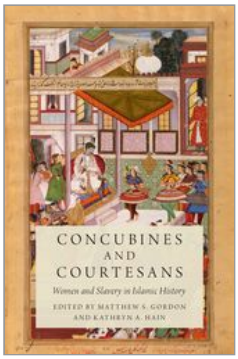

Concubines and Courtesans: Women and Slavery in Islamic History
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A Jariya's Prospects in Abbasid Baghdad

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Abstract and Keywords

The chapter takes up several related questions surrounding slave women in Abbasid culture. It considers the image of the *jawari* (slave women) in modern scholarship, arguing for a cautious approach to the Arabic sources. It also looks at elite women's relations to slave women, and the manner in which the dichotomy of free/slave intersected with gender in shaping Abbasid social hierarchies. The career of the slave poet Inan al-Natifi illustrates both the vulnerabilities and possibilities inherent to the lives of *jawari*. Her main biographer is Abu al-Faraj al-Isbahani, who accords her the first and longest biographical entry in *al-Ima al-Shawa'ir* (The Female Slave Poets), and an entry in the *Kitab al-Aghani* (The Book of Songs).

Keywords: Abbasid, women, Arabic, source, gender, Islamic history, slavery, Islam

INAN AL-NATIFI, A slave woman of early Abbasid Baghdad, flourished in the time of the caliph Harun al-Rashid (r. 786–809). She was a *jariya*[1]—a slave courtesan—and a poet. Her poetry made her famous—so famous, in fact, that she became one of the most frequently quoted Abbasid women in classical Arabic literature. Free women poets did not rise to fame in the Abbasid Empire, as they had done during the Umayyad era; instead, young, talented slave girls were selected and given an appropriate education to enable them to pursue this art. Thus, they belonged to the same branch of feminine slavery as the slave singers, the *qiyan*, who were also slave courtesans, and, occasionally, concubines, typically for the elite and growing urban classes. The institution of the slave courtesan opened up possibilities of social mobility for women. If they performed well and their fame spread, they gained access to high society and its wealth. Yet, even if they were much better off than the majority of slaves, they were subject to the same conditions: they could be bought and sold, and were exposed to the whims of their masters.

Inan did not belong to the elite courtesans, who lived in the palaces of the imperial family and chief officials, although she no doubt aspired to that standing. Her life story, although fragmented, discontinuous, and episodic, instead conveys a picture of the vicissitudes and possibilities of an ambitious *jariya* in the flourishing and growing Abbasid imperial center. In reconstructing events in Inan's life story, I hope to shed light on the general living conditions of *jawari* in early Abbasid society, and, in particular, their agency, self-perception, and access to social mobility. In brief, what was it like to be a *jariya* in early Abbasid Baghdad? What opportunities did a *jariya* have to improve her living conditions, and how did she perceive her possibilities?

(p.53) Slavery existed long before the Abbasid era, but it was during this period that the *jawari* rose to fame both as historical actors and fictional characters.[2] In contrast, *hara'ir* (free Arab women) appear to have been less influential than in earlier Islamic societies; in any case, they are seldom mentioned in our sources.[3] Modern scholars have inquired after the reasons for this phenomenon and its possible impact on society. One view sees it as having contributed to the development of the more restrictive Islamic regulations for

women and gender segregation that emerged during this period.

Biases and polemic in the medieval sources, as well as misconceptions in modern scholarship, however, have blurred our understanding of Abbasid slave women such as Inan. Medieval authors and poets often embraced age-old prejudices against the female slave singers and poets, sometimes as part of a criticism of social ills. Several modern scholars have accepted these prejudices as facts, and even held the institution of slave courtesans and concubines liable for a presumed decline in status for free women during the Abbasid era. Yet, slavery was an age-old institution, perceived as natural, and freeborn women as well as men profited from it.[4]

This chapter considers several related problems. It looks at the image of the *jawari* in modern scholarship, arguing that although medieval Arabic texts convey useful information about slave women, they should be read with caution. It also challenges the view that the trade in women was an entirely male enterprise, by looking at elite women's relations to slave women in particular. Finally, it takes up the question of how the dichotomy of free/slave intersected with gender in social hierarchies.

Inan al-Natifi

The career of the slave poet Inan al-Natifi illustrates both the vulnerabilities and possibilities inherent to the lives of *jawari*. Her main biographer is Abu al-Faraj al-Isbahani, who accords her the first and longest biographical entry in *al-Ima al-Shawair* (The Female Slave Poets), and an entry in the *Kitab al-Aghani* (The Book of Songs).[5] Al-Isbahani praises her, asserting she was the first famous slave poet in the Abbasid period.[6] Other scholars recognize her as a fine poet as well, including Ibn al-Nadim, who cites her poetic oeuvre in his tenth-century bibliographical essay, the *Fihrist* (Index). (She is also one of the few women to whom *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* devotes an article).[7]

Most of what al-Isbahani and other scholars pass on about Inan consists of glimpses from her encounters with male poets who came to visit her in her master's house and their poetic exchanges. This is typical of the narratives drawn up of women's lives—that is, that they are made up of men's memories of the brief encounters with the women. Everything

we know about Inan is related by her male friends and visitors, and we never read of another woman in connection to her. Perhaps she was her owner's only courtesan, which made the court, with its multitude of cultured and creative women, even more attractive to her.

In the elite households, where so many women lived together, there must have been female networks and friendship, but most interactions between women were never recorded **(p. 54)** and thus remain unknown. Anecdotes concerning the princess Ulayya bint al-Mahdi, the sister of Harun al-Rashid, for example, reveal something about women's oral tradition in the context of palace culture.[8] Ulayya was a skilled poet and singer—her songs sung and transmitted by female slave singers, her own and those of Zubayda, her sister-in-law. Some of their *jawari* taught their songs to male singers, who in turn are quoted in the sources. The male narrators name a few of the female transmitters and teachers, although, for the most part, these women are simply referred to as "*jawari*," sometimes in a genitive construction ("someone's *jawari*") or with a possessive pronoun ("our *jawari*"). These anonymous *jawari* populate the background of many accounts about Abbasid high society.

According to al-Isbahani, Inan was born a slave in al-Yamama, located on the Arabian Peninsula east of Najd, where she was raised and educated. She was a *muwallada*, which indicates she was raised and educated by an Arab family, and thus learned Arabic and other appreciated skills, which raised her price.[9] She was purchased in Yamama by a man, one "al-Natifi," who brought her to Baghdad in the reign of Harun al-Rashid. There, she became recognized for her abilities and, over time, in particular, for her fine poetry and quick repartee. She might not have possessed the sophistication of the high-society *jawari* who had received the best education and were often raised in elite families; her owner, al-Natifi, seems to have been a man of modest position. His name denotes "a vendor of *natif*," which was a kind of nougat.[10]

She became friendly with several male poets in Baghdad, who were, unlike her, free men. They used to visit her and sometimes she visited them, encouraged by her owner, who hoped that they would spread the word about her and thus attract wealthy visitors. She is particularly known for her relations with the most famous poet of them all, Abu Nuwas,

but other well-known poets, such as al-Abbas ibn al-Ahnaf and Marwan ibn Abi Hafsa, also visited her and admired her ability to improvise poetry.

Inan's owner, al-Natifi, seems to have abused her physically; there are two occasions when he is said to have beaten her.[11] One of these incidents is cited frequently and appears with some variants in numerous sources.[12] The earliest source to mention it is *al-Waraqa* by Ibn Jarrah (d. 296/908). His account is to the point:[13]

> Al-Mubarrad said, "Abu Nuwas came to Inan one day after her master had beaten her and found she was crying." He also said, "Abu Zayd Umar ibn Shabba commented that Ahmad ibn Muawiya had told him that Marwan ibn Abi Hafsa had said that he entered al-Natifi's house after he had beaten Inan, and reported: "Inan wept so that her tears flowed / as pearls slip off the string"[14]
>
> She answered, with tears in her voice: "May it wither on the whip / the right hand of him who struck her unjustly."
>
> Then Marwan said, "By God, she is the most poetic among *jinn* and humans."

The sources differ as to the name of the male poet who visited her. He is mostly referred to as Marwan ibn Abi Hafsa, as in this version, but sometimes as Abu Nuwas, and a few **(p.55)** times as another poet.[15] He finds Inan crying after having been flogged by her owner, which she objects to in her verse. The point of the anecdote is to highlight Inan's poetic talent. The visitor expresses his admiration for her ability to improvise despite her shock and, indeed, draw on her misfortune in the verse. It is this ability that made her "the most poetic" among *jinn* (celestial spirits) and humans.

Islamic law allowed for flogging, but only in cases in which a crime was committed. As a means of punishment inflicted by the master on a subordinate member of the household, however, the whip might have constituted the dividing line between a free wife and a slave.[16] Jurists who were critical of severe beating of wives cited the Prophet's criticism of men who beat their wives as if they were slaves and then had sexual intercourse with them.[17] The implication is that slaves could expect to be beaten. A gifted and celebrated slave

courtesan like Inan, however, might have expected to be treated better than a common slave, which possibly is the reason for Inan's versified claim to have been whipped unjustly.

Perhaps the elite slaves were better treated than "common" slaves, but probably they were more exposed to corporal punishment than free women. The *Kitab al-Aghani* cites cases of *jawari*, in their capacity as concubines and courtesans, flogged by their masters. The slave singer Arib, for example, is said to have had 100 lashes inflicted on her after having tried to escape from her master, which is a crime according to Islamic law. Characteristically, she cries while being flogged, "I am a free woman," claiming that her freeborn status should protect her from her master's mistreatment.[18]

The anecdote about Inan raises other questions, especially about the understanding of the incident by medieval authors. Although a modern reader might find it curious that Inan could defy her owner so openly—in some variants he almost brags about her outspokenness—al-Isbahani seeks to understand *why* al-Natifi beat Inan. Some 50 years after Ibn Jarrah, he provided a longer version of the episode, asserting that al-Natifi's violent treatment of Inan was prompted by her refusal to socialize with a guest to his house. According to this version, Marwan ibn Abi Hafsa ran into al-Natifi, who invited him to meet Inan. When they arrived at the house, al-Natifi went in first and told Inan that he had a guest for her. Inan answered that she was sick and did not want to see him. Al-Natifi responded by striking her with his whip before inviting Marwan to enter. He did so only to find Inan in tears, which prompted him to improvise his verse. Following her quick response, Marwan turned to al-Natifi and said that he would release his slaves if there were someone more poetic than Inan.[19]

Al-Isbahani seems to have had two objectives: first, to prove that Inan was a talented poet and, second, was blameless and thus beaten unjustly. She objected to entertaining her master's guest only because she was sick. The question remains, however: Why did al-Natifi not object to Inan's open defiance? In one variant, he even expresses his admiration.[20] Part of the answer is probably that Inan's quick wit and her biting verse

added to her fame (and raised her price), which was worth more to her owner than stating his authority in this situation.

(p.56) Inan uses a well-known motif in Near Eastern love poetry—that of the lover who accuses the beloved of unjust treatment. Inan introduces a small twist by complaining not of the beloved's mistreatment, but of that of her master. The motif of the mistreated lover is also blended with another motif: that of the slave, who has the moral right to demand protection and consideration from her owner precisely because, as a subordinate, she is in his custody.

The figure of the slave woman poses as the perfect subordinate. As a woman she submits to her husband, as a slave she submits to her master, and as a subject she submits to the sovereign. This threefold obedience is alluded to in an anecdote about the caliph al-Mutawakkil's favorite concubine, Qabiha.[21] She appeared with the caliph's name written on her cheek, which delighted him. The caliph asked Ali ibn Jahm, who was in attendance, to write a poem about it, but Mahbuba, an accomplished *jariya*, seized the opportunity in coming up with a beautiful poem before him. The poem praised Qabiha with the words, "Oh what a slave she is, who to the sovereignty of his right hand/is obedient in that which is hidden and that which is revealed," which much pleased the caliph.[22]

The medieval texts feature other *jawari* who represent themselves as obedient slaves and, yet, mistreated subordinates in poems, improvised verses, or eloquent declarations.[23] Abu al-Faraj has, for example, the poet Nasim accuse her master of mistreating her despite her obedience.[24] She declares that she adheres to her obligations as a slave, "If it was not for the submission of slavery, I would not have endured."[25] Another example is Murad, who wrote to her master Ali ibn Hisham:

> Since I am a slave twice over, to love and to my owner / I must endure, though endurance goes against the grain / Close my eyes on the speck of grit in them, submit / To being humbled and coerced as befits a slave.[26]

In the anecdotes framing this kind of poem, the woman's submission to cruel behavior often serves as a moral incentive for the accused to improve his behavior. Hence, in one version

of the beating of Inan, al-Natifi pledges never to beat her again.[27] He acknowledges, in other words, Inan's moral right to demand better treatment from her owner.

The Sale and Purchase of a *Jariya*

Inan met poets who were frequent visitors of the court and the elite households, and she must have been attracted by what they described to her. Textual evidence suggests the extent of her ambitions; she wished to be bought by the caliph. Inan's attempt to be purchased by the caliph indicates she wished to move up from her position in a relatively modest house to the imperial court—that is, the center of Abbasid culture.

There are, all together, four petition poems attributed to her, written to four different men and quoted in different sources. Al-Isbahani relates that she wrote a letter to Jafar ibn Yahya al-Barmaki (d. 803), imploring him to ask his father, the vizier Yahya (d. 805), **(p.57)** to put in a good word for her with the caliph and make him buy her.[28] To convince Jafar to help her, she sent the letter together with a praise poem. Moreover, she wrote a praise poem to Yahya himself, in which she asked him to do the same favor to her that he did to two other *jawari* whom Yahya apparently presented to the caliph.[29] She also wrote a praise poem to Yahya's son and Jafar's brother, al-Fadl, which may have been part of her efforts to ingratiate herself with the influential Barmakid family to get the caliph's favor.[30] Finally, she wrote a short poem to the succeeding vizier, al-Fadl ibn al-Rabi, with an explicit appeal to ask the caliph to buy her.[31]

There are several versions of the account of Inan's attempt to be transferred to the court and its outcome. Some authorities confirm that although the caliph, Harun al-Rashid, wished to buy her, he was dissuaded by Inan's reputation as being sexually involved with her male visitors, with whom she used to exchange indecent poetry. One source of this reputation, it is told, was a derogatory poem by Abu Nuwas, which he wrote after Inan had fallen out with him, stating: "No one would buy her except for the son of a whore or a pimp."[32]

Other authorities report that al-Natifi demanded too high a price, over which the angry caliph refused to bargain.[33] Al-Isbahani provides an anecdote in which al-Natifi asks for 100,000 *dinar*s for Inan. The caliph counters with an offer of 700,000 *dirham*s—the silver coin of lesser value—which al-

Natifi rejects.[34] It may simply be that he did not wish to sell her. Then, following al-Natifi's death, the caliph consulted with jurists, who permitted him to confiscate Inan to cover her owner's debts. The caliph ordered his eunuch, al-Masrur, to take her to the slave market by the Karkh Gate in Baghdad and pretend to sell her but put in the highest bid himself. The caliph obviously confiscated Inan with the intention to disgrace her as an act of revenge on her dead owner for not selling her to him for a decent price. At the slave market, Masrur placed the unhappy Inan on a bench, so to display her to potential buyers, and commenced the auction. Inan is said, at this point, to have cursed the caliph, "May God humiliate the one who humiliated me." The text, unsurprisingly, has Masrur fail to outbid an unnamed rival who purchased her and took her to Khurasan. Al-Isbahani's informant relates that she subsequently gave birth to two sons, neither of whom survived infancy, and died in Khurasan sometime after her new owner.[35]

The anecdote, in assigning Inan a tragic end, is typical; one can cite examples concerning others of the elite singers. But al-Isbahani, in a variant account, quotes another authority who claims that al-Natifi freed her and that she moved to Egypt.[36] Another of his informants claims she was bought by the general Tahir ibn al-Husayn, who wanted her to be in charge of his perfumes. Perhaps as an act of repentance for her impious lifestyle, and because she did not want to be exposed to jealousy, she asked to be in charge of his woolen cloths instead.[37] According to Ibn Jarrah, al-Natifi sold her to Abd al-Malik ibn Salih al-Hashimi, a cousin of the first and second Abbasid caliphs, al-Saffah and al-Mansur.[38] A further informant states she was freed on the death of her owner al-Natifi, either as part of his will or because she was his *umm walad*, having given birth to his **(p.58)** child.[39] And there is yet another version of the auction incident, in which it is al-Rashid himself who buys her. He fathers her two sons, who, again, die young, and takes her to Khurasan where he himself dies, followed thereafter by Inan.[40]

Inan was not the only female slave who pleaded with a caliph to buy her. Another example is the accomplished singer and poet Sakan, who wrote to the caliph al-Mutasim when her owner wanted to sell her.[41] Most probably, these ambitious women were attracted to the prosperity and cultural creativity at the court, and, importantly, they believed in their own

ability to get there.[42] Their slave status notwithstanding, they did not act as mere puppets of their masters. They demonstrated what we might call *agency*, and did their best to take control over the course of their lives. Inan used the same method that any ambitious poet or writer would, appealing to an influential man to act as mediator to get through to a wealthy patron. Nonetheless, there was a significant difference between her and aspiring male poets: she would be owned by her patron and sexually available to him, in accordance with the Islamic law that allowed and regulated concubinage between men and female slaves.

The real destiny of Inan is obscure; she might have been freed, sold at a public auction, or something else. The auction incident, however, involves literary features that make it perhaps less credible. Inan sitting on a bench at the public auction cursing the caliph sets up a dramatic and certainly fictional scene. Nevertheless, regardless of whether the auction really took place, the anecdote demonstrates the conditions—and possibly also the expectations—of a *jariya* in ninth-century Baghdad. Female elite slaves like Inan, who might have been her master's concubine, probably expected to be treated almost like free women, and, for example, not displayed in public. When they changed owners, they were usually presented for potential buyers in private or given away.[43] Common slaves, in contrast, were exposed for anyone who wanted to look at them at the slave market.[44]

The setting of the sale was thus an indicator of the slave's status. What is more, the *jawari* who were presented to potential buyers in private were encouraged to display their artistic and intellectual abilities, which gave them some agency in influencing the prospective purchase. The presentation of *jawari* must have been an extremely crucial occasion for them, something for which they had been trained, and their chance to get a better life. In just a few minutes, they had to make an impression that either attracted or put off potential buyers.[45] In a highly competitive environment, full of accomplished courtesans, they had to prove their uniqueness. This important moment in the career of a *jariya* became a literary topic. Classical Arabic belles-lettres, *adab*, is rich in anecdotes about witty and eloquent *jawari* being displayed before a caliph or another man, answering questions not only successfully, but also irresistibly.[46] The questions sometimes, but far from always, have sexual connotations. Of course, the

purchase might also worsen their conditions, and there are several comical anecdotes about *jawari* who put off potential buyers instead of attracting them. These anecdotes are told as humorous stories, and the same story often occurs in different versions, which vary with regard to the names of both the women and the buyers. Still, they have some historical value, I suggest, indicating the **(p.59)** efforts *jawari* made to influence the purchase of them.[47] The purchase was a resort for social mobility, and efforts by *jawari* to influence it demonstrate their limited agency, which was conditioned by their social position.

Modern Scholarship and Medieval Texts

Nabia Abbott, a pioneer scholar of Arab women's history, argues in her book on Abbasid imperial women that "the trio of polygamy, concubinage, and seclusion of women" under the early Abbasids, resulted in circumscribed lives for freeborn women and had a degenerative effect on upper class men.[48] These social phenomena brought about a decline in social and moral standards that had begun already during the early Umayyad caliphate, when "the presence and attraction of a large number of [enslaved] women" began threatening the standing of free Arab women.[49]

Abbott insists the Abbasid slave trade was part of an extensive luxury market that catered to "the tastes and vanities of both men and women."[50] Later scholars, however, have often treated the trade in *jawari* as an exclusively male affair with devastating effects for women (disregarding in the process, however, the investment of women in the trade).[51] For Leila Ahmed, the access to slave concubines during the Abbasid era was a contributing factor to gender discrimination in the emerging legal system, which has had a significant impact ever since.[52] Men became used to the sorts of relationships with women through which they became, by definition, masters. The result was a blurring of the categories of *woman* and *slave.*[53] The easy access to slave concubines did not only change men's perception of women, it had a negative impact on women's morals as well. The insecure life in a harem led to rivalry between wives and concubines as well as a certain amount of falsehood and manipulation, in contrast to the "earlier Arabian forthrightness."[54] Her examples here are entirely from the caliphal court, especially the account of Zubayda's reported jealousy of her husband Harun al-Rashid's attachment to a concubine. Zubayda was a well-known and influential queen, remembered in later history writing, whereas the concubine in question is anonymous, and did not seem to have been a real threat to Zubayda's power.

Ahmed has been criticized for disregarding primary sources and drawing a simplistic causality between the mores of elite society and the formation of Islamic law.[55] She also ignores upper-class women's investment in slavery. Moreover, polygyny was probably equally to blame as concubinage for the insecurity of women's lives in the harems, in addition to which both institutions had been endorsed long before the Abbasid era. Yet, the fact remains, as Ahmed points out, that

the system of concubinage permeated not only elite Abbasid family life, but also that of the middle class as well, with the widespread practice of taking slave women as sexual partners.[56] Islamic scholars, who usually did not belong to the elite, owned concubines.[57] The system of sexual slavery seems to have been taken for granted on the part of society at large; it is hard to find evidence of any sort of opposition. There is also undeniably a close connection between *wife* and *slave* in legal **(p.60)** texts from the period, which depicted marriage as a form of ownership of a woman, as shown by Kecia Ali in her meticulous study of marriage and slavery in early Islam.[58] It is, on the other hand, very difficult for us to determine the extent to which Abbasid society relied on concubinage. It might have been less widespread than it appears to be.

Other scholars have suggested more explicitly, with an ahistorical attitude, that the sexual mores of Abbasid high society came to have an impact on Muslim women's situation in the modern era. Perhaps the best known of these scholars, at least for a Western audience, is Fatima Mernissi. She provides the following description of the impact of Abbasid slave concubinage on twentieth-century Muslim societies:

> The models of hierarchical relationships that the Qur'an imprints in the deepest zones of the Muslim personality would not have retained such influence in the twentieth century had it not been for the expansion of a legendary Muslim empire that allowed sexual inequality to assert itself and to spread through the phenomenon of the *jariya*.[59]

Free Arab women in the early Islamic community and the Umayyad caliphate—so, roughly, the first century of Islamic history—were, in Mernissi's view, independent and often exerted political influence. She argues that aristocratic women were not only involved in politics but also spoke out specifically against the veil and polygyny, which they perceived as a threat to their independence.[60] Women's political position, however, changed profoundly during the Abbasid era as a result of the emergence of influential royal concubines: "From this point on, on the political stage, women were no longer anything but courtesans."[61] Their marital situation changed as well. Elite men not only preferred slave women, but also were "under the spell of *jawari*."[62] This spell, however, could not have been the result of any real agency on

the part of the women themselves, given that their attraction lay in the fact that, in their company, "the man was by definition superior." The *jawari* triumphed over free women as "they obeyed more readily than the *hurra* (free woman)."[63] But the *jawari* in Mernissi's view were not simply passive and obedient. She refers to a "revolt of the *jawari*," in the process of which the royal slave concubines conquered the caliph and his entourage by means of eroticism and sensuality, and, ultimately, even came to share their authority. She labels the moment, "The triumph of the jariya."[64] At this point, Mernissi's arguments become somewhat murky, painting a picture of (newly enslaved) foreign women doing anything to seduce the men who enslaved them:

> [Harun al-Rashid's] many conquests led to the enslavement of great portions of the conquered peoples, and the palaces swarmed with *jawari*, who brought with them their culture and exoticism. There were Persians, Kurds, Romans, Armenians, Ethiopians, Sudanese, Hindus, and Berbers … . The harems became places of greatest luxury where the most beautiful women of the world played their cultural **(p.61)** differences and mastery of diverse skills and knowledge like winning cards for seducing caliphs and viziers.[65]

Mernissi is not alone in arguing for the *jariya* as a contributor to the moral degeneration of Abbasid society, in part by having initiated a challenge to free women. Abdelwahab Bouhdiba labels the *jawari* as "anti-wives," exotic and beautiful concubines who brought with them "an exotic perfume of eroticism."[66] They outmaneuvered free wives deliberately by "usurping femininity and taking it over entirely" for themselves. The result was the "revenge" and "victory" of the *jawari*, which had a devastating impact on the status of the wife in Muslim societies.[67] Ahmed also blames non-Arab influences for the decline in Arab women's status during the Abbasid era. These influences came partly from enslaved women, as Persian captive women in the households of Arab Muslim men introduced Persian mores into the heart of the Muslim/Middle Eastern family.[68]

Mernissi's claim that the *jawari* obeyed more readily than free women may at a first glance seem a truism, but the question is hardly that simple. Free wives were also obliged by law to obey their husbands, and their transgressions were punished

more severely. Mernissi's analytic model, in which foreign *jawari* are opposed to free Arab women, is unfortunate, and although the dichotomy of foreign/Arab may be unintentional, its premise seems misplaced.[69]

The assertions presented here make sense mostly from an activist point of view. The search by modern activists for female role models conjoins feminist historians' search for a "turning point" in history, when civilization chose the path of discrimination, seclusion, and subjugation of women. This is, indeed, also an activist goal; finding the "turning point" would help create a more equal society without having to refute the fundamentals of the Islamic heritage. But, this kind of activist research also leads easily to unreliable historical analysis; it does little to improve our understanding of women's roles in history. Still more precarious is the tendency to cast blame on the concubines and slave women themselves, which seems to stem from sheer moralism and even ethnic typecasting.

Mernissi and Bouhdiba are part of a scholarly tradition that attributes the decline in status of free women to the Abbasid institution of *jawari*.[70] Little more than a century ago, Jurji Zaydan claimed that men's fondness for foreign concubines, "led to the degradation of the [Arab] woman and the disappearance of her pride and her independence of mind," and half a century later, Abd al-Latif Shararah stated, "Arab women lost their struggle with the foreign concubines, and lost their character with time."[71] It is no coincidence that Jurjani and Shararah, who were both Arab nationalists, emphasize that the concubines were "foreign." They, like Mernissi, do not point out that many of the slave women were descendants of natives of the countries conquered by Arab warriors, who themselves were "foreign" in those countries. That is to say that the dichotomy of foreign/indigenous is not so simple in this context.

There are several claims about *jawari* that recur in modern studies. First, that the *jawari* (especially the less cultured of them) had a negative impact on society, spreading **(p.62)** moral corruption and decadence.[72] These slave women had an inclination to swindle men by means of making them believe they were in love with them.[73] The moral corruption caused by the enslaved women had a negative impact on the status of free women, in part because seclusion and other restrictions were imposed on the latter group, and in part because they

were obliged to accept a secondary role.[74] Moreover, Abbasid men preferred *jawari* to free women because the former displayed their beauty, which was often exotic, and had been taught how to please men.[75] Free women, in turn, were jealous of their husband's slave concubines.[76]

The writers referred to here share an uncritical reading of Abbasid sources, especially *The Epistle on Singing-Girls* by al-Jahiz and his *Risala fi al-Ishq wa'l-Nisa* (*Epistle on Love and Women*), as well as *Kitab al-Muwashsha* (*The Book of Brocade*) by al-Washsha. Their descriptions of female slave singers as dishonest and particularly prone to cheat men out of money, "by training and by innate instinct," is quoted as fact.[77] The deceitfulness of the *qayna* is, however, an old theme in Arabic poetry, and should not be read as an objective depiction of a real group of women. The censure of singing girls (*dhamm al-qiyan*), for example, is a literary motif exploited thoroughly by al-Washsha.[78] Without diminishing the scholarship of al-Jahiz, relying on him for an objective social history is risky, and we should beware of transmitting medieval prejudices uncritically.

Uncritical readings of the sources are particularly problematic with regard to women's history. The literary sources either exclude women or provide one-sided accounts, depending on the specific narrative context. The narrators are almost exclusively men. In addition, the preferred narrator in classical Arabic literature is someone who has seen or taken part in the event he narrates. As a consequence, many, perhaps most, anecdotes and historical reports about *jawari* depict men's encounters with them at musical and cultural gatherings. Thus, it is easy to get the impression that *jawari* are women defined wholly by their relationship to men. Considering the apparent numbers of female slaves in Abbasid palaces, however, at least the high-society *jawari* must have spent most of their time with other women.[79] Furthermore, any information from this time may have been distorted by the nature of transmission and, especially when it comes to this group of women, the prejudices of contemporaneous and later narrators.

In recent decades, there has been an increased interest in *qiyan* and *jawari* as a historical and literary phenomenon, and scholars, approaching the sources more critically, have examined the female slaves' impact on musical history as well as their social roles. Two interesting aspects of female slavery

have received attention: the impact of domestic slavery on the Abbasid family and the role of the concubine. Julia Bray has published a significant study in which she considers the role of domestic slavery in urban Abbasid society, and Matthew Gordon discusses the background of individual slave singers and soldiers as domestic slaves.[80] Medieval sexual slavery and concubinage, however, have been generally understudied, although there is ample material on hand, especially in legal texts, and, thus, Kecia Ali's *Marriage and Slavery in Early Islam* is a significant contribution.

(p.63) Several nuanced portraits of individual influential *jawari* and *qiyan* have been composed since Abbott's pioneering studies of Khayzuran.[81] Gordon has portrayed Arib, perhaps the most famous singer of all, and Nadia El-Cheikh has written about Shaghab, mother of the caliph al-Muqtadir (295–320/908–932).[82] Gordon's study of the careers of prominent *qiyan* and their ability to face challenges in the highly competitive milieu of the court is particularly informative about these women's agency and individual achievements.[83] Kristina Richardson, for her part, has examined the agency of the Abbasid *qiyan* and their approach to gaining personal profit by means of sexual manipulation and by taking advantage of their intimacy with the men in power.[84] Lisa Nielson has investigated the role of women slave musicians from a historical perspective, as well as Abbasid authors' attitudes toward *jawari* and *qiyan*.[85]

Bray, for her part, has discussed the literary prominence of slave women in literature depicting Abbasid culture, as opposed to that of the Umayyad and early Islamic periods, during which most women are likely to have been freeborn. Bray suggests that the coming of Abbasid slave women as prolific literary characters in romantic literature reflects a shift in the dynamics of Abbasid society, with its greater variety of career options for men and greater interest in individuality.[86] Romantic love was, additionally, a means for men to develop their individuality and achieve emotional fulfillment. Framed as standing outside the regulated power relationships of the family, it found in "the urban Abbasid slave heroine," who educates her lovers in culture and fine manners, a means to prepare the young men for a career at court.[87]

Gender, Slavery, and Social Hierarchy

The sources provide some evidence of women's roles as slave owners in their own right and their relations to the slave women. Elite households kept *jawari* as ladies-in-waiting and entertainers: the ownership of *jawari* was a mark of prestige and a sign of high standing. In al-Masudi's account about Abbada,[88] the mother of Jafar Ibn Yahya al-Barmaki (d. 803 CE), she complains about her loss of status after the destruction of the Barmakids by Harun al-Rashid. In her own words, her former honorable position is symbolized by the hundreds of *jawari* who used to accompany her: "There was a time when this same feast saw me escorted by 400 serving-girls—and yet I thought my son showed me a lack of respect. Today the feast is here again and I desire no more than two sheep skins, one to serve me as a bed and one to clothe me."[89] Queen Zubayda owned a "large retinue of palace boys (eunuchs) and girls," and took pride in their accomplishments.[90] She is said to have had 100 *jawari* who were experts in chanting the Quran.[91]

Free women are also noted for enjoying the company of the most accomplished singers and courtesans. Just like men, they appreciated their artistic and cultural skills. Al-Azdi relates that Shahik, the grandmother of Ali ibn Hisham, enjoyed listening to his *jawari* when she came to visit him from Khurasan. She was especially fond of Mutayyam and rewarded her with money.[92] There are many other examples of royal women enjoying the **(p.64)** company of *qiyan* in the *Kitab al-Aghani*, in which several of the greatest singers are portrayed. The singer Duqaq, for example, was a lady-in-waiting for the princess Hamduna, Harun al-Rashid's daughter.[93] The famous singer Arib was supposedly 14 years old when she became the concubine of the caliph al-Amin, al-Rashid's son.[94] When al-Amin was overthrown by his half-brother al-Mamun, Arib was, according to one report, taken back by her former owner, which prompted Zubayda, al-Amin's mother, to say, "The worst thing that happened to me after the assassination of my son Muhammad [al-Amin] was when al-Marakibi attacked my house and took Arib."[95]

Women were not only slave owners but also slave traders, taking part, in particular, in the training of *qiyan* to sell them.[96] A woman of the Quraysh, for example, is reported to have acquired Shariya in Basra, then taught her to sing before selling her in Baghdad.[97] The singer Mutayyam, also from Basra, was owned by a woman who sold her as a young child

to Ali ibn Hisham.[98] The poet and singer Jullanar, from Kufa, was owned by a woman who sold her to her brother for his part of the heritage from their father.[99] At least one of the female slave traders is named in the sources, Barbar, who became well known for her slave singers.[100]

As the preceding examples show, women owned, trained, and traded in *jawari*. The fact that women invested in slavery, however, does not mean it did not contribute to women's subordination as a group, inasmuch as concubinage, as well as polygyny and easy divorce, likely weakened the overall position of women. Men did not have access to their wives' slaves, but a wife might have felt compelled to give an attractive *jariya* to her husband if he asked her to do so. There are several examples in the sources of wives gifting one or several of their slave girls to their husbands to please them.[101] There are also examples of women being jealous of their husband's potential or real concubines. Zubayda, for example, managed to prevent her husband from purchasing a potential rival. According to a variant of this anecdote, the potential rival was Inan al-Natifi.[102] And Zubayda was, as we have seen, fond of *jawari* herself. Her own mother was, in fact, a slave concubine. It is likely that she would not have regarded a slave concubine as a more threatening rival than a well-connected freeborn co-wife. Zubayda was a very influential woman, however, and the cousin of her husband, the caliph al-Rashid (whose mother had also been a slave concubine). Thus, the situation of royal women should not be taken as an example for all women.

In legal terms, concubines had some advantages over free women. The law stipulated men could divorce their free wives easily—which meant that free women could be forced to move abruptly from their home and children—whereas men were not allowed to sell their concubines if they had given birth to their children (and if paternity was acknowledged).[103] This, together with the fact that *jawari* and *qiyan* were "freer" than freeborn women (using a modern concept of freedom), suggests a more complex reality to the lives and careers of the female slaves. They were usually allowed to move more freely (at least if they were not kept as concubines) and, it appears, they could move up the social ladder more easily than freeborn women. Nonetheless, both slave women and freeborn **(p.65)** women were subordinated, and their legal status was vulnerable. As Bray observes, "The positions of free women

and of slaves, male or female, are analogous in that both vary according to circumstance, whereas the legal status of free Muslim male is invariable."[104]

All this said, it was still the case that slave women in general were more vulnerable than free women. Most concubines did not have the status of *umm walad* (mother of her owner's child), but were kept for sexual enjoyment with the explicit aim of avoiding pregnancy. Thus they could be sold or given away without legal restraint.[105] "Luxury" female slaves were often given away in diplomatic exchanges, and there was a "vast movement of [enslaved] women from court to court, from country to country, from continent to continent."[106] Domestic slaves belonging to less influential families likewise seem to have changed hands frequently. Studies of the Geniza records show that in medieval Cairo, female slaves changed owners much more frequently than male slaves.[107] Although there are signs of affection between slave-holding families and their female slaves, the slaves' position in less wealthy households as being, on the one hand, sexually available to their masters and, on the other hand, providing domestic help to their master's wives, was much more risky than the position of male slaves, who often were entrusted with important tasks in the family business.[108] Furthermore, family connections probably made it difficult for many men to divorce wives, whereas they could sell their concubines easily and legally as long as they did not have a living child together or did not acknowledge paternity.

Moreover, although freeborn wives may not have been happy with their husbands' concubines, the "patriarchal bargain" gave them something in return—for example, honor and social respect.[109] And the immediate effects of slave ownership may not have been perceived as negative for free women. The possession of *jawari* displayed wealth and gave prestige to the whole family, including free wives, even if their husbands kept some of them as concubines.[110] Underlying all systems of slavery are ideas about natural hierarchies of race, ethnicity, and class that position some categories superior to others. To be a freeborn woman in Abbasid society was worthy of social respect in itself, and free wives probably considered themselves superior morally and socially to slave concubines. Piety was an intrinsic quality of free, honorable women, which assured them a reward in the hereafter not attained as easily by slave women. Women's practice of piety was connected to

their willing sacrifice to fulfill their husband's desires and obey them, represented by the tradition stating that *husn al-taba'ul* (obedience and devotion to the husband) is women's jihad.[111] In light of that, Zubayda's gift of beautiful slave girls to her husband, Harun al-Rashid, as a means of asking him for forgiveness for her jealousy, was an act of piety that would not only bring her husband's appreciation, but also a reward in the hereafter.[112]

Concluding Remarks

Urban Abbasid society was characterized by a remarkable social mobility that made it possible for the able and diligent individual to change his or her living conditions for the better. Social mobility, however, did not only depend on the ability of the individual **(p.66)** but also was subject to a range of social variables, including gender, ethnicity, social class, and degrees of freedom. Free women and slaves were all subordinated, but had different opportunities. Freeborn women had higher status, yet slave women could move up the social ladder more easily and improve their living conditions. Although free women's family situation could change abruptly if their husbands divorced them, they could at least assume that their paternal family cared for them until they remarried. Female slaves, on the other hand, were more dependent on their ability to adapt to change and to grab the opportunities with which they might occasionally be provided, such as at the time of purchase.

The investment that owners made in the education of some slave women provided them with the intellectual and cultural capital that made it easier for them to control their life course to some extent. To succeed, they had to impress by manifesting their skill, wit, and individuality, and thus be noticed by the audience and patrons. Their ability to use poetry and other cultural accomplishments could be decisive for their success. This ability also gave them a chance to exercise some degree of agency and perhaps to influence the course of their lives. They had to exploit opportunities as they arose and demonstrate their skills, which in turn relied on their ability to draw from the situation at hand. The highest form of success was to secure a position in the royal court. Apparently, the feminine milieu of the palaces, with the high number of accomplished and well-educated women, not only

fostered envy and intrigues, as some scholars suggest, but also friendship and a dynamic cultural environment. Perhaps these were a significant part of the court's attraction to Inan, rather than the prospect of being the caliph's concubine.

Inan's life story, although discontinuous and episodic, illustrates the career of a slave courtesan and poet in early Abbasid Baghdad. She was educated and accomplished, and appreciated for her poetry. Part of her success was her ability to improvise on her own situation—a demand of every slave. She attempted to take advantage of her talent and training to change her living conditions. She was ambitious, apparently attracted by the imperial court, and endeavored to be purchased by the caliph. Eventually, however, she depended on her owner's will. As a slave, her owner could give her away or sell her without consulting her, if he wished. Inan's life story shows us that, although possibilities of social mobility were within reach for a talented slave courtesan in the imperial center, her opportunities remained subject to her unfree status.

Notes

(1.) *Jariya* (pl., *jawari*), "girl," is the common term for female domestic slaves and courtesans in urban Abbasid society. Although the word *jariya* often indicates a high-society slave, whereas a common female slave would be called *ama*, this differentiation is not absolute. I also use the word *qiyan* (sing., *qayna*), a term for skilled slave singers. For a distinction between *jawari* and *qiyan*, see Nielson, "Gender and the Politics of Music," 252–253.

(2.) For the literary role of the jariya, see for example Bray, "Men, Women and Slaves," 136–139, and "*Isnads*," 12–15; and Van Gelder, "Slave-Girl Lost and Regained." For some individual *jawari* and their historical roles, see, for example, Abbott, *Two Queens*; Gordon's articles on Arib; and El-Cheikh's articles on the Abbasid caliphal harem.

(3.) Cf. Atraqji, *Mar'a*.

(4.) Cf. Brockopp, *Early Maliki Law*, 131, on the concept of slavery as being natural in the Quran.

(5.) Al-Isbahani, *Ima*, 23–44, and *Aghani*, 84–91. For *al-Ima al-Shawair¸* see Kilpatrick, "Women as Poets and Chattels."

(6.) Al-Isbahani is usually generous with his praise for the female singers and poets that he portrays.

(7.) Bencheikh, "'Inan," 1202; and Ibn al-Nadim, *Fihrist*, 361. She is also portrayed by Caswell, *Slave Girls*, 56–81, and al-Heitty, *The Role of the Poetess*, 113–124.

(8.) Cf. al-Suli, *Ashar.* For another aspect of female palace tradition, see Bray, "Bleeding Poetry."

(9.) *Muwallada* is often translated as "having an Arab father and a slave mother." The explanation given by Ibn Manzur, *Lisan*, s.v. *w-l-d*, is more likely, however: "A *jariya muwallada* is born among Arabs and raised with their children; they [the Arabs] have nourished them with their food and taught them their manners."

(10.) On al-Natifi and his possible low standing, see al-Heitty, *The Role of the Poetess*, 113.

(11.) Ibn Jarrah, *Waraqa*, 41, and al-Isbahani, *Ima*, 27–28. On the second occasion, Abu Nuwas found Inan crying after al-Natifi had whipped her. He asked Abu Nuwas to distract her and they engage in a racy poetic duel.

(12.) The editor of the *Ima* provides a list of sources. I only refer to some of the more substantial references here.

(13.) Ibn Jarrah, *Waraqa*, 41.

(14.) For this line and Inan's answer, I rely on Caswell's translation. He has translated several of her known poems in *Slave Girls*.

(15.) Marwan is the visitor in al-Isbahani, *Aghani*, 23:85, and *Ima*, 24–25; al-Tawhidi, *al-Basa'ir*, 5:14; Ibn al-Sa`i, *Nisa al-khulafa,* 48; and al-Suyuti, *Mustazraf*, 39. According to Ibn Abi Rabbih *Iqd*, 6:61, the male poet was Bakr ibn Hammad al-Bahili. In Ps.-Jahiz *Mahasin*, 193–194, he is anonymous.

(16.) Although a few jurists permitted the flogging of disobedient wives as a last resort when they did not obey, most

advocated lighter corporal punishment, see Marín, "Disciplining Wives."

(17.) Ibn Sad, *Tabaqat*, 8:165. See Marín, "Disciplining Wives," 18.

(18.) Al-Isbahani, *Aghani*, 21:50. She claimed to be the daughter of Jafar al-Barmaki; see Gordon, "Arib." For a less famous, anonymous, jariya being flogged by her owner, see *Aghani*, 16:283.

(19.) Al-Isbahani, *Ima*, 24–25. This variant is quoted in al-Isbahani, *Aghani*, 23:85; al-Suyuti, *al-Mustazraf*, 40; and Ibn al-Sa`i, *Nisa*, 49. In Ibn Abd Rabbih (6:61), the narrator, Bakr bin Hammad al-Bahili, wants to meet Inan after hearing about her skills. Her owner invites him to sit with Inan, but when they entered her room she says she is tired, which makes him strike her with his whip.

(20.) Ps.-Jahiz, *Mahasin*, 194.

(21.) Al-Isbahani, *Aghani*, 22:140.

(22.) The verse is in Caswell's translation, Slave *Girls*, 144.

(23.) Cf. Kilpatrick, "Women as Poets and Chattels," 167.

(24.) Al-Isbahani, *Ima*, 81–82.

(25.) The whole poem in Caswell's translation (*Slave Girls*, 136) reads, "You lost your temper for no offense of mine / And it is you who snubs, turns away and shuns / With the might of your rule you subdued an obedient being / And but for the submission of slavery I would not bear it / If you would reflect on what you did apologies are called for / Or else be unjust and you'll be forgiven."

(26.) Kilpatrick's translation (169) of Murad's poem.

(27.) Ps.-Jahiz, *Mahasin*, 193–194.

(28.) Al-Isbahani, *Ima*, 43–44.

(29.) Ibn al-Mutazz, *Tabaqat*, 421–422.

(30.) Ibn Jarrah, *Waraqa*. 40.

(31.) Ps.-Jahiz, *Mahasin*, 196.

(32.) Al-Isbahani, *Ima*, 44.

(33.) Ps.-Jahiz, *Mahasin*, 197; al-Isbahani, *Ima*, 41, and *Aghani*, 23:89.

(34.) For this anecdote, see al-Isbahani, *Aghani,* 23:89; al-Suyuti, *al-Mustazraf*, 45; al-Heitty, *Role*, 118–119; and Kennedy, *Court of the Caliphs*, 175–176.

(35.) Al-Isbahani, *Aghani*, 23:89. The anecdote is ambiguous because of unclear references. Inan's new owner is only referred to as "he," which could be Harun al-Rashid instead of the anonymous bidder; the caliph died in Khurasan in 809.

(36.) Al-Isbahani, *Ima*, 42. According to Ibn al-Sa`i (*Nisa'*, 53), she died in Egypt in 841.

(37.) Al-Isbahani, *Ima*, 31.

(38.) Ibn Jarrah, *Waraqa*, 40.

(39.) Ibn al-Sa`i, *Nisa'*, 48.

(40.) Al-Isbahani, *Ima*, 41–42; Ibn Abd Rabbih, *'Iqd*, 6:60.

(41.) See al-Suyuti, *Mustazraf*, 32–33; and Ibn al-Mutazz, *Tabaqat*, 422. See also Atraqji, *Mar'a*, 192–193, on the letters of Inan and Sakan.

(42.) Cf. Tabbubi, *Qiyan*, 235–236.

(43.) Cf. Ragib, "Marchés," 724. He concludes that luxury slaves often changed owners in private, without intermediates, but that owners sometimes put them up for public auction only to humiliate them or correct them. Cf. al-Heitty, "Contrasting Spheres," 34.

(44.) However, according to Islamic law, female slaves only had to display their face and hands (Ragib, "Marchés," 735–736).

(45.) Cf. Atraqji, *Mar'a*, 193; and Kilpatrick, "Women as Poets and Chattels," 165–166.

(46.) Cf. al-Abi, *Nathr al-Durr*, vol. 4, who has gathered several anecdotes of this kind.

(47.) Al-Isbahani gives some accounts about successful presentations of individual *jawari*, which may have more historical value (ex. Fadl, *Aghani*, 19:215; Rayya and Zamya, *Ima*, 115–116; Amal, *Ima*, 125; Nabt, *Ima*, 130–131). al-Mutawakkil seems to be the caliph appearing most frequently in these anecdotes.

(48.) Abbott, *Two Queens*, 8.

(49.) Abbott, "Women and the State," 351: "This situation resulted, in its turn, in a definite class distinction between the free Arab woman of noble race and lineage, haughty but generally virtuous, and the foreign slave woman, singer or concubine, with pride of beauty and talent but easygoing and of comparatively loose morals."

(50.) Abbott, *Two Queens*, 9.

(51.) Women have certainly always been more affected by slavery—for example, by sexual abuse. They also appear to have been enslaved in larger numbers; cf. Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, Chapter Four ("The Woman Slave").

(52.) Ahmed, *Women and Gender*, 83–87.

(53.) Ahmed, *Women and Gender*, 85, 86.

(54.) Ahmed, *Women and Gender*, 84.

(55.) Meisami, "Writing Medieval Women," 65; and Ali, *Marriage and Slavery*, 22.

(56.) Ahmed, *Women and Gender*, 85.

(57.) For al-Shafiʿi, see Kecia Ali, *Imam Shafiʿi*, 40–42.

(58.) Ali, *Marriage and Slavery*.

(59.) Mernissi, *Women's Rebellion*, 69. Her view is criticized by Caswell, *Slave Girls*, 46–48.

(60.) Mernissi, *Women's Rebellion*, 81–83.

(61.) Mernissi, *Women's Rebellion*, 84.

(62.) Mernissi, *Women's Rebellion*, 85.

(63.) Mernissi, *Women's Rebellion*, 87.

(64.) Mernissi, *Forgotten Queens*, ch. 3, and *Women's Rebellion*, 84. She compares them to the *zanj*, the black labor slaves who rebelled 255/869: "Unlike the *zanj*, who tried to seize power from the periphery of the system, the *jawari* operated within the caliph's palace itself, in the bed and the heart of the man whom the law set up as absolute master of souls and possessions" (*Forgotten Queens*, 37–38).

(65.) Mernissi, *Forgotten Queens*, 58. Nevertheless, the conquests that brought most slaves to the Muslim Empire took place long before Harun al-Rashid, and many of the slaves in Baghdad were probably born and raised in the Empire. Most of the prominent *jawari* whose origins are noted by Abu al-Faraj al-Isbahani, in *Kitab al-Aghani* and *al-Ima al-Shawa'ir*, were *muwallidat* (i.e., slaves who were born and raised among Arabs). There were also many slaves in Baghdad who were brought from the conquered provinces as a part of the capitulation agreement, and, of course, there was an extensive slave trade from Europe and other places. See Athamina, "How Did Islam Contribute," 392–393; and Gordon, "Preliminary Remarks," 77–79. In addition, Athamina ("How Did Islam Contribute," 393) mentions kidnapping as a source of slaves. For the unknown provenance of most domestic slaves and concubines, see Bray, "Family," 732.

(66.) Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam*, 106–108: "Arab feminism was a victory of these anti-wives. They alone, indeed, and almost to the exclusion of the legitimate wives, finally got their way over men" (108).

(67.) Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam*, 106–108.

(68.) Ahmed, *Women and Gender*, 82. The tendency in modern scholarship to attribute negative influences to the Persians is amply discussed by Massad in *Desiring Arabs*.

(69.) See, for example, Mernissi, *Women's Rebellion*, 85–86, in which she compares the phenomenon with Moroccan men's "infatuation for foreign women" (i.e., French women, after the Independence, 86–87); and *Forgotten Queens*, 44.

(70.) See Massad, *Desiring Arabs*, 116–118. In contrast, Athamina ("How Did Islam Contribute," 403–408) seems to claim they had a positive impact.

(71.) Both quoted in Massad, *Desiring Arabs*, 117. Zaydan is one of the writers to whom Mernissi refers (see *Women's Rebellion*, 91, note 20).

(72.) See, for example, Amin, *Duha*, 1:95; Tabbubi, *Qiyan*, 76; Atraqji, *Mar'a*, 38; al-Heitty, "The Contrasting Spheres," 40; Caswell, *Slave Girls*, 39.

(73.) Cf. Atraqji, *Mar'a*, 39–44; Tabbubi, *Qiyan*, 76; Caswell, *Slave Girls*, 39.

(74.) Atraqji, *Mar'a*, 6–7, 33–42. She claims that the moral corruption of the foreign *jawari* resulted in the widespread misogyny of the era and unwillingness to marry among many men. See also al-Heitty, "The Contrasting Spheres," 40, and Caswell, *Slave Girls*, 39.

(75.) Cf. Amin, *Duha*, 1:98, Tabbubi, *Qiyan*, 34–35, and Caswell, *Slave Girls*, 45.

(76.) Cf. Atraqji, *Mar'a*, 126, and Tabbubi, *Qiyan*, 34.

(77.) Al-Jahiz, *Singing Girls*, 31–32.

(78.) See Gordon, "Yearning and Disquiet," for al-Jahiz's view on singing girls. For al-Jahiz and al-Washsha on this subject, see Nielson, "Gender and the Politics of Music." Notably, however, it is the *qayna*, not the *jariya* in general, who is censured by these authors.

(79.) See Nadia Maria El-Cheikh's studies of the harem of Caliph al-Muqtadir (r. 908–932): "Revisiting the Abbasid Harem"; "Qahramana"; and "Caliphal Harems."

(80.) Bray, "Men, Women and Slaves," 132–136, and Gordon, "Preliminary Remarks." See also Bray, "Family," for relevant research questions and survey.

(81.) Abbott, *Two Queens*.

(82.) Gordon, "'Arib," and "Preliminary Remarks" (on Mahbuba); and El-Cheikh, "Gender and Politics." For "Arib," see also Gordon, "Place of Competition," and "Yearning and Disquiet," 263–268. For a narrative analysis and translation of Arib's biography in al-Isbahani's *Kitab al-Aghani*, see Myrne, *Narrative, Gender and Authority*.

(83.) Gordon, "Place of Competition."

(84.) Richardson "Singing Slave Girls."

(85.) Nielson, "Gender and the Politics of Music."

(86.) Nielson, "Gender and the Politics of Music," 136–138.

(87.) Bray, "Men, Women and Slaves," 138; and also Bray, "*Isnads*," 12–15.

(88.) A variant spelling of her name is Attaba (see al-Jahshiyari, *Wuzara'*, 241).

(89.) Masudi, *Meadows*, 126.

(90.) Abbott, *Two Queens*, 160. For Fatimid imperial women and their numerous *jawari*, see Cortese and Calderini, *Women and the Fatimids*, 78.

(91.) Abbott, *Two Queens*, 160.

(92.) Al-Azdi, *Bada'i*, 335. Ali ibn Hisham was a military commander, patron of singers, and owner of famous *qiyan*; see al-Isbahani, *Aghani*, 17:59–61. For Mutayyam, see *Aghani,* 7:222–233. She was Ali's favorite concubine, according to al-Isbahani, and his *umm walad* (mother of his children).

(93.) Al-Azdi, *Bada'i'*, 12:203.

(94.) Al-Azdi, *Bada'i'*, 21:59.

(95.) Al-Azdi, *Bada'i'*, 21:52.

(96.) Cf. Bray, "Men, Women and Slaves," 137, note 44: "for women of good family, training them for resale seems to have been a long-term home-based investment."

(97.) Al-Isbahani, *Aghani*, 16:5.

(98.) Al-Isbahani, *Aghani*, 7:222.

(99.) Al-Isbahani, *Aghani*, 145–146.

(100.) Tabbubi, *Qiyan*, 53.

(101.) Cf. the example in Abbott, *Two Queens*, 140.

(102.) Cf. al-Isbahani, *Ima*, 40–41, and *Aghani*, 23:88.

(103.) The Abbasid family was "an inherently unstable entity" (Bray, "Men, Women and Slaves," 133).

(104.) Bray, "Men, Women and Slaves," 132–133.

(105.) Cf. Richardson, 107–108. Some Sh'ite hadiths permit men to "lend" their *jawari* to other men for sexual purposes; see Kulayni, *Kafi*, 5:468–470.

(106.) See Cortese and Calderini (78) on Fatimid slave exchange during the early tenth century, which probably did not differ much from Abbasid luxury slave exchanges. Slave women could be given away as reward or encouragement to civil servants, soldiers, or palace servants. See, for example, Gordon, *Breaking*, 58, 62, for slave women given to Turkish soldiers as wives.

(107.) Goitein, "Slaves and Slavegirls," 3.

(108.) Goitein, "Slaves and Slavegirls," 3.

(109.) For the "patriarchal bargain," see Kandiyoti, "Bargaining with Patriarchy."

(110.) Cf. Bray, "Men, Women and Slaves," 136.

(111.) Several hadiths circulating during the ninth century state that women are required to obey their husbands. For the saying that *husn al-taba'ul* is women's *jihad*, see al-Kulayni, *Usul*, 5:9, 507.

(112.) Cf. Abbott, *Two Queens*, 140.

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Notes:

(1.) *Jariya* (pl., *jawari*), "girl," is the common term for female domestic slaves and courtesans in urban Abbasid society. Although the word *jariya* often indicates a high-society slave, whereas a common female slave would be called *ama*, this differentiation is not absolute. I also use the word *qiyan* (sing., *qayna*), a term for skilled slave singers. For a distinction between *jawari* and *qiyan*, see Nielson, "Gender and the Politics of Music," 252–253.

(2.) For the literary role of the jariya, see for example Bray, "Men, Women and Slaves," 136–139, and "*Isnads*," 12–15; and Van Gelder, "Slave-Girl Lost and Regained." For some individual *jawari* and their historical roles, see, for example, Abbott, *Two Queens*; Gordon's articles on Arib; and El-Cheikh's articles on the Abbasid caliphal harem.

(3.) Cf. Atraqji, *Mar'a*.

(4.) Cf. Brockopp, *Early Maliki Law*, 131, on the concept of slavery as being natural in the Quran.

(5.) Al-Isbahani, *Ima*, 23–44, and *Aghani*, 84–91. For *al-Ima al-Shawair* see Kilpatrick, "Women as Poets and Chattels."

(6.) Al-Isbahani is usually generous with his praise for the female singers and poets that he portrays.

(7.) Bencheikh, "'Inan," 1202; and Ibn al-Nadim, *Fihrist*, 361. She is also portrayed by Caswell, *Slave Girls*, 56–81, and al-Heitty, *The Role of the Poetess*, 113–124.

(8.) Cf. al-Suli, *Ashar.* For another aspect of female palace tradition, see Bray, "Bleeding Poetry."

(9.) *Muwallada* is often translated as "having an Arab father and a slave mother." The explanation given by Ibn Manzur, *Lisan*, s.v. *w-l-d*, is more likely, however: "A *jariya muwallada* is born among Arabs and raised with their children; they [the Arabs] have nourished them with their food and taught them their manners."

(10.) On al-Natifi and his possible low standing, see al-Heitty, *The Role of the Poetess*, 113.

(11.) Ibn Jarrah, *Waraqa*, 41, and al-Isbahani, *Ima*, 27–28. On the second occasion, Abu Nuwas found Inan crying after al-Natifi had whipped her. He asked Abu Nuwas to distract her and they engage in a racy poetic duel.

(12.) The editor of the *Ima* provides a list of sources. I only refer to some of the more substantial references here.

(13.) Ibn Jarrah, *Waraqa*, 41.

(14.) For this line and Inan's answer, I rely on Caswell's translation. He has translated several of her known poems in *Slave Girls*.

(15.) Marwan is the visitor in al-Isbahani, *Aghani*, 23:85, and *Ima*, 24–25; al-Tawhidi, *al-Basa'ir*, 5:14; Ibn al-Sa`i, *Nisa al-khulafa,* 48; and al-Suyuti, *Mustazraf*, 39. According to Ibn Abi Rabbih *Iqd*, 6:61, the male poet was Bakr ibn Hammad al-Bahili. In Ps.-Jahiz *Mahasin*, 193–194, he is anonymous.

(16.) Although a few jurists permitted the flogging of disobedient wives as a last resort when they did not obey, most advocated lighter corporal punishment, see Marín, "Disciplining Wives."

(17.) Ibn Sad, *Tabaqat*, 8:165. See Marín, "Disciplining Wives," 18.

(18.) Al-Isbahani, *Aghani*, 21:50. She claimed to be the daughter of Jafar al-Barmaki; see Gordon, "Arib." For a less famous, anonymous, jariya being flogged by her owner, see *Aghani*, 16:283.

(19.) Al-Isbahani, *Ima*, 24–25. This variant is quoted in al-Isbahani, *Aghani*, 23:85; al-Suyuti, *al-Mustazraf*, 40; and Ibn al-Sa`i, *Nisa*, 49. In Ibn Abd Rabbih (6:61), the narrator, Bakr bin Hammad al-Bahili, wants to meet Inan after hearing about her skills. Her owner invites him to sit with Inan, but when they entered her room she says she is tired, which makes him strike her with his whip.

(20.) Ps.-Jahiz, *Mahasin*, 194.

(21.) Al-Isbahani, *Aghani*, 22:140.

(22.) The verse is in Caswell's translation, Slave *Girls*, 144.

(23.) Cf. Kilpatrick, "Women as Poets and Chattels," 167.

(24.) Al-Isbahani, *Ima*, 81–82.

(25.) The whole poem in Caswell's translation (*Slave Girls*, 136) reads, "You lost your temper for no offense of mine / And it is you who snubs, turns away and shuns / With the might of your rule you subdued an obedient being / And but for the submission of slavery I would not bear it / If you would reflect on what you did apologies are called for / Or else be unjust and you'll be forgiven."

(26.) Kilpatrick's translation (169) of Murad's poem.

(27.) Ps.-Jahiz, *Mahasin*, 193–194.

(28.) Al-Isbahani, *Ima*, 43–44.

(29.) Ibn al-Mutazz, *Tabaqat*, 421–422.

(30.) Ibn Jarrah, *Waraqa*. 40.

(31.) Ps.-Jahiz, *Mahasin*, 196.

(32.) Al-Isbahani, *Ima*, 44.

(33.) Ps.-Jahiz, *Mahasin*, 197; al-Isbahani, *Ima*, 41, and *Aghani*, 23:89.

(34.) For this anecdote, see al-Isbahani, *Aghani,* 23:89; al-Suyuti, *al-Mustazraf*, 45; al-Heitty, *Role*, 118–119; and Kennedy, *Court of the Caliphs*, 175–176.

(35.) Al-Isbahani, *Aghani*, 23:89. The anecdote is ambiguous because of unclear references. Inan's new owner is only referred to as "he," which could be Harun al-Rashid instead of the anonymous bidder; the caliph died in Khurasan in 809.

(36.) Al-Isbahani, *Ima*, 42. According to Ibn al-Sa`i (*Nisa'*, 53), she died in Egypt in 841.

(37.) Al-Isbahani, *Ima*, 31.

(38.) Ibn Jarrah, *Waraqa*, 40.

(39.) Ibn al-Sa`i, *Nisa'*, 48.

(40.) Al-Isbahani, *Ima*, 41–42; Ibn Abd Rabbih, *'Iqd*, 6:60.

(41.) See al-Suyuti, *Mustazraf*, 32–33; and Ibn al-Mutazz, *Tabaqat*, 422. See also Atraqji, *Mar'a*, 192–193, on the letters of Inan and Sakan.

(42.) Cf. Tabbubi, *Qiyan*, 235–236.

(43.) Cf. Ragib, "Marchés," 724. He concludes that luxury slaves often changed owners in private, without intermediates, but that owners sometimes put them up for public auction only to humiliate them or correct them. Cf. al-Heitty, "Contrasting Spheres," 34.

(44.) However, according to Islamic law, female slaves only had to display their face and hands (Ragib, "Marchés," 735–736).

(45.) Cf. Atraqji, *Mar'a*, 193; and Kilpatrick, "Women as Poets and Chattels," 165–166.

(46.) Cf. al-Abi, *Nathr al-Durr*, vol. 4, who has gathered several anecdotes of this kind.

(47.) Al-Isbahani gives some accounts about successful presentations of individual *jawari*, which may have more historical value (ex. Fadl, *Aghani*, 19:215; Rayya and Zamya, *Ima*, 115–116; Amal, *Ima*, 125; Nabt, *Ima*, 130–131). al-

Mutawakkil seems to be the caliph appearing most frequently in these anecdotes.

(48.) Abbott, *Two Queens*, 8.

(49.) Abbott, "Women and the State," 351: "This situation resulted, in its turn, in a definite class distinction between the free Arab woman of noble race and lineage, haughty but generally virtuous, and the foreign slave woman, singer or concubine, with pride of beauty and talent but easygoing and of comparatively loose morals."

(50.) Abbott, *Two Queens*, 9.

(51.) Women have certainly always been more affected by slavery—for example, by sexual abuse. They also appear to have been enslaved in larger numbers; cf. Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, Chapter Four ("The Woman Slave").

(52.) Ahmed, *Women and Gender*, 83–87.

(53.) Ahmed, *Women and Gender*, 85, 86.

(54.) Ahmed, *Women and Gender*, 84.

(55.) Meisami, "Writing Medieval Women," 65; and Ali, *Marriage and Slavery*, 22.

(56.) Ahmed, *Women and Gender*, 85.

(57.) For al-Shafiʿi, see Kecia Ali, *Imam Shafiʿi*, 40–42.

(58.) Ali, *Marriage and Slavery*.

(59.) Mernissi, *Women's Rebellion*, 69. Her view is criticized by Caswell, *Slave Girls*, 46–48.

(60.) Mernissi, *Women's Rebellion*, 81–83.

(61.) Mernissi, *Women's Rebellion*, 84.

(62.) Mernissi, *Women's Rebellion*, 85.

(63.) Mernissi, *Women's Rebellion*, 87.

(64.) Mernissi, *Forgotten Queens*, ch. 3, and *Women's Rebellion*, 84. She compares them to the *zanj*, the black labor slaves who rebelled 255/869: "Unlike the *zanj*, who tried to seize power from the periphery of the system, the *jawari* operated within the caliph's palace itself, in the bed and the heart of the man whom the law set up as absolute master of souls and possessions" (*Forgotten Queens*, 37–38).

(65.) Mernissi, *Forgotten Queens*, 58. Nevertheless, the conquests that brought most slaves to the Muslim Empire took place long before Harun al-Rashid, and many of the slaves in Baghdad were probably born and raised in the Empire. Most of the prominent *jawari* whose origins are noted by Abu al-Faraj al-Isbahani, in *Kitab al-Aghani* and *al-Ima al-Shawa'ir*, were *muwallidat* (i.e., slaves who were born and raised among Arabs). There were also many slaves in Baghdad who were brought from the conquered provinces as a part of the capitulation agreement, and, of course, there was an extensive slave trade from Europe and other places. See Athamina, "How Did Islam Contribute," 392–393; and Gordon, "Preliminary Remarks," 77–79. In addition, Athamina ("How Did Islam Contribute," 393) mentions kidnapping as a source of slaves. For the unknown provenance of most domestic slaves and concubines, see Bray, "Family," 732.

(66.) Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam*, 106–108: "Arab feminism was a victory of these anti-wives. They alone, indeed, and almost to the exclusion of the legitimate wives, finally got their way over men" (108).

(67.) Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam*, 106–108.

(68.) Ahmed, *Women and Gender*, 82. The tendency in modern scholarship to attribute negative influences to the Persians is amply discussed by Massad in *Desiring Arabs*.

(69.) See, for example, Mernissi, *Women's Rebellion*, 85–86, in which she compares the phenomenon with Moroccan men's "infatuation for foreign women" (i.e., French women, after the Independence, 86–87); and *Forgotten Queens*, 44.

(70.) See Massad, *Desiring Arabs*, 116–118. In contrast, Athamina ("How Did Islam Contribute," 403–408) seems to claim they had a positive impact.

(71.) Both quoted in Massad, *Desiring Arabs*, 117. Zaydan is one of the writers to whom Mernissi refers (see *Women's Rebellion*, 91, note 20).

(72.) See, for example, Amin, *Duha*, 1:95; Tabbubi, *Qiyan*, 76; Atraqji, *Mar'a*, 38; al-Heitty, "The Contrasting Spheres," 40; Caswell, *Slave Girls*, 39.

(73.) Cf. Atraqji, *Mar'a*, 39–44; Tabbubi, *Qiyan*, 76; Caswell, *Slave Girls*, 39.

(74.) Atraqji, *Mar'a*, 6–7, 33–42. She claims that the moral corruption of the foreign *jawari* resulted in the widespread misogyny of the era and unwillingness to marry among many men. See also al-Heitty, "The Contrasting Spheres," 40, and Caswell, *Slave Girls*, 39.

(75.) Cf. Amin, *Duha*, 1:98, Tabbubi, *Qiyan*, 34–35, and Caswell, *Slave Girls*, 45.

(76.) Cf. Atraqji, *Mar'a*, 126, and Tabbubi, *Qiyan*, 34.

(77.) Al-Jahiz, *Singing Girls*, 31–32.

(78.) See Gordon, "Yearning and Disquiet," for al-Jahiz's view on singing girls. For al-Jahiz and al-Washsha on this subject, see Nielson, "Gender and the Politics of Music." Notably, however, it is the *qayna*, not the *jariya* in general, who is censured by these authors.

(79.) See Nadia Maria El-Cheikh's studies of the harem of Caliph al-Muqtadir (r. 908–932): "Revisiting the Abbasid Harem"; "Qahramana"; and "Caliphal Harems."

(80.) Bray, "Men, Women and Slaves," 132–136, and Gordon, "Preliminary Remarks." See also Bray, "Family," for relevant research questions and survey.

(81.) Abbott, *Two Queens*.

(82.) Gordon, "'Arib," and "Preliminary Remarks" (on Mahbuba); and El-Cheikh, "Gender and Politics." For "Arib," see also Gordon, "Place of Competition," and "Yearning and Disquiet," 263–268. For a narrative analysis and translation of Arib's biography in al-Isbahani's *Kitab al-Aghani*, see Myrne, *Narrative, Gender and Authority*.

(83.) Gordon, "Place of Competition."

(84.) Richardson "Singing Slave Girls."

(85.) Nielson, "Gender and the Politics of Music."

(86.) Nielson, "Gender and the Politics of Music," 136–138.

(87.) Bray, "Men, Women and Slaves," 138; and also Bray, "*Isnads*," 12–15.

(88.) A variant spelling of her name is Attaba (see al-Jahshiyari, *Wuzara'*, 241).

(89.) Masudi, *Meadows*, 126.

(90.) Abbott, *Two Queens*, 160. For Fatimid imperial women and their numerous *jawari*, see Cortese and Calderini, *Women and the Fatimids*, 78.

(91.) Abbott, *Two Queens*, 160.

(92.) Al-Azdi, *Bada'i*, 335. Ali ibn Hisham was a military commander, patron of singers, and owner of famous *qiyan*; see al-Isbahani, *Aghani*, 17:59–61. For Mutayyam, see *Aghani,* 7:222–233. She was Ali's favorite concubine, according to al-Isbahani, and his *umm walad* (mother of his children).

(93.) Al-Azdi, *Bada'i'*, 12:203.

(94.) Al-Azdi, *Bada'i'*, 21:59.

(95.) Al-Azdi, *Bada'i'*, 21:52.

(96.) Cf. Bray, "Men, Women and Slaves," 137, note 44: "for women of good family, training them for resale seems to have been a long-term home-based investment."

(97.) Al-Isbahani, *Aghani*, 16:5.

(98.) Al-Isbahani, *Aghani*, 7:222.

(99.) Al-Isbahani, *Aghani*, 145–146.

(100.) Tabbubi, *Qiyan*, 53.

(101.) Cf. the example in Abbott, *Two Queens*, 140.

(102.) Cf. al-Isbahani, *Ima*, 40–41, and *Aghani*, 23:88.

(103.) The Abbasid family was "an inherently unstable entity" (Bray, "Men, Women and Slaves," 133).

(104.) Bray, "Men, Women and Slaves," 132–133.

(105.) Cf. Richardson, 107–108. Some Sh'ite hadiths permit men to "lend" their *jawari* to other men for sexual purposes; see Kulayni, *Kafi*, 5:468–470.

(106.) See Cortese and Calderini (78) on Fatimid slave exchange during the early tenth century, which probably did not differ much from Abbasid luxury slave exchanges. Slave women could be given away as reward or encouragement to civil servants, soldiers, or palace servants. See, for example, Gordon, *Breaking*, 58, 62, for slave women given to Turkish soldiers as wives.

(107.) Goitein, "Slaves and Slavegirls," 3.

(108.) Goitein, "Slaves and Slavegirls," 3.

(109.) For the "patriarchal bargain," see Kandiyoti, "Bargaining with Patriarchy."

(110.) Cf. Bray, "Men, Women and Slaves," 136.

(111.) Several hadiths circulating during the ninth century state that women are required to obey their husbands. For the saying that *husn al-taba'ul* is women's *jihad*, see al-Kulayni, *Usul*, 5:9, 507.

(112.) Cf. Abbott, *Two Queens*, 140.