

BARBARA OSTAFIN

## Presumable Sources of “Mariage d’Ibrāhīm”, “Mariage d’Ishāq” and “Muḥāriq” Stories

### Summary

Ibrāhīm Ibn al-Mahdī, famous musician, is a main character of a great number of aḥbar in medieval Arabic literature. One of them tells about his adventure as an uninvited guest, who enters merchant’s house attracted by a beautiful girl. Victor Chauvin entitled this story “Mariage d’Ibrāhīm” and similarly its version in which Ishāq Ibn Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī plays a key role – “Mariage d’Ishaq”. The story and its versions are widespread in a dozen or so works which were produced within over seven hundred years. The earliest account is preserved in Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihi’s *Al-‘Iqd al-farīd*. The aim of this research is to try to indicate the probable source aḥbār which inspired medieval Arabic transmitters and story-tellers to create the account.

**Keywords:** medieval Arabic prose, Ḥakam al-Wādī, Muḥāriq, “Mariage d’Ibrāhīm”, “Mariage d’Ishāq”, ṭufaylī

“Mariage d’Ibrāhīm” and “Mariage d’Ishāq”, two stories, or, more precisely, two versions of the same story were so entitled for the first time probably by V. Chauvin while preparing his *Bibliographie des ouvrages arabes ou relatifs aux arabes publiés dans l’Europe chrétienne de 1810 à 1855*<sup>1</sup>. Chauvin named in that way two stories which he had found in the *Arabian Nights*. Both of them are discussed in volume no VI of Chauvin’s work, entirely devoted, same as volumes IV, V and VII to the *Arabian Nights*. The author perceived the similarity of one of the motives – the motif of uninvited guest,

---

<sup>1</sup> Victor Chauvin, *Bibliographie des ouvrages arabes ou relatifs aux arabes publiés dans l’Europe chrétienne de 1810 à 1855*, XII vols, Liège: Vaillant Carmanne – Leipzig: O. Harrassowitz, 1892–1922.

and mentioned it when he summarized “Mariage d’Ishāq” story<sup>2</sup>. Probably, it was the first remark concerning relations between the stories.

These titles will be used in this paper, although in many versions of the story, which are widespread in medieval *adab* literature, they do not fully reflect their content.

These stories or versions were thoroughly studied by A. Ghersetti and the results published in two papers. The main idea of the paper entitled the “L’anecdote-accordéon ou comment adapter le sens du récit au contexte narratif”<sup>3</sup> is the comparison of two transmissive traditions found in seventeen sources written between X and XVII century. In the main conclusion of the paper A. Ghersetti distinguishes two transmissive traditions of Al-Ḥalabī and Al-Fihrī. The older Al-Ḥalabī’s tradition is stressed on historical and biographical matters while the younger Al-Fihrī’s focuses on an amorous thread of the story. In the earlier paper, “Musiciens, parasites et amoureux: le récit du ‘Mariage d’Ishāq’”<sup>4</sup>, A. Ghersetti studies the literary reworking of the story found in classical Arabic works and indicates immediate influences among various versions. Thus the researcher shows that the story had been changed, reworked, some aspects had been emphasized while the others had turned pale.

The most striking and important feature in the seven centuries lasting life of the story is that the main character is a musician, but not always the same. In medieval sources four famous musicians appeared to play a key role: Ibrāhīm Ibn al-Mahdī, Ishāq Ibn Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī, Muḥāriq al-Muḡannī and Ḥakam al-Wādī.

The most frequent main character of the story, who appears in sixteen works, both in the oldest and the youngest source, is Ibrāhīm Ibn al-Mahdī (839), Abbasid prince, son of caliph Al-Mahdī, paternal uncle of Al-Ma’mūn, also known from his brief reign for several months at the turn of 817–818. Unquestionable fame in the history earned him his activity as a poet and a musician: a composer and a singer playing lute. He is the main character of, as Chauvin called, “Mariage d’Ibrāhīm” story in some ancient works such as Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihi’s (d. 940) *Al-‘Iqd al-farīd*, Al-Mas‘ūdī’s (d. 956) *Murūğ ad-dāhab* as well as in younger like *Tamarāt al-awraq* of Ibn Ḥiğḡa al-Ḥamawī (d. 1434) or *I’lām an-nās bi-mā waqa’a li-al-Barāmika ma’ Banī al-‘Abbās* of Diyāb al-Atlīdī (d. after 1688) and of course in *Alf layla wa-layla*<sup>5</sup>.

The second possible hero and relatively frequent one is Ibrāhīm Ibn al-Mahdī’s contemporary, well known musician Ishāq Ibn Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī (d. 850). He was a singer, a composer and the author of some works about music and musicians. He

<sup>2</sup> V. Chauvin, op. cit., v. VI, p. 59. The story of Ibrāhīm is described in the same volume, p. 54, but any relations with the Ishāq story are not mentioned.

<sup>3</sup> Antonella Ghersetti, *L’anecdote-accordéon ou comment adapter le sens du récit au contexte narratif*, in: *Le Répertoire narrative arabe medieval transmission et ouverture*, (eds) F. Bauden, A. Chraïbi, A. Ghersetti, Liège 2008, pp. 63–85.

<sup>4</sup> A. Ghersetti, *Musiciens, parasites et amoureux: le récit du ‘Mariage d’Ishāq’*, “Quaderni di Studi Arabi”, 2006, 1, pp. 113–128.

<sup>5</sup> The complete list of works including the story with Ibrāhīm Ibn al-Mahī as a protagonist cf. A. Ghersetti, *L’anecdote-accordéon...*, p. 127.

also appears as a protagonist of a great number of anecdotes transmitted by his son Ḥammād. “Mariage d’Ishāq” story is preserved, as A. Ghersetti located, in eight sources like Al-Iṣbahānī’s *Kitāb al-Aḡānī*, *Al-Faraḡ ba’d aš- šidda* of At-Tanūhī, *Kitāb at-tatfīl wa-ḥikāyāt at-tufaylīn wa-aḥbārahūm wa-nawādir kalāmihim wa-aš’āruhum* of Al-Ḥaṭīb al-Baḡdādī, *Al-Qawl an-nabīl bi-dīkr at-tatfīl* of Al-Aqfahsī and *Alf layla wa-layla*<sup>6</sup>.

Muḥāriq Ibn Yaḥyā al-Muḡannī (d.c. 845) is probably the youngest from among mentioned singers. He came from Medina or Al-Kūfa, while still a boy was bought by Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī who perfected his singing. His mastery earned him the recognition of Yaḥyā Ibn Ḥālid al-Barmakī who bought him and then presented to Hārūn ar-Rašīd. He was freed by the caliph some years later and was given the *kunya* Abū al-Muḥannā<sup>7</sup>. He is the hero of the story which is a version of “Marriage d’Ibrāhīm” history. This variant appears in Al-Ḥaṭīb al-Baḡdādī’s *Kitāb at-tatfīl*<sup>8</sup> and what is worth emphasizing, not in all surviving manuscripts. The manuscript which preserves this version is in Chester Beatty Library (MS no 3851), it was, among others, the basis of Ḥusām ad-Dīn al-Qudṣī’s edition of al-Baḡdādī’s work (Dimašq 1927) annotated and reedited by Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Ġabī (Bayrūt 1999). The story is also preserved in Ibn ‘Asākir’s *Ta’rīḥ madīnat Dimašq*<sup>9</sup>.

Ḥakam al-Wādī Ibn Maymūn, of Persian origin, the *mawlā* of Al-Walīd Ibn ‘Abd al-Malik, the main character of the fourth version of the story is the oldest of all mentioned above protagonists. He came from Wādī al-Qurā and dealt with the trade of oil which he conveyed from Syria to Medina<sup>10</sup>. His career started during Umayyads reign. Abū al-Faraḡ al-Iṣbahānī on Ḥammād Ibn Ishāq’s authority states that he performed before Al-Walīd Ibn ‘Abd al-Malik (d. 715) and continued his career to mid-reign of Harūn ar-Rašīd (d. 809) during whose rule he died<sup>11</sup>. He may have performed before Al-Walīd Ibn ‘Abd al-Malik as a young boy, though his first occupation was trading, the sources allege that he was long-lived. However more reliable is that he gained his fame under Al-Walīd Ibn Yazīd (d. 744) what is alluded in another anecdote related among others on the authority of Ḥakam al-Wādī himself<sup>12</sup>. The version of the “Mariage d’Ishāq” story is contained in Al-Ḥaṭīb al-Baḡdādī’s *Kitāb at-tatfīl*<sup>13</sup> and in Ibn ‘Asākir’s *Ta’rīḥ madīnat Dimašq*<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> The complete list of works including the story with Ishāq al-Mawṣilī as a protagonist cf. A. Ghersetti, *L’Anecdote-accordéon...*, p.127

<sup>7</sup> Abū al-Faraḡ al-Iṣbahānī, *Kitāb al-aḡānī*, ed. I. ‘Abbās, Bayrūt 2008, v. XVIII, p. 244.

<sup>8</sup> Al-Ḥaṭīb al-Baḡdādī, *Kitāb at-tatfīl wa-ḥikāyāt at-tufaylīn wa-aḥbārahūm wa-nawādir kalāmihim wa-aš’āruhum*, ed. B. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Ġabī, pp. 96–99.

<sup>9</sup> Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta’rīḥ madīnat Dimašq*, v. LVII, ed. M.D. al-‘Amrawī, Bayrūt 1997, pp. 136–137.

<sup>10</sup> Abū al-Faraḡ al-Iṣbahānī, *Al-Aḡānī*, v. VI, p. 280.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 201.

<sup>13</sup> Al-Ḥaṭīb al-Baḡdādī, *Kitāb at-tatfīl*, pp. 87–89.

<sup>14</sup> Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta’rīḥ madīnat Dimašq*, v. XV, pp. 60–61.

The variant account with Ḥakam al-Wādī as protagonists is significantly different and remote from “Mariage d’Ishāq”, “Mariage d’Ibrāhīm”<sup>15</sup> and “Muḥāriq” versions of the story but all contain several characteristic motives. In this paper the versions from the following sources, two for each variant, are used to give the main idea of the story: *Kitāb at-tafīl* – for all of them, because the work contains all the versions and for “Mariage d’Ibrāhīm”- *Al-ʿIqd al-farīd*, “Mariage d’Ishāq” – *Kitāb al-aḡānī*, and as a second source both for “Ḥakam al-Wādī” and “Muḥāriq” – *Tā’rīḥ madīnat Dimašq*.

The predominant feature which links all variants is the motif of uninvited guest. “Mariage d’Ibrāhīm”, “Mariage d’Ishāq” and “Muḥāriq” versions are assumed to be standard in this study, because, as was mentioned above, “Ḥakam al-Wādī’s adventure in Al-Kūfā” version is more insulated. Here is the main thread of the standard story:

These three accounts are given directly by the protagonist. The main character, famous singer, bored or moved by other emotions decides to go for a walk. He sees a beautiful girl and attracted by her enters the place together with some men going there to a party held in the house where the girl is staying. These men are invited and expected guests and the hero pretends that he is invited and known to the host, while the host thinks he arrived with his guests. Inside the house the party begins, the food and then drinks are served, meanwhile the girl, who attracted the hero enters the chamber where the reception takes place with an instrument in her hand and starts singing and playing. She sings three different melodies. Everyone is enchanted by her performance, but the hero, a professional singer, trying either to get her attention or because of being envious of her mastery, makes some malicious remarks concerning her playing. All gathered in the room are moved by his impertinence but he takes the instrument and starts singing. As a result he is recognized as a well-known and skillful singer, he introduces himself. In the end the girl and large sum of money are offered to him<sup>16</sup>. All three versions in the end reveal caliph’s generosity. In “Mariage d’Ibrāhīm” the caliph addresses it towards a hero of mentioned frame story. In “Mariage d’Ishāq” and “Mariage d’Ibrāhīm” the caliph Al-Ma’mūn and Al-Mu’taṣim in “Muḥāriq” rewards the host.

Of course, there are some differences between these versions. In “Mariage d’Ibrāhīm”, Ibrāhīm Ibn al-Mahdī is attracted at first by the smell of food and looking around to locate its source he sees the captivating girl’s arm which for a while appears in the window. His chosen one turns out to be the host’s sister whom in the end he marries. Ishāq al-Mawṣilī meets the girl in the street riding the donkey, and follows her, she appears to be a slave girl of the host, he stays at the host’s house for thirty days and in the end he is given the girl and a large sum of money<sup>17</sup>. In “Muḥāriq” variant of the story, the hero departs from caliph’s court after obtaining the ruler’s, Al-Mu’taṣim’s,

<sup>15</sup> In some works “Mariage d’Ibrāhīm” version appears with another story about *ṭufaylī*, the sponger, and heretics from Al-Baṣra connected as a frame-story. This problem was deeply studied by A. Ghersetti, cf. A. Ghersetti, *L’Anecdote-accordéon...*, pp. 63–72.

<sup>16</sup> For all detailed common events of the story cf. Barbara Ostafin, *Intruz przy stole. Ṭufaylī w literaturze adabowej do XI wieku*, Kraków 2013, p. 155.

<sup>17</sup> For all detailed differences of the story cf. B. Ostafin, *Intruz przy stole*, pp. 155–156.

permission and sees the beautiful girl, similarly like Ishāq al-Mawṣilī, in the street, she does some shopping on the market and he starts following her. The girl realizes she is being followed and orders him to go away, then she enters the house. Muḥāriq gets into the house with two invited guests. The girl turns out to be the slave of the host like in “Mariage d’Ishāq” history. In the end he is also rewarded by the host of the house and stays in his house till the late evening.

“Mariage d’Ibrāhīm” version of the story is the most popular in preserved sources and comparing to “Mariage d’Ishāq” and “Muḥāriq” more elaborate. As U. Marzolph and R. van Leeuwen suggest it is of later date than “Mariage d’Ishāq”<sup>18</sup>. Concerning Muḥāriq, his history is not included by Al-Iṣbahānī in his comprehensive account about this singer in *Al-Aġānī*<sup>19</sup>, as well as there is no mention about it in Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihi’s *Al-‘Iqd al-farīd*<sup>20</sup>. It seems that in preserved sources it appears for the first time in Al-Baġdādī’s *Kitāb at-taṭfīl* and then unchanged with the same chain of transmitters in Ibn ‘Asākir’s *Ta’rīḥ madīnat Dimašq*. It is likely that “Muḥāriq” version which shows more similarities to “Mariage d’Ishāq” is its subsequent reworking.

“Ḥakam al-Wādī’s adventure in Al-Kūfa” version lacks some characteristic features and seemingly it may be considered a distinct story.

Here is its abridgment:

One day Ḥakam al-Wādī angry at his father leaves the home place and joins in Medina a group of camel herdsman, he arrives with them in Al-Kūfa. In the town he inquiries about a noble man at whose house he could drink wine and amuse himself. He is answered that in a certain place lives a merchant and on Fridays banquets are held in his house. On Friday Ḥakam joins a group of men heading to merchant’s house. Each men thinks that Ḥakam knows somebody in their group, so chatting and joking they reach the place. Inside the slave girl takes their coats and shortly after the food is served followed by drinks. Ḥakam leaves the banqueters for a while and overhears that they realize he is a sponger. However the host forbids them to make him aware that they know his secret. After his return Ḥakam asks if there is a tambourine in the house and obtaining it starts singing and playing. The men moved by his mastery ask him to stay with them for longer even though he tells them he wants to go to the caliph’s court to earn money performing in front of him. They offer him a large sum of money, so he stays with them until he begins to miss his family and finally presented with some gifts for family he sets back home.

Despite evident differences several common events for all version can be traced.

Common events in all versions:

- The main character is moved by emotions
- The protagonists leaves his place

<sup>18</sup> U. Marzolph, R. van Leeuwen, *The Arabian Nights Encyclopedia*, Santa Barbara 2004, v. I, p. 233.

<sup>19</sup> Abū al-Faraġ al-Iṣbahānī, *Al-Aġānī*, v. XVIII, pp. 244–270.

<sup>20</sup> Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihi dedicates Muḥāriq a few comments in chapter dealing with the musicians and music, cf. Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihi, *Al-‘Iqd al-farīd*, (ed.) Munīr M. Qamīḥa, Bayrūt 1997, v. VII, pp. 5, 34, 40.

- The host is wealthy (in “Mariage d’Ibrāhīm” and “Ḥakam” versions he is a merchant)
- Misunderstanding – the guests think he has been invited by the host, host thinks he is a friend of his guests (in Ḥakam version the guests think that he is a friend of one of them)
- The hero’s performance
- The audience is enchanted by hero’s performance
- The main character is rewarded

Differences in “Ḥakam” version:

- Ḥakam’s adventure is related by someone, not first-person narration
- Ḥakam behaves like a real *tufaylī* – a sponger – he wants to drink and entertain himself for free, his action is planned not spontaneous (the other protagonists though regarded as *tufaylīs* – spongers are in fact accidental spongers, their main reason to enter somebody’s house is the girl)
- Lack of the beautiful girl who determines the protagonist’s action and performs (though there is a slave girl who takes visitors’ coats)
- Ḥakam is not a companion of the caliph, there is only a slight mention about the ruler, so he does not reward the host or anybody else
- Ḥakam does not introduces himself by his name, because when the action of the story occurs he is visibly not a famous singer
- The action is not located in the capital city

Listed above differences may indicate that “Ḥakam” history is not a version of “Mariage d’Ishāq”, “Mariage d’Ibrāhīm” story but separate anecdote, however in *Al-Aḡānī* in an account concerning Ḥakam al-Wādī there is another interesting anecdote which can complete lacking elements. It tells about Ḥakam’s other adventure in Medina at the party where the beautiful performing slave girl is involved.

Here is its abridgment:

The action of the story takes place in Medina. One day Ḥakam overhears some people talking about paying a visit to a man who is the owner of a skillful slave singing-girl. He decides to follow them and they enter the house. The host thinks he is his guests’ friend, they think he was invited by the host. The girl begins her performance, she sings several songs, but Ḥakam seems not to be pleased with her way of singing and advises her to improve her performance. The host’s reaction is violent and the men start arguing. When Ḥakam declares that he is familiar with singing better than the host and the girl are, the girl recognizes him. The host is remorseful, apologizes for his outburst, begs the musician to stay to have opportunity to reward and honor him. Ḥakam agrees but says that he stays for her not for him<sup>21</sup>.

The lacking events which complete the story form *Kitāb at-tatfīl* and *Ta’rīḥ madīnat Dimāšq* are as follows:

<sup>21</sup> Abū al-Faraḡ al-Iṣbahānī, *Al-Aḡānī*, v. VI, pp. 283–284.



- Ḥakam’s action is not planned, it is spontaneous, after overhearing he immediately decides to follow the overheard men
- His main reason to enter is the girl, though he is not directly attracted by her beauty, he does not see her only hears she was nice, he might be interested only in her singing.
- He may be regarded as accidental *tufaylī*, though there is no allusion about the food and drink
- The performance of the slave girl and its consequence – Ḥakam corrects her
- Ḥakam is recognized as a famous singer

All events counted above are present with slight changes, some additions or omissions in “Mariage d’Ishāq”, “Mariage d’Ibrāhīm” and “Muḥāriq” story. Thus two Ḥakam anecdotes, typical *aḥbār*, could have served as an original source to create fascinating love story in the form of early *ḥikāya*.

The second Ḥakam anecdote, to my knowledge, preserved only in *Al-Aġānī*, is a typical *ḥabar* transmitted on the authority of three transmitters: ‘Alī Ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ← ‘Ubayd Allāh Ibn Ḥurdāḍbih ← Muṣ‘ab Ibn ‘Abd Allāh az-Zubayrī (d. 851) as the direct link of the chain of transmitters. Muṣ‘ab was a respected scholar and genealogist who was born and lived in Medina<sup>22</sup>, before he moved to Baghdad. He wrote some works about genealogy among them preserved *Kitāb nasab Qurayš*. The opinion on him as a reliable source of information seems to be established, he could have known Ḥakam personally. Much more controversy raises Ibn Ḥurdāḍbih, the author of famous *Kitāb al-masālik wa-al-mamālik* on geography and *Kitāb al-lahw wa-al-malāhī* on music. Al-Iṣbahānī, who relatively often includes the accounts of Ibn Ḥurdāḍbih’s authority does not appreciate him too much<sup>23</sup>. Little is known about the third link of the chain – ‘Alī Ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz. Al-Iṣbahānī rarely refers to his testimony, in another place he introduces him as a secretary - *kātib*<sup>24</sup>. The methods of indication of sources employed by al-Iṣbahānī resemble those of the historian less than *muḥaddiṭ*<sup>25</sup> but his concern to give the authorities for *aḥbār* included in the work is still visible.

As to the content of the *aḥbār*, the *matn*, the methods of reworking them are obscure to us, some of them are described by Hilary Kilpatrick<sup>26</sup>. The *matn* of the discussed *ḥabar* is a short report, not elaborated, devoid of any redundant details. It shows step by step the whole event clearly and thus seems to be a typical early not compiled historical account.

The *isnāds* of the anecdote about Ḥakam’s adventure in Al-Kūfa preserved in *Kitāb at-tatfīl* and *Ta’rīḥ madīnat Dimāšq* are the same with two additional links in Ibn ‘Asākir’s work which obviously fill the gap between two scholars. Both of them follow well-

<sup>22</sup> Harry Munt, *The Holy City of Medina. Sacred Space in Early Islamic Arabia*, Cambridge 2014, p. 71.

<sup>23</sup> Hilary Kilpatrick, *Making the Great Book of Songs*, London–New York 2003, pp. 44, 105.

<sup>24</sup> Abū al-Faraġ al-Iṣbahānī, *Al-Aġānī*, v. VIII, p. 178. The best known Ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz referred in *Al-Aġānī* is Aḥmad Ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Ġawharī.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. H. Kilpatrick, *Making the Great Book*, pp. 94–99.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

established traditional *muḥaddiṭ*'s approach towards their sources. The earliest listed transmitter is a certain Muḥammad Ibn Šabāfa al-Ġifārī. The anecdote is a little longer *ḥabar* and Ibn ʿAsākir repeats word for word Al-Baġdādī's version with only one omission *wa-marra an-nabīd fi ru'ūsihim* probably to alleviate the scene of drinking. The content of *ḥabar* like that with Ḥakam's adventure in Medina is not elaborated, told in simple language with parts of dialogue, there are no citations of poetry though the poetry is an immanent feature of a *ḥabar*. The story resembles a historical report without fancy reworking and dispensable details.

Both Ḥakam's anecdotes seem to be typical *aḥbār* that convey some, more or less, historical data which are, considering preserved sources, not verifiable. They clearly precede distinguished by A. Gherseti and mentioned at the beginning of this paper the older al-Ḥalabī's tradition of "Mariage d'Ishāq"/"Mariage d'Ibrāhīm" story stressed on historical and biographical matters. Some events from Ḥakam's life constitute the pivot of these stories. They are also enriched in collateral motives like motif of a sponger, generosity motif, motif of a singing-girl rooted in Arabic literature.

Over the time Ḥakam's fame was eclipsed by the next generation of singers and some fascinating episodes from his life could have given birth to create a tale in the way known from oral production for example the *Arabian Nights*<sup>27</sup>. As shown above two Ḥakam's *aḥbār* contain all events included in "Mariage d'Ibrāhīm", "Mariage d'Ishāq" and "Muḥāriq" story. They seem to be typical early historical reports devoid of any later embellishment which characterizes highly elaborated "Mariage d'Ibrāhīm" version thus they might serve as a source to create this history.

---

<sup>27</sup> The process was precisely described by Mia Gerhardt, *The Art of Story-Telling*, Leiden 1963, pp. 39–57.