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Meaning and Captivity in Classical Arabic Philology

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Abstract

This article takes a close look at the word *maʿnā* as analyzed by Abbasid-era authorities on the Arabic language, chiefly Ibn Fāris (d. 395/1004). The word's context-sensitivity and polysemy are well known; less well appreciated are the lexical and morphological preconditions for *maʿnā*'s diversity of meanings across the disciplines. Even less well studied (though widely quoted in lexicographical literature) is the anonymous *basīṭ*-meter couplet that Ibn Fāris cites in *al-Ṣāḥibī fī fiqh al-lugha* as a *locus probans* for the word. The speaker in these verses boasts of ransoming a bound captive (*ʿānī*), using *maʿnā* to refer to the captive's abject state. There is evidence to suggest that the verses once featured in a lost work of the philologist Abū Naṣr al-Bāhilī (d. 231/855) called *Kitāb Abyāt al-maʿānī*. This was an anthology of verses framed like riddles whose interpretation hinged on double meanings and rare metaphors, and its form and content may be judged by numerous outtakes preserved in later anthologies and lexica. The affiliation of Ibn Fāris's verses to *Kitāb Abyāt al-maʿānī* would confirm that the derivation of *maʿnā* truly is a puzzle with multiple answers. To contemplate its parameters is to uncover a paradigm for meaning in which noetic intention and phenomenological exposure are figurative correlates of bodily captivity and duress.

Keywords

Abū Naṣr al-Bāhilī – affect theory – Arabic lexicography – Ibn Fāris – *maʿnā* – semiotic theory

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Introduction

Attested meanings for the Arabic noun *maʿnā* are legion.[1] In every field of Arabophone intellectual life, the word has been multiply applied.[2] While the word's polysemy is well known, the lexical and linguistic preconditions for it are hardly anywhere discussed. To put it another way, modern scholars treat *maʿnā* as a matter of technical usage, with minimal regard for the lexical derivation of the word.[3] This approach is well enough justified from the standpoint of intellectual history, and of a Wittgensteinian philosophy of language in which word meaning is conceived as a pure function of usage.

From the standpoint of Classical Arabic lexicography, though, word meanings are of two kinds: lexical and terminological. *Al-maʿnā l-lughawī* (lexical meaning) is the product of a word's morphology and the linguistic root from which it derives, while *iṣṭilāḥ* (terminological convention) refers to the norms of a word's use in one specialized context or another.[4] The focus of the present article is on the former kind of meaning, and its evidence is mostly conceptual, as borne out in the lexicographical literature of the early Abbasid period and the wordplay of Classical Arabic poets. I present this evidence in the spirit named by Ibn Jinnī (d. 392/1002), who says that when grammarians infer unobservable points of language change through analogy, it is *taqdīran wa-ḥukman lā zamānan wa-waqtan*: "subject to appraisal and judgment, not historical consideration."[5] It is in other words a matter of theory, extending partway beyond the verifiable reach of historical linguistics. So it is that I offer little here in the way of historical argument, and zero prose evidence outside of lexicography.[6]

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1 Without the definite article, *maʿnā* is properly transliterated as *maʿnan*, and *ʿānī* as *ʿānin*. *Maʿnā* and *ʿānī* will be retained throughout to reduce confusion.

2 Khalfallah offers a catalogue of twenty-five different senses in which *maʿnā* is used by al-Jurjānī alone, in *La théorie du* maʿnā, 9-10.

3 Thus for example Horten, Was bedeutet *maʿnā*, and Wolfson, Muʿammar's Theory of Maʿnā. Richard M. Frank, who has written more on *maʿnā* in theology than anyone, also avoids questions of derivation, as stressed in Meanings, 261, n3. The only etymological analysis of *maʿnā* known to me in modern criticism is by Idrīs al-Nāqūrī (who relies heavily on Ibn Fāris) in *al-Muṣṭalaḥ al-naqdī*, 253-257.

4 Despite appearances, the distinction here is not one of diachrony and synchrony. Terminological conventions have their own histories and undergo change over time; and while lexical derivations are useful to historical linguistics, they are not historical data. ("Terminological convention" is by the way Wolfhart Heinrichs's translation for *iṣṭilāḥ*, in On the Genesis, 115.)

5 Ibn Jinnī, *Khaṣāʾiṣ*, 1, 256-257, trans. Baalbaki, Historic Relevance, 111.

6 As such, my approach is the inverse of Alexander Key's in *Language Between God and the Poets*, although it is guided by (what I take to be) a shared disbelief in the lexicon as a cybernetic force.

Literary evidence tells us at least this much: *Maʿnā* occurs neither in pre-Islamic poetry nor in the Qurʾān, and in the third/ninth century it was regarded as foreign to Bedouin speech, as we read in a report of the philologist Abū Ḥātim al-Sijistānī (d. 255/869):

> Abū Ḥātim said: "While the literate class (*al-ʿāmma*) say: *Li-ayyi maʿnā faʿalta* 'For what intention did you do [such a thing]?' the desert Arabs do not know *al-maʿnā*, and are not about to start saying it" (*wa-lā takādu tukallimu bi-hi*). This is so, [but] some of the Arabs say, *Mā maʿniyyu hādhā* ("What is meant by this?")[7]

A preoccupation with innovations of vernacular speech was general among the grammarians of Abū Ḥātim's day.[8] In this case, it affords a glimpse of *maʿnā* as a latter-day coinage, and assigns it to a community of speakers, who were the educated *vulgus* of cosmopolitan Iraq.[9] To say that "the desert Arabs do not know *al-maʿnā*" is to place it outside the pale of classical provenance, Bedouin speech being the standard for "pure" Arabic usage. This does not make *maʿnā* a vitiated word, only a late-arriving one, and an indispensable word in the vocabulary of the intellectuals of the Abbasid period.

In everyday language, it was a word for the intentional meaning of any act, acts of speaking above all, and majority opinion today holds that *maʿnā* is "etymologically" or "originally" a word of intention.[10] In what follows, I do not contest this lexical meaning, but I do say at the outset that the semantic range of *maʿnā*'s uses is not reducible to it, and that "intention" might be itself a dependent meaning, if not a derived one. *Maʿnā* has also an ontological referent, with "the general meaning of 'thing,' and," as Harry Wolfson says, "it is used as the equivalent of the term *shayʾ*. Thus both *maʿnā* and *shayʾ* are used as translations of the Greek term *pragma*, 'thing,' in Aristotle's works."[11] Part of what explains the word's applicability in the dual sense of *pragmata* and *pathēmata*

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7 Reported by al-Fayyūmī (d. 770/1368) in *Miṣbāḥ* art. √ʿ*nw*; quoted in *Tāj al-ʿarūs* art. √ʿ*ny*.

8 The *Fihrist* of Ibn al-Nadīm lists seven texts with the title *Kitāb Mā talḥanu* (or *yalḥanu*) *fī-hi l-ʿāmma*, including one by Abū Ḥātim where this remark was likely made.

9 For *al-ʿāmma* as an educated "sub-elite," see Toorawa, *Ibn Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfur*, 1-2, and Schoeler, *Genesis*, 104, with reference to Jāḥiẓ, *Bayān*, I, 137.

10 Versteegh, Maʿnā (A.), VI, 346: "Etymologically, *maʿnā* is what the speaker intends to say." Kouloughli, Maʿnā, III, 160: "The noun *maʿnā* is originally a verbal noun (*maṣdar*) formed on the verb *ʿanā/yaʿnī*, which properly means 'to aim at something.' *Maʿnā* consequently means, primarily, 'the act of aiming at something.'"

11 Wolfson, *Philosophy of the Kalam*, 115. Haq, *Names,* 26-27 points out that this usage was current in the second/eighth century. The interplay between *maʿnā*'s noetic and ontological senses in the work of al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/869) is pointed out by Larkin, *Theology of Meaning*, 33-34.

(things in the world and affections of the psyche) is that the root verb-complex from which the Arabic word derives is not limited to a verb of intending. As we shall see, it also includes a verb of *ostension and making manifest*, which Abdelhamid Sabra connects expressly to *maʿnā* when the word is used for an "accidental property" of a substance.[12] And it includes a verb of captivity, which gives the present article its title. The plurality of root meanings from which *maʿnā* could potentially be derived is part of what I am calling the lexical preconditions for its polysemy.

"Preconditions," I am careful to say, and not "determinants." Meaning really is a matter of use, but use is guided by form. And *maʿnā*'s form is pluripotential. For its every other meaning to have been attracted subsequent to *maʿnā*'s coinage as a word of intention is to my mind a far-fetched explanation. What bars all other meanings from consideration, with respect to the seldom-raised question of *maʿnā*'s derivation? The question cannot be dismissed without exploring √*ʿnw/y*, the verbal root on which *maʿnā* is constructed. In so doing, I have come back with two arguments. One (ahead at 2.3) is that the noetic meaning of "intention" (signified by the verb *ʿanā yaʿnī*) correlates metaphorically with the carceral and corporeal meaning of "captivity" (signified by the verb *ʿanā yaʿnū*), and may stem from it. Another (2.4) is that the ostensive meaning "to put forth" (signified by both verb forms) might be predicated on the fact of captivity as well, insofar as the captive's interiority is vulnerable to disclosure under duress.

I am also careful to say "polysemy." My critics are liable to object that what the root meanings of √*ʿnw/y* present is rather a case of *homonymy*, i.e., the formal coalescence of semantically-unrelated lexemes. What follows here is my response to that objection.

1 Morphology of *maʿnā*

Maʿnā's form is so little discussed that it is almost hard to identify a mainstream opinion in the matter.[13] By some it is conceived as a passive participle, i.e., a thing "intended" or "meant." One problem with this is that *maʿnịyy*, the normative or "true" passive participle of *ʿanā yaʿnī*, is already attested (as in Abū Ḥātim's statement above).[14] The claim is then encountered that *maʿnā* is a "lightened" form (*takhfīf*) of *maʿnịyy*. But while *takhfīf* (the elision of *hamza*

12 Sabra, *Optics*, II, 70-71. For *maʿnā*'s sometime interchangeability with *ʿaraḍ*, see Frank, *Al-maʿnà*: Some Reflections, 249, and furthermore Frank, Yā Kalām, 3-4.

13 Kouloughli's formal analysis (above at n10) stands out in this regard.

14 Wright's *Grammar*, I, 91 BC (§170).

and *shadda*) is a regular fact of Arabic morphology, the vocalic shift of *ī* > *ā* is an anomaly unexplainable by *takhfīf*. In an 1896 lithographic edition of Mullā Jāmī's *al-Fawā'id al-Ḍiyā'iyya*, an anonymous scholiast writes: "[To derive *maʿnā* from *maʿniyy*] comes closest in terms of meaning, but in terms of form it is way off. No parallel case of *takhfīf* can be found in the speech of the Arabs."[15]

The range of meanings adduced for *maʿnā* does not reduce to the "thing intended" of passive participle *al-maʿniyy*, and calls for a *lectio dificilior*. We find it in the *Kitāb al-Furūq* of Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī (d. ca. 400/1010):

> *Maʿnā* is a verbal noun derived from the verb *ʿanā yaʿnī*. Its form, *mafʿal*, can be used for either the noun of place (*ism makān*) or the verbal noun — and here it is a verbal noun, as when you say *dakhaltu madkhalan ḥasanan* ("I entered, making a good entrance"), using *madkhalan* [adverbially,] as you would the verbal noun *dukhūlan*.[16]

Either of these possibilities gives a likelier basis for *maʿnā*'s multivalence than the participle *maʿniyy,* "a thing intended." But what would it mean for *maʿnā*, the word for "meaning," to be formed as a noun of place?

The answer hinges on a class of verbal noun (*maṣdar*) that is formally identical and conceptually very close to the noun of place, called by grammarians the *maṣdar mīmī* ("verbal noun beginning with the letter *mīm*").[17] Rather than action itself, the *maṣdar mīmī* names the abstract fact or circumstance of an action's taking place.[18] "As is well known," writes Meir Bravmann, "such nouns may be used in a concrete meaning — a use in which they are ordinarily defined as *nomina loci* — but also in an abstract meaning, that is: as *nomina*

15 Interlinear commentary to *Fawā'id*, 5 (lines 3-4): *Hādhā l-wajh aqrab al-wujūh maʿnan wa-abʿaduhā lafẓan maʿa annahu lā yūjadu li-l-takhfīf naẓīrun fī kalām al-ʿarab.* What Jāmī (d. 898/1492) himself says in *Fawā'id* (being his commentary on *al-Kāfiya fī l-naḥw* of Ibn al-Ḥājib, d. 646/1249) is the following:

> *Al-maʿnā* is what is meant by a thing (*ma yuqṣadu bi-shay'in*). Its form, *mafʿal*, is either a noun of place, meaning a "goal" (*al-maqṣid*); or it is a *maṣdar mīmī* used as a passive participle; or it is a lightened form of *maʿniyy*, which is the [true] passive participle, analogous to *marmiyy* "thrown" [the passive participle formed on *ramā yarmī*].

16 ʿAskarī, *Furūq*, 36.

17 *Maṣdar mīmī* seems to have entered use as a term of Arabic grammar after the Abbasid period; the earliest mention known to me is Jāmī's. It was the subject of a grammatical treatise by Abū l-ʿArfān Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Ṣabbān al-Miṣrī (d. 1206/1791-2), *Risāla fī l-maṣdar al-mīmī wa-ismay al-makān wa-l-zamān*. See (in addition to Bravmann's aheadcited *Studies in Semitic Philology*) Aro, Der *Maṣdar al-mīmī*, and Roman, Sur la constitution, 121-124.

18 Compare the interrogative "question" named by verbal noun *su'āl* (Spanish *pregunta*) to the circumstantial "occasion for inquiry" named by *mas'ala* (Spanish *cuestión*), which is a *maṣdar mīmī* formed on the same root.

actionis (infinitives)."[19] Their formal identity is mirrored by the semantic overlap between noun of place and *maṣdar mīmī*, each of them being the "scene" of the action in its own way.

At the root of the word is a "defective" verb (*fiʿl nāqiṣ*) whose final radical is a long vowel (*ḥarf muʿtall*). Exactly which defective verb cannot be affirmed through morphology alone, for there are three separate verb conjugations formed on *maʿnā*'s root:

TABLE 1 1st-form conjugations of √ʿnw/y

Perfect	Imperfect	Verbal nouns (excluding *maʿnā*)
ʿanā	*yaʿnū*	*ʿunuww, ʿanā', ʿanwa*
ʿanā	*yaʿnī*	*ʿināya, ʿuniyy, ʿanya, ʿanā'*
ʿaniya	*yaʿnī*	*ʿināya, ʿuniyy*

Most lexicographers see two separate roots behind these verbs. The first conjugation (*ʿanā yaʿnū*) they identify with √ʿ*nw*, and the other two with √ʿ*ny*. One exception is Jamāl al-Dīn b. Mukarram b. Manẓūr (d. 711/1312), compiler of *Lisān al-ʿarab* (henceforth *Lisān*), where √ʿ*ny* and √ʿ*nw* are dealt with in one article (√ʿ*nā*). But whether they are conceived as separate roots or one root with three vowelings makes little difference. The affiliation of √ʿ*nw* and √ʿ*ny* is marked by too many shared meanings and formal reflexes to be denied. *Maʿnā* itself is one such overlap: in terms of form it derives indifferently from either root. Whether the third radical of a defective verb is *wāw* or *yā'*, it becomes *alif maqṣūra* in its *mafʿal* form.[20]

Corresponding to this complex of form is a a complex of word-meanings that can all be connected to *maʿnā* in some way. This is not to claim that they are equally implicit in the word's origin, nor that all are engaged whenever *maʿnā* is spoken and heard. My thesis rather is that the meanings of √ʿ*nw*/*y* are coaligned in a latent paradigm that predicates noetic *intention* and phenomenal *exposure* upon bodily *captivity*. To examine the relations between them is to uncover a structural model for *meaning* without obvious parallels in the hermeneutic and rhetorical traditions of the post-Hellenic West.

19 Bravmann, *Studies in Semitic Philology*, 236.

20 Wright's *Grammar*, I, 127D-128B (§224).

Among the lexicographers, the greatest effort to isolate its linguistic meaning was made by Abū l-Ḥusayn Aḥmad Ibn Fāris (d. 395/1004). Ibn Fāris was in many ways a maverick figure, whose biography brings contrarieties together. A highly original linguistic theorist, his speculative daring was combined with an ultra-conservative position on the origin of language. The Arabic language was revealed all at once by God to Adam, he says in *al-Ṣāḥibī fī fiqh al-lugha* (The Statutes of Language for al-Ṣāḥib b. ʿAbbād), and its origins are therefore a matter of divine inspiration (*tawqīf*) rather than human convention and coinage (*muwāḍaʿa wa-ṣṭilāḥ*). His rejection of the conventional basis of human language is best understood as a statement of opposition to Muʿtazilism — less from the theological standpoint of the Ashʿarī school, it seems, than in the spirit of traditional *ḥadīth* scholarship. But Ibn Fāris's heterodoxy as a language scholar was unhampered by religious orthodoxy. Indeed, for modern authorities he often goes too far. Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila calls his etymologies "fantastic"; "frequently arbitrary and unconvincing," says Ramzi Baalbaki.[21] It is in his resort to the intuitive etymological strategies known collectively as *al-ishtiqāq al-kabīr* ("grand derivation") that Ibn Fāris goes widest of mainstream Arabic morphology. In the present case, however — the case of *al-maʿnā* — no such strategies enter, and Ibn Fāris makes no morphological leaps outside of normative *ishtiqāq ṣaghīr* ("lesser derivation"). In fact he says little about *maʿnā* and its congeners that Ibn Manẓūr (a cautious etymologist) does not repeat after him in *Lisān*.

2 *Maʿnā* apud Ibn Fāris I: *Maqāyīs al-lugha*

In the etymological dictionary *Maqāyīs al-lugha* (Analogical Templates of Language), Ibn Fāris's combined entry for √*ʿnw/y* begins with a list of three root meanings (*uṣūl*):

(1) Being intent upon a thing, such that one's concentration and desires are bent upon it
(2) Abasement and subjugation
(3) The appearance of a thing and its standing forth[22]

21 Hämeen-Anttila, review of Zammit, *Comparative Lexical Study*, 296, n4; Baalbaki, *Arabic Lexicographical Tradition*, 351.

22 Ibn Fāris, *Maqāyīs*, IV, 146: *Uṣūl thalātha: al-awwal al-qaṣd li-l-shayʾ bi-nkimāshin fī-hi wa-ḥirṣin ʿalayhi, wa-l-thānī dāllun ʿalā khuḍūʿin wa-dhūllin, wa-l-thālith ẓuhūr shayʾin wa-burūzuhu.*

These meanings are distributed among √*ʿnw/y*'s I[st]-form conjugations in the following way. Reflexes of A.*ʿanā yaʿnū* are used to designate meanings (1) and (3), and reflexes of B.*ʿanā yaʿnī* designate (2) and (3). Conjugation C.*ʿaniya yaʿnī* meanwhile is used for both (1) and (2) but not (3).[23] The relations of these forms and meanings may be appreciated visually in Table 2.

In *Maqāyīs al-lugha*, Ibn Fāris hints at a metonymic relationship between meanings (1) and (3) where he says "*al-maʿnā* is the intention (*al-qaṣd*) that stands out in a thing and becomes apparent when that thing is looked into," as if (3) were the practical consequence of (1).[24] Although he does not establish any dependent relationship between them, I will venture some hypotheses in this connection. One is that the psychological "intention" of meaning (1) is a metaphorical correlate of the bodily "captivity" of (2). Another is that meaning (3)'s sense of "becoming apparent" is a metonymic extension of (2) and (1). Again I stress that diachronic argument is beside the point of this article, which is a survey of semantic overlaps that have so far passed unremarked in modern scholarship. Taken together, they suggest a paradigm for the becoming-manifest of meaning that is not organized around the operation of a sign. I do not call this a new paradigm, for it is assuredly very old; instead I call it a latent paradigm, even though the evidence for it lies on the browsable surface of Classical Arabic philology.[25]

Ibn Faris's entry for √*ʿnw/y* continues:

> [The verb in the phrase] *ʿunītu bi-l-amr* ("I was concerned by the matter") or *bi-l-ḥāja* ("by a necessity") is of the first [root meaning]. Ibn al-Aʿrābī (d. 231/846) and others have said that [active-voice] *ʿaniya* and [passive-voice] *ʿuniya* are both used in this context (*ʿAniya bi-ḥājatī wa-ʿuniya*), though al-Aṣmaʿī denied that *ʿaniya* is so used. And [V[th]-form verb] *taʿanna* is used in the same way.

23 As Table 1 shows, conjugation C lacks a dedicated *maṣdar* of its own. Both its verbal nouns are shared with conjugation B — a sign perhaps that conjugation C is posterior to B.

24 Ibn Fāris, *Maqāyīs*, IV, 149: *al-maʿnā huwa l-qaṣd alladhī yabruzu wa-ẓahara fī l-shayʾ idhā buḥitha ʿanhu*.

25 Constraints of space and expertise enforce my silence about cognates of √*ʿnw/y* in other Semitic languages, beyond noting that the Hebrew verb *ʿanâ* is similarly ramified in its meanings ("to answer," "to be afflicted," "to be occupied with," and "to sing"), posing a crux at Exodus 32:18. Makujina, Additional Considerations, 40; see also Good, Exodus 32:18.

TABLE 2 Three paradigms of √ʿnw/y with derived verbs and substantives (source: *Lisān al-ʿarab* art. √ʿnā)

	C. *ʿaniya yaʿnī* (2) intr. "be made captive" (1) intr. "be perturbed," act. part. *ʿānī* "preoccupied"
A. *ʿanā yaʿnū* (2) intr. "be subjugated" (Q 20:111 *Wa-ʿanati l-wujūhu*), verbal nouns *ʿunuww, ʿanwa, ʿanāʾ* "submission," act. part. *ʿānī* "captive"	**B. *ʿanā yaʿnī*** (1) intr. "become perturbed," v.n. ʿināya, *ʿuniyy, ʿanāʾ* "concern, preoccupation," act. parts. *ʿānī, ʿanī* "preoccupied" (1) tr. "affect, concern, provoke anxiety in" + acc. (Q 80:37 var. *shāʾnun yaʿnīhi*), v.n. *ʿināya, ʿuniyy, ʿanya, ʿanāʾ* "care" pass. part. *maʿniyy* "what is intended"
(3) intr. "appear, emerge" > *ʿunwān* "title" (3) tr. "reveal, express," v.n. *ʿunuww* e.g. *ʿAnawtu l-shayʾa* (I put forth the thing).	(3) intr. *ʿunyān* "title" (3) tr. "put forth," no verbal noun specified
DERIVED VERBS	
IInd form *ʿannā* "take prisoner, keep confined" + acc. IVth form *aʿnā* "cause to remain in captivity" + acc.	IInd form *ʿannā* "make a matter of concern" + double acc. IIIrd form *ʿānā* intr. "be vigilant" IVth form *aʿnā* tr. "make a matter of concern" Vth form *taʿannā*: tr."afflict" + acc.; intr. "undergo affliction" VIIIth form *iʿtanā* "become concerned"

> Its verbal nouns are *ʿināya* and *ʿuniyy*, its passive participle *maʿniyy,* and its active participle *ʿānī.* Al-Farrāʾ (d. 207/822) said: "For a man to be [actively] *ʿānī* about my affair means the same as for him to be [passively] *maʿniyyun* by it" (*rajulun ʿānin bi-amrī, ay maʿniyyun bi-hi*). And he recited [the anonymous *rajaz* verses]:
>
> *ʿĀnin bi-quṣwāhā ṭawīlu l-shughli*
> *la-hu jafīrāni wa-ayyu nabli*
>
> Intent on the remotest [beast in the herd], long at his task,
> he has two quivers — and what arrows [they contain]!

2.1 *Ergativity*

In the above passage, the verb is equally applicable in an intransitive sense or a transitive one, such that to be actively *ʿānī* (concerned) about something is the same as being passively *maʿniyy* (concerned) by it. A language's potential for fluctuating transitivity of this kind is called "ergativity," and it is more commonly observed in English than in Arabic.[26] Whereas the English verb "break" is used for transitive and intransitive action equally (such that "Robin broke the window" and "The window broke" may both be said), the I[st]-form Arabic verb *kasara* is used for transitive breakage only; to express the intransitive force of "The window broke," one uses V[th]-form *takassara* or VII[th]-form *inkasara.*[27] The challenge that ergativity poses to lexicography is described by Eugene Nida:

> For example, in the two sentences *The men marched around* and *The guard marched the men around,* is it better to set up one meaning of *march,* or two meanings, one intransitive and the other transitive? In general, dictionaries list two different meanings. But if this procedure were followed consistently, one would have to list several different meanings for *open* in the sentences: *He opened the door with a key, The door opened, A key opened the door, The door was opened with a key.* In reality,

26 Davidse, Transitivity/Ergativity, 107, upholds Michael Halliday's opinion that "all languages are a mixture of ergative and transitive."

27 Ergative verbs really are less common in Arabic than English. *Zāda*, "increase," and *naqaṣa*, "decrease," come to mind among the I[st]-form verbs, and a few others. Derived forms with ergative use include II[nd]-form *ṣarraḥa*, "to purify"/"become pure," IV[th]-form *aqāma*, "to cause to stand"/"to stay," and see the chapter from Ibn Fāris's *Ṣāḥibī* cited just ahead.

> however, the verb *open* refers only to the change of state of the *door,* from being closed to being open. It would seem more economical and relevant in approaching the problem of meaning to consider the meaning of *open* to be the same in all instances. The differences in the meanings of the utterances are then simply a matter of the co-occurrence in various transformations of the agent, affected, and instrumental constituents.... The meaning is thus a part of the total configuration, not a component added to a particular constituent in the configuration.[28]

If all the transitive and ergative shadings of *open* might be reduced to a single change of state, then what about the change named by B. *ʿanā yaʿnī*, which means both an operation of the mind and an external provocation? A "seizure of attention" is what it seems, represented from two diathetic perspectives: a quasi-passive (but grammatically active), intransitive one that is psychological and interior, and a transitive one that is phenomenological and affects the subject from without.

Although Ibn Fāris had no dedicated term for ergativity, he makes explicit note of the phenomenon in a chapter of *al-Ṣāḥibī* called "Things sometimes have the same meaning whether they come [expressed] in the passive or the active voice" (*Bāb al-shayʾ yaʾtī marratan bi-lafẓ al-mafʿūl wa-marratan bi-lafẓ al-fāʿil wa-l-maʿnā wāḥid*). In this chapter, B.*ʿanā yaʿnī* is mentioned specifically, and is demonstrated with the same *rajaz* hemistich as in *Maqāyīs* art. √*ʿnw/y* (with this variation: *ʿĀnin bi-**ukhrāhā***, "Intent on the **very last** [beast in the herd]...").[29]

Transitivity does not fluctuate so much in every paradigm of √*ʿnw/y*. The opinion in *Maqāyīs* and elsewhere is that conjugation C.*ʿaniya yaʿnī* is used for the intransitive modes of meanings (1) and (2) only. Meanwhile, conjugation A.*ʿanā yaʿnū* works both ways when used of meaning (3), but for meaning (2) — the meaning of "abasement and subjection" — Ibn Fāris supplies no transitive instances. Nowhere in fact is A.*ʿanā yaʿnū* shown to take a direct object, as do its derived IInd and IVth forms *ʿannā* and *aʿnā*. And so I exclude any transitivity of meaning (2) from Table 2 above and Table 3 on the next page.

28 Nida, *Exploring Semantic Structures*, 41.

29 Ibn Fāris, *Ṣāḥibī*, 203.

TABLE 3 Diathetic reflexes of √ʿ*nw/y*

Verb	Intransitive meaning	Transitive meaning
A. *ʿanā yaʿnū*	(2) to be made captive	
	(3) to flow	(3) to put forth
B. *ʿanā yaʿnī*	(1) to have one's attention seized	(1) to occupy someone's attention
		(3) to put forth
C. *ʿaniya yaʿnī*	(1) to have one's attention seized	No transitive meaning
	(2) to be made captive	

2.2 *Captivity*

Concerning A.*ʿanā yaʿnū*, recorded scholarly debate has little to do with transitivity. Instead, the issue was whether it could be used of subjugation in the aftermath of a peaceful surrender, or whether *ʿanwa* (its verbal noun) is essentially subjugation by force of arms.[30] Ibn Fāris summarizes the debate in *Maqāyīs* art. √ʿ*nw*/*y*:

> *ʿAnwa* is "conquest" (*al-qahr*). "We took it in *ʿanwa*" is said to mean "We conquered it by the sword." [Alternately,] "I came to you as an *ʿānī*" is said to mean "I came submissively." And some say that *ʿānwa* is "obedience" (*al-ṭāʿa*).[31]

The distinction is of little consequence; either way, *ʿanwa* is as Ibn Fāris says "abasement and subjugation." His discussion of A.*ʿanā yaʿnū* begins:

30 The first to assert that *ʿanwa* could refer to peaceful submission seems to have been al-Farrāʾ in *Maʿānī al-Qurʾān*, II, 192-193, as expounded by Ibn al-Anbārī (d. 328/940) in *al-Ẓāhir fī maʿānī kalimāt al-nās*, I, 312:

> According to al-Farrāʾ, there are two sides to *al-ʿanwa*. The first is its use that means "taking a country by conquest and abasement (*bi-l-qahr wa-l-dhull*). The other way one says it means "taking a country through the submission of its inhabitants and [their] obedience, with no battle fought" (*ʿan taslīmin min aṣḥābihā la-ha wa-ṭāʿatan bi-lā qitāl*).

By virtue of this ambiguity, *ʿanwa* was reckoned by some to be among the *aḍdād* (words that are used for two contrary meanings), as in Abū Ḥātim al-Sijistānī's *Kitāb al-Aḍdād*, 126, as well as that of Abū l-Ṭayyib al-Lughawī (d. 351/962), II, 491-493, and in *Kitāb al-Aḍdād*, 79-80, by the same Ibn al-Anbārī.

31 Ibn Fāris, *Maqāyīs* IV, 147.

> The second root is *ʿanā yaʿnū,* meaning "to submit" (*khaḍaʿa*). [Active participle] *ʿānī* means "a prisoner" (*al-asīr*). Abū ʿAmr (al-Shaybānī, d. 213/828) said [using the IVth-form imperative]: *Aʿni hādhā l-asīra* means "Prolong his captivity until the leathern thongs that bind him are dried out." Zuhayr (b. Abī Sulmā, fl. sixth c. CE) said (meter: *wāfir*):
>
> *Wa-law lā an yanāla Abā Ṭarīfin*
> *isārun min malīkin aw* ***ʿanāʾu***[32]
>
> If Abū Ṭarīf had not been taken hold of
> by **captivity**, or imprisonment fit for chattel …
>
> According to al-Khalīl (b. Aḥmad d. 175/786), *ʿunuww* and *ʿanāʾ* are verbal nouns for the *ʿānī*, such that the captive is said to concede to *al-ʿunuww*.[33] Anyone who undergoes abasement and defeat is an *ʿānī*. God, be He exalted, says: *wa-ʿanati l-wujūhu li-l-ḥayyi l-qayyūmi* ("Faces will be brought low before the Living and the All-Sustaining …").[34]

Here Ibn Fāris refers to the only canonical occurrence of √*ʿnw/y* in the Qurʾān. This is from *Sūrat Ṭā Hā*'s description of the rigors of the Last Day. The whole *āya* (Q 20:111) runs as follows:

> *Wa-ʿanati l-wujūhu li-l-ḥayyi l-qayyūmi wa-qad khāba man ḥamala ẓulman*
>
> Faces will be brought low before the Living and the All-Sustaining, and woe betide any who bear [responsibility for] oppression.

What A.*ʿanā yaʿnū* names here is the assumption of a submissive posture or position. Albeit unspecific, it is clear that on the Last Day no one is free to turn away with head held high.[35] The suggestion of bodily prostration is redoubled

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32 In Thaʿlab's commentary on Zuhayr's *dīwān* (*Sharḥ Shiʿr Zuhayr*, 69), the verse appears with *liḥāʾ* (verbal abuse) in place of *ʿanāʾ*. The editor identifies Abū Ṭarīf as "A man of Banū ʿAbdallāh b. Ghaṭafān who was made a prisoner of the Banū ʿAlīm," but notes that one commenter identifies him with Zuhayr himself (280, n1).

33 *Al-ʿunuww wa-l-ʿanāʾ maṣdar li-l-ʿānī; yuqāl ʿānin aqarra bi-l-ʿunuww, wa-huwa l-asīru*. This is a paraphrase of art. √*ʿnw* in *Kitāb al-ʿAyn* of al-Khalīl: *al-ʿānī al-asīr aqarra bi-l-ʿunuww wa-l-ʿanāʾ wa-humā maṣdarān.*

34 Ibn Fāris, *Maqāyīs*, IV, 146-147.

35 In the view of some commentators, *ʿanati l-wujūh* refers to the faces of disbelievers only, as at *Sūrat al-Mulk* (Q 67:27): "When those who disbelieve see it approaching, their faces will be aggrieved …" (*sīʾat wujūhu lladhīna kafarū*).

in a verse attributed to the Prophet's contemporary, the poet Umayya b. Abī l-Ṣalt (meter: *ṭawīl*):

> *Malīkun ʿalā ʿarshi l-samāʾi muhayminun*
> *li-ʿizzatihi **taʿnū** l-wujūhu wa-tasjudu*[36]
>
> Upon the throne of heaven [He is] Master and Overseer;
> faces **are brought low** before His glory, and press the ground.

Whereas B. *ʿanā yaʿnī* is for the seizure of a subject's attention, with A. *ʿanā yaʿnū* it is a subject's physical autonomy that is being seized, as the subject gives into domination by another. The change of state it names is from a state of freedom to one of constraint and captivity. The physicality of *ʿanwa* may be metaphorical, or a literal fact of "leathern thongs" (*al-qidd*) as mentioned above by al-Shaybānī. The evidence for my suspicion that the bodily meanings of *ʿanwa* precede the psychological meanings of *ʿināya* begins with A. *ʿanā yaʿnū*'s archaic ring. Outside of Classical Arabic poetry, and here and there in *ḥadīth*, the verb is not commonly heard. B. *ʿanā yaʿnī*, by comparison, is still in everyday use.

It is not the case that A. precedes B. in the observable record of Arabic literary history. B. *ʿanā yaʿnī* is heard all the way back, and even occurs in a non-canonical reading of *Sūrat ʿAbasa* (Q 80:37). Where the canonical reading says:

> *Li-kulli mriʾin minhum yawmaʾidhin shaʾnun **yughnīhi***
>
> On that Day, every man's circumstance will **suffice** him

al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 50/670) is said to have read it thus:

> *Li-kulli mriʾin minhum yawmaʾidhin shaʾnun **yaʿnīhi***[37]

36 *Dīwān Umayya*, 39. Ibn al-Anbārī adduces a close variant of this verse in his above-noted *Kitāb al-Aḍdād*, 80; for something similar by Zayd b. ʿAmr b. Nufayl, see *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, III, 84.

37 Ibn Khālawayh, *Mukhtaṣar*, 189. The notice by ʿAbd al-Laṭīf al-Khaṭīb (*Muʿjam al-qirāʾāt*, X, 314, n4) crediting Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ as a transmitter of this reading turns out (on comparison to al-Khafājī, *Hāshiyat al-shihāb*, IV, 370) to be a misspelling of the name Ibn al-Muqannaʿ. *Sūrat ʿAbasa* (Q 80:37) with *yaʿnīhi* is not in any of the seven or ten canonical (*ṣaḥīḥ*) readings of the Qurʾān. Only in the reading of Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥayṣin (d. 123/740) is it upheld. Ibn Muḥayṣin was reckoned the most accomplished grammarian of Mecca, where his reading was nevertheless superseded by that of ʿAbdallāh b. Kathīr al-Dārī (d. 120/738). See Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ghāyat al-nihāya*, II, 167.

On that Day, every man's circumstance will **concern** him.

As in many cases of Qur'ānic multiformity, the variance here is grammatological, hinging on the absence or presence of a single dot (*ghayn* غ vs. *ʿayn* ع). In exegetic terms it is not a terribly significant variant.[38] It is however a sign of meaning (1)'s strong affinity with meaning (2), occurring as it does in another description of the Last Day.[39] Not that the semantic connection between (2) and (1) was in much doubt; the claim of a metaphorical relationship is fairly uncontroversial. Nor is it the only case where divergent vocalizations of *a ḥarf muʿtall* correspond to concrete/abstract pairs of meanings: cf. √*dnw* "to be low" and √*dny* "to be base"; √*rkhw* "to be pliable" and √*rkhy* "to be easy"; and √*ṭghw* "to flood" and √*ṭghy* "to be excessive in anger."[40] Between A.*ʿanwa* (2) and BC.*ʿināya* (1) the relation is the same: physical "captivity" is what is undergone by the body, and noetic "captivation" is what is undergone by the mind.

With that established, my basis for according notional priority to (2) is simply that the metaphor only works in one direction. For the captivation of a subject's attention, physical restraint is a natural figure — no rare conceit in verse, as in a *zahriyya* (flower-poem) by Abū l-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī that begins (meter: *ṭawīl*):[41]

38 Ibn Jinnī (*Muḥtasab*, II, 417.) interprets the difference as one of degree:

> A thing may "concern" a man (*qad yaʿnīhi*) without "voiding his needs" (*wa-lā yughnīhi*). As an example: if a man is in possession of a thousand dirhams and a hundred are taken from him, it "concerns" him without "leaving him in no need" for vigilance and attention to the remainder of his wealth. The matter which "voids his needs" is the direr necessity and the higher consideration. This reading is not only clearer, but better known.

39 Another example of B.*ʿanā yaʿnī* on the Last Day which perhaps echoes Ḥasan's recitation of *Sūrat ʿAbasa* (Q 80:37) is heard in a sermon of ʿUmar II (d. 101/720), who calls it

> A Day on which rich and poor will be seen as equals in what befalls them, and when you will be concerned with a matter [of such magnitude] that if it were the stars' concern they would go dim (*wa-la-qad ʿunītum bi-amrin law ʿuniyat bi-hi l-nujūmu la-nkadarat*), and if it were the mountains' concern they would dissolve, and if it were the earth's concern it would split open. (Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī (d. 430/1038), *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ*, V, 291-292).

40 This effect can be observed in some cases of metathesis (*qalb*), as with √*ʿyth* and √*ʿthy* which both mean "to ruin," and on which al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī (d. ca. 409/1018) remarks: "*ʿAyth* and *ʿuthiyy*/*uthuww* are nearly alike; but *ʿayth* is mostly used in relation to that which is perceived by sense; and *ʿuthiyy* and *ʿuthuww* in relation to that which is perceived by judgment" (quoted in Lane's *Lexicon* art. √*ʿyth*).

41 This Abū l-Ḥasan was a contemporary of the poetry anthologist of Seville, Abū l-Walīd Ismāʿīl b. ʿĀmir al-Ḥimyarī (d. 440/1048), and the poem is in al-Ḥimyarī's *al-Badīʿ fī waṣf al-rabīʿ*, 119.

*Arā l-narjisa l-tibriyya **yaʿnū** la-hu l-fikru*
wa-yaqṣaru ʿan awṣāfihi l-naẓmu wa-l-nathru

I see the gilt narcissus, toward which [my] thoughts **are bent**;
poetry and prose fall short of its description.

Artful plays on √*ʿnw/y* are not encountered in late flower poetry only. We find them in the prison poems of ʿAdī b. Zayd (d. ca. 600 CE), where there is a decided flourish in the juxtaposition of mental captivation with the institutional fact of ʿAdī's captivity (verses 15-18 of a 32-verse *qaṣīda,* meter: *wāfir*):

Wa-mā dahrī bi-an kuddirtu faḍlan
wa-lākin mā laqītu mina l-ʿajībi
wa-mā hādhā bi-awwali mā ulāqī
mina l-ḥidthāni wa-l-ʿaraḍi l-qarībi
wa-mā ṭalabī suʾālan baʿda khubrin
namāhu l-mūḍiʿūna ilā l-shaʿūbi
wa-mā shaʾnī bi-hi wa-l-fayju ḥawlī
*wa-hammī law ʿ**anaytu** bi-hi muṣībī*[42]

What is my fated end? My worth besmirched,
no cause for gladness anywhere I find.
What are my sufferings — mere beginnings of
the accidents and mishaps just ahead?
What is my suppliant petition, now that I know
what hurtling toward death is like?
How am I circumstanced? Around me guards are posted.
If **I become captivated** by this, my anxiety will strike.

In this last verse, *ʿanaytu*'s voweling identifies it with B.ʿ*anā yaʿnī*, whose psychological meaning (1) is clear from context. *Law ʿanaytu bi-hi* might be translated here as "If I give mind to it." But to say that his anxiety results from mindfulness of captivity, and not captivity itself, seems to me a case of *kināya* (figurative allusion) that is very like a jest. The word for his inner state alludes to his outer state, i.e., imprisonment under guard, as mentioned in the same verse.

The verb is used ironically in another poem of ʿAdī's, such that mental captivation and physical captivity are signified at the same time. This is a pair of verses coming after the description of a rainstorm (*waṣf al-maṭar*), marking

42 *Dīwān ʿAdī*, 39.

the poem's transition to the next theme (verses 13-14 of a 50 verse *qaṣīda*, meter: *khafīf*):

> *Lam ughammiḍ bi-hi wa-shaʾyī bi-hi mā*
> *dhāka annī bi-ṣawbihi masrūru*
> *bal ʿ**anānī** qawlu mriʾin lam yuqal fī*
> *-hi ṣawābun badā wa-lā taqdīru*[43]
>
> My eyes never closed in sleep while it was going on. My vexation
> has nothing to do with the downpour, which brought me gladness.
> Nay, what **troubles me/imprisons me** is a man's statement, in which
> everything said was plainly in error and without discernment.

As with *maʿnā*, it is impossible to distinguish whether *ʿanā*'s third-person masculine singular perfect form is a reflex of B.*ʿanā yaʿnī* or A.*ʿanā yaʿnū*. Context here demands both verbs' meanings. The poet's joy in the rainstorm is contrasted (*bal*) with the mental "troubling" to which he has been subjected. The source of the trouble is "a man's statement" (*qawlu mriʾin*), i.e., the charges on which ʿAdī was imprisoned by al-Nuʿmān III (the Lakhmid king who ruled al-Ḥīra from ca. 580 to 602 CE). The resulting captivity is no mere metaphor for distress, but actual imprisonment: *ʿanānī qawlu mriʾin* means the man's accusation has rendered ʿAdī a captive.

2.3 *Abstract and Concrete*

The ironic use of *ʿanā* in ʿAdī's poems demonstrates that the connection between physical captivity and mental captivation was evident and ripe for exploitation in early Arabic poetry. What it does not demonstrate is the priority of either meaning, and so instead of identifying one or another as the derived meaning, I call them metaphorical correlates of one another.

Still and all, to contest the thesis that words for psychological events were preceded by words for physical ones is to go against an enduring linguistic insight of the Enlightenment, which Giambattista Vico (1668-1744) elevated to a "universal principle of etymology in all languages: words are transferred from physical objects and their properties to signify what is conceptual and spiritual."[44] Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786) said the same for ethical concepts, "inasmuch as we compare the derivative moral sense of the words with their original

43 Ibid., 86.

44 Vico, *New Science*, 97 (Axiom 63).

physical sense."[45] It is not that word derivation never goes the other way: certainly it happens that corporeal things come to be called by names with abstract meanings. It's just not the prevailing direction in which change of usage tends to go. I say this in the face of linguist David Justice's obscure contention that "the passage from concrete meanings to abstract and vice versa are both so common in semantic history that it is difficult to know which was original."[46] Vice-versa cases are too much harder to bring to mind.[47]

Abstraction of course takes different forms. By some it has been represented as a property of verbs relative to nouns, and a marker of their historical-linguistic posteriority.[48] This is not what I suggest here. I acknowledge that abstract verbal nouns are often used to name concrete results, instruments, or agents of the verb in question.[49] It also happens that words for abstract properties are used to mean concrete substantives (e.g., curiosities, notions, novelties). The issue here is one of relative abstraction among verbal reflexes of the same root — or perhaps relative *corporeality* describes it better. While A. *ʿanā yaʿnū* names a state of humility and helplessness that is visible and tangible (with physical restraints placed on the body as a matter of course), the state of B. *ʿanā yaʿnī* is an intangible analogue proper to the *nafs* (soul), *qalb* (heart), *ṣadr* (chest), or anywhere thought and feeling may take place. This is the kind of relative abstraction I posit between these differently-voweled reflexes of √*ʿnw/y*.

None of the Abbasid grammarians or lexicographers can be found to predicate the noetic "captivation" of √*ʿny* on the bodily "captivity" of √*ʿnw*, and in

45 Mendelssohn, *Morning Hours*, 92. The doctrine's best-known statement is by l'Abbé de Condillac (1715-1780):

> [T]he first names that were given to what we are capable of feeling signified sensible actions alone. Later, as mankind gradually became familiar with abstract terms, we be-came capable of distinguishing mind from body, and of considering the operations of these two substances separately. They then perceived not only what the action of the body is when we say, for example, "I see," but they separately observed the perception of mind and began to regard the term "I see" as being appropriate for both kinds of actions. It is even plausible that this practice came about so naturally that they did not notice the extension of the word's meaning. This shows how a sign which initially was limited to an action of the body became the name of an operation of mind (*Essay*, 165-166).

46 Justice, *Semantics of Form*, 36.

47 The most striking English-language case I know is the word *injury* < Latin *iniūria* "wrong, hurt, detriment," a nominalization of *iniūrius* "unjust, wrongful" < *in-* + *iūs, iūr-* "right." The extension of Greek *trauma* "wound" to the psychological aftereffects of a physically wounding event seems the more common direction for things to go.

48 See Genette, *Mimologics*, 65-66, 155-156, *et passim.*

49 For some German-language cases (e.g. *Bewachung*, "act of guarding" > "guardians") see Scott, Accounting.

the absence of probative evidence I will not insist on it, giving two points to the arrow I draw between Ibn Fāris's first two *uṣūl*:

(2) Captivity ⟷ (1) Intention

Theoretical though it is, the corporeal-abstract relationship between √*ʿnw* and √*ʿny* is easy to understand, and the evidence for it lies as I say on the surface of Classical Arabic tradition. To correlate meanings (2) and (1) with the third semantic aspect of √*ʿnw*/*y* is harder — the *lectio dificilior* promised above — but can hardly be avoided, since it is to meaning (3) that Ibn Fāris actually traces *al-maʿnā*.[50]

2.4 *Ostensive maʿnā*

No metaphorical connection between meanings (2) and (1) is made in *Maqāyīs al-lugha*. The connection Ibn Fāris draws is rather between (1) and (3), and is a metonymic connection, where "the appearance of a thing and its standing forth" (3) are the consequences of "being intent upon a thing" (1). In both meanings, a focus of attention is implied. In meaning (3), however, it is the *object* of attention that is at issue, or better said: the availability of the object to scrutiny.

In professing a phenomenological basis for *al-maʿnā*, Ibn Fāris does not exactly innovate. He gives his source by name: the *Kitāb al-ʿAyn* of al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad (d. 175/786), where the *maʿnā* of a thing is defined as its *miḥna*, "and the state that its affair comes down to" (*wa-maʿnā kulli shayʾin miḥnatuhu wa-ḥāluhu lladhī yaṣīru ilayhi amruhu*).[51] Now for *maʿnā* to be defined as the state (*ḥāl*) of a thing is not too surprising (given the circumstantial force of the *maṣdar mīmī* form), but for it to be called the *miḥna* of a thing is striking. For the historian of Islam, the word leaps from the page. It names a major turning point in intellectual and religious history, which was the Muʿtazilite Inquisition of the early third/ninth century. I therefore hasten to point out that the *Miḥna* prosecuted from 218/833 to 232/847 during the caliphates of al-Maʾmūn, al-Muʿtaṣim, and al-Wāthiq is not implied by the word *miḥna* in *Kitāb al-ʿAyn*. That inquisition — the Muʿtazilite Inquisition — did not begin until some thirty years after the death of al-Layth b. al-Muẓaffar (d. ca. 187/803), the lexicographer who brought *Kitāb al-ʿAyn* to completion. But *miḥna* as

50 Frank's reading of Ibn Fāris in Meanings, 267-269, does not quite take this in, attributing to him instead an understanding of *maʿnā* in which intentional meaning (1) is paramount.

51 *Kitāb al-ʿAyn art.* √*ʿny*. Ibn Fāris names *Kitāb al-ʿAyn* as his "highest and noblest" source on the first page of *Maqāyīs* (1, 3). "Comes down to" for *yaṣīru ilā* is Frank's translation, in Meanings, 267-268.

"interrogation" or "inquisition" was known before al-Khalīl's day and al-Layth's, as in the remark attributed to the Kufan jurist ʿĀmir b. Sharāḥīl al-Shaʿbī (d. 103/721) in *Lisān* art. √*mḥn*:

> Inquisition is an innovation that should be disallowed (*al-miḥna bidʿa*). It consists in taking a man by force and subjecting him to a test (*fa-yamtaḥinuhu*), saying "You did this, and you did that," until he confesses to what he has not done, or to [beliefs] it is not lawful to profess.

Of *maʿnā* as the phenomenological endpoint of captivity and duress there is much to say ahead. The link between (3) and (1) is drawn by Ibn Fāris as follows:

> The third root: In our opinion, the *ʿunyān* of a letter, like its *ʿunwān* ("address"), is best explained as the part that stands out when it is sealed. **The *maʿnā* of a thing has this sense also (*min hādhā l-bāb maʿnā l-shayʾ*).** Al-Khalīl says no more about it than that "The *maʿnā* of anything is its predicament (*miḥnatuhu*) and the state that its affair comes down to."
>
> Ibn al-Aʿrābī said: "*mā aʿrifu maʿnāhu* and *maʿnātahu* [a seldom-heard feminine form] are both said." Linguistic analogy indicates that *maʿnā* is the "aim" that stands out and appears in a thing when it is inquired into. One says: "This is the *maʿnā* of the speech" or "the *maʿnā* of the poem," i.e., that part of an utterance's content that stands forth (*alladhī yabruzu min maknūni mā taḍammanahu l-lafẓu*).
>
> Analogical evidence for this is found in an expression of the Arabs: *lam taʿni* and *lam taʿnu hādhihi l-arḍu shayʾan* are said when the earth produces no vegetation, for in that case it produces nothing of value (*lam tufid shayʾan*), and puts forth no benefit. Confirmation of this is found in the verse (meter: *ṭawīl*):
>
> *Wa-lam yabqa bi-l-Khalṣāʾi mimmā ʿ**anat** bi-hi*
> *min al-baqli illā yabsuhā wa-hajīruhā*[52]
>
> At al-Khalṣāʾ, there remains no more of what [the land] **put forth**
> in the way of green plants, only the husks and the chaff thereof.

52 *Dīwān Dhī l-Rumma*, I, 227, *Sharḥ ashʿār al-Hudhaliyīn*, III, 1250.

Further confirmation is found in the expression *ʿanat al-qirba* ("The water-skin leaked"), said when its contents flow out of it, as in the verse by al-Mutanakhkhil al-Hudhalī (meter: *sarīʿ*):

> ***Taʿnū** bi-makhrūtin* [*la-hu nāḍiḥun*
> *dhū rayyiqin yaghdhū wa-dhū shalshali*]
>
> **It exudes its contents** from a puncture [which is dripping
> and has begun to let its pure contents trickle out.][53]

In this passage, meanings (3) and (1) are represented as two faces of the same event. (1) is an instance of noetic "attention" to an object, and (3) is the phenomenological "disclosure" of that object's hidden content. As a metonymic pair the two meanings substitute for each other easily. *Maʿnā* too is biface: a scene of disclosure and attention to disclosure, independent of the disclosing object's will. The water-skin was not made to leak its contents, after all, but to retain them. What occasions disclosure is a corporeal crisis: the puncture that makes content stand forth, and renders it unto scrutiny by the concerned subject of (1), whose attention it captivates.

The dyad of attention-getting and attention-paying is observable outside of Arabic philology. As a Pragmatist tenet, it was formulated by John Dewey:

> Awareness means *attention,* and attention means a crisis of some sort in an existent situation; a forking of the roads of some material, a tendency to go this way and that. It represents something the matter, something out of gear, or in some way menaced, insecure, problematical and strained. This state of tension, of ambiguous indications, projects and tendencies, is not merely in the "mind," it is nothing merely emotional. It is in the facts of the situation as transitive facts; the emotional or "subjective" disturbance is just a part of the larger disturbance.[54]

This is not to argue for the primacy of *maʿnā* as a "state." The sense in which *maʿnā* is said of disclosed content, giving *maʿnā* the appearance of a passive participle, is stronger than any circumstantial meaning left to the word. This is

53 Ibn Fāris, *Maqāyīs*, IV, 148-149. Ibn Fāris quotes no more than the first two words of this last verse (*taʿnū bi-makhrūtin*); the rest of it is supplied in *Sharḥ ashʿār al-Hudhaliyīn*, III, 1250 and *Lisān* art. √*ʿnā*.

54 Dewey, Does Reality Possess Practical Character, 138. See also James, *Principles*, I, 450: "The things we attend to *come to us* by their own laws. Attention *creates* no idea; an idea must already be there before we can attend to it."

what brings *maʿnā* in line with *ʿunwān* and *unyān*, which also name the "title" of a book — that is, the language that stands out from it (*al-bāriz minhu*), signifying the whole of which it is a part. A title is a defining label, functioning either as a literal statement of the book's contents, or as an evocative figure.[55] For *maʿnā* to be analogous to this visible share affirms its ostentivity. From out of the background welter of experience, *maʿānī* come at the subject, and so do they come from speech. According to Ibn Fāris, that phenomenological "emergence" is *maʿnā*'s namesake attribute.

3 *Maʿnā* apud Ibn Fāris II: *al-Ṣāḥibī*

The derivation Ibn Fāris gives for *maʿnā* in his other dictionary, the more compact *Mujmal al-lugha* (Compendium of Lexicography), is simpler than in *Maqāyīs al-lugha*. In *Mujmal*, the word is connected to the phenomenological sense of meaning (3) only.[56] His treatment of the word in *al-Ṣāḥibī* is quite different. In *al-Ṣāḥibī*, all three *uṣūl* of √*ʿnw/y* are considered in succession as candidates for *maʿnā*'s root, and Ibn Fāris declares disbelief in none of them. The judgment for which he vouches in *Maqāyīs* and *Mujmal* is relegated in *al-Ṣāḥibī* to "Some people say" (*wa-qāla qawm*). Also in *al-Ṣāḥibī* he adduces a *locus probans* for the word *maʿnā*: an anonymous pair of *basīṭ*-meter verses in which *maʿnā* is used unmistakably for meaning (2), i.e. the fact or circumstance of captivity and abasement. I will refer to these verses as "the *maʿnā*-verses" throughout.

The *maʿnā*-verses are not found outside of philological literature. Their period and provenance are uncertainties, and yet they might be traced to a genre of Arabic literature, and even (as ahead in 3.2) to a particular text. Ibn Fāris's named sources for the verses (discussed at the end of 3.1) go back to the first half of the third/ninth century. Be the historical case what it may, it is for theoretical reasons (treated ahead in section 4) that these verses command the most attention.

The chapter of *al-Ṣāḥibī* in which the verses appear is called "On the meanings of words used to express what is conveyed [through discourse] about

55 *Al-Muwaṭṭa'* (The Well-Trodden [Path]) of Imām Mālik (d. 179/796) is an early Arabic example of the latter; see Schoeler, *Genesis*, 72.

56 "*'Anat al-qirba bi-mā'in kathīrin* (The water-skin leaked much water) is said if its water is not retained, and becomes visible. From this is the word *al-maʿnā* derived [*wa-min hādhā shtaqqa l-maʿnā*]. 'This is the speech's *maʿnā*,' one says, and 'the *maʿnā* of the verse.' And feminine form *maʿnāh* (معناة) is also said." Ibn Fāris, *Mujmal*, III, 412.

things" (*bāb maʿānī alfāẓ al-ʿibārāt allatī yuʿabbaru bi-hā ʿan al-ashyāʾ*). The chapter deals with the Arabic vocabulary of hermeneutics:

> These fall under three headings: *maʿnā*, *tafsīr*, and *taʾwīl*. Even though they are not the same, the differences in what is meant by them (*al-maqāṣid bi-hā*) are small differences.
>
> *Al-maʿnā* is an "aim" (*al-qaṣd*) and an "object of desire" (*al-murād*). [Its root verb,] ***ʿanaytu*** *bi-l-kalāmi kadhā* is said to mean: "My aim (*qaṣadtu*) in speaking was …" or "I endeavored (*ʿamadtu*) to say …"
>
> Al-Qaṭṭān (d. 345/956) recited these verses to me on the authority of Thaʿlab (d. 291/904), who heard them from Ibn al-Aʿrābī:
>
> *Mithlu l-burāmi ghadā fī uṣdatin khalaqin*
> *lam yastaʿin wa-ḥawāmī l-mawti taghshāhu*
> *farrajtu ʿanhu bi-ṣarʿaynā li-armalatin*
> *wa-bāʾisin jāʾa* ***maʿnāhu ka-maʿnāhu***
>
> Left like a tick in a worn-out undershirt,
> unshaved, with the hoverers of death closing in –
> I ransomed him with two of our droves [kept in reserve] for the widow
> and [any] wretch who should come along **with a *maʿnā* like his.**
>
> This was said of a man presented for execution, whom the poet ransomed with two flocks of livestock, [saying:] "I had them at the ready for any widow who should come asking, or for a wretch like this one [now] brought forth to be killed." *Maʿnāhu ka-maʿnāhu* means that their intentions (*maqṣidahumā*) in suppliance and abasement are the same. *Al-maʿnā* could also be one's "state" (*al-ḥāl*), in which case [*maʿnāhu ka-maʿnāhu* means]: "anyone in the same state as he."
>
> Some say *al-maʿnā* derives from [the idea of] "exposure" (*al-iẓhār*), as when *ʿAnat al-qirba* is said when the waterskin does not retain its water, but causes it to appear. *ʿUnwān,* the word for a book's "title," depends also on this sense. According to others, *al-maʿnā* is derived from an expression of the Arabs: ***ʿanat*** *al-arḍ bi-nabātin ḥasanin* ["The land **put forth** fine herbage"], said of sprouting plants. According to al-Farrāʾ, *lam* ***taʿnu*** *bilādunā bi-shayʾin* ["Our country did not **put** anything **forth**"] is said if no plants have sprouted. And Ibn al-Sikkīt (d. 244/858) reports *lam taʿni*, [the jussive] of *ʿanā yaʿnī.* If this is the case, then *al-maʿnā* is that thing that is conveyed by utterance (*al-shayʾ alladhī yufīduhu l-lafẓ*), as in the

saying *Lam taʿni hādhihi l-arḍ,* meaning "This land did not put anything forth."[57]

3.1 *Emancipation of the ʿānī*

The most important theoretical development in *al-Ṣāḥibī* is Ibn Fāris's introduction of the *maʿnā*-verses, in which *maʿnā* is heard as a word for "state of captivity." This interpretation is dictated by the verses' theme — a recurrent motif of early Arabic poetry representing the emancipation of a victim of live capture after a battlefield defeat.[58] The Arabic word for such a prisoner is *ʿānī* (masc. pl. *ʿunāt*, fem. sg. *ʿāniya*, fem. pl. *ʿawānī*), which is the active participle of A.*ʿanā yaʿnu* and a cognate of *maʿnā*. To pay the *ʿānī*'s purchase price and set him or her free was the initiation of a vertical relationship called *walāʾ*, in which emancipated and emancipator stood to each other as client and patron and were called each other's *mawlā*.[59] Through this transaction, material capital is converted into symbolic capital and perpetuates the emancipator's nobility. Accordingly, it is a *topos* of self-praise (*fakhr*), as in the verse by Imruʾ al-Qays (meter*: ṭawīl*):

Fa-yā rubba makrūbin karartu warāʾahu
wa-ʿānin fakaktu l-ghulla ʿanhu fa-faddānī[60]

Many a man's distress in battle have I relieved, coming [at his foe] from behind.
And many a **captive**'s fetters have I unfastened, and been pledged his life as ransom.

It also features in encomiastics (*madḥ*) such as Zuhayr's praise for Harim b. Sinān (meter: *basīṭ*):

57 Ibn Fāris, *Ṣāḥibī*, 144-145.

58 The captive is no miscreant but a prisoner of war, as discussed by Anthony, Domestic Origins, 579: "A captive's only crime is to have been an opponent of his or her enemies. More importantly, to be a captive (Ar. *asīr*) does not necessarily subject one to the vagaries of imprisonment but, rather, to the caprices of one's captor." Everywhere glossed as *asīr*, the *ʿānī* might be considered a pre-carceral category: the *ʿānī* of poetry is typically a bound captive, not necessarily confined indoors.

59 See Forand, Relation of the Slave and the Client, and Crone, *Roman, provincial and Islamic law*, 49-63.

60 *Dīwān Imriʾ al-Qays*, 90; see also 319 (verse 5), and for more examples al-Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ dīwān Labīd*, 9 (verse 19) and 251 (verse 83), *Dīwān al-Aʿshā*, 66 (verse 1), and *Dīwān al-Sulayk*, 91 (verse 3).

Agharru abyaḍu fayyāḍun yufakkiku ʿan
*aydi l-ʿ**unāt**i wa-ʿan aʿnāqihā l-ribaqā*[61]

His face blazes with nobility. He overflows [with generosity]. He unfastens
manacles from the hands of **captives**, and from around their necks.

In a *ghazal* of ʿUmar b. Abī Rabīʿa (d. 93/712 or 103/721), the trope is heard to parodic effect (meter: *basīṭ*):

*Yā Umma Nawfala fukkī ʿ**ānīyan** mathalat*
bi-hi Quraybatu aw huwa hālikun ʿajalā[62]

O Umm Nawfal, set **the captive** free — and hurry,
[before] he perishes, or Qurayba turns him into a gelding!

The *maʿnā*-verses therefore participate in a well-established convention of representing the scene of a captive's emancipation. Conventional too is their pairing of captive and widow, found together in Mutammim b. Nuwayra's elegy for his brother Mālik, who was killed in the Ridda wars of Islam's first decade (meter: *ṭawīl*):

Wa-li-l-sharbi fa-abkī Mālikan wa-li-buhmatin
shadīdin nawāḥīhā ʿalā man tashajjaʿā[63]
wa-ḍayfin idhā arghā ṭurūqan baʿīrahu
*wa-ʿ**ānin** thawā fī l-qiddi ḥattā takannaʿā*
*wa-**armalatin** tamshī bi-ashʿatha muḥthalin*
ka-farkhi l-ḥubārā raʾsuhu qad taḍawwaʿā.[64]

On behalf of wine-drinkers [everywhere], I weep for Mālik, and on behalf of the armed men [he leaves behind],
who are violent and vigilant against all comers;

61 Thaʿlab, *Sharḥ Shiʿr Zuhayr*, 49.

62 *Sharḥ Dīwān ʿUmar*, 350.

63 In al-Ḍabbī's *al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt*, this verse appears with *nawāḥīhu*; in the philological sources (*Lisān* and *Tāj* arts. √*bhm*) it is adduced with *nawāḥīhā*. In either case the pronoun's referent is *buhma*, which may be taken as a masculine singular noun meaning "a man who is courageous in battle," or a feminine singular noun meaning a "band of armed men." The latter reading is the one followed here.

64 Ḍabbī, *Mufaḍḍaliyyāt*, 622 (no. 67, verses 12-14).

and of the [would-be] guest who sets his camel bawling, in request of shelter for the night;
and of the **captive** whose leather bonds have shrunk, so long have they lain upon him;
and of the **widow** who walks with her unkempt, malnourished [child] like a bustard chick whose head is crowned with branching shocks.

Only in relation to these and other instances of the emancipation motif can the specific features of the *maʿnā*-verses be appreciated. One thing we find by comparison is that they are distinguished for their description of the captive's abject state (not as graphic as Mutammim's, but vivid nonetheless). They also have an element of suspense we do not find in the other examples. Not until the second verse do we learn the fate of the wretched individual described in the first.

There is additionally a variant of the first *maʿnā*-verse in which the captive is shown pleading with his captors. Thus it was adduced by the lexicographer al-Jawharī (d. ca. 398/1007-8), in illustration of the verb *saʾala yasʾalu*'s "lightened" form (*takhfīf*):[65]

Al-Akhfash (the Younger, d. 315/927) said: [...] The *hamza* may be lightened, rendering the verb *sāla yasālu,* as in the verse:

Wa-murhaqin ***sāla*** *imtāʿan bi-uṣdatihi*
lam yastaʿin wa-ḥawāmī l-mawti taghshāhu

Ah, the poor blighter **who begged** to keep his undershirt,
unshaved, with the hoverers of death closing in...

The *maʿnā*-verses are distinguished for their efflorescence of rare words: *murhaq* "blighter," *uṣda* "undershirt," *istaʿāna* "to shave one's pubes," *ḥawāmī* "hoverers," and *ṣarʿ* "drove of camels."[66] To these the verses owe their place in the Arabic lexicographical record, as summarized in Table 4.[67] Perhaps the most salient facts in this table are that Ibn Fāris is the only authority to adduce

65 Jawharī, *Ṣiḥāḥ* (art. √*sʾl*), v, 1723. Table 4 will show which version is cited by each authority and in what context.

66 The lightenings of *sāla* and metathesis of *ḥawāmī* (< *ḥawāʾim*) are both for the sake of meter (*bi-l-ḍarūra*). For *ṣarʿ* the reading *ṣirʿ* is general.

67 My summary builds on the work of Yaʿqūb, *al-Muʿjam al-mufaṣṣal*, 291-292.

the *maʿnā*-verses in illustration of the word *maʿnā,* and that only in *al-Ṣāḥibī* does it happen.[68]

TABLE 4 Documented occurrences of the *maʿnā*-verses

Source text		Lemma	Version	*Isnād*
al-Zajjājī, *Akhbār al-Zajjājī*		N/A	Both verses, with *mithlu*	al-Akhfash the Younger < Thaʿlab < Ibn al-Aʿrābī
al-Azharī, *Tahdhīb al-lugha*		√*ṣrʿ*	Both verses, with *mithlu*	Ibn al-Aʿrābī
		√*ʿwn*	1st verse only, with *mithlu*	Thaʿlab < Ibn al-Aʿrābī
		√*wṣd*	1st verse only, with *mithlu*	Thaʿlab
al-Khaṭṭābī, *Gharīb al-ḥadīth*		N/A	Both verses, with *mithlu*	Ghulām Thaʿlab < Thaʿlab < Ibn al-Aʿrābī
al-Jawharī, *al-Ṣiḥāḥ*		√*ʾṣd*	1st verse only, with *murhaq*	Unattributed
		√*sʾl*	1st verse only, with *murhaq*	al-Akhfash
Ibn Fāris	*Maqāyīs*	√*ṣrʿ*	2nd verse only	Unattributed
	Mujmal	√*ʿān*	Both verses, with *murhaq*	Unattributed
	al-Ṣāḥibī	N/A	Both verses, with *mithlu*	al-Qaṭṭān < Thaʿlab < Ibn al-Aʿrābī

68 As Table 4 shows, Ibn Fāris quotes the *maʿnā*-verses once in *Mujmal* and once in *Maqāyīs*, and in neither case is it in connection with √*ʿnw/y*. Similarly, Lisān quotes the verses in six different entries, and *Tāj* in five, but in their entries for √*ʿnw/y* the verses do not appear.

TABLE 4 Documented occurrences of the maʿnā-verses (*cont.*)

Source text	Lemma	Version	*Isnād*
Ibn Sīda, *al-Muḥkam*	√*ḥmw*	1st verse only, with *murhaq*	Ibn al-Sikkīt
	√*wṣd*	1st verse only, with *murhaq*	Ibn al-Sikkīt
Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿarab*	√*ʾṣd*	1st verse only, with *mithlu*	Thaʿlab
		Alt. 1st verse with *murhaq*	Unattributed
	√*ḥmā*	1st verse only, with *murhaq*	Ibn al-Sikkīt
	√*rhq*	Both verses, with *murhaq*	Ibn Barrī < "Abū ʿAlī al-Bāhilī Ghayth b. ʿAbd al-Karīm"
	√*sʾl*	1st verse only, with *murhaq*	al-Akhfash (as in *al-Ṣiḥāḥ*)
	√*ṣrʿ*	Both verses, with *mithlu*	Ibn al-Aʿrābī
		Alt. 1st verse with *murhaq*	Ibn Barrī < al-Shaybānī
	√*ʿwn*	1st verse only, with *mithlu*	Ibn al-Aʿrābī

TABLE 4 Documented occurrences of the maʿnā-verses (*cont.*)

Source text	Lemma	Version	*Isnād*
al-Zubaydī, *Tāj al-ʿarūs*	√*ʾṣd*	1st verse only, with *murhaq*	Unattributed
	√*wṣd*	1st verse only, with *murhaq*	Ibn Sīda < Ibn al-Sikkīt
	√*ṣrʿ*	Both verses, with *mithlu*	Ibn al-Aʿrābī
		1st verse with *mithlu,* and *buzāti* for *burāmi*	"A likely case of *taḥrif*" in *al-ʿUbāb al-zākhir* of al-Ṣaghānī
		Alt. 1st verse with *murhaq*	Ibn Barrī < al-Shaybānī
	√*rhq*	Both verses, with *murhaq*	al-Ṣaghānī; Ibn Barrī < "Abū ʿAlī al-Bāhilī Ghayth b. ʿAbd al-Karīm"
		Alt. 1st verse with *mithlu*	Ghulām Thaʿlab in *al-Yawāqīt fī l-lugha*
	√*sʾl*	1st verse only, with *murhaq*	Unattributed
	√*ʿwn*	1st verse only, with *mithlu*	Ibn al-Aʿrābī

An originary context for the *maʿnā*-verses seems irrecuperable. Their tale begins *in medias res*, which might suggest an extract from a longer *qaṣīda*, though their theme is conventional enough to be able tell what's going on. The main obscuring factor is the verses' avoidance of the word *ʿānī*, which is the lexical marker in every other instance of the emancipation theme. The captive is not called "captive," here, but "wretch" and "blighter"; in *ʿānī*'s place, the cognate *maʿnā* denotes the wretch's "state of captivity." As such, the verses are both formulaic and formula-avoidant, as if composed with mannerist aims of creative variation on the theme.

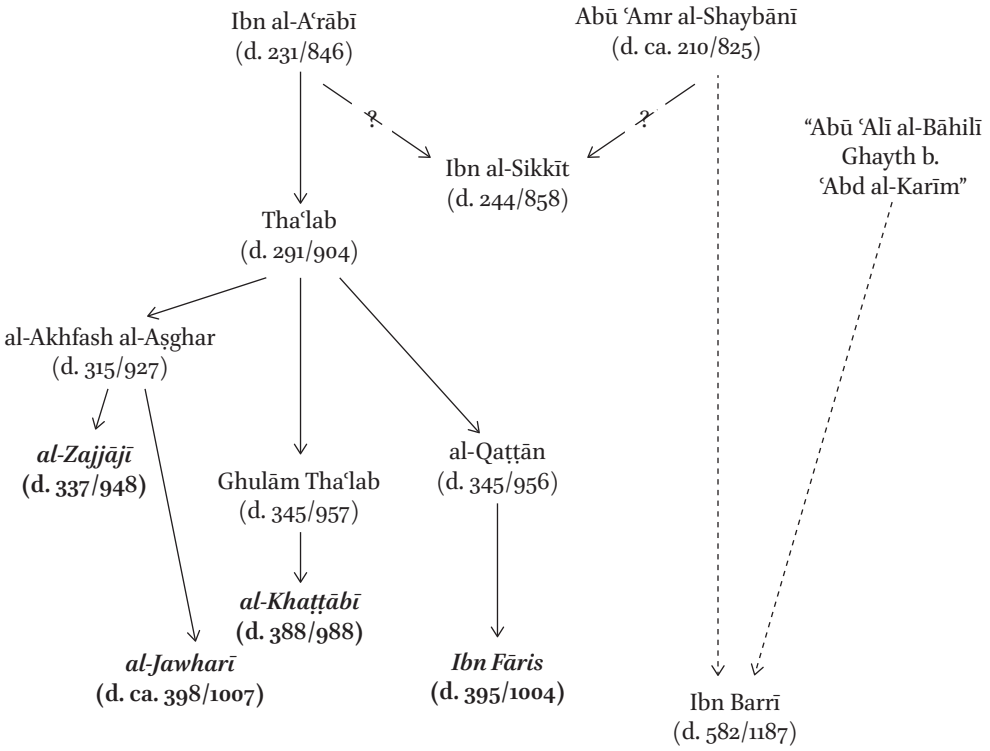
The names and death-dates of the *maʿnā*-verses' known transmitters are arranged in Table 5. From this stemma, the most important thing to point out is that the verses were transmitted overwhelmingly by Kufan scholars and students of the Kufan tradition in Arabic grammar. With regards to Ibn Fāris (called *Kuferfreundlich* by Gotthold Weil) this is no great surprise.[69] Where it might have bearing is on the probative value of the verses themselves — if, that is, any weight is given to a typically "Basran" critique of the Kufan school. Now the actual terms of the third/ninth century Basra-Kufa divide are notoriously hard to make out from the latter-day representations of al-Zajjājī (d. 337/948) and Abū l-Bakarāt b. al-Anbārī (d. 577/1181), and al-Mubarrad too (d. 286/900) is an unsure guide.[70] Typically it is remembered as an opposition between analogy and anomaly. The stereotype of the Basran position is that it put enormous trust in the analogically-derived principles (*uṣūl*) of Arabic grammar, to the point of excluding linguistic evidence that contravened them; Kufans meanwhile are remembered for their readiness to modify the *uṣūl* on the basis of rare and anomalous usage. Michael G. Carter shows in a persuasive 1999 article that the divide began with a difference over the admissibility of new data in grammatical debate.[71] The practice of deriving the principles of grammar from newly assembled literary and discursive evidence was called *istiqrāʾ* (induction), and in the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries both Basrans and Kufans did it as a matter of course. But when, some time later in the third/ninth century, the philologists of Basra began to close the door on new evidence, the Kufans kept it open, continuing to expand the poetic corpus, even if it meant arguing over already-formalized principles anew.

69 Weil, *Die Grammatischen Schulen*, 181.

70 See Baalbaki, Arab Grammatical Controversies.

71 See Carter, Struggle for Authority.

TABLE 5 The *maʿnā*-verses in lexicographical literature: a stemma of *isnāds* from *Lisān, et alibi*



Names in bold italics indicate extant sources (as named in Table 4). Solid arrows indicate direct transmission, and dotted arrows are for textual transmission. Ibn al-Sikkīt is named as a source in the *Muḥkam* of Ibn Sīda (d. 458/1066); in his extant works the verses are not found.

I bring all this up by way of conceding that the probative value of the *maʿnā*-verses lies part-way open to Basran-spirited critique. I will also concede that the verses' earliest-known transmitters were excoriated for their credulity (and worse) by contemporary Basrans and the inheritors of their school.[72] If I call these "concessions" it's not because they carry much weight with me personally,

72 See *Bayān*, IV, 24, for a low estimation of al-Shaybānī's acumen by al-Jāḥiẓ. Concerning Ibn al-Aʿrābī, the following remembrances are preserved by Abū l-Ṭayyib al-Lughawī (*Marātib al-naḥwiyyīn*, 92):

> He transmitted the teachings of Basran scholars — particularly Abū Zayd [al-Anṣārī], although he never studied with him. In addition to Abū Zayd, he had a number of Bedouin informants like al-Ṣaqīl, Ujruma, Abū l-Makārim, as well as some that did not meet the standards of the Basran scholars.... One inveterate detractor of Ibn al-Aʿrābī

but to show that my enthusiasm for the *maʿnā*-verses is not uncritical nor uninformed. I make no claim for the verses' antiquity; quite obviously they postdate the work of ʿAntara and Zuhayr. Just how late they are I decline to speculate, beyond pointing out their *terminus ante quem* in the careers of Abū ʿAmr al-Shaybānī (d. 213/828) and Muḥammad b. Ziyād al-Aʿrābī (d. 231/846). If the *maʿnā*-verses were transmitted by Kufan scholars only, it would suffice me as classical provenance.

3.2 *Abyāt al-maʿānī*

There is also however a Basran filament to the stemma. In *Lisān* art. √*rhq* we find the *maʿnā*-verses quoted with the following *isnād* and commentary:

> Ibn Barrī (d. 582/1187) said: This was attested by Abū ʿAlī al-Bāhilī Ghayth b. ʿAbd al-Karīm, who attributed it to one of the desert Arabs (*li-baʿḍ al-ʿarab*). [The poet] describes a nobleman carried off the field of battle, who asks that they not begrudge him his *uṣda*, which is a small garment worn beneath the other garments. In other words, [he asks] that he not be stripped. "Unshaved" (*lam yastaʿin*) means that he has not shaved his pubes (*ʿānatahu*). The man is on the point of death. [Where the poet says] "I ransomed him with two of our droves" (*farrajtu ʿanhu bi-ṣarʿaynā*), the "two droves" are units of camel: one you dispatch [to the water-source] when you bring the other camels back, due to their great numbers. He says: "I ransomed him with two droves of camel, exchanging them for his manumission. It was for the sake of widows and orphans that I had these droves at the ready."[73]

Abū ʿAlī al-Bāhilī Ghayth b. ʿAbd al-Karīm is a hard man to locate. Outside of *Lisān* art. √*rhq*, I find the name in a few places only. One is *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq* of Ibn ʿAsākir (d. 571/1176), where he is the source for a single *khabar* (IV, 229): "Ghayth b. ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Bāhilī Abū l-Ḥasan (*sic*) said: The

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was Abū Naṣr al-Bāhilī (!), who called him a liar and accused him of *tazayyud* (forgery or embellishment) and discounted his authority.

For more on Abū Naṣr (whose quarrels with Ibn al-Aʿrābī are the only well-documented thing about him) see just ahead.

73 *Qāla Ibn Barrī: Anshadahu Abū ʿAlī al-Bāhilī Ghayth b. ʿAbd al-Karīm li-baʿḍ al-ʿarab yaṣifu rajulan sharīfan irtaththa fī baʿḍ al-maʿārik fa-saʾalahum an yumtiʿūhu bi-uṣdatihi, wa-hiya thawb ṣaghīr yulbasu taḥta l-thiyāb, ay lā yuslabu. Wa-qawluhu "lam yastaʿin": lam yaḥliqu ʿānatahu. Wa-huwa fī ḥāl al-mawt. Wa-qawluhu "farrajtu ʿanhu bi-ṣarʿaynā": al-ṣarʿāni al-ibilāni taruddu iḥdāhumā ḥīna taṣduru l-ukhrā li-kathratihā. Yaqūlu: Iftadaytuhu bi-ṣarʿayni min al-ibil fa-aʿtaqtuhu bi-himā, wa-innamā aʿdadtuhumā li-l-arāmil wa-l-aytām afdīhim bi-hā.*

Prophet, God's blessings and peace be upon him, had five horses: Lizāz, Liḥāf, al-Murtajir, al-Sakb, and al-Yaʿsūb." Another is in the onomastic register of Ibn Mākūlā (d. 475/1082), *al-Ikmāl fī raf*ʿ *al-irtiyāb* (VII, 41), where we find: "Ghayth b. ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Bāhilī: compiler of a book of *maʿānī al-shiʿr* based on the teachings of al-Aṣmaʿī."

With that, "Ghayth b. ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Bāhilī" is an evident misnomer for the philologist Abū Naṣr Aḥmad b. Ḥātim al-Bāhilī (d. 231/855). Abū Naṣr was a student of al-Aṣmaʿī, a transmitter of his works, and was called by some *Ghulām al-Aṣmaʿī* ("al-Aṣmaʿī's amanuensis").[74] How and why his work would be given out in the fifth/eleventh century as one Ghayth's I have no idea. Yāqūt (d. 626/1229) and al-Qifṭī (d. 646/1248) knew Abū Naṣr to be the author of *Kitāb Abyāt al-maʿānī*, and so did Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 385/995), who mentions two commentaries on it: a *Kitāb Sharḥ Kitāb al-Maʿānī li-l-Bāhilī* by Lughda al-Iṣfahānī, and *Kitāb Sharḥ Maʿānī al-Bāhilī al-Anṣārī* by Bundār b. ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd b. Lizza (or Lurra) al-Karajī al-Iṣfahānī (both fl. mid-third/ninth c.).[75] Nine other titles are attributed to him by Ibn al-Nadīm, but it is for *Kitāb Abyāt al-maʿānī* that Abū Naṣr is best remembered — to the point that, as Jarīdī Salīm al-Manṣūrī Thubaytī says in his survey of the genre, "Al-Bāhilī's name is hardly ever mentioned without the accompanying phrase *ṣāḥib Kitāb al-Maʿānī*."[76]

Maʿānī, the plural of *maʿnā*, is conspicuous in these titles. In poetry criticism, *maʿnā* was used for the "poetic theme" embodied in a given verse, as well as for the "meaning" of a particular verse or phrase or word. Then there was a genre of poetry anthology called *abyāt al-maʿānī* ("verses of [ambiguous or puzzling] meanings"). The contents of *maʿānī* anthologies were selected for their obscurity, and were supplemented with clarifying commentary. *Kitāb al-Maʿānī al-kabīr* of Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889) is the major extant example, and the *Maʿānī al-shiʿr* of al-Ushnāndānī (d. 288/901) is another.[77] Abū Naṣr's *Kitāb Abyāt al-maʿānī* was an earlier member of the genre, as attested by numerous outtakes in the literature at large. A good number may be found in *Lisān*, where they were imported mostly from *Tahdhīb al-lugha* of al-Azharī (d. 370/981). Twenty-four fragments are attested in *Ḥilyat al-muḥāḍara*, the poetry anthology of Ibn al-Muẓaffar al-Ḥātimī (d. 388/998), and still more are strewn throughout tradition as *disjecta membra*.

74 See Hämeen-Anttila, Al-Aṣmaʿī. The most thorough modern study of Abū Naṣr is by ʿAbd al-Quddūs Abū Ṣāliḥ and is included in his introduction to *Dīwān Dhī l-Rumma*, I, 83-113.

75 Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-udabāʾ*, I, 227; Qifṭī, *Inbāh al-ruwāt*, I, 71; Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 88, 130, 133.

76 Thubaytī, *Abyāt al-maʿānī*, 46.

77 See Orfali, Sketch Map, 44-45, in particular 45, n71 for relevant observations on the *abyāt al-maʿānī* genre by al-Jurjānī and al-Suyūṭī.

To catalogue the surviving attestations of *Kitāb Abyāt al-maʿānī* is the work of a separate study.[78] By way of comparison to the *maʿnā*-verses I limit myself to one other excerpt from Abū Naṣr's lost work. It is preserved in *Tahdhīb al-lugha* art. √*rāq* (IX, 284), and the verses it treats are credited to Dhū l-Rumma (d. 117/735-36). Bibliographically, it is a telling citation, for while Abū Naṣr's commentary on Dhū l-Rumma's *dīwān* is extant to us as a full-length work, we do not find the verses there but in a *mulḥaq* (supplement) of attributed fragments appended to *Dīwān Dhī l-Rumma* by its modern editor.[79] Their connection to Abū Naṣr from outside this commentary argues strongly for their belonging to *Kitāb Abyāt al-maʿānī*, even though the title happens not to be mentioned here:

> The *rawq* of a tent is the same as its *riwāq*, and that is the drape of cloth (*shuqqa*) below the cloth at the top [of the tent's entrance], as in the verses by Dhū l-Rumma (meter: *ṭawīl*):
>
> *Wa-mayyitatin fī l-arḍi illā ḥushāshatan*
> *thanaytu bi-hā ḥayyan bi-maysūri arbaʿi*
> *bi-thantayni in taḍrib dhihi tanṣarif dhihi*[80]
> *li-kiltayhimā* ***rawqun*** *ilā janbi mukhdaʿi*
>
> Many's the dying [mark stamped] in the earth, little more than a wisp,
> that I have matched to the living [camel] by the sinister edge of [one of] its four [pads],
> through the two furrows [of my eyes]. Each turns to what the other hits upon.
> The "**drapes**" of each are thrown wide of its recess.
>
> Al-Bāhilī said: The "dying" thing (*mayyita*) he means is the brand (*uthra*) which he matches to the living camel. The poet says: "I followed its prints, until it was [found and] returned to the herd." *Al-uthra* is a branding-mark lain on the pad of a camel's foot, said here to be "dying" because it is faint and leaves no clear mark. This is when [the brand] has become ingrown

78 Larsen, Towards a reconstruction.

79 *Dīwān Dhī l-Rumma*, III, 1888-1889. This commentary is Abū Naṣr's only work in print. The survival of his *Ishtiqāq al-asmāʾ*, in manuscript at the Süleymaniye Library (MS Esad Efendi 2357) is also noted by the editor (I, 97).

80 Thus in *Lisān* art. √*rwq*; Ibn Qutayba's *Kitāb al-Maʿānī al-kabīr*, III, 1188, where these verses also appear, has *in* ***taṣrif*** *dhihi tanṣarif dhihi* ("Where one [eye] **turns,** there turns the other").

> and is nearly level with the pad, until such time as it is renewed — except for one remnant along a "sinister edge" (*bi-maysūr*), that is, the left side [of one pad]. The poet's meaning is that he recognized [the camel's footprint] from a single left-hand edge.
>
> By *thaniyyatayni* ("two furrows") is meant "two eyes."[81] *Rawq* is the same as *riwāq* [and here it refers to]: the bones of the brow, due to their projection over the eye. By *mukhdaʿ* is meant the inward part of the eye.

Both the verses and their commentary compare to the *maʿnā*-verses and *Lisān* art. √*rhq*'s commentary in a number of ways. Almost nothing in them is named openly: in place of ordinary names for things are substituted rare vocabulary and non-conventional epithets and metaphors. Once decoded, the underlying themes turn out to be conventional: in both examples, the theme is self-praise. The commentary in each is for the most part lexical, but also narrative: it restates the meaning of the verse in plainer language and fills in its ellipses, so as to make the verse make sense and tell more of a story.

The *maʿnā*-verses' strong resemblance to these and other attestations of al-Bāhilī leads me to hypothesize that the *maʿnā*-verses once featured in his *Kitāb Abyāt al-maʿānī*. If correct, this hypothesis dictates a new hermeneutic for the *maʿnā*-verses. Viewed as *abyāt al-maʿānī*, their rare lexemes (*murhaq, uṣda, ṣarʿ* and the rest) present as generic features. Also explained is the *maʿnā*-verses' avoidance of the word *ʿānī*, which would give away the "emancipation of the captive" theme on a first hearing or reading. Indeed, tracing the *maʿnā*-verses to *Kitāb Abyāt al-maʿānī* changes most of the literary-historical questions we might ask of them. The point is no longer to fit the verses to a particular period or style of poetry, but to a genre of scholarship. The question of the verses' place in a longer poem falls away completely.

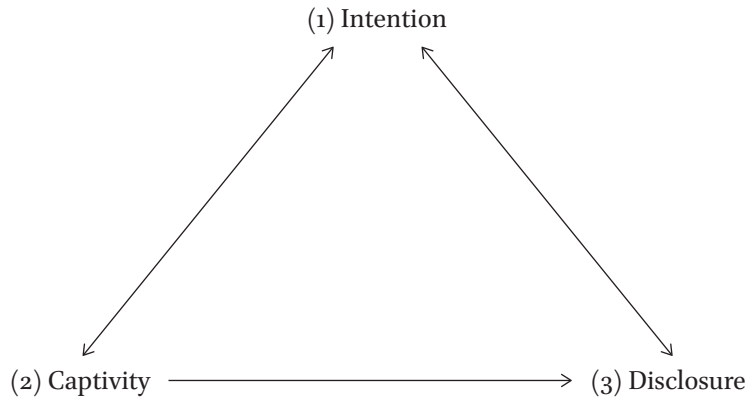
The ambiguity of the *maʿnā*-verses hinges on more than just vocabulary. Their central enigma is the identity of the third-person masculine singular pronoun — the *-hu* of *maʿnāhu* — and the nature of the predicament he is in. These at any rate are the questions that the commentary of *Lisān* art. √*rhq* answers first: "[The poet] describes a nobleman carried off the field of battle." Meanwhile, the meanings of *maʿnā* itself are left unaddressed. The word's place in the verse is plainly that of a cognate substitute for the expected term *ʿānī*. But the theoretical specifics of *maʿnā*'s meaning here were evidently beside the point for every commentator on the *maʿnā*-verses beside Ibn Fāris.

81 Here, by restoring the *yā'* to *thaniyyatayni*, the commentary makes note of the verse's rough license-taking (*ḍarūra*), through which the word was shortened to *thantayni* in order to fit the meter.

4 Meaning and Captivity

Not all great literature is major literature, and the *maʿnā*-verses are as minor as they come. The *abyāt al-maʿānī* genre might be described as minor also, albeit fruitful and well-loved.[82] It is a semi-didactic genre whose purpose is to instruct and entertain, and (like all puzzles) the pleasure it brings comes in flashes. Assuredly the genre is worthy of serious study, but I do not think its own terms (i.e., the stated concerns of the compiler-commenter) need be adhered to strictly. It may be that I see more in the *maʿnā*-verses than Abū Naṣr intended, though scarcely more than Ibn Fāris who was the first to hold them up and invite the question: what makes it possible for *maʿnā* to be used as a word for "captivity"? My answer to the question is once again that the verb for seizure of attention (1) shares a root with the verb for surrender of physical autonomy (2), and that their meanings are metaphorically coordinated even as the verbs find formal isomorphy in *maʿnā*, their common verbal noun. And so too has the overlap between a psychological seizure of attention (1) and a phenomenological disclosure of contents (3) — the connection that Ibn Fāris himself draws through *maʿnā* — been discussed.

It remains to put them all together. There is a figure into which the different reflexes of √ʿ*nw*/*y* may be assembled without strain. The figure is not predetermined by any particular commitment to Charles Sanders Peirce or the ancient Stoics or any other theorist of a tripartite sign. There is just no way of connecting three ideas in graphic space, other than with a triangle:



82 Thubaytī, *Abyāt al-maʿānī*, 44-54, builds on Sezgin's catalogue (GAS 11, 57-60), listing eight titles of *maʿānī* works predating Abū Naṣr's and upwards of two dozen by his contemporaries and later authors.

It will be noticed that the arrow from (2) to (3) is the only one without two pointed heads. This is because the connection I propose between (2) and (3) is not bi-directional. It is an instrumental and causal connection — a metonymic connection — and at that, I do believe meaning (3) and its forms to be derivative. My belief in the notional priority of meaning (2) over (1) has already been aired, on the debatable grounds that ethical and psychological concepts derive metaphorically from bodily experience (the way Latinate *emancipation* is to take someone out of someone else's grasp, and *concept* is what the mind has a grasp of).[83] But while the priority of (2) to (1) cannot be proven (and hence the arrow's two heads), the connection between (2) and (3) goes just one way, and that way goes through *miḥna.*

In *Kitāb al-ʿAyn* art. √*ʿny*, *maʿnā* was defined as "the *miḥna* of any **thing**" (*maʿnā kulli shayʾin miḥnatuhu*). The equivalence is restated in *Kitāb al-ʿAyn* art. √*mḥn*:

> *Miḥna* is the *maʿnā* of speech that undergoes a test (*yumtaḥanu*) in order that [the speaker's] inner thoughts be known. [Its affiliated verb is of the VIII[th] form. One says:] *imtaḥantuhu* ("I put him to a test") and *imtaḥantu l-kalimata* ("I put his speech to a test"), i.e., "I looked into what it came down to" (*naẓartu ilā mā yaṣīru ṣayruhu*). The Ḥarūriyya sect imposed a *miḥna* such that whoever failed it was killed, and whoever passed it was allowed to persist in error.[84]

The *miḥna* is a trial through which a subject's inner thoughts are revealed, and here it seems to name the *results* of such a trial. If not the outcome of a process of exposure, *al-miḥna* is the process itself. Where *Kitāb al-ʿAyn* equates it to *al-maʿnā*, such that the *miḥna* of a thing is its *maʿnā* and the *maʿnā* of discourse is its *miḥna*, we see Ibn Fāris's basis for opining that the word *maʿnā* derives from (3)'s meaning of visibility and exposure. Although he does not dwell on *miḥna* as a scene of detention and coerced confession, meaning (2) does enter Ibn Fāris's gloss where he says: "*Maʿnāhu ka-maʿnāhu* means that their

83 No mind-hand metaphor comes built into Arabic the way it is with the Latinate *concept*, whose place in Arabic is occupied by *maʿnā* and *maʿqūl* ("intelligible," connected also to a verb of binding and restraint). In medieval Latin, *maʿnā* coexisted with *conceptus* after it was imported as *intentio,* as discussed by de Libera, Intention, 504; cf. Gyekye, The Terms '*Prima Intentio*' and '*Secunda Intentio*,' and Black, Intentionality in Medieval Arabic Philosophy.

84 *Al-miḥna maʿnā l-kalām alladhī yumtaḥanu fa-yuʿrafu bi-kalāmihi ḍamīru qalbihi, wa-imtaḥantuhu wa-imtaḥantu l-kalimata, ay naẓartu ilā mā yaṣīru ṣayruhu wa-fī ṣifat al-ḥarūriyya la-hum miḥnatun man akhṭaʾahā qatalathu wa-man aṣābahu aḍallathu.*

intentions in suppliance and abasement are the same" (*ay inna maqṣidahumā fī l-suʾāl wa-l-buʾs maqṣid wāḥid*). The degradation of the captive comes not just through description, but is built into the very *topos* of the *ʿānī*, as it is in the experience of bound captivity: suppliance and abasement are structural features of the role. *Sūrat Ṭā Hā* (Q 20:111) itself seems to be recollected in the *maʿnā*-verses' narration of the scene, as before the reckoners of his fate the *ʿānī* is brought low.

Brought low, and made visible. In the variant of the first verse (with *murhaq*), the captive begs to keep his clothes. His fate is subject to a deliberative process — not by a judge, but by his vanquishers in battle. The *ʿānī* is objectified and exposed to view, giving us *maʿnā* in the ostensive aspects of meaning (3): the scene of something's coming to light under duress. This at any rate is how I interpret the *miḥna-maʿnā* pairing in *Kitāb al-ʿAyn.*[85]

The connection between (2) and (3) clarifies the relationship of both to meaning (1). The captive's interiorized *maʿnā* — his "intention" in the situation — is not formulated in response to his predicament, is but coterminous with it. *Maʿnā* (1) is the noetic corollary of a bodily state (2), and the way it is disclosed is only partly through speech. There may be a verb of speaking (*sāla* < *saʾala*) in the variant to the first verse, but whatever the captive's words, they are ancillary to the *Gestalt* taken in by his captors. The *maʿnā* in question is his, and not *maʿnā kalāmihi* (the meaning of his discourse). To all who behold the captive, his needs are known; they are, again, structural features of his predicament, revealed under duress.[86]

4.1 *Phenomenon and Sign*

Perhaps it is strange to say so much about meaning without talking about the sign. Then again, how is semiosis at work in the *maʿnā*-verses? To begin to answer, it is necessary at last to recall Charles Sanders Peirce, and the essential distinction he draws between sign activity and "brute force":

> It is important to understand what I mean by *semiosis*. All dynamical action, or action of brute force, physical or psychical, either takes place between two subjects (whether they react equally upon each other, or one is agent and the other patient, entirely or partially) or at any rate is

85 There is a grim possibility that *maʿnā* was in use by second/eighth-century inquisitors as a technical term for coerced confession. Cf. Scarry, *Body in Pain*, 46, for "the connection between two dreaded forms of exposure, open wounds and confession."

86 Meanings (2) and (3) are also correlated where *Lisān* art. √*ʿnā* quotes Abū l-Haytham al-Rāzī (d. 276/889): "*ʿĀnī* is [said for] the submissive, the slave, and that which flows with water or blood" (*al-ʿānī al-khāḍiʿ wa-l-ʿānī al-ʿabd wa-l-ʿānī al-sāʾil min māʾin aw damin*).

> a resultant of such actions between pairs. But by "semiosis" I mean, on the contrary, an action, or influence, which is, or involves, a cooperation of *three* subjects, such as a sign, its object, and its interpretant, this tri-relative influence not being in any way resolvable into action between pairs.[87]

The point here is not that violence and semiotics are exclusive domains.[88] A beating can be the sign of worse violence to come. But the blow itself is present to body and mind directly, not represented by a third thing. The *ʿānī* stands (or kneels) in a dynamic relation to his captors, a relation mediated by violence. Not through signs is a subject made aware of being captive, but from having the power to move around taken away.

Value on the other hand is robustly at issue in the *maʿnā*-verses, which depict in the end a scene of exchange: a large number of camels is given for the captive's life. The speaker is a man of wealth, and his herds are the fund from which his largesse is distributed. The captive's life is fungible, with a value relative to widows and other wretches. His relief on regaining his life (that *faraj baʿd al-shidda*) is not represented in the *maʿnā*-verses, nor is his gratitude to the verses' speaker. The captive is not heard to pledge his life in return. We are shown the scene of captivity, and told of camels driven here and there. There is no monetary exchange: camels for a man's life, there is no third thing.

The signs at work in the captive's *maʿnā* are immediate and embodied. Captivity is a matter of spatial fact, directly experienced — the kind of thing of which Husserl says that "we are consciously aware of it as given in its *embodied* form. We are not given an image or a sign *in its place*."[89] What *is* given to consciousness in its place is *al-maʿnā* as the inward face of experience, whose outer face is the world of bodies caught in space. Meanings (1) and (2) of √*ʿnw/y* are two sides of the same seizure of attention, as Dewey and James have both said (above at n54). From this it is a small step to thinking of (2) and (1) as end-points, with phenomenological signs passing between them through the medium of the subject's body. From (2) to (3) the vector is even clearer: under duress, the subject becomes an object available for scrutiny, whose signs are given off whether or not the subject will.

The captive's state *qua* captive is a function of spatial relations. Some who are present at the scene are free to move around, and others are held in place.

87 Peirce, Pragmatism in Retrospect, 282.

88 As the example of "a piece of mould with a bullet-hole in it as sign of a shot" makes plain in Peirce, Logic as Semiotic, 104.

89 Husserl, *Ideas*, 123.

Via (2) → (1), the sensible fact is available to the captive's consciousness, and via (2) → (3) it is manifest to his captors — "far from being a sign for *something else*, though to a certain extent a sign *for itself*."[90] Only in this sense would *maʿnā* in the verses be something *signified*, through self-ostentation of phenomena to consciousness. It is reality's experiential face, and, as Levinas says, "the face signifies itself."[91]

Sign activity at the scene of the *maʿnā*-verses is of this phenomenological kind. Abject and exposed to lethal forces "hovering" (*ḥawāmī*) about him, the captive is that figure haunting the pages of *Totality and Infinity*: "the body, indigent and naked" at the center of the perceptual world.[92] In this regard, the very wonderful thing about the *maʿnā*-verses is that their speaker rises to the ethical demand emergent along vectors (2) → (3) and (1) → (3), as Levinas describes:

> The face which the Other turns to me is not reabsorbed in a representation of the face. To hear his destitution which cries out for justice is not to represent an image to oneself, but is to posit oneself as responsible, both as more and as less than the being that presents itself in the face. Less, for the face summons me to my obligations and judges me. The being that presents himself in the face comes from a dimension of height, a dimension of transcendence whereby he can present himself as a stranger without opposing me as obstacle or enemy. More, for my position as *I*

90 Ibid., 146. All this is well summarized in MacCannell, Erving Goffman†, 24:

> The phenomenological sign (*Sinn* = meaning) that we find in Husserl's writing is an effect on consciousness produced by a correlation between an object of consciousness "out there" and a particular thought, belief, or feeling. The *sign* in the phenomenological sense is dependent on the object of consciousness being present to consciousness, that is, it is dependent on appearance, perception and presence. The phenomenological sign is an instance of *self-representation*: i.e., it represents itself to consciousness. The semiotic sign is based on quite a different principle, namely the overcoming of absence, detachment, nonpresence: "a sign," according to Peirce's formulation, "represents something to someone"; not itself to consciousness, but something to someone. According to this second definition, the sign is not a meaning-effect that arises in consciousness as a result of a correlation between things, perceptions and thoughts; it is a pointer, indicator, marker, always directing consciousness beyond itself and beyond the immediate situation.

See additionally Jacques Fontanelle, La base perceptive de la sémiotique.

91 Levinas, Totality *and Infinity*, 140.

92 Ibid., 127:

> The body naked and indigent is the very reverting, irreducible to a thought, of representation into life, of the subjectivity that represents into life which is sustained by these representations and *lives of them*; its indigence — its needs — affirm "exteriority" as non-constituted, prior to all affirmation.

> consists in being able to respond to this essential destitution of the Other, finding resources for myself. **The Other who dominates me in his transcendence is thus the stranger, the widow, and the orphan, to whom I am obligated.**[93]

These altruistic values are not alien to the *maʿnā*-verses in the least. On the contrary, they are a generic requirement: the charitable feat they describe is exactly what qualifies them as *fakhr*. A first-person speaker who cannot boast of relieving the destitution of the Other has no place in the *maʿnā*-verses.

With all of this, we start to see why *maʿnā* makes for an odd fit within theories of the sign. It is a phenomenological entity, secondarily adopted as a semiotic term. It is no conceptual analogue to the "signified" of Saussure's linguistic sign; Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd in one place correlates it with "the link between the signifier and the signified" (*al-ʿalāqa bayna l-ism wa-l-musammā*), which is apt — particularly if *maʿnā* is thought of as a process of becoming-manifest.[94] As "the exposure of inner content," "the presentation of an affair to consciousness," and even "the fact or circumstance of one's captivity," *al-maʿnā* is more of a connector than an end-point.

4.2 *Somatics of Meaning*

In the latent phenomenological paradigm of *al-maʿnā*, the body is a medium. It is the site of the duress that brings affairs to consciousness for the subject and the subject's observers alike. Captivity need not be a literal fact; it can be a metaphor for any engrossing situation (hence *captivation*), as well as a synecdoche for other positions a subject might occupy, abject or otherwise. The *ʿānī* of my three-part paradigm is understood to be "caught" in a given situation as the Latinate *subject* is understood to be "thrown" into one. The speaker of the *maʿnā*-verses may be said to have a *maʿnā* too — his "way of being caught" in social space — that is most unlike the captive's *maʿnā*.

Figurative drift like this no doubt contributes to *maʿnā*'s wide applicability. My hypothesis requires it, because I do not contend that actual captivity is latent every time the word is used. My modest contention is rather that bearing up under the stress of captivity works as a metaphor and a synecdoche for experience generally. What is latent in *al-maʿnā* is a certain positionality, or a modification of dynamic spatial relations that brings something into view. Some such figurativity may, I trust, be observed in the conceptual vocabulary of any language, as affect theorist Denise Riley writes: "In the frequent

93 Ibid., 215 (emphasis mine).
94 Abū Zayd, *al-Ittijāh al-ʿaqlī*, 84.

spatiality of conceptual thought, a fundamental metaphoricity of place and depth is embedded (as in those very words *residual, fundamental, embedded*)" — posing then a question that may have crossed my reader's mind: "But is such an observation merely a rebirth of old fevers of the excessively literalized etymological radicalism which gripped many wild nineteenth-century linguists?"[95]

The question hits home. There is in fact something untimely about a philological approach to the history of ideas, despite some enduring landmarks.[96] To this I can only say that if a detailed etymological study of *al-maʿnā* had been produced in the nineteenth century, or in 1968 or at any other point of time, the present article would not have had to be written. My dependence on poetic evidence is part of what makes it a "throwback" — not to the nineteenth century CE, but to the second, third and fourth AH. All of my source materials and some of my method owe to the philologists of the Abbasid period — Basran and Kufan alike — who argued over this same evidence while preserving it in recitation and in manuscript. Unavoidably, this article will appear in the character of an homage to the classical authorities whom Muhsin Mahdi says "have as it were set themselves up as a screen between [the gender-masculine student of Classical Arabic philology] and the raw material that he intends to investigate."[97]

But etymology is not destiny. Without disavowing the figurative extensions that philology uncovers, I don't essentialize them, nor grant them primacy over synchronic technical usage. I do consider them vital for taking a comparativist approach to mental categories as these are construed in language — an approach that "listens," as John A. Lucy puts it, "closely to what the language forms volunteer, pursuing various structured, crosscutting patterns of meaning and attempting to make sense of how the world must appear to someone using such categories," arriving ideally at "the characterization of the distinctive way a language interprets the world."[98]

Patterns of meaning are one thing, though, and *representations* of meaning another. My question here was one of mimesis: how is it that meaning itself might be pictured as a function of dynamic corporeal relations, as Ibn Fāris suggests that *maʿnā* could be? The short answer is that language always represents structures of thought as metaphorical elaborations on corporeality. How

95 Riley, *Impersonal Passion*, 51.

96 Foucault, *Order of Things*, 298: "The first book of *Das Kapital* is an exegesis of 'value'; all Nietzsche is an exegesis of a few Greek words," etc.

97 Mahdi, review of Fleisch, *Traité de philologie arabe*, 290.

98 Lucy, Linguistic Relativity, 296.

to think of meaning outside of such representations is the harder question — or series of questions, as Denise Riley goes on to ask:

> Then if the names of the structures of thought are themselves metaphorical, isn't the very idea of there being any "structure" to thought itself also figurative? Yet if so, what would constitute the nonfigurative here?.... Concepts, often figurative, are mapped onto each other, working in tandem within 'the unity of the verbally constituted consciousness,' as Vološinov put it.[99] Yet what if the very concepts which ground this overlapped consciousness, those of an external world and an internal world, begin themselves to ring strangely in our ears; what if all this interiority and its opposing exteriority are also themselves metaphorical? And then the ensuing question relentlessly becomes: metaphorical to what?[100]

Thinking outside of such metaphors is not only an interesting thought experiment, but an imperative of philosophy of mind. Even so, it is no easy thing to sail past the pillars of interiority and exteriority — least of all where outward exposure of inner content is one of *maʿnā*'s master metaphors.

In this article it was important to leave aside the specific terminological consequences of *maʿnā*'s derivation, beyond noting the lexical and morphological preconditions for its pluripotentiality. My purpose here was to attend to drift, and for this the best evidence comes from poetry. My findings are that *maʿnā*'s somatic and phenomenological metaphoricities were not "dead" in the first centuries of Islam but still-living tropes, accessible now through *Kitāb al-ʿAyn*, *al-Ṣāḥibī*, and the work of early poets (including the unknown master of the *maʿnā*-verses) who enlisted its root verb-complex in wordplay.

5 "As Thickly-Clotted Spittle"

I close with a poetic instance of *maʿnā* by one of the last poets to be considered early.[101] Ruʾba b. al-ʿAjjāj (d. 145/762) was simultaneously a poet of great traditionalism and great inventive skill, who (along with his father al-ʿAjjāj, d. 97/715) brought the monorhymed *rajaz mashtūr* form to *qaṣīda*-like heights. In one *raḥīl* passage describing a night-journey, the poet boasts of the speed and surefootedness of his Mahrī camels:

99 A reference to Vološinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, 15.
100 Riley, *Impersonal Passion*, 51.
101 Baalbaki, Historic Relevance, 104.

Wa-in khaṣāṣu laylihinna staddā
ṣadadna ʿan ʿirnīnihi aw ṣaddā
ʿanhā wa-taʿrawrā sihāban jurdā
idhā tahāwī l-qarabi jrahaddā
kaʾanna taḥtī dhā shiyātin fardā
bādara laylan wa-shamālan ṣardā
arṭā wa-aḥqāfan yadhudna l-bardā
yanḍū l-maṭāyā ʿanaqan wa-wajdā
naḍwaka ʿan ṣadri l-yamānī l-ghimdā
taṭrudu dhamman wa-tudannī ḥamdā
*taʿmī **maʿānīhā** l-lughāma l-jaʿdā.*
Lā taʿdu aqwāmun ilayya l-qaṣdā
abdaw mina l-ghayẓi wujūhan rubdā[102]

With no gap open in the [darkness of the] night,
they avoid its pointy stones, or [its pointy stones] avoid
them, as they are ridden barefoot through the desert bare and sere.
When our emaciating night-journey goes on and on without a water-stop,
it is as if a matchless [wild bull] were underneath me, one with striped
legs,
dashing through the night and the North wind's chill,
[seeking] the scrub-brush and sand-hills that fend off the cold,
outstripping [other men's] mounts in their paces
[quickly] as you strip the scabbard from a Yemeni sword.
Repulsing blame and attracting praise,
they cast **their *maʿānī*** as thickly-clotted spittle.
— May they not intend hostility toward me, those folks
who advertise their ire on ashen faces!

It is impossible to fault Ahlwardt here (and Key after him) for translating *maʿānī* as the camels' "content" (*ihr Inhalt*).[103] What comes to light as cast spittle obviously comes from within, much as the water-skin in al-Mutanakhkhil's verse exudes (*taʿnū*) its contents through a puncture. The verb here, *ʿamā taʿmī*, denotes abundant emission (in another of Ru'ba's poems it is used it of the Nile's flow), and is a literal word for camel expectoration, too.[104] All this spitting may

102 Ru'ba, *Sammlungen*, III.42 (no. 17, verses 16-28).
103 Ru'ba, *Dīwān des Reǧezdichters*, 66: "Abweisend Tadel und anziehend Lob: / Ihr Inhalt sprudelt und wirft krausen Schaum aus."
104 Ru'ba, *Sammlungen*, III.96 (no. 35, verse 39).

put the hearer in mind of *al-lafẓ,* which, in addition to being the "utterance" that communicates a *maʿnā* to a hearer, is a verbal noun for spitting.[105] The camels' *maʿānī* may be understood as "expectorations" or, defensibly, "expressions": instances in either case of "coming to light," engaging phenomenological meaning (3) of √*ʿnw/y*.[106] Their being cast as spittle weds abstract *maʿānī* to concrete *lughām* — the kind of metaphor that al-Jurjānī called "the pure type" (*al-ṣamīm al-khāliṣ min al-istiʿāra*): "not the same as the one existing between the flight of a bird and the running of the horse," but one that spans two realms of existence, as when lucid argument is compared to light.[107]

This much tells us that inner content streams forth in abundance, but not what that content is. Affect, thought, feelings? Quite naturally. In *raḥīl* poetry, the emotional lives of riding camels (often filtered through long and pathos-laden similes that compare the camel to some put-upon beast of the wild) are a regular concern. These camels have traveled far without water, which determines their intentions in the grueling matter. Then, in the next line, the fact of intention is echoed and reinforced in the optative *lā taʿdu aqwāmun ilayya l-qaṣdā*: "May they not intend hostility toward me …" Even if *qaṣd* is no decisive key to the meanings of the previous verse, there are abundant grounds for interpreting the camels' *maʿānī* as intentional entities, in accordance with the root verb's psychological meaning (1).

A metapoetic reading also presents itself. In a poem that up to this point has spoken of little but the speed and indefatigability of the poet's camels — in which their merits are the poem's theme — the *maʿānī* of the camels and the *maʿānī* of the poem are the selfsame *maʿānī*. In this sense, the camels' *maʿānī* are occasions for description and praise, and something close to proofs of worth: merits and exploits, cast off as abundantly as spittle.

Meanings (1) and (3) of √*ʿnw/y* are therefore coefficient in the polysemy of Ruʾba's *maʿānī*. The captivity of meaning (2), meanwhile, seems not to be in play. It might yet be structurally implicit in the metapoetic reading, insofar as the camels' night-journey puts their endurance to a test — no immobilizing captivity, but a mobile one, something like a forced march. *Maʿānī* as "exploits" would be the ostensive consequence of meaning (2), which is *maʿnā* as "trial." When their worth is tested, the camels prove it, bearing up under their duress and flowing (*taʿmī*) with distinguishing achievements.

105 Al-Jāḥiẓ (*Ḥayawān*, II, 152) reports that a young rooster is called *lāfiẓa* because it picks up seeds and spits them before the hen.

106 The commentator Muḥammad b. Ḥabīb (d. 245/860), so crucial for understanding Ruʾba's poetry, has nothing to say about *maʿānī's* meaning here (Yale MS Landberg 742, fol. 438b).

107 Abu Deeb, Al-Jurjānī's Classification, 70-71, quoting al-Jurjānī, *Asrār*, 60-61.

The question of meaning is all-ongoing. One doesn't raise it so much as tune it in. As a function of duress, it is well known. It is pathos and affect, passion and affection, undergone and manifested by the subject in one ergative wave. It not only determines intention, it *is* intention. It is contingent being, circumstantial, and at that there is no end to what might be said about meaning, but *maʿnā* is a realistic way of saying it.

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