Beyond theology: Muʿtazilite scholars and their authority in al-Rummānī's *tafsīr*

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Abstract

Muʿtazilite exegetical tradition has been defined primarily by reference to the theological dimensions of the *tafsīr* works authored by the Muʿtazila. This article is an attempt to go beyond this focus by exploring the significance of an exegete's affiliation to the tradition that is implicit in his selection of interpretations and his references to authorities. Focusing on the *tafsīr* of the tenth-century Muʿtazilite scholar ʿAlī ibn ʿĪsā al-Rummānī, the article analyses al-Rummānī's references to his three Muʿtazilite predecessors: Abū ʿAlī al-Jubbāʾī, Abū l-Qāsim al-Balkhī and Ibn al-Ikhshīd. The content of these references indicates that, for al-Rummānī, the authority of these Muʿtazilite scholars extended beyond their views on the theological implications of the Quranic verses. The context suggests that the scholars were part of a distinct exegetical tradition that allowed for certain differences of opinion.

Keywords: Quranic exegesis, *Tafsīr*, Muʿtazila, ʿAlī ibn ʿĪsā al-Rummānī, Abū ʿAlī al-Jubbāʾī, Abū l-Qāsim al-Balkhī, Abū Bakr Ibn al-Ikhshīd

Muʿtazilite exegetical tradition, like any exegetical tradition, does not submit itself easily to analytical definition. The task of identifying unique features that might characterize this tradition is further complicated by the relatively long duration of its existence, and the differences between the individual commentaries on the Quran authored by the Muʿtazila. The loss of a significant portion of the Muʿtazilite commentaries on the Quran only adds to this complexity.[1] Among the prominent features of Muʿtazilite exegesis, its close interconnection with Muʿtazilite theology stands out.[2] It is common to see Muʿtazilite exegesis

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1 On the challenges of defining an exegetical tradition, see Andrew Rippin, "What defines a (pre-modern) Shiʿi *tafsīr*? Notes towards the history of the genre of tafsīr in Islam, in the light of the study of the Shiʿi contribution", in F. Daftary and G. Miskinzodah (eds), *The Study of Shiʿi Islam: History, Theology and Law* (London, 2014, 95–112).

2 For an outline of the characteristics of Muʿtazilite exegesis, see Ignaz Goldziher, *Schools of Koranic Commentators*, ed. and trans. W.H. Behn (Wiesbaden, 2006), 65–95; Maḥmūd Kāmil Aḥmad, *Mafhūm al-ʿadl fī tafsīr al-Muʿtazila lil-Qurʾān al-karīm* (Beirut, 1983); ʿAdnān Zarzūr, *al-Ḥākim al-Jushamī wa-manhajuhu fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*

as "dogmatic" interpretation,[3] since the religious doctrines of the Muʿtazila shaped their approach towards the Quran and their techniques of interpretation. The need to interpret the Quran in accordance with Muʿtazilite religious doctrines explains their recourse to allegorical interpretation, and their appeal to the Quran as a proof of Muʿtazilite theology determined their positions on its ambiguous verses (*al-mutashābihāt*), as well as their view that reason (ʿ*aql*) was a criterion for deciding which interpretations are valid. Theology also left an imprint on the commentaries, which often contain references to the five principles of Muʿtazilite theology (*al-uṣūl al-khamsa*).[4] Although not every verse of the Quran allows for such reference, the theological material is easily identified in the commentaries and is properly unique to the Muʿtazila – it could, indeed, be seen as the common denominator across all the various commentaries on the Quran by the Muʿtazila. Its importance for defining Muʿtazilite *tafsīr* has become even more evident since Andrew Lane's study of *al-Kashshāf ʿan ḥaqāʾiq al-tanzīl* by Jār Allāh al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144).[5] Setting out to explore the Muʿtazilite features of *al-Kashshāf*, his study does not find a uniquely Muʿtazilite methodology or outlook in the text and so casts doubt on its Muʿtazilite character.[6] However, he still acknowledges the presence of Muʿtazilite theological material in the text, even though theology was not its primary focus.[7] The essential role of theology for Muʿtazilite exegesis is emphasized by Suleiman Mourad, who remarks: "Muʿtazilism is about theology. To establish whether or not *al-Kashshāf* is a Muʿtazilite commentary, one needs only to determine whether, and in what manner, al-Zamakhsharī defends some or all of the five principles of Muʿtazilite theology."[8]

The importance of theology notwithstanding, this article explores another important aspect for defining Muʿtazilite exegetical tradition – the exegete's

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(Damascus, 1972); Suleiman Mourad, "The revealed text and the intended subtext: notes on the hermeneutics of the Qurʾān in Muʿtazilah discourse as reflected in the *Tahdhīb* of al-Ḥākim al-Jishumī (d. 494/1101)", in F. Opwis and D. Resman (eds), *Islamic Philosophy, Science, Culture, and Religion: Studies in Honor of Dimitri Gutas* (Leiden, 2012), 367–95; Suleiman Mourad, "The Muʿtazila and their *tafsīr* tradition: a comparative study of five exegetical glosses on Qurʾan 3.178", in M. Shah (ed.), *Tafsir: Interpreting the Qurʾan. Critical Concepts in Islamic Studies* (Abingdon, 2012), III, 267–83.

3 Goldziher, *Schools of Koranic Commentators*, 65–6.

4 This aspect is the focus of Mazheruddin Siddiqi, "Some aspects of the Muʿtazilī interpretation of the Qurʾān", *Islamic Studies* 2, 1963, 95–120, and Gregor Schwarb, "Muʿtazilism in a 20th century Zaydī Qurʾān commentary", *Arabica* 59, 2012, 372–403. The five principles of Muʿtazilite theology (*al-uṣūl al-khamsa*) include God's uniqueness, God's justice, the promise and the threat, the intermediate state of a sinner, encouraging the good and forbidding the evil.

5 Andrew Lane, *A Traditional Muʿtazilite Qurʾān Commentary: The Kashshāf of Jār Allāh al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144)* (Leiden, 2006).

6 Lane, *A Traditional Muʿtazilite Qurʾān Commentary*, 147, 229.

7 Andrew Lane, "You can't tell a book by its author: a study of Muʿtazilite theology in al-Zamakhsharī's (d. 538/1144) *Kashshāf*", *BSOAS* 75/1, 2012, 47–86.

8 S. Mourad, "Review of *A Traditional Muʿtazilite Qurʾān Commentary: The Kashshāf of Jār Allāh al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144)*, by Andrew J. Lane", *Journal of Semitic Studies* 52/2, 2007, 410.

association with other Muʿtazilite adherents. This association can sometimes be quite evident, for example in the author's choices as regards the interpretations of his predecessors for inclusion in the commentary. Following Robert Gleave's study on the post-classical Imami Shīʿī conception of the legal school (*madhhab*), this article sees Muʿtazilite exegesis as a literary tradition to which an exegete adheres.[9] This approach seems particularly suitable for the analysis of the traditions of interpretations in the classical period, when, as Norman Calder suggested, the originality of exegetes "lies less in their conclusions as to what the quranic text means than in their development and display of techniques which mark their participation in and mastery of a literary discipline".[10] An important aspect of exegetes' participation was their selection of material out of the pool of interpretations advanced by their predecessors, and their evaluation of the interpretations which they included in a commentary. This evaluation could be explicit – by stating preference for a variant, indicating that this variant represents the commentator's opinion, refuting the variant or by presenting it as neutral – or could be implicit in their arrangement of the material.

This article will focus on the Quran commentary of the Muʿtazilite exegete ʿAlī ibn ʿĪsā al-Rummānī (d. 384/994).[11] The commentary entitled *al-Jāmiʿ fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān* (A collection of interpretations of the Quran) has been partially preserved in several manuscripts.[12] As its title suggests, the commentary belongs to the genre of encyclopaedic *tafsīr*. It is a comprehensive collection of various interpretations, many of which are attributed to various authorities, and thus affords us an opportunity to investigate how al-Rummānī shaped the exegetical tradition in which he operated. I will focus on the presentation of Muʿtazilite scholars in the fragments of

9   Robert Gleave, "Intra-Madhhab Ikhtilāf and the late classical Imami Shiite conception of the Madhhab", in P. Bearman, R. Peters and F.E. Vogel (eds), *The Islamic School of Law: Evolution, Devolution, and Progress* (Cambridge MA, 2005), 126–46.

10 Norman Calder, "Tafsir from Tabari to Ibn Kathir: problems in the description of a genre, illustrated with reference to the story of Abraham", in G.R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef (eds), *Approaches to the Quran* (London, 1993), 106.

11 On al-Rummānī, see J. Flanagan, "Al-Rummānī, Abu ʾl-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā", *Encyclopedia of Islam*, second ed.; Māzin al-Mubārak, *Al-Rummānī al-naḥwī fī ḍawʾ sharḥihi li-kitāb Sībawayhi* (Damascus, 1383/1963), 46–103.

12 These are *Jāmiʿ fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, part 7, Ms 6523, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris; *Al-Jāmiʿ fī ʿulūm al-Qurʾān*, part 12, Ms 29, al-Aqsa Mosque library, Jerusalem; *Al-Jāmiʿ al-kabīr fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, part 1, Ms Or 9408, British Library, London; *Al-Jāmiʿ li-ʿilm al-Qurʾān*, part 10, Ms 3137, Abu Raihan al-Biruni Institute of Oriental Studies, Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan, Tashkent; A*l-Jāmiʿ li-ʿulūm al-Qurʾān*, Ms 14750, King Faisal Centre for Research and Islamic Studies, Riyadh. The text from Ms 29 al-Aqsa Mosque library, together with references to al-Rummānī in later *tafsīr* works, has been published as *Tafsīr Abī l-Ḥasan al-Rummānī wa-huwa musammā al-Jāmiʿ li-ʿilm al-Qurʾān*, comp. and ed. Khuḍr Muḥammad Nabhā (Beirut, 2009). For discussion of the commentary, see Bruce Fudge, "*Taḍmīn*: the notion of 'implication' according to al-Rummānī", in Beatrice Gruendler and Michael Cooperson (eds), *Classical Arabic Humanities in their Own Terms: Festschrift for Wolfhart Heinrichs on his 65th Birthday Presented by his Students and Colleagues* (Leiden, 2008), 468–92, and Khuḍr Muḥammad Nabhā, *Introduction*, in *Tafsīr Abī l-Ḥasan al-Rummānī*, 5–18 and Alena Kulinich, "Representing 'a blameworthy *tafsīr*': Muʿtazilite exegetical tradition in *al-Jāmiʿ fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān* of ʿAlī ibn ʿĪsā al-Rummānī (d. 384/994)", PhD thesis, University of London, 2012.

the commentary, examining the content and the context of the references to them. The underlying question for this article is whether al-Rummānī regarded the Muʿtazilite tradition as a tradition of exegesis that responded to different types of issues arising from the difficulties of the Quranic text, or merely as a school of theology that aimed to use the Quranic text to prove its doctrines.

Muʿtazilite scholars in al-Rummānī's *tafsīr*

Of the numerous authorities mentioned in al-Rummānī's *tafsīr*, I will concentrate on the figures whose adherence to Muʿtazilism has been attested by the Muʿtazila themselves, as well as in traditional Islamic sources and in academic scholarship. This essentially means that the "traditional" authorities – the Companions of the Prophet, and scholars of the first centuries of Islam such as al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī – will be excluded from the examination, even though some of them are claimed by the Muʿtazila and included in the Muʿtazilite *ṭabaqāt* literature. Similarly, I will not deal with the philologists and grammarians who are said to have had Muʿtazilite leanings, such as al-Akhfash (al-Akhfash al-Awsaṭ), Quṭrub or al-Farrāʾ.

This leaves us with a short list of Muʿtazilites in al-Rummānī's commentary, including the following figures:

- Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī Ibn al-Ikhshīd; Ibn al-Ikhshīd (270/883–326/938) was the eponym of the school of Ikhshidiyya to which al-Rummānī belonged;[13] several works on the Quran are ascribed to him, including an abridgment of the *tafsīr* of al-Ṭabarī,[14] but it is not clear if he authored a *tafsīr*.[15]
- Abū ʿAlī Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Jubbāʾī (d. 303/915–16), the leading scholar of the school of Baṣra at the time.[16] Al-Jubbāʾī authored a commentary on the Qurʾān.[17]

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13 On Ibn al-Ikhshīd and the Ikhshidiyya, which remain *terra incognita* within the Muʿtazilite tradition, see D. Gimaret, "Ebn al-Ek̲s̲īd, Abū Bakr Aḥmad", *Encyclopaedia Iranica,* online ed.; J.-C. Vadet, "Ibn al-Ikhshīd, Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī ibn Maʿdjūr", *Encyclopedia of Islam,* second ed.; Margaretha T. Heemskerk, *Suffering in the Muʿtazilite Theology: ʿAbd al-Jabbār's Teaching on Pain and Divine Justice* (Leiden, 2000).

14 Ibn al-Nadīm, *Al-Fihrist li-Ibn al-Nadīm* (Cairo, 1929), 246; Gimaret, "Ebn al-Ek̲s̲īd".

15 Gimaret, "Ebn al-Ek̲s̲īd".

16 For al-Jubbāʾī, see L. Gardet, "al-Djubbāʾī, Abū ʿAlī Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb", *Encyclopedia of Islam*, second ed., and S. Schmidtke, "al-Jubbāʾī", *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, online ed.

17 There have been several attempts to reconstruct this commentary based on references to al-Jubbāʾī in later writings, including R.W. Gwynne, "The 'tafsīr' of Abū ʿAlī al-Jubbāʾī: first steps toward a reconstruction, with texts, translation, biographical introduction and analytical essay", PhD dissertation, University of Washington, 1982; D. Gimaret, *Une lecture muʿtazilite du Coran: le tafsir d'Abū ʿAlī al-Djubbāʾī (m. 303/915) partiellement reconstitué à partir des ses citateurs* (Louvain and Paris, 1994); and Abū ʿAlī al-Jubbāʾī, *Tafsīr Abī ʿAlī al-Jubbāʾī*, comp. and ed. Khuḍr Muḥammad Nabhā (Beirut, 2007).

- Abū l-Qāsim ʿAbdallāh ibn Aḥmad al-Kaʿbī al-Balkhī (319/931),[18] the leader of the Baghdād school of Muʿtazilism at the time. Al-Balkhī also authored a *tafsīr*.[19]

In addition to these figures, there are also a few references in the fragments to Abū Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf (d. 226/840–41 or 235/849 or 850),[20] famous for having systematized the theological doctrines of Muʿtazilism and presented them as five principles (*al-uṣūl al-khamsa*), and also the author of *Mutashābih al-Qurʾān*;[21] and to Abū ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad ibn ʿUmar al-Ṣaymarī (d. *c*. 315/927),[22] known as a follower of Abū ʿAli al-Jubbāʾī, and who earlier studied with scholars of the Baghdād school.[23] Al-Ṣaymarī was strongly opposed to Abū Hāshim al-Jubbāʾī and his followers. He is reported to have composed numerous works,[24] but it is not known whether he authored a commentary on the Quran.[25]

From this list of scholars representing different schools of Muʿtazilite theology, the Bahshamiyya school is missing.[26] The Bahshamiyya, named after Abū Hāshim al-Jubbāʾī (d. 321/933), the son of Abū ʿAlī al-Jubbāʾī,[27] are reported to have been vigorous opponents of the Ikhshidiyya.[28] In such circumstances, one would expect al-Rummānī to cite the representatives of the rival school in order to refute their positions; however, he does not seem to mention them. One probable explanation for this could be that there were no prominent *tafsīr* works from the Bahshamiyya school for al-Rummānī to use as his source. Abū Hāshim, the founder of the school, is known first of all as a theologian, not an exegete, although some sources mention that he had a commentary on the Quran.[29] It may also be that al-Rummānī does refer to the views of Abū

18 On al-Balkhī, see A.N. Nader, "al-Balkhī, Abū'l-Ḳāsim", *Encyclopedia of Islam*, second ed.
19 Schmidtke, "Muʿtazila", *Encyclopedia of the Quran*; a reconstructed version of this commentary is published as Abū-l-Qāsim al-Balkhī al-Kaʿbī, *Tafsīr Abī l-Qāsim al-Kaʿbī al-Balkhī*, comp. and ed. Khuḍr Muḥammad Nabhā (Beirut, 2007).
20 On Abū l-Hudhayl, see H.S. Nyberg, "Abu'l-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf", *Encyclopedia of Islam*, second ed. and S.A. Mourad, "Abū l-Hudhayl", *Encyclopedia of Islam*, third ed.
21 Schmidtke, "Muʿtazila"; van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft,* III, 265; V, 367–9, no. 55.
22 On al-Ṣaymarī, see Abū l-Qāsim al-Balkhī, al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār and al-Ḥākim al-Jushamī, *Faḍl al-iʿtizāl wa-ṭabaqāt al-muʿtazila*, ed. Fuʾād Sayyid (Tunis, 1974), 308–9; Aḥmad ibn Yaḥyā ibn al-Murtaḍā, *Die Klassen der Muʿtaziliten*, ed. Susanna Diwald-Wilzer (Wiesbaden, 1961), 96; Heemskerk, *Suffering in the Muʿtazilite Theology*, 23–5.
23 *Faḍl al-iʿtizāl*, 308–9.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibn al-Nadīm does not mention any work on the Quran by al-Ṣaymarī; see Ibn al-Nadīm, *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm: a Tenth Century Survey of Muslim Culture*, trans. and ed. Bayard Dodge (New York, 1970), I, 427–8.
26 On the variations of the name, see Heemskerk, *Suffering in the Muʿtazilite Theology*, 26, n. 43.
27 For the biography of Abū Hāshim, his writings and thought, see S. Schmidtke, "al-Jubbāʾī", *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, online ed.
28 See Heemskerk, *Suffering in the Muʿtazilite Theology*, 21–8.
29 See D. Gimaret, "Matériaux pour une bibliographie des Ǧubbāʾī", *Journal Asiatique* 264, 1976, 312, n. 11; ʿAbd al-Wahhāb ibn ʿAlī al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʿiyya al-kubrā*, ed. M.M. al-Ṭanāḥī, ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ al-Ḥilw (Cairo, 1964–76), V, 121, n. 463; Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Ṭabaqāt al-mufassirīn* (Beirut, 1403/1983), 88–9, n. 100; Shams al-Dīn

Hāshim and his followers but does not explicitly identify the proponents of these views.

That al-Rummānī cited the above-mentioned Muʿtazilite scholars in his commentary, indicating his commitment to the Muʿtazilite tradition, is not surprising. It is the scope of the questions for which he cites them, and his attitude to them, that has the potential to clarify whether al-Rummānī saw the Muʿtazila as a distinct tradition of exegesis.

Beyond theology: authority of Muʿtazilite scholars

This section examines the scope of the Quranic disciplines for which al-Rummānī considered the Muʿtazilite authors to be authorities; the aim of the discussion is to clarify whether in al-Rummānī's commentary Muʿtazilite scholars are presented as a school of theology or as a tradition of exegesis.

The references to Abū ʿAlī al-Jubbāʾī, Abū l-Qāsim al-Balkhī and Ibn al-Ikhshīd point to a trend that seems to go against the usual perception of Muʿtazilite scholars as focused exclusively on the issues pertaining to Muʿtazilite theology. The Muʿtazilite scholars in al-Rummānī's commentary are cited not only for theological problems but for a wider variety of questions, including such issues as legal regulations in the Quran (*aḥkam*), the abrogating and the abrogated verses of the Quran (*al-nāsikh wal-mansūkh*), occasions of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), identification of figures mentioned in the texts, and explanations concerning rhetoric and grammar.[30] They are cited as authorities on the interpretation of Quranic phrases and verses that appear to be neutral from the perspective of Muʿtazilite theology. In addition, their opinions on various matters are cited, together with those of non-Muʿtazilite scholars: these include traditional authorities such as Ibn ʿAbbās, Qatāda, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī; jurists such as al-Shāfiʿī; and grammarians such as Ibn al-Sarrāj. The following examples illustrate this tendency.

Ibn al-Ikhshīd on etymology

Ibn al-Ikhshīd is cited by al-Rummānī for a problem concerning the etymology of the Quranic word *mālik* (lord) in the interpretation of Q. 1:4 *māliki yawmi l-dīni* [Lord of the Day of Judgement].[31] Al-Rummānī cites two views on the etymology of this word: that it means "making firm" (*al-shadd*) and "binding"

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al-Dāwudī, *Ṭabaqāt al-mufassirīn*, ed. ʿAlī Muḥammad ʿUmar (Cairo, 1392/1972), I, 301, n. 281; the Quranic commentaries of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and al-Ṭabrisī seem to include interpretations attributed to Abū Hāshim (see al-Balkhī, *Tafsīr Abī l-Qāsim al-Balkhī*, 245, 261).

30 Khudr Muḥammad Nabhā also identifies two references in Ms 29 Jerusalem where Ibn al-Ikhshīd appears to be cited as an authority for variant readings of the Quranic text (see *Tafsīr Abī l-Ḥasan al-Rummānī*, 230, n. 1; 489). However, the context of these references which present Abū Bakr as transmitting variant readings from ʿĀṣim suggests that the transmitter was Abū Bakr ibn ʿAyyāsh ibn Sālim (d. 193/809), one of the *rāwī*s for the reading of the Quran by a Kūfan reciter ʿĀṣim ibn Abī al-Najūd (d. 127/745), not Abū Bakr Ibn al-Ikhshīd. On Ibn Sālim, see Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Dhahabī, *Maʿrifat al-qurrāʾ al-kibār ʿalā al-ṭabaqāt wal-aʿṣār*, ed. Ṭayyār Āltī Qūlādj (Istanbul, 1416/1995), I, 280–7, n. 63.

31 The references occur in Ms Or 9408 London, f. 25a, lines 2, 7 and 8.

(*al-rabṭ*) – this being the view of Ibn al-Sarrāj[32] – and the view that its meaning is related to "power/potency" (*al-qudra*) – this being the view of Ibn al-Ikhshīd. Al-Rummānī concludes that both of these meanings are in agreement with the rules of morphology.[33] He then continues the discussion, providing an insight into the reasoning behind Ibn al-Ikhshīd's position. He says that he asked Ibn al-Ikhshīd why he was certain that the original meaning derives from "power/ potency", given that the rule allows it to derive from both variants, and received the following answer: "From this meaning", Ibn al-Ikhshīd says, "derive the characteristics of God, the Mighty the Exalted; and when both variants are in accordance with the rule the most noble of the two meanings should be taken as [the preferred] variant, and that would be the meaning of 'power/potency' and not another variant".[34]

These references to Ibn al-Ikhshīd are a case in which Ibn al-Ikhshīd is cited regarding a formal philological question. Even though the rationale behind his view relates to the theological aspect of the characteristics of God, his view is presented along with that of the grammarian Ibn al-Sarrāj. It is also noteworthy that al-Rummānī does not support the view of his teacher in this case, and in fact seems to hold the more cautious view that the morphology allows that both variants are valid. Thus he cites Ibn al-Ikhshīd as a representative of one of the possible views, and not necessarily the only right one.

Al-Jubbāʾī on the circumstances of revelation

An example of Abū ʿAlī al-Jubbāʾī's scope of authority comes from a reference to him in the discussion of the circumstances for the revelation of the Quranic verse 3:122: *idh hammat ṭāʾifatāni minkum an tafshalā wa-llāhu walīyuhumā wa-ʿalā Allāhi fa-l-yatawakkal al-muʾminūna* [When two groups of you almost showed cowardice, but God was their protector; in God should the believers put their trust]. Answering a question concerning the circumstances in which these groups "almost showed their cowardice", al-Rummānī cites two possible answers.[35] One comes from al-Suddī and Ibn Jurayj, who say that ʿAbdallāh ibn Ubayy ibn Salūl called on these groups to return to Medina from the

32 On Ibn al-Sarrāj, who was a renowned grammarian and a teacher of al-Rummānī, see H. Fleisch, "Ibn al-Sarrādj, Abū Bakr Muḥammad", *Encyclopedia of Islam*, second ed.

33 Ms Or 9408 London, f. 24b, line 10ff.: *al-qawl fī māliki yawmi l-dīn malik min al-mulk wa-mālik min al-milk wa-qīla aṣluhu fī l-ishtiqāq min al-shadd wal-rabṭ wa-qīla min al-qudra wal-awwal qawl Ibn al-Sarrāj wal-thānī qawl Abī Bakr Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī wal-taṣrīf yaṭṭaridu ʿalā kilā al-aṣlayn.*

34 Ms Or 9408 London, f. 25a, line 7ff.: *fa-saʾaltu Abā Bakr Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī raḥimahu Allāh li-ma qaṭaʿta ʿalā annahu min al-qudra wa-huwa yaṭṭaridu fī kilā al-aṣlayn fa-qāla inna hādhā maʿnan qad ushtuqqa lillāh ʿazza wa-jalla minhu ṣifāt fa-l-wajh akhdhuhu min asharaf al-maʿnayn idh iṭṭarada ʿalā kilā al-aṣlayn wa-huwa maʿnā al-qudra dūna al-maʿnā al-ākhar.*

35 Al-Rummānī gives two variants for the identification of these groups: that they are Banū Salama and Banu Ḥāritha as related by several traditional authorities; and that they are people from the *muhājirūn* and the *anṣār*. This last interpretation is given in the Ms 6523 Paris as an anonymous view (see Ms 6523 Paris, f. 85a, line 8); however, in the commentary of al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabrisī this view is ascribed to Abū ʿAlī al-Jubbāʾī (see al-Jubbāʾī, *Tafsīr Abī ʿAlī al-Jubbāʾī*, 138).

encounter with the unbelievers at the battle of Uḥud,[36] and that they almost did but did not do so. Another account comes from Abū ʿAlī, who says that the verse refers to two groups who were arguing over whether to attack the enemy or to wait, such that they almost showed their cowardice.[37]

It would be difficult to connect al-Jubbāʾī's interpretation to Muʿtazilite religious doctrines. Although in the commentary on this verse al-Rummānī mentions the discussion of whether the two groups committed a sin *(maʿṣiya)* by their actions,[38] it is not linked to al-Jubbāʾī's interpretation. Here al-Jubbāʾī is presented not as a Muʿtazilite theologian but as an authoritative exegete whose opinion is on an equal footing with the interpretations of the traditional authorities al-Suddī and Ibn Jurayj.

Al-Balkhī on identification

Al-Balkhī is cited regarding the identification of those mentioned in Q. 3:155 *inna alladhīna tawallaw minkum yawma iltaqā al-jamʿāni innamā istazallahum al-shayṭānu bi-baʿḍi mā kasabū wa-laqad ʿafā Allāhu ʿanhum inna llāha ghafūrun ḥalīmun* [Those of you who turned away the day the two hosts encountered – Satan made them slip for somewhat they had earned; but God has pardoned them; God is All-forgiving, All-clement]. The question here is to clarify who were those who "turned away" during the battle of Uḥud to which the verse is taken to refer. But al-Balkhī is cited for identifying those who stayed with the Prophet on the day of the battle of Uḥud and did not go out to fight (and thus did not "turn away"). They comprise thirteen persons, five from the *muhājirūn* including ʿAlī, Abū Bakr, Ṭalḥa, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn ʿAwf and Saʿd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ, the rest being from the *anṣār*.[39] Al-Rummānī does not pass any comment on this interpretation.[40]

Similar to the previous example, al-Balkhī is here cited on an issue that is not pertinent to Muʿtazilite religious doctrines, illustrating the wider scope of his authority.

Ibn al-Ikhshīd on the acceptable interpretations of the isolated letters

An example in which Muʿtazilite scholars are referred to in al-Rummānī's commentary as authorities for defining the boundaries of the acceptable range of interpretations is the citation of Ibn al-Ikhshīd's view on the various

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36 On the battle of Uḥud, see C.F. Robinson, "Uḥud", *Encyclopedia of Islam* second ed., and A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muḥammad* (Oxford, 1955).

37 Ms 6523 Paris, f. 85b, line 1pp.: *wa-yuqālu mā kāna sabab hammihum* (sic!) *bil-fashal Θ al-jawāb fīhi qawlān al-awwal anna ʿAbdallāh ibn Ubayy ibn Salūl daʿāhumā ilā al-rujūʿ ilā al-Madīna ʿan liqāʾ al-mushrikīn yawm Uḥud fa-hammā bihi wa-lam yafʿalāhu ʿan al-Suddī wa-Ibn Jurayj Θ al-thānī ikhtilāfuhum fī l-khurūj ilā al-ʿadūw aw al-maqām ḥattā hammū bil-fashal ʿan Abī ʿAlī.*

38 Ms 6523 Paris, f. 85a, lines 12–15.

39 Ms 6523 Paris, f. 123b, line 5pp.: *wa-yuqālu man alladhīna baqū maʿa al-nabī ṣallā Allāh ʿalayhi yawm Uḥud fa-lam yanhazimū Θ al-jawāb thalātha ʿashara rajulan khamsa min al-muhājirīn ʿAlī wa-Abū Bakr wa-Ṭalḥa wa-ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn ʿAwf wa-Saʿd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ Θ wal-bāqūna min al-anṣār ḥakāhu Abū l-Qāsim Θ.*

40 The same passage on the interpretation of al-Balkhī with further commentary is given in the commentaries of al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabrisī (al-Balkhī, *Tafsīr Abī l-Qāsim al-Kaʿbī al-Balkhī*, 151–2).

interpretations of the isolated letters of the Arabic alphabet *alif lām mīm* which occur in the interpretation of Q. 2:1.[41] Al-Rummānī lists various explanations for the letters. He refers to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, who relates the view of his predecessors (*al-salaf*) that the letters at the beginning of the sūras are the names of the sūras and the keys to them.[42] This explanation, according to al-Rummānī, is the preferred one (*al-mukhtār*).[43] And al-Rummānī further attempts to support this view by discussing the names and how they can be formed.[44] Another view, considered by al-Rummānī as possible (*muḥtamal*), comes from Ibn ʿAbbās. It implies that the isolated letters stand for abbreviations (*ikhtiṣār*) of particular words known to the person addressed by them – that is to say, the Prophet Muḥammad.[45]

There is also a group of alternative opinions that are described by al-Rummānī as objectionable (*aqwāl marghūb ʿanhā*). Most of these are anonymous, and include such claims as that the letters should be read according to their numerical values; that they signify an oath; that they are intended to point to the isolated letters of the alphabet and that the whole of the Quran is composed of the letters of the alphabet; that they are intended to indicate that the Quran is written down and recorded; and that they point to the names of God.[46]

Finally, al-Rummānī gives one more explanation, drawn from Quṭrub, which implies that *alif lām mīm* were meant to present listeners with something unfamiliar, in order to make them pay attention and to encourage their desire to understand the message, or because the mind tends to pursue the unknown out of a desire to know.[47]

This last interpretation attributed to Quṭrub is said to have been rejected by Ibn al-Ikhshīd, who saw nothing valid in it and preferred the view of al-Ḥasan,

41 For an overview of the various explanations proposed both by Muslim scholars and academics, see Keith Massey, "Mysterious letters", *Encyclopaedia of the Quran*; A.T. Welch, R. Paret and J.D. Pearson, "al-Ḳurʾān", *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, second ed.; Martin Nguyen, "Exegesis of the *ḥurūf al-muqaṭṭaʿa*: polyvalency in Sunnī traditions of Qurʾanic interpretation", *Journal of Qurʾanic Studies* 14/2, 2012, 1–28.

42 Ms Or 9408 London, f. 49b, line 2ff.: *minhā mā qāluhu al-Ḥasan qāla samiʿtu al-salaf yaqūlūna fī alif lām mīm wa-alif lām mīm ṣād wa-ashbahahu hiya asmāʾ al-suwar wa-mafātīḥuhā.*

43 Ms Or 9408 London, f. 50a, line 11ff.: *fa-hādhā al-qawl al-mukhtār.*

44 Ms Or 9408 London, f. 49b, line 4 to f. 50a, line 11.

45 Ms Or 9408 London, f. 50a, line 11ff.: *wa-fīhi qawl ākhar muḥtamal wa-huwa mā yurwā ʿan Ibn ʿAbbās anna alif lām mīm wa-alif lām mīm ṣād ikhtiṣār min kalām yafhamuhu al-mukhāṭab wa-huwa al-rasūl ʿalayhi al-salām.*

46 Ms Or 9408 London, f. 51a, line 1ff.: *wa-qad qīla baʿda dhālika fī alif lām mīm aqwāl marghūb ʿanhā minhā anna maʿnāhu al-dalāla ʿalā ḥisāb al-jummal wa-minhā annahu qasam wa-minhā annahu urīda bihi al-dalāla ʿalā ʿalā* [sic!] *ḥurūf al-muʿjam wa-anna al-Qurʾān kulluhu muʾallaf minhu wa-minhā annahu urīda bihi al-dalāla ʿalā annahu mimmā yuktabu wa-yudawwanu wa-qīla urīda bi-hi al-dalāla ʿalā asmāʾ Allāh Θ.*

47 Ms Or 9408 London, f. 51a, line 6pp.: *wa-ḥukiya ʿan Quṭrub annahu urīda bihā khiṭābuhum bimā lā yaʿlafūna li-yuqbilū ilā al-istimāʿ wa-iltaffahum ṭamaʿan fī istidrāk al-khitāb aw-li-anna al-nafs tatbaʿu al-gharīb wa-taṭlubuhu maḥabbatah an taʿrifahu.*

while considering the explanation by Ibn ʿAbbās as possible.[48] Al-Rummānī seems to agree with his master in that he shared his preference for the opinion of al-Ḥasan, regarded the view of Ibn ʿAbbās as possible, and characterized other explanations as objectionable; however, he does not give his own comments on the opinion of Quṭrub. At the same time, al-Rummānī objects to an anonymous view that the letters imply all the meanings reported from the interpreters.[49]

On this occasion it is not Ibn al-Ikhshīd's interpretation of the isolated letters but his judgement on previous interpretations that becomes important. The reasons behind his judgement are not discussed and the possible theological implications of the interpretations are downplayed, which again emphasizes Ibn al-Ikhshīd's role as an exegete and not merely a theologian.

Schools of theology versus the tradition of exegesis

The scholars cited by al-Rummānī represent various branches of Muʿtazilite theology: the school of Baṣra, the school of Baghdād and the Ikhshidiyya. This raises the question of whether the difference between these branches of theology was also transmitted into the sphere of exegesis, and whether al-Rummānī acknowledged a division among the Muʿtazila in *tafsīr*. Since al-Rummānī belonged to the school of the Ikhshidiyya, it would be natural to expect that he would express his attitude to the views of his master Ibn al-Ikhshīd by explicitly agreeing with his position and defending it against others. However, in about a dozen references to Ibn al-Ikhshīd contained in the extant fragments of the commentary, there is only one instance in which al-Rummānī explicitly states that he holds the same opinion as his master. This occurs in the interpretation of the phrase *khatama Allāhu ʿalā qulūbihim* from Q. 2:7 *khatama Allāhu ʿalā qulūbihim wa-ʿalā samʿihim wa-ʿalā abṣārihim ghishāwatun wa-lahum ʿadhābun ʿaẓīmun*. The phrase is usually rendered in English translations of the Quran as "God sealed/put a seal on their hearts", but the interpretations given in al-Rummānī's text would imply a different meaning.

Al-Rummānī discusses the relation of the Quranic verb *khatama* to the noun *al-khatm* (seal) and gives two interpretations. One is said to come from the people of truth (*ahl al-ḥaqq*), by which he most likely means the Muʿtazila. It says that *al-khatm* is a black dot which God put on the heart of an unbeliever as a sign to the angels that he will not prosper, much as if He had branded the unbeliever to show that he does not believe. Another interpretation was proposed by certain scholars from among the people of truth (*qawm minhum*), implying that the phrase was meant to censure the unbelievers, saying that their hearts are as if sealed.[50] Al-Rummānī then gives examples from the Quran and poetry of the

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48   Ms Or 9408 London, f. 51a, line 10: *wa-kāna Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī raḥimahu Allāh yunkiru hādhā al-taʾwīl alladhī ruwiya ʿan Quṭrub wa-lā yarʾahu shayʾan wa-yakhtāru mā rawāhu al-Ḥasan wa-kāna yujawwizu mā ruwiya ʿan Ibn ʿAbbās min al-ikhtiṣār ʿalā sharīṭat ʿilm al-mukhāṭab bi-dhālika wal-dalāla lahu ʿalayhi.*

49   Ms Or 9408 London, f. 51b, lines 3–9.

50   Ms Or 9408 London, f. 96a, line 1ff.: *wa-ikhtalafū fī l-khatm fa-qāla ahl al-ḥaqq huwa nukta sawdāʾ jaʿalahā Allāh ʿallāmatan lil-malāʾika fī qalb al-kāfir annahu lā yufliḥu ka-annahu wasamahu bi-annahu lā yuʾminu wa-qāla qawm minhum innamā huwa dhamm bi-annahā ka-al-makhtūm ʿalayhā.*

Arabs that support this last interpretation, and develops it by providing further explanation.[51]

He also states that this last interpretation is preferred by his master Ibn al-Ikhshīd, and indeed by Al-Rummānī himself (*wal-wajh al-ākhar huwa al-mukhtār ʿinda shaykhinā Abī Bakr raḥimahu Allāh wa-ʿindī*).[52] Having made his choice, he then moves to the refutation of another interpretation of the phrase proposed by the adherents of predestination that follows the literal meaning of the verse, and suggests that God has barred unbelievers from belief.[53]

Besides this instance, there are several cases in which al-Rummānī's agreement with the interpretation of his master, although not explicitly stated, is still evident from the context of the reference.[54] However, on other occasions, al-Rummānī's attitude to Ibn al-Ikhshīd's interpretations appears to be neutral, by which I mean that they are not put forward as the correct, the only correct or the preferred position.

An example of this attitude can be found in the discussion of a theological question pertaining to the interpretation of Q. 2:10: *fī qulūbihim maraḍun fa-zādahum Allāhu maraḍan wa-lahum ʿadhābun alīmun bi-mā kānū yakdhibūna* [In their hearts there is a disease, and God increased their disease. And for them is the painful chastisement because they lie].[55] Ibn al-Ikhshīd is cited in the discussion of the phrase *ʿadhābun alīmun* (painful chastisement), which raises the question of whether the chastisement for the unbeliever (*al-kāfir*) is of a similar nature to that for the transgressor (*al-fāsiq*). Al-Rummānī explains that there is no agreement on this issue among scholars, and while some believe that it is of the same nature, although more intense and prolonged for the unbeliever, Ibn al-Ikhshīd and Abū ʿAbdallāh al-Ṣaymarī have rejected this view to maintain that it is of a different nature. The argument they put forward in support of their view is a proof by *reductio ad absurdum*. If the punishment was of the same nature, the argument runs, this would mean that the punishment for many sins other than unbelief would be equivalent to that for unbelief, since it would only be different from it in terms of its intensity; and since this is false (*bāṭil*), one should thus conclude that the punishment for transgression is of a different nature from that for disbelief.[56]

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51   Ms Or 9408 London from f. 96a, line 5 to f. 96b, line 5.
52   The reference occurs in Ms Or 9408 London, f. 96b, line 6.
53   Ms Or 9408 London, f. 96b, line 7 onwards.
54   For other cases in which al-Rummānī agrees with his master and where Ibn al-Ikhshīd is said to share the same view as other Muʿtazilite authorities and traditional authorities, see al-Rummānī, *Tafsīr Abī l-Ḥasan*, 23, 25, 41, 101.
55   The reference to Ibn al-Ikhshīd occurs in Ms Or 9408 London, f. 123a, lines 8–9.
56   Ms Or 9408 London, f. 123a, line 3ff.: *thumma yukhtalafu baʿda dhālika fīhi hal huwa jins wāḥid fa-yakūnu ghilaẓuhu wa-khiffatuhu bi-ḥasbi kathratihi wa-qillatihi am huwa ajnās mukhtalifa fa-kāna baʿḍ al-ʿulamāʾ yadhhabu ilā annahu jins wāḥid wa-anna ʿiqāb al-kufr min jins ʿiqāb al-fisq illā annahu aʿẓamu minhu bil-taḍāʿīf wal-kathra wa-abā dhālika Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī wa-Abū ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad ibn ʿUmar wa-qālā bal huwa ajnās mukhtalifa fa-ʿiqāb al-kufr jins ghayr* (this word is written above the line of the text) *ʿiqāb al-fisq wa-dalīl dhālika annahu law kāna jinsan wāḥidan la-laḥiqa ʿiqāb al-maʿāṣī allatī laysat bi-kufr ʿiqāb al-kufr idhā kathurat idh kāna*

It is in this instance that Ibn al-Ikhshīd is cited in the discussion of a purely theological issue; his view is shared with al-Ṣaymarī and is contradictory to that of the opponents on this issue. But even in this case of a theological issue, al-Rummānī cites the view of his master as one of the possible interpretations, refraining from taking sides with either of the positions, and not stating whether he has a different opinion on the matter – so that in the context of the commentary the two variants represent a range of possibilities.

Al-Rummānī's neutrality towards the positions espoused by Ibn al-Ikhshīd is also evident in those cases in which the latter is cited together with scholars who belong to different branches of Muʿtazilism.[57] The representatives of two other schools of Muʿtazilism, Abū ʿAlī al-Jubbāʾī and Abū l-Qāsim al-Balkhī, are cited in the surviving manuscripts of al-Rummānī's commentary more often than Ibn al-Ikhshīd. Al-Rummānī's attitude to their interpretations of the Quran, and his preference among them, differs from case to case. In most instances, he does not seem to express a preference for the position of one of these scholars over another when they are presented as holding contrasting views on the same question. Their positions appear to be presented as interpretations that are equally possible, with no further comments added nor preferences expressed by al-Rummānī. Occasionally, however, he does give his preference for one of them. Moreover, there are also instances where he chooses to support a view that is opposed to the one held by the two scholars.

An example of the second tendency is in the interpretation of Q. 3:181 *la-qad samiʿa Allāhu qawla alladhīna qālū inna Allāha faqīrun wa-naḥnu aghniyāʾu sanaktubu mā qālū wa-qatlahum al-anbiyāʾa bi-ghayri ḥaqqin wa-naqūlu dhūqū ʿadhāba l-ḥarīqi*, and in particular the meaning of the phrase *sanaktubu mā qālū* (We shall record their saying). Al-Rummānī notes that there are two interpretations of this phrase. One holds that the phrase means that the statements of unbelievers will be registered on the leaves of their deeds (*ṣaḥāʾif aʿmālihim*), and he comments that this would be a clearer argument against them, and is more appropriate as a warning that they would be ashamed to read their disgraceful acts so recorded. This interpretation is attributed to Abū ʿAlī. The other interpretation is that the phrase means that what they are saying will be preserved and that they will be punished for it – in other words that what they say has the same status as what is written down, meaning that nothing will be lost. This view is attributed to Abū l-Qāsim. Al-Rummānī concludes by saying that Abū ʿAlī al-Jubbāʾī's interpretation is correct (*al-ṣawāb*) because it is closer to the literal meaning of the text (*aẓharu*).[58]

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innamā yakhtalifu dhālika bil-taḍāʿīf wa-hādhā bāṭil fa-ṣaḥḥa annahu laysa bi-jins wāḥid idh lazima ʿalayhi bāṭil min al-qawl Θ.

57 Abū ʿAlī al-Jubbāʾī and Abū l-Qāsim al-Balkhī are cited together with Ibn al-Ikhshīd in the interpretation of Q. 3:145; Q. 3:160; Q. 16:98–100; al-Rummānī remains neutral in his presentation of their positions and does not mention his preference for any of them.

58 Ms 6523 Paris, f. 152b, line 1ff.: *wa-yuqālu mā maʿnā sanaktubu mā qālū Θ al-jawāb fīhi qawlān Θ al-awwal annahu yuktabu fī ṣaḥāʾif aʿmālihim li-annahu aẓharu fī l-ḥujja ʿalayhim wa-ajdaru an yastaḥiyū min qirāʾat mā uthbita min faḍāʾiḥihim ʿan Abī ʿAlī Θ al-thānī sayuḥfaẓu mā qālū ḥattā yujāzaw bihi ay huwa bi-manzilat mā qad kutiba fī*

At the same time, however, while al-Rummānī aligns himself with the interpretations of al-Jubbāʾī on some occasions, on others he clearly disagrees with him or expresses his preference for a contrary view. Such is the case for the interpretation of the word *maraḍ* (disease) in Q. 2:10 *fī qulūbihim maraḍun fa-zādahum Allāhu maraḍan wa-la-hum ʿadhābun alīmun bi-mā kānū yakdhibūna*. Abū ʿAlī is reported to have said that *maraḍ* refers to the unbelievers' anxiety (*ghamm*) over the influence of the Prophet and the believers, and that God has increased their anxiety by increasing the Prophet's power and influence and by providing Him with His help and support. Abū ʿAlī also rejected (*ankara*) the view that *maraḍ* means "doubt" (*al-shakk*), arguing that it is not possible that God would increase their doubt as regards faith. Al-Rummānī says that the latter view expresses the consensus of the scholars of Quran interpretation (*qad ajmaʿa ahl al-ʿilm bil-taʾwīl*), including Ibn ʿAbbās, Ibn Masʿūd, al-Ḥasan and Qatāda and the philologists, and says that this interpretation has good grounds and is supported by textual evidence from the Quran.[59] He then discusses the evidence, concluding that the acceptable interpretation (*al-wajh*) is that of the exegetes. Since there is no disagreement among them about it, it is more evident in describing the hypocrites, and there is substantial textual evidence for it in the Quran and Arabic usage.[60]

Besides these cases, there are also occasions on which Abū ʿAlī and Abū l-Qāsim are reported to share the same view, but in which al-Rummānī unusually gives preference to an alternative interpretation attributed to traditional authorities. Such is the case, for instance, with the interpretation of Q. 3:140 *in yamsaskum qarḥun fa-qad massa al-qawma qarḥun mithluhu wa-tilka al-ayyāmu nudāwiluhā bayna al-nāsi wa-li-yaʿlama Allāhu alladhīna āmanū wa-yattakhidha minkum shuhadāʾa wa-Allāhu lā yuḥibbu al-ẓālimīna*. The problem here concerns the meaning of the phrase *wa-yattakhidha minkum shuhadāʾa* (and He may choose witnesses from among you), for which two variant interpretations are given. One of them is attributed to al-Ḥasan, Qatāda and Ibn Isḥāq, and holds that the phrase signifies that those who were killed at the battle of Uḥud are honoured by their martyrdom. Another interpretation is attributed to Abū ʿAlī and Abū l-Qāsim, and holds that the meaning of the phrase is that "[God may choose] witnesses from among you to witness what sins the people committed, because this would signify your high rank and outstanding position".

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annahu lā yaḍīʿu shayʾ minhu ʿan Abī l-Qāsim Θ wasl-taʾwīl al-awwal al-ṣawāb li-annahu aẓharu Θ.

59 Ms Or 9408 London, f. 120a, line 9pp.: *wa-qāla Abū ʿAlī fī qulūbihim maraḍun ay ghamm bi-tamakkun al-nabī ṣallā Allāh ʿalayhi wa-sallama wal-muʾminīna fa-zādahum Allāh ghamman bi-mā zādahu min al-qūwa wal-tamakkun wa-bi-mā amaddahu bihi min al-naṣr wal-taʾyīd wa-ankara Abū ʿAlī an yakūna ʿalā maʿnā al-shakk li-qawlihi fa-zādahum Allāhu maraḍan idh lā yaṣiḥḥu an yazīdahum shakkan fī l-dīn wa-qad ajmaʿa ahl al-ʿilm bil-taʾwīl annahu ʿalā maʿnā al-shakk minhum Ibn ʿAbbās wa-Ibn Masʿūd wal-Ḥasan wa-Qatāda wa-ghayruhum min ahl al-lugha wa-lahu wajh yaḥsunu ʿalayhi wa-shāhid min al-Qurʾān yaruddu ilayhi jalla wa-ʿazza.*

60 Ms Or 9408 London, f. 121a, line 9pp.: *wal-wajh mā ʿalayhi ahl al-taʾwīl li-annahu lā yuʿrafu khilāf baynahum fīhi wa-li-annahu aẓharu fī waṣf al-munāfiqīn wal-shawāhid ʿalayhi min al-Qurʾān wal-kalām kathīr wa-qad bayyannā wajhahu fa-lā maʿdal ʿanhu.*

Al-Rummānī concludes that the first view is easier to understand, because the phrase occurs in a context related to the battle.[61]

The above examples show that al-Rummānī's attitude to the views of the cited Muʿtazilite scholars does not reveal a clear tendency in his preferences or in his disagreements with one particular branch of Muʿtazilism. This, however, could indicate several possibilities. One could still conclude from these examples that al-Rummānī was firmly aligning himself with the Ikhshidiyya, if one follows Daniel Gimaret's suggestion that the thought of Ibn al-Ikhshīd should be viewed as "a sort of highly eclectic synthesis between a particular 'Basran' tradition and the diverse positions characteristic of the so-called 'school of Baghdad'".[62] However, both the authority of the Muʿtazilite scholars and the questions on which al-Rummānī agrees or disagrees with al-Jubbāʾī or al-Balkhī extend beyond purely theological issues; and this raises the possibility that al-Rummānī considered the Muʿtazilite scholars as forming a tradition in Quranic exegesis – one that was distinct from other traditions but which was not uniform, and which allowed for certain differences of opinion. Al-Rummānī's commitment to this tradition is manifest in his citations of Muʿtazilite scholars and the contexts in which they occur, and in his description of such scholars as "people of the truth" or "our followers".

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61   Ms 6523 Paris, f. 106a, line 3pp.: *wa-yuqālu mā maʿnā wa-yattakhidha minkum shuhadāʾa Θ al-jawāb fīhi qawlān al-awwal li-yukrama bil-shahāda man qutila yawm Uḥud ʿan al-Ḥasan wa-Qatāda wa-Ibn Isḥāq Θ wal-thānī wa-yattakhidha minkum shuhadāʾa ʿalā al-nās bi-mā yakūnu minhum min al-ʿiṣyān li-mā la-kum fī dhālika min al-rifʿa wa-jalālat al-manzila ʿan Abī ʿAlī wa-Abī l-Qāsim wal-awwal asbaqu ilā al-nafs li-annahu fī dhikr al-qatl.* There are other occasions on which al-Rummānī disagrees with al-Jubbāʾī and gives preference to alternative interpretations: for example, in the interpretations of Q. 14:41–2 and Q. 17:42.

62   Gimaret, "Ebn al-Ek<u>š</u>īd".