

The Biography of Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī

[Kitāb al-aghānī, Vol. v – 1964 rpt. of Dār al-Kutub Edition, pp. 154–258]

Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī's Genealogy and Various Anecdotes about Him

§ *The following is part of what has been transmitted to us about Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī by Yaḥyā ibn 'Alī ibn Yaḥyā al-Munajjim,¹ from Ḥammād, who heard it from his own father, Iṣḥāq – and also what 'Abd Allāh ibn al-Rabī' transmitted to me from Waswāsa (that is, Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl, the great-grandson of Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī), from his father and his grandfather, as well as from his uncle Ḥammād, from his father:*

He was Ibrāhīm, son of Maymūn – or Māhān – son of Bahman, son of Nasak. The reason he came to use the name Maymūn in his genealogy is this: He once wrote to a friend of his and signed the letter: “From Ibrāhīm, son of Māhān.” But a Kufan fellow said to him: “Aren't you ashamed of this name?” “But that's my father's name,” Ibrāhīm protested. “Change it,” the fellow said. “How can I?” he asked. The young man grabbed the letter, rubbed out Māhān, and wrote Maymūn instead. After that he was known as Ibrāhīm, son of Maymūn.²

1 Yaḥyā ibn 'Alī ibn Yaḥyā al-Munajjim (855–912) was the author of several works on music, as well as being a major intellectual figure of his day. He was the fourth generation of his family to serve as courtiers and officials to the 'Abbasid caliphs. The family name derived from Yaḥyā's great-grandfather, Abū Maṣṣūr, who served as court astrologer (Ar. *munajjim*) to the second Abbasid caliph, al-Manṣūr (r. 754–775). His father was a great devotee of music and studied with Iṣḥāq, son of Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī. Yaḥyā al-Munajjim authored one of the most important treatises on music theory to survive into the present and it is through his writings that the musical indications used by al-Iṣbahānī in *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, originally created by Iṣḥāq al-Mawṣilī, have been deciphered by modern scholars. See Owen Wright, “Ibn al-Munajjim and the early Arabian Modes.” *The Galpin Society Journal*, Vol. 19 (April 1966): 27–48.

2 Māhān is a Persian name and Maymūn is Arabic. The 'shame' involved here is that his father's Persian name indicates that he had not converted to Islam even though he lived decades after the Islamic conquest of Iran in 651. By changing his father's name to an Arabic one, Ibrāhīm is effectively erasing part of his family's history and substituting a more politically favorable one, a continuation of the process that his father had begun by forging a 'client' [*mawlā*] relationship with an Arab clan and placing him in a 'milk brother' relationship with a scion of that tribe, as described further on, see Cooperson, “Arabs' and 'Iranians!”

§ *Ishāq reported about his father:*

Ours was a noble Persian family originally from the province of Fars.³ My grandfather Maymūn fled the oppression of an Umayyad official there and settled in the city of Kufa with the ‘Abd Allāh ibn Dārim clan. My father, Ibrāhīm, and the son of Naḍla ibn Nu‘aym were foster brothers.⁴ Ibrāhīm’s mother was the daughter of one of the landowners who fled Persia at the same time as his father, Maymūn, and they all settled together in Kufa with the ‘Abd Allāh ibn Dārim clan. Māhān married her in Kufa and she gave birth to Ibrāhīm. Māhān later died during an epidemic when Ibrāhīm was still a child.⁵ Ibrāhīm was born in the year 125 [= 742/43 CE] in Kufa, and died in Baghdad in the year 188 [803/04] at the age of 63.

§ *In his account, Aḥmad ibn Aḥmad ibn Ismā‘īl Waswāsa reported:*

Māhān died when Ibrāhīm was still a child, so the family of Khuzayma ibn Khāzim took charge of him.⁶

§ *In his account, Yaḥyā ibn ‘Alī reported:*

Ibrāhīm was two or three years old when his father died. His father also left behind two other older sons from a different mother, so Ibrāhīm lived with his mother and his maternal uncles until he reached adulthood. He went to Qur’an school with Khuzayma ibn Khāzim, which is why he was closely connected to the tribe of Tamīm.⁷ The caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd once asked him:

3 Located in the south-central region of modern Iran.

4 The Arabic term *raḍā’* implies that they were ‘milk brothers,’ that is, having suckled from the same woman as infants. The Qur’an includes several references to this practice, see for example: Q 2:233, “If ye decide on a foster-mother for your offspring, there is no blame on you.” Marriage between any children suckled by the same woman was forbidden (Q 4:23), and a ‘milk brother’ was owed nearly the same loyalty as a brother by blood.

5 *Ar. fi l-ṭā‘ūn al-jārif*: The plague referred to in historical works as the *Jārif* plague struck the city of Basra in the year 69 [688–89 CE], so this is probably a reference instead to a plague that struck the city of Kufa, where Ibrāhīm was born, in the year 125 [742–43 CE].

6 Khuzayma ibn Khāzim ibn Khuzayma al-Tamīmī (d. 818/19), was a powerful figure in the early ‘Abbasid caliphate, son of a distinguished military commander. He played a significant role in securing the throne for Hārūn al-Rashīd by supporting his claim over that of the infant son of Hārūn’s older brother, Mūsā al-Hādī. Both al-Hādī and Hārūn were patrons of Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī.

7 *Ar. walā’*: in the early Islamic centuries *walā’* was a bond between a non-Arab convert to Islam and an Arab clan or tribe that involved loyalty and even fealty; the term *mawlā* (a person in such a relationship) is often translated as ‘client.’

“What’s this close relationship you have with the Tamīm tribe?” Ibrāhīm told him the story, saying: “They raised me, Sire, and they raised me well. I grew up among them and had a foster relationship with them, which is why I am loyal to them.”⁸ Whereupon al-Rashīd retorted: “Careful! In my opinion, your loyalty is owed to me alone!” “I swear by God, Sire, this is my story,” Ibrāhīm replied.

§ *Yahyā ibn ‘Alī reported in his account:*

The reason they called him al-Mawṣilī [‘the man from Mosul’] is that when he grew up to be a young man, he befriended some local ‘swells,’ and in their company he developed a passion for singing and wanted to study it. But his uncles put pressure on him to give it up and punished him severely. So he fled to Mosul and stayed there for about a year. When he returned to Kufa, his former companions jokingly called out: “Welcome to the fellow from Mosul!” and he became known as al-Mawṣilī.⁹

§ *However, Aḥmad’s account differs:*

The reason he wanted to learn to sing was that he went to Mosul and befriended a group of ne’er-do-wells there.¹⁰ They used to work the roads and he would tag along. Once they had gathered together everything they had snagged, they would carouse and drink and sing together. He learned a bit of singing from them and started singing himself, but as it turned out, he was the best and most talented singer among them. When he realized this, he developed a real passion for singing, wanted to study it, and traveled far and wide to do so.¹¹

8 Lit. “that is why they took us on as clients” [*fa-tawallawnā bi-hādhā l-sabab*].

9 Arabs of the Arabian Peninsula used names that indicated their clan and/or tribal affiliation. Names derived from geographical origins, known as a *nisba* in Arabic, were usually generated from the place of one’s birth or the regional origin of one’s family, for example, the name of the author of this work, al-Iṣbahānī (from the city of Isfahan). Such geographic names were common among Arabizing converts who did not possess tribal names. Since Ibrāhīm was not born in Mosul, nor was his family from there, his *nisba* of al-Mawṣilī was unusual and generated conflicting accounts as to why he was known as ‘the man from Mosul.’

10 Ar. *ṣa’ālik*: vagabonds, petty thieves, possibly even brigands.

11 A different account of how Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī developed a passion for singing is offered in the biography of Jamīla, transmitted by Ibrāhīm’s older sister to her nephew, Iṣḥāq: “The reason your father was so persistent in learning to sing was a song by Jamīla that he heard in the home of Yūnus ibn Muḥammad the Secretary ...” KA VIII: 220 ff.

§ *Ibn Khurradādhbih reported the following – though he had little evidence for what he writes and includes in his books:*¹²

The reason he was associated with Mosul is that when he was in his cups, he would often sing this ditty in his drunken state:

I traveled the Mosul road,
bearing jugs of wine.
Whoever drinks with royalty,
toward drunkenness inclines!

I have only heard this story from Ibn Khurradādhbih, however, and I mention it here, despite its unreliability, because it is well-known and people believe it is the true account of the connection between Ibrāhīm's name and Mosul. I cite it here to dispel it as false.

§ *Al-Ḥusayn ibn Yaḥyā al-Mirdāsī and Ibn Abī al-Azhar*¹³ *informed me, citing Hammād ibn Iṣḥāq, citing his father, who said:*

My father Ibrāhīm was sent to Qur'an school, but didn't learn a thing; he was beaten and locked up at home, but it did no good. So he fled to Mosul where he learned to sing. He then traveled on to Rayy and studied singing there as well, and became very proficient. In Rayy he married his first wife Dōshār, whose name means 'Two Lions'.¹⁴ He lived there for a quite a while and studied both Persian and Arabic singing. In Rayy, he also married Shāhak, the mother of Iṣḥāq and the rest of his children.¹⁵

12 Ibn Khurradādhbih (c. 820–912), known primarily for his geographical compendium *Kitāb al-Masālik wa-l-Mamālik* [The Book of Roads and Kingdoms], also composed a significant work on music *Kitāb al-lahw wa-l-malāhī* [The Book of Entertainments and Musical Instruments]. Al-Ṣbahānī, however, repeatedly expresses his disdain for Ibn Khurradādhbih's scholarship and rejects many of his statements as false.

13 Muḥammad ibn Mazyad ibn Abī al-Azhar (d. 937) was a literary figure, secretary to the famous grammarian al-Mubarrad (d. 898/99), and a prolific transmitter of literary and historical information.

14 The spelling Dōshār is Arabized, derived from Persian *dō shēr*.

15 Dōshār gave birth to one daughter, but no sons, which may explain Ibrāhīm's second marriage to Shāhak. The following information is from the biography of Iṣḥāq, Ibrāhīm's son: "Iṣḥāq's mother was a woman from Rayy called Shāhak. Some say that his mother was Dōshār, who used to sing while accompanying herself on the tambourine [*daff*], whom Ibrāhīm fell in love with and married, but this is false. Dōshār only gave birth to a daughter. Iṣḥāq and all of Ibrāhīm's other children were from Shāhak." KA V: 271.

Ishāq continued:

Ibrāhīm composed the following verses about his wife Dōshār, and composed a melody for them in the *hazaj* rhythm:

Dōshār, my Lady,
the goal of my desire,
My joy above all,
give me rest from passion's fire!

§ *Ishāq said – My father told me:*

The first time that I was ever paid for singing was when I was living in Rayy. I used to socialize with the people of Rayy as an equal, and didn't take any payment when I sang. I lived off what remained of the money I had brought with me from Mosul. One day a servant, whom the caliph Abū Ja'far al-Manṣūr¹⁶ had sent to one of his governors with a letter, happened to pass by. He heard me performing in the home of a man in Rayy, admired my singing, and gave me a sable cloak of some value. He went on to deliver the letter and returned with seven thousand silver dirhams and a large amount of clothing the governor had given him. He came to the house where I was living and stayed with me as my guest for three days. He gave me half of the clothing he had received as well as two thousand dirhams and that was the first thing I ever earned from singing. "By God," I said to myself, "I won't spend this money on anything other than mastering the craft that brought it to me." I was told about a man in the town of al-Ubulla¹⁷ named Juwānuwayh¹⁸ who was supposed to be a skilled singer, so I went to him and ending up befriending some of the young men of al-Ubulla. I learned a bit from them and sang to them in turn, and they loved my singing.

§ *Al-Ḥusayn ibn Yaḥyā told me, citing Ḥammād, citing his father, citing his grandfather, who said:*

When I first went to Juwānuwayh he wasn't at home, so I waited until he returned. When he saw me, he was at first reserved because he was a Zoroastrian. But I told him that I was a singer and that was the reason I had come to him, and eventually he welcomed me and made room for me in his home. He had his sister take care of me, and she brought me everything I needed. That evening

16 Second caliph of the 'Abbasid dynasty, r. 754–775.

17 Located on the Tigris River in southern Iraq, near the city of Basra.

18 Arabized spelling, derived from Persian *javān* – *ōya* 'little young man.'

he returned home with a group of Persian singers, so I went down and joined them. Wine had been prepared and fruit and aromatic plants had been laid out. We all took our places and they began to play and sing, but I didn't learn anything useful from them. When it was my turn, I played and sang, and afterwards all of them stood up, came over to me, and kissed me on the head, saying: "You were making fun of us! It's you who should be teaching us, not the other way around!"

I stayed with them for a few days, until word of my presence reached Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān ibn 'Alī.¹⁹ He sent a message asking me to come to him, and then ordered me to accompany him as a member of his entourage. "Sir," I replied, "I am not interested in earning money from singing. I simply enjoy it, which is why I learned to sing. I'd rather return to my home in Kufa." But my objections were to no avail, and he conscripted me into his retinue. He asked me where I was from, and I told him Mosul, and it stuck – ever since, I have been known as 'al-Mawṣilī.'

I remained favored and honored in his household until a servant of the caliph al-Mahdī²⁰ arrived. When he noticed me there in Muḥammad's household, the servant said to him: "The Commander of the Faithful needs this fellow more than you do." But Muḥammad dissuaded the servant from taking me with him. When the messenger returned to al-Mahdī, however, the caliph asked him what he had seen on his travels and at his destination. He gave his account and when he got to the point in his journey where he met me, he described me to him. Al-Mahdī ordered him to return to Muḥammad and have me sent to him, which he did. The servant arrived with the caliph's orders and Muḥammad dutifully sent me off to al-Mahdī, where I enjoyed the caliph's good graces and soon became his favorite.

§ *However, Waswāsa said in his account, citing Ishāq, who said – My father told me:*

The first Hashemite I attended was 'Alī ibn Sulaymān ibn 'Alī, the brother of Ja'far and Muḥammad²¹ – he surpassed his siblings in elegance, the love of pleasure, and generosity. Juwānuwayh told him about me and introduced

19 A minor member of the royal 'Abbasid-Hāshimī family.

20 Third 'Abbasid caliph, r. 775–785.

21 Members of a branch of the 'Abbasid-Hāshimī family, related to the first two Abbasid caliphs, al-Saffāh (r. 750–754) and al-Manṣūr (r. 754–775). This account conflicts with the preceding passage where Ibrāhīm is said to have been a member of the household of Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān, rather than that of his brother 'Alī ibn Sulaymān, and to have been 'commandeered' by the caliph al-Mahdī from Muḥammad rather than from 'Alī.

me to him, and he grew very fond of me. The first caliph who heard me sing was al-Mahdī. He found out about me and commandeered me from ‘Alī ibn Sulaymān. The caliph had not previously heard any singers except for Fulayḥ ibn Abī al-‘Awrā’²² and Siyyāt,²³ who had been introduced to him by al-Faḍl ibn al-Rabī’.²⁴

§ *Iṣḥāq said – My father told me:*

The caliph al-Mahdī did not drink and he wanted me to abstain from drinking whenever I was accompanying him as well, but I refused. I used to absent myself for a few days at a time, and when I returned I was often tipsy. My behavior angered him, so he had me beaten and imprisoned, and it was there in prison that I learned to read and write. Then one day he summoned me and reproached me for drinking in other people’s houses and wasting my time with them. “Sire,” I said, “I learned the craft of music for my own enjoyment and out of love of the companionship of my friends. If I were able to abandon drinking along with all the other things I do, I would do so, for the sake of God most Glorious and Mighty!” He became very angry and said, “Don’t ever go near [my sons] Mūsā and Hārūn, for by God, if you do, I’ll have you seized and dealt with severely!” “Understood,” I replied. Later he found out that I had indeed spent time with them and got drunk with them, for the two of them were behaving recklessly under the influence of the wine. He ordered that I be given 300 strokes of the lash and had me fettered and thrown in prison.

§ *However, Aḥmad ibn Ismā‘īl said in his account – my uncle Iṣḥāq said:*

My father, Ibrāhīm, told me that he was with Mūsā and Hārūn on an excursion along with a servant named Abān: This servant informed on us to al-Mahdī and told him what we’d been up to. The caliph summoned me and asked me about this, but I denied it. Then he ordered that I be punished – I was stripped and given 360 strokes of the lash, and I cried out to al-Mahdī while

22 Fulayḥ ibn Abī al-‘Awrā’ (late 8th/early 9th centuries) – singer who performed before the caliph al-Mahdī and later Hārūn al-Rashīd, best known as one of the three singers, along with Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī and Ibn Jāmi’, who were asked to make a list of the hundred best songs for the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd.

23 ‘Abd Allāh ibn Wahb (c. 739–785), known as Siyyāt – singer who performed before the caliphs al-Mahdī and his son, Mūsā al-Hādī.

24 Al-Faḍl ibn al-Rabī’ was the son of al-Rabī’ ibn Yūnus, who served as vizier under al-Mahdī and his father, the caliph al-Manṣūr (r. 754–775 CE). He himself served as vizier to al-Mahdī’s grandson, al-Amīn (r. 809–13).

Sallām was beating me, “My crime is not a capital offense – you can’t beat me to death for this! – out of loyalty to your sons I kept their secret – otherwise I’d be as despicable as that tell-tale slave of yours, Aban!” When I said that, he struck me with his sword in its scabbard and fractured my skull.²⁵ I fell to the ground unconscious for a while. When I opened my eyes and saw the eyes of al-Mahdī, I could tell they were the eyes of someone who regrets what he has done. He said to ‘Abd Allāh ibn Mālik: “Take him to your house.”

Ibrāhīm continued:

But before he did so, ‘Abd Allāh ibn Mālik took the whip from the hand of Sallām al-Abrash and beat me again. That beating at that hands of ‘Abd Allāh was a blessing compared to the beating that Sallām had given me. Then ‘Abd Allāh ibn Mālik took me to his house while I was still dizzy and seeing stars from the searing pain of the whip. He ordered that I be taken to something like a tomb and placed in it. Then ‘Abd Allāh called for a ram and had it slaughtered and skinned. I was wrapped in the skin so that the pain of the beating would abate. He turned me over to a servant of his named Abū ‘Uthmān Sa’īd al-Turkī who placed me in that tomb, and charged a servant-girl of his named Jashsha with taking care of me. I was in sheer agony due to the water seeping into that tomb and the vermin, but there were also a privy there where I found some relief.²⁶ I told Jashsha: “Go ask for a baked brick with coal and frankincense on it to rid me of these bugs,” and she brought it to me. When I fumigated the tomb, everything grew dark from the smoke, and my soul almost departed due to my distress. But I was able to find some relief from my suffering where the water was trickling in – I held my nose close to it until the smoke lessened, and then, just when I thought that I was to be saved from this terrible situation, two snakes slithered out from a crack in the tomb and circled round me hissing fiercely! I was just about to grab one in my right hand and the other in my left – it was a do or die moment! – when I was inexplicably delivered from them, and they slithered back into the hole from which they had emerged.

I remained in that tomb quite a while until finally I was released. I sent a message to Abū ‘Uthmān the servant and I asked him to sell me Jashsha so that I might compensate her for everything she had done for me, and he did. I later married her to my chamberlain, and she remains a member of our household.

²⁵ It is unclear whether Sallām or the caliph himself struck him with the sword scabbard.

²⁶ Ar. *khalā’*: see footnote 5, KA v: 161.

Ishāq added:

She stayed with us until she died, and I married a daughter of hers, called Jum‘a, to a servant of mine in the year 234 [848/49].

Ibrāhīm continued:

I composed these verses when I was in prison:

The night grows long as I stare at the stars,
 and rub the heavy fetters on my legs.
 In the dwelling of disgrace, the worst of abodes,
 I’m unjustly humiliated, but forbear with grace.
 Friends abounded when I lived in luxury,
 but now that I’m in prison, I find they are few.
 My affliction has grown long, my friends have grown weary,
 My intimate companions are no longer true.

Ibrāhīm continued:

Then al-Mahdī had me released and made me swear to divorce my wife and emancipate my slaves, and by every ironclad oath imaginable – without a single loophole – that I would never again visit his sons Mūsā and Hārūn and never again sing for them, whereupon he freed me.

Ibrāhīm added:

While I was in prison, I composed a melody to some verses by the poet Abū l-‘Atāhiya that he had composed when al-Mahdī had imprisoned him because of ‘Utba:²⁷

Woe is my heart now that anxieties are my companions,
 woe are my legs from the ulcerous sores caused by these chains.
 Woe is my soul, woe, and then again woe!
 will I never be freed from these bonds of rope?
 Woe are my eyes, my weeping has blinded them,
 balm from the kohl jars offers no cure.
 Leave me alone to console myself, for my eyes
 are captives of cataracts, in a tomb in the earth.
 Leave me alone to console myself with drink, for I see
 that the rest of my life will not last long.

²⁷ Abū l-‘Atāhiya (748–826 or 828), was a major poet of the early ‘Abbasid era. He is said to have first traveled to the capital city of Baghdad with Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī, where he did not achieve immediate success. Eventually attending the court of al-Mahdī, he angered the caliph by composing indiscreet love poems to one of his concubines, ‘Utba, which eventually landed him in prison. Ibrāhīm is therefore quoting the verses of a close friend who had suffered a similar fate in al-Mahdī’s dungeon.

The poetry is by Abū l-ʿAtāhiya, though Ḥammād said that it was by his grandfather, Ibrāhīm; the music is by Ibrāhīm in the ‘ramal’ rhythm, with the middle finger for the first three verses, and in the ‘first heavy’ rhythm with the middle finger for the final two.

§ *Ḥammād said:*

When Mūsā al-Hādī became caliph,²⁸ my grandfather hid from him and did not appear at court, because of the oaths that al-Mahdī had made him swear. Our residences were besieged at all hours and our family was terrified by the caliph’s requests for him, until they finally found him and dragged him off to the caliph. When the caliph caught sight of him, Ibrāhīm said, [thinking that he would be forced to carry out his oath to divorce his wife], “My lord, by coming to you I have been separated from the mother of my sons, and she is the dearest to me of all God’s creation.” Then he sang a melodic setting to his own poetry:

O son of the best of kings, do not make me
 a target for enemies to aim at;
 I have, for the love of you, abandoned my family,
 and have exposed my life to the threat of annihilation.
 For love of you, I have forsaken my life,
 I have estranged myself from family and wealth

The poetry and the music are by Ibrāhīm in the ‘light ramal’ rhythm with the middle finger.

Ishāq continued:

Then, by God, al-Hādī gave him money and property – suffice it to say that Ibrāhīm received from him that day 150,000 dinars, and if al-Hādī had lived, we would have built the walls of our houses with gold and silver.

§ *Ḥammād said – my father, Ishāq, said to me:*

I once examined your grandfather Ibrāhīm’s wealth including his cash on hand, revenue, and the income from the singing-girls he sold, and I found that it totaled 24,000,000 dirhams. And that was without counting his regular income from the caliph, which was 10,000 dirhams every month, and also

²⁸ In August 785.

excluding the revenues from his estates and the trivial gifts that he did not keep track of. Yet, by God, I never saw anyone more generous than he was. He had food prepared at all hours. I [Ḥammād] asked my father, Ishāq: “How was he able to do that?” My father replied that my grandfather Ibrāhīm had three ewes ready every day – one cut up simmering in the stew pots, another skinned and hanging in storage, and another still alive. If a group of guests came to him, they ate what was in the stew pots, and when that was eaten up, the kitchen staff would cut up the ewe that was hanging and distribute it among the stew pots, the live one would be slaughtered and hung up, and another one would be brought in and kept alive in the kitchen. His budget for food, scents,²⁹ and everything connected to cooking came to 30,000 dirhams every month, not counting what he would spend on other things, and not counting his clothing. At one point we had 80 singing-girls entrusted into our custody by his friends, and he spent on every single one of them for food, clothing, and perfumes as much as he did for the most prized of his own singing-girls. When a singing-girl was returned to her master, he gave her presents of money and clothing. Yet when he died, he had only 3,000 dinars on hand and had debts of 700 dinars that had to be settled against that.

§ *Muḥammad ibn Khalaf Wakī*,³⁰ *Yaḥyā ibn ‘Ali ibn Yaḥyā, and Ibn al-Marzubān*³¹ all told me, citing Ḥammād, son of Ishāq, who said:

My father used to say that the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd³² once bought a singing-girl from my grandfather for 36,000 dinars, but she only spent a single night with him. Then he sent for al-Faḍl ibn al-Rabiʿ and said: “We bought this singing-girl from Ibrāhīm, thinking she would suit us, but she was not quite what I expected, and therefore I did not approach her [i.e. have sex with her], so now the price is weighing on me. Since you two are such close friends, go to him and ask him to lower her price by 6,000 dinars.”

Ḥammād continued:

Al-Faḍl went to Ibrahim’s home and asked permission to enter, but my grandfather instead came out to meet him. Then al-Faḍl said: “Let’s drop this

29 Ar. *ṭib*: perfumes and scents used for washing hands and fumigation, see Charles Perry, *Scents and Flavors: A Syrian Cookbook* (NY: New York University Press, 2017): 5–16.

30 Muḥammad ibn Khalaf Wakī al-Ḍabbī (d. 918), a Baghdadi scholar, best known for one of his few surviving works, a history of judges, *Akhbār al-Quḍāt* [Anecdotes about Judges].

31 Muḥammad ibn Khalaf ibn al-Marzubān (d. 921) was a philologist and historian, and a prolific translator of works from Persian into Arabic.

32 Hārūn al-Rashīd, the second son of the caliph al-Mahdī, ruled after the death of his brother, al-Hādī in 786 until his own death in 809.

unnecessary formality since there is no reason for it between the two of us – allow me to speak frankly. I'm not easily fooled, so I'll give it to you straight." Then he told him the whole story. Ibrāhīm replied, "So al-Rashīd is testing how much pull you have with me?" "That is exactly what he's up to!" he replied. "May all of my wealth be given away as alms for the poor if I don't double what he asked of you," Ibrāhīm quipped. "I hereby lower the price by 12,000 gold dinars!" Al-Faḍl returned to al-Rashīd with this news, but the caliph responded, "Blast it, go ahead and pay him the full amount. I've never seen a more generous subject than he is!"

My father, Ishāq, said:

I went to your grandfather and asked: "What was the purpose of lowering the price, and by such a large amount?" Your grandfather paid me no heed and said: "You're being foolish. I, on the other hand, understand him better than anyone. If I had taken the full amount, I would only have obtained it by angering the caliph. He would have resented it and my status in his eyes would have been lowered. Instead, I was generous with him and with al-Faḍl, and he was pleased, so my status with him has now been raised and strengthened. I bought the singing-girl for 40,000 dirhams and I received 24,000 dinars for her." When the money was brought to him without any reduction [i.e. the full 36,000 dinars], he called to me and said, "What do you think now, Ishāq? Who is wiser, me or you?"³³ "Indeed, by my life, you are!" I replied.³⁴

§ *Wakī told me that Ḥammād said to him – my father, Ishāq, once told me:*

Al-Faḍl ibn Yaḥyā al-Barmakī, son of the former vizier, once chanced upon my father as he was leaving the home of al-Faḍl ibn al-Rabīʿ, for the two of them were neighbors in the Shammāsiyya quarter.³⁵ Al-Barmakī called out to him, "Where are you coming from, Abū Ishāq? From the home of al-Faḍl ibn al-Rabīʿ?" "Yes," I said, without any apologies. "Leaving the home of al-Faḍl ibn al-Rabīʿ and meeting al-Faḍl ibn Yaḥyā!" he replied, "I can imagine doing one or the other, but not both!" But I replied, "By God, if I am not a big enough person to be able to be a loyal friend to both of you, together or separately, then I'm

33 The exchange rate between gold dinars and silver dirhams fluctuated considerably, so it is difficult to make an accurate comparison between the original price of 40,000 dirhams and the final payment of 36,000 dinars. It is clear, however, that Ibrāhīm earned a handsome profit.

34 Lit. "May God make me your ransom/sacrifice" [*jaʿalani Allāh fidāʾaka*], a common expression indicating that one would be willing to sacrifice one's own life to save the other's.

35 Al-Faḍl ibn Rabīʿ and al-Faḍl ibn Yaḥyā al-Barmakī were from powerful rival families who held a variety of high offices under the ʿAbbasids, including postings as governors, chamberlains, and viziers.

not worth much at all. Truly, I would not abandon either of you for the other. Whoever accepts me on that basis, accepts me, and whoever does not, well, let him do as he chooses!" "You're not to be blamed as far as I'm concerned," al-Faḍl ibn Yaḥyā replied, "It's just as you say, and I accept you as you are."

§ *Ismā'īl ibn Yūnus told me, citing 'Umar ibn Shabba,*³⁶ *citing Iṣḥāq, who said:*

My father told me that Hārūn al-Rashīd was angry with him once and had him shackled and thrown in prison in Raqqa. Then al-Rashīd sat down to drink one day in a sitting-room that had been decorated and ornamented for him, and he said to 'Isā ibn Ja'far: "Is there anything amiss in our gathering?" He replied: "Yes, Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī is not here!" So al-Rashīd ordered that I be brought to him and I was hauled out in shackles. I was unshackled there in front of him and he ordered his servants to bring me a lute, and said: "Sing for me, Ibrāhīm!" So I sang the following song to him:

The Valley of Na'mān emanates musk whenever
Zaynab walks through it among her modest maidens.

Al-Rashīd asked him to repeat it, and he drank and was delighted. Then he said: "You have made my day joyful, so I will make you joyful with gifts. I bestow upon you the two estates of al-Hanī' and al-Marī'." After that I left and the following morning I was given 200,000 dirhams in exchange for them.³⁷

The Background of this Song³⁸

The Valley of Na'mān emanates musk whenever
Zaynab walks through it among her modest maidens.
Scented in the afternoon, they pass by Fakhkh,³⁹ performing the Lesser
Pilgrimage,⁴⁰

36 'Umar ibn Shabba (789–878), a renowned scholar particularly known as an authoritative transmitter of historical and literary information, quoted frequently by al-Iṣbahānī in *KA*.

37 That is, he was given cash rather than the actual properties.

38 Al-Iṣbahānī includes under the term used here, *nisha*, the origin and attribution of the lyrics, that is, who composed the poem from which the song lyrics have been drawn, as well as the name of the composer of the melody, and information about the melodic mode and rhythm of the song. He often also offers information about other songs that share the same melody or the same lyrics by other singer-composers.

39 Fakhkh, a place three miles distant from Mecca.

40 The Lesser Pilgrimage (Ar. *'umra*) can be performed at any time of year, while the full or greater pilgrimage (Ar. *ḥajj*) can only be performed during the annual month of pilgrimage. The verb *labbā* here refers to saying the phrase *labbayka Allāhumma labbayka* ("Here I am, Lord, at your service") said by pilgrims during the pilgrimage.

saying, “Here we are, at your service!” to the All-Merciful.
 They cover even the tips of their fingers out of piety,
 yet even as they pray to God, their glances kill.
 When she saw the retinue of al-Numayrī, she turned away,
 for they were careful to avoid him.

The poetry is by al-Numayrī al-Thaqafī,⁴¹ and the music by Ibn Surayj⁴² in the ‘second heavy’ rhythm, on the fourth finger as tonic by way of the middle finger, according to Iṣḥāq, and Yaḥyā al-Makkī,⁴³ and ‘Amr ibn Bāna.⁴⁴ But Ḥabash⁴⁵ reported that there is another melody to it by ‘Azza al-Maylā⁴⁶ in the ‘first heavy’ rhythm.

§ *Muḥammad ibn Mazyad and Aḥmad ibn Ja‘far Jaḥẓa⁴⁷ told me that Ḥammād ibn Iṣḥāq had said to them – and al-Ṣūlī⁴⁸ also reported this to me from ‘Awn ibn Muḥammad – all of them transmitting from Iṣḥāq, citing his father, who said:*

I saw Yaḥyā ibn Khālīd⁴⁹ coming out of his palace which was near the Shammāsiyya Gate, heading towards his palace at the Baradān Gate, reciting the following verse:

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- 41 Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Numayr, known primarily for his love poetry, was one of the poets of the Umayyad period, born and raised in al-Ṭā‘if.
- 42 Ibn Surayj (fl. late 7th century) was a leading singer under the Umayyad dynasty (661–750); al-Iṣbahānī quotes Iṣḥāq al-Mawṣilī as saying: “The origin of [Arabic] singing lies in four individuals, two from Mecca and two from Medina: the two Meccans were Ibn Surayj and Ibn Muḥriz and the two Medinans were Ma‘bad and Mālik.” KA I: 250.
- 43 Yaḥyā ibn Marzūq al-Makkī (c. 728–c. 833) – a leading singer under the early ‘Abbasid caliphs and the author of a book of songs, *Kitāb fi l-aghānī*, which, revised by his son Aḥmad ibn Yaḥyā al-Makkī (d. 864), is said to have included 3,000 songs (Farmer *A History of Arabian Music*, p. 114).
- 44 ‘Amr ibn Bāna (d. 891), a singer and author of two songbooks (Farmer, *History*, pp. 157–58).
- 45 Ḥabash (fl. 9th c), famous primarily as a collector of songs, frequently cited by al-Iṣbahānī.
- 46 ‘Azza al-Maylā’ (fl. late 7th c.) was a famous female singer of the old Arabian school who lived and performed in Medina.
- 47 Aḥmad ibn Ja‘far Jaḥẓa (c. 839–936), a prominent instrumentalist and player of the *ṭunbūr* (long-necked lute); he authored a work titled *Kitāb al-ṭunbūrīyyīn* [The Lives of the Ṭunbūr-Players] that has not survived, and was one of al-Iṣbahānī’s main informants.
- 48 Abū Bakr Muḥammad al-Ṣūlī (c. 874–c. 946), historian, prominent literary figure, courtier and legendary chess-player; in the field of literature his greatest contribution was the compilation and publication of the *dīwāns* (complete works) of a number of the most famous ‘Abbasid-era poets. He studied with Yaḥyā ibn ‘Alī ibn Yaḥyā al-Munajjim whose father studied music with Iṣḥāq ibn Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī, hence his authority as a transmitter of information about the latter’s life.
- 49 Yaḥyā ibn Khālīd (d. 805), a member of the powerful Barmakī family who served as vizier under Hārūn al-Rashīd for seventeen years, but was imprisoned when the Barmakī fell from grace in 803 – he was beheaded in 805.

One love in the Tihāma and another in Najd,⁵⁰
the Tihāmis and the Najdis have put me to the test!

My father said:

I then added this verse to it:

I reside with this one, and remember when I was with that one,
and between the two of them, I have yet another budding love!

Ibrāhīm continued:

I composed a melody for this – *al-Ṣūlī said in his report that it was in the 'light heavy' rhythm* – then went to Yaḥyā ibn Khālid and sang it to him. He gave me 1,000 dinars and also the mount that he had been riding that day, along with its saddle and harness. I said to him, “May God bless you for this, Sir! You come to unsettled souls and calm them, and to spirits that are sickly and cure them.” So he ordered that I be given another thousand dinars for my elegant response.

Ibrāhīm continued:

Some time passed and I was out riding with Yaḥyā ibn Khālid, when we suddenly chanced upon al-‘Abbās ibn al-Aḥnaf⁵¹ who was annoyed with him about some piece of gossip he had heard. Yaḥyā dismounted and declaimed:

By God, sulking one, have you still not forgiven me?
Do you remember our good old times together, or have you forgotten them?

Al-‘Abbās replied: “Indeed I remember them, Abū al-Faḍl [= Yaḥyā ibn Khālid]”; and then I chimed in with another verse:

If I wanted anything other than what you want,
I’d pray for you to suffer as I have!

I composed music for it – *al-Ṣūlī said in his report that it was in the 'first heavy' rhythm* – and Ibrāhīm said: I sang it to Yaḥyā ibn Khālid with that melody. He ordered that I be given 2,000 dinars and laughed. I asked him, “Why are you laughing, sir? May you continue to laugh in happiness!” “I remember what

50 The Tihāma is the coastal plain along the Red Sea and the Najd is the central region of the Arabian Peninsula.

51 Al-‘Abbās ibn al-Aḥnaf (750–809) – a poet who enjoyed the particular favor of Hārūn al-Rashīd and composed almost exclusively love poems.

happened with the first song,” he replied, “and that along with the money you received a mount, along with its saddle and harness. You’ll not leave tonight without a similar reward.” I rose and I kissed his hand, and with that he ordered that I be given 2,000 more dinars. He said: “The last time you thanked me for my gift with words, so I added to it. But now you have thanked me with actions [i.e., by kissing my hand] and something more is required. Were I not at this time in difficulties, I would double it for you! But there will be other opportunities.”

§ *Jahḡa told me, citing Hibat Allāh ibn Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī, citing his father,*⁵² *who said:*

Once when the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd halted at Shibdāz on his way to Ṭūs, he sat and drank with Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī. Ibrāhīm was the first to sing for him and he began with this song. The poetry is his own:

I saw Religion and the World
dwelling together in Shibdāz,
In the person of a dedicated pilgrim
and a holy warrior.

It was in the ‘heavy first’ rhythm.

Al-Rashīd ordered that he be given a thousand dinars, but he did not like the poetry. “Ibrāhīm,” he said, “your music is better than your poetry.” Ibrāhīm was embarrassed and replied: “My Lord, my mind was occupied with composing the melody, so I said whatever popped into my head at the moment.” Then al-Rashīd laughed at what he had said and replied: “You got that right!”

§ *Yaḡyā ibn ‘Alī ibn Yaḡyā told us, citing Ḥammād, citing his father, Ishāq, who said:*

Your grandfather Ibrāhīm loved the nobles⁵³ and had many friends among them, so many that al-Rashīd often used to say, “I don’t know anyone who has more friends than Ibrāhīm!”

52 Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī (779–839), son of the caliph al-Mahdī, half-brother of Hārūn al-Rashīd; he was a singer and composer, and Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī’s main rival in court. He is portrayed by al-Iṣbahānī as an innovator who promulgated a new Persianized style of music, in contrast to al-Mawṣilī’s older ‘classical’ Arabian style.

53 Ar. *ashraf*, usually the descendants of the Prophet, but here more likely a reference to nobles in general.

§ *Ishāq said:*

“The four best singers I ever heard were my father [Ibrāhīm], Ḥakam al-Wādī,⁵⁴ Fulayḥ ibn Abī al-‘Awrā’, and Siyyāṭ.” I [Ḥammād] asked my father, Ishāq: “How accomplished were they?” He said: “They all composed music, which they did well, and they all performed the songs of others, which they also did well.” I then asked: “Which of them was the best?” He replied: “They were like a preacher or writer or poet who has mastered his craft, but who, when he tries to acquire another craft, never attains in the new one the level of mastery that he possessed in his original craft. Your grandfather, however, was like an eloquent man who, when he preached, he excelled; when he wrote, he wrote beautifully; and when he composed poetry, he did so beautifully. None of them was as versatile as he was.”

§ *Al-Ḥusayn ibn Yaḥyā told me, citing Ḥammād, citing his father – and ‘Alī ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz told me citing Ibn Khurradādhbih, and Ismā‘īl ibn Yūnus told me, citing ‘Umar ibn Shabba, all of them citing Ishāq, who said:*

People did not use to teach beautiful slave-girls to sing, but instead only taught light brown and dark-skinned slave-girls to sing. The first person to teach expensive slave-girls to sing was my father.⁵⁵ He achieved the highest level in the training of female singers, and thereby increased their value. Abū ‘Uyayna ibn Muḥammad ibn Abī ‘Uyayna al-Muhallabī⁵⁶ composed a poem about this because he had fallen in love with a singing-girl called Amān, but her owner kept raising her price. The owner used to send her to Ibrāhīm and his son, Ishāq, for training in music; the better she got at singing, the higher he raised the price. So Abū ‘Uyayna composed this poem:

I said when I saw that Amān’s owner
had excessively raised her price,

54 Ḥakam ibn Maymūn (fl. second half of 8th century), his father was the barber of the Umayyad caliph al-Walīd ibn ‘Abd al-Malik (r. 705–15) and he himself worked as a camel-eer before becoming a singer. He sang accompanying himself only on the tambourine (*kān yanqur al-daff wa-yughannī murtajilan*) and performed before al-Walīd and later for al-Rashīd. KA VI: 280–88.

55 Apparently female slaves who were beautiful [*ḥusnā*] did not need to be trained in singing because they could be sold as concubines, whereas those who were *ṣufr* (lit. ‘yellow’), an adjective often applied to Byzantine slaves, or *sūd* (lit. ‘black’), usually indicating African origins, were trained as singers to increase their value. Ibrāhīm is here said to have been the first to train *muthammanāt* (lit. ‘expensive’), i.e. beautiful slave girls, as singers.

56 Abū ‘Uyayna ibn Muḥammad al-Muhallabī (fl mid to late 8th c.) – poet known primarily for his love poetry, see Ameer Ghédira, “Deux poètes contemporains de Baššar, les frères Ibn Abī ‘Uyayna,” *Arabica* x, no. 2 (1963): 154–87.

“May God not grant al-Mawṣilī, Abū Ishāq,
 either reward or benefit from us.
 For he has come to us as an emissary, inspired by the Devil,
 making singing-girls more costly for us,
 With singing as beautiful as the intoxication of love,
 captivating the hearts and ears of all who hear them.”

About this matter Ibn al-Sayāba⁵⁷ composed the following song:

Song

In knowledge of this art of singing
 Ibrāhīm has no peer.
 Abū Ishāq’s life
 is the glory of our age!
 Abū Ishāq is the garden of the world,
 wherever he may be.
 For whenever Abū Ishāq sings,
 the strings of the lute respond.
 From him are harvested the fruits of pleasure
 and the aromatic plants of the garden.⁵⁸

Ibrāhīm composed two different melodies for this poem, one in the ‘light heavy’ rhythm with the ring finger, and one in the ‘light ramal’ rhythm with the middle finger, according to both ‘Amr and al-Hishāmī.

§ *My uncle told me, citing Aḥmad ibn Abī Ṭāhir,⁵⁹ citing Abū Dī‘āma:⁶⁰*

While visiting Abū l-‘Atāhiya, Salm al-Khāsir informed him that al-Rashīd had just imprisoned Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī in a dungeon. So Abū l-‘Atāhiya responded with the following poem:

Salm, O Salm, now you are unprotected,
 al-Mawṣilī is in prison and life has turned bitter.

57 Ibrāhīm Ibn al-Sayāba, a middling poet whose fame at court was due primarily to his close friendship with Ibrāhīm and Ishāq al-Mawṣilī, who frequently set his verses to music, according to al-Iṣbahānī, KA XII: 88.

58 A different version of this poem occurs later in this text, see p. 99.

59 Aḥmad ibn Abī Ṭāhir ibn Ṭayfūr (819/820–893), Baghdadi literary figure cited a number of times in KA, and most famous for his history of Baghdad and works on literary criticism.

60 ‘Alī ibn Yazīd Abū Dī‘āma, see KA IV: 8.

Since the champion of pleasures has gone to jail,
 no free man has been able to enjoy pleasures.
 Al-Mawṣilī has left behind all God's creatures,
 who now live trembling in horror.
 Entertainment and happiness have been imprisoned,
 and there is nothing left on Earth that can be relished or enjoyed.

§ *One of our companions, transmitting from Ibn al-Marzubān, from Aḥmad ibn Abī Ṭāhir, from Ibn Abī Fanan,⁶¹ recited these verses by Abū l-'Atāhiya, addressing Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī when he was imprisoned:*

What sorrow I feel for your sorrow, my friend,
 what woe I feel for you and what distress!
 How difficult it is for me that you cannot see me,
 and that neither I nor my messenger can see you,
 That you are in a place of pain and wretchedness,
 and there is no way to visit you.
 That I have no way to defend you,
 you were taken by surprise by this great calamity.

§ *Al-Ḥasan ibn 'Alī al-Khaffāf told me, citing Muḥammad ibn al-Qāsim al-Mahruwayh, citing 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Umar, citing Abū Tawba Ṣāliḥ ibn Muḥammad, citing the singer al-Qaṭrānī, citing Muḥammad ibn Jabr, whom al-Mahdī had raised, citing Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī who said:*

I went out one night from the Shammāsiyya quarter and passed by the home of Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī while he was sitting on his balcony and had just composed a melody to the verse:

There are many drinking companions whose tears for my sake
 pour down over their cheeks in streams

He was repeating it and playing the melody over and over again to smooth out the musical setting, and his singing-girls were accompanying him. I stood beneath the balcony until I had learned the song, and then went off home, and repeating it to myself till I had learned it perfectly. I woke up the next day and went in the morning to Shammāsiyya, where we both attended al-Rashīd.

61 Aḥmad ibn Abī Fanan Ṣāliḥ (fl. 9th c.), poet and secretary who achieved fame under the patronage of Muḥammad ibn 'Abdallāh Ṭāhir, governor of Baghdad (d. 867).

Ibrāhīm went first and sang this song to him right at the outset. When al-Rashīd heard it, he was delighted. He thought it quite beautiful and drank while listening to it. Then he asked him: “Who composed this, Ibrāhīm?” He replied: “I did. I composed it yesterday.” Then I said: “Sire, he’s lying! This is an old song which I also sing.” He said to me, “Then sing it, friend.” I sang it exactly as Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī had just sung it. Ibrāhīm was astonished and al-Rashīd got angry and said to him: “Son of a whore! Dare you lie to me and claim that which is not yours!?”

Ibn al-Mahdī said:

Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī was in terrible distress. Then, after I had prayed the afternoon prayers, I told al-Rashīd: “Sire, that song really is his – he did not lie. I was passing by his house yesterday while he was rehearsing it with one of his singing-girls, and I stood there until I mastered it thoroughly – I learned it from him.” So al-Rashīd called for him, reconciled with him, and ordered that he be given 5,000 dinars.

The Background of this Song Song

There are many drinking companions whose tears for my sake
pour down over their cheeks in streams.

For unlike some men, who dislike drinking because they have little self-
control,

I am in control of myself when the cup is passed round.

*The music is by Ibrāhīm in the rhythm of ‘ramal,’ on the index finger as tonic
by way of the middle finger, according to Ishāq.*

§ *Yaḥyā ibn ‘Alī ibn Yaḥyā told me: My father told me, citing Ṭayyāb ibn Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī, citing Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī, who said:*

Ibn al-Mahdī used to regard Ibn Jāmi⁶² as a great master and preferred him over all other singers.

Ibn al-Mahdī told me:

We were once at a gathering with al-Rashīd and the wine got the better of Ibn Jāmi’, so much so that he sang a song and made mistakes in the phrasing. Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī turned to me and said, “What a shitty performance your teacher has just given!”⁶³ And I understood that what he said was true.

62 Ibn Jāmi’ (fl. late 8th c), the teacher of Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī’s major rival, Ibn al-Mahdī.

63 *Ar. qad khari’a ustādhuka fīh* in the Cairo edition; an alternative reading, however, is *khazā ustādhuka fīh*, “Your teacher has disgraced himself with this performance,” see KA V: 173, note 3.

Ibn al-Mahdī continued:

So I said to Ibn Jāmi‘, “Pay attention, Sheikh, and sing it again.” He caught my meaning and repeated it. This time he was more careful and got it right. But Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī grew angry and he turned toward me and recited the following verses:

I teach him archery every day
and now that his forearm has grown strong, he shoots me.

After which he snubbed me and swore never to speak with me again. After a few days I said to al-Rashīd, “Grant me a favor!” “What favor is that?” he replied. I said, “Order Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī to reconcile with me and be friends with me as before.” But the caliph retorted: “And who is Ibrāhīm that you should beg for his forgiveness?” “Sire, what I want from him can only be obtained with his forgiveness.” So he said to Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī, “Go to him, Ibrāhīm, and kiss his head.” When he bent over me he said, “You won’t do it again, will you?” I said, “No.” He said, “Then I forgive you truly,” and we were friends again.

§ *Abū l-Ḥasan Aḥmad ibn Yaḥyā ibn ‘Alī ibn Yaḥyā told me: I heard my grandfather, ‘Alī, citing Ishāq, who said – My father [Ibrāhīm] said:*

I once went out with Hārūn al-Rashīd to the city of al-Ḥīra, and when he halted there he called for lunch. He ate his lunch and then fell asleep. I took advantage of his nap and went out and rode around the outskirts of al-Ḥīra. I saw a garden and headed toward it. At its entrance was a handsome youth, so I asked permission to enter, and he let me in. I went in and it turned out to be a garden with very good soil and abundant water. As I left I asked him, “Who does this garden belong to?” He replied, “To one of the al-Ashā‘itha family.” I asked him, “Is it for sale?” He replied “Yes, and there is an asking price.” I asked, “How much?” He replied, “14,000 gold dinars.” I asked, “What is the name of this place?” He replied, “Shumārā.” Whereupon I composed the following verses:

Song

O gardens of Shumārā, there is no sight like you,
for he who has an eye disease that the doctor is incapable of curing.
Your soil is camphor, your blossoms dazzling white,
filled with peace and delicious perfume.

Ibrāhīm said:

A beautiful melody for these verses came to me, so when I sat with al-Rashīd and he ordered me to sing, I sang it to him, the very first thing. He replied, “Blast you! Where is this Shumārā?” I told him the story and he ordered that I be given

14,000 dinars. Ja‘far ibn Yaḥyā signaled to me saying: “Bring me his signature for this amount.” Al-Rashīd’s attention turned to other things, so I repeated the song. Then he said, “Blast all of you! Give him his dinars!” So I jumped up and said, “My lord, sign them over to me in writing for Ja‘far ibn Yaḥyā.” “I will do so,” he replied. He signed them over to me for Ja‘far’s sake. When Ja‘far received the signature, he released the money and an additional 5,000 from his own funds. Dearer to me and fairer than Shumārā by far was the cash, once I got hold of it!

§ *Ja‘far ibn Qudāma*⁶⁴ told me, citing *Abū l-‘Aynā*:⁶⁵

Al-Faḍl ibn Rabī‘ left the presence of al-Rashīd one day with a scrap of paper on which there were four verses. He said, “The Commander of the Faithful wants all those present who composes poetry to cap these verses.”⁶⁶ The verses were:

The Beloved has sent his greetings with the south wind,
 so send my greetings back to him on the north wind.
 Know with your heart what his heart contains,
 and exchange your love on the wind on alternate days.
 Whenever you weep for him, be certain that he
 will shower you with tears like gentle rain.
 So hold back your tears, out of mercy for his tears,
 if you wish to preserve and protect him.

There was no one present who could cap them, so he ordered Ibrāhīm to compose a melody for these verses, and he sang them to a melody in the ‘light heavy’ rhythm.

§ *Muḥammad ibn Khalaf Wakī‘* told me, citing *Abū l-‘Abbās al-Baṣrī*, citing *‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Faḍl ibn al-Rabī‘*, who quoted his father as saying:

Once when al-Rashīd traveled to Raqqā he took Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī along because he was extremely fond of him. At one of the way-stations, he lost track of Ibrāhīm for a few days. The caliph asked after him, but no one knew what

64 Ja‘far ibn Qudāma ibn Ziyād (d. c. 931), secretary and poet close to the ‘Abbasid prince, poet, and musician, Ibn al-Mu‘tazz (d. 908).

65 Abū l-‘Aynā, a blind Basran satirical poet known for his wit and eloquence (d. c. 896).

66 Court poets were regularly expected to demonstrate their skills by composing a continuation (“cap”) to verses by supplying a second hemistich for a first hemistich, a second verse for a first verse, or, in this case, several verses in the same meter and rhyme to complete the poem.

had happened to him. When Ibrāhīm reappeared al-Rashīd said, “Blast you! What happened to you? Where have you been?” “Sire,” he replied, “My tale is a strange one. We stopped at such-and-such a place, and someone told me about a wine-merchant whose elegance and immaculate premises were said to be remarkable. So I went on ahead of my baggage, traveling light. I arrived at a beautiful house, a spacious resting place, with delicious food, served by a handsome and charming young man, so I decided to stay for a while. When I wanted to rejoin you, Sire, he begged me to stay longer and brought out the finest wine I have ever tasted – so I stayed another three days. I gave him a few dinars I had on me and a suit of clothes, and composed these verses about him:

God grant prosperity to the home of a wine-merchant,
 in the middle of Ruṣāfa where I caroused two days and then a third
 I pawned my clothes and continued to drink
 pale wine aged in a jug for two years.
 I drank it all, every single drop,
 then returned it to him with interest, one jug for two.
 He said “*izal bishīn*” when he bade me adieu,
 by my life, I withdrew from him in peace.⁶⁷

The poetry and the melody are by Ibrāhīm, in the ‘light ramal’ rhythm with the third finger. The words “Izal bishīn” are Syriac and mean: “Go in peace,” which is what the cup-bearer wished Ibrāhīm when he said farewell.

Ibrāhīm continued:

Al-Rashīd said, ‘Sing it for me!’ So I did, with Barṣūmā⁶⁸ accompanying me on the flute. Al-Rashīd gave me 100,000 dirhams and signed over an estate to me. Then he sent for the wine-merchant who was ushered in and gave al-Rashīd

67 The final word is a pun – the Syriac word *shīn* means peace, but the Arabic word *shayn* means shame or disgrace.

68 Barṣawmā (or Barṣūmā) is the most prominent flute player [*zāmīr*] to appear in the pages of KA. An account of his skill in accompanying singers is given by Ibn Jāmi’ (KA VI: 302–03): “If a singer sings to the accompaniment of a [skilled] flute player, most of the work is done by the flute player, because the latter does not [simply] follow the path [of the voice]. When Barṣawmā plays the flute I’m at ease while he exerts himself, whereas if someone else accompanies me on the flute, he’s at ease and I’m the one exerting myself. If you doubt my word, ask Barṣawmā and Manṣūr Zalzal [the lute-player].” “So they asked both of them about what Ibn Jāmi’ had said, and they both responded: ‘That’s correct.’” Adapted from George Sawa, *Music Performance Practice in the early Abbasid Era 132–320 A.H./750–932 A.D.* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1989) ([rpt. 2004]:153).

some of that wine. Al-Rashīd rewarded him, and Ibrāhīm gave him 10,000 dirhams, as well.

§ *Al-Ḥusayn ibn Yaḥyā, Muḥammad ibn Mazyad and Wakīʿ all told me, citing Hammād ibn Ishāq, who said, my father Ishāq told me:*

One day Ibn Jāmiʿ said to my father, Ibrāhīm: “I had a vision while I slept that you and I were riding in a litter. You were below, almost touching the ground, and I was in the upper half above. This means that I will be a greater singer than you.” Ibrāhīm responded, “The vision is true, but your interpretation is wrong: You and I were on a scale. I weighed more than you, so your side of the scale was raised, lifting you upwards, whereas I sank down till I touched the ground, meaning that I will outlive you and you will surely die before me.” Ishāq said, “And it happened as my father predicted – he became the more famous singer and transmitted more songs.⁶⁹ Ibn Jāmiʿ did die first, and my father outlived him.”

§ *ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Rabīʿ al-Rabīʿī told me, citing Khadija, the daughter of Hārūn ibn ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Rabīʿ, citing Khammār,⁷⁰ my father’s singing-girl from Kandahar. My grandfather ʿAbd Allāh purchased her from the family of Yaḥyā ibn Muʿādh for 200,000 dirhams when she was a newly trained girl. Khammār said:*

Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī taught me his tune for this couplet:

Song

If some matter pleases her, even though it harms me,
I would grant her whatever she wishes.
Not a day passes, but I hope for reprieve,
and I weep, remembering yesterday.

The poetry is by Abū Ḥafṣ the Chessplayer⁷¹ and the melody by Ibrāhīm in the ‘first heavy’ rhythm on the middle-finger fret.

One day Ibn Jāmiʿ heard me singing it and asked, “Who taught you that song?” I told him, and he said, “Sing it again.” So I repeated it several times while Ibn

69 Ar. *afāda akthar min fawāʿidihī* in the sense of “he transmitted/conveyed more.”

70 Unvoweled in KA, so her name might be Khammār (“wine merchant”), Khimār (“face veil”), or even Khumār (“hangover”).

71 Abū Ḥafṣ ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, a servant who was raised in the household of the caliph al-Mahdī. His skill at playing chess earning him his nickname. When he died, al-Mahdī devoted his attentions to his daughter, ʿUlayya.

Jāmi' hummed it softly along with me until I thought he had learned it. After that, whenever he visited us he'd say, "Young girl, sing that song!" and he'd sing along with me.

§ *Ismā'īl ibn Yūnus said, citing 'Umar ibn Shabba, citing Mukhāriq:*⁷²

The caliph al-Rashīd once gave us permission to stay home for three days. We learned that he would be busy with his womenfolk, so all his courtiers returned to their homes.

Waswāsa, that is, Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl ibn Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī, told me this same anecdote citing his father Muḥammad, citing his grandfather Ismā'īl, who heard it from Mukhāriq:

One day al-Rashīd was occupied drinking his morning draught with his womenfolk, so when the weather turned foul, we headed home.

Waswāsa did not mention everything that 'Umar ibn Shabba did in his account (which I mentioned above), even though their narratives usually agree. So the following words are for the most part from the version of al-Mawṣilī's son, [Ismā'īl].

Mukhāriq continued:

The sky turned grey and it began to drizzle, so I said, "I'm going to go visit my teacher Ibrāhīm, and see how he's doing – I won't be gone long." I ordered my household staff to prepare a gathering for us when I returned. When I arrived at Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī's house, the door was open, the entryway newly swept, and the doorman was sitting at his post. "How's my teacher?" I asked, and he said, "Go on in." I went in and found Ibrāhīm sitting on a veranda with bubbling pots and shiny pitchers all about. The curtain was drawn and the singing-girls were behind it. In front of him was a tub, and in there were a cup,⁷³ an earthen mug, and a drinking glass.⁷⁴

72 Mukhāriq (fl. c. 800–844/45), one of the major singers of the early 'Abbasid period. The son of a butcher, he was first trained as a slave in the household of the female singer 'Ātika bint Shuhda, who later sold him to Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī. After completing his training, Ibrāhīm eventually gave him as a gift to al-Faḍl ibn Yahyā al-Barmakī, who in turn presented him to Hārūn al-Rashīd, who eventually granted him his freedom.

73 Ar. *raṭliyya* – a cup large enough to hold a *raṭl* (of wine, for example).

74 It is unclear exactly what Ibrāhīm is up to here: the simmering pots suggest that he might be sitting down to eat, but the tub and the three different types of cups may mean that he is preparing wine, which was often served diluted with water.

I entered singing and asked, “Why is the curtain set up? I don’t hear any voices behind it.”⁷⁵ “Sit down, blast you!” he replied. “I got up this morning as usual, and found out that the estate next to mine – which I tried to acquire quite a while ago, and have been wanting but still don’t own – has been put up for sale for 100,000 dirhams.” “Why don’t you buy it? God has given you that amount many times over.” “You’re right,” he replied, “but I don’t want to spend any of the money I have saved up.” “Well, who can give you 100,000 dirhams all at one go?” I asked, “Only al-Rashīd could put up that much. No one else surely?” “Sit down,” he said, “and learn this song.” He tapped the rhythm with a stick on an inkwell⁷⁶ and performed the following for me:

Song

Those who are free from cares and illness may sleep,
 but I, from my many sorrows, cannot sleep.
 O you who would seek generosity and benefice,
 turn to Yaḥyā, that bastion of nobility and graciousness.

The poetry is by Abū al-Naḍīr⁷⁷ and the melody by Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī in the ‘heavy first’ rhythm on the ring finger.

Mukhāriq continued:

I learned the song perfectly. “Now go to the home of the vizier Yaḥyā ibn Khālid,” he said. “You’ll find people waiting around and even though the door has been opened, he will not yet have started receiving people. Beg his pardon and enter before anyone else reaches him. He’ll rebuke you for approaching him that way and will ask, ‘Where are you coming from at this hour?’ Tell him that you you’ve been to see me and tell him everything I told you about this estate. Let him know that I composed this song, which I’m very pleased with, but that I think the only one who can sing it properly is his singing-girl so-and-so, and that I have rehearsed it with you until you mastered it so that you can teach it to her. He’ll call for her and order that the curtain be set up, a chair will be brought out for him, and he’ll say, ‘Teach it to her here in my presence.’ Do as he says, and then come back to me with an account of what happened.”

75 During musical performances a curtain was sometimes set up to shield female slave-singers and musicians from the view of male visitors, as occurs several times in the remainder of this anecdote.

76 Ar. *dawāt*, see Sawa, *Music Performance Practice*, pp. 146–7; medieval inkwells from Islamic lands were often made of metal, and since they were usually close at hand, they were frequently used as make-shift percussion instruments.

77 ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-Malik, a poet who sang in Basra with his singing-girls in licentious circles, but later was patronized by the Barmakī family.

Mukhāriq continued:

I arrived at Yaḥyā's door and found everything as Ibrāhīm said I would. He asked me my business and I told him what Ibrāhīm had ordered me to say, and he did everything exactly as Ibrāhīm had said he would. He brought out the singing-girl and I taught her the song. Afterwards he said to me, "Abū al-Muhanna', would you like to stay here with us for a while or leave?" "I'd prefer to leave, may God grant you long life" I replied, "You've already heard what I was charged with telling you." Yaḥyā called out to one of his servants, "Go with Abū l-Muhanna' and take 10,000 dirhams for him and 100,000 dirhams for Ibrāhīm Abū Ishāq along with you, the price of that estate." So the 10,000 dirhams were delivered to my house and when I arrived home, I said, "My day has been a joyful one so I'll make the members of my household rejoice!" The messenger then went on to Ibrāhīm's house with the rest of the money. "When I entered my house, I shared dirhams from the bag of ten thousand among my singing-girls. I used the bag with the remaining coins as a headrest and then ate, drank, listened to music, and was content the whole day long."

When I woke up the next day I said, "I'm going to go see my teacher and find out how he's doing." When I arrived, I found the door as it had been the day before, so I entered and found Ibrāhīm as he had been the previous day. I hummed and sang, but he did not respond as he should have. So I asked, "What's the matter? Didn't the money arrive?" "Indeed it did, but tell me, what happened to you yesterday?" he asked. I told him about what I had been given. "What's behind the curtain?" I asked. "Lift the drapery and you'll see." I raised it and there were ten bags of 10,000 dirhams. "What's left to be done then regarding the estate?" I asked. "Blast you! No sooner did the money enter my house than I grew as possessive of it as I was with what I had hoarded before!" "Good God Almighty!" I said, "So what are you going to do?" "Get up," he said, "so that I can sing a song for you that I've composed, which far surpasses the other one." I stood up and then sat down in front of him, and he sang the following:

Song

Those seeking generosity, a sword, or a blade-tipped spear,
 all rejoice over a newborn from the family of the Barmakīs,
 With his birth, hopes are spread because of his graciousness [*faḍl*]
 especially if it is from the son of his Grace [*al-Faḍl*].

The poetry is by Abū al-Naḍīr and according to al-Hishāmī the melody is by Ibrāhīm in the 'heavy first' rhythm on the ring finger fret, but 'Amr ibn Bāna said that the melody is by Ishāq, and that is correct. There is another version in the 'light heavy' rhythm which I think is the melody composed by Ibrāhīm. Ismā'īl ibn Yūnus told me, citing 'Umar ibn Shabba, citing Ishāq,

who said that his father composed this song in the 'light heavy' rhythm and presented it to al-Faḍl. He liked it and ordered Mukhāriq to sing it to his singing-girls, so he sang it to M-rāq-sh⁷⁸ ("Adorned"?) and Qaḍīb ("Wand") and they learned it from him.

Mukhāriq continued:

When Ibrāhīm sang that song to me, I had never heard anything like it. The first song seemed much diminished in comparison, so I learned the new one. Then Ibrāhīm said, "Now get up immediately and go to al-Faḍl ibn Yaḥyā. You will find that he hasn't given permission for anyone to see him yet because he prefers to spend the day alone with his singing-girls. Ask permission to enter and tell him about our conversation yesterday and what his father gave the two of us. Tell him that I have composed this new song and that in my opinion it's much better than the one I composed yesterday. Let him know that I rehearsed it with you until you learned it perfectly, and sent it with you so that you can sing it to his singing-girl so-and so."

I went to the home of al-Faḍl and I found things as Ibrāhīm had predicted. I asked permission to enter and was allowed to see him. "What's the matter?" he asked. I told him what had happened the day before and about the money that had been bestowed upon Ibrāhīm and myself. "Shame on Ibrāhīm! He has become miserly even with himself!" Then he called for a servant and said, "Strike the curtain!" so he struck it.⁷⁹ Then he said, "Sing it." Before I had even finished singing, he approached, tearing his shawl with delight,⁸⁰ sat on a cushion in front of the curtain and said, "Your teacher has done well, by God, and so have you, Mukhāriq!" I did not leave until the singing-girl had learned the song perfectly, and al-Faḍl was greatly pleased. He said, "Spend the day with us," but I replied, "We courtiers only have one more free day, and were it not that I love to see you happy, I would not have left my home today at all." So he said, "Servant, go with Abū al-Muhanna' and take along 20,000 dirhams for him and 200,000 for Ibrāhīm." I left and went home with the money. I opened one of the bags and shared the money among my singing-girls. I drank and all of the members of my household and I were content that whole day.

78 Voweling uncertain: Murāqish? Marāqish?

79 Ar. *ḍaraba* can mean to set up the curtain or to strike the curtain as a signal to the singing girls behind it; other verbs used with curtains were to 'set up' (*naṣaba*), to 'raise' (*rafā'a*), to 'draw' (*madda*), and to 'lower' (*arḥkhā*), see Neubauer, *Musiker am Hof*, pp. 82–87. Illustrations of such curtains in sources such as the *Maqāmāt* of al-Ḥarīrī show curtains that are suspended from wooden frames or from curtain rods.

80 Tearing a piece of clothing was a common display of great pleasure or rapture [Ar. *ṭarab*] in reaction to beautiful singing.

The next day I woke up and went first thing to Ibrāhīm to hear his news and to give him mine, and I found him in exactly the same state as he had been before! I entered singing and clapping my hands, but he said, “Come here, close to me.” “What’s the matter?” I asked. “Sit down and lift the curtain over by that door – there are twenty new bags along with the original ten.” “What are you waiting for now?” I asked. “Blast you!” he replied, “The same thing has happened as happened before!” “By God, I don’t think anyone in this land has ever earned as much as you have earned!” I responded. “Why do you begrudge yourself something that you have wanted for ages when God has just granted you several times its cost?!” Then he said, “Sit down and learn this song,” and he sang for me a song so beautiful that it caused me, by God, to forget the other two!

Song

Do you pine with love every day and night
 for Umm Bakr, unable to recover or to desist?
 How I love the area round her house now from afar!
 How sad is a house once loved, but now abandoned.
 Towards Ja’far, every powerful she-camel speeds us,
 on an empty stomach, all night, and through the midday heat.
 His courtyard is vast for those asking for gifts
 his presents are bestowed on them readily.

*The poetry is by Marwān ibn Abī Ḥaḥṣa⁸¹ and in it he praises Ja’far ibn Yaḥyā.
 The melody is by Ibrāhīm, but the mode/rhythm⁸² has not come down to us.*

Mukhāriq continued:

Then Ibrāhīm asked me, “Have you ever heard anything to equal that?” I responded, “I have never heard its like.” He repeated it to me over and over until I had learned it, and then said to me, “Go to Ja’far, and do with him as you did with his brother and his father.”

Mukhāriq continued:

I went and did exactly as before. I told Ja’far what we had received from his brother and his father, and then I performed the song for him, which pleased him. He called for a servant and ordered him to draw the curtain, then he

81 Marwān ibn Abī Ḥaḥṣa (fl. 8th c.) was a member of a famous literary family that boasted no less than six distinguished poets in the early Islamic period (see E12 “Marwān al-Akbar ibn Abī Ḥaḥṣa”).

82 Ar. *ṭarīqa* can refer to the melodic mode, rhythm, or both, see Geroge Sawa *An Arabic Musical and Socio-cultural Glossary of Kitāb al-Aghāni* (Leiden: Brill, 2015): 324.

brought out the singing-girl and sat on a chair. “Mukhāriq, let’s hear it,” he said, so I rehearsed the song with her until she had learned it. Ja‘far said, “Well done, by God, Mukhāriq! And your teacher has done well, too. Would you like to spend the day here?” “Sir, this is the last of our free days; I only came to deliver the song in person so I could teach it to your singing-girl.” He called out to his servant, “Accompany him with 30,000 dirhams and 300,000 for Ibrāhīm.” I returned to my home with the money, and my household and I spent the rest of the day drinking and singing.

I went to Ibrāhīm early the following day and he received me standing and said, “Well done, Mukhāriq!” “What news?” I asked. “Have a seat,” he said, so I sat down. He said to whoever was behind the curtain, “Continue with what you were doing,” then he raised the drapery and there was the money. “What about the estate?” I asked. He stuck his hand underneath the leather cushion he was resting on and said, “Here is the deed to the estate. They asked around about the owner and it turns out he is here in Baghdad, and Yaḥyā ibn Khālīd bought it from him. Yaḥyā wrote me a note saying: ‘I figured that you would begrudge yourself the purchase of this estate with the money you’ve earned even if you were given the whole world, so I bought it for you with my own money and have sent you the deed.’ He sent me the deed and this money, as you can see.” Then Ibrāhīm wept. “Mukhāriq,” he said, “If you keep company with people, then keep company with the likes of these men, and if you regale listeners, then regale their likes as well.⁸³ Here are 600,000 dirhams, the estate was 100,000, and 60,000 is for you. We earned all of this while I sat here in my sitting room without moving an inch. Will there ever again be men as generous as these!?”

§ *Yaḥyā ibn ‘Alī ibn Yaḥyā told me, citing his father, citing Iṣḥāq, who said:*

Mūsā al-Hādī was malicious and ill-tempered. Whoever was attentive and familiar with Mūsā’s moods, gave him whatever he wanted, but whoever dared to open his mouth and chanced to say something that displeased him, was dismissed and banished from the court. Mūsā never concealed himself behind a curtain⁸⁴ in front of his companions and singers, and he constantly bestowed prizes and gifts on them. My father sang for him one day and Mūsā said, “Ibrāhīm, sing me a song that will delight and charm me, I leave the choice up

83 Ar. *khankara*: a footnote in KA (KA v: 183, note 3) glosses this as ‘sang,’ but Dozy, *Supplément*, lists it as a synonym for *saḥara* and *fatana* – to dazzle, infatuate, seduce, mesmerize, captivate, hence the translation ‘regale.’

84 Some caliphs, including al-Manṣūr, al-Hādī’s grandfather, regularly separated themselves from male musicians and courtiers by sitting behind a curtain. See Sawa, *Musical Performance Practice*, pp. 122–23; also, Neubauer, *Musiker am Hof*, pp. 82–87.

to you.” “Sire,” he replied, “If it should please your Highness,⁸⁵ I hope to reach what is in your soul.”

Ibrāhīm continued:

I had noticed that when Mūsā listened to songs, he listened most closely to the amatory and delicate sections, and also that he appreciated the style of Ibn Surayj much more than the style of Maʿbad, so I sang the following for him:

Whenever memories of you seize me with a delightful sensation,
I tremble like a sparrow sprinkled by raindrops.

He was so moved that he reached for the opening of his caftan, tore it one arm’s length,⁸⁶ and said, “Well done, by God, give us more!” So I sang:

May my love for her intensify my passion every night,
The consolation of time passing will not soothe me until the end of time.

He reached up and tore his caftan another arm’s length or thereabouts. He said, “Give me more, blast it, you have done well, by God. Once again, your choice, Ibrāhīm.” So I sang:

I avoided you until they said, “He does not know love,”
I visited you until they said, “He has no patience!”

Then Mūsā raised his voice and said, “Well done! May God preserve your father. Ask for whatever you want.” “My lord, I want the spring of Marwān in Medina.”⁸⁷ His eyes turned in his head till they resembled two burning embers, and he shouted: “You son of an uncircumcised woman! Are you trying to make this session of ours infamous, so that people will say, ‘Ibrāhīm first enchanted him and then subjugated him,’ and turn me into the butt of jokes and subject of

85 Lit. “If Saturn’s coldness does not impede me”: the name of the planet Saturn (Ar. *zuḥal*) derives from a root meaning ‘to be distant, removed’ and was at times used in Arabic poetry to portray majesty or exaltedness. The poet al-Mutanabbī used the image of Saturn to refer to his ruler and patron Sayf al-Dawla in a famous verse. The phrase here probably refers to the caliph, hence the translation “If it should please your Highness.” See E12, “*Zuḥal*.”

86 Tearing ones’ clothing was a standard display of deeply felt emotion, here of pleasure, but elsewhere of grief.

87 The Azure Spring (Ar. *al-ʿayn al-zarqāʾ*) was the primary source of water for the city of Medina. Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam built a structure around it in 662–63, when he was governor there. Some sources claim that it was called the Azure Spring in reference to Marwān’s bright blue eyes. In any case, Ibrāhīm is deliberately asking for something the caliph cannot give possibly him.

gossip? Ibrāhīm al-Ḥarrānī, when I rise, take this ignoramus by the hand and show him into my private treasury, and if he takes everything in it, let him!" I was led into his treasury and took 50,000 dinars.

The Background of this Song
Song

I was amazed how Fate came between us,
 then, when what was between us was over, Fate rested.
 My love for her intensifies my passion every night,
 the consolation of time passing will not soothe me until the end of
 time.
 O Layla's departure, you have pushed me to the limit,
 you have added pain to the pain of separation.
 Whenever memories of you seize me with a delightful sensation,
 I tremble like a sparrow sprinkled by raindrops.
 I avoided you until they said, "He does not know love,"
 and visited you until they said, "He has no patience!"
 By He who causes us to weep, to laugh,
 to die, and to live, whose command is absolute,
 You have left me envious of the wild animals, when I see
 two of them loving, unafraid of any harm.

The poetry is by Abū Sakhr al-Hudhalī and the melody is by Ma'bad. The first part of the melody is the verse "Wa-yā hajr Laylā" [O Laylā's departure] and after that, the second and then the first verses are in the 'second heavy' rhythm on the ring finger fret according to 'Amr. Ibn Surayj composed a song using the sixth and seventh, then the fourth and fifth verses of this poem, in the 'first heavy' rhythm according to al-Hishāmī. 'Arīb also composed a setting of the sixth, seventh, fourth, and fifth verses, in the 'first heavy' rhythm. Al-Wāthiq composed a setting in the 'ramal' rhythm which he composed earlier, and 'Arīb later imitated him with her own melody. Some people attribute the melody of Ma'bad to Ibn Surayj and that of Ibn Surayj to Ma'bad.⁸⁸

§ *Al-Ḥusayn ibn Yaḥyā told me, citing Ḥammād, citing Ishāq, citing his father:*

My grandfather Ibrāhīm bought a singing-girl for Ja'far ibn Yaḥyā for a huge sum. So Ja'far asked him, "What can this singing-girl do so well that you've

88 For a discussion of composers changing the order of verses when assembling a song text, see Kilpatrick, *Making*, pp. 58–59.

spent so much money on her?" He replied, "If she can do nothing more than imitate my verse

Whose are the dwellings in Burqat al-Rawḥān?

then she's worth this price and even more!" Ja'far laughed and said, "You're crazy!"

The Background of this Song
Song

Whose are the dwellings in Burqat al-Rawḥān?

let us not sell our time for another.

The beautiful women cracked his heart when they departed,
the way glass cracks, and it cannot be put together again.

I visited your family and obtained nothing,
but if I stay away from you, I will waste away.

The melody is by Ma'bad according to al-Hishāmī and Aḥmad ibn al-Makkī, in the 'first heavy' rhythm on the middle finger fret. Some have attributed it to Ḥunayn, and others say that it was composed by al-Gharīd,⁸⁹ Ḥabash attributed it to Yazīd Ḥawrā'. There is also a setting by Ibrāhīm in the 'light ramal' rhythm on the ring-finger fret.

§ *Al-Ḥusayn told me, citing Ḥammād, citing his father Ishāq, who said:*

Your grandfather, Ibrāhīm, composed 900 songs – some were gold [*dīnāriyya*], some were silver [*dirhamiyya*], and some were copper [*filsiyya*]. Those are the only compositions of his I have heard. Three hundred were superior to those of anyone else, three hundred were equal to the songs of other singers, and the last three hundred were just light entertainment.

[*Ḥammād added*] Later my father, Ishāq, dropped the last three hundred from his father's repertory and when he was asked about Ibrāhīm's compositions, he would say, "He composed six hundred songs."

89 Abū Yazīd 'Abd al-Malik (d. c. 716) known as *al-Gharīd* ('the tender-voiced'), was a student of Ibn Surayj and is often cited as one of the four great singers of the early Islamic period.

§ *Aḥmad ibn Ḥamdūn said that Ishāq had told him:*

One composition of my father's that I really dislike is the setting he composed for some verses by al-'Abbās ibn al-Aḥnaf:

I weep and others like me have wept over the love of a singing-girl

I don't know why he set this to music except that he liked the poetry, and this poem by al-'Abbās is indeed excellent.

The Background of this Song
Song

I weep and others like me have over the love of a singing-girl,
God did not fashion in her heart any fondness for me.
Do you remember how I stood at your door
half the day and the people of your household paid no attention?

The poetry is by al-'Abbās ibn al-Aḥnaf and the melody is by Ibrāhīm in the 'light ramal' rhythm, on the middle finger fret.

§ *Jahḥza told me, citing Ḥammād ibn Ishāq:*

A man once said to my father, Ishāq, "So tell me, why do you malign your father's song":

[Ibn Abi] 'Atīq spoke to me about her
and his words caused my tears to flow.

Ishāq replied:

Because it brings to mind Ibn 'Ā'isha⁹⁰ who composed a song to those same verses, and Ibn 'Ā'isha is not someone who can be imitated – my father's song was not nearly as good as his. My father's composition would have been excellent if he had composed it to different lyrics, but compared to Ibn 'Ā'isha's song, it's not nearly as good, so I've dropped it from my repertory.

The Background of this Song
Song

⁹⁰ Ibn 'Ā'isha (fl early 8th c.), one of the major singers of Medina, a student of Ma'bad, who performed in the court of the Umayyad caliph, al-Walīd ibn Yazīd (r. 743–44).

“You are too old for her,” he said to me,
 and his words caused my tears to flow.
 He said to me, “Say farewell to Sulaymā and let her go,”
 but my heart responded, ‘I cannot, no!’

The poetry is by ‘Umar ibn Abī Rabī‘a⁹¹ and the melody according to ‘Amr is by Ma‘bad in the ‘first heavy’ rhythm on the middle-finger fret. It is also said to be by Ibn ‘Ā’isha. There is another version in the ‘second heavy’ rhythm attributed to al-Hudhalī, and yet another in ‘light heavy’ attributed to Ibn ‘Ā’isha and to Ibrāhīm.

§ *Al-Hasan ibn ‘Alī told me, citing ‘Abd Allāh ibn Abī Sa‘d, citing Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Mālīk, citing Ishāq, citing his father, who said:*

I arrived in Rayy and began socializing with some young men from the leisured class, but they did not know who I was. This went on for quite a while until one day one of them invited me to spend the night at his home, which I did. He brought out a singing-girl and drew the curtain, and she sang while sitting behind it. I could hear that she was an excellent performer and had an extensive repertory. She made me homesick for Iraq and I remembered the time I had spent there, so I called for a lute and when it was brought to me, I sang this composition of mine set to my own verses:

In the city of Rayy I reside,
 through the outskirts of Rayy I roam.

I had composed the melody in Rayy long ago. The singing-girl came out from behind the curtain, suddenly appearing before me, leaned down over my head and said, “My teacher, by God!” Her owner asked her, “Who is this teacher of yours?” “Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī!” It turned out that she was one of the singing-girls who had studied with me years earlier. So her owner welcomed me, honored me, and gave me gifts. I stayed on in Rayy for a while after that and news of my presence spread, but then a message arrived ordering that I be taken to the governor of the region, so off I went.

91 ‘Umar ibn Abī Rabī‘a (d. c. 712), a prominent pleasure-loving poet of the Umayyad era known for his love songs that innovatively featured dialogues with the women he attempted to charm, and were suggestive rather than vulgar or obscene.

§ *Al-Ḥasan told me, citing ‘Abd Allāh ibn Abī Sa‘d, citing Abū Tawba Ṣāliḥ ibn Muḥammad, citing al-Qaṭrānī, citing Muḥammad ibn Jabr, citing Yaḥyā al-Makkī, who said:*

One day we were with al-Mahdī who had imprisoned Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī and ordered that he be beaten and then clothed in a rough woolen cloak. He was brought out in that state to teach the singing-girls. As we were enjoying our morning draught amidst early blooming flowers, the heavens opened up with a heavy summer rain, and he wrote to us saying:

Who will convey my message to this gathering
of my friends and neighbors?
Good health to you, as you drink
over flowers, while the rain pours down.
Here I am in solitude and alone,
with my worries and my sorrows
You whose eyes are dry,
know that from my eyes tears do flow.

Yaḥyā continued:

Al-Mahdī looked over at the piece of paper and read it. Taking pity on Ibrāhīm, he ordered that he be sent for at once, and a few days later he set him free.

§ *Al-Ḥasan told me, citing Hārūn ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Malik, citing Ibn al-Makkī, citing his father, who said:*

‘Alī al-Yamānī had a singing slave-girl with whom Ibrāhīm fell in love and was infatuated for quite a while. He composed the following verses about her:

Song

I was free, but became a slave to al-Yamānī,
through love of a songstress, whose love has sapped my strength.
She unites the two halves of the branch and the dune,
and two pomegranates embellish the breast of the branch.⁹²

92 The branch and the dune are common motifs in classical Arabic poetry to express the slenderness of a woman's waist rising from the breadth of her hips; pomegranates are an equally common metaphor for a woman's breasts.

According to 'Amr, Ibrāhīm's melody for these two verses are in the 'second heavy' rhythm on the ring-finger fret, but some have claimed that the poetry is by al-Ḥusayn ibn al-Ḍaḥḥāk.⁹³

§ *Ismā'īl ibn Yūnus told me, citing 'Umar ibn Shabba, citing Ishāq, who said:*

A member of the Nahik family had taken up singing, and when he thought that he'd become a rather good singer, he consulted me in the presence of my father, Ibrāhīm. "If you take my advice," I said to him, "you'll give up singing, because you don't have enough talent to satisfy me." "How dare you, boy!" my father shouted at me furiously. Then he turned to the man and said, "You, my dear friend, are quite the opposite of what he just said. If you keep working at this craft, you'll excel in it." When we were alone he said, "You fool! Do you think it shameful to earn 100,000 like this!? These folk are wealthy as kings, and they reproach us for singing. Let them be dishonored for it, reproached, and compromised, so that they come to need us and we can turn them to our advantage. Our superiority in the art singing will become clear to all by comparison with them."

Ishāq continued:

This Nahikī fellow spent time with my father, learned from him, treated him respectfully, and he rewarded my father generously. Whenever he sang well, my father would say to him, 'God blessings be with you!' and when he did poorly, he'd say to him, 'God's blessings be upon you.' He did this so often that al-Nahikī figured out what he meant. One day he sang and my father wasn't paying attention and remained silent, without saying anything. So al-Nahikī turned to my father and asked, "By my life, teacher, was that song a 'with you' or an 'upon you' song?" My father burst out laughing for he hadn't realized that al-Nahikī had picked up on his hints. Then my father said, "By God, I'll stick with you as long as you want, for you are both quick-witted and refined!" My father worked with him until his singing improved, and he also composed these verses about him:

God awarded you the right to study,
because of your refinement, with the likes of me.
After this, you will never hear me
speak of you other than with esteem.

93 Al-Ḥusayn ibn al-Ḍaḥḥāk (d. 864), a profligate poet best known for his wine poetry who frequented the 'Abbasid court from the reign of Hārūn al-Rashīd to the brief reign of al-Muntaṣir (r. 862).

You will become strong in what you seek,
after having started out weak.

§ *Ismā'īl told me, citing 'Umar ibn Shabba citing Ishāq; and al-Ṣūlī reported to me the same incident citing 'Awn ibn Muḥammad, who cited Ishāq:*

Mukhāriq once sang a song in front of al-Rashīd and made a mistake in the phrasing.⁹⁴ So I said to him, "Sing it again," and he repeated it, but the mistake was scarcely noticeable. I said to al-Rashīd, "My lord, he made a mistake." Then he said to Ibn al-Mahdī, "What's your response to what Ishāq says?" "He's wrong, there was no mistake," he replied. "Would you accept my father's opinion?" I asked. "Yes, of course." My father was recovering from an illness, but al-Rashīd ordered that he be brought, even if they had to carry him, so they transported him in a litter. Al-Rashīd said, "Mukhāriq, sing the song again," which he did. "What do you think of this song, Ibrāhīm?" he asked. "He made a mistake," my father replied. "That's what your son, Ishāq, said, but my brother Ibn al-Mahdī here claims that it's correct." My father looked at me and said, "Bring me an inkwell," and it was brought to him. He wrote something down that no one could see, then folded it and placed it in the hand of al-Rashīd. Then he said to me, "Write down where he made the phrasing mistake." I wrote it down and gave it to him. He read it and was pleased. He stood up and placed it in the hand of al-Rashīd, and it turns out that we were in agreement. Al-Rashīd laughed and was amazed, and everyone in the gathering praised, lauded, and extolled us. Those who had disagreed with us were disgraced and humiliated and were forced to concede. My father composed these verses about this incident:

If only those who do not have knowledge
would spare us from their lack of it,
By telling the truth at the very start,
and measuring knowledge by one's ken of it.
The basil's fragrance is only known
when one can smell the scent of it.⁹⁵

§ *Jahḥza told me, citing Hibat Allāh, and Muḥammad ibn Mazyad told me, citing Hammād son of Ishāq, citing his father:*

94 Ar. *qisma* refers to dividing the melodic phrases over the rhythm, parallel to the idea of *tajzi'a*, dividing syllables into feet and meters, in poetry. Presumably this means either that Mukhāriq made a melodic phrase too long or short at one point, or incorrectly placed the syllables on the melodic setting, perhaps within a melisma. See Sawa, *Glossary*, p. 412.

95 The Arabic uses a facile morphological rhyme (-*ih*), rendered here with the phrase: "of it."

One day my father sang the following verse for al-Rashīd:

Ask if any comrade I have accompanied has ever hated me,
if any companion has, while traveling, found fault in my company.

Al-Rashīd was delighted and asked him to sing it again and then ordered that he be given 20,000 dirhams. A few years later that song popped into my head and I remembered the story, so I sang it to al-Rashīd. He was delighted and drank and then said to me, "Ishāq, it's as if you yourself were speaking your father's words. I gave him 1,000 dinars for that song and you are no doubt hoping for a similar reward." I laughed and said, "My lord, in that, you wouldn't be mistaken." "Your father already received a reward for this one, so don't be greedy!" I was surprised at that and replied, "My lord, my father received more than 200,000 dinars from you, but the only sum I've ever heard you mention is this thousand, to my good fortune." "Blast you," he replied, "more than 200,000 dinars?!" "Yes, truly," I responded, and he fell silent. "I ask God's forgiveness for that. Blast you! How much of that did he leave you?" "He left me debts amounting to 5,000 dinars and I've paid them off." "I don't know which of us squandered more," al-Rashīd replied, "God help us both!"

The Background of this Song Song

Ask if any comrade I have accompanied has ever hated me,
if any companion has found, while traveling, fault in my company.
Do noble people loathe my presence,
when I travel the dusty mountain roads?
If only you knew what is hidden, then you would be certain that I am as
true to you,
as I am in bringing beasts marked for sacrifice to the sanctuary.

The poetry is attributed to Muḍarris ibn Qurṭ al-Hilālī and to Qays ibn Dharīḥ,⁹⁶ and there is one verse in it that is said to be by Jarīr.⁹⁷ The melody

96 Qays ibn Dharīḥ (d. c. 689) was an early love poet whose lifelong attachment to his wife Lubnā, despite being forced to divorce her because she was childless, became renowned along with his poems addressed to her.

97 Jarīr ibn 'Aṭīyya (d. c. 729), one of the most famous poets of his era, was the master of several genres of poetry, but he is most often remembered for the invective poems (*naqā'id*) he exchanged with his rival, al-Farazdaq (d. 728) over several decades, which are still read today as a masterpieces of early Arabic literature.

is divided among the poems of the three aforementioned poets; the background of this poem is mentioned in the section of Qays ibn Dharīḥ, but the melody for these three verses is by Ma'bad in the 'first heavy' rhythm with the fourth finger as tonic on the third-finger fret, according to Ishāq.

§ *My uncle told me, citing 'Abd Allāh ibn Abī Sa'd, citing Nashwa al-Ashnāniyya, citing Abū 'Uthmān al-Makkī who said:*

One day Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī was longing for the subterranean chamber [under his home] where there was a pool fed by water that entered at one end and then flowed out into the garden. "I'm in the mood to drink all day," he said, "and spend the night in this chamber," which he did. In the middle of the night, while he was sleeping, two cats, one white and one black, came down the steps into the chamber. The white one asked the other, "Is he sleeping?" The black one replied, "Yes, he's asleep." Then the black one began to sing in a beautiful voice:

Effaced are the lands from Muzj to Laṣaq
 To the hills of Hakir,
 To the plains of Naqīr,
 To the bottom of the slopes of Ḥilāl.⁹⁸

Al-Makkī continued:

Ibrāhīm was ecstatic and said to himself, "If only they'd sing it again!" They sang it several times until he had learned it, but then he moved and the two cats got up. He heard one of them say to the other, "Beware, anyone he sings this song to will be driven insane." The very next day Ibrāhīm sang it to a singing-girl, and she went mad!

The Background of this Song⁹⁹

The melody is by Mālik in the 'first heavy' rhythm on the middle-finger fret, according to Yaḥyā al-Makkī and 'Amr ibn Bāna.

98 Muzj is a body of water at some distance from Medina, Laṣaq has not been identified, but may be a corruption of Laṣaf, a pool of water on the road from Mecca, Hakir is a place near Medina, Naqīr is located between the Ḥijāz and Baṣra, and Ḥilāl is near Yemen. See KA V: 194, notes 2–6.

99 There is a lacuna in the text. Normally after this heading al-Iṣbahānī gives the poem from which the song lyrics were taken. On the various incomplete passages of KA, see Kilpatrick, *Making*, pp. 30–33.

§ *Al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī and my uncle told me, both of them citing ‘Abd Allāh ibn Abī Sa‘d, citing Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Mālik, citing Abū Muḥammad Ishāq ibn Ibrāhīm, citing his father [Ibrāhīm] who said:*

One day I went to visit al-Faḍl ibn Yaḥyā and said, “Abū l-‘Abbās, by my life, give me some money, for the caliph has been tight-fisted of late.” “Blast you,” he replied, “Abū Ishāq, I don’t have any money that I’m willing to give you.” Then he added, “Hah! But here’s one possibility: a messenger from the ruler of Yemen is visiting us and we have been taking care of his needs. The ruler sent 50,000 dinars with his emissary to buy whatever I want as a gift. How is that singing-girl of yours, Ḍiyā’ [‘Light’] doing?” “She’s at my house,” I replied, “by my life.” “That’s it then. I’ll tell them to buy her from you, but don’t sell her for one dinar less than 50,000.” I kissed him on the head and left.

The following day the emissary from the ruler of Yemen arrived early accompanied by a friend of mine. “Is your singing-girl so-and-so here?” he asked. “Yes, she is,” I replied. “Show her to me.” So I brought her out. “How much?” he asked. “50,000 dinars and not one dinar less! Al-Faḍl ibn Yaḥyā made me an offer for her for that amount just yesterday.” “I want to buy her for him,” he said. “As you wish. If you buy her, you can send her to whomever you want.” He asked, “What would you say to 30,000 in cash handed over to you right now?”

Ibrāhīm continued:

I had originally purchased the singing-girl for 400 dinars, and when I heard him mention 30,000 dinars and thought of the profit I would gain, a shudder of apprehension ran through me. My friend who was with him signaled to me to go ahead with the deal. Truly, I was afraid that something might happen to the singing-girl or to me or to al-Faḍl ibn Yaḥyā, so I turned her over to him and took the money on the spot.

The next morning, I went to visit al-Faḍl ibn Yaḥyā early and found him sitting alone. When he saw me, he burst out laughing and said, “What a greedy fellow you are! You’ve cheated yourself out of 20,000 dinars!” But I replied, “By my life, forget about that. I had a sort of premonition that I cannot describe. I was suddenly afraid that something would happen to the singing-girl or to the buyer or to you – may God protect you from evil! – so I jumped at the chance to take the 30,000 dinars.” “No offense taken. Servant boy, go fetch the singing-girl.” The servant came back with the very same singing-girl. “Take her and may she be a blessing for you! I was just trying to do something to help you out – I didn’t really want the singing-girl.” When I rose to leave he said, “Stay where you are. [An emissary from]¹⁰⁰ the ruler of Armenia has come to visit and I have been taking care of all his needs and carrying out all of the requests in his

100 The words ‘An emissary from’ do not appear in the text, but it is clear from what follows that it is an emissary, and not the ruler himself, who is visiting.

messages. He mentioned that he brought with him 30,000 dinars with which I should buy whatever I wish. So show him this singing-girl of yours and don't take one dinar less than 30,000." Then I left with the singing-girl.

Soon the emissary from the ruler of Armenia and another friend of mine came to see me. We haggled over the singing-girl. "I won't take anything less than 30,000 dinars," I said. He replied, "I have 20,000 in cash waiting at your front door – will you take that as full payment, and may God bless this deal?" Suddenly I experienced the same sensation I had felt before and I was seized by fear like the previous time. So I immediately turned her over to him and took the money.

The next day I went to visit al-Faḍl ibn Yaḥyā early and found him sitting alone. When he saw me, he burst out laughing and stamped his foot on the ground, saying, "Blast you! You've cheated yourself out of 10,000 dinars." I replied, "May God keep you safe! To tell the truth, I was seized by the same fear as the first time." "No offence taken. Servant boy, go fetch the singing-girl," and he came back with the very same singing-girl. "Take her – I never wanted her or anything other than to help you out." When the singing-girl was turned over to me I shouted at her, "Step back!" She stepped back. Then I said, "I testify – by my life! – that she is free before the face of God and I will marry her off with a dowry of 10,000 dinars. In two days, she has earned me 50,000 dinars, so the only proper reward for her is her freedom." Al-Faḍl replied, "May God continue to grant you success."

§ *Al-Husayn ibn 'Alī told me, citing 'Abd Allāh ibn Abī Sa'd citing Muḥammad ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn Mālik, citing Ishāq, citing his father [Ibrāhīm] who said:*

In my youth, I spent time with the residents of Quṭrubbul, Bārī, Binnī,¹⁰¹ and other places. In each locale, I struck up a friendship with a pleasant wine-merchant who would provide me with good wine and even set it aside secretly for me. One day I arrived in Bārī and my wine-merchant received me and said, "Abū Ishāq, I have something for you that is right up your alley!" I had earlier composed the following tune:

Song

Drink wine! And one should
in drinking wine be steady.
So, drink wine at dusk and dark,
and again at dawn be ready!

¹⁰¹ Villages that were famous for their wine-taverns.

The poetry and the melody are by Ibrāhīm in the ‘light heavy’ rhythm with the first finger as tonic by way of the third-finger fret, and there is another setting by Manṣūr Zalzal the lute-player in the ‘light ramal’ rhythm according to Ḥabash.

Ibrāhīm continued:

I entered his house, broke open the seal on the wine-jug, and began to sing that song in a quavering voice.¹⁰² The wine-merchant was flabbergasted and watched me as I poured the wine until it had filled the pitcher and overflowed. I said, “Blast you! Your wine has overflowed.” He replied, “Allow me to fill it with my own wine. Has someone you know recently died?” “No,” I replied. “Then why is your throat in mourning?”¹⁰³

§ *Al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī told me, citing Hārūn ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Malik al-Zayyāt, citing Ḥammād ibn Ishāq citing his uncle Ṭayyāb ibn Ibrāhīm, who said:*

I went in to see my father once when Mukhāriq was with him. My father was teaching him this song:

Song

You are grieving, distressed and gloomy,
 a saddened stranger who [for his beloved] yearns.
 The people of Khākh in al-Muwaqqar have stirred you,
 though there is no one close or near to you there.
 How many other loves do you have across the wide earth aside from her?
 Its retreating mirage is like a single strand of hair.
 By your life, I am in Raqīm Qays,
 and near her family, though deep in despair.

The poetry is by al-Aḥwaṣ¹⁰⁴ and the melody is by Ibrāhīm in the mākhūrī rhythm on the fourth-finger fret according to ‘Amr.

¹⁰² Ar. *rajjā‘a*, to sing in a quavering voice that expresses intense emotion.

¹⁰³ The quavering voice (*tarjīl*) was apparently associated with the singing of funeral lamentations, Ar. *nawḥ*. A different version of this same anecdote, but with a different song, occurs later in the text (KA V: 244): *fa-mā lī arā ṣawṭaka ḥazīnan* versus *mā bāl ḥalqaka ḥazīnan*, see p. 91.

¹⁰⁴ ‘Abd Allāh ibn Muḥammad (d. 724), known as al-Aḥwaṣ (‘the slit-eyed’), was a licentious poet who fell in and out of favor in the Umayyad court. He was at one point exiled to the

Ṭayyāb continued:

When Mukhāriq had finished learning it, my father burst into tears and said to him, “Mukhāriq, how wondrous are the ways of the Devil, that you are here on earth. For, by God, when I am gone, you will be the standard-bearer of this art!”

§ *Al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī and my uncle both told me, citing ‘Abd Allāh ibn Abī Sa‘d, citing Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Mālīk, citing Ishāq, who said:*

When my father composed the tune for:

If only Hind would fulfill her promise
and heal my soul from what it suffers.

I quarreled with him and found fault with his composition. I said to him, “Aren’t you aware of the rivals who criticize your style and belittle your talents? You compose a song to a text that Ibn Surayj long ago used in a song and you set it to a tune that is not nearly as good? The poetry is worthy of better than that! Leave the well-known compositions of the old masters alone and take up something else.” He grew angry and I went on to boast about my own compositions and to find fault with whatever I could in his. When he put up with me things were fine, but when he grew angry I had to flatter him to calm him down. He said to me, “God only knows why I stand for this – either stop it or sing me the best song you have ever composed in the ‘second heavy’ rhythm, the rhythm of this song!” When I saw how serious he was, I selected this composition of mine:

Say to the one who repelled you with reproaches,
and kept their distance from you:
“You have achieved what you desired,
even if you said it only in jest.”

We continued to disagree as we headed out into the desert to walk off the remains of our hangovers. “So who would you have judge between us?” my father asked. “Who in the world would you have judge between us out here in the desert?” I replied. “The first person we come across: I’ll sing my song to him, then you sing your song.” I had my dander up, so I agreed. A Nabatean sheikh transporting thorn brush on his donkey suddenly appeared and my father

Dahlak Islands in the Red Sea for provocatively alluding to love affairs with well-born ladies of noble families, but was later pardoned.

approached him saying, “My friend and I would like to ask a favor of you.” “And what would that be?” We replied, “Each of us claims that he is better than the other in singing, so we want you to listen to us both, and then be the judge.” “Go ahead,” he said. My father started and sang his tune, then I followed him and sang mine. When I finished, the man turned to me and said, “I judge against you, may God forgive you,” and left. Then my father slapped me harder than he had ever slapped me in my life. I fell silent and did not utter a single word, nor did I bring up the topic again until we separated.

The Background of these Two Songs
 If only Hind would fulfill her promise,
 and heal my soul from what it suffers,
 And for once take the initiative,
 for weak is the one who does not follow his will.
 They alleged that she asked her neighbors,
 one day as she undressed and bathed in cool water,
 “Does he describe me as you see me,
 truly, by your lives, or does he miss the mark?”
 They laughed and told her,
 “You are beautiful to every eye that loves you.”
 They were carried away by the envy they bore her,
 people have felt envy since the beginning of time.

The poetry is by ‘Umar ibn Abī Rabī‘a and the melody is by Ibrāhīm in the ‘second heavy’ rhythm on the middle-finger fret. There is another version by Ibn Surayj in the ‘ramal’ rhythm on the fourth-finger tonic with the ring finger, and yet another version by Malik in the ‘light heavy’ on the fourth finger and the ring finger,¹⁰⁵ according to Yaḥyā al-Makkī. Ishāq, however, mentions it in that mode, but without attributing it to anyone. Al-Hishāmī said, “I’ll offer proof that it is by Mālīk, and that is that it closely resembles his song: Surrender, O house of Hind.”

There is also a version by Mutayyim in the ‘first heavy’ rhythm. As for the song that Ishāq boasted was better than his father’s, he composed both the poetry and the music for it. The melody is in the ‘second heavy’ rhythm on the middle-finger fret according to ‘Amr. I have included it in the section on Ishāq.

105 Ar. *bi-l-khinsir wa-l-binsir*, the phrase *fī majrā* ‘by way of’ has been dropped, see Sawa, *Anecdotes*, p. 14.

§ *Aḥmad ibn Abī Ṭāhir reported, citing Ḥammād ibn Ishāq, citing his father, who said:*

Al-Rashīd had been greatly angered by something he had heard about Maṣṣūr Zalzal, so he imprisoned him for ten years, or thereabouts. One day when al-Rashīd excused himself and left to answer nature's call, Ibrāhīm began to sing a song he had composed to verses he'd written about Zalzal's imprisonment.

Will our time together ever return, O Zalzal?
 Those days when our enemies and liars envied us,
 Days when you were safe from adversities,
 and good fortune enveloped us?
 What misery it is to have lost those days and his [the caliph's] closeness,
 what humiliation he suffers – if only he would be reasonable!
 Without you I am in constant distress,
 I weep from the four corners of my eyes, as if over the death of a child.

The poetry and the melody are by Ibrāhīm, in the 'light heavy' rhythm on the middle-finger fret, according to 'Amr.

Ishāq continued:

Al-Rashīd came back during the song and took his place. Then he said, "Ibrāhīm, what were you saying?" "Only good things, my lord." "Sing it again," he ordered, but Ibrāhīm hesitated. Al-Rashīd got angry and said, "Sing it again, and no harm will come to you." So he repeated the song. "Would you like to see him?" al-Rashīd asked. "Can people be resurrected from the grave?" Ibrāhīm responded. "Go fetch Zalzal!" he ordered. They brought him out and the hair of his head and beard had turned white, but Ibrāhīm was overjoyed to see him. Al-Rashīd ordered him to sit and he did. Then he ordered Ibrāhīm to sing and Zalzal to play, and the two of them 'shook' the world.¹⁰⁶ Al-Rashīd drank a whole *raṭl* of wine while they performed. Then he ordered that Zalzal be freed and gave them both splendid rewards. He reconciled with Zalzal, and allowed him to return to his home.

Ishāq added:

Zalzal was the first to revive the *shabbūt* (fish-shaped) lute – in ancient times they were the lutes played in Persia – and when he introduced them, they caused quite a stir.

¹⁰⁶ A pun on Zalzal's name, which comes from the verb *zalzala* 'to shake.'

He added:

Zalzal's sister was married to Ibrāhīm and bore him children.

§ *Muḥammad ibn Mayzad told me, citing Ḥammād ibn Ishāq, citing his father, who said:*

The first person I learned singing from was a mad man – whenever someone would call out to him, “O Muḍar,” he'd get furious and curse them.¹⁰⁷ But I had heard that he sang brilliantly certain songs that he had learned from the great singers of the Hejaz. I used to have him brought to my house, I'd ply him with food and drink, and humor him until I had learned something from him. He was a very accomplished singer and the first song I learned from him was:

Send me your greetings O Salm, for I,
 since I fell for you, have become rich-poor.
 The richness is that I have possessed your heart,
 the poverty is that I visit one who does not visit me in return.
 Woe is me! Other souls are consoled, but mine
 is in love with an antelope – and my memory of her does not abate.
 Who can help a soul that craves your love,
 and a heart that for you almost takes flight?

Then I would wait for a while before trying to learn anything else from him. When he was in his right mind, he was a skillful and impeccable singer. Then he disappeared and I never found out what happened to him.

The poetry is by al-Walīd ibn Yazīd¹⁰⁸ and the melody by Yūnus, in the 'light ramal' rhythm on the open string with the ring-finger fret, according to Ishāq. But others have said that is by 'Umar al-Wādī, and there is another setting by Wajh al-Qar'a in the 'second heavy' rhythm on the middle-finger fret, according to Ḥabash.

§ *Muḥammad bin Mazyad told me, citing Ḥammād ibn Ishāq, citing his father, citing his grandfather, who said:*

¹⁰⁷ Muḍar is one of the broad tribal designations for the northern Arabs in contrast to the southern or Yemeni Arabs; so perhaps the madman was a southern Arab who hated being addressed as Muḍar.

¹⁰⁸ al-Walīd ibn Yazīd ibn 'Abd al-Malik (d. 744), was the eleventh Umayyad caliph, a poet, composer and musician, who patronized the famous poets and musicians of his day.

I once accompanied al-Rashīd to Syria when he went out on a military expedition. He called for me one day and I went to him in a sitting-room furbished with different types of marble such as I had never seen before. He ate and ordered me to eat with him, and I remained in attendance on him until the late afternoon. Then he called for wine and drank, and gave me wine to drink as well. Then he bestowed on me an embroidered robe from among his own garments, and gave me 1,000 dinars. “Note, Ibrāhīm,” he said, “how many favors I have given you this day! You have kept me company, just the two of us, you have eaten with me, I have bestowed on you apparel from off my own person, I have given you money, and I have allowed you to sit here in the veranda of Maslama ibn ‘Abd al-Malik¹⁰⁹ and drink with me.” “My lord,” I responded, “Not one iota of your favor has escaped my notice! Your benefaction towards me is beyond reckoning.” At that point I kissed his feet and the ground in front of him.

§ *Al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī told me, citing Aḥmad ibn Zubayr, citing Dī‘bil ibn ‘Alī, who said:*

When al-Rashīd ascended to the throne and, having finished with the affairs of state, sat down to have a drink, singers were ushered in and the first to sing was Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī, who sang the following verses of his:

After the country had been in darkness, it has now been exalted!
 For Hārūn the Imām is a shining light in it.
 With Hārūn, justice is raised among us,
 oppression has receded and hope now spreads.
 I have seen that the people feel safe with him,
 as gazelles feel safe in the sanctuary.
 You have followed the path of the Prophet truly,
 and your actions in all things are patterned on his.¹¹⁰

109 Son of the Umayyad caliph ‘Abd al-Malik (r. 685–705), and half-brother to four of the following caliphs who ruled from 705 to 743 (except for a brief hiatus in 717–720 during the rule of ‘Abd al-Malik’s nephew, ‘Umar II); he was excluded from the line of succession because his mother was a slave. An important military commander, he led the unsuccessful siege of Constantinople in 717.

110 The Prophet Muḥammad is revered as a model (*qudwa*) for humankind, and emulation (*iqtidā’*) of his behavior and acts are a mark of piety, a fitting theme for a poem celebrating the ascension of a new caliph.

A servant called out from behind the curtain, “Well done, Ibrāhīm, both the poetry and your singing!” and he ordered that Ibrāhīm be given 1,000 dirhams.

Ibrāhīm’s tune for this song is in the ‘first heavy’ rhythm, on the index finger by way of the middle-finger fret, according to Aḥmad al-Makkī.

§ *Al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī told me, citing Yazīd ibn Muḥammad al-Muḥallabī, citing his father, who said:*

One day Abū Sa‘īd al-Nahdī, Hāshim ibn Sulaymān the singer and I met in a garden and sat drinking while Hāshim sang for us. We were enjoying ourselves when suddenly a well-dressed, handsome man entered the garden and approached us. When we were still looking at him from a distance, Hāshim jumped up and ran over to meet him. He kissed his hands and embraced him, though none of us recognized him, but he greeted his friend warmly. Then the man said, “Don’t let me disturb you! I was passing by and heard Hāshim’s singing, and I was beside myself with joy. I entered certain that he could only be socializing with a refined young man who appreciates and takes pleasure in singing. In doing so I follow the example of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ja‘far ibn Abī Ṭālib¹¹¹ – upon him be peace! – because he once heard someone singing in a group of people and entered without permission, saying: ‘Your singer gave me permission to enter when he sang’:

Say to the noble ones at our door, ‘Enter!’

There is no objection to a display of passion¹¹² in a young man.

I know that you would like to know who I am. He who has recognized me is content and for those of you who do not know me, I am Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī.” We stood up and I kissed him on the head and rejoiced at our good fortune, and that day was the beginning of a deep friendship among us. Ibrāhīm was away for quite a while after that, but then Hāshim sent us a piece of paper from him on which was written:

Hāshim, is there a path for me to that which
disperses a soul’s distress of every type,

111 ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ja‘far ibn Abī Ṭālib, nephew of the fourth caliph ‘Alī, hence the blessing following his name (d. between 700 and 709). He was a major patron of musicians and singers in Medina, which earned him the sobriquet the ‘Ocean of Generosity’ (*baḥr al-jūd*).

112 Ar. *taṣābā*: ‘to act in a boyish manner’ or ‘manifesting passionate love or desire.’

Wine, aged and pure, on which the rays of light play
 like a burning fire or a star igniting?
 How many a day and night have I delighted in the company
 of the young al-Nahdī and the son of al-Muhallab,
 Passing the wine round among us with greetings,
 offering ourselves as ransom for each other's mother and father!

§ *Muḥammad ibn Mazyad told me, citing Ḥammad ibn Ishāq, citing his father, who said:*

When I was a boy, I had a pet magpie I had raised that used to imitate everything it heard. Once it stole a ruby ring that belonged to my father, who had placed it on a cushion when he went in to the toilet. When he came out, he couldn't find it. He looked for it and beat his servant who had been standing nearby, but he wasn't able to find out what had happened to it. At one point I was in our house and saw the magpie digging in the dirt and then it pulled out the ring. It played with it for quite a while, and then put the ring back in its place and buried it again! I dug it up and took it to my father, which greatly pleased him, and he composed the following verses mocking the magpie:

If God has blessed any type of bird,
 He has not blessed the magpie!
 Long-tailed, short-winged,
 at any opportunity he steals.
 His eyes roll around in his head
 like two globes of quicksilver.

§ *Al-Ḥasan ibn 'Alī gave me a report, citing 'Abd Allāh ibn Abī Sa'd, citing Aḥmad ibn al-Makkī; and I consulted Abū Aḥmad ibn Ja'far Jaḥḥa about this anecdote and he said that Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Yaḥyā al-Makkī al-Murtajil¹¹³ had narrated it to him, citing his father, citing his grandfather; and I also found this anecdote in books citing 'Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn Naṣr, citing his grandfather Ḥamdūn ibn Ismā'īl – so I have combined all of their different accounts into one:*

Al-Rashīd said to Ja'far ibn Yaḥyā one day, "We've been listening to these singers of ours for a long time without making any distinction among them. Let's you and I divide them up and put them to the test." They divided up the singers and set each one against his peer. Ibn Jāmi' was on the side of al-Rashīd, and

113 *murtajil* = a singer who sings without accompaniment, i.e. a *capella*. See *Sawa Glossary*, pp. 158–59.

Ibrāhīm was on Ja‘far ibn Yaḥyā’s side. The courtiers all attended to watch this championship of the singers. Al-Rashīd ordered Ibn Jāmi‘ to start, so he sang a song, which he performed extremely well, and al-Rashīd was beside himself with pleasure. When he finished it, al-Rashīd turned to Ibrāhīm and said, “Ibrāhīm, now you sing it!” “Sire, I cannot, for I don’t know it,” Ibrāhīm replied, with a dejected expression. Al-Rashīd said to Ja‘far, “That’s one.”

Then he said to Ismā‘īl ibn Jāmi‘, “Ismā‘īl, sing another.” He sang another song, better than the first, and more pleasing in every way. When he brought it to a close, al-Rashīd said to Ibrāhīm, “Ibrāhīm, now you sing it.” “I don’t know it,” he said. “That’s two,” said al-Rashīd. “Ismā‘īl, sing another.” He sang a third song that was exquisite and surpassed the other two. When Ibn Jāmi‘ reached the end of the song, al-Rashīd said, “Ibrāhīm, sing it.” “I don’t know this one either.” Then Ja‘far said to him, “You have disgraced us, may God dishonor you!” So Ibn Jāmi‘ finished the day in triumph. Al-Rashīd was greatly pleased with him, gave him lavish gifts, and bestowed upon him a luxurious robe of honor, whereas Ibrāhīm appeared defeated and dejected until he finally left.

He continued:

Ibrāhīm headed home, but no sooner had he arrived than he sent for Muḥammad, known as ‘al-Zaff’ [the Quick]. Muḥammad was one of the very best singers, and in his day he was known for being able to learn any song he wished faster than anyone else. Al-Rashīd had grown angry with him for one of those things that make kings angry, had placed him under house arrest, and then forgotten about him. Ibrāhīm said to al-Zaff, “I’m turning to you for help rather than to someone closer to me because this is a scheme only you can pull off: This is what we’re going to do.” Al-Zaff replied, “I shall repay your friendship, if Almighty God so wills!” So Ibrāhīm laid out his plan. “I want you to go immediately to Ibn Jāmi‘ and tell him that you have come to congratulate him on how he bested me. You should find fault with me, criticize me, and insult me. Dupe him into letting you hear the songs he sang today and learn them, and in return you will receive from me whatever intervention you desire in order to help return you to the caliph’s good favor, God willing.”

He continued:

Al-Zaff left Ibrāhīm’s house, asked permission to enter Ibn Jāmi‘’s house, and was ushered in. He entered, greeted him, and said, “I have come to congratulate you on what I heard happened today! Thank God you have been able to humiliate that son of a *jurmuq* woman¹¹⁴ and that your superiority in this art has finally been revealed to all.” “You’ve heard the news?” “It is already too

114 The *Jurmuqs* (Ar. *Jarāmiqa/Jurmuqān*) are said to have been a non-Arab people who lived in the region of Mosul in the early days of Islam, and ‘son of a *jurmuq* woman’ was apparently an insult directed at the people of that city.

well-known not to have reached someone like me!" He said, "Blast you! Only those who witnessed it know about this." Al-Zaff replied, "Sir, I would love to hear your version of what happened, so that I can transmit it directly from you, rather than second- or third-hand." "Spend the day here with me and I'll tell you the whole story." "As you wish," al-Zaff replied. Ibn Jāmi' offered him food and they ate together, then he offered him wine. He began to tell the story until he got to the first song. "And which song was it, Sir?" So Ibn Jāmi' sang it for him. Muḥammad began to applaud and guffaw and drank some more, while Ibn Jāmi' kept on singing until al-Zaff had learned it. Then he asked about the second song, so Ibn Jāmi' sang it to him, and he did as he had done with the first one, and did likewise with the third. When he had learned all three songs and mastered them, he said, "Sir, I've got what I came for, so with your permission I'll take my leave." "As you wish." So Muḥammad left, and headed directly to Ibrāhīm. When he reached the door Ibrāhīm cried out, "What've you got?" "Everything you wanted! Bring me a lute." Ibrāhīm called for a lute and al-Zaff played and sang the songs for him. Ibrāhīm said to him, "By your father's life, you have them exactly right! Now sing them again for me." He sang them again and again until Ibrāhīm had learned them correctly, and then al-Zaff left and went home.

The next day Ibrāhīm went to al-Rashīd's residence and when he called for his singers, Ibrāhīm entered with them. When al-Rashīd saw him he said, "You dare to appear here!? It would have been better for you to stay at home for a month after the drubbing Ibn Jāmi' gave you!" He replied, "Why is that, Sire? By my life, if you would permit me to speak freely, I will explain." "What is it you'd like to say?" he asked, "Speak!" "It would not be proper for me or anyone else to oppose you in anything you do," Ibrāhīm said, "or to defeat you when you are rooting for your side in a competition. In any case, there is not a song in the world that I do not know." Al-Rashīd retorted, "Enough of that! Yesterday you confessed ignorance of the songs we heard from our friend here. If you knew them yesterday, but chose not to sing them, then [prove it and] sing them today. There is no bias or favoritism here." So Ibrāhīm began and sang all of the songs straight through.

Ibn Jāmi' was listening and paid careful attention until Ibrāhīm reached the end. Then he burst out with embarrassing oaths swearing that Ibrāhīm could not possibly have known those songs or heard them because they were his own compositions and had never been performed for anyone else. Ibn Jāmi' said, "Blast you! What plot did you concoct after I sang?" "I didn't concoct any plots," responded Ibrāhīm. Al-Rashīd said, "Ibrāhīm, by my life, tell me the truth!" "By your life," he replied, "I am telling you the truth – turn about is fair play!¹¹⁵ I sent

115 Lit. "I threw his own stone back at him."

Muḥammad al-Zaff to him with assurances from me, the most important of which is that you would reconcile with him. On my behalf he duped Ibn Jāmi‘ until he had learned the songs and then taught them to me. But now all blame has been removed from me by Ibn Jāmi‘’s confession, for I am not obligated to know songs he has composed and never performed publicly. That’s foul play! It goes without saying that he should never know a song of the great masters that I do not also know. But if I am compelled to learn all of his compositions, then he must also learn all of mine, and likewise every single of one of us would be compelled to learn the compositions of all of our colleagues and peers.” Those who had derided him now appeared disgraced and contemptible. Al-Rashīd responded, “You are right, Ibrāhīm, you have cleared your name with convincing arguments.” Then he turned to Ibn Jāmi‘ and said, “Ismā‘īl, for shame! For shame! What a disgrace! What a disgrace!”¹¹⁶ Al-Mawṣilī has not only undone what you did to him yesterday, but he’s taken his revenge on you today!” Then he called for al-Zaff and was reconciled with him.

‘Alī ibn Muḥammad said: I asked my maternal uncle, Abū ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ḥamdūn, once when we were discussing this anecdote, “Do you know these songs by Ibn Jāmi‘?” He told me that he had heard Ishāq tell this story and had said that the first song was:

I wept, yes, I wept! For every lover
 whose soulmate leaves, weeps for her.
 I did not part from Lubnā out of mutual hatred,
 but our misery had reached its limit.¹¹⁷

The poetry is by Qays ibn Dhariḥ and the music by Ibn Jāmi‘ in the ‘second heavy’ rhythm on the middle-finger fret. There is another setting by Yaḥyā al-Makkī¹¹⁸ in the ‘second heavy’ rhythm on the fourth-finger and ring finger according to his book. According to al-Hishāmī there is another setting by Ibrāhīm in the ‘first heavy’ rhythm.

116 Ar. *utīta utīta duḥīta duḥīta!*

117 Qays ibn Dhariḥ was pressured by his family to divorce his wife Lubnā because they were childless; although they both remarried, he continued to love her for the rest of his life.

118 Yaḥyā ibn Marzūq al-Makkī (d. 833) was a prominent singer in the early ‘Abbasid court, but is most often remembered as the author of a major song book, which, however, does not survive.

He continued:

The second song was:

Salmā's encampment at Muḑḑā al-Raghām has been effaced
 by the winds taking turns, year after year,
 After her sojourn here, where these remains now lie,
 and the dragging of skirt hems over these places.
 The familiarity of these dwellings, the closeness of the neighborhood,
 the kindness of visits, and greetings returned,
 That was a simple time, a life of happiness,
 when jealousy was distant, and we exchanged sweet words.¹¹⁹

The poetry is by Ḥammād al-Rāwīya¹²⁰ and the music is by Ibn Jāmi' in the 'first heavy' rhythm on the third finger fret – this is what al-Ḥazanbal transmitted, citing Amr ibn Abī 'Amr.

Ibn Ḥamdūn said, "This song is an amazing composition with many notes, well-constructed, and is among the best of Ibn Jāmi's songs. The caliph al-Mu'tasim was quite taken with it and would often order other singers to be silent when it was sung in his presence and would not listen to anything else for the rest of the day."

He continued:

The third song was:

Song

Weeping has drained the tears of your eye, so borrow
 an eye from another whose tears still flow.
 Who will lend you his eye so that you may weep with it?
 Have you ever seen an eye lent for weeping?

The poetry is by al-'Abbās ibn al-Aḥnaf and the music by Ibn Jāmi' in the 'first heavy' rhythm on the middle-finger fret. Ibn Ḥamdūn continued: Ibrāhīm

119 The last three verses have internal rhymes: *bbba ccca ddda*.

120 Ḥammād ibn Abī Laylā (d. 772) was one of the most important collectors and transmitters of early poetry, hence his nickname *al-Rāwīya* ('the transmitter'), but was accused by contemporaries as well as later figures of having fabricated much of what he purported to have collected. Nevertheless, he remains one of the key figures in the transformation of early Arabic oral poetry into a written tradition.

modeled¹²¹ a later song on this using these same verses set to a melody he composed in the ‘ramal’ rhythm on the third-finger fret, but his song was not nearly as good. Al-Iṣbahānī added: Another setting has been composed for these verses which is feeble, poorly constructed, in the modern style, and is not worth mentioning here.

§ *A propos these verses, Muḥammad ibn Yaḥyā al-Ṣūlī told me, citing Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Ḥazanbal, citing Aḥmad ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Ismā‘īl, citing his father, who said:*

This verse by al-‘Abbās ibn al-Aḥnaf was once recited to the poet Bashshār [ibn Burd]:¹²²

Weeping has drained the tears of your eye, so borrow
an eye from another whose tears still flow.

Whereupon Bashshār declared: “Truly, this young fellow has joined the ranks of the best poets; he kept pushing himself on us, but we rejected him until he composed this poem.”

Muḥammad ibn Yaḥyā told me, citing Maymūn ibn Hārūn, citing Iṣḥāq, who said:

This verse by al-‘Abbās was once recited to the caliph al-Rashīd:

Who will lend you his eye so that you may weep with it?
Have you ever seen an eye lent for weeping?

And he responded, “Only someone who is neither protected nor guarded by God would lend an eye.”

121 Ar. *‘arāḍa*: in poetry this term refers to a poet ‘imitating’ or ‘responding to’ an earlier poem by borrowing some structural feature(s) from it, such as its meter and/or rhyme, and at times also the main theme. In music this term refers to *contrafactum* composition where a singer sets the lyrics from an earlier song to a new melody or sets new lyrics to the melody of an earlier song.

122 Bashshār ibn Burd (714–83), a blind poet of the late Umayyad and early ‘Abbasid periods who held a prominent place in the court of al-Mahdī. He is often cited as one of the earliest figures of the *muḥdath* (‘modern’) school of poetry that engaged in the intricate wordplay and rhetorical figures known as *badi‘*.

§ *Other songs have been composed to words drawn from this same ode rhyming on the letter R¹²³ by al-Abbās, such as this one:*

Love is the most insistent thing,
 the fates bring it and drive it onward.
 If a young man follows the impulses of love,
 matters soon reach a pitch that even powerful men cannot endure.

Ibn Jāmi' sang it in the 'second heavy' rhythm on the ring-finger fret. According to al-Hishāmī there is another version by Shāṭira, the wife of Maṣṣūr Zalzal in the 'first heavy' rhythm on the middle-finger fret.

§ *Ibn al-Makkī al-Murtajil claimed that the three songs that were stolen [by Muḥammad al-Zaff] from Ibn Jāmi' [in addition to 'Salmā's encampment'] were:*

O tomb among the dwellings of the people of Muḥarriq¹²⁴ ...

and:

The edge of al-Qurayya¹²⁵ and the sand dune have been effaced ...

In his account, Ibn al-Makkī does not mention the two songs cited above but rather:

Weeping has drained the tears of your eye so borrow ...

and:

I wept, yes, I wept! For every lover ...

The Background of these Two Songs

Song

O tomb among the dwellings of the people of Muḥarriq,
 much thunder and lightning has crashed down upon you.

123 Although end-rhymes in classical Arabic poetry normally consist of both a consonant and at least one vowel (preceding and/or following the consonant), the rhyme is traditionally referred to solely by its consonant. Hence this poem is referred to as an ode on the rhyme "R," though each verse ends in the syllable *-ār*.

124 The people of Muḥarriq are the Lakhmid kings of al-Ḥira, see KA V: 212, n. 1.

125 A name given to several different places, among which one is on the outskirts of Medina in the Hejaz and the other in the Najd region.

The weeping that was once plentiful now has lessened,
but when I weep, I weep true tears.

The poetry is by a man from the Banū Asad who was lamenting Khālīd ibn Naḍla and another man from the Banū Asad. The two of them were boon companions of the Lakhmid king al-Mundhir ibn Mā' al-Samā', who killed them in an outburst of anger. This is a famous story and is found in the section on Ibn Jāmi'.¹²⁶ The music is by Ibn Jāmi' and he composed two melodies for it: one in the 'first heavy' rhythm on the middle-finger fret and the second in the 'ramal' rhythm on the ring-finger fret. But it is also said that the setting in 'ramal' is by Ibn Surayj. Ḥabash mentioned that Muḥammad Ṣāhib al-birām¹²⁷ composed a setting in the 'second heavy' rhythm on the middle-finger fret.

From it is:

The traces¹²⁸ of al-Qurayya and the sand dune have been effaced,
and as far as the valley of Muḥā' no one dwells.
Its traces are desolate and over them
the wind-blown dust and dirt from afar have drifted.
You rejected a tryst with Su'dā in favor
of another – there was ever misfortune in your love for her!
Like one who pierces her ears to don borrowed jewelry,
and the piercings disfigure her ears.
She returns the borrowed jewelry to her neighbor,
but in her ears remain the scars.

The poetry is by Ibn Harma¹²⁹ and the music by Ibn Jāmi' in the 'second heavy' rhythm on the open string with the middle finger, according to Ishāq. There is another setting by al-Gharīd in the 'second heavy' rhythm

126 The story is not found in the section on Ibn Jāmi', but rather in the section on 'Ubayd ibn al-Abrāṣ, KA XXII: 91–92. They are said to have argued with al-Mundhir when he was drunk, and in a fit of anger, al-Mundhir ordered that they be buried alive. On the following day, when he awoke from his drunken stupor, al-Mundhir asked after his two boon companions, and when told of the events of the preceding evening, regretted his action and ordered that a she-camel be slaughtered over their graves.

127 Lit. 'of the earthenware pots,' either a nickname or an indication of his occupation.

128 This first word, *rasm* (traces), is different than the first word, *ṭaraf* (edge), in the version cited above.

129 Ibn Harma al-Qurashī (d. 792), a poet of the late Umayyad/early 'Abbasid era, is sometimes referred to as the last of the 'classical' (i.e. tribal) poets.

on the ring-finger fret according to ‘Amr. ‘Amr said, “There is a setting by al-Hudhālī,” but he did not cite a rhythm or mode for it.¹³⁰

§ *Muḥammad ibn Khalaf Wakī told me, citing Hārūn ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Malik al-Zayyāt, citing ‘Isā ibn Ayyūb al-Qurashī, citing Ghayth ibn ‘Abd al-Karīm, citing Fulayḥ ibn Ismā‘il ibn Ja‘far the religious scholar, the owner of [Ḥarb],¹³¹ citing his father, who said:*

One day I passed by Ibn Harma sitting on a bench in the neighborhood of Banī Zurayq, so I said to him, “Abū Ishāq, what are you doing sitting here?” “I was remembering a time I composed a verse, but was stumped by the rhyme and couldn’t find a way to continue it, so I got fed up and stopped working on the poem.” I asked, “What was the verse?” And he said:

You rejected a tryst with Su‘dā in favor
of another – there was ever misfortune in your love for her!

He continued:

I composed that verse and could get no further with it, but then a beautiful young fair-skinned slave girl walked by. I used to find her very attractive and would talk to her whenever she passed. She walked by me that day and I saw that her face was swollen and her appearance had changed, so I asked her how she was doing. She replied, “There was a wedding among the Banū so-and-so that I wanted to attend, and my family lent me some earrings and pierced my ears so that I could wear them, but my face swelled up and my ears are as you see them now, so they took back the jewelry and I didn’t go to the wedding after all.” On hearing this, the verses poured forth and I exclaimed:

Like one who pierces her ears to don borrowed jewelry,
and the piercings disfigure her ears.
She returns the borrowed jewelry to her neighbor,
but in her ears remain the scars.

§ *Al-Ḥusayn ibn al-Qāsim told me, citing al-‘Abbās ibn al-Faḍl, citing his father, who said:*

¹³⁰ Ar. *lam yujannishu*. The verb *jannasa*, lit. ‘categorize’ or ‘classify,’ in reference to songs is to give the main tetrachord (*jins*) of the mode, and sometimes also the rhythm. A *mujannas* songbook was one in which the songs are ‘categorized,’ that is, cited with their musical indications, such as in KA.

¹³¹ Ar. *mawlā ḥarb* (owner of ‘Battle’ or ‘War’): Ḥarb appears to be the name of a singer here.

Al-Rashīd said to Ibn al-Mahdī, Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī, Ibn Jāmi‘, and Ibn Abī al-Kannāt, “Come to me early tomorrow, each of you with some poetry you have composed, if you are able to compose poetry, and sing it set to music – any of you who is not able to compose poetry can sing someone else’s verses.” Ibn al-Mahdī said, “I got up in the early hours of the morning and did my best to compose something I could set to music, but nothing came to me. When I feared that dawn was approaching, I called to my servants, who used to spend the night at the door of my home, and said to them, ‘I want to go somewhere without anyone knowing where I am going.’ I mounted and rode to the home of Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī. He had once told me that whenever he wanted to compose a song, he wouldn’t sleep until he had come with what he needed, and that if he had to get up to answer nature’s call in the early hours, he would lean on a plank of wood in the restroom and beat the rhythm on it until he had finished the song and knew it by heart. So I went and stood outside underneath the restroom of his house and he was repeating this song”:

When wine is poured into the glass before being mixed with water,
 its color on the surface of the glass is golden.
 If it is mixed, its color is pleasing, and you could imagine
 that rather than wine, the cup contains a star.
 Its father is the rain cloud, the vineyard its mother,
 I’ve never seen a coupling more delicious and desired.
 She comes to you pale, but this does not reflect her origin,
 for she has not the color of either her mother or father.

Ibn al-Mahdī continued:

I stood there listening to the song until I had learned it. The next morning, we went to al-Rashīd and when we sat down to drink, the servant came out to me saying, “The Commander of the Faithful says to you, ‘O son of a mother,¹³² sing for me.’” So I went first and sang that song, and al-Mawṣilī sat pale as death itself until I finished. Al-Rashīd drank to it and ordered that I be given 300,000 dirhams. Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī leapt up and swore to divorce his wife and swore on the life of al-Rashīd that the poem was his and that he had composed the lyrics and the music the day before and that no one before had ever sung it. Ibn al-Mahdī replied, “My lord, this claim that ‘it is mine’ is nothing but lying and falsehood.” Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī grew agitated and started shouting. When I had had enough of teasing him, I said to al-Rashīd, “The truth must out!” and I told him what had happened. Al-Rashīd said to al-Mawṣilī, “My brother here has already taken the money, and there is no way for it me to take it back,

¹³² Al-Rashīd and Ibn al-Mahdī are half-brothers, of the same father, but different mothers.

so I'm ordering that you be given 100,000 dirhams as compensation for what happened. If you had been the one to start with that song, it would have been your good fortune." Then he ordered that the money be given to al-Mawṣilī and delivered to his home.

§ *Al-Ḥusayn ibn Yaḥyā told me, citing Ḥammād ibn Iṣḥāq, citing Mukhāriq, who said:*

Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī visited Muḥammad ibn Yaḥyā ibn Khālīd on the day of Mihrajān¹³³ and Muḥammad asked him to spend the day with him. "I can't," he replied, "because a messenger has just arrived from the Caliph." "If you stop by after you leave the palace, I'll give you all the gifts I receive today." "In that case, I will," Ibrāhīm replied, and left a friend of his there to keep track of all the gifts that were delivered to Muḥammad.

Mukhāriq said:

Amazing gifts of all sorts arrived.

He continued:

Among the gifts was a golden statue of an elephant with ruby eyes. Muḥammad said to Ibrāhīm's friend, "Don't tell him about this gift so that I can send it to the singing-girl so-and-so," which is what he did. Ibrāhīm left the palace and returned to Muḥammad and said, "Bring me all the gifts you were given." They brought him all of the gifts except for the statue. Muḥammad said, "I have to tell you the truth – this is what happened [and he told him about the statue]." "Unacceptable," Ibrāhīm said, "you were the one who set the condition!" So the statue was brought out. "This gift belongs to me and I'm free to do with it as I wish, isn't that so?" asked Ibrāhīm. "Yes, indeed," he replied. "Then take the statue back to the singing-girl." After which he began to distribute the gifts among those who were sitting with Muḥammad, piece by piece, among all of the friends and male servants who were there, and even among the female slaves in the women's quarters, until nothing remained. Then, when he wished to leave, he took two apples from the sitting room and said, "These are for me," and left. Muḥammad was left stunned by his generosity and graciousness.

§ *Aḥmad ibn al-Marzubān said that one of the Sultan's secretaries told him:*

One night al-Rashīd woke up and called for the black, short-legged donkey that he used to ride inside the palace grounds and mounted it. He set off wearing an

¹³³ *Mihragān/Mihrajān* was an ancient Iranian festival celebrated close to the autumnal equinox, parallel to the *Naw Rūz* festival at the spring equinox. Among the customs associated with *Mihrajān* well into the Islamic era was the presenting of gifts to rulers and other powerful figures. See EI2 "Mihragān."

embroidered cloak, covering his face with an embroidered turban wrapped in an embroidered shawl, accompanied by 400 white servants, not counting his personal attendants. Masrūr al-Farghānī was rather bold given his close connection to the caliph, and as al-Rashīd passed through the gate of the palace he asked, "Sire, where are you going at this hour?" "To the home of al-Mawṣilī," he replied.

Masrūr recounted:

So all of us went with him, surrounding him on all sides, until he arrived at the home of Ibrāhīm. Ibrāhīm came out to receive him and kissed the hoof of his donkey and said, "Sire, what an honor that you should arrive at such an hour!" "Yes," replied, "A strong desire to see you seized me in the middle of the night." Then he dismounted and sat at the edge of the portico and had Ibrāhīm sit with him. Ibrāhīm said to him, "Sire, would you care for something to eat?" "Yes," he replied, "*khāmīz* of gazelle,"¹³⁴ and it was brought to him immediately, as if it had been prepared especially for him. He partook of a small amount and then called for some of the wine he had brought with him. Then Ibrāhīm asked, "Would you like me to sing for you or your singing girls?" "The singing girls," he replied. Ibrāhīm's singing girls came out and together they took up the center and both sides of the portico. "Should all of them play together or just one?" Ibrāhīm asked. "Have them play two by two, but sing one by one."¹³⁵ This they did, taking turns, until they had gone around the center of the portico and along one of its sides. Al-Rashīd listened without reacting at all to their singing, until one young girl from his own entourage sang:

You who are lighting a fire with a fire-drill whose flint does not spark,
 come, if you wish, and light a brand from my heart.
 How ugly and revolting are people in my eyes,
 if I look out and among them, you I do not spy.

He was delighted, asked her to sing the song again several times, and drank several *raṭls* of wine. Then he asked the singing girl about the composer of the song, but she remained silent. He reached out towards her, but she recoiled. Then he ordered her to approach him, and she rose and moved nearer till she was standing directly in front of him. Then she whispered something to him. Suddenly he called for his donkey, mounted, and departed. As he left, he turned to Ibrāhīm and said, "You're lucky that you are not caliph!" Ibrāhīm was

134 A dish made with the meat of a young gazelle in its skin or a *sikbāj* (a dish where the trotters are cooked in a broth with lemon juice, then ladled into a bowl with the broth, and left to cool, until the broth solidifies into an aspic).

135 This presumably means that each girl took a turn singing while her partner accompanied her on the lute or tambourine, or possibly that the singer accompanied herself on the lute while her partner played tambourine.

scared out of his wits until al-Rashīd called for him some time later and once again welcomed him into his company.

Masrūr continued:

The secret she told him was that the song was composed by his sister, ‘Ulayya bint al-Mahdī, and that the singing-girl belonged to her and had been sent to Ibrāhīm so that he could train her. Al-Rashīd left because he was jealous!

The tune of the song was in the ‘light ramal’ rhythm.

§ *Muḥammad ibn Mazyad told me, citing Ḥammād ibn Ishāq, citing his father, who said:*

My father used to be friends with a female tavern-keeper in Raqqa known as Bishra who used to visit al-Hanī and al-Marī.¹³⁶ She had a beautiful daughter whom my father rather fancied. When al-Rashīd left Raqqa and traveled toward Byzantium on one of his military forays, my father composed these verses about her [as they were leaving]:

O daughter of Bishra, what obstacle has hindered me
 from keeping my promise to you?
 A shining light keeps me from sleeping,
 and causes me to burst into sobs on the hilltops.

He added:

He also composed other verses about her and composed a song in the ‘first ramal’ rhythm:

Song

You claimed that I was unfair to you and then left me,
 after shooting a piercing arrow into my heart.
 Yes, I wronged you, but forgive me, you go too far!
 For this is a place of protection and refuge.

Ḥammād said in connection to this anecdote that his grandfather’s melody was in the ‘ramal’ rhythm, but I found in Aḥmad ibn al-Makkī’s book that he composed two melodies for it, one in the ‘first heavy’ rhythm and the other in the ‘second heavy.’

¹³⁶ See earlier reference to these two estates on p. 25.

§ *ʿĪsā ibn al-Ḥusayn the Paper-vendor*¹³⁷ told me, citing *ʿAbd Allāh ibn Abī Saʿd*, citing *Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd Allāh ibn Mālīk al-Khuzāʿī*, who said:

Al-Rashīd had Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī imprisoned by the chief of police, Abū ʿAbbās (that is, his father, ʿAbd Allāh ibn Mālīk).¹³⁸ Ibrāhīm composed this tune [in prison] and one night we heard him repeating it over and over, in order to even out the setting:

Dear friends, I have grown weary of this place,
as I think about all that has happened to me:
My drinking of wine with a coquettish maid
who served me, supple as the branch of a bān tree.¹³⁹

He continued: He also sang in prison the following:

The night grows long as I stare at the stars,
and rub the heavy fetters on my legs.¹⁴⁰

§ *ʿĪsā* told me, citing *ʿAbd Allāh*, citing *Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd Allāh ibn Mālīk*, citing *Allūya al-Aʿsar*,¹⁴¹ who said:

I visited Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī when he was stricken with his final illness and had been placed in a medicinal bath¹⁴² for he was suffering from the colic from which he eventually died, and he was crooning this song:

137 The term *warrāq* referred to paper-makers, paper-vendors, and also to copyists of manuscripts. In many cities of the medieval Islamic world, the book market was referred to as *sūq al-warrāqīn*.

138 Chief of police under the caliphs al-Mahdī, al-Hādī, and al-Rashīd, and also a major military leader who took control of Armenia and Azerbaijan.

139 “A branch of the *bān* tree” (Ar. *ghuṣn al-bān*) is an archetypal image of beauty in ancient Arabic poetry, based on the slenderness and suppleness of its delicate, willow-like branches. Usually identified as *Moringa peregrina* (though a dozen other species of *Moringaceae* also grow in the Arabian Peninsula); its tuberous roots can be roasted and eaten like a sweet potato, and its termite-resistant trunk was considered excellent for making charcoal and used for the main posts and beams in the construction of houses.

140 This verse is cited in an earlier account of his imprisonment, see p. 20.

141 ʿAllūya ʿAlī ibn ʿAbdallāh (d. 850), was a major singer in the ʿAbbasid court, and the most prominent student of Ibn al-Mahdī, Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī’s main rival.

142 Ar. *abzan* – a metal box shaped like a coffin with a hole in the lid for the patient’s head; doctors used it in treatments that called for soaking the patient’s body in hot water infused with herbs or other medicaments.

Song

My good-looks and youth have changed,
 my mouth is now filled with broken teeth.
 My limbs have grown weak, and my joints are feeble,
 my bones are now bent, both the straight parts and the crooked.

Muḥammad said:

I spoke to Ishāq al-Mawşilī about this and he said, “That son of a bitch lied! He scarcely dared enter my father Ibrāhīm’s presence when he was sitting receiving people, so how could he have visited my father while he was sitting in a medicinal bath?!”

The Background of this Song

The poetry and the music are by Ibrāhīm and he composed two tunes for it, both in the mākhūrī rhythm on the middle-finger fret according to ‘Amr, and in the ‘second heavy’ rhythm according to Ibn al-Makkī.

§ *A propos this song, Jaḥza told me:*

The caliph al-Muqtadir¹⁴³ would summon us from time to time and have the singers Ibrāhīm ibn Abī al-‘Ubays, Kunayz, Ibrāhīm ibn Qāsim, as well as myself and Waşif the flute-player brought to him. Most of the time it was because his singing-girls had asked that we be summoned so that they could listen to us and learn the songs they heard us perform. We would sing and they learned whatever they chose. When we left he would order that each of them – Ibrāhīm, Kunayz Dubba, and Ibrāhīm – be given three hundred dinars, and that Waşif and I be given two hundred dinars.¹⁴⁴ To whomever else he had summoned along with us he would give anything from 100 or 200 dinars to 1,000 dirhams. When we arrived, he would be sitting behind a curtain with his singing-girls, and if he wished to suggest something, the servants would come out and order us to sing it. In front of each of us was a bottle with five *raṭls* of wine, along with a cup, a fingerbowl, and mug of water. One day, Şalifa [‘Show Off’], the singing-girl of Ziryāb,¹⁴⁵ sang that composition by Ibrāhīm al-Mawşilī:

143 r. 908–929.

144 Jaḥza, the narrator of this anecdote, and Waşif were instrumentalists who played *ṭunbūr* (long-necked lute) and flute respectively, and therefore earned less than the principal singers.

145 Not the famous male singer Ziryāb who traveled to al-Andalus, but a Baghdadi female singer of the same name.

My good-looks and youth have changed,
my mouth is now filled with broken teeth.

I drank to her and al-Muqtadir asked that she sing it again over and over, and I drank a glass to it each time. Ibrāhīm ibn Abī al-‘Ubays grabbed my shoulder and whispered, “Are you crazy? You were brought here to sing, not to be sung to, enjoy yourself, and drink! Watch out or you’re going to get drunk.” I held in check my desire for her to repeat the song after that and she didn’t. We never ended up meeting again, but I never heard anyone before or after that sing that song better than she sang it.

He continued:

Later al-Muqtadir bought her from Ziriyāb.

§ *My uncle told me, citing ‘Abd Allāh ibn Abī Sa‘d, citing Aḥmad ibn al-Qāsim ibn Ja‘far ibn Sulaymān ibn ‘Alī, citing Ishāq, citing his father Ibrāhīm, who said:*

Once when I was in Mecca wandering through its alleyways, I chanced upon a black woman standing there crying, heedless of everything around her. I didn’t know anything about her, but I couldn’t help staring at her. She wept and said:

‘Amr, why have you abandoned me?

You took my heart and now you are torturing me.

If only you had warned me, ‘Amr,

I would have been more vigilant, and you would never have won me.

I asked her, “Lady,¹⁴⁶ who is this ‘Amr?” “My husband,” she replied. “What is the matter with him?” I asked. “He told me that he loved me and kept asking for me until I married him. He stayed with me but a short while and then traveled to Judda and left me.” “What does he look like?” I asked. “More handsome than any dark-skinned man you have ever seen, and the most pleasing of men in nature and build.”

Ibrāhīm continued:

I mounted, along my servants, and traveled to Judda. I stood in the area around the port looking at who was on board the ships, and I ordered my servants to shout, “‘Amr! O ‘Amr!” Suddenly I spotted him coming off a ship with a tray of food around his neck. I recognized him from her description, so I called out to him:

146 Ar. *yā hādhihi*, lit. ‘O this one.’

‘Amr, why have you abandoned me?

You took my heart and now you are torturing me.

He responded, “Ah, have you seen her and heard from her?” “Yes,” I answered. He bowed his head a moment silently weeping. Then he started to sing those words in the most beautiful manner I had ever heard, and he repeated the song to me until I learned it. He was an extraordinary singer. “Won’t you go back to her?” I asked. “The only thing that prevents me is the need to earn a living,” he replied. “How much do you need each year to survive with her?” “300 silver dirhams,” he said.

Ishāq said – My father told me:

“By God, my son, if he had said 300 gold dinars, I would gladly have given them to him.” I called him over and gave him 3,000 dirhams and said to him, “This is so you can live with her for the next ten years, and it’d be best if you only took work that is close to where the two of you live.” After that I took him back to her.

§ *Ḥabīb ibn Naṣr al-Muhallabī told me, citing ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Nawfalī, citing Ṣāliḥ ibn ‘Alī (that is, al-Adjam), a neighbor of Ibrāhīm’s, citing Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī, who said:*

One evening I was home around nightfall when a servant from al-Rashīd came and beseeched me urgently to ride to him, so I left the house almost at a run. But as I was heading toward his residence, I was turned away from the entrance and led down streets that I did not know until I arrived at a newly built house. I entered a spacious courtyard – al-Rashīd used to love spacious courtyards – and there he was, sitting on a chair in the middle of this courtyard, with no one attending him other than one servant who was pouring his wine. He was wearing his usual summer attire – a light gown belted with a wide red *rashīdī*¹⁴⁷ shawl. When he saw me, he smiled and was pleased. “Mawṣilī,” he said, “I have been wanting to sit in this courtyard and have not been able to until today, and I wanted it to be just the two of us.” Then he shouted to the servants and one hundred pages appeared. They had been in the arcade, but hidden from Ibrāhīm by the columns, and when al-Rashīd called out to them they all stepped forward. “A cutting [of carpet] for Ibrāhīm,” and he was the first to cut

147 In some manuscripts *sindī*, i.e., from the region of Sind in the southeastern section of modern Pakistan.

up prayer rugs [as a gift?].¹⁴⁸ A chair was brought for me and was placed in front of him, very close to him. Al-Rashīd called for a lute and said, “By my life, entertain me to the very best of your ability.”

He continued:

So I did. I poured my heart into it, gave it everything I had, and was eagerly awaiting a reward for that evening. But while I was doing this, Masrūr the Elder arrived and stood where he would stand whenever he had a message for al-Rashīd that needed to be kept secret. Al-Rashīd glanced over at him, signaled for him to approach, which he did, and then Masrūr whispered something in his ear and withdrew. Al-Rashīd flew into a rage, his eyes turned red, and his jugular veins swelled up. He cried out, “How long am I going to put up with the family of the Banī Abī Ṭālib!?!¹⁴⁹ By God I am going to kill all of them, and kill their supporters – I’ll do it this time! I’ll do it!” I said, “We all belong to God!” When al-Rashīd was in that state, no one could escape his rage, and I figured that it could well be directed at me, so I began to sing:

Truly relief from cares are three cups,
 filled again after the first three have been drunk.
 And after that, four more to round out the ten,
 but drunk quickly, without tarrying.
 If they are served to you by servant-girls,
 perfumed, with soft white faces,
 Your happiness will be found in them,
 for nothing makes life sweeter than the company of women.

Al-Rashīd called out, “Blast it! Fill three cups for me so I don’t die from exasperation.” Then he drank the three, one after the other and said, “Sing!” So I sang and when I reached:

Filled again after the first three have been drunk

He called out, “Pour me another three, blast it!” Then he said to me, “Sing!” and when I sang the next verse he said, “Hurry up and bring me four more to

148 This meaning of this phrase is not entirely clear: *muqatta’a li-Ibrāhīm, wa-kāna huwa awwal man qaṭa’a al-muṣallayāt* [?].

149 The descendants of ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, cousin of the Prophet Muḥammad, who became his son-in-law when he married Muḥammad’s daughter Fāṭima, and the fourth caliph. ‘Alī’s two sons, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, and their descendants, were political and spiritual rivals to first the Umayyad and then the ‘Abbasid caliphates. They are still revered by modern Shiite Muslims.

complete the ten!" which was done. By God, he had no sooner finished the last of them than he was drunk, and rose to go inside. "Get up, Mawṣilī," he said, "and go home. Masrūr, I swear by my life that you will pay for it if you do not deliver 100,000 dirhams to his house before he arrives." I was not party to what they said, so I left [deeply disappointed]. But, by God, my fears were allayed and I obtained what I had hoped for, for when I reached my house the 100,000 dirhams had already arrived!

§ *My uncle told me, citing 'Abd Allāh ib Abī Sa'd, citing Yaḥyā ibn al-Ḥasan ibn 'Abd al-Khāliq, citing 'Abd Allāh ibn al-'Abbās ibn al-Faḍl ibn al-Rabī', who said:*

One night a messenger from al-Rashīd came out from behind the curtain to the singers with the order, "Each of you, sing this poem":

O my two companions, I have grown weary of staying
in al-Muṣallā and grown tired of al-Baqī'ā.¹⁵⁰
Take me to the dwellings of Hind and Su'dā,
then bring me back, for I love returning.

He continued:

Ibn Jāmi' sang first, and when he finished al-Rashīd was greatly pleased and drank. Then Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī said, "My lord, listen to it now from your little Nabatean,"¹⁵¹ and he sang it. Ibn Jāmi' began to squirm from the first verse to the last. Hārūn was greatly pleased and said, "Raise the curtain!" Ibn Jāmi' said to him, "Sire, he learned it from me, by God!" Al-Rashīd turned to Ibrāhīm and asked, "By my life, is he telling the truth?" "Yes, Sire, by your life, he is telling the truth," he replied. "But how did you manage to learn it from him when he is the most miserly of people when asked for anything?" "I got him to sing it once when he was drunk. He let himself go and sang it impeccably without taking any notice of me, and I learned it from him perfectly."

§ *Muḥammad ibn Mazyad told me, citing Ḥammād ibn Ishāq, citing his father, who said:*

Barṣūmā¹⁵² the flute-player and Zalzal the lutenist were from the lower classes of the people of Kufa, rough, slovenly, and uncouth folks. One year my father

150 Two places in Medina.

151 Ar. *nubayṭika* (КА v: 226, voweled *nubayṭiyka*): possibly in the sense of Iraqi, or even a low, base person.

152 Or Barṣawmā.

took them with him on the pilgrimage. He instructed them in Arabic singing, showed them the placement of the notes, and taught them about etiquette and culture until they had reached the level of refinement required of anyone in the service of the caliph. They were each the most talented of that era in their craft.

My father told me:

Zalzal had a singing-girl whom he had raised and taught to play lute, and he asked me to teach her to sing, so I did. She was quite talented and skillful.

He continued:

But he made sure that nobody heard her. When he died, I heard that she was to be put up for sale at his funeral, so I went to put a stop to that. She sang the following verses:

The lute has been abandoned by its strings,
 and the lute on its strings relies.
 The flute has been deprived of its voice,
 after you, it has no song.
 He who gave the flutes and lutes
 their pleasures and enlivened them is gone.
 The wine weeps in its pitchers
 along with this fair slender singing-girl.

He said: This poem is an elegy composed by a friend of his in Raqqa.

Ibrāhīm continued:

By God, I wept and my heart ached. So I went to al-Rashīd and I told him about her and he ordered that she be brought to him. He said to her, "Sing the song that Ibrāhīm told me you sang," so she sang it and wept. Al-Rashīd took pity on her and his eyes welled up with tears. He said to her, "Would you like me to buy you?" "Sire," she replied, "You are proposing what I would never have dared hope for, but it would be disloyal of me to allow anyone after my late master to own and enjoy me." The caliph's sympathy for her increased. "Sing another song," he said, and she sang:

My eyes reveal my secrets and display them,
 while my heart conceals what I have safeguarded within it.
 Between the two of them, how can the hidden remain hidden,
 when my eye reveals what my heart conceals?

Al-Rashīd ordered that she be purchased and set free, and he paid her a stipend until she died.

§ *Muḥammad told me, citing Ḥammād, citing his father, citing his grandfather, who said:*

Al-Rashīd said to me one day, “Ibrāhīm, come to me early tomorrow so that we can drink a morning draught together.” I replied, “Wild horses could not keep me away.”¹⁵³ So I went to him early the next day and we were alone except for a singing-girl as supple as a fresh bough of the ban tree¹⁵⁴ or the plaits of a horse’s reins, beautiful to look at, with gentle features, holding a lute in her hands. He said to her, “Sing!” and she sang verses by Abū Nuwās:¹⁵⁵

My heart imagined him, and his cheek appeared,
 and on the very spot I had been imagining, lay a mark from my glance.
 He passed through my thoughts and I wounded him,
 never before have I seen a body wounded by thoughts.
 My heart grazed him gently, but his palm was pained,
 from the lightest touch of my heart, his fingertips were hurt.

Ibrāhīm said:

I fell head over heels for her, so much so that I nearly lost control of myself. “Who is this, Sire?” I asked. He replied, “She is the one about whom the poet has said:

She possesses my heart in the morning and her heart is mine,
 we live in two bodies, but with a single soul.”

Then he said to her, “Sing!” so she sang:

On the day of separation one of their women said,
 “My heart is filled with passion, so depart and be forbearing.”
 A teardrop choked her, and on her cheek, her tears glistened white,
 and then gleamed golden as they streamed down her neck.

153 Lit. ‘The morning and I are like two horses in a race,’ referring to horses of equal ability and strength that are racing towards a single goal.

154 On the *bān* tree, see footnote 139 above.

155 Al-Ḥasan ibn Hānī’ al-Ḥakamī, known as Abū Nuwās [‘the one with the curly locks’] (c. 756–c. 814) was one of the greatest poets of the early ‘Abbasid period. He became infamous for his verses praising male-male love as well as wine and drunkenness, but he was also considered the most accomplished poet of his era. After his death he was transformed into a stock figure of Arab folklore and this fictionalized character features in many comic tales and appears a number of times in the *1001 Nights*.

The poetry is by Abū al-Shayṣ and the music by ‘Amr ibn Bāna, in the ‘light ramal’ rhythm on the middle-finger fret according to his book. There is another setting by al-Mutayyam in the ‘second heavy’ rhythm and another in ‘light ramal.’

Ibrāhīm continued:

Al-Rashīd drank and filled first my glass then hers. Then he said, “Sing, Ibrāhīm!” so I sang what was in my heart without holding back:

My heart has drunk from her love, and it has taken my heart,
 as the wine in the cup takes the body of the one who drinks it.
 Love for her has crept into my bones and seared them,
 as the poison of the scorpion creeps through the one it has stung.

He continued:

Al-Rashīd caught on to my allusions, but she paid me no attention.

He continued:

He ordered me to leave and did not send for me for a month, nor did I attend his gatherings. After a month, a servant slipped me a piece of paper on which was written:

I feared that I would die from passion,
 and the one I love would never know of my plight.
 O my message, deliver my greetings to the one
 I shall not name, and tell him, O my message,
 That the hand that has sent me to you
 is in constant misery and torment.

The servant came to me with this piece of paper, and I asked him, “What is this?” “A message from the singing-girl so-and-so, who sang to you before the caliph.” I figured out what was up, so I cursed the servant, jumped on him, and beat him till my fury and rage were spent. I rode to al-Rashīd immediately and told him the story of what had happened, handing him the message. He laughed so hard he was nearly rolling on the floor. Then he said, “I did this to you intentionally to find out what you were up to.” Then he called for the servant. When he came out and saw me, he said, “May God cut off your arms and legs! Blast you! You almost killed me!” I replied, “Killing is what you deserved after what you tried to do to me, but I had mercy on you and let you live. I’ve told the caliph to give you the punishment you deserve!” Al-Rashīd ordered that I be given an annual gift, but God knows that I did what I did, not out of virtue, but out of raw fear!

§ *Muḥammad ibn Khalaf ibn al-Marzubān told me, citing Ḥammād ibn Ishāq, who said:*

My father told me that he heard al-Rashīd ask my grandfather Ibrāhīm what he did when he wanted to compose melodies. He replied, “Sire, I empty my mind of all other concerns, and then I picture ecstasy [*ṭarab*] before my eyes.¹⁵⁶ The paths of the melodies I seek open up for me, and I follow them guided by the rhythm, and then I return having acquired and obtained what I sought.” “Ibrāhīm, you deserve to acquire and obtain [whatever you desire], for the beauty of your description matches the beauty of your compositions and singing.”

§ *Ibn al-Marzubān told me, citing Ḥammād, citing his father, citing his grandfather, who said:*

I once met Yūnus the Secretary¹⁵⁷ when he was an old man. I sang for him and he said, “If you live, you’ll be the greatest singer of your era.”

§ *Ḥammād said that Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan said to him:*

Each of the singers had their own preference when it came to light versus heavy songs. Maʿbad had no peer when it came to the heavy repertory, whereas Ibn Surayj was the master of the ‘ramal’ rhythms, and Ḥakam of the ‘hazaj’ rhythm.¹⁵⁸ No musicians were completely competent in all of the different types of songs except for Ibn Surayj, your grandfather Ibrāhīm, and your father Ishāq.

§ *My uncle told me, citing Aḥmad ibn al-Ṭayyib al-Sarakhsī, citing Aḥmad ibn Thābit al-ʿAbdī, citing al-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf (the first of the Muʿtazilite philosophers), citing Thumāma ibn Ashras, who said:*

I passed by Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī and Yazīd Ḥawrāʾ while they were sharing a morning draught and were singing a song together, taking turns, each singing one verse:

156 Ar. *umaththilu al-ṭarab bayna ʿaynayya*, more colloquially translated perhaps as, ‘I get into the mood.’

157 Yūnus ibn Sulaymān al-Kātib (fl. mid-8th century) was a singer in the Umayyad court who, according to al-Iṣbahānī, was the first to compile written collections of songs.

158 The ‘ramal’ and ‘hazal’ rhythms were considered lighter and less serious and were often performed by female singers.

Song

O mountains of Na'mān, by God, make way,
 so the East wind's breeze can reach me.
 For when the East wind blows over an anxious soul,
 it carries its cares away.

Thumāma continued:

By God, it was so beautiful I could not imagine there were any pleasures left to experience in this world after hearing the two of them sing this!

§ *Muḥammad ibn Mazyad told me, citing Ḥammād ibn Ishāq, citing his father, citing his grandfather Ibrāhīm, who said:*

I asked al-Rashīd to grant me one day a week when he would not send for me for any reason or pretext, so that I could spend it with my singing-girls and friends. He replied that I could have Saturdays free. "It's a day I care little for, so do what you wish with it," he said. I stayed home that Saturday, saw to the preparation of the food and the drink that I would need, and ordered the doorman to lock the doors and not allow anyone in to see me. While I was in my sitting room, with my servants around me and my singing-girls rehearsing nearby, there suddenly appeared a dignified, handsome, elderly gentleman wearing short boots of yellow leather, two fine tunics, a tight-fitting cap on his head, and a walking stick topped with silver in his hand. The scent of musk emanated from him and filled the room and house. When he entered despite my orders to be left alone, I was overcome with a rage the likes of which I had never felt before, and I contemplated firing my doorman and the other guards for letting him in. But he greeted me courteously, so I responded in kind and bade him sit, which he did. He then began to talk to me of family histories, the battle days of the ancient Arabs,¹⁵⁹ of their historical accounts and poems until he made me forget my anger. I thought to myself that my servants must have intended to please me by admitting someone as cultured and elegant as this man into my presence.

"Would you like something to eat?" I asked. But he replied, "I have no need of it." "Would you like some wine?" "As you wish," he responded. I drank a *ratl* of wine and poured the same for him. Then he asked me, "Abū Ishāq, would you like to sing for me one of those compositions of yours that you have made so

159 The 'Days of the Arabs' (*Ayyām al-'Arab*) are the earliest historical accounts of the ancient Arabs, in prose and verse, that recount heroic deeds, raids, battles, and love affairs among the Arabian tribes from the 5th–6th centuries.

popular among nobles and commoners alike?" His words infuriated me, but I decided to go along with his request, so I picked up the lute, tested it, played a little, and then sang. "Well done, Ibrāhīm!" he said. But my rage only increased, and I said to myself, "He is not satisfied with what he has done, entering without permission, suggesting that I sing to him, but even goes so far as to call me by my given name rather than Abū Ishāq, without addressing me respectfully!" Then he said, "Would you like to sing us a bit more?" To avoid being rude, I picked up the lute again and sang. "Excellent, Abū Ishāq! Now finish off the set so that I can reward you, and then I will sing for you."

I picked up the lute once again and sang, but this time took great care and performed what I sang exquisitely. I have never taken more care, nor performed more skillfully, even in front of a caliph or others, all because of his phrase, 'So that I can reward you.' He was delighted and said, "Sir, you have done well!" Then he said, "Would you permit your humble servant to sing for you?" "As you wish," I replied, and thought that he must be weak-minded to sing to me after having heard me sing. He picked up the lute, concentrated, and then played it.¹⁶⁰ By God, his playing was so beautiful it was as if he were making the lute speak pure Arabic! After which he sang:

Song

My heart is wounded!¹⁶¹ Who will sell me in exchange
 a heart that is not covered with wounds?
 People refuse it and will not buy it,
 indeed, who trades something ailing for that which is whole?
 I moan from the passion within me,
 like an injured man choking on wine.

Truly, from the beauty of his singing, I imagined that the very walls and doors and everything in my house were responding and singing along with him. I even imagined I could hear my limbs and clothes replying to him. I sat stunned, unable to speak, or answer, or move, from the intensity of what I felt in my heart. Then he sang:

Song

O doves of the curving sand dune, come back!
 I have been yearning for your songs.
 Yes, they returned, but in returning they nearly killed me,
 and I nearly revealed to them my secrets.

¹⁶⁰ Ar. *ḥabasahu*: likely in the sense of *ḥabasa nafsahu 'alā*, "to restrict o.s. / focus on something".

¹⁶¹ Lit. 'I have a liver which is ulcerous.'

They call out, cooing, over and over, as if
 they had been given wine to drink or been driven mad.
 My eye has never seen doves like these,
 who weep, but with eyes that shed no tears.

I don't know a melody attributed to Ibrāhīm for these verses, the only melody I know is by Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥārith ibn Buskhunnar in the 'light ramal' rhythm.

As God is my witness, I nearly went mad with ecstasy and delight when I heard this, and then he sang:

O East wind from the Najd, when did you emerge from the Najd?
 Your night journey has doubled my passion.
 A dove called out in the splendor of the late morning,
 from the branches of a fresh sprouting myrtle.
 You weep like a one grief-stricken from passion,
 wasting away from agonizing heartbreak and pain.
 They claim that a lover, when he is close to his beloved,
 grows bored, and that distance cures one of passion.
 Though treated with every remedy, our love is incurable,
 still, being close is better than being far apart.

Then he said, "Ibrāhīm, this is *mākhūrī* singing.¹⁶² Learn this and model your singing on it, and teach it to your singing-girls." "Repeat the songs for me!" I replied. But he said, "You don't need me to do that. You've already learned them perfectly." Then he disappeared before my very eyes. I was frightened, so I got up, reached for my sword, and unsheathed it. I rushed over to check the doors of the women's quarters, but found all of them locked. I asked the singing-girls, "Have you heard anything from my side?" "We heard the most beautiful singing that has ever been heard," they replied. Confused, I went out to the main door of the house and found it locked as well. I asked the doorman about the old man. "What old man?" he asked. "By God, no one has been allowed in to see you today." I went back inside to think this over and suddenly I heard his voice speaking to me from a corner of the room. "Don't worry, Abū Ishāq! I am Iblīs, the devil, and it was I who was your companion sitting with you today, so don't be frightened."

I rode to al-Rashīd's residence and said to myself, "I've never told him anything as extraordinary as this!" I was ushered into his presence and told him

162 *Mākhūr* = Persian, tavern, but here more likely reference to the rhythm known as *mākhūrī* which Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī is credited with having introduced into Arab music.

the story. “Blast you,” he said, “Concentrate on those songs – can you still remember them?” I picked up the lute and tried out the songs, and found they were so deeply lodged in my heart that I could never forget them. Al-Rashīd was delighted and sat drinking, though he had not intended to do so. He ordered that I be given a reward and two loads of gifts, and he said, “That old gentleman knew what he was saying when he told you that you had learned the songs perfectly. I hope someday he will come entertain me the same way he entertained you!”

The Origin of this Song

The version I know of the first song is in the ‘light ramal’ rhythm and is by Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥārith ibn Buskhunnar, and I have never heard a setting for these verses by Ibrāhīm. As for the second song, the first line of which is:

O East wind from the Najd, when did you emerge from the Najd?

the poetry is by Yazīd ibn al-Ṭathriyya and the music is by Ibrāhīm in the ‘light heavy’ rhythm on the ring-finger fret, according to ‘Amr. There is also a setting by Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan ibn Muṣ‘ab in the ‘second heavy’ rhythm on the middle-finger fret according to al-Hishāmī and ‘Amr. Ibrāhīm mentioned that there is a melody by Daḥmān and one by Ibn al-Zubayr, but he did not mention their modes.

§ *This is how Ibn Abī al-Azhar told me the following anecdote, and I don’t know what to say about it. Perhaps Ibrāhīm concocted this story and told it as a fib, or perhaps it was concocted and told about him by others. The most reasonable origin of the anecdote is how Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd Al-‘Azīz al-Jawharī and Aḥmad ibn ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn ‘Ammār both told it to me, citing ‘Umar ibn Shabba, citing Ishāq ibn Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī, citing his father, who said:*

I had composed a melody that pleased me, but was having difficulty finding words for it. In a dream, I saw a man who came to me and said, “Ibrāhīm, is the search for words for your song frustrating you?” “Yes,” I replied. Then he said, “How about the verses of Dhū al-Rumma¹⁶³ where he says”:

163 Abū al-Ḥārith Ghaylān ibn ‘Uqba (c. 696–d. 735–36), known as Dhū al-Rumma (‘he who wears a piece of cord’) due to an amulet he wore on a cord, was a Bedouin Arab whose poetry was infused with the ethos of ancient Arabian desert customs as well as rare vocabulary and phrases. One of his major themes was his unrequited love for Mayy.

Ah, greetings, dwelling of Mayy, despite your ruinous state,
 the rain pours down continuously on your barren hillsides.
 You will soon be nothing but a darkened spot in the wasteland,
 over which dusty summer winds drag drifts of sand.

I woke up and was pleased with the poetry, so I called to an accompanist and sang it. The words and the melody fit together better than anything God has ever created. When I realized that, having made that first song for those verses of Dhū al-Rumma, I took more notice of him and his poetry. I went on to compose other melodies in the *mākhūrī* rhythm for his poetry, including the following:

O two dwellings of Mayy, my greetings to you,
 Are those trying times from the past now returning?
 Do the three cooking pot stones or the traces in the wastelands,
 return your greetings or clear up your doubts?

*Ibrāhīm's compositions for these two poems are both in the mākhūrī rhythm on the middle-finger fret, which is the 'second light heavy' rhythm. All of the information about this subject are explained in the section on anecdotes about Dhū al-Rumma.*¹⁶⁴

§ *Muḥammad ibn Mazyad told me, citing Ḥammād, citing his father, who said – My father said to me:*

Ja'far ibn Yaḥyā said to me one day, having found out that al-Rashīd had granted me and his other singers permission to leave the court, "Come visit me so that I can give you something nice." I went to visit him and he said, "Which would you rather – that I give you the nice thing that I promised you, or that I guide you to something that will earn you a thousand thousand dirhams?" "I prefer that the vizier – May God sustain him – guide me in that direction and let this guidance take the place of the nice thing he was going to give me." He said, "The caliph memorized the poetry of Dhū al-Rumma when he was young. He loves it and is deeply moved by it, and when he hears it sung, it delights him more than hearing the poetry of other poets whose poetry he has not memorized. So if you should sing for him at some point, and it pleases him and he orders that you be given a reward, stand up and kiss the ground before him and say, 'I desire something other than this reward, something I would like to request from the caliph that would be of great benefit to me, but would

164 KA XVIII:1–47.

not harm you or cause you to incur any loss.' He will say to you, 'What is this request of yours?' 'A request that would be easy for you, but is of no value or use to anyone else.' If he reacts positively to this, tell him, 'Grant me the poetry of Dhū al-Rumma. Allow me to sing whatever I wish from his poetry, but forbid all other singers from infringing on this domain. For I love the poetry of Dhū al-Rumma so much, and find it so beautiful, that it spoils my pleasure to hear anyone else sing it!' But be sure to get a guarantee!" I acted on this advice from the vizier Ja'far and after that, I never left al-Rashīd without a reward.

I held off breaching this topic with the caliph until the right moment arrived, then I stood up and asked al-Rashīd (as Ja'far had told me to do) and I could see the gratification in his face. Al-Rashīd said, "What you have requested is not excessive; I hereby grant you what you have asked for." The others in the court began to laugh at what I had requested and said, "You thought you were asking for something magnificent!?" but Ibrāhīm sat quietly without saying a word. "Sire, would you permit me to ask for a guarantee?" I said. "Ask for whatever guarantee you like," he replied. I said, "By God, and by the Prophet, and the tomb of [your father] the caliph al-Mahdī, attest that you have granted me this in good faith, and swear to me that you will not give any other singer a reward for anything he sings to the words of Dhū al-Rumma – that will be my guarantee." He swore earnestly before the other singers that if any of them should sing the poetry of Dhū al-Rumma, he would not reward them in any way, nor honor them, nor listen to their singing. Then I thanked him for this and kissed the ground before him, and we all left.

After that I sang a hundred songs and more to the poetry of Dhū al-Rumma and whenever al-Rashīd heard his verses in song he was delighted, even ecstatic, and he gave me generous rewards. No other singer benefited from this, and I earned a thousand thousand dirhams, and again a thousand thousand!

§ *However, a different version of this anecdote is reported by Ja'far ibn Qudāma ibn Ziyād the Secretary who said, Hārūn ibn Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Malik al-Zayyāt told me, citing Abū Khālid al-Aslamī, citing Muḥammad ibn 'Umar al-Jurjānī, who said:*

Ibrāhīm al-Mawşilī said: I was once at a loss and couldn't find verses to set to music to sing for al-Rashīd, so I went into one of the rooms of my house depressed, lowered the curtains around me and started to cry. Suddenly there appeared in the room a disfigured old man who said to me, "Hey, Mawşilī, why do I see you sitting here depressed?" "I can't find verses for a song to sing to al-Rashīd tonight." I replied. "What about the words of Dhū al-Rumma?"

Ah, greetings, dwelling of Mayy, despite your ruinous state,
 the rain pours down continuously on your barren hillsides.
 You will soon be nothing but a darkened spot in the wasteland,
 over which dusty summer winds drag drifts of sand.
 The reeds have sprung up there in the earth,
 the dawn with its white cloak has driven the Pleiades away.
 The barley-grass grows high there in the summer, producing its last stalks,
 like roan horses shaking their forelocks.

Ibrāhīm continued:

He sang these verses to me to a tune, and repeated it until I learned it by heart, then I came to, feeling dazed. I called to one of my singing-girls and ordered her to bring a lute, and I kept on singing the song while she played in order to smooth out the setting. Then I went to Hārūn al-Rashīd and sang it for him. He told the other singers to be quiet. Then he said, "Sing it again!" which I did. He spent the rest of that night asking me to repeat it over and over. At dawn he ordered that I be given 30,000 dirhams and all of the furnishings of the room we were in. He said, "You have been granted the poetry of Dhū al-Rumma, so sing it!" I composed many songs to his poetry and sang them. They pleased al-Rashīd and he rewarded me generously.

§ *My uncle and Ibn al-Marzubān and al-Ḥasan ibn 'Alī all told me, citing 'Abd Allāh ibn Abī Sa'd, citing Muḥammad ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Sulmī, citing Abū Ghānim, the client of Jabala ibn Yazīd al-Sulmī, who said:*

Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī, Zalzal, and Barṣūmā gathered to perform before al-Rashīd. Zalzal played lute, Barṣūmā played flute, and Ibrāhīm sang the following:

My heart awoke and my mind returned to me,
 my vanity was cut short and I forgot my ignorance.
 I saw the beautiful women, as they leaned towards me,
 they cut me off and severed their bonds with me.

Hārūn was ecstatic, leapt to his feet and shouted, "O Adam,¹⁶⁵ if you could see who among your children are here with me now, you would be pleased!" Then he sat and said, "I ask God's forgiveness."

165 The biblical Adam, father of humankind.

The poetry that Ibrāhīm was singing was by Abū al-'Atāhiya and the melody is by Ibrāhīm in the 'light heavy' rhythm and on ring-finger fret.

§ *Jaḥḥa told me, citing Ḥammād ibn Ishāq, citing his father, who said:*

Al-Rashīd was deeply enamored of a concubine named Mārīda, but one time she grew angry with him, and he with her, and their falling out lasted for several days. Ja'far ibn Yaḥyā al-'Abbās ibn al-Aḥnaf was ordered [to compose a poem] and he composed the following verses:

Bring back your loved ones, from whom you have broken off,
for he who loves passionately can rarely keep away.
If this separation between the two of you lasts long,
forgetfulness will creep in and the difficulties will stay.

Then al-'Abbās ordered Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī to set this to music and sing these verses for al-Rashīd. When al-Rashīd heard the song, he hastened to Mārīda and patched things up with her. She asked the reason for this and when she found out, she ordered that both al-'Abbās and Ibrāhīm be given 10,000 dirhams. She then asked al-Rashīd to reward them on her behalf, so he ordered that they each be given an additional 40,000 dirhams.

§ *Ja'far ibn Qudāma told me, citing Ḥammād, citing his father, who said:*

The first prize given to a poet by al-Rashīd when he became caliph was the one he gave to Ibrāhīm, who composed the following verses praising him on his ascension to the throne:

Song

Do you not see that the sun which was weak,
at the ascension of Hārūn has now begun to radiate light?
And the face of the earth has been bedecked with beauty,
now that Hārūn is her ruler and Yaḥyā her vizier.

Ibrāhīm sang these verses and al-Rashīd ordered that he be given 100,000 dirhams and Yaḥyā gave him 50,000 more.

§ *Al-Ḥasan ibn 'Alī told me, citing 'Abd Allāh ibn Abī Sa'd, citing Muḥammad ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn Mālīk, citing Ishāq al-Mawṣilī:*

One day his father was playing backgammon with al-Rashīd and each had wagered the clothing he was wearing. He gambled with al-Rashīd and when

al-Rashīd won, Ibrāhīm stood up and began to remove his clothes, saying, "A wager over backgammon must be honored! You beat me fair and square and I am making good on my wager, so put on what I was wearing." "What!?" al-Rashīd replied. "You want me to wear your clothes?!" "Yes, at least if you want to play fair. If you don't want to play fair, that's your prerogative, and I'll let it pass." "Blast you!" he said. "And otherwise I have to forfeit some penalty to get out of this?" "Yes," he replied. "And what would the penalty be?" "That's up to you so say, Sire, for no one is more entitled to do so than you are." "I'll give you everything I'm wearing." "So be it, Sire, with God's blessings." Al-Rashīd called for another set of clothes, put them on, then took the clothes he'd been wearing and gave them to Ibrāhīm.

§ *Ismā'īl ibn Yūnus told me, citing 'Umar ibn Shabba, citing 'Alī ibn 'Abd al-Karīm, who said:*

Ibn Jāmi' once visited Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī, so Ibrāhīm brought out thirty singing-girls who all played and sang together in unison. Ibn Jāmi' said, "There is one string that's out of tune." Then Ibrāhīm called out, "So-and-so, tighten your second string." She did and then it was in tune. I was amazed first of all that Ibn Jāmi' was able to detect that one string out of 120 was out of tune, and even more amazed that Ibrāhīm could pick out which one it was!

§ *Ismā'īl ibn Yūnus and Ḥabīb ibn Naṣr al-Muhallabī both told me, citing 'Umar ibn Shabba, citing Ishāq ibn Ibrāhīm, who said, My father said:*

We were with al-Rashīd in Raqqa where there was a wine-merchant from whom I used to buy high-quality, good-tasting wine and occasionally drink in his tavern. One day when I arrived, he pierced the seal of a wine-jug, and as he began pouring it into a glass pitcher, I saw that the wine's color was bright and clear, so I began to sing:

Pour for me pure wine,
 unsullied with water.
 Pour the wine while the night is dark,
 before we hear the sounds of the chickens.
 Abū Wahb, my dear friend,
 every care is meant to be dispersed.
 When you led my heart astray,
 among the whirlwinds on the broad mountain roads.

The melody for these verses is by Ibrāhīm in the 'hazaj' rhythm on the middle-finger fret according to 'Amr. There is another setting by Siyyāṭ in

the 'second heavy' rhythm with the little finger as tonic with the third finger, according to Ishāq.

Ibrāhīm continued:

The wine-merchant was astonished at hearing my song, and I said to him, "Watch out! The wine in the pitcher is overflowing!" "Don't worry about the wine, Abū Ishāq. Why is your voice so sad and raspy, has someone close to you died?" When I went back to al-Rashīd and told him this, he burst out laughing.¹⁶⁶

§ *Aḥmad ibn Abī Ṭāhir mentioned that al-Madā'inī had told him that Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī had said:*

Al-Rashīd said to me one day, "Ibrāhīm, I have set aside tomorrow to spend with my womenfolk and I will spend the evening drinking with my companions. You are the only singer I am inviting tomorrow, so don't get caught up with anything else or drink any wine – be here in the late evening." "As you wish, Sire." "By my father's life, if you come late or make some sort of excuse, I'll have your head cut off, understood?" "Yes," I replied. I left and hid from all the friends who came to visit, didn't read messages from anyone until I had prayed the sunset prayers, and then I rode off heading toward al-Rashīd's residence. As I approached the open area in front of his home, I passed by the entrance of a palace where a large basket secured by ropes and four leather handles was dangling. A slave girl was standing there waiting for someone who, it had obviously been arranged, would come and sit in it. I wrestled with myself about the idea of getting into the basket, then I said to myself, "This is a mistake – it might lead to something that would keep me from the caliph, and that would be my undoing!" I went back and forth, but I finally gave in and sat in the basket. It was hoisted upwards until it reached the upper floor of the palace.

I clambered out and stood up, and found a group of slave girls graceful as gazelles sitting there. They laughed and were delighted and said, "By God, the one we wanted has arrived!" But when they saw me up close, they quickly hid themselves from view behind a curtain and said, "Enemy of God, what has brought you here?" "Enemies of God," I replied, "Who is it that you hoped

¹⁶⁶ This is a version of an anecdote that appears earlier in the text, p. 54 (KA V: 197). The song is different, but the wine-merchant asks "Has someone you know recently died?" "No" "Then why is your throat so sad?"

would be brought? And why should he be more worthy than I am?" We continued thus, with them laughing, and me laughing with them, until one of them said, "As for the one we were hoping for, that's over and done with, but what an elegant man we have instead! Let's go ahead and enjoy ourselves!" Food was brought out and I was invited to eat. I did not really have any desire to eat, but I hated to spoil the mood, so I partook of some food out of politeness. Then wine was brought out and we began to drink. Then they brought out three of their singing-girls who sang beautifully. One of them sang a song by Ma'bad and one of the slave girls behind the curtain called out, "Bravo, Ibrāhīm! That's one of his songs." I replied, "No, you're wrong, that's not one of Ibrāhīm's songs, it's by Ma'bad." "Trespasser, what would you know about singing?! It's by Ibrāhīm!" The next girl sang a song by al-Gharīd, and the same voice said, "Bravo, Ibrāhīm! That is one of his songs, as well." I replied, "No, you are lying, wicked one, that one's by al-Gharīd." "May God disgrace him! Blast you, what do you know?!" Then the singing-girl sang a song of mine and the same voice called out, "Well done, Ibn Surayj! For that is one of his." "You are wrong," I replied, "that one *is* by Ibrāhīm. You attribute the songs of others to him, and his to others!" "Blast you, what makes you think you know?" "Because I am Ibrāhīm!" They were all thrilled and delighted, and came out from behind the curtain, and said, "You concealed your identity, but you've delighted us." I said, "Now I must bid you farewell." "Why?" they asked. So I told them about my arrangement with al-Rashīd. They laughed and said, "But having you imprisoned here is so pleasant for us! Let the blame be ours if we only release you after a week!" "But I will be executed," I protested, but their only response was, "Who gives a damn!" And so, by God, I stayed with them for a whole week without leaving. At the end of the week they bade me farewell and said, "If God keeps you safe, then come back to us in three days." "I will," I said. Then they sat me in the basket and I was set free.

I went on my way until I came to al-Rashīd's residence. It turns out that the call had gone out throughout Baghdad to find me and that whoever brought me to the caliph was to be awarded my property and given all my wealth. I asked for permission to enter and the servants hastened to usher me in to al-Rashīd. When he saw me he cursed me, and said, "Fetch the sword and the execution mat! So, Ibrāhīm, you ignored my orders and busied yourself with common people despite the fact that I ordered you not to, and you spent time with other fools like yourself and spoiled my pleasure!" I said, "Sire, I am here before you, and there is no escape from whatever you command. But I have an amazing story, the likes of which has never been heard, and it kept me

from you by necessity, not by choice. Listen to it, and if it excuses me, please accept it, and if not, then you know what to do." He said, "Tell it, but it will not save you!"

So I told him what happened and he was silent for a moment and then said, "That is indeed amazing. Can you take me to this place?" "Yes," I replied, "and I will arrange for you to sit with them if you wish before I go, so that you can be with them, or I can make an appointment and take you with me." "Make an appointment," he said. "I will do so," I replied. Then he said, "I'll be waiting." "It will happen whenever you wish." His mood changed and he bade me sit, then he drank and grew merry. When I woke up the next morning, he ordered me to leave and to return to him after visiting those slave-girls.

I went to them at the appointed time [three days later] and when I arrived at the place where the basket was hanging, I sat in it, and the slave-girls pulled me up. When they saw me, they were overjoyed and thanked God for my safety. I spent the night with them and when I wanted to leave, I said to them, "I have a brother at home who is just like me. He would like to spend time with you and I promised him I would arrange this." "If that is what you wish, then we will welcome him!" I made an appointment with them for the next night and left, then I went to al-Rashīd and told him about the arrangements.

When it was time, he came out in disguise and accompanied me until we arrived at the spot. I went up first, then he came up after me, and we entered together. God granted me success, for I had told the slave-girls that if my friend came, they should remain behind the curtain and that he should not hear them speaking. Everything about the choosing of songs or other communication should be exchanged in written messages. They did not disobey my orders in any way and remained fully concealed in utmost modesty. We drank a great deal. Al-Rashīd had ordered me not to address him as Commander of the Faithful, but when the wine began to have its effect, I inadvertently said, "O Commander of the Faithful." The women instantly scurried away from behind the curtain and we could no longer discern any movement. Al-Rashīd said to me, "Ibrāhīm, you have managed to escape a dire fate! By God, if a single one of those women had shown herself to you, I would have cut off your head. Let's get going." Then we left. It turns out that these slave girls belonged to him. He had grown angry with them and locked them up in that palace. The next day he sent servants and had them brought them back to his palace. He gave me 100,000 dirhams, and other gifts and favors were sent to me from the slave-girls after that as well.

§ Ja'far ibn Qudāma told me, citing Ḥammād ibn Ishāq, citing his father, citing his father, who said:

I visited al-Rashīd one day and he said to me, “I’m feeling lazy and sluggish today. If you sing me a song that invigorates me, I’ll reward you well.” So I sang the following:

Never has there been seen in the world two lovers like us,
 despite what we suffer from those who look at us askance.
 Innocent, we do not gratify the slanderers when they slander us;
 virtuous, we do not commit any act that would bring disgrace.

He was delighted and called for food, then he ate and drank, and ordered that I be given 1,000 dirhams.

§ *Ismāʿīl ibn Yūnus told me, citing ‘Umar ibn Shabba, citing Ishāq, who said, My father said to me:*

Yaḥyā ibn Khālīd once said to me, “Your daughter Danānīr [‘Dinars’] composed a song that I like and she is pleased with as well, but I said to her, ‘Don’t be satisfied with it until I have you perform it for your father, Abū Ishāq.’”¹⁶⁷

I [Ibrāhīm] said to him, “Truly there is no blemish in the vizier’s knowledge – May God strengthen him – about this or any other song, for you are discerning and have the most discriminating taste and the most penetrating acumen. No song could please you, except one which is fine and true.” He replied, “Even if I am as you say, nevertheless, the people who practice a craft have more understanding of it than those who merely observe it without practicing it. So even if the two of us possessed equal knowledge of this craft, seeking out your opinion [as a practitioner] would still be more valuable, for my feelings for the composer of this particular song might cause me to consider something good when it is not. However, my pleasure in it would be greatly increased if, after hearing it, you too were to judge it truly beautiful.” I was shown to another room and found that a curtain had been set up, and that everything had been arranged before my arrival. I sat down, greeted the singing-girl, and said to her, “Sing the song that the vizier – May God strengthen him – mentioned to me.” She

¹⁶⁷ The terms ‘daughter’ and ‘father’ are honorifics here, indicating not that he is her biological father, but rather her teacher and mentor. This anecdote is re-told elsewhere in KA nearly verbatim, but the title ‘your sheikh’ appears instead of ‘your father.’ Danānīr (fl. early 9th c.) was a fair-haired slave-girl owned by Yaḥyā ibn Khālīd al-Barmakī who studied with the female singer, Badhl, as well as with several of the greatest singers of her era including both Ibrāhīm and Ishāq al-Mawṣilī. Fulayḥ, Ibn Jāmi’, and others. As well as being a famous singer, she was the author of a well-known *mujarrad* (devoid of musical captions and/or of anecdotes) book of songs (KA XVIII: 65).

replied, “The vizier said to me, ‘If Ibrāhīm deems it good, let me know, for that will increase my own appreciation of it. And if not, then don’t tell me, so that your standing with me will not be lowered.’” I said, “Sing it and let me listen to it.” She sang the following:

My soul, was I the one who accused you,
or when they resolved to depart, did you betray me?
If you are now distraught remembering them,
wasn’t separation from them what you desired?

Ibrāhīm continued:

She sang very well, without any mistakes. I asked to hear it again thinking to improve some portion of the song so that I would have some part in it, but I found nothing to fix. I said, “Truly you have done well, daughter, as well as you possibly could have.” Then I returned to Yaḥyā and I swore oaths that satisfied him that many of the most skillful singers could not do as well or compose a song equal to it. I told him that I had asked to hear it again to find some spot in it that I could improve, but found none. He said, “Your evaluation of her based on this song is due to the quality of the instruction you have given her. Truly she has made me happy, so I will make you happy!” When I left, he sent 50,000 dirhams along after me.

§ *My uncle and Ibn al-Marzubān both told me, citing Ibn Abī Sa‘d, citing Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Submī, citing ‘Umar ibn Shabba, citing Ishāq (though he did not say that he was citing his father), he said:*

I was at home one day, at times thinking I would go out riding and at other times that I would just stay at home, when my servant entered with a messenger from al-Rashīd who ordered me to come to him immediately. So I mounted up and went to him. He said to me, “Have a seat, Ibrāhīm, so that I can show you something amazing,” so I sat down. “I have a Bedouin woman here and her daughter.” The Bedouin woman was brought out along with her daughter, who was around ten years old. “Ibrāhīm,” al-Rashīd said, “This young girl composes poetry.” I asked her mother, “Is what the Commander of the Faithful says true?” She replied, “The girl is right here in front of you – go ahead and ask her.” So I asked, “Dear little one, do you compose poetry?” “Yes,” she replied. “Recite for me something you have composed,” I said, and she recited the following verses:

She says to her companions while her
tears stream down her cheeks from passion:

“Is it inevitable that every young girl should suffer the state
 I am in, or am I alone afflicted?
 A love for him that grips me by the innards has emaciated me,
 nothing remains of my body but skin and bones.
 I found love to be sweet and delicious at first,
 but bitter and fatal for the lover in the end.”

In his account, al-Shabbī [= ‘Umar ibn Shabba] said, Ishāq said:

My father was present and said, ‘Sire, don’t move and we shall compose a melody for these verses.’ I created one for it, my father, and I, and all those who were present.”

But others said [in their accounts]:

Ibrāhīm said, “I will not move until I compose a melody for this poem and sing it to her.”

Ibn al-Marzubān said in his account the following, which my uncle did not mention:

Then the girl said, “Sire, if you thought what I recited was good, would you permit me to match it by reciting a poem in praise of Ibrāhīm?” “Do so!” he replied, and she recited the following verses:

Song

In knowledge of the art of singing,
 Ibrāhīm has no peer.
 Abū Ishāq’s life
 is the glory of our age.
 From him are harvested the fruits of pleasure,
 and the aromatic plants of the gardens.
 Abū Ishāq is the garden of the world,
 wherever he may be!¹⁶⁸

Al-Rashīd ordered that she be given a reward and ordered that I be given 10,000 dirhams, half of which I gave to her.

The melody that Ibrāhīm composed for the poetry of the Bedouin girl is in the ‘first heavy’ rhythm on the middle-finger fret. ‘Allūya has a version in the ‘second heavy’ rhythm. As for the second poem, it is without doubt by Ibn Sayāba. Ibrāhīm composed a setting for it in the ‘light heavy’ rhythm.

¹⁶⁸ This poem appears earlier in the text (see p. 30) with these verses in a different order.

§ *Muḥammad ibn al-Mazyad told me, citing Ḥammād ibn Ishāq, citing his father, who said:*

I learned this song from a madman in Medina¹⁶⁹ and sang it for al-Rashīd:

Song

They were two young maids, when they got to know my character,
 in the prime of their youth, they alluded to my grey hair.
 When old age gripped me and I grew old, I saw
 that my two wives thought to separate from me and leave me,
 Though everything they do is good,
 for it rejuvenates my heart and reveals the secrets of my sorrows.
 But beware of an attack from your old man,
 go easy on your old man, go easy, young maids.

He was delighted and gave me a bag he had with him filled with 1,000 unminted¹⁷⁰ silver dirhams. Ibn Jāmi‘ was there and said, “Sire, listen to the singing of intelligent men and leave off the singing of madmen.” He was the most jealous person alive! Then he sang:

Song

She said to her companions,
 beautiful as gazelles, cavorting in their enclosure,
 Take my shadow from me so that it does not follow me,
 then off she ran to her palanquin.

Al-Rashīd was delighted and drank and ordered that he be given 500 gold dinars. Muḥammad ibn Ḥamza Wajh al-Qar‘a was next and sang:

Song

They walk in full armor,
 strengthened with nails and chainmail.
 Their fairness is known when they are seen,
 and their steadfastness when eyes gaze at them.

169 A more detailed account of the madman of Medina occurs elsewhere in the text, see p. 59.

170 Ar. *musayyaf*.

Al-Rashīd liked this as well and drank to it, and awarded him 500 gold dinars. Then ‘Allūya sang:

Song

The women reject my claim by day but I exact it
when drowsiness overcomes the sleepers.
I see that beautiful women do not make trysts with a man
who has lost his youth, but instead pursue young beardless men.

Al-Rashīd called for him and said to him, “You who bite your mother’s clitoris! Dare you sing in praise of beardless youths and reproach grey-haired men while my womenfolk are behind the curtain and I have grown grey. It’s as if you were alluding to me directly!” Then he called for Masrūr and ordered him to seize ‘Allūya by the hand and give him thirty lashes and remove him from the gathering, all of which he did. We did not enjoy the rest of the day, nor did al-Rashīd. He shunned ‘Allūya for a month then asked us about him and forgave him.

§ *There are many anecdotes about Ibrāhīm and a woman named Kunth, known as Dhāt al-Khāl [‘the girl with the mole’] whom he loved. But I have placed them in a separate section of this work, for she is worthy of attention in and of herself, beyond her role in the abundant anecdotes about him.¹⁷¹ He composed many poems about this singing-girl, some set to music by him and by others. For I stipulated [in the introduction to this work] that when it came to anecdotes about poets and singers, if this were the case, I would devote a separate section to them, so as not to interrupt the flow of related and relevant anecdotes with ones that would be superfluous and intrusive.¹⁷²*

§ *Muḥammad ibn Yaḥyā al-Ṣūlī told me, citing al-Husayn ibn Yaḥyā, who said:*

I heard Ishāq say, “At the beginning of the year 188 [803/04], my father’s colic grew worse and persisted, whereas it previously had only afflicted him from

¹⁷¹ KA XVI: 342–53; see also Kilpatrick, *Making*, 125.

¹⁷² In his introduction he wrote (speaking of himself in the third-person as ‘the author’): *In some cases, among the other songs and accounts, he presents a topic about which there are very lengthy anecdotes or a poet about whom there many stories, and it was simply not possible to explain all of this in that location without interrupting the flow of anecdotes. So they have been relegated to more suitable locations, along with related anecdotes, without cutting off the flow or separating materials that should be grouped together, which is more fitting and appropriate* (KA I: 3).

time to time. He retired from the service of the caliph and from his regular shift [*nawba*] at the caliph's residence, about which he said":

Song

My doctor has grown weary
of the suffering I am in.
My death with soon be announced,
to enemy and friend.

He sang this to a melody in the 'ramal' rhythm, and these were the last verses and the last melody he composed.

§ *Al-Ṣūlī told me, citing Muḥammad ibn Mūsā, citing Ḥammād ibn Iṣḥāq, citing his father:*

Al-Rashīd mounted his donkey and went to visit Ibrāhīm while he was sitting in the medicinal bath.¹⁷³ "How are you, Ibrāhīm?" he asked and Ibrāhīm responded, "Truly, my lord, I am as the poet said:

A sick man, whose close ones have grown weary of him,
forsaken by his physician and friends alike."

Al-Rashīd said, "We all belong to God!" and then left, but he had not gone far before he heard Ibrāhīm's dying gasps.

§ *Ismā'īl ibn Yūnus told me, citing 'Umar ibn Shabba, who said:*

Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī died in the year 188 [803/04], and on that same day died al-Kisā'ī the grammarian,¹⁷⁴ al-'Abbās ibn al-Aḥnaf the poet,¹⁷⁵ and Hushayma the female tavern-keeper.¹⁷⁶ News of this was brought to al-Rashīd, and his son al-Ma'mūn ordered that prayers be said over them. He went out and people

¹⁷³ Ar. *abzan*, see footnote 142 above.

¹⁷⁴ Abū l-Ḥasan 'Alī al-Kisā'ī (c. 737–805), a prominent grammarian and philologist, was entrusted by the caliph al-Mahdī with the education of his son Hārūn al-Rashīd, who in turn charged him with the education of his own two sons, al-Amīn and al-Ma'mūn. Other sources, however, date his death to the year 189, sometime after the death of Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī, rather than on the same day as reported here (see E12 "al-Kisā'ī").

¹⁷⁵ Other sources place the date of Ibn al-Aḥnaf's after the year 193/808 (see E12 "'Abbās ibn al-Aḥnaf").

¹⁷⁶ A wine-merchant who was also the neighbor of Ibrāhīm's son, Iṣḥāq.

lined up before him, and he said, “Who is at the head [of the procession]?” “Ibrāhīm,” he was told. “Place him last and move al-‘Abbās ibn al-Aḥnaf to the front,” he replied. So his body was brought forward and al-Ma’mūn prayed over him. When it was all over and he had left, Hāshim ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Mālik al-Khuzā’ī caught up with him and asked, “My lord, why did you think it appropriate to place al-‘Abbās in the front over the others?” He replied, “Because of his verses

People slandered her and said that she
 is one who will make you miserable and suffer.
 I broke with them for preferring someone other than you,
 for I like a lover who breaks with others [in the name of love].”

“Have you memorized it?” he asked. “Yes,” I replied. “Then recite the rest of it for me.” So I recited it:

When I understood that the night had blocked his path,
 and was keeping him from me, the unmoving darkness tortured me.
 The stars in the vault of the heavens were like
 a blind man, lost, with no one to guide him.
 I called out to he who drove sleep away with his absence,
 what can I occupy myself with while he is all alone, unsleeping?
 O you who have broken my heart with your departure,
 you are the affliction, new and old.
 You’d find between my eyelids a burning fire;
 how long will I remain sleepless, O sleeping one?

Al-Ma’mūn said, “Isn’t he who composed those words worthy of being at the front.” “Indeed, my lord,” I replied.

§ *Yaḥyā ibn ‘Alī bin Yaḥyā told me, citing Ḥammād ibn Ishāq, citing his father, who said:*

Barṣūmā the flute-player said to me [Ishāq], “After all my service, my affection, and my thanks to you, do I not have the right and deserve that you should grant me one request? That you give me one day of your life during which I can do whatever I wish and you will not oppose me in the slightest?” “You have indeed earned this right – I grant you one day,” I replied. He came to me later and said, “Give orders that I be clothed.” I did so, and I included a beautifully ornamented robe, which was quite showy. He said, “Now let us go to the

sitting room where I used to visit your father.” So all of us went to that room, which I had ordered be perfumed and scented with incense. When we got to the door of the sitting room, he threw himself on the ground, rolled in the dirt, and wept. He took out his reed flute and began to grieve through his playing, moving around the room and kissing each of the places where Abū Ishāq used to sit. He wept and played until he had achieved his aim. Then he grabbed the clothing with his hands and tore it. I tried to calm him down and began to cry with him, and after a while he quieted down. Then he called for his own clothes, put them on, and said, “I asked you to clothe me so that people would not say that Barşūmā destroyed his own clothes so that he might be clothed in better clothing afterwards.” Then he said, “Let’s go back to your house, for I have done what I needed to do.” I returned to my home and he stayed with me that whole day, and left in brand new clothes.

§ *Ismā‘il ibn Yūnus told me, citing ‘Umar ibn Shabba, citing al-Qāsim ibn Yazīd, who said:*

When Ibrāhīm al-Mawşilī died, I went to see Ibn al-Mahdī. He was drinking and his singing-girls were singing. We reminisced about Ibrāhīm al-Mawşilī, about his skill and his accomplishments, but while the rest of us were speaking about this, Ibn al-Mahdī’s head was bowed in silence. When our conversation had gone on for quite a while, and each of us had said things similar to what our companions had said, Ibn al-Mahdī suddenly began to sing the poetry of Ibn Sayāba, eulogizing Ibrāhīm – though some say the verses are by Abī al-Asad:

Al-Mawşilī has gone,
 and the cheer of the ancient lutes¹⁷⁷ and singing girls has gone as well.
 But what smile is now left?
 The life of al-Mawşilī will always be remembered.
 The *mizhars* and the other instruments will weep,
 but the aging wine jugs will cheer them up.
 The impious woman will weep for him now that he is gone,
 but not she who recites the Qur’an.

Al-Qāsim continued:

He made all those present weep, and I said to myself, “Do you suppose that either the prayer niche or the Holy Book will weep over his death?” He said, “More likely they’ll be gloating over his demise!”

¹⁷⁷ Ar. *mazāhir* (s. *mizhar*) = ancient Arabian lute, predecessor of the ‘ūd.

§ *Yaḥyā ibn 'Alī* told me: “Ḥammād recited these verses to me, saying, *My father himself recited these verses to me, eulogizing his father, Ibrāhīm*” – and people other than *Yaḥyā* have recited it as well, though they made additions, according to his account:

I said to him while I stood at his grave,
 “May the peace of God be yours, O you who lie here.
 O tomb of Ibrāhīm, may you long endure, dug into the earth.
 May your thirst be quenched by abundant rains.
 My love for you overwhelms me and leaves no
 patience or consolation for my heart.
 I used to weep when I was separated from you for a single night,
 how can I survive now that our separation is until Judgment Day!?”

§ *Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl ibn Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī*, known as *Waswāsa*, told me: *Ḥammād* recited to me verses by his father *Ishāq*, eulogizing his father, *Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī*:

Greetings to the tomb that does not answer us,
 though we salute its dirt and speak to it.
 The most noble of kings will weep for him when they see
 that from this place of youthful pleasure, the greater part is gone.
 The people of elegance, one and all, mourn him, as does
 the Commander of the Faithful and his chamberlain.
 When I feel resigned to his passing, and the eyes of those weeping
 can shed no more tears, and the professional mourners grow weary,
 The only cure for the soul after what it has suffered
 is shedding torrents of tears anew.
 I shed a single tear in the morning,
 and during the night, whose stars I cannot see, another.

Waswāsa continued:

Ḥammād recited another poem by his father eulogizing his father:

The peace of God upon you from the tomb of one who is pained,
 may the tempests of Arcturus, Spica Virginis, and rain clouds¹⁷⁸ pour
 down on you,

178 Qur'an LXXXIII: 17 – “Will they not then consider the clouds that bear rain, how they are created?”

Do you come to bring life to the tomb or merely to ask
 how can the dirt and the stones be revived?
 I continue on as if I had not been struck by tragedy,
 my heart, from my love for you, is in torment.
 It makes it easier for me to survive his loss,
 for he is, in any case, here before my eyes.

§ *Yahyā ibn ‘Alī told me, citing Abū Ayūb al-Madanī, who said, Ibrāhīm ibn ‘Alī ibn Hishām recited verses to me by a man who was eulogizing Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī:*

All pleasure is now ‘neath the dirt and the dust,
 forever dwelling where loved ones lie.
 Where al-Mawṣilī dwells, pleasure has perished,
 among the best of friends and companions.
 Female singers weep in sorrow over him,
 both love and fine wine weep for him, too.
 The musical instruments of the gatherings have wept,
 till the lute felt compassion for the tears of the plectrum.

§ *Muḥammad ibn Mazyad told me, citing Ḥammād, citing his father, who said:*

I visited al-Rashīd a month after my father’s death, and when I sat down and saw that the place where my father used to sit was empty, my eyes welled up with tears, but I held them back and persevered. Al-Rashīd glanced over at me and then called to me to come close to him. I kissed his hand and his feet and the ground before him. He began to cry, but did so discreetly, so I leapt to my feet and said:

In the life of our fortunate caliph
 lies a substitute for this tragic event.
 No harm will befall he who has suffered loss,
 as long as he has a place of refuge in Hārūn.

Al-Rashīd said, “Yes, that, by God, is the truth. You will suffer no loss from your father’s death, other than his person, as long as I am alive.” He then ordered that Ibrāhīm’s salary be added to Iṣḥāq’s. I said, “Sire, would you instead bestow it on my children, for being in service to you is enough reward for me.” Al-Rashīd replied, “Assign Ibrāhīm’s salary to Iṣḥāq’s children, and double Iṣḥāq’s salary!”