

# العالم الإسلامي

## **The Life and Works of Jāhiz**

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to pay great deference to us after forbidding us to speak, to sit with us after turning us a deaf ear, to listen to us after abusing us . . .

I have therefore written a book in refutation of the anthropomorphists which will be neither beneath the notice of [288] scholars and educated men nor above the heads of tyros.

One of the main resources of the anthropomorphists is strained interpretations of the Koran and tradition, and this the author exposes in the book in question. He asks Muḥammad to read it and give it a wide circulation; he declares that it is everyone's duty to help the authorities with advice; he sings the recipient's praises by means of examples drawn from history, for Muḥammad is still very young; and finally he explains why he writes to him and not to his father.

## VIII DRINK AND THE DRINKER

Jāḥiẓ is presumably replying to a correspondent who is fond of wine and has asked him for an account of the various fermented drinks: he is to put the arguments for and against them, explain the difference between the various vintages, and say who favoured and who avoided them in the ancient world. Using his correspondent's own terms, he gives a glowing account of the beneficial mental and physical effects of these beverages, at the same time enumerating their drawbacks. Then he compares wine with *nabīdh*\* (supposedly date wine).

### 1. Lawfulness of *nabīdh*

[282] Suppose we are asked: How do you know? It may be that *nabīdh*\* falls within the prohibition on wine, but that since this originally applied only to wine proper, people supposed that that was all that was strictly unlawful, and that other liquors were only voluntarily included? We reply: We know that this is the opposite of our correspondent's view, for good and obvious reasons. First the Companions of the Prophet, who witnessed the revelation of the precepts of the faith, and after them the 'Descendants' (*Tābi'ūn*\*), all agreed that a man who falsely accuses married women deserves to be punished; but they disagreed about alcoholic beverages, not because they did not know the names and ingredients of wine, but because as regards the traditions quoted about the lawfulness or otherwise of these drinks (*ashriba*)—even if for Arabic speakers all *ashriba* were wine—they did not need to ask the transmitters of the traditions which drinks they applied to, any more than they needed to ask the difference between male and female slaves. To go into all the questions and answers implicit in this subject would be a lengthy business. Those who disagree with us about the lawfulness of *nabīdh*\*, while

recognizing that the names, ingredients and origins of many intoxicating liquors are still known today, do not deny that God singled out wine for prohibition from among them all, leaving the others free like everything else that is lawful. The proof of this is that God has never forbidden men anything without allowing them a related category with roughly the same effect, in order that by the use of that which is lawful they may be enabled to do without the unlawful (I am speaking here of traditional prohibitions, not commonsense ones). For instance, he forbade spilt blood, but not blood which is not spilt, such as clotted blood in the liver, spleen, etc.

The people of Medina all agree in regarding alcoholic drinks as forbidden, but

### 2. Medina has no monopoly on the truth

[283] . . . I reply: The pre-eminence of a town makes nothing lawful or unlawful; these things are known only from the eloquent Book and the acknowledged *Sunna*\*, from authentic traditions and specific tests. Who, after all, is this Emigrant (*Muhājir*\*) or member of the Anṣār\* on whose authority the unlawfulness of *nabīdh*\* is reported? If he were a fair opponent, he would acknowledge that the people of Medina who prohibit *nabīdh*\* are no more virtuous than those who condone certain abnormal sexual practices—just as some Meccans regard the lending of wives as lawful, and others regard animals slaughtered by Negroes as unlawful because, they say, they are too ugly, while some Meccan judges pass sentence on the strength of a single witness or a single oath, contrary to the letter of the Revelation. The Meccans, who inflict a scourging for a slight smell [of wine], impose the same penalty for carrying an empty skin, because they reckon it a receptacle [capable of containing] wine; so that an opponent of theirs once asked: 'Why do they not scourge themselves, seeing that every man carries with him the instrument of fornication?' On that argument anyone who carries a sword, a dagger or a strong poison should be convicted, for they are instruments of crime.

Again, the men of Medina have not divested themselves of human nature and put on the virtues of angels. If all they say were right and true, they would have scourged all the people who went to listen to Ma'bad\*, al-Gharīḍ\* [and other musicians and singers, and also some *fuqahā*\*] and a group of 'Descendants' and elders, because the latter were supposed to have drunk *nabīdh*\*—which the people of Medina class with wine—while the former sang lawful, permitted songs and accompanied themselves on the lute, guitar, flute, cymbals and other instruments that are neither unlawful nor forbidden.

IX JUSTIFICATION OF *NABĪDH*

Jāḥiẓ writes to al-Ḥasan b. Waḥb to ask him for some *nabīdh*\*; after some friendly banter, he develops his ideas about

1. *The effects of nabīdh*\*

[283] . . . I shall tell you of the nobility of *nabīdh*\* and its superiority to other [alcoholic] drinks, then I shall similarly demonstrate the superiority of your *nabīdh*\* to all others. When *nabīdh*\* soaks into your bones, spreads to every organ and suffuses into your brain, it clarifies your mind, redeems your spirit [from care], relaxes you in body and soul, and makes you carefree, gay, tolerant, optimistic and good-humoured. It closes the door to suspicion and makes you understand everything and see everything in a favourable light. It liberates you from the bother of being on your guard, from carking anxiety, from fear of the future, from base covetousness and from the tediousness of thinking about earning your living—in a word, from everything that hampers gladness, disturbs pleasure, weakens desire or mars happiness. It gives old men the fire of youth and young men the exuberance of childhood. The only danger, when drinking it, is of going beyond the gay stage to the excitable or even the irritable stage. If its sole benefit were that as it seeps into your soul and mingles with your blood it absolves you from trouble and effort, makes you appreciate jesting and wit and abhor all earnestness, relieves you of the complication of bashfulness and the trammel of dignity, affords you a day of rest with an eye to days of thought that lie ahead [289], and facilitates your return to more serious things, that alone would be sufficient grounds for being grateful to it and giving it a good character.

2. *Al-Ḥasan b. Waḥb's nabīdh*\*

[291] . . . Always good, in your house this drink is still better; to serve it is always noble, but in your case still nobler. If you suppose that I ask you for some in order to drink, serve or sniff it privately, to pass it round in society, to make show of it among my equals, to test the heads of my cronies, to lavish it on my guests or to put it within reach of my friends, you have a poor opinion of me indeed; and that ill judgment leads you to underrate it in many ways and do it great injustice. But if you suppose that I wish for some in order to gratify a woman, to win the friendship of a great man, to wash the impurities from my entrails, to pay the respect due to [alcoholic] drink, to clear my bleary eyes and heal unwholesome bodies, or to be host to a fine poet, an eloquent orator or a great man of letters, so

that it may give them inspiration and ideas and lead them [to express] the gratitude they feel and the thanks they owe, [if you suppose that I wish for some] to draw a blessing from it, to soak myself in its benign influence, enjoy its presence, quench a thirst or make from it the elixir of life, or to think of you when I look at it . . . , then you have judged me aright.