

Poets, Oracles, and Nabīs as Messengers: An Evaluation of the Philosophy of al-Fārābī and Avicenna*

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Abstract: Due to the inequality regarding the susceptibility level of people's souls as well as their temperamental balance, differences occur in how they accept news containing messages arriving from the celestial realm. People who have a more competent mind, stronger intuition (hadth), and higher imitation (muḥākāt) ability compared to others more strongly accept what is revealed from the celestial realm. This article provides information about people who accept what is conveyed from metaphysical substances and who've been informed about unknown events in three stages: (i) The place of Plato's distinction among poets, oracles, and lovers in Aristotelian and Plutarchian philosophy; (ii) the position of poets and oracles in the pre-Islamic period, polytheists' attribution of both poetry and divination to Prophet Muhammad, and the description of Muhammad as a nabī in the Qur'an; and (iii) the meanings al-Fārābī and Avicenna attributed to oracles, poets, lovers, and nabīs (prophet). In this context, the article attempts to find answers to the questions of what the philosophical basis of both al-Fārābī's and Avicenna's ideas is regarding poets and oracles and what the religious basis of their views is regarding the concept of nabī. While trying to find answers to these questions, the study also aims to determine how a nabī differs from poets, oracles, and lovers by considering the superiority nubuwwa (prophecy) has over poetry and divination.

Keywords: Poetry, divination, love, nubuwwa, poet, oracle, lover, nabī

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Introduction

The emanation of the forms of truth from First Cause to human beings occurs through the Active Intellect (al-‘aql al-fa‘āl), due to First Cause and human beings occurring in different scales of existence. The mediation of metaphysical substances within the scope of the supra-lunar realm is primary in the transmission of message-containing forms that proceed from the highest point downwards. Considering the limitations of possible existence, however, secondary mediators are needed in the objective world for accepting and transmitting the forms that convey news. In fact, people do not have the same levels of competence regarding their intellective (al-quwwa al-nāṭiqa) and imaginative faculties, their ability to imitate intelligible forms with sensible ones, and the functional level of the balance between their temperament and the power of their soul (nafs). This difference among humans regarding their ability to accept what is given from the supra-lunar world shows the many respects in which not every human being is equipped to accept revelation, and this necessitates the existence of people who have a perfect competence regarding their soul and temperament for receiving revelation. al-Fārābī (d. 339/950) and Avicenna (d. 428/1037) referred to these intuitive messengers as nabī.

The conceptual studies of Islamic philosophical literature have studied the concept of nabī in many ways, with the comparison between philosophers nabīs being predominant. Nevertheless, the concept of nabī being compared with the concepts of poet, oracle, and lover has been rarely discussed. This article doesn't aim to equate the concepts of poets, oracles, and nabīs as those who accept what comes from the supra-lunar world or who give news about unknown events, nor does it aim to base the root of the concept of nabī, one of the basic building blocks of the Islamic religion, on the concept of poet and oracle as occurs in Ancient Greek philosophy. The study's main aims are to attempt to understand the philosophical reasons for the radical change that al-Fārābī and Avicenna themselves brought to the meaning of both poet and oracle from the Ancient Greek and pre-Islamic periods and to comprehend the religious reasons for their efforts to preserve the semantic continuity of the concept of nabī when addressing nubuwwa (prophecy). Without identifying the context in which al-Fārābī and Avicenna addressed the concepts of divination-oracle and nubuwwa-nabī, it will be difficult to trace the philosophical or religious meanings that the philosophers attributed to these concepts. In addition, due to al-Fārābī mentioning natural divination (divinatio naturalis) and Avicenna talking about the oracle who practices natural divination, the semantic

dimension of the criticism of both philosophers toward the oracle who practices artificial divination (*divinatio artificiosa*) will remain implicit regarding their texts.

My study will take into consideration the aspects in which people who give news about the unknown differ in terms of accepting what is transmitted from metaphysical substances, the roles they undertake for forming a liaison with society, and the guiding effects they create in their society through both the analytical messages they say about social events and the transmissions they convey about individual problems or wishes. Along this axis, I will analyze the semantic content of the concepts of poet, oracle, and nabī, which have been shaped in the historical process from ancient Greece to al-Fārābī and Avicenna, including the pre-Islamic period as well as the Prophet Muhammad's era, from both religious and philosophical perspectives. After mentioning the views of philosophers from Plato to Plutarch on poets and oracles in general terms, the article will examine the content of poet, oracle, and nabī in Qur'anic verses and hadiths in terms of meaning and attempt to reveal the meanings al-Fārābī and Avicenna attributed to these concepts.

1. Ancient Greek Philosophers' Approaches to the Concept of Poet and Oracle

In an effort to make a fundamental distinction between myth and philosophy, the thinkers of ancient Greece tended to identify divination (*mantiké*) as different from poetry and philosophy to be different from divination. They formed attitudes toward identifying the boundaries of poetry, divination, and philosophy by showing the madman, the lover, and the poet to be different from the oracle and the philosopher to be different from all of them. In this context, in *Phaedrus*, Plato (427-347 BCE) makes the classifications of the oracle to whom Apollo gives inspiration, the human being to whom Dionysus sends ecstasy, the poet to whom the Muses transmit inspiration, and the lover to whom Aphrodite and Eros offer love.¹ According to Plato, God created divination as a mediator that allows the human soul to accept influence from metaphysical substances in order to direct people to what is good and created the surface of the liver to be shiny so that divination can reach the

1 Plato, "Phaedrus", *Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus*, trans. Harold North Fowler (London: Harvard University Press, 2005), 265b.

human soul directly. As Plato mentioned in *Timaeus*, a divination message emerges by being reflected onto the liver in the form of different conceptions through the intellect. An ordinary person cannot evaluate the meaning of the content of the images and sounds related to divination, content that cannot be self-composed. For this reason, people are needed who receive complete inspiration from God and convey the divination message. These people envisage and explain the forms through the content of the message. Plato called those who practice and transmit divination as seer (interpreters of omens/mantis).²

Plato revealed the trance state of male and female oracles to be the greatest form of blessing that God bestows on human beings and conveyed how these oracles, when accepting the divination message, experienced a state similar to what the Dionysian drunkard and the poet in *Ion* had experienced. The human with Dionysian ecstasy and the poet with the enthusiasm of poetry lose themselves. According to Plato, man cannot recite poetry without divine inspiration, nor can one provide news about the unknown.³ Although Plato pointed out that divine inspiration is a single source for the emergence of poetry and the divination message in the human soul, he emphasized the difference among the poet, the drunkard, the lover, and the oracle. The reflection of the forms containing messages about the past, present, and future by one who accepts divination into their imagination (phantasia) occurs under the control of the intellect. Others aside from oracles who experience the state of accepting divine inspiration conceptualize the effect only through their imagination. Therefore, Plato placed poets in a position below oracles. The reliability of a poet's words is considered doubtful because the imagination makes misleading compositions among the conceptualizations. Plato, also emphasized that oracles should be punished when they convey the content of divination to people in a way that causes misunderstanding.⁴

In the *Republic*, Plato mentioned how oracles (fortune-teller) who are likely to convey a false message have chosen to convince the rich that God has endowed them with the gift of foresight and practice divination by means of mediational procedures that involve talismanic incantations over sacrifices. Through divination

2 Plato, "Timaeus", *Timaeus and Critias*, trans. Robin Waterfield (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 71d-72b.

3 Plato, "Ion", *Ion, Hippias Minor, Laches, Protagoras*, trans. Reginald Allen (London: Yale University Press, 1996), 534a.

4 Plato, "Phaedrus", 248d-e; 265b; Plato, "Timaeus", 72a.

ceremonies, oracles influence the rich to believe that they can purify themselves from present or past wrongs. If the wealthy intend to harm their enemies, oracles soothsay for a certain fee with the claim that they can connect with God and receive what is requested from the metaphysical substances, regardless of whether the wealthy are right or wrong.⁵

In *Apology of Socrates*, Plato justifies that a divination message will not be transmitted falsely in terms of the letter phrases oracles transmit in sentences. As Plato explained, during the defense, Socrates told how he had gone to the temple of Delphi of Khairephon and asked the oracle (Pythia/priestess of Apollo) if there was anyone more knowledgeable than her; the oracle soothsaid that no one was more knowledgeable than Socrates. Socrates believed the oracle had been given the divination by God in symbolic language and was unable to interpret the content, so he tried to prove how politicians, poets, and craftsmen are more knowledgeable than he, but he was disappointed. Through the divination message he received in the temple of Delphi, Socrates realized what human knowledge really means in the face of God's knowledge and concluded that the one thing he does know is that he knows nothing. Plato described the subject in this way in his *Apology*, and according to him, the oracle conveys to people individual words or compositions made up of letters when divination. However, oracles are not aware of the main meaning of the divination, nor the connotations that complement the main meaning.⁶

Plato considered divination to be an important opportunity God offers people in order to correct their bad ways. Plato believed that people lack the common competence that is required in the emergence of divination and assigned the task of conceiving this experience and conveying it to other people to oracles who have special abilities. The oracles in the group Plato mentioned in *Timaeus* (72b) and *Phaedrus* (244a–b) practice natural divination (*divinatio naturalis*), which emerges when metaphysical substances reflect forms of the truth to the human soul. Through natural divination, oracles foretell the unknown through the forms projected onto their imagination without the need for any external mediator. Oracles convey the solutions to high-level problems related to state administration or society to those who've requested natural divination from them by accepting

5 Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Paul Shorey (London: Harvard University Press, 1937), 364b–c.

6 Plato, "Apology", *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito*, *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, trans. Harold North Fowler (London: Harvard University Press, 2005), 21a–23a.

what is transmitted from the supra-lunar realm through the faculty of imagination under the control of the intellect. The second group of oracles Plato mentioned in this Republic (364b–c) perform artificial divination (*divinatio artificiosa*) through mediational methods by looking at birds, by examining the internal organs of animals, or by following the movement of the celestial spheres.

Despite taking into account people's statements about experiencing conceptions containing divine messages, Aristotle (384-322 BCE) was far removed from the idea that divination happens both while asleep and awake. According to Aristotle, people who state having had this experience talk too much, order words haphazardly, and are melancholic in nature. They are easily affected by external senses and have changeable thoughts. Aristotle did not use the concept of oracles to describe people with a strong imagination who say they give news about the unknown. Due to the philosopher having approached the subject of divination from a critical point of view, he made no mention of oracles in his work discussing his views on the subject. Aristotle argued that if divination is approved, the people whom God would use as mediators to reveal the unknown should have competent intellects and not necessarily imagination.⁷ According to Aristotle, people accept that divination occurs suddenly in the normal course of life. The transmission of a message that contains news to a human being may take place at a moment unknown beforehand. Therefore, when divination will occur is unknown, and the experience of divination is assumed to change the usual flow. On the other hand, the plot in poetry proceeds in a natural flow, and irrational and sudden changes in the elements of ordinary fiction are not welcome in poetry. Aristotle distinguished between divination and poetry in this way and in his *Poetics* stated, "The art of poetry is the work of the naturally gifted man (*euphyês*) rather than the delusional man (*manikos*)." Thus, Aristotle did not hold Plato's idea that poets create poetry with the inspiration given from the Muses and instead argued poetry to be formed through the poet's imitative nature. Therefore, Aristotle endeavored to clarify the difference between people who have a tendency toward ecstasy and those who have the ability to imitate.⁸

7 Aristotle, "Parva Naturalia: On Prophecy in Sleep", *On the Soul, Parva Naturalia, on Breath*, trans. Walter Stanley Hett (London: Harvard University Press, 1935), 464a 20.

8 Aristoteles, *Poetika: Şiir Sanatı Üzerine*, trans. Ari Çokona and Ömer Aygün, 9.th ed. (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası, 2021), 1454b–1455a.

Plutarch (ca. 50-120 BCE) did not hold Aristotle's attitude about people not being allowed to experience forms containing messages about the content of divination and instead systematized divination and clarified oracles' duties based on Plato's views in *Timaeus* (71d–72a). Namely, the natural divination method oracles applied in accordance with the temples under their responsibility (e.g., Greek divination centers such as the Temple at Delphi or the Temple at Dodona) differ from one another. While the oracle in Dodona conveys the message of inspiration through the singing of the black dove and the rustling of the leaves of the oak tree, the oracle in the temple of Delphi would not activate their divination message like this. In Delphi, the oracles used mediational methods, conducted preliminary interviews with people in order not to distract the Pythia, who would transmit the natural divination. If the matter were to be resolved through mediational methods, they would apply the divination themselves. If the people who'd requested a divination message had a difficult problem, the oracle in the temple of Delphi would perform the natural divination on the seventh day of the month, the day dedicated to Apollo, with the belief that once a month, the deity will act upon a mortal body.⁹ Both male and female oracles delivered divinations. Since the construction of divination centers, female oracles have been thought to be more competent than male oracles in accepting the message through natural divination, but this state was replaced by a metaphor in Greek mythology. After Apollo killed Python and gained superiority over Gaia, the primordial goddess of Earth, the gift of divination that had belonged to Gaia was transferred to the God Apollo. The myth describing how Apollo (the God of divination) killed Python, the serpent under the protection of Mother Earth, describes how the power to foretell by inspiration had belonged to female oracles and been transferred to male oracles. Thus, the divination message competence of male oracles had increased with respect to the female oracles.¹⁰

Plutarch further clarified Plato's classification between oracles who practice natural divination in *Timaeus* (72a–b) and *Phaedrus* (244a–b) and oracles who form divination messages through mediational methods in the *Republic* (364b–c). According to Plutarch's statement in "The Oracles at Delphi" in his *Moralia*, a

9 Plutarch, *Moralia: The Oracles at Delphi*, ed. Jeffrey Henderson, trans. Frank Cole Babbitt, vol. V (London: Harvard University Press, 2003), 398.

10 Robert Graves, *Yunan Mitleri / The Greek Myths*, trans. Uğur Akpur, vol. I (İstanbul: Kolektif Kitap, 2020), 220.

gradation exists among oracles in terms of the different levels of susceptibility of the faculties of the soul when establishing a divination message. Plutarch maintained Plato's distinction between oracles, placing oracles who practice natural divination in *Phaedrus* (244d) above the oracle (i.e., fortune teller) in the *Republic* (364b–c) who offers people a way out through artificial divination. While Plato mentioned the moment of acceptance of inspiration, he made no mention of the rules the oracle specifically performs before and during divination. Plutarch explained that, when the influence of metaphysical substances is combined with the mortality of the body, oracle perform a number of rituals that have been added over time, such as purifying with water, distancing the mind from worldly interests, and limiting eating and drinking before starting the natural divination in order to keep the oracle's soul under control. The rituals are not limited to the oracle who performs the natural divination, as the person requesting the divination must also fulfill obligations such as staying in the temple, making sacrifices, and purifying themselves. Once the person requesting the divination has fulfilled these sanctions, the oracle (prophetic priestess) delivers the message in the sanctuary, the place where they consult with God and where the tomb of Dionysus and the statue of Apollo are located. According to Plutarch, the oracles' acceptance of inspiration with their mortal body occurs in an extraordinary way. Oracles cannot remain indifferent to the divination, surrender themselves to what moves their calm soul that is ready for inspiration, and behave as if they are intertwined with giant waves; their senses become passive, and they focus only on the message. Oracles' oral transmission of the divination, which Plato discusses in *Timaeus* (72b) was shaped in Plutarch's period toward oracles giving a message about important matters to the person requesting the divination, with a written record accompanying the oral sharing.¹¹

The forms related to divination come to the oracle's imagination (*phantasia*) in a random flow. Even though the oracles would be criticized at the time for the meaninglessness of what they would say due to how they accept words and phrases about future events in a random flow, the accuracy of the message would be understood once the proper time had come.¹² Thus, if an oracle through natural divination foretold a commander that he would be victorious or that the city would fall, these events would occur as the oracle said. With divination, the oracle foretells

11 Plutarch, *Moralia: The Oracles at Delphi*, V, 397, 402.

12 Plutarch, "Alexander", *Plutarch's Lives: Demosthenes and Cicero, Alexander and Caesar*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin (London: Harvard University Press, 1967), 24.1–6.

not only what will happen, but also how and when it will happen. The divination of the oracles may contain good tidings, may involve negative events that require precautions, or may contain a message with which a ruler will not always be pleased. A king who'd learned that his life would be ended by a cruel enemy would inevitably have a harsh reaction. God draws a veil over messages about matters involving more than one person. This intervention occurs as such so as not to cause a mistake in the wording and meaning of the divination.¹³

Plato's view in *Apology* (22c) regarding oracles being given the divination in the form of words and that they are far removed from knowing the meaning of the content is replaced by Plutarch's view that oracles receive message in the form of both words and meaning.¹⁴ In fact, Plutarch did not hold to Plato's view in *Apology* (22c) where oracles do not envisage divination in a unity of words and meaning but rather they envisage only the forms of words. Plutarch aimed to bring to the fore the idea in *Timaeus* (72a), where Plato stated that symbolic forms are reflected in oracles' imagination, that their intellect controls this process, and that they both accept and interpret the images that convey messages. Plutarch revitalized Plato's ideas in *Timaeus* (72a), and according to Plutarch, the message is given to oracles in the form of both words and meaning. Nevertheless, errors in divination can occur when oracles do not fully understand or misinterpret the inspiration.¹⁵

To state that Plato's views on divination and oracles (seer) were influential to a certain extent on the processes in which people's thought structures were shaped would not be an exaggeration. While Aristotle had offered serious criticisms to Plato's idea of divination, Plutarch added new dimensions to Plato's explanations on divination and oracles. The pre-Islamic period saw those who defended divination and oracles by maintaining their practices and respecting oracles. Some were also later found who criticized oracles and rejected divination, especially the scholars and philosophers who'd grown up in the Islamic geography since the revelation of Islam. The views of the Islamic philosophers al-Fārābī and Avicenna on divination and oracles had been shaped differently from those of the ancient Greek philosophers as a result of the abolition of divination practices and the

13 Plutarch, "Caesar", *Plutarch's Lives: Demosthenes and Cicero, Alexander and Caesar*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin (London: Harvard University Press, 1967), 63.3.

14 Plutarch, *Moralia: The Oracles at Delphi*, V, 403, 407.

15 Plutarch, "Theseus", *Plutarch's Lives: Theseus and Romulus, Lycurgus and Numa, Solon and Publicola* trans. Bernadotte Perrin (London: Harvard University Press, 1967), 3.3.

prohibition against Muslims consulting oracles following the Prophet Muhammad's prophethood. Since pre-Islamic times, Arabs had shown great interest in divination and placed oracles in a privileged position in society, consulting them when making decisions about life based on the idea that oracles held a sacred superiority. This understanding about oracles was ended through Qur'anic verses and hadiths.

2. The Concepts of Poets, Oracles, and Nabīs in the Pre-Islamic Period and in Qur'anic Verses and Hadiths

The Arabs living in the pre-Islamic period valued oracles in terms of their ability to give news about the unknown and placed them in a privileged position among the free people in society. The Arabs attached importance to consulting oracles when encountering a situation involving individual and social demands or problems. The oracles would resolve disputes between tribes, determine the times of wars and peace, adjudicate cases called boasting competitions (*munāfara*), act as arbitrators in different matters, identify and punish the guilty, determine identity and genealogy, and diagnose and treat diseases.¹⁶ In the pre-Islamic period, each oracle with whom the people consulted was referred to by a special name. Arabs gave special names such as astrologer (*hazzā* or *munajjim*) to the oracle who interpreted the movements of celestial bodies; shrine custodian (*sādin*) or owner of the divining arrows (*sāhib al-azlām*) to the person who cast fortune arrows with yes-no answers; and fortune teller (*arrāf*) to the person who foretold and made connections between unknown events. Physiognomist/tracker (*qāif*) was used to refer to those who determined the genealogy of a person by looking at physiological characteristics, those who analyzed footprints and predicted the identity of criminals and location of missing people, *āif* to refer to those who performed divination through birds' flight paths and singing, and augurer (*zājir*) to refer to those who performed divination with gazelles, camels, and predatory animals, as well as birds. Those who explained the points drawn in the sand by transforming them into various shapes with the zodiacal system were called geomancer (*rammāl*), and those who made meaning from the posture of pieces of grain, palm kernels, and pebbles by hitting them against each other were called knocker (*turrāq*).¹⁷

16 Adem Apak, "İslam Öncesi Arapların Uluhiyet Anlayışında Kahinlerin Yeri", *Cahiliye Araplarının Uluhiyet Anlayışı*, ed. Mahfuz Söylemez (Ankara Okulu, 2020), 58.

17 Feyza Betül Köse, *Kahin* (İstanbul: Endülüs, 2018), 62.

This diversity in the names for oracles in the pre-Islamic period was reflected in the hadiths of the Prophet regarding divination and oracles. These hadiths involve the concept of oracle as used by the pre-Islamic society in general terms, as well as the special names that were preferred to describe those who made each type of artificial divination.¹⁸ As mentioned in the hadith sources, the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) declared all forms of divination (*divinatio naturalis* and *divinatio artificiosa*) to be null and void from the moment he was appointed as a prophet. He forbade Muslims from consulting oracles for obtaining news about the unknown. For example, Mu'awiyah ibn al-Khākem stated:

- "O Messenger of Allah, I have just become a Muslim and Allah has honored us with Islam. We used to go to the oracles in the Jahiliyyah and believed in what they said." The Prophet (pbuh) said:

- "Do not go to the oracles (do not believe in what they say)."¹⁹

The Prophet forbade the practice of divination methods, and the payment of divination fees (*hulwān*) that had been accepted in the pre-Islamic period, saying,²⁰ "Whoever goes to a oracle and confirms what he says denies what Allah has sent down to the Prophet Muhammad."²¹ The Prophet warned Muslims about those who ask questions to oracles in the hope that they will answer their requests or provide a solution to their problems, saying that such Muslims would not have their prayers accepted for 40 nights and would not even enter Paradise.²² The Messenger of Allah declared that oracles should not be trusted. Thereupon, the Prophet Muhammad said to those who stated that what oracles say is sometimes true, "What you say is true is what the jinn snatch away (from the angels). They murmur in the ear of its guardian (the oracle) like the clucking of a hen. The oracles add more than 100 lies to it."²³

18 Sulaymān ibn al-Ash'ath al-Sijistāni Abū Dāwūd, *Sunen* (Dār al-Risāla al-ālemiyya, 2009), Tīb, 22–23.

19 Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Ḥajjāj al-Qushayrī an-Naysābūrī Muslim, *al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. V (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' Turāsi al-Arabiyya, 2009), Selam, 121.

20 Abu 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Ismā'il Al-Bukhari, *al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ* (Riyadh: Dār al-Selām, 1999), Buyu, 113; Al-Bukhari, *Kitab al-Īcare*, 20; Abū Dāwūd, *Sunen*, Buyu, 41.

21 Al-Ḥāfiẓ Abī 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Yazid al-Qazwīni Ibn Mājah, *Es-Sunen* (Dār al-Risāla al-ālemiyya, 2009), Taharet, 122; Abū 'Isā Muḥammad ibn 'Isā ibn Sawrah At-Tirmidhi, *al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ* (*Sunen*) (Riyadh: Dār al-Selām, 1999), Taharet, 102; Abū Dāwūd, *Sunen*, Tīb, 21.

22 Abu 'Abd Allāh Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-Shaybani Ibn Hanbal, *Musned*, vol. XVII (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1999), 11107; Muslim, *al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ*, V, Selam, 125.

23 Al-Bukhari, *Tawhid*, 57; For the hadiths stating that it is Satan who acts as a mediator by stealing ears in conveying the news to the oracle, see Al-Bukhari, *Bed al-Hak*, 6; Tafsir, 15; Ibn Mājah, *Sunen*, Sunnet, 13.

In the pre-Islamic period, another group that had been thought to act under the guidance of invisible beings due to their contact with the jinn was poets. Situations occurred in which poets were privileged, having a position similar to the status of oracles in society. Poets then were respected as equivalent to the chief of a nomadic tribe, and the information they received from the jinn and presented in the form of poetry affected the decisions made about the tribe. They could increase the reputation of their tribe through the poems they expressed and defend their values with a strong rhyme against other poets who satirized their tribe.²⁴ The *jahiliyyah* (ignorant) society developed discourses about the Prophet Muhammad, who'd been given the prophetic mission, being a poet based on his conscious use of the impressive power of poetry to influence people, as well as his communications with the jinn. This discourse developed to such a degree that the polytheists did not believe in the Prophet Muhammad's prophethood and mockingly accused him of being a poet saying, "Are we to leave our gods for a mad poet?"²⁵ The polytheists who tried to prevent people from becoming Muslim said, "...Nay, these are confused dreams; nay, he has forged it; nay, he is a poet..."²⁶ In Surah Ya-Sin, Muhammad (pbuh) responds to their accusation of him being a poet in the ayah, "And in no way did We teach him (The Prophet) poetry; and in no way does it behoove him. Decidedly (this revelation) it is nothing (else) except a Remembrance."²⁷

Al-Qurtubī (d. 671/1273) performed an exegesis of the relevant ayah, and according to him, the Quraysh had planned to spread the rumor to the people coming to Mecca from different regions during the pilgrimage season that Prophet Muhammad was a poet. They had tried to strengthen their methods of persuasion by emphasizing the probability that the Arabs, being familiar with many forms of poetry, would not trust the prophet because the ayahs he preached did not resemble the rhythm of poetry. The Prophet Muhammad had not even written poetry throughout his life, nor had he memorized couplets. On the rare occasions when he had recited a poem by another poet, he would introduce and substitute words or omit a line, although he maintained the integrity of the poem's meaning. On the day of the Battle of Hunayn, The Prophet Muhammad is heard to have said, "I am the Prophet. There is no lie in this. I am the son of (son of) Abdulmuttalib," and this was agreed to have not been uttered in the form of a poem.²⁸

24 Toshihiko Izutsu, *Kur'an'da Tanrı ve İnsan / God and Man in the Qur'an*, trans. Kürşad Atalar, 7th ed. (İstanbul: Pınar, 2019), 257.

25 Qur'an 37:36.

26 Qur'an 21:5.

27 Qur'an 36:69.

28 Abū 'Abdullāh Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Qurtubī, *Cami'li-Ahkami'l-Kur'an*, vol. XVII (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 2006), 480.

In order to weaken the Prophet Muhammad's devotion to his mission, the polytheists did not limit their denials about him to poetry, but also claimed him to be a madman and an oracle. In response to the polytheists' behaviors, Allah says in Surah al-Haqqa, "(That) indeed, the Qur'an is the word of a noble Messenger. And it is not the word of a poet (شاعر); little do you believe. Nor the word of an oracle (كاهن); little do you remember. (It is) a revelation from the Lord of the worlds."²⁹ According to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's (d. 606/1210) explanation, the arrangement of these verses occurs in the form of a confirmation that the Qur'an is the speech of the prophet and a denial of it belonging to the poet as an oracle; the statement "(It is) a revelation from the Lord of the worlds" is also remarkable. The Prophet did not make up the suras on his own, just as he did not convey them by writing poetry or by divination. In addition, the fact that the verse's message about the Qur'an not being the word of a poet is followed by the phrase "Little do you believe" and that the phrase "Little do you remember" follows the declaration that the Qur'an cannot be considered the words of an oracle are quite meaningful. Namely, the polytheists tended not to believe and even turned away from thinking the matter through by expressing the assumption that the Qur'an was revealed to a poet and an oracle.³⁰

Māturīdī (d. 333/944) connected the word little (qalīl) in the verse to the words poet and oracle. Accordingly, even though people in the pre-Islamic period had witnessed that some of what both poets and oracles said was false, they thought and confirmed that some of their words contained the truth. If the polytheists claimed the prophet to be a poet and an oracle, then they must believe in some of the ayahs revealed to Prophet Muhammad. However, the polytheists denied all the verses that had been revealed to him.³¹ According to Ismail Haqqī Bursawī (d. 1137/1725), the presence of "little" in the ayahs stating little do they believe and think is an allusion to absence. This is similar to saying "Little do you come" to a person who never comes to visit. When considered in parallel with this, what the ayah really implies is that the polytheists will never believe that the revelation is the word of God sent to the Prophet Muhammad. According to the ayah, the Qur'an is not the word of a poet or an oracle, but the word of the prophet. The poet and the oracle receive news

29 Qur'an 69:40–43.

30 Abu 'Abd Allāh Muhammad ibn Umar Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṭib al-ghayb: al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, vol. XXX (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1981), 117.

31 Abū Maṣū'ir Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Samarqandī al-Māturīdī, *Te'vilatü'l-Kuran*, vol. XVI (İstanbul: Dār al-Mizān, 2007), 80.

about the earth from the sky through the jinn or the devils. If the Qur'an were the word of a poet and an oracle as the polytheists claimed, no content would be found in the Qur'anic verses criticizing both devils and their deeds. According to Bursawī, because devils would not convey messages that condemn or curse them to their mediator nor convey a message that would guide people toward the good, if the Meccans had considered the meanings of the ayahs in this way, they would not have said these things about the Prophet Muhammad.³²

The divine support given to the Prophet Muhammad against the polytheists' denial is repeated in Surah al-Tūr: "So remind (O Muhammad), for you are not, by the favor of your Lord, an oracle or a madman. Or do they say (of you), 'A poet for whom we await a misfortune of time?' Say, 'Wait, for indeed I am, with you, among the waiters.'"³³ According to Ibn Kathīr's (d. 774/1373) exegesis, when the Quraysh had gathered in Dar al-Nadwa to stop Prophet Muhammad, they thought that death would be a means to get rid him, similar to the end of the poets Zuhair, Nabigha, and Tarafah. During the meeting, some people offered to tie him up, imprison him somewhere, and wait for him to die, so that his fate would be the same as these poets.³⁴ Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 150/767) mentioned al-Khāris b. Qays, al-Nadr b. al-Khāris and Mut'am b. 'Adiy b. Nawfal b. 'Abdi Menāf among those who were waiting for the Prophet's death. He quoted the Meccan polytheists as saying, "We hope that al-Lāt and al-Uzzā will take Muhammad's life when he is young, similar to the death of Abdullah b. Abdulmuttalib, Muhammad's father, when he was young." The polytheists hatred against the Prophet Muhammad had risen to such a level, but they were informed that the end they desired would come to them with the answer, "Wait, I too am waiting with you."³⁵

The common denominator of the rumors the polytheists spread about the Prophet Muhammad was that poets and oracles both communicate with jinn and give news about unknown events. When one looks at the verses attributing poetry and divination to the Prophet Muhammad, Allah is seen to have responded to the polytheists' behaviors with the Qur'anic ayahs 69:40-43 in Surah al-Haqqa and

32 Ismail Haqqī Bursawī, *Ruh al-Bayan*, trans. Hüseyin Kayapınar, vol. IX (İstanbul: Damla, 1995), 263.

33 Qur'an 52:29-31.

34 Abū al-Fiḍā' 'Imād ad-Dīn Ismā'il Ibn Kathīr, *Tefsīru'l-Kur'ani'l-'Azim*, vol. XIII (Cize: Mu'assasat al-Qurtuba, 2000), 237.

35 Abū-l Ḥassan Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr Mukatīl b. Süleyman*, vol. IV (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Tārīkh al-'Arabī, 2002), 147.

52:29-31 in Surah al-Tūr, which dispelled the suspicion about Prophet Muhammad being a poet and an oracle and gave explanations about the duty he had been entrusted with and the attributes that had been given to him along alongside this divine responsibility.³⁶ Allah appointed prophethood to Muhammad (pbuh) and referred to him as a rasūl (messenger) and nabī (prophet) with the ayahs in the Qur'an: "Indeed, We have sent to you a Messenger as a witness upon you..."³⁷ and "... (Muhammad is) the Messenger of Allah and last of the prophets,"³⁸ as well as other ayahs that tell how the Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad through the angel Gabriel and how the prophet did not convey poetry or divination to the people but rather communicated the ayahs of the Qur'an.³⁹ The Prophet is emphasized in the Qur'an to behave as a guide and a warner while conveying the revelation to the people:⁴⁰ "O Prophet, indeed We sent you as a witness and a bringer of good tidings and a warner."⁴¹ According to Mawdūdī (1903-1979), who wrote on exegesis on Surah al-Ahzāb, the ayah (Qur'an 33:45) describes in detail the exalted position bestowed upon the Prophet Muhammad in order to comfort him against the persecution of the polytheists while also reminding both the believers and the disbelievers that the Prophet Muhammad was no ordinary human being. The Prophet is identified as being a witness to convey the subjects contained in the revelation sent to him and to perform exemplary behaviors while applying the rules of religion. The Prophet Muhammad is accepted as a witness on matters such as his being assigned the duty of prophethood and the realization of the hereafter. The Prophet has the authority to give good news of a reward in the hereafter to those who obey the message and fulfil the requirements of the call and to declare punishment for those who do not accept the message.⁴²

Although the Prophet was entrusted with the duty of giving good news and warning people, he is said to have not been privy to the knowledge of how the end would take shape.⁴³ The knowledge of the unseen being known only to God is explained in Surahs al-An'am, al-Fatir, and Hud.⁴⁴ In Surah al-A'rāf, the Prophet

36 Qur'an 4:79, 24:54, 27:6, 61:9.

37 Qur'an 73:15.

38 Qur'an 33:40.

39 Qur'an 3:7, 7:68, 10:37, 76:23.

40 Qur'an 2:119, 11:2, 17:105, 25:56, 34:28.

41 Qur'an 33:45.

42 Abū al-A'lā al-Mawdūdī, *Tefhimu'l-Kur'an*, trans. Muhammed Han Kayani, 2nd ed., vol. IV (İstanbul: İnsan, 1991), 428.

43 Qur'an 5:109, 11:31, 16:77.

44 Qur'an 6:59, 11:123, 35:38.

was told to “Say, I hold not for myself (the power of) benefit or harm, except what Allah has willed. And if I knew the unseen, I could have acquired much wealth, and no harm would have touched me. I am not except a warner and a bringer of good tidings to a people who believe.”⁴⁵ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī stated that this ayah had been revealed after the Meccans attempted to test the Prophet by asking him to predict the appropriate time for selling trade goods in order to make a profit and to predict the towns where famine would occur. In the face of the endless predictive demands of the polytheists, the Prophet stated that the knowledge of the unknown is with God. The Prophet presented his inability to know which people would believe or disbelieve as another proof that the knowledge of the unseen is with God. He related this as being the reason why he could not answer the question of when the Day of Judgment would take place. The phrase “except what Allah has willed” in the ayah indicates that the Prophet was only aware of unseen events to the extent that Allah had revealed them to him.⁴⁶ The ayah “...Nor would Allah reveal to you the unseen. But (instead), Allah chooses of His messengers whom He wills, so believe in Allah and His messengers”⁴⁷ in Surah al-’Imrān is also considered in this context.

When looking at the historical processes in which people’s belief structures were shaped, the Arabs are seen to have attributed value to poets and oracles during the pre-Islamic period, with this situation changing once the Prophet Muhammad was given prophetic duty. People were then prohibited from resorting to poets and oracles. The idea that poets and oracles were in contact with invisible beings and received information about unknown events from them caused people to accuse the prophet of being a poet and oracle. In response to those who defended this idea, ayahs were revealed in which the positions of poets and oracles were clarified, and the concept of nabī was brought to the forefront. The transformation that occurred in the interpretation of poets and oracles in the minds of the pre-Islamic Arabs after the Prophet Muhammad identified him as a nabī, as mentioned in the ayahs. This was an important basis that shaped al-Fārābī and Avicenna’s views on this subject. As a matter of fact, the influence of religious phenomena along with the philosophical background in the works of these philosophers is too pronounced to be ignored.

45 Qur’an 7:188.

46 Fakhr al-Din al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-kabīr*, 87.

47 Qur’an 3:179.

3. Al-Fārābī's and Avicenna's Views Toward Poets, Oracles, and Nabīs

Al-Fārābī and Avicenna shaped the issue by taking into account both the philosophical and religious contexts of the concept of nabī in relation to the issue of nubuwwa. They endeavored to clarify the points where a nabī differs from oracles, lovers, and poets. In order to show the difference between a nabī and oracles, al-Fārābī addressed in *al-Madīna al-Fāḍila* the divination that emerges from the supra-lunar realm through forms with messages given to human imagination (takhayyul): "True visions will arise from the particulars which the Active Intellect gives to the faculty of representation in dreams. But divinations concerning things divine will arise from the intelligibles provided by the Active Intellect, which it receives by taking their imitations instead."⁴⁸ What al-Fārābī meant by divination regarding the divine in these explanations is the natural divination that takes place in the faculties of the soul without the need for mediational procedures. Although al-Fārābī mentioned natural divination in *al-Madīna* to be a result of the Active Intellect bringing intelligibles to the imagination through their imitation, he did not identify the person who experiences this state as an oracle. Due to the glorified meaning that is attributed to the concept of the oracle who performs natural divination, al-Fārābī mentioned in *al-Fusūl* not the oracles who practice natural divination but the oracles who only engage in artificial divination. The reason underlying why the philosopher mentioned oracles who practice divination through mediational methods in *al-Fusūl* is because of his critical attitude toward oracles. In *al-Fusūl*, al-Fārābī criticized oracles who use artificial divination due to the limitations of their knowledge.⁴⁹

On the other hand, Avicenna brought the distinction Plato made in *Phaedrus* (265b) between oracles who accept what is given from metaphysical substances and poets/lovers back to the agenda in order to clarify the qualities belonging to prophets in the discussion on nubuwwa. However, Avicenna felt the need to make radical changes in terms of defining the superior being with whom the people in each classification communicate, the modes of communication, and the methods for comprehending the forms of poetry and divination and transferring them to other people. Avicenna understood Apollo (who gives inspiration to oracles), Dionysus (who delivers ecstasy to man), Muses (who convey inspiration to poets),

48 al-Fārābī, *Medinetü'l-fazıla/al-Madīna al-Fāḍila*, trans. Yaşar Aydınlı, 3rd ed. (İstanbul: Litera, 2021), 180.

49 al-Fārābī, *al-Fusūl muntaza'a* (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1971), 98.

and Aphrodite and Eros (who offer love to lovers) as motifs of ancient Greek thought and did not hold to this pattern of thought. He moved away from the idea that lovers can experience love as a result of connecting with Aphrodite and Eros. In *Risāla fī al-Māḥiyya al-Ishq* that is attributed to Avicenna, he refers to how human beings turn toward the First Cause in love, whereas in *al-Kānūn*, he explained one person falling in love with another as an infectious and diseased state caused by black bile. According to Avicenna in *al-Kānūn*, the diseases caused by the imaginative faculty (*al-quwwa al-mutakhayyila*) occur not only as a result of the wrong composition of different forms (as seen in the madmen), but also in lovers due to the constant mental imaginings of the same form, as in the infatuation one person has with another. In *al-Kānūn*, Avicenna did not consider the state of lovers as an effect from the supra-lunar realm but rather as a person afflicted with a disease. In *al-Ishq*, however, Avicenna considered the state of lovers to be the manifestation in a human being of the love-based contact between the First Cause and other beings at all levels.⁵⁰

Avicenna did not limit the subject to love and also scrutinized oracles who communicate with metaphysical substances. As Avicenna stated in *al-Ishārāt al-Tānbiḥāt* (Remarks and Admonitions), oracles soothsay with their senses by minimizing perceptions and with their imagination. They foretell the future by looking at wavy, bright, transparent objects for a long time and activating their imagination, or by panting and fainting at the end of a fast run. Because they use this way to receive unknown news, oracles cannot be said to be in contact with God.⁵¹ The transmission of revelation (*wahy*) from the supra-lunar world to the prophet has a three-dimensional characteristic that starts from the First Cause, continues through the intermediary of the Active Intellect, and ends in the *nabī*. As al-Fārābī stated, the process of revelation beings when each intellect, from passive intellect (*al-‘aql al-munfail*) to acquired intellect (*al-‘aql al-mustafād*), is made the substance of the other intellect and the Active Intellect gives forms to the human being to whom it reaches, so much so that the revelation that reaches the imagination is reflected from the Active Intellect to passive intellect by means of acquired intellect.

50 Tokadi Mustafa Efendi, *Tahbizu’l-Mathun: al-Kānūn fī al-Tıbb*, ed. Mustafa Koç and Eyyüp Tanrıverdi, vol. 3 (İstanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu, 2018), 196; Ibn Sinā, *Risale fī Mahiyeti’l-Işk/Risāla fī al-Māḥiyya al-Ishq*, trans. Ahmed Ateş (İstanbul: Büyüyenay, 2017), 116.

51 Ibn Sinā, *İşaretler ve Tembihler/al-Ishārāt wa al-Tānbiḥāt*, trans. Muhittin Macit, Ali Durusoy and Ekrem Demirli, 2nd ed. (İstanbul: Litera, 2013), 200.

Al-Fārābī defined the person who receives the influence of the Active Intellect on their imagination under the control of the intellect as a nabī. The nabī is given revelation through the Active Intellect, warns about the future, and informs about the particulars of the present moment. The flow of revelation culminates in the prophet's imagination and transcends the mediation of the Active Intellect, which is mentioned in *al-Madīna al-Fāḍila* and *al-Siyāsa al-Madaniyya* as: "Allah the Almighty and the Exalted is the one who reveals to the prophet through the Active Intellect."⁵² Avicenna also emphasized in *al-Shifā'* that revelation and knowledge of unknown events are transmitted to the nabī from Allah the Almighty. According to Avicenna, the soul of the prophet hears the word of God and sees His angels thanks to his closeness with the Active Intellect and the soul of the heavenly bodies. The angels assume a form the prophet can perceive and convey the revelation to the nabī in a way that is unlike the voice of living creatures in the objective world. The prophet rank highest among human beings and is closest to the angels. Therefore, Avicenna defined the prophet as "God's caliph on Earth."⁵³

Although al-Fārābī in *al-Madīna*, and Avicenna, in *al-Ishārāt* brought up oracles who perform natural divination, both philosophers carefully avoided using the term oracle to describe the one who transmits the revelation the First Cause conveys to human beings through the Active Intellect. This is probably due to the emphasis in ayahs 40-42 in Surah al-Haḡga and ayahs 29-31 in Surah al-Tūr in the Qur'an, where the Prophet Muhammad is stated to be neither a poet nor an oracle. The Quran's definition of Prophet Muhammad as a nabī is likely the basis for al-Fārābī's and Avicenna's preference for the concept of nabī in their works. In *al-Madīna*, al-Fārābī states the nabī to be both a warner of as yet unexperienced events as well as a messenger of news about existing particulars. In fact, ayah 48 from Surah al-An'am, ayah 56 in Surah al-Kahf, and ayah 45 in Surah al-Ahḡāb emphasize how the Prophet gives glad tidings and warnings as a requirement of his prophetic duty. As can be seen, the influence of religious phenomena has an important place both in al-Fārābī's and Avicenna's choice of the concept of nabī, as well as the qualifications they attribute to the concept of nabī.

52 al-Fārābī, *al-Madīna*, 200; al-Fārābī, *es-Siyasetü'l-medeniyye/al-Siyāsa al-Madaniyya*, trans. Yaşar Aydınlı (İstanbul: Litera, 2020), 118.

53 Ibn Sinā, *Kitabü'ş-Şifa: Nefs/Kitāb al-Shifā': al-Nafs*, trans. Mehmet Zahit Tiryaki (Ankara: Türkiye Bilimler Akademisi, 2021), 318; Ibn Sinā, *Metafizik*, trans. Ekrem Demirli and Ömer Türker, 2nd ed., (İstanbul: Litera, 2013), 181, 204.

While nabîs have contact with the First Cause through the Active Intellect in terms of accepting revelation, the absence of such a network of communication for both oracles and poets indicates that their knowledge is limited to divination and poetry. According to al-Fārâbî, oracles cannot know every one of the countless events that have happened or will happen. Oracles (munajjim) who soothsay based on the movements of the stars do not do so as a result of theoretical knowledge but rather by having established a connection between the events in the sky and the events on Earth. Oracles can only answer the question of a person who asks them to soothsay; they have no knowledge of any field in which they can have a say other than the issue that is planned to be solved by divination. On the other hand, the fact that oracles have limited knowledge brings to mind the issue of whether their knowledge is reliable or not. According to Avicenna in *al-Shifâ'*, the premises oracles use when performing divination are not based on conclusive evidence; they use syllogisms based on rhetoric or poetry to prove the premises of divination.⁵⁴

Al-Fārâbî and Avicenna stated both poets and oracles to rely on the premises of received (maqbulât), probable (madhnunât), and imagined (muhayyâlât) in conveying poetry/divination. The rhetoric-based premises of maqbulât and madhnunât, which are different from demonstrative and dialectic syllogism, can point to either truth or falsehood. Meanwhile, the premises of the poetry-based muhayyâlât indicate a false conclusion according to al-Fārâbî or can be either true or false according to Avicenna. Avicenna thought that, because these premises appeal to the imagination and perceptions, no affirmation is required for them to be true or false. In fact, because poetry and divination messages have an effect on people's senses through their imagination, these messages are unable to produce cognition above the level of an imaginable or perceivable abstraction. The premises of the imaginative type do not depend on any process of reflection. Al-Fārâbî and Avicenna thought that the majority of people are more inclined to accept imaginative premises that do not contain correct judgements than they are to accept syllogisms based on conclusive evidence. In fact, the majority of people according to both philosophers avoid and don't want to hear propositions that show the affirmed truth. This is why poets and oracles have an effect on people.⁵⁵

54 al-Fārâbî, *al-Fusûl*, 98; Ibn Sînâ, *Metafizik*, 185.

55 al-Fārâbî, "Risale fi Kavanini Sina'ati's-Şi'r/Şu'ara", *İbn Sina ve Farabi'nin Poetikaları: Aristoteles'in Poetika'sının İslam Dünyasındaki Yansımaları*, trans. Ayşe Taşkent (Ankara: Türkiye Bilimler Akademisi, 2019), 70; Ibn Sînâ, *Poetika*, trans. Ferruh Özpilavcı (İstanbul: Litera, 2020), 46.

The group that poets or oracles influence by means of their poetry or divination includes inexperienced youths; children; fools; the bewildered; people who feel excessive anger, fear, and sadness; people of weak will; people whose intellect cannot control their imagination; and people who take pleasure in following complex events and constantly talk about them.⁵⁶ In order to have an effect on these people, oracles convey their divination message by muttering incantations, enchantments, or blessings and by preferring a rhythmic style that resembles rhymed prose more than everyday speech while remaining far removed from poetry due to the lack of a syllabic meter.⁵⁷

Mediators who are appointed by the First Cause after the Active Intellect to convey the forms of truth to human beings are nabīs, not poets or oracles. Nabīs are positioned at the focal point of the revelation from the First Cause and the Active Intellect to human beings and instantaneously (daf'atan) accept both primary and secondary intelligibles without the need for the gradual progression of other people's comprehension-cognition processes thanks to their superior intuitive ability. Poets and oracles cannot reach the level of the holy intellect (al-'aql al-qudsī) even if they apply certain mental practices. Avicenna states in *al-Shifā'* that the holy intellect appears only in nabīs through nubuwwa as follows:

Because of the effective clarity of the human mind and the strength of human contact with rational principles, they can have a soul that has been empowered to ignite their intuition (hadth). In other words, their soul can have something that it receives from the Active Intellect regarding everything, and this can be pictured in them in a way that is not an imitation of the forms in the Active Intellect either at one time or close to one time, but rather of an order that includes the middle terms. However, imitations in things known by their causes are not rational and certain. This is a type of prophethood and even the highest of the prophetic powers. Calling this power a holy intellect (al-'aql al-qudsī) would be more appropriate. It is also the highest level of human powers.⁵⁸

The intelligibles (al-ma'qūlāt) emanating from the Active Intellect to the prophet at once are imitated by the nabī's faculty of imagination with the most appropriate senses and transformed into formal forms that people can comprehend. Conceptions that people would find difficult to comprehend directly are transformed into comprehensible forms through the change the nabī brings

56 al-Fārābī, "Astroloji Hakkında Doğru ve Yanlış Bilgiler", *İslam Filozoflarından Felsefe Metinleri*, trans. Mahmut Kaya, 8th ed. (İstanbul: Klasik, 2013), 189; Ibn Sinā, *al-Ishārāt*, 200.

57 Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur'an*, 260.

58 Ibn Sinā, *al-Shifā': al-Nafs*, 434.

about through imitation. The imaginations of poets and oracles also imitate the intelligible through the sensible. Nevertheless, talking about the support of a temperament that would raise the act of imitation to a perfect level is not possible for the imagination of a poet or oracle. According to Avicenna's statement in *al-Shifā'*, the news about the unknown "cannot be accepted well by those whose temperament is dry, even if they preserve it well. This news quickly leaves those with a wet temperament, even if they accept it quickly; it is as if they never accepted it, and they cannot preserve it well. Those with a hot temperament are confused in their actions. Those with a cold temperament are fools."⁵⁹ Avicenna did not include poets or oracles in the lowest category, in which he places madmen, whose imbalance between the qualities of temperament causes mental illness, nor does Avicenna exalt poets or oracles to the level of nabī. People with a ratio of the four elements and qualities in temperament that are at the extremes may possibly experience certain problems in both accepting and preserving the influence that reaches them. Due to the mixture in the prophet's temperament having a moderate ratio, the functioning between nabīs' faculties and temperament takes place at a moderate level in terms of nabīs' acceptance of the revelatory forms that reach them from beyond the physical world, and these forms make an impression in their memory by symbolizing in the unity of form and soul. In fact, Avicenna thought that because the substance that accepts the perfection of prophets is found in a small number of temperaments, their likeness is not always encounterable. Nabīs attain tremendous pleasure by seeing what is beautiful with the perfection of their temperament and are at the most perfect level, one that ordinary people cannot reach; their audience consists of people who are capable of accepting some or all of the intelligibles or particulars either directly as they are given or through close and distant imitations, most of them in their sleep.⁶⁰ These people are called believers when they accept the principles that will lead them to happiness in the way of imagined forms and turn these forms into actions.⁶¹

The Prophet conveyed the truth of the universal to the people through symbols with particular content in order to enable them to achieve happiness. He used a symbolic style in conveying these forms to people, as they lacked the same ability to grasp metaphysical truth, so much so that the nabī explained the relevant

59 Ibn Sinā, *al-Shifā': al-Nafs*, 322.

60 al-Fārābī, *al-Madīna*, 224; al-Fārābī, *Siyāsa*, 128; Ibn Sinā, *Metafizik*, 191.

61 al-Fārābī, *Siyāsa*, 132.

intelligibles through symbols that he likened to the most superior and magnificent sensible things that are known as beautiful among the people while explaining things that cannot be directly conceived, such as the First Cause, angels, things separate from matter, and the heavens. He conveyed the intelligibles that contain deficiencies by making an analogy with the lowest senses in an unpleasant way. He heralded the people with good news in order to encourage them to do good and informed them of punishment in order to forbid them from doing evil. Regarding the hereafter, which occupies people's minds, the Prophet informed them that they will be served in paradise; will be offered many blessings such as fruit, milk, and honey; will witness flowing rivers that will lead to peace and coolness; and will find comfort with thrones and silk upholstery. He informs them that they will be tormented in Hell, that they will be disturbed by the fiery fire and freezing cold, and that they will have to drink a pus that is far from flavorful.⁶²

4. Conclusion

Compared to Ancient Greece, natural divination was elaborated upon in the pre-Islamic period, with an increase occurring in the types of artificial divination. The physiological characteristics of humans, the footprints of certain animals such as camels, clumps of sand, cereal grains, palm kernels, and pebbles became the subjects of divination. With this diversification in the types of artificial divination, Arabs gave special names to oracles who applied the different methods of artificial divination. The respect shown to poets and oracles in the pre-Islamic period suffered a profound loss of prestige after the nubuwwa of the Prophet Muhammad. Under the influence of this situation, al-Fārābī and Avicenna defined those who accepted the revelation conveyed by the First Cause through the mediation of the Active Intellect as nabis rather than as poets or oracles. According to al-Fārābī and Avicenna, those who accept revelation cannot be characterized as poets, as poets' composition of poetry from imaginative premises makes what they say unreliable. On the other hand, those to whom revelation reaches cannot be called oracles, as oracles perform divination on the basis of individual effort by fulfilling certain mediational procedures or by strengthening their imagination through various practices.

62 al-Fārābī, *al-Madīna*, 178; Ibn Sinā, "Adhaviyye fi'l-me'ad", *Felsefe ve Ölüm Ötesi*, trans. Mahmut Kaya, 3rd ed. (İstanbul: Klasik, 2018), 16.

The fact that ancient Greek philosophers had brought the concept of messengers, who they defined as oracles because they conveyed what was received from metaphysical substances to people who desired to learn about the past, present, and future, to the agenda of divination had a philosophical impact on the shaping of al-Fārābī's and Avicenna's thoughts. Both philosophers dealt with the concept of nabī in connection with the issue of nubuwwa, positioning nabīs as mediators who both accept the influence of the Active Intellect and celestial bodies as well as convey the news of the unknown to the people. However, the meaning al-Fārābī and Avicenna gave to nabī and the meaning ancient Greek philosophers gave to seer (mantis) contain many differences. Al-Fārābī did not hold to Plato's or Plutarch's approach of valuing oracles who perform both natural and artificial divination or considering oracles to be superior to other human beings. Although al-Fārābī mentioned natural divination in *al-Madīna*, he made no mention of oracles who perform this type of divination. In *al-Fusūl*, he criticized oracles who perform artificial types of divination for their limited knowledge.

Meanwhile, Aristotle approached divination skeptically in his works and criticized oracles for being talkative and melancholic and for repeating the same ideas. However, Aristotle's approach in his criticism of divination and the position toward oracles was not fundamentally the same as al-Fārābī's and Avicenna's points of criticism on this issue. Aristotle considered both the communication between God and human beings as well as the mediational role of oracles in this communication to be matters of conjecture and public discussion. Al-Fārābī and Avicenna criticized divination and oracles and adopted an approach centered on nubuwwa and the nabī. Both philosophers accepted the flow of revelation as starting from the First Cause, continuing with the Active Intellect, and ending in the nabī. According to al-Fārābī and Avicenna, nabīs provide news about the unknown, give good news, and warn people. Al-Fārābī and Avicenna criticized oracles for their limited knowledge and influence over inexperienced youth. Oracles inform people who request divination about unknown events. However, the support of temperament, which is one of the effective elements in transforming what is reflected in the oracle's imagination into an appropriate sensible form, is not at the desired level in oracles. Only in a prophet does the act of imitation of the imagination function at the most perfect level and the connection between one's soul powers and temperament work properly. The nabī conveys religious laws to the people in such a way that they have no difficulty comprehending them, thanks to the imitation of the revelatory forms conveyed to the nabī through the appropriate sensible form by the nabī's imagination.

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