letter which she attached to the wing of a carrier-pigeon she had with her, and sent it off to tell Umm Ja'far this. The latter realised what Ma'mün intended, and wrote back, 'You are free.' Thereupon he married her, giving her a dowry of ten thousand dirhams, and took her off in private straight away and lay with her; then he let her go and ordered the money to be paid to her.

25 An indication that looking at women in general is not prohibited is that a middle-aged spinster will appear before men without any bashfulness. Were this prohibited when she is young, it would not be permissible when she is middle-aged. But this is a matter in which the limits of reasonableness have been overstepped by people who go beyond mere normal jealousy to positive illwill and narrowmindedness, so that they have come to regard this [attitude] as a real duty.

26 Equally, in the past they used not to see any harm in a woman transferring herself to a number of husbands in turn, and not ceasing to do so until prevented by death, so long as men still desired her. Whereas today they censure this, or in some cases regard it as [at least] unseemly. They cold-shoulder a free woman [who remarries] after she has already been married to one husband [previously], and attach social disgrace to the man who espouses her as well, and include both him and her in the blame and shame of such conduct. Yet men will take as a concubine a slave who has been in the hands of innumerable masters. Who, however, can [reasonably] approve of this in a slave and object to it in a free woman? They are not jealous over slaves (who may become mothers of their children or favourites of monarchs), and yet are jealous over free women!

27 Jealousy, if extended to persons outside the limits of those prohibited [to others] by God's sanction, is a vain thing. It is, however, a common characteristic of women, by reason of their frailty, to such an extent that they will be jealous over mere dreams or thoughts. A woman may even have jealous feelings about her own father, and thereby become estranged from his wife or concubine.

28 Singing-girls have been from time immemorial in the entourage of Arab and non-Arab kings. The Persians regarded singing as a polite accomplishment, the Greeks as philosophy. In the Jähiliyyah, 'Abdallah b. Judān had his two 'Crickets'; 'Abdallah b. Ja'far al-Tayyār had slave girls who sang and a singing boy named Bādi'. For all this, al-Ḥakam b. Marwān censured him, but he answered, 'What is it to my discredit that I should gather the choicest part of the verses of the Arabs and teach it to the girls, for them to wrangle and recite with their melodious throats?'.

29 Yazīd b. Mū'awiyah listened to music. Yazīd b. 'Abd al-Malik took Ḥabbābah and Sallāmah and brought people in to listen to them. About the former the poet says,

When her lute responds plaintively to her [voice], and beneath its influence the hearing of the noble guests is filled with yearning, and all ears hearken to it in silence, as though they were asleep when they sleep not!

and about Sallāmah,

Have you not heard her (marvellous as she is), when she raises her voice in song, how skilful is her execution; she renders the thread of the lyric in such a way as to render it to a turtle-dove cooing in her throat.

Yazīd used to listen, and when he was specially moved, he would rend his garment and cry, 'I am transported', and Ḥabbābah would reply, 'Please don’t be transported! we need you.'

30 Subsequently, Walīd b. Yazīd was pre-eminent for playfulness and amatory verse; and later rulers followed exactly the same path as this earlier precedent. 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz, before he came to the caliphal throne, used to be a singer, and a well-known piece he used to sing is,

Stay, my two friends, let us visit Su'ād, for to visit her is nigh at hand, and leave alone the distant bournes.

His also is,

My heart has often visited Su'ād, and my eye hated sleeplessness.

31 We can see no harm in singing, since it is basically only poetry clothed with melody. If [the poetry] is truthful, it is good; if false, then evil. The Prophet has said, 'Some poetry is true wisdom.' 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb said, 'Poetry is but a form of
speech; that which [as speech] is good, is good [in verse], and that which is evil, evil.’ We do not regard the metrical form of poetry as depriving speech of its basic tendency. Metrical form may be present without that fact impairing the speech or nullifying its status as ‘true wisdom’. If it be allowed that speech as such is not a prohibited thing, the addition of metre and rhyme to it cannot by any possible argument entail making it prohibited. Equally, the addition of melody to it does not amount to anything prohibited. The rhythm of poetry is of the same category as the rhythm of singing, and the domain of prosody is part of the domain of music: it belongs to the domain of psychology. It is impossible to describe satisfactorily by a verbal definition, but it can be apprehended intuitively just as much as it can be apprehended by prosodic analysis. There is hence no reason for regarding it as prohibited, nor is there any basis for such a view in Qur’an or Sunnah.

32 If [the objector] regards it as prohibited only on the ground that it distracts one from contemplation of God, we find many things such as tales, food, drink, the visual enjoyment of gardens and bouquets, hunting, sex and other pleasures, which divert and distract one from contemplation of God. Now while we know that to devote one’s whole time to the contemplation of God is, for a person to whom it is possible, a more excellent thing, yet provided that a man fulfills his canonically prescribed duty, all these other things are permissible for him; sin [only] attaches to him if he fails to fulfill his canonical duty. If anyone could have been safe from being distracted from the contemplation of God, it would have been the prophets; yet there was Solomen, distracted from prayer by the reviewing of horses ‘until the going down of the sun’ (so he hamstrung them and severed their necks).

33 Slaves are a variety of merchandise, subject to bargaining and chaffering over price; and both vendor and purchaser need to examine the piece of goods carefully, and subject it to a close scrutiny. For this purpose there is requisite the same sort of ocular selection as is obligatory in relation to all commodities sold. If a thing cannot be priced by measure of capacity, weight, number or linear measurement, it is judged by beauty or ugliness.

Of this the only judge is a person with a trained eye, skilful in his trade. For the quality of beauty is too fine and delicate a thing to be appreciated by just anyone whose eye falls on it. Furthermore, intangible qualities cannot be judged by the witness of the eye alone; were it so, anyone who cast his glance on them would be a competent judge. Yet even in the case of cattle and asses, a correct judgment on them is only formed by someone with a perceptive eye, who must inspect them, form a mental estimate [of the ocular evidence], and transmit that evidence to his intellect; the final judgment on the objects proceeds from the intellect.

34 I must explain to you that beauty lies in both completeness and moderation. By completeness I do not mean any going beyond the standard of moderation, such as a simple increase in tallness of stature, or slenderness of body, or mightiness of limb, or breadth of eye or mouth, such as might surpass that respective feature in men of a balanced physique. For where an excess of that kind occurs, it is a diminution of beauty, even though it can be regarded as an ‘addition’ in a purely physical sense. There are certain proper limits which circumscribe worldly phenomena, and draw a boundary line around the magnitudes which have been established for them. Anything which goes beyond those bounds either physically or morally (even in religion and wisdom, which are the most excellent phenomena of all) is ugly and to be deprecated.

35 Moderation consists in the balance of a thing — not with reference to quantity, but as in [the expression] ‘the balance of the earth’ referring to its equilibrium. Psychologically, balance is to be found as between the quasi-parts of the soul. In the human body, balance is a just proportionableness between its various excellencies, and the absence of an excess of one over another; such as occurs when a man with a small snub nose has an enormous eye, or a tiny-eyed man has a big nose, or an insignificant chin accompanies a huge head, or a large face goes with an undernourished skinny body, or a long back with short thighs, or a short back with long thighs, or a breadth of forehead out of proportion to the lower part of the face. One can also speak of ‘balance’ in the case of buildings, rugs, embroidery,
clothes or canals where water flows: by balance [in all these cases] we mean evenness in design and composition.

36 Certainly, since nobody is prevented from looking at a field of corn or a garden plot, or from enjoying himself in its freshness, or from sniffing its sweet scent, and all this is admitted to be allowable provided he does not stretch out a hand to [interfere with] it all (though if he interferes with the weight of a grain of mustard seed to which he is not entitled, he does that which is not permissible and tastes of forbidden fruit): so too it is with conversing, joking and flirting with singing-girls, shaking hands with them in greeting, or putting a hand on them [merely] in order to make them turn round. Looking is licit provided that there is no admixture of forbidden behaviour. God Himself has allowed an exception [from censure] for ‘trifling faults’, saying, ‘To those who avoid major sins and indecencies, [and commit none] save trifling faults, the Lord is amply forgiving’. ‘Abdallah b. Mas‘ūd, when asked about the interpretation of this verse, replied, ‘When a man is close to a woman and goes forward, it is an indecency, but if he holds back it is a trifling fault.’ Another Companion says that ‘trifling faults’ implies kissing and fondling. Others say that it is any [bodily contact] short of actual coitus. And so said the bedouin when asked about the favours he had received from his mistress, ‘How near is what God permits to what He forbids!’

37 If someone says, as the Tradition runs, ‘Set a barrier between men’s and women’s breaths’, or says, ‘Let not a man be alone in a room with a woman, even if he be called her kinsman; her [true] kinsman [in such a case] is death’; or [if he declares] that association between men and singing-girls is liable to lead to misbehaviour, in view of the way in which he who indulges in such association is exposed to a sexual urge which compulsively drives one on to the commission of sexual indecency, and most of those who resort to singing-girls’ houses do so for that purpose and not for mere listening to music or with the intention of purchasing them: then our reply [to all these arguments] is that the laws apply only to overt acts. God does not impose on mankind the duty of passing judgment on what is hidden [in the heart], nor of taking action in respect of [another man’s] intentions. A man

is legally reckoned a Muslim on the basis of his overt behaviour, though he may perhaps be [secretly] a heretic. He will be legally counted as legitimate, when possibly the father whose paternity he claims never begot him at all; still, he was ‘born on the father’s bed’, and by general repute is assigned to [that father]. If the witness who testifies for a man on one of these two counts were to be required to produce the absolute truth, no testimony could ever be given on such a subject. If someone frequents our assemblies without disclosing any lineage with which people credit him, or supposing that he does disclose it and we turn a blind eye to it[s dubiousness], then no sin attaches to us.

38 The degree of estimation whereby singing-girls fetch high prices is due to infatuation. If purchases [of them] were made on the same basis as the purchase of ordinary slaves, not one of them would run up to more than the price of a commonplace slave. But most of those who bid a high price for a girl do so because of passion. Such a one may perhaps have been intending to seduce her, thinking this an easier way to satisfy his ardent desire; then this proves impossible for him, and he turns to a legitimate approach, though he had not originally intended this, nor acknowledged that this is a preferable course. So he sells off property and looses his purse-strings, and incurs the burden of social disapproval, until he finally purchases the girl. Thus his captivation by, and addiction to, singing-girls is the very thing in his behaviour which is productive of good. For the affair starts off with his having nothing in mind but his passion for them, but then this is frustrated by the carefulness of the owners, the watchfulness of the custodians, and the strictness of the seclusion in which the girls are kept, so that the lover is forced in the end to making a purchase; whereby sexual intercourse becomes licit and the Devil is the frustrated one.

39 The passion of love is a malady which cannot be controlled. In the same way, attacks of [other] maladies may not be controllable, except by means of dieting. Yet again, one may get hardly any advantage from dieting, in view of the side-effects engendered by the [prescribed] food and the way it overloads the constitution by excessive consumption [of it]. If anyone were able to guard himself from all harm [of that kind] by complete abstention
from food, the self-doctor would stick to this course while still healthy, but his body would become emaciated and his flesh waste away, so that [in the end] he would be told to adopt a varied diet and advised to pay special attention to palatable things. And even if he were to get over the change in foods and preserve himself by dietary regime, he might still not get over the harm caused by change of air and difference of water.

40. Now I will describe for you the definition of the passion of love, so that you may understand what exactly it is. It is a malady which smites the spirit, and affects the body as well by contagion: just as physical weakness impairs the spirit and low spirits in a man make him emaciated. Love-sickness and its general effect throughout the body is due to the position of the heart in relation to the limbs. The difficulty of curing it arises from the variousness of its causes. For it is compounded of a number of aspects: like a fever attack which is compounded of cold and phlegm, so that anyone who attempts to treat one of the two elements of the disease is ineffective in remedying it and only increases the malady caused by the other element. The stronger the constituent causes of the malady are, the more inveterate it is, and the slower to clear up.

41. Passion is compounded of love and infatuation and natural affinity and habit of association. It begins with a growing intensity, reaches a climax, and then falls off by natural progression to the stage of complete dissolution and the point of positive revulsion.

42. 'Love' is a term applied to the concept which [linguistic] convention prescribes [as its meaning], and there is no other descriptive term for this. One can say, 'a man loves God', 'God loves the Believer', 'a man loves his child', 'a boy loves his father' or 'loves his friend' or 'his country' or 'his people', and his love can tend in any direction he likes; but none of this can be called passion. One understands therefore that the term 'love' is not adequate to express the idea of 'passion'; the latter needs the addition of the other factors [mentioned above]. Nevertheless, love is the starting point of passion, and is followed by infatuation. The latter may be compatible with truth and conscious choice; or the reverse, as is the case with infatuation over religions, countries and other things. An infatuated person will not budge an inch from his standpoint and his predilection for the object of his infatuation. Hence it is said, 'The eye of infatuation does not tell the truth', and it is also said, 'To love something makes you blind and deaf' - taking their fates as lords, because of their infatuations. Thus a man will often 'fall in love' with someone who is by no means the height of beauty and perfection, and not characterized by any cleverness or grace, and if he is asked the reason why, he has no reason to produce.

43. Furthermore, love and infatuation may both be present, and the combination still not qualify to be termed passion. Love and infatuation together may be felt for a child or a friend or a country or a kind of clothing or furniture or riding beasts, and yet nobody has ever been seen to be physically ill and mentally distraught for love of his country or his child, even though he may experience pain and anguish when separated from the object of his love. Whereas we have seen and heard of many a one who has been utterly destroyed, and suffered long torment and wasting away, because of the malady of passion.

44. Now one must know that if there be added to love both infatuation and affinity (meaning natural affinity, i.e. the love of men for women and women for men, such as is implanted in all males and females in the animal world) the resulting emotion becomes true passion. If this passion is felt by a male for a male, it is only derivative from this fundamental carnal instinct. Otherwise it could not be called passion when the carnal instinct is absent. Furthermore, you do not find passion likely to be fully developed at first encounter, before association is linked to it, and habitue implants it in the heart. It then springs up as the seed springs up in the soil, so that it becomes firmly established and strong, and bears fruit; and it may come to have as it were a lofty stem and a strong hard trunk, or sometimes it may grow crooked, and then there comes about the ruin of the root. When [the emotion felt] includes all these factors, it is passion in the fullest sense. At that point, infrequency of meeting only serves to increase it and add fuel to its fire, while separation inflames it to such an extent that the mind become deranged...
and the body wasted, and the heart preoccupied to the exclusion of all profit, and the image of the loved one is present to the eye of the lover, and has mastery over all his thoughts, and recurs to the heart in every possible situation.

45 But if the lapse of time is prolonged, passion wanes as the result of parting, and fades away through frustration; yet the traces and marks of its wounds and scars hardly ever disappear completely. Moreover, the conquest of the loved one tends to hasten the dissolution of the passion. The cause of this is that some men are quicker than others to conceive a passion, owing to the difference in the constitution of hearts in respect of their tenderness or hardness, and their speed or slowness in forming an intimacy, or of the fact of the [lover's] carnal instincts being feebler and weaker than the passion manifested by the beloved: unless indeed the latter infects [the lover] with the malady and makes an impression on his breast and pierces his heart. This arises from affinity and the response of some natures to others, the yearning of some souls towards others, and the mutual approximation of spirits. It is comparable with [the case of] a sleeping man: another, who is not sleepy, may see him sleeping and himself doze off. Or a person not inclined to yawn may see someone else yawning and himself do the same, by natural compulsion.

46 [This sort of thing] is rarely a passion between two persons with equal strength on both sides, unless by some special compatibility in their physical or moral make-up, or in respect of cleverness or infatuation or natural characteristics. Such [special compatibility] accounts for the fact that we may observe a handsome person nourishing a passion for an ugly one, or an ugly person loving a handsome one. A person may prefer the ugly to the handsome, though one does not observe this preference in other contexts, so that one might suppose that some mistake was involved in it; but in fact it is due to the reciprocal recognition of spirits and pairing off of hearts.

47 Passion for singing-girls is dangerous, in view of their manifold excellencies and the satisfaction one's soul finds in them. They provide a man with a combination of pleasures such as nothing else on the face of the earth does. Pleasures all come by means of the senses. Food and drink belong to the domain of the sense of taste, and no other sense partakes with it therein. If a man were to eat musk, which belongs to the domain of smelling, he would find it disgusting and loathsome, because it was in origin congealed blood. If he were to sniff the odours of foodstuffs (other than the sweet-scented foods such as fruit and the like), at a time when he had no appetite, or were to persist in simply gazing at such things, it would turn out to be unprofitable. Or if he were to bring into contact with his hearing any perfume or [other] sweet-scented thing, he would get no pleasure from it. But when one comes to consider singing-girls, three of the senses are involved all together, and [the pleasure of] the heart makes a fourth. The eye has the sight of a beautiful or [otherwise] attractive girl (since cleverness and beauty are hardly ever simultaneously possessed by a single object of enjoyment and delight); the hearing has from her its need of which is attended by no inconvenience, that in which the organ of hearing finds its sole delight; touching her leads to carnal desire and the longing for sexual intercourse. All these senses are as it were scouts for the heart, and witnesses testifying before it. When the girl raises her voice in song, the gaze is riveted on her, the hearing is directed attentively to her, and the heart surrenders itself to her sovereignty. Hearing and sight race each other to see which of the two can transmit its message about her to the heart before the other, and they arrive simultaneously at the heart's core and pour out what they have observed. From this there arises, together with the feeling of joyous abandon, [an indulgence in] the sense of touch. So that the man has at one and the same time three concurrent pleasures, such as he would not find conjoined in anything else, and the like of which the [individual] senses could never give him. Thus in his consorting with singing-girls lies the greatest temptation. It is said in Tradition, 'Beware of gazing [on women], for it sows carnal desire in the heart, and that is a most grievous temptation for one who experiences it.' How much the more will this be the case with gazing and carnal desire, when they are accompanied by music and helped along by flirting.

48 The singing-girl is hardly ever sincere in her passion, or wholehearted in her affection. For both by training and by innate
drink out of her half-emptied cup, teases him with bites of her apples or with a salute from her sweet-basil, bestows on him when he departs a lock of her hair, a piece of her robe, or a splinter from her plectrum; presents him at Nayriz with an embroidered belt and some sugar, at Mihhrān with a signet ring and an apple; engravés his name on her own signet ring; and if she happens to stumble, lets slip his name. When she sees him, she declaims,

The sight of the lover is sweet to the loved one, his shunning her is a dread disaster for her.

Then she tells him that she cannot sleep for love of him, and cannot bear to touch a bite of food by reason of her yearning for him, and is never weary of weeping for him when he is away; that she can never think of him without agitation, or utter his name without trembling, and has gathered a bowlful of her tears over him. When she encounters his name, she quotes Majnūn’s verse,

I love every name that is the same as hers, or like to it, or in any way resembles it.

If anyone calls out the name, she quotes Majnūn’s other lines,

Often has someone called out, when we were on Minā’s slopes, and has stirred unwittingly my heart’s griefs; he has called by the name Layla someone other than my love, and it was as though by [the very word] ‘Laylā’ he caused a bird in my breast to fly up.

50 But it sometimes happens that this pretence leads her on to turning it into reality, and she in fact shares her lover’s torments; so that she will come to his house and allow him a kiss, or even greater liberties, and give herself to bed, should he think fit [to accept] that from her. Sometimes she may renounce her craft, in order for her to be cheaper for him [to buy], and makes a show of illness and is sullen towards her guardians and asks the owners to sell her; or she may allege that she is really a free woman, as a trick to get herself into the lover’s possession, and out of anxiety for him lest her high price should ruin him — specially if she finds him to be sweet-tempered, clever in expressing himself, pleasant-tongued, with a fine apprehension and delicate sensibility, and light-hearted; while if he can compose and quote poetry or warble a tune, that gives him all the more favour in her eyes.

49 Later, she begins to find fault with him, affects to be jealous of his wife, forbids him to glance at her companions, makes him
51 Yet for the most part singing-girls are insincere, and given to employing deceit and treachery in squeezing out the property of the deluded victim and then abandoning him. Sometimes a singing girl may have three or four such victims with her, in spite of their own anxiety to avoid such an encounter, and their mutual jealousy when they do meet each other. Then she weeps with one eye to one of them, and laughs with the other eye to the second, and winks at the latter in mockery of the former; she deals in secret with one, and openly with the other, giving the former to understand that she really belongs to him and not to the other, and that her overt behaviour is contrary to the promptings of her heart. When they leave, she writes letters to all of them in identical terms, telling each one how much she dislikes the rest, and how she longs to be alone with him without the others. Had the Devil no other snare with which to slay, no other banner to rally [men] to, and no other temptation wherewith to seduce, than singing-girls, that would still be ample for him. Nor is this any criticism of them, but the highest praise; for we find in Tradition, ‘The best of your women are the charmers and deceivers’. Hārūt and Mārūt, Moses’ staff, and Pharaoh’s magicians, were not so skilful as these singing-girls are.

52 Furthermore, there is their indulgence in fornication forced on them by it, since their origins in pimping houses throw them into the arms of fornicators. Yet later they bear children to men who have reached such a pitch of fondness for them as to pardon every fault and overlook their every disgrace. When they are in the dwelling of a man of the common folk, one may disapprove of them; but when they move up into kings’ palaces, there is no excuse at all. But the cause and reason for the phenomenon is one and the same [in both cases]. How indeed could a singing-girl be saved from falling a prey to temptation, and how is it possible for her to be chaste? It is in the very place where she is brought up that she acquires unbridled desires, and learns her modes of speech and behaviour. From cradle to grave she is nourished by such idle talk, and all sorts of frivolous and impure conversation, as must hinder her from recollection of God; among abandoned and dissolute persons, who never utter a serious word, from whom she could never look for any trustworthiness, religion, or safe-guarding of decent standards.

53 An accomplished singing-girl has a repertoire of upwards of four thousand songs, each of them two to four verses long, so that the total amount of poetry contained in it, if one multiplies one figure by the other, comes to ten thousand verses, in which there is not one mention of God (except by inadvertence) or of the terrors of future punishment or the attractions of future reward. They are all founded on references to fornication, pimping, passion, yearning, desire and lust. Later on she continues to study her profession assiduously, learning from music teachers whose lessons are all fleeting and whose directives are a seduction. This she is compelled to do for the sake of her profession: for if she shirks it, [her skill] will slip away; if she neglect it, it will fade; if she does not make use of it, it will come to a standstill — and anything which comes to a standstill is on the brink of recession. The thing which distinguishes the masters of crafts from the unskilled practitioner is the greater degree of [the formers’] assiduous practice of it.

54 If a singing-girl were to wish to follow the path of virtue, she would not know what it is; were she to desire restraint, she could not achieve it. Although Abū I-Hudhayl’s doctrine of the duty incumbent on the thinker is generally valid, it is not applicable to the special case of the singing-girl, because her thoughts, heart, tongue and body are wrapped up in her surroundings. Proportionate to the combined influence exercised by all that [environment] on her, in her soul, is the combined influence, for the man who is so unfortunate as to associate with her, on him as well as on her.

55 Among the advantages enjoyed by each man among us is that other men seek him out eagerly in his abode, just as one eagerly seeks out caliphs and great folk; is visited without having the trouble of visiting; receives gifts and is not compelled to give; has presents made to him and none required from him. Eyes remain wakeful, tears flow, minds are agitated, emotions lacerated, and hopes fixed — all on the property which he has under his control: which is something that does not occur with anything [else] that is sold or bought, gained and acquired, unless it be very valuable estates; for who could reach anything like the price fetched by an Abyssinian girl, the slave of ‘Awn, namely 120,000 dinars?"
Furthermore, people send along to her owner’s house presents of all sorts in the way of food and drink, but if they come to visit, they get just a sight [of the girl] and go away frustrated, while her master reaps the fruit of what they have sown, so that he, not they, has the enjoyment of it and is amply provided against the expense of maintaining his [other] slave girls. All that other men have to put up with in maintaining a houseful of slaves, and the worries they have about the number of these, the huge expenses of keeping them, and the problem of getting service out of them — all this does not affect him. He need not bother about the high price of flour, the fact that barley-groats may be unobtainable, the scarcity of oil, or the poor quality of the date wine. He is proof against feeling it to be vexatious if the wine is scarce, a misfortune if it goes sour, and an absolute disaster if [the jar] gets broken. If he does get into financial difficulties, he can borrow money and not be turned away; he can make requests and not be refused. He is always met with the greatest respect, is called by his formal name when addressed, and is spoken to with all the polite phrases; he is favoured with the choicest tidbits of news, and kept informed of the most confidential secrets; the infatuated lovers struggle enviously for his notice, vie with each other in doing him favours, contend with each other for his liking, and boast over each other of his special regard.

Such a description is not known to apply except to the caliphs themselves. Yet even the latter give more than they get, and people’s objectives are really obtained by means of them, and wealth acquired from them. The owner of singing-girls on the other hand takes the substance and gives the appearance, gets the real thing and gives the shadow, and sells the gusty wind for solid ore and pieces of silver and gold. Between the suitors and what they desire lies the thorniest of obstacles. For the owner, were he not to abstain from granting the dupe his desire for motives of purity and decency, would at any rate do so out of sharp-wittedness and wiliness, and to safeguard his trade and defend the sanctity of his estate. For when the lover once possesses himself of the beloved, nine-tenths of his ardour disappear, and his liberality and contributions [to the owner] diminish on the same scale. What is there, consequently, to induce the owner of the singing-girls to give you his girl, spiting his own face and causing himself to be no longer sought after?

If he were not a past-master in this splendid and noble profession, why is it that he abandons jealous surveillance of the girls (though choosing his spies well), accepts the room rent, pretends to doze off before supper, takes no notice of winking, is indulgent to a kiss, ignores signs [passing between the pair of lovers], turns a blind eye to the exchange of billets-doux, affects to forget all about the girl on the day of the visit, does not scold her for retiring to a private place, does not pry into her secrets or cross-examine her about how she passed the night, and does not bother to lock the doors and draw close the curtains? He reckons up each victim’s income separately, and knows how much money he is good for; just as the trader sorts out his various kinds of merchandise and prices them according to their value, or as the landowner knows his land to be proper soil for vegetables, or wheat, or barley. When he has an influential customer, he takes advantage of his influence and makes requests from him; if the customer is rich but not influential, he borrows money from him without interest. If he is a person connected with the authorities, such a one can be used as a shield against the unfriendly attentions of the police; and when such a one comes on a visit, drums and hautbois are sounded. [These are] people like Sulaiman al-Fuqqari, Hamdan al-Salama'i, 'Ali al-Fanu, Hajjai al-Tawr, Faqih, Ibn Dajjaj, Hafsawayh, Ahmad Sha'rah, Ibn al-Majusi and Ibrahim al-Ghalam.

So what profession on the face of the earth is nobler than this? If those [critical] people could only realize the true distinction between permitted and prohibited, they would not charge the practitioners of this profession with pimping. It is perfectly legitimate for a girl to be sold to a rich man, who has his will on her (remaining at the same time morally irreplaceable), and then returns her to her [original] owner at a less price than that for which the latter had first sold her, so that the latter gets the profit; alternatively, she may be married off to someone in whom he has confidence and whose intention is to contract a temporary union only. But does any moral discredit attach to the one who gives [a girl] in marriage to him [in this way]? And will
anyone except an ignorant fool shrink from availing himself to the full of what is legally permitted? Has testimony of fornication ever been produced in Islam on such grounds?

60 This epistle which we have written down from the transmitters is ascribed to the authorship of the persons named in its preface. If it is genuine, we have [merely] done the job of transmitting it, and the original authors are the ones responsible for the arguments they have adopted in it. If it is a fabrication, then it is a fabrication on the part of libertines, since they have produced an argument for the casting aside of shame; or of accomplices [of the owners] in order to make easy for the owners of singing-girls a course of conduct which criminals would adopt. If anyone remarks that the treatise has a relevance and connection with [all] these three classes of person, he is quite right.

§ 1 On the general problems of this paragraph, see Introduction, p. 3.

The spelling of Khālid without an alif was evidently a scribal convention at the time the ms was written, though one less common than cases such as Ishāq, Ibn Rāhīm etc.

Kudar-kudāh is manifestly Persian, though the meaning is unclear; a Persian slant is perceptible in several of these names.

The nickname attached to Muḥammad b. Ḥammād must, it seems to me, be read in Persian form as kātab-i-rāsid, with the second term as an adjective (and not as in P's version 'secrétaire de Raṣīd'), since the Arabic name is normally al-Rāshīd.

Rābah is an attested, though somewhat rare, name; but in the present context there may be a pun on arbāb 'financial gains', with a satirical glance at the covetousness of the muqāyyin. Abū l-Khīyār 'father of good things' also has satirical overtones suggesting the covetousness of the person concerned.

F, H and P all read Rannād, since the ms does not appear to have more than one diacritic dot. But this has so extraordinary and un-Arabic a sound (there are no Arabic roots with Ṽ and Ṽ as second and third consonants), that I find it difficult to believe that any copyist would have actually intended to write this. I believe he intended Rattāl 'chanter'; Nowayri, cited by Dozy, mentions such people along with barber-surgeons (ḥayāmin), butchers (jazzārīn) and masseurs (ḥākkah), all of them despised occupations.

miṣraṭah 'scalpel', and the Persian kabāb 'cupping-glass', may be satirical allusions to the muqāyyin's expertise in 'bleeding' his customers, i.e. getting their money out of them (though kabāb also has the meaning 'tumour'). The name in between is probably to be vocalized as alif 'a tough morsel to chew'.

waṣā'īf, see Dozy, 'des vivres . . . que l'on fournit régulièrement à quelqu'un'.

al-rāqībīna bi-anfushīm 'an: the bi makes the verb transitive (see Lane), so that the phrase implies 'make oneself undesirous of'.
THE EPISTLE
ON SINGING-GIRLS
OF JĀḤIZ

Edited with translation and commentary by

A. F. L. Beeston
INTRODUCTION

1

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND ABBREVIATIONS

11

TRANSLATION

12

COMMENTARY

39

GLOSSARY

65

ARABIC TEXT

44-1

CRITICAL APPARATUS (IN ARABIC)

49-30

© A. F. L. Beeston 1980. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form by any means, without the prior written permission of the publishers.

Published by ARIS & PHILLIPS LTD., Warminster, Wilts, England.

Printed in England by BIDDLES LTD., Guildford, Surrey.