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Gleanings of Curiosities from the Harvest-Fields of Arabic Literature: Chapter 87 of *Kitāb al-Zahrah* by Ibn Dāwūd al-Iṣbahānī (d. 297/910)

Geert Jan van Gelder
University of Oxford
gerard.vangelder@orinst.ox.ac.uk

Abstract

Muḥammad Ibn Dāwūd al-Iṣbahānī (d. 297/910) was a theologian who lived in Baghdad, where he succeeded his father as the leader of the juridico-theological school called al-Ẓāhiriyyah. He wrote several books but the only one that is preserved is a work of literature and poetry. His *al-Zahrah* (*The Flower*) consists of one hundred chapters, mostly containing poetry by many poets including himself, as well as some anecdotes and passages in prose. The first fifty chapters deal with various aspects of love and the second half with various genres and kinds of poetry. Chapter 87 is entitled *Dhikr al-shiʿr alladhī yustaẓraf li-khurūjihi ʿan ḥadd mā yuʿraf*, "On Poetry That Is Deemed Curious Because It Goes Beyond What Is Conventionally Known." In a more or less unordered, partly associative sequence, this chapter offers many freaks of versification: lipograms; palindromes; lines that only use undotted, or dotted, or connected, or unconnected letters; pangrams; acrostics; unrhymed epigrams that seem to rely on non-verbal language; lines containing Persian or Greek words and expressions, etc. Many of the features of these poems are usually associated with a later stage of Arabic literature: they became more frequent especially after the appearance of the verbal artistry and artifices in the very popular *Maqāmāt* of al-Ḥarīrī (d. 516/1122). Ibn Dāwūd was therefore in a sense a pioneer. Many poems in the text pose problems. The chapter has never been investigated in detail; two passages were studied in articles by Michele Vallaro. The present article deals with the poems and anecdotes in the chapter, providing translations and commentary.

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Keywords

Ibn Dāwūd al-Iṣbahānī – *badīʿ* – poetry – versification – lipogram – pangram – palindrome – macaronic verse

The title of this contribution is partly stolen from a hefty tome of 864 pages by Charles Carroll Bombaugh (1828-1906), *Gleanings for the Curious from the Harvest-Fields of Literature* (1874),[1] selections of which were published in 1961 by Martin Gardner as *Oddities and Curiosities of Words and Literature*.[2] Those familiar with Pierre Cachia's work will know that he has contributed important studies to what can be called curiosities of Arabic literature.[3] The student of the poetic techniques, artifices, and rhetoric of Classical Arabic poetry could hardly do better than read through the very useful summary and translation that Pierre Cachia made of a late handbook on these matters, composed by ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (d. 1143/1731),[4] and which Cachia appropriately gave a punning title: *The Arch Rhetorician, or the Schemer's Skimmer*.[5] It is the culmination of a long tradition, usually said to have started with the seminal treatise by Ibn al-Muʿtazz (d. 296/908), that lists five basic figures of speech, including metaphor, antithesis, and paronomasia, to which he added a further thirteen in a later version. Through the centuries the number grew, reaching 180 in ʿAbd al-Ghanī's book, resulting from the invention of new figures or the subtle subdivision of other figures. The collective term for this is *al-badīʿ*, originally meaning "novel, original, unprecedented." Figures such as metaphor and simile can hardly be called "novel," but *al-badīʿ* came to include a number of figures that are sufficiently unusual to be called literary curiosities or oddities.

A contemporary of Ibn al-Muʿtazz was Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Abī Sulaymān Dāwūd ibn ʿAlī ibn Khalaf al-Iṣbahānī (d. 297/910), often shortened

1 C. C. Bombaugh, *Gleanings for the Curious from the Harvest-Fields of Literature: A Melange of Excerpta* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1890; first published 1874).

2 C. C. Bombaugh, *Oddities and Curiosities of Words and Literature* (*Gleanings for the Curious*), ed. and annot. by Martin Gardner (New York: Dover Publications, 1961).

3 I have learned much from Pierre Cachia's studies, and they have contributed to my own predilection for serious studies of amusing oddities or entertaining studies of serious subjects.

4 On this polymath and Sufi, see e.g. Samer Akkach, "ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Three* (Leiden: Brill, 2012); Elizabeth Sirriyeh, *Sufi Visionary of Ottoman Damascus: ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī, 1641-1731* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2014).

5 Pierre Cachia, *The Arch Rhetorician, or The Schemer's Skimmer: A Handbook of Late Arabic badīʿ drawn from ʿAbd al-Ghanī an-Nābulsī's* [sic] Nafaḥāt al-Azhār ʿalā Nasamāt al-Asḥār, *Summarized and Systematized* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998).

to Ibn Dāwūd al-Iṣbahānī. He was a theologian and man of letters living in Baghdad, whose only extant book, *al-Zahrah* (*The Flower*),[6] is an anthology of mainly poetry, divided into one hundred chapters each containing one hundred lines of verse, as the author says, not quite accurately, in his introduction. The first half, comprising fifty chapters, is all on love and its various aspects. Many quotations are ascribed to "a contemporary"; it is generally taken to mean that he himself composed them. Ibn Dāwūd al-Iṣbahānī is supposed to have been love-stricken all his life, in thrall of a beautiful young man; he died of love-malady. The other main poetic genres as well as some minor themes have chapters in the second half.

In studies on *badīʿ*, Ibn Dāwūd is not normally mentioned. Nevertheless, in his book he pays attention to some curious literary phenomena that acquired a place in lists of *badīʿ* figures only much later. Chapter 87 of his book, the subject of this article, is entitled *Dhikr al-shiʿr alladhī yustaẓraf/li-khurūjihi ʿan ḥadd mā yuʿraf* (all titles use rhyming prose, which is unusual). This may be rendered as "Poetry that is deemed curious because it goes beyond what is conventionally known." The chapter "amounts to all sorts of poetic oddities," as Raven says, in his monograph on *al-Zahrah*.[7] The verb *istaẓrafa*, here rendered as "to deem curious," is derived from *ẓarīf*, a word that as an adjective may mean "witty, elegant, charming," and as a noun (with the plural *ẓurafāʾ*) can mean a "person endowed with refinement," or a "dandy". The *ẓurafāʾ* are often

6 Abū Bakr Muḥammad Ibn Dāwūd al-Iṣbahānī, *al-Zahrah*, ed. Ibrāhīm al-Sāmarrāʾī (al-Zarqāʾ, Jordan: Maktabat al-Manār, 1985). The first half was previously edited separately: Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Abī Sulaymān ibn Dāwūd al-Iṣbahānī, *al-Niṣf al-awwal min Kitāb al-Zahrah / The Book of the Flower, The First Half*, ed. A. R. Nykl in collab. with Ibrāhīm Ṭūqān (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press/Beirut: Maṭbaʿat al-Ābāʾ al-Yasūʿiyyīn, 1932). Chapters 51-55 were edited by Michele Vallaro, in *Supplemento n. 45 agli Annali*, vol. 45 (Napoli, 1985). Little is known about Ibn Dāwūd's life. On him and his book, see J.-C. Vadet, "Ibn Dāwūd," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam, New* [= *Second*] *Edition* (Leiden: Brill, 1960-2009) [hereafter EI²], 3: 744-45, Tielman Seidensticker, "Ibn Dāʾūd al-Iṣbahānī," in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, ed. Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey (London: Routledge, 1998), 321; and especially the monograph by Wim Raven, "Ibn Dâwûd al-Iṣbahânî and his *Kitâb al-Zahra*" (Ph. D. thesis, Leiden, 1989); see also idem, "The Manuscripts and Editions of Ibn Dāwūd's *Kitāb al-Zahra*," *Manuscripts of the Middle East* 4 (1989): 133-37. I thank Adam Talib (Durham University) for sending me a copy of the Baghdad MS 1345 (al-Maṭḥaf al-ʿIrāqī), containing Chapters 67-89 of *Kitāb al-Zahrah*.

7 Raven, "Ibn Dâwûd al-Iṣbahânî," 201-2.

described in ʿAbbasid texts.[8] As we shall see, Ibn Dāwūd himself was called a *ẓarīf*.

Al-Zahrah is not the only Arabic anthology that, though mainly serious, adds some less weighty and more frivolous topic at the end, or towards the end as in this case. Abū Tammām's famous *Ḥamāsah* ends with short chapters on "pleasantries" (*mulaḥ*) and "blaming women" (*madhammat al-nisāʾ*), at the time thought a witty subject. The last section of Ibn Qutaybah's influential *ʿUyūn al-akhbār* is entitled *al-Nisāʾ* (Women) and also contains jokes about other topics. The closing chapter of a later and less well-known poetic anthology, *Nuzhat al-abṣār fī maḥāsin al-ashʿār* by al-ʿInnābī[9] (d. 776/1374), is devoted to "riddles, misspellings (*taṣāḥīf*), letter-riddles (*muʿammā*), and oddities of the art and various kinds of poetry (*gharāʾib al-ṣanʿah wa-funūn al-shiʿr*)";[10] it is obviously indebted to Ibn Dāwūd's 87th chapter.

Ibn Dāwūd opens his chapter with four short poems (together 17 lines) that only use undotted letters, as an illustration of a form of the lipogram: a figure in which one or more letters of the alphabet are deliberately left out. It is an old phenomenon, known to the ancient Greeks; in modern times it was a favorite among the French group called OuLiPo.[11] ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī, followed by Cachia, mentions the famous al-Ḥarīrī (d. 516/1122) as a pioneer

8 See Raven, "Ibn Dâwûd al-Iṣbahânî," 27-32; Mhammed Ferid Ghazi, "Un groupe social: « les Raffinés »," *Studia Islamica* 11 (1959): 39-71; J. E. Montgomery, "ẓarīf," *EI*^{2}, 10:460; L. A. Giffen, "ẓarf," in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, eds. Meisami and Starkey, 821-22; Zoltán Szombathy, "On Wit and Elegance: The Arabic Concept of *ẓarf*," in *Authority, Privacy, and Public Order in Islam: Proceedings of the 22nd Congress of l'Union Européenne des Arabisants et Islamisants*, ed. B. Michalak-Pikulska and A. Pikulski (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 101-19.

9 I follow the editors of *Nuzhat al-abṣār* (13) in reading the author's name as al-ʿInnābī, after a place in present-day Algeria, rather than al-ʿUnnābī, as in C. Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur*, Zweiter Supplementband (Leiden: Brill: 1938), 25 (where the work is wrongly called an "ausführliche Metrik").

10 Shihāb al-Dīn Abū al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-ʿInnābī, *Nuzhat al-abṣār fī maḥāsin al-ashʿār*, ed. al-Sayyid Muṣṭafā al-Sanūsī and ʿAbd al-Laṭīf Aḥmad Luṭf Allāh (Kuwait: Dār al-Qalam, 1986), 541-91.

11 See e.g. "Lipogram" (J.-J. Poucel) in *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 4th edition, eds. Roland Green et al. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 809; on OuLiPo (Ouvrage de Littérature Potentielle), see the same author in ibid., 987-88. English publications on this movement are Warren Motte, *Oulipo: A Primer of Potential Literature* (London: Dalkey Archive Press, 1997), and Harry Mathews and Alastair Brotchie, *Oulipo Compendium* (London: Atlas Press, 1998).

of the lipogram in Arabic (al-Nābulusī calls it *ḥadhf*,[12] translated by Cachia as lipogram),[13] with texts that do not use dotted or undotted letters[14] and various other forms of self-imposed restrictions based on the Arabic alphabet. They are found in several of al-Ḥarīrī's very influential *Maqāmāt*, such as the *maqāmah*s called *al-Ḥalabiyyah* and *al-Maghribiyyah*.

The four short poems (together 17 lines) with only undotted letters that open Ibn Dāwūd's chapter are anonymous, as are almost all other poems in the chapter; the fourth is attributed to "a contemporary" (*baʿḍ ahl hādhā l-ʿaṣr*), who is likely to be Ibn Dāwūd himself, as is generally and very plausibly presumed.[15] The editor may well be right in thinking that all these anonymous pieces are by Ibn Dāwūd.[16] He also remarks that the chapter is worthy of further study since it shows that the various artifices illustrated in it are much earlier than is commonly thought. A detailed study of the chapter has not been made, to my knowledge. Apart from Wim Raven's useful but short summary only very few scholars have paid attention to its contents, among them Michele Vallaro, who published two articles on two passages.[17]

Apart from illustrating lipogram the four opening poems are otherwise unremarkable, containing moralistic or pious admonitions and statements. It should be noted that Ibn Dāwūd was not the first to use the technique. A poem of some forty lines without dotted letters, twelve lines of which are quoted, is ascribed by Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī (d. ca. 363/972) in his *al-Aghānī* to Ibn Harmah, who died *c.* 176/792, and who is sometimes called the last of the early poets, in the "rear guard of classicism", but who appears to have been in the

12 Not to be confused with an older meaning of this term, used for "elision," as in *wa-s'ali l-qaryah*, "and ask the town!" for "and ask the people of the town!".

13 Cachia, *The Arch Rhetorician*, 39-40 (no. 60); cf. ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī, *Nafaḥāt al-azhār wa-nasamāt al-asḥār fī madḥ al-nabī al-mukhtār* (Būlāq: al-Maṭbaʿah al-Mīriyyah, AH 1299), 254-57.

14 Of the 28 letters of the Arabic alphabet, 13 are undotted.

15 The epigram (two lines) is quoted in al-ʿInnābī, *Nuzhat al-abṣār*, 542; the other three have not been found elsewhere. That Ibn Dāwūd incorporated his own poems attributing them to "a contemporary" was already stated as a fact by al-Masʿūdī (d. 345/956), *Murūj al-dhahab*, eds. Barbier de Meynard and Pavet de Courteille, rev. Charles Pellat (Beirut: al-Jāmiʿah al-Lubnāniyyah, 1966-79), 5:196.

16 al-Iṣbahānī, *Zahrah*, 782, note.

17 Michele Vallaro, "Tre versi arabi con parole greche attribuiti ad Abū Nuwās," in *Scritti in memoria di Paolo Minganti* (*Annali della Fac. di Scienze Politiche dell'Univ. di Cagliari, vol. IX*, Cagliari, 1983), 665-84; idem, "Temerarie congetture circa un "*gold-bug*" àrabo," *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* 8 (1990): 143-54.

vanguard of the moderns, too.[18] Abū al-Faraj is, not surprisingly, somewhat doubtful about its authenticity, but his sources show that it was around in the time of al-Aṣmaʿī (d. ca. 216/831). Abū al-Faraj notes that for Ibn Harmah final *yāʾ* counts as an undotted letter when representing *ā*; Abū Dāwūd's examples avoid final *yāʾ*, as do most later instances.[19] The existence of such an early example is striking; even more astonishing is that the opening line clearly alludes to the lipogram:

أرسْمُ سوْدةَ مَحْلُ دارسُ الطلَلِ معطّلٌ ردَّه الأحوالُ كالحُلَلِ

> O traces of Sawdah: a barren place, its remains effaced,
> made devoid, turned by changing times, like mantles.

Rasm ("trace") also means the shape of the written word regardless of diacritical dots; the placed is "barren" and "devoid" of Sawdah, a name that as a noun could mean "valley full of black stones," as if referring to the black dots. The word *muʿaṭṭal* ("made devoid") anticipates the term al-Ḥarīrī used for his undotted lines: *al-abyāt al-ʿawāṭil*.[20]

The undotted poems in *al-Zahrah* do not contain such allusions to the form. They are followed by variations on the theme of dots: short poems using only dotted letters; pieces in which the first hemistichs of lines only use dotted letters and the second hemistichs only undotted letters; a piece the words of which alternately use dotted and undotted letters; lines in which undotted and dotted letters alternate, either singly or in groups of two or three consecutive letters. Such exercises could be called pointless (the pun comes naturally) and remained isolated and rare for some time; but much later, thanks to al-Ḥarīrī,

18 Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Aghānī* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub / al-Hayʾah al-Miṣriyyah al-ʿĀmmah, 1927-74), 4:378-79, Ibrāhīm ibn Harmah al-Qurashī, *Shiʿr*, eds. Muḥammad Naffāʿ and Ḥusayn ʿAṭwān (Damascus: Majmaʿ al-Lughah al-ʿArabiyyah, [1969]), 175-78; on Ibn Harmah see Ch. Pellat, "Ibn Harma", *EI²*, 3:786; cf. Fuat Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*, *Band II: Poesie bis ca. 430 H.* (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 444-45; on this poem see also Geert Jan van Gelder, *Sound and Sense in Classical Arabic Poetry* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2012), 294-95; and especially Fahid Abu-Khadra, "Ellipsis in the 2nd Century A.H.," *Arabica* 33 (1986): 78-83 (he does not connect the graphical form with the allusion in the opening line).

19 Ibn Harmah uses the *tāʾ marbūṭah*, which in the edition is dotted, according to modern practice.

20 In *al-Maqāmah al-Ḥalabiyyah*, see Abū al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd al-Muʾmin al-Sharīshī, *Sharḥ Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī al-Baṣrī*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Munʿim Khafājī (Beirut: al-Maktabah al-Shaʿbiyyah, 1979), 4:186.

who took up the challenge in his *al-Maqāmah al-Ḥalabiyyah*,[21] the form was revived.

These and similar playful techniques and artifices are especially associated with al-Ḥarīrī and later Arabic literature and in modern times they have often been condemned as trivialities unworthy of what Poetry ought to be in the eyes of the critics and typical of the serious decline of literary standards, especially in the Mamluk and Ottoman periods.[22] It is true that such artifices are more frequent in those later periods, but they have precedents in much earlier times. The mediaeval critics even found examples, for instance, of palindromes in the Qur'ān. These are very short and obviously fortuitous,[23] but there are also some true precedents.

It is with the palindrome that Ibn Dāwūd continues: verses that can be read backwards to give the same text. This figure, too, acquired a place in *ʿilm al-badīʿ* only after al-Ḥarīrī had included examples in one of his *Maqāmāt*.[24] The palindrome has a separate section in al-Nābulusī's work, who calls it, rather clumsily, *mā lā yastaḥīlu bi-l-inʿikās*, "What does not become absurd by reversing it."[25] Ibn Dāwūd first presents a limited form in which the rhyme words of lines are palindromes of the opening words, followed by whole lines, such as:[26]

أراهُنّ نادمْنَه ليلَ لهْوٍ وهلْ ليلُهنّ مُدانٍ نهارا

I see they[27] have been boon companions of his during nights of pleasure;
Have their nights come close to being like days?

21 al-Sharīshī, *Sharḥ Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī*, 4:186-191, followed by verses in which each word is followed by another word that differs only in its dots (زُيِّنَتْ زَيْنَبُ بِقَدٍّ يَقُدُّ etc.).

22 Such views can still be seen in the chapters by Salma Khadra Jayyusi and Muhammad Lutfi al-Yousfi in *Arabic Literature in the Post-Classical Period*, ed. Roger Allen and D. S. Richards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

23 Q al-Anbiyāʾ 21:33: *kullun fī falakin* (written *kl fy flk*), "each in an orbit"; Q al-Muddaththir 74:3: *rabbaka fa-kabbir* (written *rbk fkbr*), "Magnify your Lord!".

24 *al-Maqāmah al-Maghribiyyah*, in al-Sharīshī, *Sharḥ Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī* (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Shaʿbiyyah, 1979), 2:82-85.

25 al-Nābulusī, *Nafaḥāt*, 250-527; Cachia, *The Arch Rhetorician*, 38-39 (no. 59). Other terms are *al-qalb* and *al-maqlūb*.

26 *Zahrah*, 785; quoted in al-ʿInnābī, *Nuzhah*, 545; Taqī al-Dīn Abū Bakr Ibn Ḥijjah al-Ḥamawī, *Khizānat al-adab wa-ghāyat al-arab* (Būlāq: al-Maṭbaʿah al-ʿĀmirah, AH 1291), 3:181; al-Nābulusī, *Nafaḥāt*, 251; Cachia, *The Arch Rhetorician*, 38-39 (whose translation has been used here).

27 The Arabic uses feminine plural pronouns.

As always, it is the unvowelled written text that is the basis for a palindrome, not the sounds. This line makes some sense; a following one descends into unintelligibility.

Ibn Dāwūd then gives three pangrams in Arabic, lines that contain all twenty-eight letters of the alphabet.[28] The first is:

صِفْ خلْقَ خوْدٍ كمثلِ الشمسِ إذ بَزَغَتْ يَحْظى الضجيعُ بها نَجْلاءُ مِعْطارُ

Describe the body of a young woman like the sun when it rises,
wide-eyed, fragrant, with whom her bedfellow is favoured.

Ibn Dāwūd quotes it anonymously. In al-Marzubānī's *Nūr al-qabas*, it is attributed to Khalīl ibn Aḥmad (d. 175/791),[29] which would be appropriate for someone who initiated the first Arabic lexicon. This pangram makes more sense than the most famous one in English about a quick brown fox, but it has more superfluous letters. The two other pangrams are less interesting.[30]

The pangram, for which there is no Arabic word or technical term, did not make it into al-Nābulusī's *Nafaḥāt* or, to my knowledge, any other lists of *badīʿ*. The following lines in Ibn Dāwūd's chapter are again concerned with the shapes of letters and forms of the lipogram: one two-liner using only letters that are connected to other letters and a poem of three lines using only letters that are unconnected; this piece is again attributed to "a contemporary," probably Ibn Dāwūd himself.[31] The poet is severely restricted due to the limitation

28 *Zahrah*, 785, al-ʿInnābī, *Nuzhah*, 547. Sometimes the ligature *lām-alif* (لا) is considered the 29th letter; Ibn Dāwūd does not say if he does so, but his three examples contain the ligature. On ancient Greek pangrams, see e.g. Julia Lougovaya, "A Perfect Pangram: A Reconsideration of the Evidence," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 57 (2017): 162-90.

29 Muḥammad b. ʿImrān al-Marzubānī, *Nūr al-qabas al-muqtabas min al-Muqtabas fī akhbār al-nuḥāh wa-l-udabāʾ wa-l-shuʿarāʾ wa-l-ʿulamāʾ, ikhtiṣār Yūsuf b. Aḥmad al-Yaghmūrī / Die Gelehrtenbiographien des Abū ʿUbaidallāh al-Marzubānī in der Rezension des Ḥāfiẓ al-Yaġmūrī*, ed. Rudolf Sellheim. Teil 1: Text (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1964), 59; Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Khalīl ibn Aybak al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi-l-wafayāt / Das biographische Lexikon des Ṣalāhaddīn Ḫalīl ibn Aibak aṣ-Ṣafadī* (Beirut – Wiesbaden – Berlin: Franz Steiner – Klaus Schwarz, 1931-2005), 13:388.

30 The third is incorrect, for it does not contain the letter *qāf* (instead of *munthamilā* read *mithqālā*, as in al-ʿInnābī's version, which is also faulty since it misses the letters *dhāl* and *ḍād*). For more examples of Arabic pangrams, see al-Marzubānī, *Nūr al-qabas*, 390; Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-udabāʾ*, ed. Aḥmad Farīd Rifāʿī (Cairo, 1936-1938, repr. Beirut: Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, n.d.), 17:20; al-Ṣafadī, *Wāfī*, 7:389-90, 24:353; al-ʿInnābī, *Nuzhah*, 547-48 (he includes the lines from *al-Zahrah*).

31 *Zahrah*, 785.

to the six letters (*', d, dh, r, z, w*); only the last letter of a word can be any other letter. Hiding his identity is hardly a matter of modesty here; I may not be the only one who is unable to make sense of the lines, since al-ʿInnābī does not quote them but gives other illustrations.[32] The poem begins (with the vowelling given by the editor):

أزور زرزورا وزوراً وردْ زورا وزرزورا إذا سارا[33]

أراد زادا وأرى زاده أراده داود إذ زارا

I visit Zurzūr and … (?)
… when he goes,
He wanted provisions and I see his provisions;
Dāwūd wanted them when he visited.

The next item is a piece of four lines, or twelve segments, with the rhyme scheme *abc abc abc abc*.[34]

يا فتى الجُود والندا يا عِماديياابن[35] لَيْث يا ذا الجَناب المَريع

أنْجِزَنْ[36] منك موْعدا لا تكن صاحبَ ريْث فداك كلُّ الجميع

ولقد قال لي الندا أنت يا ذا الجود غيْث معاً لحُسْن الصنيع

اعتمِدْ لي محمَّدا حين تكْدي كل غيْث أعْنيك يا ابنَ الربيع

Man of generosity and munificence!
My support, O Ibn Layth,[37]
of prosperous vicinity!
Fulfil a promise, an appointment with you!
Don't be tardy!
All people would give their lives for you.
(etc.)

32 al-ʿInnābī, *Nuzhah*, 546.

33 The Baghdad MS seems to have the wholly unintelligible اَزُورُزُرزُورُزَوارَاوَرَدَزَوّاراًوَزُوّاسـ رَا.

34 *Zahrah*, 786.

35 Emending the unmetrical يا بان of the edition.

36 Emending the unmetrical انجَزْنَ of the edition.

37 Unidentified.

Ibn Dāwūd says that it can be read as either as one poem (*qaṣīdah*) or as three. Each of the three columns can stand alone as an independent poem, the first rhyming in *-adā* in a truncated *khafīf* metre, the second rhyming in *-ayth* in *ramal* metre,[38] and the third rhyming in *-īʿī* in *mujtathth* metre. The simple syntax and the sense make this possible, even though they make the poetry trite. If the middle column is split into two equal halves and the final words of the first and second columns are no longer read as rhymes (thus reading, e.g. *mawʿidan* and *raythin* in line two instead of *mawʿidā* and *rayth*), the lines can be read as one poem in full *khafīf* metre:

يا فتى الجُود والندا يا عِمادي	يا ابن لَيْثٍ يا ذا الجَنَاب المَرِيع
أنْجِزَنْ منك موْعداً لا تكن صا	حِبَ ريْثٍ فداك كلُّ الجميع
ولقد قال لي الندا أنت يا ذا الـ	ـجودِ غيْثٌ معاً لحُسْن الصنيع
اعتمِدْ لي محمَّداً حين تكْدي	كلّ غيْثٍ أعنيك يا ابنَ الربيع

Ibn Dāwūd anticipates the technique that would become a figure of *badīʿ* called *tashrīʿ*, translated by Cachia as "fission" or "trussing" and defined by al-Nābulusī, in Cachia's translation, as:

> Composing a line or a succession of lines in such a way that a portion may be split off and read as an independent verse or verses with a different rhyme and in one of the meters recognized by classical prosody.[39]

Most later authors on *badīʿ* quote al-Ḥarīrī as a pioneer of this technique;[40] again, Ibn Dāwūd, if the lines are his, was a precursor. The next piece also plays

38 Thus in the edition; the metre would be regular if the rhyme were *-aythī*, but in that case غيث in the third line should be emended to غيثي.

39 *The Arch Rhetorician*, 12; cf. al-Nābulusī, *Nafaḥāt*, 117-19; Ibn Ḥijjah, *Khizānat al-adab*, ii, 285-93; Ibn Abī l-Iṣbaʿ al-Miṣrī, *Taḥrīr al-taḥbīr fī ṣināʿat al-shiʿr wa-l-nathr wa-bayān iʿjāz al-Qurʾān*, ed. Ḥifnī Muḥammad Sharaf (Cairo: Lajnat Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-Islāmī, AH 1383), 522-24 (who calls it *al-tawʾam*, "twins"); *Shurūḥ al-Talkhīṣ* (Būlāq: al-Maṭbaʿah al-Kubrā al-Amīriyyah, AH 1342), 4:461-63 (where it is said that it is also called *dhū al-qāfiyatayn*, "dual-rhyme," and *al-tawshīḥ*); al-ʿInnābī, *Nuzhah*, 550-51. See also van Gelder, *Sound and Sense*, 267.

40 In the 23rd *maqāmah* (*al-Shiʿriyyah*), see al-Sharīshī, *Sharḥ*, 2:212-13.

with the status of rhyme words.[41] Also quoted anonymously, it is not by Ibn Dāwūd, for they are found in older sources and are attributed to ʿUmar ibn Abī Rabīʿah[42] or Abū l-ʿAtāhiyah.[43] The opening lines are found anonymously in the earliest Arabic dictionary, by al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad:[44]

يا ذا الذي في الحب يَلْحى أما واللهِ لو عُلِّقْتَ[45] منه كما

عُلِّقْتُ[46] من حبِّ رخيمٍ لما (لُمْتَ على الحبّ ...)

You who revile me for my love! Ah, by
God! Now if *you* had loved as much as I
Have loved a soft-voiced sweetheart, why,
(You would not blame my love ...)

There are twelve half-lines in *sarīʿ* metre rhyming in *-mā*, where *mā* is a conjunction or another particle that cannot stand at the end of a well-formed sentence: it is an exercise in extreme enjambment (*taḍmīn*), a jesting breach of the general rule that forbids it.[47] Ibn Dāwūd calls it *shiʿr muḍamman baʿḍuhū bi-baʿḍ*, "enjambed poetry." One manuscript adds *wa-in adrajtahū kāna kalāman*, "and if you connect it (i.e., without observing the pause at the rhyme words) it is (ordinary) speech".

There follows another way of enabling alternative readings. A line of *hazaj* metre ("On al-Faḍl there are of generosity evident signs") is given four times, as

41 *Zahrah*, 786.

42 ʿUmar ibn Abī Rabīʿah, *Dīwān*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥyī al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Tijāriyyah al-Kubrā, 1960), 500.

43 Abū l-ʿAtāhiyah, *Ashʿāruhū wa-akhbāruhū*, ed. Shukrī Fayṣal (Damascus: Dār al-Mallāḥ, n.d.), 638.

44 al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī, *al-ʿAyn*, ed. Mahdī al-Makhzūmī and Ibrāhīm al-Sāmarrāʾī (Baghdad: Wizārat al-Thaqāfah wa-l-Iʿlām, 1980-1985), 7:50 (s.v. *ḌMN*).

45 *Zahrah* has حُمِّلْتَ.

46 *Zahrah*: حَمَّلْتَ (edition) or حُمِّلْتَ (MS Baghdad).

47 See Van Gelder, "Breaking Rules For Fun: Making Lines That Run / On: on Enjambment in Classical Arabic Poetry," in *The Challenge of the Middle East: Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Amsterdam*, ed. I. A. ElSheikh, C. A. van de Koppel, and R. Peters (Amsterdam: Institute for Modern Near Eastern Studies, 1982), 25-31, 184-186; and idem, *Sound and Sense*, 196-97 for more references and a rhymed translation of a longer version.

the four sides of a square; on each side the words are in a different order. The four versions are:[48]

على الفضل من الجُودِ	علاماتٌ مُبِيناتُ
من الجُودِ على الفضلِ	مُبِيناتٌ علاماتُ
علاماتٌ مُبِيناتٌ	على الفضل من الجُودِ
مُبِيناتٌ علاماتٌ	من الجُودِ على الفضلِ

Word order in Arabic, especially in verse, is rather free; it will be clear, nevertheless, that the first version sounds better than the other three and the fourth is decidedly clumsy, something like "Signs evident are on al-Faḍl, of generosity." Another, similarly inane example presented as a square with a smaller square inside[49] shall not detain us here.

The text of a letter, possibly by Ibn Dāwūd, to a friend, possibly his great love Muḥammad ibn Jāmiʿ,[50] is found only in one manuscript.[51] It is said to contain two lines of verse, with their letters marked so that the lines may be extracted. No such marks are given in al-Sāmarrāʾī's edition or in the extant manuscripts, but Michele Vallaro, who also provides a better text and an Italian translation, ventured a solution by picking suitable bits from the prose.[52] He comes up with two lines in *munsariḥ* metre,[53] but admits that his solution remains speculative.

Easier to solve is the acrostic that follows: the first letters of the four lines of a love epigram spell Aḥmad. It is the earliest occurrence of the acrostic known to me in Arabic.[54] The lines are anonymous. The first is found, also unattributed, in a late anthology,[55] but in al-Sarī al-Raffāʾ's *al-Muḥibb wa-l-maḥbūb* it is followed by another line, clearly not forming an acrostic, and attributed to

48 *Zahrah*, 787.

49 The inside square is lacking in MS Baghdad.

50 See Raven, "Ibn Dâwûd al-Iṣbahânî," 34-50.

51 *Zahrah*, 787-88.

52 On this passage see Michele Vallaro, "Temerarie congetture circa un "*gold-bug*" àrabo," *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* 8 (1990): 143-54.

53 Vallaro, "Temerarie congetture," 149.

54 See van Gelder, *Sound and Sense*, 293-94.

55 Muḥammad Bahāʾ al-Dīn al-ʿĀmilī, *al-Kashkūl* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnānī, 1983), 312.

Farwah ibn Ḥumayḍah (early 3rd/9th century). The last line in *al-Zahrah*'s version hints at the acrostic that has "scattered" the beloved:

دلَّ على كُنْهه لذي فِطَنٍ تفريقُه فانتهِزْه مجتمعا

His true nature is indicated, to someone of understanding,
by his dispersal. Now drive him together!

Arabic poetry is rich in name riddles (*muʿammā*) that are to be solved by manipulating its constituent letters. It was practised already by Abū Nuwās.[56] Ibn Dāwūd quotes one anonymous, rather unsophisticated example:[57]

فآخِرُ التُّرْس له أوّلٌ وثالث الدرْع له آخِرُ

وخامس الساعد ثانٍ له ورابع السيف له دابِرُ

The last of *al-turs* ("the shield") is first for him
and the third of *al-dirʿ* ("the coat of mail") is his last.
The fifth of *al-sāʿid* ("the forearm") is his second
and the fourth of *al-sayf* ("the sword") comes after.

The name is *s-ʿ-y-d* or Saʿīd, someone who judging by the choice of words had martial characteristics.

Alliteration, essential to some poetic traditions such as early Germanic and Old English, is not very prominent in Arabic but not altogether absent.[58] Ibn Dāwūd quotes a line with an accumulation of one letter, eleven instances of *ṣ*, combining alliteration with etymological paronomasia (only three roots are employed: *ṢFW, ṢDQ*, and *KhṢṢ*):[59]

56 Ewald Wagner, *Abū Nuwās. Eine Studie zur arabischen Literatur der frühen ʿAbbāsidenzeit* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1965), 380-83; Abū Nuwās, *Dīwān*, eds. Ewald Wagner and Gregor Schoeler (Wiesbaden-Cairo: Franz Steiner and Berlin-Beirut: Klaus Schwarz, 1958-2006), 5:281-86.

57 *Zahrah*, 788.

58 See van Gelder, *Sound and Sense*, 289-93.

59 *Zahrah*, 788; also in al-ʿInnābī, *Nuzhah*, 548.

صافِ الصديقَ وأَصْفِهِ صفْوَ الصَّفا واخْصُصْ صديقَك بالصَّداقة تُخْصَصِ

ṣāfi ṣ-ṣadīqa wa-aṣfihī ṣafwa ṣ-ṣafā | wa-khṣuṣ ṣadīqaka bi-ṣ-ṣadāqati tukhṣaṣī[60]

Give a friend your sincere affection, be sincere with sincere sincerity,
and favour your friend with friendship: then you will also be favoured.

This line at least makes sense, whereas Ibn Dāwūd's next illustration seems merely silly when seen on its own, managing to heap twelve instances of *ḥ* in one line:[61]

تنخنح روح حين حاد بحاجب وزحزح روح حاجيا فتزحزحا

tanaḥnaḥa rawḥun ḥīna ḥāda bi-ḥājibin | wa-zaḥzaḥa rawḥun ḥājiban fa-tazaḥzaḥā

Rawḥ said "Ahem!" when he turned a doorman away
and Rawḥ moved a doorman away, who then moved away.

The line has a background, however, for it is strangely but unmistakably based on a story told about the Umayyad tribal chief Rawḥ ibn Zinbāʿ al-Judhāmī (d. 84/703),[62] in which one reads how he entered into the presence of caliph ʿAbd al-Malik while the latter was in conversation with someone else:[63]

قال سليمان: فخلا بي عبد الملك فقال... فبينا هو يذكر ذلك إذ سمع تنخنح روح بن زنباع، وكان لا يحجب فقال لي: تنحّ فإن روحاً لا يكتم شيئاً.

Sulayman [ibn Saʿd] said: I was in private talks with ʿAbd al-Malik, who said (...) While he was mentioning this, Rawḥ ibn Zinbāʿ was heard to

60 I have added a transliteration, here and in a few other instances, for the sake of readers who do not have Arabic. Reading a passive seems better than the edition's *takhṣuṣī*. By showing the assimilation of the article in the transliteration the prominence of the letter *ṣād* is further enhanced.

61 *Zahrah*, 789, also in al-ʿInnābī, *Nuzhah*, 548.

62 See G. R. Hawting, "Rawḥ b. Zinbāʿ," in *EI*[2], 8:466.

63 Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh Dimashq*, ed. ʿUmar ibn Gharāmah al-ʿAmrawī (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995), 22:320.

cough discreetly (*sumiʿa tanaḥnaḥu Rawḥ ibn Zinbāʿ*); he used to be admitted without having to ask the chamberlain. "Move aside (*tanaḥḥa*)," he (*viz.*, ʿAbd al-Malik) said to me, "for Rawḥ will not hide anything."

The next item also involves repetition, not of a letter but of a word. "It has reached me," continues Ibn Dāwūd, "that a man recited to al-Riyāshī[64] or someone else:"[65]

ما للنَّوى جُدَّ النَّوى قُطِعَ النَّوى بالبيْن بينَ مَيامني وشِمالي

فقال: هو لعمري بيت حسن غير أنه لو طرح بين يدي الشاة لأكلته لأن فيه كِلجة نوى.

"Departure, why? May Departure be cut off, may Departure be severed, with separation between my right parts and my left!"

He replied, "Upon my life, it is a good line! But if it were thrown to a sheep it would eat it, because it contains a load of *nawā*."

The word *nawā*, which occurs three times in the line, means "remoteness" or "departure to a faraway place" (often referring to the beloved). It also means "date stone." A somewhat different, "stronger" version (with five instances of *nawā*) is given by al-Marzubānī (d. 384/993),[66] who provides an *isnād* going back to al-Aṣmaʿī (d. ca. 216/831) and who leaves it to the reader to find out why sheep would be interested in the verse:

جاء رجل إلى خلف الأحمر، فقال: إني قد قلت شعراً أحببت أن أعرضه عليك

لتصدقني عنه. قال: هات. فأنشده:

رَقد النَّوى حتّى إذا انتبه الهوى بعث النوى بالبين والترحالِ

ما لَلنَّوى جُدَّ النَّوى قُطِعَ النَّوى بالوصْلِ بينَ مَيامنٍ وشِمالِ

فقال له خلف: دعْ قولي، واحذر الشاة، فواللّه لئن ظفرت بهذا البيت لتجعلنه بعراً!

64 Muḥammad ibn Bashīr al-Riyāshī (d. 257/871), a grammarian from Basra.

65 *Zahrah*, 789.

66 Abū ʿUbayd Allāh Muḥammad ibn ʿImrān al-Marzubānī, *al-Muwashshaḥ* [*fī*] *maʾākhidh al-ʿulamāʾ ʿalā al-shuʿarāʾ fī ʿiddat anwāʿ min ṣināʿat al-shiʿr*, ed. ʿAlī Muḥammad al-Bajāwī (Cairo: Dār Nahḍat Miṣr, 1965), 557; also, but without the *isnād*, in idem, *Nūr al-qabas*, 74.

A man came to Khalaf al-Aḥmar[67] and said, "I have composed some poetry that I would like to submit to you so that you tell me truthfully what you think of it." Khalaf replied, "Let's hear it!" The man recited:

Departure was asleep; but when love awoke
Departure sent severance and migration.
Departure, why?[68] May Departure be cut off, may Departure be severed,
by the joining of right parts with left!

Khalaf said to him, "Never mind what I say, but beware the sheep! For, by God, if it gets hold of this verse it will turn it into turds!"

An anonymous piece of six lines consists of what Ibn Dāwūd calls *abyāt murajjaʿah*, "lines with an echo" or "lines made to reverberate." All opening hemistichs consist of three syntactic units that are repeated in reverse order in the closing hemistichs. It will suffice to quote the first two lines:[69]

يا بَدَني للفِراق مُتْ كَمَداً مُتْ كَمَداً للفِراق يا بَدَني
فارَقَني مَن هَوِيتُ واحَزَنا واحَزَنا من هِوِيتُ فارقَني

O body of mine, now we are parted, die of grief!
Die of grief, now we are parted, O body of mine!
He has left me, he whom I love—O wretchedness!
O wretchedness, he whom I love, he has left me!

There is not much to it. The figure, in this form, failed to be included in lists of *badīʿ* although it is related to forms of palindrome and the figure called *radd al-ʿajuz ʿalā l-ṣadr* or *al-taṣdīr*. The lines—eight in fact—are to be found, anonymously, in al-Nābulusī's *Nafaḥāt*, in the section called *al-ʿaks wa-l-tabdīl* ("reversal and substitution"),[70] and the two opening lines are given in the summary by Pierre Cachia, whose translation (with minor changes) I have quoted here, and who supplies no fewer than five English or Latin equivalents:

67 d. ca. 180/796.

68 *Nūr al-qabas* has *yā la-l-nawā*, "O departure!".

69 *Zahrah*, 789.

70 al-Nābulusī, *Nafaḥāt*, 70-71; he gives other names: *taʿākus al-jumal* ("reversal of sentences"), *al-qalb* ("inversion" or "transposition"), and *al-qahqarā* ("retrogression").

"counterchange, antimetabole, chiasmus, commutation, permutation."[71] They are, however, not representative of the figure described by al-Nābulusī, for most of the other illustrations are less strict in formal reversal, and rather more interesting in terms of sense.

The extraordinary little poem that follows is part of an anecdote:[72]

وبلغني أن محمدا بن زبيدة قال لأبي نواس: قد أكثرت عليَّ وأنا مُلق عليك شيئاً، فنفيت من هارون، لئن لم تجزه لأقتلنك وأستريح.. قال: وما هو يا أمير المؤمنين، قال: قل شعراً بلا قافية فقال:

ولقد قلتُ للمليحةِ قُولي مِن بعيدٍ لِمَنْ يُحِبُّكِ مَهْ[73] (حكاية قبله)
فأشارَتْ بمِعْصَمٍ ثم قالَت من بعيد خلاف قولي ماه[74] (حكاية لا)
فتَنَفَّسْتُ ساعةً ثُمَّ إني قلتُ للبَغْلِ عندَ ذلك راه[75] (حكاية عَد)

It has reached me that Muḥammad ibn Zubaydah (*viz.*, the caliph al-Amīn, son of Hārūn al-Rashīd and the 'Abbasid princess called Zubaydah) said to Abū Nuwās, "I have heard a lot from you. Now I'll give you something to solve. And may I not be Hārūn's son if I won't kill you if you don't succeed, and I'll have peace!" "What is it, Commander of the Faithful?" "Compose poetry without rhyme words!" Then Abū Nuwās said,

I said once to that pretty girl, "Say
  from afar to him who loves you, 'Mwah'!" (imitation of a kiss)
She gestured with her wrist; and then she said,
  from afar, but contrary to what I'd said, "Tsk!" (imitation of "no!")
I sighed for a short while; then I
  said to my mule, at that, "Rrrah!" (imitation of "move on!")[76]

71 Cachia, *The Arch Rhetorician*, 34.

72 *Zahrah*, 789. See van Gelder, *Sound and Sense*, 250.

73 MS Baghdad: مُج or بُح.

74 MS Baghdad: طَح.

75 MS Baghdad: كَ; perhaps to be read *kakh*, which serves as an interjection to express disapproval, according to the dictionaries.

76 The lines are not found in the *Dīwān*.

Ewald Wagner, who confesses that much of this is unclear to him, thinks that the word *ḥikāyah* could mean "direct speech" here and function like a colon.[77] But the point is, it seems to me, that it is not "speech" that is meant. *Ḥikāyah* could mean "imitation" or "mimicking." It is about non-verbal communication, gesturing "from afar", as confirmed in lines 1-2. I do not know what the nonverbal utterance for "No" sounded like in mediaeval times and have replaced it in my translation by an approximation of the click-like sound (accompanied by a backward movement of the head, sometimes with closing the eyes or raising the eyebrows, and a sideward motion of the index finger) that one may encounter in the modern Middle East.[78] It is of course uncertain whether this nonverbal "no" existed in the third/ninth century. I have taken *ʿad* in line 3 to be an interjection like *ʿadas* or *ʿadʿad*, both used to spur on a mule. The metre seems to require the repetition of the sounds or gestures, for as it stands each line is one syllable short. Although the lines are supposed to be unrhymed, the "words" *rah*, *māh*, *rāh* suggest at least some kind of rhyme; the Baghdad MS would offer an even better rhyme if one read its forms as *buḥ, ṭaḥ, kaḥ*.

A somewhat different version of this anecdote is found in the chapter on *ishārah* ("allusion, hint, intimation, gesture")[79] in *al-ʿUmdah* by Ibn Rashīq (d. 456/1065 or 463/1071):[80]

وقد جاء أبو نواس بإشارات أخر لم تجر العادة بمثلها، وذلك أن الأمين بن زبيدة قال له مرة: هل تصنع شعراً لا قافية له؟ قال: نعم، وصنع من فوره ارتجالاً:

ولقد قلت للمليحة قولي من بعيد لمن يحبك (إشارة قبلة)

فأشارت بمعصم ثم قالت من بعيد خلاف قولي (إشارة لا لا)

فتنفست ساعة ثم إني قلت للبغل عند ذلك (إشارة امش)

77 Ewald Wagner, *Abū Nuwās in der Nebenüberlieferung. Dem Dichter zugeschriebene Gedichte und Verse* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2008), 219.

78 It is described in Muṣṭafā Ṣādiq al-Rāfiʿī, *Tārīkh ādāb al-ʿArab*, ed. ʿAbd Allāh al-Manshāwī and Mahdī al-Baḥqīrī (Cairo: Maktabat al-Īmān, n.d.), 2:336, where Ibn Rashīq's version of the poem is quoted.

79 See *EI*[2], 4:113-14 (Ed.), "Ishāra"; G. J. H. van Gelder, "*ishāra*," in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, ed. Meisami and Starkey, 398.

80 Abū ʿAlī al-Ḥasan Ibn Rashīq al-Qayrawānī al-Azdī, *al-ʿUmdah fī maḥāsin al-shiʿr wa-ādābihi wa-naqdih*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥyī l-Dīn ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1972), 1:310; ed. ʿAfīf Nāyif Ḥāṭūm (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 2006), 262. The lines are also found, anonymously, in al-ʿInnābī, *Nuzhah*, 551, without the anecdote of which it forms part. Each line ends with the bare *ishārah*, without the clarifying words given in the other versions.

Abū Nuwās produced some other, unusual *ishārāt*. Al-Amīn, Zubaydah's son, asked him once, "Will you make some verse without rhyme words?" "Yes," he replied, and he extemporized instantly the following:

I said once to that pretty girl, "Say
from afar to him who loves you, …" (indication of a kiss)
She gestured with her wrist; and then she said,
from afar, but contrary to what I'd said, "…" (indication of "no, no!")
I sighed for a short while; then I
said to my mule, at that, "…" (indication of "move on!")

One notes that this version is strictly unrhymed and that the word *ḥikāyah* is replaced by *ishārah*, here obviously meaning "gesture" or "mimicking"; "the gesture of a kiss," "the gesture of No, no!", "the gesture of Go away!"[81] Another method is followed in a love poem variously attributed to al-Nashshābī (or al-Nushshābī) al-Irbilī (d. 657/1259),[82] and Ibn Maṭrūḥ (d. 649/1251). It is in "monorhyme": all lines end in *kadhā*, "thus" or "like this".[83] In each case it is suggested that some kind of gesture is made, mimicking the events and objects described or alluded to. The opening line is

تعشّقتُ بدْراً وجهُهُ مُسْفِرٌ كذا إذا ماس خِلت الغُصْنَ من قَدّه كذا

I have fallen in love with (someone like) a full moon, whose face shines unveiled, like this!

When he walks, swaying, you[84] would imagine a twig is made of his figure, like this!

Nonverbal language is not strictly Classical Arabic. The chapter of *al-Zahrah* ends with three further poems containing non-Arabic elements, from an

81 al-Rāfi'ī, *Tārīkh ādāb al-'Arab*, 2:337, quotes this version, speaking of *al-qawāfī al-ḥissiyyah*, "sensory rhyme words." He also quotes (2:336) two anonymous similar pieces of two lines, without giving his source.

82 On him see al-Ṣafadī, *Wāfī*, 9:35-38, Ibn Shākir al-Kutubī, *Fawāt al-Wafayāt*, ed. Iḥsān 'Abbās (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1973-74), 1:165-67.

83 al-'Innābī, *Nuzhah*, 551 (14 lines, attributing them to al-Nashshābī al-Irbilī); Ibn Maṭrūḥ, *Dīwān*, ed. Ḥusayn Naṣṣār (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub, 2004), 94-95 (17 lines). On this poem see Adam Talib, "A New Source for the Poetry of Ibn Maṭrūḥ (1196-1252)," *Annales Islamologiques* 49 (2015): 115-141, esp. 129-31.

84 I prefer reading it as the 2nd person singular; both editions have *khiltu* ("I would imagine"), which is equally possible.

unspecified African language, from Persian, and "Roman". The next poem is also part of an anecdote, another version of which is found in *Maṣāriʿ al-ʿushshāq* by al-Sarrāj (d. 500/1106).[85]

حدّثني أبو الحسن محمد بن الخطاب الكلابي، عن محمد بن مزرع البصريّ قال: مررت ببطن[86] مكة ومعي صاحب[87] لي فرأيت على ركيّة زنجياً[88] ينشد شعراً بعضه أعجميّ وبعضه عربيّ، فقلت: يا أسود ما تقول؟ فأنشد:

ألا يا لائمي في حُبّ رِيمٍ أَفِقْ من بعضِ لَوْمِكَ لا اهتدَيْتا

أتأْمُرني بهَجْري بعضَ نفْسي مَعاذَ اللهِ أفْعلُ ما اشتَهَيْتا

أُحِبُّ لحبِّها الثَّقَلَيْنِ طُرّاً وبكعة[89] والبُلين ودمع ليْتا[90]

فكائن والبكان ودوعينا وشكعة والندفت وعريتا[91]

فقلت يا حبشيّ ما هذه الأسماء؟ قال: دِمَن لنا بالحبشة نُكّا نعتادها لنُزْهتِنا. قال: قلت أحسبك كَلِفاً، قال: نعم، قلت: بمنْ؟ قال: بمن إن وقفت رأيته، قال: فطلعتْ سوداءُ على عُنقها جَرّةٌ، فمَتَح لها فيها، وقال: ها هي، قال: قلت: أراك عاقلاً فما تصنع ها هنا؟ قال: أنا وقّفتُ على قبرِ فُلانٍ وقد سمّاه، وهو يعرف[92] بعض الملوك، أَرُشُّ عليه الماء، فأنا أبرّد مِن فوقُ، وربّك يسخّن من أسفلُ، أرأيت أحمق من هؤلاء يغالبون ربهم؟

85 Abū Muḥammad Jaʿfar ibn Aḥmad al-Sarrāj, *Maṣāriʿ al-ʿushshāq* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.d.), 2:57; cf. Abū ʿAlī al-Muḥassin ibn ʿAlī al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār al-muḥāḍarah wa-akhbār al-mudhākarah*, ed. ʿAbbūd al-Shāljī (Beirut: no publ., 1971-73), 6:239.

86 MS Baghdad: بَطحاء, i.e., the lower part of the Vale of Mecca.

87 MS Baghdad: صَحَبُ [sic], perhaps standing for *ṣaḥbun*, "some friends."

88 MS Baghdad: فرأيتُ اَسْوَدَ على رَكَيّة.

89 MS Baghdad: وثكعَةَ.

90 *Maṣāriʿ*: أُحِبّ لحُبّهَا ثِنْلِيمَ طُرّاً وَتَكَعَةَ وَالمَشكَّ وعَين زَيتَا.

91 This line is not found in MS Baghdad or in *Maṣāriʿ*.

92 This word is not in MS Baghdad.

Abū al-Ḥasan Muḥammad ibn al-Khaṭṭāb al-Kilābī related to me that Muḥammad ibn Muzarraʿ al-Baṣrī[93] said to him:[94] I was going along the Vale of Mecca together with a friend of mine, when I saw a *zanjī* (East African black) at a well,[95] who was reciting a poem some of which was non-Arabic and some Arabic. "Black man," I said, "What are you saying?" Then he recited:

You who blame me for loving Rīm:[96]
Come off it! Some less blame! May you not find the Right Path!
Will you command me to part with part of myself?
God forbid! I'll never do as you desire.
I love for her sake all humans and jinnees[97]
and Bakʿah and al-Bulayn and Damʿa Laytā,
Also Kaʾin and al-Bakān and Dawwiʿīnā
and Shakʿah and al-Nadaft and ʿArriraytā.[98]

"Abyssinian," I said, "What are these names?" "Deserted abodes of ours in Abyssinia," he replied. "We would visit them by way of recreation." I said, "I think you are badly in love!" "Yes!" "With whom?" "With someone you'll see if you stop here." Thereupon a black woman appeared carrying a jar on her shoulder. He drew some water from the well for her with it. "This is she," he said. "You seem to be a sensible man," I said, "so what are you doing here?" "I have been made to stand[99] at the grave of So-and-so (he named him; he was a leading person[100]) and I sprinkle water over it. Thus

93 Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn al-Muzarraʿ ibn Yamūt al-ʿAbdī, known as Yamūt ibn al-Muzarraʿ, d. *c.* 303/915; see *EI*[2], 11:280-81 (E. Wagner).

94 The *isnād* in *Maṣāriʿ* is wholly different and the narrator is not named.

95 In *Maṣāriʿ* the well is identified as Biʾr Maymūn, in Mecca. At Biʾr Maymūn was the grave of the great Abbasid caliph al-Manṣūr.

96 Alternatively, "a white antelope," as a description of his beloved.

97 On *al-thaqalān* see Q al-Raḥmān 55:31 and its commentaries.

98 Needless to say, the vocalisation of the foreign names or words in lines 3 and 4 is highly uncertain.

99 *Maṣāriʿ*: *ushturītu fa-ūqiftu ʿalā hādhā l-qabr arushshuhū*, "I was bought and made to stand at this grave in order to sprinkle it with water."

100 The last phrase in the edition of *Zahrah*, not found in *Maṣāriʿ*, is unclear: *wa-huwa yaʿrifu baʿḍa al-mulūk*. I have followed the Baghdad manuscript, which has *wa-huwa baʿḍu al-mulūk*.

I am cool above and your Lord gives heat from below. Have you ever seen people more stupid than those who try to overcome their Lord?"[101]

I confess that I do not quite understand the end of this anecdote, about the heat provided by the Lord from below, presumably coming from hell.

The poem containing Arabic with Persian is given without context and anonymously.[102] Unlike the poem with African place-names this is a proper "macaronic" piece, the Arabic term (used in later, mainly Persian works on *badīʿ*) being *mulammaʿ* ("brightly variegated, piebald").[103] Abū Nuwās composed poems stuffed with Persian words and expressions, but the poems remain Arabic in essence apart from the diction.[104] Here, the last line is wholly Persian. As far as I know this line has not yet been discussed by anybody, perhaps because it poses problems. The version of the edition is obviously corrupt; the Baghdad manuscript has a somewhat better one:

وقائلٍ قالَ لي فأخْمَنِي يا هائمَ القَلْب ما تَرَى رُشْدَكْ
قلبُكَ هذا كَمْ أنتَ تارِكُهُ عند الذي ليسَ قلبُهُ عِنْدَكْ
يا كُور شَشْمٍ وكُور دِل وَشُوخ رُوي بيني اندَك اندَك[105]

Someone said to me, and silenced me:
"You who are madly in love, can't you see your right conduct?
This heart of yours, how can you abandon it
to one whose heart is not with you?
..."

I am grateful to Dr Anna Livia Beelaert (Leiden), an expert in classical Persian poetry, for helping me with the third line of this poem. The word that appears

101 The last sentence is absent from *Maṣāriʿ*.

102 *Zahrah*, 790; the vocalisation of MS Baghdad has been reproduced.

103 Entry "mulammaʿ" (G. J. H. van Gelder) in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, ed. Meisami and Starkey, 549; Nargis Virani, "*Mulammaʿ* in Islamic Literatures," in *Classical Arabic Humanities in Their Own Terms: Festschrift for Wolfhart Heinrichs on his 65th Birthday Presented by His Students and Colleagues*, ed. Beatrice Gruendler and Michael Cooperson (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2008), 291-324.

104 Abū Nuwās, *Dīwān*, 5:278-81 and see Wagner, *Abū Nuwās*, 213-14.

105 The version of the edition:

يا كور شنيئم وكور دل وشوح روي بُنا اندكا تَدَك.

in the edition as *sh.n.ʾ.y.m* is unintelligible, but in the MS Baghdad it could be read as *shathmin*, which seems to be Persian *chashm*, "eye," with an Arabic inflectional genitive ending. The last half of the line remains obscure. One can discern the Persian *rūy* ("face"), *bīnī* ("you see"),[106] and *andak andak* ("bit by bit," or perhaps an emphasising repetition of *andak*, "a little"). It is difficult to make sense of this and make it fit the *munsariḥ* metre. Dr Beelaert suggests, very tentatively, the following reading and translation:

yā kūr-chashm-in u kūr-dil ū | šawkh-rūʾī[107] *bīnī andak andak*

O you blind-eyed one and blind-hearted one, and
you are insolent: how little do you see!

This is still metrically imperfect, with the conjunction *u/ū* oddly placed at the end of a hemistich and the end being one syllable short. The Arabic genitive ending of the Persian word *chashm*, in an otherwise wholly Persian sentence, is very strange but somehow it adds to the macaronic character.

The poem that concludes the chapter is introduced with "This is a poem in which there is some 'Roman' (*al-Rūmiyyah*); it is by Abū Nuwās." Al-Sāmarrāʾī's edition has the following text:[108]

حبَّذا قولُها وقد لَحَظَتني من وَراءِ السَّريرِ بو سانيس
قلتُ ما قَوْلُ أيِّ شَيْئَيْنِ والاَّ عَزّ شَكّ فإنَّني قاقوسي
فإذا ما فَعَلْتُ ذاك فعندي لقطينا نعم ومليا ريس

ḥabbadhā qawluhā wa-qad laḥaẓatnī | min warāʾi l-sarīri bū sānīsī
qultu mā qawlu ayyi shayʾayni wa-l-a- | ʿazzi shakkun fa-innanī qāqūsī[109]
fa-idhā mā faʿaltu dhāka fa-ʿindī | laqaṭīnā naʿam wa-milyā rīsī

106 The word *bīnī* also means "nose," which sense could be hidden in the background to form the figure of speech called *murāʿāt al-naẓīr* together with the other part of the human body in the line.

107 The metre would require reading this as *ruʾī*.

108 *Zahrah*, 790; the edition's vocalisation (but not its punctuation, with three exclamation marks) has been reproduced.

109 The end of the first hemistich is metrically irregular.

The Arabs referred to the Byzantines (who rightly called themselves Romans) as al-Rūm; the foreign language is therefore not Latin but Greek. The poem is not found in Abū Nuwās's *Dīwān* and is unlikely to be by him. Ibn Dāwūd may have thought that a poet able to compose poems containing Persian words and expressions could do the same with Greek, but there are no indications that Abū Nuwās knew any Greed. The text is obviously corrupt. Wagner quotes the poem in his collection of poems and lines spuriously attributed to Abū Nuwās, adding, "Es ist mir genau so unverständlich wie dem Herausgeber as-Sāmarrāʾī";[110] he was apparently unaware of the article by Michele Vallaro on this poem.[111] Vallaro, who used two further manuscripts, arrives at the following reconstruction:[112]

حبَّذا قولُها وقد لَحَظَتني من وَراءِ السُّتور بُوسَاخِيسْ
قلتُ قالون اني يَشِينَ وإلّا غَيْرُ شَكٍّ فإنَّني قاقوسْ
فإذا ما فَعَلْت ذاكَ فعِنْدي لُقْطِينًا نَعَمْ وَمِلْيَارِيسْ

ḥabbadhā qawluhā wa-qad laḥaẓatnī | min warāʾi l-sutūri ***būsākhīs***
qultu ***qālūn anī/inī yashīna*** *wa-illā | ghayru*[113] *shakkin fa-innanī* ***qāqūs***
fa-idhā mā faʿaltu/faʿalti dhāka fa-ʿindī | ***luquṭīnan*** *naʿam wa-****milyārīs***

I quote Vallaro's suggested Italian translation, adding between square brackets his renderings of the Greek phrases:[114]

> Quant'era bello il suo domandar « πῶς ἔχεις ; » [« come stai? »] , quando m'ebbe guardato
> da dietro le cortine/il letto!
> Risposi : « καλὸν ἔνι γιὰ σένα » [« va bene per te »], per altro
> —non c'è dubbio—io sono κακός [« male »] .
> E se farò/tu farai quella cosa, ò qui <per te>
> un λοκοτίνιν [moneta àurea], sí, e un μιλιαρίσιν [moneta argèntea] ».

110 "It is as incomprehensible to me as it is to the editor, al-Sāmarrāʾī." Wagner, *Abū Nuwās in der Nebenüberlieferung*, 130-31.

111 Michele Vallaro, "Tre versi arabi". I am grateful to Professor Vallaro for kindly sending me a copy of his article.

112 Vallaro, "Tre versi arabi," 680. The Greek elements have been given in bold type.

113 I would rather read *ghayra*.

114 Vallaro, "Tre versi arabi," 680-81. For the details of the reconstruction and interpretation I refer to this article.

An English version, based on the Arabic, Greek, and Italian, could thus be:[115]

> How lovely, her words when she noticed me
> from behind the curtains:[116] "How are you?"
> I replied, "Fine,[117] thanks to you! But otherwise,
> there's no doubt about it, I am bad!
> And if you[118] would do this thing, well, I have
> some cash in gold, yes, and silver!"

With this piece the chapter ends. In the introduction of *al-Zahrah* the author states that in each of its one hundred chapters he will include one hundred lines of verse.[119] This is not true for the extant version, since the precise number of 100 is not found throughout and some chapters have considerably fewer; it seems that towards the end of the book the author ran out of steam. Thus the preceding chapter (86, on *irtijāl*, extemporisation) contains 90 lines, the following, 88th chapter (on ambiguous lines that could be taken as praise or blame) has a mere 49 lines of verse, and the final, 100th chapter (on some lines uttered or recited by the prophet Muḥammad) has only fourteen. Computing the exact number of lines in the present chapter is made difficult by the "square" (or circular) poems and the piece of four lines that could be read as one poem or as three. If, however, one counts this "three-in-one" as three, it is just possible to arrive at one hundred. Though this may not be significant it could be taken to indicate that Ibn Dāwūd took his curiosities seriously, even though to many a modern reader they would seem rather trivial, even silly.

Whether the contents should be deemed trivial or not, in this chapter Ibn Dāwūd explores the boundaries of the Arabic language and poetry, to the extent of crossing the borders with the non-verbal rhymes and the macaronic pieces. This is announced in the title, which speaks of "poetry that is deemed curious because it goes beyond (or 'exits from') what is conventionally known." Instead of *mustaẓraf* (here rendered as "deemed curious") he could perhaps have used *mustaṭraf*, "deemed unusual, rare, exquisite," a word cognate with

115 In a proper translation the Greek phrases ought to be in another language such as French.

116 This is a more plausible version than *min warā'i al-sarīr*, "from behind the couch".

117 I cannot bring myself to write the common vulgarism "Good", even though it would make for a better contrast with the following "bad".

118 The context suggests that the second person (*fa'alti*) is more likely than the first (*fa'altu*), whatever "this thing" may be.

119 *Zahrah*, 40.

ṭaraf, "extremity".[120] But the choice of *mustaẓraf* is fitting, all the more so because Ibn Dāwūd has himself been called *ẓarīf* by medieval biographers,[121] a cognate term that may merely mean "elegant, refined" or "witty" but is also applied to those belonging to a specific group of people with a refined, "dandyish" code of behaviour.[122] As Raven argues, Ibn Dāwūd may actually have been a model for his contemporary al-Washshā' (d. 324/937), who in his *al-Muwashshā* was the first to lay down the rules of conduct for the true *ẓarīf*. The noun *ẓarf* ("refinement, esprit", etc.) also means "container, covering, envelope": it is primarily concerned with exterior, outward matters. One is tempted to connect this with Ibn Dāwūd's religious outlook: he is often called Ibn Dāwūd al-Ẓāhirī. His father Dāwūd ibn ʿAlī ibn Khalaf al-Iṣfahānī (d.270/884) was the founder of the theologico-juridical school called Ẓāhiriyyah, which based itself on the *ẓāhir* (external, literal meaning) of the Qur'ān and the *ḥadīth*[123] and Ibn Dāwūd followed his father as a leader of the movement. Such temptation should be resisted, as it would be wrong to suggest that being a *ẓarīf* is merely a matter of outward appearance and conduct, or that Ibn Dāwūd—famous for his chaste passion which is said to have killed him—would have thought that inner life is secondary to exterior things. It is true, nevertheless, that the "curiosity," the *ẓarf* of the quotations in the chapter under discussion, is mostly a matter of surface, of *lafẓ* ("wording, form") rather than *maʿnā* ("meaning, content"). In this chapter Ibn Dāwūd was a true Ẓāhirite. One should keep in mind, however, that the work on *badīʿ* summarised and translated by Pierre Cachia mentioned above—a work full of similar "superficial" literary features and artifices—was composed by ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī, who was a famous mystic. In matters of Arabic literary style a Ẓāhirite and a mystic, seemingly poles apart, can happily find each other. One could argue that Pierre Cachia,

120 The Baghdad MS of *al-Zahrah* would allow this reading. The two words were punningly used by al-Ibshīhī (d. 850/1446) for his anthology entitled *al-Mustaṭraf fī kull fann mustaẓraf*.

121 Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, eds. Gustav Flügel et al. (Leipzig: F.C.W. Vogel, 1871-72), 217, ed. Ayman Fu'ād Sayyid (London: Mu'assasat al-Furqān, 2009), II, 1:63; al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Madīnat al-Salām wa-akhbār muḥaddithīhā* (…) [= *Tārīkh Baghdād*], ed. Bashshār ʿAwwād Maʿrūf (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2001), 3:158; Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-aʿyān*, ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1972), 4:259.

122 See above, note 7.

123 J. Schacht, "Dāwūd b. ʿAlī b. Khalaf", in *EI*[2], 2:182-83; Abdel-Magid Turki, "al-Ẓāhiriyya," in *EI*[2], 11:394-96.

with his many contributions to the study of *badiʿ* and extraordinary forms of word-play,[124] continued the tradition of Ibn Dawūd and al-Nābulusī.

Postscript

By a curious and odd coincidence that would have pleased Ibn Dāwūd, it turned out that Lara Harb (Princeton University) and I were both writing, more or less simultaneously and wholly unbeknownst to each other, an essay on his eighty-seventh chapter. Her excellent article, "Beyond the Known Limits: Ibn Dāwūd al-Iṣfahānī' Chapter on 'Intermedial' Poetry," appeared in *Arabic Humanities, Islamic Thought: Essays in Honor of Everett Rowson*, ed. Joseph E. Lowry and Shawkat M. Toorawa (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 122-49. Far from being an unfortunate doubling and waste of effort, it seems to me that our contributions nicely complement each other.

124 Numerous examples can be found in Pierre Cachia's works on vernacular Arabic literature, in his *Popular Narrative Ballads of Modern Egypt* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) and *Exploring Arab Folk Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011).