CHRISTIAN MORALITY IN THE LANGUAGE OF ISLAM: THE CASE OF AL-MAṢĀBĪḤ CHAPTER IN THE KITĀB AL-MAJDAL

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ABSTRACT

Following the Islamic conquests of the Middle East, Christians living in Iraq and the surrounding region found themselves under a new socio-political system which was organised around the religious principles of Islam. Living in an environment which was dominated by Islamic social and political norms also provided them an opportunity to express and define their theology in a new style and language.

Kitāb al-Majdal is the fruit of this fascinating period. It is composed by a member of the Church of the East called ʻAmr ibn Mattā around the end of the tenth century. It is subdivided into seven chapters dealing with different aspects of Christian theology, morality and history. The fourth division of the *Kitāb al-Majdal* is devoted to explain certain Christian practices and virtues in order to provide spiritual and moral guidance for the readers.

This study investigates how Christian morality is developed and presented in *al-Maṣābīh* chapter and the ways in which the surrounding Islamic culture influenced the text in terms of its language, style and structure. The key conclusion reached at the end is that Christian morality is defined in a very creative way in *al-Maṣābīh* chapter using both traditional Christian and Islamic sources.

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INTRODUCTION

The Dutch historian Johan Huizinga depicts the contrasting features of the life in the Middle Ages by saying "So violent and motley was life, that it bore the mixed smell of blood and of roses."[1] Iraq under Abbasid rule (750-1258) was a great mixture of different ethnic groups, cultures, and religions and certainly was not free from social and political unrest, which could make life onerous and unpredictable for its people. Despite all the social and political instability, it witnessed one of the most productive and vibrant periods in intellectual history. Scholars from various religious and social backgrounds contributed to this cultural enrichment by composing their own distinctive works, or translating and editing already existing material.

Kitāb al-Majdal, 'The Book of the Tower' (or 'Discussion') is believed to be produced in the period covering the end of the tenth and early eleventh centuries by a Nestorian Christian called 'Amr ibn Mattā. The work consists of seven chapters dealing with a wide range of topics regarding Christian doctrines, the history of the Church of the East, and Christian spirituality and morality. The subject of this thesis is investigating the moral teachings of 'Amr ibn Mattā, considering his overall theological approach and the intellectual environment in which he produced his work.

The Impact of Acculturation on Christian Arabic Literature

From the seventh century onwards, following the Islamic conquests of the Middle East, Oriental Christians found themselves under a new political system, which was followed by a dramatic change in their socio-political circumstances. This rather abrupt shift in the socio-political order led to a process of gradual adaptation by Christians to a new social and intellectual reality, which was shaped and marked by Islam. One of the earliest reactions of Christians to this new system was adopting Arabic as their

[1] Johan Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (New York: Dover Publications, 1999), 18.

spoken, liturgical, and literary language instead of their ancestral languages such as Aramaic, Syriac, and Greek. From the ninth century onwards, the writings of the first generation of Arabophone Christians, namely Abū Qurrah (d. 820), Abū Rāitah (d. c. 851), and Ammār al-Baṣrī (d. early 9th century), emerged. Much of the literature composed by these three authors, if not all, had apologetic objectives containing abstruse discussions on the doctrines of the Trinity, Incarnation, and other Christian theological matters.[2] In the tenth century, more comprehensive and diverse examples of Christian Arabic literature started to appear, such as the theological poetry of Suleiman al-Ghazzi (d. 1010), the religious compendium of ʻAmr ibn Mattā, and the philosophical writings of Yaḥyā ibn ʻAdī (d. 974).

Living in a cultural environment dominated by Islam, Christian authors had to adjust their writings to this new setting. Sidney Griffith describes this particular impact as follows:

> The works of Christian intellectuals in the early Islamic period are marked by a notable quality which commentators often fail to highlight in what they write about them. This notable quality is the high level of what one might call 'inculturation', or the integration of Christian thinking into Islamic Arabic idiom of what in the ninth and the tenth centuries was the intellectual culture of the 'Islamic commonwealth' aborning.[3]

The acculturation was visible in the language, structure, and content of the works of Middle Eastern Christians. The initial difficulty they had to cope with was translating their doctrines into the Arabic language, in which the theological vocabulary is formed and conditioned by Islam. Finding the exact equivalents of Greek and Syriac terms of Christian theology was challenging. There are many occasions in Christian Arabic texts where the authors' phraseology echoes the language of the Qur'an

[2] Sidney Griffith, "The Muslim Philosopher al-Kindi and his Christian Readers: Three Arab Christian Texts on 'The Dissipation of Sorrows'" *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 78 (1996): 111.
[3] Griffith, "The Muslim Philosopher", 111.

and hadith.[4] Another difficulty that Christian authors had to consider when composing their works in Arabic was the continuing objections of Muslim theologians, who attacked the main doctrines of Christianity. The general structure of the writings of Arabophone Christians reflects the criticism of Muslim *mutakallimūn* to the standard Christian doctrines. They start with discussing the oneness of God, followed by an explanation of the Trinity, and proceed to the nature of Christ and incarnation, and the doctrine of salvation, before finishing with the defence of certain Christian practices.[5]

Christian intellectual heritage in Arabic, which covers a rich variety of genres such as Bible translations and interpretations, homilies, history of the eastern church, liturgical texts, ascetical literature, Arabic translations of writings on philosophy and medicine, and theological and polemical treatises, has been for some time a widely neglected subject in the history of Christianity. The major source texts of Christian historiography that have been produced in Western languages usually address the topic peripherally, without providing any detailed information or discussion. This is mainly because the vast majority of Christian Arabic texts, which potentially clarify the various aspects of Christian history in the Middle East, are still in manuscript form only. Almost ninety percent of the corpus of Christian Arabic literature is yet to be edited and translated into different languages, in order to allow them to be adequately appreciated and studied by scholars.[6]

Progress has been made in recent years, thanks to an increased interest in Christian Arabic texts in terms of both editing and translating manuscripts, and studying and analysing their contents. The works of the ninth century authors Abū Qurrah, Abū Rāitah, and Ammār al-Baṣrī have been made available in English by several authors. Prof Sandra Keating's monograph containing the study and

[4] See Sidney Griffith, "Islam and The Summa Theologiae Arabica: Rabī' I, 264 AH" *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 13 (1990): 246-247.
[5] Griffith, "Islam and Summa Theologiae Arabica", 238.
[6] Samuel Noble and Alexander Treiger, ed. *The Orthodox Church in the Arab World 700-1700: An Anthology of Sources* (Illionis: Northern Illinois University Press, 2014), 3-6.

translation of a number of works by Abū Rāitah was published in 2006.[7] John Lamoreaux translated a considerable amount of the works of Abū Qurrah into English in 2005.[8] Wageeh Mikhail provided an analysis and translation of Ammār al-Baṣrī's *Kitab al-Burhan* recently.[9]

In terms of Christian Arabic texts concerning morality, Sidney Griffith edited and translated Yahya ibn Adi's *Tahdhib al-Akhlāq* ('Reformation of Morals') into English in 2002.[10] The earlier edition of Elias of Nisibis's text entitled *Daf' al-Hamm* ('Dissipation of Sorrow'), which was provided by Qusṭanṭīn al-Bāshā, was translated and edited by Anna Pagnini and Samir Khalil Samir.[11] A body of secondary literature will keep growing around these texts.

Earlier Editions and Studies of *Kitāb al-Majdal*

Kitāb al-Majdal, which is the focus of this thesis, is one of the most well-known treasures of Christian Arabic literature, but has remained only partially edited so far. Apart from the first and the second chapters, which mainly deal with issues related to Christian faith and doctrines, the fifth section of the fifth chapter, which provides a list of Nestorian patriarchs, and the first section of the seventh chapter, which discusses the practice of circumcision, are the only portions to have been edited. The remaining parts of the work are still preserved in manuscripts held in different libraries across Europe. In his article 'Reconsideration of Kitāb al-Majdal', Bo Holmberg provides a list of manuscripts containing the seven-chapter Kitāb al-Majdal along with their dates. He mentions thirteen different manuscripts held in the Vatican Library, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Cambridge University Library, and the British Library.

[7] Sandra Toenies Keating, *Defending the "People of Truth" in the Early Islamic Period*: *The Christian Apologies of Abū Rāiṭah* (Leiden: Brill, 2006)
[8] Theodore Abū Qurrah, *Theodore Abū Qurrah,* trans. John C. Lamoreaux (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2005).
[9] Wageeh Y. F. Mikhail, "'Ammār al-Baṣrī's Kitāb al-Burhān: A Topical and Theological Analysis of Arabic Christian Theology in the Ninth Century" (PhD Dissertation, University of Birmingham, 2013)
[10] Yahyā ibn ʿ Adī, *The Reformation of Morals / Yahyā ibn ʿ Adī: A Parallel English-Arabic Text Translated and Introduced by Sidney H. Griffith* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2002).
[11] Elias of Nisibis, *Kitāb Daf' al-Hamm*, ed. Qusṭanṭīn al-Bāshā (Misr: Matba'ah al-Ma'ārif, 1900); *Il Libro per Scacciare la Preoccupazione (Kitab Daf' al-hamm)*, trans. and ed. Anna Pagnini and Samir Khalil Samir (Torino: Silvio Zamorani, 2007-2008).

According to Holmberg's classification, the earliest manuscript to contain the whole work comes from the thirteenth century and is currently held in Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris. The latest copies of the work are from the eighteenth century and are currently held in the Vatican Library.[12]

Although it was intended that the whole work would be edited by a commission of the scholars Bo Holmberg, Joseph Habbi, and Samir Khalil Samir almost fifteen years ago, the project had to be delayed, mainly because of the unexpected death of Joseph Habbi.[13]

Currently, the list of the edited parts of the work is as follows: In 1975, Putrus Gewarges provided an edited French translation of the second chapter of *Kitāb al-Majdal*, *Bunyān*, in his unpublished PhD dissertation.[14] The prelude and the first chapter, entitled *Bayān*, were edited and studied by Kurkis ʻĪsā Butrūs and published separately in *Bayn al-Nahrayn* in the years 1984 and 1985.[15] Enrico Gismondi prepared an edited Latin translation of the fifth section of chapter five, which contains the chronicle of Nestorian patriarchs, in 1896.[16] Recently, Nikolai Seleznyov published the edition of the first section in the seventh chapter with a short introduction, which discusses the abolition of circumcision.[17]

Several authors also studied separate parts of *Kitāb al-Majdal*. In 1901, Gustav Westphal provided an examination of the sources and the credibility of the chronicle of Nestorian patriarchs,

[12] For the full list of manuscripts and a detailed discussion, see Bo Holmberg. "A Reconsideration of the Kitab al-Magdal," *Parole de l'Orient: Revue Semestrielle des Études Syriaques et Arabes Chrétiennes: Recherches Orientales: Revue D'études et de Recherches sur les Églises de Langue Syriaque* 18 (1993): 272.

[13] Samir Khalil Samir, E-mail message to the online group of The North American Society for Christian Arabic Studies, on 16 April 2011.

[14] Putrus Gewarges, "Mari ibn Sulaiman. Al-magdal (la tour), Deuxième Porte. Édition, Traduction et Étude." (PhD dissertation. École Pratique des Hautes Études, 1975).

[15] Kūrkīs Isḥāq Buṭrūs, "Al-Majdal al-Muqaddima," *Bayn al-Nahrayn* 12 (1984): 123-131; and "Kitāb al-Majdal 2." *Bayn al-Nahrayn* 13 (1985): 220 – 233.

[16] Amri et Slibae, *De Patriarchis Nestorianorum: Commentaria,* ed. Henricus Gismondi (Romea: Excudebat F. de Luigi, 1896)

[17] Nikolai Seleznyov, "These Stones Shall be for a Memorial: The Discussion of the Abolition of Circumcision in the Kitab al-Magdal." in *Scrinium X, Syrians and the Others: Culture of the Christian Orient in the Middle Ages,* ed. Basil Lourié and Nikolai N. Seleznyov (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2014): 115 – 148.

studying Gismondi's edition.[18] Joseph Habbi provided a short examination of the theology of *Kitāb al-Majdal* in his article 'La Somme Théologique 'al-Maǧdal'[19] French scholar Bénédicte Landron addresses the work in her PhD dissertation and book entitled *Chrétiens et Musulmans en Irak, Attitudes Nestoriennes vis-a-vis de l'Islam*.[20] She also produced two articles focusing on the issues of 'prayer' and 'asceticism' in *Kitāb al-Majdal*.[21] Apart from his article 'Reconsideration of Kitāb al-Magdal', which discusses the date and the authorship of the work, Holmberg provides an examination of the linguistic features of *Kitāb al-Majdal* by focusing on the first portion of the second chapter, *Dhurwah*, in his article entitled 'Language and Thought in the Kitāb al-Majdal'.[22] Recently, Louis Salībā contributed to the scholarship of *Kitāb al-Majdal* with his published work entitled *Min al-Majdal wa al-istibṣār wa- al-Jadal*. [23]

To summarise, only a few portions of *Kitāb al-Majdal* have been edited so far. Various scholars provided examinations of the theology, language, and historical aspects of the work, mostly focusing on the edited portions. The rest of *Kitāb al-Majdal*, including the full third, fourth, sixth, and seventh chapters, and the six unedited sections of the fifth, appear to have remained untouched so far.

Subject and Scope of this Thesis

[18] Gustav Westphal, *Untersuchungen über die Quellen und die Glaubwürdigkeit der Patriarchenchroniken des Mārī ibn Sulaimān,'Amr ibn Matai und Ṣalība ibn Joḥannān. 1. Abschnitt: Bis zum Beginn des Nestorianischen Streites* (Kirchhain: Druck von M. Schmersow vorm. Zahn & Baendel, 1901).
[19] Joseph Habbi, "La Somme Théologique "al-Maǧdal"" *Parole de l'Orient* 16 (1990-1991): 163 – 176.
[20] Bènèdicte Landron, "Apologétique, Polémique et Attitudes Nestoriennes vis-à-vis de l'islam, Entre le 8e et le Début du 14e Siècle" (PhD dissertation, Université de Paris, 1978); Bènèdicte Landron, *Chrétiens et Musulmans en Irak, Attitudes Nestoriennes vis-à-vis de l'islam* (Paris: Cariscript, 1994).
[21] Bénédicte Landron, "La Prière Selon l'encyclopédie Syrienne-orientale du Majdal" in *L'Orient Chrétien Dans l'empire Musulman. Hommage au Professeur Gérard Troupeau, Suite au Colloque Organisé les 15 et 16 Octobre 2004 par le CRITIC (Centre de Recherches sur les Idées et les Transferts Inter Culturels) á l'Université Jean Moulin Lyon 3 en Collaboration Avec l'Institut Catholique de,* ed. Gobillot Geneviève (Paris: Éditions de Paris, 2005); "La vie Monastique Selon l'encyclopédie Syrienne-orientale du Majdal" in *Christianisme Oriental: Kérygme et Histoire. Mélanges Offerts au Père Michel Hayek*, ed. Charles Chartouni (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 2007).
[22] Bo Holmberg, "Language and Thought in Kitāb al-Majdal, Bāb 2, Fasl 1, al-Dhurwa", in *Christians at the Heart of Islamic Rule: Church Life and Scholarship in 'Abbasid Iraq*, ed. David Richard Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 2003).
[23] Louis Salībā, *Min al-Majdal wa-l-istibsar wa-l-jadal* (Beirut: Dār al-Maktabat al-Babylon, 2012).

The subject of this thesis is to analyse and contextualise the moral teachings of ‘Amr ibn Mattā, focusing on the fourth chapter of *Kitāb al-Majdal*, entitled *al-Maṣābīh*. *Kitāb al-Majdal* consists of seven chapters, each chapter dealing with separate issues. The fourth chapter of *Kitāb al-Majdal* is also divided into seven subsections, containing various religious practices and virtues. This particular portion of *Kitāb al-Majdal* is not among the edited parts of the work. There are only two articles, written by Landron, which were mentioned earlier, that address some aspects of *al-Maṣābīh*. The whole chapter has not been addressed or studied yet.

The main questions of this thesis are how is Christian morality defined in al-*Maṣābīh* chapter, and what is the impact of acculturation on the text? Focusing on the content, structure, stylistic features and the language of al-*Maṣābīh* chapter in *Kitāb al-Majdal*, and contextualising the text within its intellectual environment, this thesis aims to analyse how morality is explained in *Kitāb al-Majdal* and determine the ways in which the author engages with the surrounding Islamic intellectual culture. In relation to these two objects, there are two secondary questions about the audience and the reception of al-*Maṣābīh* chapter: Why did ’Amr ibn Mattā prefer to compose his work in this style, and how was *al-Maṣābīh* received by its Christian audience?

For this purpose, this thesis is organised into seven chapters. The first chapter focuses on the socio-political and intellectual circumstances in which *Kitāb al-Majdal* was produced. This chapter is presented in two major sections. In the first part, the general features of the socio-political circumstances of the Būyid Age and the social condition of minorities are described. In the second portion, the various aspects of intellectual life and the major scholarly trends are explained. At the end of this part, Christian engagement with the intellectual life is also described separately.

The second chapter focuses on the major ethical theories that existed at the time of ‘Amr ibn Mattā. In this chapter, the main characteristics and concerns of the different ethical writings are presented under three main categories: ‘normative’, ‘theological’, and ‘philosophical’, focusing on certain examples. When categorising different types of ethical work, George Hourani’s classification is followed. This is mainly because it is comprehensive and helps to identify the main features of different ethical genres.

The focus of the third chapter is the main features and content of *Kitāb al-Majdal*. As has been mentioned, the whole *Kitāb al-Majdal* has still not been edited; therefore, a substantial introduction that helps to explain its content and style, and the mentality behind its text, is yet to be written. In this chapter, the ambiguity about the date and the authorship of *Kitāb al-Majdal* is initially discussed by presenting the two main theories, which have been proposed by Georg Graf and Bo Holmberg. In the following section, information about the life of the author of *Kitāb al-Majdal* is provided. In the next part, the content, main stylistic characteristics, language, and structure of *Kitāb al-Majdal* are introduced and its genre is discussed, considering its connections with Syriac tradition and the surrounding Islamic culture. In the final part of this chapter, the theological approach in *Kitāb al-Majdal* is investigated. The main aim of this third chapter is to contribute to an understanding of al-*Maṣābīh* chapter.

The fourth chapter moves to exploring *al-Maṣābīh*, examining the content of the text. To this end, this chapter explores the subsections of *al-Maṣābīh*: *Taqwā* (piety), *Maḥabbah* (love), *Ṣalāh* (prayer), *Ṣawm* (fasting), *Raḥmah* (mercy), *Tawāḍu‘* (humility) and *Ṭahārah* (purity). Each section is discussed under a separate heading, focusing on the main concern of each title. The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the main themes of *al-Maṣābīh* as the major components of ‘Amr ibn Mattā’s moral teachings.

The fifth chapter investigates the underlying themes throughout *al-Maṣābīh* in order to determine the main motives and mentality of the chapter. There are five main inquiries in this chapter, each of which is presented under a separate title. In the first section, the question of how the origin of moral value is determined in *al-Maṣābīh* is addressed. In the ensuing section, the function of the mind in the process of achieving the ideal moral state is investigated. Thirdly, the praiseworthy and the blameworthy actions that are specifically recounted at the end of the *Taqwā* section of *al-Maṣābīh* are translated into English and their main features are discussed. In the following section, the main purpose of morality in *al-Maṣābīh* is investigated. The final section of this chapter focuses on determining the main aspects of asceticism, which is promoted quite often throughout *al-Maṣābīh*.

The sixth chapter of the thesis focuses on the ethical terminology of *al-Maṣābīh*. In this chapter, the use of Arabic and Islamic terms and phrases in order to explain the various aspects of morality in *al-Maṣābīh* is examined under four main headings. In the first category, the terms and phrases that are used to express the stations of morality are defined. In the second category, vocabulary used to address morally good and bad acts and behaviors is addressed. The third category focuses on the expressions for virtuous and vicious people. In the final category, the terminology used to describe codes of morality is explained.

The final chapter of the thesis considers *al-Maṣābīh* in a broader context, seeking answers to the questions of what ʻAmr ibn Mattā brings from his Syriac background and how he adjusts this traditional material to an Islamic context. It first evaluates the ways in which *al-Maṣābīh* fits into the overall discourse and the style of *Kitāb al-Majdal*. Secondly, it turns to discussing the two main linguistic features of *Kitāb al-Majdal*: the use of rhyming prose and employment of Islamic terminology to express Christian religious issues. This section discusses the language of *Kitāb al-Majdal*, considering the sociolinguistic circumstances of the era. In the ensuing section, the structure, sources, and presentation

style of *al-Maṣābīh* are discussed. In the final two sections of this chapter, two peripheral questions are addressed: why did 'Amr ibn Mattā prefer to compose his work in this peculiar style, and how was al-*Maṣābīh* chapter of *Kitāb al-Majdal* received by its Christian audience?

When dealing with this particular period of history, it is really difficult to set clear-cut boundaries between different religious traditions. One of the main of purposes of this thesis is to determine the ways in which the Islamic environment shaped the moral imagination and teachings of 'Amr ibn Mattā. Therefore, since the author of *Kitāb al-Majdal* appears to have been aware of the boundaries between Christianity and Islam, the term 'Islamic' is used to address issues related to religion, while 'Arabo-Islamic' is employed for areas where non-Muslims also actively participated, such as philosophy.

The following example from *Kitāb al-Majdal* illustrates the Christian awareness of Islam as a distinct religious tradition, and their imagination of the boundaries between the 'Christian' and 'Islamic' religious spheres. One of the most striking features of *Kitāb al-Majdal* is the use of the Qur'anic introductory phrase *Bismillāhirraḥmānirraḥīm* at the beginning of the Paris manuscript Arabe 190.[24] The Islamic introductory formula appears on the first page of *Kitāb al-Majdal*, opening the introduction, with no sign or addition to suggest it was written by a Christian author. Moreover, this formula is followed by the phrase "*wa al-quwwatu billāhi al-'aliyy al-'azīm*", which means 'the strength is through God, the Highest, the Victorious', which sounds very similar to a Muslim saying from one of the Prophet Muhammad's hadiths: "*lā ḥawla wa lā quwwata illā billah*" ('there is no power, nor strength except with Allah'). The second phrase is quite commonly used by Muslims as a form of *dhikr* which is advised by Prophet Muhammad in one of the hadiths narrated by two different transmitters in Bukhari.[25] The

[24] Māri ibn Suleiman, *Kitāb al-Migdal*. Manuscript. 13th century. Arabe 190. Manuscrits Arabes, Manuscrits Crétiens. The Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, f. 1r.
[25] Two forms are quite similar. See Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Hadith No: 6384 and 7386, accessed 05 November 2013.

fifteenth-century Vatican Library copy starts with the Christian formula "*Bi ism al-ab wa al-ibn wa rūh al-Quds*", 'in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit'.[26] However, the seventeenth-century manuscript Or 4240 which is held in the British Library, similar to Paris manuscript Arabe 190, has the *basmala* and the same phrase at the beginning of the Kitāb al-Majdal,[27] This manuscript is anonymous and at the beginning it contains excerpts from Elias of Nisibis's Daf' al-Hamm.[28] In this copy, Kitāb al-Majdal starts on the folio 28 in exactly the same way with Arabe 190. None of these manuscripts is the autograph, however, having the same Islamic introductory formula at the beginnings of both the 13th century Paris copy and 17th century British Library copy strengthens the possibility that the original copy of the author has the same beginning. In any case, the variation in the choices of the scribes clearly shows that the scribe of the Vatican copy preferred a more Christian sounding expression at the beginning of his copy.

Actually, the use of a Muslim introductory formula in medieval Christian and Jewish writings is not a novelty. A similar introductory formula was frequently used from the eighth century onwards in the writings of Arabic-speaking Christians. Although Arabic-speaking Christians accepted and used a Muslim introductory formula in their writings, they usually added a sign or another formula to mark the paper as emanating from a Christian milieu. The alternative introductory formulae were introduced by Christians with roots in the Bible or liturgy. The most commonly used introductory phrase that refers to

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https://sunnah.com/bukhari/80/79

[26] Mārī ibn Suleiman. Kitāb al-Majdal. Manuscript. 15th century. Vat. Ar. 108. Vaticani Arabi. Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vatican, f. 1r.

[27] Anonymous. Daf' al-Hamm. British library. 17th century. Or. 4240. Arabic Manuscripts. British Library, London, f. 28r.

[28] Charles Rieu, *Supplement to the Catalogue of the Arabic Manuscripts in the British Museum* (London: Printed by Gilbert and Rivington LD., 1894), 19.

Christian liturgical formula was, as appears at the beginning of the British Library and Vatican copies, "*Bi ism al-ab wa al-ibn wa rūh al-Quds*", 'In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit'.[29]

When we read the end of the third section of the second chapter in *Kitāb al-Majdal*, we see that 'Amr was fully aware of the Islamic connotations of the *Basmala*. Here, he recounts various occasions in Islamic tradition where the number three plays an important role. At the beginning of this passage, he makes it obvious that he is aware of the Qur'anic origin of the *Basmala*, as he says:

> Muslims open their Qur'an with *Bismillāhirraḥmānirraḥīm*. They do not add, exclude or exceed the members of hypostases and solemnly affirm the unity of the God of the heavens. Three words come together in the meaning of unity in one sentence.[30]

This passage is a clear indication of 'Amr's awareness of the boundaries between the two religious traditions because he clearly says that *Bismillāhirraḥmānirraḥīm* is an Islamic introductory formula, which is from Muslim scripture. This very fact enables to reach a conclusion that the author of *Kitāb al-Majdal* was himself aware of the boundaries between the two religions. From 'Amr ibn Mattā's perspective, using the term 'Islamic' when addressing issues concerning Islam and Muslims would be acceptable. Indeed, making this division is vital to reaching satisfactory conclusions at the end of this thesis.

Bo Holmberg lists twelve different manuscript copies of the *Kitāb al-Majdal*, which are held in various libraries across Europe.[31] Among these, the 13th-century Arabe 190, which is held in the

[29] Karin Almbladh, "The "Basmala" in Medieval Letters in Arabic Written by Jews and Christians" *Orientalia Suecana* 59 (2010): 56.
[30] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 85r.
[31] Holmberg, "A Reconsideration of the Kitāb al-Magdal," 273.

Bibliothèque Nationale de France, is the earliest and the only complete copy.[32] The other three manuscripts that contain *al-Maṣābīh* chapter of the *Kitāb al-Majdal* are a 14th-century manuscript, Arabe 191,[33] which is held in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, a 15th-century manuscript, Vat. 108,[34] from the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana and a 17th-century manuscript, Or. 4240,[35] in the British Library. For this study, Arabe 190, Vat. 108 and Or. 4240 were consulted. There were no substantial differences observed between those three manuscripts that may have affected the meaning and the interpretation of the text. Therefore, the oldest complete manuscript of the *Kitāb al-Majdal*, Arabe 190 from Bibliothèque Nationale de France, has been used for this study, mainly because it is the earliest and the only complete copy of the *Kitāb al-Majdal*, and therefore the most likely to have been copied from the autograph of the author. The Vatican Ar. 108 and Or. 4240 copies have also been addressed when necessary.

The focus of this thesis is the fourth chapter, *al-Maṣābīh*; however, the introduction, first chapter, and second chapter of *Kitāb al-Majdal* are also addressed on several occasions.

Bible translations are taken from https://www.biblegateway.com/. For Qur'anic quotations, 'Abdullah Yūsuf 'Alī's translation is usually used, but Arabic versions of the texts are double-checked.

[32] Ms. Arabe 190.
[33] Māri ibn Suleiman. Kitāb al-Migdal. Manuscript. 14th century. Arabe 191. Manuscrits Arabes, Manuscrits Crétiens. The Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.
[34] Ms. Vat. Ar. 108.
[35] Anonymous. Daf' al-Hamm. British library. 17th century. Or. 4240. Arabic Manuscripts. British Library, London.

CHAPTER I: THE BŪYID AGE: SOCIO-POLITICAL AND INTELLECTUAL ENVIRONMENT

The Būyid Age (945-1055)[36], during which ‘Amr ibn Mattā lived, witnessed one of the most productive periods of intellectual history. Scholars from various religious and social backgrounds contributed to this cultural enrichment by composing their own distinctive works or translating and editing already existing material. The ascendancy of the Būyid dynasty in Baghdad resulted in a socio-political structure that brought a relatively unique character to the relationship between members of the society from various religious and denominational backgrounds. With its roots in pre-Būyid society, this rather particular socio-historical context, in which the various languages, cultures and religions met under the rule of Muslim administrators, who were in favour of the transmission and integration of foreign material into Arabic and created a level playing field for intellectual and religious tolerance, enabled Arabic-speaking Christian authors to contribute to the scholarly corpus of the era through the composition of works in a wide variety of literary genres, dealing with numerous subjects.

The focus of this dissertation is on evaluating the moral imagination and ethical teachings of ‘Amr ibn Mattā in his own intellectual setting. For this purpose, this chapter will initially provide information on the socio-political dynamics of the Būyid society which influenced and shaped his

[36] The periodisation follows Busse; for more, see Heribert Busse*, Khalif and Grosskönig, Die Buyiden im Iraq*, *(945 – 1055)* (Beirut: 1969).

intellectual life. Secondly, in order to provide some insight into the intellectual context in which *Kitāb al-Majdal* was produced, it will turn to discussing the main aspects of intellectual life under Būyid rule.

Socio-Political Circumstances

The instability of life, and a sense of living on the edge of catastrophe, were basic characteristics of all pre-modern societies and were not surprisingly present during the Būyid Age. People living in late tenth century Iraq suffered from similar things to all pre-modern societies. Disasters such as famine, epidemics, terror, and war were major elements of their lives. For example, in his *Tajārib al-Umam*, Miskawayh records an economic disaster that loomed over society and caused massive chaos in the year 946. He reports that inflation was so high during this year that people could not find even a small piece of bread to buy. Many people died of starvation. Since there were not enough facilities to bury the dead, human bodies were eaten by dogs on the streets. In order to survive, people had to feed themselves with weeds, and even with carrion.[37]

Baghdad and the surrounding area came under the rule of Shi'i Būyid dynasty in the year 945. When the Būyids gained power, the city was at its peak in terms of urban growth, with a population of almost half a million. At the time, it was not an integrated, municipal entity, but a sprawling urban centre built around a set of municipal institutions over a constrained land surface.[38] It consisted of smaller interdependent quarters, each containing, to some extent, its own institutions. Each quarter was occupied by members of a particular sectarian or religious group and served as a religious and political centre, where popular preachers held services, and sometimes where attacks on their opponents were

[37] Ahmad ibn Muhammad Ibn al-Miskawayh, *The Eclipse of the Abbasid Caliphate: The Concluding Portion of the Experiences of Nations*, ed. and trans. H.F. Amedroz and D.S. Margoliouth (Oxford: Basil Blacwell, 1920-21) Vol.II, 95-96.
[38] Jacob Lassner, "Massignon and Baghdad: The Complexities of Growth in an Imperial City" *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 9 (1966): 3.

organised and launched. The Bāb al-Tāq quarter on the right bank and the Karkh quarter, for example, were mainly occupied by Shi'is, while the Bāb al-Basra quarter was a centre for the Hanbalīs. Christians were mostly located around Dār al-Rūm, the Christian quarter, where the seat of the Catholicos, the head of the 'Nestorian' church, and the renowned monastery Dayr al-Rūm were situated. Its main church was called al-Kursī. Another area where Christians commonly settled in Baghdad was Dār al-Sahmmāsiyah, located in the northern region of the eastern shore.[39] Indeed, the divided land of the caliphal capital reflects how society was strictly divided and polarised. This religious and political polarisation is reflected in the 'factionalism' of Būyid society, which was seen by members of the community as an instrument for mutual protection and help. The factions in this period were not necessarily, but usually, religiously inspired.[40]

It is generally acknowledged that the period between the years 945 and 1055, when the Būyid dynasty ruled Baghdad and the surrounding region, was a turning point in the history of Islamic civilisation, with profound social and cultural consequences.[41] The first half of the 10th century witnessed a gradual decline in the military dominance of the Abbasid authority over the Islamic caliphate, which stretched from the Atlantic to Central Asia. During the reign of Caliph al-Rāḍī (907-940), the empire had disintegrated into small states controlled by local dynasties.[42] The effective political power shifted to emirs, and the caliph remained only titular sovereign of the Islamic empire. Notwithstanding the

[39] Michel Allard, "Les Chrétiens à Bagdad" *Arabica* 9 (1962): 379-381.
[40] For different types of loyalties, see Roy Motahhedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership in an Early Islamic Society*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2001).
[41] On the Būyids, see Claude Cahen, *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second edition*, s.v. "Buwayhids or Būyids." (Leiden: Brill, 2012), accessed 15 February 2014. http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/buwayhids-or-buyids-SIM_1569; John Donhoue, *The Buwayhid Dynasty in Iraq 334 H./945 to 403 H./1012*: *Shaping Institutions for the Future* (Leiden: Brill, 2003).
[42] Sadeq Sajjadi and Rahim Gholami. *Encyclopaedia Islamica.* s.v. "Abbāsids." (Leiden: Brill, 2008), accessed 25 March 2014. http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-islamica/abbasids-COM_0011?s.num=26&s.start=20

dismemberment of the caliphate, the idea of the embracing unity of the Islamic empire persisted. It was indeed this conception of 'unity' that helped Muslims to hold the caliphal state together during a series of several crises from the first *fitnah* onwards. In the tenth century, a Muslim could still travel throughout the region under a single banner of religion, law, and 'citizenship', and the Abbasid caliph was the living symbol of the unity of this empire.

The Būyid were originally Daylamīs, who were residents of mountainous regions of Northern Iran called Daylam and Gīlan, situated south of the Caspian Sea. They were peasant herdsmen who had served in Persian armies as mercenaries. Their first contact with Shi'ism was through the Shi'i refugees who fled to the area, escaping from Abbasid oppression, towards the end of the eighth century. By the end of the ninth century, Shi'i Islam was established in the region, and the area of Daylam and Gīlan became an independent Shi'i kingdom.[43] The people were followers of the Zaydi creed, though Ismaili missionaries were also quite active in the area from the early ninth century onwards.[44] The founders of the Būyid dynasty were three mercenary soldier brothers, Ali, Ahmad, and Hasan ibn Būya, who were the sons of a fisherman and transferred their allegiance from one patron to another prior to their establishment in Baghdad.[45]

Given their relatively humble background and their religious affiliations, which were enough for them to be considered 'outsiders', Būyid emirs had a quite complicated relationship with Abbasid caliphs (*emīr al-umarā*). After the arrival of Ahmad ibn Būya (regnal name Mu'iz al-Dawlah) a series of measures

[43] On the Daylamīs, see Vladimir Minorsky, *La Domination Des Dailamites* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1932), and his entry "Daylam" in Encyclopaedia of Islam: Vladimir Minorsky, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, second edition, s.v. "Daylam." (Leiden: Brill, 2012), accessed 17 February 2014. http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/daylam-COM_0158

[44] Joel. L. Kraemer, *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam: The Cultural Revival During the Būyid Age*, (Leiden: Brill, 1992): 38-39; Samuel M. Stern, "The Early Ismaili Missionaries in North-West Persia and in Khurasan and Transoxiana." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 23 (1960): 59-60.

[45] Heribert Busse, "The Revival of Persian Kingship under the Buyids' in *Islamic Civilization 950 – 1150,"* ed. D. S. Richards (London: Cassirer, 1973), 58.

was taken in order to re-establish the central authority of the caliphate. The Būyids initially limited the activities of the caliph and the vizier. They reinforced the supremacy of the army and gave a new shape to the office of the caliphate, giving it specific duties.

In the Sunni Islamic tradition, caliphs had legitimacy on the grounds of being direct successors of Prophet Muhammad and the upholders of religious law (*sharī'a*). When the Būyids gained control in Bagdad, in the capacity of Shi'i military commanders, they had no credentials to claim to be the successors of the Prophet. [46] Therefore, they preferred a new system of governance, through which they preserved the Abbasid caliphate for their own political benefit. According to the Sunni majority, the caliph was the living symbol of the religiously legitimate administration and integrity of Islam. Būyid emirs were careful not to hurt this public sentiment, protecting the caliph as the authority that legitimised their rule and acts of governance. Thus, while the political power of the caliph was indeed reduced to the spiritual and religious leadership of Islam, he continued to support the administrators, who sought political authority over the Sunni majority of Baghdad and legitimacy from the Būyid family.[47]

As has been mentioned earlier, religious polarisation and factionalism were realities of Būyid society and caused frequent urban riots and sectarian-inspired violence that made life unstable and onerous for people during this period. Previous to Būyid sovereignty, the city had already been struggling with ongoing sectarian riots between Sunnis and Shi'is. The Būyid accession to power fuelled this pre-existing sectarian tension in the region. Therefore, the Zaydī Būyid dynasty had to face the hard task of dealing with a predominantly Sunni population and reducing the tension between the adherents of the Sunni and Shi'i denominations. The first instance of sectarian unrest took place in the year 949, during

[46] For a discussion of the religious role of the office of the caliphate, see Ira Lapidus, "The Separation of State and Religion in the Development of Early Islamic Society" *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 6 (1975): 363-385.
[47] Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership,* 54-57.

the reign of Mu'iz al-Dawlah (d. 967), when he was absent from the capital. It was followed by even more violent outbreaks. In the year 959, for example, the uprising caused many casualties and a severe fire, which was responsible for alarming destruction in the city. In order to decrease the tension and avoid any future outbreaks, Mu'iz al-Dawlah adopted a religious policy of conciliation between the two sects. During the later religious disturbances, provocative wall posters deprecating the companions of the Prophet were prohibited. This policy of conciliation was followed by later Būyid emirs. During the reign of Aḍud al-Dawlah (d. 983), Baghdad was less turbulent, as he forbade preachers of both denominations from sermonising and exiled influential Shi's to Fārs. Although careful attention was paid by administrators to reducing the tension between the two sects, the region continued to suffer from sectarian riots from the 950s onwards.[48] Religious minorities suffered along with the Muslim population during the sectarian unrest. For example, the residents of Qaṭī'at al-Naṣārā, which is situated between the Bāb al-Baṣra and the Karkh quarter, were constantly disturbed by Sunni and Shi'ī clashes, as the area served as a battleground for these rival factions.[49] The following section aims to provide more insight into the social status of minorities in the Middle East during the Abbasid period.

Situation of Minorities Living Under Islamic Rule during the Būyid Age

During the first century following the death of Prophet Muhammad, Arab military forces conquered a vast swathe of territory, including vast portions of the Byzantine and Sasanian Empires. The span of the conquered area embraced the land from the borders of China and India in the East to the shores of the Iberian Peninsula's Atlantic coast in the West.[50] The dramatic change in the political situation in the lands of 'Oriental' Christians ushered in a new era of cultural and intellectual exchange and cooperation by removing the borders between the different religious communities of the region, and brought together

[48] Busse, *Khalif and Grosskönig*, 421-423.
[49] Allard, *Les Chrétiens à Bagdad*, 382
[50] Sidney Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 11.

representatives of various scientific and religious traditions, and scholarly experts in specific fields. This close contact with the followers of different religions and members of the other cultures created a vibrant social and intellectual environment. Different aspects of scholarly life in the Medieval Near East will be discussed in the following section. The main purpose of this section is to describe the situation of Christian minorities under Islamic rule, considering the realities of the new socio-political system.

The rapid success of the Islamic conquests was interpreted in various ways by the members of the different communities living in the region. For example, in his Rīsh Mellē, the seventh century Christian author John bar Penkāyē interprets the invasions of the 'children of Hagar' as part of a 'divine plan' to punish the Christians who were then living in lands controlled by the Byzantine and Sasanian Empires. [51] He blamed the Byzantines for corrupting the Christian church and dividing it into various branches. The Christian community who were living in the kingdom of the 'Persians' (the Sasanian Empire) had also been subject to 'internal scandals'.[52] In his theological interpretation, John sees the surprising pace of Arab military victories as the result of God's anger against Christians living in the region for not turning aside from their sinful acts.[53] Modern historians, on the other hand, connected the rapid victory of the Arabs to numerous factors, including the centuries-long armed conflict between the Byzantine and Sasanian Empires, which resulted in military exhaustion on both sides.[54] In his recent book entitled In God's Path: The Arab Conquests and the Creation of an Islamic Empire, Robert Hoyland provides a chronological overview of the wars between the Roman and Persian Empires from the second century, which was inherited by the Byzantine and Sasanian Empires. Hoyland argues that, in order to understand this 'world changing phenomena', it is necessary to see the deep roots of the 'superpower

[51] Sebastian Brock, "North Mesopotamia in the Late Seventh Century: Book XV of John Bar Penkāyē's Rish Melle." *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 9 (1987): 57.
[52] Brock, "North Mesopotamia," 58-59.
[53] Brock, "North Mesopotamia," 60-61.
[54] Sara Leila Husseini. "Early Christian Explanations of the Trinity in Arabic in the Context of Muslim Theology" (PhD dissertation. University of Birmingham, 2011), 20.

confrontation' in the region during which 'key transformations' occurred and prepared favorable grounds for the success of the Arab military forces.[55] Whatever the reasons behind the Muslim conquest of the Near East, it resulted in permanent changes in the lives of the Christians who were then living in the region.

At the time, the Christian community living in the conquered lands exhibited cultural and theological vibrancy and diversity. The area covering the southern Levant was occupied by the followers of the Council of Chalcedon (451), who subsequently accepted the first six councils enforced by the Byzantine Emperors. They were called 'Melkites' ('royalists') by members of the other Christian denominations, pointing to their loyalty to the Byzantine Emperors.[56] The Islamic conquest perhaps had the most immediate and drastic impact on the Melkite community. Following the political shift in the region, they were no longer loyal followers of an imperial faith, but members of an ordinary Christian sect, on a par with the other Christian denominations living in the region.[57]

Syriac speaking Christians were divided into two major groups, the first of which were followers of the Syrian Orthodox Church, also known as 'Jacobites', who occupied the western region of Mesopotamia, and the second of whom were adherents of the Church of the East, also known as 'Nestorians', who lived in the lands which were then ruled by the Sasanian Empire. The Jacobites accepted the doctrinal formula of the Greek father Severus of Antioch (d. 538) and Philoxenus of Mabbug (d. 523), which reflected the earlier teachings of St. Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444). The Church of

[55] Robert Hoyland, *In God's Path: The Arab Conquests and the Creation of an Islamic Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 9-12.
[56] Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 13.
[57] Aziz S. Atiyah, *A History of Eastern Christianity*. (London: Methuen and Co. and University of Notre Dame Press, 1967), 184.

the East adopted the doctrinal positions of the Syriac theologian Narsai (d. 503) and Babai (d. 628), echoing the theology of Theodore of Mopuestia (d. 428).[58]

The Islamic conquests of the eastern homelands of Christianity resulted in permanent changes in the socio-political conditions of Christians living in the region. They were no longer ruled by the Byzantine or Sasanian legal systems, but by Sharī'ah law, which was imposed by Muslim caliphs. In the Qur'an, Christians are classified as 'people of the book' (*ahl al-kitāb*), who possess divine scripture and are supposed to pay a special poll tax (*jizya*) as long as they live in Muslim lands.[59] During the reign of the second caliph, 'Umar, a more detailed legal settlement emerged, regulating the socio-political status of religious minorities living in conquered lands. The document is known as the 'Covenant of 'Umar' (*Shurūt al-'Umariyyah*). According to the Covenant, the lives and the properties of minority groups, including members of various religious groups, such as Jews, Samaritans, Magians and Sabians, as well as Christians, would be kept under state protection on condition that they pay *jizya* to their Muslim rulers. They were called *dhimmī*, an Arabic adjective that means 'someone under protection' or 'the protected one'.[60]

In theory, the Covenant of 'Umar imposed some restrictions on the *dhimmī* community, such as not erecting new churches or rebuilding destroyed ones, not learning or teaching Muslim scripture and not marrying a Muslim woman.[61] Scholars have expressed differing views on the social status and the treatment of religious minorities in the Islamic caliphate. Some of them believe that the *dhimmī* community was socially discriminated against in the Medieval Islamic world, while another group argue

[58] Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 12.
[59] Qur'an 9:29. For a detailed description of Christians in the Qur'an, see Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 6 – 11.
[60] For a detailed description of dhimmitude, see Claude Cahen, *Encyclopedia of Islam, Second edition,* s.v. "Dhimma" (Leiden: Brill, 2012), accessed 22 February 2017. http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/dhimma-SIM_1823; Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow,* p. 16.
[61] Arthur Stanley Tritton*, The Caliphs and Their non-Muslim Subjects*, (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1970), 5-17.

that the restrictions of the Covenant of 'Umar were not strictly imposed.[62] Although evaluating the social status of religious minorities under Islamic rule is not one of the primary concerns of this dissertation, it is, however, worth pointing out that the historical records show that the Muslim rulers left a fair degree of freedom for different religious minorities, which enabled them to contribute to the economic and intellectual growth of the caliphate in many ways.

Jews, for example, were particularly active in the financial life of Baghdad and they played vital roles as bankers and court financiers.[63] It has been suggested that the famous Rādhānites who engaged with international trade in early Middle Ages received their name from a district called Rādhān, which is situated in the eastern part of Baghdad. Indeed, the roots of their financial activity can be found in much earlier sources stretching back to the mid-ninth century. They operated along numerous routes covering the area from Western Europe to China and the Far East. This network of routes reached to the centre of Abbasid caliphate, as well as its peripheral lands. These financiers spoke several languages, including Arabic, Persian, and Greek, and traded various goods, from male and female slaves, fur, and swords, to aromatic scents and spices.[64]

Christians were highly visible and made a significant contribution to the cultural and intellectual enrichment of the Abbasid society through translating documents and philosophical writings from various languages, including Greek and Syriac, into Arabic. When Arabic gradually became the *lingua franca* of the Islamic Empire towards the end of the Umayyad period, first bureaucratic, political and mercantile documents started to be translated from Greek into Arabic merely for practical reasons, to

[62] Sara Leila Husseini, "Early Christian Explanations of the Trinity, 23. For various views on the social status of the *dhimmī* community in the Islamic Empire, see Mikhail, "Ammār al-Baṣrī's Kitāb al-Burhān", 23-30.
[63] Walter J. Fischel, *Jews in the Economic and Political Life of Medieval Islam* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1969), 10.
[64] Moshe Gil, "The Rādhānite Merchants and the Land of Rādhān" *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 17 (1974): 299-328.

enable communication between rulers and subject people. During the early Abbasid times, translation became a state activity and a deliberate and more organised scholarly interest in the translation of Greek Persian and Sanskrit works into Arabic emerged, which led to a translation movement with profound historical, social, and intellectual consequences. By the end of the tenth century, almost all scientific and philosophical secular Greek works which were available in late antiquity had been translated into Arabic. The vast majority of translators of Greek and Syriac scientific texts were Christians, from different denominations, and they played an important role throughout the whole process. Ḥunayn ibn Isḥâq (809-873) who was the member of the Church of the East, was one of the most significant figures of the era. He translated a vast range of works on medicine, philosophy, astronomy, mathematics, and magic. Working with his disciples, he translated Plato's *Republic*, nearly all of Aristotle's philosophical and mathematical treatises, and about one hundred different works of Galen into Arabic. [65]

The ascendancy of the Būyid dynasty in Baghdad was propitious for religious minorities. Faced with the challenge of controlling a predominantly unsympathetic Sunni population, Būyid sovereigns showed an interest in enlisting the allegiance of non-Sunni factions. Therefore, non-Muslim religious groups were treated reasonably well under the relatively more tolerant Būyid rule.[66] The Christian community living in Iraq were highly represented among the secretarial class, and many filled administrative positions. The renowned Christian secretary-mathematician Nasr ibn Hārun was one of the prominent figures of this era, was appointed to the position of vizier during the reign of Aḍud al-Dawla, and was in charge of building and repairing churches and monasteries throughout Mesopotamia and Iran, and distributing stipends to poor Christians.[67] The Jacobite luminary Yahyā ibn Adī, whose life

[65] For detailed information about the translation movement, see Dimtri Gutas, *Greek Thought Arabic Culture*: *The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early 'Abbāsid Society (2nd-4th/8th-10th Centuries)* (London: Routledge, 1998)
[66] Allard, *Les Chrétiens à Bagdad*, 382.
[67] Kraemer, *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam*, 75.

and works will be introduced in more detail in the coming sections, was also one of the most significant figures of this age, whose writings attest to the rich contribution of Christians to the intellectual corpus of the era. Both Christians and Muslims benefited from his school as his students. He and his colleagues translated and edited the main ancient philosophical texts, including Aristotle's *Organon* and *Physica*.[68]

To conclude, Iraq under Būyid rule showed the general features of a medieval society, with its political unrest and economic instability. Despite the violence caused by sectarianism, Būyid rulers adopted a more tolerant religious policy towards non-Muslim factions, which can be ascribed to the denominational orientation of the dynasty. There was a fair level of religious freedom, especially when considered against overall medieval standards, which enabled minorities from various religious backgrounds to be visible in various spheres of society, including administrative institutions. They played important roles during the cultural, intellectual flourishing of Arabo-Islamic culture.

Intellectual environment

During the Umayyad and the early Abbasid periods, the caliphal court was the centre of cultural activity. When the Būyid dynasty gained power in Baghdad, they put emphasis on developing the careers of all sorts of government officials, as they had to build a court of their own. In order to develop their form of aristocracy and establish their power, they fostered professionals, such as viziers, secretaries, clerks, and professional scribes, all of whom contributed to improving and shaping the new identity of the dynasty. The main function of these intellectual groups was contributing to the development of the newly founded Būyid courts, which were challenging and competing with the long-established Abbasid

[68] Kraemer, *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam*, 108.

aristocracy.[69] Therefore, apart from those affiliated with the Abbasid caliphal court, there were many separate intellectual groups operating in various smaller local courts during the Būyid Age.

These court-based intellectuals came from various branches of the sciences and arts, and were promoted by Būyid emirs. The members of the secretary class, called *kuttāb*, literally 'writers', were important figures in the intellectual life of this era. These professional official writers were expected to be knowledgeable in a wide variety of subjects, such as the Qur'an, poetry, rhetoric, and history. They usually acted as specialised writers and held the position of consultant on the internal affairs of the region for their master. Therefore, there were opportunities for many of them to be promoted to the position of vizierate, depending on their talents and skills. This fact created competition between *kuttāb*, and other poets and jurists working in the court, who were seeking to gain acknowledgement and privilege among the ruling elite.[70]

The administrators of this age made a conscious effort to attract the brightest intellectuals to their courts. Scholarly gatherings, called *majālīs*, where luminaries from various backgrounds got together and engaged in intellectual debate, were also quite common during the Būyid era. Al-Tawḥidī (d. 1023) describes these gatherings as very diverse. According to his account, each day was allotted to scholars of a certain area, such as jurists, theologians, litterateurs, and philosophers. He attended one of them with the renowned grammarian Abu Said al-Sirāfī. The *majlis* was full of remarkable scholars from various locations. The vizier, Abu al-Fatḥ, was, as Tawḥidī portrays him, an eloquent, erudite, and graceful man who was generous towards scholars and took pride in them. At the end of the session Abu

[69] Nuha A. Alshaar, *Ethics in Islam: Friendship in the Political Thought of al-Tawḥidī and his Contemporaries* (Oxford: Routledge, 2015), 36.
[70] Alshaar, *Ethics in Islam*, 37.

al-Fatḥ tried to convince al-Sirāfī and ‘Ali b. Isa al-Rummānī to join his court in Rayy.[71] Elias of Nisibis (d. 1046), whose life and intellectual activity will be addressed in more detail later, was one of those who participated in these court sessions as a Christian.

Socio-political circumstances in this age caused a measure of caution for some people in society, who preferred to stay in their own group rather than attending court gatherings or any formal organisation. These scholarly groups identified themselves according to their conscious effort and participation in the study of a certain branch of knowledge or discipline. Kraemer describes these informal groups as falling into two categories, which he calls *circles* and *schools*. These informal associations operated as the foci of intellectual life for those who preferred to remain in a group of their own, rather than attending official gatherings. In these informal organisations, a group of scholars would get together around a master, usually under his own roof, in order to study and discuss a wide variety of subjects. *Circles* were fairly large entourages belonging to a prominent teacher. The members of a circle would get together periodically in order to discuss various topics on the basis of a shared commitment to the pursuit of wisdom. At the time, *circles* brought together people from different ranks of society, including officials, poets, confidents, and astrologers, along with teachers and students. On the other hand, *schools* were fairly limited entourages compared to *circles*, which committed not to a particular scientific trend or system but to a common scholarly venture or method such as copying, translating, and editing ancient texts. [72] Jacobite philosopher Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adi formed his own school, which is a good representative of scholarly associations of this era and will be referred to in more detail towards the end of this chapter.

[71] For a description of these scholarly gatherings, see Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥidī, *Al-Ṣadāqa wa al-Ṣadīq*, ed. Ibrāhīm Kīlānī (Damascus: Maktabat Aṭlas wa Maṭb‘āt al-Insha’, 1964).
[72] Kraemer, *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam,* 103.

There were several groups who identified themselves by their engagement with the same scholarly field, such as jurists, grammarians, *mutakallims* and philosophers. Each group had their distinctive intellectual concern and domain of study. The three main schools, Shāfi'ī, Hanafī, and Hanbalī, carried out their activities and developed an authoritative structure under leading jurists who had *ijāza* (license) to teach the religious texts. Philosophers held their own classes, organising themselves in specific groups focused on certain philosophical traditions. For example, Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī, the pupil of Farābī, had his own group following the neo-Aristotelian and Alexandrian tradition, while his student al-Sijistānī, who was a follower of the Platonic and Neoplatonic traditions, had his own teaching sessions held in his residence. Furthermore, *mutakallims* organised themselves in their specific schools and circles, producing works to define their own doctrines. The followers of the ascetic-mystical movement *taṣawwuf* also continued forming and consolidating their teachings. Many Sufis composed apologetic treatises justifying the existence of Sufi teaching within the Islamic tradition, as they sought to prove the compatibility of Sufism with Islamic law. They took the attitude and behavior of Prophet Muhammad towards his followers as the ideal standard of conduct for Sufis.[73]

As a result of these rather specific intellectual alignments, new types of loyalties attached to these scholarly initiatives were developed. This era witnessed the growth of strict exclusionary boundaries between different scholarly groups, which led to an awareness among the members of each ensemble of their intellectual autonomy. Each individual group defined itself, at least to a certain extent, in contrast to other entities. Thus, in such an environment where the scholars performed within strictly defined boundaries of their own intellectual schools, a significant degree of narrowing of doctrinal

[73] For example, see, James A. Bellamy, "The Makārim al-Akhlāq" by Ibn Abī al-Dunyā (A Preliminary Study)" *The Muslim World* 53 (1963): 106 – 119.

affiliations occurred. Moreover, each school developed their own methodology, regular training methods and curriculum.

Members of these groups interacted with each other and defended their own doctrines during heated debates. One of the most common disputes occurred between the leaders of different legal schools, some of whom were still in the process of forming their doctrines. Al-Subkī reports a debate that was held in the Mansur mosque in Baghdad between the Shāfi'ī judge Abu al-Tayyib al-Tabarī and the leading Imam of the Hanafi school, Abu al-Hasan al-Ṭāliqānī, who was serving as the judge of Balkh at the time.[74] Al-Tawḥidī describes the arguments of scholars who got involved in these debates as rather unreliable. He portrays them as jealous of each other and constantly misleading one another, providing contradictory opinions in order to win the debate.[75]

Within the *mutakallims*, there was also internal conflict between the representatives of the Mu'tazilite school and the Ash'arites, the followers of a former Mu'tazilī, Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'arī (d. 936). The most renowned actors of the *kalam* discussions of this age were the jurist 'Abd al-Jabbār (d. 1025), who served as a chief judge and wrote his voluminous *Al-Mughnī fi Abwāb al-Tawḥīd wa al-'Adl*, which became one of the major sources of Mu'tazilite theology, and the 'Ash'arī scholar al-Bāqillānī (d. 1013). These two prominent figures were also actively involved in interreligious polemics at the time through producing works attacking Christian doctrines. 'Abd al-Jabbār wrote his *Tathbīt Dalā'il al-Nubuwwah Sayyidinā Muḥammad*, 'The Establishment of the Proofs for the Prophethood of our Master Muhammad'. Al-Bāqillānī touched upon the issue in the section entitled *Al-Radd 'Alā al-Naṣārā*, 'The

[74] Tāj al-Dīn 'Abd al-Wahhāb ibn 'Alī al- Subkī, *Tabaqāt al-Shāf'īyah al-Kubrā*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad al-Tanāḥī and 'Abd al-Fattāḥ al-Ḥulū (Cairo: Matba'āt 'Īsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1964 – 67), Vol. 5, 24 – 36.
[75] Alshaar, *Ethics in Islam*, 42 – 43.

Refutation of the Christians', which is part of his larger work *Kitāb al-Tamḥīd*.[76] The ethical views of the two major branches of *mutakallimūn* will be discussed at length in the following chapter.

Another form of intellectual strife occurred between the philosophers, who promoted Greek science and philosophy in the Arabic-speaking world of Islam, and the grammarians. This contradiction had an epistemological character, as the linguists had built their systems of thought on the rules of theoretical Arabic grammar and championed the authority of tradition in religious matters, including the interpretation of the sacred text, while the second group, the philosophers, claimed the superiority of human reason on the same matter. Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī was one of those who actively participated in the controversy by writing a treatise that supported the positions of the logicians and the philosophers against those of the grammarians.

The debate between the Jacobite logician Abū Bishr Mattā, teacher of Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī, and the grammarian Abū Sa'īd al-Sirāfī, illustrates this conflict very well. The dispute took place in the salon of the vizier Abū al-Fatḥ al-Faḍl Ibn Ja'far ibn al-Furāt in the year 932 and was reported by Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥidī. Ibn al-Furāt requested of the audience that one of them volunteer for a debate with Mattā (Mathew in English) on the subject of logic, in order to evaluate its ability to guide people to distinguish the right from the wrong. The full account of the dispute focuses on the different aspects of logic and grammar, and their advantages and shortcomings for finding the truth. It also contains very useful insights into how the skillful use of the Arabic language played a determining role in distinguishing individuals in the intellectual spheres of the time. Abū Sa'īd al-Sirāfī both won the debate and gained the praise of the vizier and the admiration of the audience at the end. It seems his excellent command of

[76] See Muḥammad ibn al-Ṭayyib al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Tamḥīd*, ed. Richard J. McCarthy (Beirut: Maktabah al-Sharqiyya, 1957); Gabriel Said Reynolds, *A Muslim Theologian in a Sectarian Milieu: Abd al-Jabbār and the Critique of Christian Origins* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

Arabic was one of the main factors that enabled him to silence Abū Bishr numerous times during the dispute.[77]

Despite these rather exclusivist intellectual alignments, polymaths still existed, such as al-Miskawayh, who engaged with various fields from philosophy, history, and psychology to chemistry, and al-Tawḥidī, who performed in areas that appeared contradictory to each other at the time, such as jurisprudence, linguistics, philosophy, and *tasawwuf*. These scholars were involved in scholarly activities across different groups, crossing these invisible intellectual boundaries.[78]

In order to provide a complete picture of the special environment of the Būyid era, it might be useful to mention a specific incident, which the Andalusian scholar al-Humaydī mentions in his account of an Andalusian theologian by the name of Abu Umar Ahmad b. Muhammad b. Sa'dī (still alive in 1018); it provides another window into this tolerant and vibrant environment.[79] In his biographical dictionary of Andalusian Arabs, al-Humaydī explains how the Andalusian Theologian Ibn Sa'dī was shocked by the excessive tolerance he witnessed in his visit to Baghdad at the end of the tenth century. In his account, he recounts that, in the intellectual circles where theological issues discussed, there were present not only Muslims of all sects, but also non-Muslims of every sort, including Zoroastrians (*majūs*), materialists (*dahrīs*), Manicheans (*Zanādiqa*), Jews, and Christians. Each belief had a spokesman who defended their position. When the gathering was full, one of them would open the session, stating that they all came together to engage in disputation. In the course of the discussion, Muslims were not allowed to cite their scripture or sayings of their prophets as proof against the others, since they do not affirm any of it. They support their arguments with only rational proofs (*hujāj al-aql*) and on the basis of reason (*nazar*) and

[77] David Samuel Margoliouth, "The Discussion between Abū Bishr Mattā and Abu Sa'īd al-Sirāfī on the Merits of Logic and Grammar" *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society 37* (1905): 79 – 129.
[78] For the cross-discipline groups, see Alshaar, *Ethics in Islam*, 46-49.
[79] Reinhart Dozy, *Histoire des Musulmans d'Espagne,* ed. E Lèvi-Provençal (Leiden: Brill, 1932), Vol. II, 126-127.

analogy (*qiyās*). After this introduction, he reports, Muslims would respond, saying: "Sure, we grant you that."[80]

According to Humaydī's record, unhappy with what he had seen, Ibn Sa'dī decided not to go back to that particular gathering. Then he attended another gathering on theology (*kalām*) and found that it was organised in exactly the same way as the earlier one. Extremely disappointed, and finding it unacceptable to see Muslims engaging in debate with the followers of other religious groups on equal terms, he rejected attending any other gatherings.

Christian Contribution to Intellectual Life

Following the Islamic conquests, the Christian community felt it necessary to adjust themselves to the new socio-political system, which brought with it a specific intellectual context. Acculturation and Arabisation were the two striking impacts of this process. Prior to the Islamic conquests, there were a number of languages that were written and spoken by members of the different religious groups. As has been mentioned earlier, Syriac was the ecclesiastical language of the Syriac Orthodox Church and the Church of the East, and was also spoken in the regions where these two churches were predominant. The Melkites, the followers of Byzantine Orthodoxy, mostly used Greek as their liturgical and intellectual language. Similarly, in the monastic communities of the region covering Sinai, Palestine and trans-Jordan area, Greek was the dominant spoken and ecclesiastical language. There were also instances where Christian Palestinian Aramaic served as another language spoken by local Christian monastic communities.[81]

[80] For the translation of his report and discussion, see: Michael Cook, "Ibn Said on Truth-blindness" *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 33 (2007): 169 – 178.
[81] Husseini, "Early Christian Explanations," 30; Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque*, 12.

Translating the Christian faith into the *lingua franca* of the new socio-political system was a lengthy process. The complete Arabisation of Christians living in the conquered lands, from North Africa to western Asia, took almost three centuries. It initially started in Syria and Palestine around the mid-eighth century, and was substantially completed in Northern Africa by the eleventh century.[82] The whole corpus of Christian Arabic literature covers a wide variety of genres, from the writings of Biblical exegesis, canon law, Christian theology, and church history to religious encyclopaedias. The earliest examples of this literature can be classified broadly under two categories: (1) ecclesiastical works such as patristic literature, lives of saints, and Bible translations and (2) theological treatises with an apologetic sense, produced in order to defend the Christian faith.[83] Although they were all composed to serve the needs of the Christian communities living in the various parts of caliphate, and speak to them as the primary target audience, the works that fall into the second category always consider the claims of the intellectual opponents of Christianity, mainly Muslims, and seeks to provide answers to their objections.

The major motive behind the emergence of apologetic literature in Christian Arabic was the continuing intellectual challenge posed by Muslims through theological refutations of Christianity. According to the earliest extant Muslim *kalām* texts, it is clear that a great many Muslim *mutakallimūn* were actively involved in intellectual polemics against other religions, including Christianity, from the very early stages of *kalām*. The polemics mainly revolved around three major topics related to Christian doctrine: the Trinity, incarnation, and salvation.[84] In the time of 'Amr ibn Matta, the renowned Mu'tazili, 'Abd al-Jabbār, and his contemporary Bāqillanī, also engaged with treatises opposing Christianity.

[82] Samir Khalil Samir, "Christian Arabic Literature in the 'Abbasid Period" in *Religion, Learning and Science in the 'Abbasid Period*, ed. Young, M.J.L., Latham, J.D., Serjeant, R.B, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 446
[83] Sidney Griffith, "The Monks of Palestine and the Growth of Christian Literature in Arabic" *The Muslim World* 78 (1988): 9 – 10.
[84] Jacques Waardenburg, *Muslim Perceptions of Other Religions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 49.

Using Arabic and engaging in interreligious debates with Muslims opened a new way for Christians to express their theology within a new frame of reference. Griffith observes this as follows:

> (…) the Arabic-speaking Christian writers often built their arguments on ways of thinking that the Muslims had initially elaborated in view of commending their own faith in the Qur'an and in the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad. As a result, the discourse of the Christian apologists in Arabic presents a conceptual profile that cannot easily be mistaken for Christian theology in any other community of Christian discourse. For example, their approach to the reasoned articulation in Arabic of the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation involved the effort to express the former in terms of the contemporary Islamic discussion of the ontological status of the divine attributes, the Qur'an's "beautiful names of God," and the latter in terms of the Islamic discussion of the signs of authentic prophecy and true religion.[85]

Elsewhere, speaking of Abū Qurrah, Griffith describes this process as a development in Christian Arabic:

> In this milieu Christian religious thinking found an opportunity for a development of doctrine that went beyond the initially apologetic mode in which it was rooted. Christian *mutakallimūn* actually adopted a way of presenting the traditional teachings of the church in an Arabic idiom conditioned by the Islamic frame of reference in the midst of which they lived.[86]

[85] Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow,* 75.
[86] Sidney Griffith, "Faith and the Reason in Christian Kalam: Theodore Abū Qurrah on Discerning the True Religion", in *Christian Arabic Apologetics During the Abbasid Period (750-1258*), ed. S.K. Samir and J. Nielsen (Leiden, Brill, 1994), 5.

From a very early period, in order to rebut the claims of Muslim *mutakallimūn*, Christian authors themselves composed their own *kalam* texts in order to equip their fellow Christians with tools and arguments to defend their faith in an Islamic context.

In the period covering the late tenth to the early eleventh centuries, when ‘Amr ibn Matta is supposed to have lived and operated, the intellectual corpus of Arabophone Christians was extremely diverse. For example, in addition to the earlier *kalam* and patristic writings, the first Bible commentary in Arabic was produced by Abu Tayyib. Yahya ibn ‘Adi, whose life will be addressed in more detail later. He can be considered the first philosopher who produced numerous works in Arabic. This is also the period when the first theological treatises in a more poetic and artistic style of the Arabic language started to appear. The poet Suleiman al-Ghazzī (d. after 1027) from Palestine composed his *Dīwān* dealing with Christian theology, and ‘Amr ibn Matta’s *Kitāb al-Majdal* is the first Christian text composed in rhyming prose.

A quick look into the lives and the intellectual activities of two prominent late tenth, early eleventh century Christian authors, namely Jacobite philosopher and apologist Yahya ibn ‘Adi, and Elias of Nisibis Metropolitan Bishop of the Church of the East, is helpful to provide more insight into the colourful, vibrant intellectual life of Christians of this age.

Abū Zakariyyā Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī ibn Hamid ibn Zakariyyā al-Takritī al-Mantiqī was a Jacobite Christian who was born in the city of Takrit in Iraq in the year 893.[87] In his youth, Yaḥyā ibn Adī moved to Baghdad to pursue his education. He became the disciple of the Nestorian philosopher Mattā ibn Yūnus

[87] Takrīt was a small town on the right bank of the Tigris, about 100 miles north of Baghdad, which served as one of the intellectual centres where theological and philosophical discussions where held between Muslims and Christians. Two earlier renowned Jacobite intellectuals who produced apologetic treatises to defend the Christian faith, Ḥabīb ibn Khidmah Abū Rāitah (d. before 850) and Nonnus of Nisibis (d. after 862) also hailed from Takrit for more see Griffith *Sidney Griffith*, introduction to *The Reformation of Morals / Yahyā ibn ʿ Adī: A Parallel English-Arabic Text Translated and Introduced by Sidney H. Griffith, by Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2002), xv.

and the famous Muslim scholar al-Farābi. He served as a scribe and a translator, an Aristotelian philosopher, an apologist for Christian doctrines and practices, and also as a teacher. Professionally, like his father, he earned his life as an amanuensis and a bookseller. He died on 13 August 974 at the age of 81 and was buried in the church of St. Thomas, in the Daqīq quarter of Baghdad.[88]

He produced numerous treatises concerning various issues in theology and philosophy. In his works, theology and philosophy were interwoven. Augustin Périer, who worked on the large collections of Ibn 'Adī's theological writings preserved in the Paris and Vatican Libraries, argues that Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī was first and foremost a philosopher.[89] Consistent with his teacher al-Farābī's philosophy of religion, Ibn 'Adī treated theological notions as embodiments of philosophical concepts. Therefore, for example, he interprets the persons of the Trinity as symbolic representations of Aristotelian philosophy: the Father represents the intellect, the Son represents the intellectually cognising subject, and the Spirit represents the intellectually cognised object.[90] He was also actively involved in the intellectual controversy between philosophers and grammarians by writing a treatise that supports the positions of logicians and philosophers against those of the grammarians.[91]

Apart from his engagement with current methodological discussions, he also produced works on ethical subjects. Two texts on ethics are attributed to Yaḥyā ibn Adī. The first one is a collection on sexual abstinence and is preserved in a single manuscript held in the Coptic Patriarchate of Cairo. The second text is entitled *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq* and is a treatise on the improvement of morals. It has also been

[88] Kraemer, *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam*, 104 – 106.
[89] For more, see Augustin Périer, *Yahyâ Ben 'Adi, un Philosophe Arabe Chrétien du Xe siècle* (Paris: Gabalda, 1920).
[90] For more, see the treatises of Yahya ibn Adi' on the Trinity published by Augustin Périer, *Petits Traites Apologetiques de Yahya ben Àdi: Texte Arabe* (Paris: Gabalda, 1920), 82
[91] The treatise is edited by Gerhard Endress, "Yahya ibn Adi: Maqāla fi Tabyīn al-Faṣl bayna Sinā'at al-Mantīq al-Falsafī wa al-Naḥw al-'Arabi" *Journal for the History of Arabic Science* (Aleppo) 2 (1978): 181-193

attributed to Ibn al-'Arabī, al-Jāhiz, and Ibn al-Haytham.[92] Since there is no genuine evidence against Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī's authorship, *Tahdhīb al Akhlāq* has been attributed to Yahyā ibn 'Adī by numerous scholars, including Gerhard Endress, Samir Khalil Kussaim, Samir Khalil Samir, Marie-Thèrèse Urvoy, and Naji al-Takritī. Recently, it has been edited by Sidney Griffith with the title of 'The Reformation of Morals' *(Tahdhīb al Akhlaq).*[93] The text falls into five distinguishable sections and teaches that virtue itself suffices to achieve the happiness of which human nature is capable.[94] One of the most striking features of *Tahdhīb al Akhlāq* is that it was one of the earliest examples of ethical philosophy in Islamic intellectual history. [95] It will be introduced in more detail in the following chapter.

After Mattā ibn Yūnus died in 940 and al-Farābī moved to Aleppo to join the circle of Sayf al-Dawlah in 942, Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī became one of the leading figures of the new generation of Christian and Muslim philosophers in Baghdad. His school mainly engaged with copying, editing, translating, and commenting on ancient philosophical texts. The entire *Organon* was studied in Ibn Adi's school. His pupils can be classified according to their religious affiliation. Ibn Adi's leading Christian disciples were 'Īsa ibn Zur'a, Ibn al-Khammār, Ibn al-Samh, and Nazīf al-Rūmī. Although they showed some interest in the study of the logical and physical writings of Aristotle, they were primarily involved in textual studies and translation. Most of them were physicians and they all wrote on Christian theological subjects.

There is no doubt that, as the contemporary of 'Amr ibn Mattā, Yahya ibn Adī was one of the most influential figures of the Būyid Age and his scholarly enterprise made a substantial contribution to the intellectual history of Arabo-Islamic thought. His works and his school demonstrated the strong

[92] Griffith, introduction, xxix.
[93]Emilio Platti, *Christian-Muslim Relations 600 - 1500,* s.v. "Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī." (Leiden: Brill, 2010), accessed 15 March 2015.
http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/yahya-b-adi-SIM_7949?s.num=0&s.f.s2_parent=s.f.book.encyclopaedia-of-islam-2&s.q=yahya+ibn+adi
[94] Griffith, introduction, xii.
[95] Franz Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage in Islam* (London: Routledge, 1975), 9.

influence of Aristotelian logic and philosophy, and they are important for showing the different aspects of the intellectual life of this milieu.

The Metropolitan Bishop Elias bar Shīnāyā of Nisibis is another prominent figure from the early eleventh century from the Church of the East. He was born into a Christian family in the town of Shina, which is situated on the Tigris river, a little below the mouth of the River Zab, in the year 975.[96] He was first ordained as a priest of the Church of the East when he was nineteen by Bishop Nathaniel, who later became the Patriarch John ibn 'Isa.[97] Within a short time, he was appointed arch-priest at the monastery of St Simon, which was located near his home town of Shina. Between the years 996 and 1000, he served at the monastery of St Michael near Mosul in modern northern Iraq. Before he was ordained as the Metropolitan Bishop of Nisibis on 26 December 1008, he was consecrated as Bishop of Bet Nuhadra by Patriarch John ibn 'Isa for his exceptional qualities and piety. He spent the rest of his life, until his death on 18 July 1046, producing numerous works in various fields, including theology, morality, history, and linguistics. [98]

Samir Khalil Samir provides a detailed update of the list of works attributed to Elias of Nisibis. According to his list, there are at least 24 works that can be classified under the field of theology. Among these, perhaps the most well-known is his *Kitāb al-Majalis*, 'Book of Sessions', which contains the discussions that took place during his meetings with the Muslim vizier Abū al-Qāsim al-Husayn ibn 'Alī al-Maghribī in Nisibis over the course of two years. Another example of his engagement with the contemporary Muslim officials is his letter to a Muslim judge, which he wrote when he was in Mosul, with the title 'Letter on the Unity and the Trinity of the Creator' in which he explains the use of three

[96]Joseph Simon Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis Clementino-Vaticana* (Rome: Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide, 1719 – 1728), 226.
[97] Ernest W. Brooks, ed., *Opus Chronologicum*, trans. J.-B. Chabot. (Paris: E Typographeo Reipublicae, 1910), 228-229.
[98] Samir Khalil Samir, "Date de la Mort d'Elie de Nisibe" Oriens Christianus 72 (1988): 124–132.

hypostases to describe God, and the convenience of the term *jawhar* in Arabic to address the 'substance' in Christian theology. In his other numerous theological works, he defends the doctrine of the Trinity and discusses the nature of God.[99]

Elias was also acknowledged as a historian for his *Chronography*, which was written in two languages, Syriac and Arabic, containing major historical events of his era. In terms of linguistics, he composed a book on Syriac grammar and a Syriac-Arabic word gloss. He also produced several works on various subjects, such as church law and collections of useful maxims for the health of the body and the soul.

As a possible contemporary of 'Amr ibn Matta from the Nestorian church, Elias of Nisibis also focused on ethical issues in some of his writings. His *Letter on Chastity* is a defence of the Christian practice of celibacy against the claims of the ninth-century Muslim author al-Jāhiz. He recounts nine basic motives for preferring celibacy over marriage, including the elimination of bodily passion. In his renowned work entitled *Kitāb daf' al-Hamm*, 'Book on the Dissipation of Sorrows', he gives a description of the list of vices which one can avoid through cultivating virtues, in order to discipline the body and the soul.

Elias came from a religious background, while Yaḥyā's intellectual activity had a more secular and interreligious character. They both produced works in Arabic on a wide variety of subjects. They also engaged in interreligious debates. Their writings and lives show that they were very well integrated into the society in which they lived and contributed to its enrichment in various ways. More information will be given about their ethical writings in the following chapter.

Conclusion

[99] For the full list of his works, see: Samir Khalil Samir "Un Auteur Chrétien de Langue Arabe, Élie de Nisibe" *Islamochristiana* 3 (1977): 257–284.

The Būyid Age witnessed one of the most productive periods of intellectual history. Scholars from various religious and social backgrounds engaged in a wide range of intellectual activities and provided works in various fields, from poetry to astrology. In his 'Humanism and the Renaissance of Islam', Kraemer suggests a negative correlation between the socio-economic distress and cultural efflorescence that were the main features of the Būyid Age.[100] There are probably various factors behind this cultural revival, including the availability of late antique philosophical texts in Arabic and the internal epistemological and theological crisis of Muslim society. However, as Kraemer suggests, it is quite clear that the political disintegration of the caliphate started a new age of political and cultural multiplicity and prepared the ground for the articulation of a new, more flexible society that created grounds for intellectual productivity. Non-Muslim minority groups contributed to this enrichment through producing numerous works in a wide range of fields. 'Amr ibn Mattā's highly artistic encyclopedia, which was penned during this era, is a good example of this intellectual vibrancy.

[100] Kraemer, *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam*, 27.

CHAPTER II: MORALITY IN THE CONTEXT: ETHICAL THEORIES DURING THE TIME OF 'AMR IBN MATTĀ

In order to set 'Amr ibn Mattā's ethics in its context, it will be useful to give a short sketch of the development of ethical theories in Arabo-Islamic thought and provide some information about the examples of some of the major ethical writings that were in circulation during the Būyid Age. Ethics in Islamic tradition deals with a variety of subjects, including the codes of behaviour of an individual, the management of family and household, and the administration of society.[101] Islamic ethics, which comprises various traditional religious and philosophical elements, showed a gradual development, reaching its established form around the eleventh century. Unlike the Greek tradition, in which ethics was refined and shaped by philosophical reasoning, without any explicit influence of any foreign doctrine, Islamic ethics appeared as a successful amalgamation of different branches of tradition, Qur'anic teachings, and later on Persian and Greek non-Arabic elements.[102]

The religious teachings of the Qur'an on conduct, which were subsequently expanded and interpreted by the sayings of Prophet Muhammad (*ḥadīth*), often served as a basis for the later development of various religious ethical traditions in Islam. The Islamic scripture itself is acknowledged

[101] Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage,* 82.
[102] Walzer, Richard and Gibb, H.A.R, *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition,* s.v. "Akhlāḳ." (Leiden: Brill,2012), accessed 23 October 2013.
http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/akhlak-COM_0035?s.num=0&s.q=akhlak

as the earliest example of these ethical writings as it expounds sets of rules regulating worldly and societal affairs, which are framed within the context of penalty and reward in this world and judgement and subsequent punishment or reward in the hereafter. The distinction between faith and ethics, which is the case in philosophical ethical theories, certainly does not exist in the context of the Qur'an. Although it does not provide analytical discussions on philosophical ethical questions, prescribing the right conduct for Muslims by means of commands, recommendations, and prohibitions from God, Islamic scripture represents the earliest primary source of ethics in the Islamic tradition. Prior to the emergence of *kalām* and philosophy in the eighth and ninth centuries, when there was a lack of genuine dialectical and rational intellectual activity, it served as a source for commentators, jurists, and traditionalists to expound or justify the moral *ethos* of the religious truth.[103]

Another important source for writings concerning morality was *ḥadīth* literature, which played a major role in shaping and maintaining the principal ethical ideas of the Muslim community throughout Islamic history. The corpus of *ḥadīth* provides instructions on the right forms of conduct, as well as the correct understanding of religious doctrine and accurate performance of religious duties, which are inseparable elements of Islamic religious law (*sharī'ah*). The saying of the Prophet Muhammad, "I have been sent to fulfil the virtues that go with nobility of character [*makārim al-akhlāq*]", inspired several authors to write collections of ethical *ḥadīths* under this title from the ninth century onwards. *Ḥadīth* literature also served as a major source for the development of the ethical framework of Islamic law.[104] Along with religious scripture and *ḥadīth* literature, Islamic legal thought, which systematises and classifies traditional material, has been considered a category of religious ethics by some scholars in the field. In his article entitled *Islamic Law as Islamic Ethics*, Kevin Reinhart argues that students of religious

[103] Kevin Reinhart, *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān,* s.v. "Ethics and the Qurʾān" (Leiden: Brill, 2016, accessed 14 March 2016.
http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-quran/ethics-and-the-quran-EQCOM_00056
[104] Walzer and Gibb, *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition,* s.v. "Akhlāḳ."

ethics may find the texts dealing with Islamic legal matters relevant to their focus of study, as a rich source for understanding Islamic ethics, even more so than the texts on Islamic theology and philosophy.[105] Later, John Kelsay wrote an article entitled *Divine Command Ethics in Early Islam: Al-Shafi'i and the Problem of Guidance,* focusing on the legal theory of al-Shāfi'ī, who played an important role in the early development of the theory of the principles of jurisprudence, as an example of the ethical approach that considered divine command as a basis for his theory.[106]

Persian moral thought was one of the foreign elements of Islamic ethics and its appearance in Islamic moral literature precedes the use of Greek philosophical material. Its main representative was Persian translator and author Ibn al-Muqaffa' (d. c. 756-759) who wrote the famous *Adab al-kabīr* and *al-Saghīr*, though authenticity of the latter is under question, which contain advice for rulers, civil servants, and people who wish to advance in life on how to be successful.

Later on, with the introduction of Greek philosophy into the Islamic world, philosophical ethics started to be discussed in the limited intellectual circles that devoted themselves to the study of philosophy. In the classification of the various branches of philosophy, ethics, which is expressed by the Arabic term *akhlāq*, is considered alongside politics and economics.[107]

The span of 'Amr ibn Mattā's intellectual career coincides with a very important period in the history of ethics in Arabo-Islamic tradition. Among his distinguished literary contemporaries who produced works touching upon the questions of ethics were 'Abd al-Jabbār (d.1025), the influential Mu'tazilite theologian; Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 1013), the Ash'arī scholar; Abu al-Ḥaṣan al-Māwardī

[105] Kevin Reinhart, "Islamic Law as Islamic Ethics" *Journal of Religious Ethics* 11 (1983): 186. Reinhart distinguishes 'Islamic' and 'Islamicate' according to Hodgson's proposal. He argues that as they have foreign elements, theology and philosophy cannot be entitled distinctively 'Islamic'.
[106] John Kelsay, "Divine Command Ethics in Early Islam: Al-Shafi'i and the Problem of Guidance" *Journal of Religious Ethics* 22 (1994): 101.
[107] Walzer and Gibb, *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition,* s.v. "Akhlāḳ."

(d.1058), the Shāfi'ī jurist who wrote works on religion, politics, and religious law, and served as a judge; Ibn Sinā (d.1037), who produced numerous writings on various subjects including medicine, philosophy, and ethics; Ibn al-Miskawayh (d. 1030), historian and philosopher, who wrote one of the earliest examples of systematic ethics; and Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī (d. 974), the Jacobite philosopher and apologist who contributed to the intellectual corpus of ethical literature in this century.

The literary and intellectual genres of the writings that were produced in this age can be classified under various categories of ethics and cover a very extensive field. Thus, it is not easy to draw clear boundaries between these works concerning moral issues. A complete and elaborate picture of the moral theories that were available at the time of 'Amr ibn Mattā will establish the foundation for the discussion on the ethical genre of al-Maṣābīh in the sixth chapter of this thesis. For this purpose, these theories will be presented under three main categories adopted from George Hourani's fourfold scheme of ethical theories in the Medieval Islamicate world.

In his article entitled *Ethics in Medieval Islam: A Conspectus*, Hourani proposes two sets of criteria, focusing on the method used in the texts and the sources, in order to classify different kinds of ethical writings. The first two criteria are based on the method of identifying how the ethical propositions used in the texts are arrived at. If they are prescriptions of a higher authority, they are considered 'normative', and if they are products of a process of analytical thinking, they fall under the category of 'analytical'. The other dual criteria focus on the sources questioning their origins, whether 'secular' or 'religious'. Thus, Hourani's scheme contains four separate divisions: normative religious ethics, normative secular ethics, ethical analysis in the religious tradition, and ethical analysis by secular philosophers.[108] 'Normative religious ethics' covers the area of religious writings that prescribes codes of law and conduct for different aspects of life, the Qur'an, *ḥadīth* literature, books on the qualities of noble

[108] George Hourani, *Reason and Tradition in Islamic Ethics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 15.

character (*makārīm al-akhlāq*), which mostly concern the virtues, and Sufi manuals and treatises on the instructions in the path of God and the purification of the soul, are all classified under this category. The second category deals with 'normative secular ethics' in Hourani's system and consists of writings that provide advice for rulers and administrators, represented by the 'Mirrors for Princes' in the Persian tradition. The third division deals with a complicated area. The most important concern of the writings in this category is the limits and the function of human free will in relation to divine will and predestination, and also the origins of value. The discussions of Muslim theologians on these matters are categorised under this classification. The last category in Hourani's scheme includes writings that employ Greek philosophy in the Arabic tradition, discussing issues related to the perfection of the soul, virtues and vices, the elimination of sorrow, and the means to happy life. Their focus area is Muslim society, while their framework is adopted from the books of a wide range of Greek philosophers, including Plato, Aristotle, and the Peripatetics. The main representatives of this genre in Arabic are the works of Fārābī (d.950), Ibn Sinā (d. 1037), and Ibn al-Miskawayh (d. 1030), and later on Nasīr al-dīn Tūsī (d. 1274) and Ibn Rushd (d. 1198).

In the following sections, the major ethical theories in the time of 'Amr will be presented under three divisions. The first division will cover the area of normative religious ethics; the second division will focus on the ethical analytical discussions in the religious tradition, and the last division will provide information about the ethical theories initiated by philosophers. The second classification in Hourani's scheme, which focuses on 'normative secular ethics', will be excluded here mainly because, as will be shown in the third chapter, 'Amr's text is evidently religious and contains elements from religious, theological, and philosophical sources. Moreover, the intended audience of his text is ordinary people, rather than rulers or leaders of society. Therefore, the range of writings that falls into Hourani's second classification entitled 'normative secular ethics' is very unlikely to be of 'Amr's interest. At the end of this

chapter, the writings of three Christian authors on the issue of elimination of sorrow will be addressed separately, as examples of how living in an Islamic milieu shaped their moral concerns.

In the next section, the main characteristics of each of the three types of ethical theories will be introduced through focusing on some of the texts that were in circulation and were likely to be seen by ‘Amr in the late tenth century. Under each title, a few examples will be given and the style, main questions and concerns of the texts will be discussed. Certainly, the examples provided here are not exhaustive, as the primary aim of this section is not to provide a comprehensive analysis and study of these texts, but to present a broad picture in order to elucidate the general features of the different kinds of ethical writings of this age.

Normative Religious Ethical Writings

As mentioned, the texts that fall into the category of normative religious ethics in Hourani’s classification cover a range of writings that provide guidance for various aspects of life, and are grounded in religious material. In his book entitled *Ethical Theories in Islam,* Majid Fakhry describes religious ethics as firmly based on scripture and traditions, and is inclined to exclude ‘dialectical’ or ‘methodological’ discussions mostly focusing on revealing the essence of Islamic morality in a more direct way.[109] There are various examples of moral writings from the age of ‘Amr ibn Mattā that fall into the first of Hourani’s categories and can be considered in the category of religious ethics proposed by Fakhry. This section will focus on the works of two prominent figures, the mystic scholar Hārith ibn Asad al-Muḥāsibī (d. 857) and the scholar and jurist Abu’l Ḥasan al-Mawardī (1058), as examples of religious ethical writings circulating at the time of ‘Amr ibn Mattā.

[109] Majid Fakhry, *Ethical Theories in Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 151. Fakhry classifies Qur’anic ethics under a separate title “Scriptural morality”.

Although his lifetime preceded the age of ‘Amr, some of the works of al-Ḥarith al-Muḥāsibī can be mentioned here as an example of religious ethical writings that were likely to be available and accessible to ‘Amr ibn Mattā. As a forerunner of al-Qushairī (d. 1071) and al-Ghazalī (d. 1111), al-Muḥāsibī wrote extensively on the qualities, ambitions, and faults of the human ego (*al-nafs*). In his well-known work entitled *Kitāb al-Ri’āya li Huqūq Allah wa al-Qiyām bihā,* ‘The Book of Observance of the Laws of God and Their Practice’, is divided into eight major books (*kutub*) entitled *al-riya* (‘ostentation’), *al-ikhwan wa ma’rifah al-nafs* (‘the companionship and awareness of the soul’), *al-tanbih* (‘the warning’*), al-‘ujb* (‘self-pride’), *al-kibr* (‘arrogance’), *al-ghirra* (‘carelessness’), *al-hasad* (‘jealousy’), and a final book entitled *Kitāb al-ta’dib al-murid* (‘the book of the refinement of the disciple’). Each book is organised into numerous sections (*abwāb*), and indeed the first book is preceded by numerous *bābs* in which Muḥāsibī provides discussions on the meaning of piety and the aspects of the human soul. This voluminous work provides a comprehensive and elaborate picture of al-Muḥāsibī’s moral thought.

One of the first issues that Muḥāsibī discusses is the definition and the nature of *taqwā* as the proper way of getting close to God and following His commandments. Following the first chapter (*bāb*) that carries the same title as the book, *al-bāb Ri’āya li Ḥuqūq Allah wa al-Qiyām bihā* (‘Chapter on the observance of the laws of God and their practice’), in which he discusses the proper ways of following God’s commands, he turns to describing the *taqwā* in the second chapter, entitled *Bāb Ma’rifah al-Taqwā wa mā hiya* (‘chapter on the discernment of *taqwā* and its nature’). At the beginning of the text, he explains the *taqwā* as follows:

> Taqwā, which God promises the heaven for its followers, is shunning polytheism and refraining from every misdeed which is prohibited by God, and avoiding negligence of any obligatory acts which are commanded by Him.[110]

This particular description, in which al-Muḥāsibī recounts the three major acts that should be avoided (polytheism, performing deeds that are forbidden by God, and omitting ones that are commanded by Him), clearly reflects the literal meaning of the root of the word *taqwā*, *wa-q-y*, which means 'prevention'. In the following lines, he attaches the concept of taqwā to 'fear' (*khawf*) as he says: "the essence of *taqwā* is fear and taking guard [*al-ḥizr*] against God".[111] He supports this point by citing several verses from the Qur'an advising believers to fear God. He states that *taqwā* indeed occurs after the feeling of 'fear' as it leads a person to take caution. [112] After a few chapters, he turns back to explain *taqwā* again in a separate *bāb* entitled 'the chapter on the description of *taqwā*'. Here, in a very similar way to his earlier explanations, he describes the concept as refraining from everything that God does not like and following His commands.[113]

Indeed, this emphasis on the description of *taqwā* in the prelude of his work is not coincidental, as his whole system of morality and personal development is grounded on the divine command. Therefore, before he starts the first book (*Kitāb*) of his work, 'the book of ostentation', he provides detailed information and discussion through several chapters on piety and the various aspects of the human soul. Accordingly, in order to achieve *taqwā* and follow the path with which God will be pleased, one should keep his soul under control. For this purpose, whenever it desires anything, the individual should check whether the act would be approved of by God or not. The soul tends to desire whatever is

[110] Ḥārith Ibn Asad al-Muḥāsibī, *Al-Ri'āyah li-Ḥuqūq Allah*, ed. 'Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad Aṭā. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1985), 34.
[111] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Al-Ri'āyah li-Ḥuqūq Allah*, 35.
[112] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Al-Ri'āyah li-Ḥuqūq Allah*, 35.
[113] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Al-Ri'āyah li-Ḥuqūq Allah*, 39 – 40.

pleasurable in the short term, even if the act will cause trouble in the afterlife. In this case, the person should be reminded to fear God and the consequences of his act in the future.[114] As can be seen, fear of God plays an important role in Muhasibi's system of self-control and law observance.

After discussing the ways in which an individual can follow the divine law in the best possible way, al-Muḥāsibī draws the reader's attention to the aspect of the sincerity with God (*al-ikhlāṣ*), which serves as a foundation of the actions through which a person is rewarded.[115] Having described this essential feature of human endeavour, he turns to recount the characteristic which is opposing to sincerity and degrades the quality of human being that is ostentation (*al-riyā*), vanity (*al-'ujb*), arrogance (*al-kibr*), self-delusion (*al-ghirra*) and jealousy (*al-ḥasad*) pointing out their causes and explaining their consequences elaborately in separate sections. The book is concluded with the section entitled The Book of Refinement of the Disciple, through which Muḥāsibī provides a programme aims at improving his readers' self-control and his helps him to avoid his temptations which may cause him to deviate after he has started to devote himself to God with his whole existence.[116]

Another of his works, entitled *Adab al-Nufūs / Risāla fī al-Akhlāq* ('Etiquettes of the Soul/A Treatise on Moral Character') focuses on the two main themes mentioned in the title: etiquette (*adab*) and the soul (*al-nafs*). The text provides a detailed discussion of the noble qualities and an examination of the *nafs* and relevant subjects. According to al-Muḥāsibī, before moving further, one should focus on purifying his soul, as human beings are prohibited from all forms of evil, but not expected to perform all types of good action.[117] Similar to his explanation in *Ri'āyah*, the reason for the *nafs*' disobedient nature is its love of the worldly life, taking it as its only concern and aim. Although it recognises the separation

[114] Al-Muḥāsibī *Al-Ri'āyah li-Ḥuqūq Allah*, 84.
[115] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Al-Ri'āyah li-Ḥuqūq Allah*, 193 – 201.
[116] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Al-Ri'āyah li-Ḥuqūq Allah*, 503-520.
[117] Ḥārith Ibn Asad al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. 'Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad Aṭā (Beyrut: Muassasah al-Kutub al-Thiqāfiyyah, 1991), 32.

of this life from the hereafter, it fails to realise that this worldly life is only a trial. Thus, the best remedy for diseases of the heart and the soul is to remember the afterlife and death.[118] Al-Muḥāsibī sees 'fear' as an important motive of self-discipline, which keeps the soul under control and prevents a person from following his desires, as he explains the ways in which control can be cultivated. However, he emphasises that one should always be careful not to end up in despair because of extreme fear and worry about the afterlife. Therefore, he says: "If he performs goodness he becomes hopeful and when he sins he fears".[119] The control and refinement of the soul plays a vital role in this treatise, as he devotes a lengthy section to explaining the features of the *nafs* and how to control its temptations.[120] Despite the fact that most of the discussions in *Adab* had already been addressed in Muḥāsibī's other works, such as *Ri'āyah*, this treatise was acknowledged as an elaborate summary of his ideas on the *nafs* and its etiquettes.[121]

Another example of religious ethical writings in the time of 'Amr is *Adab al-Dunyā wa al-Dīn* ('Etiquette in worldly and religious matters') by Abū al-Hasan al-Māwardī (d.1058). Al-Māwardī studied various branches of Islamic jurisprudence, traditions, theology, and philosophy, and served as a judge in different cities before eventually returning to Baghdad in order to serve Caliph al-Qadir (991-1031). In his *Adab*, he provides an analysis of religious and moral virtues with a threefold interest in worldly, religious, and personal affairs. He starts his work by discussing the value of the mind (*al-'aql*) stating that it is the basis of all virtues and the antithesis of the passions (*al-hawā*). The initial chapter on the benefits of the mind is followed by a chapter on the excellence of knowledge, where he recounts the merits of knowledge, which can be only appreciated through knowledge itself and are unknown to those who are

[118] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, 34-39.
[119] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, 40.
[120] Al-Muhasibi, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, 95-102.
[121] Gavin Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam: The Life and Works of al-Muhasibi* (London: Routledge, 2011), 74.

ignorant.[122] The primary virtue, which is cultivated when genuine knowledge is achieved, is abstinence (*al-nazahah*). A learned man should keep himself busy with acquiring more knowledge, which his soul deserves.[123] Another important quality gained through knowledge is humility, as arrogance is explained as a result of insufficient knowledge.

After providing a detailed analysis of the two concepts of reason and knowledge, al-Māwardī turns to discussing the etiquettes of religious conduct in the third chapter of his work. He initially develops a theme of religious obligation which is in line with the Mu'tazilite stance of *taklīf*, stating that God has laid down His rules for mankind and set religious obligations as a grace (*tafaḍḍul*) from His side, providing benefits through them, without any advantage arising for Him. Following this statement, he divides religious obligations into three main parts: beliefs, acts and prohibitions.[124] These types of obligation are divinely ordered and rationally commendable. After providing a detailed discussions on the various types of obligations and prohibitions, he turns to explaining the shortcomings of the worldly life and advises the reader to cut himself off from clinging to it too much by remembering that it is transitory and attachment to this temporary life will only cause suffering.[125] He then explains three major methods of detachment from the world, which are: firstly turning away from love of this temporary world, secondly acknowledging the dangers of its entertainments and being aware that man only achieves joy in this life at the cost of his own peace of mind, and lastly just avoiding to strive for the joys of it. According to him, this is necessary in order to break the vicious circle of working for the

[122] Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī Ibn Muḥammad Ibn Ḥabīb al-Mawardī, *Adab al-Dunyā wa al-Dīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1987), 25.
[123] al-Māwardī, *Adab al-Dunyā wa al-Dīn*, 29.
[124] al-Māwardī, *Adab al-Dunyā wa al-Dīn*, 71.
[125] al-Māwardī, *Adab al-Dunyā wa al-Dīn*, 89.

transitory world, as he says the one who loves the worldly pleasures will want to achieve it and consequently will work to get it.[126]

This evident otherworldly, ascetic concern also appears in the subsequent part on the etiquettes of worldly conduct. It starts with the statement of the weakness and insufficiency of man in this world, which leads him to acknowledge God's supremacy. Because of his inadequacy, he needs both the guidance of God and his mind to fulfil his needs. Similar to the previous chapter, the general concern here is that one does not attach oneself too much to this world while seeking the satisfaction of one's needs. Māwardī recounts six main conditions that are necessary for the foundation of the worldly order (*salāḥ al-dunyā*): the established religion; a strong ruler; widespread justice, which creates mutual love in society and submission to authority; general security; economic well-being; and ample hope. The necessity of mutual love (*ulfah*) for the existence of a healthy society is emphasised.

The section in al-Māwardī's work that deals with personal conduct is entitled 'Etiquettes of the soul' (*adab al-nafs*) and focuses on individual virtues and qualities, which are treated under six separate sections: humility, good manners, decency, forbearance, truthfulness, and freedom from jealousy. Throughout the text, an ascetic ideal and societal concern are evident. The themes and arguments are supported by quotes from scripture, the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, and words of other eminent personalities in Islam, such as 'Ali, the Prophet 'Isa (Jesus), and some Sūfīs and philosophers.

As can be seen in the works of al-Muḥāsibī and al-Mawardī, the most common feature of their writings is their traditional sources. Both al-Muḥāsibī and Mawardī support their arguments with verses from the Qur'an, sayings of the Prophet and prominent personalities in Islam. Although Mawardī makes use of some of the ideas of the Mu'tazila and philosophers, and emphasises the importance of the mind

[126] al-Māwardī, *Adab al-Dunyā wa al-Dīn*, 92.

in achieving the ideal moral status, he does not seem to be interested in providing rational arguments regarding the basic inquiries of ethical philosophy, such as 'What is virtue' and 'How do we know it'. Their common concern is improving an individual's self-discipline to control his passion for worldly affairs. In both al-Muḥāsibī works and al-Mawardī's text, this otherworldly focus is evident. Although al-Mawardī provides guidance on everyday conduct, he emphasises the importance of acknowledging the supremacy of God and having an established religion for creating a harmonious society. These two works can be classified under the category of 'normative ethics' or 'divine command ethics'.

Theological Ethics

The *mutakallimūn* of the era, the interpreters of Islamic theology, were more interested in questions relating to the fields of meta-ethics, applied theological ethics, and normative ethics, which were inherited from the discussions of an earlier generation of Muslim theologians. The debate revolved around the discussion of three interconnected ethical concerns:

1- The definitions of Qur'anic attributes such as just, unjust, good, and evil as applied to God.

2- The scope and the limits of human free will and divine will.

3- The question of the human being's ability to gain knowledge of objective ethical norms.

In general, two major currents emerged related to the above issues: a rationalist approach initiated by the Qadarī and Mu'tazilī theologians of the eighth and ninth centuries, and a semi-rationalist approach initiated by the ex-Mu'tazilī *mutakallim* Abu'l-Hasan al-Ash'arī (d. 935). The main representative of the Mu'tazilite stance at the time of 'Amr was the renowned theologian 'Abd al-Jabbār, whose seventeen-volume *Mughnī fi Abwāb al-Tawhīd wa'l-'Adl* provides the fullest and most systematic treatment of the abovementioned ethical issues. The founder of the Ash'ari school, Abu al-Ḥasan al-Ash'ari (d. 936), proposed an alternative understanding and interpretation of the aforementioned

questions. Both stances will be described, addressing the prominent representatives of both schools in the Būyid Age under two separate sections: the rationalist approach and the semi-rationalist approach.

Rationalist approach

The first two issues in the previous list, which are related to the ethics of divine action, had been discussed from the first century of Islam mainly under the titles of the nature of faith, free will, and predestination. A typical *kalam summa* usually starts with discussions concerning the existence of God, His essence, and His attributes, and then turns to theodicy. In Mu'tazilī sources, the issue is treated under the title of 'On justice' (*fi al-'adl*), which is one of the five main tenets (*al-usūl al-khamsah*) of the Mu'tazilite school initiated by Abu al-Ḥudayl (d. between 840 and 850). The other four principles are the unity of God (*tawḥīd*), the promise and the threat (*al-wa'd wa l-wa'īd*), an intermediary position (*al-manzilah bayna al-manzilatayn*), and commanding the right and prohibiting the wrong (*amr bi al-ma'rūf nahy 'an al-munkar*); the promise and the threat can also be easily incorporated into discussions relating to God's justice and the problem of evil.[127] The Mu'tazilite account of God's justice is usually expressed in general terms, such as 'It is not possible for God to perform an evil act, or fail in an obligation'.[128] Then this statement is explained through a set of expositions, which lay the foundations of the doctrine.

Before moving on to explain the Mu'tazilite understanding of the attributes of justice and free will, it would be useful to give the definition of 'action' in their theology. In Mu'tazilite sources, an act (*fi'l*) is defined in relation to its agent (*fāil*). In his Mughnī, 'Abd al-Jabbār rejects the temporal determination of the act, which defines it as an event that is produced in time. He explains that the act should be defined in reference to the factor that indicates the purpose underlying it, which is envisaged by a wholly

[127] Ayman Shihadah, "Theories of Ethical Value in Kalam: A New Interpretation", in *Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology,* ed. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 384 – 385.
[128] Shihadah, *Theories of Ethical Value*, 385.

capable and willing agent. There is a correlation between the will of the agent and the act, as it is logically impossible that the action should come about in a determinate way unless the will has purposefully determined its occurrence. Therefore, the action that stems from the will of the agent takes a form corresponding to this will, which makes the agent responsible for his actions. An act of willing is known to human beings in an intuitive way just like an act of believing, desiring, or thinking, though there are significant differences between the will, the wish, and the desire.[129]

According to the Mu'tazilite school, both God and human beings are autonomous in their actions. If the will determines the action in every way, willing evil is evil on its own. The claim that God can will or perform evil can be rejected on the ground that it entails absurdity (*safah*) and futility (*'abath*) on His part. Therefore, God would neither will the evil done by others, nor initiate it Himself. Mu'tazilites were divided on whether God is capable of performing evil, but necessarily avoids from doing so out of His goodness, or whether He is categorically unable to perform evil acts.[130]

As mentioned previously, both God and human beings are accepted as autonomous agents of their own acts. Consequently, the acts of human beings are also considered to be produced by their capacity (*qudrah*) according to their independent volition (*irāda*).[131] This implies that the human being is the creator of his own actions, and this argument plays a role in the Mu'tazilite system of duties and obligations. This very statement, that the acts of human beings are the result of their autonomous volition and power, makes them responsible for their actions.

In terms of the origins of the knowledge of good and bad, Mu'tazilites held the view that this can be known intuitively by human beings. According to 'Abd al-Jabbār, even the function of the divine

[129] Fakhry, *Ethical Theories*, 39.
[130] Shihadah, *Theories of Ethical Value*, 385.
[131] Fakhry, *Ethical Theories*, 32.

revelation remains questionable unless it is validated by rational knowledge. He also mentions the aesthetic aspect of actions as indicators of the value of actions as good or bad, just as with a picture, which is known to be beautiful or ugly.[132] An important feature of this intuitive moral knowledge is that it is self-validating, as it does not require acquired or deductive evidence to support it.

Semi-rationalist Approach

In terms of the relationship between the agent and the action, the Ash'arī theologians were more sympathetic to the earlier deterministic (*Mujbirah*) exposition, which tended to ascribe all activity to God, ruling out the function of human volition. However, they were also concerned about the implication of it conflicting with God's justice. Therefore, they created their own position, entitled acquisition (*kasb* or *iktisāb*), which was well articulated by the tenth-century *mutakallim* al-Bāqillānī (d. 1013) in his work entitled *al-Tamḥīd*. Here, in the beginning of the section dealing with human capacity, entitled *istitā'ah*, he asks the question of whether a man is capable (*mustaṭī'*) of gaining (*kasb*) credit for his actions. He answers the question in the affirmative, and explains that there are two types of action that man performs: voluntary, such as standing or sitting, and involuntary, such as shaking or convulsing. A man would instinctively (*min nafsih*) know that these two types of action are different, not in terms of type, place, or will, but they are different from the perspective of power, which is created in him by God while he is performing a particular action.[133] Although this Ash'arite concept of acquiring (*iktisāb*) looks quite similar to the Mu'tazilite exposition of creating (*khalq*), there is a distinct difference between the two, as according to the former, the real creator of the action is always God, while it is the human agent in the latter. The agent in the Ash'arite view (*al-muktasib*) is distinguished from the creator (*al-khāliq*) as he only has a specific relation to an accident, which is thoroughly restricted by the conditions of time and

[132] Fakhry, *Ethical Theories*, 33.
[133] Fakhry, *Ethical Theories,* 53.

space, while the latter has a universal relationship to the object that is being created and He can become involved in the production of everything at all times.[134]

In terms of justice and injustice as applied to God's actions, Ash'arīs held the view that His actions and decisions are not subject to any transcendental norms or codes, other than the dictates of His own will. Al-Baghdadi (d. 1080) explains justice (*al-'adl*) as having two major connotations, one of which is primarily related to the type of action, and the second of which is the action's relationship to God's command. Conversely, injustice (*jawr*, *ẓulm*) indicates actions performed inappropriately or against divine command.[135] Accordingly, justice and injustice should be determined according to the relationship of the agent's actions to God and His commands, and these two terms have no applications to God's actions. What God commands or does is 'just' by definition and what He avoids doing or prohibits is 'unjust'.

The answer to the question of whether it is permissible for God to act in a ruthless way or demand from His servants the intolerable, without any reward or benefit accruing to them, is yes in theory. Al-Bāqillānī expresses this position very clearly in his *Tamḥīd*, stating that it would be just and permissible (*jāiz*) for Him as far as His wisdom goes.[136] His exposition is grounded in the thesis that the definition of good and bad is different when applied to God's actions than when applied to those of human beings. The aforementioned activities are bad simply because they are unapproved by the divine command. When the possibility of God's performing such acts is considered, Bāqillānī gives the example of committing a falsehood. He states God would not lie, not because this act is morally reprehensible,

[134] Fakhry, *Ethical Theories,* 54.
[135] Fakhry, *Ethical Theories,* 55.
[136] Fakhry, *Ethical Theories,* 56.

but because the attribute 'truthful' (*ṣādiq*) is one of the essential attributes of God and He will not therefore contradict this attribute.[137]

According to Ash'ari and his successors, the grounds for obligation are not reasoning or deduction as Mu'tazila contends, but God's command and prohibition, both in the domain of acting and of speaking. If there was no command or prohibition from God, the human agent would have not been liable to obligation.[138] Baghdadi states that the only grounds for moral value is revelation and the divine law (*shar'*). Goodness and badness are not generic or essential characteristics of the action, but the good is what is commanded by religious law and the bad is what is prohibited. Ash'arites also opposed the Mu'tazilite view that the goodness and badness of specific actions can be known intuitively. According to Ash'arites, divine revelation is not the only ground of right and wrong, but also the source from where the human agents can get such information.

Philosophical Ethics

The translation of Greek philosophical material into Arabic enabled the use of the philosophical tradition in various intellectual fields, including ethics. The philosophical theories of ethics reflect the influence of a wide range of Greek philosophical schools in moral theories produced by philosophers of the era from different religious backgrounds.

The earliest Arab philosophical writer, Abū Ya'qūb al-Kindī (d. 866), was the first to produce a number of ethical treatises reflecting a deep interest in Socratic thought. In his *Art of Dispelling Sorrows* (*al-Hīla fi Daf' al-Ahzān*), he deals with moral steadiness, which became a recurrent theme in the writings of later philosophical authors, including Miskawayh (d. 1030) and Ibn Sinā (d. 1037). This work starts by recounting the reasons for sorrow, which he describes as losing something that is cherished or failing to

[137] Fakhry, *Ethical Theories,* 57.
[138] Fakhry *Ethical Theories,* 49.

gain that which is pursued. Then he argues that it is not possible for any human being in this world of transiency and corruption to avoid the causes of sorrow. His formula for escaping from this unnecessary sorrow is cultivating the state of contentment (*qanā'ah*) and not clinging to the temporary possessions of the world.[139]

Ibn Sinā, the successor of al-Farabi, produced 276 treatises in total in various fields of linguistics, science, philosophy, theology, and medicine. Three of them can be considered contributions to the field of ethics: 'On the Science of Ethics' (*Fī 'Ilm al-Akhlāq*), 'Ethics and Psychological Affections' and a very short text entitled 'Piety and Sin' (*Fi'l – Birr wa'l-Ithm*).[140] His *'Ilm al-Akhlāq* starts with a description of the ways in which one can improve his soul. He mentions two major activities: one of which, studying the sciences that are listed in the books (*ihsā al-ulūm*), helps to develop his 'theoretical' nature, and the second of which is improving his 'practical' nature, by cultivating the virtues that lead him to purify his soul and be aware of and avoid vice. The main virtues are recounted as temperance, courage, and wisdom, which respectively correspond to the three powers of the soul: the sensual, the irascible, and the rational. When all of these three virtues, each of which has several subdivisions, have been perfectly achieved, the fourth virtue, justice, arises. There are various subdivisions connected to each of these cardinal virtues. Ibn Sinā is not entirely against pleasure seeking, but he restricts it to three conditions. He states that it is acceptable only in these three cases: restoring the bodily health of an individual, protecting the species, and dealing with affairs of state. In these three instances, the rational power should be in control and the agent should be conscious of its temporariness, otherwise these sessions would turn into self-gratification opportunities. Two examples are given in this context: drinking wine for medicinal purposes and listening to music (*sama'*) to improve the essence of the soul. In Ibn Sinā's

[139] Fakhry, *Ethical Theories*, 68.
[140] Fakhry, *Ethical Theories,* 85.

system, a virtuous man will not be negligent by performing his religious duties and following the command of the divine law.[141]

Ahmad ibn Muhammad Miskawayh (d. 1030) produced various works that concern ethical issues. His work entitled *Tahārah al-A'rāq*, which is better known by the title *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq*, is considered a major ethical theory in the history of Islamic philosophy. *Tahdhīb* starts with a statement that points out the author's twofold aim in writing the book: to attain the moral quality most convenient to performing right actions, without extra effort or trouble, and doing this methodologically. In order to achieve this target, one should know himself and his soul, and determine its type and the reason why it was created in man. By learning their purpose, power and habits, one can achieve high rank.

This prelude is followed by a statement about the soul's nature, which Miskawayh explains as being not of the body, its part or condition, neither accident nor temperament (*mīzaj*), but essence (*jawhar*), a self-subsisting entity, which is not subject to death or destruction. In order to support his argument that the soul is essentially different from the body, Miskawayh provides a lengthy explanation that considers various aspects of the soul and body and their functions.

In his description of virtue, psychological body-soul dualism adopted from Plato plays an important role. Miskawayh depicts virtue (*fadhīla* or *kamāl*) as the process of achieving involved in the activities associated with the soul, such as engaging in various modes of knowledge and cognition, and avoiding those acts that are convenient to the body. Virtue increases as one follows his soul and refrains from those bodily activities that prevent it from reaching its goal. In his classification of virtues, just like Ibn Sinā, Miskawayh follows the Platonic tripartite perception of the soul and associates a cardinal virtue to each power, which he later develops further into a list stemming from these cardinal virtues. The

[141] Fakhry, *Ethical Theories,* 86.

virtue of the rational soul is specified as wisdom, the irascible soul is courage, and the appetitive is temperance. When these three virtues are practiced perfectly, the fourth virtue arises, which again is justice.

Yahya ibn Adi (d. 974)'s *Tahdīb al-Akhlāq* appears as one of the earliest examples of the ethical writings produced by Christians living under Islamic rule. The content of the treatise is divided into five principle sessions: the introduction to the book, the powers of the soul that are necessary for the improvement of the moral qualities, on the good and bad moral qualities, performing the noble moral qualities, and man's acquisition of perfection. The first division of Yahyā's *Tahdīb* is devoted to discussing the nature of man, why it is necessary to cultivate good moral qualities, and how to distinguish good character traits from bad ones. Yahyā starts by clarifying the main difference between man and animals, which he states as having critical thinking and the ability to discriminate (*tamyīz*). When man refrains from following his passion (*hawā*) and is guided by his critical thinking, he will always seek to achieve the best qualities and highest positions in life. This statement is followed by the setting of a twofold purpose that man is liable to achieve: cultivating every virtuous characteristic and avoiding every vicious one, thus achieving the perfect purification of the soul. This double task can be achieved through the methodological discussion of the varieties of moral traits (*akhlāq*), their motives, types, and subdivisions, touching upon the issue of why some of them are approved and some are reprehensible, and explaining why the one who performs the former is appreciated while the one who commits the latter is blamed. After explaining the benefits of such an analysis, Yahyā turns to describing the nature of *akhlāq*, which he defines as "a state of a soul in which it is able to perform particular acts without deliberation". He explains that in some cases it occurs effortlessly, while in others it can be gained through training.

This initial session is followed by the discussion of the powers of the soul. Following the Platonic tradition, which he inherited from his master Farabī, Yahyā distinguishes three powers of the soul: the

appetitive, irascible, and rational. According to Yahyā, the moral qualities are classified according to these three faculties of the soul. In the third section, twenty virtues and twenty vices are mentioned and described in some detail. The virtues are chastity, contentment, self-control, forbearance, dignity, friendship, mercy, loyalty, honesty, keeping secrets, humility, cheerfulness, veracity, kind-heartedness, generosity, courage, competition, patience during difficulties, high ambition, and justice; the vices are debauchery, covetousness, impudence, vulgarity, frivolity, passionate love, austerity, deception, betrayal, disclosing secrets, arrogance, grumpiness, lying, malice, stinginess, pusillanimity, jealousy, fear when facing adversity, lack of ambition, and injustice. Following these two lists, he mentions four more qualities under the title of "On moral qualities that can be both virtues and vices". This list consists of love of high repute, love of grandeur, paying for praise, and detachment (*zuhd*).

In the following section, Yahya, after stating the necessity of the refinement of moral qualities, turns to describe the ways of achieving this goal through a threefold scheme, which focuses on the three powers of the soul. The first two stages focus on training the appetitive and irascible souls, while the last one explains the ways in which the rational soul can be strengthened and empowered. This particular scheme for the refinement of moral qualities reflects the importance of 'reason' in Yahya's ethical theory.

The last session in Yahyā's *Tahdīb* is devoted to descriptions of the various traits of a morally perfect man (*insān al-tām*), the good moral traits and the ways by which one can achieve this particular state. He depicts the perfect man as "the one whom virtue does not bypass, whom vice does not disfigure".[142] When a man trains himself to reach this perfect state, he would be attentive to his moral qualities, cautious about his blameworthy actions, careful about any intrusion of defects, and would perform every virtue. While he strives to maintain this condition, he enjoys the beauty of good moral qualities. Yahyā explains the ways of achieving this perfect state as studying the "true sciences", which

[142] Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī, *The Reformation of Morals,* 93.

he later explains as reading books on ethics, biographies, and politics, and acquiring knowledge in the fields of grammar and rhetoric. Another important activity that leads one to reach moral perfection is avoiding appetitive desires and pleasure seeking, which he explains as being extremely difficult, especially for rulers and leaders of a society. These initial statements are followed by some rules on generosity and friendliness, focusing on the material and societal aspects of human relations. At the end of the session, Yahyā gives a description of a "perfect ruler".

One of the major concerns of Yahya's *Tahdīb* is providing some guidance for the ruling class as well as the ordinary people. In his section on virtues and vices, Yahyā is careful to provide a twofold explanation of some of the moral qualities for rulers and ordinary people. For example, when explaining the virtue of generosity, he states that it is more appreciated when practised by the ruler of a society. In terms of *zuhd*, he says it is better for ordinary people while very difficult to perform for the ruling class. When explaining passionate love, he says it is less blameworthy for rulers while it is bad for the rest of society. This particular emphasis on the ruling class shows the Aristotelian character of Yahyā's text.

Perhaps the most important feature of *Tahdīb* is its interreligious voice. Reading the text without any information about its author, it is almost impossible to identify that it was written by a Christian. Indeed, the attribution of the text to Yahyā is a relatively new statement.[143] A remark made by the author when explaining the practise of *zuhd* clearly reveals its neutral tone, as in the text *zāhids* are described as attending mosques and churches. Considering the author's emphasis on the study of books and attending the scholarly gatherings (*majālis*), Sidney Griffith argues that its primary intended audience was the students of Yahyā ibn 'Adī; the text was produced for educational purposes. Remembering the interreligious character of Yahyā's intellectual circle, this sounds plausible.

[143] Samir Khalil Samir argued that the text was consistently attributed to Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī by the earlier Christian scribes. For more see Griffith, introduction, xxix.

As can be seen from the general characteristics of the philosophical ethical theories, they are framed by the philosophical writings of the ancient Greek authors. Their main interests are improving an individual's quality of life, the development of his character, and the cultivation of virtues. Some of them emphasise the importance of spirituality; Ibn Sinā mentions the importance of following religious commands as the trait of a virtuous man, and Yahya emphasises the practise of detachment from the world (*zuhd*), but these are not the central themes of the texts, as is the case in normative religious ethical writings. Neither of these authors are interested in improving an individual's relationship with God. Their main concern is the personal development and refinement of the character and improving the quality of an individual's worldly affairs and life.

Christian Writings on the Art of Dispelling Sorrows

The writings of three Christian authors from the ninth and early eleventh centuries, one a Copt and the other two members of the Church of the East, can be mentioned here as examples of Christian Arabic moral literature. They are Elias al-Jawharī, who was consecrated Metropolitan Bishop of Damascus on 15 July 893, Coptic Orthodox Bishop Severus ibn al-Muqaffa' (d. 987), and Elias bar Shīnāya of Nisibis. Sidney Griffith classifies these three authors as "Christian readers of al-Kindī", as they all wrote on the subject of the elimination of sorrow, modelling al-Kindī's work *The Art of Dispelling Sorrows.*

Elias al-Jawharī's text is in the form of a letter-treatise, similar to al-Kindī's work; this was a common genre among Syriac and Arabic writers of his time. It is entitled 'Consolation of Sorrows' (*Tasliyah al-Ahzān*). At the beginning of his work, Jawharī clarifies his aim as providing consolation for those who are being put to the test by God through demonstrations of reason and testimonies of scripture and exegesis. The text is composed in two distinguishable parts, the first of which contains

more rational arguments and excerpts from al-Kindī's work, without mentioning his name, and the second includes examples from the lives of Biblical personalities, recounted in order to promote the importance of patience and endurance during difficulties. According to al-Jawharī, the difficulties that Christians suffer are actually created by God for their own good. He compares these adversities to harsh treatment by physicians. The one who has the most severe spiritual illness would suffer most from these worldly hardships.

Al-Jawharī's letter is written to a Christian friend who, along with two others named Abu Ayyub and Abu al-Qāsim, had become involved in a scandal which led to them being sacked from their high positions. Levi Della Vida associates these two people with the two viziers Suleiman ibn al-Wahb Abū Ayyūb and 'Ubayd Allah Abū al-Qāsim, who had been arrested and deprived of their official position by al-Muwaffaq, who was the brother of Caliph al-Mu'tamid (870-892) in the year 878-79. According to Levi Della Vida, these officials were members of the Church of the East who had insincerely converted to Islam in order to attain positions of power.[144]

The Coptic author Severus ibn Muqaffa' is another Christian who produced a treatise that falls under the category of 'consolation literature', entitled *Tibb al-Ghamm wa Shifā' al-Huzn*, 'Medicine of Grief and Remedy of Melancholy'. The work is presented in four sections dealing with separate issues, and aims to provide a remedy for grief. In the first division, very similar to al-Kindī's description, Severus depicts sadness (*al-huzn*) as an illness originating from Adam's sin. In the second part, he moves on to describe sorrow as the pain that occurs following the loss of something or someone loved. This particular explanation is attributed to the "teachers of the church" in the text, although it is almost identical to al-Kindī's definition. Griffith suggests that Severus cites al-Kindī's text from memory, which makes him confuse it with the teachings of church fathers. The remaining chapters of the treatise offer a twofold

[144] Griffith, *The Muslim Philosopher*, 116.

cure for sadness, the first part of which is rational and the second of which is spiritual. In the third chapter, he promotes the philosophical life as the antidote to sorrow, quoting from the philosophical writings of the desert fathers, while the final chapter is devoted to examples from the lives of Biblical personalities who experienced tribulations in their lives.

One of the most prolific authors of the eleventh century, Metropolitan Bishop Elias of Nisibis, also composed a work dealing with dispelling sorrow, entitled *Daf' al-Hamm*, 'Dissipation of Sorrow'. His work consists of twelve chapters dedicated to the vizier Abu al-Qāsim al-Maghribī with whom he had been in conversation in the sessions reported in his renowned *Kitāb al-Majālīs*. In the introduction to the work, he explains that the book was written at the request of the vizier in order to provide a rational solution for human anxieties. Here, he also admits his indebtedness to al-Kindī's work as an inspirational source. He distinguishes two types of anxiety, general and specific, and two kinds of virtue, rational and religious. The religious virtues are: piety, gratitude, chastity, humility, mercy, and repentance. The rational virtues are sensible reaction, the habit of taking advice, good manners, liberality, fairness, and mercy. He explains that he presents his work in three main parts. In the first part, he describes the virtues and vices in detail, in the second part he gives anecdotes and tales from Persian, Muslim, and Biblical sages that help motivate readers to gain similar qualities, and in the third part he provides strategies from the works of eminent people such as Al-Kindī and Galen for the attainment of virtue.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the age of 'Amr ibn Matta was a very fertile period of intellectual history in terms of the development of various branches of ethical writings. Although it is difficult to distinguish clear-cut boundaries between different ethical theories at this time, three major stances can be distinguished as potential sources for 'Amr ibn Matta: normative religious writings; theological ethical writings, which are

analytical in character and deal with the major questions of ethical philosophy; and philosophical writings, which are grounded in the Greek philosophical tradition. They all show different characteristics in terms of their sources, methodologies, and main concerns. Certainly, the classification of these ethical currents is a modern interpretation of the moral writings of this age; they were probably not thinking of these specific boundaries when they produced their writings. But they lived in this intellectual environment and worked within this framework, which shaped their approach. The writings of the three Christian authors on the 'art of dispelling sorrows' is a good example of how they adjusted al-Kindī's philosophical work to Christian context by considering their social and intellectual realities.

CHAPTER III: KITĀB AL-MAJDAL AND ITS AUTHOR

Kitāb al-Majdal is one of the most creative examples of Christian Arabic writings of the Būyid Age, which made an original contribution to the intellectual corpus of its own time. Compared to earlier and other contemporary writings of Arabophone Christians, it is vast in terms of its size, approximately one thousand pages, and genuine in its language and style. The aim of this chapter is to introduce the content, structure, and main features of *Kitāb al-Majdal*, and determine its connection with past Syriac literature and engagement with the surrounding Arabo-Islamic milieu in which it was produced.

For this purpose, before moving to evaluate *Kitāb al-Majdal* in its historical context, it is vital to establish the date of the work as there are two major theories on the date and the authorship of *Kitāb al-Majdal*. In the first section of this chapter, these two theories will be explained and a subsequent evaluation will be provided. In the second section, the main features of the language and structure of the work will be presented. Following the introduction, the chapter will focus on the first chapter of *Kitāb al-*

Majdal, entitled *Fātiḥa al-Bayān* ('the opening exposition'), in which the author discusses faith-related issues; the theological approach and the concerns of the author will be determined. Lastly, considering the structure, content, and main features of *Kitāb al-Majdal*, and the main arguments and theological concerns of the author, the genre of the work will be discussed and the questions of how he uses the traditional Syriac material and engages with the surrounding Islamic culture will be addressed.

Authorship and Date of *Kitāb al-Majdal*

In his ecclesiastical work *Misbah al-Zulma,* the fourteenth century Coptic author Abū al-Barakāt devotes a lengthy entry to the book entitled *Kitāb al-Majdal li al-Istibṣār wa al-Jadal.* Abū al-Barakāt attributes the book to ʿAmr ibn Mattā Tīrhānī from Iraq, and gives a detailed description of the content of each chapter.[145] His entry is one of the first references to *Kitāb al-Majdal* in the history. Although the section in *Miṣbāḥ al-Ẓulma* contains detailed information about the content of *Kitāb al-Majdal*, it does not provide any data about the date and the author of the book, except his name and the location. Therefore, from the eigteenth century onwards, scholars who have been working on the manuscripts of *Kitāb al-Majdal* had to make certain assumptions about the date and the author of the work. Since these assumptions are solely based on examination of the copies of the manuscripts, the suppositions vary and the issue became more complicated as the number of discovered manuscripts grew. Today, there are two different theories about the authorship and the date of *Kitāb al-Majdal*.

The first theory, which can be called the 'traditional theory', was first presented by the eighteenth century scholar Assemani in his *Bibliotheca Orientalis* and was followed and developed by the

[145] Shams al-Riʾāsa Abū l-Barakāt ibn Kabar, *Misbāḥ al-ẓulma fī īḍāḥ al-khidma*, ed. Samir Khalil Samir (Cairo: Maktabat al-Karuz, 1971-1998), Vol. I, 297-300.

contributions of Henry Gismondi and Gustav Westphal.[146] In the twentieth century, Georg Graf epitomised the complete form of the traditional theory in his *Geschichte der Christlichen Arabischen Literatur*.[147] According to the traditional view, *Kitāb al-Majdal* was written by the Nestorian author Mārī ibn Sulaiman who lived in the twelfth century.

Recently, Swedish scholar Bo Holmberg proposed another theory about the authorship and the date of *Kitāb al-Majdal*. In his article entitled *Reconsideration of Kitāb al-Majdal*, Holmberg argues that the book was produced around the late tenth century by 'Amr ibn Mattā from Iraq.

This section aims to provide the summary and evaluation of the two main theories about the authorship and the date of the work.

Traditional Theory

The traditional theory about the authorship and the date of *Kitāb al-Majdal*, which was presented in *GCAL* by Georg Graf, shows a gradual development over the course of time by the contributions of Assemani, Henry Gismondi, and Gustav Westphal. It appears that Graf's presentation offers a condensed synopsis of the expositions made by earlier authors. Therefore, chronologically assessing the contributions of each author to the process of the formation of the theory would be helpful to understand Graf's point clearly.

In his *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, the eighteenth-century scholar Assemani attributes *Kitāb al-Majdal* to the twelfth century Nestorian author Mārī ibn Suleiman.[148] His proposition relies on his examination

[146] Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, Vol. III, 554-555; Amri et Slibae, *De Patriarchis Nestorianorum*, V; Westphal, *Untersuchungen,* 1-16.
[147] Georg Graf, *Geschichte der Christlichen Arabischen Literatur* (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1947) Vol. 3., 200.
[148] Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, Vol. III, 554-555.

of two manuscripts held in the Vatican Library, Vat. Ar. 108 and Vat. Ar. 109.[149] He attributes *Kitāb al-Majdal* to Mārī on the basis of two instances at the end of the historical part in Chapter Five, where Mārī ibn Suleiman expresses himself as the first person.[150]

Actually, the position in *Bibliotheca Orientalis* is contrary to Abū al-Barakāt's earlier statement, which reports 'Amr ibn Mattā as the author of the work, and Assemani was also aware of the contradiction. In his entry on 'Amr ibn Mattā, he epitomises Abū al-Barakāt's point about the authorship of *Kitāb al-Majdal* and states that it is not possible to attribute the same work to both Mārī ibn Sulaiman and 'Amr ibn Mattā. Therefore, in order to resolve the issue, he connects 'Amr ibn Mattā with another manuscript held in the Vatican Library, Vat. Ar. 110, which is a five-chapter work written on the same pattern of *Kitāb al-Majdal*. Although Vat. Ar. 110 bears the name of Mārī ibn Sulaiman as the author, Assemani thought that the statement of authorship in the manuscript is not correct. Relying on the numerous corrections to the script that were written in the same hand as the text itself, he also argues that Vat. Ar. 110 is the work of 'Amr ibn Mattā and he dates it to the fourteenth century. Assemani's assumption about the date of the manuscript is based on a passage at the end of the historical section on the Nestorian patriarchs, which shows that the author of the book was alive 650 years after the death of Patriarch Hnānisho (d. 699). Therefore, Assemani assumes that the text must have been written after 1349.[151]

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Henry Gismondi made a contribution to Assemani's theory when he prepared an edition of the section on the Nestorian patriarchs in the fifth chapter of *Kitāb al-Majdal*. Besides the earlier manuscripts, which were examined by Assemani, Gismondi had

[149] Vat. Ar. 108 is from the fifteenth century and contains the first four chapters of *Kitāb al-Majdal*. Vat. Ar. 109 is from the thirteenth century and contains the rest of the work.
[150] Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, Vol. III, 580-588.
[151] Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, Vol. III, 580-588.

access to three additional copies, Arabe 190, Vat. Neof. 54, and Vat. Borg. 198. Among these, Arabe 190 is a complete work from the thirteenth century, which contains the seven-chapter *Kitāb al-Majdal*. Vat. Neof. 54 and Vat. Borg. 198 are copies of the five-chapter work that had been attributed to ʻAmr ibn Mattā in *Bibliotheca Orientalis*. Although Vat. Borg. 198 is incomplete at the beginning and at the end and does not contain any information about the date and the author of the work, Vat. Neof. 54 contains the complete text, that was entitled *Aṣfār al-Asrār* and it also reveals the author's name and when exactly he started writing the work. According to the testimony of the manuscript, a certain priest called Ṣalībā ibn Yūḥannā started writing the book in 1332. Relying on the evidence on Vat. Neof. 54, Henry Gismondi attributes the five-chapter work entitled *Aṣfār al-Asrār* to Ṣalībā ibn Yūḥannā and dates it to the fourteenth century. Following Assemani's earlier proposition, he also attributes the seven-chapter *Kitāb al-Majdal* to Mārī ibn Suleiman.[152]

Shortly after this, Gustav Westphal made another contribution to the development of the traditional theory. In his study on Gismondi's edition of the historical part of *Kitāb al-Majdal*, he followed Assemani's earlier statement and attributed the seven-chapter *Kitāb al-Majdal* to Mārī ibn Suleiman and the five-chapter work *Aṣfār al-Asrār* to ʻAmr ibn Mattā. What was new in Westphal's position is that he considered Ṣalībā ibn Yūḥannā to be a plagiarist. He attributed Vat. Ar. 110 to ʻAmr ibn Mattā and Vat. Neof. 54 to Ṣalībā ibn Yūḥannā, and argued that *Aṣfār al-Asrār* was first written by ʻAmr ibn Mattā in the fourteenth century and Ṣalībā's text, which is preserved in Vat. Neof. 54 represents a subsequent revision of Vat. Ar. 110. Since ʻAmr ibn Mattā's literary activity was after 1349, he argues that Ṣalībā was antedating his text deliberately to 1332.[153]

[152] Amri et Slibae, *De Patriarchis Nestorianorum*, V.
[153] Westphal, *Untersuchungen,* 1-16.

As can be seen, the traditional theory about the authorship and the date of *Kitāb al-Majdal* evolved over time with the contribution of different scholars as new manuscripts were discovered. Most recently, Georg Graf presents a total summary of the expositions made by earlier authors about the date and authorship of *Kitāb al-Majdal*. According to *Geschichte der Christlichen Arabischen Literatur*, Mārī ibn Suleiman wrote a seven-chapter book entitled *Kitāb al-Majdal* in the middle of the twelfth century.[154] Two hundred years later, 'Amr ibn Mattā is supposed to have written another book on the same pattern as *Kitāb al-Majdal* but divided into five chapters instead of seven. The whole work has been preserved through plagiarism by Ṣalībā ibn Yūḥannā, who was a contemporary of 'Amr ibn Mattā from Mosul. Ṣalībā made minor alterations and additions to 'Amr's work and entitled it *Aṣfār al-Asrār*. In order to strengthen his claim, Ṣalībā purposely antedated the book to 1332.[155]

Holmberg's Theory

In his article entitled *Reconsideration of Kitāb al-Magdal*, Bo Holmberg proposes another theory about the authorship and the date of the *Kitāb al-Majdal*. According to him, the author of the *Kitāb al-Majdal* was 'Amr ibn Mattā, as this was already reported seven centuries ago in Abū al-Barakāt's *Miṣbāḥ al-Ẓulma*, and he actually lived and worked, not in the fourteenth century, but at the end of the tenth or the beginning of the eleventh century.

In his article, Holmberg first expresses how his scepticism about the traditional theory grew when he started consulting the manuscripts containing both the seven-chapter *Kitāb al-Majdal* and the five-chapter *Aṣfār al-Asrār* in order to prepare an edition of some parts of *Kitāb al-Majdal*. He states that there is a lack of harmony between the attributions of the texts to Mārī, 'Amr, and Ṣalībā, made by Graf,

[154] Graf, *Geschichte der* Christlichen, 200.
[155] Graf, *Geschichte der Christlichen,* 216-217.

and attributions found in the manuscripts themselves. He points out that all the manuscripts that contain *Kitāb al-Majdal* are either anonymous or attributed to ʻAmr ibn Mattā. On the other hand, the name of Mārī ibn Suleiman only appears in two manuscripts, Vat. 110 and Vat. 687, which contain the five-chapter *Aṣfār al-Asrār* held in the Vatican Library. Clearly, the name of Mārī ibn Suleiman appears connected to the five-chapter *Aṣfār al-Asrār* instead of *Kitāb al-Majdal*. Therefore, Holmberg argues that the seven-chapter work is very unlikely to have been written by Mārī ibn Suleiman according to the attributions found in the manuscripts. He strengthens his argument with the testimony of earlier medieval authors who mentioned ʻAmr ibn Mattā as the author of *Kitāb al-Majdal*. He states that apart from Abū al-Barakāt, Abdīshū, who died in 1318, and Mu'taman ibn al-ʻAssāl, who wrote his *Majmūʻ al-Uṣūl al-Dīn* in the second half of the thirteenth century, also attribute *Kitāb al-Majdal* to ʻAmr ibn Mattā.[156]

The testimony of these earlier authors shows that the work had been associated with ʻAmr ibn Mattā before the fourteenth century. This raises the issue of the real date of the work. Based on his close examination of the first section of the second chapter in *Kitāb al-Majdal*, Holmberg states that the author makes some verbatim quotations from late tenth-century authors such as Yaḥya ibn ʻAdī and Ibn Zur'a (d. 1008), calling them "contemporaries". Moreover, the language of the text also shows that the author of *Kitāb al-Majdal* used certain Arabic words for some Syriac terms, which were largely in use before the time of Ibn al-Ṭayyib, who died in 1043. When all the evidence is considered, Holmberg argues, it is very unlikely that the work was composed by Mārī ibn Suleiman, who lived and worked in the twelfth century. According to Holmberg, there is no reason not to assume that *Kitāb al-Majdal* was written by ʻAmr ibn Mattā, who lived and worked around the end of the tenth or the beginning of the

[156] Holmberg, "A Reconsideration of the Kitāb al-Magdal," 261.

eleventh century. He argues Mārī can only be considered the continuator of the historical section on the Nestorian patriarchs in chapter five, where his name appears.[157]

Evaluation of Theories

In terms of the authorship of the book, Holmberg's thesis appears more likely to be accurate for two reasons. First of all, the manuscripts that contain the whole or parts of the seven-chapter *Kitāb al-Majdal* appear to be either anonymous or attributed to 'Amr ibn Mattā. Secondly, 'Amr's name was already mentioned as the author of *Kitāb al-Majdal* by three earlier scholars: Abū al-Barakāt and Abdīshū from the fourteenth century, and Mu'taman ibn al-'Assāl from the thirteenth century. There is no evidence that associates the name of Mārī ibn Suleiman with *Kitāb al-Majdal*, except his own statement at the end of the historical section on the Nestorian patriarchs in chapter five. However, as Holmberg states, the historical part is only a section within the seven chapters of the book and it is very likely that Mārī was just the continuator of the historical chronicle where his name appears, not the author of the entire work.[158]

As mentioned earlier, Holmberg also has strong textual and linguistic evidence to date *Kitāb al-Majdal* to the late tenth century. Indeed, he was not the first author to date the work to the beginning of the second Christian millennium. In her unpublished PhD thesis on *Kitāb al-Majdal*, Bénédicte Landron states that the author of *Kitāb al-Majdal* talks about the faith having been spread among the nations "since about a thousand years", which would suggest that the work was composed around the beginning of the eleventh century.[159] In her article entitled 'La vie Monastique Selon l'encyclopédie Syrienne-orientale du Majdal' in *Christianisme Oriental: Kérygme et Histoire,* Landron reiterates this statement,

[157] Holmberg, "A Reconsideration of the Kitāb al- Magdal," 261-264.
[158] Holmberg, "A Reconsideration of the Kitāb al- Magdal," 264-265.
[159] Landron, *Apologétique, Polémique et Attitudes*, 171.

pointing out the word for word quotations from Yaḥyā ibn ʻAdī's work, whom the author of *Kitāb al-Majdal* addresses as a "man of our time".[160]

Apart from Holmberg's and Landron's statements, there is also additional evidence that proves that ʻAmr ibn Mattā lived and worked before the fourteenth century. For example, at the beginning of Arabe 190, which is one of the earliest copies of *Kitāb al-Majdal* from the thirteenth century, ʻAmr ibn Mattā's name appears as the author of the book.[161]

Another detail to mention here, which suggests that *Kitāb al-Majdal* was associated with ʻAmr ibn Mattā before the fourteenth century, comes in Abū al-Barakāt's entry. As mentioned earlier, Abū al-Barakāt gives detailed information about *Kitāb al-Majdal* and its content in his *Miṣbāḥ al-Ẓulma*. He describes every section of each chapter in *Kitāb al-Majdal* elaborately, and this very familiarity suggests that he had an opportunity to consult the work. Samir Khalil Samir, who was the editor of *Miṣbāḥ al-Ẓulma* expresses his confusion in a footnote, stating that since Abū al-Barakāt and ʻAmr ibn Mattā are contemporaries, it is curious how the work reached that quickly from Iraq, where ʻAmr lived, to Egypt, where Abū al-Barakāt lived.[162] Obviously, one of the early copies of *Kitāb al-Majdal*, bearing ʻAmr ibn Mattā's name as the author, must have been produced and circulating in the area before the time of Abū al-Barakāt in the fourteenth century. Although these two examples do not indicate the exact date of the *Kitāb al-Majdal*, they both show that ʻAmr ibn Mattā's name was associated with the *Kitāb al-Majdal* before the 14th century.

To conclude, it appears that Holmberg's theory is based on evidence from the manuscripts, close study of the text, and the testimony of earlier sources, whereas the traditional theory presented by Graf

[160] Landron, *La vie Monastique,* 159.
[161] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 1r
[162] Abū al-Barakāt, *Misbāḥ al-Zulma*, Vol. I, 298.

only relies on a limited number of manuscripts and had been gradually developed by the contributions of different scholars over time. The theory seems to be built upon Assemani's first proposition, which was only based on the three manuscripts held in the Vatican Library. Perhaps the biggest problem with the development of the traditional theory is that subsequent authors stuck to the statement of Assemani about the authorship of the book, without questioning or revising it with the information they obtained afterwards. Moreover, compared to Holmberg's study, the traditional theory relies upon an extremely limited number of manuscripts. Graf's theory relies on only six manuscripts in total, while Holmberg has more than 20 manuscripts at his disposal, containing different sections of the work.[163] When both theories are compared, it appears that, probably because of its gradual development through the contributions of different scholars, the traditional theory contains many inconsistencies while Holmberg's theory has strong evidential support and is more likely to be accurate. Currently, Holmberg's theory is widely accepted by scholars working in the field of the history of Christianity. *Kitāb al-Majdal* is classified in the second volume of the encyclopaedic *Bibliography of Christian-Muslim Relations*, published by Brill, which covers the time period between 900 and 1050. The Russian scholar Nikolai Sleznyov recently provided an edition and study of the first section of the seven-chapter *Kitāb al-Majdal* which focuses on the abolition of circumcision and, following Holmberg's proposition, he dates *Kitāb al-Majdal* to the late tenth-early eleventh centuries.

Who is 'Amr ibn Matta?

As is the case with numerous Christian authors of this period, not much is known about the biography of 'Amr ibn Mattā beyond what can be gathered from his own explanations in *Kitāb al-Majdal*. 'Amr ibn Matta is classified under the title of "Nestorians of the East and Others" in Abū al-Barakāt's entry in *Miṣbāḥ al-Ẓulma* and mentioned right after the ninth century Nestorian author 'Ammār al-Baṣrī. The only

[163] For the list of manuscripts, see Holmberg, "A Reconsideration of the Kitāb al- Magdal," 269-273.

information that Abū al-Barakāt's entry provides about the author is his *nisbah*, indicating his original hometown, which is "Tirhānī".

Ṭirhān was a diocese of the Church of the East attested between the sixth and the fourteenth centuries. It was included in the metropolitan province of Beth Garmai, which covered the region around the city of Kirkuk in modern day Iraq. Beth Garmai was established at the synod of Isaac at the beginning of the fifth century. The Diocese of Ṭirhān was situated in the land between the Jabal Ḥamrīn, known as the mountain of Uruk to Nestorians, and the Tigris and Diyālá rivers, stretching down to the southwest of the Beth Garmai region. The area was surrounded by many prominent monastic and ecclesiastical centres. The town of Takrīt, from where influential theologian Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī hailed, was situated nearby, on the right bank of the Tigris.[164] The celebrated local monasteries Beth Qoqa and Beth 'Abe are only few monasteries to mention which played major roles in Syriac monasticism. The area was approximately 150 miles away from Baghdad, which was then one of the most important cultural and intellectual centres of the Islamic caliphate.

As can one easily see, the area from which 'Amr originated and probably spent the early years of his life was surrounded by various influential religious centres and libraries, which were likely to be accessible to him. Although Abū al-Barakāt mentions 'Amr as a member of the Church of the East coming from Tirhān, he does not provide any information about his education and possible tutors. In the introduction to *Kitāb al-Majdal*, 'Amr gives some information about his spiritual journey, stating that he had spent most of his life following his desires, neglecting learning about or practising his religion. He states that he enjoyed the sweetness of the immediate pleasures of the world until at some point in his life, he realised that the time of his death was getting close, which scared him, and the pursuit of desires

[164] David Wilmshurst, *The Ecclesiastical Organisation of the Church of the East, 1318-1913* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 127, 175.

was becoming difficult. Then he acknowledged the damage of his sins and the deceit of Satan. Recognising his misdeeds, he turned to God and sought repentance.[165] According to his own testimony, following this 'awakening', he repented and started to learn about and practise his religion. *Kitāb al-Majdal* is the product of this process, as he explains:

> With my shortcomings on the selection and my imperfection on the choice, I intended to write *Kitāb al-Mukhtaṣar* [The Compendious Book], which is lighter in weight on the heart and the mind, removes grief and eliminates wrath. It is constructed according to the truths and necessities in order to achieve its aim in the reader, polish the heart and sharpen the mind, increase the skills of the talented and guide the confused one. It deals with the church wisdom and guidance on the divine law [*rusūm al-sharī'ah*]. With success, I named it *Kitāb al-Majdal* [The Book of the Tower], which contains the beauty of the faith and arguments of justification [*jadal*].[166]

He does not reveal at what age he decided to turn away from his rather sinful habits and follow a pious life. From his own explanations, the process that caused him to make a dramatic change to his life almost sounds like a modern-day midlife crisis, as he sees death approaching and the impulse to change occurs, without any apparent external factor. Following this self-evaluation, and the process of learning and dedicating himself to a spiritual way of life, he lived long enough to finish the voluminous *Kitāb al-Majdal*, which is his only known work.

Although we do not have any information about the religious education of 'Amr, it is clear that he originated from and probably lived in close proximity to the intellectual and religious centres of Medieval Iraq. Considering the features of *Kitāb al-Majdal*, it can be said that he was bilingual and had

[165] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 4r – v.
[166] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 7v.

good command of both the Syriac and Arabic languages. His use of Islamic and Syriac traditional sources, which will be addressed in various sections of this thesis, suggests that he was well aware of both the surrounding Islamic culture and Syriac literature.

Between the Syriac Tradition and Islamic Milieu: *Kitāb al-Majdal*, Content, Structure, and Genre

Content

The original title of the work is *Kitāb al-Majdal li al-Istibṣār wa al-Jadal*. The title can be translated into English in two different ways. 'The Book of the Tower for Observation and Battle' would be a more literal translation, which fits into the general style and the structure of the work. When the secondary meanings of the words *jadal* and *istibṣār* are considered, 'The Book of the Tower for Comprehension and Discussion' would be an alternative translation, which is in line with the purpose and the content of the book. The Arabic word *jadal*, which can be rendered as both 'battle' and 'discussion or argument' indicate the apologetic benefit which the text is intended to have.[167] The word *istibṣār*, which comes from the root *b-ṣ-r* literally means 'to see' or 'to understand'. The term *baṣīrah*, derived from the same stem, is used especially by Sufis to express deep knowledge and perception of the reality of the world and the divine.[168] Therefore, *al-istibṣār* in the title can be translated into English both as 'vision' or 'observation', and 'perception' or 'comprehension'.

Kitāb al-Majdal contains various subjects ranging from Christian doctrines and practices to the abolishment of Old Testament law. As mentioned earlier, the work falls into seven chapters and thirty subsections dealing with separate topics.

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[167] Mark Swanson, *Christian-Muslim Relations 600 – 1500*, s.v. "Kitāb al-Majdal li-l-istibṣār wa-l-jadal." (Leiden: Brill, 2010), accessed 15 November 2013. http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/christian-muslim-relations-i/kitab-al-majdal-li-l-istibsar-wa-l-jadal-COM_25086

[168] Nicolaas H. Biegman, *Living Sufism: Rituals in the Middle East and the Balkans* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2009), 25.

The first chapter is entitled *al-Bayān*, ('the exposition' or 'the statement') and consists of one section entitled *fātiḥah al-bayān*, the opening of the statement. It starts with a discussion of the perfection and order of creation, which is followed by an argument for the existence of a creator. After proving God's existence, the author moves on to discussing His features and relationship with human beings. The questions of religious responsibility, human capacity, and free will are issues that are addressed in this section. Following these discussions, the section concludes with a description of faith (*al-īmān*) and its benefits. The main features and various aspects of faith are the central concerns of this chapter.

The second chapter is called *al-Bunyān*, ('the buildings') and divided into three sections entitled *al-Dhurwa* ('the summit'), *al-Asās* ('the foundation') and *al-Tashyīd* ('the construction'). This division deals with the issues of the unity and nature of God and the doctrines of incarnation and the Trinity.

The ensuing chapter, which is entitled *al-Arkān* ('the pillars') deals with Christian sacraments and symbols and is split into four subsections, entitled 'The honour of purification and baptism with water and the Holy Spirit', 'The splendour of Holy Eucharist with bread and wine in the Holy places for health, salvation and repentance', 'The witness of the Gospels to divinity, humanity, divine orders and examples', 'The nobility of the form of the Holy, glorious cross on which the Messiah was crucified in Jerusalem'. Each subsection discusses the issues specified in its title.

The fourth chapter is the ethical part of the work, which is the main focus of this thesis. It is called *al-Masābih* ('the lamps' or 'the candles') and is made up of seven subsections, entitled *al-Taqwā* ('fear' or 'piety'), *al-Maḥabbah* ('love'), *al-Ṣalāt* ('prayer'), *al-Ṣawm* ('fasting'), *al-Raḥmah* ('mercy'), *al-Tawādhu'* ('humility') and *al-Tahārah* ('purity'). A detailed description and examination of this chapter will be provided in the third chapter of this thesis.

The following chapter is called *al-ʿAmad* (‘the buttresses’) and consists of seven subsections dealing with the different time periods from creation up to the author’s own time. The seven subdivisions of this chapter are entitled as follows, and deal with the issues stated in their titles: ‘The acknowledgement of the creation of the universe and the start of humankind from the father Adam’, ‘The acceptance of resurrection and the day of judgement and the recognition of the provision of reward and punishment’, ‘The investigation of the prophets, starting with Isaac the sacrificed, until the appearance of Jesus the Messiah’, ‘The true evidence and witnesses with strong proofs on the coming of the Messiah’, ‘Acquisition of the obligations, laws, regulations, and orders from the prophets, saints, fathers, and their followers’, ‘The gatherings [councils] of the kings and fathers on approving the earlier [sources or decisions] and rejecting the later additions and novelties of the religion’, ‘The sum of the Christian sources among ancient and contemporary writings which became the salvation of the creatures’. The chapter contains information on how the Christian faith and its practices took shape throughout history.

The last two chapters contain dense theological discussions. In chapter six, which is entitled *al-Jadāwil* (‘the canals’) the author discusses certain religious practices. The sections are entitled as follows: ‘Praying to the exalted God turning towards the East as the contemporary practice [New Testament commandment] and the act of the earlier creatures’, ‘The proof of the magnificence of Sunday and showing the evidence of its superiority in the past and the present’, ‘The necessity of wearing a belt, lighting candles and incense, and psalming’, and ‘The consciousness of the acceptance of repentance and the acknowledgement of the sins, replacing them with the achievement of closeness’.

The last chapter of the book is called *al-Ḥadāiq* (‘the gardens’) and it contains four sections dealing with Christian freedom from Mosaic law, and discussing the character of this liberty. The divisions deal with the issues elucidated in their titles, as follows: ‘The abandonment of circumcision and

avoiding it with the virtue of religion', 'Dissolution of The New [Testament] concerning work on the day of the Sabbath and the former commandment on abstaining from it', 'Abandoning what was [previously] prescribed for food and the necessity of freeing everyone from it', and 'Condemning the Jews for what they innovated and showing their falsehood in what they claim'.

As can be seen from the summary of the book, it covers a wide range of topics concerning theological, doctrinal, historical, and ethical issues of Christian faith. There is hardly ever a connection between the different chapters. They are organised under separate sections, dealing with the issues stated in their titles. Each chapter in the text focuses on a certain subject, and each subsection in these chapters contributes to the discussion or explanation of the subject in some way.

Style and Language

Although, the chapters are different in terms of content, as they each focus on separate issues, there are common features that are observable throughout the whole text. Perhaps the most striking feature of *Kitāb al-Majdal* is its language. The whole work is composed in rhyming prose (*saj'*). Throughout *Kitāb al-Majdal*, the text is mostly rhyming and also contains various rhetorical figures. Another important detail about the language of the text is the widespread use of Qur'anic and Islamic terms throughout the text. These specific features of the language will be discussed in more detail in future sections of this thesis.

Another significant feature, which should be mentioned here, is the number symbolism that appears in the structure of the *Kitāb al-Majdal*. Chapters and sections in *Kitāb* are divided according to a certain numerical order connected to the content of each part. All the numbers that are employed to divide the sections of the work have Biblical significance. To start with, the whole work is divided into

seven chapters; the number seven is a significant number in Christianity, which represents spiritual perfection and is one of the most frequently mentioned numbers in the Bible.[169]

The first chapter deals with the different aspects of faith and consists of a single section, possibly to reveal the uniqueness of the Christian faith. The ensuing chapter, which focuses on the explanation of the doctrines of Trinity and Incarnation, has three subsections, which is relevant to its content. Although the first two sections deal with issues relating to the unity of God, the nature of Jesus, and incarnation, the main interest of this chapter is an affirmation of the Trinity, as it is discussed in detail both in both the first section and the last section.

The third chapter, which deals with Christian sacraments, symbols, and scripture, consists of four sections. The number four has great significance in the Bible, connected to creation. For example, the fourth day was the day on which the creation of the material universe was completed.[170] Perhaps the most immediate significance of the number four in Christianity, which reflects some of the content of this chapter, is the number of Gospels in the New Testament. The third section of this chapter focuses on the Gospels.

The fourth chapter of *Kitāb al-Majdal* deals with cultivating good character, and has seven subsections. The number seven appears here again, most probably because of its connection with spiritual perfection.

The fifth chapter mostly focuses on the historical development of Christianity and again has seven divisions. This chapter starts with a section that focuses on the initial stages of the creation of the universe and the spread of humankind from Adam. This particular start and the historical focus of this

[169] Ethelbert W. Bullinger, *Number in Scripture: Its Supernatural Design and Spiritual Significance* (Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1967), 158.
[170] Genesis 1:14 - 17

chapter leads one to think that the author was possibly inspired by the seven days of creation when dividing this chapter into seven sections.

The last two chapters focus on theological investigations and certain practices and beliefs and are, similar to the third chapter, divided into four subsections each.

Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of this number symbolism appears when all the subsections are added together. There are thirty subsections in total in the entire *Kitāb al-Majdal*, which are divided into seven chapters as a whole. Thirty is another number that has religious value, signifying the age of Jesus when he started his ministry.[171]

Before moving on to identifying the possible origins of this numerical classification, perhaps the question to ask here is, although the book appears to be divided according to certain numbers, whether the author makes any indication that he deliberately chose these figures. In the preface of the *Kitāb al-Majdal*, when explaining how he started writing the book 'Amr says he wanted to compose a book that contained several theological issues that fall into seven chapters and thirty subsections (*faṣl*).[172] Therefore, it is clear that the number of chapters and subsections were decided initially, before he even started writing the book. Another two instances that reveal 'Amr's consciousness about the religious significance of certain numbers appear in the third section of the second chapter (*al-Tashyīd*), which focuses on the Trinity, and the third section of the fourth chapter (*Ṣalāh*). In the first instance, after explaining the members of the Trinity, he turns to emphasising the importance of the number three, giving examples from various practices, including some Islamic ones. On the latter occasion, while discussing the details of the seven prayers, he includes a long passage giving Biblical examples indicating

[171] Luke 3:23
[172] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 7v.

the importance of the number seven.[173] It is worth pointing out here that the chapters in which 'Amr explains the Biblical value of the numbers three and seven are divided into three and seven chapters respectively. When the initial planning and the discourse on the numbers are considered together, although he does not make any explicit statement, 'Amr seems to be fully aware of his choice of numbers and their Biblical significance.

Even though there appears to be no other similar examples of such numerical organisation in earlier and contemporary Christian Arabic and Syriac literature, it seems reasonable that 'Amr had some inspirational sources at his disposal. Considering the specific connection between the content of the chapters and the number of sections they are divided into, one is reminded of the common literary genres of pre-Islamic Pahlavi *andarz* literature. The term *andarz* can be translated into English as 'guidance', 'advice', or 'instruction'. Appropriately, *andarz* literature contains advice or instructions on moral behaviour and lifestyle, given by an authoritative person to an audience that is usually drawn from lower social ranks. These instructions can cover any aspect of life, both religious and mundane. *Andarz* writings consist of short didactic sentences, usually with little or no thematic connection. The origins of this particular genre can be traced back to *Avesta.*[174]

One of the most common stylistic tools in the *andarz* genre is the use of numbers. In these texts, the words which describe the approved human qualities, ideal people, and virtuous and vicious characteristics are classified according to a numerical heading. A work of the legendary sage Oshnar is

[173] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 183r-184r.
[174] Aturpāt-i Ēmētān, comp., *Wisdom of the Sasanian Sages: (Dēnkard VI),* trans. Shaul Shaked (Colorado: Westview Press, 1979), xv – xiii.

structured according to this numerical rationale and contains instructions numbered from one to one thousand.[175]

In attempting assessing the possible affinity between 'Amr's *Kitāb al-Majdal* and *andarz* literature, it is worth noting that by the ninth century, significant portions of *andarz* literature and Pahlavi Zoroastrian texts had been translated into Arabic through the process of collection, translation, and redaction carried out by Zoroastrian priests.[176] Early *adab* writers made use of *andarz* texts anonymously, usually without any explicit reference or under a general title of 'Persian Wisdom'. Two texts from the Shiite *ḥadīth* literature can be mentioned here as examples where number symbolism in chapter headings can be explicitly observed: the opening section of Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-Barqī's (d. 888 or 894) *Kitāb al-Maḥāsin* which is entitled 'Kitāb al-Ashkāl wa al-Qarāin' and the important *ḥadīth* collection of Ibn al-Bābawayh (d. 991) called *Kitāb al-Khiṣāl*.

The title of al-Barqī's work can be translated into English as 'The Book of Parallels and Comparisons' and consists of eleven chapters that deal with fifty-one traditions, containing instructions and guidance to lead believers to the right path. The first eight chapters in the text are named after a number, from three to ten, and they deal with the issues connected to these numbers. The numerical order appears more precisely in the work of Ibn al-Bābawayh, who is a possible contemporary of 'Amr ibn Mattā. At the beginning of *Kitāb al-Khiṣāl*, the author explains his intention to write a book that deals with numbers and recount virtuous and blameworthy acts. Like al-Barqī's work, Ibn al-Bābawayh's *Kitāb al-Khiṣāl* is also divided into chapters bearing numerical titles. Each chapter focuses on a tradition or subject related to their numerical title. For example, 'Chapter on One' focuses on the unity of God, while

[175] Shaul Shaked, *Encyclopedia Iranica, s.v.* "Andarz" (New York: Colombia University, 2011), accessed in 04 April 2016.
http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/andarz-precept-instruction-advice
[176] See Ehsan Yarshater's preface in Shaul Shaked's translation of *Wisdom of the Sasanian Sages*, ix – x.

'Chapter on Two' deals with Hasan and Husain, two grandsons of Prophet Muhammad who have significant positions in Shiite tradition. Similarly, 'Chapter on Twelve' discusses the issues related to the twelve imams.[177]

It is quite difficult to trace the roots of the transmission of this particular stylistic feature in Arabo-Islamic literature. Roy Vilozny, who examined number symbolism in *'Kitāb al-Ashkāl wa al-Qarāin'*, states that it is not possible to determine whether Ibn al-Bābawayh was inspired by the earlier work of al-Barqī when structuring his book into chapters divided into numbered headings. The fact that two authors were separated from each other by a century makes it difficult to determine any connection between them. Moreover, it is also quite unclear whether al-Barqī originated the idea of dividing his text according to the method used in *andarz* literature, or he relied on any earlier Muslim sources. Nevertheless, his *Kitāb al-Ashkāl wa al-Qarāin* remains the earliest known example of the penetration of Persian stylistic and thematic features into Shiite *ḥadīth* literature. Considering the geographical location, it is quite possible that al-Barqī was aware of the works and intellectual activities of Zoroastrian priests, as he originates from the city of Kufa.[178]

Although tracing the origins and the transmission of this specific stylistic tool in Arabo-Islamic literature is extremely difficult, it is quite clear that there were writings in 'Amr ibn Matta's time that were divided into chapters according to a numerical system. The Encyclopaedia of the Brethren of Purity is a good example from the second half of the tenth century in which number symbolism can be observed. The encyclopaedia consists of fifty-two epistles, which are divided into four distinct sections, sometimes called 'books'. Number four has a special status in the Brethren's encyclopaedia;

[177] For a more detailed analysis of number symbolism in these two texts, see Roy Vilozny "A Concise Numerical Guide for the Perplexed Shiite: Al-Barqī's (d. 274/888 or 280/894) Kitāb al-Aškāl wa-l-qarāʾin" *Arabica* 63 (2016): 64 – 88.

[178] Vilozny, "A Concise Numerical Guide," 74.

mathematics for example is classified into four divisions and, similarly, the numbers are arranged into four groups as units, tens, hundreds, and thousands. Numbers in general played an important role in the Brethren's thought as a result of the Pythagorean and Aristotelian spirit of the text. They strongly emphasise the study of mathematics as the initial step before going any further into logic, physics, and theology.[179]

Certainly, the reason behind the Brethren's classification of their work according to a numerical order is completely different than 'Amr's. First of all, *Kitāb al-Majdal* is a theological work which focuses exclusively on theological issues, while the scope of interest in the Encyclopaedia of the Brethren of Purity is much wider, as it deals with a wide range of topics and follows a philosophical approach. Similarly, the reason behind the idea of dividing the chapters and sections according to a numerical system has a Biblical character, rather than a philosophical one, which parallels *andarz* literature and subsequent examples in the Shiite *ḥadīth* tradition. Obviously, numbers play a more significant role in these two *ḥadīth* compilations, as they appear as chapter headings reflecting the content of relevant divisions. In the *Kitāb al-Majdal*, the chapters are arranged and divided according to certain numbers that are connected to the subject of these chapters. These numbers are chosen for their religious or spiritual significance, as in a few occasions 'Amr explains their religious importance in the Bible and Christian tradition.

In terms of the chapter headings, 'Amr uses the different parts of a castle as the titles of each part, which is interrelated with the title of the work, 'The Book of the Tower'. This particular creative style, which is specific to *Kitāb al*-Majdal, makes one think about the possible sources that inspired or influenced 'Amr ibn Mattā when structuring his work. At this point, it might be useful to travel a few

[179] For a detailed explanation of the importance of numbers in the encyclopaedia of the Brethren, see Ian Richard Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists: An Introduction to the Thought of the Brethren of Purity* (London: Routledge, 2002), 9-13.

centuries back and look at the fourth century Christian author Aphrahat's (d. 345) major work, known as *Demonstrations*.

Aphrahat is thought to have been born in the year 280 in Assyria, on the border between the Sassanid Empire and Roman Syria. The name Aphrahat is the Syriac version of the Persian name Farhād, though he is also known by the pseudonym of the 'Persian Sage' (*hakīmā parsāyā*). He composed his work in twenty-three sections called demonstrations or expositions (*tahwītā*). Because of this particular expression, which appears in the title of each division, the works of Aphrahat are collectively called *Demonstrations*. The whole book contains twenty-three demonstrations on various subjects, which are composed in three separate phases.

The first demonstration in Aphrahat's work, similar to *Kitāb al-Majdal*, focuses on the issue of faith (*haymānūtā*). Aphrahat depicts faith as a 'building' that is raised upon a strong foundation:

> Faith is composed of many things and is built up in many ways. For it resembles a building which is constructed through many actions as its edifice rises to the top. Be aware, my friend, that stones are laid as foundations for the building stones and then on these stones the whole building raises up until it is finished. In the same way, the foundation of our whole faith is the true stone, our Lord Jesus Christ. Faith is placed on the stone, and because of faith the whole building rises up until it is completed. For the foundation is the beginning of the whole building. When a person draws near to faith, he sets himself on the stone, which is our Lord Jesus Christ. And his building is not shaken by the waves nor harmed by the winds. It does not fall in storms, because its edifice went up upon the rock of the true stone. In calling Christ 'the stone' I do not [merely]

speak from my own opinion, for the prophets who have gone before called him 'the stone'. I will make this clear to you.[180]

Certainly, Aphrahat's employment of the metaphor of 'building' when describing faith reminds one of the structure and the title of *Kitāb al-Majdal*. Indeed, a closer parallel appears in the second chapter of *Kitāb al-Majdal*, entitled *al-Bunyān* ('buildings'), which focuses on the three main aspects of Christian faith. As has been described briefly, each section of this chapter represents part of a building: 'the summit', 'the foundation', and 'the construction'. The first section in this chapter starts with the following statement: "The summit [*al-dhurwa*] of faith is the oneness of living and speaking God". The statement clearly reflects the focus of this initial section, the unity of God. The ensuing section starts with a similar exposition: "The foundation [*al-asās*] of faith is Jesus the Messiah, the son of the living God, the true saviour". The main focus of this section is the nature of Christ and incarnation. The strong affinity between Aphrahat's depiction of Jesus as the foundation of faith, 'the building', clearly appears here. When the whole discourse on faith and the use of the building metaphor is considered, one feels curious to see whether 'Amr was aware of Aphrahat's *Demonstrations*.

A subtle detail which strengthens the impression of 'Amr's acquaintance with *Demonstrations* is his quotations from an anonymous person who he calls "*al-hakīm*". Indeed, the pseudonym *al-hakīm* is used for Aristotle in the writings of philosophers after the translation of his philosophical material into Arabic. However, 'Amr's citations from the one he calls "*al-hakīm*" have a religious character rather than philosophical. For example, in the introduction to *Kitāb al-Majdal*, 'Amr promotes obeying God's commandments by saying:

[180] Aphrahat, Demonstration 1:2. Translation is taken from Adam Lehto, "Divine Law, Asceticism and Gender in Aphrahat's Demonstrations, with a Complete Annotated Translation of the Text and Comprehensive Syriac Glossary" (PhD Dissertation, University of Toronto, 2003).

> It is the word of the sage [*al-hakīm*] that when a man knows his God and obeys His rules and follows His path and submits to His law and worships Him, the Gracious one would reward him, who becomes His follower, with grace. When the passion of the soul grows stronger to know God, the wisdom of faith is signed on the heart.[181]

Another instance appears in the following page when 'Amr talks about the same issue: "The sage says whoever loves God, follows His commandments, and learns His rules and targets, gains His consent".[182]

Although it is difficult to find the exact source, these borrowings are definitely not of a philosophical character. They rather parallel Aphrahat's discourse on law observance. The expression *al-ḥakīm* reflects his Syriac nickname *hakīmā parsāyā*. Another parallel between Aphrahat's work and *Kitāb al-Majdal* is their language. Although the two works are composed in different languages, they both have ornamental features. Aphrahat's work is composed in a rhythmic Syriac and, as mentioned earlier, *Kitāb al-Majdal* is composed in rhyming prose. Therefore, while producing his work in the Arabic language under Islamic rule, 'Amr ibn Matta appears to have had strong ties with the Syriac tradition.

Theology of 'Amr ibn Mattā

As has been shown in the previous section, each chapter in *Kitāb al-Majdal* focuses on a certain issue which is specified in its title. The first chapter, *al-Bayān*, in which the author touches upon several issues related to faith, is the most useful section to get an idea of 'Amr's general approach to theological issues, central points, and the main concerns of the text. Looking into this initial chapter in more detail and identifying its main components will contribute to the analysis of the chapter on morality in the following parts of this thesis. Before moving on to elaborate the content of this chapter, it is worth pointing out a

[181] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 5v.
[182] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 6v

general feature about ‘Amr’s discourse. Although the work deals with a wide variety of theological subjects and has an apologetic purpose, dialectical argumentation, which can be observed in the writings of various contemporary and earlier Arabophone Christian authors, is hardly ever used in the text. ‘Amr expresses his ideas in short statements which are often supported by Biblical quotes. He seems not to be interested in answering the claims of any possible opponents with the use of logical or theological material. This very style can be evidently seen in the initial chapter.

Al-Bayān starts with an explanation of the creation of mankind and the main abilities which were granted by God to human beings:

> When God started bringing out the human being from nothingness into existence, he equipped him with logic, a mind and the ability of discernment. He shaped him and formed his essence with the innate ability of [performing] both good and bad. He empowered him with the capacity of performing according to his wishes and created for him the ways of benefit and harm.[183]

This initial statement, which emphasises the human being’s ability of discernment and capacity to choose his own actions, sets the ground for later theological statements on free will in the text. After pointing to the perfection of creation, ‘Amr states that it should lead one to the acceptance of the creator:

> (…) And it is necessary for him [man] to acknowledge that there is a creator for this creation, who created [*aḥdatha*] and maintains them. He formed, diversified, individuated, compiled and developed their structure and arranged them. Since it is not possible for a ‘made up one’ to bring out itself, or a ‘created one’ to cause its own

[183] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 13r-v.

> creation, then the 'created one' cannot be the creator, therefore all these productions indicates their creator. If everything came into being on their own without any cause, then their form would not be changed and modified from their original condition. Because, a thing [*shay'*] does not ruin, abolish or adjust its own essence, but the creator can.[184]

This particular explanation, which makes an explicit connection between creation and the existence of a creator, is in line with the renowned *kalam* argument of temporality (*dalīl al-ḥudūth*), which was commonly used by *mutakallims*. According to them, the universe, which is everything apart from God, consisted of atoms and accidents. Accidents and atoms are not able to endure in two separate instances of time on their own, but they are continually created, maintained and annihilated by God. Al-Bāqillānī, the leading figure of the Ash'arite school in the tenth century, sums up this argument succinctly: because the world is temporal, then it must have a Maker and a Former (*muḥdīth wa muṣawwir*), just like a writing must have an author, a picture an illustrator, and a building a constructor. [185] In 'Amr's argument, the cause and effect relationship between creation and the creator can be clearly seen. Moreover, in the following lines he goes on to say that He continually forms, maintains or ruins them.

After recounting man's capacity to acknowledge a creator, and stating the perfection in creation should lead one to think of the existence of Him, he moves on to explain some features of this creator in the line of the first cause argument, which was also used by both theologians and philosophers of the time. He says:

> Because, for every created one there is a creator before it, and without doubt the creator precedes the 'creation'. The production indicates its producer and the

[184] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 14r-v.
[185] Majid Fakhry, "The Classical Islamic Arguments for the Existence of God" *The Muslim World* 47 (1957), 140.

producer can be known through his productions. Certainly, He is the one without any companion, partner or assistant. He does not have any adversary, opponent, shape or equal. He does not get distorted, He is eternal, wise and powerful. He does not have beginning or end, nor does he transform or disappear. He is the cause [*illah*] of every effect [*ma'lūl*], the creator of everything which is corporeal or intangible.[186]

This initial statements about the necessity of the existence of a creator are followed by expositions about the features and attributes of this creator:

He gave the human being his soul and life. His creation leads one to know and acknowledge Him as one God who is the creator of everything both abstract and material, does not have any eternal being in His creation, He is the one who is infinite in His talking and living essence. With life, wisdom and power, He is the creator of everything. He is the observer, ruler and maintainer of those whom He created, formed and started. […] [He is] a hidden simple essence [*jawhar*] who can be known through the mind, not the senses. He is above all the imagination and impossible to be comprehended through comparison. He is not like apparent bodies or visible persons, but God is spirit [*rūḥ*], which the Gospels stated, and can be known through the evidence of His creation, not through observing, imagining or direct interaction. There is no boundary, limit, number or quantity for His existence. He is one in essence, eternal and living, knowing and mighty. Creator of everything without any companion, superior to all attributes and names, and beyond all meanings.[187]

[186] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 14v.
[187] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 15r.

This specific explanation about God, which emphasises His otherness and transcendence, reminds one of the Mu'tazilite expositions of the principle of *tawḥīd*. The denial of the hypostatic character of God's essential attributes and the rejection of any resemblance between God and His creation was one of the chief matters of the principle of unity in the Mu'tazilite system. They argued that the attributes of God, such as knowledge, power, speech and sight, are uniform with His essence. He knows, is capable, speaks and sees with His essence or through the relevant attributes, which are identical to His essence. By doing this, they argued that they were purifying God from all imperfections (*tanzīh*).[188] 'Amr appears to have been aware of these discussions and he employs the same explanation here. It is striking that he starts his chapter on faith with an explanation of the unity of God, which also constitutes the initial discussion in Mu'tazilite sources.

After making these brief statements about God and His unity, he turns to describing two types of spirit that exist in human kind. In connection to these two spirits, he emphasises the capacity of man to choose their own actions, which prepares the reader for upcoming statements on free will:

> A human being consists of two spirits, the animal spirit and the logical spirit [*nafs al-ḥaywāniyyah* and *nafs al-nāṭiqah*] and four natures. With the interaction of these two spirits, the choice [*al-ikhtiyār*] and thoughts of benefit or harm occur. People fall into two categories, the wise one [*'ālim*] who acknowledges that God created, structured and gave him life, and the ignorant one, who is not aware of his creator and enjoys corruption and follows his passions. […] The mindful one has proof through his mind and the ignorant one is left to his ignorance. The knowledge which guides the mindful one leads him to affirm the existence of his creator and acknowledge that he is living, wise

[188] William Montgomery Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1998), 245 – 246.

> and powerful, created through His grace, in order for him to obey his God. He acknowledges that He is just and does not create corruption [*al-fasād*] and does not like the disobedience of His servants. He [God] gave him the capacity which enables him to obey, and stay away from evil and obstinacy. He wants from him to believe voluntarily, not forcefully or unwillingly, for the purpose of trial and in order to increase the value of believers. It is sure that if He wanted, he could have created them virtuous and not in need of work, desire, wisdom and deeds.[189]

Certainly, this passage very clearly attaches wisdom or the intellect to obedience, and ignorance to unbelief and following worldly desires. However, the main point that 'Amr wants to draw attention to here is that human beings are equipped with willpower, which enables them to distinguish and choose the right path or the wrong one. The ones who follow their minds will end up believing in God, and the ignorant ones will keep following their passions. This very ability makes them responsible for their actions. This particular approach to free will can be observed in the writings of the earlier Syriac authors. For example, Ephrem (d. 373) explains that God created human beings in an intermediary position, with the capability to choose their own acts, in order to hold them responsible for their actions and reward them when they prefer keeping the commandments.[190] In the following statement, 'Amr highlights once again that man is capable of distinguishing the right thoughts and urges from the wrong ones:

[189] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 16v.
[190] Sebastian Brock, *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of Saint Ephrem* (Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1992), 34-32.

> A truthful person would distinguish two thoughts, one calling him to submission and the other to disobedience. The thought which calls to submission comes from God and the other which calls to disobedience is from Satan.[191]

This twofold source of thoughts is in line with his earlier division of the two spirits of man. Here, while he emphasises the human capacity to distinguishing the right from the wrong, he also points to the function of divine guidance and evil inclinations coming from Satan. He makes this point clearer when he moves to explain the ways in which divine guidance helps one to follow the right path:

> The guidance [*al-hudā*] which comes from God occurs in two ways. The first of them is [through] blessing, explanation and guidance. The second one occurs when the believer deserves it by his deeds, preventing himself from the ways or acts that lead him astray [al-ḍalāl]. Similarly, virtue lies on the path of free will and payer, education and instruction.[192]

Accordingly, divine guidance is granted to mankind either as a grace from God or reward for their attitudes. This particular explanation, which emphasises the function of human will and striving for divine guidance, is followed by another statement about actions and willpower:

> Volition [*irādah*] is the act through which an act happens and comes into existence. The willing agent [*murīd*] is capable of performing or leaving the act [*fi'l*] and conducting or leaving the cause of anything. The volition happens before the act because when it [the act] occurs, it separates from it [volition]. The choice [*ikhtiyār*] is the same

[191] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 18r.
[192] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 18v.

as volition and the preference [*īthār*] is like this. However, will [*murād*] differs from the choice.[193]

Similar to the discussions on the creation and the nature of God, this statement on the human volition and divine justice, which were very popular theological subjects in 'Amr's century, are also in line with the Mu'tazilite stance. Following these explanations, he makes further statements about human capacity (*istiṭā'ah*). He reiterates that human capacity is necessary for man to be held responsible for his actions. God does not deal with human beings unfairly because of His justice,[194] neither does He command his servants beyond their capability.[195] It is striking to see that 'Amr uses almost exactly the same terminology as *mutakallims*, especially Mu'tazilites, when explaining the issues related to human free will. Arabic words such as *ikhtiyār*, *istiṭā*'ah, and *irādah* are the key terms used in *kalam* texts discussing free will. Moreover, some of the statements in these passages sound very similar to two verses of the Qur'an, which are quoted by Mu'tazilites in order to support the principle of justice in their writings. For example, he says "God is not unjust to His creation"[196] which recalls 10:44 in the Qur'an: "Verily Allah will not deal unjustly with man in aught". On the following page, he states "God is merciful and does not place a burden more than they can handle"[197] which resembles 2:286: "On no soul doth Allah place a burden greater than it can bear". The expressions of these two sentences in Arabic text sound very similar to the original Qur'anic verses, and this issue will be addressed in more detail in the section on language.

It is not surprising to see the statements on free will and the justice of God, which are discussed under the title of 'justice' in Mu'tazilite sources, following the explanation of *tawḥīd* in *Kitāb al-Majdal*.

[193] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 19r.
[194] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 20r.
[195] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 19r – 21r.
[196] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 20r.
[197] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 21r

‘Amr not only borrows the Mu‘tazilite understanding of unity and justice, but also follows the same order when explaining these subjects. Another tenet of Mu‘tazilite thought appears when he turns to describe faith:

> Faith [*al-īmān*] is the believing God and acknowledgement of his prophets, accepting His books and whatever comes from Him. The attribute of a believer occurs with the submission to God, hearing His promise and fearing His threat [*wa’d wa’l-wa’id*]. When acknowledgement and knowledge unite, a clear faith appears.[198]

This explanation contains another tenet of Mu’tazilah, the promise and the threat [*al-wa‘d wa al-wa’īd*]; however, this is just a mere mention of the title of this particular tenet. ‘Amr’s description of faith is followed by a lengthy passage providing biblical examples of the benefits of faith, recounting experiences from the lives of various prophets.

The numerous borrowings of certain tenets and arguments of Mu‘tazilite thought makes one wonder about how the function of the mind is explained in this initial chapter of *Kitāb al-Majdal*. Before discussing this any further, perhaps certain deviations from the main arguments of Mu’tazilite thought in the text should be addressed here. As has been shown, ‘Amr emphasises the function of free will and describes volition as an ‘act’ solely depend on the ‘will’ of the agent, rather than God. This very statement parallels the Mu’tazilite stance. As has been shown in the second chapter, according to Mu’tazila, a human agent acts autonomously without interruption from God and is the creator of his own actions. Although ‘Amr’s statements are in line with this position, on several occasions in the text he addresses God’s intervention in guiding individuals to the right path. This can be observed clearly in his explanation of divine guidance, as it occurs in two instances, the first of which is linked to God and his

[198] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 22v.

guidance, and the second of which depends on the efforts of the individual. Therefore, it is worth pointing out that although certain Mu'tazilite arguments are used in the text on the unity and justice of God, 'Amr does not necessarily follow the Mu'tazilite stance when explaining, especially on the function of human free will.

From the very beginning of the chapter, the mind has a central position in the text. The mind is necessary for acknowledging God through examining creation and distinguishing the right path and conduct from the wrong. The main difference between the Mu'tazilite argument and 'Amr's statements is that in the Mu'tazilite system, the mind alone is sufficient to determine the 'right path', while in 'Amr's statements, 'divine guidance' is emphasised. There is a particular reason behind this attitude. The connection with God has a central role in *Kitāb al-Majdal*, and divine law is one of the main focuses of the text. As mentioned earlier, at the very beginning of his work, 'Amr states his intention to write a book that explains divine law (*rusūm al-sharīʿah*) and church matters. Thus, the mind's function in *Kitāb al-Majdal* is first acknowledging God and believing in Him, and then following His commands. In the following passage, intelligence is strongly attached to acknowledgement of God's commands and observation of them:

> It is necessary for the intelligent one ['āqil] to believe in God and keep away the thoughts of sins from his mind, accepting the prophets and their messages from the trustworthy, virtuous transmitters and believing and turning towards God and loving Him with his whole heart. Following what he revealed to His messengers in the books. Clinging to acknowledgement of the beneficial knowledge truthfully. Performing good

deeds. Taking the message of God seriously, striving to get His consent in every way and feeling fear of Him before every act of wisdom.[199]

Evidently, a religious lifestyle is strongly promoted in *Kitāb al-Majdal*. Apart from law observance, an important aspect of piety in the text is asceticism or detachment from the worldly pleasures. Among the features of the intelligent man, who is depicted as a divine law observer, 'Amr mentions turning away from bodily pleasures in the following lines:

> Preventing the soul from what the nature of the passion of the body calls him, and turning it to acts which are suitable for the eternal soul. Because souls strive for spiritual goodness, while bodies seek the pleasures of the world. The body originates from the sperm of the father, while the soul is revived through the power of the Lord.[200]

Here, avoidance of bodily passions and training the soul for greater spiritual activities are mentioned as components of the life of an intelligent, devout person. Although there is little emphasis on any other ascetic practices, this short statement makes it clear that avoiding worldly pleasures has an important role in the religious life of 'Amr's ideal pious man.

All in all, the first chapter of *Kitāb al-Majdal*, in which 'Amr explains the various aspects of faith, deals with numerous issues, including the unity and justice of God and the main features of an ideal devout man. In order to emphasise that the faith (*īmān*), which is explained throughout the chapter, is the Christian creed, he mentions the standard exposition of the Trinity in Arabic at the end of the chapter, following the description with subsequent scriptural quotes. There are certain elements from Mu'tazilite thought throughout the text, especially related to the oneness and justice of God. Although it makes one think that his arguments or statements on the justice of God, human capacity, and free will

[199] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 21v.
[200] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 22r.

could be useful for tracing and determining his ethical thinking, 'Amr's style and approach is not really suitable for such an inquiry. As mentioned earlier, in the passages where he addresses these subjects, he is not interested in providing dialectical arguments, as is the case in *kalam* writings, neither does he follow a specific structure that makes it easier for a reader to trace his logic. He rather makes short statements one after another, which are sometimes interrupted by Biblical passages or examples. In these statements, he is not interested in convincing the reader, answering an opponent, or creating an argument about the issue. Moreover, where the whole of his discourse is concerned, although he appears to use certain arguments of Mu'tazila, he does not necessarily follow their position, especially on the subject of free will. Therefore, although this chapter is suitable for developing an idea of 'Amr's general approach to theological and religious issues, it is not the place to obtain information about his ethical imagination.

Evaluation: Genre of *Kitāb al-Majdal*

Before moving to discuss the genre of the *Kitāb al-Majdal*, considering its intellectual setting, it is worth mentioning a few earlier statements on this subject. It has been described as a 'theological compendium' in various sources. On a few occasions, Samir Khalil Samir mentions classifying the work under the category of 'apologetic writings of Christian Arabic literature'.[201] At this point, it would be useful to see how 'Amr himself presents his own work. In the preface of the Paris manuscript, he states that the title of the book was initially planned to be *Kitāb al-Mukhtasar* ('The Compendious Book') which was then changed to *Kitāb al-Majdal* because of its apologetic content and purpose. This deliberate choice clearly indicates the author's intention of defending the Christian faith. However, obviously this is not the only aim of the book. According to 'Amr's own statement, the book also aims to provide information related

[201] Samir Khalil Samir, "The Earliest Arab Apology for Christianity" in *Christian Arabic Apologetics During the Abbasid Period (750-1258),* ed. Samir Khalil Samir and Jorgen Nielsen (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 114.

to church issues and improve its readers' spirituality. Therefore, the main target of the work is much more complex and comprehensive than just providing apologetic materials to its readers. Certainly, defending Christianity is one of the purposes of the book, as has already been highlighted in the title and 'Amr's own explanation, yet it is not the only purpose. When its content is considered, it aims to provide a concise spiritual guide for its readers.

When *Kitāb al-Majdal* is considered as a whole, it differs from earlier and contemporary Christian Arabic apologetic writings in terms of language, style, structure, and content. 'Amr's predecessors and contemporaries produced separate treatises in order to discuss certain subjects, while a wide range of subjects are treated in a single work in the case of *Kitāb al-Majdal*. In this way, it stands as the earliest known theological encyclopedia written in Arabic by an Arabophone Christian.

In terms of 'Amr ibn Mattā's intended interlocutors, as was stated at the beginning of the work, his foremost target audience was Christians. The language of the text shows that 'Amr assumed his audience to be familiar with the Islamic concepts and terminology that are exhaustively used throughout his work, and he never feels obliged to explain their meanings.

Conclusion

To conclude, *Kitāb al-Majdal* is an extensive and very comprehensive theological encyclopedia, which was produced towards the end of the tenth century. When the content, style, and presentation of the work are considered, 'Amr ibn Matta had strong ties to the Syriac tradition. He appears to have been particularly inspired by Aphrahat's work *Demonstrations*. At the same time, he seems to have been well integrated into the intellectual environment of his own time, as he shows great awareness of contemporary theological discussions. However, although he provides statements concerning the theological discussions of fellow *mutakallimūn*, he was not interested in taking part in the intellectual

theological debates. He was aware of the reality of Islam as a complex religious system and adjusted what he had at his disposal from his Syriac heritage, according to the concerns of his fellow religionists.

CHAPTER IV: THE CONTENT OF AL-MAṢĀBĪḤ

As has been mentioned briefly already, ‘Amr presents his *al-Maṣābīh* chapter, which is the fourth chapter of *Kitāb al-Majdal*, in seven subsections, each concerning certain practices and virtues. Similar to the general structure of *Kitāb al-Majdal*, each section focuses on a particular issue, which is specified in the title, and provides statements and advice about it. Each is an independent subsection, and have different concerns and focus, and it is really difficult to find a common denominator between them.

Although each the subsections is strictly divided, there is a structural parallelism which is observable in the text. Each section starts with a short passage recounting the benefits of the relevant practice or virtue. This prelude continues with statements and explanations about the subject, which are usually supported by Biblical citations. At the end of each section, ‘Amr provides a long list of encouraging examples from the lives of Biblical personalities who gained benefits by practising the relevant acts promoted in the section. It is worth mentioning here that in the first section, *Taqwā*, and the last section, *Tahārah*, ‘Amr provides lengthy explanations of the practice of *zuhd* and touches upon some other issues interrelated with the main subjects of these sections. These specific expositions will be the focus of the next chapter of this thesis.

This chapter will examine each of the divisions in *al-Maṣābīh* as individual components of the moral imagination of ‘Amr ibn Mattā. For this purpose, each section of *al-Maṣābīh* will be examined under a separate title, identical to their headings in *al-Maṣābīh*. In each section, the question of what this particular virtue or practice means in *al-Maṣābīh*, and how it contributes to the moral improvement of an individual, will be addressed. The reason behind this specific treatment is the author’s preferred presentational style. There is a certain mentality behind this attitude, which contributes to his overall moral discourse, and it will be addressed at the end of the chapter.

Taqwā (Piety)

'Amr discusses various issues under the title of *Taqwā*, which help the reader to grasp some aspects of his moral approach. For example, in the initial stages of this section, he provides some explanations about the origins of goodness. At the end, he gives a threefold list, which contains the virtuous and blameworthy acts and habits. However, the main purpose of this section is to look exclusively at how *taqwā* is described in the text to see the ways in which it functions to achieve the ideal moral status.

The word *taqwā* is the verbal noun of the verb *t-q-y*, which is the secondary formation from form VIII of the root *w-q-y* in Arabic. The original root, *w-q-y*, has meanings connected to 'avoidance'; the verb *t-q-y* means 'to fear'. In Arabo-Islamic tradition, the term *taqwā* had several meanings connected to its original meaning, depending on the context, such as 'God fearing', 'piety', 'devoutness', and 'pious abstinence'.[202]

It is difficult to find out what *taqwā* means in *al-Maṣābīh* as the author shows no attempt to describe the meaning of the term throughout the text. However, on certain occasions he uses the term interchangeably with *khawf Allah* (fear of God). This particular use provides a reason to think of a possible semantic connection between the concept of *taqwā* and 'fear of God' in *al-Maṣābīh*. The following passage, where 'Amr explains the benefits of a fear of God, provides a good insight into this very meaning; following a passage where the utilities of *taqwā* are recounted, he starts talking about the advantages of a fear of God:

> Fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, light [miṣbāh] of knowledge and cause of grace. The immediate effect of fear of God is getting dignity through it. Its ultimate

[202] For more detailed information about the meaning of *taqwā* in Arabo-Islamic literature, see Leonard Lewisohn, *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, s.v. "Taḳwā." (Leiden: Brill, 2012), accessed 08 August 2015. http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/takwa-COM_1457?s.num=0&s.f.s2_parent=s.f.book.encyclopaedia-of-islam-2&s.q=Taqwa;
and also Erik S. Ohlander "Fear of God (*taqwā*) in the Qur'an: Some Notes on the Semantic Shift and Thematic Context" *Journal of Semitic Studies* 50 (2005): 137-152.

benefit is reaching the end with it. Through it the crown of superiority is worn and the light of spirit is received.[203]

The passage continues with several benefits that the God fearer attains, such as getting rid of evil and unnecessary grief. Clearly, this specific explanation suggests that the fear of God is one of the components of *taqwā* in *al-Maṣābīh*. The passage at the beginning of the section, which precedes these statements, provides some insight into the meaning of *taqwā* in the text. In this initial passage, 'Amr recounts the benefits of *taqwā* in rhyming prose:

> *Taqwā* is the light of guidance [*hudā*] and the source of benefits. Its immediate effect is getting hold of the bridle of human ego [*zamām al-nafs*] and its ultimate impact is achieving the blessings of Paradise. Through *taqwā*, the good ways of service [*khidmah*] are followed and the condition of purified creatures [*khalāiq al-'ismah*] is achieved. Taqwā consummates [one's] trustworthiness, tenderness and [moral] soundness. It stimulates [one's] generosity and leads [one] to dignity and integrity.[204]

When this passage is considered, *taqwā* has three main benefits for an individual: improving his piety, enabling him to enter Paradise in the afterlife, and advancing his moral qualities. The author succinctly clarifies the ways in which piety can be improved. The process includes both practical and devotional elements, such as serving religion and attaining the status of a distinguished person by purifying the soul. Towards the end of the passage, *taqwā*'s function in developing certain moral qualities, such as trustworthiness and generosity, is briefly mentioned. All in all, *taqwā*'s benefits for an individual appear to be twofold: first, benefits that pertain to the worldly, which are eliminating the desires of the human ego (*nafs*), advancing the individual's piety and thus improving his moral qualities,

[203] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 152r.
[204] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 152r.

and the second pertain to the eschatological, enabling one to reach Paradise in the afterlife. 'Amr mentions similar achievements when he explains the advantages that the God fearer attains:

> The God fearer [*khāif Allah*] chastens his ego and [thus] God allows him to reach the truths [*haqāiq*] that he desires. The God fearer attains the good life and achieves success in this world and the hereafter. The God fearer secures [himself] from evil acts [*ba's*].[205]

The passage includes the twofold profits that the God fearer attains: having a good life in this world and achieving success in the afterlife. Fear of God functions in a very similar way to *taqwā*: it helps one to improve his spiritual inwardness, controlling his ego and achieving the desired moral condition. Indeed, this specific parallelism strengthens the connection between fear of God and *taqwā*.

However, considering the earlier explanations about the profits of *taqwā* in the previous passage, it appears that the concept of *taqwā* in *al-Maṣābīh* has a more compound meaning, rather than a mere fear of God. Certainly, the term includes the meaning of 'fear of God'; however, it has the nuance of a more complex spiritual condition combined with certain practices, such as serving God and controlling the human ego, which helps one to develop good moral and religious values and consequently advance one's piety. The focus of this spiritual condition is not God, although the target appears to be getting closer to Him, but the person's own self and his internal development.

Perhaps the most important detail to mention in this context related to self-improvement is battling with the human ego, which appears as "getting hold of the bridle of *nafs*" and "chastening the *nafs*" in the previous passages. Actually, these quick remarks prepare the reader for a discourse on the ascetic ideal, which becomes clear in the following lines when the author starts to describe the

[205] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 153r.

characteristics of a *zāhid* (ascetic). The description starts right after recounting the virtues of the God fearer. 'Amr says that a "practising ascetic's [*al-zāhid al-'āmil*] heart would be enlightened and his face would be shining".[206]

He makes no explicit connection between a *zāhid* and a God fearer at that point, apart from mentioning them in the same context, one after another. Throughout the rest of the text, a *zāhid* is often depicted as an example of an ideal virtuous person, and his distinctive features are explained several times in various contexts. One of the very clear descriptions of a *zāhid* appears in a passage where 'Amr talks about the transiency of this world and the trouble with attaching too much importance to its temporary enjoyments:

> This world is like a dream and everything in it flees into disappearance and extinction. The pleasures of this world are followed by regret and destruction. An ascetic [*al-zāhid*] in this world does not show any interest in worldly things and he does not desire them in his heart. He does not touch them with his hands and does not look at them with his eyes. The one who likes the ascetic life [*zuhd*] in this world, enjoys remembering death and works hard at good deeds before [his] time comes [to an end].[207]

Although the section is about *taqwā*, 'Amr puts more emphasis and spends more time describing different aspects and benefits of an ascetic life. Asceticism, which is expressed by the Arabic term *zuhd*, stands at the centre of the text and is very closely connected to *taqwā*. Ascetic practices, such as refraining from worldly pleasures and controlling the human ego, are often mentioned as ideal behaviours, which should be aimed to achieve. The very explicit association between asceticism and

[206] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 152v.
[207] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 160r.

taqwā appears towards the end of the section when ‘Amr says “Whoever leaves the world to improve his *taqwā*, God grants him prosperity with something other than worldly possessions”.[208]

This short remark clarifies how *zuhd* functions in achieving the *taqwā*. According to the text, *zuhd* appears to be a practice that perfects and improves one’s *taqwā*. Indeed, this particular understanding of *taqwā* is very similar to the mystical theological interpretation of the same concept in Islam. *Taqwā* is accepted as one of the spiritual stations of the Sufi path and the practise of *taqwā* is often defined as refraining from everything that distances one from God in major Sufi sources. [209]

This strong connection between abstinence and *taqwā* in *al-Maṣābīh* makes one wonder whether ‘Amr was inspired by any Sufi sources on this matter. Indeed, there is a striking parallel between his discourse on *taqwā* and the way Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī explains the same concept. As has been mentioned in the second chapter, al-Muḥāsibī’s system of piety is built upon the foundation of *taqwā*, which is the initial issue in his *Kitāb al-Riāyah*. In al-Muḥāsibī’s work, *taqwā* is explained as the foundation of abstinence and it is strongly attached to fearing God, following His commands, and keeping the human ego under control.[210] Similarly, *al-Maṣābīh* starts with the subject of *taqwā*. An interesting detail about the content is that, at the beginnings of the section on *taqwā*, ‘Amr devotes a lengthy passage to the importance of following divine commands, which parallels al-Muḥāsibī’s discourse.

In fact, there are a few occasions in the text that strengthen the connection between *al-Maṣābīh* and Sufi texts. In the same section, ‘Amr employs the term *jihād* to address inner struggle. Indeed, the concept of *jihād* has two major meanings in Islamic tradition, the first of which is ‘holy war’

[208] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 161v.
[209] Lewisohn, *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition, s.v. "Taḳwā."*
[210] Al-Muḥāsibī, *Al-Ri‘āyah li-Ḥuqūq Allah,* 35-39.

and the second of which is 'internal struggle'; the second appears in the early *ḥadīth* collections and is mostly used by Sufis.[211] Throughout the *taqwā* section, the term appears several times without any definition, in its literal meaning of 'to strive' or 'to struggle'. Although there are couple of occasions where the term is used without any religious reference, two examples immediately hint at the spiritual or religious meaning of *jihād*. The term appears in a section where 'Amr explains the process of the creation of human beings and the purpose of their creation. After explaining the initial stages, he says: "And He [God] made them responsible for struggling with Satan and being patient with worldly desires [shahawāt], which is part of *jihād*".[212]

In this use, "being patient with worldly desires" (*maṣābirah al-shahawāt*) appears as a component of *jihād*. Certainly, this example shows that the word has a strong connotation of 'inner struggle' rather than its commonly known meaning of 'armed combat'. Towards the end of the section, the term appears once again, revealing its spiritual meaning more clearly, when the author says:

> The result of following passions [shahawāt] is destruction. The best *jihād* [*afḍal al-jihād*] is the one against the desires [*al-hawā*] and the most powerful strength is eliminating the passions [*shahawāt*]. The one who becomes a slave of his desires is less valuable than a real slave.[213]

This sentence clearly shows that the term *jihād* is used to express the act of internal battle against one's own desires. What is more important here is its grammatical form. The term is mentioned in a superlative context as *afḍalu al-jihād,* the best *jihād*, and this very use of the term echoes one of the

[211] Al-Qushayrī provides a detailed explanation of the spiritual interpretation of the concept of *jihād*, quoting the *ḥadīth* and the earlier Sufi writings in his *risālah*. For more, see: Imam Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī, *Risālah al-Qushariyyah*, ed. Abdulhalem Mahmod and Mahmud ibn Sharif (Cairo: Matbaatu Muassastu dar al-Sha'b, 1989), 188-193.
[212] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 153r.
[213] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 163v.

hadiths of Prophet Muhammad describing *jihād*. In this hadith, the Prophet says: "The best *jihād* [*afḍal al-jihād*] is [to speak out] the word of justice in front of a tyrannical ruler."[214] This *ḥadīth* became part of the basis for the spiritual interpretation of the concept of *jihād* in Islamic tradition, and is cited by many prominent Sufis in their writings to promote 'inner struggle' as a form of *jihād*.[215] 'Amr seems to be fully aware of this discourse and totally at ease employing this concept to emphasise the importance of self-control.

Another subtle detail to mention in relation to the use of Sufi sources is 'Amr's portrayal of *taqwā* as 'light of guidance' at the beginning of his treatise. Similarly, 'fear of God' is also depicted as 'light of knowledge'. The analogy of 'light' was used by an earlier Sufi by the name of Abu al-Ḥusayn al-Nūrī (d. 907) who was the leading member of the Baghdad school of Sufism. In the first portion of his *Maqāmah al-Qulūb,* al-Nūrī depicts *taqwā* as the 'light of piety' and the 'soul of Sufi ethics'. According to al-Nūrī, the contemplative 'light of piety' brightens both one's faith and works.[216] Although it looks like a slight detail, it still makes one think about whether 'Amr ever had a chance to consult the works of al-Nūrī. Considering the social and intellectual environment of the late tenth century, it seems plausible that he at least heard similar statements from contemporary Muslims. His use of the same analogy at the beginning of this chapter strengthens the idea of his familiarity with early Sufi writings.

Throughout the section, 'Amr supports his statements with scriptural quotes. However, it is difficult to identify the Bible verses used in *al-Maṣābīh* as the author usually mixes different verses together.

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[214] Suleiman ibn al-Ash'āth al-Azdī al-Sijistānī Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, Hadith No: 4344, accessed on 12 March 2014.
https://sunnah.com/abudawud/39/54

[215] Al-Qushayrī cites the hadith in his *Risālah* in the chapter on *Mujāhadah*, see, Al-Qushayrī, *Risālah al-Qushariyyah*, 188.

[216] Abū al-Ḥasan al-Nūrī, *Textes Mystiques Inédits d'Abū-l-Ḥasan al-Nūrī,* ed. Paul Nywia (Beirut : Imprimerie Catholique, 1968), 132.

When this whole cluster of examples is considered, the concept of *taqwā* in *al-Maṣābīh* is explained as a spiritual condition that helps a believer to advance his piety and morality and leads him to both worldly and eternal happiness. It is strongly related to fear of God and asceticism. There is a striking number of parallels with the Sufi interpretation of the same concept, which indicates a certain level of intertextuality. Because of the ambiguity in the text, it is difficult to identify the exact form and extent of this influence. This is mainly because of two factors, firstly that 'Amr never mentions his sources, and secondly that he does not follow any systematic scheme when using these sources. Questions regarding his possible sources and the ways in which he employs them in the text will be addressed in the final chapter of this thesis.

Maḥabbah (Love)

The second section of *al-Maṣābīh* is entitled *al-Maḥabbah* and focuses on the function and benefits of love. Although he uses the word *Maḥabbah* in the title, 'Amr employs different words to address different types of love in the text, *mawaddah* and *ulfah*. The word *'ishq*, which is used to address 'love towards the opposite gender', is never employed in the text.

The section starts with a list of the benefits of love in an individual's worldly and eschatological life. The author briefly signifies the ways in which love functions in improving the quality of human relationships and one's spiritual life:

> Love is the path of salvation, the salt of success. Through love, purity is completed and the closeness is gained, loyalty is continued and friendship [*ulfah*] is

maintained. Love strengthens faith and prevents the ways of anxiety. It maintains the paths of piety and clarifies the ways of reward. [217]

According to the text, love helps increase the closeness and sincerity between people and it also strengthens one's faith, providing the grounds for piety. Similar to 'Amr's earlier explanations about the utilities of *taqwā*, a two-dimensional approach concerning the benefits of love is striking in this passage. The author emphasises the benefits of love both for this world and the hereafter.

Another important detail about the author's explanation of love is its twofold character. The love that is exhorted to be performed in the text is supposed to embrace both God and human beings; as 'Amr says: "The complete love is the one that is directed to both God and all human beings". [218]

The following lines focuses on the different aspects of love towards other human beings and its necessity for the creation of harmonious relationships in society. In this context, he mentions God's encompassing love towards all creation, regardless of their good or bad deeds, referencing Matthew 5:45, and states that human beings should be like Him when loving one another. Then he quotes another verse from the same passage, in which Jesus commands his followers to love their enemies.

It is usually difficult to distinguish the scriptural quotes in the text, as 'Amr often cites separate Bible verses in the same passage, one after another, without making any explicit distinction between them, even sometimes combining them together within the same sentence. This very feature is also evident in this section. The verses do not appear in the scriptural order and they also contain some additional phrases, which makes it difficult to identify them in the text. However, it is still recognisable that the core of 'Amr's argument is based on the passage of love in the first portion of the Sermon on the Mount, which is in Matthew chapters 5-7. The sermon is the longest piece that contains the teachings of

[217] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 165r.
[218] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 166r.

Jesus regarding Christian discipleship and ethics, and this very fact hints at the scriptural foundation and mentality of the section on love in *al-Maṣābīh*.

In the following lines, 'Amr explains different types of love towards human beings, such as love towards family members and love of neighbors. For example, he quotes the words of Peter, Paul, and John advising to love one another on various occasions. Love of people is depicted as a 'command from God'. Jesus himself performed this command through his actions and words, as he asked God to forgive even the people who crucified him.[219]

As has been mentioned, he uses a few Arabic words to address love in the text: *maḥabbah*, *mawaddah*, and *ulfah*. His choice of vocabulary shows the comprehensive character of love in the text. The term *maḥabbah* is used to express all types of love in Arabic, including divine love. The word *mawaddah* is usually employed to express affection and friendliness and it particularly appears in the contexts of 'marriage' and 'kinship' in the Qur'an.[220] The word *ulfah* means 'fondness', with the connotation of 'social harmony'. For example, the root *allafa* is employed to express attachment and solidarity between the members of society in the Qur'an.[221] Although the author mentions 'divine love' as the necessary component of the perfect complete love, as can be expected from both the scriptural citations from the Sermon on the Mount and the vocabulary used to express different types of love, the focus of the section is the love and affection between human beings, which creates strong societal bonds .

Divine love is addressed on few occasions in this section. 'Amr explains the love of God as follows:

[219] Luke 23:34.
[220] Qur'an 42:23; 30:21.
[221] Qur'an 3:103; 8:63.

> The love of a human being towards God is a pure faith in His divinity and strong belief in His promise of mercy, keeping His commandments and doing deeds which will please Him. Accepting His complete grace and encompassing blessing. Turning away from the pleasures of this transient world for His sake and devoting all the time to exalt and praise Him.[222]

In the text, love of God is expressed as following God's commandments and showing obedience and loyalty to Him, which increases an individual's spirituality and closeness to God. Apart from this very explicit reference to divine love, there is hardly any other explanation concerning love of God in this section.

Compared to the initial section, *Taqwā*, the *Maḥabbah* section is more human-centred than God-centred. The focus in the text is not love of God, but love of fellow human beings. This very fact raises an important distinction between *Taqwā* and *Maḥabbah* in *al-Maṣābīh*. As has been shown earlier, there are some specific borrowings from Sufi ethical theology in the *Taqwā* section. Love of God is one of the spiritual stations of Sufism and a central theme of Sufi writings. Considering 'Amr's earlier borrowings from Sufi theology, he appears to be well acquainted with Sufi sources. Therefore, it is not possible to assume that his lack of emphasis on love of God in the text comes from ignorance. Conversely, it is a very purposeful attitude, as Sufi terminology also does not appear throughout the section as often as it does in *Taqwā*.

Perhaps another detail to mention here is, although the concept of love is very comprehensive in this section, love towards the opposite gender is never addressed in any way. Indeed, in Yahya ibn 'Adi's *Tahdhīb* al-*Akhlāq*, '*ishq* is classified under the category of bad moral qualities, along with levity, greed,

[222] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 167v – 168r.

and debauchery. Yahya states that it is bad and abhorrent in all cases for every type of person, as it may lead people to extreme profligacy. It is less blameworthy, however, for youngsters and those who live luxurious and comfortable lives.[223] Certainly, Yaḥyā's Aristotelian approach plays a determining role in his classification and description of virtuous and blameworthy acts for different social classes. In 'Amr's text, there is no mention of this type of love in a positive or a negative way.

All in all, the central theme of al-*Maḥabbah* section is based around the different types of love towards fellow human beings, rather than towards God. Although love of God is briefly addressed in the text, the main concern of the section is promoting love and affection between people at different levels of society. The Christian ethical ideal is striking in the text, as the author quotes very specific verses of the New Testament in order to support his statements. However, there are not any limits or restrictions towards whom the love should be cultivated. In other words, the type of love encouraged in the text embraces all fellow human beings, without any religious or denominational boundaries.

Ṣalāh (Prayer)

Ṣalāh (prayer) is the third section of al-*Maṣābīh* chapter in *Kitāb al-Majdal*. As with the earlier sections, it starts with recounting the benefits of prayer in rhyming prose. Before the author moves on to explain the utilities of *ṣalāh*, he emphasises that it is an obligatory act for believers. According to the text, the person who performs *ṣalāh* but refrains from the rest of their obligations (*furūḍ*), is considered 'a virtuous person', while the one who performs every other religious obligation but *ṣalāh* is called 'infidel' (*kāfir*). Since the importance of prayer is emphasised as a religious duty at the beginning, most of the passage focuses on the necessity of prayer rather than its utilities.

[223] Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī, *The Reformation of Morals,* 48 – 49.

Several benefits of prayer are mentioned, including enabling one to gain the status of an ascetic (*zuhhād*) and placing him on the same level as the angels. Prayer saves one from wrongdoings and troubles. It is the communication of the creature with his creator and it connects him with God. Prayer polishes one's heart and mind, organises thoughts, stimulates the mind, and revives the memory. It enables an individual to reach God.[224] 'Amr uses various Biblical verses to buttress his statements.

Two main Arabic words are used to express 'prayer': ṣalāh (prayer) and du'ā (invocation). Ritualistic prayers always expressed by ṣalāh, while both du'ā and ṣalāh are employed to address invocations throughout the text. The types of prayer mentioned in this section can be classified in these two main categories. The content of the section is comprehensive and contains a wide range of prayers and invocations and their spiritual and mundane benefits.

After he recounts the necessity and benefits of prayer, 'Amr addresses two special types of prayer, which both have three main divisions. When he starts describing the first one, initially he divides the time into three different categories, from creation to the end of time. He calls the first phase, which covers the period from creation until the time of Prophet Moses, *'ālam al-jismānī* (the bodily world). The second phase, which begins with the time of Moses and continues until the time of Jesus, is called *ālam al- nafsānī* (the soul world). The last one, which covers the period from Jesus until his return towards the end of the world, is called *ālam al-ruhānī* (the spiritual world). Then he connects each phase with three main stages of human life. The first stage, *jismāni* is attached to the ages of childhood and youth. This particular period in human life consists of a struggle to overcome enemies and fulfil wishes related to worldly issues, such as acquiring a wife and children. The second stage, *nafsānī*, is associated with adulthood and it contains victory over enemies and the contentment of having material wealth and family members. The last stage, ruhānī, is attached to decrepitude. This period in human life is strongly

[224] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 171r.

connected to more spiritual activities, such as striving to achieve goodness and piety, praying for the rest of humankind for their worldly and eschatological happiness, and repenting for sins. It is mainly occupied by efforts to gain the blessings of the afterlife and closeness to God.[225] As far as the passage is concerned, there is a clear spiritual development as the person gets older.

After this particular prayer, he says the arrangement of prayer at "other times" also has three main divisions. The first one consists of believing in God, exalting His beautiful names (*asmā al-ḥusnā*) and following His commandments. The second part of the prayer includes turning towards God and asking His help for every need, being grateful for whatever comes from Him, avoiding worldly urges, and seeking repentance. He ends this second part of the prayer with a section on moral qualities: "[And] send away the evil, wickedness, and troubles and cooperate on piety [*taqwā*], goodness [*al-birr*], forbearance [*al-hilm*], humility [*tawādhu*] and kindness [*al-ihsān*]". The third division of this prayer consists of accepting God's infinite supremacy and glorifying His embracing grace and praising Him (al-tasbīḥāh) all the time.[226]

Considering the two prayers, which are explained one after another in the text, it can be said that they explain sets of attitude towards God rather than any orderly ritualistic prayer. Apart from the acts of "praying for others" and "praising God", which are both mentioned in the last division of each category, there is no a particularly worship-like act in these two prayers. The first prayer seems to describe the spiritual development of an individual, while the second is more concerned with the relationship between the human being and his creator.

Indeed, the threefold prayer, which was described in the first passage, seems to be adopted from the fifth century writer John of Apamea's three schemes of the spiritual life. John saw Christian life

[225] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 173v -174r.
[226] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 174r – v.

as a process of gradual liberation from evil passions and divided it into three levels, which are called 'body' (*pagrānūtā*), 'soul' (*nafshānūtā*) and 'spirit' (*rūḥānūtā*). According to John, in this gradual process, the three separate levels represent three successive stages. At the level of the body, there is still a tendency to commit sin and an enslavement to bodily desires. At the level of the soul, there is a refusal of worldly urges and a process of repentance. There starts to be an increasing level of awareness of sin and a continuing effort to improve the virtues of the soul. Prayer appears to be one of the main components of this stage, but it is still subject to distractions and not in its 'pure' condition. The third, spiritual, level can only be achieved by 'self-emptying'. This leads ultimately to 'purity of the soul' which stands as a threshold between the second and third levels. The state of 'purity of the soul' appears to be the condition of openness to the light of revelation and other divine mysteries. Only at this stage is the meaning of 'true love' comprehended.[227] 'Amr's explanation of the first prayer fits quite well with John's gradual scheme of spiritual development. He also appears to be very careful when choosing vocabulary, as the Arabic words *jismānī*, *nafsānī*, and *rūḥānī* in his text coincide with their Syriac counterparts *pagranuta*, *nafshānuta*, and *ruhānuta* in John of Apamea's writings.

'Amr pays considerable attention to addressing different types of prayer throughout the text from the seven daily prayers to psalming and silent prayer. He provides a detailed description of the seven daily prayers. After emphasising that they are compulsory (*wājib*) for everyone according to mind (*'aql*), religion (*dīn*), and analogical reasoning (*qiyās*), he gives information about every prayer, mentioning their names and times. At the end, he addresses the question of how one should act when he or she is not able to perform any of the prayers in special circumstances. According to 'Amr, the daily

[227] Sebastian Brock, *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life* (Massachusetts: Cistercian Publications, 1987), 78-79.

prayers should not be left in any case and should be performed in whatever way is suitable.[228] Apart from the seven daily prayers, several types of ritualistic prayer are mentioned in the text. They appear in various contexts, sometimes with detailed explanations of their content and sometimes as a mere mention of their title. Apparently, 'Amr tries to address as many different types of prayer as possible.

Invocations and their benefits are also elaborately addressed in the text. Firstly, 'Amr emphasises that the invocations should be "pure" and "sincere". The person who prays should also be honest and his words and deeds should be compatible, as nothing can be hidden from God. He or she should turn to God with sincere faith.[229] In terms of the content of the invocations, he says:

> The one who prays to God with sincerity [*bi al-ikhlās*] asks from God a favourable position on His side, and not the desires of the temporary world and urges of the ego […] He does not ask from God the life of family joys and good conditions, [and not] having more children and an increase of material wealth, [and not] having lots of friends and companions and having authority over them, [and not] being able to crush his enemies and resist his adversaries, [and] he does not want health for his body in order to taste different foods and drinks.[230]

Here, 'Amr recounts every possible type of worldly advantage and joy in a rather lengthy passage, as the benefits that one should avoid addressing in invocations. It is very clear that there is a striking resistance to the world and worldly desires, which clearly reveals the ascetic ideal of the text. In the following lines, he explains that spiritual and eschatological utilities are the ones that should be addressed in invocations. One should ask from God His guidance and His praise for one's efforts and the

[228] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 176v - 177r.
[229] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 172r.
[230] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 172r.

fruits of one's endeavours, which are all spiritual benefits. He also advises to ask for help to overcome Satan and reject worldly desires.[231]

Although religious and eschatological utilities are idealised and presented as ultimate goals, some worldly benefits are also mentioned in the text. Towards the end of the section, 'Amr gives detailed explanations about how prophets struggled with various difficulties in their lives and overcame them by turning towards God and asking His help. This attitude conforms with 'Amr's earlier explanations in the *Taqwā* and *Maḥabbah* sections, which are both concerned with worldly and eschatological utilities. However, considering the whole text, it is very clear that the main areas of focus in the *Ṣalāh* section are increasing piety in this world and achieving eschatological success in the afterlife.

In terms of the function and importance of prayer for developing an individual's piety and morality, he first emphasises that God is not the one who needs the prayers of His creatures. Human beings are the ones who need to pray in order to show their servitude and gratefulness to Him:

> [Prayer is necessary for human beings] in order to show that they are creatures [*makhlūq*] and prove their obedience to their creator, [and] to accept that they are the ones who are maintained [*marzūq*] [by God] and to continue their servitude to their maintainer [*rāziq*], [and] in order to engage their minds with useful thoughts and use their bodies for beneficial acts, [and] to avoid the inspirations of Satan and prevent thoughts of depravity, to distance themselves from their animal nature which is caused by instinctively choosing comfort.[232]

[231] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 172v.
[232] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 175r.

According to this passage, the function of prayer appears to be twofold: showing obedience and devotion to God on creation's side, and creating an awareness in human beings related to their acts and thoughts in this world, which would lead them to behave in a virtuous way.

In summary, the content of the *Ṣalāh* section in al-*Maṣābīh* chapter is comprehensive, and contains as much information as possible about prayers in Syriac Christianity. There appears to be a clear connection between prayer and spiritual development in the text, which leads people to improve their morality. Prayer functions both to enable human beings to get close to God and also to control and discipline their bodies and thoughts. As with the earlier sections, morality seems to be very clearly connected with the individual's relationship and perception of God, and his piety.

Ṣawm (Fasting)

The fourth section in al-*Maṣābīh* chapter is entitled Ṣ*awm* (fasting). As in the earlier sections, it starts with a passage where 'Amr gives the worldly and eschatological benefits of fasting:

> Fasting cleans the soul, purifies the heart and increases [one's] value. It uproots evil and prevents arrogance. It adorns [one's] speech, eliminates the vices and removes the bodily desires [*shahawāt al-jasad*]. It resolves the knot of hatred, removes obstinacy and kills jealousy. Fasting is a glory against dissidents. Fasting increases one's position in gatherings and beautifies his image in the eyes of people. Fasting exalts one's degree in the kingdom of heaven and also improves his value in the sides of kings and noble ones.[233]

When this passage is considered, the function of fasting can be classified in three main categories: firstly, it improves one's piety and brings one closer to God; secondly, it purifies the soul and

[233] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 188r.

helps the believer avoid worldly desires; and thirdly, it improves one's position in society and makes one respectable. The twofold interest that appears in the earlier sections can once again be seen here very clearly, as the passage contains benefits related to both worldly and eschatological life.

Compared to the earlier sections, there is a little more emphasis on the function of fasting as a practice of self-disciplining. After recounting the benefits of fasting, 'Amr goes on to explain how the person who is fasting should act in order to control his ego and discipline himself in order to improve his spirituality:

> It is necessary [*wājib*] for the one who is fasting to annihilate his ego [*nafs*] with hunger and diminish his power with weakness, [and to] overcome his bodily desires [*shahwah*] with avoidance and to kill his sensations with the feeling of fear, [and to] eliminate his mistakes with regret and continuing repentance.[234]

The passage continues with a certain set of attitudes that should be avoided during fasting. First, 'Amr emphasises that fasting should be only for the sake of God:

> Anyone who fasts for someone else, or leaving prayer, or considering evil, or working for corruption and deception, or committing sin, or performing persecution will not receive any benefit from his fasting.[235]

Then he goes on to recount the conditions that should accompany a valid (*sahīh*] fast. First, he explains that fasting is confirmation of faith in God and an indication of love for human beings. It is a purification of the soul and a liberation of the heart from evil. Fasting prevents the limbs of the body from committing sins, and 'Amr continues by addressing several parts of the body and how they should

[234] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 189r.
[235] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 189v.

be controlled during fasting.[236] It is very clear that the practice of fasting is very much attached to control of the body and self-disciplining.

In terms of the practical benefit of fasting in mundane affairs, ‘Amr gives examples of how previous nations and prophets gained benefits and managed to overcome difficulties by fasting. In this context, he mentions some stories from the Bible. One of them is the war between the people of Israel and the tribe of Benjamin, which was described in detail in Judges 20. ‘Amr says that the people of Israel returned to God asking for victory when they were defeated by the army of the people of Benjamin in the first two days of the battle. They turned God and asked His help for success, then they went to fight while they were fasting. After that, as a result of their sincere prayer and fasting, they were granted victory over the tribe of Benjamin.[237]

Throughout the text, ‘Amr addresses several types of fasting, from the fast of silence to the fast of Nineveh, which was observed by Eastern Christians. He gives detailed information about different fasts and explains them in some detail. Perhaps the most striking aspect related to ‘Amr ibn Matta’s description is his classification of the types of fasting. ‘Amr categorises the fasts in three main divisions, which he calls *farḍ*, *sunnah*, and *nāfilah*. He explains that *farḍ* fasting is one that is obligatory for everyone who is mentally and physically well, and abandoning this type of fasting purposely or consciously is sinful. *Sunnah* fasting, he explains, is one that was observed by prophets and it can be practised as long as one’s stamina allows. The last type, which is called *nāfilah* fasting, is explained as the practice of Prophet Elijah, and this type of fasting is recommended for those who seek closeness to God.[238]

[236] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 189v.
[237] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 192v, 193r.
[238] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 195r.

Amr's employment of the terms of Islamic jurisprudence here clearly shows that he is well aware of the meanings of the terms in Islamic tradition. He skilfully adjusts them to a Christian context to describe different types of a Christian practice. It is possible that the terms had not been used widely in Christian texts, as he feels the need to explain their meanings in detail. He does not change the terms' fundamental meanings, but he makes an effort to incorporate them into a Christian context by using the terms to define and classify already existing practices in Christianity.

Another possible borrowing from Islamic tradition appears when he gives an example of a certain type of fast, which he calls "Prophet David's fast". He explains that Prophet David used to fast after sunset until the next sunset. After fasting for the whole twenty-four hours, he would have a break the next day. 'Amr emphasises that Prophet David's custom of fasting cannot be found in his books and there is no evidence or address to this particular fast in any of his speeches.[239]

However, this specific type of fast does exist in Islamic tradition. In one of the *ḥadīths* of Prophet Muhammad, which was narrated by Bukhari, Muslim, and Abu Dāwūd, he advises one of his companions to fast one day and then break the fast the next day. He adds: "This was the fast of David, and it is the best of fasts".[240]

Amr's version of fasting is a little different from Islamic fasting, as it continues for the whole day. However, the title and the practice of the fasting very much parallels Prophet Muhammad's description. He also admits that there is no evidence or address to this fast in any Christian source. Therefore, although he does not mention it in the text, it is possible that he received this information from an Islamic source.

[239] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 192v.
[240] Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, Hadith No: 2448, accessed 03 April 2015. https://sunnah.com/abudawud/14/136

When the function of fasting is considered, it is strongly connected with self-control and consequent moral development. As with the earlier sections, there is a two-dimensional interest in the description of the benefits of fasting, concerning both mundane and otherworldly wellbeing. The practice of fasting is not only controlling the body, but also avoiding any sinful, immoral acts. While it helps people to control their bodily urges and prevents them from committing wrongdoing, it also improves their relationship with God. 'Amr's use of Islamic terminology while classifying certain types of fasting reflects one of the aspects of his engagement with the surrounding culture.

Raḥmah (Mercy)

In the opening passage of the fifth section of *al-Maṣābīh* chapter, *Raḥmah*, 'Amr recounts the importance and benefits of mercy as follows:

> Mercy is the seed of abundance and profit, [and it is] the path to the kingdom of heaven. Mercy is spiritual wisdom and heavenly blessing. The honour of mercy is obvious and the one who practices it is full of hope in both lives. Its plant is fruitful and its crop is ripe. Its title is honourable and its benefits are wide [which include] all the goodness in words and acts.[241]

Although 'Amr initially does not give an example related to merciful acts, he emphasises that its content is broad. He then turns to explain the features of *rahīm*, the merciful one:

> The person who deserves to be entitled with the attribute of mercy by his actions, and is worthy of the virtue of this grace, is the believer who gives away his possessions until he becomes poor. His face becomes bright and his reward is enormous. The merciful one, with the lucidity of his faith, is compassionate towards sick people.

[241] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 198v.

> With the beauty of his trust in God and the purity of his love towards people, he prefers them to his own self and with the health of his strong belief in [God's] promise, he generously gives his possessions to other people.[242]

It is very clear in this passage that the act of mercy is very much attached to the financial support of needy people. It also requires a strong belief and trust in God. In the following lines, this connection appears more clearly when 'Amr starts describing the features of a person who he calls 'the blessed one':

> The blessed one is the one who inspires himself to show compassion towards disadvantaged and needy people. The blessed one is the one who supports poor and helpless people. The blessed one is the one who gives charity to the miserable from what he earns lawfully [*min kasb ḥalālihī*] with a good intention, without mixing it with pride, hypocrisy and expecting gratitude.[243]

He then moves to support his argument with a wide range of Biblical quotes, which encourage and advise giving charity to needy people. He also emphasises that this charity should be secret, by quoting Matthew 6:3: "When you give charity, do not let your left hand know what your right hand did."

Apart from the material aspect, 'Amr also addresses the moral dimension of mercy. In this context, he cites a couple of Biblical verses, such as Proverbs 17:5, which prohibits mocking the poor. He continues this passage by citing several Biblical verses that advise treating poor and needy people kindly, emphasising that God values them and accepts their prayers.

[242] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 198v - 199r.
[243] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 199r-v.

Amr also talks about the people who are not able to give charity, but are themselves in need of financial support. He states that being financially disadvantaged is something good for the afterlife. God helps poor people in their hard times and poverty helps them to improve their spirituality:

> God tests His sincere servants in order to check their patience and improve their reward with [their] acquiescence, submission, contentment, gratitude and rejection of the pleasures of this transitory world.[244]

According to the text, poverty helps to increase the believer's reward in the afterlife and their relationship with God. Showing the right attitude during hard times improves an individual's spirituality: "Poverty purifies the believer just like the fire purifies gold and refines it".[245]

When the all examples are considered, the focus on mercy in *al-Maṣābīh* appears to have a more materialistic, mundane character, as it is strongly attached to the act of charity. The text not only focuses on financial aid to disadvantaged people in society, but provides advice to readers concerning their relationship with these people in society. As is the case in the other sections, there is a two-dimensional approach in this section, as the act of mercy improves both the believer's relationship with God and their engagement with society.

Tawāḍu' (Humility)

At the beginning of this section, the benefits and virtues of humility are explained as follows:

> Humility is the tool of beneficence [*al-khayr*] and supporter of goodness [*al-birr*]. Through it, the benefits of love can be continued and the advantage of closeness can be utilised. It increases [one's] status and indicates the health of [one's] mind. Humility

[244] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 201v.
[245] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 201v.

> entails peace and mercy and it protects from weariness and fearfulness. It leads [one] to maintain tranquillity and calls to the right path. Humility kills jealousy and enmity and exterminates hatred and grief.[246]

It is clear from the passage that humility's major function is improving an individual's morality and enabling him to develop good personal qualities. It also helps improve his relationship with society, as most blameworthy acts mentioned in the passage, which are supposed to be eliminated by humility, are related to an individual's relationship with others, such as hatred, jealousy, and enmity.

In the following lines, 'Amr starts to explain that the main benefit of humility is increasing one's value and position in both society in this world, and in the afterlife. Referencing Luke 14:11, he first states that the one who aggrandises himself actually humiliates himself.[247] The humble person always receives respect from society, his speech will be listened to and his actions will be followed. Moreover, whomever humbles himself, God will glorify. According to the text, humility would even be appreciated by the ruling elite, as 'Amr states: "A humble scholar would be treated very well by the governor [*al-sultan*] and praised by his peers".[248]

Humility in the text is self-evaluation along with self-consciousness about one's own value. As with the earlier sections, a twofold interpretation of the benefits of this virtue can be clearly seen here, as it helps improve one's value both in this world, in the eyes of governors and society, and in the eyes of God in the afterlife.

Another interesting aspect of humility in the text is the authority to which the person or the believer is supposed to humble himself. In terms of the objects of humility, 'Amr provides quite a

[246] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 203v.
[247] And also Matthew 23:12
[248] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 204r.

comprehensive list. He first connects humility with gratitude (*shukr*) and says it should lead one to be both grateful to God for His blessings and to human beings for their kindness and assistance. In terms of people as the objects of gratitude, he mentions administrators, leaders, and also 'weaker' members of society. [249] After he makes this connection, he turns to recounting the eschatological benefits of humility and gratefulness. He says:

> Whoever becomes grateful and humble, he will receive the contentment of God, an increase of blessings [*ni'mah*] and the virtue of gratefulness. Whoever denies [*kafara*] and becomes arrogant [*tarāfa'a*], he receives the displeasure of God, the extermination of blessing and the disadvantages of infidelity [*kufr*]. Nothing would prevent one from being humble and grateful, apart from the dominion of arrogance and the lure of ignorance [*al-jahl*] and infidelity [*al-kufr*]. The grateful and humble ones are the receivers of God's blessing and arrogant infidels the targets of His anger.[250]

The connection of the act of humility with gratefulness is very clear here, as 'Amr describes it as result or a component of humility. An interesting connection, which is striking in the passage above, is that he associates infidelity (*kufr*) with arrogance (*kibr*), which he uses as the opposite or antonym of humility in the text. According to the passage, arrogance is a consequence of infidelity and ignorance. Perhaps another semantic link that should be mentioned in this context is the connection between arrogance and ignorance (*al-jahl*). Indeed, a similar semantic connection appears in the earlier lines where 'Amr associates the intellect with humility: "If a noble one is clever [*'āqil*] he would change his arrogance to humility". When the whole cluster of terms is considered, there is a clear semantic link between humility–gratefulness–intellect and arrogance–infidelity–ignorance.

[249] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 204v.
[250] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 205r.

Indeed, this very connection sounds very similar to Qur'anic discourse related to infidelity (*kufr*). In his *Ethico-religious Concepts in the Qur'an*, Toshihiko Izutsu attempts to provide a semantic analysis of major ethical concepts in the Qur'an. Examining the language of particular verses that addresses infidelity, Izutsu states that there is a clear semantic link between ingratitude and infidelity, as in some of the verses, infidelity is expressed as the antithesis of gratefulness.[251] Moreover, in several Qur'anic verses, disbelief is mentioned next to arrogance. One of the clear examples of this particular use comes in 7: 76: "The Arrogant party said: 'For our part, we reject what ye believe in'".

'Amr's explanation of humility parallels the Qur'anic discourse on the same issue. It is almost impossible to know whether he himself consulted the Qur'an and got the idea from there, or borrowed it from any other Islamic source. However, it is clear that he definitely knew this particular interpretation of humility and arrogance, and its connection to faith and disbelief, as he employed it in his text.

In the rest of the section, he quotes several verses of scripture that advise humility, and gives examples of prophets who gained benefits for being humble, as well as people who had difficulties in their lives for being arrogant, in order to promote humility.

The content of the text shows similar features with the earlier sections. The two-dimensional concern, which considers both this world and the afterlife, clearly appears in the text as the humble one gets both the appreciation of God and of society. The person who is humble should show his gratitude and humility towards both God and the people. The aim of this praiseworthy act also appears to have a twofold interest: improving the believer's own morality and also improving their relationship with society.

Tahārah (Purity)

[251] Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an* (Canada: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 124-126

Before discussing the content of this chapter, it would be useful to give a brief description of the meaning of the term *tahārah* in Arabic, as it is the most common word used to address cleanliness throughout the in Tahārah section. The initial meaning of *tahārah* in Arabic is 'cleanliness' or 'purity'. In a religious context, the term is used for both physical cleanliness and spiritual cleanliness in Islamic tradition. For example, in the Qur'an, the ritual ablution that women are supposed to perform following their menstruation is expressed by the verb *ṭ-h-r* and its derivatives.[252] In the writings of medieval authors, the word *ṭahārah* is employed to address spiritual or moral purification and improvement. The title of ibn Miskawayh's renowned work, *Ṭahārah al-A'rāq* ('The Purity of Disposition') is a good example of this use of the term.

At the beginning of the text, 'Amr briefly mentions the advantages of purity, such as enabling one to receive heavenly wisdom and eliminate sins. It is depicted as the highest position and the best way of 'avoidance'. It is really difficult to identify what he means by *ṭahārah* in the text, as he does not provide any description. However, he classifies 'purity' in two sections, as 'the first [initial] cleanliness' (*ṭahārah al-ūlā*) and 'the second cleanliness' (*ṭahārah al-thānī*). He does not give exact definitions of these two types of cleanliness, but his explanation reveals some information regarding the thought process behind his categorisation when he says:

> Whoever wears the first cleanliness with the Holy Spirit, from the water of baptism, in the houses of God, by the hands of priests, according to the laws of Christianity, and acknowledges the great gift, which his body was marked by [this cleanliness], and protects it [the first cleanliness] with 'the second cleanliness', and does not defile it with corruption and temporary pleasures, and leads himself to salvation with all his strength, and aims towards the doors of the right path, and is patient with

[252] Qur'an 2:222.

> the detachment [*waḥdah*] that completes asceticism [*zuhd*], and eliminates the desires of his ego [*nafs*] and lust of his body, would have his goodness completed and would be saved from the faults of his nature.[253]

According to this passage, it is very clear that the first type of cleanliness is Christian baptism. In terms of the second type of cleanliness, it appears to be strongly attached to the ascetic life, as 'Amr's statement contains basic elements of asceticism, such as celibacy and controlling one's own worldly and bodily desires. In the following lines, he addresses 'the second cleanliness' as *Ṭahārah al-rūḥānī*, spiritual cleanliness, and states that this type of cleanliness is superior to the permitted bodily pleasures (*ḥalāl al-muṭlaq min lazzah al-jismānī*), just as the sky is superior to the earth, the sun to the stars, and light to the darkness.[254] Accordingly, the second type of purity is celibacy in the text.

An interesting concept that 'Amr addresses in this context is *ḥulūl*, which could be literally translated as 'indwelling'. The concept of *ḥulūl* has various interpretations among different religious and denominational groups in Medieval Arabic writings. Massignon gives two main descriptions for the term: the union of body and soul, and the union of divine spirit and human being. The first description is used by followers of atomism and Ash'ārīs, while the second one, which sounds very similar to the Christian doctrine of incarnation, was rejected by almost all Muslim *mutakallimūn*. Some Shi'a and Sufi groups, however, shared common ground with Christianity on the concept of *ḥulūl*. In Medieval Christian Arabic writings, the term *ḥulūl* is employed to address incarnation.[255]

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[253] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 210v-211r.
[254] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 211r.
[255] Louis Massignon and G.C. Anawati, *Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition*, s.v. "Ḥulūl" (Leiden: Brill, 2012), accesed 12 March 2014.
http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/hulul-SIM_2944?s.num=53&s.au=Massignon%2C+L.&s.start=40

In the *ṭahārah* section, 'Amr first states that the body is a temple of God, quoting a couple of Biblical verses, including 1 Corinthians: 6:19-20 and 16-17. Then he moves on to explain how purified bodies are the dwelling places of God. He says:

> Whoever becomes patient with celibacy [*waḥdah*] and cleanliness, would be on the spiritual way [*al-manzilah al-rūḥāniyyah*]. They would have the spirit of God in their bodies, which raised the Messiah among other dead people. Your dead bodies are revived because of the spirit of incarnation in you [*al-rūḥ al-ḥāl fīkum*]. If you know, you are in the image of God and his spirit dwells in you. Therefore, whoever corrupts and defiles the image of God, he will destroy and eliminate His image. Certainly, when the image of God is clean, so you are.[256]

In the following passage, he states that there is a lot of evidence for indwelling of the spirit of God into Prophets' bodies in famous writings. He mentions the story of seventy elderly men from the Old Testament, whom Moses placed the spirit of God within.[257] He states that the New Testament also has examples of the Holy Spirit filling human bodies, and he quotes Luke 1:67 in this context, when Zachariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied. Then he moves on to explain that like the sunlight, which enters the houses, eliminates humidity, and kills mold, increases the light and beautifies the smell, the Holy Spirit cleanses the bodies it enters. It purifies the mind, sharpens the intellect, enlightens the heart, and alleviates the ego (*al-nafs*). Just like a curtain, door or wall that prevents the sun's rays from entering a house, wrongdoing and sin intercept the Holy Spirit and prevent it from entering polluted bodies.[258]

[256] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 212r.
[257] Numbers 11:25.
[258] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 212v.

'Amr is certainly not talking about incarnation in these lines. Although he supports his statements with scriptural quotes, the concept of *ḥulūl* does not sound similar to the general understanding and the use of the term in a Christian context, as it has a clear connection with the concept of spiritual cleanliness and morality. In this sense, it resembles the Sufi discourse on the concept of *ḥulūl*. al-Muḥāsibī (d. 857), an early theorist of Sufi moral psychology, describes love as "the entering of divine goodness into the hearts of those whom he has chosen to be his lover".[259] The discourse gives grounds for *ḥulūl fi al-mustaḥsanat,* 'divine inherence through virtuous actions', in the literature, which Massignon explains as "believing that the divine spirit could be instilled drop by drop in a creature by means of his virtuous acts".[260] 'Amr's understanding of *ḥulūl* appears slightly different than the Sufi explanation, as it is connected to purity rather than love in *al-Maṣābīh*. However, it does have moral connotations and it makes one think about possible Sufi inspiration in the text.

In the following pages, 'Amr gives examples from the lives of prophets and famous historical figures, explaining how they gained worldly and spiritual benefits through purity, asceticism, and avoiding bodily desires. Here, the connection between celibacy and purity appears once again. When he moves on to explain the benefits of a celibate life, addressing a particular practice during the great storm, this connection becomes more apparent. He says that, during the great storm, God commanded women and children to stay on the West side of the ship, and men to sit on the East, in order to avoid them becoming intimate during the journey. After the storm, they were allowed to unite in order to produce

[259] Al-Muḥāsibī's *Fasl fi al-maḥabbah* is reproduced by Abu Nu'aym al-Isfahani in Hilyah al-Awliya, see Abū Nu'aym al-Isfahānī, *Hilyah al-Awliyā Tabaqāt al-Aṣfiyā*, ed. 'Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad Aṭā (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1977), 73-110.

[260] Louis Massignon*, Essai sur les Origines du Lexique Technique de la Mytique Musulmane* (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1922), 94 – 97. Also Diana Lobel, "A Dwelling Place for the Shekhinah" *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 90 (1999): 103-125.

the new generation for the new world.[261] It is worth pointing out here that sexual intimacy is allowed for the purpose of reproduction.

In several instances in the text, sexual intimacy with a woman appears to be a cause of impurity. He gives various examples from the Old Testament where ritual purity is commanded. For instance, Aaron was not allowed to offer sacrifice in Jerusalem until he was purified from his earlier encounters with women.[262] Seventy elderly men, mentioned in Numbers 11:25 as receiving the Holy Spirit, were also advised by the prophet not to get close to women in order to stay pure. After making it clear that sexual intercourse with a woman causes impurity, he gives examples from the Bible, mentioning the disadvantages and harm caused by getting close to women. He starts with the story of the forbidden fruit in Genesis, and explains in detail how approaching women resulted in various disasters. Following these examples, he states that there are many examples of holy men in the past who divorced their wives in order to practice celibacy for the sake of their religion.[263]

Although he makes it clear that having relations with women is harmful for men, he clarifies that getting married is not condemned by Christianity and if men did not have any relations with women, the human species would come to an end.[264] Moreover, if one is not able to stay chaste outside of marriage, then there is no sin for him to get married.[265] However, one cannot serve two separate masters; for either he loves the one and hates the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other.[266] Therefore, most of the pious people did not approve of getting married, having children, or dealing with

[261] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 214v.
[262] Probably incidents mentioned in Numbers 8:21, Leviticus 9:7, and Exodus 29:36.
[263] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 215v-216r.
[264] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 216v.
[265] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 217r.
[266] Matthew 6:24

worldly issues, in order to serve God with full purity and devotion.[267] In his explanations, celibacy appears to be clearly connected with purity, and having intercourse with women is considered the cause of impurity and a deviation from the service of God.

After clarifying the two types of purity, explaining the benefits of celibacy for the spiritual lives of believers, and attaching it to asceticism and detachment from the world, 'Amr devotes the rest of the *ṭahārah* section to describing different aspects of asceticism, features of ascetics, and benefits of leading an ascetic life. This attitude once again clearly reveals the ascetic ideal which was emphasised in the first section, *Taqwā*. The type of asceticism which is promoted in *al-Maṣābīh* will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Conclusion

As has been seen, each division in al-Maṣābīh appears as an individual section which focuses on a certain subject which is specified in their title. Every section is separated from each other but they all have a similar structural pattern as they start with the benefits of the relevant virtue or practice and followed by statements encouraging the reader to perform it supported by Biblical quotations and example from the lives of eminent Biblical prophets and personalities. In all sections, 'Amr is careful to provide the list of benefits which concerns both this life and the hereafter. Piety which is based on fear of God appears as the ground of morality. Ascetic ideal is striking especially in the first section taqwā and the last section al-tahārah. The underlying themes of *al-Maṣābīh* chapter will be the subject of the next chapter.

[267] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 217v.

CHAPTER V: PRIORITIES, MAIN THEMES AND OBJECTIVES OF Al-MAṢĀBĪH CHAPTER

Having examined the subsections of *al-Maṣābīh* and investigated the main concerns and the functions of each section, this chapter will consider broader questions and themes surrounding the main contribution of *al-Maṣābīh* in *Kitāb al-Majdal* as a section focusing on Christian morality.

As has been shown, it was constructed and presented in seven subsections, each of which deals with a spiritual or religious practice. Evidently, this content shows that the morality of *al-Maṣābīh* has a religious character rather than philosophical or theological. ‘Amr is not interested in engaging with the systematic analytical discussion of *metaethical* issues, neither does he seem to employ the method of

philosophers when determining the concepts of right and wrong. His *al-Maṣābīh* simply provides a sevenfold scheme of spiritual and moral development through which an individual can advance his character and piety.

Although all parts of the chapter appear as independent sections, when the entire chapter is considered, the text contains significant themes located in certain sections, which provides the reader with a deeper understanding of 'Amr ibn Mattā's moral perspective. Examining these main themes, this chapter aims to determine the subsidiary components of the morality presented in *al-Maṣābīh*.

Determining Right and Wrong: The Theory of Value in *al-Maṣābīh*

As has been described in detail in the first chapter, among the debates that took place in intellectual circles in the early Abbasid period, one of the most major was the discussion about the nature of value and the grounds of moral goodness. To summarise the situation, there are two main theories that are opposed to each other. One was that of the Basrian Mu'tazilites, which claims that values such as goodness or justice have real existence, regardless of anyone's will or judgement, including God's. According to the Mu'tazilites, God created mankind with the ability to feel pleasure and pain, with needs and desires, and he also granted them the awareness of their own positions as living beings, an intuitive knowledge of the basic moral principles, and an ability to act accordingly. Therefore, all people of sound mind have an immediate intuition concerning what is morally right and what is wrong.[268] The other theorists, namely Ash'arī and his followers, took divine will as the basis of right and wrong. According to Ash'arī, the values are determined by the will of God, who clarifies what is just and morally right or wrong.[269] The position of the Mu'tazilites is called ethical rationalism, while Ash'arī's position is

[268] Richard. M. Frank, "Moral Obligation in Classical Muslim Theology." *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 14 (1983), 205.
[269] Hourani, *Reason and Tradition*, 57.

considered an example of ethical voluntarism.

Before moving to evaluate ‘Amr’s understanding of the nature of value and the grounds of morality, it would be useful to look at how goodness is expressed in the text. ‘Goodness’ is expressed by terms such as *al-birr*, *al-khayr*, and *al-iḥsān*, which usually appear along with a cluster of terms that carry both moral and religious significations, such as *al-taqwā* (piety), *al-ḥilm* (dignity), and *al-tawāḍu‘* (humility). An illuminating example of the use of the word *al-birr* will be mentioned here to elucidate the ways in which goodness or righteousness is expressed in the text.[270] In the taqwā section of *al-Maṣābīh*, ‘Amr explains “*tarīq al-abrār*”, ‘the ways of righteous people’, as follows:

> Certainly, the greatest effort lies in the ways of righteous ones [*al-abrār*]. The most useful track is to follow the character of good people [*al-akhyār*]. A successful person is one who follows the middle way, not the one who swings to the right and the left. Our Lord Jesus said ‘I am the way, life and the gate. Whoever enters through it will be saved’.[271]

In this sentence, the path of righteous people is explicitly attached to Jesus and the doctrine of salvation. Considering this particular example, the meaning of righteousness and the cluster of terms which are associated with ‘goodness’, it can be said that goodness is not a neutral or secular concept in *al-Maṣābīh*. Conversely, it has a strong religious connotation.

Although ‘Amr does not tend to engage with dialectical arguments on the nature of value, and seems not to be interested in providing analytical discussions on the subject, he reveals his stance on the

[270] A more elaborate discussion on the meaning and the use of the term *al-birr* will be provided in the section on language.
[271] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 156v. This passage will be quoted again when discussing the meaning of goodness in the following chapter.

origins of value at the very beginning of al-*Masābīh* chapter in a well-structured passage:

> According to the text, God brought human being from nothingness into existence through His grace [*bi-faḍlihī*], while He was not obliged to do so. In addition, through His justice [*bi ʻadlihī*] he requested from them knowledge [*al-ʻilm*], goodness [*al-birr*] and righteous deeds [*al-ʻamal al-sālih*], clarifying for them the divine law [*al-shar'*].He then set the criterion of superiority [among people] as renunciation from the world. Everyone is created equal in terms of intellectual ability *[al-ʻaql*], reason [*al-nutq*], ability to discriminate [*al-tamyīz*] and the capability for action [*al-istiṭāʻah*]. He also created them equally capable of finding the true path or reaching it, and also receiving divine warnings calling for obedience.[272]

Clearly, ʻAmr emphasises in this passage that human beings are all created equal by God for the purpose of servitude to Him, with the capacity to receive the divine message and apply it to their lives. ʻAmr clarifies the right path for human beings as follows:

> He set their path as struggling with Satan, opposing desire and resisting aggression. They keep following righteousness, seeking goodness, and urging to the right path.[273]

Following this, he turns to explaining the ways in which human beings can access knowledge of goodness:

> He illuminated them with knowledge and did not leave them in purposelessness. He divided the sustenance in the world, provided it and relieving the worry about the

[272] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 153r.
[273] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 153r.

seeking of it. He taught them the benefits of striving for goodness [*al-ṣalāh*], and the profits of piety. He showed them the ways of happiness [*al-saʿādah*] and granted [to human beings] the capacity to choose of their own volition [*mallaka al-iktisāb bi al-irāda*], and he promised [*waʿada*] whoever ensures His contentment, he will receive a reward [*thawāb*], and whoever disobeys Him, will receive punishment [*al-ʿiqāb*].[274]

Before examining this particular passage, it might be useful to recall that this narrative on free will in connection with reward and punishment is not a novelty in Syriac theology, and contains several elements from earlier Syriac authors' writings. As an example, human free will plays an important role in the teachings of the fourth-century church father Saint Ephrem (d. 373) He devotes an entire hymn, Heresies 11, to the subject of free will. According to Ephrem, God created Adam in an intermediary position with the capacity to choose his own acts in order to reward him with a higher state when he keeps the commandment. Adam's misuse of his freedom of choice caused his banishment from Paradise. God could have simply forced everyone to obey and please Him, however He preferred seeing human beings strive in order to gain His content.[275] Accordingly, just like in 'Amr's passage, there is a strong correlation between free will and reward and punishment.

On the other hand, when the whole passage is considered, the narrative contains several elements from intellectual debates concerning the theory of value in the late tenth century intellectual context. The passage includes two basic tenets of the Mu'tazilite school, the justice of God (*al-ʿadl*) and divine promise and threat (*wa al-waʿd al-waʿid*). Moreover, similar to 'Amr's statement, according to Basrian Muʿtazilities, God's creation of the world and mankind is purely a gracious act (*tafaddul*) from His side. He created humanity as independent moral agents with the purpose of rewarding them in the

[274] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 153r.
[275] Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 34-36.

future according to their deeds. For this reason, He sent prophets to let mankind know the conditions of the upcoming life and imposed on them certain obligations, which are not specifically deducible from basic ethical principles. Revelation gives man further motive to act in the right way. Therefore, His creation of humanity is not a purposeless act, as the purposeless act is ethically bad and God performs only good as a result of His justice.[276] It is worth mentioning here that 'Amr's statement about mankind's capacity to choose of their own free will also clearly echoes the Basrian Mu'tazilite's position about free will. When considered as a whole, the passage not only vocalises some of the basic principles and statements of Mu'tazila, it also contains the same terminology. Certainly, 'Amr shows no interest in engaging in a dialectical argument and discussing the issues in detail or justifying his position. He declares his position through simple statements that show a clear awareness of the debates of his own time.

Although his passage bears strong parallels with the Mu'tazilite stance, it does not necessarily conflict with Ash'arī's position, especially on moral obligation. According to Ash'arī, reward and punishment are necessitated by revelation. God would be neither just nor good if He punished people for acts that they were not accountable for.

Following this reward and punishment discourse, he makes a clear statement about the origins of goodness and attaches it to submission to God, which clarifies his position:

> Goodness [*al-khayr*] is innate in the nature of the human being; evil is an addition to it, which is not part of his real nature [*'araḍī*]. If he rises against submission to his creator, he follows the way to decrease his own benefit. When he insists on his disobedience, his own self [*ḍat*] detaches from its own natural way [*tarīq al-tabī'ah*].

[276] Frank, "Moral Obligation", 204-207. 'Amr talks about the justice of God in more detail in the second chapter of *Kitāb al-Majdal*.

Obeying God is the head of goodness and disobeying Him is the cause of evil.[277]

Here, he first associates 'goodness' with the real nature of man and then attaches it to submission to God. At the end of the passage, it is very clearly stated that God is the one who decides and determines the value of actions, as obeying Him is expressed as the origin of goodness while the opposite is stated as the reason for wickedness.

After providing this explanation about the nature of value, he turns to recount several verses from the Bible that advise choosing virtuous acts and pursuing goodness. One of them is Psalms 34:12-14:

> Prophet David said in Psalm thirty-four that whoever loves life and wants to see good days, protect your tongues from evil, and your lips from telling lies. Turn from evil and perform good and seek benefit [*al-ṣalāh*] and pursue it.[278]

The passage contains similar citations from the scripture, which encourage seeking goodness (*al-khayr*) and avoiding evil. One of the most striking features of these verses is, apart from promoting goodness and virtuous acts, they all emphasise human initiative in terms of choosing the right action. The use of scriptural quotes in order to promote righteous acts is particularly important in this context, as it shows that the divine command is accepted as the source of morality.

To conclude, although 'Amr is not interested in making statements related to the major questions of morality, he expresses his position in a quite structured passage that answers the basic questions related to the nature of value: 'What are the right actions' and 'How do we know them?' According to his statements, the origin of good and right is the divine command, and God is the one who

[277] Ms. Arabe 190, 153v.
[278] Ms. Arabe 190, 154r.

informs us of it through revelation. Although he borrows some ideas from Mu'tazilite authors, which are in line with the earlier Syriac author Saint Ephrem's position, he shows no interest in providing dialectical arguments and getting involved in the debates of his time on the nature and origins of value in detail. His expositions have three main points of emphasis: firstly, human beings are created by God for the purpose of servitude to Him, secondly they all have the capability to comprehend divine guidance, and lastly they are granted the capacity to choose their own actions. This strong emphasis on the divine command as the grounds of morality brings him closer to Ash'arī's stance. Perhaps the most striking peculiarity in his exposition is that he uses and amalgamates the positions of the two opposing intellectual currents of his time, which makes it clear that his interest was, as he already stated at the very beginning of *Kitāb al-Majdal*, to simply provide a spiritual guide for his readers, rather than engage with scholarly debates.

Function of Intellect for Achieving the Ideal Moral State

As has been shown, divine law and scripture is accepted as the main grounds of ethical value. Unlike some of his contemporaries, such as al-Māwardī, who presents a detailed discussion on the function and importance of the intellect in his *Adab al-Dunyā wa al-Dīn*, 'Amr does not give a structured argument about the contribution of the mind towards achieving the ideal moral state. However, looking at some of the remarks he makes on the function of the mind provides some insight into his perception of intellect.

A rather lengthy exposition in the Taqwā section is useful for this purpose. In this passage, 'Amr first states that the mind (*al-'aql*) is a basic feature of human beings, which distinguishes them from animals:

> The human being [*al-insān*] is superior to mute, speechless animals with the distinction of the mind, the ability to choose the actions and behaviour of [their] mind

and conviction. This is because animals do whatever their desires and nature call them to. They are not aware of the consequences [of their acts], neither are they able to avoid them.[279]

He then moves on to explain the main trait of the mindful or clever person:

> The mindful person [*al-ʻāqil*] is the one who eliminates the desires [*al-hawā*] and shows strength in his aims. He accepts the wickedness of temptation and approves the eminence of rightfulness [*al-rushd*]. He wants the blessings of the highest one [*al-ʻalī*] and becomes delighted with the call of ascetics [*al-zuhhād*]. He enjoys the joy of piety and settles on the ways of worship.[280]

It is very clear in the text that there is an antinomy between desires (*al-hawā*) and the mind or mindful acts. The clever person is described as one who opposes the mundane desires and consciously prefers the pious life. Another important aspect of the passage is the ascetic emphasis, as it appears to be an indispensable aspect of the pious life of the conscious person. This narrative about the function of the mind sounds quite similar to al-Māwardī's stance, as he sees passion (*al-hawā*) as the antithesis of reason.[281] However, unlike al-Māwardī, who provides a detailed argument about the function of intellect and its divisions, 'Amr makes no attempt to provide a discussion.

On the following page in the *Taqwā* section, a close relationship between piety and the mind appears:

[279] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 157r-158v.
[280] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 158r.
[281] Majid Fakhry, *Ethical Theories*, 160.

> The rise of the servants on the path of closeness [*marātib al-qurba*] happens depending on the strength of their minds [*uqūlihim*] and value of their deeds [*al-a'mālihim*]. There is no way to goodness [*al-birr*] without the mind, and no reward without deeds [*'a'māl*]. There is no religion for the ignorant [*al-jāhil*].[282]

The passage clearly reveals the connection between pious behaviour, the mind, and getting close to God. Achieving goodness is only possible with the combination of good deeds and the contribution of the intellect. The last sentence gives the sense that ignorance is used as the antonym of the mind. Indeed, the term 'ignorant' is also used to address vicious people in the text.[283] Perhaps the most important detail to mention here is that the mind is expressed as the condition of religious responsibility, as ignorance is the reason for being an unbeliever.

To summarise, the basic function of the mind in *al-Maṣābīḥ* appears to be distinguishing right from wrong. It is the condition of moral and religious responsibility as it enables humankind to choose their behaviour and makes them aware of the consequences of their acts. Although it is mentioned along with religious law and scripture, there is no further explanation of to what extent it is involved in determining morally good and bad actions. The mind's task appears to be merely receiving and interpreting the divine command and guiding the human being to the virtuous life.

The Classification of Recommended and Blameworthy Acts

At the end of the *Taqwā* section, 'Amr gives a list of the recommended and disapproved acts and characteristics under three separate divisions. In the first category, he recounts forty favourable qualities under the title of *mashkūrāt*, 'commendables'. The following two lists include eighty unpleasant traits in

[282] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 163v.
[283] The semantic connection between knowledge-intellect-faith and ignorance-arrogance-infidelity is explained in the section on humility.

total, classified into two separate categories, each of which contain forty members, entitled *maḥẓūrāt*, 'impermissibles' and *madhmūmāt*, 'unpleasants'. Each characteristic appears without any definition or clarification. They are recounted one after another and divided by single dots in the manuscript. 'Amr appears to be more concerned about the presentation of his list than its content. All favourable and unpleasant qualities are arranged according to rhyme. Therefore, when the translation of the virtues and vices is read, it looks as if there is no meaningful or logical flow between items. Another important feature of 'Amr's list is that in some cases the same qualities or unfavourable traits and acts are mentioned more than once, using different words and expressions. He was probably aware of these two issues about his list and includes an explanatory statement at the end of each category clarifying their meanings and stating that the aforementioned acts and character traits are not exclusive, and any other qualities that fall under his classification can be added to the list.

The first list, which focuses on the recommendable acts, contains the following favourable qualities and approbatory acts: serving God, purifying the heart, cleansing the soul [*ṭahārat al-nafs*], avoiding mess, acknowledging the value of someone [*ma'rifah al-qadr*], maintaining gratitude, loyalty to a ruler, pardoning a servant, honour of the pious ones, modesty of the rich ones, paying one's debts, offering to lend, keeping humble, staying away from arrogance, having good character, following the right path, covering the residence (privacy), lowering one's gaze, keeping secrets, accepting apologies, minimising wrongdoing, not creating uproar, having a sense of loyalty, avoiding causing trouble, extending forbearance, maintaining the bonds of kinship [*ṣilatu al-raḥim*], preferring piety, dressing with modesty, comforting those of ill repute, amusing the saddened, visiting the afflicted, caring for captives, helping the powerless, aiding the weak, extending silence, hindering aspersion, sticking to rightfulness,

requesting with truthfulness, striving for peace, acting with tolerance.[284]

The most striking feature of this group of recommended acts is that they have two main objectives: improving the reader's relationship with God and also doing the same with society. The initial qualities in the list focus on the development of an individual's spirituality, such as serving the God, purifying the heart and cleansing the soul. Some of the good character traits and behaviours aims at improving individual's personal development such as being humble, grateful, and faithful. Rest of the list focuses on acts and temperaments that aim to improve the quality of communal interaction in the society and create social harmony, such as keeping the confidentiality by covering the dwellings and lowering one's gaze, maintaining family ties, helping needy ones, and visiting and comforting people who are in a disadvantaged position within the community. A short remark that 'Amr makes at the end of this list explicitly states these two major concerns:

> All of the moral qualities which are approved should create closeness and nearness to God and must cultivate love, solidarity, and friendship in people.[285]

This explanation makes it clear that 'Amr is fully aware of the content of the list and its twofold concerns. Before moving to discuss the other two lists, the interesting recommended attitude connected to the individual's relationship with the ruler should be mentioned here. There is only one approved act mentioned regulating the relationship with the leaders of society and it is loyalty towards them from the citizen. It is expressed as *mushāya'ah al-mulūk* in the text. The word *mushāya'ah* comes from the root *sh-y-'a*, which has the meanings of 'circulating' or 'distributing'. The well-known term *shī'a*, which literally means 'followers' and is used to address one of the two main branches of Islam, comes from the same root. When the political connotations of the derivatives of the root *sh-y-'a* are considered, the

[284] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 164v-165r.
[285] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 165r.

word expresses a strong sense of loyalty and support rather than mere submission. Having this particular recommended act in a book by a Christian author who lived under Islamic rule makes this statement very important in terms of Christian perceptions of and engagement with their Muslim rulers.

Following the list of recommended qualities, 'Amr gives a list of the acts and traits which should be avoided: arrogance, pride, envy, jealousy, evildoing, betrayal, oppression, injustice, fury, extortion, obstinacy, deceit, murder, cheating, abuse, defamation, tyranny, arbitrariness, backbiting, insults, hypocrisy, separation, disputation, ostentation, violation, malice, self-pride, falsehood, slander, abhorrence, enmity, acrimony, cowardice, deceit, recklessness, vulgarity, trickery, destitution, parsimony, servility.[286]

At the end of the list, 'Amr reveals the mindset behind this list which makes it clear that the main concern of this first category of bad traits are to focus on those that are caused by the temptations of internal desires and Satan:

> And anything which comes from the thoughts of desire or temptations of Satan, and originates from bodily lust and feelings of depravity.[287]

The second category, entitled *madhmūmāt*, includes wickedness, rudeness, transgression, bad character (*sū' al-khuluq*), grief, inequality, mockery, drollery, laziness, boredom, grimacing, vanity, despotism, rage, impatience, disclosing poverty, haughtiness, discontent with destiny, companionship of ignorant people, going astray, fellowship with corrupters, abusing servants, ridiculing erroneous ones, clinging to flexible ones, humiliating one who is in trouble, glee at another's misfortune, following worldly desires, spreading rumours of another's fall, love of prestige, turning away from benefits,

[286] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 165r.
[287] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 165r-v.

seeking revenge towards a punisher, taking advantage of the charitable, desiring the world, debating with inferior ones, despising a question, ending up in absurdity, greediness, sadness, impetuosity, and laziness.[288]

The list contains unfavourable acts and gives a sense of renunciation from the world, by including such acts as following worldly desires and ambitions towards this worldly life. The societal concern that appears in the classification of the recommended acts can also be seen here, as some of the bad traits are related to the relationship with morally corrupt people or despising ones who are in difficulty. An interesting detail in this list is that three of the bad traits are related to debating with others, the way of engaging with people who are asking questions, and concluding speech in a sensible manner, which suggests that ‘Amr expects some of his audience to have the capacity to engage in discussions and provides people with some guidance when answering questions. ‘Amr ends this division with a short explanation which clarifies its mentality:

> And anything which is considered as misdeeds according to *shar‘* [divine law], the mind, the tradition and scripture have condemned in the nature, character, temperament and manner.[289]

Another detail to mention about this category is that the intellect, among the other three sources, is accepted as the criterion for determining unfavourable acts. Although this is just a mere reference to the mind, with no further explanation, it is still valuable that it is mentioned among the basic sources of religion, which are the basis of the teachings of *al-Maṣābīh* and *Kitāb al-Majdal* in general.

[288] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 165v.
[289] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 165v.

Perhaps a word should be said briefly about the two major classifications of the disapproved acts. At the end of the first list, ‘Amr states that anything that originates from bodily desires and Satan should be considered as unfavourable and avoided. The second list ends with a statement that anything that is against religious law, reason, tradition, and scripture should be refrained from. When both statements are considered, it can be said that the first list is more concerned with the self-development of an individual, while the second list focuses on worldly conduct. Indeed, this twofold interest can be observed throughout the whole of *al-Maṣābīh* and will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

To sum, it is really difficult to draw a certain picture of ‘Amr’s division of recommendable and unfavourable acts and traits, as he gives no explanation or description of the items on his list. His brief remarks at the end of each classification make it very clear that there are two main interests in the three-list scheme: personal development and communal harmony. There are two main factors that should be avoided: inner desires and the temptations of Satan. Moreover, anything that is against divine law, common sense, traditional teachings, and scripture should be avoided.

Twofold Purpose of Morality: Mundane and Eschatological Interests

As briefly mentioned in the previous chapter when discussing the content of each section in *al-Maṣābīh*, every section in the text starts with a list of benefits related to the section title. For example, at the beginning of the *Taqwā* section, ‘Amr states that the initial benefit of *Taqwā* is the elimination of the unwanted authority of the *nafs* and following the right path in serving God. Its ultimate benefit is leading

the person to heaven.[290] In the following section, entitled *Maḥabbah*, the benefit of love appears as creating harmony and affection in society and improving the individual's piety. In this section, 'Amr reveals his twofold interest clearly by stating that the 'complete' love is the one which is towards God and also to all other human beings.[291]

In the third section, entitled *Ṣalāh* (prayer), 'Amr uses two different Arabic terms to address prayer: *du'ā'* for invocations and *ṣalāh* for ritual prayers. As can be expected from his division of the vocabulary, there are two main types of prayer in the *ṣalāḥ* section. At the beginning of the section, 'Amr emphasises that ritual prayers are obligatory and leaving them would result in punishment.[292] The spiritual benefits of ritual prayers are expressed as increasing a human being's status to that of an angel's, and bringing the individual nearer to God. They also prevent them from making mistakes.[293] Here, 'Amr follows his two-dimensional approach as ritual prayer has two major benefits: improving the person's relationship with God and also advancing his morality in this world, preventing him from making mistakes. As for the invocations, initially 'Amr places strong emphasis on the importance and necessity of asking for the development of piety and repentance from God. However, towards the end of the section he also states that God helps people in their worldly affairs and gives a long list of examples from the lives of prophets who overcame the difficulties in their lives by turning to God and asking for his help.[294]

The content of the following two sections on mercy and humility are more focused on societal affairs. In the section on mercy, 'Amr explains the importance of showing compassion and looking after disadvantaged people in society. In this context, he emphasises the benefits of charity. However, although the core of the section appears to be focused on mundane relationships with material interest,

[290] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 152r.
[291] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 165v-166r.
[292] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 170v.
[293] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 171r.
[294] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 183v-187r.

towards the end of the section, ‘Amr devotes a passage to explaining how being compassionate would improve an individual’s spirituality and bring them closer to God, saying: “The most beloved one to God is the one who is helpful to His servants”.[295]

In the *tawadu’* section, humility is closely associated with gratitude towards God and also all other human beings. Gratitude towards God is consist with obedience to Him and displaying his blessings. For gratitude to all others, various ways of showing gratitude are explained with regards to people from different levels of society. For example, gratitude towards rulers is explained as lowering oneself to say things that they would approve of, whereas gratitude towards younger people includes praising them and giving presents. It is striking that obeying rulers and showing them respect is advised in *al-Maṣābīh*.[296]

The last section, Ṭahārah on cleanliness, also has two explanations. As examined in the relevant section, ‘Amr divides cleanliness into two categories: ‘initial’ cleanliness and ‘secondary’ cleanliness. Initial cleanliness is expressed as ‘baptism’, which has a spiritual sense. Secondary cleanliness is defined as “rejecting being polluted by temporary pleasures” and closely associated with sexual abstinence and asceticism.[297] Consequently, secondary cleanliness is related to worldly affairs, while initial cleanliness is more concerned with the spiritual state of the individual.

As can be seen, the author is careful to give a twofold explanation in every section of *al-Maṣābīḥ*, regarding both the mundane and otherworldly spheres. This very concern is particularly striking when it appears in the context of ‘Amr promoting asceticism, in the final section, Ṭ*ahārah*. Here,

[295] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 198v-203v.
[296] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 203v-204v.
[297] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 210v-211r.

before giving comprehensive details about the lives and practices of ascetics, he explains the high status of an ascetic in society:

> He is characterised by dignity and praise in his life. He is respected and obeyed in the gatherings of wise ones. Rulers and significant personalities visit in order to gain blessings from his sight and benefits from his prayers. The leaders call at his residence and kiss his hand.[298]

The passage continues with a depiction of how an ascetic would be exalted and respected by society, even after his death. 'Amr ends this exposition by saying:

> This is the path of a practising ascetic in this immediate life. There is also the reward of what he deserves for his strife in the afterlife.[299]

This particular stress on the favourable social reaction to ascetics shows the great extent of 'Amr's societal concern. Indeed, ascetics are supposed to be ones who consciously detach themselves from society and renounce its mundane joys and benefits. In theory, asceticism has a sense of rejecting and resisting social norms. 'Amr values society's high regard for ascetics and feels at ease promoting ascetic practices by mentioning its advantages in the mundane social sphere. Another important detail in his discourse is the emphasis on receiving respect and acknowledgment from leaders and influential people in the community. He has a high opinion of the ruling class and clearly values their acknowledgement.

All in all, it is very clear that 'Amr is careful to give a twofold explanation of each practice he mentions. Indeed, his remarks at the end of the lists of recommended and unacceptable behaviours and traits show that he is fully aware of his approach and follows this particular style purposefully. This very

[298] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 219v.
[299] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 220r.

fact suggests that *al-Maṣābīh* not only aims at improving the eschatological state of individuals, but also regulating mundane social affairs, including the relationship with rulers. It is intriguing to see such a strong emphasis on worldly affairs in a text where asceticism and renunciation of the world are promoted. The main aspects of the ascetic practices promoted in *al-Maṣābīh* will be discussed in detail in the following section.

Nature of Asceticism in *al-Maṣābīh*

Zuhd is a central theme in *al-Maṣābīḥ* that flows throughout the whole text. Every section in *al-Maṣābīḥ* is connected with the practice of *zuhd* and ascetic life in one way or another. Similarly, the term *zāhid* is employed quite often to address virtuous people. The most explicit emphasis on asceticism comes in the first section, *taqwā*, and the last section, *ṭahārah.*

As has been demonstrated in the relevant section, 'Amr touches upon various issues in his first section, *Taqwā*, which are interconnected with the title and the general theme of this section. At the beginning of this initial section, he specifies the origin of goodness as the commandment from God and following His path. Accordingly, he states that the one who performs good deeds is the one who follows God's orders. Apart from following divine law, another important principle of piety that is emphasised in the *Taqwā* section is resisting worldly desires and bodily passions, which 'Amr often addresses as *al-hawā* and *al-shahwah*:

> Keeping the soul [*nafs*] sensible is easy and eliminating the worldly [or bodily] passions is possible for those who detach themselves from ignorance. Whoever likes staying away from depravity, and becomes conscious of its hideousness, and learns the

grounds of virtue, and trusts its benefits, brings his soul to the pursuit of rightness.[300]

This emphasis on abstinence, along with the practices attached to asceticism, which is part of *Kitāb al-Majdal's* religious teaching, can be frequently observed in the other sections of *al-Maṣābīh* as well. For example, in the third section, Ṣalāh, 'Amr states that the focus of the invocations should be the improvement of an individual's status in the afterlife and not any mundane benefits or gains. In the third section, on fasting, the ascetic function of fasting as the elimination of bodily desires is explained in detail. Although such emphasis or detailed passages do not appear often in the other sections, entitled *Maḥabbah*, *Raḥmah*, and *Tawādhu'*, in these divisions ascetic aspects of certain practices are mentioned briefly. For example, in the *Raḥmah* section, when describing the necessity of charity, 'Amr says:

> Some righteous people said that whoever rejects benefiting poor ones from his possessions does not get any profit from his wealth, and whoever does not offer the needy ones from his strength does not complete his practice of asceticism [*al-zahādāh*].[301]

As will be examined in detail, the last section *Ṭahārah* provides detailed information about the Christian ascetic life. Before moving on to discuss the main features of asceticism and the outlook of the monasticism depicted in *al-Maṣābīh*, a striking detail should be mentioned here about the location of more detailed expositions and the emphasis on the ascetic life in the text. The emphasis on *zuhd* and *zāhids* appears towards the end of the first section, *Taqwā*, and the last section, *Ṭahārah*, respectively. Although 'Amr does not indicate the main reason behind this particular layout, it seems that he felt the necessity of making this emphasis at the beginning of the text and then going back to it with an explanation of monasticism at the end of the chapter. While only some features of ascetics are

[300] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 157v.
[301] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 201r.

mentioned in the *Taqwā* section, *Ṭahārah* contains a rather lengthy passage which provides an elaborate picture of Christian monastic life in the time of ‘Amr ibn Mattā.

Indeed, this emphasis on asceticism is not totally unexpected in *al-Maṣābīh*. The first chapter of *Kitāb al-Majdal*, *al-Bayān*, already reveals the ascetic ideal as one of the main themes of the text. However, in this particular chapter, by locating the discussions on ascetics and asceticism at the beginning and the end of *al-Maṣābīh*, ‘Amr once again reminds his reader that devotional, ascetic practice is one of the indispensable elements of his system of morality.

One of the main components of asceticism in *al-Maṣābīh* is ‘the intellect’. In the first sentence quoted above, there is a strong correlation between resisting the world through self-control and drawing away from ignorance. Attaining knowledge of virtues and admitting their benefits are milestones for the reaching the path that leads to a virtuous life. The connection between knowledge and dispelling desire is in line with ‘Amr’s general perception of intelligence and ignorance, which was discussed in the section on humility in the previous chapter.

Amr presents knowledge and intelligence as indispensable component of piety. As has been discussed in the section on the function of the mind, the intellect is depicted as the medium that enables an individual to achieve an ideal moral and religious state. A mindful person is depicted as one who resists and eliminates worldly passions and bodily urges. Accordingly, there is a strong connection between the intellect, which is depicted as the feature that distinguishes humans from animals, and religious responsibility. The human being’s capability to choose their actions makes them responsible. The mindful person should be careful of the desires of his nature and must choose his actions carefully. Following bodily passions and behaving irresponsibly are depicted and denigrated as the habits of animals.

The human soul (*nafs*) plays an important role in 'Amr's system of self-control. It has the ability to either follow desires or turn away from them. The acknowledgement of God and performing appropriate deeds are the mediums that help to cleanse the soul and become able to receive the divine light:

> The awareness of God, the knowledge of truth and adequate acts are the motives that effectuate the peace of the soul, emptiness of the heart, and purification of the mind. Because, through the light of the heart, the glory of God, the secrets of His actions, and the signs of His mercy and grace are perceived […] The secrets of the unknown are revealed through the purification of the soul, and divine perfection is achieved through the development of virtues. When the soul is purified from the filth of searching and looking, it loves its glorified creator and worships Him, receives light from His light, and draws close to Him through the light which it takes from Him.[302]

Amr's exposition of the purification of the soul contains elements from the writings of the earlier Syriac mystics. Before going any further, it is worth remembering that in the Biblical understanding, the heart is the centre of the intellect as well as the emotions. Therefore, in the writings of Syriac authors, the terms heart, mind, soul, and intellect often appear interchangeably.[303] The analogy of light is a theme that was employed by several mystics to address the divine emanation or reflection in the human being, which enables him to obtain spiritual vision. Through it, he perceives knowledge of the mysteries of the soul and attains a state of excellence.

A brief look at John of Dalyatha's development of the analogy of light helps to reveal the subtext

[302] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 159v.
[303] Sebastian Brock, "Some Prominent Themes in the Writings of the Syriac Mystics of the 7th/8th Century AD (1st/ 2nd cent. H)" in *Gotteserlebnis und Gotteslehre: Christliche und Islamische Mystik im Orient / Herausgegeben von Martin Tamcke* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2010), 50.

that ‘Amr had in mind when writing this particular passage. Taking it from Ephrem’s analogy of light,[304] which distinguished between the physical eyes and sight, and the internal or spiritual eyes and what they can see, John of Dalyatha explains that the spiritual eyes of the heart (or mind) require the medium of the holy and divine light in order to achieve the stage of awareness of themselves, as well as the creator. The process of receiving the divine light happens through repentance. The soul has a ‘natural beauty’ acquired from God, which is polluted by the Fall. The constant state of repentance or ‘returning’ enables the soul to regain its primordial unsullied state of beauty, in which it starts to recognise the divine light shining out of itself. When this final stage is achieved, which happens very rarely, the person will see the original perfect state of his own self and the soul’s natural beauty, with divine light shining out of it, which transforms the soul into the likeness of that light.[305] ‘Amr’s description of the purification of the heart resembles John of Dalyatha’s explanation.

Another important component of ‘Amr’s ascetic system, which is worth mentioning here, is the fear of God. The connection between the fear of God and *zuhd* first appears in the initial chapter of *al-Maṣābīh*. As a matter of fact, the strong emphasis on practices and the features of *zāhids* in the *Taqwā* section gives the sense of interrelation between the two concepts. At the beginning of the *Taqwā* section, following an account of the merits of a God fearer (*khā’if Allah*), ‘Amr recounts a list of the praiseworthy qualities of several pious, respectful characters, in which he mentions *al-zāhid*:

> The practising ascetic’s heart becomes enlightened and his face becomes bright. His content, chaste body is peaceful. His community is trustful. The worshipping scholar’s statement is listened to and his benefaction is comprehensive. The mindful pious person does not work for falsehood and does not show interest in strengthening the broken [relationship]. The righteous,

[304] For a detailed discussion of the analogy of light, see Sebastian Brock, *The Luminous Eye*.
[305] Brock, “Some Prominent Themes,” 51-53.

successful person praises God for his grace and increases his praise during difficulties.[306]

While the exposition contains various people, it is striking that it starts with the qualities and description of an ascetic. Subsequently, the first passage, which exclusively focuses on ascetics, appears in a context where 'Amr talks about the transiency of the world and its entertainments, which only cause regret and harm afterwards:

> A *zāhid* in this world does not show any interest in worldly possessions and does not desire them in his heart. He does not touch them with his hands and does not glance at them with his eyes. Whoever loves asceticism [*zuhd*] in this world, and likes the remembrance of the death and struggling for the good deeds before time ends, loves living in solitude and detaching themselves from the people in silence.[307]

On the following page, the connection between *taqwā*, fear of God, morality, and *zuhd* appears very clearly:

> Whoever detaches from it [the world], he gets it. Whoever leaves the world in order to strengthen his piety [*taqwā*], will be enriched by God through something other than worldly possession and strengthened by him without hardship. […] *Taqwā* protects the soul from hastiness, anger, the evil thoughts, and assumptions about God. The weak person is the one who is not capable of self-governance [*siyāsat al-nafs*]. Abstinence [*al-wara'*] is suitable for faith; greed corrupts it. The superior one is the one who defeats the thoughts of desire. The determined one is the one who overcomes his desire and abrogates its trouble. Whoever controls his desire becomes righteous. Whoever is

[306] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 152v.
[307] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 160r.

ambitious about his faith, he feels fear [*khawf*]. The path of salvation in the afterlife lies in piety [*taqwā*]. The excess of desire corrupts the mind and weakens the faith.[308]

In this passage, *taqwā*, fear of God, and *zuhd* appear to be interconnected in many ways. Indeed, *taqwā* can be translated as both piety and fear of God, depending on the context; in this particular passage, both *taqwā* and the word fear (*khawf*) are mentioned. A very evident connection between fear of God and asceticism is mentioned in the last section of *al*-Maṣābīh, where 'Amr turns to discussing the etymology of the term *rahbanah*, a term which is used to address monastic life in Arabic:

> The term monasticism [*rahbanah*] is a word derived from the root of 'fear' [*rahbah*]. Certainly, the God fearer [*khā'if Allah*] would have a desire for closeness [to God] in his heart, and the seeker of closeness follows the righteous deeds and the one who performs the righteous deeds gradually achieves his aim.[309]

Before discussing another important ingredient of 'Amr's system of asceticism, an important detail should be addressed here about the relationship between *taqwā* and *zuhd*. In the previous passage, the renunciation of the world is depicted as a practice that helps to improve and perfect one's *taqwā*. This rather direct connection between *taqwā* and *zuhd* makes one think about the possible Sufi influence on the text, as in Islamic mysticism *zuhd* is accepted as the highest level of *taqwā*. The following investigation on the use of the concept of *jihād* in the *Taqwā* section reveals more about 'Amr's use of Sufi concepts in the text.

Significantly, the concept of *jihād* is an Islamic one; the term appears in the Qur'an forty-one times and is frequently used in the idiomatic expression *al-jihād fī sabīl Allah*, which means 'struggling in

[308] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 161v.
[309] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 220r.

the way of God'. The meaning of the term in classical Islamic literature usually appears attached to both a physical struggle, including armed warfare, and a spiritual one, which is called the 'greater struggle'. The debate on the dichotomy between the 'greater *jihād*' and 'lesser *jihād*' has its roots in a number of hadiths attributed to the Prophet Muhammad. Accordingly, the physical struggle, which is known as the 'lesser *jihād*', is considered secondary to the 'greater *jihād*', which consists of controlling and disciplining one's negative traits and urges as manifested in the soul. Despite the lack of support of the majority, the concept of 'greater *jihād*' maintained significant currency amongst certain sects in Muslim society, especially in Sufi circles. They employed the discourse and evidence of 'greater *jihād*' to elaborate the self-contained Sufi concept of *al-mujāhadah*, which is a principal property of spiritual purification that can lead an individual to achieve the mystical experience.[310]

In the first section of *al-Maṣābīh* in relation to the practice of asceticism, is *jihād***,** which literally means 'to strive' or 'to struggle' in Arabic language can be mentioned here. As has been seen, the term appears a few times in the *taqwā* section in a very similar way to Sufi interpretation of the concept. In the context of the *taqwā* section, 'Amr uses the term *jihād* attached to self-control, and as an antithesis of 'desire' (*al-hawā*). From this point forward, it can be assumed that 'Amr was aware of the Sufi discourse of 'greater *jihād*'. While his use of the term *mujāhadah* in the first sentence strengthens this assumption, the employment of the term in a comparative form as *afḍalu al-jihād* in the second instance makes it clear that he was fully aware of the Sufi concept of 'greater *jihād*' and was totally at ease employing this notion in his text to emphasise and elaborate the importance of self-control.

> The result of following desire [*shahwah*] is destruction. The most virtuous *jihād* [*afḍal al-jihād*] is the one against desire [*al-hawā*] and the most powerful strength is eliminating desire

[310] For a detailed discussion of the concept of greater *jihād* in Islamic literature, see Gavin Picken, "The Greater Jihad in Classical Islam" in *Twenty-First Century Jihad, Law, Society and Military Action,* edited by Elisabeth Kendall and Ewan Stein (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015), 126-138.

[*shahwah*]. The one who becomes a slave of his desires is less valuable than a real slave.[311]

When the whole of al-*Maṣābīh* chapter is concerned, a considerable portion of the first section, *Taqwā*, is devoted to discussing the various aspects of *zuhd* and recounting the benefits of it. From the first to the sixth section of *al-Maṣābīh*, the term *zuhd* is employed to address the set of devotional practices, including the constant conscious effort of controlling and resisting bodily desires and innate ambitions for mundane benefits and wealth. It is depicted as part of being an intelligent, fully capable human being who wishes to improve his piety. Although *zuhd* appears quite often throughout the text attached to *taqwā* and some Sufi concepts, it is difficult to identify its real form in the text. Considering the information given in the first six divisions of *al-Maṣābīh*, the concept of *zuhd* seems quite obscure, as it is not possible to answer the question of which kind of ascetic life 'Amr promotes.

Apparently, the author himself is aware of this ambiguity and he provides detailed information on ascetics and their practices towards the end of the last section, *tahārah*. As has been shown, in this particular section, 'Amr talks about two major types of cleanliness, which are classified as 'baptism' and 'spiritual cleanliness' in the text. The second type of cleanliness, which he calls 'spiritual cleanliness', is closely linked to adult baptism and consequently celibacy. In connection with the celibate life, he discusses the negative consequences of marriage in detail and promotes *zuhd*. He devotes the rest of the text to praising ascetics, describing their practices and recounting the names of numerous renowned mystics.

Before providing any information on monasticism, 'Amr makes it clear that an ascetic life was supported by Jesus. He explained the harms of the world and showed the ways of devotion and

[311] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 163v.

servitude to God.[312] This explicit emphasis on the origins of the renunciation of the world is an introduction to more detailed expositions focusing on the various aspects of Christian monasticism. This rather short statement is followed by the various spiritual qualities of the *zāhids* and their superior position in society. When 'Amr turns to describing the word *rāhib*, derived from the root *r-h-b*, which is frequently used to address Christian monks in the Arabic language, the first detailed information on Christian monasticism appears:

> The word '*rāhib*' is specifically for the single ones [*waḥdānī*] because of their detachment from society, solitude in worshipping and avoidance of the community and all humankind. The one who lives in the community is called *dayrānī* because of his residence in monasteries [*al-dayr*]. (…) The monasteries [*al-diyarat*] are the buildings that shelter groups of monks [*ruhbān*]. In the middle, they contain the altar. There resides the most pious man who devotes himself to asceticism, self-emptying [*takhallā*], and seclusion [*i'tikāf*], and who desires and aims to reach the power of the permissible [*al-ḥalāl*].[313]

The passage provides very basic information about Syriac monasticism. Firstly, 'Amr describes the two major types of ascetics, which he calls "*waḥdānī*" and "*dayrānī*" in the text. Obviously, in the initial sentence he addresses the solitary life of the anchorites, as he emphasises their seclusion from communal life. The Arabic word *waḥdānī* reflects the original Syriac term *īhīdāyā*, 'single ones', which is commonly used for a monastic holy man who follows the hermit's life. In various instances throughout the text, he translates *īhīdāyā* as *mutafarridūn*, 'isolated ones' and *mutawaḥḥidūn*, 'single ones'.[314]

In the following statement, he turns to addressing monks living in monasteries, which he calls

[312] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 219r.
[313] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 220v.
[314] For example, Ms. Arabe 190, f. 219r and 223v.

dayr/*diyārāt* and *dayrānī* respectively, again echoing the Syriac equivalents *dayrā* and *dayrāyā*. The very basic description of monasteries in the statement seems rather peculiar. It suggests that 'Amr assumes the majority of his audience were not aware of the basic features of a monastery.

This short description is followed by a recounting of the spiritual qualities of monks, such as praying regularly and perfectly, strongly attaching themselves to the teachings of the church fathers and scripture, separating themselves from their families and worldly affairs, and devoting themselves with all their strength to following the most approved path. He states that from among them emerges catholicos, archbishops, and bishops.[315] He gives examples of the monks' daily spiritual practices, such as studying scripture and spiritual manuals, praying, fasting, and devoting themselves to worship, and explains the acts and attitudes that they avoid, including following their desires, encountering women apart from their immediate family members, and consuming food and beverages that are tasty and strengthen the body. Clearly 'Amr devotes a rather lengthy passage in which the major aspects and practices of Christian monastic life are described.

Before evaluating this significant portrayal of Christian monasticism in the text, perhaps one of the most intriguing details of 'Amr's narrative should be addressed here. While depicting the main features of ascetics, 'Amr places special emphasis on the fabric of monastic clothing:

> Monks prefer wearing clothes made of wool [*sūf*] during their service because of its unpleasant colour and harshness on the skin. They prefer it because it is long-lasting and costs little.[316]

Following this initial statement, he asserts that the woollen material is chosen by monks mainly because

[315] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 221r.
[316] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 221v.

of its uncomfortable feeling on the body and distinctiveness from the garments of ordinary people, which prevents ascetics from joining gatherings where amusements and sins take place. The colour of these particular gowns are specified as dark or black. His main stress is not their form or colour, but the material from which they are made of, which is wool. He calls such a gown *al-thiyāb al-zuhd*, the garment of asceticism, and turns to explaining the origins of the use of wool in human garments. According to 'Amr, wool was the first covering with which God initially asked people to be dressed in this world, and with which Adam and Eve covered themselves. When people managed to enlarge their communities and improve their means, they became able to produce more beautiful and softer materials, such as silk, cotton, and linen. As a result, wool began to be preferred by the ascetics mainly because of its humble look, cheap price, and uncomfortableness. 'Amr buttresses his argument by giving numerous examples from the lives of the prophets and eminent spiritual personalities who, he claims, preferred wearing wool.[317]

This narrative on dressing in wool should sound very familiar to anyone who has any knowledge about the development of Islamic mysticism and its terminology. Islamic mysticism is called *taṣawwuf* which literally means 'to dress in wool'. Sufi ('man of wool') and various derivatives from the root '*ṣūf*' are frequently employed to address renunciants, pietists, and mystics in Islamic tradition. Prior to his lengthy discussion on the significance of dressing in wool, 'Amr seems to at ease calling Christian monks *mutaṣawwifūn* 'the wool wearers', a term which is frequently employed to address Muslim mystics.

When the origins of wool wearing among ascetics in Islamic tradition are considered, it can be said that initially it was a relatively minor group who adopted this dress code within the ascetics of Islam, particularly those from Basra and Kūfa. The woollen habit was criticised by the residents of Iraq as its

[317] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 221v-222r.

origin in Christian monasticism was obvious to them. When the practice spread and reached the ascetic communities of Syria and Baghdad it gave its name to an Islamic devotional pietistic movement that gained momentum in the ninth century.[318]

In the eastern Christian tradition, one of the most basic features of monastic garb was that it should be simple and cheap, as 'Amr explained. The quality of the garment should not be good, soft, or comfortable. Another detail about the dress code is that it should not be in a good condition, new or little worn. In terms of the colour, black was regarded as the only suitable colour, as the monastic garment is spoken of as a sign of mourning.[319] The explicit mention of the use of wool in monastic garments appears in pre-Islamic monastic sources, which confirms the assumption of its Christian origins by early Muslim mystics from Iraq.[320] 'Amr's description of monastic garments is in line with earlier Syrian Christian monks' practices. What makes his exposition special is his strong emphasis on the use of wool and his devotion of a lengthy passage to discussing its divine roots and association with Christian monastic life. When the contemporary Sufi discourse on woollen garments is remembered, it is possible that he felt the necessity of highlighting this particular practice's Christian origins.

Where his whole discourse on asceticism is concerned, it very clear that ascetic practice is part of his system of self-development. *Zāhids* are some of the most praised personalities throughout the text, and *zuhd* is promoted on many occasions. The basic features of the asceticism that 'Amr promotes are that it is preferred by people who use their intellect effectively, it is closely linked to fear of God, and it is part of Christian monasticism. The strong emphasis on the fear of God and the use of the concept of 'greater *jihād*' shows that 'Amr was aware of Sufi discourse on these issues and possibly some Sufi

[318] Alexander Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History* (Leiden, Brill: 2010), 15 – 16.
[319] Arthur Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient: A Contribution to the History of Culture in the Near East* (Louvain: E. Peeters, 1988), 265.
[320] Vööbus, *History*, 266; Arthur Vööbus, *Syriac and Arabic Documents: Regarding Legislation Relative to Syrian Asceticism* (Stockholm: Etse, 1960), 58.

sources and was influenced by them. In order to remove the vagueness regarding the type of asceticism that he addresses numerous times in the text, ‘Amr devotes a lengthy passage to mentioning very basic information about the major aspects of monasticism in Syrian Christianity. This style leads one to think that his intended audience was not very familiar with Christian monastic life.

Conclusion

Al-*Maṣābīḥ* chapter of *Kitāb al-Majdal* has major themes and concepts that reveal the mentality and the purpose of the text. Accordingly, the source of goodness, morality, is expressed as the divine command. The mission of the intellect in the process of choosing the right act is described as distinguishing right acts from wrong ones. It is depicted as the basic requirement of religious responsibility; consequently, having intellectual ability brings religious accountability. It has no impact on the process of determining right and wrong actions.

The main purpose of the text is to improve the reader’s relationship with God and their engagement with society. Although the teachings of the text mostly focus on individual development, societal concern is striking in many areas. The main purpose of the text is educating individuals to create social harmony.

All in all, when the general framework of ‘Amr’s treatment of the main ethical questions is considered, *al-Maṣābīh* can be classified under the category of divine command ethics or normative ethics.

CHAPTER VI: A SEMANTIC APPROACH TO ETHICAL TERMINOLOGY IN *AL-MAṢĀBĪḤ*

Along with Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī’s *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq* and a few other works on the subject of ‘dissipation of sorrow’, *al-Maṣābīh* chapter of the *Kitāb al-Majdal* appears as one of the earliest examples of ethical

writings composed in Arabic by Christians in the Middle East. As has been seen in the second chapter, the earliest known Christian Arabic ethical treatise is Yahyā Ibn Adī's *Tahdīb al-Akhlāq*, which has a more philosophical character than a theological or religious one. When considered along with Holmberg and Swanson's statements about the language of *al-Maṣābīh*, which suggest the widespread use of 'Islamic' or 'Qur'anic' terms and phrases throughout, examining the terminology of *al-Maṣābīh* will show how Christian morality was formulated in Arabic. It will provide an insight not only into the author's ethical thought processes, but also his engagement with the surrounding Islamic culture from a linguistic perspective.

This section aims to provide an examination of the key ethical and religious terms and concepts that are found throughout *al-Maṣābīh*. For this purpose, the vocabulary of the chapter will be discussed under four main categories. Firstly, the terms that are used to describe the ideal ethical state will be examined. Secondly, the vocabulary that is employed to express ethically good and bad acts will be discussed. Thirdly, the terms and phrases that are used to address virtuous and vicious actors will be determined, and lastly the terms and phrases that are used to describe the codes of religion and morality will be studied. At the end of the chapter, considering 'Amr's awareness, the form and the extent of Islamic influence on the language of *al-Maṣābīh* will be discussed. The terms and phrases in this chapter were chosen according to their frequency throughout the text. Throughout the *Kitāb al-Majdal*, the author hardly ever provides a description or clarification of the terms or phrases he uses. This is also the case in *al-Maṣābīh*. Therefore, the meanings of the terms will be determined according to the context in which they are used.

Before discussing the terminology, it is worth remembering the religious mentality of the chapter on ethics and morality, which shapes the vocabulary. It is very clearly stated in the first section

of *al-Maṣābīh* that obedience to God is the root of goodness, while the opposite is the reason for evil.[321] When classifying virtues and vices at the end of the same section, 'Amr explicitly mentions "divine law" as one of the determiners of blameworthy acts. Therefore, divine command is one of the central points of the code of ethics in *al-Maṣābīh*. Another concern of the text is the purification of human nature from bodily lust and worldly passions (*shahwah* and *hawā*), in order for the soul to gain closeness to God. According to the text, human nature is considered 'imperfect', and achieving the ideal moral status is only possible by purifying one's nature of the unwanted passion for this world.[322] Consequently, the terminology in the chapter reflects the influence of these two main interests.

Determining the Stations of Morality: Expressions for Ideal Ethical and Spiritual States

Before discussing the terms that are used to expresses appropriate moral and religious states, perhaps it is worth looking at the use of the term *akhlāq* in *al-Maṣābīh*, which has been one of the most common terms used to address morality or ethics in Arabic. The term literally means 'character' or 'nature', and it is used in various traditions of Islam to address 'good character'.[323] Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī's *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq* is one contemporary example of the use of the term *akhlāq* to address ideal moral status. He explains moral quality (*khuluq*) as a state which is proper to the soul, in which men perform actions without any effort or knowledge. According to Yaḥyā, it may occur in some people as a natural impulse. However, there are also other people who need to make an effort or struggle with themselves to achieve it.[324]

In the context of *al-Maṣābīh*, it appears very rarely and mostly in its literal meaning, 'nature' or 'character'. In the first section of the chapter, *Taqwā*, 'Amr says, for example:

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[321] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 153v.
[322] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 163v.
[323] Walzer and Gibb, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, second Edition, s.v. "Akhlāḳ." (Leiden, Brill, 2012), accessed 23 October 2013.
http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/akhlak-COM_0035?s.num=0&s.q=akhlak
[324] For more see Yaḥyā Ibn 'Adī, The *Reformation of Morals,* 6 – 9.

> The [man], who does not remove [or eliminate] the world [*al-dunyā*] from his nature [*akhlāq*], will not have a good reputation.[325]

This particular sentence appears in a passage where ‘Amr explains the damage caused by following bodily lust and worldly passions. After this initial statement, he explains the ways of getting closer to God through the mind (*al-ʻaql*), good deeds (*al-ʻamal*), and knowledge (*al-ʻilm*).

In another example, the term is used to address the nature of animals, *akhlāq al-bahīma*, who keep seeking physical and bodily comfort by following their natural instincts.[326]

At the end of the *Taqwā* section where the virtues and vices are recounted, the term appears along with *adab*, which is another word with moral connotations, used to address ‘good manners’ or ‘etiquette’ in Arabic. On this occasion, after classifying the virtues and vices under three separate categories, which contains forty items each, ‘Amr ends the second classification, vices, as follows:

> And everything which is condemned according to the divine law, mind, doctrines, and scripture and blameworthy in nature [*al-tabʻ*], character [*akhlāq*], innate temperament [*sajāya*], and etiquette [*adab*].[327]

Just like the earlier examples, in the passage above the term *akhlāq* is used with the meaning of ‘inborn character’, along with two other terms with similar meanings. This is the only occasion where the term *adab* appears throughout *al-Maṣābīh*. Therefore, these two well-known terms, which are used to address ‘morality’ or ‘ethics’ in Arabic, are not widely employed to address the same issue in *al-Maṣābīh*.

‘Amr uses a certain cluster of terms in order to address the ideal ethical state; these are all somehow semantically connected to the word ‘path’ or ‘way’. One of the most frequent words, which is

[325] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 163r.
[326] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 175r.
[327] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 165v.

used throughout the chapter, is *rushd*, which can be translated into English as 'right path'. It is used in almost every section, without any description or explanation, to address the ideal route approved by God. At the end of the section on love, for example, 'Amr says:

> When God sees the strength of [one's] faith, the purity of [his] love, [his] effort to achieve closeness, and [his] desire to increase [his] reward, He quickens the success, brings closer the target, and expedites the ways [*subul*] and clarifies the right path [*al-rushd*].[328]

In the passage above, the term appears right after the word *subul* which literally means 'way' or 'path'. Perhaps another detail to mention about the use of *rushd* in the sentence is that here God appears to be the one who is in charge of guiding or clarifying the 'right path' for human beings, as a result of their own effort. Obviously, *rushd* in the passage above is the state where a true believer, with a sincere love towards God and who seeks closeness to Him, would end up with guidance from Him.

Al-hudā, which means 'guidance', is another term that is used to address the morally approved state throughout *al-Maṣābīh*. The Arabic word *al- hudā* comes from the root *h-d-y*, which means 'to guide' or 'to instruct'. In the pre-Islamic period, the root *h-d-y* and its derivatives were used to express meanings related to 'guiding someone or something' or 'being in front of someone or something'.[329] In the Qur'anic context, the root *h-d-y* and its derivatives gained new meanings, which are more abstract and spiritual. The term *al-hudā* appears to be strongly attached to the Prophet Muhammad and his

[328] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 107v.

[329] For example, the first group of camels which lead the herd was called *hādiyāt* as they walk in front the group and guide them. The walking stick was also called *hādiyat* in Arabic as it stands in front of a man and guides him. For more see Ayşe İçöz, "Arap Dilinde Hidayet - Dalalet Salat ve Selam Kelimelerine Semantik Yaklaşım" (Master Dissertation, Marmara University, 2008), 17 – 18.

message, the religion of Islam.[330]

From the beginning of *al-Maṣābīh*, *al-hudā* appears quite often as an approved moral state. Although 'Amr tends not to provide definitions of the terms and concepts that he employs throughout the work, he makes an exception for *al-hudā* and describes it in the first chapter of *Kitāb al-Majdal* as follows:

> The guidance [*al-hudā*] which comes from God occurs in two ways. The first of them is [through] blessing, explanation, and guidance. The second one occurs when the believer deserves it by his deeds, preventing himself from following ways or acts that lead astray [*al-ḍalāl*].[331]

According to 'Amr ibn Mattā's explanation, there are two different ways for people to access *al-hudā*: divine or spiritual guidance. The first type of *al-hudā* can be defined as 'granted' by God, while the second type of *al-hudā* depends on personal effort and self-control and can be described as 'gained'. Throughout *al-Maṣābīh*, there is no clear definition of the term, however it appears along with several other expressions which are used to address ideal or approved religious or virtuous acts and positions. For example, the *Taqwā* section of *al-Maṣābīh* starts as follows: "*Taqwā* is the light of guidance [*al-hudā*] and essence of benefits".[332]

Similarly, in the section on humility, when recounting the benefits of being humble, 'Amr says:

> Through humility, faith grows and worship is accepted. Kindliness [*al-iḥsān*] is improved and happiness is achieved. It is the basis of divine guidance [*al-hudā*], piety [*al-*

[330] According to the Qur'an, *al-hudā* ('spiritual guidance') comes from God and was granted by Him to His creation. The Prophet Muhammad was described as 'being on the right path [*al-hudā*]' and in various verses the message he was delivering was expressed using the same term, see İçöz, "Arap Dilinde", 35 – 36.
[331] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 18r-v.
[332] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 152r.

taqwā] and asceticism [*al-zuhd*], and the key to peace [*al-silm*], love [*al-ulfah*], and the right path [*al-rushd*].[333]

Al-hudā appears here along with two other central themes of *al-Maṣābīh*, *taqwā* and *zuhd*, as critical for the development of humility.

Apart from these two examples, *Tariq al-Rabb*[334] ('path of the Lord') and *Tariq al-Abrār* (path of the good ones) are the phrases that are used to address ideal religious states where the word 'path' explicitly appears.

Classifying Acts: Expressions for Good and Bad in *al-Maṣābīh*

Al-birr is the most frequent word used throughout the chapter to express moral goodness. *Al-birr* literally means 'goodness' or 'righteousness' in the Arabic language and is used in pre-Islamic poetry. In earlier and contemporary religious and ethical texts, the term appears to have a meaning attached to 'religious rituals' as well as 'moral behavior'. Verse 2:177 in the Qur'an, for example, formulates the concept of *al-birr* as a combination of good works, religious rituals, and genuine faith. Ibn Sinā's partly surviving ethical work entitled *al-Birr wa al-Ithm* ('Goodness and Sin') is a good example from the same time period, which shows the religious dimension of the term *al-birr* in contemporary writings, as the term is used as the antonym of *al-ithm* (sin).[335]

In *al-Maṣābīh*, there are occasions where the term has the meaning of mere 'goodness', without any religious or spiritual connotation, such as helping and caring for needy people. One of the best

[333] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 203v-204r.
[334] In folios 156v-157r, the ideal path is explained as "the way of the Lord" using various scriptural quotes.
[335] This particular work is partly survived mainly because the original manuscript remained in the private collection of the scholar or official and was not allowed to be copied. However, the work was circulated among the disciples of Ibn Sinā and some parts are cited in their works. For more see Lenn E. Goodman, *Avicenna,* (London: Routledge, 1992), 19.

examples for this use comes in al-*raḥmah* section, where ‘Amr talks about Prophet David’s care for distressed people in his community:

> Prophet David was compassionate to poor and needy people and travelers, and he offered a good amount of charity to needy people throughout his life. He spent the rest of his days running around as an assistant to help widows and orphans, [And] he looked after the people of Israel with goodness [*al-birr*], clothing, and food for the whole of his life.[336]

However, in most instances in *al-Maṣābīh*, *al-birr* carries religious significance. The use of the term in the third section, entitled *Ṣalāh*, offers a good insight into this meaning of the word. Here, the term is mentioned in a passage where ‘Amr explains the order of a particular prayer, which comprises three separate sections. After he explains the first portion, which is mainly believing in and appreciating God’s existence, exalting Him, and following His commandments, he turns to explaining the second portion, which starts with praising God for what He grants and refraining from misdeeds:

> And [it is] cooperating on piety [*al-taqwā*], goodness [*al-birr*], dignity [*al-ḥilm*], humility [*al-tawādhu‘*], and beneficence [*al-iḥṣān*].[337]

In this use, the term *al-birr* appears in a particular context where a Christian ritual is explained, along with a certain cluster of words that clearly indicate its religious dimension. However, this passage does not provide any more understanding of the term. A significant example that clarifies the meaning of *al-birr* in *al-Maṣābīh* comes elsewhere in the text, where ‘Amr explains *tarīq al-abrār* (ways of good people):

[336] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 202r.
[337] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 174v.

> Certainly, the greatest effort lies in the ways of righteous ones [al-abrār]. The most useful track is to follow the character of good people [al-akhyār]. A successful person is one who follows the middle way, not the one who swings to the right and the left. Our Lord Jesus said 'I am the way, life and the gate. The gate that whoever enters through it will be saved.[338]

This explanation does not intend to define the meaning of *al-birr*, but it describes the path of the people who achieve it. At the end of the passage, 'Amr quotes two verses from the New Testament and combines them: John 14:6 and 10:9.[339] This particular explanation bears a striking similarity with two verses from the Qur'an, where the meaning of *al-birr* is explained: 2: 177 and 2:189. The first verse, which has already been referred to earlier concerning the meaning of *al-birr*, starts with a negative statement: "It is not *al-birr,* that you turn your faces to the East and to the West", which sounds very similar to 'Amr ibn Mattā's statement about the "good people" who are "not swinging towards the right and the left".

The rest of the passage, which contains the analogy of the gate from the New Testament, parallels verse 2:189 from the Qur'an. Here, 'Amr ibn Mattā points to salvation through Jesus, who is metaphorically represented as a "door" in the Biblical verse. In the Qur'anic verse 2:189, the term *al-birr* is defined as follows: "It is not al-birr if you enter your houses from the back; it is *al-birr* if you fear Allah. Enter houses through the proper doors and fear Allah that you may prosper".

Obviously, the Qur'anic statement aims to clarify the meaning of *al-birr*, which is fearing God, and not keeping meaningless taboos such as entering houses from the back. Although the two verses

[338] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 156v.
[339] Here he combines John 14:6 and 10:9 as "I am the way, the life and the door". Holmberg mentions the same feature in scripture quotes saying that most of them are combined together and points to the difficulty of identifying them. He suggests that Amr did not have a written Bible in his hand at the time and was using his memory. Holmberg, "Language and Thought*",* 175.

talk about entirely different subjects, they both use the analogy of a 'door'. 'Amr quotes this particular New Testament verse in a specific context, where "the ways of *al-abrār*" are explained, which parallels the Qur'anic verse 2:189.

All in all, the content of the passage has strong parallels to the Qur'anic discourse concerning *al-birr.* If this is not a mere coincidental resemblance, this suggests that the author is fully aware of the Qur'anic explanation about the meaning of the term. He makes no attempt to redefine *al-birr*, as he only explains the path of the people who achieved it, who are *al-abrār*. He subtly connects the concept of *al-birr* in his text with Christianity quoting the two New Testament verses.

Amal al-sālih (righteous deeds) is another concept in *al-Maṣābīh* which appears quite often to express the concept of ideal behaviour or deeds. The phrase is deeply rooted in the Qur'an and denotes good works, including religious rituals along with faith.[340] In the context of *al-Maṣābīh*, although it appears several times in various sections, 'Amr ibn Mattā does not provide any definition of the phrase. In one instance, the phrase is mentioned in a context where 'Amr explains the features of people who deserve the kingdom of heaven, in addition to a certain set of spiritual practices which are associated with asceticism: "They tire their bodies, eliminate their passions, deny themselves pleasures, and devote [themselves] to righteous works ['*amal al-sālih*].[341]

In another example, the phrase is mentioned in conjunction with divine law:

[340] Q 2:277; 4:122, 173; 5:19; 10:4, 9; 16:97; 19:76; 29:7, 9, 58; 48:29
[341] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 154v-155r.

> He [God] brought man from nothingness into being as a grant [from him]. [And] after that, he laid rules for him to seek knowledge [*'ilm*], goodness [*al-birr*], and *amal al-sālih* (righteous works), which are all part of divine law. [342]

These two passages reveal the connection of '*amal al-sālih* in *al-Maṣābīh* with religious law and asceticism. However, there is no other instance that could provide more insight into what these righteous deeds could be. It is likely that the author assumes his audience is aware of this Qur'anic expression, therefore he feels no need to explain it.

Another very common word that is used to address 'goodness' in *al-Maṣābīh* is *al-khayr*. In Arabic, the term has a very comprehensive meaning, which includes all types of goodness, almost anything that is beneficial, valuable, or useful. Its semantic scope covers both worldly and religious affairs.[343] Within the context of *al-Maṣābīh*, it often appears as the antonym of *al-sharr*, the generic term for 'evil' in Arabic. In the *Taqwā* section, when explaining the roots of goodness, 'Amr says:

> Goodness [al-khayr] is innate in the nature of the human being; evil is an addition to it, which is not part of his real nature [aradhī]. If he rises against submission to his creator, he follows the way to decrease his own benefit. When he insists on his disobedience, his own self [dhat] detaches from its own natural way [tarīq al-tabī'ah]. Obeying God is the head of goodness and disobeying Him is the cause of evil [*al-sharr*].[344]

It is very clear in this passage that goodness is closely connected to God's command and obedience to Him, which is in line with the religious mindset of the text and reveals the religious

[342] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 153r.
[343] Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts of the Qur'an*, 217.
[344] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 153v.

dimension of the meaning of the term *al-khayr*. In another instance, in the section on love, 'Amr translates Romans 12:20-21 as follows:

> Do not be overcome by evil [*al-sharr*], but eliminate evil by good [*al-khayr*]. If your enemy is hungry, feed him, if he is thirsty, give him water. When you do this, you will pile up the hot coals on the top of his head.[345]

This translation, once again, confirms the two main aspects of the term *al-khayr* in the text. Firstly, as mentioned earlier, it demonstrates the moral and religious dimension of goodness, as in this verse the term is used in a moral context which regulates the human relationships in Romans 12. Secondly, this particular translation clearly shows 'Amr's choice of the term *al-sharr* as the antonym of *al-khayr* in the text.

In another instance, *al-khayr* appears in a passage along with a few other terms outlining the origins of good and bad acts:

> Certainly, the causes of evil [*al-sharr*] degrade the soul and kills the heart. The paths of evil [*sayyi'ah*] empower the enemy and create fear. If a soul likes goodness [*al-khayr*], it prefers and follows it. Kindness [*al-hasana*] is the natural quality which it [the soul] follows. Whoever acts in accord with the soul and against the body, he lives with the power of the soul and escapes from corruption, because the soul [*al-rūḥ*] prefers goodness [*al-khayr*] and hates the fall [*al-rada*]. The body wants the pleasure and to follow the passions [*al-hawā*].[346]

Just like the previous example, here *al-khayr* appears in a passage that highlights the innate nature of goodness. It appears as a natural quality, which the human soul seeks and prefers. Another important

[345] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 168r; Romans 25:20-21, In the text, verse 21 is mentioned prior to 20.
[346] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 155r.

detail here is the clear dichotomy between body and soul. The body is depicted as the pursuer of pleasure, which is expressed as *al-hawā* in the text and which consequently causes evil. Therefore, the goodness (*al-khayr*) that the soul seeks should be the opposite to worldly passions.

Two other terms, which come from the root *ḥ-s-n*, are used to address goodness in *al*-Maṣābīh: *al-ḥasanah* and *iḥsān*. The term *al-ḥasanah* is used as a synonym for *al-khayr* in the previous passage. It is mentioned as one of the features of ascetics[347] and among the qualities which should be asked for from God.[348] *Iḥsān* has a subtle nuanced difference from the term *al-ḥasanah*, which appears in the section of *al-Rahmah* where 'Amr explains almsgiving as an act of mercy. In this section, *al-ihsān* appears in connection with financial aid and charity. In the initial passage of al-*raḥmah* section, 'Amr describes mercy and merciful people as follows:

> Complete mercy is enduring trouble while seeking goodness [*iḥsān*] and offering kindness [*iḥsān*] to everyone. The merciful one [*al-raḥīm*] would be kind to all creation and would offer gifts to them knowing that God will sustain him.[349]

The connection between *al-iḥsān* and financial aid is clear in the passage. In the following pages, when giving examples from the lives of the prophets, he mentions Abraham having strong faith, being good to all people, and having a reputation for his extensive care (*al-iḥsān*) and love of the needy people in his community.[350]

Similar to good acts, blameworthy or ethically bad actions are also expressed by a cluster of terms. *Al-shar*, which has a comprehensive meaning in Arabic to address anything 'bad' or 'evil', is used to express 'wickedness' and 'harm' in both mundane and otherworldly affairs. As an example of its use

[347] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 152v.
[348] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 172v.
[349] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 199r.
[350] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 202r.

for worldly matters, it appears along with terms used for worldly difficulties, such as *al-balā'* (misfortune) and *al-imtiḥān* (trial) in the text.[351]

As mentioned earlier, *al-shar* often appears as the antonym of *al-khayr* with a moral and religious connotation. It is usually connected to disobedience of God's commands and following bodily passions and desires. "*Al-shar*" appears in the first category of vices, entitled *al-mahzūrāt* (impermissible), which mostly focuses on evil acts caused by the incitement of Satan and the instincts of bodily passions. *Al-shirrah*, which comes from the same root *sh-r-r*, appears in the second list of vices entitled *madhmūmāt* (unpleasant), classified as vicious behaviors and acts that are considered unacceptable in divine law and scripture.[352] In *al-Maṣābīh*, its use in the moral and religious context parallels the author's mentality of morality, as two derivatives from the root *sh-r-r* cover both vicious actions against the divine command and those caused by worldly desires.

Another cluster of terms employed to address evildoing is derivatives of the root *s-w-a'*. *Al-sū'* and its feminine adjective form, *al-sayyiah*, are used in a very similar way to *al-shar* in the text in order to address 'bad' and 'evil' actions. Its meaning in the text is very similar to that of *al-shar*.

The term *tughyān*, which comes from the root ṭ-*gh-á* (to exceed) is another generic word to address vicious acts. It carries the meanings of 'arbitrariness' and 'depravity'. In *al-Maṣābīh*, the term appears among the first list of vices, entitled 'impermissibles'. At the end of the list, where the mentality of this category of vices is explained, 'Amr says:

[351] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 174v.
[352] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 165r-v.

> And anything that is caused by thoughts of passion [*al-hawā*], the tempting of Satan, and originates from bodily lust [*al-shahwah*] and feelings [*al-ḥawāis*] of depravity [*al-tughyān*].[353]

According to 'Amr's classification of vices, it is very clear that *tughyān* has a strong connection with following worldly passions (*al-hawā*) and bodily lust (*shahwah*), as it appears both among the vices of the first category and in the clarification at the end. This connection can be seen in another passage in al-*ṣalāh* section, where the benefits of prayer are recounted. After explaining that God does not need the prayer (*al-ṣalāh*) of human beings, 'Amr states that it is necessary for them to show their acknowledgement of their status as 'created ones' and their devotion to their creator:

> [It is necessary for them to] use their bodies for beneficial acts, escape from the instigations of Satan, escape from thoughts of depravity [*tugyān*] and stay away from the nature of animals [*akhlāq al-bahīma*] [which tend] to choose the comfort [of their bodies] by their nature.[354]

Here, the term *tugyān* appears to be a result of following the instigations of Satan and is equated with the nature of animals.

Describing Actors: Expressions for Virtuous and Vicious People

Zāhid, 'ascetic', is the most frequent word in *al-Maṣābīh* to address virtuous people. As has been shown in the previous chapter, *zuhd* appears as the ultimate aim in the text to achieve ideal morality, and every section in *al-Maṣābīh* is connected with the practice of *zuhd* in some way. The text does not offer any description of *zāhid* until the end of the last section, entitled *al-tahārat*. Throughout this section, the

[353] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 165r-v.
[354] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 175r.

terms *zuhhād* and *ruhbān* which is a term to address Christian monks that originated in the Qur'an, are used interchangeably.

As mentioned earlier, the concept of cleanliness in the *tahārah* section appears as a practice connected to adult baptism and celibacy. Asceticism is portrayed as the ideal way to keep an individual spiritually clean. Towards the end of the section, addressing the root of the term *r-h-b*, which means 'to fear', 'Amr connects fear of God and asceticism.[355] Following this, he devotes a long passage to describing the features of *ruhbān*, where he provides detailed information on their spiritual practices, their residences, and the garments they wear. At the end, he gives a list of Christian monastic fathers, which adds to his earlier explanations and makes it clear that the terms *ruhbān* and *zuhhād*, which are used to express 'ascetics' in *al-Maṣābīh*, are used to address Christian monks.

It is very rare to see such a detailed description in *Kitāb al-Majdal*, since most of the time 'Amr never gives definitions of the terms and phrases he uses. Here, he was probably aware of the vagueness of the terms *zuhd* and *zāhid*, which he keeps using throughout the earlier sections to address asceticism and ascetics, because in the contemporary writings, *zuhd* appears as a neutral term to express the practice of asceticism, without any necessary connection with a particular religion. In Yahyā Ibn Adī's *Tahdīb*, for example, *zāhids* are portrayed as attending churches and mosques. Therefore, it is possible that in order to make it clear that he is specifically addressing 'Christian' monks, he initially connects it with the term *ruhbān* and devotes a lengthy passage to explaining whom he is referring to with the word *zāhid*. This attitude looks like a deliberate effort to emphasize the Christian aspect of the term in the text.

[355] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 220r.

'Amr ibn Mattā uses the Qur'anic phrase *asḥāb al-yamīn*, 'companions of the right', quite often to address virtuous people. The phrase appears as the antonym *of asḥāb al-shimal* in the text; the latter are people who are described as stingy, mean, and ungenerous. *Asḥāb al-yamīn*, on the other hand, are described as the ones who clothe, feed, and takes care of the ill; they are promised the kingdom of heaven by Jesus.[356] Although the text does not provide a description of the phrase, there is enough indication here to conclude that *asḥāb al-yamīn* in *al-Maṣābīh* is used to address followers of Christianity.

Several are terms used to address vicious or morally wicked people, such as *mushrik* (polytheist), *kāfir* (infidel) and *munāfiq* (hypocrite). 'Amr does not provide any clarification or description of the terms, but it is certain that they all have religious significance, as piety is one of the central concerns of the text.

Determining Codes of Morality: Terminology Used for Codes of Ethical and Religious Conduct

As has been asserted earlier, morality in *al-Maṣābīh* is closely connected with religious duties and spiritual development. Being virtuous is described as having high moral values and following certain religious practices. Therefore, codes of morality, obligations, and prohibitions are determined by religious or divine law in the text. After giving the list of vices at the end of the *Taqwā* section, 'Amr makes an addition, saying:

> And everything that are considered as misdeeds according to *shar*' (divine law), the mind, tradition and scripture, and every shameful act in [one's] nature, character, temperament, and manners.[357]

[356] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 199r.
[357] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 165v.

According to the passage, divine law is one of the determiners of morally good and bad actions. As has already been mentioned earlier, divine command is accepted as the origin of value in *al-Maṣābīh*. It is expressed with the word *sharī'a* and similar derivatives from the root *sh-r-'a* in the text. It is often used along with a certain cluster of terms that mean 'rules' or 'commands', such as *aḥkām*, *sunnah* or *rusūm*.

The term *sharī'ah* has a wide range of meanings in Arabic and was used by Muslims, Christians, and Jews to refer to a prophetic religion in general without any necessary connection with a particular faith.[358] In the text, it is used to address 'divine law', along with the word *namūs* with the meaning of 'code' or 'law', which is from the Greek word *nomos*.

Sunnah is one of the words that is frequently used throughout *al-Maṣābīh* to address obligatory or recommendable acts. The word literally means 'route', 'way', or 'law' and during the pre-Islamic period it was used to express any certain way of acting, without any necessary religious or moral connotation indicating its value as good or bad. After the advent of Islam, the term occurs in the Qur'an and is mostly used to address the practices and teachings of Prophet Muhammad. In *al-Maṣābīh*, the term has various meanings connected to its fundamental meaning.

Most of the time, 'Amr employs the term *sunnah* in reference to necessary or compulsory acts according to divine commandment. The term *farḍ* is also used to express obligatory acts on certain occasions; however, it mostly appears in the sections related to religious practices, such as prayer and fasting. In other sections, such as *Taqwā* and Maḥabbah, the term *sunnah* is used to express religious obligation or compulsion. In the section on love for example, 'Amr says:

[358] For the various uses of the term *sharī'ah* in different religious contexts, see Norman Calder and M.B. Hooker *Encyclopaedia of Islam, second Edition*, s.v. "Sharīʿa." (Leiden: Brill, 2012), accessed 14 February 2015. http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/sharia-COM_1040

> The situation of a person who does not have love resembles an eye without light, [and] a tree with leaves but with no fruit, and the sun of which light and heat are hidden. Love of the human towards God, whose name is exalted, is his sincerity in believing in His deity, and a strong faith in what He promised out of His mercy, and keeping His commandments [*wasāya*] and laws [*sunan*], and acting in a way which He would approve and consent, acknowledging the completeness of His grace and vastness of His kindness, and avoiding the desires of the temporary world for His sake.[359]

In this passage, using the word *sunan*, 'Amr expresses something related to God's commandments, as in the following sentence he emphasizes the importance of acting in a way of which He would approve. On the next page, a similar use of the term *sunnah* appears, when he says: "Those who love Him would aim to receive His consent and keep His orders [*sunan*] and commandments".[360]

Another use of the term *sunnah* in *al-Maṣābīh* is related to Prophetic traditions. In the section on *Ṣalāh*, 'Amr explains how regular prayers became a practice:

> The father of humankind, Adam, kept praying upon his descent from Paradise until he heard the voice of the exalted God. He set a cave across this spot calling it 'the cave of treasure' in which he used to pray. […] This cave is where Adam's body remained buried until the time of the flood. Then Noah carried the body of his father in the ship during the flood. This was his prayer, which was told [to us]: God the creator, whose name is exalted, these heavens and this earth are yours. Seth the son of Adam prayed in the cave according to the custom [*sunnah*] of his father in the early morning and evening every day. And then he structured his prayers as seven every day and night for those of

[359] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 167v.
[360] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 168r.

> the nation who perform them […] The son of Seth, Anosh, prayed according to the tradition [*sunnah*] of Adam. Then he followed his father.[361]

In this passage, the term *sunnah* has the meaning of a custom that is practiced by Prophets. This particular use of the term parallels the Islamic concept of *sunnah.*

In order to express obligatory actions or religious duties, 'Amr uses the term farḍ, which comes from Islamic jurisprudence. In the *ṣalāh* section, when he emphasizes the importance of prayer, he says: "Prayer and fasting are both considered as obligatory, which humans are expected to perform and omitting them would result in punishment".[362]

After this initial declaration, he states that prayer is the most important religious duty, using the term *farḍ*:

> Good acts [*saliḥāt*] without prayer are not righteous, because prayer is a beneficence [ḥ*asanah*] on its own. Deeds without prayer are [signs of] weak faith. Whoever keeps prayers but leaves all the other religious duties [*furūḍ*] would be called weak, but whoever leaves the prayer and performs all other religious duties [*furūḍ*] is called infidel.[363]

In the passage above, the term *farḍ* is used to express religious obligation in a very similar way to Islamic jurisprudence. According to 'Amr, prayer is a mandatory religious action; failure to perform it will be punished and the fulfilment of it will be rewarded. As mentioned earlier, the term *farḍ* only appears in sections on religious practices: prayer and fasting.

[361] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 183v-184r.
[362] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 170v.
[363] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 171r.

In order to express permitted and prohibited acts, ‘Amr uses two Arabic terms, *ḥalāl* and *ḥarām*. In addition to their basic meanings, in the *Raḥmah* section, the term *halal* is used to address the lawful origin of someone’s income:

> Blessed is the one who helps the poor and supports the weak ones. Blessed is the one who gives to the needy from what he earns lawfully [*min kasb al-halal*] with sincere intention and without arrogance, hypocrisy, or expecting gratitude.[364]

The terminology that ‘Amr employs to describe codes of morality and religion has parallels with Islamic jurisprudential vocabulary. In order to express different levels of religious duties and responsibilities, three members of *ahkām al-khamsa*, the five qualifications of Islamic jurisprudence by which every act of man is qualified accordingly in Islamic law, are used in the text: *farḍ* for obligatory actions, *sunnah* for recommended actions, and *haram* for prohibited deeds. The term *nāfilah* is also employed to mean supplementary or supererogatory acts of worship.

An example that demonstrates the parallel use of the abovementioned terms in *al-Maṣābīh* with Islamic jurisprudence comes in al-*sawm* section which is addressed previously. Accordingly, ‘Amr is well aware of the meanings of the terms in Islamic jurisprudence, as he explains them accurately. He skillfully adjusts them to a Christian context by using them to describe different types of a Christian practice. It is possible that the terms had not been used widely in Christian texts, as he feels the need to elucidate their meanings. Here, he does not change the terms’ fundamental meanings, but he makes an effort to incorporate them into a Christian context by using the terms to define already existing practices in Christianity.

Conclusion

[364] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 199r-v.

All in all, the widely used Arabic terms *akhlāq* and *adab* are not used in the same way in *al-Maṣābīh*. The ideal ethical condition is expressed by a few terms that are semantically connected to 'path'. They have religious and ethical significance, as they appear to be states that are approved and guided by God. 'Amr uses a wide variety of Arabic terms and expressions to address ethically 'good' and 'bad' throughout *al-Maṣābīh*. They are usually connected to the two main concerns of the text, which are religious law and asceticism. Some terms from Islamic jurisprudence are also employed to express codes of morality and religion.

Before evaluating the use of Islamic terms in *al-Maṣābīh*, perhaps the most important question to ask here is to what extent these terms and phrases can be considered or labelled as 'Islamic' at the time of 'Amr ibn Mattā. The Būyid Age witnessed one of the most productive, vibrant periods of intellectual history, in which distinctions between different scholarly fields somehow blurred. A great many intellectuals from the period engaged in several scholarly disciplines at the same time. Therefore, it is not easy to set certain boundaries between separate intellectual or religious traditions of the time, or identify the distinct voice of an author. Certainly, 'Amr ibn Mattā uses a specific vocabulary in his work and it appears that, to a greater extent, he is aware of the Islamic origin of the terminology he uses.

The attitude of 'Amr ibn Mattā towards this terminology is difficult to describe. Sometimes he uses Islamic terms and phrases without making any changes to their meanings, and mentioning them in a very similar context to their Islamic usage. The use of *al-birr* is a good example of this usage. In some instances, he employs these terms to express existing concepts in Christianity, as appears to be the case with the examples of *farḍ*, *sunnah*, and *nafilah*. There are also occasions where he prefers more Islamic-sounding expressions to describe or address religious or moral issues, even though he could simply have used terms that are more neutral; *aṣḥāb al-yamīn* and *'amal al-sāliḥ* are good examples of this usage. Considering the whole cluster of examples, 'Amr ibn Mattā seems quite at ease using Islamic terms in his

work. He hardly ever defines their meanings and this suggests that he assumes his audience is familiar with this particular vocabulary.

CHAPTER VII: Al-MAṢĀBĪḤ CHAPTER AS A MORAL TREATISE: ITS LANGUAGE, STYLE AND RECEPTION

The textual features, content, and language of *al-Maṣābīh* have been discussed in the fourth, fifth, and sixth chapters of this thesis. In these chapters, while focusing on the various aspects of the text and seeking answers to specific questions, the questions of what the author brings from his Syriac background and how he engages with the surrounding Islamic culture were also addressed where necessary. This chapter aims to investigate the features and the content of *al-Maṣābīh* in a broader framework. Considering its Syriac background and the Islamic environment in which it was produced, the chapter will seek answers to the questions of which aspects of the text should be seen as continuations of the Syriac tradition and which features can be considered adaptations of Islamic intellectual culture.

To this end, the language, one of the most distinctive features of the book, will initially be discussed separately. Secondly, the structure, possible sources that ‘Amr may have employed, and the specific features of the presentation of *al-Maṣābīh* will be discussed. Lastly, two peripheral issues related to the questions of why ‘Amr ibn Matta presented his work in this particular way and how *al-Maṣābīh* was received by the Christian community will be addressed.

The Language of *al-Maṣābīh*

In his article entitled *Language and Thought in Kitāb al-Majdal*, Bo Holmberg closely examines the linguistic aspect of the work, focusing on the first portion of the second chapter of *Kitāb al-Majdal*. Holmberg refers to the use of the Qur’anic phrase *asmā al-husnā* in al-*dhurwa* section and points to the significant parallels between ‘Amr’s use of the phrase and Islamic tradition. As well as Holmberg’s explanation, Mark Swanson, in his entry in *Bibliographic History of Christian-Muslim Relations*, briefly

remarks that the expressions and the choice of vocabulary in *Kitāb al-Majdal* indicate a certain extent of Islamic influence on the language of the text.[365] Aside from these two statements, hardly anything has been asserted about the language and the vocabulary of *Kitāb al-Majdal*. As has been shown in the section on ethical terminology in *al-Maṣābīh*, 'Amr widely uses Islamic terms and phrases to address various aspects of religion and morality. This section aims to assess the linguistic features of *al-Maṣābīh*, considering the wider context of *Kitāb al-Majdal* within the social and intellectual milieu in which it was composed. For this purpose, it will start with discussing the main linguistic features of the text, including the use of Islamic vocabulary and expressions in *Kitāb al-Majdal*, and the use of rhymed prose (*Saj'*). Subsequently, this specific use of Arabic will be discussed in the light of the sociolinguistic circumstances of the society in which 'Amr lived.

Before discussing the main linguistic features of *Kitāb al-Majdal*, it is useful to recall here that by the end of the tenth century, Arabic had long been the *lingua franca* of the caliphate and there was already Christian Arabic literature, which had been produced by the first generation of Arabophone Christians. Therefore, it is really difficult to set strict boundaries between 'Islamic' terminology and 'Christian-Arabic' terminology. When 'Amr ibn Mattā started composing his work, there had already been numerous Christian texts concerning Christian theology. Perhaps the question to ask here is why did the two authors mentioned earlier, Holmberg and Swanson, express the same impression that the language of *Kitāb al-Majdal* sounds 'Islamic' at first glance?

As has been seen in the chapter on the ethical vocabulary of *al-Maṣābīh*, Islamic terms and phrases are widely used to express moral values and judgements. In this chapter, more examples taken

[365] Holmberg, "Language and Thought," 170; Swanson, *Christian-Muslim Relations 600 – 1500*, s.v. "Kitāb al-Majdal li-l-istibṣār wa-l-jadal."

from the first two chapters of *Kitāb al-Majdal*, *al-Bayān* and *al-Bunyān*, will be given in order to illustrate the way these expressions make the language of the text look and sound 'Islamic'.

An intriguing phrase that appears in *Al-Maṣābīh* and various other places in *Kitāb al-Majdal* is "*asmā al-ḥusnā*". In his article, where he examines the language and thought of the first section of the second chapter in *Kitāb al-Majdal*, *al-dhurwa*, Holmberg states that, apart from divine designations, there is also a certain category of divine attributes that appear in the text, which to some extend coincide with the Islamic names of God, called *asmā al-ḥusnā* in Muslim tradition. He gives several examples of the attributes of God from al-*dhurwa* section and states that this very expression, *asmā al-ḥusnā*, appears in the same context where these particular divine attributes are mentioned.[366]

An important detail that supports Holmberg's statement suggesting 'Amr's high level of acquaintance with Islamic discourse on *asmā al-ḥusnā* appears when a short list of some of the divine attributes of God is mentioned in al-*dhurwa* section:

> And he is called the compassionate [*Raḥmān*] and the merciful [*al-Raḥīm*], the powerful [*al-Qādir*], the wise [*al-Ḥakīm*], the bounteous [*al-Jawād*], the generous [*al-Karīm*], the compeller [*al-Jabbār*], the magnificent [*al-'Aẓīm*], the narrator [*al-Nātiq*], and the trustworthy [*al-Ṣādiq*].[367]

Apart from three in the list, *al-Jawād*, *al-Nātiq*, and *al-Ṣādiq*, all of the attributes mentioned above are parts of what is called *asmā al-ḥusnā* in Islamic tradition. Perhaps more importantly, just like in Muslim tradition, the list starts with the attributes of al-*Raḥmān* and *al-Raḥīm*, two different divine attributes expressing God's mercy.

[366] Holmberg, "Language and Thought," 170.
[367] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 38r.

Another instance in the same section of *Kitāb* where *asmā al-ḥusnā* appears in a context that clarifies its meaning is a passage where ‘Amr talks about the supremacy and otherness of God. He initially states that God cannot be appreciated or recognised by the senses, and turns to describing Him as follows:

> He has no space, there is no beginning for His existence and there is no limit for His essence [*dhat*]. Eyes cannot see Him, and minds cannot comprehend Him. He cannot be known through examining things like Him, nor through analogies. He can only be known through the mind, but not through the senses. He has beautiful names [*lahū min asmā al-ḥusnā*] […] His names are signs and expressions and His attributes [awṣāf] are symbols and indicators.[368]

In the passage above, it is very clear that he uses the phrase *asmā al-ḥusnā* in order to address the divine attributes of God. An interesting detail to mention here is that the way ‘Amr says “He has beautiful names” in Arabic, which sounds very similar to the Qur’anic expression “*lahu al-asmā al-ḥusnā*”. There are four verses where the phrase “*asmā al-ḥusnā”* appears in the Qur’an. In three of them, the statement is expressed as “*lahu al-asmā al-ḥusnā*”, which means ‘He has beautiful names’ in Arabic. Considering these two examples, it is clear that the meaning and the scope of *asmā al-ḥusnā* in the text is almost the same as in Islamic tradition, as Holmberg states. Moreover, ‘Amr’s particular way of expressing it suggests that he is fully aware of the Islamic discourse on the beautiful names of God and does not see any problem to employ it in his text.

Similar use of Qur’anic expressions appears in various places throughout *Kitāb al-Majdal*. In the prelude of *Kitāb al-Majdal*, for example, when promoting the seeking of God’s approval by choosing the

[368] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 39r.

right actions, ‘Amr says: “*Wa mā kallafa Allahu illā wus‘ahā*”, which means ‘On no soul Allah places a burden greater than it can bear’.[369] It sounds almost identical to the last verse of Surah al-Baqarah in the Qur’an, which is expressed as “*Wa mā yukallifu Allahu illā wus‘ahā*”. Here, the only difference between ‘Amr’s expression and the Qur’anic verse is the form of the verb. In ‘Amr’s text, the verb is in the active past form, while it appears in the active present form in the Qur’an. This slight difference does not make a significant change to the meaning.

On another occasion, a similar Qur’anic expression appears in a context where the origins of goodness and value are discussed, in the first section of *al-Maṣābīh*. After explaining the origin of righteousness as obeying God’s command, ‘Amr says “*Wa Allahu lam ya’muru bi al faḥshā’ wa lā yuḥibbu man ya‘malu al-sū’*”, which means ‘Allah does not command immorality and does not like one who commits evil deeds’.[370] The initial portion of the statement sounds very similar to the final part of verse 28 in Surah al-A‘rāf, which is expressed as “*Inna Allaha lā ya’muru bi al-fahshā’*”. Again, there are slight differences between the Qur’anic expression and ‘Amr’s sentence; the only differences between these two phrases are the particles at the beginning and the form of the verbs. In *al-Maṣābīh*, the sentence starts with the particle *wa*, while in the Qur’anic verse, the accusative particle *inna* is used. The verbs are also in different forms in each sentence. These small variations do not change the meaning dramatically. ‘Amr uses almost the same expression as the Qur’anic verse in order to support his argument.

In both examples, small portions of Muslim scripture are used to explain or emphasise certain points in ‘Amr’s arguments. These are significant verses, which are cited in Muslim writings. For example, both verses are quoted by ‘Abd al-Jabbar in his *Sharḥ al-’Uṣūl al-Khamsah* when discussing the justice of

[369] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 8v.
[370] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 154v.

God.[371] From the earlier examples in the second chapter of this thesis, where 'Amr's theological approach is discussed, it is clear that 'Amr appears to be aware of the theological debates of his time. When the contexts in which these verses appear are recalled, it is likely that he borrowed these expressions from Islamic theological sources and cited them along with other statements. It is difficult to answer the question of whether his main intention was to quote these particular verses as scriptural proofs. Here, he is probably aware of the origins of these expressions, as he knows the Qur'an quite well. Certainly, his primary aim is to transmit his message to his audience in a flowing language effectively. Therefore, these Qur'anic paraphrases can be considered an aspect of the linguistic features of the text. He seems quite comfortable using them in his text with very little variation from their original forms. The difficult question to ask here is whether he intentionally cites Islamic scripture to support his arguments, or he unconsciously uses these expressions without realising that they are part of the Qur'an. When 'Amr's close acquaintance with the Qur'an and Qur'anic language is considered, it is very likely that he is aware of the origins of these particular expressions. The following example may reveal more about his conscious use of Qur'anic material.

A final example should be mentioned here about the use of Islamic expressions in the text. In the chapter on mercy, when promoting compassion towards other people, 'Amr says "A merciful soul does not hide evil. Mercy would be restrained only from evil-doers. God does not show mercy to those who do not show mercy to human beings [*Lā yarḥamu Allahu man lā yarḥamu al-nās*]".[372] Indeed, the last sentence in this short passage sounds very similar to Matthew 5:7: "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy." However, its Arabic expression sounds very similar to one of the Prophet

[371] Abd al-Jabbār ibn Aḥmad al-Asadabādī, *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah,* ed. 'Abd al-Karīm 'Uthman (Beirut: Dār 'Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 2001), 270.
[372] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 202v.

Muhammad's hadiths which is narrated by Tirmidhī.[373] The original version of the hadith appears as: "Whoever is not merciful towards human beings, God will not show mercy to them [*Man lā yarḥamu al-nās, lā yarḥamhu Allah*]". 'Amr's expression is almost the same as the hadith; the only difference is the order of the two clauses. It seems quite unlikely that 'Amr's intention was to cite the hadith, because a very similar verse was already mentioned in the Bible. However, it is possible that he was both aware of the hadith and the Biblical verse and expressed this statement in Arabic, which sounds almost identical to the hadith version.

These examples show that the Islamic influence on the language of *Kitāb al-Majdal* is not limited to the ethical or religious vocabulary used in *al-Maṣābīh*, which is discussed in the relevant chapter. The use of the aforementioned specific expressions demonstrates that 'Amr was very well acquainted with Islamic terminology and writings. Moreover, he seems to be totally at ease employing this specific language in his work, while fully aware of their Islamic origins and use. Since he never mentions the origins of his sources, it is really difficult to decide whether his intention was to cite these Islamic materials in his text to support his arguments, or he just used these sentences as random expressions. In both cases, he feels quite relaxed using this language in his text. When his acquaintance with Islamic traditional material is considered, it is likely that he knew the origins of these expressions and was aware that his work would sound more Islamic when employing them. This suggests that he purposefully composed his work in this particular way, which sounds like an Islamic text. The possible reasons behind his particular method of engagement with the surrounding Islamic culture will be addressed in the following section of this chapter.

[373] Abū 'Īsā Muḥammad al-Tirmidhī. *Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī*. Hadith No: 1922. https://sunnah.com/tirmidhi/27 (Accessed 11 May 2016)

Another important linguistic feature of *Kitāb al-Majdal* is the use of rhyming prose. As mentioned earlier, one striking detail about the time period in which ʻAmr composed his *Kitāb al-Majdal* is that this was the era when the first examples of theological writings in Christian Arabic with ornamental and artistic features started to appear. For example, Suleiman al-Ghazzī (d. 1027), a Melkite bishop from Palestine, is considered as the first Arab poet whose *dīwān* extensively deals with Christian theology.[374]

Saj' is one of the very early forms of poetic expression in Arabic. In the pre-Islamic period, some of the utterances of soothsayers (*kunhān*) were expressed in rhyming prose. In the Islamic period, *Saj'* appeared, combined with pre-Abbasid oratorical style (*khutba*), in the ninth century as a new trend and gained dominance over prose writing. In the tenth century, one of the most famous preachers (*khatīb*) of the age, Ibn Nubāṭah (d. 946) used rhyming prose for his sermons. In the secular sphere, it became increasingly used in administrative correspondence and subsequently for historiography in the tenth century, as it gradually gained popularity among secretaries and chanceries. The texts are composed in a florid, assonantal style with a sense of rhythm as well as rhyme. In some cases, the style seems to be so important that there are occasions that make the reader feel that the author neglects the sense and the vividness of expression.[375]

Al-Maṣābīh, and *Kitāb al-Majdal* in general, are composed in rhyming prose. Apart from some exceptional passages, the text is mostly rhyming and embellished with a wide range of rhetorical figures. ʻAmr does not provide any clarification as to why he chose to compose his work in this particular way. It is obvious that his choice of language fits into his overall aesthetic concern. Considering the practical

[374] Samuel Noble, *Christian-Muslim Relations 600 – 1500*, s.v. "Dīwān" (Leiden: Brill, 2010), accessed 20 February 2016.
http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/christian-muslim-relations-i/diwan-COM_25139
[375] Alfred F.L Beeston, "Al-Hamadhānī, al-Ḥarīrī and the Maqāmāt Genre" in *Abbasid Belles Lettres*, (ed.) Julia Ashtiany et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 125 – 126.

benefits of s*aj‘* and its prestigious use in the tenth century, it is probable that ‘Amr wanted his text to be both kept in mind and circulated as much as possible, and also fit the intellectual context of his time.

When the whole cluster of examples is considered, *Kitāb al-Majdal* has a distinct language with specific vocabulary containing many Islamic elements. It represents one of the earliest examples of Christian Arabic writings with artistic features. In order to fully comprehend the mentality behind ‘Amr’s specific use of Arabic, evaluating the linguistic features of the text from a sociolinguistics perspective might be helpful. Such an inquiry would also contribute to contextualising the text within its intellectual environment. An example from Medieval Iberia can shed some light on the social and religious dimensions of the use and the perception of classical Arabic by members of different religious communities.

In her article entitled *The Impact of Arabic Diglossia among the Muslims, Jews and Christians of al-Andalus* Maria Gallego investigates how the use of classical Arabic and colloquial Arabic operated among Christians and Jews compared to Muslims. For this purpose, she uses the modern linguistic concept of ‘diglossia’ to distinguish two major types of Arabic, *‘al-‘arabiyya al-fusḥa*, the eloquent Arabic which is acquired by formal education and employed mostly in religious, administrative, and scientific writings and speeches and *al‘āmmiyya*, the common language, which generally refers to various Arabic vernaculars. One of the most important aspects of classical Arabic is its sacred status among Muslims as the language chosen by God to transmit His message. It is clearly stated in the Qur’an on various occasions that it was revealed in the Arabic language.[376] Thus, classical Arabic has strong religious connotations, which had various implications for the way that it has been perceived and used by the followers of different religions since the Middle Ages. In the Medieval Iberian context, Gallego summarises the correlation between the levels of Arabisation and Islamisation as follows:

[376] Qur’an 12:2, 13:37, 16:103, 20:113, 39:28, 41:3, 42:7, 43:2-3.

> The language situation in medieval Iberia has captured the attention of scholars for other reasons, notably with regard to the degree and dates of Arabization of the local population and the survival and extent of the use of Romance in al-Andalus. These questions have been addressed mostly for the sake of the historical implications derived from its conclusions: deeper Arabization means a higher degree of acculturation/Islamization of the Iberian Peninsula, whereas weaker Arabization and extended use of Romance imply a superficial acculturation of the native population and thus, a continuity in the history of the Iberian Peninsula from Roman to present times, as part of the western world.[377]

In her article, after describing the specific characteristics of Arabic diglossia, Gallego investigates the level of acceptance and assimilation of the classical and colloquial Arabic by the members of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. She states that although the replacement of Roman and Latin with colloquial and classical Arabic did not cause any negative reaction among the Jewish community, Christians were not happy with the neglect of Latin. Jews used three different linguistic varieties for different occasions: Arabic for formal and administrative interactions with the Muslim community, Judeo-Arabic in their scientific and philosophical writings, and Biblical Hebrew as a sacred language and the most perfect form of Hebrew, used to create various forms of writing, including poetry. Just like classical Arabic in an Islamic context, they extensively studied and analysed Biblical Hebrew and composed philological works. Gallego concludes that the adaptation of an Arabic diglossia among the different religious communities in Medieval Iberia was marked by the religious significance of classical Arabic. It was easily accepted and

[377] Maria Angeles Gallego, "The Impact of Arabic Diglossia among the Muslims, Jews and Christians of al-Andalus" in *Comparative History of Literatures in the Iberian Peninsula*, ed. Fernando Cabo Aseguinolaza et al. (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2010), 351.

assimilated by the native Iberian Muslims, while Christians and Jews found ways to extend its linguistic impact in their respective religious traditions.[378]

Certainly, Gallego's research focuses on a completely different context from the one in which 'Amr ibn Matta's *Kitāb al-Majdal* was produced. As has been mentioned in the first chapter, Arabic had been used by Middle Eastern Christians to compose theological writings as early as the mid eighth century. However, classical Arabic still had religious connotations embedded in its sacred status in Abbasid society, and the use of the language in one way or another had important social and intellectual implications in this particular context. al-Jāhiz (d. 868) argues that there are only four nations, Arabs, Indians, Greeks, and Persians, who managed to attain intellectual perfection. Among them, Arabs are depicted as the ones on top, for the richness of their vocabulary and the beauty of their rhetoric and poetry.[379]

From the Christian side, Antony of Tagrit, whom scholars believe lived in the early Abbasid period, probably the ninth century, complains about the claims of the Arab community regarding the superiority of Arabic over all other languages and the inadequacy of others. In the prelude of the Fifth Book of his treatise, he explains that he wants to remove from his people the reproach of those who claim the Syriac language is "meagre, narrow, stunted, and feeble" and the designation of their literature as "poor and beggarly". Accordingly, he aims to present the Syriac language in its full glory, which will stop the attacks of all the "maligners and slanderers".[380]

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[378] Gallego, "The Impact of Arabic Diglossia," 365.
[379] See Charles Pellat, "Al-Gahiz. Les Nations Civilisées et les Croyances Religieuses" *Journal Asiatique* 255 (1967): 68-87.
[380] John W. Watt, "Guarding the Syriac Language in an Arabic Environment: Antony of Tagrit on the Use of Grammar and Rhetoric" in *Syriac Polemic: Studies in Honour of Gerrit Jan Reinink*, ed. Bekkum et al. (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 138.

The same concern was expressed by the thirteen century East Syrian Metropolitan Bishop of Nisibis Abdisho' bar Berikha (d. 1318) at the beginning of his Syriac work entitled *Pardaisa da'Den*. Abdisho' composed his work under the influence of the Arabic *maqāma* genre, which was initiated by the late tenth century author Badī' al-Zamān al-Hamadānī (d. 1007). This particular genre consists of collections of stories which are composed in rhyming prose. Abdisho's text was composed in Syriac and contains fifty *maqāmas*, similar to Hamadāni's text. At the beginning of his work, Abdisho explains his main purpose in composing this text:

> Some Arabs, therefore, who are poets in the elegance of diction, and grammarians in the art of composition, castigated in their stupidity and foolishness the Syriac tongue as being impoverished, unpolished, and dull, and the beauty and the abundance of subtleties at the present time, they ascribed and attributed to their [own] language. At all times and before all men they bring forward as proof the book which they call the *maqāmāt*. All the books of poets and orators in every [other] language they look down on and belittle, while the compilation of fifty stories, interwoven with all sorts of fictions, which men of intelligence will upon examination realise are [nothing other than] a colourful bird and plastered sepulchres, they praise, glorify, and exalt, and in them they take pride and boast. Therefore, it has befallen to me, the most despised of the Syrians, and the weakest of the Christians, to show my indignation against the folly of their arrogance and to pull down the height of their criticism. I shall gain a victory for our language, which is the oldest of all and shall scatter its detractors with the catapults of justice.[381]

[381] Translation is taken from Naoya Katsumata "The Style of the Maqāma: Arabic, Persian, Hebrew, Syriac" *Middle Eastern Literatures* 5 (2002): 122.

There are two main points in Abdisho's statement that parallel Antony of Tagrit's exposition: Arabs are extremely proud of their language and keep criticising the shortcomings of Syriac in various ways, and a Syriac author composes his work in order to defend the language of his nation. In both Antony of Tagrit's and Abdisho's statements, apologetic purpose can be clearly seen. What is more in Abdisho's attempt is that he borrows a literary genre that originated in Arabic and adapts it to Syriac. The strong emphasis on the superiority of Arabic over other languages forces the Syriac author to create a similar genre in Syriac. This impact sounds very similar to Gallego's earlier observation.

In his article entitled *The Style of the Maqāma: Arabic, Persian, Hebrew, Syriac*, Naoya Katsumata investigates how the Arabic *maqāma* genre was adopted and developed in the four different languages of the title by the authors Abū Muḥammad al-Qāsim al-Ḥarīrī (d. 1122), Qāḍī Ḥamīd al-Dīn 'Umar ibn Maḥmūd al-Balkhī (d.1164), Yehuda al-Harizi (d. 1225), and Abdihso. He examines the various aspects of four different texts, including the authors' intention, stylistic features and thematic aspects, in order to determine the ways in which the *maqāma* genre was assimilated by the members of different groups into different languages. At the end, he concludes that the attitudes of three non-Arab authors, namely Ḥamīd al-Dīn, al-Harizī, and Abdihso, towards the religious significance of Arabic differs according to their religious orientation. Similar to Gallego's remark, he observes that the superiority of Arabic did not disturb the Persian Muslim author Ḥamīd al-Dīn, while the Hebrew and Syriac authors al-Harizi and Abdisho were seen to be uncomfortable with it.[382]

One of the best examples from the tenth century, which illustrates the reactions of Christians to debates on the supremacy of Arabic over the Syriac language, can be seen in the Nestorian bishop Elias of Nisibis' work entitled *Kitāb al-Majālīs*, the 'Book of Sessions'. The work consists of seven chapters recounting discussions between Elias and the Muslim vizier Abu al Qāsim al-Maghribī. The sixth section

[382] Katsumata, "The Style of the Maqāma", 131.

of the discussion focuses on the comparison of Arabic and Syriac, considering the various linguistic aspects of each language such as vocabulary, syntax, lexicography, and the alphabet. Throughout the polite debate, the vizier usually asks the questions and Elias provides his answers. Although Elias presents himself as an objective party of the debate and never associates with the Syriac community, he clearly argues in favour of the Syriac language, even to the extent that he sometimes conflicts with his earlier opinions expressed in his other works. In seven instances during the debate he addresses himself in the first person singular when talking about Arabs. Certainly, he was a bilingual member of the Medieval Būyid society and was fluent in both languages. However, although he feels the part of the 'Arab' community, he strives to prove the shortcomings of Arabic language as opposed to Syriac, which clearly reveals the polemical dimension of the debate and the religious connotations of classical Arabic. Throughout the debate, both the Muslim vizier and Elias employ verses from the Qur'an exemplifying the various features of classical Arabic in order to support their argument.[383] It is clear that in the early eleventh century, Arabic was still seen as the 'language of Islam' by religious minorities as well as Muslims.

Another important aspect of the language of *Kitāb al-Majdal* is the use of *saj'*. Here, a final example should be given here concerning how skilful and coherent use of Arabic was seen as prestigious in the intellectual circles of early Abbasid society. The debate between the Jacobite logician Abu Bishr Mattā and the grammarian Abu Saīd al-Sirāfī illustrates this very well. The dispute takes place in the salon of the vizier Abu al-Fatḥ al-Faḍl Ibn al-Ja'far ibn al-Furāt at his request. The main aim of the discussion is to evaluatie the merits of logic and grammar. From the very early stages of the dispute, it is very clear that Abu Sa'īd al-Sirāfī repeatedly silences Abu Bishr Mattā with his rhetoric. His excellent

[383] David Bertaina, "Science, Syntax, and Superiority in Eleventh-Century Christian-Muslim Discussion: Elias of Nisibis on the Arabic and Syriac Languages" *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 22 (2011): 197-207.

command of Arabic plays a very important role in his superiority during the debate. Throughout the whole discussion, Abū Ṣaʿīd al-Sirāfī makes numerous references to the inadequacy of Mattā's Arabic. For example, at the beginnings of the dispute, he criticises him for his poor Arabic upon which he answers:

> It is sufficient for me to know out of your language the noun, the verb, and the particle; with that much I can make shift in expressing ideas which the Greeks have polished for me.[384]

Abu Saʿīd answers this argument stating that in order to express the ideas clearly and effectively, one has to have proper knowledge of grammar:

> You are wrong. About these nouns, verbs, and particles you have to know how to employ them and arrange them in the order which the speakers of the language instinctively approve, and also you need to know the vocalisation of these nouns, verbs, and particles, for error and corruption of the vowels are as bad as the same in the case of the consonants. And this is a subject neglected by you, your friends, and your associates, although there is a mystery involved of which you have no inkling, and which has never dawned on your intellect. That is, that you ought to know that no one language exactly corresponds with another language in all respects, or has conterminous properties in its nouns, verbs, and particles, in its mode of composition, arrangement, employment of metaphor and of exact expression, duplication and simplification, copiousness, poverty, verse, prose, rhyme, metre, tendency, and other things too numerous to mention. Now no one, I fancy, will object to this judgment, or question its

[384] Margoliouth, "The Discussion," 117.

correctness, at least no one who relies on any fragment of intelligence or morsel of justice.[385]

According to Abu Said, knowing the basic functions of Arabic grammar and vocabulary is not sufficient to express ideas and thoughts in an efficient way. Therefore, an intellectual should have a deep knowledge of grammar and different rhetorical figures. He is very strict in this statement, and in the following stages of the discussion he asks specific questions to Abu Bishr Mattā on the use of the particle *waw* in Arabic, which Mattā fails to answer satisfactorily:

> […] tell me what are the rules of the *waw*, for I wish to show that your insistence on logic does not avail you at all, while you are unacquainted with a single particle of the language in which you invite us to study Greek philosophy. And he who is ignorant of one particle is potentially ignorant of the whole language, and even though he be not entirely ignorant of it, yet, being ignorant of some of it, he may chance to be ignorant of what he wants, and knowledge of what he does not want will not help him. And this is the stage reached by the vulgar, or those who are slightly above the vulgar. And why should he object to this description and reject it, and fancy that he is one of the superior class, nay, the most superior class, and that he knows the mystery of dialectic, and the hidden things of wisdom, and the secret of the syllogism, and the correct form of demonstration? Now I have only asked you about the senses of one single particle: what would happen if I were to shower down upon you the whole series of particles, and demand of you their senses and their proper and permissible employments?[386]

[385] Margoliouth, "The Discussion," 117-118.
[386] Margoliouth, "The Discussion," 118-119.

This debate reveals some social and intellectual implications of the use of skilful Arabic. Abū Bishr Mattā's level of Arabic is evidently good enough to express himself and his ideas on logic and philosophy. Nevertheless, it is described by Abu Sa'īd as being on the level of "slightly above the vulgar". Moreover, he criticises Mattā's implicit claim of superiority in society based on his knowledge in philosophy by pointing out his poor knowledge of Arabic, which clearly reveals that having good command of classical Arabic was attached to high status in the society.

When all the examples are considered, there are two main points to be made about the social and intellectual perception of Arabic in Būyid society. Firstly, the Islamic connotation of classical Arabic was acknowledged by both Muslims and non-Muslims, and secondly, using Arabic in an effective way was seen as a prestigious skill in the intellectual sphere. As a Christian living in this environment, 'Amr ibn Mattā must have been aware of all the implications of his use of Arabic and extensive utilisation of Islamic terms in his text. As has already been stated, it appears that he consciously choses Islamic-sounding terms and expressions to elucidate his ideas. Therefore, when the linguistic aspects of *Kitāb al-Majdal* and al-*Maṣābīh* chapter in particular are considered, it can be said that 'Amr ibn Mattā was fully aware of the social and intellectual implications of his extensive use of *saj'* and Islamic terms in his work. Consequently, he purposefully composed his work in a way which sounds like a 'Muslim text'. His specific use of Arabic can be seen as one of the examples of the acculturation of Christians living under Islamic rule. This raises the question of why he chose to compose his work in this way, which will be addressed in the following section.

Structure, Sources, and Presentation

Before elaborating the sources and the presentation of *al-Maṣābīh*, a few words should be said about its position in the whole *Kitāb al-Majdal* and how it fits into the general style of the encyclopaedia in terms

of structure. As has been mentioned earlier, each of the seven chapters in *Kitāb al-Majdal* appears as an independent unit, subdivided into sections dealing with particular issues. 'Amr follows a certain numerical order when dividing and structuring his work into chapters and subsections. Al-*Maṣābīh* chapter is the fourth division in *Kitāb al-Majdal* and consists of seven separate sections, called *faṣls*, focusing on specific issues that are stated in their titles. There is a connection between this particular number and the title of the chapter, which may not be easily recognised at first glance. As has been discussed, seven is a significant Biblical number, which represents perfection. When it is considered along with the title of *al-Maṣābīh*, 'the lamps', it appears that there is a subtle allusion to the analogy of seven lamps in the Bible, which makes the title and the choice of the number of the sections very harmonious. This particular allusion recalls Revelation 4:5, where the analogy of seven lamps appears: "From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. In front of the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God".[387]

Along with the other three verses in the book of Revelation that address seven spirits of God, 1:4, 3:1, and 5:6, this verse is interpreted in various ways that do not seem to be directly connected to the content of *al-Maṣābīh*. 'Amr is usually not very interested in providing further explanations or elucidation about the Biblical allusions he uses. He enjoys employing them in places where he thinks they fit into his overall message and narrative.

A subtle detail that hints at 'Amr's purposeful use of the analogy of lamps comes at the very beginning of the first section of *al-Maṣābīh*. In the first sentence of this initial section, 'Amr uses the analogy of light, saying "*Taqwā* is the light of guidance" which is in line with his 'seven lamps' allusion and strengthens the idea that he is conscious of his choice of metaphors. As has been shown in the section on *Taqwā*, the analogy of 'light' also exists in Sufi literature in connection with the description of

[387] Revelation 4:5

taqwā. In this case, the choice of the number of sections in this chapter, the title of the chapter, the analogy that is used in the first section of this chapter, and the theme of the section in which this analogy was mentioned are all related to each other.

In terms of the number seven, 'Amr provides a rather lengthy explanation in the third section of *al-Maṣābīh* regarding the importance of seven, which indicates that he is fully aware of the significance of this number in Christian spirituality. In al-*Ṣalāt* section, after explaining the seven prayers in Christian tradition, he says: "In our books, there are a lot of cases which demonstrate that seven is an excellent number" and turns to give a comprehensive list of events and occasions which prove the distinction of the number seven, such as the number of days in one week, the holiness of the seventh day of the week, and God's command to Prophet Noah to take pure animals to the ship in seven pairs. He recalls several occasions in the flood narrative which indicate the importance of seven, such as following the flood, the ark settles on the peak of the mountain on the seventh month of the year, and Noah sends out a dove which returns back with an olive leaf seven days after releasing a raven.[388] 'Amr states that there are many instances in the Old Testament and the New Testament that point to the importance of the number seven. His list is quite extensive and contains several occasions from the experiences of Biblical personalities where the number seven played an important role. This special emphasis on the significance of seven in a chapter which is divided into seven subsections indicates that he has a fair degree of awareness of the number symbolism and this very feature of *al-Maṣābīh* fits into 'Amr's general mentality on dividing his work into a certain number of chapters and subsections, which can be observed throughout the whole *Kitāb al-Majdal*. The numbers that 'Amr employs in the text have Biblical significance. As explained in the second chapter, when discussing the genre of *Kitāb al-Majdal*, this

[388] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 182v.

particular feature of dividing and presenting the text according to a particular numerical order can be seen in the compositions of various Muslim authors.

Before discussing possible sources for *al-Maṣābīh*, it is worth mentioning a few characteristics of 'Amr's presentation. Although he appears to use a wide variety of sources, 'Amr hardly ever mentions the name of the author or the work he quotes from. Therefore, it is very difficult to identify the exact source that he use for information or an idea. Moreover, he usually quotes from several sources in the same context, which makes it almost impossible to determine the origins of his ideas. These two facts gives the impression that he generally cites the information, from whichever source he uses, from memory rather than consulting these works. Another important detail about his presentation is, similar to his use of the analogy of light at the beginning of this chapter, which seems to be subtly interrelated to many different aspects of the text, the ideas that he presents in his text are usually well-known statements that were commonly used by the Christian and Muslim intellectuals of his time. For example, his explanation of *taqwā* resembles the Sufi interpretation of the same concept, but it is almost impossible to determine which Sufi author or work he was inspired by. However, for the purpose of this chapter, which determines 'Amr's method of engaging with Syriac tradition and the surrounding Islamic culture, it is still possible to get the idea of at least which 'type' of source he had at his disposal when composing his work, and it is sufficient to make the intended evaluation.

As has been asserted in the fourth chapter while discussing the main purpose of *al-Maṣābīh*, the text aims to provide moral guidance which will improve both the eschatological and the mundane affairs of the readers. Having the divine command as the grounds of good and bad, scripture is naturally one of the most extensively employed sources throughout *al-Maṣābīh*. 'Amr uses Biblical verses, analogies, and examples from the lives of the prophets quite often in order to substantiate and justify his arguments. These borrowings from scripture are presented in various patterns. Scriptural citations are used in every

section and they usually appear after the initial passage, at the beginning of the section, which recounts the benefits of the relevant virtue. They often follow a chronological order, starting with the sayings of the Old Testament prophets and followed by the advice of Jesus, Paul, and other New Testament personalities.

From the very beginning of the chapter, Biblical analogies are also employed quite often throughout *al-Maṣābīh*. As mentioned earlier, the title of *al-Maṣābīh* was very likely chosen in relation to Revelation 4:5, which represents the seven spirits of God. These metaphors sometimes appear in a very subtle form. For example, at the beginning of the second section, entitled *al-Maḥabbah*, 'Amr starts the section with: "Love is the path of peace and salt of salvation. With love, the purity is completed and closeness is expected, loyalty is kept and friendship is continued".[389] In this sentence, the analogy of 'salt' sounds rather irrelevant. However, when the whole content of the section of *al-Maḥabbah* is considered, it makes a lot more sense. The section on love in *al-Maṣābīh* is heavily based on Biblical citations from the Sermon on the Mount in the New Testament, Matthew 5-7. The analogy of salt and light appears at the beginning of the sermon in Matthew 5:13-14. The first verse, 5:13, starts with "You are the salt of the earth." 'Amr uses the analogy to address 'love' instead. Thus, it seems it is not coincidental that this metaphor is used at the very beginning of this particular section rather than anywhere else. When the analogy of 'light', which is employed at the beginning of the previous section, *Taqwā*, is considered, which has been discussed earlier, the use of the 'salt' analogy at the beginning of this second section looks complementary to the first one. Certainly, the text does not provide any clarification as to why he employs these specific analogies. Therefore, all we can do is read between the lines in order to make sense of his distinctive style, which may reveal the specific aspects of his message

[389] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 165v.

and teaching. Actually, these subtle allusions and analogies divulge the Biblical mentality lying behind all these linguistic structures and stylistic features.

Another aspect of 'Amr's use of the Bible is his reference to scripture as a whole, without any explicit distinction between the Old Testament and the New Testament. He rarely mentions the Old Testament and the New Testament separately. He usually follows a chronological order when quoting the words of prophets or giving examples from their lives. On these occasions, the Old Testament quotations appear before the New Testament citations. In some cases, examples from Old Testament law are also used to buttress the arguments. An interesting citation from the Old Testament, which appears in the second section on love, can be mentioned here. On this occasion, 'Amr initially makes a distinction between the Old Testament and the New Testament:

> It is written in the Torah [*Tawrāt*], one can find it in the New Testament when he reads it [*Injīl*], that you should love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, all your soul [*nafs*] and all your strength, and you should love your neighbour as yourself. It is also commanded in the New Testament to treat people in a way that you want them to treat you. There is no commandment better than these two.[390]

Here, 'Amr uses four different verses from the Bible. The first two statements about loving God and one's neighbour are portions from Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. The following statement on the relationship with others is, as also 'Amr points out, a portion from the New Testament: Matthew 7:12. Up until that point, it looks very natural to combine different verses from the Bible as it is not a novelty in Christian writings. But the last sentence makes this passage quite remarkable by connecting it with two New Testament verses as a whole, Mark 12:30-31:

[390] Ms. Arabe 190, f. 166r.

> Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these.

What 'Amr does in this passage is initially separate the Old Testament and the New Testament verses, emphasising their origins, and then, mentioning the last statement of Mark 12:31, he presents them in a New Testament pattern. Certainly, the Peshitta as a whole serves as one of the bases of Eastern Christian spirituality. What makes this example rather intriguing is 'Amr's particular way of presentation. This is one of the examples of 'Amr's creativity and subtlety in employing the material obtained from various sources in a way which looks more 'Christian'.

Traditional Christian homiletic and monastic writings are also extensively used in the text. As mentioned earlier, 'Amr does not give any information about the author or the title of the work that he quotes from, but he usually employs ambiguous expressions such as "in our old books" or "one of the scholars of our time says". This does not really help to find out exactly which sources he had at his disposal. He was influenced by Aphrahat's *Demonstrations,* makes citations from the book using Aphrahat's pseudonym, and takes it as a model when structuring his work. Therefore, *Demonstrations* is certainly one of the books to which he often refers. In the section on prayer, he uses John of Aphamea's scheme of spiritual development when explaining the different divisions of a specific prayer. Obviously, he was aware of Aphamea's spiritual development scheme, but it is difficult to identify whether he took it directly from him, or from any other church father who employed it in his work, such as Saint Ephrem. Indeed, Ephrem's understanding of free will can be also observed in 'Amr's explanation of volition. Another possible source, as far as we can see from his explanation of the purification of the soul in the process of receiving the divine light, which is explained in the fifth chapter, is John of Dalyatha's works.

However, due to ‘Amr’s quite obscure language, it is very difficult to pinpoint from which church fathers he gathers his ideas.

From the Muslim side, the Qur’an can be mentioned as another source which ‘Amr indirectly uses in his work. As has been explained in the section on vocabulary, Quranic terms, phrases, and ethical concepts are employed to describe morally good and bad actions, virtuous and wicked people, and the codes of morally acceptable behaviour throughout *al-Maṣābīh*. These expressions usually appear without any definition. In the section on humility, a deeper engagement with Qur’anic thought appears when he connects *shukr* (gratitude) with humility, and ungratefulness with pride, ignorance, and infidelity. This particular way of interpreting humility is in line with the Qur’anic discourse on infidelity, which is attached to the attitudes of arrogance and ingratitude. A rather subtle example of the use of Qur’anic narrative appears in his exposition on the “way of righteous ones” where ‘Amr employs the analogies of the “door” and the people who “swing to the right and the left” from the Qur’an. As explained in detail in the chapter on ethical terminology, ‘Amr adjusts the Qur’anic description of goodness (*al-birr*) to fit a Christian context by employing two Biblical verses. His way of engagement with the Qur’anic material indicates that he has a fair degree of knowledge of Islamic scripture, not only on matters related to controversial issues between Muslims and Christians, but also the verses and teachings that concern Islamic spiritual and moral life.

Another type of borrowing from Islamic tradition appears as hadith quotations. A striking example comes in the section on Ṣ*awm* (fasting) which has been explained in the section of Ṣawm in this thesis. ‘Amr mentions a certain type of fast, which he calls “Prophet David’s fast” which sounds very similar to Prophet Muhammad’s definition.

As has been addressed in detail in the previous chapter, renunciation of the world is one of the main teachings of *al-Maṣābīh* and *Kitāb al-Majdal* in general. Throughout the text, there are indications that 'Amr employs some of the concepts popular in Sufi literature, such as 'greater *jihad*'. Therefore, it is very likely that he also had some Sufi writings at his disposal. However, it is really difficult to find out which exact source he borrowed from. When using Sufi material, his style is certainly different from the thirteenth century Syriac author Bar Hebraeus (d. 1286), who used al-Ghaẓālī's *Iḥyā al-'Ulūm al-Dīn* as the 'blueprint' for his own ethical work, entitled *Ethicon*.[391] 'Amr's use of Sufi material does not seem to be as systematic as Bar Hebraeus'. Nevertheless, a Sufi understanding and interpretation of certain practices and virtues is striking in *al-Maṣābīh*, therefore it is possible that he had some Sufi works to hand, or had at least heard of their teachings while composing his work.

Another type of literature from Islamic tradition that should be mentioned here as one of the possible sources that 'Amr had in mind when writing *al-Maṣābīh* are texts and works on Islamic *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence). 'Amr uses the concepts of Islamic jurisprudence to express some prohibited and permitted acts, using terms such as *halal* and *haram*. In the section on *sawm*, he employs several members of *aḥkām al-khamsa* to express the different types of fasting, which sounds very similar to the Islamic classification of fasting. Certainly, these examples are not enough to determine from which particular source he received this information, or whether 'Amr borrowed any other elements from Islamic *fiqh*. As has been shown in the chapter on terminology, he also employed terms and some expressions from Islamic jurisprudence when expressing the various levels of codes of morality and religion. Therefore, it is quite clear that he was familiar with Islamic jurisprudential literature and borrowed and employed some material.

[391] Herman Teule provides the parallel passages in Ghazali's *Iḥyā* and Bar Hebraeus' *Ethicon* in his edition of *Ethicon*. For a detailed elaboration of the similarities between *Iḥyā* and *Ethicon*, see Bar Hebraeus. *Ethicon: (Memra I) / by Gregory Barhebraeus*, trans. Herman Teule. (Louvain: Peeters, 1993)

When determining the grounds of moral values, ‘Amr uses some ideas of Muslim theologians, especially from the Mu’tazilite stance. Indeed, in the first chapter of *Kitāb al-Majdal*, where he discusses faith and relevant issues, he addresses two of the tenets of the Mu’tazilite system, *tawḥīd* and ‘*adl*. Thus, he appears to be well aware of the theological teachings of the Mu’tazilite school. His style is quite different from Muslim *mutakallimūn* as he only makes certain statements without providing any dialectical arguments. Although his borrowings from Mu’tazilite writings are extremely limited in *al-Maṣābīh*, and have a different character, they can still be mentioned among the sources by which ‘Amr was influenced.

On the whole, ‘Amr uses both Christian traditional sources and Islamic material throughout the text when developing his moral teachings. In certain cases, he makes a conscious effort to make the text sound more ‘Christian’. At the same time, he seems quite at ease using ideas or information that originated from various branches of Islamic intellectual tradition. His engagement with Islamic thought and sources indicates that he has a good understanding and acknowledgement of the reality of Islam as a complex religious tradition, and one which shapes and dominates the culture in which he lived. This also shows that he was well trained and knowledgeable in both Christian and Muslim sources as he employs them coherently and skilfully in his text.

Before investigating the reasons as to why ‘Amr prefers this particular style, two points should be addressed regarding his presentation, which may reveal more about his engagement with the surrounding culture. As mentioned earlier, scripture is used very widely in the text. Biblical analogies and various examples from the lives of the prophets are recounted in order to buttress the arguments. An interesting feature of some of the Bible quotes is that ‘Amr cites the sayings of the prophets in a way which sounds very similar to hadith quotes in Islamic tradition. In the first section, for example, when explaining the origins of goodness as God’s command, after stating that submission to God’s orders is

the essence of goodness, he starts quoting a series of sayings of the prophets that promote following the religious way of life:

> Our master Messiah said: Whoever keeps my advice, I free him from slavery. Whoever disobeys, he becomes a slave of his mistakes. Do not work for the food that destroys, but for the food that lasts for eternal life.[392] It is not possible for you to serve God and the world.[393] The blessed are the performers of goodness, for they will be called the children of God.[394] Prophet Moses said to his nation: I gave in your hands life and goodness, and death and evil. And I advise you to love the Lord your God, and walk in His path and follow His advice. Blessings on he who obeys God's commands, and curses on he who turns away from His way. Prophet David said in Psalm thirty-four: 'Whoever wants life and loves waiting for good days, keeps his tongue from evil and his lips from talking malice and escapes from wickedness. He performs goodness and seeks peace and pursues it'. The Prophet Isaiah said: 'Preserve the law [*sunnah*] and perform good deeds. The blessed is he who keeps his hand from doing evil'.[395] The Prophet Amos said: 'Seek goodness and avoid evil, that you [may] live. Then the Lord Almighty be with you, just as you wished'.[396]

The passage continues with citations from Prophets Nahum, Daniel, and Solomon, and the words of the apostles advising on the same issue. Usually, it is very difficult to identify the verse that the author quotes in these types of quotation, because in these passages he only mentions a certain portion of the words of the relevant prophet and discards the rest of the verse. Sometimes, he combines the words of

[392] John 6:27.
[393] Matthew 6:24.
[394] Matthew 5:9.
[395] Isaiah 56:1-2.
[396] Amos 5:14.

the same prophet from different verses in the same quotation. The pattern seems to be quite peculiar to *Kitāb al-Majdal* and can be observed in all sections of *al-Maṣābīh*. This particular way of citing Biblical prophets' advice recalls the use of hadith quotes in Islamic writings.

Another interesting feature of *al-Maṣābīh* is the structure and the order of the subsections. The chapter starts with the section on *Taqwā*, which is explained as 'piety combined with fear of God' in the text. *Taqwā* is the first section, even preceding 'love', which has a more central position in Christian spirituality than 'fear of God'. When other religious ethical writings in Arabic are considered, it can be said that this feature of starting the text with *Taqwā* is quite common in Sufi ethics. The parallels between 'Amr's and al-Muḥāsibi's discourse on *Taqwā* have already been addressed in the section on *Taqwā*. Another example of the use of *Taqwā* at the beginning of a text is the ninth century author Ibn Abi al-Dunya's (d. 894) *Makārīm al-Akhlāq*, which is considered one of the earliest examples of religious ethics with an ascetic ideal. It is striking to see that 'Amr's *al-Maṣābīh* has the same ideal throughout the text. Therefore, it is possible that 'Amr has seen the type of ethical writings that start with the subject of *Taqwā* in Islamic tradition, and kept this in mind when dividing and structuring his chapters.

All in all, al-*Maṣābīh* chapter of *Kitāb al-Majdal* fits into the style of the whole encyclopaedia in general, bearing similar features regarding structure and content. Both the Bible and traditional Syriac sources on one hand, and the Qur'an and various writings of Muslim authors on the other, are used throughout the text. It is very difficult to identify the exact sources that 'Amr benefited from, mainly because of his style. The Christian voice and mentality behind the text are very clear. However, without considering the influence of the surrounding Islamic culture, it would not be possible to make sense of the various aspects of *al-Maṣābīh* and *Kitāb al-Majdal* in general.

The Reasons Behind 'Amr ibn Matta's Style

In order to discuss the reasons for 'Amr's engagement with Islamic culture, a broader question concerning the emergence of Christian texts in Arabic should be considered. Scholars interpret the appearance and development of Christian Arabic writings as a consequence of the increasing number of Christians converting to Islam. When discussing the superseding of Greek, Aramaic, and Syriac works by Arabic writings in the ninth century, Sydney Griffith points to the correlation between the rise in the use of the Arabic language by Christians as a result of their integration into Islamic society, and the large number of conversions from Christianity to Islam. According to Griffith, the primary intended audience of this first generation of Christian Arabic authors were their fellow Christians, and the main purpose of the Christian apologetics and treatises composed in Arabic was stopping conversions from Christianity to Islam.[397] Sandra Keating supports this view, linking the large amount of conversions to the rising level of poll taxes (*jizya*) and social restrictions on the *dhimmi* community. She states that the decrease in the number of Christians caused theologians to search for means to ameliorate the circumstances. This very movement resulted in the emergence of Christian apologetics in the Arabic language, whose aim was to tackle the challenge brought by Islam through answering questions posed by Muslims.[398]

In fact, when compared to the earlier writings of Christian authors, *Kitāb al-Majdal* is more comprehensive in terms of content, as it contains a wide variety of subjects. As has been discussed in the second chapter, it shows the character of a compendious theological encyclopaedia with the underlying agenda of defending the Christian faith. 'Amr makes his intention clear in the prelude of his book, saying that he wants to clarify and discuss the issues of faith, church, and divine law for a Christian audience. Therefore, while the content of *Kitāb al-Majdal* covers a wider scope, including the history of the church,

[397] Griffith, "Faith and the Reason", 6.
[398] Keating, *Defending the "People of Truth"*, 32.

doctrinal issues, and ethics, one of its main purposes is protecting and defending the faith of the Christian community.

As has been discussed, ‘Amr appears to be well acquainted with Islamic culture and the Arabic language, and shows a fair degree of awareness in his employment of Islamic elements in his text. Certainly, the portions of *Kitāb al-Majdal* that have been the subject of this study demonstrate that the text bears significant influence from Islam. However, when ‘Amr’s choice of vocabulary, his style, and his presentation are considered as a whole, it seems a purposeful and sophisticated attempt to adapt Christian doctrines, values, and teachings to an Islamic context. When the features of the whole encyclopaedia, and al-*Maṣābīh* chapter in particular, are considered, perhaps the question to ask here is why did ‘Amr prefer to defend his faith in this particular way? In respect to *al-Maṣābīh*, why does he produces his ethical teachings, which mainly target his fellow Christians, in this particular style, containing numerous elements and borrowings from Islamic writings?

‘Amr does not seem to be interested in elucidating the reasons that motivated him to write *Kitāb al-Majdal* in this way. Since the text does not provide any clarification, we can only make some speculations based on the social and intellectual realities of the environment in which it was produced.

As mentioned, Sidney Griffith and Sandra Keating rightly argue that the main purpose of Christian Arabic writings of the ninth century was defending the doctrines of Christianity against the challenges of the *mutakallimūn*, as well as supporting and encouraging Christians to remain true to their religion and prevent any further conversions to Islam. The defensive motive of *Kitāb al-Majdal* is quite obvious, which suggests that one of the main aims of ‘Amr writing this book was to promote Christianity and stop future conversions to Islam. Why did he want to defend his religion in such a style, which looks like imitating the writings of Muslims?

Before answering the question, it is important to recall here that the rising trend of conversions from Christianity to Islam continued during the Būyid Age.[399] Considering the social and intellectual conditions of his era and the continuing drop in the number of Christians, it is quite possible that 'Amr saw some Christians who were impressed by Islamic literature. Therefore, he created his work with very similar features to Muslim writings of his time in terms of language, presentation, and style. He hardly ever felt any necessity to explain any of the expressions or terms borrowed from Islam, which suggests that he is aware of the familiarity of his intended Christian audience with these terms and concepts. His adjustment of Qur'anic terms and analogies to a Christian context seems to be an effort to present Islamic material in a Christian way, to show his readers that these particular elements are compatible with Christianity. Overall, he imagined his audience to be well acquainted with the surrounding Islamic environment and familiar with his style. Therefore, his attempt sought to tackle the intellectual challenge of Islam, which he sees as a threat to the followers of Christianity. His primary audience was certainly the Christian community, as he makes clear at the beginning of *Kitāb al-Majdal*.

Reception of *al-Maṣābīh* among Christians

As with the reception of *al-Maṣābīh*, it is worth remembering that *Kitāb al-Majdal* as a whole served as a model for Ṣalībā ibn Yuhanna's fourteenth century work *Asfār al-Asrār*, which is considered plagiarism by some of the scholars mentioned in the section on the author and date of *Kitāb al-Majdal*. Therefore, *Kitāb al-Majdal* itself seems to have had a considerable impact on Christian Arabic literature.

Recently, Alexander Trieger discovered that certain parts of al-*Maṣābīh* chapter were separately copied and circulated in a work entitled *Kitāb al-Maṣābīh*. This particular distribution story is quite complicated. As Trieger summarises it, *Kitāb al-Maṣābīh* was initially attributed to the eleventh century

[399] Richard W Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in Medieval Period: An Essay in Quantitative History* (London: Harvard University Press, 1979), 82-83.

Melkite philosopher ‘Abdallah ibn al-Faḍl al-Antakī by Graf in his *GCAL*. Joseph Nasrallah states that the work contains dogmatic theology and ethics. According to Asad Rustum, the ‘Book of Lamps’ is the most important work of Ibn al-Faḍl and contains numerous examples from the sayings of wise men, prophets and the holy apostles. Joseph Zaytun has recently discovered that in the last chapter of the work, which is entitled *al-Maḥabbah al-Ilāhiyya*, Ibn al-Faḍl quotes a poem from the late tenth century Palestinian Melkite theologian Suleiman al-Ghazzī, without naming him.[400]

Examining the Damascus manuscript of *Kitāb al-Maṣābīh*, Trieger states that contrary to earlier assumptions, the work is not attributed to ‘Abdallah ibn al-Faḍl in this copy. He determines the work as “a collection of excerpts from the eleventh-century Nestorian work *Kitāb al-Majdal*, particularly from its fourth chapter, entitled ‘Lamps’”. The other two manuscripts of the ‘Book of Lamps’, Vat Ar. 122 dated 1580 and Paris, BNF Ar. 211 dated 1581, also contain passages from *Kitāb al-Maṣābīh*. Trieger concludes that this must be the case also with the other reported manuscripts of the ‘Book of Lamps’ which are not accessible, currently held in Aleppo in the Collection of Greek Catholic Merchant Jirjī Maẓlūm. Therefore, Abdallah ibn al-Faḍl never wrote a book entitled *Kitāb al-Maṣābīh*. The work is attributed to him based on the single fact that the Damascus manuscript contains some of his other writings. Hence, *Kitāb al-Maṣābīh* is an anonymous manuscript which consists of numerous passages from *Kitāb al-Majdal*’s fourth chapter, entitled *al-Maṣābīh*.[401]

It is very striking that this particular chapter of *Kitāb al-Majdal* was chosen and copied along with the works of two other prominent contemporary figures of the early eleventh century. Both Suleiman al-Ghazzī and Abdallah ibn al-Faḍl were members of the Melkite church. Thus, ‘Amr ibn Mattā’s fourth

[400] Alexander Treiger, *Christian-Muslim Relations 600-1500*, s.v. “Kitāb al-Maṣābīḥ.” (Leiden: Brill, 2010), accessed 23 April 2013.
http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/christian-muslim-relations-i/kitab-al-masabih-COM_25041
[401] Treiger, *Christian-Muslim Relations 600-1500, s.v. “Kitāb al-Maṣābīḥ.”*

chapter of *Kitāb al-Majdal* was circulated among Middle Eastern Christians, crossing sectarian boundaries, which makes it quite remarkable. Its impact on the later writings of Eastern Christianity is yet to be investigated and is not one of the main concerns of this research. But it is clear that the fourth chapter of *Kitāb al-Majdal*, *al-Maṣābīh*, was well received in church circles and had a significant audience among the Christians of the Middle East, as it was copied and circulated separately from *Kitāb al-Majdal*.

CONCLUSION

Iraq under Būyid rule witnessed one of the most fertile periods in intellectual history. Following the dismemberment of the caliphate, the establishment of the Būyid dynasty in Bagdad started a new era for minorities living under Islamic rule, which was relatively more tolerant. In this environment, members of different religious communities found opportunities to become involved in various social and intellectual activities. Christians were particularly visible in political and intellectual spheres as court officials, translators, and teachers.

Kitāb al-Majdal was the product of this fascinating period. It was constructed in the form of a castle, with each chapter representing a part of this building. The content of the book is diverse, covering areas from Christian theology to church history. It aimed to provide guidance on religious conduct and church matters to its Christian readers, with the underlying agenda of defending the Christian faith. It is composed with a specific style, structure, and language that indicate its connection to both Syriac tradition and the surrounding Islamic environment.

In the first chapter, where ‘Amr ibn Mattā explains the various aspects of faith, there are two main components that an ideal pious life should have: law observance and asceticism. These two concerns are more clearly observable in al-*Maṣābīh* chapter, in which the ways of achieving an ideal moral state are explained. The seven sections of this chapter provide a list of practices and virtues for a Christian audience, in order to improve their moral and religious lives. Throughout *al-Maṣābīh*, piety and morality are intertwined. In each section, the relevant practice or virtue’s otherworldly benefits and its contribution to an individual’s pious life are explained in detail. The ultimate aims, which believers are

encouraged to strive for in each section, are getting closer to God and achieving entry into Paradise in the afterlife.

On the other hand, the text also has societal concerns and aims to improve its reader's relationship with the community in which they are living. Similar to its eschatological aim, there are two main mundane concerns in the text: enabling individuals to have good relationship with other people and creating social harmony.

The impact of acculturation is visible on the language, structure, and content of the text. Islamic terminology is widely used to express various aspects of religion and morality. 'Amr appears to be conscious of the Islamic connotations of the religious terminology that he employs in the text, because he uses these terms and phrases in a very similar way to the way they are used in Islamic texts. He hardly ever feels it necessary to explain their meanings, and this very fact suggests that he assumes his audience to be familiar with this terminology.

A wide variety of Christian traditional sources and Islamic material are employed in the text. Since 'Amr never feels it necessary to mention the name of the author or the text that he quotes from, it is very difficult to determine the exact sources that he had to hand. However, it is very clear that Biblical quotes are employed quite extensively in the text. Traditional Christian monastic texts and homilies are another possible source that he had at his disposal. Aphrahat's *Demonstrations* is one early monastic text that 'Amr appears to have been inspired by.

In terms of Islamic sources, since 'Amr uses various Qur'anic concepts and expressions, the Qur'an is one of the texts that he used as a source. On a few occasions, he cites from hadith literature. He also borrows from some Sufi sources and *kalam* texts. However, these are not systematic quotations;

he randomly employs ideas and teachings from these sources without making any explicit mention of the text or the author he cites from.

The structure and the presentation of the text also has Islamic elements. It starts with the *Taqwā* section, which is a commonly used theme at the beginning of Muslim ascetic texts. His way of citing the words of Biblical prophets sounds similar to *hadith* quotations in Islamic texts.

Al-*Maṣābīh* chapter of *Kitāb al-Majdal* appears as one of the earliest examples of Christian Arabic writings concerning ethics. Christian moral teachings and Islamic elements are combined in a very creative way to encourage the Christian community living under Islamic rule to improve their communal and religious lives. Its peculiar style suggests that the Christians who were the intended audience of *al-Maṣābīh* were very familiar with Islamic religious and moral discourse and teachings. 'Amr ibn Matta, as a pious Christian, feels totally at ease presenting his text to Christians of the time in a way that sounds like an 'Islamic' text.

All in all, al-*Maṣābīh* chapter in particular, and *Kitāb al-Majdal* in general, are good examples of Christian attempts to redefine their morality and various aspects of theology, and adapt them to an Islamic context. They are important as literary pieces which reflect the ways in which the Christian community was integrated into an Islamic context, and how it influenced the evolution of Christian Arabic literature. Further research concerning different aspects of *Kitāb al-Majdal*, or any other Christian Arabic text from this period, will reveal more about the intellectual and social lives of Christians who lived under Islamic rule. Besides the apparent conflict, war, and brutalities of the Middle Ages, which are realities in most historical periods, the creativity and art in the writings of medieval authors such as 'Amr

ibn Mattā enable us to imagine the beautiful smell of the medieval roses that Johan Huizinga mentions in his book.[402]

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[402] Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, 18.

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