

they ask, could the Arabs have been expected to understand it, were it sent down in a non-Arabic tongue? ¹

Others took a different line of argument, and claimed that the existence of foreign words in the Qur'ān would be a reflection on the sufficiency of Arabic as a medium for the divine revelation. The Qur'ān, said the theologians, is the final and most perfect of divine revelations, and Allah naturally chose to reveal the final revelation in the most perfect of all languages, so how can one pretend that Arabic was lacking in the necessary religious vocabulary, and that Allah had to borrow Nabataean or Persian or Syriac words to express His purpose? as-Suyūṭī (*Itq*, 315) quotes Ibn Fāris as representative of this attitude. "Ibn Fāris said that if there is therein anything from a language other than Arabic that would raise a suspicion that Arabic was imperfect as compared with other tongues, so that it had to come in a language they did not know." If asked to account for the fact that the early authorities had great difficulty in explaining certain words which they were forced to conclude must be of foreign origin, a thing which would hardly have been likely were they ordinary Arabic words, the advocates of this view reply that the Arabic language is so rich and copious that it is practically beyond the powers of any ordinary mortal to encompass all its variety,² so it is no wonder if certain words were strange to the interpreters. In illustration of this they refer to a tradition that Ibn 'Abbās was uncertain about the meaning of the word فاطر until one day he overheard two desert Arabs

quarrelling over a well, when suddenly one of them said انا فطرته, and immediately its meaning became clear.³ If further asked how the Prophet could have known all these words, they quote the dictum of

¹ Dvořák reminds us (*Fremdwörter*, 5) that Muḥammad himself used these words قرآنًا عربيًا to reply to the charge of his contemporaries that a foreigner instructed him (xvi, 105; xxv, 5; xlv, 13), his argument being—what he hears from this foreigner is a foreign tongue, whereas he himself understands only Arabic. Yet the Qur'ān is Arabic which they understand perfectly, so their charge is false, for how could they understand the Qur'ān if it were composed of what he learned from this foreigner? This argument does not seem to have had much effect in convincing the Meccans to whom it was addressed (see Osborn, *Islam under the Arabs*, 20, 21), though later Muslim theologians regarded it as conclusive.

² So as-Suyūṭī, *Itq*, 315: ولكن لغة العرب متسعة جدًا ولا يبعد ان تخفى على الاكابر. الجلة.

³ *Vide Baiḍ*, on vi, 14.