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SEMANTICS OF METAPHOR: AN OVERVIEW OF
MAJAZ INTERPRETATION IN THE HOLY QUR'AN

BY

SULAYITI DAWUDA KABALI

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INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ISLAMIC
THOUGHT AND CIVILIZATION (ISTAC)
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ABSTRACT

Majāz (metaphor) is the backbone of any language. It supports its structure and makes it strong and more beautiful. It clearly communicates the intended meaning to the reader or listener. It dramatizes it and presents it in a different and special style. This unique structure, uncommon style, and different presentation of the meaning has made *majāz* a center of controversy over many centuries. Scholars were divided on this matter into two major groups. One group was moderate and considered *majāz* as a significant vanguard of the language and a means of its development. The traditionalists were of two kinds. Those who were totally offended by its nature and completely denied its occurrence neither in the Qur'ān nor in Arabic language, and those who considered it a lie. They, therefore, rejected its occurrence in the Qur'ān because it does not befit Allah. They also refused its occurrence in the prophetic traditions. The Qur'ān; the most eloquent work ever written in the Arabic language, was revealed at a time when the Arabs (the people of Prophet Muḥammad) were highly proud of their tribesmen who used their tongues to defend their tribes. They used to respect and honor them publicly with great awards. These men of letters, especially the poets, were fond of using figurative language. When the Qur'ān was revealed it did not change this significant aspect of the language. On the contrary, it promoted it more with deeper meanings and applications that go beyond the human ability and, hence, it challenged them to introduce a similar book which could compete with the Qur'ān eloquently if they doubted that it did originate from Allah. The Companions of the Prophet and their successors did not argue about the figurative expressions of the Qur'ān especially those connected with Allāh Himself. They believed in those sentences as they were passed to them without investing their deep meanings. Rather, 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb whipped a man who asked about the meaning of such a verse to discourage him from sinking into the sea which he may not be able to come out of it. After a while and with the spread of Islam to other areas of non Arab lands, the intellectual arguments about these phrases of the Qur'ān and in the prophetic *aḥādīth* evolved and ended up in disputes. These disputes have resulted into theological wrangles in the Ummah and many have used them as an excuse to excommunicate others from Islam. This study investigates the meaning of *majāz* and its stages of development to justify or refute such a stand. It goes further to categorize the Qur'ānic verses into those with theological connotations and those without, and proposes a unified position on the possibility of occurrence of *majāz* in the Qur'ān. It discusses the linguistic and theological implications of negating the dynamic power of *majāz* in the Qur'ān and in the prophetic traditions. It goes further to discuss the arguments of those who negate the occurrence of *majāz* in the Qur'ān giving special emphasis to the arguments of Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah. He is the only one among the deniers of the legitimacy of *majāz* whose works are still surviving. After a thorough analysis of the materials of the deniers of the occurrence of *majāz* in the Qur'ān and in the prophetic traditions, it was concluded that *majāz* is so vital in communication that it cannot be rejected from the Qur'ān and from the prophetic traditions. It is the backbone of all languages. Negating such an important aspect of the language in the two original sources of Islam is tantamount to declaring them inferior to many other works of Arabic literature. This is absolutely inconceivable.

ملخص البحث

المجاز هو العمود الرئيسي لأي لغة من اللغات، فهو يؤيد ويقوى بناءها ويعبر عن جمالها، فهو يقدم المعنى المراد إلى القارئ أو المستمع بوضوح، فإنه يصوره تصويراً بأسلوبه الخاص الذي يختلف عن الأساليب الأخرى. فهذه الحالة الفريدة وأسلوبه غير المعهود وتقديمه المعنى بصورة مختلفة عن الوسائل المعهودة، جعل المجاز محل خلاف عبر القرون الكثيرة. فالعلماء انقسموا حوله إلى فرقتين. فرقة معتدلة نظرت إلى المجاز على أنه الوسيلة الأساسية المؤدية إلى نمو وتقدم اللغة. وأما المتمسكون فقد انقسموا فيما بينهم إلى مجموعتين؛ مجموعة اشمزت من طبيعة المجاز ورفضته في القرآن الكريم وفي اللغة العربية مطلقاً، وفرقة أخرى نظروا إليه بأنه كذب، فلذلك رفضوا وقوعه في القرآن الكريم لأن الكذب لا يليق مع الله. وكذلك رفضوا وقوعه في الحديث النبوي الشريف. فالقرآن الذي هو أبلغ الكتب المكتوبة بالعربية أنزل في الوقت الذي كان العرب، (وهم قوم محمد صلى الله عليه وسلم) يفتخرون بأبناء قبائلهم الذين استعملوا أسنتهم للدفاع عن قبائلهم. كانوا يعظمونهم ويحترمونهم ويعطونهم العطايات القيمة. هؤلاء الناس وخاصة الشعراء منهم كانوا مولعين باستعمال المجاز في كلامهم ولم يغير القرآن تلك الحالة. وبالعكس، فقد عززه القرآن وقام بترقيته فصار أسلوبه معجزاً للبشر وتحداهم بأن يأتوا بمثله في البلاغة إن كانوا شاكين أنه من عند الله. الصحابة رضوان الله عليهم والتابعون لم يعرف عنهم أنهم اهتموا بمناقشة معاني المجازات القرآنية وخاصة تلك التي لها علاقة مع الله جل جلاله، فإنهم آمنوا بها وأمروها كما جاءت، بل ضرب عمر بن الخطاب رجلاً سأل عن أمر من هذه الأمور تحذيراً له من أن يخوض في مثل هذه المناقشات التي قد تكون سبباً لضلالة. فبعد مرور مدة من وفاة الرسول صلى الله عليه وسلم وبعد أن انتشر الإسلام في الأنحاء الأخرى غير العربية، بدأت المحاورات العلمية الحرة حول معاني تلك العبارات في القرآن الكريم وفي الحديث الشريف وانتهى الأمر باختلاف العلماء في معانيها، ونتج عن ذلك خلافات عقديّة وصلت إلى حد تكفير بعضهم بعضاً. فهذا البحث تطرق إلى البحث عن معنى كلمة المجاز وعن مراحل تطور مفهومه لينقض أو يؤيد مثل ذلك النهج الذي سلكه علماء التوحيد. لقد قسمت الآيات فيه إلى تلك التي لها صلات بالأمر العقديّة وإلى تلك التي لا تمت إلى ذلك بصلة واقترحت الطريقة الأمثل التي يمكن بواسطتها الوصول إلى الإيمان بوجود المجاز في القرآن الكريم أو عدمه دون أن يقتضي الأمر تكفير أحد. وقد ناقشت في هذا البحث آراء الذين يرفضون وجود المجاز في القرآن الكريم مع التركيز على آراء شيخ الإسلام أحمد بن تيمية لأن كتب الآخرين الذين رفضوا وقوع المجاز في القرآن الكريم قد ضاعت. وأما كتب شيخ الإسلام عن الموضوع فهي لا تزال باقية إلى يومنا هذا. وبعد المناقشة الدقيقة لآراء الرافضين بوقوع المجاز في القرآن الكريم وفي الحديث النبوي الشريف، توصلت الدراسة إلى أن المجاز ركن أساسي في اللغة وفي القرآن الكريم والسنة النبوية ولا يمكن أن يخلو القرآن أو الحديث النبوي منه. كيف، وهو العمود الفقري الذي تعتمد عليه أي لغة من اللغات؛ فإنكاره في هذين المصدرين الأساسيين للإسلام يعادل إعلانهما أقل درجة بلاغية في كثير من الوثائق العربية الأخرى، وهو أمر غير مقبول أصلاً.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation of Sulayiti Dawuda Kabali has been examined and is approved by the following:

HASAN EL-NAGAR
Supervisor

AHMAD SHEHU ABDUSSALAM
Internal examiner

YASIEN MOHAMED
External Examiner

WAN RAFAEI ABDUL RAHMAN
Chairman

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

Sulayiti Dawuda Kabali

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SEMANTICS OF METAPHOR: AN OVERVIEW OF MAJAZ INTERPRETATION IN THE HOLY QUR'ĀN

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To my biological parents; Hajjat NAMWANDU Mwajjuma Namutebi and the late Hajj Dawūd M. Gweyawadde of Kinoni, Masaka, Uganda and to my spiritual parent Sheikh Mūsā ‘Abd al-Wāḥid Bakulumpagi of Butabalwa, Masaka, Uganda.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BSOAS = Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies

Ed./ Eds = Editor/ Editors

Edn. = Edition

EI¹ = Encyclopedia of Islam, First Edition.

EI² = Encyclopedia of Islam, New Edition.

GAL= Geschichte der Arabischen Litteratur

GAS= Geschichte Des Arabischen Schrifttums

JAOS = Journal of American Oriental School

REPh=Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy

SWT = Subḥānahu wa ta'āla

Trans. =Translator/ Translated by

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The Holy Qur'ān is a divine message revealed in the Arabic language to guide mankind. It was gradually revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad, may peace be upon him, in a period of twenty-three years depending on events that were taking place. Prophets were given powers to perform miracles, which were in conformity with the nature of their people's most overwhelming actions. Prophet Muḥammad as the last messenger of God who was sent to all mankind was given the Holy Book as his everlasting miracle to all generations and races. Intellectuals of various disciplines have recognized the Qur'ān as a true miracle of God and that it is superior to all other miracles till the end of the world. Ibn Rushd, one of the controversial and great Muslim philosophers asserts that

The clearest of miracles is the venerable Book of Allah, the existence of which is not an interruption of the course of nature assumed by tradition, like the changing of a rod into a serpent, but its miraculous nature is established by way of perception and consideration for every man who has been or who will be till the Day of Resurrection. And so this miracle is far superior to all others.¹

The style of the Qur'ān, has defeated all human beings and jinn to imitate and surpass it in spite of the challenge that is recorded in it for many centuries. History tells us that after the demise of the Prophet some people claimed to receive revelations but it has never been recorded anywhere that even these people claimed at any given time that their messages were equal to that of the Qur'ān. The fact that this challenge has remained valid up to this day without anyone coming out and claim that he has produced a book that is similar to the Holy Qur'ān is an indicator

¹ Abū al-Walīd Muḥammad, Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* "The incoherence of the incoherence", ed. Sulaymān Dunyā (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1965), 515-6; Oliver Leaman, *Averoes and Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 53

that this book is of divine origin and that it is being guarded by none other than the One Who revealed it. Although the Qur'ān was revealed in the language that the Arabs understood very well and excelled in it to the extent of holding an annual event where they used to honor the excellent poets and orators, its revelation caused a literary revolution among the Arabs. They had no choice but to surrender to its charming language, its semantics and style.² Some of them believed in it while others rejected its doctrine of unity of God but, seeing the linguistic excellence of the Qur'ān, they stood firmly and declared that the Qur'ān was not originating from Muḥammad.³

As the Final Divine revelation, the Qur'ān completely changed the semantics of the language that was known to the Arabs. This could be the major reason why they failed to compose anything similar to it, in spite of the continued challenge to do so. The sequence of sentences therein relates to each other in a highly systematic and organized manner, which cannot accept a replacement or any alteration. Each word or particle in the Qur'ān communicates the intended meaning accurately and serves a rhetoric purpose in its proper place. Words like *al-ḥāqqah*⁴, *al-qāri'ah*⁵, *al-Ṣākhkhal*⁶ and *al-Tāmmah*⁷ depict and vividly convey a message which can only be expressed by more than one sentence.

The message of the Qur'ān is addressed to all generations of people and is suitable for all places and times. Therefore, its meaning must be clearly understood

² Muḥammad Ibn Ishāq Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrat al-Nabawiyyah*, edited by al-Saqā Muṣṭafā et al (Beirut: Dār al-Qalam, n.d.)1: 313-314. See also A. Guillaume, *The life of Muḥammad: a translation of Ibn Ishāq's Sīrat Rasūl Allah*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982) 142-143; Ilse Lichtenstadter, *Introduction to Classical Arabic Literature* (New York: Twayne Publishers Inc. 1974) 191-201.

³ Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah* 1: 288-290

⁴ Qur'ān, *al-Ḥāqqah* 69: 1

⁵ Qur'ān, *al-Qāri'ah* 101: 1

⁶ Qur'ān, *Abas* 80:33

⁷ Qur'ān, *al-Nāzi'āt* 79: 34

and properly explained. In doing so, its challenge to all mankind and *Jinn* will continue. From the time it was sent down to our Prophet up to the present, and up to the end of the world, the Qur'ān has attracted, and continues to attract the attention of many researchers focusing on either its content or its style. Many grammarians and other scholars of Arabic language who were interested in knowing its nature and different usages, analyzed the uniqueness of its style, its vocabularies and the way they were used in a manner that made them express their opinions according to their individual understanding. This was to be beneficial to the language itself and assisted in making the Qur'ān understandable and popularized Arabic language scripture.

Statement of the Problem:

Majāz (a word or expression used in figurative sense) in its generic sense is one of the pillars of the style of the Qur'ān. The Qur'ān uses it to depict the image and impress it in the mind of the reader or a listener for the sake of additional clarity of the intended meaning. This important phenomenon, which exists in almost all languages, has been perceived differently. For quite a long time, metaphoric or figurative expressions generally looked like a lie, and, therefore, have been controversial and difficult to accept. The nature of metaphor, which “consists in giving the thing a name that belongs to something else”,⁸ led some people to consider it ambiguous. They believed that “reality could be precisely described in a manner that was clear, unambiguous, and, in principle, testable – reality could, and should, be literally

⁸ See *Poetics* 21 in I. Bywater, (trans.), *Poetics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1920) as cited by Roy Harris and Talbot J Taylor, *Landmarks in Linguistic Thought: The Western Tradition from Socrates to Saussure* (London: Routledge, 1989 reprinted in 1991), 20.

describable”⁹. Others, however, realized that metaphor is the center and an essential characteristic of the creativity of a language. They also realized that cognition is a result of mental construction of anything. Therefore, knowledge of reality does not depend only on the information given in one or many sentences but rather necessitates going beyond it. The knower’s preexisting knowledge, the context in which it is presented and the information itself interact with each other and form it. Depending on the above facts, this group, hence, upheld and appreciated the role of metaphor in any language.

The intellectual background of *majāz* or metaphor in Arabic-Islamic literature is not exempted from such conflicting differences. Its importance is so much praised and magnified in almost all classical Arabic-Islamic works. A majority of scholars agree that *majāz* in some places is more beautiful and more eloquent (*ablagh*) in conveying the intended meaning than *ḥaqīqah* (the usage of the word in its literal sense)¹⁰. Commenting on this, Al-Jaṣṣās (d. 370) said, “This is something, which cannot be denied by anyone with a slightest knowledge of any aspect of the Arabic language”¹¹. Scholars who looked at figurative expressions from that angle agreed that metaphoric expressions “are not devices to state what is demonstrably untrue...

⁹ Andrew Ortony, “Metaphor, Language, and Thought” in Andrew Ortony (ed.), *Metaphor and Thought* 2nd edn. (Cambridge: University Press, 1993), 1

¹⁰ See for example, ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī, *Dalā’il I’jāz al-Qur’ān*, ed. Muḥammad al-Tunjī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 1415/1995), 69-75, 317, 323-325; Abū Ya‘qūb Yūsuf b. Abī Bakr al-Sakkākī, *Miftāḥ al-Ulūm*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutb, 1403/1983), 412-413; Abū ‘Abdullāh Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Rahmān Al-Khaṭīb al-Qazwīnī, *al-Idāh fī ‘Ulūm al-Balāghah*. Ed. ‘Abd al-Qādir Hussein (n.p.: Maktabat al-Ādāb, 1416/1996), 376-377; Abū Bakr ‘Alī al-Jaṣṣās, *Uṣūl al-Jaṣṣās al-Musammā al-Fuṣūl fī al-Uṣūl*, edited by Muḥammad Muḥammad Tāmir. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutb al-‘ilmiyyah, 1420/2000), 1:200.

¹¹ Jaṣṣās, *Uṣūl* 1:201.

they often state truths that more literal language cannot communicate; they call attention to such truths; they lend them emphasis”.¹²

On the other hand, some Muslim theologians either deny the occurrence of *majāz* in Arabic language completely or reject its occurrence in the holy Qur’ān. For example, when Ibn Taymiyah (d. 728/1328) was discussing whether faith (*īmān*) was composed of action or not, he mentioned a number of Ḥanbalite scholars who reject the existence of *majāz* in the Qur’ān¹³. He also mentioned other names of people from other schools of thought (*madhāhib*) who rejected the occurrence of *majāz* in the Qur’ān. He additionally mentioned another group of people who believe that *majāz* exists neither in the Arabic language nor in the Qur’ān. Ibn Taymiyah himself, when discussing the concept of *īmān*, denied the authenticity of *majāz*.¹⁴ It is reported that even when he found out that Imam Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, the eponym of the Hanbalite school, used it in one of his writings as a strong defense against the *Zanādiqah*, he (Ibn Taymiyah) interpreted Aḥmad’s words in a way which fits his will so that his denial for its existence remained upheld.

The interpretation of the Holy Book has, for a long period, been a concern of both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars. In this effort of trying to understand the meaning of the Qur’ān, many linguistic and theological issues have been raised. The occurrence or non- occurrence of *majāz* in the Qur’ān is one of these issues which have been and are still controversial. As stated earlier, this led to the creation of two groups; one in support of a literal interpretation and another upholding a metaphoric one. Those who believed that *majāz* does not exist in the Qur’ān preferred a literal

¹² X. J. Kennedy and Dana Gioia, *Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, and Drama*, 6th edn. (New York: Harper Collins Collage Publishers, 1995), 678.

¹³ Aḥmad, Ibn Taymiyah, *Majmu’ Fatāwā Shaiikh al-Islām*, edited by al-‘Āṣimī, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad, (Riyadh: Da.r ‘Ālam al-Kutub, 1991), 7: 107.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 7:89

interpretation, while those who upheld the validity of *majāz* applied a metaphorical method of interpretation. Each group defended its ideas vigorously because, according to them, they were all trying to deliver and safeguard a correct understanding of the Qur'ān. Verses of the Qur'ān, especially those connected to theological matters have been interpreted differently. Even those verses without theological connotations are sometimes given different interpretations. One of the frequently quoted verses in this connection is “and ask the town where we have been, and the caravan in which we returned; and indeed we are telling the truth.”¹⁵ The word *qaryah* (town) in this context has been interpreted differently and in a way it turned out to be a source of different understanding of the intended meaning of the Qur'ān. Those who favored metaphor, understood it, and rightly so, to be referring to the inhabitants of the town, because *qaryah* or a town could not be imagined to give an answer, or to be asked. On the contrary, the advocates of the literal meaning opposed this interpretation to the extent that some of them gave unbelievable meanings. For example, it was reported that a man called Muḥammad b. Khuwayzmandād, a Mālikī who extremely accepted the literal way of understanding the Qur'ān, believed that stones referred to in the verse had a mind and that asking a city, therefore, was perfectly sensible¹⁶.

Majāz vis-a-vis God's Attributes

The issue of *majāz* in the Qur'ān when related to the nature of God, His attributes and names, made things more complicated. Those who believed in a metaphorical interpretation found it convenient because it allowed them to interpret the attributes

¹⁵ Qur'ān, *Sūrat Yūsuf*, 12: 82

¹⁶ Abū Muḥammad 'Alī b. Aḥmad Ibn Ḥazm, *Al-Iḥkām fī uṣūl al-aḥkām*, edited by a committee of 'ulamā (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1407/1987), 441-442.

of God allegorically whereas the literalists opposed it strongly. Consequently, this led to the division of the *Ummah* into two antagonistic groups; the traditionalist theologians and the speculative or rationalist theologians who are sometimes called the “free thinking” group. The former clung to the literal formations of the Qur’ān with all what is believed to be ‘anthropomorphic’ attributes. They believed that God is absolutely unique but His uniqueness does not mean to deny what He described Himself with. Therefore, the Qur’ānic expressions ascribing to Him hands, eyes, a face, and portraying Him as speaking and sitting on a throne, etc... were understood in their literal meanings without looking into their anthropomorphic implications. On whether this was made to be compatible with the unity and simplicity of God, the founder of the Ash‘arite school, Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Ali b. Ismā‘īl (d. 324/935)¹⁷ replied using the phrase *bilā kayf* (i.e. I know not how. It has no rational explanation. I accept it as an article of faith)¹⁸. The speculative theologians upheld the principle of the supremacy of reason and they rejected the possibility of God possessing a plurality of attributes because it was incompatible with the Divine Essence. Therefore, expressions of the Qur’ān implying multiplicity like hearing, touching, thinking, wishing, loving, hating, etc were interpreted allegorically¹⁹. They also

¹⁷ On him see Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi‘iyyah*, edited by Maḥmūd Muḥammad al-Tanālī et. el., (Cairo: Dār Iḥyā’ al-kutub al-‘Arabiyyah/ Faiṣal ‘Isā al-Babī al-Ḥalabī, n.d.) 2: 245; Abū Bakr b. ‘Alī al-Khaṭīb, al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdad*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutb al-‘Ilmiyyah, n. d.), 12: 212; Ibn Khalikān, *Wafayāt al-A‘yān Wa ‘anbā’ Abnā’ al-Zamān*, (Qum:Manshūrāt al-Raḍī, 1364Q.) 3: 284-6; ‘Abd al-Ḥayyi ibn al-‘Imād, *Shadharāt al-Dhahab fī Akhbār man Dhahaba* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Tijārī, n.d.), 2: 303; Jalāl M. Mūsā, *Nash‘at al-Ash‘ariyyah wa Taṭawwurihā*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnānī, 1395/1975), 160

¹⁸ Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Ali b. Ismā‘īl al-Ash‘arī, *al-Ibānah ‘an Uṣūl al-Diyānah* (al-Maḍīnat al-Munawwarah: Islamic University Press, 1975), 18-19; M. J. L. Young, J. D. Latham and R.B. Serjeant, *Religion, Learning and Science in the ‘Abbasid Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 7-8.

¹⁹ See for example, Al-Qāḍī Abū al-Ḥasan, ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī fī abwāb al-Tawḥīd wa al-‘adl*. Various editors. (Miṣr: Ministry of Culture and National Guidance (al-Muassasat al-Miṣriyyah al-‘Ammah), n.d.) vol. 10; Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Ali b. Ismā‘īl al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, edited by Muḥammad Muḥyiddī ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd, (Beirut:al-Maktabat al-‘Asriyyah, 1419/1999) 1: 290; W. Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology: An Extended*

objected to the possibility of seeing God. Thus, the prophetic traditions that affirm the vision of God must, therefore, be interpreted metaphorically in a way that is in conformity with their belief²⁰.

God's nature, His names and His attributes became so much sophisticated and the more the theologians and Muslim thinkers tackled the issue the more they got divided. And the more they disagreed on that issue, the more the issue of *majāz* and allegorical interpretation of the Qur'ānic text became complicated. The two major groups and others that followed ended up taxing each other with unbelief (*kufī*) and accusing one another of going against the teachings of the apostle of Allah, may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him.

The writings of some philologists like Abū 'Ubaydah Ma'mar al-Muthannā al-Taymī (d.210/825)²¹ interpreting and treating the word *majāz* as a synonym of *ma'nā*, *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl*²² added more confusion to the matter. Although the title of Abū 'Ubaydah's book is *Majāz al-Qur'ān*, it has been established that it has nothing to do with figurative expressions of the holy book. The author's major task was apparently to explain the meanings of some rare words and irregular expressions.

Survey (Edinburgh: University Press, 1985), 14, 46, 75; A. J. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed: Its Genesis and Historical development*, (Cambridge: University Press 1932 and reprinted in New Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corporation 1979), 58-82 Pagination is to reprint; M. J. L. Young, *Religion* 4-5

²⁰ Al- Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Mughnī-ru'yah*; Al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt* 1: 238; A. J. Wensinck, *Muslim Creed* p. 64,

²¹ He was a prominent Khārijite scholar and great philologist. In spite of his being a philologist, he used to make many mistakes while reading the Holy Qur'ān or when he was reciting a poetry line. He is one the scholars who are both their birth and death dates are uncertain. It is said that he was born in 108, 109, 110, 111, 114 and died in 209, 210, 211 or 213. For more details on him refer to Fuat Sezgin, *Geschichte Des Arabischen Schrifttums*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1984), 5: 67-71; Ibn Nadīm, *al-Fihrist* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, n. d.), 79-81; Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt*, 5: 235-45; Ibn 'Imād, *Shadharāt* 2: 24-25, H. Ritter, "Philologica, XIII, 7 Ein Korankommentar" in *Oriens*, 2, (1949) 296-299, *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd Edition, "Abū 'Ubaydah,"; Abū 'Uthmān, 'Amr b. Baḥr al-Jāhīz, *al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn*, ed. 'Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Harūn, (Cairo: Maktabah al-Khanjī, 1405/1985), 1: 343-7; *Eḏ* "Sufriyya".

²² *Majāz al-Qur'ān*, Ed. Fuād Sizghīn (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khanj, n.d.).

Abū ‘Ubaydah himself admits this²³. Additionally, this has been observed by the editor of *Majāz al-Qur’ān* Fuād Sezgīn and by H. Ritter.²⁴

The problem of *majāz* poses many hypothetical questions such as on what basis do the deniers object to the existence *majāz*? Is it a problem of language or theology? In any case, how could the results of one domain affect the other? Is the theologians’ understanding of the language different from that of the linguists? Could political or other circumstances have a role in this? All these questions need to be addressed in a well organized manner so that an un-necessary mix-up of the issues can be avoided. *Majāz* an integral aspect of the Arabic language and the proper understanding of the Qur’ān must be based on the understanding of the Arabic language. The current study will try to answer the above questions and clarify the reasons why the scholars have treated *majāz* differently especially in the Qur’ān.

Scope of the study

As noted above, many studies have been done on *majāz*. There are materials on it in almost all languages dealing with a very wide range of issues. This study will limit itself to classic materials dealing with *majāz* in the holy Qur’ān both in the Arabic and English languages. It will not concern itself with the studies dealing with the controversial subject of whether Qur’ānic words contain *ẓāhir* (outer) and *bāṭin* (inner) meanings, although there is a connection between the two, because doing so may divert this undertaking to another area, which has been exhaustively studied.

²³ See page 13 of this study

²⁴ Abū ‘Ubaydah, *Majāz*, intr.; “Philologica, XIII, 7 Ein Korankommentar”, *Oriens*, 2 (1949), pp. 266-299 and esp. 298. See also E. Almogor, “Majāz and Abū ‘Ubayda’s exegesis” in Andrew Rippin (ed.), *The Qur’ān: Formative Interpretation* (Variorum: Ashgate publishing Company, 1999), 263-326, foot note 8.

Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study are:

1. Briefly analyze how the concept of *majāz* was treated in classical works, especially in semantics and lexicology, rhetoric, *tafsir*...etc. In doing so, our intention is to arrive at its proper meaning and usage.
- 2- Highlight the theological and linguistic implications of accepting or rejecting the usage of *majāz* in the Qur'ān by some of the great Muslim scholars who discussed the matter and whether the same reasons are still applicable today.
- 3- Examine the backgrounds of the scholars who dealt with *majaz* in the Qur'ān and analyze the possible consequences of those backgrounds, and how that was reflected in the way they treated the issue of *majāz*.

Literature Review

The issue of *majāz* in Arabic language generally and particularly in the holy book led to the production of numerous studies and materials dealing with many theological and linguistic matters in several languages of which we are concerned with those in Arabic and English. In Arabic language, almost all branches of knowledge old and new have talked about *majāz* even though in the early literature it has been referred to and interpreted differently. The great Arabic grammarian Sībawayh (d. 161-94/778-810)²⁵ talked about what he named *si'at al-kalām* (the wide and different range

²⁵ For more biographical details about him see Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, 12: 195-9; Ibn Khalikkān, *Wafayāt*, 3: 463; Ibn 'Imād, *Shadharāt*, 1: 252-5

of expressions in Arabic language)²⁶. Careful examination of the phrases and examples he discussed indicate that Sībawayh laid the foundation of what was later called *majāz*. His understanding was not far from that of ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī in his *Asrār al-Balāghah*²⁷ about the subject.

A. Linguistic studies of *majāz*:

The term *majāz* is a nominal noun. Its verbal root is *jawaza* turned into *jāza* due to the linguistic formula of converting the *wāw* into *alif*. This term is one of the few words which have two different contexts. “In its earliest attestations the term *majāz* does not have one unified meaning, such as “trope” in later literature. It occurs in two different contexts, one philological-hermeneutical, [and] the other theological”.

²⁸ Linguistically, Abū ‘Ubaydah was the first scholar to use this term. Due to this, it is claimed that the philological-hermeneutical understanding of the term started with him and the other with the theological discussions among the Mu‘tazilites concerning the problem of anthropomorphism in the Qur’ān and interpretation of the Divine Attributes²⁹. If this is granted, it indicates that the relationship between language and theology is as strong and old as the term itself. It is difficult in Islam to separate between language and other affairs of Muslims as the two are so much interrelated. Indeed, the Islamic faith controls all of them and it is the foundation on which a Muslim must base all his worldly and religious matters.

²⁶ Abū Bishr ‘Amru Ibn ‘Uthmān Ibn Qanbar, Sībawayh, *Kitāb Sībawayh*, edited by ‘Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn (Beirut: ‘Ālam al-kutub, n.d.), 1:211-15.

²⁷ Edited by H. Ritter (Istanbūl: Maṭba‘at Wizārat al-‘Ma‘ārif, 1954)

²⁸ Wolfhart Heinrichs, “Contacts Between Scriptural Hermeneutics And Literary Theory In Islam: The Case of *Majāz*” in *Zeitschrift Fur Geschichte Der Arabisch-Islamischen Wissenschaften*, Band 7, (1991/92): 255.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 255-256