



AL-JĀḤIẒ'S VIEWS ON CHRISTIANITY WITH
SPECIAL REFERENCE TO *AL-RADD 'ALĀ AL-
NAṢĀRĀ*

BY

SALMAN BIN ZAINAL ABIDIN

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for
the degree of Master of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and
Heritage (Usūl al-Dīn and Comparative Religion)

Kuliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and
Human Sciences

International Islamic University
Malaysia

AUGUST 2011

ABSTRACT

The study of other religions is not alien in Muslim legacy as Prophet Muḥammad (p.b.u.h) from the very beginning had established the first Islamic state in Medina where the society was multi-religious in nature. In fact, throughout the different stages of its long history, Islam has never been a community that has isolated itself from others. This is true from the time of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) through the era of the rightly guided Caliphs, the Umayyad and ‘Abbāsīd caliphates up to the Ottoman caliphates. This has urged Muslims to explore the teachings of other religions, particularly those whose followers lived with them. Therefore, it is no surprise to see Muslim scholars in comparative religion produce scholarly works especially during the ‘Abbāsīd rule such as those by Abū Ya‘qūb Ishāq al-Kindī, Abū Hudhāyl al-‘Allāf, Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbā‘ī, al-Jāḥiẓ, Ibn Rabān al-Ṭabarī and al-Bīrūnī. This research analyzes al-Jāḥiẓ’s treatise, “*al-Radd ‘alā al-Naṣārā*” as he was one of the earliest Muslim authors who wrote on Christian doctrines. Moreover, al-Jāḥiẓ did not only confine his treatise to Christianity, but he revealed some aspects of Christian practices and their social status in the first era of the ‘Abbāsīd period. Therefore, this research on al-Jāḥiẓ simultaneously exposes the situation of the Dhimmīs and the nature of inter-religious dialogue in his time. Several conclusions can be drawn from this study; firstly, al-Jāḥiẓ’s treatise is polemical in nature as he himself did not comprehensively expose the whole aspects of Christianity. But rather he focused on the most debatable issues in his time such as the sonship of Jesus, the authenticity of the Gospels, Jesus miracle and some Christian practices. Besides, al-Jāḥiẓ described the Christian community and the privileges they enjoyed under the Muslim caliphs. Secondly, with regard to the sources used in this treatise, it can be said that al-Jāḥiẓ had obtained first hand information from the Christians who were neighbours of the Muslims. Thirdly, it can be observed that al-Jāḥiẓ had applied argumentative and logical approach as well as textual analysis during his refutation of Christian doctrines. Finally, al-Jāḥiẓ did not confine his discussion to Christians alone, but he included some Jewish practices and extended his refutation to some Muslim traditionalists whose principles were contrary to the Mu‘tazilite school of thought.

خلاصة البحث

تتناول الدراسة قطباً من أقطاب الدراسات الدينية المقارنة في الإسلام وهو أبو عمرو بن بحر عثمان الجاحظ وجهوده في دراسة الأديان من خلال رسالته الشهيرة "الرد على النصارى". فقد كان الجاحظ من أوائل المسلمين كتابة في هذا الموضوع. لم يقتصر الجاحظ في هذه الرسالة على مناقشة تعاليم ومبادئ المسيحية فحسب، بل وتطرق إلى أحوال المسيحية السلوكية والاجتماعية مما كان يشاهد في أواسطهم في المجتمع الإسلامي آنذاك. وبهذا يمكن أن يقال إن الرسالة دراسة في مقارنة الأديان وفي الآن ذاته دراسة في المسائل الاجتماعية. في هذه الدراسة ركّز الباحث على عرض وضع أهل الذمة وطبيعة الحوار الديني في تلك الفترة بناءً على ما عرضه الجاحظ في رسالته. وقد تمخضت من هذه الدراسة عن بعض النتائج الهامة منها: أن الجاحظ احتّمى بالمنهج التهكمي والمزري في ردوده في هذه الرسالة، ولكن مع هذا، لم يتناول جميع مبادئ المسيحية بكاملها ولكن اعتنى ببعض الجزئيات التي كثر التساؤل عنها ودارت المناقشات حولها فقط. فقد تناول مواضيع عديدة مثل دعوى اتخاذ الله تعالى المسيح بن مريم ولداً، وأصالة الأناجيل عند المسيحية، و معجزة المسيح عيسى عليه السلام، وبعض السلوكيات المنتقدة عند أتباع المسيحية. وأظهرت هذه الدراسة بعض الميزات التي منحت لرواد المسيحية في عصور الخلافة. ثم إن الجاحظ في رسالته هذه اعتمد أولاً على معلومات تلقّفها من المسيحيين مباشرة لأنهم كانوا جيران المسلمين وسكانهم. وانتقد الجاحظ بعضاً من هذه المعلومات بالأسلوب الجدلي والعقلاني الواضح وأحياناً يستعمل منهج تحليل النصوص الواردة في كتب المسيحية. وأخيراً، انطوت هذه الرسالة أيضاً على ردود لتقاليد دينية عند اليهود وبعض عقائد أهل السنة في عصره التي تخالف مذهبه الاعتزالي.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Heritage (Uşul al-Dīn and Comparative Religion).

.....
Wan Sabri Wan Yusof
Supervisor

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Heritage (Uşul al-Dīn and Comparative Religion).

.....
Mohamed Tahir El-Masawi
Examiner

This dissertation was submitted to the Department of Uşul al-Dīn and Comparative Religion and is accepted as a fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of degree of Master of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Heritage (Uşul al-Dīn and Comparative Religion).

.....
Thameem Ushama
Head,
Department of Uşul al-Dīn and
Comparative Religion

This dissertation was submitted to the Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences and is accepted as a fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of degree of Master of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Heritage (Uşul al-Dīn and Comparative Religion).

.....
Badri Najib bin Zubir
Dean,
Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed
Knowledge and Human Sciences

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.

Salman bin Zainal Abidin.

Signature

Date

INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA
DECLARATION OF COPYRIGHT AND AFFIRMATION
OF FAIR USE OF UNPUBLISHED RESEARCH

Copyright © 2011 by Salman bin Zainal Abidin. All rights reserved.

AL-JĀHĪZ'S VIEWS ON CHRISTIANITY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO
AL-RADD ʿALĀ AL-NAṢĀRĀ

No part of this unpublished research may be reproduced, stored in retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without prior permission of the copyright holder except as provided below.

1. Any material contained in or derived from this unpublished research may only be used by others in their writing with due acknowledgement.
2. IIUM or its library will have the right to make and transmit copies (print or electronic) for institutional and academic purposes.
3. The IIUM library will have the right to make, store in a retrieval system and supply copies of this unpublished research if requested by other universities and research libraries.

Affirmed by Salman bin Zainal Abidin.

.....
Signature

.....
Date

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Praise due to Allah, the Most Gracious, and the Most Merciful who showers me with His Mercy and Blessings, and enables me to complete this humble thesis successfully.

The writing of this thesis would have not been completed without continuous support and assistance of many individuals to whom the writer owes a lot. They deserved to be mentioned in this thesis in a way to express the writer's indebtedness and appreciation to all of them.

First and foremost, this acknowledgement goes to Dr Wan Sabri Wan Yusof for his continuous guidance and support in supervising this thesis, which had enthusiastically helped the writer to develop his intellectual ability and complete this thesis successfully. Special words and thanks also go to Associate Professor Dr Mohamed El-Tahir El-Masawi, the examiner, for his contribution in improving the contents of this thesis. The special thank also goes to my parents, Ustaz Haji Zainal Abidin bin Ahmad and Hajjah Rosmani binti Ngah and my parents in law, Dr Abdul Latif bin Ahmad Zabidi and Hajjah Zaliha binti Abdullah for their love, support and understanding throughout my study.

My most heartfelt surely goes to my beloved wife and son, Nawal binti Abdul Latif and Abdurrahman for their understanding, patient and support during the process of writing this thesis.

To all my friends, who are also pillars of inspiration and each of them has contributed in his/her own way, a million words of thanks to all of you for your continuous support. May our friendships, sincerities and hardworking in the *da'wah* being accepted by Allah (s.w.t).

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Abstract in Arabic	iii
Approval Page	iv
Declaration Page	v
Copyright Page	vi
Acknowledgments	vii
Transliteration Table	x
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Background of the Study	1
Statement of Problem	3
Justification of the St.....	3
Objectives of Study	4
Research Questions	4
Research Methodology	5
Scope of the Study	5
Literature Review	6
CHAPTER 2: LIFE AND WORKS OF AL-JĀḤIẒ	
Background	12
Inter-religious Milieu	15
A Brief Account of al-Jāḥiẓ's life	20
Works and Contribution	26
CHAPTER 3: OVERVIEW OF <i>AL-RADD ʿALĀ AL-NAṢĀRĀ</i>.....	31
Introduction	31
Historical Background	31
Publication of <i>al-Radd ʿalā al-Naṣarā</i>	38
A Comment on the Title.....	40
Al-Jāḥiẓ's Method in the Study of Christianity	40
The Contents of <i>al-Radd ʿalā al-Naṣarā</i>	43
CHAPTER 4: CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF AL-JĀḤIẒ'S VIEWS ON CHRISTIANITY	49
Introduction	49
Al-Jāḥiẓ's views on Christian Community	49
External Factor	49
Internal Factor	54
Al-Jāḥiẓ's views on the Doctrine of Christianity.....	58
Jesus' speech from the Cradle	58

Son of God	61
Punishments	75
Al-Jāhīz's views on Christian Practices.....	77
Al-Jāhīz's views on the Jewish Doctrine	80
CONCLUSION	84
BIBLIOGRAPHY	87

TABLE OF TRANSLITERATION

The English transliteration for Arabic names and terms followed in this thesis is as follows:

Consonants

ا	=	a		ط	=	ṭ
ب	=	b		ظ	=	ẓ
ت	=	t		ع	=	‘
ث	=	th		غ	=	gh
ج	=	j		ف	=	f
ح	=	ḥ		ق	=	q
خ	=	kh		ك	=	k
د	=	d		ل	=	l
ذ	=	dh		م	=	m
ر	=	r		ن	=	n
ز	=	z		و	=	w
س	=	s		ه	=	h
ش	=	sh		ي	=	y
ص	=	ṣ		ء	=	’ (like Alif)
ض	=	ḍ				

Vowels

Short

Fathah َ _____

Kasrah ِ _____

Dammah ُ _____

Long

اَ = ā

إِ = ī

أُ = ū

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Islamic scholarship in the study of comparative religion is vast and rich as many Muslim scholars have produced pioneering works in this discipline. Some Western scholars believed that the emergence of this discipline represents the germination of seeds planted and watered over centuries of Western history¹. On the contrary, Muslim scholars argue, the root and the concept of comparative religion actually began as early as the advent of the prophet Muḥammad (p.b.u.h) in the Arabian Peninsula in the 7th century.² The populations of Mecca and Medina were mostly Pagans, Jews and a small number of Christians. During this period the prophet Muḥammad (p.b.u.h) held dialogues with them to convey the message and teaching of Islam. His companions too as reported in the books of *sīrah*, used to be involved in the so-called inter-religious dialogue. This is evident in the dialogue between Ja‘far ibn Abī Ṭālib and King Negus who was a Christian.³

Dialogue and research on other religions developed into more sophisticated forms as Islam spread outside the Arabian Peninsula. During the ‘Abbāsīd period, Islam penetrated into regions which were previously under Roman and Persian rule, whose official religion was Christianity.⁴ During this period, Muslim scholars were

¹ J. Sharpe, Eric, *Comparative Religion A History* (London: Gerald Duckworth and Company Ltd., 1975), 1.

² Kamar Oniah Kamaruzzaman, *Early Muslim Scholarship in Religion Swissenschaft* (Kuala Lumpur: International Islamic University Malaysia, 2003), 6-17.

³ Abu Zahrah, Muhammad, *Khātamun al-Nabiyyīn* (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-‘Arabī, 1993), 265-267.

⁴ Fluehr-Lobban, Carolyn, *Islamic Society in Practice* (University Press of Florida, 1994), 85.

advanced in many fields of knowledge.⁵ This development encouraged Muslim intellectuals to further explore the study of Christianity and other religions.

Among the earliest Muslim scholars deeply engaged in research on Christianity were Abū al-Hudhayl al-'Allāf (d. c. 226/840), Abū 'Amr Ḥafs al-Fard (d. 132/749), Abū 'Alī al-Jubbā'ī (d. 179/795), Dirār ibn 'Amr (d. c. 184/800), Ya'qūb ibn Ishāq al-Kindī (d. 260/873) and his pupil Aḥmad ibn al-Ṭayyib al-Sarakhsī (d. 287/900), al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm al-Ḥasan (200/815-211/826), Bishr ibn al-Mu'tamir (d. 210/825), Abū Ishāq al-Nazzām (d. c. 226/840), 'Alī ibn Sahl Rabbān al-Ṭabarī (d. 247/861), Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq (d. 248/862), Abū 'Uthmān 'Amr ibn Baḥr al-Jāhiz (d. 255/869), al-Ḥasan ibn Ayyūb (d. c. 287/900), Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhti (d. c. 310/922), Abū al-Qāsim al-Ka'bi (d. 316/929), Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā'ī (d. 321/933), Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Qaḥṭabī (d. c. 328/940) and Abū 'Alī Muḥammad Khallād (d.c. 339/950).⁶ However, most of the manuscripts recording their experiences and research are not available today. Among the manuscripts still in existence is the work of al-Jāhiz entitled *al-Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā*. Although the title of this treatise states the author's intention to discuss Christianity, al-Jāhiz also briefly discussed some claims made by the Jews such as that the prophet 'Uzāyr is the son of God, etc.

Although al-Jāhiz is a well-known Muslim scholar, writers and researchers rarely explore his ideas and opinions on Christians and Christianity. Their discussions are limited to al-Jāhiz's works on poetry, rhetoric, zoology and other subjects.⁷ Thus he is a well-known figure to Muslim and Western scholars of these disciplines, but not on the study of Christianity. As such, it is imperative to highlight al-Jāhiz's work on

⁵ Bloom, Jonathan, Blair, Sheila, *Islam: A Thousand Years of Faith and Power* (Yale Nota Bene book, 2002), 120-155.

⁶ Kamar Oniah, 20.

⁷ The most important books by al-Jāhiz are *Kitāb al-Hayawān*, *al-Bukhalā*, *al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn* and several others.

Christianity as an authentic source on the subject, particularly on the doctrines of Christianity in the 8th century.

The researcher hopes that this research will encourage other researchers and intellectuals to explore al-Jāḥiẓ's other contributions for the benefit of the *ummah*.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Al-Jāḥiẓ's treatise, *al-Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā*, is one of the oldest works on Christianity by a Muslim scholar. It expounds al-Jāḥiẓ's ideas and thoughts on Christianity, and is considered to be genuine and unique. However, some Muslim and non-Muslim scholars have criticized al-Jāḥiẓ of being dishonest in his refutation of Christianity.⁸

For this reason, it is imperative to critically analyze this treatise, as well as the accuracy of his ideas and judgements. Furthermore, al-Jāḥiẓ's treatise is unique as it does not only discuss the doctrines of Christianity, but also discusses certain psychological reasons underlining the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims. This research will thoroughly examine this treatise, and critically review the feedback on al-Jāḥiẓ's work on Christianity from Muslim and Western scholars of the past and present.

In addition, the research will focus on the facts and arguments advanced by al-Jāḥiẓ as a basis in the contemporary inter-religious dialogues.

JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

This topic was chosen by the researcher based on Muslims' inclination towards the discipline of comparative religion, especially between Islam and Christianity. The researcher is of the opinion that those who are involved in debates and inter-religious

⁸ For example Ibn Qutaybah in his book, *Ta'wīl fi Mukhtalif al-Hadīth* and Hugh Goddard in his book, *Muslim Perception on Christianity*.

dialogues should engage in serious research on works by classical Muslim scholars. Therefore, al-Jāḥiẓ, who is among the earliest Muslim scholars on comparative religion, should be a point of reference for the modern Muslim society.

Due to the lack of intellectual effort by Muslim scholars on al-Jāḥiẓ's views on Christianity in comparison with the extensive literature on Ibn Taymiyyah and al-Ghazālī, a research of this kind is needed and timely. The ideas presented by al-Jāḥiẓ should be thoroughly investigated as the doctrines of Christianity during his era probably still exist in its original form alongside the doctrines of Christian sects today.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What was the methodology adopted by al-Jāḥiẓ in his treatise?
2. What were al-Jāḥiẓ's sources in writing this treatise?
3. What was the nature of the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims during his period?
4. What were the Christian denominations that existed in the Arabian Peninsula during the 'Abbāsīd period?
5. What are the main issues discussed by al-Jāḥiẓ in his treatise?
6. How have al-Jāḥiẓ's ideas influenced both Muslim and Western scholarship in comparative religion?

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To analyze al-Jāḥiẓ's ideas on Christianity.
2. To examine the inter-religious milieu in al-Jāḥiẓ's time.
3. To provide information for inter-religious dialogue between Muslims and Christians.

4. To investigate the Christian denominations which existed in the Arabian Peninsula during al-Jāḥiẓ's time.
5. To investigate the impact of al-Jāḥiẓ's ideas on Christianity on Muslim and non- Muslim intellectual discourse.
6. To highlight early Muslim scholarship in comparative religion.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The main focus of this research is to analyse al-Jāḥiẓ's ideas in his treatise *al-Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā* from various aspects such as his methodology, ideas and approaches. This will be complemented by material scattered in other works by him such as *al-Ḥayawān*. However, the study will not only be confined to al-Jāḥiẓ's treatise, but will also include other relevant sources on the history and doctrines of Christianity to establish the differences and similarities between al-Jāḥiẓ's and other Muslim scholars after his period.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study will be qualitative in nature. The researcher will mainly depend on library research. The primary sources include al-Jāḥiẓ's *al-Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā* and other classical books written by either Muslim or non-Muslim scholars. Other sources such as encyclopaedias, conference papers, journals, magazines and the internet will be referred to, as and when necessary. The collected data will be investigated and studied carefully before being included in this research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Undoubtedly, Christianity is one of the most discussed religions in the field of comparative religion. Numerous works on Christianity have been produced by both Muslim and Western scholars in the past and present. Some of them focus on the history and origin of Christianity, while others are more interested in its doctrines and dogmas. Comparative studies on the methods and epistemological frameworks of inter-religious dialogue have also been made.

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, the available treatise on Christianity by al-Jāḥiẓ was rendered completely by J.Finkel.⁹ He collected several manuscripts from his own collection and from the University of al-Azhār. He translated the treatise into English and made a brief commentary on al-Jāḥiẓ's life and his background, methodology, and the reasons which led him to write the treatise. Finkel seems impressed with al-Jāḥiẓ's ability to write on various fields of knowledge. However, he criticized al-Jāḥiẓ's arguments as being unrealistic. Finkel rendered a brief analysis on the possibility for the emergence of al-Jāḥiẓ's treatise. Although Finkel's commentary was simple, it is nevertheless interesting.

A prominent Muslim scholar, Muḥammad 'Abdullāh al-Sharqāwī has also made a brief analysis of al-Jāḥiẓ's treatise. In his research *al-Mukhtār fī al-Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā ma'a Dirāsah Taḥlīliyyah Taqwīmiyyah*,¹⁰ he divided his analysis into several chapters. In the first chapter, he discussed al-Jāḥiẓ's background and his treatise, which was printed and distributed by two orientalist namely J.Finkel and

⁹ N.A. Newman. *The Early Muslim-Christian Dialogue: a Collection of Documents from the First Three Islamic Centuries (632 – 900 A.D). Translation with Commentary* (USA: Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute, 1993).

¹⁰ Al-Sharqāwī, Muhammad Abdullah, *Al-Mukhtār fī al-Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā ma'a Dirāsah Taḥlīliyyah Taqwīmiyyah* (Cairo: Dār Al-Ṣaḥwah. 1984). In some existing manuscripts, it appears as *al-Mukhtār fī al-Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā*. However, this research will rely on the manuscript edited by 'Abd al-Salām Hārūn titled *al-Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā*.

Recher. He also mentioned that this treatise is significant not only because of its contribution to comparative religion but also because of the methodology and style adopted by al-Jāhiz, who elaborated his ideas providing rhetorically and logically. In the third chapter, al-Sharqāwī refuted Ibn Qutaybah who accused al-Jāhiz of exposing some information on Christianity which the Christians themselves do not know. According to Ibn Qutaybah, this exposition will in turn strengthen their faith. Ibn Qutaybah also claimed that al-Jāhiz's argument may weaken some aspects of the Muslims' faith, especially those who lack the knowledge of Islam.

Al-Sharqāwī also elaborated on al-Jāhiz's methodology in dealing with Christianity. The interesting part of the research is that, upon analyzing the sources used by al-Jāhiz, al-Sharqāwī discovered that no date was indicated as to when the *Injil* was translated into Arabic. Although this research is valuable, it would be more interesting if al-Sharqāwī could explain al-Jāhiz's methodology in greater detail. It also seems that al-Sharqāwī did not criticise some of the weaknesses of al-Jāhiz's treatise.¹¹

Another book directly related to the discussion is *al-Fikr al-Islāmī fī al-Radd 'alā al-Nasārā ilā nihāyat al-Qarn al-Rābi' / al-'Ashir*,¹² by 'Abd al-Majīd Sharafī. He made a thorough analysis of Muslim scholars' refutation of Christianity since the revelation of the Qur'ān until the beginning of the 4th century after *hijrah*. The refutation of Christianity made by Muslims during that period focussed on four subjects, namely the doctrines of the Trinity, God's incarnation, Jesus' crucifixion and the discrepancies of the Gospels. The book is significant as the author elaborated

¹¹ A critical analysis of al-Jāhiz's treatise is provided throughout this research especially in chapter four.

¹² Sharafī, 'Abd al-Majīd, *Al-Fikr al-Islāmī fī al-Radd 'alā al-Nasārā ilā Nihāyat al-Qarn al-Rābi' / al-'Ashir* (Al-Tūnis: Al-Dār al-Tūnisiah li al-Nashr, 1986).

precisely each doctrine of Christianity as well as the Muslim scholars who were involved in its refutation.

In order to identify the Christian sects which existed in the region where al-Jāḥiẓ lived, the researcher referred to several books detailing the emergence of Christianity and its origin in the Arabian Peninsula. *Christianity in the Arab world*,¹³ written by El-Hassan bin Ṭalāl, discusses in great length the origin of Christianity, the origin of the Nicene Creed, Christological controversies which led to the formation of several denominations and sects, as well as the schism between Rome and Constantinople. This book will be used by the researcher as a major source on the emergence of various sects in Christianity.

Another relevant book to this research is *al-Fikr al-Tarbawī fi Kitābāt al-Jāḥiẓ*,¹⁴ written by Muḥammad Sa‘ad al-Qazzāz. He explained in great length the political situation as well as the development of various fields of knowledge during al-Jāḥiẓ’s period. This book consists of seven chapters of which two are closely related to this research. In the second chapter, the author elaborates the glorious ‘Abbāsīd period during which al-Jāḥiẓ lived. Some important aspects were highlighted such as the development of the *Sharī‘ah*, the establishment of many new branches of knowledge, the political situation and the existence of multi-racial societies which probably influenced al-Jāḥiẓ’s thought. In the third chapter, the author discusses al-Jāḥiẓ’s personality in terms of his personal life, intellectual sources, teachers, students and contributions to various bodies of knowledge.

¹³ Talal, El-Hasan, *Christianity in the Arab World* (London: Arabsque Int. 1995).

¹⁴ Al-Qazzāz, Muhammad Sa‘ad, *Al-Fikr al-Tarbawī fi Kitābāt al-Jāḥiẓ* (Madinah Nasr: Dār al-Fikr al-‘Arabī. 1995).

Kamar Oniah's book titled *Early Muslim Scholarship in Religionswissenschaft*,¹⁵ is another valuable reference for this research. Although the main subject of this book is al-Birūnī's works and his scientific approach to comparative religion, the author meticulously explains the origins of comparative religion. According to her, comparative religion has its roots in al-Qur'ān and the Traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h). The author then enumerates the contributing factors which led to Muslim scholars dedicating themselves to the study of other religions. Finally, she listed some of the early Muslim scholars who were actively involved in this field, one of whom is none other than al-Jāhīz.

The book titled *Muslim Perception of Christianity*¹⁶ is used to analyze non-Muslim responses towards Muslim scholars' views on Christianity. The author, Hugh Goddard, intended to expose the Muslim perception of Christianity to his fellow Christians. Based on the Qur'ānic injunctions, the author focused on several fundamental issues mentioned in the Qur'ān such as the authenticity of the Bible, the nature of Jesus and the Christians. In his subsequent investigations, Goddard discussed Muslim scholars on Christianity such as al-Jāhīz, al-Ṭabarī, al-Ya'qūbī, al-Jabbā'ī, al-Bayḍāwī, al-Rāzī, al-Zamakhsharī, Ibnu Ḥazm and the group of tenth-century Shī'ī thinkers known as the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā. Goddard also made similar analyses on contemporary Muslim scholars such as al-Afghānī, 'Abduh, Rashīd Riḍā and Raḥmatullāh al-Hindī.

One of the aims of this research is to study the relationship between Muslims and Christians in the early period of Islam. The book which will be referred to is

¹⁵ Kamar Oniah Kamaruzzaman, *Early Muslim Scholarship in Religion Swissenschaft* (Kuala Lumpur: International Islamic University Malaysia, 2003).

¹⁶ Goddard, Hugh. *Muslim Perception of Christianity* (London: Grey Seal Books. 1996).

Christian-Muslim Relations,¹⁷ written by R. Marston Speight. The fourth chapter of this book is relevant to this research. In it the author explained that Christian communities were given the status of *Dhimmīs* during the reign of the ‘Abbāsīd Caliphs. The existence of this multi-religious country made inter-religious debate between Muslims and Christians inevitable. The author also highlighted some Christian intellectuals who countered Muslim scholars’ arguments with respect to the doctrines of Christianity.

To understand al-Jāḥiẓ’s personal life, the researcher referred to several books. First, *al-Fihrist*,¹⁸ which was written by Ibn al-Nadīm. This book is a collection of records on works done by Arabs and non-Arabs in various fields of knowledge. The author describes in great length the life and works of each scholar. The researcher found that Ibn al-Nadīm listed works by al-Jāḥiẓ and the factors which led him to write various books. Second, *Mu‘jam al-Udabā’*¹⁹ compiled by Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī. The author of this book collected detailed information of hundreds of prominent poets, philologists and writers of literature during his period. With regard to al-Jāḥiẓ, the author included almost everything about al-Jāḥiẓ’s personal life and his works. Third, al-Mas‘ūdī’s *Murūj al-Dhahab wa Ma‘ādin al-Jawhar*,²⁰ an encyclopaedic book which includes the history of man and Creation from the prophet Adam (p.b.u.h) till the ‘Abbāsīd caliphs. The author not only narrated al-Jāḥiẓ’s personal life, but analyzed and sometimes criticized his opinion on the universe. These three books can be considered as primary sources on al-Jāḥiẓ’s personal life.

¹⁷ Speight, R. Marston. *Christian-Muslim Relations* (1983).

Ibn al-Nadīm, Abu ‘l-Faraj Muhammad Ibn Ishāq, *al-Fihrist*, ed. Yūsuf ‘Alī al-Ṭawīl (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1996).

¹⁹ Al-Rūmī, Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Mu‘jam al-Udabā’ Irshād al-Arīb ilā Ma‘rifat al-Adīb*, ed. Iḥsān ‘Abbās (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, n.d.).

²⁰ Al-Mas‘ūdī, Abi al-Hasan ‘Alī bin al-Husayn, *Murūj al-Dhahab wa Ma‘ādin al-Jawhar*, ed. Muṣṭafā al-Sayyid (al-Maktabah al-Waqfiyyah, n.d.).

The researcher will also refer to an article entitled "*The Orthodox and Mu'tazilite Approach towards Christian Doctrine: A comparative study*",²¹ written by A.Rashid Ahmad. In this article, the author briefly discussed Muslim scholars who were involved in inter-religious discussions and their approaches towards it. Among the scholars highlighted in the article were al-Qāsim bin Ibrāhīm al-Haussani, Abū 'Isā al-Warrāq, al-Jāhiz, Qaḍi 'Abd al-Jabbār, Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī, Ibn Ḥazm and Ibn Taymiyyah.

These are some of the books which are directly or indirectly related to the subject of this study. Having reviewed these books, it can be said that most of the scholars who have written on al-Jāhiz's works focussed on his rhetorical, logical, zoological and poetic contributions. However, the researcher discovers that research conducted on al-Jāhiz's views on Christianity are mostly analytical and not critical. Therefore, existing works on al-Jāhiz's views seem to be incomplete and devoid of profound analysis.

Thus, this research will critically analyse al-Jāhiz's views on Christianity with special reference to his treatise, *al-Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā*. The study will focus on al-Jāhiz's approach and methods and investigate the practical dimensions of his arguments and claims. Moreover, this research aims to identify the similarities and dissimilarities between al-Jāhiz's views and that of his contemporaries.

²¹ A. Rashid Rahmat, "The Orthodox and Mu'tazilite Approach towards Christian Doctrine: A Comparative Study", *Islamic Order Quarterly*, vol. 10, no. 4 (1988): 68.

CHAPTER TWO

AL-JĀHĪZ: HIS LIFE AND WORKS

BACKGROUND

Studies on al-Jāhīz's ideas and thoughts on the doctrines of Christianity require a thorough understanding of the environment in which he was born and raised. Al-Jāhīz was born in the early era of the 'Abbāsīd Empire, during the pinnacle of Islam's glory. The first 'Abbāsīd period¹ was the most suitable for the cultural revival of Islam. After the expansion of Islamic territory during the Umayyad period had ceased, the Islamic Empire had come to a stability.² The stability of the new empire paved the way for its rulers to give due attention to the development of culture and knowledge.

Studies and research on various branches of knowledge were pioneered by the 'Abbāsīd caliphs. Knowledge based on Islam and Arabic literature such as grammar, hadīth, tafsīr, fiqh and literature, which were studied during the Umayyad era, were improved to become more systematic. Attention was also given to translate into Arabic works on other sciences such as logic, mathematics and astronomy from other languages such as Syriac, Greek, Sanskrit and Persian.³

Baghdād during the 'Abbāsīd period was the centre of civilization and knowledge for Muslims. According to al-Ḍahhabī, during this period almost all

¹ Historians always divide the phases of the 'Abbāsīd caliphate into four namely: The First 'Abbāsīd Era (750 – 847 C.E), The Second (847 – 945 C.E), The Third (945 – 1055 C.E) and The Fourth (1055 – 1258 C.E). See: Sālim, al-Sayyid 'Abd al-'Azīz, *al-'Asr al-'Abbāsī al-Awwal* (Alexender: Muassasah Shabāb al-Jāmi'ah), 6-11., See also: Al-Shārimī, Aḥmad, *al-Dawlah al-Islāmiyyah fi al-'Asr al-'Abbāsī al-Awwal* (Maktabah al-Anjlū al-Miṣriyyah, 1987), 10-11., Ḥasan, Ibrahim Ḥasan, *Tārīkh al-Islāmī al-Siyāsī wa al-Dīnī wa al-Thaqāfī wa al-Ijtīmā'ī* (Cairo: Maktabah al-Nahḍah al-Miṣriyyah).vol. 2, 1.

² Al-Qazzāz, Muḥammad Sa'ad, *Al-Fikr al-Tarbawī fi Kitābāt al-Jāhiz* (Madīnah Naṣr: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, 1995), 74.

³ Amin, Aḥmad, *Ḍuhā al-Islām*, translated from Arabic by Osman Hj Khalid (Kuala Lumpur: Percetakan Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, cet. 2, 1983). vol. 2, 11-17

knowledge was produced in Arabic, as it was very rare to find other branches of knowledge emerging after the ‘Abbāsīd era.⁴

Undoubtedly, the multi-racial population of Baghdād between the years 754 C.E and 853 C.E contributed to the rapid progress of the translation of knowledge from other languages into Arabic. The ethnic and racial diversity of the ‘Abbāsīd Empire as well as the rapid development of civilization required vast knowledge and skills in various aspects of the complexities of life such as engineering, medicine, astronomy, law etc., which in turn led to the development of various cultures during the ‘Abbāsīd Empire.⁵

The development of knowledge based on the legacy of previous civilizations particularly Greek and Persian was also driven by the fact that many non-Arabs embraced Islam. Cross- marriages between Arabs and non-Arabs also contributed to the dominance of four main cultures in Baghdād: Arab, Persian, Indian and Greek. This intellectual multi-cultural dynamic facet of Baghdad shaped al-Jāhīz’s life and thoughts.⁶

Al-Manṣūr (754 -775 C.E) was the first caliph responsible for the translation of various literatures into the Arabic language.⁷ His determination to translate various works into the Arabic language was manifested in his willingness to pay the weight of the translated works in gold.⁸

The translation project pioneered by al-Manṣūr reached its peak during the time of al-Ma’mūn (813-833 C.E).⁹ He was a learned man and historians recorded that

⁴ Ibid., 16.

⁵ Ibid., vol. 1, 175.

⁶ Al-Qazzāz, 75.

⁷ Amin, vol. 2, 288. During the period of the Umayyads, there were efforts to translate various literature into Arabic, but those efforts were individual in nature. See: al-Fīqī, ‘Iṣamuddīn ‘Abd al-Raūf, *Al-Dawlah al- ‘Abbāsīyyah* (Cairo: Al-Maṭba‘ah al-Tijāriyyah al-Hadīthah, 1987), 147.

⁸ Al-Qazzāz, 75.

⁹ Ibid.

he consistently attended the intellectual circles (*ḥalaqah*) of scholars and studied hadīth and tafsīr from them.¹⁰ Among the works translated,¹¹ were those directly related to religion, philosophy and the cultures of other nations.¹² Without doubt, these works shaped the thoughts of the ‘Abbāsīd society, subsequently serving as a catalyst in the development of *Ilm al-kalām* (the science of theological discourse) and philosophy.

Nevertheless, the rapid dissemination of knowledge as a result of the translation process of foreign literature also had a negative impact on the Muslim community. For example, the translation of the books of Mānī¹³ and Ibn Diṣān¹⁴ had a detrimental effect on the belief of the Muslims. The contents of these books, laced with the thoughts of the *zindīq* (Atheist)¹⁵ began to influence the public. Realizing this fact, one of the ‘Abbāsīd caliphs, al-Mahdī (775-785 C.E) ordered Muslim scholars to write books refuting those deviant teachings.¹⁶

In this regard, Baṣrah, which was the birthplace of al-Jāhīz, was not far behind in the development of knowledge. It is recorded that Baṣrah was the birthplace of

¹⁰ Ibid., 77.

¹¹ Among the figures famous for translation were Ḥunayn bin Ishāq, Yuḥannā bin Māsawayh and Ibn Baṭrīq. See: Shāhīn, Hasan ‘Abd al-Nabiyy Ibrāhīm, *Ahl al-Dhimmah fī Bilād al-Shām wa al-Jazīrah Khilāl al-‘Asr al-‘Abbāsī al-Awwal* (Unpublished PhD Thesis), 79-80.

¹² Amin, Ahmad, vol. 1, 190-193. It is recorded that Ḥunayn bin Ishāq was the one responsible for the translation of the Old Testament into Arabic. See: Al-Dibyan, Aḥmad bin Muḥammad bin ‘Abd Allah, *Ḥunayn bin Ishāq Dirasatan Tārīkhiyyah wa Lughawiyyah* (Riyadh: Maktabah al-Mulk Fahd al-Waṭoniyyah, 1993), 174.

¹³ Or best known as *al-Mānawīyyah*, is one of the most famous Persian religious sects. Its founder is Mānī bin Fātik. He believes in the conflict between good and evil, and that each has its own lord who governs and regulates its affairs. These two lords are both eternal. When Mānī realized that both good and evil have combined in this world, he thus forbade marriage, called for the ascetic life and recommended seven-day fasting in every month. He also forbade the slaughtering of animals, and affirmed the prophethood of Jesus and Zarathustra or Zoroaster. See: Ḥamad, Husayn ‘Alī, *Qāmūs al-Maḍhāhib wa al-Adyān* (Beirut: Dār al-Jāyil, 1998), 208-209.

¹⁴ Ibn Diṣān is a founder of the Magus sect named al-Diṣāniyyah. He asserted that there is a third world whose function is to separate light from darkness, and that the light is a symbol of good, whereas darkness signifies evil. By principle, they forbid marriage and the slaughtering of animals. See: Ibid.

¹⁵ *Zindīq* or also known as *Zandaqah* refers to people who do not believe in the life in the hereafter. The majority of Muslim scholars defined *zindīq* as people who appear to be Muslims but in fact are not. See: *Al-Mawsū‘ah al-Fiḳhiyyah* (Kuwait: Wizārat al-Awqāf wa Shu‘ūn al-Islāmiyyah), vol. 24, 48.

¹⁶ Al-Fīqī, 150