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THE EMERGENCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF ARABIC RHETORICAL THEORY,
500 C.E.-1400 C.E.

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By
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1998

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This dissertation is a survey of the emergence and development of Arabic rhetorical theory between c. 500 C.E. and 1400 C.E. It has been undertaken within the framework of the study of rhetoric in the communication field. After an introduction (chapter 1) and a review of the available literature (chapters 2), an investigation is made, in chapter 3, of the early origins of rhetorical thinking among the Arabs. This chapter covers the pre-Islamic period (c. 500 C.E.) and the early Islamic period to the end of the Umayyad period (c. 750 C.E.). The early Arabs had great appreciation for oral poetry and oratory, but did not produce any system of rhetoric in written form. In the 'Abbâsid period (beginning in c. 750 C.E.) theorizing about rhetoric began. In chapter 4, the contribution of a variety of scholars to the emergence of Arabic rhetoric is reviewed. Chapter 5, discusses the early philological approach to the study of Arabic rhetoric. The literary approach to Arabic rhetoric is the topic of chapter 6. In chapter 7, the philosophical and theological approaches to Arabic rhetorical theory are explored. Finally in chapter 8, conclusions are drawn about the nature and scope of Arabic rhetoric and implications for the study of rhetoric are offered.
Dedicated to my family
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

There is no universally accepted system of Arabic transliteration. However, one of the most common methods is the one used by M. G. S. Hodgson in his *The Venture of Islam* series, adopted here with small modifications as the list below shows.

\[
\begin{array}{ll}
\text{b} & \text{English b} \\
\text{t} & \text{like English t} \\
\text{th} & \text{English th in thin} \\
\text{j} & \text{English j} \\
\text{h} & \text{pharyngeal h ('guttural')} \\
\text{kh} & \text{German and Scots ch, Spanish j (nearer h than k)} \\
\text{d} & \text{like English d} \\
\text{dh} & \text{English th in this} \\
\text{r} & \text{rolled (trilled) r} \\
\text{z} & \text{English z} \\
\text{s} & \text{hissed s (in this)} \\
\text{sh} & \text{English sh} \\
\text{s} & \text{velar s ('emphatic')} \\
\text{d} & \text{velar d ('emphatic')} \\
\text{t} & \text{velar t ('emphatic')} \\
\text{z} & \text{velar z ('emphatic')} \\
\end{array}
\]
c  glottal scrape; to Anglophones difficult to pronounce; sometimes omitted
gh  voiced equivalent of kh above
f  English f
q  uvular k ('guttural')
k  English k
l  English l (in live)
m  English m
n  English n
h  English h
w  English w
y  English y (as consonant)

Short Vowels:
a  short a as in cat or ask (according to position)
i  short i as in bit
u  short u as in full

Long Vowels:
a  long as in father; sometimes as in fat (but held long)
i  long i as in machine (but held long)
û  long u as in rule (but held long)

Note: All translations are mine, except otherwise noted.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE ARABIC RHETORICAL TRADITION

In recent decades, scholars of rhetoric have shown a growing interest in rhetorical theories across cultures. A growing body of research is being devoted to the study of the rhetorics of non-Western societies such as India, China and Africa, among others. However, one of the world's major rhetorical traditions which is yet to be fully introduced to this discussion is the Arabic system of rhetoric, known as 'ilm al-balāghah (The Science of Eloquence). The Arabs not only had a long tradition of rhetorical and linguistic studies but they also helped preserve and transmit ancient Greek scholarship. In fact, the Arabs consider their language and rhetorical arts to be their highest cultural achievement and main contribution to world culture. Therefore, the lack of knowledge among Western students of rhetoric regarding the Arabic tradition is indeed unfortunate. This dissertation seeks to bring this little-known topic to the attention of rhetorical scholars in the English-speaking world.

In the field of speech communication and journalism, very little research has been done on Arabic rhetoric and a comprehensive study is needed. It is hoped that this dissertation will be an introduction to the topic and lead to more research in this area. A review of the literature outside the communication field indicates that considerable

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research on Arabic rhetorical theory exists but it is scattered among many humanistic disciplines such as linguistics, literary studies, political science, and philosophy, among others. This dissertation integrates some of this research along with original translations of Arabic writings on the theory of rhetoric to present in one place a comprehensive survey of the emergence and development of Arabic rhetorical theory.

Arabic Rhetoric and The Communication Disciplines

The Arabic rhetorical tradition is a rich and significant one. Students of western rhetoric will find it very useful to learn about Arabic rhetoric and how it dealt with theoretical issues that are similar to those discussed in the West. Some Arab thinkers addressed rhetorical topics that were identical to those discussed by theorists throughout the history of Western rhetoric. These include, for example, the relationship between rhetoric, dialectic and grammar and the nature of persuasion, among other issues. But more importantly, there are other approaches to rhetoric that were specific to the Arabic intellectual tradition and, in fact, make up the mainstream of writing on Arabic rhetoric. Yet, English-speaking students of rhetoric and communication have almost no access to this information.

There are at least three major reasons for this scarcity of knowledge about Arabic rhetoric. First is the fact that many of the original writings on Arabic rhetoric and other sciences are still contained in unpublished and uncataloged manuscripts. It is reported that there are around 600,000 hand-written Arabic manuscripts in libraries around the world,
only about half of which are cataloged and a small number published. This is certainly a drawback for any researcher trying to establish a comprehensive study of the topic. Second, the paucity of research that has been done is scattered among many disciplines and published in disparate publications, thereby making it very difficult to get a clear and unified picture of Arabic rhetoric. The third factor is that most Arabic rhetorical writings that are published remain largely untranslated into English and continue to be inaccessible to most scholars in the speech communication field. Therefore, an effort to put together a research document that introduces and explains the principles of Arabic rhetorical theory is sorely needed.

In an attempt to meet this need, I present this study of Arabic rhetoric within the framework of the discussion about the nature and scope of rhetoric that is currently taking place in the field of communication. Therefore, it is essential to describe, at least briefly, the nature of this theoretical debate among communication scholars. To this end, the following section is devoted to a brief description of the emergence and development of rhetorical theory in the West, emphasizing its classical origins.

Definitions of Rhetoric in the Western Tradition

Historically, the debate about the nature and scope of rhetoric goes back to the days of ancient Greece. Specifically, theorizing about rhetoric is said to have begun with Corax and Tisias, two teachers of rhetoric, who lived in the Greek colony of Syracuse in Sicily in the middle of the fifth century B.C.E. After a political revolution in Sicily in 466

B.C.E., a new court system was established to settle disputes among citizens regarding recovered lands and properties. Individuals were required to speak for themselves before the court. This led to a new demand for training in public speaking for the purpose of winning a case in front of a judge. One of the earliest teachers to meet this demand is believed to have been Corax who instructed litigants on how to plead their cases effectively.

Corax's advice might have included ways of organizing a speech into introduction, argument or proof, and conclusion. But most importantly, he emphasized including arguments from probability, that is, showing that one's arguments were more likely to be true than the arguments offered by the other side. Corax's system of instruction was eventually published in a book called Art of Rhetoric, which most scholars agree to be the beginning of the study of rhetoric. The concept of probability in public debate raised by Corax became one of the most important concepts in rhetorical theory—a concept that persists to the present day.3

The work of Corax was continued and popularized by his student Tisias, who also published a handbook on rhetoric. This handbook and many others similar to it became common during this period. The purpose of these books was to teach Greek citizens effective public speaking whether in court or in the public assembly. Tisias emphasized that the purpose of the rhetorical arts was to persuade primarily through public speaking

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and writing. Therefore, based on Corax's and Tisias's work, the definition of rhetoric began to take shape as the art of public argument from probability to achieve persuasion.

The demand for rhetorical teaching soon grew exponentially in the Greek mainland. This demand was met by a new class of teachers of rhetoric, called sophists (from the Greek word *sophos*, meaning wisdom). Although the sophists were not a monolithic group, they shared many traits. In general, they claimed that they could teach eloquence, wisdom and excellence. Their primary subject matter was the art of rhetoric. They taught rhetoric according to specific methods but they also taught by example through their own oratorical displays. Philosophically, they did not believe that objective or universal truths could be found. Truths, they argued, were relative and had to be determined in each individual case. This relativistic philosophical position led to the famous clash between the sophists and the philosopher Plato, who rejected their moral relativism and argued for a more objective view of reality. As will be seen in this dissertation, a similar conflict took place among Arab scholars of the Middle Ages. Subsequent to the transmission of Greek knowledge to the Arabic cultural milieu in the ninth and tenth centuries, some scholars adopted skeptical philosophical views that seemed to be based largely on the Greek sophistical tradition. In fact, the Arabized word *al-

4 Murphy, "The Origins," 6-7.


6 Murphy, "The Origins," 7-9; and Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg, eds. The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present (Boston: Bedford of St. Martin's, 1990) 22-24.
Sūfistāniyyah was used to refer to those who espoused sophistic views; the word safsatah was used for the process of engaging in a sophistic debate (i.e. sophistry). In general, sophistry in the Arabic tradition was taken to mean “the misleading philosophy.” Scholars who adopted the sophistic approach were rejected by the majority of Islamic scholars.

In the Greek tradition, one of the most influential sophists was Protagoras (481-411 B.C.E.). He is known for the statement, “Man is the measure of all things,” which emphasized his position that truth is relative to the individual and his or her social circumstances. This led him to assert that “on every question there are two speeches that oppose each other” and that one person can argue equally well both sides of any case. Therefore, he was criticized for teaching his students “to make the worse appear the better cause.” Protagoras’ view of rhetoric seems to be motivated by winning a case through disputation and oratorical display. As will be discussed later in this work, in the Arabic rhetorical tradition a style of debate known pejoratively as “showing falsity in the guise of truth and truth in the guise of falsity” (ižhār al-bāṭil bi šūrat al-haqq, wa al-haqq bi šūrat al-bāṭil) seems to have been based on similar techniques.

Another famous Greek sophist was Gorgias (485-380 B.C.E). He came from Sicily as an ambassador to Athens in 431 B.C.E. and stayed to open a school of rhetoric. He is most known for his embellished style of oratory. He believed that certain stylistic features, such as alliteration, assonance, antithesis and parallelism, can make a speech more

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8 Hikins, Remarks, 19.
persuasive. Thus, he believed in the power of the spoken word to manipulate the listeners' reactions and asserted that "speech is a powerful lord . . . it can stop fear and banish grief and create joy and nurture pity." Gorgias' work does not seem to have been known to the Arab rhetoricians of the the Middle Ages, and no mention of his name is found in their writings. However, his emphasis on style and rhetorical figures will have strong parallels within the Arabic tradition, as will be seen throughout this dissertation.

The rhetorician Isocrates (436-338 B.C.E.) rejected the style of the sophists and their disregard for the truth. Instead, he proposed a practical educational system based on moral principles. Speech, he declared, was a gift from the gods which made civilization possible. Therefore, the purpose of his school was to produce educated statesmen for the benefit of Greece. A crucial element in the education of the statesman was skill in oratory. A great orator, according to Isocrates, has to have three attributes: natural ability, practice, and education (knowledge that can be applied in practical affairs). Isocrates' concepts of education were highly influential. They became the foundation for Roman rhetorical schools, which in turn influenced European and American education—an influence which is still discernable today.

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9 Murphy, "The Origins," 10.


11 Bizzell and Herzberg, 43-46.

12 Murphy, "The Origins," 14.
The philosopher Plato (427-347 B.C.E.) opposed the relativism of the sophists and attacked their view of rhetoric. In one dialogue, *Gorgias*, he charged that rhetoric, as practiced by the sophists of his day, feeds on the ignorance of the audience and aims at producing pleasure and gratification. Moreover, he said, the rhetoric of his contemporaries is not based on true philosophical knowledge, and has no subject matter of its own. It is a mere skill or knack similar to cookery. Therefore, sophistic rhetoric is false and harmful to society.\(^{13}\) In a later dialogue, *Phaedrus*, Plato apparently describes what he considered to be true or ideal rhetoric. At one point in the dialogue he defines rhetoric as "a kind of influencing the mind by means of words."\(^{14}\) A speaker can achieve good rhetoric by meeting certain conditions, among them: knowledge of the subject matter, knowledge of the audience's mind or soul (psychology), and the ability to organize a speech into the right structure.\(^{15}\)

Plato's views were systematized and expanded by Aristotle (394-322 B.C.E.). In his *Art of Rhetoric*, he defined rhetoric in two ways. First, unlike Plato, who initially questioned the value of rhetoric, Aristotle wanted to establish the legitimacy of rhetoric as an important discursive art. Therefore, in the opening sentence of the *Rhetoric*, he declares that: "Rhetoric is a counterpart of Dialectic."\(^{16}\) By associating rhetoric with

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\(^{15}\) Hikins, *Remarks*, 20.

dialectic (i.e., with philosophical thought) he is stressing the significance of rhetoric both as an art and as a topic for study. In the second definition, Aristotle describes rhetoric as "the faculty of seeing in any situation the available means of persuasion." In general, Aristotle's work treats rhetoric as an important art—an art of persuasion grounded on theoretical principles.

Aristotle devotes a large portion of his book to the process of finding the right arguments and the modes of proof to be presented to an audience. He also discusses style, organization and presentation. Thus, Aristotle's work became the basis for the five major canons of rhetoric in the Western tradition: (1) invention: the discovery of ideas and arguments; (2) organization: the arrangement of the ideas and arguments already discovered by invention; (3) style or elocution, including linguistic choices; (4) delivery: the presentation of the speech; and (5) memory, which was not mentioned by Aristotle but was added to the canons by later writers. Finally, Aristotle's view of rhetoric reinforced persuasion as an essential element of rhetoric.

As will be discussed in this dissertation, the works of both Plato and Aristotle had a significant impact on the thinking of many Arab scholars of rhetoric. This will be evident in the works of the major Islamic philosophers, such as al-Farâbî, Ibn Sinâ (Avicenna), and Ibn Rushd (Averroes). Also, several other writers in the tradition of 'ilm al-balâgah (the science of eloquence), whose work will be discussed in chapter seven, were significantly influenced by Greek philosophy.

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After Aristotle, some significant Greek works on rhetoric were apparently written, but many of them did not survive.\(^{18}\) While the Greek approach to rhetoric was mostly theoretical, the Roman view of rhetoric tended to be more practical. The first major Latin text on rhetoric, *Rhetorica Ad Herennium*, written about 100 B.C.E., is a practical manual for the student of rhetoric. It contains a discussion of the five canons of rhetoric and their application, with little to say about their theoretical underpinnings.

The most famous representative of Roman rhetoric is Cicero (106-43 B.C.E.), who not only wrote about rhetoric but was himself a great orator. In his writings, he called for combining philosophical wisdom with the study of rhetoric for the purpose of dealing with practical affairs. In his early work, *De Inventione*, he said that the function of rhetoric is "to speak in order to persuade an audience."\(^{19}\) In a later work, *De Oratore*, he followed Isocrates in stressing the importance of natural ability, knowledge of the liberal arts, and extensive practice. In a third book, *Orator*, he discussed style, which he divided into three levels: plain, moderate and grand.\(^{20}\)

The Roman rhetorician Quintilian (35-95 C.E.) was a lawyer and educator. He wrote the famous *Institutes of Oratory* in which he described the ideal education for the citizen-orator from childhood to retirement. It is a comprehensive work that draws

\(^{18}\) For example, Aristotle's pupil, Theophrastus (c. 370-c. 285 B.C.E.) apparently wrote a number of works on rhetoric. See George A. Kennedy, *A New History of Classical Rhetoric*, 84-87.


eclectically from Greek and Roman sources and the author's own experience. For Quintilian, the perfect orator is "the good man speaking well." As in the case of other Roman writers, Quintilian emphasized the practical end of rhetoric, namely persuasion.

With the decline of democracy in Rome in the three hundred years after Quintilian's death, there were less opportunities for the practice of robust, invention-centered public debate and oratory. In their place, public speech often became a fulsome performance, meant to display the rhetorical skills of the speakers at the expense of the cogency of the message. Therefore, there was a growing emphasis on style and presentation. This period (c. 150-400 C.E.) is often referred to as the Second Sophistic because of the excesses of style similar to those practiced by the early sophists. A well-known work from this period is On the Sublime, written in Greek by an unknown author usually referred to as Pseudo-Longinus. This work stresses the importance of elevated style that goes beyond the ordinary level of speaking or writing, making ideas powerful and culturally and temporally transcendent. Therefore, interest in rhetorical figures and tropes is a very essential part of rhetoric as viewed by the author of this work. Rhetoric is a work of art that produces in the audience effects going beyond the mechanical process of putting the speech together.


23 Murphy, "The End of the Ancient World," 180.
As will be seen within the course of this dissertation, in the Arabic rhetorical tradition, the notion of the "sublime" was reserved for the Qur'an. The style of the Qur'an will be described as transcending everyday eloquence to reach a miraculous (wāfaq) level of excellence in expression, a level beyond the reach of human speakers. The nature of this miraculous style will be described in terms similar to those articulated by the Greek author of On the Sublime, especially his emphasis on figures of speech, nobility of diction, and dignified and distinguished arrangement.

In the Middle Ages (c. 400-1400 C.E.), the Roman empire was replaced by the authority of the Christian Church and rhetoric was eventually adopted to the demands of this new age. Previously, many of the early Christian writers, such as Tatian (fl. 167), were hostile to all aspects of the pagan Greek and Roman cultural tradition, including philosophy and rhetoric. They maintained that knowledge of God's truth is associated with the ability to communicate that truth effectively. However, it was St. Augustine (354-430), one of the early Church fathers, who asserted that rhetoric, a pagan art, can and should be used for the practical aims of the Church, namely, interpretation and transmission of Christian doctrine through preaching and persuasion.

St. Augustine had been a teacher of rhetoric before becoming a Christian in 386. In his On Christian Doctrine he argued that rhetorical knowledge could be used to both interpret and communicate the truth of the Bible. Based on the writings of classical rhetoricians such as Cicero, he argued that Christian preachers must be able to teach, delight, and move. This, he maintained, could only be achieved by paying careful attention

\[\text{24} \text{ Hikins, Remarks, 23.}\]
to the rules of effective expression. St. Augustine's rhetorical and linguistic analysis restored a new vitality to the study of rhetoric, an aspect which it had lacked since Roman times. Although it would take some time for this vitality to become manifest in important treatises, Augustine insured that the classical rhetorical tradition would be preserved until such time as scholars could further explore the art.

Although theoretical treatments of rhetoric were uncommon, rhetoric in the Middle Ages became an essential part of the educational curriculum. The influential writer, Cassiodorus (fl. c. 551) wrote *Introduction to Divine and Human Readings* in which he divided the liberal arts into the *trivium* that includes logic, rhetoric and grammar. Based on Roman sources, his discussion of rhetoric emphasized its practical implications for effective persuasion.

In addition to preaching and practical training, rhetoric in the Middle Ages took the form of letter writing. Due to the lack of public debate on controversial and practical issues, many political, business and legal affairs were conducted through letters. Letter writing became the principal medium for persuasion in this period and therefore required its own mode of rhetoric. The Italian monk, Alberic of Monte Cassino (fl. 1075), is credited with making rhetoric an independent subject of study in medieval universities with an emphasis on effective letter writing.

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26 Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, 64; and Hikins, *Remarks*, 24.

27 Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, 203-10.
Arabic rhetoric will be shown to have some parallels with western rhetoric of the Middle Ages. For example, both systems give rhetoric a central role in the educational curriculum. They also give significant attention to the art of letter writing.

During the Renaissance and throughout the Modern and Contemporary periods of the Western tradition, rhetoric was studied and investigated by many authors resulting in different emphases reflecting the intellectual environment of each period. For example, in the Renaissance (c. 1400-1600) the classical tradition was rediscovered and Humanism flourished. The reemergence of democratic institutions, combined with increased literacy and international trade, led to new demands for the practice and study of rhetoric. For example, the French educator, Peter Ramus (1515-1572) called for the separation of logic and rhetoric in the curriculum. He argued that rhetoric should be concerned with style and adornment of ideas discovered separately by logic. In addition, the British philosopher Francis Bacon (1565-1621) applied the principles of faculty psychology to the study of rhetoric. He concluded that rhetoric should be used for the social improvement of individuals and their community. The function of rhetoric, he said, was "to apply reason to imagination for the better moving of the will." Bacon also believed that rhetoric's main function in relation to other sciences is to order and embellish the discoveries of the other arts and sciences.

28 Bizzell and Herzberg, 557-62.

In the Modern period (eighteenth century), three British theorists made significant contributions to the study of rhetoric. First, George Campbell (1719-1796) applied recent developments in the field of psychology to study the relation between the speaker and the audience. He defined rhetoric as "that art or talent by which the discourse is adapted to its end." He then identified four ends for discourse: to enlighten the understanding, please the imagination, move the passions, and influence the will. Second, Hugh Blair (1715-1800) was interested in rhetoric as polite literature, including literary criticism and composition. He identified rhetoric with the ability "to speak or to write perspicuously and agreeably with purity, with grace, and strength . . . to address the public." Third, Richard Whately (177-1863) asserted that finding suitable arguments and their skillful arrangement are the two processes that define rhetoric as an art. This view was very influential among later writers until the present day, where the concept of rhetoric as argument has become an important part of rhetorical studies. Finally, in the nineteenth century there was a decline in theorizing about rhetoric, but there was a rise in applied studies of well-known speeches through history, as "public address" became central to rhetoric.


31 Hugh Blair, "Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres," in Bizzell and Herzberg, eds., The Rhetorical Tradition, 799.

32 Bizzell and Herzberg, 828-30.

33 Hikins, Remarks, 28.
In the Contemporary period (roughly the twentieth century) several important authors contributed new concepts to the study of rhetoric, many of which emphasize the concept of rhetoric as a tool for social amelioration. For example, I. A. Richards (1893-1979) investigated language, meaning, and misunderstanding. In *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, he argued that rhetoric should be "the study of misunderstanding and its remedies."34 Similarly, Kenneth Burke (1897-1993) discussed how rhetoric can function as a medium for identifying common interests between the speaker and the audience. Rhetoric can also be a means for understanding and changing human motivation. He defined rhetoric as "the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols."35

In addition to viewing rhetoric as a means of social amelioration, the definition of rhetoric itself was expanded at the hands of contemporary theorists. According to many scholars, rhetoric is no longer restricted to the study of speech but includes the analysis of all symbols used in modern communication. For example, Douglas Ehninger defined rhetoric as "the art of symbolic inducement." He argued that the study of rhetoric should involve "all of the ways in which men may influence each other's thinking and behavior through the strategic use of symbols."36

Not all rhetorical scholars agree with this expanded approach to the definition of rhetoric. Richard Cherwitz and James Hikins, for example, point out that this perspective


fails to identify the fundamental characteristic that sets rhetoric apart from other human activities. The essential constituent of rhetoric, they suggest, is "the linguistic description of reality." This definition is based on the philosophical theory that reality exists independent of human discourse and that the process of rhetoric is an attempt at describing this reality and, thereby, persuading others as to the authenticity of the claim being offered. This is in sharp contrast to other contemporary theories of rhetoric, usually labeled as postmodernist or post-philosophical, that are based on the notion that all human knowledge is rhetorically constructed. Postmodern theories of discourse are very diverse, but what characterizes most of them is a total rejection of foundationalism, essentialism, and realism. More specifically, postmodern theories of rhetoric are based on "a denial of any fixed meaning, or any correspondence between language and the world, or any fixed reality or truth or fact to be the object of enquiry." This leads many postmodern theorists to call for the rejection of the classical rhetorical tradition. However, the basic issues of rhetoric seem to persist through time, with very little, if any, fundamental change. As Bizzell and Herzberg point out, "The fundamental concerns of rhetoric in all ages appear to be those defined in the classical period: purpose, audience, composing process, argumentation, organization, and style." Therfore, even those contemporary theories which are written in opposition to the classical tradition can most

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39 Bizzell and Herzberg, 7.
often only be understood in light of it. As George Kenney put it, “there are, of course, other ways of approaching rhetoric today, some of them consciously anti-Aristotelian, but the distinctive contribution of these other approaches can often be better understood when compared with Aristotle's.”

With regard to the Arabic approach to rhetoric, and despite the conscious opposition of some of its representatives to Greek philosophy and logical methods, it also shares with the Western classical tradition many of the same fundamental concerns, as will be clear from the chapters that follow.

Presently, there is a growing interest among many Western scholars in the rhetoric of non-Western societies. In 1975, George Kennedy called for research into the relationship between classical rhetoric and the rhetoric of other cultures. In a review article, Kennedy stated that:

the most open frontier now seems to lie in examination of the relationship between the classical tradition and its variants or alternatives within Judaism, Christianity, Islam, or cultures of Africa or Asia.

Subsequent to Kennedy's commentary, research has been done in some of these areas. For example, there is a growing body of research on Asian rhetoric, especially the rhetoric of

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China and Japan. But the study of other rhetorics from other cultures has not been systematically pursued. One source that will certainly contribute to the discussion of non-Western rhetoric in several valuable ways is the Arabic rhetorical tradition. Yet until now it has not been thoroughly introduced into the on-going debate in America about the nature and scope of rhetoric. It is the purpose of this dissertation to fill this gap in the understanding of Arabic rhetoric.

The Significance of the Arabic Rhetorical Tradition

In a recent review of scholarship, Richard Leo Enos and Ann M. Blakeslee point to the fact that we still do not know very much about the relation between classical rhetoric and the rhetoric of other cultures, one of which is Arabic:

"The impact of classical rhetoric across cultures and through time is still in need of study. It is known for example, that classical rhetoric was influential, and in some cases even preserved by the Byzantine Empire and the Arab World, yet relatively little is known about these phenomena."

This indicates that many Western rhetorical scholars are aware of the existence and significance of the Arabic rhetorical tradition, but that little research has been done in this


area. This scarcity of research on Arabic rhetoric is unfortunate, but it also becomes ironic when one is reminded of the richness and major significance of the Arabic rhetorical and linguistic tradition, as Bohas et al. suggest in relation to the study of Arabic grammar:

The corpus of Arabic linguistics constitutes, unquestionably, one of the major linguistic traditions in the world, together with the Indian and Greek ones. It is consequently obvious that the very limited amount of space devoted to Arabic grammarians in the main histories of linguistics... is quite out of proportion to the real importance of this tradition.44

The Arabic language is the primary medium of expression of Islamic civilization. Moreover, it is generally regarded as one of the five languages in human history which have been transmitters of cultural knowledge, the others being Greek, Latin, Chinese, and Sanskrit.45 Another scholar, Edward Said, explains further the significance and uniqueness of the Arabic language and, at the same time, points to the scarcity of knowledge about Arabic literature among people in the West. He states that:

of all the major literatures and languages, Arabic is by far the least known and the most grudgingly regarded by Europeans and Americans, a huge irony given that all Arabs regard the immense literary and cultural worth of their language as one of their principal contributions to the world. Arabic is of course the language of the Koran and is therefore central to Islam, in which it has a hieratic, historical, and everyday use that is almost without parallel in other world cultures.46


Given the prevalence and significance of the Arabic language, it is surprising that scholars have not paid more attention to Arabic rhetorical theory. One reason to consider for this scarcity of research in this area among Western scholars is the historical animosity between the West and Islam. Again, Said states that long held prejudices against Arabs and Islam led most Westerners to ignore learning about Arabic culture and literature. He writes:

It is impossible not to believe that one reason for this odd state of affairs is the longstanding prejudice against Arabs and Islam that remains entrenched in Western, and especially American, culture.47

However, in the last few years, the situation shows significant signs of improvement. With increased communication between the two cultures, prejudices are slowly receding, as the two cultures learn more about each other. This opens the way to in-depth studies of aspects of Arabic culture such as this one. Accordingly, this project was undertaken to study the history and early development of the Arabic rhetorical tradition.

Method, Limitation, and Division of the Study

As stated in the introduction, the purpose of this dissertation is to introduce in one place the little-known topic of Arabic rhetorical theory (‘ilm al-balāghah) to scholars in


the English-speaking communication field. While conducting this study, several methodological issues had to be addressed and clarified. The first theoretical problem to be confronted is the overall vantage point from which this study will be carried out. Ideally, Arabic rhetoric might be investigated without prior reference to any other system of rhetoric. However, in the case of this study, it was decided, based on pragmatic considerations, to start with the available foundation of knowledge about rhetoric shared by both the researcher and the intended audience. This initial shared knowledge happens to be the Western rhetorical tradition. Therefore, it was decided to use Western rhetoric as the benchmark for this investigation. Also, based on the same consideration, references to parallels and similarities between the Western and Arabic systems whenever they occur will be pointed out and discussed throughout this work, a process that should enlighten our understanding of both traditions.

Overall, the approach to this study will be descriptive. Specifically, the emergence of rhetorical consciousness among the Arabs will be traced in its historical and cultural context from pre-Islamic times to shortly after the ‘Abbāsid age, when Arabic rhetorical theory was given its final systematized form. The main focus of this study will be to describe in detail the contributions of the Arabs to the understanding of effective discourse, i.e. to the theory of rhetoric. However, this dissertation makes more than just a descriptive contribution to the literature. By understanding how Arabic rhetoric evolved, we will be in a position to better understand the evolutionary processes by which the art of discourse emerges, develops, and adapts to varied cultural circumstances.

The span of time covered by this study is a long one, stretching from pre-Islamic times (c. 500 C.E.) to about 1400 C.E. Therefore, a sound system of dividing this long period had to be adopted for this study. Traditionally, Arabic literary history has been
divided into four major periods corresponding to the major political periods of the
culture of Islam. However, this system of division has been critiqued by many scholars.
Nevertheless, it is by far the most widely used system of periodization. Therefore, it was
decided to use this conventional method of division despite its limitations. While this
method of division is adopted here, it must be acknowledged that the history of literary
and rhetorical phenomena does not always correspond precisely to changes in political
systems. Thus, the four periods will be used as a general guideline and a convenient
reference point, but the continuity of cultural and rhetorical trends between the various
periods will be noted and discussed. The four major periods are: (1) the pre-Islamic
period (c. 500-622 C.E.), (2) the early Islamic period (c. 622-661); (3) the 'Umayyad period
(661-750); and (4) the ‘Abbāsid period (750-1258). Also, the insights of a few important
authors who lived after this last period will be included. I will offer appropriate
commentary on Arabic rhetoric subsequent to 1258 C.E. Therefore, the central focus of
the dissertation is on the formative era of Arabic rhetoric between c. 500 C.E. and c. 1400
C.E.

Limitation of the Study

There are basically four key limitations on this study. First, there is a limitation
associated with the amount and type of original Arabic materials available for study. It
was already mentioned that hundreds of thousands of Arabic manuscripts are still kept in

48 The problem of periodization is discussed in S. D. Goitein, "A Plea for the
224-28; see also Mattityahu Peled, "The Controversy over Concepts of Arabic Literary

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various libraries around the world awaiting publication. Various scholars, in the Arab world and outside it, are working on editing and publishing some of these manuscripts. Therefore, at some point in the future, the discovery of new original materials will likely alter the understanding of the Arabic rhetorical tradition. Thus, the dissertation is based on the state of current knowledge of the tradition. The following comment was made in 1970, but I believe it is still relevant today. Bonebakker wrote that Arabic rhetoric is one that deals with material that consists for the greater part of unpublished manuscripts most of them uncataloged. In years of work I have been able to glimpse the vast material on this subject, and am far from finding an answer to some of the fascinating questions that have recently been raised in connection with it. I have asked myself whether there is any point in trying to outline the history of this branch of Arabic literature; any attempt may be frustrated tomorrow by the discovery of new texts.  

Now, about 30 years later, it is true that our understanding of the Arabic rhetorical tradition has improved significantly, so that an outline of its history and development can be studied and analyzed. Nevertheless, the broader issue remains the same, namely, that new discoveries of primary sources that might alter, or reinforce, our current understanding of the Arabic rhetorical tradition, are still probable.

Second, there is a limitation associated with the secondary sources available for this study. My linguistic ability allows me to research and assess studies that were written in either Arabic or English. However, the reader should be reminded that research on the

topic of Arabic rhetoric has been conducted in many European languages such as German, French, Spanish and Russian.

Third, there are limitations associated with translating Arabic texts into English. The best attempts in this area will always face some inherent problems. As Beeston et al. warned:

On the subject of translations a word of warning must be voiced. It is vastly more difficult than in the case of European languages, sometimes well nigh impossible, to translate from Arabic classics in a way attractive to a reader unacquainted with the original tongue and civilization associated with it. Both idiom and culture often appear strange and remote. Professional scholars and amateurs have essayed many an effort, in the domain both of prose and verse, at the rendering of Arabic into English, but if the results often appear unsatisfactory to the English reader it should certainly not be assumed that the original author is at fault.  

I hope to be able to overcome most of the problems associated with translation, especially because Arabic is my native language. In addition, I have studied and used English for most of my adult life.

Fourth, because this dissertation is basically a preliminary survey, there will be limits on how detailed the analysis of each concept, rhetorical term, or a specific author's work, might be. Hence, the emphasis will be put on the overall picture of the emergence and development of the Arabic tradition as a whole, rather than the detailed analysis of any isolated concept or individual work. However, it is hoped that this study will lead to

more specific analyses of some of the major issues that will be highlighted in this dissertation.

Finally, the key assumption underlying this study is that the Arabic science of rhetoric ( علم البالاغة) is a topic that is virtually unknown to scholars in the field of communication. This dissertation is but a first step in introducing them to this topic.

The Division of the Study

The remainder of this study of the history and development of Arabic rhetorical theory is divided into seven chapters which will trace the emergence of Arabic rhetorical consciousness in a systematic and chronological fashion. Specifically, the chapters will cover the following issues.

Chapter 2 will be devoted to a review and an evaluation of the current state of scholarship on Arabic rhetoric. As stated earlier, there is a considerable literature on Arabic rhetoric dispersed in the publications of many academic fields, such as literary studies, linguistics, philosophy and political science, among others. This literature will be surveyed to assess the state of knowledge available about Arabic rhetoric, especially in English- and Arabic-language publications.

In Chapter 3, the early origins of rhetorical thinking among the Arabs will be investigated. This chapter will cover the first three periods of Arabic rhetorical history. In the pre-Islamic period the focus is mainly on poetry and some of the early remarks about eloquence found among the early Arabs. With the coming of Islam, the Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. It became a major source for literary and linguistic study among Muslims over time, especially during the 'Abbasid period. In the Umayyad period, there was a resurgence of poetry associated with the development of new poetic
genres. Also, since this period was a time of great conflict within Islam, there was considerable activity in political and religious oratory. Moreover, towards the end of this period, artistic prose writing began to develop at the hands of government secretaries. Finally, the major Islamic intellectual disciplines, such as philology and Qur'anic interpretation, began to gather momentum at the end of this period to reach their highest level of achievement in later centuries during the 'Abbāsid age. These developments and their relationship to Arabic rhetoric will be explored.

Chapter 4 traces further developments during the 'Abbāsid period. In this period, the contributions of Greek and Persian civilizations were absorbed into the new cultural environment, leading to great advancement in literary, religious, philosophical and scientific studies. In addition, new styles of poetry were introduced along with a growing sophistication in the art of Arabic writing. It is during this period that many works of rhetorical theory were written. In this chapter, the major motivations for the emergence of rhetorical theory are explored and major theoretical developments surveyed.

Chapter 5 will be devoted to the discussion of the early philological approach to Arabic rhetoric. Specifically, the chapter will focus on the works of five early philologists as representatives of this approach. The five authors are al-Asma'ti, Ibn Sallām, Abū 'Ubaydah, Tha'lab, and al-Mubarrad.

Chapter 6 discusses the literary approach to Arabic rhetoric. Based on the foundation of the early philological approach, several authors developed a literary approach to the study of Arabic rhetoric. Three authors are chosen in this chapter as representatives of the literary approach. They are al-Jāhiz, Ibn Qutaybah, and Ibn al-Mu'tazz.
Chapter 7 discusses the philosophical and theological approaches to Arabic rhetorical theory. Several authors applied rationalist approaches to the study of both poetry and the style of the Qurʾān. Among the major authors discussed in this chapter are Qudāmah ibn Jaʿfar, Ibn Wahb, and ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī. The final systemization of Arabic rhetorical theory into the science of eloquence (ʿilm al-balāghah) is then discussed.

Finally, Chapter 8 gives a summary of the major findings of this study and points to questions for further research.
CHAPTER 2

THE STATE OF SCHOLARSHIP ON ARABIC RHETORIC

The Arabic theory of rhetoric (‘ilm al-balāghah) is not considered a separate academic discipline by the Arabs. Rather, it is usually studied within the general category of Literary Studies and Literary Criticism, often with an emphasis on poetry. In the Arabic tradition, poetry played a major public role with strong rhetorical (persuasive) dimensions. However, this is not a completely unique phenomenon. Most scholars in the West, for example, agree that poetry often has a rhetorical dimension. For example, Donald C. Bryant argues that most poetry "is rhetorical in the most obvious sense—in the same sense as epideictic oration. It 'pleases' largely by rhetorical means or methods. It 'reminds' us of experience instead of 'organizing' or 'creating' experience."¹ Other scholars remind us that poetic and rhetoric (and logic) "constitute a common ground," that is, they are interrelated.² In the case of early Arabic poetry, this rhetorical dimension is clearly manifested in the functions that will be discussed below.


In addition, the preservative function of early Arabic poetry could also be seen as rhetorical. For example, according to Cherwitz and Hikins, one of the epistemic functions of rhetoric is its preservative role. As will be shown in this chapter and in chapter 3, early Arabic rhetoric had a strong preservative and documentary function that was encapsulated by the phrase, "poetry is the diwan (register) of the Arabs". Many historical, cultural, and linguistic issues were preserved by pre-Islamic poetry until later scholars began to debate them and argue their merits.

Based on the above considerations, this review of scholarship on Arabic rhetoric will begin with the literature on the broad category of Arabic literary studies. Commentary on Arabic rhetoric is generally scattered and disunited, appearing—and disappearing—at numerous points in the long literary history of Arabic scholarship.

**Histories of Arabic Rhetoric**

Perhaps the oldest and most detailed survey of Arabic literature in English is Reynold A. Nicholson's *A Literary History of the Arabs* published in 1907 and reprinted in 1969. It is a chronological and descriptive review of Arabic literature in poetry and prose (but also including religious, philosophic, and scientific writings) from pre-Islamic

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4 As noted earlier, this review will be limited to studies written in English and Arabic. However, the reader should be aware that additional research has been published in other languages, notably German, French, Spanish and Russian. See the bibliography in M. H. Bakalla, *Arabic Culture: Through Its Language and Literature* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1984) 291-361.
times to the 19th-century. The same topics are covered by H. A. R. Gibb in a shorter work, *Arabic Literature: An Introduction* (2nd edition, 1963). A Third brief survey was written by Ignace Goldziher, *A Short History of Classical Arabic Literature* (translated, revised and enlarged by Joseph Desomogyi, 1966). Also, Gustave E. Von Grunebaum wrote *Medieval Islam: A Study in Cultural Orientation* (2nd ed. 1953) in which he surveys the Islamic religious, intellectual, and literary tradition with an emphasis on parallels with the Western (Greco-Roman and Christian) tradition. Finally, a recent introductory work was written by M. H. Bakalla, titled *Arabic Culture Through Its language and Literature* (1984).

In addition, there are several anthologies of Arabic literary works in English translation. Among these are James Kritzeck’s *Anthology of Islamic Literature* (1964), Najib Ullah’s *Islamic Literature* (1963), and Ilse Lichtenstadter’s *Introduction to Classical Arabic Literature* (1974). All three works contain short translated selections from Arabic poetry (especially pre-Islamic poetry), written prose and correspondence, philosophical writings, and other genres.

More recently, Cambridge University published a multi-volume history of Arabic literature, each volume containing several studies on specific topics by specialists in the field. The first volume, *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period* (1983) contains introductory chapters on Arabic culture and the Arabic language. This is followed by a number of articles on poetry, early Arabic prose and oratory, the epistolary genre, the Qur’an, and the Prophetic traditions (*Hadith*). For example, R. B. Sergeant, in his article "Early Arabic prose," discusses the literature of proverbs, oratory, sermons, and addresses in the pre-Islamic and early Islamic periods. The peculiar style of oratory of the pre-Islamic soothsayer (*Kāhin*, oracle) is analyzed and briefly illustrated. Also, the oratory,
correspondence, and contracts attributed to the Prophet Muhammad are discussed in some
detail. Serjeant concludes by discussing the emergence of the Government Registry in the
Umayyad period, which led to the development of Arabic chancery prose.

Another article in this volume worthy of mention is by J. D. Latham, who traces
the early development of the Arabic epistolary genre during the Umayyad period. He
discusses the findings of a study by the Italian scholar Mario Grignaschi regarding
connections between early Arabic epistles and Greek sources. The rest of the article is
devoted to analysis of the works of ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd al-Kātib, who is often referred to as
the founder of the Arabic epistolary genre. In addition, this volume of the *Cambridge
History* includes separate chapters on the Greek, Persian, and Syrian impact on Arabic
Literature.

The second volume, *ʿAbbasid Belles-Lettres* (1990), continues a discussion of
Arabic literature during the ʿAbbāsid age. After a historical introduction to this period of
five centuries (750-1258), separate articles are devoted to the discussion of literary trends
and major literary figures. It is noted that the character of Islamic culture was enriched
in this period by the contributions of the non-Arabs who adopted Arabic as their
language. Worth mentioning is the analysis by S. A. Bonebakker of the development of
the Arabic genre of *Adab* (usually translated as literature or belles-lettres), followed by
separate chapters on the lives and works of several major literary and rhetorical scholars
including the epistolary writer Ibn al-Muqaffāʾ, the rhetorician al-Jāḥīz and the essayist
Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī. In addition, M. M. Badawi gives a general review of the new or
"modern" ʿAbbāsid poetry, followed by separate chapters on various poetic genres
including hunting, political, love, mystical, and ascetic poetry.
Of special interest is the chapter on literary criticism by K. Abū Deeb, in which he traces the emergence and development of Arabic literary criticism (al-naqd al-adabī). Here the discussion is focused on poetic and practical criticism, especially through the works of five major literary critics: Ibn Tabātabāh, Qudāmah ibn Ja'far, al-Āmidī, al-Qādī al-Jurjānī, and 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī. The work of these critics and others mentioned in the article also had an impact on the development of Arabic rhetorical theory in the abstract sense (i.e., 'ilm al-balāghah). In this connection, Bonebakker discusses, in a separate chapter, the importance of Kitāb al-Badh (The Book of the Novel Style) by Ibn al-Mu‘tazz to the history of Arabic rhetoric, tracing its background and possible influences on its author. He then analyzes the content of the book, explaining the terminology found in it and the influence it had in turn on future rhetoricians.

The third volume in the Cambridge University series is titled Religion, Learning and Science in the ‘Abbasid Period (1990). As the title indicates, this volume is concerned with Arabic and Islamic contributions to Theology, Philosophy, and Science. The first few sections explain the methods and doctrines of several theological schools in Islam, most notably within the Sunnī (orthodox) tradition. But there are sections on Shī‘ī and Sufī (mystical) traditions as well. Most related to Arabic rhetoric is the discussion by John Burton of Qur’ānic exegesis. One of the approaches to understanding the Qurʾān was the linguistic approach, which had an impact on the development of linguistic and rhetorical studies.

The third volume also includes sections on Islamic philosophy providing separate chapters on important philosophers such as al-Kindī, al-Razī, al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna), and the theologian al-Ghazālī. Finally, L. E. Goodman describes, in a separate chapter, the movement of translation of Greek works into Arabic, especially during the
reign of al-Ma'mūn, who in 830 founded a "House of Wisdom" (bayt al-hikmah) mostly for that purpose. The lives and works of several famous translators, such as Thābit ibn Qurrah and Hunayn ibn Ishāq, are discussed. Hunayn is the most important translator of Greek works into Arabic. He also oversaw the translation made by his followers including his son Ishāq and others. To Hunayn are attributed "translations, paraphrases, elucidations and abridgements of Plato's Republic, Aristotle's Categories, De Interpretatione, Analytica, Topica, Sophistica, Rhetorica, Physica, De Anima, Metaphysica, De Caeo and Magna Moralia; and from the same school came numerous other translations of Aristotelian and neo-Platonic works."^5

Arabic linguistic studies are covered by M. G. Carter in two chapters. In the first, he discusses the development of Arabic lexicography, pointing to the contribution of early scholars such as al-Khalīl ibn Ahmad (d. c. 786) in developing an early Arabic dictionary. The compilations of dictionaries of the Arabic language reached its zenith in such works as Lisān al-ʿArab (The Tongue of the Arabs) of Ibn Manzūr (d. 1311) and al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ (the Ocean) of al-Ftrūzabādī (d. 1414). In another chapter, Carter discusses the emergence and development of Arabic grammar. He first points out the controversy about the external influences on this Arabic field of study. The content and terminology found in al-Kitāb (The Book) of Sībawayhi, the first known comprehensive work on Arabic grammar, is an issue of debate among scholars. Some of them see a Greek influence, while others argue for a more indigenous development within the Islamic tradition.

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Carter then discusses the methods of Arabic grammatical studies from its early stages to the mature works of the "great masters." In its mature form, Arabic grammar is known to be very sophisticated and elaborate. Therefore, Carter concludes that "la! sufficient tribute to this achievement is the fact that modern linguistics, which once considered itself a science without a past, now recognizes that many of its insights into the workings of language have been part of the grammatical tradition of Arabic for centuries."

The aforementioned works are some of the most representative treatments in English of the general category of Arabic literature and literary history in the widest sense available to the student of Arabic rhetoric. On the other hand, there is a large number of works covering the same topics written by scholars in the Arab world in Arabic. It would not be possible nor desirable to give an exhaustive list of such works. However, the following section will highlight some of the most important titles which have a significant historical and or critical value for the understanding of Arabic rhetorical history.

Other works of some relevance to the present study take a particularly historical approach. In the Arab world today, there is a great interest among scholars in recovering, interpreting, and publishing literary and critical works from past historical periods. In fact, this activity started in the 19th-century during what is usually referred to as the Arabic Literary Renaissance (al-Nahđah al-Adabīyah). The purpose of that movement was to revive the Arabic literary and scientific heritage. The printing presses, which began to

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appear at that time, made possible the publication of classical literary works of prose and poetry, an activity which still continues today. In addition, contact with the West introduced many Arab writers to new genres of literature and new methods for research and inquiry. Within this context, critical works on the Arabic literary tradition began to appear.

One of the earliest detailed histories of Arabic literature was written by Jurjì Zaydàn. In about 1910, he published Tārīkh Ḥādīb al-Lughah al-ʿArabīyah (The History of the Literatures of the Arabic language). He divided the history of Arabic literature into seven periods corresponding to seven major historical periods in Arab history: pre-Islamic, early Islamic, Umayyad, ʿAbbāsid, Mongol, Ottoman, and Modern. Within each period, Zaydàn discusses the development of various literary genres, including poetry, prose, and letter-writing. He also includes writings on grammar, religion, and philosophy. The division of Arabic literary history along political lines was controversial from the start, yet because of the lack of a clear, agreed-upon alternative, it became the most often used method of dividing the periods of Arabic literary history.

From a wider perspective, beginning in 1928, Ahmad Amīn wrote a series of books on the history of Islamic civilization. In them, Amīn provides a systematic overview of Islamic thought, including centers of intellectual life and famous contributors in the various fields of Islamic culture. The first book, entitled Fājr al-Islām (The Dawn of Islam), focuses on the intellectual life of the Arabs before Islam and during the early years of Islam. Amīn includes a discussion of possible contacts between the early Arabs and ideas and beliefs of Persian and Greco-Roman cultures. He continues the discussion along the same lines in the other two books, Duḥā al-Islām (The Forenoon of Islam) and Zuhr al-Islām (The Highnoon of Islam). These books, especially the first one,
have been of great value for students of Arabic literary history and are frequently referred to by scholars.

The well-known Egyptian scholar Tāhā Husayn also published several works in which he tries to reevaluate the common understanding of classical Arabic poetic and prose literature. His most controversial work is Fī al-Shīr al-Jāhili (On Pre-Islamic Poetry), originally published in 1926, but modified and published a year later as Fī al-Adab al-Jāhili (On Pre-Islamic Literature). At issue was Husayn’s argument that almost all of what is considered to be pre-Islamic poetry and literature was a fabrication by later ‘Abbasid writers. However, more recent critical studies call for a modification of his views based on new evidence. Also, Husayn’s lectures on aspects of Arabic literary history are published in book form and continue to attract the attention of contemporary scholars.

Another scholar, Zāki Mubārak, was interested in genres of Arabic prose, especially during the tenth century, when prose writing reached a high level of maturity. He wrote al-Nathr al-Fannī fī al-Qarn al-Rabī‘ (Artistic Prose in the Fourth Century) in 1931. Mubārak shows how artistic prose had its origins in pre-Islamic and early Islamic times with emphasis on rhymed prose (ṣaj). Then he analyzes several unique features of artistic prose during the tenth century, including new developments in subject matter and style. He then divides Arabic prose writing into narratives, literary criticism, religious opinions and dogma, and letter-writing.

Finally, and more recently, Shawqī Dayf has contributed numerous works on Arabic literary history and criticism. His work usually takes the form of descriptive syntheses of literary trends and accounts of the life and works of major writers throughout the history of Arabic literature. For example, his Ta’rīkh al-Adab al-‘Arabī
(The History of Arabic Literature), a series of five books on the various periods of Arabic literature, provides the social and cultural background necessary for understanding the development of Arabic literature and rhetoric throughout the various periods. He also wrote specifically on Arabic rhetorical theory and grammar, topics that will be discussed below.

One can readily see that there is a significant and complex body of works devoted to the study of the Arabic literary and linguistic tradition. As the above summary suggests, a proportion of this scholarship touches on Arabic rhetoric, although none of the above-mentioned works pretend to provide any systematic or exhaustive treatment of the art in its practical (i.e., applied) or its theoretical forms. There are many scholars who are studying Arabic rhetoric specifically, both as practice and as a theory. These studies tend to be rather generalized and limited to fairly specific time periods and/or issues. The rest of this discussion will be divided into two sections covering the literature on: (1) Arabic rhetoric as practice; and (2) Arabic rhetoric as theory.

Studies on Arabic Rhetoric as Practice

In a review article of classical Arabic prose literature, Leder and Kilpatrick point out that, compared to Arabic poetry, Arabic prose (spoken and written) has not been given the attention it deserves from scholars. They set out to show the wide variety and richness of this literature and call for further research in this area. They define Arabic prose as "works principally in prose, in which there is a pervasive concern with artistic

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expression as well as the communication of information. They divide classical Arabic prose into several types: speeches (khutāb, sing. khutbāh), letters (rāsā'il, sing. risālah); short narratives (akhbār, sing. khabar, or qisas, sing. qissah); and original works of fiction or non-fiction.

With regard to speeches, they point out that their importance in public life goes back to the pre-Islamic period. Al-Jāhiz in his al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn (Clarity and Clarification) provides information on Arabic oratory and orators of this period. During the Umayyad period, the practice of oratory was also significant and political leaders were expected to be effective orators. This period was considered to be an age of great speeches and eloquence. Although there are many collections of speeches from different periods of Arab history, researchers are cautioned about the authenticity of many of pre-Islamic and early Islamic addresses, especially those that are given within a longer narrative to make a political or ideological point. Therefore, speeches must be examined and evaluated carefully and cautiously by the contemporary scholar.

In addition to political speeches, there were a number of other types of oratory practiced by the Arabs. They include the religious sermon (maw'izah), which was perfected by a number of well-known religious leaders. One of the most famous preachers was al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 728) who "brought the penitential sermon to magnificent heights with stirring images, striking antitheses, and ringing, unaffected prose rhyme." Another type of speech was the short exhortation (wasīyah), which generally

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8 Leder and Kilpatrick, 2.
9 Leder and Kilpatrick, 4.
contains concise ethical and spiritual advice. It sometimes combines Islamic teachings with pre-Islamic wisdom. For example: “My son, remorse is infirmity, covetousness is infamy, despair is impotence. Think no more of what is past, be avid for what the future brings. First ponder, then calculate, then act.”

The condolence speech (ta‘zīyah) is another important type of Arabic oratory. It might also be conveyed in writing. Arabic oratory might also incorporate proverbial phrases (amthāl), sing. mathāl and aphorisms. In terms of style, pre-Islamic and early Islamic oratory tend to rely on rhyme and parallelism. This is particularly true of the style of the pre-Islamic soothsayer (kāhun).

Regarding current research on Arabic oratory, only a few studies exist. For example, the work by R. B. Serjeant on early Arabic prose was mentioned above. In addition, J. Pedersen wrote on the role of the Islamic preacher. Specifically, he describes the function of the Islamic khatīb (orator) as religious exhorter and admonisher. Preaching seems to have been very important to Islam since the beginning of the Prophet’s mission, but little is known about this early activity. In the first century of Islam, the Prophet, and later the caliphs and governors, delivered the Friday sermon themselves. However, during the Umayyad period, the role of the khatīb in the mosque began to be regulated. The task was given over to a class of specialized preachers whose function was to speak on matters of faith and religious conduct, but more importantly to be the representatives of the caliph. However, alongside the official khatīb, there emerged

\[10\] Leder and Kilpatrick, 4.

a group of independent and popular preachers who practiced outside the Friday sermon framework. A preacher of this kind was often called qāṣṣ (story-teller) or wāʿiz (admonisher), or mudhakkir (reminder). Pedersen traces the development of the function and social status of this type of preacher. Their methods of preaching and examples of their speeches have been preserved in some of the early Arabic sources.

There are also several current studies in Arabic dealing with the topic of classical Arabic oratory. One of the most representative is a work by Ihsān al-Nuṣṣ titled al-Khāṭābah al-ʿArabiyyah fī ʿAsrīhā al-Dhahabī (Arabic Oratory During Its Golden Age) (1963). As mentioned earlier, the Umayyad period witnessed a great activity in religious and political oratory, therefore it is referred to by al-Nuṣṣ as the golden age of Arabic oratory. In this work, he begins by discussing the different types of oratory in the pre-Islamic period. He divides pre-Islamic oratory into several types according to the occasion or motivation for the speech, including: (1) oratorical contests where members of rival tribes compete in boasting matches; (2) calling for war or revenge; (3) peace-making and calling for a stop to bloodshed; (4) orations on behalf of men who are asking for marriage, recommending individual men to the woman’s tribe; (5) sermons and wisdom speeches; (6) speeches during ceremonial meetings between tribes; (7) short exhortations (wāṣayā) to members of one’s family or tribe; and (8) orations of the soothsayer (kāhīn). The importance of oratory for the pre-Islamic Arabs is discussed, along with examples of famous orators. In Islamic times, the types of oratory expanded to include religious preaching and political speeches. Al-Nuṣṣ then moves on to discuss the oratory of the Umayyad period, the main topic of his work, explaining the factors that led to its proliferation. Among the reasons for the increase in oratory during this period are the divisions among religious and political factions and the conflicts associated with them.
The second type of classical Arabic prose which Leder and Kilpatrick discuss is letters (rasâ’il). The authors note that Arabic letters have been more frequently quoted and anthologized than speeches. Letters were generally communications drafted on behalf of a ruler for political and administrative purposes. These letters were usually written in "an elevated style which presupposes the mastery of clear, dignified and pithy expression (jazâlah)."\textsuperscript{12} With regard to authenticity, some letters may have been improved upon in the course of transmission. Moreover, some letters which were attributed to the pre-Islamic and early Islamic times show clear signs of fabrication and reflect the political and religious polemics of a later period. A style of answering a letter with a short reply appended to it, known as tawqîf (decision), enjoyed high esteem.

The Arabic epistolary style took shape at the hands of the secretarial class of the Umayyad and 'Abbâsid administrations. In general, there was a "tendency to develop a style which on the one hand aims for embellishment by the repetition of the same ideas in different forms and the use of synonyms, while on the other it refines the technique of parallelism, which it expanded into long phrases."\textsuperscript{13} Two secretarial writers, 'Abd al-Hamîd al-Kâtib (d. 750) and Ibn al-Muqaffâ (d. c. 757), are among the early and most influential contributors to this genre. The literary epistle (or treatise) was also practiced by Arab writers. This form of scholarly epistle reflected the new intellectual environment and linguistic developments facilitated by "the movement of translation of scientific works into Arabic, the development of dialectic, especially in connection with theological

\textsuperscript{12} Leder and Kilpatrick, 7.

\textsuperscript{13} Leder and Kilpatrick, 8.
issues, and the increased possibilities for sustained thought and speculation afforded by the extension of the use of writing.\textsuperscript{14}

In letters of correspondence, writers sought to incorporate stylistic devices (badī‘) which were popularized by the poets. In fact, some famous letter writers were also skilled in poetry. The use of these rhetorical figures led to a unique style of official letters known as inshā‘ (composition). These devices were also used in composing informal (private) letters to express delicate emotions and were meant to be savored at leisure. Some writers specialized in writing short passages (fusūl) to display their virtuosity during different social occasions. These passages became models for later writers and were collected in anthologies.

Regarding Arabic prose writing, including letter-writing, some current research is available. First, there is the article by J. D. Latham about the emergence of the epistolary genre. In addition, in his Samples of Arabic Prose, A. F. L. Beeston provides an introduction to the development of the art of writing in Arabic, followed by examples of writing from the various periods of the Arabic tradition. The rest of the literature on this topic is in Arabic. For example, Muḥammad Ahmad wrote al-Nathr al-Kitābī fī al-ʿAsr al-Umayyādī (Secretarial Prose during the Umayyad Period). In it he provides an analysis of the different types of epistles written during this period. These include: official correspondences; political treatises, especially regarding the political legitimacy of the caliph; epistles regarding religious doctrine and dogma; didactic epistles. In addition, the early history of Arabic prose is discussed by Ḥusayn Naṣṣār in his Nashʾat al-Kitābah al-

\textsuperscript{14} Leder and Kilpatrick, 8.
In addition to discussing official letters and literary epistles, Nassar describes the emergence of historical writing as an important genre. A third example is the historical review of the art of writing by Shawqi Dayf in his *al-Fann wa Madhahibuh fi al-Nathr al-`Arabi* (Artistic Methods in Arabic Prose). In it he reviews the development of Arabic artistic prose from the pre-Islamic period to modern times.

Leder and Kilpatrick go on to discuss the other types of classical Arabic prose, namely, short narrative texts. A number of interrelated narrative genres fit under this category. They include *khabar* (report or news), *hadith* (conversation) and *qissah* (story). In addition, there is the genre of fabulous tales (*ikhurafah*), which draws on ancient Arabian, Persian, Indian and Greco-Roman sources. Finally, the fourth type of classical Arabic prose is original works of fiction and non-fiction. Works of original fiction are comparatively rare in the classical Arabic tradition, but a few important examples are mentioned, including the genre of *maqamah* (a story in rhymed prose). The non-fiction category includes original contributions to prose styles made by major literary figures such as al-Jahiz, al-Ma`arri, and al-Tawhidi.

**Studies on Arabic Rhetoric as Theory**

Arabic rhetorical theory attracted the interest of Western scholars at a relatively early date. Among the earliest well-known studies is a work by A. F. Mehren titled *Rhetoric der Araber* published in 1853. According to Bonebakker, this and similar early

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works were mostly descriptive, but they lacked a discussion of the historical context from which this branch of Arabic literature developed. In a few cases, the authors tried to render some of the Arabic rhetorical terms by their Western equivalents. Overall, the emphasis of these works was mostly on helping to understand Arabic poetry and not on studying Arabic rhetoric from a historical point of view.

In later decades, these early works were followed by a number of critical studies. For example, Goldziher wrote an important article analyzing the attitude of early Arab critics on the issue of the superiority of pre-Islamic over Islamic poetry. Other scholars were concerned with editing and publishing early Arabic manuscripts. For example, the Arabic translation of Aristotle's *Poetics* by Abū Bishr was edited and published by Tkatsch (1928-1932). In 1935, Kratchkovsky edited and published *Kitāb al-Badīʿ* (The Book of the Novel Style) of Ibn al-Muṣṭazz and Ritter edited and translated into German al-Jurjānī's *Asrār al-Balāghah* (The Secrets of Eloquence) (1954, 1959).16

Subsequently, many detailed studies about Arabic rhetorical theory have appeared. Most of these studies, however, tend to focus on literary theory and literary criticism. This is not surprising since the Arabic theory of rhetoric itself focuses on the literary aspects of discourse over any other characteristic. Therefore, in the Arabic tradition, the phrases "literary theory" and "rhetorical theory" are interchangeable. Among the early investigation of Arabic literary theory and criticism is a study by Gustave von Grunebaum in which he explains the motivations for the interest in literary theory among the Arabs.17 According to Grunebaum, there were four different impulses for the

16 The above four works are cited in Bonebakker, "Aspects" 77.
emergence of Arabic literary theory and criticism among Arab scholars. The first came from the early philologists who had a great interest in the collection and preservation of poetry. Second, the interest in poetry developed into a separate field of inquiry focusing on classification of poets and close scrutiny of poetic texts. This led, thirdly, to a theory of poetic expression and the embellishment of speech. Fourth, interest in rhetoric developed among theologians in connection with the belief in the uniqueness of the Qur’an. This is the doctrine of *i'tâz* (inimitability). Scholars debated whether the superiority of the Qur’an could be proved to be stylistic as well as spiritual. This discussion contributed to the development of further theorizing about rhetoric. Grunebaum devotes the rest of his article to describing standards for literary judgments among Arab critics of the 10th century C.E. These developments in turn influenced further theorizing by later generations of scholars, culminating in a number of significant works by great writers such as Ibn Rashîq (d. 1064 or 1070), ‘Abd al-Qâhir al-Jurjânî (d. 1078), and Ibn al-Athîr (d.1239).Moreover, Grunebaum published a translation of the sections on poetry found in *I’tâz al-Qur’an* by al-Baqqilânî (d. 1012).18

Similarly, Wolfhart Henrichs wrote several works on Arabic literary theory. In one study, he examined the Arabic theory of literary expression, while pointing out some of the achievements of classical Arabic poetry which the early critics overlooked.19 Like

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Grunebaum, he agreed that the motivations that led to the emergence of Arabic rhetorical theory were diverse in character. In addition to the motivations pointed out by Grunebaum, he discussed another factor, namely, the influence of Greek logic and philosophy. According to Heinrichs, knowledge of philosophy and logical training had an influence on some Arab authors, such as Qudâmah ibn Ja'far (d. 958). The Greek influence was mostly evident in his method of organization and coherent presentation.

Several other works that discuss aspects of Arabic literary and poetic theory were published in recent years. For example, Vincent Cantarino wrote *Arabic Poetics in the Golden Age* (1975) in which he introduces the work of several major Arab critics and translates some of their views on poetic expression. G. J. H. Van Gelder investigated the issue of poetic unity and the structure of the poem in Arabic rhetorical theory in his *Beyond the Line* (1982). Finally, the issue of truthfulness in poetry as viewed by the early Arab critics was the subject of Mansour Ajami's *The Alchemy of Glory* (1988).

In the Arab world today there is a vast literature on literary theory and criticism. The most important critical works in this field include a study by Ihsân ʿAbbâs titled *Tārîkh al-Naqd al-Adabî ʿind al-ʿArab* (The History of Literary Criticism Among the Arabs) (1971). It is a chronological and critical review of the main issues in Arabic poetic criticism from the earliest remarks of the pre-Islamic Arabs to the writings of Ibn Khaldûn (d. 1406). ʿAbbâs divided the most important issues in Arabic poetic criticism into the following categories: (1) the relation between words and meaning; (2) natural talent and artificiality; (3) truthfulness and falsity; (4) poetry and morality; and (5) plagiarism.

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among other issues. In addition, Jābir ʿAsfūr investigated the concept of poetic imagery in Arabic Literary theory in a work titled *al-Šūrah al-Fannīyāh fi al-Turāth al-Naqdī wa al-Balāghī* (Poetic Imagery in the Literary and Rhetorical Tradition) (1974). Here, ʿAsfūr analyzes the historical development of several theoretical concepts such as poetic imagination, metaphor, and simile.

**Studies on ʿIlm al-Balāghah**

While there are numerous and lengthy works on Arabic literary theory and criticism, research on the Arabic theory of rhetoric in its abstract sense (*ʿilm al-balāghah*) is very limited. Not one study in English in book form has been published regarding *ʿilm al-balāghah*. Instead, there are very few articles on the subject published in a variety of fields, including two short essays in the speech-communication field. These articles are discussed below, but it should be remembered that the difference between literary and rhetorical theory in the Arabic tradition is a matter of emphasis. The two disciplines share many of the same underlining motivations for their emergence and were often influenced by the same early works in the tradition. The studies also emphasize the points of similarity and connections between the Arabic and Western traditions.

One of the earliest treatments of Arabic rhetoric in English was written by H. Samuel Hamod. He traced the development of rhetorical thought in Arab culture, stressing the parallels he found between it and the phases of rhetorical theory and practice in the West.20 For example, in the beginning of the Arab tradition (the pre-Islamic period,

c. 500 C.E.), there was a rich poetic and oral practice that has some parallels in the West. Halim points out that "a"s with the Homeric Greeks, prowess of body and mind were highly valued among the Arabs and their tribal storytellers functioned as historians and moralists in recounting battles and instances of outstanding bravery and cunning. The storytellers (poets and orators) became very influential not only as entertainers but also as defenders of their community. In fact, there were many people who believed that the storytellers had magical powers and could assist in battle with curses.

In the course of the pre-Islamic period (c. 500–620 C.E.), the Arabic language and the practice of poetry grew in sophistication. Oratorical and poetic contests were held in urban centers to meet the growing demand for entertainment. Many of the participants in these contests became teachers by example to their followers. The poets taught the standards of excellence which they helped to formulate through their knowledge of figures of speech and vocabulary. This contributed, as Hamod points out, "to the development of at least an operational Arab rhetorical theory and practice." The Arab poets of this period used "grand stylistic structure..." and "spoke in a finely embellished language..." Hamod explains that this elevated style of communication was called Balagha (balāghah) and points out that it was not documented in writing, but it helped in identifying higher forms of expression in Arab culture.

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21 Hamod, 97.
22 Hamod, 97.
23 Hamod, 98.
With the coming of Islam (c. 620 C.E.), the Prophet Muhammad became the next important influence on Arabic speaking. He stressed the importance of truth as a criterion for judgement, but he did not ignore the importance of style. Hamod maintains that, in this phase of the development of Arabic rhetoric, “the goal of speaking became persuasion instead of entertainment, truth served by beauty.” The Qurʾān itself is “stylistically beautiful.” The impact of the style of the Qurʾān was great upon Arab listeners. ʿUmar ibn al-Khattāb, a companion of the Prophet and a later caliph, is said to have “even declared that it was the beauty of the language in the Koran which converted him to Islam.”

With his emphasis on truth and knowledge of God, the Prophet clashed with the poets of his time. The Qurʾān said, “as for the poets, only those who go astray follow them.”

In later centuries, the Arabs began to codify the science of balāghah, which was eventually systemized into three branches, one dealing with Semantics (ʿilm al-maʿānī), another with lucidity and modes of presentation (ʿilm al-bayānī), and a third with embellishment (ʿilm al-badīʿ). Among the important works in this tradition, Hamod mentions two in particular. One is the Kitāb al-Badīʿ of Ibn al-Muʿtazz (written about 887) and the encyclopedic work of al-Sakkākī (d. 1229), who gave the science of balāghah its final form in his Muftāḥ al-ʿUlūm (The Key to the Sciences).

24 Hamod, 99.

Hamod goes on to explain that Greek Philosophy played an important role in Arab and Muslim cultural milieu, especially during the reign of the caliph al-Ma'mūn (ruled 813-33). Aristotelian logic was awarded a great value "as a means of helping the religious speaker to be effective." However, Hamod adds that Muslims "were always aware of the difference between the ultimate truth of the Koran and the truth of logic and dialectical skill . . ." Therefore, educational systems based on rationalism were eventually rejected and replaced with schools that were in more harmony with traditional Muslim belief. Hamod then explains how the system of balāghah survives in the curriculum of one of the most influential Islamic educational institutions in modern times, the University of al-Azhar in Cairo. He concludes his essay by mentioning some recent attempts by contemporary Arab intellectuals to reform the traditional system of Arabic rhetoric. The reformers, he explains, stress clarity and simplicity of style.

In another study, Allen Merriam argues that the Arabic-Islamic rhetorical tradition is highly similar to the Western system of rhetoric in one important way. They are both built on the idea of persuasion. Merriam states that "[t]he life and teachings of Mohammed provided a sense of moral earnestness and religious zeal which transformed the pre-Islamic tradition of storytellers and entertaining poets." The Prophet used oratory to address his followers on important occasions and during Friday prayers. The significance of rhetoric for Muslims, Merriam adds, is reflected in the writings of the

26 Hamod, 100.

27 Allen H. Merriam, 43-49.

28 Merriam, 43.
essayist al-Jähiz (*d. 869*) who wrote an epistle entitled "The Superiority of Speech to Silence." He is quoted as saying that "were silence superior, the Prophet's mission would have been dumb and the nonexistence of the Koran would have been better than its existence."29

Merriam goes on to explain that the Qur'ân itself encourages the use of eloquence and rational debate in promoting Islam. For example, the Qur'ân says that "Your only duty is to give warning. We have sent you with the truth to proclaim good news and to warn your people;"30 "those who deny Our word when it is preached to them shall be sternly punished;"31 and "We will hurl Truth at Falsehood, until Truth shall triumph and Falsehood be no more."32 Merriam concludes that: "This view of the advocate as an aggressive social agent who overwhelms his opponent by the power of argumentation closely parallels the Greco-Roman orientation towards persuasion."33 He adds that, while the Qur'ân provides the justification for advocacy, it also gave impetus for the study of language. This led to the codification of rhetoric (*balághah*) as described by Hamod above.

A prominent feature of Arabic rhetoric is its concern with stylistics (*badī‘*), for despite the Qur'ānic injunctions against the manipulation of truth, Merriam says, "it does

29 Merriam, 43.

30 Merriam, 43; Qur'ān, 35: 24.

31 Merriam, 43; Qur'ān, 41: 41-43.

32 Merriam, 43; Qur'ān, 21: 18.

33 Merriam, 43.
not follow that Arab rhetoric is essentially simple and direct. On the contrary, the Semitic
tendency towards linguistic vagueness, verbal embellishment, and exaggeration
(mubalaghah) is generally recognized. He points to the preoccupation with stylistic
rhetoric (badī‘) in the Arabic tradition manifested in the collection of ever growing lists
of figures of speech and the concern with "style for style's sake" among some Arab
rhetoricians. However, some Arab scholars from different periods, such as al-Jāhiz and
Ibn Khaldūn, are quoted as speaking against this tendency.

Finally, Merriam discusses briefly the Islamic philosophers' contributions to
rhetoric. The most well-known Islamic philosophers are al-Fārābī (d c. 950), Ibn Sīna
(Avicenna d. 1037) and Ibn Rushd (Averroes d. 1198). Merriam points out that all three
philosophers commented on the works of Aristotle, including the Rhetoric. He adds, citing
James Murphy, that it was from an Arabic manuscript attributed to al-Fārābī that the
first Latin translation of the Rhetoric was made, probably by Hermannus Allemanus
about 1240 C.E. Merriam concluded that the Arabic rhetorical tradition has much in
common with the Western system of rhetoric. He observed that:

both systems enjoyed a firm basis in the theoretical writings of Aristotle. Both
experienced the growth of a stylistic orientation to rhetoric. And just as Arabic
language and diction developed within a religious context, so Western theory has,
since the time of St. Augustine, placed a strong emphasis on preaching and Biblical
style.35

34 Merriam, 45.
35 Merriam, 45.

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These parallels will be discussed further in this dissertation.

In Arabic scholarship there is a great number of books that collect and summarize works of rhetorical theory. Among the most important is al-Bayān al-‘Arabî (Arabic Rhetoric) by Badawī Tabānah (1967), which describes the historical development of Arabic rhetorical theory from its early beginnings to modern times. Similar synoptic works include al-Balāghah Tatāwwur wa Tārīkh (Rhetoric Its History and Development) (1965) by Shāwqī Dayf and Manāhij Balāghīyah (Approaches to Rhetoric) by Ahmad Maṭlūb (1973).

Finally, a small number of studies are concerned with rhetoric as viewed by the Islamic philosophers, such as al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā, and Ibn Rushd. The major Islamic philosophers addressed rhetoric and poetics as part of their system of philosophy. Their views were much nearer to the Greek concept of rhetoric and poetics than to the mainstream of Arabic rhetorical writings. These topics are discussed in the works of several scholars such as C. E. Butterworth, Deborah Black, and Salim Kemal (cited in the bibliography).

Conclusion

Based on the above review of the literature, it becomes clear that much commentary has been made on Arabic rhetoric, especially in its literary and poetic forms. Knowledge about Arabic rhetoric is largely embedded in historical reviews of Arabic literature and in the investigations of poetic theory. The few essays that discuss Arabic rhetorical theory (‘ilm al-balāghah) are brief and schematic. It is evident that there were no unified and comprehensive studies in English on the emergence and evolution of Arabic rhetorical theory. Therefore, the need for a comprehensive study, such as this one, on the topic is
reinforced. In the following chapter, the investigation of the emergence and development of Arabic rhetorical theory begins with a discussion of the early historical and cultural background, within which rhetorical consciousness among the Arabs began to take shape.
CHAPTER 3

THE EARLY RHETORICAL BACKGROUND

In the previous chapter, it was stated that the emergence and development of Arabic rhetorical theory is best understood by examining the early historical and cultural background against which rhetorical consciousness among the Arabs developed. To this end, this chapter will trace the early development of several rhetorical trends in their historical context, that is, during the pre-Islamic period through early Islamic times, until the end of the Umayyad period (i.e., the period between c. 500-750 C.E.). No written treatises on rhetorical theory were made during this span of time but, as the discussion below will show, the Arabs had an implicit understanding of the rules of eloquence and fragments of their critical remarks were transmitted orally until the beginning of the 'Abbásid era (c. 750 C.E.).

Arabic rhetorical theory came about mainly as a result of the great appreciation among the Arabs for spoken and written discourse, especially their high esteem for poetry. The historian Bernard Lewis has observed that "the highest achievement of the Arabs in their own reckoning and the first in order of time was poetry, with the allied art of rhetoric."1 After the coming of Islam, the Qur'ān also gradually became an important

1 The Arabs in History, 146.
source for linguistic investigation and theorizing. The investigation of these phenomena begins with a brief look at Arab life and culture before Islam.

The Arabs Before Islam

The Arabian peninsula is generally regarded as the original homeland of the Arabs, although recent research indicates that the Arabs lived also in the north of Arabia, that is, in Syria, Iraq and east of Egypt. Shaped as a vast rectangle of about one and a quarter million square miles and surrounded by water from three directions, it is often referred to as “The Island of the Arabs” (Jazirat al-‘Arab). It is bordered in the west by the Red Sea, in the east by the Persian/Arabian Gulf, and in the south by the Indian Ocean. In the north it is delimited by the arch of lands commonly known as the Fertile Crescent, comprised of the southern territories of Palestine, Syria and Iraq. Topographically, the Arabian peninsula consists mostly of large deserts broken by oases and steppes. There is generally very little rainfall and the climate is very hot in the summer and cool and dry in winter. However, the far south-western corner, present-day Yemen, consists of relatively high mountains which benefit from frequent rainfall. This allowed for the rise of an agricultural society in that area since ancient times, going back to about the 6th century B.C.E. Unfortunately, aside from inscriptions, these south Arabian civilizations did not leave any significant written literature.2

The earliest known examples of Arabic literature and rhetoric begin with the poetry of the nomads of northern and central Arabia. This literature and rhetoric was composed about two centuries before the rise of Islam, which is traditionally dated from 622 C.E. One of the most important themes of pre-Islamic poetry was the panegyric (madīth, praise), which served an important rhetorical function. In the following example the poet al-Musayyab ibn 'Alas praises his patron, al-Qa'qā', the leader of Banū Tamīm tribe. Here, the poet is aware of the rhetorical function of his qaṣīdah (ode), that is, its influence on public opinion. al-Musayyab said:

Indeed shall I send a qaṣīdah on the wings of the wind, a present despatched from me to al-Qa'qā'.
It will come down to the watering places, lasting ever wondrous and strange, quoted and heard among the tribe.
Of a truth you are more generous than a bay brimming over with wave piled upon wave, surging to and fro.
Of a truth you are known among your enemies, all of them, as braver than a lion in its lair, returning to the charge again and again.4

The rhetorical function of the pre-Islamic ode (qaṣīdah) is here explicitly stated by the poet. A successful ode was usually preserved by the tribes through oral transmission, insuring that the good reputation of the praised individual or tribe will be widespread and kept alive in the collective memory. Thus, among the rhetorical purposes of early Arabic poetry was the spread and preservation of information, ideas, and opinions.

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4 Translated by Abdulla el Tayib, "Pre-Islamic Poetry," Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period, ed. A. F. L. Beeston et al. 68.
The cultural life of the Arabs in this period was centered around the tribe. Most of the inhabitants of Arabia at that time were pastoral nomads known as Bedouin (from the Arabic word *badawîn*, people of the steppes). Originally, the Bedouin were also called *al-Arab* (the Arabs) before this term was expanded to include the sedentary people of the peninsula and eventually all Arabic-speaking people.

The basic values and morality of tribal society were largely determined by the harsh reality of desert life. The Bedouin depended on herding sheep and camels, and sometimes on raiding other tribes and villages for their livelihood. In such an environment, the individual cannot survive without the support of the group. Therefore, duty to the tribe becomes paramount, while personal feelings are subordinated to the cause of group cohesion. The sense of loyalty among the members of the tribe was supported by blood relations and the belief in a common noble ancestry.\(^5\)

The political organization of the tribe was partially based on selecting a leader (*Shaykh*, also sheikh, but more properly *sayyid*, leader) who is elected by the elders of the tribe and known to be essentially no more than a first among equals. The *shaykh* did not have the authority to impose duties or inflict punishments. Rather, he (women were generally not found in leadership positions) was an arbiter of disputes between members and among families and clans within the larger tribe. The *shaykh* was usually elected from within a family of high prestige in the tribe. The elders gathered in an informal assembly known as the *Majlis* (or *mala*) consisting of heads of the various families and sub-tribes. The *Majlis* was the place for voicing public opinion and reaching consensus. Decisions were often regulated by established customs (called *Sunnah*, the practice of the ancestors).

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and usually enforced by the weight of public opinion. Oratorical skills were highly valued during meetings of disputation, arbitration and consultation. Furthermore, the poet was highly regarded as a spokesman and chronicler for his tribe. His role often was to glorify his tribe and undermine its enemies with ridicule.

The religious life of the pre-Islamic Arabs was characterized by a belief in shadowy supernatural beings known as *jinn* (spirits, demons), some of whom were believed to reside in places and objects such as stones and trees. Interestingly, the eloquence of the poets, orators and soothsayers was often thought by many to be due to direct communication with these supernatural beings. Poets especially—even during Islamic times—were thought to have their own enabling demonic counterparts. Also, there was a belief in gods in the more conventional sense, transcending the boundaries of one place. These were usually symbolized by a stone or some other object around which a shrine was built and which was carried with the tribe upon migration or during battles. The guardianship of the shrine was entrusted to the *shaykh* and his family, which brought them increased religious and political prestige.

Not all inhabitants of Arabia before Islam were pagans, for there were several Christian and Jewish communities settled in various locations. Most notably, Jewish agricultural tribes were found in Yathrib (later named Medina), north-east of Mecca, and

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8 Lewis, *The Arabs in History*, 27.
Christian minorities were known to live in Najrân in the south-west of Arabia, just north of Yemen.\footnote{Spencer Tringham, \textit{Christianity Among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times} (London: Librairie du Liban, 1979).}

In general, the moral values of the nomads were largely shaped by the demands of desert life. As a result, the pre-Islamic Arabs had high regard for bravery, endurance, vengeance, defence of the weak, hospitality and the exercise of wisdom. These and other valued characteristics constituted the Arabic concept of \textit{murūj} (manliness, chivalry, prowess). This perspective on life was frequently depicted in pre-Islamic poetry and proverbs.\footnote{Shahīd, 28.}

In addition to the nomads, Arabia was also inhabited by small sedentary communities in oasis towns, such as Yathrib and Tā’if, where people subsisted on date palm cultivation and simple forms of agriculture. Furthermore, neighboring Arabia to the north were two Christian principalities founded by semi-nomadic tribes of south Arabian origin. The two states, the Ghassânīds in Syria and the Lakhmids in al-Hīrah (south-central Iraq), were subsidized by the Byzantine empire and the Sāsānids of Persia respectively. Both small kingdoms served the interest of their respective allies in the latter’s attempt to gain more control of the region, especially in protecting caravan trade against Bedouin attacks.\footnote{Tringham, 178-202.} The two small Arab states enjoyed a relatively high level of culture and their courts attracted some of the most well-known poets of Arabia. The cultural influence of these two kingdoms on the Arabs of the interior was considerable. In
fact, the Arabic literary language, including the system of writing, may owe much of its
development and refinement to contact with the Christian culture of al-Hijrah.\textsuperscript{12}

Meanwhile, the city of Mecca (Arabic, \textit{Makkah}) had been gaining importance for
about a century before Islam. The influential tribe of Quraysh had settled there and taken
control of the camel caravan trade route along the west coast of Arabia between Yemen
in the south and Syria in the north. In addition, Mecca was the site of ancient shrines to
which many Arabs made annual religious pilgrimage associated with commercial and
cultural fairs.

By the end of the pre-Islamic period, the Arabs had already developed a cultural
identity manifested in a common poetic language. This language spread throughout
Arabia with the help of poets and reciters. Similarly, a prose style was also developed by
orators and soothsayers.\textsuperscript{13} For example, in pre-Islamic times, the soothsayer (\textit{k\dh\in}) was
often called upon to settle disputes between tribes or individuals, issuing his verdict in a
unique rhetorical style. It was also common to test the \textit{k\dh\in} by bringing to him (or her;
there were several famous female soothsayers during this period) a concealed object and
ask him to guess what it was. In one case, two disputing parties, on their way to a \textit{k\dh\ina},
picked up a dead vulture which they hid in a saddle-cloth and brought it for him to make
his guess. He answered in a style that was typical of the oratory of the \textit{k\dh\ins}:

\begin{quote}
You have concealed from me the owner of a wing with a long neck, lengthy of
leg, black mixed with white, when it hastens it soars and circles in its flight, when it
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{12} Anwar Chejne, \textit{The Arabic Language: Its Role in History} (Minneapolis: U of
Minnesota P, 1969) 27

\textsuperscript{13} Shah\dtd, 28-29.
stoops from the height of the sky it splits [its prey?] from end to end, owner of a keen-pointed claw, living until worn out. I swear by the light and the moon, thunder and fate, the winds and creation, you have concealed from me a vulture’s corpse, in a saddle-cloth of hair, with the gallant lad of Banū Nasr.  

As the above passage shows, among the most common features of the soothsayer’s rhetoric was parallelism and the use of oaths, usually, by the light, the sun, the moon, the wind, etc. It is also couched in rhymed prose (say) which the translation usually cannot convey. Some scholars argue that this style found its way to the early rhetoric of the Prophet Muhammad. However, Muslim believers tend to view the oratory of the Prophet and the style of the Qurʾān as completely separate rhetorical phenomena. On the other hand, one famous pre-Islamic preacher was said, by Muslim tradition, to have influenced the Prophet, who heard him preaching in Mecca, while the Prophet was a young man. The famous preacher was named Quss ibn Sāṣidah. He was believed to have been a Christian preacher from the city of Najrān. He is said to have delivered this speech during the pilgrimage season at ʿUkāz, near Mecca:

"O people, listen and consider, remember and benefit by what I say to you. He who lives is bound to die, and he who dies misses all opportunity to reform himself. Everything destined to come must come—rain and plants, food and provision, fathers and mothers, living and dead, union and separation. There are a host of signs that point to a creator—the high sky, the setting-stars, the raging seas, the thriving trade, darkness and light, sin and virtue, food and drink, dress and the

14 Translated by R. B. Serjeant, “Early Arabic Prose,” 126.

riding—beast. Hark! walking about the deserts and looking at the graveyards provide the most effective warning. The sky above conveys the news of a creator, and the earth below offers much for consideration—the dark night, the sky with its signs of the Zodiac and the billowing seas. How is it that I see men going to the grave but not return? Are they so pleased with their stay in the graves that they don’t want to return, or have they been left there and are sleeping? Quss takes a true oath that God has a religion which is dear to Him and which is better than the one you have been following. May a dire fate be the lot of the heedless among the bygone nations! O tribe of ÿâd, where are your forefathers and ancestors, where are the sick and their visitors and where are the mighty Pharaohs? Where are those who raised lofty buildings, adorned and embellished them, whom wealth and children deceived? Where are the tyrants and the mischievous, and where are those who collected and hoarded treasures and said: ‘I am your most supreme lord?’ Were they not more wealthy than you, and did they not live longer than you? Nevertheless, the earth ground them with its chest and destroyed them with its tyranny. Their decayed bones lie in the graves; their homes are deserted, save for the preying wolves which hunt them.”

This speech might not be totally authentic, but it does reflect pre- and early-Islamic usage. It is also characterized by parallelism and rhymed prose, two rhetorical features that became predominant in Arabic literature throughout its various periods. In addition, the speaker uses a variety of persuasive appeals, including historical anecdotes and the use of rhetorical questions.

After the rise of Islam, the pre-Islamic period was referred to by Muslims as al-Jâhiliyyah (The Time of Ignorance, or Paganism). The etymology of the term Jâhiliyyah is debated by contemporary scholars. For the early Muslim commentators, it was often used as the opposite of the word İslâm and referred to the state of affairs in Arabia before Islam and to paganism in general, including sometimes that of people outside Arabia.
Thus, the term *JâhilTyah* was often used in the sense of "ignorance of God and the true religion." However, Muslims generally believe that the pre-Islamic Arabs possessed a certain number of virtues. Among these are courage, generosity and honor—that is to say, the concept of *muʃraah* mentioned earlier. Above all, however, the linguistic and literary achievements of the pre-Islamic Arabs were admired and carefully studied by Muslim scholars. As Shahîd explains,

of all the constituents of the pre-Islamic scene relevant to Arab history, the one which has proved the most vital and durable of all has undoubtedly been the linguistic medium of pre-Islamic poetry, the seemingly indestructible *al-ʃarabiyya*.

The concept of the pure Arabic language (*al-ʃArabiyyah*) will be of great importance for the early Arab rhetoricians at the end of the Umayyad period and, in fact, throughout Arab history.

In the few centuries before Islam (c. 500 C.E.), the nomadic tribes of the central and northern parts of the Arabian peninsula spoke a variety of dialects closely related to each other. Eventually, a common literary language grew out of these dialects and spread all over Arabia. Today, the Arabic language is known to be a branch of the group of languages known as Semitic, which include Hebrew, Aramaic and Syriac, among others.

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17 Shahîd, 29.

18 The history of the Arabic language and its early formation is controversial among scholars. See the discussion in Zwettler, *The Oral Tradition*, chapter 3.
This language, now called Classical or Literary Arabic, was given its shape largely through the efforts of the major poets. These poets composed lyrical poetry dealing with the themes of tribal desert life. They sang of love, bravery, hunting, and desert journeys, and painted precise and graphic pictures of life in the desert.

Pre-Islamic Poetry

The most important and highly valued type of pre-Islamic poetry is the *qasīdah* (formal ode). It seems to have reached structural and technical perfection in the sixth century C.E. at the hands of several great poets, the most famous of whom was perhaps Imru' al-Qays (d. c. 540 C.E). The *qasīdah* is a composition of about 25-100 lines based on one of several established quantitative meters. The unit of composition is the line (*bayt*) consisting of two precisely equal halves. Usually each line is expected to be grammatically independent of the preceding and following line, conveying a separate idiom or image. All lines must end in their second half with the same single rhyme throughout the poem. The purpose of the *qasīdah* was often to glorify the poet’s tribe. The word "qasīdah" might have come from the verb *qasada* "to aim at" or "to have a purpose." The earliest examples of the pre-Islamic *qasīdah* were intended to eulogize the poet’s tribe and denigrate its enemies. Often, this was accomplished by the poet through offering himself as a brave warrior and hunter, a man (women were relegated to non-leadership roles) of noble character and a representative of a distinguished tribe. For example, in a panegyric

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poem, the famous poet Zuhayr praises the clan of his patron, Harim, emphasizing the themes of leadership, hospitality, and noble decent:

Among them orators handsome of face, and conclaves where word is followed by deed.
The wealthy among them have the duty [to entertain] those who came as guests to them; those with little give generously, spending [according to their means].
Some folks after them striven to match them, but could not do so, yet are not to be blamed, for they spared no endeavor.
For whatever benefits they have brought are inherited from their fathers and fore-fathers.\(^{22}\)

This poem, and may others like it in the Arabic literary tradition, give a picture of aspects of Arab life before Islam. It should be noted that, in addition to their content, these poems were also appreciated for their symmetry of construction and uniform single rhyme, features which are almost impossible to convey in English translation.

Over time, many pre-Islamic poets became professional panegyrists, traveling to their patrons in the hope for reward or protection. The pre-Islamic ode seems to have started as an informal construction which later became fixed and standardized. The philologists of the early centuries of Islam who collected and commented on the pre-Islamic qas\(\text{idah}\) might also have given it its final form. Hence, the standard qas\(\text{idah}\) consists of essentially three sections of variable length.\(^{23}\) These sections are:

\(^{22}\) Translated by Tayib, 70.

A prologue known as *nasīb* (love-theme). In the opening of the ode the poet creates a persona, a speaking “I,” who recalls a lost love affair. The woman he loved has departed with her tribe. The memory of the love affair is rekindled when the poet’s persona passes by the remains of the long abandoned campsite where the two tribes used to live side by side. He praises the woman’s personal qualities and physical beauty and laments his loss.

A journey theme known as *rahīl* (travel). Here the persona resolves to move on and starts to narrate the story of his journey through the dangerous desert. He usually describes his camel or horse in great detail and praises its strength and speed. There might also be a description of wildlife and encounters with wild beasts.

The main purpose of the ode (*gharad*) which is often a panegyrical (*mādīḥ*, praise): The poet exalts the virtues, deeds, and glories achieved by the poet himself, his tribe, and, or his patron. He might also add a satirical denunciation of his rivals.

The three-part structure of the *qasīdah* is highly conventional, and the themes are known in advance by the audience. Therefore, the skill of the poet seems to depend on his ability to invent new ways of embellishing the same themes without straying too far from what is expected by the audience. According to Gibb:

To gain approval the poet had not only to play up to the tribal sense of pride or to his patron’s self-importance, he was obliged even more to keep within the range of themes which his audience understood, trying to touch their feelings and captivate them by an illusive and pictorial evocation of subjects with which they were familiar and on which they were ready to back their judgment. He could not, even...
had he wished, strike out on fresh paths and introduce a new or wider range of ideas; had he done so he would have outstripped their comprehension and lost contact with them.²⁴

This adherence to the structure of the three-part ode continued throughout Arabic literary history with little modification. The early Arab critic Ibn Qutaybah seems to have been the first to write about the rhetorical effectiveness of this three-part structure of the qasīdah. He said, in a passage translated by Nicholson:

The composer of Odes began by mentioning the deserted dwelling places and the relics and traces of habitation. Then he wept and complained and addressed the desolate encampment, and begged his companion to make a halt, in order that he might have occasion to speak of those who had once lived there and afterwards departed; for the dwellers in tents were different from townsmen or villagers in respect of coming and going, because they moved from one waterspring to another, seeking pasture and searching out the places where rain had fallen.

Then to this he linked the erotic prelude (nasībi), and bewailed the violence of his love and the anguish of separation from his mistress and the extremity of his passion and desire, so as to win the hearts of his hearers and divert their eyes towards him and invite their ears to listen to him, since the song of love touches men's souls and takes hold of their hearts, God having put it in the constitution of His creatures to love dalliance and the society of women, in such wise that we find very few but are attached thereto by some tie or have some share therein, whether lawful or unpermitted.

Now, when the poet had assured himself of an attentive hearing, he followed up his advantage and set forth his claim: thus he went on to complain of fatigue and want of sleep and travelling by night and the noonday heat, and how his camel had been reduced to leanness. And when, after representing all the discomfort and danger of his journey, he knew that he had fully justified his hope and expectation of receiving his due meed from the person to whom the poem was addressed, he entered upon the panegyric (madīth), and incited him to reward, and kindled his generosity by exalting him above his peers and pronouncing the greatest dignity, in comparison with his, to be little.²⁵

²⁴ Gibb, Arabic Literature, 19.
The pre-Islamic poets were not necessarily conscious of these specified rhetorical functions that Ibn Qutaybah explains. However, they could have been motivated by them implicitly, that is, in their awareness of the audience responses and approval of certain themes and their rejection of others.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, early Arabic poetry often served rhetorical functions. For example, due to the lack of writing, the poet became entrusted with documenting and preserving the collective memory of the tribe. In fact, it was common among Arab rhetoricians to refer to poetry as the diwān al-ʿArab (the Register of the Arabs or their collective memory). Ibn Sallām al-Jumāhī said in a famous quote:

Before Islam poetry was to the Arabs the register of all they knew, and the utmost compass of their wisdom; with it they began their affairs, and with it they ended them.26

al-Ǧāḥīz added that:

The poet in pre-Islamic times was placed ahead of the orator, because of their (the Arab tribes) excessive need for poetry which documents for them their good deeds, glorifies their status, intimidates their enemies and invaders, creates awe of their horsemen and fear of their great numbers. The poet of the others will dread him and will always take him into consideration.27

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In the above passage, al-Jähiz summarizes the main rhetorical functions of pre-Islamic poetry including historical preservation, glorification, and boasting. He emphasized that, due to the lack of writing during pre-Islamic times, poetry was greatly valued for its documentary and preservative function. Another rhetorician, Ibn Qutaybah, agreed and elaborated on the function of poetry in preserving past glories. He wrote:

Poetry is the real source of knowledge for the Arabs, the book of their wisdom, the record of their history, the storehouse of their days (of battle), the fence raised around their exploits, the trench that holds in their glorious deeds, a fair witness in the days of disputation, a positive proof during quarrels. He among them who did not render a verse of poetry in support of his honor and the noble virtues he claims for his ancestry, his effort will diminish, even if they were reputable; they will be obliterated with the passing of time even if they were momentous. But he who ties them to the rhyme of poetry, secures them with its meter, makes them famous with a rare verse, a lasting proverb, and a witty expression, will immortalize them forever, rescue them from denial, safeguard them from the deceit of the enemy and detract the eye of the envious.28

Here, Ibn Qutaybah elaborates on the preservative function of early Arabic poetry. He suggests that poetry is able to perform this function because of its ease of transmission. Specifically, the meter and rhyme in poems make them enjoyable and easy to remember and recite.

The significant role that the pre-Islamic poet played made him a source of pride for his tribe or clan. Thus, it was important for each community to have its own poet. The value of a poet for the tribe was described by Ibn Rashîq:

Once an Arab tribe has among its members a poet who demonstrated his genius, the other tribes would come to congratulate them. Food will be prepared, women

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will gather to play on their lutes as they usually do in weddings, men and boys will rejoice in the good news; because he will be a protector of their honor, a defender of their nobility, and a celebrant of their reputation.29

This comment by Ibn Rashīq emphasizes the major role the poet played within pre-Islamic Arab society. The poet seems to be the the most significant source of information and the major disseminator of opinions. Consequently, the poet also had a role of reinforcing the moral values observed by the society and contributing to the cohesion of the tribal system. R. Jacobi explains that:

As is characteristic of oral literature, the poet rarely refers to his own individual experience. Although he always speaks in the first person, his verses are based on a collective experience which is recreated in such a way that each member of the tribal aristocracy can identify himself with it. In the nasīb, as well as in other sections of the ode, the poet conducts himself as the hero, the Bedouin par excellence. The attitudes he adopts, the problems he encounters, and the moral solutions he offers represent the main aspects of Bedouin life and conform to the values of tribal society. Repeating them means safeguarding the tribal system. This is the principal function of the kasīda...30

By repeating the themes of leadership, hospitality, bravery, and other highly valued traits, and by using stable literary forms and stylistic devices, the poet was able to contribute to societal cohesion and reinforce moral values.

Another form of pre-Islamic poetry was the occasional poem (qitābah, piece). This is a shorter poem devoted to a single theme which may or may not be addressed by the formal ode. Among the most important themes of the short poem is the elegy (rithâ or


30 "Nasīb." Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2nd ed. vol. 7, 979.

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This often comes in two parts: (1) a prelude containing the poet's reflection on life, death, and destiny, or time (al-dahr); (2) an account of the virtues of the deceased and consolation for the bereaved.\(^{31}\) Another major theme of the occasional poem is bravery in battle (*hamâsah*, valor). Often included in this genre are the rebellious songs by several outlaws known as *sa'âlik*, (wretched).

In general, Arab rhetoricians of the 'Abbâsid period divided the themes of early Arabic poetry into several genres (*funûn*) or motifs (*aghâd*, purposes). The most important are: (1) panegyric, *madâh* (praise); (2) self-glorification (*fakhâr*); (3) satire or insult (*hijâ*); (4) elegy (*rithâ*); (5) love (*ghazal*, flirtation); (6) description (*wasf*) mostly of animals and natural phenomena; and (7) wisdom (*hikmah*). Obviously, these categories overlap with many of the persuasive purposes of traditional rhetorical forms and many other themes could be added. In this regard, when Aristotle's *Poetics* was first translated into Arabic, the terms Tragedy and Comedy were translated (albeit inadequately) as *madâh* (praise) and *hijâ* (satire) respectively. Since the Arab rhetoricians were not familiar with Greek drama, some of them tended to believe that Aristotle was discussing themes of poetry similar to the ones with which they were dealing. Some modern scholars argue that this was due in large part to the mistaken translation of the two aforementioned Greek terms.\(^{32}\) However, this issue remains controversial due to the lack of clear and direct reference by the early Arab writers to the works of Aristotle. In this connection, another source of the dual division of the themes of Arabic poetry seems to have been overlooked.

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\(^{32}\) *‘Abbas, Târikh*, 197-98; Wolfhart Heinrichs, "Literary Theory: The Problem of Its Efficiency," 42.
by modern commentators, namely, the *Rhetoric* of Aristotle. In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle divided epideictic rhetoric into praise and blame. This dichotomy should also be considered as a possible source of influence on the Arab rhetoricians' dual division of the themes of Arabic poetry into praise and blame.

Since the transmission of early Arabic poetry was oral (written collections were not made until about one century after the rise of Islam), the question of authenticity became a problem for modern scholarship. Some doubted the entire corpus of early Arabic poetry, charging that it was fabricated by later reciters and anthologists for a variety of political, ethnic and religious reasons. However, based on further studies, most scholars now agree that, aside from a few cases of clear forgery, most collections of early Arabic poetry do in fact belong to the period assigned to them by traditional Arabic scholarship.

The most famous collection of pre-Islamic poetry is known as *al-mu‘allaqât* (perhaps meaning Treasured, Cherished or Valuable). It is a collection of seven formal odes by seven different pre-Islamic poets. At some point in the history of this collection, three other odes by three other poets were added for a total of ten odes. The original anthology is often attributed to the professional reciter (*rāwī*) and collector Hammād al-Rāwīyah (d. c. 772). This collection has been commented upon and annotated by several Arab scholars. In modern times it has been translated into several European languages.

Also, the Arab scholar and transmitter al-Mufaḍḍal ibn al-Ḍabbi (d. 780) created a selection of about 126 early Arabic poems (mostly from the pre-Islamic era). It was later

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known by the name al-Mufaddalīyāt after his name. This collection was also translated into English.

Pre-Islamic Prose

In addition to poetry, there were several other types of artistic discourse practiced by the Arabs in pre-Islamic times. The pre-Islamic Arabs used writing in a very limited way which did not result in any significant written prose literature. The earliest known examples of Arabic writing are a group of inscriptions dated from the sixth century C.E. Only one famous funerary inscription is known to come from an earlier date, 325 C.E. It was found in Nemara in the Syrian desert and referred to an individual who was "king of all the Arabs," referring to the Bedouin tribes of the region. Other earlier inscriptions are found in south and south central Arabia but those were written in a South Semitic script and language, which is now almost extinct. The standard Arabic script developed from the Nabataean (North Semitic) script. By the sixth century C.E. it was widely used throughout Arabia; however, its exact history and development is not precisely known. Research by Nabia Abbott indicates that the Arabic script might have developed, as mentioned earlier, with the help of Christian missionaries in al-Hīrah (in southern Iraq). Some scholars argue that it is probable that parts of the Christian Bible were translated into Arabic before Islam. Moreover, members of the Jewish community in Yathrib used classical Arabic and there were several Arabian Jews who were among the famous pre-

34 A. F. L. Beeston, "Background Topics," Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period, 3.

Islamic poets. An early Muslim historian, al-Baladurî reported that Jews taught writing to Muslims during early Islam. However, most literary activity seems to have originated in al-Ḥīrah.36 The early Muslim sources indicate that among the first to write in Arabic was Zayd ibn Hamād (c. 500 C.E.) and his son, 'Adî ibn Zayd, a well-known poet. Also, as mentioned earlier, al-Ḥīrah was a cultural center to which some of the most famous pre-Islamic poets traveled.37 This activity contributed to the standardization of the poetic language and the refinement of the system of Arabic writing. But this knowledge of writing did not contribute in the pre-Islamic period to the emergence of literary written prose. Writing in the pre-Islamic period was mostly used for commercial contracts, political treaties and other official documents. For example, the conventional form and language of political treaties evident in early Islamic documents reflect the well established usage of pre-Islamic times.38 In addition, there is some indication that the pre-Islamic Arabs kept sheets (ṣuhuf sing. ṣahīfah). These sheets were used to record some wisdom sayings (ḥikmah pl. ḫikām), genealogy, reports (akhbār) of battles, and other materials considered important. Mostly, however, pre-Islamic artistic speeches were preserved orally.39

For example, the pre-Islamic Arabs had a an extensive literature of proverbs (amthāl, sing. mathāl) transmitted orally. These were concise sayings, describing social

38 Serjeant, "Early Arabic Prose," 114.
experience, wisdom, or ethical instructions. The early Arab philologists collected these pre-Islamic proverbs with explanations and commentary in special anthologies. In a detailed article, R. Sellheim traces the history of this genre of Arabic literature, giving lists of anthologies written by Arab philologists and rhetoricians over the centuries. According to Sellheim, the Arab philologist defined the *mathal* (proverb) as having three essential characteristics: comparison (*tashbih*), that is, a metaphorical way of expression; (2) brevity of expression; and (3) familiarity (*sa?n*), that is, the expression is referred to frequently, i.e., it is in wide circulation. They added that: (a) a proverb is based on experience and therefore contains common wisdom (*hi?m*); (b) a proverb helps the speaker to state facts pointedly but indirectly; and (c) a proverb helps the speaker to address by analogy matters which would otherwise be difficult to communicate. The following are just a few examples of pre-Islamic proverbs.

A man under your protection — defend him from any attack; there's no good in a defender who from the defenceless holds back.
Do not eat while your protected person's children are hungry.
A free man keeps his promise.
Misfortune is often due to the misuse of the tongue.
A man's demise is between his jaws (his tongue).
A man is known by two small things: his heart and his tongue.
Send a sensible man (on a mission) and do not instruct him.
A summer cloud is soon cleared away.
Fresh grass and no camel.
He stumbled like a near-sighted camel.
What could bring a mountain goat and ostrich together?
A snake does not give birth but to a snake.
Your lean animal is better than the fat one of others.
A quarrel between two thieves discloses the theft.

These and other proverbs are usually incorporated into pre-Islamic oratory. On the other hand, some phrases taken from a speech or a poem might stand alone as proverbs in future discourses. The following lines are taken from a poem by Zuhayr, the third of which is a famous proverb:

Many are there whom you may admire whilst they remain silent.  
But when they speak, you discover where they excel or fall short.  
For the tongue of a lad is half of him, half is his heart.  
Naught else remains save the shape of flesh and blood. \(^{41}\)

It should be noted, however, that in many cases it cannot be decided with complete accuracy which came first, the line of poetry or the proverb. In their anthologies of proverbs, the Arab rhetoricians try to document the first instance of a proverb and whether it came from a poem or was said in response to a particular social situation.

Oratory was highly valued in pre-Islamic times. However, not many speeches survived from this period and they were not memorized and recited as much as poetry, perhaps because it is easier to memorize a shorter, rhythmic poem than a long oration without rhyme or meter. Yet, skill in oratory was a praiseworthy trait in a person or a tribe as many pre-Islamic poems have recorded. These lines by al-Samawal are a typical example:

We disapprove if we will of what other men say,  
but they disavow never words spoken by us.  
Whenever a sayyid [leader] of ours disappears, another sayyid arises,  
one eloquent to speak as noble men speak, and strong to act moreover. \(^{42}\)

\(^{41}\) Translated by Tayib, 69.
This is one example of how the skill in oratory is praised by the pre-Islamic poets. Many other examples like it exist in the poetic literature, indicating the high status of orators within pre-Islamic society.

Despite the scarcity of authentic examples of speeches from the pre-Islamic period, contemporary Arab scholars are able to distinguish between several types of pre-Islamic oratory according to the occasion or reason for the speech. For example, Ihsán al-Nuss divides pre-Islamic oratory into eight types. They are: (1) boasting (mufakharah) or verbal contest (munafarah). This usually takes place in front of a judge chosen by the competing individuals. They might be competing for leadership of a clan or a tribe, or simply for fame and prestige; (2) calls for war or revenge; (3) calls for peace and reconciliation and stopping bloodshed; (4) asking for marriage; (5) advice and guidance; (6) ceremonial speeches during tribal meetings and visitations; (7) exhortations (wasīyah), usually by an elder person to members of his or her family or clan; and finally (8) orations of the soothsayer (kāhin, oracle). In addition, the pre-Islamic Arabs had a collection of stories and legends relating to tribal warfare and feuds transmitted orally. This was eventually collected in writing in the early Islamic centuries under the title of Ayyām al-‘Arab (The Days of battles of the Arabs).

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42 Translated by Arberry and cited in Bakalla, Arabic Culture, 124.

Early Rhetorical Awareness

It was mentioned that the pre-Islamic Arabs did not produce any systematic analysis of the rules of eloquence. Yet, they seemed to have an implicit understanding of these rules and special requirements. This was evident in several ways. First, as was stated above, the poets were aware of the needs of their audience and the themes that they should be addressing. A similar approach to artistic discourse took place in ancient Greece. Specifically, the term *kairos* was used to refer to the process of knowing what to say and when to say it. According to George Kennedy, the concept of *kairos* "means the opportune moment, the right time to say or do the right thing." In a similar fashion, early Arab poets were conscious of the social needs and literary tastes of their audience, according to which they fashioned their poetical and rhetorical products.

In addition, some pre-Islamic poets were reported to have kept working on their major odes for a year before reciting it publicly. Therefore, those works were referred to as annual poems (*hawlīyat*, sing. *hawlīyah*, it takes a year to be composed). Furthermore, most major poets had apprentices (called *ruwat*, sing. *rāwī*, reciter or transmitter) who recited their poetry on their behalf and in the process became major poets themselves, exhibiting the same stylistic features of their master. Contemporary scholars have detected several "schools" of poetry due to this phenomenon. However, not much is known about this method of teaching poetry in pre-Islamic times. Some scholars speculate that this process must have been somewhat extensive.

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44 *A New History of Classical Rhetoric*, 35.
Also, there was said to have been a tradition in the pre-Islamic period of judging verbal contests, whether in poetry or oratory. The judge, who was usually a well-known poet or orator, was often chosen by the competing individuals to issue a verdict about who was the most eloquent. The judgment was usually expressed in a poetic form similar to the literary style found in early Arabic discourse. It was also often subjective and somewhat vague and it did not seem to reflect any well established system of criticism. Yet these early remarks were the seeds for the more elaborate analysis of later centuries.  

Finally, the emergence of rhetorical consciousness among the Arabs in the pre-Islamic period could be said to have had much in common with the emergence of rhetorical awareness in ancient Greece. Most fundamentally, they both had their origins in the works of the poets and reciters of oral poetry (rhapsodists). Richard Enos has shown that Greek rhapsodists played a major role in the development of rhetorical techniques and theory. He explains that:

Rhapsodes were composers of epic poetry who continued from the formation of Homeric literature through the evolution of rhetoric into a discipline. Yet the relationship between the rhapsodes and the development of rhetoric was far from autonomous. In the period prior to rhetoric's emergence as a discipline, rhapsodes developed compositional techniques that laid a foundation which contributed to rhetoric's development.

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As we have seen, this process of oral transmission and its role in codifying rhetorical techniques and theory has its parallel in the Arabic rhetorical tradition. The role of the râwîs (reciters of oral poetry, rhapsodists) is well documented in Arabic literary history. In fact, the work of the early Arab philologists is based largely on the information supplied by the reciters. In addition, many of the same early philologists were also known as famous reciters. Therefore, it could be suggested that the two rhetorical traditions, the Arabic and the Greek, emerged by way of closely similar processes, ones that were largely based on oral transmission of poetry.

The Emergence and Expansion of Islam

Around the year 570 C.E., the Prophet Muhammad was born in Mecca in central-west Arabia. At that time, Mecca was a prosperous commercial center, a transit point for trade by camel caravans between Yemen in the south and Syria in the north. This was a crucial trade link between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean regions. Mecca was also a sanctuary for ancient shrines to which many Arab tribes made pilgrimage at certain times of the year. People came from all parts of Arabia, not only to participate in the pilgrimage but also to benefit from trading. It was at these times that commercial and cultural fairs were held during which, according to traditional reports, orators and poets displayed their skills. As a result of all this, Mecca enjoyed economic, religious and political prestige among the tribes of the peninsula. The most dominant tribe in Mecca at that time
was Quraysh, whose members were known for their skill in trade and organization. The Prophet was born into this tribe, but his family was not among the elite.48

The prophet Muhammad began to receive revelations in about 610 C.E. when he was about forty years old. During his solitary meditations inside a cave on top of Hirâ' mountain northeast of Mecca, he had visions of an angelic being named Jibrîl (Gabriel). The angel conveyed to him that he was chosen to be the Messenger of God (Rasûl Allâh) and gave him a message to preach to the people of Mecca. He continued to receive these revelations throughout his life. They were finally collected in the form of the Qur‘ân, which was completed about 650 C.E., after the Prophet's death. However, it seems that the Prophet Muhammad gave instructions to his followers on how the Qur‘ân should ultimately be organized. The Prophet believed that these revelations were the speech of God and that he was able to distinguish them from his own thought. Hence, Muslims believe that the Qur‘ân is the unchangeable Word of God.49

Based on these revelations, Muhammad began to preach publicly in Mecca. He stressed the Oneness of God and the need for repentance. He warned that in the Last Days all people would be raised from the dead, stand before God for judgement, and rewarded or punished according to their past deeds. He began to collect a small group of followers but soon he was met by strong opposition from the wealthy and powerful merchants of Mecca. They perceived him to be a threat to their business success and political prestige as custodians of pagan shrines. Eventually, Muhammad was forced to emigrate to Yathrib


The emigration took place in the year 622 C.E. which later became the first year of the Muslim calendar.

The prophet Muhammad was welcomed in Medina as a religious and political leader (mostly as an arbiter between the main tribes of Yathrib) and he was gradually able to build a new Muslim community there. The Muslims gained increasing power and fought three major battles with the people of Mecca. Finally, Muhammad was able to return in triumph to Mecca as a conqueror in the year 630. Two years later he preformed what is known as the "Farewell Pilgrimage" and died shortly after that in 632. He was succeeded as head of the community by his close friend Abū Bakr who was given the title Khalīfah (caliph, deputy or successor). After Abū Bakr’s death, the position of caliph passed on successively to three other companions of the Prophet — namely ʿUmar, ʿUthmān, and ʿAlī. Together the first four caliphs are referred to by orthodox Islam as the Rightly Guided Caliphs (al-Khuṭbā al-Rāshidūn). During this period, the Arabs swept outside the peninsula and conquered Iraq, Syria and Egypt.\footnote{Lewis, \textit{The Arabs in History}, 47-64.}

In 661 power passed on to Muʿāwiyyah, who was the governor of Syria and a member of the prominent family of Umayyad. He went on to establish the Umayyad dynasty, which lasted for almost one century, until 750. The Umayyads made Damascus their capital and continued the campaigns of expansion. During this period, the Umayyad armies carried Islam across North Africa to Spain and across central Asia to the borders of China and India. The changes in the social, economic, and cultural lives of the Arabs and non-Arabs under Islam were far reaching. The political and cultural situation under the
Umayyads generally favored the Arab elements over the non-Arab subjects in the newly created empire.

The Umayyad caliphs actively encouraged the collection of pre-Islamic poetry and legends and invited contemporary poets to recite panegyrics in their courts in Damascus. There was an increase in oratorical activities reflecting the political and religious conflicts within Islam during this period. This is the period that al-Nuss referred to as the Golden Age of Arabic oratory. During this period, some orators specialized in religious preaching and admonition. Among the most famous practitioner of this genre was al-Hasan al-Basri, who was very well respected for his sincerity and upright personality. On the other hand, political speeches were practiced by rulers of the Umayyad period. For example, the founder of the Umayyad dynasty, Mu'âwiyah, was known for his skill in oratory and diplomacy. He also encouraged many of his political allies to speak on his behalf, and in response to his political opponents. These political opponents also had among them famous and influential orators. At the same time, this period witnessed the emergence of theological debates, related to the nature of God and the status of the nonbelievers, among other issues. Many of the theological issues and dogmas had their origin in this period, including the events that led eventually to the split between Sunnî (orthodox) and Shi'î Islam. As a result, Arabic oratory reached its zenith during the Umayyad period. However, after the establishment of the 'Abbâsid dynasty, open political debates were discouraged, while theological debates became specialized and took place only among limited numbers of scholars.

51 Nicholson, A Literary History of the Arabs, 193-252
Rhetorical Developments in Early Islam

For the study of Arabic rhetoric, the most important events in this early Islamic period were the revelation and the later collection of the Qurʾān. In addition, there were new developments in poetry and oratory. Moreover, towards the end the Umayyad period the Arabic art of prose writing began to emerge and develop.

As for the Qurʾān (often spelled Koran), it was collected in writing during the reign of the third caliph ʿUthmān and became fixed ever since. The word Qurʾān means "Recitation," indicating its oral origin and liturgical function. The text consists of 114 chapters (each called a sūrah in Arabic). The chapters are labeled either Meccan or Medinan, according to whether they were revealed in Mecca or Medina, although this chronology is not exact. The chapters are ordered roughly in terms of length, the longest chapters appear first followed by the shorter ones. Some chapters are as short as two lines (ten words), others are about sixty pages long. The whole book is slightly shorter than the New Testament. The Qurʾān stresses that the Prophet Muhammad is the last in a chain of prophets including Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, among many others. It adds that Abraham (Ibrāhīm) was in fact the first Muslim. In addition, all the discrepancies between the Qurʾān and the Holy Books of the Jews and Christians are due to later corruption by writers and commentators in those communities. Muslims believe that the Qurʾān is stylistically miraculous and inimitable, a claim that was the basis for much linguistic analyses by later Arab scholars.

In addition to the Qurʾān, the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad and reports of his deeds were transmitted orally until they were collected and verified by later scholars.

The collection of the Prophet's sayings and doings are called *hadith* (conversation) or sometimes, *sunnah* (custom, precedent). The study and verification of *hadith* became a major science in Islam. It was used next to the Qur'ān to establish legal rulings.53

With the coming of Islam, the Friday congregational prayer was established. It was accompanied by a sermon (*khutbah*) which was initially given by the Prophet himself. In his sermons, Muhammad talked about both religious and political issues facing the new Muslim community. After the Prophet's death, the caliph and his governors gave the *khutbah* in their respective mosques. In the Umayyad period, however, the task was given over to a class of preachers who spoke on behalf of the caliph. The mention of the caliph's name and praise for him in the *khutbah* was a sign of loyalty. Conversely, omitting the name of the caliph in the Friday sermon in a particular region was a sign of revolt. Also, as stated above, during the Umayyad period—and outside the framework of the Friday sermon—there was great activity in independent political and religious oratory.54

In poetry, the same styles of pre-Islamic verse-making continued during the early years of Islam. It was also used in wars of propaganda between the pagan Arabs and the new Muslim community. There were several Muslim poets who were known to have composed odes in defence of the Prophet Muhammad with his approval. However, he seemed to have disliked and discouraged pre-Islamic themes of tribal boasting, drinking, and other behaviors considered immoral. During the Umayyad period, there was a marked resurgence of Arab pride which was reflected in the poetry of this period.


54 J. Pederson, "The Islamic Preacher,"
Also, some religious and political factions used ideological poetry to propagate their views against the ruling Umayyads.

Finally, a new and important genre of Arabic rhetoric, namely, the art of letter writing, developed towards the end of the Umayyad period. It was developed mostly by the secretarial class during the latter part of the Umayyad period (c. 700 C.E.). Therefore, the discussion of the epistolary arts in the Arabic tradition is often linked to a discussion of the important cultural role of the kātib (secretary, pl. kuttābi). Since the time of the Prophet Muhammad (d. 632), there were references to secretaries among his companions who assisted him in writing letters and contracts, in addition to writing passages of the Qurān. However, this does not seem to have been an organized activity. During the time of the second caliph, 'Umar (d. 644), a rudimentary civil administration was introduced into the conquered lands of Syria, Palestine, and Egypt. 'Umar is said to have introduced for the first time the Divān (Register) system. The purpose of this governmental department was to organize the payments of pensions for the Arab fighters in the wars of conquest and to set government finance in order.

During the Umayyad period (beginning in 661 C.E.), several more specialized departments were eventually created. Among these, for example, were departments for tax collection (diwān al-kharāj), army registration (diwān al-jund), and a department for correspondence (diwān al-rasā'il). It was within this last department of letters that the art of Arabic letter-writing was developed. Up to this point, Arabic artistic prose was mostly oral in nature, relying more on oratory and poetry than on writing. However, the needs of the administration during the Umayyad period led to an increased demand for writing. The Umayyad rulers in Damascus depended on the skills of members of the native populations of the conquered lands who had knowledge of Arabic and the Arabic
tradition in addition to their knowledge of past imperial (Persian and/or Byzantine) traditions. According to Sellheim and Sourdel, these secretaries most certainly had an excellent knowledge of Arabic, but had picked up from their forefathers a whole administrative tradition connected in particular with calculating the taxes due from the different types of land, irrigated or unirrigated. The land tax instituted by the Muslim law seems really to have been very closely inspired by the previous financial system and the administrative practices adapted by the nascent Muslim state were also inherited from the states which it had supplanted.

Based on these foundations, the Arabic art of letter writing became an important rhetorical genre in the Arabic tradition. The first known influential secretary was Sālim Abū al-ʿAlāʾ, who worked during the time of the caliph Hishām ibn ʿAbd al-Malik (reigned 724-43). Sālim is credited with writing several epistles (rasāʾil, sing. risālah) based on the supposed written correspondence between Aristotle and his student, Alexander the Great. One epistle has the title of Risālat Aristātūs ilā al-ʾIskandar fī Siyāsat al-Mudun (Aristotle's letter to Alexander On Civic Policy). In these epistles, Sālim combined Greek sources with his knowledge of Persian court literature to write the oldest known epistles of this kind in Arabic. However, not much else is known about Sālim Abū al-ʿAlāʾ.

Sālim's student, ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd ibn Yahyā, nicknamed al-Kātib (the writer, or secretary) (d. 750) is more well-known and is often referred to as the real founder of the Arabic art of letter-writing and ornate prose in general. He is said to have been a

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travelling teacher before he joined the rank of secretaries under the guidance of Sālim. Later, ‘Abd al-Hamîd became the personal secretary for Marwân ibn Muhammad, who later became the last Umayyad caliph (reigned 744-50). Several of his epistles are well-known. The most famous of these is his letter to the secretaries (Riṣalâh ilâ al-Kuttâb), in which he describes the importance of, and the requirements for, the office of the kâtib. This epistle, in which ‘Abd al-Hamîd draws on the Sâsânîd court literature, is the first known treatise in what became a long tradition of works within Arabic rhetoric on the craft of the secretary (adab al-kâtib). Another important epistle of ‘Abd al-Hamîd is the one he addressed to Marwân’s son and heir, ‘Abd Allâh, advising him on personal and ceremonial conduct and the art of war.57

Gibb points out that, although ‘Abd al-Hamîd’s letters are written in a mostly traditional Arabic style, some literary elements in his writings might indicate a Greek influence. He explains that the language and style of ‘Abd al-Hamîd are usually based on

the idioms, rhythms, and vivid metaphors of Arabic poetry and rhetoric, but elaborated by the addition of often lengthy sequences of qualifying clauses. Since the same style appears in most of his other official rasâ’il epistles, it can only be conjectured (in the absence of earlier secretarial documents) that this feature—unusual in both earlier and later Arabic style—is to be traced to Greek influences in the Umayyad secretariat.58

Many early Arab critics refer to ‘Abd al-Hamîd with admiration as the founder of Arabic epistolary art. For example, al-‘Askarî wrote that “‘Abd al-Hamîd extracted from the


Persian tongue the modes of secretarial composition which he illustrated, and transposed them into the Arabic tongue.” And Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih said that ‘Abd al-Hamîd was “the first to open up the buds of rhetoric, to smooth out its ways...”

The art of letter writing became a topic for rhetorical theorizing in the Arabic rhetorical tradition. A similar process took place in the Western rhetorical tradition in the Middle Ages. For example, Alberic of Monte Cassino (late eleventh century) is believed to be among the first exponent of this art in the Western Middle Ages. He emphasized the dependence of the art of letter-writing (Dictamen) on the classical rhetorical tradition. Similarly, in the Arabic rhetorical tradition, philologists and rhetoricians stressed the need for the letter writer to be knowledgeable of Arabic grammar and the Arabic poetic and rhetorical tradition.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the emergence and development of rhetorical consciousness among the Arabs was traced from its early beginnings in the pre-Islamic period and throughout early Islamic times, to the end of the Umayyad period. It was found that poetry, in addition to oratory and proverbs, had a central role in early Arab culture. Most importantly, poets and poetry reciters (râwîs) played a significant role in shaping rhetorical techniques and anticipating the emergence of Arabic rhetorical theory. In this connection, a similarity was noted between the role of early Arab poets and reciters, on


60 Camilla Allison Torre, The Art of Letter Writing in the Middle Ages (Reprint of Master's Thesis, Tulane University, 1943) 17

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the one hand, and the ancient Greek rhapsodists, on the other. Both were found to have played significant roles in shaping the rhetorical technique and theory of their respective systems. In addition, the role of the Qur'ān in the emergence of rhetorical and linguistic investigation was highlighted. Finally, the art of letter writing was also discussed in terms of its influence on future theorizing about rhetoric.

All these early rhetorical activities make up the foundation for the great period of scholarly investigation about the nature of Arabic language and rhetoric that took place during the ‘Abbāsid period. This will be the topic of the next chapter, which will give a broad overview of Arabic rhetorical theories as formulated by Arab philologists, writers of adab literature, philosophers, and theologians, leading to the codification of the Arabic science of eloquence (‘ilm al-balāghah). In subsequent chapters, each approach will be discussed in further detail.
CHAPTER 4

THE EMERGENCE OF ARABIC RHETORICAL THEORY

The previous chapter dealt with the emergence of rhetorical consciousness among the Arabs since pre-Islamic times (c. 500 C.E.) to the end of the Umayyad period (c. 750). No significant written treatises about Arabic rhetorical theory existed during that period, but much of the early critical remarks about eloquence were transmitted orally until the emergence of an Arab-Islamic literate society in the early ‘Abbāsid period. During the ‘Abbāsid age, diverse groups of scholars began to devote their attention to the study of language, grammar, poetry and oratory. Their efforts led eventually to the emergence of the Arabic science of eloquence known as ‘ilm al-balāghah. Hence, in this chapter the contributions of these groups of scholars will be described in their totality as a broad overview of the emergence of the Arabic science of rhetoric. In subsequent chapters, further detailed examination will be made of specific authors and works, especially those that had the most influence in shaping the science of rhetoric.

The scholarly environment of the ‘Abbāsid age reflects the far reaching cultural, ethnic and political changes of the period. The ‘Abbāsids came to power in 750 C.E. and built on the organizational foundations established by the Umayyads. But they also supported religious studies and the participation of non-Arabs in the society and the intellectual life of the empire. In addition, they encouraged the translation and discussion of Greek philosophical and scientific works. The result was a golden age for Arabic and
Islamic scholarship which lasted for about three centuries (750-1055), followed by a silver age of about two centuries (1055-1258) of codification and commentary. Also, an Umayyad dynasty was created in exile in 756 in Spain, where, under successive dynasties and regimes, the Muslim presence lasted in various forms until 1492. A post-Abbasid period of decline lasted until about 1800, when the modern period began and continued until the present.

Within the above cultural context, studies of Arabic rhetoric (broadly defined to include grammar, poetry, oratory, writing, the rhetorical style of the Qur'ân, and literary criticism) emerged and flourished. These studies were pursued by various scholars who, depending on their intellectual background and purpose, emphasized certain methods and ideas which were most suited to their goals. Therefore, the origin and development of Arabic rhetorical studies could be discussed in terms of a number of areas of study which led eventually to the establishment of \textit{ilm al-balâghah} (the science of eloquence), divided into three branches of \textit{mazan} (semantics), \textit{bayân} (clarity) and \textit{badr} (embellishment). Specifically, the areas of study are: (1) philology and grammar; (2) prose writing; (3) the new poetry; (4) philosophy and Greek logic; (5) the eloquence of the Qur'ân; (6) the systemization of the science of eloquence (\textit{al-balâghah}).

Philology and Grammar

One of the most important reasons for the emergence of the study of the Arabic language was the need to understand and explain the Qur'ân correctly. Early in the Islamic period, there was a need to teach the correct reading and understanding of the holy text, not only among Arabs but also among the masses of the newly converted non-Arabs. Moreover, knowing the Arabic language was becoming a pre-condition for employment.
in government offices around the empire. In response, scholars began to research, formulate, standardize and debate the rules of the Arabic language.

This took place early in the Islamic period (eighth century), specifically in the cities of Basrah and Kufah (both in Iraq). These cities were, at the beginning of the Islamic conquest, military settlements, but later grew to become urban centers. Besides the Arabs, these cities were also inhabited by peoples of many other nationalities who spoke their own languages, most notably the Persians. The two cities became cultural and intellectual centers for the people of the Islamic empire and they were not eclipsed until many years after the founding of the city of Baghdad in 761. It was in these two cities primarily that the development of the study of the Arabic language and literature took place. Often, the two cities were in conflict over methods of gathering information and ways of formulating rules and principles. Eventually, however, the city of Baghdad developed its own eclectic method based on the foundations of both schools, thereby shaping the direction of further developments.¹

Generally speaking, Arabic philology is based on the assumption that the pure Arabic language was spoken by the Bedouins of the deserts of Arabia, and that this pure language was preserved, especially in the dialect of the tribe of Quraysh and the language of pre-Islamic poetry. The Prophet Muhammad was a member of the Quraysh tribe. Therefore, when the Qur’an was revealed to him, it was in his spoken language, the dialect of Quraysh, which was seen as the pure Arabic of the Bedouins (al-A’arab). Thus, for the

Arab philologists, the pure Arabic language is that which is found in the Qurʾān, pre-Islamic and early-Islamic poetry, and the speech of Bedouins (especially from central and eastern Arabia) who were not influenced by the recent urbanization.

Based on their investigation of the above sources, the early philologists eventually developed two main areas of linguistic studies: (1) the collection of Arabic words and their correct meaning and usage (ʿilm al-lughah, the study of language, lexicography); and (2) Arabic grammar (ʿilm al-nahw) and the related science of morphology (ʿilm al-ṣarf). Among the early scholars working in those fields was Abū ʿAmr ibn Al-Ḥaḍīr, who was a philologist and a Qurʾānic reader (qāriʿ, an authority on the correct vocalization of the Qurʾān). His student, al-Khalīl ibn Ahmad (d. c. 786), had an interest in the musicality of Arabic poetry, and to him is attributed the discovery of Arabic metrics and the foundation of ʿilm al-ṣarūʿ (the science of metrics). He is also known for writing the first Arabic dictionary, Kitāb ʿAyn (The Book of the Letter ʿAyn), organized phonetically starting with the letter ʿayn. The phonetic system used in this work indicates to some scholars an Indian influence. al-Khalīl lectured on grammar, and some of his grammatical theories survived in the work of his famous student, Sībawayhi (d. c. 798). Sībawayhi then wrote the first known comprehensive treatment of Arabic grammar which was known as al-Kitāb (The Book) and became the most important reference on Arabic grammar for many centuries to come.

In al-Kitāb, Sībawayhi gives a systematic description of the Arabic language, including phonetics, morphology, syntax and semantics. The origins of the terminology of Arabic grammar as it appears in Sībawayhi's Kitāb are not fully known, but some scholars have argued that it was highly influenced by Greek logic. For example C. H. M. Versteegh has written extensively on the topic, arguing that Greek logic influenced the early Arabic
grammarians through the Hellenistic system of education that was in existence in the Middle East during the early period of the Islamic conquest (c. 660-800 C.E.)\(^2\). Versteegh points out that Sibawayhi used examples and terminologies that were familiar to students of Hellenistic grammar, such as the use of "man" and "horse" as examples of nouns. In addition the concept of \(i\'r\ab\) (declension, to speak Arabic correctly) is similar in meaning to the concept of \(helle\,nism\,s\) (to speak Greek correctly). However, Versteegh agrees that although the early Arabic Grammarians seem to have borrowed some Greek terminologies and methods, the resulting Arabic system was highly different from the Greek one:

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\text{It should be clearly understood, however, that the dependence of Arabic on Greek grammar for the 'invention' of a technical terminology, for basic concepts etc., does not imply that the whole Arabic grammar is to be regarded as a slavish imitation of Greek examples. On the contrary, Arabic grammarians used the foreign material in order to build up a system of their own.}^3
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Thus, Greek logical methods were used by early Arab Grammarians as tools for organizing linguistic data. The close connection with the Hellenistic system of education in Syria, Palestine and Iran made this influence possible. In general, the degree of Greek influence


on the emergence of Arabic Grammar remains a controversial issue among contemporary specialists in the field of historical linguistics.\(^4\)

After the rules of the Arabic language were codified, some philologists turned their attention to the aesthetic and critical aspects of Arabic poetry. For example, two philologists, al-Asma\(\text{	extsuperscript{T}}\) (d. 628) and Abu 'Ubaydah (d. 625), were known for their extensive knowledge of pre-Islamic poetry and tribal stories and legends. al-Asma\(\text{	extsuperscript{T}}\) gave lectures on the major pre-Islamic poets, whom he called \textit{fuhul} (masters). However, the first major work on early poetry belongs to Ibn Sall\(\text{\text{"}am\text{"}}\) al-Juma\(\text{\text{"}i\text{"}}\) (d. 546), who, in his \textit{Tabaq\(\text{\text{"}at al-\textit{Shu\text{"}ar\text{"}a}\text{"}}\} (Classes of Poets), gives a survey of pre-Islamic and early Islamic poets, dividing them into classes according to the quality and quantity of their output and their place of origin. He was also one of the first critics to point to the importance of authenticity of authorship of certain poems. In general, Pre-Islamic and early Islamic poetry was transmitted orally until it began to be collected in various anthologies around the eighth century.

Modern scholars have debated the authenticity of the poetry in these collections, but the consensus now is that most of that poetry has its source in pre-Islamic and early-Islamic times.\(^5\) In a few cases, there are strong indications of forgery; but, aside from those, scholars allow for variations in the poems due to the oral nature of this early poetry and the way it was transmitted, or performed, by the professional reciters.\(^6\)


\(^5\) Gibb, Arabic Literature, 20-21.
During Ibn Sallâm's time, it was common to attribute works to major poets without regard to the validity of attribution. Since the works of early poets were used as a validation of correct Arabic usage, it was important to know the correct author and time and place of his or her poetry. Ibn Sallâm was also concerned with the influence of the environment on poetry and how it was transmitted.

The work of the early philologists constituted the foundation for further investigation by later generations of scholars into the nature and function of rhetoric. As a group they opened the way for the critical analysis of artistic and persuasive texts found in the Qur'ān and early Arabic poetry and oratory. Most importantly, they established the field of linguistic investigation emphasizing authentic scholarship and critical analysis. Their data and methods of investigation were used by later authors to shape the emerging field of balâghah, the study of eloquence.

Writing

The other major influence on the development of Arabic rhetoric, both as discourse and theory, is the development of Arabic prose writing in the context of the general transformation of the society from an oral to a literate culture. In the pre-Islamic and early Islamic periods, writing was employed only on rare occasions, mostly for commercial contracts and occasional short letters. No substantive literary works were written during this period. However, toward the end of the Umayyad period, writing began to be used more frequently, especially in government bureaus for official letters.

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and administrative documents. It was among the government secretaries that Arabic writing began to be employed to serve administrative, as well as rhetorical and literary, ends. The secretary (kātib, writer, pl. kuttāb) was attached to a government bureau (dīwān) which the Umayyad caliphs established based on Sāsānid and Byzantine models. At first, the government business was run in the language of the conquered people, for example, Greek in Syria, and Pahlavi in Iraq and Iran. The administration was later Arabized, and all personnel had to be Arabic-speaking. Yet, many of the them still had knowledge of the older Greek and Persian traditions and they used this knowledge to contribute to the emerging Arabic culture.

Little is known about the earliest writers in the Umayyad period, but some of them had direct access to the caliphs and therefore were able to play major roles in forming policies. The earliest known influential secretary was Sālim Abū al-‘Alā’, who worked for the caliph Hishām (reigned 724-43). He is credited with writing formal epistles on political administration and the art of war. Apparently, Sālim had managed to integrate Greek and Persian political traditions and present them in a new Arabic style. The Greek letters he had translated (or ordered to be translated) were letters attributed to Aristotle, written ostensibly to his student Alexander on the art of politics and war. These letters seem to have originated in Hellenized Egypt as part of what it is called the Alexander Romances, originating around 200 B.C.E. Sālim adapted many of the political ideas found in these letters to the political situation in Damascus.


Sâlim’s student ‘Abd al-Ḥamîd ibn Yahyâ, known as al-Kâtîb (the writer) (d. 750), is more well-known for his literary activity and is often referred to as one of the founders of the art of Arabic prose writing. He was the personal secretary for the caliph Marwân II, the last of the Umayyad caliphs in Syria. Some of his official and private letters were preserved. One of them is a long epistle (risâlah) addressed to ‘Abd Allâh, son and heir of Marwân II, in which he gives advice on personal and ceremonial conduct. But his most famous epistle is the one he addressed to the secretaries (kuttâb, writers), where he advises them on the right conduct and responsibilities of their profession. According to Gibb, ʿAbd al-Ḥamîd’s style of writing reflects the traditional Arabic oratory and poetry, with the addition of Greek elements such as lengthy qualifying clauses.  

In the early ʿAbbâsid period (eighth century), the center of government was moved to Iraq, where the influence of the Persian tradition became more apparent. The most famous writer of the early years of the ʿAbbâsid dynasty was Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ (d. 756), who started his career during the Umayyad period. He is most famous for his translations of Persian court literature such as Kalīlah wa Dimnah, a collection of didactic fables which originated in India. He also wrote epistles containing advice on court and ceremonial conduct based on Sasanid sources. His writing is generally seen as representing the early beginning of the Arabic genre called adab (literature, belles-lettres). But Arabic prose writing reached higher levels of sophistication during the ninth century. During this time, works of philology, theology, philosophy and science were written or translated from Greek into Arabic (often by way of Syriac). This activity had a great impact on

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Arabic prose writing and was reflected in the works of two great writers of this period: al-Jāhiz and Ibn Qutaybah.

al-Jāhiz (d. 669) was born and educated in Basrah, which was, as already mentioned, a great intellectual center at the time. He later traveled to Baghdad, where he was able to read Greek works already available in Arabic translation. He was influenced by a group known as al-Mu'tazilah, a school of speculative and rationalist theology highly influenced by Greek logic. Their doctrines were made the official dogma of the state by the caliph al-Ma'mūn (reigned 813-833) and upheld by his two successors, al-Mu'tasim and al-Wāthiq. However, the privileged status of the Mu'tazilah was overturned by the orthodox position under al-Mutawakkil (reigned 847-861). al-Mu'tazilah's influence on al-Jāhiz is reflected in the humanistic and rationalistic point of view evident in most of his works. Based on his style of writing, al-Jāhiz is often referred to as an adīb (writer of adab, literature, a man of letters). He wrote on a wide variety of topics including philosophy, theology, history, geography, natural science, literary criticism, and rhetoric. His most important work on rhetoric is called al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn (Clarity and Clarification), in which he states his opinions on eloquence and verbal skills, supported by a wealth of examples from Arabic speeches, poetry and proverbs. al-Jāhiz wrote this book partly to refute charges made by members of the movement known as al-Shu'ūbīyah, a literary movement against the Arab traditional cultural dominance. Therefore, al-Jāhiz


seizes every opportunity to display the eloquent skills of the Arabs in oratory, poetry and clever and witty remarks. This makes his book a valuable reference for the study of early Arabic literary and rhetorical heritage. Some of his early theorizing about rhetoric, such as the relationship between words (la\text{f}z) and meaning (ma\text{\'}n\text{a}), became standard topics for discussion among later Arab rhetoricians. al-J\text{\'}ahiz argued that ideas (ma\text{\'}an\text{\'}i; concepts) are available to everyone, whether he or she was Arab or non-Arab, villager or city dweller. It is the excellent choice of words and expression for those ideas that makes a speech eloquent. This idea was very influential among many later Arab rhetoricians. Eventually, the theologian and critic ʿAbd al-Q\text{\'}ahir al-Jurj\text{\'}an\text{\'}i took issue with this notion and advanced his theory of arrangement (na\text{\'}zm, construction), arguing that eloquence does not come from words alone, nor from ideas alone, but from the combination of the two to form eloquent discourse according to the rules of syntax (see chapter seven).

The other important writer was Ibn Qutaybah (d. 889), who was a conservative theologian and a writer of adab. Compared to al-J\text{\'}ahiz, his works were relatively limited in scope and subject matter, but his style of writing was more controlled and organized. Therefore, his writing is considered the beginning of a more standardized Arabic prose writing that was imitated by many authors in later centuries. Ibn Qutaybah wrote many works on theology and religious tradition, but his works that were most relevant to the development of Arabic rhetoric were his books on adab and poetic criticism. His Adab al-K\text{\'}atib (The Craft of the Secretary) is a manual for writers, containing advice on grammar and style, in addition to areas of general knowledge required by the secretary. Ibn Qutaybah's other important work, al-Shi\text{\'}r wa al-Shu\text{\'}r\text{\'}a (Poetry and Poets), is a critical anthology of early and current poets. Here he gives, for the first time, an analysis of the three standardized parts of the Arabic qa\text{\'}sidah (ode). As shown in the previous chapter,
according to Ibn Qutaybah, the first section (*nasīb*, the love theme) is an introduction that provokes the attention of the audience, while the second part (*raḥīl*, the journey theme) provokes their sympathy and identification with the poet, and the third section (*gharad*) is the purpose or main theme of the poem (panegyric, or blame, etc.). The division of the Arabic ode into three sections based on their rhetorical (i.e., persuasive) function seems to indicated a Greek influence. Many of the scholars of Ibn Qutaybah's time were probably aware of Greek methods of rhetorical analysis found in the Hellenistic schools of Syria and Palestine. C. Rabin explains that the early philologists and reciters of poetry (*rāwīs*) "were soon joined by men who had inherited the habits of thinking taught in the Hellenistic School of Rhetoric, and who systematised the traditional lore of the *rāwīs* and applied the science thus created not only to poetry but also to the Kurān." Thus, the Greek and Roman models of discourse arrangement might have found their way to the analysis of the early Arabic formal ode.

Although Ibn Qutaybah was a great defender of traditional Arabic poetry, he also made room for the new poets and argued that poetry should not be judged by age alone. Some new poets, he argued, could be just as good as the early masters, provided they had a good command of the art of Arabic poetry.

The New Poetry (al-*Badī*ʿ, The Novel Style)

As mentioned earlier, the Arabs and non-Arabs under Islam went through far-reaching social and cultural changes, first under the Umayyads and then during the ʿAbbāsid age. In poetry, however, the pre-Islamic *qaṣīdah* (ode) and Bedouin themes

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remained the standard examples for most poets well into the late Umayyad period. The poet Dhū al-Rummah (d. 735) was often referred to by the philologist as “the last of the poets” because he continued to adhere to the pre-Islamic example and desert themes during Islamic times. But under the vast cultural changes taking place in the empire, new poets began to take Arabic poetry in different directions, away from the desert themes, into more urban subject-matters. These were more suited to the temperament of their age and environment. While keeping the structure of the pre-Islamic ode, the new poets developed new themes such as hunt-poems (ṣaṭrīyāt), wine-songs (khāmriyāt), love-poems (ghazar), and ascetic poems (zuhdiyāt). Some of the new poets openly rejected the conventional Bedouin themes found in early poetry. Moreover, they became aware of the impact of poetic imagery and rhetorical figures of speech on their listeners. Most poets were eager to prove their worthiness in the royal courts and among the public as well. They competed in terms of style and literary innovation, all of which led to the emergence of new and unusual literary styles. Therefore, their style became known as bādirī (innovative, unusual, embellished) and was met initially by rejection and reproach from the traditional philologists.¹³

Over time, however, the new poetry gained more supporters among the public and within the circles of scholars and critics. The most important early work to defend the new poetry was written by Ibn al-Mu'tazz (d. 908), a critic and a major poet, who was also a member of the 'Abbāsid royal family. He wrote Kitāb al-Bādirī (The Book of the Novel Style) to demonstrate that the figures of speech and poetic imagery used by the

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new poets were not in fact new, but could be traced back to the Qur’ân and the early speech and poetry of the Arabs. The only difference, he argued, is that the new poets tended to exaggerate the use of these figures. He listed five figures of speech or rhetorical devices as the most important ones used by the new poets. They are *isti'arah* (roughly, metaphor), *tajnis* (paronomasia), *tibâq* (antithesis), *radd a'jâz al-kalâm ʿalā sudûrîh* (internal repetition, epanalepsis), and *al-madhhab al-kalâmi* (the dialectical manner or jargon of the theologians). At a later date, he added to the same work 13 other figures he called beauties (*mahâsin*) for a total of 18 tropes and figures. Many of these figures have parallels in the Western rhetorical tradition which led some scholars to investigate the Greek influence on Ibn al-Mu’tazz in writing this book. However, this task is complicated by the fact that the author does not point to any sources, Greek or Arabic, if any, for his work. Scholars hope that if and when additional primary sources from this period are recovered, these and other related questions might be answered authoritatively.¹⁴

*Kitâb al-Badî* was of great importance to the development of the theory of Arabic rhetoric. The book became influential in several ways. First, it became a source for the legitimation of *badî* style. Thus, the discovery of legitimizing precedent (i.e., *sunnah*) in older texts, especially the Qur’ân, became the norm among later writers. Second, the difference between poetry and prose in most respects became less important. Third, the book became the source for a branch of Arabic rhetoric called *ʿilm al-badî* (the science of embellishment), dealing with figures of speech.¹⁵

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The conflict between the old and the new style led to the appearance of many works of applied literary criticism focusing on the work of one or two poets. Within these works, many theoretical concepts were debated, including natural talent vs. artificiality, the relation between words and meaning, the truth value of poetry and prose, the ethical content of poetry and prose, and plagiarism. The most important works of applied poetic criticism include al-Muwāzanah (The Counterbalancing) in which al-Àmidī (d. 950) compares the poetry of two major poets of the early ʿAbbāsid period, namely, Abū Tammām and his younger contemporary al-Buhturī. Another important work, al-Wasāṭah (The Mediation), written by al-Qâdi al-Jurjānī (d. 1002) was an attempt to mediate between the opponents and supporters of one major poet, al-Mutanabbī. These works, and many like them, contributed to further elaborations of aspects of eloquence (balāghah). Many later Arab rhetoricians drew on the works of those critics to build their theories of rhetoric. Overall, the conflict between the old and new poetry resulted in a wealth of critical commentary that became an important part of the literature on Arabic rhetorical theory. Another important influence came from the contact with Greek science and philosophy.

Philosophy and Greek Logic

While scholars debated the relative merits of the old and new poetry, a different kind of discussion about rhetoric was taking place among the Islamic philosophers and

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16 Ihsān ʿAbbās, 30-41
other writers who were interested in the Greek tradition in general. The literature on Islamic philosophy is immensely vast, and the discussion of rhetoric constitutes a significant part of that literature. When the *Rhetoric* of Aristotle was translated into Arabic, the word *khatābah* (oratory, but not *balāghah*, eloquence) was used to describe the content of Aristotle's book (i.e., the art dealing with persuasive speech). Sometimes, the Arabized word, *Rttūrīqah*, was also used. It is not known precisely when Aristotle's *Rhetoric* was first translated into Arabic, but some sources attribute the work to the famous translator Ishāq ibn Hunayn (d. 910). Badawi argues that the first translation was made by an unknown scholar earlier in the ninth century. However, the first well-known commentary on it was made by the philosopher al-Fārābī (d. 948).

According to Bohas et al, there are two main points to keep in mind while discussing the introduction of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (and *Poetics*) into the Arabic-Islamic context. First, it was considered part of the tradition of Greek philosophy, or *falsafah* (the Arabic word for philosophy, considered to be a foreign science), and therefore it was seen as an almost exclusive field of inquiry for the philosophers and logicians, rather than the mainstream of literary critics and rhetoricians. Second, the Islamic philosophers' interpretation of the place and status of rhetoric in the system of philosophy is

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remarkably different from the place it had in the Greek original. This issue is rather complicated and controversial among scholars who investigated the logical works of the leading Islamic philosophers such as al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīna (Avicenna, d. 1037), and Ibn Rushd (Averroes, d. 1198). Basically, however, the Islamic philosophers viewed the three arts of logic, rhetoric and poetics as standing at different levels on a continuum of methods dealing with the influence of language on human thoughts and actions: logic through the syllogism, rhetoric thorough the enthymeme, and poetry through the imagination.

Even though these kinds of discussions remained within the boundary of falsafah, there were several Arab rhetoricians whose works indicate a strong Greek influence. One of these is Qudāmah ibn Ja'far (d. 948), who wrote Naqd al-Shīr (Criticism of Poetry) in order to present a scientific (objective) method for the evaluation of poetry and to distinguish between good poetry and bad. The Greek influence in Qudāmah's work is found mostly in his system of organization which he applied to traditional ideas about Arabic poetry. He defines poetry as "metrical, rhymed utterances pointing to a meaning (intention). He explains that poetry is made of four basic elements: form (laťz), meaning (ma'na'), meter (wazn), and rhyme (qāfiyah). The analysis of poetry comes from the study of these basic elements and their combinations which yield positive or negative results. The study of meaning is discussed in terms of the intention of the poet that moved him to

19 G. Bohas et al., The Arabic Linguistic Tradition, 104-105.

20 Bohas et al., 105; see also Deborah L. Black, Logic and Aristotle's Rhetoric and Poetics in Medieval Arabic Philosophy (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990).

21 Naqd al-Shīr, 17.
compose the poetry. These intentions are divided into the traditional purposes or themes of Arabic poetry, such as panegyrics, elegy, love, and insult, among others. The analysis grows from basic units to more complex combinations of elements. Many of Qudāmah's terminologies survive in the writings of later critics and theorists. In addition, he elaborated on the topic of figures of speech that was initiated by Ibn al-Mu'tazz. Thus his work is also considered crucial for the emergence of the science of embellishment ("ilm al-badī'").

The other writer whose work exhibits a strong Greek influence is Ishāq ibn Wahb (tenth century). His book was first given the title Naqd al-Nathr (Criticism of Prose) and was wrongly attributed to Qudāmah. However, a more complete manuscript was found and published under the correct title of al-Burhān fī Wujūh al-Bayān (Demonstrating the Aspects of Rhetoric). This work extends the theoretical notions discussed by al-Jāhiz in his al-Bayān and adds many ideas from Aristotle's writings on rhetoric and poetics. Like al-Jāhiz, Ibn Wahb is concerned with the modes of human expression. He divides these modes of expression (bayān) into four categories, saying that things may become intelligible: (1) by their essences (dhawāt) without the need for words to express them; (2) by applying thought and intellect they become known to the mind; (3) by articulating sounds with the tongue, and (4) by writing which reaches those who are far away or do not yet exist (60). He goes on to explain these ideas, relying mainly on Aristotle's Rhetoric and Poetics, devoting sections to logic, the role of the intellect, speech, and writing. However, his difficult style of writing and his emphasis on the Greek approach made his work unpopular and almost unknown among the mainstream of Arab critics. Finally, a

\[22\] al-Burhān, 60.
third critic (from a much later period), Ḥāżim al-Qartājānī (d. 1255), wrote Minhāj al-
Bulaghā' wa Sirāj al-ʿUdabā' (The Path of the Eloquent and the Lamp of the Cultured). He
combined Greek and Arabic theories of poetic criticism to form his own theory of the
poetic imagination.

While most writers discussed so far were concerned mainly with poetry, prose-
writing, and the Greek approach, many other authors devoted their attention to the study
and analysis of the style of the Qurʾān. Alongside poetry and adab writing, the Qurʾān is
another major driving force behind the development of Arabic rhetorical theory.

The Eloquence of the Qurʾān

Early in Islam, theological arguments arose between various religious groups
regarding, for example, the nature of God, free will and predestination, and the nature of
the Qurʾān itself. Each group sought evidence for its arguments from the Qurʾān, but, in
many cases, the Qurʾān has paradoxical answers. Therefore, the notion of literal (haqīqī,
true, real) vs. non-literal (majāzī, figurative) meaning was used to explain those passages.
For example, one group believed that God was “in the image of man,” because God says,
for example, “God’s hand is above their hand.” The other group replied that the expression
is a figurative one, and maintained that God could be understood only as an abstract unity.
Other theological issues were more complicated, but they contributed to the emergence
of the linguistic interpretation of the Qurʾān.23 The first work of this kind was written

al., 360–6; on Islamic Theology see W. Montgomery Watt, Islamic Philosophy and
Theology, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1985); see also works on Islamic Philosophy
already cited.
by the early philologist Abū ‘Ubaydah (mentioned earlier) under the title, Majāz al-Qurān (Metaphorical Usage in the Qurān). Here, Abū ‘Ubaydah takes words and phrases considered to be difficult and establishes their range of meaning by applying to them his wide knowledge of the Arabic language and the pre-Islamic literary tradition. A similar work was later written by Ibn Qutaybah called Tawil Mushkil al-Qurān (Interpretation of Difficult Expressions in the Qurān).

However, it was the issue of the nature of the Qurān itself that provoked the most debate and contributed to further development in Arabic rhetorical theory. This debate took place in the ninth and tenth centuries between the Mu'tazilah and Ash'arīyah schools of theology. The Mu'tazilah was a rationalist group (already mentioned in connection with al-Jāhiz's work), while the Ash'arīyah was a more conservative group. Among the major issues debated were whether or not the Qurān was created by God and what is meant by the doctrine of the miraculous nature (i'jāz) of the Qurān. In general, the Mu'tazilah asserted that the Qurān was created by God for the benefit of human understanding and, therefore, does not have any special value beyond that. The Ash'arīyah (along with other orthodox groups) said that the Qurān was in fact the speech of God and the eloquence of its style is one proof of its divine origin. The eloquent style of the Qurān, they argued, is so miraculous that it was impossible to imitate. As mentioned at the beginning, the origin of the notion of the inimitability of the Qurān (i'jāz al-Qurān) is found in the Qurān itself. Several passages of the Qurān state emphatically that it is the word of God and that no one else is able to issue anything similar to it. For example:

This Qurān is not such (a writ) as could be composed by anyone but God. It confirms what has been revealed before, and is an expression of (Heaven's) law. Without any doubt it's from the Lord of all the worlds. Do they say (of the
Prophet) that: "He has composed it?" Say to them: "Bring a Surah [chapter] like this, and call anyone apart from God you can (to help you), if what you say is true" (10: 37-38).\(^{24}\)

Within the debate about this challenge and its exact meaning, attempts were made by various scholars to determine exactly what qualities make the Qur'ân inimitable. In the end, and based on the orthodox position, the Qur'ân was said to be miraculous because it has three basic qualities: (1) it contains information beyond human knowledge; (2) it contains information about the past relating to ancient prophets, and, since the Prophet Muhammad is said to have been unable to read or write, this confirms its heavenly origin; and (3) it is miraculous because of its eloquence and unique style, which is neither poetry nor prose. Accordingly, the pagan Arabs could not meet the challenge of imitating the Qur'ân even though they had among them masters of poetry and eloquence. It is the elaboration of the third point by various scholars that contributed to further theorizing about Arabic rhetoric in the ninth and tenth centuries.

There are many scholars who contributed to this debate from various points of view.\(^{25}\) One of the most relevant authors to this discussion is al-Baqillânî (d. 1013) who wrote ʻIjâz al-Qur'ân (Inimitability of the Qur'ân). In order to demonstrate the superiority of the style of the Qur'ân, he compares it with an example of the best pre-Islamic poetry (a famous poem by Imru’ al-Qays) and another from ʻAbbāsid poetry (a


poem of al-Buhturi). He finds numerous faults and weaknesses in both examples of poetry, while he argues that the Qur'an is consistent in its eloquence regardless of the theme chosen.\(^{26}\) Other important works on this topic were also written by al-Khattabî (d. 998) (An Epistle on the Inimitability of the Qur'an) and al-Rummani (d. 994) (Remarks on the Inimitability of the Qur'an).\(^{27}\) The most important concept for Arabic rhetoric that came out of these studies is the notion of arrangement (\textit{nazm}, organization of the text) (see below). This concept would be the central theme in the work of 'Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani who contributed the most rigorous (logical and psychological) analysis of rhetoric in the Arabic tradition up to his time.

al-Jurjani (d. 1078) wrote two important books, \textit{Dalail al-I'jaz} (Evidence for the Inimitability of the Qur'an), and \textit{Asrar al-Balaghah} (Secrets of Eloquence). In both works, al-Jurjani surveys the state of rhetorical knowledge before him and points out the lack of true critical thinking and the preoccupation among his predecessors with so many side issues. In his work, he says, he will focus on the major concepts only. In the first book, \textit{Dalail} (Evidences), the initial purpose is to demonstrate the Qur'anic \textit{i'jaz} (inimitability), but he goes beyond that to form a theory of construction (\textit{nazm}, arrangement). Writers before al-Jurjani debated the dichotomy between word (\textit{lafz}) and meaning (\textit{ma'na}). For example, al-Jahiz had stressed that ideas are found everywhere, but it is only the excellent


choice of words that make a speech eloquent. al-Jurjānī argues that eloquence does not come from words alone, nor from ideas alone, but rather it is the result of organizing the words in a construction (nazm) according to the required intention (meaning). Once ideas are formed in the mind, the verbal expression should convey them in an orderly fashion and according to their meaning (i.e., the intention of the speaker). Therefore, knowledge of language and grammar is essential for achieving this task. The semantic and grammatical analysis that al-Jurjānī gives in this book (Dala’il) became the basis for the branch of Arabic rhetoric called ‘ilm al-ma'anī (semantics).

A second book by al-Jurjānī, Asrār al-Balāghah (Secrets of Eloquence) is devoted to the discussion of the pleasing effect of poetic imagery and rhetorical figures on the human mind. In the previous book, the problem was organizing and composition, but here the problem is taken further into ways of communicating the ideas in the most pleasing (acceptable, effective) way. The issue then becomes finding the variety of ways of expressing meanings and intentions, not only clearly, but also aesthetically. This became the basis for another branch of Arabic rhetoric called ‘ilm al-Bayān (Clarity of Expression).

Although al-Jurjānī does not cite external influence on his writing, some modern scholars argue that he must have been acquainted with the Arabic translations of Aristotle’s Rhetoric and Poetics, but they add that this must not distract from the importance of his original contributions.28

The Science of Eloquence (‘Ilm al-Balāghah)

Around the end of the tenth century, efforts towards systematization of rhetorical theory began to be made. The most famous works of synthesis include a book by Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī (d. 1004) titled *Kitāb al-Ṣināʿatayn: al-Kitābah wa al-Shīr* (The Book of the Two Crafts: Writing and Poetry). al-ʿAskarī builds on the works of al-Ḥāfiz, Ibn al-Muʿtazz, and Qudāmah ibn Jaʿfār, giving examples of good writing and poetry. In addition, he lists 35 rhetorical figures, or *badīʿ* devices, to be used for embellishment by writers and poets. Another rhetorician, Ibn Rashīq (d. 1044), wrote a famous manual for poetry and poetics, called *al-ʿUmdah fī Mahāsin al-Shīr wa Ādābih wa Naqdih* (The Pillar: on The Beauties of Poetry, Its Proper Modes and Criticism), which summarizes most of the theoretical concepts about poetry debated by previous writers in the tradition. A third important work was written by Diyāʾ al-Dīn Ibn al-Athīr (d. 1239) called *al-Mathal al-Sārīr fī Adab al-Kātib wa al-Shārīr* (The Current Adage on the Craft of the Writer and the Poet). Ibn al-Athīr gives advice on composition of poetry and prose and discusses the qualities required for excelling in both crafts.

Although the works we have so far discussed in this chapter each contributed to Arabic rhetorical theory, the science of *balāghah* was given its most systematic treatment by al-Sakkākī (d. 1228). al-Sakkākī based his ideas mostly on the works of ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī. The writings of al-Jurjānī were codified by al-Sakkākī in his *Miftāḥ al-ʿUlūm* (The Key to the Sciences). This work is an encyclopedia of Arabic linguistic studies, including morphology, grammar, rhetoric, argumentation and metrics. In this work, al-Sakkākī gives the theory of Arabic rhetoric its final shape by dividing it into three parts. The first is ‘ilm al-∗maʿāni* (the science of meaning, semantics). It is the science by which one comes to understand the different kinds of sentences and their correct grammatical
construction, as well as their proper use in accordance with the requirements of the situation. It thus shows how to avoid mistakes in such situations. The second is 'ulm al-bayân (the science of clarity). It is the science by which one comes to understand the variety of ways of expressing the same meaning with different degrees of clarity. This helps the writer or speaker to express ideas with the least amount of ambiguity. It requires the study of figures of speech such as metaphor and simile. The third branch is called 'ulm al-badîl (the science of embellishment). It is the study of additional techniques used as ornaments of speech.

Despite this attempt at classification, the three categories exhibit a large degree of overlap. For example, both ma'ani (semantics) and bayân (clarity) are concerned with the different ways of expressing the same idea with different degrees of clarity or authenticity, while bayân shares with badîl the study of figures of speech. The difference is that bayân is concerned with only the major devices such as metaphor and simile, while badîl is devoted to all other styles of ornamentation, sometimes including even the features of calligraphy. This overlap was probably a reflection of the diversity of points of view (poetic, theological, philosophical, etc.) represented in the discussion of Arabic rhetoric throughout the centuries of its development. The section on balāghah in its three parts, as it appears in al-Sakkākī's Miftāh, was later a subject for further commentary and codification. The most important commentators include al-Qazwīnī (d. 1338), who wrote al-Talkhīs (The Summary), followed by his al-Idāh (The Clarification). These two works represent the Arabic theory of balāghah (eloquence) in its standardized and final form which has endured to the present day.

Conclusion

This chapter presented an overview of the emergence and development of Arabic rhetorical theory. It highlighted in broad outline the contribution of many scholars in several areas of study to the emergence of rhetorical theory. The scholars contributing to the emergence of Arabic rhetorical theory were divided into six categories: (1) philology and grammar; (2) prose writing; (3) the new poetry; (4) philosophy and Greek logic; (5) the eloquence of the Qur'ân; and (6) the systemization of the science of eloquence (al-balâghah). The following chapters discuss the works of these scholars in more detail, with an emphasis on how each group of scholars contributed to a specific facet of Arabic rhetoric, giving further examples of their theories of eloquence. We now turn, in chapter 5, to a discussion of the works of the early philologists and their contribution towards the emergence of the study of balâghah (eloquence).
CHAPTER 5

THE EARLY PHILOLOGICAL APPROACH TO ARABIC RHETORIC

In the previous chapter, the various major factors contributing to the emergence of Arabic rhetorical theory were outlined. The earliest rhetorical investigations in the Arabic tradition were philological in nature. This chapter will discuss in some detail the most important contributions of the early philologists to the study of Arabic rhetoric. The activities of these early scholars centered around pre-Islamic and early-Islamic poetry. We have already discussed the rhetorical dimensions of poetic discourse (in chapters 2 and 3). Pre-Islamic and early-Islamic poetry had become canonized as classical and was held as an example for excellence in discourse. Moreover, early poetry was used as the standard by which to judge correct and authoritative speech. Therefore, early Arabic poetry became the primary data of investigation for the early philologists who collected them in numerous anthologies. Several important philologists began to theorize about the literary and artistic value of this poetry, as well as its rhetorical function, that is, its persuasive impact on listeners. Specifically, five scholars who made the most substantial advancements in the field of poetic and rhetorical theorizing are chosen here as representatives of this early philological approach. The scholars chosen are: al-Asma‘ī, Ibn Sallām, Abū ‘Ubaydah, Tha‘lab, and al-Mubarrad. These writers were selected because each
contributed unique and influential ideas and theories about eloquence and about the impact of literary discourse that became the foundation for later writing within the emerging field of balāghah (the study of eloquence).

al-Asma’ī (d. 828)

Abū Sā’īd ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Qurayb, widely known by his ancestral name, al-Asma’ī, is one of the most influential figures in early Arabic literary history. He studied under some of the leading philologists of his time, such as Abū ʿAmr ibn al-ʿAlāʾ, and ʿIsā ibn ʿUmar. Among his most famous disciples are the early critics Abū Ḥātim al-Sijistānī, Ibn Sallām al-Jumahī, and the great writer and rhetorician al-Jāhiz. al-Asma’ī was most famous for his great knowledge of early Arabic poetry. His student, Abū Ḥātim collected his remarks regarding the masters of early Arabic poetry in a notebook called Fuhūlāt al-Shuʿarāʾ (The Masters of Poetry). It contains al-Asma’ī’s answers to the question of which poets are to be considered as faḥl (a master of poetic art; the word faḥl literally means stallion).

The ideas about poetry in al-Asma’ī’s work reflect the intellectual and cultural environment of his time. His generation of scholars valued greatly the poetic output of the pre-Islamic Bedouin Arabs and regarded them as the supreme examples of excellence in poetry. Therefore, they did not consider the new poetry of the Islamic period to be worthy of much admiration, except in isolated cases. However, when it came to justifying this critical stand regarding poetry, they did not offer much more than vague subjective remarks. al-Asma’ī reflects this tendency toward unjustified critical views about poets and poetry. However, he is the first among the early philologists to offer some critical explanations about the nature of poetry and poetic talent. Although these accounts are
limited, they nevertheless opened the way for further theoretical speculation among his disciples.

According to Ihsān ʿAbbās, al-ʿAsmaʿī made three specific insights into the evaluation of poetry.¹ The first insight deals with the issue of the separation between poetry and religion. al-ʿAsmaʿī was aware that much of the secular content of pre-Islamic poetry contradicts the teachings of Islam. However, he argued that poetry tends to be more vigorous and impressive when it is dealing with such worldly issues. On the other hand, when it is dealing with religious or pious subject matter, poetry tends to lose its vigor and becomes soft (layyin). al-ʿAsmaʿī uses two examples of poets whose poetry became soft when they addressed religious issues. The first one was Labīd ibn Rabīʿah, who lived most of his life during pre-Islamic times, but was alive during the early years of Islam. It was often commented that his poetry during Islam was less vigorous than his pre-Islamic output, which was judged to be less appealing. al-ʿAsmaʿī reported that his teacher, Abū ʿAmr, admired Labīd's later poetry because of its religious value, but not as poetic art, because it sounded unharmonious. Abū ʿAmr is quoted as saying:

There is no one whose poetry I like better than Labīd ibn Rabīʿah because of his glorification of God (the great almighty), his adherence to Islam, and his praise for religion and the good, but his poetry sounds like millstones grinding seeds.²

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¹ ʿAbbās, Tārikh al-Naqd al-ʿAdabī 49-56.

² ʿAbbās, Tārikh al-Naqd al-ʿAdabī 50.
Supporting his teacher's opinion, al-Asma'î adds that "Labîd's poetry is like a (fine) cloak that is well-crafted but lacks charm." The reason for this perceived low quality of Islamic poetry is found in its association with the good (al-khayr, a term indicating wealth, prosperity and the good life), which inevitably makes it soft and less vigorous. al-Asma'î explains this notion in a passage that is often quoted by later writers regarding the relation between poetry and religion. This time he uses as an example a second poet, Hassan ibn Thabit, who lived both in pre-Islamic and Islamic times. Moreover, during the early Islamic period, Hassan became a well-known defender of the Prophet Muhammad against the poetic attacks of the nonbelievers. al-Asma'î commented on Hassan's poetry:

When it entered in the domain of the good, the art of poetry becomes soft. Don't you see that Hassan ibn Thabit was well regarded in pre-Islamic and Islamic times, but when his poetry entered the sphere of the good—such as the elegies of the Prophet (peace be upon him), Hamzah, and Ja'far (may God be pleased with them) and others—his poetry became soft? The art of poetry is that of the masters (fuhûl) such as Imru' al-Qays, Zuhayr and al-Nabighah. It consists of description of abodes, departing, insult, praise, love of women, description of wine, horses, war and boasting. Thus, when poetry enters the domain of the good it becomes soft.\(^3\)

'Abbâs comments that in this passage al-Asma'î restricts the field of poetry to human affairs, especially those which were prevalent during pre-Islamic times. He also specifies which topic he considers suited for poetry and which ones are not. He associates softness (al-lîn) with issues relating to religion and the good. However, as 'Abbâs points out, al-Asma'î is not clear on what he means by softness (al-lîn), and by the good (al-khayr). As

\(^3\) 'Abbâs, Tārîkh al-Naqd al-Adabî 50.

\(^4\) 'Abbâs, Tārîkh al-Naqd al-Adabî 50.

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for softness, al-Asma'i did not elaborate beyond using it as a vague and broad concept. It also appears in the writings of later critics and remains broadly defined as the lack of strength or vigor (da'f al-asr).\(^5\)

The use of the term good (khayr) by al-Asma'i is often thought to be the opposite of evil (sharr). But 'Abbâs argues that this dichotomy is not accurate in the case of al-Asma'i. It is more likely, 'Abbâs explains, that al-Asma'i meant by the good, all the things that relate to religion and piety and seeking a reward in the afterlife. Therefore, its opposite are issues that relate to this life, that is, secular issues (dunyawîyâh), including struggle in this world.

During al-Asma'i's time, religious poetry was increasingly being used for private and mystical contemplation. Therefore, by restricting poetry to major public issues such as praise, insult, war etc., al-Asma'i brings the definition of poetry closer to the definition of rhetoric. In other words, he is emphasizing the rhetorical (i.e., persuasive, public, and political) dimensions in early Arabic poetry. This is not surprising since early Arabic poetry played a significant public and political role in the cultural lives of the early Arabs, as discussed in Chapter 3. This explains and justifies further the significance of poetry and the analysis of poetry within Arabic rhetorical theory. Poets who fulfill the traditional public and political role of their craft are more likely to be described as masters (fuhûl).

The second critical insight attributed to al-Asma'i deals with the concept of fuhûlah (mastery). According to 'Abbâs, the choice of the word fahl (stallion, pl. fuhûl, noun. fuhûlah) to describe the masterful poet is consistent with a practice, common

\(^5\) 'Abbâs, Tārîkh al-Naqd al-Adâbî, 51.
among the early Arab critics, of using concepts taken from Bedouin life to describe the
elements of poetry. Among the Bedouins, the adult male camel or horse is called *fahl*
(stallion). It has the strong masculine connotations that al-Asma'î admires and which he
believes are generally lacking in the female or the younger members of the species. Abū
Hātim, the student of al-Asma'î, asked him what he meant by using the word *fahl* to
describe a poet. al-Asma'î replied, "He has an advantage over others such as the advantage
*al-fahl* has over younger camels." Thus, according to al-Asma’î, a poet is either
*fahl* or not *fahl*.

Abū Hātim then presents his teacher with a series of names of famous poets and
asks which ones he considers to be *fahl*. The following is part of Abū Hātim's check-list. In
addition to judging whether a poet was a *fahl* or not, al-Asma’î also gives some indication
of the criteria he applies for reaching his decision. However, these criteria are not always
clear, nor consistent, as the following passage illustrates:

I asked al-Asma’î about al-A’shâ . . . "Is he a *fahl*?" He said "Not a *fahl* . . ." I asked
him about Muhalhil. He said "Not a *fahl*, but if he had composed five more odes
such as his (earlier well-known) ode, he would have been the most *fahl* . . ." I asked
him about ‘Amr ibn Kuhlthum. "Is he a *fahl*?" He said "Not a *fahl*;" I said "What
about Abū Zubayd?" He said "Not a *fahl.*" I said "And Ḥurrah ibn al-Ward?" He
said "A noble poet, but not a *fahl*.
. ." I said "And Mu’qar ibn Ḥamār . . .?" He said "If he finished five or six (odes) he would
have been a *fahl* . . ." I said "And Ka’b ibn Ju’ayl?" He said "I suppose he is among the *fahl*, but I am
not certain about him." I said "And Ḥātim al-Ta’it?" He said "Hātim is counted
among the praiseworthy," but he did not say he was a *fahl* in his poetry. I said
"And Mu’qar ibn Ḥamār . . .?" He said "If he finished five or six (odes) he would
have been a *fahl* . . ." I said "And Ka’b ibn Sa’d al-Ghanawī?" He said "Not a *fahl*
except for his elegy, for there is nothing like it in the world." I asked him about
Khufāf ibn Nudbah, ‘Antarah, and al-Zibriqān ibn Badr. He said "Those are the

6 ‘Abbās, Ṭārīkh al-Naqd al-Adabī 51.
most poetic among horsemen (knights), . . . ,” but he did not say they were fuhûl. I said “And al-Aswad ibn Yâfur al-Nahshâf?” He said “He resembles the fuhûl . . . ” etc.7

From the above passage, ‘Abbâs concludes that, according to al-Âsma’î, fuhûlah (mastery) is a precious status. It means that the poet has to be unique. In terms of its gender reference, although it would appear that the concept of fahl, which emphasizes maleness, would lead to the exclusion of women poets from the master class, this does not seem to be the case. Some famous women poets, such as al-Khansâ?, were sometimes paradoxically included in the fahl class. It is true, however, that the vast majority of valued poets in the Arabic tradition are men.8

More specifically, based on al-Âsma’î’s remarks, several requirements could be deduced as being necessary to achieve this unique status. First, poetic talent has to be the dominant trait in the individual. So, for example, Hâtim is known for his legendary hospitality, but cannot be called fahl because his poetic talent is not his most overriding characteristic. The same could be said about poets who are known as brave horsemen who compose poetry. They are more known for legendary valor than for their poetry. Second, the poet has to produce a certain number of odes in order to qualify as fahl. For example, as indicated by the passage above, one poet’s elegy, although described as unique in the world, was not enough to include him in the fuhûl category. However, as ‘Abbâs points

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7 This is an abridgment of a text cited in ‘Abbâs, Tarîkh al-Naqd al-Adabî 51-52, itself is an abridgment of a text from al-Muwashshah by Abû ‘Abd Allah al-Marzûbânî.

8 For more on the status of women poets in the Arabic tradition see Bakalla, Arabic Culture 199-204.
out, al-Asma't was not clear on how many odes are required as a prerequisite for inclusion in the fahl class. Without a clear rule, the numbers five, six, and twenty were mentioned in the text above as requirements.

Elsewhere, Ibn Rashīq, a later critic, quotes al-Asma't in a passage that explains the requirements for any poet to reach the level of fahl. It refers mostly to the educational background necessary for the poet, but does not explain the concept itself any further:

In composing of poetry, a poet does not become a fahl unless he memorizes the poetry of the Arabs, listens to their histories, knows the literary themes (al-ma'ānī), becomes familiar with verbal expressions. He should begin by knowing: metrics to help him measure his composition; grammar to correct his language and straighten his declension; genealogy and the history (ayyām) of the (different) peoples to help him in knowing their virtues and faults when he mentions them in praise or blame.⁹

However, this does not explain precisely the concept of fuhūlah. It merely describes the educational requirements for greatness in poetry but does not specify further what this greatness entails. al-Asma't seems to have left this question for later critics to expand upon. Overall, 'Abbas observes that:

There is no doubt that this fuhūlah means: a refined type of casting (an ode), a big reservoir of poetic talent, a mastery of literary concepts (ma'ānī), even if al-Asma't did not explicitly state all that.¹⁰

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⁹ Ibn Rashīq, al-'Umdah vol. I, 197-98; and see 'Abbas, Tārīkh 53.

¹⁰ 'Abbas, Tārīkh al-Naqd al-Adabī, 53.
Hinted at in this quotation are the notions of expansiveness and the ability to wield expansive themes. ʿAbbās also stresses that the concept is not necessarily associated with valor or horsemanship, nor with manliness as opposed to effeminacy, although some critics of al-ʿAsmaʾī’s time did use it in contrast to effeminacy. ʿAbbās observes:

It is noticeable that this fuhūlah is not associated with the spirit of chivalry according to al-ʿAsmaʾī. So, it is not only a matter of strong will in the face of death expressed in poetry. However, it took on this meaning according to Abū ʿUbaydah, for upon hearing the poetry of Qatari ibn al-Fafal, he said (to a group of listeners): “This is poetry! not the unmanly (effeminate) poetry with which you entertain yourselves.”

Again, the operative term seems to be forcefulness. ʿAbbās comments that in Abū ʿUbaydah’s use of the term, fuhūlah is the opposite of effeminacy, but this is a moral criteria that al-ʿAsmaʾī perhaps would not agree with, even though there is similarity between the trait of effeminacy and softness (al-lin) that al-ʿAsmaʾī talked about. In general, fuhūlah as used by al-ʿAsmaʾī and Abū ʿUbaydah indicates vigor (qūwah, power) which seems to be the common criterion used by them and other scholars and transmitters of poetry.

However, the use of only one criterion by which to judge poetry was limiting. Many scholars and transmitters who insisted on it reacted against it at some point or another. ʿAbbās says:

\[11\] ʿAbbās, Tarīkh al-Naqd al-Adabi, 53.
The reliance on one criterion by which to distinguish among the variety of poetic forms is dangerous to both criticism and the enjoyment of poetry. It was inevitable that scholars would lose their tolerance for it. Even those transmitters themselves (who used *fuhūlah* as a criterion) would not have enough patience to transmit only one style of poetry. Change in taste would soon take place if the criteria for judgment were limited. How then if there was only one criterion!^{12}

'Abbās’ complaint about limiting the criteria of appraisal to just one criterion may be sound. But it may also miss the point of those who advance power or forcefulness as the single criterion. This may be seen most readily if we compare the criterion to a counterpart notion in rhetoric, namely, the *sublime*.

As mentioned in chapter 1, the notion of the sublime in Western rhetoric goes back to the anonymous work titled *On the Sublime*, written in Greek around the first century C.E. In it, the author argues that the “power of expression” is the foundation of sublime rhetoric, whether in poetry or prose. More specifically, there are five sources of sublimity:

First, the most potent is the faculty of grasping great conceptions, . . . Second comes passion, strong and impetuous. These two constituents of sublimity are in most cases native-born, those which now follow come through art: the proper handling of figures, which again seem to fall under two heads, figures of thought, and figures of diction; then noble phraseology, with its subdivision, choice of words, and use of tropes and of elaboration; and fifthly that cause of greatness which includes in itself all that preceded it, dignified and spirited composition . . . ^{13}

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The first two faculties described in the above passage are said to be native-born, that is, they describe the poet's or orator's innate skill and ability for grasping great concepts and communicating strong passions. This comes close to al-Asma'ī's concept of *fuhūlah* (innate mastery). However, the difference is that al-Asma'ī does not go beyond this concept to explain characteristics in the poetry itself. He left this for later rhetoricians to investigate.

In general, al-Asma'ī did not rule out the appreciation of some poems based on criteria other than *fuhūlah* (mastery of strong and masterful themes). 'Abbās points out that al-Asma'ī himself was said to have transmitted some light poetry because it was, in effect, delightful and easy to recite. Therefore, it would not be surprising to see other people doing the same. The change in the literary tastes of the transmitters and listeners in Basrah over time was described elsewhere by al-Jāhiz who says that early in life:

I witnessed the transmitters in the mosques and the Mirbad fair: they will not count as a transmitter anyone who did not recite the poetry of the madmen, the vagabonds of the Arabs, the erotic poetry of the Arabs, the short Bedouin songs, the poetry of the Jews, and the poetry of the fair-minded (that does justice to the enemies). But they eventually lost interest in all that and began to dwell on short conversations and short odes and short quotations and selections from every source. I also saw them when they were so enamored, above all else, with the love-poetry of al-'Abbās ibn al-Ahnaf. But when Khalaf al-Ahmar introduced them to the love poetry of the Bedouins they became less interested in the poetry of al-'Abbās and their desire for the love poetry of the Bedouins grew larger. Then I witnessed them a few years ago: no one among them recites the love poetry of the Arabs anymore, except the young boys who are beginning to learn poetry, or for the sake of flirtation.

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The above description by al-Jâhiz of the change of literary tastes over time shows that the concept of *fuhûlah* was one among several criteria for the appreciation of poetry. Nevertheless, the notion of *fuhûlah* became the key quality discussed by the early philologists—a situation that did not change until centuries later, with the increased popularity of new themes in 'Abbāsid poetry.

The third critical insight attributed to al-Āšma't is his discussion of simile (*tashbîth, comparison*). Most Arab critics (early in the tradition and throughout the centuries) consider simile to be one of the primary and highly appreciated elements in Arabic poetry. In a work of poetic criticism by al-Ḥâtimî, he describes a literary gathering in the court of the famous caliph, Hârûn al-Rashîd, during which the topic of the best simile in Arabic poetry was discussed. The account gives al-Āšma’t a major role in the discussion. 'Abbâs says that this account is probably fictional, but the fact that al-Āšma’t was given a prominent role in it does indicate his leading role as a critic in singling out the simile as a poetic and literary device (55). al-Āšma’t’s comments on the best similes in the poetry of the Arabs, although not yet fully elaborated, were often quoted by later writers and established the topic as a key issue of discussion among later Arab critics. For al-Āšma’t, excellence in the use of simile indicates further his notion of poet’s innate mastery of the language. Most importantly, simile was seen as a valuable rhetorical device for the description of nature, events and actions. In later centuries Arab rhetoricians expanded the discussion of simile, especially as it relates to metaphor. Both concepts were later to be considered among the main tools in the second branch of Arabic rhetoric, the science of clarity (*al-bayân*). Finally, al-Āšma’t’s notion of *fuhûlah* (mastery) was the basis for the
work of his follower Ibn Sallām who elaborated it into a system of classes of masters of poetry.

Ibn Sallām al-Jumahī (756-845)

Among the disciples of al-ʿAsmaʾī was Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Sallām al-Jumahī, known mostly as Ibn Sallām. He learned philology and poetry in Basrah where he was born and also in Baghdād where he came in contact with other scholars. He also transmitted Ḥadīth (sayings) of the Prophet Muḥammad. Several books on philology and adab are attributed to him, but his fame rests mostly on his Tabaqāt Fuhūl al-Shuʿārāʾ (The Classes of The Masters of Poetry). This work seems to have been transmitted orally for decades and was not put into writing until after the author’s death. Like many scholars of his generation, Ibn Sallām was suspicious of writing, and preferred the authenticated method of oral transmission among scholars and trustworthy individuals.

Ibn Sallām deals with a little more than a hundred poets, all of whom he considered fuhūl (Masters). However, they are further divided into classes or degrees of quality. The book is organized into three parts. The first consists of ten classes of pre-Islamic poets, each class containing four poets. This is followed by a listing of more poets categorized by various criteria including poets who excel in elegy (marāthī), poets of the cities (such as Mecca, Medina, etc.) and Jewish poets. The third part includes ten classes of Islamic poets, again containing four poets each. The Islamic category includes poets from early Islam and the ʿUmayyad period, but not from Ibn Sallām’s own age, the early ʿAbbāsid period.

In the introduction, Ibn Sallām discusses several issues related to the study and evaluation of poetry. First, he wants to establish the authority of the well-informed critic
and his (the critic's) role in distinguishing good poetry from bad, or false, poetry.

According to Ibn Sallām, the role of the critic is similar to the role of the expert in all other scholarly disciplines, trades or crafts, such as the making of jewelry or the exchange and evaluation of money:

Poetry is a craft and a skill which is judged by scholars in the same way other disciplines and crafts are judged. Some crafts are examined by the eye, the ear, the hand, or the tongue. For example, pearls and sapphires are not judged by mere appearance and weight, but they have to be scrutinized visually by an expert. Also, the real value of the dirham is not known by their mere color, feel, pattern, sound, or appearance. Rather, the currency expert (the money changer) examines them carefully and knows which ones might be forged or counterfeit.16

Similarly the craft of poetry, then, needs an expert to evaluate it. This task is performed by the critic whose authority is based on learned judgment and long study of poetry. Once the authority of the critic is established, the judgment issued should be accepted by those who know less than the critic does. Ibn Sallām continues with an anecdote:

Thus, long and repeated study helps in gaining the required knowledge. A man asked Khalaf "If I heard some poetry and liked it, why do I have to care what you and your friends say about it?" Khalaf replied, "If you had a dirham and liked it, but the money changer told you it was bad, how does your approval of it benefit you?" 17

16 Ibn Sallām al-Jumāhī, 26-27.

Ibn Sallâm relates the above anecdote to reinforce his argument about the authority of the critic. He seems to be reacting to the practice, common among his contemporaries, of quoting poetry without regard to its literary value, or to the authenticity of its authorship. Thus, he became one of the earliest known Arab rhetoricians to establish the notion of the skilled and knowledgeable evaluator of discourse (naqîd, critic, or rhetorician).

Ibn Sallâm then devotes a section to a brief discussion of the origin of Arabic philology and the most important scholars in the field. These early scholars represent, according to Ibn Sallâm, the kind of trustworthy scholarship that should be used as a reference and an example that should be emulated. Ibn Sallâm seems to have been the first to establish the technical term naqîd for literary criticism. The Arabic word naqîd means money, and the word nâqîd means one who evaluates coins to assess their real value. Thus, the terms naqîd and nâqîd were borrowed to refer to criticism and critic respectively.

One of the most important tasks for the critic is to be able to distinguish authentic poetry from that which is forged. Ibn Sallâm argues that, in many cases, the poetry that the public recites and attributes to pre-Islamic poets is in fact forged. He provides several reasons for this phenomenon. First, the Arabs before Islam had an abundance of poetry. In fact, it was their single most important cultural activity. But when Islam came they became preoccupied with holy war and the expansion of Islam. After many decades the Arabs settled in the new lands, but most of their poetry was lost and what they remembered from it was in fact little, compared to what has been lost. But due to the rivalry between tribes much poetry was invented to claim and describe past glories. In short, Ibn Sallâm was the first to discuss the problem of the authenticity of poetic texts. This problem remained largely unexplored until modern times, when scholars such as
Tāhā Husayn and D. S. Margoliouth revisited the issue in the early twentieth century (see bibliography).

After the introduction, Ibn Sallām moves on to discuss the various classes of poets using a number of criteria, some more explicit than others. His criteria for classification include:

1. *Fuhūlah*: The first criterion is the concept of *fuhūlah*, discussed above. Here, Ibn Sallām took the concept of *fuhūlah* from al-ʿAṣmaʿī and expanded on it. Whereas al-ʿAṣmaʿī divides poets into either *fuhūl* or not *fuhūl*, Ibn Sallām argues that all the poets he is concerned with are *fuhūl*, but he adds that there are degrees of *fuhūlah*, therefore he presents them in a hierarchy of ten classes. Ibn Sallām also includes some pre-Islamic poets whom al-ʿAṣmaʿī did not consider to be *fuhūl*, such as al-ʿAṣhāʿ (Ibn Sallām puts him in the first class) and Kaʿb ibn Zuhayr (second class).

2. Quantity of Output: Another criterion for selection was the quantity of poetic output. As shown earlier, al-ʿAṣmaʿī thought that no poet was considered a *fahl* until he or she composed a certain number of odes. Ibn Sallām also applies this criteria. When he discusses the seventh class of pre-Islamic poets, he explains that they were put in this lower category because their poetic output was low. However, this criterion was not used uniformly. For example, some poets were put in a higher level despite the fact that their known poetic output was low, including Tārīfah and ʿAbīd ibn al-Abras. Here, Ibn Sallām argues that, in the case of these poets, they are so famous and revered that it must be assumed that they had composed much more poetry than was actually transmitted. Therefore, these
poets deserve to be placed in the higher categories, even if some of the their
poetry was lost.

(3) Resemblance between Poets: Ibn Sallam's third criterion was the close
resemblance between poets of each class. However, some later critics disagreed
with him when it came to putting certain poets together in one class based on this
criterion. Some of those poets (such as al-A'ashâ, Zuhayr, and al-Nâbighah from the
first class) were considered by later critics to be highly dissimilar in their poetry.
Other criteria of resemblance used by Ibn Sallam include the subject matter, or
theme, addressed by the poets. For example, he groups authors of elegies (marâthî)
together in one class. Other poets were grouped together because their major
theme was love-poetry (ghazal), and others were similar in their use of a simple
meter known as rajaz. Also, some poets were grouped according to their
environments, such as poets of the cities, or according to their religious/ethnic
background, such as Jewish poets.

Many other selections and classifications remain unjustified, being listed
without providing a rationale by the author for their selection nor for their
placements. In addition, the selection of four poets for each class seems arbitrary
and based on purely quantitative symmetry. For example, Ibn Sallam admits that
he placed Aws ibn Hajar in the second class even though he thinks this poet
deserved to be put in the first, but since he already decided on including only four
poets in each class, he had to move him to the second level.

(4) Softness: The criterion of softness (al-lîn) as advanced by al-Asma'î was
also present in the work of Ibn Sallam. al-Asma'î argued that softness (al-lîn) in
poetry is often associated with inclination towards the good (al-khayrî and religion
ial-dîn). However, Ibn Sallâm does not establish a relationship between softness and inclination toward the good (al-khayr). He does however discuss the problem of moral looseness (ta‘ahhur) among some poets without, however, discussing it in terms of vigor or softness (or weakness) of the poetry itself. But he still uses the general concept of softness (al-lîn) to disqualify some poets from consideration. He says from example “the poetry of (the tribe of) Quraysh exhibits some softness (lîn) which creates a problem (for the critic).”

In addition, Ibn Sallâm does not agree with al-Asma‘ī and other early critics that the poetry of Hassân ibn Thâbit, the defender of the Prophet Muhammad, is soft, because it deals with religious and pious matters. Rather, he argues that Hassân was a productive and excellent poet who was, more than any other poet, a victim of much forged poetry. He seems to suggest that, whatever soft poetry is attributed to Hassân, it was the result of forgery.

In the course of his work, Ibn Sallâm advances several theoretical remarks regarding poetic creativity. For example, he speculates that war and conflict would lead to an increase in the production of poetry among the members of the tribes involved. Therefore, he argued that the city of Tâhif (near Mecca) did not produce a lot of poetry:

Poetry is more abundant when there are wars between tribes such as that between Aws and Khazraj (in Medina), or among people who invade others and are invaded by others. Also, the reason (the tribe of) Quraysh produced little poetry was that

18 Ibn Sallâm al-Jumâhî, 96.
they did not have a conflict among them and they did not go to war. The same
could be said about 'Umayn and the people of Ta'if...

This exemplify the notion that poetry played a major public and political role—and, hence,
a major rhetorical role—in early Arab culture. It also indicates that the early philologists
were concerned largely with the rhetorical (persuasive and public) dimensions of poetry.

In addition, Ibn Sallām suggested that the environment in which the poet lives
affects the style of poetry that will be produced. He stressed this notion while discussing
the poetry of ʿAdī ibn Zayd (of the fourth class of pre-Islamic poets), saying that this
poet lived in al-Ḥīrah (southern Iraq) and its outlying agricultural areas, therefore, "he had
a soft (supple) language and an easy articulation." Overall, these and other comments
were mostly suggested casually by Ibn Sallām and were not fully elaborated.

The contributions of Ibn Sallām to the study of Arabic rhetoric could be
summarized in the following way. First, he was the first Arab writer to claim an
independent scholarly field for the evaluation of poetry (and by extension other forms of
elocution), and to establish the importance of the critic (rhetorician) in this field. Second,
he established a model for other works of criticism which exhibits a systematic
organization and rational judgments for evaluative claims. Third, his evaluation and
ranking of poets reflect the prevailing wisdom among the early philologists which he
represented faithfully, coherently and succinctly. Fourth, he was the first to address
seriously the problem of authenticity of pre-Islamic poetry and to call attention to it.

19 Ibn Sallām al-Jumahir, 100-101.

Fifth, he also discussed the effect of the environment and social conditions on poetic creativity and style.

The works of the two philologists discussed so far (al-Asma’î and Ibn Sallâm) indicate a major emphasis on poetry. As mentioned previously, poetry often exhibits some rhetorical (i.e., persuasive, public and political) dimensions. This was certainly true of early Arabic poetry, as illustrated in chapter 3. Therefore, the interrelationship between poetics and rhetoric in the Arabic tradition was very strong from the beginning. However, this phenomenon is not exclusive to Arabic culture. In the Greek tradition, for example, the transmission of oral poetry and the role of rhapsodists (the transmitters of the Homeric epics and other poetry) were shown by Richard Leo Enos to be instrumental in shaping early Greek rhetorical theory. Therefore, as stated in chapter 3, the two rhetorical traditions are similar in the sense that they both have a strong basis in the study of poetry.

In addition to their interest in the evaluation of poetry, the early philologists were also interested in the language and style of the Qur’ân. In fact, some of them used their great knowledge of early Arabic poetry, including its obscure vocabularies, to help in interpreting the Qur’ân. One early religious authority, ‘Abd Allâh ibn ‘Abbâs, had proclaimed: “If something in the Qur’ân is not clear, look for it in poetry, for poetry is also Arabic.”21 The first substantive attempt to interpret the language of the Qur’ân using what is known from poetry and other Arabic speech forms was undertaken by Abû ‘Ubaydah.

Abū 'Ubaydah (d. 825)

Like al-Asma‘ī, Abū ‘Ubaydah Ma‘mar ibn al-Muthanna studied under Abū ṢAmr, Yūnis Ibn Ḥabīb and other founders of Arabic philology and became an authority on Arabic poetry as well as on early tribal history and genealogy. He lived in Basrah but traveled occasionally to Baghdad to entertain his patrons and engage in scholarly and literary debates with other philologists such as al-Asma‘ī and others. Many books are attributed to Abū ‘Ubaydah covering lexicography, genealogies, and proverbs among other topics. However, his most important book for the study of Arabic rhetoric is Majāz al-Qurān (Figurative Language in the Qur‘ān).

Abū ‘Ubaydah wrote this book for the purpose of explaining the obscure passages found in the Qur‘ān. It is one of the earliest known discussions of figurative language in Arabic. Therefore, in addition to its religious value, it is considered the first work explicitly devoted to aspects of the theory of Arabic rhetoric (al-balāghah). The word majāz in the title was used by Abū ‘Ubaydah to refer to the variety of admissible ways of expressing an idea or stating a fact in the Arabic language. In later centuries the same word took the technical meaning of a “figure of speech” in opposition to “literal statement.” However, at this early stage of theorizing, Abū ‘Ubaydah used it in the general sense to include all expressions that were vague or unusual and needed a philological, lexicographical, or syntactical explanation.

Abū ‘Ubaydah argued that the Qur‘ān was revealed in clear and pure Arabic. For example, God said: “We have revealed it, an Arabic Qur‘ān, so that you may understand.”

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22 Qur‘ān, 12: 2.
Therefore, the knowledgeable philologist should be able to interpret any passage that may be difficult for the lay person to understand. The specific reason for the writing of this book is that Abū 'Ubaydah was asked one day about this verse from the Qurʾān: "It is a tree that grows in the bottom of Hell. Its spathes are like the heads of satanic beings." The problem was that the verse compares the spathes of the tree with something unfamiliar to the listener (i.e., heads of satanic beings) which seems illogical. Abū 'Ubaydah answered that God spoke to the Arabs in a manner consistent with their language. The nature of the Arabic language, he argued, allows for this and similar figurative expressions. He added that it is often found in pre-Islamic poetry. For example, the poet Imruʿ al-Qays said that his sword was "as sharp as the fangs of the ghoul," even if the Arabs had never seen a ghoul. He concluded that the expression is valid because the mere notion of the ghoul is frightening to them. Abū 'Ubaydah later said: "After that day, I decided to write a book on these and similar phrases in the Qurʾān, and what is needed to know them. When I returned to Basrah, I wrote my book which I called al-Majāz." 

Some of Abī 'Ubaydah's contemporaries, such as al-ʿAsmaʿī, criticized him for interpreting the Qurʾān based on his own linguistic opinions. Most of them believed that interpreting the Qurʾān should be left for the religious scholars who were more qualified than philologists for this task. In addition, the rules of grammar at the time of his writing were not fully codified and agreed-upon; rather, they were highly controversial, which

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23 Qurʾān, 37: 64-65.

added to the critics' displeasure with his effort. Nevertheless, Abū 'Ubaydah was not
deterred and his book became widely known for its linguistic analysis. In addition, later
commentators added corrections to some of his mistakes in interpretation.

The book is organized according to the order of the chapters of the Qur'ān. The
problematic passages, phrases or single words in each chapter are explained and
commented upon, often by using pre-Islamic poetry as evidence for the explanation being
offered. In the introduction, Abū 'Ubaydah explains his motive for writing the book and
the method he will use. He starts by explaining the word Qur'ān itself. He shows that it is
used specifically to refer to the Arabic Book of God, and no other books are called by the
same name. Later he adds that:

The Qur'ān was revealed in the Arabic tongue. The proof of this is in a verse of
the Qur'ān. In another verse: "We did not send a Prophet except with the tongue of
his people." Therefore, the ancestors and those who lived during the revelations to
the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) did not protest nor did they ask about its
meanings, because they were of the Arabic tongue. Thus their (direct) knowledge
of it was enough for them not to ask about its meanings, or about the things
which are found in the speech of the Arabs, such as multiple meanings and
concision. The styles found in the Qur'ān are the same ones in Arabic speech
including ways of inflection, strange vocabularies, and literary notions. 25

However, Abū 'Ubaydah overlooks the fact that there were occasions during the Prophet's
lifetime when some of his companions did ask him about unknown expressions in the
Qur'ān. Thus, he continues to insist that, since the Qur'ān was revealed in "clear Arabic
speech," the early Muslims must have understood it fully and perfectly. In connection

25 Abū 'Ubaydah, Majāz al-Qur'ān, 8.
with this notion, he also denies that the Qurʾān contains any foreign words (borrowed from Persian, Syriac or Greek). If similar words exists, he argued, it is a mere coincidence. He concludes the introduction by saying:

The Qurʾān was revealed in a clear Arabic language. Thus, anyone who claims that it contains other than the Arabic language is greatly mistaken . . . The Qurʾān contains what Arabic contains including: strange words and notions, a variety of admissible figures, such as concision, omission, discontinued predicate, the use of the one to stand for the many, the use of the many to stand for the two, the use of the predicate of the many to stand for the predicate of the one, . . . using the third person pronoun for the second person pronoun, elliptical statements instead of explicit ones, repetition for the sake of assertion, generalization instead of repetition, changing the order of the sentence, . . . all this is admissible and they (the Arabs) have used it in their speech.26

Based on this premise, in the course of this work, Abū ‘Ubaydah gives many explanations, most of which are syntactical or lexicographical. In addition, he mentions several figures of speech which he, however, does not elaborate fully. These became the basis for much more detailed investigation by later rhetoricians. These include, for example, the word majaz (trope) itself, tashbih (simile), and kinayah (metonymy). Thus, Abū ‘Ubaydah’s work, Majaz al-Qurʾān, became one of the earliest known treatises that contributed significantly to the development of Arabic rhetorical studies (ilm al-balāghah).

Several decades later, in Baghdad, two philologists made important contributions to Arabic rhetorical theory. One was the grammarian Tha‘lab, representing the Kūfah school of grammar. The other was his rival, al-Mubarrad, who represented the more dominant Basrah school. While Tha‘lab’s work tended to be highly grammatical, al-

26 Abū ‘Ubaydah, Majaz al-Qurʾān, 18-19.
Mubarrad made a more diverse contribution covering, in addition to grammar, the nature of *balāghah* (eloquence), and the evaluation of poetry and oratory.

**Tha'lab (d. 904)**

Abū al-'Abbās Ahmad ibn Yahyā, known as Tha'lab, was a well-known grammarian who also had a great knowledge of early Arabic poetry. He lived in Baghdad and taught grammar, lexicography, poetry, and religious traditions. While in Baghdad, he represented the grammatical school of Kūfah in a famous rivalry with another famous philologist, al-Mubarrad, who represented the Basrah school. Many accounts of their rivalry was reported in the early Arabic sources. Some of Tha'lab's students went on to become famous rhetoricians, such as Ibn al-Mu'tazz and Qudâmah ibn Ja'far.

Tha'lab's contributions to the study of the theory of Arabic rhetoric comes mainly from his book *Qawsīd al-Shīr* (The Grammatical Rules of Poetry). Some scholars have questioned the attribution of this book to Tha'lab, but they agree that it does represent the grammatical thinking of the period in which he lived.

In this short book, Tha'lab outlines his grammatical view of poetry. He maintains that all poetry falls into one of four categories corresponding to the four types of sentences: (1) imperative (*amr*); (2) prohibition (*nahy*); (3) statement (*khabar*); and (4) inquiry (*istikhbar*). He gives examples of poetry for each type. He adds that these four types can then be divided into these sub-categories: (1) panegyric (*mādīh*, praise); (2) Satire (*hiyâ*, insult); (3) elegy (*rithâ*, dirge); (4) apology (*iṣtīdhar*); (5) love (*tashbîh*, praising women); (6) comparison (*tashbîh*, simile); and (7) telling of historical events (*iqtiṣâs al-akhbâr*). He then gives examples for each of the seven sub-categories. Almost all of the eleven types of poetic expressions are given by name only, followed by one or two lines of
poetry to illustrate them. He pays special attention to simile (tashbih) by giving additional examples of it. He suggests that a good simile should not be too exaggerated nor too simple. Also, more examples are given to illustrate the best panegyric lines which are said to represent the ultimate in praising someone's virtue.

In addition, Tha'lab discusses several rhetorical concepts which are related to the appreciation of poetry. Some of these are defined briefly and illustrated. For example, some lines of poetry are said to embody a "delicate meaning" (latâfîfat ma'na). This is defined as the use of intimation (tafrîd) rather than direct statement (tasrîh). Metaphor (istîrârah, borrowing) is defined as "to borrow for something a name or a meaning from something else." It is also illustrated by a number of examples. Some lines are given as examples of a good transition (husn al-khurûj, disengagement) between the first two sections of the formal ode (i.e. the love- and travel-sections) and the purpose-section of the ode. Tha'lab discouraged the use of standard phrases for transition, such as "leave all that aside," or "turn away from that." He concludes by discussing a list of concepts related to the structure of the line of poetry in terms of its meter and rhyme.

Tha'lab's initial grammatical terminology was not accepted by later critics, but his later discussion of simile and metaphor and other rhetorical concepts was more influential. Some of his rhetorical terminologies are found in the works of his students Ibn al-Mu'tazz and Qudâmah ibn Ja'far (to be discussed in later chapters).

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27 Tha'lab, Qawâ'id al-Shîr, 57.
Abū al-Abbās Muḥammad ibn Yazīd, known as al-Mubarrad, was the last important member of the philological school. Although he lived in Baghdad at a time of growing intellectual diversity, he remained loyal to the conventional philological methods and the traditional Arabic sources of poetry and literature. He was one of the most sought after teachers in Baghdad in matters of lexicography and grammar. He has several works on grammar and literature, the most important of which is his *al-Kāmil fī al-Lughah wa al-Adab* (The Complete (Reference) On Language and Literature). Also important for this discussion is his short epistle on eloquence, called *Risālah fī al-Balāghah* (An Epistle on Eloquence). He seems to be the first author to use the term *balāghah* (eloquence) in the title of a work. However, the term was not yet used in the sense of a distinct and independent field of study. The discussion of al-Mubarrad’s contribution to Arabic rhetorical theory begins with this short epistle.

**An Epistle on Eloquence (Balāghah)**

The emphasis in this work is on the difference between eloquence in poetry and eloquence in prose, which lead to speculation about the nature of eloquence as a rhetorical concept. Apparently, the reason for writing this epistle was to answer a question which al-Mubarrad received from a friend who wanted to know the difference between eloquence in poetry and eloquence in prose. The friend asked al-Mubarrad:
Which of the two types of eloquence is more eloquent, the eloquence of poetry or eloquence of oratory and speeches in prose and rhymed prose? Which of the two in your opinion—may God be pleased with you—is the most eloquent? 28

This question reflects the interest in the ninth century in comparing poets with writers of artistic prose, especially letter writers in the chancery, as well as orators and debaters. During this time, the status of prose writers in the chancery and elsewhere was on the rise and in rivalry with the status of poets. The questioner requires a comparison between poetry and prose rather than asking about the nature of eloquence itself. However, in order to answer it, al-Mubarrad finds it useful, if not necessary, to start by stating what he thinks the definition of balâghah is. He writes:

The essence of balâghah is for speech to encompass meaning, (this requires) selectivity in speech and excellence in arrangement, so that a word is harmonious with its neighbor and in balance with its form. With it (balâghah) the far becomes near and the excess (of speech) is omitted. 29

The definition above has two major parts. The first deals with style and arrangement. The word nazm (arrangement or composition) was used by al-Mubarrad in a very general sense to mean good and harmonious composition, but the same concept would in future centuries take on a specialized meaning with regard to the miraculous composition of the Qur'an. In the second part of the definition, al-Mubarrad stresses the function of balâghah

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28 Cited in Ahmad Maṭlūb, Manāḥīj Balâghīyah (Kuwait: Wakālat al-Maṭbū‘āt, 1973), 89.

29 Cited in Maṭlūb, Manāḥīj, 89.
by saying "with it the far becomes near." Here he is suggesting that the purpose of *balāghah* is to make known the things that were previously unknown to the listener. In other words, the purpose of *balāghah* is to inform and explain. This definition of *balāghah* is consistent with the definition of other writers of al-Mubarrad's time (and somewhat earlier) who were influenced by rationalist theology, such as al-Jāhiz. For example, al-Jāhiz says the purpose of *balāghah* (and *bayân*, another name for rhetoric) is to make things understood (a notion treated further in the next chapter). Therefore, it is probable that al-Mubarrad was influenced by the same mode of thinking which was prevalent during the early ninth century.

al-Mubarrad then proceeds to answer the question of which is more eloquent, poetry or prose. He states that both could be considered highly eloquent, but poetry has the advantage of meter and rhyme, which is a more difficult skill to master. This, he argues, gives the advantage to the poet over the orator or prose writer. He says:

> If this (the essence of *balāghah*) is equal in prose and poetry, so that there was no (perceived) merits of one over the other, then the author of poetry is more praiseworthy, because he composed a speech similar to that offered by his counterpart but added the meter and rhyme. The meter is a strict requirement, and the rhyme needs ingenuity.\(^{30}\)

Here, al-Mubarrad advances the notion that eloquence comes in many forms and that the task of the speaker or poet is to mold the content or meaning (ma'na) into the required

\(^{30}\) Cited in Matlub, *Manāhij*, 89.
shape whether it is a poem, a speech, or a letter, etc. He then adds a third notion, that of the actual delivery. He explains:

One aspect remains which cannot be determined when their speech is transmitted. It has to be evaluated while they are speaking to determine which one of the two is more capable of speaking, more at ease, with less struggling and difficulty. Accordingly, it will be known who has the advantage.31

Delivery, although important, seems to be of less value to al-Mubarrad than the previous requirements. Perhaps he was saying this at a time when most literature that was being discussed by scholars was in written form. The society itself had moved away from the "golden age" of oratory during the Umayyad period (although, skills in debate were valued by scholars in theological circles, a rhetorical phenomenon examined in chapter 6 and 7). In addition, the classic examples of poetry were being committed to written anthologies. Above all, the Qurʾān itself was now a written text. However, al-Mubarrad is one of the few Arab rhetoricians to discuss delivery explicitly. He elaborates on this aspect in his famous book al-Kāmil (see below, see also al-Jāhiz in the next chapter).

In the same epistle, al-Mubarrad goes on to discuss the eloquence of the Qurʾān and the speeches of the Prophet Muhammad. He argues that they represent the highest level of eloquence known to the Arabs because they are inspired by God. In the case of the Qurʾān, it is the direct speech of God himself. However, at this early stage of the Arabic rhetorical tradition, al-Mubarrad is not equipped with the methods of analysis that will later develop concerning the style of the Qurʾān. He limits himself to simple comparisons

31 Cited in Matlûb, Manâhij, 89.
between the best prose composed on a given topic and selections from the Qur'ān or the sayings of the Prophet concerning the same issue. He then shows that the Prophet Muhammad or the Qur'ān addressed the same topic in a highly eloquent manner beyond the reach of all other speakers.

Overall, the epistle on eloquence is devoted more to comparisons between literary genres than a general treatment of the nature and scope of *balāghah* (eloquence or rhetoric). This epistle also represents only a small part of al-Mubarrad’s writings on eloquence. He has a great deal more to say on the topic in his book *al-Kāmil*.

*al-Kāmil* As a Source For the Study of Eloquence

*al-Kāmil* is a source book on *adab* (literature), as the term was known in the Arabic tradition. Therefore, it includes discussions on a wide variety of topics, including grammar, lexicography, poetry, oratory, the style of the Qur'ān, etc. Many scholars have commented on this book in terms of its value for the study of early Arabic literature. For example, Ibn Khaldūn said that it was one among four original sources of Arabic literature. He wrote:

We heard from our teachers in the courts of learning that the sources of the art of *adab* and its pillars are four books. They are *al-Kāmil* by al-Mubarrad, *Adab al-Kātib* by Ibn Qutaybah, *al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn* by al-Jāḥiz, *Kitāb al-Nawādr* by

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Abū 'Alī al-Qâlî al-Baghdâdî, and that any (books) other than these four are derived from them or offshoots of them.\(^{33}\)

The main purpose of _al-Kâmil_ is pedagogical. It is addressed to al-Mubarrad's students, especially those who are looking for ways to enhance their own eloquence and rhetorical skills. Therefore, it includes a lot of advice on enhancing the student's style and eloquence. In fact, the book is said to have been written down by al-Mubarrad's student al-Akhfash al-Asghar, based on al-Mubarrad's lectures. At one point, the purpose of writing the book is explained this way:

> This is a book we composed containing types of literary productions (âdâb, sing. _adab_) including speeches in prose, crafted poetry, famous proverbs, effective exhortations, selections of noble sermons, and eloquent letters. Our intention is to interpret everything in it, (including) strange expressions and obscure meanings, and to explain some of it in terms of grammar, a full explanation, so that this book will stand sufficient by itself with no need to consult anyone about its meanings.\(^{34}\)

The book in fact includes a wealth of examples of eloquence, especially from the early period of Arabic literature. In addition, later in the book the author adds a comment about the approach in this book towards entertaining the reader in order to enhance the learning experience.

> Abū al-ʿAbbās [al-Mubarrad] said: we mention in this chapter something of everything so that the reader will find in it some recreation, and a transition to avoid boredom by way of nicely placed humor. We mixed seriousness with a little

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\(^{33}\) Ibn Khaldûn, _Muqaddimât Ibn Khaldûn_, 460.

\(^{34}\) al-Mubarrad, _al-Kâmil_, vol. II, 2.
amount of jest, so that the hearts will have a respite, and the souls will be attracted to it.\(^\text{35}\)

These qualities contributed to the fame and longevity of this book. In addition to the many examples of poetic and oratorical eloquence, al-Mubarrad gives many theoretical insights regarding eloquence. For example, he discusses the requirements for good delivery. He explains the concept of \textit{isti\'ânah} (to seek help). This is regarded as a drawback among poets and orators. However, it is manifested differently in each genre. In poetry, \textit{isti\'ânah} is the use of words or phrases which are not essential to the poem but are used for the sake of meter or rhyme (i.e., to help meet the requirements of the style without adding new meanings). In oratory, the speaker might use words or phrases which are not essential to the speech but which give him or her a chance to collect his or her thoughts and to remember what to say next. The concept also includes non-verbal behaviors that the speaker might engage in while trying to think of things to say. He wrote:

\[\text{As regards \textit{isti\'ânah} (seeking help), it is adding to the speech things for which the listener has no need, to correct the meter or the measurement when it occurs in poetry, or to remember what comes next when it occurs in oratory, such as what you hear in common speech when they say: "Don't you listen? Do you understand?" and the like. Also, the faltering speaker might occupy himself by twisting his fingers, touching his beard or other parts of his body, or clearing his throat repeatedly.}\(^\text{36}\)\]


This kind of discussion about delivery is rare in Arabic rhetorical theory, since most theorists (al-Jāhiz is an important exception) were concerned largely with textual analysis.

al-Mubarrad also discusses the concept of al-Majāz (figurative language), pointing out that speech might come in the form of figurative expressions as well as literal ones. He wrote:

Speech comes in different forms including direct reference originally meant for itself, indirect reference by way of an alternative equivalent, and some expressions are proverbial, which makes them more effective for articulating ideas.  

This is what later became known as literal (haqīqah, truth) vs. figurative expression (majāz, trope). al-Mubarrad does not develop this theoretical dichotomy much further. However, based on this theoretical notion, he goes on to discuss several types of figurative expression, including tashbīḥ (simile) and kināyah (metonymy).

al-Mubarrad pays special attention to simile, devoting a large section of his book, al-Kāmil, to illustrating it. He justifies this great attention to simile by saying that it is the form of literary expression most often used in the speech of the Arabs. He wrote: "Simile runs abundantly in the speech of the Arabs to the point that if someone were to say that it makes up most of their speech, he would not be mistaken." In another place he states: "Simile is abundant. It seems like a limitless topic." He discusses the good use of simile by

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giving numerous examples of it from early and modern (‘Abbāsid) poetry. Following al-Mubarrad's lead, several later critics wrote separate treatises on simile alone. For example, Ibn Abī 'Aawn wrote a book called al-‘Tashbîhât (Similes).

al-Mubarrad’s discussion of simile leads to several theoretical statements about its definition, elements, and literary function. He said "Know that what defines a simile is that the things (expressed) have to be similar in some ways and different in others." Although this is not a complete definition, al-Mubarrad wants to stress that the two parts of a simile have to have something in common to justify their connection, but they cannot be exactly the same so that they are one and the same thing. If things are so closely similar to each other, the simile will lose its rhetorical effectiveness and literary value. Therefore, the simile is a transfer of some elements of one part, but not all, to the other. For example, "If a face is said to be like the sun, the similarity is in terms of brightness and glamour, but not in size and heat." This indicates that the word "sun" means many things, such as brightness, glamour, great size, and heat, etc. The successful speaker joins the right elements and brings them together in a simile. Depending on the skill of the speaker, the resulting simile could be described in many ways by the critic. For example, the simile could be described as: good, excellent, charming, humorous, wonderful, strange, exaggerated, bad, silly etc. There seems to have been a long tradition of issuing such comments (by the earlier philologists and critics), which al-Mubarrad collects and organizes.

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al-Mubarrad also discusses metonymy (*kinâyah*). He said that there are three rhetorical functions for metonymy: (1) to be vague or secretive; (2) to avoid obscene words and use acceptable alternatives, i.e., euphemisms; and (3) to bestow honor and respect on someone. The first type is often used by poets who do not want to reveal the identity of their beloved in love-poems. al-Mubarrad says that the second function, the euphemism, is the most common and appreciated form of *kinâyah* because it allows for the avoidance of what might be considered obscene or vulgar. The third form of *kinâyah* includes calling a person by a nickname (*kunyah*) mostly in the form of Abū (the father of . . .) followed by the name of his son, regardless if he has, or does not yet have, a son by that name. al-Mubarrad suggests that even boys could be given this type of nickname to indicate optimism about their future as fathers. Finally, al-Mubarrad mentioned *isti'ârah* (borrowing, metaphor) but did not consider it to be separate from simile.

The above are some of the theoretical issues raised by al-Mubarrad in both his short epistle on eloquence and his longer work *al-Kâmil*. In conclusion, al-Mubarrad's contribution to Arabic rhetoric could be summarized as follows: First, he gave one of the earliest definitions of *balâghah*, devoting an epistle to its discussion. Second, he was one of the earliest writers to organize rhetorical concepts, such as simile and metonymy, into specialized chapters within larger works.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the contributions of the early philologists to the development of Arabic rhetorical theory. The work of the five scholars discussed above represent the most significant contributions of the early school of philology to this field of inquiry. It was found that the early philologists' main sources of inquiry were early
Arabic poetry and the Qurʾān. In general, they emphasized the rhetorical (persuasive, active, and public) role of poetry, which led to a close interrelationship between poetics and rhetoric in the Arabic tradition. The need for the interpretation of the Qurʾān for new generations of believers of Arab and non-Arab origin led to detailed examination of the Arabic language and of metaphorical expressions according to the usage of the early Arabs. In addition, there were outstanding, but not yet elaborated, attempts to classify and explain the major figures of speech, such as simile, and metonymy. Also, there was an interest in comparing the relative merits of literary and rhetorical genres, such as poetry, oratory and letter writing. All are said to have the potential for high eloquence (balāghah).

The diversity of scholarship in the ninth century will produce additional insights into Arabic rhetorical theory. This includes the contributions of writers who are often referred to as writers of adab (belles lettres). Their approach, which could be described largely as literary, will be the topic of the following chapter.
CHAPTER 6

THE LITERARY APPROACH TO ARABIC RHETORICAL THEORY

The early philological studies explored in Chapter 5 became the basis for what has been described as the literary approach to Arabic rhetoric. The phrase "literary approach" distinguishes the methods of these rhetoricians from the philological approach that preceded it, on the one hand, and the philosophical and theological systems that followed it, on the other. But it should be noted, as discussed in chapter 4, and as will be seen in this chapter, that there is a great deal of overlap between all these approaches. After a discussion of the characteristics of the literary approach, three major rhetoricians representative of it are chosen for discussion. They are: (1) the famous essayist and rhetorician al-Jāḥiz; (2) the conservative theologian and rhetorician Ibn Qutaybah; and (3) the poet and critic Ibn al-Mu'tazz.

The Literary approach (The Concept of Adab)

In the early centuries of the 'Abbāsid period (c. eighth-ninth century C.E.) a new style of Arabic prose writing was developed. This new literary medium was shaped by the efforts of several groups of scholars and practitioners. It was influenced largely by the intellectual, cultural, and ethnic diversity of the new Muslim society, especially in the cities of Iraq. Gibb explains that:
Of the changes and developments that resulted from these new conditions the most significant is the emergence of an Arabic literary prose, clear, precise, and well-articulated. This was the final product of a confluence of literary activities, which, during this first 'Abbâsid period, were pursued separately by the secretaries, the philologists, and the lawyers and Traditionists.

The role of the secretaries and early philologists was discussed in previous chapters. The scholars of Islamic law and tradition were also instrumental in shaping the new Arabic prose through their written treatises on law and religion. Within this context, a genre of prose writing called *adab* (manners, but broadly translated as belles lettres, or literature) was developed, mostly by the secretarial class. The purpose of this type of literature was the education of the secretaries and other court officials. Gibb elaborates:

> The function of this secretarial literature was didactic and ceremonial. It laid down the rules of conduct of princes, court officers, secretaries, and administrators of all kinds, and supplied the professional knowledge required for the performance of their duties, in the form of manuals, anecdotes, and romances. All this was comprised under the general head of 'manners' (*adab*).

When this literature began to be written, it was limited in scope and audience, being directed mostly to court officials. However, with the discovery of paper about the year 600 C. E., this literature gained a wider audience. Later generations of *adab* writers began to address themselves to a larger segment of the public, at the same time tackling

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1 Arabic Literature, 2nd. ed., 51.

2 Arabic Literature, 2nd. ed., 52.
increasingly sophisticated topics.\textsuperscript{3} The most influential figure in the early history of this genre of Arabic literature was al-Jâhîz (d. 869), as discussed in chapter 4. His younger contemporary, Ibn Qutaybah (d. 889) was also instrumental in shaping the course of \textit{adab} writing. The contribution of these two major figures to the development of Arabic rhetorical theory is discussed in this chapter. In addition, the poet and critic Ibn al-Mu'attazz (d. 908) contributed to the study Arabic rhetoric by collecting and classifying rhetorical and stylistic figures. His work, which he titled \textit{Kitāb al-Badî\textsuperscript{c}} (The Book of the Novel Style), will be discussed in the final section of this chapter.

\textbf{al-Jâhîz (d. 869)}

Abū 'Uthmān 'Amr ibn Bahr al-Jâhîz was a prose writer whose works rank among the greatest classics of Arabic literature. His style of \textit{adab} writing influenced (and continue to inspire) many later Arab writers. His most important work on rhetoric is called \textit{al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn} (Clarity and Clarification; hereafter \textit{al-Bayān}), but his views on the subject are also found in his encyclopedic work \textit{al-Hayawān} (The Animal) and numerous epistles. The book \textit{al-Bayān} was valued by many later scholars as a source of literature and rhetorical theory. As previously mentioned, the philosopher Ibn Khaldūn listed it among the four main sources for the study of Arabic literature.

In \textit{al-Bayān}, al-Jâhîz discusses a wide variety of topics related to eloquence and linguistic expression, including poetry, oratory, the Qurān, letter writing, and proverbs, among other issues. Unfortunately, the issues are not presented in an orderly fashion due

\textsuperscript{3} As mentioned in chapter 5, the term \textit{adab} cannot be defined with precision. See p. 149, n. 32.
to al-Jāhiz's well-known style of digressive writing. A later rhetorician, Abū Hilāl al-
'Askarī, commented on the significance of this book and the way it was written. He wrote
that he examined the works on balāghah that came before him and found that:

The largest and most famous among them is Kitāb al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn by Abū
Uthmān 'Amr ibn Bahr al-Jāhiz. Indeed it has many benefits and great value, for
it contains excellent chapters, subtle quotes, great speeches, outstanding reports,
and because of its inclusion of the names of orators and eloquent speakers, and its
mention of their skill in eloquence and oratory, in addition to its other selections
and excellent commentary. However, the explanation of the definition of balāghah
and the types of bayān and fasābah (euphony) are distributed among its chapters
and scattered within its sections. Thus, they are lost among the examples, not to be
found except by long study and frequent search.

This comment by Abū Hilāl is representative of the opinion of most Arab rhetoricians
who admired al-Jāhiz and were influenced greatly by his treatment of rhetoric in al-
Bayān. In general, the major topics discussed in al-Bayān by al-Jāhiz can be classified
under the following categories: (1) Bayān (Clarity, rhetoric, communication); (2) Balāghah
(eloquence) (3) Oratory (khatābah); (4) Poetry (shīr); (5) Examples of speeches, poetry, and
letters; and (6) Theoretical concepts and Rhetorical Terminology.

The Concept of Bayān

The word bayān is generally defined in terms of communicating an idea clearly
and unambiguously, the purpose being ifhām (making things understood). In his opening
remarks, al-Jāhiz says that God sent prophets and messengers through the ages to inform

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people about him. These prophets used bayân to communicate this message. For example, he quotes this line from the Qur'ân: "He created man and taught him bayân." The Qur'ân itself is said to be a form of bayân: "We revealed the Book on to you (using bayân) to explain everything." Al-Jâhiz gives a great number of similar examples of how the word bayân is used in the Arabic language through poetry, oratory and the Qur'ân. However, at page 75, he stops to give his formal definition of the concept in a chapter titled Bâb al-Bayân (A Section on Bayân). He argues that human thoughts are usually concealed in the mind, but they are revealed through bayân (communication):

Some of the great scholars of utterances and evaluators of meanings have said that ideas are to be found in people's hearts, envisioned in their minds, gnawing at their souls, linked to their imagination, occurring in their intellect, hidden and concealed, far and remote, enclosed and sheltered. They take place but seem to be nonexistent. A man does not know the inner thoughts of his companion, the desires of his friend or acquaintance, the ideas of his associate and helper in his affairs . . . But what brings these thoughts to life is their talking about them, declaring them, and utilizing them. These activities are what brings them closer to the understanding, clarifying them to the mind, making the hidden visible, the absent present, the far near. They also simplify the complex, untangle the knotty. They make the scattered tidy, the shackled free, the unknown known, the alien familiar, the uncertain certain, the certain fixed.⁵

Thus, bayân is a process of communication and elucidation that starts as private thoughts and ends as spoken or written words, revealing the ideas, feelings and intentions of their makers to a wider audience. The degree of understanding between individuals is dependent on the degree of clarity of this communication process:

⁵ al-Bayân, 1, 75.
To the extent that the signs are clear, the indications sound, the concision proper, and the approach accurate, the meaning will be clear. When the sign is more clear and correct, the indication more distinct and lucent, the benefit and value will be greater. The sign that indicates a hidden meaning is called *bayān*. It is what God (The Great Almighty), as you heard him, exalts, advocates, and recommends. With it, the Qur'ān was articulated. And with it, the Arabs boasted among each other, and various nations of non-Arabs competed.\(^6\)

The process of *bayān* is a social phenomenon common to all nations. However, individuals and nations vary in the degree to which they are able to utilize this God-given skill. It is a process of communication that includes verbal as well as non-verbal means. The main purpose of *bayān* is to make things understood:

*al-Bayān* is a comprehensive word for everything that uncovers for you the mask of meaning, and unveils the curtain away from concealed thoughts, so that the listener will realize their true meaning, and harvest their fruits in whatever type of *bayān* it may be, and whichever kind of signification is used. Hence, the main issue, and the purpose to which the speaker and the listener strive, is to understand and make things understood. So, any means you use to reach understanding and clarify the meaning is called *bayān* in that particular situation.\(^7\)

In the above definition, al-Jāhiz states that there are different ways of expressing ideas and feelings, all of which can be called *bayān* as long as they communicate ideas clearly. Specifically, according to al-Jāhiz, there are five types, or means, of *bayān*:

All ways of signifying meaning, either in words or other than words, are five things no less and no more. First is the word, then gesture, then calculation

\(^{6}\) *al-Bayān*, I, 75.

\(^{7}\) *al-Bayān*, I, 76.
(arithmetic), then writing, then the situation which is called *nisbah*. And *nisbah* is a situation that signifies itself and stands for the above types and is no less than them. Each one of the five has its own form which is distinct from the others.  

In this list of five types of bayān, words (speech) is given first which indicates its high importance for al-Jāhiz. In fact, most of the book is devoted to this type of bayān, almost to the exclusion of others. He goes on to explain each type in turn. As regards words, he casually states his opinion about the separation between utterances and meaning, without much elaboration. However, he will return to this topic later in the book. His comments about the separation between utterances and meaning will have a great impact on many later rhetoricians. About utterances he writes:

> Also, know—may God protect you—that evaluating ideas is different from evaluating utterances (words), because ideas are extended to no end and expanded with no interruption, but the words that express these meanings are limited and calculable, collectable and restricted.  

This separation between words and ideas was to become an influential concept among many Arab rhetoricians. Following al-Jāhiz, most later rhetoricians put the emphasis on words and style as the foundation for eloquence. It was the critic ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (tenth century) who argued forcefully that eloquence is a result of a combination of the two elements within artistic discourse.

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8 *al-Bayān*, 1, 76.

9 *al-Bayān*, 1, 76.
The second element on the list of five types of bayān is gestures, or non-verbal behavior, which can help or, sometime, stand for words:

As for gestures, they are made with the hand, the head, the eye, the eyebrow, and shoulder, when two persons are far from each other; and with dress and sword. A man might make a threat by raising a sword or a whip which becomes a deterrent, a dissuasion, and a rebuke, and is taken to be a warning and admonishing. Gestures are partners with words, they assist them and illuminate them, and often replace them.10

Gestures are important for al-Jāhiz, especially when he discusses elsewhere in the book the mannerisms of the Arab orator. He argues that people in every nation have their own unique mannerisms that become manifest while given a speech. The motivation for this discussion was largely in response to the attacks by non-Arab groups (the group known as al-shuʿubiyah) on the mannerisms of Arab orators. For example, they objected to the Arab orator’s use of a stick for pointing or as support while standing. al-Jāhiz argues that these are established habits among the Arabs which in fact enhance the orator’s delivery. Aside from this specific dispute, however, al-Jāhiz does not offer further discussion on the role of non-verbal behavior in communication.

The third form of bayān is writing. In discussing its value, al-Jāhiz compares it with speaking and finds that writing has the advantage of persisting through time, so that its benefit will outlive its producer, while speaking is of benefit only to those who are present when the speech is given:

10 al-Bayān I, 77.
It is said "The pen is a second tongue" . . . and "The pen has a more-lasting influence, while the tongue produces more nonsense" . . . It is also said "The tongue is limited to the near and present, but the pen is extended to the present and the absent." It was of benefit for those who are gone and dead as well to those who are now living. Also the book is read everywhere and studied in every age, but the tongue reaches only the listener and no one else.  

Writing is also of great importance for al-Jâhiz, since he was living in a period when Arab-Islamic society was being transformed from an oral to a literate culture. The value of books as tools for the transmission of knowledge was gaining greater acceptance among the learned public.

The fourth type of bayân is counting (al-‘aqd) or "calculating, which is arithmetic aside from words and writing." al-Jâhiz argues that humans need the knowledge of arithmetic (hisâb) to be able to count the days, the months, the years, and the seasons. It is also used in calculating the movements of the stars, the sun, and the moon in the heavens. All of these phenomena are expressions (bayân) of how the universe is made according to specific laws. If people did not know ways of measuring these phenomena, a great benefit would be lost.

The fifth and last type of bayân, according to al-Jâhiz, is called nisbah (a signifying situation or event). He explains that humans gain an understanding from a situation without using any of the above four types of bayân, that is to say, by observing a situation directly and being a witness to it:

As for nisbah, it is the situation which articulates without words, gesturing without hands. This is clear in the creation of the heavens and earth . . . A silent

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11 al-Bayân, 1, 79.
thing can articulate by signifying . . . Therefore, the ancient author (al-awal) said
"Ask the earth and say: who parted your rivers and planted your trees and
harvested your fruit. If it did not answer you with speech, it will answer you by
implication." 12

By using the term nisbah, al-Jâhiz seems to be referring to the context of communication.
Unfortunately, this notion is not discussed much further by al-Jâhiz. In fact, although al-
Jâhiz gives five distinct types of bayân, he is mainly concerned with the first one—
communication through the spoken word. This is generally referred to as bayân,
sometimes, as fašahah (euphony, correctness of speech), but most often, as balâghah
(eloquence). The concept of balâghah is defined by al-Jâhiz in a variety of ways.

The Concept of Balâghah

In discussing the concept of balâghah, al-Jâhiz provides several definitions
attributed to a variety of people and nations. For example he gives the following
definition attributed to the Bedouins which emphasizes conciseness. The definition comes
in the form of an anecdote associated with the fifth caliph (the first ruler of the Umayyad
dynasty), Mu̇awiyyah, who asked a tribesman about eloquence:

Mu̇awiyyah asked Sahâr al-Åbdî "What is balâghah among you?" He said,
"Concision (fā兹)." Mu̇awiyyah asked, "What is concision?" Sahâr said, "That you
answer without hesitation, and speak without error." 13

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12 al-Bayân, l, 81.

13 al-Bayân, l, 96.
This definition reinforces the notion that the early Arabs preferred concision in discourse, that is, the ability to communicate a certain idea effectively and correctly with the least amount of words. The same definition is also emphasized and elaborated in another anecdote told in a conversation between two early philologists quoted by al-Jāhiz:

Ibn al-ʿrābī said that al-Mufaddal ibn Muḥammad al-Dabbī said: “I asked one Bedouin (afrābī) among us ‘What is balāghah?’ He said to me, ‘Concision without weakness and elaboration without drivel.’ Ibn al-ʿrābī said, “I asked al-Mufaddal, ‘What is concision in your opinion?’ He said ‘To omit what is superfluous and to make the far near’...”  

The above definitions reflect the early Arabs’ view of balāghah before the advent of Islamic culture. It emphasized concision and improvisation as well as innate ability. Later, some philologists began to give somewhat more detailed definitions. For example, this definition is attributed to the philologist al-ʾAttābī:

A friend told me: 1 asked al-ʾAttābī what is balāghah? He said, “Everyone who makes his purpose understood by you without repetition, stammering, nor istiʿānah (seeking help) is balīgh (eloquent). But if you are asking about the speaker who surpasses other speakers, and exceeds all orators, then it is to clarify the hidden truth, and to portray falsity in the shape of truth.”

In this definition, al-ʾAttābī is referring to two different concepts of balāghah. The first one is the Arabic concept mentioned earlier but in an elaborated form. The second is

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14 al-Bayān, 1, 97.
15 al-Bayān, 1, 113.
referring to the style of debate practiced by theologians and dialecticians of the time (the
ninth century). The idea of "portraying falsity in the shape of truth" might be referring to
disputation exercises and techniques practiced by various debaters, especially among the
rationalist theologians, the Mu'تazilah. Unfortunately, no more details are given about
these activities. If rhetorical manuals for debates of this kind existed at some point they
are no longer extant, nor are they referred to in any great detail by later Arab
rhetoricians.

With regard to the first part of the definition, al-Jāhiz takes issue with the
explanation of balāghah offered by al-"Attābī. al-Jāhiz does not agree that anyone who
can make his purpose understood by others is eloquent. He goes on to clarify al-"Attābī's
statement:

When al-"Attābī claimed that everyone who makes his purpose understood by you
is eloquent, he did not mean that anybody, including groups of half-Arabs and city
dwellers, who makes clear to us his purpose and intention by way of a colloquial,
altered and aberrant speech, is judged to be eloquent regardless of what form his
speech takes, as long as we understand him. Anybody who claims that balāghah is
that the listener understands the purpose of the speaker is making euphony and
barbarism, wrong use and correct use, vagueness and clarity, solecism and
decension—all the same, all bayān (clarity). But how could all this be bayān? . . .
What al-"Attābī meant was to make the Arabs understand your purpose according
to the ways of the speech of the eloquent Arabs.\footnote{al-Bayān, I, 162.}

Therefore, balāghah is a level of artistic speech that is above the level of everyday
conversation. Later, al-Jāhiz give a short definition of balāghah which emphasize clarity
and quickness of impact on the listener. He states that he prefers this definition:

\footnote{al-Bayān, I, 162.}
Someone said—and this is among the best of what we found and recorded—"A speech does not deserve to be called eloquent until there is a race between its words and meaning, its meaning and words, so that its words do not reach your ear quicker than its meaning your heart."\(^{17}\)

This definition emphasizes the impact on listeners. Eloquent speech has an immediate impact and it is easily understood. Therefore, words should be pleasing to the ear while the ideas should be free from complication. al-Jāhiz then moves on to give definitions of balāghah attributed to two famous writers. One is Ibn al-Muqaffā who gives this all-embracing description:

*al-Balāghah* is a term for several notions which come in many forms: some in silence, some in listening, some in gesturing, some in disputation, some in answering, some in introductions, some in poetry, some in rhyme prose and orations, some in epistles. These categories in general, in the way they hint at, indicate, or sum up a meaning, are called *balāghah*.\(^{18}\)

This definition by Ibn al-Muqaffā reflects the literary and intellectual environment of this well-known secretary and writer of *adab*. It brings together many of the literary and rhetorical genres practiced during that period.

In addition to definitions of *balāghah* in Arab culture, al-Jāhiz provides remarks about the concept attributed to persons from other nations such as in this famous passage:

\(^{17}\) *al-Bayān*, I, 115.

\(^{18}\) *al-Bayān*, I, 115-116.
The Persian was asked, what is *balāghah*? He said "Knowing the places of division and connection." The Greek was asked, what is *balāghah*? He said "Correctness in divisions and selectivity of speech." The Roman was asked, what is *balāghah*? He said "Good concision during spontaneous occasions and richness when elaborateness is required." The Indian was asked, what is *balāghah*? He said "Clarity of the argument, seizing the opportunity, and good gesture." Some people of India said: "The collective elements of *balāghah* is knowing the argument and the places of opportunity." Then he said: "The knowledge of arguments and places of opportunity might require you to forgo explicitness and rely on intimation, if explicitness is a rugged path, and relinquishing it is more likely to achieve the goal and aptly to succeed."¹⁹

The above passage indicates al-Jāhiz’s interest in rhetoric among other nations. Unfortunately the information he provides tends to be vague and stereotypical. It gives a hint at the type of intellectual interaction between various ethnic and cultural groups in Baghdad in the eighth and ninth century. Although this discussion about the nature and scope of rhetoric among representatives of various nations and cultures was not fully documented, it indicates that some Arab theorists exhibited an interest in cross cultural rhetoric.

In one case, al-Jāhiz explains that the Indian physicians who were invited to Baghdad were asked about *balāghah* among their people. One of them replied that they have a sheet containing remarks on the subject. The sheet was then given to translators to put into Arabic. a-Jāhiz then quotes, from this Indian sheet, the following description of *balāghah*:

> Foremost for *balāghah* is to have all its conditions present together. These include that the speaker be composed and calm, exhibiting little eye shifting, selective in his words. He should not talk to a slave the same way he talks to a free man, nor to

¹⁹ *al-Bayān*, I, 88.

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kings with the speech of the common people. He must treat each class knowingly. He should not be too meticulous with his ideas, nor should he polish his words too carefully, nor purify them too closely, nor smooth them too finely. He should not do this unless he meets a wise man, a knowledgeable philosopher, or someone who is used to the conciseness of speech, and the discarding of overlapping vocabularies, and knowledgeable about the science of logic in a genuine manner. The important thing is to inform each group according to their ability.

This definition mentions the speaker's ability and composure, but emphasizes the importance of knowledge of the situation and the context of speech, in addition to knowledge of the social and educational level of the audience.

Elsewhere, al-Jâhiz quotes a long passage from a sheet written by a famous member of the Mu'tazilah theological movement named Bishr ibn al-Mu'tamir. al-Jâhiz reports that Bishr came upon an orator by the name of Ibrâhîm ibn Jabalah while he was teaching oratory to a group of boys. Bishr stood to observe the lesson, but later told the boys to leave aside what they have been taught and read, instead, the instruction on a sheet he offered to them. al-Jâhiz then quotes the sheet which runs for about three pages. In it Bishr gives advice on learning speaking and writing, focusing mostly on natural talent and the benefit of long practice. In addition, he emphasized the awareness of the requirements of each situation in terms of the style and vocabulary used.

Based on the various definitions of balâghah above, and Bishr's sheet, several requirements of eloquence can be identified. Many of these requirements are discussed by al-Jâhiz throughout his book. They can be summarized as follows:

\[\text{al-Bayān, I, 92-93.}\]
(1) Concision and Elaboration (\textit{al-tjåz} and \textit{al-\text{\text{tnâb}}}). As the definitions given by the early Arabs indicate, concision (\textit{tjåzi} was a highly valued way of expression. This continued to be the case among most Arab rhetoricians who tried to explain its nature and appropriate use while, at the same time, contrasting it with elaboration and the occasions for its use. al-Jåhiz also admired concision, giving examples of it in the form of proverbs and short clever remarks attributed to various early Arabs, including the Prophet Muhammad. He concludes that "the best speech is that of which a little is more adequate than a lot. Its meaning is on the surface of its words." However, he points out that there are occasions where elaboration (\textit{\text{tnâb}}) is required, such as during speeches of peace-making between tribes. But elaboration, he warns, should not be confused with meaningless repetition; rather, all statements should be of added value to the speech. This became a common issue of discussion among later rhetoricians.

(2) The Awareness of the Requirement of the Situation. This was emphasized in Bishr’s sheet. He instructed that a speaker must be aware of the appropriateness of the ideas to the audience and the situation they are in. Each class has its own vocabulary. He explains that, for example, if the speaker is a theologian he should not use theological jargon unless he is addressing fellow theologians. This concept also became a central notion in Arabic rhetoric, usually encapsulated in the phrase \textit{murâ\text{"at muqtada al-hål} (tending to of the requirements of the situation) or \textit{li kul maqâm maqâl (to each situation its own speech). As mentioned in chapter 3,

\footnote{\textit{al-Bayân}, I, 83.}
this notion is similar to the Greek concept of *kairos* (the ability to known the appropriate thing to say or do in a particular situation).

(3) Style: or the Relation between Words and Meaning. This is one of the most controversial issues in Arabic rhetoric. al-Jâhiz suggests in many places that eloquence depends mostly on excellent expression, because ideas are available to everyone and found everywhere. It is the skill of verbalizing and articulating these ideas that is important to eloquence. He said in a famous statement that subject matter or topics (*ma^ânî*) "are scattered in the streets and known to non-Arabs and Arabs, to nomads and villagers." He also argued that words should be suitable to the ideas they express "for each kind of topic there is a type of utterance, for each type of subject there is a type of name, the humorous for the humorous, the light for the light, the serious for the serious." It seems that al-Jâhiz's emphasis on words over meaning (along with other cultural factors) had a major impact on later rhetoricians, who focused much of their attention on stylistic devices.

On the other hand, al-Jâhiz mentioned the concept of *nazm* (arrangement or composition), where the ideas and meaning collaborate in producing eloquence, especially in the case of the Qur^ân*. He states that he wrote a book titled *Nazm al-Qur^ân* (The Composition of al-Qur^ân*); however, it did not survive, and not much is known about its content. The concept of *nazm* was later elaborated by

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rhetorical theorists who were interested in the style of the Qur'ān (this will be discussed in chapter 7).

In addition to the discussion of the above theoretical issues, al-Jāhiz provides numerous examples of oratory and poetry in his book. As a result, his book *al-Bayān* became a valuable source of early Arabic rhetorical theory and practice.

Ibn Qutaybah (d. 889)

Abū Muḥammad ʿAbd Allāh ibn Muslim al-Dīnawarī, known as Ibn Qutaybah, was a conservative theologian and writer of *adab* works. Many of his writings reflect his reaction against rationalist theology during a time of orthodox resurgence. It is said that, while al-Jāhiz was the most outspoken representative of the Muʿtazilah, Ibn Qutaybah is the most vocal representative of the Sunnī (orthodox) movement. He wrote many works of theology and traditional commentary. However, his contribution to rhetoric comes mainly from four books: (1) *Adab al-Kâtib* (The Craft of the Secretary); (2) *Tāwīl Mushkil al-Qur'ān* (Interpretation of the Difficult Passages of the Qur'ān); and (3) *al-Shi'r wa al-Shu'arāʾ* (Poetry and Poets), in addition to his anthologies of *adab* and traditions such as *ʿUyūn al-Akhbār* (Fountains of Stories) and *al-Maʿārif* (Knowledge).

*Adab al-Kâtib* (The Craft of The Secretary)

Ibn Qutaybah wrote *Adab al-Kâtib* as a guide for writers in the chancery. He points out that the level of writing skills and linguistic and rhetorical knowledge in his time was deteriorating. Therefore, he decided to write this guide to help in correcting this situation. In the introduction he describes the bad state of *adab* and learning among the
public. In addition, he criticizes people who are enamored by foreign (Greek) logic. He observes that many of them engage in trivial (hypothetical) logical riddles which have no benefit to them or to society. At the same time they turn away from the real source of Arabic and Islamic learning and traditions. Because they are ignorant of the value of Arabic sources of knowledge and eloquence, they favor books on logic, which in his opinion are not as worthy of study. He comments that the author of the Logic (i.e. Aristotle, although he does not mention him by name) himself would be impressed by Arabic ways of expression, if he were to know them. He writes:

If the author of the Definition of Logic were alive today, so he might listen to the subtlety of discourse in religion, jurisprudence, the law of inheritance, and grammar, he would have become speechless. Or if he were to listen to the speech of the Messenger of God (peace be upon him) and his Companions, he would surely realize that the Arabs have wisdom and clarity of speech.24

The above comment reflects Ibn Qutaybah’s conservatism and his defense of traditional Islamic scholarship and literature. Thus, he laments that the writers (secretaries) of his time are not taking advantage of the Arabic source of knowledge. He describes these writers as lazy and happy with what little knowledge they have. Many of them are put in embarrassing situations in the courts of their employers. For example, one was asked about an Arabic word, but it was unfamiliar to him and he could not explain it or pronounce it correctly. In order to help in correcting this situation, Ibn Qutaybah decided to write his book, Adab al-Kātib, and include in it all the necessary information for a

24 Adab al-Kātib, 11-12.
writer. He said he made it accessible and easy to use, so that its benefit would reach a great number of people. However, he adds that it is addressed to those who already know basic grammar and lexicography and are ready to build on their basic knowledge to improve their writing and professional skills.

Ibn Qutaybah continues in his introduction to list briefly the kinds of knowledge and expertise that would be required for a secretary, a profession that seems to have been reserved exclusively for men. First, in addition to this book, the writer must also study the science of land-surveying and geometry for the purpose of assessing the value of agricultural lands and taxation. This knowledge has to be practiced in the field, so the writer should not be happy with knowing it only from books. Therefore, he has to have intimate knowledge of agricultural methods, irrigation, farming tools, and building of dams, in addition to his knowledge of the seasons and the lunar calendar. Ibn Qutaybah stresses that this type of knowledge is necessary for the secretary and without it his education is incomplete.

Second, the secretary also has to know the basics of Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) with regard to resolving disputes and judging cases. He also has to study famous historical anecdotes (precedents) related to these legal issues. He has to memorize speeches of the Prophet and use them in his writing and conversation.

Third, and most importantly, the writer has to have a sound intellect and a natural good disposition. With them a little knowledge is enough, but without them a lot of knowledge is insufficient:

We like for the one who follows us, and is guided by our books, to cultivate his soul before he cultivates his tongue, polish his manners before he polishes his words, protect his virtue from the baseness of gossip and his craft from the
disgrace of lying, and avoid—above his avoidance of solecism and idle talk—repugnant speech and vulgar conversations.  

Humor could be used judiciously, if it does not involve lying or deception.

Fourth, and in terms of style of speech and writing, the secretary should avoid *taqsef* (drawl, pompous speech). He should also, if he can, avoid the places where grammar might be too difficult for him, so that he can be safe from solecism. In general, the writer should avoid strange vocabularies and complicated sentences. Fifth, the writer should use the language that is suitable for both the status of the author of the letter and the one addressed by the writing. This is in accordance with the notion of knowing the requirements of the situation discussed earlier, which is similar to the Greek concept of *Kairos*. Thus, the writer should not address the lower classes with the highest vocabulary, nor the the highest classes with the lowest type of speech. Ibn Qutaybah observed that many of the writers of his time are ignorant about styles of address (protocol) which, in his opinion, are very important. For example, the use of the pronoun "We" instead of "I" indicating that the speaker is a great or important person. It is the speech of kings and rulers. It is also used in the Qur'an when God refers to himself.

The letter must also be consistent in its content and meaning. Ibn Qutaybah points to a common problem in letters where the conventional opening formula is a praise for the addressee, while the topic of the letter is, in fact, a rebuke of the same person. For example, in the beginning of a letter, the writer might use the usual phrase, "May God be pleased with you," and "May God protect you." However, in the middle of the letter, faults

\[25\] *Adab al-Kātib*, 16.
of the addressee are mentioned, followed by a phrase such as, “May God curse you,” and, “May God humiliate you.” This, he points out, cannot be said in one and the same letter. He then gives what he calls the rule of suitability for speech (Tanzīl al-Kalâm) quoting what seems to be a Persian source:

Indeed, speech is of four types: To request something, to ask about something, to give orders, or to inform (tell news). These are the main types of letters. You will not find a fifth kind, and if one is missing they are incomplete. If you ask for something (petition), use rhymed prose. If you ask about something, be clear. If you give orders, be just. If you are telling news, be truthful. Ibn Qutaybah says that the source added: You should say most of what you want in the fewest words. 26

Each occasion has its own style, most of which will require concision (ijāz). But Ibn Qutaybah points out that concision is not suitable in every occasion, because there are occasions where long speeches are required, citing the famous phrase: li kul maqām maqāl (for each situation its own speech). He explains that, if concision was desirable in every context, God would have made the Qurʾān very short and abstract, but he did not. Therefore, the Qurʾān has long passages for assertion, and short passages, and repetition, etc. He adds that, in some occasions, long speeches are required, such as when one is calling for war, in which case he should not be concise. The same is true when calling for peace between tribes.

The above summarizes the important issues raised by Ibn Qutaybah in his introduction to *Adab al-Kātib*. As for the book itself, it is highly technical and grammatical in most parts. It is divided into four parts as follows:

1. **knowledge ma'rifah**: This includes basic instructions on a variety of issues, which the writer might be expected to know during his career. These include, for example: the calendar, the seasons, weather conditions, plants, horses, foods and drinks, clothing, and weaponry, etc.

2. **Correction of the Hand**: This part deals with problems encountered during writing, especially the spelling of difficult words.

3. **Correction of the Tongue**: This part is devoted to the correction of pronunciation by way of correct spelling. It included common mistakes and how to avoid them.

4. **Grammatical Issues**: This deals with a great number of grammatical points, focusing on inflection and ways of knowing the proper structure of sentences.

As a companion to this book, Ibn Qutaybah wrote the anthology called *'Uyun al-Akhbār* (The Fountains of Stories). The book is divided into ten chapters covering a variety of issues such as kingship, war, friendship, manners and ethics, etc. Of special interest is a chapter called *al-‘Ilm wa al-Bayān* (Learning and Eloquence). In the first part of this chapter, Ibn Qutaybah discusses the value of knowledge and learning. He gives many anecdotes about famous scholars and their efforts in gaining and imparting knowledge. Later, he discusses *bayān*, by which he means eloquence. He again provides
quotations about the value of eloquence attributed to the Prophet and his companions and various poets and scholars. Many of these passages were already cited by al-Jāhiz in his book al-Bayān. Ibn Qutaybah concludes this chapter with a number of examples of speeches and sermons attributed to famous figures in Islamic history down to his age. He also wrote another book, al-Maʿārif (Knowledge) along the same lines, focusing on traditions attributed to the Prophet and early Islamic figures.

Ibn Qutaybah's work on adab al-kātib, along with his anthologies on literature and eloquence, became influential sources for rhetorical teachings. They also inspired later rhetoricians to write similar works for the purpose of teaching and preserving Arabic rhetoric and literature. The genre of adab al-kātib, that is, works devoted to teaching the principal areas of knowledge required for the secretary, became an important part of the Arabic rhetorical tradition.

The Style of The Qur'ān

Ibn Qutaybah also wrote a famous book on the interpretation of the Qur'ān called Taʾwīl Mushkil al-Qur'ān (The Interpretation of the Difficult Passages of the Qur'ān). In writing this book, he was motivated by what he referred to as the ignorance of those who interpreted the Qur'ān wrongly, and of those who claimed that it contains grammatical and semantic mistakes. In doing so, he explains a large number of linguistic and rhetorical issues, which makes this book of great value for the development of Arabic rhetorical theory. The following is a discussion of the major issues raised in this book.

The Introduction and Chapter One: In the introduction as well as in the first chapter, Ibn Qutaybah explains his purpose for writing this book. He basically wants to refute the claims of certain religious groups who found faults in the Qur'ān, or
interpreted it wrongly. Most of these groups belonged to the Mu'tazilah branch of theology and used rationalist methods to interpret the Qur'an. They used their knowledge of Greek logical methods to analyze the content of the Qur'an. As a result, many controversial religious issues were debated. Some of these debates centered around the concept of God's unity and his attributes. In general, the Mu'tazilah denied any physical attributes to God. They argued that the passages in the Qur'an that speak of God's hand, eyes, voice, and hearing, etc. are to be taken metaphorically. On the other extreme, other groups believed that God has a physical body and advocated *tashbih* (anthropomorphism).

Ibn Qutaybah takes a conservative middle position arguing that Muslims should accept God's description of himself in the Qur'an (as well as the Prophet's description of God), but without asking for more explanation about the nature of these attributes.

This discussion leads Ibn Qutaybah to the analysis of the style of the Qur'an and the Arabic language itself. He argues that many of the problems of interpretation come as a result of ignorance of the ways of expression in the Arabic language, especially as used in the Qur'an. He argues that the Arabs were gifted with eloquence and an abundance of figurative expressions (*majáz*).

Chapters Two through Six are devoted to the refutation of the claims that the Qur'an has semantic or grammatical mistakes, or that it has contradictory and vague statements. He again argues that these issues could only be understood by those who know the ways of the Arabic language and the Islamic tradition.

Chapter Seven discusses the term *Majáz* (figurative language). Ibn Qutaybah uses this term in the same way Abū 'Ubaydah used it in his *Majáz al-Qur'an*, that is, in the sense of figurative language in general (as discussed in chapter 5 of this dissertation). Under this broad category of *majáz*, Ibn Qutaybah includes, for example, metaphor, omission,
repetition, intimation, euphemism, among others. Thus, the term *majaz* here could be said to mean literary device.

Ibn Qutaybah points out that the Mu'tazilah took the idea of figurative language to the extreme, so that they even denied that God has the attribute of speech. They used some expressions in the Qur'ân to show that the word "say" or "speak" must be taken figuratively. For example, the heavens and earth "both said we obeyed (God);" and "The day when We say to hellfire: Are you full? She will say: Is there more?" They argued that the heavens and earth and hellfire certainly did not speak. Therefore, God's dialogue with them is figurative, not real. Ibn Qutaybah replied that it is true that, in Arabic, this type of *majaz* is used for inanimate objects. However, when it comes to God's speech, Ibn Qutaybah argues that it was asserted explicitly elsewhere in the Qur'ân. For example "God spoke to Moses in words *itakirtn*." In this case, he argued, there is no *majaz*, rather the expression is real.

On the other hand, some groups claimed that figurative expressions are basically untrue statements, and wondered how the Qur'ân could contain falsehoods. Again, Ibn Qutaybah replied that this claim is based on ignorance of the ways of language. He explained that the use of *majaz* is not engaging in falsehoods, otherwise most of everyday language would be corrupt. He said that it is common, and appropriate, to say, for example, "the wall wants to fall," to mean: it is about to fall. He adds that this confusion also happened among Christians who claimed that Jesus is the son of God, even though the expression is figurative not real. Ibn Qutaybah concludes that ignorance of the appropriate use of *majaz* led these groups to misinterpret the Qur'ân.

Chapter Eight is devoted to the discussion of Metaphor (*isti'arah*). He begins this chapter by defining the term *isti'arah*. He explains that
the Arabs borrow a word and use it in place of another word when there is a cause, an analogy, or resemblance between the two. Therefore, they call plants *nawr* (star-brought rain) because they grow after a rain storm.27

Following this definition, he gives some examples from the Qur’ān including this sentence: “As in the case of a man who was dead but we brought him to life and gave him a light to walk by among people.” He explains that the word “dead” stands for disbelief in God, and the words “life” and “light” stand for faith in God. Sometimes, the borrowing is exaggerated which is common in the speech of the Arabs. For example, God said, “The sky did not cry for them nor did the earth.” He explains that the Arabs usually use expressions such as these to describe the loss of an important person (king or leader). He continued by observing that the Arabs say:

the sun darkened, the moon was eclipsed, for his loss, and the wind cried as did lightning, the sky, and the earth. By saying this, they indicate the magnitude of the tragedy, and that it was greatly felt. This is not considered lying, because all of them are aware of it, so the listener knows the real intention of the speaker.28

According to Ibn Qutaybah, this type of exaggeration is appropriate in eloquent speech and poetry. In fact, he adds, it is admired and appreciated in Arabic poetry. The concept of exaggeration in poetry and prose became an issue for discussion among later rhetoricians, especially in connection with the issue of truth and falsity in discourse. In


general, the concept of istī'ārah, according to Ibn Qutaybah, is wide and not yet specific. Therefore, many of the examples he gives in this chapter were subsequently classified more precisely by later rhetoricians as metonymy or simile.

Chapter Nine is devoted to the discussion of Inversion or Reciprocity (al-Maqlūb). This is of two kinds: one is conceptual, the other is structural (the point at which the word is placed in a sentence). The first one is known among later rhetoricians as opposition (tadādd). It is the use of one word to mean its opposite. He gives several reasons for its use: (1) to avoid a bad omen, as in, for example, the use of the word “well” instead of “ill” or “diseased”; (2) exaggeration in the description, as in, for example, calling someone blind, meaning he has sharp vision; (3) ridicule, or scoffing, as in, for example, saying about someone: he is very kind and compassionate, when in fact he or she is the opposite; (4) to generalize, for example, referring to both buying and selling as buying. The notion of conceptual inversion has an obvious parallel with the Greek rhetorical notion of irony, that is, stating a meaning opposite of that intended. The second type of inversion is to put a word in a place other than its expected place in a sentence or structure of speech for the purpose of emphasis or concision.

Chapter Ten is devoted to the discussion of Omission and Abridgment (al-Hadhf wa al-Ikhtisār). Ibn Qutaybah explains that the Qurʾān has eight distinct ways for omission and abridgments. Among the most important are these three types: (1) to omit the first noun of a genitive construction and keep the second one. For example, God said, “Ask the village.” This means: Ask the people of the village; (2) the use of one verb in a sentence, when a second one is usually required, for example, God said, “Make your decision and your allies.” This means, “Make your decision and call your allies;” (3) when part of the sentence is omitted because the listener already knows it. For example, God said, “If it was
not for the grace of God and his mercy over you, but God is kind and merciful." The missing part is: "He would have punished you." Similar categories are given, based on the notion that the omission is justified by the fact that the listener already understands what has been omitted. For example, in the Qur'an, the unbelievers are said to have scoffed at the Prophet and said, "This is strange, after we die? That is impossible" The full expression would have been "This is strange, we are resurrected after we die? . . ." The idea that an audience would understand and supply the omitted matter is reminiscent of the way the Aristotelian enthymeme is generally held to function, according to most rhetorical theorists.

Chapter Eleven discusses Repetition of Speech and Augmentation (al-Takrār wa al-Ziyyādah). Here Ibn Qutaybah wants to show that repetition in the Qur'an always serves a purpose. It is not considered redundancy or wordiness, because every word in the Qur'an signifies a specific meaning, even if this is not clear to the casual reader. Repetition includes the repetition of one word or phrase, and the repetition of specific themes or stories throughout the Holy Book. In general, repetition is said to be used for the purpose of emphasis and assertion.

Chapter Twelve is devoted to Metonymy and Intimation (al-Kināyah wa al-Ta'īfād). The first and basic type of kināyah is the surname, or agnomen (kunyāh), consisting of Abū (father of) followed by the name of his son, or Umm (mother of) followed by the name of her son (sometimes, the daughter's name is used). Ibn Qutaybah explains that this is helpful when writing to men who have the same first name (e.g. Muhammad), but have different kunyāh (e.g. Abū al-Abbās, etc). Also kināyah is used in the Qur'ān, as in, for example, the use of the word fulān (a person whose name is withheld). This does not necessarily mean a specific historical person, rather it refers to
humanity in general. The same is true with the word "aggressor" (zālim), which stands for any person who commits aggression. However, in general, intimation and allusion are used in place of explicitness for the sake of politeness and avoiding objectionable or vulgar expressions.

The rest of the chapters cover issues of interpretation including words that do not mean what they appear to mean, strange and isolated letters in the Qurʾān, words that have multiple meanings. The last two chapters cover specific grammatical constructions.

In his attempt to interpret the difficult passages of the Qurʾān, Ibn Qutaybah developed a system of linguistic analysis, based mostly on the notion of metaphorical usage in Arabic. In this sense, his book can be seen as analogous to Abū ʿUbaydah's book, Majāz al-Qurʾān (Figurative Language in The Qurʾān). Ibn Qutaybah's analysis is more extensive and benefits from the advances in linguistic and theological studies made during his time. As a result, Ibn Qutaybah's linguistic analysis in this book, Taʿwil Mushkil al-Qurʾān (Interpreting the Difficult passages in the Qurʾān) became an important source within the early development of Arabic rhetorical theory.

Poets and Poetry

Another famous book by Ibn Qutaybah is his anthology of poets titled Poets and Poetry (al-Shīr wa al-Shuʿarā'). This book contains a collection of Arabic poetry, including both early and modern selections. It was designed to be a reference for the writer (secretary) and the student of adab. The importance of this book for the study of Arabic rhetoric and literary criticism lies in the introduction. The major issues raised in this introduction include the following. First, Ibn Qutaybah did not use the age of the poet as a criterion for judging poetry. Thus, he is among the first critics to deny that all pre-
Islamic poets are superior to later Islamic and modern poets. He argued that excellence in poetry could be found in any age.

Second, Ibn Qutaybah addresses the issue of the relationship between words and meaning. Despite his attack on logic, Ibn Qutaybah divides poetry into four logically based categories, arguing that poetry can come in one of these possible combinations: (1) good words and good meaning; (2) good words and bad meaning; (3) bad words and good meaning; (4) bad words and bad meaning. He gives examples for each, focusing on the themes found in the line of poetry, but not in the poem as a whole. In general, the discussion is not precise, but it does indicate that Ibn Qutaybah does not think that eloquence is found in the expression alone. He seems to suggest that eloquence is the result of the combination of the two concepts (i. e., words and meaning).

Third, Ibn Qutaybah also comments on the issue of natural talent vs. affectedness. He discusses poetry in terms of naturalness and artificiality. He also discusses the psychological state of both poet and audience and gives his famous explanation of the three-part ode and its rhetorical effectiveness (discussed in Chapter 3 of this dissertation).

This work on poetry reflects the continued interest among Arab rhetoricians in the analysis of poetry as an important part of Arabic rhetoric. Knowledge of poetry is considered a valuable tool for enhancing the eloquence of a speaker or a writer.

Ibn al-Mu'tazz (d. 908)

Abū al-ʿAbbās ʿAbd Allāh, known as Ibn al-Mu'tazz, was a major poet and critic. He wrote anthologies of modern poets, but his most influential work is Kitāb al-Badīʿ (The Book of Novel Style). He claims that he was the first to write about this topic, although the rhetorical concepts he presents in this book have been in use by previous
critics and rhetoricians. Therefore, his major contribution for Arabic rhetoric was that he was the first to write a book solely for the purpose of explaining rhetorical theory; other works were written in connection with the interpretation of the Qur'ān, as shown above. He was also the first to use the term *Bādir* to describe rhetorical figures. This eventually became an independent branch of the science of *balāghah*.

*Kitāb al-Bādir* seems to have been written in response to the controversy over the new styles of poetry which were becoming popular in the early 'Abbāsid period. Ibn al-Mu'tazz admired the new poetry, himself being a modern poet. Therefore, his purpose was to show that the new styles are in fact an extension of original styles found in the Arabic language and manifested in the Qur'ān and the early speech of the Arabs. By doing so, he succeeded in legitimizing the new poetry. In addition, he began the trend toward collecting and classifying rhetorical figures and stylistic devices among many Arab rhetoricians. The purpose and content of the book are clearly explained by Ibn al-Mu'tazz:

We have presented in the chapters of this book of ours some of what we found in the Qur'ān, the language, the conversations of the Messenger of God (peace be upon him), the speech of his Companions, the Bedouins and others, and the poetry of the ancients, in terms of what the moderns called *Bādir*, so that it would be known that Bashshār, Muslim, and Abū Nuwās, and their imitators and followers, are not the first to practice this art. But it was abundant in their poetry and became well-known in their time, so that it was called by this name (*Bādir*) which was used as a term and signifier for it. After them, Ḥabīb ibn Aws al-'Ādī was attached to it, and it predominated his poetry, and he elaborated it and used it frequently, sometimes with good results, other times with bad. This is the result of excess and the fruits of exaggeration. In the past, a poet would compose one or two lines containing this art within a poem. In fact, you might have read in the works of some of them poems which did not contain any *Bādir* lines. Therefore, it was appreciated when it was used infrequently.²⁹

²⁹ *Kitāb al-Bādir*, 1.
The above passage indicates that the primary sources for study by Ibn al-Mu'tazz were the Qur'an and the early speech and poetry of the Arabs, in addition to the new poetry. The purpose of the analysis is to show that certain stylistic figures are part of the Arabic language from the beginning (i.e., justified by sunnah). This approach reinforced the notion among later Arab rhetoricians that the primary sources for the study of Arabic rhetoric (eloquence) are the Qur'an, oratory, poetry and prose writing. Ibn al-Mu'tazz goes on to explain five major badi figures and provides examples of each.

The first badi figure is Isti'arah (borrowing, metaphor). Ibn al-Mu'tazz defined it as: "borrowing a word for something which was not known by it from something known by it, such as the mother of the book, the wing of humility . . ." This is similar to the definition given earlier in The Rules of Poetry (Qawā'id al-Shīrī) attributed to Tha'lab, and also by Ibn Qutaybah above. This definition is still not precise and the examples of it given by Ibn al-Mu'tazz are varied. In fact, some of these examples will be considered by later writers more precisely as simile or metonymy. Some of the examples given by Ibn al-Mu'tazz include the use of the word "mother of the book" to mean the original source of the Qur'ānic revelations. Also, God said, in reference to one's duty towards parents, "lower for them the wing of humility and compassion." And God said, "the head is burning with white hair." Also, the Prophet said, "My Lord accept my repentance and wash my sins."

Second is the concept of Tajnis (paronomasia). Ibn al-Mu'tazz explains this figure by saying, "It is when a word has tajnis (consonant affinity) with another in a line of

30 Kitāb al-Badi', 2.
poetry or speech. The resemblance between them is in terms of the composition of the letters . . . It includes the resemblance in the composition of its letters and meaning when it is derived from it . . . or it could be in terms of the composition of the letters but not the meaning.31 This art of badi' will eventually be elaborated by later critics, and divided into several categories in terms of complete resemblance, partial resemblance, resemblance in meaning, opposition in meaning, etc.

The third major badi' figure is Tibaq (antithesis). This is defined as the inclusion of two opposite concepts in one saying, such as night and day, life and death, black and white, sad and happy, etc. This type was also enlarged by later rhetoricians who divided it into positive contrast using opposite words (knowledge vs. ignorance; life vs. death), negative contrast using the same word twice (know vs. not know; life vs. not life), and the appearance of contrast (wrong doing vs. forgiveness).

The fourth figure is called Radd Aljaz al-Kalam 'ala Suduruh (internal repetition, epanalepsis). It is the repetition of words previously mentioned. It is divided into three types in poetry in terms of the place of repetition in each line. However, in prose there is no mention of a specific order of repetition. For example, God said "Do not fabricate upon God a lie lest you be severely punished. Doomed are those who fabricate." The word "fabricate" is repeated.

(5) al-madhab al-Kalamī (the jargon of the theologian, dialectics). Ibn al-Mu'tazz says of this device:

31 Kitāb al-Bādi', 25.
this is a category which al-Jāhiz called *al-madhhab al-kalāmi*. And this is a category for which I, according to my knowledge, did not find an example in the Qurʾān. It is associated with *takallul* (mannerism, affectation) and God (Almighty) is greatly and highly above that.\(^{32}\)

Ibn al-Muʿtazz does not give a definition of this type, nor does he refer to a definition by al-Jāhiz (it is not found in the known writing of al-Jāhiz). The examples he gives seem to indicate that this category refers to rationally argumentative or philosophical statements. Examples include these statements: Abū al-Dardāʾ said: "Indeed the greatest fear which I fear for you is that it be said: You have been taught but what do you know?" al-Farazdaq said: "In each man two souls, one noble, the other he sometimes disregard and other times he follows." And ʿUmar said to ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbbās: "Who do you think we should appoint in charge of Homs (in Syria)?" He answered "A man who is safe from you and loyal to you." ʿUmar said "Be that man!" He said "I am of no use to you because of my suspicion of your suspicion of me."

However, there are indications that this category might have originally referred to parodies of dialectal discourse, rather than actual philosophical argument. John Wansbrough investigated the use of this term by Arab rhetoricians. He explains that the origin of this term is not clear, except that Ibn al-Muʿtazz said it originated with al-Jāhiz. He adds that some rhetoricians took it to mean an actual syllogism or an enthymeme. For those rhetoricians who were philosophically inclined, *al-madhhab al-kalāmi*

resembles in many respects the application by the Greek and Roman rhetoricians of the enthymeme: in the sense of persuasive argumentation based upon a

\(^{32}\) *Kitāb al-Badr*, 53.
reflexion drawn from contraries, e.g., if self-control is good then lack of self-control is bad; or, if it is unfair to be angry with those who have done wrong unintentionally, it is not fitting to feel beholden to one who is forced to do us good, etc.\textsuperscript{33}

According to Ibn al-Mu'tazz, this type of argumentative discourse is lacking in the Qur'\textsuperscript{a}n. However, later rhetoricians found many instances of its use in the Holy Book. A famous example is "If there were in them (the heavens and earth) gods besides God they would both have been in disarray." This is usually explained this way: The heavens and earth are not in disarray, therefore there is only one God. On the other hand, some rhetoricians treated this figure as a stylistic parody and not an actual argument, regarding it as the playful mimicking of dialectical jargon, meant to have a stylistic impact (which justifies its inclusion as a stylistic device).

Having listed five \textit{bad\textsuperscript{f}} figures, Ibn al-Mu'tazz explains that there are many other rhetorical styles which he does not call \textit{bad\textsuperscript{f}} figures; rather, he describes them as "beauties of style." However, the distinction between the two categories is not made clear. He seems to be aware of this problem when he explains

> We have presented the five categories of \textit{bad\textsuperscript{f}} completely. We imagine a stubborn individual, who is in love with negating virtues, saying that \textit{bad\textsuperscript{f}} is more than this, or (conversely) only one or two of the five we have presented. This judgment is of little importance because \textit{bad\textsuperscript{f}} is a name given for several genres of poetry mentioned by the poets and the literary critics among them. As for the philologists and the scholars of ancient poetry, they do not recognize this name, nor do they know what it stands for and what \textit{bad\textsuperscript{f}} arts come under it. Nobody has collected the styles of \textit{bad\textsuperscript{f}} nor did anybody precede me to it.\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{33} John Wansbrough, "A Note on Arabic Rhetoric," 56.
This statement contributed to the fame of Ibn al-Mu'tazz as the first writer in the Arabic literary tradition to collect and explain the major stylistic figures. Many authors such as the early philologists had commented on these styles within their discussion of poetry or the style of the Qur'an. However, Ibn al-Mu'tazz seems to be the first to write a manual devoted exclusively to the discussion of these figures.

Ibn al-Mu'tazz then explains that he will mention more beauties of style which he considers to be numerous and cannot be presented in full. Therefore, he gives a list of thirteen figures, only as examples. He explains his approach as follows:

Now we will mention some of the beauties of speech and poetry which are numerous. No one scholar should claim to have complete knowledge of them because some are likely to escape his knowledge and learning. We wish that the benefit of our book will reach the cultured people, and that the reader will know that we chose to limit the badr to five styles without being ignorant of the beauties of speech nor because of limited learning. Those who wish to follow us and limit the badr to five categories should do so, and those who want to add several of these beauties of speech or others to the art of badr . . . the choice is theirs.  

This statement seems to have given licence to many later Arab rhetoricians to collect and classify ever-growing lists of stylistic figures, culminating in the establishment of the third branch of Arabic rhetoric known as 'ilm al-badr (the science of embellishment).

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34 Kitāb al-Badr, 57-58.

35 Kitāb al-Badr, 58.
Some of the beauties of style mentioned by Ibn al-Mu'tazz are briefly as follows (some of Ibn al-Mu'tazz's examples are vague, therefore, examples for some of the concepts are taken from later sources):

1. *iltifât* (Turning around, shifting) A sudden shift in topic or grammatical address. An example from the Qur'ān:

   He (God) is the one who moves you in land and sea, so when you are in a ship, and we moved them with a gentle breeze which made them happy, a violent wind came upon it and waves came upon them from every direction, so they thought that they were engulfed and prayed sincerely to God: if you save us from this we will surely be among those who extol you.  

   The sudden shift in the form of address (from you to them) is said to engage the listeners into the story much further, making them witnesses to the moral tale.

2. *lqirād* (Interruption). To interrupt a sentence before it is finished with a phrase, then complete the sentence. For example, "Banū Sa'd claim that I—but they are lying—am old and infirm."

3. *al-Rūjā* (Backtracking). To say something and negate it or qualify it. Abū Nuwās said "You are the most noble among those who were (living in the past) and those who are (now living), except for the Prophet . . . ."

4. *Husn al-Khurūj*. Excellence in Transition from one idea to another in the same line. A poet said "My friends, help your brother against his fate. It is the noble who give assistance."

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36 *Kitāb al-Badī‘*, 58-59.
(5) The Confirmation of Praise by what sounds like Blame. al-Dhubyānī said "They have no faults except that their swords are dented from facing armies in war."

(6) Tajâhul al-ʿĀrif (Claiming Ignorance). To claim ignorance of an issue while actually knowing it for the purpose of rhetorical emphasis. For example, in the Qurʾān:

God asked: O Jesus, son of Mary, did you say to mankind: Worship me and my mother as two deities apart from God? He said Praise to you I cannot say what I have no right (to say) Had I said it you would surely have known, for you know what is in my heart though I know not what is in your mind. You alone know all the secrets.\(^{37}\)

(7) The use of Humor to make a serious point (satire). For example the poet Ibn al-Hubārīyah said:

Abū Saʿīd said when he saw me
chaste for a year without a drink
At the hands of what religious master
did you repent? tell me
I said: at the hands of bankruptcy, I repented.\(^{38}\)

(8) al-Taʿrīq (intimation), and Kināyah (metonymy) For example, the use of euphemisms to avoid vulgarity.

\(^{37}\) Qurʾān, 5: 116.

\(^{38}\) Husayn, Fann al-Badr', 98.
(19) Exaggeration in Description. For example, The sun darkened for his death, and the wind, earth and sky cried.

(10) Taršbīth (Simile). No definition is given for the simile but a list of examples of the correct and effective use of it in poetry are given.

The work Ibn al-Mu'tazz led to great interest in collecting and enlarging the lists of badi' figures beyond his initial list, and became a separate branch of study in Arabic rhetoric.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the literary approach to Arabic rhetoric was discussed. The works of three rhetoricians, al-Jāhiz, Ibn Qutaybah, and Ibn al-Mu'tazz, were described. al-Jāhiz contributed one of the most famous and influential works of Arabic rhetoric called al-Bayān was al-Tabīn (Clarity and Clarification), a work that was studied and commented upon by many later Arab rhetoricians. al-Jāhiz emphasized the role of communication and persuasion in rhetoric. For him, the concept of bayān means communication in the largest sense, including non-verbal means of communication. The purpose of bayān is ifhām (to make ideas understood). al-Jāhiz also discusses balāghah (eloquence), which means communicating ideas in an elevated and correct Arabic style. It requires the mastery of oratorical skills, knowledge of the audience and their cultural and education status and being aware of the context of communication. al-Jāhiz's work includes a wealth of examples from early Arabic poetry and oratory which makes a valuable source for the study of the early emergence and development of Arabic eloquence.
Ibn Qutaybah made contributions to the study of Arabic rhetoric through his discussion of *adab al-kātib* (The Craft of the Secretary), his interpretation of the difficult passages of the Qurʾān, and his critique of Arabic poetry. In all of his works, Ibn Qutaybah emphasized the preservation of the Arab and Islamic literary and rhetorical heritage. Like al-Jāḥiz, he emphasized the persuasive function of rhetoric, whether it was found in official correspondence, the Qurʾān, or poetry. For Ibn Qutaybah, *balāghah* (eloquence) requires a high and correct Arabic style, knowledge of the requirements of the situation. This last factor includes the knowledge of the status of the audience addressed by the discourse.

Ibn al-Muʿtazz’s unique contribution to Arabic rhetorical theory came in the form of collecting, classifying and commenting on the major rhetorical and stylistic figures prevalent in Arabic discourse. According to Ibn al-Muʿtazz, stylistic figures, which he called *badrī*, are found in early, as well as later, Arabic forms of discourse, including the Qurʾān, poetry, and speeches. His list of figures was a topic of discussion and analysis by later rhetoricians and critics culminating in a specialized branch of Arabic rhetoric known as *ʿilm al-badrī* (the science of embellishment).

Later Arab rhetoricians continued the discussion of *balāghah* (eloquence) as found in the Qurʾān, poetry and oratory. The most important contribution came from scholars who were influenced by Greek logical methods of analysis, whether through their study of Islamic philosophy or Islamic theology—two disciplines which have a strong basis in Greek logic and dialectic. This approach to the study of Arabic rhetorical theory will be the topic of the next chapter.
CHAPTER 7

THE PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO ARABIC RHETORICAL THEORY

Following the literary approach to Arabic rhetoric discussed in the previous chapter, additional approaches emerged based on new developments in Islamic philosophy and theology. Authors within these approaches share a rationalist approach to the topic, in the sense that Greek logical methods were evident in their theories of discourse. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the most important scholars who were influenced by Greek philosophy include Qudāmah ibn Ja'far and Ishaq ibn Wahb. These authors tried to use Greek logical methods to present Arabic theories of rhetoric in a more coherent and systemized fashion; they tried as well to incorporate a few Greek rhetorical and poetic concepts. In the field of Islamic theology, the most influential author by far was 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī, who based his work on the notion of the miraculous nature of the style of the Qur'ān (Ijāz) and went on to present a comprehensive theory of eloquent discourse based on the idea of arrangement (nazm). He also analyzed the logical and psychological process of creating effective and beautiful style through the use of rhetorical figures such as metaphor, metonymy, and simile. His works contributed to the emergence of two major branches of Arabic rhetoric, namely, 'ilm al-maʿānī (the science of meaning, or semantics) and 'ilm al-bayān (the science of clarity, or expressiveness). This chapter will
discuss the works of the above mentioned authors, leading eventually to the final systemization of Arabic rhetoric into three branches: semantics, clarity, and embellishment. It should be mentioned that all the authors in this chapter continued the traditional emphasis on poetry and the Qur'an, but their theoretical analysis tended to be of wider philosophical and theological scope, focusing on the nature and function of artistic and effective discourse in general.

Qudâmah ibn Ja'far (d. c. 948)

Abû al-Faraj Qudâmah ibn Ja'far was an important kâtib (secretary) who wrote several books on the craft of the secretary and on Arabic rhetoric. He converted to Islam from Christianity and was known for his mastery of Greek logic and philosophy, as well as for his elegant Arabic prose style. Among his well known works is a manual for secretaries titled Kitâb ahKharâj wa $inS*^at ahKitsbah (The Book of Taxation and the Craft of Writing), only the second half of which has survived. The book deals with a wide range of topics that a secretary is expected to know in order to perform the duty of the office of kâtib. This includes, for example, knowledge of the various governmental departments and their functions, the system of taxation and its legal foundations, and geographical facts, among other technical matters. It also includes extensive advice on linguistic usage, the literary tradition, and the correct formulas and proper style for official correspondence. The first half, which is now lost, contained a section (the third chapter) on the art of eloquence (balâghah) that is known only from references to it by other authors. For example, 'Ali ibn ʿIsâ was quoted as saying that Qudâmah presented him with a copy of this book, which he (Ibn ʿIsâ) read and examined carefully. He found that the third chapter contained a unique treatment of the arts of eloquence that was not
equaled by other authors in terms of its content and style. Given Qudāmah’s knowledge of Greek works, Iḥsān ‘Abbās speculated that this section might have echoed many of Aristotle’s ideas in the *Rhetoric*.

Moreover, Bonebakker suggested that prose examples attributed to Qudāmah might have originated in this chapter, which led to his fame as a master of eloquence. In another book, titled *Jawāhir al-Alfāz* (Verbal Gems), Qudāmah lists a selection of words and expressions that are recommended for use by writers, orators, and poets to enhance their literary compositions.

The most famous work by Qudāmah is called *Naqd al-Shīr* (Criticism of Poetry). In this work, Qudāmah wanted to present a comprehensive and logical analysis of the elements of poetry. Although this work was devoted to the analysis of poetry, its theoretical treatment of the elements of discourse were general enough to make it a major source for the future systemization of Arabic rhetoric. Qudāmah argued that evaluations of poetry that were written by previous authors were superficial and subjective and did not allow for an objective method for evaluating poetry and distinguishing good poetic discourse from bad. He goes on to present a logical (objective) method for the evaluation of poetry and begins by offering a comprehensive definition of it. He defines poetry as “metrical, rhymed utterances pointing to a meaning (ma‘nā, intention).” Based on this definition, Qudāmah divides poetry into four basic elements: words (*lafz*, utterance), meaning (*ma‘nā*, content), meter (*wazn*), and rhyme (*qāfiyah*). Each

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3 *Naqd al-Shīr*, 17.
element could be evaluated on a continuum ranging from excellent to bad. Similarly, the combination of two elements results in good or bad qualities. There are four meaningful combinations of the four basic elements. They are: words and meaning, words and meter, meaning and meter, meaning and rhyme. Two possible combinations, words and rhyme and rhyme and meter, are discarded by Qudâmah because he believed they did not yield significant results in evaluation. Thus, the elements of poetry are eight, the basic four and the four combinations.

Based on this system, a poet can be judged regarding his skill in using these elements and their combinations. In general, there are positive and negative uses for these elements in poetry. The positive, or proper, use of elements is called nuṣūt (proper or good qualities), while the negative, or defective, use is called ṭuyūb (faults, defects). Qudâmah then moves on to discuss these qualities in further detail, beginning with the four basic constituents. For example, words should be easy to pronounce, free from complication, having the quality of euphony (faṣāḥah). The meter must be chosen from among the conventional meters used by the early major Arab poets. In addition, the structure of the poem has to be symmetrical, that is, each line has to be divided into two even and logical parts (hemstitches). The end-rhyme must be simple and easy to pronounce.

Finally, with regard to meanings (ideas and concepts), Qudâmah explains that the poet has almost an unlimited number of maḏānī (themes) that he might want to use in his poetry. However, it is possible, according to Qudâmah, to divide the major themes of poetry into principal motifs or purposes (aghrād). These are general themes or subject matters under which minor related sub-themes might be included. Thus, the major themes or aims of poetry are: panegyric (madīḥ); satire or insult (hijâb); elegy (rithâ or marâṯîh); description (waṣf); praising women (nasīb, love theme); and comparison
(tashbih, simile). The last category is usually considered as a figure of speech, but since it was often used by the Arab poets, Qudāmah included it as a major theme, that is, a major purpose for composing the poem. In addition, Qudāmah argues that, in the broadest sense, all themes of poetry could be seen as either praise or blame. As mentioned earlier, some authors speculated that, in making this argument, Qudāmah was trying to harmonize his system with the Greek concepts of comedy and tragedy found in Aristotle’s Poetics. It was also mentioned that Aristotle’s division of epideictic rhetoric into praise and blame could also be a source of influence on Qudāmah’s dual division of the themes of Arabic poetry (see chapter 3). Whether the source for Qudāmah’s systematization of poetry was Greek or not, it is clear, given the themes just mentioned, that his poetics functioned frequently to rhetorical ends.

Another Greek influence on Qudāmah’s classification of the themes of Arabic poetry is seen in his discussion of the function of the four cardinal virtues in panegyric, satire and elegy. These four virtues are ‘aqīl (intelligence), shajā‘ah (courage), ‘adl (fairness, justice), and ‘iffah (integrity). He argued that a person can only be praised as having one of these four virtues or minor characteristics associated with them. By the same token, a person could be blamed for the lack of one or more of these virtues.

The Greek influence on Qudāmah is also evident in his opinion of the use of hyperbole in poetry. He argued that exaggeration (ghulāw) is a valued characteristic of poetry, saying that previous experts on poetry have advocated the same opinion. He wrote, “I heard some of them say the best poetry is least truthful. Also, the Greek philosophers
agree with this according to their language. However, all exaggerations have to have a basis in reality to be believable.

Qudama\'s logical system of poetic analysis was unique among Arab rhetoricians and was rarely adopted by later writers. However, his discussion of the figures of speech was influential and became the basis for further codification. In this regard, Qudama\'s work is considered the second main source, after Ibn al-Mu\'tazz\'s *Kitab al-Badi* (see Chapter 6), for the future codification of the third branch of Arabic rhetoric known as *ilm al-Badi* (the Science of Embellishment).

A book that was originally titled as *Naqd al-Nathr* (The Criticism of Prose) was wrongly attributed to Qudama, but later was correctly identified as *Kitab al-Burhan fi Wujuh al-Bayan* (Demonstrating the Aspects of Rhetorical) written by Ibn Wahb. It is the subject of the following section.

Ishaq ibn Wahb (tenth century)

Like Qudama, Ishaq ibn Wahb was a government secretary (*katib*) who was also influenced by Greek logical methods. In addition, his writing reflects a theologically-based training. Thus, his method of presentation combines both rational and theological methods. Most points in his work are demonstrated logically on the one hand, and with supporting passages from the Qur\'an on the other. He is most known for his work *al-Burhan fi Wujuh al-Bayan* (Demonstrating the Aspects of Rhetoric). He seems to have written this book in an attempt to put the previous work of al-Jahiz, *al-Bayan*, (see

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4 *Naqdd al-Shir*, 62.
Chapter 6) into a logical and organized order. In the introduction he explains that he wrote this book in response to a request from a friend who read al-Bayán but was disappointed with it because it was too long and disorganized. In addition, it did not elaborate fully on the types of bayân. Thus, Ibn Wahb decided to build on the work of al-Jâhiz and other previous authors of rhetoric to write a comprehensive and concise work that explains and demonstrates all aspects of rhetoric.

As an introduction, Ibn Wahb emphasizes the role of reason (‘aqīl, mind, intellect) in human affairs. He argues that God created humans and favored them over other animals by granting them the ability to use reason and reflection. The mind allows humans to distinguish between good and evil, advantage and disadvantage. It also enables them to reflect on issues that are not immediately known to them, or are far away from them. Thus, the ability to reason is what makes humans superior to other animals. Ibn Wahb further explains that God communicates his proofs to humans in two ways. One is by sending messengers and prophets with revelations, the other by creating the ability in humans to reason for themselves. God does not punish children or the insane, since both are lacking the faculty of reason and reflection.

Ibn Wahb goes on to explain that the intellect is of two kinds, one is given (mawhūb), the other is acquired (maksūb). The first kind is the mind that is created in every human since birth. He cites the Qur‘ān to further explain that, "God produced you from your mothers’ wombs not knowing anything, but gave you ears, eyes, and hearts, so that you may be grateful." The other type of intellect is the kind acquired through

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5 al-Burhān, 54.

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experience and education. People must use their given intellect to educate themselves about God and the creation, otherwise they are not better than other animals and they will be punished by God. This is also explained in the Qur'an as quoted by Ibn Wahb:

We destined for Hell many of the jinn and human beings who possessed hearts but did not reflect, had eyes but did not see, had ears but did not hear. Those are like cattle, even worse than them. Those are people who were heedless.⁷

Therefore, the given mind needs experience and education to acquire the necessary knowledge of God and the world. Ibn Wahb further explains that, in the same way that the body needs food, the given mind needs experience and education. Therefore, the two types of intellect are dependent on each other.

Four Types of Bayân (Rhetoric)

The discussion of the role of intellect leads Ibn Wahb to his main topic, which is the many types (or levels) of bayân (expressiveness). According to Ibn Wahb, the use of the intellect leads to knowledge, through a process called bayân (expressiveness). This bayân is of four types:

some of it (bayân) is the knowledge of things in their essences, even if they are not articulated through language; other types of bayân occur in the heart after reflection and thinking; another is the bayân through the tongue, and a bayân through writing, which reaches the far and the absent.⁸

⁶ Qur'an, 16: 78.

⁷ al-Burhān, 57; Qur'an 7: 189.
This list of the four types of bayân seems to be a modification of the list of five types of bayân offered earlier by al-JâhiZ (Chapter 6). Ibn Wahb agrees with al-JâbiZ on speaking, writing, and direct sensory knowledge (which al-Jâhiz called nisbah, direct knowledge of a situation), but Ibn Wahb disregards non-verbal behavior (which al-Jâhiz called ishârah, gestures), and counting, or mathematics. Moreover, Ibn Wahb places direct knowledge in the top of the list, while al-Jâhiz placed it last. This is so largely because Ibn Wahb is adopting a logical sequence of the four types, or levels, of bayân, beginning with direct knowledge to reflection in the mind, followed by speaking and writing. According to Ibn Wahb's logical sequencing, direct sensory knowledge comes first:

Things appear clearly to the discerning viewer, and to the person who is intelligent and reflective. They appear in their essences (dhawâtiha, and in the way they were wondrously created by God. The evidences of his creation appear in them, as when He (the Almighty) said "These are signs for those who are discerning," and He also said "We left a clear sign of this [the destruction of previous immoral cities] for people of sense to see." And for the same reason it was said: "Say to the Earth: Who opened your rivers, planted your trees, and harvested your fruits? If it did not answer you with speech, it will answer you by way of reflection (i'tibârî). So if it was verbally silent, it is articulate in its visible appearance. In this way, the Arabs attribute speech to lands and encampments. They answer on their behalf by way of borrowing (isti'ârah, metaphor) in discourse.⁸

In this passage, Ibn Wahb is reinforcing al-Jâḥiz's concept of nisbah (direct sensory knowledge) by placing it as the first type of bayân. It is worth pointing out that, from the

⁸ al-Burhân, 60.

⁹ al-Burhân, 60.

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point of view of the contemporary debate about rhetoric's epistemic status, Ibn Wahb is clearly advancing a realist position. Rhetorical theories based on realism argue for the existence of knowledge in the world independent of the cultural framework or communication behavior of the observer (See Chapter 1).

Ibn Wahb adds that these signs are only useful to those who reflect on them and study them, which leads to the second type of bayán, namely, reflection in the mind (i'tiqâd, conviction). Once the visible signs are viewed and their lessons absorbed, the person doing the reflection becomes knowledgeable and wise with regard to the particular situation being observed and reflected upon. However, this type of bayán is still limited to one person, for his reflection and the resulting wisdom takes place within his own mind. But God wants bayán to be widespread and its benefit well known. Therefore, God created speech by way of the tongue and made the verbal articulation of bayán possible.

Since what the person learns through this bayán (reflection and conviction), and what he gains from it, does not reach beyond him to others, and since God (the Great Almighty) wanted this favorable characteristic of human beings to be complete, He created for him a tongue and made him able to articulate this bayán. As a result, the person can report with it what is in his soul, including the wisdom he gained and the knowledge he acquired, making this, the third type of bayán, more clear than the ones preceding it, its benefits more widespread. This is so because the person shares it with others, while the preceding types are limited to him only. However, the first two types of bayán are natural (bi al-tabû), therefore, they do not change, while this type (speaking) and the one after it (writing) are conventional (bi al-wadû) and change according to the changes in language, and differ according to the difference in terminology. Don't you see that the sun is one in its essence; it is the same in the mind of the Arab and the non-Arab. But if you look at its name, you will find it different from one language to the other. The same could be said about books, for shapes and letters in them are different according to the difference in the languages of the authors, but the things
(discussed) are the same and do not change according to the language from which
the book is translated.\textsuperscript{10}

This also reinforces Ibn Wahb’s realist position on rhetoric. He is aware of the differences
in languages and cultural attitudes, but wants to stress that things in themselves do not
change by the change in language or terminology. Once he reached the third type of
\textit{bayān} (speaking), Ibn Wahb pauses to compare its value with the perceived merits of
silence. This topic was also addressed previously by al-Jāhiz. Here, Ibn Wahb gives a
summary of the dialectical relation between the two concepts of speech and silence. He
starts by citing several anecdotes, which he admires, about the function and value of
speech:

"A person hides behind his tongue. When he speaks, he becomes visible." This is
among the best and most noble of sayings, having a lot of meaning in a few words,
because you do not know a man thoroughly until you speak with him and listen to
his speech. Therefore, it was said that a man was asked: "How long would it take
you to know a man?" He said: "If he is silent, in a day, but if he speaks, in one
hour." Also, a wise man said "God (Almighty) made the tongue the most valuable
body part, because it is the one that testifies to God’s existence."\textsuperscript{11}

These anecdotes are intended to illustrate the value of speech in society. However, Ibn
Wahb also points out that silence is sometimes preferred. He says that ignorance is
common among the public. Therefore, many of them are quick to talk about things they
do not understand. They are apt to admire their own speeches, even if they were not

\textsuperscript{10} \textit{al-Burḥān}, 62.

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{al-Burḥān}, 63.
worthy of admiration. As a result, some knowledgeable scholars and leaders advocated silence. They taught that making mistakes by way of silence is less harmful than making mistakes by way of speaking. The value of silence is illustrated by several parables. For example, a man was asked why he was often silent. He answered, "I keep silent to be safe, and I listen to learn." It was also said "Silence is wisdom, but few practice it." A philosopher said to a man who was a frequent talker, "Do justice to your ears over your tongue. You were given two ears and one tongue, so you might listen more than you talk." Ibn Wahb goes on to explain that the purpose of this type of advice is to keep people from talking about things they do not know, and to keep them from being quick to speak about things they do not understand. He concludes that, in general, some occasions will require silence, yet others will require speech. This depends largely on the knowledge or expertise of the person involved. It is preferable for a person to be silent about things he does not understand, but he is required to speak out on things about which he is knowledgeable.

After his initial discussion of the four type of bayān, Ibn Wahb devotes the rest of the book to further analysis of verbal bayān (both speaking and writing). Thus, as in the case of al-Jâhiz, most of the discussion is devoted to linguistic expression. The chapter on verbal speech (ṣībārah) is divided into numerous sections discussing grammatical and rhetorical terminologies, in addition to explaining the various oratorical and poetic genres.

In a section titled "The Composition of Expression," (Tā'ilf al-ṣībārah), Ibn Wahb explains that the speech of the Arabs is of two kinds, poetry and prose. He goes on to

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12 al-Burhān, 65.
explain several genres under each category. Also, he explains that all these types of speech have the potential for conveying eloquence (balāghah). He points out that the concept of balāghah has not been adequately defined and offers his own definition of the term:

Balāghah was discussed by many people who described it in ways that did not define it properly. al-Jāhiz mentioned many of the characteristics used to described it, but each description is less than a complete definition of it. We define it as: the speech that encompasses the intended meaning, with selectivity in words, excellence in arrangement, and euphony of utterances.\(^\text{13}\)

This definition is not entirely new, but it brings together all the major characteristics of eloquence that might have been discussed separately by previous authors, namely, expressing a meaning, selectivity of words, good arrangement, and euphony (which renders discourse pleasing to the ear). Thus, this definition is another reflection of Ibn Wahb’s attempt to organize and synthesize Arabic rhetorical theory.

A discussion of poetry and poets is then offered. It follows traditional views on poetry that were articulated by previous writers, with little modification. For example, Ibn Wahb says that the themes of poetry are four: panegyric (madīb), satire (hijā), wisdom (hikmah), and amusement or entertainment (lahw). Although these four basic categories differ slightly from previous classification, Ibn Wahb agrees with previous rhetoricians, such as Qudāmah, by saying that many sub-themes could be derived from the basic four principal aims. For example, under the category of panegyric poetry falls

\(^{13}\) al-Burhān, 163.
similar themes, such as elegy (rithâ*) and self-glorification (iftikhâr). And under satire falls
similar topics, such as blame (dhamm), rebuke (‘atab), and censure (ta’nimb).

The second type of Arabic discourse is prose (nathri). According to Ibn Wahb, there are four types of prose: oratory, letters, debates (disputation), and conversation. Oratory (khatâbah) is used during peace-making and calling for an end to bloodshed and war. It is also used during royal inaugurations, marriage announcements, appealing to God, eulogies, and for everything that needs to be mentioned, published and propagated among the public. Letters (rasâ’il) are also used for similar occasions. In addition, letters are used for reporting news such as victory in war, for offering apologies, and other administrative matters.

According to Ibn Wahb, the requirements of eloquence for both oratory and letter writing are generally the same. However, oratory is more demanding since it is delivered orally in front of a public audience who are watching and listening while the speaker performs his speech. This puts additional strain on the speaker, who should be careful not to make mistakes. On the other hand, the letter writer has the time to edit his letter, correcting any mistakes that might have occurred. In addition, the content of the letter is not delivered by the writer in person, rather it is carried by a messenger. This helps the writer to avoid the strain associated with public speaking. Ibn Wahb then goes on to discuss requirements for eloquence such as being aware of the requirements of the situation and the value of conciseness.

The third type of speech is disputation and debates (al-jadal wa al-mujâdalah). These are speeches the purpose of which is to establish proofs regarding a disputed issue. They are often used in theology and religious and judicial matters. Political deliberation took place among members of the government and advisers to the rulers, but they were
not practiced in official assemblies as was the case in ancient Greece. Disputations could be conveyed in prose or poetry. According to Ibn Wahb, disputations are of two kinds: one is acceptable and praiseworthy, the other unacceptable and deplorable. The first kind is that which is used for the sake of truth and justice, utilizing truthful statements. The deplorable kind is that which is used for the sake of games, wining, and seeking fame and reputation. Ibn Wahb points out that the first kind is praised in the Qur'an. For example, God said, "Do not argue with the people of the Book (Christians and Jews) unless in a fair way," and, "Call them to the path of your Lord with wisdom and words of good advice, and reason with them in the best way possible." Conversely, the other kind was condemned in the Qur'an. For example, God said, "As for those who argue in the matter of God after He has been fully acknowledged, their disputing has no force with their Lord. Upon them is (God's) anger, and the punishment for them will be severe." The reader familiar with Western theories of rhetoric cannot help but notice the parallel between this distinction of Ibn Wahb's and Plato's distinction between noble and base rhetoric in *Phaedrus*.

Ibn Wahb also gives a list of rules for debate and disputation under the term *adab al-jadal* (craft, or etiquette for disputation and debates). The first rule is that the debater must make the truth his main objective. Therefore, he should not use his skill in oratory and eloquence as a tool to impose his opinions on his counterparts. Each issue should be

14 *al-Burhân*, 222; Qur'an 29: 46.

15 *al-Burhân*, 223; Qur'an 16: 125.

16 *al-Burhân*, 224; Qur'an 42: 16.
debated on its merits, aside from the personality of the debater, and regardless of his previous positions on other issues. Hence, one debater should not be believed regarding an issue based on the truth of his past claims in connection with a separate case, nor should he be disbelieved based on past mistakes. A debate should take place during appropriate times, when the debaters are mentally and emotionally ready to engage in it. This will prevent mistakes from happening due to fatigue, bad temper, or inattentiveness. Overall, the debater should be patient and fair minded. In addition, he has to be knowledgeable about language and grammar, a skill which will help him in mastering the correct terminologies and avoiding the confusion that result from inappropriate use of terms and concepts.

The fourth kind of spoken discourse is every-day conversations (al-*hadîth*). This includes a wide variety of topics. Everyday speech ranges from the serious to the mundane. It includes truthfulness and lying, seriousness and humor, eloquent and ineloquent, questions and answers, among other topics.

Having discussed the various aspects of spoken discourse, Ibn Wahb moves on to analyze the fourth major type of rhetoric (bayân), namely, writing, in further detail. This is mostly related to the art of official correspondence. Ibn Wahb gives a comprehensive analysis of the requirement of the profession of the secretary. The discussion includes issues of grammar, spelling, calligraphy, types of pens and ink. In addition, the education of the secretary must include knowledge of geography, farming, mathematics, and taxation.

In sum, Ibn Wahb’s contribution to Arabic rhetoric is evident mostly in his logical organization, including his taxonomy of the writing of previous Arab rhetoricians, especially that of al-Jâhiz, but including others as well in the field of poetry and poetic
evaluation. The next significant contribution to Arabic rhetoric was made by ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī whose work in two important books led ultimately to the three-part classification of the Arabic science of rhetoric into ma‘ānī, bayān, and badī‘.

‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d. 1078)

Abū Bakr ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī was a philologist and rhetorical theorist whose work contributed significantly to the final systematization of Arabic rhetorical theory. His theories about eloquence and poetic imagery are found in two works well known to readers of Arabic literary history. The first one is titled Dalā‘il al-I‘jāz (The Evidences of the Inimitability of the Qurān) in which he introduces and explains his influential theory of nazm (arrangement or composition). In the second book, titled Asrār al-Balāghah (The Secrets of Eloquence), he continues his theorizing about eloquence, focusing on the role of metaphorical language in creating aesthetic and rhetorical effects in the minds of the listeners and readers.

In the first book, Dalā‘il, the stated purpose is to demonstrate the inimitability of the Qurān (that is, the doctrine of i‘jāz, discussed in Chapter 4), but al-Jurjānī goes beyond this goal to present a comprehensive theory of eloquence. Specifically, the author is concerned with the question of what makes one discourse more eloquent than another. To answer this question, he offers his theory of nazm (arrangement), which states that eloquence is found not in utterances alone nor in ideas alone, but in the combination of words in discourse according to the rules of syntax.
The Theory of *Nazm* (Arrangement)

The main purpose of al-Jurjânî’s work, *Dalā'il (Evidences)* is to explain the secrets of the superior eloquence of the Qur'ān. He argues that the secret of eloquence in any discourse, whether it is the Qur'ān, poetry, or artistic prose, is found in its unique arrangement (*nazm*). This is a departure from previous theories of rhetoric which located the secret of eloquence in the euphony of individual words or in oral delivery and correct articulation. Although the term *nazm* was discussed by previous scholars, no one seems to have developed it into a systematic theory. Previous authors who used the term *nazm* in connection with eloquence include al-Jâhiz who wrote a book called *Nazm al-Qur'ān* (The Arrangement or Style of the Qur'ān) which is lost and known only by its title. However, in his other works, al-Jâhiz used the term *nazm* in the sense of genre or style, but not in the sense of internal arrangement, as al-Jurjânî will propose to do. During the ninth century, the concept of *nazm* in connection with *ijāz* (Inimitability of the Qur'ān) began to be used frequently by theologians. These include al-Bâqillânl, al-Qâdî al-Jurjânî and others (see Chapter 4). However, al-Jurjânî argued that the treatment of the concept of *nazm* by previous authors was inadequate. He added that previous rhetoricians did not give logical reasons for their evaluation. They gave only subjective impressions and personal feelings. Thus, he argued that the evaluation of eloquent discourse must be based on justified arguments and logical explanations:

For every discourse you find beautiful, and every utterance you find good, there must be a known cause and a rational justification for your approval of it. And there must be available to us a way to express this approval and evidences to prove the validity of our claim.17
Therefore, according to al-Jurjānī, it is not enough to say that the secret of eloquence is found in the nazm (arrangement), without explaining further the nature of this arrangement and the way in which it creates the desired effect. Thus, the concept of nazm must be explained in detail:

It is not sufficient to say that it (iṣāz, inimitability of the Qurān) is a special feature attributed to the manner of nazm, and a special method in arranging words with each other, until you describe that special feature and clarify it.¹⁸

These special features of arrangements must be explained. Once this is accomplished, the secrets of eloquence will then be known based on reasoning. This in turn will be the basis for the study of rhetoric. Therefore, the investigation into the secrets of eloquence, and ultimately the appreciation of the miraculous nature of style of the Qurān, will not be an easy task. Anyone who wants to understand the secrets of eloquence must develop the necessary knowledge and taste required for this task.

The two most important areas of study on which to build this understanding of eloquence are poetry and grammar. Therefore, al-Jurjānī starts his book by stressing the need for the study of poetry and grammar as the basic foundations for any further investigation of the nature of eloquence. During al-Jurjānī's time, there seemed to have been a decline in interest in both poetry and grammar. As a result, his discussion of these topics takes the form of a defense and justification for their value in studying eloquence.

¹⁷ Dalāʾīl al-ījāz, 89.

¹⁸ Dalāʾīl al-ījāz, 85.
As for poetry, he argues that it should be studied and examined not for its own sake, that is, not for its entertainment value, but to help in understanding the ways of Arabic eloquence. The study of grammar and theories of syntax is even more important for analyzing eloquent discourse. No one can compose, or appreciate fully, an eloquent discourse in any language without familiarity with its grammar and linguistic conventions. Based on the detailed knowledge of these linguistic processes, al-Jurjânî argued, eloquence can be achieved by the speaker and appreciated by the listener.

Based on this introduction, al-Jurjânî declares that his major task in this book is to explain the process of creating eloquence. He argues that, regardless of the name given to it by previous authors, the essence of the process of rhetoric is the same. Thus, his book will be devoted to:

A careful exposition of balâghah (eloquence), faṣâihah (euphony), bayân (clarity of expression), barâ'ah (skillfulness) and whatever is similar to these (terms) which are used to indicate the superiority of some speakers over others in the way they articulate, speak, and communicate to the listeners their purpose and meaning, and report to them what is in their souls, and uncover for them what is in their hearts.¹⁹

al-Jurjânî does not seem to be interested in what term is used to refer to the process of eloquence. He accepts the various terminologies used by previous authors as long as the exact nature of the process is understood. Thus, after this definition, he adds that those terms have frequently been used to refer to utterances (alfâz, sing. lafẓ) to the exclusion of meaning (ma‘ānî, ideas). Before al-Jurjânî, many Arab rhetoricians argued that the secret

¹⁹ Dalâ‘il al-‘Ijâz, 90.
of eloquence resides mostly in the proper choice of verbal expressions, thereby emphasizing utterances over meanings. For example, al-Jāhiz said meanings (concepts or ideas) are available everywhere and are known by the Arabs and non-Arabs. He argued that eloquence is manifested in the choice of correct and proper words for expressing those ideas. This view was very influential and was adopted by many later rhetoricians. For example, Abū Hilāl al-Askarī, author of The Book of the Two Crafts (see chapter 4) wrote that:

The proof that the crucial aspect of balāghah is based on excellence in utterances is that great speeches and splendid poems were not made for communicating a meaning only, for bad utterances can stand for good ones in communicating an idea. Therefore, excellence in speech, the mastery of its craft, the beauty of its words, its proper introductions, its fine paragraphs, its embellished style, its wonderful structures—indicates the nobility of its speaker and the proper understanding of its author. Most of these characteristics are found in the words not in the meanings . . . For this reason, elegance of style was sought after by the writer in his letter, the orator in his oration, and the poet in his ode, they perfect its beauty and amplify its construction, so that it indicates their skillfulness and superior knowledge of their craft.  

Excellence of utterances as the secret of eloquence was a widely held view.

This view was rejected by al-Jurjānī who argued that utterances alone cannot be considered the reason for eloquence. Moreover, individual utterances are sometimes considered eloquent in one place and not eloquent in another. This proves that the secret of eloquence is found in the specific arrangements of words to create a meaning. This process is called connecting tanzīq, through which arrangement is created:

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20 Dalā'il al-'lāz, 73.
It is known that *naẓm* is no more than *ta'līq* (interrelationship) between words, and making some of them a link to others. Words are of three types: nouns, verbs, and particles. The interrelationship between them have known methods which are no more than three: connecting a noun to a noun, a verb to a verb, and a particle to either of them.\(^\text{21}\)

Thus, the term *ta'līq* refers to the basic grammatical level of joining words in order to form sentences that ultimately form the discourse. Therefore, knowledge of grammar becomes an essential requirement for the eloquent arranging of discourse. This leads to the discussion of what al-Jurjānī calls *maṣāni al-nahw* (grammatical semantics):

Know that *naẓm* is nothing but to arrange your discourse according to the convention required by the science of *nahw* (grammar), following its rules and standards, knowing its established methods without departing from them, and maintaining the patterns that were drawn for you without violating any one of them.\(^\text{22}\)

This process of joining words together is not merely grammatical correctness. Rather, it is using the rules of grammar to create an eloquent and artistic discourse. This is similar to most other artistic crafts such jewelry making:

In short, silver and gold cannot become a ring or a bracelet by themselves but by means of the image they are shaped into. Similarly, single words, which are nouns,

\(^{21}\) *Dalā'il al-İjāz*, 48.

\(^{22}\) *Dalā'il al-İjāz*, 117.
verbs, and particles cannot become discourse without nazm whose essence is adhering to the grammatical meanings and the rules occurring in them.\textsuperscript{23}

In the above analogy, gold is the raw material for the jewelry maker in the same way that single words are the raw material for the speaker or author of artistic discourse.

Eloquent arrangement is dependent on the knowledge of grammatical semantics (\textit{ma\'\=aan\=i al-nahw}) which al-Jurj\=an\=i goes on to discuss in detail. Therefore, the rest of the work was devoted to the discussion of the various types of syntactic expression that affect the creation of meaning. More specifically, the analysis focuses on how one syntactic construction can express a given idea more accurately, more eloquently, and more beautifully than another. This detailed analysis constituted the impetus for the emergence of one branch of Arabic science of rhetoric called \textit{\text{`ilm al-ma\'\=aan\=i}} (The Science of Meaning, or Grammatical Semantics). Among the most important topics covered in this analysis are the following:

1. Variations in Word Order (\textit{al-taqd\=im wa al-ta\=kh\=ir}: Grammarians before al-Jurj\=an\=i noted that a given sentence can be presented in different forms without changing its basic meaning. However, al-Jurj\=an\=i criticized them for not realizing that any change in the order of the words in the sentence would inevitably lead to a subtle semantic change, depending on the intention of the speaker. Therefore, if a speaker wants to emphasize a certain concept or event, the words referring to these concepts or events are mentioned first in the sentence. This process is called

\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Dal\=ar\=il al-\=l\=ij\=az}, 122.
taqdīm (fronting, or preposing, i.e., to mention first) and ta'khīr (deferring, or postposing, i.e., to mention later). The main purpose of fronting is to focus the attention and place more value on the concept that is mentioned first, as in this line from the Qurʾān: "Thee we worship and Thee we implore for help."24 Another construction of this sentence might be, "We worship you and implore you for help," but the emphasis has shifted from God as the center of the believers' attention to themselves, because the second sentence begins with "We." al-Jurjānī gives numerous examples of this process that shows the subtle change in meaning whenever the word order of a sentence is altered.

(2) Omission and Mention (al-hadhf wa al-dhikr): al-Jurjānī points out that there are occasions when a given part of a sentence or phrase can be omitted or deleted. In certain contexts, omission (hadhf) is more rhetorically effective than mentioning (dhikr). Examples are given for the omissions of nouns and verbs in certain constructions where the deleted words or concepts are implied and left to the listener to grasp based on the overall context. For example, often omission is made for the sake of conciseness, such as in this line from the Qurʾān, "If God had willed, He would have brought them all to the right path," meaning, if God wanted to bring them all to the right path, He would brought them all to the right path. But the rules of eloquence require omitting this kind of repetition.

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24 Qurʾān, 1: 5.
(3) Conjunction and Disjunction (al-faṣal wa al-waṣah) Based on his theory of nazm (arrangement), discourse gains meaning through the joining together of words into a meaningful construction according to the rules of grammar. Therefore, the process of joining sentences together in discourse becomes an important area of investigation. The most important tools for joining sentences are wa (and), fā (then), thumma (after which). The first one (wa, and) is the basic and most often used element of joining. The other two often indicate a hierarchy of events, sometimes based on causality.

(4) Qualification or Limiting (al-qasr). al-Jurjānī also discusses the contexts in which limiting the validity of an idea or concept is rhetorically required, depending on the intention of the speaker, as in these sentences: "Only Zayd is generous," and "Zayd is nothing but generous." The first sentence singles out Zayd among other people as generous, while the second sentence singles out generosity as the most important quality of Zayd.

(5) Metaphorical Language (al-majāz). al-Jurjānī devotes sections of the book to the discussion of several types of figurative expression, most importantly, istīfārah (metaphor), kināyah (metonymy) tashbīh (simile) tamthīl (analogy). In the course of this discussion, he disagrees with previous authors who said that metaphor (isti‘ārah) is based on the borrowing of a name from one concept to another. He explains that the crucial element in metaphor is the borrowing of an idea (an intellectual concept) not the name itself. For example, to indicate the courage of a man, one might say, "I saw a lion." The traditional explanation of this expression is
to say that the name "lion" was borrowed for the man. But al-Jurjānī argues that what has been borrowed is the concept of courage associated with the lion.

The above five areas of discussion are among the most important topics of linguistic analysis found in al-Jurjānī’s work Dalā‘il (Evidences). The first four topics were enlarged and systemized by later authors under the branch of ‘ilm al-ma‘ānī (Grammatical Semantics). The fifth area of investigation (metaphorical language) was enlarged by al-Jurjānī himself in his work Asrār al-Balāghah (The Secrets of Eloquence), which later became the basis for the branch of ‘ilm al-bayān (The Science of Clarity).

In Asrār (Secrets), al-Jurjānī builds on his theory of construction (nāpricing, arrangement), which he established in the first book, to discuss the specific ways that metaphorical language is created in the mind (or psyche) of the speaker and, in turn, the ways in which it affects the listener. According to al-Jurjānī, the secret of eloquence lies in the ways poetic imagery is created through majāz (non-literal expressions, that is, metaphorical language). The most important types of non-literal language are isti‘ārah (metaphor), tashbih (simile), tamthīl (allegory), and kināyah (metonymy). These concepts were often treated by previous rhetoricians as embellishing (bādi‘) devices. al-Jurjānī, however, considers them to be the major ways for creating rhetorical meaning and the communication of ideas. Therefore, future systematizers of Arabic rhetoric isolated these devices and gave them the title of the science of clarity (‘ilm al-bayān). The rest of the long list of embellishment devices were eventually relegated to a third branch of Arabic rhetoric called ‘ilm al-Bādi‘ (the science of Embellishment).

al-Jurjānī’s principal contribution to Arabic rhetorical theory lies in his careful, analytical and systematic treatment of the major issues discussed by his predecessors. His
efforts opened the way for his followers to bring together all elements of Arabic rhetorical study into one overarching science called *'ilm al-Balāghah*.

The Final Codification of The Arabic Science of Rhetoric (*'ilm al-Balāghah*)

After al-Jurjānī, no significant original writing on rhetoric appeared. Instead, several scholars began to synthesize and codify the science of rhetoric largely on the basis of his two books, *Dalā'il al-Iṣāj* and *Asrār al-Balāghah*. Among those scholars was the philologist Mahmūd ibn ʿUmar al-Zamakhsharī (d. 1143) who was well known for his detailed commentary on the Qurʾān. His most famous work of Qurʾānic interpretation is called *al-Kashshāf* (The Unveiler), containing a phrase-by-phrase philological and logical commentary on the Qurʾān. His method of interpretation was based on his vast knowledge of Arabic philology, grammar, and rhetoric. For each phrase in the Qurʾān he presents a surface, or literal, meaning, followed by other possible alternative metaphorical meanings. al-Zamakhsharī based his linguistic analysis of the Qurʾān on the theories of eloquence advanced by al-Jurjānī, contributing to their wider dissemination. In addition, al-Zamakhsharī wrote a dictionary which he called *Asās al-Balāghah* (The Basis of Rhetoric), in which each entry is interpreted in terms of its literal as well as metaphorical meaning. Finally, al-Zamakhsharī seems to have been among the first authors to distinguish between two sciences of Arabic rhetoric, namely, *'ilm al-bayān* (clarity) and *'ilm al-maʿānī* (semantics). In his book *al-Kashshāf* (The Unveiler) he argued that knowledge of these two sciences are necessary for the understanding of the Qurʾān saying, "No one can delve into anything relating to these truths (of the Qurʾān) except those who had excelled in two sciences devoted to the Qurʾān which are the science of meaning and
the science of clarity.\footnote{25} However, al-Zamakhsharî does not elaborate on these terms as individualized branches. Moreover, he often uses the term bayân in its traditional sense as a name for all rhetorical studies. Nevertheless, the idea of dividing Arabic rhetoric into, initially, two main branches found its way to the works of another influential scholar, al-Sakkâkî.

al-Sakkâkî (d. 1229) composed an encyclopedic work called \textit{Miftâh al-'Ulûm} (The Key to the Sciences) as a reference to all aspects of Arabic linguistic studies up to his time, including phonology, morphology, grammar, rhetoric, argumentation and metrics. This work gave Arabic rhetoric its basic structure, which has come down to us and persists to this day. Perhaps following al-Zamakhsharî, al-Sakkâkî divided Arabic rhetoric (\textit{al-Balâghah}) into two major branches \textit{ilm al-Ma\'ânî} and \textit{ilm al-Bayân}, while adding a third auxiliary branch he called \textit{ilm al-Badî‘}, dealing with the embellishment of style. This section on rhetoric attracted the attention of many later scholars who wrote numerous commentaries on it. The most famous commentator on al-Sakkâkî was al-Qazwînî (d. 1338) whose work contributed to the final systemization and popularization of the science of rhetoric in its three branches known today.

The science of \textit{balâghah} as it is known today represents the culmination and the final systematization of the variety of works offered by the authors discussed in this dissertation. The early comments on poetry and oratory, the initial interpretations of the Qur\'ân, and the educational needs of the secretaries developed into a more sophisticated analysis of Arabic rhetoric. The logical tools of the philosophers and theologians

\footnote{25}{cited in Matlûb, \textit{Asâlib}, 75.}
contributed to a process of codifying Arabic rhetorical theory into a broad science, one that was considered of high importance within the Arabic educational curriculum for many centuries down to our own time.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the philosophical and theological approaches to the study of Arabic rhetoric were reviewed and illustrated. The logical orientation of the authors selected for discussion in this chapter contributed to the systemization of the science of balāghah. Most notably, the works of al-Jurjâni were found to be the most pre-eminent sources for this final codification. al-Jurjâni's extensive knowledge of both Islamic theology and Arabic grammar allowed him to present the most sophisticated views on rhetoric known up to his time. Finally, the scholastic methods of his followers led them to distil the vast literature on Arabic rhetoric into standardized categories under three main branches: (1) Semantics, (2) Clarity and (3) Embellishment.

In the final chapter of this dissertation, generalizations about the history and development of Arabic rhetorical theory will be made. Concluding remarks and implications for the contemporary study of rhetoric will also be offered.
CHAPTER 8

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this dissertation was to introduce the science of Arabic rhetoric known as 'ilm al-balāghah (the study of eloquence) into the wider discussion about the nature and scope of rhetoric that is currently taking place in the field of communication. A growing body of research is now being devoted to the study of the rhetorics of non-Western societies such as India, China and Africa, among others. However, knowledge about Arabic rhetoric is extremely limited, with only two short articles about the subject appearing in communication journals. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overall summary of the dissertation, followed by a discussion of the major conclusions that can be drawn based on the findings of this work and an assessment of their implications for the study of rhetoric in the communication field.

Summary

Research concerning various aspects of Arabic rhetorical theory was found among a number of humanistic disciplines, including linguistics, literary studies, political science, and philosophy. This literature was reviewed and evaluated in Chapter 2. It is evident that much commentary has been made on Arabic rhetoric, especially in its literary and poetic forms. Also, knowledge about Arabic rhetoric is found embedded in historical reviews of Arabic literature and culture, and in the investigation of poetic theory. However, it is
equally evident that this literature is incomplete, unsystematic, and sporadic in terms of both breadth and depth of analysis. There are simply no unified and comprehensive studies in English on the emergence and development of Arabic rhetorical theory (‘ilm al-balāghah). Thus, the need for a comprehensive study of the topic was confirmed.

In order to present a comprehensive view of the emergence and development of Arabic rhetorical theory, this investigation began, in Chapter 3, with an examination of the early historical and cultural background against which rhetorical consciousness among the Arabs developed. Specifically, the discussion focused on the early development of several rhetorical trends and practices in their historical context during the period from c. 500 to 750 C.E., that is, covering the pre-Islamic period (commonly known as al-Jāhiliyyah, The Time of Ignorance or Paganism), through early Islamic times, until the end of the Umayyad period. It was found that no treatises on rhetorical theory were written during this span of time, but the Arabs had an implicit understanding of the rules of eloquence and fragments of their remarks on rhetoric were transmitted orally until the beginning of the ‘Abbāsid era (c. 750 C.E.).

Chapter 4 was devoted to the presentation of a broad overview of Arabic rhetorical studies as formulated by various groups of scholars, including the early philologists, writers of adab literature (belles lettres), philosophers, and theologians, leading to the codification of Arabic eloquence (‘ilm al-balāghah). The main impetuses for the emergence of Arabic rhetorical theory were found to be: (1) interest in the collection and evaluation of poetry; (2) interest in the interpretation of the Qurʾān; (3) external influences, most notably Greek science and philosophy. This chapter explored the rhetorical dimensions of: (1) philology and grammar; (2) prose writing and the adab (belles lettres) genre; (3) the new poetry (al-bādir); (4) philosophy and Greek logic; (5) the
eloquence of the Qurʾān; and (6) the systemization of the study of rhetoric. In general, it was found that the study of Arabic rhetorical theory emerged gradually from within the environment of the early philologists and their close connection to the reciters of early Arabic poetry. Some early philologists were also interested in the linguistic interpretation of the Qurʾān, which was viewed as the supreme example of eloquence in Arabic. The relationship of poetics to rhetoric was explored and I argued that, in significant ways, Arabic poetry exhibited rhetorical dimensions, serving the end of persuasion in civic and religious contexts.

A second generation of scholars built on the foundation that was created by the early philologists. They emphasized written, as well as spoken, discourse. They also were interested in artistic prose writing alongside their study of poetry. In addition, the Qurʾān continued to play a major role in the study of Arabic rhetoric as a paradigmatic example of eloquence. A third group of scholars were influenced by Greek philosophy and logic. Their work tended to be rationalistic in its outlook and more coherently organized. Finally, several theologians contributed to the advancement of Arabic rhetorical theory by examining and analyzing the style of the Qurʾān, which they believed to be inimitable. The work of all these scholars culminated in a science of eloquence called ʿilm al-balāghah in three branches, including semantics (maʿnī), clarity (bayān) and embellishment (badf). The vast primary literature on Arabic rhetorical theory was divided into three categories that were presented in three subsequent chapters: (1) the early philological approach (chapter 5); (2) the literary approach (chapter 6); (3) the philosophical and theological approaches (chapter 7).

In chapter 5, the contributions of the early philologists to the study of Arabic rhetoric were explored. Specifically, the works of al-ʾĀṣmaʾī, Ibn Sallām, Abū ʿUbaydah,
Tha’lab, and al-Mubarrad were discussed as representatives of this approach. Overall, the early philologists used pre-Islamic and early Islamic poetry as their main source for linguistic and rhetorical investigations. This early poetry had become canonized as classical and was held as an example of correct and eloquent discourse. The philologists advanced theories about the literary and artistic value of this poetry. They also commented on its rhetorical functions within Arab society, emphasizing its public and persuasive dimensions. In addition, some philologists devoted special attention to the language of the Qur’an, leading to works of interpretation and rhetorical analysis.

Chapter 6 was devoted to a discussion of the works of three important rhetoricians grouped under the category of the literary approach. A rise in literacy in Arabic culture took place during the ninth and tenth centuries C.E., resulting in the development of the Arabic genre known as adab (belles lettres). One of the most influential writers of adab was the famous essayist and rhetorician al-Jâhiz, who wrote a major work of Arabic rhetoric entitled al-Bayân wa al-Tabyīn (Clarity and Clarification). In this work, al-Jâhiz emphasized the role of communication and persuasion in rhetoric. For him, the concept of bayân means communication in the broadest sense, including non-verbal communication. The purpose of bayân is ifhām (making things understood). He also discusses the concept of balāghah (eloquence), which means communicating ideas in elevated and correct Arabic style. Balāghah requires the mastery of oratorical skills, knowledge of the audience and their cultural and educational status, and being aware of the context of communication.

Another rhetorician, Ibn Qutaybah made contributions to the study of Arabic rhetoric through his discussion of adab al-kātib (The Craft of the Secretary), his interpretation of the difficult passages in the Qur’an and his critique of Arabic poetry.
Like al-Jāhiz, he emphasized the persuasive function of rhetoric, whether it was found in official letters, the Qur'ān, or poetry. For Ibn Qutaybah, balāghah (eloquence) requires a high and correct Arabic style and knowledge of the requirements of the situation, which includes the knowledge of the social status of the audience.

A third critic, Ibn al-Mu'tazz, collected, classified and commented on the major rhetorical and stylistic figures that were common in Arabic discourse. He argued that stylistic figures, which he called badī', are found in early, as well as later, Arabic forms of discourse, including the Qur'ān, old and new poetry, and speeches. His discussion of the figures of speech led ultimately to the establishment of a special branch of Arabic rhetorical study called 'ilm al-badī' (the science of embellishment).

Finally, in chapter 7, the philosophical and theological approaches to the study of Arabic rhetoric were explored. Greek philosophy and logic were the impetus for the development of Islamic philosophy and Greek dialectical methods were also evident in Islamic theology. Several Arab rhetoricians who were influenced by Islamic philosophy and theology contributed to the advancement of Arabic rhetorical studies. The most notable contribution came from al-Jurjānī who wrote two important works of rhetoric, Dalā'il al-Ijāz (The Evidences of the Inimitability of the Qur'ān) and Asrār al-Balāghah (The Secrets of Eloquence). These two works became the basis for the contributions of his followers who divided Arabic rhetoric into three branches of semantics, clarity, and embellishment.

Conclusions

Based on this study, several conclusions about the nature and scope of Arabic rhetorical theory can be made and some implications for contemporary rhetoric can be
drawn. This section illuminates the nature and scope of Arabic rhetorical theory. A third and final section discusses some of the implications for the general study of rhetoric.

(1) The Relation Between Poetics and Rhetoric

Poetry played a central role in early Arabic culture and a primary part of this role was rhetorical. In pre-Islamic and early Islamic times, the poet had a dominant public and political role. Early Arabic poetry was often based on public and persuasive themes such as praise and blame, calling for unity or advocating war, among others. Poetry reflected almost all aspects of the lives of Arabs before Islam and was often referred to as *dīwān al-ʿarab* (the archive or register of the Arabs). The early Arabs associated the eloquence of the poet with magical powers and attributed his or her verbal skills to direct connection with supernatural beings.

Later, in the pre-Islamic period, there were some indications of rhetorical awareness among many Arabs. For example, it became common to hold contests between two or more poets, especially during annual fairs. The poet al-Nābighah was said to be a judge of poetry during the annual fair outside Mecca. However, most of these critical remarks that came down from this period were subjective, impressionistic and *ad hoc* in nature. They were not elaborated into a rhetorical system.

Additionally, some poets were known for their careful compositions. Their poems were called *hawliyah* (yearly) because they took a year to compose and polish. According to al-Jāḥiz, these poets, such as Zuhayr, spent a year working on their major poems, editing and polishing them until they became satisfied with them and made them public. This indicates a knowledge on the part of the poet about selectivity of linguistic expressions and literary themes and sensitivity to audience and situational factors. Also, the
major poets taught their knowledge of poetry to their followers, the reciters. This process continued for generations, creating distinct schools of poetry that reflect the style of the original master. However, much like the Homeric tradition in ancient Greece, this system of teaching poetry was not preserved in writing, but was transmitted from one poet to another, and from one reciter to another via the oral tradition.

Pre-Islamic and early Islamic poets and poetry reciters (rāwīs, transmitters, or rhapsodists) played a leading role in shaping rhetorical techniques, anticipating the emergence of Arabic rhetorical theory in later periods. There was an extensive role for the philologists in collecting this poetic heritage for the purpose of codifying and teaching the Arabic language. Therefore, the early philologists played a major role in the emergence of rhetorical studies. The study of rhetoric became heavily influenced by this early work. In this connection, a similarity was noted between the role of early Arab poets and reciters, on the one hand, and ancient Greek rhapsodists, on the other (see chapter 3). Both were found to have played substantial roles in shaping the techniques and theoretical frameworks of their respective rhetorical systems.

Later, the conflict between the old and new poetry led to new works on rhetoric and works of applied rhetorical analysis. In the early ‘Abbāsid period, a new style of poetry known as bādir was developed, causing great controversy among Arab rhetoricians. This led to the appearance of one of the earliest main works of Arabic rhetoric called Kitāb al-Bādir by Ibn al-Mu’tazz (see chapter 6). This work had a sizable impact on the history of Arabic rhetoric, leading to the establishment of a branch of Arabic rhetoric devoted to the study of rhetorical figures known as bādir (embellishment). In sum, one may conclude that the poetry of the early Arabic culture served specifically rhetorical ends and presaged later developments in Arabic rhetoric.
(2) The Role of Formal Oratory

Next to poetry, formal oratory was also practiced frequently and greatly appreciated by the early Arabs. The orator (khatīb) also played a public and political role, participating in tribal gatherings and meetings of consultation or disputation. In addition, a unique style of oratory was associated with the pre-Islamic kāhin (soothsayer), using parallelism and rhymed prose (ṣafī). With the coming of Islam, the Friday congregational prayer was established. It was accompanied by a sermon (khutbah, oration) which was given by the Prophet himself. During the Friday sermon, the Prophet addressed both religious and political issues facing the new Muslim community. Gradually, the Friday sermon became ritualized and was given over to a special class of preachers who spoke on behalf of the caliph or governor. Later, the Umayyad period witnessed a rise in political, religious and ceremonial oratory, reflecting the political and social changes of that period (see chapter 3).

In the 'Abbāsid period, there was interest in theological disputations based on rationalist methods that were founded on Greek sources. For example, members of the theological movement known as al-Muʿtazilah practiced oratory and debates. They advocated that the purpose of oratory is persuasion and formulated rules for eloquence. As shown in chapter 6, a member of this movement wrote a sheet containing the rules of oratory and persuasive writing. He argued that effective discourse depends on natural talent and extensive practice. He also emphasized the importance of knowing the social and educational status of the audience in order to match the speech to the requirements of the situation. The rhetorical teachings of al-Muʿtazilah had an impact on al-Jāhiz, who wrote extensively on Arabic oratory in his al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn (Clarity and
Clarification) (see chapter 6). However, with the ascendancy of religious orthodoxy around the tenth century, and the consequent evaporation of opportunities for robust oratory, there was little emphasis on disputation and open debates. Muslim scholars began to devote their attention to the style of the Qur’ân as a source for rhetorical study.

(3) The Style of the Qur’ân

The role of the Qur’ân in the emergence of rhetorical and linguistic investigation was highly significant. Muslims believe that the Qur’ân is the direct speech of God (Allāh) and that it is inimitable. This led to the doctrine of the iṣâr qān the inimitability of the Qur’ân) among Islamic theologians and rhetoricians. The language of the Qur’ân was an important aspect of the notion of inimitability. The eloquence of the Qur’ân was a sign or a proof of its divine origin. This had a major impact on the development of Arabic rhetorical studies. Many works of linguistic and rhetorical analysis were written for the purpose of explaining the supreme nature of the language of the Qur’ân. In this connection, poetry was seen as a tool for understanding some of the obscure language found in the Qur’ân, giving further legitimization to the continuation of the study of the old poetry. Thus, the Qur’ân and poetry became the two major sources of primary data for Arab philologists and rhetorical theorists.

The early philologists were concerned with the preservation of the language of the Qur’ân and its correct interpretation. Early studies were concerned with the interpretation (tafsīr) of the Qur’ân. Most works of interpretation were based on the notion of majāz (metaphorical expression). One of the early inquiries was Majāz al-Qur’ân by Abū ʿUbaydah, which became a primary source for rhetorical study. But the most important concept for Arabic rhetoric in Qur’ānic studies is the notion of the inimitable
style (rijaz) of the Qur'an. The concept of rijaz was elaborated by the Islamic theologians using their knowledge of Greek dialectical methods. According to most scholars, the Qur'an is miraculous because of its content and style. Later, however, the term rijaz was mostly used to refer specifically to the linguistic and rhetorical characteristics found in the Qur'an. Following the discussion of the style of the Qur'an, the theory of nazm (arrangement) was developed, especially at the hands of al-Jurjani, whose two major works Dalail al-rijaz (Evidences for the Inimitability of the Qur'an) and Asrar al-Balaghah (The Secrets of Eloquence) led his followers to codify Arabic rhetoric into three branches:

(4) The Education of the Writer (Adab al-Katib, The Craft of the Secretary)

As in the case of Europe and the West, the art of letter writing was developed and became a major rhetorical form in the Arab world. Some external influences, namely, Greek and Persian, were noticeable in the writings of the early founders of this art (see chapter 3). Arab rhetoricians developed a genre of rhetoric called adab al-katib (The Craft of the Secretary). Several important works in this genre, such as Adab al-Katib by Ibn Qutaybah, were written for the purpose of the rhetorical education of the secretary, in the sense that the knowledge required by the secretary includes mastery of the Arabic language and grammar, in addition to the memorizations of poetry and oratory. In the Arabic tradition, letter writing developed into two major categories: (1) formal correspondence; and (2) informal or friendly letters. The first dealt with affairs of the state, including political announcements and administrative documents. The second type of letter was exchanged between friends and dealt with personal subject matter. The development of techniques and formulas for the Arabic art of letter writing had parallels in the Dictamen of the Middle Ages. Both traditions emphasized the importance of
correct grammar and adherence to established models. Both served as important forms of persuasion. Both explored the application of rhetorical forms to written discourse. And both became integral parts of their respective rhetorical systems.

(5) External Influences

Arabic rhetoric did not develop in a vacuum; rather, Arabic rhetoric and rhetoricians were influenced significantly by a number of external cultural forces. One source of influence was the Persian court literature which was mostly evident in the manuals of the education of the secretary. As shown in chapter 3, many works of Persian literature were translated and incorporated into Arabic adab (belles lettres). More importantly, Arabic rhetoric was influenced by the existing Hellenistic educational environment of the Middle East during the early centuries of the Islamic expansion (c. 600-800 C.E.) As Versteegh pointed out, this influence came about as a result of the contact made with the living Hellenistic cultures of Syria, Palestine and Egypt, where the Arabs learned from the conquered peoples many skills and sciences for the administration of their new empire. Specifically, the existing system of Hellenistic education was a major source for the transmission of Greek rhetorical knowledge to the Arabs. Versteegh explains that

the essential factor in transmission of the Greek knowledge to the Islamic world was the network of rhetorical schools in the Hellenistic countries, from which Greek culture radiated into Syria, Palestine, Mesopotamia etc. . . . This educational network formed the cultural context, the medium, through which Greek elements could pass into Islamic culture.\(^2\)

This type of influence is usually described as indirect to distinguish it from the direct influence on Islamic culture brought about by a second phase of transmission.

The second or direct phase is the translation into Arabic of Greek works of science and philosophy commissioned by the 'Abbāsid caliph al-Ma'mūn in the ninth century. As mentioned in chapter 4, al-Ma'mūn created an academy known as Bayt al-Hikmah (The House of Wisdom) for the sole purpose of transmitting ancient Greek scholarship into the Islamic cultural context. This included the translations of the *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* of Aristotle. As discussed in chapter 4, the word *khatābah* (oration) was used to describe the contents of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*; sometimes, the Arabized word, *Rîtūrīqah* (rhetoric) was used.

The major Islamic philosophers such as al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) and Ibn Rushd (Averroes) commented on both the *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* of Aristotle as part of their philosophical inquires. In addition, several authors also applied the works of the Islamic philosophers to their rhetorical efforts, leading to several works on Arabic rhetoric that benefited from Greek knowledge and methods. The most important of these was Qudāmah ibn Ja'far and Ibn Wahb whose work was discussed in chapter 7. Greek rhetorical and logical concepts, then, were eventually enfolded into the Arabic rhetorical and literary tradition.

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Implications

Based on the findings of this dissertation, some implications for the general study of rhetoric can be identified.

(1) Implications for the Cross-Cultural Study of Rhetoric.

In his recent work, *Comparative Rhetoric*, George Kennedy explains that one of the most important objectives of the cross-cultural study of rhetoric is "to identify what is universal and what is distinctive about any one rhetorical tradition in comparison to others." A second objective "is to try to formulate a General Theory of Rhetoric that will apply in all societies." To this end, Kennedy discusses the rhetorics of several cultures whose systems of rhetoric are known to him through the available scholarship. These include several major world cultures such as the ancient Near East, India, China, and ancient Greece and Rome. However, there is no mention of the Arabic system of rhetoric, probably because of the lack of unified scholarship in this field (see chapter 2) and the paucity of translations into Western languages, especially English. The addition of the Arabic system of rhetoric to this new cross-cultural field of study will be of considerable value. At this stage, some initial observations can be made about the system of Arabic rhetoric within the comparative framework offered by Kennedy.

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4 *Comparative Rhetoric*, 1.
Three characteristics of the Arabic rhetorical system can be said to represent the universal traits that it shares with most of the major world rhetorical systems. First, like many world traditions discussed by Kennedy, Arabic rhetoric has a strong foundation in oral poetry. According to Kennedy, many ancient rhetorical systems, such as that of China and Greece, had oral poetry as one of their foundational sources. This is true also of the Arabic tradition. As happened in other cultures, Arabic poetry was transmitted orally for many generations until it was committed to writing in the eighth century C. E. It was then used as an example for correct and elevated discourse, thereby influencing the future development of rhetorical theorizing.

Second, next to poetry, formal oratory was of importance for the development of Arabic rhetorical theory. This reinforces Kennedy’s findings that appreciation for oratory is an almost universal phenomenon:

Traditional societies all over the world have admired effective and eloquent orators. Most languages have a word for “orator,” and orators everywhere have recognized the functions of deliberation. Ability at speaking is partly a natural endowment, but enhanced by listening to older speakers to learn traditional technique and topics, by imitating good speakers, and by opportunities to practice, in private or in public.⁵

As mentioned earlier, the Arabs had great appreciation for oratory since pre-Islamic times. The orator (khatīb) had public and political roles throughout the history of Arabic culture, although the role of oratory has changed with changing religious and political environments (see chapter 3).

⁵ *Comparative Rhetoric*, 217.
Third, the development of literacy seems to be a universal ingredient in catalyzing the development of rhetoric. As Kennedy points out, the increase in literacy within ancient societies had an impact on rhetorical awareness and the conceptualization of rhetoric. This phenomenon is also evident in the case of Arabic rhetoric. It was pointed out earlier that the pre-Islamic Arabs had an appreciation for eloquence in the form of poetry and oratory, but they did not develop a system for the study of rhetoric. It was only in the eighth and ninth centuries, when literacy became widespread among the Arabs, that speculation about the nature of eloquence began.

On the other hand, Arabic rhetoric has traits that, judging by Kennedy's work, are not found in many other world cultures. They are found principally in the Greco-Roman rhetorical tradition. These include the preoccupation with rhetorical figures and the creation of an independent academic discipline for the study of rhetoric. This lead to the question of the role of Greek thought in the Arabic rhetorical system, which is best discussed in the following section.

(2) The Role of Greek Thought in Arabic Rhetoric

In Kennedy's *Comparative Rhetoric*, the emphasis was on assaying widely divergent cultures to find out whether there are commonalities in their systems of rhetoric, despite their isolation, in many cases, from each other. For example, ancient China and ancient Greece exhibited similar rhetorical phenomena, not due to direct influence, but probably due to common situations. For instance, sophistic movements analogous to those in ancient Greece appeared in Chinese thought and flourished there.
from the fourth to the second century B.C.E. Both systems exhibited an interest in public debate, fascination with logical paradox, and the correct use of language.\(^6\)

In the case of Arabic rhetoric, the direct Greek influence is discernable and had been documented in certain cases, especially in the field of philosophy and theology (see chapter 4). However, the role of Greek thought in Arabic rhetoric is not yet fully explored, aside from some studies of the Greek influence on the emergence of Arabic grammar (discussed in chapter 4). Kennedy does not address this issue because the Arabic tradition was not one of the rhetorical systems that he chose for his comparative analysis. Thus, the interaction between the two cultures and how it manifested itself in the study of Arabic rhetoric is an intriguing topic that merits future study. Some areas of possible interaction include the interest, on the part of both Greco-Roman and Arab rhetoricians, in collecting and classifying rhetorical figures, which is not found in other cultures. According to Kennedy

The classical distinction between tropes, figures of speech, and figures of thought is not found outside the West. Chinese and Indian writers on language and literature name and define a number of individual tropes and figures but do not classify them under these three headings.\(^7\)

This phenomenon of classification is also found in the Arabic tradition. This raises the question of direct borrowing by the Arab rhetoricians from the Greek system. Van Gelder points out that

\(^{6}\) *Comparative Rhetoric*, 167.

\(^{7}\) *Comparative Rhetoric*, 228.
the study of figures and tropes, which undoubtedly formed part of the study of rhetoric in the Hellenistic school tradition, could well have appealed to the Arab critics... In early Arabic critical terminology and concepts there are, undeniably, a number of parallels with Greek equivalents. This could be explained as the result of independent origin; it might be easier to believe, though difficult to show in detail, that it was the outcome of the contacts of the Arabs with the Christian schools and their tradition of rhetorical training.  

Van Gelder's comments point the way to future inquiry in a specific area of rhetorical study, that is, the origin of Arabic rhetorical figures and the probable influence of Greek thought on their formulation. However, we might speculate that interest in early Arabic poetry and in the Style of the Qur'an might have led by itself to interest in rhetorical figures, independently of Greco-Roman influences.

Kennedy also asserts that an important feature of Greco-Roman rhetoric is its independence as a distinct academic discipline, a phenomenon not found outside the West. In non-Western cultures rhetoric is often studied as an integral part of philosophy, morality and ethics. According to Kennedy, the Greek form of constitutional democracy, which allowed for the participation of ordinary citizens in the decision-making process to a degree not found elsewhere, is the main reason for the establishment of the academic discipline for the study and teaching of rhetoric. In ancient Greece, citizens were often required to speak for themselves in political assemblies and courts of law. Therefore, Kennedy points out, the study of rhetoric came about largely as a result of the need for teaching citizens the art of persuasion. This entails knowledge of how to compose a speech that was likely to be persuasive in a public assembly or a court of law.

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8 Van Gelder, *Beyond the Line*, 5.
In the Arabic tradition, the study of eloquence (*ilm al-balâghah) also became an independent academic discipline. This can be attributed partly to general Greek influences in the area of classification of the sciences. In the Islamic system of education known as *madrasah* (school, or college), knowledge was divided into (1) religious sciences, (2) foreign sciences (i.e., Greek philosophy and science) and (3) the linguistic arts, including rhetoric (*balâghah*). However, the Islamic political environment differed from that of ancient Greece. The Islamic form of government is based on the system of Caliphate, in which the caliph is regarded as the Head of the Islamic Community. His major function is the upholding of the rule of God as found in the Qur'ân and the Prophetic tradition.

Therefore, Arabic rhetoric as an academic discipline was directed to a large extent to the study and the interpretation of the style of the Qur'ân. William Smyth compared the Western and Arabic systems of rhetoric and found that the two are similar in the sense that they are both concerned with the study of persuasion through discourse. However, his main findings indicated that, while the Western rhetorical tradition teaches composition of speeches and texts for the purpose of persuading an audience, the Arabic system, in its codified form, emphasizes the reading and interpretation of texts that are already established, namely the Qur'ân and classical poetry, for the purpose of drawing both legal and aesthetic rules. This resulted in less emphasis being put on oral delivery and public performance in the later works of Arabic rhetoric, including the works of al-Jurjânî, who was mostly interested in the critical analysis of written texts. Overall, this area of comparative rhetoric, including the issue of disciplinization of the art of rhetoric merits future inquiry.
(3) Expansion of the Concept of Arabic Rhetoric

This study gave an overview of the emergence and development of Arabic rhetorical theory. The main sources for this study were works considered to be classical within the tradition of Arabic literary history. However, it was mentioned in chapter 1 that many previously unpublished sources for the study of Arabic rhetoric are in the process of being edited and published in the Arab world and elsewhere. Future studies of Arabic rhetoric should take advantage of this newly emerging literature to help in answering many questions regarding the nature and scope of Arabic rhetoric, such as the ones discussed above. Of particular interest is information about the system of rhetorical education for orators, debaters, and writers. In addition, early works of linguistic and rhetorical analysis, if and when recovered, might shed more light on the connection between Arabic rhetoric and the rhetoric of neighboring Persian and Hellenistic cultures. In general, newly recovered material will help expand our knowledge of the Arabic rhetorical tradition beyond the limited form it takes today.

Conclusion

This study was a journey through the history of the Arabic rhetorical tradition. It represents a preliminary survey of the emergence and development of Arabic rhetorical theory. This survey has undertaken to present a broad view of the history and evolution of the Arabic rhetorical system, up to about 1400 C.E. Some of the information offered here is known to specialists in the fields of linguistics, literary theory, and Islamic philosophy, among others. However, this is the first time that the early history of Arabic rhetoric has been presented within the framework of rhetorical studies in a unified form
in English, including numerous original translations from a variety of relevant texts forming the canon of Arabic rhetorical theory.

This study confirms the richness and diversity of the Arabic rhetorical tradition. Of special interest to scholars of Western rhetoric are the many points of similarity and close interactions between the Arabic and Greek systems of rhetoric that deserve the attention of future researchers. As a whole, I consider this work as only a small beginning of what I hope to be a rich field of inquiry in the years to come.
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