

My Ordeal with the Qur'ān

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Contents

Preface	v
Introduction	vii
1 My Journey from Doubt to Belief	1
1.1 The Belief Phase	1
1.2 The Test Phase	1
1.3 The Whirlwind Phase	1
1.4 The Investigation Phase	1
1.5 The Breaking-Off Phase	1
2 The Methodology of Examining the Qur'ān	3
3 The Qur'ān According to the Belief of Muslims	9
3.1 The Qur'ān is the Speech of God	9
3.2 The Qur'ān is the Centre for all Schools of Thought & Opinion in Islam	9
3.3 The Linguistic Beauty was the Qur'ān's Key to the Hearts of the Pre-Islamic Arabs	9
3.4 The Work of the Exegetes of the Qur'ān	9
3.5 An Inevitable Revolution	9

4	The Miraculous Nature of the Qur'ān	11
4.1	The Belief of Muslims in the Miraculous Nature (of the Qur'ān)	11
4.2	What kind of Miraculousness is it?	16
4.2.1	Ibn al-Rawandi (d. 298H / 910AD)	19
4.2.2	Abd al-Masih al-Kindi (9th Century AD)	25
4.2.3	Abu Bakr al-Razi (d. 311H / 923AD)	25
4.3	The Eloquence of the Qur'ān	34
4.4	Where is the Eloquence of the Qur'ān?	34
4.5	Disorder in the Distribution of Topics	34
4.6	Ambiguity in the Qur'ān	34
4.7	Obscurities of the Qur'ān	34
4.8	Weakness of the Qur'ān	34
4.9	Contradiction is the Distinguishing Feature of the Qur'ān	34
4.10	The Qur'ān and Science	34
4.11	Everything in the Qur'ān is from God	34
4.12	Verses that Have no Meaning	34
4.13	The Rhymed Prose of the Qur'ān and the Rhymed Prose of the Soothsayers	34
4.14	The Qur'ān and the Belief in the Unseen	34
4.15	Barbarism of the Qur'ān	34
5	God in the Qur'ān	35
5.1	Attributes of God in the Qur'ān	36
5.2	God and the Devil	36
5.3	God the Compassionate the Merciful	36
5.4	God is Near and Answers	36
5.5	God is the Best of Sustainers	36

<i>CONTENTS</i>	iii
5.6 There is no Help Except from God	36
5.7 God Crams Himself into Everything	36
5.8 God is the Conqueror over his Slaves	36
5.9 With God. Man Must Impose his Law	36
5.10 God. An Ineffective God	36
Epilogue	37
Index	39

Preface

TODO:

Introduction

TODO:

Chapter 1

My Journey from Doubt to Belief

1.1 The Belief Phase

1.2 The Test Phase

1.3 The Whirlwind Phase

1.4 The Investigation Phase

1.5 The Breaking-Off Phase

Chapter 2

The Methodology of Examining the Qur'ān

There are two methods to understand the Qur'ān. They are: The Methodology of Transmission, that gives precedence to revelation over reason, the unquestioning acceptance of the veracity of the text and the inability of reason to comprehend its ultimate aims and objectives, and the Methodology of Reason that gives precedence to reason over revelation and its ability to comprehend the truth without need for reference to the text. For text is the last concern of the mind that is in itself free, independent and believing.

For that reason I will employ, in this book, the Methodology of Reason, that Descartes established at the beginning of the modern age even though he did not always abide by it and in particular in understanding religious texts but manoeuvred, twisted and distorted the neck of Reason to stop the rot that fills Revelation and that which Revelation contains of garbage that diseases minds.

See how this great man compromises for the sake of (divine) text. Descartes wasn't the first to compromise, not at all, and he will not be the last apart from those who believe in Reason and act according to it and trust that which Reason obligates — and they are few indeed! For (divine) text has such influence and

4CHAPTER 2. THE METHODOLOGY OF EXAMINING THE QUR'ĀN

power, few can withstand.

The fundamental principle of the methodology of Reason is impartiality and objectivity and to approach the research with a mind free from prejudice and bias “Bias is Sickness” as they say. In this spirit we must resolutely proceed in studying the Qur'ān and treat it as we would any other scientific research and subject it to examination and analysis and skepticism and rejection and contestation because that is what will make our examination fruitful and profitable and make it of universal benefit.

Applying the methodology of Reason to the Qur'ān is in my view a dangerous and massive event that will shake the earth below the feet of blind faith (Taqlēd) and inertia, and putrid decay. And it something that must be done the for the most extreme cure is cauterization.

The Qur'ān has deep roots in our cultural composition and if these roots are shaken then composition changes to a different composition and destiny changes to a different destiny and people changes to a different people and as a consequence a new generation emerges that wasn't in the reckoning.

For that reason the first thing I will confront you with in this discourse is that I doubt the Qur'ān and in the god of the Qur'ān and in the teachings of the Qur'ān and in the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān and in the sublime language of the Qur'ān.

I insist on doubt, I embrace it on principle. For doubts — as al-Ghazali says — leads one to the truth. So one who does not doubt cannot look and one who does not look cannot see and one who cannot see will remain in blindness and error.

This is my method in doing the work and this is how I start examining, thinking, reading and reflect until the circumstances lead me to something resembling certainty. That is because what we call the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān and infallibility of the Qur'ān is really only like any human piece of work containing error as well as correctness.

I'm aware of the consequences which I have arrived at but that won't deter me from proving them and broadcasting them

and expressing my opinion freely. I know in advance that it will lead to mortal dangers and grave confrontations that I perhaps don't need. But no! For truth deserves to be followed. I will take refuge in a mountain that will protect me from the water (*NB: This is a reference to Noah's son*) as far as I am able and if not then martyrdom is better than I suffer incapacity and weakness to declare what I believe in and what many others besides me believe in, though they are waiting for the spark of light to set alight after that many sparks of light and sparks of light light up the dark tunnel that we are living in. So is there any other way to escape from a path?

As for the reasons that led me to doubt in the Qur'ān, they are because of its contradictions, generalisations, pompous rhetoric, and fecetious phrases that have no meaning. The grammatical and stylistic errors that the classical scholars were at their wits end trying to find explanations. And others, both scientific and historical that I consider the Lord of the worlds above making. Just as the Qur'ān is full of rhetorical explosive charges, verbal bombs, that create such an extreme uproar that ears almost become deaf but after deep analysis and despite what it contains of sweetness and charm and alluring beauty, it is pale, emaciated, little content, lacking substance, bubbles in the air, radiating beams of light like fireworks, except that they soon extinguish and fall to the ground spent, leaving behind it pitch dark.

It is as though it is a bolt of lightening glistening with
fury — then fizzles out and it is as though it never shone.
(a line from a poem by *Ibn Sina*)

Many of the prose of the masters of eloquence (classical literati) and even the doggerel of soothsayers is better — a thousand times — than many of the Qur'ānverses that are of nonsensical language, stuffed full of fairy tales, that the Qur'ānic commentators — and strangely, amongst them Mu'tazilites — became masters at dealing with and defending.

There remains another matter and it isn't the last. It is the matter of the indictment of the Qur'ān upon the Qur'ān. For the

6CHAPTER 2. THE METHODOLOGY OF EXAMINING THE QUR'ĀN

narrative of the Qur'ān is confused — and how confused — for how abundant is the confusion of the Qur'ān. “The Almighty” said: “And if this was from other than Allah you would have found a lot of contradiction.”

The Qur'ān has passed the guilty verdict upon itself! For that which it contains of contradictions goes beyond the limit of ‘a lot’. Nay, it is the centre of every disparity and contradiction. The amount of disparities and contradictions in any book in the world has never reached the level of the Qur'ān. Yet despite this they want us to believe that there is no disparity nor contradiction in the Qur'ān. We must ignore the evidence to believe that which does not agree with reason nor with the evidence in the manner of “Believe Allah and disbelieve the stomach of your brother” and if you don’t (ignore evidence and reason) then you will see and hear that which will not please you. (*NB: Reference to a hadith where someone came to the prophet complaining of his brothers stomach/bowel problem, the prophet said ‘give him honey’ — but the guy returned saying it has got worse, so the prophet said ‘give him honey’ this happened twice more — finally the prophet said ‘believe Allah and disbelieve the stomach of your brother’.*)

I am not calling for the renunciation of religion, for that is a difficult objective, in fact it is a demand that cannot be sought. Because religion for its adherents is sweet nectar and for so long I myself savoured this sweetness until I returned to my senses.

I say I am not calling for the renunciation of religion but am calling for the end to resorting to religion for decisions in all matters and sticking its nose into every tiny matter in the affairs of life. And that (can be achieved) by applying Secularism as a principle both in thought and in life. Secularism is not disbelief, nor is it a call to disbelief as some of its enemies portray it, but it is merely placing a limit to the interference between religion and the state.

Religion is not the execution of the captive, nor the stoning of the adulterer, nor the chopping of the hand of the thief. Religion, according to secularists, is that which lives in the heart and dwells in the conscience. Believe what you like, but beware of

imposing your beliefs on others nor make it into a system for government or life. Religion is for God while the nation is for everyone. That is the slogan of Secularism.

There is nothing inviolable, nothing sacred in Secularism. The only thing that is inviolable and sacred in it is Humanity and the value of Humanity and the freedom of Humanity and respect for the dignity of Humanity. The lack of exploitation of man by another. The unbeliever (Kafir) is not the one who disbelieves in religion. The only unbeliever is the one who disbelieves in Humanity and Human Rights.

For the value of life is Reason. The value of life is Freedom. The value of life is Progress and Development. The value of life is Innovative Vision and expressing it according to what suits the requirements of the time and place. As for disbelief and belief, angel and devil, it (creates) conflict that impedes the development of innovations and the flow of progress in a world of powers and balances of powers and centers of powers.

The thing that most frightens man is to be consigned to the debris of memory. Ruminating over myths and delusions. In a trance over the invisible, and text, and miraculousness and rhetoric and to follow the stories of the garden of Eden and the Houris, and the (verse of) Light and the servant boys (of paradise) and stories of Jinn and tales of Luqman and the like of these stories and tales that for so long fertilized the minds and imaginations, both in the near and distant past but then today lose the bet. (i.e. discover it was all BS)

8CHAPTER 2. THE METHODOLOGY OF EXAMINING THE QUR'ĀN

Chapter 3

The Qur'ān According to the Belief of Muslims

- 3.1 The Qur'ān is the Speech of God**
- 3.2 The Qur'ān is the Centre for all Schools of Thought & Opinion in Islam**
- 3.3 The Linguistic Beauty was the Qur'ān's Key to the Hearts of the Pre-Islamic Arabs**
- 3.4 The Work of the Exegetes (Mufas-sirin) of the Qur'ān**
- 3.5 An Inevitable Revolution**

Chapter 4

The Miraculous Nature of the Qur'ān

4.1 The Belief of Muslims in the Miraculous Nature (of the Qur'ān)

“Say: If the whole of mankind and Jinns were to gather together to produce the like of this Qur'ān, they could not produce the like thereof, even if they backed up each other with help and support.” (17:88)

The Qur'ān is indeed a unique book. It is prose and yet unlike prose. It is poetry and yet unlike poetry. It is metered and rhyming and yet it is not like the (standard) meters and rhymes. So what is it then? It is the Qur'ān and that's it!

Perhaps the best description of the Qur'ān is that which the late Dean of Arabic literature, Dr. Ta Ha Hussain said: “The Genres of Arabic expression are poetry, prose and Qur'ān.” For the Qur'ān is not poetry — no! and it is not prose. It is a type of speech that is of a singular nature, unique of its kind. It's Qur'ān! For that reason they (the scholars) are united in the opinion that what is called the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān is its amazing composition.

12CHAPTER 4. THE MIRACULOUS NATURE OF THE QUR'ĀN

Miraculousness (al-'Ijaaz) in the Arabic language comes from "To Make Unable", in other words it attributes the inability to another and a miracle is called a miracle because mankind is unable to replicate it.

The (scholarly) discipline of the Miraculous Nature (of the Qur'ān) was a discipline that was an innovation in religion. This discipline reached its full maturity in the 4th century of the Hijra when it became independent and grew into a discipline in its own right. Today it's a fundamental tenet of faith that no-one can dare throw doubt on. Beginning in the 4th century of the Hijra the (discipline) of the Miraculous Nature became indelibly written in stone.

Despite that there were those who cast doubt on this belief, going right back to the first centuries of Islam.

Perhaps the first of these was al-Ja'd ibn Dirham, tutor to Marwan ibn Muhammad the last of the Umayyad Caliphs. For he was the first one to openly express skepticism of the Qur'ān, and refutation of it and rejection of things in it. He said that its eloquence was not a miracle and that people can do the like of it and better than it when no-one had before him had said such as that. Marwan — who was nicknamed the donkey — used to follow his view to the extent that he was linked to him and called "Marwan al-Ja'di"¹.

During the mid Abbasid period this view (that the Qur'ān was not a miracle) spread along with other views of a similar nature, such as the view that the Qur'ān was created as well as its opposition (those who believed it was not created, but eternal — on the "Protected Tablet"). The first to go to great lengths in that was 'Isa ibn Sabih, known as Abu Musa al-Mirdar, who was one of the Mu'tazilite scholars and amongst the leading ones. He was called the Monk of the Mu'tazilites and differed from the rest of the Mu'tazilites in all of the issues that concern us here. Saying about the Qur'ān that people are able to produce the like of

¹See: Mustafa Sadiq al-Rafi'i, "The Miraculous Nature of the Qur'ān and the Prophetic Rhetoric." Page 160.

4.1. THE BELIEF OF MUSLIMS IN THE MIRACULOUS NATURE (OF THE QUR'ĀN)13

this Qur'ān as regards eloquence, and composition and rhetorical beauty².

Similar to that (view, that others could produce the like of the Qur'ān) was the view taken by his contemporary, Ibrahim Ibn Sayyar Ibn Hani' al-Nazzam, who expounded many of the works of the philosophers and combined their ideas with the ideas of the Mu'tazilites³. But he differed from his colleagues in 13 matters, while al-Baghdadi increased that number to 21.

If al-Shahrastani labels the areas al-Nazzam differed from his colleagues, "issues", these "issues" become "shameful scandals" in the view of al-Baghdadi! So the 9th issue that al-Shahrastani reproaches al-Nazzam about; becomes "The 25th shameful scandal of his shameful scandals" according to the wording of al-Baghdadi: "His view regarding the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān that it is to do with the fact it predicts events of the past and future, and to do with the the fact it diverted the causes of opposition and prevented the Arabs — by force and incapacitation — from being concerned with (trying to imitate) it, because if he (Allah) let them then they would have been able to produce a Sura (chapter) the like of it in beautiful rhetoric, eloquence and composition" For mankind is able to produce the like of this Qur'ān, but Allah diverted them from doing that and prevented them by placing hinderance and incapacity within them to do so. This is "The View of Diversion."⁴

(NB: In other words al-Nazzam's view was that the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān was NOT that it could not be imitated — in his view it could easily be imitated — but that Allah prevented the Arabs from doing so!)

Now we ask what is the nature of the Miraculousness of the Qur'ān?

The scholars of Arabic — especially the scholars of language and elegant speech — are completely united that the Qur'ān is

²Al-Baghdadi, "The Difference Between the Groups" Page 164-165; and al-Shahrastani, "The Book of Sects and Creeds", 1 / 68-69.

³Al-Shahrastani, 1 / 35-45.

⁴Previous Reference 1 / 56-57.

14CHAPTER 4. THE MIRACULOUS NATURE OF THE QUR'ĀN

in itself a miracle. That its miraculousness is in its wonderful composition, in the eloquence of its expressions, the astounding nature of its clear speech, its unique style that is unlike any other style, its captivating verbal impact, that reveals itself in its acoustic structure, and linguistic beauty, and its sublime artistry.

Al-Qadi Abu Bakr (d. 1148) said the nature of the miraculousness of the Qur'ānis in its composition, arrangement, and structure. That it's beyond all types of standard composition in the language of the Arabs, departing from their styles of oration and for this reason they were unable to oppose it. The composition of the Qur'ān had no model to imitate, nor any antecedent to emulate and it's unreasonable (to think) that the like of it could happen by chance. He said: "the miraculousness of Qur'ān is much clearer in some parts while in some parts it is more subtle, and more obscure."⁵

Al-Imam Fakhr al-Din (d. 1210) said the nature of the miraculousness is the eloquence, and unique style, free from all defects.

Al-Zamalkani (d. 727h) said the nature of the miraculousness derives from the composition that's unique to it and is not haphazard. In that its words are finely balanced in construction, in meter and the reason behind the way it's been put together, in meaning. So that every type occurs in the best possible place for its pronunciation and meaning.

And Ibn Atiyya said: The correct (opinion) and the one that laymen and experts are agreed upon in regard to its miraculousness is that it is its composition and the soundness of its meanings. and in the arrangement of the eloquence of its wording. And that is because Allah's knowledge surrounds all things and surrounds all (aspects) of language. So since the organisation of the wording in the Qur'ān is something his knowledge completely surrounds, i.e. each word perfectly suits the one it follows and each meaning is elucidated after another and that is the case from beginning to end of the Qur'ān and man is encompassed by ignorance, bewilderment and perplexity and it is self-evident that no human being encompasses all that, then as a result the

⁵Quoted from the previous reference, p. 122.

4.1. THE BELIEF OF MUSLIMS IN THE MIRACULOUS NATURE (OF THE QUR'ĀN)15

arrangement of the Qur'ān is furthest epitome of eloquence and for that reason one destroys the saying of those who claim that the Arabs were able to replicate the like of it or that they were 'diverted' from doing so. The correct (opinion) is that it is not within the ability of anyone ever!⁶

However the scholars disagree about the difference in the degrees of eloquence of the verses of Qur'ān after having agreed it is in the highest forms of eloquence, in so far as you cannot find phrasing that is more suitable nor balanced, to convey that meaning.

Al-Qadi (Abu Bakr d. 1148) takes the opinion of 'negation', meaning negation of there being any difference (in degrees of eloquence). For every word in it is depicted in its highest (form/usage) even though some people are better at sensing it than others.

While Abu al-Qushairy and others take the opinion of 'difference' (in degrees of eloquence), he said: "We do not claim that everything in the Qur'ān is in the highest rank of eloquence."

And likewise others have said: "In the Qur'ān is (both) the Eloquent and the Most Eloquent." This is the opinion taken by Sheikh 'Izz al-Din 'Abd al-Salam who then asked: "Why was the Qur'ān not entirely in the most eloquent form?" Al-Sadr Mawhoob al-Jazari replied to the effect that 'if the Qur'ān had come in that (most eloquent form) it would not be in the usual style of speech from the Lord, combining the Most Eloquent with the Eloquent and so the proof of the miraculousness would not be complete. So it came in their usual style of speech to highlight the inability to challenge it and so they can't say, for example: 'You have brought that which we have no ability in its like. Just as it would not be right for a sighted person to say to a blind person: "I beat you by virtue of my sight." Because the blind person will say to him: "Your victory can only be valid if I was able to see, and (then you could say) your sight was better than mine. But if I lack the ability to see then how can I make a challenge?"'⁷

⁶All the quotes are taken from the previous reference, p. 133 with some slight edits in wording but not meaning.

⁷The previous reference p. 109.

In any case the Qur'ān is in the eyes of Muslims the Prophet's greatest miracle. No falsehood in it either before or behind it. "Indeed everything in the Qur'ān is a miracle in respect of the music of its letters, the kinship between its wording, the synchronicity of its words with its expressions, and well-knit arrangement in its resonance and that which it arrives at in regards to composition between the words and the fact that every word intentionally fits its counterpart. As though the weave of each part perfects its picture and completes its objective. Its meanings coalesce with its words as though its meanings are related to its pronunciations and its pronunciations were designed for it, and made to fit its size."⁸

4.2 What kind of Miraculousness is it?

Now we say: Indeed the belief in the miraculousness of the Qur'ān is no more than a myth amongst myths. Indeed! The Qur'ān is not amongst the secrets of the gods. It doesn't bear the slightest relation to divine inspiration that takes it outside the (normal) activity of (human) history. It's a purely human achievement that follows the norms of humanity in strength and weakness, correctness and error, agreement and contradiction, cohesion and disparity, consistency and inconsistency, uniformity and disarray.

The direct result of all that is that the Qur'ān is a very ordinary book. For that reason it is necessary to remove it from its safe refuge, outside Human history and return it to the world of people. After that it will no longer be storehouse for timeless wisdom nor a divine book protected from error that no falsehood can approach it from either front or behind.

In that way, it and its time and its context become part of the historical process of the area which has witnessed, and continues to witness every day, comparable books that influenced these

⁸The previous reference p. 99.

books and are influenced by it and ignite the interaction between them.

Every star-struck believer, regardless of whether he is from the common people or their elite or even from the elite of the elite, relies (on the belief) that “in the Qur’ān, due to beauty of the words and the splendour of the style especially, no-one can attain the phrases, style and meanings.”⁹

And that challenge, that Allah announced in the Qur’ān for Man & Jinn to bring the like of this Qur’ān,

“Say: ‘If the whole of mankind and Jinns were to gather together to produce the like of this Qur’ān, they could not produce the like thereof, even if they backed up each other with help and support.’” (17:88)

is absolutely true, but it doesn’t apply only to the Qur’ān, it also applies to every great work. For just as Man & Jinn are not able to produce the like of the Qur’ān, likewise they cannot produce the like of that which Plato brought, nor al-Jahiz, nor al-Tawhidi, nor Dante, nor Goethe, nor Shakespear...

Great works always contain the fingerprints of their authors. It is a part of their identity. So if it is impossible to imitate these fingerprints, then it is also impossible to imitate these works. Each one is a unique weave that has no match in the works of man and thus establishes its character. Despite this each one is not free from flaws and errors and defects that the critic can be aware of. Likewise the Qur’ān. In the work of al-Jahiz and al-Tawhidi is that which far surpasses what is in some of the verses of the Qur’ān, as we shall see, but who dares criticise the Qur’ān?

Indeed the Muslims of the Middle Ages during the Golden Age, had more freedom than Muslims in this time. If not then why does no-one dare, like al-Sarakhsi and Ibn Rawandi and al-Razi, to defame the most holy symbol of Muslims, the valuable of valuables that gives meaning to their existence and bestows on them hope and immortality.

⁹Muhammad Abu Zahra, “The Greatest Miracle.”

18CHAPTER 4. THE MIRACULOUS NATURE OF THE QUR'ĀN

All efforts and active forces in the Islamic world have been enlisted to repel the “Enemies of Allah”. Criticism of Allah’s book has been met with a reception that varies from forbearance & irritation, between insult & vilification and between suppression & temperance, and ‘dealing’ with antagonists ranged between chit-chat & bluster, to finding excuses and haphazard solutions — or as I myself call it, “Patching” (the holes) — to save the word of Allah from the clutches of the deniers, the astray and the ones who lead others astray. Between hitting and slapping, punching and physical eradication, seeking closeness to Allah through the blood of that insolent fabricator of lies about Allah, denier of his signs, so that he be a warning to his like, the forces of the Devil, “and Satan indeed found his calculation true concerning them, for they followed him...” (34:20) them and the seducers. Then they topple into the Fire of Hell all of them together¹⁰. They are the ones who Allah curses, and those who curse, curse them!!

Indeed opposing the Qur’ān was a natural process that arose with the rise of Islam, but the new religion killed it in the cradle, or at least was able to silence it for a while. That was after the astounding victory that it achieved in the Arabian Peninsula and the area surrounding it. Indeed it was such a tremendous breakthrough that it temporarily diverted attention away from that which interplays in it of (opposing) forces and deep contradictions that don’t appear on the surface except in moments of quiet and stability or at the times of fitna.

For that reason it is not strange that this process started anew or returned to the open when the Umayyad dynasty began to disintegrate and draw towards its inevitable end. For indeed Islam injured the pride of many of the leaders of the heretics (Zanadiqa) — and they were the Shu’ubiyah (*NB: A popularist movement against the the supremacy of the Arabs*) — and nationalist pride overtook them and led them to fanaticism for the religion of their fathers such as Zoroastrianism and Manichean dualism and hatred towards Islam that ended their glory and destroyed their dreams in lasting and noble life. A group of poets

¹⁰Allusion to what is related in Sura al-Shu’araa’ 26/94.

who belonged to “The League of the Mujjan” (NB: A group of libertine/dissident intellectuals such as Bashar ibn Burd and Abu Nuwas) joined them, fleeing from the constraints of religion and seeking a life of freedom with no restrictions or regulations.

Then came the Abbasid period where the Shu’ubiyya movement was active side by side with the Heretical movement (Harkatu z-Zandaqa) and the attacks on Islam intensified and disparagement of its holy of holies — the Qur’ān. And at the head of this movement were poets, satirists, and disaffected thinkers, the most famous of them: Salih Ibn Abdul Quddus, and Abdul Karim ibn Abu al-’Awjaa’, and Abu ’Isa al-Warraaq and Bashar ibn Burd, and his adversary Hammad Ajrad, and Iban ibn Abdul Hamid al-Lahiqi, and Ibn Muqaffa’, and (his son?) Muhammad ibn Abdullah ibn Muqaffa’, and Abd al-Masih al-Kindi who we shall say a few words about in a bit to show the participation of non-Muslims in the attack on the Qur’ān...

But the most famous of all these without argument is: Abu al-Hussein Ahmad ibn Yahya ibn Ishaq al-Rawandi, and Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Zakariyya al-Razi, under both of whom the movement of Heretics reached its climax and extent of its maturity and we will discuss now each of them briefly, enough to clarify what we mean.

4.2.1 Ibn al-Rawandi (d. 298H / 910AD)

(NB: none of his books have survived. What exists are quotes from critics.)

At first the Dissident Movement, or the Movement of Heretics, was simply a spontaneous individual attitude or libertine outburst or a transient intellectual position, but then this movement began to manifest itself and crystalize with the passing of time until it became a comprehensive school of thought based on the pillars of reason. It acquired supporters who believed in it and worked to publicise it and disseminate its principles. This movement continued to grow, consolidate and rise until it reached its apex under Ibn al-Rawandi. His view of Prophethood formed the

20CHAPTER 4. THE MIRACULOUS NATURE OF THE QUR'ĀN

cornerstone of the the barrage on the Qur'ān, by these Heretics, though without that extending to doubt in the existence of Allah who revealed the Qur'ān.

Doubt in Prophethood was the furthest extent that this movement of Heretics achieved in Islam. Then it came to a halt after a violent shake-up in concepts and doctrines grew out of it, in the 4th century (of Hijra) that drew towards it the movements of the concealed ideologies that were influenced by Gnosticism and Esoteric Knowledge and especially those associated with the Shi'ism and the Isma'iliyyah Shi'ism in particular.

Ibn Rawandi was the most famous of the dissenters of the 3rd century of Hijrah, though only a little is known about him, even the date of his birth and death are not known for certain. He was originally a Mu'tazilite (A non-orthodox Sunni School of thought) then recanted and leaned towards Shi'ism and became a bitter enemy to the Mu'tazilites.

He was a vehement believer in Reason, praising it and relying on it in all matters and affairs. Reason, in his opinion, was: "The greatest gift bestowed by God, glorified is he, upon his creation. Indeed it is through it that the Lord and his blessings can be known and by virtue of it that orders & prohibitions, his promises & threats become valid."¹¹ He wrote a book called "The Scandal of the Mu'tazilah"¹² which was a critical analysis of the Mu'tazilite School of thought from the perspective of the Shi'ah al-Rafidah and a reply to the book of al-Jahiz "The Virtue of the Mu'tazilah". But this period did not last long and we see him after that amongst the group of those who the author of the "The Catalogue" (Kitab al-Fihrist, by Ibn al-Nadim d. 995 AD) gives the title "Theologians who manifest Islam, but conceal heresy." He was influenced in this by Abu 'Isa al Warraq who was a teacher of his and encouraged him towards Heresy.

Ibn Rawandi began his Heretical writings in the latter years of his life, and they are the books that he owes his importance

¹¹Quoted from Dr. Abd al-Rahman Badawi, from "History of Disbelief in Islam" page 202.

¹²See: The previous reference, page 87, 186 and that which is after it.

and high status to. Amongst these books is a book where he dealt a massive blow to the Qur'ān. He called it "The Crushing Blow". It was, as its title suggests, a merciless attack on the Qur'ān.

A third book is attributed to him called the book of "The Emerald" where he refutes the concept of Prophethood in Islam and attacks the belief in the Miraculousness of the Qur'ān. We said that this book is "attributed to him" due to a reference that it's said it's attributable to al-Jaba'iy and goes on to say: "Indeed Ibn al-Rawandi and Abu 'Isa Muhammad Ibn Harun al-Warraq the Heretic, also dispute with one another over the book of "The Emerald" each one claiming that it is amongst their compilations as both were in complete accordance in attacking the Qur'ān."¹³

In the the first and third parts of this book, Ibn al-Rawandi (or Abu 'Isa al Warraq?) presents his opinion on Reason and Religions that depend on Revelation and explains the position on each. He begins his book with Human Reason, praising it and going to great lengths in celebrating the fact that it is the only path to enlightenment. For that reason his opponents must agree with him that Reason is the mightiest thing that man possesses and is the sole refuge to solve problems, indeed! "The prophet bore witness to the high status and majesty of Reason."¹⁴

So Reason should be used to analyse Prophethood. Either the teachings of the Prophet agree with Reason, and in that case there is no need for it because Reason is in no need of it, or it contradicts reason in which case it is false. For that reason it was necessary for Ibn al-Rawandi to be surprised at the position of Muhammad and wonder; "Why did he bring that which negates him if he was authentic?"¹⁵ For the revelation of Muhammad is in complete opposition to reason. Then, what is the meaning of these obligatory religious injunctions upon the Muslim, such as ritual washing, and prayer and circumambulating around the Ka'abah and visiting the holy sites?

Regarding that, Ibn al-Rawandi says "Indeed the prophet brought

¹³Quote from the previous reference p. 112 and 182.

¹⁴Quote from the pervious reference p. 186-187.

¹⁵Quote from the pervious reference p. 84.

22CHAPTER 4. THE MIRACULOUS NATURE OF THE QUR'ĀN

that which contradicts Reason, such as prayer, ritual cleansing from impurity, throwing stones at pillars during Hajj, and walking around a house that cannot hear nor see? Or dashing between two rocky mounds that can neither benefit nor harm. All of this has nothing to do with Reason. So what is the difference between (the hills of) Safa and Marwa and (the hills of) Abu Qubays and Hira? And walking round the (holy) house is no different than walking round any other houses.”¹⁶

Ibn al-Rawandi used the myths of the Brahmans to express his bold views. He used them as the means by which to attack “Divinely revealed” religions and laws (*NB: Since it is easier for Muslims to recognise the superiority of using reason in relation to the claims of ‘divine inspiration’ of others,*) so he could hide beneath this veil his belief (about Islam). He made them as analogies for the (necessity of) Reason and Intellect so that they could be set free of their own accord and express the views and thoughts that naturally occur to them, while attaching it to delusional characters to soften its blows upon the audience.

In this vein and in the name of Reason that he never ceases to praise and extol for a moment, he goes on to attack the Qur’ān in his previously mentioned book “The Emerald”. He reviews in this book the concept of the Miraculousness of the Qur’ān and criticises it ruthlessly, and annihilates the view of the divine origin of the Qur’ān and puts forward a simple, concrete, logical and reasoned view with no ambiguity in it. Convincing the intellect of the human nature of the Qur’ān, refuting those who say that it is an inspiration from Allah and a revelation from an all-wise and all-knowing entity.

It is also related that Ibn al-Rawandi said — regarding refuting the belief in the miraculousness of the Qur’ān:

“Indeed it is not impossible that one Arab tribe is more eloquent than all the other tribes, and that a group of people in this tribe are more eloquent than (others) in this tribe and one member of this group is more eloquent than this group... and suppose

¹⁶Quote from the pervious reference 101-102. Abu Qubais and Hira are mountains in Makkah.

that his eloquence was spread amongst the Arabs... so what is its wisdom upon the non-Arabs who do not understand the Arabic language? What is the proof for them?"¹⁷

And Ibn al-Rawandi mocked the theatrical spectacle of the angels who Allah sent down from heaven during the battle of Badr, to help the prophet. He said, indeed: "They had limited effect, little power, despite their great number and the combination of them and Muslims, they could not kill more than 70 people... And where were the angels during the battle of Uhud when the prophet was skulking in fear amongst the slain? Why didn't Allah help him in that situation?"¹⁸

It was also related in the book of "The Emerald", quoting from the book of "The Victory" by al-Khayyat, his saying: "Indeed the Qur'ān is not the speech of a wise god. In it are contradictions and mistakes and passages that are in the realms of the impossible."¹⁹As in the theatrical episode of the angels of Badr that we just mentioned.

Then indeed Ibn al-Rawandi finds in the discourse of Aktham Ibn Sayfi better (language) than (the Qur'ān that boasts) "Indeed we have given you the Abundance" (108/1)²⁰ As Ibn al-Jawzi says in his brief allusion to the book of "The Emerald": "Then he begins with attack on the Qur'ān and claims the existence of linguistic mistakes in it."²¹

And before ibn al-Rawandi exploits criticism of the Qur'ān in his book "The Crushing Blow", and Ibn Jawzi has preserved for us copies of this criticism, for amongst the parts that he preserved for us in his book "Al-Muntathim Fi al-Tarikh", from the book of "The Crushing Blow" which has not survived, the following piece: "When (Muhammad) described (in the Qur'ān) Paradise, he said: In it are rivers of laban, whose taste has not gone off, and that is milk, yet no one desires that apart from the hungry. And he

¹⁷Quote from the previous reference p. 87.

¹⁸Quote from the previous reference p. 87.

¹⁹Quote from the previous reference p. 110.

²⁰Quote from the previous reference p. 111.

²¹Quote from the previous reference p. 120.

24CHAPTER 4. THE MIRACULOUS NATURE OF THE QUR'ĀN

mentioned honey that no-one wants at all and Ginger, which is not tasty except as a drink and silk brocade (sundus) which is used as a spread, not as clothes and likewise embroidered brocade (Istabriq) which is a thick/rough type of silk brocade. He said one who imagines himself in Paradise wearing this rough clothing and drinking milk and ginger, will be like a bride in a Kurdish or Nabataean wedding!"²²

Ibn al-Rawandi turns his attention to the Divine challenge to bring the like of the Qur'ān and says: "If you want the like of it in respect of superior speech, we can bring you a thousand like it from the speech of the masters of rhetoric and champions of eloquence and poets and is more fluent in wording and more concisely conveys the meanings, more elegantly rendered and expressed and more beautifully rhymed. An if you are not content with that then we demand from you the same that you demand from us!"²³

(NB: There appears to be a opening quotation mark missing from the original in this next bit, and I'm not sure where it should go.)

Even the Mu'tazilah who reject all Miracles or at least attach no importance to them, still believe in the miracle of the Qur'ān.²⁴ But al-Nazzam, who was the most bold and freethinking of the Mu'tazilite theologians, rejected the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān in regard to its composition, he rejected what was related of miracles of our prophet, peace be upon him, as regards splitting the moon, the pebbles in his hand glorifying God, the gushing of water from his fingers, to arrive by way of rejection of the miracles of our prophet, peace be upon him, to the rejection of his prophethood."²⁵

²²Quote from the previous reference p. 133.

²³Quote from the previous reference p. 216.

²⁴Quote from the previous reference p. 119 and 153.

²⁵Al-Baghdadi, "The Difference Between the Groups", p. 132; See also p. 149-150

4.2.2 Abd al-Masih al-Kindi (9th Century AD)

This attack on Islam was not restricted to apostate Muslims. No, indeed, non-Muslims entered the ranks, galvanized by the fury of the fierce offensive being waged on the new religion. Perhaps the most famous of these, whose quotes have reached us, was the philosopher Abd al-Masih ibn Ishaq al-Kindi (*NB: Not to be confused with the well known Muslim philosopher also called al-Kindi.*) He was a Nestorian that it is claimed lived in the courtyard of (the Caliph) al-Ma'mun who, no doubt due to his openness towards those who differed from him in views and belief, (*NB: Al-Ma'mun was famous for gathering opposing sects and religions to hear them debate,*) tolerated the ferocious criticism of this Christian who attacked the rituals of Islam and its beliefs, one after another and especially the rites of Hajj.

His views that concern us here are those connected to our topic and his explanation for the effect of the Qur'ān in that "The Nabataeans, the rabble, non-Arabs, the gullible and the ignorant who have no understanding of the Arabic language", are the only ones who would be duped by the claim of the Miraculous nature of the Qur'ān in respect of its composition."²⁶

4.2.3 Abu Bakr al-Razi (d. 311H / 923AD)

Al-Razi is the second of the two who, without rival, courageously barged their way over the red line. Many before them hovered close but never quite hit the mark. Either because of their fear or lack of resources. As for al-Razi and before him, Ibn al-Rawandi, they are the indisputable masters of the field. Indeed all those who attempted to reply to them could not match them. Not at all! They were not on their level. They were dwarfs that cannot be compared to either of them. No way! No way!

Each one was a revolutionary, rebellious visionary, who revealed the concealed (thoughts), brought out the pent-up (feelings) and freed the suppressed (minds). They thought the thoughts

²⁶Quote from Dr. Badawi, from "The History of Disbelief in Islam," p. 129.

that were not thought about. No! That were not allowed to be thought about. Each one of them would not accept anything less than making the most holy of holies the object of their criticism, and delving into it to uncover its flaws, and disgrace its myths and illusions. Exposing what it contains of threats, claims and hearsay on account of which man is crushed, and paralyzes his abilities and enslaves him to supernatural powers and invisible entities. To rob and intimidate him like an unsheathed sword hanging over his head, not allowing him any room to move to see what is beyond his nose or know what is going on around him. Thus he must live his life, hostage to the fears, anxieties, whisperings and misgivings that come between him and achieving his best potential. Destroying all his ambitions of self realization and personal freedom.

Al-Razi was a philosopher, doctor and alchemist of the highest order just as he was the pillar of the dissident and heretical movement during his age and the following centuries.

If there was a difference between him and Ibn al-Rawandi then it was in the degree of depth and widening of the details and (his) ability to generate new ideas from old ones, but both believed and relied upon Reason and both base their judgments and conclusions upon Reason. In their opinion, Reason was to the yardstick to measure everything.

If Ibn al-Rawandi, in his heretical and irreligious meditations, worked within a similar atmosphere to that of the Muslim theologians, then: "Al-Razi attacked and criticised the shortcomings of Religion from the perspective of Philosophy."²⁷

In the same way as Ibn al-Rawandi used the Brahmins as a vehicle by which to disguise his views, and to place on their tongues what was really in his own mind regarding the invalidation of prophethood and virtues of Reason, al-Razi also did likewise, in that he attributes to it (Reason) not just the (ability to arrive at) ethical behaviour, as Ibn al-Rawandi did, but attributes to it (knowledge) of divine matters also. For he said, indeed we:

²⁷Quote from the previous reference p. 127.

"Through it (Reason) arrive at knowledge of the Creator, Mighty & Glorified is He."²⁸

This proves that there is no justification for Prophethood as long as Reason is able to lead us to all that is ethical and unethical. In any case Ibn al-Rawandi: "Moved in Theological and Religious field of study, where as al-Razi moved in the Scientific field."²⁹

In summary, there is no doubt that Ibn al-Rawandi blazed the trail, and opened the way, but al-Razi watered it and boarded it with palm trees and beautified it with flowers and scented herbs and raised upon it a lofty edifice.

Al-Razi praised Reason "using language which surpasses that used by the great rationalists of all ages, even in the modern age," as Abd al-Rahman confirmed in his aforementioned book.

By virtue of Reason, man is in no need of Prophethood, nor Religion, nor all the Divine Books and as a consequence; nor the Qur'ān. By virtue of Reason and Reason alone, we can know good from bad and truth from falsehood. There is no authority other than the authority of Reason, nor any belief other than belief in Reason... and if this is its magnitude then we must never minimise its value, nor reduce its status, and never make it a subject when it is the master.

Prophethood was al-Razi's overriding concern, he demolished it on the basis that Reason has no need for it. He said: "From whence did you make it necessary that God singled out a people for Prophethood instead of another? Preferring them over (other) people? Giving them evidences and forcing others to be in need of them (in need of these people)? And from whence did you allow in the wisdom of the Wise that he chooses that for them and raises some over others confirming enmity between them, increasing wars and with that annihilate people?"³⁰

We are not so concerned here that al-Razi heaps criticism and abuse on prophethood & prophets, and elaborates in great detail

²⁸Quote from the previous reference p. 203.

²⁹Quote from the previous reference p. 217.

³⁰Quote from the previous reference p. 205.

28CHAPTER 4. THE MIRACULOUS NATURE OF THE QUR'ĀN

on that. What concerns us is his criticism of Religions, so we can arrive, in that way, at his opinion on the Qur'ān. For that reason we see him turning his attention to "Revealed" Religions and the books they brought which they ascribe divinity to. He analyses them without bias, favouritism, or discrimination. For all of them are of equal importance.³¹

For the disbelief of al-Razi was not aimed at a specific religion without another, in other words it was not aimed at Islam alone. That highlights the objectivity of al-Razi and the soundness of his opinion. For all religions were subject to attack and abuse. For they do not say the same things. They contradict one another despite the fact they claim to come from the same source and (claim) they are free from defect and lies. But how can that be the case when they contain absurdities and contradictions.

Here the adversary poses the question: If religions are as you say, then how can we explain the adherence of the masses to them?

Al-Razi responds to this objection by (saying) that the followers of (the various) religions have taken the religion from their (religious) leaders by way of imitation. They are prevented from questioning or scrutinizing the foundations, and tales are related to them that discourage them from questioning these foundations. Whoever contravenes that is accused of Kufr (disbelief). If the (religious) leaders are asked to prove the truth of what they say they fly into a rage and spill the blood of one who demands that of them.

Then came (a period of) long familiarity, the passing of time, acquaintance and deception of the people by the goat-bearded (clergy) who stand at the front of religious gatherings and shriek out lies and gibberish while around them the weak-minded men, women and children (listen) until it all roots itself deeply within the people and becomes a predisposition and habitual.³²

Then al-Razi returns to his charge of contradictions in the "Holy" books as proof of their falsity. For the contradiction of

³¹Quote from the previous reference p. 208-211.

³²Quote from the previous reference p. 211-212.

religions leads to contradiction of revealed books that brought them. He begins with the Torah and the Qur'ān and the prophetic Hadith and what they contain of anthropomorphic and human-like qualities (of God). He mentions what is in the Torah of putting the fat on the fire so that the Lord can smell its scent. Also how it depicts an image of an old man with white hair and beard. This human-like and anthropomorphic description contradicts impassive and impervious nature of God to things like smells etc... All this announces that God is constructed, fabricated, reacting to things like the rest of creation.

Likewise al-Razi attacks Christianity and its claim of the existence of an uncreated ancient being by the side of God; the Messiah his son, which leads to associating a partner with God. Furthermore how can we reconcile his saying that he came to fulfill the Torah with his abolishing its laws and changing its rulings? Strangely, during his criticisms of Christianity, he did not mention — in the texts we have — the passages in the Qur'ān about corruption of the Gospels.³³

Anthropomorphism and contradictions are not only limited to Judaism and Christianity but also envelop the sayings of the prophet and the Qur'ān... and that is exemplified by what is related from the prophet when he said "I saw my Lord in the best of forms. He put his hand on my shoulders until I felt the cold of his fingertips on my chest."³⁴ and his saying "Beside the throne by the shoulder of Israfeel, and he will be groaning the groan of a young camel being saddled."³⁵ (NB: *Israfeel is the angel who blows the trumpet twice on the day of judgment. Once to destroy everything and a second time to bring humans back to life and summon them for judgment.*)

It's also obvious that many of the verses of the Qur'ān demonstrate anthropomorphism and no-one can deny that apart from the arrogant. For example His saying, mighty and glorified is he: "The Compassionate One is firmly established on the Throne."

³³Quote from the previous reference p. 213-214.

³⁴Quote from the previous reference p. 214. (ﻟﻪ ﻟﺒﺲ ﻣﻦ ﻟﺒﺲ ﻧﺴﻲ) is the flesh between the nipples.)

³⁵Quote from the previous reference p. 214.

(20:5) and He also said: "And eight (angels) will carry the Throne of your Lord above them on that Day" (69:17) and His saying: "Those who carry the Throne and those around him..." (40:7) So how can this make sense, be sound, correct in light of the fact that God is completely and utterly free from all the attributes of the profane as made clear in His — Most High — saying: "There is nothing whatever like unto Him..." (42:11)

Likewise how can we reconcile verses about predestination with others about free-will? And perhaps al-Razi borrowed these questions from the books of Theological Discourse as Abd al-Rahman Badawi noted.³⁶

As for the view that these verses require "Esoteric Interpretation" (Ta'wil) in other words taking them to have a hidden meaning that is not the plain meaning of the words, that was of no interest to al-Razi, he rejected it utterly and paid no regard to Ta'wil, not taking it seriously at all. Because Ta'wil in his opinion and the opinion of his like, was just interpolation and deceitful pretense — or in my own expression: "patching up" — the intent of which was to rescue the text, however one can, and give it an acceptable meaning. For al-Razi and his like approached religions as it appeared plainly in its texts and not as it is (claimed to be) wrapped up in hidden meanings.³⁷

Al-Razi criticised the Qur'ān also on the basis of what it said that contradicted Christianity and Judaism. He said: "Indeed the Qur'ān contradicts that which the Jews and Christians believe regarding the death of the Messiah — upon him be peace. Since the Jews and Christians say the Messiah was killed and crucified, but the Qur'ān says he was not killed and not crucified and that God raised him up to himself."³⁸

Thus does al-Razi use religions and divine books to undermine each other to arrive at the result that they are all false! Because the contradictions between them declares their falsehood in total as long as they claim that they come from the same divine source.

³⁶Quote from the previous reference p. 218.

³⁷Quote from the previous reference p. 214–215.

³⁸Quote from the previous reference p. 215.

After this attack on all religions al-Razi comments also, saying “Indeed, by God, we are amazed at what you say that the Qur’ān is a miracle when it is full of contradictions. It is the narration of ancient myths, it has no benefit nor is it proof of anything.”³⁹

And this is a view that is completely sound, for in the Qur’ān are conundrums and riddles — ambiguities and mysteries, that the greatest scholars of Tafseer until today, haven’t been able to arrive at any conclusive conclusions on. Despite all the ink they have spilled, and the efforts they spent in meaningless summations, tedious disputations, and nonsensical prattle with the sole obsession of rescuing a text that cannot be rescued except through sophistry, interpolation, prevarication, nonsense and legends.⁴⁰

Just as the Qur’ān challenged Mankind and Jinn to bring the like of it, likewise al-Razi challenged the Arab Scholars of eloquence to bring the like of that which is in the book of “Elements” (by Euclid) or *Almagest* (by Ptolemy) and others. Al-Razi says: “Indeed we demand from you the like of that which you claim we are not able to do,”⁴¹ and with this he threw the burden of proof back to the adversary. In other words with this challenge

³⁹Quote from the previous reference p. 216 and 218 in two different versions.

⁴⁰Whoever wishes to compose an approximate picture — even if it is not precise — of these prattlers and nonsense-talkers, then let him listen to the recordings of Sheikh Mutawali Sha’rawi, who’s voice reverberates all over Arab radio. He explains the Qur’ān with a sharp tongue that erupts like a flood that he uses to delight the masses and ignorant amongst the scholars, while the idiots sitting around him roar out the words: “Allah! Allah!” or “Allah is great! Allah is great!” and grow in zeal and impulsiveness. If they weren’t in the mosque in a solemn religious gathering they would fill the world with shouts and clapping as they do at public rallies and I have complete confidence that they don’t understand a thing that’s going on. This is an example that is emulated by the ignorant amongst the scholars and the religious teachers and preachers and Imams of mosques and the rest of this type. He (Sha’rawi) is regarded by his followers and admirers, to be amongst the greatest (scholars) of Tafseer in this day and age — even a unique phenomenon amongst the phenomena of this age. He is even considered by his pupils to be amongst those who the prophet alluded to in the famous hadith: “Indeed God will send to this Ummah (Nation) at the beginning of every 100 years he who will renew/reestablish their religion for them!”

32CHAPTER 4. THE MIRACULOUS NATURE OF THE QUR'ĀN

he showed that the proof itself must lie with the adversary (making the claim), since it is not within the ability of man to bring the same that another man has brought, no matter how great is his ability in copying and perfecting the art of imitation.

Furthermore indeed these books and their like are more useful and of greater benefit than the Qur'ān and all the divine books, because they contain knowledge that benefits people in their livelihoods and situations in the real world, while the Torah, Gospels and Qur'ān benefit nothing. And if one must discuss Miraculousness and Proof then these useful books are more deserving of having such things ascribed to them. In this respect, al-Razi says: "By Allah, if he wanted a book to be a Proof the books like the 'Elements' or 'Almagest' that lead to understanding of the movement of the stars and planets, or the books of logic, or the books of medicine that is of benefit to the body, would be more deserving of being (called) Proof than those (divine books) that are of no benefit or harm."⁴²Meaning the Qur'ān and its like.

In any case I am not the first to present criticism of the Qur'ān. I cannot claim that honour. No! Nor will I be the last, for indeed my work here has precedence, but it differs from that which preceded it in respect of the method of treatment, and in respect of the level and terms and fields of knowledge. But it is the duty of the pioneer to always acknowledge those who blazed the trail and opened the way before them. As for the right of the one who went before upon the one who comes after, it is that no-one will deny him other than the arrogant fool. For if the one who comes after had not found assistance and clarification from the one who was before, things would not go right for him and he could not complete his intent, and his efforts would be futile and his aim confounded and thus is the blade blunted and the mind become dull and aspiration fails. "And those who went before are the foremost. They are the ones who will be drawn near." (56:10-11) (NB: *There is of course irony in that quote from Qur'ān.*)

⁴¹Quote from the previous reference p. 218.

⁴²Quote from the previous reference p. 219.

4.3 The Eloquence of the Qur'ān

4.4 Where is the Eloquence of the Qur'ān?

4.5 Disorder in the Distribution of Topics

4.6 Ambiguity in the Qur'ān

4.7 Obscurities of the Qur'ān

4.8 Weakness of the Qur'ān

4.9 Contradiction is the Distinguishing Feature of the Qur'ān

4.10 The Qur'ān and Science

4.11 Everything in the Qur'ān is from God

4.12 Verses that Have no Meaning

4.13 The Rhymed Prose of the Qur'ān and the Rhymed Prose of the Soothsayers

4.14 The Qur'ān and the Belief in the Unseen

4.15 Barbarism of the Qur'ān

Chapter 5

God in the Qur'ān

Introduction — The Existence of God and the non-Existence of a Likeness

5.1 Attributes of God in the Qur'ān

5.2 God and the Devil

5.3 God the Compassionate the Merciful

5.4 God is Near and Answers

5.5 God is the Best of Sustainers

5.6 There is no Help Except from God

5.7 God Crams Himself into Everything

5.8 God is the Conqueror over his Slaves

5.9 With God. Man Must Impose his Law

5.10 God. An Ineffective God

Epilogue

TODO:

Index

TODO: