

## Affairs of the Heart: Early Theophanic Interpretations of Muhammad's Relationship with the Divine

Dr. Michael Cook, NES 502  
William McCants

January 14, 2001

The relationship between God and humanity is one of the principal motifs of the Qur'an. This relationship centers primarily upon the human heart (*al-qalb*), which is the locus of understanding (e.g. 22:46) and the recipient of divine guidance (64:11). As an instrument of understanding, the heart often takes on the properties of other sense faculties, particularly sight (22:46). The Qur'an, therefore, is describing an epistemology of the heart. Despite the dozens of verses detailing this process of divine unfoldment to humanity through the agency of the heart, only one verse in the Qur'an enigmatically adumbrates Muhammad's relationship with the divine. The verse in question occurs in the Surat an-Najm (The Star) in the midst of a narrative concerning the Prophet's ascent (*mi'rāj*) to heaven:

1. By the Star when it plunges,
2. Your comrade is not astray, neither errs,
3. Nor speaks he out of caprice.
4. This is naught but a revelation revealed,
5. Taught him by one terrible in power,
6. Very strong; he stood poised,
7. Being on the higher horizon:
8. Then drew near and suspended hung,
9. Two bows'-length away, or nearer,
10. Then revealed to his servant that he revealed.
11. The heart lies not of what he saw<sup>1</sup>  
    [*ma kadhaba al-fu'ádu má ra'á*]
12. What, will you dispute with him what he sees?

Ibn al-Jawzi (d. 597), a sixth century exegete of the Qur'an, identifies the following obstacles to a correct interpretation of the verse:

1. There is a disagreement among the authoritative readers of the Qur'an over the proper vocalization of the verse, which in turn affects its meaning.
2. The text is not explicit concerning the object of sight.<sup>2</sup>

Fakhr ad-Din ar-Razi (d. 606), a contemporary of Ibn al-Jawzi, identifies three further questions that must concern the exegete:

3. To whom does the heart belong?
4. Is sight, in this instance, a property of the human eye or the heart?
5. What does the phrase "the heart lies not" mean?<sup>3</sup>

I will use these questions as my basic framework of inquiry, but I am not solely concerned with the product of early Muslim interpretation of the verse. I am also interested in the development of the methods of Qur'anic exegesis in the first two hundred years of Islam, most of which are evident in the commentaries on this verse. More importantly, these interpretations are some of the first recorded instances of early Muslim understanding of Muhammad's epistemological status in relation to the divine. As such, it gives us valuable insight into the mental universe of early Muslim exegetes.

Before we discuss the early *tafsir* literature, a brief analysis of the term *fu'ad* in the Qur'an is necessary. In the Qur'an, the *qalb* and the *fu'ad* are synonymous. Like the *qalb*, the *fu'ad*<sup>4</sup> is the ground of human experience of the divine. It can be inclined to things both godly [14:37] and ungodly [6:113]. It can be strengthened through the stories of the messengers of God [11:120] and the gradual outpouring of revelation [25:32]. It can also be made empty through disobedience [14:43] and overcome by the fire of God's wrath [104:6-7].

In one verse in the Qur'an, the *fu'ad* is mentioned explicitly as a synonym for the common Arabic word for heart, *qalb*:

On the morrow the heart [fu'ad] of Moses' mother became empty, and she wellnigh disclosed him had We not strengthened her heart [qalbihá], that she might be among the believers.

[Qur'an 28:10]

---

<sup>1</sup> I have modified Arberry's version in order to illumine some of the difficulties in reading the verse. Arberry renders the verse as "His heart lies not of what he saw." All other quotations from the Qur'an are from Arberry, unless indicated otherwise.

<sup>2</sup> Abú al-Faraj `Abd ar-Rahmán ibn `Alí Ibn al-Jawzí, *Zád al-Masír fi `ilm al-Tafsír* (Beirut: Dár al-Kutub al-`Ilmiyah, 1994), vol. 7, 276-7.

<sup>3</sup> Fakhr ad-Dín Muhammad ibn `Umar ar-Rázi, *al-Tafsír al-kabír* (Tehran: 1980), vol. 28, 288-290.

<sup>4</sup> I have chosen not to translate this term throughout the text in order to preserve its flexible meaning and to distinguish it from *qalb*.

Moreover, the *fu'ád*, like the *qalb*, is depicted as a sensory organ. Frequently, it occurs in a list of faculties of perception:

And it is God who brought you forth from your mothers' wombs, and He appointed for you hearing [as-sam'], and sight [al-'abSár], and hearts [al-'af'ida], that haply so you will be thankful.

[Qur'an 23:78]

Six of the verses in the Qur'an mention the *fu'ád* in combination with hearing [as-sam'] and sight [al-baSar],<sup>5</sup> while an additional one mentions it solely in connection with sight.<sup>6</sup> Although the *fu'ád* is referred to in connection with hearing and sight, it is never used synonymously with either, with the possible exception of the verse in question.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Qur'an 16:78, 17:36, 23:78, 32:9, 46:26, 67:23.

<sup>6</sup> Qur'an 6:110.

<sup>7</sup> In the canonical Sunni hadith literature, the *fu'ád* is mentioned fifteen times (see A. J. Wensinck ed., *Concordance et indices de la tradition musulmane* (Leiden: Brill, 1965), vol. 7, p. 38-9). Like the *fu'ád* of the Qur'an, the word has a large semantic field of meanings. Typically, it is used to refer to the mundane physical heart in the body, as in the following hadiths:

It is related from 'A'isha that she used to instruct that the sick and those grieving over the dead [be given] *Talbina* [a mixture of flour and honey]. She used to say: "I heard the messenger of God, peace and blessings be upon him, say: 'Verily, *Talbina* relaxes the heart [fu'ád] of the sick person and ameliorates some of his sorrow.'"

[See section on *Tibb* in Muhammad ibn Ismá'il al-Bukhari, *Le recueil des traditions mahométanes: par Abou Abdallah Mohammed ibn Ismaïl el-Bokhâri* (Leiden: J. Brill, 1862), vol. 4, 52. Variations of the same hadith also appear under the heading of *salâm* in Muslim ibn al-Hajjâj al-Qushayrî, *Sahîh Muslim* (Cairo: Dâr Ihyâ' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyah, 1955), vol. 4, 1736; Ahmad b. Hanbal, *al-Musnad* (Cairo: al-Matba'ah al-Maymaniyah, 1895) vol. 6, 80 and 155]

'A'isha said, "If one of the Messenger of God's people became ill, he commanded them [to eat] soup. It was prepared and then he commanded them to sip from it, whereupon he said that it mends the sorrow-laddened heart [fu'ád] and dispels the ills of the heart [fu'ád] just as one removes filth from her face with water.

[Hanbal, vol. 6, 32. See also Muhammad b. 'Isâ Tirmidhî, *al-Jâmi' as-Sahîh* (1965), vol. 6, 239-40; and Muhammad ibn Yazîd b. Majah, *Sunan*, (Cairo: Dâr Ihyâ' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyah, 1952), vol. 2, 1140.]

TalHa said, "I entered into the presence of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), and he had a quince in his hand. Whereupon he remarked, 'Hold fast to it [dúnakaha], O TalHa! Truly, it relaxes the heart [al-fu'ád].'"

[Ibn Majah, vol. 2, 1118.]

Sa'd said, "When I became very ill, the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) came and visited with me. He put his hand between my breasts [i.e. "upon my chest"], until I found that it [the hand] was cold upon my heart [fu'ádî]. He then said, 'You are a man affected by a disease in your heart...[innaka rajalun maf'udun]'"

[Dawud, *Sunan Abi Dawud* (1935, vol. 4, 7.)

Like the common use of *qalb*, the *fu'ád* is also the locus of emotion, as in the following hadith:

I heard Abu Huraira when someone died among the people of Marwan. The women gathered together and cried over him and so Marwan said, "Get up, O 'Abd al-Malik," and forbade their crying. Afterwards, Abu Huraira said, "Let them be." Thereafter someone among the people of the Prophet died and the women gathered together and cried over him. Whereupon 'Umar b. al-KhaTTâb [the second Caliph] stopped them and made them leave. With that, the Prophet said, "Leave them be, O Ibn. Al-KhaTTâb, for, verily, the eye weeps and the heart [al-fu'ád] is stricken."

The first person to interpret the verse was ‘Abdu’llah b. al-‘Abbás, usually referred to as Ibn ‘Abbás (d. 68). In addition to being a distinguished Companion of the Prophet, Ibn ‘Abbás is credited with being the progenitor of *tafsír*.<sup>8</sup> However, due to the lack of reliable historical information, Ibn ‘Abbás is more myth than historical man, leading Andrew Rippin to compare him with Adam as an archetypal “representative” of the Muslim community.<sup>9</sup> In an analysis of his well-known *tafsír*, considered to be the earliest example of the genre, Rippin asserts that the commentary was actually composed in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Further, the work cannot be reliably traced by the Ibn ‘Abbás since the *isnads* of the commentary always fail.<sup>10</sup> He overlooks, however, pieces of Ibn ‘Abbás’s *tafsír* preserved in the *SaHiH* traditions of Muslim (d. 261). Thankfully, the exegete’s explanation of the *fu’ád* verse has been preserved in the collection, which at least dates the micro-commentary to the mid-third century. Further, Ibn ‘Abbás’ explanation does not depend upon the usual chain of transmitters critiqued by Rippin.<sup>11</sup>

---

[Hanbal, vol. 2, 110.]

The *qalb* and the *fu’ád* are also referred to metaphorically, although they do not seem wholly synonymous:

‘Uqba b. ‘Amir said, “I heard the Messenger of God (peace and blessings be upon him) say, ‘The people of Yemen are the softest of heart [araqqa qulúban], most tender of heart [alyana ‘af’ida], and the most wholesome in acquiescence [anjaba Ta’a].”

[Hanbal, vol. 4, 154.]

aD-Dahák b. ‘Abd ar-Rahman b. Abi Musa al-Ash’arí said that the Messenger of God said: “God, the Most Exalted, said, ‘O Angel of Death! You have seized the son of my servant. You have seized the solace of his eye and the fruit of his heart [fu’ádihi].’ [The Angel of Death] said, ‘Yes.’ And [God] said, ‘What did he say?’ [The Angel of Death] said, ‘He praised you and said ‘We belong to God and to God do we return.’ [God] said, ‘Build a house for him in Paradise and name it the House of Praise.’”

[Hanbal, vol. 4, 415. A version of this hadith is also recorded by Tirmidhi, vol. 3, 396.]

‘Ali b. Abi Tálib (may God be pleased with him) said: “The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) sent me as a judge to Yemen.” Then he mentioned the hadith, “He [the Prophet] said, ‘May your heart [qalb] remain steadfast and may your heart serve as a guide [hádin fu’áduka].”

[Hanbal, vol. 1, 149.]

The last passage in particular seems to connect the *fu’ád* with guidance, a Qur’anic theme that is complimented by the following passage in Ibn Hanbal’s *Musnad* which mentions the *fu’ád* concurrently with the faculty of sight:

LuqaT b. ‘Amir...said, “The people were sitting at the time my companion and I arrived, until the Prophet occupied his heart and vision with us [i.e. until the Prophet gave us his attention, *Hatá idhá faragha laná fu’ádahu wa baSrahu*].

[Hanbal, vol. 4, 13.]

<sup>8</sup> See L. Veccia Vaglieri, “‘Abd Allah b. al-‘Abbás,” *El<sup>2</sup>*, vol. 1, 40-1. See also Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, *Tahdhíb at-Tahdhíb* (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risálah, 1996), vol. 2, 364-365.

<sup>9</sup> Rippin, “Tafsír Ibn ‘Abbás and Criteria for Dating Early Tafsír Texts,” *JSAI* 18 (1994): 38-83.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 77-8.

Beginning with Ibn ‘Abbás, the *tafsír* is transmitted to Abu al-‘Aliya al-Bara’ (Basra, d. 90),<sup>12</sup> Ziyad b. al-HuSain b. Qais (Basra, no death date),<sup>13</sup> Sulaiman b. Mihran al-A`mash (Kufa, b. 60 or 59 and d. 147 or 148),<sup>14</sup> and Waki’ b. al-JarraH b. MaliH (Kufa, b. 128, d. 196).<sup>15</sup> Both Al-Ashajj ‘Abdu’llah b. Sa’id b. HuSain (Kufa, d. 257),<sup>16</sup> and ‘Abd ar-Rahman b. ‘Abd al-Malik b. Shaiba<sup>17</sup> transmit it to Muslim. Even if we allow that the *tafsír* did not originate with Ibn ‘Abbás, we could reasonably assume that is at least as old as Waki’, which would still make it one of the first commentaries on the verse.

As for the *tafsír* itself, Ibn ‘Abbás says nothing of the textual problems embedded within the verse or of the theological implications of his interpretation. Rather, he merely states his opinion:

Abu’l-‘Aliya related that Ibn ‘Abbás said regarding God’s words, “The heart did not lie about that which it saw” [Qur’an 53:11],<sup>18</sup> “for indeed he saw him at a second descent” [Qur’an 53:13]”<sup>19</sup>: “He saw him twice with his heart [bi-fu’ádihi].”<sup>20</sup>

The commentary, of course, is not a Prophetic tradition as it does not mention the Prophet directly nor does it seem likely that the Prophet would refer to himself in the third person. We are left, therefore, with a clear statement by Ibn ‘Abbás: The Prophet beheld God, but not with sight. Rather, he gazed upon God with his heart. Further, the intermediary of the angel Gabriel, the vehicle of the revelation, is totally absent.

Further evidence suggesting that this brief commentary should be dated to at least the mid-second century is supplied by ‘Abd ar-Razzaq b. Hammám b. Nafi’ as-San’ani (b. 126, d. 211), a noted exegete of the latter half of the second century. In his commentary on the Qur’an, San’ani relates a similar interpretation from Ibn ‘Abbás: “He saw him with his heart.”<sup>21</sup>

This theophanic interpretation may have regional roots. Ibn ‘Abbás’s primary center of political activity was Basra (although his primary region of scholarly activity was the Hijaz) and

<sup>12</sup> Ibn Hajar, vol. 4, 545.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 645.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., vol. 2, 109-111.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., vol. 4, 311-314.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., vol. 2, 345-6.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., vol. 2, 529.

<sup>18</sup> I have retranslated the Qur’anic verse in order to harmonize it with the interpretation embedded in the hadith.

<sup>19</sup> Yusuf Ali translation.

<sup>20</sup> Muslim, vol. 1, 158 in the *Kitabu’l-Iman*. Interestingly, this interpretation also appears in the later work attributed to Ibn ‘Abbás: “‘The heart did not lie,’ is the heart of Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him. ‘That which it saw,’ [means] that he saw his Lord with his heart [ra’á rabbahu bi-qalbihi], and it is said he saw his Lord with his *fu’ád*, and it is said [he saw] with his vision [bibaSrihi].” See al-Muhammad Ibn Ya’qub al-Firuzabadi, *Tanwir al-Miqbas min Tafsír Ibn ‘Abbás* (Cairo: Sharikat Maktabat wa-Matba’at Mustafá al-Bábi al-Halabí, 1951), 332.

<sup>21</sup> ‘Abd ar-Razzaq ibn Hammám al-San’aní, *Tafsír al-Qur’an* (Riyád: Maktabat al-Rushd, 1989), vol. 2, 251. San’ani also relates that al-Hasan and Qatáda [see below] remarked, “He [it] saw Gabriel in his form which he appeared [fi Súratihí allati hiya Súratuhu].” They also said, “He [Gabriel] it is who he [it] saw in the second descent [v. 13].”

two of the initial transmitters are from the same region. Three of the last four transmitters are based in nearby Kufah. Interestingly, the founding father of Islamic mysticism, al-Hasan b. Abi al-Hasan al-Basri (b. 21, d. 110), also lived in Basra and was a contemporary of the first three transmitters. Like Ibn ‘Abbás, he interprets the verse theophanically: “He saw his Lord, the Powerful, the Exalted.”<sup>22</sup> In contrast to Ibn ‘Abbás, al-Basri also articulated a variant reading of the Qur’anic verse that supports his interpretation, although it is separate from his discussion of the verse in his *tafsír*. His reading is contained in Abu Zakariyya’ Yahya b. Ziyád al-Farrá’s *Ma’ani al-Qur’an*.

Al-Farrá’(d. 207), one of the founders of the Kufan school of grammar, treats the verse in detail and illuminates the textual difficulties impeding interpretation. Subsequently, his explication of verse eleven is much more tentative than the previous exegetes: “His [Muhammad’s] heart told him truly of that which he [it] saw” [Sadaqahu fu’áduhu alladhi ra’á].<sup>23</sup> Al-Farrá’ then proceeds to discuss the other variant readings existent at his time:

*K-dh-b* is read with a doubling of the medial consonant [to disacknowledge or deem improbable]<sup>24</sup> and without it [to lie]. ‘Ásim,<sup>25</sup> al-‘Amash,<sup>26</sup> Shayba,<sup>27</sup> and Nafi’ al-Madaniyyán<sup>28</sup> do not double it, while al-Hasan al-Basri<sup>29</sup> and ‘Abu Ja’far al-Madani<sup>30</sup> do. It is as if someone doubling the medial consonant of *k-dh-b* intends to say, “The heart [al-fu’ád] did not deem false [lam yukadhdhib] that which it saw, but rather deemed it true.” It is possible that he also intended, “It didn’t deceive its owner of that which he saw.” Those who don’t stress it say, “It did not lie of that which he [it] saw, but rather told him the truth [ma kadhaba alladhi ra’á wa lakinnahu Sadaqahu].<sup>31</sup>

As further evidence of a regional, theophanic interpretation of the verse, we also possess the Qur’anic commentary of another resident of Basra, Muqátíl b. Sulaiman (d. 150). In Muqátíl’s *tafsír* of the verse in question, he writes:

<sup>22</sup> Ibn al-Jawzi, 277.

<sup>23</sup> Yahyá ibn Ziyád al-Farrá’, *Ma’ani al-Qur’an*, (Cairo: al-Dár al-Misriyah lil-Ta’lif wa-al-Tarjamah, 1973), vol. 3, 96.

<sup>24</sup> See Lane’s useful discussion of the variant vocalizations of this verse under “f-‘-d” in his *Arabic-English Lexicon* (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society Trust, 1984), vol. 2, 2324.

<sup>25</sup> One of the seven canonical “readers” of the Qur’an. Died 127 or 128 AH. See A. Jeffery, “‘Asim Abu Bakr, ‘Asim b. Bahdala Abi al-Najjád al-Asadi,” *EI2*, vol. 1, 706-7.

<sup>26</sup> Sulaiman b. Mihrán al-Asadi al-‘Amash (born 60, died c. 147). One of the readers of Kufah. See Tahdhib, vol. 2, 109-11; and Ibn al-Jazari, *Kitáb gháyat al-niháyah fí tabaqát al-qurrá’*, vol. 1, 315-16.

<sup>27</sup> Shaiba b. NaSáH (d. 130 or 138), a reader of Medina. See *Ghayat*, vol. 1, 330.

<sup>28</sup> Nafi’ b. ‘Abd ar-Rahman b. Abi Nu’aym al-Laithi of Medina (d. 169), one of the seven canonical readers. See A. Rippin, “Nafi’ b. ‘Abd al-Rahman b. Abi Nu’aym al-Laythi,” *EI2*, vol. 7, 878.

<sup>29</sup> Treated in following pages.

<sup>30</sup> Yazíd b. al-Qa’qá’ Abu Ja’far (died c. 130), one of the ten recognized readers (seven canonical readers plus an additional three added later). *Ghayat*, vol. 2, 384.

<sup>31</sup> Farrá, 96.

It means the heart [qalb] of Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) did not lie concerning that which he [it] saw with his [its] sight [baSruhu] of his Lord's affair [amr rabbihi] that night.<sup>32</sup>

Taken alone, this explanation could be read in a number of ways. Did Muhammad see the *amr rabbihi*, or was it his heart? Did he behold God? Muqátil's commentary on verse 13 clarifies his position: "For indeed he saw him at a second descent.' It is saying that Muhammad saw his Lord with his heart once again."<sup>33</sup> Therefore, with this third early commentary, we have additional evidence of a Basran exegete interpreting the verse as a theophanic, unmediated experience of God through the heart of the Prophet.

Until this point in time, we have seen a progression in the *tafsír* literature dealing with this verse. The earliest period, evident in the exegesis of Ibn 'Abbás and Muqátil, is characterized by short, succinct interpretations without reference to textual problems imbedded in the verse or reference to *hadith* from the Prophet or the Companions. The second period, beginning with al-Hasan al-Basri and flowering with al-Farrá', is distinguished by a growing recognition of linguistical impediments to interpretation, but still lacks discussion of the *hadith* literature. It must be admitted, however, that the progression was not linear, but rather undulating (al-Hasan al-Basri died forty years before Muqátil). With at-Tabari (d. 311), both trends reach their culmination and are complimented by consideration of traditions by the Prophet and his Companions.<sup>34</sup> Although at-Tabari, a famed historian and exegete, lies outside of the field of our discussion (the first two hundred years of the Islamic era), his work includes a number of *hadith* and commentaries from Ibn 'Abbás and other early exegetes that illumine our previous discussion.

At-Tabari begins his discussion of the verse by acknowledging the two divergent interpretations of the text: One group maintains that the heart of Muhammad saw God while the second group maintains that he saw Gabriel. Not surprisingly, most of the traditions from the first group trace their *isnad* back to Ibn 'Abbás and reiterate his interpretation of the verse quoted above. The *isnads*, however, all differ from one another, with only a few sharing the name of "'Ikrima"<sup>35</sup> as a second transmitter from Ibn 'Abbás. 'Ikrima, one time slave of Ibn 'Abbás and considered the chief transmitter of his master's interpretations of the Qur'an, even offers his own commentary on the verse, which largely reflects the opinion of his master:

---

<sup>32</sup> Muqátil ibn Sulaymán al-Balkhí, *Tafsír Muqátil ibn Sulaymán*, (Cairo: al-Hay'ah al-Misriyah al-'ámmah lil-Kitáb, 1979), vol. 4, 160.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> At-Tabari's discussion of the syntactical problems in the text closely mirrors that of al-Farrá'. The only addition is the mention of 'Asim al-JaHdari (died before 130) as one of those that stress *k-dh-b*. For 'Asim, see *Ghayat*, vol. 1, 349.

<sup>35</sup> See Joseph Schacht, "'Ikrima," *EI2*, vol. 3, 1081-2.

‘Ikrima was asked about the verse..., to which he replied: “Do you want me to tell you it saw Him?” “Yes.” “It beheld Him, and beheld Him, and then beheld Him once again until the soul expired.”<sup>36</sup>

One of the most interesting interpretations of the verse also comes to us by way of Ibn ‘Abbás, although all of the transmitters are obscure.<sup>37</sup> Even if the *hadith* is a much later invention, it demonstrates the importance of the verse as it pertains to Muhammad’s Prophetic experience in the minds of some early Muslims:

The Messenger of God, peace and blessings be upon him, said: “I saw my Lord in the most beautiful form and He said to me, ‘O Muhammad, do you know what the Concourse on High are arguing about?’ I said, ‘No, my Lord.’ He put his hand between my shoulders and I found that it lay cold between my breasts. Whereupon, I learned all that is in the heavens and on earth. I said, ‘O Lord, [they are arguing about] degrees and atonements, and the movement of feet towards the Friday assemblies, waiting for prayer after prayer.” And I said, “O Lord, verily you took Abraham as a Friend and spoke to Moses, and so forth.” He said, “Did I not lay open your chest? Did I not put a heavy load upon you? Did I not do this to you? Did I not do that?” He informed me of things which I am not permitted to relate to you. Thus His relates to you in His book: “Then drew near and suspended hung,/ Two bows’-length away, or nearer,/ Then revealed to his servant that he revealed./ The heart lies not of what which it saw” [53:8-11]. He put the light of my sight in my heart [fu’ádi], and then I looked upon Him with my heart.”<sup>38</sup>

In a similar vein, Ibn ‘Abbás relates: “Verily, God singled out Abraham with friendship, Moses with speech, and Muhammad with vision.”<sup>39</sup> Unlike the interpretations cited previously, this last one and the *hadith* before it frames Muhammad’s visionary experience in terms of a natural progression of prophetic interaction with the divine that culminates in Muhammad.

In contradistinction to the above interpretations, the second group of commentaries adduced by at-Tabari rejects a theophanic reading of the text and asserts that Muhammad only beheld the angel Gabriel. Of the four, three trace their *isnads* to ‘Abdu’llah b. Mas’úd (d. 32), a Companion of the Prophet with a stature in the Muslim community rivaling that of Ibn ‘Abbás.<sup>40</sup> In one interpretation, Ibn Mas’úd asserts “The Messenger of God, peace and blessings be upon

<sup>36</sup> At-Tabari, *Jámi` al-bayán `an ta`wíl áy al-Qur`án* (Egypt: Mustafá al-Bábi al-Halabí, 1954), vol. 27, 38. Of course, the pronoun can also be read as “he,” which moves the emphasis of the verse from the heart of Muhammad to Muhammad himself.

<sup>37</sup> Of the six transmitters named, only one is recognizable (‘ATa’ b. Abi RabáH).

<sup>38</sup> Tabari, 38.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> See J. C. Vadet, “Ibn Mas’ud,” *EI2*, vol. 3, 873-5.



him, saw Gabriel.”<sup>41</sup> Two *hadith* from the Prophet are also related on the authority of Ibn Mas’ud, reinforcing his interpretation. He states, for example, “The Messenger of God said: I saw Gabriel at the Lote-Tree. He had six hundred wings.”<sup>42</sup>

An interpretation of the verse by Qatáda (d. 168),<sup>43</sup> an early Muslim exegete who lived in Basra, is also cited by at-Tabari. Qatáda states, “He saw Gabriel in his form in which he appeared to him. It is [Gabriel] that he saw the second time.”<sup>44</sup> The fact that Qatáda, a Basran, offered a counter-interpretation of the verse moderates the view that a theophanic interpretation was largely centered in Basra. Further, a number of transmitters of Ibn Mas’úd’s commentaries are from the Kufah-Basra region.<sup>45</sup> Still, the number of *hadith* and *tafsir* transmitted by people from the region is minimal in comparison with those who transmitted the theophanic interpretation and traditions in Basra and Kufah.<sup>46</sup>

The discrepancies between the interpretations of Ibn ‘Abbás and Ibn Mas’úd raise some interesting questions about conflicting opinions of the Companions. In legal thought during this period, the opinions of Ibn ‘Abbás and Ibn Mas’úd are given interpretive primacy since they were two of the most prominent Companions of the Prophet and would have known the intent of his words.<sup>47</sup> Further, Kufans accepted the explanations of Ibn Mas’úd over others, while in Mecca Ibn ‘Abbás’s interpretations had primacy.<sup>48</sup> Theologically, however, the situation may have been reversed, with Ibn ‘Abbás’ views holding sway in Iraqi territory. Such an assertion, however, requires more investigation of the early exegetical material.

We can, however tentatively conclude that there was a larger Basran/Kufan milieu of theophanic interpretation of Muhammad’s relationship with God based upon early commentaries of the verse attributed to Ibn ‘Abbás. Further, it seems that Hasan al-Basri, the father of Sufism, and Muqátíl, one of the earliest Qur’anic exegetes, were influenced by his exegesis of the verse. Indeed, it may be the genesis of later Sufi speculation on the primacy of the heart in religious experience.<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> Tabari, 39.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> See Ch. Pellat, “Katada b. Di’ama,” *EI2*, vol. 4, 748.

<sup>44</sup> Tabari, 39.

<sup>45</sup> Such as ‘Abd ar-Rahman b. Yazid b. Qais, a Kufan. See *Tahdhib*, vol. 2, 567.

<sup>46</sup> Of the ten *tafsirs* and one prophetic *hadith*, ten out of fifteen identifiable transmitters are from the Basra/Kufah region.

<sup>47</sup> Joseph Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959) 29.

<sup>48</sup> Schacht, *An Introduction to Islamic Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964) 32-3.

<sup>49</sup> See J. C. Vadet’s article on “Kalb” (*EI<sup>2</sup>*, vol. 1, 486) for a succinct explanation of the development of this doctrine.

## Works Cited

- Abu Dawud, *Sunan Abi Dawud*. 1935.
- al-Asqalani, Ibn Hajar, *Tahdhīb at-Tahdhīb*. Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risálah, 1996.
- al-Bukhari, Muhammad ibn Ismá'íl, *Le Recueil des Traditions Mahométones: par Abou Abdallah Mohammed ibn Ismaïl el-Bokhâri*. Leiden: J. Brill, 1862.
- al-Farrá', Yahyá ibn Ziyád. *Ma`ání al-Qur'án*. Cairo: al-Dár al-Misríyah lil-Ta'líf wa-al-Tarjamah, 1973.
- al-Firuzabadi, al-Muhammad Ibn Ya'qub. *Tanwir al-Miqbas min Tafsír Ibn 'Abbás*. Cairo: Sharikat Maktabat wa-Matba`at Mustafá al-Bábí al-Halabí, 1951.
- Hanbal, Ahmad b., *al-Musnad*. Cairo: al-Matba`ah al-Maymaníyah, 1895.
- Jeffery, A. "Asim Abu Bakr, 'Asim b. Bahdala Abi al-Najjád al-Asadi," *EP*.
- Lane, Edward William. *Arabic-English Lexicon*. Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society Trust, 1984.
- Ibn al-Jazari, *Kitáb Gháyat an-Niháyah fí Tabaqát al-Qurrá'*.
- Ibn al-Jawzí, Abú al-Faraj `Abd ar-Rahmán ibn `Alí. *Zád al-Masír fí `Ilm al-Tafsír*. Beirut: Dár al-Kutub al-`Ilmíyah, 1994.
- Ibn Majah, Muhammad ibn Yazíd. *Sunan*. Cairo: Dár lhyá' al-Kutub al-`Arabíyah, 1952.
- Muqátil ibn Sulaymán al-Balkhí. *Tafsír Muqátil ibn Sulaymán*. Cairo: al-Hay'ah al-Misríyah al-`ámmah lil-Kitáb, 1979.
- Muslim ibn al-Hajjáj al-Qushayrí. *Sahíh Muslim*. Cairo: Dár lhyá' al-Kutub al-`Arabíyah, 1955.
- Pellat, Ch. "Katada b. Di'ama," *EP*.
- ar-Rází, Fakhr ad-Dín Muhammad ibn `Umar. *al-Tafsír al-kabír*. Tehran: 1980.
- Rippin, Andrew. "Tafsir Ibn 'Abbás and Criteria for Dating Early Tafsír Texts." *JSAI* 18 (1994): 38-83.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Nafi' b. 'Abd al-Rahman b. Abi Nu'aym al-Laythi," *EP*.
- al-San`ání, `Abd ar-Razzáq ibn Hammám. *Tafsír al-Qur'án*. Riyád: Maktabat al-Rushd, 1989.
- Schacht, Joseph. "'Ikrima," *EP*.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *An Introduction to Islamic Law*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964.

----- . *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959.

at-Tabari, *Jámi` al-Bayán `an Ta'wíl áy al-Qur'án*. Egypt: Mustafá al-Bábí al-Halabí, 1954.

Tirmidhi, Muhammad b. `Isá, *Jámi` al-Sahíh*. 1965.

Vadet, J. C. "Ibn Mas'ud," *EP*.

----- . "Kalb." *EP*.

Vaglieri, L. Veccia. "'Abd Allah b. al-'Abbás." *EP*.

Wensinck, A. J. ed., *Concordance et Indices de la Tradition Musulmane*. Leiden: Brill, 1965.