

## Conference Report

### **“Al-Jahz: A Muslim Humanist for our Time“**

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Auditorium B, West Hall, American University of Beirut

A Cooperation of AUB and OIB

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With great support of the teams of CAMES and OIB

#### I General Remarks

All panels of the conference had to take place at the Auditorium B, West Hall, AUB, because the Orient-Institut as an equal co-organizer does not have a conference room big enough for international conferences.

The effective and pleasant cooperation with the team of CAMES served as a basis for a trouble-free course of events. The intense working atmosphere led to vivid and fruitful discussions after the substantial papers were given.

These discussions were recorded for every participant to serve as an audio document for the preparation of the papers for their publication in the future.

Starting with the first evening, the stimulating scientific conversation lasted over all the three conference days. Due to the additional program it also went beyond the panels everyday.

The echo of the participants as well as that of the auditors was very positive.

The conference was judged as highly important, instructive, stimulating, useful and enjoyable.

The remarkable public interest in the conference attracted a scientific and intellectual audience from whole Lebanon and even from Damascus, Amman and Cairo to attend.

The press coverage of the event was focused on the main subject Al-Jahiz as well as on the content of the given papers. As an example may serve the detailed report of January 29<sup>th</sup> edition of “al-Hayat” which filled a double page completely and is presented as PDF for download [here](#).

The financial support by the German Research Foundation (DFG) was essentially helpful to realize the project.

## II Panels, Papers and Lectures

After the welcoming addresses of Provost Heath, Dean Bitar, Manfred Kropp, John Meloy and Ezzedin Ibrahim, **Josef van Ess (Tuebingen)** held the opening lecture **“Jahiz as a Mu’tazilite: his humanist approach to theology”**.

First, Van Ess dealt with the question of where and for how long al-Jahiz was considered to be a theologian, *mutakallim*, instead of an *adib*. Therefore he looked more closely at the *Mu’tazili* school-tradition and offered a few new details concerning its development up to the Qadi Abdaljabbar (died 415/1025).

Furthermore *Van Ess* took the motto of the conference as an opportunity to ask the question: if and if yes, in which way and how far one could put al-Jahiz, the *Mu’tazilite*, in the context of the term “humanist”?

He was searching for “Humanist” elements in Jahiz’s theology with the intention to show what could eventually be done if one insists on using the term “humanism” with respect to this period and to this author and with regard to the implications of this historical “school of thinking” and the facts we know concerning the historical figure of al-Jahiz and the content of his works.

In this connection he referred to the varied term “humanist”, including its use until today, as well as to the problem of the assignment of a later term to an earlier conception, idea or the thinking of a historic figure.

**Gregor Schoeler (Basel)** stressed in **“Writing for a reading public: the case of al-Jahiz and Ibn Qutayba”** that the book for a reading public, the literary book, had already come to existence in the 2<sup>nd</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> century. The oldest writings meant for a reading public like courtiers, rulers, princes or secretaries were in the form of letters (epistles). He added that both instruments of mediating knowledge, i.e. the recitation for listeners based mostly on written notes that were transmitted by means of notes as well as the book for a reading public, existed side by side in the 3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> century.

In comparison of the two types he emphasized that concerning the former only a few of the lecture papers still exist in form of further transmitted texts and a large part of the transmissions have gone to later compilations while numerous works of the other type have survived, because the writings were passed on from the start by normal written transmission, i.e. through the copying of manuscripts.

Furthermore Schoeler added that the proper books and treatises almost always had a precise title, are generally provided with a preface or introduction, and are often dedicated to a high-ranking person.

Regarding to the content of the books of al-Jahiz and Ibn Qutaiba Schoeler pointed out that the extension of themes is not to be attributed solely to the interest of the of the author, but also to a new composition of audience or new tendencies and interests in the public at large.

As the subject of his paper **“Yearning and disquiet: al-Jahiz and the Risalat al-qiyān”** **Matthew Gordon (Miami, Ohio)** chose texts of al-Jahiz and al-Isfahani dealing more or less directly with elite slave women of third century’ Abbasid society – that is, the singers, entertainers and other female denizens of Abbasid court culture. The main question Gordon has asked is if such texts are useful to the writing of a social history of these women.

Some passages of the texts provide a set of characteristics of the *qiyān* in general or describing a certain *qaynah*.

Gorden argued that rather than read these characteristics as simply shared textual or literary devices that circulated among the writers of *Adab* that one also consider them as patterns of the history of a particular social group, that is, the elite women slave singers.

**Michael Cooperson (Los Angeles)** argued in “*Jahiz, the Hanabila and the Bukhala*” that the *Bukhala*’ uses misers as a vehicle for lampooning the *Hadith*-men whose “anthropomorphism” al-Jahiz so despised. Furthermore he stresses that the characteristic ethic of the *Hadith*-community, especially of the ascetics associated with Ibn Hanbal, was *wara*’, the scrupulous avoidance of objects and activities that might entail a violation of *sunnah*.

As Cooperson put it, the practical consequence of *wara*’ was *zuhd*, renunciation of worldly goods and pleasures and for al-Jahiz, the behavior of the *zuhhad* was practically indistinguishable from that of the misers. Given the many parallels between the two groups, Cooperson added, it appears likely that the *Kitab al-bukhala*’ represents the continuation of al-Jahiz’s anti-*Hadith* polemic by other means.

In his paper “*The portrayal of individuals by al-Jahiz*”, **Tilman Seidensticker (Jena)** threw a glance at the the “*Kitab al-bukhala*” and noticed that 17 out of a whole of 32 chapters are devoted to the *bukhl* (avarice) of just a single person and that among these seventeen chapters, there are twelve which contain more than only one anecdote - in average, they contain about five texts - about or statement made by this person.

With respect to the question as to whether the individuals are exchangeable or not Seidensticker so far thoroughly studied seven among those twelve chapters containing several texts on a single person and selected four for a detailed comparison which contain 2, 5, 10 and 4 texts respectively.

Furthermore he mentioned that it might be objected that if there is a harmony in the character of a certain *bakhil*, it might be due to the fact that the persons al-Jahiz describes actually had these traits matching with each other and that this of course could be possible.

But, Seidensticker continued, in some other cases, one doesn’t even know from other sources that the person ever existed, and as everybody certainly knows, man often has contradictory traits.

Therefore he stressed that he would like to ascribe the harmony in a character to the role of al-Jahiz as the person who selected the texts or is their author and continued emphasizing that a detailed analysis shows that the four misers he selected can be arranged neatly on the axis of *bukhl*, and in addition, one knows more about each of these men than his mere degree of *bukhl*, though he admitted that things of course get the more difficult the more persons one includes in this scheme.

Nevertheless, Seidensticker stated finally that from his point of view al-Jahiz has succeeded in showing a remarkable wide range of individuals characterized by, first, a specific degree of *bukhl* and, second, by some other trait or traits.

**George Saliba, (Columbia University)** in “*Jahiz and the critique of Aristotelian science*” started with serious doubts about the role of pre-Islamic Syriac sources as intermediaries of the transmission of Greek scientific tradition into Arabic and put into question the widely held opinion about the decline of Arabic science after the twelfth century.

According to Saliba a detailed survey of several pre-Islamic and early-Islamic Syriac scientific sources has revealed that none of those sources seem to have made direct use of such major classical Greek works as Ptolemy's *Almagest* and Euclid's *Elements*, let alone being capable of transmitting them. He emphasized that the sophistication of the scientific texts of the latter half of the eighth and the early ninth century reveal a maturity that could not have been based on the investigated Syriac sources and pointed out that all the evidence that is known so far indeed suggests that the advanced Greek scientific texts were translated directly from Greek into Arabic. Furthermore he mentioned that from the thirteenth till the sixteenth century the evidence, gathered from the field of astronomy, suggests a remarkable original activity in sophisticated mathematical modeling of planetary theories that was not paralleled by anything written before the eleventh century. From his point of view this result completely overturns the generally accepted opinion about those centuries being centuries of decline. He continued that the main feature of the mathematical astronomy that was produced in this later period was the persistent attempts at overhauling the classical Greek astronomical theories, and at times to create alternatives to such theories.

Following these arguments Saliba stresses that the earliest expressions of this critical tradition not only in the works of the ninth century scientists themselves, but also in the works of famous belletrists such as Jahiz who had their own axe to grind with the inherited Aristotelian science.

Furthermore Saliba's given illustration of Jahiz's critique of Aristotelian science, with few examples from his work *On Animals*, gains a special significance when it is placed against the background of *mu'tazilite* thought itself which was supposed to have championed at least philosophical dimension of that same Aristotelian thought.

**Geert Jan Van Gelder (Oxford)** dealt in his paper "*Kitab al-Bursan: Al-Jahiz on Right- and Lefthanded*" with a relatively recently rediscovered work by Al-Jahiz on body defects and abnormalities, or rather about prominent and somewhat less prominent people with various defects and diseases with the general drift, insofar as one may be discerned, that a disability should not stand in the way of greatness or fame.

He mentioned *Al-Bursan's* two concluding chapters "On the right-hander, the left-hander, the both-hander and the ambidexter" and "On the superiority of the right-hander over the left-hander" and stressed that the former chapter is in fact the counterpart of the latter, i.e. on the superiority of the left-hander, although this is somewhat obscured by the author's habit of digressing and interrupting, which takes him from the topic of handedness to matters of laterality in general.

As one of the remaining problems of this text van Gelder marked the fact, that it is still not clear to define what al-Jahiz meant by *adbat*, normally considered a synonym of *a'sar yasar*, *ambidextrous*.

**Suzanne Enderwitz, (Heidelberg)** spoke in "*History, culture, and religion: A propos the introduction of the Kitab al-Hayawan*" of al-Jahiz' fondness of books and his discussion of their merits. In her view, the logic of al-Jahiz' preoccupation with books is bound to an ascending order of reflection in the species of God's creation. This hierarchy leads from the bottom, i.e. the wholly passive testimony of inanimate beings with their specific "location in the universe" (*maudu*), followed by the spontaneous self-expression of the animals through "instinctive articulation" (*dalil*), to the articulate reasoning of human beings aiming at an "argument from design"

(*istidlal*) and culminates in the “communicable appropriation” of nature which is the fulfillment of the commission appointed to man (*bayan*). The most reflected, communicable, and durable form of *bayan* is to be found not in the eloquent speech of man, but in the written word of books, ancient and modern, which therefore represent the highest form of human culture and thus mark the opposite end of the holy order of creation.

In this context Enderwitz pointed out to the Arab culture as a particularly ambivalent case. As the pre-Islamic Arabs were not used to preserve their culture, especially poetry, in written form, and as Arabic poetry is untranslatable, urban Arab culture is not only the legitimate heir of Bedouin Arab culture, but also the active agent for its future use.

Moreover Enderwitz continued with the remark that for al-Jahiz this achievement is unthinkable without or apart from the religion of Islam, because for him, Islam is the only guarantee for a universal culture reflecting the unity of the creation.

Starting from this and al-Jahiz’ remarks on the indispensability of the books of the ancients for present and future generations because of their immense achievements, Enderwitz suggests to conclude that between the books of the ancient cultures which rank highest among the historical forms of human expression, and the books of religion containing the word of God which rank highest among the forms of expression in general, a third species of books has emerged under Islamic rule, of which “*al-Hayawan*” – in the eyes of its author – is an outstanding example. It comes along as a synthesizing adab book, thus giving the achievements of the ancient cultures, of the Arabic poetry and of God’s power their due share.

**Basim Musallam (Cambridge)** referred in his contribution “*What al-Jahiz said he was doing in Kitab al-Hayawan*” mainly to the problems of the structure of the “*K. al-Hayawan*” as a whole and the presumed intention of his author al-Jahiz.

He started his reflections that were pointed at basic problems concerning the question how to deal with the *K. al-Hayawan* in general, with the assessment that the numerous studies on *K. al-Hayawan* few or never dealt with the problem of its structure as a whole work of several volumes in general and its (also very practical) purpose, not least intended by the author, what one from his point of view should do before one undertakes detailed research.

By means of numerous examples from *K. al-Hayawan* Musallam developed the picture of the *K. al-Hayawan* as a large-scaled collection of essays, which served at least two purposes, first, the transmission and the dissemination of al-Jahiz’ knowledge as well as his original ideas and thoughts to increase his reputation, second, the beneficial distribution of his essays as bound volumes by selling them to earn his living and eventually some prosperity.

**Ramzi Baalbaki (AUB)** started his paper “*The place of Jahiz in the Arabic philological tradition*” with the assessment that it is quite stunning how little credit Jahiz was given in the grammatical and philological sources in spite of the praise which he received outside these two traditions, and in spite of the philological insight which his works so vividly reflect. This statement included biographical sources specialized in grammarians and philologists as well as the grammatical and philological works of his contemporaries or those by later authors.

Afterwards Baalbaki mentioned al-Jahiz’ critical views of several aspects of the grammatical tradition, his criticism of particular grammarians as *Khalil b. Ahmad* and

*Isa b. Umar* and on the other hand several instances in which grammarians openly attacked him.

Moreover Baalbaki touched upon some of al-Jahiz' challenging remarks on grammatical problems like case-endings (*I'rab*) and those of proper pronunciation as solecism (*lahn*) and grammatical methods in general.

Furthermore he opened up new interesting perspectives on what al-Jahiz, sometimes as a forerunner of al-Jurjani, let us know on different phenomena of phonology (*sawt*, *lukna*), morphology (*taqti'*, *kalam*), syntax (*bayan*) and sociolinguistic issues like language variety due to social class and profession, the role of the ethnic background in speech, the mutual influence between native and regional dialects and the universal applicability of *bayan*.

**Vahid Behmardi (AUB)** in "*The impact of al-Jahiz on the genesis of the Maqamah genre*" started to deal with the school of al-Jahiz in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century and that of Ibn al-Amid in the 4<sup>th</sup> century and Jahiz's thematic innovations and its impact on the genesis of the Maqamat of Badi al-Zaman al-Hamadhani, the acclaimed founder of the maqamah genre.

In this connection he discussed some aspects of the development of prose and poetry from al-Jahiz to Hamadhani and stressed that al-Jahiz as a writer was used by Hamadhani to illustrate the literary and rhetorical values of the school of Ibn al-Amid. He continued with reflections upon al-Jahiz's position among the writers of the 4<sup>th</sup> century in the eastern provinces of the Abbasid caliphate and on the defects in the prose of al-Jahiz according to Hamadhani.

**Salih Agha (AUB)** gave a review of six relevant texts from al-Jahiz's "*Rasa'il*", his "*Kitab al-hayawan*" and his "*Kitab al-bayan wa-t-tabyin*" on the issue of Isma'il's conversion to Arabhood in his paper "*Language as a component of Arab identity in Jahiz*" to show the elements of this tradition as may be harvested from these texts. He started with the discussion of several methodological parameters to continue with reflections upon the discourse of the texts in their context to end with some tentative conclusions on al-Jahiz's view on the issue.

**Hilary Kilpatrick (Zurich)** opened the remarks of her paper "*Jahiz on Music*" with the statement that though al-Jahiz was not a significant contributor to the corpus of writings on Arabic music his wide-ranging interests led him to observe musical facts and reflect on the place of the art of music in his society.

She continued stressing that al-Jahiz mentioned - what Kilpatrick suggested may be termed as "natural music" – musical sounds produced by birds and animals paying special attention to doves. But, when he spoke of music he was usually referring to the music of mankind distinguishing types of music and musical gifts associated with certain peoples or social groups which in the case of the latter reflect the fondness for ethnic typologies to be found in several of his texts. Moreover she mentioned remarks of al-Jahiz devoted to the teaching and transmission of music, among animals and humans.

Furthermore Kilpatrick stated that even more often al-Jahiz treated contemporary elite music and musical practice, mostly embedded in discussions on non-musical subjects, so that one can conclude that he well understood the issues being discussed by his contemporaries who were concerned with the history, theory and performance of music. Above that he recognized that music can be used for relaxation and therapeutic ends as well as he rejected the global condemnation of it as encouraging immortality,

taking the overwhelming emotional effect it can have on its hearers (*tarab*) for granted. Kilpatrick said that his criticisms were rather directed at the *qiyān* and their owners who exploit it for economic gain and that al-Jahiz' argument that music is simply poetry with an extra something added one may be could consider as adequate to defend it against its critics but not as convincing to explain the extreme emotional effect he described as exerting.

She concluded emphasizing that al-Jahiz' approach to music can be useful today, because he is an example of an eminent Muslim thinker who did not condemn music, because he integrated music into his vision of different cultures and he realized that music lends itself to exploitation for commercial purposes.

**Maher Jarrar (AUB)** with "***Basrah stinks!***" ***Jahiz on odours*** originally adopted the ambitious task of closely examining "smell" in al-Jahiz's *Kitab al-Hayawan*, in an attempt to detect how the author juggles with it and how he finally situates olfaction through its overall relationship to the "body social." After the nature of the present work had to verify serious alterations it finally laid in sketching al-Jahiz's various categorizations of smell, as a token of his curiosity and extensive knowledge of humans and things alike.

Then, a major concern of his paper culminated in unraveling the relationship between al-Jahiz's *I'tizal* and the notion of *Kumun* or Theory of Latency – embraced by the Mu'tazilite al-Nazzam, al-Jahiz's mentor.

Furthermore Jarrar stressed that if this project was unable to establish a satisfactory understanding of the link between olfaction at the time of Jahiz and intimacy, presentation of self, aesthetics, spirituality, power, culture or sexuality by now, it sure aspired to set fertile grounds for further research on the matter.

He continued emphasizing that it is intriguing that even an author like Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi, who wrote love out in his *Tawq al-Hamama* (Dove's Necklace), did not devote a single section to smell and its potency in animating both love and sexuality – when older Arabic poetry was already filled with explicit insinuations on the captivating charm of odors, worthy of much comprehensive theorization.

While al-Jahiz provided readers with material that transcends the confines of his personal spatial-temporal framework, the focus of Jarrar's paper did not deviate from the latter; i.e. showing that al-Jahiz outlined some interesting findings about smells in the city of Basra and its vicinity, during his own time.

**Sebastian Guenther (Toronto)** provided with his paper "***Jahiz on Intellectual Education***" an insight into Jahiz's literary and scholarly work that embodies most exquisitely the humanist concerns of classical Arabic-Islamic education as epitomized by the term *adab*, i.e. signifies the very notion of a general or "liberal" education within the framework of Islam and showed al-Jahiz as one of the very earliest Muslim scholars theorizing on education and, importantly enough, one whose educational ideas have universal appeal and are of significance for the history of pedagogy and didactics in general.

Guenther made visible that for al-Jahiz education is a means to an end, rather than an end in itself and that al-Jahiz's views on intellectual education profoundly reflect both his Mu'tazilite stances and his essentially dialectical intellect. This is why learning means to him not merely training the mind, but applying it.

He continued with the statement that al-Jahiz's philosophy of education is inclusive rather than exclusive and that this is particularly noticeable in terms of the social classes and groups in society he considers to be in need and worthy of formal

instruction. In fact, Guenther said, much of al-Jahiz's educational advice seems to be directed to the general Muslim public, expressly including to some degree the lower classes. Yet, the proposition to instruct certain social groups in various crafts or professions also indicates that al-Jahiz, like Plato, believed that the society is best served when its citizens have been educated to suit their needs and interests so that they eventually become engaged in endeavors meaningful to them.

Furthermore he dealt with a number of al-Jahiz's particularly striking pedagogical principles that include the key role al-Jahiz assigns to the teachers and educators in the process of efficiently transferring a preset of knowledge to students and in facilitating them in their quest of intellectual development and acquisition of certain useful skills as well as the sincerity and enthusiasm with which he promotes such virtues of the teaching profession as modesty, patience, and a passion for working with youth: moreover his understanding of education as "guidance" rather than "correction" of the young; the view that the teacher-student relationship be: an attentive, caring, and even loving one.

Thus, al-Jahiz presents himself as a scholar who not only promotes learning as such, but, in fact, advances an idea that one could call, in the Aristotelian sense, a "poetics" of education. He does so when he aims at human flourishing by drawing together aspects of "art" and of "inquiry" and by fusing "reason" and "emotion" so as to make education become a kind of "interpretive lens of human conduct."

In other words, as Guenther put it, in al-Jahiz's opinion intellectual education is more than merely a sum of its occupational parts such as: following a certain curriculum, managing the educational environment, and assessing students' learning, etc. He seems to view education in a holistic way that draws together intellectual, aesthetic, and moral dimensions; and that brings to the fore how much the educational process is an endeavor that can enrich the life of both the student and the teacher.

**Hans Daiber (Frankfurt)** discussed "*A new manuscript of Jahiz's works and its importance for their transmission*" starting with the statement that the most complete edition for the moment being is that by 'Abdassalam Harun, which in four volumes appeared in 1965 in Cairo and was reprinted in 1991 in Beirut; but even this has not compared all manuscripts.

Then Daiber turned to the manuscript with the title al-Mukhtar min kalam Abi 'Uthman al-Jahiz, which was copied during Sha'ban 1060/July 1650 and is preserved in the Library of Berlin (nr. 5032) which, as Pellat has emphasized it, as an anthology could have used manuscripts, which are lost or authors, who used in their compilation Jahiz's works.

The importance of the Berlin manuscript as a source of new and unknown texts deriving from an anthology already available in the 10th century can be confirmed by the happy discovery of a second manuscript copy of the Mukhtar min kalam Abi 'Uthman al-Jahiz, which Daiber said he found 20 years ago in an Indian library in Hyderabad, in the Andhra Pradesh Government Oriental Manuscripts Library and Research Institute as a second copy of the same text, however containing a lot of lacunas due to the loss of folios, and several folios are disarranged.

Daiber showed that it must have been compiled in the period between 961 and 970, i.e. the anthology apparently is the oldest one. He added that in the light of these facts the excerpts from Jahiz's works in the manuscripts of Berlin and Hyderabad will be extremely important and interesting for the reassessment of the available texts.

Furthermore Daiber said that some excerpts differ from the printed version, and that in his own view a thorough comparison of all excerpts with the printed version surely

will reveal more details. He continued mentioning that in addition to the already known texts the anthology contains a lot of excerpts or chapters which are new and which cannot be identified, and which still wait for an edition and identification on the basis of the two manuscripts in Berlin and Hyderabad, which is being prepared in Frankfurt at present.

Moreover he emphasized that some of the unidentified texts include sketches on historic figures, given within extracts from other historical works as preliminary studies and collections of notes on remarkable persons. In the following Daiber dealt with some of Jahiz's textual composition principles as the combination of two contradictory sketches in one text and his motivation embedded in the historical context, which showed again his sensitiveness and ability to see and describe human faults.

He concluded with the remarks that the unpublished texts belong to the oldest, so far known anthology, which in the Hyderabad manuscript with good reasons is attributed to Hamza al-Isfahani from the early 10th century. Therefore, it is important to compare the excerpts from the known texts with the printed versions and to edit the unpublished sketches on well-known personalities. The manuscripts in Berlin and Hyderabad will be a sufficient basis for this task. Although the Hyderabad manuscript is defective, it is helpful as it derives from an archetype different from that of the Berlin manuscript.

In "*Jahiz, Adab and the art of the essay*" Peter Heath (AUB) sought to develop the beginnings of a poetics for al-Jahiz's artistic prose at three levels.

First, he situated al-Jahiz's writings within the greater conceptual framework of *adab* literature which required a reexamination of what one indeed means with the term *adab*. Starting from the initial definition of *adab* as a combination of knowledge of "proper conduct" and "literary education" Heath tried to clarify the concept of *adab* by arguing for first placing *adab* in a broader social perspective as being a guide for one type of proper behavior among many, thus pointing out that there are in fact many types of *adab* literature. Then he argued that one must also broaden the concept even in the context of "literary" or "court-directed" *adab* to distinguish between a notion that is both aesthetically operational for the production of literature and socially operational as representing an ideal of behavior.

Second, he noted that literary *adab* is distinguished by being discursive prose that is not based on the structuring device of plot. This feature has, in his view, hindered modern literary analysis, since the assumption of the existence of narrative plot is pervasive in critical discussions of prose. He thus focused on one western generic analogy for non-plot based discursive literature, the "familiar essay," a literary form began by Montaigne and Francis Bacon. Heath discovered that there has been an astonishing lack of modern critical study of this form as well, despite its continued prevalence in all western literary traditions. He continued with the examination of Lucacs' and Adorno's studies who offer two of the few theoretical studies of the role of the essay in modern culture.

Third, through examination of parts of *al-Bayan*, *al-Bukhala'*, *al-Hayawan*, and the *Rasa'il*, Heath turned to analyze aspects of al-Jahiz's writings to delineate its basic strategies, investigating three "levels" or "dimensions": voice, organization of materials, and ideology. He stated that Al-Jahiz's voice in his writing can be implicit, guiding, or polemical. Furthermore he organized his materials according to the literary principle of metonymy and uses "keywords" that guide his narrative in general although not always in particular. Moreover Heath stressed that al-Jahiz also

used the anatomy as a general organizational goal, and that his ideology is based on a love of knowledge in all forms, a resultant curiosity and rationalism, and the intellectual irony of humor. As the key for al-Jahiz's literature, Heath named the intermixture of high and low elements, both societal and scientific, which he regarded as one of his lasting legacies to the literary form of adab.

**Lale Behzadi (Goettingen)** focused in her paper "*How does communication work? Some answers of al-Jahiz and some misreadings of his successors*" on the semiotic observations al-Jahiz made within his literary theory.

She started stressing that al-Jahiz did not only set up criteria for beautiful and faultless speech, but went into the rules of communication. For him, theories about linguistic phenomena are not reduced to poets and rhetoricians, but throw light upon every human expression.

Behzadi continued stating that while some of al-Jahiz's famous successors were absorbed in weakening the reproaches of plagiarism or tried to move forward in the analysis of the system of signs, they commented on al-Jahiz from a somewhat narrow perspective, and repeated the common judgements and sometimes even ignored the epistemological dimension al-Jahiz had seen.

From Behzadi's point of view intertextual reading of al-Askari, al-Jurjani, and then back to al-Jahiz shows, how both refer to al-Jahiz without being always conscious of it.

As a contribution to further comparative research, Behzadi suggests that one could also read al-Jahiz in a new way, if one relates the theoretical approaches of later scholars, even up until today – as an example she mentioned Derrida and his *différance*, to the interesting thoughts of their predecessor.

In "*Early views on political legitimacy: the Kitab al-Uthmaniyya of Jahiz*"

**Asma Afsaruddin (Notre Dame University, USA)** dealt with the centrality of the Qur'anic concepts of *sabiqa* ("precedence;" "priority") and *fadl/fadila* ("excellence;" "virtue") in the formation of a paradigm of legitimate leadership in the early medieval period which is already in evidence in al-Jahiz's valuable political treatise *Risalat (Kitab) al-Uthmaniyya*, composed circa 203/819.

Afsaruddin explained that the work discusses the legitimacy of the caliphate of Abu Bakr, as contrasted to that of 'Ali b. Abi Talib, on the basis of these two concepts. She stressed that al-Jahiz maintains, Abu Bakr was the best candidate for the caliphate on account of his precedence in conversion to Islam, his unflagging courage, and selfless devotion to the cause of Islam and its prophet.