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Muʿtazilism and *Ḥalq al-Qurʾān* and *Lingua Sacra*: The Qurʾānic Arabic Text as a Challenge in Early Islam

Introduction: The Question of the Created Creating Medium

During the 3rd/9th century, the discussion among Muslim scholars overheated over whether the Qurʾān is created or uncreated; is eternal or contingent. The supporters of each opinion equally believed that, before the existence of the written *muṣḥaf*, God has eternal words/speech (*kalām*) called ‘the Qurʾān’. They both conceded that God’s *kalām* (Qurʾān) is eternal and it is part and parcel of God’s eternity before any other existence. However, the clash circled around a differentiation between those who believe in ‘a created pre-existent Qurʾān’ and those who emphasize ‘an uncreated pre-existent Qurʾān’.¹ Both sides embraced the ‘pre-existence’ idea, yet one suggested that there *was a time* when the Qurʾān did not pre-exist (it is contingent), while the other argued that there *was no time* when the Qurʾān did not pre-exist (it is eternal). On the side of the ‘uncreated pre-existence’ option stood Ibn Ḥanbal, some Aṣʿarites, and Ibn Ḥazm. Whereas, on the side of the ‘created pre-existence’ idea stood the Muʿtazilites and their diversified elaborations on the matter.

In his attention to the Muʿtazilites’ take on the createdness argument, Harry Wolfson pauses at a saying attributed to the Muʿtazilites and was invoked by Ibn Ḥazm. According to the latter, the Muʿtazilites explained how God usually brings His words (*kalām*) into existence (creates them!) by means of a mediatorial, sort-of calculated action, and they back this explanation by pointing to the example of God’s communicating with Moses by means of a word God created and divulged from a burning bush. Commenting on this logic as transmitted by Ibn Ḥazm, Wolfson states that what is evidently meant by such an idea (if one of the Muʿtazilites truly articulated it) is “that the word of God in the sense of the Qurʾān was created in some created thing, just as the word of God spoken to Moses was created in a bush. But what was that created thing in which the Qurʾān was created? We are not told”.²

¹ Harry A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalām*, (Cambridge, USA/London, UK: Harvard University Press, 1976), pp. 240ff.

² H. A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalām*, pp. 266-267.

Wolfson chases after what that created thing was, and he searches for a possible data about it in extant sayings from the Mu‘tazilites’ legacy. To fulfill this goal, he resorts to al-Aš‘arī’s text, *Maqālāt al-Īslāmiyyīn wa-Iḥtilāf al-Muṣallīn* (The Muslims’ Discourses and the Discrepancies among the Worshippers). He pauses there at the data recorded on the Mu‘tazilite views of Ja‘far b. Ḥarb, Ja‘far b. Muḃaššir, and Abū al-Huḃayl al-‘Allāf.³ In the transmitted sayings of these three figures, Wolfson detects a suggestion that the created medium, by means of which the Qur’ān was brought into being, is ‘*al-laṭīḃ al-mahfūz*’ (the preserved tablet). This meant that these Mu‘tazilites deemed the Qur’ān the created, contingent text that is arranged of words and letters, whose role is to mediate the pre-existent words of God that exist eternally in a pre-existing, yet created and preserved tablet.⁴ Since the created thing, in which the Qur’ān was created, is heard, memorized and written, it is, then, just “an imitation (*ḥikāya*) of the pre-existent Qur’ān [in the preserved tablet]...and this imitation is the act of the writer and reciter and memorizer”.⁵

Wolfson’s pondering of the Mu‘tazilites’ attempt at specifying the mediating created means, in which the Qur’ān was created, invites us to detect the Mu‘tazilites’ attention to the mediatorial role played by the human agent (through writing, memorizing or reciting), and to ponder its influence on determining the nature and value of the Qur’ān, let alone inviting us to acknowledge the primary role the human linguistic agency (i.e. the agency of Arabic language) plays as that mediating, contingent means in which the Qur’ān was created. Upon looking at the Qur’ānic studies during the early Islamic era and beyond, the reader realizes a highlighting of the role of Arabic language and a stress on the belief in its sacred, miraculous nature, specifically in relation to the Qur’ānic textual attestation. One gleans the impression that such attention to the textual Arabic language and its sacred status was one of the primary arguments in these literatures. Focusing on the Arabic language as the *lingua sacra* that mediates the eternal words of God might be the untold mediating factor, which Harry Wolfson tried to find in the Mu‘tazilites’ suggestion that there is a created thing that God uses to create the Qur’ān and to imitate (*ḥaka*) his eternal words through the Arabic words of this created text.

If this could be the case, one is motivated to ask whether this *lingua sacra* conviction is connected, by any logical, theological, and contextual means possible, to the Mu‘tazilites’ conviction that the Qur’ān, after all, is nothing but a created/contingent text. Scholars have so far been occupied with how the early Muslim historiographers account for the ramifications of the caliph al-Ma‘mūn’s adoption of the ‘*ḥalq al-Qur’ān*’ (the createdness of the Qur’ān) belief and imposing it over the caliphate, and the ideas, which the Mu‘tazilites and some *muḃaddithūn*, like Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, exchanged in their debates over this teaching. However, what we do not exactly have a sufficient investigation on yet is related to the primary, motivating reasons that

³ H. A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalām*, pp. 267ff.

⁴ H. A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalām*, p. 268.

⁵ H. A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalām*, p. 269.

drove the Mu‘tazilites to develop such a theological doctrine in the first place. Figuring this out requires attentive interrogation after the broader intellectual and contextual factors that could have driven the Mu‘tazilites to believe that the ‘createdness of the Qur’ān’ idea would speak positively to the broader public, and it would resonate with what this public seeks to understand and deal with (given the fact that no one would conjure a public religious teaching for the hobby of deliberately provoking or challenging the public and stand in enmity with them).

In this essay, therefore, I attempt at pursuing an investigation after possible answers to the question of the historical and contextual reasons behind the Mu‘tazilites’ leaning toward the belief in the createdness of the Qur’ān. I shall search for an answer to the question: What could be the challenge or the problem related to the Qur’ānic texts, which the Mu‘tazilites thought that the teaching of ‘the createdness of the Qur’ān’ would sort-out or respond to? I attempt to pursue this by, first, pausing at the stances of some main Qur’ānic studies from early Islam. Investigating this literature is something scholars today hardly opt for when they try to unpack the roots and ramifications of the Mu‘tazilites’ belief in ‘the createdness of the Qur’ān’ teaching. I believe that, in these Muslim texts, one finds a stance on the Arabic linguistic nature of the Qur’ān, paired with an endeavor to deal with the problems, ambiguities, and challenges which the Arabic wordings of the Qur’ān cause for the Muslim readers, reciters, hearers, and memorizers. The authors of these old Qur’ānic studies do not touch directly upon the createdness of the Arabic Qur’ānic text. They, deal more attentively, instead, with the *lingua sacra* belief in relation to the Qur’ān’s linguistic nature.⁶ I shall be seeing how such a textual-linguistic discussion corresponds and correlates with the Mu‘tazilites’ stance on ‘the createdness of the Qur’ān.’ Before delving into the Qur’ānic studies of these Muslim traditionalists’ stance on *lingua sacra* and then into the Mu‘tazilites’ stance on ‘*ḥalq al-Qur’ān*’, I will pause shortly at the historical context of the famous ‘*Mihna*’ (crisis) situation during the rule of the caliph al-Ma’mūn. I pause at this moment because it represents one of the central contextual frameworks of the controversy within the Muslim intellectual circles over the issues of *lingua sacra* and ‘*ḥalq al-Qur’ān*’ alike.

Once Upon a Crisis in Baghdad

The extant Muslim historiographical and theological texts report frequently about the so-called ‘Qur’ān’s ordeal,’ and they inform us that this affliction circled around an intellectual and

⁶ This essay is not on the ‘*lingua sacra*’ concept as such, nor about the historical process that generated it. I deal with these aspects elsewhere, particularly my forthcoming, “From ‘*Lingua Graphica*’ into ‘*Lingua Sacra*’: When Arabic Language Became the *Lingua Franca* of the Early Islamic Centuries,” which will be published in an anthology from Routledge in 2026.

theological divisiveness over whether the Qur'ān is created/contingent or uncreated/eternal. They all similarly maintain that this crisis perpetrated dire, afflictive tribulation in the early Abbasid era. In his book, *Ṭabaqāt al-Mu'tazila* (The Mu'tazilites' Strata), Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā b. al-Murtaḍā (d. 1437 A.D.) narrates that a *muḡādala* (debate) over the createdness of the Qur'ān occurred in the court of the caliph al-Mu'taṣim between the Mu'tazilite, Ibn Abī Dū'ād, and the traditionalist, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal. Ibn al-Murtaḍā's account confirms the prevalence of Ibn Dū'ād's 'createdness/contingency' argument over Ibn Ḥanbal's 'uncreatedness/eternity' defense, and it reports the caliph's order of punishing Ibn Ḥanbal for his failure and flagellating him with sixty-eight lashes, before making him, afterwards, confess that the Qur'ān is created/contingent.⁷

We do have also another extant text reporting a *muḡādala* over '*ḥalq al-Qur'ān*'. This debate took place this time in the court, and under the moderation, of the caliph al-Ma'mūn, and it occurred between the Jewish Mu'tazilite (Jahmite) who converted to Islam, Biṣr b. Ghayyāt al-Marīsī, and the Muslim orthodox scholar, 'Abdul'azīz b. Yaḥyā b. Muslim b. Maymūn al-Kinānī al-Makkī. The extant account of this debate is written by the Sunnite orthodox *mutakallim*. Therefore, it bluntly praises its author's point of view and its formidable accuracy, and it explicitly declares the triumph of the 'uncreatedness/eternity' belief over the 'createdness/contingency' discourse. This text narrates that, rather than being punished by the caliph, al-Ma'mūn praises al-Makkī's solid argument that the Qur'ān is uncreated and is the eternal divine words of God. The Caliph, the text suggests, endorsed al-Makkī's suggestion that the Qur'ān's Arabic text delineates its eternal uncreatedness vis-à-vis the *suras*' literally lucid and explicit meanings that need no interpretation or exegesis. This report then relates that the Caliph rewarded al-Makkī with thousand Dinars, and he categorically rebuked al-Marīsī for his total failure in defending the belief in the createdness of the Qur'ān.⁸

According to Muḥammad b. Jarīr at-Ṭabarī (d. 923 A.D.), a crisis (*Miḥna*) was generated by a debate over the createdness of the Religious Book, when the caliph al-Ma'mūn – who is known with his avid passion towards the Mu'tazilite teaching – sent a letter from his residence in Raqqa city to Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm, the Head of Security in Baghdad, ordering him to interrogate all the jurists (*quḍāt*) and *muhaddithin* (*Ḥadīth* scholars) and examine their stance on the belief in the createdness of the Qur'ān and its contingent origination (*ḥalq al-Qur'ān wa-ihdātih*).

⁷ Aḥmad Yaḥyā b. al-Murtaḍā, *Ṭabaqāt al-Mu'tazila* (The Mu'tazilites' Strata), Susanna Diwald-Wilzer (ed.), (Beirut & Wiesbaden: Franz Schöner Verlag, 1961), Vol. 2, pp. 123-125. The narrative of this debate before al-Mu'taṣim is also conveyed by 'Amr b. Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ in one of his letters: al-Jāḥiẓ, "Ḥalq al-Qur'ān" (The Creating of the Qur'ān), in *Rasā'il al-Jāḥiẓ* (al-Jāḥiẓ's Letters), 'Abdulsalām Ḥārūn (ed.), (Cairo: Ḥānī Bookshop, n. d.), pp. 283-300, pp. 292-296.

⁸ 'Abdul'azīz b. Yaḥyā b. Muslim b. Maymūn al-Kinānī al-Makkī, *al-Ḥayda wal-Itibār fī al-Radd 'alā Man Qāla bi-Ḥalq al-Qur'ān* (Digressive Apology in Response to those Who Said the Qur'ān is Created), 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. Nāṣir al-Fiqhī (ed.), (Madina, KSA: al-'Ulūm wal-Ḥikam Bookshop, 2002).

The Caliph eventually asked his officer to emancipate those who complies with the createdness teaching and to allow them to teach religion to the public, and to detain those who call for the uncreatedness belief and prohibit them from contacting the public.⁹ Aṭ-Ṭabarī goes so far as reporting that al-Ma'mūn ordered Ishāq to send a number of scholars from Baghdad up to Raqqa in order for the Caliph to interrogate them personally.¹⁰ In his explanation of the theological problem that lies in the public belief in the uncreatedness/eternity of the Qur'ān, according to aṭ-Ṭabarī's report, the caliph al-Ma'mūn relates that the people started to exchange wrong ideas about God and to equate the divine reality of God with the creaturely things, making God and His creation co-eternal and equal:

وقد عرف أمير المؤمنين أنَّ الجمهور الأعظم والسواد الأكبر من حشو الرعية وسفلة العامة...أهل جهالة بالله...[قاصرين عن] أن يقدرُوا الله حقَّ قدره ويعرفون كنه معرفته ويفرقوا بينه وبين خلقه... وذلك أنَّهم ساووا بين الله تبارك وتعالى وبين ما أنزل من القرآن، فأطبقوا مجتمعين واتَّفَقُوا غير متعاجمين على أنه قديم أول لم يخلقه الله ويحدثه ويخترعه، وقد قال الله عزَّ وجلَّ في مُحْكَمِ كِتَابِهِ... "إِنَّا جَعَلْنَاهُ قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا، فكلُّ ما جَعَلَهُ اللهُ فقد خلقه.

It has been brought to the attention of the prince of the believers that the public predominant majority of the subjects' orators and the lowly commoners...are ignorant about God...incapable of appreciating God accurately and of perceiving Him profoundly and of distinguishing Him from His creatures...for, they equalized God, be blessed and glorified, to the Qur'ān that He descended, consensually conceding and monolithically concurring that [the Qur'ān] is eternal and *a priori*, uncreated, unoriginated, and uncaused by God. Whereas, God, be blessed and glorified, stated in one of His Book's crystal-clear verses... 'we have made it an Arabic Qur'ān' (az-Zuḥruf 43:3], so whatever God made, God Has created.¹¹

The theological logic of al-Ma'mūn's support of the createdness of the Qur'ān is symptomatic of a typical Mu'tazilite reasoning. The almost exact argument was echoed by Biṣr al-Marīṣī in al-Makkī's account on their debate. Al-Marīṣī similarly cites from *surat az-Zuḥruf*, the very same verse al-Ma'mūn personally jots down in his letter to Ishāq: *innā ja'alnahu Qur'ānan 'Arabīyyan*.¹²

Another traditionalist response to the belief in the createdness of the Qur'ān by means of referring to verse 3 in *Surat az-Zuḥruf* is also developed by the orthodox scholar, 'Abdullah b. Muslim Ibn Qutayba. This is what Ibn Qutayba attends to in the section titled "Response to Those Who Say the Qur'ān is Created" (*Al-Radd 'alā al-Qā'ilīn bi-ḥalq al-Qur'ān*), in his book,

⁹ Muḥammad b. Jarīr aṭ-Ṭabarī, *Tārīḥ al-Rusul wal-Mulūk* (The History of the Messengers and the Kings), Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ībrāhīm (ed.), (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif al-Maṣriyya, 1980), VIII: 531-534.

¹⁰ aṭ-Ṭabarī, *Tārīḥ al-Rusul wal-Mulūk*, VIII: 534.

¹¹ aṭ-Ṭabarī, *Tārīḥ al-Rusul wal-Mulūk*, VIII: 532.

¹² al-Makkī, *al-Hayda wal-Ītibār*, II: 59.

Al-Iḥtilāf fī al-Lafẓ wal-Radd ‘alā al-Jahmiyya wal-Mušbiha (The Discrepancies of Pronunciation and the Response to the Jahmites and the Anthropomorphists). There, Ibn Qutayba relies on an argument similar to the one made by ‘Abdul‘azīz al-Makkī, and he stipulates that the word ‘ja‘ala’ (made) is etymologically different from ‘ḥalaqa’ (created) in Arabic language.¹³ Back in his *al-Ḥayda wal-Ītibār fī al-Radd ‘alā Man Qala bi-Ḥalq al-Qur’ān* (Digressive Apology in Response to those Who Said the Qur’ān is Created), his own (most probably partial) personal account on this debate, al-Makkī reports his success in explaining the very same Qur’ānic verse and in refuting the Mu‘tazilites’ scriptural backing of ‘ḥalq al-Qur’ān.’ He even relates that the caliph personally praised his (al-Makkī’s) counter-explanation of the concerned verse. As if by saying this he alludes that al-Ma’mūn embraced an argument against the ‘createdness’ belief.

Over all, the contrasting trends in the accounts of al-Makkī and the abovementioned one of aṭ-Ṭabarī are inescapable, and both cannot be right. Some other historiographical records provide an answer for this contrariety by reporting on a close affinity between al-Ma’mūn and the Mu‘tazilites. ‘Abdulqāhir al-Asfarāyīnī al-Baghdādī (d. 1037 A.D.), for instance, points to a strong influence from the Mu‘tazilite Ṭumāma b. al-Aṣras over the caliph al-Ma’mūn, and the former’s responsibility of seducing the latter and calling him to embrace the ‘*Ītīzālī*’ way.¹⁴ The role of the Mu‘tazilites in the caliphal court in the 3rd/9th century and the impact of their teaching on the createdness of the Qur’ān has perpetually captured the attention of contemporary scholarship. It made scholars compose considerable number of writs on this subject during the past decades. This interest was essentially motivated by a consensual conviction like the one Telman Nagel once stated: “It was during [al-Ma’mūn’s] caliphate that the *Mu‘tazila* reached the height of its influence”,¹⁵ as they succeeded in making effective impacts on the caliphal court by prominent Mu‘tazilites, like Ṭumāma b. al-Aṣras, Ībrāhīm b. Sayyār an-Nazzām, and Abū al-Hudayl al-‘Allāf. The consequences of such dominance, however, were inerasable on the career-track of Mu‘tazilite rationalism, as it led to this rationalism’s defeat and paved the way for a sweepy come-back to the Sunnite traditionalist rationalism soon after al-Mu‘taṣim’s rule. It even left deep scars on the Abbasid caliphate, as al-Ma’mūn’s and al-Mu‘taṣim’s presentations against the believers in the ‘uncreatedness of the Qur’ān’ (like Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal) “helped to further fuel the masses’ anger toward the caliphate...[after it] sowed the seeds of discord among the Sunnis [that] was to flare up two

¹³ ‘Abdullah b. Muslim ibn Qutayba, *Al-Iḥtilāf fī al-Lafẓ wal-Radd ‘alā al-Jahmiyya wal-Mušbiha* (The Discrepancies of Pronunciation and the Response to the Jahmites and the Anthropomorphists), ‘Umar b. Muḥmūd Abū ‘Umar (ed.), (Giza: Dār al-Rā’iyya, 1991), pp. 38-39.

¹⁴ ‘Abdulqāhir al-Asfarāyīnī al-Baghdādī, *Al-Farq Bayn al-Firq wa-Bayān al-Firqa al-Nājiyya* (The Difference between the Groups and the Discourse of the Surviving Group), (Beirut: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadida, 1977), p. 157.

¹⁵ Tilman Nagel, *The History of Islamic Theology: From Muhammad to the Present*, Thomas Thornton (trans.), (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2010), p. 106.

hundred years later”.¹⁶ Such a public reaction, and not just the jurists’ influence, must have been one of the reasons that forced al-Ma’mūn to refrain from openly declaring ‘*halq al-Qur’ān*’ as an official, stately recognized, dogma.¹⁷

One of the prominent scholars who offered a tentative (though now classical) reading of the *Mihna*, and the connection of its genesis and evolvement to the Mu‘tazilites’ thought, is Josef van Ess. In the third volume of the English translation of his *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, van Ess refers to the profound affinity between al-Ma’mūn and the two Mu‘tazilites, Abū al-Hudayl al-‘Allāf and Ībrāhīm b. Sayyār an-Nazzām. In the eyes of these two known Mu‘tazilites, van Ess relates, al-Ma’mūn “presented himself as teacher of the community,” that is, as someone who “lived up to the image theologians [like the Mu‘tazilites]...sketched of the caliph”.¹⁸ Many contemporary scholars are persuaded like van Ess that al-Ma’mūn bought seriously into this image and he acted towards the public upon it. He expected the people to succumb to whatever he deems true and abide with it as decreed resolutions.¹⁹ This self-belief, van Ess suggests relying on the historiography of aṭ-Ṭabarī, originated al-Ma’mūn’s decision on June 827 A.D. to issue a public decree proclaiming the createdness of the Qur’ān.²⁰

The accent of van Ess’s abovementioned speech gives the reader the impression that the caliph’s decision was sudden and unpredictable; something aṭ-Ṭabarī’s account of the decreeing of ‘*halq al-Qur’ān*’ similarly alludes to. Van Ess demonstrates that the real motivation behind al-Ma’mūn’s various decrees, including ‘*halq al-Qur’ān*,’ still puzzles scholars and leads them into considerably diverse conjectures that never exclude a pure politically-driven scenario.²¹ Van Ess personally does not cast the political complications off the scene. Yet, he seems to be leaning

¹⁶ T. Nagel, *The History of Islamic Theology*, p. 125.

¹⁷ Josef van Ess, *Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra: A History of Religious Thought in Early Islam*, Gwendolin Goldbloom (trans.), (Leiden & Borton: Brill, 2017), Vol. II. p. 489. Van Ess points out that it was believed that al-Ma’mūn refrained from this due to the influence of the *Ḥadīṭ* scholar, Abū Ḥālid Yazīd b. Ḥārūn b. Zādī (J. van Ess, *Theology and Society*, II: 488-489).

¹⁸ J. van Ess, *Theology and Society*, III: 483.

¹⁹ J. van Ess, *Theology and Society*, III: 483. See also Ira M. Lapidus, “The Separation of State and Religion in the Development of Early Islamic Society”, in *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 6(4), 1975, pp. 363-385; and Tilman Nagel, *Rechtleitung und Kalifat. Versuch über eine Grundfrage der islamischen Geschichte*, (Bonn: Selbstverl. des Oriental Seminars der Universität, 1975).

²⁰ J. van Ess, *Theology and Society*, III: 483.

²¹ This is, for example, what one gleans from the proposals of W. Montgomery Watt, “The Political Attitudes of the Mu‘tazila”, in *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1/2(1963), pp. 38-57; W. M. Watt, “Early Discussions about the Qur’ān”, in *The Muslim World*, 40(2), 1950, pp. 96-105; M. Qasim Zaman, *Religion and Politics under the Early ‘Abbāsids: The Emergence of the Proto Sunni Elite*, (Leiden: Brill, 1997); and Marco Demichelis, “Between Mu‘tazilism and Syncretism: A Reappraisal of the Behavior of the Caliphate of al-Ma’mūn”, in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 71(2), 2012, pp. 257-274.

further towards factors and challenges of predominant intellectual and theological nature. He relates that, after his removal to Baghdad from Merv, al-Ma'mūn coincided with his old, Mervian, intellectual opponents in Baghdad. His reaction to this, van Ess proposes, was as follows:

He stood for a 'progressive' concept of God focusing on transcendence, while [his opponents] adhered to the older anthropomorphism that had already been in conflict with transcendentalism in Eastern Iran, and whose Iraq opponents were decried by them, ascribed by them as 'Jahmites.'²²

What al-Ma'mūn launched in the eyes of the Baghdadi public, knowingly or unknowingly, was a permission, coming from the highest rank of power in the caliphate, for promoting theological innovations in "an area traditionalists and legal scholars regarded as theirs",²³ much to the annoyance of scholars like Ibn Ḥanbal and other *muhaddithūn*, and much more to the relief of Qur'ānic scholars and Mu'tazilites, so it seemed. Be that as it may, the teaching of '*ḥalq al-Qur'ān*' was not necessarily the most central, most discussed, most cognized theological idea among all sorts of scholars at that time. It was, rather, one *detour*, or road-junction, towards reasoning on another more crucial and important matters: Some political, others Qur'ānic and exegetical in nature. Legitimizing this teaching placed it under the spot as an instrument used for all kinds of political and social reasons and ends, save for the original ones that generated the belief in the createdness of the Qur'ān and drove the Mu'tazilites to construct such an idea, in the first place.

As for the reason behind al-Ma'mūn's official endorsement of '*alq al-Qur'ān*', J. van Ess, T. Nagel, and M. Watt, relying fully on aṭ-Ṭabarī's account, maintain that the caliph was driven by a realization of a spread public ignorance about Islamic faith. He was also motivated by his full obsession with his role of "protecting the true faith of God (*dīn Allāh*) and of perceiving the prophetic legacy he received".²⁴ Something pushed the Caliph towards practicing his religious patriarchal duties specifically by imposing on his subjects, primarily the jurists and the scholars, the belief in the createdness of the Qur'ān. It is well known, in this regard, that one of the prominent scholars who paid the price of disobeying the caliph's orders was Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal. This Sunnite, traditionalist scholar was interrogated over his stance on the createdness of the Qur'ān, summoned by the caliph to debate with other Mu'tazilites in his court over it, and he was, eventually, fated to sustain thirty lashes (or sixty-eight, according to some accounts) and was thrown into prison as a punishment for his standpoint. For the Sunnites, van Ess notices, al-Ma'mūn made Ibn Ḥanbal a heroic martyr, something that generated a direly reversed outcome that caused deep disintegration and fraction in the society: "Al-Ma'mūn wanted the

²² J. van Ess, *Theology and Society*, III: 486.

²³ J. van Ess, *Theology and Society*, III: 489.

²⁴ J. van Ess, *Theology and Society*, III: 491.

unity of power and authority, but the process he initiated shortly before his death would put it into doubt forever".²⁵ His scheme eventuated public resistance clearly leaning towards violence and bloodshed, which started first in the chief mosque of Ruṣāfa and ensued in Karḥ: Both were hotbeds of resistance in that *Miḥna* incidents.²⁶

It was from Ruṣāfa that the resistance against the 'createdness of the Qur'ān' view kicked off, just two weeks after the death of al-Ma'mūn's successor, al-Mu'taṣim. Such riots were not unexpected reactions to the radical extent the application of the '*ḥalq al-Qur'ān*' reached: "A woman could divorce her husband if she could prove that he did not 'believe the commander of the faithful's doctrine on the Qur'ān'".²⁷ No wonder that after the success of the traditionalists in defeating this doctrine and imposing the 'uncreatedness of the Qur'ān' norm again, the Mu'tazilites, who were publicly held accountable of the *Miḥna* and were deemed the protégées of the caliphal agenda, were exposed to different forms of persecution and atrocity from the opponents of the '*ḥalq al-Qur'ān*' among the jurists, the *fuqahā'*, the *muḥaddithūn*, and the traditionalist *mutakallims*.

The complexity of the political and religious relationship between al-Ma'mūn and the Mu'tazilites, in the context of the *Miḥna* and the doctrine of the 'createdness of the Qur'ān', occupied scholars for quite a long time.²⁸ Marco Demichelis (in the footsteps of the majority of other scholars) have already formidably argued that one of the central reasons behind this relationship is rooted in the caliph's following two fold *modus operandi*.

The caliph's first political and religious objective was to create persistent enemies... to enable him to appear as the defender of Islam... the second aim of al-Ma'mūn was to surprise and guide debates on religious and cultural subjects, to foster the image of a caliph who was the defender of the religion and to personalize the interpretation of the holy Qur'ān based on a political-religious ideology.²⁹

Supervising *muḡādalāt* (debates) between theologians in his court over all kinds of religious themes gave al-Ma'mūn the chance to witness at first-hand scholars like Bišr al-Marīsī, Abū al-Ḥuḍayl al-'Allāf, Ṭumāma b. al-Aṣras, Bišr b. al-Mu'tamir, Ḍirār b. 'Amr, Aḥmad b. Abī Dū'ād, and others right in action. The role of the Mu'tazilites' thought in religiously solidifying the Abbasid dynasty's rule was already established in the first half of the 3rd/9th century. This must have motivated the *Kalām*- and *falsafa*-oriented caliph, al-Ma'mūn, to pause

²⁵ J. van Ess, *Theology and Society*, III: 495.

²⁶ J. van Ess, *Theology and Society*, III: 508.

²⁷ J. van Ess, *Theology and Society*, III: 510.

²⁸ For a valuable list of some of the main studies in modern scholarship, see Marco Demichelis, "Between Mu'tazilism and Syncretism: A Reappraisal of the Behavior of the Caliphate of al-Ma'mūn", *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 71(2), (2012), pp. 257-258.

²⁹ M. Demichelis, "Between Mu'tazilism and Syncretism", p. 261.

piercingly and to demonstrate great interest in what he heard of the Mu'tazilite *mutakallims* in such *muḡādalāt* occasions. He might have even decided to make Mu'tazilites like Ṭumāma and Ibn al-Mu'tamir members in the circle of his intimate collaborators and friends.³⁰ This personal intimacy and intellectual affinity must have been one of the sources of the caliph's decision to fulfill his vision by means of a theological belief like 'the createdness of the Qur'ān' and no other.

All the above historiographical data and hermeneutical analysis of it offer us an explanation of the reason and circumstances that could have been behind the caliph al-Ma'mūn's adoption of '*ḥalq al-Qur'ān*' Mu'tazilite teaching and implementing it as the primary instigator for cementing his political and religious status. What all this fails to tell us, nevertheless, is *why would the Mu'tazilites conjure up such a teaching on the createdness/contingency of the Qur'ān in the first place?* There is nothing to indicate that the *Mu'tazila* constructed such a discourse upon the request of the caliph or as a response to al-Ma'mūn's ambition, or even as their contribution to the grounding of his cause in religious soil. The historiographical extant data indicate, or at least invite us to surmise, that the Mu'tazilites already had discourses on the createdness of the Qur'ān, and that they possibly entertained their views on this doctrine in interaction with the public, the *muḥaddithūn*, the *fuqahā'* and other *mutakallims*, even *before* the beginning of the *Mihna* incidents. Could this suggest, then, that the *Mu'tazila* developed their theological views on the createdness of the Qur'ān in interaction with other Muslim voices occupied with theological and exegetical matters that are directly related to how the public approached the Qur'ānic *muṣḥaf* and related to its linguistic content?

Let us remember here that the 3rd/9th century's Muslim intellectual scene was not merely occupied with *mutakallims*, *muḥaddithūn*, *falāsifa*, and *fuqahā'*. It witnessed also the presence and seminal intellectual influence of the Qur'ānic scholars: the *Mufasssirūn*. Those scholars were primarily occupied with the Qur'ānic texts' understanding by the community of the believers and with attending to the possible inquiries and problems its linguistic forms, content, and transmission (oral and textual) might generate before the Muslims. It was within this scriptural focus that the treating of the Arabic language of the Qur'ān as *lingua sacra* was born. What if the Mu'tazilites' primary motivation behind speaking about the createdness of the Qur'ān was a scriptural, linguistic, and interpretative concern about the same *lingua sacra* view, and what if it was expressive of their reciprocation with the Qur'ānic scholars' attempt at assessing the belief in the sacredness of the Arabic language of the Qur'ān, which was commonly embraced by the Muslim public? What if '*ḥalq al-Qur'ān*' is the Mu'tazilites' way of rejecting the '*lingua sacra*' idea in correspondence with the Qur'ānic scholars' reservations on the very same claim?

³⁰ M. Demichelis, "Between Mu'tazilism and Syncretism", p. 267. This is also stressed and paused at in Patricia Crone and Michael Hinds, *God's Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

In the ensuing two sections, I examine the plausibility of such option. I visit first some of the Muslim Qur‘ānic scholars to unpack their stances on the linguistic nature and value of the Qur‘ānic text. Afterwards, I visit the available data we have on the Mu‘tazilites’ ‘createdness of the Qur‘ān’ discourses to see whether, or not, one can detect therein a connection which the *Mutaẓila* could have presumed between the belief in ‘*ḥalq al-Qur‘ān*’ and the *lingua sacra* claim.

Attending to the ‘Lingua Sacra’ Belief By the Qur‘ānic Scholars

It does not seem to be the case that the early Muslim Qur‘ānic scholars allowed the belief in the sacredness of the Arabic language of the Qur‘ān (i.e., it was descended from God’s divine realm) to detain them from treating this language as a subject for critical intellectual, philological, and etymological investigation and assessment. Hani Hayajneh expresses this factor eloquently in the following manner:

«Medieval Muslim scholars generally understood that language is one of the main sciences that one should master before starting any endeavors of Qur‘ānic exegesis, as it is deemed to be the repository of the collective memory of the community members through which interpretation takes place. Language, as a holistic system, absorbs the experience of the predecessors who utilized and made it productive morphologically and semantically».³¹

Quite intriguing here is that old Muslim exegetes seem to be more liberal and scientifically critical in their approach to Qur‘ānic language than contemporary scholars like Hayajneh. Contrary to tolerating the impact of linguistic, historical, and culturally-based complexities on the diversification of the textual interpretation, Hayajneh believes that, no matter how multifaceted and diverse the Qur‘ānic language might be, the interpretation of the Qur‘ānic linguistically-based content must be universal, simply because the Qur‘ān is a ‘sacred text,’ which means that its linguistic attestations are sacred too. This is how Hayajneh articulates the universality of the sacred textuality of the Qur‘ān.

I think that the historical and cultural horizon of the interpreter’s understanding should not influence the meaning of the texts, especially if we are dealing with a sacred text such as the

³¹ Hani Hayajneh, “The Usage of Ancient South Arabian and other Arabian Languages as an Etymological Source for Qur‘ānic Vocabulary”, in *New Perspectives on the Qur‘ān: The Qur‘ān in its Historical Context*. 2, Gabriel S. Reynolds (ed.), (London & New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 117-146, p. 120. Hayajneh echoes here the claims of Sizā Qāsim-Dirzār, “Tawālud al-Nuṣūṣ wa-l-Īṣbā’ al-Dilāla: Taṭbiqāt ‘alā Tafsīr al-Qur‘ān al-Karīm” (The Multiplication of Texts and the Gratification of Denotation: Applications on the Interpretations of the Glorious Qur‘ān), in *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics. Interpretation and hermeneutics*, 8(1988), pp. 30-41.

Qur'ān. A universal understanding of the Qur'ān means that it must be valid to scholars from different social and cultural backgrounds. This is especially important for a sacred text such as the Qur'ān.³²

At any rate, and the sacredness aspect notwithstanding, Hayajneh does acknowledge the etymological and semantic linguistic exegesis of the Qur'ānic attestation. He deems such exegetical approach to the Qur'ānic language the plausible means for demonstrating that the Qur'ān is “a very important source of linguistic and cultural knowledge that can elucidate vague cultural and linguistic references in ancient Arabian inscriptions”.³³ This was also the conviction of the old Muslim exegetes, according to Hayajneh. These early Qur'ānic *mufasssirun* paused seriously at the text's Arabic language and terms, and they painstakingly uncovered the linguistic origins of some of them, describing, eventually, “some Qur'ānic words as *himiari* ‘Himyaritic’, *Yamani* or *Yamānī* ‘Yemenite’ and *bi-lughati abl al-Yaman* ‘in the language of the people of Yemen’”.³⁴

Quite known are also the Mu'tazilites' views among the Qur'ānic scholars of early Islam who developed a theory of language and applied it exegetically to the Arabic language of the Qur'ān. For them, treating the Qur'ānic text as ‘created/contingent’, not as sacred, leads to approaching its language not as a holy, ontological manifestation of divine will, nor as an infallible, epistemological, and linguistic medium of divine revelation. The Arabic language of the Qur'ān, for the Mu'tazilites, was a medium of ideas, the content of which is attainable by human reasoning (*‘aql*). Human reason deduces the meanings of the message by treating the language as a conglomeration of ‘*majāz*’ (metaphorism) and ‘*qiyās*’ (analogy) and by using what they described “*qiyās al-ghā'ib ‘alā al-shahād*” (analogically deducing the invisible from the visible).³⁵ This is what made the Mu'tazilites implicitly sideline the claim of the universality of the Qur'ānic sacred content, and thus of the sacredness of its Arabic language. For them, this language is not universal or sacred because it loads the Qur'ān's passages with some clear (*muḥkam*), yet simultaneously other far-from-clear and ambiguous (*mutashābih*), linguistic expressions of God's transcendence and will.³⁶ It is just tenable to say that the Mu'tazilites' approach to the Arabic linguistic content of the Qur'ān is purely humanist, rather than metaphysical, and their epistemological stance on it is purely textual and exegetical.

³² Hayajneh, “The Usage of Ancient South Arabian and other Arabian Languages as an Etymological Source for Qur'ānic Vocabulary”, p. 122.

³³ Hayajneh, “The Usage of Ancient South Arabian”, pp. 125-126.

³⁴ Hayajneh, “The Usage of Ancient South Arabian”, p. 127.

³⁵ See on this Nasr Hamid Abuzayd, “Towards Understanding the Qur'ān's Worldview: An Autobiographical Reflection”, in *New Perspectives on the Qur'ān*, pp. 47-88, pp. 55ff.

³⁶ Abuzayd, “Towards Understanding the Qur'ān's Worldview”, p. 59. See also Nasr H. Abuzayd, *Maḥbūm al-Naṣṣ: Dirāsāt fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur'ān* (The Concept of the Text: Study in the Sciences of the Qur'ān), (Beirut & Casablanca: The Arabic Culture Center, 1990).

I am going to reflect at length on the Mu'tazilites' stance on the Qur'anic linguistic attestation in the ensuing section. I just wanted here to show that the Mu'tazilites seriously overlapped with the Muslim *mufasssirin* in avoiding the treatment of the Qur'anic text as a metaphysically sacred, un-investigable, divine gift from heaven. They both seem to have approached the religious text as a linguistic enterprise, whose pros and cons have irregular rhythmical rhyming that can obstruct clarity and hinder understanding; thus, it needs clarification and interpretation. Known in modern Western Islamic studies is Theodore Nöldeke's comprehensive overview of the attending to this matter by the earliest Muslim creators of Arabic exegesis, starting with Ibn 'Abbās (d. 687 A.D.), Ibn Ishāq (d. 786 A.D.), al-Wāqidī (d. 822 A.D.), Ibn Hishām (d. 828 A.D.), al-Buḥārī (d. 870 A.D.), right to al-Tirmidī (d. 829 A.D.).³⁷ Even the Qur'an scholar who staunchly confirms the sacred origin of the Arabic language of the Qur'an, Muḥammad b. Jarīr at-Ṭabarī, indirectly concedes that the Qur'an's Arabic speech might sometimes hold meanings beyond the apprehension capacities of the common readers, and that the Qur'an's linguistic attestation needs interpretation by the help of the prophetic *Hadīth*:

وإن كان ذلك كذلك وكان الله جلّ ذكره قد أخبر عباده أنه جعل القرآن عربياً وأنه أنزل بلسان عربي مبين ثم كان ظاهره محتجلاً خصوصاً وعموماً، لم يكن لنا السبيل إلى العلم بما عني الله تعالى ذكره من خصوصه وعمومه إلاّ ببيان من جعل إليه بيان القرآن وهو رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم.

And if it happened that God, be glorified, told His worshippers that He made the Qur'an in Arabic and that it was descended in a plainly clear Arabic language, yet its [linguistic] exterior manifestation implies different private and public understandings, we are left with no option for truly knowing which among the private and the public connotations is God's meaning unless by means of the clarification made by the one whom the declaration of the Qur'an was bestowed upon, namely the Messenger of God, peace be upon Him.³⁸

This is at-Ṭabarī's indirect arguing for the necessity of treating the language of the Qur'an exegetically in order to unpack God's message in it. The exegetical requirement that is necessitated by the demand of obtaining clarity about the declaration (*bayān*) justifies sidelining the belief in the sacredness of the Qur'anic language and permits treating it as just a language of particular human tongue in need of interpretation. Even orthodox commentators, like at-Ṭabarī, were ready to pragmatically sideline the *lingua sacra* belief regarding the Qur'anic linguistic content in order to guarantee that this content is clearly perceived by the

³⁷ Theodore Nöldeke & Friedrich Schwally, *Geschichte des Qur'āns: Die Sammlung des Qur'āns*, 2nd. Ed., (Leipzig: Dietrichsche Verlagbuchhandlung, 1919), pp. 163-179.

³⁸ Muḥammad b. Jarīr at-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wil al-Qur'an* (The Complete Declaration on the Hermeneutic of the Qur'an), 'Abdullah b. 'Abdulmuḥsin al-Turkī (ed.), (Cairo: Hajr Press, 2001), I: 21.

worshippers. Even at-Ṭabarī walked in the footsteps of the rationalist exegetical approach to the religious scripture without needing to declare, for instance, that the Qur’ān is just human-made (*mabluq*).

Treating the Arabic language from a focused approach is also followed by the 4th/10th century linguist, Aḥmad b. Fāris b. Zakariyyā al-Qazwīnī al-Rāzī (d. 1004 A.D.). In his book, *Al-Ṣaḥibī fī Fiqh al-Lughā al-‘Arabiyya wa-Masā’ilihā wa Sunan al-‘Arab fī Kalāmihā* (The Companion to the Jurisprudence of Arabic Language and the Arabs’ Rules and Issues Regarding their Speech), Ibn Fāris dedicates a chapter for discussing if the Qur’ān was descended or it, rather, contains pericopes written in a language other than Arabic. After invoking different *musnads*, and after echoing the belief that God “ordered reading the miraculous Qur’ān that is written in Arabic” (*innamā amara Allah jalla thanā’uhu bi-qirā’ati al-Qur’ān al-‘arabi al-mu’jiz*), he discloses his leaning towards acknowledging the possible existence of non-Arabic language in the Qur’ān. He thinks that the letters of the foreign languages are mixed with the Arabic letters; therefore, he concludes: “فمن قال إنها عربية فهو صادق ومن قال إنها عجمية فهو صادق” (*fa-man qāla innahā ‘arabiyya fa-huwa ṣādiq wa-man qāla innahā ‘ajamiyyā fa-huwa ṣādiq*) so, whoever said it is Arabic is right and who said it is foreign is also right).³⁹ Ibn Fāris, then, concedes the existence of discrepancies among the exegetes in interpreting the Qur’ān. Yet, he believes in the reliability of the made exegeses, and he does not seem to consider the potential existence of non-Arabic terms or parts in the Qur’ān a threat to the authenticity and referentiality of the Arabic language.

It seems that the Qur’ān’s scholars tended often to justify the discrepancies between their interpretations of the content of the Qur’ān (there was no consistent, evident *iğmā’* [consensus] in this regard) by means of emphasizing that the language of the text is one, i.e., Arabic, yet there are various readings for the linguistic attestations of the *suras* (seven readings, first of all), and that all these readings are decreed by God (*qirā’a munzala*). This approach seems to have even persisted in the ensuing centuries. For instance, in his commentary of the Qur’ān, the Muslim scholar, Nizām ad-Dīn al-Qammī al-Nisābūrī (d. 1416) refers to a *musnad* from *Ḥadīṭ* to support his adoption of such an exegetical approach, narrating that ‘Amrū b. al-‘Āṣ and Hishām b. Ḥakīm used to recite *Surat al-Furqān* after two clearly different ‘alphabets’ (*ḥurūf*). This made ‘Amrū complain about it to the Prophet, stating that Hishām reads the alphabets very differently from how ‘Amrū learned to read this *sura* from the Prophet: “فإذا هو يقرأ على حروف كثيرة لم يقرئنيها رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم” (*fa-idā huwa yaqra’u ‘alā ḥurūfin kaṭīratin lam yuqri’ nihā rasūlu Allah ṣallā Allah ‘alayihī wa-sallam*) and behold, he reads many alphabets in a different manner, the Prophet, peace be upon Him, did not teach me to read after). To ‘Amrū’s complain, the Prophet responds by saying that both ‘Amrū’s and Hishām’s readings are congenial with how this *sura* was given down to the Prophet from God, and that the Qur’ān was descended from God after seven alphabetic readings, all are acceptable and the Muslims

³⁹ Aḥmad b. Fāris b. Zakariyyā al-Rāzī, *Al-Ṣaḥibī fī Fiqh al-Lughā al-‘Arabiyya wa-Masā’ilihā wa Sunan al-‘Arab fī Kalāmihā* (The Companion to the Jurisprudence of Arabic Language and the Arabs’ Rules and Issues Regarding their Speech), (Beirut: Muḥammad ‘Alī Bayḍūn, 1997), pp. 32-33.

are called to use whichever reading was available: *هكذا أنزلت، إنَّ القرآنَ أنزلَ على سبعةِ أحرفٍ فأقرأوا ما تيسر منه* (bakadā unzilāt. Innā al-Qur'ān unzila 'alā sab'ati ḥrūfīn, fa-aqra'ū mā-tayassara minhu).⁴⁰

In his commentary on various readings of the Qur'ān, Nizām ad-Dīn Al-Qammī relates that the seven various readings are frequent in recurrence (*mutawātirāt*) and this frequency is evident in relation to the common and to the dissonant between the readings. So, one must not discriminately cling to one reading and abandons the others.⁴¹ He, then, points out that these seven alphabetic recitations represent seven dialects spoken by the tribe of Quraysh, and they are all consonant in meaning, without discrepancy or contradiction: *أنها سبع لغات من لغات قريش لا تختلف ولا تضاد بل هي متفقة المعنى* (annahā sab'u lughātīn min lughātī Quraysh lā-taḥtaliḥu wala-ttaḍādu bal-hiya muttafiqatu al-ma'nā).⁴² As an explanation of this diversity, al-Qammī argues that the Qur'ān contains inclusively every language known to Quraysh, for every content in the Qur'ān must be understood by every member in Quraysh. God sends His messengers speaking in the tongues of the targeted people, so that these recipients can perceive lucidly His message. Add to this, al-Qammī relates, the Qurayshi people knew also the languages of other nations (*al-'ilmu bi-lughātī ghayribim*).⁴³ Over all, al-Qammī concedes that the Qur'ān's language is human in origin, as it is the language of the tribe of Quraysh with its seven Arabic alphabetic variations that are all synonymous in meanings, though different in pronunciation and vocalization.⁴⁴

The example of a latter exegete like al-Qammī shows us that the challenge of having diverse Arabic alphabetic languages in the Qur'ān consistently confronted the Muslims long after the end of the 3rd/9th century. Although the exegetes departed in their attendance to this challenge from the affirmation of the correctness and authenticity of all these various readings as equally descended from God (*munzala min 'indi Allah*), they also conceded that the divine origin of the Qur'ānic language requires exegetical efforts to interpret them lucidly and accurately. And, as al-Qammī says echoing what aṭ-Ṭabarī suggests earlier, when the exegetes disagree on the right interpretation, the opinion of the Prophet (derived from the *Ḥadīth musnads*) is the criterial, determining voice on how to understand the related Qur'ānic parts. The foundational exegetical criterion which al-Qammī proposes is

فإن قيل: فما قولكم في القراءات التي تختلف بها المعاني؟ قلنا: إنها صحيحة منزلة من عند الله ولكنها خارجة من هذه السبعة الأحرف، وليس يجوز أن يكون فيما أنزل الله من الألفاظ التي تختلف معانيها ما يجري اختلافها مجرى التضاد والتناقض، لكن مجرى التغاير الذي لا تضاد فيه

⁴⁰ Nizām al-Dīn al-Qammī, *Gharā'ib al-Qur'ān wa-Ragha'ib al-Furqān* (The Wonders and Inclinations of the Qur'ān), Zakariyyā 'Umayrāt (ed.), (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1995), I.1, p. 9.

⁴¹ al-Qammī, *Gharā'ib al-Qur'ān*, I.3, p. 23.

⁴² al-Qammī, *Gharā'ib al-Qur'ān*, I.3, p. 23.

⁴³ al-Qammī, *Gharā'ib al-Qur'ān*, I.3, p. 23.

⁴⁴ al-Qammī, *Gharā'ib al-Qur'ān*, I.3, p. 24.

So, if it was said: what do you say about the readings that denote different meanings? We would say: there are [all] correct and descended from God, yet they are derived from these seven alphabetic terms and there must not be in what God descended any terms whose meanings are contradictory and conflictual, but only diverse without contradiction.⁴⁵

This suggest to us that the Qur'ānic scholars did not shy away from admitting that the Arabic language of the Qur'ān is not supernatural, sacred, or metaphysically miraculous. It is, rather, loaded with diversity and dissonance that sometimes obscure the meaning and fail to elucidate the message. It is a language that demands painstaking interpretational efforts that can exclusively be made by specialized *mufasssīrīn*. Furthermore, the scholars went as far as distinguishing God's words/speech (*kalāmullāh*) from the Arabic Qur'ānic codex. God's speech was believed to be eternal (*qadīm*) and one of God's divine attributes, whereas the Qur'ānic text is not eternal because it is 'contingent' (*ḥādīṭ*). God's speech cannot happen, because no contingency takes place in eternity (which is beyond sequence): "من الحال قيام الحادث بالقديم" (*min al-mushālī qiyāmu al-ḥādīṭi bil-qadīm*). This is not the case with the Qur'ān. In its various modes of subsistence, i.e., concrete (*'ayn*), intellectual (*dīhn*), verbal (*wujūd fī al-'ibāra*), and scriptural (*wujūd kitābī*), cannot be eternal but contingent, and the linguistic attestation we call 'Qur'ān' is just allegorically expressive of the speech that is substantially in God's being: "لا ريب أن القرآن ... حادث بل القرآن إنما يطلق ... بالجاز ... على الكلام القائم بذات الله تعالى" (*lā-rayba anna al-Qur'ān...ḥādīṭun, balil-Qur'ān innamā yutlaqu ... bil-majāzī 'alā al-kalāmī al-qā'imī bi-dāti Allah ta'ālā*).⁴⁶

Back in the early Islamic centuries, especially the 2nd/8th- 3rd/9th centuries, such challenges that are related to the linguistic-textual nature of the Qur'ān clearly occupied the attention of the Muslims in general. The *mufasssīrūn* listened to the believers transpiring that there are verses in the Qur'ān that are ambiguous, abrogated, and hard to relate to (something, actually, the Qur'ānic text itself attests to in *Sura 3:7*); the thing that drove the exegetes, as early as the 2nd/8th century, to distinguish, for instance, between the *muhkamāt* and the *mutashābihāt* verses.⁴⁷ This is also what seems to have made them search for arguments that can hermeneutically demonstrate the linguistic-textual divine *arḥe* (origin) of the Qur'ān, if not necessarily the sacredness and metaphysical origin of its language. This seems to be one of the challenges that Muslim scholars were internally haunted by during the peak of the 3rd/9th century.

In his text on the challenges in the Qur'ān, the Muslim scholar, Ibn Qutayba, starts by a manifesto-like declaration of the divine origin and descension of the Qur'ān (he is someone who was contemporaneous to the *Mihna* and certainly familiar with the '*ḥalq al-Qur'ān*' teaching), which was handed down from God in absolute pricelessness (*qaiyyman*), in details (*mufaṣṣalan*), in lucidness (*bayyinan*) and in infallibility (*lā ya'tibi al-bāṭil*); as a descended book

⁴⁵ al-Qammī, *Gharā'ib al-Qur'ān*, I.3, p. 25.

⁴⁶ al-Qammī, *Gharā'ib al-Qur'ān*, I.10, p. 54.

⁴⁷ J. van Ess, *Theology and Society*, I: 44. See also Leah Kinberg, "Muhkamāt and Mutaṣābihāt (Qur'ān 3/7): Implications of a Qur'ānic Pair of Terms in Medieval Exegesis", in *Rabica*, 35(2), 1988, pp. 143-172.

from a blessed omniscient source (*tanẓīlun min ḥakīmīn ḥamīd*).⁴⁸ Ibn Qutayba proceeds claiming the miraculous nature of the Qur'an's composition and the wondrousness of its structuring and its fullness of miraculous content. He grounds his attestation in a belief in a superiority which God bestowed upon the Qur'an's Arabic language above all other languages: "وما خَصَّ الله" (wa-mā ḥaṣṣa Allāh bihi lughatihā dūna jamī'i al-lughāt). For him, bestowing this language, and the ability to apprehend its sciences and meanings, upon the Arabs has assigned to these people an exclusive prerogative from God: "ما أوتيته العربُ حصيصاً من الله" (*mā utiyatuhu al-'Arabu ḥiṣṣiṣan min Allāh*).⁴⁹ This prerogative makes the linguistic-textual attestation called 'Qur'an' the central miraculous sign of the Prophet Muḥammad:

وكانَ لمحمد... الكتاب الذي لو اجتمعت الإنسُ والجنُّ على أن يأتوا بمثله لم يأتوا به...

And for Muḥammad ...the Book was given, which if the humans and the *Djinn*s gathered to make a book similar to it, will fail to do so...⁵⁰

It is essential to pause here and realize that, despite his above stated stance, Ibn Qutayba does not opt for such a glorifying prolegomenon to deny or negate the need for attending to the evident ambiguity, and sometimes problematic content, of the Arabic sacred text. Far from this, he concedes such problematic challenges and proposes nothing but an exegetical method to attend to it. His first take on achieving elucidation is that the experts in the sciences of Arabic language, not the common Arabic-speakers and certainly not the foreigners, can alone understand fully and accurately the textual-linguistic attestations of the Qur'an. Be that as it may, they alone can realize that there is no actual built-in problematic fallibility or defect in the text.⁵¹ Only those who are not qualified to read Arabic and to perceive its profound, wonderful content dare to mistakenly charge the followers of the Prophet with abrogating and manipulating the grammar, the syntaxes, the forms, and the expressions of the Arabic Qur'an. By spotting such discrepancies and linguistic flows in the text, the vilifiers, (*aṭ-ṭā'inūn*), Ibn Qutayba relates, say to the believers

وَأَنْتُمْ تَزْعُمُونَ أَنَّ هَذَا كُلُّهُ كَلَامُ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ، فَأَيُّ شَيْءٍ بَعْدَ هَذَا الْاِخْتِلَافِ تُرِيدُونَ؟ وَأَيُّ بَاطِلٍ بَعْدَ الْخَطَأِ وَالْخَلْعِ تَبْتَغُونَ؟

⁴⁸ 'Abdullah b. Muslim b. Qutayba, *Ta'wīl Muṣkil al-Qur'an* (Hermeneuting the Qur'an's Challenge), Ibrāhīm Šamsiddīn (ed.), (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1973), p. 11.

⁴⁹ Qutayba, *Ta'wīl Muṣkil al-Qur'an*, p. 17.

⁵⁰ Qutayba, *Ta'wīl Muṣkil al-Qur'an*, p. 17.

⁵¹ Qutayba, *Ta'wīl Muṣkil al-Qur'an*, pp. 18ff.

And you allege that all this is the speech of God, the Lord of the worlds. What more than the [mentioned] discrepancies you need? And, which abrogation other than such mistakes and errors you seek?⁵²

In response to these vilifiers, Ibn Qutayba suggests that the discrepancies and variations in the Arabic Qur'ānic text are not signs of contradiction, mistakes, or abrogation. They are just variations expressive of diverse alphabets of seven Arabic linguistic accounts existing simultaneously in and as the Qur'ān. They are all God's talk, descended upon His messenger by the trustworthy Spirit: "وكل هذه الحروف كلام الله تعالى نزل به الروح الأمين على رسوله عليه السلام" (*wa-kullu haḍihi al-ḥurūfu kalāmu Allah ta'ālā nazala bihi al-Rūḥu al-amīnu 'alā rasūli Allah 'alayihī as-salām*). This variety is due to God's order to Muḥammad to let people recite the Qur'ān, each in his own Arabic dialect and after their common manner of speech: "أن أمره بأن يقرأ كل قوم بلغتهم وما جرت عليه عادتهم" (*an amarahu bi-an yaqra'a kullu qaūmin bi-lughatibih wa-mā jarat 'alayihī 'ādatuhum*).⁵³ The difference in these attestations is a "difference of distinction" (*اختلاف التباين / iḥtilāfu at-tagḥāyir*), and not a "difference of contradiction" (*اختلاف التضاد / iḥtilāfu at-taḍādd*).⁵⁴ In the remaining of his commentary, Ibn Qutayba busies himself fully with a meticulous implementation of this exegetical method on the verses of the Qur'ānic *surās*. He endeavors to demonstrate the text's harmony and to elucidate and interpret what he already, even if implicitly, conceded and embraced to be problematic and defective therein.

In the 3rd/9th century as well, al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī attends to the criticism against the Qur'ānic language, and he develops a proposal on how to interpret the text and understand it. He pursues this vis-à-vis his debate with the Jahmites, the Mu'tazilites, the Hashwites, and the Mushabbihites, as he tells us in his book, *Fahm al-Qur'ān wa-Ma'ānīh* (Understanding the Qur'ān and its Meanings). Al-Muḥāsibī argues that the Qur'ān prevails over reason (*al-muḥayminu 'alā al-'aql*), and those who are rational would be able to apprehend that the divinely descended Book is inimitable in its splendor. All the texts that preceded it testify to the Qur'ān and declare that it is immune from any fallibility.⁵⁵ Like other Muslim exegetes, al-Muḥāsibī emphasizes that understanding the Qur'ān accurately requires a reliable, comprehensive knowledge on how to deal with its language and its grammatical rules

ينبغي لتالي القرآن أن يعرف ناسخه ومنسوخه، محكمه ومُتشابهه، وعامه وخاصه، ومقدمه ومؤخره، وموصوله ومفصوله وغريبه وما لا يعرف معناه إلا باللغة أو بالسنة أو بالإجماع.

The reciter of the Qur'ān must know its replaced and deleted parts, its confirmed and debated verses, its generals and particulars, its beginning and end, its conjunctives and disjunctives, its

⁵² Qutayba, *Ta'wīl Muškil al-Qur'ān*, p. 24.

⁵³ Qutayba, *Ta'wīl Muškil al-Qur'ān*, p. 32.

⁵⁴ Qutayba, *Ta'wīl Muškil al-Qur'ān*, p. 33.

⁵⁵ al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī, *Fahm al-Qur'ān wa-Ma'ānīh* (Understanding the Qur'ān and its Meanings), Husayn al-Qūwatī (ed.), (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1977), pp. 246-247.

foreign elements as well as what cannot be understood except linguistically or by means of Sunna and consensus.⁵⁶

Al-Muḥāsibī's words suggest his acknowledgment of the existence of replacement and deletion (*nash wa-mansūb*) cases. This might suggest his concurrence with the Mu'tazilites' belief in the createdness/contingency of the Qur'ān. Far from being the case, however, al-Muḥāsibī argues that the *nash* cases in the Qur'ān do not prove its createdness. God did not change his words or deleted them or replaced them with different ones. Such actions are usually done by the liar who reverts from what he said (*al-kāḍibu ar-rāji'u ammā qāl*).⁵⁷ God merely changes the manner of his verbal expressions of one and the same meaning: He utters one message in more than one linguistic alphabet, but He does not contradict the meaning He conveyed in the first place, nor does He delete or cancel it: "الله... لا يبدل كلامه ولا ينسخ قوله وإنما ينسخ فرضه بفرض آخر" (*Allah... lā yubaddilu kalāmahu wa-lā yansakh qawlahu wa-innamā yansakh fardahu bi-farḍin aḥar*).⁵⁸

The superiority of the Qur'ānic linguistic attestation, for al-Muḥāsibī, is the main reason behind the ambiguity of its content for those who are not qualified to read the Qur'ān and interpret it. So, when a reader fails to understand what God said and complains to al-Muḥāsibī about it, the latter would tell him that what the non-specialized readers need merely to perceive is that understanding the text grants salvation, while failing to do so (*al-i'rādu 'an fahmihī*) leads to damnation (*al-balaka*), and that the reader ought to consult an exegete to show him that God availed in the Qur'ānic text the explanations of what might avers as ambiguous.⁵⁹ The Qur'ānic language is self-elucidating, self-exegeting, to those who master the language, who would be able to perceive that there is no rating or leveling in the Qur'ānic language: All of it is good and none is imperfect.⁶⁰ Be that as it may, al-Muḥāsibī concludes that God's divine wisdom decreed handing the Qur'ān down specifically in the 'language of the Arabs' (*bi-lisāni al-'arab*), so that its meanings would be apprehensible, and this language, in its sophisticated structure, nature and grammars, is the most qualified language for achieving this purpose.⁶¹

Another commentator from the 3rd/9th century, who also occupies himself with explanations to the linguistic ambiguity and inconsistency among the various versions and readings of the Qur'ān, is Hūd b. Muḥakkam al-Hauwārī. In his book, *Tafsīr Kitāb Allah al-'Azīz* (A Commentary on the Precious Book of God), al-Hauwārī refers to a *musnad* relating that the Qur'ān descended in fourfold form: "حلال وحرام لا يسع الناس جهله، وتفسير يعلمه العلماء وعربية" (*ḥalālun wa-ḥarāmūn lā-yasa'u an-nāsa jahluhu, wa-tafsīrun ya'lamuhū al-'ulamā'u wa-'arabiyyatun ta'rīfuhā al-'arabū wa-ta'milun lā-ya'lamuhū illā Allāh*) lawful and unlawful

⁵⁶ al-Muḥāsibī, *Fahm al-Qur'an*, p. 248.

⁵⁷ al-Muḥāsibī, *Fahm al-Qur'an*, p. 252.

⁵⁸ al-Muḥāsibī, *Fahm al-Qur'an*, p. 252.

⁵⁹ al-Muḥāsibī, *Fahm al-Qur'an*, pp. 274-275.

⁶⁰ al-Muḥāsibī, *Fahm al-Qur'an*, p. 368.

⁶¹ al-Muḥāsibī, *Fahm al-Qur'an*, p. 493.

which people cannot unknow, and an interpretation known to the scholars and an Arabic language known to the Arabians and an exegesis only known to God).⁶² Al-Hauwārī's relating that the Arabic Qur'ānic text can, at some parts, be un-interpretable, save by God, is an expression of his awareness of the controversies among his contemporary Muslims over the defects and contradictions of the unclear and enigmatic elements in the Arabic language of the Qur'ān. This is why he proceeds by citing another *musnad*, which relates that the Prophet personally pointed to these linguistic and exegetical difficulties, and he warned the believers about it, saying: "There is no verse in the Qur'ān without explicit and implicit meanings and each letter in it has someone who can know what it means" (ما في القرآن آية إلا لها ظهر وبطن، وما فيه) / *mā-fi al-Qur'an āyatun illā lahā ṣaḥrun wa-baṭnun wa-mā fihī ḥarfun illā wa-bunna ḥaddun wa-likulli ḥaddin muṭṭali*).⁶³ This *Ḥadīṭ* is invoked as an authoritative explanation aiming to convey that, though God handed the Qur'ān down in a language known to people, He does not want every person to read the Qur'ān and to give himself the right to explain what its language transmits. Be that as it may, al-Hauwārī confirms:

لا يعرف تفسير القرآن إلا من عرف اثنتي عشرة خصلة: المكي والمدني، والناسخ والمنسوخ، والتقديم والتأخير، والمقطوع والموصول، والخاص والعام، والإضمار والعريّة

Only the one who knows the following twelve features would be able to interpret the Qur'ān: the Meccan and Medinan [*surās*], and the transcribed and the duplicated, and the forwarding and the postponement, and the disjunctive and the conjunctive, and the particular and the general, and the concealment and the Arabic [language].⁶⁴

We also have here a similar approach to the Arabic text of the Qur'ān in the commentary of the 3rd/9th century's Sufist exegete, Sahl b. 'Abdullah b. Yūnis at-Tastarī. In his book, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm* (A Commentary on the Glorious Qur'ān), at-Tastarī re-articulates most of the arguments for the divine origin of the Arabic text of the Qur'ān that we read in the other discourses we visited. He also grounds his defense of the infallibility of the Qur'ānic text in the prophetic *Ḥadīṭ* and the *musnads* attributed to authoritative Muslim voices (e.g., Ibn 'Abbās).⁶⁵ He also refers to the Prophet's call for the believers to learn how to exegete the Qur'ānic Arabic discourses and to beware of the multi-layered meaning of the Qur'ānic verses.⁶⁶ He also suggests that the various ways of relating to the Qur'ānic text stem from the

⁶² Hūd b. Muḥkam al-Hauwārī, *Tafsīr Kitāb Allah al-'Azīz* (A Commentary on the Precious Book of God), Balḥāj b. Sa'īd Ṣarīfī (ed.), (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1990), Vol. I, p. 69.

⁶³ al-Hauwārī, *Tafsīr Kitāb Allah al-'Azīz*, I: 70.

⁶⁴ al-Hauwārī, *Tafsīr Kitāb Allah al-'Azīz*, I: 71.

⁶⁵ Sahl b. 'Abdullah b. Yūnis at-Tastarī, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm* (A Commentary on the Glorious Qur'ān), Ṭaha 'ABdulra'ūf Sa'd and Sa'd Ḥasan M. 'Alī (eds.), (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥarm lil-Turāt, 2004), pp. 75-84.

⁶⁶ at-Tastarī, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, p. 76.

diverse motivations and goals that drive the believers to read the Qur’ān.⁶⁷ He also relates that God descended the Qur’ān in an Arabic language that is fully known to Muḥammad’s followers, so that not just the divine text, but also the exegesis of the explicit and implicit meanings of its verses would also be known to them.⁶⁸ What is particularly highlighted in at-Tastarī’s commentary is his affirmation that quarreling and debating (*ḡidāl*) over the meanings of the Arabic Qur’ānic text is not recommended by God. It is, rather, forbidden, for, at-Tastarī states, “if the guided believer debated about it, he will be correct, but if the one who debates is a hypocritical slanderer, he will inaccuracy fabricate arguments by means of analogy and bias predisposition”: (إن جادل به المؤمن المهتدي أصاب وإن جادل به المنافق المفتري أقام حجة بالقياس والهوى بغير) (إن جادل به المؤمن المهتدي أصاب وإن جادل به المنافق المفتري أقام حجة بالقياس والهوى بغير) *in jādala bihi al-mu‘minu al-muhtadī aṣāba, wa-in jādala bihi al-munāfiq al-muftarī aqāma ḥujjatan bil-qiyāsi wal-hawā bi-ghayri ṣawāb*).⁶⁹ Eventually, at-Tastarī endorses the studying of the Arabic Qur’ānic text and mastering the accurate exegetical methods of understanding and interpreting over the mere mastering of the arts of enchanted reading and reciting of the Qur’ān; deeming the latter a threat to the Qur’ānic message if it was pursued and performed as an end by itself.⁷⁰

The previous examples of Qur’ānic exegetical discourses on the Qur’ān and its Arabic language inform us that, at least, during the 3rd/9th century there were lively interlocations over the Qur’ān and the problems that the worshippers encounter when they read it, recite it, or hear it. The *mufasssirūn* did not delve into a discussion on the Qur’ān’s createdness/contingency or uncreatedness/eternity. They were, rather, more concerned about approaching the Qur’ānic text and the claim of its sacred language from the perspective of the *lingua sacra* belief. In touching upon this, the *mufasssirūn* not only engaged a public concern and challenge, but also other Muslim intellectuals, particularly the Mu‘tazilites. This plausibly invites for realizing that the Mu‘tazilites tackled problems related to the Qur’ānic text even before the *Mihna* phase, and that such a correlation continued after the receding of the *Mihna* ramifications (and maybe even after). In the ensuing section, I shall cross over to the Mu‘tazilite river-bed to see whether in the extant data we have on their teachings we might see them speaking about the createdness of the Qur’ān in any sort of a connection with the *lingua sacra* and the problematic ambiguity of the Qur’ānic language.

Lingua Sacra and Halq al-Qur’ān in The Mu‘tazili Thought

One of the teachings that are consensually ascribed to the Mu‘tazilites is their claim that the Qur’ān is created/contingent (*mahlūq/hādīth*). We have primary and secondary resources

⁶⁷ at-Tastarī, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm*, pp. 77-78.

⁶⁸ at-Tastarī, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm*, p. 79.

⁶⁹ at-Tastarī, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm*, p. 81.

⁷⁰ at-Tastarī, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm*, pp. 83-84.

explaining the meaning of this Mu'tazilite teaching and how these rationalist *mutakallims* elaborated on the religious text as created/contingent. However, while the 'how' question is intensively attended to, what is yet to be answered is the following question: *Why* did the Mu'tazilites opt for this theological belief? What drove them towards arguing for the createdness/contingency of the Qur'ān instead of just following the predominant trend of thought of their contemporary Muslim Qur'ānic scholars; namely that the Qur'ān is not just pre-existent but also uncreated text? Why the Mu'tazilites parted ways with this mainstream conviction?

In his book, *Al-Fiṣal fī al-Milal wal-Aḥwā' wal-Niḥal* (Chapters on the Sects, the Heresies and the Confessions), 'Alī b. Aḥmad b. Sa'īd Ibn Ḥazm touches upon the miraculousness of the Arabic text of the Qur'ān. Against those who ascribe the Qur'ān's uniqueness to its highest rank of linguistic rhetorical eloquence, Ibn Ḥazm maintains that the Qur'ānic miraculous superiority lies in the fact that its linguistic content is inimitable and impossible to be produced by any rhetorician or someone versed in Arabic language

لَكِنَّ الْإِعْجَازَ فِي ذَلِكَ إِنَّمَا هُوَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ حَالَ بَيْنَ الْعِبَادِ وَبَيْنَ أَنْ يَأْتُوا بِمِثْلِهِ وَرَفَعَ عَنْهُمْ الْقُوَّةَ فِي ذَلِكَ جُمْلَةً...
الْقُرْآنُ لَيْسَ مِنْ نَوْعِ بَلَاغَةِ النَّاسِ لِأَنَّ فِيهِ الْأَقْسَامُ الَّتِي فِي أَوَائِلِ السُّورِ وَالْحُرُوفِ الْمُقَطَّعَةِ الَّتِي لَا يَعْرِفُ أَحَدٌ مَعْنَاهَا
وَلَيْسَ هَذَا مِنْ نَوْعِ بَلَاغَةِ النَّاسِ الْمَعْهُودَةِ.

But the miraculous in this is that God, be praised and glorified, hindered the worshippers from creating a text like it and He totally deprived them of the capacity to do so... the Qur'ān is not a model of the people's rhetorical eloquence, for it contains these parts at the beginning of the suras and the dissected letters which no one knows their meaning. Such is not a model of the common public rhetoric.⁷¹

Ibn Ḥazm states that his argument here is his primary response to the Mu'tazilites' claim of the createdness of the Qur'ān in specific. In the light of this, it is valid to inquire if the Mu'tazilites' discourse on '*ḥalq al-Qur'ān*' was not just developed in relation to the debate over divine attributes and their createdness or eternity, but equally, if not primarily, within the framework of the Muslims' defense of the divine origin of the Qur'ān from a *lingua sacra* perspective. Ibn Ḥazm invites us to ponder such a connectedness when he associates the demonstration of the Qur'ān's miraculous nature directly with the factor of linguistic supreme rhetorical eloquence and hidden meanings.

Ibn Ḥazm's attestation suggests that the Mu'tazilites were not happy with the defense of the Qur'ān's divine origin on the basis of confirming the miraculous inimitability of its language. It seems that they did not consider the repetitiveness, the ambiguity, the unclarity, the

⁷¹ 'Alī b. Aḥmad b. Sa'īd Ibn Ḥazm, *Al-Fiṣal fī al-Milal wal-Aḥwā' wal-Niḥal* (Chapters on the Sects, the Heresies and the Confessions), (Cairo: al-Ḥānjī Bookshop, n. d.), I: 87.

interruptions, and other linguistic features demonstrative of uniqueness and inimitability, but evident, instead, of human weakness, normality (rather than supra-normality), fallibility, and contingency: The Qur'ān is imitable and not miraculous, and this is what one gleans from pausing at its linguistic posture. This seems to be the logic that possibly drove Ġa'far al-Qaṣābī and al-Aṣāgġ, two leading Mu'tazilite figures according to Ibn Ḥazm, to say: "إن القرآن ليس هو في المصاحف وإنما في المصاحف شيء آخر وهو حكاية القرآن" (*inna al-Qur'ān laysa huwa fil-maṣāḥifi wa-innamā fil-maṣāḥifi šay' un aḥarun wa-huwa ḥikāyat al-Qur'ān*/the Qur'ān does not exist inside the written texts. Inside the texts there is something else, namely the Qur'ānic narrative).⁷² For the Mu'tazilites, ambiguity and defections in the linguistic format of the written texts can never be characteristic of God's words and, thus, the divine words of God are not truly the *muṣḥaf*. These latter can only be God's words metaphorically (*bil-majāz*), as their ambiguous, and sometimes meaningless, linguistic terms and letters cannot really contain God's perfect, infinite, and infallible knowledge.⁷³ One can even glean from Ibn Ḥazm's insistence on treating the Arabic language of the Qur'ān as an emblem of its divinity his indirect response to the following Mu'tazilite argument: The Qur'ānic narrative inside the written *muṣḥaf* is created/contingent, simply because it is composed in a language originated by the Arabic-speaking nations (*al-lisān al-'arabi*), and because the Arabic text is inscribed by created human beings and by means of creaturely materials (*'avraq* [papers]) and *midād* [ink]).⁷⁴

The claim that some Mu'tazilites believed that the Qur'ānic written text is creaturely because it can be imitated by humans is also recorded in Abū al-Ḥasan al-Aṣ'arī's book, *Maqālāt al-Īslāmyyīn wa-Īḥtilāfāt al-Muṣalliyīn* (The Muslims' Discourses and the Worshippers' Discrepancies). He attributes to Ībrāhīm b. Sayyār an-Nazzām the belief that what is miraculous in the Qur'ānic text has nothing to do with its composition and writing, since these are potentially possible to be conducted by the worshippers, though God seeded in the humans an incapacity that hinders them from creating similar composition: "فَأَمَّا التَّأْلِيفُ وَالنَّظْمُ فَقَدْ كَانَ يَجُوزُ: "أن يقدر عليه العباد لولا أن الله منعهم بمنع ونجز أحدهما فيهم" (*fa-ammā at-ta'lifu wan-naẓmu faqad kāna yajūzu an yaqdira 'alayih al-'ibādu lanlā anna Allāh mana' abum bi-man'in wa-'ajzin aḥdatahumā fihim*).⁷⁵ Further down, al-Aṣ'arī invokes diverse Mu'tazilite views on the idea of '*ḥalq*.' He principally states that the Mu'tazila almost consensually relate that, though the Qur'ān is God's own words, there was a time when the Qur'ān was not, and that God, at one point, brought it into existence (*lam yakun tumma kān*). Here also, al-Aṣ'arī points out that, for some Mu'tazilites, like Hiṣām b. al-Ḥakam and al-Balḥī, one must neither say the Qur'ān is 'created' (*maḥlūq*) nor 'uncreated' (*qayru maḥlūq*) since God's words are God *per se*, and God's divine attributes cannot

⁷² Ibn Ḥazm, *Al-Fiṣal fī al-Milal*, IV: 149-150.

⁷³ Ibn Ḥazm, *Al-Fiṣal fī al-Milal*, VI: 3.

⁷⁴ Ibn Ḥazm, *Al-Fiṣal fī al-Milal*, VI: 3.

⁷⁵ Abū al-Ḥasan al-Aṣ'arī, *Maqālāt al-Īslāmyyīn wa-Īḥtilāfāt al-Muṣalliyīn* (The Muslims' Discourses and the Worshippers' Discrepancies), Muḥammad Muḥyiddīn 'Abduḥamīd (ed.), (Beirut & Sidon: al-Aṣriyya Bookshop, 1990), I.2, p. 296.

be described as separate entities (*li-anna aṣ-ṣifāta lā tuṣāf*).⁷⁶ Instead of ‘created’ or ‘uncreated,’ some Mu‘tazilites, like Muḥammad b. Šuġā‘ al-Talġī and Zuhayr al-Aṭarī, opted for terms like ‘contingent’ or ‘generated’ (*muḥdaṭ*) to speak about the Qur’ān as a contingent thing engendered by God, and not co-eternal with Him.⁷⁷

The most interesting understanding of ‘*ḥalq al-Qur’ān*’ al-Aš‘arī reports on is the stance of ‘Abdullah b. Kullāb, which sounds like an attempt at working out a solution around the Mu‘tazilite thought, instead of rejecting it. According to al-Aš‘arī, Ibn Kullāb differentiates between the Qur’ān as God’s speech (*kalām Allāh*) and the Arabic written attestation of the Qur’ānic speech. For him, God’s speech is not made of letters, nor vocalized and neither it is divisible or disintegrated nor partitive or variant: “إِنَّ الْكَلَامَ لَيْسَ بِحُرُوفٍ وَلَا صَوْتٍ وَلَا يَنْقَسِمُ وَلَا يَتَجَزَأُ وَلَا يَتَّبَعُ وَلَا يَتَغَايَرُ” (*inna al-kalāma laysa bi-ḥurūfīn wa-lā ṣawtin wa-lā yanqasimu wa-lā yatajaʿzaʿu wa-lā yatabaʿu wa-lā yataghāyaru*). On the other hand, Ibn Kullāb maintains, the Arabic written text is the produced depiction (in words and letters) of the divine speech. This depiction (*al-rasm*) contains divisibility, disintegration, partition, and variation, because it is made of linguistic differentiated letters (*al-ḥurūfu al-mutaḡāyyira*) and it is expressed in the readings of the Qur’ān (*qirāʾatu al-Qur’ān*).⁷⁸ Ibn Kullāb’s logic unfolds the Mu‘tazilite conviction that God’s speech cannot ontologically be the Arabic text of the written depiction of the Qur’ān, for the Arabic text contains differences, variations, and partitions; the things that cannot be applicable to God’s divine, eternal speech.

Be that as it may, Ibn Kullāb, as al-Aš‘arī presents his stance here, seems to be implicitly conveying the Mu‘tazilite suggestion that the written Arabic attestation of the *muṣḥaf* is not exactly, or evidently, a *lingua sacra*. We had to call the divine speech *allegorically* ‘Arabic Qur’ān.’ It was called ‘Arabic’ merely because the originated linguistic depiction that expresses it, and represents its reading is Arabic: “وَإِنَّمَا سَمِيَ كَلَامَ اللَّهِ سَبْحَانَهُ عَرَبِيًّا لِأَنَّ الرِّسْمَ الَّذِي هُوَ الْعِبَارَةُ عَنْهُ وَهُوَ قِرَاءَتُهُ “عَرَبِيٌّ فَسَمِيَ عَرَبِيًّا لَعَلَّه” (*wa-innamā summiya kalāmu Allāh, subḥānahu, ‘arabiyyan li-anna ar-rasmā al-laḏī huwa al-ibāra ‘anhu wa-huwa qirāʾatuhu ‘arabiyyun fa-summiya ‘arabiyyan li-illa*).⁷⁹ Ibn Kullāb, in al-Aš‘arī’s account, seems to be inviting for the conclusion that the Mu‘tazilites propose a notional and ontological distinction between ‘spoken speech,’ associated with hearing (*simā*), on one hand, and ‘written discourse,’ associated with inscribing (*kitāba*). For them, the first is applicable to God, and it can be deemed uncreated (though brought by God once into being, for some Mu‘tazilites), and it is not associated with language. Whereas, the second is inapplicable to divine wording, and it is deemed created because it is characterized with all the limitations, differentials, divisibility, partition, disintegration, and finiteness of human languages, Arabic language included. For the Mu‘tazilites, therefore, the written textual Arabic depiction of God’s speech belongs to the second category and there is no necessarily miraculous sacredness in its Arabic *rasm*.

⁷⁶ al-Aš‘arī, *Maqālāt al-Īslāmyyin*, II.284.2-3, p. 256.

⁷⁷ al-Aš‘arī, *Maqālāt al-Īslāmyyin*, II.284.4-5, p. 256.

⁷⁸ al-Aš‘arī, *Maqālāt al-Īslāmyyin*, II.284.20, p. 257.

⁷⁹ al-Aš‘arī, *Maqālāt al-Īslāmyyin*, II.284.10, p. 258.

The Arabic linguistic identity of the Qur'ān, then, neither demonstrates anything about its sacredness or miraculousness, nor does it directly grant the Qur'ān evident imitability. Later in the 4th/10th century, the Mu'tazilite judge, 'Abduljabbār al-Hamaḍānī, leaned towards a similar argument. In his multi-volumes' composition, *Al-Mughnī fīl-Tawḥīd wal-'Adl* (The Enricher on Monadization and Justice), 'Abduljabbār defended the miraculousness of the Qur'ān (in volume 16), and simultaneously explained and justified the Mu'tazilites' use of the term '*ḥalaqa*' (created) and '*muḥdaḥ*' (generated) in relation to the Qur'ān and its origination (in volume 7). In volume 16, he critiques Ibn Kullāb's take on createdness. Yet, he follows suit in avoiding the use of a *lingua sacra* preconception to prove the Qur'ān's miraculousness. Right in the volume he dedicated to defend this miraculousness, 'Abduljabbār relates, instead, that one of the justificatory logical indications of the validity of saying that the Qur'ān is created is the fact that it was descended in the language of the Arabs: "إِنَّمَا نَزَلَ بِلسَانِ الْعَرَبِ" (*innamā naẓala bi-lisāni al-'arab*). 'Abduljabbār concedes that this factor suggests that Arabic language existed *before* the Qur'ān's existence and that God has generated the Qur'ān *after* the appearance of this language: "أَحْدَثَهُ بَعْدَ ظُهُورِ هَذَا اللِّسَانِ" (*aḥḍaṭahu ba'da ẓuhūri ḥaḍā al-lisān*).⁸⁰ In other words, Arabic language needed to already exist and be known to the Arabs so that the Qur'ān's writ can be produced in it, so that the readers of this text will understand its content since they already know its language *before* the Qur'ān was engendered. All this logically necessitates, 'Abduljabbār implicitly proposes, that there was a time when the Qur'ān was not and then it came into being. This is a subtle use of the linguistic identity of the Qur'ān not to verify its miraculousness and inimitability, but, rather, to delineate a rational explanation for the Mu'tazilite belief in the Qur'ānic text's createdness and producibility.⁸¹

'Abduljabbār was relatively a later Mu'tazilite voice, which frankly grounded the miraculoussness of the Qur'ān in a strong defense of the Qur'ān's superior, inimitable, and unmatched eloquence and fluency (*faṣāḥa*), as one can read all over volume 16 of his *Mughnī*. Earlier Mu'tazilites from the 2nd/8th- 3rd/9th centuries were less certain or emphatic about connecting the Qur'ān's extent of uniqueness to its Arabic linguistic superiority or supernatural caliber. Aḥmad al-Šahristānī in his book, *Al-Milal wal-Niḥal* (The Sects and the Confessions) reports also on the ideas of the early Mu'tazilites. He refers, for instance, to Bišr b. al-Mu'tamir's staunch emphasis on the createdness of the Qur'ān, relating that the latter insisted

⁸⁰ 'Abduljabbār al-Hamaḍānī, *Al-Mughnī fīl-Tawḥīd wal-'Adl* (The Enricher on Monadization and Justice), Amīn al-Ḥūlī (ed.), (Cairo: al-Dār al-Mašriyya Press, n. d.), XVI.102a, p. 233.

⁸¹ For some other, now classical and slightly outdated, literature on the miraculousness of the Qur'ān subject, one can also see and assess, for example, J.R.T.M. Peters, *God's Created Speech: A Study in the Speculative Theology of the Mu'tazilī Qādī l-Qudāt Abū l-Ḥasan 'Abd al-Jabbār bn. Aḥmad al-Hamaḍānī* (Leiden: Brill 1976); argaret Larkin, "The inimitability of the Qur'ān: Two perspectives", *Religion and Literature* 20 (1988), 31-47; M. Larkin, *The Theology of Meaning: 'Abd al-Qābir's theory of discourse*, (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1995); Sophia Vasalou, "The miraculous eloquence of the Qur'ān", *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, 4 (2002), 23-53; and S. Vasalou, "i'jāz", *The Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics*, II, (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 302-307.

on this createdness not just because stating otherwise would make the Qur'ān co-eternal with God: "من قال يقدمه بأنه قد أثبت قدمين" (*man qāla bi-qidamibi bi-annah qad atbata qidamayin*). Bišr's insistence on the createdness of the Qur'ān is equally grounded in his belief that people can imitate the Qur'ān's eloquence: "إن الناس قادرون على مثل القرآن فصاحة" (*inna an-nāsa qādirūna 'alā mitli al-Qur'an faṣaḥa*).⁸² Al-Šahristānī also reports that Bišr's disciple, Abū Musā al-Mirdār (whom he calls 'the monk of the Mu'tazila' (*rāhib al-Mu'tazila*)), not only confirmed the createdness of the Qur'ān on the basis of the human ability to produce a text linguistically equal to it, but also negated any evidence of the Qur'ān's miraculousness that can be derived from claimed Arabic linguistic eloquence and succinctness: "إبطال إعجاز القرآن من جهة الفصاحة والبلاغة" (*ibtāl i'ğāzi al-Qur'an min ġihati al-faṣāḥati wal-balāġa*).⁸³

To the above Mu'tazilite interpretation, 'Amr b. Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ, in his attempt at justifying the Mu'tazilite belief in the createdness of the Qur'ān, adds that, not just people can compose texts that can match the Qur'ān in eloquence, but God can also make amendments to the Qur'ānic composition if God willed to. For example, God can replace one verse with another (*yubaddilu āyatan makāna āya*), displace and abrogate a verse by another (*yansahu āyatan bi-āya*), or even take this Qur'ān in its entirety away and bring over another (*yadhhabu bi-haḍā al-Qur'an wa-ya'ti bi-ġayrih*). Be that as it may, al-Jāḥiẓ opines, God's words in the Qur'ān cannot be eternal like His knowledge, but rather created and engendered.⁸⁴ God can perform these options in the Qur'ān because it is a composed writ that has a body and a sound (*ġismun wa-sawt*), and it is composed and it has a structure (*ta'lifun wa-dū naẓm*); it has signs and divisions (*tauqī'un wa-taqtī'*) and it is disposed to expansion or reduction (*yaḥtamilu al-ziyādata wal-nuqṣān*) and it is exposed to perish ability and durability (*al-fanā'u wal-baqā'*).⁸⁵ In other words, the Qur'ānic text, like any other creaturely thing holding the same features, is engendered *de facto* and not just analogically. In this sense, the Qur'ānic Arabic writ is imitable, since the humans can imitate it (*hikāya*) in their hearing, memorization, and writing.⁸⁶

We have other accounts reporting that what al-Jāḥiẓ states was echoed also in the discourses of other Mu'tazilites from that era. Ibn Ḥazm, for example, informs us that the Mu'tazilite, Ġa'far b. Mubaššir al-Qaṣabī, used to say: "The Qur'ān is not the pages of the book. What is

⁸² Aḥmad al-Šahristānī, *Al-Milal wal-Niḥal* (The Sects and the Confessions), Aḥmad Fahmī Muḥammad (ed.), (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2007), Vol. I, p. 69.

⁸³ al-Šahristānī, *Al-Milal wal-Niḥal*, I: 30. The same reporting is also repeated in Ibn al-'Abrī, *Tārīḥ Muḥtaṣar al-Duwal* (The Brief Historiography of States), Anṭoun Šālḥānī, S.J. (ed.), (Hāzmiyyih, LB: Dār al-Rā'id al-Lubnāniyya, 1983), pp. 164-165.

⁸⁴ 'Amr b. Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ, "Ḥalq al-Qur'ān" (The Createdness of the Qur'ān), pp. 294-295.

⁸⁵ al-Jāḥiẓ, "Ḥalq al-Qur'ān", pp. 290-291.

⁸⁶ See al-Aš'arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyin*, II.1-2, p. 600; al-Šahristānī, *Al-Milal wal-Niḥal*, II.5-7: 49; and Harry Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalām*, pp. 268-269.

in the pages of the book is something else, and that is the imitation of the Qur’ān”.⁸⁷ If ‘imitation’ is designative of an act of bringing something into being, which the human writer, reciter, and memorizer can originate, then the text of the Qur’ān is created. Such a logic stands behind the Mu‘tazilites’ general differentiation between the preexisting Qur’ān, which is saved in a reserved tablet in God’s eternity, and the earthly Qur’ānic *muṣḥaf* that is written in Arabic language. The latter, which is imitable, fallible, and ambiguous in some of its linguistic attestations, is made by the human agent through writing, memorizing, or reciting. The Mu‘tazilite, Abū al-Hudayl al-‘Allāf, means as much when he construes all these human-made mediums the ‘abode’ (*maḥallu*) of the preexisting Qur’ān, and this dwelling location is created by the human to enable the Qur’ān to exist in earthly form.⁸⁸ In his turn, al-Šahrastānī reports the Mu‘tazilites’ saying that the Qur’ān is generated as a contingent (*muḥdaṭ*) and created (*maḥlūq*) thing in the abode where its letter (*ḥarf*), sound (*ṣawt*) and likeness (*amṭal*), namely the earthly Arabic texts, are all just created imitations (*ḥikāyāt*).⁸⁹

The belief in the imitability of the Qur’ānic Arabic text seems also to underpin an-Nazzām’s take on the Qur’ān as a created text. He is reported “to have denied the miraculous nature of the literary form of the Qur’ān and to have maintained that a work of greater [linguistic] beauty and elegance could be produced by others”.⁹⁰ For an-Nazzām, not every Qur’ānic content is evidence of the prophetic status of Muḥammad, for there are parts there in that are linguistically obscure and far from revelatory. Only the content that makes the unknown understandable and disclosed, he maintains, are revelatory in this regard. It seems clear from this that the Mu‘tazilites shared with some other Muslim scholars the feeling that the Qur’ānic Arabic is far from sacred and is linguistically inflicted with weaknesses and problems at considerable places inside the *muṣḥaf*. Harry Wolfson, thus, is not probably far from truth in relating that, for Mu‘tazilites like an-Nazzām and others:

The language in which the Qur’ān is written is only an external shell of the created word of God and an obstacle to its audibility. That shell... is broken, as it were, when one reads the Qur’ān.⁹¹

Such an attention to the literary imperfections of the Arabic text of the Qur’ān drove the Mu‘tazilite Mu‘ammar al-Sulamī, for instance, to a far radical extreme denial that the Qur’ān could by any means be created by God. For Mu‘ammar, such an Arabic literarily broken ‘shell’

⁸⁷ Ibn Ḥazm, *Al-Fiṣal fī al-Milal wal-Aḥwā’ wal-Niḥal*, II.9-10: 97, as translated into English and cited in H. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalām*, p. 269.

⁸⁸ Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalām*, pp. 270-271.

⁸⁹ al-Šahrastānī, *Al-Milal wal-Niḥal*, II.10-11: 30.

⁹⁰ Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalām*, p. 274.

⁹¹ Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalām*, p. 275.

of God's words cannot but be the responsibility of a human creator or any other created natural side.⁹²

The skepticism towards the *lingua sacra* belief and its applicability to the Arabic text of the Qur'ān, as we can realize, is not a Mu'tazilite invention, and it did not start, so it seems, in the 3rd/9th century. It might, rather, have already been in circulation since the 2nd/8th century. Josef van Ess seems to be suggesting this, as he brings to our attention the text that some scholars used to attribute to Ibn al-Muqaffa' (and it was refuted by al-Qāsim b. Ībrāhīm), where the author seems to suggest that the Qur'ānic text is imitable and that nothing really singles out its Arabic language from other languages. Commenting on this text, van Ess states the following:

The author was not imitating the Qur'ān in order to replace or improve it, but merely to show that the Qur'ānic style was nothing special, that the awe people felt when they heard the *suras* was due to their being accustomed to hearing them in a liturgical context. [Such imitation seems to be responding to] a diffuse conviction that the language of the Qur'ān was perfect and inimitably beautiful, a conviction presumably held mainly by Arabs.⁹³

Associating the language with hearing evolved in the ensuing century's Mu'tazilite discourses into something designative of the nature of divine speech. Van Ess brings to our attention, in this regard, an-Nazzām's definition of divine speech, and of human speech, as a conglomeration of interrupted soundings (*aṣṣūāt muqatta'a*), which God brings into being (almost begot) in a specific place (namely, in the heavenly realm). Be that as it may, an-Nazzām concluded, this broken linguistic shell of the Qur'ānic text cannot be God's un-mediated, un-created speech, but only figuratively a mediation of God's speech through created means.⁹⁴ For an-Nazzām, the challenge lies in the fact that God conveyed His speech via this Arabic language and by means of any Arabic Prophet. This leaves us with a scripture "expressed in oblique language and awaits interpretation", and it informs us that "the Qur'ān is not rhetorically unsurpassable".⁹⁵ Van Ess suggests that it was an-Nazzām's views that inspired al-Jāhīz to relate that "*i'ḡāḡ* is not a permanent quality of the Qur'ān, but a kind of a shock caused by the challenge (*taḥaddī*)": If it is a miracle, it is not unique, but "a miracle God worked in other cases as well".⁹⁶

⁹² Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalām*, p. 276.

⁹³ J. van Ess, *Theology and Society*, II: 40.

⁹⁴ J. van Ess, *Theology and Society*, III: 443-444.

⁹⁵ J. van Ess, *Theology and Society*, III: 444-445.

⁹⁶ J. van Ess, *Theology and Society*, III: 446.

Concluding Remarks

One can certainly find in the extant primary resources considerable data on the historical and intellectual circumstances that surrounded, or generated, the Mu‘tazilites’ discourse on ‘the createdness/contingency of the Qur’ān’ during the 2nd/8th- 3rd/9th centuries. Known, and intensively studied in contemporary research are the political crisis (*Mihna*) that this Mu‘tazilite teaching participated in inflecting during the reigns of al-Ma’mūn and al-Mu‘taṣim, and how the Mu‘tazilites exploited this doctrine’s decree in the service of their ambitious manipulation of power to prevail over the intellectual scene. Known also are much details related to the theological and philosophical components of *how* the Mu‘tazilites advocated for their belief and how ‘*halq al-Qur’ān*’ was theologically linked to their understanding of God’s oneness, divine attributes, and God-world relation.

All this, nevertheless, does not give us a direct answer to the specific question of *why* the Mu‘tazilites needed to develop a discourse on the idea of ‘createdness’ (*halq*) in particular, and *why* to speak about this createdness idea specifically in relation to the Qur’ān (not to *ḥadīṭ* or to *ṣarī‘a* or to *Sunna* for instance) in the first place? The ‘*why*’ inquiry is not truly answered by just looking at how the Mu‘tazilites constructed *Kalām* on God and the attributes in relation to the createdness of the Qur’ān. Also, the political ramifications of adopting this belief shed light on some major consequences and results of embracing such belief and implementing it in power-games. However, it does not necessarily unearth the reasons and factors that generated the belief in the createdness of the Qur’ān and the genesis story that lies behind it.

In this essay, I tried to revisit the discourses of early Qur’ānic scholars on the linguistic superiority of the Qur’ān, as well as the available data on the early Mu‘tazilite discourses on ‘*halq al-Qur’ān*’. My examination of the available data invites for pausing at a serious causal link behind the Mu‘tazilite, rather, reactionary stance on the Qur’ānic attestation. This causality is primarily rooted in a particular discourse the Muslims at that era started to construct on the superiority of the Qur’ān and on the basis of a gradually spreading presumption that the Arabic language of the Qur’ān is not just *lingua franca*, but ultimately a *lingua sacra* that is demonstrative of the miraculoussness of the Muslim religious text.

There seems to have evolved among the Mu‘tazilites a conviction that claiming the miraculoussness and divine origin of the Prophet’s religious book on the basis of its Arabic textual-linguistic quality is not a rationally and theologically persuasive, solidly plausible, or rationally demonstrable argument. The Mu‘tazilites seemed to have been down-to-earth in their perceptive sensitivity towards the complains and quarrels in the public domain about the problems and challenges, let alone what is deemed either wrong or foreign, in the Arabic text of the Qur’ān. For the believers, the Qur’ānic texts were sometimes sources of discrepancies, ambiguity, obscurity, contradictions, and divisiveness. One can find good examples of Muslim referential primary sources suggesting that the Qur’ānic Arabic text during that era was not just a triggering source of awe, admiration, and wonder, but also a subject of fractions and schisms. Suffice it is just to go through the long list of titles related to problems in the

Qur'ānic text in Ibn an-Nadīm's *Fihrist*, volume one, chapter one, article three, for the reader to encounter an endless number of books Muslims composed to interpret the Qur'ān, to attend to the challenges of grasping its meanings and decoding its metaphors and their problems (*al-kutub al-mu'allafa fi ma'āni al-Qur'ān wa-muškilibi wa-Mağāzih*), or to tackle the awkward elements in the Qur'ān (*al-kutub al-mu'allafa fi ġaribi al-Qur'ān*), or its various languages (*fi Luġāti al-Qur'ān*), or the discrepancies among its various *muṣḥafs* (*fi Iḥtilāfi al-Maṣāḥif*).⁹⁷

One of the known orthodox Sunnite traditionalist authors, who seems to have been deeply concerned about the linguistic problems and textual ambiguities and confusions the common believers were seemingly exposed to in their use of the Qur'ān, is Ibn Qutayba. One just needs to look at some of the titles and themes of the extant writs from his pen to realize that the textual linguistic attestation of the Qur'ān might have seriously driven the public to become skeptic about the sacredness of the Arabic language of the Qur'ān, thus of the Qur'ān's divine origin: *al-Iḥtilāfu fi al-Lafzi wal-Raddi'alā al-Jahmiyya wal-Muṣabbiha* (The Discrepancies in Pronunciation and the Response to the Jahmites and the Anthropomorphists); *Ta'wīlu Maṣākili al-Qur'ān* (Hermeneuting the Qur'ānic Problematic Aspects). Ibn Qutayba conceded at least the Qur'ān's need for interpretation and exegesis, he did not condescend above it. For him, the Qur'ānic literary attestation is not quite clear or self-elucidating by default.

Another exemplary demonstration of the problems the Qur'ānic texts' lucidness in that era is the *muğādala*, mentioned earlier, in al-Ma'mūn's court between Biṣr al-Marīsī and 'Abdul'azīz al-Kinānī al-Makkī over the createdness of the Qur'ān. There, al-Makkī degrades al-Marīsī's take on the Qur'ān upon the latter's non-Arab, foreign (*a'ġami*) background and original tongue (Hebrew), accusing his linguistic apprehension of making the Qur'ānic lucid Arabic literal meaning obscure and ambiguous and exempting the Arabic text of the Qur'ān from such responsibility. Noticeable also is the fact that the questioning of the Arabic textual nature of the Qur'ān occupies an entire, rather lengthy, section in al-Makkī's account on the debate over the specific subject of the createdness of the Qur'ān and no other issue. There, al-Marīsī argues that the Arabic language of the Qur'ān needs interpretation and exegesis (*ta'wīl wa-tafsīr*) to be understood correctly, whereas al-Makkī rejects the createdness claim upon the conviction that the Qur'ānic Arabic is lucid and its literal meanings are evidently plain to those who are indigenous Arabs and masterfully speak Arabic as their native language. Insisting on the Qur'ānic Arabic's need for interpretation and exegesis (al-Marīsī) or on the Qur'ānic Arabic literal lucidity (al-Makkī), and both sides' use of such arguments in particular in a debate over the createdness of the Qur'ān, are yet further demonstrations that this was one of the possible, urgent factors behind the dynamics of the 3rd/9th century's Muslim-Muslim interlocutional context.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Muḥammad b. Abī Ya'qūb Iṣḥāq al-Warrāq, al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-Fihrist* (The Book of Catalogue), Riḍā Tajaddud al-Māzindrānī (ed.), (Amman: Dār al-Masīra, 1988), I.1.3: 36-45.

⁹⁸ Al-Makkī, *al-Hayda wal-Ītibār fi al-Radd 'alā Man Qāla bi-Halq al-Qur'ān*, II: 59ff.

The massive number of texts and authors the *Fihrist* of Ibn an-Nadīm enlists, and the debate over the clarity of the Qur’ānic language in the abovementioned *muḡādala*, strongly suggest to us the seriousness of the quarrels, problems, and instability the Arabic textual attestations of the Qur’ān and its language were causing in that Abbasid social and intellectual context. In the light of this, the Mu‘tazilites attended to such a public crisis and decided to critically respond to it by trying to find an explanation to the linguistic fallibility, ambiguity and problems of the religious Book. They endeavored to achieve this by means of confirming the Qur’ān’s createdness. They could have opted for this idea upon the hope that it might bring forth some peace-of-mind and tranquility to the public scene.

There are enough data, as this paper endeavored to show, to make us propose the following: Comparing the theological stances on the Qur’ān that were developed by the Qur’ānic exegetes and commentators (*mufasssirūn*), on one hand, and by the Muslim Mu‘tazilites, on the other, relinquishes serious indications that the former’s defense of the uncreatedness of the Qur’ān and the latter’s argument for the createdness of the religious text were neither related primarily to a theological disagreement (though such disagreement did exist indeed) about God’s oneness and the divine attributes. It was, rather, contextually driven and historically generated from an occupation with a *lingua sacra* idea that was attentively constructed and spread during the early centuries of the Abbasid era.

In his monograph on the historical origination of the Qur’ān, Stephen Shoemaker chases after the transition of the Qur’ān from an oral tradition into a written text, concluding that “the conversion of an oral tradition to a written one is not sudden but gradual, involving numerous stages and multiple editions along the way to a finished product”.⁹⁹ In a similar vein, is it valid to surmise that the debate over the *lingua sacra* nature of the Arabic written Qur’ān in relation to the theological idea of ‘ḥalq al-Qur’ān’ was just one stage along the way of bringing to completion the Qur’ānic attestation in its now written, no more oral, form gradually, and through multiple editions of composing, reading, and determining the shape and content of the finished reliable product? If this conjecture is plausible, and if the Qur’ānic Arabic text is “a continuous communal rethinking”,¹⁰⁰ the ‘createdness of the Qur’ān’ theology might not be confounded to the circle of the Muslim-Muslim discussions on monotheism and divine attributes. It can, rather, be validly seen as one of the chapters of the Muslims’ story with the evolutionary formation of the final Qur’ānic canonical written *muṣḥaf*. This, I reckon, is a niche of inquiry that merits further serious investigation.

⁹⁹ Stephen J. Shoemaker, *Creating the Qur’ān: A Historical-Critical Study*, (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2022), pp. 14-15.

¹⁰⁰ S. J. Shoemaker, *Creating the Qur’ān*, p. 260; an expression earlier used and expanded by Angelika Neuwirth, “Locating the Qur’ān in the Epistemic Space of Late Antiquity”, in *Books and Written Culture of the Islamic World -Studies Presented to Claude Gilliot on the Occasion of His 75th Birthday*, Claude Gilliot; Andrew Rippin and Roberto Tottoli (eds.), (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2015), pp. 159-179 and pp. 166-167.

Abstract: One of the discourses that are ascribed to the Mu‘azilites is their claim that the Qur’ān is created. We do have primary and secondary resources explaining this Mu‘tazilite teaching and elaborating on how these rationalist *mutakallims* treated the Religious Text as a created entity. However, while the question of ‘how’ is intensively exposed in scholarship, what is yet to be answered is the following question: *Why* did the Mu‘tazilites opt for this theological belief in specific? What drove them to argue for the createdness of the Qur’ān instead of just following the predominant trend of thought that was adopted by their contemporary Muslim Qur’ānic scholars, namely the belief that the Qur’ān is not just pre-existent but also an uncreated text? What could be the driving-force behind the Mu‘tazilites’ parting ways with this mainstream conviction? This essay tackles these inquiries by means of proposing that the Mu‘tazilites’ speech about the createdness of the Qur’ān is scriptural, linguistic, and exegetical in nature. It is expressive of their corosspollination with the other Muslim Qur’ānic scholars’ praising of the sacredness of the Qur’ān’s Arabic language; this belief that was commonly emphasized by the Muslim public. This might indicate that ‘*ḥalq al-Qur’ān*’ is the Mu‘tazilites’ way of questioning the ‘*lingua sacra*’ idea in correspondence with other Muslim traditionalists’ reservations on this sacredness. The essay develops this proposal by unpacking the stances of discourses on the Qur’ān from 2nd/8th-3rd/9th centuries onwards on the sacredness of the Qur’ān’s Arabic language. It, then, looks attentively at some of the main discourses on the createdness of the Qur’ān in known Mu‘tazilite texts. The

Resumen: Uno de los discursos atribuidos a los mutazilíes es su afirmación de que el Corán fue creado. Disponemos de fuentes primarias y secundarias que explican esta enseñanza mutazilita y profundizan en la forma en que estos mutakallimūn racionalistas trataron el texto religioso como una entidad creada. Sin embargo, aunque la cuestión del ‘cómo’ se debate ampliamente en la erudición, lo que aún queda por responder es la siguiente pregunta: ¿por qué los mutazilíes optaron por esta creencia teológica en particular? ¿Qué les llevó a defender la creación del Corán en lugar de seguir simplemente la corriente de pensamiento predominante adoptada por sus eruditos coránicos musulmanes contemporáneos, es decir, la creencia de que el Corán no sólo es preexistente, sino también un texto increado? ¿Cuál podría ser el motivo detrás del distanciamiento de los mutazilíes de esta convicción dominante? El presente trabajo aborda estas cuestiones y propone que el discurso de los mutazilíes sobre la creación del Corán es de naturaleza escritural, lingüística y exegética. Esto expresa su correspondencia con la alabanza de otros eruditos coránicos musulmanes a la sacralidad del Corán en árabe, una creencia que era comúnmente enfatizada por el público musulmán. Esto podría indicar que el *ḥalq al-Qur’ān* es la forma en que los mutazilíes cuestionan la idea de la ‘*lingua sacra*’, en consonancia con las reservas de otros tradicionalistas musulmanes sobre dicha sacralidad. Este trabajo desarrolla esta propuesta analizando las posturas de los discursos sobre el Corán desde los siglos II/VIII-III/IX, en adelante, en relación con la sacralidad del Corán en árabe. Para ello, se examinan con atención algunos de los

essay aspires at offering a new reading of the historical-contextual and religious factors that generated the controversy between Muslim scholars over the createdness of the Qur’ān, and wants to propose a possibility exceeds the classically believed political and power-game causing factors.

Keywords: Createdness of the Qur’ān; Mu‘tazilites; *Mufasssirūn*; *Mihna*; *Lingua sacra*; Early Islam.

principales discursos sobre la creación del Corán en textos mutazilíes conocidos. Este trabajo pretende ofrecer una nueva lectura de los factores histórico-contextuales y religiosos que generaron la controversia entre los eruditos musulmanes sobre la creación del Corán y propone una posibilidad que trasciende los factores políticos y de juego de poder clásicamente considerados.

Palabras clave: Creación del Corán; Mutazilíes; *Mufasssirūn*; *Mihna*; *Lingua sacra*; Islam primitivo.