

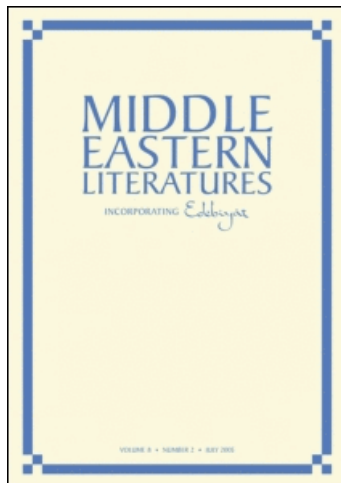
This article was downloaded by: [Harvard College Library]

On: 30 June 2010

Access details: Access Details: [subscription number 918422419]

Publisher Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Middle Eastern Literatures

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713404747>

### The Wiles of Creation: Philosophy, Fiction, and the 'Ajā'ib Tradition

Travis Zadeh

Online publication date: 29 June 2010

**To cite this Article** Zadeh, Travis(2010) 'The Wiles of Creation: Philosophy, Fiction, and the 'Ajā'ib Tradition', Middle Eastern Literatures, 13: 1, 21 – 48

**To link to this Article:** DOI: 10.1080/14752620903566095

**URL:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14752620903566095>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.informaworld.com/terms-and-conditions-of-access.pdf>

This article may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

## The Wiles of Creation: Philosophy, Fiction, and the 'Ajā'ib Tradition

---

TRAVIS ZADEH

### Abstract

In the introduction to the Arabic cosmology of marvels, *'Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt wa-gharā'ib al-mawjūdāt* ('Marvels of Creation and Rarities of Existence'), Zakariyyā' al-Qazwīnī (d. 682/1283) raises the issue of veracity in the narration of the wondrous. Central to al-Qazwīnī's exposition of the strange and marvellous is a sustained interest in the pleasure produced through the narration of elegant tales. Despite this aesthetic awareness, al-Qazwīnī returns repeatedly to the question of authenticity. For al-Qazwīnī, the estimation of these wondrous accounts also depends on their relative truth-value. This article traces the tension between the fictive and the real by exploring some of the Greek, Arabic, and Persian antecedents to al-Qazwīnī's phenomenology of creation.

### To Verify it all in One Lifetime

Far more than a simple catalogue of curiosities, the *'Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt wa-gharā'ib al-mawjūdāt* ('Marvels of Creation and Rarities of Existence') of Zakariyyā' al-Qazwīnī (d. 682/1283) presents a fully developed cosmographical account of the universe. Moving from the heavenly bodies above to the minutia of minerals on earth, al-Qazwīnī offers his readers a detailed inventory of existence. From the many works that the Ottoman bibliophile Kātib Çelebi (d. 1067/1657) lists as bearing similar titles, we may observe that writings on the marvels of creation (*'ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt*) blossom into a field of inquiry across Islamicate societies.<sup>1</sup> It is of note that al-Qazwīnī's work occupies the most

---

A version of this article was read before the Annual Meeting of the American Oriental Society, Seattle, WA, USA, 2006. Material for the present study forms part of a larger analysis on wonders and descriptive geography developed in my doctoral dissertation: Travis Zadeh, *Translation, Geography, and the Divine Word: Mediating Frontiers in pre-modern Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2007).

Travis Zadeh, Department of Religion, Haverford College, Haverford, PA 19041, USA.

E-mail: tzadeh@haverford.edu

<sup>1</sup>Kātib Çelebi, *Kashf al-ẓunūn* (İstanbul: Wikālat al-Ma'ārif al-Jalīla, 1941–55), vol. 2, 1127–8. It is of note that under the category *'ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt*, Kātib Çelebi also lists works that bear other titles, such as texts by Abū Ḥāmid al-Gharnāfi (d. 565/1169–70), Yāqūt al-Rūmī (d. 626/1229), and 'Izz al-Dīn b. al-Athīr (d. 630/1233). The idea that one could write on this topic (*ṣannaf fih*) suggests that Kātib Çelebi has a clear sense of these works as a cohesive discursive unit on the marvels of the world. This runs against the analysis advanced by Syrinx von Hees, which suggests that there was no categorical or generic demarcation for writings on marvels. Syrinx von Hees, 'The Astonishing: A Critique and Re-reading of 'Aḡā'ib-literature', *Middle Eastern Literatures* 8, no. 2 (2005): 101–20 (pp. 112–14). Already with Ibn al-Nadīm's (d. c. 385/995) bio-bibliographic survey, the topic of the wonders of the world, both man-made

prominent place in Kātib Çelebi's account of this body of writing, due, no doubt, to the great influence of this particular encyclopaedia on later writers. Originally written in Arabic, al-Qazwīnī's encyclopaedic digest of wonders has enjoyed an immense popularity; not only has it been translated several times over the centuries into Persian and Turkish, but it also has served as a wellspring of inspiration for miniature painting.<sup>2</sup>

Al-Qazwīnī was not the first to take an interest in this field of inquiry, nor was he entirely original in either the material he gathered or his exposition of it. The same can be said for his accompanying descriptive geography, entitled *Āthār al-bilād fī akhbār al-'ibād* ('The Monuments of the Regions and Accounts of their Inhabitants'), which reveals that al-Qazwīnī often merely compiled together previous authorities.<sup>3</sup> But originality is perhaps not the most useful rubric by which to evaluate this writer or his effect on future generations. Rather, the copious citation of established authorities is hallmark of pre-modern scholarly conventions.

So it should come as little surprise that nearly a century before al-Qazwīnī, Muḥammad b. Maḥmūd b. Aḥmad al-Ṭūsī compiled a work in Persian by the same title, which he dedicated to the last Saljūq ruler of Persia, Ṭughril (III) b. Arslan (d. 590/1194).<sup>4</sup> Kātib Çelebi relates that al-Ṭūsī's *'Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt wa-gharā'ib al-mawjūdāt*, which he describes as decorated with paintings (*kitāb<sup>um</sup> muṣawwar<sup>um</sup>*), was composed in 555/1160.<sup>5</sup> Like the geographers and cosmographers before him, al-Ṭūsī integrates in his wonder-book detailed maps of the earth and heavens. The tradition of illustrating this particular work develops on into the Ilkhānid period to include a full range of illuminations representing the exotic and strange phenomena of creation. However, if surviving manuscripts are any indication, it is al-Qazwīnī whose name has become most

---

and natural, had formed a discrete field of inquiry that, interestingly enough, he classified under writings on night-tales (*asmār*) and legends (*khurāfāt*). Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, ed. Yūsuf 'Alī Ṭawīl (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1996), 481, cf. 155–6, 245–6, 542–3. The category of *'ajā'ib* as a discursive device for mapping the world is fully present, for instance, in the earliest descriptive geographies of the 'Abbāsīd period, deployed as an organizing principle for such topics as the location of the cave of the Seven Sleepers (*aṣḥāb al-kaḥf*), the wall of Gog and Magog, Khidr's journey to the fountain of life (all of which intersect with Qur'ānic material), along with accounts concerning such man-made marvels as the pyramids of Egypt and the palace at Ctesiphon, see Ibn Khurrādādhbih's descriptive geography. Ibn Khurrādādhbih, *al-Masālik wa-'l-mamālik*, ed. M.J. de Goeje (Leiden: Brill, 1889), 106–7, 162–70, 123–41, 159–62, respectively.

<sup>2</sup>There are several studies dedicated to specific illuminated MSS of al-Qazwīnī's work; see for instance, Hans-Caspar Graf von Bothmer, *Die Illustrationen des 'Münchener Qazwini' von 1280 (cod. Monac. arab. 464): ein Beitrag zur Kenntnis ihres Stils* (München: Universität München, 1971); Julie Anne Oeming Badiie, *An Islamic Cosmography: The Illustrations of the Sarre Qazwini* (doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan, 1978); Stefano Carboni, *The Wonders of Creation and the Singularities of Ilkhanid Painting* (doctoral dissertation, University of London, SOAS, 1992); Persis Berlekamp, *Wonders and their Images in Late Medieval Islamic Culture: 'The Wonders of Creation' in Fars and Iraq, 1280–1388* (doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, 2003); Syrinx von Hees, *Enzyklopädie als Spiegel des Weltbildes: Qazwini's Wunder der Schöpfung: eine Naturkunde des 13. Jahrhunderts* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2002).

<sup>3</sup>Maria Kowalska, 'The Sources of al-Qazwīnī's *Āthār al-Bilād*', *Folia Orientalis* 8 (1966): 41–88. For a summary of both al-Qazwīnī's life and the scholarly debate surrounding how his works draw on previous authorities, see T. Lewicki, 'Qazwini, Zakariyyā', *EI*<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>4</sup>Muḥammad b. Maḥmūd al-Ṭūsī, *'Ajā'ib nāma*, ed. Manūchir Sutūda (Tihṙān: Nashr-i Kitāb, 1966)—on the title of the work as the *'Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt wa-gharā'ib al-mawjūdāt*, see p. 5; on the dedication, see p. 14; on information concerning the biography of the author, see Sutūda's introduction, pp. 19–23. There is a popular Persian edition of al-Ṭūsī's work, which is helpful for its introduction, however, as it rearranges the order of the text and modernizes the prose, a practice referred to as 'retelling' (*bāz-kh<sup>w</sup>ānī*), it is not very useful for scholarly purposes. Ja'far Mudarris Ṣādiqī, ed. and trans., *'Ajā'ib nāma* (Tihṙān: Nashr-i Markaz, 1996).

<sup>5</sup>Kātib Çelebi, *Kashf*, 1127.

associated with this genre, where his writing on the wonders of existence has inspired both patrons and painters throughout the ages.

The similarities between the projects of al-Ṭūsī and al-Qazwīnī, in regard to both form and content, are indeed striking, and point to an even broader tradition of marvel-writing. The wide range of topics covered by both of these authors represents an intersection of literary and scientific traditions. This perhaps suggests how such a body of writing, which aims to both inform and delight, became so popular. The strong current of story-telling prevalent throughout the various configurations of *‘ajā’ib* builds on an ancient inquisitiveness and curiosity for the foreign and remote.

In pre-modern Islamicate contexts, writings on marvels and monsters draw extensive inspiration from Hellenistic models.<sup>6</sup> To make this point, we need look no further than the perennially popular tales surrounding Alexander the Great and the narratives depicting his marvellous feats in the exotic lands of the East. The Pseudo-Callisthenes cycle, which details the legendary aspects of Alexander’s life, makes its way into Syriac, Arabic, Ethiopic, Armenian, and Persian, not to mention various European reconfigurations. We find throughout the Arabic and Persian traditions on the marvels of the world a sustained interest in the life of Alexander, whose adventures in far-off, exotic lands are often represented.

Beyond the various lives of Alexander, and the treatment of the exotic and marvellous by such writers as Ctesias (fl. fifth century BCE) and Herodotus (d. c. 425), Aristotle’s study of biology, the *Historia animalium*, wields a great influence on the Greek discourses of paradoxography (παρὰδοξογραφία), an encyclopaedic tradition of pseudo-scientific writing on the strange and exotic.<sup>7</sup> Such practices of tying wondrous narratives together with the authority of scientific investigation has a long history. In Arabic a prime model is the *Kitāb al-ḥayawān* of al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/868–9), which—by building upon the tradition of Aristotelian zoology as a unifying model—weaves together themes ranging from Qur’ānic exegesis and metaphysical speculations, to fables, poetry, and literary criticism. It is precisely the intersection of the literary, often, in the form of anecdotal material—drawn, for instance, from travellers’ accounts of journeys to remote lands—with scholarship on the nature of existence, which makes the marvel-writings of such later authors as al-Ṭūsī and al-Qazwīnī so compelling.

Much has been said regarding the place of fiction in pre-modern Islamicate belletristic traditions.<sup>8</sup> I would like to reiterate the hermeneutic difficulty of using the term ‘fiction’ when discussing the variegated forms of Arabic and Persian story-telling, especially when

<sup>6</sup>Natalia Tornesello offers an illustration of this process, tracing the origin of the Persian *davālpā*, ‘string-legged’ monster, found throughout Arabic and Persian traditions on monsters, including both al-Ṭūsī and al-Qazwīnī, through its roots in the Hellenistic tradition of the Himantopodes. Natalia Tornesello, ‘From Reality to Legend: Historical Sources of Hellenistic and Islamic Teratology’, *Studia Iranica* 31 (2002): 163–92.

<sup>7</sup>See Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map is not Territory* (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 251. On the hermeneutic dangers of making analogies with modern epistemes, as Smith does in this context, see Lisa Verner, *The Epistemology of the Monstrous in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 2005), 1. For the role of Aristotelian biology and its influence on the pseudo-scientific tradition of marvels in Greek, see James S. Romm, *The Edges of the Earth in Ancient Thought, Geography, Exploration, and Fiction*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 92 ff.

<sup>8</sup>Seeger Bonebakker, ‘Nihil Obstat in Story-Telling?’, in *The Thousand and One Nights in Arabic Literature and Society*, ed. Richard Hovannisian and Georges Sabagh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 56–77; Rina Drory, ‘Legitimizing Fiction in Classical Arabic Literature’, in *Models and Contacts: Arabic Literature and Its Impact on Medieval Jewish Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 37–47; idem, ‘Medieval Fiction’, in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, ed. Julie Meisami and Paul Starkey (London: Routledge, 1998). Also see the essays collected in Stefan Leder, ed., *Story-telling in the Framework of non-Fictional*

approaching the wide-ranging discourses on the wonders of the world. While such writing was neither conceived of, nor consumed as fiction, in the modern sense of the word, it nonetheless demonstrates a full awareness of the pleasure produced by tales whose veracity cannot be fully verified. Thus, it would be misguided to imagine that Arabic and Persian marvel-writings were written and read solely for their scientific merit.<sup>9</sup> In this genre, pleasure figures prominently in the framing of both text and image. It is in this regard that attempting to separate the literary from the scientific in these works may be an exercise in futility, for the discursive arc buttressing much of this material is predicated on the fusion of what we might characterize as literary pleasure with serious scholarship. Furthermore, when approaching ‘*ajā’ib*’-writing, we should be careful not to associate literariness with fiction, itself a very modern notion. Rather, the broad literary sensibility suggested in the concept of ‘*ajā’ib*’, as Roy Mottahedeh has demonstrated, is one that seeks to cultivate a sense of astonishment and awe in the face of uncanny reality.<sup>10</sup>

Just as their titles suggest, the encyclopaedias of al-Ṭūsī and al-Qazwīnī traffic in discourses of wonder. These authors use the rubric of ‘*ajā’ib*’ to classify the vertiginous diversity of creation. Here frightening accounts of dog-headed men and fierce Amazon women share room with detailed descriptions of the movement of the heavenly spheres and the medicinal qualities of plants, all unified by a single concern for the marvels of existence. Much of the material contained in these works represents established scientific knowledge as attested by trusted authorities concerning the nature of God’s creation. As a part of a larger discourse, the unifying theme of ‘*ajā’ib*’ continues throughout the development of Arabic, Persian, and Turkish writings on descriptive geography and natural history, where, well after the discovery of the Americas and its subsequent impact on Islamic societies, representations persist of the world’s margins as inhabited with monstrous creatures and marvellous curiosities.<sup>11</sup>

To be sure, beliefs in the apocalyptic races of Yājūj and Mājūj (i.e. Gog and Magog) at the edge of the world, or tales of the peoples of the Wāq-Wāq Islands who grow off trees, might not seem to us today the stuff of scientific inquiry (Figure 1).<sup>12</sup> Such geographical

---

*Arabic Literature* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998); and Philip Kennedy, ed., *On Fiction and Adab in Medieval Arabic Literature* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2005).

<sup>9</sup>In an attempt to deconstruct the idea of a genre of ‘*ajā’ib*’-literature, as inherited from early 19th-century and 20th-century western scholarship, Syrinx von Hees accentuates the importance of the scientific merit of works on the wonders of the world to such an extent that she at times loses sight of the clear literary dimensions running throughout this discourse, as in the case with al-Qazwīnī, where she argues that the ‘highly scholarly’ character of his work would have been ‘measured according to the standards of medieval natural history’, standards which nonetheless, as she goes on to suggest, are themselves predicated on the literary conventions which come to shape this particular genre (Hees, “Astonishing”, p. 112).

<sup>10</sup>Roy Mottahedeh, “‘*Ajā’ib*’ in *The Thousand and One Nights*,” in *The Thousand and One Nights in Arabic Literature*, 29–39.

<sup>11</sup>On the continuation of ‘*ajā’ib*’ discourse throughout descriptive geography into the pre-modern period, see my forthcoming book. Travis Zadeh, *Mapping Frontiers across Medieval Islam: Translation, Geography, and the ‘Abbāsīd Empire* (London: I.B. Tauris).

<sup>12</sup>See Zakariyyā’ al-Qazwīnī, *Kosmographie* (‘*Ajā’ib al-makhlūqāt*’), ed. Ferdinand Wüstenfeld (Göttingen: Verlag der Dieterichschen Buchhandlung, 1848), 108, 128. To date there is no critical edition of al-Qazwīnī’s ‘*Ajā’ib al-makhlūqāt*’. Wüstenfeld’s edition is in need of revision based on the earliest recensions. There are numerous popular Arabic editions, which, although likewise not critical, are useful for comparing variants with Wüstenfeld’s text, such as Fāruq Sa’d’s edition (Bayrūt: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadīda, 1973). I have also consulted two Ilkhānīd manuscripts—British Library OR 14140, the focus of S. Carboni’s dissertation, and Süleymaniye, Yeni Cami 813, studied by P. Berlekamp—for further variants. Based on accepted scholarly practice, I cite the Wüstenfeld edition, hereafter al-Qazwīnī, ‘*Ajā’ib*’.



Figure 1. The *Wāq-Wāq* Islands. *Tarīkh al-Hind al-gharbī* (Istanbul: İbrahim Müteferrika, 1730), a 10th/16th-century Ottoman geographical and historical account of the Americas, based largely on European sources, courtesy of Houghton Library, Harvard University, Typ 794.30.822, f. 15r.

and zoological projections of marvels and monsters resonate within a larger theological universe populated with *jinn*, demons, angels, saintly marvels, and prophetic miracles, all in concert with broad currents of salvation history.<sup>13</sup> In this light, it is difficult for modern readers, influenced by an Enlightenment-era disdain of the marvellous, to truly fathom how ‘*ajā’ib*’-writings could harmoniously fuse together seemingly disparate levels of discourse. As Syrinx von Hees has observed, the meaning of the marvellous expressed in these works represents a radical departure from most modern epistemological views of the world.<sup>14</sup> She points to a contempt for the ‘unscientific’ and ‘superstitious’ character of these writings that inflects much 19th-century and 20th-century scholarship on the subject.

Such a disdain has made it hard to appreciate the complicated configuration of wonder in this material. Caroline Bynum argues that, in the context of medieval European discourses on *mirabilia*, the very function of wonder is predicated upon an uncanny reality, for ‘you can marvel only at something that is, at least in some sense, there’.<sup>15</sup> The significance of the marvellous in such contexts lies in its veridical ontological status, what Bynum calls ‘the there-ness of the event’. To this end, it is

<sup>13</sup>The eschatological intersection with the ‘supernatural’ is fully developed in credal literature, and becomes a mainstay of Ash‘ari theology. See the statements ascribed to al-Ash‘ari in Abū Bakr b. Fūrak’s (d. 406/1015) digest, *Mujarrad Maqālāt al-Shaykh Abī al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī*, ed. Daniel Gimaret (Bayrūt: Dār al-Mashriq, 1987), pp. 278 ff.; compare with Mu‘tazila arguments on *karāmāt*, Gardet, L., s.v. *EF*<sup>2</sup>; *Fiqh Akbar II*, A. J. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1932), §16, 193, 224 ff.

<sup>14</sup>Hees, ‘The Astonishing’, 105.

<sup>15</sup>Caroline Bynum, ‘Wonder’, *The American Historical Review* 102, no. 1 (1997): 1–26 (see p. 24).

important to appreciate how writings on ‘*ajā’ib*’ position themselves to be in commerce with reality.

Throughout works on the wonders of the world, a good deal of attention is given to the question of authenticity. Both al-Ṭūsī and al-Qazwīnī, clear representatives of the genre, are keenly aware of a tension between the authentic and the spurious, and both develop quite novel ways of dealing with it. The question of how these two writers justify the inclusion of potentially fictive material into their narratives proves particularly interesting in this regard. Al-Qazwīnī uses his introduction to outline a systematic account, influenced by the fully developed tradition of Islamic scholasticism, detailing the meanings of the four key terms of his title; namely, ‘*ajab*, ‘*gharīb*, ‘*makhluq*, and ‘*marwūj*. As for al-Ṭūsī, his introduction draws more on the didactic model, prominent within courtly circles, of the *speculum principii* tradition, weaving together a series of anecdotes to draw out allegorical messages and exemplary principles.

At the conclusion of his introduction, after a long series of interlinking stories highlighted by moral lessons, al-Ṭūsī makes a revealing move in an attempt to lend weight to his project:

ما این کتاب را جمع کردیم آنچ دیدیم درکتبها مسطور و آنچ شنیدیم از جوالان و سیاحان، بعضی آنست کی آنرا شاهی نباید و ظاهر است، چنانک افلاک و ماه و آفتاب کی از همه عجایبها عظیم تر است برحاشیه آن رقم کردیم «ظ» یعنی ظاهرست. بعضی آنست کی بیرهان حاجت افتد و بروزگار دراز حاصل توان کردن، چنانک طلسمهء روم و اندلس، برحاشیه آن رقم کردیم «بع» یعنی بعید است و بعضی آنست کی قرآن بدان ناطق است و اخبار، یا محسوس است، بدان رقم کردیم «صد» یعنی صدقست و بعضی از شگفتی بود کی ذکر آن متواتر بود درکتبها برحاشیه وی رقم کردیم «مع» یعنی معروفست و بعضی از عجایبها که شنیده ام از سیاحان و برآن برهانی ندیدم قاطع و نتوان گفتن کی آن دروغ است، برحاشیه آن رقم کردیم «شبه» یعنی شبهت است، زیراکی انکار کردن خصلتی شوم است. تا اگر یکی از عجایب رومیه و اندلس و قندهار و مولتان چیزی باز گوید، اگر از وی دلیل آن طلبی بعمری تصحیح آن نتوان کرد.

We have gathered this book from what we have seen hidden in books and from what we have heard from globe-trotters and world-travellers. Some of this is such that it is not necessary for anyone to stand as witness to it, for it is self-evident, such as the heavens, the moon, and the sun—which is greater than all the wonders. On the margins of these, we have set down a ‘*zā*’ for ‘*zāhir*’, self-evident. Some of these are in need of proof (*burhān*), which can be reached in only a long period of time, such as the talismans of Byzantium and al-Andalus. Next to these, we have placed on the margins ‘*bā*’ ‘*ayn*’ for ‘*ba’id*’, remote. Some of these the Qur’ān and the sayings of the Prophet discuss; for these we have placed a ‘*šād dāl*’ for ‘*šidq*’, authentic. The mention of some of these wonders is transmitted through established authorities (*mutawātir*) in books. On the margins of these, we have marked a ‘*nīm*’ ‘*ayn*’ for ‘*ma’rūf*’, well-known. Some of these marvels we have heard of by way of world-travellers, for which we have no decisive (*qā’i*) proof and thus they cannot be said to be blatant lies (*durūgh*). On the margins of these we have marked ‘*šim bā*’ ‘*hā*’ for ‘*shubha*’,

uncertain. For to deny such a thing is an evil characteristic. When somebody reports on the wonders of Byzantium, al-Andalus, Qandahār, or Multān, if you were to request proof of their authenticity, it would be impossible to verify (*taṣhīh*) it all in one lifetime.<sup>16</sup>

In this passage, al-Ṭūsī advances a system, much like *ḥadīth* criticism, which sets out to establish the relative veracity of any given report. From established facts to blatant lies, al-Ṭūsī is fully aware of a spectrum of veracity, recognizing that the material gathered may indeed contain false information. Nonetheless, this schema for assaying truth-value, with its specialized terminology—such as *burhān*, *ẓāhir*, *baʿd*, *ṣiḍq*, *mutawātir*, *qāʿi*, *shubha*, *taṣhīh*—creates an air of scientific rigour in the pursuit of establishing authenticity. Al-Ṭūsī's exposition reveals a conscious attempt to counter those who might doubt the veracity of the marvellous tales he records.

This desire to differentiate the potentially spurious from the real also finds its expression in the introduction to al-Qazwīnī's *ʿAjāʾib al-makhlūqāt*. Not only does al-Qazwīnī give a rationale for the encyclopaedia as a whole, but he, like al-Ṭūsī before him, explores the importance of veracity in the configuration of the marvellous.

### Pleasurable Speculation

Before delving into his taxonomy of wonder, al-Qazwīnī frames his entire project as an investigation into the divine sublimity (*ʿaẓama*) expressed in natural phenomena, a common motif within Arabic and Persian descriptive geography and cosmography.<sup>17</sup> His speculation into the wonders of God's design, in the first instance, is overtly in dialogue with both the Qurʾān and the traditions of the Prophet (*ahādīth*). Al-Qazwīnī places the contemplation of God's creation in the context of the following Qurʾānic verse:

﴿أَفَلَمْ يَنْظُرُوا إِلَى السَّمَاءِ فَوْقَهُمْ كَيْفَ بَنَيْنَاهَا وَزَيَّنَّاهَا وَمَا لَهَا مِنْ فُرُوجٍ﴾

Did they not look into the sky above them as to how we formed it and decorated it and how there are no rifts therein? (Q: 50.6)

As he explains, 'looking (*naẓar*) at God's creation, does not signify merely casting the pupil of the eye in the direction of the heavens', but rather, for him, this verse has an explicitly speculative meaning.<sup>18</sup> Situating us inside a broader epistemological framework, al-Qazwīnī argues that the true meaning of *naẓar* 'is contemplation (*fikr*) on those things intelligible through reason (*maʿqūlāt*), and on those things perceivable

<sup>16</sup>Al-Ṭūsī, *ʿAjāʾib nāma*, 16–17.

<sup>17</sup>See, for instance, the introductions to Ibn Rusta's (fl. 300/912) descriptive geography, and to Yāqūt al-Rūmī's geographical dictionary. Ibn Rusta, *al-Aʿlāq al-naḥṣa*, ed. M.J. de Goeje (Leiden: Brill, 1892), 3–4; Yāqūt al-Rūmī, *Muʿjam al-buldān* (Bayrūt: Dār Ṣādir, 1955), vol. 1, 7; cf. al-Qazwīnī, *Āthār al-bilād fi akhbār al-ʿibād* (Bayrūt: Dār Ṣādir, 1960), 56; for *ʿaẓama* as a rubric for studying the wonders of world, see Abū ʿl-Shaykh al-Iṣfahānī (d. 360/979), *Kitāb al-ʿaẓama*, ed. Muḥammad Fāris (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1994), 17–38.

<sup>18</sup>Such Qurʾānic quotations are standard to broader theological discourses on the argument from design, as is the notion that the contemplation of God's creation leads to knowledge of the existence of God. See al-Ghazālī, *al-Ḥikma fi makhlūqāt Allāh*, ed. Muḥammad Rashīd Qabbānī (Bayrūt: Tawzīʿ Dār Iḥyāʾ al-ʿUlūm, 1978), 13–15. Al-Ṭūsī quotes Q. 30:50, 'contemplate the signs of God's compassion', (*fa-ʿnẓur ilā āthār rahmat ʾllāh*) to a similar end; al-Ṭūsī, *ʿAjāʾib nāma*, 1.

through the senses (*mahsūsāt*), and investigation (*baḥṭh*) into their underlying principle ('*an hikmatihā*) and their uses, so that their truths appear on examination'.<sup>19</sup>

This particular definition of contemplation echoes Greek philosophical traditions, which, by the time that al-Qazwīnī writes, had been fully appropriated, internalized, and transformed in the fields of Islamic philosophy (*falsafa*) and theology (*kalām*).<sup>20</sup> The conversion of 'intelligibles' (*νοητά*) into *ma'qūlāt* and 'sensibles' (*αἰσθητά*) into *mahsūsāt* had taken place centuries before, during the 'Abbāsīd translation movement that set out to synthesize Greek philosophy into Arabic.<sup>21</sup> Much of the terminology and many of the debates recurrent throughout Greek traditions of learning had been completely absorbed into, and refashioned through, Arabic and Persian intellectual discourses.<sup>22</sup>

Al-Qazwīnī's definition of *naẓar* speaks to a broader backdrop of Hellenistic philosophy. Aristotle, for instance, in his *Metaphysica*, discusses the difference between speculative and practical knowledge:

ὁρθῶς δ' ἔχει καὶ τὸ καλεῖσθαι τὴν φιλοσοφίαν ἐπιστήμην τῆς ἀληθείας.  
θεωρητικῆς μὲν γὰρ τέλος ἀλήθεια πρακτικῆς δ' ἔργον.

It is right, moreover, that philosophy should be called knowledge of the truth. Whereas the goal of practical knowledge is action, the goal of speculative knowledge is truth.<sup>23</sup>

This is rendered, with some liberty, into the Arabic translation of this section of Aristotle's *Metaphysica*:

مِنَ الصَّوَابِ أَنْ تُسَمَّى مَعْرِفَةُ الْحَقِّ مِنَ الْفَلْسَفَةِ الْفَلْسَفَةُ النَّظَرِيَّةُ لِأَنَّ غَايَةَ الْمَعْرِفَةِ  
النَّظَرِيَّةِ الْحَقُّ وَغَايَةَ الْمَعْرِفَةِ الْعَمَلِيَّةِ الْفَعْلُ.

<sup>19</sup>Al-Qazwīnī, *Ajā'ib*, 3. OR 14140, f. 1a; Yeni Cami, 813, fol. 3a; var. *tafakkur*, Fārūq Sa'd (ed.), 26. In his introduction, al-Ṭūsī lays out a similar motif concerning contemplation (*fikr*) and knowledge (*dānīsh*) in relationship to marvels; al-Ṭūsī, *Ajā'ib nāma*, 1–2.

<sup>20</sup>Following the three-stage pattern of the introduction, appropriation, and naturalization of Hellenistic learning into Islamicate scholarship, as advanced by A.I. Sabra, the currents of Greek philosophical traditions that reach al-Qazwīnī would have already been incorporated into broader Islamic discourses of theology (*kalām*). A. I. Sabra, 'The Appropriation and Subsequent Naturalization of Greek Science in Medieval Islam: A Preliminary Statement', *History of Science* 25 (1987): 223–43 (pp. 236–8). It is of note, concerning the place of scientific writing in the context of *madrasa* education, that al-Qazwīnī throughout the end of his life dedicated himself to teaching in *al-madrasa al-Sharābiyya* of Wāṣit. See pseudo-Ibn al-Fuwaṣī, *Kitāb al-ḥawādith* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1997), 469. This fits into Sabra's broader discussion of the role of the *madrasa* in the continued study of science.

<sup>21</sup>See Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: the Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and early 'Abbāsīd Society (2<sup>nd</sup>–4<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup> centuries)*, (New York: Routledge, 1998).

<sup>22</sup>See Sabra, 'The Appropriation'. On the broader absorption of Greek material in the context of Islamic education, see George Makdisi, *The Rise of College: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981), 77–80.

<sup>23</sup>Aristotle, *Metaphysica*, ed. W. Jaeger (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 993<sup>b</sup>19–21; cf. Ibn Sīnā, *Ilāhiyyāt*, ed. al-Ab Qanawāī and Sa'īd Zāyid (al-Qāhira: al-Hay'a al-'Āmma li-Shu'ūn al-Maṭābi' al-Amiriyya, 1960), vol. 1, 3 and 5.

It is correct that knowledge of truth in philosophy is called speculative philosophy, for the aim of speculative knowledge is truth and the aim of practical knowledge is action.<sup>24</sup>

Aristotle links philosophy to the speculative knowledge of truth, translated in Arabic as *al-maʿrifa al-naẓariyya*. In the Arabic context, *al-ḥaqq* (the truth) takes on a further valence, beyond Aristotle's higher truth (ἀλήθεια), standing in Islamic traditions as one of the 99 names for God. For al-Qazwīnī, speculation (*naẓar*) ultimately bears a theological dimension, which he aligns with a scientific pursuit of discovering the order of the natural world, based on an implicit teleological argument from design for the proof of God, as reflected through the marvels of creation.

Out of this speculation into the nature of existence, al-Qazwīnī cites a *ḥadīth* where the Prophet asks God to show him the elements of the world as they really are (*arim̄ ʿl-ashyāʿa kamā hiya*). This is followed by another *ḥadīth* where the Prophet enjoins, 'Contemplate God's creation' (*tafakkārū fī khalq̄ ʿllāh̄*).<sup>25</sup> A version of this prophetic saying, deployed to theological ends by Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), which al-Qazwīnī does not quote, adds: 'but do not ponder God Himself' (*wa-lā tafakkirū fī ʿllāh̄*).<sup>26</sup> Regardless of whether al-Qazwīnī intentionally evokes such a distinction, his work itself does not delve into broader theological questions concerning the transcendent nature of God, whom he identifies as the Necessary Existent (*wājib al-wujūd*),<sup>27</sup> but turns speculation toward the realm of existence, describing the diverse world of creation and not contemplating the hand of the Creator.

Al-Qazwīnī's notion of speculation (*naẓar*) resonates with an epistemological discourse, fully developed in Islamic theology, on the acquisition of knowledge. Al-Ghazālī, for instance, positions theology (*kalām*) as the most universal knowledge (*al-ʿilm al-kullī*) of all religious disciplines (*al-ʿulūm al-dīniyya*), for, according to him, it is the theologian who examines (*yanẓur*) the most general matters of all, namely existence (*marwūjūd*).<sup>28</sup> By setting in motion a broader theological framework concerning creation, al-Qazwīnī goes on to affirm that contemplation on the wonders of existence brings both pleasure in this world (*al-ladhḥāt al-dunyawiyya*) and happiness in the next (*al-saʿādāt*

<sup>24</sup>Ibn Rushd, *Tafsīr mā baʿd al-ṭabīʿa*, ed. Maurice Bouyges (Beirut: Imprimerie catholique, 1938–48), vol. 1, 11. For a description of the various pre-modern Arabic translations of the different books of the *Metaphysica*, see Bouyges' posthumous introductory volume to his edition of Ibn Rushd's commentary. Maurice Bouyges, *Notice* (1952): cxvi–cxxiv and cxxvii–cxxxii. Ibn Rushd availed himself of several different Arabic translations in the course of his commentary. To date, Bouyges' edition is the only available edition of these Arabic translations of the *Metaphysica*. On the translations of the *Metaphysica* into Arabic, see Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 409–10, cited in Bouyges, *Notice*, cxvii; on the various titles given to it in Arabic, see Bouyges, *Notice*, cxxiv–cxvii; see also Amos Bertolacci, *The Reception of Aristotle's Metaphysics in Avicenna's Kitāb al-Šifāʾ* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 595–8.

<sup>25</sup>Al-Qazwīnī, *ʿAjāʾib*, 4.

<sup>26</sup>Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, ed. Maurice Bouyges (Beirut: Imprimerie catholique, 1927), 132, §71. For this *ḥadīth* and variants, see al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr fī ʿl-tafsīr bi-ʿl-maʿthūr*, (Miṣr: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Maymaniyya, 1314/1897), vol. 7, 663; the significance of the second part of this *ḥadīth*—namely, the command not to think about God Himself—supports a theological injunction against anthropomorphism.

<sup>27</sup>Al-Qazwīnī, *ʿAjāʾib*, 3.

<sup>28</sup>Al-Ghazālī, *al-Muṣṭafā min ʿilm al-fiqh*, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Arqam, undated), vol. 1, 18. On the broader epistemological role of *naẓar* as a foundation of religious knowledge, see Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed*, 250 ff.

*al-ukhrawiyya*).<sup>29</sup> The link between wonder and pleasure has a long genealogy. Aristotle, for instance, in the *Ars rhetorica*, argues that the act of wondering is alone a source of pleasure.<sup>30</sup> This idea appears in the Arabic translation, known as *al-Khaṭāba*,<sup>31</sup> where that which is marvellous (*‘ajīb*), or which causes one to marvel (*yata‘ajjabu minhu*), is considered pleasurable (*ladhīdh*).<sup>32</sup>

For his part, al-Qazwīnī draws from the Qur’ān and *ḥadīth* to argue that pleasure arises from acts of contemplation. This is part of a bid to justify his entire body of wonders as the fruit of his dutiful labour. In this schema, the more that one contemplates marvellous phenomena, the closer one comes to God.<sup>33</sup> As with medieval Christian theology, where wonder (*admiratio*) seeks its own destruction in knowledge (*scientia*),<sup>34</sup> Islamicate discourses on wonder turn to the sign of the marvellous as a path toward understanding the divine order of existence. Thus al-Qazwīnī positions the pursuit of the strange and remote as part of the perfection of the mind in a progression toward greater awareness, which is only achieved after studying the various branches of knowledge (*al-‘ulūm*), purifying one’s morals, and disciplining the lower self (*riyādat al-nafs*).<sup>35</sup> He argues that once this knowledge is attained, higher levels of perception become manifest:

تَنْفِخُ لَهُ عَيْنُ الْبَصِيرَةِ وَيَرَى فِي كُلِّ شَيْءٍ مِنْ الْعَجَبِ مَا يَعْجِزُ ذِكْرُ بَعْضِهِ وَلَوْ ذَكَرَ طَرْفًا مِنْهُ لَعَبَّرَهُ  
لَا تُنْكِرُهُ.

The [internal] eye of insight opens to him and he sees every aspect of wonder, the mention of which is impossible to articulate completely, for even if he expressed just a bit of it to someone else, this other person would not believe him.<sup>36</sup>

This apophatic gesture toward the wondrous ineffability of God’s design highlights a deeper tension concerning the relative veracity of the material gathered. Al-Qazwīnī sets out to frame his wonder-book in dialogue with speculative traditions of exploration and contemplation.<sup>37</sup> While wonder is a means or catalyst for knowledge, for al-Qazwīnī it is

<sup>29</sup>Al-Qazwīnī, *‘Ajā’ib*, 4.

<sup>30</sup>Aristotle, *Ars rhetorica*, ed. W. D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), 1371<sup>a</sup>31–1371<sup>b</sup>12.

<sup>31</sup>See Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 406–7.

<sup>32</sup>Aristotle, *Ars rhetorica, The Arabic Version*, ed. M. C. Lyons (Cambridge: Pembroke College, 1982), vol. 1, 58.

<sup>33</sup>Al-Qazwīnī, *‘Ajā’ib*, 4.

<sup>34</sup>Bynum, ‘Wonder’, 4; on wonder as leading to knowledge through the destruction of ignorance, see Alexander of Aphrodisias’ (fl. end of second century CE) commentary on 982<sup>b</sup>12–13 of Aristotle’s *Metaphysica*. Michael Hayduck, ed., *In Aristotelis Metaphysica commentaria* (Berlin: G. Reimeri, 1891), 15, 25–30.

<sup>35</sup>Al-Qazwīnī, *‘Ajā’ib*, 4; var. *al-‘ulūm wa-l-riyādat*, Fārūq Sa’d (ed.), p. 27; Wüstenfeld, *al-‘ulūm al-riyādiyya*; Yeni Cami, 813 offers a *lectio facilior* with *al-‘ulūm wa-riyādat al-nafs*, fol. 3a; the sense suggested here is akin to what al-Ghazālī outlines in his *summa*, which itself contains a discussion of purifying morals (*tadhīb al-akhlāq*) (pp. 59–60). Al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn* (Mişr: Dār Ihyā’ al-Kutub al-‘Arabiyya, 1957), bk. 22, ‘*Riyādat al-nafs*’, vol. 3, 47–77.

<sup>36</sup>Al-Qazwīnī, *‘Ajā’ib*, 4. A very similar sentiment is expressed by the Ḥanbalī jurist and preacher, Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200), in his homiletic work. Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣayd al-khāṭir*, ed. al-Sayyid Muḥammad Sayyid and Sayyid Ibrāhīm (al-Qāhira: Dār al-ḥadīth, 1996), 10.

<sup>37</sup>On the question of existence created to its best, see Eric Ormsby, *Theodicy in Islamic Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984).

also an end in and of itself. As such, pleasure forms a key element in al-Qazwīnī's justification for his subject matter.

In a detailed treatment of Aristotelian thought, the philosopher al-Fārābī (d. 339/950) makes a brief excursus to examine why humans take interest in story-telling. He describes how humankind desires those things that are perceivable by the senses (*maḥsūsāt*), such as statues, beautiful vistas, and things pleasant to hear and to smell.<sup>38</sup> Al-Fārābī explains how this desire, which is tied directly to cognition and perception, arises for no other reason than for the experience of aesthetic pleasure:

فإنه ليس معنى اللذني شيئاً سوى أنه مُدركٌ أفضل إدراكٍ إدراكاً أفضل.

For the meaning 'pleasurable' is nothing other than that one is apprehending most excellently a most excellent object of apprehension.<sup>39</sup>

This definition forms part of al-Fārābī's larger description of how humankind obtains pleasure (*ladhdha*) from fables (*khurāfāt*), narratives (*aḥādīth*), histories of people (*akhbār al-nās*), and histories of nations (*akhbār al-umam*), which 'man uses and to which he listens solely in order to take delight in them' (*innamā yasta'mil<sup>u</sup>-hā 'l-insān<sup>u</sup> wa-yasma<sup>a</sup>-hā li-yatafarrah<sup>a</sup> bi-hā faqat*).<sup>40</sup>

Of particular interest, in light of our inquiry into al-Qazwīnī's collection of both ordinary and extraordinary phenomena, is the literary sensibility present in al-Fārābī's discussion of the intersection of sense-perception, narrative, and pleasure. Al-Fārābī details how the aesthetic experience of perception need not lead to any end other than the pleasure of the apprehension itself. The place of *khurāfāt* in al-Fārābī's list of discursive forms, loosely translated here as fables or myths, however, does not help us to truly fathom the aesthetic sensibilities of 'ajā'ib discourse.<sup>41</sup>

For al-Fārābī's view of the utility of narrative as pleasure for pleasure's sake cannot fully dissolve the ontological tension that is at the very heart of the wondrous. Ultimately, the aesthetic logic that informs writings on the wonders of the world is one which is in constant dialectic with questions of veracity and mendacity. Al-Fārābī's comments, rather, point to an appreciation for the physiological dimensions behind the enjoyment of narrative, which transcends the question of both value and authenticity. Al-Fārābī further stresses this point, arguing that delight (*tafarrah*) in something means nothing other than to find comfort and pleasure. It is in this context where he advances that we take pleasure in looking at imitators (*muḥākūn*), listening to imitative statements (*al-aqāwīl allatī yuḥākā bi-hā*) and the recitation of poetry. As for the question of *khurāfāt*,

<sup>38</sup> Al-Fārābī, *Falsafat Aristūṭālīs*, ed. Muḥsin Maḥdī (Bayrūt, Dār Majallat Shi'r, 1961), 61. Compare with Al-Kindī's (d. c. 252/866) discussion of story-telling and the role of *khurāfāt* in the process of education (*ta'lim*), in his treatise on metaphysics. Al-Kindī, *Kitāb fi 'l-falsafa al-ūlā*, published in *Rasā'il al-Kindī al-falsafiyya*, ed. Muḥammad 'Abd al-Hādī (Miṣr: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, 1950), 110–11. The subject of how both al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā approach the issue of pleasure in the Aristotelian context has been discussed by Salim Kemal, *The Poetics of Alfarabi and Avicenna*, (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 158 ff.

<sup>39</sup> Al-Fārābī, *Falsafat Aristūṭālīs*, 61.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> On *khurāfāt*, its aetiology, along with the broader question of fiction in Islamicate traditions, see Seeger A. Bonebakker, 'Some Medieval Views on Fantastic Stories', *Quaderni di studi arabi* 10 (1992): 21–42.

al-Fārābī holds that humankind relates and recites fables (*khurāfāt*) solely for the pleasure (*li-'l-iltidhādih*) derived from apprehending them.<sup>42</sup>

### 'I have no female nor male camel in this affair'

Al-Qazwīnī, in contrast, would not call the material he gathers a body of fictions nor a collection of fables. And it would be a mistake to consider his cosmography as such, for the work truly is an amalgam of various traditions, which speak to such learned registers as astronomy, geology, medicine, biology, geography, and so forth. However, al-Qazwīnī punctuates this 'high' level of discourse with a string of anecdotal occasions, drawn from age-old traditions of fantastic tales.

It is the importance of veracity, or least of its semblance, which leads al-Qazwīnī into a detailed justification for the inclusion of potentially spurious narratives. Al-Qazwīnī positions for himself an escape route out of the dialectic between the real and the imaginary, presenting his work as an earnest reflection on the divine design replicated throughout every aspect of being. Like al-Ṭūsī before him, al-Qazwīnī tackles the problem of authenticity head-on, describing how he includes in his work matters that only a fool would reject. This issue leads him into a preliminary taxonomy of the phenomena treated:

وَقَدْ ذَكَرْتُ فِيهِ أَشْيَاءَ يَأْبَاهَا طَبَعُ الْغَيْبِيِّ الْغَائِلِ وَلَا تُنْكِرُهَا نَفْسُ  
الذَّكِيِّ الْعَاقِلِ وَإِنْ كَانَتْ بَعِيدَةً عَنِ الْعَادَاتِ الْمَعْهُودَةِ وَالْمُشَاهَدَةِ  
الْمَأْلُوفَةِ لَكِنْ لَا يُسْتَعْظَمُ شَيْءٌ مَعَ قُدْرَةِ الْخَالِقِ وَحِيلَةِ الْمَخْلُوقِ وَجَمِيعِ  
مَا فِيهِ إِمَّا عَجَائِبُ صَنَعَ الْبَارِي تَعَالَى وَذَلِكَ إِمَّا مَحْسُوسٌ أَوْ مَعْقُولٌ لَا  
شَكَّ فِيهَا وَلَا خَلَلَ وَإِمَّا حِكَايَةَ ظَرِيفَةٍ مَنْسُوبَةٍ إِلَى رِوَايَتِهَا لَا نَاقَةَ لِي  
فِيهَا وَلَا جَمَلٌ وَإِمَّا خَوَاصُّ غَرِيبَةٍ وَذَلِكَ مِمَّا لَا يَفِي الْعُمُرُ بِتَجَرُّبَتِهَا وَلَا  
مَعْنَى لِيَتَرَكَ كُلُّهَا إِذْ كَانَ الشُّكُّ فِي بَعْضِهَا.

I have mentioned in [this work] matters which the disposition of a negligent idiot might reject, but that the soul of a rational man could not deny. Although these affairs may be far from well-known customs and ordinarily witnessed events, nothing should be deemed too great for the power of the Creator or the cunning of creation and everything therein. They are the marvels of the art of the Creator, which are either perceivable by the senses or intelligible by the intellect, for which there can be no doubt or imperfection concerning them; or they are elegant tales ascribed to transmitters, for which I have no responsibility concerning their authenticity; or they are strange properties for which a lifetime would not be enough to test them, and thus it would make little sense to ignore all of them, since there is doubt concerning just some of them.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup>Al-Fārābī, *Falsafat Aristūṭālis*, 61.

<sup>43</sup>Al-Qazwīnī, 4–5. On the meaning of the Arabic word *hīla* pl. *hīyal*, as ruse, cunning, deception, trick, wiles, which is the sense suggested in this particular context, see the third technical use of the term as

Here, al-Qazwīnī echoes al-Ṭūsī's rationale for including material of suspect origin, arguing that one lifetime is not sufficient to verify all the marvels of the world. At first glance, we may find striking the mixture of philosophical terminology (*maḥsūs*, *ma'qūl*) with such colourful proverbs as '*lā nāqat<sup>um</sup> lī fī-hā wa-lā jamal*' (literally, 'I have no female nor male camel in this affair').<sup>44</sup> Al-Qazwīnī sustains throughout his introduction a rhetorical flair that mixes a range of semantic fields together, as he structures his argumentation, moving deftly across various discursive registers.

From the pious to the epistemological, the philosophical to the popular, al-Qazwīnī, with sundry references and allusions, positions his work to be part of broader belletristic conventions of erudition and etiquette characteristic of *adab*. Furthermore, the lingering yet persistent traces of internal rhyme and rhythm (*saj'*)—not only in the above passage (*ṭab<sup>at</sup> 'l-ghabīyi 'l-ghāfil, nafs<sup>u</sup> 'l-dhakīyi 'l-āqil; lā khalal, lā jamal*), but consistent throughout the introduction—gives a driving, rhetorical force to his argumentation.<sup>45</sup> Al-Qazwīnī sets out to persuade his readers of the legitimacy of his work on wonders, not

---

outlined by Schacht, J. 'Ḥiyal', *EF*<sup>2</sup>; the other technical senses given are: (1) strategies in war, (2) automata/mechanical devices and thus the science of mechanics, and (4) specific kinds of legal devices. Also see Lane, A. s.v., *Arabic-Lexicon*. The context here suggests something playfully akin to the word as used by al-Jahīz in the title of his treatise, *Kūtab ḥiyal al-lusus* ('On the deceptions of thieves'). Charles Pellat, 'Ġāḥiẓiana iii. Essai d'inventaire de l'oeuvre ḡāḥiẓienne', *Arabica* 3, no. 2 (1956), 147–80, §95, cf. §§60, 111. In this regard, al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī describes *ḥīla* as a means of attaining some state secretly (*fī khufyat<sup>im</sup>*), which, while used most often in a context of wickedness (*khubth*), can sometimes be referenced to signify wisdom (*ḥikma*). Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Mufradāt fī gharīb al-Qur'ān*, ed. Muḥammad Sayyid Kīlānī (al-Qāhira: Muṣṭafā 'l-Bābī 'l-Ḥalabī, 1961), 137. It is this negative sense of the word that the Ash'arī theologian al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013) draws on in his treatise. Al-Bāqillānī, *Kūtab al-bayān 'an al-farq bayna 'l-mu'jizāt wa-'l-karāmāt wa-'l-ḥiyal wa-'l-kihāna wa-'l-sihr wa-'l-nāranjāt* ('Exposing the difference between Prophetic miracles and charismatic acts, tricks, divination, magic, and spells'), ed. R. McCarthy (Bayrūt: al-Maktaba al-Sharqiyya, 1958), §§66–70; this is the meaning used by Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 482–8. Al-Qazwīnī, as Yāqūt before him, highlights the juxtaposition between divine power and the trickery of creation. In this regard, there are interesting similarities to the Greek concept of *μητις*, where numerous animals are endowed with *μητις* serving 'comme l'incarnation de la ruse dans le monde animal', Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Les ruses de l'intelligence: la mētis des Grecs* (Paris: Flammarion, 1974), 32–57 (p. 41). The *ḥiyal* mentioned by al-Qazwīnī should not be confused with the neutral, technical sense of the word in Islamic jurisprudence to signify legal stratagems for extra-legal ends (i.e. Schacht's fourth category). The sense of *ḥiyal* in relationship to *automata*, in contrast, is relevant to a broader discussion of '*ajā'ib*, in so far as the wonder which they inspire is produced through the trickery of mechanical deceptions. See, for instance, the description of the mechanical stand for the 'Uthmānic codex commissioned by the Muwaḥḥid ruler 'Abd al-Mu'min (d. 558/1163) as a wonder of the world. Al-Maqqarī, *Nafh al-ṭīb* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1995), vol. 2, 146–9; cf. my article, Travis Zadeh, 'From Drops of Blood: Charisma and Political Legitimacy in the *translatio* of the 'Uthmānic codex of al-Andalus', *Journal of Arabic Literature* 39 (2008): 322–46.

<sup>44</sup>As for the pedigree of this expression, Abū 'l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī (d. shortly after 360/971) states that the first person to use this proverb (*mathal*) was the pre-Islamic warrior al-Ḥārith b. 'Ubad. Abū 'l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, *Kūtab al-aghānī* (Bayrūt: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1994), vol. 5, 41. Sībawayh (d. c. 180/796) quotes this expression as a line of poetry from the first/seventh-century poet, Abū Jandal al-Rā'ī. Sībawayh, *al-Kūtab*, ed. 'Abd al-Salām (al-Qāhira: Dār al-Qalam, 1968), vol. 2, 295. This statement is very much part of the lexicon of Arabic proverbs (*amthāl*), as is the case here with al-Qazwīnī's deployment of the expression. See Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Maydānī (d. 518/1124), *Majma' al-amthāl*, ed. Na'im Ḥusayn Zarzūr (Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1988), vol. 2, 260–1; cf. al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144), who gives a different account of the origin of this expression. Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Mustaḥṣā fī amthāl al-'Arab*, ed. Muḥammad 'Abd al-Mu'īd Khān (Ḥaydarābād, India: Majlis Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-'Uthmāniyya, 1962), vol. 2, 267.

<sup>45</sup>Use of *saj'* is a common literary feature of such works; see, for instance, the introduction to the wonder-book of Abū Ḥāmid al-Gharnāṭī, a major source for al-Qazwīnī. Abū Ḥāmid al-Gharnāṭī *Tuḥfat al-albāb*, ed. Gabriel Ferrand, *Journal asiatique* 207 (1925): 1–304 (pp. 33–9).

only based on its scientific merit but also on the grounds of its aesthetic value. In this regard, we may appreciate how he emphasizes elegant narrative (*hikāya ḡarīfa*) as central to the exposition of the marvellous.<sup>46</sup>

Yāqūt al-Rūmī (d. 626/1229), in his geographical dictionary *Muʿjam al-buldān*, from which, incidentally, al-Qazwīnī often pilfers *verbatim*, explores in very similar terms this concern for accuracy, fidelity, and honesty. We hear from Yāqūt how he has included in his work accounts which could be considered suspect:

وَلَقَدْ ذَكَرْتُ أَشْيَاءَ كَثِيرَةً تَأْبَاهَا الْعُقُولُ، وَتَنْفِرُ عَنْهَا طِبَاعُ مَنْ لَهُ مَحْصُولٌ، لِبُعْدِهَا  
عَنِ الْعَادَاتِ الْمَأْلُوفَةِ، وَتَنَافُرِهَا عَنِ الْمَشَاهِدَاتِ الْمَعْرُوفَةِ، وَإِنْ كَانَ لَا يُسْتَعْظَمُ  
شَيْءٌ مَعَ قُدْرَةِ الْخَالِقِ وَحِيلِ الْمَخْلُوقِ، وَأَنَا مُرْتَابٌ بِهَا نَافِرٌ مُتَبَرِّئٌ إِلَى قَارِيهَا مِنْ  
صِحَّتِهَا، لِأَنِّي كَتَبْتُهَا حِرْصًا عَلَى إِحْرَازِ الْفَوَائِدِ، وَطَلَبًا لِتَحْصِيلِ الْفَلَائِدِ مِنْهَا  
وَالْفَرَائِدِ، فَإِنْ كَانَتْ حَقًّا فَقَدْ أَخَذْنَا مِنْهَا بِنَصِيبِ الْمُنْصِيبِ، وَإِنْ كَانَ بَاطِلًا فَلَهَا  
فِي الْحَقِّ شَرِكٌ وَنَصِيبٌ، لِأَنِّي نَقَلْتُهَا كَمَا وَجَدْتُهَا، فَأَنَا صَادِقٌ فِي إِيرَادِهَا كَمَا  
أُورِدْتُهَا، لِتَعْرِفَ مَا قِيلَ فِي ذَلِكَ حَقًّا كَانَ أَوْ بَاطِلًا فَإِنَّ قَائِلًا لَوْ قَالَ: سَمِعْتُ زَيْدًا  
يَكْذِبُ، لِأَحْبَبْتَ أَنْ تَعْرِفَ كَيْفِيَّةَ كَذِبِهِ.

I have mentioned many things which rational minds would reject and from which the natural dispositions of whoever has procured knowledge flee due to the remoteness of such things from familiar customs and their incongruity with known observations. Yet, nothing should be deemed as too great for the power of the Creator or the wiles of creation. However, I am sceptical of such things and shrink away from them, discharging myself to the reader of responsibility over the truthfulness of these matters, for I have written these things down desiring to preserve the benefits of knowledge, seeking to obtain from them necklaces and rare gems. If they be true, then we may claim a portion of what is correct, if however they prove false, they nonetheless share part in the truth, for I have related them just as I have found them, I am honest in adducing them the way have adduced them, so that you may know what has been said, whether it be true or false. For if someone were to say, 'I heard Zayd lie', certainly you would be interested in knowing the manner in which he lied.<sup>47</sup>

This elaborate justification to include material of dubious pedigree not only frees Yāqūt from any responsibility for the authenticity therein, but also frees us as readers to determine the value of the narratives ourselves. Yāqūt goes on to link his justification for suspect information with how *ḡadīth* collectors have often collected material that is unsound (*saqīm*). Ultimately, he concludes, the responsibility of determining what is authentic (*ṣaḡīh*) rests with his readers.

<sup>46</sup>For the signification of *hikāya* in the context of Arabic literature, see Pellat, s.v., *EI*<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>47</sup>Yāqūt al-Rūmī, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, vol. 1, 12.

To this end, Yāqūt argues that the occurrence of a narrative account, in and of itself, tenders value as a testament to the spectrum of discursive potential. He succeeds in bypassing the question of authenticity altogether, finding, rather, intrinsic value in narration itself; for although something might not be true, are we as readers not curious how or why it is false? Yāqūt's rationale hinges on a discourse of curiosity tied to the pleasure of seeking knowledge in imagining the wide array of narrative possibilities. In this swift turn of phrase, Yāqūt justifies the field of potential, the account that may potentially be true, as a strategy for mapping out the reality of the world.

The striking parallels as to how both Yāqūt and al-Qazwīnī frame this issue suggest, not so much plagiarism on the part of al-Qazwīnī, but an intentional intertextual reworking. Al-Qazwīnī's reference to the power of the creator and the cunning of creation (*qudrat<sup>u</sup> 'l-khāliq<sup>i</sup> wa-hīlat<sup>u</sup> 'l-makhlūq<sup>i</sup>*) finds an almost natural outlet in the narrative universe of geography and cosmography. However, when al-Qazwīnī reformulates this expression, he is clearly drawing on Yāqūt's justification for the dissemination of narrative material that does not bear the strongest mettle. Unlike other instances where al-Qazwīnī lifts whole sections word-for-word from Yāqūt's *Mu'jam al-buldān*, this moment of intertextuality speaks to a conscious reconfiguration.

These two passages both engage the problem of authenticity by skirting responsibility for the transmission of potentially spurious narratives. Al-Qazwīnī, however, gives a twist to Yāqūt's language. As quoted above, Yāqūt informs us that he has mentioned many things that rational minds would reject. Al-Qazwīnī folds this statement back onto itself, arguing that in his own work he has included marvels that 'only a negligent idiot would reject, but which a rational man could not deny'. For a writer so attentive and indebted to Yāqūt's work, this clear distinction suggests a playful reassessment of the argument. With this reversal, al-Qazwīnī argues that the marvellous is recognized only by one who contemplates existence and develops the faculty of reason; the negligent, out of their ignorance, fail to perceive the marvellous design of nature, and thus readily reject that which they do not understand.<sup>48</sup>

From this distinction between ignorance and knowledge, the epistemological backdrop foregrounding al-Qazwīnī's treatment of wonder comes into sharper focus. Continuing his introduction, al-Qazwīnī turns to the question of scientific rigour and experimentation to further situate his work. Throughout all this, the issue of veracity cannot be escaped, as it is predicated on his desire that this collection of marvels be authentic (*aḥbab<sup>u</sup> an takūn<sup>a</sup> min-hā 'alā thiqa<sup>tn</sup>*).<sup>49</sup> To this end, al-Qazwīnī describes how he has prepared his work so that the wonders of the world could be examined and tested (*li-tajribat<sup>i</sup>-hā*).<sup>50</sup>

### Magnets, Garlic, and Wondrous Perplexity

If a phenomenon does not correspond to how it is described by established authorities, it does not necessarily mean that the authorities are wrong. To make this point, al-Qazwīnī turns to the famous case of how magnets are known to attract iron, but when rubbed with garlic they are said to lose their special power of attraction. On this point, al-Qazwīnī claims

<sup>48</sup>Abū Ḥamid al-Gharnāfi makes a similar argument (*Tuhfat al-albāb*, 37); this is a line of argumentation developed by Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣayd al-khāṭir*, 414–15.

<sup>49</sup>Al-Qazwīnī, *Ajā'ib*, 5.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

that if one merely poured vinegar onto a magnet afflicted with garlic, the effect of the garlic would be cancelled out and the magnet would again return to its normal state.<sup>51</sup>

We may observe for the purpose of our investigation that garlic does not have such a power over magnets.<sup>52</sup> However, it is of note, that—like much material on marvels—this popularly held belief disseminated from learned Greek culture into both Latinate and Arabo-Persianate intellectual traditions.<sup>53</sup> We may find it ironic that, just as al-Qazwīnī enjoins us to adhere to something akin to the scientific method, he uses an example that is itself based on a popular misconception, reified by authoritative tradition, rather than independent investigation.

Yet the account of a garlic-stricken magnet represents for al-Qazwīnī, and arguably for his audience, an established scientific fact, drawn not from our modern notions of empiricism but from authorities of past generations. Indeed, the power of established authorities plays a tremendous role in the endurance of much of this material. With a rhetorical flourish to win over his audience, al-Qazwīnī stresses this point himself:

إِنِّي أَشْهَدُ اللَّهَ أَنَّ شَيْئًا مِنْهَا مَا أَفْتَرَيْتُهُ بَلْ كَتَبْتُ الْكُلَّ كَمَا أَفْتَرَيْتُهُ وَإِنْ  
نَظَرْتَ إِلَيْهَا بِعَيْنِ الرِّضَا فَإِنَّهَا عَنْ كُلِّ عَيْبٍ كَلِيلَةٌ وَإِنْ نَظَرْتَ بِعَيْنِ  
السُّخْطِ فَالْمَسَاوِي كَثِيرَةٌ وَعَيْنُ الْكَرِيمِ عَنِ الْمَعَائِبِ عَمِيَاءٌ وَأُذُنُهُ عَنِ  
الْمَسَاوِي صَمَاءٌ.

I call God the Almighty as witness that there is nothing from these [marvels], which I have invented. Rather, I have written everything down as I have come across them. If you look at these [marvels] with an accepting eye, then [the eye] would be dimmed to every defect. But if you viewed [them] with an eye of indignation, then the shortcomings would be many. The eye of the generous is blind to the blemishes and his ear is deaf to the shortcomings.<sup>54</sup>

Appealing first to our reason and then to our compassion, al-Qazwīnī, with proverbial authority,<sup>55</sup> slips in a kind of *caveat emptor*, rhetorically exonerating himself of any

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

<sup>52</sup>See Daryn Lehoux, 'Tropes, Facts, and Empiricism', *Perspectives on Science* 11, no. 3 (2003): 326–45.

<sup>53</sup>The belief that magnets lose their attractive power when rubbed with garlic can be traced back in the Greek tradition to at least Plutarch (d. c. 120 CE), 'ἡ δὲ σιδηρῆτις λίθος οὐκ ἔχει τὸν σίδηρον, ὡς σκόρδιον χρυσῆ', *Symposiaca problemata, Œuvres morales*, ed. and trans. F. Fuhrmann (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1972), vol. 9, 90, 1.7.641c5. On the dissemination of this belief throughout the West, see Lehoux, 'Tropes, Facts, and Empiricism'. This account became known in Arabic through various translations of Ptolemy's (d. c. 170) geographical/astronomical treatise, the *Tetrabiblos*, translated with the title *Kitāb al-arba'ā*. See Sezgin, *GAS*, vol. 7, 41 ff. For an earlier Arabic version of this popular belief, see al-Mas'ūdī's (d. 345/956) encyclopaedia, *Murūj al-dhahab*, ed. Charles Pellat (Bayrūt: al-Jāmi'a al-Lubnāniyya, 1966–79), §816.

<sup>54</sup>Al-Qazwīnī, *Ajā'ib*, 5.

<sup>55</sup>Al-Qazwīnī draws here on an established proverb, itself expressed in a line of verse ascribed to the 'Alid revolutionary 'Abd Allāh b. Mu'āwiya (fl. 127/740), 'wa-'ayn' l-riḍā 'an kull' 'ayb' kaḥlat' / wa lākinn' 'ayn' l-'sukh' tubdā l-'masāwiya'. See al-Jāhiz, *Kitāb al-ḥayawān*, ed. Muḥammad Bāsil 'Uyūn al-Sūd (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1998), vol. 2, 236; also al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-aghānī*, vol. 12, 214; Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī, *al-Baṣā'ir wa-l-dhakhā'ir*, ed. Ibrāhīm al-Kilānī (Dimashq: Maktabat Aṭlas, 1964), vol. 1, 555; idem, *al-Ṣadāqa wa-l-ṣadiq*, ed. 'Alī Mutawallī Ṣalāḥ (al-Qahira: Maktabat al-Ādāb, 1972),

responsibility for the veracity of the many marvellous accounts contained in his encyclopaedia. The importance of not having invented any aspect of this work speaks directly to the deep concern for truth central to the framing of the ‘*ajā’ib*’ tradition. The established authorities of learned and popular beliefs are held up to shield al-Qazwīnī from any possible reproach. In this way, he sets forth a peculiar kind of dialectic that at once calls for scientific investigation and exploration, while also conversely claims to represent age-old traditions.

What, then, of wonder? Al-Qazwīnī’s opening flirtation with the fabulous, alluding to invented tales whose value his audience may question, leads him into a detailed examination of wonder itself. He divides the remainder of his introduction into four sections that aim to explain the four categories mentioned in his title. Although, nearly a century before, al-Ṭūsī had written a work in Persian bearing the same title and composed of similar material, we find in al-Qazwīnī’s exposition what seems to be a unique addition to the genre of wonder-writing.

Al-Qazwīnī’s taxonomy suggests a scholastic tradition of classifications in the manner of the *Arbor porphyriana* (*tashjīr*). His definitions for created things (*al-makhlūqāt*) and existing things (*al-mawjūdāt*) reflect philosophical and logical traditions of delineation and classification, as inflected in the development of Islamic theology (*kalām*).<sup>56</sup> Al-Qazwīnī informs us that *makhlūq* is everything other than God, which is either self-sufficient (*qā’im<sup>um</sup> bi-’l-dhāt<sup>ih</sup>*) or contingent upon something else (*qā’im<sup>um</sup> bi-’l-ghayr<sup>ih</sup>*); if it is self-sufficient, then it either occupies space (*mutaḥayyiz*) or not; if it occupies space, then it is a body (*jism*); if not, it is a spiritual substance (*al-jawhar al-rūḥānī*).<sup>57</sup>

He continues on in this manner with his definition of creation, until transitioning, in pious reverence for the order of nature, to how God created all the elements of the universe as subordinated to a master plan. A similar pattern of classification is to be found with al-Qazwīnī’s definition of *mawjūd*, which he defines tautologically as all things other than God, thus His creation (*makhlūq<sup>at</sup>-hu*). Here we see how al-Qazwīnī joins these two terms—created things (*makhlūqāt*) and things imbued with being (*mawjūdāt*)—where the creation of being occurs from a divine act, such that all beings other than God are contingent upon Him.

The theological backdrop of the terminology employed, and its philosophical processors, suggests a broad intersection with Greek learning. However obliquely, al-Qazwīnī’s definition of the word ‘*ajab*’ draws upon Aristotelian epistemology:

أَلْعَجَبُ حَيْرَةٌ تَعْرِضُ لِلْإِنْسَانِ لِقُصُورِهِ عَنِ مَعْرِفَةِ سَبَبِ الشَّيْءِ أَوْ عَنِ مَعْرِفَةِ  
كَيْفِيَّةِ تَأْثِيرِهِ فِيهِ.

144; idem, *Akhlaq al-wazīrayn*, ed. Muḥammad b. Tawīt al-Ṭanjī (Dimashq: al-Majma‘ al-‘Ilmī al-‘Arabī, 1965), 17; for further citations, see *Shi‘r ‘Abd Allāh b. Mu‘āwīya*, ed. ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Rādī (Bayrūt: Mu‘assasat al-Risāla, 1976), 90.

<sup>56</sup>Take for instance the strong parallels between al-Qazwīnī’s definition for *makhlūq* and al-Ghazālī’s exploration into the meaning of *mawjūd* in his work, *al-Iqtīṣād fi ‘l-i‘tiqād* (al-Qāhira: Muḥammad ‘Alī Ṣubayḥ, 1971), 15 & ff. In this light, echoes can be heard in al-Qazwīnī’s terminology of Ash‘arī ontology, as outlined, for example, in Richard Frank, ‘The Aś‘arite Ontology: I Primary Entities’, *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 9, no. 2 (1999): 163–231.

<sup>57</sup>Al-Qazwīnī, ‘*Ajā’ib*’, 8.

Wonder is a confusion that appears to man due to his lack of knowledge concerning the cause of something, or lack of knowledge concerning the influence of the cause in the effect produced.<sup>58</sup>

This particular approach to the word ‘*ajab*’ has been examined by Roy Mottahedeh, where he cites how al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī (fl. end of fourth/10th century), in a lexicographical work on the Qur’ān, explains that ‘‘*ajab* and *ta‘ajjub* are states which come to a person at the time of that person’s ignorance of the cause (*sabab*) of something’.<sup>59</sup> In a similar vein, the Mu‘tazilī philologist al-Rummānī (d. 384/994) describes *ta‘ajjub* as obscurity or confusion (*al-ibhām*). He explains that it is normal for man to be astonished (*yata‘ajjab*) by that for which he does not know the cause (*sabab*), adding with an eye toward aesthetic value, that the more the cause of something is obscured, the greater the sense of wonder becomes.<sup>60</sup> Likewise, Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī (d. 414/1023), in *al-Muqābasāt*, follows a similar definition when he defines *ta‘ajjub* as the desire to discover the cause (*sabab*) and reason (‘*illa*) of any unknown issue.<sup>61</sup> This tradition of linking ‘*ajab* and *ta‘ajjub* with the search for the reason behind a given phenomenon continues well past al-Qazwīnī, with such later writers as al-Jurjānī (d. 816/1413) and al-Suyūfī (d. 911/1505).<sup>62</sup>

In the introduction to his *Metaphysica*, Aristotle builds upon the Platonic association of wonder with the development of philosophy,<sup>63</sup> stating that it is through the act of being astonished that man begins to philosophize: ‘*διὰ γὰρ τὸ θαυμάζειν οἱ ἄνθρωποι καὶ νῦν καὶ τὸ πρῶτον ἤρξαντο φιλοσοφεῖν*’.<sup>64</sup> The claim that to wonder is the beginning of philosophy raises the epistemological status of curiosity as a legitimate psychological response to, and engagement with, the phenomenological world of being. Aristotle continues to explain that wonder arises out of a curiosity to uncover the puzzles of existence, starting with obvious difficulties and progressing toward greater perplexities (*διαπορήσαντα*), such as the changes of the moon and of the sun, the movement of the stars, and the origin of the universe.<sup>65</sup> Aristotle argues that whoever wonders (*θαυμάζων*) does so because he is perplexed (*ἀπορῶν*) and feels that he is ignorant concerning a given phenomenon.<sup>66</sup> We may observe how this notion of perplexity (*ἀπορία*) is not only central to Aristotle’s

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 5.

<sup>59</sup>Mottahedeh, ‘*Ajā’ib*, 30; al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Mufradāt*, 322.

<sup>60</sup>Al-Rummānī’s definition is quoted in al-Suyūfī, *al-Itqān fi ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān*, 4th ed. (Bamba’i: Abnā’ Mawlawī Muḥammad b. Ghulām al-Sūrātī, 1978), vol. 2, 99. So too do we find the same citation attributed to al-Rummānī in al-Tahānawī, *Mawsū‘at kashshāf iṣṭilāḥāt al-funūn wa-l-‘ulūm*, ed. ‘Alī Dahrūj (Bayrūt: Maktabat Lubnān, 1996), vol. 1, 474.

<sup>61</sup>Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī, *al-Muqābasāt*, (al-Qāhira: al-Maṭba‘a ‘l-Raḥmāniyya, 1929), §71, 274.

<sup>62</sup>Al-Jurjānī, *Kitāb al-ta‘īfāt*, ed. Gustavus Fluegel (Leipzig: Sumptibus F.C.G. Vogelii, 1845), 152; see Mottahedeh, ‘*Ajā’ib* in *The Thousand and One Nights*’, 30. As for al-Suyūfī, see his *al-Itqān fi ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān*, where he also references other definitions of this term.

<sup>63</sup>Plato, ‘*μάλα γὰρ φιλοσόφου τοῦτο τὸ πάθος, τὸ θαυμάζειν ὃ γὰρ ἄλλη ἀρχὴ φιλοσοφίας ἦσθη*’, in *Theaetetus*, *Platonis Opera*, ed. E. A. Duke et al. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), vol. 1, 155<sup>a</sup>2–4.

<sup>64</sup>*Metaphysica*, 982<sup>b</sup>12–13; cf. *Ars rhetorica*, 1372<sup>b</sup>27–8.

<sup>65</sup>*Metaphysica*, 982<sup>b</sup>15–17. A similar argument is deployed by the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’ to describe their theory of the development of monotheism from polytheism based upon the astonishment which humans felt in the face of the wonders (‘*ajā’ib*) and rarities (*gharā’ib*) of creation. Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, *Rasā’il*, (Bayrūt: Dār Ṣādir 1957), vol. 9, 482.

<sup>66</sup>*Metaphysica*, 982<sup>b</sup>17–18.

definition of wonder, but also to the natural movement of the intellect to contemplate existence.<sup>67</sup> Wonder, for Aristotle, is produced by a necessary perplexity about the order of the universe that leads to curiosity and contemplation, and ultimately concludes teleologically with knowledge of truth.<sup>68</sup>

The extant pre-modern Arabic translations of the *Metaphysica* contain several major lacunae, and, unfortunately for our purposes, do not include the relevant opening section (982<sup>b</sup>12–28) of Aristotle's introductory chapter, known as Alpha Meizon.<sup>69</sup> Nonetheless, there is ample evidence that Aristotle's notion of wonder as the driving force of philosophy was widely known.<sup>70</sup> For instance, Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī, in his *al-Baṣā'ir wa-'l-dhakā'ir*, anecdotally links Aristotle with perplexity and wonder when relating a story of how Plato asked his students what the most amazing thing in the world was. Some of them replied the sky and the stars; some thought daily sustenance; while still others responded mankind. Then they turned to Aristotle. He answered that the most amazing of all things is that whose cause remains unknown (*a'jabu 'l-ashyā' mā lam yu'raf sabab<sup>u</sup>-hu*), a formulation which very much echoes the definition of wonder expressed in the *Metaphysica*.<sup>71</sup>

For his part, al-Qazwīnī circumscribes 'ajā'ib discourse, however indirectly, by drawing upon the Aristotelian notion of wonder as a central tenet to perplexity. Aristotle's ἀπορία is frequently rendered with the Arabic *taḥayyur*, where, for example, in the *Metaphysica* the expression δὴ ἀπορίαν ('by way of perplexity') becomes *bi-taḥayyur<sup>in</sup>*, and ἀποροῦσι ('they are perplexed') becomes *yataḥayyarūn<sup>a</sup>*.<sup>72</sup> Here

<sup>67</sup>On the role of *aporia* in traditions of Greek philosophy, see Gareth B. Matthew, *Socratic Perplexity and the Nature of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), with special attention to Aristotle's conception of perplexity as the beginning of philosophy (pp. 11–17).

<sup>68</sup>*Metaphysica*, 982<sup>b</sup>14–83<sup>a</sup>23.

<sup>69</sup>According to an annotation to Ibn Rushd's commentary, Alpha Meizon was translated by Naẓīf b. Yumn (or Ayman) al-Rūmī; however, the commentary of this translation begins only at 987<sup>a</sup>6, see Bouyges, *Notice*, lvi, cxii–cxiii; cf. Amos Bertolacci, 'On the Arabic Translations of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*', *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 15, no. 2 (2005): 241–75; idem, *The Reception of Aristotle's Metaphysics*, 5–35; Cecilia Martini, 'The Arabic version of the book Alpha Meizon of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and the testimony of the ms. Bibl. Apostolica Vaticana, Ott. Lat. 2048', *Les traducteurs au travail: leurs manuscrits et leurs méthodes*, ed. Jacqueline Hamesse (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), 173–206; idem, 'La tradizione araba della Metafisica di Aristotele libri α–Α', *Aristotele e Alessandro di Afrodisia nella tradizione araba*, ed. Cristina D'Ancona and Giuseppe Serra (Padova: Il poligrafo, 2002), 75–112.

<sup>70</sup>See, for instance, the role that confusion (*ḥayra*) plays in al-Kindī's presentation of the progression of knowledge. Al-Kindī, *Kūtab fi 'l-falsafa al-ūlā*, 110. Salim Kemal discusses Aristotle's notion of wonder in the context of al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, *The Poetics of Alfarabi and Avicenna*, 161 & ff. The digest of Aristotle's *Metaphysica*, *Kūtab fi 'ilm mā ba'd al-ṭabī'a*, by 'Abd al-Latīf al-Baghdādī (d. 629/1231–2), contains significant portions of Books A and α, and condenses the Aristotelean position that wonder is the origin of philosophy. Angelika Neuwirth, intro. and ed., 'Neue Materialien zur arabischen Tradition der beiden ersten Metaphysik-Bücher', *Die Welt des Islams* 18, no. 2 (1977): 84–100 (pp. 97–8).

<sup>71</sup>Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī, *al-Baṣā'ir wa-'l-dhakā'ir*, vol. 2.2, 410; cf. vol. 2.2, 567 and vol. 1, 34; al-Tawḥīdī outlines a parallel account during his engagements with Miskawayh (d. 421/1030). Al-Tawḥīdī, *al-Hawāmīl wa-'l-shawāmīl*, ed. Sayyid Kasrawī (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2001), 82–3. Cf. al-Raghib al-Iṣfahānī, who relates a similar story in the mouth of Hippocrates. Al-Raghib al-Iṣfahānī, *Muḥāḍarāt al-udabā'*, ed. 'Umar al-Ṭabbā' (Bayrūt: Dār al-Arqam, 1999), vol. 2, 745.

<sup>72</sup>*Metaphysica*, 1011<sup>b</sup>2 and 1011<sup>a</sup>3; Ibn Rushd, *Tafsīr*, 447 and 441, respectively; cf. 1030<sup>b</sup>28, 814; 1034<sup>a</sup>9, 871; 1034<sup>b</sup>22, 889; 1036<sup>a</sup>26, 918; 1036<sup>b</sup>8, 923; 1037<sup>b</sup>10, 942; 1044<sup>b</sup>29, 34, 1083; 1045<sup>a</sup>7, 1089; 1045<sup>a</sup>22, 24–5, 1090; 1045<sup>b</sup>8–9, 1097; 1058<sup>a</sup>34, 1373; 1074<sup>b</sup>15, 1691; 1075<sup>a</sup>5, 1693; contrast, for example, with the translation of ἀπορία, and its cognates, as *mas'ala ghāmīda*, and variants thereof, cf. 995<sup>a</sup>25, 995<sup>a</sup>28–9, 995<sup>a</sup>31, 165; 995<sup>b</sup>4, 171; 996<sup>a</sup>5, 174; 996<sup>b</sup>17, 175; 997<sup>b</sup>25, 209; 998<sup>a</sup>20, 215; 999<sup>a</sup>24,

confusion is connected to perplexing questions (*al-masā'il al-mutaḥayyira/ἀπορήματα*) on the nature of existence, themselves at the heart of philosophical inquiry.<sup>73</sup> Al-Qazwīnī follows this notion of perplexity in his definition of *'ajab* when he discusses the sensation of confusion one faces in the contemplation of beehives: 'when a man discovers that this is the work of bees, then he becomes perplexed (*taḥayyara*) as to how this weak insect could produce such perfectly equilateral hexagons, which even a skilful engineer with a compass and a ruler could not replicate'.<sup>74</sup>

While al-Qazwīnī does not necessarily evoke the idea of *ḥayra* with an awareness of the Aristotelian notion of ἀπορία, he draws on this concept of perplexity working within an intellectual milieu where wonder and confusion have been completely fused. This fusion appears, for instance, when Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037), in the section on dialectic (*jadāl*) from his philosophical compendium *al-Shifā'*, defines perplexity as 'the excess of astonishment' (*taḥayyur<sup>um</sup> huwa ifrāt<sup>u</sup> 'l-ta'ajjub<sup>i</sup>*).<sup>75</sup> Al-Qazwīnī's contribution in this intersection of confusion and wonder lies with shrouding popular traditions of marvellous tales in a mantle of scholastic learning.

### Myth-lovers and Philosophers

Aristotle, when defining wonder as the beginning of philosophy, famously draws a parallel between the lovers of myth and the lovers of wisdom. He argues that the myth-lover (*φιλόμυθος*) is, in a sense, a philosopher (*φιλόσοφος*), as myths are composed of wonders.<sup>76</sup> Aristotle goes on to argue that humankind pursues science not for any practical utility, but for the sake of knowledge alone, and that this kind of speculation begins with a view to recreation, when practically all the necessities of life are already fulfilled.

The simile between myth-lovers and philosophers is striking. Aristotle claims that the philosopher contemplates wonders as the lover of myth enjoys stories, out of the pleasure of the experience itself, and not for any intrinsic value. As we have seen, al-Fārābī draws on a similar notion of the pleasure of myth (*μῦθος*) when he describes *khurāfat*, which people listen to solely for the purpose of pleasure. As for this parallel between the wonder produced by myths and the function of wonder as an inherent element in philosophy, Aristotle does not hold the end of the two pursuits—that of the myth-lover and that of the philosopher—to be equal.

It is evident from the *Ars poetica* that Aristotle approaches myth (*μῦθος*) in its capacity for imitation (*μίμησις*), as a derivative aesthetic production that offers a reflection of

235; 1000<sup>b</sup>20, 1000<sup>b</sup> 23, 249; 1001<sup>a</sup>2, 250; 1001<sup>b</sup>4, 262; 1001<sup>b</sup>26, 276; 1002<sup>b</sup>12, 287; 1002<sup>b</sup>34, 290; 1003<sup>a</sup>6, 290; 1004<sup>a</sup>34, 318; and *mas'ala 'awīs*, 1043<sup>b</sup>24, 1060; 1045<sup>a</sup>22, 1090; 1055<sup>b</sup>30, 1319; 1056<sup>a</sup>10, 1326; and *mu'dila*, 996<sup>a</sup>12, 175.

<sup>73</sup>*Metaphysica*, 1011<sup>a</sup>6, 441, 4; compare 1011<sup>a</sup>8, ἀπορίαι, translated as *al-masā'il al-muḥayyira*, 441, 6–7; cf. 1037<sup>b</sup>10, 942.

<sup>74</sup>Al-Qazwīnī, *'Ajā'ib*, 5. The lifecycle of the bee serves as a common motif in discourses promoting a teleological argument for the proof of God, itself articulated in the Qur'ān (Q. 16:68–9). See, for instance, the work ascribed to al-Jāhīz, *al-Ibar wa-'l-'ibār*, ed. Šābir Idrīs (al-Qāhira: al-'Arabī, undated), 75; Ikhwān al-Šafā', *Rasā'il*, vol. 5, 301–2; al-Ghazālī, *al-Hikma fī makhliqāt Allāh*, 90–1; Abū Hāmid al-Gharnāfi, *Tuḥfat al-albāb*, 33.

<sup>75</sup>Ibn Sīnā, *al-Jadal* from *al-Shifā'*, ed. Aḥmad Fu'ād al-Ahwānī (Cairo: Organisation Générale des Imprimeries Gouvernementales, 1965), vol. 6, 189.

<sup>76</sup>*Metaphysica*, 982<sup>b</sup>20.

being; a likeness that, however imperfect, leads us to believe in its veracity.<sup>77</sup> Beyond this literary aspect, where myth is framed in its narrative capacity as plot, expressed in such fields as poetry and theatre, we also see Aristotle describe myth as something akin to superstitious legend. Take, for example, how in his zoological study, *Historia animalium*, Aristotle details the migratory patterns of cranes, which according to him lead these birds north to the land of Scythia. In this region, he informs us, live pygmies, who dwell in caves with their equally small horses. He concludes, affirming the veracity of what he has just related, that this account is not a mere legend ( $\mu\theta\omicron\sigma\varsigma$ ). Here Aristotle links the scientific discourse describing migratory patterns of birds with popular Greek accounts, which stretch back as far as Homer's *Iliad* (3.6), of pygmies in the land of Scythia, who ride tiny horses and fight with giant cranes.<sup>78</sup> Aristotle is quick to argue for the truth of this description, by opposing his account with similar legends about the extreme ends of the earth.<sup>79</sup>

This distinction between myth and truth, in the context of wonder-writing, is fully expressed by the Greek geographer Strabo (d. c. 23 CE), when he takes to task spinners of marvellous tales. Strabo argues that writers of myth ( $\mu\theta\omicron\sigma\gamma\rho\acute{\alpha}\phi\omicron\iota$ ), such as Ctesias and Herodotus, have tried to make their writings pleasing by narrating in the guise of history that which they have never seen, nor even have heard, solely to afford their readers pleasure and amazement.<sup>80</sup>

Similarly, Aristotle's notion of myth as linked with wonder does not lead to the illumination of truth, but to the pleasure of perplexity. For Aristotle the aesthetic dimension of myth, with its mimetic quality of imitating reality, has its own place.

<sup>77</sup>*Ars poetica*, 10:1452<sup>a</sup>12–13.

<sup>78</sup>Aristotle, *Historia animalium*, 7(8), 597<sup>a</sup>3–9. Aristotle is quick here to mention that this account is no myth, probably due to the fact that the story of the pygmies and the cranes was an established tradition in the world of Greek wonders, appearing in the *Iliad* (3, 6), along with Herodotus (3, 116; 4, 13). See Rudolf Wittkower, 'Marvels of the East. A Study in the History of Monsters', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 5 (1942): 159–97 (p. 160, note 2). For further background on pygmies, see David Williams, *Deformed Discourse: The Function of the Monster in Mediaeval Thought and Literature* (Montreal: McGill Queens University Press, 1996), 111–13.

<sup>79</sup>As for Aristotle's work on natural history and its influence on Arabic and Persian letters, it is of note that this particular description of the migratory pattern of cranes is drawn upon as a pre-Islamic confirmation for the existence of the barbarous races of Yājūj and Mājūj. Andalusian religious scholar and *adīb*, Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064) bases himself on Aristotle's account, in his doxography. Ibn Ḥazm, *Faṣl fi milāl wa-'l-ahwā' wa-'l-nihāl* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1999), vol. 1, 143–4. He states that Aristotle has made reference to Yājūj and Mājūj, who are the height of one cubit (*dhira'*), in his *Kitāb al-ḥayawān*, in a section on the natural characteristics of cranes (*gharāmīq*). This identification, however, is not to be found in the edition of Ibn al-Baṭṭīq's (d. c. 200/815) translation of Aristotle's *Historia animalium*, ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān as *Ṭībā' al-ḥayawān* (Kuwayt: Wakāla al-Maṭbū'at, 1988), 330–1. Al-Ṭūsī, without referencing Aristotle, describes how cranes, in the course of the migratory flight toward the end of the east, engage in war with Yājūj and Mājūj; *Ajā'ib nāma*, 535. Without direct reference to cranes, al-Idrīsī outlines an account of how gigantic birds would attack the races of Yājūj and Mājūj. Al-Idrīsī, *Opus geographicum = Nuzhat al-muṣhtāq fi khtirāq al-'afāq*, ed. E. Cerulli et al. (Napoli: Istituto italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1970–8), vol. 2, 964. Muḥammad b. Mūsā 'l-Damirī (d. 808/1405) details an account that links the cranes and pygmies to the Alexander cycle. Al-Damirī, *Ḥayat al-ḥayawān al-kubrā*, 3rd ed. (al-Qāhira: Muṣṭafā 'l-Bābī 'l-Ḥalabī, 1956), vol. 2, 103. Cf. Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam (d. 257/871), *Futūḥ Miṣr wa-'l-Maghrib*, ed. Charles Torrey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1922), pp. 38–9; Ibn al-Wardī, *Kharīdat al-'ajā'ib* (Miṣr: Maṭba'a al-Maymaniyya, 1324/1906), 101. The transposition of pygmies with Gog and Magog likely occurs due to small stature often associated with these apocalyptic peoples. See E. van Donzel, and C. Ott, 'Yādūdī wa-Mādūdī', *EI<sup>2</sup>*.

<sup>80</sup>Strabo, *Geographica*, ed. Augustus Meineke (Leipzig: Teubner, 1877–98), vol. 2, 713, C. 507–8.

However, he argues that philosophy, unlike other pursuits, is *sui generis*, concerned with discovering truth, to which myth ultimately must be opposed and subordinated. For us, the double-bind is apparent, as the wonder produced by perplexity can be linked both to things real and unreal.

This combination of wonder, pleasure, and narration comes together uniquely in Ibn Sīnā's commentary on Aristotle's *Ars poetica*. Ibn Sīnā follows the long tradition of viewing both the *Ars poetica* and the *Ars rhetorica* as the last two works included in the Aristotelian body of logical writings, known as the *Organon*.<sup>81</sup> Previous to Ibn Sīnā, al-Fārābī had argued that poetry represents the last of the syllogistic arts (*al-ṣanā'i' al-qiyāsīyya*): the demonstrative (*burhānīyya*), the dialectical (*jadaliyya*), the rhetorical (*khuṭbīyya*), the sophistic (*sūfiṣṭā'īyya*), and the poetic (*shī'riyya*).<sup>82</sup> In this configuration, poetry treats, in the incremented spectrum of syllogisms, propositions that are completely false. Moreover, unlike the other forms of syllogisms—which through logical premises aim to produce in the mind either conception (*taṣawwūr*), caused by the definition of a term, or rational assent (*taṣḍīq*), caused by a true syllogism<sup>83</sup>—the goal of the poetic syllogism is the creation of images (*khayālāt*) in the mental faculty of representation (*al-quwwa al-mutakhayyila*).<sup>84</sup>

Ibn Sīnā follows a similar course when he argues that poetry (*shī'r*) is image-evoking speech (*kalām mukhayyilī*) concerned with imitation and image-making (*muḥākāt/μίμησις*); the soul yields and responds to this speech psychologically (*infī'āl<sup>an</sup> nafsānīyy<sup>an</sup>*).<sup>85</sup> For Ibn Sīnā, poetry specifically, and image-evoking speech generally, are not occupied with the issue of truth (*ṣidq*), but with the arousal of pleasure (*iltidhādih*) and amazement (*ta'jīb*)—two responses he views to be interconnected.<sup>86</sup>

Ibn Sīnā advances that humans incline more to the consumption of images (*takhylī*) in the faculty of the imagination than to logical assent (*taṣḍīq*), for many people, when they hear demonstrable truths (*taṣḍīqāt*), respond with aversion and dislike. From this observation on aesthetics, he argues that imitation possesses an element of amazement, which truth lacks (*li-'l-muḥākātī shay<sup>an</sup> min<sup>a</sup>*

<sup>81</sup>On the so-called 'context theory', which situated Aristotle's *Ars rhetorica* and *Ars poetica* as works of logic in the *Organon*, see the introduction to Deborah Black, *Logic and Aristotle's Rhetoric and Poetics in Medieval Arabic Philosophy* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 1–16, and *passim*.

<sup>82</sup>Al-Fārābī, *al-Risāla fī qawānīn ṣinā'at al-shu'arā*, in *Fann al-shī'r: ma' al-tarjama al-'arabīyya al-qadīma wa-shurūḥ al-Fārābī wa-Ibn Sīnā wa-Ibn Rushd*, ed. 'Abd al-Rahmān Badawī (al-Qāhira: Maktabat al-Nahḍa al-Miṣriyya, 1953), 151; idem, *Iḥsā' al-'ulūm* (Bayrūt: Dār wa-Maktabat al-Hilāl, 1996), 38–41; cf. al-Khwārazmī, *Mafāṭīḥ al-'ulūm*, ed. G. van Vloten (Leiden: Brill, 1895), 130–52.

<sup>83</sup>For a general account of these categories, see Harry A. Wolfson, 'The Terms *taṣawwūr* and *taṣḍīq* in Arabic Philosophy and their Greek, Latin, and Hebrew Equivalents', *The Moslem World* 33 (1943): 1–15. On the Arabic philosophical use of these terms, see Black, *Logic*, 71 ff.

<sup>84</sup>On the topic of al-Fārābī's conception of the poetic syllogism, see M. Aouad, and G. Schoeler, 'Le syllogisme poétique selon al-Fārābī: un syllogisme incorrect de la deuxième figure', *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 12, no. 2 (2002): 185–96. Also see al-Fārābī, *Iḥsā' al-'ulūm*, 42–3; cf. al-Khwārazmī, *Mafāṭīḥ al-'ulūm*, 152. In regard to the subject of *takhylī* in the context of Arabic poetry and its relation to the Greek traditions, see Black, *Logic*, s.v. index, and Wolfhart Heinrichs, s.v., *EP<sup>2</sup>*; as for the broad development within Persian poetics with, for example, the *Asās al-iqtibās* of Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274), see Muḥammad Riḍā Shafī'ī Kadkanī, *Ṣuwar-i khayāl dar shī'r-i Fārsī*, 9th ed. (Tīhrān: Intishārāt-i Nīl, 1383/2004–5), 28–39.

<sup>85</sup>From Ibn Sīnā's *al-Shifā'*, included in *Fann al-shī'r*, 161.

<sup>86</sup>*Fann al-shī'r*, 162. On the intersection between pleasure and wonder, see Ismail M. Dahiyat, *Avicenna's Commentary on the Poetics of Aristotle, a Critical Study with an Annotated Translation of the Text* (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 35–6, and notes to pp. 62–3.

'*l-ta'jībī lays<sup>a</sup> li-'l-sidq*').<sup>87</sup> Ibn Sīnā holds this process of amazement (*ta'jīb*) to be the product of imitation, an idea seemingly unique to him and central to his notion of the aesthetic value of poetry.<sup>88</sup>

Although, for Ibn Sīnā, poetry may be the most excellent vehicle for imitation, he also explains that verbal compositions could also consist of image-evoking statements written in prose (*wa-qad takūn<sup>u</sup> aqāwīl<sup>u</sup> manthūrat<sup>um</sup> mukhāyyilat<sup>am</sup>*).<sup>89</sup> He describes how imitation is a source for producing pleasure (*fa-inna 'l-muḥākāt<sup>a</sup> hiya 'l-mufrihat<sup>t</sup>*), arguing that there have developed proverbial stories and popular tales (*al-amthāl wa-'l-qīṣaṣ*) out of an aesthetic appreciation for narrative imitation.<sup>90</sup> Although Ibn Sīnā sees imitation in such narrative expressions as proverbs and stories, he advances that poetry, by contrast, is concerned with an imitation of what is possible, or exists by necessity.<sup>91</sup> For this reason, Ibn Sīnā argues that a poet errs when imitating that which is not possible.<sup>92</sup>

It is in this context where Ibn Sīnā holds that a versified version of a collection of popular animal fables, known in Arabic as *Kalīla wa-Dimna*—based upon the Sanskrit mirror for princes, the *Pañcatantra*—does not truly represent poetry, for it does not aim to imitate what is possible, but rather serves a didactic purpose of presenting learned statements (*ārā'*) in the exposition of that which does not exist (*yatakallam<sup>u</sup> fī-mā wujūd<sup>u</sup>-hu fī 'l-qawli faqat*).<sup>93</sup> However, with this examination on the poetics of amazement, Ibn Sīnā does not go on to develop a fully synthesized literary notion akin to what we might label fiction.<sup>94</sup>

We may observe, nonetheless, in Ibn Sīnā's philosophical configuration that first, the question of truth is subordinated to an interest in both amazement and pleasure, and that second, there exists a space for image-evoking statements outside purely poetic forms. This inquiry into the nature of poetry leads Ibn Sīnā to place a psychological (*naḥsānī*) emphasis on the mind's sensation of astonishment (*ta'ajjub*), which is aroused by the imitative quality of image-evoking statements. Such a line of argumentation locates wonder as a psychological response related to the faculty of representation (*al-quwwa al-mutakhayyila*).<sup>95</sup>

<sup>87</sup>*Fann al-shi'r*, 162.

<sup>88</sup>On this subject, see Heinrichs, 'Ta'jīb', *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*.

<sup>89</sup>*Fann al-shi'r*, 168; also see Dahiyat's note on p. 72.

<sup>90</sup>*Fann al-shi'r*, 179; see Pellat, 'Kiṣṣa', *EL*<sup>2</sup>. Ibn Sīnā argues that poetry, rather than other forms of narrative, is closer to philosophy, for it imitates that which either was, is, or will be, *Fann al-shi'r*, 183. Dahiyat, in a note to his translation of this section, argues that Ibn Sīnā believes such narratives, 'lack the essential characteristic of poetry, namely, imitation' (p. 94). This reading appears to miss the mark, for it is the combination of metre and imitation which makes poetry unique in the eyes of Ibn Sīnā; the aim of poetry as a metrical form is the production of images (*al-takhyīl*) in the mind of the listener. If poetry loses its metre, it ceases to be poetry, although the result is still a poetic statement (*qawli shi'rī*). This is not to say that in other forms of artistic expression, such as paintings (*ṣūra manqūsha*) and parables (*amthāl*), the phenomenon of imitation is lacking—a position that Ibn Sīnā clearly does not hold—rather that the imitation of poetry deals especially with that which is possible, *Fann al-shi'r*, *ibid*.

<sup>91</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>92</sup>*Ibid*, 196.

<sup>93</sup>*Ibid*, 183.

<sup>94</sup>This notwithstanding, Ibn Sīnā's lengthy observations on *khurāfāt* would seem a natural venue for such a discussion. However, *khurāfāt* for Ibn Sīnā take on a specialized meaning in the context of Aristotle's theory of poetics *vis-à-vis* theatre, corresponding to *μῦθος* in regard to its function in tragedy, something akin to story-line or plot, not fiction or even legend, but with a more broadly defined sense, *Fann al-shi'r*, 184–5.

<sup>95</sup>*Fann al-shi'r*, 161–2. For an overview of Ibn Sīnā's epistemic system, see Dimitri Gutas, 'Intuition and Thinking: The Evolving Structure of Avicenna's Epistemology', *Aspects of Avicenna*, ed. Robert Wisnovsky (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener, 2001), 1–38.

### Two-headed People and People with No Heads

Al-Qazwīnī's exploration into the philosophy of wonder does not reach the same level of complexity, in regard to explaining how the mimetic fashionings of language produce pleasure and amazement. Furthermore, he does not engage in any way with the philosophical notions of *takhyīl*, a category one might expect to be germane to his inquiry into the psychology of wonder. In a standard discussion of human physiognomy,<sup>96</sup> al-Qazwīnī does, however, mention the faculty of representation (*al-quwwa al-mutakhayyila*) as one of the five inner faculties of perception,<sup>97</sup> explaining:

فَإِنْ كَانَتْ فِي طَاعَةِ الْعَقْلِ تُسَمَّى مُتَفَكِّرَةً وَإِنْ لَمْ تَكُنْ تُسَمَّى مُتَخَيَّلَةً وَهِيَ الَّتِي  
تَتَخَيَّلُ إِنْسَانًا عَدِيمَ الرَّأْسِ أَوْ إِنْسَانًا ذَا رَأْسَيْنِ.

If this faculty is under the control of reason, then it is called the contemplative faculty, if not, then it is called the representational; for it is this faculty which creates a fantastical image of a person without a head, or someone who possesses two heads.<sup>98</sup>

This notion, taken in a philosophical context, positions the *khayāl*—which al-Qazwīnī goes on to describe as produced by the faculty of representation—as something akin to the Greek *φαντασμα*, an image without reality. Aristotle describes in many instances the deceptive power of *φαντασία* in relation to sensory perception, such as with the following example from the *Metaphysica*:

Περὶ δὲ τῆς ἀληθείας, ὥς οὐ πᾶν τὸ φαινόμενον ἀληθές, πρῶτον  
μέν ὅτι οὐδ' <εἰ> ἢ αἰσθησις <μη> ψευδῆς τοῦ γε ἰδίου ἐστίν, ἀλλ' ἢ  
φαντασία οὐ ταῦτόν τῇ αἰσθήσει.

Regarding [now] the truth; [we should say] that not every appearance is true, firstly, even if sense-perception, at least of the proper object of the sense in question, is not false, still the impression produced by it is not the same as the sense-perception.<sup>99</sup>

With regard to this disjunct between the intellectual capacity to create impressions through sensory perception and reality itself, Ibn Rushd (d. 595/1198) in his

<sup>96</sup>Cf. al-Ṭūsī, *'Ajā'ib nāma*, 386.

<sup>97</sup>Compare al-Qazwīnī's list of the inner faculties—common sense (*al-ḥiss al-mushtarak*), representative faculty (*al-khayāl*), the imaginative faculty proper (*al-mutafakkira*), the estimative faculty (*al-wahm*), and the retentive faculty (*al-ḥāfiẓa*)—with Ibn Sinā's fivefold division. Ibn Sinā, *Kiṭāb al-najāh fī 'l-ḥikma al-mantiqiyya wa-'l-ṭabī'iyya wa-'l-ilāhiyya*, ed. Muḥyī al-Dīn Ṣabrī al-Kurdī (al-Qāhira: Maṭba'at al-Sa'ada, 1938), 162–3; cf. Black, *Logic*, 201–3. On the origins of this fivefold division, see Harry A. Wolfson, 'The Internal Senses in Latin, Arabic, and Hebrew Philosophic Texts', *The Harvard Theological Review* 28, no. 2 (1935): 69–133.

<sup>98</sup>Al-Qazwīnī, *'Ajā'ib*, 358.

<sup>99</sup>*Metaphysica*, 1010<sup>b</sup>1–3.

commentary on this section of the *Metaphysica* argues that the faculty of representation can produce images in the mind, the existence of which is impossible.<sup>100</sup> Such a position fits into an established discourse on the faculty of representation in Islamic philosophical traditions. On this issue, for instance, the authors of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* (composed around the middle of the fourth/tenth century) argue that *al-quwwa al-mutakhayyila* is responsible from producing images (*ṣuwar*) in the mind, which can either correspond to or diverge from reality. It is this faculty, they explain, which allows painters and sculptors (*al-muṣawwirūn wa-'l-naqqāshūn*) to create representations of *jinn*, demons (*shayāṭīn*), and wonders of the sea (*'ajā'ib al-baḥr*), which may or may not have any truth (*ḥaqīqa*) to them.<sup>101</sup>

Such observations concerning the power of the intellect to imagine impossible occurrences seem fertile ground for a work on wonders and the problem of veracity. Yet the manner in which al-Qazwīnī treats this issue suggests a popular and topical reception of these philosophical concepts concerning human psychology and physiognomy.<sup>102</sup> Given the larger context of his wonder-book, the examples al-Qazwīnī offers for the kind of *khayāl* produced by *al-quwwa al-mutakhayyila* are striking.<sup>103</sup> The image of someone lacking a head or of someone possessing two heads fits in organically with the overarching curiosity for monstrosities so central to this genre of writing. It then should come as no surprise that al-Qazwīnī references on separate occasions a two-headed person from Yemen,<sup>104</sup> and a race of headless people whose faces grow on their chests (Figures 2 and 3).<sup>105</sup>

Al-Qazwīnī's description of the imaginative faculty producing unreal images, and his examples of a person with two heads, or with no head at all, are not readily synthesized with his transmission of, what we might term, fantastic material. The accounts of such wonders and the description of the imaginative faculty as the power to conjure up unreal images are only connected in so far as they both from part of traditions concerning the veritable nature of the world. Beyond this, the two-headed curiosity from Yemen and the race of headless people have no connection with our capacity to fathom something that is unreal, as they are both presented as real examples of bizarre phenomena. Al-Qazwīnī is not interested in a philosophical exploration into the psychology of the mind's relationship to the imaginary; nor, for that matter, does he wish that we truly question the authenticity of his catalogue of strange phenomena.

An aesthetic examination into amazement and wonder, such as that made by Ibn Sīnā, might come too dangerously close to the question of truth-value and ultimately fiction. This is a topic that al-Qazwīnī wishes to turn back onto itself. For him, the

<sup>100</sup>Ibn Rushd, *Tafsīr*, 431, 11–12; the original Arabic of Ibn Rushd's commentary for chapter Γ, 5 is missing (pp. 413, 9–437, 8); Bouyges reconstructed this section through later Hebrew and Latin translations of the *Tafsīr*.

<sup>101</sup>Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il*, vol. 7, 416.

<sup>102</sup>See, for example, the strong parallels between al-Qazwīnī's definition concerning the representative faculty, and that of al-Jurjānī, who cites the same example of someone with two heads, describing such imaginings as *ṣuwar khayālīyya*. Al-Jurjānī, *Kutāb al-ta'rifāt*, 208.

<sup>103</sup>Similar examples are given by Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il*, vol. 7, 416.

<sup>104</sup>Related on the authority of the eyewitness account of Imām al-Shāfi'ī (d. 204/820), al-Qazwīnī, *'Ajā'ib*, 12 and 451. This well-known account of how al-Shāfi'ī saw a two-headed person while travelling in Yemen circulates well before al-Qazwīnī, appearing, for instance, in Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī's (d. 430/1038) entry on al-Shāfi'ī in his biographic work. Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā' wa-ṭabaqāt al-aṣfiyā'* (al-Qāhira: Maktabat al-Khānī, 1938), vol. 9, 127–8.

<sup>105</sup>Al-Qazwīnī, *'Ajā'ib*, 112; the description of a race of people with no heads can be traced through Pliny and Herodotus, see Bynum, 'Wonder', 21.



Figure 2. Two-headed figure from Yemen. Al-Qazwīnī, *‘Ajā’ib al-makhlūqāt wa-gharā’ib al-mawjūdāt*, courtesy of the Harvard Art Museum, Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Gift of Philip Hofer in memory of Eric Schroeder, 1972.3.269, fol. 269r.



Figure 3. *Jazīrat al-jāba*, Island of Java, where the people are said to have their heads grow on their chest. Al-Qazwīnī, *‘Ajā’ib al-makhlūqāt wa-gharā’ib al-mawjūdāt*, courtesy of the Harvard Art Museum, Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Gift of Philip Hofer in memory of Eric Schroeder, 1972.3.269, fol. 85r.

‘*ajā’ib*, much like the *mirabilia* of the Latin West, are to be found repeated throughout the larger text of existence, in the signs of interconnected natural phenomena.<sup>106</sup> Aristotle finds, in his own manner, a path of wonder that, instead of leading out of perplexity and encouraging philosophy, detours into the world of mythology. This is a position untenable for al-Qazwīnī, as he tries in every instance to rhetorically persuade us of the truth-value of his entire work. In order for the ‘*ajā’ib* to truly have their effect of producing pleasurable perplexity, al-Qazwīnī must convince us at least of the possibility of their authenticity.

<sup>106</sup>For a study on wonders in the Latin West, see L. Daston and K. Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature 1150–1750* (New York: Zone Books, 1998); also see Jacques Le Goff, ‘Le merveilleux dans l’Occident médiéval’, in *L’imaginaire médiéval* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985), 17–39. On the conception of the monstrous as part of divine design, see Verner, *The Epistemology*, *passim*.



Figure 4. The Island of Dog-headed Men (*Jazīrat Sag-sār*). Al-Qazwīnī, *‘Ajā’ib al-makhlūqāt wa-gharā’ib al-mawjūdāt*, courtesy of the Harvard Art Museum, Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Gift of Philip Hofer in memory of Eric Schroeder, 1972.3.269, fol. 91v.



Figure 5. Maidservant emerging from the body of a fish. Qazwīnī, Al-Qazwīnī, *‘Ajā’ib al-makhlūqāt wa-gharā’ib al-mawjūdāt*, courtesy of the National Library of Medicine, US Army Medical Museum, Islamic MS P2, fol. 65v.

Yet, we cannot ignore the fact that, from the onslaught of anecdotal material, of islands populated by dog-headed men (Figure 4) and maidservants emerging from the bodies of giant fish (Figure 5), the textual universe al-Qazwīnī tenders before us is woven together by the power of the anecdote, itself always at odds with reality. Al-Qazwīnī’s digression on the nature of wonder is a novel contribution to *‘ajā’ib*-writing. Although he might come tantalizingly close to a philosophical approach to the causes of wonder, he evokes such a discourse only to subordinate it within his larger encyclopaedic digest.

The wondrous for al-Qazwīnī offers an occasion to adumbrate an array of narrative moments, precisely for the value of these accounts that, as Yāqūt comments, could possibly be true, reflecting the marvellous world of potential. Moving seamlessly from philosophical allusions concerning the nature of wonder to fantastic tales of monstrous creatures, al-Qazwīnī sets out to, above all, inspire in his readers textual pleasure through a dizzying assortment of perspectives and voices. This, however, must be seen to play in concert with a larger vision of the marvellous, which consistently confirms that *‘ajā’ib* are to be found throughout existence, often dwelling on the margins of the world. Al-Qazwīnī turns to the potentially spurious anecdotes of travellers and sailors, just as al-

Ṭūsī and Yāqūt had before him, not only to record the accounts of what could very well prove true, but also to pass on the pleasure such tales engender. The universe of *jinn* and demons, or the ominous wall against Gog and Magog at the margins of the map, are never brought into doubt; for, as those who are well accustomed to the wiles of creation know, the world, indeed, is a marvellous place.

### **Acknowledgements**

Research for this article was supported through a Mellon Humanities grant at the Harvard University Sackler Museum. The author would like to thank Wolfhart Heinrichs, Wheeler Thackston, Roy Mottahedeh, Luis Girón-Negrón, Deborah Roberts, and Aryeh Kosman for their input. Special thanks also to the anonymous readers who reviewed this article.