Note: this piece was written several computers ago, so the transliteration is a little chewed up.

'I'jāz

A technical term referring to the status of the Qur'an as a miracle (*mu'jiz* or *mu'jiza*) resisting imitation and confirming the Prophet's mission. The doctrine of the inimitability of the Qur'an was founded on a number of Qur'anic verses in which the authenticity of the Prophet's mission was linked to a challenge (*tah□addī*) addressed to unbelievers to produce a likeness (*mithl*) of a specified portion of it: "Or do they say, 'He fabricated the (Message)?' Nay, they have no faith! Let them produce a recital unto it – if (it be) they speak the Truth!" (Q.52/33-34, and cf. Q.2/23-24, 10/38, 11/13, 17/88). This notion of matching or emulating (*mu'ārad□a*) reflected the competitive practice of pre-Islamic poets, and there are several reports of attempts to meet the Qur'anic challenge by the Prophet's contemporaries, such as Musaylima b. H□abīb, whose verses earned him the taunts of later writers. But it was in the 3rd/9th century that the doctrine took shape and found its place at the confluence of several Islamic sciences, such as exegesis, theology, and the nascent practice of literary criticism, whose resources it both used and helped extend.

The development of the doctrine must be seen as a response to several social, political and intellectual contexts, such as the heightened interest in the notion of prophethood and in miracles as the grounds of prophetic claims which was stimulated by inter-religious (especially Muslim and Christian) polemics in the 3rd/9th century, as well as by the challenges arising from within the Islamic community itself, where attacks on the notion of prophethood were often combined with criticisms of the Qur'an. Ibn ar-Rāwandī (d. 245/860 or ca. 298/912) is the most famous example, but similar challenges were ascribed to representatives of the *šu'ūbī* movement in the same century, whether poets or secretaries, several of whom attracted charges of freethinking or dualism (*zandaqa*) (Abdul Aleem 1933, Martin 1980 and 2002). Thus, the doctrine of *'i'jāz* might be seen in its connection with the battles over language which were bound up with larger questions about cultural and ethnic allegiance involved in *šu'ūbism*, and hence as a force cementing a sense of community – a community ranged around a text whose fixedness the doctrine could be seen as reflecting and celebrating (cf. Audebert 1982:10-11). In addition, the doctrine had close links with the theological controversies concerning the status of the Qur'an (whether created or eternal) and of the divine attribute of speech that dominated the 3rd/9th century and constituted a formative influence on the perspective on language developed across a variety of Islamic sciences. Theological commitments on these questions were an important factor affecting positions adopted on the question of *'i'jāz* (Larkin 1995).

Several unpreserved works appear in the 3rd/9th under the title of *Naz□m al-Qur'ān*, among them one by the renowned Mu'tazilite litterateur al-Jāh□iz□ (d. 255/868-9), and have been interpreted as precursors of the later treatments of the topic, initiating an exploration of the Qur'an's literary qualities (see Audebert 1982:57-71). Special treatises under the title of *'i'jāz al-Qur'ān* begin to be written in the 4th/10th century, with the Mu'tazilite ar-Rummānī's (d. 384/994) *al-Nukat fī 'i'jāz al-Qur'ān* and the traditionalist al-Khat□t□ābī's (d. 386/996 or 388/998) *Bayān 'i'jāz al-Qur'ān,* while the works often deemed to consummate the treatment of the

doctrine appear soon after, in the contributions of the Ašʿarite authors ’Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013) (*’I'jāz al-Qur’ān*) and ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d. 471/1078) (*Dalā’il i'jāz al-Qur’ān*), on which the greatest focus will be placed here.

Investigations into the Qur’anic miracle had to engage with several distinct questions, of which the most important concerned the nature of the miracle and the means by which knowledge of it was attained. The first question was directly invited by the terms of the challenge itself, which challenged unbelievers to produce the 'like' of the Qur’an. But 'like' in what respect? Two approaches came to be distinguished early in the history of the debates, one of which located the miracle in certain features of the Qur’an itself, while the other located it in God’s act of averting or preventing (sᵓarafa) human beings from attempts to rival the Qur’an by depriving them of motivation and interest. Known as the doctrine of *sᵓarfa,* the latter was notably propounded by the Baġdādī Muʿtazilite ’Abū Ishᵓāq an-Nazᵓzᵓām (d. between 220/835 and 230/845), and its corollary was the claim that "had God left [the Arabs] to their own devices, they would have been capable of producing a *sūra* which was like it in eloquence" (aš-Šahrastānī, *Milal* I, 56-57). Like others who followed his lead (notably ar-Rummānī), he was happy to combine this view with an approach of the first kind, and here he claimed that the feature internal to the Qur’an which constituted its miraculous nature was the knowledge of "*ġuyūb*"– information inaccessible to human beings, such as prophetic statements – which it contained.

An-Nazᵓzᵓām’s view remained popular with Baġdādī Muʿtazilites as well as Imāmite Šīʿites, but most writers on the topic – in particular, the Basᵓᵓran Muʿtazilites, Zaydite Šīʿites and Ašʿarites – rejected it on both counts. On the one hand, they took issue with its implied ascription of miraculous quality to God’s act of averting as against the Qur’an itself, and some went as far as to claim consensus for the latter position (as-Suyūtᵓī, *’Itqān* II, 231; cf. al-Bāqillānī’s discussion of the *sᵓarfa* view in *’I'jāz,* 41-43, and ʿAbd al-Jabbār’s in *Muġnī* XVI, 217-220, 323-328). Equally important, the dominant view within the second approach was to identify the miraculous quality, not primarily within the content of the message, but within its form, and in particular, within its singular and insuperable eloquence.

The long probing of Muslim scholarship into the stylistic wonders of the Qur’an which thus began would play host to several key themes that linked it to other domains of scholarship in various ways. One prominent theme, which brought investigations into *’i'jāz* into the intellectual orbit of literary criticism, appeared in answer to the second question mentioned above, concerning the means by which knowledge of the miracle could be gained. Insofar as the miracle was to serve as a proof (*hᵓujja*) and a sign of prophethood (one of the Prophet’s *dalā’il an-nubuwwa*), knowledge of it needed to be readily accessible – its target audience was not the believer but the unbeliever. Indeed 'the underlying assumption of the challenge was that the merit and beauty of the Qur’an could be appreciated even by those outside the hold of faith' (Mir 1988:51). The fact of its accessibility was urged by reports of spontaneous responses to the beauty of the Qur’anic language by the Prophet’s contemporaries, which could produce conversions and secure grudging admissions even from the Prophet’s opponents (see az-Zarkašī’s paradigmatic description of al-Walīd ibn al-Muġīra’s awestruck response in *Burhān* II, 110-111). At the same time, the fact that knowledge of the Qur’an’s aesthetic excellence required cultivation was made evident in certain writers’ classification of the miracle as one known through a process of proof (*istidlāl*). The more nuanced position on the topic was that an immediate knowledge was possible to those of trained literary judgment and ability, whereas others would need to rely on proof, and avail themselves of the indirect or

circumstantial evidence provided by the fact that the Arabs, acknowledged masters of their eloquence, had not produced a successful match for the Qur'an (al-Bāqillānī, *'I'jāz,* 393, cf. the discussions in al-Ġazālī, *Iqtisād*, 206-208, al-Juwaynī, *'Iršād,* 288-295, Weiss 1992:74-79). This understanding of aesthetic judgments was in line with developments in the field of literary criticism, where the notion of the critic as an authority whose literary judgment overruled the subjective response of ordinary people, and of criticism as a craft (*sinā'a*) requiring professional training and producing specialized knowledge had emerged clearly, beginning with Ibn Sallām (d. ca. 232/847) in the 3rd/9th century and carried forward by his successors in the 4th/10th (Abu Deeb 1990, esp. 348-349). While never losing sight of the limits of explanation, these developments led away from aesthetic subjectivism and towards a view of literary judgments as justifiable by reasons.

A second theme carried discussions of the Qur'anic *'i'jāz* into the range of *kalām,* where the debates concerning the nature of divine speech – chiefly polarized between Muʿtazilite and Ašʿarite theologians – had issued in theologically mindful accounts of the nature of language and the relation between word (*lafz*) and meaning (*ma'nā*). These accounts provided the backdrop for a debate to which early critics such as al-Jāhiz and Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889) had made formative contributions, which sought to identify the locus of eloquence, and in particular whether it lay in the words of a text or its meaning – a contrast between form and content different from, but not entirely unrelated to, the debate between an-Nazzām and his detractors.

These themes provide us with some important prisms for presenting and contrasting the works of al-Bāqillānī and al-Jurjānī in this field. An accomplished theologian, al-Bāqillānī's *'I'jāz al-Qur'ān* was a layman's foray into the field of literary studies (cf. the comments of van Gelder 1982:100, Grunebaum 1950:xx), and he draws heavily on the work of predecessors such as ar-Rummānī, Qudāma ibn Jaʿfar (d. 337/948) and al-ʿAskarī (probably 'Abū Ahmad, d. 382/993). He identifies several elements which might constitute the Qur'an's miraculous character (al-Bāqillānī, *'I'jāz,* 48-71), but his main focus is on its eloquence (*fasāha, balāġa*), which he claims surpasses that of any other speech. His account of this position is multifaceted, but his urge throughout is to present the Qur'an as a literary phenomenon transcending the categories of human literary creation. Thus, one of the grounds on which al-Bāqillānī argues the case of the Qur'an's unsurpassable eloquence is in its *sui generis* construction (*nazm*) which defies classification and departs from all accustomed styles, modes or genres, such as poetry or rhymed prose (*saj'*) (ibid, 51-52, and 76ff). The same desire to steer clear of category is revealed in al-Bāqillānī's discussion of the types of *badī'* – which he lists in some detail – where again he insists that, while the Qur'an partakes of such figures, its eloquence cannot be reduced to them. Employing many of the concepts familiar in the literary thinking of his contemporaries, he likens such figures to a craft attainable through training, and argues that the grounds of the Qur'an's miraculous character must lie beyond the reach of human artifice (ibid, 162).

The challenge, then, is to place the Qur'anic eloquence beyond human artifice yet still within human capacities of aesthetic appreciation, beyond human literary categories yet still within the reach of judgments of value which stand in need of such categories. However, this is not ultimately the task that al-Bāqillānī has set himself. Whether it was in awareness - or, if not, then in token - of his status as layman in the field of literary studies (a status expressed in the pervasive mode of third-person reference to the judgment of the specialists or *'ahl as-san'a*), or whether it was a

result of his stress on the transcendence of the Qur'anic eloquence, al-Bāqillānī's positive strategy for revealing this quality does not involve an analytical approach to the text (cf. the remarks in ʿAbbās 1971:353-354; his negative strategy, which consists of a critique of the *Muʿallaqa* of Imruʾ ʾl-Qays, among the 'ancients', and of a poem by al-Buḥturī, among the moderns, is examined by van Gelder 1982:100-107, Mir 1990, Grunebaum 1941). Diffuse and rhetorically effusive, its task is not to educate the reader's judgment through literary analysis and lead him through a perception of the grounds of eloquence to an aesthetic response. Within this framework, the capacity for responding to the beauty of the Qur'an is demanded as a prerequisite – for otherwise al-Bāqillānī's invitations to contemplate examples of it (al-Bāqillānī, *ʾIʿjāz,* 279ff) would meet with no response – as, indeed, is the willingness to engage in the attempt, insofar as this cannot be urged on by reason-giving. Both demands are evident in al-Bāqillānī's final admonition to his reader, should he fail to perceive the beauty towards which al-Bāqillānī points, to "take one's seat among the *muqallidīna*" (ibid, 370), contenting himself with *taqlīd* – the mode of knowledge which consists of accepting the judgment of authority. This authority must be understood at the same time as literary and religious (that the latter is also at issue is revealed further in al-Bāqillānī's references to the authority, internal to faith, of consensus [*ʾijmāʿ*]: ibid, 389). At his hands, the inquiry into the Qur'an's unsurpassable eloquence, formally conceived as a probative sign addressed to he unbeliever, becomes a form of *fides quaerens intellectum* – a devotional practice in which the miraculous character of the sacred text is presupposed in the attempt to perceive it.

Al-Jurjānī – fellow-Ašʿarite, philologist, literary theorist and thus member of the specialist *ʾahl aṣ-ṣanʿa* which is the subject of al-Bāqillānī's allusions – approaches the topic in a way which shares many of the elements of al-Bāqillānī's outlook while displaying fundamental differences in others. He too locates the miracle in the Qur'an's inimitable eloquence (*faṣāḥa, balāġa, bayān*), which he examines in the context of a multi-layered project addressing the nature and locus of eloquence, the (closely linked) question of the relation between meaning and words, and the means by which eloquence may be known. Rejecting narrow views of eloquence which locate it *merely* at the level of isolated words, of the aural qualities of speech, or of its semantic content, he argues for a more holistic view of both eloquence and language. Eloquence is a matter of the '*naẓm*' – the ordering or construction – of speech, where *naẓm* is defined in terms of the features of grammar (*maʿānī n-naḥw*), and is seen as the carrier of an indissoluble connection between thought and language, insofar as the order of words is determined by the order of meanings in the mind. Al-Jurjānī's position on the semantic dimension of eloquence is supported by his discussion of figurative language (*majāz*), arguably a showpiece of eloquent speech, claiming that devices such as *istiʿāra* (metaphor), *tamthīl* ('analogous comparison'), *kināya* ('metonymy' or 'allusiveness') are only intelligible in terms of second-order signification (al-Jurjānī, *Dalāʾil,* passim; Larkin 1988 and 1995, Abu Deeb 1979).

Al-Jurjānī's stress on the unity of thought and language and on the semantic dimension of eloquence aims in part to heal the rift, fraught with theological significance, pervasive in Muʿtazilite views of the nature of language and, as a corollary, of the nature of eloquence. Part of his project constitutes a polemical engagement with the views of the Basṛan Muʿtazilite ʿAbd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025) (Larkin 1988 and 1995; for his views see briefly Rahman 1996). Al-Jurjānī's stress on the semantic component may be seen simultaneously as supporting

an Ašʿarite understanding of language in terms of a connection between uncreated internal speech (*kalām an-nafs* or *nafsī*) and its external expression as phonic speech (*kalām lafzī* or *lisānī*) which buttressed Ašʿarite claims about the eternity of the Qurʾan as God's speech (Larkin 1995; cf. the presentation of the Ašʿarite position in Weiss 1992:65-69). Simultaneously, in overcoming the duality of thought and language through a conception of grammar in which the structure of the linguistic utterance is based on the structure of a mental act, al-Jurjānī was helping to overcome a view of language – made compelling by a prevalent conception of its institution – as a naming mechanism intelligible in terms of a correlation between words and objects (see esp. his remarks in al-Jurjānī, *Dalāʾil,* 374ff).

Al-Jurjānī's opposition to placing the Qurʾan's eloquence in the realm of the ineffable subjective reactions and his commitment to the justifiability of aesthetic response in terms of reasons and grounds are expressed clearly in his work, in the insistence that "for every instance of discourse which you approve (*tastahsinu-hu*)…your approval of it must have a known ground and intelligible cause (*ʿilla*)" (al-Jurjānī, *Dalāʾil,* 85). The language of reason, cause, and proof (*dalīl, ʿilla,* and *sabab* all appear in al-Jurjānī's idiom), carried over to an investigation of the Qurʾan's eloquence, pulls in the opposite direction from al-Bāqillānī's transcendentalism. Here, al-Jurjānī's interest in producing a unified, general account of the qualities determining literary value could be deemed to frustrate an appreciation of the special otherness of the Qurʾan, insofar as it is handled in terms of its instantiation of grounds of value which it shares with other literary works and is thus assimilated to human literary creations (Vasalou 2002). Taken as a remark about the absence, in al-Jurjānī's work, of an explicit analytical statement of the features constituting the Qurʾan's miraculous eloquence, this appraisal may rest on a conception of the aim as that of *saying* or of *stating,* whereas al-Jurjānī's work might be cast as an effort to rather *show,* which, by training one in the recognition of literary beauty through the recognition of general grounds exemplified by means of a variety of literary works, cultivates the taste that equips one to perceive the Qurʾan's inimitable beauty. Later writers using al-Jurjānī's tools, such as az-Zamakhšarī (d. 538/1144) in his Qurʾanic commentary *al-Kaššāf* (Boullata 1988:146-7), may be said to exemplify this training.

On the other hand, a careful attention to al-Jurjānī's method will reveal that his strategy in examining literary passages – whether from poetry or from the Qurʾan – is often to begin from the aesthetic response (of approval, of delight, of wonderment) and, working backwards, to provide a literary analysis which comes as an interpretation of this response by uncovering its latent reasons (for an example, see al-Jurjānī, *Dalāʾil,* 282). The question which such a strategy raises is faced boldly by al-Jurjānī when he confronts the possibility (ibid, 284) of a failure to respond differently to qualitatively different types of utterance – to have the response that becomes material for interpretation. Here, acquiescing to the logic of his specialized craft, he accepts that the capacity for such response may be confined to the people of taste and knowledge (ʾ*ahl adh-dhawq wa-l-maʿrifa*), and, regarding it as a given which one either has or fails to have, countenances the existence of those who altogether lack the instrument (ʾ*adā*) and the sense (*hāssa*) by which such knowledge is attained, whom he would advise against seeking to enlighten ("how little words avail with such a one!"). Whether or not al-Jurjānī's professional exclusiveness here prevented him from doing sufficient justice to his own work and its capacity to cultivate aesthetic taste and judgment, these features of his project render it a contribution, less to the articulation of an apologetic theological doctrine, than to the development of the

sciences of rhetoric (*ʿilm al-maʿānī* and *ʾilm al-bayān*), where he can rightly be credited with having bequeathed a towering presence to the generations that followed.

Sophia Vasalou (Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge)

References

Primary Sources

ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *Muġnī* = ʾAbū l-Ḥasan ʿAbd al-Jabbār b. Aḥmad al-Asadābādī, *al-Muġnī fī abwāb at-tawḥīd wa-l-ʿadl,* 16 vol. Various editors. Cairo: various publishers, 1960-1969.

Al-Bāqillānī, *ʾIʿjāz* = ʾAbū Bakr Muḥammad b. aṭ-Ṭayyib al-Bāqillānī, *ʾIʿjāz al-Qurʾān*. Ed. by as-Sayyid Aḥmad Ṣaqr. Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1954. Translated selections in Grunebaum, Gustave E. von. 1950. *A tenth-century document of Arabic literary theory and criticism.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Al-Ġazālī, *Iqtisād* = ʾAbū Ḥāmid Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Ġazālī, *al-Iqtisād fī l-iʿtiqād.* Ed. by Ibrahim Agâh Çubukçu and Hüseyin Atay. Ankara: Nur Matbaasi, 1962.

Al-Jurjānī, *Dalāʾil* = ʾAbū Bakr ʿAbd al-Qāhir b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Jurjānī, *Dalāʾil al-ʾiʿjāz.* Ed. by Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Munʿim Khafājī. Cairo: Maktabat al-Qāhira, 1969.

Al-Juwaynī, *ʾIršād* = ʾAbū l-Maʿālī ʿAbd al-Malik b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Juwaynī, *Kitab al-ʾIršād ʾilā qawātiʿ al-ʾadilla fī ʾusūl al-iʿtiqād.* Ed. by Asʿad Tamīm. Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Kutub ath-Thaqāfiyya, 1996.

Aš-Šahrastānī, *Milal* = Tāj ad-Dīn ʾAbū l-Fatḥ Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Karīm aš-Šahrastānī, *al-Milal wa-n-niḥal,* 2 vol. in 1. Ed. Muḥammad Sayyid Kīlānī. Cairo: Maktabat Musṭafā l-Bābī l-Ḥalabī, 1967.

As-Suyūṭī, *ʾItqān* = ʾAbū l-Faḍl ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. ʾAbī Bakr as-Suyūṭī, *al-ʾItqān fī ʾulūm al-Qurʾān*, 2 vol. Ed. by Muḥammad Sālim Hāshim. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2000.

Az-Zarkaši, *Burhan* = Badr ad-Dīn ʾAbū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh, *al-Burhān fī ʾulūm al-Qurʾān,* 4 vol. Ed. By Muḥammad ʾAbū l-Faḍl ʾIbrāhīm. Cairo: Dār ʾIḥyāʾ al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyya, 1957-1958.

Secondary Sources

ʿAbbās, ʾIḥsān. 1971. *Taʾrīkh an-naqd al-ʾadabī ʾinda l-ʿarab: naqd aš-šiʿr min al-qarn ath-thanī ḥattā l-qarn ath-thāmin al-hijrī.* Beirut: Dār ath-Thaqāfa.

Abdul Aleem. 1933. "Iʾjazuʾl-Quran". *Islamic Culture* 7.64-82 and 215-233.

Abu Deeb, Kamal. 1990. "Literary criticism". *ʾAbbasid belles-lettres,* ed. by Julia Ashtiany et al., 339-387. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Abu Deeb, Kamal. 1979. *Al-Jurjānī's theory of poetic imagery.* Warminster: Aris & Phillips.

Audebert, Claude-France. 1982. *Al-Hatṭābī et l'inimitabilité du Coran: traduction et introduction au* Bayān ʾiʿǧāz al-Qurʾān. Damascus: Institut Français de Damas.

Boullata, Issa J. 1988. "The rhetorical interpretation of the Qur'an: *i'jāz* and related topics". *Approaches to the history of the interpretation of the Qur'an,* ed. by Andrew Rippin, 139-157. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Gelder, G.J.H. van. 1982. *Beyond the line: classical Arabic literary critics on the coherence and unity of the poem*. Leiden: E.J. Brill.

Grunebaum, Gustave E. von. 1941. "Arabic literary criticism in the 10th century A.D." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 61.51-57.

Larkin, Margaret. 1995. *The theology of meaning: 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī's theory of discourse.* New Haven, Connecticut: American Oriental Society.

Larkin, Margaret. 1988. "The inimitability of the Qu'ran: Two Perspectives." *Religion and Literature* 20.31-47.

Martin, Richard C. 2002. "Inimitability". *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān,* ed. by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, vol.2, 526-536. Leiden: E.J. Brill.

Martin, Richard C. 1981. "The role of the Basrah Mu'tazilah in formulating the doctrine of the apologetic miracle." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 39.175-189.

Mir, Mustansir. 1990. "Bāqillānī's critique of Imru' al-Qays." *Studies in Near Eastern culture and history: in memory of E.T. Abdel-Massih,* ed. by James A. Bellamy, 118-130. Ann Arbor, Michigan: Center for Near Eastern and North African Studies, University of Michigan.

Mir, Mustansir. 1988. "The Qur'an as literature." *Religion and Literature* 20.49-64.

Rahman, Yusuf. 1996. "The miraculous nature of Muslim scripture: a study of ʿAbd al-Jabbār's *I'jāz al-Qur'ān.*" *Islamic Studies* 35.409-424.

Weiss, Bernard G. 1992. *The search for God's law: Islamic jurisprudence in the writings of Sayf al-Din al-Amidi*. Salt Lake City, Utah: University of Utah Press.

Vasalou, Sophia. 2002. "The miraculous eloquence of the Qur'an: general trajectories and individual approaches." *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 4.23-53.