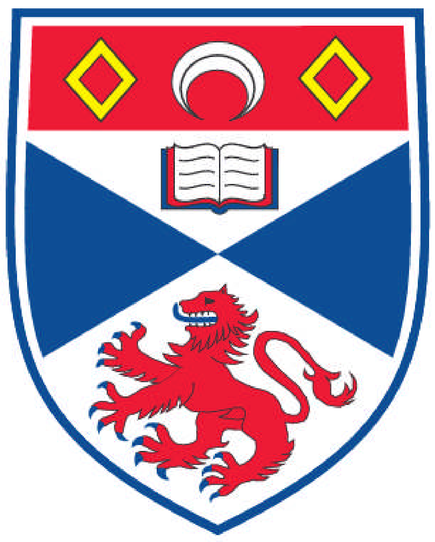
SLAVE GIRLS UNDER THE EARLY ʻABBASIDS: A STUDY OF THE ROLE OF SLAVE-WOMEN AND COURTESANS IN SOCIAL AND LITERARY LIFE IN THE FIRST TWO CENTURIES OF ʻABBASID CALIPHATE, BASED ON ORIGINAL SOURCES

Nasser Saad al-Rasheed

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St. Andrews



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Slave Girls under the Early ʿAbbāsids:

A study of the role of slave-women and courtesans in social and literary life in the first two centuries of the ʿAbbāsid Caliphate, based on original sources

by
Nasser Saad al-Rasheed

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C E R T I F I C A T I O N

I CERTIFY THAT Nasser Saad Al Rasheed has completed nine terms of research work in the United College of St. Salvator and St. Leonard, University of St. Andrews, that he has fulfilled the conditions of Resolution No. 1 (1967) of the University Court, and that he is qualified to submit the accompanying thesis in application for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

.....[redacted].....

J. Perry

(Supervisor)

Declaration

I hereby declare that the following is a record of research work carried out by me; that the thesis is my own composition, and that it has not previously been presented for any other degree.

Nasser S. al-Rasheed.

St. Andrews.
6-9-1971.

Table of Transliteration

ء	=	'	ḍ	=	ض
b	=	ب	ṭ	=	ط
t	=	ت	ẓ	=	ظ
th	=	ث	ʿ	=	ع
j	=	ج	gh	=	غ
ḥ	=	ح	f	=	ف
kh	=	خ	q	=	ق
d	=	د	k	=	ك
dh	=	ذ	l	=	ل
r	=	ر	m	=	م
z	=	ز	n	=	ن
s	=	س	h	=	هـ
sh	=	ش	w	=	و
ṣ	=	ص	y	=	ي

ḍamma + wāw	=	ū	fatḥa	=	a
fatḥa + yā	=	ay	kasra	=	i
fatḥa + wāw	=	au	ḍamma	=	u
			fatḥa + alif	=	ā
			kasra + yā	=	iy

Acknowledgement

I wish to thank Dr. M.A. Ghul and Dr. J. Burton, head of the Arabic Department at St. Andrews, for many useful suggestions. My sincere thanks are due to Dr. J.R. Perry for his supervision and his assistance in relation to linguistic problems. To Dr. D.E.P. Jackson I owe an acknowledgement for taking pains in reading a part of this thesis and making some useful observations. Finally, I should like to extend my thanks to the staff of the library of St. Andrews University for their kind co-operation and help.

The Contents

Introduction

For a long time the study of 'Abbāsid society has had a special fascination for me, not only because it was "The Golden Age" of the Islamic civilization, but also because it witnessed changes in both literary and social life. Naturally, such changes were a result of a mixture of various nations and an intermarriage of different civilizations.

From reading certain books which deal with social and literary aspects of that society, I have been struck by the idea that the numerous slave-girls might have participated in one way or another in such changes. This would not be surprising, since slave-girls in other societies played social and literary roles. It might be seen as conceivable that slave-girls, through their clothes, their social novelties, their fondness for poetry and above all their emergence in the households, influenced the man of that society, his way of life and then his poetical production. I have thus decided to work on the study of this subject, endeavouring to find out how far slave-girls of the 'Abbāsid period played their social and literary roles. I hope this work will stand as a useful contribution to serve those interested in such a study.

For the purpose of brevity and in view of the fact that the 'Abbāsid period covered several centuries, I have tried to confine this work exclusively to the so-called first 'Abbāsid

period (from al-Saffāh's Caliphate, 749 A.D., to that of al-Mutawakkil, 847), but at the same time I have referred to incidents which took place outside this period, especially when the reference was necessary.

However, two difficult things may be expected to confront anybody trying to study such a subject:

1. The approach to this subject is narrative. The majority of the available information is acquired in the form of stories and tales, some of doubtful authenticity. In this case, it is necessary to throw an adequate critical light on such information, an art which requires knowing how widespread and accepted the stories about slave-girls were. This art also requires reading the same information recorded in various books and told by different narrators. Again, a difficult task would arise from the fact that most of these stories were copied or borrowed from al-Aghānī, even if they were available in other books. In this position, one has to rely upon familiarity with the uncertain nature of the stories and tales told by relators.

2. A great deal of information about slave-girls is subject to exaggeration. This is so not only in the case of their poetical talents, but also of their numbers, their prices and their musical achievements. Such an exaggeration has been dealt with throughout my work.

It seems that discussion of slave-girls in the 'Abbāsid period was customary and appreciated, not only among ordinary people in order to entertain themselves but also in the courts of

the caliphs. The caliph usually used to select his associates and his boon companions among those with an adequate knowledge of literature, history and stories (akhbār). Al-Aṣma'ī, Isḥāq al-Mūṣilī and Ḥammād were among them, and all found favour with several caliphs. The caliph, having his palace crowded with slave-girls, would be pleased when he retired to his private life to listen to stories and tales woven about slave-girls. The caliph al-Mahdī was renowned for his fondness for listening to such stories, and his vizier Ya'qūb ibn Dāwūd used to provide him with them.[1]

It appears that certain story tellers took to the profession of inventing stories about various subjects and spreading them. Among the most attractive subjects was, undoubtedly, slave-girls. For example, al-Aṣma'ī, like other story tellers, was popular inside and outside the court.[2] The caliph wanted him to entertain him with stories, and the public wanted to hear them, and he himself wanted to make money out of them and find favour with the caliph. Slave-girls represented an endless source for him to extract his stories from. In order to have his pocket full of the caliph's dīnārs on one hand, he told him stories about the public's slave-girls and in order to establish his popularity on the other, he told the public stories about slave-girls of the palaces.

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1. Ibn al-Athīr, al-Kāmil, v, p.67.
2. al-Jarrāḥ, al-Waraqa, p.30.

The singer, attempting to provide suitable atmosphere for his song, might tell a curious story, as for instance that he had borrowed his song from a slave-girl, adding more details in describing her and praising her talent and ability. The singer Ibn Jāmi' told how he learned a particular song, which won the appreciation of his listeners, among whom was al-Rashīd, from a little pale slave-girl in al-Medīna.[1] Ibrāhīm al-Mūṣilī told al-Rashīd about his musical adventures with three slave-girls and how he used to disguise himself when he went to them. The story goes on to tell how al-Rashīd himself was tempted by the way Ibrāhīm told his story, and that he put on a disguise and went with Ibrāhīm to the slave-girls.[2]

At any rate, slave-girls initially began influencing society and played their literary and social roles in the Umayyad period. All events concerning both roles in the 'Abbāsid period appeared to be a higher development and a continuity of what already took place in the Umayyad. The climate and the seeds of both literary and social changes on the part of slave-girls in the 'Abbāsid period were found in the Umayyad. The contribution of 'Abbāsid slave-girls such as 'Arīb, Janān and 'Anān was an extension of that of Umayyad slave-girls such as Ḥabbāba and Sallāma. Influenced by this thought, I have begun my writing on the chapters dealing with both literary and social roles of slave-

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1. al-Aghānī, vi, pp.292-99.

2. Ibid v, pp.221-23.

girls with a background sketch which is a brief study of the literary and social roles of slave-girls of the Umayyad period.

The Sources

First among the most important and useful sources I have referred to is al-Aghānī. The author, Abu 'l-Faraj al-Isfahānī, (d. 967) was a man of vast knowledge, especially in literature, songs and Ayyām al-'Arab. He was a member of the tribe of Quraysh and a descendant of Marwān ibn Muḥammad, the last of the Umayyad caliphs. His family inhabited Iṣfahān, but he passed his early youth in Baghdad, and became the most distinguished scholar and most eminent author of that city.[1] He received his education from a number of scholars such as Ibn Durayd, Niftawayh and al-Akhfash. Although he was described as a dirty-looking person lacking etiquette, Rukn al-Dawla held him in favour and appointed him as his kātib.[2]

As regards songs and literature, al-Aghānī is regarded as the greatest book. It was not the first attempt of its kind, for there were books which bore the same titles and were written earlier than al-Aghānī of al-Iṣfahānī. That which is attributed to Isḥāq al-Muṣīlī and denied by his son Ḥammād was among them.[3] In his introduction, al-Iṣfahānī reveals that the reason for writing his book was that a certain chief (ra'īs) had asked him to

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1. Ibn Khallikān, Wafiyyāt, translated into English by De Slane, ii, p.249.

2. Yāqūt, Mu'jam al-Udabā', v, pp.149-57.

3. Ibn al-Nadīm, al-Fihrist, p.202.

collect all information concerning singing, because this chief had heard of the book of al-Aghānī which was ascribed to Isḥāq al-Mūṣilī.[1] Indeed, al-Aghānī of al-Iṣfahānī may be regarded as a history of all the Arabian poetry that had been set to music down to the author's time.

Al-Aghānī was based on a collection of one hundred melodies which was made for the caliph al-Rashīd.[2] This was not exclusively the contents of al-Aghānī. Al-Iṣfahānī added much more information and poetry and many other melodies chosen by himself. "After giving the words and the airs attached to them", he usually used to "relate the lives of the poets and musicians by whom they were composed, and take occasion to introduce a vast quantity of historical traditions and anecdotes including much ancient and modern verses."[3] A great deal of historical information such as the Ayyām al-'Arab, the history of kings of the Jāhiliyya and the caliphs of Islam is included in al-Aghānī, and it is certainly a very important authority on the history of civilization. All the technical terms relating to music were given according to the school of Isḥāq al-Mūṣilī, even if authorship of the narration was attributed to others.[4]

Al-Aghānī lacks systematic and chronological order.

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1. al-Aghānī, i, p.16.
2. Ibid, p.12.
3. Nicholson, A Literary History of The Arabs, p.347.
4. al-Aghānī, i, pp.14-15.

The author recognised this and gave those following reasons:[1]

1. The purpose of this book is not to put things in order, but to include songs and accounts of them, and this does not reduce the importance of its contents.

2. Quite often most of its accounts concern a good number of singers and include various methods of singing. Since priority cannot be given to any singer or any method in particular, the systematic order then does not matter much.

3. Since the soul gets bored, the heart displeased, and since the desire to move from one thing to another is a nature of human beings, the order is neglected. Variety is important for the convenience of the reader who would be refreshed by moving from a story to a poem, from ancient accounts to modern ones, from kings to subjects and from seriousness to jocularity (hazl).

Although the author declares that this book is merely a collection of both ancient and modern melodies, it is untrue to suggest that al-Iṣfahānī did not include his personal views and criticism, and discuss and establish the authorship of some disputed poems. The author claims that he had attributed his accounts to their original sources and to the people with authority on the subject he dealt with.[2] Throughout the book, the author refers to the authority he heard or copied from, using such terms as "on the authority of", "I was told" (ḥaddathanā) and

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1. Ibid, p.15.
2. Ibid, p.12.

"I copied from".

Al-Aghānī was received with unique favour among educated people contemporary to its author, because it served a purpose that no other book could serve. Suffice it that al-Mustanṣir of Spain, on receiving a copy of it, sent a gift of 1,000 pieces of gold to al-Iṣfahānī.[1] Sayf al-Dawla al-Ḥamdānī also rewarded al-Iṣfahānī for this book with the same amount, regretting his inability to offer a more adequate recompense.[2] The famous writer al-Ṣāḥib ibn ʿAbbād commented on this reward and wrote: "Sayf al-Dawla did give little. The book deserved much more for it is full of selected accounts and curious phrases. It is entertainment for the zāhid, substance for the scholar, treasury for the learned, manhood and courage for the brave, art for the elegant (ẓarīf) and pleasure for the king".[3] He added: "It is my favourite book among 206,000 books my library contains."[4] It is said that when al-Ṣāḥib was travelling or changing residence, he used to take with him thirty camel loads of books on literary subjects, but on receiving al-Aghānī, he found he could dispense with all other books and took it alone.[5]

People of that time did not regard al-Aghānī as an

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1. al-Maqqarī, Nafḥ al-Ṭīb, i, p.180.
2. Ibn Khallikān, ii, p.250.
3. al-Aghānī, (printed by Dār al-Kutub) introduction i, p.32.
4. Yāqūt, v, p.150.
5. Ibn Khallikān, ii, p.250.

ordinary book. On the contrary, they thought it was uniquely useful. Ibn Khaldūn read it and gave his views as follows: "It is the record (dīwān) of the Arabs and the collection of their deeds as regards the art of poetry, the art of history and the art of singing. As far as we know, there is no equal book. It is the ideal book which the learned aspires to follow, but cannot."[1]

Some learned men used to learn it by heart, and this was sufficient to increase the respect of society for them. Al-Marrākishī related how a man with shabby looks and rough clothes was despised at first by the vizir Abū Marwān. When he found out that this shabby man had learned al-Aghānī by heart, he kissed his head and apologised to him for the way he had treated him.[2]

There are accounts concerning the price of al-Aghānī in the 'Abbāsid period which show how important this book was. It is said that it was bought for 4,000 dīnārs for Ibn Ḥafṣ. Ibn 'Irs bought it for 10,000 dirhams for an important man, who, when he had a good look at the book, said: "It is unfair to the poor seller. This book is worth 10,000 dīnārs."[3]

Efforts were made by some writers to abbreviate al-Aghānī. Among them were Ibn al-Maghrib, Ibn Wāṣil al-Ḥamawī, Ibn Bāqiya, the author of Lisān al-'Arab Ibn Mukram and others.[4]

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1. Ibn Khaldūn, Tārīkh, i, p.1070.
2. al-Marrākishī, al-Mu'jib, pp.143-144.
3. Yāqūt, v, p.164.
4. al-Aghānī, introduction (printed by Dār al-Kutub), i, p.35.

The reliability of al-Aghānī was a controversial subject; people of literature held it in trust and made a number of statements about its author. In his Mu'jam, Yāqūt writes: "He was a scholar, a man of accounts (Ikhbārī). He was a Qur'anic scholar who knew the book by heart (hufaẓa). He combined a vast narration (riwāya) with accuracy of study. As regards the style and the selection of collecting information, I do not know better sources than those from which he collected."[1] Al-Bittī hold al-Iṣfahānī in estoem and stated that there was no more reliable source than Abu 'l-Faraj."[2] Ibn al-Nadīm writes: "He was a poet and a learned man. He was a writer of little riwāya. He depends on the sources of reliable origin."[3]

Al-Iṣfahānī and his book could not evade the attack of men of religion who resented the immortality of some accounts included. On religious grounds Ibn al-Jawzī, suspecting the reliability of information included in al-Aghānī, writes: "He belonged to the Shi'a sect. His type cannot be trusted, for he mentions in his books immoral things, sufficient to show his inclination to wantonness and his fondness for drinking. He admitted this himself. The reader of his book al-Aghānī would find such ugly and undesirable (munkar) things."[4]

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1. Yāqūt, v, p.149.
2. al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, Tārīkh Baghdād, xi, p.400.
3. Ibn al-Nadīm, pp.166-167.
4. Ibn al-Jawzī, al-Muntaẓim, vii, pp.40-41.

Another religious man, Ibn Taymiyya, is said to have described al-Iṣfahānī as a man of feeble riwāya and unreliable collection and a person whose intellect became disordered prior to his death.[1] Al-Nawbakhtī is credited with stating that Abu al-Faraj was a liar and that he used to go to bookshops (sūq al-Warrāqīn) and buy books and then copied them."[2]

His being a Shī'ī and a kātib of a Buwayhid prince might occasion some suspicion of some of his accounts, especially those concerning some of the 'Abbāsid caliphs such as al-Rashīd and al-Ma'mūn. The first in particular is portrayed in al-Aghānī as a caliph of pleasure, singing and slave-girls, while historians tell a great deal of his devotion, his piety,[3] and of his fighting for the cause of religion.[4]

However, as regards my subject, al-Aghānī is the most important source, not only because it is a history of literature or a mirror of both Umayyad and 'Abbāsid society of which slave-girls were a part. It also includes information of the caliph's court. Accounts of slave-girls, their way of life and their participation in literature and singing are available in al-Aghānī in more details than any other book. Dealing with such a subject, nobody can dispense with al-Aghānī. Writers who lived later than

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1. al-Aghānī, (printed by Dār al-Kutub), introduction i, p.19.
2. al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, xi, p.399.
3. Ibn al-Athīr, v, p.131.
4. Ibn Ṭiqṭaqa, al-Fakhrī, p.193.

al-Iṣfahānī borrowed from him or even copied him. For example, al-Nuwayrī in his chapter on slave-girls and Qiyān referred to al-Aghānī and copied most of his accounts from it.[1]

It is true that al-Aghānī includes some tales concerning slave-girls. Such tales are mentioned not necessarily as true accounts but in order to refresh the reader, since the refreshment of the reader was among the aims of al-Aghānī.[2] Like other writers and relators, al-Iṣfahānī did not take pains to examine such accounts. However, al-Aghānī must be regarded as the most important source for my subject.

Al-'Iqd al-Farīd is another indispensable book. Its author Ibn 'Abd Rabbih was descended from an enfranchised slave of the Spanish Umayyad Caliph Hishām ibn 'Abd al-Rahmān. Ibn 'Abd Rabbih was deeply learned in traditional knowledge and possessed great historical information,[3] and he was a man of knowledge of poetry and ability to compose it.[4]

Al-'Iqd itself is a miscellaneous anthology. It is divided into twenty-five books, each bearing the name of different gems. Like al-Aghānī, al-'Iqd was received with appreciation and criticism. The book had wide fame and learned men looked for it with passion. It is said that al-Ṣāḥib ibn 'Abbād heard of it and

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1. al-Nuwayrī, Nihāya al-Arab, v, pp.64-5.
2. al-Aghānī, i, p.15.
3. Ibn Khallikān, i, p.92.
4. al-Ḍibbī, Bughya al-Multamis, p.137.

took pains to obtain it. When he went through it, he remarked with disappointment: "It is our things returned to us. I thought this book contained some useful information of their country [Spain]. It exclusively contains information of our country. We do not need this. So return it."[1] But al-ʿIqd cannot be condemned because it is empty of important information dealing with literature of the country of the author, Spain, for it includes some of his own poetry here and there. Ibn Khallikān holds an opposite opinion of al-ʿIqd and states that it is a work of merit and contains something on every subject and the dīwān of the author's poetical compositions.[2] Ibn Kathīr believes that al-ʿIqd's contents suggest many advantages and branches of knowledge.[3] al-Maqqarī testifies that al-ʿIqd is "that famous anthology which was protected against criticism by being very well reviewed and arranged in such a lively way and by the spell of charm found in every part of it."[4]

It seems that Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih was to a noticeable degree influenced by Ibn Qutayba, and al-ʿIqd was an imitation of ʿUyūn al-Akhbār of Ibn Qutayba, especially in the matter of organising the material, choosing the titles of chapters and even in some of the contents. In spite of this, it cannot be denied that al-ʿIqd includes novelties and that the author was not only a copyist or

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1. Yāqūt, ii, p.67.
2. Ibn Khallikān, i, p.92.
3. Ibn Kathīr, al-Bidāya wa'l-Nihāya, xi, p.193.
4. al-Maqqarī, iv, p.217.

a collector, but he was also a composer. He follows what he collected by relevant poetry of his own composition. He gives his views from time to time. He criticises other writers' views such as Ibn Qutayba's on al-Shu'ūbiyya, and he accuses al-Mubarrad of having bad taste in choosing poetry. He even includes suggestions for and criticism of singers and melody-makers.

In his introduction the author, speaking of his method, points out that he selected the contents from the best sources and that his own work in this book was only that of organisation, revision and comparison. He also points out that he omitted the isnād for the convenience of the reader and for conciseness.

Ibn 'Abd Rabbih received the prevalent knowledge of his time, religion, poetry and history, as being a wit (ẓarīf) and a boon companion of the Spanish ruler 'Abd Allāh. He was described as the wit (malīḥ) of Spain.[1] He had the characteristics of the boon companion and appreciated music and a beautiful face. Therefore, it is not surprising that al-'Iqd is a reflection of his personality and the up-to-date taste of his time.

However, volume six of this book includes a good deal of information on singing and characteristics of women. This volume in particular has been a great help to me.

Al-Muwashshaḥ is a useful book. Its author, al-Washshā', was described as an elegant man (ẓarīf),[2] and his book contains

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1. Yāqūt, ii, p.71.

2. Ibn al-Nadīm, p.126.

what he thought necessary for the zurafā'. In his introduction he writes: "I have included a great many accounts concerning etiquette and zurf.[1] The book is divided into two parts. Both deal with politeness (adab), clothes of the zurafā' and their customs and the accounts of lovers. The custom of writing on head bands, curtains, beds, shoes and rings, which was practised mainly by slave-girls and their friends among the zurafā', was an important part of the contents of this book.

It seems that the occupation of the author, the sale of embroidered and brightly-coloured fabrics (tawshiya) enabled him to know much about the fashion of males and females alike. His description of them shows this. His style of writing was influenced by this occupation. Throughout the book, he used saj' even in the headings of chapters.

Al-Washshā' wrote a whole chapter on slave-girls' disadvantages, especially from a social point of view. He had a low opinion of women in general and of slave-girls in particular. He describes them as untrue to their friends and untrustworthy mercenaries. At any rate, al-Muwashshā' is a record of the elegant 'Abbāsid society and a reflection of its leisure and its entertainment. At the same time, it can be regarded as a dictionary of terms and names given to clothes, perfume and the countries they were imported from.

The dīwāns of the 'Abbāsid poets in general and that of

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1. al-Muwashsha', p.11.

Abū Nuwās in particular contain useful information. Abū Nuwās was not only a ẓarīf and an intimate associate of slave-girls, but he is said to have been in love with the slave-girl Janān, about whom he wrote a number of poems. The story of his relationship with Janān was popular and spoken of in detail. Al-Iṣfahānī devoted a whole chapter to this event.[1] The record of his romantic adventures with slave-girls reveals how much he enjoyed them and how much he suffered from them. Throughout his dīwān, Abū Nuwās refers to all this. He also describes their beauty and charm and the ways they adopted to capture gentle hearts. When he becomes disappointed with them, he satirises them, from time to time using uncouth expressions. The Dīwān gives enough idea about some of the social customs of slave-girls and their clothes, and it gives a good picture of the ghulāmiyya (boy-like slave-girl) and her social conduct.

At any rate this Dīwān can be regarded as a record of 'Abbāsid society and its characteristics, drinking, cup-bearers, homosexuality and moral corruption. It is also a record of the kind of life the ẓurafā' used to lead at that time and some of the accounts of their novelties and entertainment.

That a number of history books which deal with accounts of the Caliphs, their courts, courtiers and their boon companions, are of use to my subject cannot be ignored. The Annals of al-Ṭabarī and al-Kāmil of Ibn al-Athīr are among them. Murūj al-

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1. al-Aghānī xx, pp.3-18.

Dhahab of al-Mas'ūdī is of special importance, and indeed can be compared to al-Aghānī in its importance. Its author 'Alī ibn al-Husain al-Mas'ūdī was a native of Baghdad. He was called al-Mas'ūdī after one of the Prophet's companions, 'Abd Allāh ibn Mas'ūd, to whom he traced his descent.[1] He was a historian and a traveller at the same time. His travels covered a great part of his world. Among the remote places he visited were Armenia, India, Ceylon, Zanzibar and Madagascar, and he seems to have sailed in Chinese waters as well as in the Caspian Sea. He said of his journey: "it resembles that of the sun." He settled in the latter years of his life chiefly in Egypt and Syria "compiling the great historical works, of which the Murūj'l-Dhahab is an epitome."[2]

Unlike most of the historians, al-Mas'ūdī gathered a great part of his knowledge and information from travelling and meeting peoples of different races. He entrusted these results to his three famous historical works, Murūj al-Dhahab, Akhbār al-Zamān and al-Tanbīh wa-l-Ishrāf. Although Akhbār al-Zamān is larger and contains more details, Murūj al-Dhahab is more popular. From his works, al-Mas'ūdī possessed vast and various knowledge in the characteristics of races, different customs of nations, geography of countries and popular tales of different languages, and he was perhaps conversant with a number of languages.

Murūj al-Dhahab is a universal history beginning with

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1. al-Mas'ūdī, Murūj, i, pp.18-19.

2. Nicholson, p.353.

the Creation and ending at the Caliphate of al-Muṭī, in 947 A.D. This book can hardly be given an adequate summary in a few lines for "no description can cover the immense range of topics which are discussed and the innumerable digressions with which the author delights or irritates his readers, as the case may be."[1]

As regards the motive behind writing this book, al-Mas'ūdī declares that he wished to follow the example of scholars and people of wisdom and to leave behind him a praiseworthy and durable contribution.[2] There is a reason for choosing this title for this book. It is explained by al-Mas'ūdī himself in his introduction: "I have chosen this title because this book contains valuable contents and important events which my other books contain. I have endeavoured to make it a curiosity (tuḥfa) for kings and people of knowledge by including in it necessary accounts of the far off past and by not neglecting to mention directly or indirectly something of the various branches of knowledge and something of the art of relating (fann al-akhbār)."[3]

Al-Mas'ūdī might be criticised for lacking artistic unity in some of his writing, but instead "he has thrown off a brilliant but unequal sketch of public affairs and private manners, of social life and literary history."[4] Ibn Khaldūn called him:

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1. Ibid, .353.
2. al-Mas'ūdī, i, p.20.
3. Ibid, p.26.
4. Nicholson, p.354.

"an Imām for all historians."[1] Much later he was named "The Herodotus of the Arabs", and the comparison is not unjust.[2] In comparing al-Mas'ūdī and this Greek historian, Nicholson reached the conclusion that the work of al-Mas'ūdī "shows the same eager spirit of enquiry, the same open-mindedness and disposition to record without prejudice all the marvellous things that he had heard or seen, the same ripe experience and large outlook on the present as on the past."[3]

In spite of the fact that Murūj al-Dhahab includes some tall tales and curious accounts, it is still greatly useful in regard to the history of civilization in general and social information in particular.

It might be worthwhile to throw some light on the work of two writers, Ibn Buṭlān and al-Ghazālī. Both spoke of their expertise as regards the hiyal (tricks) of nakhkhāsūn and the physical characteristics of slaves, which the customer had to take into consideration. Both wrote their experiences in the form of a treatise. Ibn Buṭlān, who lived much earlier than al-Ghazālī, entitled his treatise Risāla fī Shirā' al-Raqīq wa Taqlīb al-'Abīd (treatise in buying and inspecting slaves.) The treatise of al-Ghazālī, Hidāyat al-Murīd fī Shirā' al-'Abīd (Guidance for one wishing to buy slaves) seems to be a sequel to that of Ibn Buṭlān.

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1. Ibn Khaldūn, i, p.52.

2. Nicholson, p.353.

3. Ibid.

Both treatises were edited by 'Abd al-Salām Hārūn and published with another treatise in the book entitled Nawādir al-Makhṭūṭāt.

It is interesting to learn that Ibn Buṭlān borrowed the contents of his treatise from the writings of Greek philosophers. In his introduction,, he writes: "I have collected and organised this work from the treatises of the teacher (mu'allim) of Alexander and other philosophers."[1]

In respect of the legal position of slaves, their rights, their treatment and the technical definition of slavery, jurisprudence and tradition (ḥadīth) books and the Qur'ān are the main references. In dealing with this, I have not followed any particular school of jurisprudence. Nor have I favoured any particular sect. Both Kitāb al-Kharāj of Abū Yūsuf and Sharḥ al-Siyar al-Kabīr of Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥasan include a great deal of useful information on captives of war, their legal status and what right the Imām possessed in relation to conquered countries and their populations.

The books written by travellers and geographers contain information on the slave trade and the caravans passing through Europe and carrying slaves to be sent to far destinations. Typical of these books are al-Masālik wa'l-Mamālik of Ibn Khurdādbih, Risāla of Ibn Fuḍlān and al-Masālik wa'l-Mamālik of al-Iṣṭakhrī.

In this context, some recent European writers have written a good deal concerning the routes of slave caravans and

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1. Ibn Buṭlān, Risāla, p.354.

their exportation to Islamic countries. In his book Die Renaissance des Islams, Mez has written at some length on how Slavs in particular used to be carried away to Islamic countries. An adequate coverage of this subject is available in the work of Henri Pirenne included in his two books Economical and social history of medieval Europe and Medieval cities.

1. Slavery in Islam

a) Slavery among ancient nations:

Slavery is as ancient as mankind itself, for it was natural for the man with power at his disposal to enslave the weak and exploit him to meet his needs. Civilised nations of times much earlier than Islam and contemporary with it knew slavery and practised it. Greeks, Romans, Persians and Byzantines had slaves and their own laws of slavery. Tremendous numbers of slaves were found in Greek and Roman society. Speaking of the number of slaves in Greece and Rome, the authors of Life and thought in the Greek and Roman world write: "Although slaves were kept by all ancient peoples who had the force to catch them or the means to buy them, they were especially numerous in the world of Greece and Rome."[1]

It is thought, for example, that Corinth possessed 460,000 slaves and Aegina 470,000.[2] The proportion of slaves was in some places higher than that of free people. Dealing with this, Carry and Harrhoff write: "The proportion of slaves to free persons in Greek and Roman society is difficult to determine. It was higher in the more urbanised and industrialized regions: but even at Athens and Rome the servile population probably remained at all times inferior to that of the free residents. In the smaller Greek cities in the Near East, and in the Western provinces of the Roman Empire, it was in a distinct minority. But in the

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1. Carry & Harrhoff, Life and thought in the Greek and Roman World, p.129.

2. Ingram, History of slavery, p.107.

Greek and Roman world as a whole the servile element was present in sufficient numbers to exercise a far-reaching influence upon the life of the free population."[1]

Surprisingly enough, it is stated by Athezeus, on the authority of Ctesicles, that the census of Demetrius Phalerous, in 309 B.C., gave for Athens 21,000 and 10,000 metics (resident foreigners) as well as 400,000 slaves.[2] Dealing with this, Wallon comes to the conclusion that "the servile population of Attica was comprised between the limits of 188,000 and 203,000 souls, the free population being about 67,000, and the metics amounting to 40,000." The slaves thus bore to the free native population the ratio of three to one.[3]

In the book Life and Leisure in Ancient Rome there is a brief estimate of the number of slaves owned by some masters. Pliny left a household of 4,116 slaves. Pedanius Secundus had four hundred slaves. The Younger Pliny made provision at his death for the support of a hundred of his freedmen.[4]

As in 'Abbāsid society, owning slave-girls in great numbers seemed to be a distinguishing feature of Greek and Roman society, and it was a common practice. The royal palaces of Augustus and Claudius were crowded with numerous slave-girls.[5]

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1. Carry & Harrhoff, p.130.
2. Ingram, pp.21-2.
3. Ibid., p.23.
4. Balsdon, Life and Leisure in Ancient Rome, p.107.
5. Balsdon, Roman Women, p.230.

A considerable number of slave-girls in the Greek and Roman world worked as professional prostitutes. No shame was attached to celibates or widowers who kept a concubine.[1] Even the men of thought and wisdom in that society saw owning slave-girls as normal and necessary. Socrates was credited with owning a good number of them. In his famous will, issued just before his decision to take poison, he reputedly ordered that his slave-girls should be set free.[2]

It might be of interest to know something about the origins of slavery in the ancient world according to the laws of Greek and Roman society. Among the chief causes was of course war. The captives or the kidnapped were made slaves.[3] Prisoners of war who failed to find their ransom were doomed to become slaves and were sold off by auction,[4] and "the entire population of towns taken by storm were liable to the same fate."[5] So it is not surprising that slave-dealers by profession used to accompany the army.[6] Such slave-dealers, if given the chance, used to abduct unwary adults and pick up exposed infants or buy the unwanted children of certain barbarian tribes.[7]

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1. Carry and Harrhoff, p.147.
2. al-Qifṭī, Ikhbār al-ʿUlamāʾ, pp.25-6.
3. Shafīq, al-Riqqfi l-Islām, p.33.
4. Carry & Harrhoff, p.129.
5. Ibid.
6. Shafīq, p.33.
7. Ibid, 19.

War brought to Rome an incredible number of slaves. Estimating the number of captives and prisoners of war whose fate was slavery, Ingram writes: "In Epirus, after the victories of Aemilius Paullus, 150,000 captives were sold. The prisoners at Aquae Sextiae and Verellae were 90,000 Teutons and 60,000 Cimbri. Caesar sold on a single occasion in Gaul, 63,000 captives; Augustus made 44,000 prisoners in the country of Salassi; after immense numbers had perished by famine and hardship and in the combats of the arena, 97,000 slaves were acquired by the Jewish war."[1]

In ancient Greek times, piracy was rife round the neighbouring coasts. Those unfortunate people who happened to be kidnapped by the pirates were regarded as slaves.[2] There were also slaves by birth.[3]

Among the most interesting sources of slaves in those societies was punishment for certain offences. An unmarried Athenian girl who had been seduced could, as her punishment, be sold into slavery according to Solon's law.[4] Under the Roman emperors, slavery was often inflicted on those criminals whose offences were of a serious type, as an alternative to a death sentence.[5]

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1. Ingram, pp.37-8.
2. Carry & Harrhoff, p.129.
3. Shafīq, p.33.
4. Lacy, The family in Classical Greece, p.115.
5. Carry & Harrhoff, p.129.

A regular commerce in slaves was established, and thus there was a regular importation at Rome of slaves who were not acquired by war but brought by slave-merchants from Africa, Spain and Gaul. Asiatic and African countries such as Bithynia, Galatia, Cappadocia and Syria were the main sources for the supply of slaves.[1]

Greek society witnessed a systematic slave-trade. Syria, Pontus, Phrygia, Lydia, Galatia, Paphlagonia, and above all Thrace, represented a rich source of slaves, while Egypt, Italy and Ethiopia also furnished numbers of slaves.[2] Athens was also very important as a market for slave-dealing, and in latter times Delos became a large centre of trade, and as many as 10,000 slaves were sold there in a single day.[3]

In the Persian Empire there were many slaves. Persia annexed whole countries and fought different nations, so war brought her many slaves. Persian slaves fulfilled many functions. There were slaves who were put in charge of pasturing cattle. In addition, there were private slaves who were used to serve "the requirements of decoration and wealth."[4]

Slaves were found in Persian society in great numbers. As an example, it is said that Khusrau Parwīz gave the daughter of the Byzantine Emperor Maurice one hundred slave-girls among her dowry.[5]

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1. Ingram, p.38.
2. Ibid., p.19.
3. Ingram, p.20.
4. Shafīq, p.93.
5. al-Tha'ālibī, Ghurar al-Siyar, p.692.

Shāpūr I used to be received every day when he went to his palace by a hundred slave-girls carrying musical instruments as well as drinking cups, and laden with jewels and fine clothes.[1] Parwīz ibn Hurmuz possessed 12,000 slave-girls to sing to him, to entertain him and to serve him.[2]

It seems that the Persians acquired most of their slaves from the Turks in war, and that this kind of slaves were held in favour. Consequently they were included among the selected gifts suitable to send to kings and princes. It is recorded that Khusrau Parwīz, King of Persia, presented the Greek emperor Maurice with a hundred slaves, belonging to princely Turkish families, all of them of considerable beauty, with gold earrings in their ears containing pearls or gems.[3]

Byzantium was not without slaves. The record tells of the number of slave-girls with whom this same Maurice furnished his daughter on the occasion of her wedding to the Persian king Parwīz. It was as many as 200 slave-girls.[4] Al-Mas'ūdī mentions that this emperor made a return gift to a Persian king of one hundred and twenty slave-girls, all daughters of princes of the Burgundians, Galicians, Slavs and Gascons, all neighbouring

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1. Ibid, 460.
2. al-Iṣfahānī, Tārīkh, p.53.
3. al-Mas'ūdī i, p.303.
4. al-Iṣfahānī, Tārīkh, p.53.

peoples. Each of the slave-girls had on her head a crown of gold.[1]

In Byzantium, war was the largest source of slaves,[2] and captives "taken in battle were normally enslaved."[3] In Byzantine society "slaves were on the great estates in the countryside as well as in the houses of the rich in the towns."[4] There, slaves seem on the whole to have been well-treated, "for though slavery was countenanced by the Church, both masters and men were exhorted to respect their mutual obligations."[5]

b) Slavery among the pre-Islamic Arabs:

Like other nations, the Arabs of pre-Islamic times owned slaves comprising captives taken from among the Arabs themselves or non-Arabs. Raids between tribes occurred frequently and repeatedly; those unfortunates who happened to be captured in such raids would mostly become slaves, especially the women.[6]

In his Mu'allaqa, 'Amr ibn Kulthūm expressed fear that the women of his tribe would be enslaved if captured by the enemy and promised the women of Taghlib to bring them women of other

1. al-Mas'ūdī, i, p.303.
2. Shafīq, p.51.
3. Rice, The Byzantines, p.98
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. al-Aghānī, iii, p.73.

tribes as slaves.[1] Zayd ibn Ḥāritha, whose mother was from Ṭay' and his father from Quḍā'a, was taken by Banū al-Qayn and sold as a slave at 'Ukāẓ. He was finally set free by the prophet Muḥammad.[2]

The speedy raids the Arabs launched in the Jāhiliyya period into such neighbouring countries as Persia and Byzantium brought them spoils, captured boys and women who, according to the law of the Arabs at that time, became slaves. Bilāl al-Ḥabashī,[3] Ṣuhayb al-Rūmī[4] and Salmān al-Fārisī,[5] all Companions of the Prophet, were among the outstanding non-Arab slaves.

Some slave-girls were originally Persian or Byzantine. Arab delegates[6] used to visit the neighbouring countries, chiefly Persia, so it is possible that some of the slave-girls were included in the gifts which such delegates used to return with. Perhaps al-Jarādatān (the two locusts), who were the talk of the Jāhiliyya, whose singing was highly praised[7] and who contributed to entertaining the generous 'Abd Allāh ibn Jad'ān and his guests,[8]

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1. al-Shanqīṭī, al-Mu'allaqāt, p.118.
2. Ibn Ḥajar, al-Iṣāba, ii, p.45.
3. Ibn Sa'd, al-Ṭabaqāt, iii, p.232.
4. Ibid., p.226.
5. Ibid., iv, p.84.
6. Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, al-'Iqd, ii, p.9.
7. al-Zubaydī, Tāj al-'Arūs, ii, p.318.
8. Ibn Ḥabīb, al-Muḥabbar, p.138.

might have been of Persian origin, given to Ibn Jad'ān in one of his visits to Persia; especially since it is generally assumed that singing in Arabic and in an artistic manner first began in the Umayyad period under the school of Ibn Misjaḥ.[1] It is felt that Sumayya (a slave-girl of the physician al-Ḥārith ibn Kilda and mother of Ziyād ibn Abīh) was a Persian from the town of Zandāvard. She was given to al-Ḥārith as a reward for his success in treating a certain disease.[2]

The need for more slaves made the Arabs, especially those who lived in towns such as Mecca and al-Madīna, look for them and purchase them from other nations dwelling close to Arabia, mainly the Abyssinians and the uncivilised peoples round Abyssinia. There were slave-dealers who used to bring them to markets and sell them. Quraysh seems to have been the most active tribe in dealing with slaves as they dealt with other commodities. This kind of trade was not seen as a degrading or dishonourable occupation. 'Abd Allāh ibn Jad'ān, who was one of the leaders of Quraysh in the war of al-Fijār[3] and described as a noble and generous man,[4] was a famous slave-dealer (nakhkhās).[5]

When a man bought a slave, he would usually put a cord

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1. al-Aghānī, iii, p.271.
2. Ibn Qutayba, al-Ma'ārif, p.288.
3. al-'Iqd, v, p.256.
4. al-Muḥabbar, p.137.
5. al-Ma'ārif, p.576.

round his neck and drag him to his place as if he were a camel or a horse.[1] Another strange way of making a slave of a free man was known at that time but rarely practised. This was gambling, and the loser would become the slave of the winner. The record preserves a single case, that Abū Lahab and al-'Āṣ ibn Hishām gambled and the former happened to win. Therefore he enslaved his fellow-tribesman as the penalty for losing.[2]

Tilling the soil and herding the cattle were the main occupations filled by slaves at that time. Resembling the serf in the Roman Empire was the qinn, who used to work on the land and be sold with it.[3] 'Antara ibn Shaddād was put in charge of taking the camels of his master to the pasture.[4] Abū Lahab employed al-'Āṣ to feed his camels.[5] Besides, some of the slaves owned by generous men such as Qays ibn Ma'dīkarib (The Yamani King)[6] were employed to light fires at night on high ground in order that passers-by would see them and come as guests. This kind of slave was promised liberty if he managed to bring to his master's tent guests who were guided by the fire, especially on cold nights.[7]

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1. Ibid, 328.
2. al-Aghānī, iii, p.307.
3. Zaydān, Tārīkh al-tamaddun, iv, p.27.
4. al-Aghānī, viii, p.237.
5. Ibid., iii, p.307.
6. al-Aṣma'ī, Tārīkh, p.124.
7. Ḥātim, Dīwān, p.59.

There seems not to have been any stigma attached to any dealer who put his slave-girls into prostitution, or to any man of whatever class who patronised such girls. 'Abd Allāh ibn Jad'ān had slave-girls who worked as prostitutes, and he used to sell their illegitimate children.[1] Sumayya, the mother of Ziyād ibn Abīh and the slave-girl of al-Ḥārith ibn Kilda, was a prostitute in al-Ṭā'if. Most of her customers were among the chiefs and the nobles.[2]

It was customary for prostitution to be an occupation of slave-girls. When 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb directed the bay'a of women on behalf of the Prophet and asked Hind bint 'Utba to promise not to commit adultery, she looked amazed and answered him plaintively: "Does the free woman do that?"[3]

The Arabs married their slave-girls. Their offspring were denied the status of acknowledged progeny and regarded as slaves.[4] They might be adopted as sons if they demonstrated any special gift or remarkable ability to fight.[5] The adoption of 'Antara of Banū 'Abs by Shaddād was the most famous case of its kind. He was the son of a black Abyssinian slave-girl called Zabība, and for this he was deprived of his father's house until

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1. al-Ma'ārif, p.576.
2. al-Dīnawarī, Kitāb al-Akhbār al-Ṭiwāl, pp.232-33.
3. Ibn Sa'd, viii, p.237.
4. al-Aghānī, viii, p.237.
5. Ibid., p.235.

he showed bravery in battle. When he did, he was set free and adopted.[1] For such important reasons the Arabs granted liberty to their slaves. Otherwise, if a slave desired to be quit of his master, he would demand to be sold, and if the master liked this idea, he would sell him to another master.[2]

c) Slavery in Islam:

Islam rose and with it came the Arab conquests which covered a great part of the earth. The Arabs were permitted by Islam to hold the captured pagans until they were ransomed[3] or treat them as slaves, as it did not completely abolish slavery, although it ordered its followers to treat slaves well as will be seen later.

A man might legally be enslaved in Islam if he were either a pagan or a prisoner-of-war. This did not mean he would automatically be freed if the justification for his enslavement ceased.[4]

From a theoretical point of view, the imām is entitled to enslave the pagan population, men and women alike, of any country taken by storm by the Muslim army,[5] but in practice it

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1. al-Aghānī, viii, p.237.
2. Zaydān, iv, p.28.
3. Qur'ān, XLVII, 41.
4. Muhammad ibn al-Hasan, Sharh al-Siyar, iii, p.1028.
5. Ibid, 1039.

never happened that the whole population of any country was enslaved. Historically, it was only the captured soldiers and some women who were enslaved, and the great majority of civilians were regarded as possession of the state (al-dawla) and then set free, as 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb freed civilians. He granted them freedom and the option to work and to go anywhere they wished on condition that they would pay the poll-tax (jizya)[1] as long as they remained non-Muslims, for there is no jizya on a Muslim.[2]

It is related that the Banū Umayya used to say: "Egypt was conquered by force. Therefore its people are our slaves. We command them as we will."[3] This statement can be treated as follows: Firstly: the practice of enslaving all Egyptians did not arise. So that this statement meant is most probably that the people of Egypt were inferior to the Arab conquerors, and the Arabs had the right, by force, to treat them as inferior subjects. Such treatment of non-Arabs whether slaves or mawālī was widely practised and supported especially in the Umayyad period.[4]
Secondly: the authenticity of this statement was suspect to a modern scholar , namely Husain Mu'nis of the Institute of Islamic Studies in Madrid.[5]

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1. al-Ṭabarī, Tārīkh, v, pp.2405-6.
2. Abū Dāwūd, Sunan, ii, p.152.
3. Ibn al-Athīr, Tārīkh, ii, p.397.
4. al-Mubarrad, al-Kāmil, i, p.274.
5. Mu'nis in his comment on Zaydān, iv, p.56.

Purchasing slaves from dealers was another source of slavery in Islam. Slaves were purchased by Muslims from Africa, southern Europe and central Asia as will be dealt with in due course.

Another source of slavery was that slaves were paid as part of the land-tax (kharāj) to governors, who used to send some of them in hundreds or thousands to the court of the Caliphs. This happened in the case of some land-tax collectors (ʿummāl) in Africa, Turkistan and Egypt, who collected slaves as part of the tax.[1]

Both Ibn Khaldūn and al-Jahshayārī give statistics for the land tax from some parts of the Islamic Caliphate in the 'Abbāsid period. It included a thousand slaves from Khurāsān,[2] a thousand from al-Jazīra[3] and a hundred from Gīlān.[4] It is said that slaves were paid to Muslims as a poll-tax (jizya) by the protected peoples (ahl al-dhimma). The dhimmīs among the Berber tribes in particular in North Africa used to pay slaves from among their children instead of money as a jizya, according to Ibn al-Athīr;[5] but such cases were infrequent at least, and this account must be treated with caution, for the Berbers seem

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1. al-Maqrīzī, Khuṭaṭ Miṣr, i, p.313.
2. al-Jahshayārī, al-Wuzarā', p.283.
3. Ibn Khaldūn, Tārīkh, i, p.309.
4. al-Jahshayārī, p.286.
5. Ibn al-Athīr, iii, p.13.

to have paid the jizya only once, when 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ invaded Barqa, and none of their children was given.[1] In addition, it was not customary for slaves to be included in the jizya. What was customary was that slaves so offered were valued and the monetary equivalent paid in the jizya.[2]

Slaves could also be paid as part of a peace settlement (ṣulḥ). A certain king of Armenia paid Marwān ibn Muḥammad a thousand black-haired slaves with long eyelashes, male and female, and also the population of the Armenian town of Tumān paid a hundred slaves.[3]

The Courts of the Caliphs had a good number of slaves who had been sent as presents by non-Muslim kings and princes (ifranj) in order to consolidate the relationship between them or as a friendly gesture. When the princes of Barcelona and Tarragona requested the Caliph al-Mustanṣir to renew a certain peace agreement, they presented him with as many as twenty slaves.[4]

Captives in war were usually distributed among Muslim fighters in the same manner as that of the spoil; three parts for the horseman and one for the foot soldier.[5]

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1. Mu'nis on Zaydān, iv, p.56.
2. Abu Yūsuf, al-Kharāj, p.122.
3. al-Balādhurī, Futūḥ al-Buldān, i, p.245.
4. al-Maqqarī, Nafḥ al-Ṭīb, i, p.179.
5. al-Dārimī, Sunan, ii, p.144.

The numbers of the captives exceeded thousands in some battles and surpassed the bounds of credibility in others. For example, the captives from the Battle of Amorium alone numbered 30,000.[1] The number given for the captives from Africa was 300,000. The fifth of this number (sixty thousand) was sent to the Caliph al-Walīd ibn ʿAbd al-Malik.[2] The negro slaves in Iraq known as Zanj numbered millions. Ibn Ṭabāṭabā puts the death toll in the fight between the Zanj and the Iraqi army as high as 2,500,000.[3]

Historians seem to have mentioned these accounts of the incredible numbers of captives without sufficiently close study. Typical of these accounts is that Mūsā ibn Nuṣayr returned from Spain bringing with him 3,000 virgin girls of the Goths (al-qūt).[4] Al-Maqarrī mentions that a tremendous amount of spoil, people and property, resulted from the battle of Arāk in Spain. Because of the great numbers of captives, a single captive was sold for one dirham.[5] Another historian, Ibn al-Athīr, goes further and writes: "After the battle of ʿAmmūriyya (Amorium), the number of the captives was so enormous that for the sake of speed, they were sold five by five and ten by ten."[6] It is also said that

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1. Ibn Kathīr, al-Bidāya Wa'l-Nihāya, x, p.296.
2. Ibn al-Athīr, iv, p.112.
3. Ibn al-Ṭiqṭaqā, al-Fakhrī, p.251.
4. Ibn al-Athīr, iv, p.124.
5. al-Maqqarī, i, p.207.
6. Ibn al-Athīr, v, p.250.

al-Rashīd's army, fighting a certain battle against the Turks, captured ten thousand Turks.[1]

So it is not surprising that some of the Arab fighters owned a hundred or a thousand slaves.[2] The soldier in the Syrian army in the battle of Ṣiffīn had from one to ten servants waiting on him.[3] In the possession of al-Zubayr ibn al-'Awwām were a thousand slaves.[4] However, it was expected of the nobles and princes to possess considerable numbers of slaves. Dhu l-Kilā' (head of Ḥimyar) was seen accompanied by a thousand of his own slaves, when he visited Abū Bakr as delegate of his people.[5] 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān, the Caliph, was credited with owning one thousand slaves.[6]

If such numerous slaves were owned by the first Muslims (ṣaḥāba), who were renowned for their austerity and contempt for the luxurious kind of life (zuhd), then some of the kings and princes who lived later and enjoyed more luxury would undoubtedly be expected to have owned more slaves. It is recorded that the 'Abbāsid Caliph al-Mu'taṣim possessed nearly 20,000 Turkish slaves[7]

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1. al-Tha'ālibī, Thimār al-Qulūb, p.114.
2. Ibn al-Athīr, iv, p.147.
3. al-Mas'ūdī, ii, p.394.
4. Ibid., p.333.
5. Ibid., p.299.
6. al-Dumayrī, Ḥayāt al-Ḥayawān al-Kubrā, i, p.49.
7. Ibn Kathīr, x, p.296.

and that the Caliph al-Muqtadir owned 11,000 slaves.[1] The governor (wālī) of Egypt Aḥmad ibn Ṭūlūn is thought to have had 7,000 slaves (mamlūk) and 24,000 young slaves (ghilmān).[2]

Owning slaves was not a monopoly of warriors or princes. It was within the reach of ordinary people who could afford their prices, since slaves were regarded as capital to be used in most commercial contracts such as sale, purchase, pledge (rahn) and rent (ijāra).[3] 'Umar ibn Abī Rabī'a, the famous Meccan poet of love, owned many more than seventy slaves.[4]

A precise estimate of the number of slaves of that time cannot easily be made, but at the same time, it can be assumed that the number of slaves, especially in important towns such as Baghdad and al-Baṣra, was so great that it might have been equal or near to the number of non-slaves. It is said that one notable of al-Baṣra alone, Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān, owned 50,000 slaves.[5] If such an account is to be accepted, the number of slaves in a certain household could have been as great as the population of one of the towns at that time.

Although such great numbers of slaves and captives were given in many cases to magnify the Arab domination and the

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1. al-Fakhrī, p.260.
2. Ibn Taghrī Bardī, al-Nujūm al-Zāhira, iii, p.21.
3. See below, p.49.
4. al-Aghānī, i, p.86.
5. Ibn Taghrī Bardī, ii, p.74

Arab warriors, they show that slaves were found in enormous numbers.

d) Treatment of Slaves:

Although Islam approved of slavery, it came as a benefit to slaves in many aspects. The Qur'ān urges masters to observe humanity and display sympathy in treating their slaves as they treat their parents and neighbours: "Worship God, associating nothing with him; be kind to your parents and relatives, orphans and poor, neighbours near and far, companions near, beggars, and those that are possessed by your hands; verily God loves not him that is puffed up and proud."[1]

The Prophet commanded that slaves should be treated kindly, and the master should not beat his slave, and he rebuked Abū Mas'ūd for beating his slave.[2] This action was regarded as a sin which might be expiated, and the expiation might be the manumission of the beaten slave.[3] The master who treats his slave cruelly is scorned and warned by the Prophet of an evil consequence in the afterlife, with the words: "Neither the arrogant, nor the traitor will enter paradise, nor he who abuses his rights in the ownership of slaves."[4]

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1. Qur'ān, IV, 35.
2. al-Ghazālī, Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn, ii, p.220.
3. Abū Dāwūd, ii, p.634.
4. al-Ghazālī, ii, p.219.

Slaves should not be made to carry or do more than they can bear: "Do not engage them in a task harder than they could bear or manage."[1] 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb devoted a particular day, Saturday to going to the Medinan suburb of al-'Awālī to inspect slaves and masters. He used to reduce the size or the amount of the work the slave was to do, whenever he found the work too hard for the slave to bear.[2]

Moreover, the slave should be given to eat the same food as his master at the same table and wear the same clothes as his master. The Prophet emphasises this by saying: "Fear God in respect of those you possess; let them eat the same food you eat, wear the same clothes you wear."[3] In another ḥadīth he says: "When any of you has his food cooked and served by his slave, he should ask him to sit down and eat with him. If the slave hesitates, he should hand him some."4

The slave should be allowed to ride when his master is riding a horse or camel. The Prophet used to carry his slave or servant as he did his friends, on his horse behind him.[5] Abū Hurayra saw a man riding his horse, while his slave was walking behind him. This lack of manners displeased Abū Hurayra, who then

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1. Ibid.
2. Mālik, al-Muwaṭṭa', ii, p.980.
3. al-Bukhārī, Ṣaḥīḥ, iii, p.195.
4. al-Hindī, Kanz al-'Ummāl, ix, p.40
5. Ibn Ḥazm. Jawāmi' al-Siyar, p.42.

said to the man: "O man, carry your lad behind you."[1]

Islam looks at the slave as a human being who, by unfortunate circumstances which could conceivably overtake the master, has lost his freedom, but still has the same feelings and passions as the master. Considering this, the Prophet says: "If you like them, keep them. If otherwise, sell them, and never torture the creatures of God, for he enabled you to possess them as he could have enabled them to possess you if he willed."[2] It would seem from the above example that Abū Hurayra did not regard the slave as a commodity, a mere means for service or a person without feelings, but as a brother who had the same feelings. There was no other reason for the resentment of Abū Hurayra than what he himself gave: "He is your brother. His soul (rūḥ) is the same as yours."[3]

Dealing with slaves, Islam also takes into account most of the spiritual factors which might lead to psychological stresses. In other words, as it was obligatory for the Muslim to take care of his slave physically, he was likewise responsible for his spiritual wellbeing. For example, he should not be made to feel sad or look gloomy. Related slaves should not be parted. It is said that Zayd ibn Ḥāritha brought a number of slaves with him. Inspecting them, the Prophet saw among them a man and a woman,

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1. al-Ghazālī, ii, p.220.
2. Ibid, 219.
3. Ibid, 220.

gloomy and sad. He asked why they were so. Zayd answered him: "O Messenger of God, we needed to maintain the rest of the slaves and therefore we sold a son of theirs." Then the Prophet commanded Zayd to return him and let him rejoin his parents. Afterwards, the Prophet sent a messenger to spread his command: "Do not separate related slaves (Dhawu l-arḥām)."[1] The Caliph ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb never separated related war captives.[2]

The male slave and the female should not be called by such discriminating names as ʿabd and ama, but by euphemisms such as the phrases "my lad, my boy, my girl". In a certain ḥadīth, owners were urged to avoid calling them by such names in order to show modesty and to bridge the gulf between the owner and the owned. This ḥadīth goes as follows: "Never any of you call his male slave ʿabd or his female ama, but always say 'my lad' (fatāya) and 'my girl' (fatātī).[3]

Some Muslim moralists viewed the treatment of the slave from an ethical standpoint. Ibn Ḥazm and al-Ghazālī were among them. Not only did they believe that the slave should be treated kindly but also that the conduct of the master couldbe judged from the manner in which he treated his slave. For example, Ibn Ḥazm writes: "that oppressing and ill-treating your slaves whom God has enabled you to possess indicates meanness of the self,

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1. Zayd, Musnad, p.272.
2. al-Balādhurī, Futūḥ, i, p.163.
3. Abū Dāwūd, ii, p.591.

lack of gallantry and niceness of mind."[1] It was a virtue for the master to treat his slave as a friend. A certain poet writes: "If you are looking for virtue and glory to be attached to your name, you should be a friend to your slave and a slave to your friend."[2]

Beating slaves was regarded as a mean and dishonourable action which a good man should disdain to do. In praising a man, a certain writer notes: "He has never beaten his slave."[3]

Al-Ghazālī deals with this subject from both religious and ethical points of view: "In short, the master should share with his slave food and clothes, and not entrust him with a task beyond his capacity. The master also should not look upon him as inferior, should forgive his faults, and when angry, the master should think that he, by punishing his slave, might fall into sin or violate the laws of God whose strength is above his."[4]

Islam ordered the slave, on the other hand, to be true and faithful in serving his master. He is encouraged to be so by the promise that he will obtain a considerable reward in the next life: "The slave who serves his master faithfully and does well in worshipping his God, will earn a double reward."[5] He is also

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1. Ibn Ḥazm, Kitāb al-Akhlāq Wa'l-Siyar, p.72.
2. al-Tawḥīdī, Risālatun fi l-Ṣadāqa, pp. 168-69.
3. 'Umāra al-Yamanī, al-Nukat al-'Aṣriyya, p.9.
4. al-Ghazālī, ii, p.221.
5. Abū Dāwūd, ii, p.635.

promised entry to Paradise: "The first three to enter Paradise are the martyr, the slave who properly worshipped his God and was true to his master, and the poor but honest father."[1]

The liberation of slaves was always looked upon as a good deed (taqarrub) and declared to be the highest act of virtue entitling the master to a special reward in the next world.[2] Hoping to obtain such a reward, the pious among the Muslims used to set their slaves free or buy those of others and grant them liberty. Such a case occurred in the record of Abū Bakr, who on several occasions purchased seven slaves tortured by Quraysh for adopting the new religion, Islam, and set them free.[3] ʿĀʾisha bought Barīra and freed her.[4] Abd al-Raḥmān ibn ʿAwf set free thirty slaves in a single day.[5]

Slaves should also be allowed to work out their emancipation.[6] This action is termed in jurisprudence as mukātaba, and the slave as mukātab.[7]

Islam takes every opportunity to encourage people to set their slaves free not only by promising them a special reward

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1. al-Ghazālī, ii, p.220.
2. Qurʾān, XC, 13.
3. al-Maʿārif, p.177.
4. Muslim, Ṣaḥīḥ, iii, p.1245.
5. al-Maʿārif, p.236.
6. Qurʾān, XXIV, 13.
7. al-Buhūtī, al-Rawḍ, iii, p.56.

in the next world, but it orders muslims to liberate a slave (raqaba) as an expiation (kaffāra) for committing certain sins or violating some religious ordinances.[1] If the master promised his slave freedom, even if he was joking or did not mean it, the slave should have the right to claim freedom and should be freed, for "there is no joking in three things; marriage, divorce and manumission."[2]

In addition to the fact that the motive behind manumission was the display of piety and zeal in the cause of religion, there are other motives such as when a slave became a Muslim and showed a sign of sincerity. On these grounds, it is said, 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Umar manumitted 1,000 slaves,[3] and Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān as many as 20,000 male and female slaves.[4]

Manumission was occasionally an act performed in discharge of an oath, or in fulfilment of a vow (nadhr), or as a thanksgiving to God for his grace. When the poet 'Umar ibn Abī Rabī'a grew old, he vowed that he would manumit a slave for every verse of poetry he composed. On several occasions he composed poetry and carried out his vow.[5]

Slaves were set free to encourage them to fight as was

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1. Qur'ān, LVIII, 3.
2. al-Muwatta', ii, p.548.
3. Ibn Kathīr, ix, p.5.
4. Ibn Taghrī Bardī, ii, p.74.
5. al-Aghānī, i, pp.148-49.

done by al-Junayd ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Murrī, the governor of Khurāsān, at the Battle of al-Shi'b. When the fight reached its climax and al-Junayd feared his troops might fail, he proclaimed that any slave who fought should be free. On hearing this proclamation, they fought so bravely as to gain the admiration of those who saw them, and the enemy was put to flight.[1] It happened that the slaves of a place which was besieged by the Muslim army were urged to defect and join them with promises of liberty. At the siege of al-Ṭā'if, the Prophet himself did this and made a proclamation: "If any slave come down, he is free."[2]

Moreover, it was regarded as a good custom among Muslims to manumit some of their slaves by their will, just before their death. Ja'far ibn Barmak thus liberated all his slaves,[3] as did the general of al-Mu'taḍid, Badr.[4] The relatives of the deceased might manumit some of his slaves if he owned any, or if not, they might manumit some of their own slaves on behalf of him; 'Ā'isha manumitted many slaves after the death of 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Bakr.[5]

Socially, the liberation of slaves was considered a noble work, and the liberator was held in esteem and praised for

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1. Ibn al-Athīr, iv, p.211.
2. Ibn Sa'd, ii, pp.158-59.
3. al-'Uyūn Wa'l-Ḥadā'iq, iii, p.306.
4. Ibn al-Athīr, vi, p.102.
5. al-Muwaṭṭa', ii, p.779.

this act. Praising a certain governor, al-Mutanabbī described him as a man who gives gold and liberates slaves.[1]

Islam encourages the manumission of female slaves (imā') by urging masters, under some circumstances, to marry their slaves or let others do so.[2] The Muslim who does not enjoy a life of celibacy but for one reason or another cannot marry a free woman, is exhorted to marry a slave-girl: "Any one of you who has not the affluence to be able to marry believing free women in wedlock, let him take believing handmaids that your right hands own."[3]

As regards marriage, a Muslim female slave is given the priority to a pagan free woman with unique beauty or high position: "Do not marry idolatresses, until they believe; a believing slave-girl is better than an idolatress, though you may admire her."[4]

The Prophet, who himself set an example to his followers by marrying Ṣafiyya (a Jewish captive from Khaybar),[5] encouraged the marrying of slaves, an action that might lead to their freedom. The ideal dowry one can give to a female slave is liberty, as did the Prophet with Ṣafiyya.[6] By doing this, the Muslim can secure

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1. al-Mutanabbī, Dīwān, ii, p.67.
2. Qur'ān, XXIV, 33.
3. Ibid., IV, 25.
4. Ibid., II, 221.
5. al-Wāqidī, al-Maghāzī, ii, p.675.
6. Zayd, p.308.

two rewards in the next world: "He who owned a female slave, looked after her, set her free and then married her would be doubly rewarded."[1]

e) Legal Position:

In most of the legal procedures, it is noticeable that Islam has looked at the slave as a person who is not, because of his loss of freedom, qualified to be on a level with the free man. Not only had the slaves fewer rights in social requirements such as marriage and divorce, but also his punishment for some offences was commuted compared with that of the free man. For example, the punishment inflicted upon a slave-girl convicted of fornication was half of that of free women,[2] i.e. one hundred strokes for the free woman[3] and fifty for the slave. 'Umar I followed this precept with a number of slave-girls.[4] For the same offence, the free man was to be banished for a time, while there was no banishment in the case of the slave.[5]

In a case of murder, the slave was to be killed for the free man if the family of the free man chose the Qisās,[6] but not vice versa.[7] All the free man had to do was to compensate the

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1. al-Dārimī, ii, p.78.
2. Qur'ān, IV, 25.
3. Ibid., XXIV, 2.
4. Abū Yūsuf, p.167.
5. al-Buhūtī, iii, p.310.
6. Ibn Qudāma, al-Mughnī, iii, p.455.
7. al-Qurṭubī, Tafsīr, ii, p.248.

master for as much as the agreed equivalent price (qīmat al-mithl).[1] The family of the murdered free man could be paid atonement (diya), while the master of the murdered slave was paid his price. Half a diya should be paid for such damage as breaking the leg or severing the arm of the free man, and half the price in the case of the slave.[2]

It is understood that the free Muslim is entitled, if he fulfils certain conditions, to marry as many wives as four.[3] The male slave is not completely deprived of the privilege of marrying more than one. But once more, his share is half of that of the free, i.e. two wives.[4] The husband with more than one wife should sleep with his free wives equally in turn.[5] If any of them is a slave, then the husband should give two nights to the free and one to the slave.[6] Not only in such a case does the free wife have more rights than the slave, but also in other treatment: the free woman is entitled, if she wishes, to marry a man who already has a slave wife, whereas a man should not take a slave wife if he has already married a free woman.[7] The legal difference between

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1. Ibn Quddāma, iii, p.393.
2. Abū Yūsuf, p.158.
3. Qur'ān, IV, 3.
4. Zayd, p.307.
5. al-Buhūtī, iii, p.132.
6. Zayd, p.307.
7. Ibid.

the free man and the slave also appears in divorces. The divorce whereby the husband cannot be reconciled with his wife and cannot remarry her until she enters another lawful marriage takes effect when repeated three times by the free husband[1] or twice by the slave.[2] Another difference between the free woman and the female slave is manifested in the matter of 'idda (the period the wife should spend single from the moment she is divorced before marrying another husband and by which it would be clear if she were pregnant or not). It is three periods of menstruation in the case of the free[3] and two in that of the slave.[4] It is stated that the īlā' (vow not to cohabit with his wife for a certain period) made by a slave should be two months,[5] while it is four months for a free man.[6]

The master is entitled to take as many concubines (sirriya) among his female slaves as he wishes, and there is no limit as in the case of free women (four).[7] Marriage to slave-girls was not considered desirable by the early Arabs, but with great numbers of slave-girls coming into their possession as a

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1. Qur'ān, II, 230.

2. al-Muwaṭṭa', ii, p.574.

3. Qur'ān, II, 228.

4. al-Muwaṭṭa', ii, p.574.

5. Ibid., ii, p.588.

6. Qur'ān, II, 226.

7. Ibid., IV, 3, and LXX, 30.

result of their conquests, instead of marrying them, they took them as concubines. None of the first Caliphs was credited with marrying any of his slaves, but enjoyed them as concubines. 'Alī ibn 'Abī Ṭālib had several concubines.[1] At the climax of the Islamic civilisation in the 'Abbāsid period, the concubinage of slave-girls became a desirable custom, and consequently the number of concubines of certain Muslims reached into the thousands. It is said that al-Mutawakkil had 4,000 concubines, and he slept with them all.[2]

However, as he is entitled to take any of his female slaves as a concubine, the master is also entitled to arrange the marriage of his female slaves and young male slaves even without their permission.[3] The older male slave should be given the option in this matter, and the master has no right to compel him without his acceptance.[4]

As regards divorce, the master might force a slave who married without his approval to divorce his wife. But if marriage was approved by the master, the divorce is entirely in the hands of the slave, and interference by the master is rejected.[5]

According to Islamic law, the child of a female slave

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1. al-Ṭabarī, v, p.155.
2. al-Mas'ūdī, iv, p.40.
3. al-Buhūtī, iii, p.71.
4. Ibn Quddāma, iii, p.16.
5. al-Muwaṭṭa', ii, p.575.

by another slave or by any man other than her master is a slave like her. In a case where her master does not acknowledge paternity, the child is likewise a slave. But the offspring of a male slave by a free woman is free.[1] (The case of Umm al-Walad will be dealt with below).

Like any other property, the slave is inherited after the death of his owner by his relatives, and ownership of him would pass to them.[2] When manumitted, the slave enjoys the status of a client (mawlā) of his former master, who is now his patron. If the patron died without heirs, the mawlā would inherit his estate.[3] Although zakāt is not obligatory on the master for his slaves,[4] the slave is still regarded as estate in many commercial contracts such as rent (ijāra),[5] pledge (rahn).[6] He can be also paid as a dowry (mahn).[7] It is said that the famous poet Bashshār ibn Burd and his mother were paid as a dowry by their master, a man of Azd.[8] The slave can also be paid as an atonement for the crime of killing a baby in its mother's womb or as an expiation for a certain form

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1. al-Dārimī, ii, p.284.
2. Ibn al-Ḥasan, iii, p.1066.
3. al-Buhūtī, iii, p.51.
4. al-Muwaṭṭa', i, p.277.
5. al-Buhūtī, iii, p.58.
6. Ibid., p.55.
7. Ibn Quddāma, iii, p.76.
8. al-Aghānī, iii, p.131.

of abortion. The slave paid them is called ghurra.[1] However, the slave, in some circumstances, was enabled to work in trading. This kind of slave who engaged in business was termed "he who is permitted to trade" (al-ma'dhūn lahū fi l-tijāra).[2] It was customary and canonically recommended that the money the slave had made would be given to him when liberated.[3]

f) Social position and occupations of slaves:

The Arab in the Umayyad period believed that he was superior to all other peoples, whom he had called "the red" (al-ḥamrā').[4] Thus he considered himself born to fight as a soldier or to rule, and everyone else to serve. Accordingly, he occupied himself only with governing, fighting and engaging in politics and left all other occupations, particularly arts and crafts, to non-Arabs whether slaves or clients. Nothing can be more revealing than a proverb used by the Arabs at that time: "الحمق في الحاكة و المعلمين والغزالين" ("folly is found with weavers, teachers and spinners"),[5] for these occupations were the spheres of non-Arabs. Moreover, it is said that an Arab and a client had a dispute in the presence of the governor of Iraq 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Āmir. The client lost his temper and said to the Arab: "God

1. al-Bukhārī, vii, p.175.
2. al-Sarakhsī, al-Mabsūṭ, xxv, p.26.
3. al-Muwaṭṭa', ii, p.775.
4. al-Mubarrad, ii, p.274.
5. al-Jāḥiẓ, al-Bayān, i, p.249.

give us few of your kind". The Arab answered him: "God give us many of your kind." When asked why he answered with a blessing to the client's curse, he replied: "Do not these people sweep our streets, make our shoes and weave our garments?"[1]

At any rate, slaves were taught how to manage the domestic duties and then were employed to work inside the houses of the rich as cleaners, cooks, housekeepers, grooms and porters.[2] 'Abd Allāh ibn Abī Rabī'a had a good number of Ethiopian slaves who were able to do many skilful things.[3] Ibn Khaldūn refers to such occupations and how far slaves affected the mode of living in the typical Arab house. He writes: "When the Arabs enslaved nations, they employed them to fill skilled occupations and to meet domestic needs. They chose the skilled among them to do such things. They benefited from them especially in the matter of treating such things properly and introducing a variety of methods required for improving such things."[4] Slaves worked as masons, spinners, weavers and armourers. Ibn Khaldūn credited them not only with filling such occupations, but also with developing the techniques of building, decorating houses, weaving carpets, spinning clothes and making weapons and vessels.[5]

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1. al-'Iqd, iii, p.414.
2. Ibn Abī 'Uṣaybi'a, Ṭabaqāt al-Aṭibbā' i, pp.141-45.
3. al-Aghānī, i, p.75.
4. Ibn Khaldūn, i, p.305.
5. Ibid.

In nomadic societies, slaves were entrusted with feeding camels and looking after sheep. Female slaves were usually used to take the sheep to the pasture.[1] Because looking after camels was a harder task, male slaves were chosen to do this. For a certain praiseworthy poem, ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān gave the poet Jarīr one hundred camels. When Jarīr requested him to give him shepherds to feed them, ʿAbd al-Malik asked his associates how many shepherds were required for a hundred camels. "Eight, O Commander of the Faithful", was their answer. Then he ordered the gift of eight slaves of whom four were Slavs and four were Nubians.[2] The most celebrated slave who was employed to feed camels was the Umayyad poet Suḥaym, better known as the slave of Banū al-Ḥishās. He managed to establish himself in the list of romantic Umayyad poets by his poetry composed about his relationship with women of Banū al-Ḥishās in general and with the daughter of his master in particular, although this led him to be silenced for ever.[3]

The serf (qinn) remained in Islam as he had been in the Jāhiliyya.[4] He was only found in the villages. He stayed with the land on which he had worked. If this land was given away in fief or sold, he went with it, and he rarely had the prospect of

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1. al-Muwaṭṭa', ii, p.776.
2. al-Qālī, Dhayl al-Āmālī, p.44.
3. al-Aghānī, xxii, pp.333-36.
4. Abū Yūsuf, p.96.

being sold or liberated, and the master had no power to do either. He remained a serf all his life, and his offspring would be slaves, and they became the slaves of the owner of the soil.[1] al-Qushayriyya (a wife of al-Muhallab ibn Abī Ṣufra) owned a good number of slaves, male and female, who were confined to working on her farm in al-Baṣra and among whom Bashshār's father was thought to be.[2] 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Āmir employed a number of Zanj in his farm.[3]

The majority of this kind of slave were from the negro community. In the 'Abbāsid period, there was a class called the negroes (al-Zanj), who used to work as serfs in the villages of Iraq.[4] They were found in great numbers. Those of them who raided al-Baṣra in the series of rebellions from 869 to 883 A.D. alone numbered as many as 6,000.[5]

In addition, slaves were employed to make bows, shoot arrows or pick up fallen arrows in the battlefield[6] and to trade. The famous Umayyad singer Ma'bad, before his manumission, used to trade for a part of his time and feed sheep for the other part.[7]

The Arabs took no interest in any kind of learning

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1. Zaydān, iv, p.58.
2. al-Aghānī, iii, p.130.
3. al-Ma'ārif, p.321.
4. al-Ṭabarī, xii, p.1743.
5. Ibn Abī Ḥadīd, Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāgha, viii, p.137.
6. al-Aghānī, i, p.313.
7. Ibid., p.50.

except what was necessary for government and conquest, such as poetry and history. Clerical work and calculation were left to either slaves, clients or the protected people (ahl al-dhimma). Poetry and history were not reserved exclusively for the Arabs in the Umayyad period, but slaves took interest in such kinds of learning and they were employed to recite poetry.[1]

There is no doubt that Islam owes much to slaves and clients, since great numbers of huffāẓ (learner of the Qur'ān by heart), transmitters of Ḥadīth (Ruwāt), poets, singers and scholars were among them. The majority of the clients who served the Arabs were the remnants of spoils earned from different countries, mainly Persia. Some of them were educated before falling into the hands of the Arabs. It is said that forty youths were taken by Khālid ibn al-Walīd from 'Ayn Tamar, where they had learned the Gospel. Since they were captives, they were sent to al-Madīna where the Caliph Abū Bakr distributed them between warriors. They were manumitted by their master after embracing Islam. Their children became of considerable importance to the Muslims as men of administration, warriors, scholars and divines. Among them were Mūsā ibn Nuṣayr (the conqueror of North Africa and Spain), Muḥammad ibn Sīnīn (a famous dream-interpreter) and Ḥumrān, a slave of 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān.[2] It is claimed that Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq (author of the Life of the Prophet) was a grandson of one of those forty

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1. Ibid, i, p.313.

2. Ibn al-Athīr, ii, p.270.

mon, named Yasār.[1] Ḥammād (known as al-Rāwiya, reciter of poetry) was a son of a Dailamite who was taken captive.[2] Sā'ib Khāthir, the famous Umayyad singer, owed his origin to the captives taken from Persia.[3] The celebrated 'Abbāsid poet Marwān ibn Abī Ḥafṣa was a descendent of a Jew captured at Iṣṭakhr.[4] Abū Dulāma, a poet, was a negro slave at al-Kūfa of an Arab of Banū Asad who set him free.[5]

Slaves were kept for aesthetic ends, especially the youths and the females. They were dressed in beautiful clothes and golden ornaments.[6] Ironically enough, women used female slaves for this purpose and let them wear clothes resembling those of boys in order to appear like boys, while men used boy slaves and made them look like women. This kind of female acquired the title ghulāmiyyāt. They will be dealt with later. This became a custom, especially in the houses of the rich. The mother of Ja'far al-Barmaki had one hundred slave girls to wait on her.[7] The Ayyūbid princess Sitt al-Mulk possessed 8,000 slave-girls.[8]

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1. al-Ma'ārif, p.491.
2. Ibid., p.541.
3. al-Aghānī, viii, p.323.
4. Marzubānī, Mu'jam, p.317.
5. Ibid., p.247. al-Aghānī, x, p.247
6. al-Mas'ūdī, iv, p.226.
7. al-Jahshayārī, p.24.
8. al-Maqrīzī, ii, p.485.

In addition to their employment asnurses and concubines, female slaves were also employed to serve as cup-bearers at banquets and private parties. This kind of slave made his first appearance in the court of the Umayyad Caliph al-Walīd ibn Yazīd[1] for whose service his governor of Khurāsān, Naṣr ibn Sayyār, presented him with five hundred waṣīfa (a waitress or a cup-bearer).[2]

It seems that there was a particular kind of slave-girl who worked as prostitutes. This kind had houses especially in Baghdad. Their houses were distinguished as the houses of slave-girls (Buyūt al-Qiyān). They were readily accessible. Many customers enjoyed going there. They seemed to be more active in the evening.[3]

The title "Houses of slave-girls" can be sufficient to suggest the possibility that there were special houses in which slave-girls worked and that these houses, even if not legally recognised by the government, were at least known to seekers of pleasure.

If those who had been in need or desirous of enjoying such slave-girls could not, for one reason or another, go to the "houses of slave-girls", this kind of slave-girl would have been sent to them. Soldiers in their camps were not deprived of them.

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1. al-Aghānī, vii, p.66.
2. Ibn al-Athīr, iv, p.206.
3. Abū Nuwās, p.653.

Among the slave-girls who entertained soldiers were the slave-girls of Barbar.[1]

Muṭī' ibn Iyās wrote a poem about Barbar and her slave-girls. It is worth quoting two verses of this poem: "O Barbar, have fear of Allāh. You have corrupted the soldiers. You have spread fornication so widely that it has become commonplace."[2] From this poem, it is clear that such slave-girls used to be sent to the camps of soldiers and probably to other places in order to provide soldiers with the required entertainment even if not innocent.

It is possible that the slave-girl would be appointed as a spy to report on the political activities of her master. She would be expected to play this role with at least partial success, especially if she was endowed with beauty and experience. Some of the slave-girls, particularly in the 'Abbāsid period, were appointed to spy on their masters. When the Caliph al-Mahdī seized a certain dangerous man of the 'Abbāsids' rivals al-'Alawiyyūn, he charged his Wazīr Ya'qūb ibn Dāwūd with murdering him. Al-Mahdī appointed a certain slave-girl of Ya'qūb's to watch his treatment of the 'Alawī and report this. Persuaded by the truth and the wisdom of the 'Alawī, Ya'qūb released him secretly and claimed that

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1. al-Aghānī, xiii, p.313.

2. Ibid., p.314.

he had executed him. The slave-girl spy informed al-Mahdī of what actually happened, and consequently Ya'qūb was severely punished and tortured.[1] The slave-girl 'Arīb, who claimed that she had love affairs with eight of the caliphs,[2] not only spied on some of them, but also took part in an abortive plot against al-Wāthiq in support of al-'Abbās ibn al-Ma'mūn.[3]

Writers recognized the possibility that some of the slave-girls could be sold or presented as a gift or come in some way into the possession of leaders and statesmen for the purpose of spying on them. So they warned them of the danger of neglecting such a thing, and at the same time gave them some advice such as: "The statesman who has enemies and does not want his secrets to leak out should avoid buying any slave-girl who has already been in the possession of another statesman, especially if she knows how to write. But if buying her was seen as necessary, a careful examination of her and her attitudes should be made before any decision to buy her. The statesman should not buy any muwallada slave-girl from a dealer or a trader, for it could be part of an intrigue which has already led several kings and statesmen to tragedy."[4] As for young slaves, termed ghilmān, they received special favour from their master, wore rich and attractive uniforms,

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1. Ibn al-Athīr, v, p.67
2. al-Aghānī, xxi, p.82.
3. al-Nuwayrī, v, p.106.
4. Ibn Butlān, p.356.

and often beautified and perfumed their bodies in an effeminate manner. They were usually selected from among the Turks, the Slavs and the Greeks. They played social, literary and political roles no less than those of their female colleagues.

However, although there was mention of some ghilmān in the reign of al-Rashīd,[1] it was apparently his son al-Amīn who, following Persian precedents, established in the Islamic world the institution of ghilmān for service, company, and, it was felt, for the practice of unnatural relations.[2] Towards the end of the first 'Abbāsid period, it became a fashion for people to own ghilmān and keep them to serve them. Aḥmad ibn Ṭūlūn owned 24,000 ghulāms,[3] the number of those possessed by Bughā (a Turkish General) reached 500, and the Fāṭmid wazīr Ya'qūb ibn Killis owned 4,000 ghulāms.[4] Even judges and men of religion had them. A certain qāḍī of al-Ma'mūn is said to have owned 400 of them.[5] Sayf al-Dawla al-Ḥamdānī, who was famous for his courage and fighting the Byzantines, had a ghulām who bore a female name, Thamil, and who was "dear to him".[6]

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1. al-Ṣūlī, Akhbār, Awlād al-Khulafā, p.57.
2. al-Ṭabarī, xi, pp.950-51.
3. Ibn Taghrī Bardī, iii, p.21.
4. Zaydān, iv, p.183.
5. al-Mas'ūdī, iii, p.435.
6. Miskawayh, Tajārib al-Umam, ii, pp.44-5.

In addition to serving as a cup-bearer (sāqī)[1] and waiting on the master (wasīf),[2] the ghilmān had another occupation; he was required for homosexual purposes. The Caliphs al-Amīn[3] and al-Mutawakkil[4] and the qādī of al-Ma'mūn, Yaḥyā ibn Aktham,[5] were accused of such practices with them. This practice seemed so common that jurists were engaged in discussing the proper punishment for it. They differed in their verdicts. Some wanted to regard it as the same as the practice of fornication with women, a sin the punishment (ḥadd) for which should be flogging or stoning,[6] while others tried to differentiate between whether the ghulām was the culprit's own or not: the ḥadd should be inflicted if the ghulām was not his own. There should be no ḥadd according to some who viewed that it was just a venial sin for which a disciplinary sanction (ta'zīr) should be imposed by the judge.[7] Such slaves often captivated their masters. Mez thinks that the reason for this is that the Eastern man is fond of any person who combines beauty with sagacity,[8] such as the ghulām.

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1. al-Aghānī, vii, p.211.
2. al-Mas'ūdī, iv, p.42.
3. Ibn al-Athīr, v, p.170.
4. al-Aghānī, xx, p.99.
5. al-Mas'ūdī, iii, pp.434-35.
6. Ibn Quddāma, iii, p.456.
7. al-Subkī, Ṭabaqāt, iii, p.18.
8. Mez, i, pp.290-91.

It is said that the Buwayhid prince Bakhtiyār had a Turkish ghulām of whom he was very fond. This ghulām happened to be captured in a certain battle. Bakhtiyār became so sad that he refrained from eating and drinking and kept himself aloof and indifferent to his army and the affairs of the state. He claimed that this disaster was greater for him even than if he had lost his throne.[1] In such a society whose people possessed unusual love for ghilmān, it is not surprising that the jealousy arising from a competition between two generals over a "beardless ghulām" led to a military engagement, as happened between Nāzūk and Hārūn ibn Gharīb over a certain beautiful ghulām.[2]

The volume of poetry composed in complaint of the abandonment of ghilmān is not smaller than that composed about women, especially in the third and fourth century of the hijra. Some poets did not disdain to give public expression to their suppressed passions and to address amorous pieces of his poetry to a "bearded"[3] or "beardless" ghulām.[4] This ghulām attracted the attention of some poets in the ʿAbbāsid period more than anybody else, male or female, and there were particular poets who confined their poetry or most of it to ghilmān. Among them were

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1. Ibn Miskawayh, ii, pp.372-33
2. Ibid., i, p.187.
3. al-Thaʿālibī, Yatīma, ii, p.405.
4. Abū Nuwās, Dīwān, p.203.

Muṣ'ab[1] and al-Sulāmī.[2] In that society, it was not surprising that Abū Firās al-Ḥamdānī, despite his nobility and gallantry, composed amatory verses about ghilmān. He had two of them to whom he used to send poetry of complaint at being far away from them and longing to see them, when he was a prisoner of war in Byzantium.[3] It is said that the poet Naṣr ibn Aḥmad al-Khubzarzī, whose occupation was baking rice in his shop in al-Baṣra, used to recite to his customers, while baking rice, his amatory poetry about ghilmān. Among those who enjoyed this entertainment were the youths of al-Baṣra, who competed in attracting his attention and learning what he composed by heart.[4]

Ghilmān were often used as a bodyguard for the prince or the ruler. They were taught the necessary arts of fighting. The Ikhshīdid, the ruler of Egypt, had 8,000 of them. They guarded his palace in rotation, one thousand each night.[5] They formed detachments called by special names such as "The lesser ghulāms" (al-Aṣāghir), "The ghulāms of the rooms" (al-Ḥujriyya) and "The men of the ranks" (al-Maṣāffiyya). These ghilmān were the personal property of the Caliph or the ruler employed for his defence and supported out of his private estate. Detachments of

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1. al-Shābushtī, al-Diyārāt, p.193.
2. Yatīma, ii, pp.403-08
3. Ibid., i, pp.80-81.
4. Ibid., ii, p.366.
5. Ibn Taghrī Bardī, iii, p.256.

ghilmān might be transferred to detachments of the regular army or compelled to perform public services in their company, if circumstances required.[1] The princes, especially in the later ʿAbbāsid period, employed many of their ghilmān in battle, to flank their master and defend him. Fighting a certain battle against a Byzantine army, Sayf al-Dawla of Banū Ḥamdān was joined by 300 ghulāms.[2] The general Sabuktakīn was also surrounded by 400 ghulams.[3]

The presence of concubines and slave-girls in great numbers in the palaces of the Caliphs and the houses of the rich was accompanied by another phenomenon, which was the appearance of eunuchs (khiṣyān). This was a custom with which the pre-Islamic Arabs were unfamiliar, although it was in practice among the ancient eastern kingdoms in general and the Byzantine state in particular.[4]

It is most likely that the Muslims borrowed this "abominable custom" from the Byzantine Court.[5] Al-Jāḥiẓ emphasises that this custom was purely a Byzantine invention when he writes: "Every kind of castration was originally Byzantine. Surprisingly enough, they are Christians who preach love, piety and kindness.

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1. Zaydān, iv, p.183.
2. Miskawayh, ii, p.180.
3. Ibid., p.326.
4. Mez, ii, p.151.
5. Ameer Ali, Short history of Saracens, p.198.

Suffice it to say that there is no greater cruelty than castrating a living soul."[1] Al-Jāḥiẓ's statement is not entirely accurate, for this custom was in practice among nations much earlier than Byzantium. The Babylonians and Assyrians had their eunuchs, and it was said that the first to invent castration was the Babylonian Queen Semiramis in 2000 B.C.[2]

It appears that castration was at first associated with religious practice, especially in Bysantium. Some devout fathers used to castrate their sons and send them to churches.[3]

Islam forbade the castration of human beings and even animals, for it was regarded as a torture and mutilation (muthla), and it was left to the muḥtasib to inflict punishment for it.[4] When some of his early followers asked him to allow them to castrate themselves for the purpose of devotion and piety, the Prophet forbade them.[5]

At any rate, Muslims found a way round this prohibition by buying eunuchs from non-Muslim dealers, especially Jews and Christians. The town of Hadya in Ethiopia was a famous place for taking medical care of negro eunuchs.[6] Al-Muqaddasī mentions that

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1. al-Jāḥiẓ, al-Ḥayawān, i, p.124.
2. Zaydān, v, p.33.
3. al-Ḥayawān, i, p.124.
4. al-Māwardī, al-Aḥkām al-Sulṭāniyya, p.258.
5. Ibn Sa'd, iii, p.394.
6. al-Qalqashandī, Ṣubḥ, v, p.328.

slaves used to be carried away from their country to Spain where they would be castrated and sent to Egypt.[1]

Eunuchs might have been acquired by war for it often happened that Muslims, invading a town, went to churches and took away the eunuchs who used to work there.[2]

Castration was a very lucrative occupation, and most of the dealers and the castraters were among the Jews. Pechina the capital of Almeria was inhabited by Jews whose occupation was castrating slaves.[3] Jews of France engaged in this trade and they established "factories" to produce eunuchs. Verdun was a famous centre for exporting them to Spain.[4]

Motivated by jealousy for their harems, Arabs started to employ eunuchs in their houses for interior service and to guard the harem. According to Zaydān, Yazīd ibn Muʿāwiya was the first to employ eunuchs. He employed Fatḥ as an usher of his office (hājib al-dīwān).[5] But it was his father Muʿāwiya who, trying to resemble Byzantine kings, wanted to introduce eunuchs in his court, and it was his wife Fākhita who strongly protested against this custom and refused to employ them.[6] It seems that Sulaymān ibn

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1. al-Muqaddasī, Aḥsan al-Taqāsīm, p.242.
2. Mez, ii, p.153.
3. Ibid.
4. Zaydān, v, p.34.
5. Ibid., p.33.
6. al-Masʿūdī, iv, p.158.

'Abd al-Malik, who was renowned for his jealousy,[1] was the first to employ them inside the house to watch the harems in his palace.[2]

It was the 'Abbāsid Caliph al-Amīn who actually promoted them and took pains to acquire a multitude of them. When he succeeded his father, he looked for eunuchs and offered a high price for them. He made them his private attendants, he had them wait at his table and carry out his orders. There were two classes, one called Jarādiyya (white eunuchs) and the other Ghurābiyya (black eunuchs). His purpose in promoting them was neither as a body-guard nor in the in the interest of his Caliphate, "but purely debauchery and wantonness."[3]

Castration was a cruel and dangerous operation which led to the death of most of the castrated children. Therefore the number of eunuchs was not as great as that of ghilmān for example, but their prices were much higher than that of any other kind of slave. The average price of the eunuch in Byzantium was four times that of the ordinary slave, and later in Egypt, a slave after being castrated was sold for twenty times the initial price paid for him.[4]

They were thus regarded as valuable property and, like rare things, they were sent to the courts of the Caliphs as gifts from friendly kingdoms. Al-Mustanṣir of Spain received on a

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1. al-Aghānī, iv, p.274.
2. Muir, The Caliphate, p.375.
3. Ibn al-Athīr, v, p.170.
4. Mez, ii, p.154.

certain occasion a gift of twenty Slav eunuchs sent by princes of neighbouring countries.[1]

In spite of this, 'Abbāsid society did not hold them in respect. On the contrary, they were regarded as a peculiar class, neither men nor women. The people of Baghdad used to make eunuchs a target of their wit and satire, running after them in the streets and shouting various jeering slogans and abusive rhymes: "Mister no-power, sprinkle the water and scatter the flower" or "Daddy long-legs". They complained to the Caliph of this treatment. Al-Mu'taḍid severely punished the Baghdadis for conduct of this sort. Having received an appeal from some of the black eunuchs complaining of persecution, al-Mu'taḍid ordered a number of their persecutors to be scourged.[2]

Towards the end of the third century, the term "the castrated" (al-khiṣyān) almost disappeared, and these unfortunate people tended to be called by some respectable terms such as "the servant" (al-khādim),[3] or "the teacher" (al-ustādh).[4]

Al-Jāhiz wrote a chapter on eunuchs and their character in his Book of Animals (Kitāb al-Ḥayawān). He claims that castration made out of the savage slave a gentle servant with a quick wit and a wise mind. To prove his theory, he made a comparison between twin Slavs of whom one was castrated. He

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1. al-Maqqarī, i, p.179.
2. al-Mas'ūdī, iv, p.171.
3. Miskawayh, ii, p.172.
4. al-Mutanabbī, i, p.293.

arrived at the conclusion that the castrated one would be better in service and more flexible in dealing and brighter in arguing, while the other brother would remain a typical Slav with an evil nature and dull wit.[1] Eunuchs, according to al-Jāḥiẓ, were not gifted enough to participate in any craft which required hardship or deep reflection. But they mostly excelled in playing stringed instruments, hunting small birds and training pigeons.[2]

Like ghilmān, eunuchs were used as protectors by the Caliphs, who wished to preserve their lives or maintain their authority in the face of the Turkish troops, especially since eunuchs were famous for their ability to ride a long time and to run so fast that they surpassed the Turks and the Khārijite warrior. They were also famous archers.[3]

In Islamic times slaves, whether ghilmān (younger slaves) or eunuchs or mamālīk (older slaves) became celebrated and held high posts as generals, governors, treasurers etc., and played important political roles, in the early as well as the later ʿAbbāsid period. The Turkish slave Yaḥya ibn Dāwūd was governor of Egypt for al-Manṣūr. The latter said about him: "He is a man who fears me and does not fear God."[4] Masrūr al-Khādim was the trustee of al-Rashid,[5] and

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1. al-Jāḥiẓ, al-Ḥayawān, i, pp.116-7.
2. Ibid., pp.117-18.
3. Ibid., i, p.136.
4. al-Kindī, p.123.
5. al-Jahshayārī, p.234.

Mu'nis was a celebrated general.[1] Badr of al-Mu'tadid became so popular a general that his name was engraved on shields and banners. He served his master faithfully and was finally slain in his defence.[2] Jawhar, general of the Fāṭimids and the founder of Cairo, who conquered Egypt for them, was a Greek slave. So great was the honour paid him that when he started from the West to conquer Egypt the children and retinue of the Caliph Mu'tazz dismounted and walked in front of his horse.[3]

The highest position a slave ever reached was that of Kāfūr,[4] eunuch of the Ikhshīd. He ruled Egypt and, like Caliphs, had poets and rewarded them with gifts. The poet al-Mutanabbī, who was renowned for his Arabic nationalism and who refused to mention princes and petty rulers in his poetry,[5] was one of Kāfūr's encomiasts. Having failed to countenance al-Mutanabbī's ambitious aim of being appointed as ruler in Kāfūr's land, Egypt, Kāfūr became the target of the sharp satire of al-Mutanabbī, who called him in some of his poems "the black eunuch."[6]

The admirals both of the navy of the Fāṭimids and the

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1. al-Hamadānī, Takmila, p.31.
2. Ibn al-Athīr, vi, p.102.
3. al-Maqrīzī, i, p.377.
4. Ibn al-Athīr, vii, p.25.
5. Yatīmā, i, p.136.
6. al-Mutanabbī, ii, p.147.

fleet of the Caliph were eunuchs.[1] Barjwān, a eunuch slave, was promoted to the post of vizier, which he held under the Caliphs al-ʿAzīz and al-Ḥākim. The title "Amīn al-Dawla" was bestowed upon him, and he was the first ever to earn such a title.[2]

Such events were not features exclusively of Islamic history but also took place in ancient empires and those contemporary with the ʿAbbāsid. Stephanus (A.D.96), the freedman, controlled the Roman empire, and slew, appointed and deposed as he wished.[3] In the fourth century of the Hijra, the slave Salmon emerged in the Byzantine empire as a general![4] The Justinian eunuch Narses (568 A.D.) "had proved himself to be a man of exceptional energy, and had won a reputation for sagacity which placed him in the formost rank among the statesmen of his time."[5]

However, public opinion about slaves in general was of a suspicious and biased nature. Although some masters used them to defend them against intrigues and to fight their enemies, the slaves were not trusted,[6] and nothing good was expected of them. The poet al-Mutanabbī heightened the feelings of strong suspicion, and his extreme views about slaves were expressed through his poetry. One of his verses was: "Never expect good of a person

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1. al-Kindī, p.276.
2. Ibn al-Athīr, vii, pp.177-87.
3. Lynam, The history of the Roman Emperors, ii, p.351.
4. Mez, ii, p.156.
5. Holmes, The age of Justinian, ii, p.574.
6. al-Aghānī, i, p.75.

Conduct showing arrogance and pride was unacceptable in slaves, and it aroused the resentment of the authorities, who punished them for it on grounds that such conduct should be left to the nobles among the Arabs, especially in the Umayyad period. It is said that two youths, one described as a black slave and the other a descendent of a noble Arab, wore long and rich uniforms and walked proudly. The qāḍī of al-Madina summoned them and, after questioning them, punished the slave for the conduct and discharged the Arab youth.[1]

1. al-Aghānī, vi, pp.14-15.

2. Provenance of slave-girls

a) Their origins: Slave-girls came from different nations and were of different colours. The black generally came from central Africa and the Sudan[1] as well as Ethiopia[2] through Egypt.

China[3] and India[4] provided some of them, but the Chinese did not find favour with ʿAbbāsid society. There is no noticeable mention of them. If al-Jāḥiẓ had not mentioned them among the things brought from China, they might not have been thought to exist in that society.

White slave-girls came from various sources. One of these sources was Spain. Spanish slave-girls were brought either straight from Spain or through North Africa.[5] Slave-dealers used to go there to buy them[6] because such slave-girls had such a good reputation at that time that they were bought, even without skill or qualification, for very high prices.[7]

Perhaps the slave-girls whose origin was Greek enjoyed the greatest fame at that time. To make his gift more valuable,

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1. al-Iṣṭakhrī, al-Masālik wa'l-Mamālik, p.37
2. Ibid p.42
3. al-Jāḥiẓ, al-Tabaṣṣur fi l-Tijāra, p.21
4. Ibn Buṭlān, p.372.
5. Ibn al-Faqīh, al-Buldān, p.252-
6. Ibn Khurdādbih, al-Masālik, p.153.
7. al-Iṣṭakhrī, p.37.

on whose head the hand of the slave-dealer has lighted."[1]

It was a prevalent saying that the slave sleeps and steals when hungry, and when full he fornicates.[2] "If hungry, he would annoy his master and if full, he would run away."[3] is another saying about the slave. The slave with ability to compose poetry was feared more and consequently out of favour. When 'Abd Allāh ibn Abī Rabī'a wrote to 'Uthmān, the Caliph, informing him that he had bought him an Ethiopian slave who composed poetry, 'Uthmān, in replying to him wrote: "This slave I do not want. The service he could offer his master would be composing amatory verses about his women when full, and satirising him when hungry."[4]

The poetry of slaves suffered prejudice as much as the slave himself. It was thought that any compliments in his poetry were not sincere. When the slave poet Nusayb recited a certain poem of his own composition in the presence of the Caliph Sulaymān who appreciated it and rewarded him, the poet al-Farazdaq, motivated by a mixture of prejudice and jealousy, composed: "The best poetry is that which is composed by honourable people, and the worst by slaves."[5]

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1. al-Mutanabbī, ii, p.313.
2. al-Aghānī, xxii, p.329.
3. Ibid., p.330.
4. Ibid., xxii, p.329.
5. Ibn Rashīq, al-'Umda, i, p.73.

Al-Manṣūr selected three Greek slave-girls as a gift to his special physician.[1] Ibn Khurdādih mentions this kind of slave-girl and how they were brought to the market through the Mediterranean Sea.[2]

There is no doubt that slave-girls who were of Greek origin were introduced to ʿAbbāsid society. In his poem which he sang in front of al-Rashīd, Isḥāq al-Mūṣili mentions the Greek slave-girls.[3] They were in great numbers and were in great demand. Among the slave-girls to whom Abū Nuwās was indebted for stimulating his talent was a Greek slave-girl.[4] Al-Wāthiq one day on one of his holidays chose Greek slave-girls to be with him.[5] Four mothers of four ʿAbbāsid Caliphs were Greek slave-girls.[6] Dhāt al-Khāl, the beautiful and educated slave-girl, who took the heart of al-Rashīd and was a rich source of inspiration to a number of poets, was Greek.[7]

Greek slave-girls were favoured, possibly for two reasons:

1. Their white skin: this will be dealt with in the proper place.
2. Their education: they were better educated than most of the

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1. al-Zawzanī, Tārīkh al-Ḥukamā', p.159.
2. Ibn Khurdādbih, p.92
3. al-Aghānī xvi, p.269.
4. Abū Nuwās, p.694.
5. al-ʿAmrī, al Masālik W'l-Mamālik i, p.294
6. Ibn Hazm, Risāla (Published in Majallatu l-Muʿjam al-ʿIlmī al-ʿIrāqī xxxiv, p.297.
7. al-Aghānī xvi, p.269.

slave-girls who belonged to other races.

There was another kind of white slave-girl called the Slav.[1] This kind of slave was preferred to the Turks. Al-Khwārazmī said that the Turk could be taken in the absence of the Slav.[2] Mez explains the ways in which the Slavs were brought, as follows:

1. The majority were brought from Bulgaria to the Oxus. Samarqand was the largest market for them.
2. They were brought through Germany to Spain as well as to the ports of Italy and France. The majority of the dealers in this kind of slaves were Jews who settled for this purpose in the eastern province of Saxony.
3. They were brought straight to the East passing through Prague, Poland and Russia.[3] They were carried off or brought on the Dalmatian coast in great numbers.[4]

Al-Maqqarī mentions that al-Jalāliqa (most probably the Franks) were in a state of war with the Slavs who were their neighbours and followed a different religion. The captives among the Slavs were usually enslaved and brought to Spain for sale.[5]

Generally, slaves were easy to acquire and, "thanks to

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1. Ibn Khurdādbih, p.92.
2. al-Tha'ālibī, Yatīma al-dahr iv, p.196.
3. Mez i, pp.282-3.
4. Pirenne, Economical and Social History of Europe, p.18.
5. al-Maqqarī i, p.71.

the Moslem harems and the great houses of the Byzantine workshops", had a sale as sure as it was lucrative.[1] Slav slaves were no exception. There was a commercial relation between the Arabs and the Slavs, and there were Arab, Jewish and Byzantine adventurers, who used to frequent the Slavic regions "where they took possession, and showed them a route to follow. They themselves did not hesitate to plunge along it under the spur of the love of gain, quite as natural to primitive man as to civilized."[2] The commerce with the Slavs on the banks of the Elbe and the Saal seems to have been limited to the interlocking activities of merchants, who supplied arms to the barbarians and bought the prisoners of war in order to sell them again as slaves.[3]

It was not only the Arab or Jewish merchant who brought Slav slaves to the Arab countries, but it was also the active Venetians who seemed professional merchants and who exported to "the harems of Egypt and Syria, young Slavs."[4]

Through Spain came another kind of white slave. This kind seemed to be in relatively small numbers. They were of Frankish origin. Frankish territories were a source of supplying slaves to other countries among which were Muslim countries. There, traffic in slaves was very active and it "did not cease

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1. Pirenne, Medieval Cities, p.49.
2. Ibid pp.48-9
3. Pirenne, Economical and Social History of Europe, p.7.
4. Ibid p.18.

to be carried on in the Frankish Empire until the end of the ninth century."[1]

War was the main source of slaves, and the Franks waged it against neighbours among the barbarians for whom slaves were the most valuable articles of commerce.[2] The war they waged against "the barbarians of Saxony, Thuringia and the Slavic regions provided a source of supply which seems to have been abundant enough."[3] The Franks also made unprovoked aggression against the Mediterranean ports, chiefly Marseilles for the always urgent need for slaves.[4] The Franks established themselves in power enough to watch over the movements of the tribes in Germany and "to exact, when they could, heavy tribute of livestock and slaves."[5]

These territories were a centre for slave-dealing as well as a destination and an aim of many foreign dealers. Jew, Syrian, Greek and overseas merchants from the East established and engaged themselves in commerce. Some of them had residence in the ports of southern France, and some of them spread into the interior, in Poitiers, Orleans, and Paris as also in Mainz and Worms.[6]

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1. Pirenne, Medieval Cities, p.21.
2. Hadrill, The Barbarian West, p.60.
3. Pirenne, Medieval Cities, p.21.
4. Hadrill, p.77.
5. Ibid.
6. Dopsch, The Economical and Social Foundation of European Civilization, p.344.

They usually brought goods and stuffs from the East, such as spices, papyrus, costly textiles, wine and oil[1] and return with Western goods and slaves.[2] Jewish merchants in particular applied themselves especially to traffic in slaves. They were numerous and were seen in every part of "Francia".[3] It seems that there was an active slave-trade in the "Frankish kingdom", and it seems also apparent "that the Jews were specially interested in this trade."[4]

Despite the prohibitions laid down by the sovereigns and also despite the fact that the Church encouraged and actually recommended the manumission of slaves,[5] the sale of slaves was carried on along the Western frontiers, where the prisoners of was taken from among the pagan Slavs found numerous customers.[6]

In spite of its being forbidden among the Franks to sell slaves outside the country in order not to let Christians go into slavery among Jews and heathens,[7] some of the foreign merchants, especially the Jews, managed to take them outside the country and

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1. Pirenne, Medieval Cities, p.34.
2. Hadrill, p.81.
3. Pirenne, Medieval Cities, p.34.
4. Dopsch, p.350.
5. Ibid p.251.
6. Pirenne, Medieval Cities, p.34.
7. Dopsch, p.250.

sell them to the Muslims particularly in Spain.[1] Although the Pope threatened to excommunicate the sellers of Christian slaves,[2] the Jews were also accused of having sold Christian children to the Muslims of Spain.[3]

Marseilles and Venice seem to have been the most active Mediterranean ports in trading with the East. Foreign merchants among Jews and Syrians for the most part had their residence in Marseilles. A very lively shipping bound it to Constantinople, to Syria, Africa, Egypt and Spain.[4] In Venice, various stuffs, spices, wine, wool, salt, were unloaded. Slaves "easily secured among the Slavic people of the shores of the Adriatic" were brought there, in spite of the prohibition of the Pope and the Emperor himself. Her ships transported these things and the products of the countries which "were contiguous to her on the east and the west."[5]

From Sicily came another kind of slave. This kind was held to surpass many kinds of other slaves.[6] In the Court of the ʿAbbāsid Caliph al-Mutawakkil, there were slaves from Sicily. As a result of conquering Sicily, "The Victors marked their satisfaction by sending some of the captives as a gift to the Caliph Mutawakkil."[7]

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1. Pirenne, Medieval Cities, p.34.
2. Pirenne, Economical and Social History of Europe, p.18.
3. Pirenne, Medieval Cities, p.34.
4. Ibid p.18.
5. Pirenne, Medieval Cities, p.85
6. al-Iṣṭakhrī, p.51.
7. Bury, Eastern Roman Empire, p.307.

From the statement of al-Istakhrī about slave-girls of Sicily, it is clear that there was a good market for slavery there. There were, presumably, slaves from the neighbouring countries brought to this market especially from Italy where there was a large slave-market. According to Levy, "there was a brisk trade from Italian harbours, the Venetians having a slave-market of their own in Rome in the eighth century."[1]

Berber slave-girls were also known in that society.[2]

Ibn Fadlān, during his journey through Russia, saw slave-girls and slave-dealers who came from outside for this business.[3] Russia's capital, Kiev, was an important commercial centre, where Byzantium, the Arab World and Western Europe, especially Germany and Scandinavia, exchanged trade in their products.[4] Arab, Jewish and Byzantine merchants, by showing the Scandinavians a road "which they were more ready to follow", so that this region was conquered by them, found many products of this region at their disposal of which slaves were the most important, "the demand for whom arose from Muslim harems, as well as from the great states."[5]

The best Eastern slaves were those who came from Transoxania. They were found in greater numbers than the need of

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1. Levy, The Social Structure of Islam, p.81.
2. Ibn al-Qayyim, Akhbār al-Nisā', p.3.
3. Ibn Fadlān, Risāla, p.170.
4. Dvornik, The Slavs in European History and Civilization, p.5.
5. Pirenne, Economical and Social History of Europe, p.23.

the people of that part and were exported to many other markets.[1]

In Bukhārā and Samarqand there were brisk markets to which Dailamite and Turkish slaves were brought.[2] Such slave-girls seem to have enjoyed special favour even with widely-respected Arab nobles who sometimes professed to despise them: one such chieftain, Abū Dulaf, in a poem which he recited before al-Ma'mūn, claimed to prefer the dust of battle to the delights of slave-girls;[3] but he is elsewhere stated to have liked the idea of being waited on by slave-girls from Bukhārā and Samarqand.[4]

The slave-girls of Khurāsān did much to contribute to its reputation.[5] The best of them, described as of the finest slaves, were of Turkish origin.[6]

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1. al-Iṣtakhrī, p.162.
2. Ibid p.170.
3. al-Mas'ūdī, iii, p. 418.
4. al-Tha'ālibī, Laṭā'if al-Ma'ārif, p.237.
5. al-Jāḥiẓ, al-Tabaṣṣur fi l Tijāra, p.21.
6. al-Iṣtakhrī, pp.157-58.

Khwārazm was not without a good market for native slaves or those from the Khazars as well as the Turks as such.[1]

b) Markets for slave-dealing:

There were famous markets specifically for slave-girls. Baghdad had a brisk market where the most beautiful and intelligent slave-girls used to be brought in expectation of high prices.[2] This market is said to have been looted in the wake of the violence which had swept Baghdad at the hands of the ʿAyyārīn in the war between al-Amīn and al-Ma'mūn. A certain poet who was an eye witness recorded this painful event in a famous poem,[3] with a great deal of pain and sorrow.

Another known market was in Sāmarrā. Al-Yaʿqūbī describes this market as square and split into many paths which led to shops and rooms where slave-trade and bargaining took place.[4]

Besides this there were many private but accessible places for buying and selling slave-girls. The sale of the slave in public markets degraded his quality and lowered his price. It was a sort of punishment for the slave-girl to be sold in the public market.[5] The best way of buying or selling slaves was through private houses or known slave dealers.

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1. al-Iṣṭakhrī, p.170.
2. Zaydān, v,p.38.
3. al-Ṭabarī xi, p.880.
4. al-Yaʿqūbī, Kitāb al-Buldān, p.259.
5. Ibid.

Public markets were supervised by government employees.[1] Probably such officials were responsible for three things in connection with the requirements of such markets:

1. Protection: such markets had slave-girls. Some of them were beautiful and some were valuable. Such slave-girls were liable to fall victim to raping and looting. Therefore, officials responsible for security would have been available.

2. For dealing with problems: some problems would be likely to arise between slave-dealers and customers. Some of these problems would be so minor that the dealer and the customer would not need to go to Court to solve them. For this purpose, officials would have been on hand.

3. For writing contracts: to guarantee the legality of the sale, contracts had to be written and receipts had to be given. Thus the presence of some officials to supervise or write such a thing was necessary. Whether these speculations are correct or not, the existence of government officials at all shows how large some of these markets were and how many activities they supported.

c) Their Numbers:

To see how greatly slave-girls influenced the society they lived in, their number must be studied first of all. Reading some of the books concerned with such a matter, the reader would find that many people owned slave-girls wholesale. It was quite common for a single person to own a number of slave-girls. So it

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1. Mez i, p.284

is not surprising that while the owner is mentioned in the singular in some accounts, slave-girls are mentioned in the plural form, as for example: "Jawārī Ibn Rāmīn, Jawārī Ibn Buskhannar, Jawārī 'Aṭ'aṭ, etc."[1]

Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī states: "In al-Karkh, we counted four hundred slave-girls." He adds: "Apart from those of whom we could have no personal knowledge."[2]

Abū Ḥayyān wrote his book "Al-Imtā' Wal-Mu'ānasa" for one of the Sultāns in the form of stories for leisure. Philosophy, wisdom and morals constitute the contents of this book. Not to bore his listeners or for the sake of variety and attraction, Abū Ḥayyān used to tell something about singing and slave-girls. The attention of his listeners would grow as his stories grew more exaggerated.

" 400 " like " 40 " or " 4,000 " and similar numbers are often used in eastern tradition to express any impressively large number; thus we hear of 4,000 slave-girls in al-Rashīd's palace alone.[3]

Moreover, al-Mas'ūdī mentions that al-Mutawakkil owned

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1. See for example al-Aghānī xiv, p.117.
2. al-Tawḥīdī, al-Imtā' W'l-Mu'ānasa ii, p.183.
3. Ibn Kathīr, x, p.220.

four thousand slave-girls.[1] The warden of the slaves of al-Amīn one day prepared a hundred skilful slave-girls who could sing and compose to line up before al-Amīn.[2] If the palace of al-Amīn had such a number of skilful slave-girls, then the total number of skilled and unskilled slave-girls altogether in the palace of al-Amīn could not be imagined. It is said that a hundred waṣīfas were put at the service of the mother of Ja'far ibn Yaḥyā.[3]

It is strange that historians mentioned such accounts without paying much attention to their correctness. Assuming that historians might not attend to the number of slave-girls as much as to battles or dates, some excuse might be found for them.

There were storytellers at that time, notably al-Aṣma'ī and Hammād ibn Isḥāq, who used to spread stories about many things, especially about slave-girls, because talk about slave-girls at that time seems to have been very popular.

It seems that the historians and the writers who lived in the 'Abbāsid period took their accounts of slave-girls from story-tellers who invented some, if not most, of such accounts.

This is obvious from some of the conflicting accounts of the same event, like that of the number of the slave-girls presented to al-Mutawakkil by Ibn Ṭāhir. Al-Mas'ūdī makes the number two hundred waṣīf and waṣīfa[4] while it is made four hundred slave-girls

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1. al-Mas'ūdī iii, p.331.
2. Ibn al- Athīr v, p.170.
3. al-Jahshayārī, p.241.
4. al-Mas'ūdī lv, p.42.

by al-Iṣfahānī.[1]

To intimidate his wife, Ibn al-Muʿtazz said that he had a thousand slave-girls.[2] Probably Ibn al-Muʿtazz did not mean that he possessed them but he meant that he could get them even if owned by others.

Whatever the number of slave-girls, it can be recognised that they were found in numbers sufficient to have some social influence on ʿAbbāsid society.

d) Prices of slave-girls:

The price of the slave-girl was due to her position, her education and maybe her origin. Naturally the ignorant slave-girl or one whose Arabic was not good would have been obtained for a low price.

An incredible price was paid for some of the slave-girls. The record preserves the statement that ʿAnān, for example, was bought for two hundred and fifty thousand dirhams.[3] Al-Rashīd bought Dhāt al-Khāl for seventy thousand dirhams.[4] The same price was offered to Ibrāhīm ibn Mahdī by al-Muʿtaṣim for the slave-girl of the former.[5]

That some of the slave-girls were bought for unimaginable

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1. al-Aghānī xxii, p.204.
2. Ibn al-Muʿtazz, Dīwān, p.465.
3. al-Aghānī xxii, p.529.
4. Ibid xvi, p.266.
5. Ibid xv, p.325.

prices is presumably apparent from such an account as that al-Amīn loaded the boat of Ja'far ibn Mūsā with "twenty million dirhams for Badl, the slave-girl of the latter."[1] There is no need to point out the unlikelihood of such an account because it exposes itself clearly. Besides, it is doubtful if the treasury of al-Amīn had such a sum altogether on a single day.

Such a strange account was made up probably to serve the purposes of emphasising the magnificence of the 'Abbāsid Caliphate and the 'Abbāsid Caliphs.

At her time Zarqā of Ibn Rāmīn was a famous as Zubayda (the wife of al-Rashīd).[2] So it could be accepted that she was sold for one hundred thousand dirhams.[3]

The price might have been paid for the slave-girl not because of the slave-girl herself but because of her fame or her position. Thus it is thought that the high price of Zarqā was for her wide fame. The same high price was paid for other famous slave-girls, such as 'Arīb, for her position.[4]

Expressing why he wanted to buy 'Anān whatever her price was, al-Rashīd said: "I want her for nothing but for her literary talent."[5] Because he admired what he saw of Shārya and despite

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1. al-'Iqd vi, p.119.
2. al-Aghānī xv, p.58.
3. Ibid xi, p.347.
4. Ibid xxi, p.74.
5. Ibid xxii, p.528.

the fact that he was not able to afford the price required for her and that he sent his son to a certain man to borrow her price, Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī determined to buy her. The most interesting part in the story of Ibrāhīm's buying of Shārya is the comment of his son: "Owning Shārya, Ibrāhīm looked happier than if he had the Caliphate."[1] In this connexion, it is known that Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī attempted to take over the Caliphate from al-Ma'mūn, but for one reason or another did not succeed.[2]

The person interested in a famous slave-girl might buy her even without seeing her but because she happened to be praised in front of him, no matter how much he paid for a famous and admirable one, even if this "costs him the land taxes of Khurāsān."[3] On the other hand, some owners would not have sold their famous slave-girls even if they were paid the land taxes of al-Sawād.[4]

Of course, it would seem questionable that such immense sums as the land taxes of Khurāsān, or al-Sawād, were offered as the price of a slave-girl. Despite the fact that such a price is beyond imagination, the Arabic language is characterised by such hyperbole, used to show the readiness of those who were interested in a famous slave-girl to buy her, or refuse to sell her, for any offer however much.

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1. al-Aghānī xv, p.321
2. al-Ṣūlī, p.18.
3. al-Aghānī ii, p.21.
4. Ibn al-Mu'tazz, Ṭabaqāt, p.425.

c) Their characterization:

Black and white slave-girls were owned and enjoyed alike. Every kind had supporters and admirers. Every admirer defended the colour of the type he admired. Ibn al-Muʿtazz, Abul-Shibb and Saʿīd ibn Wahb, all poets, were among the admirers of black slave-girls. To defend them, they described them as a lovely mole on the face of the day,[1] black-skinned but white-mannered,[2] and as musk.[3]

Some of them went so much further that they described them as an indication of youth and attacked the white, describing them as the grey indication of old age. Siding with theblack slave-girls, Abu-l-Shibl writes: "I offer myself as a sacrifice for those who have resemblance with youth and musk. How can the elegant boy be fond of the white girl who resembles the grey old woman?"[4]

Black slave-girls had admirers by reason of:

1. Their novelty: men admired them because they found something special in them which was not available in other kinds. Among the special things said to characterise black slave-girls was that they did not worry. In addition, dancing as well as singing were something natural in them.[5]

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1. Ibn al-Muʿtazz, Dīwān, p.253.
2. Ibn Taghrī Bardī ii, p.189.
3. Ibn al-Muʿtazz, Dīwān, p.253.
4. al-Marzubānī, p.123.
5. Ibn Buṭlān, p.374.

Generally, the Arabs were fond of white women. They mentioned them with admiration in their poetry.[1] Whiteness was regarded by some of the Arabs as one of the measures of beauty.[2] There is no doubt that white slave-girls found favour with that society. Possibly, two reasons can be given for this:

1. The majority of the Arabs were brown. Thus it is no surprise that they liked and appreciated white slave-girls.

2. White slave-girls were more educated than black. Education had much to do with the slave-girl of that time as will be seen later on.

Al-Jāḥiẓ, who lived in that period, knew much of slave-girls, and tried to prove that every country was fond of the slave-girls to whom its people were accustomed, either because of proximity or capture. In his reasonable statement, al-Jāḥiẓ writes: "In al-Baṣra, Indian slave-girls are preferred. In The Yemen and al-Aghwār, Ethiopian slave-girls are favoured, while the Greeks are popular in al-Shām."[3]

Writers championed both light and dark-skinned slave-girls, and wrote vividly in support of their choice.

Al-Ḥuṣarī who, seemingly, was among the admirers of

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1. al-Qurashī, Jamhara, p.98.
2. Ibn Abī Ḥajla, Dīwān al-Ṣabāba i, p.46.
3. Rasā'il al-Jāḥiẓ, p.75.

the white kind, drew a good picture of the disadvantages of black slaves through his statement: "Among the disadvantages of black slaves is the fact that their hands are very rough." He adds: "Their lips are apt to be easily cracked. Besides their sweat smells bad."[1]

It was easy enough for that society, which seems to have been preoccupied with many kinds of slave-girls, to recognize the advantages as well as the disadvantages of every kind. People appear to have been experts in this matter. They said, for example: "Nothing like the Berber for pleasure and for production, the Persian is the ideal and the Russian is the best for service."[2] Their experience with slave-girls led some of them to issue this statement: "Slaves are beauty and not money."[3]

Abū ʿUthmān, one of the recognised expert slave-dealers, announces his experience through his thoughtful statement: "The ideal slave-girl is the Berber if brought at the age of nine to Al-Madīna for three years and afterwards to Mecca for three years and after that, when she is fifteen, to Iraq. Then she would combine the good origin of the Berber with the coquetry of the Medinese, the femininity of the Meccan with the education of the Iraqi."[4]

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1. al-Ḥuṣarī, Zahr al-Ādāb i, p.277.
2. Ibn al-Qayyim, , p.3.
3. Ibn Qutayba, ʿUyūn al-Akhbār i, p.251.
4. Ibn Buṭlān, p.374.

Ibn Buṭlān wrote a treatise in which he dealt with the advantages as well as the disadvantages of all kinds of slave-girls and the tricks of their dealers.

It is worthwhile quoting what he says of three different kinds of slave-girls:

1. The Negress: "Their disadvantages are many. The blacker they are, the uglier, less useful and more harmful they become. They are mostly bad-tempered. They do not know worry. Dancing comes naturally to them. There is no pleasure in them on account of their bad smell and the harshness of their bodies..."[1]

2. The Turks: "They combine fineness and whiteness with grace. Their faces tend to be pale. Although small, their eyes are very sweet. There are occasionally tall brown ones among them. They range from medium to short in their build. It is very rare to find tall ones among them. The beautiful among them is unusually beautiful and ugly is really very ugly. They are very good for producing children. It is rare for their offspring to be bad or weak-looking. They are clean and neat."[2]

3. The Greeks: "They are white, blond and loose-haired, blue-eyed and women of obedience, of agreement, of service, of honesty, who look after their charges. Their hands are usually never empty of skilful crafts."[3]

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1. Ibid.

2. Ibid p.376.

3. Ibid p.377.

About Negro slave-girls, al-Jāḥiẓ writes: "They are well-mannered and have fine voices for singing."[1]

The statements of the people of that time about slave-girls must not be taken too literally. It depends on the experience the person had undergone with some kind of slave-girl.

The statement of al-Jāḥiẓ conflicts with that of Ibn Buṭlān, that negresses are bad-mannered.[2] Prejudice against or in favour of Negro slave-girls, provided that people probably had different experiences with them, might have done something that caused both Ibn Buṭlān and al-Jāḥiẓ to issue their conflicting statements on Negro slave-girls.

In a clever attempt to persuade al-Saffāḥ to enjoy slave-girls, Khālid ibn Ṣafwān gave an amusing description of various kinds of slave-girls. Since the translation might not be as clear as the original text, it is better to put down the text of the description of slave-girls by Khālid ibn Ṣafwān as it is in Arabic:[3]

" ... فان فيهن يا امير المؤمنين الطويلة الغيداء ، وان فيهن الخضة البيضاء ، والعتيقة الادماء ، والدقيقة السمراء ، والبربرية العجزاء ، من مولدات المدينة تفتن بمحادثتها ، وتلذ بخلوتها ، واين امير المؤمنين من بنات الاحرار والنظر الي ما عندهن ، وحسن الحديث منهن ، ولو رأيت يا امير المؤمنين الطويلة البيضاء ، والسمراء اللعساء ، والصفراء العجزاء ، والمولدات من البصريات ، والكوفيات ذات الالسن العذبة ، والقدود المهفهفة ، والاوساط المخصرة ، والاصداغ المزرنفة ، والعيون المكحلة ، والثدى المحققة ، وحسن زيهن وزينتهن وشكلهن لرأيت شيئا حسنا . "

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1. Al-Jāḥiẓ, Thalāthu Rasā'il, p.1903.
2. Ibn Buṭlān, p.374.
3. al- Mas'ūdī, iii, p.261.

Such descriptions in such imaginative words seem to have prevailed at that time in connexion with the talk of slave-girls.

Nobody can deny the fact that the Arabic language itself might have had something to do with the description of Khālid ibn Ṣafwān. Arabic is a language of imagination. To make his speech or talk eloquent, the speaker would usually resort to using imaginative words. Much imagination is no doubt a sort of exaggeration.

Arabic also is a language which pays much attention to rhyme (Sajʿ). In Arabic sajʿ is regarded as eloquence and needed for the eloquent speaker. Sajʿ most probably would lead to the use of unnecessary words, just for the sake of balancing sentences and for giving them more rhythmical sound.

In addition to the fact that Khālid ibn Ṣafwān was known as an eloquent speaker,[1] he was in a situation where he had a hard man, al-Saffāḥ, to persuade. This situation would encourage him to use as eloquent and imaginative style as his talent could provide. In such a situation, such a description might be expected and acceptable.

A brief picture of the main and special characteristics of most kinds of slave-girls can be derived from the entire treatise of Ibn Buṭlān: The Indians had a dark skin and a fair portion of beauty. A slim waist was characteristic of those from Sind.

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1. al-Jāḥiẓ, al-Bayān i, p.317.

Beautiful faces were the characteristic of the Turks. Sweetness of talk was the fame of the slaves of al-Madīna. The Berbers had a good reputation in service and production of children. The Greeks had a white skin and were good at keeping things. Negresses were good for dancing.

Abū Nuwās wrote a poem in which he described a certain slave-girl. In describing her, he borrowed the best physical parts possessed by various kinds of slave-girls and worked them into hid description. He wrote: "In Baghdad, I saw a certain slave-girl. She was so beautiful that not every one would dare to own her or even to wish to own her. She had the typical eye of the Qasriyya (a slave who lived in a palace), typical conversation of the Syrian, typical smell of the negress, typical leg of the Soghdian, typical arm of the Turk, typical waist of the Tukharian, typical brow of the Indian and typical pride of the ʿAbbādiyya (one of the tribe ʿAbbād).[1]

1. Abū Nuwās pp.694-95.

3. Dealers and the training of slave-girls.

Once the nakhkhās had his slave-girls, he had two options: to sell immediately, on the physical merits of the girl, or to invest in a programme of training suitable girls in order to increase their value. How he approached the first alternative may be treated under the heading of:

a) Dealers' devices (ḥiyal al-nakhkhāsīn):

The nakhkhās and his customers showed great expertise in diagnosing the characteristics, merits and defects of slave-girls; accordingly the methods used by the dealer to conceal any disadvantages in his wares, and the precautions taken by the customer, as depicted in contemporary literature, show considerable ingenuity.

The dealer's sole object was to make as much money as possible out of his slave-girl by any method, legal or not. For example, he instructed his slave-girls how to change many of their physical defects such as the colour of their skin, eyes or hair, how to remove or lengthen their hair, fatten their limbs and eliminate the marks of certain diseases such as smallpox and leprosy. Killing bad smells was also practised. Among the tricks (ḥiyal) was making the girl who was no longer a maid look virginal. They used, if necessary, chemical material, to help these processes. Of the means the nakhkhās used in order to change an undesirable colour of skin, Ibn Buṭlān writes: "It is a common practice to change brown skin into golden and glossy white (durrī) into matt white (abyaḍ), and they had special means to redden yellow cheeks. As for the black, they sprayed their faces and limbs with oil extracted from certain flowers and roses. That of the violet is recommended by the women of palaces." There were other materials

used for this purpose, among them milk, water-melon and saffron.[1]

Concerning their hair, he writes: "Spraying oil of myrtle and of nutshells on the hair, and washing it with amlij (sugar-candy) plus oiling it with the oil of certain roses help in changing blond hair into black. Superfluous facial or body hair is removed either with tweezers or by spraying it often with nūra (a certain type of burned clay) adding ants' eggs afterwards, with oil, after boiling green frogs in it, or lizards boiled in the blood of rabbits and finally washing it with alum, borax and gallnut (marāra). Spraying the hair with henna and myrtle makes straight hair curly. It is a habit of the nakhkhās to lengthen the hair of slave-girls by sticking similar artificial hair onto the ends of their natural hair. Oil, wax, bitter almonds, perfume, oil of violets, besides abstention from any kind of food which causes any trouble in the stomach, are used to soften rough-skinned limbs."[2]

Ibn Buṭlān includes among the solutions whereby the marks of smallpox, freckles and tattoing can be removed, one compounded of the roots of canes (qaṣab), bitter almonds, broad beans and the seeds of water melon mixed into honey. He also mentions that the seed of the sour pomegranate, the green gallnut mixed with gall bladder of cows, help the girl who is no longer a maid to look like a virgin.[3]

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1. Ibn Buṭlān, pp.378-9.
2. Ibid, pp.380-381.
3. Ibid, pp.381-382.

In addition to her ability to attract the customer by the way she talked, the way she dressed and the way she made up her face, the slave-girl for her part excelled in mastering the art of concealing her physical defects and misleading the customer. The nakhkhās gave three pieces of advice to slave-girls who tried their best to follow them. First, to pay great attention to cleanliness and perfume and also to show the customer her face once and hide it again, for this may increase the attraction felt by the customer. Secondly, to show the most beautiful parts in her and to conceal the ugliest ones. Thirdly, to try to understand the psychology of the old and the nervous in order to win them over, and in dealing with the young, to know how to flirt with them and attempt to conceal any expression of feeling in order to attract them more.[1]

Slave-girls knew the psychology of the customer, and they succeeded in attracting him indeed. They used every means within their power. They understood how effective a factor skin and clothes were. Thus, they made up their faces and selected a particular kind of clothes. The nakhkhās, who knew such things as well as the slave-girl herself, recommended some means and ways for the slave-girl to follow in her beautification. Two means were offered by the nakhkhās and employed by the slave-girl:

1. Concerning the colour and the face, cheeks must be reddened, and brows must be made up. Limbs, if the slave-girl is white, should

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1. Ibn Buṭlān, 383.

be dyed with a red material, with golden and red if she is black, and with black, if she is yellow.

2. Concerning clothes, the white slave-girl is to wear light black or brown-coloured clothes. The black is to wear red and yellow.[1]

Such means, whereby the disadvantages of physical looks of the slave-girl would be detected with difficulty, seem not to have been exclusive to ʿAbbāsid slave-girls and nakhkhāsūn. Such means were practised much earlier by slave-girls and courtesans of Roman society, who "Found advice on the right colour to wear, on make up and hair style (even dyes or wigs). They were told how to remedy such defects as halitosis and bad teeth; how to conceal the fact of being short or too thin. They should hold themselves well, and talk and laugh quietly. She should never give extravagant expression to her feelings."[2] Concerning the way the slave-girl in Roman society used to brighten her unpleasing complexion, there were "innumerable concoctions"[3], chiefly a certain stuff for blackening the eyelids.[4]

In order to guarantee the success of his tricks (hiyal), the nakhkhās had to choose the right time andplace. There were special seasons (mawāsim) for selling slaves. In these seasons,

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1. Ibn Buṭlān p.383-4.
2. Balsdon, Roman women, p.228.
3. Ibid p.260.
4. Ibid p.261.

the market seems to have been crowded with slaves on sale and with customers coming from near and far ready to buy them, and the sale seems to have been made in a hasty manner. So the nakhkhās used to wait for such a time (mawsim) to sell his slave-girls. In such seasons "Nakhkhāsūn succeeded in playing their tricks. It was quite often that they sold very thin slave-girls as well-built, the pale as golden yellow, the small-bottomed as big-bottomed, the pot-bellied as slim-waisted, the one with bad breath as one with sweet breath. Quite often they also disguised the whiteness resulting from leprosy or some other disease, which affects the eyes and turns the pupil white; they made blue eyes black, reddened yellow cheeks, broadened thin faces, enlarged small bottoms, blackened blond hair, whitened black faces, adjusted ugly legs, lengthened short hair and eliminated the marks of smallpox, tattooing, freckles and inflammation."[1] Speaking of the success of the nakhkhās's tricks in these particular seasons, Ibn Buṭlān, at one point strains the bounds of credibility by claiming that the nakhkhās often sold the slave-boy as a slave-girl.[2]

Immense sums might come into the pockets of nakhkhāsūn through their instructing their slave-girls to use some simple means of dyeing and beautification: suffice it here to quote some nakhkhāsūn as saying: "Henna for a quarter dirham is enough to raise the price of the slave-girl by one hundred dirhams."[3]

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1. Ibn Buṭlān, p.355.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid, p.356.

Considering the prevalence of such deceit on the part of the nakhkhās or his slave-girls, legists, basing their verdicts (aḥkām) on Islamic sources, pressed a law that the customer has the right to return a slave once he finds out in him any defect, mental or physical, of which he was not aware at the time of the contract.[1] The customer also has the option to accept compensation for any kind of defect.[2] It was thought that such a law would do something to counter the tricks of the nakhkhās and reduce the deceit of the slave.

According to Islamic law, the slave-girl would be entitled to a better social status and a promise of freedom, if she produced children by her master. She would then be called Umm walad.[3] She would be automatically free after the death of her master.[4] Since freedom was the most important aim of the slave-girl and since producing a child by her master would set her on the road to freedom, she would be expected to do her best to become pregnant by her master; she might even try to be so by someone else and illicitly if necessary. Knowing that not every master would wish to have her pregnant by him, the slave-girl would do her utmost to cheat her master in various ways, such as wearing sanitary towels stained with the blood of others in order to prove that she was not pregnant

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1. al-Muzanī, Mukhtaṣar, p.82.
2. al-Muwaṭṭa', ii, p.613.
3. al-Muzanī, p.332.
4. Ibn Māja, Sunan ii, p.841.

while she actually was. She would do this because she wanted to claim that she had become pregnant since being in the possession of the new master, who would be regarded as the legitimate father of her son.[1] Among those ways is that the slave-girl, especially if she was bought very young, might reach maturity without informing her master, because she wished to produce children by him. Another way is that she might go out from the possession of her master into the hand of the nakhkhās by whom or in whose house she might become pregnant, and then she would claim that she was pregnant by her master, who sold her to the nakhkhās or put her in his house for sale.[2]

In order to foil the tricks of the nakhkhās and the deceit of the slave-girl, experts put forward some useful advice for the customer as well as the master. This advice could help in unveiling hidden and very well organised tricks. Ibn Buṭlān includes such advice in his treatise and claims that they were not his invention but that of philosophers and people of wisdom. Among the advice put for the customer was the following: "the customer must not make any decision to buy the slave-girl at first sight. He should not be in great need for her, because the hungry appreciates any kind of food, even bad. The customer who is sexually frustrated should not decide at first sight, for in this condition he would most likely be lacking in judgment and subject

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1. al-Mirghīnānī, ii, p.51.

2. Ibn Buṭlān, pp.357-8.

to the superficial attraction of novelty. Moreover, it is repeatedly looking at things that helps to uncover their disadvantages and the artificiality of their charms. What the eye appreciated in the slave from the first glances should be suspected until the appreciation increases as the examination is prolonged".[1] Avoiding buying slaves or being careful in the market season is advisable.[2]

It was not on a scientific basis as much as on experience and familiarity that some of the intelligent people, who had good judgment and were endowed with the ability to observe things closely, made some of the rules for the customer whereby he could gauge the charactors and conduct of slaves. These rules were not precise, but they would at least serve as a guide. These rules abound in contemporary literature, they concentrate on the physical features of slaves in general, such as eyes and noses, and the colour and shape of the face, and are worthy only of summary treatment here. Writing of what the customer is bound to inspect in the slave as regards his eyes, al-Ghazālī writes: "The customer should look at the slave's eyes closely. The slave with very big eyes is usually ugly and lazy, and with deep-set eyes, he is hit by serious disease. If his eyes are very prominent, he is cheeky and talkative. If they are small and deep-set, he is crafty and malicious. If they are small and prominent, he is ignorant and

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1. Ibn Buṭlān, pp.355-6.

2. Ibid 355.

inclined to lust. If they are shifty, with small eyeballs, he is wicked, but with big eyeballs, he is simple and stupid, and with very black and big eyeballs, he is a coward. If they are blue and small, he is lazy and lustful. If they are blue and yellow, he is bad mannered."[1]

Dealing with what the customer should inspect in relation to the slave's nose, al-Ghazālī quotes the author of Luqaṭ al-Manāfiʿ as saying: "He who has a thin nose tends to be quarrelsome, and he who has a big nose lacks intelligence."[2]

As regards the colour and the shape of the face, al-Ghazālī makes this statement: "the customer should look at the slave's face intensely. If its colour looks like flame (lahab al-nār), he is hasty and insane. If its texture is smooth, he is shy. If it is olive-tinged, he is of bad character. The customer should also consider looking at the shape of his face. If it is very round, he is ignorant (jāhil). If thin, he takes things seriously. If small, he is mean, wicked and a flatterer. If long, he is cheeky."[3]

Writers on such topics also lay down special rules applicable only to slave-girls in that they deal with

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1. al-Ghazālī, Risāla, p.398.
2. Ibid 400.
3. Ibid 402.

pregnancy and childbirth. Among those rules or counsels, al-Ghazālī includes these in his treatise: "If the customer wished to buy a slave-girl, he would have to inspect the part of her body which lies in between the navel and the female organ. Roughness of this part indicates the possibility of cancer in her womb. He is also to inspect her in her periods of menstruation in order to make sure that she is free of narrowness in her womb, which causes sudden death."[1]

As it was advisable not to believe the nakhkhās, it was also advisable not to believe the slave-girl, because the slave-girl, who had mastered the art of knowing how to flirt and attract the customer, could mislead him by her attractive converse and her coquetry. The people of experience and who understood such things advised the customer "not to believe what the slave, male or female, says, for his saying might chance to find you ready to believe it, so that his hidden defects stay unrecognised before you buy him." The customer is also advised to "be suspicious and not trust any slave. The more suspicious the customer grows, the safer he will be."[2]

In an attempt to avoid being victimised by the deceit and the tricks of the slave-girl, experts found some means to combat these: especially to deal with her claim that she had become

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1. al-Ghazālī, Risāla, p.404.

2. Ibn Buṭlān, p.356.

pregnant by either the master or the customer, or to foil her plans to become so. There are two valuable counsels for both master and customer to consider:

1. "Before buying her, make sure that she is not pregnant. Choose a woman whom you trust to be unwilling to ascribe the son of others to you, and send her to inspect the breast and belly of the slave-girl."

2. Look carefully at the colour of her face and take note of her desire for salted food, for paleness of face and an unusual desire for salted food indicate pregnancy."[1]

In Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh), there is a law relating to a matter known as al-istibrā'. This stipulates that any one who bought a slave-girl must not touch her, kiss her, or try to have sexual intercourse with her until he makes sure that she is not pregnant (yastabri').[2]

The master who does not like to see his slave-girl pregnant by him should pay attention to this series of counsels given by experts: "Watch carefully the slave-girl who came into your possession very young. She might not tell you of her maturity, because she desires to bear your son. Take every precaution to make sure that you are not deceived by the slave-girl who claimed that she was barren. Make sure that she was in her courses when she left for the nakhkhās to be sold, because she might become pregnant

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1. Ibn Buṭlān, p.357.

2. al-Mirghīnānī, ii, p.65.

while she is in his house and claim that she was pregnant then."[1]

Those counsels put forward by experts and philosophers for the customer and owner in order to combat the tricks of the nakhkhās and the deceit of the slave- whether or not they proved of practial value, reflect how active both nakhkhās and slave-girl were in playing tricks on the customer and in cheating the master.

b) The Nakhkhāsūn and the activities in their houses:

The ʿAbbāsid period witnessed many slave-dealers and their activities. Some of them became popular because of their popular slave-girls. Ibn Rāmīn,[2] al-Aḥdab al-Muqayyin,[3] Ibn abi l-Baṣīr,[4] ʿAbd Allāh al-Marākibī,[5] Maḥmūd al-Warrāq[6] and Ḥarb ibn ʿAmr[7] were among the popular slave-dealers and owners.

The business of slave-dealing attracted some people, for such a business brought profit and pleasure at the same time. Thinking that slave-dealers enjoyed the happiest life, some of the people envied them and wished to be slave-dealers. Abū Dulāma passed by a certain slave-dealer who owned beautiful slave-girls. Fascinated by them and their beauty, Abu Dulāma wrote a famous poem

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1. Ibn Buṭlān, p.358.
2. al-Aghānī xv, p.48.
3. al-Diyārāt, p.66.
4. al-Aghānī xxii, p.23.
5. Ibid xxi, p.64.
6. al-Khaṭīb, Tārīkh Baghdād xiii, p.88.
7. al-Aghānī xviii, p.177.

in which he recommended this business of slave-dealing when he writes: "If you want your life to be happy, you must renounce poetry and turn to being a slave-dealer."[1] Although lucrative, this occupation was not traditionally respectable, and it was considered a mean source of making a fortune. This is expressed through this hadīth: "The worst fortune a man can possibly make is that which he makes out of slaves."[2] Slave-dealers who took to buying and selling slaves as a profession did not thus gain much respect in the eye of society. Ibn Qutayba states: "Men visited Muʿāwiya, who asked them about their occupations. 'Selling slave-girls' was their answer. Then Muʿāwiya said: 'It is a bad profession'."[3] Selling slaves was regarded as a bad profession probably for two reasons:

1. Tradition: the business of selling slaves was traditionally regarded as a thing beneath the dignity of noble men and that is why it is a sort of insult to call a person nakhkhās (slave-dealer). Attacking a certain general, Muḥammad ibn Ashʿath of Egypt in his speech said: "he is a nakhkhās and a liar."[4]

2. Humanity: Such a business was considered a bad profession by some people who might have looked at it from a humane aspect. Selling or trading with human beings for profit is really a very

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1. al-Aghānī x, p.262.
2. Kanz al-ʿUmmāl ix, p.49.
3. ʿUyūn al-Akhbār i, p.49.
4. al-Kindī, al-Wulāt, pp.109-110.

ugly profession. Perhaps Muʿāwiya considered this human aspect when he said: "it is a bad profession" to his visitors.

Besides, there were slave-owners who did not own them for business or profit but to enjoy their talents, their beauty or their service. Such owners were exempted from criticism or insults inflicted upon the nakhkhāsīn. On the contrary, some of these were described as noble. Zurayq ibn Mutīḥ, who was one of them, was described in a context of admiration as a generous and as a noble man."[1]

The nakhkhāsūn and some owners of slave-girls opened the gates of their houses to visitors. We are told how the house of Ibn Nafīs, the owner of Baṣbaṣ, was crowded with many visitors who used to come there to listen to the singing of his slave-girl.[2] Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, Maʿn ibn Zāʾida and Rawḥ ibn Ḥātim were among the regular customers at the house of Ibn Rāmīn.[3]

Some houses of slave-dealers or owners seem to have been small guest-houses. To come in, one had to book or obtain permission in advance. Ibn Muqrin told how he wrote to Ibn Rāmīn to visit the latter's house and how Ibn Rāmīn replied that his house had been booked by Ibn Ḥātim.[4]

Such houses seem to have enjoyed special status for several reasons:

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1. al-Aghānī xv, p.48.
2. Ibid p.24
3. Ibid p.54
4. Ibid xv, p.52

1. Visitors to those houses were among the nobles such as Ibn Za'ida and Rawḥ ibn Ḥātim. So nobody could dare to come to such houses without obtaining permission or booking in advance.

2. The slave-girls who were owned by such houses or served there, were among the educated type of slave-girl, such as Zarqā of Ibn Ḥāmīn[1] and Basbas.[2]

3. The owners of such houses arranged such a thing for mere business. Such houses used to own slave-girls to entertain customers who came mostly from among the rich.[3]

At the same time, there were some houses which anyone would not feel ashamed to visit even without an invitation or reservation in advance. Generally the houses of the nakhkhāsīn seem to have been accessible to everyone. Accordingly, it was said that the place a free man did not feel ashamed to visit was the house of the nakhkhās.[4]

When the nakhkhās opened his house to visitors, especially the rich, he got something in return. They rewarded him and his slave-girls and "spent much in his house."[5] There was another profit which appears to have been very important. The visit of the noble or the rich to the house of the nakhkhās would

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1. al-Aghānī xv, p.54.
2. al-Nuwayrī v, p.73.
3. al-Aghānī xv, p.24.
4. Ibid xviii, p.47
5. Ibid 177.

no doubt contribute to bringing more value and more fame to his slave-girls and that was what every nakhkhās used to seek.

Presents were offered by visitors of the house of the nakhkhās to him or to his slave-girls. Such presents were stated in greater value and multiplicity than they probably were in fact. Al-Iṣfahānī mentions the following story: "Ma'n ibn Zā'ida, Rawḥ ibn Ḥātim and Ibn al-Muqaffa' happened to be together in the house of Ibn Rāmīn. When Zarqā and Sa'da sang, Ma'n sent a package of money which was thrown in front of the slave-girls. Rawḥ did the same. Because he had no money to give, Ibn al-Maqaffa' gave his farm."[1] This story strikes one as suspect; it would be unlikely for Ibn al-Muqaffa' to give away his farm, since he was a man of sense.[2] In spite of this, it is possible for Ma'n and Rawḥ to have done this.

There was a kind of slave-owner whose friends could enjoy his slave-girls without presenting him or his slave-girls with anything. This kind of owner owned slave-girls only to enjoy them and not to make business out of them. They wanted their friends to share enjoyment with them. They opened their doors to friends and might have offered them free food and drink and let them enjoy the singing of slave-girls.[3]

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1. al-Aghānī xv, p.54.
2. al-Jāḥiẓ, al-Bayān i, p.252.
3. al-Aghānī xii, p.48.

Some of the nakhkhāsūn used to give their customers freedom to deal with slave-girls and ask them not to be very conservative in their jokes or talk with them.[1] Because he had in mind that such visitors used to come for nothing but for his slave-girls, the nakhkhās used sometimes, if necessary, to go out under the pretence that he had some business to do and leave his visitors with his slave-girls in absolute freedom.[2]

In the house of the nakhkhās, talks, jokes and singing used to go on. Jokes, in particular, seem to have been very prevalent in such a house. The house of Ibn Rāmīn, for instance, witnessed many types of jokes such as this: A certain visitor to the house of Ibn Rāmīn left his coat when he went to the toilet. Sa'da, the slave-girl of Ibn Rāmīn, for a joke, sewed it and turned it into a gown. She said to him: "Have you ever seen a coat change into a gown?" On hearing this, the visitor laughed and said: "Take it, it is now yours."[3] This story recalls another story said to have taken place in the same house. It goes as follows: "Yazīd ibn 'Awn put in his mouth a pearl which is said to have been worth three thousand dirhams and asked Zarqā to take it from his mouth with her lips."[4] Neither story would bear close examination. The first one might be rejected on the ground that it was impossible

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1. al-Aghānī xx, p.54
2. Ibid, p.53.
3. Ibid, p.53
4. Ibid, pp.52-53.

for Sa'da to have sewed the coat of her visitor and made it a gown in such a short time. The second tale invites the question whether anyone would be prepared to pay thirty thousand dirhams for his lips to touch the lips of a slave-girl.

Regardless of the authenticity of such stories which people of that time accepted, there might be some evidence that funny jokes were among the prevailing things which used to take place in the house of the nakhkhās.

Some nakhkhāsūn used their houses as clandestine brothels. They opened their houses under the claim that they just had slave-girls. Those who were interested in enjoying such a thing used to go there under the cover that they go to hear the singing of slave-girls.

On the morrow of his visit to the house of the nakhkhās ʿAṭʿaṭ, Ibn Abi l-Zawā'id described what his eyes witnessed going on in the house of ʿAṭʿaṭ. In a tone full of anger and surprise, Ibn Abi l-Zawā'id wrote within his poem a certain verse in which he declared that the house of ʿAṭʿaṭ was a place set up only for prostitution. He writes: "When he put them at my disposal, I said: 'I am a man who is not amused by fornication'."[1] Hammad ʿAjrad, in his poem in which he satirized al-nakhkhās Nāfiʿ, said that Nāfiʿ was running the shocking business of prostitution for mere profit.[2]

Al-Jāḥiẓ saw fornication as bound to happen between

1. Al-Aghānī ·xiv, p.117.

2. Ibid, p.327

slave-girls and their visitors because the majority of the visitors attended not for the slave-girls themselves and not to hear or buy them either. Throwing together slave-girls with visitors would without any doubt lead to love and fascination which would usually lead to fornication.[1]

Some of the nakhkhāsūn and some of the slave-girls found at least slight encouragement to exercise such a business in society. Islam adopted a more lenient view in connexion with punishment inflicted upon the slave-girl who was found guilty of illicit sex relations. According to Islamic law, the punishment of the slave-girl is a half of that of the free woman,[2] and banishing her is excluded.[3] In addition, it seemed that 'Abbāsid society, especially from a religious point of view, paid little attention to the conduct of slave-girls as a whole, thinking that bad behaviour in a slave-girl was a matter of course. Possibly that society attached no stigma to celibates or widowers who enjoyed this kind of pleasure. Even in the time of the Prophet and the first Caliphs, society winked at conduct of slave-girls with youths. These youths used to tease slave-girls and wooed them publicly, and they did the same with free women who were mistaken for slaves. In view of this, free women, in order to be recognized and then avoided, were ordered to wear different clothes.[4]

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1. al-Jāḥiẓ, Risālat al-Qiyān, p.65.
2. Qur'ān iv, 25.
3. Ibn Quddāma, al-Muqni' iii, p.455.
4. al-Ṭabarī, Tafsīr xxii, p.47.

Much earlier, such a kind of slave-girl was enjoyed in Roman and Greek societies.[1]

1. Carry, p.147.

c) Professional training of slave-girls:

It seems that the training of slave-girls, mainly how to sing, was initially attempted in the Umayyad period under various schools which progressed particularly in al-Madīna. Both Jamīla, a singing-girl, and Ma'bad, a famous singer, participated in teaching slave-girls the art of singing. The school of the former had a good number of pupils among slave-girls,[1] and she "was in great demand as a teacher, with the result that a crowd of slaves were to be found at her house prepared as singing-girls (Qiyān)"[2]

Ḥabbāba[3] and Sallāma,[4] who had wider fame than most of slave-girls even in the 'Abbāsid period, were among the popular graduates of the school of Jamīla. Among the less celebrated slave-girls who learned in the school of Jamīla were al-Fārihah, Khulayda, 'Uqayla, al-Shammāsiyya, Bulbul, Ḥadhdha al-'Aysh, Su'da and al-Zarqā.[5]

Ma'bad had his own school, and many of his pupils were slave-girls. In his time, Ma'bad's house seems to have been the

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1. al-Aghānī viii, p.188.
2. Farmer, History of Arabian Music, pp.85-6.
3. al-Nuwayrī v, p.58.
4. al-Aghānī viii, p.366.
5. Ibid , p.210.

most famous institute in the Ḥijāz for training slave-girls, and qiyān.[1] Ḥabbāba was among his distinguished pupils.[2]

A little earlier than Ma'bad, a religious man called al-Mājishshūn was credited with teaching slave-girls of al-Madīna how to sing. He is said to have been the first pious and decent man voluntarily to go in for teaching slave-girls.[3] From the manner in which accounts concerning his teaching singing to slave-girls were handed down, it is most probable that his contribution was not as extensive as that of Ma'bad and Jamīla.

The training of slave-girls in a more effective manner and for a professional purpose actually began in the 'Abbāsid period and at the hands of famous singers, so we are told. al-Iṣfahānī relates from Ḥammād Ibn Isḥāq that Ibrāhīm al-Mūṣilī was the first to teach beautiful slave-girls how to sing.[4]

In pre-'Abbāsid times, it seems that there were special kinds of slave-girls who were, in a limited way, taught and trained, for it was known that "Before Ibrāhīm al-Mūṣilī, people used to train black and yellow slave-girls"[5] possibly for the purpose of entertainment.

Ibrahim made of his house an institute for teaching slave-

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1. al-Aghānī i, p.60
2. al-Anṭākī, Tazyīn al-Aswāq i, p.123.
3. al-Dhahabī, Tārīkh al-Islām v, p.19.
4. al-Aghānī v, p.156.
5. Ibid , p.156.

girls, and it was crowded with pupils. He and other famous singers were the teachers. His house does not seem to have been only a place for classes, but also for accommodating and taking care of slave-girls. Food and clothes were provided, so were other necessities such as perfume. In addition to his own slave-girls, and those who just attended the classes, Ibrāhīm had eighty slave-girls at one time for whom full board was provided.[1]

The profession of training slave-girls seems to have been very profitable and attractive - this encouraged other singers in the 'Abbāsid period to share with al-Mūṣilī this profession or become rivals. Both Yazīd Ḥawrā[2] and Daḥmān[3] trained slave-girls and reaped profit.

The main aim of the company of Ibrāhīm al-Mūṣilī or his rivals in training the slave-girls was, in fact, to raise the value of the slave-girl herself and consequently to increase her price.

Trained slave-girls captured the admiration of the people of that time. The untrained were mostly ignored or put in charge of cleaning and washing.[4] Beauty alone without being supported by training or education seems not to have had as much attention as training did.

It is said that ibn Ṭāhir wrote to Abu al-Samrā' asking

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1. al-Aghānī v, p.150.
2. Ibid iii, p.246.
3. Ibid vi, p.22.
4. Ibid x, p.145.

him to buy a particular trained slave-girl who could compose poetry, whatever her price, although she looked sad, neglected her appearance and was not beautiful.[1] Al-Ma'mūn, bargaining with a certain slave-dealer over a slave-girl, said: "If she can cap the verse of poetry I compose, I shall pay a higher price for her."[2] Al-Ma'mūn did not say, for example, if she was beautiful. Even in her description, al-Suyūṭī said: "she is a poetess, eloquent and learned".[3] He neglected the aspect of beauty in her as if it was not necessary or important for the slave-girl.

Perhaps eloquence and education were more favoured in slave-girls than beauty. In other words, the intellectual skills seem to have been preferred to the physical appearance. The importance of education and training cannot be denied. Noticing this, the slave-girl's trainer understood how much money he could obtain through training her and how lucrative a profession this was.

Without training or education, the slave-girl would usually be bought for a low price but sold for more than double after being trained and educated. It was said that Ibn al-Mahdī bought an uneducated slave-girl for three hundred dīnārs and was offered three thousand dīnārs after he had trained her.[4] Daḥmān,

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1. al-Qālī, al-Āmālī ii, p.21.
2. Tārīkh al-Khulafā', p.328.
3. Ibid, p.328.
4. al-Aghānī vi, pp.26-27.

also, bought one for two hundred dīnārs. He taught her and then sold her for ten thousand.[1] This big difference in the price was, undoubtedly, a result of education and training.

That beauty alone did not do much in raising the price of the slave-girl is suggested by the fact that a certain beautiful slave-girl without education or skill was bought for a thousand dīnārs.[2]

Slave-girls used to be presented as a gift especially to the nobles. For this, the giver had to choose the slave-girl to be presented. An educated one, if presented, would obtain more appreciation. The more educated a slave-girl was, the higher was her price.

Flattering the nobles by presenting them with slave-girls, the trainer would do his best to train and discipline the slave-girl whom he intended to present, as did Isḥāq al-Mūṣilī.[3]

That training and education were vital factors in determining the price of the slave-girl and guaranteeing a higher price might be deduced from the accounts just mentioned above.[4] The price of the slave-girl wholly depended on the degree of her skill and training. The record preserves an account that the slave-girl ʿAnān used to be sent to Ibrāhīm al-Mūṣilī and to his son

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1. Mez i, p.280.
2. Ibid i, p.280.
3. al-Fakhrī, p.203.
4. See above, p. 119.

Ishāq so as to learn from them. The more she learned, the more her master was offered for her.[1]

The rise of the price of slave-girls because of training and education provoked the reaction of poor people who wanted to possess slave-girls but could not. On behalf of them, Abū 'Uyayna expressed this reaction in his poem which also gives clear evidence that training put the slave-girl out of the reach of the poor. This poem is: "I said, when the owner of 'Anān went too far in her price: May Allāh not requite al-Mūṣilī well. He came with the revelation of the Devil shereby the price of slave-girls went higher than we could reach, the revelation of the Devil (represented in singing) which is like a frenzy of love that tempts hearts as well as ears".[2]

Trained slave-girls were more favoured than the merely beautiful for slave-girls were not used only to satisfy the sexual desire of men of that society. They were possessed to fulfil many functions, enjoyment of sex, enjoyment of singing, enjoyment of reciting or composing poetry, enjoyment of creating pleasant times for their associates and that of writing. Without training, they would be able to succeed in providing only one enjoyment, which is the sexual one, and fail in providing the others.

The reason for training the slave-girl was not only to increase her price for the dealer but also to increase her value

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1. al-Aghānī v, p.156.
2. Ibid v, p.156.

for her owner, and that is why some owners kept trained slave-girls not to sell them but to enjoy them. Hāshim al-Makfūf owned Khansā'. She was an educated slave-girl. Hāshim was offered a tremendous amount of money for her but even this amount was not enough to persuade him. He shook his head and said: "What can I do with money? The pleasure she gives me in one day is better than anything else".[1]

The owner of the slave-girl was very eager to have this slave-girl trained and educated. So he used many means to achieve this.

It must be stated that eloquence and the ability to pronounce Arabic words correctly were the most important item in deciding the position of the slave-girl at that time. Without the latter, the slave-girl would be put in charge of sweeping or cooking.[2]

Being aware of the importance of this, slave-dealers were so careful that they used to examine the slave-girl, if they suspected her ability to pronounce Arabic words correctly, by asking her to say repeatedly the words <u>shams</u> and <u>nā'ima</u>,[3] which were apparently judged difficult.

At that time, eloquence was reputedly to be acquired in one of the places where there was no foreign influence on the

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1. <u>Tabaqāt al-Shu'arā'</u> p.425.
2. <u>al-Aghānī</u> x, p.145.
3. <u>al-Bayān wa'l Tabyīn</u> i, p.71.

language. There were places known to be centres for eloquence and good discipline such as al-Madīna,[1] and al-Ṭā'if[2].

It happened that some poets, especially those whose origin was not Arab, used to go or to be sent to certain places or to associate with bedouins or to stay with them in the desert to attain a considerable degree of eloquence.[3]

On a smaller scale, some slave-girls managed to go to the encampments of bedouins to learn from them. The slave-girl 'Arīb told how she went to the desert, met bedouins and learned from them.[4]

Under Islamic law, it is known that it was not legal for a woman to go or to be sent anywhere unless she was accompanied by one of her very close relatives.[5] Sending slave-girls or letting them go to seek eloquence anywhere was very difficult indeed. But the ambitious slave-girl such as 'Arīb could find the opportunity of going accompanied by her owner.[6]

The places of training slave-girls seem to have exercised the method of specialisation. In other words every place was famous for teaching a certain thing. Al-Madīna was famous for

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1. Ibn Buṭlān, p.324.
2. al-Mas'ūdī iv, p.42.
3. Ibn al-Nadīm, p.202.
4. al-Aghānī xxi, p.94.
5. ibn Māja, ii, p.968.
6. al-Aghānī xxi, p.94.

teaching the method of coquetry, Mecca for gentleness and 'Irāq for education.[1]

So the experts in the affairs of slave-girls agreed that the ideal slave-girl was the one who was sent to Al-Madīna, Mecca and 'Irāq.[2]

If a sign of intelligence had been seen in the slave-girl in her early age, she would usually have been sent away to one of these places so as to learn there. Although born in Al-Madīna, Budhl was brought up in al-Baṣra[3] because it was a very famous centre where seekers after eloquence and literature used to go.[4] There al-Marākibī took his slave-girl 'Arīb out with him in order to learn poetry, grammar, singing and writing.[5]

Al-Ṭā'if was a famous centre for eloquence. It was so possibly because of its isolation from any outside influence. It is no surprise that seekers of eloquence in their slave-girls used to send them there. Muḥayyā chose it as the right place to send her slave-girl Shakla, the mother of Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī. It is said that Shakla became so eloquent that she was able to compose poetry.[6]

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1. Ibn Buṭlān, p.374.
2. Ibid, 374
3. al-Nuwayrī v p.97.
4. Ṭabaqāt al-Shu'arā', p.201.
5. al-Nuwayrī v, p.97
6. Ash'ār Awlād al-Khulafā', p.17.

Because she was brought up in al-Ṭā'if, Maḥbūba was selected and regarded as the best and the most valuable present offered to Al-Mutawakkil by Ibn Ṭāhir.[1] Maḥbūba was not presented alone. With her was a good number of slave-girls. But because of her training and education she was given a special mention. 'Anān, who was credited with being on equal terms with the first-class poets of her time, was a product of al-Yamāma.[2]

From all this, it might be seen how far eloquence played its role and effectively helped in bringing value to slave-girls and how very keen owners were to see their slave-girls eloquent whatever the cost.

Most of the famous slave-girls learned from the famous singers contemporary with them, such as Ibrāhīm al-Mūṣilī, ibn Jāmi' and Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī.

Slave-girls obtained their knowledge of singing in two ways:

1. they were taught by some of the famous singers.
2. they studied the songs of the first-class singers and benefited from them.

It is said that Sharya was among those who followed, because she admired him, the school of Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī[3] and that Daqāq[4] and Baṣbaṣ[5] learned singing from the first-class singers.

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1. al-Mas'ūdī iv, 42.
2. al-Aghānī xxii, p.521.
3. Ibid x, p.72.
4. Ibid xii, p.284.
5. al-Nuwayrī v, p.73.

It was not necessary for the slave-girl to confine herself to training under only one famous singer. She tried her best to learn from as many singers as possible. Al-Iṣfahānī, for example, speaking of Qalam, said that she learned from Ibrāhīm, his son Isḥāq, Yaḥya ibn al-Makkī and Zubayr ibn Daḥmān.[1]

Through their earnest seeking after singing and their hard efforts trying to acquire as much as their ability could absorb, some slave-girls were able to reach the same high standards of proficiency as first-class singers. ʿArīb is a good example of this.[2]

Of course, some exaggeration coloured the discussion of this subject on the part of some writers and story tellers. It was said that Sharya was able to absorb all the singing of Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī. Realising his exaggeration, this storyteller said afterwards: "All the singing of Ibrāhīm, or most of it".[3]

It would have been very hard indeed, although not impossible, for this slave-girl to know all the melodies of such a leading figure in the history of Arabic singing.

Similarly, it is mentioned in al-Aghānī that Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī, while on his death-bed, said to his visitors: "suppose I burned all my production of singing, what am I going to do with Rayyiq? She knows it all".[4]

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1. al-Aghānī xiii, p.348.
2. Ibid xxi, p.58.
3. Ibid xv. p.320.
4. Ibid x, pp.132-3.

The slave-girl was encouraged to acquire the prevailing knowledge especially that of singing and its requirements like poetry, encouraged either by her ambition such as Al-Zabbā' who was credited with saying of herself: "I heard the singers, learned from them and studied their compositions",[1] or encouraged by the attempt of her owner who used to bring the famous singers for her to hear from or to sing in front of them and finally to have her songs corrected by them.

Yaḥyā ibn Khālid used to bring Ibrāhīm al-Mūṣilī to hear and correct Danānīr (the slave-girl of the former) when she composed a new melody.[2] Once the famous singer approved the composition of the slave-girl, she would go and spread it because she would be confident at least of one thing: that her composition would gain some admiration.

Probably the subject of the training and the education of slave-girls would constitute an attractive field for storytellers to spread some of their stories about.

There is even an account that Badhl, challenging the most outstanding personality in the history of singing in the 'Abbāsid period, Isḥāq al-Mūṣilī,[3] sang three compositions by Ibrāhīm al-Mūṣilī (father of Isḥāq) and challenged Isḥāq to identify

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1. Ibid vi,p.148.

2. Ibid v, p.224.

3. Ibn al-Nadīm, p.202.

them. The account goes on to say that he knew none of them.[1] This type of situation will be dealt with later on and in an appropriate place.

Although the exaggeration of this account can be easily recognized, there is enough in it to show that some slave-girls were eager to know even the most difficult or ambiguous things particularly in the matter of singing.

Slave-girls, particularly the educated ones, held a position similar to that of magazines or newspapers at the present time. The famous singers used to make compositions and teach them to slave-girls. On their part, slave-girls used to pick up the compositions and spread them. Through slave-girls the people of that time were able to learn what the talents of the famous singers had produced. For this purpose Ibrāhīm Al-Mūsilī, for example, had Danānīr[2] and Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī had Sharya.[3]

Not every one in ʿAbbāsid society, even if able, wanted to be known as a singer or appear as a composer. There were some people who regarded the profession of singing and composing as beneath their dignity because of either their own position or that of their families. Some of these people happened to have the gift of composing. They could not suppress this gift, which was original enough to force itself out, and appear from time to time.

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1. al-Nuwayrī v, p.98.
2. al-Aghānī v, p.224.
3. Ibid x, p.145.

To avoid attributing their compositions to themselves on the one hand and to allow their talents free rein on the other, they found a good solution to this conflict in slave-girls. They taught their melodies and compositions to slave-girls and let them spread them.[1] The ordinary people would think this was the work of the slave-girls themselves. 'Ubayd Allāh Ibn Abī Ṭāhir[2] (a certain noble), Khadīja[3] (daughter of al-Ma'mūn) and 'Ulayya[4] (daughter of al-Mahdī) used this means.

Slave-girls would not be able to carry out this task unless they were well educated. Without a good training and a satisfactory portion of education they would not be able to perform the compositions of the famous singers. Also, without the satisfaction and the confidence of singers that the training and the education of slave-girls were good enough to enable them to handle this task properly, they would not let them sing their songs on their behalf.

The owners of slave-girls were very proud of their educated slave-girls. They were very pleased when their slave-girls acquired new compositions. Yaḥyā ibn Khālid could not conceal his pleasure with his slave-girl Danānīr when she created a good composition which Ibrāhīm al-Mūṣilī, after following it

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1. Ibid xii, p.102.
2. Ibid ix, p.39.
3. Ibid xv, p.329.
4. Ibid x p.189.

carefully, admired. Yaḥyā said to Ibrāhīm: "You have pleased me, so I shall please you".[1]

The owner spared no pains in attempting to make his slave-girl learn as much as possible. Everything required to this end was provided for her. The owner, hearing an appreciated composition, would do his best to enable his slave-girl to learn it by inviting or asking the composer or the singer to sing it in front of the slave-girl. Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī one day heard Salīm singing a new melody which captured his admiration. Ibrāhīm then asked Salīm to sing it in front of his slave-girls until they learned it.[2]

For the goal of educating his slave-girl or enabling her to learn compositions or songs, the owner cared little about the money he spent. In the eye of the owner, one composition taught to his slave-girl would be better than a great deal of money. Yaḥyā ibn Khālid deluged Ibrāhīm al-Mūṣilī with money in return for teaching Danānīr or correcting her.[3] Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī presented Salīm with a gift when he sang one of his songs to his slave-girls.[4] Ibrāhīm, for having his slave-girls taught how to beat the drum, paid Ja'far al-Ṭabbāl one hundred dīnārs.[5]

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1. Ibid v, p.223.
2. Ibid ii, p.159.
3. Ibid v, p.224
4. Ibid xv, p.214
5. Ibid.

The owner of the slave-girl used to woo the famous singers, doing his utmost to get them. If necessary, he paid them money and took every opportunity to present them with valuable gifts, as did Abū Ḥammād (owner of Rayyiq) to Isḥāq al-Mūṣilī.[1]

There was a kind of educational exchange between slave-girls themselves, largely in singing and knowledge of compositions and melodies. Owners arranged what was needed for this. They invited the slave-girls of others to meet theirs. Their meeting used to go like a small conference. During this meeting they would mostly discuss singing affairs, raise arguments about compositions and sing.

'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abbās al-Rabī'ī relates: "The slave-girls of al-Ḥārith ibn Buskhannar used to come to our house and meet the slave-girls of my aunt".[2] They did not come only for a mere visit but to exchange points of view. In other words, they visited or received the slave-girls of others to learn and to teach, learn what they did not know and give what the others did not know. Al-Rabī'ī referred to this.

Singing-girls were a necessary part of the entertainment provided at the celebrations and soirées of the rich; these occasions woud provide opportunities for slave-girls from differant houses to compare notes on technique and repertoire.

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1. Ibid p.265.
2. Ibid xix, p.167.

On a certain occasion al-Muʿtaṣim asked Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī to let the latter's slave-girls visit his slave-girls. Rayyiq (the slave-girl who told the story), describing the visit, said that she and the others with her sang in front of the slave-girls of al-Muʿtaṣim, who in return, sang for them.[1]

The owners or the dealers of slave-girls used to open their houses to the educated people, mostly poets and singers. Their houses were exactly like clubs or small schools where slave-girls used to consort with the educated people. The house of ʿAlī ibn Hishām was crowded with famous singers where his slave-girl Mutayyam learned from them.[2]

Besides ʿAlī, there were many owners and dealers who opened their houses. Take for example Ḥarb ibn ʿAmr, whose house was a resort of poets, writers and people of letters in Baghdad.[3]

Slave-dealers used every possible means to attract learned people to their houses. The mediation of the noble was sought, if need be, to bring the poet or the singer to the house of the dealer or the owner. It is said that ibn Rāmīn sought the mediation of a certain noble to persuade the poet ibn al-Ashʿath, whose relations with the house of ibn Rāmīn had deteriorated, for

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1. Ibid xv, p.324.
2. Ibid vii, p.280.
3. Ibid xv, p.178.

one reason or another, to visit his house as often as before.[1]

Both owner and dealer took pains to satisfy their educated visitors, possibly for two reasons:

1. The education of their slave-girl: it was known that slave-girls whose visitors were educated would increase their knowledge.
2. For their fame: the visiting poet or singer would usually mention how beautiful and gentle or how clever and gifted they were.

Both education and recognition were necessary for the position of the slave-girl. As has already been seen education contributed to determining the value of the slave-girl,[2] the importance of being recognized for the slave-girl must be stressed. One of the most effective means of propaganda in favour of the slave-girl was mentioning her in a poem or in a story. Because of verses of poetry containing mention of Dhāt al-Khāl, al-Rashīd, being under the spell of them, decided to buy her.[3]

To prove how valuable being mentioned was for the slave-girl in giving her a good reputation and consequently a good price, it is worth noting that Abū Dulāma, the poet, frequently used to visit al-Junayd, a dealer. The latter was well aware that the former would not buy any of the slave-girls. Abū Dulāma was fond of a certain slave-girl of Junayd. The latter one day refused the

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1. Ibid xv, p.48
2. See above, p.120.
3. al-Aghānī xvii, pp.265-66

request of the former to see this slave-girl saying: "You will not buy her!". "Even if I do not buy her, I spread her praises!" was the answer of Abū Dulāma.[1] Perhaps the one who mentioned and praised his slave-girls might be more useful to the dealer than some who came to buy them.

Encouraged by the stories woven about her and by her awareness of the importance of education, equally for herself and for her fame, the slave-girl, especially the ambitious one, used to seek education by herself.

It is not surprising that some slave-girls such as Faḍl[2] and Danānīr[3] opened their houses, which often turned into a sort of comfortable salon which echoed with the recital of poetry and the vibration of singing. Poets and singers used to visit them. Al-Ḥusain ibn al-Ḍaḥḥak, Abū Nuwās and al-Raqāshī were among their regular visitors.[4] Conversation between slave-girls and their visitors was of the highly intellectual kind. The most prevailing topic was discussing singing or reciting poetry, because such a discussion was the topic of witty people (al-Ẓurafā').[5]

The benefit was mutual between slave-girls and poets.

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1. Ibid x,p.281.
2. Ṭabaqāt al-Shu'ara', p.426.
3. al-Aghānī xiii, p.238.
4. al-Khalī', Ash'ār, p.73.
5. al-Aghānī xx, p.90.

Poets found a good source in slave-girls for stimulating their muses. Similarly, slave-girls found a good school in poets for increasing their knowledge and polishing their talents.

Janān,[1] Dhāt al-Khāl[2] and Zarqā' of ibn Rāmīn[3] represented very rich fields for poets. Abū Nuwās and al-Khalī' were asked by slave-girls what they had written about them.[4]

The slave-girl's fondness for poetry would motivate her to ask the poet to write poetry about the subject which she wanted or thought good. Bashshār for example was asked by a certain slave-girl to compose a poem about what was going on in a certain meeting.[5]

The slave-girl was keen to know the novelties which the talents of poets produced. She did her best in an attempt to get in touch with them, trying to miss no available chance. The slave-girls of al-Mahdī requested him one day to grant Bashshār permission to visit them, claiming that he would please them with reciting his poetry.[6]

The validity of this account seems to be in question. The possibility that it was invented may seem reasonable. Both

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1. Ibid xx,p.7
2. Ibid xvi, p.279.
3. Ibid xv, p.49.
4. Ibid vii, pp.204-05.
5. Ibid iii, p.158.
6. Ṭabaqāt al-Shu'arā', p.23 and al-Ḥuṣarī ii, p.140.

ibn al-Mu'tazz and al-Ḥuṣarī mention this account but they differ in its last part, namely the reaction of al-Mahdī to the answer of Bashshār: "And I wish we were followers of the religion of Kisrā" to the wish of the slave-girls of al-Mahdī: "We wish you were our father that we would never part".

Commenting on the reaction of al-Mahdī, ibn al-Mu'tazz said that he laughed and rewarded Bashshār with a gift,[1] while al-Ḥuṣarī insisted that al-Mahdī became so angry that he forbade him to visit his slave-girls.[2]

Being unable to have poets and singers in her house or in her owner's, for one reason or another, the slave-girl used to try to meet them by visiting them in their houses. When visiting, she would usually go accompanied by a servant or by a slave-girl. Al-Ḥusain ibn al-Ḍaḥḥāk told how Fatan, a slave-girl, often came to his house accompanied by a servant of her owner.[3]

Bashshār's house was said to have been crowded with slave-girls who used to come there to hear his poetry and enjoy his sense of humour.[4] Under the pressure of demands on the part of slave-girls, Bashshār devoted one day a week to receiving them.[5]

Some of the slave-girls showed concern to obtain education,

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1. Ṭabaqāt al-Shu'arā', p.23.
2. al-Ḥuṣarī ii, p.140.
3. al-Aghānī vii, pp.172-73.
4. Ibid vi, p.228.
5. Amīn, Ḍuḥa l-Islām, i, p.129.

using every means in their power such as pursuing the news of singing and singers because they wanted to keep in close contact with up-to-date songs. 'Arīb was credited with asking about what was going on in the council of the Caliph; such as which songs were sung, who sang them and which were the most popular.[1]

Although singing and its requirements were the most important phase in education for the slave-girl to obtain, other kinds of education were also important. Since being a boon companion and an associate was among her functions, the slave-girl had to acquire a special kind of education and training which suited this function. Some games such as chess, backgammon (nard), polo and riding were important accomplishments for this kind of slave-girl. Therefore, training of the slave-girl to play such games was quite a feature of the programme of her study. 'Arīb was trained to ride,[2] and she was described as the best woman who has ever played chess.[3] Both Shāriya and Rayyiq were good players of backgammon. They used to play it in the presence of Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī.[4] Describing a certain ghulāmiyya, Abū Nuwās mentioned that she played polo and practised archery.[5]

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1. al-Aghānī xxi, pp.88-9.
2. al-Nuwayrī v, p.103.
3. al-Aghānī xxi, p.58.
4. Ibid xv, p.328.
5. Abū Nuwās, p.588.

It seems that some of the owners employed their slave-girls as secretaries. They were to write and read their correspondence. So such slave-girls had to learn at least how to write and read. For example, 'Arīb went to al-Baṣra to learn the art of writing.[1] In a particular poem, Abū Dulāma referred to a letter written by a certain slave-girl who used to go to her teacher to learn writing.[2]

Since the matter of singing was a prevailing order in the life of the trainee slave-girl, literature, especially poetry, automatically followed this. The song of that time was usually a chosen classical poem. Voice alone was not everything the song required. The words, the meaning, the subject and the imagery of the sung poem would largely contribute to bringing something valuable to its singer.[3]

Being aware of the effect of the classical style of the poem on any singer's reputation, trainers would be expected to do their best in trying to teach slave-girls the best poetry.

Unless she had many poems by heart and knew how to pronounce the words properly, the slave-girl would not be able to sing the poetry of Al-A'shā, for example, or Abū Nuwās, in an acceptable manner.

In this case, training the slave-girl in the rules of

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1. al-Nuwayrī v, p.97.
2. al-Aghānī x, p.278.
3. Ibid v, p.169.

pronunciation, stress and anything else regarding the sound was one of the most important issues the trainer would consider.

It was not an easy task for the trainer to discipline the girl, on one hand, and for the slave-girl to absorb technique on the other. Nevertheless, the trainer could overcome the difficulty of this task and the slave-girl could succeed in absorbing it, using a variety of means and methods necessary for this task. For example, when he found out that the slave-girls of al-Wāthiq failed to learn a certain composition directly from him, Isḥāq al-Mūṣilī, who might be regarded as being one of the experts, resorted to another means. He sang it to Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥārith, from whom the slave-girls of al-Wāthiq succeeded in getting the composition of Isḥāq.[1]

The trainer was supposed to be very patient and tolerant for the things taught might require a long time and repetition until the slave-girl absorbed them properly. Tolerance and patience is clear from the account told by Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī, that he repeated a certain part of a certain composition to Sharya, while teaching her, more than a thousand times.[2] Ibrāhīm doubtless did not count how many times he repeated the composition, but at any rate it gives an indication that the trainer might have needed to repeat the subject to be taught a considerable number of times.

In spite of the fact that some slave-girls were so

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1. Ibid xii, pp.47-8.

2. Ibid xv, p.325.

educated in religion that they narrated some ḥadīths[1] and were set to recite the Qurān,[2] one would presume from the bulk of the evidence that the education of slave-girls was concentrated largely on the matters of singing and its requirements such as poetry and correct pronunciation.

There was a kind of slave-girl who seemingly received a special education for a special purpose. This kind was taught mainly what was necessary to the art of coquetry and attracting men. They were mostly set to work in the places where al-Ẓurafā' used to go, especially taverns.[3]

The owners of such places used to own or hire this kind of slave-girl to serve drinks, encourage visitors and attract more customers. Such slave-girls were expected to be endowed with beauty, knowledge of the art of coquetry and understanding of poetry.[4]

Muslim ibn al-Walīd[5] and Abū Nuwās[6] were among the customers or the visitors of these places who met slave-girls serving there. They were attracted by them and described them. In their poetry, they described the way those slave-girls served

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1. Ibn al-Sā'ī, p.80.
2. al-Diyārāt, p.269 and Ibn Ṭayfūr, p.94.
3. al-'Amrī, Masālik al-Abṣār, i, pp.282-83.
4. Ibid , p.285.
5. Ṣarī' al-Ghawānī, dīwān, p.242.
6. Abū Nuwās, p.242.

drinks and the way they flirted. They also described the beauty of their conduct as well as that of their physical looks. In some of their poems they told, in the form of a story, how they went to these places and what a good time they had with slave-girls.

It can be concluded, then, that slave-girls were trained and sought education either because they were motivated by ambition in order to hold a higher position and to earn a wider fame, or because their dealers and owners were encouraged by a higher price or doubled pleasure obtained through slave-girls if educated.

4. The Accomplishments of Slave-girls in Singing

a) Prevalence of singing in the ʿAbbāsid Period:

The study of Arabian singing suggests that singing was known in the Jāhiliyya period as well as in the Umayyad and the ʿAbbāsid. At least three different types of singing, ḥudāʾ, naṣb and sinād, were reputedly popular in the Jāhiliyya.[1] There was also another kind of singing, made to suit dancing and the sound of the drum, and it was known as the hazaj.[2] All these types owed their origin to the unaccompanied singing in a loud voice by which herdsmen used to urge on their camels. Other types of singing accompanied by musical instruments seem to have been practised, especially among the Arabs of the towns such as Mecca and al-Ḥīra. Singing-girls (qiyān) were employed to sing them. When the Meccans marched to Badr, they took with them all means of pleasure, including singing-girls to entertain them ; their chief swore that they would not return to Mecca until they had refreshed themselves at Badr and spent three days in listening to singing-girls.[3]

A plucked, stringed instrument of the lute type was quite common, under various names such as Kirān, mizhar, barbaṭ, and ʿūd.[4]

During the rapid expansion of Islam in the reign of the

1. al-Masʿūdī iv, p.133.
2. Ibn Khaldūn i, p.765.
3. al-Wāqidī i, pp.43-4.
4. al-ʿIqd vi, p.27.

Orthodox Caliphs, singing almost disappeared from society except on such occasions as weddings[1] and feasts,[2] where women were allowed to beat drums in private.

It was in the more settled Umayyad period that singing began to revive and take a different shape at the hands of the pioneer singers such as Ma'bad,[3] al-Gharīd,[4] and Jāmīla[5] who took it as profession. Since then, singing improved and, as ibn Khaldūn states, gradually reached its zenith by the time of the 'Abbāsid Caliphate at the hands of the great singers such as Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī, Ibrāhīm al-Mūṣilī, his son Isḥāq and Ḥammād.[6]

In the 'Abbāsid period, singing became widespread and popular. Among things in which singing was used were the celebrations of feasts and on the occasions of weddings and banquets.[7] Even at the opening of their reigns, some of the Caliphs began with singing and music.[8] To celebrate his accession al-Wāthiq is said to have brought singers and ordered them to sing,

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1. Ibid, 8-7
2. Muslim ii, p.608
3. al-Aghānī i, p.50
4. Ibid ii, p.321.
5. al-Nuwayrī v, p.41.
6. Ibn Khaldūn i, pp.765-66.
7. Ibid i,p.766.
8. al-Ṭabarī, xii, p.1390.

and he himself took part in the singing.[1]

The common practice of singing on the occasions of drinking should not be ignored. Without singing or the strains of the lute,[2] as Abū Nuwās put it, drink cannot be enjoyable. Singing or the "strains of the lute" seemed a fashionable necessity according to the custom of the ẓurafā' in that period. The lute was a twin of the glass. Both were necessary to each other. The ẓarīf would not enjoy his cup of wine unless he was sure that the quiet sound of his sips would be in harmony with the dreamy strumming of the lute. Abū Nuwās, whose name should be placed at the top of the list of the ẓurafā', indirectly declares that the genuine drinker is the person whose glass must be accompanied by music and singing. He writes: "Do not drink without singing and amusement, for singing stimulates your desire to enjoy drink just a whistling does with horses when they drink water."[3]

In general, three things were required for the ẓurafā' when they gathered; drink, music and a beautiful sāqiya or a charming sāqī. The most enjoyable time for them was that which they spent amongst the hysteria of music and the frenzy of drink, served by a languid-eyed sāqiya. Muṭī' ibn Iyās draws a picture of a typical gathering of the ẓurafā' in a certain poem in which

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1. al-Aghānī ix, p.29.
2. Abū Nuwās, Dīwān, p.187.
3. Ibid p.257.

he claims that he and his friends, while looked after by a merry-eyed girl, indulged themselves in drinking during which the tunes of the lute and the sounds of the cymbals rang out.[1] The singing-girl Jawhar was chosen as the guest of honour on the occasion of a certain gathering of Ḥammād, Muṭīʿ ibn Iyās, Yaḥyā ibn Ziyād and Ḥakam al-Wādī.[2] Jawhar was chosen probably because they wanted her to amuse them by her singing and to play the role of the beautiful cup-bearer, whose presence was one of the necessary things which the gathering of the ẓurafāʾ at that time required.

As singing was used on occasionsof joy and pleasure, it was also commonly used on those of sadness and misfortune. It was employed in bewailing the dead. Al-Wāthiq ordered a certain singing-girl to sing him a very sad song which suited the sad occasion of his father's death.[3] Singing was in demand at times of sadness because it cheers the listener and makes him forget his misfortune: it "Takes the place of wine and does what drunkenness does"[4] as the Caliph Yazīd III sees it, or because it kindles the emotions and makes the listener relaxed. Listening to music, as the boon companion of al-Walīd II Shurāʿah ibn Zayd puts it, "kindles sorrow and consequently brings a touch of amusement to places of sadness. It consoles the lonely and appeases the burning

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1. Al-Aghānī xiii, p.301.
2. Ibid xii, pp.322-23.
3. al-Ṭabarī xii, p.1390.
4. al-Ghazālī ii, p.286.

feeling of the lover. It also stimulates the parts of the body, arouses the spirit and consolidates the feeling."[1]

At any rate, singing formed a very important part of the life of some people, who regarded life without singing as useless, tasteless and worthless. It was not only a handful of immoral people who thought so, nor was it only Abū Nuwās who wrote: "Life is only music, drinking and sleep",[2] or al-Ḥusain ibn al-Ḍaḥḥāk when he composed: "Life is only going with a beloved, taking a good portion of drink and living among singing-girls",[3] or al-Buḥturī, who wrote: "Pleasure in life is a beautiful woman, entertaining singing from a slave-girl and renowed drinking".[4] Even the Caliph al-Mahdī is credited with a verse claiming that "Enjoyment of life lies in singing, in grapes, in sweet-smelling slave-girls and in music.[5]

In spite of the fact that al-Mahdī himself was renowned for his passion for music and that his Court was crowded with many singers, as will be seen, it is difficult to believe that the actual composer of this verse was al-Mahdī as ascribed, especially if it is taken into account that this Caliph was distinguished for

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1. al-Masʿūdī iii, p.214.
2. ʿUyūn al-Akhbār i, p.259.
3. al-Khalīʿ, Ashʿār, p.29.
4. Al-Buḥturī, Dīwān ii, p.793.
5. Tārīkh al-Khulafāʾ, p.279

persecution of the zanādiqa[1] and that many strong enemies among the zanādiqa or their sympathizers would take advantage of such a thing and with no hesitation use it against him. In this case al-Mahdī, even if he was the actual composer, would not allow such a complacent and dissolute attitude to be attributed to him.

Singing in itself in the ʿAbbāsid period was widespread. Similarly, it was a good item in forming a topic of the conversation of intellectuals as well as that of the common people. The talk of singing and the matters connected with singing might be regarded as subjects which both Caliph and common man equally discussed. In discussing singing, the Caliph al-Maʾmūn on a certain occasion asked Isḥāq al-Mūṣilī about Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī and Mukhāriq.[2] Al-Mutaṣim, speaking about the singing of a certain slave-girl, asked Isḥāq to give his opinion in connexion with her.[3] "What do you think of her?" was the question put by the Caliph al-Muʿtazz, after hearing the singing of Shāriya, to ʿUbayd Allāh ibn Abī Ṭāhir.[4] Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī, when speaking of a certain singing-girl, says: "She was more beautiful than her sister but less skilful in making songs. She shook Baghdad. For her quick wit, her sharp temper and her clever repartee, people of her time spoke of nothing but her."[5]

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1. Al-Fakhrī p.179.
2. al-Aghānī xiii, p.257.
3. Ibn Kathīr x, p.296.
4. al-Nuwayrī v, p.86.
5. al-Tawḥīdī ii, p.182.

Not only did they discuss song compositions and the talents of singers, but also they discussed them with knowledge and spoke of them with interest. Their discussion was not of a superficial nature, nor did it betray a hasty analysis. This is clear from the judgment of Isḥāq al-Mūṣilī, in his comparison between Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī and Mukhāriq: "Ibrāhīm would be better than Mukhāriq if he took proper advantage of his education and knowledge. Mukhāriq, by exploiting the virtues of his fine natural voice, would surpass Ibrāhīm".[1] Another analysis made by Isḥāq of a certain girl who was singing in the presence of al-Mu'taṣim:[2]

" أراها تقهره بحذق ، وتختله برفق ، ولا تخرج من شيء إلا الى أحسن منه ، وفي صوتها قطع شذور أحسن من نظم الدر على النحور "

indicates that the professional fraternity took its art very seriously.

b) Schools of singing:

Two schools of singing flourished in the 'Abbāsid period. The first one aimed to adhere to the old Arabian traditional manner of singing. In other words, it followed the same steps of Ma'bad and al-Gharīdh of the Umayyad period by either completely imitating it or improving slight things but within the frame of this traditional school. This school was headed by Isḥāq ibn Ibrāhīm al-Mūṣilī.[3] The other school aimed to raise the banner of change,

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1. al-Aghānī, xviii, p.182.
2. Ibn Kathīr x, p.295.
3. Farmer, p.120.

not to change the most basic rules of singing but to change some of the conventional approaches. This school introduced innovations in the manner of singing. In other words, this school stood for borrowing some of the "Persian romantic music movements" which that time demanded. The celebrated Prince Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī was regarded as the father of thismodern school.[1]

Ibrāhīm and Isḥāq were contemporary and both schools went on side by side. Both schools had supporters and admirers. The existence of such schools, conflicting with each other, would be expected to cause many arguments and many competitions. This is clear from an account of an occasion when Mukhāriq sang in the presence of al-Rashīd. Both Isḥāq al-Mūṣilī and Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī were present. Mukhāriq committed an error while singing a certain part of his song. Isḥāq noticed the slight mistake and, to put his rival Ibrāhīm in a critical situation, he said that Mukhāriq had made a mistake. In order to examine the talents of both men or to make sure of the mistake, al-Rashīd asked Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī whether Mukhāriq had made a mistake or not. Since he had failed to recognize the mistake, Ibrāhīm stated that Mukhāriq was correct. To settle this argument, arising from the difference of the opinions of Isḥāq and Ibrāhīm over the song of Mukhāriq, both of them agreed to accept Ibrāhīm al-Mūṣilī to judge between them. Sure enough, Ibrāhīm al-Mūṣilī gave his judgement for Isḥāq.[2]

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1. Ibid.

2. al-Aghānī v, p.178.

On another occasion, Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī beat Isḥāq al-Mūṣilī in the presence of al-Ma'mūn. This took place when Isḥāq sang a certain song which al-Ma'mūn appreciated and asked Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī to sing the same song in his own way. Ibrāhīm sang it so well that al-Ma'mūn applauded it more and Isḥāq kept silent.[1]

Sharp disputes between both heads occasionally resulted from the conflicting ideas of what singing or the manner of singing should be. According to al-Iṣfahānī, 'Ullawayh narrated a certain event which suggests that a sharp dispute used to take place between Ibrāhīm and Isḥāq and that this dispute exceeded the limits of being a subjective discussion and became a personal attack. This concerned the question whether taḥrīk or non-taḥrīk in singing is better. Taḥrīk means that singing should include many notes (naghamāt) as Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī puts it. Ibrāhīm believed it was better, while Isḥāq took the opposite view.[2]

c) Patronage of Singing:

Singing seemed to be the order of the day in 'Abbāsid society, not only for professional singers but also for the nobles with no exception for some of the Caliphs and Princes. Apart from the very early 'Abbāsid Caliphs - al-Saffāḥ, who had no spare time to enjoy singing, and his successor al-Manṣūr, whose palace never

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1. Ibid x, p.126-27.

2. Ibid v, pp.259-60.

witnessed any sort of amusement[1] - the Caliphs patronized singing and singers, and some of them played an important role in contributing to singing. In addition, at that time "music has not yet been placed under the ban by the legists of Islam, and people of the highest rank, both men and women, cultivated it."[2]

Al-Mahdī might be regarded as the first 'Abbāsid Caliph to patronize singing in an effective manner. He himself was very fond of singing,[3] and about him Ibn Khallikān says: "No man had a finer voice than he."[4] Because he was particularly fond of music, his Court was crowded with musicians, among them Ḫakam al-Wādī, Siyāṭ, Ibrāhīm al-Mūṣilī and Yazīd Ḥawrā.[5]

Al-Rashīd's encouragement of singing cannot be ignored. Music and singing found unprecedented favour in his court, which was a luxurious haven for singers, who benefited from millions disbursed in their favour. Such were Ibrāhīm al-Mūṣilī, ibn Jāmi', Fulayḥ, Zubayr ibn Daḥmān, al-Mu'allā ibn Ṭarīf, Ḥusain ibn Muḫriz, Salīm ibn Salām, Yaḥyā al-Makkī and his son, Isḥāq al-Mūṣilī, the blind Abū Zakkār, and others.[6]

Al-Rashīd was very eager to preserve the heritage of

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1. al-Fakhrī p.159.
2. Ameer Ali p.456.
3. al-Aghānī v, p.146.
4. Ibn Khallikān iii, p.464.
5. Farmer, p.93.
6. al-Aghānī xviii, p.230.

singing. By his command, a committee for studying the classical compositions and choosing the best hundred compositions among them was set up.[1] Besides, he is the first to have classified singers.[2] Ibrāhīm al-Mūṣilī, ibn Jāmi' al-Sahmī, Mukhāriq represented the first class of singers, Zalzal, 'Amr al-Ghazāl, 'Ullawayh and Barṣomā were among the singers who held lower ranks.[3]

In spite of the fact that the record of the Caliphate of al-Rashīd is empty of information such as that he had a fine voice like that of al-Mahdī or that he left compositions behind like al-Wāthiq, al-Rashīd possessed striking knowledge in the field of singing and a bright talent for criticising and appreciating singing as well. Al-Rashīd himself played the role of the judge betwen the two rivals Ibrāhīm al-Mūṣilī and ibn Jāmi'. His ability to pinpoint mistakes was surprising enough to strike both of the two rivals. As a result of this, both rivals produced such flattering comments on the talent and the knowledge of al-Rashīd as that of Ibrāhīm al-Mūṣilī: "May I be denied my father if his judgment was unfair. I really made these mistakes and by Allāh, nobody else on the face of the earth knows singing better than the Commander of the Faithful"[4] The comment of ibn Jāmi' on this event was: "It is not surprising, for he is a man who has been listening

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1. Ibid iv, p.361.
2. Tārīkh al-Khulafā', p.298.
3. al-'Iqd vi, p.31.
4. al-Aghānī vi, p.284.

to singing for twenty years with the unusual intelligence which he possesses."[1]

Like science, singing flourished remarkably in the reign of al-Ma'mūn. Al-Ma'mūn, especially in the last part of his Caliphate, extended the hand of support and patronage to singing and singers. He himself had a special group of singers.[2] Not only did he earn a good portion of knowledge of science and literature[3] but he understood music, analysed singing and argued about it. He entered an argument with Abū 'Alī about a certain composition. 'Arīb was chosen as a judge of this argument.[4] He was very interested not only in singing itself but in learning the opinions of singers about each other too. For example he asked Isḥāq al-Mūṣilī about Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī and Mukhāriq. Isḥāq answered: "Ibrāhīm would be better if he took proper advantage of his education and knowledge. Mukhāriq, by exploiting the virtue of his fine natural voice would surpass Ibrāhīm." Al-Ma'mūn's agreement with Isḥāq and his saying: "You are right",[5] suggests his knowledge in singing.

Al-Wāthiq patronized singers and contributed to singing, for he was not only the Caliph who was

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1. Ibid, p.284.
2. al-'Iqd vi, p.60.
3. Ibn Kathīr x, p.275.
4. al-Aghānī xxi, p.88.
5. Ibid xviii, p.257.

fondest of singing, but he himself was a singer and a talented musician. Al-Wāthiq was regarded as the first of the 'Abbāsid Caliphs who was a real musician.[1] In addition to the fact that he sang songs and played musical instruments, he also left a hundred compositions behind.[2] His musical education outran that of any other Caliph. Isḥāq al-Mūṣilī says of him: "Among those who attend the council of al-Wāthiq, nobody knows better than him as far as singing is concerned".[3] Al-Ṣūlī also says of him: "Al-Wāthiq was a poet, knew singing better than any Caliph and made nearly a hundred compositions. He was very skilful in playing the lute..."[4]

At the court of al-Wāthiq, so much did singing find support and flattery "that one might think that it had been turned into a conservatory of music with Isḥāq al-Mūṣilī as principal, instead of its being the majlis of the "Commander of the Faithful".[5] His court echoed with the rhythmic modes of music and with the tones of reasoned, though heated argument about singers and musicians. Al-Wāthiq seemed to conduct such arguments, and his opinion was held in esteem.[6] As a result of his patronage of music, musicians and

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1. Farmer pp.96-97.
2. al-Aghānī ix, p.269.
3. Ibid , p.272.
4. Tārīkh al-Khulafā', p.97.
5. Farmer, p.97.
6. al-Ghazūlī i, p.245.

singers flocked into his court and enjoyed his support. Among the older musicians at the court were Isḥāq al-Mūṣilī, Mukhāriq, 'Ullawayh, Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥārith, 'Amr ibn Bāna, whilst among the newcomers were 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abbās al-Rabī'ī, ibn Fīlā' al-Ṭanbūrī, Ibrāhīm ibn al-Ḥasan ibn Sahl and al-Ḥusan al-Masdūd.[1]

So much did al-Wāthiq offer encouragement and facilities to singing and singers that, after being appointed as acting ruler by al-Mu'taṣim, he opened the ceremony of this event by inviting all singers, and he could not show more fondness and support for singing and music than that he was the first of them to sing.[2] Al-Wāthiq was not the only 'Abbāsid Caliph who left production of singing. With him were al-Muntasir,[3] al-Mu'tazz[4] and al-Mu'tamid.[5]

It is worth noting that the history of singing is indebted to the 'Abbāsid princes and princesses who encouraged singing and patronized singers, while at the same time some of them participated in singing. There were singers and there were musicians among them. 'Abd Allāh ibn al-Hādī,[6] who is said to have been accomplished in playing the lute,[7] Abu 'Īsā ibn al-Rashīd, of whose

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1. Farmer, p.97.
2. al-Aghānī ix, p.290.
3. Ibid, p.294.
4. Ibid, p.298.
5. Ibid, p.317.
6. Ash'ār Awlād al-Khulafā', p.84.
7. al-Aghānī x, p.205.

singing and appearance 'Arīb says: "I never heard such a fine singing and never saw such a beautiful face",[1] 'Abd Allāh ibn al-Amīn,[2] 'Abd Allāh ibn al-Mutawakkil, who left approximately three hundred compositions[3] and 'Abd Allāh ibn al-Mu'tazz,[4] all princes, were counted among those who contributed in one way or another to singing.

In spite of the absolute seclusion imposed upon them, "princesses and ladies of high rank often gave musical soirées".[5] Both 'Ulayya bint al-Mahdī and Khadīja bint al-Ma'mūn can be taken as distinguished examples. In addition to the fact that she was a poetess,[6] the former was regarded, with the exception of one or two famous singing-girls such as 'Arīb and Shāriya, as the most accomplished woman 'Abbāsid society produced in the field of singing. This made the people of her time agree that "Never before in pre-Islamic times or in Islam were there a sister and a brother better than 'Ulayya and Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī".[7]

It seems as if so much attention was paid to 'Ulayya that, in a way, she seemed a semi-legendary personality. Transmitters

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1. Ash'ār Awlād al-Khulafā', p.92
2. al-Aghānī x, p.209
3. Ibid, 213.
4. Ibid, 289.
5. Ameer Ali, p.450.
6. al-Fihrist, p.233.
7. Ash'ār Awlād al-Khulafā', p.55.

went so far as to claim that the celebrated singer Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī, her brother, learned and borrowed in his singing from ʿUlayya.[1] The main reason for both the unusual appreciation and the flattery which she was accorded might be the fact that she had the courage to break the chains of palace tradition and emerge from the thick screen of seclusion; a thing which was not expected of women of the palaces.

Although Khadīja bint al-Maʾmūn had no such credit in singing and composition, there is an account in al-Aghānī that she composed a poem which she sang so beautifully that al-Mutawakkil, listening to it from Shāriya and her slave-girls, liked it and asked about the original composer of this song. To his surprise, Mulah the slave-girl answered him: "Both poem and song were the composition of Khadīja bint al-Maʾmūn, who wrote the poem about a certain servant of her father of whom she was very fond".[2]

Singing did not seem to be a monopoly of a certain group of professional singers such as Ibrāhīm al-Mūṣilī, his son Isḥāq and his rival ibn Jāmiʿ and their type. Interest in singing was shared even by some of the religious people who were expected at least to take a neutral stand and not to oppose it. This does not mean that they sang songs, but listened to singing and approved it. In this context witness al-Iṣfahānī's account that a certain qāḍī composed a poem about a slave-girl whom he admired and gave it to

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1. Ibid.

2. al-Aghānī xv, p.329.

'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abbās al-Rabī'ī to sing.[1] So it is not surprising to learn that the qāḍī of al-Madīna, 'Abd al-'Azīz ibn 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib al-Makhzūmī, approved the testimony of the singer Daḥmān, despite an objection made that Daḥmān was a singer and a tutor of slave-girls. To this, the judge replied: "I know, may Allāh forgive us. Who of us does not sing!"[2] The qāḍī al-Kuttāb, Sahl al-Aḥwal, who was described as trusted and distinguished, listened to the singing of Shāriya. Speaking of the effect of her singing, he said: "I just lost my mind."[3] Two famous qāḍīs, Abu Yūsuf al-qāḍī and Aḥmad ibn Abī Du'ād, listened to singing and wept as a result of the effect of singing on them.[4]

Some of the generals and the Arab chiefs participated in singing and made compositions. Al-Iṣfahānī mentions that 'Abd Allāh ibn Ṭāhir produced many compositions.[5] Abu Dulaf al-'Ijlī was credited with particular skill in singing and composing.[6] 'Ubayd Allāh ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn Ṭāhir was the author of a famous book concerning the tunes and the problems of singing. This book is described by al-Iṣfahānī as "a famous and a highly useful book,

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1. Ibid xix, p.205.
2. Ibid vi, p.22.
3. Ibid xv, p.325.
4. al-'Iqd vi, p.5.
5. al-Aghani xii, p.97.
6. Ibid viii, p.8.

which indicates the ability of its author."[1]

d) Enthusiasm for singing:

Enthusiasm for singing was quite high among the people of that time. They loved singing and felt its effect. Classification of singers, on grounds of their talents and the quality of their productions, came out as a result of this interest in singing. There seems to have been two classes of singers, high-class and low. In the reign of al-Rashīd, Ibrāhīm al-Mūṣilī, ibn Jāmiʿ and Mukhāriq, for example, were among the singers of the high class, while, for example, Zalzal and ʿAmr al-Ghazāl were classified as of the lower singers.[2] In the Caliphate of al-Muʿtaḍid, al-Qāsim ibn Zarzūn and Aḥmad ibn al-Makkī were among those singers who formed the higher class, while Ahmad ibn Abī al-ʿAlā and other singers were the singers of the lower class.[3]

Among some people there was a passion for singing akin to madness. This passion drove them on some occasions to a degree of hysteria and insanity.[4] This effect is described in similar terms in various sources, as "they nearly hit their heads against the wall"[5] or "they stood in their heads."[6]

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1. Ibid ix, p.40.
2. al-ʿIqd vi, p.31.
3. al-Muḥāsin Wa'l-Aḍdād, p.201.
4. Ashʿār Awlād al-Kulafā', p.83.
5. al-Aghānī x, p.189.
6. Ibid xviiii, p.261.

The effect of singing was not necessarily always pleasant. It could be, on the contrary, sad and miserable. But both effects were desirable and sought on different occasions, since singing was not always meant to entertain its listeners; it was also meant to recall some bitter or sad events in which the listener would find a psychological comfort or an emotional escape which might help him to forget his pains. This might be clearly seen in the case of Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī, who failed in claiming the right to the Caliphate and whose life was saved by the charity of his nephew - who was at the same time his enemy - al-Ma'mūn.[1]

Weeping is among the sources of comfort in misfortune, especially for those who are hit by crises which could not be helped, such as the death of a beloved. Singing of sad songs was a form of consolation. Hard hit by the death of the slave-girl of whom he was fond, al-Ma'mūn wrote a couplet and ordered Mukhāriq to sing it.[2] The poor lover who found no response from his beloved or who was, on any social ground, denied the chance to meet her, found his great comfort in listening to singing and then weeping. The singing of the slave-girl Baṣbaṣ represented a great source of consolation for Abu-l-Sā'ib, who used to visit her and request her to sing for him. When she sang a particularly moving song, he could not help beating his face, weeping and lamenting the sufferings of lovers.[3]

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1. al-Ṣāḥib ibn 'Abbād, 'Unwān al-Ma'ārif, pp.55-6.
2. al-Aghānī xviii, p.287.
3. Ibid xv, p.30.

Singing to some people was a thing which pleases the heart and refreshes the soul, as Abu-l-ʿAtāhiyya says.[1] Abu-l-ʿAtāhiyya, who is said to have given up the material life,[2] from time to time resorted to listening to singing in order to find a spiritual inspiration and a pious comfort in it. When he felt worried or oppressed by the fast-moving material life around him, he used to go to the house of Mukhāriq and in it find a comforting resort. Muḥammad ibn Saʿīd told how 'Abu-l-ʿAtāhiyya went to Mukhāriq and requested him to sing certain songs and how the tears poured from the eyes of Abu-l-ʿAtāhiyya as if they were meant to be in harmony with the notes of the lute of Mukhāriq. It is interesting to note that Mukhāriq's singing of a sad couplet was the only thing on earth that Abu-l-ʿAtāhiyya wished when on his death-bed.[3]

The wilder manifestations of this passion for singing inspired some very far-fetched anecdotes, of which many feature in al-Aghānī. For example, when Mukhāriq sang a certain song between two graves, people on the road left their business and gathered round him.[4] The effect of the singing of Ibn Jāmiʿ lamenting his mother so affected his listeners that some of them hit their heads against the walls.[5]

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1. Ibid xviii, p.261.
2. al-Masʿūdī iii, p.357.
3. al-Aghānī xviii, pp.261-62.
4. Ibid xviii, p.263.
5. Ibid vi, p.290.

Similar is the tale about the grave old man who was sailing in a boat on the Euphrates together with a group of youths and a slave-girl. The slave-girl sang a certain poem on the upper deck, and her fine voice reached the ears of the old man in the cabin below; he in consequence became so excited that he threw himself into the river. Justifying his mad act after he was rescued, the old man claimed that he had been overcome by a sensation like that of ants crawling over him from head to foot, which had made him lose his wits.[1]

Such tales are obviously far-fetched, but they do indicate a great interest in the art of singing, and in its practioners, among the cultured class of ʿAbbāsid society.

e) Opposition to singing:

In spite of the fact that singing was widespread in ʿAbbāsid society and that there were strong passions and support for it, there was opposition to it. This opposition was based on both religious and social grounds. Some of the jurists adopted the religious stand. Mālik, al-Shāfiʿī, Abū Ḥanīfa and al-qāḍī Abu-l-Ṭayyib treated singing as a sacreligious act.[2] In addition to the fact that he prohibited singing, Mālik passed this verdict: "If a person bought a slave-girl and found out that she sang, he would have the choice of returning her".[3] As for al-Shāfiʿī, who

1. Ibid ix, p.284.

2. al-Ghazālī ii, p.269.

3. Ibid.

did not take a very strict attitude towards singing, he said: "Verily, singing is makrūh and whoever is addicted to it must be regarded as unsound and refused the right of testimony".[1] Abū Ḥanīfa is said to have hated singing and regarded it as a sin.[2] That there is a canonically recognised punishment for listening to music or making songs isnot certain, and legists did not emphasise it.

Abū Ja'far al-Manṣūr stood against singing. He thought that listening to singing from a slave-girl was unbecoming for him and for the nobles. He criticised 'Abd Allāh ibn Muṣ'ab because he used to listen to the slave-girl Baṣbaṣ and generously reward her. He said:"What I like is listening to a camel-driver (ḥādī) shattering the calm of the night with the poetry of Ṭarīf al-'Anbarī; such a thing can be more pleasant to my ears than the singing of Baṣbaṣ."[3] (Ḥudā is traditional unaccompanied folksong.) He disapproved of musical innovations of 'Abbāsid times, probably because of the intimate connection of slave-girls with this type of music. He took a strict stand. When he heard one of his servants playing the ṭunbūr in his palace he considered this sort of behaviour was enough to violate the respectability of his palace, and punished the servant by breaking the ṭunbūr over his head and selling him.[4]

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1. Ibid.
2. Ibid.
3. al-Aghānī xv, p.26.
4. al-Fakhrī p.159.

A number of people shared with al-Manṣūr his view with regard to singing. They regarded it as something beneath one's dignity, and the honourable man would not take to singing. But listening to singing was a different matter, and it was not beneath one's dignity because the Caliphs themselves listened to it. Bearing such a thing in mind, the man of high rank or of a highly respected family, if he happened to be able to sing or to compose any melody, disdained to claim the song or the composition for himself. He used to attribute them to one of his servants or slaves. The Caliph al-Muʿtaḍid is said to have made praiseworthy compositions but he never indicated that they were his own creation, on the contrary, he always used to hint that his slave-girl Shājī composed them.[1] So did ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ṭāhir in attributing his own songs to his slave-girls. ʿUbayd Allāh (his son) relates that his father ʿAbd Allāh produced some compositions, and because he considered it unworthy of him to claim authorship, he did not like people to learn that he was the actual composer of these particular items. Thus he used to teach his compositions to his slave-girls, who spread them. People thought that they were their real composers.[2]

If singing did not debase the position of the noble man, it would at least be enough to shake it. He was well aware of this and hated to be seen singing or to be known as a singer. This can be clearly seen from al-Iṣfahānī's report that Abū Dulaf, who was

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1. al-Aghānī viii, p.97.
2. Ibid ix, p.39.

forced to sing by the command of al-Mu'taṣim, hated to be seen singing by Aḥmad ibn Abī Du'ād.[1] Al-Mu'taṣim ordered Abū Dulaf to sing in front of Aḥmad ibn Abī Du'ād probably because he wanted to lower his standing especially in the eyes of such important people as Aḥmad. Abū Dulaf, who was said to be a learned and influential man and among the strongest Arab chiefs,[2] could have been a serious threat to the policies of al-Mu'taṣim, who had reduced the influence of the Arabs by favouring the Turks and entrusting them with the important military posts.[3] Among the effective weapons which al-Mu'taṣim saw suitable to use against him was ordering him to sing in order that people might learn that he was a singer. Consequently, he would lose some of his influence, and the confidence placed in him would be diminished. The policy which al-Mu'taṣim adopted against Abū Dulaf seems to have succeeded, particularly in the case of Aḥmad ibn Abī Du'ād who was a close friend of Abū Dulaf. This is apparent from the comment of Aḥmad: "This is too bad. At such an age and with such a position, you have put yourself in such a wretched situation as I see."[4]

Earlier than al-Mu'taṣim, al-Ma'mūn, combating the influence of Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī, used the same weapon.

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1. Ibid viii, p.249.
2. al-Fihrist, p.169.
3. al-Mas'ūdī iii, p.465.
4. al-Aghānī viii, p.249.

Historically, it is known that Ibrāhīm revolted against al-Ma'mūn and failed in achieving his purpose. The latter captured him but pardoned him.[1] To ruin his position and to make him lose his supporters, al-Ma'mūn encouraged him to sing. Ibrāhīm himself was content with this, for he was well aware that the only way he could save his life was just to sing and to be known as a professional singer.[2] In attacking him, those who stood against him, either because they hated him or in order to show loyalty to al-Ma'mūn, found no weakness in Ibrāhīm to exploit except his singing. Da'bal ibn 'Alī and ibn al-Zayyāt were among those poets who in one way or another contributed to satirizing Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī, stressing only the matter of singing. The former wrote: "If he had been entrusted with the Caliphate, Mukhāriq would of necessity have been his heir-apparent and Zalzal a legitimate inheritor of the Caliphate".[3] As for the latter, he wrote: "Except for singing about Laylā, Mayya, or Hind, what could he say if he mounted the platform?"[4]

In similar vein is the story of 'Abd Allāh ibn al-'Abbās al-Rabī'ī who learned how to sing, though his grandfather was a proud man and regarded singing as a lasting disgrace.[5]

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1. ibn al-Athīr v, p.209.
2. Ash'ār Awlād al-Khulafā' p.20.
3. Ibid.
4. al-Aghānī xix, p.168.

As ʿAbd Allāh himself related the story it goes as follows: "My grandfather called me when he knew that I had learned singing. He was fit to burst with anger. As soon as I appeared, he shouted at me: "O dog, you have dared to learn singing without my knowledge and without my permission. Furthermore, you have excelled in it to the extent that you could make compositions. You have not been content with this and gone much further that you have taught your compositions to the slave-girls of my house and those of al-Ḥārith ibn Buskhanar. You have become so popular that the news of your compositions has leaked out to the ears of the Commander of the Faithful, who for this blamed me. By such an act you have brought shame to your forefathers in their graves and become nothing but one of the singers." This story carries on: "O my little son, you have fallen and disappointed me. I feel sorry for you and for your father."[1] Such a sharply worded censure is enough to reflect the deep concern of those who came of well-bred families to avoid having themselves or their relatives known as singers.

In spite of the fact that ʿUlayya bint al-Mahdī was distinguished more as a singer than as a princess, her relatives hated hearing people attributing songs and compositions to her. Al-Rashīd, who was fond of her and who liked listening to her singing,[2] threatened the life of Muḥammad ibn Jaʿfar al-Barmakī

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1. Ibid x, p.177.

2. Ibid x, p.179.

if he told anyone that a certain song was the work of 'Ulayya, and warned him not to spread it.[1] So it is not surprising if Mukhāriq, 'Ullawayh, Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥārith and 'Aqīd were reluctant to toll al-Mu'taṣim the name of the actual composer of a certain song which captivated al-Mu'taṣim, precisely because 'Ulayya was its actual composer.[2] Isḥāq al-Mūṣilī told how he sang one of the songs of 'Ulayya in the presence of al-Ma'mūn and how the face of al-Ma'mūn was clouded with anger and how he severely rebuked him.[3]

Al-Rashīd, al-Ma'mūn and al-Mu'taṣim did not want people to know 'Ulayya as a singer because she was a princess, a daughter of a Caliph and a sister of a Caliph, and because they probably regarded singing as a degradation of her position and as a profession of the commons. Probably there was another reason for this, which was the fear that she might be exposed to calumniators who would exploit her and her royal position and might add to her something enough to harm the reputation of the ruling family. This is clear not only in the case of 'Ulayya but also in that of Khadīja bint al-Ma'mūn. It is said that she was fond of a certain handsome servant of her father. She wrote a poem about him and sang it. In order to restrict the spread of such information, al-Mutawakkil ordered Mulaḥ, the slave-girl who knew this and who

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1. Ibid xv, p.329.
2. Ibid x, p.177.
3. Ibid, p.179.

related it to him, to keep it secret.[1]

f) Traditions of singing:

There was a special tradition of listening to music and singing. The singer would usually sing his song from behind a curtain, so as to be heard but not seen. Both 'Amr ibn Bāna[2] and 'Ubayd Allāh ibn Ṭāhir[3] attended the soirées of al-Mu'taṣim and al-Mu'tazz bi-l-Lāh respectively and listened to singing in their soirées from behind the curtain. Even on the informal occasions, this tradition was carried out. Although he used to teach singing to Danānīr and treated her like a daughter,[4] Ibrāhīm al-Mūṣilī was greeted by Danānīr and listened to her while they were separated from each other by the curtain.[5] In order to make the guest feel informal and at home, the singer would sing in front of the curtain. Such an act on the part of the host was regarded as one of warm hospitality extended to the guest.[6]

Certain times were regarded as specially suitable for singing. The best season was that when it was cloudy and showery weather.[7] Probably Spring was the most active season in

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1. Ibid xv, p.329.
2. Ibid, p.326.
3. Ibid, p.325.
4. Ibid xviii, p.15.
5. al-Nuwayrī v, p.88.
6. Mez ii, p.248.
7. Ash'ār Awlād al-Khulafā', p.204.

regard to the activities of singing and listening.[1] The best place was that which commanded a garden, full of smiling roses and fragrant jasmines.[2] The right atmosphere was an important factor in making singing appear more enjoyable, so clients and singers sought to create such an atmosphere. The shadow of the vine was recommended for this purpose.[3]

Among the most interesting traditions of singing was to listen to the song motionlessly as if the listener was sleeping. Conversation or laughter while singing was going on was a breach of the tradition of listening to music in the eyes of the zarīf. Describing how calmly he and his companions listened to a certain singing-girl, a certain poet wrote: "When she played her lute, the generous friends were charmed by her singing. As still as if they were sleeping they carefully listened to her."[4]

g) Musical instruments and the style of the song:

Many musical instruments were in use. The lute (ʿūd) could be regarded as the most popular and the most vital instrument. It was used solo and accompanied by other instruments. The lute occupied a wide place in the veritable ocean of ʿAbbāsid literature.[5]

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1. al-Aghānī viii, p.322.
2. Ibid xix, p.189.
3. Tārīkh al-Khulafāʾ, p.279.
4. ibn Abī ʿAwn, p.121.
5. Bashshār, dīwān, p.151.

It was the first thing to come to the mind of the poet when he described a slave-girl or a singing-girl.[1] Ibn al-Rūmī described certain singing-girls playing the lute as mothers holding babies to their bosoms.[2] The pipe (mizmār) was also known, and its player was called the zāmir, as Zunām al-Zāmir and Tuffāḥ al-Zāmir.[3] ʿAbd Allah ibn al-Muʿtazz described a certain female pipe-player as "a white singing-girl kissing an illegitimate baby whose father was a negro".[4] It was recommended that the zāmira should be black-skinned. It is said: "To make the pipe perfect, its player must be a black zāmira".[5]

The tunbūr (pandore) was among the musical instruments played at that time.[6] There was a band known as the tunbūr-players (al-ṭunbūriyyīn), among whom were al-Masdūd and ʿUbayda.[7] The singer Jaḥẓa was credited with being the author of a book entitled Kitāb al-ṭunbūriyyīn wa'l-ṭunbūriyyāt.[8] Both rebec (rabāb) and wand (qaḍīb)[9] were known and played. In the poetry of

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1. al-ʿAmrī i, p.287.
2. al-Āmālī i, p.231.
3. al-Diyārāt, p.153
4. Ibn al-Muʿtazz, dīwān p.135
5. al-Bayān wa'l-Tabyīn i, pp.93-94.
6. al-Fakhrī p.159.
7. al-Aghānī xxii, p.209.
8. Ibid, p.207.
9. al-Ghazālī ii, p.272.

the 'Abbāsid period, there is mention of other musical instruments such as the Kurān,[1] the mizhar (kind of lute),[2] the barbaṭ (lute or barbiton),[3] the drum and the cymbals.[4]

The style of the language of the song was chosen from among the most eloquent and the most expressive poems. Singing at that time was not only music, nor was it a voice; it was in the first place the meaning as well as the style of the song. In other words, two things were important to determine the standard of the song: the language of the sung poem, and the way it was sung. The meaning of the song might be more effective than the way it was sung. Such an effect of the meaning of the sung poem can be clear from the story already mentioned: a certain old man had thrown himself into the river as a result of his extreme excitement when a certain slave-girl sang this couplet:

حتي اذا الصبح بدا ضـوءه وغابت الجوزاء والمـرزم
اقبلـت والوطء خفي كمـا ينساب من مكـة الارقـم

"When the light of the morning appeared and after the late stars went down, like a snake slithering from its lair I came forth with silent step". Asked why he had acted like this, he answered: "I acted so because I understood the meaning of the couplet better than anybody else."[5]

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1. al-'Aqqād p.297.
2. al-Aghānī xiii, p.301.
3. Ṭabaqāt al-Shu'arā' p.141
4. Ibn Haffān p.89.
5. al-Aghānī ix, p.284.

The way in which the singer sang the poem was also very important to make the song very effective. According to Ibn Buṭlān, there were conditions for the perfect song, and among them was the way in which the poem was sung.[1]

A vulgar rendering of the song reduced the admiration for it. The song had to be relevant to the occasion for the best effect; pleasant occasions required pleasant songs and vice versa. If the customer wished to be cheered by the song, then a sad song would not be appreciated, even one of elegant style and high artistic standard. In the last days of his Caliphate, al-Amīn was involved in bitter fighting with his brother al-Ma'mūn. At a certain stage he felt depressed and ordered Ḍa'f to entertain him by singing. Because he wanted comforting songs, al-Amīn raged with anger and ordered her to get out when she sang him very alarming verses.[2] A similar reaction is reported of al-Rashīd when one of his slave-girls, in error, sang him a poem which was written in praise of the Banū Umayya.[3]

Verses containing ambiguous or difficult words would be chosen on some occasions or for some purposes such as confusing or surprising the listener. Ibn al-Nadīm mentions that a certain singing-girl sang a confusing verse in the presence of al-Wāthiq. This verse caused al-Wāthiq to call the philologist al-Māzinī

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1. Ibn Buṭlān p.385.
2. Ibn al-Athīr v, p.162.
3. al-Aghānī v, p.76.

from al-Baṣra in order to clarify some mysterious things in the verse.[1]

The style of the sung verses might be above the heads of the listeners who would fail to understand them. A certain rich man happened to be fond of a certain educated singing-girl. From time to time, she used to sing him songs of a type that was above his head, since his level of education and artistic approciation was still that of the lower classes.[2]

h) Slave-girls and singing:

The slave-girl as a singer was evidently preferred to male singers. Ibn Buṭlān, as one of his conditions which the perfect song required, emphasised the importance of a slave-girl's being the singer.[3] Al-Tha'ālibī states: "the singing of slave-girls, who are endowed with beauty and acquaintance with the art of flirtation, penetrates deeper into the heart than that of men, even if the latter have a higher quality from an artistic point of view".[4]

Slave-girls who were able to sing and compose melodies were found in great numbers. Even the courts of the Caliphs were crowded with singing-girls "who were treated with unheard-of favours and generosity".[5] On one of his holidays, al-Amīn was

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1. al-Fihrist p.85.
2. al-Tanūkhī i, p.55.
3. Ibn Buṭlān p.385.
4. al-Ghazūlī i, p.258.
5. Farmer p.100.

entertained by a hundred singing-girls who were described as able to compose.[1] Such a great number of singing slave-girls was among a greater number of others who were in the possession of al-Amīn. On a friendly visit to Mūsā ibn Isḥāq al-Azraq, Aḥmad ibn Abī Ṭāhir and Sulaymān were entertained by Mūsā with wine and thirty good singing-girls.[2] Taking advantage of the unconfirmed first day of Ramaḍān, Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī invited Abū 'Īsā to join him. In order to make his invitation more attractive, Ihrāhīm informed him that he had with him right then five skilful singing-girls.[3] Al-Ḥusain ibn al-Ḍaḥḥāk assured al-Ḥasan ibn Rajā', if he accepted his invitation, of the presence of ten singing-girls before drinking and double that number after.[4] When she visited Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mudabbir, 'Arīb was accompanied by a good number of singing-girls who were described as clever.[5]

Some of the slave-girls composed melodies and left many compositions behind. At the top of the list of these slave-girls, 'Arib could be placed. Like some of the popular singers, she was credited with making one thousand compositions.[6]

As they composed songs, so they transmitted them. Like

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1. Ibn al-Athīr v, p.170.
2. al-Aghānī vi, p.157.
3. Ash'ār Awlād al-Khulafā', p.90.
4. al-Aghānī vii, p.197.
5. al-Tanūkhī i, pp.131-33.
6. al-Aghānī xxi, p.63.

trusted transmitters, they were quoted. There is a general statement about Budhl that she was the ablest person to transmit singing.[1] Maṣābīḥ is said to have been the only person who knew and was able to transmit the compositions as well as the singing style of ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbbās.[2] General statements about the unusual ability of some of the slave-girls seems to have been in fashion among writers at that time. Similar to the general statement about Budhl is that of al-Iṣfahānī about Danānīr, in which he states that among transmitters, she was the best, particularly in the classical type of singing.[3] Sufficient to support this claim is the account that ibn Jāmiʿ sang al-Rashīd a certain song about which Danānīr stated on the authority of Fulayḥ that both ibn Surayj and ibn Muḥriz had composed versions of the same song.[4]

As they made and transmitted compositions, so they also wrote about singing and compositions. Some of them were credited with being authors of certain books concerning singing and matters connected with singing. Budhl for example is said to have written a book on singing which included the authorship of all compositions involved. She wrote it at the request of ʿAlī ibn Hishām.[5] Being

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1. Ibid, p.16
2. al-Diyārāt p.66.
3. al-Aghānī xviii, p.36.
4. Ibid v, p.239.
5. Ibid xvii, p.32.

lost in admiration for the contents of this book and grateful for her work, 'Alī ibn Hishām wrote in his letter to Budhl: "You have sent me a great book for which I am unable to thank you".[1] Like Budhl, Danānīr is said to have produced a famous book on singing.[2]

'Arib wrote the whole of her own work of singing and compositions.[3] By the command of al-Mu'tamid 'ala-Allāh, 'Alī ibn Yaḥyā collected the work of 'Arib and found that her total output was a thousand compositions.[4] There is another account concerning the total number of her works that Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm Qurayṣ collected her work from the books of Ibn al-Mu'tazz, Abu l-'Abīs ibn Ḥamdūn plus what he learned from her slave-girl Bid'a. After studying them, he reached the conclusion that the entire work of 'Arīb was one thousand one hundred and twenty five compositions.[5]

Some slave-girls did well in singing and in composing. Like their poetic work, their singing was praised by writers and transmitters. Shājī was among the outstanding figures whose accounts of singing were spoken in terms of admiration.[6]

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1. Ibid, p.34
2. al-Mustazraf p.28.
3. Ibid xxi, p.60.
4. al-Nuwayrī v, p.96.
5. al-Aghānī xxi, p.60.
6. Ibid ix, p.39.

Al-Muʿtaḍid used to entrust her with singing any composition he appreciated.[1] A composition of hers during the reign of al-Muʿtaḍid was even called ghinā'al-Dār (The song of the House).[2] Speaking about a certain singing-girl, Abū Ḥayyān said that she shook Baghdad, and people talked about nothing but her ready wit, her talent and her singing.[3] Bidʿa al-Dārūniyya was credited with skill, elegance and many witty actions. She was described as "the famous songstress of the town".[4] Commenting on the singing of Farīda in some verses, Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Malik said that he never heard finer singing than hers, before or after.[5] It might be relevant to quote Muḥammad ibn Ḥāmid as saying: "We happened to assemble with Isḥāq ibn Nujayḥ. Among those present was his slave-girl Shādin. She was endowed with the skill of playing the lute, with a fine voice, with a good nature and with a sweet face. She sang a certain poem with such a fine voice and in such a beautiful manner that we fainted".[6]

Singing for the slave-girl was not a simple matter. On the contrary, it formed an aspect of the life of both slave-girl and her associate. Her associate would usually be expected to be

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1. al-Nuwayrī v, p.70.
2. Ibid.
3. al-Tawḥīdī ii, p.182.
4. al-Tanūkhī i, p.98.
5. al-Aghānī iv, p.121.
6. al-Maḥāsin wa'l Aḍdād, p.201.

at least among those who understood the language of singing. Such an associate was not as much interested in the slave-girl herself or the pleasure she gave him, as he was interested in her singing. In other words, such an associate sought the company of the slave-girl mainly for her singing. Her beauty or charm was a secondary consideration for him. Even in the available accounts, she is stressed in the description given of her by her associate as a songstress and not as beautiful, for example. On one of their holidays, Ḥammād, Muṭī' ibn Iyās, Yaḥyā ibn Ziyād and Ḥakam al-Wādi asked for the company of Jawhar just because she was a fine songstress.[1] When a good number of the Kuttāb[2] or 'Amr ibn Mas'ada and Aḥmad ibn Yūsuf[3] associated with slave-girls, they did so because they wanted to enjoy their singing in the first place.

On her part, the slave-girl wanted her associate or friend to understand and appreciate singing. She would stipulate that her friend should know singing. Accordingly, her friend, if he was fond of her and did not know singing, would learn it to please her. It is said that Nabīh al-Kūfī, because he was fond of a certain slave-girl learned singing just to please her.[4] The slave-girl wanted this in her friend, probably because singing

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1. al-Aghānī xiii, p.322.
2. al-Tawḥīdī ii, p.56.
3. 'Awwād, Nuṣūṣ Ḍā'ia Min kitāb al-Wuzarā' W'l-Kuttāb, p.48.
4. al-Aghānī v, p.174.

had some significance for her as the language through which they could express what they wanted or felt so that others would not be able to understand them. When Muḥammad ibn Ḥāmid wanted a kiss from ʿArīb, ʿArīb, because she could not explain her answer in words, sang him a song indicative of what she wanted to express.[1] Both Mukhāriq and the slave-girl of whom he was fond, in the presence of Umm Jaʿfar, expressed what they felt for each other through two significant songs.[2] According to these accounts, it might be thought that expressing what the slave-girl and her friend wanted or felt through singing was among the elegant customs slave-girls introduced to ʿAbbāsid society.

There seemed to be musical ensembles used for the purpose of entertainment. These bands were composed of famous slave-girls and the junior slave-girls attached to them. ʿArīb,[3] Shāriya[4] and Barbar[5] had their own bands. They used to bring them when they were invited or visited friends. When she visited al-Faḍl ibn al-ʿAbbās, ʿArīb was accompanied by some of her slave-girls, who used to sing songs or to play music.[6] Bidʿa and Tuḥfa were the most distinguished songstresses of ʿArīb. She depended

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1. Ibid xxi, p.79.
2. Ibid xviii, p.286.
3. al-Tanūkhī i, pp.132-33.
4. al-Diyārāt p.153.
5. al-Aghānī xiii, p.313.
6. Ibid xxi, p.89.

on them, especially when she gave up singing. She taught them what she wanted and let them sing it, as happened when she visited Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mudabbir, who asked her to sing him a suitable song.[1] In some of the soirées which al-Mutawakkil used to hold for singing, Shāriya used to sttend them while accompanied by a good number of her songstresses.[2]

Such bands were mostly founded for a professional purpose. They used to be hired or invited so as to provide entertainment. Consequently, they were paid or rewarded. Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mudabbir, for example, hated to let 'Arīb and her songstresses go away empty-handed, but rewarded them and presented them with suitable gifts, even though he had neither invited them on one hand nor was in a good financial condition on the other. He asked his slave-girls to help him in making this reward, and they provided him with some jewels.[3]

In this context, it is a mistake to neglect mentioning something about the slave-girls of al-Ḥārith ibn Buskhannar. They were popular and widely enjoyed. They were taught by famous singers such as 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abbās al-Rabī'ī.[4] Isḥāq al-Mūṣilī gave them credit and depended on them in teaching his slave-girls. On a certain occasion, Mukhāriq sang Isḥāq a certain

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1. al-Tanūkhī i, pp.132-33.
2. al-Diyārāt, p.104.
3. al-Tanūkhī i, p.133.
4. al-Aghānī xix, p.168.

song. Mukhāriq happened to be confused and failed to sing it properly. Ishāq thereupon told him that he had deteriorated and advised him to go to the old slave-girls of ibn Buskhanner in order to improve.[1]

Some of the slave-girls had unique ability not only to compose and sing but also to absorb what the talents of famous singers had produced. Both Danānīr and Rayyiq are distinguished examples in this matter. In addition to the fact that Danānīr learned from great singers such as Fulayh, Ibrāhīm al-Mūsilī, ibn Jāmiʿ and Ishāq,[2] she was credited with being one of the best people in looks, wit and in singing as well as in poetry.[3] People were astonished at her ability to copy Ibrāhīm al-Mūsilī so accurately that the difference between the way in which both sang could not be noticed.[4] Ibrāhīm himself acknowledged this and said to Yahyā al-Barmakī: "You will not miss me as long as Danānīr is alive."[5]

As for Rayyiq, she was able to learn all the compositions of Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī by heart. Ibrāhīm himself confirmed this. While on his death-bed, he was advised by some of his visitors to repent and burn his works. He nodded and said:

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1. Ibid xxiii, p.53.
2. Ibid xviii, p.14.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid, p.17.
5. Ibid.

"You foolish people, suppose I did so, what am I going to do with Rayyiq? She knows it all!"[1]

Since ʿArīb and Shāriya can be regarded as the most distinguished songstresses in the ʿAbbāsid period, it is worth while throwing some light on some of their activities connected with singing and the matters of singing. ʿArīb occupies a large place in al-Aghānī. So many accounts concerning her talent and position are available. Al-Iṣfahānī wrote about her like a legendary personality. Isḥāq al-Mūṣilī is quoted as saying: "In playing music, making compositions, looks and spirit, participating in a conversation, giving a clever repartee and playing chess and backgammon, no woman could be better than ʿArīb."[2]

It is worth mentioning the first lines in which al-Iṣfahānī included the description of ʿArīb. It goes as follows: "She was a fine songstress, a poetess of good quality. She wrote a beautiful hand. Her manner in talking was fine. She was outstanding in fineness, beauty and wit, as also in making her compositions mutoan, in her knowledge of melodies and acquaintance with poetry and literature. She had no equal among her like, after the Ḥijāzī slave-songstresses such as Jāmila, ʿAzza and Sallāma al-Zarqā, she had more privileges than we have mentioned."[3]

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1. Ibid x, pp.132-3.
2. Ibid xxxi, p.58
3. Ibid, p.58

Like other popular singers, 'Arīb's work was studied and spoken of. It was appreciated on one hand and criticised on the other. The well-known singer Jaḥẓa argued with Abu l-'Abbās ibn Ḥamdūn over the quality of the work of 'Arīb. Although Ibn Ḥamdūn thought that some of her compositions lacked the necessary depth which music requires, both agreed that 'Arīb left no woman equal to her in relation to singing and compositions.[1]

In order to prove her talent, 'Arīb used to make settings of the same poetry as others had used. Her compositions, as said, would appear better and more accurate. The story about her and al-Wāthiq, the musician-Caliph, cannot be ignored in such a connexion. It is said that she used to set to music the same poetry al-Wāthiq had set and that hers were better. Al-Iṣfahānī gives two poems of which both al-Wāṯhiq and 'Arīb made settings, as an example.[2]

As she used her talent in singing and making compositions, 'Arīb also used it in understanding singing and in criticising compositions. The singer Ibn Hishām was among those who did not, for one reason or another, merit the satisfaction of 'Arīb. So she bitterly criticised him. When asked to sing, Ibn Hishām claimed that he had given up the profession of singing. No sooner had 'Arīb heard him than she said to him: "You have done well to give up singing, for your singing is meaningless, imprecise

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1. Ibid pp.93-4.

2. Ibid xxi, p.86.

(ghair mutoan) and unexciting."[1]

Although this account suggests that 'Arīb was annoyed with Ibn Hishām and that her criticism was general, her criticism in a way might win admiration, if not for its content, at least for her quick repartee and for reducing her rival Ibn Hishām to silence.

Like 'Arīb, Shāriya was popular and highly praised. Shāriya was more popular in singing than composing or criticising singing, in which 'Arīb was popular. There are claims concerning the singing as well as the accomplishment of Shāriya such as that she was the best singer from the death of al-Mu'taṣim until the end of the caliphate of al-Wāthiq.[2] According to al-Iṣfahānī, Shāriya was able to sing better than any other singer or songstress. He mentions that Ḥamdūn ibn Ismā'īl visited Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī (Shāriya's owner). Ibrāhīm asked him whether he would like to listen to the best singing that he had ever heard; Ḥamdūn accepted. Then Shāriya was ordered to present and sing a certain song. Describing the effect of her singing, Ḥamdūn said that he had never heard such singing before.[3]

The qāḍī Sahl al-Aḥwal censured Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī for not selling Shāriya to al-Mu'tazz, who offered 70,000 dīnārs as a price for her. In order to show Sahl that Shāriya was worth

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1. Ibid, p.63.
2. al-Nuwayrī v, p.86.
3. al-Aghānī xv, p.324.

more than 70,000 dīnārs, Ibrāhīm ordered her to sing in front of Sahl who, according to what he stated about the effect of her singing upon him, lost consciousness when Shāriya sang a certain poem. Noticing the effect of her singing on Sahl, Ibrāhīm said: "This is Shāriya whom you wanted me to sell. By Allāh, I would not sell even this moment for 70,000 dīnārs."[1] One of her performances took place in the presence of 'Ubayd Allāh ibn Ṭāhir and under the patronage of al-Mu'tazz bi-Allāh. This was the first time 'Ubayd Allāh had heard Shāriya. He approved of her and was astonished with her accuracy.[2]

'Arīb and Shāriya engaged in a sort of competition in singing and the works of singers. This competition led them to arguments for which they prepared. These arguments motivated them to learn things that they did not know before and to improve their knowledge. Shāriya was not able to play the lute until the competition between her and 'Arīb reached its climax. Because of the fact that 'Arīb, who was among the best lute-players,[3] had this advantage over Shāriya, the latter was forced to learn how to play the lute so as to stand on an equal footing with the former.[4]

By virtue of these talents, these two slave-girls

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1. Ibid, p.325.
2. al-Nuwayrī v, p.86.
3. al-Aghānī xxi, p.59.
4. Ibid xv, p.325.

succeeded in creating wide fame and vast popularity for themselves. Both of them had supporters and admirers. Ya'qūb ibn Bayān was credited with saying: "the people of Sāmarrā were divided over 'Arīb and Shāriya. The supporters of 'Arīb did not agree with those of Shāriya and vice versa. Abul-Ṣaqr was among the supporters of 'Arīb. On a certain occasion, 'Alī ibn al-Ḥusain (who was probably a supporter of Shāriya) invited 'Arīb and her slave-girls and, at the same time, invited abul-Ṣaqr. No sooner did Shāriya know this than she sent her slave-girls to them and ordered them to sing a poem which included an indirect censure of 'Alī for inviting 'Arīb. 'Alī understood it and said: "I shall not do it again."[1]

Speaking of the division of people over Shāriya and 'Arīb, al-Iṣfahānī said that people of the ẓurf were divided into two parties. Those who were for 'Arīb were called 'Arībiyyīn, and those for Shāriya, Shāriyyīn. Each party did its utmost for its favourite, especially as concerned encouragement and suggestion.[2]

Both 'Arīb and Shāriya had slave-girls through whom they competed. In other words, when Shāriya and 'Arīb, in front of their supporters, met to sing what they had learned or produced, they usually used their slave-girls. 'Arīb and Shāriya used to make up the composition and teach it to their slaves to sing it.

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1. al-Nuwayrī v, p.87
2. al-Aghānī kiv, p.203.

Typical of this was the event in which 'Irfān represented Shāriya while Bid'a represented 'Arīb.[1]

Singing alone was not the only subject of competition between 'Arīb and Shāriya. The discussion of singing and compositions as well as singers was among the subjects about which they used to argue. In one of their competitions, Shāriya ordered her slave-girl 'Irfān to sing a certain song. 'Arīb asked Shāriya of the actual composer of this song. Shāriya answered: "I made it during the life of my master Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī. I sang it to him and he appreciated it. I also sang it to Isḥāq and others and they liked it." Recognising this allegation of Shāriya as false, 'Arīb maintained silence for a while. Afterwards, 'Arīb asked Abū 'Īsā to bring the singer 'Ath'ath. 'Ath'ath came, made himself comfortable and had a drink. Then 'Arīb asked him whether he still remembered the song which Zubayr ibn Daḥmān had sung one day in his presence. Affirming that he did, he proceeded to sing the same song which 'Irfān had sung and which Shāriya claimed she had composed. Pleased with her triumph over her rival Shāriya, 'Arīb laughed. Shāriya, her slave-girls and her supporters were most disconcerted.[2]

Both Shāriya and 'Arīb were controversial figures. The discussion of their works constituted a good subject and kept many singers and writers busy. An example of this is the discussion

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1. Ibid.

2. Ibid xiv, p.203.

which took place between Rayyiq and Khashf about Shāriya and ʿArīb. Rayyiq held the opinion that Shāriya was better than ʿArīb in singing, while Khashf believed the opposite. After a long discussion, they came to the decision that ʿArīb's output was larger, while Shāriya's was better and more precise.[1]

As she argued with Shāriya about singing and the works of singers, so did ʿArīb with others. Not only on ordinary occasions or in common places did she do this, but in front of important figures. Al-Mutawakkil himself witnessed her discussion, and his palace echoed with her fine tones, arguing or discussing the compositions of famous singers.[2]

Khashf al-Wāḍiḥiyya was a bitter rival of ʿArīb. When she sang a certain song, Khashf was described by al-Hishāmī as the person who sang it better than anybody else.[3] In spite of this, she could not gain so much popularity as ʿArīb. There was a very heated argument between ʿArīb and Khashf over the number of the compositions of ʿUlayya. Khashf put it at seventy three compositions, while ʿArīb said it was only seventy two. Al-Mutawakkil, who chaired this debate, ordered them to sing them. They went on up to the seventy second, and could not remember a seventy third.[4]

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1. Ibid iv, p.117.
2. Ibid x, p.183.
3. Ibid vi, p.245.
4. Ibid x, p.183.

That ʿArīb or Khashf lost or won the competition is not so important as that such a competition shows the fact that some of the slave-girls were concerned about singing and were aware of compositions and the production of singers.

First-class singers associated with slave-girls. They taught them, supervised them on one hand and some of them learned from them on the other. The accounts of the association of Ibrāhīm al-Mūṣilī with Danānīr might be worthy of consideration. Danānīr was a slave-girl of Yaḥyā ibn Khālid,[1] who was keen to see her a great songstress and therefore he did his best, attracting Ibrāhīm al-Mūṣilī by rewarding him to teach and direct her. In this permanent association of Ibrāhīm with Danānīr, he used to call him father. Danānīr was no hopeless disciple, and Ibrāhīm was no useless teacher. She did most things precisely, and Ibrāhīm proved a successful teacher. He was very proud of his disciple Danānīr. Accordingly, he allowed himself to make the serious statement that not many first-class singers were able to produce work as good as that of Danānīr. On some occasions, Ibrāhīm declared that he asked Danānīr to repeat some of her songs in order to discover a mistake or weakness in them and "to find an excuse to interfere and correct mistakes or give directions that might be attributed to him", but he could not find any.[2]

Danānīr possessed the gift not only of singing and

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1. Ibid x, p.183.

2. Ibid xviii, p.15.

composing melodies but also of imitating singers. ʿUmar ibn Shabba was credited with saying that Danānīr learned from Ibrāhīm al-Mūṣilī so that she was able to sing his songs exactly as he did, and nobody could notice the difference between them. For this reason, Ibrāhīm himself, as has already been noted, told Yaḥyā ibn Khālid that he (Ibrāhīm) would not be missed while Danānīr was alive.[1]

As Danānīr with Ibrāhīm al-Mūṣilī, Khulayda al-Makkiyya was a close associate of Ibn Jāmiʿ. He admired her singing, and it was said that Ibn Jāmiʿ was never seen more excited with singing than with that of Khulayda.[2]

Danānīr was an ambitious girl. Although Ibrāhīm devoted a great part of his time as well as his attention to teaching and supervising her, she was not content with grasping only what he taught her. She wanted to know more about the songs and the compositions produced by other talents. She learned from first-class singers such as Fulayḥ, Ibn Jāmiʿ and Isḥāq al-Mūṣilī.[3] Ibn Jāmiʿ, who was regarded as among the great singers of the ʿAbbāsid period,[4] was among those who had an association with Danānīr. He and the father of the singer Ibn al-Makkī used to compete and argue with Danānīr. Quite often she won the argument.[5] Any slave-

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1. Ibid, p.17.
2. Ibid xv, p.134.
3. Ibid xviii, p.14.
4. Ibn Kathīr x, p.207.
5. al-Aghānī xviii, p.14.

girl whose associates were Ibrāhīm al-Mūṣilī and Ibn Jāmiʿ, provided she was endowed with an unusual talent, was naturally expected to be an excellent songstress.

Slave-girls were not always merely machines for reproducing singing taught to them. Some of them composed and produced original things connected with singing on one hand, and some of the famous singers learned or borrowed from them on the other. Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥārith ibn Buskhannar learned a good song from the slave-girl whom he loved.[1] Ibn Jāmiʿ told how he learned a difficult and amusing song for which he was handsomely rewarded, from a pale little slave-girl in Medina.[2]

Muttayyam, whom ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbbās al-Rabīʿī counted among the three best composers,[3] produced two great compositions. Both the celebrated singers, Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī and Isḥāq al-Mūṣilī listened to them and appreciated them, and both of them wanted and attempted to learn them and to attribute them to themselves. It is said that Mutayyam sang for al-Muʿtaṣim in the presence of Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī her famous song li-Zaynab. Ibrāhīm very much admired it and asked her to repeat it. Recognising that the intention of Ibrāhīm was to learn it, Mutayyam told al-Muʿtaṣim, who ordered her not to repeat it, of Ibrāhīm's intention. One day while on his way from a soirée of al-Muʿtaṣim,

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1. Ibid xii, p.45.
2. Ibid, pp.292-93.
3. Ibid vii, p.281.

Ibrāhīm accidentally heard Mutayyam teaching the same song to the slave-girls of ʿAlī ibn Hishām. Ibrāhīm listened very carefully and managed to learn it.[1]

Isḥāq was captivated by her song Falā zilna ḥasrā. He was able to learn it after many repetitions from her. Isḥāq bargained over this song, threatening the master of Mutayyam ʿAlī ibn Hishām that he would attribute it to himself. Isḥāq succeeded in persuading ʿAlī of the fact that people would believe him rather than believing Mutayyam. Isḥāq offered a concession that he would accept the grey horse of ʿAlī as a compensation for the song. Thinking that the song was more valuable than his favourite grey horse, ʿAlī accepted Isḥāq's offer.[2]

Some of the first-class singers admired some of the slave-girls and testified that these were equal to themselves. Isḥāq al-Mūṣilī, for example, listened to Mutayyam singing a certain poem and out of admiration he said to her: "You are me and who am I?" Isḥāq meant that she was equal to him.[3]

Some singers admitted that some of the slave-girls were more talented than they. For this, they accorded them a higher class than that of their own. Asked about the best singers contemporary with him, ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbbās al-Rabīʿī answered: "Isḥāq, ʿUllawayh, Mutayyam and myself". Some wondered how ʿAbd

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1. Ibid, p.282.
2. Ibid, p.283.
3. Ibid, p.283.

Allāh could give preference to the slave-girl Mutayyam over himself. Admitting the fact that Mutayyam was better then he, ʿAbd Allāh said: "How can I ever produce such a great song as Mutayyam's Falā zilna ḥasrā?"[1]

ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbbās had a slave-girl friend who was very talented in singing and knowing singing. ʿAbd Allāh used to consult her about his compositions before publishing them. He produced two popular songs from settings of poems by al-ʿArjī. In order to make sure that they were worthy of wider publication, he showed them to his slave-girl friend and asked her to give her comment on them. ʿAbd Allāh was happy when she approved their originality.[2]

Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī was never more attracted by any singing than that of a certain slave-girl, who knew how to select the poetry of her songs. She sang Ibrāhīm three songs. Telling of the effect of the first song upon him, Ibrāhīm says: "She aroused my feelings and because of her fine singing and her skill, I was highly entertained". Commenting on the second, he says: "I shouted. I was so overcome by astonishment that I failed to exercise self-control and patience". As for the third, he says: "By Allāh, I envied her for her talent, for her knowledge of singing and for her ability to choose the content of this poetry."[3]

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1. Ibid, p.281.
2. Ibid xix, p.167.
3. al-Masʿūdī iii, p.424.

Poets listened to slave-girls and admired them. As they described their physical beauty, they also described their singing. Bashshār was among those poets who listened to their singing and described it. In a certain poem he writes:

و صفراء مثل الخيزرانة لم تعش ببؤس و لم تركب مطية راعي
إذا قلدت أطرافها العود زلزلت قلوبا دعاها للوساوس داعي
يروحون من تغريدها و حديثها نشاوى و ما تسقيهم بصواع

"A tawny girl, like a bamboo cane, who has never lived in misery nor ridden on a camel, when she takes up the lute she causes to tremble hearts already tempted to madness; they are intoxicated by her singing and her converse, without her offering them a drop to drink."[1]

Ibn al-Rūmī found her lute the centre of attraction as far as his poetic talent was concerned. He listened to its tunes and was aroused. Then he recorded his reaction in these following verses: "If one stricken by crisis listened to it, he would find comfort for his troubled heart." Ibn al-Rūmī wonders "How it amuses and arouses sad feelings at the same time. Sad and happy signs are discerned in the person who listens to it."[2]

Slave-girls not only learned singing from others or sang songs but they also taught singing to others. Such names as ʿUbayda, Budhl, ʿĀtika bint Shahda and Zarqā ibn Rāmīn are associated not only with singing but also with teaching it.

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1. Bashshār, dīwān, p.57.
2. al-ʿAqqād, p.297.

'Ubayda was very popular and her work was highly praised. She excelled in playing the ṭunbūr, and for this she was called 'Ubayda the Ṭunbūriyya.[1] Isḥāq al-Mūṣilī, who was intolerant of other singers' works,[2] could not conceal his appreciation of 'Ubayda as far as the ṭunbūr was concerned. He stated: "The ṭunbūr without 'Ubayda is complete nonsense".[3] Jaḥẓa mentioned her in his book Al-ṭunbūriyyīn Wa'l-Ṭunbūriyyāt and stated that no other woman in the world could be greater than her in playing the ṭunbūr. 'Ubayda was distinguished for teaching some of the singers or influencing them. Her professorship was recognised by some singers.[4] Al-Ustādha was another title given to 'Ubayda the Ṭunbūrist.[5] Ṭunbūriyyūn respected her, and consequently, on some occasions, refused to begin singing before her. It is said that al-Masdūd, who was asked to sing first, at a certain gathering of the ṭunbūriyyūn, said: "No, by God, I will not start singing before 'Ubayda. She is the ustādha.[6]

'Ātika bint Shahda was a teacher of some of the famous singers. Ibrāhīm al-Mūṣilī, his son Isḥāq and Mukhāriq were, in

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1. al-Aghānī xxii, p.208.
2. Ibid xxi, p.62.
3. al-Aghānī xxii, p.214.
4. Ibid, p.207
5. Ibid, p.209.
6. Ibid.

one way or another, indebted to 'Ātika. Speaking of 'Ātika, Ibrāhīm al-Mūṣilī said: "She was the best lute-player I have ever seen. I used to visit her every day to play the lute with her for seven years." Isḥāq al-Mūṣilī, who testified that she was among the best in singing and in transmitting songs,[1] admitted that he had learned from her. Concerning the literary and religious education of Isḥāq, he was taught by some of the great teachers such as al-Kisā'ī, al-Farrā' and Ibn Ghazāla. As for his education in singing and music, he was taught by Manṣūr Zalzal and 'Ātika. Giving a brief statement about his education and his teachers, Isḥāq says: "For a part of my life, I used to go in the early morning to the muḥaddithūn to learn Ḥadīth. After that, I would go to al-Kisā'ī or al-Farrā'. In addition, I would go sometimes to Ibn Ghazāla to study the Qur'ān. Then I would go to Manṣūr Salzal to play music with him." Isḥāq ended his list of his daily activities with "going to 'Ātika bint Shahda to learn singing".[2]

'Ātika bought Mukhāriq and taught him how to play the lute and some singing and sold him to the family of al-Zubayr.[3] Ibn Jāmi', who was regarded as among the best singers in the history of Arabian singing,[4] recognised 'Ātika's talent as well as

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1. Ibid vi, p.247.
2. al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, vi, p.340.
3. al-Aghānī vi, p.259.
4. Ibn Kathīr x, p.207.

her ability to criticise singing. For this, Ibn Jāmi' tried to avoid her criticism by making great use of tarjī'. She used to say to him: "Where are you! come back to singing and give up madness."[1]

Both Zarqā' of Ibn Rāmīn and Budhl taught singing to others. Among those who were taught by Budhl was the distinguished slave-girl Danānīr. It is said that Danānīr depended largely on what was taught to her by Budhl and others, especially Ibrāhīm al-Mūṣilī, Ibn Jāmi' and Isḥāq.[2] Zarqā' seems to have been a popular teacher in Medina. Her school was crowded with slave-girls who used to go there in order to learn singing.[3]

As far as teaching singing to slave-girls is concerned, the slave-girls of al-Ḥārith ibn Buskhannar were popular. They were reliable in correcting singing. Isḥāq al-Mūṣilī recognised their accomplishment. He depended on them for correcting the singing of his slave-girls or for consulting them about confusing songs. Because he appreciated them, Isḥāq advised Mukhāriq, who became confused when singing a certain song, to go to them in order to have some of his errors corrected. (yuqawwimna awadah).[4]

It seems it was not only 'Ātika or Budhl who taught singing to singers or to slave-girls; every famous slave-girl did

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1. al-Aghānī xviii, p.259.
2. Ibid, p.14.
3. Ibid iii, p.250.
4. Ibid xxiii, p.53

so. Famous slave-girls such as 'Arīb and Shāriya were always accompanied by other junior slave-girls, who were described as 'Arīb's slave-girls,[1] or Shāriya's.[2] Now it is known that both Shāriya and 'Arīb themselves were slaves; so they would not be entitled to own slaves. It is most likely that these slave-girls who used to accompany 'Arīb and Shāriya were not their slave-girls but their students. In other words, these slave-girls were put under the supervision or the direction of 'Arīb and Shāriya.Their accompanying 'Arīb and Shāriya was a sort of a practical lesson for them. This can be supported by the fact that such associate slave-girls were ordered to sing by 'Arīb and Shāriya mainly on friendly visits and rarely on those of a formal nature. 'Arīb paid a friendly visit to her old friend Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mudabbir. In order to recall some good memories of the past on one hand and to double the pleasure derived from being together on the other, Ibrāhīm suggested to 'Arīb that she sing a certain poem which he had just composed. 'Arīb said: "If you insist, Bid'a and Tuḥfa (her associate slave-girls) will sing it". Following some instructions from 'Arīb, Bid'a and Tuḥfa sang it.[3]

The knowledge as well as the expertise of some of the slave-girls reached such a high degree that they were regarded as an authority in the matter of singing. In order to settle their

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1. al-Diyārāt, p.153.
2. al-Nuwayrī v, p.87.
3. al-Tanūkhī i, pp.131-33.

arguments, especially over singing, people turned to them and accepted their judgment. It was not only the slave-girls of al-Ḥārith ibn Buskhannar who were regarded as an authority and to whom Isḥāq al-Mūṣilī quite often turned and whose opinion he respected, especially when any of his slave-girls was confused about any song.[1] But it was also ʿArīb whose judgment on a certain dispute was sought. It is said that al-Ma'mūn argued with Abū ʿAlī over a certain song. Al-Ma'mūn looked for ʿArīb to be the judge. In spite of ʿArīb's being ill with a fever, she came to settle the argument.[2] However, it is difficult to accept that a sick slave-girl would be sent for especially to act as judge, since al-Ma'mūn was not short of singers who were capable of settling the argument, nor was it difficult for him to find them at any time he wanted. Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī, for example, or Isḥāq, would be available.

Assuming that this account has any foundation, it is possible that al-Ma'mūn chose ʿArīb, not because she was the only available singer who was able to give a correct and reliable view, but probably because this song had something private or personal to do with her or because this song pertained to a private matter between al-Ma'mūn and ʿArīb. This is clear from these two following notes:

1. ʿArīb was among the slave-girls of al-Ma'mūn who found favour

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1. al-Aghānī xxiii, p.53.
2. Ibid xxi, p.88.

with him.[1] Without any doubt, they shared some secrets.[2]

2. The song itself was not mentioned. Nor was anything said about it. It seems to have been deliberately veiled in secrecy.

Among the most interesting aspects of the accounts of the accomplishments of some of the slave-girls in the field of singing are some incredible things attributed to Budhl. It was not enough that she was described as "the teacher of every accomplished singer and songstress",[3] or that she was one of the best people of her type.[4] She herself claimed that she was able to transmit thirty thousand compositions. She forgot half of them as a result of neglecting them.[5] Some of the singers who were contemporary with her considered the ability to know such a tremendous amount of compositions beyond belief and too much for any slave-girl's memory to absorb. Zarzūr al-Kabīr was surprised when this claim was mentioned in front of him and said: "This prostitute is a liar".[6] ʿAlī ibn Hishām, who had some special relationship with Budhl,[7] was credited with saying: "There cannot

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1. al-Aghānī xxi, p.91.
2. Ibid, p.82.
3. al-Nuwayrī v, p.89.
4. al-Aghānī xvii, p.32.
5. Ibid, p.35.
6. Ibid.
7. al-Nuwayrī v, p.90.

be more than four thousand compositions in the world".[1]

The most incredible things about Budhl were the stories about her and both Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī and Isḥāq al-Muṣilī.. The story concerning the former goes: "Budhl heard that Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī had claimed that he could do without her. Then she went to him and asked him to lend her a lute. In a simple style, following one tune and using one finger, she sang a hundred songs of which Ibrāhīm recognised none. She left him and did not enter his house until he requested her to visit him again."[2]

It cannot be imagined that Ibrāhīm, who was regarded as one of the few most outstanding figures in the history of singing, would fail to recognize a single song among one hundred songs known to any slave-girl at this time. It is possible he failed to recognize one or two songs, but not a hundred.

Similar is the story concerning Isḥāq al-Mūṣilī: Isḥāq differed with her on the authorship of a certain song. In order to defend her opinion, in the presence of al-Ma'mūn she sang three songs and challenged Isḥāq to name their actual composer. Isḥāq failed to name him. Then she said to al-Ma'mūn: "O Commander of the Faithful, by God, I learned them from his father, and since he does not know the songs of his father how can he be expected to know others?"[3] Isḥāq, who was regarded not merely as a first-

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1. al-Aghānī vii, p.34.
2. al-Nuwayrī v, p.90.
3. al-Aghānī xvii, p.35.

class singer but "the father, the teacher, and having no equal or similar as far as singing is concerned",[1] cannot be compared with a slave-girl such as Budhl. It is unfair to accept that Budhl was able to know three of the songs of Ishāq's father and that Ishāq did not know any of them, for he was an authority on the work of his father. He estimated the total number of songs and compositions by his father as nine hundred songs. He studied them and classified them by their quality as follows: "Three hundred were wonderful, and they brought him into such a position that he surpassed all singers. Three hundred were of a good quality and other singers succeeded in sharing with him this good quality. As for the remaining three hundred, they were just amusing and not of a high quality as far as singing is concerned." Ishāq dropped these from the work of his father and used to put his father's entire output at some six hundred songs.[2]

However, both stories, regardless of the truth or the falsehood of their entire contents, suggest that Budhl was talented and accomplished in singing and in the knowledge of compositions.

Al-Nawā'ih:

Some slave-girls used to sing mostly on occasions of lamentation for the dead. They bewailed them and sang poetry composed to praise them or to encourage any concerned in the sad occasion of the death not to forget them or to take revenge on

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1. al-Aghānī v, p.242.
2. Ibid, p.171.

their killers. This kind of songstress was called nā'iḥa.

This kind of singing (nawḥ or niyāḥa) was in practice among the Arabs in pre-Islamic times. Women, whether free or slaves, used to gather in the wake of the event of death or murder in order to sing sad songs and weep, especially for men of important positions in the tribe. The death of the chief of Taghlib, Kulayb ibn Rabī'a, for which the women of his tribe gathered to lament this sad occasion,[1] can be given as an example. In his poetry, Abū Ḍhu'ayb describes a scene in which some women, after hearing the shocking news of the death of a generous man, went out to bewail him.[2] After the Battle of Badr where Quraysh suffered a shattering defeat, the women of this tribe in Mecca gathered and bewailed their dead.[3]

(Nawḥ) was prohibited by Islam,[4] which regarded its practice as a great sin on a level with fornication, betrayal and theft. When a number of women of the unbelievers came to Muḥammad to declare their conversion to Islam, Muḥammad ordered them to swear to avoid theft, fornication[5] and, according to Umm 'Atiyya who was among these women, al-niyāḥa.[6]

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1. al-Aghānī v,p.53.
2. Ibn Manẓūr, Lisān al-'Arab iii, p.467.
3. Ibn al-Athīr ii, p.92.
4. al-Imām Zayd, Musnad, p.175.
5. Ibn al-Athīr ii, p.171.
6. al-Bukhārī, Ṣaḥīḥ ii, p.106.

In spite of this, Islam, if it partly succeeded in reducing the practice of the custom of niyāḥa, could not completely put an end to it. It continued in the hands of some slave-girls, who gave it a professional shape in the ʿAbbāsid period. It seems that there were groups of slave-girls in particular, who were trained or taught to play the role of nawāʾiḥ.[1] They were professionals and hired or brought to take part in bewailing the dead. al-Iṣfahānī mentions that al-nawāʾiḥ came when ʿAlī ibn Hishām died and that some of the slave-girls sang a certain sad song by Mutayyam.[2]

Mutayyam al-Hāshimiyya might be regarded as among the best nawāʾiḥ. A certain slave-girl was credited with saying, when a certain sad song of Mutayyam came to her ears: "May Allāh forgive you Mutayyam! You were excellent in the happy seasons, and so are you on occasions of misfortune."[3]

Mutayyam was not alone in being a popular nāʾiḥa. Many slave-girls shared with her this type of singing. The slave-girl of Abī Tammām, Ḥubaba, was described by Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī as a nāʾiḥa who had no equal and of whose nawḥ the people of Iraq were very fond.[4]

It is not certain whether al-nawḥ in the ʿAbbāsid period

1. al-Aghānī vii, p.290.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. al-Tawḥīdī ii, p.181.

in its professional context was confined only to slave-girls, as singing was. It is possible that some of the free women worked as nawā'iḥ and, like slave-girls, were hired or brought to sing on the occasions of bewailing the dead. Some cases are recorded which give evidence to justify this suggestion. It is said for example that Abu l-ʿAtāhiyya in his youth was fond of a free woman who used to bewail the dead, called Suʿdā, and that he wrote some poetry about her.[1] Isḥāq al-Mūṣilī was credited with saying that Umm Jaʿfar assembled the daughters of the Caliphs as well as of the Banū Hāshim, just after al-Rashīd's death, to bewail this sad event. Isḥāq added that Umm Jaʿfar ordered him to teach Kunayza a suitable song and that he taught her the poem of Sallāma which she sang in bewailing her master Yazīd II.[2]

Finally, in view of all this, two conclusions can be reached:

First: Slave-girls did not introduce anything particularly new into music, nor did they make any fundamental change as far as the history of Arabian singing is concerned. But they mostly imitated first-class singers or repeated their songs and compositions.

Second: It cannot be denied that the history of ʿAbbāsid music is indebted to slave-girls at least for preserving and spreading singing and above all effectively participating in creating the right atmosphere whereby the general enthusiasm for singing was encouraged and increased.

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1. al-Aghānī iv, p.26.
2. Ibid viii, p.351.

5. The literary role

It appears that the slave-girls of 'Abbāsid society played a noticeable literary role. Slave-girls, as will be seen later, dominated 'Abbāsid society and played a very important social role. And as the contemporary social background is one of the chief influences on literature, slave-girls affected the course of the 'Abbāsid literature in many ways.

In the Jāhiliyya period as well as the Umayyad, the poet used to begin his poem with some verses about the free woman, her figure and her beauty, ignoring the slave-girl except on very rare occasions.[1] But in the 'Abbāsid period, the poet invariably started his poem by mentioning the slave-girl, her beauty, her attractive way of talking, her clothes and her coquetry.[2] The replacement of reference to free women like Laylā and Salmā, by reference to slave-girls became a rule that every 'Abbāsid poet was to follow.

Abū Nuwās began one of his poems by ridiculing those who began with mentioning free women in their poetry. He said "Do not weep over Laylā and do not be captivated by Hind".[3] Al-Mutawakkil ordered Marwān al-Ṣaghīr to compose a poem in which he was to avoid mentioning Asmā' and Laylā.[4]

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1. Ṭarafa, dīwān, pp.30-1.
2. Ṣarī' al-Ghawānī, dīwān, p.242.
3. Ibn Qutayba, al-Ashriba, p.44.
4. Mashriq, no.50, p.185.

The mention of slave-girls at the beginning of a poem was evidently one of the literary tastes of 'Abbāsid society. So no wonder Ibn Qutayba, one of the great literary critics of that age, regarded composing verses of poetry in praise of a slave-girl or in the description of a glass as the highest literary aim for the poets of his time.[1]

It seems that the poets of the 'Abbāsid period competed in writing poetry about slave-girls. Al-Aghānī refers to this indirectly in stating that al-'Abbās ibn al-Aḥnaf in composing his poetry about Fawz imitated Abu l-Atāhiyya in his poetry about 'Utba.[2] It appears that amatory poetry about the slave-girl became a literary custom or even an independent genre.

The custom of composing poetry about slave-girls was not a monopoly of the poets of the first class only or the professional poets. Every one in 'Abbāsid society who could compose poetry, good or bad, composed about slave-girls or at least made mention of them.

The Caliphs al-Mahdī,[3] al-Rashīd[4] and al-Ma'mūn[5] wrote poetry about their slave-girls. Talking of al-Rashīd, al-Diyārāt states that most of his poetry was written about slave-girls[6]. One

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1. Ibn Qutayba, Adab al-Kātib, p.2.
2. Al-Aghānī xvii, p.25.
3. al-'Iqd vi, p.406.
4. al-Diyārāt p.266.
5. al-Āmālī i, pp.225-26.
6. al-Diyārāt, p.266.

of the most famous and widespread poems throughout the world of Arabic literature is al-Rashīd's poem about his three slave-girls.[1] Even the Caliph al-Mu'taṣim, whose poetical talent was not renowned, was credited with composing a poem about one of his slave-girls.[2]

There is good reason to suspect the authenticity of some of the poems attributed to some Caliphs, especially if it is taken into account the likelihood that some famous poets composed them on behalf of the Caliphs, as did al-Buḥturī for example,[3] and the poems were then attributed to the Caliphs themselves because of confusion in the narration or because it was more attractive to attribute them to the Caliphs rather than to their real authors. Thus there is a statement in al-Aghānī about the famous poem attributed to al-Rashīd: "It is said that al-'Abbās ibn al-Aḥnaf composed this poem on behalf of al-Rashīd".[4]

The nobles such as Abū Dulaf[5] and ibn al-Zayyāt,[6] despite the fact that they had many enemies who would not hesitate to look for any social or political mistake to exploit and to exaggerate against them, wrote poetry about slave girls.

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1. al-Aghānī xvi, p.269.
2. al-Washshā' p.82.
3. al-Buḥturī, dīwān i, p.129.
4. al-Aghānī xvi, p.269.
5. Ibid. viii, p.248.
6. al-Washshā' p.248.

Even religious men, despite their very careful attitude, composed poetry about slave-girls. The singer ʿAbd-Allāh ibn ʿAbbās tells how a certain qādī wrote a poem about a slave-girl and asked him to sing it and keep the authorship of this poem secret.[1]

Poets wrote their poetry about particular slave-girls. Bashshār, for example, wrote about ʿAbda,[2] al-ʿAbbās ibn al-Aḥnaf about Fawz[3] and Abu l-ʿAtāhiyya about ʿUtba.[4]

The slave-girl was a very rich source for the ʿAbbāsid poet. Bashshār composed more than twenty poems about ʿAbda alone.[5] Abu al-ʿAtāhiyya also wrote many poems about ʿUtba.[6] Ibn Sukkara was credited with writing ten thousand verses solely about a certain slave-girl of whom he was fond.[7]

The slave-girl so much occupied the ʿAbbāsid poet that he put her in a position that approached the high and spiritual. This is clear from his swearing by her.[8] One has to swear by the most beloved or holy things, such as the homeland or God, but the

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1. al-Aghānī xix, p.205.
2. See Bashshār, dīwān.
3. See ibn al-Aḥnaf, dīwān.
4. See Abu l-ʿAtāhiyya, dīwān.
5. See Bashshār, dīwān.
6. See Abu l-ʿAtāhiyya.
7. Yatīma al-Dahr iii, p.3.
8. al-Aghānī xiv, p.176.

'Abbāsid poet, because he saw in the slave-girl something beloved and holy, not less than the homeland or other holy things, did swear by her.

The question why Salmā and Laylā (free women's names) almost disappeared in 'Abbāsid poetry and 'Abda and 'Anān - slave-girls' names - took over could be explained as follows:

1. A life of strict and absolute seclusion was imposed on free women while slave-girls to a great extent emerged from Purdah. Poets were allowed to see and mix with slave-girls while access to free women appeared impossible or very often difficult. When al-Ẓurafā', among whom were included poets, gathered, the slave-girls' attendance was necessary.[1] They talked and joked with them and finally wrote poetry about them.

2. The mention of the slave-girl, in any way, in poetry would not cause any jealousy, while it did in the free woman's case. For this reason, we find that some poets who admired free women did not dare to mention their names but mentioned the names of their slave-girls instead.[2]

3. The slave-girl answered the requirements of the fast-changing 'Abbāsid society while the free woman seems to have failed. It is evident that the 'Abbāsid poet found what he wanted or what the taste of his society required in the slave-girl; he found novelties in the slave-girl, the way she spoke, the way she dressed and the

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1. al-'Āmilī ii, p.185.

2. See below, p.289.

way she inspired him.

4. Probably the education of the slave-girl had very much to do with this. Education enabled the slave-girl to enter the society in which poets were members and influence it. Most, if not all, slave-girls who had a mention in ʿAbbāsid literature were educated. At least they could inspire poets to compose poetry, and understand and appreciate what was written about them.

5. The slave-girl was independent and to a degree led a dissolute life. Her independence gave the poet a kind of courage to compose about her a dissolute poetry which he could not venture to compose about the free; dissolute poetry indeed like that which ibn al-Rūmī, for example, wrote about Durayda,[1] Abū Nuwās about ʿAnān[2] and ibn Abi-l-Zawāʾid about the slave-girls of ʿAṭʿaṭ.[3]

a) The ability of slave-girls to encourage the talent:

The slave-girl was surprisingly adept at knowing how to encourage the poet's talent. One of her ways was using confusing words. Such words were sufficient enough to puzzle the curiosity of the poet and accordingly to produce a reaction, usually in the form of a poem. The word mumannaʿa which was an answer to the question "what is your name?" deliberately given to confuse the poet by a certain slave-girl, caused the poet to compose a whole poem.[4]

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1. ibn Abī ʿAwn, al-Tashbīhāt, p.133.
2. Abū Nuwās, dīwān, ed. Ewald Wagner i, p.84.
3. al-Aghānī xiv, p.117.
4. Ibid iii, p.250.

Pretending to ignore the poet but without rudeness when he asked her about anything was one of those ways. The slave-girl usually used to ignore the poet purposely after knowing him a long time. The poet did not take it amiss for he was aware that such a thing was deliberately done as a sort of coquetry on one hand and to inflame his talent on the other. The best example of this is the story concerning a slave-girl and the famous dissolute poet Muṭīʿ ibn Iyās: she passed by him and did not greet him. The story continues: "he immediately composed a poem".[1] A certain slave-girl entered a place where Saʿīd was gathering with a group of friends and greeted them all except Saʿīd, although Saʿīd himself was known to adore her, and she said to a certain member of the group: "Please ask him not to speak to me". This unexpected action shocked him and he became so upset that he consoled his excitement with a good poem.[2]

Putting a band on her forehead without feeling a real headache was a way that the slave-girl used in order to test the friendship of the poet on one hand and to enjoy his reaction, usually a poem, on the other. Al-ʿAbbās ibn al-Aḥnaf (Fawz's lover) experienced this action on the part of Fawz and about this he composed poetry.[3]

The slave-girl would sometimes enter into argument, either

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1. Ibid xiii, p.312.
2. Ibid xviii, p.97.
3. Ibid xvii, p.27.

serious or frivolous, with poets. She might return him answers that silenced him; this made the poet either feel defeated or admire her and some verses of poetry were often the result. Abū Nuwās, although he interpreted the silencing answer of 'Anān to him as a joke and as an example of the normal coquetry of slave-girls, made a mention of such an argument between him and 'Anān in the form of a poem and used the same answer she gave in this poem.[1]

A pleasing answer by a slave-girl to any question or request usually brought some appreciation from the hearer, often in the form of a verse composed then and there. The answer of the slave-girl of al-Amīn, because it contained some pleasing words, made al-Amīn ask all poets available at his court to compose poetry on condition that they concluded their poems with her poetical answer. Among those poets who took part in this were Abū Nuwās and al-Raqāshī.[2]

Never before in the history of Arabic literature was woman, whether free or slave, as rich a source as the slave-girl was in the 'Abbāsid period, as if she had a poem naturally written in every movement or deed she did. Her clothes caught the eye of the poet.[3] Her death kindled his talent and set his heart burning. Many poems were written in praise of her. Ibn al-Zayyāt produced

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1. Abū Nuwās, dīwān, edited by Ewald Wagner, i, p.86.

2. Ibn Abī Ḥajla i, pp.84-5.

3. al-Aghānī x, p.291.

a good number of elegiac poems about his slave-girl Sulwāna.[1] Abū Fidda composed a long and popular elegiac poem about a certain slave-girl.[2]

Like her death, her anger or others' anger at her inspired poets to compose poetry describing her anger and trying to ask her to forgive them and come back.[3] If the owner of the slave-girl could not compose poetry he used to ask any poet to compose some verses putting himself in the position of the owner[4] or to ask his associates to recite any poem which was consistent with the situation.[5]

The sale of the slave-girl,[6] her departure,[7] constituted a source of sadness for poets which drove them to compose poetry.

Through her movements or her actions, the slave-girl was capable of creating a new subject not only for one poet but for a group of poets (to produce many poems about the subject). Poets were involved in a sort of competition whereby every one of them composed a poem on the same subject. For example, three famous ʿAbbāsid poets saw a slave-girl walking provocatively while she was

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1. ibn Rashīq ii, p.108.
2. Ṭabaqāt al-Shuʿarāʾ, p.380.
3. al-Aghānī iv, p.76.
4. al-Buḥturī, akhbār, p.94.
5. al-Aghānī xiv, p.102.
6. Ibid xii, pp.149-50.
7. al-Kutbī, Wafiyyāt ii, pp.78-9.

wearing three garments of different colours, white, yellow and red, and of different lengths. They agreed to enter a kind of competition in which each one tried to describe her walk and her clothes. A good number of verses derived from this event.[1]

The apple that they used to present with writing on it was one of the things that stirred up the talent of the poet or the desire of those who were deprived of the ability of composing poetry to ask poets to compose verses about the apple and its donor. A certain slave-girl of al-Mahdī presented him with an apple upon which two verses were written. Al-Mahdī was so excited that he replied with two similar verses.[2] The same thing is said to have happened to al-Rashīd, who took an apple and upon it he wrote a similar verse. Moreover, he asked Khālid al-Kātib to compose some verses about this.[3]

The last account is told in a different way by al-Iṣfahānī who attributed the incident not to al-Rashīd as al-Mas'ūdī did but to 'Alī ibn al-Mu'taṣim.[4] Al-Iṣfahānī also mentions more verses. Although credit in such a difference is likely to be given to al-Aghānī because it is more specialised in such things than al-Mas'ūdī, one might be encouraged by this difference in the authorship to suspect such an account.

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1. Abū Nuwās, dīwān, edited by Farīd, pp.23-5.
2. al-'Iqd vi, p.406.
3. al-Mas'ūdī iii, p.370.
4. al-Aghānī xx, p.249.

Nothing aroused the excitement of the poet of the 'Abbāsid period more than the singing of the slave-girl. The poet, hearing her, would be thrilled and subsequently compose something. When the slave-girl sings she possess the ability of injecting a fiery inspiration into the poet. This can be exemplified in the following ways.

1. The poet composed poetry about her voice or her singing itself, praising[1] or satirising[2] it and how deeply it affects the heart or how flat it falls.[3]

2. The slave-girl, singing a certain poem, might have thrown more fuel onto the talent of the poet and made him add similar verses to the same sung poem. It is said that Mānī, under the effect of the slave-girl of ibn Ṭāhir, added about six verses to three couplets.[4]

3. The slave-girl happened to sing only one bayt of a poem. Because it was met with appreciation by the listeners and to avoid repeating the same verses many times and to "make the poem longer, the song easier and the rhyme better",[5] the poet used to add more verses. This actually happened when a certain slave-girl sang in front of 'Amr ibn Mas'ada and Ahmad Ibn Yūsuf one verse of a poem.

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1. al-Nuwayrī v, p.120.
2. ibn al-Mu'tazz, dīwān, p.70.
3. al-Aghānī iii, p.183.
4. al-Kutbī ii, pp.519-20.
5. al-Jahshayārī, pp.47-8

ʿAmr asked Aḥmad to add some more verses to this sung poem, and Aḥmad did.[1]

4. The composition of the slave-girl thrilled some listeners who composed poetry about it or asked poets to do so. Because he appreciated a composition of a certain slave-girl, al-Mahdī ordered Bashshār to compose poetry about this.[2]

The history of ʿAbbāsid literature is indebted to the slave-girl for providing the poet with a new field from which to extract his wonderful similes. These images derived from the physical things she possessed. The poets saw her in everything, imagined her even in nature around him.

Through the scene of the blossoms of the trees shaken by the wind, al-ʿAlāwī imagined the slave-girl in his poem which includes a description of Al-Khawarnaq (a palace) and extracted a good metaphor from something found in her. He described the blossoms of the trees being shaken by the wind as the falling strands of hair of slave-girls joining each other.[3]

Pigeons singing in the trees inspired ibn al-Rūmī. To describe them, his imagination turned to the slave-girl to find some similarity between the voices of pigeons and that of the slave-girl.[4]

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1. Ibid.
2. al-Aghānī iii, pp. 182-83
3. al-ʿAmrī i, pp.285-86.
4. Ibn Abī ʿAwn, p.197.

Describing the cypress trees the poet Saʿīd ibn Ḥumayd found similarity between the trunks of these trees and the figures of slave-girls and between the colour of the leaves and the clothes of slave-girls and wrote: "These trees are like slave-girls who have straight figures and who appear wearing green silk."[1] ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Muʿtazz used the same image: "We quaffed our drink in a place where there were fresh violets and cypress trees. These trees resemble the figures of swaying slave-girls wearing green dresses."[2]

Arabic literature did not know this particular image at any time preceding the ʿAbbāsid period. It seems obvious that this image was associated only with slave-girls wearing green clothes and not with free women. Thus, this image was a novelty in the ʿAbbāsid poetry, and it was inspired by the slave-girl through her figure, her swinging gait and the colour of the clothes she wore.

The view of rows of flowers reminded the poet of the slave-girl or something she owned. Seeing rows of flowers which were set up in two different ways; scattered and arranged, reminded al-Ṣanawbarī of the slave-girl. When he described these two different ways in which rows of flowers were laid out, he used the shifts and the decorations of the head-bands of slave-girls.[3]

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1. Ibid.

2. Ibid, 196.

3. al-Ḥuṣarī, Zahr al-Ādāb i, p.233.

Even in a description of gigantic palaces, poets did not forget slave-girls. On the contrary, they found similarity between the palaces and slave-girls themselves or something they owned. ʿAlī ibn al-Jahm described the tops of al-Mutawakkil's palaces as drunken slave-girls going out to attend the feasts of the Christians. Some of the tops looked like those slave-girls who were loosening the strands of their hair and turning it up and some looked like those who were adjusting their belts.[1] Through what the slave-girl did with her hair or with her belt, ʿAlī ibn al-Jahm was inspired in this description.

Kashājim described the fresh violet as the mark of a bite on the cheek of al-Jawārī.[2] Why did Kashājim refer to the mark of a bite on the cheeks of al-Jawārī although it would look the same with al-Jawārī or the free women? In other words, why did he not mention the mark of biting on the cheeks of women in general?

To this question, there are two possible answers:

1. Because the poet saw something in the slave-girl which he could not see in free women; mention of her gave his simile more attraction in a society where the slave-girl played a noticeable role, or perhaps the word jawārī sounded more poetical than the word nisāʾ or the mention of the slave-girl instead of a free woman became a kind of literary convention.

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1. Ibid, 231.

2. al-Diyārāt, p.259.

2. Because of rhyme, the description of the fresh violet as the mark of a bite on cheeks of al-Jawārī is only one verse of a whole poem in which every verse must end with the same rhyme, which is -ārī. So one of the reasons why the poet chose the word al-Jawārī was merely for the sake of the rhyme.

It is worth asking whether there was any relation between slave-girls and the subject of zuhd in Arabic literature. It is known that Abu l-ʿAtāhiyya was the first poet to introduce this subject in any real form to Arabic literature.[1]

Abu l-ʿAtāhiyya fell deeply in love with ʿUtba (a slave-girl) and he composed many poems about her.[2] His love ended sadly in complete failure. This failure produced a sharp reaction in him. Because of his despair of a successful end to his love affair, he gave up his materialistic life and turned to the life of zuhd.

Al-Masʿūdī attributed the zuhd of Abu l-ʿAtāhiyya to his unrequited love.[3] In a certain poem, Abu l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī said that Abu l-ʿAtāhiyya abandoned ʿUtba and adopted the zuhd.[4] If that was so, the subject of al-zuhd in Arabic literature introduced by Abu l-ʿAtāhiyya was indebted to slave-girls.

One might now appreciate how far the slave-girl affected

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1. al-Aghānī iv, p.65.
2. Abu lʿAtāhiyya, dīwān, pp.385-86
3. al-Masʿūdī iii, p.357.
4. Abū al-ʿAlāʾ al-Luzūmiyyāt i, p.146.

the poetry of 'Abbāsid society not only through creating new images for the poet or because she in herself formed a good field which caused the poet to describe her, her clothes, her voice, her way of walking etc., but also through stimulating his imagination, as appears clearly from his similes. In short, the slave-girl was like a new fertilizer for the imagination of the poet of that period.

b) Importance of poetry for slave-girls:

Poetry meant something important for the slave-girl because she was one of the Ẓurafā'. Use of poetry was necessary for the slave-girl especially if she was in the habit of mixing with the educated élite. As if poetry were the only medium for the slave-girl and her friends to use in every walk of life, especially in correspondence, she used poetry of her own composition in reproaching, wooing, or complaining, if she was a poetess, as 'Arīb for example used to write to Ibn Ḥāmid[1] or Faḍl to Ibn Ḥumayd.[2] If she was not a poetess, she would ask one of the poets to write a poem expressing what she wanted. Qabīḥa, for example asked Faḍl to compose a poem on her behalf to send to al-Mutawakkil.[3]

Falling into the habit of exchanging correspondence with the slave-girl, the ẓarīf had to write to her in poetry of

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1. al-Aghānī xxi, p.98
2. Ibid xix, p.289.
3. Ibid xvii, p.227

his own composition if he was a poet; take al-ʿAbbās ibn al-Aḥnaf and his correspondence to Fawz, apologising to her for some mistake.[1] If a ẓarīf did not have the gift of composing poetry, he would resort to any poet seeking his help to compose a poem reflecting what he wanted. The poet al-Ḥusain ibn al-Daḥḥāk told how he used to write poetry for a certain soldier who fell into the habit of writing to slave-girls.[2]

In her answer or comment, the slave-girl used poetry of her own composition or that of others. The slave-girl Sinīn sang two verses. Both begin by referring to the same incident which was the surprise (ʿajab) of Salmā. Teasing her in order to hear her reply, Ibn Ṭāhir said; "How often this Salmā appears to be surprised!" Sinīn immediately replied in this verse of poetry:

فهلك الفتى الا يراح الى ندى وان لا يرى شيئا عجيبا فيعجبا

"Dead indeed is the person who does not incline to generosity and who is not astonished on seeing something surprising."[3]

From this, it is clear that poetry formed a part of the life of the slave-girl with her associates and her friends.

c) Contribution of slave-girls to poetry:

The right climate for polishing the poetical talent of the slave-girl was created for her. She was able to consort with poets, a significant factor in this. There are accounts that,

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1. Ibid xvii, p.29.
2. al-Khalīʿ, Ashʿār, p.69.
3. al-Aghānī xx, p.109.

for example, Faḍl used to gather with learned men[1] and to be visited by poets.[2] Al-Jarrāḥ states that ʿAnān used to sit with poets.[3] The famous poets such as al-Ḥusain ibn al-Ḍaḥḥāk, Abū Nuwās and al-Raqāshī were among the associates of ʿAnān.[4] The assembly held between the slave-girl and learned men or poets was a sort of small conference in which they discussed or recited poetry, as is directly referred to.[5]

From this, one might draw a good picture of the atmosphere (literary atmosphere) in which the slave-girl grew and moved and helped her talent to develop to the extent that she was able to compose or criticise poetry as we shall point out later.

The slave-girl who used to gather with poets or to sing had to know a good deal of poetry, especially since poetry was the basis of singing as well as of the conversation of the literati. Without knowing at least something about poetry in that society one would be regarded as lacking the privilege which would enable one to be ẓarīf.

So, the slave-girl who gathered with Marwān ibn Abī Ḥafṣa[6] or with Abū Nuwās[7] was bound to know much about poetry

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1. Ṭabaqāt al-Shuʿrāʾ, p.426.
2. al-Aghānī ixx, pp.258-59.
3. al-Jarrāḥ p.39
4. al-Khalīʿ, Ashʿār, p.73.
5. al-Jarrāḥ, p.39.
6. al-Aghānī xxii, pp.523-29.
7. Abū Nuwās, dīwān, i, pp.80-81.

including having many poems by heart. Having many poems by heart is a very essential factor in polishing the talent.

Like Ḥammād or Abū ʿUbayda, the slave-girl was credited with being a transmitter of poetry but to a limited extent. The slave-girl actually narrated the poetry of her friends or her masters, although al-Iṣfahānī says of Janān that she transmitted poetry.[1]

That the slave-girl transmitted the poetry of her friends or masters is clear from such accounts as that Kunayza (the slave-girl of ʿUlayya) narrated many poems of ʿUlayya. Al-Ṣūlī, who mentioned this, took verses from Kunayza as if she was a reliable source.[2] Dawla (the slave-girl of ibn al-Muʿtazz) narrated some of his poetry.[3] Maṣābīḥ (the slave-girl whom ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbbās admired), about whom it was said that she was the one who knew ʿAbd Allāh's poetry better than anybody else,[4] cannot be overlooked in dealing with this matter.

So, it might be recognized that the slave-girl was not qualified enough to be a famous transmitter, but she was credited with transmitting the poetry of the poets who happened to be either her masters or her friends. Perhaps the term "knowing by heart" might be more suitable than "transmitting".

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1. al-Aghānī xx, p.4.
2. Ashʿār Awlād al-Khulafāʾ, p.69.
3. ibn al-Sāʿī, Nisāʾ al-Khulafāʾ, p.123.
4. al-Diyārāt, p.66.

The slave-girl criticised incidentally, but she could not be regarded as a professional critic. There is no evidence such as to encourage one to believe that the slave-girl exercised criticism in an effective way, apart from the account mentioned in Ṭabaqāt al-Shu'arā' that 'Arīb used to follow the productions of poets and recognise their mistakes.[1]

However, ibn al-Mu'tazz generalised from his statement concerning 'Arīb. In addition, he did not mention any example showing any of her criticism. This suggests that the slave-girl had a good talent and a good portion of knowledge that was enough to enable her to understand poetry and recognise the mistakes of poets, but not to criticise in a scientific way.

Some slave-girls had a flourishing poetic talent. Many of them composed poetry. 'Anān,[2] Khansā',[3] 'Arīb[4] and Faḍl[5] were among many slave-girls who were credited with composing poetry. A great deal about their ability to compose poetry is mentioned in the books concerned. Of Maḥbūba, al-Iṣfahānī, for example, says: "She was a witty and original poetess".[6] About Faḍl, al-Iṣfahānī also says: "She was learned, eloquent, quick-witted and gifted in

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1. Ṭabaqāt al-Shu'arā', pp.61-2.
2. Ibn Kathīr x, p.196.
3. Ṭabaqāt al-Shu'arā', p.425.
4. al-Tanūkī, al-Mustajād Min Fi'l al-Ajwād, pp.191-92.
5. Dayl al-Āmālī, p.86.
6. al-Aghānī xxii, p.201.

composing poetry".[1]

As for Ibn al-Muʿtazz, he made mention of ʿArīb, saying that she was a gifted poetess.[2] In his Āmālī, al-Zajjāj says of Khansāʾ: "She was an elegant poetess".[3]

In her poetry, the slave-girl tried all prevailing subjects of the poetry of the ʿAbbāsid period. Like Abū Nuwās or Abu l-ʿAtāhiyya, she composed encomiam,[4] satire,[5] amatory verse,[6] laments[7] and congratulatory poems[8] but she did this in a very economical way.

The slave-girl Faḍl was known as Faḍl al-Shāʿira (the poetess). It is a considerable title that requires justification. But first it is worth quoting the accounts mentioned about her. Al-Iṣfahānī said that she was an eloquent and gifted poetess and none of the contemporary women was better than she was.[9] Ibn al-Sāʿī made a similar statement about her.[10] Al-Iṣfahānī also

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1. Ibid xix, p.257.
2. Ṭabaqāt al-Shuʿarāʾ, pp.425-26
3. al-Zajjāj, āmālī, p.98
4. Ibn Kathīr x, p.196.
5. Ṭabaqāt al-Shuʿarāʾ, p.425.
6. al-ʿIqd vi, p.408.
7. al-Aghānī xxi, p.78.
8. al-Mustajād, pp.191-92.
9. al-Aghānī xix, p.256.
10. ibn al-Sāʿī, p.85.

mentions this incident: "Faḍl came into the presence of al-Mutawakkil, who asked her whether she was a real poetess". She answered: "It is the claim of those who buy or sell me".[1] Laughing at her answer, al-Mutawakkil ordered her to recite some poetry of her own composition. She then recited a poem. So much did this poem catch his appreciation that he rewarded her with five thousand dirhams[2] as he used to do with famous poets.

Ibn al-Mu'tazz, who was contemporary with Faḍl and knew her and who was a poet and whose statement would be accepted without much argument, wrote about her as follows: "Faḍl excelled in beauty, in perfection, in eloquence and in precision of poetry. Learned men used to gather with her. She composed many poems in praise of Caliphs and kings".[3]

Apart from two short poems out of all Faḍl's poetry which is available, one cannot find any good poetry. Nor can one find a good reason for the fuss made about her.

Both poems were found in al-Aghānī. She wrote one of these on the occasion that al-Mutawakkil promised that she should spend a night with him. Unfortunately, al-Mutawakkil on that night had drunk a great deal and slept heavily. Being unable to wake him up, she composed these verses and put them under his pillow:[4]

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1. al-Aghānī xxi, p.258.
2. Ibid xix, pp.258-59.
3. Ṭabaqāt al-Shu'arā', p.426.
4. al-Aghānī xix, pp.264-65.

قم بدا شبهك يامولا ... ي يحدو بالظلام
قم بنا نقض لبانا ... ت التثام و التزام
قبل أن تفضحنا ... عودة أرواح النيام

"O master quickly rise. Your likeness (the moon) is singing to the darkness. Rise and let us enjoy kissing and embracing before the return of the sleepers' souls tell on us."

She composed the other one, at the command of al-Mu'tamid, about a certain slave-girl whom he wished to own. It goes as follows:[1]

علم الجمال تركتنى ... في الحب أشهر من علم
و نصبتنى يا منيتى ... عرض المظنة و التهم
فارقتنى بعد الدنو ... فصرت عندى كالحلم
فلو أن نفسى فارقت ... جسمى لفقدك لم تلم
ما كان ضرك لو وصلت ... فخف عن قلبى الألم
برسالة تهدينها ... أو زورة تحت الظلم
أو لا فطيف في المنا ... م فلا أقل من اللمم
صلة المحب حبيبه ... الله يعلمه كرم

"O symbol of beauty, in love you have made me more famous than a mountain. You have left me an open target to doubts and rumours. You left me and became a dream for me. For loss of you no blame would be mine if my soul left my body. What harm if you communicated with me and eased the pain resting on my heart by a correspondence, by a visit under cover of darkness or by

1. Ibid, 290.

permitting your image to pass me when sleeping, for nothing is less than this. Communication between lovers, God knows, is generosity."

Although one might be charmed by both poems and, accordingly, believe they could stand on a level with that of the first class poets, their authenticity is doubtful, especially since one of the poems was attributed to Maḥbūba of al-Mutawakkil in a different page of al-Aghānī.[1] In other words, they were composed by one of the famous poets but were, by mistake or perhaps deliberately, attributed to Faḍl. If the rest of her poetry, including the poem which al-Mutawakkil admired and rewarded her for, were read and given a proper analysis bearing in mind that some wrong attribution took place, as we shall deal with below - then it is conceivable that these two poems are not authentic.

The title of "the poetess" was seemingly given to Faḍl for three reasons:

1. Because she was a gifted poetess. We have just dealt with this.
2. As part of a "publicity campaign" in order to create a wide fame for her. Her reply to al-Mutawakkil's enquiry as to whether she was a poetess - "He who buys or sells me claims so"[2] - might indicate that this title was created for her for this reason.
3. Because the people of that period, when a woman was not expected to show talent, saw the very ability to compose poetry, apart from

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1. al-Aghānī xix, p.269.
2. See above, p.229.

the quality of the poetry, as a strange and striking thing in a woman. So they granted this title to Faḍl. Aware of this reason, al-Iṣfahānī, mentioning Mutayyam says: "She was able to compose poetry of poor quality but it was appreciated of her and her like".[1]

Since it has perhaps been demonstrated that Faḍl was not quite such a good poetess that she was qualified to have such a grandiose epithet, it seems that she was given this title for one of the latter two reasons.

Abu l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī was credited with being the author of a book entitled: "The poetess slave-girls" (al-Imā'al-Shawā'ir). Unfortunately, this book is not extant. This title might cause one to ask whether there was really any special class, composed of slave-girls, known as the class of the poetess slave-girls. The title suggests so - but one cannot be sure because this book is not available. The statement of al-Zarkalī that Tatrīf was one of the poetess slave-girls[2] (al-Imā'al-Shawā'ir) suggests that there were special slave-girls known by the title of the poetess slave-girls.

It might be thought that every slave-girl, apart from the quality of her poetry, who left any production of poetry behind, was regarded as one of the poetess slave-girls because both Tatrīf and Taimā,[3] whom al-Iṣfahānī mentioned in his missing

1. al-Aghānī vii, p.280.
2. al-Zarkalī, al-A'lām i, p.428.
3. al-Suyūṭī, p.16.

book "the poetess slave-girls", were regarded as being of the poetess slave-girls although their poetry available in al-Mustazraf[1] is not of good quality.

Like the first-class poets, such as 'Alī ibn al-Jahm and al-Ḥussain ibn al-Ḍaḥḥāk, the slave girl, because of her ready talent, used to be asked to compose occasional poetry about any subject and to compose it immediately. Al-Iṣfahānī mentions that al-Mu'tamid asked Faḍl al-Shā'ira to extemporise poetry. Al-Aghānī quotes the poem she composed.[2] This poem is a well-constructed one. But at the same time, this account seems suspect: on the basis of Faḍl's poetry which she did not extemporise but composed after reflection, the majority of her poems do not seem to be of good quality, whereas the poem referred to above is the best of all poems attributed to Faḍl. In addition, some of the verses of this poem were ascribed to Aḥmad ibn Abī Ṭāhir.[3]

Since it is impossible for the extemporised poem to be better than a poem composed after a long time of intensive thought, it would be obvious that this poem was either wrongly attributed to Faḍl, deliberately or not, or a creation of storytellers.

Pursuing accounts of slave-girls, one will find such amazing accounts as that, as is mentioned in al-Aghānī, Faḍl and Khansā' used to enter a sort of poetical competition which pushed

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1. Ibid, 17-18
2. al-Aghānī xix p.259
3. Ibid, 262.

them to satirise each other.[1] This reminds one of the competition between Jarīr and al-Farazdaq. Such an account is liable to suspicion especially if it is known that such a clash requires a very unusual talent that slave-girls seemingly lacked.

In this account there is a statement which provides good evidence for supposing that the slave-girl was used by poets as she was used by singers - that some poets, for one reason or another, revealed their poetry through attributing it to the slave-girl. This is the statement that Abū Shibl ibn Wahb helped Faḍl while al-Qaṣīdī and al-Ṣulḥī helped Khansā'.[2]

Probably the competition occurred between Abū Shibl on one hand and al-Ṣulḥī and al-Qaṣīdī on the other and not between Faḍl and Khansā'. This clash was attributed to the slave-girls Faḍl and Khansā' for the following reasons:

1. To discount this competition and show the other poets that it was merely between two slave-girls, to prevent partisanship as one sees in the accounts of Jarīr and al-Farazdaq.[3]

2. To avoid the anger of the relatives or the tribes of those poets involved in this clash, since if it was between two slave-girls, no one would care much except those who were interested in the resultant poetry of the clash.

3. This sort of clash might have driven them to produce something

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1. al-Aghānī xix, pp.265-66.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid, viii, p.4

that they would not like to hear or read ascribed to them.

Al-Iṣfahānī mentions an instance of the slave-girl's skill in improvisation. This account is as follows: "A slave-girl, in front of al-Rashīd, sings:

ما نقموا من أمية إلاّ أنهم يحلمون إن غضبوا

"They were resentful of Banī Umayya for nothing but that they used to forgive in time of anger." Al-Rashīd's face clouded. Noticing she had committed a serious error, she quickly changed the word Yaḥlum (forgive) into Yajhal (be foolish)."[1]

The situation of this slave-girl was critical indeed because she was in front of al-Rashīd, praising his enemies by mistake, when she saw his face clouded with anger. The slave-girl therefore did not hesitate or stutter, but on the contrary, she changed one word which changed the whole meaning of the verse and did not affect the metre. Falling into the same dangerous error, the most talented poet would not be able to escape it easily and with no mental effort. Just to change the meaning of such a verse, even for a poet not in such a dangerous situation, and without damaging the metre, would require quick thinking and selecting the suitable word.

Because it is not easily possible to do such a thing without stopping and thinking, it seems that this account, for the purpose of showing the intelligence and quick wit of the slave-girl, was so cleverly woven by storytellers to give it more

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1. Ibid xiv, p.193.

attraction they said that al-Rashīd, admiring her and being captivated by her unique wit, said to Yaḥyā ibn Khālid: "Did you hear that?!"[1]

The slave-girl was encouraged to compose poetry. Her poetry was, in most cases, highly thought of. A great deal was made of it by transmitters, storytellers and writers. This sort of encouragement and appreciation gave the slave-girl such an inflated opinion of her abilities that she threatened the poet Abū Shibl and arrogantly claimed that she was better than him in poetry and that she could silence and denounce him.[2]

This kind of false pride that the slave-girl possessed was a product of the appreciation she was accorded in everything, or most things, she did or said.

Such a thing is sufficient to reflect, directly or indirectly, how far attention was paid to the slave-girl and how far her productions, good or not, were met with encouragement and welcome by that society.

d) Capping poetry (ijāza):

It is very interesting to know that the slave-girl was said to be capable of capping verses (ijāza). In the books concerned, there are references to the ability of ʿAnān, Janān and Faḍl to stand on a par with the great poets, Marwān ibn Abī Ḥafṣa,[3]

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1. Ibid v, p.76
2. Ibid xiv, p.193.
3. Ibid xxii, pp.523-24

Abū Nuwās[1] and 'Alī ibn al-Jahm.[2] Some accounts went so far as to claim that the slave-girl surpassed the poet or reduced him to silence.[3]

Because 'Anān was the most outstanding slave-girl who appeared credited with doing very well in the business of gathering with poets and entering many ijāzāt with them,[4] she would be the best example to present.

There is an account dealing with an ijāza-style poem produced jointly by 'Anān and another poet. It is told in two different ways. Al-Iṣfahānī does not mention the name of the poet, but calls him merely "a certain poet".[5] At the same time the whole poem is ascribed to the poet Abū Nuwās.[6] The authorship of the verses was also differently narrated. In the dīwān of Abū Nuwās, the verses which were ascribed to 'Anān by al-Iṣfahānī were ascribed to Abū Nuwās.[7] Commenting on the account, al-Suyūṭī quoted al-Ṣalāḥ al-Ṣifdī as saying, in analysing the verses, that there is a coherence in the verses of 'Anān while the verse of the poet looks alien.[8] Such a disorder in the authorship and the

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1. Ibid xxii, pp.525-26.
2. Ibid xix, pp.270-71.
3. al-Jarrāḥ, p.41.
4. al-Khalī', Ash'ār, p.73.
5. al-Aghānī xxii, p.525.
6. Abū Nuwās, dīwān, i, pp.80-81.
7. Ibid.
8. al-Mustaẓraf, p.45.

difference in the narration of the distribution of the verses are an obvious indication that this account was fabricated.

Transmitters and storytellers transformed ʿAnān from an ordinary poetess slave-girl into a legendary poetess. This is apparent from the testimony attributed to Marwān ibn Abī Ḥafṣa, after he had challenged her to cap his difficult verse, that she was the most talented among mankind as well as jinn.[1]

ʿAnān, as if she was an unbeatable poetess, was made to be the most gifted and unparalleled poetess through the story that she opened her house to poets who used to come to her and challenge her to cap their verses. The story even has it that poets from near and far, including some bedouins, used to come to see her for the purpose of capping. After being involved with her and with another poet in a capping competition, a certain bedouin is said to have declared that she was the best of them,[2] and was so impressed at her unusual talent that he wanted to express his admiration by kissing her.

The most surprising thing about ʿAnān is that she was credited with excelling not only poetess slave-girls, but also poets. It was said that a man, while reading a book, found a verse which captivated him very much. He endeavoured to find some poet who could cap it, but as the account goes, he could not find any. At last he was advised to go to ʿAnān to cap it. She promptly did.[3]

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1. al-Aghānī xxii, p.524.
2. al-Jāḥiẓ, al-Maḥāsin Wa'l-Aḍdād, p.193.
3. al-Aghānī xxii, p.524

The dubious nature of this account is clear from the fact that:

1. Its transmitter did not ascribe it to any specified person. He just said: "a man said to me".[1]

2. ʿAnān was contemporary with many famous poets, namely Abū Nuwās, Marwān ibn Abī Ḥafṣa and al-Khalīʿ. All of them were better and more gifted than she was. Accordingly, any one of them was easily able to cap this verse. As regards rhyme and metre, the verse itself is not very difficult to cap.

3. The difference in the manner of the narration of this account itself: Al-ʿIqd tells it in a different way. Briefly, it goes as follows: "Al-Rashīd ordered all poets available to cap a verse. He promised to reward the poet who could cap it with a generous gift. None of them could. Because he was aware of ʿAnān's ability a certain servant of al-Rashīd went to her master's house. He met her there and told the whole story. She then capped the verse in a moment.[2]

The reader of ʿAbbāsid literature may notice two things in connection with ijāza:

1. It flourished in the ʿAbbāsid period to an extent never reached before. In the periods prior to the ʿAbbāsid, capping verses was never or very rarely used indeed. The record preserves few cases

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1. Ibid.

2. al-ʿIqd vi, pp.57-8.

of capping like that of Imri' l-Qays and 'Abīd ibn al-Abraṣ[1] or Imri' l-Qays and al-Yashkurī.[2]

2. The slave-girl was more closely linked with it than she was linked with any other type of poetry.

Probably capping in the 'Abbāsid period between the slave-girl on one hand and the first-class poets on the other was an invention of transmitters and storytellers. Many suggestions could be given as to the purpose of this invention:

1. To show that the slave-girl was so gifted a poetess that she was able to hold a position equal to that of poets, including some of the famous ones, or to surpass them in some cases. This is obvious from the fact that the qāfiya of most, if not all, of the ijāzāt was purposely chosen so as to be difficult. The letters ḍād[3] dhal[4] ṭā[5] yā[6] ṣād[7] and ṯhā[8] are good examples.

2. To attract lovers of poetry and stories. The slave-girl in herself, as in her actions, possessed an element of attraction. So poetry, if ascribed to her, would attract more interest than if

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1. 'Abīd ibn al-Abraṣ, Dīwān, pp.84-5.
2. Imri' l-Qays, Dīwān, pp.147-49.
3. al-Aghānī xviii, pp.330-31.
4. Ibid xix, pp.270-71.
5. al-Zajjāj, p.98.
6. al-Aghānī xiv, pp.190-91.
7. Abū Nuwās, dīwān, i, pp.80-81.
8. al-Maḥāsin wa'l-Aḍdād, p.193.

it were ascribed to an ordinary poet. To choose the manner whereby their narrations and their stories would find a brisk market and a ready ear, transmitters and storytellers chose the slave-girl and attributed poetry and stories to her.

3. To create a wide reputation for the slave-girl. We have already dealt with this reason.

Concerning poetry of the slave-girl, two points are worthy of mention:

1. It is noticeable that the majority of the poetry attributed to slave-girls consists of short poems; each poem is a couplet or a single verse. For this, there are three reasons: Firstly, although the slave-girl was said to have composed her poetry on the traditional poetical subjects, she did not often produce long poems. Most, if not all, of her poetry was written so as to demonstrate a quick wit and a ready tongue.

What attracts one's attention most is that the slave-girl was associated with capping verses rather than anything else. Capping requires a very quick wit and a short poem.

Secondly, it is known that the long poem needs a genuine gift. If not very gifted, one might be able to write a couplet or three verses without any sign of weakness in one's poem, but the long poem would appear a clumsy and weakly-constructed one.

Bearing this in mind, the slave-girl probably did not venture to try long poems and was content with short ones.

Thirdly, we have mentioned above that some poems, in spite of being attributed to slave-girls, were an invention of transmitters

and storytellers.[1] It might be of interest to know that some transmitters and storytellers such as al-'Aṣma'ī were able to compose poetry.[2] They were not gifted enough to succeed in long poems.

Gifted poets such as Abū Nuwās, Muslim ibn al-Walīd, or al-Buḥturī who could write any type of long poems would not compose poetry and ascribe it to slave-girls. But those who were aware that their poetry, if attributed to them, would not be appreciated, looked for a more attractive means of propagating their verse, and found it in attributing their works to slave-girls.

2. There is a kind of confusion and disorder in the poetry of slave-girls. This confusion makes distinguishing their poetry from that of others very difficult. Al-Ḥuṣarī refers to this confusion through his statement that there was a difference over the authorship of some verses. He mentions a verse over which transmitters differed. Some of them attributed it to 'Anān, while some to Abū Nuwās.[3]

Such a confusion might cause uncertainty regarding at least some of the poetry attributed to slave-girls. Such a confusion seems to represent a kind of difficulty and confusion for the reader in recognising three things connected with the

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1. See above, 240.

2. al-Jarrāḥ, p.30.

3. al-Ḥuṣarī i, p.46.

poetry of slave-girls:

1. The actual poetry which slave-girls composed.

2. The poetry which transmitters and storytellers composed and attributed to slave-girls.

3. The poetry which was attributed to slave-girls on one hand and to some famous poets on the other.

. A possible result of this confusion is the adoption of an extreme view about the poetry of slave-girls, which may lead to rejection or suspicion of some of it.

This confusion and disorder in authorship occurred in connexion with poetry which was composed about slave-girls, not by slave-girls themselves, but by poets. It seems astonishing that a single incident concerning a slave-girl and a poem written of her was handed down in three different ways. The poem was attributed to four persons: al-Rashīd,[1] an unknown man,[2] a certain clerk[3] and Abū 'l-Shibl.[4] In the second verse of this poem, there is a word which is differently mentioned in every narration. Another poem was ascribed to three Caliphs, al-Mahdī, al-Rashīd and al-Ma'mūn.[5]

In al-Aghānī, there is another poem which is attributed to Muṭī' ibn Iyās and at the same time some of its verses are

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1. al-Jarrāḥ, pp.18-9

2. 'Uyūn al-Akhbār ii, p.41.

3. al-'Iqd vi, p.407.

4. al-Jarrāḥ, p.18.

5. Ibn Abī Ḥajla i, p.62.

ascribed to al-Mahdī.[1]

It seems that this poem was composed by Mutīʿ but it was attributed to al-Mahdī for several reasons:

1. Al-Mahdī used to order poets to compose poetry about most of the exciting incidents and beautiful views which could create a rich subject for poets.[2] Because he was not a genuine poet, al-Mahdī used to compose only a single verse or a couplet and order poets to continue them.[3]

2. A good number of short poems and verses was attributed to al-Mahdī. He wrote them about slave-girls among whom was Jawher.[4]

Now, two conclusions can be drawn:

1. Since there is no agreement on attribution, the accounts are unreliable.

2. Not only did the disorder occur in the case of poetry <u>by</u> slave-girls, but also in the case of that composed <u>about</u> slave-girls.

Now the conclusion that the slave-girl played a very effective role indeed in the history of ʿAbbāsid poetry can be reached through the poetry which she composed, the poetry she did not write but which was attributed to her, and the poetry which was composed about her.

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1. <u>al-Aghānī</u> xiii, pp.322-23.
2. <u>Ibid</u> iii, pp.182-83.
3. al-Ṭabarī x, pp.542-43.
4. <u>al-ʿIqd</u> vi, p.407.

Moreover, it might be concluded, in spite of the exaggerated mention given to the talent as well as the poetry of the slave-girl, that the slave-girl did not possess great talent like that of the famous poets such as Muslim ibn al-Walīd, Muṭīʿ ibn Iyās and Abū Nuwās.

Both al-Iṣfahānī and al-Masʿūdī recognised this fact and made fair statements about two slave-girls. The former said of Ḥasanā: "She produced some praiseworthy things".[1] About Maḥbūbah, the latter said: "She was conversant with things which most educated people know".[2] Perhaps such statements may more fairly apply to the slave-girl than the exaggerated others with which we have dealt above.[3]

e) Literary prose of slave-girls:

To conclude this chapter, a study of the literary prose of the slave-girl would seem in order. Like the quality of her poetry, transmitter and storyteller exaggerated the quality of her prose. The reasons for this might be similar to those given for the supposed quality of her poetry.

For example, there are two accounts about Faḍl and her prose in al-Aghānī: "In her eloquence and fluency, Faḍl was one of the best people",[4] and: "By Allāh, if the first-class writers

1. al-Aghānī xx, p.310.
2. al-Masʿūdī iv, p.42.
3. See above, 227-28.
4. al-Aghānī xviii, p.101

borrowed from her, they would not be blamed because they could not help it".[1]

Probably the exaggeration and the fabrication of such accounts can be seen, especially in the last example. Going through Faḍl's production of prose from which writers could not help borrowing, according to the claim of ibn al-Mudabbir, nothing striking would be noticed. All her production available was correspondence with her friends, namely ibn al-Mudabbir[2] and Saʿīd ibn Ḥumayd.[3] Expressing his admiration and his gratitude at the same time, the latter was credited with saying: "All my known letters are of Faḍl's composition."[4]

It seems that the last statement was never given by ibn al-Mudabbir himself. It was most probably made up by transmitters. Like other slave-girls, Faḍl used to seek fame and popularity using every possible means. Therefore, no one would imagine that she would accept the attribution of her own compositions to anyone at all. In this case, attributing the composition of others to her would seem more reasonable than attributing her compositions to others.

One should not rule out the possibility that she wrote

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1. Ibid.
2. al-Aghānī xviii, p.101.
3. Ibid xix, p.263.
4. Ṭabaqāt al-Shuʿarāʾ, p.426.

all known correspondence of ibn al-Mudabbir and willingly accepted its attribution to him because she was in love with him.[1] But this cannot stand up in the face of the fact that her master, who was like other masters in seeking every means which might lead his slave-girl to the path of fame and did his utmost to achieve this, would not accept such an act on the part of his slave-girl and would try to prevent her from doing it.

It is likely that transmitters or storytellers invented this account. Attempting to have it believed, they related it to Ibn Ḥumayd because he was her close friend.[2]

ʿArīb was credited with being very eloquent. Her eloquence happened to be mentioned in front of a certain writer. Expressing his agreement he said: "She cannot help being eloquent, since she is a daughter of Jaʿfar ibn Yaḥyā."[3] This is what was said of ʿArīb, but nothing particularly eloquent can be found in her available prose.

What can be said about ʿArīb is that she was a witty and lively slave-girl. She was able to give very striking answers like her answer to a question of al-Maʾmūn which won the appreciation of al-Maʾmūn and his boon-companions. Al-Maʾmūn for a certain reason abandoned her. It happened that she fell sick. Al-Maʾmūn visited her and asked her: "How did you find the (taste

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1. Ibid.
2. al-Aghānī xix, p.263.
3. al-Nuwayrī v, p.97.

of abandonment)?" She answered him: "O Commander of the Faithful, without the bitterness of abandonment the sweetness of reunion (al-Wasl) could not be recognised and enjoyed and he who refrained from giving offence would reap the harvest of content." Al-Ma'mun told his boon-companions the story and added: "Her answer would be seen too strange even if given by al-Naẓẓām, (an eminent theologian).[1]

This can also be said of some other slave-girls. A certain slave-girl was asked a difficult question. Immediately and without reflection, she gave so striking an answer that it made Muḥammad ibn 'Alī ibn Ṭāhir admire her and say: "If this answer were given even by al-Jāḥiẓ, it would be admirable from him."[2]

Aware of the quick wit and the clever repartee of the slave-girl, her associate, for fear that she might say something which he might not understand, because of the depth of her knowledge and her ability to express anything in her heart, used to prepare himself and empty his mind of any preoccupation when he talked with her.[3]

In general, the prose of the slave-girls was of poor quality. It was mostly either ordinary letters of complaint or expressing sentimental feeling or replies to letters. Faḍl and

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1. al-Aghānī xxi, p.90.
2. Ibid xx, p.109
3. al-Mubarrad ii, 279.

'Arīb are the best-known slave-girls who left some prose, which has come down in the form of correspondence.

At any rate, this kind of prose cannot be compared at all with that of writers who were contemporary with them such as Ibn al-Muqaffa' or al-Jāḥiẓ for example.

The reason that the slave-girl did not leave any worthwhile prose at all is, seemingly, one of the following two reasons:

1. The slave-girl lacked the necessary gift which prose requires.
2. To prose she did not pay as much attention as she did to poetry, possibly because poetry was the more interesting art to the average 'Abbāsid citizen. Prose was much less widespread than poetry. Also, poetry was a more effective factor in contributing to spreading the fame of the slave-girl. Since fame was the most important thing the slave-girl sought, she concentrated on poetry rather than on prose.

It can thus be seen how great was the influence of the slave-girl on poetry, and how little or nothing on prose. It can therefore be argued that the slave-girl left behind some striking answers or praiseworthy sayings, but nothing to be regarded as real literary prose.

6. The Social Role of Slave-girls.

a) Their Position:

Both slave-girls and singing-girls earned a high position in Umayyad society. Some of them were held in esteem and respect. Both the singing-girls 'Azza al-Maylā' and Jamīla were visited by important people, especially among those with respect and affection for music and the arts. Like the house of 'Azza in al-Madīna,[1] the house of Jamīla when she was in Mecca[2] was a regular resort and it was crowded with male and female visitors from among the nobles. Jamīla devoted a particular day to receiving her visitors,[3] who used to come to greet her. The house of 'Azza was described as a place where "The people of nobility and gallantry used to go."[4] At a particular session, she was visited by Mus'ab ibn al-Zubayr, 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Bakr and Sa'īd ibn al-'Āṣ.[5] No greater respect could be shown to a singing-girl than that a good number of the people of al-Madīna - singers, non-singers, men, women, poets and a group of the nobles - went out almost as far as Mecca with Jamīla, when she was on her way to that city, to bid her farewell. Arriving at Mecca, Jamīla was received by a great number of people of all classes and both sexes, including a number of the

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1. al-Aghānī, xi, p.166.
2. Ibid, viii, p.211.
3. Ibid, 227.
4. Ibid, xi, p.166.
5. Ibid.

nobles, among whom was al-Ḥarīth ibn Khālid al-Makhzūmī, who was one of the wālīs of Mecca in the Umayyad period.[1] Coming back to al-Madīna, she was received by an even greater number of people than had seen her off to Mecca.[2]

However, the story of such an unusual reception and farewell was viewed with suspicion not only by scholars or critics but by its very teller al-Iṣfahānī,[3] who is normally uncritical of the material he purveys.

The slave-girls Sallāma and Ḥabbaba were very much loved and very much respected. This not only occupied a place in the hearts of people but was also manifested in their talk and stories. They were visited by the nobles and even by some of the traditionists and the devout.[4] People of al-Madīna were sad and some of them wept, when Sallāma left for Damascus after being sold to Yazīd II. Her departure was a moment of sadness for al-Madīna, and many people saw her off.[5] Yazīd II was fond of both, and consequently he bought them. On the death of Ḥabbāba, Yazīd was not only grieved, but for his love and idolisation of her he walked out in her funeral procession to the grave.[6] The noble

1. 'Uyūn al-Akhbār, i, p.197.
2. al-Aghānī, viii, pp.209-10.
3. Ibid.
4. al-'Iqd, vi, p.16.
5. al-Aghānī, viii, p.345.
6. al-'Iqd, iv, p.4.

Ibn Abī 'Atīq used to visit Sallāma just to greet her or to listen to her singing. It is said that Ibn Abī 'Atīq, who was absent from al-Madīna, visited Sallāma after returning and before going to his house and said: "No, I shall not enter my house until I greet Sallāma al-Qiss."[1]

In spite of this, slave-girls were not desired for producing children in the early part of the Umayyad period. The Umayyad Caliphate was purely in favour of the Arabs. Non-Arabs (al-Mawālī) were regarded as inferior, not according to religion,[2] but as far as the social structure was concerned.[3] The son of the slave-girl was in a way discriminated against, especially in the political field. This does not mean that people of that time did not favour slave-girls or marry them. The record does not tell of any Umayyad Caliph whose mother was a slave-girl. 'Abd al-Malik,[4] al-Walīd I[5] and al-Walid II[6] had slave-girls who bore them sons, but none of them was elected caliph. The reason that hismother was a slave-girl might have had something to do with this. These Caliphs did not do so, not mainly on the grounds that their mothers were slave-girls, but most probably on the grounds that the Arabs, who

1. al-Aghānī, viii, p.343.
2. Qur'ān, xlvix, 13.
3. al-Mubarrad, i, pp.273-74.
4. al-'Iqd, vi, p.130.
5. Ibn Ḥabīb, al-Muhabbar, p.305.
6. al-Aghānī, vii, p.70.

had a strong national feeling, would resent it, and this might lead to difficult problems. Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi writes: "Banū Umayya never wanted any Caliph from among the sons of slave-girls. They said that the Arabs would not approve of this."[1] Maslama ibn ʿAbd al-Malik, whose mother was a slave-girl[2] and who was a brave man as well as a successful leader,[3] suffered from being the son of a slave-girl. His father ʿAbd al-Malik did not recommend him to be in line for the succession,[4] probably for his being the son of a slave-girl. Maslama, who probably inherited a different complexion (yellow) from his mother, consequently suffered from a form of colour-prejudice. "The yellow locust" was his nickname.[5]

Al-Walīd II unsuccessfully appointed both of his sons by a slave-girl as heirs-apparent and tried to obtain the obedience of his subjects for them.[6] Commenting on this, al-Iṣfahānī says: "He was the first Caliph to appoint his heir-apparent from among his sons by a slave-girl. This had never been done before."[7] This comment suggests that this action was seen as

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1. al-ʿIqd, vi, p.130.
2. Ibn al-Athīr iv, p.103.
3. Ibid, 108.
4. al-Ṭabarī vi, p.416.
5. al-Thaʿālibī, Laṭāʾif al-Maʿārif, p.41.
6. al-Aghānī, vii, p.70.
7. Ibid.

contrary to convention.

Towards the beginning of the last part of the Umayyad period, the views of people about the sons of slave-girls changed, and they started favouring their sons. It was because of the fact that there were great people among their sons, as al-Tha'ālibī puts it.[1] Speaking of 'Alī ibn al-Husain, whose mother was a slave-girl from Kabul, al-Ya'qūbī writes: "When 'Alī ibn al-Husain was mentioned, people wished that their mothers were slave-girls."[2]

In 'Abbāsid society some slave-girls, on account of their fame or skill, enjoyed a higher position. When slave-girls for example fell ill many people used to visit them and many presents used to be sent by friends or admirers.[3] No greater compliment could surely have been paid to a slave-girl than to be the object of the solicitude of important figures. The slave-girl 'Arīb told how on a certain occasion she happened to be in the presence of twenty chiefs. She claimed that every one of them claimed that she had directed her glance at him.[4]

Like princesses, some of them were received not only by the commons but by important people. A warm welcome by the host in person seems to have been required when the slave-girl paid a visit:

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1. al-Tha'ālibī, Latā'if al-Ma'ārif, p.124.
2. al-Ya'qūbī, Tārīkh vi-vii, p.40.
3. al-Aghānī xv,p.53.
4. Ibid, xxi,p.93.

when visited by 'Arīb the important man Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mudabbir ran barefoot to receive her and hold the halter of her donkey exactly as does a servant.[1]

Some of the famous slave-girls managed to escape the inferior treatment which unjust society used to inflict on common slaves. On the contrary, some of them were sought in marriage, even by some of the generals and the kuttāb. Mutayyam is the best example of this respected kind of slave-girl. It is said that the distinguished ones from among the generals, the kuttāb and even from among Banī Hāshim requested her to marry them, but she refused them because she wanted to stay true to her dead master.[2]

So remarkable a position did slave-girls enjoy that al-Rashīd ordered his usher to receive certain owners of certain slave-girls and to look after them. Al-Rashīd did so not for the position of owners but because he admired their slave-girls and bought some of them.[3] In al-Aghānī there is an account concerning al-Rashīd and Dhāt al-Khāl. This account is nearer to fiction than reality. It goes as follows: "On the day he bought Dhāt al Khāl, al-Rashīd swore to carry out any request she made. She requested him to put a certain wasīf called Ḥamawayh in charge of war and the collection of land tax in Persia for seven years. She asked this of al-Rashīd just because Ḥamawayh was her master and not because he was capable.

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1. Ibid. xxii, p.177.
2. al-Nuwayrī v, p.89.
3. Ibn Kathīr x, p.220.

"al-Rashīd", the account goes on, "ordered his heir-apparent to observe this appointment if he himself died before seven years had passed."[1]

Both accounts might be open to suspicion. It cannot be rejected that some of the Caliphs might have ordered some of the requests of their slave-girls to be carried out, such as that of the slave-girls of al-Mahdī when they requested him to allow Bashshār to visit them.[2] But such a demand mentioned in the second account cannot conceivably have been granted, since Persia was a very important part of the Caliphate and the charge of the war and the collection of the land tax was no easy task, but on the contrary one of the hardest and most vital tasks and required an experienced man, which the wazīf Hamawayh was not.

Ismā'īl ibn Bulbul managed to acquire a certain slave-girl whom he liked. Because of his fondness for her, he asked her if there was anything on earth she did not own that she wished for. She told him how she had everything she wished except a crystalized glass found in the possession of al-Hasan ibn Rajā'. Ismā'īl used every means at his disposal to get it for her.[3]

So high a position did some of the slave-girls reach that their mediation was accepted. Like influential people, they dared to come between important people and ordinary ones. Some

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1. al-Aghānī xvi, p.266.
2. al-Husarī ii, p.140.
3. Ibn al-Abbār, I'tāb al Kuttāb p.169.

people turned to them in days of crisis seeking their help in one way or another. It is said that a certain man had some trouble with Ṭāhir ibn al-Ḥusain, who threw him into prison. This man was a neighbour of Dīza, a slave-girl. He sought her protection on the ground that he was her neighbour. The protection of such a neighbour was sufficient to impress Ṭāhir and to save the man.[1]

Like every great man, Ṭāhir would naturally have enemies who would not hesitate to take advantage of such a thing and use it against him or who would try to defame him by inventing and circulating such a story. Considering such possibilities, such an account might seem far-fetched. But at the same time, especially bearing in mind the tolerance of some of the Arab chiefs, some truth might be seen in such an account.

b) Umm al-Walad:

The slave-girl who produces a child of her legal master, provided she is certified not to have been pregnant when he required her, is called umm al-Walad.[2] She is to become free once her master dies.[3] The majority of jurists justify her freedom by the freedom of her son, for he is a part of her.[4] Some justify her freedom in that the slave-girl would become a share of her son from the

1. Ibn Ṭayfūr, Tārīkh Baghdad, p.67.
2. al-Ḥusain, al-Zawā'id (on Zād al-Mustaqna'), pp.618-19.
3. al-Sarakhsī, al-Mabsūt vii, p.150.
4. Ibn Rushd, Bidāyat al-Mujtahid ii, p.393.

legacy of his father, and since her son owned her, she therefore would be free,[1] for the son is not allowed to own his mother.[2]

That it is legal for the master to sell her, after her becoming pregnant, is a controversial subject. Bishr al Mirīsī, Dāwūd al-Ẓāhirī and his followers among the Ẓāhirīs entitle the master to sell her. They based their verdict on some ḥadīths such as that in which Jarīr and Abū Sa'īd said: "We used to sell ummahāt al walad in the life of the Prophet. He did not forbid this."[3] Although he was a Ẓāhirī, Ibn Ḥazm saw the selling of umm al-walad as illegal and said: "As soon as the pregnancy of his slave-girl is recognized, it is illegal for the master to sell her. If he sold her, the sale would be invalid."[4] The majority believe the master is not allowed to sell her.[5] 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb passed a verdict in which he stated that umm al-walad is not to be sold and that she is free once her master dies.[6] If the master sold his pregnant ama, who gave birth within a period of six months, and claimed her son, he would be believed. Consequently, she would be umm al-walad, the son would be affiliated to the master and the contract would be invalid.[7]

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1. al-Ṭusī, al-Istibṣār iii, part ii, p.13.
2. Ibid, 14.
3. Ibn Rushd ii, p.393.
4. Ibn Ḥazm, al-Muḥallā ix, p.18.
5. Ibn Rushd ii, p.393.
6. al-Sarakhsī vii, p.149.
7. Ibid, 202.

It is a controversial issue among jurists whether the master has the right to exploit umm al-walad as long as he is alive. Mālik considers that he has the right only of sleeping with her and not of exploiting her, while al-Shāfi'ī entertains quite a contrary opinion.[1] According to the Ḥanbalī school, represented by Ibn Quddāma, umm al-walad, as long as her master is alive, is treated as an ama in the matter of his sleeping with her, enjoying her service and hiring her out but not in the respect of selling her and giving her away for endowment (waqf) or deposit (rahn).[2] According to the Ḥanafī school, the master has the right of sleeping with her, exploiting her and arranging her marriage.[3]

The son of umm al-walad is free. He has all the rights of a freedman's son. He is attributed to his father, and he has the right even to inherit from him.[4] If the master denied his son by umm al-walad, the son would be free but not related to him.[5] If the master married his ama (slave-girl) to his slave and claimed the son of the ama, the son would be free, and ama would be umm al-walad and the son would be related to the slave because the son is always attributed to the marriage-bed (al-firāsh).[6] If two masters

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1. Ibn Rushd ii, p.394.
2. Ibn Quddāma, Zād al-Mustaqna', p.620.
3. al-Mirghīnānī, al-Hidāya ii, p.50.
4. al-Sarakhsī vii, p.175.
5. Ibid, 152.
6. Ibid, 175.

owned an ama and both claimed her son, the son would be related to both of them, and he would inherit from both as they could inherit from him.[1]

The slave-girl whose master decides to free her once he dies is called mudabbara.[2] She automatically becomes free after her master's death if she wishes.[3] The master is entitled to exploit her, sleep with her and hire her out as well as arrange her marriage.[4] It is illegal for her master to sell her or to present her as a gift except if such an act would lead to freeing her.[5] If the master needed to sell her for some financial reason, he would be allowed to sell her, but on condition that she would become free after the buyer's death.[6] If she produced a son by her master, she would become umm walad, and the promise to free her (tadbīr) would no longer be necessary.[7] Her son is also mudabbar.[8] According to the majority of jurists, the son of the mudabbara by a man other than her master, whether legitimate or not, takes the status of his mother.[9]

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1. Ibid, 159.
2. al-Shāfiʿī, al-Umm viii, p.17.
3. Ibid.
4. al-Ṭūsī iii, part II, p.29.
5. al-Mirghīnānī ii, p.50.
6. al-Ṭūsī iii, part II, p.29.
7. al-Sarakhsī vii, p.151.
8. al-Mirghīnānī ii, p.51.
9. Ibn Rushd ii, p.391.

c) Social innovations and customs of slave-girls:

Among things which slave-girls introduced to ʿAbbāsid society was the exchange of presents. The novelty was not the exchange itself but the kind of present. Slave-girls were considered elegant and zarīfāt and those people which whom they used to exchange presents were described as such also. Accordingly, the nature of the present was expected to have been chosen to mean something. Non-acceptance of the present was, in the opinion of slave-girls, the custom of common people with no claim to elegance and who lacked a necessary portion of good taste.[1]

Presenting bread, meat, sweets and that sort of thing was not appreciated because such a present did not suit the taste of elegant slave-girls but Turkish men and tough soldiers, as ʿArīb puts it.[2] In order to teach a lesson to a certain man who was rude in the eyes of slave-girls because he did not take into account the suitability of his presents, ʿArīb sent him, as a present and at the same time as a lesson in elegance and taste, a plate covered with a handkerchief. Inside the plate, there was a small plate on which there were two pieces of riqāq (thin bread) and two pieces of the roasted breast of a bird and salt. The ends of the riqāq were bitten.[3]

As she gave, so the slave-girl received presents from

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1. al-Aghānī xxi, p.83.
2. Ibid, 84.
3. Ibid.

friends and admirers. Some of these presents were extravagant. It is said that Ibn al-Muṣaffa' presented Zarqā' of Ibn Rāmīn with a thousand birds carried on a huge camel.[1] Extravagance is very apparent from the account that Faḍl presented Sa'īd ibn Ḥumayd with a thousand small goats, a thousand chickens and a thousand bowls of basil and fruit as well as perfume and drink.[2]

It was common for the present sent by or to a slave-girl to contain either birds or meat of birds, as has just been seen. In some cases the type of bird sent would have a special significance. Faḍl, for example, sent a chicken. Al-Ḥasan ibn Wahb presented Bunān with turtle doves (Shafānīn) inside a cage.[3] Probably birds meant something to the slave-girl and her friends between whom presents were exchanged. Possibly it was a symbol of elegance. This might be clear from the story that 'Arīb got offended with the person who presented her with meat, and in order to teach him a lesson in elegance, she sent him meat, but meat from a bird.

The custom of presenting or sending apples[4] was apparently introduced by slave-girls. This custom increasingly grew widespread in that society. As concerns the exchange of presents, it was necessary to take into account fashionable taste.

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1. al-Aghānī xv, p.53.
2. Ibid xviii, p.100.
3. Ibid xxii, p.544.
4. Ṭabaqāt al-Shu'arā, p.208.

For example, presenting sour-tasting fruit, such as lemon or grapefruit, seems not to have been appreciated,[1] possibly because such fruits are good on the outside and sour inside.

Apples as a present seem not to have been complete unless they were bitten by the sender.[2] Writing something very brief to blame a lover or to complain of love on the bitten or unbitten apple was common.[3] Verses of poetry which meant something between the sender and the person to whom the apple was sent would usually be written on the apple. Al-Muwashshā' mentions something of this sort, such as that a certain slave-girl sent a present to her friend. Within the present was an apple on which the following verse was written: "An apple is not sweeter-smelling than a lover embracing his beloved."[4]

Like a bird, an apple had a meaning. In the customs of slave-girls and their friends, the meaning of sending the apple could be a deep thing; that they were sincere and pure not only externally but also in their inner feelings because an apple smells good, looks good and tastes good. It carried another meaning, the meaning which Ibn al-Mu'tazz expresses in his poem: "The messenger of kisses."[5] The apple was called the messenger between lovers

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1. al-Suyūṭī, al-Mustazraf i, p.56.
2. Ibn al-Mu'tazz, Dīwān, p.369.
3. al-Washshā', al-Muwashshā' p.281.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibn al-Mu'tazz, Dīwān, p.369.

which would not disclose their secrets. Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih mentions that a certain slave-girl asked a certain man: "What does the poet mean by saying: 'Tell me who is the honest messenger I could send to you and who would not divulge our secrets?'" The man failed to find the correct answer. Seeing this, the slave-girl suddenly threw an apple to him and said: "This is the messenger meant."[1]

There is another mystery about the apple. It was considered shameful to eat the presented apple. Al-Faḍl ibn al-ʿAbbās was criticized by a certain man who saw him eating a presented apple. In his criticism, the man said: "Woe to you, how can you eat a greeting!"[2]

Drinks were among the appreciated and common presents from or to slave-girls.[3] Like apples, handkerchiefs were exchanged between slave-girls and their friends. Handkerchiefs would usually be decorated with some writing which would often include sentiments of love or complaints of a lover.[4] Lubān[5] (Olibanum) and siwāk[6] were also presented.

Other kinds of presents were exchanged by slave-girls

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1. al-ʿIqd vi. p.407.
2. al-Tawḥīdī iii, p.79.
3. al-ʿIqd vi, p.407.
4. al-Washshā' p.p.262-263.
5. Ibid, p.212.
6. Ibid, p.217.

and their lovers or friends. Among them were rings, as 'Arīb gave to Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mudabbir.[1] Al-Muwashsha' includes a good deal of information about the customs which slave-girls and their friends adopted, such as writing the name of the slave-girl or that of her friend reversed on their rings. It includes the account that al-Ḥasan ibn Wahb wrote the name of the slave-girl of whom he was fond (Na'am) reversed (Ma'an) on his ring.[2]

The exchange of this type of present seems to have been among the customs which slave-girls introduced into 'Abbāsid society, rather than invented, because such a custom was said to have existed in Greek society much earlier.[3]

Although the apple was used as a reliable messenger between slave-girls and their friends, there were real messengers, men and women. Slave-girls who had friends or lovers, and for one reason or another could not meet them, used confidential messengers. These messengers used to carry the messages of love, complaint, conciliation or blame. It is said that al-Ma'mūn, for the purpose of deepening the relationship between him and a certain slave-girl, sent a messenger to her.[4] For keeping in touch with each other, al-'Abbās ibn al-Ahnaf and Fawz, who are believed to have been in love, used this means. 'Ain the slave-girl was the messenger of

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1. al-Aghānī xxii, p.161.
2. al-Washsha' p.248.
3. Mez ii, p.198.
4. al-'Iqd vi, p.408.

Fawz to al-'Abbās ibn al-Aḥnaf.[1]

The relation between the slave-girl and her friend or lover might have been cut off with nothing to keep their friendship or love alive except secret messengers through whom they were able to recall some memories of their friendship or their love.[2] As slave-girls managed to have admirers, so they managed to have friends too. Their friendship was different from one to the other. Some of them made friends not for the sake of friendship but for a material aim or for pleasure. Such a rootless friendship was liable to fade as soon as the material aim in it was over. Such a friendship is clear from the friendship of 'Arīb with 'Alī ibn Ḥātim. It is said that she left her master for him. She became bored with him, therefore she left him.[3]

Nothing could be worse for a man than falling in love with such slave-girls who made friendship or pretended to be in love with some of her associates, to get money or benefit out of such pretence. It was related that a certain boy fell in love with a certain slave-girl. He started wooing her by sending messengers and letters to her, in which he described how deep his love was and how he could not eat or sleep. She did not care to reply. Desperately he wrote to her saying: "You have refused to visit me. Would you be kind enough to let your image pass before

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1. al-Aghānī xvii, p.29.
2. Ibid xii, p.141.
3. Ibid xxi, p.70.

me in order to cool the burning heat of my tortured heart and tell me when you are going to do this." The slave-girl one day said to his messenger: "Tell this foolish boy that I would come to him myself if he sent two dirhams."[1]

The seeking of a friendship based on a material aim which ended as soon as the aim ended was common practice among slave-girls and their friends; a slave-girl's friend might have befriended her just for pleasure or gifts. Continuance or non-continuance of pleasure or gifts would determine how long such a friendship would last. Because their friendship was based on mere pleasure, Al-Ḥasan ibn Wahb abandoned Bunāt when she gave birth to a son of her master.[2]

Most of the slave-girls who exercised such friendship confined themselves not only to one person. On the contrary, they moved from one friend to another. ʿArīb, who was extremely attractive, had a life crowded with many men who were after her because she was well-endowed with lustful and dissolute qualities. ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ismāʿīl, Ḥātim ibn Abī ʿAdī, Muḥammad ibn Ḥāmid (both commanders of the army of Khurāsān) al-Amīn, al-Maʾmūn, al-Muʿtazz, al-Wāthiq, Abū ʿĪsā ibn al-Rashīd and Ibn al-Mudabbir were among her distinguished friends.[3]

Because of good training or the ability of their

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1. al-Azdī, Ḥikāyāt Abi l-Qāsim al-Baghdādī, pp.72-3.
2. al-Aghānī xxii, p.547.
3. Ibid. xxi, pp.67-92.

profession to captivate hearts and persuade people, some of the slave-girls had many friends with whom they went about, and pretended to be fond of every one of them. They succeeded in playing this game. Such an act on the part of 'Abbāsid slave-girls may remind one of the similar act on the part of the Roman concubine, who had always to convince her lover of her exclusive love for him.[1]

Like 'Arīb, Daqāq, who is saidnot to have refused any hand, used to go with many friends. She had a very striking ability to play the trick of making everyone feel that she loved him and was true to him.[2]

It is worth wondering whether such information could have been invented by those who stood against the predominance of slave-girls. But bearing in mind the fact that slave-girls were women who were rejected by society, and could not be expected to conform to its moral standards, the truth of such statements would seem more likely.

However, it cannot be denied that sincere friendship had a place in the dictionary of slave-girls. Even after the death of their friends they remained true to them. The slave-girl of Ashja', who deeply loved him, pledged hereself not to eat or to drink after the news of his death had reached her. She carried out her pledge until she died.[3] The same fate overtook

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1. Balsdon, p.229.
2. al-Aghānī xii, p.287.
3. Ibn al-Qayyim, pp.69-70.

Ṭarīf (the slave-girl of al-Ma'mūn) for her deep love for him and her profound sadness on his death.[1]

The history of Arabic literature is full of the tales of love which led to the deaths of both lovers. Suffice it to mention the names of Jamīl and Buthayna or Qais and Laylā. Whether this is fiction or fact, it is very hard to believe in the reality of such love in the case of slave-girls who were rather professional in their friendship or their love. This is not to deny that some of the slave-girls remained true to their friends or masters even after their death. Danānīr,[2] Sakan,[3] Mutayyam[4] and Khuzāmā[5] were said to have remained true to their owners after their death and to have refused any offer of marriage or alternatives.

Some of the lovers of slave-girls suffered and even enjoyed anguish and deprivation. A certain lover refused to buy a slave-girl even though he could afford her, claiming that his love would die out if he owned her.[6] At the same time, some lovers made every effort to own their slave-girl beloved, trying every possible means and seeking the mediation of the nobles.

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1. al-Suyūṭī, al-Mustazraf i, p.18.
2. al-Aghānī xviii, p.18.
3. Ṭabaqāt al-Shu'arā', p.367.
4. al-Aghānī vii, p.287.
5. Ibn Ṭayfūr, p.94.
6. al-Aghānī ii, p.247.

The case of the love of Abu l-'Atāhiya for 'Utba and his attempt to own her by appealing to al-Mahdī, and by presenting him with things on which his poetry about 'Utba was written,[1] is clear to reflect the great effort the lover made to own his slave-girl beloved.

In the records concerning the accounts of slave-girls of the 'Abbāsid period nothing has been preserved to suggest that the lover sold his property to buy or to free his slave-girl beloved, as the hero of Plautus' Mostellaria did with "his father's property in order to free and set up the slave-girl he loved."[2]

It was enough for many a slave-girl's lover to see his beloved from afar, and a few words from her were sufficient to satisfy him.[3]

While not completely rejecting any of these accounts, it would seem a good idea to emend or change the word "love" in the dictionary of the slave-girl and her friends, unless the word "love" carried the same meaning as it does today. Perhaps such words as fondness or admiration might be more suitable.

Slave-girls, particularly the famous ones, enjoyed a good deal of independence in choosing their friends and in going out whenever they wanted. But there was only one kind of freedom

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1. al-Mas'ūdī iii, p.317.

2. Balsdon, p.227.

3. al-Aghānī ii, p.247.

which they could not enjoy: they could not escape being bought and sold or called slaves. 'Arīb could be taken as the distinguished example of the independent slave-girl. Her behaviour is also a good example of the behaviour of such an independent kind of slave-girl. Against the consent of her first master, she left his house for Ḥātim ibn 'Adī because she was fond of him.[1] Moreover, she secretly married Ṣāliḥ al-Mundhirī without the knowledge or the permission of her late master.[2]

Some of the owners did not give their slaves a free rein but at the same time did not completely restrict them. The restriction imposed would be, for example, to send a chaperone with them to watch them during their visits. The slave-girl Fatan used to be accompanied by a certain servant when on a visit to Ḥusain ibn al-Ḍaḥḥāk.[3] In his Kitab al-Ḥayawān, al-Jāḥiẓ mentions that the slave-girl Ṭughyān used to be accompanied by a certain eunuch in order to report on her when she was on a visit to the houses of singers.[4]

It is indicative of this high degree of independence that a slave-girl dared to clutch the sleeves of al-Rashīd and asked him to free her from her old master.[5] They enjoyed the

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1. al-Aghānī xxi, p.67.
2. Ibid, 80.
3. al-Khalī', Ash'ār, p.108.
4. al-Jāḥiẓ, al-Ḥayawān i, pp.17475.
5. al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, i, p.97.

choice of freedom to keep their religion. They were also granted the facilities to perform their religious rites. They were seen with golden crosses at their necks in the place of al-Mahdī[1] as well as in that of al-Ma'mūn.[2]

Their independence seems to have led them to be very dissolute. Probably some of them were practising libertines. Daqāq, who did not refuse any seeker after pleasure, is a good example to show that slave-girls believed in libertinism and exercised it. Her going about with several friends at the same time,[3] her conduct with her two servants (she promisedthat she would set them free if they went to bed with her)[4] and the very immoral motto seen on her fan: "the need of the female organ for two male members is greater than the need of the mill for two mules,"[5] cast no doubt on her libertinism. Among the astonishing things about the dissolute life some of the slave-girls led, was that Daqāq, without any shyness, sent a letter to a certain man in which she described her organ. She used very embarrassing and outspoken language. This man failed to find any satisfactory reply to send to her.[6]

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1. al-Ṭabarī x, p.542.
2. al-Diyārāt, p.178.
3. al-Aghānī xii, p.287
4. Ibid, 286.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid, xii, p.285.

'Ubayda al-Ṭanbūriyya, 'Arīb and Khulayda al-Makkiya exactly followed the same road. Of 'Ubayda, al-Iṣfahānī writes: "People desired her and she welcomed them."[1] He adds: "She was very lustful, refused no-one, young or old. She liked a man with a funny face, a flat nose, an ugly look and with a black skin. Brazenly and unashamedly, she said of her fondness for this man that she had enjoyed every kind of man except the black and wanted to try them."[2]

The accounts of 'Arīb's friendship with Muḥammad ibn Ḥāmid, especially that concerning her answer to him: "O weak man. Why do you not stop chiding me and take off my clothes!"[3] is a clear reflection of the dissolute behaviour of 'Arīb. Nothing could be funnier than the story of the famous condition she imposed on her friends. This condition became widely known and it was used as a proverb. A certain man from among the many who had heard of her condition asked 'Arīb what it was. Without feeling shy, she told him: "a very hard 'ayr."[4]

As for Khulayda, al-Nuwayrī relates: "Muḥammad ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Amr ibn 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān sent Abū 'Awn to Khulayda to ask her hand in marriage. Wearing light clothes which were not enough to hide her body, Khulayda received Abū 'Awn and

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1. Ibid xxii, p.211.
2. Ibid, p.212.
3. Ibid xxi, p.81.
4. Ibid xxi, p.83.

said: "Oh! I thought you were one of the naughty young men!" The story goes on to mention the answer of Khulayda to Abu 'Awn's offer of marriage on behalf of Muḥammad. "Tell him he is welcome whether he wants a legal marriage or fornication."[1]

Such dissolute behaviour of slave-girls came as a shock to the principles of decency in that society and it was a surprise to some people such as Mazyad, who was credited with saying: "In former times a man, being fond of a slave-girl, used to send messages or messengers to her for a whole year and chew the olibanum which she chewed. Afterwards, they would talk and recite poetry during their meeting. But nowadays, a man hasnothing more to do to the slave-girl than to part her legs as if they were already married.[2]

Some of the slave-girls seem to have been fond of making and playing jokes. Even in their jokes, they were dissolute. Dissolute jokes from the slave-girl seemed to be accepted. Al-Aṣma'ī tells how he asked a certain facetious slave-girl whether she had any work in hand. She replied: "Not in my hand, but in my leg."[3]

It is likely that al-Aṣma'ī invented this joke. This is clear from the fact that this story was mentioned by al-Jāḥiẓ in a slightly different way. According to al-Jāḥiẓ, it is not

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1. al-Nuwayrī v, p.64.
2. Abū Ḥayyān ii, p.55.
3. 'Uyūn al-Akhbār iv, p.111.

attributed to al-Aṣma'ī but to an unnamed man.[1] In addition al-Aṣma'ī, who composed verses and attributed them to poets, would find no difficulty in creating such a joke and attributing it to a slave-girl. Wooing a certain slave-girl, Abū al-'Aynā', who is said to have been very ugly, writes: "I am a man of knowledge and intelligence." Answering him, the slave-girl writes: "It is not for filling an office that I want you."[2]

However, slave-girls had their own system of jokes and coquetry. Typical of this is the ambiguity of the answers they occasionally gave or the usage of strange words. On a certain occasion the slave-girl of whom Muḥammad ibn Umayya was fond gave him an ambiguous answer which he could not understand (and which unfortunately al-Iṣfahānī does not quote).[3] Answering the question of Yazīd Ḥawrā': "What is your name?" a certain slave-girl said: "It is Mumanna'a (fortified)."[4] Probably slave-girls used such jokes to attract attention to themselves and to confuse or surprise their interlocutors and provoke further questions. It was a triumph for the slave-girl over the men of her society to achieve such a thing.

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1. al-Ḥuṣarī i, p.199.
2. Ibid.
3. al-Aghānī xii, p.147.
4. Ibid iii, p.250.

d) The fashion of slave-girls:

Slave-girls introduced novelties in fashion to 'Abbāsid society. On their hands, sleeves, pillows, curtains, foreheads, fans, hats, trains, shirts, musical instruments, cooking utensils, shoes and even their underwear, slave-girls wrote verses of love or poetry of complaint. On the hat of the slave-girl of Hamdān appeared this couplet: "Look closely at the beauty of this slave-girl who confuses the seer for she looks feminine and masculine. She is male and female."[1] Al-Washshā' mentions many accounts concerning such writings. Among them was that which was seen on the forehead of a certain slave-girl: "The full moon could not be a substitute for her if she was concealed, but she could be a substitute for the moon if it was concealed."[2]

This kind of fashion found a ready response from the elegant people of that society who used such writings on their things because they liked them and admired them. On his fan, an educated man wrote these verses: "The spirit of life lies in the movements of fans. Many soft fingers of beautiful girls have moved them. Consequently, they bring comfort to sweating cheeks."[3]

Slave-girls were fascinated by flowers, especially roses and violets. They used them and carried them for decoration. The sleeves of Mutayyam, who liked violets, were never seen empty of

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1. al-'Iqd vi, p.427.
2. al-Washshā' p.274.
3. Ibid p.287.

violets.[1] The use of violets was not a monopoly of slave-girls but the elegant people of that time used them too.[2]

Slave-girls knew some of the primitive means of beautification such as making up their lips,[3] dyeing their hair and spraying their hair with perfume and musk.[4] Such means of beautification as making up faces, dyeing hair and if need be wearing wigs were in common use among the Roman courtesans much earlier.[5] According to Ameer Ali, Persian slave-girls used such things. He thinks that 'Abbāsid society through its slave-girls borrowed the art of tinting lips and cheeks from Persian society.[6]

Among the means of beautification slave-girls used was engraving pictures of a crescent,[7] a snake or scorpion[8] on their cheeks or between their eyes. This curious practice was in fashion and possibly appreciated at that time. The picture of a snake or scorpion seems a horrible device to have used, and there must have been a special meaning for this. Probably it symbolized danger or was a warning that one could not or should not touch or

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1. al-Aghānī vii, p.291.
2. al-'Iqd vi, p.403.
3. Abū Nuwās, Dīwān, p.323.
4. al-Aghānī xxi, p.88.
5. Balsdon, p.228.
6. Ameer Ali, p.455.
7. al-'Iqd vi, p.402.
8. Yatīma al-Dahr iii, p.261.

kiss the part on which the picture was. It is possible that most of them did not mean this but used it as a sort of coquetry and to attract attention to themselves.

In connexion with the choice of the colours of their clothes and the way in which they wore them, slave-girls seem to have used a new fashion. The attempt to attract the attention of men was the thing most preoccupying the mind of slave-girls. Thus, they probably used such a fashion in their clothes and their appearance for this reason or perhaps to distinguish them from free women.

It is thought that slave-girls had their own clothes with special colours whether society imposed this on them or not. It is said that free women used to wear clothes of ordinary colours (ṭabī'ī), while slave-girls used to wear extra bright colours (ghayr ṭabī'ī).[1] Describing the appearance of a slave-girl by whom he was fascinated, Abū Nuwās came to her clothes and wrote: "White, black and yellow were the colours of the silken garments she was wearing. Each garment was shorter than the other."[2]

Free women avoided wearing such clothes possibly because this was regarded as a sort of violation of decency. Slave-girls cared nothing about decency. What they really cared about was looking attractive.

It seems that there was a special kind of clothes

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1. Mez ii, p.222.

2. Abū Nuwās p.24.

imposed on slave-girls to wear in earlier times. In the Prophet's time, free women were ordered to wear clothes different from those of slave-girls, whereby they could be recognised.[1] 'Umar I strictly applied this rule and punished offenders. He used to inflict disciplinary punishment upon a slave-girl who broke this rule and wore the same clothes as a free woman.[2] In the Umayyad period, it is recorded that some of the slave-girls wore different clothes from the normal type. This kind of clothes was described as differently dyed. The slave-girls of Jamīla were seen wearing such dyed clothes.[3]

c) Al-Ghulāmiyyāt:

The most interesting thing about the novelties which slave-girls brought or introduced to 'Abbāsid society was the imitation of boys in their appearance, their clothes and the style of their hair. Some of them wore swords,[4] held sticks or branches of palm and olive.[5] In their imitation, some of them went so far as to dye their upper lips with a green material to represent the moustache of a youth.[6]

The contents of a certain poem written by Abū Nuwās about

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1. al-Ṭabarī, Tafsīr xxii, p.47.
2. al-Qurṭubī xiv, p.244.
3. al-Aghānī viii, p.227.
4. al-'Iqd vi, p.427.
5. al-Aghānī x, p.219.
6. al-Diyārāt, p.178.

a certain ghulāmiyya can be regarded as the best picture ever drawn of the typical ghulāmiyya: "She is proud of the beauty of her face, which looks like the lightening breaking the thickness of the dark night. She considers the clothes of the youth finer and closer to fornication and sin. She goes on experimenting until she becomes exactly like the youth in word and deed. She plays with pigeons. When the old intoxication begins to take effect on the mind of the drinkers, her skill nominates her to play the ṭanbūr. In the early morning, she goes to play polo and she is fond of shooting. She takes care of her hair and lets down its sides. Like a youth, she often rolls up her sleeves."[1] The invention of this custom is attributed to Zubayada. In order to curb the fondness of her son al-Amīn for boys, she took to choosing slim-waisted and nice-looking slave-girls and tried to make them look like boys. She made them wear round head-dresses and curl their hair round their ears.[2] There is evidence in al-Aghānī that such a custom had already appeared in al-Madīna during the Umayyad period in the person of a singing girl 'Azza al-Mayla'. The only available reference is to the reason why 'Azza was called al-Mayla'. Three reasons were given, among them that she wore al-mulā, (an over-garment exclusive to men) and imitated men. Isḥāq al-Mūṣilī, whose view would be favoured in such a matter, did not agree with this reason and stated that she was called al-Maylā

1. Abū Nuwās, p.568.

2. al-Mas'ūdī iv, p.226.

for the swaying way (tamāyul) she walked.[1]

This kind of slave-girl attracted people, presumably because they found something new in her. They cut the sides of their hair in the form of the letter ق[2] or the letter ن[3] or in the form of the tail of the scorpion,[4] and made the front part very thick. They were known as Maṭmūmāt.[5] Some of them gave up what women used to wear, such as necklaces and ear rings. In his description of a certain ghulāmiyya, al-Mu'allā, al-Ṭā'ī writes: "She is a rosy-cheeked, slim-waisted, has ringlets like scorpions and languid eyes. She obstinately wears the clothes of youths and disdains to wear necklace or ear ring."[6] Such a style captivated the admiration of some people among whom was al-Mutawakkil, who divorced his wife Rīṭa simply because she refused his suggestion that she cut her hair as did the ghulāmiyya.[7]

The fashion of imitating youths seems to have been openly followed only by slave-girls. Free women avoided such a fashion, possibly because they saw it as being either beneath their dignity, as did Rīṭa, for example, or against the strict

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1. al-Aghānī xvii, p.101.
2. Ash'ār Awlād al-Khulafā, p.192.
3. Ibn al-Mu'tazz, Dīwān, p.440.
4. al-Aghānī vii, pp.204-05
5. Abū Nuwās, Dīwān, p.627.
6. Ṭabaqāt al-Shu'arā', p.334.
7. al-Jāḥiẓ, al-Maḥāsin Wal-Aḍdād, p.234.

traditions.

Despite the fact that Rīṭa saw cutting her hair in the same fashion of slave-girls as beneath her dignity, Ḥamdūna (the daughter of al-Rashīd) did not consider it so, and actually adopted the fashion. Such an action irritated conservative free women, among whom was one who said when describing Ḥamdūna: "What is Ḥamdūna? I have seen her but I have not seen any good. Her face looks like an angry cock fighting another cock."[1]

Ḥamdūna was a luxurious princess. She was confined to her palace mixing with nobody but her slaves. She probably fell under their influence, and with her no doubt were others. In order to satisfy the desires of their husbands, who were enthusiastic over this new fashion, and whether they were willing or not, some of the free women had to do so, or they faced the same tragedy Rīṭa faced.

It is likely that this hair style was either brought into ʿAbbāsid society through those slave-girls who had Greek origins or borrowed from Greek society because such a thing was perhaps known earlier among Greek slave-girls and servants. Among the surprising things which the messenger of the Caliph ʿUmar saw at the court of Jabala ibn al-Ayham were ten slave-girls who cut their hair and wore silk.[2]

It was, seemingly, not easy to distinguish between those

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1. ʿUyūn al-Akhbār iv, p.39.

2. al-ʿIqd ii, p.59.

slave-girls called al-Ghulāmiyyāt and boys. They looked like each other. Describing a certain ghulāmiyya, 'Ukkāsha writes: "She wears exactly the same clothes the youth wears and they share the same appearance."[1] The only distinction was the appearance of the hair on the cheeks or the moustache of a youth. Being confused with the distinction between a ghulāmiyya and a youth, al-Ṭibī writes:"Without seeing the hair on his cheeks, I would not have known which is the boy."[2] At the palace of al-Ma'mūn, 'Īsā ibn Abān saw two beautiful ghulāmiyyāt and thought they were youths. He was astonished when al-Ma'mūn told him that they were slave-girls.[3]

Like some of the boy-slaves, some of these slave-girls (al-ghulāmiyyāt) were used for the purpose of sodomy. Throughout the dīwān of Abū Nuwās, there are a great many accounts concerning his adventures and relations with this kind of slave-girl, who suited both hetero- and homosexual practices. For instance, his description of his slave-girl friend as equally suitable for both kinds of fornication,[4] proves this. Al-Jāḥiẓ also mentioned something in connexion with this matter. Speaking of the slave-girl, when attempting to point out some of the advantages of the slave-girl for pursuers of pleasure, al-Jāḥiẓ says: "One can use

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1. al-Jāḥiẓ, Mufākhara al-Jawārī Wa'l-Ghilmān, p.15.
2. Mashriq, number 50, p.191.
3. Ibid , 190.
4. Abū Nuwās, Dīwān, p.627.

her according to one's desire whether from the front or from behind."[1]

f) Reaction against slave-girls:

Despite the fact that slave-girls in the 'Abbāsid period were in great demand and that the majority of the people of that society entered into the habit of owning skilful slave-girls, there was a hostile reaction from certain people who did not appreciate slave-girls and who directed their blame at those who were fond of slave-girls.

They saw slave-girls dominating their society. Perhaps a fear that free women would be neglected entered theminds of these people. There might have been religious grounds for this reaction: slave-girls were independent in one way or another, as in the way they dressed and the way they behaved, as just been pointed out in the proper place. This was opposed to religion, which orders women to dress and to behave in a very decent manner.[2]

Whatever the reason, the reaction against owning slave-girls found supporters. Muḥammad ibn al-Ash'ath used to go quite often to Zarqā' of Ibn Rāmīn. His visits produced some reaction from his people, who severely censured him for this.[3]

The oppostion seems to have been strong enough to be taken seriously. In an introduction to one of his works on slave-

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1. al-Jāḥiẓ, Mufākharat al-Jawārī Wa'l-Ghilmān, p.17.
2. Qur'ān, XXIV, 31.
3. al-Aghānī xv, p.48.

girls, al-Jāḥiẓ takes into account the strength of the opposition when he writes: "In this account, I have marshalled some arguments for those who have reproached us for owning slave-girls."[1]

Some people regarded relations with slave-girls as a disgrace.[2] Accordingly, they tried by all means to put an end to any kind of relationship established between slave-girls and any of their relatives.[3]

Because they took notice of the criticism of the opposition, some people hid their slave-girls away from their families. An unnamed man from al-Baṣra said: "I hate my slave-girls to be seen by my family. So I decided to sell them".[4] The use of the word "hate" (akrahu) in his statement contains an indication to how strong was the opposition and how much some people cared.

The resentment against slave-girls is evident from the stories available in the books concerned. Such stories were related in order to warn people of the dangerous effect of slave-girls on society and people. Moreover, there are many stories full of accusations against slave-girls: accusations of being insincere,[5] of running not after love and romance but only after the sparkling

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1. al-Jāḥiẓ, Thalāth Rasā'il, p.54.
2. al-Aghānī xiii, p.287.
3. Ibid xxii, pp541-42.
4. Ibid xiii, p.17.
5. al-'Iqd vi, p.63.

of the dirham[1] and of preferring those whose presents were more valuable.[2]

Some of the poets who for one reason or another stood against slave-girls wrote poems in which they satirized them. al-Iṣfahānī mentions how Yūsif ibn Ṣaqīl wrote a poem in which he rebuked slave-girls and how this poem became known everywhere.[3] Stories containing some innuendoes against slave-girls were invented and circulated. Al-Tanūkhī mentions that Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Khurāsānī spent fifty thousand dirhams on the slave-girl Zahra. For this, he became so penniless that he could not afford a shirt and was seen walking barefoot. Al-Tanūkhī also mentions that a son of a certain man spent three thousand dirhams on a certain slave-girl during the absence of his father in Iṣfahān.[4]

Because the opposition thought that indulgence in the habit of owning and enjoying slave-girls would lead people to abandon the serious life for relaxations which would consequently form a threat to morals and to the performance of duties, especially religious ones, it is most likely that they invented such stories to discourage society from accepting slave-girls in the way it did.

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1. al-Washshā' p.142.
2. Ibid 138.
3. al-Aghānī xxiii, pp.92-93.
4. al-Tanūkhī, Nishwār, i, pp.94-5.

Since sincerity was the quality most preferred and loved by the owners and the friends of slave-girls, the opposition seems to have concentrated on describing slave-girls as insincere, as has just been mentioned. Of course, some people suffered from the insincerity of slave-girls. There is no convincing reason not to believe Abū Nuwās, who was among those who described slave-girls as insincere,[1] although he was not against owning or enjoying slave-girls. Abū Nuwās was known as a man of adventures with slave-girls. Better than anybody else, he knew them, enjoyed them, and suffered from them,[2] and he mentioned both cases.

Since the opposition had no power to prevent or reduce the dominant role of slave-girls in this society, they resorted to another ineffective weapon. This was inventing hostile epigrams such as "the slave-girl is like market bread and the free woman is like home-baked bread", or "Do not joke with a slave-girl, or "The free man is one who does not accept the slave-girl for she is the wickedest of creatures."[3]

g) <u>The effect of slave-girls on free women:</u>

By virtue of their tremendous numbers and their popular novelties, slave-girls dominated ʿAbbāsid society, where people

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1. Abū Nuwās, <u>Dīwān</u>, p.630.

2. Ibid, 283.

3. al-Maqdisī, <u>al-Ẓarā'if Wa'l-Laṭā'if</u>, p.118.

who favoured them[1] accordingly owned them. This was of course at the expense of free women, whose reactions, as well as those of their supporters, were ineffectual.

Many answers can be given to the question why the demand for slave-girls was greater than for free women:

1. They were expected to be more beautiful than free women because they came from various countries, and presented a variety of different features accordingly: in white or black skin, yellow hair , blue eyes and the like, men of that time found a different thing and a novelty to enjoy.

2. As al-Jāḥiẓ mentions:[2] "Before owning the slave-girl, a man could find out all her attractions except that of actually sleeping with her. Accordingly, he bought her for what he appreciated in her. As for the free woman, he had to consult women about her beauty and women naturally do not appreciate the beauty of women with regard to the needs and tastes of men. Men know women better than women know women. A woman does not understand the characteristics of another woman which fascinate a man. All a woman can say of another woman is: "her nose is as straight as the sword, her eye is like that of the gazelle and her neck is like a silver amphora."

3. Access to them was easy. The jealousy of the owner of the slave-girl was seemingly not so strong as his jealousy in respect

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1. al-Jāḥiẓ, Mufākharat al-Jawārī Wa'l-Ghilmān, p.17.
2. al-Jāḥiẓ, Rasā'il, p.274.

of his free wife or his sister for example, and that is why a certain poet, in order to avoid the jealousy of her relatives, did not dare to mention a free woman of whom he was fond in his poem and turned to mentioning her slave-girl instead.[1]

4. The nobility of their sons: a certain general was credited with saying: "On the face of the earth, there is no braver man than the child of Khurāsān whose mother was a slave-girl."[2] Men of that society knew the nobility as well as the bravery of the sons of slave-girls and testified to them. Analysing women, al-Aṣma'ī said: "Female relatives are more patient. Foreign women are better at producing children. In cutting off the heads of brave men, there is nobody like the son of the 'Ajamiyya."[3] Concerning the nobility of the sons of slave-girls, al-Jāḥiẓ writes: "People did not desire slave-girls for producing children until they saw al-Qāsim ibn Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr, Sālim ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Umar and 'Alī ibn al-Ḥusain ibn 'Alī, whose mothers were slave-girls and who had no equal as regards nobility of character, whether in al-Madīna , al-Ḥijāz, Iraq or the whole earth."[4]

Despite the fact that the nobility of the sons of slave-girls was admitted, 'Abbāsid society had some people who were

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1. al-Aghānī xx,p.24.
2. Ṭayfūr, p.143.
3. 'Uyūn al-Akhbār iv, p.3
4. Ibid, p.8.

proud of having no single drop of servile blood in their veins. Both al-Amīn and al-Ma'mūn were the sons of al-Rashīd, the former by a free woman and the latter by a slave-girl. In their support of al-Amīn, some of the poets wrote poems in which they praised al-Amīn on one hand and satirized al-Ma'mūn on the other. A good example of those verses is the following: "His birth was not from a slave-girl who had been moved from one dealer to another before coming into the possession of his father."[1] It was said that Muḥammad ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn Ḥasan ibn al-Ḥasan ibn 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, reproaching al-Manṣūr whose mother was a slave-girl,[2] said: "You must know that I am free of any blood of a slave-girl."[3]

5. Apart from al-Saffāḥ, al-Mahdī and al-Amīn, the mothers of all the 'Abbāsid Caliphs were slave-girls.[4]

Ibn Ḥazm wrote a short treatise entitled Ummahāt al-Khulafā'. This treatise was devoted to showing the origins of the mothers of the 'Abbāsid Caliphs. It is worthwhile summarising his data concerning the mothers of those Caliphs who ruled as from al-Saffāḥ to al-Muhtadī:[5]

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1. al-Fakhrī, p.212.
2. Ibn Ḥabīb, p.45.
3. al-Ṭabarī x, p.210.
4. Ibn Ḥabīb, pp.46-5
5. Ibn Ḥazm, Risāla, published in Majalat al-Mu'jam al-'Ilmī al-'Irāqī xxxiv, pp.296-7.

Caliph's Name	Mother's Name	Mother's Origin
Al-Saffāḥ	Rīṭa bint Zayd	Free woman from Banī Hāshim
Al-Manṣūr	Sallāma	Berber
Al-Mahdī	Umm Mūsā bint Manṣūr	Free woman from Ḥimyar
Al-Hādī and Al-Rashīd	Al-Khayzurān	Slave-girl (mawlāt)
Al-Amīn	Zubayda	Free woman from 'Abbāsid family
Ibrāhīm Ibn al-Mahdī	Shakla	Slave-girl from Ẓafār
Al-Ma'mūn	Marājil	Greek slave-girl
Al-Mu'taṣim	Mārida	Muwallada slave-girl
Al-Wāthiq	Qarāṭīs	Greek slave-girl
Al-Mutawakkil	Shujā'	Turkish slave-girl
Al-Muntaṣir	Ḥabashiyya	Greek slave-girl
Al-Musta'īn	Makhāriq	Greek slave-girl
Al-Mu'tazz	Qabīḥa	Slav slave-girl
Al-Muhtadī	Qurb	Greek slave-girl

This precedent did much to encourage people to own and favour slave girls.

6. People who enjoyed slave-girls found in them something which they failed to find in free women. For example, it was easy to get rid of the slave-girl once the owner was no longer interested in her, but this was not so in the case of the free woman. So people said: "The slave-girl is bought when desired and returned when it is discovered that she has a defect, mental or physical."

But the free woman is usually like a chain round the neck of her husband."[1] Maslama ibn 'Abd al-Malik, whose mother was a slave-girl,[2] was credited with saying: "It is a strange thing ('ajab) to turn to a free woman after experiencing a slave-girl."[3] Bearing in mind that the mother of Maslama was a slave-girl, he might well have been prejudiced in favour of slave-girls.

However, al-Mahdī, al-Buḥturī and Muṭī' ibn Iyās made statements tending to support that of Maslama and to show that slave-girls were among the pleasures of life at that time. They said that slave-girls were the pleasure of life,[4] and without them life seemed tasteless.[5]

Generally, people of that time not only regarded them as one of life's pleasures, but some of them thought that there was a combination of pleasures in them such as nothing else on the face of the earth could possess.[6] At any rate, these statements are enough to reflect the fact that slave-girls were far more favoured than free women.

Free women did their utmost to resist the domination of slave-girls and to bring back to their fold errant men in whom the

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1. al-'Iqd vi, p.129.
2. Latā'if al-Ma'ārif, p.124.
3. 'Uyūn al-Akhbār iv, p.9.
4. al-Maqdisī, p.116.
5. al-Buḥturī, Dīwān ii, p.793; Tārīkh al-Khulafā', p.279; al-Diyārāt, p.251.
6. al-Jāḥiẓ, Rasā'il, p.69.

attractions of slave-girls found a fertile soil to flourish and prosper.

Umm Salama (al-Saffāḥ's wife), despite the fact that al-Saffāḥ did not have any time to spare for enjoying slave-girls, was prooccupied with a fear that slave-girls might find access to the heart of al-Saffāḥ. In order to combat this, she took strict measures, such as making al-Saffāḥ swear not to marry or take any slave-girl as long as she was with him.[1] On a certain occasion, she sent her servants to beat Khālid ibn Ṣafwān who had been doing his best to persuade al-Saffāḥ to enjoy slave-girls.[2]

Al-Ḥimyariyya (al-Manṣūr's wife) used every available means in her power to keep al-Manṣūr away from slave-girls. It is said that she used to reward judges and religious men, by whom al-Manṣūr was surrounded, to discourage him from enjoying slave-girls.[3] She asked al-Manṣūr to guarantee in writing that he would not marry or take any concubine as long as she was with him.[4]

Probably both al-Saffāḥ and his successor al-Manṣūr did not enjoy slave-girls at the expense of their wives, not because of the strict measures their wives imposed on them before accepting marriage to them, but because they had no spare time

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1. al-Masʿūdī iii, p.261.
2. Ibid p.262.
3. al-Ṭabarī x, p.423.
4. Ibid x, p.423.

for such affairs. The former devoted all his time to founding the 'Abbāsid Caliphate while the latter devoted his time to consolidating it and building it into a powerful state.

It is noticeable that founders of states tried to remain away from slave-girls. Undoubtedly, they know how very influential were beautiful slave-girls, because beauty is a force and love is a weapon. Al-Manṣūr, the true founder of the 'Abbāsid Caliphate, was known to hate amusements,[1] of which slave-girls constituted a great part. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Dākhil, the founder of the Umayyads in Spain, did not accept any slave-girl presented to him.[2]

Zubayda, a noble woman of influential personality and popular reputation, struggled against slave-girls, whose charm found a ready response in her husband al-Rashīd. She used every possible pressure. On a certain occasion, she complained about the potentially serious affairs between the slave-girl 'Anān and al-Rashīd to his relatives, asking them to intervene and put an end to his admiration for 'Anān.[3] When her complaint to the relatives of al-Rashīd failed, she resorted to a more effective weapon, available in the poetry of Abū Nuwās[4] or in the cynical jokes of al-Asma'ī. She hired both of them to play their tricks

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1. al-Fakhrī, p.159
2. al-Maqqarī, ii,p.70.
3. al-Aghānī xxiii, p.14.
4. Ibid xxii, p.531.
5. Ibid 528.

in order to make al-Rashīd hate 'Anān or at least give up his intention of buying her. She apparently succeeded in thus eliminating 'Anān[1] but failed to stop the steady influx of slave-girls into the palace of al-Rashīd.

Zubayda seems to have recognized her failure and given up her ineffective struggle and concentrated on strengthening or at least maintaining her position in the heart as well as the palace of al-Rashīd by presenting him from time to time with nice-looking slave-girls.[2]

If Zubayda and Rīṭa of al-Mutawakkil, who were of the 'Abbāsid dynasty, despite their hard struggle, failed to stop or even to reduce the access of slave-girls to the hearts and the palaces of their husbands, it would be interesting to know something about the fate of other free women. They tended unwillingly to lead a life of seclusion.

It was towards the close of the Umayyad period that the effect and the participation of free women in society actually began to emerge. As slave-girls started affecting society and the households, free women started disappearing from social activities. They were forced by the pressure from slave-girls and by the neglect on the part of their men on the other hand to turn to a self-contained life of seclusion. The active kind of free woman, who played an active social role in early Umayyad

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1. Ibid p.531.

2. Ibn Ḥajla p.64

society, such as Sukayna bint al-Ḥusain,[1] 'Ā'isha bint Ṭalḥa[2] and Umm al-Banīn (the wife of al-Walīd I)[3] disappeared and closed their doors, looking at life and society round them from behind the windows of their seclusion and giving way to slave-girls to take over.

The effect of slave-girls on society was inevitable and a natural result of their presence. Dealing with this, Akel writes: "Educated slave-girls, it should be remarked, played, at this stage of the life of the Muslim society, a remarkable role. They not only made their way to distinguished households and assumed higher social positions, but began to occupy the place left by the elimination of free-women's social life."[4] Speaking of the chance given to slave-girls by the elimination of free women from society, he adds that this elimination "offered from the beginning an ample opportunity to slave-girls to step in and take up the wives' place in the social circles."[5]

Ameer Ali thinks that the custom of female seclusion was in existence among the pre-Islamic Persians, and according to him,

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1. al-Aghānī xvi, p.108.
2. Ibid vi, pp.192-93.
3. Ibid 206
4. Akel, thesis, p.341.
5. Ibid.

this custom "made its appearance among the muslim community in the reign of Walīd II."[1] This dark seclusion developed and became a custom among the noble families in the 'Abbāsid period.[2] The absolute frustration bore heavily on free women, and many of them were entirely ignored. The man of that society found everything he wanted in the slave-girl and consequently neglected the free woman and set himself free from his duties towards her.

'Ulayya bint al-Mahdī was among the free women who suffered from seclusion and frustration. She kept herself entirely in her house, or rather her luxurious prison, mixing with no one but her servants and her slave-girls. It was inevitable that she found a slight relief for her frustration in writing her poetry about her servants, Ṭall and Rasha'.[3]

This new trend on the part of men of that time had its effect on the sense of jealousy in the free woman. This sense seems to have almost disappeared. Instead of protesting at her husband's fascination for slave-girls, she, just to preserve her shaky position, began to present him with nice-looking slave-girls. According to al-Tanūkhī, she did this without the slightest sign of jealousy.[4]

Society seems to have been watching free women but with indifferent eyes. Some men enjoyed abandoning them and seeing them

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1. Ameer Ali, p.199.
2. Mez ii, p.170.
3. Ash'ār Awlād al-Khulafā, pp.61-2.
4. al-Tanūkhī, al-Faraj ba'd al-Shidda ii, p.290.

wrapped in a thick veil of seclusion and frustration. Intimidating his wife, ibn al-Mu'tazz wrote: "Bint al-Numayniyya seems to be angry! Does she not know that I possess a thousand slave-girls?"[1] This ironical tone and the callous way in which this threat was issued are sufficient to reflect the indifferent attitude of that society towards free women.

Among things resulting from the domination of slave-girls was a falling-off in men's inclinations to marry free women. Although it was an Arab custom in the Jāhiliyya and Umayyad periods that the family would not usually approve of the marriage of her daughter to any man who loved her and mentioned her in his poetry,[2] families in the 'Abbāsid period desperately used every means in their power to find husbands for their daughters. They were prepared even to pay the dowry and fill the husband's house with valuable presents.[3] This social problem was not a characteristic only of the 'Abbāsid family in the eastern part of the Islamic world but was also shared by the western part, especially Spain. Dealing with this, al-Marrākishī writes: "Al-Manṣūr Abū 'Āmir filled Spain with girls and women from neighbouring countries. Their prices were so low that every man was able to buy some of them. This caused a disaster for the Arab families, who started to attempt every possible means to attract husbands by furnishing their

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1. Ibn al-Mu'tazz, Dīwān, p.465.
2. al-Aghānī ii, p.16.
3. al-Anṭākī, Tazyīn al-Aswāq, p.122.

daughters with jewelry, clothes and other necessities. Had they not done this, nobody would have been ready to marry their daughters."[1]

It seems that it was the free women of noble blood and high position who suffered more, for it was a degrading act for this kind of family to look for husbands for their daughters.

The failure of the free woman on one hand and the husband's neglect of his free wife on the other caused her to lead a life shadowed by suspicion and moral corruption, so that she started to befriend her servants or to enjoy her slave-girls for sexual purposes. This actually happened in the case of some free women. Despite the carefulness and conservatism of some historians about recording information concerning such a subject, there is a handful of indications which could not be suppressed, such as the relationship between 'Ulayya and her servant,[2] and the fact that a certain man found his Sindī slave in bed with his wife.[3] Furthermore, it is said that some women who could afford to possess slave-girls kept them for sexual enjoyment. A good example is the daughter of the Ikhshīdid ruler of Egypt who is said to have bought a particular slave-girl for this purpose.[4]

It can thus be recognized how very dominant a role

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1. al-Marrākishī, al-Mu'jib, pp. 83-4.
2. Ash'ār Awlād al-Khulafā' p.p.62-3.
3. al-Mas'ūdī iii, p.326
4. al-Maqrīzī (Beirut 1959) ii, p.158.

slave-girls played in ʿAbbāsid society and how much they captivated the hearts and admiration of its men. It can also be recognized how far slave-girls took their social role not only in introducing novelties in the way of customs or fashion, but by dominating the household and the mistress of the house, forcing her to be unhappily resigned to her seclusion and to suffer from her frustration.

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