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THE RISE OF THE ABBASID PUBLIC SPHERE: THE CASE OF AL-MUTANABBĪ AND THREE MIDDLE RANKING PATRONS

LA APARICIÓN DE LA ESFERA PÚBLICA ABBASÍ: EL CASO DE AL-MUTANABBĪ Y TRES MECENAS DE EXTRACCIÓN SOCIAL MEDIA

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The tenth century in Iraq and Syria saw an unprecedented rise in the number of canonical poets who were delivering glorious praise hymns (*madīh*) to middling members of society. Scholars have posed many theories in the past 30 years to explain the function and purpose of praise hymns for royalty and rulers, but why would ordinary men who had no hope of rulership pay painful sums to commission praise hymns in their favor? This article examines the emergence of a new kind of sociability and patronage in the tenth century that enabled middling people to form alliances and exercise influence in shaping ideals of government, leadership and manhood. Examples are given of poems to patrons of middle rank who gain glory and influence via the artistic endorsement of al-Mutanabbī (d. 965): The first ode restores the public dignity of a nineteen-year-old soldier who lost his face in battle; in the second ode, the poet glorifies and defends a state clerk who had little-known Sufi leanings; in the third ode, the poet vindicates an unmasked pseudo-Muslim who was in private a Christian. Using J. Habermas's theory of the "Public Sphere," I show the way these odes illustrate how middling members of society gained influence in a public sphere of participation and took measures to preserve that influence.

En el siglo X, y en la zona de Siria e Iraq, el número de poetas canónicos que dedicaron panegíricos (*madīh*) a miembros no destacados de la sociedad experimentó un incremento sin precedentes. A lo largo de los últimos treinta años, especialistas en este campo han formulado diversas teorías sobre los himnos de alabanza dedicados a la realeza y a los gobernantes, pero ¿qué llevó a personas corrientes, sin ninguna aspiración de llegar a gobernar, a pagar grandes cantidades de dinero por himnos de alabanza en su honor? Este artículo plantea la aparición de un nuevo tipo de sociabilidad y un nuevo patronazgo en el siglo X. Ambos elementos habrían permitido a miembros de las categorías sociales inferiores formar alianzas y tener influencia a la hora de dar forma a los ideales del gobierno, el liderazgo y la propia hombría. El artículo presenta, a modo de ejemplos, poemas dirigidos a personas corrientes que adquirieron gloria e influencia gracias al apoyo artístico de al-Mutanabbī (m. 965). El primer poema le devuelve la dignidad pública a un soldado de diecinueve años cuyo rostro había quedado desfigurado en combate; en el segundo, el poeta glorifica y defiende a un funcionario del gobierno con inclinaciones sufíes poco conocidas; en el tercero, el poeta limpia el nombre de cierto pseudo-musulmán que era cristiano en privado. A partir de la teoría de la "esfera pública" de J. Habermas, el artículo describe el modo en el que estos poemas ilustran cómo miembros comunes de la sociedad adquirieron influencia en la esfera pública de participación y usaron los medios a su alcance para conservar esa influencia.

Key words: Middling; Patronage; Identity; Public Culture; Jürgen Habermas; al-Mutanabbī; *madīh*; *qaṣīda*; Sufi; Handicap.

Palabras clave: Categorías sociales inferiores; patronazgo; identidad; esfera pública; cultura; Jürgen Habermas; al-Mutanabbī, *madīh*; *qaṣīda*; sufi; minusvalía.

Problem and Methods

In recent decades, the field of Arabic literature has fostered a variety of plausible theories to help explain the appeal and utility of praise hymns (*madīh*) across many Arabo-Islamic societies for a millennium and half. These theories have ranged from social to political functions served by the poet's declamation of praise, effecting a ritual gift exchange between the poet and the patron,¹ expressing a formal liturgy of sacred kingship,² presenting guidance in the form of "mirrors for princes,"³ or illustrating the ideals of patronage itself.⁴ Stetkevych has argued for the importance of the praise genre in promoting an imperial ideology beneficial to the Islamic caliphate.⁵ Most recently, I have contributed to the discussion by showing how praise hymns shape and are shaped by literary salons in making cultural memory.⁶ As a consequence of these social and political effects, we notice that wherever kings claimed Islam as a legitimating ideology, the praise ode (*qaṣīdat al-madh*) inspired parallel genres in other languages such as Hebrew, Persian, Turkish, Malay, Berber, Fulani, Fulfulde, Hausa, Swahili, Hindi, Pashto, Urdu, and Kurdish.⁷ These approaches have been fundamental to our understanding of praise hymns in honor of the highest members of the nobility—kings, sultans, and governors. While high profile patrons were a source of pride for poets, numerically most praise verse in the Abbasid period was

¹ Stetkevych, S.P., "Pre-Islamic Panegyric and the Poetics of Redemption," in S.P. Stetkevych (ed.), *Reorientations: Arabic and Persian Poetry*, Bloomington, 1994, 1-49.

² Sperl, S., "Islamic Kingship and Arabic Panegyric Poetry in the Early Ninth Century," *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 8, 1 (1977), 20-35.

³ Meisami, J.S., *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, Princeton, 1987.

⁴ Gruendler, B., "Ibn al-Rūmī's Ethics of Patronage," *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review*, 3 (1996), 104-60; *idem*, *Medieval Arabic Praise Poetry: Ibn al-Rūmī and the Patron's Redemption*, London, 2003.

⁵ Stetkevych, S.P., *The Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy: Myth, Gender, and Ceremony in the Classical Arabic Ode*, Bloomington, 2002.

⁶ Ali, S.M., *Arabic Literary Salons in the Islamic Middle Ages: Poets, Public Performance and the Presentation of the Past*, Notre Dame, forthcoming.

⁷ Sperl, S. and Shackleton, C., *Qaṣīda Poetry in Islamic Asia and Africa*, Leiden, 1996.

composed for middling men of society —judges, state secretaries, military officers, and merchants. These were, demographically, the rank and file of the middle nobility, and thus the grand functions of praise above cannot fully apply in these cases. The question remains: why would middling men, with no hope of rulership or governorship, pay poets outrageous sums to praise them? As a rough measure of proportional cost, a praise *qaṣīda* in ninth- and tenth-century Abbasid society would have cost approximately the value of a small house.

This article constitutes the first of a series forming a book project that examines the reasons and functions that motivated canonical poets to serve middling individuals and motivated middling members of society to sacrifice painful sums of wealth for reputation, glory, and in death, legacy. In this article, I aim to offer a function for middling praise in the tenth century by placing it within a constellation of macro-social changes that conform to a phenomenon which Jürgen Habermas calls the public sphere. In using Habermas's theory of the public sphere, I deliberately join researchers across the humanities who have applied the theory to many contexts as a paradigm of how ordinary people use communication to exercise influence on the state.⁸ While some have taken Habermas's theory to explain a unique European experience in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, my assumption in using it as a humanistic paradigm falls into line with Habermas's own formulation that the public sphere is a *kind* or category of bourgeois society that can emerge and wane depending on favorable circumstances and certainly irrespective of how far West a society might lie on the map. Furthermore, he systematically avoids making linear developmentalist arguments that restrict the public

⁸ Dodd, W., "Impossible Worlds: What Happens in King Lear, Act 1, Scene 1?," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 50, 4 (1999), 477-507; Eickelman, D.F. and Salvatore, A., "The Public Sphere and Muslim Identities," *European Journal of Sociology*, 43 (2002), 92-115; Graham, L., "A Public Sphere in Amazonia? The Depersonalized Collaborative Construction of Discourse in Xavante," *American Ethnologist*, 20, 4 (1993), 717-741; Hoexter, M., Eisenstadt, S.N. and Levtzion, N. (eds.), *The Public Sphere in Muslim Societies*, Albany, 2002; Lee, H., "All the Feelings that Are Fit to Print: The Community of Sentiment and the Literary Public Sphere in China, 1900-1918," *Modern China*, 27, 3 (2001), 291-327; Masschaele, J., "The Public Space of the Marketplace in Medieval England," *Speculum*, 77, 2 (2002), 383-421; Özkoçak, S.A., "Coffeehouses: Rethinking the Public and Private in Early Modern Istanbul," *Journal of Urban History*, 33, 6 (2007), 965-986; Schneider, G., "The Public, the Private, and the Shaming of the Shrew," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 42, 2 (2002), 235-258.

sphere to a unique or exceptional Europe, outside the patterns of human society and communication. It should be clear from Habermas's corpus as a whole that his core interest lies not in explaining a period or two of European history, but in systematically rethinking the ways that human beings create alliances, with shared subjectivities, without falling into the trite routines of objectivist theories (such as behaviorism, empiricism, positivism, and conventionalism) that undermine the agency of the individual self, and subjectivist theories (such as constructivism) that downplay social and psychological structures and norms, which are prior and external to the self, and which influence, and at times govern, conceptions of the subject as a self.⁹ In this paper, I hope to show the utility of Habermas's reconception to understanding tenth-century Abbasid society.

Public Sphere?

The Abbasid era based in Iraq began in 750 AD out of the ashes of the Umayyad dynasty, which produced widespread discontents outside the court. The Abbasids did not so much reconquer Umayyad territories by brute force as capitalize on a chain reaction of popular discontents fueled by the excesses of Umayyad court culture itself. Primarily, the court promoted a preference for blood or tribal Arabs, which meant lack of opportunity to gain status and influence for the waves of non-Arab converts who joined the new Muslim community (or *Umma*). Since the qur'anic and Muhammadan traditions themselves elevated expectations of brotherly equality regardless of ethnicity, the daily realities of life for average people drained the legitimacy of the Umayyads.

Needless to say, the Abbasids in 750 did not bring salvation. Rather, a new form of Islamic kingship emerged, modeled on Sasanian Iranian rulership, which paradoxically preserved the ceremonials of absolute authority for the caliph, while requiring him tacitly to earn the legitimacy of subordinates who could promote or demote his reputation in life, as well as his legacy after death. Nevertheless, this Sasanian model of kingship enabled a measure of abso-

⁹ Habermas, J., *On the Pragmatics of Social Interaction: Preliminary Studies in the Theory of Communicative Action*, B. Fultner (transl.), Cambridge, 2001, 10.

lutism. One only needs to recall al-Saffāḥ's elimination of rivals or Hārūn al-Rashīd's destruction of the Barmakids to sense the latitude that the caliph could exercise.

By the mid-tenth century, however, a noticeable renaissance was in evidence, particularly outside the Abbasid court, with an autochthonous Islamic egalitarianism and humanism—a relativism of truth, a concern with the human subject, individualism, and foreign cultures—as indicated by Joel Kraemer.¹⁰ This transformation, from absolutism in the eighth century to humanism in the tenth, has yet to be explained adequately. Thus, in the course of illustrating the functions of middling praise hymns, Habermas's theory of the public sphere will also help explain the major cultural forces that enable a middling public to engage in a sphere of participation that shape ideals of culture and selfhood, as well as principles of government.

Habermas defines the public sphere as such: private individuals of a certain middle standing came together as a bourgeois public; they claimed for themselves a sphere of influence from the government, using social forums for communication, such as the circulation of literature and literary salons, to exchange ideas and associate, and to use their intellect openly to form alliances and public opinions in order to counterbalance government.¹¹ This transformation, as Habermas notes, fundamentally altered the way that private individuals related to each other and to the state. While the theory of public sphere as Habermas describes it contains historically specific features, such as print technology, one can retool it for the specifics of the phenomenon for the Abbasid tenth century by identifying functional analogues. I will thus argue that an analogous transformation with its own cultural and historical specifics took place in the ninth- and tenth-century Middle East.

In sum, Habermas describes the emergence of the public sphere as having four concurrent characteristics:

1. Socio-economic changes: (a) Manorialism and feudalism (and the practice of bonding peasants) wane, while long distance ex-

¹⁰ Kraemer, J.L., *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam: The Cultural Revival during the Buyid Age*, Leiden, 1986.

¹¹ Habermas, *On the Pragmatics of Social Interaction*, 24.

changes of commodities increase.¹² Habermas argues that this material experience with goods reinforces the habit of exchange in the realm of sociability and ideas.¹³ (b) Towns gain importance as hubs for the traffic of commodities, information, and cultural knowledge over distances.¹⁴ Because of the increased importance of townspeople, there is a distinct tension between town and court.¹⁵ For the Abbasid context, several scholars have discussed the gradual but persistent rise in long-distance trade upon land and sea around the Mediterranean and as far as Slavic lands, India, and China from early Islam to the tenth century and beyond.¹⁶ Marshall Hodgson argues that the incremental increase of long distance trade from the axial age through

¹² Habermas, J., *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, T. Burger and F. Lawrence (transl.), Cambridge, 1999, 10.

¹³ *Ibidem*, 5-6, 10.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁶ Abulafia, D., "The Role of Trade in Muslim-Christian Contact during the Middle Ages," in F. Micheau (ed.), *Les relations des pays d'Islam avec le monde latin du milieu du Xe siècle au milieu du XIIIe siècle*, Paris, 2000, 304-332; *idem*, "The Role of Trade in Muslim-Christian Contact during the Middle Ages," in D.A. Agius and R. Hitchcock (eds.), *The Arab Influence in Medieval Europe*, Reading, 1994, 1-24; *idem*, *Commerce and Conquest in the Mediterranean, 1100-1500*, Aldershot, 1993; Christides, V., "Raid and Trade in the Eastern Mediterranean [sic]: A Treatise by Muḥammad b. 'Umar, the Faḡīh from Occupied Moslem Crete, and the Rhodian Sea Law, Two Parallel Texts," *Graeco-Arabica*, 5 (1993), 63-102; Donner, F.M., "Mesopotamian Trade from the Tenth to the Fifteenth Century C.E.," *Asien, Afrika, Lateinamerika*, 20, 6 (1993), 1095-1112; Gil, M., "References to Silk in Geniza Documents of the Eleventh Century A.D.," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 61, 1 (2002), 31-38; Lewicki, T., "Les commerçants juifs dans l'Orient islamique non méditerranéen au IX^e-XI^e siècles," *Settimane di studio del Centro Italiano di Studi*, 26, 1 (1978), 375-400; Morony, M., "Commerce in Early Islamic Iraq," *Asien, Afrika, Lateinamerika*, 20 (1993), 699-720; Nazmi, A., *Commercial Relations Between Arabs and Slavs: 9th-11th Centuries*, Warsaw, 1998; Patlagean, E., "Byzance et les marchés du grand commerce vers 830-vers 1030: Entre Pirenne et Polanyi," in *Mercati e mercanti nell'alto medioevo: L'area euroasiatica e l'area mediterranea; XL Settimana di Studio, 23-29 aprile 1992, Centro Italiano di Studi sull'alto Medioevo*, Spoleto, 1993, 587-632; Verlinden, C., "Guerre et traite comme sources de l'esclavage dans l'empire Byzantin aux IX^{ème} et X^{ème} siècles," *Graeco-Arabica*, 5 (1993), 207-212; Von Sivers, P., "Taxes and Trade in the 'Abbāsīd Thughūr, 750-962/133-351," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 25, 1 (1982), 71-99; Whitehouse, D., "Abbasid Maritime Trade: Archaeology and the Age of Expansion," *Rivista degli Studi Orientali*, 59 (1985), 339-347; *idem*, "Abbasid Maritime Trade: The Age of Expansion," in *Cultural and Economic Relations between East and West: Sea Routes*, Wiesbaden, 1988, 62-70; Ziadeh, N.A., "External Trade of Bilad al-Sham in the Early Abbasid Period," *Aram Periodical*, 8, 1 (1996), 189-199.

late antiquity to early medieval Islam fosters the rise of an urban bourgeoisie in the temperate regions of the world.¹⁷ Habermas notes that with trade, towns and their merchant class become more influential.¹⁸ In the Arabic literary context, one can note for example the growing appeal of the *maqāmāt* genre, which is premised on the importance, liveliness, and interconnectedness of towns. For example, the *maqāma al-maḍīriyya* puts on display the bourgeois life and concerns of a merchant and invites the audience to appreciate and envy the material and social privileges the merchant enjoys.¹⁹ Along these lines, the story of “Sindbad the Sailor and Sindbad the Porter” from *A Thousand and One Nights* evinces the bourgeois concerns of merchants and their customers with the conspicuous display of commodities from distant lands and the valorizing of a sea trader, especially in contrast to the meek life of Sindbad the Porter.²⁰ As townspeople gain influence, Habermas suggests that a tension grows between town and court.²¹ In the Arabo-Islamic context, one might note the dramatic movement of the Abbasid court from Baghdad to Samarra, in response to the protests of Baghdad’s populace over the abuses of the caliphal army. In Habermas’s terms, it must have been a sign of new clout that masses, as well as the bourgeois public, could express such outrage and expect a resolution.

2. Reconceptions of mind and language: Habermas argues that the bourgeois public uses reason and rhetoric to influence the ruling classes and to redefine principles of authority.²² In the medieval Arabo-Islamic context, the most influential application of reason was in the realm of oratory (*khiṭāb*), which included the production and dissemination of poetry and narrative for the purpose of shaping views of the present and memory of a shared past. This phenomenon

¹⁷ Hodgson, M.G.S., *The Venture of Islam*, Vol. 1, *The Classical Age of Islam*, Chicago, 1974, 3-100.

¹⁸ Habermas, *The Structural Transformation*, 23.

¹⁹ Al-Hamadhānī, Badī’ al-Zamān, *Maqāmāt*, M. Abduh (ed.), Beirut, 1993, 104-117; Malti-Douglas, F., “*Maqāmāt* and *Adab*: ‘Al-Maqāma al-Maḍīriyya’ of al-Hamadhānī,” *JAOS*, 105, 2 (1985), 247-258.

²⁰ Dawood, N.J. (transl.), *Tales from the Thousand and One Nights*, New York, 1973, 113-164.

²¹ Habermas, *The Structural Transformation*, 23.

²² *Ibidem*, 28, 30.

has been discussed by J. Stetkevych,²³ S.P. Stetkevych,²⁴ Sperl,²⁵ Meisami,²⁶ Gruendler²⁷ and Ali.²⁸

The political implications of literary language can best be demonstrated by Ibn Qutayba (d. 889) in his *al-Ma'arif* [Types of Knowledge], where he explicitly justifies the purpose of his literary anthology. His justification captured a historic sense that literary knowledge served the purposes of a new kind of *sociability* in the Islamic heartland for parvenu urbanites, like himself. Before, knowledge had been the privilege of a courtly elite to shape and define, but in the tenth century, he identified an emerging middling strata of people who were neither "royalty" nor "rabble," who needed and acquired information about the Muslim past in order to serve certain purposes: first, to cultivate and educate the self; second, to secure ancestral knowledge for the involvement of future generations; and third, to impress superiors, peers, and colleagues in public gatherings for the sake of gaining or maintaining influence (Ibn Qutayba).²⁹ In the ninth century, this self-made, future-conscious group of socialites was distinguished from "someone of pedigree" (*dhū l-ansāb*) by the term "someone of acquired merit" (*dhū l-aḥsāb*) and from "someone of old money" (*dhū l-talīd*) by the term "someone of new money" (*dhū l-ṭarīf*). They were the emerging bourgeoisie of the Abbasid era, using language and knowledge to gain power from the state and the higher strata of society and to preserve it.

In order to earn membership to society, it was essential that they acquire a literary *paideia* (*adab*), or humanistic knowledge, that made

²³ Stetkevych, J., *The Zephyrs of Najd: The Poetics of Nostalgia in the Classical Arabic Nasīb*, Chicago, 1993; *idem*, *Muḥammad and the Golden Bough: Reconstructing Arabian Myth*, Bloomington, 1996.

²⁴ Stetkevych, S.P., *Abū Tammām and the Poetics of the 'Abbāsīd Age*, Leiden, 1991; *idem*, *The Mute Immortals Speak: Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Poetics of Ritual*, Ithaca, 1993; *idem*, *The Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy*.

²⁵ Sperl, "Islamic Kingship."

²⁶ Meisami, J.S., *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*; *idem*, *Persian Historiography to the End of the Twelfth Century*, Edinburgh, 1999.

²⁷ Gruendler, *Medieval Arabic Praise Poetry*.

²⁸ Ali, S.M., "Reinterpreting al-Buḥturī's Īwān Kisrā Ode: Tears of Affection for the Tragic Cycles of History," *JAL*, 37, 1 (2006), 46-67; *idem*, "Singing Samarra (861-956): Poetry and the Burgeoning of Historical Narrative upon the Murder of al-Mutawakkil," *JALIS*, 6 (2006), 1-23; *idem*, *Arabic Literary Salons in the Islamic Middle Ages*.

²⁹ Ibn Qutayba, Abū Muḥammad 'Abdullāh b. Muslim, *al-Ma'arif*, M.I. al-Ṣādī (ed.), Beirut, 1970, 2.

them *littérateurs* (*udabā'*, sg. *adīb*). It is also important to recount those whom Ibn Qutayba described as living in a sanctioned limbo: men of humble origins who become “naturalized,” so to speak, into the nobility by presenting claims of prestigious lineage in order to exercise influence,³⁰ indicating a variety of methods for rising into that bourgeois public.

Ibn Qutayba took it for granted that upstarts interact with kings and men of high rank. He advised, for example, against embarrassing situations where the person might find himself at the salon of kings, noblemen, or scholars, unable to understand cultural and historical references in narratives, let alone to recite amusing and edifying narratives by heart.³¹ Surprisingly, he not only presumed that members of the bourgeoisie would speak to rulers and men of influence, but that they would pursue purposes of *public* import. He cautions,

For it is rare to find any gathering organized *for* knowledge (*khibra*), established *for* guidance (*rushd*), or pursued *for* the sake of cultivating manliness (*murū'a*), but that one of these types of knowledge is displayed there [in assembly], whether in the remembrance of a prophet, or the remembrance of a king, a scholar, a lineage, an ancestor, a time, or one of the battle days of the Bedouin Arabs. Thus, anyone present there would need to know that story well, that tribe's location, that king's era, that man's rank, or the right occasion for the common proverb.³²

Not only is cultural and historical knowledge needed to function, whether passively or actively, in the presence of others, but here Ibn Qutayba gives us a hint as to the new purpose of oratory in public gatherings: they are for the *sake of* the knowledge, guidance of rulers and society, and the cultivation of masculine selfhood. Members of the Abbasid bourgeoisie are assembling, not only to influence and edify one another, but also to promote ideals that are of public benefit.

Humanistic knowledge (*adab*) was the key to participating in a sphere of public concerns. Ibn Qutayba clarifies that there was no prestige or influence to be obtained without knowledge:

For I have seen, among the nobles (*ashrāf*), those who know not their lineage, and among those of acquired merit (*dhawī l-aḥsāb*), those who know not their ancestors, and from the tribe the Quraysh who know not how they may be related to

³⁰ *Ibidem*, 3.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

³² *Ibid.*, 1.

the Messenger of God —peace be upon him— or be kindred to the prominent among his companions. I have seen the sons of Persian kings who know neither the situation nor the era of their forefather. I have seen those who claim descent from a clan, but... know not the tribe.³³

The lack of canonical knowledge for a man amounted to a loss of face before peers. For example, so many claimed pseudo-lineages descendent from historical figures, that they would bungle their way into naming a supposed ancestor who had no progeny! However, in contrast to early Islamic society when such a presentation would be stigmatized,³⁴ in the tenth century the shame grew not out of the artifice itself (which was then understandable) but from a flimsy knowledge of communal forebears and history. Clearly, knowledge and oratory held a formidable persuasive power in “forging” social ties, which implied a savvy understanding of the goals of social influence. With these new forms of influence, otherwise middling people could redress questions of public concern.

3. Salons and public gatherings outside the control of the state: Habermas argues that the public sphere also exhibits a third characteristic extending from the second one: the literary public needs forums where they meet, associate, and communicate. These gatherings are places where (a) social unequals can associate in relative equality facilitated by tact.³⁵ Tact among unequals obviates conspicuous celebrations of rank, enabling unequals to interact on the basis of a shared bourgeois “humanity.”³⁶ These forums provide (b) places where the public can focus their minds on a realm of shared public concern, such as the degree of wisdom displayed by rulers, the state of persuasive arts, which shame or honor conduct and taste, thus the connoisseurship of art, especially poetry in the Abbasid era, gains value among the public. In my own work, I have illustrated the growth and prevalence of literary salons from the mid-ninth century onward and the impact they had on social mobility and canon formation.³⁷ However, it is also important to note other *adab* venues that

³³ *Ibid.*, 2.

³⁴ Landau-Tasseron, E., “Adoption, Acknowledgement of Paternity and False Genealogical Claims in Arabian and Islamic Societies,” *BSOAS*, 66, 2 (2003), 169-92. Szombathy, Z., “Genealogy in Medieval Muslim Societies,” *SI*, 95 (2002), 5-35.

³⁵ Habermas, *The Structural Transformation*, 34.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, 36.

³⁷ Ali, *Arabic Literary Salons in the Islamic Middle Ages*.

were beyond the control of the government, such as those held in libraries, monastery vineyards, mosques gardens, and bookshops.³⁸

In the course of archival research, I discovered a manuscript of al-Nawājī's (d. 1455) *Ḥalbat al-Kumayt* [The Racing Formation of the Bay Horse/The Gathering for Bay-Colored Wine], which includes phrasing and characterization not present in printed editions. The Berlin manuscript marks a palpable social and inter-subjective difference between the salons of royals and those of peers:

It is appropriate that one leaves behind inhibition in the literary salon, for it is said that it is good manners for a person to let go of good manners (*min al-adabi tarku al-adabi*) around those he does not fear or dread, to see little squabbling, to be treated fairly, to be forgiven in one's drink, to be allowed to feign no answer, to remain happy, to leave the past behind, to ask the service of those present, to recite what comes easily, to expect others to keep one's faults private... to put aside boasting of one's merit and pedigree. As for those, however, that one fears and dreads, such as kings, caliphs, princes, and viziers, it [their salon] has arduous rules, strict decorum for which the heart quakes upon hearing, let alone seeing or witnessing: One must perfect his manners and stone silence —without vexation— never leaning on a cushion, nor playing with his clothes nor beard, nor showing any pain when [his foot] swells or goes numb (if it's pinched under his clothes), nor can he rub his hands together nor crack his knuckles, nor play with his ring, nor yawn even... Thus, the salon of one who is a merchant or a commoner feels more joyful and more literary (*aktharu adaban*) than that of a king or vizier.³⁹

At this point, one might note two salient characterizations here that deserve notice: first, that skillful littérateurs had access (at least on occasion) to the salons of royals where they might exercise some influence, but more importantly, second, that al-Nawājī, as a littérateur identifies himself with merchants and commoners. I would argue that precisely these are the middling members of society, state clerks, judges, soldiers and at their center, long-distance and bazaar merchants who come together as a “public” in their literary salons.

This contextual setting enables us to understand some of the subtleties of *al-maqāma al-maḍrīyya* of al-Hamadhānī. As Malti-

³⁸ *Ibidem*; Makdisi, G., *The Rise of Humanism in Classical Islam and the Christian West: With Special Reference to Scholasticism*, Edinburgh, 1990.

³⁹ Ms. Spr. 1216, *Ḥalbat al-Kumayt* [The Racing Formation of the Bay Horse/The Gathering for Bay-Colored Wine], Staatsbibliothek, Berlin, f. 12a. Cf. al-Nawājī, M.Ḥ., *Ḥalbat al-Kumayt*, Cairo, 1881, 20; and *idem*, *Ḥalbat al-Kumayt*, Cairo, 1938, 24.

Douglas notes, the narrative presents us with a frame story about a gathering of merchants that enframes a story about a gathering with a merchant.⁴⁰ In the frame story, the trickster (Abū l-Faṭḥ al-Iskandarī) is the one who employs artful speech to manipulate others, but in the enframed story, he becomes the victim of his own devices when the merchant promises *maḍīra*, the meaty stew, but employs artful speech to deny Abū l-Faṭḥ the satisfaction of tasting it. The most provocative feature for our purposes here is the antipathy that the merchants in the frame story project toward the merchant in the enframed story, despite their professional affiliation, for they identify not with merchants in general, but with Abū l-Faṭḥ because of his presence and performance in the literary gathering. In effect, the bonds of literary exchange override imagined bonds of profession. It is important to bear in mind that for Abū l-Faṭḥ, such a pleasant reception from merchants in the frame story was not to be taken for granted; in fact, he prefaces the story of his misadventure with a caveat, “If I tell you the story, I may not be safe from [your] scorn.”⁴¹ The success of his story validates, in a sense, the power of literary performance to restructure social ties in assembly and to create new alliances that countervail others.

4. Privatness of self that is audience oriented: Habermas characterizes the members who form the public sphere as having a saturated and free interiority, a private subjectivity, enacted by displays of a putatively non-instrumental “humanity:” free volition (not coercion), a community of love (marriage and family for love, not reason, despite hierarchy and restrictions on wife, children, and slaves/servants) and self-cultivation (not instrumental training).⁴² In the Arabo-Islamic milieu, mature selfhood enables a littérateur to contemplate his vulnerability (danger: illness, travel, unhappy clients, etc.), mortality, especially in *madīḥ*, which forms reputation in preparation for death, and in *rithā'*, which marks the passage of one's reputation into a stage of legacy. This humanity or subjective interiority equips one with a kind of genuineness of voice to understand and address others who also possess a private subjectivity.⁴³ Privatness be-

⁴⁰ Malti-Douglas, “*Maqāmāt* and *Adab*,” 253.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, 105.

⁴² Habermas, *The Structural Transformation*, 28, 47.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, 28.

comes oriented toward audiences in the public sphere. It is important to note that human closeness (among friends and colleagues) or family intimacy could be channeled into leverage. Members of the bourgeoisie —i.e., private individuals not holding high office— gain legitimate access to symbols in order to stage representations of their power and prestige. They do so not *before* the people, as do kings, but *for* the people.⁴⁴ Unlike the modes of absolute power, the public sphere creates incentives for the gaining and holding of prestige via interactive, negotiated methods with the audience. Subjects perform their social standing and submit themselves to the evaluation of others.

As examples of this privateness of self, which is audience oriented, I submit three odes by al-Mutanabbī in which the poet offers his professional praise services to enable his patrons to reveal and in effect celebrate misunderstood aspects of their identity. In the first one, *Kuffī arānī*,⁴⁵ the patron appears to have come across as a crypto-Christian passing as a Muslim or perhaps a believing Muslim who was *suspected* of being crypto-Christian.⁴⁶ This ambiguity of identity, even in poetic retrospect, transmutes his misunderstood persona into a thing of art and appreciation. In the second, *Amina izdiyāraki*,⁴⁷ the patron displays Sufi leanings (*yadhhabu ilā l-taṣawwuf*). To fully appreciate the latter ode, one should not take for granted the cultural acceptability of Sufism (*al-taṣawwuf*), since tenth-century courtly (*adab*) culture hardly recognized it, let alone embraced it. For example, the *Malāmatiyya* of Nishapur dissembled, claiming to be of certain professions (*zajjāj*, *ḥammāl*, etc.) or devotees of chivalry (*futuwwa*), since in favorable settings it preserved the glory of their creed for God and in hostile ones it obviated explaining.⁴⁸ Intuitively, al-Mutanabbī's praise for a Sufi patron suggests the

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁴⁵ See Appendix below.

⁴⁶ The wording of the Arabic does not clarify, brilliantly requiring the ode to weigh in: “*yuqāl inna hādihā al-mamdūha kāna naṣrāniyyan, fa-aḏhara l-islāma wa-huwa mut-tahamun bi l-tanaṣṣuri, fa-arāda [al-shā'iru] an yastakshifahu 'an madhhabihī fa-awrada 'ibārātī l-naṣārā 'alā wajhī l-intihāl.*” Defending the poet against accusations of polytheism (*kufṛ*), al-Ma'arrī continues, “*wa-gharaḏuhu istikshāf hālihi wa-waṣf manhajihī, fa-'alā hādihā lā yulzam al-kufṛ.*”

⁴⁷ See Appendix below.

⁴⁸ The earliest known work by a *Malāmatiyya* scholar is that of Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Sulamī (d. 1021). His treatise on the *Malāmatiyya* can be found in Abū l-'Ilā

emergence of crisis, since panegyric is polemical and it vindicates in time of crisis.⁴⁹ If the Sufi's identity was not under threat, he probably would not need a praise hymn delivered in his favor. Perhaps the most astonishing of the odes is the third, *Ahlan bi-dārin*,⁵⁰ where al-Mutanabbī serves with his image-making praise a nineteen-year old soldier who received blows in the face with a sword. The scar in the face was said to have been caused either by Bedouin highway robbers or while the young soldier fought in battle against the Byzantines.⁵¹

The elegiac *nasīb* section, which opens the ode, has historically been the home of a poet's subjectivity and vulnerability. One might even note that there is a particularly *nasibic* mode of communication which is archetypal in Arabo-Islamic culture dating back to the ode's pre-Islamic origins.⁵² Through the "manners and customs" of this *nasibic* mode of speech, historical loss and yearning become an emblem of all losses and yearnings. J. Stetkevych notes that the poetic idiom enables historical denotative allusions to "open up to new ever different poetic uses."⁵³ For example, almost three centuries after al-Buḥturī, a poet-knight named Usāma b. Munqidh (d. 1188) would suffer great losses when his family and birthplace were destroyed in Syria's earthquake of 1157. The poetic language he would use as a messenger of his grief would be that of the *nasīb*, with its archaic but meaningful idiom of effaced campsites and ghostly traces of bygone life in the sand.⁵⁴ The power of the *nasīb* to express human sorrow is

al-'Afifī (ed. and transl.), *al-Malāmatiyya wa-l-Šūfiyya wa-Ahl al-Futuwwa, Mu'allafāt al-Jam'iyya l-Falsafiyya l-Miṣriyya*, 5, (Cairo, 1945), 76-120, which was originally published as Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Sulamī, and Abū l-'Ilā al-'Afifī (ed.), *al-Risāla al-Malāmatiyya, Majallat Kulliyat al-Ādāb Jāmi'at Fu'ād al-Awwal*, 6 (1942), 47-103. For general reference to the development of Sufism, I have referred to Lewisohn, L., *The Heritage of Sufism*, Oxford, 1999; and al-Sulamī, M.H., *Ṭabaqāt al-Šūfiyya*, [Prosopography of Sufis], Nūr al-Dīn Shurayba (ed.), Cairo, 1969. See also the biography of al-Sulamī in Cornell, R.E. (ed. and transl.), *Early Sufi Women: Dhikr al-niswā l-muta'abbidāt al-Šūfiyyāt*, 15-70. For more on the *Malāmatiyya*, see Schimmel, A., *The Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, Chapel Hill, 1975, 86-7.

⁴⁹ Stetkevych, *The Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy*; Garrison, J.D., *Dryden and the Tradition of Panegyric*, Berkeley, 1975.

⁵⁰ See Appendix below.

⁵¹ *Sharḥ Dīwān Abī l-Ṭayyib al-Mutanabbī: Mu'jiz Aḥmad li-Abū l-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī*, Cairo, 1992, 1, 45-54.

⁵² Stetkevych, *The Zephyrs of Najd*, 52.

⁵³ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

made infinite by the innumerable users of that mode of expression. One can trace a common denominator, if not a genealogy, of socio-cultural heartache; it “contains a whole people’s historical reservoir of sorrow, loss, yearning.”⁵⁵

One might note however that in the tenth century the poet finds it tenable to take otherwise ordinary men and elevate them to mythic status, while making them *understandable* and *likable*. In effect, in all three of these odes, al-Mutanabbī presents odes that condition audiences to embrace these otherwise misunderstood men. In *Kuffī arānī*, the patron’s identity suffers from a jarring fusion of Muslim and Christian features. Rather than refute the fusion of beliefs or modify that identity to suite normative standards, al-Mutanabbī employs poetic antitheses, of a particularly jarring kind, throughout the ode’s tripartite structure (*nasīb-raḥīl-madīḥ*) in order to demonstrate how one might embrace and even relish the irreconcilable complexities in the unnamed patron’s public persona. While al-Mutanabbī had a penchant for antithesis, we are invited here to savor antitheses that are unconventional. In the *nasīb*, the pain and pleasure of the beloved culminates in an almost farcical bodily description of the beloved that combines the slight build of botany and the colossal scales of geology, as well as a mien that combines a face like day and hair like night. It is conventional for the poet to picture a beloved of slender waist but wide hips here he goes to almost absurd extremes. He puts aesthetic “absurdity” in the service of a seemingly “absurd” fusion of identity found in the patron. These most cognitively complex images fall in the place where one would expect the poet’s journey, his ordeal and transformation, but instead, it is the audience that is called upon to transform. Line 8 explicitly renders otherwise jarring opposites as complements, when the poet states of the beloved, “She does not merge these opposites in a single likeness, but to render me prey to my own desires.” One must note that if the normative standards of tenth-century Iraq caused the stigma of the patron, al-Mutanabbī is asking audiences nothing less than to reconsider the folly of such norms, posing compelling aesthetics and ideas that defy normative reasoning.

In line 9, al-Mutanabbī deploys those compelling aesthetics and ideas to the aid of his patron, when he declaims, “Like the virtues of

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

our unique Abū l-Faḍl, that dazzle. They inspire them who seek to describe him to speak and unspeak.” With this line, the stigma shifts to those who are unable to comprehend and describe accordingly. In the praise (*madīḥ*), the patron has reason to bask in the glory of his Muslim-Christian identity, without shame or stigma: in Christ-like manner, he is *from* the Lord of the Kingdom (l. 13); a divine light emanates from him (l. 14); for his eloquence, flesh becomes word (l. 15); he is a dream deity for those who dream (l. 16). Far and away, though, the most poignant and comical line of the ode is the penultimate, where the poet unabashedly depicts the patron as above or beyond labels. His generosity toward orphans is so outrageous that people cry out: “This is not sensible!” and the treasury cries: “This is no Muslim! / He will not give up!” The final phrase (*mādhā muslimā*) can be read as a statement of defiance, suggesting that the rhetorical performative effect of the ode bolsters the patron’s will and determination to remain as he is. The poet and patron’s expectation at this point would be for the audience to embrace a vulnerability previously stigmatized and to accept a complex subjectivity, which the patron-poet duo directs toward the audience for their estimation.

In the second ode, *Amīna izdiyāraki*, delivered to a clerk with Sufi leanings, al-Mutanabbī also cultivates within the audience the interpretive and cognitive tools to accept and esteem the patron. Here, however, the poet employs poetic antitheses that are not jarring, but complementary and spiritually mysterious, even deliciously paradoxical. In the *nasīb*, the poet recalls an evening tryst with the beloved, while affirming that the beloved’s beauty would give her away to her chaperones (l. 1). The verse defies poetics or reason, but it does present a certain spiritual charm. The conventional motifs of the *nasīb* (sorrow, limbs that feel pain) are in this ode rendered absent. The motif of plea here is not for sorrow or pain, but paradoxically for their loss in this *nasīb* (l. 3-5). Line 6 is the most lyrical, since it presents the poet as warrior safe from fire-hardened lances, but vulnerable to the emotional arrows of the beloved. Without notice, the next two lines jump to boasts promoting the poet’s talents, but also paradoxically standing in tension with the utter helplessness and impotence of the poet-warrior in line 6. Reflecting the paradoxes and complementary opposites of early Sufism, here the poet gives the audience the tools they need to embrace and elevate the identity of the patron.

The *raḥīl* continues in this vein: it begins as a desert journey on camel mare, and then morphs almost imperceptibly into a journey through snowy mountains of Lebanon, though the conventions of nature would make it impossible for a one-hump desert camel to survive such high altitudes and cold temperatures. The poet gives the audience every incentive to suspend their knowledge of natural conventions and adopt spiritual mysteries to comprehend the image even at the most rudimentary level.

With the expectation of spirituality and paradox established, the poet continues to invert natural and poetic convention: The glare of the snow made the white seem black (l. 15); the patron's generosity causes gold to melt and water to stand still (l. 16); the patron "oppresses" the ignoble (l. 23); he wants to be slandered (l. 25). Provocatively, the poet uses the imperative to tell his patron to feel grateful to his supplicants; what they leave untaken is a gift (l. 31); his blessings gossip about him (l. 40). The mere mention of the word "stingy" in line 37 is provocative, lending an air of paradox to an otherwise favorable line. Finally, the poet calls upon time to save the patron from time, and upon death to redeem the patron from death (l. 46). He gives purpose to creation and Eve's offspring (l. 47).

The third ode, *Ahlan bi-dārin*, similarly presents the vulnerability of the patron as an audience-oriented subjectivity. The patron is a mere nineteen-year old. Like the others, he has virtually no trace in historical narratives, thus were it not for this ode, nothing of him would exist in perpetuity. The physical marks of his identity and dignity (face) are reflected in a highly visual and bodily *nasīb*, in which the beloved is considered fleshy, young, supple (*aghyaḍ, khurraḍ*; l. 1). The pain of separation becomes bodily, almost cinematic, as the poet doubles over in pain, belly warm (l. 2). Passion is not rendered as sweet or bitter, but rather tactile and intense (l. 5). The signs of mortality take on color with hair gray and pearly like damask (l. 6). The next two lines are likewise corporeal and visual (ll. 7-8).

The *raḥīl* journey of this ode likewise simulates the journey befitting the young patron, since the poet riddles his way toward describing a journey on foot, sandal-shod (ll. 13-15), like that of the pre-Islamic brigand poet (*su'lūk*), who has no attachments, no place in society and little to lose, surviving only by his stamina. Thereafter, the poet weaves the patron's facial scar into an impressive warrior identity: land formations of the journey are like the fronts and backs of shields (l. 16); the

poet pictures motion like a martial artistic sequence whose lands hurl the poet to his goal (l. 17); the patron's martial skills, forged pedigree, and generosity pervade the remainder of the ode. In lines 26-28, the poet gives value and prestige to the scar, rendering it a badge of honor and source of proud narrative in perpetuity.

For the purposes of the public sphere thesis, there are two salient aspects of these three odes: first, the patrons who receive these public displays of glory are ordinary. Two are non-famous chancery employees, and the third is a warrior who has no trace in historical sources. Second, their subjectivity and the interpretive tools to appreciate them are at the center of each ode. The first salient point raises further questions. If these patrons were ordinary, how were they able to afford the cost and sacrifice of compensating al-Mutanabbī for this service? One can easily rule out the government salary that a clerk or a warrior would receive for his service, and one can also rule out independent inherited wealth since this would obviate any need for being a state clerk or a warrior. The only other possibility would be wealth from land or trade that is falling into the hands of socially mobile groups. This acquired wealth, would also help to explain why these patrons felt secure in helping redefine norms surrounding honor and shame and forming alliances with likeminded people in promoting complicated identities. Ironically, in the ninth century, the praise ode was the instrument par excellence for bolstering the legitimacy of hierarchical order of sacral kingship that promoted the Umayyad and Abbasid empires as universal systems,⁵⁶ but in the tenth century, those same instruments were being appropriated by middling ordinary patrons who happened to acquire the wealth to redefine standards of manhood, selfhood, dignity and leadership in a manner conforming more with their interests. By appropriating praise patronage, these patrons were gradually reformulating and adjusting the ideals and standards they were expected to live up to. Thus, to return to the question of the praise ode's function, it would appear that in the tenth century, patrons were able to appropriate the ode in order to influence notions of government and society. The effect of that influence can best be imagined when one contemplates a cultural practice of performing these odes in assembly that must have amplified the legacy and influence of those patrons in perpetuity.

⁵⁶ Stetkevych, *The Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy*.

APPENDIX I

1. Mutanabbī, *Dīwān*, 1, 45-54.

[البحر الكامل]

1. كُنِّيَ أَرَانِي وَبِكَ لَوْمَكَ أَلْوَمَا
 2. وَخِيَالُ جِسْمٍ لَمْ يَجُلْ لَهُ الْهَوَى
 3. وَخُقُوقُ قَلْبٍ لَوْ رَأَيْتَ لَهْبِيهِ
 4. وَإِذَا سَحَابُهُ صَدَّ جَبَّ أَبْرَقَتْ
 5. يَا وَجْهَ دَاهِيَةِ الَّذِي لَوْلَاكَ مَا
 6. إِنْ كَانَ أَعْنَاهَا السُّلُوكُ فَإِنِّي
 7. غُصْنٌ عَلَى ثَقْوَى فَلَاةٍ نَابَتْ
 8. لَمْ تَجْمَعِ الْأَضْدَادَ فِي مُتَشَابِهِ
 9. كَصَفَاتٍ أَوْجَدْنَا أَبِي الْفَضْلِ
 10. يُعْطِيكَ مُبْتَدَأًا فَإِنْ أُجْلِنَتْهُ
 11. وَيَرَى التَّعْظِيمَ أَنْ يَرَى مُتَوَاضِعًا
 12. نَصَرَ الْفَعَالَ عَلَى الْمَطَالِ كَانًّا
 13. يَا أَيُّهَا الْمَلِكُ الْمُصَفَّى جَوْهَرًا
 14. نَوَّرَ تَظَاهَرَ فِيكَ لَاهُوتِيَّةً
 15. وَيَعْنَمُ فِيكَ إِذَا نَطَقَتْ فَصَاحَةً
 16. أَنَا مُبْصِرٌ وَأَطْلُقُ أَيُّ نَائِمٍ
 17. كَبَّرَ الْعِيَانُ عَلَيَّ حَتَّى إِنَّهُ
 18. يَا مَنْ لِحُودٍ يَدِّيهِ فِي أَمْوَالِهِ
 19. حَتَّى يَقُولَ النَّاسُ مَاذَا عَاقِلًا
 20. إِذْكَارٌ مِثْلِكَ تَرَكُ إِذْكَارِي لَهُ
- هَمْ أَقَامَ عَلَى فُؤَادِ أَنْجِيَا
 لَخَمًا فَيُنَجِلُهُ السَّقَامُ وَلَا دَمَا
 يَا جَنَّتِي لَطَنَنْتِ فِيهِ هَمَّهَا
 تَرَكْتُ خِلَاوَةَ كُلِّ حُبِّ عَلَمًا
 أَكَلِ الصَّنَا جَسَدِي وَرَضُّ الْأَعْطَا
 أَمْسَيْتُ مِنْ كِبَدِي وَمِنْهَا مُعْدِمَا
 شَمْسُ النَّهَارِ تَقُلُّ لَيْلًا مُظْلِمًا
 إِلَّا لِتَجْعَلَنِي لِغَزِيهِ مَغْنَمًا
 الَّتِي بَهَرَتْ فَأَنْطَقُ وَاصْفِيهِ وَأَفْحَمًا
 أَعْطَاكَ مُعْتَدِرًا كَمَنْ قَدْ أُجْرِمَا
 وَيَرَى التَّوَاضِعَ أَنْ يَرَى مُتَعَطِّمًا
 خَالَ السُّؤَالَ عَلَى التَّوَالِ مُحَرِّمًا
 مِنْ ذَاتِ ذِي الْمَلَكُوتِ أَسْمَى مِنْ سِنَا
 فَتَكَادُ تَعْلَمُ عِلْمَ مَا لَنْ يُعْلَمَا
 مِنْ كُلِّ غُضُوبٍ مِنْكَ أَنْ يَتَكَلَّمَا
 مَنْ كَانَ يَحْتَلِمُ بِالْإِلَهِ فَأَخْلَمَا
 صَارَ الْبِقِيْنُ مِنَ الْعِيَانِ تَوْهَمَا
 يَقُمْ تَعَوُّدُ عَلَى الْبِنَايِ أَنْعَمَا
 وَيَقُولُ بَيِّنُ الْمَالِ مَاذَا مُسْلِمًا
 إِذْ لَا تَرِيدُ لِمَا أَرِيدُ مُتَرَجِمًا

2. Mutanabbī, *Dīwān*, 2, 80-101.

[البحر الكامل]

1. أَمِنَ إِذْ بَارَكَ فِي الدُّجَى الرُّقْبَاءُ
 2. فَلَقِيَ الْمَلِيحَةَ وَهِيَ مَسْنُكٌ هَتَكَهَا
 3. أَسْفَى عَلَى أَسْفَى الَّذِي دَلَّهْتَنِي
 4. وَشَكَيْتِي فَقَدْ السَّقَامَ لِأَنَّهُ
 5. مَمْلَتَ عَيْنِكَ فِي حِشَايَ جِرَاحَةً
 6. نَفَذْتَ عَلَيَّ السَّيْرِيَّ وَرُبَّمَا
 7. أَنَا صُخْرَةٌ الْوَادِي إِذَا مَا زُوِجَتْ
 8. وَإِذَا خَفِيَتْ عَلَى الْغَيْبِ فَعَادَتْ
 9. شَيْمٌ اللَّيَالِي أَنْ تُشَكِّكَ نَاقَتِي
 10. فَتَبِيْتُ تُسَيِّدُ مُسَيِّدًا فِي نَيْهَا
 11. أُنْسَاغَهَا مَمْغُوطَةً وَخَفَافُهَا
 12. يَتَلَوَّنُ الْحَزِيَّتُ مِنْ خَوْفِ التَّوَى
 13. بَيْنِي وَبَيْنَ أَبِي عَلِيٍّ مِثْلُهُ
 14. وَعِقَابُ لُبْنَانٍ وَكَيْفَ بَقَطْعُمَا
 15. لُبَسُ الثَّلُوجِ بِهَا عَلَيَّ مَسَالِكِي
 16. وَكُنَّا الْكَرِيمُ إِذَا أَقَامَ بِبَلْدَةٍ
 17. جَمَدُ الْقِطَارِ وَلَوْ رَأَتْهُ كَمَا رَأَى
 18. فِي خَطِّهِ مِنْ كُلِّ قَلْبٍ شَهْوَةٌ
 19. وَكُلُّ عَيْنٍ قُرَّةٌ فِي قُرْبِهِ
 20. مَنْ يَهْتَدِي فِي الْفِعْلِ مَا لَا يَهْتَدِي
 21. فِي كُلِّ يَوْمٍ لِلْمَوَاقِي جَوْلَةٌ
 22. وَإِغَارَةٌ فِيهَا اخْتَوَاهُ كَأَنَّهَا
- إِذْ حَيْثُ أَنْتَ مِنَ الظَّلَامِ ضِيَاءُ
وَمَسِيرُهَا فِي اللَّيْلِ وَهِيَ دُكَاءُ
عَنْ عَلِيمِهِ فِيهِ عَلَيَّ خَفَاءُ
قَدْ كَانَ لَمَّا كَانَ لِي أَعْضَاءُ
فَتَشَابَهَا كِلْتَاهُمَا نَجْلَاءُ
تَنَدَّقُ فِيهِ الصَّعْدَةُ السَّمْرَاءُ
وَإِذَا تَطَلَّطْتُ فَأَيْتِي الْجُوزَاءُ
أَلَا تَرَانِي مُثَقَّلَةً عَمِيَاءُ
صَدْرِي بِهَا أَفْضَى أُمِّ الْبَيْدَاءُ
إِسَادَهَا فِي الْمَهْمَةِ الْإِضْءَاءُ
مَنْكُوحَةٌ وَطَرِيفُهَا عَذْرَاءُ
فِيهَا كَمَا يَتَلَوَّنُ الْجِزْبَاءُ
سُمُّ الْجِبَالِ وَمِثْلُهُنَّ رِجَاءُ
وَهُوَ السَّنَاءُ وَصَيْئُهُنَّ شِنَاءُ
فَكَأَنَّهَا بِيَابِضِهَا سَوْدَاءُ
سَالَ الثُّصَارُ بِهَا وَقَامَ الْمَاءُ
بُهَيْتٌ فَلَمْ تَبْتَجِسِ الْأَنْوَاءُ
حَتَّى كَأَنَّ مِدَادَهُ الْأَهْوَاءُ
حَتَّى كَأَنَّ مَغْيِبَهُ الْأَقْدَاءُ
فِي الْقَوْلِ حَتَّى يَفْعَلَ الشُّعْرَاءُ
فِي قَلْبِهِ وَلِأَذْنِهِ إِضْغَاءُ
فِي كُلِّ نَيْبٍ فَيَلْقَى شَهْبَاءُ

23. من يظلم اللؤماء في تكليفهم
أن يضحوا وهم له أكفأه
24. ونذمهم ويهم عرفنا فضله
ويضدها تبتين الأشياء
25. من نفعه في أن يهاج وضره
في تركه لو تقطن الأعداء
26. فالسلم يكسر من جناحي ماله
بنواله ما تجبر الهيجاء
27. يعطي فتعطي من لها يده الها
وترى بزوية زاية الآراء
28. مفرق الطلعين مجتمع القوى
فكأنه السراء والضراء
29. وكأنه ما لا نشاء عدائه
متمكلاً لوفوده ما شاءوا
30. يا أيها المجدى عليه روحه
إذ ليس يأتيه لها استجداء
31. احمد عفانك لا فجعفت بقفدوم
فلترك ما لم تأخذوا إعطاءه
32. لا تكثر الأموال كثرة قلة
إلا إذا شقيت بك الأحياء
33. والقلب لا ينشق عما تحته
حتى يحل به لك الشخاء
34. لم نسم يا هارون إلا بعد ما إذا
ترعت ونازعت اسمك الأشاء
35. ففدوت واسمك فيك غير مشارك
والناس فيما في يدك سواء
36. لعنمت حتى المذن منك ملاء
ولفت حتى ذا الثناء لفاء
37. ولجذت حتى كذت تبخل حابلاً
للمنتهى ومن السرور بكاء
38. أبدأت شيئاً منك يعرف بدوة
وأعدت حتى أنكر الإبداع
39. فالفخر عن تقصيره بك ناكب
والمجد من أن تستزاد براء
40. فإذا سئلت فلا لأنك مخرج
وإذا كئمت وشئت بك الآلاء
41. وإذا مدحت فلا لتكسب رفعة
للساكرين على الإله ثناء
42. وإذا مطرت فلا لأنك مجذب
يُنقى الحصيد ويُطر الساماء
43. لم تحك نائلك الشحاب وإنما
حمت به فصبيها الرخصاء
44. لم تلق هذا الوجه شمس نهارنا
إلا بوجه ليس فيه خياء
45. فبأيا قدم سغيت إلى الغلا
أدم الهلال لأخصيك جداء
46. ولك الزمان من الزمان وقاية
ولك الجاهم من الجاهم فداء
47. لو لم تكن من ذا الوزى اللد منك هو
عقمت بموليد نسلها حواء

3. Mutanabbī, *Dīwān*, 1, 12-37.

[البحر المسرح]

1. أهلاً بدارِ سبائكِ أَعْبُدُهَا
2. ظَلَّتْ بِهَا تَنْطَوِي عَلَى كَبِدِ
3. يَا حَادِيَّ عِيرِهَا وَأَحْسَبِي
4. قِنَا قَلِيلاً بِهَا عَلَيَّ فَلَإِ
5. فِي فُؤَادِ الْمُحِبِّ نَارُ هَوَى
6. شَابَ مِنَ الْهَجْرِ فَرَقَ لِمَتِيهِ
7. بَانُو بَجْرَعَوِيَّةٍ لَهَا كَفَلٌ
8. رَحْلَةَ أَسْمَرٍ مُتَقَلِّهَا
9. يَا عَادِلَ الْعَاشِقِينَ دَعْ فِتْنَةَ
10. لَيْسَ يُحِيكُ الْمَلَامُ فِي هَمِّ
11. يَبْسُ اللَّيَالِي سَهْرَتْ مِنْ طَرِي
12. أَحْيَيْتِنَا وَالْدُمُوعَ تَنْجِدُنِي
13. لَا نَاقَتِي تَقْبَلُ الرَّدِيفَ وَلَا
14. يَشْرَاكُهَا كَوْزُهَا وَمَشْفَرُهَا
15. أَشَدُّ عَصْفَ الرِّيحِ يَنْسِبُهُ
16. فِي مِثْلِ ظَهْرِ الْمَجْنُونِ مُتَّصِلِ
17. مُرْتَمِيَاتِ بِنَا إِلَى ابْنِ عَبِيٍّ
18. إِلَى فَتَى يَصْدُرُ الرِّمَاحَ وَقَدْ
19. لَهُ أَيَادٍ إِلَى سَابِقَةٍ
20. يُعْطِي فَلَا مَطْلَهُ يَكْتَدِرُهَا
21. خَيْرٌ فُرَيْشِ أَبَا وَأَمَجْدُهَا
22. أَطْلَعُهَا بِالقَنَاةِ أَضْرَبُهَا
- أَبْعُدُ مَا بَانَ عَنْكَ خُرْدُهَا
- نَضِيحَةٌ فَوْقَ حَلْبِهَا يَدُهَا
- أَوْجَدُ مَيْتًا فَنَيْلَ أَفْقِدُهَا
- أَقَلَّ مِنْ نَظْرَةِ أَرْوَدُهَا
- أَحْرُ نَارِ الْجَحِيمِ أَبْرُدُهَا
- فَصَارَ مِثْلَ الدَّمْعِ أَسْوَدُهَا
- يَكَاذُ عِنْدَ الْقِيَامِ يُبْعِدُهَا
- سِنْخَلَةٌ أَيْضٌ مُجْرَدُهَا
- أَضَلَّهَا اللَّهُ كَيْفَ تُرْشِدُهَا
- أَقْرَبُهَا مِنْكَ عَنْكَ أَبْعُدُهَا
- شَوْقًا إِلَى مَنْ يَبِيثُ يَرْفُدُهَا
- شُؤْنُهَا وَالظَّلَامُ يُنْجِدُهَا
- بِالسُّوْطِ نَوْمَ الزَّهَانِ أُحْمِدُهَا
- زِمَامُهَا وَالسُّسُوعُ مَقْوَدُهَا
- تَحْتِي مِنْ خَطْوِهَا تَأْتِدُهَا
- بِمِثْلِ بَطْنِ الْمَجْنُونِ فَرْدُهَا
- بِاللَّهِ غِيْطَانُهَا وَقَدْ فَعْدُهَا
- أَنْهَلَتْهَا فِي الْقَلُوبِ مَوْرِدُهَا
- أَعَدُّ مِنْهَا وَلَا أَعْدُدُهَا
- بِهَا وَلَا مِنْهُ يَنْكُدُهَا
- أَكْثَرُهَا نَائِلًا وَأَجْوَدُهَا
- بِالسِّيْفِ جَحْجَاحُهَا مُسْوَدُهَا

23. أفرسها فارساً وأطولها
 بأعاً ومغوارها وسيدها
24. تاح لؤي بن غالب وبه
 سبأ لها فرعها ومخيدها
25. شمس ضحاها هلال ليلتها
 ذو تقاصيرها زرجدها
26. يا ليلت بي ضربة أتيخ لها
 كما أتيت أه محمدها
27. أثر فيها وفي الحديد وما
 أثر في وجهه مهدها
28. فاعتببت إذ رأت تزيتها
 بمنله والجراخ تحسدها
29. وأيقن الناس أن زارعها
 بالمكر في قلبه سيحصدها
30. أصبح حساده وأنفسهم
 مجذرها خوفه ويصيدها
31. تبكي على الأضل العمود إذا
 أنذرها أنه يجزدها
32. لعلمها أنها تصير ذماً
 وأنه في الرقاب يبعدها
33. أطلتها فالعدو من جزع
 يذمها والصدق يحمدها
34. تنقذ الناز من مضارها
 وضب ماء الرقاب يحمدها
35. إذا أضل الهام مهجته
 يوماً فأطرافهن تنسدها
36. قد أجمت هذه الخليفة لي
 أنك يا ابن النبي أوحدها
37. وأنك بالأمس كنت محتلاً
 شيخ معد وأنت أمردها
38. فكم وكم نعمه مجللة
 ريتها كان منك مولدها
39. وكم وكم حاجة سمحت بها
 أقرب مني إلي موعدها
40. ومكرات مننت على قدم الـ
 بر إلى منزلي تزددها
41. أقر جلدي بها علي فلا
 أفيد حتى المات أجمدها
42. فعد بها لا عدمتها أبداً
 خير صلات الكرم أعوذها

APPENDIX II

Translation of *Kuffī arānī* composed by al-Mutanabbī (d. 965) delivered to an anonymous patron (1:45-54): Al-Mutanabbī said [this ode], while at the chancery, praising a human (*insānan*), aiming to reveal his creed. It was said, “This patron was Christian, but put on a display of Islam, all the while he was suspected of being Christian, so he (al-Mutanabbī) helped to reveal his creed.” He cites the expressions of the Christians for the sake of exact mimesis (*‘alā wajh al-intihāl*):

1. Enough! Woe unto you! In a forbearing heart, resides valor, which shows me that your reproach is more reproachable. / In a forbearing heart, resides valor. I see that I reproach myself more than you could.
2. Passion has left of the body a phantom, so lovesick can sap neither blood nor body.
3. O my Paradise! The tremors of this heart, if you were to sense its blaze, you would think it a Gehenna.
4. If the cloud of a beloved’s separation flashes, the sweetness of all love becomes bitterapple.
5. O face of the tremendous! Were it not for you, no ailment would consume my body nor break my bones.
6. If forgetting us frees her, I [in contrast] while the night deprived of her and my liver.
7. [Her figure is like] a shoot sprouting upon a double dune (her rump) on the plain: [her face like] a daylight draws a dark night behind it (her hair).
8. She does not merge these opposites in a single likeness, but to render me prey to my own desires.
9. Like the virtues of our unique Abū l-Faḍl, that dazzle. They inspire them who seek to describe him to speak or shush.
10. He gives out of enterprise first; if you initiate, he gives apologetically, as if in the wrong.
11. His greatness in his eyes means humility in all eyes. His humility in his eyes means greatness in all eyes.
12. He favors deeds over promises; he deems prodding and reminding “sinful.”
13. O you king, who is sanctified in essence from the Spirit of the Lord of the Kingdom (*min dhāti dhī l-malakūti*), the loftiest of the lofty.
14. A light manifests itself in you divinely (*lāhūtiyyatan*). You well nigh know what shall remain unknown.
15. When you utter the word, it begins to speak, for your eloquence, from your flesh.
16. I am awake, but me thinks me asleep. Along with those who dream, I too dream of the deity.

17. Seeing him with my eye seemed so great to me that certainty seemed as illusion.
18. O you who, for the munificence of your hands, “afflictions” plague the orphans as a blessing.
19. Until people cry out: “This is not sensible!” and the treasury cries: “This is no Muslim!/He will not give up!” (*mādhā muslimā*)
20. To remind you [of my supplication] is to leave alone my reminder; you need no interpreter to know what I need.

Translation of *Amina izdiyāraki* composed by al-Mutanabbī (d. 965) delivered to a patron named Abū ‘Alī Hārūn b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, a state clerk who had Sufi leanings (2:80-101):

1. Your chaperones would know of your visits in the dark; you’re a light which cuts the night.
2. The movement of a belle itself betrays, so too musk, as is her passage in the night when she’s a sun.
3. My sorrow is for my sorrow; you beguiled me from feeling it; from me, it was hidden.
4. My plaint is for pain lost; when I had limbs, it existed.
5. You painted your eyes as a wound in my belly; both seemed akin; each wide open.
6. They speared to my armor through, yet a lance fire-tempered bends.
7. I am, in trial, like a boulder in the valley firm; in speech, the Gemini.
8. If I am unknown to the fool, I am forgiving when a blind eye will not me-see.
9. Be it in the nature of night that it makes my camel mare wonder. Which is more vast, my heart or the desert steppe?
10. The mare whiles the night racing by night —exhaustion “races” to waste her away— as nightlong she races the steppe.
11. Her girth stretched; hoof bleeding; path virgin.
12. For fear of harm, the guide shifts, as would a chameleon.
13. Between me and Abū ‘Alī stand peaks like him lofty as is hope in him.
14. How do I cross the highlands of Lebanon, when it’s winter? (Even its summer is winter.)
15. Snow blinded my road, as if its glare in white were black.
16. Thus [in irony] is the noble: if he alights in a town, gold melts [put to shame] and water halts.
17. Drops freeze; if the rain star foresaw him as drops saw him, it would be stunned and not gush forth.
18. In every heart, there is desire for his calligraphy; as if love were his ink.
19. Every eye delights in his proximity, as if his absence were dust in the eyes.
20. Who is guided to actions that poets are not guided to in speech, until they act?
[Whosoever is guided in deeds is not guided in speech, until poets act.]

[He (the patron) is guided to actions that even poets are not guided in speech to until he acts.]

21. Every day, verses spring into his heart and his ear attends.
22. For what it contains, it provokes rivalry [between poet and army], as if a shining troop were in each verse.
23. He “oppresses” the ignoble by daring them to become his match.
24. Though we fault them, we thus come to know his nobility. All things are defined by their opposite.
25. He has an interest in being provoked, and no interest in being ignored, if only his foes realize it.
26. Peacetime shears the wings of his wealth in charity, which wartime restores.
27. He gives, and thus coins are given from his open hands, and viewers inevitably view the vision of his views.
28. He doles out both sweet and bitter; he combines all traits, as if he were both fortune and misfortune.
29. He is not what his foes wish, rather he embodies what his supplicants wish.
30. O you who is virtually “given” your soul: Since no supplicant asks for it, it’s a “gift” from you to yourself.
31. Be grateful to your supplicants —be not shocked by their loss— for whatever they leave untaken is a “gift.”
32. The dead are not great —like empty numbers— unless the living are deprived of you.
33. The heart doesn’t break unless hatred toward you taints it.
34. You were not named, O Hārūn, until names drew lots and your name vied with others to be yours.
35. Overnight, your name emerged without partners, yet people were all equal before your blessings.
36. You gave everywhere, so that cities were full due to you. You broke bread, and now this praise is no more than crumbs.
37. You gave to the utmost —anything less seemed stingy— and out of joy came tears.
38. You set precedents known only by your initiative, then outdid them, thus initiatives were forgotten.
39. In faith to you, honor is justified. In depriving you, glory is absolutely innocent.
40. If you are plead publicly, it’s not due to your force, and if privately, your blessings “gossip” about you.
41. If you are praised, it’s not for want in rank. The giver of thanks has a debt to thank the deity.
42. If you receive rain, it’s not for dearth: the Fertile Crescent is drenched, and the sea too enjoys rain.
43. The clouds can never mimic your blessings, which gave it a fever, and now the cloud’s ‘sweat’ is its downpour.
44. Our morning sun can never face your face except with a shameless face.

45. With what feet have you climbed to the highest heights? May the skin of the moon be a sole for your feet.
46. May time from time save you, and may death from death redeem you.
47. If you were not born into this creation, which comes from you, Eve with all her young would seem barren.

Translation of *Ahlan bi-dārin* composed by al-Mutanabbī (d. 965) delivered to Muḥammad b. ‘Ubayd Allāh, a nineteen-year-old warrior who suffered sword-blows in the face (1:12-37):

1. Greetings to an abode whose supple maiden has captivated you, while its nubile damsels were most remote.
2. You stayed there doubled, your hands warm on your belly.
3. O drivers of her caravan, both of you, I’m content to be found dead if I must give the place up.
4. Keep her waiting for a moment for my sake. There’s nothing less than a glance that will provision me.
5. You see, in the heart of a lover there is the heat of passion. The hottest hellfire is yet colder.
6. My hair has gone gray from abandonment. The darkest of it looks like damask silk.
7. They departed with a tall fleshy maiden loaded in the rear. It almost sits her down, when she stands up.
8. She’s plump. Her lips are dark. She’s vast. Her shanks are white.
9. O you who reproach lovers, leave one party alone —God has led them astray, how on earth can you then guide them?
10. Nagging serves no purpose. The closer it is to you, the less it affects you.
11. One wretched night, I stayed up anxiously out of yearning for one who spends the night sleeping.
12. I kept vigil while only tracts of tears consoled me. Though only darkness consoled her.
13. My camel mare allows no passenger. And it is not by whip on race day that I urge it.
14. Its saddle is a sandal sole. Its lip is actually a sandal thong. And its halter is a strap.
15. Steps beneath me outpace the strongest of stormy winds.
16. In a hollow like the back of a shield linked to peaks like the front of a shield.
17. Deserts and lowlands have hurled us forward to Ibn ‘Ubayd Allāh,
18. To a man who plunges the javelin and gives it blood to drink. It drinks from the hearts of men.
19. There are old bounties to his credit which he procured, but they are beyond number.
20. He gives without delay, so nothing spoils it. There is no blessing he spoils, no favor he wastes.

21. He is the best of Quraysh as a patriarch: their most glorious, their most giving, their most generous.
22. He is their most capable of stabbing with spears, their most fierce with a sword. He is their senior chief, their highest ruler.
23. He is their most chivalrous on horseback, their most capable, their most talented at raiding, their lord.
24. He is the crown of Lu'ayy b. Ghālib [Quraysh]. Because of him, their branches and roots have risen high.
25. He is the sun of their mid-morning, the crescent moon of their evening, the pearl of their choker band—even its topaz.
26. Would that I had been blessed with a sword-blow like that which “blessed” Muḥammad.
27. He dented it and the metal, and the saber did not dent his face.
28. The strike felt privileged when it saw how it adorned the likes of him, and the wound felt jealous.
29. Everyone knew for sure that the one who did it with malice in his heart will by the sword be struck down.
30. The hearts of his [Muḥammad's] rivals are calmed and agitated out of awe for him.
31. When he warns aggressors, the sheath weeps goodbye for the blade; he *will* unsheathe it.
32. They know that blood will come of it, and that he will—only in necks—re-sheathe it.
33. When he releases his sword, his enemies criticize and his friends praise.
34. Sparks fly from metal clash enough to start fire. Only blood will put it out.
35. If one day perchance the warrior senses not the enemy, the tip of his sword will point the way.
36. O Son of the Prophet, these virtues together have shown me you are unique in them,
37. And yesterday you were the wise chief of Ma'add, though you were a youth.
38. There have been many many great blessings which you sired and fathered.
39. And many many needs you fulfilled. Your promise is as good as gold.
40. And so many glorious gifts that walked to my home with elegant beauty time and again.
41. My skin bears witness with gifts from you upon it. I cannot deny them so long as I live.
42. Encore, encore! May you never run out. The best virtues of a man of honor are those most repeated.

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