Jeannie Miller

Commentary and Text Organization in al-Jāḥiẓ's Book of Animals

When texts come alive as part of a canon, they grow and change.[1] One agent of this transformation is the commentator; an equally important but often overlooked agent of reinterpretation and cultural digestion is the copyist. From early on, copyists of Islamic manuscripts often made executive decisions about which words of the base text constituted headings deserving of rubrication or other visual markers. Such interpretive tools increased in variety and density over the long history of Islamic manuscript production, culminating for the most part in the Ottoman era. They included tables of contents, marginal topic headings and notabilia, elaborate notation systems indicating textual variants, dots indicating punctuation, lists, and other kinds of text segmentation, as well as the identification of text segments as chapter headings through rubrication and text size. In some cases, these scribal techniques fit under the heading of what Ann Blair calls »finding devices, and layouts to facilitate consultation reading«, and can be associated with the ever-increasing volume of textual material available in Arabic.[2] In other cases, they fit into an increasingly systematic linguistic pedagogy. The accumulation of this sort of textual management can have a surprisingingly strong effect on the overall sense of the base text. When we turn to particular examples, it becomes clear that the boundary between copyist interpretation and commentary proper is a fuzzy one. Frequently, scribal interpretations by the copyist are as substantive as commentary proper. In order to think more about the relationship between the activities of commentary and copying, this essay focuses on text organization – the identification of chapters and sections, and decisions about which recurrent topics and patterns are primary or secondary.

Following a spurious 19th- and 20th-century ›narrative of decline‹ that discouraged research into the intellectual production of the Mamluk and Ottoman

---

2 Ann M. Blair, *Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information Before the Modern Age*, New Haven 2011, p. 9.

era, there have been numerous recent calls to explore this rich period in Islamic intellectual history.[3] Another consequence of the decline narrative has been to ignore the transformative contributions of Ottoman copyists, commentators, readers, and scholars to the transmitted heritage of earlier periods. When we study Abbasid literature, for example, the so-called ›golden age‹ of Arabic letters, we rarely pause to remember the Ottoman impact on our perception of these texts.[4] The 20th-century editors who published these classics often include lexicographic glosses and topic headings drawn from the Ottoman tradition of text management. They usually distinguish such additions clearly from the ›authentic‹ base text, but rarely give credit to the early modern scholarly labour and insight that they reflect. In the case of al-Jāḥiẓ's *Book of Animals* (*Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*), for example, ʿAbd al-Salām Hārūn's edition includes topic headings in parentheses, tracking the contents of the disorderly text page by page and paragraph by paragraph.[5] These headings are certainly not of al-Jāḥiẓ's authorship, nor does Hārūn claim they are, though a casual reader might be misled. Some of these headings – but not all – appear in the margins of the extant manuscripts. Hārūn made no attempt to distinguish between those he added himself and those he borrowed from the tradition; neither does he identify the authors of these marginal commentaries or assess their work.

The *Book of Animals* (*Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*) by al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 868 CE) is a perfect test case for studying the impact made by early modern scholarship on our perceptions of the structure and organization of classics from an earlier era. The author is famous for the meandering organization of his large-scale works. Two separate 10th-century authors already claim to provide a more organized account of the contents of al-Jāḥiẓ's book on eloquence, *Clarity and Clarification* (*al-Bayān wal-Tabyīn*)[6], and the 14th-century author al-Ṣafadī names al-Jāḥiẓ's *Book of Animals* as an authoritative example justifying the use of »digression« (*istiṭrād*) by those identifying themselves as polymathic belles-lettrists (*udabāʾ*).[7] Al-Ṣafadī's

3 Thomas Bauer, »Mamluk Literature: Misunderstandings and New Approaches«, in: *Mamluk Studies Review* 9 No. 2 (2005), pp. 105-132. Thomas Bauer, »In Search of ›Post-Classical Literature‹: A Review Article«, in: *Mamluk Studies* Review 11 No. 2 (2007), pp. 137-167. Adam Talib, *How Do You Say ›Epigram‹ In Arabic: Literary History at the Limits of Comparison*, Leiden 2018. Elias Muhanna, *The World in a Book: Al-Nuwayrī and the Islamic Encyclopedic Tradition*, Princeton 2018.

4 For a critical investigation of this notion, see Michael Cooperson, »The Abbasid ›Golden Age‹: An Excavation«, in: *al-ʿUṣūr al-Wusṭā* 25 (2017), pp. 41-65.

5 Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Hārūn, 2nd edition, 8 Vols., Cairo 1966-1969.

6 Abū al-Ḥusayn b. Ibrāhīm Ibn Wahb al-Kātib, *al-Burhān fī wujūh al-bayān*, ed. Aḥmad Maṭlūb and Khadīja Ḥadīthī, Baghdad 1967, pp. 51-52. Abū Hilāl al-Ḥasan b. ʿAbdallāh al-ʿAskarī, *Kitāb al-Ṣināʿatayn*, ed. ʿAlī Muḥammad Bajāwī, Cairo 1952, pp. 4 f.

7 Khalīl b. Aybak al-Ṣafadī, *al-Ghayth al-Musajjam fī Sharḥ Lāmiyyat al-ʿAjam*, 3rd edition, Beirut 2003, Vol. 1, p. 12. I thank Kelly Tuttle for alerting me to this.

comment is quoted by Ḥajjī Khalīfa (Katib Çelebi) in his influential 16th-century encyclopedic bibliography, ensuring its canonicity for the next few centuries.[8] Looking at the texts of al-Jāḥiẓ's great multi-volume works, the reason for this reputation for digression becomes clear. They are compilations gathering poems, anecdotes, arguments, and citations from every discipline, but these materials are not ordered in clear chapters that might facilitate consultation.

Book of Animals has a multi-axis and ambivalent organizational structure. Al-Jāḥiẓ often announces the beginning of »chapters«, but he rarely acknowledges their ending, and these chapters often appear to be subsumed within some other, unmarked structure such as an over-arching debate, whether between al-Jāḥiẓ and the book's Addressee in volume 1, or between the Proponents of the Dog and Rooster in volumes 1 and 2. While al-Jāḥiẓ has some textual mechanisms for segmenting the text, they are not consistent or hierarchical, so it is often difficult to see even at the most basic level what constitutes a chapter. The digressive qualities of his text are clearly in part the result of al-Jāḥiẓ's moment. Drawing on Gregor Schoeler's research into knowledge transmission practices in the early centuries of Islam, James Montgomery has recently pointed out that al-Jāḥiẓ's works bear clear traces of having been recompiled as »authored« texts for verbatim transmission after a prior life as private teaching notes or *hypomnemata* (following Schoeler's adaptation of the Greek terms *hypomnema* and *syngramma* to the Islamic context).[9] Teaching notes would have been transmitted in an oral-written manner – reading or reciting for students who made their own sets of private notes. This method of knowledge transmission was open to reorganization, and encouraged the transmission of text fragments rather than large-scale compilations. As a member of the first generation to write authored compilations for *syngrammatic* dissemination of the text verbatim, al-Jāḥiẓ explicitly spoke of balancing the competing and often contradictory demands of the oral and written contexts when it came to information mangement. However, in addition to the standard 9th-century traces of the oral-written context visible in *Book of Animals* we also find disruptions to text organization that are specific to al-Jāḥiẓ.[10] Much of the book consists of a series of overarching debates, often spanning several hundred print pages and multiple volumes. Within these long debate formats, numerous short passages offer comprehensive anthologies on a particular topic – all the

---

8 Ḥajjī Khalīfa (Katib Çelebi), *Kashf al-ẓunūn ʿan asāmī al-kutub wal-funūn*, ed. Muḥammad Sharaf al-Dīn Yāltaqāyā, (reprint) 2 Vols., Beirut 1999, Vol. 1, p. 696.

9 James Montgomery, *In Praise of Books*, Edinburgh 2013, pp. 55-104. For a succinct summary of Schoeler's extensive research, see Gregor Schoeler, *The Genesis of Literature in Islam: From the Aural to the Read*, tr. Shawkat Toorawa and Gregor Schoeler, Edinburgh 2009.

10 Jeannie Miller, *The Quibbler: Al-Jāḥiẓ's Equivocations in Kitāb al-Ḥayawān and Beyond*, Edinburgh [forthcoming], especially chapter 5.

poetry on the bad smell of dogs, for example. Sometimes these comprehensive collections have a chapter heading, which can be a distraction from following the progress of the debate; sometimes they have no headings and thus the information they transmit becomes difficult to find within the massive seven-volume work.

   Using two of the twenty extant complete or partial manuscripts of *Book of Animals*, this article compares the interpretations of text structure made by two copyists and two commentators, from the Mamluk and Ottoman eras, to show the impact and contribution of the intervening centuries of textual management. There is a dramatic development from the older to the later manuscript in the density and content of the copyist techniques used to bring out the structure and plan of the text. While the sparse chapter headings of the older manuscript are largely reproduced in the the top-level chapter headings in the newer manuscript, the newer manuscript's many additional techniques make a dramatic contribution to the text's legibility, while at the same time closing off other valid interpretations of text structure. I will consider here two examples: (1) the tension between organizing the first two volumes according to the topics discussed, or according to the overarching Dog-Rooster Debate and (2) a similar tension in volume 6 between a hierarchical taxonomic chapter structure and organization of the text as a line by line commentary on a poem.

1) Debate and Text Organization

Some 500 printed pages in the edition of *Book of Animals* are dedicated to the Dog-Rooster Debate.[11] It consists of discourses attributed to a Proponent of the Dog and a Proponent of the Rooster, with interpolations in the voice of al-Jāḥiẓ. The first part is led by the Proponent of the Rooster, with responses by his opponent, while the second part is led by the Proponent of the Dog, with responses by his opponent in turn. Discourses range from a brief comment to passages of fifty printed pages or more, and often include subsections compiling textual evidence in the form of a sequence of poetry citations and other authoritative texts. This leads to two simultaneous ways of thinking about the organization of the text: as a debate with different speakers that respond to one another, and as a compilation of texts organized by topic. When we think of the topics as the main organizational structure, the discursive context in which these topics are deployed falls out of the picture. And when we think of the debate speakers as the main organizational structure it becomes more difficult to index the precious materials compiled within the debate. Montgomery has pointed out that

---

11   Al-Jāḥiẓ (as note 5), Vol. 1, p. 222 – Vol. 2, p. 375.

al-Jāḥiẓ was deeply ambivalent about the fact that his books would be copied in the open book market and read without the expert aid of a teacher; he asks whether al-Jāḥiẓ made the text organization difficult in part to prevent access.[12] I have argued elsewhere that al-Jāḥiẓ's purpose in using a structure that is so infamously difficult to read and interpret was to transmit not only the materials themselves but also the expert deployment of them in a debate context, facilitating access to a knowledge that was vastly more complex than an accumulation of information.[13] He was teaching both argumentation method and the textual heritage of the Arabic language at the same time. So how did readers understand this odd structure? Were they sensitive to the sophisticated rhetorical techniques of the Dog-Rooster Debate, or were they merely interested in mining this rich text for the voluminous early textual material that is transmitted here and in many cases nowhere else?

The older manuscript consists of two matching Mamluk codices, Fazıl Ahmed Paşa 992 and 994 (FA) now preserved in the Süleymaniye Library in Istanbul. The codices are labelled volumes 1 and 5, they reproduce the text at volume 1, pages 4-323 and volume 5, page 119 – volume 6, page 25 according to the pagination of Hārūn's edition. Presumably they once formed part of a seven-volume set. Since they both lack a colophon, we can date them only vaguely. They were certainly produced before 859 AH / 1455 CE, when they were purchased in Mecca by ʿUmar b. [illegible] al-Maʿarrī al-Tanūkhī, whose ownership mark appears on their front pages.[14] And they appear to be newer than Fazıl Ahmed Paşa 996 (volume 7), which bears a colophon dating it to 580 / 1184-5, and must have originally belonged to a different set. Although both Fazıl Ahmed Paşa 992 and 994 appear to have been rebound at least once, Fazıl Ahmed Paşa 994 currently sports a two-tone tooled leather Mamluk binding. It is possible it was rebound using its original binding, although this is not necessarily the case. By 859 / 1455, these two matching codices began to be grouped with other volumes to eventually form a mismatched 4-volume set that was bought and sold as a unit following their union in the collection of the Ottoman poet and chancery prose author Veysi, or Uways b. Muḥammad (d. 1628), whose ownership marks on the four volumes date to 1012 / 1603-4 and 1015 / 1606-7.[15] The modern editor Hārūn treats

12 Montgomery (as note 9), especially pp. 70-72.

13 Miller (as note 10), chapter 5.

14 This ownership mark appears on Fazıl Ahmed Paşa 992, fol. 1r and 186v below the colophon, Fazıl Ahmed Paşa 993, fol. 1r, and Fazıl Ahmed Paşa 994, fol. 1r. The name is effaced in 992 and 994, but can be read in 993 where unfortunately the name of the owner's father is cut off due to a premodern paper repair.

15 Th. Menzel and Edith G. Ambros, »Weysi«, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam,* 2nd edition, ed. by P. Bearman et al., Leiden 2002. For Veysi's literary milieu, see Sooyoung Kim, *The Last of an Age: The Making and Unmaking of a Seventeenth-Century Ottoman Poet*, New York 2017.

the set as a single witness, which he calls the Köprülü manuscript (ك). All four codices do appear to represent an older branch of the text's stemma, resembling the text of Ambrosiana D 140 in Milan and Escorial 897 in San Lorenzo de El Escorial, in contrast to the other extant manuscripts of *Book of Animals*.[16] But they certainly do not represent a single set. For this article, we consider Fazıl Ahmed Paşa 992 and 994 as a single source (FA) since they appear to share a single copyist and origin.

The newer manuscript is Damad İbrahim 861 (DI), also now kept in the Süleymaniye Library in Istanbul. It is a single codex containing the entire *Book of Animals*, copied in Cairo in 1084 / 1674 by someone named Aḥmad b. ʿAlī al-Furayʿī al-Ṣāliḥī, according to the colophon. It transmits what I identify as the ›new recension‹ of the text, with some marginal variants in the hand of the original copyist that in certain passages (notably volume 1) transmit lacunae and variants from the ›old recension‹.

The copyist of FA uses a single visual style for chapter headings: enlarged script in the same black ink as the rest of the text (Figure 8). He uses a separate visual style for paragraph markers: black circles containing dots. Lines of poetry are visually distinct as well – they are usually preceded by a paragraph marker, they take up the entire line, so that their matching rhyme letters are visually perceptible, and they usually extend beyond the justification of the text area. (A great deal of poetry can be seen in Figure 1). There are no other text organization indicators. All the rubrication and marginal comments in FA were added in 1635 by the Ottoman commentator Nevizade Atai, between his purchase of the four codices in 1635 and his death later that year.[17] This is discernable because there are certain sections where the rubrication drops out, and these coincide precisely with the sections lacking Atai's marginal commentary (Figure 1). This means the Mamluk-era FA copyist had originally created a quite minimalist representation of the text.

The copyist of FA pays little attention to the disputational structure of the Dog-Rooster Debate. Only one chapter heading over the course of the entire debate indicates debate structure, and this is the opening of the entire debate itself: »Chapter on what the Proponent of the Rooster Said.«[18] Since we are missing the second volume in the hand of this copyist, it is unclear whether he would have given a similar heading to the opening of the portion of the debate led by

---

16 This represents an update to the excellent stemma provided in Hellmut Ritter's review of Harūn's first edition of *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, 1938-1947, in: *Oriens* 1 No. 2 (Dec. 31, 1948), pp. 365-372. I intend to publish an updated stemma in full as part of a partial re-edition in the future.

17 Hatice Aynur, »Atai«, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. 3rd edition, ed. by Kate Fleet et al., Leiden 2007.

18 Fazıl Ahmed Paşa 992, fol. 132r.

the Proponent of the Dog; since all the surviving manuscripts that include this part of the text do assign it a chapter heading, it is very possible. This means that only the very highest level of the debate structure was made visible by the copyist. Within the part of the debate led by the Proponent of the Rooster, the FA copyist assigns a chapter heading to the Proponent of the Rooster's compilation of reports about people who ate and enjoyed dog meat, thus prioritizing topical organization over debate structure.[19]

In 1635, the commentator Atai supplemented the work of the FA copyist in managing the contents of the text, and his interpretation balances between topical organization and debate structure. He marks in the margin every clearly announced change in voice, with the phrases »the discourse of the Proponent of the Dog« (*qawl ṣāḥib al-kalb*) or simply »Proponent of the Rooster«, either in red ink or in black ink with red overline (Figures 2 and 3). The only exceptions are two changes in voice that he apparently missed, as the pages in question contain no rubrication or comments at all.[20] Atai only occasionally identifies al-Jāḥiẓ's interpolations in the debate, such, as when al-Jāḥiẓ gives his own opinion about the best and worst smells in the world.[21] Atai does not visually distinguish between his indexing and voice-tracking notes. Nonetheless it is possible at any point to read backwards through the marginalia in order to efficiently discover which Proponent is speaking at any given point in the text.

DI, by contrast, sports numerous distinct levels of text segmentation indicators. Chapter headings of the highest order appear in large black lettering flanked by gold rosettes, taking up a full line, followed by a continuation in smaller red ink (Figure 7). At the second level, we find either the same red lettering flanked by gold rosettes indicating a chapter heading, or large black lettering flanked by rosettes and occupying a full line, but without the additional red lettering (Figure 6). With some significant exceptions, these three visual styles correspond to the same chapter headings found in FA. There is one instance of a large blue heading with gold rosettes, and one combined blue and red heading.[22] DI thus transmits a tradition of identifying certain phrases as chapter headings, but newly distinguishes between different levels. It also offers numerous small-scale text segmentation indicators that operate in conjunction and separately, in contrast to FA's single visual style for paragraph markers. At the smallest scale in DI, we find red dots, gold rosettes, and red overlines alone or in conjunction with red dots or gold rosettes. Typically, every citation is marked with a red overline on the phrase »[So and so] said […]«. At the next level up, paragraphs are indicated

---

19 Ibid., fol. 154v.
20 Ibid., fol. 171v-172r.
21 Ibid., fol. 145r.
22 Damad İbrahim 861, fol. 6v and 13v.

with very large bold initial words in the same black ink as the main text, but without taking up a whole line. It is this intermediate level of text segmentation that allows for the added legibility of DI. These large words act as a flexible tool for visually indicating large-scale text structures without formally designating a new chapter (Figure 4).

Because of the largely conservative nature of chapter headings from manuscript to manuscript, it is the paragraph headings that offer the most flexibility for copyist interpretation. DI works the debate structure into the visual representation of the text, supplying the visual indication of voice changes that Atai had apparently found lacking in FA. Typically, the large-script paragraph openers read simply »Said […]« (*qāla*) and indicate the start of a citation. These low-level text segments are distinguished from changes in voice within the debate in that the changes of voice include the full phrase, »The Proponent of the Dog said«, or even »The Proponent of the Rooster said to the Proponent of the Dog«. This allows efficient visual tracking of the debate structure throughout its long duration. Figure 4 shows the distinction between large black lettering used as paragraph markers versus indicators of voice change in the debate structure. While the lettering looks the same, the difference in length of the enlarged phrase makes it possible to visually track the progress of the debate.

2) Commentary as Text Organization

Throughout *Book of Animals*, al-Jāḥiẓ makes comments about text organization, some of which are highlighted as chapter headings by later copyists, and some of which are not. In the base text itself, we find phrases like »we now begin a complete discussion of […]« or »we have now completed our discussion of […]« or »Chapter on […]«.[23] There is some consistency from one manuscript to the next, as to which of these organizational bits of text are visually marked as chapter headings, but there are also key differences. Overall, the trend was to increase the number of headings, though the opposite occurred as well. Headings are almost never added into the transmitted text, but rather occur when a copyist newly treats an existing phrase from the text of *Book of Animals* as a heading.

Since the earliest manuscript testimony to *Book of Animals* dates to three and half centuries after al-Jāḥiẓ's death[24], it is impossible to determine how the first copies of this text identified chapters. It is more feasible to study al-Jāḥiẓ's general ideas about the text organization of *Book of Animals*, without asking about

23 For a list of these phrases, which Montgomery calls paratexts, see Montgomery (as note 9), pp. 74-93.
24 Fazıl Ahmed Paşa 996, copied 580 / 1184-5.

formal chapter demarcation, because in two passages al-Jāḥiẓ provides tables of contents for the book in a discursive format, with ambivalent discussion of his choices.[25] In both cases, he uses a transition from one major section to another to take stock of his book structure thus far and provide, for the first time, tables of contents listing the chapters he has completed and those he envisions for the rest of the book. In these discursive tables of contents, he refers to »chapters« (*abwāb*), some of which are identified as such when they appear, while others are not. This suggests that these tables of contents functioned more as a description of the organization of the book than as a hard and fast identification of absolute chapter divisions.[26] In any case, the result is a set of manuscripts that represent the chapter structure in differing ways.

These two tables of contents are themselves examples of important text segments that are not visually identified in any of the manuscripts. The first of these authorial discussions of text organization reads as follows:

> We have cited the totality of the discussion on fire, although this does not fit within the discussion of the animals species. This brings us back to noble things, useful to mention and thought-provoking. Discussion will arise that will hopefully prove useful to the reader of this book: a chapter discussing the elephant […].[27]

This clearly marks a new departure, following the massive chapter on fire that spans multiple volumes. But it does not receive a chapter heading in any of the manuscripts, and DI marks it only with a paragraph indicator.[28] FA at least adds here a visually elongated *basmala* invocation[29], a formula typically occuring at the start of books, that occasionally but rarely occurs elsewhere in the body of al-Jāḥiẓ's works. James Montgomery has suggested it is a relic of al-Jāḥiẓ's hypomnemic materials, which likely grouped material in separate notebooks by topic, but in this case it seems more likely to result from a pause and re-commencement of composition, comparable to the rededication of his *Epistle on the Merits of the Turks*.[30] We find similarly undramatic treatment of al-Jāḥiẓ's other table of contents in FA, with once again an elongated *basmala* (Figure 5).[31] DI adds a chapter heading reading merely, »Chapter« (*bāb*) before the *basmala*

---

25 Al-Jāḥiẓ (as note 5), Vol. 5, p. 148 ff. and Vol. 6, pp. 5 ff.
26 For futher discussion and examples see Miller (as note 10), chapter 5.
27 Al-Jāḥiẓ (as note 5), Vol. 5, p. 148.
28 Damad İbrahim 861, fol. 200r.
29 Fazıl Ahmed Paşa 994, fol. 6v.
30 Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Rasāʾil al-Jāḥiẓ*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Hārūn, 4 Vols., Cairo 1964-65, Vol. 3, p. 196.
31 Fazıl Ahmed Paşa 994, fol. 166r.

(Figure 6).[32] Although this may seem a minor change, it is significant that this major transition is now visually recognized and highlighted in the manuscript.

The organization of volume 6 is another instance of a multi-axis structure, comparable to the multi-axis structure of the Dog-Rooster Debate. This is because much of the volume takes the form of commentaries on three long poems, each cited in full before certain lines are cited again in order as *lemmata* with al-Jahiz's comments. There is a running tension between a hierarchical animal by animal structure, and a commentary structure organized according to the *lemmata*. Here is a sketch of the text's structure, with the headings appearing in FA in italics.

> I. Small land creatures
>> A. spiny-tailed lizards (*ḍabb*, uromastyx), p. 38
>> 1. *Complete discussion of the spiny-tailed lizard's share in wonders and rarities,* p. 54.
>> 2. *Those who enjoyed or were disgusted by the meat of the spiny-tailed lizard,* p. 79.
>>> a. Full citation of the poem by al-Bahrānī.
>>> b. Other discussions of the meat of the spiny-tailed lizard.
>> 3. *Age and longevity of the spiny-tailed lizard*, p. 115.
>> 4. *Names of Bedouoin games*, p. 145.
>> 5. Commentary on Bahrānī poem using *lemmata.* Includes these chapter headings:
>>> a. *Chapter on the Bedouin and poets who claimed they saw Ghūls and heard the whispers of the jinn*, p. 172.
>>> b. *Chapter on what is true (jidd) about the jinn*, p. 264.
>> A. Bishr poems, p. 283.
>> B. Bishr poem commentaries using *lemmata.* (Includes chapter headings.)

The volume begins with a discursive table of contents that identifies small land creatures (*ḥasharāt*) as a topic that will occupy nearly the entirety of volume 6. After a methodological discussion of the kinds of sources available, the first species announced is the spiny-tailed lizard (*ḍabb*). Several subsections then receive chapter headings in all manuscripts. The discussion of enjoyment and disgust at lizard meat concerns us here, for before delving into a sequence of dietary law discussions and historic anecdotes, al-Jāḥiẓ first mentions one specific reason for this disgust, namely the belief that the spiny-tailed lizard originated when certain humans were transformed into beastly form (*maskh*). In turn, this topic spurs

---

32 Damad İbrahim 861, fol. 234r.

al-Jāḥiẓ to cite in full a 41-line satirical poem by al-Ḥakam b. ʿAmr al-Bahrānī, whom al-Jāḥiẓ describes as an elderly materialist (Dahrī) who lived with the Banī al-ʿAnbar tribe as a jurist.[33] The poem is about a man who married a female *jinnī*, and it mentions human-beast transformation and spiny-tailed lizards. This poem turns out to be suprisingly important for the book's organization. Al-Jāḥiẓ immediately begins his commentary (*tafsīr*) on this poem by announcing that it is the first of three poems whose commentary will structure the rest of the the volume.[34] The other two poems are by a Muʿtazilī theologian, natural scientist, and propagandist, Bishr b. al-Muʿtamir, and they provide a structure for discussing the numerous remaining small creatures »about which little is known« within the topic of small land creatures (*ḥasharāt*). The commentary on al-Bahrānī's poem reflects the topics identified in the methodological discussion at the opening of this volume, for it provides the occasion for discussions of superstitions (*baṭalāt, khurāfāt*) regarding *jinn*, throughout the exegesis and in a dedicated chapters, as well as a separate »Chapter on what is true (*jidd*) about the *jinn*.«

There are two overlapping text organization structures here that compete for priority: organization according to a commentary structure with *lemmata* and comment, and organization animal by animal. For most of the text, these structures overlap more or less, in that one line of poetry mentions the hyena, for example, so the comment on this line is equivalent to a chapter on the hyena. However, if the original full citation of the poem is not highlighted as a structural feature, its function as a table of contents loses its force. Theoretically, a reader might memorize the poem and then use the lemmata, ordered according to the order of lines in the poem, to find information. But this is made more difficult when the lemmata are not visually demarcated. Even more confusingly, all the manuscripts highlight as text headings the phrases from the base text starting with the word »chapter« (*bāb*), which I have listed above. But these chapters arise as part of a very long comment on a *lemma.* So the commentary structure gets lost when these chapter headings are marked and the *lemmata* are not.

Because *lemmata* are not demarcated as such in either manuscript, the co-pyists' use of chapter headings makes a big impact on the reader's perception of text organization. The taxonomic organization at the start of the volume is completely invisible in FA because the chapter on lizards is not visually demarcated at all despite its clear textual announcement: »I will begin in the name of God the discussion of spiny-tailed lizards.«[35] DI rectifies this by giving it a

---

33 Al-Jāḥiẓ (as note 5), Vol. 6, p. 146. On the Dahriyya, see Patricia Crone, »The Dahrīs According to al-Jāḥiẓ«, in: *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph* 63 (2010-2011), pp. 63-68.

34 Al-Jāḥiẓ (as note 5), Vol. 6, p. 146.

35 Fazıl Ahmed Paşa 994, fol. 179r, corresponding to al-Jāḥiẓ (as note 5), Vol. 6, p. 38.

proper second-level chapter heading (enlarged black text occupying the whole line, flanked by gold rosettes)[36], but still reserves the top-level chapter heading style for the subsection that already receives a chapter heading in FA, »Complete discussion of the spiny-tailed lizard's share of wonders and rarities« (Figure 7). [37]

When the Bahrānī poem is first cited in full, it receives no fanfare in either manuscript, although the commentator of DI, al-Shirwānī, does index it in the margin. The start of al-Jāḥiẓ's commentary on the Bahrānī poem receives a proper chapter heading in FA (Figure 8)[38] but is completely invisible in DI, even though the text of DI provides a *basmala* invocation there (Figure 9).[39] This may be an oversight on the part of the DI copyist, since he twice elevates to a second-level chapter heading the phrase »Now the discussion brings us back to commenting on the ode of al-Bahrānī.«[40] These returns occur to mark the close of the chapters embedded in the commentary. The manuscript of FA ends before it reaches the commentary on the poems of Bishr b. al-Muʿtamir. DI does not visually mark the full recitation of these two poems that act as a table of contents for the ensuing several hundred printed pages of text[41], nor does it mark the beginning of the commentary on the first poem[42], though chapter headings within the commentaries are marked, mainly on the topic of individual animal species. However, DI does assign an unusually small second-level chapter heading to the end of the commentary on the first Bishr poem: »The first ode of Bishr b. al-Muʿtamir has concluded.«[43] The fact that this is also the start of the commentary on the second poem is completely unremarked.

3) Two Ottoman Commentators

The exceedingly broad scope of al-Jāḥiẓ's *Book of Animals* makes it particularly interesting for a study of reception history, since various interpreters have classed it as natural science, lexicography, rhetoric, or as part of the genre of wonder books that fell between geography and natural history. Montgomery has argued that the book's main purpose was theological, and I have argued that al-Jāḥiẓ meant for it to present his vision of an expanded scope for the discipline of *kalām* (theology)

---

36 Damad İbrahim 861, fol. 237r.

37 Al-Jāḥiẓ (as note 5), Vol. 6, p. 54. Fazıl Ahmed Paşa 994, fol. 184r. Damad İbrahim 861, fol. 238r.

38 Fazıl Ahmed Paşa 994, fol. 212r.

39 Damad İbrahim 861, fol. 244v.

40 Ibid., folio 250v, corresponding to al-Jāḥiẓ (as note 5) Vol. 6 p. 225. Damad İbrahim 861 folio 256r, corresponding to al-Jāḥiẓ (as note 5) Vol. 6 p. 281.

41 Damad İbrahim 861, fol. 256v-257v.

42 Ibid., fol. 257v.

43 Ibid., fol. 266v, corresponding to al-Jāḥiẓ (as note 5), Vol. 6 p. 406.

as a unified science of all things, including the Arabic language and the natural world.[44] This universal science of *kalām* did not catch on, but al-Jāḥiẓ became a canonical figure in the development of the polymathic pursuit of knowledge that almost immediately after came to be called *adab*. Already al-Jāḥiẓ's younger contemporary Ibn Qutayba (d. 889) is often quoted as distinguishing between a scholar (ʿālim) who must choose a science, and a polymath or belles-lettrist (*adīb*) who must »have broad knowledge in the sciences (*yattasiʿ fī al-funūn* or *yatafannan fī al-ʿulūm*).«[45] Pellat has demonstrated how quickly al-Jāḥiẓ came to be associated with *adab*.[46] Nonetheless, the tradition of Arabic letters remained undecided about how to classify this polymathic text. In 13th-century encyclopedic texts, al-Jāḥiẓ's *Book of Animals* was often mentioned along with Aristotle's *Book of Animals* (*Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*)[47] and a *Book of Animals* by the Galenic physician Ibn Abī al-Ashʿath (d. 970 CE), so that the three works came to constitute a canon of zoology for wonder books.[48] The polymath, medical scholar, and philosopher ʿAbd al-Laṭīf al-Baghdādī (d. 1228-9 CE) wrote Galenic epitomes of each of these three animal books, confirming that al-Jāḥiẓ's *Book of Animals* was treated by some as a scientific work.[49] Of these three animal books, only al-Jāḥiẓ's was interpreted as being itself a member of the less technical encyclopedic wonder book genre, by the creators of a manuscript housed in Milan's Ambrosiana Library, D 140.[50] It is a 15th-century manuscript with spectacular illustrations comparable to those in the many lushly illustrated copies of *Book of Creatures* by al-Qazwīni, *Book of Animals* by al-Damīrī, and *Life of Animals*

---

44 Montgomery (as note 9) and Miller (as note 10).

45 Al-Ṣafadī (as note 7), Vol. 1, p. 11. Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi, *al-ʿIqd al-Farīd*, 8 volumes, Beirut 1983, Vol. 2, p. 78. Kelly Tuttle, *Expansion and Digression: A Study in Mamlūk Literary Commentary*, Ph.D. dissertation University of Pennsylvania 2013, p 120. I have not been able to locate this statement in any book by Ibn Qutayba.

46 Charles Pellat, »Al-Ğāḥiẓ jugé par la posterité«, in: *Arabica* 27 No. 1 (Feb. 1980), pp. 1-67.

47 This title was given to a compendium of Aristotle's biological works in translation, including *History of Animals, Parts of Animals,* and *Generation of Animals*. Remke Kruk, »La Zoologie Aristotélicienne: Tradition Arabe«, in: *Dictionnaire des Philosophes Antiques Supplément*, ed. by Richard Goulet, Jean-Marie Flamand, and Maroun Aouad, Paris 2003, pp. 329-334.

48 Remke Kruk, »Ibn Abī al-Ashʿath's *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*: A Scientific Approach to Athropology, Dietetics and Zoological Systematics«, in: *Zeitschrift für Geschichte der arabisch-islamischen Wissenschaften* 14 (2001), pp. 119-168, here p. 119. Remke Kruk, »Some Late Medieval Zoological Texts and Their Sources«, in: *Actas del XII Congreso de la Unión Europea de Arabistas e Islamólologos* (1986), pp. 424-429.

49 Remke Kruk, »ʿAbd al-Laṭīf al-Baghdādī's *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*: a Chimaera?« in: *Islamic Thought in the Middle Ages: Studies in Text, Transmission and Translation, in Honour of Hans Daiber*, ed. by Anna Akasoy and Wim Raven, Leiden and Boston 2008, pp. 345-362, p. 346. Hajjī Khalīfa (as note 8) Vol. 1, p. 696.

50 Oscar Löfgren and Carl Johan Lamm, *Ambrosian Fragments of an Illuminated Manuscript Containing the Zoology of al-Ğāḥiẓ*, Uppsala 1946.

by Ibn Bukhtishūʿ.[51] At the same time, al-Jāḥiẓ's *Book of Animals* is cited by al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 1071) as one of four top books by Baṣran scholars, in the company of other works clearly in the category of linguistic study.[52] It was epitomized by the poet Ibn Sanāʾ al-Mulk (d. 1155) under the title *Spirit of the ›Animals‹* (*Rūḥ al-Ḥayawān*) as well as by the philologist Ibn Manẓūr (d. 1312), author of a dictionary that is still widely used today, *The Arab Tongue* (*Lisān al-ʿArab*).[53] Lexicography, wonder compilation, Aristotelian zoology – al-Jāḥiẓ's *Book of Animals* is a book with many faces. What can the manuscripts of this work tell us about how readers understood it?

Two Ottoman commentaries on *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān* survive in the hand of their respective authors, in the margins of FA and DI. Both commentaries were subsequently copied into the margins of later manuscripts, suggesting they were ascribed some cultural importance.[54] They include marginal topics indexing the subject matter of the text page by page and paragraph by paragraph. While the topic headings do not overtly deal with the large questions of text organization that we have been discussing, the differences between these commentaries do reveal how reader presuppositions about the discipline and purpose of the text can dramatically transform the perception of its contents. Both commentators seem to have read closely, but they differ in their understanding of which ideas are primary and which are mentioned only in passing. Broadly speaking, Atai, the commentator of FA, sees *Book of Animals* as a book about phenomena with relevance for studying the Arabic literary tradition. Meanwhile the commentator of DI, al-Shirwānī, is more concerned to study the texts transmitted within *Book of Animals*, focusing especially on unusual vocabulary. His commentary suggests that he sees al-Jāḥīẓ as pursuing a chiefly philological project in this text. The two commentaries then provide two running sequences of topic headings, with very little overlap.

---

51 Anna Contadini, *A World of Beasts: A Thirteenth-Century Illustrated Arabic Book on Animals (the Kitāb Naʿt al-Ḥayawān) in the Ibn Bakhtishūʿ Tradition*, Leiden 2011. Persis Berlekamp, *Wonder, Image, and Cosmos in Medieval Islam*, New Haven 2011.

52 Pellat (as in note 46), pp. 4-5. The other Basran books are: the canonical grammar book, Sibawayhi's *Kitāb*; the first Arabic dictionary, al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad's *Kitāb al-ʿAyn*, and al-Jāḥiẓ's other compilatory work, *al-Bayān wal-Tabyīn*.

53   Ḥajjī Khalīfa (as note 8), Vol. 1, p. 696. The unpublished autograph of Ibn Manẓūr's epitome is in San Lorenzo ed El Escorial, Escorial arab. 901.

54 Atai's commentary was copied into the margins of the uniform set of codices Fazıl Ahmed Paşa 992M, 997, 995, 997M, which are copied from the mismatched set that FA belonged to. Shirwani's appears in the margins of Reïs'ul-Kuttab 876, Reïs'ul-Kuttab 584, and Nuruosmaniye 3031, all gathered now in the Suleymaniry Library in Istanbul, and in 56870 (adab ٩س), in Cairo's Dār al-Kutub.

The commentary visible on FA is by the the poet, cultural historian, and Ottoman judge in Rumelia, Nevizade Atai (1538 – 1635) or ʿAṭāʾ Allāh b. Yaḥyā Nevʿi.[55] Atai wrote an update to Taşköprüzade's definitive biographical dictionary of Ottoman elites, entitled *Realities of Realities in Completion of the ›Crimson Anemone‹*. He was part of the Ottoman *divan* poetry movement to incorporate into Ottoman Turkish poetry the complex tropology of Arabic and Persian poetics and poetry. He composed prose and poetry in Turkish as well as translating from Persian to Turkish. In his ownership mark on Fazıl Ahmed Paşa 993, volume 3 of the mismatched set to which FA also belongs, Atai takes credit for his commentary and rubrication in general terms:

> Then [this codex] entered into the possession of this humble servant, along with the first, fifth, and final volumes. Its editor (*muḥarrir*) is the most deficient of God's servants, ʿAṭāʾ Allāh, the judge of the city of Uskūb. 1044.

Atai specifies in his ownership notes on Fazıl Ahmed Paşa 992, 993, and 994 that he was the judge of Skopje (Uskūb), but in the note to Fazıl Ahmed Paşa 996, he writes that he had been removed from his position as judge but was still living in Skopje.[56] On the fly leaf to Fazıl Ahmed Paşa 994, he adds a line of poetry in Ottoman Turkish by »the humble author« (*al-muḥarrir al-ḥaqīr*), dated to 16 Shawwal 1044 (April 4, 1635) in Trikala (Tirḥāla), Thessaly (Figure 10).[57] It is unclear whether Atai here references himself as author of the poem, or rubricator and commentator of the codex. To confirm Atai's authorship of the commentary, I checked that the hand and ink color and lustre of the comments and rubrication appear to match Atai's ownership marks in these codices, in contrast to the only other ownership mark found on all four manuscripts, that of Veysi. I also compared Atai's practice of rubricating, commenting, and adding a table of contents to numerous other manuscripts that he owned and commented, including an autograph copy of a text he authored.[58] This process was made possible by the catalogs of Ramazan Şeşen and Maḥmūd al-Sayyid al-Dughaym, of the Fazıl Ahmed Paşa (Köprülü) and Ragip Paşa collections respectively, both now housed at the Süleymaniye Library in Istanbul.[59] These catalogs index manuscript owners, and in combination with Turkey's massive digitization project, allowed me to quickly compare numerous codices owned by Nevizade Atai.

55 Aynur (as note 17). Maḥmūd al-Sayyid al-Dughaym, *Fihris al-makhṭūṭāt al-ʿarabiyya wal-turki-yya wal-fārisiyya fī maktabat Raghib Pāshā*, 10 Vols., Jeddah 2016, Vol. 4, pp. 382-384, fn. 2.

56 Fol. 1r in each case.

57 Fazıl Ahmed Paşa 994 fol. 1r (recto of the first fly leaf).

58 Esad Efendi 923 at the Süleymaniye Library.

59 Dughaym (as note 55). Ramazan Şeşen, *Fihris makhṭūṭāt maktabat Köprülü*, 3 Vols., Istanbul 1986.

The commentary appearing on DI is by the *adīb*, Ottoman financial administrator, and possessor of a vast library, Abū Bakr b. Rustum al-Shirwānī (d. 1135 / 1723). It includes many dictionary definitions taken from the lexicographic works of Ibn Fāris (d. 395 / 1004) and *al-Ṣiḥāḥ* by al-Jawharī (d. 393-400 / 1003-1010), in addition to topic headings and at least one case of cross-referencing with al-Jāḥiẓ's other large-scale work, *al-Bayān wal-Tabyīn*.[60] Two manuscripts bearing al-Shirwānī's commentary identify certain notes as being authored by al-Shirwānī, by appending to the comment the phrase »in the hand of Abī Bakr al-Shirwānī«.[61] DI bears his ownership mark on fol. 1r, similar to the one published by Ayman Fuad al-Sayyid.[62] Boris Liebrenz's online databases of ownership marks in Islamic manuscripts provide a rich list of numerous manuscripts owned by al-Shirwānī.[63] While Atai's reading practice is consistent across the many manuscripts he owned, al-Shirwānī apparently did not consistently comment the manuscripts he owned, so a comparison with other books in his library was not useful. An examination of the manuscript convinced me that the marginal notes prefaced with the tag ح for »marginal commentary« (*ḥāshiya*) are written in the hand of the original copyist, not al-Shirwānī, while numerous notes can be very clearly identified as belonging to al-Shirwānī. The variety of colours and sizes, however, means that there are inevitably some notes that cannot be reliably ascribed to one or the other. As there are no other ownership marks on the manuscript, these are the only two hands we could try to identify. There are also indications that al-Shirwānī copied a few of these comments from a prior manuscript of *Book of Animals*.

Atai's commentary clearly displays the effects of a long-standing re-interpretation of al-Jāḥiẓ's work as primarily not theological.[64] It segregates certain passages in the text as belonging to al-Jāḥiẓ's theological school, Muʿtazilism, treating this as a curiosity and implying that the rest of the text need not be considered in relation to Muʿtazilism or theology generally speaking. When al-Jāḥiẓ cites the harsh words of his Addressee who falsely ascribes to him the most extreme version of the mild views al-Jāḥiẓ has himself merely described rather than espousing them, Atai's marginal thematic heading reads simply, »Reference to his theological school (*madhhab*)«, responding only to the word *al-muʿtazila* in the

---

60 Dughaym (as note 55), Vol. 8, p. 330.

61 For example, Reïsʾul Kuttab 584 fol. 2r and 4r, and Nuruosmaniye 3031 fol. 2r and 4r.

62 Ayman Fuad al-Sayyid, »Les marques de possession sur les manuscrits et la reconstitution des anciens fonds de manuscrits arabes«, in: *Manuscripta Orientalia* 9 No. 4 (2003), pp. 14-23.

63 Rifāʾiyya Library now in Leipzig: https://www.refaiya.uni-leipzig.de/content/index.xml Staatsbibliothek in Berlin: http://orient-digital.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/content/index.xml Gotha Research Library: http://www.manuscripts-gotha.uni-jena.de/content/index.xml?XSL. lastPage.SESSION=/content/index.xml

64 Pellat (as in note 46).

base text.[65] This may suggest an insensitivity to the theological import of the text as a whole, which al-Jahiz says aims to prove (and I would add, to reinterpret) the Muʿtazilī doctrine of theodicy (maṣlaḥa). Instead, Atai is mainly oriented toward adab and the encyclopedic wonder tradition, mining Kitāb al-Ḥayawān for Arab lore about animals and jinn, and only occasionally delving into the philological niceties of lexicography and grammar.[66] It seems he envisioned using this information to understand the Arabic literary tradition. Al-Jāḥiẓ at one point claims that a famous line of poetry by ʿAmr b. Yarbuʿ b. Ḥanẓala references the tale of a siʿlāt (a kind of fabulous female being, sometimes identified as a kind of jinnī) [67] who lived with the Tamīm tribe long enough to bear a child among them: »When she saw a flash of lightning gleaming from a mountaintop in the land of the saʿālī, she became homesick and flew to them.«[68] In his comment, Atai indicates that this narrative explains another canonical line of poetry:

> This is what Abū al-ʿAlāʾ [al-Maʿarrī] referenced when he said [of his camels], *When the lightning gleamed I covered their faces, as if I were ʿAmr and the steeds were saʿālī.*[69]

By Atai's time, the link between ʿAmr's story and the poem by al-Maʿarrī (d. 1057) had become a *topos* in literary commentaries and Arabic poetry[70], but al-Jāḥiẓ of course does not mention this since al-Maʿarrī would not live until several centuries later. Atai thus brings the later Arabic tradition of poetic commentary into the margins of *Book of Animals*. But he also links al-Jāḥiẓ's information more creatively with Persian and Turkish proverbs and idioms, sometimes signed with the first letter of his name, ع (Figure 11).[71]

Al-Shirwānī, by contrast, treats al-Jāḥiẓ's *Book of Animals* as a repository of lexicographic information. The vast majority of his comments reproduce dictionary definitions and morphological discussions of difficult terms in the base text. He also provides a running series of topic headings indexing the content consistently, if less closely than the dense topic headings Atai provides. Surprisingly, these two accounts of what the book is »about« rarely coincide. On the balance, al-Shirwānī identifies philological topics discussed in the text, while

65 Al-Jāḥiẓ (as note 5), Vol. 1, p. 7. Fazıl Ahmed Paşa 992, fol. 4r.

66 One example is FA 992, fol. 138v, where Atai discussions the phonetic form of the name of the fish called *shabbūṭ*.

67 Pellat and MacDonald, »Ghūl«, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam,* 2nd edition (as in note 15).

68 Al-Jāḥiẓ (as note 5) Vol. 1, pp. 185-186.

69 Fazıl Ahmed Paşa 992, fol. 108v.

70 Yāqūt (d. 1229) describes this verse in his entry on al-Maʿarrī as being, »of dubious explanation« (*mushkil al-tafsīr*) and he cites later poetic riffs on the *topos*. Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Muʿjam al-Udabāʾ*, ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās, Beirut 1993, Vol. 5, p. 2000.

71 Fazıl Ahmed Paşa 992, fol. 139v.

Atai names the creatures or phenomena it discusses. For example, for the same passage, here are the topic headings provided by each commentary, excluding Atai's marginal identification of changes in speaker. The location in the base text is identified using page and line numbers from Hārūn's edition.

Location in edition Vol.:p.:line	DI folio	Al-Shirwānī heading	FA folio	Atai heading
I:291:08	41r	ḥinn are weak jinn	168v	dogs that are jinn
I:291:10			168v	types of jinn
I:291:15			169r	jinn and ḥinn are two kinds
I:292:03	41r	on killing dogs	169r	on killing dogs
I:292:17			170r	abrogation regarding dogs
I:293:09			170r	reparation for the killing of dogs
I:294:08	41v	the matter of those [houses] with exposed areas		
I:297:05	42r	*al-irbiyāna* [shrimp or another kind of crustacean]	172v	kinds of transformed humans
I:300:03	42v	the Bedouin call any snake a shayṭān		
I:300:05			175r	As is common[ly said] in our age, »Ibn Shayṭān al-defteri« ع [72]
I:301:03			175v	the authoritative story of Khurāfa
I:301:08			175v	Sharīk entered heaven
I:302:02			175v	jinn's touch

72 I do not know this phrase nor to whom it refers. It is signed with Atai's initial. See Figure 11.

			176v	the reason for killing dogs in Medina
			176v	why rabies affects the dog
			179r	a[nother] book by the author
I:307:04			179v	legal status of beating a thief
I:307:16			180r	killing vermin
I:308:06			180r	discussion of beastly transformation is one of the author's charms
I:308:10	43v	mentioning fables as examples		
I:310:5			181r	joke
			181r	the tongue of the elephant is backwards
			181r	pause [to consider this]
I:311:8			181v	reference to his epistle
I:311:10			181v	kinds of dogs
I:313:02	44r	discussion of [words] for praiseworthy things that have been derived from the word »dog«	182v	discourse of the Proponent of the Dog

While both commentators highlight both phenomena and philology, Atai tends to to focus more often on phenomena, while al-Shirwānī focuses more often on philology. For example, al-Shirwānī identifies the discussion at I:291:08 as a point of philology identifying the meaning of the unusual word ḥinn, whereas Atai is more interested in the lore about various appearances and kinds of jinn, which I here class as phenomena as opposed to philology. Both commentators point out the legal discussion of killing dogs, and al-Shirwānī notes the legal discussion of keeping dogs when the house is not secure. While Atai then continues to index specific stories related to jinn, al-Shirwānī focuses only on the odd philological point, such as the fact that Bedouin called snakes demons (shayāṭīn), perhaps

without intending to claim for them any supernatural status. At I:308-311, al-Jāḥiẓ lists a number of tough questions regarding Bedouin lore and its associated philological and biological conundrums, citing in full a passage he had originally written as part of his *Epistle on Squaring and Circling* to insult and challenge a courtly rival.[73] Atai indexes several of these conundrums as independent topics, and points out the reference to the epistle only when al-Jāḥiẓ finally reveals this connection in the base text. Al-Shirwānī, meanwhile, identifies the rhetorical purpose of this list from the beginning of the passage: »mentioning examples of fables«. At I:313, the Proponent of the Dog responds to his opponent's, citation of negative idioms and semantic derivations from the word »dog« by arguing, »Aren't the derivations from its name for praiseworthy things more numerous?« This announces a new topic, for the Proponent of the Dog follows up with a long list of examples. While Atai remarks simply, »Discourse of Proponent of the Dog«, al-Shirwānī assigns a topic heading: »discussion of [words] for praiseworthy things that have been derived from the word dog (*kalb*).«

A similar difference in weight between Atai's relative emphasis on phenomena and al-Shirwānī's relative emphasis on philology arises in their interpretation of the book's introduction. Both commentators flag a passage in the introduction to *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān* where al-Jāḥiẓ gives a taxonomy of »the world along with the bodies in it«.[74] I have argued elsewhere that this taxonomy operates as a performative introduction to the methods of the text as a whole, in that it highlights a tension between al-Jāḥiẓ's divisions and the numerous exceptions and challenges to these divisions that he uses to disrupt the stability of the knowledge system he introduces.[75] In many cases, al-Jāḥiẓ presents this tension as a conflict between the approaches of lexicography and biology. It seems that Atai was not reading closely for tone at this point, for he flags only the major taxonomic divisions introduced, making no note of the the passage's disruptive lexicographic and biological quibbles. His comments on the entire interlude introducing the topic of *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān* read as follows:

> Introduction to the division of bodies
> Elements
> That which is growing consists of two classes
> Animals 4 [i.e. there are 4 major classes of animals]
> That which walks 4
> Birds 3

---

73 Charles Pellat, *Le Kitāb at-tarbīʿ wa-t-tadwīr de Ǧāḥiẓ*, Damascus 1956.
74 Al-Jāḥiẓ (as note 5), Vol. 1, pp. 26-37.
75 Miller (as note 10), chapter 2.

Definition (*taʿrīf*)
Sea animals
Wisdom 2
Communication (*al-bayān*) 4
Important point (*maṭlab*): One of the two classes of wisdom in animals
Return to the discussion of this book[76]

The first comment identifies this passage as a textual segment on the classification of bodies with its own introduction (*muqaddima*). Thereafter, Atai flags each level of the division al-Jāḥiẓ provides, without noting any of the numerous quibbles, caveats, and self-corrections troubling the text. From this outline, we would expect a straightforward taxonomy. The label »definition« contributes to this focus on al-Jāḥiẓ's most apparently definitive statements, while eliding the persistent quibbling rhetoric. The label refers to al-Jāḥiẓ's remark, »Predators (*al-sabuʿ*) among birds are those which eat only flesh, while livestock (*al-bahīma*) among birds are those which eat only grain.«[77] This deceptively simple definition comes in the midst of a long and ambivalent discussion of the many characteristics associated with »predatoriness« (*al-sabuʿiyya*) beyond simply being a carnivore. Carnivore is the default sense of this term for al-Jāḥiẓ throughout *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, so Atai is not wrong to flag this »definition«. But in doing so, he allows a skimming reader to skip over al-Jāḥiẓ's more complex semantic investigation of these terms, that works between law, lexicography, and biology. This goal of simplifying to make the most important information easily accessible can be read as well in Atai's comment, »Communication 4.« This refers to al-Jāḥiẓ's division of human communication (*bayān*) into four categories: speech, script, dactylonomy (the expression of numbers by hand signs), and gesture. It elides al-Jāḥiẓ's immediate addition,

> And the communication of the sign which does not seek signs (i.e. non-human communication) was created to make itself available to the sign-seeker, leading all those who reflect on it to knowledge of the proofs it has stored up and the signs it contains […].[78]

This is a fifth type of communication, non-human communication, namely the semiotic function of Creation. This is a key passage where al-Jahiz vociferously defends the truly semiotic character of Creation as comparable to language, thus setting his book up as a demonstration of his practice of reading together the signs embedded in material reality and in the Arabic linguistic heritage. Atai's

---

76 Fazıl Ahmed Paşa 992, fol. 13v-19v.
77 Ibid., fol. 15v, corresponding to al-Jāḥiẓ (as note 5), Vol. 1, p. 29.
78 Fazıl Ahmed Paşa 992, fol. 17r, corresponding to al-Jāḥiẓ (as note 5), Vol. 1, p. 34.

commentary does later flag this fifth type of communication: »The classes of communication are 4 but there is a fifth characteristic.«[79] But this comes too late, for at this point al-Jahiz has turned his attention to linguistic media. The key rationale for insisting on a fifth type of communication is discussed the first time it is mentioned: the identification of the semiotic function of Creation as the fifth form of communication (*bayān*).

Only a century later, al-Shirwānī's lexicographic focus leads him to a more balanced reading of this passage, though his topic headings are less consistent and so provide a more sketchy account of his interpretation. He does not highlight the beginning of the passage as Atai does, possibly since the manuscript copyist had already noted that moment by enlarging its opening word, »I say [...]« (*wa-aqūl*). Al-Shirwānī's only topic headings focus on the division of birds:

> Classes of birds (*aqsām al-ṭayr*)
> Not everything that flies with two wings is a bird (*ṭāʾir*)
> That which is called by the name »bird« (*ṭāʾir*)[80]

This collection of notes gives the clear impression of a balanced reading of the text. Al-Shirwānī notes al-Jāḥiẓ's scientific rhetoric of division, without losing track of his lexicographic interest in the semantic extension of class names.

In sum, the distinct interests of the two commentators produce a very different overall impression of what the book is about, and where the text progresses from one topic to the next. Text segmentation through topic headings can make a huge interpretive impact on the perceived purpose and disciplinary orientation of the base text. This only serves to deepen our appreciation of the contributions made by copyists, for the copyists were also actively involved in demarcating text segmentation. In this way, the activities of the copyist and the commentator are only somewhat distinguishable. The copyist of DI performs many of the tasks that Atai undertakes as marginal commentator on FA: indications of voice changes in the Dog-Rooster Debate, and certain topic headings. DI's extensive use of various levels of paragraph and chapter headings make for a much more legible text than what we find in the Mamluk-era FA. But the flip side of this increased legibility is a deeper elision of those important text divisions that the DI copyist does not demarcate.

79 Ibid., fol. 25r, corresponding to al-Jāḥiẓ (as note 5), Vol. 1, p. 45.
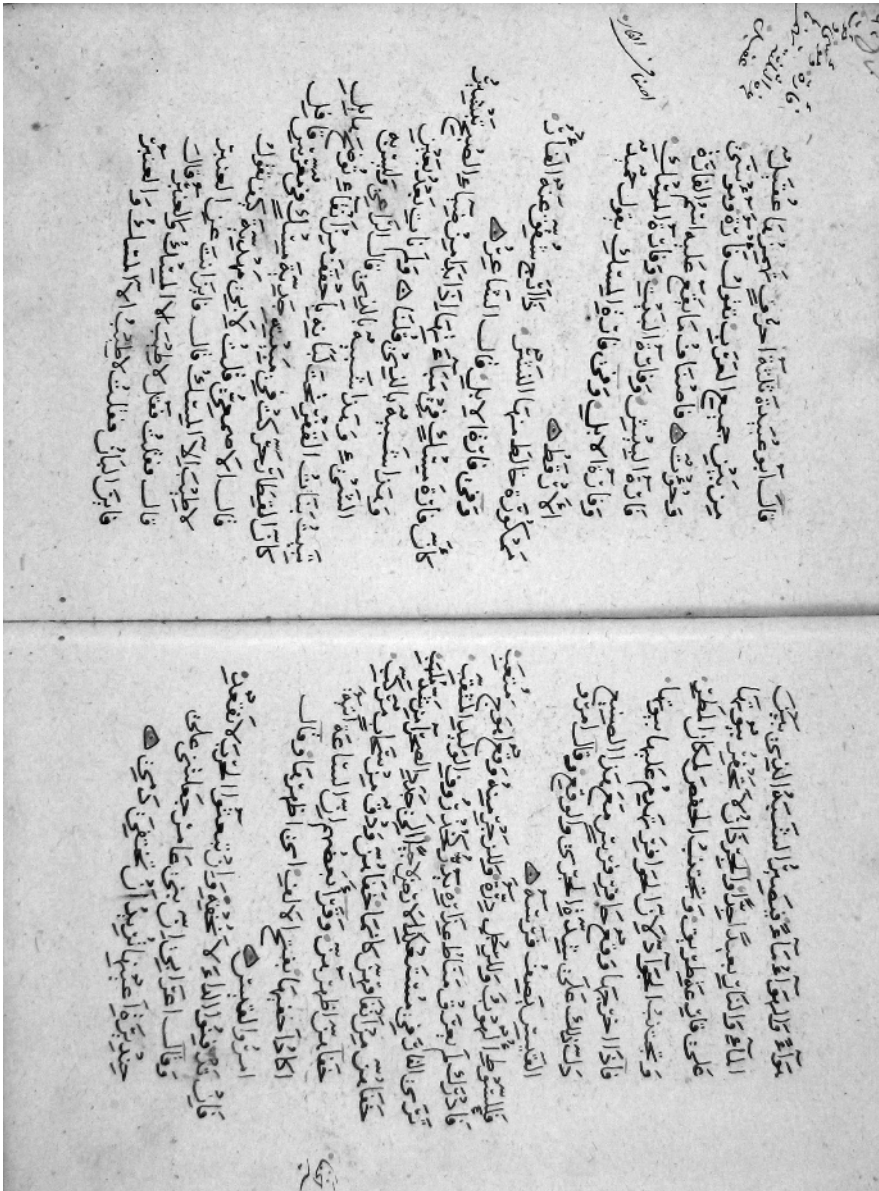80 Damad İbrahim 861, fol. 5r.

Figure 1: Fazıl Ahmed Paşa 994, fol. 61v-62r,
Istanbul, Süleymaniye Manuscript Library
The right page displays red dots and red filling in the punctuation circles, but this
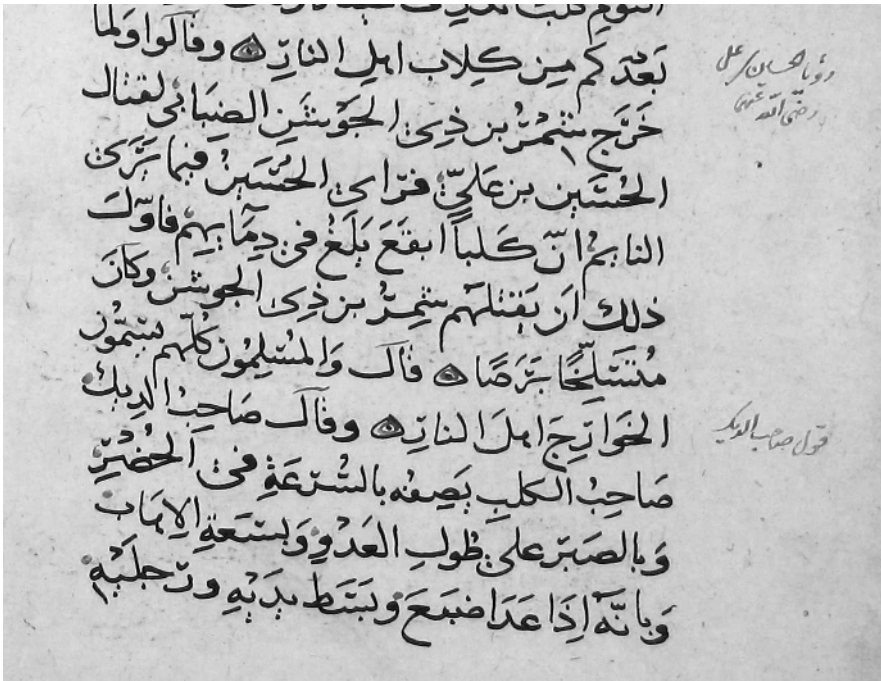rubrication drops off mid-way down the left page.

Figure 2: Fazıl Ahmed Paşa 992, fol. 156v,
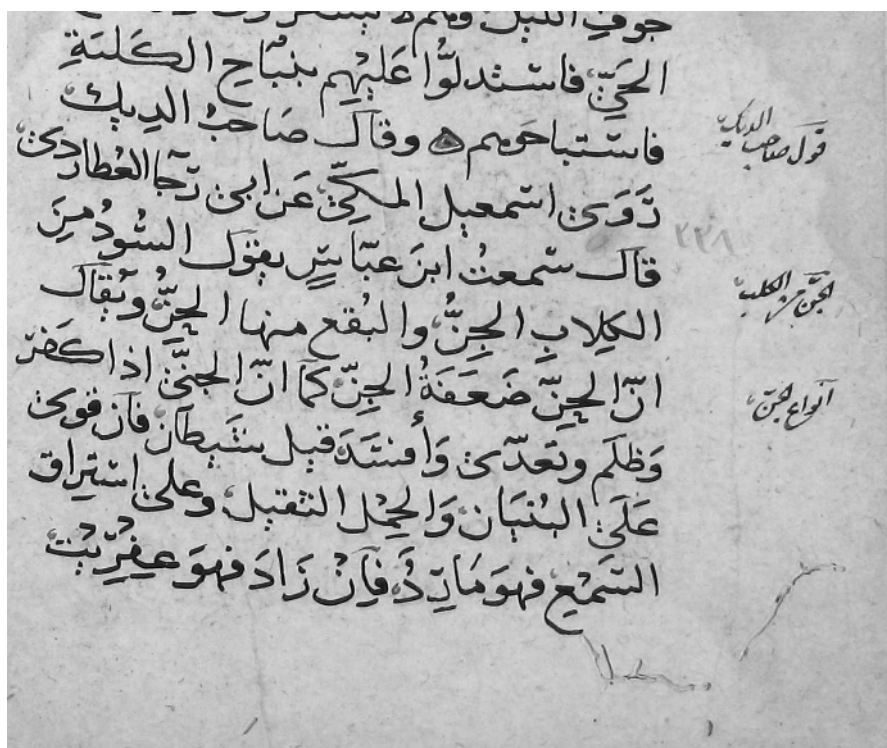Istanbul, Süleymaniye Manuscript Library

جوف الإبل وهم ... الحق
الحق فاستدلوا عليهم بنباح الكلبة
فاستباحوهم وقال صاحب الديك
روى اسماعيل المكي عن ابي نجا العطاردي
قال سمعت ابن عباس يقول والسود من
الكلاب الجن والبقع منها الجن وقال
ان الجن ضعفة الجن كما ان الجني اذا كفر
وظلم وتعدى وأفسد قبل شيطان فان قوي
على البنيان والحمل التقبل وعلى استراق
السمع فهو مارد فان زاد فهو عفريت

(hāmish): قول صاحب الديك · الجن من الكلب · أنواع الجن

Figure 3: Fazıl Ahmed Paşa 992,
Istanbul, Süleymaniye Manuscript Library
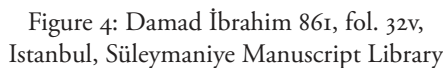
Figure 4: Damad İbrahim 861, fol. 32v,
Istanbul, Süleymaniye Manuscript Library
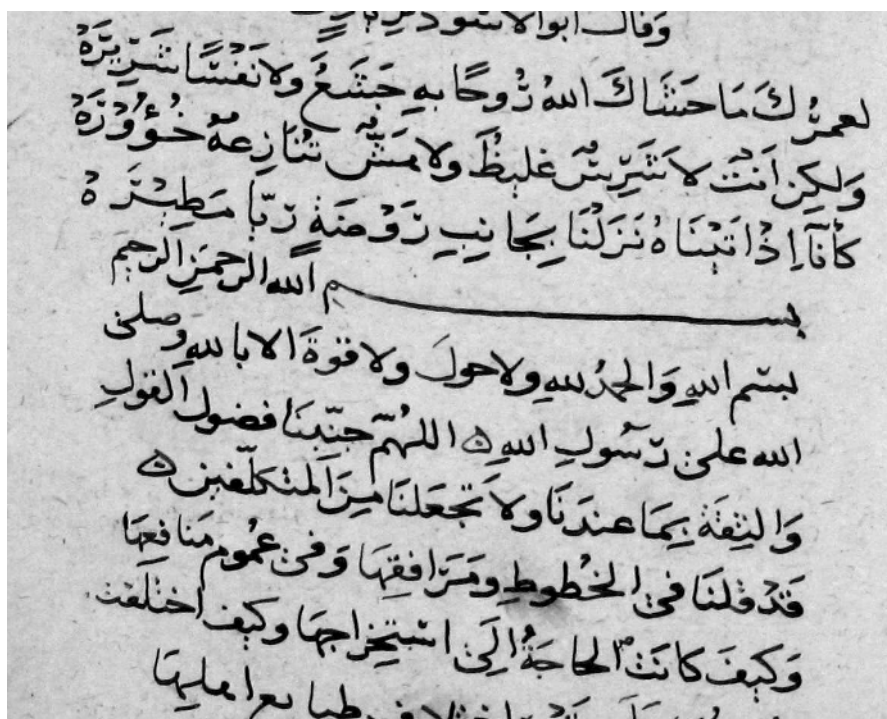
Figure 5: Fazıl Ahmed Paşa 994, fol. 166r,
Istanbul, Süleymaniye Manuscript Library
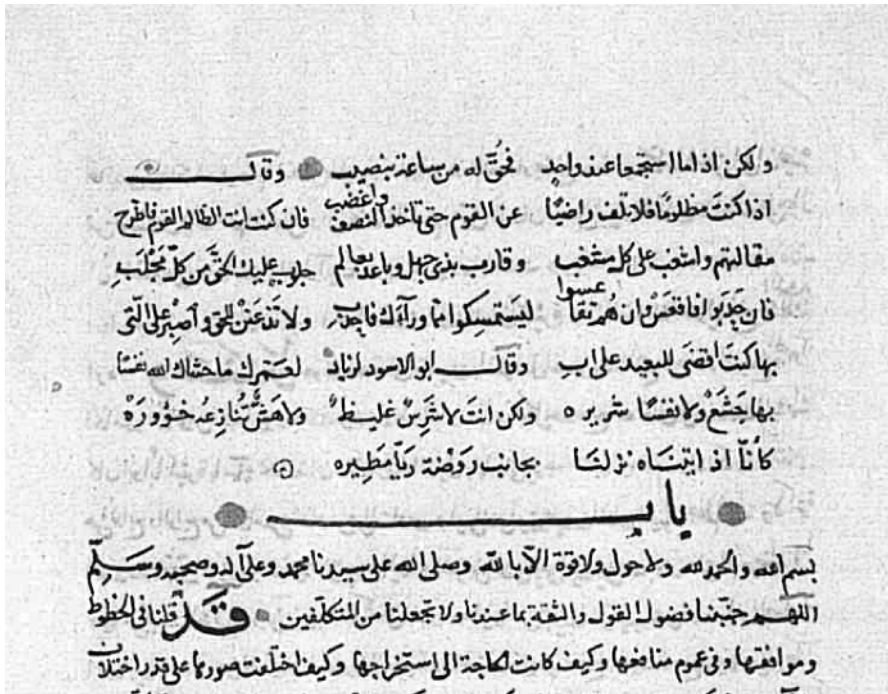
Figure 6: Damad İbrahim 861, fol. 234r,
Istanbul, Süleymaniye Manuscript Library

Figure 7: Damad İbrahim 861, fol. 238r,
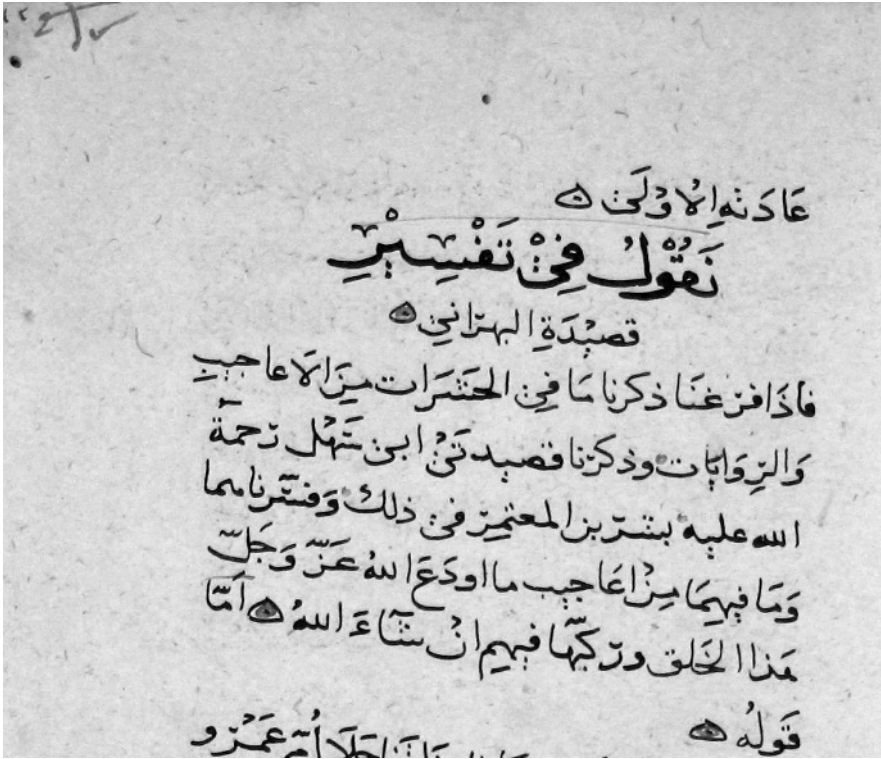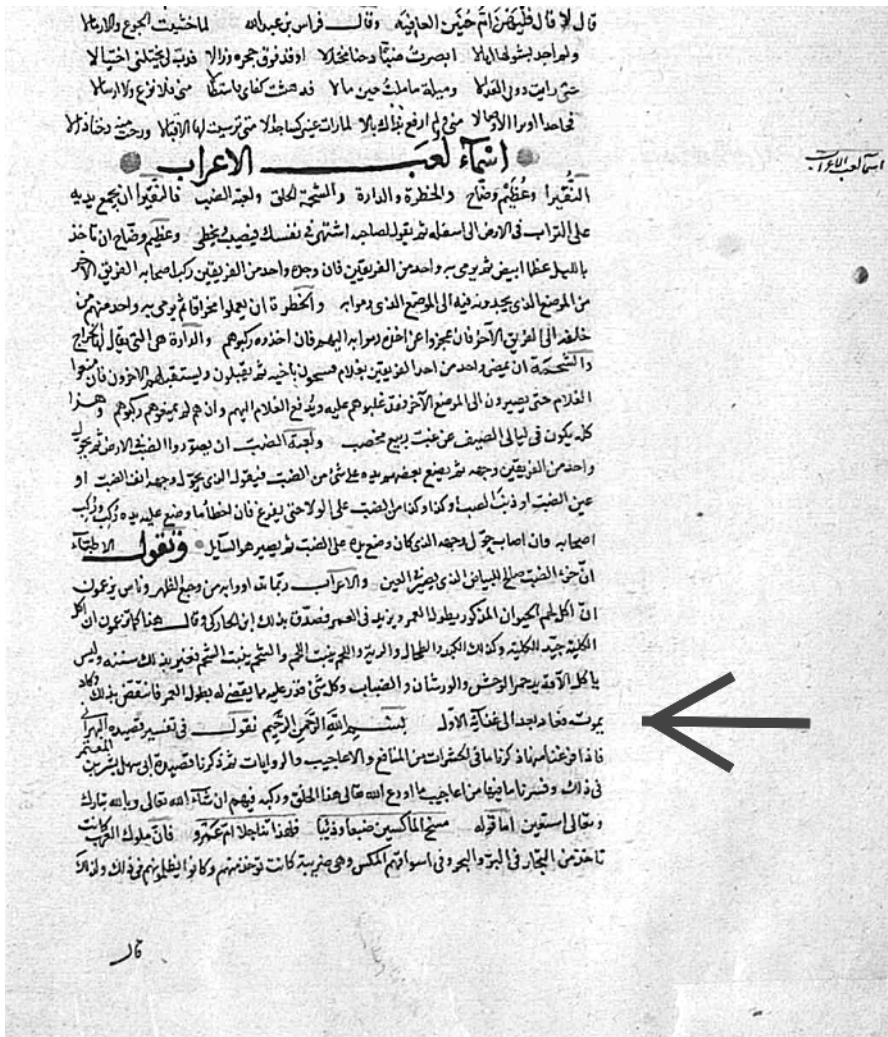Istanbul, Süleymaniye Manuscript Library

Figure 8: Fazıl Ahmed Paşa 994, fol. 212r,
Istanbul, Süleymaniye Manuscript Library

Figure 9: Damad İbrahim 861, fol. 244v,
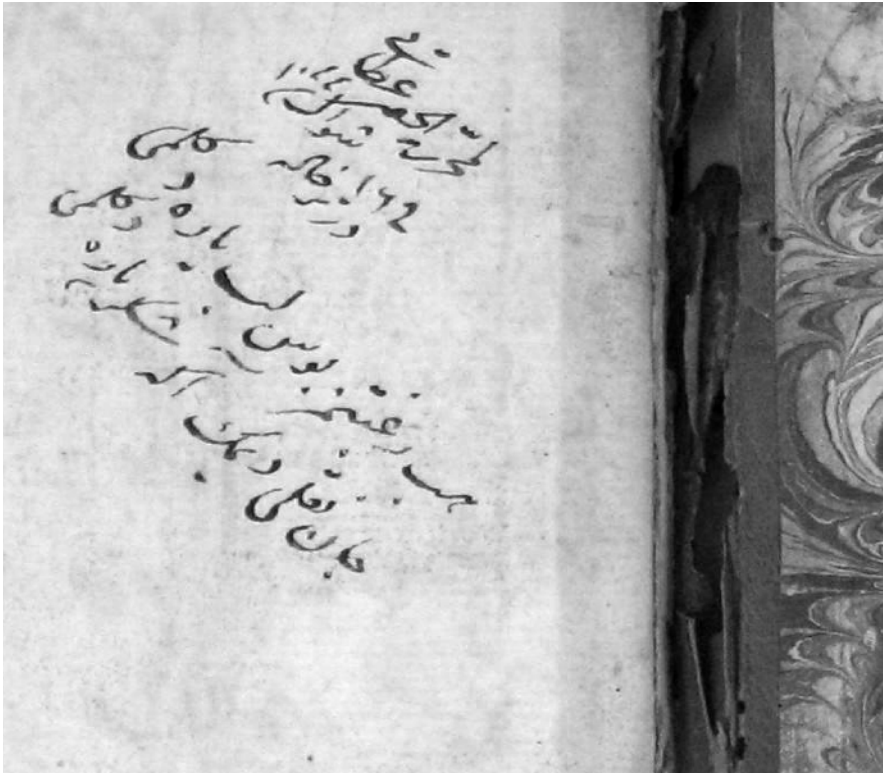Istanbul, Süleymaniye Manuscript Library

Figure 10: Fazıl Ahmed Paşa 994, fol. 1r (recto of the first fly leaf), detail,
Istanbul, Süleymaniye Manuscript Library.
I would like to thank Lale Javanshir for transliterating and translating this verse of
Ottoman Turkish poetry.

المحرّر الحقير عطائي
شوال 1044
در ترحاله

هب رغبتمز بوس لب یاره دكلمی
جان نقلی دیمك اكه شكرباره دكلمی

Hep raġbetimiz būs-i leb-i yāre degil-mi
Cān naqli démek aña şekerpāre degil-mi

Don't we always desire to kiss the beloved's lips?
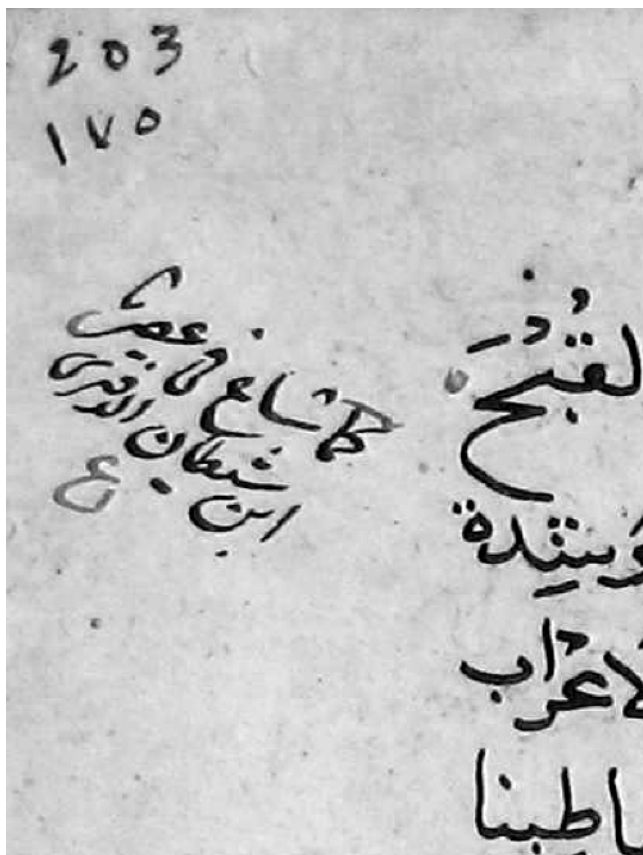Isn't it sweet to give her a translation of the soul?

Figure 11: Fazıl Ahmed Paşa 992, fol. 175r, detail,
Istanbul, Süleymaniye Manuscript Library.