

The Center for Muslim Contribution to Civilization

THE  
*Unique  
Necklace*

VOLUME I

*Al-'Iqḍ al Farīḍ*

Ibn 'Abd Rabbih

Translated by Professor Issa J. Boullata

Reviewed by Professor Roger Allen

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VOLUME I

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## FOREWORD

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THE interrelationship and interaction of human cultures and civilizations has made the contributions of each the common heritage of men in all ages and all places. Early Muslim scholars were able to communicate with their Western counterparts through contacts made during the Crusades; at Muslim universities and centres of learning in Muslim Spain (al-Andalus, or Andalusia) and Sicily to which many European students went for education; and at the universities and centres of learning in Europe itself (such as Salerno, Padua, Montpellier, Paris, and Oxford), where Islamic works were taught in Latin translations. Among the Muslim scholars well-known in the centres of learning throughout the world were al-Rāzī (Rhazes), Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna), Ibn Rushd (Averroes), al Khwārizmī and Ibn Khaldūn. Muslim scholars such as these and others produced original works in many fields. Many of them possessed encyclopaedic knowledge and distinguished themselves in many disparate fields of knowledge.

In view of this, the Center for Muslim Contribution to Civilization was established in order to acquaint non-Muslims with the contributions Islam has given to human civilization as a whole. The Great Books of Islamic Civilization Project attempts to cover the first 800 years of Islam, or what may be called Islam's Classical Period. This project aims at making available in English and other European languages a wide selection of works representative of Islamic civilization in all its diversity. It is made up of translations of original Arabic works that were produced in the formative centuries of Islam, and is meant to serve the needs of a potentially large readership. Not only the specialist and scholar, but the non-specialist with an interest in Islam and its cultural heritage will be able to benefit from the series. Together, the works should serve as a rich source for the study of the early periods of Islamic thought.

In selecting the books for the series, the Center took into account all major areas of Islamic intellectual pursuit that could be represented. Thus the series includes works not only on better-known subjects such as law, theology, jurisprudence, history and politics, but also on subjects such as literature, medicine, astronomy, optics and geography. The specific criteria used to select individual books were these: that a book should give a faithful and comprehensive account of its field; and that it should be an authoritative source. The reader thus has at his disposal virtually a whole library of informative and enlightening works.

Each book in the series has been translated by a qualified scholar and reviewed by another expert. While the style of one translation will naturally differ from another as do the styles of the authors, the translators have endeavoured, to

the extent it was possible, to make the works accessible to the common reader. As a rule, the use of footnotes has been kept to a minimum, though a more extensive use of them was necessitated in some cases.

This series is presented in the hope that it will contribute to a greater understanding in the West of the cultural and intellectual heritage of Islam and will therefore provide an important means towards greater understanding of today's world.

May God Help Us!

Muhammad bin Hamad Al-Thani  
*Chairman of the Board of Trustees*

## ABOUT THIS SERIES

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THIS series of Arabic works, made available in English translation, represents an outstanding selection of important Islamic studies in a variety of fields of knowledge. The works selected for inclusion in this series meet specific criteria. They are recognized by Muslim scholars as being early and important in their fields, as works whose importance is broadly recognized by international scholars, and as having had a genuinely significant impact on the development of human culture.

Readers will therefore see that this series includes a variety of works in the purely Islamic sciences, such as Qurʾān, *ḥadīth*, theology, prophetic traditions (*sunna*), and jurisprudence (*fiqh*). Also represented will be books by Muslim scientists on medicine, astronomy, geography, physics, chemistry, horticulture, and other fields.

The work of translating these texts has been entrusted to a group of professors in the Islamic and Western worlds who are recognized authorities in their fields. It has been deemed appropriate, in order to ensure accuracy and fluency, that two persons, one with Arabic as his mother tongue and another with English as his mother tongue, should participate together in the translation and revision of each text.

This series is distinguished from other similar intercultural projects by its distinctive objectives and methodology. These works will fill a genuine gap in the library of human thought. They will prove extremely useful to all those with an interest in Islamic culture, its interaction with Western thought, and its impact on culture throughout the world. They will, it is hoped, fulfil an important rôle in enhancing world understanding at a time when there is such evident and urgent need for the development of peaceful coexistence.

This series is published by the Center for Muslim Contribution to Civilization, which serves as a research centre under the patronage of H.H. Sheikh Muhammad bin Hamad al-Thani, the former Minister of Education of Qatar who also chairs the Board of Trustees. The Board is comprised of a group of prominent scholars. These include His Eminence Sheikh Al-Azhar, Arab Republic of Egypt, and Dr Yousef al-Qaradhawi, Director of the Sira and Sunna Research Center. At its inception the Center was directed by the late Dr Muhammad Ibrahim Kazim, former Rector of Qatar University, who established its initial objectives.

The Center was until recently directed by Dr Kamal Naji, the Foreign Cultural Relations Advisor of the Ministry of Education of Qatar. He was assisted by a Board comprising a number of academicians of Qatar University, in addition to a consultative committee chaired by Dr Ezzeddin Ibrahim, former Rector of the University of the United Arab Emirates. A further committee

acting on behalf of the Center has been the prominent university professors who act under the chairmanship of Dr Raji Rammuny, Professor of Arabic at the University of Michigan. This committee is charged with making known, in Europe and in America, the books selected for translation, and in selecting and enlisting properly qualified university professors, orientalists and students of Islamic studies to undertake the work of translation and revision, as well as overseeing the publication process.

# CENTER FOR MUSLIM CONTRIBUTION TO CIVILIZATION

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## TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

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*Al-ʿIqd al-Farīd (The Unique Necklace)*, translated here for the first time into English, is one of the classics of Arabic literature. Compiled in several volumes by an Andalusian scholar and poet named Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih (246–328 H/860–940 CE), it remains a mine of information about various elements of Arab culture and letters during the four centuries preceding his death. Essentially it is a book of *adab*, a term understood in modern times to specifically mean literature but in earlier times its meaning included all that a well-informed person had to know in order to pass in society as a cultured and refined individual. This meaning evolved over the years to reach this connotation, but it started with the basic idea that *adab* was the socially accepted ethical and moral quality of an urbane and courteous person. An intellectual content rooted in the learning of the period was gradually added later on to this quality, particularly *belles lettres* in the form of elegant prose and verse that was as much entertaining as it was morally educational. This included poetry, pleasant anecdotes, proverbs, historical accounts, general knowledge, wise maxims, and even practical philosophy.

### **Adab works**

*Adab* material had been growing in volume in Arabia before Islam and had been transmitted orally for the most part. With the advent of Islam, its growth continued and it became increasingly diversified. It was gradually collected and written down in books, along with other material adopted from Persian, Sanskrit, Greek, and other tongues as the Arabic language spread with the expansion of Islam's political dominion in the world. It also included stories and sayings from the Bible, the Qurʾān, and the Ḥadīth. Eventually the heritage of *adab* became so large that philologists and other scholars had to make selections therefrom, each according to his interests and his plans to meet the needs of particular readers, such as students seeking learning and cultural refinement, or persons associated with the Islamic state such as viziers, courtiers, chancellors, judges, and government secretaries seeking useful knowledge and success in polished quarters.

One of the earliest books of poetic selections was *al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt*, an anthology of ancient Arabic poetry, mostly from the pre-Islamic period, compiled by al-Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbī (d. c. 163/780). A later and more organized one was *Dīwān al-Ḥamāsa* compiled by Abū Tammām (d. 231/846) and arranged in ten chapters according to themes, and containing poems and poetic fragments mostly from the pre-Islamic and early Islamic periods, with some others from the ʿAbbāsīd period. A still later book of selections containing prose as well as poetry

was *ʿUyūn al-Akhhbār* compiled by Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889) and arranged thematically with greater sophistication. Other books of *adab* included works by Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ (d. c. 139/760), al-Aṣmaʿī (d. 213/828), al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/868), al-Mubarrad (d. 285/898), and others.

### **Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih and his *al-ʿIqd al-Farīd***

In this tradition of *adab* selections and thematic compilations, *al-ʿIqd al-Farīd* stands as one of the largest and most sophisticated of its time. Its compiler, Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, was an Andalusian born most probably in Cordova, where he grew up and lived. A descendant of a non-Arab client of Umayyad Prince Hishām ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān (r. 172–180/788–796), he was educated in Cordova in the traditional disciplines of Islamic jurisprudence, Qurʾān exegesis, and Ḥadīth studies as well as in history, literature, Arabic language, grammar, and prosody. Not much is known about his life, but he was reputed to like music and singing, to enjoy wine, women, and the company of courtiers and friends, and to appreciate amusement and merrymaking as well as the beauty of natural scenery and gardens. He established relations with the Umayyad princes of the Iberian peninsula (al-Andalus) and panegyricized the four who ruled in his lifetime; and he included in his *al-ʿIqd al-Farīd* some of his poems on them. In particular, he composed an historical *urjūza* (a poem in the meter of *rajaz*) in which he narrated in 445 verses the military exploits of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Nāṣir in the years 300–322/912–934, as a result of which this Umayyad prince consolidated his rule over al-Andalus and, in 317/929, declared himself to be caliph and was the first there to be called Commander of the Faithful, rivaling the ʿAbbāsīd caliph in Baghdad.

Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih spent all his life in al-Andalus and did not travel to the East like some other Andalusian scholars. Yet his *al-ʿIqd al-Farīd* consists almost exclusively of the *adab* of the East, which he had acquired from his professors Baqiyy ibn Makhlad ibn Yazīd al-Qurṭubī (d. 276/889), Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Salām al-Khushanī al-Qurṭubī (d. 286/899), and Muḥammad ibn Waḍḍāḥ (d. 286/899), as well as from others and especially from his wide readings. The well-known prose writer and poet al-Šāḥib ibn ʿAbbād (326–385/938–995), who was a Būyīd vizier in the East, is said to have been disappointed after reading *al-ʿIqd al-Farīd*, of which he had eagerly sought to have a copy. He is reported to have said, allusively quoting the Qurʾān (Q. 12:65 in part), “‘*This is our merchandise returned to us.*’ I thought this book contained some information about their country. But it rather contains information about ours. We have no need for it.” However, Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih did not, in fact, completely exclude the *adab* of al-Andalus from his book but included some of his own poems, many of which were in the form of contrafactions (*muʿāraḍāt*) of famous models of the East, trying to improve on them while using the same rhyme and meter, and dealing with a similar or comparable subject matter; he also included some of his eulogies of the Umayyads of al-Andalus in his book and, notably, his long narrative *urjūza*

on 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Nāṣir's military exploits. Furthermore, he included – mostly indirectly – some information about certain aspects of life and society in al-Andalus. Although the inclusion of his own poems in *al-ʿIqd al-Farīd* is rather self-serving and ignores the large amount of Andalusian poetry by others, it has at least preserved the bulk of Ibn 'Abd Rabbih's extant poetry. Some of his poetry was also preserved in later books by anthologists and writers who quoted it, such as *Yatīmat al-Dahr* of al-Thaʿalibī (d. 429/1038) and *Nafḥ al-Ṭīb* of al-Maqqarī (d. 1041/1631) and others. Ibn 'Abd Rabbih's collection of his own poetry, his *Dimān*, does not seem to have survived, nor has any one of his other unknown works, including one known only by its title, *al-Lubāb fī Maʿrifat al-ʿIlm wa al-Ādāb*, mentioned by Ḥājī Khalifa (d. 1067/1657) in his *Kashf al-Zunūn*.

### His poetry

It is difficult to make a conclusive judgment regarding the value of Ibn 'Abd Rabbih's poetry because what came down to us is only about 1,900 verses of it. Muḥammad ibn Tāwīt, a contemporary Moroccan scholar, collected about 1,260 verses of it from *al-ʿIqd al-Farīd* and other sources, excluding Ibn 'Abd Rabbih's historical *urjūza* of 445 verses on 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Nāṣir's military exploits and his *urjūza* of 191 verses on Arabic prosody, both of which are found in Ibn 'Abd Rabbih's *al-ʿIqd al-Farīd*. Muḥammad ibn Tāwīt's edition of the verses that he collected in a slim book is entitled *Shiʿr Ibn 'Abd Rabbih* and it was published in Casablanca in 1398/1978. He did not organize the verses thematically but in separate sections, each of which contained poems or poetic fragments having the same rhyme letter, and he arranged the sections of the book in the order of the letters of the Arabic alphabet. In his edition there are four verses that have lacunae, presumably because of illegible manuscript originals, and many verses that have variants or textual corruptions attributed to the various sources he consulted.

In an earlier attempt to know the surviving amount of Ibn 'Abd Rabbih's poetry, Muḥammad Shafīʿ, a modern Indian scholar, said that *al-ʿIqd al-Farīd* contained 1,350 verses, to which should be added about 100 more from other sources he named.<sup>1</sup>

All this shows the difficulty of textually identifying, generically organizing, and then critically judging Ibn 'Abd Rabbih's poetry – knowing meanwhile that it is only a small part of his poetry, for Ibn Khallikān (d. 681/1282) said in his biographical dictionary, *Wafayāt al-Aʿyān*, that Ibn 'Abd Rabbih had a *Dimān* of good poetry; and in his biographical dictionary *Irshād al-Arib*, known also as

1 See Muḥammad Shafīʿ, "A Description of the Two Sanctuaries of Islām by Ibn 'Abd Rabbih (+940)", p. 417 in *ʿAjab Nāmeḥ: A Volume of Oriental Studies Presented to Edward G. Browne on His 60th Birthday*, edited by T. W. Arnold and Reynold A. Nicholson (Cambridge: University Press, 1922), pp. 416–438.

*Muṣjam al-Udabāʾ*, Yāqūt (d. 626/1229) said that Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih’s poetry was compiled in a collection and that al-Ḥumaydī (d. 488/1095) had seen more than twenty tomes of it as attested in the biographical dictionary of Andalusian men, *Bughyat al-Multamis*, of al-Ḍabbī (d. 599/1203).

However, we can look at Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih’s poetry that has come down to us in *al-ʿIqd al-Farīd* and other sources, and note that he has composed verse in many literary genres known to Arabic, including panegyrics, elegies, descriptions, lampoons, ascetic poetry, and love poetry. He even composed in a genre that is rare in Arabic – namely, narrative verse as in his long *urjūza* on the military exploits of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Nāṣir. He also composed in the common, rather trite, genre of didactic verse meant to teach a particular science or branch of learning, as in his shorter *urjūza* on Arabic prosody.

### His two *urjūzas*

The narrative verse in the former *urjūza* and the didactic verse in the latter cannot be called poetry if, by poetry, we mean something more than mere metrical writing. Poetry in this sublime sense is a formulation of the poet’s intensified awareness of a life experience in an imaginative language with creative turns of phrase and figurative use of words, and with attention to sound and cadence in delivering the meaning. The effect of such a formulation is to elicit an emotional response from the reader or listener, and this may be achieved even in prose; but in verse the meaning is enhanced by regulated rhythm and rhyme in accordance with the conventions of a particular literature at a particular time of its history.

Both *urjūzas* of Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih tend to be mere metrical productions and, as such, versifications with little literary merit. Yet they are not without use to those interested in their topics. The historical *urjūza* on ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Nāṣir’s military exploits describes twenty-one battles led by him, reporting on them year by year from 300 to 322 (912 to 934), naming the Iberian localities and cities where fighting took place, celebrating Muslim victories and acts of bravery, denouncing the Christian enemies, and sometimes referring to them as infidels, dogs, and swine from whose filth the land had to be purified and restored to God’s dominion. Its narrative style may have influenced the development of the Hispanic epic tradition, according to F. Marcos Marín.<sup>2</sup> As for Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih’s didactic *urjūza* on Arabic prosody, it is useful to those who would study the intricacies of Arabic metrics and rhyme rules, the permutations of meters, and the permitted variations in the syllabic composition of a verse’s feet.

After the didactic *urjūza* on prosody in his book, Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih added examples of his own poetry (about 300 verses), composed expressly on love themes for easy memorization according to him, quoting sixty-three verses cited as proof texts regarding variations permitted in the last foot of the second

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2 See F. Marcos Marín, *Poesía narrativa árabe y épica hispánica* (Madrid, 1971).

hemistich of any poem's verse in the various meters, and adduced by al-Khalil ibn Aḥmad (d. c. 175/791) in his classic study of Arabic prosody. Ibn 'Abd Rabbih's poetic examples had, of course, to agree in meter and rhyme with al-Khalil ibn Aḥmad's cited verse coming at the end of each example of four rhyming verses, and they had to fit the contextual meaning. In addition, Ibn 'Abd Rabbih followed this with other examples of his own love poetry (about 200 verses) to cover other permitted prosodic variations, and he offered four-verse examples, each set of which rhymed in a different letter, so that the letters of the whole Arabic alphabet were represented as possible rhymes.

### His love poetry

It is to be noted that the amorous poems of Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, which constitute a large portion of his love poetry, are used as examples for a prosodic teaching purpose and that, therefore, they may possibly lack genuine emotion. Yet, when taken with his other love poetry often composed in contrafaction of admired models of love poetry from the East, it can be seen that, as a whole and despite an obvious measure of affectation, it has many endearing qualities to it, and that it is not inferior to the love poetry of other Arab poets of the time and is sometimes superior to it in places. That is because its language is elegant, its tropes are imaginative and often new, its representation of dramatic love scenes is tender, its portrayal of lovers' suffering is gripping, its physical description of the beloved is beautiful, and its general effect is usually captivating. No wonder anthologists made their selections mostly from his love poetry, and so did biographers. The high praise he received from classical critics was most probably because of his love poetry. Al-Mutanabbī (d. c. 354/965), Ibn 'Abd Rabbih's much younger contemporary in the East, called him *Malih al-Andalus* (The Handsome Man of Andalusia), when he asked someone to recite some of the latter's poetry to him. After he heard it, he was thrilled, clapped his hands, and asked for a repetition, then exclaimed, "O Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, Iraq might come crawling to you!" The verses recited are reportedly the following verses from Ibn 'Abd Rabbih's love poetry, addressing the beloved:

O elegant pearl that captivates the minds,  
 O doe that is kind in afflicting the hearts:  
 I've never seen the like of her, nor have I heard of one –  
 For she's a pearl that turns into carnelian out of shyness.  
 If one looks into the beauty of her face,  
 One sees one's own face drowned in its radiance.  
 O you whose waist is slim with tenderness,  
 Why is it that your heart is not so tender?

Al-Mutanabbī, one of the greatest of Arab poets, did not compose much love poetry and was known to have a high opinion of himself; his spontaneous reaction and unguarded testimony is therefore specially significant in this instance.

### His elegies

Elegies were among the other poetic genres that Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih wrote. He restricted them mostly to relatives and they usually exhibited genuine feelings of sorrow for the loss of loved ones. This is particularly true of the elegies he composed about his two sons, the older one who fell sick and suffered before dying and the younger one who died as a child. In both cases, Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih’s bereavement is described in poignant expressions of sadness, unceasing remembrance, and recurring pain.

### His descriptive poetry

The imaginative power of description is also evident in Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih’s poems describing natural scenery and especially gardens, where color and fragrance and light and shade excite his command of imagery and make him compose with a sense of joy and exhilarated creativity. Many other Andalusian poets excelled in such descriptions impelled by the beautiful scenery of their country and, like Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, may have surpassed many poets of the East in this genre.

### His panegyrics and lampoons

As for the literary genres of panegyrics and lampoons, Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih’s compositions in these genres were not particularly of a high or distinctive quality. In the former genre, he tended toward exaggeration in praising his subject, like many poets of his age. In the latter genre, Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih was often prodded by his natural inclination to ridicule and jest, and poured out his invective on his enemy with vehemence, sometimes not restraining himself from lowering his diction to the level of vile and even obscene remarks.

### His ascetic poetry

In the later years of his long life, Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih composed ascetic poems he called *al-Mumalḥiṣāt* – that is, the expiatory poems. These were written in the same rhyme and meter as poems of his youth on love and pleasure, and he hoped they would efface his youthful sins and regretted transgressions. Despite the affectation in most of them, especially when imitating Abū al-‘Atāhiya (d. 211/826) of Iraq or versifying the prose sayings of ascetics of the East, there are some poems among them that represent the old man’s genuine repentance and contrition as he felt death approaching and expressed his rueful realization about the ephemeral character of life and the hopeful existence of the Hereafter. A few years before his death, Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih was afflicted with hemiplegia and died at the age of eighty-one, having continued to write poetry until eleven days before passing away.

### The text of *al-ʿIqd al-Farīd*

Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih's book was known to the earliest historians and biographers as *al-ʿIqd (The Necklace)* without the attribute of *al-Farīd (Unique)*, which seems to have been added later, perhaps about 300 years after its compiler's death. Some of those historians and biographers referring to the book only as *al-ʿIqd* include al-Ḍabbī (d. 599/1203) in his *Bughyat al-Multamis*, Yāqūt (d. 626/1229) in his *Irshād al-Arib* or *Muʿjam al-Udabāʾ*, Ibn Khallikān (d. 681/1282) in his *Wafayāt al-Aʿyān*, and even later ones like al-Qalqashandī (d. 821/1418) in his *Subḥ al-Aʿshā*, al-Maqqarī (d. 1041/1631) in his *Nafḥ al-Ṭib*, and Ḥājji Khalīfa (d. 1067/1657) in his *Kashf al-Zunūn*. Although al-Ibshīhī (d. c. 850/1446) may not have been the first to add the attribute *al-Farīd* to the book's title as he did in his *al-Mustaṭraf*, ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Baghdādī (d. 1093/1682) in his *Khizānat al-Adab* followed suit, and many others after him – including some modern scholars and publishers, without questioning the additional attribute.

Not only was the title of *al-ʿIqd* subject to variation but also the book's very text was not free from additions, deletions, and corruptions, having suffered the ravages of time and the whims, errors, or negligence of copyists as is the case of many other old works. Textual imperfections are present in the extant manuscripts of the book as well as in the modern printed editions of it. There are about forty surviving manuscripts of *al-ʿIqd* preserved in the various libraries of the world. Based on some of these manuscripts (and sometimes on imperfect editions of them), the book has been published eleven times by different publishers in the last 130 years, with an uneven quality of editing; and some of the editions have been printed more than once, with little improvement to the quality of editing. The first edition of *al-ʿIqd al-Farīd* was published in 1293/1876 in Būlāq, Egypt; seven other editions were later published in Cairo and two in Beirut by various publishers. For this English translation, we have depended on the latest and arguably the best available (though not perfect) editions, and they are the following three, none of which is free from typographical errors.

- *Kitāb al-ʿIqd al-Farīd* edited by Aḥmad Amīn, Aḥmad al-Zayn, and Ibrāhīm al-Abyārī (Cairo: Lajnat al-Taʿlīf wa al-Tarjama wa al-Nashr, 1940–1953), 7 vols. Third printing, 1965. This edition, based on two manuscripts and seven previously printed editions, has ample footnotes with a competent apparatus criticus. It also has a good introduction and detailed indexes.
- *Al-ʿIqd al-Farīd* edited by Muḥammad Saʿīd al-ʿAryān (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Istiḳāma, 1940–1954), 8 vols. Second printing, 1953. This edition has rare footnotes but detailed indexes. Its good text reflects an implicit apparatus criticus in the mind of the editor but it is not explained in notes. It has a good introduction which faults Aḥmad Amīn's with regard to a couple of historical facts.
- *Al-ʿIqd al-Farīd* edited by Mufīd Muḥammad Qumayḥa (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1997), 9 vols. This edition has short footnotes, mostly

abbreviated or derived from those in the edition of Aḥmad Amīn *et al.* and published selectively with only a few additions. It has detailed indexes and a general introduction but barely any apparatus criticus, its text being mostly based on the edition of Aḥmad Amīn *et al.* with very minor differences.

*Al-ʿIqd al-Farīd* was not translated into other languages. However, parts of it relating to pre-Islamic Arabs were translated into French by Fournel and published as *Lettres sur l'histoire des Arabes avant l'Islamisme* (Paris, 1836–1838); Muḥammad Shafīʿ translated (in 1922) the parts describing the two sanctuaries of Islam in Mecca and Medina, as mentioned earlier; and Henry George Farmer translated the section on music and published it in the 1941–1942 issue of the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (pp. 22–30 and 127–144), reprinted as book V in the collection he edited on Oriental writers on music, entitled *Music: The Priceless Jewel* (Bearsden, Scotland, 1942) mentioned earlier. Furthermore, Arthur Wormhoudt translated the section on secretaries and published it as a pamphlet entitled *al-Kitāba waʾl-kuttāb from the ʿIqd al-Farīd* (Oskaloosa, Iowa: William Penn College, 1988).

### *Al-ʿIqd al-Farīd's* structure

An encyclopedic compendium as large and heterogeneous as *al-ʿIqd al-Farīd* could easily have been a chaotic jumble of materials. Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih’s imagination and organization saved the book from such a fate, within the Arab tradition of *adab* selections and thematic compilations of his time. He conceived of it as a necklace composed of twenty-five “books”, each of which carried the name of a jewel. In the middle was the Middle Jewel and on each of its two sides was a succession of twelve jewels of different kinds and names; each jewel in the second set was named by the name of the parallel jewel in the first set, except that the attribute “second” was added. Each of the twenty-five “books” was organized around a major theme and had an introduction, called a *farsh*, written by Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, followed by his relevant *adab* selections of verse and prose on the theme of the “book”. He drew on a repertoire of sources whose titles and authors he sometimes mentioned but only rarely acknowledged. He usually omitted the chains of authorities vouching for the authenticity of his selected quotations, and he said he did this for the sake of brevity and because their intrinsic utility was not dependent on the authorities. The twenty-five “books” were threaded together in the following order, as stated in Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih’s general introduction to his book.

- 1 **The Book of the Pearl** on the ruler
- 2 **The Book of the Nonpareil Jewel** on wars and similar matters
- 3 **The Book of the Chrysolite** on generous men and liberal givers
- 4 **The Book of the Nacre** on delegations
- 5 **The Book of the Coral** on addressing kings

- 6 **The Book of the Ruby** on learning and *belles-lettres*
- 7 **The Book of the Gem** on proverbs
- 8 **The Book of the Emerald** on sermons and asceticism
- 9 **The Book of the Mother-of-Pearl** on condolences and elegies
- 10 **The Book of the Unique Jewel** on genealogy and the virtues of the Arabs
- 11 **The Book of the Adorable Jewel** on the speech of the bedouin Arabs
- 12 **The Book of the Flanking Jewel** on responses
- 13 **The Book of the Middle Jewel** on orations
- 14 **The Book of the Second Flanking Jewel** on signatures, departments, viziers, and stories of secretaries
- 15 **The Book of the Second Adorable Jewel** on caliphs, their histories, and battles
- 16 **The Book of the Second Unique Jewel** on reports about Ziyād, al-Ḥajjāj, the Ṭālibīs, and the Barmakīs
- 17 **The Book of the Second Mother-of-Pearl** on the battle days of the Arabs
- 18 **The Book of the Second Emerald** on the merits of poetry, its meters, and scansion
- 19 **The Book of the Second Gem** on prosody, rhymes, and metrical irregularities
- 20 **The Book of the Second Ruby** on the art of song and people's disagreement on it
- 21 **The Book of the Second Coral** on women and their attributes
- 22 **The Book of the Second Nacre** on pretenders of prophecy, lunatics, misers, and parasites
- 23 **The Book of the Second Chrysolite** on demonstrating the natural dispositions of humans, other animals, and the contention for precedence among cities
- 24 **The Book of the Second Nonpareil Jewel** on food and drink
- 25 **The Book of the Second Pearl** on tidbits, gifts, jokes, and witty anecdotes.

In his general introduction to the book, Ibn 'Abd Rabbih says that he has divided each of the twenty-five "books" into two parts. But we note that, in the manuscripts and the printed editions, only three "books" have such division. Furthermore, we note that the order of the twenty-five "books" in Yāqūt's entry on Ibn 'Abd Rabbih in his biographical dictionary is different from that of *al-'Iqd al-Farid* and its compiler's general introduction. We may surmise that these are only some of the corruptions that have entered the book over the years, let alone the obvious additions about the history of caliphs who ruled after Ibn 'Abd Rabbih's death.

However, from the compiler's listing of the book's content, we can clearly see how vast was the *adab* material that Ibn 'Abd Rabbih consulted. Although his sources were many, he seems to have quoted from Ibn Qutayba's works more than he did from any others'. In some places of his *al-'Iqd al-Farid*, he mentions

Ibn Qutayba's *Kitāb 'Uyūn al-Akhhbār*, *Kitāb al-Ashriba*, and *Kitāb Faql al-'Arab 'alā al-'Ajam* as sources of his quotations. Jibrā'il Jabbūr, a modern Lebanese scholar whose book is to date the most extensive study of Ibn 'Abd Rabbih and his *al-'Iqd*,<sup>3</sup> believes that Ibn 'Abd Rabbih has even taken from Ibn Qutayba's *'Uyūn al-Akhhbār* the very organization of his book as well as the arrangement and the naming of some of his "books" (actually, seven of Ibn 'Abd Rabbih's twenty-five "books" have the same titles as chapters of Ibn Qutayba's book). Moreover, Jabbūr gives a detailed analysis, showing parallel passages of both compilers, and leaves no doubt about the dependence of Ibn 'Abd Rabbih on *'Uyūn al-Akhhbār*, whether acknowledged or not.<sup>4</sup> But Ibn 'Abd Rabbih had many sources including works by al-Jāhīz, al-Mubarrad, Abū 'Ubayda Ma'mar ibn al-Muthannā (d. 209/824), and others as well as the Bible, the Qur'ān, the Ḥadīth, and probably the *Divāns* of many Arab poets, of whom more than 200 are quoted with no fewer than 10,000 verses.

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It is with great pleasure that I present this translation to the English reader. Professor Roger Allen of the University of Pennsylvania has carefully reviewed it and made excellent suggestions for improvement. We have both tried to make this tenth-century Arabic classic as readable in English as possible in the twenty-first century. I have avoided providing the reader with footnotes of any sort except when inevitable, but I have often offered brief explanations in square brackets within the text and in the least intrusive manner. I hope that, by becoming acquainted with *al-'Iqd al-Farīd*, English readers will be in a better position to appreciate the breadth and depth of classical Arabic literature and its contribution to world civilization and to the understanding of the human condition, human frailties and glories, and humankind's intellectual and cultural history.

Montreal, 29 July, 2004  
 Professor of Arabic Literature  
 Institute of Islamic Studies  
 McGill University

3 See Jibrā'il Jabbūr, *Ibn 'Abd Rabbih wa 'Iqduh* (Beirut: al-Maṭba'ā al-Kāthūlikiyya, 1933; slightly enlarged and updated 2nd printing, Beirut: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadīda, 1979).

4 See *ibid.*, pp. 57–60; and pp. 154–155.

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## THE UNIQUE NECKLACE

**In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful.  
Lord, facilitate and help.\***

Abū ‘Amr Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, the Andalusian, may God have mercy on him, said:

Praise be to God, who is the first without beginning, and the last without end; who is alone in His power, and transcendent in His authority; who is not limited by directions, and not described by attributes; who is not perceived by eyes, and not attained by thoughts; who initiates beneficence, and gives again with graciousness; who shows evidence of His eternity by the passing away of His creatures, and of His power by the incapacity of everything other than Him; who forgives the misdeeds of the sinner by His pardon, and the ignorance of the ill-doer by His forbearance; who has made knowledge of Him an obligation and His worship a choice; who created creatures, some of whom recognize His unicity and some are silent and submissive to His Lordship; nothing is beyond His power, and nothing escapes His vision; who associates mercy with His bounty, and justice with His punishment; and so, people are indebted to Him for His bounty and His justice, showing signs of imminent evanescence, being on the move, from an abode of trial to an abode of reward.

I praise Him for His forbearance after His knowledge, and for His forgiveness after His power; for He has kindly accepted to be praised as a price for His abundant grace and His great blessings, and He has made this the key to His mercy, the appropriate response to His benefaction, and the last invocation of the people of His Paradise by His saying, may He be exalted: “And their last invocation is ‘Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds.’” [Q. 10:10] And may God bless our Master, Muḥammad, the honored Prophet, the proximate intercessor, who was sent last and chosen first, and who made us the people of his obedience and the freedmen of his intercession.

After this exordium, I note that people of every generation and experts of every nation have spoken about literature and have philosophized about branches of learning in every tongue and in every age; and that every one of them has given his utmost and done his best to summarize the beautiful ideas of the ancients and to select the gems of the sayings of past generations. They have done this so profusely that their summaries have needed summarization and their selections have needed choice-making.

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\* Volume I of this translation of Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih’s *al-Iqd al-Farid* contains four of its twenty-five “books”, namely, **The Book of the Pearl**, **The Book of the Nonpareil Jewel**, **The Book of the Chrysolite**, and **The Book of the Nacre**.

Furthermore, I have noted that the last one of every generation and of those who recorded wise sayings and written all manner of literary works, has been sweeter in wording, easier in structure, wiser in procedure, and clearer in method than the first one, because he came later and was a successor, while the first one was an initiator and a predecessor.

Let any person look fairly into the perfectly written tomes and translated books, and let him make his intellect a just arbiter and a decisive judge. He will learn that they are an elegant tall tree, rooted in good and fragrant earth, and that they bear ripe fruits. He who takes his share of them will become acquainted with the heritage of prophethood and the way of wisdom, whose follower will not suffer from loneliness and will not go astray.

I have compiled this work and selected its jewels from the choice gems of literature and the best picks of eloquence. It is therefore the quintessence of jewels and the kernel of all pith. My merit in it is only that of compiling the reports, exercising good choice, summarizing well, and writing an introduction at the beginning of every book. Everything else has been taken from the mouths of the learned and traditionally received from the wise and the literati. Selecting speech is more difficult than composing it. They say, "A man's selection demonstrates his mind." A poet said:

We have known you by your selection,  
For one's selection shows one's intelligence.

Plato said, "People's minds are recorded on the tips of their pens and are evident in their selection."

I therefore diligently sought peerless modes of speech, a variety of concepts, gems of wisdom, and many kinds of *belles-lettres*, anecdotes, and proverbs; then I put together each with its own kind and made a separate chapter of it, so that anyone seeking something may find it in its place in the book, next to its kind in every chapter.

Of the abundance of reports and many kinds of sayings, I chose the noblest in essence, the clearest in beauty, the most elegant in meaning, the most eloquent in wording, the most exquisite in style, and the sweetest in gracefulness, taking into consideration God's saying, may He be blessed and exalted: "Those who listen to the Speech, then follow the best thereof." [Q. 39:18]

Yahyā ibn Khālid said, "People write the best of what they hear, remember the best of what they write, and speak about the best of what they remember."

Ibn Sīrīn said, "Knowledge is larger than can be encompassed; therefore, choose the best of every thing."

All else is worthless opinion and wrong utterance. Yet occasionally, every learned man errs, every noble horse stumbles, and every sharp sword misses.

In one of the books, there is this saying, "God, most high, is alone perfect and no one else is free from imperfection."

Al-‘Attābi was asked, “Do you know anyone who is without a fault?” He said, “He who is without a fault never dies; but there is no way one can be safe from being faulted by the common people.”

Al-‘Attābi also said, “He who composes a poem or writes a book exposes himself to enemies and is susceptible to being bad-mouthed, unless he is looked at by persons who judge him with fairness and without bias – and these are very few.”

In my effort to seek ease and brevity and to avoid being burdensome and too long, I have eliminated the chains of authorities from most of my reports; for these reports are interesting narratives, wise sayings, and anecdotes which do not benefit from a continuous chain of authorities, nor are they impaired by chains eliminated from them.

Some writers used to omit the chains of authorities of the Ḥadīth and of prescribed Islamic law. Why, then, can we not omit them from a rare anecdote, a popular proverb, an exquisite report, and a narrative which will lose its luster if it were to be long and ponderous.

Ḥaḍḥ ibn Ghiyāth asked al-A‘mash about the chain of authorities of a certain ḥadīth. He held his own throat and propped it up against a wall, saying, “This is its chain of propping authorities.”

Ibn al-Sammāk narrated a ḥadīth and was asked, “What is its chain of authorities?” He said, “It is one of the free winds that blow in succession.”

Al-Aṣma‘ī related a narrative and was asked about its chain of authorities. He said, “It is one of the clear verses that need no evidence or proof.”

Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī narrated a certain ḥadīth and he was asked, “O Abū Sa‘īd, on whose authority is it?” He answered, “And what will you do with whose authority it is, son of my brother? Suffice it that you have received the ḥadīth’s moral exhortation and are bound by its legal obligation.”

I have looked into some of the compiled books and found that they do not contain a variety of reports and do not exhaust the abundance of received tradition. So I have made this book sufficing and satisfying, and I gathered in it most of the ideas that run on the tongues of the common people and the elite, of plebeians and kings. I embellished each book with citations of poetry relevant to the reports in their meaning, and agreeing with them in methods. I added to that some fine poems of mine so that the reader of this our book may know that our Western land, despite its remoteness, and that our country, despite its distance, has a good share of verse and prose.

I entitled it **The Book of the Unique Necklace** because of the gems of speech it contains that are finely threaded together and beautifully organized. I divided it into twenty-five books, each of which has two parts, making a total of fifty parts in twenty-five books. Each book of them has the name of one of the jewels of the necklace.

The first is **The Book of the Pearl** on the ruler, then **The Book of the Nonpareil Jewel** on wars and their affairs, then **The Book of the Chrysolite**

on generous men and liberal givers, then **The Book of the Nacre** on delegations, then **The Book of the Coral** on addressing kings, then **The Book of the Ruby** on learning and *belles-lettres*, then **The Book of the Gem** on proverbs, then **The Book of the Emerald** on sermons and asceticism, then **The Book of the Mother-of-Pearl** on condolences and elegies, then **The Book of the Unique Jewel** on genealogy and the virtues of the Arabs, then **The Book of the Adorable Jewel** on the speech of the bedouin Arabs, then **The Book of the Flanking Jewel** on responses, then **The Book of the Middle Jewel** on orations; then **The Book of the Second Flanking Jewel** on signatures, departments, viziers, and stories of secretaries, then **The Book of the Second Adorable Jewel** on caliphs, their histories, and battles, then **The Book of the Second Unique Jewel** on reports about Ziyād, al-Ḥajjāj, the Ṭālibīs, and the Barmakīs, then **The Book of the Second Mother-of-Pearl** on the battle days of the Arabs, then **The Book of the Second Emerald** on the merits of poetry, its meters, and scansion, then **The Book of the Second Gem** on prosody, rhymes, and metrical irregularities, then **The Book of the Second Ruby** on the art of song and people's disagreement on it, then **The Book of the Second Coral** on women and their attributes, then **The Book of the Second Nacre** on pretenders of prophecy, lunatics, misers, and parasites, then **The Book of the Second Chrysolite** on demonstrating the natural dispositions of humans, other animals, and the contention for precedence among cities, then **The Book of the Second Nonpareil Jewel** on food and drink, and then **The Book of the Second Pearl** on tidbits, gifts, jokes, and witty anecdotes.

# THE BOOK OF THE PEARL

## On the ruler

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### Introduction to the book

Ruling power is the rein of all things. It organizes rights, maintains punishments, and is the hub around which religious and secular matters turn. It is God's protection of His country, and His shadow stretching over His servants. Through it, their wives are secure, their oppressed are given justice, their oppressors are deterred, and their frightened are safe.

### Sayings by the wise

The wise have said, "A just leader is better than downpouring rain and an unjust one is better than lasting civil strife. What God restrains by a ruler is indeed more than what He restrains by the Qur'ān."

Wahb ibn Munabbih said, "Among what God revealed to His prophet David, peace be on him, is: 'I am God, King of kings, and the hearts of kings are in my hand. To those who are obedient to Me, I will give kings who are merciful; and to those who are disobedient to Me, I will give kings who are vengeful.'"

Therefore, it is incumbent upon him whom God has invested with the reins of His rule, whom He has made sovereign over the affairs of His creatures, whom He has specially favored with His beneficence, and whom He has firmly appointed to wield power – it is incumbent upon him to care seriously about his subjects' interests and pay attention to the welfare of the people obedient to him, in accordance with the honor that God has conferred upon him and the conditions of happiness He has bestowed upon him.

God, may He be mighty and exalted, said, "Those who, if We establish them in the earth, will perform prayer, give alms, enjoin good and forbid evil. And to God belongs the consequence of all affairs." [Q. 22:41]

### Sayings of the Prophet, may God's blessing and peace be upon him

The Prophet, may God's blessing and peace be upon him, said, "Being just for one hour in government is better than worshiping for sixty years." And he said, may God's blessing and peace be upon him, "Each of you is a shepherd, and each shepherd is responsible for his flock."

A poet said:

Each of you is a shepherd and we are his flock  
And each will meet his Lord, who will bring him to account.

It is usual for the flock to be little satisfied with the leaders, to find no facile excuse for them, and to blame them when many a blamed person may be innocent. There is no way one can be safe from the biting tongues of the common people, for the satisfaction of everyone and the agreement of all are among the impossible and unattainable things.

Each has his share of justice and his place in government. It is the right of the leader to rule his people by deeds that satisfy the majority. And it is the right of the ruled to have their leader accept their apparent obedience and turn away from disclosing their misdeeds. It is just as Ziyād said when he came to Iraq as a ruler, “O people, there were grudges and hostilities between you and me. I have put all that behind me and underfoot. He who has done good deeds, let him increase them; and he who has done bad deeds, let him desist from them. If I know that someone among you hates me to high heaven, I will not expose him unless he reveals his innermost to me.”

#### **A saying of Ibn ‘Umar**

‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Umar said, “If a leader is just, he is rewarded and thanked; and if he is unjust, the burden is his and you have to endure.”

#### **A saying of Ka‘b al-Aḥbār**

Ka‘b al-Aḥbār said, “Islam, the ruler, and the people are like a tent, a pole, and pegs. The tent is Islam, the pole is the ruler, and the pegs are the people. Each is useful only with the others.”

Al-Afwah al-Awdī said:

People do not thrive in chaos without leaders,  
Nor do leaders thrive if their fools prevail.  
A tent cannot be pitched without a pole,  
And a pole is nothing if not firmed by pegs.  
But when pegs and pole are banded together,  
Then will they reach the aim they seek.

#### **Advising and obeying the ruler**

God, may He be blessed and exalted, said, “O you who believe, obey God, obey the Prophet, and those in power among you.” [Q. 4:59]

Abū Hurayra said, “When this verse was revealed, we were commanded to obey the leaders; for obeying them is part of obeying God, and disobeying them is part of disobeying God.”

#### **Sayings of the Prophet, may God’s blessing and peace be upon him**

The Prophet, may God’s blessing and peace be upon him, said, “He who disagrees with the community’s consensus or disobeys will die a pagan’s death.”

And he said, may God's blessing and peace be upon him, "Religion is advice, religion is advice, religion is advice." He was asked, "Advice to whom, O Messenger of God?" He answered, "To God, His Messenger, and those in power among you."

Therefore, advising the leader and obeying him is a prescribed duty and a necessary obligation. Faith is not complete without it and Islam is firmly established only upon it.

### **Some of al-'Abbās's advice to his son when he presented him to 'Umar**

Al-Sha'bi said on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās, May God be pleased with both, "My father said to me, 'I see that this man' – meaning 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb – 'seeks your opinion and gives you precedence to the senior Companions of Muḥammad, may God's blessing and peace be upon him. I am therefore advising you to have four qualities: Do not divulge any secret of his, do not let him test a lie about you, do not withhold advice from him, and do not backbite anyone when you are with him.'"

Al-Sha'bi said, "I said to Ibn 'Abbās, 'Every one of these qualities is better than a thousand others.' He said, 'Indeed, by God; and even better than ten thousand.'"

### **A saying of a man from India advising a king**

In an Indian book, a story is told about a man who entered into the presence of one of their kings. He said, "O king, advising you is a duty required of the lowly little person as well as the important great one. If it were not for my confidence in the virtue of your mind and your tolerance of what may be disagreeable to hear and accept in the interest of the common people and in consideration for the elite, it would be rash of me to say anything. But if we realize that our continued existence is related to yours, and that our lives are dependent upon yours, we will inevitably have to do our duty to you, even if you do not ask us to do it. It is said, 'He who withholds his advice from the ruler, who conceals his illness from the physicians, and who keeps secret his inner feelings from friends will hurt himself.' I know that any speech that is unpleasant to hear is not said to anyone unless the one who says it has trust in the mind of the person addressed; for if the latter is wise, he will tolerate it, because its benefit is to the one who listens and not to the one who says it. O king, you are one who has the virtue of intelligence and the sophistication of knowledge. This encourages me to tell you what you do not like, fully confident in the fact that you value my advice and that I prefer you to my own self."

### **Ibn 'Utba advises al-Walīd**

'Amr ibn 'Utba said to al-Walīd when people turned against him, "O Commander of the Faithful, my intimacy with you prompts me to speak but my awe of you

makes me hold my tongue. I see that you feel safe with regard to things that make me fear for you. Shall I then keep silent in obedience or shall I speak in concern?" He answered, "All is acceptable from you. Only God knows the unknown for which we are destined." And he was killed a few days after that.

### **Ibn Ṣafwān on loyalty to the ruler**

Khālīd ibn Ṣafwān said, "He who associates with the ruler, correcting and advising him, has more enemies than the one who associates with the ruler, deceiving and betraying him; for on advising the ruler, he invites upon himself the enmity and the envy of both the ruler's enemy and the ruler's friend, because the ruler's friend competes with the adviser over the latter's favorite position, and the ruler's enemy hates him for giving advice."

## **Qualities of the ruler's associate**

### **Ibn al-Muqaffa' on the ruler's servant**

Ibn al-Muqaffa' said, "He who serves the ruler ought not to be conceited when the latter is pleased, nor ought he to waver when he is angry; he should not grumble when given a burdensome task, nor be importunate when making a request." He also said, "Let your association with the rulers come into being only after you train yourself to obey them. If you are faithful when they commission you, cautious when they draw you closer to them, loyal when they put their trust in you, humble when they cut you off, and pleasant when they anger you: you will teach them and appear as though you are learning from them, you will chasten them and appear as though you are chastened by them, and you will thank them without obliging them to express thanks. Otherwise, get away from them as far as possible and be extremely wary of them."

Al-Ma'mūn said, "Kings tolerate all but three things: criticism of the king, revealing his secrets, and meddling in his women's affairs."

Ibn al-Muqaffa' said, "If you acquire a position of trust with the ruler, do not call down blessings on him with every word, for that will cause estrangement and will impel gloom."

Al-Aṣma'ī said, "I won people over with witty anecdotes and achieved acclaim with uncommon words."

Abū Ḥāzīm al-A'raj said to Sulaymān ibn 'Abd al-Malik, "A ruler is only a market; what sells well is brought to him."

### **Abū Sufyān's and his wife's advice to their son Mu'āwiya when 'Umar appointed him governor**

When Mu'āwiya came back from Syria, of which 'Umar had appointed him governor, he went to see his mother Hind. She said to him, "My son, rarely has

a free woman given birth to one like you, and this man has appointed you governor; so, do what pleases him, whether you like it or not.” Then he went to see his father Abū Sufyān. He said to him, “My son, this group of Emigrants have preceded us in adopting Islam and we came to it later; so, their precedence has raised them and our lateness has reduced our rank. We have become followers and they have become leaders. And now they have appointed you for a great task; so, do not disagree with them, for you are running toward an end that you have not reached; and even if you have reached it, you will breathe easily in it.”

Mu‘āwiya said, “I was amazed at their agreement on the idea, although their words were different.”

#### **Abrawīz advising his treasurer**

Abrawīz said to his treasurer, “I will not excuse you if you cheat by one dirham and I will not praise you if you preserve one thousand thousand because you only spare your blood and prove your honesty, for if you cheat by a little, you have cheated by too much. And be careful of two things: shortage in the amounts you receive and excess in the amounts you pay. Know that I have only appointed you to care for the treasures of the realm, the prosperity of the kingdom, and the equipment against the enemy because, in my estimation, you are more honest in this position than anyone else in it and better for its future. So, live up to my good opinion of you when I chose you and I will live up to your expectations of me, and you will not be rewarded for good by evil, nor will you have humiliation as a substitute for elevation, or regret for safety, or betrayal for honesty.”

#### **Yazīd ibn Mu‘āwiya advising Salam on appointing him to rule Khurāsān**

When Yazīd ibn Mu‘āwiya appointed Salam ibn Ziyād to rule Khurāsān, he said to him, “Your father served his brother when he was old and I have asked you to serve me when you are young. So, do not expect that I will excuse you, for I depend on full service from you. And beware of me, before I say to myself I should beware you. For if I am disappointed in you, you will be disappointed in me. You are now at the beginning of your fortune; seek then its farthest end. Your father has made you tired, so do not give yourself rest.”

#### **‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb advising Mu‘āwiya on coming to Syria**

Yazīd said, “My father told me that when ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb came to Syria, he came riding a donkey, and with him was ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn ‘Awf riding another donkey. Mu‘āwiya went out to meet them in a grand procession and passed ‘Umar by, then returned to him on being told of him. When he was close to him, he dismounted and went to him but ‘Umar ignored him. So he walked along by him on foot. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn ‘Awf said, ‘You have exhausted the man.’ ‘Umar then turned to him and said, ‘O Mu‘āwiya, is the preceding

procession yours, in addition to what I heard about people with requests standing in line at your door?’ He said, ‘Yes, O Commander of the Faithful.’ ‘Umar asked, ‘And why is that?’ Mu‘āwīya answered, ‘Because we are in a country in which we are not safe from the enemy’s spies, whom we must intimidate by the ruler’s awe. If you order me, I will keep this practice; but if you forbid me, I will desist.’ ‘Umar said, ‘If what you say is true, then it is a wise idea; and if it is wrong, then it is a trick of a refined man. I will neither order you to do it nor forbid you from doing it.’ ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn ‘Awf said, ‘How well this young man has developed compared to the time you sent him out!’ ‘Umar said, ‘It is because of his resourcefulness that we burdened him with what we did.’”

### **Al-Rabī‘ al-Ḥārithī in Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb’s presence**

Al-Rabī‘ ibn Ziyād al-Ḥārithī said, “I was governor of al-Baḥrayn, appointed by Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī. ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb wrote to him, ordering him to present himself with all his governors, and commanding that they appoint dependable replacements till they returned. When we arrived, I went to Yarfa’ and said, ‘O Yarfa’, I am a traveller who needs guidance. Tell me, in what appearance does the Commander of the Faithful like to see his governors most?’ He suggested a harsh, rough one. So I wore open sandals and a wool garment, and I wrapped a dark turban around my head. We then entered into ‘Umar’s presence and he lined us up in front of him. He looked at us intently and his eyes fell on no one but me, so he called me and said, ‘Who are you?’ I said, ‘Al-Rabī‘ ibn Ziyād al-Ḥārithī.’ He asked, ‘And what province of ours do you govern?’ I said, ‘Al-Baḥrayn.’ He asked, ‘And how much are you paid?’ I said, ‘Five dirhams every day.’ He said, ‘That is too much! What do you do with this amount?’ I said, ‘I use some for food and the remainder I distribute to relatives of mine; what is in excess, I give to the poor of the Muslims.’ He said, ‘That is all right. Go back to your place.’ So I returned to my place in the line. Then he looked at us intently again, and his eyes took in no one but me, so he called me and said, ‘How old are you?’ I said, ‘Forty-three.’ He said, ‘Now is when you have achieved wisdom.’ Then he ordered food to be served. My friends were new to luxury of living and I was hungry. He brought us hard bread and chunks of bare camel bones. My friends were disgusted and repelled at that. But I ate and relished the food. I noticed that he was observing me among them all. Then I said something in haste that I wished I had sunk into the earth and not said. I said, ‘O Commander of the Faithful, people are in need of your goodness and I wish you chose some softer food than this.’ He upbraided me, saying, ‘What did you say?’ I said, ‘I am saying: O Commander of the Faithful, I wish you had thought of your flour earlier, so that it might be made into bread one day before you needed it, and in a similar way the meat would be cooked earlier for you. Then you would be served with soft bread and tender meat.’ His anger subsided and he said, ‘Is that what you meant?’ I said, ‘Yes.’ He said, ‘O Rabī‘, if we wished,

we could have filled this place with stewed and grilled meat, flat bread, and raisin pudding; but I note that God, may He be exalted, reproached people for their desires and said, “You entirely consumed your good things in your life of this world and you enjoyed them.” [Q. 46:20] Then he ordered Abū Mūsā to confirm me in my position and to replace my friends.”

### **Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih explains the rare Arabic words of the story**

His saying *luth-tu-hā ‘alā ra’sī* (I wrapped it around my head). It is said: *rajul almāth* (a strong man) when he is mighty, derived from *al-lamth* (might); and it is said *rajul almāth* (a rash man), derived from *al-lamtha* (rashness). It is said *luth-tu ‘imamar<sup>an</sup> ‘alā ra’sī* (I wrapped a turban around my head), when he means: I folded parts of it on other parts in lines that are not straight.

His saying *ṣalā’iq* means something made from meat, some of which is cooked and some grilled. It is said: *ṣalaq-tu al-laḥm* (I stewed the meat) when you cook it, and *ṣalaq-tu-hu* when you grill it.

His saying *ghariḍ* (tender) means soft. He says: *laḥm ghariḍ* (tender meat), referring to its softness. Al-‘Attābi said:

When I miss tender meat,  
I strike my young camel’s arm and grill it.

By *sabā’ik*, he means white bread, so called because it is *yusbak* (purified). The Arabs call *al-riqāq* (flat bread) *sabā’ik*.

*Al-ṣināb* is a kind of food made of raisins and mustard. From this is derived the word *ṣinābī*, said of a horse when its color is red. Jarīr said:

I am required to live like the clan of Zayd.  
How can I obtain flat bread and raisin pudding?

His saying *aksār ba‘īr* (bare camel bones): *kisr*, *qaṣal*, and *jazl* mean bones stripped of meat. His saying *na‘ā ‘alā qamm<sup>in</sup> shahawātihim* (he reproached some people for their desires) means he found fault in them and rebuked them.

### **Ziyād is the first to drop greeting someone coming in to the ruler**

Among the customs of associating with the ruler is that when someone comes into his presence, he should not be greeted by the others. Ziyād ibn Abihi was the one to make this rule. For ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abbās came in to Mu‘āwiya when Ziyād was present with him. Mu‘āwiya welcomed him, was pleasant to him, and seated him close by; but Ziyād did not say anything to him. So Ibn ‘Abbās turned to him and said, “What is the matter with you, Abū al-Mughīra? It is as if you intended to create separation between you and us.” He said, “No, but someone coming in front of the Commander of the Faithful is not to be greeted.” Ibn ‘Abbās said, “People do not drop exchanging greetings in the presence of their

princes!” Mu‘āwiya said to him, “Leave him alone, O Ibn ‘Abbās, for whenever you wish to win, you do so.”

### **Abū Muslim drops greeting al-Manṣūr in the presence of al-Saffāḥ**

Abū Muslim entered into the presence of Abū al-‘Abbās when al-Manṣūr was with him. He greeted Abū al-‘Abbās. So he said to him, “O Abū Muslim, this is Abū Ja‘far!” He said to him, “O Commander of the Faithful, this is a situation in which no one but you should be dutifully attended to.”

### **Mu‘āwiya and Ibn al-‘Āṣ attending ‘Umar on arriving from Syria and Egypt**

Abū Ḥātim said on the authority of al-‘Utbi, “Mu‘āwiya came from Syria and ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ from Egypt and entered into the presence of ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb. He seated them in front of him and began asking them about their work until ‘Amr interrupted Mu‘āwiya. The latter said to him, ‘Are you finding fault with my work and actually referring to me? Come on, you tell the Commander of the Faithful about my work and I will tell him about yours!’ ‘Amr said, ‘I immediately knew that he was more conversant with my work than I was with his, and that ‘Umar would not leave off this matter until he learned the end of it. I wanted to do something to divert ‘Umar’s attention, so I raised my hand and slapped Mu‘āwiya.’ ‘Umar said, ‘By God, I have never seen someone more impudent than you! Get up, O Mu‘āwiya, and avenge yourself on him.’ Mu‘āwiya said, ‘My father ordered me not to do anything without consulting him.’ So ‘Umar sent for Abū Sufyān and when he came, he gave him a cushion to sit on and said, ‘The Messenger of God, may God’s blessing and peace be upon him, said: When a people’s nobleman comes to you, honor him.’ Then he related to him what had happened between ‘Amr and Mu‘āwiya; and Abū Sufyān said, ‘Is this why you sent for me? He is his brother and his cousin. He has not done anything gross. And I grant him that.’”

### **Someone’s saying about applying finesse in advising the ruler**

They said, “He who is associated with the ruler should not withhold advice from him even if the ruler finds it annoying. However, his speech to him should be kind, not stupidly unthoughtful, so that he may inform him of his fault without saying it to his face. He should rather speak proverbially and tell him of the fault of others so that he may know his own fault.”

They also said, “He who opposes the ruler is scorned by him, and he who grovels to him is overlooked. The ruler is likened to a strong blowing wind which does no harm to the grass and trees softly bending with it, but it breaks those that resist.”

A poet said:

If stormy winds blow, they break  
Arrowwood trees but care not for retem.

### **A saying by Shabīb on walking with the ruler**

Shabīb ibn Shayba said, “He who walks with a caliph should place himself in a position so that if the caliph wanted to ask him about anything, he would not need to turn his head; and he should be at a side so that if the caliph turned he would not be facing the sun.”

### **An Indian minister between the king and the queen**

I read in an Indian book that a king was given a gift of clothing and jewelry. He called two of his wives and gave each the choice between the clothing and the jewelry. His minister was present and one woman looked at him as if to seek his opinion. He winked, pointing to the clothing with his eye. The king noticed him but the woman chose the jewelry so that the king would not take account of the wink, and the clothing went to the other woman. The minister continued to wink for forty years afterward, so that the king should not think ill of him but rather that it was a habit caused by a genetic twitch.

## **The ruler’s selection of his officials**

### **Ibn Hubayra advising Muslim ibn Sa‘īd on being sent to Khurāsān**

When ‘Umar ibn Hubayra sent Muslim ibn Sa‘īd to Khurāsān, he said to him, “I advise you to be watchful about three types of people. First, your chamberlain, for he is your face, the personage you use to meet people; if he does good deeds, then you are the good-doer, and if he does evil ones, then you are the evil-doer. Second, he is the chief of police, for he is your whip and sword; wherever he uses them, it is you who does. Third, the officials of honor.” He was asked, “And who are they?” He said, “They are the men you choose from every locality of your province to govern, for if they are right, then that is what you want, and if they make mistakes, then they are the mistaken ones and you are the one who is right.”

### **Ibn Artāh choosing between Iyās and al-Qāsim**

‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz wrote to ‘Adī ibn Artāh, “Bring together Iyās ibn Mu‘āwiya and al-Qāsim ibn Rabī‘a al-Jawshanī, and appoint to the judgeship the sharper of the two.” So he brought them together. Iyās said to him, “O man, ask al-Baṣra’s two jurists, al-Ḥasan and Ibn Sīrīn, about me and about al-Qāsim.” Al-Qāsim used to go to al-Ḥasan and Ibn Sīrīn but Iyās did not, and he knew that if ‘Adī asked them, they would advise him to appoint Iyās. So al-Qāsim said, “Ask neither about me nor about him, for by God, other than whom there is no

god, Iyās ibn Mu‘āwiya is a better jurist than I am and is more informed about judicial matters. If I lie, you should not appoint me; and if I tell the truth, then you should accept what I say.” Iyās said to him, “You have brought a man and placed him on the edge of Hell, and he saved himself from it by a false oath, for which he will seek God’s pardon and be saved from what he fears.” ‘Adī said to him, “Well, since you have understood it, then you deserve it.” And he appointed Iyās judge.

### **Between ‘Adī and Iyās on Qur’ān readers**

‘Adī ibn Arṭāh said to Iyās ibn Mu‘āwiya. “Direct me to Qur’ān readers and I will appoint them officials.” He said to him, “Qur’ān readers are of two kinds: one kind works for the afterlife and not for you; and the other kind works for this world. What do you think they will do if you firmly establish them in it? You should rather approach people from respectable families who are ashamed of dishonoring their noble descent – and appoint *them*.”

### **Abū Qilāba and the judgeship**

Ayyūb al-Sikhtiyānī said, “Abū Qilāba was asked to become judge of al-Baṣra, so he escaped to Syria and lived there for some time, then returned. Ayyūb said, “I said to him, ‘If you had assumed the judgeship and had been just, you would have received two rewards.’ He replied, ‘O Ayyūb, if a swimmer falls into the sea, for how long might he possibly swim?’”

### **‘Abd al-Malik appointing al-Sha‘bī judge of al-Baṣra**

‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān said to the men sitting together with him, “Show me a man whom I can appoint judge.” Rawḥ ibn Zinbā‘ said, “O Commander of the Faithful, I will show you a man who will respond positively if you invite him, and who will not bother you if you leave him alone; he is not persistent in seeking, nor is he assiduous in escaping: ‘Amir al-Sha‘bī.” So ‘Abd al-Malik appointed him judge of al-Baṣra.

### **‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz asks Abū Mijlaz about whom to appoint to rule Khurāsān**

‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz asked Abū Mijlaz for a man he could appoint to rule Khurāsān. He said to him, “What do you think of So-and-So?” He said, “He is affected and is not suitable for it.” He asked, “Then, how about So-and-So?” He said, “He is quickly angered and difficult to please; he asks for too much and withholds what is little; he envies his brother, competes with his father, and scorns his freedman.” He asked, “How about So-and-So, then?” He said, “He rewards the competent, is hostile to the enemies, and does what he likes.” He said, “There is no good in any one of these.”

### ʿUmar and a man seeking a position

ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb wanted to appoint a man to a ruling position, but the man hastened to ask for it. ʿUmar said, “By God, I intended you for it, but one who asks for such a matter is not assisted to have it.”

A man asked the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, to appoint him to a position. He answered, “We do not appoint to a position someone who wants it.”

Al-ʿAbbās, the uncle of the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, asked the Prophet for a ruler’s position. He said, “O uncle, a soul that you can enliven is better than a province whose population you cannot count.”

Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, may God be pleased with him, said to Khālid ibn al-Walīd, “Run away from honor and it will follow you; seek death, and life will be abundantly given to you.”

The Christians say, “No man is elected to the position of Catholicos but one who is not interested in it and does not seek it.”

### Ibn Hubayra appointing Ibn Iyās

Iyās ibn Muʿāwiya said, “Ibn Hubayra sent for me, so I went to him. He was silent with me, so I remained silent. After a long time, he exclaimed, ‘Heh!’ I said, ‘Ask whatever comes to your mind.’ He said, ‘Can you recite the Qurʾān?’ I said, ‘Yes.’ He said, ‘Can you calculate the distributive shares of an estate?’ I said, ‘Yes.’ He asked, ‘Do you know anything about the battle days of the Arabs?’ I said, ‘Yes.’ He asked, ‘Do you know anything about the battle days of the Persians?’ I said, ‘I know them better.’ He said, ‘I would like to seek your help in governing my province.’ I said, ‘I have three traits that disqualify me for province work.’ He asked, ‘What are they?’ I said, ‘I am ugly as you can see, I am ill-tempered, and I am inarticulate.’ He said, ‘As for your ugliness, I do not intend to vie with others over your beauty; as for your inarticulateness, I see that you express yourself well; and as for ill-temper, the whip will set you straight. Rise, I have appointed you.’ And so he appointed me to rule and gave me the sum of one hundred dirhams, which was the first pay I received.”

Al-Aṣmaʿī said, “Sulaymān ibn Ḥabīb al-Muḥārībī was the judge of Damascus during the reigns of ʿAbd al-Malik, al-Walīd, Sulaymān, ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, Yazīd, and Hishām.

ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz wanted to appoint Makḥūl a judge, but the latter declined. He asked him, “What prevents you?” Makḥūl said, “God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, ‘Only a man of honor among his people may be a judge, and I am a freedman.’”

### Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb appointing al-Mughīra to replace Ibn Abī Waqqāṣ in al-Kūfa

When the men of al-Kūfa came to ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb and complained about Saʿd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ, he said, “Who will find an excuse for me among al-Kūfa’s

people? If I appoint a pious man over them, they consider him weak; and if I appoint a strong one, they accuse him of being immoral.” Al-Mughīra said to him, “O Commander of the Faithful: with regard to the pious weak man, his piety is his but his weakness is yours; as for the immoral strong man, his strength is yours but his immorality is his alone.” He said, “You are right. You are the immoral strong man, so go out to them.” He continued to rule them in ‘Umar’s reign, in the early part of ‘Uthmān’s reign, and in Mu‘āwīya’s reign until al-Mughīra died.

### **Good administration and the reign’s well-being**

#### **Al-Ḥajjāj describing his demeanor to al-Walīd**

Al-Walīd ibn ‘Abd al-Malik wrote to al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf commanding him to write him back about his demeanor. So he wrote, “I have awakened my reason and put my emotion to sleep; I have brought close to me the chieftain who is obeyed by his people; I have appointed to the administration the experienced man who is decisive in all matters; I have appointed to the treasury the economizing man because of his honesty; and to every enemy I have divided myself up, giving each a part with a measure of my kind care and attention; I have reserved my sword to the accused wrong-doer and my reward to the innocent good-doer. And so, the suspect feared the compulsion of punishment and the good-doer held on to his share of reward.”

#### **Ardashīr advising his son**

Ardashīr said to his son, “My son, kingship and justice are brothers, neither of which can dispense with the other. Kingship is the foundation and justice is the guardian; for what has no foundation collapses, and what has no guardian is lost. My son, let your conversation be with the people of high rank, and let your gifts go to the people who fight, your joy to the people of religion, and your secret to the intelligent people concerned about what concerns you.”

#### **Wise men on the ruler’s duty**

The wise said, “Among the duties of a ruler is to be just in his seen deeds in order to preserve the well-being of his rule, and to be just in his own conscience in order to preserve the well-being of his religion. If his administration is corrupt, his ruling power is gone. All politics revolves around justice and fairness, and no rule can last without them, be it one of believers or of unbelievers; this is in addition to the organization of state affairs and placing them in their right places. He who rules should let himself be judged by his subjects, and the subjects should let themselves be judged by the ruler. A ruler’s judgment of others should be akin to his judgment of himself, for rights are known only by him who knows

their limits and their correct places. No person can be a ruler unless he was a subject earlier.”

‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān said to his sons, “Each one of you is eligible to this kingship but it is only good for him among you who has an unsheathed sword, readily spent wealth, and justice that can reassure hearts.”

#### **A king describing his own policy**

Describing his policy, a king said, “I do not joke when I promise or threaten, and when I command or forbid. I do not punish on being angered. I appoint the capable, and I reward for good service done and not for emotional reasons. In people’s hearts I strike awe which is unmixed with hatred, and affection which is unmixed with brazen audacity. I make foodstuffs available and I prevent hoarding.”

#### **An Arab bedouin describing a prince**

An Arab bedouin mentioned a prince and said, “When he went away, he never closed his eyes, for he sent spies to keep secret watch on his spies; and so, he was absent from them but present with them: the good-doer was hopeful and the evil-doer was afraid.”

‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, may God be pleased with him, said, “Only the lenient without weakness and the strong without violence are good for this matter [of ruling].”

#### **Good policy between al-Walīd ibn ‘Abd al-Malik and his father**

Al-Walīd ibn ‘Abd al-Malik asked his father, “O father, what is good policy?” He said, “Having the awe of the elite with their true affection, winning the hearts of the common people by being fair to them, and tolerating the mistakes of those charged with public duties.”

#### **Aristotle advising Alexander**

Aristotle wrote to Alexander, “Rule your subjects with beneficence and you will win their affection, seeking of which by beneficence is more enduring than by oppression. And know that you only rule their bodies, so unite their hearts with their bodies by affection. Know also that if the subjects are able to speak, they are able to act too. Therefore do your best so that they do not speak and you will be safe they will not act.”

Ardashīr said to his companions, “I only govern the bodies and not the intentions; I only rule in justice and not in order to please; I only examine the deeds and not the consciences.”

‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ used to say about Mu‘āwiya, “Beware the noblest one of Quraysh, son of its nobles, who laughs when angry, sleeps only satisfied, and gets what is beyond him by the ruse he conceals.”

### **Mu‘āwīya on his own good policy**

Mu‘āwīya said, “I do not use my sword when my whip is sufficient, and I do not use my whip when my tongue is sufficient. If there is only a hair connecting me to the people, it will not be broken.” He was asked, “And how so?” He said, “If they pull at it, I will let go; and if they let go of it, I will pull.”

### **‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ on Mu‘āwīya and his policy**

‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ said, “I saw Mu‘āwīya in one of our battles at Şiffin going out to the field wearing an outfit I had never seen him in before. He stood in the midst of his soldiers, noticing a gap in their right wing and immediately sending those who would fill it, then doing the same with their left wing – a mere look being sufficient rather than a commanding gesture. A sense of pride filled him at what he saw and he said, ‘O Ibn al-‘Āṣ, what do you think of these men and of what they are doing?’ I said, ‘By God, O Commander of the Faithful, I have seen those who govern people by religious and secular means, but I have not seen anyone who was given his subjects’ obedience as you have been by these men.’ He said, ‘Do you know when all this will be undone and in how long it will be demolished?’ I said, ‘No.’ He said, ‘In one day.’ So I was very amazed. He said, ‘Yes, by God, even in part of a day.’ I asked, ‘And how is that so, O Commander of the Faithful?’ He said, ‘If they are lied to in promises and in threats, and if they are rewarded for emotional reasons and not for services done – all that you see will be undone.’”

### **Ibn ‘Abbās advising al-Ḥasan**

‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abbās wrote to al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī when the people chose him to rule them after ‘Alī, may God be pleased with him, “Prepare for war, fight your enemy, pay off the religiously suspect without impairing your own religiosity, and appoint men from the nobility to rule and you will win over their tribes.”

### **Wise men on good policy**

The wise said, “The most politic of rulers is one who steers the bodies of his subjects by their hearts, their hearts by their thoughts, and their thoughts by the causes of desire and fear in them.”

### **Abrawīz advising his son Shīrawayhi**

Abrawīz said to his son Shīrawayhi, “Do not give so lavishly to your soldiers that they will have no need for you, and do not be so stingy with them that they will complain about you for pinching. Give them rather in moderation, restrain them gently, and be liberal toward them in affording them hope but not in bestowing gifts.”

### **Between al-Manṣūr and his generals**

Similar to this is the saying of al-Manṣūr to his generals, “Truly has he spoken who said, ‘Make your dog hungry and it will follow you; fatten it and it will eat you up.’” Abū al-‘Abbās al-Ṭūsī said to him, “O Commander of the Faithful, are you not afraid that if you make it hungry, someone may wave with a loaf to it and the dog will follow him and abandon you?”

### **Abrawīz advising his son Shīrawayhi**

Abrawīz wrote to his son Shīrawayhi from prison, “Know that one word from you can shed blood and another can spare it, that your wrath is an unsheathed sword over the one with whom you are angry, that your satisfaction is an abundant blessing to the one with whom you are satisfied, and that your command is effective as soon as you express it. Therefore, be cautious when angry lest your words be wrong, lest your color change, and lest your body shake. For kings punish with resoluteness, and pardon with clemency. Know also that you are too great for anger and that your kingdom is too small for your satisfaction. Therefore think of a punishment proper for your wrath in the same manner as you think of a reward proper for your satisfaction.”

### **From a speech by Sa‘īd ibn Suwayd**

Sa‘īd ibn Suwayd gave a speech in Homs. He first praised God and lauded Him then he said, “O people, Islam has a well-fortified wall and a secure gate. Islam’s wall is truth and its gate is justice. Islam will remain invincible as long as its ruler is powerful. His power does not result from killing with the sword and lashing with the whip, but from judging in truth and implementing justice.”

### **Ibn al-Ḥakam on a person with a grudge against the ruler**

‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Ḥakam said, “Two men may have a grudge against the ruler: a man who did a good deed along with others who did likewise, and they were rewarded but he was not; and a man who committed an evil act along with others who did likewise, and he was punished but they were pardoned. The ruler ought to beware these two.”

### **Abrawīz advising his son Shīrawayhi**

In *The Book of the Crown*: Abrawīz wrote to his son Shīrawayhi advising him and saying, “Let him whom you choose to serve you be a man who had been low and was elevated by you, or a man of honor who had been neglected and was made a favorite by you. Do not choose a man whom you had punished and who was subjected by the punishment, nor a man who obeyed you after you had humiliated him, or a man about whom you feel that he likes the demise of your rule more than he likes its affirmation. And beware of appointing a weak and

inexperienced man who is self-conceited and little-skilled in knowing others, or an old declining man whose mind has been worn by time as his body has been worn by age.”

### Doing justice and correcting iniquities

#### Al-Maʿmūn doing justice to a woman wronged by his son

Al-Shaybānī said, “Muḥammad ibn Zakariyyā related to us on the authority of ʿAbbās ibn al-Faḍl al-Hāshimī, on the authority of Qaḥṭaba ibn Ḥumayd, and said, ‘I was standing at the head of al-Maʿmūn one day as he sat for judicial appeals. The last person to approach him as he was about to rise was a woman who appeared to have been on a journey and who wore tattered clothes. She stood in front of him and said, “O Commander of the Faithful, peace be upon you, God’s mercy and His blessings.” Al-Maʿmūn looked at Yaḥyā ibn Aktham and Yaḥyā said to her, “And peace be upon you too, handmaid of God. State your need.” She said:

O best man to do justice who is endowed with wisdom,  
 O leader with whose light the country has shone:  
 A widow is complaining to you about a people’s chief  
 Who wronged her and left her without her belongings.  
 He unjustly took property that was securely mine  
 And my relatives and children were separated from me.

Al-Maʿmūn bowed his head in silence for a while, then he raised it and addressed her, saying:

For lesser things than what you said, I lost my patience,  
 And my heart and soul were painfully concerned.  
 But here is the afternoon prayer being called, so go  
 And bring your opponent on the day I appoint.  
 The session will be on Saturday, if we are meant to sit,  
 And I will give you justice – otherwise, in Sunday’s session.

On Sunday, he held a session and the first to come to him was that woman. She said, “O Commander of the Faithful, peace be upon you, God’s mercy, and His blessings.” He said, “And peace be upon you too. Where is your opponent?” She said, “He is the one standing at your head, O Commander of the Faithful.” And she gestured pointing out his son al-ʿAbbās. He said, “O Aḥmad ibn Abi Khālid. Take him by the hand and seat him next to her as an opponent.” Her words were becoming louder than al-ʿAbbās’s, so Aḥmad ibn Abi Khālid said to her, “O handmaid of God, you are in front of the Commander of the Faithful and you are talking to him; so lower your voice.” Al-Maʿmūn said, “Leave her alone, O Aḥmad, for it is truth that made her talk and silenced him.” Then his judgment was that her property be returned to her, and he punished al-ʿAbbās for his

wrong-doing. He ordered that it be written to the governor of her province that her property be exempted from land-tax and that she be given help. He also ordered that a regular wage be paid to her.’”

### **Hishām being sentenced in a lawsuit between him and Ibrāhīm ibn Muḥammad**

Al-ʿUtbi said, “I was sitting with Hishām ibn ‘Abd al-Malik’s judge when Ibrāhīm ibn Muḥammad ibn Ṭalḥa came with Hishām’s chief of guards and they both sat in front of him. He said, ‘The Commander of the Faithful appointed me as an agent regarding a lawsuit between him and Ibrāhīm.’ The judge said, ‘Where are your two witnesses for this appointment as an agent?’ He said, ‘Do you think I am saying what the Commander of the Faithful has not said, when there is no interest between him and me but this tunic?’ He said, ‘Yes, but evidence is needed to prove whether the right is yours or not.’ So the guards’ chief got up, went in to Hishām, and informed him. Shortly afterward, we heard the sounds of doors, the guards’ chief came out, and said, ‘Here is the Commander of the Faithful,’ and Hishām came out. When the judge saw him, he stood up, gestured to him, and spread out for him a prayer rug; so he and Ibrāhīm sat on it in front of him. We were in a position from which we were able to hear some of their words and unable to hear others. They both talked and brought evidence, and the judge judged against Hishām. Ibrāhīm then uttered some rash words and said, ‘Praise be to God who revealed your injustice to the people.’ Hishām said to him, ‘I am about to give you a blow that will separate your flesh from your bones.’ Ibrāhīm said, ‘By God, if you do, you will have done that to an aged man of nearby relatives, to whom right is due.’ Hishām said, ‘Cover it up for me!’ He said, ‘If I do, then God will not cover up my sins on the Day of Resurrection.’ He said, ‘I will give you one hundred thousand for that.’ Ibrahim said, ‘So I covered it up for him during his lifetime for the price that I had taken from him, and I publicized it after his death as an embellishment to his character.’”

### **Al-Ḥajjāj and Sulayk ibn Sulaka**

He said, “Sulayk ibn Sulaka came to al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf and said, ‘May God make the commander prosper: Give me your ear, let your eyes overlook me, and spare me your sword’s blade. If you hear me say anything wrong, make haste to punish me.’ He said, ‘Speak.’ So he said, ‘A man committed a disobedience in the tribe, so my name was crossed out [of the official list] and I was not given my regular wage, and my house was demolished.’ He said, ‘Oh! Have you not heard the verses of the poet, saying:

Your criminal is the one who commits a crime against you  
 But mangy camels may often infect the healthy ones.  
 Many a man may be accused of the crime of his companion,  
 While the one who really committed the crime gets away.’

He said, “May God make the commander prosper: I heard God, may He be exalted and magnified, say something else.’ He asked, ‘And what is it?’ He said, ‘God most high said, “O exalted one, he has a very aged father; so take one of us in his stead – we see that you are one of those who do good.” He said, “God forbid that we should take anyone but him with whom we found our property, for otherwise we would be unjust indeed.”’ [Q. 12:78–79] Al-Ḥajjāj said, ‘Bring me Yazīd ibn Abī Muslim.’ When he came, he said to him, ‘Reinstate this man’s name [on the list] and write that he be paid his regular wage. Build his home for him and order that a towncrier shout: “God spoke truly and the poet lied.”’”

Mu‘āwiya said, “I am ashamed to do injustice to a man who finds no other than God to help him.”

#### ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz advising a governor

‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz wrote to one of his governors suggesting to him to fortify his city. He wrote, “Fortify it with justice, and clear away injustice from its ways.”

#### Al-Mahdī advising Ibn Abī al-Jahm

Al-Mahdī said to al-Rabī‘ ibn Abī al-Jahm when he was governor of the land of Persia, “O Rabī‘: choose truth, abide by moderation, implement justice, be kind to the subjects, and know that the most just is he who gives them justice against himself, and that the most unjust is he who wrongs people for the sake of others.”

#### Between Ibn ‘Āmir and Ibn Aṣḥbagh

Ibn Abī al-Zinād said on the authority of Hishām ibn ‘Urwa, “Ibn ‘Āmir appointed ‘Amr ibn Aṣḥbagh to govern al-Ahwāz. When he deposed him, he asked him, ‘What did you come by?’ He said, ‘I have no more than one hundred dirhams and some clothes.’ He asked him, ‘And why is that so?’ He said, ‘You sent me to a country whose people have two kinds of men: a Muslim man who has the same rights as I have and the same obligations as I have, and a non-Muslim man [*dhimmī*] who enjoys God’s and the Messenger’s protection [*dhimma*]. So by God, I did not know where to fill my hand from.’ So he gave him twenty thousand.”

Ja‘far ibn Yaḥyā said, “Taxes are the pillar of the state. Nothing can make them more abundant than justice and nothing can render them less scant than injustice.”

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, “Injustice is tenebrous darkness on the Day of Resurrection.”

## The prosperity of the subjects

### Depends on the ruler's righteousness

The wise said, "People follow their ruler in good and in evil."

And Abū Ḥāzim al-Aʿraj said, "The ruler is a market. What sells is brought to him."

### ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb and Kisrā's crown and two bracelets

When ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, may God be pleased with him, was brought Kisrā's crown and two bracelets, he said, "He who brought these is an honest man indeed." A man said to him, "O Commander of the Faithful, you are God's honest man and they bring to you what you will bring to God, may He be exalted. So if you fail to do that, they will too."

One of their proverbs on this subject is, "If a fountain is good, its streams are good too."

Al-Aṣmaʿī said, "It is said, 'If two things are good, then the people are good too, and these are: rulers and jurists.'"

### Between Marwān and his agent

Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam was inspecting a plot of land he owned in al-Ghūṭa and he found something wrong with it. He said to his agent, "Woe to you! I think you are cheating me." He said, "Do you *think* that, and you do not seek to ascertain the truth of it?" He asked, "Do you do it?" He said, "Yes, by God. I cheat you, and you cheat the Commander of the Faithful, and the Commander of the Faithful cheats God. May God curse the worst of the three."

## Sayings about the king, his companions, and ministers

### Wise men on the king and the ministers

The wise have said, "The king is useless without his ministers and helpers; and the ministers and helpers are useless without affection and advice; and affection and advice are useless without good opinion and integrity. Furthermore, kings should not leave a beneficent man or an evil-doer without requital, for if they do, the beneficent man will become lax and the evil-doer will become daring; then matters will deteriorate and discretion will be rendered useless."

### Al-Aḥnaf on corrupt retinue

Al-Aḥnaf ibn Qays said, "He whose retinue is corrupt is like one who chokes on water, and he who chokes on water cannot swallow, and he who is betrayed by his confidants is assailed at his most secure point."

Al-ʿAbbās ibn al-Aḥnaf said:

My heart calls me to what harms me,  
 It multiplies my sorrows and my pains.  
 How can I guard against my enemy  
 When my enemy is within my ribs?

Another man said:

In my distress, I used to escape to them.  
 They are now my distress, so whither is my escape?

**A verse by ‘Adī ibn Zayd**

The first one to express this meaning was ‘Adī ibn Zayd on saying to al-Nu‘mān ibn al-Mundhir:

If my throat chokes on other than water,  
 I will sip water to overcome my choking.

Another poet said:

One choking on his saliva drinks water.  
 Say, what will he who chokes on water do?

**Ibn al-‘Āṣ on justice**

‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ said, “There can be no ruler without men, and there can be no men without wealth, and there can be no wealth without civilization, and there can be no civilization without justice.”

And it was said, “The ruler and his companions are like the sea and its waves.”

It was also said, “There is nothing more harmful to a ruler than a companion who speaks well but does not act well, and there can be no good in speech without action, in wealth without generosity, in truthfulness without loyalty, in jurisprudence without piety, in charity without good will, in life without health.”

They said, “If a ruler is good but his ministers are bad, his good will not reach the people and no one will be able to gain any benefit from him. This situation has been likened to a body of pure water in which a crocodile abides: no one can enter it, even if he were in need of it.”

### Description of a just ruler

**Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī’s letter to ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz describing the just ruler**

When ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz assumed the caliphate, he wrote to al-Ḥasan ibn Abī al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī asking him to write to him and describe the just ruler. Al-Ḥasan, may God have mercy on him, wrote:

“Be it known to you, O Commander of the Faithful, that God instituted the just ruler to be the redress of every wrong-doer, the discipline of every unfair person, the correction of every corrupt man, the strength of every weak one, the justice of every wronged being, and the refuge of every frightened individual. The just ruler, O Commander of the Faithful, is like a shepherd who is tender toward his camels and kind to them; he takes them to the best pastures, prevents them from going to dangerous places, defends them against wild beasts, and protects them from the harms of the heat and the cold. The just ruler, O Commander of the Faithful, is like a father who feels compassion for his children, works hard for them when young and teaches them as they grow older, earns for them during his lifetime, and saves for them after his death. The just ruler, O Commander of the Faithful, is like a tender mother who is dutiful and kind to her baby, who bears him and gives him birth unwillingly, who brings him up as a child, staying up at night when he does, and being quiet when he is at rest; she suckles him for a time and then weans him, she rejoices when he is healthy and is saddened when he is in pain. The just ruler, O Commander of the Faithful, is the guardian of orphans and treasurer of the poor, educating the young among them and providing for the older ones. The just ruler, O Commander of the Faithful, is like the heart among the other body organs: they are healthy if the heart is healthy, and sick when the heart is sick. The just ruler, O Commander of the Faithful, is the one who stands between God and his servants; he listens to what God says and conveys it to them, he looks to God and makes them look too; he is led by God and he leads them. Therefore, O Commander of the Faithful, in relation to the realm given to you by God, may He be exalted and magnified, do not be like a servant whose master entrusted him with his wealth and dependents, but who wasted the wealth and drove away the dependents like tramps, thus impoverishing his master’s family and frittering away his wealth.

Be it known to you, O Commander of the Faithful, that God has prescribed punishments to act as deterrents to wicked deeds and vile acts. So if these deeds and acts are committed by those responsible for implementing the punishments, what will happen? God has prescribed punishment as a means to better living for His servants. So if the one who should be doing justice to them kills them, what will happen? And remember death and what follows it, O Commander of the Faithful, when you will have no adherents and no supporters to help you against it; so provide for it and for the great terror that follows it.

Be it known to you, O Commander of the Faithful, that you have a home other than the one you are in now. In it you will abide for a long time. Your loved ones will abandon you and leave you in it all alone. Provide for it that which will remain with you. “On the day when a man flees from his brother, and from his mother and his father, and from his wife and his sons.” [Q. 80:34–36]

Remember, O Commander of the Faithful, “... when what is in the tombs is resurrected, and what is in the breasts is gathered” [Q. 100:9–10], secrets will become manifest, and the Book “... leaves out nothing small or great but has recorded it” [Q. 18:49].

Now, O Commander of the Faithful, while you still have time and before the arrival of the appointed hour of death and loss of hope: do not rule God’s servants as the ignorant do, and do not behave with them as oppressors do, the

way the domineering arrogant ones conduct themselves with those they deem to be weak, for they observe no covenant or compact of protection. Otherwise, you will end up bearing your burdens and other burdens too, and you will carry your loads and other loads too. Do not be deceived by those who enjoy what causes you misery and those who eat good things in this world of theirs, for you will then lose your good things in the Hereafter. Do not look at your power today but look rather at your power tomorrow, when you are captive in the snares of death, standing before God, may He be exalted, and in the presence of the angels, the prophets, and the apostles, when “All faces shall be humbled before the Living, Self-Subsisting One” [Q. 20:111].

O Commander of the Faithful, although I have not achieved in my sermon what earlier men of intellect have, I have not withheld advice and sympathy from you. Consider this letter of mine to you as would a healer who gives his beloved to drink bitter medicine because he hopes for the cure and good health it will bring about. Peace be upon you, O Commander of the Faithful, God’s mercy, and His blessings.

### **The ruler’s awe is in his humility**

#### **ʿĪsā ibn al-Sammāk**

Ibn al-Sammāk said to ʿĪsā ibn Mūsā, “Your humility when you are in a position of honor is greater than your honor itself.”

ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān said, “The most virtuous man is one who is humble when he is in a high rank, who restrains himself when he is powerful, and who is fair when he is strong.”

#### **Words of the Negus when a son was born unto him**

It was related that the Negus, Prince of Abyssinia, was sitting on the floor one morning while wearing the crown. His bishops considered that to be unusual. He said to them, “I have read in what God, may He be exalted, revealed to Christ, peace be upon him, that He said to him, ‘When I bestow a blessing upon my servant and he humbles himself, I will complete it for him.’ A son was born unto me last night, and so I humbled myself because of that, in a gesture of thanks to God, may He be exalted.”

#### **Poets on humility**

Ibn Qutayba said, “No verse of poetry has ever been said that is more beautiful than one said to one of the Umayyad caliphs:

He lowers his gaze bashfully and others lower theirs  
In awe of him; and so he is only spoken to when he smiles.”

More beautiful than this in my opinion is the verse of another:

He is a young man whose power of awe increases his humility;  
And so, every powerful man becomes humble before him.

Abū al-ʿAtāhiya said:

O you who seek honor in this world and its adornments:  
Honor is not to be found in elevating clay by clay.  
If you would like to find the noblest of all people,  
Look then at a king in the clothes of a poor man.  
That, by God, is one whose bliss is great  
And that is one who is good for both world and religion.

Al-Ḥasan ibn Hānī<sup>2</sup> said of a ruler's awe accompanied by his people's affection:

He is a ruler who has awe and affection.  
By my father I would redeem this favored beloved.

Another poet said on awe, though not necessarily the ruler's:

By my soul I would redeem him who, passing his cool fingertip  
On my sick heart, would heal me by his touch;  
Who, in all situations, is awed by me and I by him.  
So he does not give me anything and I do not request.

Ibn Harma said of al-Manṣūr:

When he casts his looks on both sides of the throne,  
There is punishment in them and munificent giving.  
He is a generous man with two faces: one face is smooth  
And tender when he is satisfied, the other is brave in war.  
The mother of him whom you promised safety is safe from death,  
And of him whom you threatened with bereavement is bereft.  
He does not give his pardon without power  
And he pardons when his strength can kill.

Another poet said on awe:

O Hāshim, O young man of both religion and world,  
Who is in the core of my heart.  
I hold you in awe and cannot divulge my innermost thoughts  
And I forgo my blame of you to hear your blame.

Ashjaʿ ibn ʿAmr said regarding awe towards the ruler:

Your awe has prevented people from speaking  
Of things they hate, although they know not.  
Some rulers are honored but not feared  
Even with a double-edged sword dripping with blood.

He also said to Hārūn al-Rashīd:

O cousin of Muḥammad, there are two watchers  
 Observing your enemy: morning light and darkness.  
 When he wakes up, you frighten him; and when he sleeps  
 Dreams will unsheathe your swords on him.

Exaggerating, al-Ḥasan ibn Hānī<sup>2</sup> said:

He is a king whose image is in all hearts.  
 It is as if no place were devoid of him.  
 People's hearts cannot get away from him with a sin  
 Without their furtive side looks speaking to him about it.  
 Even the heart of one in the womb, not yet formed,  
 Throbs in trepidation of him.

The explanation of these exaggerated verses is that, if a man fears or loves anything, he does so with his hearing, his sight, his hair, his skin, his flesh, his blood, and all his organs. Sperm that are in the loins are included in such a category.

A poet said:

Will you not sympathize with a sorrowful person  
 Whose flesh and blood love you?

The blind poet said of Muḥammad's family:

My love for you is so great that only God can reward it,  
 It abides in my inner depths, in my flesh, in my blood.

In a similar verse al-Ḥasan ibn Hānī<sup>2</sup> said:

You frightened the polytheists to the extent that  
 Even uncreated sperm live in fear of you.

For if the polytheists fear him, the sperm in their loins will too, in accordance with the explanation given earlier.

Here is another interpretation: the sperm that made a covenant with God may be said to do what they will inevitably do, before they actually do it; the tradition mentions that God, may He be exalted and magnified, displayed to Adam his descendants and said, "These are the people of Paradise and they will do the acts of the people of Paradise; and these are the people of Hell and they will do the acts of the people of Hell."

**Verses by the author on awe**

And here I say on awe:

O you who, from his insight, unsheathes  
 The sharp sword of determination in events,

You frightened the enemy; whenever you appeared to him,  
 He was scared by you in his dream.  
 Discretion on your part has become a regular happening  
 Like the regularity of the verb following the noun.  
 The jealous envier raised his eyes to you  
 And saw you rising with the stars.

### Verses by al-Akḥṭal on Muʿāwiya

Abū Ḥātim Sahl ibn Muḥammad said, “Al-ʿUtbi recited to me the following verses by al-Akḥṭal on Muʿāwiya:

The eyes rise up to a just ruler  
 With awe, for he can help and he can harm.  
 And when they catch a glimpse of him,  
 They see signs of clemency and of frightful might.

## Good behavior and kindness to the subjects

### Citations from the Qurʾān and tradition

God, may He be exalted, said to His Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, among other things related to being kind to the subjects, “... and if you had been uncouth and hard-hearted, they would have dispersed from around you” [Q. 3:159].

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, “He who is given his share of kindness is given his share of all good; and he who is deprived of his share of kindness is deprived of his share of all good.”

### Sālim and Ibn Kaʿb advising ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz on assuming the caliphate

When ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz became caliph, he sent for Sālim ibn ʿAbd Allāh and Muḥammad ibn Kaʿb and said to them, “Advise me.”

Sālim said to him, “Consider people to be father, brother, and son to you; be reverent to your father, preserve your brother, and have mercy on your son.” Muḥammad ibn Kaʿb said, “Love for people whatever you would love for yourself; likewise hate for them whatever you would hate for yourself; and know that you are not the first caliph who will die.”

### ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz and his son on kindness

ʿAbd al-Malik ibn ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz said to his father ʿUmar, “My dear father, why do you not forcefully execute matters? By God, when I am dealing with truth, I would not care if heated discord would boil between you and me.” ʿUmar said to him, “Do not be hasty, my son. For God, may He be exalted,

condemned wine twice in the Qurʾān before He forbade it the third time; and I am afraid of prompting people to accept truth all at once lest they should reject it and a sedition would ensue.”

#### **From ʿUmar to Ibn Arṭāh on kindness**

ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz wrote to ʿAdī ibn Arṭāh, “Furthermore, if you have power over a creature, remember the Creator’s power over you; and know that the position you have in relation to God is like the position your subjects have in relation to you.”

#### **Part of al-Manṣūr’s advice to his son**

Al-Manṣūr said to his son ʿAbd Allāh al-Mahdī, “Do not conclude a matter until you have pondered about it long and hard; for an intelligent man’s thinking is his mirror that shows him his good and bad qualities. Know too that only piety mends the ways of the caliph, only obedience reforms the ruler, and only justice reforms subjects. The people who most deserve pardon are those most capable of punishing; and the people with the least intelligence are those who wrong the people beneath them.”

#### **Khālīd al-Qasrī’s advice to Bilāl**

Khālīd ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Qasrī said to Bilāl ibn Abi Burda, “Do not let your power make you act with severity and only ask of your subjects what you generously offer them, for ‘Verily, God is with those who are pious and those who do good’ [Q. 16:128].”

Abū ʿAbd Allāh, al-Mahdī’s secretary, said, “How needy the powerful ruler is of a friend who would restrain him, of modesty that would curb him, of intelligence that would control him, and of long experience, perspicacious mind, noble descent, and personal ethics that would facilitate matters to him; how needy he is of a compassionate companion, a kind friend, an eye that foresees consequences, and a heart that fears others. And he who does not recognize the evil of pride is not safe from slips of the tongue, nor does he consider any misdeed reprehensible even when it is, or any praise great even when it is lavish.”

Ardashīr wrote to his subjects, “From Ardashīr, the strongly supported, king of kings, and inheritor of the great to the jurists and theologians who transmit religion, the brave who preserve the homeland, the secretaries who are the embellishment of the kingdom, and the plowmen and farmers who are the mainstay of the country: Peace be upon you and praise be to God who preserves us. By virtue of our kindness, we have relieved our subjects of the taxes imposed on them. Meanwhile, we are writing to you to give advice, so keep it in mind: do not bear a grudge against one another lest the enemy suddenly overwhelm you; do not hoard lest drought befall you; intermarry among relatives, for such

intermarriage is better in preserving blood relationships and confirming descent; do not consider this world anything, for it preserves no one; neither reject it, for it is the only path to the afterlife.”

**Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam’s advice to ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, his son, when he appointed him as ruler of Egypt**

When Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam left Egypt for Syria, he appointed his son ‘Abd al-‘Azīz as ruler of Egypt and said to him as he bade him farewell, “Whenever you send a wise man as messenger, do not advise him. My dear son, take account of your provincial governors: if you owe them any rightful thing in the morning, do not postpone giving it to them till the evening; if you owe them anything in the evening, do not postpone it till the morning. Give them their due on time, and you will earn their obedience. Beware of lying to your subjects; if you do, they will not believe you when you tell the truth. Consult your companions and the learned; if you are not clear about anything, write to me and I will give you my opinion, if God most high wills. If you are angered by any one of your subjects, do not blame him in the heat of your anger and do not punish him until your anger subsides, for then you will act with a calm temper when the embers of your anger are extinguished; the person who first instituted imprisonment was a forbearing and patient man. Furthermore, take account of those of noble descent, religious piety, and magnanimous manliness and let them be your friends and companions; elevate their positions with you above others without undue freedom or restraint. I say all this and leave you in the protection of God.”

**From Mu‘āwiya to Ziyād concerning a man who sought refuge with him**

Abū Bakr ibn Abī Shayba said on the authority of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Mujaḥid on the authority of al-Sha‘bī: Ziyād said, “Mu‘āwiya, the Commander of the Faithful, only once bested me in matters of policy. I employed a man who had embezzled the land tax in his care. He was afraid I would punish him, so he ran to Mu‘āwiya, sought refuge with him, and was promised safety. I wrote to Mu‘āwiya, ‘This conduct is to the detriment of those with me.’ He wrote back to me, ‘We should not treat all people in accordance with a single policy, neither being too lenient lest people rejoice in disobedience, nor too severe lest we endanger people’s lives. Rather you should stand for severity and harshness, and I for compassion and mercy.’”

**The ruler’s manners regarding  
decisiveness and determination**

The wise have said, “The most resolute of kings is one whose seriousness vanquishes his jesting, and whose rational opinion overcomes his passion; he is one for whom thought is a companion to improve consequences for him, one

whose action expresses his conscience. He is someone for whom satisfaction is not a cause for forgetting his wrath, nor anger a cue for failure to use his cunning.”

#### ‘Abd al-Malik’s advice to al-Walīd, his heir apparent

‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān said to al-Walīd, who was his heir apparent, “My dear son, know that there are only two words between a ruler’s control of his subjects and his being controlled by them, and they are: determination and slackness.”

#### On small errors

They said, “A wise man ought not to belittle any mistake or slip, for when he permits a small one he will soon fall into a big one. We have seen kingship being overtaken by a scorned enemy, health being eroded by an insignificant disease, and rivers flooding over from little streams.”

#### On blame by the subjects

They said, “Only one of three men occasions blame of the ruler by the subjects: a noble man whose respectful rank is belittled so that he bears a grudge; a mean man who is ill-treated more than he deserves, thus making him ungrateful; or a man who is denied his share of justice, so that he complains excessively.”

#### Sayings from India on kings

In the book of India is the following, “The best king is one who resembles an eagle surrounded by corpses, not one who resembles corpses surrounded by eagles.”

A king who had been stripped of his monarchy was asked, “How did you lose your monarchy?” He said, “Postponing today’s work till tomorrow, seeking one particular aim by losing many others, and rewarding every man deceived by his own intellect. The man deceived by his own intellect is one who has reached a rank he does not deserve or who has been given a reward he does not merit.”

#### Ibn Abī Ṭālib on opportunities

‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, may God be pleased with him, said, “Seize these opportunities, for they pass like clouds. Do not seek a bygone matter.”

#### About ‘Umar and ‘Ā’isha’s opinion of him

‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, may God be pleased with him, was the most resolute caliph. ‘Ā’isha, may God be pleased with her, used to say when ‘Umar was mentioned, “By God, he was in full control of affairs, and unique in himself; he always had at the ready people who could handle circumstances.”

Al-Mughira ibn Shuḅba said, "I have never seen anyone more resolute than ʿUmar. By God, he had the virtue that would prevent him from deceiving and the brain that would prevent him from being deceived."

And ʿUmar said, "I am no impostor, and no impostor can deceive me."

### ʿUmar and the governor of al-Baḥrayn

ʿUmar passed by a building being built with bricks and gypsum. He asked, "Whose is this?" He was answered, "Your governor of al-Baḥrayn." He said, "Money has insisted on self-display." He then sent for the governor and seized half of his possessions.

### ʿUmar and Ibn Abī Waqqāṣ

Saʿd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ used to be called "the one whose prayer is answered" because the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, "Beware of Saʿd's invocation." So when ʿUmar seized half of his possessions, Saʿd said to him, "I was about to." "To invoke God against me?" ʿUmar asked. "Yes," he replied. To which ʿUmar retorted, "Then, you will not find me unblest by invoking my Lord."

### Ibn Abī Waqqāṣ and a poet who lampooned him

A poet lampooned Saʿd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ at the Battle of al-Qādisiyya and said:

Have you not seen that God gave victory to His religion,  
While Saʿd was clinging safely to the gate of al-Qādisiyya.  
Then we returned, many women having lost their husbands,  
While Saʿd's women had not a single widow among them.

Saʿd said, "God, save me from his hand and spare me his tongue." So the poet's hand was cut off and his tongue was rendered mute.

### ʿUmar, Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī, Abū Hurayra, and al-Ḥārith

When ʿUmar dismissed Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī from the governorship of al-Baṣra and seized half of his possessions, and when he did the same with Abū Hurayra, governor of al-Baḥrayn, and al-Ḥārith ibn Kaḅ ibn Wahb, he summoned Abū Mūsā and said to him, "Who are those two slave-girls that I heard you have, one called ʿAqīla and the other a daughter of kings?" He said, "As for ʿAqīla, she is a slave-girl serving me and the people; as for the one who is a daughter of kings, I had asked a high price for her redemption." ʿUmar asked, "What are those two large bowls at your home for?" He said, "My stipend from you is a sheep every day, and so half of it is cooked for lunch and the other half for supper." ʿUmar asked, "What are those two bushels that I heard you have at your home?" He said, "With one of them I measure for my family and my debtors; as for the other

one, the people use it for their commerce with one another.” ‘Umar said, “Give us ‘Aqīla. By God, you are indeed either a believing man who does not cheat or else a smart immoral one who is clever with words. Go back to your governorship, shamefully twisting your forelock and with your tail between your legs. If I hear anything bad about you again, by God, I will not reappoint you.”

Then he summoned Abū Hurayra and said to him, “Do you know that, when I appointed you to rule al-Baḥrayn, you were barefooted? Now I hear that you have bought horses for one thousand and six hundred dinars.” Abū Hurayra replied, “We had horses that have reproduced and a series of gifts that we have received.” ‘Umar said, “I calculated your stipend and the sustenance that I allowed you. This is excessive, therefore you have to pay it back.” “You do not have the right to that,” Abū Hurayra objected. “Yes, I do and I can hurt your back as well,” said ‘Umar. Then he got up, took a whip to him, and beat him until he bled. “Bring it forth,” ‘Umar ordered. Abū Hurayra said, “I hereby give it away in anticipation of God’s reward.” ‘Umar responded, “That would have been possible if you had taken it from lawful possessions of yours and given it up willingly. Have you come from the farthest corner of al-Baḥrayn to tax people for your own benefit, rather than for God’s and the Muslims’? Umayma only gave birth to you to take donkeys out to pasture.” Umayma was Abū Hurayra’s mother.

In Abū Hurayra’s version of the story, he said, “When ‘Umar dismissed me from the governorship of al-Baḥrayn, he said to me, ‘O enemy of God and of His Book, you have stolen God’s wealth?’ I said, ‘I am not the enemy of God or of His Book, but the enemy of him who is their enemy; and I have not stolen God’s wealth.’ He said, ‘How then did ten thousand [dinars] come into your possession?’ I said, ‘Horses that reproduced, a series of gifts received, and portions obtained consecutively.’ So he took them away from me. When I prayed the morning prayer, I asked the Commander of the Faithful to pardon me. After that he said to me, ‘Would you want to be a governor?’ I said, ‘No.’ He said, ‘One who is better than you was a governor: Joseph, may God’s blessings be on him.’ I said, ‘Joseph is a prophet while I am the son of Umayma. I am afraid my honor will be sullied, my back will be beaten, and my wealth will be taken away from me.’”

Then ‘Umar summoned al-Ḥārith ibn Wahb and said, “What are those young camels and slaves that you sold for two hundred dinars?” He said, “I went out with some expenditure funds and used them to trade.” ‘Umar said, “By God, we have not sent you out to trade, using the wealth of the Muslims. Pay them back.” He said, “By God, after this I will not serve as governor.” ‘Umar said, “Wait and see if I appoint you as a governor!”

### Between ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb and Ibn al-‘Āṣ

‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb wrote to ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ, who was his governor of Egypt, “From the servant of God ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb to ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ. Peace be on you. I have heard that you have an excess of horses, camels, sheep, cows, and

slaves. Having known you earlier, I remember you had no wealth. Therefore, write to me about the source of this wealth without any obfuscation.”

So ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ wrote back, “From ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ to the servant of God ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, Commander of the Faithful. Peace be on you. I praise God, other than whom there is no god. I received the Commander of the Faithful’s letter mentioning the excess of wealth that had accrued to me, while he had known me earlier without any wealth. I hereby inform the Commander of the Faithful that I am in a country where prices are low; I occupy myself with business and agriculture as its inhabitants do. My stipend from the Commander of the Faithful is not sufficient. But by God, even if I thought cheating you was permissible, I would not do so. So, refrain from such accusations, O man. We have an honorable lineage that is better than serving as a governor for you; if we go back to it, we can live well. By my life, you have [wealthy people at your end] who do not complain about their lives and whose way of life is not being criticized. You have mentioned that among the first Emigrants you have some who are better than I am. How can that have happened, when we did not accusingly knock at your door or demand a share of your rule?”

‘Umar wrote back to him, “By God, I am not one like you who writes legendary stories or beautifully arranged words that have no basis. Justifying yourself is of no avail to you. I have sent Muḥammad ibn Maslama to you, so give him half of your wealth. You people of the military command sit on fountains of wealth and find all manner of excuses for yourselves. You amass wealth for your sons and make life easy for yourselves. You are indeed amassing shame and you bequeath hellfire. Peace.”

When Muḥammad ibn Maslama came, ‘Amr made a lot of food for him. Muḥammad ibn Maslama refused to eat anything from it. ‘Amr asked him, “Do you consider our food to be forbidden?” He said, “If you had offered me a guest’s meal, I would have eaten. But you offered me food that is an offering of evil. By God, I will not have a drink of water at your home. Write down then for me everything that is yours, and do not conceal anything.” And so, he took away half of all ‘Amr’s wealth. Only his two sandals remained, so he took one and left him the other. ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ was angry and said, “O Muḥammad ibn Maslama. May God curse the time when ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ was a governor for ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb. By God, I remember al-Khaṭṭāb carrying a bundle of firewood on his head and his son [‘Umar] carrying another, each of them wearing no more than a wool cloak not reaching his wrists. By God, [my father] al-‘Āṣ ibn Wā’il was not content with wearing silk brocaded with gold.”

Muḥammad said to him, “Shut up. By God, ‘Umar is indeed better than you. As for your father and his, they are both in hellfire. If it were not for the time in which he preceded you [by adopting Islam before you], you would have remained sitting by a ewe, whose abundant milk used to make you rejoice and whose little milk used to make you sad.” ‘Amr then said, “It is here for you, take it into the safety of God.” So he did not inform ‘Umar about it.

### **Abū Sufyān on money and “a black stallion”**

From a narrative by Zayd ibn Aslam on the authority of his father. He said, “When Mu‘āwiya was ruling Syria, he sent ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb some money and “a black stallion”. He wrote to his father Abū Sufyān asking him to give them to ‘Umar – by “black stallion” he meant a chain – and he wrote to ‘Umar, “In the fortresses of the Byzantines, I found a group of Muslim captives fettered in iron chains, so I am sending him this one so that the Commander of the Faithful may see it.”

The Arabs before that used to fetter in chains. Jarīr said:

... or to control black stallions.

The messenger left. When he came to Abū Sufyān, he gave him the money and “the black stallion”. Abū Sufyān took “the black stallion” and the letter to ‘Umar but retained the money for himself. When ‘Umar read the letter, he said, “So where is the money, O Abū Sufyān?” He answered, “We had a debt to pay and some help to give; and we have some money due to us from the treasury. So if you will give us some of it, you will settle the accounts with us.” ‘Umar said, “Put him in ‘the black stallion’ until he brings the money.” So Abū Sufyān sent someone who brought him the money, and ‘Umar released him from “the black stallion”. When the messenger came back to Mu‘āwiya, the latter asked him, “Do you think the Commander of the Faithful liked ‘the black stallion?’” He said, “Yes, and he put your father in it.” He asked, “Why?” He said, “He had given him ‘the black stallion’ and retained the money.” He said, “Yes, by God. Even if it had been al-Khaṭṭāb, he would have put him in it!”

### **‘Umar and Abū Sufyān regarding money he tried to conceal**

Abū Sufyān paid a visit to Mu‘āwiya in Syria. When he returned home, he entered into the presence of ‘Umar who said, “Award us, O Abū Sufyān.” He said, “We have not received anything with which to award you.” ‘Umar took off his ring and sent it to Hind with a messenger, saying, “Tell her, ‘Abū Sufyān tells you, “Look for the two saddlebags I brought, and bring them over.”” ‘Umar was soon brought two saddlebags containing ten thousand dirhams, which he put in the treasury. When ‘Uthmān assumed the caliphate, he returned them to Abū Sufyān but the latter said, “I would not take back any money for which ‘Umar had reproved me.”

### **‘Umar and ‘Utba regarding money he found with him**

When ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb appointed ‘Utba ibn Abī Sufyān to rule al-Ṭāʾif and be responsible for its charities, but then deposed him, he met him on the way and found thirty thousand on him. He said, “How did you come by this?” ‘Utba replied, “By God, it does not belong to you or to the Muslims. It is money I have taken out to purchase a plot of land.” ‘Umar said, “We have found money with

our appointed ruler and it has no place to go but the treasury.” Whereupon he took it away. When ‘Uthmān became caliph, he said to ‘Utba, “Do you want this money back? I do not see any reason why Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb took it away.” ‘Utba said, “By God, we need it badly. But do not respond to the actions of someone before you lest someone after you should do the same to you.”

#### **‘Umar and Abū Sufyān regarding a man’s pre-Islamic call**

Al-Qaḥḍhamī said, “‘Umar beat a man with the whip. The man called out, ‘O Quṣayy, help!’ Abū Sufyān said, ‘O son of my brother, if you had called Quṣayy before this day, many noblemen would have come to your help.’ ‘Umar said to him, ‘Shut up, you fatherless man.’ Abū Sufyān said, ‘Ha!’ and put his forefinger on his mouth.”

#### **Yazīd’s letter ordering Marwān to give allegiance**

Khalifa ibn Khayyāṭ said, “Yazīd ibn al-Walid known as the Deficient, so-called because of his excessive perfection, wrote to Marwān ibn Muḥammad, having heard he was tardy in giving him his allegiance, ‘I see that you are shuffling one foot forward and one foot back. On receiving this letter of mine, put your weight on whichever foot you wish, and peace.’ His allegiance soon followed.”

#### **Abū Ghassān and the people of Merv when he was denied water**

When the people of Merv denied Abū Ghassān water and threw him out into the desert, he wrote to them, “To the sons of assholes among the people of Merv: water had better be sent to me by evening or else the cavalry will be sent to you in the morning!” By evening, water was sent to him. He commented, “It is truthfulness that tells who you are, not threats.”

#### **Ibn Ṭāhir’s letter to al-Ḥasan al-Taḡhlibī**

‘Abd Allāh ibn Ṭāhir al-Khurāsānī wrote to al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Umar al-Taḡhlibī, “I heard a lot about what happened concerning the vicious men engaging in highway robbery. You fail to protect the highways, to punish thieves, and to satisfy the subjects – and yet you aspire for a raise! Indeed, you are too hopeful. I swear by God that you will either punish those at your end or else I will send you men who do not distinguish between Murra and Jahm, or ‘Adī and Ruhm. There is no power or strength but by God.”

#### **Al-Ḥajjāj’s letter to Qutayba regarding Wakī‘**

Al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf wrote to Qutayba ibn Muslim, his governor of Khurāsān, “Wakī‘ ibn Ḥassān did whatever he did in al-Baṣra, then he became a thief in Sijistān, and then he went to Khurāsān. When you receive this letter of mine, demolish his house and untie his banner.” Wakī‘ was head of Qutayba’s police,

so the latter deposed him and appointed in his place al-Ḍabbī, the uncle of Masʿūd ibn al-Khaṭṭāb.

### **Al-Ḥajjāj's letter to a group doing evil in the world**

Al-Ḥajjāj heard that a group of bedouins were committing highway robbery. He wrote to them, "You take sedition lightly, neither fighting for a right nor forbidding an evil. I am about to send against you horses that will lay waste both your newly acquired and inherited wealth, making widows of your women, orphans of your sons, and ruins of your homes!" When they received his letter, they desisted from highway robbery.

### **Opposition to rulers and response to it**

The wise said, "He who opposes the ruler is killed by him, and he who grovels to him is overlooked. He is likened to a stormy wind which does no harm to pliant trees and grass that bend with it, but breaks the great tall trees that resist it."

A poet said:

If stormy winds blow, they break  
Arrowwood trees but care not for retem.

Ḥabīb ibn Aws said, and this is the best ever said about the ruler:

He is the flood. If you confront it, you are forced by it;  
But it follows you if you lead it gently by the two sides.

Another poet said:

He is the sword. If you are flexible, its blade is soft;  
But its two sharp edges are rough if you treat it roughly.

### **Between Muʿāwiya and Abū al-Jahm**

Muʿāwiya said to Abū al-Jahm al-ʿAdawī, "Which of us is older, you or I?" He said, "I ate at the wedding feast of your mother, O Commander of the Faithful." Muʿāwiya then asked, "Her wedding to which one of her husbands?" "To Ḥaḥṣ ibn al-Mughīra," Abū Jahm replied. "O Abū al-Jahm," Muʿāwiya commented, "beware of the ruler, for he gets angry like a boy and pounces like a lion."

Abū al-Jahm is the one who said of Muʿāwiya:

We anger him to test his two conditions  
And we find in them generosity and leniency.  
We lean on his sides as though we are  
Leaning on our father, when we lean.

### Mu‘āwiya and ‘Uqayba al-Asadī

‘Uqayba al-Asadī came to Mu‘āwiya and gave him a piece of paper on which the following verses were written:

O Mu‘āwiya, we are human beings, so be kind;  
 We are neither mountains nor are we iron.  
 You ate our land’s produce and denuded it;  
 Is there a thing in it, standing or to be harvested?  
 Do you aspire for immortality if we perish?  
 Immortality is neither ours to have, nor is it yours.  
 We are a people who were lost and have perished,  
 Their prince is Yazīd and Yazīd’s father.

Mu‘āwiya summoned him and said, “What made you so audacious to me?” He said, “I gave you advice when others cheated you; and I told you the truth when they lied to you.” “I think you are right,” Mu‘āwiya said, and gave him everything he needed.

From a narrative by Ziyād on the authority of Mālik ibn Anas. He said, “Giving a sermon, Abū Ja‘far al-Manṣūr praised God and lauded him, then said, ‘O people, fear God.’ A man from the public rose up and said, ‘I remind you of God, of whom you reminded us, O Commander of the Faithful.’ Abū Ja‘far answered without much thought or deliberate reflection, ‘I hear and I obey him who reminds others of God; and may God forbid that I forget Him when reminded of Him, for then I will be overtaken by the pride of sinfulness, “... I am therefore lost and not one of the guided” [Q. 6:56]. As for you, by God, you have not intended God by your remark, but rather so that it may be said, ‘He spoke out, was punished, and remained patient.’ How easy that would be, if it were so. O people, I caution you against similar behaviour; for moral teaching has been revealed to us and it has been learned from us.” Then he returned to the point in his sermon where he was interrupted.

### Al-Rashīd and a man who interrupted his sermon

A man stood up while Hārūn al-Rashīd was preaching in Mecca and said, “It is most hateful in God’s sight that you say what you do not do” [Q. 61:3]. Hārūn ordered that the man be whipped one hundred times. The man moaned all night long and said, “Death! Death!” Hārūn was informed that the man was righteous, so he sent for him. The man asked to be released and Hārūn did so.

### Al-Walīd and a man who interrupted his sermon

Al-Madā’inī said, “Al-Walīd ibn ‘Abd al-Malik sat on the pulpit on Friday until the sun started to decline. A man stood up to him and said, ‘O Commander of the Faithful, time does not wait for you and the Lord will not excuse you.’ He said, ‘You are right. But he who speaks as you do, ought not to stand as you do. Which of the guards is closest? Let him go to this man and cut off his head.’”

### **A man wagering with regard to Muṣāwiya and Ziyād**

Al-Riyāshī said on the authority of al-Aṣmaʿī, “A man wagered with another that he would go to Muṣāwiya as he prostrated himself in prayer, place his hand on his buttocks, and say, ‘Praise be to God, O Commander of the Faithful. How similar is your posterior to that of Hind, your mother!’ So he did that. When Muṣāwiya was thus distracted from his prayer, he said, ‘O my brother’s son, Abū Sufyān was more inclined to her [posterior] than she was to his. Take then what they have allotted you.’ So the man took it.

“Then he wagered that he would go to Ziyād while he preached and say to him, ‘O commander, who is your father?’ So he did, and Ziyād said to him, ‘This man will tell you.’ He pointed to the chief of police, who brought him forth and cut off his head. When Muṣāwiya heard that, he said, ‘I was the one who killed him. If I had disciplined him the first time, he would not have done that a second time.’

“A man wagered that he would go to ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ while he preached and say to him, ‘O commander, who is your mother?’ So he did, and ʿAmr said to him, ‘Al-Nābigha bint ʿAbd Allāh. She was a victim of the spears of the Arabs and was sold at Ukāz. ʿAbd Allāh ibn Judʿān bought her for al-ʿĀṣ ibn Wāʿil, and she gave birth to children who later achieved great distinction. If they have allotted you anything, then take it.’”

### **Between Muṣāwiya and Khuraym**

Khuraym al-Nāʿīm called on Muṣāwiya ibn Abī Sufyān, and Muṣāwiya looked at his legs and said, “What legs! I wish they were a slave-girl’s.” Khuraym said to him, “With buttocks like yours, O Commander of the Faithful!” Muṣāwiya said, “Tit for tat, but the one who starts is a more heinous villain.”

## **The ruler’s forbearance with people of religion and virtue on their being audacious with Him**

### **Abū Jaʿfar with Mālik and Ibn Ṭāwūs**

Ziyād said on the authority of Mālik ibn Anas, “Abū Jaʿfar al-Manṣūr sent for me and Ibn Ṭāwūs, so we came to him and entered his palace. He was sitting on a stack of cushions. In front of him executioners’ leather mats had been spread out. Policemen were holding swords with which they were cutting off heads. He gestured to us to sit down, so we did. He bowed his head in silence for a long time, then he raised it, turned to Ibn Ṭāwūs, and said, ‘Tell me about your father.’ He said, ‘I heard my father say that the Prophet, may God bless him and give him peace, said: “On the Day of Resurrection, the one who will suffer most is a man whom God had given to share rule with Him but who introduced injustice in his judicial administration.”’ Abū Jaʿfar al-Manṣūr fell silent for a while. Then Mālik said, ‘I pulled up my clothes away from his, lest I be splashed

with blood.’ Abū Jaʿfar then turned to him and said, ‘Give me a moral lesson, O Ibn Ṭāwūs.’ He said, ‘Yes, O Commander of the Faithful. God, may He be exalted, said, “Have you not seen how your Lord dealt with ʿĀd, the people of Iram the Many-Columned, the like of which was not created in these lands? And with Thamūd, who hewed out rocks in the valley? And with Pharaoh, who had many pegged-down camps – who transgressed in the cities, and wrought much corruption therein? Your Lord then let fall on them a whip of punishment. Surely, your Lord is on the watch.”’ [Q. 89:6-14] Mālik said, ‘I pulled up my clothes away from his, lest I be splashed with blood.’ Abū Jaʿfar fell silent for a long while, until darkness came between us, then he said, ‘O Ibn Ṭāwūs. Pass me that inkstand.’ He did not respond. Abū Jaʿfar then repeated, ‘Pass me that inkstand.’ He still did not respond. Abū Jaʿfar now asked, ‘What prevents you from giving it to me?’ Ibn Ṭāwūs replied, ‘I am afraid that you will write with it a sin of disobedience to God, and I will therefore be your partner in it.’ When Abū Jaʿfar heard that, he said, ‘Rise and go away from me.’ Ibn Ṭāwūs said, ‘That was what we have been desiring all day.’

“Mālik said, ‘Since then, I have continued to hold Ibn Ṭāwūs in high esteem.’”

### **Abū Hurayra and Marwān when he was late to Friday prayer**

Abū Bakr ibn Abī Shayba said, “Abū Hurayra went to Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam, who was late for the Friday prayer, and said to him, ‘Will you tarry with So-and-So’s daughter to be fanned by her and given cold water to drink while the sons of the Emigrants and the Supporters are being seared by the heat? I was about to do this and that.’ Then he said, ‘Listen to your Commander.’”

### **Between Abū Jaʿfar and Ibn Abū Dhīʿb**

Faraj ibn Sallām said on the authority of Abū Ḥātim, who had heard it from al-ʿAṣmaʿī, “A man from the people of Medina, who lived in the neighborhood of Banū Zurayq, related to me the following, ‘I heard Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm reporting and saying, “I heard Abū Jaʿfar in Medina, while he investigated a dispute between a man from Quraysh and a family of Emigrants in Medina who were not from Quraysh. They said to Abū Jaʿfar, ‘Let Ibn Abī Dhīʿb be an arbiter between us and him.’ Abū Jaʿfar asked Ibn Abī Dhīʿb, ‘What do you think of the sons of So-and-So?’ He said, ‘They are evil ones from a family of evil ones.’ They said, ‘Ask him, O Commander of the Faithful, about al-Ḥasan ibn Zayd,’ who was his governor of Medina. He asked, ‘What do you think of al-Ḥasan ibn Zayd?’ He said, ‘He is motivated by hatred and judges by emotion.’ Al-Ḥasan said, ‘By God, O Commander of the Faithful, if you ask him about yourself, he will cause you a calamity or ascribe evil to you.’ Abū Jaʿfar then asked, ‘What do you think of me?’ He said, ‘Excuse me from answering.’ He said, ‘You must answer.’ He said, ‘You are not just to your subjects, and you do not divide

equally.’ Abū Ja‘far’s face changed color. Ibrāhīm ibn Yaḥyā ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī, governor of Mosul, said, “Let me do my ritual ablution with his blood, O Commander of the Faithful.” He said, ‘Sit down, my son. The blood of a man who witnesses that there is no god but God cannot be used in ablution.’ Then Ibn Abī Dhīḥb resumed speaking and said, ‘O Commander of the Faithful, let us leave what we are talking about. I heard you have a righteous son in Iraq,’ meaning al-Mahdī. He said, ‘Indeed, you have said it. He constantly fasts and prays, and he is of a long line of noble ancestry.’ Ibn Abī Dhīḥb then got up and went out. Abū Ja‘far said, ‘Indeed, by God, his mind is not reliable; he says whatever is in his heart.’” Al-Aṣma‘ī said, “Ibn Abī Dhīḥb is from the tribe of ‘Āmir ibn Luṭayy, he is of a kind with them.”

#### **Al-Maʿmūn and al-Ḥārith ibn Miskīn**

He said: Al-Ḥārith ibn Miskīn called on al-Maʿmūn. The latter asked him about a matter, so he said, “My opinion on it is like Mālik ibn Anas’s expressed to your father Hārūn al-Rashīd.” He proceeded to explain it, but al-Maʿmūn was not pleased. “You are as stupid in it as a billy goat,” he said, “and so was Mālik.” Al-Ḥārith ibn Miskīn said, “Then the one listening is more stupid than both billy goats, O Commander of the Faithful.” Al-Maʿmūn’s face changed color. Al-Ḥārith ibn Miskīn rose and went out. He regretted what he had said. No sooner was he back at home than al-Maʿmūn’s messenger came to him. Al-Ḥārith was sure of dire consequences, put on his shroud, then came to al-Maʿmūn. The latter brought him closer to him, stared at him intently, and said, “O man, God commanded someone better than you to speak gently to someone more evil than I am; for He said to His prophet Moses, may God bless him and give him peace, when He sent him to Pharaoh, ‘And speak to him gently that he might possibly heed or fear.’” [Q. 20:44] Al-Ḥārith said, “O Commander of the Faithful, I admit my offense and seek pardon of the Lord.” He said, “May God pardon you. Go as you wish.”

#### **Al-Manṣūr and Sufyān al-Thawrī**

Abū Ja‘far sent for Sufyān al-Thawrī. When he arrived, Abū Ja‘far said, “Give me a moral lesson, O Abū ‘Abd Allāh.” He said, “Tell me what have you done with what you know so that I may give you a moral lesson on what you do not know?” Al-Manṣūr could not find an answer to give him.

#### **Abū al-Naḍr and a governor of the caliph**

Abū al-Naḍr Sālim, the freedman of ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd Allāh, called on a governor of the caliph. The latter said to him, “O Abū al-Naḍr, we receive messages from the caliph containing this and that, and we have no recourse but to implement them. What do you think should be done?” Abū al-Naḍr said to him, “Before the

messages of the caliph, you received a Message from God, may He be exalted. Whichever message you follow, you are one of its adherents.”

Similar to this statement is what al-Aʿmash related on the authority of al-Shaʿbī: Ziyād wrote to al-Ḥakam ibn ʿAmr al-Ghifārī, who was leading the summer raid, “The Commander of the Faithful Muʿāwiya has written to me with orders to keep the yellow and white for him. So do not divide the gold and silver [of the booty] among the people, but you may divide everything else.” So he wrote back to the Caliph, “Before the message of the Commander of the Faithful, I find directions in the Message of God. I swear by God that if the heavens and the earth were patched together to confine a God-fearing servant, God would surely give him a way out.” Then he called the people and divided among them all the booty in his possession.

### **Ibn Hubayra, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and al-Shaʿbī**

Similar to this is al-Ḥasan’s story when Ibn Hubayra sent for him and for al-Shaʿbī, and he said to the former, “Abū Saʿīd, what do you think we should do with letters that come to us from Yazīd ibn ʿAbd al-Malik, with their controversial contents? If I implement them, they incur the wrath of God; but if I do not implement them, I fear for my life.” “Here,” al-Ḥasan said to him, “you have with you al-Shaʿbī, the jurist of al-Ḥijāz.” So he asked him. Al-Shaʿbī made light of the matter. “Implement as much as possible and make adjustments,” he replied. “You are only a servant who takes orders.” Then Ibn Hubayra turned to al-Ḥasan and asked, “What do you think, Abū Saʿīd?” “O Ibn Hubayra,” he replied, “fear God when obeying the commands of Yazīd and do not fear Yazīd when obeying the commands of God. O Ibn Hubayra, God will protect you from Yazīd, but Yazīd cannot protect you from God. O Ibn Hubayra, no creature should be obeyed who commands the disobedience of the Creator. Look then at what Yazīd wrote to you, and compare it with the Book of God, may He be exalted. What agrees with the Book of God, may He be exalted, you may implement; and what disagrees with the Book of God, you should not implement. God should have for you a priority over Yazīd, and the Book of God should have for you a priority over his letters.” Ibn Hubayra patted al-Ḥasan on the shoulder. “This old man has told me the truth. By the Lord of al-Kaʿba,” he said. He then he ordered al-Ḥasan to be given four thousand [dirhams], and al-Shaʿbī two thousand. Al-Shaʿbī said, “We made light of the matter for him, now he has made light of the reward for us.” Al-Ḥasan sent for the poor; when they came, he distributed the money to them. Al-Shaʿbī accepted the money and gave thanks for it.

### **Muʿāwiya and al-Aḥnaf on seeking the caliphate for Yazīd**

Similar to this is what al-Aḥnaf ibn Qays said to Muʿāwiya when consulted regarding Muʿāwiya’s seeking the caliphate for Yazīd. He was silent, so he was

asked, “Why do you not speak?” He said, “If we tell you the truth, we incur your wrath; and if we lie to you, we incur God’s wrath. The wrath of the Commander of the Faithful is easier for us than God’s wrath.” He said to him, “You have spoken the truth.”

#### **The letter of Abū al-Dardā’ to Mu‘āwiya**

Abū al-Dardā’ wrote to Mu‘āwiya, “He who seeks God’s pleasure by angering the people, God will save him the trouble of the people; and he who seeks the people’s pleasure by angering God, God will entrust him to the people.”

#### **‘Ā’isha’s letter to Mu‘āwiya**

‘Ā’isha, may God be pleased with her, wrote to Mu‘āwiya, “He whose actions incur God’s wrath will be blamed by those who previously praised him.”

#### **Hishām and an adviser who advises him of four things**

Abū al-Ḥasan al-Madā’inī said: Al-Zuhrī left Hishām’s palace one day with four advice items. He was asked, “What are they?” He said, “A man called on Hishām and said, ‘O Commander of the Faithful, remember from me four items of advice in which lies the well-being of your kingdom and the good of your subjects.’ ‘Tell me,’ Hishām ordered. He said, ‘Do not ever promise what you are not confident of fulfilling.’ ‘This is one,’ Hishām said, ‘now give me the second.’ He said, ‘Let not the ascent deceive you, even if it is easy, when the descent is a difficult rocky terrain.’ ‘Now the third,’ Hishām said. He said, ‘Know that actions have a requital, so beware of consequences.’ ‘And now the fourth.’ He said, ‘Know that matters have unexpected sudden turns, so be cautious.’”

Mu‘āwiya sat in al-Kūfa giving people declarations of his innocence regarding the death of ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, may God be pleased with him. A man said to him, “O Commander of the Faithful, we obey the living among you [Umayyads] but we do not declare ourselves innocent of your dead.” Mu‘āwiya turned to al-Mughira and said to him, “This is a man, take good care of him.”

#### **‘Abd al-Malik and al-Ḥārith on Ibn al-Zubayr**

‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān said to al-Ḥārith ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Abī Rabī‘a, “What did the liar say about such and such?” meaning Ibn al-Zubayr. He answered, “He was not a liar.” Al-Ḥakam ibn Yaḥyā said to him, “Who is your mother, O Ḥārī(th)?” He said, “She is the one who knows.” ‘Abd al-Malik said to him, “Shut up, for she is more honorable than your mother.”

#### **Al-Walīd ibn ‘Abd al-Malik and al-Zuhrī**

Al-Zuhrī called on al-Walīd ibn ‘Abd al-Malik, and the latter asked him, “What is this story that the people of Syria are relating to us?” He said, “And what is it,

O Commander of the Faithful?" Al-Walid said, "They say that if God favors a servant, He records his good deeds but not his bad ones." He said, "That is false, O Commander of the Faithful. Is a caliph who is a prophet more honorable in God's sight than a caliph who is not a prophet?" He said, "Rather, a caliph who is a prophet." He said, "God says to His prophet David, 'O David, We have made you a vicegerent [caliph] in the earth; so judge among people in justice and do not follow passion lest it should lead you astray from the way of God. Verily, those who go astray from the way of God have a severe punishment because they forgot the Day of Reckoning' [Q. 38:26]. This is a threat to a caliph who is a prophet, O Commander of the Faithful. So what do you think of a caliph who is not a prophet?" He said, "People do, indeed, tempt us away from our religion."

### **Between Ibn Yasār and ʿAbd al-Malik**

Al-Aṣmaʿī said on the authority of Ishāq ibn Yaḥyā, who heard it from ʿAṭāʾ ibn Yasār, who said, "I said to al-Walid ibn ʿAbd al-Malik, ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb said: 'I wish I would be quits when I leave this office, owing nothing and being owed nothing.'" He said, 'You lie.' I said, 'Am I accused of lying?' Only with great difficulty could I extricate myself from him."

### **Consultation**

The Prophet, may God bless him and give him peace, said, "He who consults others shall never regret it, while he who seeks proper guidance from others shall never be unhappy."

### **From the Speech of God**

God, may He be exalted, commanded His Prophet, blessing and peace be upon him, to consult those who were less wise than he was and said, "... and consult them in the matter, and when you are determined, then put your trust in God." [Q. 3:159]

### **ʿUthmān and Thaḳīf when they were about to apostatize**

When the tribe of Thaḳīf were about to apostatize after the death of the Prophet, may God bless him and give him peace, they consulted ʿUthmān ibn Abī al-ʿĀṣī, who commanded obedience among them. He said, "Do not be the last Arabs to adopt Islam and the first to apostatize." And God made them benefit from his opinion.

### **A wise man on what benefits and what harms**

A wise man was asked, "What things are of greatest help to a young man and what things are of greatest harm?" He said, "Three things are of greatest help to

him: consulting the learned, life experience, and careful verification. Three things are of greatest harm to him: tyranny, laziness, and haste.”

### **Between two wise men**

A wise man gave advice to another wise man, who accepted it and said to him, “You have said what a compassionate adviser should say, mixing sweet and bitter words, easy and difficult ones; your kindness manages to motivate what is otherwise quiet. I have understood your advice and accepted it, for its source has been one whose love, sincerity, and truthfulness are not in doubt. May you remain, God be praised, a clear way to good and a shining beacon.”

### **Al-Rāsī on hasty advice**

‘Abd Allāh ibn Wahb al-Rāsī used to say, “Beware of unleavened, hasty advice.” He used to seek God’s protection from leavened advice given after a lost opportunity.

### **‘Alī on an old man’s advice**

‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, may God be pleased with him, used to say, “The advice of an old man is more beautiful than the sight of a handsome lad.”

### **Ibn Hubayra advising his son**

Ibn Hubayra advised his son. “Do not be the first one to give advice,” he said. “Beware of passion and a hasty advice. Do not give advice to a despot, a scoundrel, a fickle man, or an insistent one. Fear God by not giving partial advice that agrees with the desire of the one asking for it; seeking his agreement is mean and listening to him is betrayal.”

### **A saying by ‘Āmir ibn al-Zarīb**

‘Āmir ibn al-Zarīb, the wise man of the Arabs, used to say, “Let your advice take time until it ferments, and beware of an unleavened advice.” He meant unhurried, patient deliberateness in giving advice and ascertainment in doing so.

And among Arab proverbs in this context is one that says, “One who is not obeyed has no say.”

### **A saying by al-Muhallab on advice**

Al-Muhallab used to say, “It is unfortunate that the final say is in the hands of one who owns it, and not the one who thinks it.”

**A saying by an 'Absī man on resoluteness**

Al-'Utbi said, "A man from the tribe of 'Abs was told, 'How often you are right!' He said, 'We are one thousand men and there is one man among us who is resolute. We consult him and so it is as though we were one thousand resolute men.'"

A poet said:

One's opinion is like night with dark sides,  
 And night is dispelled only by morning light.  
 So join the lamps of other men's opinions to yours  
 And you will obtain increased light from all the lamps.

**'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abd al-A'ālā after the caliph became angry with him**

Al-'Utbi said: Someone who saw 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abd al-A'ālā being the first to call on the caliph and the last to leave his palace told me, "Then I saw him being avoided like a mangy camel. He said to me, 'O brother of Iraq, people have accused us regarding our innermost secret and have refused to accept our frankness. However, behind them and us is a just arbiter.'"

**A saying of Subay' on the people of al-Yamāma**

One of the best things said about an advised person who refuses to accept the advice is the saying of Subay' to the people of al-Yamāma after Khālid defeated them, "O Banū Ḥanīfa," he said, "woe to you as woe was to 'Ād and Thamūd! By God, I had informed you of the event before it happened; it was as though I could hear its sound and see it though yet unseen. But you refused my advice, so you reaped regret. When I saw you accusing the adviser and decrying the forbearing sage, I felt desperate and feared a calamity might befall you. By God, God did not deny you repentance, nor did He take you unawares; He granted you a respite until the preacher was bored and the preached to became weary. Meanwhile, you acted as if others were intended, not you. The result is that you now believe what you disbelieved, you regret not heeding my advice, and I lament your destruction and fear your humiliation. What happened cannot be restored and what remains now is not safe for you."

Al-Qaṭāmi said regarding this idea:

Disobeying the one who sympathizes with you  
 Increases your interest in listening to him again.  
 The best thing to do is to heed what he says  
 And not to follow it to the letter.  
 That is best, but I see people  
 Hurrying to follow their deceiver.  
 You see them criticizing those they consider weak  
 And avoiding those who would fight with the sword.

It used to be said, “Do not consult a teacher, a weaver, a shepherd, or one who often sits with women.”

On teachers, it was said in verse:

How do you expect to find reason and advice with one who  
Goes to a child in the morning and a woman in the evening?

It used to be said, “Do not consult a person who has a need that he wants to satisfy.”

It also used to be said, “No say is allowed an enema giver, a man wearing tight shoes, or one who has noises in his belly.”

The following is said in verse about ignored advice:

The indecisive person loses his opportunity;  
When his chance is gone, he blames destiny.

### *Poetry by the author*

Among what we have said on this idea is the following:

If you listen to my advice and disobey it,  
I am not the first adviser who is disobeyed.

When Mālik ibn Ṭawq defeated the Banū Taghlib, Ḥabīb said about them:

Mālik spared no pains in pardoning and forgiving you,  
If only the tribe’s smith were blowing on live coal.

### **Keeping secrets**

Wise men have said, “Your own breast is safer for your secret than the breast of others.”

They also said, “Your secret is part of your blood.” They meant that, in divulging it, your blood might perhaps be spilled.

ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān wrote to al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf:

Do not divulge your secret save to yourself,  
For every advising confidant has a confidant.  
And I found that men who dabble  
Leave nobody’s skin unscathed.

Wise men have also said, “Whatever [secret] you keep from your enemy, do not inform your friend of it.”

ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ said, “I never blamed a man to whom I entrusted a secret that he divulged, for when I entrusted it to him I was more eager to give it away than he was when he divulged it.”

A poet said:

If a man's breast is too narrow to keep his secret,  
The breast of the one entrusted with it is narrower.

### A saying by a bedouin Arab

A bedouin Arab was asked, "How well do you keep a secret?" He said, "I disavow the informant and I swear to the one seeking information."

Another was asked, "How well do you keep a secret?" He said, "My heart is only a tomb for it."

Al-Ma'mūn said, "Kings tolerate all but three things: vilifying kings, divulging secrets, and meddling in women's affairs."

Al-Walid ibn 'Utba said to his father, "The Commander of the Faithful entrusted me with a secret. Shall I tell it to you?" He said, "No, my son. He who keeps a secret retains the choice but he who divulges it gives up the choice to others. So do not be an owned slave after having been an owner."

### A king of the Persians consulting his two viziers

In *The Crown*, there is a report that a king of the Persians once consulted his two viziers. One of them said, "The king ought to consult in private only one of us alone, for this is better for keeping secrets, conducive to more determined advice, likely to be safer, and more liable to prevent the one from doing evil to the other. Divulging a secret to one man is more confidential than divulging it to two; and divulging it to three is like divulging it to a large group. For if only one man knows it, he is bound by what is entrusted to him; if two men know it, the second is freed from that bond; and the third is even freer. If only one man knows it, it is more likely that he will not divulge it whether out of desire or fear. But if two know it, the king has suspicions, and the two men are widely open to interventions. If he punishes the two, he will be punishing two for the offense of one of them; if he accuses both, he will be accusing an innocent man for the criminal betrayal of another; and if he pardons both, he will be pardoning one of them who has not committed an offense and the other without having evidence."

### 'Umar ibn Abī Rabi'ā on secrets

Among the best statements made by poets about secrets is the saying of 'Umar ibn Abī Rabi'ā:

Letting down the curtain, she said, "Speak  
Only to me, for my family are not watching."  
I said, "I know I am not being watched by them  
But no one can keep my secret better than I."

Abū Mihjan al-Thaqafi said:

Do not ask people about my wealth and its abundance  
 But ask people about my courage and character.  
 I stab and cause a gaping wound with nonchalance  
 But I keep a secret for which my head can be cut off.

Al-Ḥuṭayʿa said, lampooning:

Are you a sieve, if entrusted with a secret,  
 And a brazier, when attacking detractors?

### Permission

#### Between Ziyād and his chamberlain

Ziyād said to ʿAjlān, his chamberlain, “By what priorities do you permit people [to have audience with me]?” He said, “By family rank, then by age, and then by good manners.” Ziyād asked, “And whom do you hold back?” He answered, “Those whom God does not care for.” Ziyād asked, “And who are they?” ʿAjlān said, “Those who wear winter clothing in summer, and summer clothing in winter.”

#### Saʿīd ibn ʿUtba on being far from the one who permits

When Saʿīd ibn ʿUtba presented himself at the door of a ruler, he used to sit on the far side. Someone said to him, “You do your best to be far from the one who permits people to enter.” He said, “To be called from afar is better than to be dismissed from close up.” Then he said:

I journey widely in the country, my campsite being  
 The farthest one if I am not invited to be near.  
 Even if I am ever invited to be near, I do not sell  
 My share of good qualities or religion to endear myself.  
 Some people consider endearment to be a profitable trade,  
 But my religion and my rank prevent me from that.

Another poet said:

I see some people rush to be ahead of one another  
 When the doorman opens the door a crack.  
 As for us, we remain quietly sitting with dignity  
 And patience until the door is widely opened.

#### Between Muʿāwiya and Ibn al-Ashʿath on having audience with kings

Al-Aḥnaf ibn Qays and Muḥammad ibn al-Ashʿath stood at the door of Muʿāwiya. Muʿāwiya permitted al-Aḥnaf to enter first, then ibn al-Ashʿath. The latter quickened his steps to be ahead of al-Aḥnaf, and entered before him. When

Muḥāwiya saw him, he was distressed and angered by that. He turned to al-Aḥnaf and said, “By God, I did not permit him to enter before you; rather I wanted you to enter before him. But just as we are rulers of your affairs, so are we arbiters of your good manners. No one increases his steps to be ahead unless he feels a deficiency in himself.”

Humām al-Raqqāshi said:

On my behalf, tell Abū Mismaʿ of a deep pain I feel,  
 For there is better life in mutual reproof among people:  
 You made other men precede me who have  
 No right to enter doors before me.  
 If people were considered one by one, I would be  
 The nearest in relation and the farthest in blame  
 To the extent that, if a need arose for resort  
 To your palace door, I would ask them to intercede.

### **Muḥāwiya on his chamberlain**

It was said to Muḥāwiya, “Your chamberlain gives precedence to his acquaintances and permits them in before the notables.” He replied, “What is wrong with that? Acquaintance is useful even with a mordacious dog and a rapacious camel; how much more it is with an honorable man of generosity and religion.”

### **Wise men on reaching one’s goal**

Wise men have said, “No one who persistently waits at a ruler’s door, shedding his pride, tolerating rudeness, and suppressing anger can fail to reach his goal.”

They have also said, “He who constantly knocks at a door will soon have it opened for him.”

A poet said:

How many a young man unable to earn his livelihood  
 Have I later found to be abundantly provided for.  
 If all paths are closed in one’s affairs  
 Patience will open up all that was locked.  
 Do not despair of relief, long as it may take,  
 If you make patience your helping companion.  
 How worthy a patient man is to achieve his goal  
 And one who constantly knocks at the doors to enter!

### **Between a man and Rawḥ**

A man saw Rawḥ ibn Ḥātīm standing in the sun at al-Manṣūr’s door, so he said to him, “You have stood in the sun for quite a long time.” He replied, “That is in order that my sitting in the shade may be for a long time too.”

### Between a man and al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd

Another man noticed al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd jostling other people at the door of Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān, so he said to him, “Imagine! Someone like you accepting to behave like that!” He replied:

I humiliate myself to them  
in order to honor myself through them.  
For no man who does not humiliate himself  
will be able to honor himself.

### Sayings from India

In a book from India, there is the following: The ruler does not draw people near because of their fathers’ nearness, nor does he drive them far away because of their fathers’ distance; he rather looks at what every man among them possesses and draws near to him the far one if he is beneficial, and drives away the near one if he is harmful. This is likened to a rat driven away to a neighboring house because of the harm it does, and to a falcon acquired and kept because of its benefits despite its wild nature.

### Between the Prophet and a man seeking permission to enter

When the Prophet, may God bless him and give him peace, was at someone’s home, a man sought his permission to enter, saying, “May I enter?” The Prophet, may God bless him and give him peace, said to his servant, “Go out to this man and instruct him how to seek permission. Tell him that he should say, ‘Peace be to you, may I enter?’”

The Prophet, may God bless him and give him peace, also said, “Seek permission three times. If you are permitted, enter; otherwise, go back.”

‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, may God be pleased with him, said, “The first time is for permission, the second is for deliberation, and the third is for resolution: they either give him permission, or else he should go back.”

### Chamberlains

#### *Ziyād and his chamberlain*

Ziyād said to his chamberlain, “O ‘Ajlān, I have appointed you my chamberlain and discharged you of four duties: first, the one who calls to God in prayer and prosperity, do not prevent him from entering for you have no power over him; second, the night visitor, do not prevent him from entering, for what he brings is bad news because if it were good, he would not have brought it at that late hour; third, the messenger from the borders with the enemy, for if he were one hour late, he would spoil one year’s work, so let him in even if I am in bed; and fourth, the food servant, for food goes bad if it is reheated.”

Abū Sufyān stood at the door of ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān, having been prevented from entering because ʿUthmān was busy with some affairs of the Muslims. A man who wanted to annoy him said, “O Abū Sufyān, I do not think that you should have to stand at the door of a Muḍarī man [like you] who prevents you from entering.” Abū Sufyān said, “May I never be deprived of someone among my people at whose door I stand and he prevents me from entering.”

*Abū al-Dardāʾ at Muʿāwiya's door*

Abū al-Dardāʾ sought permission to see Muʿāwiya but was not permitted to enter. He said, “He who frequents the doors of kings has to stand and sit; whenever he finds a closed door, he finds an open one next to it; if he calls, he will be answered and if he asks, he will be given.”

Maḥmūd al-Warrāq said:

Kings have built their palaces and protected themselves  
 From every needy seeker or desirous supplicant.  
 They exaggerate by having iron doors, considered strong,  
 And are excessive by choosing an ugly-faced chamberlain.  
 If by subtle means a hopeful man does enter to see them,  
 They greet him with false promises.  
 Seek therefore the king of kings and do not be  
 Obvious in your entreaty, a seeker who begs a seeker.

*Between Saʿīd ibn Muslim and Abū Hiffān*

Saʿīd ibn Muslim said, “I was governor of Armenia and Abū Hiffān stayed waiting at my door for several days. When he finally reached me, he presented himself to me standing between the two rows of soldiers and said, ‘By God, I know some people who, if they knew that eating earth would keep them alive, would rather eat it to preserve their breath of life than abide in a life of penury. Indeed, by God, I am ambitious and slow to be deflected [from my aims]; and, by God, nothing turns me away from you but what drives you away from me. I would surely prefer being poor and in good favor to being rich and ostracized. By God, we do not ask for a job that we cannot do well, nor do we ask for money that we do not own in abundance. This power that has devolved on you and that you now possess was earlier in the hands of others. By God, they have become a mere story; if they did good, then it is a good story; if they did evil, then it is a bad one. Ingratiate yourself then with God’s servants by being pleasant, gentle, and easily accessible through your chamberlain. The love of God’s servants is related to loving God, while hating them is related to hating Him. They are God’s witnesses against His creatures, and they are His watchful observers, surveying those whose path has become crooked.’”

*Between Abū Mus-hir and Ibn ʿAbda-Kān*

Abū Mus-hir said, "I came to see Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbda-Kān but was prevented from entering. So I wrote to him:

I came to greet you yesterday but  
 Curtains and screens did not permit me.  
 I knew that I was not turned down but,  
 By God, only learning and literature were.

Ibn ʿAbda-Kān replied, saying:

If you requited by fair means, you would have said  
 As Ibn Aws had said with seemly refinement:  
 "A screen does not make my hope in you farther;  
 For the sky is propitious when it is screened."

*Ibn Maṣṣūr and a man of his retinue not permitted to enter*

A man of Muḥammad ibn Maṣṣūr's retinue stood at ibn Maṣṣūr's door and was not permitted to enter, so he wrote to him:

At what other door should I stand to seek permission  
 After I was denied entry at the door that I guard?

Abū al-ʿAtāhiya stood at the door of one of the Hāshimites and asked permission to be let in. He was told to come back another time, so he said:

If I return another day, I will be unjust, for  
 I will go away to where generous deeds are sought.  
 When can one, coming to you in the morning, obtain a need  
 While half of you is screened and half is asleep?

Similar to this idea is al-ʿAttābī's, where he said:

We have come to you several times to greet you  
 Without considering our visit to you to be a favor.  
 And lo and behold, your concealment from us  
 At night is like ours from you in the daytime.

*Abū Dulaf and a man not permitted to see him*

A man stood at the door of Abū Dulaf and stayed there for a while, unable to reach him. Seeking a subtle means, he ascertained that a note got to him, in which he wrote:

If a generous man has a screen,  
 What is his virtue over a mean man?

Abū Dulaf answered:

If a generous man has little wealth  
 And is not excused, he uses the screen as a pretext.  
 Kings' doors are screened; and so  
 Do not consider unthinkable my door's chamberlains.

Ḥabīb al-Ṭāʿī said about chamberlain screening:

I will leave this door so long as its permission  
 Is as strict as I see, until it is a little lenient.  
 One not coming to it purposely is not disappointed then,  
 And one successfully entering it is not triumphant.  
 May our livelihood not be in the hands of a man  
 Who protects his door from being entered.  
 If we find you have no place for permission,  
 We will find a way to abandon coming to you.

Abū Bakr al-ʿAṭṭār recited in verse:

What is the matter with you, having abandoned loyalty  
 And exchanged it for a turbid quality, O ʿAmr?  
 You have no hope in a Day of Reckoning,  
 Nor in a Day when the heavens will be split.  
 My face was earlier definitely known to you  
 But today it has become an indefinite unknown.

Another poet said:

I came to greet you, not because I am a man who,  
 By coming to you, wanted to receive a gift from you;  
 And I found a doorman at your door who is enamored  
 Of destroying the virtues that you firmly established.  
 Some people said, "A man's chamberlain guards his honor."  
 Beware then of your guardian's disloyalty.

Al-Ḥasan ibn Hānīʿ said:

O mounted man, hurrying to al-Faḍl,  
 Slow down, for there is a screen before reaching him.  
 And suppose your reach al-Faḍl:  
 Will there be anything but earth in your hands?

Another poet – Maḥmūd al-Baghdādī – said:

Your being awesomely concealed is difficult  
 And your beneficence in my hands has become little.  
 Leaving you, I was the same as when I came to you  
 Except for a lot of dust that collected on my shoes.

Al-ʿAṭṭābī said:

Your concealment resembles no other concealment  
 And your beneficence is way beyond the clouds.  
 Your sleep is like the sleep of the dead  
 Who have no return to this world.

Another poet said:

Since morning, I have been waiting at the door  
 Sitting on my saddle and holding my rein.  
 The doorman sees me fully well  
 But looks at me as though he does not see me.

Another said:

When we come to see him about a need  
 We raise notes to him fixed on reeds.  
 He has a chamberlain, before whom there is another,  
 And there is a third one, whose chamberlain is concealed.

*Between Abū Bashīr and one of the army secretaries*

Abū Bashīr said, "One of the army secretaries denied me entry, so I wrote to him, 'He who is not elevated by permission to enter is not lowered by being denied entry. I consider you to be higher than this situation, and I do not wish this quality to be yours. Anyone in your position, however great or small, who tries to conceal the Caliph can do it; but think of this situation and look at it with understanding, and you will find it to be the ugliest image and the meanest position.'"

*Verses by Ibn 'Abd Rabbih*

On this subject I said:

If you come to a person in order to honor him  
 And he ignores your act, then it is better to abandon him.  
 Seeking alternate people and turning your back brings comfort.  
 Other people will give you sufficiency, if one is unsuited.  
 A man who accepts humiliation for himself  
 Deserves to have his lofty nose cut off.

Another poet said:

O Abū Mūsā, you are a young man  
 Of ambition and good qualities.  
 Be on the path of knowledge:  
 A man's face is his chamberlain  
 For in it appear his virtues  
 And in it too appear his faults.

Ḥusayn al-Jamal came early to Sulaymān ibn Wahb's door. He was denied entry by the chamberlain, who admitted Ibn Sa'wa and Ḥamdawayhi. Whereupon Ḥusayn said:

By my life! If we were denied seeing the Shaykh,  
 We were not denied seeing a noble face there.  
 No, nor were we denied his measly food,  
 Around which his sons slap one another.  
 We were rather spared ignominy and falsehood,  
 And all that glitter and affectation.  
 May God reward an uncouth chamberlain of yours  
 On our behalf with every good, when He rewards him.  
 Ibn Sa'wa's entry without me pleased me  
 And so did Ḥamdawayhi's following it.  
 Those ugly faces on that morning  
 Would have killed me with their meanness.

Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Baghdādī said the following verses about al-Ḥasan ibn Wahb, the secretary:

A man estranged from al-Ḥasan ibn Wahb  
 And from his "generosity" and "honor"  
 Came to me seeking information on him,  
 So I said to him, "You have come to an expert.  
 He is a refined man, except that I see  
 That he often lowers his concealing curtains.  
 And most of what his young man sings to him  
 When he retires privately for pleasure is:  
 'If it were not for the wind, the people of Ḥajr  
 Would hear the clash of testicles hit by penises.'"

Some of what we said on this topic is the following:

Why is your door guarded by a doorman  
 Who protects it from night guests and visitors?  
 Your hated face cannot be concealed from anyone,  
 For hatred alone conceals it without chamberlains.  
 Dismiss from the door the one guarding it,  
 For your face is a forbidding talisman there.

Ḥabīb al-Ṭā'ī stood at the door of Mālīk ibn Ṭawq and was denied entry, so he wrote to him:

Say to Ibn Ṭawq, who is the millstone of Sa'd when  
 The upper disasters of Time hit the lower ones:  
 "You have become the tribe's Ḥātīm in generosity, its Aḥnaf  
 In clemency, and its Kayyis and Daghfal in learning.  
 Why am I locked out of the white dome?"

Long have I unlocked its locked doors.  
 It appears to me like the garden of Paradise  
 And I have no justifying good deed to enter it.

### A chapter on loyalty and betrayal

#### Between Marwān and ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd, the secretary

Marwān ibn Muḥammad said to ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd, the secretary, when he became sure of the loss of his reign, “Now you need to be with my enemies and to betray me. Their admiration of your literary abilities and their need for your service as a secretary will make them think well of you. You have been so far able to help me in my life; now it is otherwise, but you will be able to keep your respect for me after my death.” ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd replied, “What you have ordered me to do is the most useful thing for you and the ugliest for me. I have no other choice but to share endurance with you until God improves matters for you or I am killed with you.” Then he said:

In my conscience I am loyal, then I publicly betray.  
 What excuse can I offer that is acceptable to people?

#### ‘Abd al-Malik after killing Ibn Sa‘īd

Abū al-Ḥasan al-Madā‘īnī said, “When ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān killed ‘Amr ibn Sa‘īd after having made peace with him and given him amnesty in the presence of witnesses, he asked a man whom he usually consulted and whose opinion he accepted in difficult situations, ‘What do you think of what I have done?’ The man replied, ‘That is a bygone matter beyond reach.’ ‘Abd al-Malik insisted, ‘But you must tell me.’ The man said, ‘It would have been really judicious had you killed him and lived.’ ‘Abd al-Malik asked, ‘Am I not alive now?’ The man replied, ‘Anyone who puts himself in a position whereby no one trusts any promise or agreement he makes is not alive.’ ‘Abd al-Malik remarked, ‘Had I heard those words before I acted, I would have desisted.’”

#### Abū Ja‘far [al-Manṣūr] and Ibn Hubayra

Al-Madā‘īnī said, “When Abū Ja‘far wrote the statement assuring Ibn Hubayra of safety and security, after witnesses had differed about it for forty days, Ibn Hubayra went with other mounted men to al-Manṣūr. ‘This regime of yours is new,’ he said. ‘Therefore, give people the opportunity to taste its sweetness and avoid its bitterness, so that love may quickly find its way to their hearts and your reputation may become good among them. I have been waiting for [the success] of this cause.’ Abū Ja‘far ordered that the curtain between him and Ibn Hubayra be removed; he then looked at his face and spoke with him at length until Ibn Hubayra’s fear was allayed. When the latter left, Abū Ja‘far said to his friends, ‘I

am amazed at everyone who orders me to kill a person like this one!' Later he broke his word and had him killed."

### **Abū Jaʿfar and Salm on the killing of Abū Muslim**

Abū Jaʿfar asked Salm ibn Qutayba, "What do you think of the killing of Abū Muslim?" Ibn Qutayba replied, "If there were gods in them other than God, they would have been perverted." [Q. 21:22] Abū Jaʿfar exclaimed, "God is enough for you, Abū Umayya!"

Abū ʿAmr ibn al-ʿAlāʾ said, "The tribe of Saʿd ibn Tamīm was the most treacherous among the Arabs; they used to term treachery *kaysān* (shrewdness)." A poet said about them:

If you were a stranger in Saʿd and your maternal uncle  
Was one of them, let not your maternal uncle deceive you.  
When they call for *kaysān*, their mature men are more prone  
To commit treachery than their beardless young men.

### **Appointments and dismissals**

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, "You will strive for authority, then there will be grief and regret. How truly wonderful is the woman who suckles, and how wretched the woman who weans!"

### **Ibn Shuʿba on the love and hatred of authority**

Al-Mughira ibn Shuʿba said, "I like being in authority for three reasons, and I hate it for three others. I like it because I can raise supporters, lower enemies, and obtain things cheaply; and I hate it because of the fear of espionage, the death of being deposed, and the gloating of the enemy."

### **Between Ibn Shubruma and his father on Ṭāriq's procession**

The son of judge Ibn Shubruma said, "I was sitting with my father before he was appointed to be judge, when Ṭāriq ibn Abī Ziyād passed by in an imposing procession as governor of Baṣra. When my father saw him, he sighed deeply and said:

Although it is desired, I think it is like  
Summer clouds that will soon disperse.

Then he added, "O God, I have my religion and they have their world." When he was afflicted with the judgeship, I asked him, "Father, do you remember Ṭāriq's day?" He replied, "My son, they can appoint a successor to your father, but your father cannot appoint a successor to them. Your father has been rooted in the love of them and has eaten of their sweets!"

### **Ibn al-Ḥasan on a man changed by his appointed post**

It was said to ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Ḥasan, “So-and-So has been changed by his appointed post.” He remarked, “He who assumes an appointed post that he deems to be bigger than he is will change and adapt himself to it. But he who deems himself to be bigger than it will not change and will not adapt himself to it.”

### **Al-Mughīra on being dismissed by ‘Umar**

When ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb dismissed al-Mughīra ibn Shu‘ba from his post as secretary to Abū Mūsā, al-Mughīra asked, “Am I being dismissed because of incompetence or betrayal, O Commander of the Faithful?” “Because of neither,” replied ‘Umar. “I rather do not wish to impose your refined mind on the general public.”

### **Ibn ‘Umar’s curse on Ziyād**

Ziyād wrote to Mu‘āwiya, “I have taken Iraq with my right hand but my left hand is empty” – insinuating his desire to rule the Ḥijāz. When ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Umar heard that, he raised his hands to heaven and said, “O God, spare us Ziyād’s left hand.” An abscess developed in Ziyād’s left hand and killed him.

### **Between Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb and Abū Hurayra**

‘Umar met with Abū Hurayra and asked him, “Don’t you want to be a ruler?” “No,” he replied. ‘Umar retorted, “Someone who is better than you sought to be a ruler, I mean Joseph, may he be blessed and have peace, for he said, ‘Appoint me over the treasures of the land, for I am a good keeper and possessed of knowledge.’” [Q. 12:55]

### **Khālid al-Qasri appointing Bilāl**

Al-Madāʿini said: Bilāl ibn Abi Burda used to stand constantly by the door of Khālid ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Qasri. Whenever Khālid went out mounted, he saw him in his procession and was annoyed by him. “Bring me that man with the black turban,” Khālid ordered a policeman of his, “and tell him, ‘The commander asks: Why do you constantly stand by my door and attach yourself to my procession? I will never appoint you to any post.’” The messenger went and told Bilāl, whereupon the latter asked, “Will you tell the commander something from me just as you told me something from him?” “Yes,” the messenger said. Bilāl continued, “Tell him, ‘By God, if you will ever appoint me, you may not dismiss me thereafter.’” When the messenger told Khālid, the latter said, “What is with him, God damn him! He makes promises for himself with assurance.” He then summoned him and appointed him to a post.

### **Between ʿUmar and an applicant for a post**

ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb was about to appoint a man to a post when the man anticipated him by asking for the appointment. Thereupon, ʿUmar said to him, “By God, I intended to appoint you, but anyone who asks to be appointed should not be aided in that quest.”

### **Between the Prophet, God bless him and give him peace, and al-ʿAbbās**

Al-ʿAbbās, the uncle of the Prophet, may God bless him and give him peace, asked the Prophet for a province to rule. “O uncle,” the Prophet advised, “To enliven one’s soul is better than to rule a province whose population one cannot count.”

### **Between the Prophet, God bless him and give him peace, and a man seeking to be appointed**

One of the Companions of the Prophet, may God bless him and give him peace, asked him for an appointment. The Prophet responded, “In making appointments we do not seek help from those who want them.”

The Christians say, “We choose for the position of Catholicos only someone who does not desire it and does not seek it.”

### **Ziyād on the happiest person in his way of life**

Ziyād asked his friends, “Who is the happiest of all people in his way of life?” “The prince and his friends,” they answered. “No,” he objected, “for the pulpit fills the prince with awe, and the sound of the bridle of the courier’s horses inspires him with fear. The happiest of people in his way of life is rather a man who owns a house that earns him regular rent and has a wife who agrees with him on frugal living; he does not deal with us and we do not deal with him, for if he deals with us and we with him, we will spoil his life in this world and the next.”

### **Between Muʿāwiya and al-Mughīra when he grew old**

When al-Mughīra ibn Shuʿba grew old and was afraid he would be replaced, he wrote to Muʿāwiya:

“I am writing to say that I have grown old, my bones have weakened, my death is approaching, and the shameless fools of Quraysh have discredited me and declared me incompetent. The Commander of the Faithful’s opinion regarding my appointment is therefore sought and deemed appropriate.”

Muʿāwiya wrote back to him, “As for what you mentioned regarding your advancing age, it is you who have dissipated your youth. As for what you mentioned concerning the approach of your death, if I could push away death I would have done so for Abū Sufyān’s family. As for your mention of the shameless fools of Quraysh, it is Quraysh’s discerning wise men who placed you

in that post. As for your mention of your appointed position, ‘Don’t make haste in sacrificing the animal and Ḥamal will catch up with the war.’” This is a proverb [urging unhurried caution] explained in *Kitāb al-Amthāl* (*The Book of Proverbs* [by al-Maydānī]).

When the letter reached al-Mughīra, he asked permission to come and see Mu‘āwiya. He was permitted and we went out with him. When he went in, Mu‘āwiya told him, “Mughīra, you have grown old, your bones have weakened, and nothing of you is left. I have no alternative but to replace you.” The narrator who told the story said, “Al-Mughīra turned to us, and we saw sorrow written all over his face. He told us what had happened. ‘What are you going to do?’ we asked. ‘You will see,’ he replied. Al-Mughīra went back to Mu‘āwiya and said, ‘O Commander of the Faithful, human life is short; souls come and go. You are not living now in the times of Abū Bakr or ‘Umar [when successors to rule had to be elected]. I wish you would appoint a notable man to succeed you whom we could follow. For I have called the people of Iraq to declare allegiance to Yazīd [your son].’ ‘O Abū Muḥammad,’ Mu‘āwiya quickly responded, ‘go back to your province and seek this matter for [Yazīd] your brother’s son.’ We went scurrying back on our camels. Al-Mughīra turned to me, ‘By God,’ he said, ‘I have put Mu‘āwiya’s feet in stirrups for a long term of rule over the community of Muḥammad, God bless him and give him peace.’”

### A chapter on some qualifications for judges

‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz said, “If a judge has five qualities, he is perfect: knowledge of precedents, abstention from greed, forbearance with adversaries at court, imitation of imams, and consultation with people of learning and opinion.”

He also said, “If a plaintiff comes to you with one of his eyes having been gouged out, don’t judge in his favor until the defendant comes, for haply both of the latter’s eyes may have been gouged out.”

### ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb’s letter to Mu‘āwiya on judgeship

‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb wrote a letter on judgeship to Mu‘āwiya, in which he said, “When two contestants come to you, you have to require fair evidence or a decisive oath. You should put the weak person at ease until he is heartened and his tongue is untied. Take care of the stranger; for if you do not, his rights will be forfeited and he will return to his people, having lost his rights because of the one who has not been kind to him. Comfort people with your attention and your looks, and encourage reconciliation among them, unless you are clear about a decisive judgment.”

Al-‘Utbi said, “Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī and Bukhtishū‘, the physician, had a dispute at the court of judge Aḥmad ibn Abī Duwād over an estate in the Sawād district [of Southern Iraq]. Ibn al-Mahdī scorned Bukhtishū‘ and used

rude language with him in front of Aḥmad ibn Abī Duwād. That angered the judge, who said, ‘Ibrāhīm, if you have a dispute with someone at court, I do not wish to discover that you raise your voice or gesture at him with your hand. Rather you should let your intention be fair, your way straight, and your demeanor calm. Give courts their due respect, dignity, and commitment to duty. For that is more appropriate for you and more consonant with your honorable descent and high rank. Don’t be hasty, for haste may often lead to delay. May God protect you from error and from wrong speech and action, and may He make perfect His grace upon you as He has earlier made it perfect upon your parents. Your Lord is wise and knowledgeable.’ Ibrāhīm responded, ‘May God grant you prosperity. You have commanded rightly and urged wisely. I will never again do anything that will be blameworthy of my honor at your court, or cause me to lose your respect, or take me beyond the duty of apologizing. I hereby apologize to you for this blunder, being one who admits his wrong-doing and acknowledges his crime. This will be our custom with you, God be our sufficiency and He is the best One to depend on. I hereby grant Bukhtīshū‘ my right to this estate, and wish that this be the fine I pay for my crime. No wealth is lost that offers a moral lesson. God grants success.’”

#### ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb’s letter to Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī on judgeship

‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb wrote a letter to Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī reported by Ibn ‘Uyayna as follows:

I am writing to let you know that judgeship is a confirmed obligation and an observed tradition. Understand, then, that when a party to a lawsuit speaks to you, telling the truth is only beneficial when put into effect. Be fair with people at your court and in your treatment of them, so that no nobleman will ever expect you to be unfair and no weak man will fear your being unjust. The plaintiff should offer evidence, and he who denies it should give an oath. Reconciliation between Muslims is permissible, except one that permits forbidden things or forbids permitted things. Let no sentence you gave yesterday prevent you from revoking it if you have thought it over and been shown the correct judgment concerning it. Justice is of long standing. Returning to it is better than persisting in wrong. Seek to understand deeply those things that give you pause regarding matters that you do not find in the Book of God or in the Tradition of His Prophet, may God bless him and give him peace. Give recognition to similarities and analogies. Compare matters at that point, then resort to solutions most liked by God and His Prophet and most likely to be fair. Give the claimant a term and a limit: if he brings you evidence, judge in his favor; otherwise, give your sentence against him; for this procedure is more likely to clarify obscure matters and provide you with a pretext. Muslims are equal to one another as witnesses, except anyone who has been punished with lashes or been proven to have given false testimony, or one whose descent is suspect with regard to tribal ascription, blood kinship, or marriage relationship. God knows

what is in your hearts and protects you by giving you the opportunity to offer evidences and oaths. Beware of feeling offended and dealing ungraciously with adversaries in court in cases where upholding rights is rewarded by God and compensated. For anyone whose intention as known to God and himself is clear, even if it is against himself, will be spared by God the ill intentions of people; whereas whoever adorns himself with qualities seen by people which God knows to be otherwise, will be unveiled by God and exposed.

### He also wrote advising him

ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, may God be pleased with him, wrote to Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī the following:

Know that people have an aversion to their ruler. Beware then of catching up with me in that, and beware of unknown blind feelings, born grudges, followed passions, and worldly preferences. Implement prescribed punishments, sit for adjudication at least one hour a day, and frighten the vicious and disperse them. If there is hostility among tribes and they call out, “O So-and-So, help!”, then that is a prompting from Satan. Smite them with the sword until they submit to God’s command and their call for help is to God and Islam. Seek the permanence of blessings by offering thanks, of obedience by spreading conciliation, of power by granting pardon, and of support by being humble and loving the people. I heard that the tribe of Ḍabba called out, ‘O Ḍabba, help!’ By God, I have never known that God has ever brought any good or dispelled any evil at the hands of Ḍabba. When you receive my letter, punish them severely until they are terrified if they don’t understand otherwise, and assign Ghaylān ibn Kharsha to deal with dissidents among them. Visit the sick among Muslims, attend their funerals, tend to their affairs, and open your door to them. You are only one of them, except that God has made your burden the heaviest among them. The Commander of the Faithful has learned that you and your family have adopted appearances in clothes, foods, and mounts the like of which no Muslims possess. Beware, O servant of God, of being like an animal whose concern is in becoming fat – for fatness leads to its death. Know that if a governor goes astray, his people will too, and that the most miserable person is one who causes the people to be miserable. Peace be to you.

### Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb and Ibn al-ʿAṣ on invasion by sea

ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb wanted to invade a certain people by sea, so he wrote to ʿAmr ibn al-ʿAṣ, his governor in Egypt. The latter answered, “O Commander of the Faithful, the sea is a great creature plied by a little creature like a worm on a twig.” ʿUmar replied, “God will not ask me about anyone I carry on it.”

Al-Shaʿbī said, “I was sitting with Shurayḥ when a woman entered and complained about her absent husband while weeping severely. I said to him, ‘May God reform your ways. I think she has been unfairly treated.’ ‘How do you know that?’ asked Shurayḥ. ‘Because of her weeping,’ I said. ‘Don’t do that,’ he

responded, ‘Joseph’s brothers came to their father weeping in the evening and they had wronged him.’”

### **Al-Ḥasan and a man whose testimony Iyās refused to accept**

Al-Ḥasan ibn Abi al-Ḥasan believed no testimony by a Muslim man should be refused unless the person testified against challenged him with proofs. A man once came to him and said, “O Abū Saʿīd, Iyās has refused to accept my testimony.” Al-Ḥasan went with him to Iyās and said, “O Abū Wāʿila, why have you refused to accept the testimony of this Muslim when God’s Messenger, God bless him and give him peace, said, ‘Anyone who prays like us turning his face to our *qibla* (Mecca) is a Muslim: he has the same rights and duties as we do?’” “O Abū Saʿīd,” Iyās replied, “God says, ‘... of such as you approve as witnesses ...’ [Q. 2:282], and this one is not approved.”

### **An example of the justice of Judge Shurayḥ**

Al-Ashʿath ibn Qays entered the court of Judge Shurayḥ. The latter said to him, “Welcome to our learned teacher and master,” and seated him beside him. As he was sitting with him, a man entered and complained about al-Ashʿath. Whereupon, Shurayḥ said to al-Ashʿath, “Get up and sit as an adversary and speak to your friend.” “I would rather speak to him from where I am now sitting,” said al-Ashʿath. “You will get up or I will order someone to make you get up,” stressed Shurayḥ. Al-Ashʿath remonstrated, “How high you have risen, indeed!” Shurayḥ countered, “Has that ever caused you any harm?” “No,” al-Ashʿath said. “I see that you acknowledge God’s blessing when given to others,” Shurayḥ chided, “but you do not acknowledge it when given to yourself.”

### **Iyās refusing to accept Ibn Ibī Sūd**

Wakīʿ ibn Abi Sūd, governor of Khurāsān, came to testify at the court of Iyās. Seating him next to him, the latter said, “Welcome to Abū Muṭraf,” then asked, “What has brought you here?” “To testify to So-and-So,” Wakīʿ answered. “Leave testimony alone!” Iyās said, “only clients, merchants, and common people testify.” Wakīʿ said, “You are right,” and left him. Someone said to him, “He has deceived you; the truth is that he would not accept your testimony.” “If I had known that,” fumed Wakīʿ, “I would have thrashed him with the stick.”

### **ʿAdī ibn Arṭāh and Shurayḥ**

ʿAdī ibn Arṭāh entered Shurayḥ’s court and asked, “May God reform your ways, where are you?” Shurayḥ answered, “I am between you and the wall.” ʿAdī began, “I am a man from Syria.” “Of a distant place and a faraway home,” commented Shurayḥ. “I got married at your court,” explained ʿAdī. Shurayḥ felicitated, “Live in happiness and beget sons.” ʿAdī added, “A boy was born to me.”

“Congratulations,” Shurayḥ said, “may he become a knight.” ‘Adī said, “I now want to divorce her.” Shurayḥ commented, “This is a man’s right regarding his wife.” “I had made a condition to give her a house,” explained ‘Adī. “A condition is binding,” Shurayḥ confirmed. ‘Adī said, “Now rule between us.” “I have,” Shurayḥ responded. “Against whom have you passed judgment?” asked ‘Adī. “Against your mother’s son,” replied Shurayḥ. “By whose testimony?” asked ‘Adī. “By the testimony of your maternal aunt’s nephew,” answered Shurayḥ, meaning by ‘Adī’s own confession.

### **Shurayḥ and a man claiming ownership of a cat**

Sufyān al-Thawrī said, “A man came to Shurayḥ claiming ownership of a cat. ‘What is your evidence of ownership?’ asked Shurayḥ. The man replied, ‘I have no evidence about a cat born at our home.’ Shurayḥ said, ‘Take it to her mother and set her free. If she settles down, stays, and prospers, then it is your cat. But if she shudders and her hair stands on end, then she is not your cat.’”

Sufyān al-Thawrī also said, “A man came to Shurayḥ and asked him, ‘What do you think of a sheep that eats locusts?’ Shurayḥ answered, ‘Good milk with free fodder.’”

### **Shurayḥ being asked to arbitrate**

Shurayḥ was asked, “Which is more delicious: a walnut tart or an almond tart?” He replied, “I don’t give judgment in absentia.”

### **Al-Sha‘bī on separating a man from his wife**

A man entered al-Sha‘bī’s court with a woman, who was extremely beautiful. They litigated with each other before him. The woman presented her argument and gave her evidence. Al-Sha‘bī asked the husband, “Do you have any defense?” The husband said:

Al-Sha‘bī was infatuated when  
 He raised his eyes to her.  
 She charmed him with her coquetry  
 And with the curves of her eye-brows.  
 He said to the policeman: Bring her  
 Close, and bring her two witnesses.  
 Then he ruled unfairly against her  
 Adversary and not against her.

Al-Sha‘bī said, “Then I went to ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān and when he saw me, he smiled and quoted:

Al-Sha‘bī was infatuated when  
 He raised his eyes to her.

Then he asked, ‘What have you done with the one who said these verses?’ I said, ‘I beat him thoroughly, O Commander of the Faithful, because he disrespected me in court and slandered me.’ The Caliph said, ‘Well done.’”

End of Part 1 of **The Book of the Pearl** on the ruler, by God’s grace. It will be followed, God willing, by **The Book of the Nonpareil Jewel** on wars, which is Book 2 of the twenty-five books into which the author divided this work. Praise be to God in the beginning and at the end, and His blessings and peace be on our Master Muḥammad, his family, and his Companions.

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# THE BOOK OF THE NONPAREIL JEWEL

## On wars and their affairs

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### Introduction to the Book of Wars

Abū ‘Umar Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Rabbih said:

We have spoken of the ruler and of exalting him, of his subjects’ duty to obey him and constantly give him advice, and of the ruler’s duty to be just toward his subjects and kind to the people of his realm. With the help of God and His guidance, we will now speak of wars and their affairs, of leading and managing armies, and of the obligations of the one who manages them to seize opportunities, seek the enemy’s inadvertency, dispatch spies, send out vanguards, avoid difficulties, and be cautious as to where to camp at night. This happens after the leader has learned the principles of wars perfectly well and experienced them for a long time, enduring them and braving armies, and after he realizes that there is no shield for him as good as patience and no stronghold as good as certainty. We will then mention the nobility of courage and its praiseworthy consequences and the shame of fleeing and its blameworthy results. God is our helper.

### Description of wars

War is a millstone whose flour-bag is patience, whose pivot is cunning, whose axle is diligence, whose refining file is perseverance, and whose controlling handle is caution. Each of these qualities has a consequence: the result of cunning is victory, that of patience confirmation, that of diligence success, that of perseverance prosperity, and that of caution safety. Every situation has a corresponding way of speaking and every period has its relevant men. War between people has its ups and downs; giving an opinion regarding it is more effective than fighting.

‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb asked ‘Amr ibn Ma‘dīkarīb to describe war to him. “It is bitter when it begins,” ‘Amr said. “The one who is patient in it becomes well known but the one who shrinks from it is ruined.” Then he recited the following verses:

War at the beginning is like a young woman  
Whose adornment distracts every foolish man.  
But when it warms up and its flames rage,  
It becomes like an old woman with no friends,  
Unseen with her clipped-off gray hair,  
Repulsive to anyone who would smell or kiss her.

‘Antara, renowned as a cavalier, was asked to describe war. “At the beginning it is a complaint,” he said, “in the middle it is an intimate whisper, and in the end it is a calamity.”

Al-Kumayt said:

On war, people’s opinions differ when it begins  
 But they are all agreed when it comes to an end.  
 They all know it well as it recedes into the dark  
 But few know its impending vicissitudes as it dawns.

Naṣr ibn Sayyār, governor of Khurāsān, described war and its beginning as follows:

In the ashes, I see the sparkle of fire  
 Which is about to glow fully ablaze.  
 For fire is kindled by rubbing two twigs  
 And war is ignited by words to begin with.

#### A wise saying of Solomon

In a wise maxim Solomon, son of David, to both be peace, said, “Evil is sweet at the beginning but bitter at the end.”

#### An Arab maxim

The Arabs say, “War is iniquitous, for it harms [people] other than the culprit.”

#### Ḥabīb said:

War acts rashly in a [battle] scene in which  
 A fool is equated with a thousand wise men,  
 And in an hour which, if wise Luqmān attended,  
 He would not be counted among the wise.

Aktham ibn Ṣayfi, the sage of the Arabs, said, “There is no wisdom to him who has no fool around.”

A similar saying is that of al-Aḥnaf ibn Qays, “Whenever the fools of a people are few, they are humiliated.”

He also said, “I would rather be obeyed by the fools of my people than by their wise men.”

Al-Aḥnaf also said, “Honor your fools, for they spare you fire and shame.”

#### A verse by al-Nābigha al-Ja‘dī and the Prophet’s invocation

Al-Nābigha al-Ja‘dī said:

There is no good in clemency if it is devoid of impulses  
 That would protect its purity from being soiled.

He recited this poem to the Prophet, may God bless him and give him peace. When he reached this verse, the Prophet, may God bless him and give him peace, exclaimed, “Well said! May God not break up [the teeth of] your mouth.” Al-Nābigha lived for one hundred and thirty years and not one of his front teeth fell out.

Al-Nābigha al-Dhubayāni described war thus:

Its stars appear while the sun is shining.  
Neither light is light, nor darkness is darkness.

By saying “Its stars appear while the sun is shining,” he means the intensity of [war’s] terror and grief, very much as the common people say, “I showed him the stars at midday.”

Al-Farazdaq said:

I will show you the night stars while the sun is alive.

Ṭarafa ibn al-ʿAbd said:

It will show you the stars shining at noon

and to him Jarīr refers when saying:

The sun is up and not clouded, lamenting you  
And weeping for the night stars and the moon.

He means: the sun is up and is not eclipsing the night stars, because of the intensity of sorrow and grief overwhelming the people.

*Verses by Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih*

Describing war, we said:

When the dust in the sky clears,  
It shows the ground purple-colored.  
The daytime is like night’s darkness  
Whose shining stars are supple spears.  
Like its own dust, I rose to fight in it  
Carrying a sharp lance with a long spearhead  
And a polished sword with two sharp edges,  
A Yemenite saber, white as salt when unsheathed.

Describing the battlefield, we said:

A battlefield in which death brandishes  
Sharp Indian swords in the hands of males,  
Shining so brightly that the blind see their light  
And the eyes of the sighted are blinded therewith.  
Long locks of hair flowingly waft

Over red lances with sharp spearheads.  
 Around them the eagles of death hover in circles  
 Snatching hearts from breasts  
 On a day clothed in the garment of night so that  
 The afternoon can't be distinguished from morning.  
 The eye of the sun looks down through the dust  
 Like a virgin peering through the chinks of curtains.  
 How many a long life have you shortened this day  
 And how many a short life you have rendered long.

### What to do in war

Aktham ibn Ṣayfī was asked to say what should be done in war. "Don't disagree about your commanders," he replied, "for no one over whom there is disagreement will command a unifying authority. Know that shouting a lot is a sign of failure; so be firm, for the more determined of the two parties is the one that is calm. Many an act done in haste results in delay. Use the night as a shield, for it is more likely to hide misfortune. Be cautious where you camp by night."

Shabīb al-Ḥarūrī said, "Night spares you the coward and half of the courageous man." When evening came, he used to say to his friends, "Reinforcements have come to you."

Having heard the disputing voices of her supporters and their shouts on the day of the Battle of the Camel, ʿĀ'isha, may God Most High be pleased with her, said, "Disputes in wartime are a weakness, and shouting matches a failure. It was not my idea to go out with these people."

When ʿUtba ibn Rabīʿa saw the soldiers of the Messenger of God, may God bless him and give him peace, on the day of the Battle of Badr, he said to his friends, "Don't you see that they are silent and don't speak, licking their lips like snakes?"

### Ibn Abī Ṭālib on consequences

ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, may God be pleased with him, said, "A person who looks at consequences too long will lose courage."

Al-Nuʿmān ibn Muqarrin said to his friends when encountering the enemy, "I will shake the flag at you. At that point let every one of you get set and prepare himself and his horse; when I shake it at you a second time, let everyone check where his arrows are, where his enemy is, and where his opportunity for attack is; when I shake it at you a third time, I will charge, so charge with me in the name of God."

### ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb on Ibn Muqarrin

When the horses were ready and the Companions were looking forward to advancing on them, ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, may God be pleased with him, said

to this al-Nu‘mān ibn Muqarrin, “Verily I will give authority over their bridles to a man who will be the first to face the sharp spearheads tomorrow.” He gave that authority to al-Nu‘mān ibn Muqarrin.

### ‘Alī on opportunity

‘Alī, may God be pleased with him, said, “Seize the opportunity for it passes like clouds; do not seek it once it is long gone.”

A wise man said, “Seize the opportunity for it amounts to stealth. Pounce at the beginning of a situation, not at its end. Beware of weakness for it is the most humiliating quality; beware of a contemptible intercessor, for he is the weakest means.”

### Ibn Muslim on Ibn Abī Sūd

A group in Khurāsān rebelled against Qutayba ibn Muslim and caused him concern. Someone said to him, “What worries you about them? Send Wakī‘ ibn Sūd to them; he will be their match.” Qutayba replied, “No. Wakī‘ is an arrogant man who scorns his enemies. A person like that has little concern for enemies and would not be on his guard against them. His enemy will take advantage of his inadvertence.”

### A king on determination

A king was asked about the hallmarks of determination in fighting. “Deceiving the enemy away from the countryside,” he said, “preparing spies to observe, rewarding those reporting the truth, punishing opportunists who lie, never going out to fight while fleeing from something, never being strict on someone seeking amnesty, and never letting booty distract one from being cautious.”

### Persians on the best means for training

In a book of the Persians, a wise man was asked about the best means for training soldiers and sharpening them for combat. “Being accustomed to fighting and to numerous victories,” he replied, “and having reinforcements and provisions behind them.”

### Between Mu‘āwiya and ‘Amr ibn al-Āṣ

‘Amr ibn al-Āṣ said to Mu‘āwiya, “By God, I don’t know whether you are courageous or cowardly, O Commander of the Faithful.” Mu‘āwiya answered:

I am courageous when an opportunity lets me  
And I am cowardly when I have no opportunity.

Al-Aḥnaf ibn Qays said, “If you see that evil will leave you alone when you leave it alone, then leave it alone.”

Hudba al-ʿUdhri said:

I do not wish to do evil, if evil leaves me alone.  
 But when I am forced to do it, I will embark on it.  
 I am not joyful when fate delights me,  
 Nor am I fearful of its vicissitudes.

### Patience and courage in war

In two verses of His Book, God, may He be blessed and exalted, epitomized the management of war: “O you who believe, when you encounter an army, be steadfast and remember God much, so that you may be successful. And obey God and His Messenger, and do not dispute with one another lest you lose heart and your strength depart, and be steadfast; surely, God is with the steadfast.” [Q. 8:45–46]

### The Arabs on courage

The Arabs say, “Courage is a protection and cowardice is a cause of death. Learn a lesson from the fact that those killed while running away are more numerous than those killed while advancing.”

### Abū Bakr advising Khālid

That is why Abū Bakr, may God Most High be pleased with him, said to Khālid ibn al-Walid, “Desire death, and life will be granted to you.”

### Arab sayings

Arabs say, “The courageous man is protected and the coward is imperiled.”

A bedouin Arab said, “God preserves what people destroy and fate ruins what they gather. How many a death is caused by seeking life, and how many a life is caused by exposure to death.”

### Khālid on steadfastness

Khālid ibn al-Walid used to walk among the ranks of fighters, encouraging them and saying, “O adherents of Islam, steadfastness is power and fear is weakness; with steadfastness comes victory.”

Anūshirwān wrote to his satraps, “Make use of the generous and the brave, for they are the people who think well of God.”

Wise men have said, “Facing death is better than turning one’s back to it.”

Ḥassān ibn Thābit said:

Our wounds don’t bleed on our heels.  
 It is on our feet that blood drips.

On the same idea al-ʿAlawī said:

The croups of my horses are forbidden to spears  
 But their throats and chests are bloody.  
 Our lances are forbidden to stab fleeing [enemy] backs  
 But in chests do the spearheads sink.

They used to praise dying by a single blow on the spot and despise dying in bed. About the latter, they used to say, “He died a natural death in spite of his nose.” The first person to say that was the Prophet, may God bless him and give him peace.

### ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Zubayr on the death of his brother Muṣ‘ab

‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Zubayr gave a speech to the people when the news reached him of the killing of his brother Muṣ‘ab. “For him to be killed is [normal],” he said, “for his father, his brother, and his uncle were killed. By God, we don’t die a natural death but are felled on the spot by spears and are killed in the shadow of swords. If Muṣ‘ab is killed, the clan of al-Zubayr has successors to follow him.”

Al-Samawʿal ibn ‘Ādiyā said:

No lord of ours died a natural death  
 Or was unavenged, if he had been killed.  
 Our souls flow in death on the sharp edges of swords  
 And on nothing else but the swords do they flow.

Another poet said:

Our souls find death to be sweet.  
 Other deaths are bitter and we taste them not.

Al-Shanfarā said:

Don’t bury me. Burying me is forbidden  
 To you; but be of good cheer, Umm ‘Āmir.  
 When my head is carried away, in it being most of me,  
 And the rest of me is abandoned on the battlefield,  
 At that moment I want no life to please me  
 For ever, as I am handed [to the enemy] with my deeds.

His saying, “... be of good cheer, Umm ‘Āmir” refers to the hyena. He means: When I am killed, don’t bury me, but throw me to the one to whom it is said, “Be of good cheer, Umm ‘Āmir”, that is the hyena [who would devour his corpse]. The meaning of this phrase is far-fetched.

### A saying of ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib

Someone said to the Commander of the Faithful, ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, peace be on him, “You kill the people of Syria in the morning, then appear in the evening with

a loin-cloth and a cloak.” “Are you threatening me with death?” he responded. “By God, I don’t care whether I fall on death or it falls on me.”

He said to his son al-Ḥasan, on both be peace, “Never challenge anyone to a duel; but if you are challenged, respond. The one who issues the challenge is a wrong-doer, and the wrong-doer is bound to die.”

‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, may God Most High be pleased with him, said, “The remainder of the sword grows more numbers and better children.” He means that when the sword kills many members of a household, their numbers increase and their children multiply thereafter.

Evidence of the truth of his saying is that the family of al-Zubayr and the family of Abū Ṭālib were often put to the sword, and yet how numerous they still are.

Abū Dulaf al-‘Ijlī said:

At night my sword is my light  
 And in the day it is my intimate companion.  
 I am a young man whose filly  
 Has accustomed me to fight in the dark.  
 My sword praises me  
 And my horse lauds my foray.

Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ṭāhir, Khurāsān’s governor, said:

I am not for sweet basil and wine,  
 Nor am I for generosity to a neighbor.  
 If you now want to know my position,  
 It is among the swords and the spears.  
 You will see a young man in the shade of spears  
 Grabbing [enemy] souls by [offering] souls.

Ashhab ibn Rumayla said:

Forest lions encountering hidden lions,  
 Meeting in anger over the blood of heroes.

### **Al-Muhallab on the strangest things he saw while fighting the Azāriqa**

Al-Muhallab ibn Abī Ṣufra was asked, “What is the strangest thing you saw while fighting the Azāriqa?” He replied, “A young man among them who would come out to us every morning and recite:

Many a woman asks about me in my absence; if she knew  
 I was fighting with heroes, she would wail for long.  
 When meeting the enemy, I would be the first horseman  
 To give up my soul burdened with its sins.

“Then he would charge, letting nothing stop him. On the next day he would return to do the same thing.”

### Between Hishām and his brother Maslama on fear

Hishām ibn ‘Abd al-Malik said to his brother Maslama, “O Abū Sa‘d, have you ever experienced fear of war or an enemy?” Maslama replied, “I was never spared a fear that would draw my attention to a stratagem, yet no fear ever deprived me of my self-possession and thought.” Hishām commented, “You are right. By God, that is real bravery.”

‘Antara was asked, “How many were you in the Battle of Farūq?” He answered, “We were one hundred: not more, lest we rely on one another; and not less, lest we be humiliated.”

### A saying that Ibn al-Muhallab used to cite

Yazid ibn al-Muhallab used often to cite the verse of Ḥuṣayn ibn al-Ḥumām:

I stayed behind seeking the good things of life,  
But I found no life better than advancing.

Al-Khansāʾ said:

We think little of our selves, for giving away one’s self  
On a day of adversity is more likely to preserve it.

‘Abbād ibn al-Ḥuṣayn, who used to be one of the mightiest men of Baṣra, was asked, “In what situation would you have liked to meet your enemy?” “In a situation where appointed death would be postponed,” he replied.

During the Battle of Ṣiffīn, Mu‘āwiya, may God Most High be pleased with him, used to cite the following:

My character and my bravery proudly insist  
And I accept praise for paying a high price.  
I push myself forward to face a loathsome situation  
And I strike the hero’s head turning away.  
Whenever fear rises in my self, I say:  
Stay put, and you will be praised or will rest.  
I do this to defend glorious deeds  
And continue to protect a still sound honor.

Similar to this are the verses by Qaṭarī ibn al-Fujāʾa:

I say to my self, as it flew in fear  
Of the heroes: Woe is you! You shall not fear!  
For if you asked for one more day of life  
Beside the life appointed for you, you’ll not be obeyed.

### A saying by Ibn Abī Ṭālib during the Battle of Ṣiffīn

‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, may God be pleased with him, used to go out every day during the Battle of Ṣiffīn and, standing between the two fighting armies, he would say:

On which one of two days shall I flee from death:  
 On an undestined day or on a day destined?  
 The undestined day I fear not,  
 And caution will not save anyone from destiny.

Similar to this is Jarīr's verse:

Say to the coward who delays saddling his horse:  
 Will you escape from the net of death?

This verse is from his poem that begins with:

Separation has aroused your excited heart,

in which he praised al-Ḥajjāj. When he recited to him:

Say to the coward who delays saddling his horse,

al-Ḥajjāj said to him, "You have made people dare to oppose me, you son of an uncircumcised, stinking woman!" Jarīr said, "By God, O commander, this idea has not occurred to me until this very moment."

#### ʿĀṣim ibn al-Ḥadathān and al-Farazdaq

ʿĀṣim ibn al-Ḥadathān was an intelligent scholar and was the head of the Khārijites in al-Baṣra. A messenger was often sent from them to him from the [Arabian] peninsula to seek his opinion about a matter of dispute. As al-Farazdaq passed by, ʿĀṣim said to his son, "Recite something for Abū Firās." So ʿĀṣim's son recited:

When they unsheathe their swords and are ready  
 To fight, they are honorable and steadfast.  
 They enter the battlefields of death which,  
 For the sake of God, are insignificant to them,  
 And they advance with spears undeterred,  
 For, with their spears, they trade in death.

Al-Farazdaq said to ʿĀṣim's son, "Woe to you! Conceal this lest the weavers come out against us with their looms." The boy's father replied, "He is the poet of the believers and you are the poet of the unbelievers."

Similar to this are the verses of the reputed cavalier, ʿAntara, which encourage the coward:

She came quickly to warn me against death as if  
 I would be spared death by her words.  
 I answered her: Death is a spring  
 And inevitably I will be given to drink a cup from it.  
 Keep to your gentle diffidence, my dear, and know  
 That I will eventually die, if I am not killed.

Among the best that has ever been said about steadfastness is the saying of Nahshal ibn Ḥarī ibn Ḍamra al-Nahshalī:

It was a day in which those scorched by its heat  
Were burned by a fire not rising from embers:  
We were steadfast in it until its heat died down,  
For days of war are relieved by steadfastness.

Better than this in my view is the saying of Ḥabīb:

He firmly thrust his foot into the swamp of death saying:  
Under the hollow of your sole is Resurrection Day.  
He wore the red garments of death, but no sooner had  
Night fallen than they turned into Paradise green.

Better than this is his saying:

They consider their death to be sweet as if,  
When killed, they do not depart this world;

and his saying on the same idea:

They are people who, when they put on their armour,  
You think they do not think that death can be created.  
Look, and you will see their swords shining,  
Ever and brightly glistening above their heads.

Al-Jahḥāf ibn Ḥakīm said:

They attended battles with the Prophet:  
The Battle of Ḥunayn, with bloody hooves;  
And the Battle of Rāhiṭ, which witnessed  
Their hooves descend upon the Holy City.  
When encountering [the enemy], they offer for stabbing  
Cheeks never offered for slaps.

He took the idea from the saying: “Being stabbed with a sword in dignity is better than being slapped in humiliation.”

One of the best descriptions of men in war is the saying of the poet:

Take it easy, O Banū Shayban, and stop your threats.  
For tomorrow you will meet my horses storming toward you.  
You will meet men who do not swerve from fighting  
When horses sway on the battlefield.  
When called to succor, they ask not who called them,  
Nor to what land or place.

Similar to this is the saying of another poet:

They are people who, when a stranger visits their home,  
Make him a master of horses and singing girls.

When you call them to a day of bitter fighting,  
 They fill broad daylight with horsemen.  
 They do not scratch up the earth with their sticks  
 Seeking excuses, when you ask them for help.  
 Rather they reveal their faces. When they are thus asked,  
 You will see them in their most beautiful colors.

One of the best moderns in describing war is Muslim ibn al-Walid al-Anṣārī,  
 saying to Yazīd ibn Mazyad:

With equipment like theirs, you will meet death  
 Like a flood jostling one great rock with another.  
 When a generous man spares his soul,  
 They generously give up their souls.  
 Giving up one's soul is the extreme of generosity.

He also said:

He pounces on souls on a dusty day  
 As if he were death marching toward a hope.  
 He takes with ease what men are unable to take,  
 Like hasty death coming slowly.

Abū al-ʿAtāhiya said:

When you charge in battle, it is as if  
 You run away from peace that is behind you.  
 It is as though death in war does not act  
 When heroes meet, except by your command.  
 No one but you is the bane of death in war  
 And nothing but your giving is the bane of wealth.

Zayd al-Khayl said:

Safety has learned that my sword  
 Is hateful when it is called to battle:  
 I polish it well every day  
 And try it on men's heads.

Abū Muḥallim al-Saʿdī said:

She said, as she slapped her face with her right hand:  
 Is this my pigeon-breasted husband turning the millstone?  
 I said: Don't judge in haste. Acquaint yourself  
 With my valor when horsemen surround me in battle.  
 Am I not the one to fell the enemy,  
 With a quivering, double-edged spearhead in him?  
 When men are afraid, I enter the war whose intensity  
 Is feared by mutually hostile and persistent fighters.

By your good father's life, I am a servant  
To my guest and, when I mount, I am indeed a horseman.

Another poet, praising al-Muhallab's steadfastness, recited:

When you meet good fortune, everything is useful.  
When you are angered, everything is harmful.  
When a Muhallabī comes to you in war  
With a sword in his hand, he is the best helper.

Some of our own verses on the war leader, Abū al-ʿAbbās:

May my soul be your ransom as heroes stand  
While death divides vengeance among their souls.  
You take part in the vicissitudes of death among them,  
Controlling death, just as it controls them.  
If high honor could, it would come to you submissively  
To kiss your hand as well as your foot.

Some of our verses describing war:

Death takes rest under the edges of swords  
That eat kidneys and drink thereof.  
When flags are arrayed in red color  
And flutter in the wind, hearts yearn for them.  
Heroes speak only through their deeds:  
Their tongues are dumb, their actions eloquent.  
When they meet in a crisis and embrace one another,  
Their meeting is stabbing, their embrace smiting.

Some of our verses on men fighting, when war has taken a toll on both them and their bodies so that they are like swords, thin and solid:

A sword brandishing another,  
Like one branch leaning on another.  
With one, necks are cut off;  
With the other, misfortunes are brought on.

We also said:

In war you will see him like a polished sword  
Turning over the two sides of a polished sword.

We also said:

He is a sword wearing a similar sword-belt.  
In his sharp edge resides reform for evil-doers.

Some of our verses on war, mentioning the leader:

You sleep in the shade of spears  
 And your home is on the backs of horses.  
 You proudly walk clad in armor  
 And you strut garmented in a sword-belt.  
 It is as though you were breast-fed by war,  
 Nourished by all manner of calamitous disaster.  
 How great is your wish for death  
 And how profound your steadfast patience!  
 If holy war is known to occur once a year,  
 To you it is a lifetime occupation.  
 When you return [from battle] with good luck  
 Like the soul returning to the heart,  
 We see a sword wearing a sword  
 And we behold a horse mounted on a horse.

We have described war, using unprecedented wonderful similes and offering matchless beautiful ideas. Some of the verses we said are the following:

Like the surface of the sea ruffled by the breeze,  
 The army surges in waves of spears and horses.  
 Its vanguard approaches and continues to come  
 And its rear departs but does not disappear.  
 In the ensuing struggle, its armed men drink  
 Glasses of blood from enemy kidneys and joints.  
 With thin swords or slender lances,  
 They pass among them a wine made of their foe's souls.  
 Amid this, the mother of death sings to them  
 Songs of swords clashing under spearheads.

Some of our other verses on the same theme:

On the battle day, he was a sword of determination  
 Wearing a sword of death,  
 And with the enemies he maintained a relationship  
 Of hatred, not one of family and blood,  
 A relationship in which "the beloved"  
 Yearned desiringly to be abandoned and jilted.  
 In the end, when his sword had given them to drink  
 From every bitter tasting glass of wine,  
 Whose effect on their heads was seen sinking  
 Between their skins and their bones,  
 As among them spears were singing  
 Songs of elimination and penetration,  
 They obeyed him after their former disobedience,  
 The enemies' obedience being always against their will.  
 Much had they prepared and much made ready for him  
 But alas, chewing with one's molars  
 Is not like biting with one's front teeth.

In a similar vein, I said:

Many are those whom the sword smote in battle,  
 None of whom is alive on the face of the earth.  
 Many dissenters' souls were given fire to drink  
 That made hellfire almost burst with anger.  
 In his armor, he attacked as though he were  
 A lion, roaring with inner fury.  
 When he saw that sedition had widened  
 Its horizons and provinces, involving many people,  
 And darkness upon darkness of it closed in  
 Offering neither light nor fire,  
 He led the horses to the enemy, and they ran  
 As fast as wind with their slender bodies.  
 United, they competed in the battalion  
 As though they were pestles meant to crush people.  
 When fighting was heated, their eyes squinted  
 As they continued to look through the dust gaps.  
 They took revenge against some people,  
 But when impossible, missed it with others.  
 At the front was the supporter of God's religion,  
 Surrounded by supporters of God's soldiers.  
 Regiments competed around his banner  
 As well as a huge army, as black as night.  
 As night wore on, their shouts  
 In the dust of battle echoed back and forth.  
 They met huge divisions of cavalry  
 Pushing forward, wave after wave,  
 Each combatant having no apprehensions  
 As though he were a lion attacking horses.  
 The dust of war extended  
 Between heaven and earth like curtains.  
 Many a corpse lay in the battlefield  
 Leveling the surface of the uneven ground,  
 The head thereof was split like a colocynth,  
 Its arms down to the forearms were like palm pith.  
 Many severed limbs lay on the river  
 Claimed by death in pieces.  
 Their heads were split by Indian steel swords  
 And lay under the horses' hooves like gambling gains.

Some of what I said in verse on war:

Many a battle occurred in which you led horsemen  
 In a war zone with a narrow defile,  
 Intertwined with death and sensing it,  
 Severing relations, and joining others.  
 Many a town there was, whose hills you leveled using

An army corps that advanced like a torrential current.  
 Their helmeted heads rising above their shields  
 Looked as if desert ostriches had laid their eggs.  
 When spotted in the heat of battle,  
 They appeared like jinn in a land of hills and sand.  
 They carried beloved swords, the blades of which  
 Were engraved with lines like ants crawling in a plain.  
 One's eyes were deflected from their sharp edges  
 As though from brilliant stars of death.

I also said in verse on war:

Many a dense thicket of lances  
 With death shining at their tops  
 Trampled down rugged terrain  
 And pounded their haughty heights.  
 They were led by a forest lion  
 Who seized every opportunity.  
 His commands were carried out by swords  
 With death flowing from their edges.  
 Polished, they became dim when unsheathed  
 And sunken into the hearts as he so determined.  
 Birds of prey followed him among his enemies  
 And reaped their kidneys as lush as grass.  
 He advanced when all other lions cowered  
 Away from the battle of death on seeing it.  
 He plunged the horses into a risk  
 Whose jaws were agape with death.  
 Fate submissively obeyed him:  
 While the enemies hated it, he desired it.

### Arab horsemen in the Jāhiliyya period and in Islam

#### Ibn Mukaddam and Ḥassān's verses on him

The premier horseman of the Arabs in the Jāhiliyya period was Rabīʿa ibn Mukaddam. He belonged to the tribe of Banū Firās ibn Ghanm ibn Mālik ibn Kināna. Animals were sacrificed at his tomb in the Jāhiliyya and never at anybody else's. Having passed by his tomb, Ḥassān ibn Thābit said:

My young camel bolted at the stones of a volcanic ground  
 Built over the body of an open-handed generous man.  
 "Don't bolt at him, my camel, for he was  
 A drinker of wine and a kindler of wars."  
 Had it not been for long traveling and the vast desert,  
 I would have made my camel crawl on its hamstrings.

### The Firās ibn Ghanm tribe and a few words of ‘Alī concerning them

The tribe of Banū Firās ibn Ghanm ibn Kināna were of all Arabs the readiest to rush to help. One of them was equal to ten from other tribes. ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, may God be pleased with him, used to say to the people of Kufa, “He who has you for supporters has the losing share of the lot. May God give you someone instead of me who is bad for you and may He give me instead of you people who are better than you. By God, I wish I had three hundred men of the Banū Firās ibn Ghanm instead of all of you, one hundred thousand men that you are.”

Among the horsemen of the Arabs in the Jāhiliyya were the following: ‘Antara, the knight of knights; ‘Utayba ibn al-Ḥārith ibn Shihāb; Abū Barā’ ‘Āmir ibn Mālik, the player with spearheads; Zayd of the horses; Biṣṭām ibn Qays; al-Uḥaymir al-Sa‘dī; ‘Āmir ibn al-Ṭufayl; ‘Amr ibn ‘Abd Wudd; and ‘Amr ibn Ma‘dīkarib.

In the Islamic period the most noted horsemen were the following: the Commander of the Faithful ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, peace be on him; al-Zubayr; Ṭalḥa; and the Anṣār: ‘Abd Allāh ibn Khāzim al-Sulamī; ‘Abbād ibn al-Ḥuṣayn; ‘Umayr ibn al-Ḥubāb; Qaṭarī ibn al-Fujā’a; al-Ḥarīsh ibn Hilāl al-Sa‘dī; and Shabīb al-Ḥarūrī.

### Sayings of the Arabs on some of their horsemen

They said, “No brave man was ever ashamed of running away from ‘Abd Allāh ibn Khāzim and Qaṭarī ibn al-Fujā’a, leader of the Azraqites.”

They also said, “Ḥātīm was the paragon of generosity, al-Aḥnaf of forbearance, Khuraym of benefaction, and ‘Umayr ibn al-Ḥubāb of strength.”

### Ibn Khāzim on seeing a rat while he was with Ibn Ziyād

While ‘Abd Allāh ibn Khāzim was sitting with ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn Ziyād, someone entered carrying a white rat. ‘Ubayd Allāh was amazed at it and said to ‘Abd Allāh, “Abū Ṣāliḥ, have you ever seen a more amazing thing than this?” Looking at him, he saw that ‘Abd Allāh had shrunk so that he looked like a chick and had turned pale so that he looked like a male locust. ‘Ubayd Allāh remarked, “Abū Ṣāliḥ disobeys the Compassionate, makes light of political power, seizes a snake, walks over to a lion, meets spears with his chest, and yet has been overtaken by fear of a rat as you can see. I testify that God is capable of doing everything.”

Shabīb al-Ḥarūrī used to shout at the army on all sides, and no one dared look at another. About him a poet said the following:

If ever he shouted, you would think rocks were falling,  
Winds were blowing, and waves were clashing.

When he was killed, al-Ḥajjāj ordered that his chest be opened. It was found that he had a heart as big as a camel’s. When they hit the ground with it, it bounced like a blown [empty] bladder.

### A saying of Ibn ‘Abbās about the Anṣār

The men of al-Anṣār are the most courageous of all men. ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abbās said, “No swords were unsheathed, no armies marched, and no ranks were arrayed until the two sons of Qayla adopted Islam.” He was referring to al-Aws and al-Khazraj, who are the Anṣār (the Supporters) among the Banū ‘Amr ibn ‘Āmir, who belonged to the tribe of al-Azd.

### Abū Barā’ in old age

Al-‘Utbi said, “When Abū Barā’ ‘Āmir ibn Mālik became old and his brother’s sons considered him to be weak and doting, and he had no children to protect him, he said:

I pushed you away from me, but no pushing by the hand  
Is of any use if not assisted by the fingers.  
My forbearance and your foolish behavior toward me  
Make me appear weak, and the fact that I attack no fool.

### A saying of ‘Alī about Hamdān

When ‘Alī ibn Abi Ṭālib, may God be pleased with him, saw the capability of the tribe of Hamdān in war in the Battle of Ṣiffin, he said:

I called upon Hamdān when doors were closed  
And men like Hamdān are capable of opening doors.  
They are like Indian blades, with unblunted edges:  
Beautiful faces and unperturbed firm hearts.

Ibn Barrāqa al-Hamdānī said:

By God’s Shrine, you lie and will not attain victory  
By fighting, as long as my sword has a hilt.  
Whenever one combines intelligence, a sharp sword,  
And honorable pride, one can be spared injustice.  
If some people attack me, I fight back:  
Am I unfair in doing so, Hamdān?

Ta’abbaṭa Sharran said:

Little does he complain when afflicted by a grave matter,  
And far he goes in various paths and passions.  
He spends the night in one wilderness and in the morning  
He is in another, riding alone the bare back of danger.  
When sleep closes his eyes, he continues to be  
Protected by a determined and brave heart.  
He lets his eyes be the vigilant guard of his heart  
And quickly unsheathes a smooth and sharp sword.  
When he smites the bones of an opponent with it,  
Death’s jubilant mouth shows its rejoicing teeth.

Abū Saʿīd al-Makhzūmī, who was a brave man, said:

What do the sons of menstruating women want of a man  
 Who darkens his eyelids with embers  
 and girds himself with arrows,  
 Who drinks not but from a well of blood  
 And whose neighbor sleeps not in fear?

Similar to this is Bashshar al-ʿUqaylī's verse:

He is a young man who does not sleep unavenged  
 And who does not drink water except with blood.

### Between Ibn al-Zubayr and al-Ashtar

ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Zubayr said, "I fought with al-Ashtar al-Nakhaʿī in the Battle of the Camel. When I gave him one blow, he gave me five or six. Then he took me by the leg and threw me in the trench, saying, 'By God, if it were not for your family relationship with God's Messenger, God bless him and give him peace, no limb of your body would have remained attached to the others.'"

### ʿĀʾisha's award to the one who told her of Ibn al-Zubayr's safety

Abū Bakr ibn Abī Shayba said, "ʿĀʾisha granted the person who gave her the good news of Ibn al-Zubayr's safety after his fight with al-Ashtar ten thousand [dirhams]."

### A saying of Mutammim about his brother

Mutammim ibn Nuwayra mentioned his brother Mālik and his great endurance and said, "He used to go out on a chilly night, wearing an open wrap, sitting between two provision bags as he rode a slow camel, and carrying a Khaṭṭī spear." The listeners said, "By your father, this is indeed real endurance."

### From ʿUmar to Ibn Muqarrin in a summer raid

ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb wrote to al-Nuʿmān ibn Muqarrin while the latter was out on a summer raid, "Seek help in your fighting from ʿAmr ibn Maʿdīkarib and Ṭulayḥa al-Azdi but do not put them in charge of anything, for every craftsman knows his craft best."

ʿAmr ibn Maʿdīkarib said, describing his patience and endurance in war:

O you who blame me: my equipment is my sword and spear,  
 And my long-legged horse that is easy to control.  
 O you who blame me: what consumed my youth  
 Was my response to those who screamed for help.  
 I [battled] with heroes until my body became thin,  
 And carrying the sword-belt scarred my shoulder.

My forbearance outlasted that of the tribe  
 And my provision was exhausted before theirs.  
 I was astonished by a wondrous saying  
 That was not among the wonders of level-headedness.  
 Ubayy wished to meet me in battle  
 And I wished [otherwise], but far removed were my wishes.  
 He wished [to fight] me, my shirt being my coat of mail  
 Whose nails were like the eyes of locusts,  
 And my sword being one from the time of Canaan's son,  
 Its ancient blade having been chosen at the time of 'Ad.  
 If you met me in battle, you would encounter a lion  
 Killing its prey, with a sharp sword and spearhead,  
 And you would ascertain that death was rightful  
 And the fat of your heart would show its blackness.  
 I wanted him to live and he wanted to kill me:  
 "Your excuse to your friend is what he wants."

Included in what he said about Qays ibn Makshūḥ is the following:

He wished me to be mounted on a horse,  
 On which sat his lion.  
 I was wearing a coat of mail as smooth as a stream  
 Whose water was purified by its rock-solid bed.  
 If you encountered me, you would have encountered  
 A lion towered by its mane,  
 Courageous, daring, ravenous,  
 Solid, and with raised shoulders.  
 I would stand up to my opponent, if an opponent  
 Headed for me, and I would raise him up,  
 Take him, fell him,  
 Lower him, and kill him.  
 I would hit his head, break his bones,  
 Eat him, and swallow him.

### Ruse in war

The Prophet, God bless him and give him peace, said, "War is deception."

Al-Muhallab said to his sons, "Make use of trickery in war, for it is better than bravery."

Al-Muhallab used to say, "Unhurried action that results in missing something is better than hasty action whose consequence is obtaining it."

Maslama ibn 'Abd al-Malik said, "Never have I dealt with a matter decisively and blamed myself, even if the result was bad for me; and never have I dealt with a matter indecisively but blamed myself, even if the result was good for me."

A person experienced in war was asked which conflict stratagems were most judicious. He replied, "Dispatching spies, promoting victory, seeking news,

showing joy, suppressing fear, being cautious of one's retinue while not driving away advisers and depending on deceivers, and occupying people with interests other than war."

In an Indian book, there is the following saying, "In any case a judicious person remains cautious of his enemy: he guards against attack if the enemy is near, raid if the enemy is far, ambush if the enemy is uncovered, and pursuit if the enemy runs away."

#### **Al-Ma'mūn and al-Faḍl ibn Sahl regarding an opinion al-Amīn missed**

Al-Ma'mūn said to al-Faḍl ibn Sahl, "My brother [al-Amīn] had an opinion which, had he implemented it, would have made him victorious." Al-Faḍl asked, "What was it, O Commander of the Faithful?" Al-Ma'mūn replied, "If he had written to the people of Khurāsān, Ṭabaristān, al-Rayy, and Dunyāwand that he would grant them one year's value of the land tax, we would have had one of two alternatives: either to ignore his promise to them and incur the disobedience of these countries, leading them to harbor ill-will and discontinue their help to us; or to acquiesce in his promise and honor it, leaving us with nothing to give those who were with us, our soldiers would have dispersed, and our cause would have become weak." Al-Faḍl remarked, "Praise be to God who kept this opinion from him and his supporters."

Al-Ḥajjāj wrote to al-Muhallab asking him to hurry and fight the Azraqites. Al-Muhallab wrote back saying, "It is a disaster when command is in the hands of someone who has it but does not realize its consequences."

#### **A saying of an experienced person**

An experienced person used to say to his friends, "During your wars, consult brave men of determination and cowards possessed of prudence; for the coward will not fail to give you an opinion that will preserve your lives, while the brave man will not go beyond what will strengthen support for you. From the two opinions, choose what will remove from you the shame of the coward and the foolhardiness of the brave man. The result will be more penetrating than an arrow and more piercing than a sword."

#### **Between Alexander and his educator regarding a city he conquered**

Alexander never conquered a city without destroying it and killing its people until he passed by a city in which his educator resided. The latter came out to meet him, so Alexander treated him kindly and respectfully. The educator said, "May God keep the king well. I am indeed the one who has most contributed to your excellent state and helped you with all that you desired. The people of this city hope well of you because of my position with you. I would like you to permit me to intercede for them and not to withhold whatever I ask of you for them." Alexander gave him his word in binding promises that he could never break.

When the educator was convinced, he said, "My request is that you destroy the city and kill its people." "Never," Alexander remonstrated, "I have to disobey you." "Then go away and leave us alone," the educator said.

### **Saʿīd ibn al-ʿĀṣ and a fort he conquered**

It was said that Saʿīd ibn al-ʿĀṣ made peace with the defenders of a Persian fort, promising not to kill a single man among them. He then killed them all except for a single man.

### **ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ and the infidel ruler of Gaza**

Ibn al-Kalbī said, "When ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ conquered Caesarea, he marched on and camped at Gaza. Its infidel ruler sent word to him saying, 'Send me one of your men so that I may talk to him.' ʿAmr thought, 'I am the only one suitable for this occasion.' So he went out, came to the infidel ruler, and talked to him. The latter heard from him things the like of which he had never heard before. The infidel ruler then asked, 'Tell me, are all your friends like you?' ʿAmr replied, 'Don't ask about such things. I am the least important among them. That is why they sent me to you and exposed me to danger in this way, not knowing what you would do to me.' The infidel ruler ordered that ʿAmr be given an award and a suit of clothes but he sent word to the doorman to cut off ʿAmr's head and take what he had with him when he passed by. So ʿAmr left the infidel ruler and happened to pass by one of the Christian men of the tribe of Ghassān, who recognized him. 'ʿAmr,' the man warned. 'You have entered safely, so make a safe exit.' ʿAmr realized what the man meant, so he returned. 'What brought you back to us?' the infidel ruler asked. ʿAmr answered, 'I looked at what you had given me and thought it was not sufficient for my cousins. I intend to come back to you with ten of them so that you may give them similar gifts. Your favor toward ten men would be better than toward one man only.' 'Very well,' the infidel ruler said, 'Make haste and bring them along.' He also sent word to the doorman to let ʿAmr go. ʿAmr left, watching carefully all around him until he felt safe. 'Never will I do a similar thing again,' he thought to himself. When ʿAmr finally made peace with the infidel ruler, the latter exclaimed in surprise, 'Is that you?' ʿAmr said, 'Yes, indeed, despite your treachery.'"

### **ʿUmar and al-Hurmuzān**

Ibn al-Kalbī also said, "When al-Hurmuzān was brought as a captive to ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, the latter was told, 'O Commander of the Faithful, this is the leader of the Persians and Rustam's friend.' ʿUmar said to him, 'I offer you as a matter of counsel the chance of adopting Islam, for it is better for your present and your future.' 'O Commander of the Faithful,' al-Hurmuzān said, 'I only believe in the religion I now have, and I have no desire for Islam.' ʿUmar ordered

that al-Hurmuzān be put to the sword but when he was about to be killed, al-Hurmuzān pleaded, ‘O Commander of the Faithful, a drink of water, please; that would be better than killing me thirsty.’ So ‘Umar ordered that he be given a drink of water. When al-Hurmuzān took it, he asked, ‘Am I safe until I drink it?’ ‘Yes,’ ‘Umar assured him. Al-Hurmuzān then dropped it and said, ‘Fulfilling one’s promise is a bright light, O Commander of the Faithful.’ ‘You are right,’ ‘Umar said. ‘We hereby grant you suspension of execution and a study of your case.’ Then he commanded, ‘Take away the sword.’ When the sword was taken away, al-Hurmuzān said, ‘Now, O Commander of the Faithful, I testify that there is no god but God, that Muḥammad is His servant and messenger, and that what he has come with is Truth from God.’ ‘You have adopted Islam in the best way,’ ‘Umar remarked, ‘so what kept you back?’ Al-Hurmuzān replied, ‘I did not want you to think that I adopted Islam out of fear of the sword or preferred to embrace its faith because of terror.’ ‘Umar said, ‘People of Persia have minds that made them deserve the dominions they possessed.’ Then he ordered that al-Hurmuzān be honored and treated well. Later he used to seek his advice when sending out armies against the people of Persia.”

### **Maʿn and a group of captives**

This is similar to the act of a captive who was one of a group of captives brought by Maʿn ibn Zāʿida. When he gave orders for them to be killed, the captive pleaded, “Do you kill captives, Maʿn, when they are thirsty?” So Maʿn ordered that they be given water. When they drank, the captive reproved, “Maʿn, do you kill your guests?” Whereupon Maʿn set them free.

### **A Persian king**

It was related that a Persian king was known to be thoughtful, intelligent, and diplomatic. When he wanted to go to war against another ruler, he would send someone to seek reports about that ruler and his subjects before declaring war on him. There were three qualities this king wanted to discover about the other ruler’s circumstances. He used to tell his spies, “Look and see whether the ruler receives true reports about his subjects or is deceived by whoever reports to him. Then look at the matter of wealth; see what sort of his subjects have it: those whose integrity is high and whose greed is low, or those whose integrity is low and whose greed is high. Then investigate what sort of subject administers his affairs: someone who looks out for his present and future, or someone who is preoccupied by his present to the detriment of his future.” If he was told that the ruler was not deceived by the reports he received, that wealth was in the hands of those whose greed was low and integrity high, and that the administrator of his affairs was someone who looked out for his present and future, the king would say, “Look for someone else.” If he was told the opposite, he would say, “This is a potential fire waiting for someone to light it; all these things are

suppressed grudges seeking a mode of escape. Go for him. For there can be no destruction worse than one that results from safety that is wasted, no enemy worse than peace that leads to self-delusion.”

### **Yazdajird deceived by the king of the Hayāṭila**

Before the Party Kings, the kings of Persia used to reside in Balkh, then they resided in Babylon; then Ardashir ibn Bābak resided in Pars, which became the capital of their kingdom. The kings of the Hayāṭila ruled Khurāsān; they were the ones who killed Fayrūz ibn Yazdajird ibn Bahrām, the King of Persia, who had invaded them. The king of the Hayāṭila conspired against him by resorting to a man whom he knew to be both cunning and experienced in affairs of state. He pretended to be angry with him and punished him publicly and severely. Then he set him free, after reaching agreement with him on a secret matter about which he informed him. The man then left and came upon Fayrūz on his way. He pretended to be inclined to him and sought his aid regarding the great affliction he had suffered. When Fayrūz learned about the severe punishment the man had undergone, he trusted him and considered him to be safe. The man then said to Fayrūz, “I will show you, O King, the weak points of your enemy and show you the points of their inadvertence.” He then led him along a path of thirst and destruction. The king of the Hayāṭila came out against him and captured him with most of his friends. Fayrūz begged them for the favor of sparing him and his companions; he gave them a solemn promise that he would never invade them, and he erected a stone which he designated as the boundary between him and them. He swore to them that he and his soldiers would never cross it and declared God to be his witness to that as well as every one of his relatives and generals who were present. The Hayāṭila granted him the favor he requested and set him free along with everyone with him. When Fayrūz returned to his kingdom, his pride prompted him to refuse to accept what had befallen him. So he attacked the Hayāṭila, breaking his promise and not keeping his compact. However, he resorted to a subtle trick that he thought would relieve him of his oaths. He placed the boundary stone on an elephant at the front of his army and explained that he would never cross it. When he came to the Hayāṭila, they pleaded with him in the name of God and reminded him of his oaths and the compact to which he had promised to bind himself. But he persisted in his betrayal and violation of his agreement. So they fought him, captured him, and killed him along with those who protected him. They then seized his army.

### **A saying of the Prophet, God bless him and give him peace**

Usāma ibn Zayd al-Laythī said, “When the Prophet, God bless him and give him peace, embarked on a raid, he followed a path different from the one he had earlier intended and announced. He used to say, ‘War is deception.’”

### **Mālik al-Khath‘amī and his nickname, “The Fox”**

Ziyād said on the authority of Mālik ibn Anas, “When Mālik ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Khath‘amī was leading a summer expedition, he used to stand among the people whenever he intended to march. He would glorify God Most High, praise Him, then say, ‘Tomorrow, God Most High willing, I intend to march and take such-and-such a route.’ Spies would disperse and give out this information about him. However, when people got up next morning, he would take them on another route. The Byzantines used to call him ‘The Fox.’”

### **Commandments to army leaders**

‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz wrote to al-Jarrāh, “I was informed that, when the Messenger of God, God bless him and give him peace, sent out an army or a detachment, he used to say, ‘Attack in the name of God and for the cause of God. You are fighting those who disbelieve in God. Don’t hate, don’t betray, don’t mutilate, and don’t kill a woman or a child.’ So when you send out an army or a detachment, command them likewise.”

When ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb commissioned army commanders, he used to say, “In the name of God, by God, and with the help of God. Go with the support of God. Victory comes from none other than God and by adhering to truth and patience. So for the cause of God fight those who disbelieve in God. Don’t be aggressors for God does not like aggressors. In an encounter don’t be cowards, don’t mutilate when you get the upper hand, and don’t be exuberant when you are victorious. Don’t kill an old man, a woman, or a child; and beware of having them killed when the two armies meet and when raids are made.”

### **Abū Bakr commanding Yazīd ibn Abi Sufyān**

When Abū Bakr, God be pleased with him, sent out Yazīd ibn Abi Sufyān to Syria, he saw him off while standing on the ground. Yazīd said to him, “Either you mount your horse or I dismount.” Abū Bakr replied, “You will not dismount nor will I mount. I consider these steps of mine to be for the cause of God.” Then he added, “You will come across people who have dedicated themselves to God [meaning monks]. Leave them alone to do what they have dedicated themselves to. You will also come across people who parted their hair in the middle, so smite what they have parted with the sword.” Lastly Abū Bakr said, “I give you ten commandments: Don’t betray, don’t mutilate, don’t kill an old man or a woman or a child, don’t slay a sheep or a camel except what you need to eat, don’t burn palm trees, don’t destroy a cultivated land or a built-up and peopled area, don’t hate, and don’t lessen the value of things.”

### **Abū Bakr commanding Khālīd ibn al-Walīd**

When Abū Bakr, God be pleased with him, sent out Khālīd ibn al-Walīd to fight

the apostates, he said, “March ahead with the blessing of God. When you enter the enemy’s land, remain at a distance from the attack, for I fear for you if you enter the fray. Have sufficient provisions; march with the help of guides; and don’t let a wounded man in your army fight, for part of him is no longer his. Beware of camping overnight, for Arabs tend to be inadvertent. Speak little, for only what is remembered of you is yours. Accept people at their face value and leave what is in their hearts to God. I entrust you to God, whose trusts are never lost.”

### **From Khālid to the satraps of Persia**

Khālid ibn al-Walīd sent a letter with Ibn Nufayla al-Ghassānī to the satraps of Persia saying, “Praise be to God who broke up your unity, dispersed your assemblage, weakened your power, took away your kingdom, and humiliated your dignity. When this my letter reaches you, send me hostages, take faith in our covenant of protection, and pay the head tax. Otherwise, by God other than whom there is no god, I will march to invade you with men who love death as much as you love life and who desire the Afterlife as much as you desire this world.”

### **From ‘Umar to Ibn Abī Waqqās**

‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb wrote to Sa’d ibn Abī Waqqās, God be pleased with both of them, and to the soldiers with him, “I command you and those soldiers with you to fear God in all events, for fear of God is the best preparation against the enemy and the strongest stratagem in war. I command you and those soldiers with you to be more wary of sins than of your enemy; for the sins of the army are more detrimental than the enemy itself. Muslims are victorious only because their enemy disobeys God by sinfulness; if it were not for that, we would have no strength to defeat them, because our numbers are not as great as theirs, and our equipment not like theirs. If we were equal in sinfulness, they would be our betters by their strength; and if we were not victorious over them by our virtue, we would not defeat them by our strength. Know that, in your march forward, you have guardians from God who know what you do, so be wary of them and don’t disobey God while you are fighting for the cause of God. Don’t say that our enemy is worse than us and will never be given dominion over us, even if we commit sins. For many a people were dominated by others who were worse than them: when the Children of Israel committed sinful actions provoking God’s wrath, they were dominated by the infidel Magians who ‘ravaged the habitations and it was a promise performed’ [Q. 17:5]. Ask God to help you, just as you ask Him to give you victory over your enemy. I ask this from God for ourselves and for you. Be kind to Muslims while on their march: don’t force them to tolerate a march that will exhaust them and don’t shorten a camping period that will provide them with rest. Then, they can reach the enemy with their strength

undiminished by travel, since they are marching toward an enemy who is stationary and defended by men and cavalry. Every Friday abide in a place for one day and one night with all those with you, so that they may have rest to refresh themselves and repair their weapons and materials. Let their encampments be distant from the towns of people who have made peace with you and those under a covenant of protection. Let no one of your companions enter these towns unless you are sure of their faith. None of their inhabitants should be robbed of anything, for they have a respect and protection that you should honor as an obligation, just as their obligation is to accept their status with patience. As long as they are patient in this regard, you should treat them well. Don't seek help against people you do war against by treating people who made peace unjustly. When you enter the nearest area of enemy land, spread out your spies between them and you; do not let their conditions be unknown to you. You should have some Arabs or people from the area whose advice and sincerity you trust, for a liar's information is no use to you even if some of it is truthful; a deceiver is a spy against you, not for you. When you approach enemy land, let numerous sorties go forth and let detachments spread out between you and the enemy. These detachments will cut off their reinforcements and supplies. The sorties will be able to discover their weaknesses. Choose wise and brave people from among your companions as sorties, and give them the best fast horses. When they meet an enemy, the first thing they realize will be the strength of your opinion. Let the detachments be made of men known for their patience in struggling and fighting, and don't choose anyone in them for a special personal reason lest you lose respect for your opinion and yourself more than the favor you would gain with those to whom you have been specially inclined. When you come in sight of the enemy, call in your farthest soldiers, your sorties, and your detachments; and invoke your stratagem and your strength. Unless you are obliged, don't be hasty to engage the enemy in fighting until you see his weak points and mortal defects and until you know all the terrain as well as its own people. Then you can do to your enemy as much he is able to do to you. Spread out your lieutenants among your soldiers and do your best not to camp overnight. If a captive without a covenant is brought to you, cut off his head as a way of frightening God's enemy and yours. May God help you and those with you, and may He be the patron of victory for you over your enemies. God is the one from whom help should be sought.

#### **‘Abd al-Malik advising his general sent to the land of the Byzantines**

‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān gave this advice to a general he was sending to the land of the Byzantines. “You are God's merchant on behalf of His servants,” he said. “So be like a wise speculator who, if he finds the possibility of profit, will trade but who will otherwise be cautious with capital. Don't seek booty until you have achieved safety. Of your trickery against the enemy, be more cautious than of theirs against you.”

### **Ziyād advising his generals**

Ziyād used to say to his generals, “Avoid two things and don’t fight any enemy in them: winter and valley bottoms.”

### **Between al-Walīd and ‘Abbad ibn Ziyād**

Al-Walīd ibn ‘Abd al-Malik sent out an army on a raid in winter; it achieved victory and was safe. He said to ‘Abbād [ibn Ziyād], “O Abū Ḥarb, what value has Ziyād’s opinion compared with ours?” ‘Abbād answered, “O Commander of the Faithful, you have committed an error, even though not every weakness is invariably vulnerable.”

### **Mu‘āwiya having wanted to appoint Ibn Khālīd, then al-Ghāmīdī**

Al-‘Utbi said: The Byzantines assembled their army and attacked the Muslims by land and sea. Mu‘āwiya appointed ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Khālīd ibn al-Walīd to lead the summer expedition against them. Having written his commission to him, Mu‘āwiya asked, “What will you do with my written commission?” ‘Abd al-Raḥmān answered, “I will take it as a guiding command, something that I will not disobey.” “Give me back my commission,” Mu‘āwiya responded then summoned Sufyān ibn ‘Awf al-Ghāmīdī, wrote him a commission, then asked him, “What will you do with my written commission?” Al-Ghāmīdī replied, “I will take it as a guiding command in relation to judicious discretion; if it goes contrary to judicious discretion, I will disobey it.” “There,” Mu‘āwiya commented, “this is the man who will not be held back when he acts in haste, who will not be shoved in the back when he knows he is weak, and who will not be goaded to do things like a slow camel.”

### **Durayd and Ibn ‘Awf al-Naṣrī**

Durayd ibn al-Ṣimma said to Mālik ibn ‘Awf al-Naṣrī, leader of Hawāzin in the Battle of Ḥunayn, “Mālik, you are the head of your people. This is a battle day that will have serious consequences. Why do I hear the mooing of camels, the braying of donkeys, the crying of children, and the bleating of sheep?” Mālik said, “I have brought my people with their children, their wives, and their animals.” “Why?” asked Durayd. “I wanted to have behind every man his own family and animals to fight for,” replied Mālik. Durayd disapproved of this. “Shepherd of God’s sheep!” he said. “Do you think a runaway will be held back by anything? If victory is to be yours, no one but a man with a sword and a spear will be of any help to you; if you are meant for defeat, you will be disgraced with your family and animals. Woe to you! You have gained nothing by placing Hawāzin’s people at the head of the cavalry. Send them back to the high and impregnable places of their country, then place the Muslims on horseback. If victory is yours, those behind you will follow you; if you are defeated, you will have put your family and

animals in a safe and secure place.” Mālik said, “No, I will not do that. You have grown old and your mind is gone.” Durayd said, “This is a day that I will witness and it has not yet passed me.” Then he recited the following verses:

I wish I were a young man on this day,  
Trotting and galloping,  
Riding a long-haired mare with a dense mane  
As if it were a reddish moose.

### **Qutayba advising his companions**

Qutayba ibn Muslim used to say to his companions, “When you go on a raid, let your nails grow long, shorten your hair, give people angry looks, talk to them curtly, and stab [your enemies] sharply.”

### **Abū Muslim advising his generals**

Abū Muslim used to say to his generals, “Let your hearts feel daring, for it is one of the causes of victory. Keep mentioning grudges, for they motivate boldness. Be obedient, for obedience is the stronghold of a fighter.”

Saʿīd ibn Zayd used to say to his sons, “Shorten your bridles and sharpen your spearheads, and you will eat up the near ones and frighten the far ones.”

### **Al-Manṣūr and ʿĪsā ibn Mūsā**

ʿĪsā ibn Mūsā said, “When al-Manṣūr sent me out to Medina to fight ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Ḥasan, he kept on advising me and overdid it. ‘O Commander of the Faithful,’ I asked, ‘how much longer will you continue to advise me?’

I am indeed that Indian blade.  
I unsheathed my sword and broke my scabbard.  
All you ask of me is here with me.’”

## **Defending the clan and protecting seekers of help**

### **Juʿayl describing his people to ʿAbd al-Malik**

ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān asked Juʿayl ibn ʿAlqama al-Thaʿlabī, “How strong are your people?” “We have never been the object of others’ greed,” Juʿayl boasted, “and we have never been thought to be harmless.” “How good is your protection of others?” asked ʿAbd al-Malik. Juʿayl answered, “One of us would defend a seeker of help against other people as he would defend himself.” ʿAbd al-Malik remarked, “It is only one like you who can describe his people so well.”

**Ibn Muṭāʿs saying**

ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān said to Muṭāʿ al-ʿAnzī, “Tell me about Mālik ibn Mismaʿ.” “If Mālik ever got angry,” Muṭāʿ replied, “one hundred thousand swords would become angry too without asking him the reason for his anger.” ʿAbd al-Malik said, “This, by God, is real power.”

He said, “Neither Mālik ibn Mismaʿ nor Asmāʾ ibn Khārija was ever in charge of anything for the ruler.”

**Arab sayings on defending one’s neighbor**

Arabs used to praise people for defending neighbors. “So-and-So has a well-defended neighbor,” they used to say, “and a well-protected honor.” Yes indeed, and there would be a person among them who even defended locusts that alighted in his neighborhood; he would be called locust-protector.

Praising Maʿn ibn Zāʾida, and describing the honorable deeds of Banū Shaybān and their defense of anyone seeking their help, Marwān ibn Abī Ḥafṣa said:

They are the people who, if they said anything,  
they said the right word; and if they were invoked,  
They promptly responded; and if they gave anything,  
they gave good things and with generosity.  
They protect their neighbor so well that it is as though  
his home is between Arcturus and Spica Virginis.

Another poet said:

They protect their neighbor so well that it is as though  
he is a sandhill gathered under an eagle’s wing.

**Muʿāwiya and Hānīʾ on money Ibn Shihāb embezzled**

It was related that Muʿāwiya appointed Kathīr ibn Shihāb al-Midhḥaji as ruler of Khurāsān. There he embezzled a lot of money, ran away, and hid with Hānīʾ ibn ʿUrwa al-Murādī. When Muʿāwiya heard that, he declared that Hānīʾ’s blood could be shed with impunity. Hānīʾ traveled to see Muʿāwiya, was in his neighborhood, then attended his council without being known by him. When all the people left, Hānīʾ stayed put. Muʿāwiya asked him what was the matter with him. Hānīʾ said, “I am Hānīʾ ibn ʿUrwa.” Muʿāwiya said, “This day is not like the day in which your father said:

I comb my long hair and I drag my tailing robe  
And a dark red horse carries my armor and weapons.  
I walk among the noblemen of Banū Ghaṭīf.  
When I am vexed by anything, I rise above it with pride.”

Hānīʾ said, “By God, I am today more powerful than on that day, O Commander of the Faithful.” “How so?” asked Muʿāwiya. “By being a Muslim.” “Where is

Kathīr ibn Shihāb?” asked Mu‘āwiya. “With me and at your disposal, O Commander of the Faithful,” replied Hānī. Mu‘āwiya said, “Look into the money he has embezzled, then take away from him some of it and leave a permissible amount with him. We have granted him safety and given him to you.”

### **The killing of Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr**

Al-Shaybānī said, “When Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr went to Egypt and Mu‘āwiya sent Mu‘āwiya ibn Ḥudayj al-Kindī after him, those who were with Muḥammad left him and dispersed. Muḥammad hid, but his hiding place was disclosed. He was taken, and his head was cut off and sent to Mu‘āwiya. His was the first head ever shown around in Islam. Muḥammad ibn Ja‘far ibn Abī Ṭālib had been with him, so he sought the help of his maternal uncles who belonged to the tribe of Khath‘am, and they hid him. The chieftain of Khath‘am in those days was a man with a protruding chest and a sunken back, a deformity resulting from a bone break he had suffered. When he walked, anyone who did not know him would think he was strutting pompously. It was mentioned to Mu‘āwiya that Muḥammad was hiding with this chieftain, so he said to him, ‘Hand over this man to us.’ The chieftain said, ‘He is our nephew who took refuge with us so that we may save his blood from being shed. Leave him alone, O Commander of the Faithful.’ ‘By God,’ Mu‘āwiya said, ‘I will not leave him alone until you bring him to me.’ The chieftain said, ‘By God, I will never bring him to you.’ ‘You have lied,’ Mu‘āwiya insisted, ‘you will – by God – bring him to me. I can see, you are very stupid.’ ‘Yes,’ the chieftain agreed, ‘I am very stupid indeed when I fight you to spare your cousin’s blood by offering my own cousin’s blood to be shed for him.’ Mu‘āwiya fell silent and let him go and have his way.”

### **Al-Mahdī and Ma‘n on a man whose blood was to be shed with impunity**

Al-Shaybānī said, “Sa‘īd ibn Salm said, ‘Al-Mahdī declared that a certain Kūfan man’s blood could be shed with impunity, so the man hid for a while. Then he appeared in the City of Peace [Baghdad] and was present like one who was absent, afraid and ever watchful. When he was walking one day in some section of the city, a man from Kūfa saw him, recognized him, and held him by the edges of his robe, saying, “This is the man wanted by the Commander of the Faithful.” The frightened man let him get hold of him, certain of his own death. But while he was in this condition, he heard the hooves of horses behind him, turned around, and saw Ma‘n ibn Zā‘ida. He shouted, “O Abū al-Walīd, help me – may God help you.” Ma‘n halted and asked the man holding him, “What is your problem?” The man replied, “This is the man wanted by the Commander of the Faithful who declared that his blood could be shed with impunity and promised to give one thousand [dirhams] to anyone who disclosed his whereabouts.” Ma‘n said, “Boy, dismount and let our brother mount your horse.” The man shouted, “O people, look how someone is intervening between me and one sought by the

Commander of the Faithful.” Maʿn said to him, “Go then and tell him that the man is with me.” The man went to the Commander of the Faithful’s gate, informed the gatekeeper, then entered to see al-Mahdī, and informed him. Al-Mahdī ordered that the man be imprisoned, then sent some messengers to fetch Maʿn. The Commander of the Faithful’s messengers came to Maʿn and found that he had put on his formal clothes and that his horse was ready next to him. He instructed his family and freedmen, “Let no one reach this man as long as you have eyes that blink.” Maʿn then mounted his horse and left. He greeted al-Mahdī but the latter refused to return his greeting. “Maʿn,” he said, “have you given protection to someone against my will?” Maʿn replied, “Yes, O Commander of the Faithful.” The Commander of the Faithful was infuriated. “And you admit it, too?!” he shouted. Maʿn explained, “O Commander of the Faithful: in obedience to you, I killed fifteen thousand men in one day in Yemen. There have been many other days in the past in which my heroic actions and my performance capabilities were proven. Don’t you think I deserve that you grant me one man who has sought my protection?” Al-Mahdī bowed his head in long silence. As his anger subsided, he raised it again and said, “We will protect the man you have protected.” Maʿn pleaded, “If the Commander of the Faithful finds it suitable to give the man a gift, thus giving him life and wealth, he will do it.” Al-Mahdī said, “We have ordered that he be given five thousand [dirhams].” Maʿn protested, “O Commander of the Faithful, gifts of caliphs are as big as their subjects’ crimes. The man’s crime is great, so give him a great gift.” The Caliph said, “We have ordered that he be given one hundred thousand [dirhams].” Maʿn added, “Let it be fast, O Commander of the Faithful, with the best blessings.” Then he left, and the money was sent following his departure. Maʿn summoned the protected man and said, “Take your gift and join your family. Take care never to disobey the caliphs of God, Most High.””

### Cowardice and fleeing

#### ʿAmr ibn Maʿdīkarib on fear

ʿAmr ibn Maʿdīkarib said, “Fear is of three kinds: he whose fear is in his legs is the one whose legs cannot carry him; he whose fear is in his head is the one who flees from his parents; and he whose fear is in his heart is the one who fights.”

Al-Aḥnaf said, “The quickest of men to cause sedition is the least ashamed of fleeing.”

ʿĀʾisha, Mother of the Faithful, said, “There are creatures of God whose hearts are like birds’ hearts; whenever the wind blows, their hearts palpitate with it. Fie to the cowards!”

A poet said:

The coward of any people flees from his own mother,  
And their brave man protects those unrelated to him.

The enemy benefits from a generous man's liberality,  
And a miser's relatives are deprived of his giving.

Khālid ibn al-Walīd said as he was dying, "I confronted many armies, and there is not a single spot in my body but has the scar of a blow, a stab, or a wound; and here I am, dying in spite of myself as a donkey dies. May cowards' eyes never sleep!"

### Deserter al-Sulamī on fleeing

Verses by deserters who continued to portray fleeing in a good light, despite its ugliness, until it looked good include the following verses by deserter al-Sulamī:

Many a battalion I had mixed with another  
Until, when intertwined, I washed my hands of them.  
I left them, spears breaking their backs,  
Some were killed and others were propped up.  
Will it benefit me anything when their women say  
"Don't go far," if I am killed defending their men?

### Al-Hārith ibn Hishām on deserting

Abū 'Ubayda Ma'mar ibn al-Muthannā said, "No deserter ever gave a better excuse than al-Hārith ibn Hishām when he said:

God knows I did not abandon fighting them  
Until they covered my horse with frothy blood,  
And I knew that if I fought one more man, I would be  
Killed, my enemy being unharmed by my presence.  
So I turned away from them, with beloved ones among them,  
Hoping for an awaited day when I would punish them.

This is what Ratbīl's companion heard, so he said, "O Arabs, you embellished everything and it became beautiful, even fleeing."

Next [in beautiful expression] comes the saying of Ḥassān on that subject.

Al-Hārith adopted Islam on the day Mecca was conquered and his Islam was genuine. At the time of 'Umar, he went out from Mecca to Syria with his family and belongings, and the people of Mecca followed him [to bid him farewell], crying. He was touched and he cried and said, "If we exchange one abode for another or one neighbor for another, we will not find anyone to replace you; but moving is in the service of God." He remained in Syria fighting until he died.

Another poet said:

Hind stood up to encourage me, knowing  
That courage is associated with perdition.

No. By Him who prevented eyes from seeing Him,  
 No one with sensibility desires death, in my opinion.  
 Warriors are people, whose effort God has led astray,  
 Who jump to war's fire whenever they are called.  
 I am not one of them and I don't like their deeds,  
 Neither killing appeals to me nor do spoils of war.

Maḥmūd al-Warrāq said:

O raiding horseman, serious in his quest,  
 My heart flies with fear of weapons.  
 I have no strength to bear the dust of horses  
 When it is stirred up by excited warriors,  
 And when war's millstone turns, grinding people,  
 Some are killed, some flee, and some fall captives;  
 When the coward does not utter a sound, out of terror,  
 And when shouts rise and cheers glorify God.  
 In things such as this and that, I am dull-witted;  
 But in other things, I am intelligent and knowledgeable.

Ayman ibn Khuraym said:

War strife has a clear fury,  
 Which gradually becomes moderate.  
 So, when there is giving, come to them;  
 But when there is fighting, stay away.  
 Only the ignorant kindle the firewood  
 Of war, so let it burn with a flame.

**By the author of *Kalila and Dimna***

Among the proof-texts that deserters use is one by the author of *Kalila and Dimna*, who said, "A wise man hates fighting unless it is inevitable, for loss in it is in souls while in other matters loss is only in money."

Ḥabīb took this meaning, put it in verse, and said:

What a difference there is between people whose losses  
 Are only in money and people whose losses are in souls!

Among the deserters was ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Ashʿath. He ran away from the Azraqites when he was leading ten thousand men. Al-Muhallab had sent him word, saying, "Son of my brother, entrench yourself and your companions, for I know the Kharijites; and don't you be deluded." ʿAbd al-Raḥmān replied, saying, "I know them better than you do and they are of less worth to me than a camel's fart." Qaṭarī, leader of the Azraqites, let him spend the night. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān killed five hundred of Qaṭarī's companions, then ran away heeding no one. A poet said of him:

You deserted our sons with bleeding chests  
And came [home] in defeat, O camel's fart.

Among other deserters was Umayya ibn ʿAbd Allāh ibn Khālid ibn Asīd. He ran away from Abū Fudayk at the Battle of Mardāʾ Hajar. He journeyed from Baḥrayn to Baṣra for three days. One day, as he sat in Baṣra, he said, "I journeyed from Baḥrayn to Baṣra on my horse for three days during the Mihrajān festival." One of those sitting in his company joked, "May God make the prince prosper, if you had journeyed during the Nayrūz festival, you would have made it in one day!" When the people of Baṣra came to see him, they did not know how to speak to him or what to say: whether they should congratulate him or console him. Then ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Ahtam came and the people's eyes turned to him and wondered what he would say to one who had run away. ʿAbd Allāh greeted everyone then said, "Welcome to the patient disappointed man, who was left in the lurch by his people. Praise be to God who looked upon us and took care of you for us, and did not look upon you and let you die for us. For you have been exposed to dying for Islam as best you could, but God knows the need of the Muslims for you; so he spared you by making those who were with you abandon you." Umayya ibn ʿAbd Allāh commented, "I have never met anyone who informed me about myself but you."

A poet said about him:

When he hears a bird chirp,  
His heart flies in fear;  
But he is a sharp-toothed lion  
When a broth of meat and bread is served.

### Al-Ḥajjāj and horses belonging to Umayya

Al-Ḥajjāj brought some animals belonging to Umayya, with the word "Equipment" branded on their thighs. He ordered that the words "for desertion" be written under it.

Abū Dulāma said, "I was with Marwān during the days he was fighting al-Ḍaḥḥāk al-Ḥarūrī. A horseman from the latter's camp came out and called for a duel. A man from our camp went out to him but was killed, then a second, and then a third. People cringed in fear of him, so he began coming nearer to us and roaring like an excited stallion. Marwān said, 'Who will go out to him and receive ten thousand dirhams?' When I heard of the ten thousand dirhams, life became worthless to me; I gave myself generously for the sake of the money and came out for the duel. I saw that the man was wearing a fur that the rain had wetted until it was drenched, then the sun had dried it until it was shrunken; he had fiery eyes like two embers. When he saw me, he understood the reason why I had come out and he came toward me, declaiming verses in the *rajaz* meter:

A man came out haply, motivated by greed.  
 He ran away from death, but in death he fell.  
 Whoever intends to be with his kin will not return.

“When I saw him, I veiled my head and escaped, as Marwān was saying, ‘Who is this scandalous man? Don’t let him get away!’ and I disappeared among the crowd of people.”

### A bedouin Arab on raiding

A bedouin Arab was asked, “Will you not raid your enemies?” He answered, “How can they be my enemies if I don’t know them and they don’t know me?”

Another was asked, “Will you not raid your enemies?” He answered, “By God, I hate death, lying on my bed; so how can I accept to run to it?”

### Ḥassān reproaching al-Ḥārith ibn Hishām

Verses said about coward deserters include the following said by Ḥassān ibn Thābit reproaching al-Ḥārith ibn Hishām, mentioned earlier, for his desertion in the Battle of Badr:

[Lady:] I wish you lied when you told me the story,  
 When you escaped like al-Ḥārith ibn Hishām.  
 He deserted his beloved ones and did not fight for them  
 And he escaped on a bridled and long-legged mare,  
 Which galloped with him by leaps and bounds  
 As his beloved ones remained in the worst condition.

One of the Iraqi poets said of a gluttonous coward:

When he hears a bird chirp,  
 His heart flies in fear;  
 But he is a sharp-toothed lion  
 When a broth of meat and bread is served.

He also said of him:

He is faint-hearted and timorous,  
 Yet of imposing sight and bulk.  
 He saw a bird in a dream  
 And concealed himself for months.

Another poet said:

If horses were ever to run in flight,  
 They would be the horses of Dhufāfa.  
 Neither are they horses that raise hope,  
 Nor are they horses that cause fear.

Another poet said:

We went out on one of our raids  
 And with us was Ziyād Abū Ṣaṣa'a.  
 With him, a group of six men are only five,  
 And a group of five are only four.

No one described cowardice and desertion better than al-Ṭirimmāḥ when he said of Banū Tamīm:

In the ways of meanness, Tamīm are better guided  
 Than the sand grouse;  
 But if they were to take the ways of noble traits,  
 They would go astray.  
 If Tamīm saw a gnat riding on the back of a louse  
 On a day when armies march, they would flee.  
 If Tamīm were ever to gather their soldiery  
 To defeat a bound ant, they would disperse.

A brave man or an impregnable hero is not shamed by a single desertion that occurs on a particular occasion and not as a general rule, as was said by Zufar ibn al-Ḥārith who had deserted his father and brother in the Battle of Marj Rāhiṭ:

Will a single day, if I did badly in it, take away  
 The good and excellent performance of all my days?  
 Not a single lapse has ever been seen of me before this:  
 My desertion, my abandoning of my two friends behind me.

ʿAmr ibn Maʿdīkarib fled from ʿAbbās ibn Mirdās, who captured his sister Rayḥāna about whom he says:

Is it Rayḥāna's call I hear  
 That keeps me awake while my friends sleep?

He also fled from Banū ʿAbs, among whom were Zuhayr ibn Jadhīma and his sons Sha's ibn Zuhayr, Qays ibn Zuhayr, [and Mālik ibn Zuhayr]. About them ʿAmr ibn Maʿdīkarib said:

Does [my wife] Umm al-Thuwayr consider it shameful  
 For me to flee when I encountered the Banū ʿAbs?  
 I encountered Abū Sha's as well as Sha's, Mālik,  
 And Qays, and my soul was troubled on meeting them.  
 They met us and struck our two sides with piercing  
 Stabs that were like fire striking dry firewood.  
 When we entered under the shadow of their spears,  
 I struck with my palms, seeking to touch the ground.  
 It is not shameful for a person to be coward one day  
 If courage is known of him in the past.

He also said:

In it, I prepared my legs  
 To flee in fear of death.  
 I bent them against their will  
 When my soul screamed, awed by death.  
 All that is part of my character;  
 And in all that, I was rightly afraid.  
 The heedless, morning attacker threatened me.  
 He shall have no help from anyone as long as I live.

Al-Ḥārith's wife saw him sharpening a spear on the day Mecca was conquered. So she asked, "What are you doing with this?" "I prepare it for Muḥammad and his Companions," he replied. She commented, "I don't think Muḥammad and his Companions will amount to anything!" He said, "By God, I hope to make some of them servants to you!" Then he began to say in verse:

If they come today, I have no problem.  
 Mine are full weapons: a lance with a long spearhead,  
 And a double-edged sword quick to unsheathe.

When Khālid met them in the Battle of al-Khandama, al-Ḥārith fled and his wife blamed him, so he said:

If you witnessed the Battle of al-Khandama  
 When Ṣafwān fled as well as ʿIkrima,  
 And Abū Yazīd stood like a widow with children,  
 And the Muslims followed us with their swords  
 Breaking every forearm and every skull  
 With their blows, with no sounds but only battle cries  
 And a roar behind us and a humming drone,  
 You would not have blamed me by the least word.

### Between Ibn Ziyād and Ibn Zurʿa

Aslam ibn Zurʿa was sent by ʿUbayd Allāh ibn Ziyād with two thousand men to fight the Kharijite Abū Bilāl. Abū Bilāl had only forty men but they attacked Aslam's men as one man and defeated them. When Aslam went back to Ibn Ziyād, the latter chided him severely and said, "Woe to you! You go out with two thousand men and you are defeated by forty?" Aslam left, saying, "To be blamed alive by Ibn Ziyād is better for me than to be praised by him when I am dead." In another version, his words were, "That the Commander curse me when I am alive is more likable to me than that he invoke blessings upon me when I am dead." A Kharijite poet said:

You claim they were two thousand believers  
 And they were defeated in Āsak by forty?

You are liars, that is not so.  
 It is rather the Kharijites who are believers.  
 They are the small group, as you know,  
 Who were victorious over the large group.

Similar to that is a report by ‘Abd Allāh ibn Muṭī‘ ibn al-Aswad al-‘Adwī, who fled from Muslim ibn ‘Uqba’s army in the Battle of al-Ḥarra. During al-Ḥajjāj’s siege of ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Zubayr in Mecca, ‘Abd Allāh ibn Muṭī‘ was fighting the Syrians and saying:

I am the one who fled in the Battle of al-Ḥarra,  
 A chief does not flee but only once.  
 Today I compensate for that fleeing by an attack.  
 There is nothing bad in an attack after a fleeing.

He continued to fight until he was killed.

The best thing ever said about fleeing is what Qays ibn al-Ḥāṭim said:

The worst thing happening to us when we fled  
 Was the turning away of cheeks and shoulders.  
 I fought them patiently and bare-headed  
 In the Battle of al-Ḥadiqa,  
 As if my hand wielding the sword  
 Was just waving the kerchief of a children’s toy.

‘Uṭayba ibn al-Ḥārith ibn Hishām fled and abandoned his son Ḥazra in the Battle of Thabra and he said:

What a pity! I met with grief,  
 O Tamīm, and was overcome by tears.  
 At Thabra I left the best of young men,  
 I saved myself and abandoned Ḥazra.  
 Does a noble free man abandon his first-born?

Abū Khirāsh al-Hudhalī fled from Fāṭid and his companions, so they lay in wait for him at ‘Arafāt and he said:

They were loyal to me and said,  
 “O Khuwaylid, don’t be afraid.”  
 Refusing to acknowledge them, I said,  
 “It is they, it is they.”  
 Having escaped Fāṭid’s companions, I wondered,  
 “Have I disabled the horsemen or am I dreaming?”  
 Had I not avoided evil, my wife would have had  
 To choose one of her suitors as a widow.  
 Had I not avoided evil, I would have destroyed myself  
 And Khirāsh would have become an orphan that day.

Khubbayb ibn ‘Awf fled from Abū Fudayk in the Battle of Mardā’ Hajar, so he said:

O my people, I freely gave them my effort and my strength  
 As well as my advice and the gold I possessed.  
 When it came to my soul, however,  
 I turned my back to your enemies.  
 I fled and did not care for the blame of a weakling  
 Who stays put when facing the brown spears.  
 If I had two souls, I would have offered one  
 To the spears and well-crafted blades of swords.

Let us return to deserters and cowards and what was said of them.

### **Al-Farazdaq on Khālid ibn Asīd**

Khālid ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Asīd fled from Muṣ‘ab ibn al-Zubayr in the Battle of al-Jufra in al-Baṣra, so al-Farazdaq said of him:

All the black woman’s sons fled at one time  
 And there remained one more fleeing in Khālid’s buttocks.  
 You disgraced the Commander of the Faithful  
 As you passed, black men with brawny arms.

A cowardly man was told to advance in a certain battle and he said:

They said, “Advance.” I said, “I will not,  
 I am afraid that my earthenware will break.  
 If I had two heads, I would have destroyed one.  
 But I have one head and, if gone, I am left with none.  
 If one like it could be bought in the market,  
 I would have done and would not mind advancing,  
 Making orphans of my children and widows of my wives.  
 This being the case, what do you now think of advancing?”

### **Between Hind and Ibn Zinbā‘**

Hind bint al-Nu‘mān ibn Bashīr said to her husband Rawḥ ibn Zinbā‘, “How have your people made you their chief when you are cowardly and jealous?” He said, “As for cowardice, I have only one soul and I therefore protect it; as for jealousy, there is no one more entitled to it than one who has a stupid wife like you, for he fears she would bring him a child from another man and throw it in his lap.”

Ka‘b ibn Zuhayr said:

You are miserly with us  
 and cowardly with your enemy.  
 What evil characteristics these two are:  
 miserliness and cowardice.

### Virtues of horses

The Prophet, God's blessing and peace be on him, said describing horses, "Their manes are their wings, their tails are their defenders, and good is tied to their forelocks until Resurrection Day."

He also said, "Take care of the females of horses, for their bellies are a treasure, their backs are a stronghold, and their owners receive help for them."

A man said to the Prophet, God's blessing and peace be on him, "I want to buy a horse and prepare it to fight for the cause of God." The Prophet advised, "Buy a black horse, or one which is dark red with some white on its forehead and having a white upper lip and nose, or one which is white-footed except for its right leg, for these are the fortunate horses."

A wise man was asked, "What animal is the most honorable?" He said, "A mare followed by a mare, in whose womb is a mare."

### Attributes of the best horses

#### Sayings by the Prophet, God bless him and give him peace

The Messenger of God, may God bless him and give him peace, used to like russet horses.

He once said, "If the horses of the Arabs were gathered on equal footing, the reddish one will surpass them all."

A man asked him, "What property is best?" He said, "A road lined with fertilized palms and a productive brood mare."

Blessing and peace be upon him, he used to dislike white-footed horses with one leg of another color.

#### Sayings by others

It was said horses were called *khayl* in Arabic on account of their *ikhtiyāl* (haughtiness).

Describing a horse, an Arabian bedouin said, "If I left it alone, it would become sleepy; and if I moved it, it would fly."

Muslim ibn 'Amr sent word to a cousin of his living in Syria, asking him to buy some horses for him. "I know nothing about horses," the cousin replied. "Are you not a hunter?" the bedouin asked. "Yes, of course," was the answer. "So look," the bedouin advised. "Seek in a horse every quality you like about a dog." And thus, the cousin brought horses [from Syria] the likes of which the Arabians never had.

Describing a horse, one of the poets from the tribe of Ḍabba said:

It is swift, full-thighed, and has spasmodic leg nerves;  
 It outstrips the best steeds and is extremely agile.  
 If other horses offer excuses for being whipped,  
 It gives you its best and offers no excuses.

### Between al-Mahdī and Ibn Darrāj on the best horses

Al-Mahdī asked Maṭar ibn Darrāj about the best kind of horse. “It is the one,” he answered, “which, if viewed from the front, you would say it is bulky; viewed from the rear, you would say it is corpulent; and viewed from the side, you would say it is stout.” Al-Mahdī asked, “Which of these horses is the best?” Ibn Darrāj replied, “It is the one guided by its eyesight and bridled by its whip.”

Another person said, “It is the one which, when it walks, it prances; when it runs, it sprints; when it is approached from the front, it rises on its hind legs; when approached from behind, it lowers its front legs; and when approached from the side, it remains steady.”

### Between Mu‘āwiya and Ṣa‘ṣa‘a

Mu‘āwiya ibn Abī Sufyān asked Ṣa‘ṣa‘a ibn Ṣawḥān, “What horse is the best?” “It is the one with three long things,” Ṣa‘ṣa‘a replied, “three short things, three wide things, and three clear things.” Mu‘āwiya said, “Explain to us what you mean.” “Three long things,” Ṣa‘ṣa‘a replied, “are the ears, the neck, and the girth; the three short things are the back, the tail bone, and the penis; the three wide things are the forehead, the nose, and the rump; and the three clear things are the skin, the eyes, and the hooves.”

### ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb and ‘Amr ibn Ma‘dīkarib on pure Arabian horses

‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb asked ‘Amr ibn Ma‘dīkarib, “How good is your knowledge of pure Arabian horses?” ‘Amr replied, “As good as one’s knowledge of oneself, one’s family, and one’s children.” ‘Umar ordered that horses be brought and shown to him. ‘Amr said, “Offer them water in round shields. The ones that drink without raising their shoulder bones are pure Arabians and the ones that bend the toes of their hooves are not.”

I [Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih] say: We should note that ‘Umar had doubted the nobility and the low lineage of certain horses, so he called Salmān ibn Rabi‘a al-Bāhili and told him about it. Salmān asked that a washbowl full of water be brought. It was put on the ground, then the horses were brought to it one by one. The horse that bent the toes of its hooves and drank was declared by Salmān to be of low lineage, and the one that drank and did not bend them was declared by him to be a noble, pure Arabian.

Describing the long neck of a horse, Ḥassān ibn Thābit recited:

With every russet black steed,  
 whose barrel makes half of its body,  
 And has slender flanks, high stature,  
 and towering withers.

Zuhayr said:

The light touch of the finger tips  
 on our bridled horse's occiput  
 Makes his feet run and hardly touch the ground.

Another poet said:

Its legs are like the reddened legs  
 of a lustful male ostrich suddenly terrified.  
 Its sight, shoulders, hamstrings, and heart are sharp.

Another said:

It is broad-jawed and has a short bridle cheekpiece,  
 It is smooth-cheeked and has a long halter strap.

By "a short bridle cheekpiece" he did not mean that it had a short cheek but rather a long mouth opening; and by "a long halter strap" he meant it had a long cheek.

Another said:

With every broad-jawed horse having a clear skin,  
 A long rein, and a short throatlatch.

### **Abū 'Ubayda on the nobility of a horse**

Abū 'Ubayda said, "The nobility of a horse is known by the thinness of its lips and nose bone, the largeness of its nostrils, the openness of its tear-duct bones, the slenderness of its loins and ear tops, the smoothness of its cheeks and skin, and the softness of its hair. But an even clearer indication than all that is the softness of the short hair on its head and mane."

They used to say, "A horse is considered excellent when its breathing is strong, its nostrils are large, its neck is long, its loins are robust, its jaws are wide, its thighs are bulky, its sciatic nerves are short, its teeth are big, and its hooves are hard and solid."

A man from Banū Asad was asked, "Can you distinguish between a noble horse and one of low pedigree?" "Yes," he said, "The noble horse is the good steed that rises to run like an onager and is well-proportioned like a leather strap cut out of a hide. When it runs, it gallops; when it is hobbled, it lies on the ground; and when it rises, it first raises its chest and head. As for the horse of low pedigree, its hip points are level with its belly, its nose bone is bulky, its neck is thick, and it is too noisy and fidgety; when you set it free, it says 'Tie me up' and when you tether it, it says 'Set me free'."

Muḥammad ibn al-Sā'ib al-Kalbī used to relate that the noble horses shown to Sulaymān ibn Dāwūd, may God give both peace, were one thousand that he had inherited from his father. When they were first shown to him, they distracted him from the afternoon prayer and diverted him until the sun set. So he had

them all tethered except for a few that had not yet been shown to him. A group of people from the Azd tribe, who were his in-laws, arrived. When they had finished doing their business, they said to him, “O Prophet of God, our homeland is far; give us some provisions to sustain us.” He gave them one of those horses. “Whenever you stop to camp,” he told them, “let a boy ride it out while you look for firewood; before you even kindle your fire, he will bring you your food.” They went away and took the horse. Whenever they stopped to camp, they let one of them ride the horse and go out hunting; nothing escaped it, be it a deer, a wild cow or donkey, until they reached their homeland. They said, “Our horse is indeed the rider’s provision.” So they named the horse Rider’s Provision, and all Arabian stallions were its descendants.

It is said that Aʿwaj [Crooked] was one of them. It was a stallion that belonged to Hilāl ibn ʿĀmir. Its mother gave birth to it in one of the tribe’s tents, so they looked around for a shawl on which it might put its muzzle as it was laid on its mother’s thigh next to the pudenda. “Hurry with the colt,” they said, “before it jumps on its mother.” They said so because of the large size of Aʿwaj and its long legs. So they hurried over, found the pony [crooked], and named it Aʿwaj.

Faraj ibn Sallām told us on the authority of Abū Ḥātim, who had taken the story from al-Aṣmaʿī, “The people of al-Nisār were raided while Aʿwaj was tethered to a bush. Its owner caressed its back, then yelled at it. It bolted, uprooted the bush, and ran away with it hanging from its back like a spinning top. All day long, it ran and, in the evening, grazed on the abundant brush at Qubāʾ.”

Describing a horse, a poet said:

It is red like silk, and its sky  
Is luxuriant but its earth is arid.

By “its sky” he means its top; and by “its earth” he means its lower part – that is, its legs.

Al-Ṭāʾī has a similar idea, where he says:

Its back and withers are moist and soft,  
Its hooves are hard and smooth.  
At a time of fear and of racing,  
Its top is dewy and its lower part dry.  
Or it is black tinged with intermediate red  
As though it were part of night’s darkness.  
When it neighs, its neighing is piercing  
As if a bell were sewn into its throat.

Describing a horse given to him by al-Ḥasan ibn Wahb, the Secretary, Ḥabīb also said:

It is a close dear horse that swaggers in its ropes,  
Full of pride and supreme haughtiness.

Its digging hooves and its solid back are hard,  
 Its coronets are hairy and its gullet is wide.  
 The white patch on its withers appears  
 Like gray hair appearing on one's parting.  
 Under battle dust, it is mad with agility,  
 Its madness – though – is from extreme sanity.  
 Eyes are bewitched by it, so that a mediocre poet  
 Easily becomes an excellent one in describing it,  
 Portraying in beauty its higher and lower parts,  
 As well as its middle part and its separate limbs.  
 White colors flow on it like water in a valley's bottom,  
 Sometimes separating and sometimes meeting together.  
 Its skin is clear as though it were clothed  
 In a silken garment and glimmering brocade;  
 Black in part like a pitch-black night,  
 And white in part like snow-white rag paper.  
 Its rider, given a free hand over it, appears  
 On its back like a son of piebald morning.  
 It is so soft and smooth that, if the evil eye  
 Were to fall on its withers, it would not hang.  
 Guarded by magic spells, it is not bitten by snakes;  
 It goes out in the early morning without weapons  
 As though it were an unarmed brave man.

### Verses by a certain poet on Abū Dulaf

Abū Suwayd said, "Abū Dulaf participated in the Battle of Badhdh, riding on a black horse splattered with blood. A certain poet stopped him and recited the following verses:

Often has death tried to gobble him but he was safe.  
 If his black horse could, it would complain to him.  
 At the root of every hair on his skin there is  
 An embellishment for every sharp-edged sword.  
 It is as if he had tied his eyesight to the stars  
 And as if he were bridled to the bonds of the Milky Way.  
 Among the shining swords, he looks like a falcon,  
 Blond and rapacious, devouring all there is to eat.  
 Spirits cannot catch up with even his least speedy walk,  
 He even surpasses the wind and is ever in the front.  
 Spearheads encountered him when he was blond  
 But his color was black when he was drenched in blood.

With that Abū Dulaf ordered that the poet be given ten thousand [dirhams]."

*Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih describing a horse*

Some of our verses describing a horse:

It is a favored horse, whose dark red color  
 turns blond in battle dust,  
 And it becomes green sometimes  
 when oozing sweat drenches it.  
 It flies without feathers at every shout  
 and it swims on land where no one swims.

ʿAdi ibn al-Riqāʿ said:

They come out bloody from gaps of battle dust  
 As though their ears were tips of reed pens.

The poet al-Buḥturī asked Saʿīd ibn Ḥumayd ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥamid, the Secretary, for a horse. He described for him several kinds of horses in his verse:

I will impose on the camels the farthest goal  
 Toward which runs someone who is afraid or hopeful  
 And I will head for the noble sons of Ḥumayd,  
 For they have become stars shining in darkness.  
 If a house were without virtue that  
 Raises it above others, it would not be frequented.  
 Help me, therefore, to raid the enemy by giving me  
 A horse with a waist as slim as a wrapped cloak:  
 Either a bright blond one with which I would go to war  
 Like a star that is blazing,  
 Clothed in a color that stains its sides  
 With blood so that you always see it reddened,  
 Or a black one, clear of skin, as though it were,  
 Under an ironclad knight, tinted with black hand pigment,  
 Fiery and excited to run faster when whipped  
 Like winds blowing into a burning bush fire.  
 Its hooves step so lightly that, if it were to run  
 On the sandy ground of ʿĀlij, it would raise no dust.  
 Or [give me] a gray horse with strong whiteness, whose  
 Back shines like the crests of quivering waves  
 And whose white-feet are invisible, although their color  
 Reaches its white breast that glitters like an anklet;  
 Whose black, unique mane is abundant  
 Next to it, and whose hooves are turquoise.  
 Or [give me] a piebald horse that fills one's sight  
 And has a sample of every wonderful color,  
 A joyful horse envied by other horses when it trots,  
 Clad in a most beautiful, unwoven garb,  
 And having a wide, level back which, if you pour

Flowing mercury on it, will not let it roll down.  
 Its strongly built legs have waded through  
 Waves of a slight curvature in its front legs.  
 Verily you are far more generous  
 Than withholding from me a bridled or saddled horse.

### Verses by Imru' al-Qays

The first to liken horses to gazelles, wolves, and ostriches was Imru' al-Qays. Other poets followed his example and imitated him:

It has the waist of a gazelle, the legs of an ostrich,  
 The running speed of a wolf, the trot of a fox's cub.  
 When it moves, it is as though its back carries  
 A bride's powder quern or a smooth colocynth grindstone.  
 It charges and withdraws, it advances and falls back  
 Like a boulder which a flood has dislodged from a height.  
 It is fast like a boy's spinning top that has been wound  
 By his tightening eager hands with a long string.  
 It is dark red, and the felt pad slides from its back  
 Like a smooth rock sliding from a slippery slope.

Poets took this simile from Imru' al-Qays and imitated him. Ṭufayl al-Khayl said:

Although I have little wealth, a horse like an ostrich  
 With long limbs is never separated from me.  
 As its trunk remains level, its galoping trot  
 Is like a basin's filtering cloth washed by water.  
 Or else, it is a frowning horse and not hamstrung,  
 Well protected, yet not spared on a frightful day of war.

### Between 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān and his companions

'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān asked his companions, "Which handkerchiefs are the best?" "The handkerchiefs of Egypt", someone said, "for they are like the inner thin skin of eggs". "The handkerchiefs of Yemen", someone else said, "for they are like the bright lights of spring". 'Abd al-Malik said, "You have said nothing worthy, for the best handkerchiefs are those of 'Abda ibn al-Ṭabīb where he says:

When we alighted we pitched shady tents,  
 And boiling pots overflowed with meat for the men.  
 Red meat and pink meat not yet well done by the cook:  
 Whatever became well done was immediately consumed.  
 Then we leapt to our branded, bow-legged horses  
 Whose manes we used as handkerchiefs to wipe our hands."

### Winners among racing horses

Al-Aṣmaʿī said, “Never has a straight-ribbed, narrow-bellied horse won a race.” Then he recited Abū al-Najm’s hemistich:

A full-bellied, broad-breasted horse.

### Abū Najm’s verse about Hishām’s mare

Al-Aṣmaʿī said, “Hishām ibn ʿAbd al-Malik was a loser in races; he hardly ever won a race. However, a mare of his was once first in a race and its sister was second, so he was overjoyed and said, ‘Bring me the poets.’ Abū Najm said, ‘So we were summoned and were told to recite verses about this mare and its sister. The poets requested time to compose, but I told him, “Will you accept a man’s verse when others have requested delay?” “Let me have it,” he said. So I recited on the spot:

The mare with a blaze was mentioned among us  
 Because of its bow-legs that obeyed its command.  
 And we did not forget to mention its filly on the road  
 When we assessed the value of the one and the other,  
 And their persistence and patience when running  
 As sweat covered the breast of the one and the other.  
 Well put together and made strong by the Lord,  
 Its lower part, its belly, and its back.  
 Its long neck was almost half its body size,  
 The race taking only part of its strength.’

“Abū al-Najm continued, ‘So Hishām ordered that I be given an award and I went away.’”

### Between al-Rashīd and al-Aṣmaʿī concerning a winning horse

Abū al-Qāsim Jaʿfar ibn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad and Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn Jaʿfar al-Baṣrī said, “Abū Saʿīd ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Qurayb al-Aṣmaʿī related to us that Hārūn al-Rashīd rode his horse in the year one hundred and eighty-five to see the horse race.” Al-Aṣmaʿī added, “So I entered the racing grounds to attend the race, along with the distinguished personalities in the Commander of the Faithful’s company. The race in those days consisted of horses belonging to al-Rashīd, to his sons al-Amīn and al-Maʾmūn, to Sulaymān ibn Abū Jaʿfar, and to ʿĪsā ibn Abū Jaʿfar. A black horse called al-Rubaydh [The Fast One] belonging to Hārūn al-Rashīd came first in the race and al-Rashīd was overjoyed and that could be seen in his face, and he said, ‘Bring me al-Aṣmaʿī.’ So my name was called out in every place, and I went forthwith and presented myself to him. He said, ‘O Aṣmaʿī. Hold al-Rubaydh by its poll and describe it from head to hoof; for it has been said that it has twenty names of birds.’ I said, ‘Yes, Commander of the Faithful; and I will recite to you verses by Abū Ḥazra that combine them all.’ He said, ‘Recite to us, God bless your father.’ So I recited:

Narrow-waisted like the wolf, with perfection  
From the top of its head to the bottom of its hoof.”

The word in Arabic for narrow-waisted is *aqabb*. It is a natural quality caused by emaciation or a long back and neck; the feminine is *qabbāʾ*, the plural is *qubb*, and the verbal noun is *qabab*. The wolf in Arabic is called *sirhān*; the poet compared the horse to it because of its slenderness and fast running; the plural is *sarāhīn*, and some say it is *sirāh*. The top of the head in Arabic is the *hāma*, the place of the brain; *hāma* is also the name of a bird. The bottom of the hoof in Arabic is the *nasr*, which is the raised upper part of the bottom that looks like date pits and pebbles; the word is also the name of a bird (the eagle) and its plural is *nusūr*.

Its head's skin is wide and its brain is ample;  
Its two tongue-veins are firmly connected to its throat.

The Arabic verb for being wide is *raḥuba*. The head's skin that covers the brain is called in Arabic the *naʿāma*, which is also the name of a bird (the ostrich). The poet's saying “its brain is ample” uses the Arabic word *farkh* for brain, which is also the name of a bird (the chick). The Arabic verb for being ample is *wuffira* – that is, being complete and full. The two *ṣurads* in Arabic are two green veins underlying the tongue and are the source of saliva and breath in the lungs; and they are also the names of a bird (the shrike). There is a *ṣurad* in the horse's back also: the whiteness where the saddle is placed and causes a callus. A horse is said to be *ṣarid* when it has a callus. The throat in Arabic is the *naḥr*, the place where the necklace sits on the chest (the *ṣadr*, also called the *bark* in Arabic).

Its forelock hangs down from the top of its head,  
Flowing copiously on its firmly built nose-bone.

The Arabic verb *anāfa* means to look down upon from above, and the *ʿuṣfūr* in Arabic is the root of the forelock; it is also a protruding bone in the forehead; the *ʿuṣfūr* is also the horse's blaze if it is fine and flows down but does not reach its eyes and is not round like a sore; *ʿuṣfūr* is also the name of a bird (the sparrow). The *saʿaf* in Arabic means copious flowing; it is said: a horse with a clear *saʿaf*, meaning one whose forelock flows copiously. *Hāmi* in Arabic means flowing widely. *Ashamm* means high, and *shamam* in the nose denotes a high nose-bone. In another version, the words are *hādī ashamm*, meaning high neck; the plural is *hawādī*. The poet's saying *mumaththaq* means strong, and *jidhr* refers to the root of anything. Al-Aṣmaʿī and other philologists said it is *jadhr*, but Abū ʿAmr ibn al-ʿAlāʾ prefers *jidhr*.

Its forelock whiteness is embellished  
by its two ears' hindbones,  
And its frontal flesh between its forelegs  
bulges out of its chest.

The Arabic verb *izdāna* has the *iftaʿala* pattern (Form VIII) and is derived from *zāna*, to embellish; originally it is *iztāna*, but the /t/ has been turned into a /d/ because of its proximity to the /z/ phonologically; likewise *izdāda* (increase) is originally *iztāda*. The Arabic noun *dīk* is the bone behind the ear, also called the *khushashāʿ* and the *khushshāʿ*. The *ṣalṣal* in Arabic is the whiteness on the edge of the forelock, and it is also said to be the root of the forelock. The *dajājā* is the flesh of the horse's upper chest between its forelegs; the *dīk* (the cock) and the *dajāja* (the hen) are names of birds.

The flesh on its shoulders is tightly entwined,  
As if [broken shoulder bones underneath] were set awry.

The flesh on the shoulders is called *nāhiq* in Arabic and the dual noun is *nāhiqān*; some philologists say the *nāhiq* is the flesh on the upper foreleg; the plural is *nawāhiq*, and some say it is *anhud*, which is irregular. The *nāhiq* is the chick of the sand grouse, and it is the name of a bird. When the poet says *umirra jalzu-humā* (tightly entwined), he means perfectly twisted. It is said: *amrar-tu al-ḥabla* (I entwined the rope), and it is *mumarr* – that is, entwined; and *jalz* means tightness. The poet's saying:

As if [broken shoulder bones underneath] were set awry

means as if they were broken, then set. In Arabic *ʿathamtu yadahu* is used (I set his broken hand awry), because *ʿathm* means setting a broken bone awry – that is, with a knot or crookedness in it; the adjective *ʿuthmān*, which is on the pattern of *fuʿlān*, is derived from it.

With plump flanks, it is of moderate size  
Between its throat and its leg muscles.

*Mushāfir al-janbayn* in Arabic means having chubby flanks; *muʿtadil* means moderate. Its *shīma* means its throat, and *shīma* is used in the expression *faras ašyam* (white-spotted horse) – that is, having a clear *shīma*, which is the white color in it. Others say that the expression refers to a *shāma* or *shām* (a mole or moles) in its body. Among birds the *ghurr* is the one known as *rakhama* (Egyptian vulture), which also means leg muscle.

Its *sumānā* is clear, and so are its hooves,  
As well as its skin and its hair roots.

The *sumānā* in Arabic is a bird (the quail) and here it is a place in the horse's body that I can't remember, unless the poet intended the *samāma*, which is a circle on the side of the horse's neck; the *samāma* (the bobwhite) is also a bird. *Adīm* in Arabic means skin.

The points of its hips rise to its coccyx,  
With a moderate distance between them.

*Samā* in Arabic is a verb that means to rise, and the *ghurāb* (the crow) is the point of the hip; the horse's two *ghurābs*, also known as the *ṣalamayn* (the croups or rumps), enclose the coccyx of the horse's tail. They are also said to be the upper parts of the horse's hips, and the two *mawqīʿ*s are its two hips. *Ubīna* means separated, and *ʿalā qadri* means in a moderate measure – that is, characterized by evenness and moderateness.

[On viewing it from behind], its belly is concealed  
by its hind legs meeting together;  
And the *samāma* marking its neck  
Is at a distance from the *ṣagr* marking its head.

*Iktanna* is a verb in Arabic that means to conceal, and the *qabiḥ* (the ugly point) is the place where the two hind legs meet, and it is also said to be the joint of the forelegs and the forearms. The *khuttāf* is the name of a bird (the swallow); it is also the place which the mounted horseman's heels reach when he moves his legs; these two places in the horse are called the two *markals* (the kick points). *Naʿā* is a verb meaning to be at a distance; and the *samāna* is a circle on the horse's neck, as we mentioned earlier, and it is also the name of a bird. As for the *ṣagr*, I think it is a circle on the horse's head, but I don't know it; it is also the name of a bird (the falcon).

The rear rider's seat is relatively forward,  
Yet its place is distant from the horse's black earmarks.

The rear rider's seat is called the *qaṭā* in Arabic, which is also the name of a bird (the sand grouse). The *ḥurr* is a bird too, and it is said to be the male pigeon but, in the horse, it is the black color on the back of its ears.

Separated by the span of a hand, its haunches rise  
On marrow-filled bones at a distance from the neck.

The *naqm* (dual, *naqmān*; plural, *anqāʾ*) is a marrow-filled bone, the poet here meaning the bones of the haunches, visible with a resemblance of grease on the horse's hips. The *kharaḥ* (haunch) is also the name of a bird, the male of the *ḥubārā* (the bustard). The *ḥidʿa* is a bird (the kite); it is originally pronounced with a glottal stop (ʿ), but in the verse it has been lightened to be read without it; it means the horse's neck, its plural is *ḥidāʿ*, on the pattern of *fiʿāl* (similar to *ʿazāʿa* in the singular, and *ʿazāʿ* in the plural, and *ʿazāya* as some would say). If you pronounce it with an /a/ after the first two radicals, you say *ḥadaʿa*; then it means a double-bladed axe, the plural is *ḥadaʿ* (like singular *nawā[t]*, plural *nawā*; and *qaṭā[t]*, *qaṭā*).

[On running], it leaves the stones broken into chips  
By its brown twins that are as hard as branding irons,

*Al-raḍīm* in Arabic are stones, and *filaq* means broken into chips. *Tawāʿim* are twins, being the plural of *tawām*; some [grammarians] have said that the plural

of *tawʿam* is *tuʿām*, on the pattern of *fuʿāl*, which is irregular; by twins the poet refers to the horse's hooves running in twos. *Mawāsim* is the plural of *mīsam*, the branding iron; he means that the hooves are as hard as the branding iron. By saying *sumr* (brown) he means the color of the hooves, for such are the hardest hooves.

Built into an easy [horse], with wrapped feet,  
Collected to jump and created to be strong.

*Al-shawā* here means the feet, its singular is *shawā*[*t*]; it is said a horse is *maḥḍ al-shawā* when its feet are wrapped. *Sabṭ* means easy [to ride] and *kaft al-wuthūb* means collected [to jump], as when you say *kafat-tu al-shayʿa*, meaning I collected and perfected a thing. *Mushaddad al-asri* means its created physical constitution [is strong].

Al-Aṣmaʿī said, “So he ordered that I be given one thousand dirhams.”

#### Verses of Abū al-ʿAtāhiya concerning al-Mushammir, al-Rashīd's horse

One day a horse named al-Mushammir belonging to al-Rashīd was a winner. He had made him run with horses belonging to al-Faḍl and Jaʿfar, the sons of Yahyā ibn Khālīd al-Barmakī. Abū al-ʿAtāhiya said:

Al-Mushammir came easily first among the horses  
Despite their speed, and yet it had not been urged.  
It left the wind behind it, grieving and following it,  
And it passed by, capturing everyone's eyesight.

#### Verses of Abū al-Najm concerning the race track

Abū al-Najm said the following poem describing a horse, these verses being the best ever said describing a race track:

Then we heard of a race we had hoped for,  
To which was summoned cavalry from every horizon.  
I said to the groom: “Lead [the horse] and hasten,  
Perhaps in the race we may set it free.”  
We ascended the hill with it, we didn't go to the plain.  
As it rose to the rough parts of it, its rocks cried,  
Like bereaved women lamenting their sons.  
In the clangor that defied detailed description,  
Rose a sound like pipers and a tambourine with bells,  
Till we came to a region with horses ready to run  
As fast as folding a cloak that had been chosen.  
We saw their act and did likewise.  
We ran, the running strengthening the horse's muscles  
As we lessened its fat without making it thin.  
When most of the night had passed,

Its forelegs having followed its hind legs,  
 We rose to a great terror with fear  
 Stretching a rope at a start line made straight.  
 We said: Bring this horse forward and that one back,  
 Urging everyone with an open shirt.  
 The five-foot jockey riding the horse,  
 Understood mentally, race being his job,  
 So he overtook the other horses set free  
 And a cloud of dust rose in the air.  
 The horses fluffed up the dust they didn't create,  
 One time being covered by it, another time treading it,  
 Like sand grouses overhead, their leader swooping down  
 Unconcerned but with heightened fear.  
 It set an example to whomever would learn,  
 Flown by the jinn one time, and walked by them another.  
 Its hind quarters swam as its front floated,  
 And the jockey was quiet and refrained from kicking it.  
 He gave it free rein, and didn't ask anything of it.  
 It was as if he clothed it with froth,  
 Or with the cotton of carders, had it not been wet.  
 You would think the horse was given musk to drink.  
 We then received the jockey as he alighted  
 From the horse's high shoulders with unadorned neck,  
 Whose belly was large and whose back was wide.  
 The other horses arrived as we decorated it  
 And the jinn surrounded it and kissed it.

Another poet said the following concerning the horse of Abū al-Aʿwar al-Sulamī:

It passed like the flash of lightning, its eyes aloft,  
 Its front swimming and its hind quarters floating.  
 Its hooves not touching the ground.

This metaphorical saying is more likely than that of Abū al-Najm, who said:

Its hind quarters swam as its front floated.

Al-Aṣmaʿī said, "If the horse were as Abū al-Najm said, a street sweeper's donkey would be faster than it, because perturbation of its hind quarters is ugly." He also said, "Abū al-Najm was a good describer of horses, but he was wrong in this verse. Ruḅa was also wrong in describing a horse and saying of its legs:

They drop dispersed and fall in unison.

When Muslim ibn Qutayba recited it, al-Aṣmaʿī said to him, "You erred in this, Abū al-Jaḥḥāf, for you made it shackled." Muslim replied, "Bring me near a camel's tail [I'll describe it better]."

Al-Aṣmaʿī recited the following:

The tribe surrounded a long-necked horse  
 That resembled a hairless, young deer.  
 When I came to the tribe [I touched] its back,  
 I felt as if a palm's thin branch were in my hand.  
 The horse moved proudly forth, with its lean body,  
 Hitting those nearby and those far from it  
 As if it were drunk or frowning in anger  
 Or as if it were a lord's son just born.

Another recited the following:

If you look at it as it faces you, it is like  
 A trimmed bunch of dates on a palm tree.  
 If you look at it from the side, its limbs are even;  
 And if, from the back, it appears to be going forth.

Ibn al-Muʿtazz said:

It may participate in war despite back pains.  
 Its teeth are full grown, for it is five years old.  
 It has a neck that consumes its long bridle  
 And a breast that swims away, if given free rein.  
 When it swaggers, you would say it is drunk  
 Yielding to a brimful glass of mellowed wine.

He also said:

I entered a hunting thicket, being carried  
 By a filly whose color was like morning when it dawns.  
 It walked, often turning away from its bridle  
 Like a coy beloved showing playful reluctance.  
 Its white-footed hind legs and forelegs flew off  
 With it, scattering the pebbles on its way.  
 It was like waves: it flowed when you set it free  
 And it froze when you reined it in.

### The race track and betting

The race track (*ḥalba*) is where horses gather or, it is said, where people gather to bet. The word is related to the verb *ḥalaba* or its derivative *aḥlaba* (to gather), as when you say: the sons of So-and-So gathered (*ḥalaba* or *aḥlaba*) against the sons of So-and-So. It is said that the word is also related to the verb *ḥalaba* (to milk) as when you say: the man milked (*ḥalaba*) the milk into the glass – that is, he gathered it into it. The word *al-miqwas* means the rope stretched across the chests of horses when readied for release in a race, and *al-munaṣṣaba* denotes the horses readied for release.

The origin of the word *riḥān* (mutual betting) is *rahn* (a bet, a wager), because a man is said to bet with another in a race, each placing a bet; the one whose horse

wins takes his own bet and that of his friend. The word *rihān* is a verbal noun from the verb *rāhana*, whose verbal noun is *rihān* and *murāhana*, and it is of the same pattern as the verb *qātala*, whose verbal noun is *qitāl* and *muqātala*. This practice of betting used to happen in the *Jāhiliyya* (the pre-Islamic period); it is the kind of gambling that is forbidden [in the Qurʾān]. However, if the bet is placed by only one of two persons by naming something which he will not receive if he wins the race but which the other person will take if the former loses, this arrangement is permissible, because the bet only involves one person and not the other. Similarly, if each of them places a bet on his horse and lets a third horse enter their race as a legalizer (*muḥallil*), also called an interloper (*dakhil*), with no share for its owner, and then they release the three horses, the resolution is that, if one of the original two horses wins the race, its owner takes his own bet and that of his second friend; such is considered lawful. However, if the interloper wins the race, its owner takes both bets; and if it loses the race, he has to pay nothing. This is done on condition that the interloper should be a magnificent race-horse by whom the other two are not sure of being outstripped; otherwise, it is considered to be gambling, because it is as if the two original owners have not allowed a legalizer between them.

Al-Aṣmaʿī said, “The horse that comes first in the race is called the *sābiq* (the outstripper), and the one that comes second is called the *muṣallī* (the tailer) because it runs next to the two *ṣalās* (the right and left tail ends) of the outstripper’s tail. The horses that come in line after the second – that is, the third and up to the tenth position – have no names, but the tenth horse is called the *sukayt* (the taciturn).”

Abū ʿUbayda said, “We have not heard from any reliable scholars that winning horses other than the second and the tenth have any names. The second is called the *muṣallī* and the tenth is called the *sukayt*; all the others are called third, fourth, and so on until the ninth, then comes the *sukayt*. It is called *sukkayt* with double /k/ or *sukayt* without doubling it. Any horse that comes after is not deemed worthy of mention. The *fiskil* is the horse that comes last in a race; common people call it *fuskul*.”

Abū ʿUbayda said, “The *qāshūr* is the horse that comes last in a race, otherwise called the *fiskil*. The *sukayt* is so called because it is the last number at which the one who counts stops, for the gerund *sakt* means stopping. This is what they used to say, but today they have changed things.”

It was their custom to rub the face of the winning horse. Jarir said:

If you would like to rub the face  
of a victorious race-horse,  
Give me free rein in betting.

Along the same lines, we said:

When horses take their time on the race track  
As they strive to win and are out of breath,

Give me free rein in betting and then rub  
The blaze of my famous piebald horse.

### Describing weapons

#### ‘Alī’s armor

‘Alī’s armor had a breastplate but no backplate. When asked about that, he replied, “If my enemy has command of my back, he will leave me no recourse.”

Al-Jarrāḥ ibn ‘Abd Allāh was seen wearing two sets of armor. When asked about that, he replied, “I am not protecting my body but rather my endurance.”

Zayd ibn Ḥātīm bought some armor and said, “It is not armor I am buying, but rather lifetimes.”

Ḥabīb ibn al-Muhallab said to his sons, “Let none of you sit in the market. If you have to, then let it be at a coat-of-mail maker’s, a saddle maker’s, or a bookseller’s.”

#### ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb and ‘Amr ibn Ma’dikarib concerning al-Ṣamṣāma

Al-‘Utbi said: ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb sent word to ‘Amr ibn Ma’dikarib asking him to send him his sword known as al-Ṣamṣāma, so he sent it to him. When ‘Umar used it, he found it to be less good than he had heard, so he wrote to ‘Amr about that. The latter answered, “I only sent the sword to the Commander of the Faithful and not the arm that strikes with it.”

One day ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb asked him about various kinds of weapons. ‘Amr said, “Let the Commander of the Faithful ask about whatever he likes.” “What do you think of the shield?” ‘Umar asked. “It is a circular protector around which adversities turn.” “What do you think of the spear?” asked ‘Umar. “It is your brother,” answered ‘Amr, “but it may betray you and break.” “What then of arrows?” inquired ‘Umar. “They are deaths,” opined ‘Amr. “Sometimes they miss, sometimes they hit their targets.” “What do you think of armor?” ‘Umar asked. “It is heavy for a footman and exhausting to a knight,” replied ‘Amr, “but it is really a stronghold.” “And what do you think of the sword?” ‘Umar asked. “There, you have no mother [to help you], O Commander of the Faithful!” ‘Umar struck him with a whip. “No,” he said, “you are the one with no mother!” ‘Amr commented, “I am compelled to yield to your status.”

#### Ibn Yāmin’s verse on al-Ṣamṣāma

Al-Haytham ibn ‘Adī said: ‘Amr ibn Ma’dikarib’s sword, which was called al-Ṣamṣāma, was described to Mūsā al-Hādī, so he ordered that it be brought to him. He placed it unsheathed in front of him, then said to his chamberlain, “Permit the poets to enter.” When they entered, al-Hādī ordered them to recite some improvised verses describing the sword. Ibn Yāmin was first:

From among all people, Mūsā al-Amīn was the one  
 Who obtained ‘Amr-the-Zubaydite’s Ṣamṣāma:  
 ‘Amr’s sword, as we have heard,  
 Was the best ever enclosed in a sheath.  
 Its blade was green, and between its two sharp edges  
 Light shone from the cutlass that eyes admired.  
 Thunderbolts kindled a fire over it,  
 Then swordsmiths mixed poison with it.  
 When you unsheathe it, it outshines the sun  
 With its dazzle, making it hardly visible.  
 It is as though the cutlass and the splendor  
 Of its two sides are clear deep water flowing.  
 It is as though death has been entrusted to it,  
 So it metes out death from either of its edges.  
 What a good sword it is in combat for a rancorous man  
 To fight with, and what a good companion!  
 It cares not who unsheathes it in war and whether  
 It is a left or a right arm that attacks with it.

So Mūsā al-Hādī ordered that he be given a huge amount of money and they all left.

#### **Al-Zubayr ibn al-‘Awwām and a sword**

Al-Zubayr ibn al-‘Awwām struck ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Mughīra with a sword at the Battle of al-Khandaq and rent him asunder down to the saddle seat. Whereupon they said, “What a fine sword!” This angered him, for he believed it was his hand that had done the deed, not the sword. He said:

When you meet me in arms, on the back of a reddish,  
 Long-legged, clear-skinned horse running away with me,  
 Or on the back of a white-footed horse with a blaze,  
 You will meet a man with whose sword  
 Days will teach you what you have never known.

Abū al-Shīṣ said:

Death outfoxed him after he had moved proudly  
 Between two rows of lances and spearheads,  
 Wearing a tunic of polished sheet iron  
 And a loose shirt of iron plate.

#### **Abū al-Agharr giving advice to his son**

Abū al-Agharr al-Tamīmī learned that evil had befallen his friends in the desert. He sent for his son al-Agharr and said to him, “Son, offer help to your friends against those who are fighting against them. Beware of the sword, for it is death’s

shadow; and guard yourself against the spear, for it is death's rope. Don't come close to arrows, for they are messengers who never ask their sender's advice." "With what shall I fight, then?" the son asked. The father replied, "With the words of the poet:

Rocks that fill one's grip as though they were  
Men's heads being shaved in festive seasons."

Referring to some people who were engaged in warfare, a bedouin said, "The paragons of fighters arrived, prancing like mountain goats. When they clashed with their swords, death opened its mouth."

Referring to some people who had been taken captive, another bedouin said, "They dismounted them from their horses with supple spears and dragged them as one hoists water buckets with ropes [from a well]."

Another bedouin said about others who pursued some people who had raided them, "They urged their strong agile camels on, their mounts' paws falling on the traces of the hooves of their enemies' horses as though patching them like a cobbler, until they overtook them after the third night. Then they brandished their spears as ropes of death, using them to draw the souls of their enemies [like water from a well]."

One of the best things said about a sword is the line by Ḥabīb [Abū Tammām]:

[Adversities] make him alert like a sword; if undrawn  
By hand, it will be unsheathed by its own sharp edges.

He also said about spears:

Refined, they robbed the Byzantines of their blue hue;  
The Arabs, of their colors; and the lover, of emaciation.

An example of ugly exaggeration is found in al-Nābigha's verse describing the sword:

It splits asunder the doubled Saluqī armor  
And strikes sparks of fire from the flagstones.

He means that it splits the doubled armor asunder, in other words both horseman and horse, so that, when they all fall on the ground, they strike sparks of fire from the stones.

An even uglier exaggeration is the verse of another poet:

You have to dig it up from the earth after you strike  
The arms, the legs, and the neck with it.

Al-ʿAlawī described horses and weapons combined, and his lines are excellent:

Of my possessions, suffice me a long-necked horse,  
With sound leg bones, clear eyes, and hairless skin;

A shining, Indian blade of limpid steel  
 And a long, well-browned, shaking spear;  
 A well-fitting suit of plate armor, like shallow water,  
 With no hindrance to my striped sword-belt;  
 And a convenient bow, whose grasp fills my fist,  
 And whose ends spring, being made of yellow wood.  
 I do not care if all my other possessions  
 Are thrown into a sea with surging waves.  
 What I wish for in life is to spend a night  
 When no powerful person can order me around.

*Verses by Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih*

The following verses are some of our own poetry describing spears and swords:

[We fight] with every Rudaynī spear, whose spearhead  
 Appears like a bright shooting star in the dark night.  
 Lives become short because of its long shaft  
 And hopes become tragedies with its use.  
 It thinks well of itself but in war its thoughts  
 Turn evil, for they are sharp edges striking the hearts.  
 [We fight] with every engraved sword that decides death,  
 And there is no escape from its decision of death.  
 Its cutlass appears to be quiet when eyes are set on it,  
 But it is bright lightning when shaken by the hand.  
 It draws the souls of armed men as it is drawn,  
 And death is terrified by it, though death is terrifying.  
 When the likes of it meet in a battle, what a [fighter]  
 Thinks of another is inevitable [death].

The following is some of our poetry describing swords:

[We fight] with every sword whose blade is engraved  
 With lines like tracks of ants in a plain.  
 When eyes look at its sharp edge,  
 They behold a brilliant star of death.

Ishāq ibn Khalaf al-Bahrānī described a sword in these lines:

On the side of his hip, he carried a sword  
 Sharper than destined fate.  
 It is as though the breaths of wind  
 Sprinkled dust particles on it.

A fine description of the sword is by al-Ghanawī:

On the fearful day of battle, it is a sharp sword  
 Which is like a messenger sent by God to take souls.  
 Its blade looks as if it were undulating waves of water,

Rolling short and long in a wide sea.  
 It is as though armies of ants broke horns of locusts  
 Over it, avenging themselves on them.

### Shooting with bows

Ibrāhīm al-Shaybānī said:

A man from Kufa heard about a man serving the government who offered for sale a property in Wāsiṭ to pay off a debt that he owed to the caliph. The Kufan man sent an agent of his on a mule with a saddlebag full of dinars. He told him, "Go to Wāsiṭ and buy me this property offered for sale. If what is in this saddlebag is not sufficient, write to me and I will send you more money." The agent left. When he was in the wilderness far from houses, a bedouin riding a donkey and carrying a bow and a quiver caught up with him. "Where are you heading for?" he asked. "For Wāsiṭ," replied the man. "May I accompany you?" asked the bedouin. "Yes," the man answered. So they traveled together until they entered the desert and saw some deer. "Which of those deer do you like," the bedouin asked, "the one in front or the one in the rear? Tell me, and I will shoot it for you to eat." The man said, "The one in front." The bedouin shot it with an arrow and hit it. They roasted the deer and ate. The man was happy with the bedouin's company. Then a flock of sand grouse appeared, and the bedouin asked, "Which of these grouse do you like and I will kill it for you?" The man pointed to one of them, so the bedouin shot an arrow at it and hit it. They roasted it and ate. When they finished eating, the bedouin put an arrow in his bow, aimed it at the man, and asked, "Where do you want me to hit you?" The man begged, "Fear God and respect the rights of company." "No way out of it!" the bedouin said. The man implored, "Fear God, your Lord, and keep me alive. Take the mule and the saddlebag full of money." "Take off your clothes," the bedouin ordered. So the man undressed, garment by garment until he was naked. The bedouin commanded, "Take off your overshoes," for the man wore sandals of Ṭā'if underneath. "Fear God, have pity on me," the man pleaded, "and leave me the sandals so that I may be protected by them from the heat. The sun-baked ground will burn my feet." The bedouin insisted, "No way out of that." So the man said, "Well, then. Here is one sandal. Take it off." When the bedouin reached for the sandal, the man remembered a dagger he had hidden in it, took it out, and stabbed the bedouin in the chest, cleaving him down to his crotch. "Seeking extremes leads to separation," he told the bedouin. His saying became a proverb. The bedouin was a [known] sharpshooter.

### Between a thief and an archer

Al-ʿUtbi related the following story on the authority of his teachers:

I was with al-Muhājir ibn ʿAbd Allāh, the governor of al-Yamāma, when a bedouin renowned as a thief was brought to him. "Tell me about some of your

remarkable thefts," he said. "My wondrous deeds are many," the bedouin replied. "One of the most amazing is that I had a camel which could not be outstripped and horses which could not be overtaken, so that, whenever I went out [for theft], I never returned disappointed. One day I caught a lizard and hung it on my camel saddle. Then I passed by a tent, in which there was no one but an old woman. 'She must have some sheep and camels,' I told myself. When evening fell, I saw a hundred camels arriving with a big-bellied, thick-palmed old man who had a black slave with him. When he saw me, he welcomed me, went to his she-camel, milked it, and gave me the large bowl. I drank from it as much as a man could drink, then he drank the rest until he tipped back his head. He then milked nine other she-camels and drank their milk, then slaughtered a baby camel and cooked it. I ate a little piece of it, while he ate the whole, leaving only its bare white bones. He then lay down, made a heap of earth on the flat ground as a pillow, and was soon snoring like a camel. 'By God,' I said, 'this is my loot.' I went to his camels' stallion, unleashed it, and tied it to my own camel. I shouted at it, and the camel stallion followed me, along with all the other camels as a single group in a train; they followed behind me like a stretched rope. I headed quickly for a mountain pass at a distance of one night's travel for a fast traveler. I kept goading my own camel, at one time with my hand and at another with my feet until dawn rose. I looked at the mountain pass and saw a black spot on it. When I approached it, I saw the old man sitting there, with his bow in his lap. 'Is it our guest?' he asked. 'Yes,' I replied. 'Will you be so generous as to give me these camels?' he asked. 'No,' I said. He took out an arrow like a dog's tongue and said, 'See how this arrow hits the lizard on your camel saddle right between its ears.' He shot it and split the lizard's bones from its brain. 'Now what have you to say?' he asked. 'I still hold to my first opinion,' I replied. 'Look at this second arrow,' he said. 'See how it hits the lizard's middle vertebra.' He shot it and it was as if he had placed the arrow by hand and put it with his fingers where he had estimated. 'What's your opinion?' he now asked. I answered, 'I would like to be sure.' 'Look,' he said, 'this third arrow will hit the root of the lizard's tail and, by God, the fourth will hit your belly.' He shot it and did not miss the root of the lizard's tail. 'Will I be safe if I dismount?' I asked. 'Yes,' he reassured me. I gave him the leash of his stallion. 'These are your camels,' I said, 'and they are not missing a single hair.' Meanwhile, I kept watching and wondering when he would shoot me in the heart with an arrow. When I took a few steps away, he said, 'Come forward.' By God, I came forward fearing his evil intent and not hoping for any good from him. He said, 'I think you must have undertaken what you did last night for a strong need.' 'Yes,' I said. He said, 'Choose two of these camels and go on your way.' I replied, 'By God, I will not leave until I tell you something about yourself. For, by God, I have never seen a bedouin of stronger teeth than you, nor one of faster feet, of more precise shooting, of greater forbearance, or of more generous spirit.' He turned his face away shyly. 'Take all the camels,' he said. 'May they be blessed for you.'"

### **Sayings about archery by the Prophet, may God bless him and give him peace**

The Prophet, may God bless him and give him peace, said, “Be horsemen and archers; but I prefer for you to be archers rather than horsemen.”

He also said, “All amusement for a Believer is wrong except for three things: training his horse, shooting his arrow, and playing with his wife, for that is right. God admits to His Paradise a God-pleasing servant for one arrow he shoots in the cause of God.”

It was related about ‘Uqba ibn ‘Āmir that he said, “I heard God’s Messenger, may God bless him and give him peace, say as he stood on the pulpit, ‘And prepare for them whatever force you can.’ [Q. 8:60] Indeed, force is archery; indeed, force is archery; indeed, force is archery.”

The best archer among the Companions of God’s Messenger, may God bless him and give him peace, was Sa’d ibn Abī Waqqāṣ, because God’s Messenger, may God bless him and give him peace, invoked God in his favor and said, “O God, let his bow shot be accurate, and hearken to his invocation.” And so, no invocation of Sa’d’s was ever rejected and no arrow of his ever missed.

### **The Prophet, may God bless him and give him peace, and some archers from Aslam**

Uṣāma ibn Zayd mentioned that some old men from Aslam related to him that God’s Messenger, may God bless him and give him peace, came to them while they were [competing at] shooting arrows in Buṭḥān [in Medina]. God’s Messenger, may God bless him and give him peace, said, “O sons of Ismā‘īl, shoot arrows, for your father was an archer and I am siding with Ibn al-Adra‘.” The men held the competition, then said, “O Messenger of God, the one you sided with has won the shooting competition.” God’s Messenger, may God bless him and give him peace, said, “Shoot your arrows, and I will side with all of you.” They shot their arrows that day and returned home on even terms, none among them having superiority over another.

### **Sayings by ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb**

‘Umar said, “Wear loincloths, put on cloaks, wear sandals, go barefooted, hit your targets with arrows, put away stirrups, gallop on horses, use the Ma‘add language” – or he said: Arabic – “and leave off luxury and Persian clothing.”

He also said, “Your strength will not decline so long as you gallop and shoot.” By that he meant galloping on horses and shooting arrows.

### **A man from the desert encouraging his tribe**

A tribe from al-Yamāma committed a crime, so the ruler dispatched some soldiers from the fighters of Ibn Ziyād. A man from the desert rose to encourage

his companions. "O ye Arabs," he said, "sons of chaste women of unblemished reputation: fight for your honorable descent and noble kin. For, by God, if these people defeat you, they will leave no red brick or green palm tree standing. You will be hit by arrows which they have put in quivers as big as elephants' penises, and with which they will shoot you from bows as large as camel saddles. Their arrows will whizz like pulley poles over a well when one of their archers pulls the string of his bow so fiercely that the hair of his armpit stands on end as he shoots his arrow like a severed well rope. Only a short distance will separate any one of you from a gouged eye or a cleft heart." He sowed dismay in their hearts, and they were scared out of their wits.

### **Al-Mahdī consulting members of his family regarding war with Khurāsān**

This is a record of the deliberations of al-Mahdī and his ministers, and of the exchange of opinion among them regarding war with Khurāsān when its governors sided against them and came down on them harshly. The governors had been so carried away by their familiarity and high standing with the caliph and his ministers that they broke their promise of fealty to them, expelled their lieutenants, and seized the taxes they had collected. Al-Mahdī took their interest to heart and had no desire to harm them. He was motivated to forgive their lapse into error and to tolerate their familiarity, as a sign of his magnanimity and indulgence as well as a mark of his readiness to be reasonable and to practice good policy. That is why, since God had given him the burdens of the caliphate and the care of his subjects' affairs, he continued to show kindness toward those under his power. Knowledgeable about the people of his time, he showed justice toward his subjects. They in turn were content with him; they expected him to be forgiving and were confident of his clemency. However, when compulsory laws and imperative rights were to be implemented, he showed no leniency; there was neither compromise nor favor toward anyone because he favored truth, exercised justice, and had adopted a policy of resolution. People of Khurāsān were deluded by his clemency and by their confidence in his forgiveness, so they purloined the taxes, expelled the lieutenants, and demanded things to which they were not entitled. Then they blended pretext with apology, enmity with admission of culpability, their disavowal with excuse. When this came to the knowledge of al-Mahdī, he had recourse to the council of his confidants and sent for a group of his blood relations and ministers. He informed them of the situation and sought their advice regarding his subjects. He commanded that his clients begin the discussion. "My uncle," he told al-ʿAbbās ibn Muḥammad, "follow our discussion carefully and be an arbiter among us." He sent for his sons Mūsā and Hārūn, told them of the matter, and sought their opinion. He ordered Muḥammad ibn al-Layth to keep track of their deliberations and put in writing what they said.

Sallām, chief of the court of appeal, said, “O Mahdī, each matter has an ultimate goal, each man has a skill, one that completely occupies his mind, wholly engages his deeds, and fully consumes his lifetime. He dedicates himself to it and allows it to occupy his entire attention so that he becomes known for it and it for him. The matters in which you have considered us to be ultimate experts and for which you have sought our help all have their own experts, people who are adepts of war, managers of matters, leaders of soldiers, horsemen in hostilities, persons of experience, and heroes in battles whose vicissitudes have hardened them and whose difficulties have strengthened them. If you test them to discover their abilities, you will find them to be men who will support you, with experiences that agree with what you are looking for, and words that will strengthen your heart. As for us, your employees and chiefs of your governmental offices, it is good enough for us (perhaps even too much) if we do the work which you have assigned to us, entrusted to us, and engaged us for, all with the goal of implementing your justice, carrying out your rule, and showing forth your fairness.”

Al-Mahdī answered, “Every group of people has wisdom, every time has a relevant policy, and every situation has a way of management, the last of which annuls the first. We are most knowledgeable about our own times and the management of our rule.”

Sallām said, “Yes, O Mahdī. You are a person of broad opinions, firm determination, mighty power, great intelligence, perfect intention, ready reflection, perceptive intuition, successful resolution, endowed victory, and you are guided to what is good. When you decide to act, there is surety in your determination; and when you make up your mind, your deed commands obedience from the diffident. Therefore, decide and God will lead your heart to what is right. Speak and God will make your tongue tell the truth. Your soldiers are numerous, your treasury is full, your spirit is generous, and your command is effective.”

Al-Mahdī answered, “Consultation and debate are gates of mercy and keys of blessing. When they are resorted to, no opinion is wasted and no determination weakened. So give your opinion and tell us what comes to your mind. I am with you and success from God will be the result.”

Al-Rabī‘ said, “O Mahdī, opinions are many and insinuated allusions are easy to make. But [frankly] Khurāsān is a distant and far-flung land with inaccessible roads. If it is indeed a good decision, a firm estimation, and a right resolution that you have reached, one that your mind has pondered so thoroughly and your heart has turned around so wisely that there is no way for anyone to find fault with it, then dispatch your secret agents and messengers. It is likely that when the enemies learn of your right decision, they will do something to oppose it. The messengers will return to you easily, and reports will reach you about the realities of your foes, their whereabouts, and the sources of their organization. You will then adopt another plan and create another policy, as their groupings may have broken, their unity may have been untied, their preparations weakened, and time would have passed. Perhaps the end will be like the beginning.

But it is up to you, O Mahdī, to make up your mind, may God lead you to success. For you can dispense with any debate or deliberation about what you have assembled us for, and about the preparation for war and stratagems that you have consulted us about; and you can seek a man of good religion, of a perfect mind and great piety, who is not depicted as liking anyone but you, who is free from any accusation of feeling against you, who is not suspected of any hateful idea, and who does not subscribe to any dangerous heresy that would defame your rule and confirm others in it. You will then charge him with running their affairs, instruct him to fight them, and – by agreement with you and by expression of your will – command him to obey you in whatever needs determination and to disobey your prohibition when it is unwise, insofar as situations change and those absent cannot judge correctly whereas those witnessing them can. When this is done, he can then spring on them from close range and be clear of whatever orders may come to him from a distance. The strategy will thus succeed, the ruse will be strengthened, action will be executed, and sharp opinion will be effective – God willing.”

Al-Faḍl ibn al-ʿAbbās said, “O Mahdī, a person charged with administration and war leadership may perhaps mobilize his soldiers and spend his wealth in a situation that is not pressingly difficult or necessarily exigent. When he is in need of resources that he has already spent, he will find himself in dire straits, unable to rely on any strength, to resort to any equipment, or to seek any confidential adviser. O Mahdī, may God grant you success, it is at your discretion to exempt your treasury from spending, and your soldiers from enduring travel, facing danger, and the potential harm of conflict. Do not hurry in responding to your hostile people by giving them what they demand, for that will corrupt their behavior toward you and encourage others among your subjects to be likewise. Instead, invade them, but with tricks: fight them by ruse, wrestle with them by gentleness, and beguile them by kindness. But speak to them like lightning and act toward them like thunder: send deputations, mobilize soldiers, form battalions, assign brigade banners, raise flags, and pretend that you are sending armies to them led by generals who hold the biggest grudge against them and will treat them the worst. Then dispatch messengers and send letters. Make some enemies desire your promises, and others fear your threats. By these methods and similar ones, you will kindle the fires of jealousy among them and plant the seeds of rivalry, so that their hearts will be filled with desolation. They will all bear a grudge and be afflicted by caution and awe. Victory by deception, fighting by tricks, hostility by letters, outwitting by messengers, and engagement through gentle words that easily enter the hearts and strongly affect people’s souls, by words that are supported by evidences and laced with tricks, words that are built on a kindness that steals the hearts, enslaves the minds, captivates the thoughts, inclines the emotions, and invites agreement – these stratagems are more effective than fighting with swords and spears. A ruler who seeks the obedience of his subjects by tricks and dissipates his enemy’s unity by ruse acts more wisely and

shows more subtle perception and better policy than one who only achieves that goal by fighting, by spending wealth, and by endangering life and property. And be it known to al-Mahdī, may God grant him success, that, if he sends a man to fight them, he has to send numerous soldiers who will go out in difficult circumstances, endure hard travel and various dangers. They will have to be led by deceitful leaders; if he trusts them, they will exhaust his wealth; if he seeks their advice, they will be against him and not for him.”

Al-Mahdī said, “This is an opinion whose beam has shone, whose light has flashed, whose correctness has become clear to all eyes, and whose truth has been embodied in all hearts – but above every knowledgeable person, there is an All-Knowing [God].”

He then looked at his son ‘Alī. “What do you say?” he asked.

‘Alī replied, “O Mahdī, the people of Khurāsān have not rebelled against you, nor have they appointed someone else who is striving to replace your rule and establish causes to destroy your governance. Had they done that, the misfortune would have been easier to deal with, the significance would have been lesser, and the circumstances less humiliating. God upholds His truth and does not abandon it; He keeps His promise and does not break it. However, these are a group among your subjects, a band of your followers; God has made you a ruler for them, and established justice as an arbiter between you and them. They are seeking a right and requesting justice. If you meet their request and relieve their concerns before their condition unites them against you or causes a break with you, you will have obeyed the command of your Lord, extinguished the fire of war, spared your treasury, and avoided the destruction that results from conflict. People will interpret such behavior as the nature of your generosity, the character of your clemency, the goodness of your inherent forgiveness, and the justice of your vision. Thus you will have defended yourself against the accusation of weakness, while for them that will be a moral lesson ever after. However, if you deny them what they have requested and do not respond to their request, you and they will be on an equal footing; in the arena of discourse, you will be equivalent to them. The goal of al-Mahdī is not to aim at a group of his subjects who already acknowledge his rule, submit to his authority, and neither exclude themselves from his power nor declare themselves free from his dominion – and then empower them, depose himself from being their sovereign, and enter into a dispute with them, and afterwards punish them with conflict and peril. Does al-Mahdī want wealth, may God grant him success? By my life, he will only achieve it by spending more than he will ask from them and by giving many times more than he claims from them. Were he to acquire this wealth and have it placed in skin bags in front of him, then give it up to them and lavish it upon them, such an act will be something to be credited to him. He would be ever known by it, being the generosity that God has put in his nature and made him happy by practicing. If al-Mahdī says, ‘This is a right opinion with regard to tax collectors who have complained of the injustice of our governors and the ill

treatment of our lieutenants. As for the soldiers who broke the bonds of allegiance and spoke ill of us and opened the gates of disobedience and sedition, I ought to make an example of them to others and a moral lesson to everyone else,' then he should realize that, if he clapped them in irons and bound them with ropes, then spared their blood by pardoning them, forgave them their error, and kept them to fight his wars and face his enemies, that would not be considered an odd judgment, nor would it be disapproved as a sentence. For Arabs know that he is the greatest among caliphs and kings with regard to pardon, effectiveness, and true power. No pardon is above him, no forgiveness is beyond him, however great the crime and however significant the issue. The decision is up to al-Mahdī, may God grant him success, for he can allay his wrath in the hope of God's reward after he pardons them. As he acts with charity and generosity toward them, he can recall their earlier conditions and the penury of their families. After all, they are the brethren of his power, the cornerstones of his cause, the basis of his right; it is by their strength that he exercises power and by their evidentiary argument that he speaks. Their example in provoking his wrath, disobeying him, and disregarding him, and his example in not changing his opinion of them, his attitude to them, or his benefaction toward them, is like that of two brothers who mutually help and support each other, then one of them is temporarily afflicted with a mental disorder or an accidental levity, which causes him to harm his brother and do him injury. Even so, his brother returns nothing but kindness and gentility to him, and endeavors to cure his illness and help him recover because of his compassion for him, his devotion to him, and his mercy on him."

Al-Mahdī said, "Alī intends to be lenient with the people of Khurāsān and forgiving toward them. Every opinion will be considered, and you will know our decision." Then he said, "What do you think, Abū Muḥammad?" meaning his son Mūsā.

"O Mahdī," Mūsā replied, "do not be lulled by the sweetness of their words when you see blood flowing because of their acts. Those people's behavior loudly declares intended evil and hidden hatred, something that they veil with excuses and pretexts. By so doing, they hope to delay matters and thus outflank al-Mahdī's stratagems and keep his soldiers away. Meanwhile, they hope to unite themselves, gather their resources, prepare for a dreadful war, and retain their current state. Al-Mahdī meanwhile remains unaware of their strength, having a sense of security to which he has weakly yielded, and which has pleased him and given him reassurance. If it were not for their intention to fight triggered by a call to error or a devil's seduction, they would have feared the consequences of the rulers' wrath when general conditions were calm. Let al-Mahdī, may God grant him success, be vigorous; let him mobilize his regiments against them; let him treat the matter at the highest level that he thinks of; and let him be sure that every action he takes for their benefit is not used by them as a way to become more corrupt, more determined to disobey him, and as a factor in their return to evil and to corrupting the soldiers with him and the deputations coming to him. If he permits this to

become a custom and lets this be their behavior, he will continue to have schism and disagreement, something with which no religion can be effective and no administration of world affairs can be successful. If he then seeks to change this behavior once it has become a well-ingrained custom and an ongoing practice, he will not be able to achieve that even by resorting to excessive punishment and severe treatment. The decision is up to al-Mahdī, may God grant him success, not to forgive their error or accept their excuse until his armies subdue them and they are taken by the sword, and until such time as killing is rife in them, death and misfortune surround them, and humiliation overcomes them. If al-Mahdī does that to them, he will terminate every one of their bad customs and defeat every evil initiative of theirs. If al-Mahdī takes the pains to attack them now, he will save himself from many further attacks and great expense.”

Al-Mahdī said, “The people have spoken. Now give your judgment, O Abū al-Faḍl.”

Al-‘Abbās ibn Muḥammad said, “O Mahdī. The clients have considered side issues and missed the main point. They have ignored certain issues where their views are deficient because they have had no experience in them.

“As for al-Faḍl, he advised that no funds be spent and no soldiers be dispatched, and that the people should not be given what they wanted and sought. He suggested this because he downplayed their significance and underrated their fighting. However, momentous issues are often caused by minor ones.

“As for ‘Alī, he advised that you be lenient and exceedingly kind to them. If a ruler offers leniency and goodness to those who ignore his authority and disregard his right, without combining his leniency with some severity that inclines hearts to his forbearance and with some harshness that makes them seek after his goodness, he will have given them free rein for further stubborn behavior. If they respond to his call and accept his leniency without being forced by fear and need, this will continue to arouse their sense of pride and their appetites, by which they will bring misfortune to themselves and waste al-Mahdī’s concern for them. If they reject his call and do not hasten to respond to his pure leniency and goodness, this will confirm what has been thought of them and what may resemble the behavior of others like them. For God, may He be exalted, created Paradise and made available within it eternal bliss and great capacity that have never occurred to human hearts and minds and never been known to human souls. He then invited human beings to it and made them desire it. If He had not created hellfire for them as a mercy by which He would lead them to Paradise, they would not respond or accept.

“As for Mūsā, he advised that they be treated with severity untinged with any leniency, and with harshness unaccompanied by any goodness. If a ruler intends to strike unadulterated fear in the hearts of those who disobey him and disagree with the consensus of his community, without any hope or leniency toward them that might make them desist, their attitude will become worse and their situation will lead to one of two consequences: either they will develop an

ardor as a result of being treated severely, a pride from being humiliated, and a hatred from being subdued – and they will therefore continue their disagreement, become yet braver in fighting, and readier to surrender only to death; or they will become obedient by force and subdued by coercion, while still bearing a grudge and a permanent enmity, things that cause hypocrisy and division. But when an opportunity presents itself to them, power returns to them, or their conditions improve, their attitude toward you will become more difficult, more boorish, and more severe than it was.”

He added, “Al-Faql’s advice, O Mahdī, has the most sufficient evidence and the clearest proof. It contains the most transparent statement made. His opinion is correct and his view is prudent when he suggests that you dispatch armies and deputations to the people, who should then be given the lawful things they asked for and the justice they sought.”

Al-Mahdī said, “This is an opinion.”

Hārūn said, “You have blended severity with leniency, O Mahdī, so that severity has become the most bitter abstention from what you dislike, and leniency has become the surest guide to what you like. But I have another opinion.”

Al-Mahdī said, “You have spoken well and differed with all the members of your family. A man is accountable for what he says and suspected for what he claims – that is, until he brings forth a fair proof and clear evidence. So, come out and explain what you have said.”

Hārūn said, “O Mahdī, war is based on trickery, and the Persians are a cunning people. When their passions are agreeable, their attitude may sometimes be balanced, so that what they secretly think agrees with what they openly declare. Their attitude may sometimes differ and their heart may not agree with what their tongue proclaims, since the heart conceals hidden feelings and undeclared thoughts. A physician who knows his art, who is cognizant of his profession, knowledgeable about what his hand performs, aware of where to place his cautery, does not act rashly by giving a treatment until he identifies the disease. It is therefore up to al-Mahdī, God grant him success, to test their inner feelings and examine their apparent state by repeatedly sending letters, messengers, and spies to them until the veils are removed from their unrevealed business. If their condition becomes clear to him and matters lead him to change the situation or deal with an advocate of error who has inspired men and led them to follow him by a religious creed they believe in or by a crime they find lawful, he will deal with them severely and without leniency and will administer punishment to them without forgiveness. However, if the unknown is revealed and the veils are removed, and it is then found that their situation is prosperous and things are good, and that their seeking of income, their criticism of deeds, their purported injustices, and rights demanded are all based on a former good relationship and the familiarity of mutual advice, then it is up to al-Mahdī, God grant him success, to be generous to them regarding what they seek, remove from them what they dislike, reform what they have broken, mend what they have ripped, appoint as

ruler someone they like, and thus treat the disease in their hearts and the corruption in their affairs. Al-Mahdī's position toward his community and the majority of the people of his kingdom is like that of a kind physician, a compassionate father, and a caring shepherd who feels sorry for his ailing sheep and the lost of his flock until the sick one recovers from its illness and the lost one is returned to the geniality of its group. Now Khurāsān in particular has a tolerable familiarity with al-Mahdī as well as an acceptable relationship, a known connection, and due rights because its people are the right hand of his rule, the swords of his mission, the supporters of his truth, and the helpers of his justice. It is not seemly that al-Mahdī should bear a grudge against them, lay blame upon them, treat them harshly, or do injury to them. To solve minor problems decisively before they become grave and to nip them in the bud before they become ugly is a wiser opinion and a more correct action than delaying doing anything and belittling the harm they cause until the small problems combine to make a bigger one and the insignificant parts unite to create a formidable whole."

Al-Mahdī said, "Hārūn's words have continued to fall like dew until they have now emerged like arrows and are unsheathed like a sword. However, leave what Mūsā has said earlier as the right opinion and what Hārūn has said next. The question is: who will take the rein of the cavalry, direct the war policy, and lead the people if the Khurāsānians persist in their disagreement and exceed all bounds in their audacity?"

Ṣāliḥ said, "O Mahdī. Even with continued discussion and deep thought, we will not reach the lowest level of your perspicacity and observation. Around you at all times are Arabs from the best tribes and Persians of honorable status. Appoint one of them who is devout, of sound opinion, and strong management, someone whom you can entrust with your soldiers, who can bear the great responsibility and shoulder the heavy burdens. You have, thank God, a fortunate and good character and blessed determination; you are well experienced, your deeds' consequences are praiseworthy, and your will is infallible. Your choice will fall on a person whom you can appoint and entrust because God will lead you to what you like and will give you what you want."

Al-Mahdī said, "I do hope so, because of God's long experience and His good help to me. But I prefer to seek the agreement of others and to consult them regarding important matters."

Muḥammad ibn al-Layth said, "O Mahdī. The people of Khurāsān are a people who have dignity and strength. They are devils of trickery, people in whom zeal is ever alive, arrogance is always clear, reflection is constantly absent, and haste is continually present. Their floods precede their rains and their swords come before their blame, because their ruffraff have minds that see no farther than their eyes and their leaders are only restrained by severity and coercion. If al-Mahdī appoints a lowly person to rule them, their grandees will not obey him; and if he appoints a nobleman, the weak ones will be biased against him. If he delays taking action and avoids fighting them until he finds among his

retinue and clients or his cousins and brothers someone they can all agree on, a trustworthy person about whom their groups will have a meeting of minds without there being any abiding pride, intervening zeal, or repellent solidarity, days will have passed and the situation will have worsened. This will cause great corruption and loss, which the person chosen for that quality will be unable to redress, however hard he tries; he will be incapable of redeeming the situation, even if he exerted all his efforts. By then a long time will have passed and much evil will have occurred. Al-Mahdī, God grant him success, will only quash their customs and suppress them with the like of one of two men who have no third or equal alternative. One of them is a man who has a tongue that speaks and you hear, who has hands whose actions are visible to your eyes; a man who is an unshakeable rock, a bull who cannot be dissuaded, a grown camel who is not frightened by a jingling bell; a man who is of pure honor, fair spirit, great social importance, for whose high esteem the world is too low; a man who aspires to the next world with his high-mindedness and so he makes the farthest purpose his aim and the lowest one a treading place for his foot; he neither neglects any job nor transgresses any person's hope; in giving advice, he is the head of your clients and the wisest of your brothers; he is a man nurtured by your kind generosity, who has grown up in the shade of your power and in accordance with your good manners. If you assign him to rule them and give him the burden to carry, he will be a lock which your command unlocks, a door which your prohibition will close; he will make justice his and their prince, and fairness his and their judge. When he rules, he will be impartial and will give them their due and take from them what they owe. Thus he will plant in their hearts an obedience with deep roots and high branches, visible among their common people and strong in the hearts of their elites. They in turn will allay every suspicion and render every right – and this is one of the two men.

“The other man is a twig from your thicket and a radical from your roots; he is of young age, manly clemency, wise mind, praiseworthy severity, and reliable even in his disagreements. He unsheathes his sword against them, spreads his good among them whenever merited and deserved. He is So-and-So, O Mahdī. Give him power over them, may God grant you strength, and send him to them with your armies. Let not his young age prevent you, for clemency and trust combined with youth are better than suspicion and foolishness combined with middle age. O descendants of Prophet Muḥammad's family: as God has by nature distinguished you with noble manners, praiseworthy deeds, good dispositions, wise management, and serious purpose, your young are like the chicks of noble birds that can hunt without being trained and know good without being taught. Clemency, knowledge, determination, resolve, generosity, deliberateness, and kindness are firmly implanted in your hearts, and steadfast and complete in you through abiding nature and firm instinct.”

Muḥāwiya ibn ʿAbd Allāh said, “The young of your family, O Mahdī, are characterized by clemency as has been mentioned. The people of Khurāsān are

in a situation of strength as has been described. But if al-Mahdī appoints someone to rule them who is not of an established reputation among soldiers, of voice obeyed in wars, of long experience in the world's affairs, of known good management of armies, and of noted fear among enemies, two great dangers will ensue: one is that enemies will decry this quality of his, despise it in him, and because of it have the audacity to rise against him, fight him, and disagree with him before they have even tested him, learned his qualities, and appreciated his characteristics. The other danger is that if the soldiers he leads and the armies he manages have not experienced his strength and bravery, and have not known him to have a commanding voice and awe, they will lose their courage and intrepidity. They will withhold their obedience until they have tested him and gotten to know him. Ruin may well happen before their testing. Meanwhile, at al-Mahdī's gate, may God grant him success, there is a well-known man of great prestige, a man of noble descent with a commanding voice; he has led armies and managed wars; he has gained the hearts of the people of Khurāsān, and they are united in liking him and fully trusting him. If al-Mahdī appoints him to rule them, God will spare him their evil."

Al-Mahdī said, "You have missed the point and insisted on tribal solidarity, for the opinion of a young man from our family is equal to that of ten wise men from others. But where have you left my heir apparent?"

They said, "We have not mentioned him only because he is similar to his grandfather and is unique. Our speech will fail to adequately describe the least virtues of his devoutness and good relations with people of religion. But we have found that God, may He be exalted, has veiled from him the knowledge of the vicissitudes of daily life, and of the events and unpredictable turns of fortune that fate brings about, things that have destroyed the achievements of past centuries and kings. So we did not like the idea of him traveling far from the status of kingship, the locus of power, the seat of the imamate and rule, and the capital where the treasury is, where soldiers and notables are, and where the wealth is collected that God has meant to be the mainstay of the kingdom and the attraction of people's hearts. That capital is a frequented target for the greedy, dissidents, heretics, erroneous horsemen, and unfaithful people. We therefore said: If al-Mahdī dispatches his heir apparent and if his armies meet with the fate of the soldiers of his former messengers, al-Mahdī will not be able to send a successor unless he himself goes to them. This presents a great danger and a serious problem. If the situation deteriorates until an inevitable event happens, what occurs afterwards will be of even greater significance and danger, being a direct consequence of it."

Al-Mahdī said, "The problem is less serious than you think and different from what you describe. We, people of the [Prophet's] family, manage matters with a received and determined knowledge that is provided in the scriptures and repeated by [God's] Messengers. It has reached us in full detail: with it we dispose and in God we trust. My heir apparent, who is my successor, must lead those sent to Khurāsān and must go there with the soldiers.

“The first thing he will do is to send his messengers to the enemies and use all his tricks. Then he will go out to confront them with full force; he will be angry with them and will want to spare none of the dissidents, heretics, and erroneous horsemen, all of whom he will subdue by killing, coercing, or humiliating. He will also let the bounty of his generosity reward everyone who has contributed to the suppression of sedition and heresy, and to the support of the rightful rulers. When he goes out determined to do that, he will not go far before he learns that his tricks have worked and his messages and stratagems have had their effects; estranged hearts will be comforted, impassioned spirits will be pacified, and the dissidents will come to agreements with him. He will then treat them charitably and sympathetically and turn to an enemy who has made their roads frightening and unsafe, prevented their pilgrims from reaching the Holy House of God [in Mecca], and robbed their merchants of their rightful subsistence from God.

“The second thing he will do is to send them someone who, he believes, has a credible argument for giving them what they seek. If the groups feel inclined toward him, their hearts are willing to listen to him, and they send him deputations, he will head for the first district to obey him and give him its rule. On that district he will shower his bounty, treating it with dignity and endowing it with his generosity. He will then let justice pervade its people and grant them mercy so that no nearby district or faraway group will remain without his blessings and benefits. Their poor will become rich, their shattered folk will become whole, their lowly will rise, and their highborn will be enhanced – except for two groups. One of them consists of people dominated by mischief and inclined to passions, who will belittle his call, be slow to respond to it, and be the slowest or the last to send deputations to him. On those people, he will pour down his wrath, seeking a cause that he will soon find to rightfully subdue them. His armies will fight them, swords will slay them, captivity will be their lot as they are pursued until their land is destroyed and their children are orphaned. To the other group, he will give no peace; he will accept no pact from them, and will give no promise of protection because they were the first to open the door of dissension, rebellion, and disobedience. He will kill their notables, capture their leaders, chase their escapees all the way to the sea, mountain tops, valley trees, and underground retreats – putting them to death, fettering them, and making an example of them – until he ruins their country and widows their women. This is something for which we know no time in our scriptures and authenticate no other interpretation other than what we have said.

“As for Mūsā, my heir apparent, this is the time for him to go to Khurāsān and abide at Jurjān. What God has destined for him in going and staying there will produce better results for Muslims and be of greater consequence to him, by God’s permission, rather than staying here where he will be immersed in our flooding bounties. His great merit will diminish, his shining light will flicker, and many will belittle his existing qualities. Then who among his ministers will befriend him and who from among his people will be chosen for him?”

Muḥammad ibn al-Layth said, “O Mahdī, your heir apparent has become an eminent personality in your community and the people of your religion. They turn to him and look up to him. Because of his nearness to you, he has remained without a position and unknown, but for good reason. However, if he goes out on his own, makes his own decisions, and manages affairs by himself, the common people and the leaders of the community will, as is to be expected, examine his decisions, check on his activities, and ask about events during his watch. They will keep an eye on his piety and mercy, his fairness and justice, his management and policy, his ministers and companions. They will then make up their minds in accordance with criteria familiar to them that they hold dear to their hearts and that incline their opinions and passions. Al-Mahdī, may God give him success, will consequently look for what will strengthen his [heir apparent’s] rule and gain his people’s satisfaction by doing something that will embellish it, bring good results, affect the hearts of his flock, and earn the praise of the people of his religion. In gaining their hearts and minds, nothing is more effective than mercy in his actions, justice in his deeds, and love for good and good-doers. Al-Mahdī, may God give him success, will choose persons from among the best people of every city and the best legists of every region, people in whom the common folk will have confidence when mentioned and toward whom they will be genial when described. Means of beneficence will be facilitated for them and the door of good deeds will be opened, as indeed they were opened and facilitated for him.”

Al-Mahdī said, “You have spoken truly and have given good advice.” Then he addressed his son Mūsā and said, “My son, you have become a model to whom the common people turn. When you do a good deed, news of it spreads far and wide; when you do a bad deed, it too is widely disseminated. Your conduct is publicly known. So you should fear God, obey Him, and tolerate people’s anger in doing so, not seeking their satisfaction by doing otherwise. God, may He be exalted, will deal with those who are aggravated by your preference for His satisfaction, but if you have a preference for someone other than God, those whom you annoy because of that will be of no help to you.

“Know that in every age God, Most High, has a group of messengers, remnants of the pick of His creatures, and hidden supporters of His truth. Through their calling, He renews Islam and by their support He establishes the pillars of religion. He adopts them as supporters of His religion and helpers to effect His justice. They correct the wrong, straighten the crooked, and remove corruption from the world. The people of Khurāsān have become the strength of our state and the swords of our call. With their obedience we fight evil, with their advice we avoid great calamities, with their determination we face the vicissitudes of daily life, and with their insights we deal with the burdens of time. They are the pillars of the earth when it shakes, the death of enemies when they rise, and the strongholds of my people when they are in difficulty. In the past, they have participated in great battles and in good deeds that extinguished the fires of sedition, rooted out heresies, and subjugated powerful tyrants. They continued

to do these things as long as they kept pace with the current of our power, lived in the shade of our call, and offered us obedience, all of it behavior by which God removed their humiliation and made them lords of many regions and kings over many people after times when they had lived in humiliation, fear, distress, sorrow, and harm. Therefore, give them their due dignity and lead them to the gardens of your blessings; and know their rights when they obey you and their proximity to you as a result of their past services and good advice. Treat them well and be generous to them; reward the good among them and help those who go wrong.

“My son, take care of the common people. Seek their satisfaction by being just and their love by being fair. By so doing, you will please your Lord and will be liked by your flock. Let government officials and the judiciary be intermediaries between you and your flock in matters of fairness, by ordering the judge in every city and the elite of every region to choose a man you will appoint to rule them who makes fairness the principle of his relations with them. If he does well, you will be praised; and if he does badly, you will be excused. These people are the government officials and the judiciary. If knowledge of this spreads and people get to hear of it, do not allow what you have done to make you forget that it will silence all those who spread calumnies and suppress the malice of those who harbor envy in their hearts. That will extinguish the fires of war and lead to secure consequences. Let two men always remain revered by you and strongly associated with you: one of them a noble man from among the Arab nobility, a renowned person from honorable families, someone with laudable manners, good insight, and true religiosity; and the second a man of unblemished religiosity and unassailed social position, who is knowledgeable about the use of words and the evaluation of opinions, conversant with *belles-lettres* and books, aware of conditions of wars and changes of circumstances, someone who can compose beneficial writings and long-lasting works that will be a beautiful record of your good qualities and an embellishment of your memory. You will therefore consult him whenever you make war and take him into your confidence. If you find such a man, he is one to abide in my place and graze in my green gardens. Don’t forget to select persons from among the jurists of cities and the elites of regions, who will be your neighbors and evening companions and your consultants in assessing ideas that come to you and decisions that you make. Go forth, with God’s blessing. May God’s help and success lead your heart to what is right, and guide your tongue to speak what is good.”

Written in Baghdad in the month of Rabī‘ II of the year 170 [after the Hijra].

### A section on dealing wisely with the enemy

In a book from India, it is advised that you cannot parry the harm of a strong enemy, whom you cannot defeat, with anything better than humility and submission. It is like grass spared from a stormy wind only by being soft and flexible.

They said, “Dance for the monkey when it has power.”

A poet has taken this idea and said:

Do not ever worship an idol,  
 if you fall on bad times,  
 And dance for the monkey, unembarrassed,  
 during its time [of power].

Aḥmad ibn Yūsuf, the secretary, said, “If you cannot bite your enemy’s hand, kiss it.”

Sābiq al-Balawī said:

If you are ever afraid of someone  
 who has power over you,  
 Flatter him, for he who does not flatter  
 cannot ever dupe.

Wise men have said, “The beginning of wisdom is to seize opportunity whenever possible and to abandon the unattainable.”

A poet said:

To have an enemy without noble descent or religion  
 Is an unparalleled affliction.  
 He permits you to attack an honor he did not uphold  
 While he revels in the honor that you yourself have preserved.

### **Being circumspect with the enemy even if he shows friendship**

Wise men have said, “Watch out for anyone whose relative’s murder has been unavenged and do not feel safe with him. The more he shows intimacy toward you, the more cautious you should be with him. Safety from the enemy involves staying remote from him and withdrawn; for when you grant him friendliness and confidence, you empower him with your own killing points.”

They said, “Do not be at ease with the enemy if he draws close to you and shows friendliness. He is just waiting for opportunities to jump on you. He harbors plans to harm you; he hopes for your good only in order to ruin you, and for your elevation only to bring your dignity to ruin.”

### **Al-Akḥṭal cautioning the Banū Umayya**

In the same vein, al-Akḥṭal said:

O Banū Umayya, I am advising you  
 That Zufar should not remain safe among you.  
 Regard him as your enemy: for what you see of him  
 And what you don’t of his manners are corrupt.

You will find that a grudge, however old,  
Is like mange: it hides for a while, then spreads.

In the book from India there is this aphorism, “A judicious man is wary of his enemy in every situation. He is on his guard against attack when the enemy is near, of his return when he is remote, of his ambush when he is uncovered, of his diversions when he runs away, and of his renewed attack when he escapes.”

A wise man advised a king: “Do not allow the enemy who reveals his enmity to frighten you more than the suspect who deceitfully hides it from you. A man may often be afraid of poison, which is the most deadly thing, yet he may be killed by water, the life of everything. He may often fear kings who rule him, but then he is killed by slaves whom he rules and owns.”

No one spoke of an enemy concealing his enmity better than al-Akḥṭal:

You will find that a grudge, however old,  
Is like mange: it hides for a while, then spreads.

Al-Ḥasan ibn Hānī? made a good allusion to this idea, where he said:

Despite his grudge and his deceit,  
We wore a cousin of ours like a garment.  
Yet hatred for us hid in him  
Like fire hiding in a flintstone.

The enemy who acts in this manner has been likened to a serpent with a reared head. The nephew of Taʿabbata Sharraṇ said:

He bows his head but death oozes out of him  
Like a snake rearing its head and squirting out venom.

### Between Muʿāwiya and Ibn al-Zubayr

ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Zubayr said to Muʿāwiya – while others claim Muʿāwiya said it to ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Zubayr, “Why are you rearing your head like a snake at the roots of a tree?”

In the book from India is this saying, “If an enemy extends friendship to you for a reason that has forced him to resort to you, his enmity will return as soon as the reason goes away. It is like water: we heat it, but, once we stop, it reverts to its original cold condition. It is also like a bitter tree: daub it with honey, but it will produce only bitter fruit.”

Durayd said:

Grudge cannot be concealed, wherever it is hidden,  
Nor will a sickly look be taken for a healthy one.

Zuhayr said:

Whatever quality a friend or a foe has,  
His eyes will tell you what is in his heart.

Ziyād was asked, “What is joy?” He answered, “[It is the feeling of] him whose life is long enough to see something in his enemy that makes him happy.”

### A section with reports on the Azraqites

After ‘Alī’s murder, God be pleased with him, the first rebel among the Khārijites was Ḥawthara al-Aqṭa‘. He went out to al-Nukhayla and was met by a group of Khārijites. Mu‘āwiya meanwhile was in Kufa, having been acknowledged as caliph by al-Ḥasan, al-Ḥusayn, and Qays ibn Sa‘d ibn ‘Ubāda. Al-Ḥasan then left for Medina. Mu‘āwiya sent word to him while he was on his way, asking him to take charge of fighting the Khārijites. Al-Ḥasan, peace be on him, said, “I have refrained from fighting you in order to spare the blood of Muslims. I don’t think I can fight them: how can I fight a group, when you are more deserving to be fought than they are?” When this response reached Mu‘āwiya, he sent an army in pursuit, most of whose soldiers were Kufans. He told Ḥawthara’s father, “Go forth and deal with your son for me.” Ḥawthara went out to his son and asked him to return to Mu‘āwiya’s fold, but the son refused. When his father attempted to persuade him, the son doggedly resisted. “My son,” Ḥawthara said to him, “I will bring you your own son. When you see him, perhaps you will yearn for him!” “Father,” the son replied. “By God, I yearn more for a sharp stab that makes me wallow among spearheads than for my own son.” Ḥawthara returned to Mu‘āwiya and informed him of what had happened. “O Abū Ḥawthara,” Mu‘āwiya said, “your son has gone to extremes.” When Ḥawthara saw the Kufans around him, he told them, “O enemies of God! Yesterday you fought Mu‘āwiya in order to destroy his power; today you fight on his side to support his power!” Then he attacked them severely and said:

O Ḥawthara, attack these hordes.  
Very soon you will obtain forgiveness.

A man from the tribe of Ṭay’ attacked him and killed him. When he noticed the mark on his forehead from constant prostrations, he repented for having killed him.

### The killing of Mirdās

Mirdās Abū Bilāl had participated in the Battle of Ṣiffīn with ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, may God be pleased with him. He had disapproved of arbitration. He had also participated in the Battle of Nahrawān, where his life was spared among others. When he was released from the prison of Ibn Ziyād and saw how persistently the Shurāt were pursued, he decided to take up arms and rebel. He told his friends, “By God, we cannot afford to live with these unjust wrong-doers, being subjected to their laws, while they shirk justice and shun virtue. By God, it is a grave wrong to accept this patiently; to unsheathe the sword and render roads unsafe

are severe actions. We should rather isolate ourselves from them and unsheathe our swords only in order to fight those who fight us.” About thirty men of his friends followed him, among whom were Ḥurayth ibn Ḥajl and Kahmas ibn Ṭalq al-Ṣarīmī. They wanted to put Ḥurayth in charge but he declined, so they put Mirdās in charge. When Mirdās went on his way with his friends, they were met by ‘Abd Allāh ibn Rabāḥ al-Anṣārī, who was a friend of his. “My dear friend,” he asked Mirdās, “where are you going?” “I want to take my religion and my friends’ religion and flee from the laws of these unjust people,” Mirdās answered. “Has anyone heard about you?” asked ‘Abd Allāh. “No,” Mirdās answered. “Then go back,” advised ‘Abd Allāh. “Why? Are you afraid some evil will befall me?” asked Mirdās. “Yes,” ‘Abd Allāh said. “I fear you will be brought [to the ruler].” “Don’t be afraid,” Mirdās replied, “I will not unsheathe my sword and will not frighten anyone. I will fight only those who fight me.”

He went on his way until he reached Āsak. Some merchandise on its way to Ibn Ziyād passed by him. His friends now numbered forty, so he stopped the caravan and took from it a portion of the merchandise as his stipend and that of his friends. Leaving the rest, he said, “Tell your ruler that we have taken our stipends.” “Why have you left the rest?” his friends asked. “They divide this booty and perform the prayer,” he replied, “so don’t fight them as long as they keep performing the prayer.”

Ibn Ziyād sent Aslam ibn Zur‘a al-Kilābī with two thousand men to fight them. When Aslam reached them, Mirdās said to him, “Beware of God, Aslam. We do not want to fight, nor do we intend to terrorize anyone. We have only fled from injustice. We take no more of the booty than our stipends, and we fight only those who fight us.” “But we must take you to Ibn Ziyād,” Aslam declared. “Even if he will kill us?” asked Mirdās. “Even if he will kill you,” Aslam insisted. “So you will share the responsibility of shedding our blood,” warned Mirdās. “Yes,” said Aslam. So attacking him as if they were one man, they defeated him and killed his friends.

Ibn Ziyād then sent them ‘Abbād, who fought them on a Friday. When it was time for prayer, Abū Bilāl called out to them, “O people. It is time for prayer, so give us respite so that we and you may pray.” They gave them respite, but ‘Abbād’s men attacked them while they were praying, and killed them while some of them were bowing or prostrating, and others were standing or sitting in prayer. In an elegy on Abū Bilāl, ‘Imrān ibn Ḥiṭṭān said:

Weep for Mirdās and his death, O eyes.  
 Lord of Mirdās, pray make me like Mirdās.  
 You left me wandering, weeping for my calamity  
 In a desolate but formerly genial house.  
 After your death, I disavow all that I knew;  
 For people, after you have gone, are no more people.  
 You drank of a cup that had first circulated  
 Among peers in battle who had tasted sips of it,

But everyone who has not tasted it will soon drink  
Gulp after gulp of it [– and know].

Among all sectarians and heretics, there were none with deeper insights, nor more perspicacious theological judgment, nor greater readiness to die than the Khārijites. One of them, who had been pierced by a spear, ran to his killer. “I have hastened to You, my Lord,” he said, “so that You may be satisfied.”

When the Khārijites went to Isfahan, they besieged ‘Attāb ibn Warqā’ for seven months, during which time he fought them every day. There was a man on ‘Attāb ibn Warqā’’s army named Shurayḥ, whose patronymic was Abū Hurayra. One day he went out to the Khārijites and called out:

O son of Abū al-Māḥūz and O sons of evil ones,  
O dogs of hellfire: How do you like  
The attack of Abū Hurayra, the Growler,  
Afflicting you day and night,  
While he is nigh to the Merciful?

This angered them, so ‘Ubayda ibn Hilal ambushed him and cut him down. His friends then carried him away. The Khārijites thought that he had been killed. Whenever they stopped fighting, they used to call out, “How is the Growler?” “In good condition,” they were answered. When Abū Hurayra recovered, he went out to them. “O enemies of God,” he said, “did you think I was harmed?” The Khārijites taunted, “We thought you had followed your mother into the heat of hellfire.”

When the siege of ‘Attāb became prolonged, he said to his friends, “What are you waiting for? By God, you are people who would never be defeated by a few. You are the cavaliers of your tribes; you have fought them many times and won. This siege has to end soon, once their provisions and ammunition have been depleted. Then when one of you dies, his friend will bury him; but when one of them dies, he will find no one to bury him. Fight them while you still have strength and before any one of you becomes so weak as to be unable to walk to his peer in battle.”

In the morning, he led them in the morning prayer, then went out to catch the Khārijites unawares. He raised a flag of a slave-girl named Yāsamin. “He who wishes to remain alive,” he said, “let him follow the flag of Yāsamin! He who wishes to participate in *jihād*, let him follow my flag.” He then went out with two thousand and seven hundred horsemen. The Khārijites were unaware of them until ‘Attāb’s men had arrived and fought a serious battle, the like of which the Khārijites had never seen. They killed the Khārijī commander, al-Zubayr ibn ‘Alī, and the Khārijites were routed. However, ‘Attāb ibn Warqā’ did not follow them.

Qurayb ibn Murra al-Azdī and Zaḥḥāf al-Ṭā’ī, who were two theological legists of Baṣra during Ziyād’s rule, became Khārijites and kept blocking people’s way. They met an old ascetic from the tribe of Ḍubay‘a ibn Rabī‘a ibn Nizār and

killed him. The people alerted one another, and a man from the tribe of Qutayʿa of al-Azd went out with his sword. But people from some of the houses warned him, shouting, “Al-Ḥarūriyya, al-Ḥarūriyya! Run and save yourself.” They shouted back, “We are not Ḥarūriyya. We are the police.” The man stopped, and they killed him.

Abū Hilāl, who was a follower of the Khārijites but did not believe in their practice of blocking people’s way, heard of their deed. “Qurayb,” he said, “may God not bring him close to any good; and Zaḥḥāf, may God not forgive him. They have both mounted a blind, fumbling she-camel.”

However, they both continued to kill anyone they found in any tribe on their way, until they passed by the tribe of ‘Alī ibn Sūd of al-Azd, who were good marksmen; there were one hundred men among them who were all skillful shooters. They showered them with arrows. “O sons of ‘Alī,” the two men shouted, “spare us and let us have no shooting between us.” One of ‘Alī’s sons said:

The people have nothing but arrows  
Sharpened in the darkness of night.

The Khārijites ran away from them and crossed the cemetery of Banū Yashkur and came out to Muzayna, where the people confronted them and killed them to the last man.

### Ziyād and the Khārijites

The people then returned to Ziyād, “Don’t people restrain their own fools?” he asked. So, whenever a tribe noticed there was a Khārijite among them, they tied him up and brought him to Ziyād, but some of them imprisoned him and others killed him.

Ziyād had another story connected with the Khārijites. He was brought one of their women, so he killed her and undressed her. Thus women did not become Khārijites until Ziyād’s death. Whenever women were forced to become Khārijites, they said, “If it were not for the undressing, we would have hastened.”

Among the famous horsemen of the Khārijites were ‘Amr al-Qanā, of the tribe of Sa‘d ibn Zayd Manat, and ‘Ubayda ibn Hilāl, of the tribe of Yashkur ibn Bakr ibn Wā’il, the latter being the one who stabbed al-Muhallab’s friend in his thigh and transfixed it with the saddle. They were the two men about whom Ibn al-Munjib al-Sadūsī, one of al-Muhallab’s horsemen, said the following verses. This was after his master Khilāj had said to him, “I wish we could disperse their soldiers until I arrive at their abode and steal two girls from it, one for you and the other for me.”

O Khilāj. You will not embrace a tender girl  
Resembling a doll, on whom even saffron chokes,  
Until you embrace famous men in the battalion,

‘Amr al-Qanā and ‘Ubayda ibn Hilāl,  
 And until you see al-Muqaṣṭar in the battalion  
 Advancing with a group of unjust, straying men.

Al-Muqaṣṭar was one of their famous horsemen; Qaṭarī [ibn al-Fujāʿa] was the most heroic of them all. Ṣāliḥ ibn Mikhrāq was one of their brutes, and so was Saʿd al-Ṭalāʾiʿ.

### Al-Muhallab on a group of the Khārijites

When the Khārijites disagreed among themselves and Qaṭarī isolated himself with his followers, ‘Abd Rabbih remained. Al-Muhallab said to his friends, “God, Most High, has relieved you of four peers in battle: Qaṭarī ibn al-Fujāʿa, Ṣāliḥ ibn Mikhrāq, ‘Ubayda ibn Hilāl, and Saʿd al-Ṭalāʾiʿ. Only ‘Abd Rabbih remains among Satan’s ruffians.”

### The Khārijites’ thirst for fighting

The Khārijites used to fight most fiercely even for a whip or a mean object that had been taken away from them. The spear of a Khārijite man from the tribe of Murād once fell into enemy hands, and they fought for it until many were wounded and killed by sunset. Meanwhile the Muradī man recited:

Night was night and was full of great woe,  
 And the Shurāt people’s flood flowed in it  
 If enemies were allowed to say anything about us.

The beliefs of the Khārijites were of four kinds. Nāfiʿ ibn al-Azraq believed in the random obstruction of people; in the disavowal of ‘Uthmān, ‘Alī, Ṭalḥa, and al-Zubayr; in the legal permissibility of seizing trusts; and in the killing of children.

Abū Bayhas Haysām ibn Jābir al-Ḍabuʿī said, “Our enemies are like the enemies of the Messenger, God bless him and give him peace. It is legally permissible for us to reside among our enemies as the Messenger, God bless him and give him peace, and the Muslims resided among the polytheists. Furthermore I say that marrying them and inheriting from them is permissible because they are hypocrites pretending to be Muslims; God’s rule concerning them is like that concerning the polytheists.”

‘Abd Allāh ibn Ibād said, “We do not believe that those [Muslims] who disagree with us are polytheists, because they maintain the unicity [of God] and accept the Book and the Messenger. They are only ungrateful for [God’s] blessings. Inheriting from them, marrying them, and residing among them are permissible, and they are united by the call of Islam.”

The Ṣufriyya believed in ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ibād’s sayings and in residing [among other Muslims]; thus most of them resided [among other Muslims]. They were called Ṣufriyya because of the paleness (*iṣfirār*) of their faces. It was suggested they were so called because they were followers of Ibn al-Ṣaffār.

# THE BOOK OF THE CHRYSOLITE

## On generous men and liberal givers

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### Introduction to the Book of the Chrysolite

Abū ‘Umar Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, the jurist, may God have bountiful mercy on him, said:

We have spoken about wars as well as about the flaws and the perfections that involve them and about the precedence of men therein, despite their different degrees of patience, endurance, equipment, and number. With the help of God and His guidance, we will now speak about generous men and liberal givers; for the noblest quality in this world, the most beautiful, the most praiseworthy, and the best by which to guard oneself against blame and shield defects – is for anyone to have an innate generosity that adorns his munificent nobility and open-handed liberality. If generosity has nothing else to commend it but the fact that it is one of the attributes of God Most High by which He has named Himself, [it is a worthy quality]; for He is the Generous One, may He be exalted. Whoever among His creatures is generous has taken unto himself God’s name and assumed His attribute as his example.

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, “When a generous man comes to visit you, be generous to him.”

A well-known, transmitted ḥadith says, “People are God’s dependents, and so the most loved of God’s people are the most beneficent to His dependents.”

Al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, God grant them peace, said to ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ja‘far, “You have been extravagant in giving money.” He responded, “I redeem you by my father and mother. God has accustomed me to His bountiful giving, and I likewise have accustomed Him to my bountiful giving to His servants. I am therefore afraid to abandon this custom lest He abandon His giving to me.”

Al-Ma‘mūn said to Muḥammad ibn ‘Abbād al-Muhallabī, “You are an excessive squanderer!” He replied, “Withholding generosity is an expression of distrust in the Worshipped [One]. God, may He be exalted, says, ‘And whatever you spend, He will replace it; and He is the best of providers.’” [Q. 34:39]

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, “Spend generously and fear not any reduction of giving from the One on the Throne [God].”

### Praising generosity and condemning miserliness

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, “Doing good protects one from all ways of evil perdition.”

He also said, may blessing and peace be upon him, “God loves generosity and noble characteristics, and He hates inferior manners.”

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, asked a group of Arabs, “Who is your leader?” They said, “Al-Jadd ibn Qays, despite some miserliness in his character.” He remarked, may God bless him and grant him peace, “And what malady is worse than miserliness!”

God Most High said, “And whosoever is guarded against the covetousness of his own self – these are the successful ones.” [Q. 59:9]

Aktham ibn Şayfi, the sage of the Arabs, said, “Train your character to [the achievement of] high aims, lead it to praiseworthy deeds, teach it nobility, don’t persist in a trait you condemn in others, be kind to those inclined to you, adorn yourselves with generosity and it will bring you others’ love, and don’t be stingy for you will accelerate poverty.”

Taking the latter idea, a poet said:

Is it for fear of poverty, you’ve hurried it up  
 And delayed spending what you gathered?  
 Thus, you’ve become poor, when you’re really rich,  
 And now you’re no more than what you’ve done.

### **A generous man and a miser**

A miser wrote to a generous man advising him to save and scaring him about poverty. The generous man replied, “‘Satan threatens you with poverty and commands you to commit abomination, whereas God promises you forgiveness and bounty from Him’ [Q. 2:268]. I hate to abandon what has already happened in order to do what may never happen.”

### **From a speech by Khālid al-Qasrī**

From the pulpit Khālid ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Qasrī used to say, “O people. Do good, for God will not hold back reward from a doer of good. What good human beings perform with difficulty, God will reward with ease.”

He took this idea from al-Ḥuṭay’a, who said:

Whoever does good will not be deprived of its reward.  
 Good deeds are not wasted on God and human beings.

And al-Ḥuṭay’a had taken it from an ancient book that said, “God, Most High, says in a revelation to David, peace be on him, ‘Whoever does good will find it with Me. A good deed is not wasted on Me and My servant.’”

### **From a sermon by Sa‘īd ibn al-‘Āṣ**

From the pulpit Sa‘īd ibn al-‘Āṣ used to say, “Let him whom God has given a largesse spend from it secretly as well as openly, so that he may be the happiest

of people therewith. What he bequeathes at his death is only left to one of two men: either a doer of good who belittles nothing, or a doer of evil who will spare nothing.”

A poet took this idea and said:

Make others happy with your wealth during your lifetime,  
For only a doer of good or a doer of evil will succeed you.  
If you amass wealth for a doer of evil, this will not enrich him;  
Whereas the doer of good will make a little wealth increase.

Abū Dharr said, “You have two partners sharing your wealth: time and the inheritor. Do your best not to be the partner whose share is the least.”

The Persian Buzurjumīhr said, “If fortune smiles on you, spend from it; for it will not be exhausted. If it frowns on you, spend from it too; for it will not last.”

Taking this idea a poet said:

Don't be stingy with a fortune that smiles on you,  
For it will not be diminished by squandering and extravagance.  
And if fortune frowns on you, it is better for you to give it away;  
For when you go, it will leave you praise.

### **Kisrā on generous men**

Kisrā used to say, “Make use of generous and courageous people, for they think well of God, Most High. Even if stingy people, because of their stinginess and of people's blame and general hatred of them, had no greater harm done to them than their bad opinion of God's reward, that would still be dire enough.”

Maḥmūd al-Warrāq took this idea and said:

Whoever thinks well of God is generous, right from the beginning.  
Miserliness is caused by having a bad opinion of God.

### **Between Mūsā al-Hādī and Ibn Yazīd**

Muḥammad ibn Yazīd ibn ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz said, “I went out of Jurjān with the Commander of the Faithful, Mūsā al-Hādī. He said to me, ‘Either you carry me or I will carry you.’ I understood what he meant, so I recited to him a few verses by Ibn Ṣirma al-Anṣārī:

First and foremost, I advise you to honor God  
Then your noble descent, but God comes first.  
If your tribesmen dominate, don't be jealous of them;  
And if you have sovereign power, then be just.  
If you are poor and in need, then be modest and abstinent;  
And if your wealth is abundant, then give abundantly.

He ordered that I be given twenty thousand [dirhams].”

‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abbās said, “People’s masters in this world are the generous, and in the next are the pious.”

Abū Muslim al-Khawlānī said, “Apart from its reward, nothing is more beautiful than a good deed. Not everyone capable of doing a good deed intends to do it. If ability and intention [to do a good deed] are combined, happiness is complete.” He then recited:

All noble traits of character are beautiful,  
 But generosity is the most beautiful of them all.  
 How many a person knows me, whom I don’t know,  
 And how many a person informs about me, who has never seen me.  
 Stories about me reach them although my abode is distant  
 And although my homeland has been distanced from them.  
 I disdainfully give away my free wealth  
 But my free honor I will never give away.

Khālid ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Qasrī said, “Whoever is touched by the dust of my procession deserves my thanks.”

‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ said, “By God, a man who mentions me as he turns from one side to the other when sleeping and who thinks I can help him is indeed truly deserving of my help; if he asks me for something he needs, I will give it to him.”

‘Abd al-‘Azīz ibn Marwān said, “If a man permits me to do him a favor, his good deed to me is greater than mine to him.” He then recited the following verses by [‘Abd Allāh] Ibn ‘Abbās, may God Most High be pleased with them both:

When worries visit a young man in his sleep  
 And he thinks of them all night as darkness reigns,  
 Then he comes in the morning seeking help that  
 No one but I can give to allay Time’s disasters,  
 I will dispel his choking worries with my wealth  
 And his oppressive, recurring worries will depart.  
 He will be doing me a favor by thinking well of me,  
 And I will be grateful to him for his good thinking of me.

### Abū ‘Uqayl on Marwān

The well-known eloquent Iraqī, Abū ‘Uqayl, was asked, “What did you think of Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam when something was asked of him?” He answered, “I found that his desire for generous giving was greater than his desire for thanks, and that his need for fulfilling a request was stronger than the need of the one who made it.”

Ziyād said, “For shaming miserliness, it is sufficient that its name has never been praised; for generosity, it is sufficient glory that its name has never been blamed.”

Another said:

Don't you see me as you tear me to pieces by blaming me,  
 Concerning the merits of miserliness and generosity?  
 If there are no [falling] leaves to give me pleasure  
 When branches are being hit by strikers, then I am a tender twig.  
 When seekers of a good deed ask, I will always give  
 Either as an initial gift or one in good return.

When he says "If there are no leaves" he uses a simile to mean "money". It is said: So-and-So came to So-and-So "to hit what he has" [that is, to seek what he has]; hitting means "striking the trees with a stick so that the leaves may fall for the stray animals to eat from." He likened the seeker being given sustenance to one who strikes.

Asmā' ibn Khārijā said, "I hate to rebuff anyone who comes to me in need of something. He may be a generous person, in which case I will preserve his honor and dignity; or he may be a mean person, in which case I will preserve my honor and dignity from his attack."

Aristotle said, "He who comes to you from his homeland has begun by thinking well of you and having confidence in you."

### Making praise and good deeds desirable

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, "If you wish to know a person's position with his Lord, look at how well he is praised following [his death]."

### From 'Umar to Abū Mūsā

'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, may God be pleased with him, wrote to Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī, "Consider your position with God to be your position with people, and know that what you have with God [as recorded good deeds] is equivalent to what you have with people."

A wise man was asked, "What benefit has Time given you?" "Knowledge of it," he replied. "And what is the most praiseworthy thing?" he was asked. "That a man leave good repute after [he dies]."

In interpreting the words of God Most High, "And give me a true tongue among posterity" [Q. 26:84], an exegete said that he [Abraham] meant praiseworthy memories after [his death].

Aktham ibn Ṣayfi said, "You are only reports, so let reports about you be good."

[Abū Tammām] Ḥabīb al-Ṭā'ī took this idea and said:

A human being is nothing but a mention of a good deed  
 Or an evil deed, which speech spreads out and circulates.  
 Have you not heard of a generation that became extinct,  
 Reports about whom were transmitted, nation after nation?

Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Durayd said:

A man is only a story that follows [his death].  
So, be a good story to those who heed.

It was also said, “Days are plantations. What you plant in them is what you harvest.”

*Verses by Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih*

The following verses are part of what we ourselves have said on this topic and others regarding noble character:

O you, who patiently endure Time,  
Know that Time is more enduring than you.  
Let your reason control your passion  
And consider your present to be not part of your morrow.  
Life is only a plantation,  
So plant in it what you wish to harvest.  
Of human beings, nothing remains  
But their traces; their physical substance is lost.  
Have you not heard of those in the past?  
Some are blamed and some are praised.  
Money is as good as the good you do with it;  
If you do bad things with it, it is bad.

Al-Aḥnaf ibn Qays said, “Fathers have not bequeathed to sons and the dead have not left for the living anything better than good deeds toward people of noble descent.”

It was said, “To amplify a good deed is worthier than doing it, because doing it is a supererogatory performance but amplifying it is a duty.”

It was also said, “Give life to your good deed by not mentioning it, and magnify it by belittling it.”

Wise men said, “To disregard one’s reason for generous giving and to recognize the virtue of a thankful receiver are some of the signs of the giver’s perfect munificence.”

They also said, “A good deed has three attributes: promptness, facility, and secrecy. Whoever fails to meet any one of these attributes diminishes the value of his good deed and does not deserve to be thanked.”

Mu‘āwiya was asked, “Who do you love most among people?” “The one who has done me a good deed,” he answered. “What if there aren’t any?” he was asked. “Then, the one to whom I myself have done a good deed.”

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, “Whoever considers God’s benefaction to him to be great must have an equally high regard for his own duty to be beneficent toward people. If he does not do this duty, he exposes God’s benefaction to extinction.”

### ʿUrwa ibn Udayya on his crucifixion

Abū al-Yaqzān said, “ʿUbayd Allāh ibn Ziyād seized ʿUrwa ibn Udayya, Abū Bilāl’s brother, cut off his hand and foot, and crucified him at the door of his own house. ʿUrwa said to his family as he was on the cross, ‘See to those people responsible for me and treat them well, for they are your guests.’”

Ibn al-Mubārak said on the authority of Ḥumayd, who had heard it from al-Ḥasan, “That I meet a brother’s need is dearer to me than a whole year’s worship.”

### Between al-Sindī and a chivalrous Kūfan

When speaking to an eloquent man from Kūfa who was one of the city’s elite, whose saddle’s felt-mat never dried, whose heart never rested, and whose movement was constant in seeking needy men and giving help to the weak, Ibrāhīm ibn al-Sindī asked, “Tell me, what reduces your fatigue and facilitates your exertion when you aspire to help people in need?” “By God,” he answered, “I have heard the chirping of birds on tree branches at dawn and lute strings playing and songstresses’ voices echoing. But I have never been so moved to ecstasy by any sound as by good and well-spoken praise for a man who has done a charitable deed, by a free man’s expression of his thankfulness to a free giver, and by the intercession of a God-fearing person on behalf of a grateful seeker.” Ibrāhīm said, “God be your father’s help! You are chock-full of generosity.”

### A saying by Jaʿfar ibn Muḥammad

Ismāʿīl ibn Masrūr said on the authority of Jaʿfar ibn Muḥammad, “God created certain people from His mercy, by His mercy, and for His mercy, and they are those who help others who are in need. So whoever of you is able to be one of them, let him so be.”

### Generosity despite paucity of resources

As part of what God, Most High and Blessed, said about the Anṣār, we find: “They prefer [others] to themselves, even though they are poor; and whosoever overcomes his own covetousness – those are the successful ones.” [Q. 59:9]

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, “The best sort of giving is that which comes from a poor man to another poor man.”

He also said, blessing and peace be upon him, “The best sort of giving is that which comes as the utmost exertion of a man with few resources.”

Wise men have said, “A little amount given from little is more praiseworthy than much given to many.”

Ḥabīb [Abū Tammām] took this idea and put it in verses he sent to al-Ḥasan ibn Wahb, the secretary, with a pen as a gift:

We have sent you something, may God honor you.  
 So, be gracious in accepting it.  
 Don't compare it to your lavish openhandedness,  
 Nor to your abundant and ample liberality.  
 Accept this humble gift from me –  
 The utmost exertion of a man with few resources is not little.

They also said, “The utmost exertion of a man with few resources is better than the wealth of one who gives abundantly.”

Ṣarī‘ al-Ghawānī [Muslim ibn al-Walīd] said:

Generosity does not involve that a man give abundantly to his people  
 But rather that, being poor, he gives and they are thankful.

### Abū Hurayra on Ja‘far ibn Abī Ṭālib

Abū Hurayra said, “I never wished I was given birth by anyone’s mother but Ja‘far ibn Abī Ṭālib’s. Following him one day, I felt hungry. When he reached his door, he turned around and saw me. ‘Enter,’ he said. I entered. After thinking for a while, he could find nothing in his house apart from a skin-bag containing bitter ghee. He brought it down from the shelf, split it open, and put it between us. As we began licking the ghee and oil in it, he intoned:

God does not burden anyone with what is above his capacity,  
 And no hand gives generously but of what it finds.’”

A wise man was asked, “Who is the most generous of people?” “The one,” he replied, “who gives despite paucity and preserves the dignity of the beggar.”

Ḥammād ‘Ajrad said:

Burst into leaf and you will be expected to give much.  
 Fruits are not expected if the branches don't leaf.  
 A generous man conceals his straitened condition from you  
 And you think he is rich, while he is really in straits.  
 Give abundantly and don't let paucity of resources deter you,  
 For everything that relieves poverty is praised.  
 Despite his wealth, an avaricious man suffers from diseases  
 Of the ugliest and most gruesome kind.

Ḥātim said:

I display cheer to my guest before he dismounts.  
 Although my home be arid, he will find fertility within it.  
 Being generous toward guests is not by offering a lot of food  
 But by showing a generous man's welcoming face.

‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān said, “I never wanted to be the son of anyone among the Arabs other than ‘Urwa ibn al-Ward. That is because he said:

Do you make fun of me because you've grown fat and see  
 That hunger has touched my body? Hunger is grueling.  
 I'm a man whose dish is emptied by being shared  
 And you're a man whose dish is emptied by one person.  
 I apportion my body into many bodies  
 And only drink water, pure and cold."

One of the best things said about generosity despite paucity is what Ṣarīf said:

If there is nothing in his hand but his own soul,  
 He will give it away generously. Let him who asks him fear God.

Some of the most excessive things said about generosity is what Bakr ibn al-Naṭṭāḥ said:

I say to one who seeks generosity from Mālik,  
 "Hold fast to Mālik's generosity and gifts.  
 He's a young man who made the world his honor's protector  
 And so, he renders favors in it before his enemies do.  
 If his wealth were to disappoint his hand's generosity,  
 He would share part of his own life with whoever asks him.  
 If no sharing of one's life were permissible to Mālik,  
 He would, if permitted, give from his charitable [religious] dues  
 And would give them generously without denying his Lord  
 And would share his fast and prayer with whoever asks him."

In this same vein another poet said it even better :

I filled my hand of this world many times  
 And those who blamed did not wish that I economize,  
 Nor was the payment of religious tax due on my wealth.  
 Should such tax be due from a generous man?

### Giving before being asked

Saʿīd ibn al-ʿĀṣ said, "In the sight of God, beneficence is ugly unless it is initiated without being begged. When a man begs for beneficence, he loses face, his heart is apprehensive, his breast muscles tremble, his forehead sweats, and he does not know whether he will go back having succeeded in his begging or else badly thwarted. This makes him turn pale, and the blood of his face sinks away. O God: if the world has a hold on me, don't let me have a hold on the Afterlife."

Aktham ibn Ṣayfī said, "Any begging, however little, is more than any gift received, however great."

ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, may God be pleased with him, said to his companions, "Whoever of you has a request from me, let him put it in writing so that I may spare you [the humiliation of] begging."

Ḥabīb [Abū Tammām] said:

Your giving is endless and is exhaustive of all wishes,  
And the faces of those in need preserve their dignity.

Habīb also said:

The humiliation of begging is a lump in my throat  
With a choking feeling in front and a stifling one behind.  
A gift flowing from your hand, be it generous or miserly,  
Is no recompense for exhaustive humiliation flowing from my face.  
The least that you give makes me cheerful  
And the most that you withhold makes me downcast.

It was said, “Whoever humiliates himself to you has already paid you your reward in full.”

It was also said, “There are three perfect characteristics: having dignity without causing fear, being generous without seeking a reward, and being mild-tempered without suggesting submissiveness.”

People have also said, “A generous man is one who is happy with his generosity and voluntary in his giving; someone who does not seek petty ephemeral things and thus lose the merit of his deed; nor does he look for a reward and deserve not to be thanked. He should not be like a hunter who scatters seeds for birds, not for their benefit but rather his own.”

### Between Ibn Abī Sabra and Abū al-Aswad

Al-Mundhir ibn Abī Sabra saw Abū al-Aswad al-Duʿalī wearing a patched shirt. “What has made you so stalwart as to wear this shirt?” he asked. “Many’s the slave from whom separation is impossible,” he answered. Al-Mundhir sent him an entire wardrobe of clothes. Abū al-Aswad responded:

He clothed me although I did not ask him to, so I praised him.  
One who gives you abundantly is a brother of yours and a helper.  
The one most deserving of your thanks, when you show your gratitude,  
Is the one who gives you while your honor is spared.

### Between Muʿāwiya and Ibn Ṣawḥān on generosity

Muʿāwiya asked Ṣaʿṣaʿa ibn Ṣūḥān, “What is generosity?” “Donation of money,” he answered, “and giving before being asked.”

### *Verses by Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih*

Part of what we have composed on this topic is the following:

He is generous to all, and his giving is abundant.  
He gives freely even before he is asked.  
A generous person is not one who gives when asked  
But one who gives without being asked.

Bashshār al-ʿUqaylī said:

True to his Mālikī ancestry, he is cheerful when giving;  
 His face shines, splitting aridity as light splits darkness.  
 Abundant rains of heaven are the overflow of his hands  
 To a kinsman and to a migrant far away from home.  
 He does not give because he expects or fears anything  
 But takes pleasure in the sweet taste of giving.  
 Nor does he give so that it may be said that generosity  
 Is his characteristic, but because it is that of his ancestors.

Another poet said:

Between being asked to give and offering an apology  
 There is a difficult matter for all freely giving liberals.

Ḥabīb [Abū Tammām] said:

If I were ungrateful for the blessings you bestowed on me,  
 My vileness would be more far-reaching than your generosity.  
 When surrounding colors were grim, your smile made me forget  
 The smile of morning in the pitch-black darkness.  
 You restored the beauty of my face's features  
 As polishing restores the beauty of a cutting sword.  
 Since the best speech is the truest, I care not  
 Whether you spared my face or my blood.

### Praying for the success of one's needs

Their practice for achieving that was the following:

They used to implore God for the success of their needs by praying two *rakʿas*, saying, “O God, only from You do I seek success, only in Your name do I ask for it, and only through Your Prophet, Muḥammad, do I address You. O God, diminish the difficulty [of success] for me, and make its rough path smooth. Grant me more good than I expect, and drive away from me more evil than I fear.”

The Prophet, may God bless him and give him peace, said, “Seek help for [the success] of your needs by keeping them secret; for everyone with a blessing is envied.”

Khālīd ibn Ṣafwān said, “Only ask for your needs at their due time; only seek them from those who can fulfill them. Needs are sought in expectation and are achieved by being fulfilled.”

He also said, “The key to the success of one's need is patience, despite the length of waiting. It fails when laziness blocks its way.”

A poet said:

Time gives one experience: I have discovered that  
 Patience has a praiseworthy consequence;

It is rare to find someone, patient in what he seeks,  
Who is not successful in the end.

An Arab proverb says, “Whoever continues to knock at a door will soon have it opened for him.”

Adopting this idea, a poet said:

If the way to things is blocked,  
Patience will open all that is locked.  
Even if seeking is long, don't despair  
Of an escape when things are straitened.  
A patient person deserves to obtain his need;  
Whoever knocks at doors continuously will enter.

Khālid ibn Ṣafwān said, “Missing a need is better than asking for it from those who cannot fulfill it; greater than any misfortune are its bad consequences.”

It was said, “A needy person is ever perplexed. Requesting one's needs all at once is a reprimand.”

Wise men said, “Don't ask a liar for what you need; he will admit it in words, but dispel it in fact. Nor should you ask an imbecile; he will intend to do you good, but will actually harm you. Nor a man who hopes to get a meal from someone else, for he will prefer his meal to your need.”

Diʿbil ibn ʿAlī al-Khuzāʿī said:

I have come to you seeking a gift  
Having no cause but good manners.  
Answer my request, for I am a man  
Who is not a persistent supplicant.

Shabīb ibn Shayba said, “I know something which, if two men agree on, will necessarily bring about successful relations between them.” “What is it?” he was asked. “Reason,” he said, “for a man of reason does not ask for what is impossible and does not turn away from what is possible.”

A poet said:

I've come to you, not invoking my closeness to you nor  
A good deed I've done for you, but only trusting in your generosity.  
So if you give me generously, I will be thankful;  
But if you offer an excuse, I will say you're sincere.

[Abū Nuwās] al-Ḥasan ibn Hānīʿ said:

If you give me what makes me grateful, I deserve it.  
Otherwise, I will excuse you and be thankful.

Another poet said:

By your life, I've not sullied my dignity that I humbled  
To you, nor have I exposed it to shameful blame.

I'm a young man whose honor was spared by good deeds  
Which, however, did not spare my resulting condition.

### **Between Ibn Wāsi' and a prince**

Muḥammad ibn Wāsi' dropped in on a prince. "I've come to you with a need," he said. "If you wish, you will grant it and both of us will be generous; or, if you prefer, you will not meet it and both of us will be miserly." He meant: if you grant it, you will be generous by providing for it, while I will be generous by asking you for it and having placed my request with the right man; if on the other hand you do not grant it, you will be miserly by withholding it, and I will be miserly because of my bad choice for you.

Ḥabīb stole this idea and said:

'Ayyāsh, you are indeed miserly and I am too  
Since you've become the place of my request.

### **'Abd Allāh ibn Ṭāhir and Sawwār, the judge**

Sawwār, the judge, came to see 'Abd Allāh ibn Ṭāhir, the governor of Khurāsān, and said, "May God mend the ways of the prince:

We have a need, yet excuse for it may be offered.  
It is easy to grant, and the reward for it is doubled.  
If you grant it, praise will be due to God alone,  
But if destiny prevents that, then your excuse is clear."

"What is your need, Abū 'Abd Allāh?" the governor asked. "A letter on my behalf," he answered, "to be sent by the prince, may God honor him, to his distinguished administrator if he so wishes, telling Mūsā ibn 'Abd al-Malik to hasten the payment of my stipend to me." "Is there anything else, Abū 'Abd Allāh" the governor asked, "that we could expedite to be paid to you from your own money? If you wish, you may choose either to take or return it." Whereupon, Sawwār recited the following verses:

Your door is the most auspicious of their doors  
And your house is ever inhabited and prosperous.  
When your hand sees those seeking your gifts,  
It acts more generously than a rainy night.  
Your dog is more friendly to callers on your munificence  
Than a mother to her daughter who comes to visit her.

### **Abū Ḥāzim al-A'raj and a man in authority concerning a need**

Abū Ḥāzim al-A'raj dropped in on a man in authority. "I've come to you regarding a need," he said, "one that I asked of God before I came to ask you. If God has permitted that it be granted, you will grant it and we will praise you; but if He has not so permitted, then you will not grant it and we will excuse you."

In a ḥadīth, Prophet Muḥammad said, “Seek your needs with people who have beautiful faces.”

Al-Ṭāʿī took this idea, put it in verse, and said:

I have applied to you the saying of God’s Messenger  
 Who said in clear and eloquent expression,  
 “If you seek your needs with any people,  
 Choose for them those with radiant faces.”  
 By my life, I have chosen a face which  
 Will never disappoint anyone who desires success.

### **Between [Caliph] al-Manṣūr and a man with a need**

Al-Manṣūr said to a man who came to see him, “Ask for your need, for you cannot have an opportunity like this one every moment.” “O Commander of the Faithful,” the man said, “I do not ask that your life be short, nor do I fear that you are miserly. Your giving is indeed a bestowed honor. Asking for a gift from you is indeed an acquisition of beauty. No man who humbles himself to you becomes deficient or tainted with shame.” So al-Manṣūr gave him a gift and treated him well.

## **Seeking the fulfillment of promises**

### **Sayings on the idea of this title**

One of their proverbs on this topic is: “A free man fulfills what he promises.” They have also said, “A generous man’s promise is [as good as] payment in cash but a miserly man’s is procrastination.”

Al-Zuhrī said, “It is incumbent on whoever makes a promise like a leafing tree to fulfill it like a fruit-bearing one.”

Al-Mughīra said, “Whoever delays a need insures it.”

The Persian Mubadhān said, “A promise is like a cloud, fulfillment like rain.”

Another said, “Promises are the heads of needs, fulfillment is their bodies.”

ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿUmar said, “Breaking a promise is one-third of hypocrisy and fulfilling it is one-third of faith. What would you think of a quality that God has considered to be praiseworthy in His Book and a source of pride for His prophets? For the Most High said, ‘Mention Ismāʿīl in the Book, he faithfully kept his promise.’”[Q. 19:54]

In mentioning ʿAmir ibn al-Ṭufayl, Jabbār ibn Sulmā said, “By God, when he promised anything good, he fulfilled his promise; but when he promised anything evil, he broke it.” It is he who said:

My cousin does not fear my tyranny as long as I live  
 And he is safe from my power when I threaten.  
 Even if I threaten him or promise him  
 He disbelieves my threat and believes my promise.

Ibn Abī Ḥāzim said:

If you say “Yes” to anything, you should fulfill it,  
 For the “Yes” of a free man is a debt to be duly paid.  
 Otherwise, say “No” and you can relax and make others do so  
 Lest people should say that you are a liar.

If there were nothing said about breaking a promise but the saying of God, may He be exalted, it would be sufficient; for He says, “O you who believe, why do you say what you do not do? It is most hateful in the sight of God that you say what you do not do.” [Q. 61:2–3]

‘Umar ibn al-Ḥārith said, “They used to do and not to say, then they came to say and to do, then to say and not to do, and then not to say and not to do. So he claimed they were stingy in telling lies, let alone in telling the truth.”

On this idea, [Abū Nuwās] al-Ḥasan ibn Ḥānī<sup>2</sup> says:

He said to me, “Will you accept a false promise?”  
 I said, “If there is no fat, then wool will do.”

A similar saying is that of ‘Abbās ibn al-Aḥnaf, which is also said to be that of Muslim ibn al-Walīd, “Ṣarī‘ al-Ghawānī” (“The Belles’ Fallen Victim”):

What would it hurt the one who preoccupied my heart  
 By his stinginess to have given me hope by a false promise?  
 I must be patient with you, for I have no recourse  
 But to hold on to a disappointing hope.  
 I will die of sorrow and my need for you  
 Will remain, but there will be no one to ask for it.

### Between ‘Abd al-Malik and Ibn Umm al-Ḥakam

‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Umm al-Ḥakam spoke to ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān concerning the promises he had given him but procrastinated in meeting. “We are more in need of deeds than of words,” he said, “and you are more worthy of fulfilling promises than of postponing them. Know that you don’t deserve thanks until you fulfill a promise and complete a good deed.”

### Between ‘Īsā ibn Mūsā and Ibn Ma‘n

Al-Qāsim ibn Ma‘n al-Mas‘ūdī reported, “I said to ‘Īsā ibn Mūsā: ‘O prince, I have not benefited anything from you since I came to know you. You have done me no favor since I became your companion.’ ‘Did I not put in a good word for you with the Commander of the Faithful regarding such-and-such and ask him for such-and-such on your behalf?’, ‘Īsā asked. ‘Yes indeed,’ I said, ‘but have you fulfilled what you promised and completed what you began?’ ‘Some decisive matters and mitigating circumstances prevented that,’ ‘Īsā explained. ‘O prince,’ I said, ‘you have done nothing but awakened incapacity from its sleep and stirred

sorrow from its rest. If a promise is not coupled with fulfilment to realize it, it is like a word without a meaning or a body without a soul.’”

‘Abd al-Ṣamad ibn al-Faḍl al-Riqāshī said to Khālid ibn Daysam, governor of Rayy:

O Khālid, Rayy has treated us unfairly  
 And its ample space and life were straitened to us.  
 One day a cloud of yours made us hope,  
 It shone with lightning but its rain lingered.  
 Neither did it clear away to bring a hoping person to despair  
 Nor did its water come down to quench the thirst of the thirsty.

### Between Bashshār and Salam

Saʿīd ibn Salam said, “My father promised Bashshār al-ʿUqayli [a gift] after being praised by him in the poem in which he says:

She turned away one cheek and displayed the other  
 Then she leaned like a heaving sigh.

So on the following day, Bashshār wrote to him:

‘The promise by which you raised my hopes continues  
 To fill me with anxiety, so put my grief to rest.  
 If you did not want my praise, then expect my blame.’

“My father said to him, ‘O Abū Muʿādh, I wish you had asked for the fulfilment of your need without a threat! But you have not. You should have waited three [nights] and three more. By God, I have accepted to give you a promise only after hearing al-Abrash al-Kalbī say to Hishām, “O Commander of the Faithful, do me a favor only after promising me to do it. I have never received an abundant gift from you without a promise, to whose value I attached little importance and for which I thanked you little.” Hishām replied, “If you say such a thing, Abū Muslim al-Khawlānī – one of the leaders of your people – has said, ‘The favor that most affects the hearts and best pleases the souls is one that is expected after a promise unsullied by procrastination.’”

### Yaḥyā ibn Khālid and the fulfillment of needs

Yaḥyā ibn Khālid ibn Barmak used to meet people’s needs only after a promise. “Whoever does not experience the pleasure of a promise,” he used to say, “will not relish the taste of the favor bestowed.”

It was said, “Breaking a promise is meaner than being miserly. Whoever fails to do a good deed is only blamed for being mean, whereas anyone who promises something, then breaks his promise, acquires three kinds of blame: for being mean, for breaking a promise, and for lying.”

Ziyād al-Aʿjam said:

By God, what a great fellow you would have been  
 If you were to have done what you said you would do.  
 There is no good in a generous man who lies,  
 Much more preferable is a miser who is truthful.

[Abū Tammām] Ḥabīb al-Ṭāʿī felt that a gift promised him by al-Ḥasan ibn Wahb was slow in coming, so he composed a few verses asking him to expedite it and sent them to him. Al-Ḥasan sent him one thousand dirhams and wrote the following verses back to him:

You made us hurry up, so our fast gift came to you  
 In a small portion, which – if you'd waited – would have been large.  
 So, take the small portion and be like someone who made no request  
 And we will be like someone who did not give anything.

### Ibn Daʿb with al-Mahdī

ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Mālik al-Khuzāʿī said, “I dropped in on the Commander of the Faithful, al-Mahdī, when Ibn Daʿb was with him; he was reciting the following verses of al-Shammākh:

A dishevelled man with a shirt ripped by long travel  
 Used his stick to pull out some grilled meat that was not well done.  
 I told him what had befallen me, and the generous man  
 That he was responded, for he did not lack magnanimity.  
 He was a chivalrous man who filled the wood bowl [with food],  
 Gave his spearhead [blood] to drink, and cut off the head  
 Of the ironclad man bristling with arms.  
 He was a man who was not satisfied with a mediocre life,  
 Nor did he enter the tents of the tribe [as a hanger-on].

“Al-Mahdī raised his head and looked at me. ‘This is a description of you, Abū al-ʿAbbās,’ he said. ‘I earned it because of you, O Commander of the Faithful,’ I replied. ‘Recite me something, then,’ the Caliph said. So I recited to him the verses of al-Samawʿal:

If a man’s honor is not soiled by meanness,  
 Any cloak he wears is beautiful.  
 If he does not make himself endure injustice,  
 Good praise will find no way to him.  
 If he cannot achieve magnanimity as a youth,  
 Seeking it as a man of mature age is difficult.  
 She reproaches us because we are few in number.  
 I said to her, ‘Honorable people are few indeed.’  
 It hurts us not that we are few, for our protégé  
 Is unassailable while the protégé of the many is humbled.  
 We are a people who don’t consider killing to be a shame,  
 While the tribes of ʿĀmir and Salūl consider it to be so.

The love of death brings our end closer to us,  
 While their hate of it makes their lifetimes long.  
 No one of our leaders has died a natural death in bed,  
 Nor has anyone of us remained unavenged if he was killed.  
 Our blood flows on the sharp edges of swords,  
 Nor does it flow on anything but swords.  
 We deny what people say about us, if we wish,  
 But they cannot deny what we say about them.  
 We are like the water of rain clouds, none of our swords  
 Is blunt, and none among us is considered a miser.  
 Our swords have dents in them from fighting  
 With armored men in the East and the West.

“‘Well said,’ al-Mahdī exclaimed. ‘Sit down. It is with such [qualities] that you have all reached [high status]. Ask for what you need.’ ‘O Commander of the Faithful,’ I said, ‘write that I be given the stipend of thirty men of my family.’ ‘Fine,’ said the Caliph, ‘it is my duty to do so if I promise.’ ‘O Commander of the Faithful,’ I said, ‘you are in full possession of power, and nothing prevents you from an act of giving. What is the meaning of the promise?’ The Caliph looked at Ibn Daʿb, wanting him to say something on the virtue of giving a promise. Ibn Daʿb said:

An act of giving is sweet when a promise is fulfilled.  
 There is no good in a gift taken as a plunder that is seized.

“Al-Mahdī laughed and said:

An act of giving is at its best  
 When preceded by an assurance.’”

#### **Al-Muhallab advising his sons**

Al-Muhallab ibn Abī Ṣufra said to his sons, “Sons, if a man comes to you, then leaves with a greeting, that is sufficient compensation.”

A poet said:

I leave you with a greeting and I come back,  
 Sufficient compensation for you is my greeting.

Another poet said:

My expression is a sufficient informer to you about my condition.  
 It is sufficient for you that I see you and you see me,  
 That you [know] what I think of him who is concerned about me,  
 Is aware of my need and sees my situation.

Al-ʿAttābī wrote to someone in authority, “Now then, the cloud of your promise has flashed. Let its downpour be safe from the ills of procrastination. Peace [be to you].”

Al-Jahīz wrote to a man who had made him a promise, “Now then, the tree of your promise has leafed. Let its fruit be safe from the calamities of procrastination. Peace [be to you].”

#### ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ṭāhir and Di‘bil

‘Abd Allāh ibn Ṭāhir promised to give Di‘bil a slave. After waiting long [for the slave], one day Di‘bil stood in Ibn Ṭāhir’s way as the latter was part of a mounted procession heading for the Gate of the Notables. On seeing him, Ibn Ṭāhir said, “You’ve ill-chosen the time of your demand. You’ve shown that you don’t know proper manners and that you’ve not thought well. We are worthier of bestowing the favor [than you think]. The slave and the riding animal will be yours as soon as we dismount, God Most High willing.” Di‘bil took hold of Ibn Ṭāhir’s bridle and recited:

O man with a generous tongue who does not act,  
I wish your tongue’s generosity were in your hands.  
Mihrān’s eye has been often buffeted by you.  
Fear the God of Majesty in your treatment of Mihrān.  
You gouged one eye of Mihrān, so leave him the other.  
Don’t let him wander about among the blind.

Ibn Ṭāhir dismounted, gave him his own riding animal, and ordered that he be given the slave.

#### Abān and Khalaf ibn Khalifa

When Khalaf ibn Khalifa asked Abān ibn al-Walīd for a slave-girl, he promised him one. However, the gift was slow to arrive. Khalaf wrote to him as follows:

I note that my need tarries at the prince’s  
As if it wants to spend time at his place.  
When I meet him, I can’t express myself to remind him,  
For genuine shyness restrains me like a bridle.  
I am made to imagine [my need] when the day is long,  
But at night it is met whenever I fall asleep.  
O Lord, bring it out alive, for You bring out  
A living and eloquent creature from a dead one.  
It will then know how thankful I am, if You fulfill it,  
And how much I pray and fast for its sake.

Abū al-‘Atāhiya wrote to a man who had promised him a gift but procrastinated [in fulfilling his promise]:

May God never let me be in need of you  
Or ask a request from you, as long as I live.  
Every time I come to you with a need that pleases me,  
You find it burdensome and turn away. “Tomorrow,” you say.

Diʿbil wrote to a man who had promised him something and broken his promise:

Did you think that God's earth is narrow  
 For me? No, God's earth is not narrow.  
 You treated me like a mushroom growing in soft earth  
 And you trampled me angrily underfoot.  
 If I ever ask you for a need of mine,  
 Clamp down on it with lock and key,  
 Prepare for me manacles and a shackle  
 And use it to tie my hands to my neck.  
 How large and wide is the world !  
 How well-guided I am about its byways!

*Verses by Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih*

The following verses are part of what I have composed about a man who had written a promise to me on a paper but procrastinated in [his fulfilment of] it:

It is a paper whose character is blameworthy  
 And whose title is stamped with ignorance.  
 The one guided to [writing] it, with promise-breaking contained in its folds  
 As well as procrastination, postponement, and miserliness,  
 Is one whose face is an evil omen, whose nearness is  
 Filth, and whose acquaintance is a misfortune.  
 If ever you are his guest, don't oppress anyone  
 For his bread in your stomach is oppressive.  
 Mere looks wound it because of its thinness,  
 For it is injured by the looks of one's eyes.  
 Don't eat with it any additional food  
 For it is to be eaten with hunger.

About him I also said:

It is a paper in which "I wish" and "perhaps" are written,  
 Its title is the comfort of one who hopes, when he is in despair.  
 [The man's] promise is a notion in my heart which has bored  
 My innards because I have contemplated it so long.  
 His writing skill deceived me with its brilliance  
 And I stretched out my hand to it, seeking its light,  
 But my hand hit a rock so mean that, even if you hit it  
 With Moses' staff, it would not flow with water.  
 It is as if he is made of miserliness and of lying,  
 The former his soul, and the latter his breath.

I also said about him:

My nearest hope is farther than the clouds  
 And his promise is like a shimmering mirage.

His procrastination exhausts my patience  
 And his postponement defies calculation.  
 These are days devoid of all goodness.  
 This is a world that dogs have divided among themselves.

### Subtle ways of seeking gifts

Wise men have said, “Seeking a gift in a subtle way is the cause of success. One’s soul may brighten and open up when approached by a subtle request, but it may turn depressed and unforthcoming when approached by an uncouth request.” This is as the poet said:

You abandoned me, so I cut off my benefits from you  
 Like milk, whose flow is cut off when the milker is rough.

Al-ʿAttābī said, “If you ask a person in authority for something, be polite in your mode of request. Beware of pestering him, for that will wound your honor and remove your dignity. Don’t take from him any compensation for what he takes from you. An importunate request may cause you both loss of dignity and deprivation of success, for the one requested may become so wearied that he makes light of the one requesting.”

Al-Ḥasan ibn Hānīʿ said:

Bide your time with the promises of the generous  
 For your pestering of an openhanded man may make him miserly.

Another poet said:

If you ever ask for anything, be as courteous  
 As you can in your request and be polite.  
 An honorable person possessed of manliness and good sense  
 Is one who never asks for his needs with urgency.

### Between Marwān ibn Abī Ḥafṣa and Ibn Yazīd

Marwān ibn Abī Ḥafṣa said: “I met Yazīd ibn Mazyad as he was leaving an audience with [Caliph] al-Mahdī. ‘I’ve composed three verses about you,’ I said, holding his mount, ‘and I want to be paid one hundred thousand [dirhams] for each.’ He said, ‘Recite, God be your father’s [help]!’ So I recited:

O you, who – after the caliph – are the most generous  
 Among Persians and Arabs, and who are the lion of the Arabs:  
 You exhausted your wealth by giving it away and dispensing it,  
 You, who are the bane of shining silver and gold.  
 If spearheads and sword edges were to speak,  
 They would tell wonders about you in combat.”

[Yazīd ordered that Marwān be given the amount.]

### ‘Abd al-Malik and a group from Banū Umayya

Al-Madāʿinī said, “A group of men from Banū Umayya came to see ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān. ‘O Commander of the Faithful,’ they said, ‘we are from a people you know and our right cannot be denied. We’ve come to you from a far distance and we are related to you closely. Whatever you give us, we are worthy of it.’”

### Al-Rashīd and ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Ṣāliḥ

‘Abd al-Malik ibn Ṣāliḥ dropped in on [Caliph] al-Rashīd and said, “Shall I ask you in the name of kinship and the upper class or that of the caliphate and the populace?” “Rather in the name of kinship and the upper class,” said the caliph. “O Commander of the Faithful,” ‘Abd al-Malik said, “your hands are freer [to give] than my tongue to ask.” So the caliph gave him abundantly.

Abū al-Rayyān came to see [Caliph] ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān, with whom he was a favorite. The caliph noticed he seemed out of sorts. “Abū al-Rayyān,” he asked, “what is the matter with you? You look weak.” “O Commander of the Faithful,” said Abū al-Rayyān, “I’ve come to complain of honor to you!” “How is that?” the caliph asked. Abū al-Rayyān explained, “We are asked to do things that we cannot do, so we apologize, and yet our apology is not accepted.” ‘Abd al-Malik said, “How subtle is your seeking of a gift and your asking of a favor, Abū al-Rayyān. Give him such and such.”

### Al-Ḥajjāj and al-Shaʿbī

Al-ʿAttābī said, “Al-Shaʿbī wrote to al-Ḥajjāj asking him for something, but the latter used some pretext to excuse himself. Al-Shaʿbī wrote back, saying, ‘By God, I will not excuse you while you are the ruler of the two Iraqs and the son of the great man of the two cities.’ Whereupon, al-Ḥajjāj met al-Shaʿbī’s need. Al-Ḥajjāj’s maternal grandfather was ‘Urwa ibn Masʿūd al-Thaqafī.”

### Muʿāwiya and Ibn Zurāra

Al-ʿUtībī said, “‘Abd al-ʿAzīz ibn Zurāra al-Kilābī came to the Commander of the Faithful Muʿāwiya. ‘I have continued to travel around on my way to you,’ he said, ‘and found no one to depend on but you. I journeyed by night and day, and I passed landmarks of unknown areas, led to you by hope and by tribulation. One who does his best should be excused. Now that I have reached you, let me abide by you.’ Muʿāwiya said, ‘Dismount.’”

### Yazīd ibn al-Muhallab and Kurayz

Kurayz ibn Zufar ibn al-Ḥārith dropped in on Yazīd ibn al-Muhallab. “May God mend the ways of the prince,” he said. “You are greater than one to be asked for help and to ask help against. You never do any good that is not smaller than you and that you are not greater than. It is no wonder if you do that. The wonder

is if you do not do it.” Yazīd said, “Ask for what you need.” Kurayz said, “I have committed myself, on behalf of my tribe, to pay the blood money of ten persons.” Yazīd said, “I have ordered that the money be paid to you and I have coupled it with an equal amount.”

#### **Ḥātīm al-Ṭāʿī and a seeker of a need**

Al-ʿUtībī reported that his father said, “A man came to Ḥātīm al-Ṭāʿī and said, ‘Some blood money had to be paid by me to a group of people, and I bore the responsibility of paying it with both my money and my hope. Now my wealth is lost, and you remain my hope. If you pay it on my behalf, you will relieve my concern, dispel my worry, and settle my debt. If something prevents you from doing that, I will not blame this day of yours and will not despair of your morrow.’ So Ḥātīm paid it on his behalf.”

#### **Khālīd al-Qasrī and a seeker**

Al-Madāʿīnī said, “A man asked Khālīd al-Qasrī for a favor, but the latter offered an excuse. The man said, ‘I have asked the prince without being in need.’ ‘What made you do that?’ the prince asked. ‘I noted that you like a person to whom you have done a favor,’ the man replied, ‘so I wanted to attach myself to you with a cause for affection.’ Whereupon, the prince gave him a gift, awarded him, and made him a closer friend.”

#### **Al-Manṣūr and al-Hajarī**

Al-Aṣmaʿī said, “Abū Bakr al-Hajarī came to see al-Manṣūr and said, ‘O Commander of the Faithful, my teeth have become weak and shaky, and [I know that] you’ – members of the [Prophet’s] family – ‘are a blessing. So if you will permit me, I will kiss your head: perhaps God will strengthen my teeth!’ Al-Manṣūr said, ‘Choose either a blessing or an award.’ ‘O Commander of the Faithful,’ al-Hajarī said, ‘It is easier for me that no tooth remain in my mouth than losing a dirham of the award.’ Al-Manṣūr laughed and ordered that al-Hajarī be given an award.”

#### **Abū Dulaf and a neighbor of his**

It was related that a neighbor of Abū Dulaf in Baghdad, who needed to pay a heavy debt, had to sell his house in order to pay it. He set a price of two thousand dinars to those who chattered with him. They said, “Your house is worth only five hundred.” “And my being a neighbor of Abū Dulaf,” he retorted, “is worth one thousand and five hundred!” Abū Dulaf heard about the story, so he ordered that the man’s debt be paid. “Don’t sell your house,” he told his neighbor, “and don’t move from our neighborhood.”

### Qays ibn Sa‘d and a woman

A woman stood in front of Qays ibn Sa‘d ibn ‘Ubāda. “I complain to you of the lack of rats [in my house],” she said. “How beautiful this allusion is!” Qays observed. “Fill her house with bread, meat, and cooking butter.”

### Al-Manṣūr and Azhar al-Sammān

Ibrāhīm ibn Aḥmad reported on the authority of al-Shaybānī and said, “Whenever Abū Ja‘far al-Manṣūr entered Baṣra during the reign of Banū Umayya, he did so in disguise. He used to sit in the circle of Azhar al-Sammān, the ḥadīth narrator. When he assumed the caliphate, Azhar came to see him. Al-Manṣūr welcomed him and drew him near. ‘What do you need, Azhar?’ he asked. ‘My house is in ruins,’ Azhar began. ‘I have to pay four thousand dirhams and I wish that my son Muḥammad would consummate his marriage.’ Al-Manṣūr awarded him twelve thousand [dirhams], saying, ‘We’ve met your need, Azhar, so don’t come again to seek [a gift].’ Azhar took the award and left. A year later, he came back. When Abū Ja‘far saw him, he said, ‘What brought you back, Azhar?’ ‘I’ve come to greet you,’ Azhar replied. Al-Manṣūr said, ‘The Commander of the Faithful thinks you’ve come to seek [a gift].’ ‘I’ve come only to greet you,’ replied Azhar. Al-Manṣūr said, ‘We ordered that you be given twelve thousand [dirhams]. Go and don’t come back to us to seek or to greet.’ Azhar took the money and left. A year later, he came back. ‘What brought you back, Azhar?’ al-Manṣūr asked. ‘I’ve come to visit,’ Azhar explained. ‘I think you’ve come to seek [a gift],’ al-Manṣūr surmised. ‘I’ve come only to visit,’ Azhar said. Al-Manṣūr replied, ‘We’ve ordered that you be given twelve thousand [dirhams]. Go and don’t come back to us to seek, to greet, or to visit.’ Azhar took the award and went away. When a year passed, he came back. ‘What brought you back, Azhar?’ asked al-Manṣūr. ‘O Commander of the Faithful,’ Azhar said, ‘it is an invocation [of God] that I heard you say and I’ve come to write it down.’ Abū Ja‘far [al-Manṣūr] laughed and said, ‘It is an invocation which has not been answered, for I invoked God not to see you but He did not answer my invocation. We have ordered that you be given twelve thousand [dirhams]. Come back whenever you wish. I am at my wit’s end with no way out.’”

### Ibn al-Muhallab and a bedouin

A bedouin came to Dāwūd ibn al-Muhallab and said, “I have composed verses in praise of you, so listen.” Ibn al-Muhallab said, “Wait a minute!” He then entered his house, put on his sword, and came out. “Recite,” he said. “If you do well, we shall reward you; if you do badly, we shall kill you.” The bedouin recited:

With Dāwūd and the generosity of his right hand,  
I am safe from feared events, misery, and poverty.  
With Dāwūd, I do not fear the brunt

Of adversities, for with him I have increased my strength.  
 His rule is like Luqmān's, his form like Yūsuf's,  
 His wisdom like Solomon's, his justice like Abū Bakr's.  
 He is a young man, whose generous hand wealth fears  
 As Satan fears the Night of Destiny.

Ibn al-Muhallab said, "We will reward you either in accordance with your position, if you wish, or in accordance with my position, if you wish." The bedouin said, "Rather in accordance with my position." So Dāwūd gave him fifty thousand [dirhams]. Those sitting with him asked the bedouin, "Why did you not accept to be rewarded in accordance with the prince's position?" The bedouin replied, "His wealth is not sufficient for his position!" "You are a greater poet in saying so than in your verse," remarked Dāwūd, and he ordered that the bedouin be given an additional amount equal to what he had given him before.

### Al-Rashīd and Ishāq al-Mawṣili

Al-Aṣmaʿī said, "I was with al-Rashīd when Ishāq ibn Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣili entered and recited:

'I said to the woman who ordered me to be stingy,  
 Desist! For there is no way to do what you command.  
 My deeds are those of the generous by imitating them  
 But my money, as you know, is little.  
 How can I fear poverty or be deprived of wealth  
 When the Commander of the Faithful's opinion of me is good?'

'How beautiful are the verses you have brought us!' exclaimed al-Rashīd, 'How beautiful their origins, how clear their parts, and how little their intrusions! Servant: give him twenty thousand [dirhams].' Al-Mawṣili remarked, 'That is because your speech, O Commander of the Faithful, is better than my poetry.' 'Give him forty thousand [dirhams],' al-Rashīd ordered."

Al-Aṣmaʿī added, "I knew then, by God, that al-Mawṣili was more able than I was to chase and catch the dirhams of kings."

### Muʿāwiya and Zayd ibn Munya

Reporting on the authority of his father, al-ʿUtbi said, "Zayd ibn Munya came from Baṣra to see Muʿāwiya [ibn Abi Sufyān in Damascus]. Zayd was the brother of Yaʿlā ibn Munya, the owner of the camel – that is, the camel of ʿĀʾisha, may God be pleased with her. He was the person in charge of those wars and the leader of the people of Baṣra. The daughter of Yaʿlā was the wife of ʿUtba ibn Abi Sufyān. When Zayd entered to see Muʿāwiya, he complained that he had a debt to pay. Muʿāwiya said, 'Kaʿb, give him thirty thousand [dirhams].' When Zayd turned his back to go, Muʿāwiya added, 'And thirty thousand more in appreciation for the Battle of the Camel.' He then said, 'Follow your in-law.' (He

meant ʿUtba.) So Zayd caught up with ʿUtba in Egypt. ‘I have been following you for two months,’ Zayd complained to ʿUtba, ‘during which I have encountered dangers, sometimes moving under cover of night and at others wading through the waves of mirage. I held you in highest regard as I was escaping from adverse time and a persistent debt, after having previously enjoyed wealth that allowed me to spite people who envied us.’ ‘Time gave you wealth,’ ʿUtba replied, ‘and made you our in-law. But then it snatched whatever it could from you, and yet within us it left feeling towards you that will not allow you to be lost. I join your hand and mine to God’s.’ ʿUtba then gave Zayd sixty thousand [dirhams] as Muʿāwiya had given him.”

### Ibn Suwayd and Abū Sāsān

Ibrāhīm al-Shaybānī said, “‘Abd Allāh ibn ʿAlī ibn Suwayd ibn Manjūf said, ‘At one time in Baṣra, my father became poor. He had not a single dirham to his name. He went to Khurāsān but found it of no avail. While experiencing these difficult times, his slave stole his clothing and mule, and ran away. My father came to Abū Sāsān Ḥuḍayn ibn al-Mundhir al-Riqāshī and complained to him about his circumstances. ‘By God, my nephew,’ Ḥuḍayn said, ‘your uncle cannot endure your sufferings. Perhaps I can help you by a ruse.’ He sent for good clothes and made me<sup>1</sup> put them on. ‘Let’s go,’ he added. When we came to the gate of [the palace of] the governor of Khurāsān, he left me at the gate and went in. Soon afterwards, the chamberlain came out and called, ‘Alī ibn Suwayd.’ I went in to see the governor and found Ḥuḍayn sitting on a couch beside him. I greeted the governor, and he returned my greeting. ‘May God mend the ways of the prince,’ Ḥuḍayn addressed the governor, ‘this is ʿAlī ibn Suwayd ibn Manjūf, chief of the youths of the tribe of Bakr ibn Wāʿil and son of the chief of its mature men. He is now the wealthiest of the people in Baṣra and everywhere that the tribe of Bakr ibn Wāʿil owns wealth. He has asked me to approach the prince for a favor.’ ‘It is his,’ the governor declared. ‘He asks you,’ Ḥuḍayn continued, ‘to feel free to take whatever you wish from his wealth, his riding-animals, and his weapons.’ ‘No,’ the governor expostulated, ‘I will not do that to him. It is rather more appropriate for us to increase his wealth.’ ‘Fine,’ Ḥuḍayn said, ‘we exempt you from this, since you don’t like it. But he asks you to let him bear the responsibility of your needs in Baṣra.’ ‘If there is any need, then he has my full confidence [to fulfill it]. However, I ask you to put in a good word for me so that he may accept help from us, for we like men like him to be seen with our influence on them.’ Ḥuḍayn then turned to me and said, ‘O Abū al-Ḥasan, I beseech you not to refuse any gift with which your uncle honors you.’ I remained silent, and the governor ordered that I be given money, mounts, clothes, and

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1 Me = my father. From here onwards, there is a shift of pronouns in the story and it is told from the point of view of the father as the first person singular. (Translator.)

slaves. When I went out, I said, ‘Abū Sāsān, you’ve shown me a ruse, the like of which I have never seen.’ Abū Sāsān Ḥuḍayn said, ‘Forget it, my nephew! Your uncle knows about human beings more than you do. If people know that you have a large sack full of money, they will give you another. If on the other hand they know that you’re poor, they’ll assault you despite your poverty.’”

### Al-Mahdī and Abū Dulāma

Ibrāhīm al-Shaybānī said, “Abū Dulāma’s wife gave birth to a daughter at night, so he lit the oil lamp and began making a kerchief by sewing rags together. In the morning, he folded the kerchief between his fingers and went to see al-Mahdī. He asked permission to enter (he being someone who was never prevented from seeing him). He recited the following verses to him:

If it were possible for any people to sit above the sun  
For their generosity, it would be said: ‘Sit, O Family of ‘Abbās.  
Then rise from the rays of the sun on stairs to heaven,  
For you are the most generous of people.’

“‘Well said, by God,’ al-Mahdī told him, ‘What brought you to see us so early?’ ‘A girl was born to me, O Commander of the Faithful,’ Abū Dulāma answered. ‘Have you composed any poetry about her?’ asked al-Mahdī. ‘Yes,’ Abū Dulāma answered, ‘I said:

You were not born of Mary, mother of Jesus,  
Nor did wise man Luqmān provide for you.  
But a bad mother may press you  
To her bosom and a mean father.’

“Al-Mahdī laughed and asked, ‘How would you like me to help you in bringing her up, Abū Dulāma?’ ‘Fill this, O Commander of the Faithful,’ said Abū Dulāma, pointing to the kerchief between his fingers. ‘What can this possibly hold?’ wondered al-Mahdī. ‘Whoever is not content with little is not content with much,’ replied Abū Dulāma. So al-Mahdī ordered that the kerchief be filled with money. When it was spread out, it covered the courtyard of the house, and was able to hold four thousand dirhams.

“[Caliph] al-Mahdī had earlier given Abū Dulāma a cape as a reward. One day, Abū Dulāma was caught drunk while wearing it and was brought before al-Mahdī. The caliph ordered that the cape be torn to pieces while he was wearing it and that he be imprisoned in the chicken coop. When Abū Dulāma’s drunkenness wore off at some time in the night and he found himself among the chickens, he yelled out, ‘O owner of the house!’ The prison warden responded, ‘What is the matter, O enemy of God?’ ‘Woe be you!’ Abū Dulāma said, ‘Who put me with the chickens?’ ‘Your evil deeds!’ answered the warden. ‘The Commander of the Faithful brought you here while you were drunk, ordered that your cape be torn to pieces, and that you be imprisoned with the chickens.’ ‘Woe! If you

light an oil lamp for me and bring me an inkwell and paper, I will give you this booty of mine.’ So the warden brought him an inkwell and paper, and Abū Dulāma wrote the following poem to al-Mahdi:

Is it because of red wine of pure blend,  
 Beaming like the flame of an oil lamp [that you imprison me]?  
 One’s soul cheers up on seeing it, and desires it  
 When it appears sparkling in the glass.  
 It has been fermented in God’s fire  
 Until it has become as refined as pure water.  
 Commander of the Faithful, may my soul be your ransom,  
 Why have you imprisoned me and torn my cape?  
 I have been led to prison without being guilty of any crime  
 As though I were one of the tax agents.  
 Had I been imprisoned with them, my emotional upset  
 Would have been easy; but I was imprisoned with chickens!  
 They are chickens among which a cock swaggers,  
 Rending the air with its cries as it woos them.  
 My crimes tell me that  
 I will not be spared your punishment.  
 Yet, although I am encountering evil,  
 I hope for your goodness after that evil.

“Then Abū Dulāma said, ‘Deliver it to the Commander of the Faithful.’ The warden did so. When the caliph read it, he ordered that Abū Dulāma be released and brought to him. ‘Where have you spent the night, Abū Dulāma?’ the caliph asked. ‘Among the chickens, O Commander of the Faithful,’ Abū Dulāma said. ‘And what did you do there?’ enquired the caliph. ‘I cackled with them until morning.’ Al-Mahdī laughed and ordered that Abū Dulāma be given a generous gift, and he bestowed a robe of honor upon him.”

### Between Abū Dulāma and ʿĪsā ibn Mūsā

Abū Dulāma wrote a note to ʿĪsā ibn Mūsā, while the latter was governor of Kufa. In it were the following verses:

When you come to the prince say: Peace  
 Be to you and the mercy of the merciful God.  
 After that, I have a creditor among the Anṣār,  
 And what an ugly creditor he is!  
 He lingers at my door, for as long as I can remember,  
 Like the dog of the “People of the Cave”.  
 I owe him one hundred, and half of another [hundred]  
 And half of the half according to an old document.  
 I have had no use for their house  
 But in it I met with the leaders of Banū Tamīm.  
 They have come to me with the tribe to demand [the debt],  
 And I have never been mean toward the tribe.

The narrator said, “Īsā ibn Mūsā sent him one hundred thousand dirhams.”

### **Abū Dulaf and Abū Dulāma**

Abū Dulāma met Abū Dulaf on a hunting trip while the latter was governor of Iraq. Abū Dulāma held the bridle of the governor’s horse and recited:

I have sworn that if I see you safe  
 In Iraq’s villages and that you are well off,  
 You shall pronounce blessings on Prophet Muḥammad  
 And you shall fill my lap with dirhams.

Abū Dulaf said, “As for the blessings on the Prophet, yes, may God bless him and give him peace. But as for the dirhams, [we shall give them to you] when we return, God Most High willing.” Abū Dulāma pleaded, “May I be your ransom, don’t separate the two [acts].” So Abū Dulaf borrowed the dirhams and they were poured into Abū Dulāma’s lap until they weighed him down.

### **Abū Dulāma and al-Mahdī**

Abū Dulāma dropped in on al-Mahdī and recited some verses to him that the caliph liked. Al-Mahdī said, “Abū Dulāma, ask me for whatever you wish. Have your own way and be as excessive as you like.” “Commander of the Faithful,” Abū Dulāma said, “Give me a dog that I can hunt with.” “We have ordered a dog for you,” al-Mahdī said, then added, “Is this the highest reach of your ambition and the farthest goal of your aspiration?” “Don’t rush me, O Commander of the Faithful,” Abū Dulāma remarked, “for there is something more.” “What remains?” asked al-Mahdī. “A slave to lead the dog,” Abū Dulāma said. “And a slave to lead the dog,” al-Mahdī agreed. “And a servant to cook what I hunt,” Abū Dulāma requested. “And a servant to cook what you hunt,” al-Mahdī agreed. “And a house for us to live in,” Abū Dulāma added. “And a house for you to live in,” al-Mahdī agreed. “And a slave-girl for us to go to bed with,” Abū Dulāma requested. “And a slave-girl for you to go to bed with,” al-Mahdī agreed. “Now,” Abū Dulāma added, “there remains the means of subsistence.” Al-Mahdī said, “We have bestowed on you as a fief an acre of arable land and an acre of arid land.” Abū Dulāma asked, “What is an arid land, O Commander of the Faithful?” “That which cannot be tilled,” the caliph explained. “Then,” Abū Dulāma ventured, “I bestow as a fief on the Commander of the Faithful fifty acres of the deserts of the Banū Asad!” The caliph said, “I have ordered that both of your acres shall be arable.” “Will the Commander of the Faithful now permit me to kiss his hand?” Abū Dulāma asked. “As for that request, skip it!” the caliph said. Abū Dulāma remarked, “You have not withheld from me anything that is easier for my child’s mother to miss than this one!”

### Abū Dulāma and al-Manṣūr

One day Abū Dulāma went to see Abū Jaʿfar al-Manṣūr. He was wearing a tall headgear, like the ones he had made his friends wear, along with long-sleeved outer robes like his, on whose back was written “And God shall suffice you against them, for He is All-Hearing, All-Knowing” [Q. 2:137]. He had also ordered them to wear swords on their waists. When Abū Dulāma entered the presence of al-Manṣūr wearing this attire, the caliph asked, “How are you this morning, Abū Dulāma?” “In the worst condition, Commander of the Faithful,” Abū Dulāma replied. “How is that, woe is you?” asked the caliph. “Commander of the Faithful,” Abū Dulāma said, “What would you think of a man, whose face has come to be in his middle and his sword on his buttocks, having cast the Book of God behind his back?” Abū Jaʿfar laughed, ordered the situation to be changed, and commanded that Abū Dulāma be given a gift.

### He and [Ibn] al-Manṣūr also

Abū Dulāma sent a note to al-ʿAbbās ibn al-Manṣūr in which the following verses were written:

Stop at the abodes. When have you ever not stopped  
 At the homes between Sahl and Najaf  
 Why would you stop at the remains of a home, if it were not  
 For what they had created in your love-smitten heart?  
 If you have become enamoured of a slave-girl,  
 I swear by the Lord that He will not heal your passion.  
 Nor will He increase anything but your sickness  
 Because of grief. Can your heart endure such grief?  
 These are the words of a chieftain from the Banū Asad  
 Who sends his greetings to al-ʿAbbās, jotted on paper,  
 And written by a slave-girl from the province  
 Who was often beaten to improve writing her L and her A  
 And who often went to her teacher in summer and winter,  
 Carrying her writing slate and shoulder blade,  
 Until her breasts rose and became full  
 And it was feared she might transgress and be accused.  
 She was then kept for three years, seeing no one,  
 Preserved as a pearl in a shell at the bottom of a sea.  
 While the young man walked early to his mosque  
 To perform his morning prayer in the dark,  
 His eyes happened to fall on her, and he saw her  
 Looking out, from between the two curtains of her room.  
 He fell to the ground, and no one at that early moment  
 Knew whether, on falling, he was covered or uncovered.  
 People came to him in groups with water  
 To sprinkle pure drops of it on the unconscious man.  
 They whispered Qurʾānic words in his ears,

Fearing the jinn. But the man had not feared  
 Anything, except that he had come to the verge  
 Of death because of his love for a slave-girl.  
 They asked, "May you be safe, what have you seen?"  
 I said to them, "A female jinni made me go to the Banū Khalaf.  
 I saw a sequestered slave-girl of theirs  
 Looking down from the high palace with many balconies.  
 I said, 'Who of you, with the help of God,  
 Will give of his strength to ease my weakness?'  
 A handsome chief from their traders stood up  
 Who had often deceived people by oaths  
 And bought her for me for two thousand red coins,  
 Brought her to me, and laid her on my shoulder.  
 At times I kissed her, at other times she kissed me  
 And we did some other thing under the bedcovers.  
 We continued to do that until her owner came,  
 Seeking dinars, weighed in a balance with two scales."  
 That was a due debt owed by Zand, but what could he do  
 When his due debt was in one scale and gold in the other?  
 There were witnesses to all that, but I heeded them not,  
 Whether or not I recognized them.  
 And so, if you give me money, I will pay the people their due;  
 But if you say no, the people's right will be lost.

When al-ʿAbbās read Abū Dulāma's verses, he approved and found them charming. He also paid the price of the slave-girl on his behalf. Abū Dulāma's name was Zand.

### Jaʿfar ibn Yaḥyā and ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Ṣāliḥ

Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī said:

One day Jaʿfar ibn Yaḥyā said to me, "I sought the permission of the Commander of the Faithful to be cupped. I wanted to be alone, to run away from people's requests, and to relax. 'Will you help me, may God make me your ransom?' I asked. 'I am the happiest of people because I help you and find solace in being alone with you.' The caliph replied, 'Come to me as early as the crow.' So next day I went at dawn and found him waiting for me, with a candle in front of him. We prayed, then conversed at length until the time of cupping arrived. He then brought a cupper, who cupped us both at the same time. Food was then offered to us, and we ate. When we washed our hands, we were given wine companions' clothing to wear, and were sprinkled with perfume. We continued to enjoy the happiest day we had ever had until the caliph remembered something and summoned the chamberlain. 'If ʿAbd al-Malik al-Qahramānī comes,' he said, 'let him in.' The chamberlain forgot [the person's name]. So when ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Ṣāliḥ al-Hāshimī arrived, with all his exalted reverence, advanced age, high esteem, and refined manners, the chamberlain let him in. We were surprised to

see ‘Abd al-Malik [al-Hashimī instead of al-Qahramānī]. Ja‘far ibn Yaḥyā<sup>2</sup> was upset, and his sense of happiness was ruined. When ‘Abd al-Malik saw him so, he called his servant and gave him his sword, his black cloak, and his turban. He then went to the door of the sitting room. ‘Do for me what you have done for yourselves,’ he asked. A servant came and clothed him in the garments of wine companions; food was brought, and he ate; drinks were served, and he drank three glasses. Then he said, ‘Go easy on me, for this is something I have never drunk.’ Ja‘far’s face brightened, and he became happy. [Hārūn] al-Rashīd had once scolded ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Ṣāliḥ and was still angry with him. Ja‘far ibn Yaḥyā asked ‘Abd al-Malik, ‘May I be your ransom, you’ve honored us, you’ve been kind to us, and you’ve made us happy. Is there any need of yours that I can fulfill in recompense for what you’ve done?’ ‘Yes,’ he replied. ‘The heart of the Commander of the Faithful is full of blame for me. Ask him to be reconciled with me.’ Ja‘far said, ‘The Commander of the Faithful has become reconciled with you.’ ‘I have a debt of four thousand dinars,’ ‘Abd al-Malik continued. ‘The amount is ready for you,’ Ja‘far assured him, ‘but from the money of the Commander of the Faithful, which is more to your liking.’ ‘And I like to strengthen my son’s back,’ ‘Abd al-Malik added, ‘by making him an in-law to the Commander of the Faithful.’ Ja‘far said, ‘The Commander of the Faithful has married him to ‘Ā’isha.’ ‘And I like that flags flutter over his head,’ ‘Abd al-Malik requested. ‘The Commander of the Faithful has appointed him as ruler of Egypt,’ Ja‘far responded. When ‘Abd al-Malik had left, we were all astonished that Ja‘far had dared to fulfill the man’s needs without seeking the permission of the Commander of the Faithful. Next day, Ja‘far entered while we were standing at the door of [Hārūn] al-Rashīd. Soon afterward Judge Abū Yūsuf, Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan, and Ibrāhīm ibn ‘Abd al-Malik were summoned. The marriage deed was written, the gifts were carried to ‘Abd al-Malik’s house, and a decree was written appointing Ibrāhīm ruler of Egypt. Ja‘far then left and gestured to us, so we followed him. When he reached his house, he dismounted and so did we. Turning to us he said, ‘Your hearts became anxious when you heard the beginning of ‘Abd al-Malik’s story, so I am sure you would like to hear how it ended. Well, when I went in to see the Commander of the Faithful, I stood in front of him and related to him the story from the beginning. He kept saying, “He did well, by God. And what did you do?” So I informed him of all that ‘Abd al-Malik had asked and what I had said in response. “You’ve done well, you’ve done well!” the caliph continued to say.’ Ibrāhīm left to become a ruler of Egypt.”

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2 Ja‘far relates the story in the first person up to this point. He is henceforth referred to in the third person and the story is told from the viewpoint of the retinue in the plural. (Translator.)

**A man with a need at the gate of one of the Persian kings**

A man came to see one of the Persian kings but had to wait at his gate for some time without being able to gain access. Using subtle means, he succeeded in sending him a note which contained the following four lines:

First line – Adversity and hope made me come to you.

Second line – Poverty cannot be patient with continuous begging.

Third line – Leaving with no benefit is a temptation and a cause for enemies to gloat.

Fourth line – So, either a fruitful “Yes” or a restful “No”.

When the king read the note, he signed under each line of it ordering in each one thousand *mithqāls* for the man.

**Yaḥyā ibn Khālid and a poet**

A poet went in to see Yaḥyā ibn Khālid ibn Barmak and recited the following verses:

I asked Generosity, “Are you a free man?” He said, “No.

I am a slave of Yaḥyā ibn Khālid.”

I asked, “By being purchased?” He said, “Rather by inheritance:

He inherited me from one forefather after another.”

So Yaḥyā ibn Khālid ibn Barmak ordered that he be given ten thousand [dirhams].

**Khālid al-Qasrī and a bedouin**

A bedouin came to Khālid ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Qasrī and recited the following verses to him:

O Khālid, I am not visiting because of friendship

But rather because I am destitute and you are generous.

O Khālid, my request lies between praise and reward [for you],

So whichever you choose of the two, you are my reliable support.

So Khālid ordered that the bedouin be given five thousand dirhams.

**[Abū] al-‘Abbās and Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih**

Some of what we have composed in a similar vein ... Entering the presence of General Abū al-‘Abbās, I recited the following verses to him:

God has unsheathed a sword of generosity and power

And girded Abū al-‘Abbās with it.

He is a king whose bright face, when you see it,

Puts Despair to death and enlivens Hope for you.

It is a face clad with the tranquillity of shyness

And with love that flows with every breath of his.

When God loves his servant one day,  
He lays upon him love for people.

Then I asked him for a particular need in a manner that was a little impolite, so he deliberately bided his time. I took a piece of paper and wrote on it the following improvised verses:

My need has no excuse for being hurt by you,  
When you give yourself your full value.  
Look at all the length and breadth of the country,  
Are you not the most generous and kindest of its people?  
Far be it from you that your generosity should roughen my need,  
For my trust in it has facilitated for me my need's roughness.  
Sweet praises are not culled by a glorious man  
Until he tastes bitter requests.

With that he immediately fulfilled my need.

#### **Al-Mutawakkil and 'Abd Allāh ibn Yaḥyā**

'Abd Allāh ibn Yaḥyā was late in arriving at the chancellery, so [Caliph] al-Mutawakkil sent someone to learn what was the matter with him. 'Abd Allāh wrote back the following verses:

I am sick because of two things:  
Penury and debt.  
I am preoccupied with these two things.  
It suffices me to be preoccupied by them.

So the caliph sent him one thousand dinars.

#### **Al-Faḍl ibn Yaḥyā and a seeker of a grant**

'Abd Allāh ibn Maṣṣūr said, "One day I was in a social gathering with al-Faḍl ibn Yaḥyā when the chamberlain came in. 'There is a man at the door,' he said, 'who persists in asking for permission to see you. He claims he has a special link to you.' 'Let him enter,' said al-Faḍl. A man with a handsome face and a shabby appearance came in and politely offered greetings. Al-Faḍl gestured to a seat, and the man sat. When al-Faḍl ascertained that the man was at ease and could speak, he asked him, 'What do you need?' 'My shabby appearance and weak condition,' the man said, 'must have expressed what I need!' 'Yes,' al-Faḍl said, 'but what is your special link?' 'My birthday being close to yours, my residence being near yours, and my name being derived from yours,' the man explained. 'As for neighborly residence,' al-Faḍl remarked, 'it may be as you've said, and a name may be similar to another name. But what do you know about my birthday?' 'My mother told me,' the man responded, 'that, when she gave me birth, it was said that a boy was born that night to Yaḥyā ibn Khālid and was named al-Faḍl.

So she named me Fuḍayl [diminutive of Faḍl], in great respect for your name and lest she associate me with you as an equal.' Al-Faḍl smiled and asked, 'How old are you?' 'Thirty-five,' the man said. 'You're right,' al-Faḍl agreed, 'this is how old I am too. And what has your mother done?' 'She passed away, may God have mercy on her,' the man said. 'What prevented you from coming to us in the past?' al-Faḍl asked. 'I could not make myself meet you,' he answered, 'because she discouraged me as a youth from meeting rulers, in accordance with popular belief.' Al-Faḍl then declared, 'Boy: give him one thousand [dirhams] for every year of his age, and give him clothing and a mount suitable for him.' When the man left the house, he was surrounded by his brethren and close relatives."

### From [Abū Tammām] Ḥabīb to Ibn Abī Duwād

Ḥabīb ibn Aws al-Ṭāʿī composed the following verses to Aḥmad ibn Abī Duwād:

Know, you who are a man in no need of knowledge.  
 Without being taught, may I be your ransom, you realize  
 That, if beneficence is not done to perfection,  
 It is like a garment that is not embroidered;  
 If gratitude is not called for by a good deed,  
 It is like writing that one reads without diacritics;  
 Then my artful speech will be an exaggeration.  
 You've put on the saddle of good deeds, put on the bridle.

### Diʿbil ibn ʿAlī al-Khuzāʿī composed the following verses on Ṭāhir ibn al-Ḥusayn, governor of Khurāsān:

O you who have two right arms and two callings  
 And are known for beneficence and giving:  
 Do you accept that one like me should stand  
 At your door, thrown down and undistinguished?  
 Of affection, income, and all that a man hopes for  
 From you, I was satisfied with a gift of five or six  
 When you were in a well-attended social gathering.  
 I would never be satisfied with such a gift from anyone else,  
 Would any man in his full senses be satisfied with that?  
 If, instead, I was given work to do,  
 Then I would be occupied with less than what you plan.  
 Peace be to you and good-bye, for I am a man who  
 Departs when a town is too depressing for me.

### Between Ziyād and a man from the tribe of Ḍabba

Al-Aṣmaʿī said, "Ziyād saw a man from the tribe of Ḍabba with an ugly face, eating in a disgusting manner. 'How many dependents do you have, O man from Ḍabba?' asked Ziyād. 'Seven daughters,' the man replied, 'My face is more

beautiful than any of theirs and they are more voracious eaters than myself.' Ziyād laughed and said, 'My goodness, how subtle is your begging!' Then Ziyād ordered, 'Give him and each of his daughters one hundred [?dinars] and a servant, and hasten to give him and them their subsistence.' The Ḍabbite left, saying:

If you seek generosity and liberality,  
 Call then Ziyād or a brother of his.  
 You'll be answered by a man who gives away his wealth  
 For praise, when all other generous men would be stingy.  
 Why will I not shower praises on you?  
 My newly acquired wealth and my inherited fortune  
 Are only a beneficence from you."

Diʿbil met one of the princes of al-Ruqqa. Standing before him, he said, "May God mend your ways. I will not say about you what Maʿn's friend said:

For which of the two qualities shall I praise you?  
 (Because when I leave I will be asked about you.)  
 Shall I praise you for your benevolence, whose light  
 Did not shine on me? (Who will believe what I say?)  
 Or shall I praise you for the opposite?  
 (You don't deserve that, for you do all manner of good deed.)

"Instead I will say:

What shall I say to my companions on returning empty-handed  
 After being with the free-giving, generous man?  
 If I say, 'He gave me', I will be lying. And if I say,  
 'The prince was stingy with his wealth', it will not be nice.  
 You are so knowledgeable about generosity and excellence  
 That I am unable to say you have done what you have not.  
 Choose then for yourself what I should say, for I will  
 Inform them without fail, even if I am not asked.

"'Damn you!' the prince said, and ordered that he be given ten thousand dirhams."

### **Bishr ibn Marwān and Ibn ʿAbdal**

Al-ʿUtbi said, "Ibn ʿAbdal went to see ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Mubashshir ibn Marwān after the latter had been appointed governor of Kufa. He sat between the two rows of visitors, then said, 'I've seen a dream, O Prince. Allow me to relate it to you.' 'Relate it,' ʿAbd al-Malik said, and Ibn ʿAbdal recited:

Before morning dawned, I slept after a sleepless night  
 At an hour in which I have never slept.  
 And I dreamt that you gave me a slave-girl  
 With well-spaced teeth who was pleasant to be with.

You also gave me a purse of coins and  
A slim, gray mule whose bridle squeaked.

“‘I have all that you dreamt of,’ ‘Abd al-Malik said, ‘and it is all here for you except the mule, for it is sturdy and black.’ ‘Oh, may my wife be divorced from me by three pronouncements,’ Ibn ‘Abdal said correcting himself, ‘if I had not dreamt that the mule was anything but black. I was mistaken.’”

#### ‘Alī al-Armīnī and al-Buṭayn

Al-Shaybānī said, quoting al-Buṭayn, the poet, “I came to see ‘Alī ibn Yaḥyā al-Armīnī and sent him the following written note:

I dreamt I was riding a horse,  
Had a servant, and was possessed of gold dinars.  
Knowledgeable people with intelligence said to me,  
‘You’ve seen a good dream, and dreams have interpretations.  
Have your dream interpreted at the prince’s palace tomorrow,  
And you’ll find a good omen in foretokens.’  
So I’ve come with cheer and with happy feelings,  
For with one like you, I have hope things are possible.

“Quoting the Qurʾān, ‘Alī ibn Yaḥyā al-Armīnī wrote at the bottom of my note, ‘... confused dreams, and we do not know the interpretation of dreams’ [Q. 12:44]. Then he ordered that I be given all that I had mentioned in my verses and seen in my dream.”

Bashshār al-Uqaylī said:

I wish I knew until when I should continue to praise you,  
Ibn Yaḥyā, when you give me nothing.  
Don’t you know, may God reward you on my behalf  
And increase your prosperity, O Ibn Yaḥyā,  
That I wish you the best in this world and its embellishments  
And don’t want you judged badly on the Day of Judgment?

In a similar vein, another poet said the following:

Mirdās ibn al-‘Alāʾ, son of highborn masters,  
I praise you among my relatives and companions.  
I commend you, yet my situation gives me the lie  
For what I say, and I am ashamed of people.  
When they ask, “What gifts has he given you?”  
I bow my head [in shame] for my bad situation.

#### Receiving from princes

Ja‘far ibn Muḥammad related the following on the authority of Yazīd ibn Sim‘ān, who had heard it from ‘Abd Allāh ibn Thawr on the authority of ‘Abd

al-Ḥamīd ibn Wahb who had heard it from Abū al-Khallāl, “I asked ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān about the [best] reward of a person in power. ‘Tender and delicious meat,’ he replied.”

### ‘Ikrima and the reward

Ja‘far ibn Muḥammad said the following on the authority of Yaḥyā ibn Muḥammad al-‘Āmirī who had heard it from al-Mu‘tamir on the authority of ‘Imrān ibn Ḥudayr, “I went to see ‘Ikrima with another man, and this man noticed that ‘Ikrima was wearing a worn-out turban, so he said, ‘We have turbans; shall we send you one of them?’ ‘Ikrima replied, ‘We accept nothing from ordinary people. We only accept gifts from princes.’”

### Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and his black chemise

Hishām ibn Ḥassān said, “I saw al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī praying while wearing a black chemise with ribbons which Maslama ibn ‘Abd al-Malik had given him as a present.

The Prophet, God bless him and give him peace, used to wear a pair of black sandals, which the Negus, ruler of Abyssinia, had given him as a present.”

Nāfi‘ said, “‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Umar used to accept gifts from people who had participated in the Fitna [the Sedition against Caliph ‘Uthmān], such as al-Mukhtār and others.”

“Mālik ibn Anas entered the presence of Hārūn al-Rashīd and complained of a debt he had to pay. Al-Rashīd ordered that he be given a thousand gold dinars. When Mālik was set to leave, he said, ‘Commander of the Faithful, I also married my son Muḥammad and incurred a debt of one thousand dinars.’ Al-Rashīd said, ‘And one thousand dinars for his son Muḥammad.’”

Nāfi‘ added, “Mālik died and left the money for his heir in a provisions bag.”

Al-Aṣma‘ī said:

Ishāq ibn Yaḥyā ibn Ṭalḥa said, “Al-Rabī‘ ibn Khuthaym was allotted one thousand and one hundred [dinars] from public payments. My father interceded on his behalf with [Caliph] Mu‘āwiya, who then agreed that al-Rabī‘ should receive two thousand. When time of payment came, al-Rabī‘ ibn Khuthaym’s name was called out and he was told to stand with those listed for two thousand. He sat down. They looked and found against his name in writing: ‘Yaḥyā ibn Ṭalḥa interceded on his behalf with the Commander of the Faithful, who added his name to those receiving two thousand.’”

A man said to Ibrāhīm ibn Adham, “Abū Ishāq, I wanted you to accept this overgarment from me as a gift.” “If you are rich,” Ibrāhīm said, “I will accept it; but if you are poor I will not.” “I am rich,” the man affirmed. “And how much money do you have?” asked Ibrāhīm. “Two thousand dinars,” the man answered. “Do you wish the money were four thousand?” Ibrāhīm asked. “Yes,” the man said. “Then, you are poor. I will not accept your gift.”

Ibrāhim ibn al-Aghlab, known as Ziyādat Allāh, ordered that some money be divided up among the legists. Some of them accepted, others declined. Al-Asad ibn al-Furāt was among those who had accepted, then he later heard that Ziyādat Allāh used to decry those who had accepted. Asad ibn al-Furāt commented, “That’s fine, for we’ve taken only part of our right, and God will ask him to account for what remained.”

Arabs were proud of taking rewards from kings and used to consider them among the best things they owned. Dhū al-Rumma said:

My wealth is not from an inheritance I received,  
Nor is it from blood-money or a sinful benefit.  
It is rather God’s gift received after every trip I made  
To generous men screened off in pavilions.

Lamponing Marwān ibn Abī Ḥafṣa and criticizing him for accepting gifts from ordinary people and priding himself on accepting gifts only from kings, another poet said:

[I accepted] gifts from the Commander of the Faithful,  
Not ones doled out by everybody and his brother;  
While you, until your hair grayed, received nothing  
But gifts you bundled under your cloak on rising.

### Preferring some people to others when giving

ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, may God be pleased with him, mentioned the poor and said Saʿd ibn Khidhyam was one of them. He gave him one thousand dinars and said, “I heard God’s Messenger, God’s blessing and peace be upon him, say, ‘When you give, enrich.’”

A delegation of Arabs came to God’s Messenger, God’s blessing and peace be upon him, so he gave them gifts, and with particular abundance to one of them. When he was asked about that, God’s Messenger said, “All his people depend on him.”

### The Messenger, God’s blessing and peace be upon him, and ʿAbbās ibn Mirdās

After the Battle of Ḥunayn, the Prophet, God’s blessing and peace be upon him, gave gifts to those “whose hearts were conciliated”. [Q. 9:60] He gave al-Aqraʿ ibn Ḥābis al-Tamīmī and ʿUyayna ibn Ḥiṣn al-Fazārī one hundred camels, but he gave al-ʿAbbās ibn Mirdās al-Sulamī [only] fifty. For the latter, this was hard to bear, so he composed a few verses and recited them to the Prophet. They are the following:

Will my plunder [in war] and [my horse] al-ʿUbayd’s  
Be lost between ʿUyayna and al-Aqraʿ?

Neither Ḥiṣn nor Ḥābis  
 Surpassed Mirdās in any assembly.  
 I've been only one like them.  
 Yet whomever you lower today will never be raised.

God's Messenger, God's blessing and peace be upon him, said to Bilāl, "Stop al-'Abbās from criticizing me." So Bilāl gave him a gift and satisfied him.

**God's Messenger, God's blessing and peace be upon him,  
 and Ṣafwān ibn Umayya**

Ṣafwān ibn Umayya said, "I was in a raid with God's Messenger, God's blessing and peace be upon him, when for me he was the most hateful of God's creatures. He continued to make gifts to me until he became the most loved of God's creatures to me." Ṣafwān ibn Umayya was one of those "whose hearts were conciliated".

### **Being thankful for a benefaction**

Sulaymān al-Tamīmī said, "God has bestowed favors upon His servants in accordance with His power, and He charged them with being thankful in accordance with their ability."

It was said that the following is written in the Bible, "Thank the one who gives to you and give to the one who thanks you."

It was also said, "Being ungrateful about a benefaction necessitates its loss, and being thankful about it necessitates its increase."

They said, "Whoever praises you has paid you back the debt of your benefaction to him."

In the Ḥadīth, we read, "Whoever publicizes a good deed has expressed his thanks; whoever conceals it from the public has shown his ungratefulness."

'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abbās said, "If Egypt's Pharaoh did me a favor, I would thank him for it."

It was said, "If your hands are unable to pay back a favor, let your tongue recompense by being thankful."

It was also said, "God, Most High, has not conferred on His servants anything less than thankfulness. Consider this in relation to the words of God, may He be exalted, '... and few of My servants are thankful.'" [Q. 34:13]

**Al-Wāqidi and Yaḥyā al-Barmakī on people who came to thank him**

Muḥammad ibn Ṣāliḥ al-Wāqidi said, "I went to see Yaḥyā ibn Khālīd al-Barmakī. 'Here are people,' I said to him, 'who have come to thank you for a favor.' 'Muḥammad,' he said, 'these people thank us for a favor. How are we to thank them for their thanks?'"

**A saying of the Prophet, God's blessing and peace be upon him, regarding gratefulness and ungratefulness**

The Prophet, God's blessing and peace be upon him, said, "Whenever God bestows a blessing upon His servant and sees its effect on him, He writes, 'God's beloved is one who thanks Him for His blessings.' Whenever God bestows a blessing upon His servant and does not see its effect on him, He writes, 'God's hated is one who is ungrateful to Him for His blessings.'"

**Between 'Adī ibn Arṭāh and 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz**

'Adī ibn Arṭāh wrote to 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz, "I live in a land where blessings are abundant. But I am concerned that Muslims near me have little thankfulness and are too slack in showing gratitude." 'Umar, may God be pleased with him, wrote back, "When God bestows a blessing on a certain people and they thank Him for it, what they are given is always greater than what they have given. Consider in this regard the words of God, Most High, 'And We gave knowledge to David and Solomon, and they said: Praise be to God' (Q. 27:15]. What blessing is better than what David and Solomon were given?"

**Between the Prophet, may God bless him and give him peace, and 'Ā'isha concerning verses by Ibn Janāb**

The Prophet, may God bless him and give him peace, heard 'Ā'isha, may God be pleased with her, reciting the following verses of Zuhayr ibn Janāb:

Help one who is weak, and let not his weakness  
Ever deter you lest his deeds' consequences overtake him.  
He will reward or praise you; and whoever praises you  
For what you have done is like one who rewards you.

The Prophet, blessing and peace be upon him, said, "He spoke truly, 'Ā'isha. Whoever does not thank people is not thankful to God."

Al-Khushanī said, "Al-Riyāshī recited the following verses to me:

If I don't thank people who do good  
And if I don't decry the blameworthy miserly coward,  
What is the use of knowing good and evil by name  
And of God's having given me a mouth and ears?

And on thankfulness he recited to me:

So long as my death remains distant, I shall thank 'Amr  
For his good deeds, by which he does not make me obliged.  
He is a man who does not conceal his wealth from his friend,  
Nor does he complain if his [friend's] foot slips.  
He saw my need, which was unseen [by others].  
And it hurt his eyes until it was removed [by him]."

### Paucity of the generous and abundance of the miserly

The Prophet, God bless him and give him peace, said, “People are like a hundred camels, among which you hardly find one that is travel-worthy.”

Wise men have said, “The generous among the miserly are like the blaze on a horse’s face.”

A poet said:

[The tribe of] Qurayz take pride over me by their numbers,  
But falcons beget only a few young ones.  
If among your evil men I am scarce,  
Among your good men I am plenty.  
Weak birds beget many young ones,  
While a falcon’s mother begets only one or a few.

Al-Samawʿal said:

She criticized us for our few numbers  
So I told her that the honorable are few.  
It does not hurt us that we are few, for  
Our protégé is respected but the protégé  
Of those who have numbers is humiliated.

[Abū Tammām] Ḥabīb said:

We may be there, with no honorable man to defeat,  
Until we reach him through a thousand dishonorable ones.

Ibn Abī Ḥāzim said:

They said: We wish you had praised a generous man.  
I said: How will it be possible for me to find a generous man?  
I have tried and have spent fifty years [trying] –  
And one who has tried has sufficient knowledge.  
There is no one who can be counted on for a day of good deeds  
And there is no one who deigns to be generous to a poor man.

Diʿbil said:

How many people are, or rather, how few they are!  
God knows that I am not expressing a falsehood.  
I close my eyes, then I open them  
In front of many – but I see no one.

The best that was said about this idea are the verses of Ḥabīb al-Ṭāʿī:

The generous are many in the land, even if  
They are few; others are a few, even if they are many.  
Let not surprise take you unawares because of their masses,  
For most of them or all of them are cattle.

Whenever perils among them become deadly,  
 You'll discover who [of them] has importance.  
 If piebald animals were not the most common among horses,  
 The white-footed and those with a blaze would not be praised.

### Chosroes on avarice

Al-Aṣmaʿī said, "Chosroes asked, 'What is the most harmful thing?' The consensus was that poverty was. 'Avarice is more harmful,' Chosroes corrected, 'for a poor man finds relief and so he can relax.'"

### First generous, then miserly

A bedouin stayed at the home of a man from Baṣra and was treated with great generosity. The host then withheld his hospitality. The bedouin said:

He acted honorably as a noble man, but when he thought  
 Within himself, he found honor and nobility do not suit him.

Yazīd ibn Maṣṣūr used to pay Bashshār a monthly stipend, then he withheld it. Bashshār said:

Abū Khālid: when you were young, you swam in deep water;  
 But when gray-haired, you pitched your tent on the shore.  
 Previously you ran fast, then you continued to slow down  
 Until now you walk heavily and with short steps.  
 You're like 'Abd Allāh's cat; as a kitten it was sold  
 For one dirham and, when grown, for a mere cent.

Muslim ibn al-Walīd, "Victim of the Belles", recited the following verses to Muḥammad ibn Maṣṣūr ibn Ziyād:

O Abū Ḥasan, you extended a benefaction to me  
 And I thanked you, then you withheld it and lost interest.  
 No harm was done, and I did not blame you.  
 You treated me badly in the end but well at first.  
 I swear I will not requite you for one evil deed with a similar one.  
 What you rewarded me with is sufficient reward for you.

Sulaymān al-Aṣmā, brother of the "Victim of the Belles", recited the following verses about Sulaymān ibn 'Alī:

What a shame it is! If it is mentioned to the Devil,  
 He would find Sulaymān's deeds to be great wonders!  
 Don't be surprised if some good comes perchance at his hands,  
 Sometimes the ill-omened star showers the earth with rain.

### Miserly first, then generous

Al-Ḥārith ibn Khālid al-Makhzūmī came to see [Caliph] ‘Abd al-Malik but could not reach him, so he said:

I was in your vicinity but my eyes were veiled.  
As the veil was removed, I blamed myself [for not seeing you].  
I have dedicated myself to you as if  
My misery and my happiness were solely in your hands.

His words reached ‘Abd al-Malik, who then sent for him and asked him, “Did you feel any shame in waiting at my door?” “No,” Al-Ḥārith replied, “but I missed my family and my homeland. I found good words and said them, and I had a debt to pay [so I left].” “What is the amount of your debt?” the caliph asked. “Thirty thousand [dirhams],” al-Ḥārith said. “What would you like better?” the caliph asked, “Your debt paid or the governorship of Mecca?” “The governorship of Mecca, of course,” replied al-Ḥārith. And so, the caliph appointed him governor of Mecca.

Al-Ḥuṭay’a came to Medina and stood before ‘Uyayna ibn al-Nahhās al-‘Ijlī and said, “Give me.” “I owe no debt to be paid to you,” ‘Uyayna said, “and I have no money beyond my dependents’ sustenance to give away to you.” So al-Ḥuṭay’a was angered and left. ‘Uyayna’s companions sitting with him apprised him of who the man was, so he asked that he be called back. “You stood before us,” ‘Uyayna said, “you were not friendly, and you did not greet us as if [you thought] you were al-Ḥuṭay’a.” “I am he,” al-Ḥuṭay’a said. “Sit down,” ‘Uyayna said. “We have everything you would like.” So he sat. “Who is the best poet of all people?” ‘Uyayna asked. Al-Ḥuṭay’a replied, “It is the one who says:

Whoever does a good deed to save his honor will spare it,  
And whoever does not avoid vilification will be reviled.”

(He meant Zuhayr [ibn Abī Sulmā].)

‘Uyayna asked, “Who is next?” Al-Ḥuṭay’a said, “It is the one who says:

Whoever begs of people will be denied [their giving]  
But whosoever begs of God will never be disappointed.”

(He meant ‘Abīd.)

“And who is next?” ‘Uyayna asked. “I,” al-Ḥuṭay’a replied. ‘Uyayna said to his agent, “Take this man to the market and buy him whatever he wants.” So the agent went to the market with al-Ḥuṭay’a and offered to buy him silk and all manner of luxurious products, but al-Ḥuṭay’a paid no attention to any of them. Instead he pointed to ordinary garments, coarse cotton clothing, and cloaks. The agent bought him all he needed. “That’s enough,” al-Ḥuṭay’a said. “But I have been ordered to spend freely,” the agent remonstrated. Al-Ḥuṭay’a replied, “I don’t want my people to be indebted to him [‘Uyayna] any more than this.” Then he recited the following verses:

You were asked and were not miserly, but you did not lavish.  
 So you ought not to be censured and, equally, not praised.  
 You are a man, for whom liberality is not a natural quality  
 That makes you give. Yet, being rich may help one be liberal.

### Praising a prince and being disappointed

Saʿd ibn Salm said, “A bedouin praised me eloquently, saying:

Oh say to a traveler by night: Don’t fear being lost,  
 For Saʿd ibn Salm is the light of all countries.  
 In him we have a master above all masters,  
 A generous man who outstrips all the generous.

“But I was a little slow to give him anything, so the bedouin lampooned me eloquently, saying:

Every praised man I’ve known gives a reward  
 But al-Bāhili gives no reward when praised.  
 I praised Saʿd (and praise is a stimulus to give),  
 But he was like a smooth stone on which was a little earth.”

Al-Ḥasan ibn Rajāʾ praised Abū Dulaf, but the latter did not give him anything, so he said:

Abū Dulaf, what great liars all people are  
 Except me, for I am a greater liar when praising you.

Another poet said in the same vein:

I lied when I praised you, and you rewarded me  
 As you would reward a liar.

And yet another poet said:

I’ve made a mistake in praising you  
 As you did in giving me nothing.  
 I’ve sowed my needs  
 In a valley with no plants.

[Abū Tammām] Ḥabīb al-Ṭāʾī eulogized ʿAyyāsh ibn Lahīʿa, after coming to Egypt and asking him for a loan of two hundred *mithqāls*. ʿAyyāsh consulted his wife. “He is a poet,” she said. “Today he eulogizes you and tomorrow he’ll lampoon you.” So ʿAyyāsh offered a pretext and apologized, and gave him nothing. Ḥabīb al-Ṭāʾī said:

ʿAyyāsh, you are indeed an ignoble man and I,  
 Being subject to my request, am ignoble too.

He continued to lampoon ʿAyyāsh until the latter died. After his death Ḥabīb al-Ṭāʾī said:

May your effaced remains not be watered  
 And may your stumbling fall continue for ever.  
 Lion of Death, you have saved him  
 From the jaws of the lion of al-Qāṣira.

*Verses by Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih*

Some of the verses we have composed on the same idea, when I asked one of the ruler's associates to free a prisoner but he hesitated to act:

Far be it from one like you to free a prisoner  
 Or be a helper against time's vicissitudes.  
 For your poetic rhymes are like black armor,  
 Failing to cover your face's dignity and heart's feeling.  
 Would you not have pity when my praises  
 Called woe and destruction upon you?  
 If your meanness were only one-tenth of your generosity,  
 Ḥātīm wouldn't be mentioned [as paragon of generosity].

**Rabīʿa al-Ruqqī and Yazīd ibn Ḥātīm**

Rabīʿa al-Ruqqī praised Yazīd ibn Ḥātīm al-Azdī, governor of Egypt, and thought the governor tarried in rewarding him, so he left Egypt and said:

Without being ungrateful to God, I return with Ḥunayn's  
 Shoes [empty-handed], despairing of Ibn Ḥātīm's giving.

His words reached Yazīd ibn Ḥātīm, who then sent for him. When Rabīʿa entered, Yazīd asked him, "Are you the one who said, 'Without being ungrateful to God, I return ...?'" "Yes," the poet said. "Will you not say anything different from that?" the governor asked. "No, by God," the poet affirmed. "You will indeed return with Ḥunayn's shoes, but filled with money," the governor said, and ordered that the poet's shoes be taken off and filled with money. When Yazīd ibn Ḥātīm was deposed from Egypt's governorship and Yazīd ibn Usayd al-Sulamī was appointed in his place, Rabīʿa composed the following verses:

The people of Egypt wept with flowing tears  
 On the morning when generous Ibn Ḥātīm left.

In this poem he says:

What a difference between the two Yazīds in generosity:  
 The Yazīd of Sulaym and the generous Ibn Ḥātīm!  
 The concern of the Azdī man was to spend his money,  
 While that of the Qaysī man was to gather dirhams.

The stammering man should not think I lampooned him,  
I rather preferred over him people of noble deeds.

### Generous men of the pre-Islamic period

Those in the Jāhiliyya (the pre-Islamic period) who reached the highest point in generosity were three individuals: Ḥātim ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Sa‘d al-Ṭā‘ī, Harim ibn Sinān al-Murri, and Ka‘b ibn Māma al-Iyādī.

#### Some information on Ḥātim

However, the only one who has become proverbial in his generosity is Ḥātim. He is the one who, when the cold was severe and winter was harsh, ordered his slave Yasār to light a fire on a hill that would be visible to anyone who had lost his way. Then anyone who was lost might be guided to him. In this regard Ḥātim said:

Kindle the fire, for the night is severely cold  
And the wind is gusty and biting, O kindler.  
Perhaps your fire will be seen by a passer-by;  
If it will bring a guest to me, you will be free.

It was said Ḥātim did not withhold anything from others except for his horse and weapons, which he never gave away in any act of generosity.

While traveling, Ḥātim passed by the tribe of ‘Anaza, who were holding a captive. The latter appealed for Ḥātim’s help, but Ḥātim did not have the wherewithal for liberating him, so he bought him from the ‘Anaza tribe and set him free. He then took the captive’s place in the fetters until he paid his own ransom.

Nawār, Ḥātim’s wife, said, “We once had a bad year, in which the earth was bone-dry, the horizon was dusty, the camels were emaciated and the suckling mothers could not give one drop of milk to their young. The year was so bad that all stocks were wiped out, and we were certain we would die. One long and frigid night, our children – ‘Abd Allāh, ‘Adī, and Saffāna – were crying in hunger, so Ḥātim went to attend to the boys and I to the girl. And, by God, they did not calm down until after the night had fallen silent. Ḥātim then came to me to entertain me with conversation, so I knew what he wanted and pretended to be asleep. When the stars had set, someone raised the lower edge of the tent, and did it again. ‘Who is there?’ Ḥātim shouted. ‘Your neighbor, So-and-So,’ a female voice said. ‘I’ve come to you, having left my children howling like wolves. I have no one to help me but you, Abū ‘Adī.’ ‘Bring them over quickly,’ Ḥātim said, ‘for God has given both you and them enough food to satisfy them here.’ The woman came in carrying two children, while four others walked beside her, as though she were an ostrich surrounded by her young. Ḥātim went to his horse, stabbed its breast with a knife, and the animal sank to the ground. He then skinned it and gave the knife to the woman. ‘It’s your job, now,’ he said to her. We all gathered around the horse’s meat, grilled it, and ate while Ḥātim went out

walking among the tribe's tents, one by one. 'Get up, people,' he shouted, 'and come to the fire.' They all gathered around the fire, while he stood aside wrapped in his robe. By God, he did not taste a bite of the meat, although he was more in need of it than we were. When morning dawned, there was nothing left of the horse on the ground but its bones and hoofs. Ḥātim recited the following verses:

Nawār, take it easy and lessen your blame and reproof.  
 Don't say about anything that passed, 'What use was it?'  
 Don't say, 'Go easy,' about money that I spend,  
 Even though I am used to give to both humans and jinn.  
 A miser sees only one way for money,  
 While a generous man sees many."

Ḥātim was once seen beating his son, whom he had seen hitting a dog, which [by barking] guided guests to his father. Ḥātim recited:

I say to my son, after whipping his hands  
 On account of a dog he was beating:  
 "I advise you to treat it well, for  
 It does me a great favor that I always praise.  
 It guides my guest to me in the darkness of night,  
 When the fire is extinguished in the fire-place."

The tribe of Ṭayyīʿ related in the presence of 'Adī ibn Ḥātim that a man known as Abū al-Khaybarī passed by Ḥātim's tomb and camped next to it. "Abū 'Adī," he called out, "be hospitable to your guests." Someone said to him, "Take it easy. You're only talking to decaying bones." "Ṭayyīʿ claims," he continued derisively, "that Ḥātim was always hospitable to every guest staying with him." At dawn Abū al-Khaybarī got up and shouted, "Oh, my camel!" "What's the matter with you?" his companions asked. "By God, Ḥātim rose from his tomb and killed my camel, even as I was looking at it." They turned to his camel and found it dead. "Ḥātim has indeed offered you hospitality," they said. They cut its throat and ate its meat, then they seated him behind one of them riding an animal and went off. While they were traveling, 'Adī ibn Ḥātim unexpectedly came to them on his camel, to which another camel was tied. "Ḥātim came to me in sleep," he said to Abū al-Khaybarī, "and he told me what you had said, and that he was hospitable to you and your companions by offering your camel. He composed some verses and repeated them to me until I had learned them by heart. Here they are:

Abū al-Khaybarī, you are a man  
 Who envies your clan and vilifies it.  
 What did you want from decayed bones  
 In a desert, where unavenged souls cry?  
 Did you want to harm and distress them

When you're surrounded by [the descendants of]  
 Ghawth [ibn Ṭayyṣ?] and their cattle?  
 We feed our guests big-humped camels  
 Which we select for them with our swords.

“Ḥātim ordered me to give you a camel in compensation for yours, so take it.”  
 And so Abū al-Khaybarī took it.

The following verses are also by Ḥātim ibn ‘Abd Allāh:

Māwiyya, you've long avoided and abandoned me  
 And I have been excused from seeking you.  
 Māwiyya, money comes and goes.  
 What remains are reports and remembrances.  
 Māwiyya, either a preventive cause needs to be explained  
 Or else giving should be generous and unrestrained by rebuke.  
 Māwiyya, I never say to one who one day asks me  
 When he comes to me, “My money has become little.”  
 Māwiyya, what is the use of wealth to a man  
 When life rattles in his throat and his breast can't retain it.  
 Māwiyya, when my soul ends up [at death] in a deserted land  
 With no water and no wine,  
 You will see that what I spent failed to harm me  
 And that my hands are empty of what money I withheld.  
 When those who survive me lower me  
 Into a dark tomb with dusty, smooth sides,  
 They will leave in a hurry, brushing their palms  
 And saying, “Digging has made our nails bleed.”  
 Māwiyya, money is only the money I spend;  
 Its beginning is thankfulness, its end remembrance.  
 People know that if Ḥātim had intended  
 To become rich, he would have had abundant wealth.  
 Like my grandfather, I often protected a mother's only son  
 And he was safe from being killed or enslaved.  
 I do not wrong my cousin, even if my own brothers  
 Witness against him; but Time often betrays its brothers.  
 For a period we've been rich by being vagabonds and wealthy,  
 For Time has given us to drink from both cups;  
 But our wealth did not increase our pride over relatives  
 Nor did poverty mar our minds.

As for Harim ibn Sinān, he is the friend of Zuhayr who says about him:

Whenever you meet Harim, despite his faults,  
 You'll find magnanimity in his appearance and character.

Sinān, Harim's father, was the chief of the tribe of Ghaṭafān. His mother died when she was pregnant with him. “When I die,” she said, “split open my belly,

for the chief of Ghaṭafān is in it.” When she died, they split open her belly and extracted Sinān from it. About the sons of Sinān Zuhayr says:

They are people whose father is Sinān, when you trace their lineage.  
 How good are they and the children to whom they gave birth!  
 If any people were to sit above the sun for their generosity,  
 Their progenitor, or their glory, they would rightfully sit there.  
 They are jinn when scared, humans when safe.  
 And brave generous chiefs when approached.  
 They are envied for the blessings they have, and envied further  
 Because God doesn't take away His wealth from them.

Zuhayr composed the following verses about Harim ibn Sinān:

He is abundantly liberal. His hands are like a generous cloud  
 To those seeking his gifts, which never cease.  
 When you visit him, you see him beaming with joy as if  
 You were the one giving him what you've come to ask him for.  
 He is trustworthy, and wine does not wipe out his wealth,  
 But generous giving may willingly do so.

Al-Ḥasan ibn Hānī<sup>9</sup> took this idea and said:

Wine does not destroy the young man's wealth  
 But rather repeated generous giving, visible to all.

Zuhayr composed the following verses about Sinān and members of his household:

I perfected [my verses] for you in two months until  
 They had brawny elbows and productive wombs [like camels].  
 Then they were presented to a man of good qualities,  
 Who is like rain that makes leaves grow after it falls.  
 He is from a family whose merit [God] on His Throne ordains  
 That it be built for them with reward in Gardens of Eternity.  
 They offer food when a crisis [of famine] occurs.  
 Their clothes are redolent of perfume when they sweat.  
 In generosity the last of them is like the first,  
 For their good qualities and morals agree and coincide.  
 If they gamble, they win; if they boast, they persuade;  
 If they fight, they vanquish; and if they race, they surpass.  
 The earth vies for their dead when they are buried,  
 As merchants vie with one another for gold.

He also said about them:

Among them are men of dignity, with handsome faces;  
 They have assemblies where words and deeds make the rounds.  
 Those who give plenty have a duty toward those who ask them

And those who give little are known for generosity and bounty.  
 Whatever good they do, their fathers' fathers  
 Have passed it down to them in earlier times.  
 Will Khaṭṭī spears grow from any branches but their own kind?  
 Will palms be planted anywhere but in their good earth?

As for Kaʿb ibn Māma al-Iyādī, the only fact that has reached us about him is that he died of thirst, when he preferred his Namarī companion to himself and let him drink and be saved – and this is greater than every quality praised in others. [Abū Tammām] Ḥabīb referred to him, saying:

He gave up his soul, when a mean person would withhold it.  
 To lay down one's soul is the extreme example of generosity.

And to him and Ḥātim al-Ṭāʿī, he also refers, saying:

Kaʿb and Ḥātim have divided between themselves  
 The heights of praise, in old times and new.  
 The former was the successor of clouds, and the latter  
 Died as a generous brave man in good fortune.  
 If he did not die a martyr, his people  
 Will still not give him up for a thousand martyrs.

### The generous men of Islam

As for the generous men of Islam, they were eleven in one period. No one before or after was like them.

The generous men of al-Ḥijāz were three in one period: ʿUbayd Allāh ibn ʿAbbās, ʿAbd Allāh ibn Jaʿfar, and Saʿīd ibn al-ʿĀṣ.

The generous men of al-Baṣra were five in one period, and they are: ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿĀmir ibn Kurayz, ʿUbayd Allāh ibn Abī Bakra (the free man of the Messenger of God, may God bless him and give him peace), Muslim ibn Ziyād, ʿUbayd Allāh ibn Maʿmar al-Qurashī then al-Taymī, and Ṭalḥat al-Ṭalaḥāt (he is Ṭalḥa ibn ʿAbd Allāh ibn Khalaf al-Khuzāʿī) whom the poet [ʿAbd Allāh ibn Qays al-Ruqayyāt] elegized when he died in Sijistān, of which he was governor, saying:

May God freshen the bones of Ṭalḥat al-Ṭalaḥāt,  
 Which they buried in Sijistān.

The generous men of al-Kūfa were three in one period, and they are: ʿAttāb ibn Warqāʿ al-Rayāḥī, Asmāʿ ibn Khārīja al-Fazārī, and ʿIkrima ibn Ribʿī al-Fayyād.

### The generosity of ʿUbayd Allāh ibn ʿAbbās

Among examples of ʿUbayd Allāh ibn ʿAbbās's generosity is that he was the first to offer breakfast to his neighbors, the first to set up tables with meals on the

streets, the first to greet others while eating, and the first to let others rifle his food. Medina's poet says the following about him:

In the year of drought, you offered sour  
 And sweet food, and chunky and cut meat.  
 To orphans, you are a springtime and a resort  
 When the sky looks down on barren lands.  
 Your gracious father was a mercy,  
 A help, and a light to all creatures.

Another example of his generosity is that a man came to see him in the courtyard of his home, stood in front of him, and said, "Ibn 'Abbās, I once did you a favor and now I need one in return." Ibn 'Abbās looked him up and down, but did not recognize him. "What is the favor you have done us?" he asked. "I saw you once at the Zamzam well," the man said, "when your servant was drawing up water for you from it and the sun was scorching you. So I shaded you with my cloak until you finished drinking." "I remember that," Ibn 'Abbās said, "and the memory of it keeps often returning to me." Then addressing his superintendent, he asked, "How much money do you have?" "Two hundred dinars and ten thousand dirhams," the superintendent said. "Pay them to him," Ibn 'Abbās ordered and then added, "I don't think the amount is sufficient for the favor he has done us." "By God," the man remarked, "if Ismā'īl had no sons but you, he would have been sufficed. How much more he has been, having sired the Master of the ancients and the moderns, namely [Prophet] Muḥammad, God bless him and give him peace, who interceded for you and your father."

Another example of his generosity is that Mu'āwiya withheld his gifts from al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī until the latter was hard up. "If you'd ask your cousin 'Ubayd Allāh," someone suggested to him, "[he'd help you], for he has come by about one thousand thousand dirhams." "What are one thousand thousand to 'Ubayd Allāh?" al-Ḥusayn said, "By God, he is more generous than the wind when it is stormy and more liberal than the sea when it surges." Al-Ḥusayn then sent a letter by messenger to 'Ubayd Allāh, mentioning that Mu'āwiya had withheld his gifts from him and that he was hard up and needed one hundred thousand dirhams. When 'Ubayd Allāh read the letter, being a kind man with a most tender heart, his eyes welled up with tears, "Woe to you, Mu'āwiya," he said, "for the crime you committed after you've come into luxury and power, if at the same time you allow that al-Ḥusayn complain of being hard up and burdened by many dependents." He then addressed his steward. "Take half my possessions of gold, silver, clothing, and mounts," he said "and give them to al-Ḥusayn. Tell him that I would like to share half of my wealth with him. If that is sufficient for him, [well and good]; otherwise, come back and take the other half of my possessions and give it to him." "What about the clothing you are wearing?" asked the steward, "How will you fare without?" "If we reach that stage," 'Ubayd Allāh said, "I will tell you how to acquit yourself." When the messenger of 'Ubayd Allāh brought

the message to al-Ḥusayn, the latter exclaimed, “We are God’s ...! I have burdened my cousin and never thought he would be as generous as all that.” He then took the portion of the wealth sent to him. ‘Ubayd Allāh was the first person in Islam to do that.

Yet another example of ‘Ubayd Allāh’s generosity is that, when he was in Syria as a guest of Mu‘āwiya ibn Abī Sufyān, the latter sent him a gift with his chamberlain on the occasion of Nayrūz [New Year’s Day]; it consisted of many clothes, musk, and gold and silver vessels. ‘Ubayd Allāh noticed that, when the chamberlain put the gift before him, he was looking covetously at it. “Do you have any desire for it in your soul?” he asked. “Yes, indeed,” the chamberlain said, “the same desire as Jacob had in his soul for Joseph, may God grant both of them peace.” ‘Ubayd Allāh laughed and said, “It’s yours, take it.” “May I be your ransom,” the chamberlain said, “I’m afraid Mu‘āwiya will learn about that and be angry with me.” “Seal it with your own seal,” ‘Ubayd Allāh counseled, “and hand it over to the treasurer. When it will be time for us to leave, he will carry it to you by night.” “By God,” the chamberlain exclaimed, “this stratagem of generosity is greater than generosity itself. I wish I would not die until I see you in his place,” meaning Mu‘āwiya’s. ‘Ubayd Allāh thought this might be a ruse to trick him, so he said, “Leave off such talk. We’re people who fulfill their promise and do not revoke what we affirmed.”

Another example of his generosity is that a beggar, who did not know who he was, asked him for alms. “I have been told,” he said, “that ‘Ubayd Allāh gave a beggar one thousand dirhams and apologized to him.” “Who am I compared with ‘Ubayd Allāh?” ‘Ubayd Allāh said. “Compared with him in nobility or wealth?” asked the beggar. “In both,” replied ‘Ubayd Allāh. “As for a man’s nobility,” the beggar said, “it consists in his magnanimity and his deeds. If you have a will to do something, you’ll do it; and if you do it, you’re noble.” Whereupon, ‘Ubayd Allāh gave him two thousand dirhams and apologized to him for being hard up. “If you’re not ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn ‘Abbās,” the beggar said, “you are better than he is; and if you are he, you are better today than you were yesterday.” ‘Ubayd Allāh gave him one thousand dirhams more. “This is a noble act by a generous and respected man,” the beggar said. “I have delved into my heart of hearts and emptied it into your heart, and I know I’m not wrong [about your identity] except for the intervention of doubt between my ribs.”

Another example of his generosity is that a man from the Anṣār [Prophet Muḥammad’s Medinan Helpers] came to ‘Ubayd Allāh and said, “O cousin of God’s Messenger: a baby boy was born to me last night. I have named him after you, seeking the blessing of your name. His mother died.” “May God bless His gift to you,” ‘Ubayd Allāh said, “and may He grant you ample comfort in your loss.” He then called his agent and said, “Go immediately and buy a slave-maid to nurse the baby, and pay him two hundred dinars for the expenses of bringing him up.” Then turning to the Anṣārī man, he said, “Come back tomorrow, for you’ve come today when we are short of money and in difficult circumstances.”

“If you had come a day before Hātīm,” the Anṣārī man said, “the Arabs would not have ever mentioned him. But he preceded you and you’ve become a successor. I testify that your spontaneous giving is more abundant than his painstaking endeavor, and that the dew of your generosity is greater than the downpour of his.”

### The generosity of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ja‘far

An example of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ja‘far’s generosity is that ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī ‘Ammār saw a slave trader showing his slave-songstresses and became fond of one of them [but couldn’t afford to buy her]. He became notorious for mentioning her to the extent that ‘Aṭā’, Ṭāwūs, and Mujāhid blamed him for that. His answer was:

Some people I sit with have blamed me because of you.  
I don’t care whether their blame flies or falls.

His story reached ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ja‘far, who had no concern for anyone but him. He went on pilgrimage [to Mecca], where he sent for the songstress’s master and bought her from him for forty thousand dirhams. He then ordered his own slave-girls’ female superintendent to embellish and adorn her, so she did. People heard of his coming [to Mecca], so they came to see him. “Why don’t I see Ibn Abī ‘Ammār coming to visit us?” he asked. Shaykh Ibn Abī ‘Ammār was duly informed and came to greet ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ja‘far. When he stood up to leave, Ibn Ja‘far asked him to sit. “What has your love for So-and-So done to you?” he asked. “It affected my flesh, my blood, my brain, and my nerves,” Ibn Abī ‘Ammār lamented. “Would you know her if you saw her?” asked ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ja‘far. “I would, even in Paradise [among countless houris].” ‘Abd Allāh commanded that she be brought out to him. “I’ve only bought her for you,” ‘Abd Allāh said, “and, by God, I haven’t approached her [for sex]. Take her, may she be blessed for you.” When Ibn Abī ‘Ammār turned to go, ‘Abd Allāh commanded his servant, “Give him one hundred thousand dirhams to enjoy with her.” ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī ‘Ammār wept with joy and said, “People of [the Prophet’s] house: God has given you a special honor, which He has given no other humans descending from Adam before you. May you enjoy this grace and may it be blessed unto you.”

Another example of his generosity is that he gave a woman a large sum she had asked him for. He was told she did not know him and would have been satisfied with little. “If little would have satisfied her,” he answered, “I am only satisfied with much; and if she does not know me, I know myself.”

### The generosity of Sa‘īd ibn al-‘Āṣ

Among the examples of Sa‘īd ibn al-‘Āṣ’s generosity is that once he was sick in Syria. [Caliph] Mu‘āwiyā visited him accompanied by Shuraḥbīl ibn al-Simṭ,

Muslim ibn ‘Uqba al-Murri, and Yazid ibn Shajara al-Ruhāwī. When Sa‘īd saw Mu‘āwiya, he jumped out of bed in respect for him, but Mu‘āwiya said, “I swear that you should not move, Abū ‘Uthmān, for you are weak because of your sickness.” Sa‘īd collapsed and Mu‘āwiya rushed to support him; he bent over him, helped him rise, seated him on the bed, and sat next to him. He then asked him about his illness, his sleep, and his food, prescribed what he ought to avoid, and sat with him for a long time. Mu‘āwiya then left with his company and turned to Shuraḥbīl ibn al-Simṭ and Yazid ibn Shajara and asked, “Has either of you seen anything wrong with Abū ‘Uthmān’s home?” They both said they had not seen anything untoward. “What do you say?” he asked Muslim ibn ‘Uqba. “I have,” Muslim replied. “What was it?” asked Mu‘āwiya. “I saw that his servants and clients were wearing dirty clothes, I saw that his house’s courtyard was not swept, and I saw merchants quarrelling with his household manager.” “You’re right,” Mu‘āwiya said, “I saw all that too.” He then sent to Sa‘īd three hundred thousand [dirhams] with Muslim, whose messenger preceded him and informed Sa‘īd of what had happened. Sa‘īd was upset and said to the messenger, “Your master thought he had done something good but he actually did something bad; he thought he had explained everything, but he was wrong. The servants’ clothes are dirty because they are constantly moving. The house needs sweeping because our manners are not those of someone who chooses to make his home his mirror, his adornment his clothing, and his good deed his perfume, but then does not care who dies of hunger among his relations and dear ones. The merchants were quarrelling with my household manager because he has many transactions of purchase and sale with them and cannot avoid being wrong or wronged. As for the money the Commander of the Faithful has ordered for me, it has reached every needy person of my immediate relationship and dignified him by the honor conferred on him. We have accepted it and commanded that your master be given one hundred thousand [dirhams] from it, that Shuraḥbīl ibn al-Simṭ be given an equal amount from it, and that Yazid ibn Shajara also be given an equal amount from it. What we depend on is God’s bounty and the good favor of the Commander of the Faithful.” Muslim ibn ‘Uqba went to Mu‘āwiya and informed him of what had happened. “My cousin is right in what he said,” Mu‘āwiya commented to Muslim, “and I was wrong in the conclusion I drew. You should give your share of the money to Rawḥ ibn Zinbā‘ as a punishment for you, because whoever commits a felony is punished for it, whereas whoever does a good deed is rewarded for it.”

Another example of Sa‘īd’s generosity is that [Caliph] Mu‘āwiya alternated the governorship of Medina between him and Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam. As a result, Marwān and he used to look askance at each other. When Sa‘īd entered to see Mu‘āwiya one day, the latter asked him, “In what condition was Abū ‘Abd al-Malik when you left him?” He was referring to Marwān. Sa‘īd said, “I left him implementing your command and taking good care of your work.” Mu‘āwiya said, “He is like a man with a loaf of bread that was baked for him, so he ate it.” “No, Commander of the Faithful,” Sa‘īd remarked, “he is one of those who eat

only what they reap, and reap only what they sow.” “What then has caused the hostility between you two?” Mu‘āwiya asked. “I have feared him for my honor,” said Sa‘īd, “and he has feared me for his.” “Why, what about him do you begrudge?” Mu‘āwiya asked. “He is worst when present,” Sa‘īd said, “and most pleasing when absent.” Mu‘āwiya said, “You have abandoned us in these wars, Abū ‘Uthmān.” “That’s because you’ve carried the burden alone,” Sa‘īd said, “and you’ve had sufficient determination.” “What kept you back?” Mu‘āwiya asked. “What kept me back was the fact that you could dispense with my services,” Sa‘īd said. “I was always close at hand. If you called, we answered; and if you ordered, we obeyed.” “That’s what we have always thought of you,” Mu‘āwiya said, then turned to the people of Syria and added, “People of Syria, these are my people and these are their words.” “Tell me about your wealth,” Mu‘āwiya said to Sa‘īd, “I was told you attend to it.” “Commander of the Faithful,” Sa‘īd explained, “We have property from which we receive some income. If the income we receive is little, we spend it all even though it is so little; if it is plenty, we do the same. We do not save any of it or withhold it from a poor man in difficulty, a seeker for help, or a destitute person enduring his condition; nor do we claim from it a piece of meat or fat for ourselves to the exclusion of others.” “How long does that [income] last?” Mu‘āwiya asked. “Half of the year,” Sa‘īd answered. “What do you do in the rest of the year?” the Caliph asked. “We find someone who is ready to loan us money and eager to make a deal with us,” Sa‘īd responded. The Caliph exclaimed, “There is no one whose condition is more in need of improvement than you.” “Our condition is fine, Commander of the Faithful. If you were to double my wealth, I would be in no other condition than this.” Mu‘āwiya ordered that Sa‘īd be given fifty thousand dirhams. “Use this money,” he said, “to buy a country estate that will help you to keep your sense of chivalry.” “I will rather use it to buy praise and lasting repute,” Sa‘īd said. “I will feed the hungry, marry widows, free captives, comfort friends, and improve the conditions of neighbors.” Hardly had three months passed when he had not a single dirham left. Mu‘āwiya said, “After faith in God, there is no virtue more noble than good repute; and there is no honor greater than generosity. It is sufficient to know that God, may He be blessed and exalted, has taken generosity as one of His attributes.”

Another example of Sa‘īd’s generosity is the following as narrated by al-Aṣma‘ī. “Sa‘īd ibn al-‘Āṣ used to spend his evenings in gatherings with his friends until part of the night had passed. One night, everyone had left except for one man who remained seated. Sa‘īd ordered that the candle be extinguished. ‘What do you need, young man?’ he asked. The man said that he had to pay a debt of four thousand dirhams. Sa‘īd ordered that this sum be paid to him. He considered extinguishing the candle dearer than giving the money.”

### The generosity of ʿUbayd Allāh ibn Abi Bakra

An example of ʿUbayd Allāh ibn Abi Bakra’s generosity is that a man once spoke to him with great respect, so he gave him one hundred thousand dirhams. The man said, “May God make you prosper. No one has ever given me an amount as large as this. You have virtually cut off my tongue so that I can’t thank anyone else. I see the world in no one’s hands as beautiful as it is in yours. Without you, every splendor in it is gone and every light extinguished.”

### The generosity of ʿUbayd Allāh ibn Maʿmar al-Qurashī al-Taymī

An example of ʿUbayd Allāh ibn Maʿmar al-Qurashī’s generosity is his story with a man from Baṣra, who had a valuable slave-girl he had educated in several arts so that she excelled in all of them. The man then fell on bad times. When ʿUbayd Allāh ibn Maʿmar was visiting Baṣra to see some notables, the slave-girl said to her master, “I’d like to say something to you, but I’m ashamed because it may sound harsh on my part. What makes it easy for me now is that I see your critical situation, your lack of money, and your loss of prosperity. I’m afraid you’ll be in straits and in great need. Now ʿUbayd Allāh ibn Maʿmar has come to Baṣra. You are aware of his honor, his virtue, his open-handedness, and his magnanimity. Permit me to embellish myself so that you may present me to him and offer me to him as a gift. I hope the reward he will give you will lift you up, by God’s will.” The Baṣran man wept because of his passion for her and his fear of being separated from her. “If you had not said this,” he noted, “I would have never initiated such an act.” He then took her, made her stand in front of ʿUbayd Allāh, and said to him, “May God honor you, this is a slave-girl whom I have educated well and whom I am pleased to make yours. Please accept her as a present from me.” ʿUbayd Allāh said, “Someone like me does not seek gifts from someone like you. Will you sell her to me? I will offer you a high price that will please you.” “As you wish,” the man said. “Will you be satisfied with ten purses,” ʿUbayd Allāh said, “in each of which there are ten thousand dirhams?” “By God, sir,” the Baṣran man exclaimed, “I’ve never hoped for one-tenth of the amount you’ve mentioned. But this is an example of your kindness and generosity.” ʿUbayd Allāh then ordered that the money be brought out and placed in the hands of the man. To the slave-girl he said, “Enter into the seclusion [of veiled women].” “May God honor you,” the Baṣran man pleaded, “permit me to bid her farewell.” “Go ahead,” ʿUbayd Allāh said. The slave-girl stopped, and the Baṣran man stood up and recited the following verses to her, with tears in his eyes:

Because of my separation from you, I express deep sorrow,  
Which I’ll endure by night and which will make me think long.  
If it were not for my difficult times, nothing but death  
Would have separated us, so accept my apology.

Peace be to you, there will be no visits between us  
And no contact, unless Ibn Ma‘mar wishes.

“I do indeed so wish,” ‘Ubayd Allāh said. “Take back your slave-girl, and may God bless the money for you.” And so the man took his slave-girl and the money, and became rich again.

These are the generous men of Islam, famous for the generosity proverbially ascribed to them. They are eleven men as we mentioned and named. After them comes another class of generous men, famous for generosity and known for liberality, whose deeds have been praised. We will mention as many as we can of them, if God Most High wills.

### The second class of generous men

#### Al-Ḥakam ibn Ḥanṭab

Among them was al-Ḥakam ibn Ḥanṭab. Someone said to Nuṣayb ibn Rabāḥ, “Your poetry rambles, Abū Miḥjan.” “No,” he answered, “It is rather generosity that rambles. There was a time when I praised al-Ḥakam ibn Ḥanṭab and he gave me one thousand dinars, one hundred she-camels, and four hundred ewes.”

A bedouin asked al-Ḥakam ibn Ḥanṭab for a gift and was given five hundred dinars, so he wept. “What makes you cry, bedouin?” al-Ḥakam asked. “Do you consider the sum we’ve given you too little?” “No, by God,” the bedouin said, “I rather weep for what the whole earth has taken from you.” He then recited the following verses:

It is as if Adam, when he was dying,  
Advised you – while breathing his last –  
To take care of his sons, so you did  
And you spared Adam the poverty of his sons.

Al-‘Utbi said, “One of the inhabitants of Manbij told me, ‘Al-Ḥakam ibn Ḥanṭab came to us one day when he was destitute and made us rich.’ ‘How could he make you rich when he was destitute?’ he was asked. ‘He taught us noble deeds,’ the man said, ‘and so our rich provided for our poor.’”

#### Ma‘n ibn Zā‘ida

Another of them was Ma‘n ibn Zā‘ida, of whom it was said, “Speak at length of the sea and don’t be stinting, then speak at length of Ma‘n and don’t be stinting.”

A man came to him and asked him for a mount. In response he said, “Servant, give the man a mare, a work horse, a mule, a camel, a donkey, and a slave-girl.” Then he added, “If I knew any mount other than these, I would have given it to you.”

Al-ʿUtbi said, “When Maʿn ibn Zāʿida came to Baṣra and people gathered to meet him, Marwān ibn Abī Ḥafṣa arrived, held the door by its side-beams, and recited to him the poem in which he says:

Enemies did not refrain from killing you to preserve you,  
But they despaired because they were unable to hurt you.  
He has two hands, in which abide death and generosity.  
For God willed that he do both harm and good.”

### Yazīd ibn al-Muhallab

Among them was Yazīd ibn al-Muhallab. Whenever Hishām ibn Ḥassān mentioned him, he said, “By God, ships sailed in [the sea of] his generosity.”

Yazīd ibn al-Muhallab was asked, “Why don’t you build a house?” “My home,” he said, “is either the governor’s mansion or prison.”

When Yazīd ibn ʿAbd al-Malik brought back the head of Yazīd ibn al-Muhallab [from the battle field], one of those present criticized him, so he said to him, “Hush! Yazīd ibn al-Muhallab sought great things, did great deeds, and died a generous man.”

Al-Farazdaq visited Yazīd ibn al-Muhallab in prison and recited to him:

In your fetters reside generosity and glory,  
Freeing captives and doing good.

“Are you praising me when I am in this condition?” he asked. “I’ve caught you at a low price,” al-Farazdaq replied, “so I bought you.” Yazīd ordered that the poet be given ten thousand [dirhams].

Sulaymān ibn ʿAbd al-Malik said to Mūsā ibn Nuṣayr, “Multiply your blood money by fifty.” “I don’t have [enough money] to multiply it,” Mūsā objected. “By God,” Sulaymān emphasized, “then you will multiply it by one hundred.” “O Commander of the Faithful,” Yazīd ibn al-Muhallab intervened, “I will multiply it on his behalf [and pay it].” “Then do so,” the Caliph said. And so, Yazīd multiplied it on behalf of Mūsā to the tune of one hundred thousand [dirhams].

Al-ʿUtbi said, “ʿAwāna informed me of the following: [Caliph] al-Walīd ibn ʿAbd al-Malik appointed ʿUthmān ibn Ḥayyān al-Murri as governor of Medina and ordered him to impose exorbitant fines on suspicious people. When Sulaymān became Caliph, he ordered him to pay two thousand thousand dirhams. The Qaysite tribes met and agreed to bear the payment of one half of the amount but could not afford the payment of the second half. This coincided with Sulaymān’s appointment of Yazīd as governor of Iraq. ʿUmar ibn Hubayra said, ‘You have to resort to Yazīd ibn al-Muhallab; in such matters he is the only person to ask.’ So they went to Yazīd, taking with them ʿUmar ibn Hubayra, al-Qaʿqāʿ ibn Ḥabīb, and al-Hudhayl ibn al-Ḥārith. When they reached Yazīd’s pavilion, Yaḥyā ibn Aqṭal, Yazīd ibn al-Muhallab’s chamberlain (who was a man from the Azd tribe), said, ‘I sought permission for them to see him.’ Yazīd came out to the

pavilion, greeted and welcomed them, then ordered lunch to be served. They were offered food of such quality that no one could find fault with it. After they had eaten lunch, ‘Uthmān ibn Ḥayyān, who was an eloquent and articulate man, rose up to speak. ‘May God increase your success, commander,’ he said. ‘Al-Walid ibn ‘Abd al-Malik sent me as governor of Medina and ordered me to impose exorbitant fines on suspicious people and to be severe with them; then Sulaymān demanded a payment of me which, by God, was beyond my wealth to meet and my ability to bear. So we’ve come to you, hoping that you may bear of this money what will be a trivial matter for you but what remains a heavy burden on me.’ Then each of them spoke what came to his mind, words that we have here curtailed.

“Yazīd ibn al-Muhallab said, ‘Hail and welcome to you all. The best that money can do is pay rightful debts and financial obligations. The money I have is only what remains as a surplus of payments I made to my brethren. I swear by God that, if I knew anyone who could satisfy your need better than I can, I would lead you to him. Therefore, decide [how much you need] and ask for a lot.’ ‘Uthmān ibn Ḥayyān said, ‘Half [of the amount], may God grant prosperity to the commander.’ ‘Yes, and with my respect,’ Yazīd agreed, ‘Come and take your money.’

“They thanked him, rose up, and left. When they reached the door of the pavilion, ‘Umar ibn Hubayra said, ‘What a stupid opinion you’ve had! By God, Yazīd doesn’t care whether he bears the payment of half or all of the money. Who will now pay the remaining half?’ ‘This, by God,’ the people said, ‘is the [right] opinion!’ Yazīd heard their secretly exchanged talk and said to his chamberlain, ‘Yaḥyā, see whether the people have something more to pay and let them return.’ So they returned and said, ‘Help us.’ ‘I will,’ he said. ‘If you think you can bear to pay all the amount, then you’re worthy; and if you decline, then there is no one else who can help in this matter but you.’ Yazīd said, ‘I will pay it.’

“Yazīd ibn al-Muhallab went to Sulaymān early next morning. ‘Commander of the Faithful,’ he said, ‘Uthmān ibn Ḥayyān and his friends came to me.’ ‘He was unable to pay the money, wasn’t he?’ the Caliph asked. ‘Yes,’ Yazīd said. ‘By God,’ Sulaymān threatened, ‘I shall indeed take it from them.’ ‘I have accepted to carry it on their behalf,’ Yazīd explained. ‘Then pay it,’ Sulaymān commanded. ‘By God,’ Yazīd affirmed, ‘I have brought it here only in order to pay it.’ Then he added, ‘Carrying this debt, although a matter of great concern, is praiseworthy. By God, its praise is of greater value than the amount itself. My hand is extended to yours, so extend your hand to those who make a request.’ Yazīd then went to the men of the treasury and paid the money. They in turn went to Sulaymān and informed him that they had received it. ‘My oath has been fulfilled,’ Sulaymān said, ‘Carry back Abū Khālid’s money to him.’ ‘Adī ibn al-Riqā‘ al-‘Āmili said:

Blessed be the eyes that see the carrying of a debt  
Like the debt carried by Yazīd, the ram of Iraq.”

Al-Aṣmaʿī said, “Some people from the tribe of Quḍāʿa belonging to the clan of Banū Ḍabba came to Yazīd ibn al-Muhallab. One of them said:

By God, if we give up requesting from you,  
 Who else can we request from?  
 We have traveled widely in the country but found  
 No one but you, to whom noble deeds are ascribed.  
 Be patient with our habit, to which you accustomed us  
 Or else, guide us to whom we should go.

“Yazīd ordered that the man be given ten thousand dirhams.”

On his way to Baṣra, Yazīd ibn al-Muhallab passed by a bedouin woman who gave him a goat as a present. He accepted it and said to his son Muʿāwiya, “How much money do you have for expenses?” “Eight hundred dirhams,” his son said. “Give them to her,” Yazīd ordered. “But she does not know you,” the son objected, “and she will be satisfied with a small sum.” “If she does not know me,” Yazīd explained, “I know myself. A small sum may satisfy her, but I am only satisfied with a large sum.”

### Yazīd ibn Ḥātim

Among them was Yazīd ibn Ḥātim. A religious scholar once wrote to him asking him for a gift. Sending him thirty thousand dirhams, Yazīd wrote back, “I have sent you thirty thousand [dirhams], which I neither increased in order to seek your gratitude, nor decreased to demonstrate my power. I do not solicit your praise as reward for it, nor do I exclude your hope for more of the same. Peace be to you.”

When Rabīʿa al-Ruqqī arrived in Egypt, he came to Yazīd ibn Ḥātim al-Wardī [al-Azdī] but the latter did not give him anything because he was preoccupied by some other matter. Rabīʿa left, saying:

Without being ungrateful to God, I see that I return  
 With Ḥunayn’s sandals, without a gift from Ibn Ḥātim.

Yazīd later asked about him. He was informed that Rabīʿa had left and had said such-and-such; the verse was recited to him. Yazīd sent for Rabīʿa, and he was summoned. “What did you say?” Yazīd asked. Rabīʿa recited the verse. “We were preoccupied and distracted from you,” Yazīd explained. He then ordered that his sandals be removed from his feet and filled with money. “Now return with these sandals instead of Ḥunayn’s!” he said. When Yazīd was deposed from the governorship of Egypt and Yazīd [ibn Usayd] was appointed in his place, Rabīʿa said:

The people of Egypt shed flowing tears  
 When early one morning the noble Ibn Ḥātim left it.

In the poem, he further said:

Between the two Yazīds, Yazīd Sulaym and the noble Ibn Ḥātim,  
 There is a great difference in generosity.  
 The concern of the Azdī young man is to spend his wealth,  
 While the concern of the Qaysī young man is to gather dirhams.  
 Let not the stammerer think that I have lampooned him,  
 I have rather preferred people of noble deeds.

A poet had gone out to Yazīd ibn Ḥātim in order to praise him. On reaching Egypt, he found that he had died, so he said:

If Egypt eluded me, regarding what I had hoped for,  
 And if it disappointed me, concerning what I desired,  
 The fact is: man is not afflicted by all that he fears,  
 Nor does he receive all that he hopes for.  
 If I had met you alive, only a few nights  
 Would have lain between me and becoming rich.

### Abū Dulaf

Among them also is Abū Dulaf, whose name is al-Qāsim ibn Ismāʿīl. About him ʿAlī ibn Jabala said:

Between his abiding in desert and city,  
 Abū Dulaf is indeed the whole world.  
 If Abū Dulaf departs,  
 The world departs after him.

About him one of the poets of al-Kūfa said:

God has given most means of living  
 To human beings at the hands of Abū Dulaf.  
 He competed with the wind and gave while it blew;  
 When it stopped, he did not stop but continued to give.  
 His two secretaries never wrote "No" in his book,  
 Even though "No" was written in all other books.

So Abū Dulaf gave the poet thirty thousand [dirhams].  
 Another poet praised him thus:

Thunder resembles him when it rumbles.  
 He is like lightning when it flashes.  
 He is like death when it draws near.  
 Speedy steeds carry him to war.  
 When he walks, glory walks; and when he halts, it stops.  
 With your own eyes, look up to the highest honor:  
 Have any people but Abū Dulaf ever achieved it,  
 Even if they exerted their efforts and full strength?

So Abū Dulaf gave the poet fifty thousand [dirhams].

**Maʿn ibn Zāʿida**

Among the stories told about Maʿn ibn Zāʿida is the following:

Sharāḥīl, son of Maʿn ibn Zāʿida, reported, “Hārūn al-Rashīd and his companion Judge Abū Yūsuf went on pilgrimage [to Mecca]; I often accompanied the caliph. Once a bedouin from the tribe of Asad stood in his path and recited a poem praising him excessively. ‘Have I not forbidden you from saying such things in your praise, brother of Banū Asad?’ the caliph chided. ‘When you say anything about us, say something like the poet who said the following about this man’s father:

On the day of fighting, Banū Maṭar are  
 Like lions that have cubs in the Khiffān thickets.  
 They protect their neighbor so well that it is as though  
 He is [impregnable] between Arcturus and Spica Virginis.  
 In Islam, they are leaders who dominate;  
 In pre-Islamic times, there was no equal to their first chief.  
 Those able to perform cannot do what they do,  
 Even when they do well in calamities.  
 They are a people who, when they talk, are right;  
 Who, when they are sought, respond; and who,  
 When they give, give well and abundantly.’”

**Khālid ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Qasrī**

Another such is Khālid ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Qasrī. It is he about whom a poet said:

To Khālid [we journeyed] until the she-camels  
 Were made to kneel down at Khālid’s place.  
 What a perfect young man he is,  
 To be relied on and hoped for!

While Khālid ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Qasrī was sitting under a sheltering awning, he saw a bedouin on a camel trotting toward him. “When he arrives,” he told his chamberlain, “don’t stop him entering.” So when the bedouin arrived, the chamberlain let him enter. After giving his greeting, the bedouin said:

May God grant you prosperity, I have slender means  
 And can’t support my many dependents.  
 Time weighed heavily on me with its oppressive burden,  
 So they sent me to you and are waiting.

“They sent you and are waiting?” Khālid exclaimed, “By God, you’ll not even alight. Instead you will go back and take to them what will please them.” With that he ordered that the bedouin be given a great gift and an honorable set of clothing.

### ‘Adī ibn Ḥātīm

‘Adī ibn Ḥātīm is one of them. Ibn Dāra once entered his presence and said, “I have a eulogy for you.” “Stop,” ‘Adī said, “until I bring you my possessions, then praise me accordingly. I would hate not to give you the value of what you say. I have one thousand ewes, one thousand dirhams, three male slaves, three female slaves, and this my horse, which is dedicated to the service of God. Praise me now in accordance with what I have informed you.” Ibn Dāra said:

My young camel yearns in the land of Ma‘add.  
 But in the land of Banū Thu‘al, it finds springtime.  
 I spend many nights with ‘Adī ibn Ḥātīm,  
 Who is a sword unsheathed from its scabbard.  
 Your father is a peerless, generous man,  
 And you are a generous man, who offers no pretexts.  
 If you do evil, people like you are feared;  
 And if you do good, people like you do it.

“Stop,” ‘Adī said, “my possessions don’t match up to more words.”

### Liberal kings giving [rewards] for praise

Sa‘īd ibn Muslim al-Bāhili said:

A bedouin from the tribe of Bāhila came to [Caliph] al-Rashīd; he was wearing a silken cloak, a Yemenite loose wrap that he had tightened around his waist with part folded on his shoulder, and a turban that he had swathed around his head with a tail of it dangling behind him. He stood in front of al-Rashīd. “Honor the Commander of the Faithful,” Sa‘īd told him, so he began reciting his poetry. “Bedouin,” al-Rashīd said, “I hear you when you say something good, and I ignore you when you say something accusatory. Say a couple of verses about these two.” He meant his sons Muḥammad al-Amīn and ‘Abd Allāh al-Ma’mūn, who were at his side. “Commander of the Faithful,” the bedouin began, “you’ve forced me to take the rocky, rugged terrain and turned me away from the easy, level ground. The splendor of the caliphate, the dazzling rank, and the natural flow of rhymes require that you give me respite so that I may relax and my fleeing ideas may be composed.” “Done!” the caliph said, “I’ve accepted your excuse instead of testing you.” “Commander of the Faithful,” the bedouin responded, “you’ve relieved my stress and made the race easier for me.” He then recited:

You’ve established the green peaks of Islam’s tent  
 For ‘Abd Allāh and then for Muḥammad.  
 They are the [tent’s] pegs, may they be blessed by God,  
 And you, Commander of the Faithful, are its main pole.

“And you, bedouin,” al-Rashīd said, “may you too be blessed by God. Make your request, and let it not be of less value than your good deed.” “Al-Hunayda [The

Little Indian Gift], O Commander of the Faithful,” the bedouin asked [meaning one hundred camels]. So the caliph commanded that he be given one hundred she-camels and seven sets of clothes.

### Al-Mahdī and Marwān ibn Abī Ḥafṣa

Marwān ibn Abī Ḥafṣa said, “I entered the presence of al-Mahdī. He asked me to recite a poem to him, so I recited the poem in which I say:

A white woman came to visit you, so greet her phantom  
As she diffuses her coyness in the tent.  
She captured your heart, which accepted to be captured.  
Her likes have captured hearts and led them to youthful passion.

“Until I reached the following verses:

The last verse of the ‘Chapter of Spoils’ [in the Qurʾān]  
Witnessed to their inheritance, but you hoped for its abrogation.  
Can you efface the stars of the sky  
With your hands or can you conceal heaven’s crescent?  
Or can you deny a saying from your Lord,  
Which [Angel] Jibril conveyed to the Prophet to recite?

“Then I recited to him verses from my [other] poem in which I say:

O you, who are heirs to Prophet Muḥammad  
To the exclusion of other blood relatives,  
[Qurʾānic] Revelation should stop the dispute  
Between you and daughters’ sons, for it is too late for dispute.  
What women inherit in relation to men is [God’s] ordinance  
Revealed in the “Chapter of Cattle” [in the Qurʾān].  
How can it be legal for daughters’ sons to inherit  
From uncles? This is not possible.  
The Book abolished their shares, so they tried  
To legalize them without having shares.  
The sons of those who gave pilgrims to drink gained  
Their right, but you were deluded by imagined dreams.”

Marwān ibn Abī Ḥafṣa continued, “When I had recited these two poems to al-Mahdī, he said in the presence of a group of his next of kin, ‘These persons here owe you a rightful debt, and I am ordering that you be given thirty thousand from me. I have imposed on Mūsā five thousand, on Hārūn an equal sum, on ‘Alī four thousand, on al-‘Abbās such-and-such, and on So-and-So such-and-such.’ I calculated a total of seventy thousand [dirhams]. Al-Mahdī ordered the sum of thirty thousand and it was brought forth, then he said, ‘Go to these persons now and take what I imposed on each for you.’ So I went to Mūsā and he ordered five thousand for me, then I went to Hārūn and he ordered an equal sum for me, then

I went to ‘Alī and he said, ‘He imposed on me less than on my brothers, but I will not impose less on myself.’ And he ordered five thousand for me, then I took from all the others, and received a total of seventy thousand [dirhams].”

#### ‘Abd al-Malik and al-A‘shā of Rabi‘a

Al-A‘shā of Rabi‘a entered the presence of [Caliph] ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān, who had al-Walīd on his right and Sulaymān on his left. ‘Abd al-Malik said to al-A‘shā, “What is left, Abū al-Mughīra?” “What is gone is gone,” al-A‘shā replied, “and what is left is left.” Then he recited:

I am not one whose right is wronged,  
 Nor one who regrets being hostile.  
 I do not absolve my lord of the evil he has done,  
 Nor am I afraid of my lord for the evil I do.  
 My virtue among people and in my poetry  
 Is that I say what I mean, and I know what I mean;  
 And that my heart between my ribs knows  
 What my eyes have seen and what my ears have heard;  
 And that, when I preferred Marwān and his son  
 To all people, I preferred the best father and son.

‘Abd al-Malik laughed. “Do you blame me for this?” he asked al-Walīd and Sulaymān, then ordered ten thousand [dirhams] for al-A‘shā.

#### ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn [Umm] al-Ḥakam and al-Farazdaq

Al-‘Utbi said:

Al-Farazdaq went to see ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Thaqafi ibn Umm al-Ḥakam. The latter said to him, “Abū Firās, spare me your poems where you have forgotten the beginning by the time you reach the end. Instead compose a couple of verses about me that will cling to the narrators’ mouths. Then I will give you a gift, the like of which no one has ever given before me.” Early next morning, al-Farazdaq came and recited:

You are the son of Quraysh’s two flatlands, but if you wish  
 You can be Thaqīf’s down-flowing, torrential flood.  
 You are the son of a glorious branch through a noble lady,  
 And for your sake the shining sun met with the full moon.

“Well said!” ‘Abd al-Raḥmān exclaimed, and ordered ten thousand [dirhams] for al-Farazdaq.

#### Al-Faḍl ibn Yaḥyā and a young merchant

Abū Suwayd said, “Al-Kūfī informed me of the following, ‘On his way to Khurāsān, al-Faḍl ibn Yaḥyā ibn Khālīd was stopped by a young merchant who,

while coming to al-Kūfa, had been waylaid by highway robbers who had taken all he had. Taking hold of the bridle of al-Faḍl's horse, the young merchant said:

I will recite a verse, like which there is none in poetry,  
 For it will cut off the necks of all exceptional verses.  
 Liberality and bravery reside in every house  
 In which al-Faḍl ibn Yaḥyā ibn Khālid resides.

“So al-Faḍl commanded that the young merchant be given one thousand dirhams.’”

### **Zubayda and Ibn Abī Ḥafṣa on verses in which he praised al-Amin**

Al-ʿUtbi related that Abū al-Janūb Marwān ibn Abī Ḥafṣa composed some verses which he presented to Zubayda, daughter of Jaʿfar, praising her son Muḥammad. In those verses he says:

O noble daughter of Jaʿfar, how excellent you are!  
 What great height and glory you've given birth to!  
 The light of the caliphate has become clear  
 To onlookers on the forehead of Muḥammad.

So she ordered that his mouth be filled with pearls.

### **Al-Ḥasan ibn Sahl and ʿAlī ibn Jabala**

Al-Ḥasan ibn Rajāʿ, the secretary, said:

ʿAlī ibn Jabala came to us as we were with the troops of al-Ḥasan ibn Sahl. Al-Maʿmūn was there, having married Khadija, daughter of al-Ḥasan ibn Sahl, known as Būrān. At the time, we were paying the stipends of more than seventy thousand peasants. Al-Ḥasan ibn Sahl was having breakfast with al-Maʿmūn; he used to meet people until al-Maʿmūn was ready to attend to them. When ʿAlī ibn Jabala arrived, he came to me. “The prince is very busy,” I told him. “In that case, I'll not be lost, with your help,” he replied. “Indeed,” I assured him. Then I went to see al-Ḥasan ibn Sahl at the time he was ready to go out and let him know that ʿAlī was there. “But don't you see how busy we are?” al-Ḥasan complained. “You are not so busy that you can ignore dealing with him,” I remarked. “Till we are free, have him given ten thousand,” al-Ḥasan said. “We can deal with him later.” When I informed ʿAlī ibn Jabala, he said in one of his poems:

O rightful patron, you have given me an initial gift,  
 Which rewarded my praise when you had not yet seen me.  
 As soon as I hopefully looked at your lightning, I received  
 Rain – as though you were rushing to reward me without delay.

**Ibn Ṭawq and a man who approached him**

As Ibn Ṭawq was going for a walk in the square, a man accosted him and gave him a note containing a request for everything he needed. Ibn Ṭawq took it. Inside he found the following:

I've considered you my whole world, so if you give to me,  
That's fine; otherwise, goodbye to the whole world.

Ibn Ṭawq said, "By God, I will be true to your expectation." And he gave him enough to make him rich.

**ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ṭāhir and Diʿbil ibn ʿAlī**

Diʿbil ibn ʿAlī, the poet, approached ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ṭāhir al-Khurāsānī while the latter was on board a pleasure boat on the Tigris. The poet gestured to him with a piece of paper, so ʿAbd Allāh ordered that it be taken from him. In it there was the following:

I am amazed at Ibn al-Ḥusayn's pleasure boat,  
How it sails and does not sink  
While there are two seas: one is under it  
And the other is overwhelming it from above.  
More amazing than that are its twigs:  
When he touches them, why don't they blossom?

So ʿAbd Allāh ordered that Diʿbil be given five thousand dirhams, a slave-girl, and a mare.

ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ṭāhir left. Diʿbil again met him with a note in which the following verses were written:

Your flagpole appeared with happiness  
Tied to the flag of a forthcoming reign.  
It fluttered over two game animals as if  
It was yearning for two falcon wings.  
The deceptive miser was spared his honor  
Through your open-handedness and radiant face.  
If he knew that your giving was immediate,  
He would not have stinted, stream after stream.

So ʿAbd Allāh ordered that the poet be given five thousand [dirhams].

Another poet stood in front of ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ṭāhir and recited the following verses:

If it were asked: What young man do you know  
Who is joyfully readier to practice bravery and giving,  
Who is mightier in striking heads on the battle field,  
Who is more generous in feeding others in barren years?

All the people would point to you  
As those drowning would to a shore.

So ʿAbd Allāh ordered that the poet be given five thousand dirhams.

Aḥmad ibn Muṭīr said, "I recited some verses to ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ṭāhir in which I had praised one of the governors. They go like this:

He has a Day of Misery, in which people suffer miseries,  
And a Day of Bliss, in which people enjoy blessings.  
On the Day of Bliss, generosity trickles from his hand,  
And on the Day of Misery, blood drips from his hand.  
Had the Day of Misery not restrained his hand,  
No criminals would remain on the earth.  
And had the Day of Bliss emptied his hand  
In generous giving, no destitute man would exist on the earth.

"ʿAbd Allāh asked me, 'How much did he give you?' 'Five Thousand,' I said. 'And did you accept the sum?' he asked. 'Yes,' I said. 'You made a mistake,' he said. 'The price of these [verses] should be no less than one hundred thousand [dirhams].'"

#### Abū Jaʿfar and Ḥammād ʿAjrad

Ḥammād ʿAjrad entered the presence of Abū Jaʿfar after the death of Abū al-ʿAbbās, his brother, and recited:

They came to you after Abū al-ʿAbbās departed,  
O noblest of people in lineage and branches.  
If a branch were to ooze out its sap,  
Yours would exude musk and ben perfume.

So Abū Jaʿfar ordered that Ḥammād be given five thousand dirhams.

#### Saʿīd ibn Khālīd and Mūsā Shahawāt

Al-Qaḥdhamī said, "Abū Mūsā Shahawāt came to see Saʿīd ibn Khālīd ibn ʿAmr ibn ʿUthmān. 'There is a slave-girl here,' he said, 'with whom I am passionately in love. But they have refused to sell her to me for less than two hundred dinars.' 'Bless him!' Saʿīd said and went to Saʿīd ibn Khālīd ibn Asīd, whose mother was ʿĀʾisha bint Ṭalḥat al-Ṭalāḥāt. The latter Saʿīd ordered that a silk shawl be brought. Spreading it out, he knotted one hundred dinars to each of its [four] corners, then said to Mūsā, 'Take this shawl with everything in it.' So he took it, then returned early next day and recited the following to him:

O Abū Khālīd, I mean Saʿīd ibn Khālīd,  
The beneficent, and not the son of Bint Saʿīd.  
I mean ʿĀʾisha's son, whose

Grandfather is Khālīd ibn Asīd.  
 The chief of the generous, as long as he lives  
 Generosity accepts him as such, but if he dies  
 Generosity will not accept any other chief.  
 Let him be, let him be. You have fallen asleep  
 But he is not asleep with regard to your noble descent.”

### Verses by al-Zubayrī on Marwān’s family

Al-ʿUtbi said, “I heard my uncle recite the following verses by Abū al-ʿAbbās al-Zubayrī:

Every caliph and every heir apparent:  
 To you, Marwān’s family, is ransom owed.  
 Your rule is a healing, wherever it spreads,  
 And the rule of some other people is disease.  
 When you reign, you do well;  
 And when some other people reign, they do wrong.  
 Do I make you and the others equal when [the disparity]  
 Between you and them is [as vast as] the air?  
 They are earth to your feet and you are  
 Heaven to both their hands and feet.

“‘How much did he give you for it?’ I asked. ‘Twenty thousand,’ he answered.”

### Abū Muslim and Ruʿba

Al-Aṣmaʿī said:

Ruʿba related the following to me, “I entered the presence of Abū Muslim [al-Khurasānī], the leader of the [ʿAbbāsīd] cause. When he saw me, he greeted me, ‘O Ruʿba!’ My reply was:

Here I am: when you call me, I’m at your service.  
 I praise the Lord who has led me to you.  
 All praise and benefaction are in your hands.

“‘Rather in God’s hands, may He be exalted,’ he said. ‘And in yours too,’ I replied, ‘for when you bestow favors, you do well.’ Then I added, ‘Will the commander permit me to recite?’ ‘Yes,’ he said, so I recited:

He continued to seek dominion in his regions  
 And on his right and on his left,  
 Always ready, always invincible,  
 Until he established his dominion on a firm basis.

“‘Ruʿba,’ he said, ‘you’ve come to us when our funds are low, having been depleted by expenses. We’ve ordered a reward for you, although it is trivial and little. But you have to return to us, and we will be reliable when time will be on

our side. So don't erect any barriers between us and you.' 'The benefit I've derived from the commander's words,' I said, 'is greater than what I've derived from his money.'"

Nuṣayb ibn Rabāḥ entered the presence of [Caliph] Hishām and recited:

If people race to reach high honors, your right hand  
Precedes them spontaneously, followed by your left.

"You've raised eulogy to the greatest extent," Hishām said. "Ask me [for a gift]." "Commander of the Faithful," Nuṣayb said, "your hands are freer to give a gift than my tongue is to ask for one." "No, you must ask," the caliph insisted. "I have a daughter," Nuṣayb said, "who has inherited my blackness and so she has remained unmarried. I wish the Commander of the Faithful could give her something that would be her own." The caliph bestowed a plot of land on her as a fief and ordered that she be given jewelry and clothing. The black woman was married soon afterward.

#### ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ja‘far and Nuṣayb

Based on the authority of al-Aṣma‘ī, al-Riyāshī said, "Nuṣayb ibn Rabāḥ eulogized ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ja‘far, so the latter ordered that he be given a lot of money, an honorific suit of clothes, and female camels loaded with wheat and dates. 'You do all this for such a black slave?' someone wondered. 'If he is a slave,' ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ja‘far replied, 'his poetry about me is free; if he is black, his eulogy to me is white. All he has received is money that will be spent, clothing that will wear out, and female camels that will perish. On the other hand, he has given praise that will be continually related and eulogy that will abide.'"

#### Hishām and Abū al-Najm

People have recorded that Abū al-Najm al-‘Ijlī recited to Hishām his poem in which he says:

Praise be to God, who grants generously,

which is one of his best poems. When he reached the words:

And the sun in the sky is like the eye of a cross-eyed man,

Hishām, who was cross-eyed, became angry, so he ordered that the poet be kicked out. Abū al-Najm hoped he would return, so he took lodging at the mosque. One night Hishām could not sleep. "Bring me an Arab who is eloquent," he told his chamberlain, "and will converse with me and recite poetry." The chamberlain searched for what he was asked, found Abū al-Najm, and brought him. When Abū al-Najm entered, Hishām asked him, "Where have you been since we drove you away?" "Where your messenger has found me," he replied. "And with whom did you stay, Abū al-Najm?" asked Hishām. "With two men," Abū al-Najm

replied. "I had lunch with one of them and supper with the other." "How many children have you?" Hishām asked. "Two daughters," the poet replied. "Have you married them?" the caliph asked. "I married one of them," Abū al-Najm answered. "What advice did you give her on the night you gave her away?" Hishām asked. Abū al-Najm replied, "I told her:

Reville your mother-in-law and tell lies about her.  
 If she repudiates that, flatter her  
 Then beat her elbows with a stick,  
 And thus renew the disparity between you.  
 Don't ever tell her two sons about that."

"And have you given her any more advice after this?" Hishām asked. "Yes," the poet said,

I advised Barra's kind heart  
 To treat the dog well, and her mother-in-law badly:  
 'Don't get tired of choking and dragging her.  
 As for the tribe, treat them badly one and all,  
 Even if they clothe you in gold and pearls,  
 Until they see the sweetness of life bitter.'

"This is not what Jacob advised his son," Hishām said. "Neither am I like Jacob," Abū al-Najm explained, "nor is my offspring like his." "What about your other daughter?" Hishām asked. The poet replied, "She is Zallāma about whom I say:

Zallāma, sister of Shaybān, is like  
 An orphan, although her parents are alive.  
 Her head is full of lice and nits,  
 And her feet are bare but for two threads.  
 Even Satan is scared of her."

Hishām asked his chamberlain, "What have you done with the dinars I ordered you to cash?" "They are still with me," the chamberlain replied. "There are five-hundred dinars." "Pay them to Abū al-Najm," Hishām ordered, "so that he may use them to cover Zallāma's feet, in place of the two threads."

### Marwān ibn Muḥammad, Ṭurayḥ, and Dhū al-Rumma

Abū 'Ubayda said:

"Yūnūs ibn Ḥabīb related to me the following, 'When Marwān ibn Muḥammad was chosen as caliph, poets went to congratulate him. Ṭurayḥ ibn Ismā'īl al-Thaqafī, maternal uncle of al-Walid ibn Yazīd, approached him and said, 'Praise be to God, who blessed Islam with you as its imam, who made you the champion of His religion's laws, and who designated you as the shield and organizer of the community of Muḥammad, the Chosen One.' Then he recited the poem in which he says:

You spite your enemies with your good sense and grace.  
Our caliphate shall last ninety years – and months.

“‘How many months?’ Marwān asked. ‘As many as would complete one hundred years, Commander of the Faithful,’ Ṭurayḥ asserted. ‘During that period you will achieve the highest degree of power with the happiest of consequences.’ With that Marwān ordered that Ṭurayḥ be given one hundred thousand dirhams.

“Then Dhū al-Rumma approached the caliph. He was bent over with old age, and his turban was untied and coming down on his face. He paused to straighten it and put it right. He was told to approach. ‘Such is my reverence for the Commander of the Faithful,’ he said, ‘that I can’t speak to honor him with praise while my turban is improper.’ ‘I did not expect,’ Marwān remarked, ‘that [your beloved] Mayy and [your camel] Ṣaydaḥ have left for us any enjoyable words in you.’ ‘Yes, they have by God, O Commander of the Faithful,’ Dhū al-Rumma assured him. ‘I choose the purest and most limpid of words, and the best and most beautiful in their praising power.’ Then he approached and recited a poem in which he says:

So I said to her, ‘Move on. Ahead of you is a chieftain  
Descended from Marwān or from Muḥammad.

“‘What happened to Mayy?’ the caliph asked. Dhū al-Rumma said:

Her tresses are enveloped in a cloak of decay  
And the soil has effaced the beauty of her cheeks.

“Marwān turned to al-‘Abbās ibn al-Walīd and said, ‘Don’t you see how freely his rhymes flow? He should be given one thousand dinars for every one of my forefathers he mentioned.’ ‘Had I known that,’ Dhū al-Rumma observed, ‘I would have reached back to ‘Abd Shams.’”

### **Al-Manṣūr and Ibn Harima**

Al-Manṣūr’s chamberlain, al-Rabīʿ, said, “One day I said to al-Manṣūr, ‘There are many poets at your door. They have been waiting for many days and have spent all their money.’ ‘Go out to them,’ al-Manṣūr ordered, ‘greet them and say to them: Whoever praises me, let him not compare me to a lion, for it is only a dog; or to a snake, for it is a stinking little animal that eats the soil; or to a mountain, for it is a dumb rock; or to the sea, for it is an uproarious body of water with waves. Whoever has no comparisons of this sort, let him enter; whoever has, let him go away.’ So they all went away except Ibrāhīm ibn Harima, who said, ‘I am the one for him. Let me enter, Rabīʿ.’ So al-Rabīʿ let him enter and stand before al-Manṣūr. ‘I’ve learnt, Rabīʿ,’ the caliph said, ‘that no one has answered your call except him. Ibn Harima, let me hear.’ So Ibn Harima recited his poem in which he says:

He casts his glances on both sides of the throne.  
 When he does, an agony and a boon are seen in them.  
 Theirs is the white clay of the family of Hāshim,  
 While other tribes' clay is a black heap of earth.  
 If he refuses something, what he refuses is executed;  
 And if he says, 'I'll do a thing,' he will surely do it.

“‘Enough,’ al-Manṣūr said. ‘Here you’ve attained a high degree. This is really genuine poetry. I’ve ordered that you be given five thousand dirhams.’ So I went to him, kissed his head and hands, then left. I was hardly out of his sight when I heard him call, ‘Ibrāhīm!’ Feeling scared, I returned. ‘Here I am,’ I said, ‘may my father and mother be your ransom.’ ‘Take care of it,’ the caliph said, ‘for we have no other poem of yours.’ ‘May I redeem you with my father and mother,’ I replied. ‘I will take care of it until I give it to you sealed by its master on the day we walk on the Path [to Afterlife].’”

### Ja‘far and Ibn al-Jahm

‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn said, “‘Alī ibn al-Jahm recited to Ja‘far al-Mutawakkil his poem which begins:

Whatever you load the soul with, it will bear it.

“Al-Mutawakkil had two jewels in his hands, so he gave him the one that was in his right hand. The poet bowed his head in silence, thinking of something to say in order to take the jewel in al-Mutawakkil’s left hand. ‘What are you thinking of?’ asked al-Mutawakkil. ‘You are trying to think of something that will get you the other jewel, aren’t you? Here, take it, may it not be blessed for you!’ Thereupon, Ibn Jahm began reciting:

In Surra-Man-Raʿā, there is a just imam,  
 From whose sea all the seas scoop.  
 He is the hope and fear of everyone in all matters  
 As if he were a Paradise and a Hell.  
 Dominion resides in him and in his sons  
 So long as night follows day.  
 His generous hands are like two co-wives  
 Of his, each of whom is jealous of the other.  
 Whenever his right hand does anything,  
 His left hand follows suit.”

Another poet said the following about al-Hawl:

If you ask Generosity about every good deed,  
 You will find it related to no one but al-Hawl.  
 If he vies with the sun, he finds the sun dark;  
 If he vies with the mountains, he forces them to incline.

He is stronger than Time, when a misfortune befalls him;  
And to his enemies, he is stronger than an inundating flood.

One of the people of al-Rayy, a poet named Abū Yazīd, entered the presence of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ṭāhir, governor of Khurāsān, and recited the following:

Drink happily, with the crown ever firm on your head  
In Shādamihr, and leave [the palace of] Ghumdān to Yemen.  
You are more entitled to wear the crown of kingship  
Than Hawdha ibn ‘Alī and Ibn Dhī Yazan.

Whereupon ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ṭāhir ordered that he be given ten thousand dirhams. Laylā al-Akhyaliyya entered the presence of [governor] al-Ḥajjāj and recited the following to him:

When al-Ḥajjāj comes to a sick land,  
He traces its severest ills and heals it.  
He is a youth who heals it from its chronic disease  
And when he shakes the spear, he gives it [blood] to drink.

“Don’t say ‘youth’ (*ghulām*),” al-Ḥajjāj advised, “but rather say ‘high-minded man’ (*humām*).” Then he asked her, “Which one of my wives is your favorite, I will let you stay with her?” “And who are your wives, prince?” she asked. “Umm al-Jullās bint Sa‘īd ibn al-‘Āṣ al-Umawiyya,” he said, “Hind bint Asmā’ ibn Khārija al-Fazāriyya, and Hind bint al-Muhallab ibn Abī Ṣufra al-‘Atakiyya.” “The Qaysiyya one is my favorite,” Laylā said. On the next day, she came to see him. “Give her five hundred,” al-Ḥajjāj ordered. “Five hundred white camels, I presume,” she said. “He rather ordered sheep for you,” someone said. “The prince is more generous than that,” she quickly added. Being ashamed, al-Ḥajjāj agreed to give her camels although he had first ordered sheep for her.

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# THE BOOK OF THE NACRE

## On delegations

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### Introduction to the Book of Delegations

Jurist and theologian Abū ʿUmar Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd Rabbih said:

We have spoken about generous men and liberal givers of different ranks and social positions, about their usual behavior, and about the beautiful manners and good deeds they graced themselves with. We will now speak – God helping us and providing success – about the delegations who came to the Prophet, God bless him and give him peace, and about those who came to caliphs and kings. For these were occasions of excellence and scenes of celebration, in which spoken words were well chosen and weighty ideas well thought out. A person delegated to represent his people must be their chief and leader. From his power they draw guidance; from his opinion they derive a sense of direction. For he is a single person equivalent to an entire tribe, a tongue who speaks for many tongues. What would you think of a delegate representing his people and speaking in the presence of the Prophet, God bless him and give him peace, or in the presence of his caliph or a powerful king, about a matter he desires or an issue he fears? At one point he vigorously asserts the position of his people; at another he is cautious of the person he faces. Do you think he spares any means to achieve wise results or keeps to himself any unusual trait of his intelligence? Do you think his people would have given him the undertaking of representing them unless he was in their view extremely clever and articulate, the embodiment of poetic expression and oratory? Don't you see that Qays ibn ʿĀṣim al-Minqarī spread his cloak wide open when he was delegated to speak to the Prophet, God bless him and grant him peace, and said, “This is the chieftain [of the people] of camel-hair [tents]”? When Qays ibn ʿĀṣim died, a poet said about him:

Qays ibn ʿĀṣim: God's peace be on you and His mercy,  
However long He wishes to have mercy on you.  
Greetings from one on whom you bestowed your favors.  
Visiting your country from a distant place, he greets you.  
The death of Qays has not been the death of one person,  
But rather the collapse of the structure of a whole people.

### Arab delegations to Chosroes

Quoting al-Kalbī, Ibn al-Qiṭāmi said:

When al-Nuʿmān ibn al-Mundhir came to Chosroes, the delegations of the Byzantines, the Indians, and the Chinese were all present. They mentioned their

kings and countries. So al-Nu‘mān boasted of the Arabs and preferred them to all the nations, not excluding the Persians and others. “O Nu‘mān,” Chosroes said, being elated by the power of kingship, “I have considered the Arabs and other nations, and I have looked into the condition of their delegations that come to me. I have found that the Byzantines have a high degree of unity, great power, many cities, and strong buildings; they also have a religion that clarifies what is permitted and what is forbidden, and restrains the shameless and corrects the ignorant. I have found that the Indians are similar in that they have wisdom and medicine, many rivers and fruits in their country, wondrous arts and crafts, good trees, meticulous arithmetic, and large numbers of people. Likewise, I have found the Chinese to have unity, many handicrafts for making war equipment and iron products, horsemanship, high-aiming ambition; and they have a king who unites them. The Turks and Khazars, despite their bad living conditions, the paucity of their cultivated lands, fruits, and fortresses, and the scantiness of their housing and clothing (both of which are chief products of civilization) – have kings who bring together their farthest people and manage their affairs. But I have not detected in the Arabs any good qualities regarding matters of religion and the world, and issues of determination and strength. Furthermore, their degradation, ignominy, and low-mindedness are indicated by their living among wild beasts and stray birds. They kill their children because of poverty, and eat one another out of need. They have no part of the world’s foods, clothes, drinks, entertainment, and pleasures. The best food that the most luxurious among them can attain is camel meat, which disgusts [even] many animals because it is heavy [to digest], has a bad taste, and is feared to cause illness. If an Arab entertains a guest hospitably, he considers his act a noble deed; if he is treated to a meal, he deems it a gain. Arab poems speak of that, and Arabs boast of it – except for that Tanūkhī woman whose regime my grandfather established, whose kingdom he strengthened, and whom he defended against her enemies. Her state has continued to this day; now she has monuments, clothing, villages, fortresses, and other things resembling those of some other people” (by which he meant Yemen). “Yet I see that you don’t submit to your state of humiliation, your lack, poverty, and misery, but rather boast and claim a position above the ranks of all people.”

“May God mend the king’s ways,” al-Nu‘mān said. “It is only right that a nation, of whom the king is a member, should have high merit, great importance, and elevated rank. However, I have a response to everything that the king spoke of, without refuting it or considering it fallacious. If he promises that I will be safe from his anger, I will say it.”

“Speak,” Chosroes said, “for you will be safe.”

“Your nation, O king,” al-Nu‘mān began, “is unequalled in merit because of its men of intellect and wisdom, its extended dominion, its prosperous power, and its God-endowed governance by your forefathers and yourself. As for the nations you have mentioned, there is no one of them that cannot be surpassed by the Arabs in any comparison.”

“Surpassed in what?” Chosroes asked.

“In their power and invincibility, in the beauty of their faces, in their courage and generosity, in the wisdom of their speech, in the strength of their intellects, and in their pride and faithfulness.

“As for their power and invincibility, the Arabs have always been neighbors of your forefathers who had conquered several countries, established kingship, and led armies, yet no one ever coveted dominating the Arabs or harming them. Their fortresses are the backs of their horses, their beds are the earth, their roofs are the sky, their shields are their swords, and their equipment is their patience, while the power of other nations consists in stones, clay, and islands in the seas.

“As for the beauty and color of their faces, their superiority over the slender Indians and Chinese, the ugly Turks, and the shaved off Byzantines is well known.

“As for their genealogies and noble descent, all other nations do not know their forefathers, their roots, and their many ancestors. If any of them is asked who is historically earlier than his own father, he does not know and cannot trace his ancestry. On the other hand, there is no Arab who cannot name his forefathers, one by one in succession. Arabs have maintained their noble descent and preserved their genealogies. Thus no man belongs to any but his own kinsfolk. He never relates himself to anyone but his own noble descent, and he is not ascribed to anyone but his own father.

“As for their generosity, the least of them has a young she-camel and an old one that constitute his sufficiency for purposes of carrying, riding, eating, and drinking. A night visitor might be content with a little piece of meat and satisfied with a single drink, but his Arab host will kill the she-camel for him and will be happy to give away all his worldly possessions in order to gain praise and good repute.

“As for the wisdom of their speech, God Most High has given the Arabs [qualities] in their poetry, in the beauty of their language, its rhythms and rhymes, in addition to their knowledge of things and their ability to quote proverbs and offer eloquent descriptions, that no one of the other peoples' languages possess. Furthermore, Arabian horses are the best, Arab women are the most chaste, and Arab clothes are the most excellent. Arab metals are gold and silver, and the stones of their mountains are marbled and veined. Their mounts are unequalled for travelers who need to reach anywhere and to traverse a desert land.

“As for their religion and religious law, the Arabs cling to them. Their religious rituals require that they have sacred months, a sacred city, a shrine to which they go on pilgrimage and in which they perform religious rites and kill their sacrifices. Moreover, a man might meet the murderer of his own father or brother and be able to take vengeance on him and achieve his desire to kill him, but his magnanimity would prevent him, and his religion would restrain him from doing him any harm.

“As for their faithfulness, any one of them may just give a look and make a gesture, and that will be his promise and the bond that will not be broken by him

until he gives up the ghost. If any one of them just picks up a twig from the ground, that will be a pledge of his indebtedness; it will not be repudiated, nor will his liability be dishonored. Any one of them may learn that a man has sought his protection even when he was away from home; if the man is harmed, he [as protector] will not be satisfied until he does away with the tribe that has harmed the man or until his own tribe perishes [in fighting] because his protection of the man has been dishonored. A criminal evil-doer may seek refuge with them without former acquaintance or without being related by a blood relationship to them; they will still defend him with their souls and shield his possessions with their own.

“As for your statement, O king, that they bury their children alive, this is only done with females lest they bring shame to them, and also out of jealousy for [future] husbands.

“As for your statement that their best food is camel meat as you described, it is only out of scorn that they have turned their back on what is inferior, preferring to resort to what is better and more splendid. Camels are thus their mounts as well as their food; all in the knowledge that – among all animals – camels have the most abundant fat, the most delicious meat, and the most delicate milk, and that their meat is the least harmful [to health] and the sweetest to chew, and that no other meat is as good when similarly cooked.

“Regarding their fighting with one another, their mutual destruction, and [as a consequence] their abandonment of leadership to one man who might rule and unite them, this is done by nations when they feel weak and are afraid of the enemy’s inroads against them. In every great kingdom, there is usually one family whose superiority over others is known; as a result, people give members of that family the reins of power and let them run their affairs. This is common among the Arabs to an extent that they have all tried to be kings because they dislike paying taxes and being chased by coercive tyranny.

“Concerning Yemen, which the king has described, its ruler came to the king’s grandfather when the Abyssinians had conquered the latter’s organized domain and unified regime. Having been dispossessed and chased out, he came to the king seeking help, but he was not given refuge. What he had constructed was belittled. If it were not for the nearby Arabs who had clung to him deceptively, he would have gone elsewhere and found people who were skilled in fighting and would rise to help free men against the risk of conquest by evil slaves.”

Chosroes was amazed at al-Nuṣmān’s response. “You are fully worthy of your position of leadership among the people of your region,” he said, “and you even deserve something better.” He then gave him a suit from his own [royal] clothing and let him return to his place at al-Ḥīra.

When al-Nuṣmān reached al-Ḥīra, his mind teeming with the scathing disparagement of the Arabs he had heard from Chosroes, he sent for the two Tamimites, Aktham ibn Ṣayfi and Ḥājib ibn Zurāra, the two Bakrites al-Ḥārith ibn ʿUbād and Qays ibn Masʿūd, as well as for Khālid ibn Jaʿfar, the two ʿĀmirites

‘Alqama ibn ‘Ulātha and ‘Āmir ibn al-Ṭufayl, ‘Amr ibn al-Sharīd al-Sulamī, ‘Amr ibn Ma‘dīkarib al-Zubaydī, and al-Ḥārith ibn Zālim al-Murri. They all came to [his palace] al-Khawarnaq. “You’ve known these Persians,” he told them, “and their close quarters as neighbors of the Arabs. I’ve just heard statements from Chosroes which aroused fears in me and may have deep consequences. He may have expressed them with a purpose in mind, namely to turn the Arabs into slaves as he has done to some of his own barbarians who now pay him taxes, and just as he has forced the kings of the nations surrounding him to do.”

He then related to them Chosroes’s statement and the responses he [al-Nu‘mān] had made. “May God give you prosperity, O king,” they said. “How beautiful your responses were and how eloquent your arguments! Give us your orders, and command us to do what you wish.”

“I’m only one of you,” he said. “With your support, I’ve ruled and become strong, and I’ve cared for your interests. There’s nothing dearer to me than what God has set straight for you, something that has made your affairs prosper and your strength endure. I think that you should go to Chosroes as a group. When you enter, every one of you should say what comes to his mind, so that Chosroes may learn that the Arabs are not what he has thought or imagined. None of you should say anything to annoy him; he is a king of great power and has many helpers. He lives in luxury and is conceited. But don’t humiliate yourselves to him like abject subalterns. Let this be an occasion for you when the wisdom of your minds, the superiority of your positions, and the weightiness of your importance will all be evident. Let Aktham ibn Ṣayfi be the first one to speak, because of his high rank; then follow him in the succession of ranks I’ve put you in. What has made me prioritize you is my knowledge that each of you is inclined to attempt to precede his friend. Let this never happen, for Chosroes will use it as a pretext to discredit your manners. Remember, he is a luxurious, capable, and powerful king.”

He then ordered a variety of royal garments for them from his wardrobe and gave each man a suit, a turban, and a ring with a ruby. He also ordered that each of them be given a mare and filly of noble breed. He penned the following letter for them to be carried with them:

After greetings, I refer to what the king told me about the Arabs and to the response I gave him. I hope he has understood what I wanted him to know, so that he would have no doubt in his mind about any of the nearby nations in their kingdoms that are independent of him and protect their land with their own forces. They have reached this state by all the means utilized by people of determination, power, organization, and shrewdness. O king, I am hereby sending you a deputation, consisting of a group of Arabs who are meritorious because of their noble descent, lineage, intellects, and manners. The king should listen to them and overlook any harshness that may be evident in their speech. Let him honor me by honoring them and expediting their dismissal. At the end of this letter, I have appended their relationship to their clans.

The men left in their [new] outfits. When they reached the palace of Chosroes in al-Madāʿin (Ctesiphon), they gave him al-Nuʿmān's letter. He read it and ordered that they be given accommodation until he held a session to listen to them. A few days later, he commanded his chiefs and the notables of his kingdom to attend. When they came, they all sat on chairs on his right and on his left. He then invited the men of the Arab delegation in succession and according to the prioritized ranks that al-Nuʿmān had indicated in his letter. He asked the interpreter to stand and be ready to translate their speeches to him, and then permitted them to speak.

Aktham ibn Ṣayfī stood up. "The best of things," he said, "are their loftiest parts. The highest of men are their kings, the best of kings are those with the widest benefits, the best of times are the most fertile ones, and the best of orators are the most truthful. Telling the truth leads to safety, telling lies leads to decline, and being disputatious leads to evil. Resoluteness is a difficult *modus vivendi*, while vacillation is an easy one. Sound opinion is impaired by passionate judgment, weakness is the key to poverty, and the best of all things is fortitude. Thinking well of others causes trouble and thinking ill of them leads to infallibility. Reforming a corrupt flock is better than reforming a corrupt shepherd. Whoever has a bad entourage is like someone choking on water. The worst of countries is one without a ruler. The worst of kings is the one who is feared by the innocent. It is man who fails, not the stratagem. The best of children are those who are dutiful; the best of helpers are those who are not hypocritical when giving advice. Soldiers who deserve victory most are those with good intentions. Sufficient travel provisions are those that make you reach your destination, and sufficient evil is your mere hearing of it. Silence is wisdom but few keep it. Eloquence consists in brevity. Whoever demands emphatically alienates others, while whoever is flexible wins them over."

Chosroes was amazed at Aktham. "Woe unto you, Aktham!" he said. "How wise you are! And how true are your words, except that you have used them in an improper situation!"

"Telling the truth," Aktham said, "is what informs others about you, not making threats."

"If the Arabs had no one but you," Chosroes added, "that would be sufficient."

"Many a word is more effective than a full attack," Aktham concluded.

Hājib ibn Zurāra then stood up. "Your flintstone has struck fire," he said. "Your power is supreme, and your rule feared. The Arabs are a nation with big hearts and enmeshed power, and they can protect themselves. They love you so long as you befriend them; they are at ease with you so long as you treat them kindly; and they are obedient to you so long as you show yourself tolerant towards them. They are as bitter as colocynth, yet as tender as rain clouds, as sweet as honey, and as smooth as pure water. We are their delegates to you and their spokesmen in your presence. We keep our word and defend our honorable descent; our clans listen to us and obey us. If we return to them praising you, that

will be a general commendation from all of us; but if we blame you, we will not be alone in doing so for they will not be excluded.”

“O Ḥājib,” Chosroes exclaimed. “How similar the stones of the hills are to the color of their rocks!”

“Rather,” Ḥājib added, “how similar the roar of the lions is to their forceful attack!”

“And that, too,” Chosroes agreed.

Then al-Ḥārith ibn ‘Ubād al-Bakrī stood up. “May your kingdom endure in perfect great fortune and high praise,” he said. “Whoever has a long rope will draw much water from the well; whoever has lost his wealth will give fewer gifts. Reports passing from person to person enlighten the mind. Here we have a situation in which what is being said will be quickly reported by caravans, and the Arabs and Persians will know our situation. We are the nearest of your neighbors and also your helpers who will assist you. Our horses are numerous and our armies imposing. If you seek our help, we are not ones to linger; if you need us for an action, we will not disappoint you; and if you require us, you will not find us asleep. We do not retreat out of fear, nor will we be alienated from anyone because of the vicissitudes of time. Our spears are long, and our lifetimes are short.”

“Dignified individuals,” Chosroes commented, “but a weak nation, by God.”

“O king,” al-Ḥārith remarked. “How can a weak person have dignity or a lowly person have power?”

“If your lifetime were short,” Chosroes answered, “your natural inclination would not have taken control of your tongue.”

“O king,” al-Ḥārith continued. “If a horseman attacks a squadron and puts himself in danger, it is death that he confronts and life that he leaves behind. The Arabs know that I can both start a war and stop it even when it is in full swing. When its fire is kindled, its flames are hot, and its flares burst violently into life, I make my spear its bridle, my sword its lightning, and my roar its thunder. I am not slow to wade through its deep water; rather I plunge into its rolling waves and become a ship leading my horsemen to its leader. I make it rain blood and abandon its defenders as carrion for wild beasts and old eagles.”

“Is he truly so?” Chosroes asked some Arabs who were present.

“His deeds are more eloquent than his words,” they said.

“Never before today,” Chosroes said, “have I seen a delegation that is as focused, and witnesses who are as eloquent envoys as these.”

‘Amr ibn al-Sharīd al-Sulamī then stood up. “O king!” he said. “May your mind be happy and your state endure in felicity. The consequences of speech should be pondered and the forms of things to come should be reckoned. Too many words cause surfeit, while a few result in satisfaction. Kings possess the power of high rank. This is a speech with a consequence. Through it some will achieve honor, others will remain undistinguished. We have not come here to wrong you, we have not traveled as envoys to cause you anger, nor have we

presented ourselves to you to be granted gifts. In our wealth, we have sufficiency; and on our strength, we can depend. If we kindle a fire, we make it burn. If Time leads us astray, we set ourselves straight. However, we retain a neighborly attitude toward you and are ready to fight against anyone who wants to harm you. As a result we will fulfill our mission with praise, and the event will be spoken well of.”

“Your brief speech,” Chosroes said, “does not stand up to your excess, nor does your praise to your blame.”

“Let my brief speech be an indication, and my little excess a source of information. Anyone who edges away from what he knows and is content with brevity will never be blamed.”

“Not everything that one knows should be said,” Chosroes said. “Sit down.”

Then Khālid ibn Ja‘far al-Kilābi stood up. “May God bring happiness to the king as well as guidance,” he said. “Every speech has a right occasion, and every need has an associated agony. The incapability of expressing oneself is more stressful than the inability to keep silence; stumbling over words is worse than stumbling in a plain with soft muddy ground. In our view, the right occasion for speech is when we can say what we like; the agony of saying what we don’t like is not palatable. To abandon saying what I know about myself and what my listeners know I am capable of is preferable to me rather than reluctantly constraining myself to say what I fear and what others fear of me. Our king al-Nu‘mān has sent us to you, he being among the best of those who would be able to help you and the worthiest of those who feel a sense of friendliness and kindness toward you. We obey you and dutifully offer you advice, and we pledge we are faithful to you.”

“You have spoken with reason,” Chosroes responded. “Virtue has made you rise, and nobility has allowed you to soar.”

Then ‘Alqama ibn ‘Ulātha al-‘Āmirī stood up. “The paths of right guidance have been made clear to you,” he said, “and human beings have submitted to you. Speech has many modes, ideas have many approaches, and difficulties have many outlets. The best speech is the truest; the best request is the most successful. Even though love for you has brought us here and your kind hospitality has made us closer, we who have attended are no better than those of our people who are absent. If you were to evaluate each of them and know what we know, you would find he has among his nearest forefathers men equal to us. Each of them is associated with virtue, qualified with honor and supremacy, and known for good opinions and accepted behavior. Each protects his homeland, quenches the thirst of his wine companions, and fights against his enemies. His fire [cooking food for his guests] is never extinguished, and his neighbor never need be wary of him. O king! Whoever tests the Arabs recognizes their virtue. Therefore, adopt the Arabs as your friends; for in strength they are like firmly established mountains; like rising seas in the surge of their abundance; like shining stars with regard to their high honor; and like pebbles in their great numbers. If you

acknowledge their virtue, they will strengthen you; if you seek their help, they will not disappoint you.”

Afraid that ‘Alqama might say something that would arouse his ire, Chosroes said, “That is enough. You have made your point and spoken well.”

Then Qays ibn Mas‘ūd al-Shaybānī stood up. “May God make you a good source of mature reason,” he said. “May He ward off calamities from you and protect you against difficulties. Having come to you, we are entitled to let you hear things that will not aggravate you or plant in your heart seeds of resentment against us. O king, we have not come here to vie with you for superiority, nor have we traced our ancestry to compete with you, but only so that you, your subjects, and the attending delegations of other nations may know that we neither flinch from eloquent speech, nor are we incapable of deeds of courage. If others challenge us to a race, we will not be outpaced; if they vie with us for superiority, we will not be overcome.”

“But when you make a treaty, you do not keep it,” Chosroes said, hinting at Qays’s unfaithfulness as guarantor of [the allegiance of] the Sawād [region of rural Iraq].

“O king,” Qays replied. “In that matter, I was only behaving like a faithful person who has been betrayed or a protector whose covenant of protection has been perfidiously dishonored by others.”

“A weak person cannot give a guaranty,” Chosroes commented, “and a lowly person cannot offer protection.”

“O king,” Qays retorted. “In my covenant of protection that was perfidiously dishonored, I was not more blameworthy than you were in events leading to the killing of your subjects and the violation of your royal reverence.”

“That is because,” Chosroes explained, “whoever trusts traitors and seeks the help of criminals will fall into the error that I fell into – but not all people are equal. What do you think of Ḥājib ibn Zurāra? He consolidates his strength and settles matters conclusively. When he makes a pledge, he honors it; when he makes a promise, he keeps it.”

“How worthy he is of that!” Qays commented. “He is my kind of man.”

“People are like old camels,” Chosroes retorted. “The best are the strongest.”

Then ‘Āmir ibn al-Ṭufayl al-‘Āmirī stood up. “There are many kinds of speech,” he said, “yet the confusion of words is more blinding than the darkness of night. Real pride resides in deeds, real strength in readiness to help, and real dominion in complying with power. How well do you know our power, and how well do you comprehend our merit? Or rather, if the coming days will give us the upper hand and discerning minds will return to us, things will happen that will bring banners of renown.”

“And what are those banners of renown?” asked Chosroes.

“The union of the tribes of Rabī‘a and Muḍar,” ‘Āmir said, “in order to undertake a matter of moment.”

“And what is this matter of moment?”

“I have no knowledge beyond what I was told by an informant.”

“Since when have you been a soothsayer, Ibn al-Ṭufayl?” Chosroes asked.

“I am not a soothsayer,” Āmir replied. “I am rather someone ready to thrust at others with my spear.”

“What will you do,” Chosroes asked, “if someone attacks you from the side of your blind eye?”

“My back is no less fear-inspiring than my front,” Āmir replied. “What took away my eye was not evil-doing but compliance with it.”

Then Āmr ibn Maḍikarib al-Zubaydī stood up. “The value of a man,” he said, “is known by the two smallest parts of his body: his heart and his tongue. The aim of speech is truth. The search for food is based on exploration. Spontaneous opinion is better than forced thinking. Hesitation born of experience is better than aberration caused by perplexity. So attract our obedience through your words, tolerate our initiative with your patience, and treat us kindly – you will find us amenable. We are a people whose smooth rock has not been scratched by the tapping beaks of those who wanted to crunch us. We have protected our homeland against all those who have desired to do us harm.”

Then al-Ḥārith ibn Zālim al-Murrī stood up. “Lying is the bane of speech,” he said, “hypocrisy is an aspect of bad manners, and the frivolity of a powerful king is a result of stupidity. If we tell you that our encounter with you today is based on mutual agreement and our compliance is the result of reciprocal concord, you are not likely to accept that from us and not entitled to depend on it. But it is a duty to be faithful to agreements and to fulfill conditions of contracts. Matters between you and us are in order, unless some disinclination or error occurs on your part.”

“Who are you?” Chosroes asked.

“Al-Ḥārith ibn Zālim,” al-Ḥārith answered.

“In the names of your forefathers,” said Chosroes, “there is a sign of your lack of faithfulness, your proneness to treachery, and your closeness to crime.”

“Telling the truth can be a cause for anger,” al-Ḥārith said. “Honorable manliness consists in feigning inattention. No one deserves to be called clement unless he is powerful, so let your deeds resemble your council [manners].”

“This is the people’s young man,” declared Chosroes.

Then he said, “I have understood what your orators have said and what your speakers have stated in artful detail. If I had not known that good manners have not smoothed your roughness or perfected your character, and that you have no king to gather you together so you can speak in his presence like obedient subjects – and that is why you have spoken [in my presence] in accordance with the emotions that seized your tongues and suited your habits – I would not have permitted you to say much of what you have already said. I don’t like to have a confrontation with my delegations and make them angry. What I prefer is to reform your renegades, conciliate the anomalous persons among you, and let God excuse what has happened between you and me. I have accepted what truth

there has been in your speeches, and I have forgiven what error they have contained. Go back to your king, support him well, commit yourselves to obeying him, deter the foolish ones among you, reform their attitudes, and teach them good manners. For in that is the good of the general public.”

### Ḥājib ibn Zurāra’s coming to Chosroes

Al-ʿUtbi said, based on the authority of his father, that Ḥājib ibn Zurāra came to Chosroes when the latter had forbidden the tribe of Tamīm to enter the countryside of Iraq. He sought permission to see Chosroes, but the latter sent him word.

“Are you the chieftain of the Arabs?” he asked. “No,” Ḥājib replied.

“The chieftain of Muḍar, then?” “No,” Ḥājib replied.

“Are you then the senior of your father’s sons?” “No,” he replied.

With that Chosroes permitted him to enter. “So who are you?” he demanded. “The chieftain of the Arabs,” Ḥājib replied. Chosroes inquired, “Didn’t I ask whether you were the chieftain of the Arabs, and you said no; I then limited you to being the senior of your father’s sons, and you still said no?” “O king,” Ḥājib said, “I was not so until I entered your presence. When I did, I became the chieftain of the Arabs.” “Zih!” Chosroes exclaimed in admiration, and said, “Fill his mouth with pearls.” He then added, “You Arabs are treacherous. If I permit you [to enter], you will destroy the country, launch raids on the population, and do me harm.”

“I guarantee to the king,” Ḥājib said, “that they will not.”

“How am I to be sure that you will be faithful yourself?” Chosroes asked. “I will deposit my bow as security with you,” Ḥājib assured him. When he brought it to the king, all those around him laughed. “Will he be faithful for the sake of this stick?” they scoffed. “He has never given it up for anything,” explained Chosroes, then he took the bow from him and permitted the Arabs to enter the countryside.

When Ḥājib ibn Zurāra died, his son, ʿUṭārid ibn Ḥājib, went to Chosroes and asked for his father’s bow. “You were not the one who mortgaged it!” Chosroes objected. “That’s true,” ʿUṭārid agreed. “What happened to him?” Chosroes asked. “He has died,” ʿUṭārid explained, “and he is my father. His people lived up to their agreement with him, and he to his agreement with the king.” So Chosroes returned the bow to him and awarded him a suit.

When ʿUṭārid, as chieftain of the tribe of Tamīm, came to the Prophet, God bless him and give him peace, and became Muslim at his hands, he gave the bow to the Prophet, God bless him and give him peace. The latter did not accept it, so ʿUṭārid sold it to a Jew for four thousand dirhams.

Then the tribe of Muḍar came to the Prophet, God bless him and give him peace. “Messenger of God,” they said, “your people have perished and were devoured by the hyena.” They meant they died of famine, for the Arabs called the year [of famine] the hyena and the wolf. Jarīr said:

... One who was driven by the barren year and the wolf.

So the Prophet, God bless him and give him peace, invoked God on their behalf, and they were reinvigorated. He had earlier invoked God against them with the words, “O God, bear down heavily on Muḍar and send them [lean] years like Joseph’s years.”

### Abū Sufyān’s coming to Chosroes

Al-Aṣmaʿī said:

‘Abd Allāh ibn Dīnār related to us the following on the authority of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Bakr al-Murri:

Abū Sufyān said, “I gave Chosroes a gift of horses and skins. He accepted the horses but returned the skins. When I was permitted to enter his presence, I saw that his face was as though it were two faces, because of his grandeur. He gave me a cushion he had. ‘O my hunger!’ I said [to myself]. ‘Is this my portion from Chosroes, son of Hurmuz?’ I left, but whenever I passed by any of his servants, he regarded it as a huge gift. When it was given to the treasurer, he gave me eight hundred vases of silver and gold for it.”

Al-Aṣmaʿī said, “I related this story to the Persian Nawshajān. ‘The value of the cushion was one thousand,’ he said, ‘but the treasurer reduced the amount by two hundred.’”

### Ḥassān ibn Thābit’s coming to al-Nuʿmān ibn al-Mundhir

He [al-Aṣmaʿī] said:

Ḥassān ibn Thābit came to see al-Nuʿmān ibn al-Mundhir. He reported the following, “I met a man on the way and he asked me, ‘Where are you going?’ I said, ‘To this king.’ ‘When you reach his court,’ he said, ‘you’ll be kept waiting for one month, then you’ll be left to wait for one month more. Then perhaps he’ll permit you to see him. When you do, and if he likes you, you’ll receive much good from him. However, if you see Abū Umāma al-Nābigha there, leave; for you’ll receive nothing.’ So I came to al-Nuʿmān, and he treated me exactly as the man had said. Finally I was permitted to see him and received a lot of money and drank wine with him. While I was with him, a man was heard reciting verses in the *rajaz* meter and going around the pavilion, saying:

Has the lord of the pavilion slept or does he hear me?  
O most generous giver of strong, sturdy she-camels  
Which shoo flies with their large lips  
And have a loud bellow and wrenching front paws.

“‘This is Abū Umāma,’ al-Nuʿmān said. ‘Let him in.’ Abū Umāma entered, greeted al-Nuʿmān, and drank with him. Then the black camels arrived. No one of the Arabs had black camels except al-Nuʿmān, and no one ever used a black

stud. Al-Nābigha then asked permission to recite a poem. When he was given permission, he recited his poem in which he says:

You are a sun and the other kings are stars.  
When you shine, no star of them is visible.

“Al-Nu‘mān ordered that he be given one hundred black camels with their shepherds. I have never envied anyone as much as I envied him for his poetry and his enormous gift.”

### Quraysh’s coming to Sayf ibn Dhī Yazan after he killed the Abyssinians

Na‘īm ibn Ḥammād said:

‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Mubārak related the following to us on the authority of Sufyān al-Thawrī:

Ibn ‘Abbās said, “When Sayf ibn Dhī Yazan defeated the Abyssinians – and that was after the birth of the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace – delegations of the Arabs, their noble men, and their poets came to see him in order to congratulate him, praise him, and glory in the mention of his brave, goodly fight to avenge his people. The delegation of Quraysh who came included ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib ibn Hāshim, Umayya ibn ‘Abd Shams, Asad ibn al-‘Uzzā, and ‘Abd Allāh ibn Jud‘ān. They came to him as he was in one of his palaces called Ghumdān, and it was about him that Abū al-Ṣalt, the father of Umayya ibn Abi al-Ṣalt, said:

Nobody has ever taken vengeance like Ibn Dhī Yazan.  
He braved the waves of the sea, pursuing his enemies for years.  
He came to Heraclius, who was angry and proud of his strength,  
But he did not find him to be what he had said he was.  
He then turned toward Chosroes after the ninth  
Year – you have indeed taken a very long time –  
Leading the sons of the free and bringing them along –  
You have, by my life, hurried and made haste.  
Who is like Chosroes and Bahram with their soldiers?  
Who is like Wahriz on a day when the army is on the move?  
What an excellent group they are, when they go out [to fight]!  
We have not seen the equals of them among people.  
Lords and masters, white and honorable,  
They are lions who grew up as cubs in the jungles.  
You have sent lions after black dogs and,  
In their defeat, you have rubbed their faces in the dust.  
Drink happily, may you permanently wear the crown  
In the high palace of Ghumdān, suited for your long residence.  
And as they disperse or die, daub yourself with musk  
And let your cloak today flow freely.

These are honorable deeds, not two cups of milk  
Mixed with water and becoming like urine.

“The Quraysh delegation sought permission, and were allowed to see Sayf ibn Dhī Yazan. They entered and found that he had perfumed himself with ambergris; musk was shining brightly at the parting of his hair. He had two green cloaks on; one he was wearing and the other he had wrapped around his waist. His sword was in front of him, and to his right and left were kings as well as kings’ sons and princes.

“‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib asked him for permission to speak. ‘Speak,’ he was told, so ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib said, ‘O king, God Most High has put you in a high place, impregnable and protected, elevated and proud. He has made you grow from a good family tree, with powerful and noble roots and lofty branches. He has made it thrive in the most honorable place and the most excellent homeland. May you remain above reproach! You are the head of the Arabs, their springtime which makes them fertile, their king by whom they are led, their pillar on which they depend, and their stronghold in which they take refuge. Your ancestors are the best forefathers, and after them you are the best descendant for us. Those of whom you are the successor will never die, nor will those of whom you are the predecessor be obscure. O king, we are the people of God’s sanctuary and covenant, and the guardians of His house [in Mecca]. We have been sent to you by the One who has designated you to relieve the distress that has burdened us. We are the delegation of congratulation, not the delegations of calamity.’

“‘Who are you, speaker?’ asked Sayf ibn Dhī Yazan.

“‘I am ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib ibn Hāshim,’ he said.

“‘Son of our sister?’ Sayf asked.

“‘Yes,’ ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib agreed.

“So Sayf ibn Dhī Yazan brought him closer to him and opened his heart to him and his people. ‘Welcome,’ he said. ‘You’ve come to your family, with your camels and baggage; you’ve arrived at a plain where you can halt for a rest; you’ve reached a great king who gives abundantly.’ And his words became proverbial [as expressions of welcome].

“The first thing he said next was, ‘The king has listened to what you have said. He is cognizant of your kinship and has accepted your request. You are a people of high honor and fame. To you we offer close relationship for as long as you stay, and gifts when you leave.’

“Then they were asked to rise and go to the house of hospitality and delegations, where they were offered food as guests. They remained for a whole month at Sayf’s gate, unable to reach him and not permitted to go back home [to Mecca]. Then Sayf ibn Dhī Yazan paid attention to them and summoned ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib alone for a private meeting [with him]. He placed him close to him and said, ‘O ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, I will divulge a secret to you from my knowledge, which I would never disclose to anyone else. I have found you worthy of it, so I will reveal it to you. Let it be kept privy until God permits it to be known, for God

will reach His goal. In the stored knowledge and the concealed book that we have kept to ourselves and have hidden from everyone else, I have found a great piece of news of immense importance, in which abide the honor of life and the virtue of death for all people, for your group generally, and for yourself in particular.’

“‘Someone like you, O king,’ said ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, ‘is one who is truthful, who pleases and gives good news. What is the secret? May the bedouins be your ransom, group after group!’

“‘When a baby boy is born in Tihāma,’ Ibn Dhī Yazan said, ‘with a mole between his shoulders, religious leadership will be his unto the Day of Resurrection.’

“‘May you be above reproach,’ ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib said. ‘I will return home with the best news any homecoming person ever had. If it were not for my deep respect for you, I would dare ask you to give me details of the good news, so that my joy would increase.’

“‘This is the time in which he is to be born or has been born,’ Ibn Dhī Yazan explained. ‘His father and mother will die, and his grandfather and uncle will support him. We found this about him over many generations of forefathers. God will send him [as a Prophet] publicly and will make us his helpers, by whom He will strengthen His saints and subjugate his enemies. He will conquer the best countries of the earth and rule people with power; he will extinguish fires, break idols, and worship the Merciful. His speech will be right and decisive, and his command will be determined and just. He will order what is good and do it; he will forbid what is evil and invalidate it.’

“‘May God give you long life,’ ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib said, ‘and may your kingship last, your good fortune be high, and your pride be glorious. Will the king make me rejoice by clarifying his speech a little?’

“‘By the House that has tent ropes, symbols, and idols,’ Ibn Dhī Yazan swore. ‘You – ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib – are indeed his grandfather, and I am not lying.’

“‘Thereupon ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib sank to the ground in prostration.

“‘Raise your head,’ Ibn Dhī Yazan said. ‘May your heart be delighted and may your situation be elevated. Have you ever sensed what I have just mentioned to you?’

“‘O king,’ ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib said. ‘I had a son whom I loved, and toward whom I was tender and compassionate. I married him to an honorable woman of his people who was called Āmina bint Wahb ibn ‘Abd Manāf, and she gave birth to a boy with a mole between his shoulders, and he has all the signs you mentioned. His father and mother died, and I and his uncle now support him.’

“‘What I told you is as I had said. Take care of your son, and beware of the Jews for they are his enemies, but God will not let them have their way. Keep what I have told you from the group who are with you, for I feel uneasy in view of a possibility that jealousy may motivate them to oppose your having the leadership. They and their sons may then seek to ruin him and will set up traps to snare him. Had I not known that death would take me before the beginning of

his mission, I would have marched with my cavalry and infantry to Yathrib, the town to which he will emigrate. For I have read in the eloquent book of ancient knowledge that Yathrib will be the town of his migration and the haven of his support. Were I not afraid that harm might befall him and wary in case physical dangers might befall him, I would have announced his mission despite his young age and made the Arabs follow him. But I am leaving that to you, without any neglect on my part of those who are with you.’

“Then he commanded that every man of them be given ten male slaves, ten black bond-maids, five rotls of silver, two Yemeni suits, and a flask of ambergris. He also ordered that ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib be given ten times that. ‘At the end of one year,’ he told ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, ‘let me know what is happening to his mission.’

“At the end of the year, Ibn Dhī Yazan died. ‘People of Quraysh.’ ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib ibn Hishām used to say, ‘let no man among you envy me for the abundance of the king’s gift to me, for it will come to an end. But let him envy me for the remembrance that will remain for me for ever and the pride that will abide for my descendants.’ When he was asked, ‘And what is that?’, he would only say, ‘It will come to light after a while.’”

### ‘Abd al-Masiḥ’s coming to Saṭīḥ

Jarīr ibn Ḥāzīm reported on the authority of ‘Ikrima, who took the information from Ibn ‘Abbās:

“On the night when the Prophet was born, may God bless him and grant him peace, the palace of Chosroes shook and fourteen of its balconies collapsed. For the people of his kingdom, this event was ominously weighty. Soon afterward the governor of Yemen wrote to him informing him that Lake Sāwa had dwindled away that night. The governor of al-Samāwa wrote informing him that the stream in Wadi al-Samāwa had dried up that night. The governor of Tiberias reported that water had stopped running into Lake Tiberias that night, and the governor of Pars wrote that the fire in the Fire Temples had gone out that night, not having gone out for a thousand years before that. After the letters had arrived in succession, Chosroes brought out his throne, appeared publicly to the people of his kingdom, and informed them of the news. Al-Mūbadhān [the Magian prelate], said, ‘O king. That night, I saw a vision which frightened me.’ ‘What did you see?’ Chosroes asked. ‘I saw headstrong camels leading noble Arabian horses, and they invaded the Tigris and spread out in our country.’ ‘You’ve seen something prodigious,’ Chosroes said. ‘What is your interpretation of it?’ ‘I have no idea, and I do not have any interpretation of it,’ said al-Mūbadhān. ‘Send word to your agent in al-Ḥira and ask him to send you one of their learned men, for they are people who have knowledge of portents.’ The agent sent him ‘Abd al-Masiḥ ibn Nufayla al-Ghassānī. When the latter arrived, Chosroes told him the news. ‘O king,’ the man said, ‘by God, I have no idea, nor do I have any interpretation of it. But give me equipment to go to a maternal uncle of mine in

Syria named Saṭīḥ.’ Chosroes commanded that the man be so equipped. When he came to Saṭīḥ, he found him dying. He hailed him but was not answered; he talked to him, but received no response. So ‘Abd al-Masīḥ said:

Is the noble potentate of Yemen deaf or can he hear –  
 He who can decide an issue that has defied many?  
 The tribal chief from the clan of Sanan has come to you,  
 White in his flowing robe and with his corpulent body.  
 He is the messenger of the idol-worshipping Persian king,  
 Who fears no threat and no unpredictable turn of fortune.

“Saṭīḥ raised his head to him and said, ‘Abd al-Masīḥ has come on a recalcitrant camel to Saṭīḥ, who is on the verge of dying. You have been sent by the king of Banū Sāsān, because the palace shook, the fires went out, and al-Mūbadhān saw a vision of headstrong camels leading noble Arabian horses, which invaded the Wadi and spread out in the country. O ‘Abd al-Masīḥ, if what I am telling you comes true, and the Wadi of al-Samāwa overflows, Lake Sāwa dwindles away, the man with the club appears, and the fires of Persia are extinguished, then Babylon will no longer be a place of residence for the Persians, nor will Syria be a Syria for Saṭīḥ. Those who will rule of them will be as many kings and queens as the number of collapsed balconies. And all that will happen, will happen. Whatever will be, will be.’ Then he recited the following verses:

If the rule of Banū Sāsān has let them endure,  
 Time has [yet] many severe turns of fortune.  
 Among them were Bahrām and his brothers,  
 Hurmuzān, Sabūr, and Sabūr – sons of royalty.  
 Perhaps they were able to reach such positions  
 Of power, as would be feared by rapacious lions.  
 They urged their mounts, strove seriously on their saddles,  
 So that no free roaming or packsaddle was ever at rest.  
 People are offspring of one man and many mothers,  
 Those known to do little are scorned and abandoned.  
 Good and evil are associated together on even footing;  
 But good is adhered to and evil is an object of caution.

“‘Abd al-Masīḥ then returned to Chosroes and informed him of what had happened. The latter was greatly distressed but consoled himself, saying, ‘Until fourteen of us rule as kings, time will roll on.’ They all died within forty years.”

### **Hamdān’s coming to the Prophet, God bless him and grant him peace**

Mālik ibn Namaṭ came as a member of Hamdān’s delegation to God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace. They found him having just returned from Tabūk. “O Messenger of God,” Mālik ibn Namaṭ said, “The elite of

Hamdān, their townspeople and bedouins, have come to you on speedy young camels, drawn by the net of Islam, unconcerned – in the cause of God – about the blame of anyone who might blame them; they are from the province of [the tribes of] Khārif, Yām, and Shākir. Regardless of the tricks of wily slanderers or dark-intentioned sly fellows, their pledge to you will not be revoked so long as Mount La‘la‘ stands and a fawn runs in a waste land.”

The Prophet wrote back to them, God bless him and grant him peace, “This is a letter from Muḥammad, God’s Messenger, to the province of Khārif, and the people of Jināb al-Ḥaḍb and Ḥifāf al-Raml, conveyed by their delegate Dhū al-Mish‘ār Mālik ibn Namaṭ and those of his people who have adopted Islam: Theirs shall be the mountains, the valleys, and the rocky lands of their area [in Yemen] so long as they perform the ritual prayer [*ṣalāt*] and pay the alms dues [*zakāt*]. They may eat the fodder of the land and graze their flocks in the commons. To us shall belong what they have agreed to give of their cattle and palms’ crop by treaty and in honesty; and to them shall belong their share of charity consisting of camels with broken teeth, aged she-camels, weaned young camels, tame old camels, and dyed rams. They are required to give us the five-year- or six-year-old ewes and horses.”

### **The Nakha‘ites’ coming to the Prophet, God bless him and grant him peace**

Abū ‘Amr al-Nakha‘ī came to the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace. “Messenger of God,” he said, “on my way here I dreamt a dream in which I saw a female donkey I had left back with my tribe give birth to a blackish-red, reddish-black kid.” “Have you a bond-maid,” asked the Prophet, God bless him and grant him peace, “whom you have left pregnant and about to give birth?” “Yes,” Abū ‘Amr replied. “I left a bond-maid of mine whom I think is pregnant.” “She has given birth to a boy, who is your son,” said the Prophet. “But why is he blackish-red and reddish-black?” asked Abū ‘Amr. “Come close to me,” the Prophet said, so Abū ‘Amr came closer. “Are you afflicted with leprosy, which you secretly keep from others?” whispered the Prophet. “Yes,” Abū ‘Amr answered. “And by Him who sent you as a Prophet in truth, no creature has ever seen it or known of it.” “That’s it,” said the Prophet. Abū ‘Amr then continued relating his dream, “And I saw al-Nuḥmān ibn al-Mundhir wearing two earrings, two hand-cuffs, and two bracelets.” “That is the rule of the Arabs,” the Prophet explained, “having returned to its best guise and splendor.” “And I saw an old gray-haired woman coming out of the earth,” Abū ‘Amr added. “That’s the rest of the world,” the Prophet said. “And I saw a fire coming out of the earth, intervening between me and a son of mine named ‘Amr, and saying, ‘Blaze, blaze! Sighted and blind! Feed me! I’ll eat you up, I’ll eat you up! I’ll destroy you and your wealth!’” “That is sedition at the end of time,” the Prophet said, may God bless him and grant him peace. “What is sedition, O Messenger of God?” asked Abū ‘Amr.

“People will kill their religious leader,” explained the Prophet, “then they will embroil themselves in a mesh of interlocking quarrels as fast as the bones of the skull,” (and the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, interlocked the fingers of his hands). “The evil-doer will think he is the good doer, and to another believer the believer’s blood will be easier to shed than drinking water.”

### **Kalb’s coming to the Prophet, God bless him and grant him peace**

Qaṭan ibn Ḥāritha al-ʿUlaymī came with the delegation of the tribe of Kalb to the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, and delivered a speech. God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, wrote him the following letter:

This is a letter from Muḥammad, God’s Messenger, to the clans of Kalb and their allies, and whoever have been drawn toward Islam among other tribes. It is conveyed to them by Qaṭan ibn Ḥāritha al-ʿUlaymī, commanding the performance of the ritual prayer at its due time and the payment of the alms dues as rightfully owed in accordance with their strict compact and in faithfulness to their agreement in the presence of Muslim witnesses, Saʿd ibn ʿUbāda, ʿAbd Allāh ibn Unays, and Dihya ibn Khalīfa al-Kalbī: From the flocks of nursing she-camels freely grazing, they owe a spotless she-camel for every fifty; camels of burden that carry provisions are theirs, tax-free; from fat sheep, whether old, pregnant, or unimpregnated, and from whatever the stream irrigates from the fountain source, they owe one-tenth of the product of their land; and from unirrigated plants and palms they owe half as honestly evaluated; no further imposition shall be added and none shall be reduced. God Most High and His Messenger are witnesses to that. Written by Thābit ibn Qays ibn Shammās.

### **The coming of Thaqīf to the Prophet, God bless him and grant him peace**

The tribe of Thaqīf came to Prophet Muḥammad, may God bless him and grant him peace. When they adopted Islam, he wrote them a letter saying he gave them God’s covenant of protection: their valley would be treated as sacred, its great thorny trees as well as its hunting animals and trespass areas; whatever debt they owed for a term certain and was due would be usury, of which God and His Messenger would be innocent; and whatever debt and mortgage they owed before ʿUkāz would be settled as far as the capital was concerned, the usury being attributed to ʿUkāz and would not be renewed.

### **The coming of Madhḥij to the Prophet, God bless him and grant him peace**

Zabyān ibn Ḥaddād came with the elite of the tribe of Madhḥij to the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace. Zabyān greeted the Prophet, may God

bless him and grant him peace. After praising God, may He be exalted, with words He merited, he proclaimed, “Praise be to God who split the earth with plants and cleft the sky with rain.” Then he continued, “We are a group of notables from Madhḥij, descendants of Yuḥābir ibn Mālīk. On our young camels we ascended the heights of al-Ḥawf and the tops of the mountains, rising on the crowns of the hills, descending to the bottoms of the plains, and traveling under the cover of tenebrous darkness. The hills of al-Ṭāʾif belonged to Banū Mahlāʾil ibn Qaynān, who planted their valleys, smoothed their rough areas, and grazed by their running waters.” Then he went on to mention Noah when he and those with him left the ark, “Among his sons, ʿĀd and Thamūd were the ones with the largest number of daughters and had the fastest growing plants; so God hit them with round smooth pebbles and destroyed them with thunderbolts.

“The Banū Hāniʾ were descendants of Thamūd and lived in al-Ṭāʾif. They were the ones who planned its drinking places, organized its streams by facilitating their running courses, brought its plants to life, and built its trellises.

“Ḥimyar ruled the strongholds and settled areas of the earth, the mature as well as young inexperienced people, the intelligent as well as dim-witted kings, and they had white and black subjects, dealt with Persia, and received taxes in gold. They became cocky, did not appreciate their blessings, and deserved punishment, so God made them strike one another with ruin.

“Certain tribes of al-Azd arrived at the time of ʿAmr ibn ʿĀmir and opened water holes in it, built houses, and established villages. Madhḥij then extended their realm with their spears and hopped around with their bridles: the powerful among them overcame the weak, the many killed the few.

“The Banū ʿAmr ibn Jadhima used to hit its trees to give their animals fallen leaves as fodder; they used to eat its harvested crops, take care of broken palm trees, and make them fruitful again.”

“In God’s eyes, this world’s happiness,” God’s Messenger commented, may God bless him and grant him peace, “is less and even smaller than the excrement of a gnat. If this world were fair in God’s eyes, even as tiny as a fly’s wing, it would not give an infidel a share in it, nor would it give a Muslim a permanent part of it.”

### **The coming of Laqīṭ ibn ʿĀmir ibn al-Muntafiq to the Prophet, God bless him and grant him peace**

Laqīṭ ibn ʿĀmir ibn al-Muntafiq came to the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, accompanied by a friend of his, named Nahīk ibn ʿĀṣim ibn Mālīk ibn al-Muntafiq.

Laqīṭ said, “My friend and I set out until we arrived in Medina at the end of the month of Rajab. We went to God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, and reached him when he had just finished the early morning prayer. He stood up to deliver the sermon to the people. ‘O people,’ he said, ‘I

have withheld my voice from you for four days so that you may hear me now. Is there a man here who has been sent by his people, who told him, “Inform us what God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, says?” Perhaps he has been distracted by his own thoughts, by his friend’s conversation, or else by a person gone astray. Indeed, I am responsible. Have I clearly conveyed my message? Listen and sit down.’

“The people sat down, and my friend and I stood up. When the Prophet’s attention was fully given to us, I said, ‘O Messenger of God! What information do you have about the Unknown?’ He laughed, by God, and shook his head; he knew I was seeking to catch him in an error. ‘Your Lord has withheld the keys to five things of the Unknown,’ he replied, ‘and no one but God knows them.’ He gestured [upward] with his hand. ‘And what are they?’ I asked. ‘Knowledge of [the time of] death,’ he said. ‘He knows the time of death of each one of you, and you do not know it; He knows all that is in the morrow and what you will eat, and you do not know it; He knows the semen when it is in the womb, He surely knows it and you don’t; He knows when it will rain – He looks down on you in your drought and distress, and continues to laugh, knowing that your help is close.’ Laqīṭ said, ‘We will never be deprived of good from a Lord who can laugh.’ [The Prophet continued,] ‘And He knows the Hour of Resurrection.’ ‘O Messenger of God,’ I said, ‘I would like to ask you about something, but don’t brush me off in a hurry.’ ‘Ask whatever you like,’ the Prophet said.

“‘O Messenger of God,’ I said. ‘Teach us what you know and what people do not. We belong to a group of people who do not believe anyone from Madhḥij who are close to us, Khath‘am who are next to us, and even from our own clan.’

“‘You will live as long as you will,’ said the Prophet, ‘then your Prophet will die. You will live until the Scream is sounded. By your God, it will leave nothing on the surface of the earth that will not die, and the angels who are with your Lord. Your Lord will roam about the earth; all the countries will be empty for Him. Your Lord will then make the sky send rain from the Throne. By your God, it will leave no place on the surface of the earth where a murdered person lies and no tomb where a dead person is buried, which it will not split open; it will create him anew from the top of his head and he will sit up. Then your Lord will say to whatever was in the burial place or tomb, “Mahyam? What’s the matter?” and he will say, “O Lord, yesterday! Today!” thinking of the life he knows and that he is continuing a recent conversation with his family.’

“‘O Messenger of God,’ I said. ‘How will He put us back together after we have been dispersed by the winds, decay, and wild beasts?’

“‘I will give you an example of that concerning the power and knowledge of God,’ said the Prophet. ‘I came to a plot of land that was hard clay. “This will never come back to life,” I said. Then from the sky your Lord sent rain on it. A few days later, I came to it and found a little pond at the bottom of the palm’s trunk providing it water to drink. By your God, He is more able to put you together than water is with the plants of the earth. You will emerge from the *aṣmā*? [Ibn

Ishāq said: *aṣṣawā* means tombstones] and from the burial places where you were murdered. You will look at Him and He at you.'

"'O Messenger of God,' I said. 'And how can we look at Him and He at us when we are all over the earth and He is only one person?'

"'I will give you an example of God's power and knowledge. The sun and the moon are a little miracle of His. You see them and they see you at the same time. By your God, He is indeed more powerful to see you and be seen by you than you are to see them and be seen by them without suffering any harm in doing so.'

"'O Messenger of God,' I said. 'What will our Lord do with us when we meet Him?'

"He said, 'You will be paraded before Him, and your tablets will appear clearly to him. Nothing of yourselves will be hidden from Him. Your Lord will scoop water in His hand and sprinkle your faces. By your God, not a single drop of it will miss the face of any one of you. As for the Muslim, it will let his face be like a white sheet of soft cloth; as for the infidel, it will hit his nose as with black coal. Then your Prophet will go away, and the righteous will follow in his footsteps. You will walk on a bridge of fire, and each of you will tread on the embers and exclaim: Ouch! And your Lord will say reprovingly: Are you groaning? You will then go to the Messenger's basin; by God, whoever drinks from it will not thirst. Whenever any one of you stretches out his hand, by God, he will be given a cup that will purify him from food grime, urine, and dirt. The sun and the moon will be concealed, and you will not see either.'

"'O Messenger of God,' I said. 'On that day, with what will we see?'

"'With the same eyes you use now before sunrise on a day when the earth shines and the mountains reflect the light.'

"'O Messenger of God,' I said. 'With what will we be requited for our good deeds and our evil deeds?'

"'For one good deed, ten similar ones; and for one evil one, one like it – unless He forgives.'

"'O Messenger of God,' I said. 'What is Paradise and what is hellfire?'

"He said, 'By your God, hellfire has seven gates; it takes a mounted man seventy years to cross the distance between every two gates. Paradise has eight gates; it takes a mounted man seventy years to cross the distance between every two gates.'

"'O Messenger of God,' I said. 'What do we see in Paradise?'

"'Rivers of pure honey,' said the Prophet, 'rivers of a drink that does not cause headache or regret, rivers of milk whose taste does not change, and [rivers] of water that is not brackish, and fruits that you have never known, by God; and with all that better things still, and pure spouses.'

"'O Messenger of God,' I said. 'Will we have spouses there? Will there be righteous ones among them?'

"'Righteous women are for righteous men. You will have pleasure with them as you do in this world, and they will have pleasure with you. But there will be no procreation.'

“‘The ultimate that we will achieve and reach [?],’ I said, but the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, did not answer.

“‘O Messenger of God,’ I continued. ‘What are the conditions for me to express my allegiance to you?’ He stretched out his hand to me. ‘Performance of the ritual prayer,’ he said, ‘payment of the alms dues, abandonment of polytheism, and not associating any other god with God.’

“‘And that we shall have anything between the East and the West?’ I said.

“He pulled his hand away, thinking I was making a condition that he would not be prepared to grant.

“‘That we settle down wherever we wish,’ I explained, ‘and every person will be responsible for himself?’

“He stretched out his hand to me again. ‘That’s yours’ he said. ‘Settle down wherever you wish, and no one will be responsible for you but yourself.’ So we left him.”

### **The coming of Qayla to the Prophet, God bless him and grant him peace**

Qayla bint Makhrama al-Tamīmiyya went out to seek someone to accompany her on her trip to meet God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace. Her daughters’ uncle, Athwab ibn Azhar, had taken her daughters away from her. A little girl among them, slightly humped with [a bone deformation of] a hunchback and wearing a woollen chemise, wept. Qayla felt sorry for her and took her along with her. While they were urging the camel to go faster, a rabbit leapt. “Relax,” the slightly humped girl said. “Your status will remain higher than that of Athwab.” Then a fox passed by, and she called it by a name that the narrator forgot, and she used exactly the same words as she had with the rabbit. While they continued to urge the camel to go faster, it suddenly stopped, knelt down, and began to shiver. “Honestly, you are afflicted just as Athwab is,” she remarked. “What shall I do, woe to you?” asked Qayla. “Turn your clothes inside out,” said the girl, “roll over on your back and belly, and turn over your camel’s under-saddle felt.” She then took off her woollen chemise, turned it inside out, then rolled over on her back and belly.”

“When I had done what she had told me to do,” said Qayla, “the camel shook, then stood up, brayed, and urinated. ‘Put your equipment back on it,’ the girl said, so I did. We then set out, urging the camel to go faster. Lo and behold, Athwab was following us with an unsheathed sword. We took refuge in a large camp of hair tents, which kept us hidden from him. My camel, an obedient one, stopped at the middle tent, and I entered it. Athwab caught up with me, and the sharp edge of his sword cut off some locks of my hair. ‘Give me back my brother’s daughter, you stinking woman!’ he yelled. I gave her back to him, whereupon he put her behind his back and took her away. I knew him better than the people of the tent did. I then went to a married sister of mine who was living with the Banū

Shaybān, to seek someone to accompany me to God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace. While I was with her and she thought I was asleep, her husband returned from his group of night entertainment. 'By your father,' he said, 'I have found an honorable companion for Qayla.' 'Who is he?' my sister asked. 'Ḥurayth ibn Ḥassān al-Shaybānī,' he said, 'the delegate of Bakr ibn Wā'il, who has a shrill, loud scream.' 'Woe to me,' my sister said. 'Don't tell her that she is to follow Bakr ibn Wā'il's delegate in the full sight and hearing of the whole world, with no male relative of her own people accompanying her.' 'I will not mention him,' he said.

"I heard what they said. Early in the morning, I went to my camel and saddled it. Then I looked for Ḥurayth and found him not far away. I asked to join his traveling party. 'Yes, with all respect,' he replied, with his riding camel kneeling down beside him.

"So I traveled with him as an honorable companion until we reached God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, as he was leading the people in the early morning prayer, which had started at daybreak while the stars were still studding the sky and men could hardly recognize one another in the dusk. I joined a line of men [for prayer], being a woman still close to the age of the Jāhiliyya. 'Are you a woman or a man?' a man next to me asked. 'A woman,' I replied. 'You have almost tempted and distracted me,' he chided. 'Go pray with the women behind.' Lo and behold, a line of women was formed up near the [Prophet's] rooms but I had not seen it when I entered. So I joined their line. When the sun rose, I came closer. Whenever I saw a man with a pleasing appearance and clothing, I looked up to see whether he was God's Messenger above the crowd. Then a man came up and said, 'Peace be to you, O Messenger of God.' 'And peace be to you too and God's mercy,' he answered. He – meaning the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace – was wearing two ragged wraps whose saffron dye had faded, and was holding a palm branch stripped of its leaves except for two at the top. He sat in a squatting position. When I saw God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, in this humble and pious sitting position, I was struck with awe. His companion said, 'O Messenger of God, you have frightened the poor woman.' 'Poor woman,' God's Messenger said without looking at me standing by his back, 'may you have tranquillity.' When he said that, God bless him and grant him peace, God removed all the fear that had entered my heart.

"My traveling companion was the first man to come forward. He swore allegiance to the Prophet in his own name and his people's. Then he said, 'O Messenger of God. Write a letter of agreement between us and the tribe of Tamīm concerning al-Dahnā' region, stating that none of them may cross it to reach us unless he is a traveler or a mere passerby.' 'Boy,' the Prophet said, 'write to him concerning al-Dahnā'.'

"When I saw that he ordered a letter be written to him, I was disturbed, for al-Dahnā' was my homeland and my place of residence. 'O Messenger of God,'

I said. 'He has not been fair when he asked you for the land. This al-Dahnā is the place to which the camels limit themselves [to graze because it is so fertile]; it is the place where the sheep graze, while the women and sons of the tribe of Tamim are watching. 'Boy,' the Prophet said, 'Stop [writing]! The poor woman is right. A Muslim is a brother to another Muslim; water and trees are spacious enough for both. They help each other against [Satan,] the Tempter.'

"When Ḥurayth saw that his letter had been stopped, he said, 'You and I have been in the situation described by the proverb, "With their own hooves, the sheep hold their fate."' 'By God,' I said, 'I did not know that you were a good guide in the darkness, a generous man with the traveling group, and a chaste man toward a female companion until we reached God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace. But don't blame me for asking for my share when you have asked for yours.' 'And what is your share in al-Dahnā, may your father be lost?' Ḥurayth asked. 'You wanted my camel's grazing ground to become that of your wife's camel,' I said. 'Surely, I take God's Messenger as my witness, that I will be your brother so long as I live, because you praised me to him.' 'Now that you have started it, I will never waste it.'

"'Will this woman's son be blamed,' said God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, 'when he is wronged and defends himself without the help of the authorities?' With that I wept. 'By God, O Messenger of God,' I said, 'I gave him birth illegitimately. He fought with you at the battle of al-Rabdha, then went to Khaybar to prove himself but was afflicted with its fever and died.' 'If you were not a poor woman,' the Prophet said, 'we would have dragged you, face downward. Will any one of you find it easy to do a favor for a friend in the world then, when someone more suitable intervenes between them, changes his mind and says, "My Lord, give me the good example of what I have done, and help me with what I have perpetrated for good." By Him, in whose hand Muḥammad's soul is, when one of you weeps, his friend should weep with him. O servants of God, do not make your brethren suffer.'

"He then wrote on a piece of red skin, 'Qayla and the women among Qayla's daughters should not be deprived of any of their rights, nor should they be unwillingly forced into marriage. Every Muslim should help them. Do good, women, and eschew evil.'"

### **The letter of God's Messenger, God bless him and grant him peace, to Ukaydir of Dūma**

From Muḥammad, God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, to Ukaydir of Dūma when he accepted Islam's call, and deposed the opponents and idols with Khālid ibn al-Walid, God's sword, at Dūmat al-Jandal and its environs:

Ours shall be the lands on the outskirts, the shallow water holes, the unplanted lands, the lands with no designated owners, and the unbuilt lands, as well as the

coats of mail, the weapons, the hoofed mounts, and the castle [of Dūmat al-Jandal]. Yours shall be the secure palms [within the castle] and the fountains in the built area. Your flocks shall not be prevented from grazing freely, those of them not liable for charity payment shall not be counted, and you shall not be forbidden from grazing wherever you wish. You shall perform the ritual prayer at its proper time and pay alms dues when rightfully owing. God's covenant and promise shall be your guarantee, which will be truthful and will be fulfilled. God and the Muslims here present witness to that.

**His letter, God bless him and grant him peace,  
to Wā'il ibn Ḥajar al-Ḥaḍramī**

From Muḥammad, God's Messenger, to the established kings and handsome chiefs of the people of Ḥaḍramawt: Perform the ritual prayer and pay alms dues. For the minimum number of taxable animals, give a ewe that is neither of a flaccid skin nor of a fleshy body, but rather in-between. Any additional ewe over the minimum forty belongs to its owner [it is untaxed]. As for underground wealth [or mines], pay one-fifth. Don't mix your animals [with those of others to avoid correct enumeration for taxation] and don't hide them away in a precipice [so that they may not be seen by the tax collector]. Don't exchange your female charges in reciprocal marriage [to avoid dowry payment]. Whoever sells goods at a price, with an agreement to buy them later at a lesser price, has committed usury. Every intoxicant is forbidden.

**The narrative of Jarīr ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Bajalī**

Jarīr ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Bajalī came to God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, and described to him his home at Bisha [in Yemen] seeking his opinion about it. "It is in a plain with no high sand dunes," he said. "It has acacias and arāk trees, citrus plants and 'alāk trees, and many palms. Its water is from a fountain, its land is fertile, and its winter is [as good as] spring." God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, replied, "The best water is cool water, the best wealth consists in sheep, and the best pasture is arāk trees and acacias; when the latter have their second leafing in summer, their leaves can be made to fall by beating them with a stick, then pounding them into viscid dough; if they fall by themselves, they can be debris for fodder; if they are eaten [by animals], they can increase the production of milk." During his statement, peace be on him, he also said, "God created the lower earth from frothy scum and deep water."

**The narrative of 'Ayyāsh ibn Abī Rabī'a**

God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, sent 'Ayyāsh ibn Abī Rabī'a to the Banū 'Abd Kulāl. "Carry my letter in your right hand," he told

him, “and give it with your right hand unto their right hands. They will tell you, ‘Recite [the Qur’ān].’ So recite, ‘Those who disbelieve among the People of the Book and the polytheists would not desist ...’ [Q. 98:1]. When you finish reciting the sūra, say, ‘Muḥammad has believed, and I am the first of believers.’ Each of the arguments they will offer you will be refuted, and every book of falsehood [they will adduce] will lose its light and will fade. Then they will recite. If they jabber, that is because they are translating. Therefore say, ‘Well, I believe in God and in what has been revealed of God’s Book.’ If they accept Islam, then ask them to give you their three staffs which, when they carry [as symbols of authority], others will prostrate themselves to them. One is a staff of tamarisk, a polished rod with a white color; another is a staff with knots as though it were a cane of reed; and the third is a jet-black wand as though it were of ebony. Take the three staffs and burn them in their market.”

### The narrative of Rāshid ibn ‘Abd Rabbih al-Sulamī

‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Ḥakam al-Wāsiṭī related the following on the authority of one of the sheikhs of Syria:

God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, appointed Abū Sufyān ibn Ḥarb as ruler of Najrān, and made him responsible for ritual prayer and war. He also sent Rāshid ibn ‘Abd Rabbih to be responsible for the judiciary and appeals. Rāshid ibn ‘Abd Rabbih composed the following verses:

My heart has come to its senses regarding Salmā,  
 and its extreme emotion has ended.  
 She restored to it what Tumāḍīr had taken away.  
 The gray hair of my head has made me sagacious  
 concerning [the foolishness] of youth,  
 For gray hair restrains a person from certain allurements.  
 My ignorance has now ended and my error is corrected,  
 There’s no ignorance when my hair tresses are white.  
 Yet after my heart came to its senses, it has been excited  
 By young camels traveling in the heath of thickets.  
 When they drew near the side of the depression  
 And halted, they were met by [men from] Sulaym and ‘Āmir.  
 The mounted travelers informed them that, between them  
 And the villages of Buṣrā and Najrān,<sup>1</sup> there were no infidels.  
 They stopped their travel and rested from tiring distances,  
 And were as happy as a traveler returning home.

1 Buṣrā and Najrān: two towns in Syria. This is not a reference to Najrān of Yemen. (Translator.)

**The coming of Nābigha of Banū Ja‘da to the Prophet,  
God bless him and grant him peace**

Abū Laylā, the poetic genius (Nābigha) of Banū Ja‘da, came to see the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, and recited to him the poem in which he says:

We’ve reached the sky, that’s our glory and exaltation.  
Yet we surely seek a prominent place above that.

“Where?” asked the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace. “Paradise,” replied Nābigha. “If God wills,” said the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace. When Nābigha reached the verse in which he says:

There’s no good in clemency if it does not have signs  
Showing that its purity is protected from being disturbed,

the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, exclaimed, “Well said! May God preserve your mouth from rupture!” Nābigha lived to be one hundred and thirty years old, but not one of his teeth was broken. He lived to see the days when ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Zubayr was in Mecca; he went to visit the latter and eulogized him. “O Abū Laylā,” the latter told him, “the least of your means to us is your poetry. You have two rights to [share in] God’s wealth: one right is because you saw God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace; and the other is because of your participation in the booty of the Muslims.” He then treated him well and gave him a reward.

**The coming of Ṭihfa ibn Abī Zuhayr al-Nahdī to God’s Messenger,  
God bless him and grant him peace**

When delegations of Arabs came to the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, Ṭihfa ibn Abī Zuhayr stood up and said, “Messenger of God, we have come to you from the two valleys of Tihāma on saddles of willow wood, traveling on camels of good stock. [On the way,] we sought rain from thick white clouds, cut grass with our sickles, and plucked the ripe fruits of arāk trees. We imagined there was enough drink in fine drizzle and looked desperately at the rainless clouds scudding by. We have come from a dangerously far land, hard to even tread, in which stream valleys have dried up, roots of plants are desiccated, branches dead, tree leaves fallen; where sacrificial animals have perished, and palm fronds are parched. O Messenger of God, we disavow idols and polytheism, and we [want to be] free from the impurities that Time brings. We have accepted the call of peace and the law of Islam for as long as the sea seethes and Mount Tī‘ār stands. We have livestock with no pastures or wet udders, and flocks of sheep that roam far [to graze] but have little milk – they have all been stricken by a bad year, one of extensive drought in which there has been no drop of water to drink or sip.”

“God, bless their pure milk, their buttermilk, and their watered milk,” God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, intoned. “Let their shepherds graze in fertile lands with ripe fruits, and let their little water gush forth abundantly. Bless their wealth and their children. Whoever performs the ritual prayer shall be considered a Muslim; whoever pays alms dues shall be considered a benefactor; and whoever testifies that there is no god but God shall be considered faithful. O Banū Nahd, yours shall be the properties entrusted to you by the polytheists, and yours shall be the levies imposed on your possessions [by idolaters]. Don’t withhold payment of alms dues, don’t abandon your faith as long as you live; and don’t be slothful in performing the ritual prayer.”

The Prophet then wrote the following letter and sent it with Ṭīḥfa to the Banū Nahd.

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. From Muḥammad, God’s Messenger, to the Banū Nahd ibn Zayd: Peace be to those who believe in God and His Messenger. O Banū Nahd, yours will be the very old animals, which will not be assessed for purposes of taxation; yours will be the flawed animals and those with milk that have recently given birth; yours too will be the bridled horses trained to be ridden and the untrained colts difficult to ride. Your animals shall not be prevented from grazing freely; your acacia trees shall not be cut down; and your milch animals shall not be hindered from browsing – unless you harbor a grudge against the payment of charity and break your agreements. Whoever accepts the contents of this letter shall have the assurance of God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, of the fulfillment of this compact and covenant. Whoever rejects them shall have an increase [of taxation].”

### **The coming of Jabala ibn al-Ayham to ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, God be pleased with him**

Al-‘Ījlī said:

Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī ibn Aḥmad ibn ‘Amr ibn al-Ajda‘ al-Kūfī related the following to me in Hīt:

Our reliable sheikhs related to us that Jabala ibn al-Ayham ibn Abi Shamir al-Ghassānī wrote to ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb from Syria, telling him that he intended to adopt Islam and asking for permission to come and see him. The news made ‘Umar and the Muslims happy. ‘Umar wrote back, “Come. Your rights and your obligations will be the same as ours.” So Jabala set out with five hundred horsemen from ‘Akk and Jafna. When he reached the outskirts of Medina, he gave his men gold- and silver-brocaded clothes to wear. On that day Jabala wore his crown set with the earring of Māriya, his grandmother. That day everybody in Medina, even women and children, went out to see him. The Muslims rejoiced at his coming and his adoption of Islam. He attended the season [of pilgrimage] that year with ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb. While circumambulating the House [the Ka‘ba in Mecca], a man from the Banū Fazāra trod on his loincloth

and untied it. Jabala turned to him angrily, slapped him, and broke his nose. The Fazārī man reported him to ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb. The latter sent for Jabala. “Jabala,” he asked him, “what made you slap this Fazārī brother of yours and break his nose?” “He trod on my loincloth and untied it,” Jabala replied. “Had it not been for the sanctity of this House, I would have cut off his head.” “You have just admitted [your guilt]. Therefore, either you satisfy him, or I will let him avenge himself on you.” “Will you let him avenge himself on me,” Jabala asked, “when I am a king and he is a commoner?” “Jabala,” ʿUmar explained, “Islam has united you and him. You are no better than he is in anything except power.” “By God,” Jabala remonstrated, “I had hoped that in Islam I would be more powerful than in pre-Islam.” “Think no more of that,” ʿUmar advised him. “Then, I’ll become a Christian,” Jabala said. “If you become Christian,” ʿUmar warned, “I’ll cut off your head [as an apostate].” Jabala’s people met with the Banū Fazāra [for discussions], but their discord was about to turn into a riot. “Give me till tomorrow, O Commander of the Faithful,” Jabala pleaded with ʿUmar. “That’s fine,” the latter agreed.

Under the cover of the dark night, Jabala and his companions made their escape. He did not stop until he reached Constantinople, went to see Heraclius, became a Christian, and stayed with him. Heraclius regarded the coming of Jabala as a great event and was happy about it. He bestowed possessions, lands, and residences as a fief on him.

When ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb sent a messenger to Heraclius inviting him to adopt Islam, the latter responded by asking him for a mutual peace treaty without adopting Islam. When he was about to write his response to ʿUmar, Heraclius asked the messenger, “Have you met your cousin who is in our city,” (he meant Jabala) “who came to us desiring to join our religion?” “No, I have not met him,” the messenger replied. “Go and meet him,” Heraclius said, “then come back to me. I’ll give you the answer to your letter.” The messenger went to the gate of Jabala’s residence and found there as many stewards, chamberlains, and crowds as were at Heraclius’s gate and equally as much magnificence. “I continued to plead for permission to enter,” the messenger related, “until eventually I was admitted. I went in to see Jabala and saw a man with a reddish beard and mustache. I had known him as a dark man with a black beard and black hair. I looked at him and did not recognize him. He had asked for gold filings, which he sprinkled on his beard until it became reddish. He was sitting on a crystal throne whose legs were in the shape of four golden lions. When he recognized me, he brought me up to sit with him on the throne. He asked me about the Muslims, and I told him good things. ‘They have multiplied many times as much as you knew them,’ I said. ‘How was ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb when you left him?’ he asked. ‘He was well,’ I replied. I could see anxiety on his face as I mentioned ʿUmar’s well-being. I descended from the throne. ‘Why are you declining the honor we have conferred on you?’ he asked. ‘God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, forbade all this,’ I replied. ‘Yes, may God bless him and grant

him peace,' he said. 'But cleanse your heart from defilement, and don't worry where you sit.' When I heard him say 'may God bless him and grant him peace,' I felt encouraged. 'Woe to you, Jabala,' I said. 'Why don't you become a Muslim, after having known Islam and its superiority?' 'After all that I have done?' he wondered. 'Yes,' I assured him. 'A man from Fazāra did worse than what you have done: he reneged on Islam and struck Muslims' faces with his sword; then he returned to Islam, and that was accepted from him. I have left him in Medina as a Muslim.' 'Leave all this alone. But if you guarantee that 'Umar will give me his daughter in marriage and appoint me to rule after him, I will return to Islam.' 'I will guarantee you the marriage,' I said, 'but I cannot guarantee you rulership.' He gestured to a servant in front of him, and the latter went away in a hurry. Soon afterward, servants came carrying boxes with food, which they put down. Tables of gold were set up with silver dishes. 'Eat,' he said. I refrained. 'God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, forbade eating from gold and silver dishes.' 'Yes, may God bless him and grant him peace,' he said. 'But cleanse your heart and eat from whatever dishes you like.' He ate from the gold and silver [dishes], while I ate from the bowl. When the food was removed, silver washbowls and gold water jugs were brought. Then he gestured to a servant in front of him who went out speedily. Whereupon I heard a sound, so I turned and saw servants carrying chairs studded with gems, ten of which were placed on his right and ten on his left. Then I heard another sound and saw ten slave-girls approaching, whose hair was parted and braided, and who wore silk clothes and were decked in jewelry. I had never seen faces more beautiful than theirs. Jabala seated them on the chairs to his right. Then I heard still another sound, and saw ten other slave-girls, whom he seated on the chairs to his left. After hearing a further sound, I saw a slave-girl as beautiful as the sun. On her head she wore a crown, on which was perched a bird, more beautiful than anything I had ever seen. In her right hand she had a cup of musk and amber, and in her left a cup of rose water. She signaled to the bird (or whistled to it), whereupon it flew, dipped into the cup of rose water, and wallowed in it. Then she signaled to it (or whistled to it), and it flew and alighted on a cross on the top of Jabala's crown. It fluttered until it had shaken off all [the rose water] on its feathers. Jabala laughed so heartily that his teeth showed. He then turned to the slave-girls on his right. 'Play me some exciting music, for God's sake,' he said. At that, they began to play their lutes and sing:

How good was a group I drank wine with  
 One day in Jillaq in former times!  
 To those who came to drink from the Barış stream,  
 They gave nectar wine mixed with Baradā's water.  
 They are sons of Jafna grouped around their father's tomb,  
 The grave of the generous, honorable Ibn Māriya;  
 They are accustomed to being visited, so their dogs don't bark,  
 Nor do they ask: Who is the approaching black figure?

They have white faces, honorable lineage,  
And proud noses, and they are of the first rate.

‘Jabala laughed until his molars showed. ‘Do you know who composed these verses?’ he asked me. ‘No,’ I replied. ‘It is Ḥassān ibn Thābit, the poet of God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace.’ He then turned to the slave-girls on his left. ‘Now make us weep, for God’s sake,’ he said. So they began playing their lutes and singing:

Whose is the desolate home in Maʿān,  
Between the higher part of Yarmūk and al-Khammān?  
That was a habitation of Jafna’s family in olden times,  
A place where momentous events of past epochs occurred.  
I remember myself there at one time being strong,  
Sitting in my place next to the man with the crown.  
When Easter came, the little girls began stringing  
Crowns of pearls with nimble fingers,  
Not using glue and gum  
Or mucilage of colocynth.

Jabala wept, and the tears flowed down on his beard. ‘Do you know who composed these verses?’ he asked. ‘No, I don’t know,’ I replied. ‘Ḥassān ibn Thābit,’ he said, and then began to recite the following verses:

Noblemen became Christian because of the shame of a slap  
In which there was no harm, if only I was patient.  
Because of it, I was overtaken by stubbornness and arrogance  
And because of it, I sold the sound eye for a blind one.  
I wish my mother had not given me birth, and I wish  
I had returned to the situation as ‘Umar had told me.  
I wish I were a shepherd on a shoal in a desert  
Or a captive in the hands of Rabīʿa or Muḍar.  
I wish I had the lowest life in Syria  
Where I would sit with my people, with no sight or hearing.

‘Then he asked me for information about Ḥassān. ‘Is he alive?’ he asked. ‘Yes, I left him alive,’ I replied. He ordered that I be given a suit of clothing, some money, and she-camels laden with wheat. ‘If you find him alive [when you return],’ he said, ‘give him this gift and convey to him my salutation. If you find him dead, then give it to his family and slaughter the camels at his grave.’

‘When I came back to ‘Umar, I told him about Jabala and how I had invited him to become a Muslim; I also mentioned the condition that Jabala had made and that I guaranteed him marriage [to ‘Umar’s daughter] but not the rulership. ‘Why didn’t you guarantee him the rulership too?’ ‘Umar asked. ‘If God were to strengthen Islam through him, He – may He be exalted – would make him rule in accordance with its prescriptions.’ Then I mentioned to ‘Umar the gift that

Jabala had sent with me for Ḥassān ibn Thābit. He sent for Ḥassān, but he was now blind, so he was brought and led in by a guide. ‘Commander of the Faithful,’ he said as he entered, ‘I smell the winds of Jafna’s family here with you.’ ‘Indeed you do,’ ‘Umar said. ‘This man has just returned from being with Jabala.’ ‘Tell me [of his news], my nephew,’ Ḥassān said. ‘He is one of the generous men I eulogized in the pre-Islamic period and swore he would send me a gift with every man he met who knew me.’ So I gave him the gift, the money and the clothing, and told him what Jabala had commanded in case he was found to have died. ‘I wish I were dead,’ Ḥassān said, ‘and camels were slaughtered on my grave.’”

Al-Zubayr said, “As Ḥassān was leaving, he recited:

Ibn Jafna is indeed a remnant of people  
Whose forefathers did not feed on miserliness.  
He did not forget me when he ruled in Syria as a king,  
Nor did he forget me as a Christian with the Byzantines.  
He gives abundantly, but in his eyes his gift  
Is only a part of what a blameworthy man gives.

“A man sitting in the meeting with ‘Umar chided him, ‘How dare you mention infidel kings whom God has destroyed and annihilated?’ ‘What is the tribal affiliation of this man?’ Ḥassān asked. ‘I’m Muzani,’ the man replied. ‘By God,’ Ḥassān said, ‘if your people had not done good deeds for God’s Messenger in former times, I would have choked you.’ ‘Umar then equipped me to travel to Caesar and commanded me to guarantee the condition that Jabala had made. When I reached Constantinople, I found people leaving Jabala’s funeral. I knew that misery was his lot [as predetermined] in the Mother of the Book.”

### Al-Aḥnaf’s coming to ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, God be pleased with him

Al-Madā’ini said:

Al-Aḥnaf ibn Qays al-Tamimi came to see ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, may God be pleased with him, along with the people of Baṣra and Kūfa. They spoke to him about themselves and about the difficulties that afflicted each of them.

“O Commander of the Faithful,” al-Aḥnaf said, “the keys to what is good are in God’s hands. The delegations of Iraq’s people have come to you. Our brethren from Kūfa, Syria, and Egypt have savored the things enjoyed by the ancient peoples with powerful kings, and the folks of Chosroes, Caesar, and the Byzantines. They live in an abundance of fresh water and fertile gardens, and their fruits reach them tender and unspoiled. As for us, we live in a swamp land, with a desert to one side and a bitter salt region to the other. One side has an overgrowth of reeds; the other is an oozing marsh. Its soil is never dry and its pastures never grow anything. Its benefits reach us as though through the gullet of an ostrich. A weak man has to walk for two leagues to seek fresh water and a

woman has to walk as much, looking at her baby pitifully like a goat and passing by enemies and wild beasts. We will all perish if you do not raise our condition to a better one, set right our topsy-turvy world, remedy our poverty, increase our support for our families, augment our men with your men, change our silver dirham into yellow gold, enlarge our bushels, and order the digging of a flowing well of fresh water for us.”

“By God, this is a real chieftain,” exclaimed ‘Umar, “this is, by God, a real chieftain!”

“I still continue to hear this sentence [echoing],” al-Aḥnaf said.

Wanting to deprecate al-Aḥnaf, Zayd ibn Jabala said, “Commander of the Faithful, he is not there and his mother is a woman from the tribe of Bāhil.”

“He is better than you, if he is truthful,” ‘Umar commented, meaning if his intentions were good.

Al-Aḥnaf said:

I am the son of the Bāhiliyya woman. She suckled me  
 From a breast that was neither dry nor unwholesome.  
 I close my eye on a mote in it, ignoring it patiently,  
 When a foolish man intends to do evil to a gentle man.

The delegation went back, but ‘Umar retained al-Aḥnaf with him for a year and some months. “God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace,” ‘Umar said, “warned us against every hypocrite who is loquacious. I was afraid of you and so I have retained you here. However, only good reports have reached me about you. I have found that you are a man of opinion and reason. Go back home and fear God, your Lord.” ‘Umar then wrote to Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī ordering him to dig a flowing well for them.

### **The coming of al-Aḥnaf and ‘Amr ibn al-Ahtam to ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, God be pleased with him**

Al-‘Utbi said on the authority of his father:

Al-Aḥnaf and ‘Amr ibn al-Ahtam came to see ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, may God be pleased with him. The latter wanted to cast lots between them regarding who was to be the leader. When the Banū Tamīm were gathered, al-Aḥnaf said:

An arrow was diverted from its people (and it often was);  
 But when it hit them, he said: Rise and fight!

“You and we used to live in a time of irrational, foolish behavior [in the Jāhiliyya period before Islam]. Then merit belonged to those who behaved irrationally and foolishly. We shed your blood and captured your women as prisoners of war. But today we live in the time of Islam. Now merit lies with those who act with reason and forbearance. May God forgive you and us.”

‘Amr ibn al-Ahtam won on that day and al-Aḥnaf lost, for the lot-casting was in favor of the family of al-Ahtam.

‘Amr ibn al-Ahtam composed the following verses:

When the tribe of Minqar called me to leadership  
 At a meeting in which the star became evident,  
 I prepared myself vigorously for it, as I used to do earlier  
 On similar occasions, tightening my loin-cloth in readiness.

‘Amr ibn al-Ahtam was the one who spoke in front of God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace. The latter had asked him about al-Zibriqān. “He is obeyed by those close to him,” ‘Amr replied. “He is of great eloquence and defends what is behind his back.” “O Messenger of God,” al-Zibriqān protested. “By God, he knows more about me than he has said, but he is envious of me.” Whereupon ‘Amr added, “By God, O Messenger of God, he is of little valor and narrow-minded; his father is stupid and his maternal uncle is mean. By God, I have not lied earlier, and I have told the truth in my later statement. I was pleased with my cousin and have said the best of what I knew of him. I did not lie. Then I became angry with him and said the ugliest of what I knew of him. I did not lie then either.”

God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace said, “Eloquence is fascinating indeed.”

### **The coming of ‘Amr ibn Ma’dikarib, delegated by Sa’d, to ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, God be pleased with him**

When al-Qādisiyya was conquered by Sa’d ibn Abi Waqqāṣ, ‘Amr ibn Ma’dikarib had fought extremely well. Sa’d sent him to ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, may God be pleased with him, with a letter concerning the conquest, and he praised ‘Amr highly in it. On arriving, ‘Amr was asked by ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb about Sa’d. “He is a bedouin in his woollen cloak, a lion in his den, and a Nabataean in his taxation style. He divides [the booty] fairly, is just in litigation, encourages the squadron to excel, and gives us our right with precision.” “You have often exchanged praise of each other,” ‘Umar commented.

‘Umar had written to Sa’d during the Battle of al-Qādisiyya ordering him to pay the fighters in proportion to what they knew of the Qur’ān by heart. “How much do you know of the Qur’ān by heart?” Sa’d asked ‘Amr ibn Ma’dikarib. “Nothing,” ‘Amr replied. “The Commander of the Faithful wrote to me,” Sa’d explained, “that I should pay the fighters in proportion to what they knew of the Qur’ān.” ‘Amr said:

When we are killed, nobody laments us;  
 Quraysh says: This is preordained destiny.  
 We are given equality when being pierced by stabs,  
 But we are denied equality when dinars are given out.

Sa’d wrote to ‘Umar, quoting these verses. ‘Umar wrote back that ‘Amr should be paid in accordance with the scale of his actions in war.

### **The coming of the People of al-Yamāma to Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, God be pleased with him**

After Khālid [ibn al-Walid] had attacked and killed Musaylima al-Kadhhab (the Liar) [who claimed to be a prophet], the people of al-Yamāma came to see Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, may God be pleased with him. “What did your friend use to say?” Abū Bakr asked them. “Spare us from this, O Caliph of God’s Messenger,” they pleaded. “No, you must tell me,” Abū Bakr insisted. They said, “He used to say, ‘O frog, how you do croak! You neither prevent others from drinking, nor do you render the water turbid! Half the earth is ours, and Quraysh’s is the other half. But Quraysh are people who do not behave justly.’” “Woe to you,” Abū Bakr commented, “These words have not come from an *ill* or a *barr*. Where was he leading you?” “The *ill* is God Most High,” Abū ‘Ubayda explained, “and a *barr* is a righteous man.”

### **The coming of ‘Amr ibn Ma’dikarib to Mujāshī‘ ibn Mas‘ūd**

‘Amr ibn Ma’dikarib al-Zubaydī came to Mas‘ūd al-Sulamī in Baṣra to ask for a gift. In pre-Islamic times wars had been waged between ‘Amr and the tribe of Sulaym. “Ask for what you need,” Mujāshī‘ told ‘Amr. “What I need is a gift suitable for someone like me,” the latter ventured. Whereupon, Mujāshī‘ gave him ten thousand dirhams, a mare that was one of the daughters of [the famous mare called] al-Ghabrā, a sharp sword, a strong shield, and a servant who was a baker. When he left Mujāshī‘, the people who had been present at the meeting asked him, “How do you like your friend?” “How wonderful Banū Sulaym are!” he replied. “How strong in war, how generous in difficult times, and how firmly rooted in honorable deeds! By God, O Banū Sulaym: we fought you in pre-Islamic times but could not turn you into cowards; we mutually exchanged defamatory poems with you but could not silence you; and we have asked you for gifts but cannot say you are miserly:

How wonderful is Mujāshī‘ when asked for gifts,  
And how wonderful as a warrior on a day of battle !

### **The coming of al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī, God be pleased with both of them, to Mu‘āwiya, God be pleased with him**

Abū Bakr ibn Abī Shayba said, “Al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī, may God be pleased with both of them, came to see Mu‘āwiya after the Year of Reconciliation. ‘By God,’ Mu‘āwiya said to him, ‘I will grant you a reward that I have not given to anyone before you and shall not give to anyone after you.’ And he commanded that al-Ḥasan be given one hundred thousand [dirhams].”

In a Ḥadīth of the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, it is reported that he entered the home of his daughter Fāṭima and saw al-Ḥasan as a

baby playing in front of her. “God Most High,” he told her, “will reconcile two great groups of Muslims at the hands of this your son.”

**The coming of Zayd ibn Munya to Muḥāwiya,  
God have mercy on him**

Al-ʿUtbi said:

“Zayd ibn Munya came from Baṣra to see Muḥāwiya [ibn Abī Sufyān in Damascus]. Zayd was the brother of Yaʿlā ibn Munya, the owner of the camel that ʿĀʾisha rode. He was the person in charge of the conduct of those wars and the leader of the people of Baṣra. ʿUtba ibn Abī Sufyān had married the daughter of Yaʿlā ibn Munya. When Zayd entered to see Muḥāwiya, he complained that he had a debt to pay. Muḥāwiya said, ‘Kaʿb, give him thirty thousand [dirhams].’ When Zayd turned his back to go, Muḥāwiya added, ‘And thirty thousand more in appreciation for the Battle of the Camel.’ He then said, ‘Follow your in-law.’ (He meant ʿUtba.) So Zayd joined ʿUtba in Egypt. ‘I have been following you for two months,’ Zayd complained to ʿUtba, ‘during which I have encountered dangers, sometimes moving under cover of night and at others wading through waves of mirage. I have held you in highest regard while escaping from the adversities of time and a persistent debt. Previously I have enjoyed sufficient wealth to allow me to spite people who envied us. I have found no one but you to escape to and depend on.’ ‘You are welcome,’ ʿUtba replied. ‘Time has given you wealth and made you our in-law. But then it snatched whatever it could from you. But it has still left within us a feeling towards you that will not allow you to be lost. I join your hand and mine to God’s.’ ʿUtba then gave Zayd sixty thousand [dirhams] just as Muḥāwiya, may God have mercy on him, had given him previously.”

**The coming of ʿAbd al-Azīz ibn Zurāra to Muḥāwiya,  
God have mercy on him**

Reporting on the authority of his father, al-ʿUtbi said:

“ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ibn Zurāra, leader of the people of Kūfa, came to see Muḥāwiya. When he was permitted to enter, he stood in front of Muḥāwiya. ‘Commander of the Faithful,’ he said, ‘I have urged on my camels in your direction, for I have found no one to depend on but you. I have ridden to you night and day, leaving traces of my movement on unknown lands. I was led to you by hope and driven by tribulation. A diligent person ought to be excused. Now that I have reached you, help me.’ ‘Take the saddle off your camel,’ said Muḥāwiya.

“ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ibn Zurāra went out with Yazīd ibn Muḥāwiya on a summer hunt and died, so Yazīd ibn Muḥāwiya wrote to his father informing him of the fact. ‘I have been informed today about the death of the leader of young Arab men,’ Muḥāwiya said to Zurāra. ‘Commander of the Faithful,’ the latter asked,

‘is it my son or yours?’ ‘It’s rather your son,’ Mu‘āwiya replied. ‘Offspring are born by mothers only to die.’”

Sābiq al-Barbarī took this idea and put it in verse:

Mothers feed their babies only to die,  
Just as houses are built to be destroyed by Time.

Another poet said:

Every infant of ours is born only to die;  
Nothing that exists remains and does not perish.

### The coming of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ja‘far to Yazīd ibn Mu‘āwiya

Al-Madā’inī said:

‘Abd Allāh ibn Ja‘far came to see Yazīd ibn Mu‘āwiya. “How much has your stipend been?” the latter asked him. “One thousand thousand [dirhams],” ‘Abd Allāh replied. “We now double it for you,” Yazīd said. “May my father and mother be your ransom,” ‘Abd Allāh said, then added, “and I have never said that to anyone before you.” “We now double it again,” Yazīd said. “Do you give a single man four thousand thousand?” Yazīd was asked. “Woe to you!” he answered. “I have indeed given this to all the people of Medina. In Yazīd’s hand, it is only a loan.”

In the following year, ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ja‘far came again, bringing a client of his called Nāfi‘ who had a special position in Yazīd ibn Mu‘āwiya’s heart. “When we came to him,” Nāfi‘ related, “he ordered one thousand thousand [dirhams] for ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ja‘far and paid off a debt of his amounting to one thousand thousand [dirhams]. Yazīd then looked at me and smiled. ‘This is because of that night,’ I said. I had spent a night of pleasant entertainment with him during Mu‘āwiya’s caliphate during which I had sung to him. I reminded him of it. Many presents were then brought to him that had been sent from Egypt, and he ordered that they be given to ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ja‘far except for one hundred she-camels that he kept for himself. So I said to Ibn Ja‘far, ‘I wish you could ask him for some of them, so that we can milk them on our way back.’ So ‘Abd Allāh did, and Yazīd ordered that all the she-camels be given to him. When Yazīd wanted to bid us farewell, he sent for me and I entered. ‘Woe to you,’ he said. ‘I only delayed you in order to be alone with you. Come on, give me what Jamīl said:

O my two friends: In your whole life, have you ever seen  
A killed man before me who weeps out of love for his killer?

“So I sang it to him. ‘Well done, by God,’ he said. ‘Tell me: What do you need?’ There was nothing for which I asked him that he did not give me. ‘If God sets right this affair concerning Ibn al-Zubayr,’ he added, ‘you will see us in Medina;

only there is this [singing] most appropriate. By God, it has been Ibn al-Zubayr's ill-starred business that has prevented that.'”

### The coming of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ja‘far to ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān

Budayh said:

“‘Abd Allāh ibn Ja‘far came to see ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān [in Damascus] after he had married his daughter Umm Kulthūm to al-Ḥajjāj for a secret dowry of two thousand thousand [dirhams] and a public one of five hundred thousand [dirhams], and had taken her to him in Iraq, where she had stayed with him for eight months. We set out with ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ja‘far when he left Iraq and went to see ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān. Eventually we entered Damascus. As we were unloading our camels, al-Walīd ibn ‘Abd al-Malik came toward us riding a reddish mule, accompanied by other people. We thought he was coming to greet Ibn Ja‘far and invite him to his home. Ibn Ja‘far greeted him warmly, but al-Walīd did not reciprocate. Instead he said, ‘As for you, you are not welcome!’ ‘Take it easy, my nephew,’ Ibn Ja‘far retorted. ‘I don’t deserve such words from you.’ ‘Indeed you do,’ al-Walīd said, ‘and even worse.’ ‘And why is that?’ asked Ibn Ja‘far. ‘Because you took the pick of Arab women, the lady of the Banū ‘Abd Manāf,’ al-Walīd replied, ‘and laid her down for the slave of Thaqīf to enjoy her thighs.’ ‘Am I to be blamed for this, my nephew?’ asked Ibn Ja‘far. ‘What could be worse?’ al-Walīd asked. ‘By God,’ Ibn Ja‘far answered, ‘The people who are most expected not to blame me in this regard are you and your father. The rulers before you recognized my blood relationship with them and my rights, whereas you and your father denied me any part of your wealth until I was riddled with debts; so much so that, if a mutilated Abyssinian slave had given me the same amount as the slave of Thaqīf, I would have married her to him, by God. I only did it to save my neck from fire.’ Al-Walīd did not utter a single word in response, but turned away his mule’s bridle and went to ‘Abd al-Malik, anger visibly depicted on his face, a quality for which he was widely known. ‘What’s the matter with you, Abū al-‘Abbās?’ ‘Abd al-Malik asked him when he set eyes on him. ‘You have given power to the slave of Thaqīf,’ he replied, ‘you have given him authority, and raised him so that he now enjoys the thighs of the women of ‘Abd Manāf.’ ‘Abd al-Malik was overtaken by a sense of honor and wrote to al-Ḥajjāj adjuring him to divorce Umm Kulthūm as soon as he finished reading his letter. [Al-Ḥajjāj divorced her], yet he continued to give her a regular means of livelihood and afford her respect until she departed this life. He also continued to maintain close relations with ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ja‘far until he died. Every new moon, caravans from al-Ḥajjāj arrived, carrying gifts, clothing, and provisions until ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ja‘far also went to meet his Maker.

‘Ibn Ja‘far asked permission to enter ‘Abd al-Malik’s presence. When he entered, ‘Abd al-Malik received him with welcoming remarks, took him by the hand, and seated him with him on the throne. He questioned him kindly and

even asked about his food and drink. When the questions ended, Yaḥyā ibn al-Ḥakam asked, ‘O Abū Ja‘far, have you come from *khibtha*?’ ‘What is *khibtha*?’ Ibn Ja‘far inquired. ‘The land from which you have originally come,’ Yaḥyā explained. ‘Praise be to God,’ Ibn Ja‘far remarked, ‘God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, used to call it *ṭiba* (good earth) and you call it *khibtha* (bad earth)! Both of you differed in this world, and I think you will both do so in the next as well.’

“When Ibn Ja‘far left ‘Abd al-Malik, he made ready to give him wonderful presents. ‘What was their value?’ I asked.<sup>2</sup> ‘One hundred thousand [dirhams], Budayḥ replied, ‘including menservants, maids, clothing, silk, and many wonderful gifts from Hejaz. He sent them with me to ‘Abd al-Malik. When I entered his presence, there was nobody with him. So I began showing them to him one thing at a time. I have never seen him appreciate anything as much as he appreciated the gifts that I showed him. Whenever I showed him one thing, he said, “May God give Abū Ja‘far health and well-being. I have never seen a day like this. We don’t want him to charge himself with anything of this sort for our sake, although we are grateful and respectful.”’ I left ‘Abd al-Malik and he permitted his friends to enter.

“By God, while I was in Ibn Ja‘far’s company and telling him about ‘Abd al-Malik’s admiration and appreciation for the gifts he had given him, a horseman approached us. “Abū Ja‘far,” he said, “the Commander of the Faithful sends you greetings and tells you the following, ‘You have collected for us despicable, runaway slaves from Hejaz, but withheld from us the slave-girl So-and-So. Send her to us.’” The reason for this statement was that, when his friends went to see him, ‘Abd al-Malik told them about Ibn Ja‘far’s gifts and extolled their value. “What has Ibn Ja‘far given you?” Yaḥyā ibn al-Ḥakam mocked. “He has collected despicable, runaway slaves of Hejaz for you, yet withheld from you the slave-girl So-and-So.” “Woe to you,” ‘Abd al-Malik said. “Who is So-and-So?” “Nobody has ever heard of anyone to match her beauty, perfection, character, and manners,” Yaḥyā ibn al-Ḥakam said. “If he had intended to honor you, he would have sent her to you.” “Where do you think she is?” asked ‘Abd al-Malik. “She is with him, by God,” Yaḥyā answered. “She is [as valuable to him as] the heart between his ribs.” When the horseman bringing the message had said his piece, Ibn Ja‘far, who was hard of hearing in one ear and pretended to be deaf when he heard anything he did not like, turned to me and asked, “What does he say, Budayḥ?”<sup>3</sup> (The narrator said:) I said, “The Commander of the Faithful sends you greetings and says that he received news from Such-and-Such port that God has given victory to the Muslims and reinforced them.” Ibn Ja‘far said [to the messenger], “Give my greetings to the Commander of the Faithful and tell him, ‘May God give you victory and suppress your enemy.’” “Abū Ja‘far, I have not said so,” the

2 The narration shifts here to another person. (Translator)

3 The pronouns of the narration become confused here. (Translator)

messenger objected, then repeated his original message. Abū Jaʿfar questioned me again, but I changed the subject. “You sucker,” the messenger said to me. “How dare you make fun of the Commander of the Faithful’s messengers, and give such a reply on his behalf? By God, I shall shed your blood!” Then the messenger went away. Ibn Jaʿfar turned to me, “Who do you think is our friend?” he asked. “Your friend of yesterday,” I replied. “I agree,” he said. “So, what is your opinion?” “O Abū Jaʿfar,” I said, “you have taken upon yourself so much for the sake of ʿAbd al-Malik; if you now refuse to give him the slave-girl, you will give him cause to hold that against you. If the Commander of the Faithful asks for one of your daughters in marriage, I don’t think you will refuse him.” “Call her in to me,” he said. When the slave-girl came, he welcomed her and seated her beside him. “By God,” he told her, “I have never thought that anything would separate us but death.” “Why do you say that?” she asked. “Something has happened,” he replied, “but there is nothing in it that you would not like. Time has brought what it has.” “And what is that?” she asked. “The Commander of the Faithful has sent word, asking for you,” he answered. “If you like that, well and good. If not, it will never happen, by God.” “There is nothing that you like,” she said, “and that will bring relief for you, that I would not do by giving my life.” She then started weeping. “If you do this,” he assured her, “you will not experience anything bad.” With that she wiped her tears. “Woe to you, Budayh,” he said, turning to me. “Encourage her before any untoward thing is done to me by the people.” He called four maids [to accompany her] and asked his bursar to give [me] five hundred dinars. He then summoned another maid responsible for his perfumery; she filled a large, leather-lined basket with bottles of perfume for her. “Take her fast [to ʿAbd al-Malik], woe betide you,” he said to me. So I left with her until I reached the gate [of ʿAbd al-Malik’s palace in Damascus]. I found that the horseman had conveyed my message, for I had hardly dismounted when the gatekeepers let me enter the presence of ʿAbd al-Malik, who was convulsed with rage. “You sucker,” he fumed, “you put words in the mouth of the Commander of the Faithful and make fun of his messengers?” “O Commander of the Faithful,” I pleaded, “permit me to speak.” “What will you say, you such-and-such?” he rejoined. “Permit me to speak, may I be your ransom,” I pleaded again. “Speak,” he said. “Commander of the Faithful,” I began, “I am of much lower status and less importance than to be able to affect the Commander of the Faithful with my words to the extent that I see I have. I am no more than a slave among the slaves of the Commander of the Faithful. Yes, I did say what was conveyed to you. The Commander of the Faithful knows that I live under the sponsorship of this sheikh, [Ibn Jaʿfar,] and that God has been beneficent to him. Then he received from you a request, the like of which he had never received; for you asked for the heart that is between his ribs. So I answered with the words that have been conveyed to you, because I wanted to make matters easy for him. Then he asked me, and I responded; he consulted me, and I gave him my opinion. Now here she is, I have brought her to you.” “Bring her in, woe

to you," 'Abd al-Malik said. When I brought her in, his son, Maslama, was with him, a young lad with a fresh-grown mustache, the like of whose beauty I have never seen. When she sat down, 'Abd al-Malik spoke to her and liked her words. "May God be with your father," he told her. "Would you rather that I keep you for myself," he asked, "or grant you to this lad, who is the son of the Commander of the Faithful?" "O Commander of the Faithful," she replied, "I don't deserve you. Perhaps this lad may be a good companion to me." 'Abd al-Malik stood up without saying anything and went in [to another room]. "You stupid woman," Maslama said as he approached her, "How dare you prefer anyone to the Commander of the Faithful?" "You enemy of yourself! Do you blame me because I chose you? By God, the opinion of the one who chose you is auspicious." She made his situation difficult indeed. 'Abd al-Malik then returned to us, having dyed himself with an ointment that concealed his gray hair. He was wearing a suit that sparkled like gold. In his hand, he had a stick with which he walked with a swinging, proud gait. He sat on his throne. "Oh yes, may God be with your father," he said to her. "Would you rather that I keep you for myself or grant you to this lad?" "And who are you, may God make you righteous?" she asked. "This is the Commander of the Faithful," the eunuch told her. "I choose no one but the Commander of the Faithful," she assured him. "Why did you say something different earlier?" asked 'Abd al-Malik. "I saw an old man," she replied. "Now I see that the Commander of the Faithful is the youngest of people and the most handsome, and I choose no one but him." "Take her, Maslama," 'Abd al-Malik said. (Budayḥ said:) With that I showed him the suit and dinars that I had, and the maidservants and perfumes [that I had brought]. "May God protect Ibn Ja'far!" he said. "Was he afraid that we would not have expenses, perfume, and clothing for her?" "No," I replied, "but he wanted her to have enough until she settled down." Maslama took her, but she did not have long to live with him because she died. (Budayḥ said:) By God, who holds Maslama's soul, I never had a meeting or conversation with him in which he would not say to me, "Bring me a woman like So-and-So." To which I would reply, "Bring me a man like Ibn Ja'far."

The narrator said:

I said to Budayḥ, "Woe is you! What did he give him as a reward?" He replied, "When he gave him what he had requested and paid his debt, he said to him, 'I will surely give you a reward, more than which I would not give even to Marwān if he was resurrected from his tomb.' He then ordered that he be given one hundred thousand [dirhams]. I make an oath by God, I don't think he spent two hundred thousand altogether on his gift, on that act of his, and on his slave-girl who was as valuable to him as his own soul."

### The coming of al-Sha'ḅī to 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān

'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān wrote to al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf, "Send me a man who is competent in matters of religion and the world, someone I can adopt as evening

companion and intimate conversation partner.” “No one else is as suitable as ‘Āmir al-Sha‘bī,” thought al-Ḥajjāj, and he sent him to ‘Abd al-Malik. When al-Sha‘bī entered the presence of ‘Abd al-Malik, he found him with his head bowed and looking worried. “What is the matter with the Commander of the Faithful?” he asked. ‘Abd al-Malik replied, “I remembered Zuhayr’s saying:

Having lived beyond seventy years, I appear to have  
 Thrown off therewith all restraints from myself.  
 The vicissitudes of Time have shot unseen arrows at me.  
 What can a man do, who is shot and cannot shoot back?  
 If I were shot by arrows that I can see, [that would be fine;]  
 But I am hit [by things] that are not arrows.  
 Crawling on my hands sometimes and on my stick,  
 I am heavily weighed down thrice before I can rise.”

Al-Sha‘bī said to him, “Not so, Commander of the Faithful, but as Labīd ibn Rabi‘a said, when he was seventy years old:

Having lived beyond seventy years, I appear to have  
 Thrown off therewith my cloak from my shoulders.

When he reached seventy-seven years of age, he said:

My weakened soul complained to me. [I said:]  
 ‘I bore you for seven years beyond seventy.  
 If you are given three more, you’ll achieve a hope;  
 With three years more, you’ll complete eighty.’

When he reached ninety, he said:

I am bored with life and its length,  
 And with people asking: How is Labīd?

When he reached one hundred and ten, he said:

If my death is delayed, is there anything to expect  
 But clinging to a stick on which my fingers bend,  
 And telling stories of centuries that passed,  
 Burdened whenever I rise, as if I were kneeling?

And when he reached one hundred and thirty and was on the brink of death, he said:

My two daughters wish their father would live.  
 Am I not only a man from Rabi‘a or Muḍar?  
 Rise and tell others what you know of me.  
 Don’t scratch your faces and don’t shave your hair [lamenting].  
 Say: He was a man who did not lose a friend  
 And did not betray or cheat a mate.

[Mourn] for a year, then peace be with you.  
Whoever weeps for a full year is excused.”

Al-Sha‘bi added, “I saw ‘Abd al-Malik’s face beaming with joy because he wished to live as many years.”

### **Al-Ḥajjāj coming to ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān with Ibrāhīm ibn Muḥammad ibn Ṭalḥa**

‘Imrān ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz said:

When al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf was appointed to rule over the two Holy Sanctuaries [Mecca and Medina] after killing Ibn al-Zubayr, he befriended Ibrāhīm ibn Muḥammad ibn Ṭalḥa, made him a close companion, and gave him an exalted position. This continued to be the case, so when al-Ḥajjāj went to see ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān [in Damascus], he took Ibrāhīm with him as an equal; he made sure to treat him well and show him great respect until he brought him to ‘Abd al-Malik. When he entered the latter’s presence, the first thing he did after greeting him was to say, “Commander of the Faithful, I have brought to you the man from the Hejaz. I have not left behind there anyone who can rival him in virtue, manners, chivalry, and right belief. In addition, he has regard for blood relationship, a strong sense of duty, and greatly respected parentage. I have had good experiences with him in matters that show his obedience, advice, and good support – he is Ibrāhīm ibn Muḥammad ibn Ṭalḥa. I have brought him to you to facilitate his being granted your permission and so you may find out for yourself the things I have just told you about him.” “You have reminded us of a close blood relationship and a due obligation,” said ‘Abd al-Malik. “Boy, permit Ibrāhīm ibn Muḥammad ibn Ṭalḥa to enter.” When Ibrāhīm entered, ‘Abd al-Malik brought him close to him and seated him on his bed. Then he said to him, “O Ibn Ṭalḥa, Abū Muḥammad [al-Ḥajjāj] has just reminded us of what we still recollect about you, your virtue, manners, chivalry, and right belief as well as your regard for blood relationship, strong sense of duty, and greatly respected parentage. He has told us of his experience in matters that reveal your obedience, advice, and good support. Therefore, let there not be any private or public need that you have that you do not bring to our attention.” “Commander of the Faithful,” said Ibrāhīm. “The primary need and the most meritorious of matters to be advanced before all others is one that pleases God; which His Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, requires to be performed as a duty; and which contains advice for you and the community of Muslims. I have advice, which I must pass on; but I can’t do that unless I have a private meeting with you. So let me be alone with you, Commander of the Faithful, and my advice will be passed on to you.” “Without Abū Muḥammad?” asked ‘Abd al-Malik. “Yes, without Abū Muḥammad,” Ibrāhīm affirmed. “Rise [and leave],” ‘Abd al-Malik said to al-Ḥajjāj. When the curtain was let down, ‘Abd al-Malik said,

“Ibn Ṭalḥa, give me your advice.” “By God, Commander of the Faithful,” Ibrāhīm began, “you have resorted to al-Ḥajjāj with all his arrogance, haughtiness, remoteness from truth, and closeness to falsehood, and you have appointed him to rule over the two Holy Sanctuaries, which are what they are, where Emigrants and Supporters [of the Prophet] live as well as righteous clients. Al-Ḥajjāj tramples them down by using vile Syrians and hooligans who have no concept of maintaining truth and removing falsehood. He treats the people unjustly and governs them in a manner that is not in accordance with the Sunna [the Prophet’s Practice]; all this after having shed their blood and violated their women. You think that this will come to nothing between you and God, and between you and your Prophet on the morrow, when he confronts you before God in order to dispute with you and seek justice for his community. I tell you, by God, that you will not get away from there without a valid argument. Therefore, cease and desist, or let go.” “You are lying and telling falsehoods,” ‘Abd al-Malik said. “Al-Ḥajjāj has attributed to you good qualities that he did not find in you. Good qualities may sometimes be attributed to people who don’t deserve them. Rise [and leave], you liar and falsifier.”

Ibrāhīm said:<sup>4</sup>

I got up, hardly able to see my way out. When the curtain was lowered behind me, someone followed me. “Imprison this man,” he ordered. He then said to al-Ḥajjāj, “Enter.” He entered and stayed there for much of the day; I had no doubt that he and ‘Abd al-Malik were discussing me. Then the usher said, “Ibn Ṭalḥa, enter.” When the curtain was raised, Al-Ḥajjāj met me on his way out as I was entering. He embraced me and kissed me between my eyes. “Truly,” he said, “if God were to reward two fraternizing persons well on account of their continued friendship, you would be one to be granted the best reward for what you have done for me. By God, if I remain safe and sound so I can do something for you, I shall [honor you and] raise your head, elevate your status, and make men follow the dust of your feet.” “By the Ka’ba, he is mocking me,” I thought to myself.

When I reached ‘Abd al-Malik, he drew me close to him, closer even than my previous meeting with him. “O Ibn Ṭalḥa,” he said. “Perhaps there has been someone who shared this advice with you!” “By God, O Commander of the Faithful,” I said. “I know no one who has been of greater help and more beneficence to me than al-Ḥajjāj. If I were to be partial to anyone out of interest in this world, I would be partial to him. But I have preferred God and His Messenger, and you and the believers to him.” “I knew that you did not relish this world,” ‘Abd al-Malik replied. “If you had desired it, it would have been yours through al-Ḥajjāj. But instead you desired God and the Next World. I have deposed him from his rule over the two Holy Sanctuaries because you did

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4 The narration here is taken over by Ibrāhīm ibn Muḥammad ibn Ṭalḥa. (Translator)

not approve of his style of ruling them. I have told him that you asked me to oust him in order to assure their independence. I have appointed him to rule over the two Iraqs [Baṣra and Kūfa], for there are problems there that no one but he can solve. I have informed him that you requested me to appoint him to rule over them in order to get the best out of him and to make him obliged to you. That decision is in recognition of your good advice to me. Go with him then, and you will not find fault with his companionship.” So I left with al-Ḥajjāj, and he honored me, many times more than he had done earlier.

### The coming of al-Muhallab’s Messenger to al-Ḥajjāj, informing him of the killing of the Azraqites

Abū al-Ḥasan al-Madā’inī said:

When al-Muhallab ibn Abī Ṣufra defeated Qaṭarī ibn al-Fujā’a, the leader of the Azraqites, he summoned Mālik ibn Bashīr. “I am sending you to al-Ḥajjāj,” he told him, “so go, he is only a man like you.” He sent him a reward but Mālik returned it, saying, “A reward [is accepted] after being deserved.” With that, he set out. When he entered al-Ḥajjāj’s presence, the latter asked him, “What is your name?” “Mālik ibn Bashīr,” he replied. “*Mulk* (rule) and *bishāra* (good news),” al-Ḥajjāj said [playing on the radicals of the messenger’s name]. “How was al-Muhallab when you left?” “He had achieved what he had hoped for,” Mālik said, “and had reassured himself against those he had feared.” “How does he relate to his soldiers?” al-Ḥajjāj asked. “Like a kind father,” Mālik replied. “And how do his soldiers relate to him?” al-Ḥajjāj asked. “Like dutiful children,” Mālik answered. “How has he pleased them?” al-Ḥajjāj asked. “He has been generous to them by granting favors,” Mālik answered, “and he has persuaded them by acting justly.” “What do you do when you meet your enemy?” asked al-Ḥajjāj. “We meet them with our swords and long to kill them,” Mālik replied, “and they meet us with their swords and likewise hope to kill us.” “That’s how it is when sword meets sword,” al-Ḥajjāj said, then he asked, “And what is the situation of Qaṭarī?” “He deceived us by using some of the ruses we had used against him,” Mālik explained. “What stopped you following him?” asked al-Ḥajjāj. “We have found that life after he is gone is better than following him,” Mālik answered. “Tell me about al-Muhallab’s sons,” al-Ḥajjāj said. “They are ready to fight at night and to defend property and freely grazing livestock in the daytime,” Mālik said. “Who is best among them?” al-Ḥajjāj asked. “That’s for their father to say,” replied Mālik. “No, tell me,” al-Ḥajjāj insisted. “They’re like a well-tempered ring,” Mālik said, “whose two edges can’t be known.” “I adjure you,” al-Ḥajjāj urged, “have you planned that response in advance?” “God apprises no one of His Unknown,” Mālik quipped. Thereupon, al-Ḥajjāj addressed the people sitting in his company. “By God,” he said, “this is indeed eloquent natural speech, not merely artificial.”

### The coming of Jarīr to ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān

When Jarīr ibn al-Khaṭaḥfi eulogized al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf in the poem where he says:

Who closed the source of hypocrisy for you?  
 Or who can attack as fiercely as al-Ḥajjāj?  
 Or who can jealously protect women with zeal  
 When they have no confidence in their husbands’ jealousy?

and:

Al-Ḥajjāj invoked [God] in the same manner as Noah did,  
 And made [the Lord of] the Ascending Stairs hear and grant,

al-Ḥajjāj said to him, “My capacity to reward you is deficient. But I am sending you to the Commander of the Faithful, ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān. Go to him and give him this letter of mine.” So Jarīr went to ‘Abd al-Malik and asked permission to recite [a poem] to him. When permitted, he said:

Are you awake, or is your heart not awake?

‘Abd al-Malik demurred, “It’s rather your heart!” When Jarīr reached the following verses:

Umm Ḥazra was consoled, then she said,  
 “I saw those who came were seekers of gifts.”  
 “Trust in God, He has no partner,” [I said,]  
 “And [trust] in success on my return from the Caliph’s.”  
 I will thank you [Caliph] if you will restore my feathers  
 And if you will fix the vane on the tip of my wing.  
 Are you all not the best people who ever rode mounts  
 And the most generous, open-handed men in the world?

‘Abd al-Malik was pleased. He had been reclining but now sat up. “Whoever among you praises us,” he said, “let him do so like this or else remain silent!” Turning to Jarīr, he then asked, “Jarīr, do you think Umm Ḥazra will be satisfied with one hundred she-camels from the livestock of Kalb?” “If she is not, Commander of the Faithful,” Jarīr replied, “may God never satisfy her.” Thereupon, ‘Abd al-Malik ordered that Jarīr be given one hundred she-camels from the livestock of Kalb, all of which had eyes with black pupils. “Commander of the Faithful,” Jarīr begged, “they are all runaway camels. We are elderly men; none of us can dispense with his own camel. If you would order that herdsmen [be provided] ...” So ‘Abd al-Malik ordered that Jarīr be provided with eight herdsmen. In front of ‘Abd al-Malik were silver bowls that he kept ringing by knocking them with a stick in his hand. So Jarīr asked him, gesturing to one of the bowls with his stick, “And the milking container, Commander of the Faithful?” ‘Abd al-Malik flung it toward him with the stick, saying, “Take it, may it not be useful to you!” On this subject, Jarīr says in a poem:

They gave a hundred camels, urged forward by eight herdsmen.  
 Their gracious giving is neither obliging nor extravagant.

**Jarīr's coming to ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, may God be pleased  
 with him, on behalf of the people of Hejaz**

Jarīr ibn al-Khaṭaṭfī came to see ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, may God be pleased with him, acting on behalf of the people of Hejaz. He asked permission to recite him some poetry. “What interest do I have in poetry, Jarīr?” ʿUmar said. “I am busy with other things and completely distracted from it!” “But it is the message of the people of Hejaz, Commander of the Faithful,” Jarīr persisted. “Recite it, then,” ʿUmar agreed. So Jarīr recited the following:

O Commander of the Faithful: Many a blind man among  
 The people of Hejaz has been afflicted with misery and harm.  
 The barren year has stricken all that his right hand  
 Possessed, so he is bent by tedious effort and old age.  
 Away from his gaunt body, [the year] eked out, concealed,  
 Neither the sun nor the moon could see it.  
 When the vicissitudes of Time unwillingly noticed it,  
 They rose and called out, at the top of their voice: “O ʿUmar!”

**The coming of Dukayn to ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz,  
 may God be pleased with him**

Dukayn ibn Rajāʾ al-Fuqaymī, the poet who composed verse in the *rajaz* meter, related the following:

I eulogized ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz when he was governor of Medina, so he ordered that I be given fifteen headstrong she-camels of noble descent. I did not want to travel with them in the ways and byways lest they should prove to be uncontrollable, nor was I inclined to sell them. A group from Muḍar passed by, and I requested to join them. “Only if you set out tonight,” they said. “I have not bidden farewell to the commander,” I said, “and I must say goodbye.” “The commander will not deny entrance to one who knocks on his door at night,” they said. So I asked and was given permission to see ʿUmar. There were two old men with him, whom I did not know. “Dukayn,” ʿUmar said, “I have a soul that yearns [for higher status]. If I ever arrive at a higher position than the one I now have, I avidly hope to see you.” “Give me a witness to that, Commander,” I said. “My witness is God,” he said. “And from among His creatures?” I persisted. “These two sheikhs,” he said. Turning to one of them, I asked, “Who are you that I may know you, may God be merciful to you?” “Sālim ibn ʿAbd Allāh,” he answered. “I’ve gained an important witness,” I said. Turning to the other, I asked, “Who are you, may God be merciful to you?” “Abū Yaḥyā, client of the commander,” he answered. Abū Yaḥyā was the patronymic of Muzāḥim. So I set

out to my town with the she-camels. God sent me blessings through them; and I bought country estates, houses, and servants. While I was [traveling] in the middle of a desert, I saw a courier speeding on his way to Syria. “Is there news from a far land?” I asked. “Sulaymān ibn ‘Abd al-Malik died,” he answered. “Who will succeed him?” I asked. “‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz,” he replied. So I made my young camel kneel down, laid my travel equipment on it, and headed to ‘Umar [in Syria]. On the way I met Jarīr coming from ‘Umar’s. “From where have you come, Abū Hazra?” I asked him. “From a Commander,” he answered, “who gives to the poor and withholds from the poets.” “What do you think [will happen],” I asked, “for I am going to see him?” “Depend on him,” he advised, “as you’ve already done, regarding money for wayfarers.” So I went to ‘Umar and found him sitting in the courtyard of his house, surrounded by people. I could not reach him, so I called out at the top of my voice:

O ‘Umar of good deeds and noble acts,  
 O ‘Umar of generous gifts and great feats:  
 I am a man from [the tribe of] Qaṭan ibn Dārim  
 Asking what I need from a man of noble acts.  
 [Remember] when we talked intimately, awake  
 In the darkness of night, when my night was obscure,  
 With Abū Yaḥyā and with Salim.

Abū Yaḥyā rose and broached the topic on my behalf. “Commander of the Faithful,” he said, “I am a witness to the promise you made to this bedouin.” “I know that,” the Caliph said. “Come closer to me, Dukayn. As I told you, I have an eager soul, one that yearned for the noblest and highest positions in this world. Now that I have attained them, I have found that my soul longs for the Hereafter. By God, I have not deprived people of anything that I have available to give you. I only have two thousand dirhams, and I will give you one thousand.” He then ordered that I be given one thousand dirhams. By God, I have never seen a thousand dirhams that brought a greater blessing than this.

### **The coming of Kuthayyir, al-Aḥwaṣ, and Nuṣayb to ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, God be pleased with him**

Ḥammād al-Rāwīya (the narrator) said:

Kuthayyir ‘Azza said to me, “Shall I tell you why I abandoned poetry?” “Yes, do,” I said. “Al-Aḥwaṣ, Nuṣayb, and I went to see ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, may God be pleased with him,” he said. “Each one of us had previously made his acquaintance and become firm friends of his. We had no doubt that he would treat us well during his caliphate. When the flags of Khunāshira were raised for us, Maslama ibn ‘Abd al-Malik – who in those days was the young man of the Arabs [par excellence] – met us. We greeted him and he returned our greeting. “Have you not heard,” he asked, “that your Imam does not countenance poetry?”

“We have not heard anything definite,” we answered, “until we met you.” For a moment, we were dumbfounded. When he noticed that, he commented, “If the religious man of Banū Marwān has become caliph and you are afraid he will deprive you, the man of this world of ours is still alive. I have for you whatever you like. I’ll soon return and grant you what you deserve.”

When he returned, our saddlebags were, as far as he was concerned, in the most honorable house and with the most generous of hosts. We stayed with him for four months, during which time he and others sought permission for us [to see the caliph], but without success. On a particular Friday, I thought I could get close to ‘Umar [in the mosque], listen to his words [in the Friday sermon], and learn them by heart. That seemed like a good idea, and I did so. The following was part of what he said in the sermon: “Every trip must have provisions. Therefore equip yourselves with provisions for your trip from this world to the Hereafter by being pious. Be like someone who has seen what God has prepared for him in the way of reward or punishment; as a result, you will desire [reward] and fear [punishment]. Do not tarry before doing that, lest your hearts become hard and you be led astray by your enemy ...” He said many other things that I do not remember, then went on: “May God prevent me from commanding you to do something that I forbid myself from doing; for then, my bargain will be lost, my poverty will show, and my misery will be manifest on a day when only truth and veracity will serve.” Then he started weeping, and I thought he was about to die. The whole mosque and everyone in it shook with weeping. I went over to my two friends. “Choose some other kind of poetry,” I said, “something different from the one we used to recite to ‘Umar and his forefathers. He is now a man of the Hereafter and not of this world.”

Then Maslama sought an audience for us on a Friday, after the common people had been admitted. When I entered, I greeted [the caliph]. “Commander of the Faithful,” I said, “we waited a long time, the anticipated benefit has diminished, and the Arab delegations have been gossiping about your antipathy toward us.” “Kuthayyir,” he said, “Alms are only for the poor and the needy, and for those employed in connection therewith, and for those whose hearts are to be reconciled, and for [freeing] slaves, and for those in debt, and for the cause of God, and for the wayfarer ...’ [Q. 9:60]. Are you in one of those categories?” “Yes,” I said, “I am a wayfarer who has been cut off, and yet I am your friend.” “Aren’t you also the friend of Abū Sa‘īd?” the caliph asked. “Yes,” I replied. “I don’t think,” he said, “that Abū Sa‘īd’s guest is one to be cut off.” “Commander of the Faithful,” I urged, “Will you permit me to recite poetry?” “Yes,” he said, “but tell nothing but the truth.” So I recited the following:

You’ve been given authority, but you didn’t curse ‘Ali,  
 Frighten the innocent, or accept the advice of a criminal.  
 You’ve proven in deeds what you had said in words  
 And every Muslim has become truly satisfied.  
 Your refining correction is sufficient for a person,

After going astray, to redress his remaining crookedness.  
 The world, dressed up for you in a prostitute's clothing,  
 Displays herself to you, [brandishing] her palms and wrists,  
 Sometimes glittering with languid, coquettish eyes  
 And smiling to exhibit regular rows of pearl teeth.  
 But you turned away from her in disgust as if  
 She had given you to drink a mixture of poison and colocynth.  
 To her perilous mountains and frothy seas  
 You were impregnable and fully protected.  
 You have continued to be eager to reach every aim  
 By which you would attain the peak of an upright structure.  
 When rulership came to you spontaneously, as  
 No seeker of the world had any possible advance,  
 You left that which perishes, though attractive,  
 And preferred, with determination, that which remains;  
 And you suppressed the ephemeral and rallied all your might  
 To encounter the evil in front of you on a dark day.  
 As caliph, you had only God to prevent you from  
 [Acquiring] desired wealth or [shedding] blood.  
 A concern that kept your heart awake rose up to you,  
 And with it you reached the highest aspirations on a ladder.  
 Between Eastern and Western parts of the entire earth,  
 There is no one, eloquent or inarticulate, who calls out  
 Saying: "Commander of the Faithful, you have wronged me  
 By taking a dinar or a dirham [from me],  
 And by giving power to a man who is not a criminal  
 And unjustly shedding a cupful of blood from him."  
 If the Muslims could, they would give you  
 Half of their lifetimes without regret.  
 What a gainful deal it is to one who pledged allegiance to you!  
 How great it is, how great it is, how great!

The caliph turned to me. "You are responsible for what you have said," he noted.  
 Al-Aḥwaṣ then came forward and sought permission to recite his poetry. "Recite,"  
 the caliph said, "but tell nothing but the truth." So he recited the following poem:

Poetry is only wisdom composed by a writer  
 With an utterance of truth or falsehood.  
 So only accept that which satisfies you,  
 And don't reject us like widows.  
 We have seen that you do not spurn justice  
 Either to right or to left, like an unfair crafty man.  
 But you do your best to support truth,  
 Following in the footsteps of your righteous forefathers.  
 So we have said what seemed to us to be right,  
     and we have not been refuted.  
 Who can reject the truth when somebody says it?

Who can return an arrow after it is shot [from the bow's]  
 Notch, when nobody knows whence it came and who shot it?  
 Had it not been for the things that noble caliphs,  
 Who were like brave lions, have made us accustomed to,  
 My fast she-camel would not have scurried for a month,  
 Crossing the surface of deserts in the midst of other camels.  
 But we hoped we would get from you the like of what  
 We had been granted in the past by your earlier relatives.  
 If poetry has no place with you,  
 Even if it is strung together like pearls by its composer,  
 And is apposite and truthful with nothing to mar it  
 Except that it is constructed like the building of houses,  
 We still have a relationship [with you], a pure affection [for you],  
 And the legacy of forefathers who dashed forth with swords  
 Defending their own homes against the enemy of peace,  
 And firmly anchoring the pillar of religion after it had inclined.  
 Otherwise, one hundred camels, eight or nine years old each,  
 Would not have been given as a gift to Kaʿb [ibn Zuhayr]  
 For his poetry by God's Messenger, whose guiding light is sought,  
 Upon him be peace in the forenoon and in the afternoon.

“You are responsible for what you have said,” the caliph commented. Nuṣayb then came forth and asked for permission to recite his poetry. But the caliph refused him, and ordered him instead to go to Dābiq on a raid. So he went there, flushed with anger. The caliph commanded that I be given three hundred [dirhams], that al-Aḥwaṣ be given an equal sum, and that Nuṣayb be given one hundred and fifty.

### The coming of the poets to ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, God be pleased with him

Ibn al-Kalbī said:

When ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, may God be pleased with him, became caliph, poets came to see him as they used to do with caliphs before him. They waited at his gate for days but were not permitted to enter. When ʿAwn ibn ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿUtba ibn Masʿūd came to see ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, with whom he had a special relationship, he was wearing a turban whose two edges he had let loose. Jarīr said:

O man who has let his turban loose,  
 This is your time; my time is gone.  
 Tell our caliph, if you will meet him,  
 That I am like a fettered prisoner at his gate.  
 I feel lonesome, away from my family and son  
 In this place, distant from my home and homeland.

“Yes, Abū Ḥazra,” ʿAwn said, “[I’ll tell the caliph,] and with pleasure.” When he entered the presence of ʿUmar, he said, “Commander of the Faithful, the

poets are waiting at your gate. Their poems remain [for history] and their spear-heads are sharp.” “What have I to do with the poets, O ‘Awn?” the caliph asked. “Commander of the Faithful,” ‘Awn replied, “the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, was praised [by poets] and he gave rewards. He is an example for every Muslim.” “Who praised him?” the caliph asked. “Abbās ibn Mirdās,” ‘Awn replied, “and the Prophet gave him a suit of clothing that silenced him.” “Will you recite what he said?” the caliph asked. “Yes,” ‘Awn said:<sup>5</sup>

O best of all creatures, I see that you have  
Publicly announced a Book bringing clear truth;  
With proof you have shed light on dark matters  
And have extinguished a fire that has been blazing.  
Who will tell Prophet Muḥammad on my behalf  
That every man is rewarded for what he says?  
Our God is on a very high throne,  
Yet God’s place is higher still and greater.

“You are right,” the caliph said. “Who among the poets are at my gate?” “Your cousin, ‘Umar ibn Abī Rabi‘a,” ‘Awn replied. “May God never make his blood relationship any closer,” the caliph exclaimed, “and may He never greet him! Isn’t he the one who said [to a woman]:

I wish that on the day when my death draws near  
I could smell what lies between your eyes and mouth.  
I wish my ritual ablution water were your saliva  
And my embalment were from your marrow and blood.  
I wish Salmā would be lying there next to me  
In the tomb, in Paradise or in Hell.

“By God, I wish he wished to meet her in this world and do a righteous deed. By God, he shall never enter my presence. Who else is there at the gate besides the one you mentioned?” “Jamil ibn Ma‘mar al-‘Udhri,” ‘Awn replied. The caliph said, “He is the one who says:

I wish that we both could live together and, on dying,  
That my grave would be close to hers among the dead.  
I don’t desire to have long life  
When it is said a flat slab has been placed on her.  
All day long I don’t see her, but my soul  
Meets her soul in sleep at night.

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5 In the Arabic text, the narrator is Ibn al-Kalbi, but there is a confusion of pronouns from this point onward and the narrator sometimes becomes ‘Awn, speaking in the first person. In the translation, we preferred to keep the pronouns referring to the narrator consistently clear by keeping Ibn al-Kalbi as the narrator. (Translator)

“Take him far away. By God, he shall never enter my presence. Who else is there, other than those you have already mentioned?” “Kuthayyir ‘Azza,” ‘Awn replied. The caliph said, “He is the one who says:

The monks of Madyan and those I knew,  
 Sit weeping in fear of punishment [after death].  
 If they could hear her speaking, as I did, they would fall  
 On their knees and prostrate themselves before ‘Azza.

“Take him far away. Who else is at the gate other than those you have mentioned?” “Al-Aḥwaṣ al-Anṣārī,” ‘Awn replied. “May God keep him far away and destroy him. Isn’t he the one who corrupted the relations between a man from Medina and a slave-girl with whom he eloped, and the one who said:

God is between me and her master.  
 He runs away from me with her, and I follow.

“Keep him far away too. Who else is at the gate other than those you have mentioned?” “Hammām ibn Ghālib al-Farazdaq,” ‘Awn replied. The caliph said, “Isn’t he the one who is proud of adultery and says:

The two women let me fall down from a height of eighty men  
 Like a rapacious, black-feathered falcon swooping down.  
 When my feet reached the ground, they asked,  
 ‘Is he alive to be hoped for, or a dead man we should avoid?’  
 I landed among a group of people having fun in a social gathering  
 And ended with her behind the closed doors of their tavern.  
 I said, ‘Cut off relations with them, they will not be aware of us.’  
 And I left at the end of a night I would like to experience again.

“Keep him far away. By God, he shall never enter my presence. Who else is at the gate other than those you have mentioned?” “Al-Akhṭal al-Taḡhlibī.” ‘Awn replied. The caliph said, “Isn’t he the one who says:

I shall not fast in Ramaḍān, ever in my life,  
 And I shall never eat the meat of sacrificed animals.  
 I shall not urge a camel early in the morning  
 To the plain of Mecca in order to succeed [spiritually].  
 I shall never stand up like an ass calling  
 Before daybreak, ‘Come to salvation.’  
 But I will drink it, pure wine,  
 And I will prostrate myself at the rise of day.

“Keep him far away as well. By God, he shall never tread on a carpet of mine so long as he remains an infidel. Who else is at the gate other than those you have mentioned?” “Jarir ibn al-Khaṭafī,” ‘Awn replied. The caliph said, “Isn’t he the one who says:

If it were not for spying eyes, they [women] would have shown us  
 [Their beauty:] the eyes of wild cows and the hair locks of antelopes.  
 Will you not be admonished by their killing of Muraqqish  
 Or by what they have done to ‘Urwa ibn Ḥizām?  
 Blame all camp sites after the [beloved’s lost] camp site at al-Liwā  
 And blame all living after those people [are inaccessible].  
 The captor of hearts has come to visit you when this is not  
 The time for visits – so [tell her], go back in peace.

“If I must, then let it be this one.” Thereupon, Jarīr was permitted to enter. ‘Awn went out and said to him, “Enter, Abū Ḥazra.” He entered, saying:

The One who sent Prophet Muḥammad  
 Has placed the caliphate on [the shoulders of] a just imam.  
 His justice and faithfulness have encompassed all creatures  
 Until they desisted [from sin], and he straightened the crooked.  
 In the Qurʾān, God has revealed an obligatory duty  
 To help the traveler and the poor man with dependents.  
 Therefore I do expect immediate good from you,  
 For a man’s soul is fond of immediate results.

When he stood in front of the caliph, the latter said, “Fear God, Jarīr, and tell nothing but the truth.” So Jarīr recited:

How many are the unkempt widows in Yamāma!  
 And how many are the orphans with a weak voice and sight  
 Who consider you their sufficiency after losing their fathers  
 And are like young birds in a nest, unable to rise or fly!  
 They call out to you anxiously as would someone with a touch of insanity.  
 Caliph of God, what do you propose to do for us?  
 We do not live with you, nor do we reside in a house of waiting.  
 Without you, I continue to be worried by cares that keep me awake,  
 Going up and down in the tribal quarters for a long time.  
 The exhausted man of the city is not helpful to our man of the desert,  
 And no man of the desert returns to us with benefits from the city.  
 When rain is withheld from us, we hope to receive  
 From the caliph what we have expected from the rain.  
 He obtained the caliphate, for it was predestined for him,  
 Just as Moses came to his Lord through predestination.  
 Here are the widows, whose needs you have satisfied.  
 Who will satisfy the need of this widower?

The caliph said, “Jarīr, I swear by God that I came to be in charge of this caliphate, owning nothing but three hundred [dirhams], of which ‘Abd Allāh took one hundred, and ‘Abd Allāh’s mother took one hundred. Boy, give Jarīr the remaining one hundred.” “By God, Commander of the Faithful,” Jarīr said, “that is the dearest amount of money that I have ever earned.” He then went out and

was asked, “What happened?” “Something that will vex you!” Jarīr answered. “I have just left the presence of a Commander who gives to the poor and yet withholds his gifts from poets. Even so, I am most satisfied with him.” He then recited the following [alluding to his poetry as incantations]:

I see that the incantations of Satan do not stir him up,  
My demon from the jinn being a maker of incantations.

**The coming of al-Nābigha of Banū Ja‘da to Ibn al-Zubayr,  
God Most High have mercy on him**

Al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār, the judge of the Two Sanctuaries [Mecca and Medina], said:

The year [of drought] forced al-Nābigha (the genius) of Banū Ja‘da to go to Ibn al-Zubayr. He entered the Holy Mosque, where Ibn al-Zubayr was, and recited the following verses to him:

When you came to rule us, you resembled [Abū Bakr] al-Ṣiddīq,  
‘Uthmān, and [‘Umar] al-Fārūq; and the poor were happy.  
You treated people equally in fairness, and they were all even.  
So the dark, pitch-black color became [shining] morning.  
Abū Laylā has come to you, traveling in the darkness  
Of night on a strong camel, which traverses the deserts,  
So that you may restore a part of him shaken  
By the vicissitudes of resolute Time and dark fortune.

“Calm down, Abū Laylā,” Ibn al-Zubayr said. “Poetry is the least of your means of contact with us. The choicest of our wealth is for the kinsfolk of al-Zubayr; as for what is left after expenses, Banū Asad and Taym have precedence over you. But you have [the right to] two shares in God’s wealth: one share because you saw God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, and another because you have participated in the booty of the Muslims.” Ibn al-Zubayr then took Abū Laylā al-Nābigha by the hand into the livestock stables. He gave him seven young camels and a travel camel, and loaded his saddlebag with wheat, dates, and clothing. Al-Nābigha immediately started to eat the seeds, pure [without other food]. “Woe to Abū Laylā,” Ibn al-Zubayr observed. “He has suffered extreme hardship because [of the drought].” Al-Nābigha said, “I testify that I heard God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, say, ‘Whenever Quraysh ruled, they were just; whenever they were asked for mercy, they were merciful; whenever they spoke, they told the truth; and whenever they promised something good, they fulfilled. I and the prophets are the *furrāt* of al-qāṣifīn.’”

Al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār explained: *fāriṭ* (plural: *furrāt*) is the one who goes to the water to repair the well rope and the buckets; and *qāṣif* (plural: *qāṣifūn*) is the one who goes to buy food.

### The coming of the Kūfans to Ibn al-Zubayr, God Most High have mercy on him

He said:

When Muṣʿab ibn al-Zubayr killed al-Mukhtār ibn Abī ʿUbayd, he went on pilgrimage and approached his brother ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Zubayr in Mecca in the company of the notables of Iraq. “Commander of the Faithful,” he said to his brother, “I have brought you the notables of Iraq so that you may give them some of this wealth. No one left behind there is their peer.” “You have brought me the slaves of Iraq,” ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Zubayr said, “so that I may give them God’s wealth. By God, I shall not do that.” Once they had entered and taken their seats, he said to them, “People of Kūfa, I wish by God that I could give you as much money as I give the people of Syria, or even give one man of you as much as I give to ten of them.” “Commander of the Faithful,” ʿUbayd Allāh ibn Zabyān said. “Concerning what you have just said, do you know what we and you are like?” “Like what?” ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Zubayr asked. “We and you and the people of Syria,” ʿUbayd Allāh ibn Zabyān replied, “are as Aṣhā Bakr ibn Wāʾil said:

I loved her incidentally, and she loved another  
Man, who loved a woman other than her.

“We love you, and you love the people of Syria, who love ʿAbd al-Malik.”

With that the Kūfans then left disappointed. They wrote to ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān and betrayed Muṣʿab ibn al-Zubayr.

### The coming of Ruḅba to Abū Muslim

Al-Aṣmaʿī said:

Ruḅba related the following to us, “I went to Abū Muslim [al-Khurāsānī], the leader of the [ʿAbbāsīd] cause, and recited poetry to him. He called out to me, ‘O Ruḅba!’ and I found myself called out for him everywhere, ‘O Ruḅba!’ I replied:

‘Here I am: when you call me, I’m at your service.  
I praise the Lord who has led me to you.  
All praise and benefaction are in your hands.’

“‘Rather in God’s hands, may He be exalted,’ Abū Muslim said. ‘And in yours too,’ I replied, ‘for when you bestow favors, you are to be praised.’ Then I added, ‘Will the commander permit me to recite?’ He gave me permission, so I recited:

‘He continued to seek dominion in his regions  
And on his right and on his left,  
Always ready, always invincible,  
Until he established his dominion on a firm basis.’

“‘Ruḥba,’ Abū Muslim said, ‘you’ve come to us when our funds are low, having been depleted by expenses. We’ve ordered a reward for you, but it is trivial and too little. But you must return to us, and, when time is on our side, we will prove reliable. So don’t remain silent concerning the feelings you are harboring inside you.’ ‘The benefit I’ve derived from the commander’s words,’ I said, ‘is greater than what I’ve derived from his money.’”

### The coming of al-ʿAttābī to al-Maʿmūn

Al-Shaybānī said:

In the caliphate of Hārūn al-Rashīd, Kulthūm al-ʿAttābī sided with al-Maʿmūn. When the latter went to Khurāsān, al-ʿAttābī accompanied him to Qūmis to bid him farewell and stayed at Sindād Kisrā with him. When he tried to say goodbye to al-Maʿmūn, the latter said, “Don’t forget to visit us, if we are destined to achieve power in this conflict.” When the caliphate devolved upon al-Maʿmūn, al-ʿAttābī came to pay him a visit, but was denied entry. He accosted Yaḥyā ibn Aktham. “O judge,” he said, “please remind the Commander of the Faithful of me.” “I am not the chamberlain,” Yaḥyā said. “I know that,” al-ʿAttābī said, “but you are an honorable man, and an honorable man is always helpful.” When Yaḥyā entered the presence of al-Maʿmūn, he said, “Commander of the Faithful, save me from al-ʿAttābī and his tongue.” But al-Maʿmūn did not permit al-ʿAttābī to enter and was distracted by other matters. When al-ʿAttābī noted that al-Maʿmūn’s antipathy had gone thus far, he wrote the following verses to him:

At Sindād we did not part on this [understanding],  
 Nor did we perceive brotherhood to be like this.  
 I never thought that the caliphate would do anything  
 But increase the purity of a man’s pure friendship.  
 You strike people with the smooth, dark lances  
 For their betrayal, and you forget the faithful.

When al-Maʿmūn read his verses, he called him in. Al-ʿAttābī approached, greeted the caliph, and stood in front of him. “O ʿAttābī,” al-Maʿmūn said, “we heard of your death and were grieved; then we were told of your visit and rejoiced.” “Commander of the Faithful,” al-ʿAttābī responded, “If this land were to be divided among the people [the masses of pilgrims] at Minā and ʿArafāt, it would be sufficient for them. Without you, there is no religion; but for you, there is no world!” “Ask for what you need,” al-Maʿmūn said. “Your hand is freer to give,” al-ʿAttābī said, “than my tongue to ask.” So al-Maʿmūn rewarded him, and al-ʿAttābī went away.

### The coming of Abū ʿUthmān al-Māzinī to al-Wāthiq

Abū ʿUthmān Bakr ibn Muḥammad said:

I came to see [Caliph] al-Wāthiq, I entered his presence, and greeted him. “Have you left behind anyone whom you care for?” he asked. “A little sister whom I brought up,” I said. “It is as if she were my daughter.” “I wonder, what did she say when you left her?” al-Wāthiq asked. I<sup>6</sup> replied, “She recited to me the following verses of al-Aʿshā:

When the day of departure finally came, my daughter said:  
 ‘We are both equal to someone who has been orphaned.  
 Father, I wish you would not leave our home here,  
 For we are afraid you will be carried away by death.  
 I feel that, if a [distant] land keeps you absent from us,  
 We would be abandoned and our blood kinship would be cut off.’”

“I wonder, what did you say to her in reply?” the caliph asked. I said, “Commander of the Faithful, I recited to her the following verses of Jarīr:

Trust in God, He has no partner. [And trust in]  
 Success that comes from the caliph.”

“Success has just come to you,” the caliph said and ordered that I be given ten thousand dirhams. Then he said, “Tell me a pleasant story about Abū Maḥdiyya.” “Commander of the Faithful,” I said. “Al-Aṣmaʿī related to me the following: Abū Maḥdiyya said to me, ‘I understand that *al-aʿrāb* (the Arab bedouins) and *al-aʿzāb* (the bachelors) are similar in spelling [in the ancient Arabic *scripta defectiva*, the r and the z being written the same, without diacritics].’ I said, ‘Yes.’ He said, ‘Then don’t read: “The Arab bedouins are the worst in disbelief and hypocrisy ...” [Q. 9:97], but rather read: The bachelors are the worst in disbelief and hypocrisy. Don’t ever be deceived by a bachelor, even if he fasts and prays!’”

Al-Wāthiq laughed and raised his leg in merriment. “Abū Maḥdiyya has encountered a lot of trouble in celibacy,” he said, and ordered that I be given five hundred dinars.

## The women who came to Muʿāwiya

### The coming of Sawda ibnat ʿUmāra to Muʿāwiya

ʿĀmir al-Shaʿbī said:

Sawda bint ʿUmāra ibn al-Ashtar al-Hamdāniyya came to see Muʿāwiya ibn Abī Sufyān. She asked permission to enter, and it was granted. When she entered, she greeted him. “How are you, O Bint al-Ashtar?” he asked her. “I’m well, Commander of the Faithful,” she replied. He asked her, “Aren’t you the one who told your brother:

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6 The Arabic text alternates the pronouns of the narrator between the third and the first persons. In the translation, we preferred to keep the narrator as the first person for the sake of clarity. (Translator)

O Ibn ‘Umāra, be ready – as your father was –  
 For a day of fighting and encounter with matching opponents.  
 Support ‘Alī, and al-Ḥusayn and his group,  
 And intend humiliation for Hind and her son.  
 The Imam, ‘brother’ of Prophet Muḥammad,  
 Is the emblem of guidance, the lighthouse of faith.  
 Lead the armies, and march forward in front of  
 His flag, with a sharp sword and a spear.”

“Commander of the Faithful,” Sawda said. “The head perished and the tail was cut off. Stop remembering what has been forgotten.” “Far from it,” Mu‘āwiya said. “Someone of your brother’s position cannot be forgotten.” “You are right,” Sawda said, “my brother was not someone of an insignificant position and a humble place, but rather as al-Khansā’ said [of her brother Ṣakhr]:

Ṣakhr is a man whom guides take as a leader,  
 As if he were a mountain with fire on its peak.

“I beseech you by God, O Commander of the Faithful, exempt me from asking for your reprieve.” “I do,” the caliph said. “Say what you need.” “Commander of the Faithful,” Sawda said, “you are a master of the people and in charge of their affairs. God will question you about the mandate He charged you with regarding our rights. You have continued to appoint over us someone who would advance your power and spread your authority. He has harvested us as one would ears of wheat, trodden on us as though we were cattle, treated us with infamous injustice, and exacted momentous things from us. I am referring to Ibn Arṭāh, who has come to my country, killed my men, and taken my money. Were it not for obedience [to you], we would have displayed our strength and resistance. Either you depose him, in which case we will be grateful to you, or else you won’t, in which case we will know you!” “Are you threatening me with your people?” Mu‘āwiya fumed. “By God, I am about to send you to him on the tight saddle of a vicious camel so that he can carry out his legal judgment against you.” She fell silent then said:

May God bless the soul [of a man] contained  
 In a tomb, in which justice is buried.  
 He was an ally of truth and sought no price for it,  
 So he came to be ever associated with truth and faith.

“And who is that?” Mu‘āwiya asked. “‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, may God Most High have mercy on him,” Sawda said. “I don’t see any trace of him in you!” Mu‘āwiya retorted. “Yes indeed,” she affirmed. “I came to ‘Alī one day regarding a man whom he had appointed to collect our charities, and there were good and bad dealings between us. I found ‘Alī standing and performing his prayer. He broke off his prayer and turned to me. ‘Do you need anything?’ he asked with compassion and sympathy. So I told him about the man. ‘Alī wept, raised his hands toward

the sky, and said, ‘O God, I did not command them to wrong your creatures or to abandon your truth.’ He then took a piece of paper from his pocket and wrote on it, ‘In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. Evidence has come to you from your Lord: “Give full measure and full weight with equity, and do not defraud people of their things and do not commit iniquity in the earth, causing mischief. What God has left is better for you, if you are believers – and I am not a keeper over you.” [Q. 11:85–86] When you receive this letter of mine, keep what is in your hands until someone comes to take it from you. Peace.’ So I took [the letter] from him, O Commander of the Faithful. He did not pierce it or seal it.” Thereupon, Mu‘āwiya ordered [his secretary], “Write some words in her defense, so that she may be treated with equity and justice.” “Will that be for me in particular or for my people in general?” she asked. “What have you to do with the others?” Mu‘āwiya asked. “It is, by God, a vile and mean deed [to accept],” Sawda said, “if justice is not comprehensive, and if what satisfies me does not also satisfy my people.” “Good heavens!” Mu‘āwiya commented. “[‘Alī] ibn Abī Ṭālib has given you the taste for daring remarks against the ruler, and you will obviously not be weaned from the practice any time soon. You have been deceived by his saying:

If I were a gatekeeper at a gate of Paradise,  
I would have said to Hamdān: Enter in peace.

And by his saying:

I called out to Hamdān, when the doors were closed,  
And the likes of Hamdān make opening the door easy. [He is]  
Like the Indian sword whose sharp edge has not been blunted:  
A handsome face and a heart that does not throb with fear.

“Write for her what she needs,” [Mu‘āwiya concluded.]

### The coming of Bakāra al-Hilāliyya to Mu‘āwiya

Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Khuzā‘ī said, on the authority of al-Sha‘bi:

Bakāra al-Hilāliyya asked permission to see Mu‘āwiya ibn Abī Sufyān, and she was granted permission. At that time, he was in Medina. So she entered. She was an aged woman with weak sight and a frail body, tottering between two servants of hers. She gave her greetings and sat down. Returning her greeting, Mu‘āwiya said, “How are you, aunt?” “I am fine, Commander of the Faithful,” she replied. “Time has changed you,” he observed. “That’s how it is: life is filled with vicissitudes. Whoever lives, grows old, and whoever dies is buried.” ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ said, “Commander of the Faithful, she is by God the one who said:

O Zayd, take from our house a sharp sword  
That has been buried in the soil.  
I have kept it for a day of war,  
And time has today revealed it is well-preserved.”

Marwān said, "Commander of the Faithful, she is by God the one who said:

Do you think the son of Hind will rule as a caliph?  
That is too far for him, even if he wants it.  
Your soul in the open air has made you wish an error,  
‘Amr and Sa‘īd have deceived you into misery."

Sa‘īd ibn al-‘Āṣī said, "By God, she is the one who said:

I used to wish I would die and not see  
Any orator from Umayya in the pulpits.  
God has delayed my death and lengthened [my life]  
And I came to see oddities in time:  
Every day as time goes by, their orator  
Blames the family of Aḥmad to everyone."

Then they were silent. "Mu‘āwiya," Bakāra said. "Your words have weakened my sight and shortened my argument. By God, I am indeed the one who said what they quoted to you. But what has been hidden from you is even more." Mu‘āwiya laughed and said, "That does not prevent us from giving you a gift. Say what you need." "Not now," Bakāra said.

### The coming of al-Zarqā’ to Mu‘āwiya

‘Ubayd Allāh ibn ‘Amr al-Ghassānī related the following on the authority of al-Sha‘bī:

A group from the Banū Umayya who used to spend evenings with Mu‘āwiya said:

While Mu‘āwiya was one night with ‘Amr, Sa‘īd, ‘Utba, and al-Walīd, they mentioned al-Zarqā’ ibnat ‘Adī ibn Ghālib ibn Qays al-Hamdāniyya, who had been present with her people at the Battle of Ṣiffīn. "Who among you remembers the words she spoke?" Mu‘āwiya asked. "We remember them," some of them said. "In that case advise me what to do with her," Mu‘āwiya replied. "We advise you to kill her," some of them said. "What bad advice you have given me!" Mu‘āwiya said. "Is it proper for someone like me to be spoken of as the one who killed a woman after he got the upper hand over her?"

He then wrote to his agent in al-Kūfa asking him to send her to him in the company of a reliable man from among her closest relatives whose degree of consanguinity precluded his marrying her, along with several horsemen from her people. He also asked him to pave the way by kindly predisposing her, to veil her with a thick veil, and to spend lavish amounts on her. Mu‘āwiya’s agent summoned her and made her read the letter. "If the Commander of the Faithful is giving me the choice," she said, "I will not go to see him. But if he is imposing an injunction on me, obedience to him is preferable." So the agent took her with him and equipped her well as he had been instructed.

When she entered the presence of Mu‘āwiya, the latter said, "Welcome, welcome! You have come in the best manner in which a new arrival may come!

How are you?" "I'm fine, Commander of the Faithful," she replied. "May God continue to bless you always." "How did you fare on your trip?" Mu'awiya asked. "Like a family's foster daughter or a spoilt child," she said. "That's what we ordered the men to do." Mu'awiya said. "Do you know why I sent for you?" "How can I know the things that I don't know?" she said. "Were you not the woman who rode the red camel," he asked, "and, standing between the two rows [of fighters] in the Battle of Şiffin, urged the fight on and kindled the fire of war? What made you do that?" "Commander of the Faithful," she said. "The head perished and the tail was cut off. What is gone has not come back. Time has its vicissitudes, and whoever ponders will perceive. Events occur, and they are followed by others." "You are right," Mu'awiya said, then asked, "Do you remember the words you said on that day?" "No, by God," she said. "I don't remember them. I was made to forget them." "But I remember them," Mu'awiya said. "How excellent you were when you said: 'O people: repent and come back. You are engaged in a seditious strife that has clothed you in cloaks of injustice and diverted you from the right goal. What a blind, deaf, and dumb act of sedition this is, one that fails to listen to those who scream at it and does not obey its leader. A lamp does not shine in the sun, nor do stars in the moonlight. Only steel can cut steel. Whoever asks for our advice, will be given guidance by us; whoever inquires, will receive information. O people: truth has been persistently seeking its goal, and now it has found it. O Emigrants and Supporters, be patient in your ordeal. It is as if the gaping wound of separation has healed, the forces of justice have united, and truth has refuted falsehood. Let no one say out of ignorance, "How to be just and where?" Let God dispose of an affair that has been determined. Indeed, women's dye is henna, while men's dye is blood. This day shall have its consequences.

And in matters of consequence, patience has the best outcomes.

"Now then, march onward to war. Do not flee or quarrel with one another."

Mu'awiya then added, "By God, Zarqā'. You have been 'Alī's partner in all the blood he shed." "May God give you good news," al-Zarqā' said, "and may He make your safety endure. Someone like you is worthy of giving good news and pleasing the companion who sits with him." "Does that please you?" Mu'awiya asked. "Yes, by God," she said. "I am pleased with the news, but how can I authenticate the actual deed?" Mu'awiya laughed. "By God," he said, "your loyalty to 'Alī after his death is indeed more remarkable than your love for him when he was alive. Tell me what you need." "Commander of the Faithful," al-Zarqā' said, "I swore an oath to myself never to ask any commander for anything if I had helped others against him. Someone like you gives without being asked, and is generous without being begged." "You're right!" Mu'awiya said, and ordered that she and those who had come with her be given rewards and suits of clothing.

### The coming of Umm Sinān Bint Khaythama to Mu‘āwiya, God have mercy on him

Sa‘īd ibn Ḥudhāfa said:

When Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam was governor of Medina, he imprisoned a boy from the Banū Layth because he had committed a crime. Umm Sinān bint Khaythama ibn Kharasha al-Madhḥijīyya, the boy’s grandmother and his father’s mother, came to Marwān and interceded for the boy, but Marwān was rude to her. So she went to see Mu‘āwiya [in Damascus], entered his presence, and introduced herself. He recognized her. “Welcome, daughter of Khaythama,” he said. “What has brought you to our land? I have known you to be someone who vilifies us and incites our enemy against us.” “The Banū ‘Abd Manāf,” she said, “have refined manners, prominent notables, and great wise men. They don’t behave foolishly once they have the ability to discern, they don’t act insolently after they acquire forbearance, nor do they take revenge after they gain the quality of forgiveness. Furthermore, the worthiest of all people to follow the traditions of forefathers is, indeed, you.” “You are right,” Mu‘āwiya said. “We are the worthiest. But how about your verses that say:

Sleep has eluded me and my eyes don’t sleep,  
And night brings me worries and takes them away.  
O family of Madhḥij: there is no rest for you, get ready;  
The enemy has Aḥmad’s family in mind.  
Here is ‘Alī: he is like the crescent surrounded  
By stars of good fortune in the middle of the sky.  
He is the best of creatures, the cousin of Muḥammad.  
If he guides you by his light, you’ll be led on the right way.  
Ever since he attended wars, he continued to be victorious,  
And triumph was ever present above his flag.”

“That was in the past, Commander of the Faithful,” Umm Sinān said. “I hope you will be a successor for us after him.” A man among those sitting with him said, “How can that be, Commander of the Faithful, when she is the one who says:

If you perish, Abū al-Ḥusayn, you will continue to be  
Known truly as the one who guides and is guided [by God].  
Go, may your Lord’s blessing be on you, so long as  
A pigeon calls a turtledove on the tree branches.  
After Muḥammad, you have been his successor  
As he entrusted us to you, and you were faithful.  
Today there is no successor, after him, who can be hoped for.  
It is impossible for us to hope for a human being like him.”

“Commander of the Faithful,” Umm Sinān said. “It’s a tongue that spoke, and a saying that was true. If what we had thought of you were realized, you would be abundantly fortunate. By God, none but these men has bequeathed on you the hatred of the Muslims’ hearts. Refute their statement and distance yourself from

them. If you do, you'll increase your own nearness to God and become more loved by the believers." "Do you really think so?" Mu'āwiya asked. "Praise be to God!" Umm Sinān said. "I swear by God, someone like you is not praised with false words, nor is he offered apology with lies. You know this to be our opinion of you and the hidden content of our hearts. By God, 'Alī was more loved by us than you were, and you were more loved by us than others were." "Others like whom?" Mu'āwiya asked. "Like Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam and Sa'īd ibn al-ʿĀṣ," Umm Sinān said. "And what makes me deserve that, in your opinion?" Mu'āwiya asked. "Your great forbearance and noble forgiveness," Umm Sinān replied. "They both aspire for that too," Mu'āwiya said. "By God," she rejoined, "they both hold an opinion [desiring to be caliph] similar to the one you used to have regarding 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān, may God have mercy on him." "By God," he agreed, "you are close [to the truth]. What do you need?"

"Commander of the Faithful," she began. "Marwān has settled in Medina like someone who does not intend to leave it. He does not rule justly, nor does he judge according to tradition. He relentlessly prosecutes the stumbling acts of Muslims, and unveils the imperfections of believers. He has imprisoned my son's son, so I went to see him. He said such-and-such, so I gave him the brush-off and vented my spleen on him. I later blamed myself and said, 'Why don't I take my case to someone who is more likely to forgive?' So I came to you, Commander of the Faithful, so that you may look into my case and help."

"You are right," the caliph said. "I am not going to ask about the boy's crime and require you to defend him." [He then ordered his secretary,] "Write that he be set free."

"Commander of the Faithful," Umm Sinān pleaded, "how can I return when my provisions are depleted and my camel is exhausted?" So Mu'āwiya commanded that she be given a camel and five thousand dirhams.

### The coming of 'Ikriṣha bint al-Aṭraṣh to Mu'āwiya, God most high have mercy on him

Abū Bakr al-Hudhalī said on the authority of 'Ikrima:

Leaning on her crutch, 'Ikriṣha bint al-Aṭraṣh ibn Rawāḥa entered to see Mu'āwiya. She greeted him as caliph and sat down. "'Ikriṣha," Mu'āwiya said, "Have I now become Commander of the Faithful to you?" "Yes," she answered, "for 'Alī is not alive." Mu'āwiya continued, "At the Battle of Ṣiffīn, were you not the one who gave [the warriors] the swords as you stood between the two rows saying,

O people: take care of yourselves and don't let someone who has gone astray harm you after you have been given guidance. Whoever is given a home in Paradise never leaves it, whoever lives there never gets old, and whoever enters it never dies. So buy it then by giving in exchange a home whose bliss never endures and whose worries never end. Be a people who have insight into your

religion, strengthened by patience in seeking your right. Muṣāwiya is marching against you with dumb Arabs who have closed minds and don't understand faith or know what wisdom is. He has summoned them by offering worldly incentives, and they have responded. He has invited them to falsehood, and they have obeyed him. Servants of God: beware of God in [following] God's religion. Take care not to depend on others [to do your duty], for this will break the ties between Muslims and extinguish the light of truth. This is the lesser Battle of Badr and the latter encounter of al-ʿAqaba. O you Emigrants and Supporters, march forth behind your mental vision and be steadfast in implementing your determination. Tomorrow you will meet the Syrians, who will be like braying donkeys that fart like cows and drop dung like camels.

“I can see you [in my mind] leaning on this staff of yours, as the two armies gathered around you and said, ‘This is ʿIkriṣha bint al-Aṭraṣh ibn Rawāḥa.’ You would have almost killed the Syrians, if it had not been for God's decree; and God's command is a decree ordained. [Q. 33:38] What made you do that?”

“Commander of the Faithful,” ʿIkriṣha said. “God Most High says, ‘O you who believe, ask not about things which, if revealed to you, would displease you ...’ [Q. 5:101]. An intelligent person does not like to repeat anything that he hates.” “You are right,” Muṣāwiya said. “Tell me what you need.” “In times of old, our charities used to be taken from our rich and given to our poor. This is no longer the case nowadays: down-trodden people are not supported, nor are the poor provided for. If this is in accordance with your policy, someone like you has to be made aware of his inadvertence and his need to seek repentance. If however it is not in accordance with your policy, someone like you should not seek the help of traitors and appoint oppressors.” “Woman,” Muṣāwiya said, “we sometimes have problems with our subjects – matters that erupt out and seas that burst forth.” “Praise be to God!” ʿIkriṣha said. “By God, there is no right that God has given us that causes harm to others, and He knows the unknown.” “People of Iraq,” Muṣāwiya concluded, “‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib has made you alert, so you cannot be mastered!” He then ordered that their charities be returned to them and that they be treated fairly.

### **The story of Dārimiyya al-Ḥajūniyya with Muṣāwiya, God Most High have mercy on him**

Sahl ibn Abī Sahl al-Tamīmī related the following on the authority of his father:

Muṣāwiya went on pilgrimage and inquired about a woman from the Banū Kināna who lived in al-Ḥajūn. She was called Dārimiyya al-Ḥajūniyya and was black and plump. He was told that she was in good health, so he summoned her and she was brought to him. “How are you, daughter of Ḥām?” he asked. “I am not Ḥām's [daughter],” she replied, “if you find such a trait blameworthy. I am a woman from the Banū Kināna.” “You are right,” Muṣāwiya said. “Do you know why I summoned you?” “Only God knows the unknown,” she replied. “I sent for you,” Muṣāwiya continued, “to ask you: ‘Why did you love ʿAlī and hate me,

and why did you give him support and show me enmity?" "Will you guarantee my safety?" she asked. "No, I will not," he answered. "Now that you have refused," she said, "I loved 'Alī because of his justice in treating his subjects and his equal treatment of everyone. I hated you because you fought someone who was more worthy of command than you are. You sought something that was not yours by right. I supported 'Alī because God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, demanded allegiance to him, and because he loved the poor and respected people of religion. I was hostile to you because you shed blood, were unjust in judicial matters, and ruled capriciously."

"That is why your belly is paunchy, your breasts are big, and your buttocks are bulky," Mu'āwiya taunted. "O you," she countered, "by God, it is Hind [your mother] who was proverbial for these qualities, not I." "Take it easy, woman," Mu'āwiya said, "We have only talked in compliments. When a woman's belly is paunchy, her child is ready to be born; when her breasts are big, her suckling baby is satiated, and when her buttocks are bulky, her sitting posture has poise." She relented and calmed down. "Woman, did you see 'Alī?" Mu'āwiya asked. "Yes, by God," she replied. "What did you think of him?" he asked again. "By God, I saw a man who was not beguiled by kingship as you have been, and not preoccupied by luxury as you have been." "Did you hear him speak?" Mu'āwiya asked. "Yes, by God," she replied, "he swept away the blindness of hearts just as oil clears rust in a bowl." "You are right," Mu'āwiya said, "Do you need anything?" "Will you give me things, if I ask?" she dared. "Yes," he said. "Then give me one hundred red she-camels," she said, "with their stallion and shepherd." "What will you do with them?" he asked. "I'll feed the little ones with their milk, and use them to keep the adults alive, to merit noble deeds, and to reconcile [feuding] clans." "If I give you all that," Mu'āwiya asked, "will I occupy the same position that 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib did with you?" "You'll be a better water fountain than Ṣaddā, a better plant of pasture than Cyperus, and a better young man than Mālik [ibn Nuwayra]. Praise be to God, do you ask for less?" Mu'āwiya then began to recite:

If I do not practice clemency with you,  
 Who, after me, will be hoped for clemency?  
 Take them happily and remember the act of a laudable man  
 Who rewarded you with peace for a war of enmity.

Then he added, "By God, if 'Alī were alive, he would not have given you anything like that." "No, by God," she said, "not even a single hair from the property of the Muslims."

### The coming of Umm al-Khayr bint Ḥuraysh to Mu'āwiya

Basing himself on al-Shu'aybi's authority, 'Ubayd Allāh ibn 'Umar al-Ghassāni said:

Mu‘āwiya wrote to his governor in al-Kūfa, asking that Umm al-Khayr bint al-Ḥuraysh ibn Surāqa al-Bāriqī be sent to him on her camel. He told the governor that he would reward or punish him according to whatever good or bad things she had to say about him. When the governor received Mu‘āwiya’s letter, he rode to her house and made her read it. “As for me,” she said, “I am neither going to deviate from obedience nor offer a false pretext. I always wanted to meet the Commander of the Faithful for reasons stirring in my heart.”

When he bade her farewell and was about to leave, he said to her, “Umm al-Khayr: the Commander of the Faithful wrote to me that he would reward me well or punish me badly according to the good or bad things [you would tell him]. What can I expect from you?” “Listen, man,” she said, “the way you treat me should not give you the idea that I will please you by telling lies; however, your acquaintance with me should also not make you despair that I would say anything but the truth about you.”

She then proceeded on her journey. The trip passed pleasantly, until she came to Mu‘āwiya. He put her up with his womenfolk and admitted her into his presence on the fourth day when his companions were sitting with him. “Peace be upon you, Commander of the Faithful, God’s mercy and His blessings,” she greeted him. “And upon you be peace, Umm al-Khayr,” Mu‘āwiya said. “You have rightly addressed me by this title.” “The sudden, unexpected appearance before a potentate invalidates what he likes to know,” she continued, “and every appointed time has a decreed content.” “You are right!” Mu‘āwiya said, “How are you, aunt? And how was your trip?” “Commander of the Faithful,” Umm al-Khayr replied, “I was well and in good health all the way till I reached you. Now I find myself in an elegant session in the presence of a kind king.” “I won you over with my good intentions,” Mu‘āwiya said. “Commander of the Faithful,” Umm al-Khayr said, “may God spare you the trouble of refuting a saying or anything whose consequence may be fatal.” “We did not mean that,” the caliph said. “Tell us about what you said when ‘Ammār ibn Yāsir was killed.” “They were words I had not embellished,” Umm al-Khayr said, “and I had not thought out well; simply words that my tongue discharged at the shock [of ‘Ammār’s death]. If you would like me to create other words for you, I will.” Mu‘āwiya turned to his companions sitting with him and asked, “Is there anyone among you who remembers her words?” One man among them said, “I remember some of her words, Commander of the Faithful.” “Let us have them,” the caliph said. The man began, “I remember she was wearing a thick cloak from Zabid with a patent weave; she was riding a gray camel and surrounded [by men]. In her hand she carried a whip with a long lash. Like a braying male camel, she bellowed saying:

O people: fear your Lord. The earthquake at the Hour of Resurrection is awesome! God has clarified the truth for you, He has shown you the evidence, made visible the path, raised the flag, and has not left you in dark, thick clouds. What do you want to do, may God have mercy on you? To flee from the Commander

of the Faithful [‘Ali] or from the march? To abandon Islam or renege on the truth? Have you not heard God, may His praise be exalted, say, ‘And We will surely test you so that We may know those among you who strive and those who are steadfast; and We will test your reports’ [Q. 47:31].

“Then she raised her head toward the sky, saying,

Patience has run out, certainty has faltered, and fear has spread. In Your hand, Lord, lies the control over people’s hearts. So unite all aims in piety, O God; conciliate hearts in guidance; and restore truth to its people.

Ahead, all of you, to the just Imam, may God have mercy on you; ahead to the pleasant, pious man and the greatest friend. These are old feuds going back to the Battle of Badr, grudges coming from the Jāhiliyya [the pre-Islamic period], and hatreds traceable to the Battle of Uḥud – which an instigator has aroused among you when you were inadvertent, so that he may achieve revenge for the Banū ‘Abd Shams.

“Then she said,

‘Fight then the leaders of disbelief – they have no regard for their oaths – haply they may desist’ [Q. 9:12]. Be steadfast, O you Emigrants and Supporters. Fight, while you are aware that your Lord sees you and steadfast as you follow your religion. Tomorrow you will encounter the Syrians, who are like frightened donkeys fleeing from lions and who don’t know where they are being led in the earth’s deep ravines. They have sold the Afterlife for this world, and purchased error for guidance. For blindness they have sold vision, and surely they will soon be regretful. When repentance sets in and they seek revocation [of their sale], it will be too late to escape. By God, whoever strays from truth falls into falsehood. God’s friends have belittled life in this world and refused it, deeming the Afterlife delightful. So they have made an effort to achieve it. O people: adhere to God before [His] rights are invalidated and [His] bounds become inoperative, when tyrants appear and Satan’s command becomes powerful. May God have mercy on you, where do you want to go leaving [‘Ali] the cousin of God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, his son-in-law and his two grandsons’ father? [‘Ali] was created from [Muḥammad’s] clay, and branched out from his same root. He was singled out by him to keep his secret, and was made by him to be the gate of his city. [Muḥammad] informed Muslims about his love for [‘Ali] and elucidated [for them] the hypocrites’ hatred of him. Now here he is, [‘Ali,] the one who split skulls and broke idols: he prayed [to one God] when people were polytheists; he obeyed [Muḥammad] when people hated [him]. He continued to do so until he killed the [enemy] fighters at Badr, annihilated the [hostile] people at Uḥud, and defeated the Parties. Through him God killed the people of Khaybar and dispersed the gang of Huwāzin. What great events these were, events that sowed hypocrisy, apostasy, and discord in the hearts [of the defeated], and strengthened the faith of [the victorious] Muslims. I have done my best in my speech and gone to great lengths in my advice. Success is from God – peace be upon you and the mercy of God.”

After that, Muṣāwiya said, “Umm al-Khayr, in this speech you intended only to see me dead. If I kill you, I will have no compunction about that.” “By God,” she responded, “what hurts me is that my killing will be at the hands of the one, whose misery would be God’s way of making me happy.” “That’s impossible, you meddling woman,” Muṣāwiya said, then went on to ask, “What do you think of ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān, may God have mercy on him?” “What can I possibly say about ‘Uthmān?” she said. “People chose him as caliph when they were satisfied with him, and they killed him when they hated him.” “Umm al-Khayr,” Muṣāwiya said, “this is the foundation on which you can build.” “But God witnesses,” she replied, “and He is a sufficient witness for me! I have not intended to disparage ‘Uthmān in any way, for he was first in the race to do good and has a high degree in future [life].” “What do you think of Ṭalḥa ibn ‘Abd Allāh?” Muṣāwiya asked. “What might I say about Ṭalḥa?” she said. “He was assassinated in a place he deemed to be safe, having been approached from a direction against which he failed to take precaution. God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, promised him Paradise.” “What do you think of al-Zubayr?” Muṣāwiya asked. “What shall I say about the son of the aunt of God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, and one of his disciples? God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, testified that he would enter Paradise. Before all others he was the first to do every noble deed in Islam. I beseech you, by God, O Muṣāwiya (for the tribe of Quraysh has said you are the most forbearing of its members): accommodate me by virtue of your forbearance, spare me all these questions, and ask me about whatever else you like.” “Yes, with pleasure,” Muṣāwiya said, “I will spare you.” Then he ordered that she be given a big reward and returned her [to al-Kūfa] with honor.

### **The coming of Arwā bint ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib to Muṣāwiya, God have mercy on him**

Al-‘Abbās ibn Bakkār said:

‘Abd Allāh ibn Sulaymān al-Madani and Abū Bakr al-Hudhali related to me that, when Arwā bint al-Hārith ibn ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib entered the presence of Muṣāwiya, she was an old woman. When Muṣāwiya saw her, he said, “Welcome, aunt. How have you been after our departure?” “Son of my brother,” she replied, “you have been ungrateful for the favors you received, you have acted meanly vis-à-vis your cousin’s friendship, you have called yourself by a name that is not yours, and you have taken what is not yours by right – all in a manner that bespeaks no religion of yours or your forefathers’, and that has no precedent in Islam. All this happened after you had all disbelieved in God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace. So God has made your fortunes miserable and your faces humiliated. He has restored right to its people, even if the polytheists hated that. We had the upper hand and our Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, was the one given victory. After his death, you have been made rulers over us, with the pretext that you are related to God’s Messenger,

may God bless him and grant him peace, while we are closer to him than you and worthier of this rulership. Thus, as far as you are concerned, we are now in the same position as the Israelites in relation to Pharaoh's family; while after the death of our Prophet, 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, may God have mercy upon him, has occupied the position of Aaron in relation to Moses, after the death of our Prophet. Our goal is Paradise and yours is hellfire."

"That's enough, you deluded hag," 'Amr ibn al-ʿĀṣ protested. "Abstain from talking since your mind has gone; in any case, your testimony alone has no validity."

"And you are talking, you son of an adulteress!" she said. "Your mother was the most famous female singer in Mecca, and the readiest of them to take a fee! Mind your own business and take care of yourself. By God, nowhere in the tribe of Quraysh do you belong to the heart of their noble descent or honorable position. Five men from Quraysh claimed you, each of them alleging he was your father. So your mother was asked about them. 'Each of them had intercourse with me,' she replied. 'Look and see which of them resembles the boy closest. Let the boy belong to him.' The similarity of al-ʿĀṣ ibn Wā'il prevailed, and so you were said to be his child."

"That's enough, old woman," Marwān interrupted. "Move on to the reason why you have come here." "And you too are talking, you son of al-Zarqā'?" Then she turned to Mu'āwiya. "By God," she said, "only you have encouraged these men to harass me. It was your mother who said about the killing of Ḥamza:

We requited you for the Battle of Badr,  
Though fighting a war after another is madness.  
I had no patience to endure the loss of 'Utba,  
So mine is a wild thankfulness to Time  
Until my bones decay in my grave.

"My uncle's daughter answered her, saying:

Shame on you at Badr and after Badr,  
Daughter of a tyrant with monstrous unbelief."

"May God forgive what is bygone, my aunt," Mu'āwiya said. "Tell me, what do you need?" "I need nothing from you," she said and left.

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