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Of Ladies and Lesbians and Books on Women from the Third/Ninth and Fourth/Tenth Centuries

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Abstract

Information about women in Abbasid society — and especially the subgroups of *mutaẓarrifāt*, ladies, and *saḥḥaqāt*, lesbians — is gathered from two extant sources that explicitly deal with the subject: *al-Muwashshā*, "The Painted Cloth," by al-Washshā' (d. 325/936-7) and *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha*, composed some fifty years later by ʿAlī b. Naṣr al-Kātib. The *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha* is an erotic compendium that relies heavily on earlier sources, *al-Muwashshā* included; however, most of the works cited are lost. A survey of book-titles from the same period indicates that a good many books about women were written at the time. Representations of ladies and lesbians as they appear from the two sources and surveyed lists of book-titles suggest a complex picture of the lady-lesbian that changed over time. That some of the books dealing with the subject were still available some six-hundred years later shows that the erotic lore of the Abbasids continued to arouse interest for centuries.

Keywords

Abbasid culture – homosexuality – refinement – *saḥq* – slave-girls – *ẓarīf*

Introduction

The late fourth/tenth century erotic compendium *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha*, "Encyclopaedia of Pleasure," contains several chapters on different types of love and intimate relations.[1] A main division is made between heterosexuality

1 The *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha*, written by a certain ʿAlī b. Naṣr al-Kātib toward the end of the fourth/tenth century, is the earliest extant work of the kind. The work is partly edited and

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on the one hand, and male and female homosexuality on the other. In the first of these chapters proponents of the three main categories defend their positions in a section of short poems. A *ẓarīf* (a gentleman) wants to know who would be the happiest, "a man who has captured a woman, a young man who has captured a gazelle, or a woman with another woman, who do not desire men".[2] The first to answer is a woman who defends her desire for women:

> We are two women and sisters, who are equal in our reunion
> One at the time, we mount pleasure when we are together
> Let every derider leave us alone, we are superior to men[3]

The second, a male poet, defends his love for a boy, beautiful like a gazelle; and the third defends the love between men and women. His argument is perhaps the most compelling, as he emphasizes the divine will behind heterosexuality. People who are attracted to the opposite sex, he hints, have the advantage of being able to enjoy sexual relations both legally and illicitly, whereas the other orientations are confined to illicit sex.

It is noteworthy that the male poet who explains his preference for boys does so in terms of his lover's outstanding beauty and social competence. Apparently, the boy-lover combines a female role of being subservient with that of a male friend. The female poet, instead, declares that she and her girlfriend ("sister") are equal, they take turns in satisfying themselves but there is no set division between a passive and an active partner.[4]

The female poet who declares herself a *saḥḥāqa* (lesbian) is introduced in the *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha* as *min al-mutaẓarrifāt*, "from amongst the ladies," and as such she seems to belong to a subgroup in society, whose members, for different reasons, have renounced male company, at least temporarily. Whether this subgroup was merely fictional, a literary motif without any resemblance in reality, is virtually impossible to establish on the basis of *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha* alone. Not only relies this erotic encyclopaedia heavily on earlier literature that

translated, but the complete text is only available in manuscripts. See Rowson, Arabic, and Myrne, Beloved.

2 For *ẓarīf*, see Montgomery, *Ẓarīf*, and below.

3 The sources for this poem are three manuscripts of *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha* covering the first part of the book. I follow the reading in MS Fatih 3729, fol. 41b, which in this case is more grammatically correct. All three have problems with the dual; MS Aya Sofya 3836, 41b, and MS Chester Beatty ar 4635 48a-b have "we are afraid of men" instead of "we are superior to men."

4 Elsewhere, the author of *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha* describes men who take turns in being the active partner in homosexual intercourse, but the relationship between a man and a boy, as in this poem, is clearly hierarchical.

is mostly lost, but the poetry and anecdotes it contains are also genre specific and may not have the slightest relation with contemporary society.

In an attempt to get a better understanding of the position of *mutaẓarrifāt* and *saḥḥaqāt* in Abbasid society, I compare in this article information from two extant sources that explicitly deal with the subject: *al-Muwashshā*, "The Painted Cloth," by al-Washshā' (ca. 255/869-325/936-7) and the above mentioned *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha*, composed some fifty years later by ʿAlī b. Naṣr al-Kātib. The information thus gathered gives insight into how norms about women and refinement were set and transformed over time and in different social contexts.

As just mentioned, the *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha* relies on earlier sources, dating from the time of *al-Muwashshā* onwards as well as from before. Many references to and citations from books on women are found in this erotic encyclopaedia, but most of these works are lost. A survey of book-titles and citations from the period presented in this article indicates that there was once a substantial literature on women in general and on particular subgroups of women in Abbasid society. The information from *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha* and the *Muwashshā* taken together with the survey of book-titles and citations from works now lost allow us a glimpse into a lively literary universe populated by women who, helped by a literary technique that lets them speak in the first person, enhance their identity as a distinct social group.

The *Mutaẓarrifāt* in *al-Muwashshā*

The female poet expressing her desire for a woman, is called "one of the *mutaẓarrifāt*," a plural meaning "elegant women, ladies." The singular, *mutaẓarrifa*, is seldom used in Abbasid sources; by far the most common word for a lady is *ẓarīfa*, the feminine of *ẓarīf*. The two words have the same meaning, but the plural *mutaẓarrifāt* apparently has further implications. The *mutaẓarrifāt* seem to denote a specific social group, whereas *ẓarīfa* is an epithet to be given to any elegant woman. There was a certain interest for this group of ladies; at least three books were devoted to them by authors who lived in Baghdad in the third/ninth and early fourth/tenth centuries. According to the *Fihrist* of Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-Mutaẓarrifāt* ("Book on Elegant Women") or *Akhbār al-mutaẓarrifāt* ("Accounts about Elegant Women") were the titles of works written by Ibn Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfūr (204/819-280/893), his son ʿUbayd Allāh (d. 313/925), and al-Washshā' (ca. 255/869-325/936-7).[5] None of the books has survived, and

5 Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 1, 263, 452, 453; see Ghazi, Un group social, 51; also Rosenthal, Aḥmad b. Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfūr; Toorawa, Ibn Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfūr; Raven, al-Washshā'.

we can only speculate about their content. However, al-Washshāʾ refers to specific groups of ladies as *mutaẓarrifāt* in his etiquette book *al-Muwashshā*, where they are the counterparts of *al-ẓurafāʾ*, the more familiar group of sophisticated elite men, who together made up the refined society of the Abbasid capital.[6]

Al-Washshāʾ describes their lavish clothing, perfume, and jewelry and calls them *mutaẓarrifāt al-quṣūr*, "elegant ladies of the castles," *mutaẓarrifāt al-qiyān*, "elegant slave-singers," or just *mutaẓarrifāt al-nisāʾ*, "elegant women."[7] They seem to be women who take active participation in sophisticated society life, where personal activities such as clothing, eating, and engaging in love affairs are part and parcel of cultural capital and every single gesture and causal word is evaluated by companions adding to or reducing that capital. Al-Washshāʾ gives advice of how to express refinement by choice of personal attire, food and drink, as well as appropriate language in social interactions, illustrated by examples of *ẓurafāʾ* and *mutaẓarrifāt* who he himself or his informants and sources have seen in the palaces and salons of Baghdad.

The social life in Abbasid Baghdad is the subject of numerous anecdotes in classical Arabic literature, purporting to represent the witty dialogues and poetic exchanges of the cultural elite. A major achievement of *al-Muwashshā* is the representation of a visual culture where literature interacts with the material, and poetic sentences are engraved, embroidered or written on personal attire, tableware, textile, furniture and structures.

The inscribed objects had probably a symbolic value for the refined elite; the exclusiveness of the material was as important as the inscribed texts. They also had a social value, reflecting shared values and tastes of the elite, and displayed, as it were, on a scene, as the inscribed texts were not only read by those present, but also shared with a wider audience. Al-Washshāʾ relates about an exchange of accusations, written on rings, between a female singer and Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Malik al-Zayyāt, who was the vizier of several caliphs until he died in prison 233/847.[8] They had a love affair, which Muḥammad ended, and the singer, feeling abandoned, wrote an accusation on the stone of her ring. This reached Muḥammad, who in turn wrote an answer to the accusation on his own ring. When the singer was informed about this, she erased her initial accusation and wrote a new one, and so they continued. Had it not been for visitors who conveyed the words the lovers exchanged on their rings,

6 See Montgomery, *Ẓarīf*.

7 Cf. Ghazi, Un group social, 54, 56-59.

8 Washshāʿ, *Muwashshā*, 165. The verb used in this anecdote and subsequent poem is *kataba*, write, whereas the other examples of text on rings use *naqasha*, engrave.

the argument would not have taken place. The historical value of this anecdote is diminished by the fact that al-Washshā''s source is a poem attributed to the same Muḥammad b. al-Zayyāṭ who is also the main character of the anecdote, whereas the singer remains anonymous. Nevertheless, it expresses an ideal of a refined conversation as a performance, the dialogue, in this case, being presented by the audience.

Most people depicted in *al-Muwashshā* are men, and the intended readers are obviously men as well. There are, however, enough examples of women's refinement and advice about women's attire to presume that it was also read by women. The recommendation about women's clothing and the samples of women's verses were probably intended for female readers, that is, the *mutaẓarrifāṭ* of al-Washshā''s time. The first part of *al-Muwashshā* treats, among other things, the idea that chaste love, characterized by suffering and yearning, is more refined than physical love; he also dwells upon women's (especially singers') treacherous nature. Al-Washshā''s female examples are primarily from the early Islamic era, some of them elite women who became stock characters in *adab* literature. Some are presented as devoted lovers, loyal until death, whereas a few are treacherous and fickle. In the last part of the book, al-Washshā' provides samples of the art of refined people. Gentlemen engraved pens and furniture with poems and wisdom and painted expressions on structures. Ladies, on the other hand, were restricted to use their clothes and bodies; they embroidered their garments and waistbands with poetic sentences and painted their sandals, hands and feet. All women in al-Washshā''s examples are identifiable as Abbasid slave women (*jawārī*) or freed slaves, some of them singers or musicians. Half of the women are named, and most of the others are identified by the names of their owners.

The majority of women whose art is depicted in *al-Muwashshā*, lived decades before al-Washshā' was born; he knew only a few of them himself. His information comes from other sources, oral or written, and although he does not mention Ibn Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfūr's book on *mutaẓarrifāt*, some accounts seem to have been taken from it. Despite using examples from the past, he seems to have in mind a certain group of contemporary women when he gives advice on clothing and appropriate texts for decoration.

Al-Washshā', who was primarily known as a grammarian and believed to have been a teacher, perhaps at court, had also access to information from contemporary women. One of his pupils was Munya al-Kātiba, a slave of Caliph al-Muʿtamid (256-79/870-92).[9] He was probably too young to have been her

9 Raven, al-Washshā'.

teacher during the lifetime of al-Muʿtamid, but she probably remained at the royal palace after the death of her owner and could have been his informant.

According to al-Washshāʾ, he had also access to information from at least a few other palace women. For example, he asks one of the palace's *mutaẓarrifāt* about what she considers as *ẓarf* (elegance). She answers: "One who is eloquent and chaste is the perfect *ẓarīf* for us."[10] This is at once the central message of the book: chastity and eloquence are necessary components of elegance and sophistication, combined with a taste for luxurious apparel and food a perfect *ẓarīf* is made.

Al-Washshā"s idea of chastity as an essential component of *ẓarf* is often taken as an example of the courtly ideal of his time. Nonetheless, *al-Muwashshā* is not necessarily a description of the manners of his time, it rather promotes a value system in which chastity is part of claims of superiority. Elsewhere, however, we read stories that reveal a more complex attitude to chastity among Abbasid elite women than the one presented in *al-Muwashshā*. The *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, for instance, mentions the famous singer ʿArīb who had been a free woman since the days of al-Muʿtaṣim and had lived a love life far from chastity. She spent her last years at al-Muʿtamid's court or at least with regualr access to it. According to various anecdotes, members of the Abbasid family and high officials loved to hear her talking about her sexual preferences and gossiped about her during their gatherings.[11] When al-Washshāʾ mentions ʿArīb in *al-Muwashshā*, he calls her "one of the slave-girls of the Abbasids," without acknowledging her fame.[12] Al-Washshā"s attitude towards female singers and musicians is complex as well — in the part of *al-Muwashshā* that is specifically devoted to them, al-Washshāʾ condemns them, but in other parts he uses several singers to illustrate elegant art.[13]

Who were the *mutaẓarrifāt*? A *ẓarīf* was, as pointed out by James Montgomery, "a type of *adīb*," a man who engaged in literary activities and was part of the intellectual circles in the urban centers of the Abbasid Empire. He was also well informed about cultural trends. The *ẓurafāʾ* have been identified as a social group who came from the upper strata of society. They were poets and littérateurs, professional men and officials, or they belonged to the ruling family.

10 Washshāʾ, *Muwashshā*, 42.

11 See ʿArīb's biography in Iṣfahānī, *Aghānī*, XXI, 54-87. On the *Ahgānī*'s sources of information about women, see Fleischhammer, *Die Quellen*; Kilpatrick, *Making the Great Book*.

12 Washshāʾ, *Muwashsha*, 167.

13 *Dhamm al-qiyān* was already a literary *topos* by the time of al-Washshāʾ, inspired by, among others, al-Jāḥiẓ and his *Risālat al-qiyān*.

Their female counterparts are more elusive as the term *mutaẓarrifa* is much less employed than the male term *ẓarīf*. They seem to have been privileged urban women and socialites, known for their stylishness and glamour.

Most of the *mutaẓarrifāt* seem to have been *jawārī*, slave courtesans, concubines, and companions of the Abbasid elite. Although they were enslaved, they belonged to the highest strata of society, and in contrast to their male counterparts, their cultural capital had a triple value: it had an impact on their own social standing, that of their owners, as well as on their market value, should their owners wish to sell them. Even if they lived a privileged life with enough time and money to cultivate an interest for fashion and engage in society, they were nonetheless slaves with restricted agency.

The Abbasid *jawārī*, high-class courtesans, have fascinated readers and historians for centuries, and some of them had standings and wealth that surpassed that of most free women. Although the primary sources about these women are problematic to use as historical sources, it can be assumed that their principal role was to add to the glory of their masters. Their "elegance" was not only theirs, but also their owners'. As long as they were slaves, the poems written on their bodies or embroidered on their clothes could as well represent the refinement of their owners, or describe the slave women themselves for potential buyers or patrons. One of the samples of elegant art in *al-Muwashshā* is a poem about the sufferings of love, written with henna on the hand of a *jāriya* named Shamārīkh. Al-Washshā' mentions specifically that it was her owner, a woman called al-Māhāniyya, who wrote it.[14] Another example is a verse written on the forehead of a *jāriya* who was put on display for sale — al-Washshā' had seen her with his own eyes.[15] The verse alludes to a beautiful woman, perhaps the slave herself, and, considering the situation, it was probably there to attract select buyers with a cultural interest, and hence increase her monetary value. As such, a poem written on the body or clothes of a slave woman could also be part of a marketing strategy, attracting potential buyers.

Mutaẓarrifāt and Female Same-sex Desire

Most of the verses embroidered, engraved, or written on women's attire have to do with love. They often take the form of messages to their lovers. *Jawārī* famously engaged in love affairs by their own free will, so it is not impossible that the verses expressed real affection, but in many (or most) cases their

14 Washshāʿ, *Muwashshā*, 183.

15 Ibid., 183.

"lovers" were their owners, which restricted their agency. Some of the poems express love for a woman. With the little information we have, however, it is not possible to recognize these verses as expressing same-sex desire, as they are not necessarily the female bearer's own words. Their purpose was perhaps to praise an owner, who happened to be a woman. This may have been the case with the *jārīya* of Ḥamdūna bt. al-Mahdī who wrote a love poem to a woman on her shoe,[16] and the *jārīya* of Fāṭima bt. Muḥammad bt. ʿImrān al-Kātib who had a poem about her subservient love for a woman written with musk on her cheek.[17] In both cases, the slave-girl's expression of love is a poetic topos, symbolizing the will to submit and serve her owner.

There is one anecdote in *al-Muwashshā*, however, where a female character explicitly loves another woman. It is a story about unfulfilled love and suffering leading to death, a favourite topic in the narratives al-Washshāʾ uses to substantiate his claims about chaste love. Unusually, this particular story is a love triangle: a young woman loves a young man, but the young man loves a female singer, who in turn loves the young woman.[18] It was supposedly narrated by the young woman's father in the *majlis* of al-ʿUtbī (probably the poet from Basra, d. 228/842-3). He had, at another *majlis*, heard the singer performing a song about love's inevitable suffering, which caused the young man's immediate death. Upon hearing about the death of the young man, his daughter perished, which, in turn, caused the death of the singer.

Chaste love is in line with the ideal of *al-Muwashshā*, but there are other instances in Abbasid literature where female same-sex desire is less virtuous. Some examples come from the court of Caliph al-Mutawakkil (232-47/847-61), before al-Washshāʾ was born. One anecdote is about the above mentioned court singer ʿArīb. The caliph's *jawārī* whisper about her secret love affair with a palace eunuch and she answers by calling them *saḥḥāqāt*, lesbians.[19] The word is used here invectively, but lesbianism was treated as a recognized sexual orientation at the same court, which produced a few books entirely devoted to the subject of same-sex desire.

16 Ibid., 182.

17 Ibid., 183-184. Two *jawārī* of Ḥamdūna bt. al-Mahdī (sister of Hārūn al-Rashīd) figure in *Muwashshā* (175, 182), as well as a Bint al-Mahdī, perhaps Ḥamdūna, who wrote with gold on a cup, praising a beautiful "gazelle" (187). She may have been her half sister, ʿUlayya bint al-Mahdī, who was more famous for her poetry.

18 Ibid., 61-62.

19 Iṣfahānī, *Aghānī*, XXI, 71-72. Rowson (Categorization, 77, n. 36) translates *saḥḥāqa* as "tribade," because the term refers to "an activity rather than to choice of sexual partner." The activity is *saḥq*, "to grind." In all examples used for this article, however, the *saḥḥāqāt* choose female partners; that is why I translate *saḥq* as tribadism and *saḥḥāqa* as lesbian.

For instance, two of al-Mutawakkil's boon companions wrote books on lesbianism. One was written by the buffoon and scholar Abū l-ʿAnbas (213-275/828-888) bearing the title *Kitāb al-Saḥḥāqāt wa-l-baghghā'īn*, "Book on Lesbians and Passive Sodomites."[20] Later biographers note Abū l-ʿAnbas' multifaceted personality; he was at the same time a jester who wrote books on *mujūn*, an astrologer, and a *faqīh*, who had worked as a qadi.[21] He wrote many books on serious as well as amusing topics, and his book on tribadism and passive sodomy appears to belong to the latter, not the least as Ibn al-Nadīm lists it among titillating, erotic stories.[22] The book is mentioned in *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha* and in a passage attributed to Abū l-ʿAnbas, the "community of lesbians" (*maʿshar al-saḥḥāqāt*) describe in a satirical manner the kind of woman they desire, how they like her genitals, and the best ways of lesbian sexual intercourse.[23] In another citation, perhaps from another of his books, Abū l-ʿAnbas makes a serious attempt to explain tribadism.[24] He claims to have asked the philosopher and scholar al-Kindī (d. ca. 252/866) about *saḥq*, tribadism, and al-Kindī answered that it is "a natural sexual appetite," explaining it in accordance with humoral theory.[25] His fellow boon companion, Abū Ḥasan al-Namlī (d. ca 246/860), wrote on the same topic a book on tribadism (*Kitāb al-Saḥq*) and one on passive sodomy (*Kitāb al-Bighā'*); both are listed by Ibn al-Nadīm in the *Fihrist*, though not in the section on erotic literature.[26] Another book written by al-Namlī was regarded as titillating; it is about two women called Burjān (or Bardān) and Ḥabāḥib who gave sexual advice to a king. Judging by the citations from this book in *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha*, the female protagonists in al-Namlī's stories were voluptuous women whose sexual appetite overshadowed their reason (see below).

Some citations dating from the end of the fourth/tenth century, again indicate an association between female same-sex love and elegance. As we have seen at the beginning of this article, the female poet who expressed her desire for a woman is referred to as "one of the *mutaẓarrifāt*" in *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha*. There is also a short section in the *Fihrist* entitled *Asmā' al-ḥabā'ib*

20 Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, I, 468, II, 345.

21 Pellat, Abū l-ʿAnbas.

22 Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, II, 345.

23 Ibn Naṣr, MS Aya Sofya, fols., 85a-b.

24 Ibid., fols., 83a-b.

25 Ibid., fol. 83a. I have not been able to find this or a similar text among al-Kindī's works. *Ṣaḥq* means "pounding, rubbing" and is used in the same sense as "tribadism"; see Rowson, Categorization, 63, and 77, n. 36.

26 Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, I, 469. Nothing is left of these two books by al-Namlī that I am aware of.

al-mutaẓarrifāt, "Names of Elegant Female Loved Ones," which appears to be a list of female same-sex couples.[27] Each of these couples probably represents a fictional love story. Elegance was an ideal in certain elite circles, and the association of female same-sex love with elegance indicates that love between women was conceivable and not entirely condemned in these circles. It seems that readers of *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha* and *Fihrist* did not consider the connection between female elegance and female same-sex desire as completely astonishing.

The chapter on female same-sex relations in *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha* is the oldest extant substantial treatment of lesbianism and tribadism in Arabic. As we have seen, it relies to some degree on Abū l-ʿAnbas' writing on the subject.[28] It is difficult to distinguish where citations end, so it is not possible to properly establish the extent of the reliance on Abū l-ʿAnbas. The chapter starts with a discussion of the possible reasons for tribadism; al-Kindī's explanation is followed by attributions to Hippocrates, Galen and Ibn Māsawayh. Regardless of whether they are correct, tribadism seems to have been a fairly well explored topic in natural philosophy and medicine.

The bulk of the chapter, however, is devoted to lesbian women expressing their desires and explaining their sexual orientation. At the end, there is a section where both women and men argue against it. The few women in this section who are named could not be identified, but they are apparently free women — only a few of them are said to be *jawārī*. The author starts this section with a sociological explanation of tribadism and claims that some women choose tribadism as an alternative of heterosexual intercourse either for fear of loosing their virginity and good reputation, or for fear of pregnancy. These claims are illustrated with poems such as

27 Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 11, 329-330. Dodge (*Fihrist* 2, 721) translates the section title as "Names of Loving and Fickle Girls." Ghazi (La littérature d'imagination en arabe, 177) argues that although the women listed in pairs were indeed loving couples, their love was chaste: "nous croyons que l'amour *ʿuḏrī* est un sentiment pouvant naître et se developer entre deux cœurs feminine." Amer (Medieval Arabic Lesbians, 219), instead, presupposes that the couples are lesbians.

28 This, as well as the chapter on male same-sex relations is missing in the available edition of *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha*, which only covers the last part of the work due to the use of an incomplete manuscript; it is therefore often overlooked. A more detailed study of this chapter will be published in a forthcoming monograph, entitled *Female Sexuality in the Early Medieval Islamic World*.

> How much we have practiced tribadism (*saḥaqnā*), my sister!
> For ninety years and it is more enjoyable and concealed than the inserting of penises[29]
> and pregnancy, the knowledge of which would please the enemy and, worse than that, the censure of the blamers
> We are not imposed *ḥadd* punishment for tribadism, as for fornication (*zinā*),
> although it is more desirable for women who take the active role (*fawāʿil*)[30]

Unlike the satirical depiction of lesbian women in a quotation attributed to Abū l-ʿAnbas, this poem is, like most others in the section, quite sober and could be grounded in real experience. Interestingly, it alludes to women who prefer to take the active role, something that is not elaborated further upon. Although much of the material in the chapter on female same-sex love is serious, it is difficult to evaluate these representations; are they really women's words or merely satire? Perhaps they are a mix of both; the account attributed to Abū l-ʿAnbas is more satirical than the poems that are unattributed.

In *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha*, ʿAlī b. Naṣr gives examples of women who engage in tribadism for these reasons, but most of them "recover" when they get married. Only a few of them discover that *saḥq* is more pleasurable than *nayk* ("fucking") and start to reject men. Tribadism is described both as an active choice — which could be made by any woman who had time and means to engage in extra-marital relationships — and a sexual orientation which is preferred by some women. Tribadism, *saḥq*, is opposed to *nayk*, fucking, which is the word used for penetrative sex in this context. There seems to be an ongoing debate as to whether *saḥq* is more pleasurable than *nayk*, perhaps initiated by a poem by Abū l-ʿAtāhiya, (d. 211/826), who, the sources tell us, had been in love with a woman who preferred women. After having been spurned, he addressed a poem to "those who engage in tribadism" (*dhawāt al-saḥq*) in which he argues for the superiority of *nayk* to *saḥq*.[31]

In the chapter on female same-sex desire in *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha*, most women prefer *saḥq*, defending it with words like

29 *Fa-kam saḥaqnā yā ukhtī tisʿīna ḥijjatan asarru wa-akhfā min dukhūli l-fayāshilī. Tisʿīna*, "ninety, ninety times," must be understood as "many times" or "for a long time."

30 Ibn Naṣr, MS Fatih 3729, fol., 85a. The English translation of *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha*, glosses over the poems in this chapter, and parts of the text are abridged or omitted.

31 Iṣfahānī, *Aghānī*, IV, 24 and XV, 277-78.

> Praise the lord of the creation, my beloved, tribadism (*saḥq*) has made our life agreeable
> but fucking (*nayk*) makes its pursuers ugly, so may that which we love last forever[32]

The poem is part of a series of love letters between women, which correspond to the examples of love letters between elegant people in *al-Muwashshā*. There are, in fact, some similarities between the group of *saḥḥāqāt* in *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha* and the *mutaẓarrifāt* in *al-Muwashshā*. The literary representation of ladies and lesbians positions them as groups with their own identity, admired by society for their elegance on the one hand, and standing outside because they are slaves or reject men on the other. The identification of lesbian women as a group, however, might be entirely fictional, inspired by the representation of the *mutaẓarrifāt*. Some of the lesbian women are said to have engraved mottos on their rings, similar to the elegant people in *al-Muwashshā*. These lesbian mottos, however, are poles apart from the sober engravings on the rings of the *ẓurafāʾ*. A lesbian woman named Wuhayba, for example, engraved on her ring, "I seek protection by God from the penis and from the monk entering the monastery."[33]

The most striking difference between the *saḥḥāqāt* in *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha* and the *mutaẓarrifāt* in *al-Muwashshā* is the former's explicit desire for sexual satisfaction, which would have been considered as entirely inelegant by the latter. Nevertheless, exactly what constitutes elegance changes with time and so do gendered expectations. Thus, the definition of *ẓarf* offered by al-Washshāʾ was not necessarily prevailing when Ibn Abī Ṭāhir was writing his book on the same social group, or when Abū l-ʿAnbas wrote his one on lesbians associating them with elegance. Likewise, a *mutaẓarrifa* at the time of al-Washshāʾ was not necessarily the same *mutaẓarrifa* of late fourth/tenth century Baghdad.

It could be argued that differences in the understanding of "elegance" have more to do with individual authors' outlooks or differences in literary genre. The author of *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha*, ʿAlī b. Naṣr, wrote for men with pretensions to be part of the elegant elite, just like al-Washshāʾ had done some fifty years earlier. Contrary to al-Washshāʾ, however, ʿAlī b. Naṣr argued against the ideal of chastity. He explicitly dedicates his erotic compendium to the *ẓarīf*, who is expected to "achieve the excellence of manly virtue (*muruwwa*) and combine the characteristics of chivalry (*futuwwa*)" by reading the book and following

32 Ibn Naṣr, Aya Sofya 3836, fol. 84b.

33 *Wa-naqashat Wuhayba al-saḥḥāqa ʿalā khātimihā aʿūdhu bi-llāhi mina l-ayri wa-min dukhūli l-qassi fī l-dayri*; MS Aya Sofya 3836, fol. 84b.

its instructions,[34] With sophisticated erotic knowledge and behaviour, a man can distinguish himself from common people, in this case the most urgent outcome of *ẓarf*.[35]

The *ẓarīf* does not have to remain chaste, he may engage in different types of legal bonds (*nikāḥ* and *mutʿa* marriage as well as slave concubinage) and at once enjoy extra-marital relations with women or men, if he so pleases. In fact, ʿAlī b. Naṣr seems to have al-Washshāʾ in mind when he defends those who claim that sexual reunion is necessary for long-lasting affection and intimacy, and therefore call sexual intercourse "the nails of love."[36] Al-Washshāʾ also refers to this expression, but he sharply condemns it. He sides instead with those who maintain that sexual union destroys love, a claim that ʿAlī b. Naṣr dismisses as hypocrisy.[37]

Women's Voices in Erotic Literature

The most striking example of the representation of lesbian women as a social group is attributed to Abū l-ʿAnbas and probably taken from his book "Lesbians and Passive Sodomites." In a rather long monologue, the lesbians speak as a group in first person plural: "We, the community of lesbians" (*maʿshar al-saḥḥāqāt*), followed by an imaginative description of the women they prefer.[38] The use of first-person speech and letting characters speak for themselves and defend themselves in a debate, is a common literary device. In this case, Abū l-ʿAnbas' book was possibly structured as a dialogue between "the lesbians" and "the passive sodomites."

The use of direct speech in representations of women is characteristic for *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha* and many of its sources. It gives the impression that the women tell their own story and represent themselves. In a humorous and quite indecent boasting match, attributed to al-Jāhiẓ and quoted in *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha*, the vagina is successfully defended by a slave-girl, named Badīʿ, against the penis, which in turn is defended by a young man of Banū Tamīm. In the end, the two opponents find each other, the young man buys the slave-girl and

34 Ibn Naṣr, MS Fatih 3729, fols. 1b.2a. Al-Washshāʾ devotes a chapter to *muruwwa* in *al-Muwashshā*, where he identifies chastity as a necessary component.

35 See Myrne, Pleasing the Beloved.

36 Ibn Naṣr, MS Aya Sofya 3836, fol. 42a; MS Fatih 3729, fol. 42a. See Myrne, Pleasing the Beloved, 218-219.

37 Washshāʾ, *Muwashshā*, 76; see Myrne, ibid.

38 Ibn Naṣr, MS Aya Sofya 3836, fol. 85a.

they live together happily ever after.[39] In another long altercation, related by a ʿAbd al-Wahhāb b. Aḥmad b. Yazdād al-Kātib al-Marwazī, a slave-girl defends her sex against a slaveboy in a debate that goes far above the merits of the sexual organs. Whereas the boy easily finds arguments for men's superiority in the literary tradition — he refers to *ḥadīth*, medical writing and poets, among other sources — the girl does not lack forceful arguments either, mentioning the merits of Fāṭima and other historic women. She is eventually successful and wins the argument.[40] These two "boasting matches" stand out in that the protagonists defend themselves or their sexual organs. Al-Jāḥiẓ is credited to have introduced this literary genre to the Abbasid audience and his *Kitāb Mufākharāt al-jawārī wa-l-ghilmān*, "The Boasting Match between Slave-girls and Slave-boys" became famous.[41] In this particular boasting match, the real argument is between men who prefer to have sex with a woman and those who prefer a man.[42] A boasting match with the same perspective — that of senior men's sexual preferences — was told by Aḥmad b. Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfūr and Aḥmad b. al-Ṭayyib al-Sarakhsī, also quoted in *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha*.[43]

ʿAlī b. Naṣr cites several fictional female authorities on sex and women's preferences, some of them appear as titles of erotic stories in *Fihrist*. One was written by Abū l-Ḥasan al-Namlī, the boon companion of al-Mutawakkil, who also wrote the above mentioned book about lesbianism and passive sodomy. The book was called *Barjān wa-Ḥubāḥib fī akhbār al-nisāʾ*, "Burjān/Barjān and Ḥabāḥib/Ḥubāḥib on Acounts about Women."[44] From citations in *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha*, we know that Burjān and Ḥabāḥib are two elderly women who give sexual advice and expertise to an anonymous king. The narrative situation is a *majlis*, or a private conversation between the king and the two women, rendered in the form of dialogues and monologues in direct speech. The king asks the women about various topics related to sex, such as women's *shahwa* (sexual appetite), what kind of sex women like and which men they prefer. In a long narrative, they divide women into categories with strange names depending

39 Ibid., 19a-21a.

40 Ibid., 21a-29b. Arguably, her victory owed more to her sexual attractiveness and seductive skills than to her intellectual arguments.

41 Rosenthal, Male and female, 25.

42 If the above attribution to al-Jāḥiẓ is correct, he apparently has written more than one work on the subject.

43 Rosentahl, ibid.; Toorawa, *Ibn Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfūr*, 99-101.

44 Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, spells the names Bardān and Ḥabāḥib (Fu'ād Sayyid's vocalization). In the oldest citations from this story, however, the names are given as *Burjān/Barjān/Barḥān* and *Ḥabāḥib/Ḥubāḥib* (*Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha*, MSS Aya Sofya 3836); cf. Rowson, Arabic, 47-48.

on age and shape of genital organs, each of which goes together with a category of men. Although this particular narrative is more erotic and entertaining than instructive, it is clearly inspired by the more serious literature about "perfect sex couples" that flourished at the time; ʿAlī b. Naṣr refers to an extensive technical literature on this topic.

Several of Burjān and Ḥabāḥib's answers to the king's questions are humorous, in *mujūn* style, and they also tell stories about their own sex life, apparently with the intent to be arousing. Characteristically, the point of most of their stories is women's extreme *shahwa*: "The woman with the weakest *shahwa* has more *shahwa* than the man with the strongest *shawha*".[45] Women are entirely driven by their sexual appetite, according to these two advisors; they choose men based on the size of their genital organs and their performance in bed, and they love them as long as they receive sexual satisfaction. Some of the answers are more serious, however, and provide quasi-scientific knowledge or ethical guidance. They also give more realistic representations of women's sexual desire and discuss different reasons for sexual dysfunction among women.

The book of Burjān and Ḥabāḥib, as presented in *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha*, plays with the wisdom genre, it is a mirror for princes in *mujūn* style on the subject of sex and women. Wisdom in the form of the Arabic testament (*waṣiya*) had been popular since long, influenced by the Middle Persian advice literature, and around the time of al-Mutawakkil's caliphate more complex works on governing and kingship were produced.[46] One of the earliest full scale mirrors for princes in Arabic, *Kitāb al-Tāj*, was written for al-Fatḥ b. Khaqān (d. 247/861-2), who was al-Mutawakkil's courtier.[47] This work was probably known at court, which gave credence to the erotic counterpart written by al-Namlī and made its mocking parts even more amusing. It must have been an attractive format, as the legacy of Burjān and Ḥabāḥib lived on for centuries and other works were written in the same style.

The section on erotic literature in the *Fihrist* contains other stories presented as wisdom literature. There are, for instance, the stories of Bunyānnafs (or Bunyāfis in the oldest manuscripts) and Bunyāndukht, who figure in *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha* as well. The woman, Bunyāndukht, gives advice to women on how to get pleasure, seduce a man, and get the best out of their husbands. Bunyāfis, the man, bears the epithet *al-ḥakīm*, "wise," as if he were a sage or a philosopher, and presents his sexual wisdom in appropriate short sentences. Nonetheless, he calls himself a *mājin*, a joker with an obscene sense of humour

45 *Aḍʿaf shahwat al-nisāʾ aghlab min aqwā shahwat al-rijāl*; MS Aya Sofya 3836, fol. 103 a.

46 Marlow, *Counsel for Kings*, 6-7.

47 Ibid., 45-46.

and he addresses his audience likewise. He is indeed a wise buffoon and his expertise expands to things like the benefits and disadvantages of pubic hair. The couple sometimes appears together, then called al-Fārisī and al-Fārisiyya, experts in physiognomy related to sex.[48] Al-Fārisiyya is specialized in men's physiognomy and al-Fārisī's in women's, showing that women by experience are knowledgeable about men and men about women. The concept of the couple with mutual experience plays, however, a minor role in *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha*. Al-Fārisī/Bunyāfis is only mentioned a few times, whereas al-Fārisiyya/Bunyāndukht and other female experts abound, with expertise on women's sexuality as well as on men's desires. The overarching idea in *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhda* is thus that women, in the form of female protagonists, represent their own sex. The focus on women in erotic books is in itself not surprising, considering the intended reader was a heterosexual man. However, the literary technique of letting women speak for themselves is striking.

More Books on Women from the Third/Ninth and Fourth/Tenth Centuries

From Ibn al-Nadīm's section on erotic literature, we know that several other books on women and sex have been written at the time but did not survive. ʿAlī b. Muḥammad b. al-Shāh al-Ṭāhirī, a grandson of the military commander al-Shāh b. Mikāl who died in 302/914-5, wrote *Akhbār al-nisāʾ*, "Accounts about Women," which probably covered erotic aspects, since Ibn al-Nadīm describes the author as a follower of Abū l-ʿAnbas who wrote on lesbians and passive sodomites, as we have seen above. Indeed, ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Ṭāhirī also authored two books about male same-sex desire in a humorous way, *Kitāb al-Bighāʾ wa-ladhdhātihi*, "The Book on Passive Sodomy and its Pleasures," and *Kitāb al-Ghilmān*, "The Book on Slave-boys."[49] Another book called *Akhbār al-nisāʾ* was written by Ibn Ḥājib al-Nuʿmān (d. 351/962) and seems to have dealt with female erotica as well. The book was also known as *Ḥadīth Ibn al-Dukkānī*, "The Discourse of Ibn al-Dukkānī," and it apparently survived for centuries, but is no longer extant. Ibn Ḥājib was an official in charge of the land tax bureau for Iraq (*diwān al-sawād*) under the Būyid sultan Muʿizz al-Dawla. He was a

48 Cf. Polemon's counsel in *Firāsat al-nisāʾ*: see Ghersetti, A Science for Kings; idem, Polemon's Physiognomy.

49 Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 1, 471.

contemporary of Ibn al-Nadīm who praises his dignity, virtues, and administrative skills. Ibn Ḥājib also owned one of the best book collections of his time.[50]

Outside the section on erotic literature, Ibn al-Nadīm lists a number of other books entitled *Akhbār al-nisāʾ* or *Kitāb al-Nisāʾ*, or the like.[51] These titles seem pretentious, promising the reader to provide everything he or she needs to know about women. Presumably, these books did not cover issues that were interesting for women in particular; their authors probably wrote for readers from their own circle of (male) scholars and officials.[52] These books may have belonged to different genres, with different connotations of the word "women." Other book titles listed by Ibn al-Nadīm indicate that their subject is women or issues related to women, or "subgroups" of women. In addition to *mutaẓarrifāt*, there are books on *jawārī* and *qiyān*, some of which are well-known even today. Many books have a genealogical or historical focus, for example female lineages (*ummahāt*) or various categories of wives, such as the wives of the Prophet (*azwāj al-nabī*) or wives of noblemen. Other books contain poetry of women or poetry on women.

Two extant Abbasid "books" with the title *Kitāb al-Nisāʾ* are mentioned in the *Fihrist*, and both are well-known: a short epistle by al-Jāḥiẓ (160/776-255/868) and the last volume of *ʿUyūn al-akhbār* of Ibn Qutayba (213/828-276/889).[53] Al-Jāḥiẓ's epistle, also called *Risāla fī l-ʿishq wa-l-nisāʾ*, "Of Passion and Women," is, according to Charles Pellat, probably an amalgamation of two or three different texts.[54] The text as we now have it contains a short discussion of love and women from an exclusively male perspective. As Nadia Maria El Cheikh has shown, Ibn Qutayba's perspective on women is almost exclusively male as well; he locates women's behavior and appearance as crucial for the success of marriages.[55] Nevertheless, we can also read women's voices in this treatise, albeit fictional, as women's agency is connected to genre.[56] Women are often

50 Ibid., I, 415 and II, 345; see Rowson, Arabic, 48.

51 Obviously, not all of these titles represent a book; many were probably only short written pieces.

52 There were of course exceptions, i.e., "women prepared for and inducted into the male environment of the classical language"; Toorawa, *Ibn Abī Ṭāhir*, 12. Al-Munajjid includes some titles that he deemed of interest for women, on jewelry, clothes, and finery; Mā ul-lifa, 315.

53 Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, I, 237, 586. For women in the volume by Ibn Qutayba, see El Cheikh, Ideal Spouse.

54 Pellat, Nouvel essai, 152.

55 El Cheikh, Ideal Spouse.

56 Myrne, *Narrative, Gender and Authority*, 100-169.

the active subject and narrators of several of Ibn Qutayba's anecdotes, which is seldom the case in normative literary forms such as wisdom literature.

One of Ibn Qutayba's main informants in his *Kitāb al-Nisā'* is al-Aṣmaʿī (d. ca. 215/830). According to Ibn al-Nadīm, he wrote numerous books, but none specifically on women.[57] However, Ibn Qutayba quotes a good many other writers who devoted entire books to the topic of women, as recorded in the *Fihrist*, mentioning Hishām b. al-Kalbī, al-Madā'inī, al-Haytham b. ʿAdī, Isḥāq al-Mawṣilī and Muḥammad b. ʿUbayd Allāh al-ʿUtbī. Among the first Abbasid scholars who made "women" a specific topic for their written works was Khālid b. Ṭalīq, a historian and qadi in Basra during the caliphate of al-Mahdī. His work is called *al-Muzawwajāt*, "Married Women," a title that is difficult to pinpoint — was it a genealogy of wives of the noblemen, or perhaps a legal treatise of rulings for women? We know more about Hishām b. al-Kalbī (d. 204/819 or 206/821), a historian from Kufa who wrote more than 150 works, a few of them entirely devoted to women, and widely cited by later scholars. His historical and genealogical interests prompted him to write about the female ancestry of the Prophet (*ummahāt al-nabī*) and the caliphs (*ummahāt al-khulafā'*), the wives of the Prophet (*azwāj al-nabī*) and "the Arabs" (*manākiḥ azwāj al-ʿarab*).[58]

The prolific historian al-Madā'inī (135-215/752-843) was an important source for reports about women, too, cited by Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih in the sections on women in *al-ʿIqd al-farīd*, Ibn Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfūr, and others. He produced a number of works specifically on women, some of which treated the maternal ancestors of the Prophet (*ummahāt al-nabī*), probably with a genealogical focus, and his wives (*azwāj al-nabī*).[59] A whole section in *Fihrist* is devoted to al-Madā'inī's books on the wives of noble men, perhaps in the form of genealogical lists, and narrative reports on women (*akhbār manākiḥ al-ashrāf wa-akhbār al-nisā'*).[60] The section includes titles such as "The Book on Women Whose Husbands Were Killed" (*Kitāb Man qutila ʿanhā zawjuhā*), "The Book on Women Called Fāṭima" (*Kitāb al-Fāṭimiyyāt*),[61] "The Book on Those Who Were Lampooned by Their Husbands" (*Kitāb Man hajāhā zawjuhā*), and "The Book on Women Who Complained to Their Husbands about Their Conduct"

57 Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*: 1, 155-157.

58 Ibid., 307, 304.

59 Ibid., 316.

60 Ibid., 318.

61 They are probably the *Fawāṭim*, Muḥammad's ancestors with the name Fāṭima, as there is also a "book" in this section called *Kitāb al-ʿAwātik*, on Muḥammad's ancestors named ʿĀtika; see Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1, 32-34. These books are probably genealogical lists, which may be true of several of the titles listed here.

(*Kitāb Man shakat zawjahā*). Al-Madā'inī also wrote "Poets' Contradictions and Narrative Reports on Women" (*Munāqaḍāt al-shuʿarā' wa-akhbār al-nisā'*).[62] Altogether, these intriguing titles show a keen interest in historical details and, notably, women were not treated as one single group, but as numerous subgroups just like men were.

One of the first to write a *Kitāb al-Nisā'*, according to Ibn al-Nadīm, was the early Abbasid historian, al-Haytham b. ʿAdī (d. 207/822).[63] His written works are all lost, but from references and citations in later sources, it is evident that he wrote narrative reports about female personalities, as well as anecdotes and humorous stories about named and unnamed women. He was a source to Ibn Qutayba, Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, and Ibn Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfūr. In some of the anecdotes he relates from his teacher Ṣāliḥ b. Ḥassān, the main character is Ḥubbā, a woman with some standing in Medina. Al-Balādhurī and al-Ṭabarī mention that Ḥubbā's judgment was respected by Caliph ʿAbd al-Malik; she also conveys some wisdom.[64] In al-Haytham's accounts, Ḥubba is portrayed as an independent woman and given her own voice and agency. However, she is also utterly libidinous, has sex with dogs, and discusses erotic dreams with her daughters. It is no wonder then, that she became one of the main female characters in *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha*.

The use of a historical personality belongs to the preferred narrative situation of the Abbasid anecdote and Ḥubbā's historical persona has been used for creating a *mujūn* character for the amusement of Abbasid readers. Yet, these anecdotes also sanction a posthumous shaming of a strong, female personality.[65] They can be read as the prejudices of the exclusively male readership of the time.[66] It is also possible to read them as part of a type of literature to be labeled "shameful ancestry," which seems to have been entertaining in a sensational way and at the same time used for deriding certain people because of their low origin and base ancestors. Among titles with this content we find al-Haytham's "The Names of the Prostitutes of Quraysh before Islam and Their Children" (*Kitāb Asmā' al-baghāyā Quraysh fī l-Jāhiliyya wa-asmā' man*

62 Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 1, 318.

63 Ibid., 311-313; Pellat, Al-Haytham b. ʿAdī; and, especially, Leder, *al-Haiṯam ibn Adī*.

64 Cf. Leder, *Korpus*, who considers it possible that the anecdotes about Ḥubbā in *Balaghāt al-nisā'* are from al-Haytham's *Kitāb al-Nisā'* (*al-Haiṯam ibn Adī*, 84). For the representation of Ḥubbā in these and other early sources, see Myrne, Ḥubbā al-Madīniyya.

65 At least she appears strong when she confronts Caliph ʿAbd al-Malik and the poet Hudha in the reports by al-Balādhurī and al-Ṭabarī; see Myrne, Ḥubbā.

66 See Malti-Douglas, *Women's Body*, 45-47, for Ḥubbā as an adab character, and see Meisami's critique in Writing Medieval Women.

waladna), and "Noble Fornicators" (*Kitāb al-Zunā al-ashrāf*) by his transmitter, Ḥafṣ b. ʿUmar al-ʿUmarī (d. 246/860), who himself wrote a *Kitāb al-Nisāʾ*.[67]

Concluding Remarks

A poem from a lesbian poet who was referred to in the sources as "from the *mutaẓarrifāt*, the ladies," prompted my interest in the representation of these two groups of women in Abbasid literature: the *mutaẓarrifāt* and the s*aḥḥāqāt*. Who wrote about these women and for what audience? What was these women's role in Abbasid society and how did this change over time? What had ladies and lesbians in common in this context?

In the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries, there was an extensive literature on women in Arabic. Most of it, however, is lost and quotations from it are relatively scarce. We do have the erotic compendium *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhda*, composed in the late fourth/tenth century, and al-Washshā"s *Muwashshā*, from about half a century earlier, and both deal with the subject explicitly containing many citations from works now lost.

In this article, I have compared representations of ladies and lesbians as they appear from these two sources and surveyed lists of book-titles referring to women from the same period. The information gathered suggests that the picture of the lady-lesbian is complex and flexible. *Mutaẓarrifāt* and s*aḥḥāqāt* seem to have constituted distinct social groups with considerable overlap — as such admired for their refinement on the one hand and placed outside society on the other, because most of them appeared to have been slaves. Moreover, *mutaẓarrifāt* is a name with different connotations in different times and contexts.

Titles of books now lost suggest that women were the topic of various literary genres, portraying women or women related issues from different perspectives. Works with titles such as *Kitāb al-Nisāʾ* or *Akhbār al-nisāʾ* seem to have dealt with "women" in line with the genre of the work and the aim of the author. It also appeared that the few books that are extant were intended for male readers and most accounts about women were narrated by men. Nevertheless, citations from lost stories in *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha* reveal that female protagonists were also narrators and in some of the stories women's voices are heard. And even if the narrators were fictional, women's views, experiences, and knowledge were believed to be best presented by women.

Some of the books I have mentioned above continued to be read for centuries, even though they are not extant today. The most well-known author

67 Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 1, 312, 313-314.

is al-Jāḥiẓ, and his *Kitāb al-Nisāʾ* seems to have survived, at least partially. Al-Jāḥiẓ is often referred to by authors of sex and marriage manuals, for example by the late Mamluk scholar al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) in his *al-Wishāḥ fī fawāʾid al-nikāḥ*. Al-Jāḥiẓ was apparently considered an authority on women and sex. Several of the books mentioned are included in the index of manuscripts dating from 694/1294 that were found by Paul Sbath in Aleppo:[68] *Azwāj al-nabī* by al-Madāʾinī (n. 82), *al-Manākiḥ*, also by al-Madāʾinī (n. 847),[69] *al-Nisāʾ* by al-Haytham b. ʿAdī (n. 879), *al-Qiyān* by Isḥāq b. Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī (n. 731), *al-Nisāʾ* by al-Jāḥiẓ (n. 880),[70] *Akhbār al-nisāʾ* by Hārūn b. ʿAlī al-Munajjim (n.19), and *Ashʿār al-nisāʾ* by al-Marzūbānī (n. 109). Three books that have been discussed more elaborately in this article are mentioned in Sbath's index as well — *al-Saḥq* by al-Namlī (n. 502) and *al-Saḥḥāqāt wa-al-baghghāʾīn* by Abū l-ʿAnbas (n. 501).[71] Finally, the book by al-Namlī on the two female erotic experts *Burjān and Ḥabāḥib* (n. 192) was also present in the libraries of Aleppo; this book is mentioned in the Mamluk sex manual *Rujūʿ al-shaykh ilā ṣibāh* as well.[72] Ḥajjī Khalifa (1017/1609-1067/1657) mentions one title by al-Namlī that apparently was still available at his time, namely *Kitāb al-Bāh*, "The Book on Coitus," which might well have been his *Burjān and Ḥabāḥib*. The erotic lore of the Abbasid Empire continued to arouse interest for centuries, not the least stories with strong female characters. But there is still much to be done to find more traces of these stories in later sources.

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68 The index contains altogether 915 book titles; Sbath, *Choix de livres*. For books on female poets, see Hammond, Literature. On the later tradition of books about women, see Kilpatrick, ʿAbbāsid and Mamlūk Books.

69 Probably the same as *akhbār manākiḥ al-ashrāf wa-akhbār al-nisāʾ* , see above.

70 Al-Jāḥiẓ's "book," as indicated by the preserved epistle, admittedly was more on love than women in general.

71 The index includes another book on a similar topic written by Abū l-ʿAnbas entitled *al-ʿĀshiq wa-l-maʿshūq* (n. 618).

72 For the dating of this book, see Rowson, Arabic, 56-57.

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