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Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/beo/4799>

DOI: 10.4000/beo.4799

ISSN: 2077-4079

Publisher

Presses de l'Institut français du Proche-Orient

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 April 2017

Number of pages: 51-64

ISBN: 978-2-35159-731-6

ISSN: 0253-1623

Electronic reference

Michael G. Carter, “The “Zamaḥšarian *lan*”, a review of the evidence”, *Bulletin d'études orientales* [Online], LXV | 2017, Online since 01 April 2019, connection on 06 January 2021. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/beo/4799> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/beo.4799>

The “Zamahšarian *lan*”, a review of the evidence

Michael G. CARTER

Abstract: There is an old sectarian accusation that al-Zamahšarī (d. 538/1144) interpreted *lan* “not” as denoting perpetual negation, with the heretical (i.e. Muʿtazilite) theological implication that *lan tarānī* in Sūra 7 v. 143 denies the Beatific Vision to believers in the afterlife. This paper argues that al-Zamahšarī himself never made such an assertion. He was certainly aware that negation in perpetuity could be expressed by *abadan* and similar temporal qualifiers, but when he does discuss *lan* it is always as a purely future negative with strong emphasis, which he refers to as *taʿkīd* or *tawkīd*, and the term *taʿbīd* [*al-nafy*] “perpetual [negation]” is not found in any of those works of his which were accessible for this article. As the valuable study by al-Buʿaymī shows, that idea was already in circulation at least half a century before al-Zamahšarī’s time, but he is not explicitly connected with it by name until Ibn Mālik (d. 672/1274), later enthusiastically followed by Ibn Hišām (d. 761/1360). This suggests that the heretical parsing of *lan* may have been attributed to al-Zamahšarī retrospectively by opponents of his Muʿtazilite position, a polemical fabrication which ever since has been accepted without question in both the Arab and Western grammatical traditions.

Keywords: Arabic grammar, *lan*, perpetual negation, *taʿbīd al-nafy*, al-Zamahšarī, Muʿtazilites.

Résumé : Il existe une vieille accusation sectaire visant al-Zamahšarī (m. 538/1144), lequel aurait interprété *lan* « ne... pas » comme désignant la négation perpétuelle, avec l’implication théologique hérétique (c.à.d. muʿtazilite) que *lan tarānī*, dans la sourate 7 du Coran, verset 143, dénierait aux croyants dans l’au-delà l’accès à la Vision béatifique. Cet article soutient qu’al-Zamahšarī lui-même n’a jamais défendu un tel point de vue. Il était certainement conscient que la négation perpétuelle pouvait être exprimée par *abadan* et autres qualificatifs temporels semblables, mais quand il discute de *lan*, c’est toujours en tant que pure négation du futur, avec une forte emphase qu’il appelle *taʿkīd* ou *tawkīd*, tandis que le terme *taʿbīd* [*al-nafy*] « perpétuité [de la négation] » ne se trouve dans aucune de celles de ses œuvres qui nous ont été accessibles. Comme le montre la précieuse étude d’al-Buʿaymī, cette idée était déjà en circulation au moins un demi-siècle avant al-Zamahšarī, mais son nom n’y est pas explicitement associé avant Ibn Mālik (m. 672/1274), plus tard suivi avec enthousiasme par Ibn Hišām (m. 761/1360). Ceci suggère que l’analyse hérétique de *lan* a pu être rétrospectivement

attribuée à Al-Zamahṣārī par les adversaires de ses vues muʿtazilites, cette attribution polémique ayant été acceptée sans discussion depuis, tant dans la tradition grammaticale arabe que chez ses commentateurs occidentaux.

Mots-clés : grammaire arabe, *lan*, négation perpétuelle, *taʿbīd al-naḥw*, al-Zamahṣārī, muʿtazilites.

ملخص : هنالك رأي قديم متعصّب يتهم الزمخشري (ت ١١٤٤/٥٣٨) بتحميل الحرف «لن» قيمة النفي المستمر أو الأبدى، مع ما يحيل عليه هذا المعنى من هرطقة، بمعنى تبني الرأي المعتزلي، في تأويل «لن تراني» في الآية ١٤٣ من سورة الأعراف. فالنفي المستمر ينكر للمؤمنين قدرتهم على النظر إلى الذات الإلهية في الآخرة. يسعى هذا المقال إلى البرهنة على كون الزمخشري لم يتبن هذا الرأي قط. فقد كان ولا شك مدركاً كون التعبير عن هذا النوع من النفي يحتاج إلى استخدام «أبدًا» أو غيرها من الأدوات الزمانية، حيث كان يضيف على «لن»، حين يتطرق إليها، قيمة النفي في المستقبل مع «التأكيد» أو «التوكيد» على هذا النفي، بحسب تعبيره. أما «تأييد النفي» فهو مصطلح لم يرد في أي من كتاباته التي وصلتنا. ولقد أوضح البُعيمي في دراسته القيمة أن هذه الفكرة كانت متداولة قبل نصف قرن على الأقل من حياة الزمخشري، وأن اسمه لم يُربط بها صراحةً قبل ابن مالك (ت ١٢٧٤/٦٧٢)، الذي اتبعه ابن هشام (ت ١٣٦٠/٧٦١) بحماس كبير. يسمح ذلك بالاعتقاد أن خصوم الزمخشري في العقديّة، الرافضين لأفكاره المعتزليّة، قد نسبوا إليه تحليل «لن» الهرطقي هذا بصورة استرجاعيّة بعد وفاته، فقبلت هذه النسبة المشكوك في أمرها دون أي نقاش لدي النحويين العرب ولدى دارسيه المستشرقين.

الكلمات المحوريّة : علم النحو العربي، لن، النفي المستمر، تأييد النفي، الزمخشري، المعتزلة.

This paper is inspired by Kouloughli's 2007 edition of al-Zamaḥṣarī's *al-Unmūdağ fi al-naḥw*, which makes accessible, by its text, translation and notes, the essence of Arabic syntax, and thus unites the two linguistic traditions of the Arab and the Western worlds.

One notion for which al-Zamaḥṣarī is well known — indeed notorious in some quarters — is the assertion that the particle *lan* signifies negation in perpetuity, *ta'bīd al-nafy*, the so-called *lan al-zamaḥṣariyya*. This heretical proposition enraged the orthodox to a point where, as this paper will argue, it was introduced retrospectively into the manuscript tradition even though it is extremely unlikely that al-Zamaḥṣarī himself ever made such a claim for *lan*.

Before going any further, it is necessary to point out that for a number of reasons, particularly of time pressure and inaccessibility of material, the contents of this paper rely on only a fraction of the relevant primary sources, mainly al-Zamaḥṣarī's *Kaššāf*, *Mufaṣṣal* and *Unmūdağ*, and the commentary of al-Ardabīlī (see further below) on the *Unmūdağ*. A valuable resource, which quotes a much wider range of sources, is the online article by Ibrāhīm b. Sulaymān al-Bu'aymī entitled *Qaḍāyā lan fi al-naḥw al-ʿarabī*.

The other commentaries on the *Unmūdağ* were simply out of reach, geographically and electronically. Brockelmann (GAL 1:291 and S 1:510f) lists eight (not including commentaries on the *šawāhid*), to which a ninth can be added, *al-Fawā'id al-ʿabdiyya fi šarḥ Unmūdağ al-Zamaḥṣarī*, by al-Mūstarī (1061/1651-1151/1738-1739), reported by al-Bu'aymī (23, details in n. 158). The anonymous item listed in no. 3 by Brockelmann as MS Garrett 334 is evidently a fragment of the commentary of al-Barda'ī.

Some of these are too late to be of much use, but three are potentially critical, and the conclusions of this paper could be overturned by any one of them. They are, in reverse chronological order:

1. Brockelmann no. 2. *Ḥadā'iq al-ḥaqā'iq* by Sa'd al-Dīn Sa'd Allāh al-Barda'ī (d. 927/1520-1521).
2. Brockelmann no. 8. An untitled commentary by ʿAlī b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Aḥmad Zayn al-ʿArab, composed in 736/1335.
3. Brockelmann no. 5. *Kifāyat al-naḥw* by Ḍiyā' al-Dīn al-Makkī, who died in 568/1172. This author appears in three separate entries in Brockelmann, with minor differences in the name and biographical details, viz. (1) in S 1,513 as Ḍiyā' al-Dīn al-Makkī, active 550/1155, (2) in S 1,549 as Ḍiyā' al-Dīn Abū al-Mu'ayyad al-Muwaffaq b. Aḥmad b. Ishāq al-Makkī al-Bakrī al-Ḥawārazmī, 484-568/1091-1172, and (3) in S 1,623 as Abū al-Mu'ayyad Muwaffaq b. Aḥmad b. Abī Sa'id Ishāq al-Ḥawārazmī, died 568/1172, and there are also variations in his name in the two published editions of his commentary.

Since al-Makkī was a favourite pupil of al-Zamaḥṣarī (and the teacher of al-Muṭarrizī), it is a great pity that his *Kifāyat al-naḥw* could not be consulted ¹.

1. Googlebooks offers two printed versions, a Meccan edition of 1982 by Fawziyya Rašād Abū ʿAyš, and an undated Cairo edition by Ġābir al-Sayyid Mubārak, but attempts to access them or even trace them in the major library catalogues were unsuccessful.

As far as the *Unmūdağ* is concerned, therefore, the texts on which this paper is based are :

1. three versions of the *Unmūdağ* itself, namely the editions of Sāmī b. Ḥamad al-Manṣūr (1420/1999) and of Kouloughli (2007) and a downloaded Saudi MS (see bibliography for details); the hand-written edition of Broch (1863) was inaccessible.
2. For the commentary of al-Ardabīlī four versions are used, namely the partial edition of Silvestre de Sacy (1829), and three downloaded Saudi MSS (details in bibliography). Two recent printed editions (see bibliography), one used by al-Bu‘aymī, could not be accessed; however, the three MSS consulted and de Sacy all agree on the relevant passages.

Little is known about Ğamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Ġanī al-Ardabīlī, and his dates are disputed (see discussion in al-Bu‘aymī, 23 and n. 156). At one time he was believed to have lived in the 11th/17th century, but the existence of at least two MSS from the 9th/15th century pushes the date back. The current view is that he died in 647/1249, which would make him an older contemporary of Ibn Mālik (d. 672/1274, but see al-Bu‘aymī for objections). For reasons which could not be ascertained the editor of the version used by al-Bu‘aymī (Šādīlī Farhūd) gives the author’s name as al-Arbilī, presumably after the Kurdish town of Arbil, while all other sources call him al-Ardabīlī after Ardabīl in Azerbaijan.

In this paper the focus will be restricted to the perpetual negation assigned to *lan*, and other aspects will be left out of account. These include the etymology of *lan* and the related issue of whether *lan* is a dependence operator in its own right or because of the ‘*an*’ element it is alleged to contain, and a number of other syntactical, semantic and dialectal problems, all covered by al-Bu‘aymī. As is well known, there has always been disagreement among the Arab grammarians about whether *lan* was a simple particle, or a phonological variant of *lā* (*la’* > *lan*), or a compound of *lā* + ‘*an*’, and it is remarkable that all Western treatments, with one exception, assume the last to be correct (Lipiński, 366, §39.17, can be taken as a recent representative: he offers no alternative possibilities). The exception is Aartun (1976, 188), who groups it with similar compound elements bearing emphatic suffixes, such as *lam*, *lāta*, with *-n* in the case of *lan*, which he compares with ‘*idān*’ < ‘*idā*’ + *n*. Veccia Vaglieri (2,99) states that *lan* “stands for *lā yakūnu ‘an* ‘it will not be the case that’”, via an underlying **lā ‘an*, but she offers no evidence of such a historical or formal relationship.

Western views on the function of *lan* are influenced by the Arab grammatical tradition. Most agree that *lan* is an emphatic negative particle assigning a future meaning (e.g. Reckendorf, de Sacy, Veccia Vaglieri, Blachère/Gaudefroy-Demombynes), and some also include perpetuity in their definition, e.g. Wright (2,300) “very strong negation of the future, *not at all, never*” (Wright’s italics), or else imply it in their translation, as Fleisch (201 n. 1) *lan yadhūla* “il n’entrera *jamais*” (italics added). Bergsträsser (15-17) discusses the range of “meanings” of *lan*, by which we should understand the different ways it can be translated into European languages, but it is not necessary to pursue them here.

However we must draw attention to a detail which is usually overlooked: the perpetual sense lies not in *lan* itself but in the intensifying adverbials which often accompany it. Blachère/Gaudefroy-Demombynes (404) prudently mention these as a separate item after

the negative particles, including of course *ʾabadan*, and Reckendorf (47) deserves credit for reflecting this important distinction in the translation of his two examples, one which does not contain the word *ʾabadan*, namely S. 3:92, *lan tanālū al-birra* “ihr werdet der Frömmigkeit nicht teilhaftig werden”, and one which does, a poetic quotation, *lan tahbiṭi ʾabadan*, appropriately rendered as “du wirst *nimmermehr* herabsteigen” (italics added). The same precision is not apparent in Wright’s translation (2,300) of S. 2:24, in which *ʾabadan* does not appear, *fa-ʾin lam tafʿalū fa-lan tafʿalū fa-ttaqū al-nāra* “and if ye do not do it — and ye will *never* do it — then dread the fire [of hell]” (again italics added). The confusion is widespread: Wright is here fairly close to Sale’s translation (“nor shall *ever be able to do it*”, Sale’s own italics), and while Sale often does translate *lan* as purely emphatic with the help of phrases such as “by no means, in no wise”, in Wright’s case theology has been allowed to triumph over syntax in the verse just quoted, with “never” replacing what could have been expressed by ordinary emphasis, “not at all, in no way”.

In the following discussion *lan* will accordingly be treated as composite of three elements, (1) negation of the future with (2) emphasis, and (3) according to some, the implication of perpetuity.

To clear the decks, let it be noted that Sībawayhi deals only with the first item, future negation, defining *lan yafʿala* as the negative of *sa-yafʿalu* or *sawfa yafʿalu* (*Kitāb*, Der. 1,87/Bül. 1,68, in §32 and again Der. 1,409/Bül. 1,460, in §259 and Der. 2,332/Bül. 2,305, in §508). This, of course, is repeated in all subsequent grammars, both pedagogical and theoretical.

But Sībawayhi shows no interest in the emphatic function of *lan*, which we know, thanks to al-Buʿaymī, was plainly stated by al-Ḥalīl b. Aḥmad in the *Kitāb al-ʿayn* (8,350, see al-Buʿaymī, 15): *lan* is “more emphatic (ʾawkad) than *lā*”, says al-Ḥalīl, such that “when you say *lan yukrima-ka zaydun* ‘Zayd will not at all treat you generously’, it is as if someone was hoping very much to be treated generously but you denied it and reinforced (*wakkadta*) your denial by means of *lan*” (al-Azharī, who quotes this verbatim in the *Tahdīb*, replaces ʾawkad with ʾawḡab “more assertive than *lā*”, see al-Buʿaymī, *loc. cit.*). Sībawayhi makes no mention of this, even though he was well aware of what his master al-Ḥalīl thought about *lan*, and indeed rejected his notion that *lan* was a compound of *lā* + ʾan (*Kitāb*, Der. 1,361f/Bül. 1,407, in §233), but apparently other aspects of *lan* did not come up in their discussions.

Later grammarians, of course, adopted al-Ḥalīl’s interpretation (either directly from his *Kitāb al-ʿayn* or indirectly through the quotation from it in the *Tahdīb al-luġa* of al-Azharī, born ca. 280/893, died before 360/970) as part of the definition of *lan*, and it is sufficient to cite al-Zamaḥṣarī here, *lan li-taʾkīd mā tuʿṭī-hi lā min nafy al-mustaqbal* “*lan* is for emphasising the negative future [sense] it acquires from *lā*” (*Mufaṣṣal*, 143, §549), and *lan naẓīrat lā fī nafy al-mustaqbal wa-lākin ʾalā al-taʾkīd* “*lan* is analogous to *lā* in negating the future, but with emphasis” (*Unmūdaġ*, 169, §75).

It might be thought that this definition would be canonical, but in fact both the futurity and the emphasis of *lan* were challenged, the former on the grounds that the future meaning can also be negated by *lā* (and *lā* is indeed classified among the future negatives by al-Zamaḥṣarī himself in *Mufaṣṣal*, 148f, §578, see Kouloughli’s note 3 to *Unmūdaġ* §86), the

latter on the grounds that emphasis is not inherent in *lan* but is supplied by the context. Both these disputes are well described by al-Bu‘aymī and need not be followed here, as we are only concerned with al-Zamaḥṣārī’s position, which he states with perfect clarity.

The third element, perpetual negation, has obvious theological implications, which we return to later. At this point it is necessary to review the history of the idea before and after al-Zamaḥṣārī.

Although the term “Zamaḥṣarian *lan*” implies that it was a creation of al-Zamaḥṣārī, we now know, thanks to al-Bu‘aymī (18ff), that the idea of perpetual negation was already in circulation at least half a century before his time, not unexpectedly in Mu‘tazilite circles. Al-Bu‘aymī cites three 5th/11th century authors who discuss or allude to the topic, and, without documenting it, suggests that their ideas could go back to the 4th/10th century, as some of those authors were in the same circle as Abū ‘Alī al-Fārisī (d. 377/987) and his pupil Ibn Ğinnī (d. 392/1002), both renowned for their Mu‘tazilite leanings, and doubtless open to all the intellectual opportunities of the Abbasid court under the patronage of al-Šāḥib b. ‘Abbād (d. 385/995) and others.

It cannot be denied that al-Bu‘aymī’s quotations (four in all) are evidence that the connotations of *lan* were being discussed in broad terms, but taken together they are not conclusive proof that the concept of perpetual negation had achieved scientific grammatical recognition by their time. Two of the quotations mention only the emphatic function (‘*akkada*, *qaṭ‘*, *batāt*, *nafy ‘āmm*), and one refers to the future tense without mentioning emphasis at all. Only the quotation from Ibn al-Ġabbān (d. after 416/1025, see Sezgin, GAS 8,143, 228f) comes close to the formulation ascribed to al-Zamaḥṣārī, namely: *li-‘anna lan tufid nafy al-šay’ fi al-mustaqbal ‘abadan* “because *lan* denotes the negation of something in the future for ever”. But Ibn al-Ġabbān is here talking about a poetic hemistich *lan yurāġi‘a qalb-ī ḥubb-ahum ‘abadan* “my heart will not return to loving them ever”, which contains the word ‘*abadan*. It is a big leap from interpreting *lan* accompanied by ‘*abadan* as denoting perpetual negation to claiming that *lan* denotes perpetual negation by itself, which is the peculiar property of the “Zamaḥṣarian *lan*”, and al-Bu‘aymī (21) is right to point out that the frequent collocation of *lan* and ‘*abadan* must have played some part in the evolution of the idea of *ta’bīd al-nafy*.

Once the idea was in circulation, it was quickly adopted (or challenged!), already by contemporaries of al-Zamaḥṣārī (details in al-Bu‘aymī, 19ff, where he traces the polemic on both sides). We should note especially the phraseology of al-Ṭabarsī in a work written in 536/1142, a couple of years before al-Zamaḥṣārī’s death, where he speaks of *al-ta’bīd fi al-mustaqbal* and paraphrases the key Qur’anic verse *lan tarā-nī* (S. 7:143) as *lan tarā-nī ‘abadan* because, as he says, *lan tanfī ‘alā waġh al-ta’bīd* “*lan* negates in the mode of perpetuity”.

As al-Bu‘aymī shows, the first to link the concept of *ta’bīd* with al-Zamaḥṣārī was probably Ibn Mālik (d. 672/1274). The subsequent propagation of the idea was encouraged by Ibn Hišām (d. 761/1360), who is frequently cited by later grammarians, but whether he derived the notion from Ibn Mālik or independently remains to be established.

Curiously, although Ibn Mālik does name al-Zamaḥṣarī as the proponent of *taʿbīd al-nafy* in some of his works (see al-Buʿaymī, 23-25 for references), there is one occasion when he appears not to know the name of the author. In his *Tashīl al-fawāʿid*, 229, Ibn Mālik states that *lan* negates the future with or without a limit “contrary to those who make perpetual [negation] a specific feature of *lan*” (*ḥilāfan li-man ḥaṣṣa-hā bi-l-taʿbīd*). What is strange here is that Ibn Mālik mentions al-Zamaḥṣarī in four other places in the *Tashīl*, also to disagree with him, so it is a mystery why he cannot name him here. Perhaps the *Tashīl* predates Ibn Mālik’s acquaintance with the *Unmūdağ*, where *taʿbīd* is alleged to have appeared. Perhaps the idea was still not universally known: it is significant that an older contemporary of Ibn Mālik, al-Astarābādī (d. 688/1289 or later), while aware of the issue, can only say that “*lan* is not for long duration and perpetuity as some have said”, *laysa li-l-dawām wa-l-taʿbīd kamā qāla baʿḍu-hum* (or “as someone has said”, *Ṣarḥ al-kāfiya*, 2,218, quoted by al-Buʿaymī, 17). A little later, in an unpublished commentary on Ibn al-Ḥāḡib’s *Kāfiya* by Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. al-Naḥwiyya al-Ḥamawī (659/1261-718/1318, not in GAL) there is a lengthy refutation of *taʿbīd* (fols. 101r, 101v), but Ibn al-Naḥwiyya is unable or unwilling to identify any author more specifically than by *qāla qawm*. The picture is further complicated by the fact that Ibn al-Naḥwiyya’s wording is the same as al-Zamaḥṣarī’s definition of *lan* in *Mufaṣṣal*, §549 (or *Kaššāf*, 1,349 on S. 7:143), *taʿkīd mā tuʿṭi-hi lā min nafy al-mustaqbal*, but with *taʿbīd* instead of *taʿkīd*.

At all events it can be reasonably assumed that al-Zamaḥṣarī’s name was associated with perpetual negation by the 7th/13th century, but in fairness to him we should look now at his own works. The three most important (not to mention accessible) are his *Mufaṣṣal*, the *Unmūdağ*, and his Qurʾān commentary, the *Kaššāf*.

The *Mufaṣṣal* is easily disposed of: in the sections dealing with *lan* (§§410, 549, 578, 580) there is no trace of *taʿbīd*. Only the first and second features of *lan* are mentioned, negation of the future, and emphasis (*taʿkīd*). The edition of Broch is based on eleven manuscripts with their marginal annotations, two commentaries, and a recently printed edition, yet at no time does he indicate in his critical apparatus that there was a variant reading *taʿbīd* for *taʿkīd* anywhere in the text.

With access to only three versions of the *Unmūdağ* and four of the commentary of al-Ardabīlī it is risky to make generalisations about the presence or absence of the reading *taʿbīd*. What can be said, however, is that if the *Unmūdağ* is indeed abstracted from the *Mufaṣṣal*, we would not expect to find *taʿbīd* there, and this is confirmed by that fact that all the texts consulted have *taʿkīd*.

One of them, however, does have a fascinating interlinear correction. In the Saudi MS (PDF p. 27), over the word *taʿkīd* is written *ṣḥ byd*, standing for *taṣḥīḥ bīd*, indicating that an editor has “corrected” *taʿkīd* to *taʿbīd*. Since the original text is clearly not that of the manuscript said by al-Ardabīlī to read *taʿbīd*, the emendation must have been inserted by someone who knew of that variant, either from another copy of the *Unmūdağ* or, more likely, from the grammatical tradition.

This is as far as we can go on the available evidence. We cannot even conclude that there ever was a version of the *Unmūdağ* with *taʿbīd* for *taʿkīd* — we only have Ibn Mālik’s and al-Ardabīlī’s word that such a manuscript existed (or possibly manuscripts, al-Ardabīlī’s *baʿḍ al-nusaḥ* is ambiguous), and still less can we assume that *taʿbīd* was al-Zamaḥṣarī’s own personal and authorised reading: any copyist could have altered *taʿkīd* to *taʿbīd*, as we have seen in the Saudi MS.

As for the *Kaššāf*, the general conclusion offered here is vulnerable to the charge than not every page of that work has been checked, nor indeed all of the 105 instances (according to Flügel’s concordance) of the word *lan* in the Qurʾān. All that can be done is to present some examples of al-Zamaḥṣarī’s treatment of *lan* taken largely from the verses which attracted the attention of other grammarians and commentators.

On its very first occurrence in the Qurʾān (S. 2:24, *Kaššāf*, 1,41), *fa-ʿin lam tafʿalū wa-lan tafʿalū fa-ttaqū al-nāra*, we are given what must surely be the definitive statement on the difference between *lā* and *lan*: *lā wa-lan ʿuḥtān fī nafy al-mustaqbal ʿillā ʿanna fī lan tawkidan wa-tašdidan* “*lā* and *lan* are sisters in negating the future, except that *lan* contains emphasis and intensification”, illustrated by *lan ʿuqīma ġadan* in answer to someone who refuses to believe the unmarked and neutral *lā ʿuqīmu ġadan*. There is no question here of *taʿbīd*, the issue for al-Zamaḥṣarī is a binary contrast of futurity (both *lā* and *lan*) and emphasis (*lan* only).

This distinction is restated in his comment on *lā yatamannawna-hu ʿabadan* in S. 62:7, *Kaššāf*, 2,457, which he compares with *lan yatamannaw-hu ʿabadan* in S. 2:95, *Kaššāf*, 1,67: *wa-lā farq bayn lā wa-lan fī ʿanna kull wāḥida min-hā nafy li-l-mustaqbal ʿillā ʿanna fī lan taʿkidan wa-tašdidan laysa fī lā* “there is no difference between *lā* and *lan* insofar as each of them negates the future, except that *lan* contains an emphasis and intensification which is not in *lā*”. From this we can safely infer that the only aspects of *lan* which interested al-Zamaḥṣarī were its future reference and emphasis. Similar pairs occur elsewhere in the Qurʾān, e.g. *lan ʿabraha* in S. 12:80, *lā ʿabrahu* in S. 18:16, though al-Zamaḥṣarī makes no special remarks on these.

On S. 5:24, *Kaššāf*, 1,252, *qālū yā Mūsā ʿinnā lan nadḥulahā ʿabadan mā dāmū fī-hā*, al-Zamaḥṣarī points out that *ʿabadan* here is a *taʿlīq li-l-nafy al-muʿakkad bi-l-dahr al-mutaṭāwil* “a supplementary comment on the emphatic negation [to indicate] a very long time”. The purpose of the phrase *dahr mutaṭāwil* can only be to exclude all considerations of negation in perpetuity, at least in the present verse (see further below on S. 19:26).

The most famous example of the “Zamaḥṣarian *lan*” is in S. 7:143, *Kaššāf*, 1,348f, where God says to Moses *lan tarā-nī* “you shall not see me”. Yet in accounting for the fact that Moses will not see God, al-Zamaḥṣarī makes no mention at all of *lan* as denoting perpetual negation. Instead he invokes the standard Muʿtazilite doctrine of *tawḥīd/tanzīh* and asserts that it is logically impossible (*muḥāl*) and contradictory to God’s attributes (*munāfin li-ṣifāti-hi*) for God to be visible to humans. Significantly al-Zamaḥṣarī again contrasts unmarked *lā* and the emphatic *lan*, and also offers a definition of *lan* in terms very similar to those of the *Mufaṣṣal*, viz. *taʿkīd al-nafy-llaḍī tuʿṭī-hi lā*.

The same Mu‘tazilite arguments are used to explain *lan yaḥluqū dubāban* in S. 22:73, *Kaššāf*, 2,67, i.e. that it is logically absurd (*muḥāl*), and for a fourth time the contrast between *lā* and *lan* is invoked, with the *ta’kīd* feature of *lan* itself emphasising the logical impossibility of mankind creating anything.

One of the favourite verses for the opponents of *ta’bīd* is S. 19:26, *Kaššāf*, 2,6, when Mary says *lan ‘ukallima al-yawma ‘insiyyan*. This is of course a red herring, since al-Zamaḥṣarī would, if he made any comment at all, simply say that this is a very emphatic negative statement, and there is no implied perpetuity, hence no contradiction in the alleged sense of *lan* “never” and “today”, but he passes over the whole issue in silence.

These are only the more accessible instances where *lan* is discussed in the *Kaššāf*, but they are enough to give a strong impression that al-Zamaḥṣarī never connects *lan* with *ta’bīd*. Far from it, his treatment of *lan* is confined to the two features, negation of the future and emphasis, which he carefully contrasts with those of *lā*. There are no grammatical properties of *lan* in the *Kaššāf* which would justify interpreting it as denoting perpetual negation.

In the absence of critical editions it cannot be ascertained whether there are any variants in the manuscripts, but in a recent printed edition (Riyadh 1998), based on four manuscripts, there is no variant *ta’bīd* for *ta’kīd* in any of the passages cited above. Furthermore, from a searchable PDF version of the *Kaššāf* it appears that *ta’bīd* itself is only mentioned in five places, none of them involving *lan*. Three of them concern expressions intended to imply that something will or will not ever happen, such as the kind of Arab idiom which al-Zamaḥṣarī calls *kalimāt al-ta’bīd*, e.g. *mā lāḥa kawbabun* “as long as a star appears”, comparable with the Qur’anic *mā dāmat al-samāwātu wa-l-‘arḍu* (S. 9:107, *Kaššāf*, 1,456). The fourth occurs in a discussion of the rejection of the testimony of slanderers (S. 24:4, *Kaššāf*, 2,84): the Muslims are told *lā taqbalū la-hum šahādatan ‘abadan*, paraphrased by Abū Ḥanīfa as *‘alā al-ta’bīd*, and glossed by al-Zamaḥṣarī as meaning “for the length of their lives”. The fifth is associated with the impossible (*muḥāl*), in this case certain prohibited pre-Islamic marriage customs (S. 4:22, *Kaššāf*, 1,199f): al-Zamaḥṣarī equates their impossibility with such phrases as *ḥattā yabyaḍḍa al-qār* “until pitch goes white” and *ḥattā yaliḡa al-ḡamalu fī sammi al-ḥiyāti* “until the camel goes through the eye of a needle” (S. 7:40), i.e. they can never happen, but *lan* does not come into the picture anywhere.

In corroboration we can mention that in his short theological treatise, *al-Minhāḡ fī ‘uṣūl al-dīn*, al-Zamaḥṣarī likewise restricts himself to the doctrine of *tawḥīd/tanzīh*, and makes no appeal to *ta’bīd al-nafy* when discussing the Beatific Vision (Eng. text 16f, Ar. 54f). And although he does allude to the use of *lan* in S. 2:24 *lan taʿālū* during his discussion of prophethood (Eng. text 43, Ar. 80), he cites it only as proof that God knows the future, and no *ta’bīd* is mentioned.

We can also cite the lemma *‘abad* in al-Zamaḥṣarī’s *Asās al-balāḡa*, where he gives *lā ‘aʿalu-hu ‘abada al-‘ābād*, and variants, as examples of *‘abad* in the meaning of “[not] ever”, i.e. “never”. This confirms what we know from the sources quoted above, that in its future

sense *lan* would be synonymous with *lā* here, plus emphasis, and that perpetuity resides in *'abad* and not in *lā* or *lan*.

If we had to judge only by the works examined above, it would be impossible to conclude that al-Zamaḥṣārī regarded *lan* as denoting perpetual negation. The question arises, then, why is his name associated with that feature?

Since the answer is obvious there is no need to discuss it in detail here. As an outspoken Mu'tazilite, al-Zamaḥṣārī drew upon himself the universal hostility of the orthodox for his theologically challenging interpretations in the *Kaššāf*. Qualitatively the Mu'tazilite feature that would have been most annoying is the inexorable logic with which he and his fellows demonstrated the impossibility of a number of religious assertions, as if it were not enough that they were God's word, but needed some rational support, for instance, that it is inconceivable (*muḥāl*) that man himself could create anything (S. 22:73, *Kaššāf*, 2,67, see above).

In another place (S. 4:129, *lan tastaṭī'ū 'an ta'dilū bayna al-nisā'i*, *Kaššāf*, 1,231) al-Zamaḥṣārī manages to combine this logical impossibility with another favourite Mu'tazilite theme, that of God's justice, pointing out that it is impossible (*muḥāl*) to treat one's wives equally because of our human weakness, hence to impose it on the believers would imply injustice (*ẓulm*) on God's part. Al-Zamaḥṣārī, with total consistency, then adds that even the Prophet was incapable of perfect impartiality towards his own wives, an assertion which would not endear him to the orthodox.

Among the objectionable doctrines of the Mu'tazilites was their denial of the Beatific Vision, *ru'yat Allāh*. However, as we have seen, al-Zamaḥṣārī does not explicitly assign eternal impossibility to the negative particle in *lan tarā-nī* (S. 7:143, *Kaššāf*, 1,348f), or indeed to any other instance of *lan*. Having nothing else to go on, we can only conclude that al-Zamaḥṣārī's name was attached to that concept because he was the most prominent Mu'tazilite exegete of his day. By whom, we may never find out.

The suggestion (al-Bu'aymī 22f) that the *Unmūḍağ* circulated in two forms, an early version with *ta'bīd* and a later one with *ta'kīd*, is plausible but still needs to be verified by examining the extant manuscripts. It would not be the first time: the *Kitāb* of Sībawayhi existed in an "eastern" and "western" recension, with minor differences at the beginning and end, as a means of protecting the copyright of the licensed transmitters and teachers.

An alternative view (sources in al-Bu'aymī, 2, 22) is that *ta'bīd* is not a motivated change but a simple misreading of *ta'kīd* (the same point is also made by Bergsträsser, 16), and there is even a variant *ta'yīd* "corroboration, confirmation" in Ibn Mālik's paraphrase of al-Zamaḥṣārī in one copy of the *Tashīl* (229 n. 4, see editor's introduction, 72). It does not help that *ta'kīd* and *tawkid* appear to be used indiscriminately, thus *Mufaṣṣal* §549 speaks of *ta'kīd* but uses the verb *wakkada* in the same sentence, and while *lan* is said to indicate *ta'kīd* in *Mufaṣṣal* (*ibid.*) and *Unmūḍağ* (§75), it is called *tawkid* in *Kaššāf* (1,41 etc.).

Al-Zamaḥṣārī has been the victim of another slander, that he changed the opening words of the *Kaššāf* from *al-ḥamdu li-Llāhi-llaḍi ḥalaqa al-Qur'ān* to *allaḍi ḡa'ala al-Qur'ān*, allegedly to protect himself by a kind of Mu'tazilite *taqiyya*, which was subsequently altered to *'anzala*

al-Qurʾān, perhaps not by al-Zamaḥṣarī himself. The anecdote stems from Ibn Ḥallikān (5,170, cf. al-Buʿaymī, 23), who lived from 608/1211 to 681/1282, about the same time as Ibn Mālik was spreading the story of *taʿbīd* in the *Unmūdağ*, and al-Buʿaymī (12f, 22f) wonders whether the original *taʿbīd* might have been diluted to *taʿkīd* for the same reason that *ḥalaqa* was replaced by *ğāʿala* or *ʿanzala*.

This does not seem likely. As Lane shows (76-85), there is not the slightest proof that al-Zamaḥṣarī ever did write *ḥalaqa* and then change it to *ğāʿala* (a Muʿtazilite code word for *ḥalaqa*) and then to *ʿanzala*. Lane examined 110 manuscripts of the *Kaššāf* and found *ʿanzala* in every one of them, though he did come across a single manuscript where the word *ğāʿala* had been inserted over *ʿanzala* (78f), rather as *taʿkīd* was “corrected” to *taʿbīd* in the *Unmūdağ*, see above.

Throughout the *Kaššāf* al-Zamaḥṣarī makes no attempt to conceal or water down his Muʿtazilite views, even though (as Lane observes) he does not take every opportunity to express them. Here we must disagree with Gimaret (350 n. 9), that in matters of exegesis, “le muʿtazilisme de Zamaḥṣarī est fort discret, souvent insoupçonnable”, and with Lane (148) that the *Kaššāf* is not a full-scale Muʿtazilite work at all, but has “garnered far more criticism for its Muʿtazilite interpretations or influences than its actual contents rightly deserve”. This is a matter of opinion, of course, and all we can say here is that al-Zamaḥṣarī had the reputation of an uncompromisingly assertive Muʿtazilite: Ibn Ḥallikān (*ibid.*) portrays him as flaunting his Muʿtazilism, *mutazāhir bi-hi* “making a show of it”. And it suffices to read the violent refutations of Ibn al-Munayyir printed in the margin of the edition of the *Kaššāf* used for this paper (cf. Goldziher, 124), to realise that al-Zamaḥṣarī’s heresies were self-evident to his fellow Muslims, and he would have had nothing to gain from such a trivial alteration of his text as Ibn Ḥallikān accused him of making.

In any case there are good general reasons for scepticism about both accusations, of *taʿbīd al-nafy* and the change of *ḥalaqa* to *ʿanzala*: they are entirely irrelevant to al-Zamaḥṣarī, in grammar and in theology, and they are inconsistent with his high intellectual standards. We might charitably assume that *taʿbīd* was attributed to him by some opponent of his position on the Beatific Vision, and originally referred exclusively to *lan tarā-nī* in S. 7:143: al-Zamaḥṣarī’s *theological* arguments against the Beatific Vision could have led this opponent to the false deduction that *lan* has the *grammatical* effect of perpetual negation, a misconception which was later extended to *lan* in other contexts.

But since we do not know the originator of this misunderstanding (if that is what it was) we can do no more than speculate. The theological conflict may also have been exacerbated by underlying cultural hostilities — it is well known that non-Arabs were treated with suspicion even when (or especially when) their mastery of Arabic surpassed that of the native speakers (cf. Trumpp’s introduction to his translation of the *Mufaṣṣal*, 197f).

To repeat the caveat made at the beginning, the speculations in this paper might be overturned by any of the works which could not be consulted. A small consolation is that these works, particularly the early commentaries on the *Unmūdağ* by al-Makkī and

ʿAlī b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Aḥmad Zayn al-ʿArab, are never mentioned in connection with *taʿbīd*, either in the secondary literature or the grammatical tradition. All our knowledge goes back to indirect sources, Ibn Mālik, al-Ardabīlī’s *Unmūdağ* commentary, and Ibn Hišām. Although the *e silentio* argument is the weakest type, it may be that al-Ardabīlī is so widely known precisely because he is the only author who claimed that there was a manuscript of the *Unmūdağ* with the reading *taʿbīd* for *taʿkīd*. It may also be relevant that Fischer, in his critical notes on Broch’s edition of the *Unmūdağ*, has nothing to say on the matter.

Western knowledge of al-Ardabīlī may well depend on the coincidence that his commentary was partially edited by de Sacy in 1829, whence it made its way into Howell’s enormous compendium, and from there into the Western grammars. It is not unlikely that de Sacy himself became aware of al-Ardabīlī’s commentary through d’Herbelot (923), who chose to mention it in his article on al-Zamaḥṣarī, as the manuscript was in the Paris collection, though there is no reference to the *taʿbīd* issue.

The link between perpetual negation and al-Zamaḥṣarī survived in spite of its lack of foundation: al-Kaffawī (d. 1094/1683) makes the myth official in his dictionary of technical terms (4,161f), where he rejects *taʿbīd* as an unsubstantiated claim (*daʿwā bi-lā dalīl*, probably quoting Ibn Hišām, who uses this phrase in the *Muḡnī* on the same topic, 2,221), and he names al-Zamaḥṣarī as the source. Elsewhere in the *Kullīyyāt* (5,91) al-Kaffawī quotes al-Zamaḥṣarī’s distinction between the “two sisters” *lā* and *lan* in the exact wording of *Kaššāf*, 1,41 (on S. 2:24), and, again following Ibn Hišām, he dismisses the idea that *lan* is more emphatic than *lā* as yet another *daʿwā lā dalīl ʿalay-hā*.

One of the most intriguing cases of the persistence of the idea of perpetual negation (though not associated explicitly with al-Zamaḥṣarī) occurs in the *Baḥṭ al-Maṭālib* by the Maronite Germanius b. Farḥāt (d. 1732), who declares (224) that the meaning of *lan* is *naḡy al-istiqbāl muʿabbadan* “the negation of the future perpetually”, illustrated by an unattributed Gospel verse, quoted as *lan taḥilla ʿan takūna la-ka mraʿatun* and fully parsed in note 510, where *lan* is termed a “particle of dependence and negation in perpetuity” (*naḡy li-l-taʿbīd*). The verse does not correspond exactly to the current Arabic Bible translation, the nearest being Mark 6:18 *lā yaḥillu ʿan takūna la-ka mraʿatu ʿaḥī-ka* “It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother’s wife” in the King James translation, conspicuously lacking the *lan* (as does a slightly different translation from 1811, *mā yaḥillu la-ka ʿan taḥuḍa mraʿata ʿaḥī-ka*).

The prejudice dies hard. There are only two textual footnotes in the version of the *Unmūdağ* edited by al-Manṣūr (1999), one of which concerns the definition of *lan* as denoting *taʿkīd* [sic] (32). Al-Manṣūr’s comment is *hādā min iʿtizāliyyāt al-muṣannif, wa-Llāhu ʿalam*, apparently taking *taʿkīd* to reflect the Muʿtazilite position on *lan*. It is true that the *taʿkīd* function of *lan* was not universally accepted, but there is no reason to connect it with the Muʿtazilites. Can it be that the editor has mentally replaced the orthodox *taʿkīd* printed in his text by the heterodox *taʿbīd* attributed to al-Zamaḥṣarī, or at least has understood *taʿkīd* in that meaning?

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