translation. It was not very appropriate indeed that works like the *Arabian Nights*, which were meant only for recital in the market-place, were read in book form in Europe. This was bound to produce a certain revulsion at a later period when they were found to be devoid of the finer elements of literary art. Anyhow, "orientalism"—a touch of the fabulous, the wonderful, and the exotic—entered the thought-processes of the European writers and poets. Still more important is the percolation of some of the higher devices resting on characteristically Islamic traditions like the *mi'rāj* into the *Divina Commedia* and the Solitary Man into *Robinson Crusoe*.

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Chapter LI

ARABIC LITERATURE: GRAMMAR AND LEXICOGRAPHY

A

GRAMMAR

The intellectual activity of the early Muslims stemmed directly from their devotion to religion. The Arabs had throughout been sensitively proud of their language; contacts with foreigners were regarded by them as derogatory to pure Arabism. However, before Islam any corruption of the dialect was but a social drawback; after Islam any lapse from the norm inevitably led to distortion of the sacred text with dire consequences both in this as well as in the next world. Curiously enough, it was Islam itself which brought about the commingling of the Arabs with the non-Arabs on a vast and unprecedented scale. In the very second decade of the Hijrah the Arabs were carried on the crest of a wave of military conquests across the bounds of their homeland to settle down in the neighbouring countries of Iraq, Persia, Syria, and Egypt. At the same time there was a large influx of aliens, mostly prisoners of war, into the principal towns—Makkah and Madīnah—of Arabia itself. Before long there appeared for the first time in history a considerable and growing number of neophytes seeking initiation into Arab society with a conscious effort to learn, imbibe, and serve that new religious culture which was only couched in Arabic and had its prototype in Arab milieu. Naturally enough, the inaptitude

of these neophytes in the use of the Arabic tongue excited the laughter of the younger folk in Arab households; it also shocked the elders as it amounted to inadvertent profanity and distortion of the Qur'ānic verses.[1] The corruptive effects on the new generation of the Arabs—the townsmen among them—were no less disconcerting; the daily usages marked a sharp decline from the Qur'ānic idiom. Thus, there is little doubt that about the middle of the first century of the Hijrah the Muslims were squarely face to face with their foremost literary problem, viz., the need for the preservation of the Qur'ān. The Arabs needed reinforcing their own natural way of speech with a discipline of conscious effort; they were also eager, in keeping with the true spirit of Islam, to pass on to the myriads of non-Arabs, who daily swelled the ranks of the faithful, not only the religion and the practices of Islam but also the language as a key to a first-hand knowledge of its primary source or sources.[2] Actually, however, only a few of the Arabs concerned themselves with those branches of studies which involved the use of the method of *qiyās*, i.e., analogy and deduction.[3] Such creative intellectual activity was notably a flair of the non-Arab inhabitants of Iraq, which province occupied a unique position in the incipient literary life of Islam. It is worthwhile recalling that the province had been the cradle of ancient civilizations and the nursery of cultural currents from the Hellenes, including those relayed from the important academy at Jundi-Shāpūr; hence, the mental attitudes of its inhabitants bore the stamp of philosophical and scientific discipline. Still more remarkable was the spirit motivating the political relationship of these "intellectuals" with their proud and unlettered masters, the Arabs, and their peculiar religious and cultural propensities towards Islam and the Arabic language. In contrast with Syria and Egypt, it will be seen that the *'Ajamīs* of Iraq were from the very beginning determined to assert their own individuality, albeit only within the pale of Islam and on the ground of Arabs' own devotion to the Arabic language. Even the Shu'ūbīyyah movement, the outburst of an outraged sense of superiority of the Persians over the Arabs, involved no resilience from loyalty to the language of the Qur'ān. It was a clear parallel to early Shī'ism, which was calculated to work out the political ascendancy of the Persians but only under the supreme and authoritarian overlordship of the House of the Arabian Prophet. Baṣrah and Kūfah, the two cantonments of the Arabs, provided ideal conditions for fruitful contact between the Arabs and the non-Arabs. Of particular importance was the proximity of the two towns to the northern Arabian desert, long regarded as the preserve of the linguistic

[1] This is amply borne out by the different versions of what prompted abu al-Aswad al-Du'ali to turn to grammar.

[2] It is noteworthy that abu al-Aswad al-Du'ali, who showed himself genuinely anxious to help the non-Arabs learn Arabic and Islam, did so in spite of his jealousy of their prosperity and influence. There was not the slightest trace of any tendency among the Arabs to sit Brahman-like over the treasures of religious knowledge.

[3] This applies equally to grammar and to *al-rā'i* in the realm of *Fiqh*.

norm, and the market-place of al-Mirbad—on the outskirts of Baṣrah—was no less a close-by rendezvous of the *A'rāb* (Bedouin Arabs of the desert) and the *literati* until the former, becoming aware of the demand, themselves came to offer their linguistic materials to the *élite* of Iraq and western Persia.

According to the classical tradition, it was abu al-Aswad (Ẓālim b. 'Amr) al-Du'ali (or al-Dīli), a poet, warrior, and teacher (died in 69/688–89 at the age of 85), who took the first step to stem the tide of growing laxity and error in the use of the Arabic tongue. He was an active partisan of 'Ali in politics and actually fought against Mu'āwiyah at Ṣiffīn. It is, therefore, no surprise that he should take pride in claiming that the rudiments of Arabic grammar were confided to him by 'Ali. This assertion can safely be dismissed as only an instance of the too frequent attempt to trace all learning to 'Ali, the "Gateway of the City of Knowledge." It is also true that abu al-Aswad himself cannot be credited with having worked out the fundamentals of Arabic grammar as such.[4] But it is reasonably certain that he did institute something which, to later historians of the development of grammar, appeared to be the genesis of it. Let us examine what it actually was. Till the time with which we are concerned, the Arabic script, originally taken over from the Syriac-Nabataean writing, remained without a system of *i'rāb*, i.e., vowel-marks. Nor was there any established practice as to *i'jām*, i.e., diacritical marks, to distinguish letters of similar shape. Of course, there was no urgent need for either so long as the main dependence was on memory and writing was regarded as a mere casual help.[5] In the context of the new demands made by the change in the social pattern, the alert and acute mind of abu al-Aswad realized the inadequacy of the written consonantal letter to evoke the correct unmarked vowel, which had ceased to come natural as of yore. He, therefore, must have been the first to conceive the idea of introducing some further aid to make the people "know and observe correct speech." It appears that at first the innovation was opposed by Ziyād b. Abīhi, the Governor of Baṣrah, with whose sons abu al-Aswad might have discussed it. After some time, however, all conceded that it was absolutely needed and abu al-Aswad went forward to lay down the following system:

(i) the vowel "a," the pronunciation of which needs a full upward opening *(fatḥah)* of the mouth, to be marked with a dot above a letter.

(ii) the vowel "i," the pronunciation of which needs a little downward movement *(kasrah)* of the mouth, to be marked with a dot below the letter.

[4] *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, "Abu al-Aswad."

[5] In the Islamic literary tradition, the written book long continued to serve merely as an *aide memoire*—a copy of what was preserved in memory and not *vice versa*.

(iii) the vowel "u," the pronunciation of which needs a rounded closing *(ḍammah)* of the lips, to be marked with a dot in front of the letter.[6]

This system of dots is to be seen in one of the oldest copies of the Qur'ān dated 77/696, now preserved in the National Library at Cairo. The text on parchment is in black, while the vowel-dots are in red, in accordance with the usual practice. It has been noted that a similar system of dots was in use in the writing of Syriac, and, though abu al-Aswad's contacts with the Syrians are not expressly alluded to, it stands more than probable that having realized the urgency he turned round and took the cue from his compatriots of the Syrian Christian Church.[7]

It is also possible, as some reports make out, that abu al-Aswad went a step further to propound some broad distinctions in the main parts of a sentence such as the subject and the predicate. On the whole, however, his contribution was merely to focus attention on the usage of vowel-endings as the distinctive characteristic of Arabic. Hence, observation of vowel-endings was designated *al-'Arabīyyah*, i.e., the art of speech in the correct and characteristic Arab way. The use of vowel-endings itself was known as *al-i'rāb*, i.e., rendering into the proper Arabic way.[8] The *al-'Arabīyyah* was undoubtedly an embryonic form of Arabic grammar.

The emphasis on *al-'Arabīyyah* grew in proportion to the need for saving the Qur'ān from being consigned to antiquity. So far the method used was mere *talqīn*, i.e., putting the particulars in the mouth of the pupil. Only the necessary terms and signs for indicating the different vowels in speech and writing had been devised. As yet there was no *ta'līl* or reasoning on the basis of general principles governing the incidence of the *i'rāb*. But certainly the *i'rāb* was under intense and searching observation, from which it was not a far step to collecting a number of analogous examples and inducting from them some rules for general guidance. This was the beginning of the discovery

[6] It will be remarked that the other synonymns such as *naṣb*, *jarr*, and *raf'* also refer to the same varied movement of the mouth. Closely parallel to the Arabic terms are the Persian equivalents: *zīr*, *zabar*, and *pīsh*.

[7] The Syrian Christians of the West had another system, first introduced in second/eighth century, in which letters of the Greek alphabet (five altogether: Y, E, H, O, A), instead of the dots, were used as vowel-marks. At some later date, not exactly ascertained, the Arabs also replaced the dots with letters of their own alphabet albeit in an abbreviated form: ـَ from ا, ـَ from ى (somewhat doubtful), and ـُ from و. Obviously, the change must have been necessitated by the use of dots for diacritical marks along with their use for vowel-marks. The diacritical marks are said to have been brought into somewhat systematic use at the behest of al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf, the Governor of Iraq, by Naṣr b. 'Āṣim (d. 89/708), who, remarkably enough, is also reckoned as one of the founders of Arabic grammar. For some time the two kinds of dots were distinguished by the different colours of the ink. The replacement of the vowel-dots with abbreviations of ا, ى, and و is sometimes ascribed to al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad, which is supported by the title *Kitāb al-Naqṭ w-al-Shakl* among his works.

[8] Al-Suyūṭi, *al-Ashbāh w-al-Naẓā'ir*, Hyderabad, 1359/1940, I, p. 76.

of the logical structure of the language which, in the words of Sarton, was as much a scientific discovery as, for example, the discovery of the anatomical structure of the human body. This scientific discovery, the *Naḥw* proper, reached the proportions of a separate branch of study at Baṣrah with 'Abd Allah b. abi Isḥāq al-Ḥaḍrami (d. 117/736) and his pupil, abu 'Amr 'Īsa b. 'Umar al-Thaqafi (d. 149/767). Both the teacher and the pupil were non-Arab clients (the latter being the client of none other than Khālid b. al-Walīd) who relished putting the Arabs to shame on the score of incorrect speech. They had a reputation for boldness in *'ilal w-al-qiyās*, i.e., induction of causes from an array of analogous examples. Even in the first flush of discovery, they were so confident of the principles arrived at that they did not mind criticizing on their basis the ancient model poets such as al-Nābighah, not to speak of the contemporary al-Farazdaq. When the latter composed a vitriolic satire against his dogmatic critic, ibn abi Isḥāq would only retaliate by pointing out a grammatical mistake even in the satirical verse.[9] The pupil elaborated the method explicitly, as in discovering principles which held good generally and in listing the deviations as *lughāt*, i.e., exceptional usages. And it was he who embodied the results in two books said to have been the first on the subject.

It must be noted that *al-laḥn*, i.e., incorrect speech, which gave stimulus to the thought of abu al-Aswad, had by the turn of the first/seventh century assumed alarming proportions. It had percolated to the ranks of the *élite* of the Court and the administration as well as the circles of the learned such as the traditionists and the jurists. But the deterioration, far from inducing an attitude of toleration, gave rise to a strong reaction against what was regarded almost as a sin, and there was a determined effort not so much to preserve the purity of the Qur'ānic text as to make the ordinary speech conform to the standards of its idiom.[10] It was at this very time that *al-Naḥw*, the science of "the proper way of the speech of the Arabs" (ibn Jinni), was fully recognized as an independent branch of study and the term *al-naḥwi* became widespread in popular parlance.[11]

The Baṣrah school reached its perfection in the following age, which produced such giants as al-Khalīl and Sībawaihi. Al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad, a truly versatile genius of Arab descent (al-Furhūdi/al-Farāhīdi, al-Azdi), whose contribution alone would outweigh the achievement of the host of non-Arabs, was born in 100/718–19 and died some time between 170/786 and 175/791. There can be no greater testimony to his high powers of originality than the discovery of Arabic prosody without any previous pattern, taking his cue merely from the rhythmic beats of the smith's hammer. No surprise that after benefiting from the teachings of 'Īsa b. 'Umar, he should have been able to elaborate the framework of Arabic grammar, a framework within which

[9] Al-Jumaḥi, *Ṭabaqāt*, Dār al-Ma'ārif, Cairo, 1952, pp. 16–17.

[10] J. Fuck, *al-'Arabīyyah* (Arabic translation), Cairo, 1951, pp. 26, 65, 74.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 30.

al-i'rāb could be explained and reasoned out. But al-Khalīl cared neither for fame nor for material gain; it is said of him that he lived in a state of abject penury while his pupils made a fortune with the learning imbibed from him. It fell to the lot of his Persian pupil Sībawaihi,[12] who also had direct contact with 'Īsa b. 'Umar, to complete the work of al-Khalīl and to arrange and produce his findings in concrete book form. Sībawaihi (abu Bishr 'Amr b. 'Uthmān b. Qanbar), a native of Shīrāz who died at the young age of about forty years in the last quarter of the second century of the Hijrah, really proved to be another genius for comprehensiveness, if not so much for originality. His *Kitāb* has throughout the ages been regarded as the final word on Arabic grammar and has become proverbial for its unique position in the field. Those who followed Sībawaihi right down to the present time could only comment upon, remove obscurities from, and arrange and rearrange the materials furnished in the "Book" without adding much to it.

It has been a vexed question as to whether the main concepts of Arabic grammar are an indigenous growth or they are traceable to some external pattern. Modern scholars have stumbled upon casual resemblances such as those with the Indian *Praticakhyas*, but they offer no secure ground for any assumption of borrowing. It must be remembered that the Arabic grammar is concerned mainly with the *i'rāb*, which is a peculiarity of the Arabic language and was actually realized and proudly asserted to be so by the early grammarians. Hence, it is no less misleading to make much of the similarity between the division of a word into "*ism*," "*fi'l*," and "*ḥarf*" in Arabic and the analogous categories in Syriac or Greek. Obviously, the Arabic grammarians had to chalk out and proceed on their own lines and, in fact, they have given us a fair idea of how they applied their efforts to the problem, which was peculiarly their own. As hinted earlier, they began by observing the various positions of the words in a sentence and the particular *i'rāb* taken by them in those positions.[13] These positions came to be designated by distinctive terms and certain rules were laid as to the *i'rāb* appropriate for those positions. These rules went on developing in the direction of reducing further and further the number of exceptions which would not admit of their general application. What helped the people of Iraq in this undertaking was a flair for *'ilal* and *qiyās*, which was exhibited in an equal measure in grammatical and literary studies as well as in *Fiqh* and jurisprudence.[14] This flair certainly

[12] The reading "Sībūyah" is not supported by comparison with "Nifṭawaihi," which latter is in no doubt because of its occurrence in the rhyme of a verse. *Vide* ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt*, "Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad b. 'Arafah."

[13] Cf. Fuck, *op. cit.*, pp. 11–12.

[14] What distinguished the *Fiqh* of abu Ḥanīfah was exactly the same: the probing into the "efficient cause" *('illah)* governing a number of given instances and then applying the same to unforeseen circumstances. The people of the Ḥijāz were extremely chary of such reasoning and it is no mere chance that they came to be notorious for their ignorance of grammar. It is remarkable that the opponents of abu Ḥanīfah, who wanted to run down his school of *Fiqh*, thought it necessary

bears the impress of Hellenism. Nevertheless, it remains a mere conjecture that the early Muslims took over anything specific from Greek sources in grammar, in the same way as it is a mere wishful thought that *Fiqh* is indebted to anything specific in the Roman Law.[15]

The cornerstone of Arabic grammar is the correlation of the *i'rāb* of the different parts of a sentence based on the theory of an *'āmil*, i.e., an efficient cause supposedly resident in one of the parts and governing the whole. The earliest trace of it is perhaps in the *Kitāb al-'Awāmil* of al-Khalīl—a work known to us only by its title. But there is no reason to suppose that al-Khalīl diverged in any way from the general line pursued thitherto by 'Īsa b. 'Umar and others. Unless, therefore, this *'āmil* theory is proved to have been formulated on a familiar pattern, the indebtedness of Arabic grammarians to any external source will remain highly problematic.

There is, however, yet another development of Arabic grammar which is clearly and directly traceable to Greek influence. The most notable and lasting effect of the assimilation of Greek logic and philosophy in the 'Abbāsid period was a general tendency to remould into logically defined systems almost all the nascent branches of learning, which until then lacked a rigid order. So far as Arabic grammar is concerned, this development took place when a Mu'tazilite Mutakallim and a *naḥwi* were combined in the person of abu al-Ḥasan 'Ali b. 'Īsa al-Rummāni (d. 384/994). Actually, the process must have started with the Kūfan grammarian, al-Farrā' (d. 207/822), who was also a Mu'tazilite. Under the patronage of al-Māmūn he produced the *Kitāb al-Ḥudūd*, which must have been the first attempt, so to say, to "philosophize" Arabic grammar. However, the process reached its culmination in al-Rummāni so as to justify his being credited with that highly conventional logical reasoning which has since formed such a notable feature of Arabic grammar. This new development is amply borne out by a saying that out of the three contemporaries the words of al-Sīrāfi (abu Sa'īd al-Ḥasan b. 'Abd Allah) were thoroughly understood without a teacher, those of abu 'Ali (al-Ḥasan b. Aḥmad) al-Fārisi were only partly so, whereas those of al-Rummāni were not intelligible at all.[16] Even abu 'Ali al-Fārisi, who, according to the above testimony, was himself partly affected by the innovation, is reputed to have commented that if *Naḥw* be what was expounded by al-Rummāni, then he had nothing to do with it, and *vice versa*. Undoubtedly, al-Rummāni did not bring out a new system of grammar; he only applied the methods and the jargon of Aristotelian logic to the adumbration of those nebulous conceptions which, in the simple language of the old tradition as represented by al-Sīrāfi, were easily comprehended by the average student. There was a similar

to make fun of the application of his methods to grammar. Cf., Fuck, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

[15] M. Ḥamīdullah, "Influence of Roman Law on Muslim Law"—a paper read before the All-India Oriental Conference, December 1941.

[16] Yāqūt, *Mu'jam al-Udabā'*, " 'Ali b. 'Īsa."

transformation in Arabic rhetorics too. Further, it will be noted that by this time the Arabs had acquired some familiarity with Greek grammar, which warranted their indulging in a comparison of its merits with those of Arabic grammar. But the latter was considered to have already possessed a separate entity with a different development.

While the general trend at Baṣrah was to go ahead with the formulation of general rules, there also developed a reaction against the scant attention paid to the angularities of actual usage, which, however, came to the fore only when abu Ja'far (Muḥammad b. abi Sārra 'Ali) al-Ru'āsiyy took it over as the basis of the rival school of Kūfah founded by him in the later half of the second/eighth century. The Kūfans would assiduously collect such instances as violated the general rules of the Baṣrans and would treat them not as exceptions but as the basis of another general rule opposed to that of the Baṣrans. This school achieved a meteoric rise in importance under the favour of the 'Abbāsid Caliphs. Two of its very influential representatives at the Court were: (a) al-Kisā'iyy (abu al-Ḥasan 'Ali b. Ḥamzah), the Persian pupil of both al-Khalīl and abu Ja'far al-Ru'āsiyy, who came to be regarded as the compeer of Imām abu Yūsuf under Hārūn al-Rashīd, and (b) al-Farrā' (Yaḥya b. Ziyād), the Dailamite, who was appointed tutor to al-Māmūn's sons and was designated as *Amīr al-Mū'minīn* in the realm of *al-Naḥw*. Ultimately, however, Baghdād proved a veritable crucible for the gradual fusion of the two schools through interchange. From the end of the third/ninth century onwards there flourished at the metropolis scholars who were free from prejudice for or against any particular town or tribe and were actuated by sheer academic interest and reasonableness.

Just one more development may be noted. Abu 'Ali al-Fārisi, who has been mentioned above, had an illustrious pupil called 'Uthmān b. Jinni (d. 392/1002), the son of a Greek slave, regarded as the last of the philosopher-grammarians. But ibn Jinni did not help in clothing the *'āmil* theory with the armoury of logic; rather he submitted the *'āmil* theory itself to the scrutiny of reason. The result was a scathing attack on the false notion that one particular word in a sentence governed the whole. The hint dropped by ibn Jinni was picked up in far distant Spain by "ibn Maḍḍā'," the Ẓāhirite Qāḍi of Cordova under the Muwāḥḥids, who in his *al-Radd 'ala al-Nuḥāt* attempted something in grammar akin to al-Ghazālī's *Tahāfut* in philosophy. However, his attack, though not lacking in flashes of brilliance, remained a cry in wilderness as no alternative formulation of Arabic grammar on a basis other than the *'āmil* theory was ever achieved, far less accepted.

To sum up, the inspiration for Arabic grammar came from religion; the need for it was created by the commingling within Islam of the Arabs and the non-Arabs. The methods of observation and induction yielded the discovery of the main body of "laws" in the working of language; the only snag was that the laws of language are not so uniform and immutable as the laws of nature. The older school of grammarians at Baṣrah suffered from an immature

pedantry which was aggravated by the desire of the non-Arabs among them to outdo the Arabs. At a very early time 'Īsa b. 'Umar had the temerity to boast in the presence of the Arab philologist, abu 'Amr b. al-'Alā', that he ('Īsa b. 'Umar) was a greater master of Arabic than Ma'add b. 'Adnān, the progenitor of the Arabs! And both 'Īsa b. 'Umar and abu 'Amr b. al-'Alā' exhibited a tendency to prefer such readings of the Qur'ān as, in their opinion, were more in consonance with the general rules of grammar.[17] This authoritarianism on the part of the "wisdom of the school seeking to improve upon the facts" (Noldeke) was checked by the rise of the rival school of Kūfah. Rather the latter erred on the other extreme; it is said of al-Kisā'iyy that in his avid search for the unusual and the exceptional he would not pause to test the reliability of his sources. None the less, a relieving feature of the situation was that dogmatism always felt compelled to bow before actual usage, as typically exemplified in the contest between Sībawaihi and al-Kisā'iyy at the Court of Hārūn al-Rashīd.[18] Ultimately, Baghdād provided the necessary atmosphere for the gradual shedding of prejudices and the engagement of all in a joint effort to erect a common edifice large enough to accommodate the conflicting viewpoints on most, if not all, of the established usage. The final success was vitiated by sporadic attempts at putting possible constructions on actual usage. This tendency was decried at the very start by 'Īsa b. 'Umar,[19] but it reappeared prominently later on and is justly parodied by abu al-'Alā' al-Ma'arri in his *Risālat al-Ghufrān*.[20] The instruments of Aristotelian logic helped to hammer out the crudities of enunciation and adumbration. Finally, there was an attempt to rebuild the entire system on a simpler basis other than the *'āmil* theory, which, however, did not fructify. On the whole, the Arabic grammar remains a magnificent achievement—religious in spirit,

[17] It must be pointed out that it was merely a choice from among the various current readings; there was no attempt to "correct" the Qur'ān in line with usage elsewhere. As pointed out by Wolfensen, it is an entirely wrong and unscientific approach on the part of some Western scholars to judge and criticize the Qur'ān on the basis of pre-Islamic poetry. Apart from any religious sentiment, the Qur'ān is the oldest and the most reliable book; other sources, though relating to anterior times, are posterior to it in point of actual compilation. *Tārīkh al-Lughāt al-Sāmiyyah*, Cairo, 1926, pp. 169 *et seq.*

[18] The reference is to what is known as "al-Mas'alah al-Zunbūriyyah." When Sībawaihi challenged al-Kisā'iyy on a point of grammar, the matter had to be referred for decision to the Arabs. It is alleged that the Arabs were bribed to save the face of the royal tutor. The incident affected Sībawaihi so deeply that perhaps it caused his death prematurely.

[19] Once when al-Kisā'iyy began giving the various grammatically correct readings of a particular phrase, 'Īsa b. 'Umar rebuked him saying: "I want the actual way in which it is spoken by the Arabs." Yāqūt, *op. cit.*, "'Īsa b. 'Umar," last paragraph. This tendency is to be compared with the *ḥiyal*—permissible tricks for evading the Law—in which some of the legists exhibited their acumen.

[20] Al-Ma'arri contrives to bring the grammarians and the poets in the heaven together when the latter protest at the former's purely speculative interpretation of verses, e.g., p. 152 of the *Risālah*, ed. Bint al-Shāṭi, Cairo.

linguistic in material, scientific in methods, and logical in form—which has been eminently successful in preserving the Qur'ān and keeping its idiom unchanged yet alive throughout the centuries.

B

LEXICOGRAPHY

The preservation of the Qur'ān involved the institution of such disciplines as would effectively safeguard not only the authentic rendering of the text but also the warranted understanding of its import against error, corruption, or ignorance overtaking those for whom it was "plain Arabic" at the time. The former purpose was achieved through *al-'Arabīyyah*, which later on developed into a full-fledged science under the name of *al-Naḥw*. The next concern was naturally the meaning conveyed by the text. In the beginning, there could have been little difficulty about it in the same way as about the vocalization of the text which was just a matter of natural aptitude.[21] However, with the lapse of time and the changes in the social pattern, uncertainties began to creep in around words and expressions which had gradually assumed an air of rarity. Obviously, the way to clearing such doubts and uncertainties was to search for the occurrence of those words and expressions in the speech of the Arabs elsewhere.[22] In doing so, care had to be taken that the citations should faithfully reflect the idiom of the time of the Prophet during which the Qur'ān was revealed. That is to say, either the citations should belong to the period contemporary with, or immediately antecedent to, the Qur'ān or be culled from the current usage of those whose social pattern had continued unchanged and who, therefore, could be relied upon to have preserved the idiom from that time uncorrupted and untainted by extraneous influences. Consequently, a zealous hunt was afoot to collect and preserve as much of pre-Islamic poetry, proverbs, and orations as could be salvaged from the memories of the people together with the current idiom of the *A'rāb*, i.e., the people of the desert impervious to influences from outside. The method of collection was identical with that of the collection of the Ḥadīth.

The end of the first/seventh century witnessed the rise of a band of scholars specially noted for their profundity in the field of *al-lughah* (Arabic usage)

[21] In the words of abu 'Ubaidah introducing his *Majāz al-Qur'ān*: "The Qur'ān was revealed in clear Arabic language and those who heard it recited by the Prophet had no need of asking for its meaning . . . ."

[22] Cf. the saying attributed to ibn 'Abbās: When you be in doubt about any rare expression of the Qur'ān, seek it in poetry. Al-Suyūṭi, *al-Muzhir*, ed. Muḥammad Aḥmad Jād al-Maula and others, Cairo, II, p. 302. It was in consideration of this that linguistic studies were regarded an obligation on a par with the obligation of prayer; cf. the verses *(ibid.)*. Ibn al-Qaṭṭā' (*al-Af'āl*, Hyderabad, p. 3) went so far as to declare that anyone who decries the poetry of the Arabs is a sinner, and the one who runs down their language is an infidel *(kāfir)*.

with its ancillary branches of *al-shi'r* (poetry), *al-akhbār* (historical annals), *al-ayyām* (accounts of tribal wars), and *al-ansāb* (genealogies). The most prominent name among these scholars is that of abu 'Amr b. al-'Alā' (70/689–154/770), an Arab nobleman of Baṣrah and an associate of 'Īsa b. 'Umar. His collection of Arabic philology, when piled up, touched the ceiling of his room. He set fire to this vast collection when he was overwhelmed by a fit of asceticism towards the end of his life. Yet he continued to be the primary source of knowledge for the next generation.

While the process of collecting the vocabulary and the illustrations of its diverse uses was still going on, the genius of al-Khalīl, whom we have mentioned before, burst with the idea of arranging and fitting the vocabulary into the orderly scheme of a lexicon. Actually, al-Khalīl is known as the author of the first Arabic lexicon called the *Kitāb al-'Ain*, but the authorship is a bit disputed. This much, however, is certain that even if the actual compilation was not exclusively or partially the work of al-Khalīl, the idea of a lexicon and the scheme thereof were first conceived by him. Let us now examine what the scheme is like.

Al-Khalīl starts with (a) reducing all words to their roots, i.e., the radical letters *(al-uṣūl)* which form an immutable kernel in contradistinction to those that are added *(al-zawā'id)* in the course of derivation and inflexion. Next (b) he classifies the roots according to the number of letters comprised in them: 2, 3, 4, and 5. Each class of words is then arranged in a separate part and even within each class special treatment under distinctive heading is resorted to in the case of words containing one or more of the vowels, double letters, or a *hamzah*.

The above framework is in line with al-Khalīl's attempt at a computation of Arabic vocabulary, which is a further proof of his originality. This quest he pursued on the same structural basis in a mathematical way. By multiplying the 28 letters of the alphabet by 27 (28 minus 1, to drop out double letters) he got 756 forms of the biliteral (there being no uniliterals in Arabic). Dividing this number by 2, he had 378 combinations irrespective of the order of the two letters. Taking these biliteral forms as one unit and adding a third letter to them, he worked out the number of triliteral forms and so on. It will be observed that the above method yielded the theoretically possible combinations of letters, all of which are not in actual use *(musta'mal)*. Consequently, al-Khalīl had to mention each and every possible combination and indicate if any specific forms were unused *(muhmal)*. A further peculiarity, which made reference so difficult and cumbersome, was that in the arrangement of the lexicon he concerned himself merely with combinations of letters and mentioned all the forms yielded by a change of order of the letters under one and the same heading. For example, under MY one will find both MY and its reverse *(maqlūb)*, YM.

Within the above framework, intrinsically scientific but practically unhandy, the order was according to the opening letter of the alphabet in the

words. But the order of the alphabet observed by al-Khalīl was not free from novelty; the grouping was according to the part of the mouth, from down the throat right out to the lips, which produced the sound. This novelty has been aptly noted and the similarity between it and the practice of the Sanskrit lexicographers has aroused a good deal of speculation. There is no doubt that the present-day arrangement, based on grouping of words according to the shape of the letters in writing, was the one in common use even at that distant date, though the Arabs were also familiar with the order according to the *abjad* system, which was originally taken over from the Syriac (and Hebrew) along with the art of writing.[23] The phonetico-physiological system of al-Khalīl was neither common at the time nor did it achieve popularity afterwards. But any significance which its similarity to that of Sanskrit might suggest is whittled down by due consideration of the fact that in all probability it developed indigenously out of the practice of the recitation of the Qur'ān. With the emphasis on recitation it was but natural that phonetics should receive special attention and that there be a grouping of letters on that basis. Actually, evidence is not wanting that the linguists did engage themselves in such a study; there were some differences too between the Baṣrans and the Kūfans as to the order of the alphabet on the basis of phonetics.[24] Moreover, al-Khalīl also paid some regard to the frequency of the letters in use; otherwise *'ain* would not have come first in order.[25]

No doubt, the general lexicon of al-Khalīl represented an idea much in advance of his time; for the following one century or so no one dared imitate, far less improve upon, his scheme. In the meantime, however, much valuable work was done in the form of small tracts comprising words, synonyms, and cognates with their fine shades of meaning grouped around particular subjects. Typical of such subjects are: *al-ibil* (the camel), *al-maṭar* (the rain), *al-silāḥ* (the weapons), and the like. Similarly, special features of the Arabic usage were also singled out for monographic treatment: (a) *al-muthallathāt*, (b) *al-maqṣūr w-al-mamdūd*, (c) *al-itbā' w-al-muzāwajah*, (d) *al-ajnās*, and (e) *al-nawādir*. Some philologists wrote running commentaries (concerned merely with the meaning of selected words and phrases supported with illustrations from other sources) on the Qur'ān and the sayings of the Prophet under such captions as *Gharīb al-Qur'ān*, *Gharīb al-Ḥadīth*, *Majāz al-Qur'ān*, *Ma'āni al-Qur'ān*, etc. The veterans in this field were two Arabs and two non-Arabs, one of the latter being from the distant province of Sind:

[23] It was in that original source that numerical values were assigned to the letters in that order, which is still adhered to in Arabic and other Islamic languages for purposes of chronograms. The assertion by later Arab philologists that *abjad*, *hawwaz*, etc., were the names of the inventors of the art of writing (al-Suyūṭi, *op. cit.*, II, p. 342) should be taken merely as a recollection of the old borrowing.

[24] Ibn Duraid, *Jamharat al-Lughah*, Hyderabad, cf. the Preface; cf. also al-Suyūṭi, *op. cit.*, I, p. 85.

[25] Al-Suyūṭi, *op. cit.*, I, p. 90.

(1) Al-Aṣma'i (abu Sa'īd 'Abd al-Malik b. Quraib), an Arab of Baṣrah, was born in 122/739 or 123/740 and died in about 217/832. He amused Hārūn al-Rashīd with his stock of interesting anecdotes about the life of the *A'rāb*.

(2) Abu Zaid (Sa'īd b. Aus) al-Anṣāri was another Arab of Baṣrah who reached Baghdād during the time of al-Mahdi and died about 215/830, then over ninety years of age. He was not inhibited by partisanship and eagerly learnt from al-Mufaḍḍal and other Kūfans. By common agreement, he is regarded as thoroughly trustworthy, though his pedantry is often a source of amusement.

(3) Abu 'Ubaidah Ma'mar b. al-Muthanna, a *maula*, said to have been of Persian Jewish descent, was born in 110/728 at Baṣrah where he spent most of his life. He was patronized by the Barāmikah and was summoned to Baghdād by Hārūn al-Rashīd to read his works to him. While rendering yeoman service to the Arabic philological studies, he collected the *mathālib* or the vices of the Arab tribes and caused such offence to tribal pride that at his death in 210/285 nobody attended his funeral.

(4) Ibn al-A'rābi (abu 'Abd Allah Muḥammad b. Ziyād) was the son of a Sindian slave and the foster-child of the famous Kūfan philologist, al-Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbi. His prodigious memory was a storehouse of Arabic philology and folklore. Remarkably enough, he relied on his own independent sources and questioned not without success the authority of al-Aṣma'i and abu 'Ubaidah. He died about 231/845.

The special treatises referred to above naturally swelled to a considerable extent the volume of material which lay ready at hand for incorporation in a general lexicon. Another such lexicon was produced, rather dictated mostly from memory, by ibn Duraid (abu Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan, born at Baṣrah in 223/837 and died 321/933) who enjoyed the patronage of the Mikālids of Fars. Though ibn Duraid claims that his work is much easier for reference than that of al-Khalīl, the fact is that there is little improvement so far as the scheme, particularly the break-up of the vocabulary into structural categories, is concerned. Even the irksome device which jumbles up all the orders, forward and reverse, of a combination of letters under one and the same heading, continues to be there. Only the phonetic order of the alphabet is discarded. Much of the confusion was caused by the nebulous state in which *al-taṣrīf* (etymology) happened to be at that time. There was so far no clarity as to the roots of words, particularly those containing a vowel, a double consonant, or a *hamzah*. Similarly, lack of clarity as to the distinction between *al-uṣūl* and *al-zawā'id* caused the different categories to be mixed up. As a matter of fact, it was this uncertainty which made it expedient for ibn Duraid to insert a miscellany here and there, apart from the *nawādir* or peculiar usages and expressions listed under appropriate captions at the end.

There is indeed one important point of difference which is indicated by the very name, *Jamharat al-Lughah*. Ibn Duraid included in it only the familiar and the useful and eschewed the obsolete and the discordant. This was the

beginning of a process of subjecting to criticism and sifting out the useful and the dependable from the large mass of material left behind by the early scholars, who were concerned with collecting and recording whatever they came across. At the time when the mistakes were being corrected, an attempt was also made to supply the omissions in the works of the earlier authors. These, in short, are the new features noticeable in the lexicographical productions of the fourth/tenth century. Particularly notable in this respect is the *Tahdhīb*, whose author, abu Manṣūr Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Azhari (d. 370/980), a pupil of ibn Duraid, was urged to wanderlust in the desert for the collection of *al-lughāt*. Incidentally, he fell a captive into the hands of a Bedouin tribe; this provided him with the desired opportunity. Equally important is *al-Muḥīṭ* of al-Ṣāḥib b. 'Abbād, who died in 385/995.

The culmination of the critical activity of the fourth/tenth century aiming at authenticity and comprehensiveness, was reached in the *Ṣiḥāḥ* of al-Jauhari, abu Naṣr Ismā'īl b. Ḥammād (died about 398/1007), a native of Fārāb who settled down at Nīshāpūr. The very name *Ṣiḥāḥ* reminds one of the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Bukhāri. It has already been hinted at that the method of collecting *al-lughāt* was essentially the same as the one applied to the collection of the traditions, only a higher degree of stringency was observed in the case of the latter than in that of the former. This is aptly illustrated by the example of al-Aṣma'i, who is held to be trustworthy in regard to Ḥadīth, but he risks conjectures in matters pertaining to the *lughāt* and even embellishes anecdotes for the sake of amusement.[26] Anyway, it is worthwhile to note that even the nomenclature of the Ḥadīth such as the *mutawātir* and the *āḥād* was applied to the *lughāt* and the degree of reliability of any particular usage determined accordingly. In the beginning it was not uncommon even to mention the *isnād* or the chain of narrators and to discuss the personal character and reputation of the transmitters.[27] Thus, a compendium of the *Ṣaḥīḥ* was sought to be arrived at in the field of *lughāt* parallel to a similar, though much more scrupulously worked out, effort in the field of religious tradition.[28] It has, however, to be noticed that the *Ṣiḥāḥ* suffered grievously from an unfortunate circumstance: the author was overtaken by a fit of melancholy which rendered him incapable of revising the manuscript. Further, due to the absence of any authentic copy of the text, a good deal of corruption also set in. All this necessitated a re-examination of the work in glosses and commentaries by later writers.

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[26] Cf. Aḥmad Amīn, *Ḍuḥa al-Islām*, Cairo, 1952, II, p. 301. Abu 'Ubaidah once ridiculed al-Aṣma'i's extreme cautiousness in the interpretation of the Qur'ān by asking him whether he was sure of the meaning of *al-khubz* (bread). Cf. Yāqūt, *op. cit.*, "Ma'mar b. al-Muthanna."

[27] Al-Suyūṭi, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 118 *et seq.*

[28] Just because the sciences of al-Ḥadīth and *al-lughah* were recognized as twins, the highest academic title for the learned in either was the same, *al-ḥāfiẓ*. *Ibid.*, II, p. 312.

The work of al-Jauhari was still more remarkable in another way. In it the entire vocabulary was integrated (instead of being split up into structural categories) and arranged in alphabetical order with first reference to the last letter and a second reference to its combination with the first. This new scheme at once became popular and was highly appreciated as particularly suited to a language in which the endings of the words had a unique importance for purposes of rhyme *(qāfiyah* and *saj')*. Apart from the merits of this integrated scheme, the development and standardization of *al-taṣrīf* (etymology) at the hands of al-Mazīni (abu 'Uthmān Bakr b. Muḥammad, d. 249/863), ibn Jinni, and al-Rummāni during the course of the fourth/tenth century removed a good deal of the confusion which marred the works of al-Khalīl and ibn Duraid.

We have now reached a time when the Arabic vocabulary was supposed to have been exhaustively collected and the meanings of words established with reasonable certainty. Henceforth, efforts were directed at collecting the material scattered in the previous works either (a) in the form of large comprehensive dictionaries or (b) in concise handy volumes designed for the ordinary student. Naturally, the latter often dispensed with illustrations and citations. The most important works of the former category are:

(1) *Al-Muḥkam* by the blind Spanish scholar, ibn Sīdah (abu al-Ḥasan 'Ali b. Aḥmad ?, d. 460/1068), was held in great esteem for comprehensiveness and absolute reliability. But perhaps the author did not like innovations; hence he went back to the earliest model of al-Khalīl for its arrangement.

(2) *Al-'Ubāb* (incomplete) was composed by Raḍi al-Dīn Ḥasan al-Saghāni, born in Lahore in 570/1174. He settled at Baghdād where he dedicated his work to ibn al-'Alqami, the minister of al-Musta'ṣim, whence he was sent out twice as ambassador of the 'Abbāsid Caliph to the Court of Iltutmish at Delhi.

(3) The *Lisān al-'Arab* was compiled by ibn Mukarram/ibn Manẓūr (Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad), who was born in 690/1291, and died at Cairo in 771/1369. It is expressly based on the works of ibn Duraid, al-Azhari, al-Jauhari, and ibn Sīdah.

Of the latter category, the work which achieved a high degree of popularity is the *Qāmūs* of Majd al-Dīn al-Fīrūzābādi (Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb) who died in 816/1413. It draws upon *al-Muḥkam* and *al-'Ubāb*.

Yet another work which deserves special mention is the *Asās al-Balāghah* of the well-known Mu'tazilite al-Zamakhshari (abu al-Qāsim Jār Allah Maḥmūd b. 'Umar, born 467/1074 and died 538/1143). The author was a native of Khwārizm who spent a long time in Makkah and Baghdād. He realized that the mere recording of meanings was an insufficient guide to the practical use of words. He, therefore, would give the occasions and the contexts in which the words were employed. What is still more remarkable is the arrangement of the *Asās*, which is in the alphabetical order with reference to the first (and then the second and so forth) letter of a word. That is to say, its arrangement

is exactly the same as has come into vogue in modern times since the impact of Western literary influences.

It is interesting to note that the early trend towards compiling treatises dealing with words grouped around particular subjects did not die with the appearance of the general lexicons; it had an uninterrupted development on parallel lines. The greatest work of this kind is *al-Mukhaṣṣaṣ*, a twin of the general lexicon, *al-Muḥkam*, by the Andalusian ibn Sīdah. In *al-Mukhaṣṣaṣ*, the vocabulary is grouped under subject headings, e.g., the hair, the eye, etc., which are classified into "books" such as that on "human body." Even if the position of *al-Muḥkam* is not wholly unsurpassed, that of *al-Mukhaṣṣaṣ* is definitely so.

Once the framework of a general lexicon was fixed, the running commentaries on the rare and difficult words in the Qur'ān and/or the Ḥadīth were also brought under that form.[29] Similarly, no time was lost in extending the facility and the benefits of a general dictionary to the other specialized branches such as zoology, botany, biography, geography, bibliography, and finally the encyclopedias *(al-mausū'āt)*. It may be observed in this connection that interest in language and literature, which the scheme of a lexicon was originally designed to subserve, seldom disappeared in any of the works, however specialized and limited the scope of their treatment. It would, for example, be really odd to conceive of a zoologist or a geographer who was not familiar with the references in the Qur'ān and the Ḥadīth or who would be unable to recall poetry, proverbs, and pithy sayings concerning animals or towns. This all-pervading interest in humanities is perhaps the most valuable asset of Islamic culture.

In conclusion, it will be recalled that the early philologists were fully conscious of the sanctity of their task; they showed themselves to be scrupulous in method and honest in purpose. But the scope of the linguistic studies was bound in course of time to extend beyond what was strictly relevant to the Qur'ān and the Ḥadīth. As the bounds of the sacred faded into those of the profane, the common failings of vanity, mere guess or conjecture, or even unguarded reliance on genuine misunderstandings, contributed to the interpolation of the spurious. Also, as these studies came to be held in high esteem and patronized with abundant monetary gifts, the veterans in the field were sometimes tempted to window-dress faked rarities in their shop. But the probe into their personal weaknesses, so characteristic of Islamic religious and literary tradition, and the severe tests subsequently applied to their statements served to a large extent to clear the chaff from the grain. On the whole, there is no doubt that a fair degree of reliability was achieved. In the same way it is impossible to claim that the entire vocabulary and usage were exhausted, yet there is no gainsaying the fact that an enormous part of them was actually encompassed. The charge that the Arabic philologists

[29] Cf. *Kashf al-Ẓunūn*, II, pp. 1204–06.

concerned themselves too exclusively with the idiom of the Qur'ān and showed no interest in contemporary deviations from the same, tantamounts to questioning their objective or purpose, which has been steadily confirmed throughout the ages. In regard to the scheme and the arrangement of a lexicon, the early pioneers proceeded on the basis of a scientific etymological analysis of the structure of the vocabulary. Practical convenience was achieved later in the superbly original plan of al-Jauhari, which remains the one specially suited to the genius of the language. Even the model which has become so popular in modern times is traceable to al-Zamakhshari.

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Chapter LII

ARABIC LITERATURE: THEORIES OF LITERARY CRITICISM

In this account of the Arab contribution to the theories of literary criticism, the term "Arab" is used in a wide sense to include all the Arabic-speaking peoples, and the writers who used Arabic as their cultural medium, regardless of their racial origins.

Literary criticism is also broadly used to cover the whole field of literary appreciation, analysis, judgment, and comparison on the practical as well as the theoretical side. In this broad sense, *Balāghah*—which concerns itself with the study of the figures of speech and the stylistic aspects of literature in general—may be included under literary criticism, at least of the golden era of the early centuries of Hijrah, although, generally speaking, the relation between the two is a matter of controversy.

The period covered by our treatment is likewise a fairly long one. It extends from the first/seventh century to the present time, and it corresponds to the Islamic era in the history of the Arabs. For, although the Arabs achieved a high measure of perfection in their poetry two centuries before Islam, they did not reach the maturer stage of theorizing about literature and its excellence until their minds were stirred and stimulated by the call of the new religion that arose in their midst. The fact that the miraculous sign of the religion of Islam came in the form of a "Clear Arabic Book" was destined to play