot be accepted as meaning [their *ni'ma* is fettered] when He says: [but both His hands are spread out wide in bounty], unless it is not also accepted as meaning [but *ni'matāh* are spread out].... Then Ibn Qutaybah goes on to refute their accusation regarding the third meaning:

If anyone says: what is the meaning of hands here? We reply that they are the hands which people know. Ibn 'Abbās comments on this verse: *al-yadān al-yadān* (the hands are the hands), and the Prophet also says: "*kiltā yadayhi yamīn* (both of His hands are right)."<sup>3</sup> Then can anyone regard the hands here as *ni'ma* or *ni'matān*?<sup>4</sup>

Subsequently he says:

We say as God and His Messenger said. And what we are involved in (i.e. the rejection of resemblance) does not cause us to deny what God describes of Himself, but we do not say: what are the *yadān* like? And if anyone asks a question concerning them we limit the answer to be as He said and we keep (*numsik*) our tongues in check from what He did not say.<sup>5</sup>

After that Ibn Qutaybah gives the interpretation of this verse, i.e. that the Jews said that God's hand is fettered (*maghlūlah*), meaning that His hand is kept from spending; thus the fettering of the hand is a proverb which has been coined to give this meaning, and when anyone keeps his hand from extending and spreading (*tamtadd wa tanbasit*), this is like the avaricious person who keeps his hand from spending and donating....<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Ibn Qutaybah gives the meaning of this Tradition in this book, see p. 30. In addition he discusses it again in *Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth*, pp. 247 where he gives the same meaning as in *al-Ikhtilāf fī al-Lafz*; which we can summarize as meaning the completeness and perfection (*al-tamām wa-al-kamāl*), and that Arabs wish to follow the right and dislike to follow the left side, because of the perfection in the right and the imperfection in the left. This Tradition is reported by Muslim in *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, see al-Nawawī, Yaḥyā b. Sharaf, *Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, (Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, Beirut, s.d), 12/211-2.

<sup>4</sup> *Al-Ikhtilāf fī al-Lafz*, pp. 28-9.

<sup>5</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 30.

<sup>6</sup> *Loc. cit.* See also *Fath al-Bārī*, 13/392-7, where both al-Bukhārī and Ibn Ḥajar maintain this view, quoting the verse: [He said: O Iblīs! What hindereth thee from falling prostrate before that which I have created with both My hands? 38/75] and others.

It is quite clear that he explains this attribute according to the traditional view, and this is what we have mentioned in Ch. 2. Thus we find him in other books giving the same interpretation.<sup>7</sup>

2. In respect of the verse [...and have breathed (*nafakhtu*) into him (Adam) of My Spirit; 15/29 & 38/72], Ibn Qutaybah mentions the Jahmiyya's view of the word *rūḥ* (spirit), that it means command (*amr*).<sup>8</sup>

Ibn Qutaybah replies by mentioning many meanings of this word, such as God's speech as in verses [40/15 & 42/52]; the spirit of the bodies; a great Angel, as in verse [78/38]; mercy, as in verse [58/22]; and finally the *rūḥ* is the blowing. Thus if we choose any of these meanings, the word (*nafakhtu*) still has only one meaning.... The most important comment by Ibn Qutaybah is:

We believe in *nafkh* and *rūḥ*, but we do not say what they are, because our duty regarding God's attributes is to stop where He and His Messenger stopped, and not to remove the word from what the Arabs know and use, and not to go beyond this.<sup>9</sup>

3. In respect of the verses [*Wujūhun yawma'idhin nāḍirah ilā rabbiha nāzīrah* (That day will faces be resplendent. Looking toward their Lord); 75/22-3], Ibn Qutaybah says that the Jahmiyya explain the word "*nāzīrah*" as "*muntazīrah* (awaiting)" supporting their view with the verse: [On the day when the hypocritical men and the hypocritical women will say unto those who believe: Look on us (*unzurūnā*) that we may borrow from your light...; 57/13].<sup>10</sup>

Ibn Qutaybah replies that we do not deny that "*nazartu*" could mean "*intazartu*" and "*al-nāzīr*" could mean "*al-muntazīr*", but nevertheless, while one can say "*anā laka nāzīr*", meaning "*anā laka muntazīr*", it is not accepted, on the other hand, to say

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<sup>7</sup> Such as *al-Gharīb*, p. 144; and *Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth*, p. 75. It is worth reminding ourselves that the middle view regarding the meaning of verse [3.7] and whether the scholars know the ambiguous verses or not says that if the ambiguous concerns the ambiguous in meaning, then we treat it by following the Traditional view, taking into account that their literal meanings are absolutely known.

<sup>8</sup> See p. 31.

<sup>9</sup> *Al-Ikhtilāf fī al-Lafz*, p. 32.

<sup>10</sup> Loc. cit.

"*anā ilayka nāzir*" meaning "*anā ilayka muntaẓir*" since it only means looking by eye, and God says [*ilā rabbihā nāzirah*] and He did not say [*lī rabbihā nāzirah*]. Thus for their claim to be valid (i.e. that it means awaiting) it should be "*li rabbihā nāzirah = muntaẓirah*"), but the preposition "*ilā*" is used with looking, and thus in this verse it means looking and not awaiting.

In refuting this claim, Ibn Qutaybah goes on to say that the arguments they have adduced to support their view (i.e. that God cannot be seen, this on the basis of verses [6/103 & 7/143]) are not true,<sup>11</sup> because these verses talk about this life, and the main issue is about the hereafter.<sup>12</sup>

4. Discussing the verse [The Beneficent One, Who is established (*istawā*) on the Throne; 20/5], Ibn Qutaybah maintains that the Jahmiyyah explain *istawā* as "*istawlā* (took over)". He replies by saying that it is not known in language that "*istawā 'alā al-dār*" means "*istawlā 'alayhā*", but *istawā* in this verse means "*istaqarr* (settled or became established)" as God says in another verse: [And when thou (Noah) art on board the ship (*fa idhā istawayta...*); 23/28], which means established on it. As for this word in the verse: [Then turned (*istawā*) He to the heaven; 41/11], it means aimed.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> The first verse is: [Vision comprehendeth Him not, but He comprehendeth (all) vision], and the second is: [And when Moses came to Our appointed tryst and his Lord had spoken unto him, he said: My Lord! Show me (Thy Self), that I may gaze upon Thee. He said: Thou wilt not see Me, but gaze upon the mountain! If it stand still in its place, then thou wilt see Me. And when His Lord revealed (His) glory to the mountain He sent it crashing down...].

<sup>12</sup> Op. cit, pp. 33-5. In fact, there is a long discussion of this matter in this book and in *Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth*, pp. 240-4 & 254-6. However, what we have mentioned above is sufficient to show his treatment and opinion. See also *Fath al-Bārī*, where Ibn Ḥajar mentions the same argument as Ibn Qutaybah, and discusses the Traditions mentioned by al-Bukhārī in this matter, see 13/419-34. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that what the Jahmiyya say is also attributed to the Mu'tazilites, Shi'ites, Ibāḍiyya and other sects; for example see *Tafsīr al-Kashshāf* by al-Zamakhsharī, 4/662; *Mutashābih al-Qur'ān*, by al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, pp. 673-4; *'Aqā'id al-Imāmiyyah*, by Muḥammad Riḍā al-Muzaffar, ed by Ḥ.Ḥ. Dāwūd, (al-Maṭba'ah al-Ḥaydariyyah, Najaf, Iraq, s.d), pp. 36-7; al-Qurṭubī, 19/105-7, who maintains that to say that "*nāzira*" means "*muntaẓirah*" is also Mujāhid's opinion, and also mentions Ibn Qutaybah's words in refuting claims about this verse; and *al-Ḥaqq al-Dāmigh*, by Aḥmad b. Ḥamad al-Khalilī, (Maṭābi' al-Nahḍah, Oman, 1989), pp. 23-95.

<sup>13</sup> *Al-Ikhlāf fī al-Lafz*, pp. 41-2. See also *Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth*, pp. 327-32, where Ibn Qutaybah discusses the Tradition concerning God's coming down to the lowest heaven every night, and talks about the establishment on the throne during his discussion. Furthermore, this Tradition was reported in most books of Tradition, see for example al-Bukhārī, 2/47; Abū Dāwūd, 4/234; Ibn Mājah, 1/435; and Aḥmad, 2/264.

On this point, some scholars have accused Ibn Qutaybah of going beyond the Ancients and following the Mushabbiha; for instance, the editor of *al-Ikhtilaf fi al-Lafz* (M.Z. al-Kawtharī), who says that those who choose this meaning depend on Ibn ‘Abbās, although the narrative attributed to him in this meaning is not sound.<sup>14</sup> Also Ibn Ḥajar maintains that to say that "*istawā*" means "*istaqarr*" is the interpretation of the Mujassimah (i.e. Mushabbihah).<sup>15</sup> We can simply say that Ibn Qutaybah here just gives the literal meaning of this word, although he intends the Ancients' opinion. It may be true that he chose the wrong meaning, but nevertheless this does not mean that he only adopts this meaning or prefers it to the ancients' view; this can easily be observed when we read his comments after every problem, as we have mentioned above and as we shall see later.<sup>16</sup>

Following the same approach he discusses other issues such as the *qurb* (nearness) of God,<sup>17</sup> and the friendship between God and some Prophets (this is according to the verse: [Allāh (Himself) chose Abraham for friend; 4/125]).<sup>18</sup> He also discusses some Traditions which indicate some of God's attributes, those known as *Aḥādīth al-Ṣifāt*, among these attributes being God's fingers and laughter.<sup>19</sup>

As we have mentioned above, in his discussion of all these issues he refutes the Jahmiyya's claims. As for the Mushabbiha, he eventually turns to them saying:

And when some people saw the Jahmiyya's extremeness in negating (these attributes), they opposed them in the extreme resemblance...; both groups are wrong, God has made intermediateness the degree of justice, and He has prohibited the excess of everything in our religion..., He does not ask us to think how He was, how He

<sup>14</sup> See his comment in the footnote, pp. 41-2.

<sup>15</sup> See *Faṭḥ al-Bārī*, 13/406; also see pp. 405-9 in general where there are some Traditions (from *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*) and explanations thereof.

<sup>16</sup> For further details about this attribute, see *Kitāb al-Asmā' wa-al-Ṣifāt*, by al-Bayhaqī, Aḥmad b. al-Ḥasan, ed by M.Z. al-Kawtharī, (Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, Beirut, s.d), pp. 405-15.

<sup>17</sup> See pp. 35-7.

<sup>18</sup> See pp. 40-1. He also discusses this matter in *Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth*, see p. 75.

<sup>19</sup> See pp. 42-4. He also discusses the Tradition of God's fingers in *Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth*, see pp. 245-6; God's laugh in p. 248; and many other attributes. For more details see *al-Asmā' wa-al-Ṣifāt*, pp. 300-48 and 467.

decided and how He created, and He does not order us concerning something which is out of our power and scope.<sup>20</sup>

Subsequently, he again declares his opinion regarding all these matters in general terms:

The best view of these accounts is to believe in what is sound and which is narrated by reliable authorities, and therefore we believe in *ru'ya* (looking), *tajallī* (revealing),<sup>21</sup> that God wonders, comes down to the lowest heaven, that He is established on His throne, and that He has a soul and hands, without saying anything about how they are or seeking to define them, or to measure what we have heard against that about which we are not informed. Thus, we hope that by adopting this opinion we shall be following the path of safety.<sup>22</sup>

From Ibn Qutaybah's treatment of these matters, we can note the following points:

a. In understanding them, he follows the Traditional view. This does not mean that to know the meaning of such attributes is impossible, rather that he gives all possible meanings of each one.<sup>23</sup>

b. In refuting the claims raised by the Jahmiyya and the Mushabbiha, he mostly depends on the Qur'ān itself, and the Arabic Language.<sup>24</sup> In addition to this we find him supporting his views with the words of the Companions.

c. He always distinguishes between the literal meaning of these attributes and the manner or the reality or the hidden meaning; a matter on which the scholars differed as to whether those who are rooted in knowledge (*al-rāsikhūna fī al-'ilm*) know the

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<sup>20</sup> Pp. 45-6. As for the Qadariyyah, he discusses some of their doctrines, especially their view of destiny, which they deny, saying that people have the full power to do what they want, and which they use to interpret some verses according to their opinion. It is clear that the Jahmiyyah oppose them on this issue, see *al-Ikhtilāf fī al-Lafz*, pp. 12-23.

<sup>21</sup> This is according to the verse [And when His Lord revealed (His) glory (*tajallā*) to the mountain...; 7/143]

<sup>22</sup> Pp. 46-7.

<sup>23</sup> Compare his interpretations with *al-Fiqh al-Akbar*, by Abū Ḥanīfah, with comments by Mullā 'Alī al-Qāri', (Dār al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah al-Kubrā, Cairo, 1909), pp. 30-8; *Mukhtaṣar al-Ṣawā'iq al-Mursalāh 'alā al-Jahmiyyah wa-al-Mu'aṭṭilah*, of Ibn al-Qayyim, summarized by Muḥammad b. al-Mawṣilī, (Dār al-Buḥūth al-'Ilmiyyah, Riyadh, s.d), 1/127-41; Al-Shanqīṭī, Muḥammad al-Amin, *Manhaj wa Dirāsāt li Āyāt al-Asmā' wa-al-Ṣifāt*, (al-Jāmi'ah al-Islāmiyyah, Medina, s.d), pp. 4-23; Ibn Qāsim, 'Abd al-Raḥmān, *al-Durar al-Saniyyah fī al-Ajwibah al-Najdiyyah*, (al-Maktab al-Islāmī, Beirut, 2nd ed, s.d), 2/208-19; and others.

<sup>24</sup> He clearly states this in *al-Ikhtilāf fī al-Lafz*, see p. 12.



ambiguous verses or not. We have discussed all these opinions in Ch. 2, in section 2.1.3 regarding the ambiguous in meaning.

Thus we can regard Ibn Qutaybah as the founder of the opinion which appears as a result of point (c) above. Some scholars have adopted it and built their opinions in order to be compatible with it, as we have noted with regard to the statements of Ibn Taymiyyah and al-Aṣḥānī in Ch. 2 (section 2.1.3., point c). Thus we can regard Ibn Qutaybah as the one who opened the door for all these scholars to distinguish between ambiguous matters, and which kind can be known and which cannot.

## 7.2. HIS TREATMENT OF THE PROBLEM OF THE CREATION OF THE QUR'ĀN AND ITS UTTERANCE.

In this section, we may throw light on Ibn Qutaybah's treatment of two particular points: his opinion regarding whether the Qur'ān is created or not; and the dispute between Sunnīs regarding the utterance of the Qur'ān and whether it is also created or not.

Ibn Qutaybah discusses these two points mainly in *al-Ikhtilāf fī al-Lafz*, which was composed in order to clarify these points, but he implicitly mentions the first point in *al-Mushkil* and *Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth* as we shall see later.

It is worth mentioning that such problems did not occur to the first generations of Islam, and the main reasons for their later importance are firstly the expansion of the Muslim community to take in many non-Arabs who had a different background because of the theological traditions of their regions; and secondly because of the huge movement of translation, such as from Greek, Persian, and Indian sources, which took place during the beginning of the Abbasid era.<sup>25</sup> Another important

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<sup>25</sup> See *al-Haqq al-Dāmigh*, pp. 106-7; *Aqīdat al-Imām Ibn Qutaybah*, pp. 6-7; and *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, by W.M. Watt, (Edinburgh University Press, 1979), pp. 41-2.

reason which was in fact a result of the first reason is the emergence of certain Islamic sects.<sup>26</sup> From that time Muslims faced issues which they had never heard of before. Scholars have refuted all innovations, among them the matter of the creation of the Qur'ān. As for the second subject, the utterance, no sufficient attention was paid to it until Ibn Qutaybah came and wrote *al-Ikhtilāf fī al-Lafz*, as we shall see later.

First of all, we should draw attention to the fact that these are two points which do not depend on clear evidences of the Qur'ān or the Traditions. However, scholars have directed their efforts to this and used reasoning to produce evidences from the Qur'ān, depending mainly on the Arabic language, as we shall see from Ibn Qutaybah's treatment.

### 7.2.1. The problem of the creation of the Qur'ān:

As mentioned in Ch. 1, the Mu'tazilites paid much attention to this matter, and eventually persuaded the Caliph al-Ma'mūn to establish Mu'tazilism as the state doctrine,<sup>27</sup> although al-Jahm b. Ṣafwān had been the first to declare the createdness of the Qur'ān.<sup>28</sup>

Ibn Qutaybah wrote *al-Ikhtilāf fī al-Lafz* after the time of the *miḥnah*, when the conflict between Sunnīs and Mu'tazilites took place regarding the creation of the Qur'ān. However, he discusses this subject in this book during his refutation of the Jahmiyya's claims and innovations. Many other views existed, every sect supporting its opinion with arguments and claiming to be in the right, but it is not possible to study everything related to this question here, and it is not our intention to study

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<sup>26</sup> In *al-Ikhtilāf fī al-Lafz* Ibn Qutaybah mentions some sects such as the Jahmiyya, Mushabbiha, Qadariyya and Shi'ites (also known as Rāfiḍah).

<sup>27</sup> This continued to be adopted by the following Caliphs al-Mu'taṣim and al-Wāthiq and was ended by al-Mutawakkil as we have mentioned in Ch. 1, section: 1.1.3.

<sup>28</sup> See *al-Madkhal ilā Madhhab al-Imām Aḥmad*, p. 10; *al-Ikhtilāf fī al-Lafz*, pp. 68-9 where both Ibn Qutaybah and the editor attribute this matter to Jahm, though after that it was developed by the Mu'tazilites and others; and *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, pp. 64-6.

anything other than Qur'ānic subjects and what is necessary for understanding them. Thus, it may be sufficient to discuss the views of the Sunnīs and the Jahmiyya, which is the main subject of this book.<sup>29</sup>

It is appropriate here to quote Ibn Qutaybah's discussion of this subject:

They (the Jahmiyya) also said that God's speech is created, because He says: [Lo! We have appointed (*ja'alnāh*) it a Lecture (Qur'ān), in Arabic; 43/3], and the word *ja'l* means "*khalq* (creation)"; and also because God says: [Never cometh there unto them a new (*muḥdath*) reminder from their Lord...; 21/2], although every new thing is created. Also the meaning of (*kallama Allāhu* = Allāh spoke to) means that He founded (*awjada*) a speech, thus the verse [*kallama Allāhu Mūsā taklīmā* (and Allāh spoke directly unto Moses; 4/164)] means that He founded a speech which was heard by Moses. Then, by such interpretations they went beyond the scope of the language and logic, because the meaning of *takallama Allāh* is "to bring a speech from His own", just as *tarraḥama Allāh* means He brought mercy from His own...etc, and thus if it is intended to be (*awjada kalāman* = created a speech), then it should not be "*takallama*" but "*aklama*", as it is said "*aqbaha al-rajul* (did infamous deeds)"..., thus it should be "*aklama Allāhu Mūsā iklāmā*)....<sup>30</sup>

After discussing the Arab's use of "*lisān*" instead of "*kalām*" Ibn Qutaybah continues his refutation of the Jahmiyya's claims:

As for their interpretation that (*ja'l*) in verse [43/3] above indicates the creation of the Qur'ān, we reply that (*ja'l*) comes in two meanings, one of them being to mean "creation" and the other something other than creation. It means creation when the verb "*ja'ala*" is used with a single object, such as God's saying [...Who hath created the heavens and the earth, and hath appointed (*ja'ala*) darkness and light; 6/1]; in this position it means "*khalaqa* (created)", also in the verse [He created you from one being, then from that (being) He made (*ja'ala*) its mate; 39/6] to mean "created from it...". As for the second case, it occurs when it is used with two objects, as His saying [...*wa qad ja'altum Allāh 'alaykum kafīla* (and after ye have made Allāh surety over you); 16/91] to mean "*ṣayyartum* (made)", and as [*fa ja'alnāhā nakāla limā bayn yadayhā wa mā khalfahā* (And We made it an example to their own and to succeeding generations); 2/66]....<sup>31</sup> Thus, if they find in the Qur'ān that "*ja'ala*" is used with the Qur'ān as its sole object in order to indicate its creation, then we shall follow them.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Because other sects depend on the Jahmiyya in their doctrine, and therefore this study may be regarded as a model for this subject in general.

<sup>30</sup> *Al-Ikhtilāf fi al-Lafz*, pp. 25-6.

<sup>31</sup> The underlined words are the objects.

<sup>32</sup> From this quotation we can note that Ibn Qutaybah regards this as a challenge which cannot be met.

Likewise the word "*muḥdath*";<sup>33</sup> it does not mean created anywhere. If they deny this then let them say about the verse [...it may be that Allāh will afterword bring (*yuhdith*) some new thing to pass; 65/1] that He creates (*yakhlūq*) some new thing..., and likewise the verse [...that peradventure they may keep from evil or that it may cause (*yuhdith*) them to take heed; 20/113]; but the meaning is to renew to them what they did not know....<sup>34</sup>

Ibn Qutaybah also studies this subject in *Mukhtaliḥ al-Ḥadīth*, where he refutes the claim that the Qur'ān is created, because it is God's speech, and God's speech is from Him, and nothing of God (Himself) is created.<sup>35</sup>

He also throws light on this subject in his *al-Masā'il wa-al-Ajwibah*, when a question is directed to him concerning the verse: [That it is (the Qur'ān) indeed the speech of an illustrious messenger; 69/40], and they say that the messenger's speech is created, thus the Qur'ān is created. Ibn Qutaybah replies that here there is an omitted speech, that indeed it is the speech of the messenger, but it is from his Lord and not his own (*innahu la qawl rasūl karīm - 'an rabbih-*).<sup>36</sup>

### 7.2.2. The dispute on whether the utterance (*lafz*) of the Qur'ān is created or not:

At the beginning of *al-Ikhtilāf fī al-Lafz*, Ibn Qutaybah explains the main reason behind his writing it, and says that the final matter of dispute is a matter which

<sup>33</sup> This refers to verse [21/2] mentioned above.

<sup>34</sup> *Al-Ikhtilāf fī al-Lafz*, pp. 27-8. See also *Mukhtaliḥ al-Ḥadīth*. Of course there are many other arguments from the two groups, for further details see *al-Fiqh al-Akbar* with its commentary, pp. 24-30; *al-Madkhal ilā Madhhab al-Imām Aḥmad*, pp. 10-3; *Kitāb al-Luma' fī al-Radd 'alā Ahl al-Zaygh wa-al-Bida'*, by Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī, ed by Ḥ. Gharābah, (Maṭba'at Miṣr, Cairo, 1955), pp. 33-8; *al-Ibānah 'an Uṣūl al-Diyānah*, by Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī, trans and ed by W.C. Klein, (American Oriental Society, New Haven, U.S.A, 1940), pp. 66-75; *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, 13/452-55, where Ibn Ḥajar details this issue and mentions the different views of it, and p. 494; and *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, pp. 76-7. As for the Mu'tazilites' doctrine, see *Mutashābih al-Qur'ān*, by al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, pp. 389, 488 and other places.

<sup>35</sup> See pp. 310-2. We also should bear in mind that Ibn Qutaybah discusses God's speech from another angle, when he discusses *majāz* and refutes the claim that God's speech is not real speech but it is a kind of inspiration (*ilhām*) or is the foundation of the speech, see *al-Mushkil*, pp. 106-15; see also section 4.3.

<sup>36</sup> See p. 253.

concerns "*Aṣḥāb al-Ḥadīth*".<sup>37</sup> He gives some of the good qualities by which they are distinguished from other sects till the devil deceived them (*kādahum*) in a matter which God does not make a fundamental issue in religion, nor a branch of it; rather there is an excuse (*sa'ah*) for ignoring it and a virtue in knowing it. Unfortunately, it became a great evil which eventually divided their society and dissolved their unity..., after which he says that he saw the scholars' avoidance of speaking on this matter at its beginning, and neglecting to give the cure for it when it started..., a situation where he cannot find any excuse for abandoning what God made a duty upon him, since because of the extra knowledge which God has granted him he regards himself as capable of and responsible for doing so, as this matter has become widespread and dreadful. Thus he promises to clarify it.<sup>38</sup>

Having established that the Qur'ān is not created, and answered some claims and misapprehensions concerning God's attributes, Ibn Qutaybah has reached the point which he seeks. Because of the length of his discussion, we shall summarize as follows:

1. The main aim of writing this book concerns the dispute between the ancients over the utterance of the Qur'ān, and the unbelief of which this dispute led them to accuse one another, this despite their agreement that the Qur'ān is God's speech and not created.<sup>39</sup>
2. Their main dispute was over something which they did not understand, because of its ambiguity and their lack of the capability which is necessary for such ambiguous problems to be solved.<sup>40</sup>
3. He gives some examples of the way in which the Jahmiyya misunderstood this matter; e.g, some thought that "*qirā'ah*" could mean "Qur'ān" because if someone

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<sup>37</sup> By this he means the ancient authorities (*al-salaf*).

<sup>38</sup> See pp. 9-11.

<sup>39</sup> See p. 50.

<sup>40</sup> See pp. 50-2.

hears the *qirā'ah* then this means that he hears a Qur'ān. And some scholars hold that the infinitives "*qirā'ah*" and "Qur'ān" have the same meaning, and thus they thought that the *qirā'ah* is also not created, as is the Qur'ān. Another group thought that *qirā'ah* is an act, because there is a reward to those who recite it, and also some merit between recitations. Thus it is clear that this is an act which is different from the Qur'ān, and whoever says that it is not created, then he must say that people's doings are not created.<sup>41</sup>

4. Following on from the last point, Ibn Qutaybah says that when this occurred, people referred to their scholars, but the scholars themselves gave different accounts, such as those mentioned above, while another opinion holds that this is an innovation which people did not speak about nor deal with in the past.<sup>42</sup>

5. After that Ibn Qutaybah gives a clear account of Ibn Ḥanbal's opinion on this subject, saying that there are various views attributed to him (Ibn Ḥanbal), which are unquestionably false, for example that he said: "Anyone who claims that *qirā'ah* is created then he is a Jahmī, and the Jahmī is a *kāfir* (disbeliever), and anyone who claims that it is not created then he is an innovator, and every innovation is error (*kullu bid'a ḍalālah*). Ibn Qutaybah replies: how could Ibn Ḥanbal say such words when we know that the truth cannot be something other than one of the two cases, since otherwise the truth will be thrown into disbelief or error?"<sup>43</sup>

6. Ibn Qutaybah next turns to those who adopted a negative position, in that they kept silent and ignored this *fitnah* (sedition). Their attitude may have been right before the spread of this *fitnah*, but the ignorant will not keep silent even if the scholars do so. Ibn Qutaybah goes on to blame those scholars, since they had a good model from earlier scholars, when Jahm spoke about the Qur'ān; at that time none said that this is

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<sup>41</sup> See p. 52.

<sup>42</sup> See pp. 52-3.

<sup>43</sup> See pp. 53-5. In fact Ibn Ḥanbal intends to prohibit people from discussing such matters from the beginning, although he knows the true meaning.

an innovation in which people should not become involved, but rather they made every effort to establish certainty in place of doubt and confusion, until the consensus was reached that it is not created; after which they delivered a formal legal opinion, and attempted to discover evidences from the Qur'ān.<sup>44</sup>

7. Commenting on the attitude of those who go no further than giving their decision that it is an innovation, he replies that people should refer to the scholars concerning such innovations and not traditional things which are well known, and thus we cannot oppose utterance by silence, or doubt by standing aside. In fact falsehood becomes strong when we see it and then ignore it, and we may regard those who stop at the utterance of the Qur'ān as being similar to those who did not say whether the Qur'ān is created or not, and whom some scholars charged with unbelief.<sup>45</sup>

8. After this Ibn Qutaybah gives his own opinion on this significant issue, saying that the equitable verdict on their differences concerning the utterance of the Qur'ān is that *qirā'ah* is an expression which includes two meanings, one of them 'amal (doing or action), and the other "Qur'ān", but the doing cannot be distinguished from the Qur'ān as (for instance) the eating can be distinguished from the eaten thing, where the eaten thing is the chewed and swallowed, while eating (*al-akl*) is the chewing and the swallowing. The Qur'ān cannot exist by itself alone (*lā yaqūm bi nafsih waḥdah*) as the eaten thing (which can exist by itself). The Qur'ān can exist by one of four things: writing, recitation, memorization and hearing. Thus by the action of writing it exists; the action is a line or stroke (*khaṭṭ*), which is *makhlūq* (created), but on the other hand the written thing is Qur'ān which is not created. He gives similar arguments for the other three cases, followed by some examples.<sup>46</sup>

9. After that he discusses some specific points. Thus he says: "If anyone says: what do you say about recitation? We reply that it is a Qur'ān which is connected with

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<sup>44</sup> See pp. 55-9.

<sup>45</sup> See pp. 59-61.

<sup>46</sup> See pp. 63-5.

doing. If he says: is it created or not? We reply that you have questioned us concerning one expression which has two meanings, one of them being created (i.e. the doing) and the other not created (i.e. the thing which is recited = the Qur'ān)."<sup>47</sup>

10. Going on to a very interesting example, Ibn Qutaybah compares the utterance to a firebrand which has two qualities at the same time, i.e. a body and a fire, or to a star which is a light and a fire at the same time.<sup>48</sup>

As a result of the above, we can say that this book can be regarded as one of Ibn Qutaybah's contributions to both theological and Qur'ānic studies, especially when we bear in mind that Ibn Qutaybah is the first scholar to undertake such a detailed discussion. In fact many scholars have adopted Ibn Qutaybah's views, especially Ibn Taymiyyah and al-Bayhaqī, who were influenced by this book.<sup>49</sup>

### 7.3. 'IṢMAT AL-ANBIYĀ' (THE PROPHETS' INFALLIBILITY):

Ibn Qutaybah discusses this issue in *al-Mushkil* during his explanation of some verses which were claimed to be in an odd style; and discusses it in general terms, where he talks about the stories of Abraham and Jonah. During his discussion of the latter story he comments on the stories of Adam and Joseph.

First of all, we may start with the different opinions on this matter in general. Briefly we can say that there are three views of it, which are:

a. That it is possible for the Prophets to commit great sins, this being attributed to some Kharijites.

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<sup>47</sup> P. 65.

<sup>48</sup> See pp. 65-6.

<sup>49</sup> See *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, 17/34-5, where Ibn Taymiyyah regards Ibn Qutaybah as the first scholar to clarify this particular issue, and also quotes many of his arguments; and *al-Asmā' wa-al-Ṣifāt*, pp. 258-69, where al-Bayhaqī explains the difference between the utterance and the uttered thing which is the Qur'ān.



b. That Prophets are preserved from doing any sin, either great or light, and thus it is impossible for them to fall into any error or even to forget; this is attributed to Mu'tazilites and Shi'ites.<sup>50</sup>

c. That the Prophets are preserved from doing great sins, disbelief, and from everything connected with conveying their message. Those who hold this view add that they are also preserved from some venial sins. As for other venial sins, forgetfulness and inattention, they may do them, but nevertheless, they are not fixed in any error, and if they commit any sin or error they immediately repent, and God corrects their error through the revelation; this is the Sunni's opinion.<sup>51</sup>

Ibn Qutaybah supports the third opinion, or rather his full discussion leads us to say that he may be among the first scholars to confirm it, which can easily be noticed from his discussion.

Let us now throw some light on Ibn Qutaybah's discussion of some sections of the stories of the Prophets mentioned above:<sup>52</sup>

1. In respect of Abraham's story, Ibn Qutaybah quotes the verses:

When the night grew dark upon him (Abraham) he beheld a star. He said: This is my Lord. But when it set, he said: I love not things that set. And when he saw the moon uprising, he exclaimed: This is my Lord. But when it set, he said: Unless my Lord guide me, I surely shall become one of the folk who are astray. And when he saw the sun uprising, he cried: This is my Lord! This is greater! And when it set he exclaimed: O my people! Lo! I am free from all that ye associate

<sup>50</sup> Shi'ites also say that this infallibility also applies to the Imāms as well since they regard them as having a greater position than the Angels and the Prophets, for more details see Muḥammad Abū Zahrah, *Tārīkh al-Madhāhib al-Islāmiyyah*, (Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, Beirut, s.d), 1/55-9; and al-Ḥibr Yūsuf Nūr-ad-Dā'im, *The Charge of Shi'ism Against At-Ṭabarī*, (A PhD thesis at Edinburgh University, 1969), pp. 58-65.

<sup>51</sup> See *al-Shifā' bi-Ta'rīf Huqūq al-Muṣṭafā*, by al-Qādī 'Iyād b. Musā al-Andalusī, ed by M.A.Q. 'Alī, (Maktabat al-Fārābī, Damascus, s.d), 2/327; *Minhāj al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah fī Naqd Kalām al-Shī'ah wa-al-Qadariyyah*, by Ibn Taymiyyah, (al-Maṭba'ah al-Amīriyyah, Būlāq, 1st ed, 1903), 1/130; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim bi Sharḥ al-Nawawī*, 15/124, 3/53; al-Qurṭubī, 1/308-9; *Iṣmat al-Anbiyā'*, by al-Rāzī, (Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, Beirut, 1st ed, 1981), pp. 26-8; and *al-Nubuwwa wa-al-Anbiyā'*, by Muḥammad 'Alī al-Ṣābūnī, (Riyadh, 2nd ed, 1980), pp. 53-4, he also discusses whether the infallibility is before Prophecy or after it, giving two opinions on the subject.

<sup>52</sup> As we know, in the Qur'ān there are many stories, and not even a single story is mentioned in only one place except for the story of Joseph. Ibn Qutaybah discusses some sections of these stories where confusion or odd style is claimed to have occurred.

(with Him). Lo! I have turned my face toward Him Who created the heavens and the earth, as one by nature upright, and I am not of the idolaters; 6/76-9.

After this he explains the meaning of these verses, which we may summarise as being that Abraham was sent during a time of prediction and astrology, which is why Nimrūd<sup>53</sup> commanded all children to be killed at the time when Abraham was born, as the astrologists told him that there would be a new Prophet who would preach to people a different religion from his...

People used to respect and glorify the stars, thus Abraham did the same as his folk when they asked him to join them in one of their celebrations. However Abraham did not want to go with them, and thus he looked in the stars and said: "I am sick", (*fa nazara nazratan fī al-nujūm, fa qāl innī saqīm*), but in fact he looked in the astrology and not at the stars themselves, because God said; "*fī al-nujūm*" and not "*ilā al-nujūm*".

Ibn Qutaybah goes on to say that in fact Abraham intended to make his people imagine (*yūhim*) that he believed in what they believed and thus said: "I am sick". Indeed this was a clever way of avoiding going with them, as when he said: "*innī saqīm*", this meant "*sa asqam*" (i.e. from his look into the stars he knew that he would be sick in the future), and thus he could not go with them. Actually in this case he was not lying, but intended that everyone must be sick because of death, this being as God said in another verse: [*innaka mayyit wa innahum mayyitūn* (Lo! thou wilt die, and lo! they will die; 39/30)]. Thus when the night grew dark upon him and he said "this is my Lord", he intended to persuade (*istidrāj*) his folk by exposing their error; therefore he behaved as they did in order to build confidence with them, but when the star set he showed them that this quality does not apply to God, and he did the same with the moon and the sun, without any enmity with them till he said: "O my people! Lo! I am free from all that ye associate (with Him). Lo! I have turned my face

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<sup>53</sup> The name of the king at that time.

toward Him Who created the heavens and the earth, as one by nature upright, and I am not of the idolaters."

After that Ibn Qutaybah goes on to say: "some people say that Abraham at that stage was in doubt and disbelief", but then replies: how can we accept this of a Prophet who was prevented and purified by God (from the first moment of his creation), while God says (about him): [when he came unto his Lord with a whole heart; 37/84], which means that he never associated anything with Him. Thus Ibn Qutaybah maintains that this is what the exegetes or some of them have said, but also points out that God says before these verses: [Thus did We show Abraham the kingdom of the heavens and the earth that he might be of those possessing certainty; 6/75]; thus, he says, would you believe that after all of this he saw a star and said: this is my Lord, in real intention!?<sup>54</sup>

Thus we observe that he defends Abraham's position on two occasions. He rejects the imputation that he lied to his folk by saying "I am sick", and he employs rhetorical arguments, and then he refutes the claim that Abraham really was a disbeliever and in doubt, when the answer is given by the Qur'ān itself.

It seems that the second point supports the idea that the Prophets are prevented from doing great sins even before prophethood.

2. In his discussion of Jonah's story, Ibn Qutaybah quotes the verse: [And (mention) Dhū al-Nūn (Lord of the fish, i.e. Jonah), when he went off in anger (*idh dhahaba mughādiba*) and deemed that We had no power over him, but he cried out in the darkness, saying: There is no God save Thee. Be Thou Glorified! Lo! I have been a wrong-doer; 21/87]; then Ibn Qutaybah comments:

Most of the people find it strange to attribute sins to Prophets, (their belief) in infallibility causes them to oppose God's Book, and to

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<sup>54</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, pp. 335-8. See also al-Ṭabarī, 7/248-9, where he mentions the different opinions on these verses; al-Qurṭubī, 7/25-7, where in the course of his discussion he mentions Ibn Qutaybah's words; and *'Iṣmat al-Anbiyā'*, pp. 49-50, where al-Rāzī supports Ibn Qutaybah's opinion.

refuse its (obvious) interpretation, after which they look for further interpretations which are far away from the real meaning....<sup>55</sup>

After this Ibn Qutaybah gives examples of such strange interpretations from the stories of Adam and Joseph, quoting what they have said about [*dhahaba mughāḍiba*], that he *ghāḍaba qawmah* (went off in anger upon his folk) and not upon his Lord. He replies that if Jonah went off in anger upon his folk before their belief, then he did the right thing, but here some questions arise: Why did God blame him in the verse [And the fish swallowed him while he was blameworthy (*mulīm*); 37/142] since the word *mulīm* indicates that he did something in which he was blamed? Also, why did God exclude him from *ulū al-'azm min al-rusul* (the stout of heart among the messengers)<sup>56</sup> when He said to Muḥammad [But wait thou for thy Lord's decree, and be not like him of the fish, who cried out in despair; 68/48]? Ibn Qutaybah goes on to say that if this happened after they have believed, this will be more strange, since how can we believe that he became angry because of their belief when he was sent to them for this purpose?

Then Ibn Qutaybah gives the linguistic meaning of the word "*mughāḍib*", the most important thing concerning its meaning being that "*mughāḍib*" can apply to one side as well as to two (i.e. that anger should be between two persons or sides but can also be by one side only), and in this verse it applies to one side only, which is Jonah himself, so that we can explain the verse as meaning that when Jonah informed his folk that there would be a punishment upon them within a limited time, and then this time passed without there being any punishment, then Jonah was afraid that his folk would accuse him and blame him for lying, and thus he became angry and steadfastless, and wished that God's punishment would come because of their rejection and denying of his message. At that time he thought that God would not straiten him (as in the verse [But whenever He trieth him by straitening (*qadara*) his

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<sup>55</sup> *Al-Mushkil*, p. 402.

<sup>56</sup> Those are Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad (Peace be upon them all).

means of life...; 89/16]), and thus God punished him because of his anger and impatience....<sup>57</sup>

We see how Ibn Qutaybah explains the word "*naqdir*" as "to straiten" and not "to have power over",<sup>58</sup> and this is another point by which Ibn Qutaybah defends Jonah's position, in addition to seeking to establish that Jonah's anger was not directed against anyone, but arose from his own feelings.<sup>59</sup>

Thus once again we find Ibn Qutaybah employing arguments based on the Arabic language and reason to refute other opinions, and prove that Jonah sinned.

3. As for Adam, Ibn Qutaybah mentions a short passage from Sūra 20 as an example of people's wrong interpretations concerning the Prophets' infallibility; he quotes the verse [...And Adam disobeyed ('*aṣā*) his Lord, so went astray (*ghawā*); 20/21], then says that they thought that the word "*ghawā*" means that he ate excessively from the tree. Ibn Qutaybah replies that even if this is true, what are we to say about "'*aṣā*"? But, he says, we say that they have the same meaning, which refers to sin, and that whoever disobeys God will go astray....

After this Ibn Qutaybah explains that Adam ate from the tree from which he was prohibited to eat, but Iblīs urged him to eat from it, then he ate; nevertheless his sin was not intended or premeditated like disbelievers' sins, rather he disobeyed and went astray ('*aṣā* and *ghawā*) as God said. However we do not say "*ghāwin* or '*āṣin*",

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<sup>57</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, pp. 402-9. See also al-Ṭabarī, 17/77-8, and al-Qurṭubī, 11/329, where he mentions the different opinions on this subject, among them Ibn Qutaybah's opinion. Al-Qurṭubī maintains that Ibn Qutaybah strongly defends this opinion, and he himself supports it, he also mentions another opinion that Jonah *ghāḍaba* his folk for the sake of God, and gives evidences for it, though this does not contradict Ibn Qutaybah's opinion. On the other hand it is worth mentioning some of those who say that Jonah went off in anger at his folk, such as Abū Ḥayyān in *al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ*, 6/335 and Muḥammad 'Alī al-Ṣābūnī in *Ṣafwat al-Tafāsīr*, (Dār al-Qur'ān al-Karīm, Beirut, 4th ed, 1981), 2/273. And for more details about this story see '*Iṣmat al-Anbiyā*', pp. 114-6.

<sup>58</sup> Thus we note that Pickthall's translation above seems to be based on other views.

<sup>59</sup> See also *Ṣafwat al-Tafāsīr*, 2/273, where al-Ṣābūnī attributes this opinion to al-Rāzī and Abū Ḥayyān, though Ibn Qutaybah said it before them as we have seen.

using the active participle form which would mean that he always disobeys and goes astray.<sup>60</sup>

We here note the same points which were made in the previous stories, where Ibn Qutaybah justifies these sins after confirming that they were committed.

4. The last story concerns Joseph, where Ibn Qutaybah mentions a short section from *Sūrat Yūsif* for the same purpose as the previous example. He quotes the verse [She verily desired him (*hammat bihi*), and he would have desired her (*hamma bihā*) if it had not been that he saw the argument of his Lord; 12/24]. Ibn Qutaybah maintains that some people say that she desired him in *ma'ṣiyah* (disobedience) and he desired to escape from her or to strike her. He argues: although God says [if it had not been that he saw the argument of his Lord], how can we believe that he desired to escape from her or to strike her and when he saw the argument he stayed with her or stopped striking her? This is quite wrong; she did indeed desire him in deliberate disobedience, but he desired her by an external accident (*hamm 'ārid*) caused by her long temptation which led him to lust, a matter because of which most Prophets have committed their sins.

Ibn Qutaybah goes on to say that it was related in one Tradition that every Prophet made an error or was about to do it except John (Yaḥyā) the son of Zachariah, because he was chaste (*ḥaṣūr*), which means that he did not have the ability to lie with women.<sup>61</sup> He goes on to say that on the other hand the Prophets have never committed any *fāḥishah*,<sup>62</sup> because God chose them for prophethood.

To confirm this interpretation Ibn Qutaybah supports it with a subsequent verse where Joseph says: [I do not exculpate myself. Lo! the (human) soul enjoineeth unto evil...; 12/53], to show that he meant what he intended when the lust occurred, but that

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<sup>60</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, pp. 402-3. See also al-Qurṭubī, 11/255-7, where he quotes Ibn Qutaybah's words without mentioning him; and *Ṣafwat al-Tafāsīr*, 2/250.

<sup>61</sup> See *Musnad Aḥmad*, 4/80.

<sup>62</sup> A word which especially means adultery.

nevertheless God Has excused those who intended to commit a sin but did not do it....<sup>63</sup>

In fact, we can say that the main point regarding his discussion in general is that he explains the meanings of words logically and on the basis of grammar, but that this does not mean that he accuses the Prophets of something they did not do, or that he does not respect them. This is clear from what we have briefly mentioned above. Indeed, this is the most acceptable explanation of such sensitive subjects, and many scholars support such explanations offered by Ibn Qutaybah or adopt them as their own.<sup>64</sup>

#### 7.4. 'ADHĀB AL-QABR (THE PUNISHMENT OF THE GRAVE):

Ibn Qutaybah does not devote a special section to this issue, but we may mention some sections of *al-Mushkil*, where he depends on certain verses to produce evidence from the Qur'ān to support the existence and reality of this punishment.

During his refutation of certain accusations concerning contradictions and differences claimed to exist in some verses, Ibn Qutaybah discusses the verse [The fire; they are exposed to it morning and evening; 40/46]; he explains that this is not in the hereafter, rather it is for them after their death in their graves, and this, he says, is a clear evidence from the Qur'ān for this matter. Ibn Qutaybah goes on to say that this is because God says immediately after this verse [...and on the day when the Hour

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<sup>63</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, pp. 403-5. In fact Ibn Qutaybah also makes the same comments when he discusses the meaning of a Tradition concerning the Prophet Muḥammad's "magic" in *Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth*, see pp. 209-19. For further details about this verse see al-Ṭabarī, 12/184-9, where he chooses the opinion which says that Joseph was really about to commit a *fāḥisha*; *Mutashābih al-Qur'ān*, pp. 390-1; al-Qurṭubī, 9/165-9; and al-Ṣābūnī, 2/47, where he quote Ibn Qutaybah's words verbatim, but attributes them to al-Rāzī and Abū al-Su'ūd. On the other hand, Abū Ḥayyān rejects any explanation which maintains that Joseph was about to commit a *fāḥishah*, and goes on to say that there was no desire at all, because God said: [if it had not been that he saw the argument of his Lord], thus there was no desire, see *al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ*, 5/295.

<sup>64</sup> For example see *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, 4/319; *Minhāj al-Sunna al-Nabawiyyah*, 1/130; and al-Qurṭubī, 1/308-9.

upriseth (it is said): Cause Pharaoh's folk to enter the most awful doom; 40/46], thus they are in the *barzakh* (i.e. the time after death and before the resurrection).<sup>65</sup>

This is the first time he mentions the punishment of the grave, and it is clear that Ibn Qutaybah adopts the idea and defends it. We say this because on the other hand there are other opinions which express doubt about it, and claim that there is no clear evidence to support it from the Qur'ān.<sup>66</sup>

On other occasions, Ibn Qutaybah argues against those who misunderstand *majāz*, and subsequently deny magic, and most other invisible things, among them the punishment of the grave, the interrogation of the dead by the two angels known as Munkar and Nakīr, the martyrs' life with their Lord, and other matters concerned with charms....<sup>67</sup> After reviewing some of the Arabs' sayings and poetry regarding such things, he asks: is it strange for him who believes in the resurrection after death to believe also in the punishment of the grave, or: for him who believes that God speaks with people on the day of judgment to believe in a dialogue between angels and people? Yet the Prophet has told us about these.<sup>68</sup>

We see from this simple argument how Ibn Qutaybah depends on the Qur'ān and Sunna to support this particular belief, and we can regard this discussion as a model for the other similar questions mentioned above, in which some people do not believe, or at least cannot imagine them.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, p. 83.

<sup>66</sup> See *al-Ibānah*, where al-Ash'arī maintains that the Mu'tazilites deny the punishment of the grave, see p. 132. See also *Faṭḥ al-Bārī*, 3/183-92.

<sup>67</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, p. 116.

<sup>68</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, p. 130. For further details about this subject see *al-Fiqh al-Akbar*, pp. 89-92; al-Ṭabarī, 24/71-2; *al-Rūḥ*, by Ibn al-Qayyim, (Dār al-Fikr, Beirut, 1986), pp. 104-11; and al-Qurṭubī, 15/318-20.

<sup>69</sup> See *al-Mushkil*, pp. 120-3. See also *Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth*, pp. 175-9, where Ibn Qutaybah discusses the punishment of the grave, the martyrs' life and other matters.



These, then, are the most important points discussed by Ibn Qutaybah, though there are other subjects mainly connected with dogma, a matter with which we are not concerned here.

We have here explained his treatment of and opinions about certain theological-Qur'ānic subjects, where we note that he completely follows the Sunni doctrine, and defends its attitudes. On the other hand, he employs reason and logic in understanding them and refuting claims against them.

## CONCLUSIONS

Having completed our discussion of the most important points in Ibn Qutaybah's works on Qur'ānic studies, we can now formulate our conclusions concerning his contribution to this field of knowledge.

To begin with, we may say that our study has confirmed the view that Ibn Qutaybah is one of the outstanding encyclopaedic scholars; we have seen him writing on most fields of knowledge, employing every necessary tool in order to make his views clear. Sometimes his works were intended to achieve one particular aim, sometimes more, but in every case they correspond to the needs of the situation, and this is very clear for his works on Qur'ānic studies, such as *al-Mushkil*, *al-Gharīb*, *al-Ikhtilāf fī al-Lafz* and *al-Masā'il wa-al-Ajwibah*. Some scholars did not agree on Ibn Qutaybah's preeminence, but most scholars commend him and refute the accusations raised against him.

As we have seen, his Qur'ānic works in general in themselves form a great contribution to Qur'ānic studies, this depending on the fact that these works discuss certain subjects in detail for the first time. This is very clear in *al-Mushkil* and *al-Ikhtilāf fī al-Lafz*.

The science of the obscure and ambiguous verses in the Qur'ān was brought into great prominence by Ibn Qutaybah when he wrote *al-Mushkil*, in which work he analyses the most important points, such as the meaning of the terms *mushkil* and *mutashābih*, which, he says, are synonymous with darkness and doubtfulness. He describes the different types of ambiguous, which he suggests may be divided into the verbally ambiguous and the ambiguous in meaning, there being also different kinds of each, such as God's attributes, the mysterious letters which begin some sūras, the different meanings of some expressions, apparently contradictory verses, and the difficulty in understanding some expressions; and the different opinions on how to

deal with them. This leads him to study in detail one particular issue, concerning whether the firmly rooted scholars know the ambiguous or not; he answers this in the affirmative and explains his reasons clearly. Similarly he maintains that nothing of the Qur'ān is meaningless, but that some Qur'ānic matters are completely beyond the capability of humans to know their "how" or their hidden meanings, for example God's attributes and the reality of some aspects of the day of resurrection. And thus we can regard him as being among the first scholars to distinguish between the meaning of the thing and its reality.

Critics have made their accusations against the Qur'ān regarding many of its aspects, such as the ambiguous verses found in it, the differences in the readings of the Qur'ān, the claim that there is ungrammatical speech within it, the allegorical nature of much of its wording, and the claim that some verses have an odd style. There are clear accounts of every type throughout his Qur'ānic works, and he seems to be the first scholar to detail such criticisms and refute them classifying his answers to these accusations on the basis of the main subjects to which these criticisms refer.

Ibn Qutaybah combines both reasoning and traditional accounts (*ra'y* and *ma'thūr*) in his Qur'ānic works in a rational way, paying close attention to both. Thus he uses the Qur'ān itself, the Traditions and other sayings of the ancients, while at the same time he uses the different sciences of the Arabic language, the Qur'ānic sciences and other rational methods. However, the tools of the Arabic language dominate a great area of his attention, and he makes most use of them in his arguments, from which we can say that Ibn Qutaybah is first of all a philologist and a man of letters.

In addition, Ibn Qutaybah seems to be one of the creators of Baghdad school of grammar, or rather one of those responsible for its foundation, and this too can be regarded as one of his general contributions. Unfortunately, his syntactical works are lost. In philology, he is the first scholar to say that despite the different meanings of

certain words, they can be traced back to one origin; also he was very interested in the derivation of words, poetry, proverbs and other aspects of the Arabic language.

As for the figures of speech, Ibn Qutaybah seems to be the missing link in the history of their development, and he introduces them into most of his discussions, and indeed devotes a special detailed and classified study to them in *al-Mushkil*. Among the matters discussed are: a general introduction dealing with allegory, metaphor, reversal of meaning, ellipsis, abridgment, repetition, addition, metonymy, allusion, and the contrast between the outward expression and its meaning, something which distinguishes him from other scholars before and after him. The whole subject has been studied in detail, and this allows us to say that he has made an outstanding contribution to the field, especially when we take into account that such subjects are the pillars of *i'jāz al-Qur'ān*. The most important thing to draw attention to is that most of the accusations raised against the Qur'ān lie in the domain of this subject, and we can say that this is the reason for his long and detailed study of these figures of speech.

In the field of Qur'ānic readings, he has also made great contributions to many of its branches: He strongly supports and defends the opinion regarding the meaning of the 7 *ahruf* in the Qur'ān which says that they are 7 dialects distributed throughout the Qur'ān. Furthermore, he is the first scholar to discuss the different aspects between the readings of the Qur'ān; the general kinds of difference being *taghāyur* and *taḍādd* (diversity or multiplicity and opposite), of which the differences in the Qur'ānic readings lie in the first. He also gives a clear account of the reason for these different readings; whether the 7 dialects exist in the Qur'ān or not, where we have maintained that neither all of them nor a specific one existed, but that some of them exist; and he refutes accusations that certain copies of the Qur'ān may have been longer or shorter, or that ungrammatical speech can be observed in some of its verses. Then he lays down the conditions for accepted readings, laying special emphasis on one of them

which says that the reading must apply to the written form of the Qur'ān, on which the Companions have agreed. Perhaps there was more in his book *al-Qirā'āt*, which, despite his clear indications that he wrote and completed it, seems to be no longer extant.

Ibn Qutaybah's general interest in the Qur'ānic sciences led him to pay some effort to clarifying certain issues connected with them. He pays particular attention to the mysterious letters which begin some sūras of the Qur'ān, and refutes the opinion which says that they are a type of ambiguity, giving different possible meanings for them. One of these opinions eventually developed into the opinion which says that they are intended to complete the challenge put for mankind and jinn to produce a *sūra* like it. He was also concerned with the translation of the Qur'ān, maintaining that to translate it literally is impossible; this was the first step in this subject which allowed later scholars to develop it to its greatest extent. As for abrogation, his indirect discussion of it leads to the opinion that it is found in the Qur'ān, although it is limited and not widespread as many other scholars have thought. Other subjects with which he was concerned are the Meccan and Medinan sūras in the Qur'ān, and the reasons for certain revelations. We can say that his information corresponds to what latter scholars have said in their specialist books on these subjects..

As for theology and his opinion regarding it, he generally follows the ancients' views, but nevertheless he sometimes has his own opinion, this being very clear in his discussion of the ambiguous verses of the Qur'ān, and some of God's attributes. In general we find that Ibn Qutaybah distinguishes between the meaning of the thing and its reality, and this approach was strongly taken up by other scholars. Other issues in which he was concerned are the claims regarding the creation of the Qur'ān and its utterance, the first raised by al-Jahm b. Ṣafwān and was later adopted by Mu'tazilites and other Islamic sects; while as for the utterance of the Qur'ān, this issue was found among Sunnīs themselves and created disputes between them. He gives clear

accounts of both subjects in *al-Ikhtilāf fī al-Lafz*, and in fact the second issue can be regarded as one of Ibn Qutaybah's theological-Qur'ānic contributions. Furthermore, in this field, he contributes to the subject of the Prophets' infallibility, discussing some examples and rejecting some ideas which say that it is impossible for them to commit sins.

Finally, it is his methodology of brevity and careful arrangement, which distinguishes him from other scholars, previous, contemporary and later.

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