ABU'L-ATĀHIYA; HIS LIFE AND HIS POETRY

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The history of Arabic literature, on which there is no lack of general and summary works, can only progress from its present unsatisfactory state with the help of detailed studies of individual writers which will seek to relate them to the living traditions of the literature as well as to expose their own individual contributions. While it is true that the sources rarely afford us the quantity or kind of information which would allow us to grasp the full personality of any of the classical writers, there is still much that can be derived from the facts they do give when considered in relation to his period, environment and literary production. The ideals of literary criticism can no longer be served by a mere confrontation of texts and citations as has hitherto been the practice in this literature; scholarship should now seek to isolate to the degree possible the individuality of the authors it studies, and to present them in those aspects which made them great in their own time and assured their survival into later ages. It will be the purpose of the present thesis to attempt such a presentation of Abu'l-'Atahiya, who less than any of the great poets of the early 'Abbasid period has attracted serious study, despite his acknowledged importance in the religious and cultural life of his age and his high reputation down to our very own day.

Abu'l-'Atahiya is of considerable importance both in the field of Arabic literature and in the field of religious history,
for he was the first poet to concentrate on the production of ascetic poetry, and in the Divan which has come down to us there is a very high proportion of such poetry.

Abu'l-'Atahiya has been the subject of some study during the present century. The work of O. Rešer has been mainly concerned with his Divan, on which he published in 1914 a valuable and exhaustive list of corrections of the 1909 edition (1) and, in 1928, a translation into German of the ascetic poems (2). Such works as have appeared in Arabic are of little value: the volume of Muhammad Ahmad Barāniq (3) is merely a collection of quotations and texts. The same can be said of the series of articles of Abu'l-Muta'āl al-Sa'id (4). Al-Bustānî published in his series Al-Rawa'i a pamphlet (5) about Abu'l-'Atahiya which again is little more than a random collection of some quotations from the old sources without any attempt at serious study.

The article by Muhammad Khalaf Allah can be considered the best which has yet appeared in Arabic although it extends to only a few pages (6). The article by Anis al-Maqdisî is more

1. cf. WZKM, 28, 362, 1914.
4. Al-Risāla, iii (Cairo, 1935).
5. Abu'l-'Atahiya, selected poems by Father Shaykhū (Beirut, 1950). This edition was used. The first appeared in(1927) and the second in(1931).
6. Dirāsāt Fi Al-Adab Al-Islāmi (Ladżnat al-ta'līf wa'l-tardjamā wa'l-nashr, Cairo, 1947).
accurate, but it is unsatisfactory as he does not give sufficient information in it\(^1\). Nor, also, can any help be gathered from the books which deal with Arabic literature in a general manner. In view of this it is not too much to claim that an adequate study of this poet has yet to be made, but there will be attempted here an exposition of his life and work in relation to the general culture of the time and the literary history of the early 'Abbāsīd.

In our sources there are to be found collections of short stories and dispersed quotations which are seldom arranged in proper chronological order, or according to subject matter; these, too, are sometimes in contradiction with each other. There are few details available, but such as they are they can be made to provide the outlines of a picture of the life of Abu'l-'Atāhiya.

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The old sources can be divided for our purpose into literary and historical and other books. No such complete division occurs in these sources, but it is a useful one for the purpose of their study.

A. - The literary sources:

1. Abu'l-'Atāhiya's Dīwān\(^2\)

It is clear that the poet himself must be the first source

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1. **Umarā' Al-Shi'r Al-'Arabī Fī Al-'Asr Al-'Abbāsī** (Beirut, 1946).

2. This was first printed in Beirut in 1887. It was reprinted by Father Shaykhū (Beirut, 1909) and again in (1914). O. Regeër in WZKM, 28, 362, gives a critical study of the 1909 edition, and lists many of the mistakes in the Dīwān.
for such a study, and fortunately we do have this large collection of his poems which was collected in the 5th century A.H. by Ibn 'Abd al-Barr al-Qurtubi\(^{1}\). All these poems are on ascetic themes. There is also a small collection of poems on various subjects dispersed throughout many literary books which were collected by Father Shaykhū as a supplement to the Diwān.

The Damascus manuscript\(^{2}\) which was consulted shows many differences from the edited Diwān. Apparently Father Shaykhū did not consistently use this manuscript although he does refer to it\(^{3}\) and to the manuscripts of Asitāna, Cairo, and Beirut\(^{4}\). More details of this will be given in the chapter on his Diwān.

2. **Abu'l-Faradj al-Asfahānī\(^{5}\): *Kitāb Al-Aghānī\(^{6}\)**

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2. It is in Damascus in the Zāhirīya library under (Abd al-Barr, (s.S.368) Dam. Um. 91,1).
4. Shaykhū did not refer to the Berlin and Petersburg MSs. which O. Nešer (WZKM,28,362) speaks of. C. Brockelmann even gives their shelf mark in GAL, (Gi,77, Si, 119).
6. Al-Aghānī was edited several times. The first one is in twenty volumes (Būlāg,1285). It was reprinted (Cairo,1323). The twenty-first volume was edited by R.E. Brunnow, (Leyde, 1883). Then a nine volume edition by Dār al-kutub was produced (Cairo,1927). Dār al-Kutub also edited it again (Cairo,1950). It is at present being re-edited by Dār al-thaqāfa. Although several editions are now available the Būlāg edition which although not entirely satisfactory was the basis for the *Alphabetiques du Kitāb Al-Aghānī* of Guidi (Leide,1900)
This is an anthology which was based upon ninety-nine songs well known in the time of Abu'l-Faradj. From these songs Abu'l-Faradj derived his organisation of subjects and the subjects themselves and then turned to the authors of the verses and their lives. This is a very valuable work from which much of our information about many poets comes down to us. There is no comparable work in this field for it provides much of the background for the study of Abu'l-'Atahiya and much actual information about him as well. Abu'l-Faradj was considered to be a reliable man and in Al-Aghānī there is little trace of any marked polemical inclination or prejudice. Most of our information about Abu'l-'Atahiya does in fact come down to us through this book. Although he does not fulfil his promise to tell the stories of Abu'l-'Atahiya and 'Utba he does devote more than sixty pages (in vol. iii in the Būlāq edition) to his life and adds some scattered verses and stories about him in the other volumes. His narrative sources are reliable ones, and al-Sūlī's name frequently appears. It would seem

footnote cont. from previous page)
and has also served as the text upon which the remarks of other scholars such as Goldziher are based. Despite its well known defects it has been used in the present thesis in order to take advantage of these critical aids.

1. Shafiq Djabri’s Dirasat Al-Aghanī (Damascus, 1952) shows that Abu'l-Faradj remained uninfluenced by the literary polemics of the time, and he gives the book a considerable importance since it would appear that it really does give a true picture of the life of the time.
that quite a lot of Abu'l-Faradj's information came from him. The name of the first narrator is usually mentioned whenever texts are quoted from Al-Aghānī, and in the appendix to this thesis tables of narrators are given. Abu'l-Faradj also frequently points out that he is quoting from Kitāb Harūn b. 'Ali which has been lost. (1) Al-Aghānī really takes a place in Arabic literature which no other work could fill, and without it little would be known about Abu’l-'Atāhiya.

Abu'l-Faradj's Maqātil Al-Ta'libiyīn (2), is an historical work in which Abu'l-Faradj gives an account of the 'Alīs who were killed from 'Ali up to his own time. The only interesting account in the book for our purpose is the story of Abu'l-'Atāhiya and Hadīr which contradicts what Abu'l-Faradj tells us in Al-Aghānī.


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1. In Al-Fihrist (144) we find Harūn's name with the with the title of his book: Ikhtiyār Al-Shu 'arā'

2. Al-Maqātil was edited and lithographed (Teheran, 1307) and again four years later (Bombay, 1311) on the margin of the selection of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Nadīf. This was not a complete edition. It was edited again (Nadjaf, 1353), and the last edition was edited by Ahmad Sāqr (Cairo, 1949). This is the one which was used.


4. It was printed (Dulāq, 1313) and again by 'Abd al-Salām Muhammad Harūn (Cairo, 1938) and by al-Sandūbī (Cairo, 1932) (footnote cont. on next page)
This is an anthology of Arab eloquence and is an essential source for literary history in general, as well as for the literary and social life of al-Djahiz's time. The digressions in this book do not prevent us from appreciating the valuable materials that it gives. There is not actually more than a few verses here and there of Abu'l-'Atahiya's work and nothing at all about his life, but the value of this book to the present thesis lies in the background material which it gives for the study of our poet.

4. Ibn Qutayba(1) Al-Shi'r Wa'l-Shu'arā(2)

In this famous work Ibn Qutayba deals with many poets, giving an account of their lives, discussing their poetry, and providing examples of it. For this reason it has long been recognised as an essential source for the literary background. Again it is in that that its value for this thesis lies.

(footnote cont. from previous page)

In three volumes. The last edition by 'Abd al-Salam Muhammad Hārūn (Ladjnat al-ta'līf wa'l-tarjama wa'l-nashr, Cairo, 1948) appears to be the best. Al-Bayān was used in the edition of al-Sandubī which is far from satisfactory, and would appear to be defective in some respects. The latest edition was not available in Edinburgh at the time of writing.

1. For Ibn Qutayba cf. C. Brockelmann E.I., ii, 399-400, and also the important introduction of M. Gaudefroy-Demombynes to his translation of the Mughaddima of Al-Shi'r (Paris, 1947).

2. Edited by M. J. de Goeje (Leiden, 1904) and by M.M. Shākir (Cairo, 1364) in two volumes. The last named was used although it is not satisfactory.
Ibn Qutayba tells us in his general introduction about poetry that he proposes to discuss fairly the contemporary poets. He did not in fact always fulfil that intention and on occasion descends to polemics though in general he is trustworthy and seldom exaggerates in his stories of the lives of the poets. His information about Abu'l-'Atāhiya is usually very reliable as can be seen by comparing the other sources, but he does not devote more than a few pages to him. Nor does he give a thorough account of his own sources; he finds it sufficient to say that one of the old writers told him this and that. This work, though, has proved valuable in giving accurate information about Abu'l-'Atāhiya and literary life in general.

'Uyun Al-Akhbār (1), which is a collection of poems, sayings, tales, and texts on ten different subjects (ascetic, war, etc.) is similar in value to Kitāb Al-Shīr. The social aspect of life appears more clearly in this book, and a description of the ascetic side of Abu'l-'Atāhiya is given in the chapter on al-Zuhd as an example of the ascetic poets. Again the value of the book lies more in the background it provides than in the scant information it gives about Abu'l-'Atāhiya.

1. This book is in ten volumes. 1-4 were edited by C. Brockelmann (Berlin, 1900), (Strassburg, 1903). C. Brockelmann also mentions the following editions in GAL (Gi, 120, Si, 185) by Dār al-kutub, Cairo, 1925) 1-IV, by U M. al-Ṣaqqā'ī (Cairo, 1932). Dār al-kutub's edition was used here, but it is far from satisfactory.

This is a typical philological work which can be considered one of the most interesting literary books. The philological interest does not dominate the historical and literary part. Al-Mubarrid made a serious attempt to be unpolemical and was generally considered to have succeeded although many criticised his literary taste. It has been said that he was an admirer of Abu'l-'Atahiya's poetry, but we don't find in his work more quoted than a few scattered verses, some of which are to explain how Abu'l-'Atahiya took the meaning of the elders and other ascetics. There is nothing about his life at all. This work has proved valuable not only in giving the background for our study but also in explaining, albeit briefly, the relationship of Abu'l 'Atahiya to contemporary ascetics.

6. Ibn al-Mu'tazz(3): Tabaqat Al-Shu'arā' Al-Muhdathīn(4)

This is a work which deals with the modern poets and their

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1. For al-Mubarrid cf. C. Brockelmann, E.I., iii, 623-624 and GAL (Si,168).
2. This book has been printed by W. Wright, parts 1-12 (Leipzig, 1864-1892), reprinted (Cairo, 1308, 1323, 1324), reprinted with extracts from al-Djahiz on the margin (Cairo, 1339) and with two modern commentaries: Tahdīb Al-Kamil by al-Sībā'i al-Bayānūnī (Cairo, 1923) in two volumes and Raghbat Al-Āmil by S. 'A. al-Marsīfī (Cairo, 1927-28) in 8 volumes. This last edition was the one used. O. Reşer translated it into German. Zāhī Mubārak re-edited this book (Cairo, 1936*) but even this edition is unsatisfactory.
4. Published in facsimile by 'Abbās Iqbāl (E.J.W. Gibb memorial series, London 1939) with introduction and notes by Iqbāl who lists the many mistakes in the facsimile.

* in 3 volumes
poetry and gives much about Abu'1-'Atáhiya himself as well as his contemporaries. It would seem, however, that Ibn al-Mu'tazz is somewhat polemical in his writing. His information about Abu'1-'Atáhiya does coincide with that given by Ibn Qutayba but he gives more details. His source is an old writer and his book takes a unique place in the study of Abu'1-'Atáhiya. His book Al-Badí'(1) which is a treatise on poetics is also of considerable importance as background to this study.

7. Al-Súlí(2) : Al-Awráq(3).

This is a work which contains a selection of poetry produced by members of the caliph's house and others, and is a valuable source for the literary history of the 'Abbásíd times. Al-Awráq provides much of the background for the study of Abu'1-'Atáhiya. In these books there is no information about Abu'1-'Atáhiya's life, only a few scattered verses, but the book still remains an interesting contribution.

The same can be said of his other work Akhbar Abi Tammām(4) which deals mainly with Abū Tammām.

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2. For al-Súlí cf. the interesting article in E.I. iv, 541-543 by Ign. Kratchkovsky and C. Brockelmann GAL (Gi, 143, Si, 218).
3. Ash'ar Awlād Al-Khulāfā' Wa Akhbaruhum and Akhbar Al-Rādī Billāh Wa'l-Muttaqi Lillāh which were edited by H. Dunne with the help of E.J.W. Gibb Memorial series (Cairo, 1935–86).
8. Ibn 'Abd Rabbih(1): Al-'Iqd Al-Farîd(2)

This is a work which has been named after jewels and divided into chapters dealing with different subjects such as proverbs, embassies, etc. The value of this book lies in its Andalusian authorship; the rest of its materials are taken from the literary eastern books like 'Uyûn Al-Akhbâr with a few individual changes. From Abu'l-'Atâhiya, Ibn 'Abd Rabbih chose a few poems but he gives no account of his life. This book is interesting for the present purpose because it throws some light on Abu'l-'Atâhiya's reputation in al-Andalus at that time.

9. Al-Qâlî (3): Al-Amâlî (4)

2. C. Brockelmann in GAL (Si, 250) mentions the following editions: (Bûlâq, 1923), (Cairo, 1302, 1305, 1316, 1321, 1913, 1928). The edition of (1928) is in the library of Edinburgh University in 4 volumes. Al-'Iqd was edited by M.S. al-'Aryan (Cairo, 1940) in 8 volumes. Although this edition is far from being satisfactory it was used because it was available in Edinburgh at the time of writing. A new edition by (Ladjnîn al-‘a[l wa’l-tardjama wa’l nashr, Cairo, 1940) appeared in 7 volumes. It is the best of the editions. C. Brockelmann (Si, 250) mentioned the following book which was a selection from Al-Iqd; Mukhtâr Al-’Iqd al-Farîd by 'A. al-‘Hakâm b. Muhammâd 'Abd al-Khâliq, 'A. Khalîl and M. al-Khudârî (Cairo, 1913).


4. Edited (Bûlâq, 1324) in 3 volumes. This edition is far from being satisfactory. The Indices to the Poetical Citations in the Kitâb Al-Amâlî for the Bûlâq edition made by F. Krenkow and A. Bevan (Leiden, 1913) facilitates the use of this edition. C. Brockelmann mentioned in GAL (Si, 202) the following works about Al-Amâlî: Al-Tanbîh ‘Alâ Awhâm Al-Qâlî Fî Amâlîh footnote cont. on next page.
This is a work which was dictated in Cordova and which displays the familiar literary mixture of philology, poetry, etc., and therefore is an interesting one for Abu'l-'Atāhiya's literary period. He does not give any detailed information about Abu'l-'Atāhiya although he refers to him in a few places and tells the story about him and 'Umar b. al-'Alā'. Again the value of this work lies in the background which it provides for a study of this period.

10. Al-Djumahī\(^{(1)}\): *Tabaqāt Fuhūl Al-Shu'arā*,\(^{(2)}\)

This book is concerned with the pre-Islamic and early Islamic poets and their classes. It has long been considered as a very valuable source for the literary standards of these poets. Again, its value for us lies naturally in the background material it provides.

11. Bashshār's\(^{(3)}\) Dīwān\(^{(4)}\)

1. For Al-Djumahī cf. the interesting introduction of the editor M. M. Shākir and GAL (Gi, 505, Si, 43, 165).
2. Edited by M. Shākir (Dār al-ma'arif, Cairo, 1952). It was also edited by V. J. Hell (Leiden, 1916) and M. H. A'yan (Cairo 1923). Shakir's edition was used.
3. For Bashshār cf. V. J. Hell, E.I., i, 671, Al-Aghānī, iii, 19-73 and C. Broekelmann GAL (Gi, 73, Si, 108).
4. Edited by Ibn ‘Ashūr (Cairo, 1950). Bashshār's Dīwān is not complete. Most of his poems have been lost. A selection from Bashshār's poetry: *Al-Mukhtār Min Shi'r Bashshār* by al-Khālidiyān and commented on by al-Tāhir al-Tudjībī ('Allgarh, 1935) has now appeared.

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by Abū 'Ubayd al-Bakrī edited by al-Ṣālḥānī (Dār al-kutub, Cairo, 1926) and *Simt Al-La'ālī Fi Sharḥ Al-Amālī* edited by 'Abd al-'Azīz Maymanī, (Cairo, 1936)
This collection of the poems of Bashshar must be studied closely because he was the contemporary of Abu'l-'Atahiya, although there is no similarity between their styles. Both however, belong to the "modern school": "al-shu'arā' al-muhdathūn" but both display a special trend in the poetry of that period. The facility, simplicity, and fluency of Abu'l-'Atahiya never appears in Bashshar's poetry. Bashshar shows more clearly a great vigour of expression, the eloquence of the old poetry. It is not so easy to understand him, and he frequently used an elaborate rhetorical style. His poetry cannot be compared with that of Abu'l-'Atahiya, and in their way of life too there was a considerable difference between them. Abu'l-'Atahiya was basically serious with a religious outlook; Bashshar displayed the lighter and more dissipated aspects of life. His Dīwān then may well throw some contrasting light on our study of Abu'l-'Atahiya.

12. Ḍū Nuwās (1) Dīwān (2).

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1. For Ḍū Nuwās cf. C. Brockelmann, E.I., 1, 102-103, GAL (Gi,75, Si,114-118). 'Abd al-Rahmān Sīdī Alī al-Ḥan (Cairo,1944), 'Umar Farrūkh Ābū Nuwās Shīr al-Rasīṭ Wa Muḥaddith Al-Āmīn in 2 volumes (Beirut,1932).

2. Edited by 'Abd al-Madjīd al-Ghazzālī (Cairo,1953). This is the edition which was used. There are other editions; edited by W. Ahlwardt (Greifswald,1861), lithographed (Cairo,1277) printed (Beirut,1301); by M.K. Farīd (Cairo,1932); by M. Ef. Wāsīf (Cairo,1898). There are also many works about Ābū Nuwās and selections from his poems. C. Brockelmann mentions some of these such as: Hadīqat Al-Inās Fi Shi'r Ābū Nuwās (Bombay,1312); Al-Fukaha Wa'l-I'timās Fi Mūdhūn Ābū Nuwās (Cairo,1316)

footnote cont. on next page.
This is an extremely important work for the study of Abu'l-'Atahiya. They lived at the same time and were friends. Both lived dissipated lives in their youth and both were later converted to asceticism although Abu'l-'Atahiya changed his way of life sooner. Abu'l-'Atahiya was a technical innovator in that he produced an entire poem on ascetic theme and Abū Nuwās in that he composed a whole poem on the subject of wine. In his wine songs and his panegyrics Abū Nuwās can be distinguished quite easily from Abu'l-'Atahiya in that he had a more virile style than Abu'l-'Atahiya. In their ascetic poems, however, it is very difficult to distinguish between them and many ascetic poems appear in the Dīwāns of both poets. It is necessary to discuss these and attempt to attribute them to one or other. Abū Nuwās' Dīwān is therefore quite clearly an essential source for this study.

13. Abū Hilāl al-'Askarī(1): Kitāb Al-Sinā'atayn(2)

This is an interesting book on rhetoric and criticism of style. Abu'l-'Atahiya's verses are given in a few places as an illustration of extremely inept verses. This book, therefore, is important as showing another view of literary activity and

Footnote cont. from previous page.

1. For Abū Hilāl cf. C. Brockelmann, E.I., i, 489; and GAL (Gi,126, Si, 193-194).
2. Printed by M.A. al-Khandjī (Istāmbūl, 1320); edited by M. ′A. al-Badjāwī and M. Abu'll-Fadl Ibrāhīm (Cairo, 1952). This edition was the one used and is not satisfactory.
helps to show us the attitude which some critics had to him.

14. Al-Marzubānī(1): Al-Muwashshah Fī Ma‘ākhidh Al-
‘Ulama’ Alā Al-Shu‘ara’(2)

it may be seen

From the title of this work that it deals with artistic
criticism and tells only of the defects of poets. This is a
most interesting work. It would seem that at times Al-Marzubānī
is rather polemical in his approach, but he puts not only his
own points of view but also others, referring to his narrators.
There are about ten pages on Abu'l-'Atāhiya in which he is
harshly attacked. For the purpose of this thesis the book
is specially valuable on the side of literary criticism.

15. Al-Djurđjanī(3): Dalāʾil Al-Idżaz(4)

This is a work on the subject of rhetoric and is most
interesting from this point of view. Abu'l-'Atāhiya is
mentioned in it only very unfrequently which shows that his
reputation had declined through the centuries. Apart from this
contribution particular / the book is not of any direct use to us.

1. For al-Marzubānī cf. C. Brockelmann GAL (Si,157,190);
Tarīkh Baghdād, iii, 135; Yaqūt, Irshād, vii, 50-52.
2. Edited (Cairo, 1343) this edition is far from being
satisfactory.
3. For al-Djurđjanī cf. C. Brockelmann, GAL (G1,287, Si, 503)
4. Edited (Cairo, 1321,1331) and by M. 'Abdu, M. Ma al-
Turkuzī (Cairo, 1367) This last edition was used and is
unsatisfactory. Muhammad al-Hanāfi al-Halabi summarised
this book in Al-Mukhtasar Dalāʾil Al-I'djaz (Aleppo, 1343).
16. Al-Husri(1): Zahr Al-Adab(2)

This is an anthology, and it serves to show how time affects
the tales and biographies of the past. The imagination of the
5th century A.H. appears clearly in it, and more details and
information about Abu'l-'Atahiya's life in general and about
his romance with 'Utba are given. There is no isnad or
anything about his sources. We find in this anthology some
love poetry which cannot be found in any other sources. The
collection is an interesting one but the authenticity of its
contents must be accepted with reservation.

17. Al-Mawardi (3): Adab Al-Dunya Wa'l-Din(4)

This is a work, which as is clear from the title, gives
quite a different aspect of literary production. One concern
of this book is with the religious aspects of literature.
Abu'l-'Atahiya's name appears frequently and al-Mawardi uses
his verses as examples of the ideas which he is expounding.
In many places he shows the relationship between the verses
of Abu'l-'Atahiya and the aphorisms of other ascetics and wise
men. This work has proved valuable in filling a gap in Arabic
literature.

1. For al-Husri cf. C. Brockelmann GAL (Si, 472); Yaqt, Irshad,
i, 358-360.
2. Edited by Z. Mubarak (Cairo,1344) in 2 volumes. This is an
unsatisfactory edition.
3. For al-Mawardi cf. C. Brockelmann, E.I.,iii,416; GAL (Gi,386,
Si,668).
4. C. Brockelmann in GAL (Si,668) and in E.I., iii,416 mentions
the following editions: (Cairo,1310,1315,1327,1328,1339),
(Bulaq,1922), (Istambul,1299), (India,1315), by O. Rezer
(Stuttgart,1932). This was edited also by M.A. Hanafi
(Cairo, 1952). Although it appeared in 1952 it is far from
satisfactory but was used because it was the available one in
Edinburgh at the time of writing.
18. Ibn al-Shadjarī(1): Al-Hamāsa(2)

This is another anthology which is interesting for the purpose of this thesis because it shows how Abu'l-'Atāhiya's reputation declined through the centuries. We find very few verses of his compared with the numbers of his contemporaries. It does not, however, provide very much of the background and its value for the study of Abu'l-'Atāhiya is small compared with other sources.


This is, as the title indicates, a literary and historical anthology from every fann or a collection of the most exciting and interesting from every fann from the viewpoint of al-Ibshīhī. This work has less importance for us than it might have had since al-Ibshīhī is a very late writer and he used sources which are still available to us. Al-Ibshīhī

1. For Ibn al-Shadjarī cf. C. Brockelmann GAL (Gi, 280, Si, 493, 498).
2. Edited by F. Krenkow (Hyderabad, 1345).
3. For al-Ibshīhī cf. C. Van Arendonk, E.I., i, 443, and C. Brockelmann GAL (Gii, 56, Sii, 55)
4. C. Brockelmann gives a list of the editions of this book and we find this list in two places with a slight difference. In (Gii, 56) the list is as follows: (Bulaq, 1268, 1272, 1285, 1292), (Cairo, 1279, 1300, 1302, 1304, 1305, 1306, 1308, 1320). In (Sii, 55): (Bulaq, 1268), (Cairo, 1277, 1285, 1292, 1300, 1302, 1320, 1348). In E.I. the list of editions differs again: (Bulaq, 1272), (Cairo, 1272, 1279, 1304, 1305, 1306, 1308). The edition used here was (Cairo, 1348) in 2 volumes.
5. G. Rat translated this (Paris-Toulon, 1899) and gave an account of the author and his work as well. Djurdji Shabln published a selection of his work called Al-Mustaqtaf Min Al-Mustatraf (Beirut, 1864)
saying in his preface that he quotes many things from al-
Zamakhshari and Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi. Abu'l-Atahiya is
mentioned in a few places and for this reason the book was
referred to. Apart from that no great value can be placed
upon it.

20. Al-Maqqari (1): Nafh Al-Tib Fi Ghusn Al-Andalus
Al-Ratib (2)

This is, in the words of Levi Provençal,

"an immense compilation of historical and literary
information, poems, letters and quotations very
often taken from work now lost. It is this that
gives the Nafh an inestimable value and puts it in
the first rank for our sources of Muslim Spain."

This is not, however, a good source for Abu'l-
Atahiya who
is mentioned in it only twice. Al-Maqqari attributes to
him two verses which are well known as being al-'Abbās b.
al-Ahnaf's verses (ii, 416) and they are also attributed to
al-'Abbās in Al-Aghānī (viii, 17). Al-Maqqari's book, however, is
a good source for Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, who was the collector of
Abu'l-Atahiya's ascetic poems. He gives an account of his
works, his teachers, and his pupils, and its value derives
chiefly from the detailed information which it gives about him.

1. For Al-Maqqari cf. E.L. Provencal, E.I., iii, 173-74 and
C. Brockelmann, GAL (Gii, 296).
2. Edited by R. Dozy, G. Dugat, L. Krehl and W. Wright (Leyde,
1855, 60) in 2 volumes. Three other editions appeared:
(Bulaq, 1279), (Cairo, 1302, 1304) in 4 volumes; M. 'Abd
al-Hamīd (Cairo, 1949) in 10 volumes, again an
unsatisfactory edition. J. Th. Zenker in his work
Bibliographie Orientale (Leipzig, 1861), i, 101, says
that a selection from Nafh Al-Tib were translated from
the British Museum M.S. with critical notes on the
history, geography and antiquities of Spain by Pascualde
Gayangos, (London, 1840) in 2 volumes. Dozy's edition was
used.
21. Ibn 'Umar al-Bagh dādi\(^{(1)}\): Khizānat Al-Adab Wa-
Lūbū Lubāb Lisān Al-'Arab\(^{(2)}\)

This is a book which is based on the explanation of examples given by al-Radiyy in his explanation of the "Kafiya" in the grammar of Ibn al-Hādib. Only a few verses of Abu'l-'Atāhiya's can be found in it. It is a very late work and therefore has little of value for the study of Abu'l-'Atāhiya.

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B - Biographical and bibliographical works:

1. Ibn al-Nādīm\(^{(3)}\): Al-Fihrist\(^{(4)}\)

This is one of the most valuable and important books in Arabic literature. It is not only biographical but also bibliographical and historical. It gives an account of books which have been written about religion, history, literature, music and other subjects. It is from it that we learn something of the lost works written about Abu'l-'Atāhiya such as: Akhār Abī’l-'Atāhiya by Ibn 'Ammād al-Thaqafi (d. 319)\(^{(5)}\), Ikhtiyār Shi'r Abī'l-'Atāhiya by Ibn Tayfūr\(^{(6)}\)

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1. For al-Bagh dādi cf. C. Brockelmann, E.I., i, 45 and GAL (Gi, 286).
2. Edited (Cairo, 1348), (Būlāq, 1299) in 4 volumes. The first edition was used but both are unsatisfactory.
3. For Ibn al-Nādīm cf. The important preface of G. Flugel and C. Brockelmann GAL (Gi, 147, Si, 226) and Yāqūt, Irshād, vi, 408.
4. Edited by Gustav Flugel (Leipzig, 1871). This was used. The other edition (Cairo, 1930) is not satisfactory.
5. Al-Fihrist, 148.
6. Al-Fihrist, 146-147.
Kitāb Abīl-'Ātāhiya Wa 'Utb(1), and Ikhtiyār Al-Shu'arā' Al-Kabīr by Abū 'Abdillāh Rā'ūn b. 'Alī(2) and from this last work Abūl Farāq quotes frequently. There is not a great deal in Al-Fīhrīst about the life of Abīl-'Ātāhiya, but there is an important note about his Diwān. The author also writes a good deal about the religious life and gives a clear description of the various different sects. For these reasons the book is an important one for this study.

2. Al-Baghdādī(3): Tarīkh Baghdād(4)

This work opens with a geographical and historical introduction about Baghdād and then goes on to deal with the notable people who lived there and especially the traditionalists. This work is particularly interesting for the biography of Abīl-'Ātāhiya and for the social and historical background to his period. Al-Baghdādī seems singularly unpolemical and lacking in exageration. Ibn Khallikān says(5) that Al-Baghdādī is Hāfiz al-Mashriq as Ibn 'Abd al-Barr is Hāfiz al-Maghrib. Al-Baghdādī in his account of Abīl-'Ātāhiya mentions his Isnād and

2. Al-Fīhrīst, 144.
4. Edited by A. Khāndjī (Cairo, 1931) in 14 volumes. This edition was used though it is very unsatisfactory. The biographical part of this book was abreviated and partly translated by G. Salmon in his work: L'Introduction Topographique a L'Histoire de Bagdad d'Abou Bakr Ahmad Ibn Thabit Al-Baghdādī (Paris, 1904).
5. Wafayāt, 368.
sometimes goes as far as Abu'l-'Atahiya or his son. New information about Abu'l-'Atahiya is provided there. This is an essential book for the study of our poet.


This is an important work in which Ibn Khayr classifies books according to their subject matters. There is nothing in it about Abu'l-'Atahiya except the title of a lost work about him(3). Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, however, is mentioned in it frequently and an account of his works is given, but the work which contains Abu'l-'Atahiya's Diwan is not mentioned. This work is quite a good source for Ibn 'Abd al-Barr in general.

4. Yaqūt(4): Mu'djam Al-Udabā' or Irshād Al-Arīb Ilā Ma'rifat Al-Adīb(5).

This is a work of great importance for Arabic literature and Arabian life in general. It provides a great deal of information about the intellectual activity of the past, and gives in alphabetical order the biographies of philologists, poets, grammarians and others. He does not give a biography of Abu'l-'Atahiya, but here and there we find some verses and and titles of lost works about him(6). Yaqūt also mentions

1. For Ibn Khayr cf. C. Brockelmann, GAL (Gi, 499).
2. Edited by Franciscus Coderra, J. Ribera Tarrago (Bibl. Ar. His., ix, x., Coes sarawgustoe, 1894) in 2 volumes.
3. Al-Fahrasa, 414.
4. For Yaqūt cf. the interesting article of R. Blachère, E.I., iv, 1153-1154; F. Wustenfield's article in ZDMG, 397, (1864) and C. Brockelmann, GAL (Gi, 479-481).
5. Edited by D. S. Margoliouth (E.J.W. Gibb memorial series, Leyden, 1907-1931) in 7 volumes.
6. cf. Irshād, i, 227 or i, 155.
Ibn 'Abd al-Barr but does not give any information about his life. He discussed Abu'l-Faradj and his work Al-Aghani and assessed him as a reliable writer though he observed that he sometimes failed to keep his promises as on the question of Abu'l-'Atahiya's relationship with 'Utba.1 Here, though, he mentions the possibility of mere forgetfulness and says that it is quite possible to imagine that a part of the book has been lost since there are ninety-nine songs in it and one would expect there to be a hundred. Again, this work is of great importance in the background that it provides for the study of Abu'l-'Atahiya.

His Mu'djam Al-Buldan2 is not only a geographical dictionary: it contains also literary and historical information.3 In the introduction to the Mu'djam he explains his methods of research and the way in which he collects information, which gives us an impression of reliability. He referred to early works, heard narrators, and gave his sources. He gives al-Hazinī in his book: Ma'khtalaf Wa 'I'talaf Min Asmā' Al-Buldan as an example.

1. Irshād, v, 151.
2. Edited by F. Wustenfield (Leipzig, 1866-1873) in 6 volumes. This edition was used. It was re-edited (Cairo, 1906-1907) in 10 volumes.
3. This fact made 'Abd al-Mu'in b. 'Abd al-Haq collect only the geographical information in Yaqūt's dictionary in his work: Marāsid Al-Ittilā' Alā 'Asmā' Al-Amakin Wa'l-Bīga' which was edited by Juyn Ball (Leyden, 1851-1864) in 4 volumes.
Apparently one of his friends showed him a book written by Nasr b. 'Abd al-Rahman al-Iskandari: *Fima 'I'talaf* Wa 'khtalaf Min Asmā' Al-Bīqā'. Yaqtùt noticed that the book showed him up as a reliable and precise authority and it seems that he spent a lot of time collecting his own material and wrote a very good book. Then he noticed that al-Hāzimi had taken it and pretended that his work was original, believing that the transmitters were so ignorant they would not be able to detect the fraud. Here he asserts that he always cites the titles and authors of the books from which he quotes. Yaqtùt even travelled to distant places in order to observe and collect his information. He points to the difficulty of referring to some of the old books which are often full of copyists errors and are badly arranged; and he collected and arranged himself materials which past transmitters and authors had allowed to be dispersed, and added what they neglected and put them in alphabetical order. This work is generally of great importance for any study in Arabic literature and life.

5. Ibn Khallikān(1): *Wafayāt Al-A'yān*(2)

1. For Ibn Khallikān cf. C. Brockelmann, E.I., ii, 396-397 and GAL (Ci, 326, Si, 561).
2. The edition available in Edinburgh at the time of writing was very unsatisfactory. The editor and the date of the edition are unknown. C. Brockelmann mentions that M.G. De Slane published the book (Paris, 1838-1842) and translated it from Arabic in 4 volumes (Paris, London, 1843, 1871). It was printed (Būlāq, 1275, 1299) and (Cairo, 1310), lithographed (Teheran, 1284), translated into Turkish (İstanbul, 1280).
This work gives accounts of the lives of famous men in general. He deals, of course, with poets and authors, and therefore his book is of considerable importance to literary history as well. We must, however, be rather cautious in using the information given for the early 'Abbāsid period. Ibn Khallikān gives an account of Abu'l-'Atāhiya's life and if we compare it with our information from earlier sources we can trace easily the influence of the centuries on his information, especially in his style, expression, and the extent of his exaggeration. As regards Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, Ibn Khallikān can be considered the best source since he is nearest in time to him. He does not, however, list his work on Abu'l-'Atāhiya among his other works, but what is interesting is that he mentions the title of his book: Bahājat Al-Majālis Wa Uns Al-Djālis and the quotation from it which shows us the literary side of Ibn 'Abd al-Barr. Elsewhere Ibn 'Abd al-Barr is always referred to as a traditionalist, Muhaddith, and so this work gives an additional slant to the biographical side of this study.

5. Ibn Shākir al-Kutubi: Fawāt Al-Wafayāt(2)

This is not an independent work. Ibn Shākir tells that he wrote it to fill in the gaps left by Ibn Khallikān.

2. Edited by M. M. 'Abd al-Hamīd (Cairo, 1926) in 2 volumes. This edition was used. " It was also edited (Bulaq, 1283, 1299)."
and he adds the names of people who came after Ibn Khallikān. It is a useful work for the names of transmitters of people who had some connection with Abu'l-'Atahiya.


In this book can be found translations of many famous people from the first year of the immigration till the year 1,000 A.H. Ibn al-'Imād was a very late writer, and he got all his information from books or teachers, and his two pages on Abu'l-'Atahiya only go to show that he simply collected information without exercising any judgment. He does not even follow the example of earlier writers who used the formula "it is said" when they lacked other as certain corroborative evidence, but gives/information which in some cases cannot be substantiated. For example he says: "'Ayn al-tamr is a small town in al-Ḥidjāz beside Medina", while Ibn Khallikān, the only other writer who mentions that it is in al-Ḥidjāz, suggests other probabilities. Nevertheless, considering the state of scholarship in his century some respect can be given to Ibn al-'Imād, provided we do not accept him as an unquestioned source.

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2. Edited (Cairo, 1350) in 8 volumes. This edition was used and is far from satisfactory.
C - Historical Works:

1. Ibn Djarir al-Tabari\(^\text{1}\): *Tārīkh Al-Rusul Wa'l-Mulūk*\(^\text{2}\).

   This is an important work for Abu'l-'Atāhiya's period, in which the main events are listed in chronological order. With this as a framework it is possible to understand or limit the time of some events in Abu'l-'Atāhiya's life. It also gives some of his verses. Al-Tabari who was a reliable Faqīh and pious man, can also be considered reliable as an historian. Although he gives biographies of Adam and his descendants till the arrival of the Prophet he can generally be trusted in what he relates, though we have to exercise our critical judgement on him.

2. Ibn Tayfur\(^\text{3}\): *Kitāb Baghdād*\(^\text{4}\)

   This is a book which contains a collection of social events of the people of Baghdād rather than an historical work. It is interesting because the author is close in time

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1. For al-Ṭabarī cf. R. Pare, E.I.,iv, 578-579, C. Brockelmann, *GAL* (Gi,142).

2. Edited by M.J. de Goeje (Leyde,1951) in 3 series, the first in 6 volumes, the second in 3 and the third in 4 volumes. The introduction is in 1 volume and the indices in a separate volume. Because of the indices al-Ṭabarī was easy to use, and this edition was used.


   footnote No. 4 cont. on next page.
to Abu'l-'Atahiya. Ibn al-Nadīm, 146-147, quotes from Ibn Hamdān, the author of Kitāb Al-Bārī that Ibn Tayfūr was not an educated man and that he imitated the poems of others. He mentions that he wrote a book: Ikhtiyār Shi'r Abī'l-'Atahiya which has unfortunately been lost. Ibn Tayfūr mentions Abu'l-'Atahiya in a few places. He was the first to give more details of Abu'l-'Atahiya's relations with Zubaydā. To some extent this book is a useful and necessary addition to our sources for the study of Abu'l-'Atahiya.

3. Al-Mas'ūdī(1): Murūdī Al-Dhahab Wa Ma'ādīn Al-Djawhar(2)

This is an historical work in which al-Mas'ūdī classifies events chronologically but has no great historical value. The part played by his imagination can clearly be seen throughout the book. The stories told have the atmosphere of the

Footnote cont. from previous page.


1. For al-Mas'ūdī cf. 'C. Brockelmann, E.I., iii, 403-404, and GAL (G1, 144, G4, 220) and Yaqūt, Irshad, v, 147, 149.

2. Edited and translated by C. Barbier De Maynard and Pavet De Courteille (Paris, 1861-1877) in 9 volumes. This edition was used here. Others are (Bulaq, 1283), (Cairo, 1313), on the margin of Ibn al-Athīr, "(Bulaq, 1303), of Maqqarī's Nafh Al-Tib (Cairo, 1302, 1346) in 1-3 volumes.

J. Th. Zenker in his Bibliographie Orientale, i, 101, mentions the work: Meadows of Gold and Mines of Gems which is a translation of al-Mas'ūdī's work by Aloys Sprenger (London, 1841) and he mentions in S.i, that a selection from Al-Murūdī is lithographed (Delhi, 1846).
Thousand and One Nights, and we have to be sceptical about most of the information that he gives. He gives quite a lot of details about Abu'l-'Atáhiya's life and the same story which is in the older sources can be found in his book, but in a highly developed state. This source was used with reservation and mainly for the information given about Abu'l-'Atáhiya.

4. Ibn al-Tiqtiqa\(^{(1)}\): Al-Fakhrī Fi Al-Ādāb Al-Sultanīya\(^{(2)}\)

This is a short historical work which covers a long period in the Islamic history. It tells the history of the Moslem Dynasties from the death of Muhammad until the end of the 'Abbāsid caliphate. He does not give many details nor does he follow al-Tabarī's method of classifying the events chronologically according to their years, but according to Caliphs, and he passes quickly from one Caliph to another. It was therefore simply used here as a source which was quoted in connection with some of the 'Abbāsid Caliphs under whom Abu'l-'Atáhiya lived and was connected with.

5. Al-Tanūkhī\(^{(3)}\): Al-Farādī Ba'da Al-Shidda\(^{(4)}\)

2. Edited by W. Ahlwardt (Gotha, 1860). This edition was used. Other editions are by H. Derenbourg (Paris,1895) and (Cairo,1317,1345); translated into French by M.Emile Amar (Paris, 1916), and into English by C.E.J.Whitting (London, 1947).
3. For al-Tanūkhī cf. R.Paret, E.I., iv,655-656, and C. Brockelmann, GAL (Gii,155,Si,253) and F.Gabrieli, RSQ, xix,16-44.
4. The edition used is in 2 volumes and is quite unsatisfactory. Its date and place of publication are not mentioned. (footnote cont. on next page)
This is a work which cannot be taken seriously. Again it can be compared with the Thousand and One Nights and cannot be considered as an historical source.

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D - Encyclopaedic Works:

1. Al-Nuwayrí(1): Nihāyat Al-Arab Fi Funūn Al-Abd(2)

This work deals with a variety of subjects: geography, history, literature, religion, and so on. The author does record some verses of Abu'l-'Atāhiya with some short stories, but he is a late writer and cannot be considered a very reliable or important source for Abu'l-'Atāhiya. He does not even refer to him seriously. However, the work has its value as a source for the study of different aspects of life in the past.

2. Al-Qalqashandi(3): Subh Al-‘A’shā Fi Sinā’at Al-Inshā(4)

footnote cont. from previous page.

C. Brockelmann refers to several editions; it was lithographed by M. 'Abd al-Rahman (Bombay, 1919) and edited by M. al-Zuhri al-Ghamrawi (Cairo, 1903-4) re-edited (Cairo, 1938).

1. For al-Nuwayri cf. the very important article of Ign. Kratchkovsky in E.I., iii, 968-969, and C. Brockelmann, GAL (Gii, 139, Sii, 173).

2. Edited (Cairo, 1935) in 18 volumes. This unsatisfactory edition was used. It was also edited (Cairo, 1923-37) in 1-12 volumes. M.G. de Slane partly translated this book into French and M. Gaspar Remiro translated part of it into Spanish (Granada, 1917).


4. Edited (Dar al-kutub, Cairo, 1922) in 14 volumes. This footnote cont. on next page.
This work, as C. Brockelmann says, presents all that was known in the time of al-Qalqashandī. It was written for the writers in al-dawāwīn, the bureaux. The intention was to give writers all the information they could use and thus the work was similar to an encyclopaedia. A few verses of Abu'l-'Atāhiya occur at different places. It is a very interesting work and shows the social aspect of the past and makes clear many points in the Islamic history.

* * *

I should like to express here my gratitude for the patient and courteous assistance I have received in every phase of my work, to my supervisors, Mr. J. R. Walsh and Doctor P. Cachia of the Muir Institute, Edinburgh University; to Doctor Sharp and all the staff of the University Library I am indebted for help in securing books and periodicals, and for other services too numerous to mention; to

footnote cont. from previous page.

'Umar Rida Kahala of the Zahiriya of Damascus I owe thanks for procuring for me photographs of the rare copy of the Diwan in this collection.
Islam, which had been brought from the Arabian desert into the areas of Middle Eastern civilisation by the Arabs in the early part of the seventh century, and had become there, the central dynamic of an Empire which spread from the Atlantic to the Oxus, had after a century or so become something other than the simple creed which had served to unite the raiding bedouin. This change in Islam had been brought about by the gradual but constant conversion of peoples of other faiths and other cultures, and ultimately they came to form the vastly preponderant majority of the Moslem population, a majority which could not fail to make its influence felt, not only socially but also politically. It is convenient, although probably an over-simplification, to regard the Umayyād period as one of Arab resistance to the influences and the pressures which this new community exerted upon them; whereas, on the other hand, the 'Abbāsid revolution may be seen as a capitulation of the effective authority to the forces generated by its environment.

Although Islam had spread across North Africa to Spain, and had crossed the regions of Iranian civilisation as far as Kashgar in the east, we must not think of this as a closely organised or carefully controlled homogeneous Empire. In each of these regions it soon began to assume certain characteristics from pre-existing religions and cultures which
were to manifest themselves in a variety of so-called heresies, which are usually presented in the sources as the motivations for political revolt. Such was Kharidjism, such was Shī'ism; though these, in fact, are but two of the major grouping of a wide variety of heretical activity. The success of the 'Abbāsīd revolution was due to its willingness to compromise with the irresistible non-Arabic elements, and to include them within its concepts of state.

Whereas the Umayyād dynasty thought to project into the ancient regions of civilisation the values and objectives proper to a desert society, seeking thereby to maintain the aristocracy of the Arabs, a century of economic deterioration and scarcely concealed anarchy had forced new concepts of state upon the ruling power, concepts more in keeping with the realities of the situation. The 'Abbāsīd state, while basically the same type of military despotism as all its predecessors in this area, was nevertheless more highly representative of the people whom it governed and of the sentiments, religious and social, which they held.

With the collapse of Byzantine and Persian power in the area, the religion which these governments had represented no longer could claim the unquestioning loyalty of the great mass of the people; and with the established authority being Moslem, henceforth only Islam could be regarded the viable religion; Islam, being originally a very amorphous and loosely formulated creed, lent itself to the interpretation
and adaption of people of other religious pre-conceptions and experience; they could all feel that they were behaving as true Moslems and serving the same ideals as Muḥammad had preached on the inspiration of God. It was this attitude that was to lead to many of the conflicts of the early 'Abbāsīd period, when the Arabs sought to maintain Islam as a purely Arab expression which was the token of their own nobility and superiority over other peoples.

It was inevitable that these other peoples should react against this attitude, and in the so-called Shu'ūbīya movement we find an energetic assertion and defence of their own values and ideals in the face of Arab pretensions to superiority. This movement, which is usually regarded as a literary partisanship, extended in reality to almost every phase of social and political life, creating two well-defined tendencies within the body of the state. In matters of religion, the Arab party adhered to a rigid fundamentalism such as was expressed by the doctrines of Ahmad b. Hanbal, while their opponents espoused the rationalistic position of the Mu'tazila school with its strong leanings towards Greek philosophy. This opposition was to have its political repercussions, too, and for a period the individual's belief as to the creation of the Qur'ān was made practically a loyalty-test.

In the literature, and especially the poetry, of the period we find much the same division, the Arab faction holding that
all innovation in style and manner which was without pre-Islamic precedent could not be admitted, while the more inventive genius of the local peoples demanded a less restricting conception of art. As all such poetry was the product of patronage, and can be held to reproduce the prejudices of the group of the individual to whom it was addressed, the phases of the struggle and the ultimate triumph of the innovators can be taken as the measure of a far more pervasive social change in 'Abbāsīd society than mere literary fashion.

With society thus sharply divided, and with the ultimate outcome for long obscure, it is natural that many should try to maintain a position of neutrality, leaning conspicuously neither to the one nor to the other faction. They professed a religious attitude of other-worldliness and ignored the disputes over doctrine and dogma. All that mattered in this transient world, they held, was to achieve the merit which would assure them happiness in the hereafter and to this end they made renunciation of the material goals of life and the practice of an ascetic piety their practical religion. These were called zāhid, and in the poetry of Abu'l-'Atāhiya we have a precious expression of the philosophy by which they lived, as in his life we have an interesting example of how much their attitude towards society was one of disengagement from the contentions of the age.

* * *
The full name of Abu'l-'Atáhiya is Ismā'īl b. al-Qāsim b. Suwayd b. Kaysān. According to al-Baghdādī (1) and Ibn Khallikān (2) he was born in the year 130 A.H. No other commentators mention his date of birth.

Little is known about his ancestry apart from the following which is related by Abu'l-Faradj reporting from Muhammad b. sallām:

Muhammad b. Abu'l-'Atáhiya mentioned that the family were originally descended from 'Anaza, and that Kaysān came from 'Ayn al-tamr. When the town was conquered by Khalid, Kaysān who was a young orphan living with relatives, was taken by Khalid along with some other young boys and sent to Abū Bakr. When the boys arrived Abū Bakr had 'Abbad b. Rifa'a, the 'Anazite, with him. He questioned them all about their families and the boys told him what they knew. When it came to Kaysān's turn, he told Abū Bakr that he was from 'Anaza, and when 'Abbad heard that, he asked Abū Bakr to hand Kaysān over to him. Abū Bakr agreed, and 'Abbad gave Kaysān back his freedom. Kaysān then became the client of 'Anaza (3).

According to this text Kaysān came from 'Ayn al-tamr, and this is substantiated by al-Baghdādī(4). Yāqūt says in his Mu'djam that

'Ayn al-tamr was a small, old town near al-Anbār in the west of Kīfā. It was conquered by the Moslems under the command of Khalid b. al-Walīd during the time of Abū Bakr in the year 12 A.H. Khalid took the town by force, slaughtering its men and taking captive its women. (5)

1. Tārīkh Baghdād, vi, 260.
2. Wafayāt, 90.
3. Agh, iii, 127.
4. Tārīkh Baghdād, vi, 250.
5. Mu'djam Al-Buldān, iii, 759
Ibn al-'Imād, on the other hand, says that 'Ayn al-tamr was a small town near Medīna(1), but this seems doubtful for several reasons. In the first place, Yaqtū is usually more precise and reliable than Ibn al-'Imād. Secondly, most sources are agreed that Abu'l-'Atāhiya spent his childhood at Kūfa; and therefore a location for 'Ayn al-tamr somewhere in the neighbourhood of Kūfa would be expected, since a poor family like Abu'l-'Atāhiya's was unlikely to move from somewhere as far off as al-Hidjāz. Thirdly, if we accept the evidence of our text that 'Ayn al-tamr was captured in the time of Abū Bakr(2) it must follow that it could not have been situated in al-Hidjāz near Medīna since the north of the Arabic peninsula was by this time already Moslem, and had been so since the last years of Muhammad's life. Because of this all conquests were then directed outside the peninsula. The wars of Ridda (the wars of apostacy) were not fought either in al-Hidjāz or in any place near Medīna.

The accounts given by Muhammad b. Abi'l-'Atāhiya about

2. Al-Balādhurī, Al-Fuṭuh, 247, gives this list of captives made by Khalid at 'Ayn al-tamr:
   a). Hūmrān b. 'Abān, who became freedman of the Caliph 'Uthmān.
   c). Abū 'Amrah, grandfather of the poet 'Abdullāh b. 'Abd-al-A'Ilā.
   d). Yāṣār, grandfather of Muhammad b. Ishaq.
   e). Murra, whose descendants were known as landowners.
   f). Nusayr, father of Mūsā, governor of the Maghrib.
his family and its origins which have been quoted, presents us with the question as to whether Kaysan was an Arab of the tribe of 'Anaza or only a client. Despite the explicit statement by Muhammad b. Abi'l-'Atāhiya that his ancestry was purely Arab, it would seem that the latter was actually the case. If we refer to his own poems and to the various accounts of his life, we find that most of the narrators who contributed to Abu'l-'Atāhiya's biography said that he was a client. Ibn Qutayba(1) and Ibn al-Mu'tazz(2) both of whom lived only a few decades after Abu'l-'Atāhiya, describe him as a client. Abu'l-Faradj agrees with them(3) and relates from Dhumadā b. al-Aflas through al-Sūlī, a reliable source, that Abu'l-'Atāhiya was the client of 'Atā b. Mihdjan(4). He also relates from Muhammad b. Mūsā, that Abu'l-'Atāhiya, on his father's side was the client of 'Anaza(5).

We also find that Abu'l-Faradj relates from al-Husayn b. Abi'l-Sarī that during the life of Yazīd b. Manṣūr, Abu'l-'Atāhiya pretended to be a Yemenite client denying his affiliation with the 'Anazites. After Yazīd's death he returned to his former allegiance. Al-Fāḍl b. al-'Abbās tells al-Husayn that he asked him, "did you not pretend that

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1. Shi'r, ii, 765.  
2. Tabaqāt, 105.  
3. Ḥaj, iii, 126.  
4. Ḥaj, iii, 127.  
5. Ḥaj, iii, 127.
you were the client of Yemen?". Abu'l-'Atāhiya answered that it was necessary for him at that time to practice deception, but since he had discovered that neither the Yemenites nor the 'Anazites were any better than one another he felt that he might as well be truthful and admit that he was really the client of 'Anaza. (1)

We are less interested here, however, in discovering whether he was a client of the Yemen or of 'Anaza than in his own clear confession that he was in fact a client. Abu'l-'Atāhiya's own verses satirising Wāliba also contains a confession that he was a client:

1. Come to the good clients; They will receive you cheerfully.

2. You are more like us than you are like the Arabs.

3. You remind me of my ancestor's colouring and of my father's (2).

If, in the first verse, we read bihim instead of the variation bina, then the third verse can only be interpreted in one way: that he was a client.

We know a little about the family in which he was born and bred; his mother, his father, and his brother Zayd. We know that they were all members of the pottery trade (3), and

1. Agh., iii, 141.

2. These verses are only to be found in Father Shaykhū appendix to the Diwan, 359.

3. Agh., iii, 127.
that Abu'l-'Atāhiya inherited this trade and bore the name of a potter till the end of his life. In the book Al-Aghānī there is a reference to his father as a cupper as well (1), but in any case, he came from the labouring class.

Abu'l-Faradj is the only writer to mention his mother. He says that his mother was called Umm Zayd, the daughter of Ziyād who was the client of Banū Zuhra (2), and he also relates that Muhammad b. Mūsā says that Abu'l-'Atāhiya was through his father the client of 'Anaza, and through his mother the client of Banū Zuhra, and later of Muhammad b. Hāshim b. 'Utba b. Abī Waqqās. Abu'l-'Atāhiya's mother was their client and was called Umm Zayd(3).

Nothing can be found about Ziyād al-Muhāribī or Muhammad b. Hāshim in the biographical works, but the above texts show quite clearly that Abu'l-'Atāhiya's mother was from a very simple family, quite similar to that of her husband. She may well have shared in the pottery with him because it seems probable that at this social level women shared in the work with the men. We cannot provide any proof that she worked, unless we can take the present position of the working classes in Syria or what 'Alī Mazāhīrī says regarding the wives of peasant and labouring men in that century sharing with their husbands in their work(4), but al-Mazāhīrī does not give the

1. Agh, iii, 127.
2. Agh, iii, 126.
3. Agh, iii, 127.
4. La Vie Quotidienne des Musulmans au Moyen Age, 67.
evidence on which he bases this statement.

Abu'l-'Atāhiya's brother Zayd gave his name to his mother who was known as Umm Zayd, which shows that he was older than Abu'l-'Atāhiya. It seems that Zayd continued to be a potter for a long time, so that Abu'l-'Atāhiya could say: "I am the djarrār of rhyme and my brother is the djarrār of commerce" (1).

From this we may infer that Abu'l-'Atāhiya's family atmosphere was very simple and can agree with Ahmad b. 'Ammār's statement that Abu'l-'Atāhiya was from the uneducated and working classes (2).

The name of the poet is Ismā'īl b. al-Qāsim and his kunya is Abū Ishaq, but he is always known by his nickname of Abu'l-'Atāhiya. There is some doubt as to whether he had a son called 'Atāhiya or whether it was just simply a nickname.

Ibn Qutayba who is a reliable source and was contemporary with people who had known our poet said that "Abu'l-'Atāhiya" was a nickname (3), and al-Baghdādi adds that it was given him because of an instability of character or because he was living a dissolute life (4).

1. Agh., iii, 129.
4. Tarīkh Baghdād, vi, 250.
Abu'l-Faradž says that Abu'l-'Atāhiya was a nickname which was used instead of his ordinary name\(^1\). In another part of his book he gives more details and says that Muhammad b. Mūsā mentioned having heard that al-Mahdī once said to Abu'l-'Atāhiya: "You are one who tries to make a false show of ability and you are mu'attah". Since then he is said to have had this nickname instead of his real name. According to Abu'l-Faradž, one can say 'atāhiya for a man who makes a false show of ability just as we can say "shanādjiya" for the tall man, we can say Abū 'Atāhiya without the al\(^2\).

If it is true that al-Mahdī gave him this nickname, we can take it that Abu'l-'Atāhiya was known by his real name Abū Ishaq for about twenty-eight years before he met al-Mahdī, because it was not until the year 158 A.H. that al-Mahdī assumed the caliphate, and Abu'l-'Atāhiya, if the quotation from al-Baghdādī can be trusted, was born in the year 130 A.H. Perhaps that was what was meant by Wāliba when he says\(^3\):

1. He was called by us Abū Ishaq and everyone knew him by that name.

2. He called himself "'Atāhinn" and the meaning of this kunya is the meaning of his character

\(^1\) Agh., iii, 126.
\(^2\) Agh., iii, 126.
\(^3\) Agh., iii, 127.
Abu'l-Faradż gave another reason for the nickname when he said that he was given it because he loved fame and enjoyed living a dissolute life(1).

In Al-Lisan under 'ataha we find that "we can say radjulun 'atahin which means silly. 'Atāhiya is a name, and Abu'l-'Atāhiya is a kunya. This Abu'l-'Atāhiya is the well known poet. It has been said that he had a son called 'Atāhiya and that if this was so his name must be Abū 'Atāhiya without al and that therefore it is a nickname and not a kunya. His kunya was Abū Ishaq and his name Isma'il b. al-Qāsim. He was given this nickname because al-Mahdī said to him, I see that you are muta'attih (nearly mad)... and it is said that he had this nickname because he was tall and unstable and accused of being an unbeliever. Al-'atāh means the erroneous or the stupid"(2).

One could be led to believe that Abu'l-'Atāhiya had a son called 'Atāhiya from the statement in the Tarīkh Baghdād (vi, 256):

Abū Hanīfa related that... Ahmad b. Khaythama related that 'Atāhiya b. Abī 'Atāhiya related.

Ahmad b. Abī Khaythama is a reliable man and it is impossible that he could have been giving an account of an imaginary person. Also in all the books which give his biography we can only find reference to his son Muḥammad. If he had another son who gave an account of his father we would be likely to come across

1. Agh., iii, 127.
2. Al-Lisan under 'ataha.
his name in another place. Ibn al-Nadīm probably explains the confusion when he says under the name of Muhammad b. Abī'1-
'Atāhiya: "he was called 'Atāhiya"(1).

From all this we can see that Abī'1-'Atāhiya is simply a nickname and not a kunya, and that he had no son called 'Atāhiya. How it happened that Muhammad was known as 'Atāhiya does not interest us here. We can only infer that his father's nickname was transferred to him.

To deny that Abī'1-'Atāhiya is a kunya just because if he had a son called 'Atāhiya he must have been called Abū 'Atāhiya without the al is not sufficient proof, especially since in Al-Aghani it is said: "we can say Abū 'Atāhiya without al"(2).

If our sources are in agreement that Abī'1-'Atāhiya is a nickname, and if we cannot find any traces of a son called 'Atāhiya, then there is no reason at all to think that he had a son called 'Atāhiya or that Abī'1-'Atāhiya is a kunya and not a nickname.

The discrepancy in the reasons given for the acquisition of his nickname is not considerable, and we cannot find any special reasons which might make us prefer to take it that al-Mahdī gave it to him because he mentioned his slave, or because he had a disability, or because of his dissipation or instability. Possibly all these reasons brought about the general use of a

1. Al-Fihrist, 161.
2. Agh., iii, 126.
nickname which was hardly complimentary and which superceded the use of his real kunya: Abū Ishāq.

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Our sources are generally of an anecdotal nature and often merely incidental to the biography of the poet himself. However, this information can be classified into period and place and allows for a rough sketch of the poet's life:

1. The Kūfa period.

2. The Baghdad period.
   i). his life during al-Mahdī's rule
   ii). during al-Hādī's rule
   iii). during al-Rashīd's rule
   iv). during the rule of al-Ma'mūn, in which Abu'l-'
Atāhiya died.

1. The Kūfa period

It is generally agreed that Abu'l-'Atāhiya was born and bred at Kūfa(1), and he became well known as a Kūfite (2). Bashshār, for example, said to Ashdja' while Abu'l-'Atāhiya was reciting one of his poems to al-Mahdī: "Is he the famous Kūfite who has a nickname?"(3). Abu 'Abd al-Rahmān al-
Samargandī said to Muslim b. al-Walīd: "I left behind me at

1. Tārīkh Bagḥdād, vi, 251: Agh, iii, 126,127...
2. Agh, iii, 144,142, etc..
3. Agh, iii, 142, reading mulaqqaṭ instead of muqallab. It reads thus in the other editions like Dar al- ṭhaqāfa's one (Beirut, 1955) iv, 35. The meaning of the text also commends that reading.
Baghdād one Kūfite and one Baṣrite who were masters of poetry". The Kūfite was Abu'1-'Atāhiya (1).

Khiyār al-Kātib is the only source to mention that Abu'1-'Atāhiya and Ibrāhīm al-Mawsilī came from al-Madhār. According to him they came to Baghdad together, but Ibrāhīm stayed while Abu'1-'Atāhiya left for al-Hīra. How did Abu'1-'Atāhiya arrive at Kūfa, and how did he make his living? It is related that al-Riyāshi said that it was Abu'1-'Atāhiya's father who took his son to Kūfa (2).

According to Yāqūt, al-Madhār was the capital of Maysān and situated between Wāsit and Basra. It was four days journey from there to Basra (3).

At this point we must express our doubts as to the accuracy of Khiyār al-Kātib's account which contradicts what is generally accepted. All the texts which concern his life are agreed that he lived at Kūfa (4), and only in this one account are we told that he lived first at Madhār, then at Baghdad, and from Baghdad went to al-Hīra where he remained till his father took him to Kūfa.

Since we know that he was able to travel alone from town to town we can safely assume that he was sufficiently mature to be allowed to travel without his father before he actually arrived.

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1. Al-Muwashshah, 260.
2. Agh, iii, 127.
4. Al-Muwashshah, 254; Tabaqāt, 106; Agh, iii, 126, 127, etc.
at Kūfa. This means that he cannot have lived at Kūfa for a long period because though he was young when he came there he was still young when he left to go to Baghdad at the beginning of al-Mahdī's rule. To have spent a few years in Kūfa would not be enough to give him the surname: the Kūfite. In addition there is no evidence that he was even in Baghdad before his known arrival in al-Mahdī's time.

If we are supposed to think that Abu'l-'Atahiya's father came from Madhār - a possibility which we rejected during our discussions of the poet's origin - when, then, did he come to Kūfa? Why did he choose there and not Basra which is nearer to Madhār? And why did he not accompany his son from the beginning? We find ourselves more inclined to reject Khiyār's (1) quotations and accept that Abu'l-'Atāhiya was born and bred in Kūfa.

Unfortunately there is a scarcity of material for his childhood and youth. We first come across him quite suddenly selling pottery (2) in the streets of Kūfa, and sitting among the youths while they all recited their own poetry. Ibn Sarī' says that he saw Abu'l-'Atāhiya when he was still a potter holding an audience of young people and literary students to recite to them his poetry which they used to write down on pieces of broken pottery (3).

1. No other accounts have come down to us about his life related by Khiyār.
2. Agh, iii, 126.
3. Agh, iii, 129.
Abu'l-Faradż began his story of how Abu'l-'Atahiya bargained with the youth for the continuation of a half of a verse with these words:

Abu'l-'Atahiya went around Kūfa during his early youth carrying a cage on his back full of pottery to sell. (1).

Ibn Qutayba said: "he was a potter" (2). Zubayda having received Abu'l-'Atahiya's complaint said to Surrad who was responsible for distributing the Ma'mūn's annual gift of money sent to her: "Why you have not given the potter his share of the money?" (3). Abu'l-'Atahiya was not at that time a potter, but we can take her words as a proof of his background and first profession.

Ibn al-Mu'tazz relates that al-Mahdī, when he heard Abu'l-'Atahiya's poems about 'Utba, said: "Did the potter not find anyone else to play within his private rooms" and continues, "Abu'l-'Atahiya was once a potter in the streets of Kūfa" (4), and this is corroborated by al-Mas'ūdī (5).

Salm al-Khasir, on hearing Abu'l-'Atahiya's verse:

1. O Salm, God be great,
avarice has humiliated men.

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1. Agh., iii, 149.
2. Ši'r, ii, 765.
4. Tabaqāt, 106.
5. Murūdī, vi, 245.
said: "Woe to the effeminate potter, the hypocrite."(1)

When Yahyā b. Khalid was told that Abu'l-'Atāhiya renounced worldly things and sat in the street to practice the old medical art known as "cupping" in order to humiliate himself for the sake of reward in another life, he said:

Was he not previously selling pottery? and was he not sufficiently humiliated by that without doing the 'cupping'? (2)

Abu'l-'Atāhiya's friend, Khalīl b. Asad said that when Abu'l-'Atāhiya was visiting them he used to ask permission to enter by presenting himself as Abū Ishaq al-Khazzāf, the potter(3). And on one occasion he said that his door-keeper had announced that "Abū Ishaq, the potter, was waiting"(4).

Despite the fact that we cannot take it seriously we will now mention in passing the following story. Our source for it, 'Umar b. Shabba, is a well known and reliable chronicler, but we can, nevertheless, see quite clearly the role which imagination played in it.

'Umar cites that Abu'l-'Atāhiya had two daughters called (Lillāh) for God, and (Billāh) by God. Mansūr b. al-Mahdī asked him to let him marry Lillāh, but Abu'l-

'Atāhiya refused to allow this on the pretext that he wanted her as a wife simply because she was his daughter, and if he, in fact, consented, Mansūr would very soon begin to tire of her while Abu'l-'Atāhiya would do nothing

1. Agh., iii, 164.
2. Agh., iii, 129.
3. Agh., iii, 127.
4. Agh., iii, 130.
about it. Further, he was intending to marry her to a potter, preferably a wealthy one (1).

Possibly this story was based upon the psychological tendency towards inter-marriage in the same profession rather than mixed marriages with members of other professions. At any rate, this story again shows Abu'l-'Atāhiya retaining the reputation of a potter long after he had in fact abandoned that job.

Abu'l-Faradj makes mention of the fact that Abu'l-'Atāhiya and his brother Zayd had male black slaves to manufacture the pottery, which was to be sold by their servant Abū 'Abbād al-Yazīdī while the profit was to be collected by them. But it is also said that only Abu'l-'Atāhiya's brother did this, and when Abu'l-'Atāhiya himself, was asked about this he said: "I am the poet and my brother is the business man" (2).

The content of this story does not contradict what we said earlier: that Abu'l-'Atāhiya spent his youth selling pottery in the streets of Kūfa. Possibly they later became rich and therefore more able to maintain slaves and servants to do the work for them. It is also possible that Abu'l-'Atāhiya only gave up his job when he began to produce good poetry. We are not able to trace anything about his brother's later career, but it seems reasonable to accept Abu'l-'Atāhiya's assertion that his brother was the business man who continued in his job.

1. *Agh.*, iii, 170.
2. *Agh.*, iii, 129.
We would perhaps be able to discover more concerning that if we could find anything more about Abū 'Abbād al-YaẓīĪ, their servant. But it is scarcely surprising that we cannot obtain any detailed information about so humble a person devoid of any special ability which might make him of interest to chroniclers.

At what point, we must now ask, did Abu'l-'Atahiya give up this trade? But it is impossible to define the time because we have no information about it.

As regards Abu'l-'Atahiya's appearance, Abu'l-Faradī describes him as elegant, slim, and white skinned with curly black hair(1). Al-Mas'ūdī, however, describes him as a man with an ugly face, pleasant gestures, and a good voice for the reciting of poetry(2). And again, we have in Al-Aghānī Shāhīb b. Mānsūr referring to Abu'l-'Atahiya saying that once while standing by al-Raṣīl's door he saw a very ugly man(3). Confronted with all these contradictory statements it is difficult to decide whether Abu'l-'Atahiya was in fact ugly or attractive. The last can only be a matter of personal taste.

Next we have to consider the question of his alleged effeminacy. Some writers maintain that he was effeminate. Was this in fact the case?

1. Aḥb., iii, 129.
3. Aḥb., iii, 163
In order to answer this question adequately it is necessary to enumerate and discuss all that has been said on the matter. First there is Abu’l-Faradj, who says that in his youth Abu'l-’Atáhiya was an effeminate and even the lackey of the effeminates (1). He also mentions that Bashshar when asked who was the master poet of his time, replied: "the effeminate of Baghdad" (2) by which he meant Abu’l-’Atáhiya. Then, as we mentioned before, Salm al-Khásir, the poet, on hearing Abu’l ’Atáhiya’s verse:

1. O Salm. God be great, Avarice has humiliated men

said: "Woe to the effeminate potter, the hypocrite" (3).

Al-Marzubānī says:

It is said that Abu’l-’Atáhiya was the lackey of effeminates, and that when he was asked why he followed such a perverted path, he said that he wanted to learn their style and manner of speech (4).

In al-Marzubānī's view that is quite clear in his poems, especially in the following verses:

1. Woe to my heart! if it ceases to love, my life will not be so unhappy.

1. What is the matter with my mistress? Is it a coquetry which I can endure?

1. God is between me and my mistress, she turned away from me and blamed me.

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1. Agh., iii, 126.
2. Agh., iii, 162.
3. Agh., iii, 164.
4. O 'Utbi! what is our trouble? Be kind, my sister, with your Lord (1).

While speaking about Rabî'a al-Ruqqî, Abu'l-Farâdj says that both Abu'l-'Atâhiya and he were fastidious in their manner (2). Abu'l-Shamaqmaq, the poet, tells that seeing Abu'l-'Atâhiya following the effeminates one day, he asked him:

Why do you put yourself in this false situation when you are an elderly distinguished poet, and an eminent man?

Abu'l-'Atâhiya answered again that he wanted to learn their style and manner of speech (3).

When al-Rashîd put Abu'l-'Atâhiya in prison for refusing to write poetry, Abu Habash said:

Poets are offering their best poems and nobody wishes to listen to them, while this effeminate refuses to versify until he is implored to do so (4).

Before discussing these stories it is essential to explain the expression yahmil zamilat al-mukhannathîn. Zâmila in Al-Lisân means the camel who carries food and other burdens. There is no mention of it in any dictionary or book of proverbs such as Al-Lisân, Lane's Dictionary or al-Maydânî. But in Fraytag's collection (i, 596, No. 49) we do find the expression zamilat al-akâdhîb which is there said to mean an exaggerated power of lying.

1. Al-Muwashshahâk, 261.
3. Agh., iii, 128.
4. Agh., iii, 149.
From this expression it is possible to understand three meanings. Firstly, it would mean that *zāmilat al-mukhannathīn* refers to a special symbol which they used in order to distinguish themselves. In the second place it is a figure of speech and means simply the lackey who follows the effeminates. In the third place it would mean that he was taking over the leadership of the effeminates by comparing it to the leader who guides the camel of the caravan.

In appraisal of this information we can start with the quotation from Abu’l-shamaqmaq. We know from Al-Aghānī itself that Abu’l-’Atāhiya and Abu’l-Shamaqmaq were enemies and this by itself is enough to throw doubts upon the truth of this quotation. In the story we find Abu’l-shamaqmaq saying to Abu’l-’Atāhiya:

Why do you put yourself in this false situation now that you are an elderly, distinguished poet and an eminent man?

The word "elderly" implies that he was still an effeminate after the earlier years of his life had passed. But we are unable to find among all the information that we have about Abu’l-’Atāhiya and his life, any evidence which brings us to believe that he was effeminate when he became elderly and reached a position of eminence as a poet.

We can take Abu’l-shamaqmaq’s quotation together with al-Marzubānī’s, and assume that both had the same origin.

1. Agh, iii, 169.
The only difference between them is that in the quotation of al-Marzubānī the story is told obliquely thus: "It has been said", while in the story of Abu'l-shamaqmaq the story is told directly by himself. In Arabic, the expression "It has been said" does not always correspond exactly to "It really happened". It is used more often to express the possibility of being wrong or doubtful.

As to the verses that al-Marzubānī used as arguments and proofs of the effeminate character of Abu'l-'Atāhiya, we can certainly reject them as evidence. It is not logical to accuse a poet of being effeminate simply by referring to a few verses which do not suit one's own taste. If we followed al-Marzubānī's standards of judgment we would find ourselves similarly accusing many of the 'Abbāsid's poets like al-'Abbās b. al-Ahnaf, (1) for example, and many others. In any case we cannot see any thing particularly effeminate about these verses. On the other hand, Salm al-Khāsir and Abū Habash,

1. Al-'Abbās had similar verses like:
   1. If you want to make things which command the admiration of the people
   2. Draw here the likeness of Fawz and there the likeness of 'Abbās.
   3. If they do not move nearer to each other till you can see their two heads as one head.
   4. Accuse her of not suffering and him of not suffering.
      Agh, viii, 16-17.

   and 1. O Fawz, that causes 'Abbās to tremble.
      How I suffer because of your cruel heart.
      Agh, viii, 18.
being bitter enemies, are far too unsympathetic to be trusted in their assessments of him. Nor can Bashshar's word be relied upon since he is renowned for crude and extravagant language.

All that remains concerning his alleged effeminacy is what Abu'l-Faradj says of Abu'l-'Atahiya in his youth: "effeminate and lackey of effeminates".

If we leave aside what he says about the fastidiousness of al-Rugqi and Abu'l-'Atahiya on account of the big difference in the meaning of the words effeminacy and fastidiousness, we would ask to what extent Abu'l-Faradj's story revealed the true character of Abu'l-'Atahiya. It is, of course, possible, that Abu'l-'Atahiya was really effeminate, but we have no real evidence of that.

On the other hand, we have some valid reasons to hesitate in attributing this character to him. Our sources which speak of him keep silent regarding this aspect of his conduct. And Abu'l-Faradj who writes in detail about the day to day life of effeminate does not mention a single story emphasising the effeminate side of Abu'l-'Atahiya's life. So although it is not allowable to deny that he was effeminate it is equally unjust to accept that he was, because our present available sources are too flimsy to be used as solid proof.

Now we turn to the story of Su'da, his love, and his quarrel with Ibn Ma'n(1). Although we do not have a great deal of

1. Agh, iii, 135-138. This story is mentioned only in Al-Aghani.
information about the youth of Abu'l-’Atāhiya and his life at Kūfa before he travelled to Baghdad, what we do have is quite sufficient to give us a general picture of his life then.

Making a clear distinction between effeminacy and licentiousness we can consider Abu'l-’Atāhiya to be one of the licentious poets. The story of his relationship with Su'dā is sufficient proof of that. Abu'l-Faradī tells us that Abu'l-’Atāhiya fell in love with a beautiful woman from Hira called Su'dā. Su'dā, however, was already the love and also the slave of ’Abdullāh b. Ma’n b. Zā’īda. When he addressed a shameless satire to her he was threatened by ’Abdullāh and told never to mention her again. His reply to that was a sarcastic poem which included the verses:

1. Say to Ibn Ma’n who gave up his friendship for me.

2. I have been told what he said but did not care.

In the first verse he was speaking about a previous good relationship with Ibn Ma’n, and this means that by this time Abu'l-’Atāhiya was making friends among the higher classes of society. In the second verse he refers to Ibn Ma’n’s threatening messages, and the remaining verses are a very piquant satire.

The story, however, does not tell us anything about his actual relationship with Su’dā, or how he could have known her, or when, or where. On the basis of the earlier friendly relationship between Abu'l-’Atāhiya and Ibn Ma’n described in
the foregoing verses, we can assume that he could have met Su'dā in her master's house.

What is meant by the expression "he prevented him from mentioning her"? Did he intend that Abu'l-'Atāhiya should not mention her in his amatory or in his satirical poetry? It is reasonable to assume, however, that he disliked both. But it does not necessarily follow from the fact that he addressed a satiric poem to Su'dā that he was therefore seriously in love with her.

His quarrel with Ibn Ma'n became increasingly serious. Ibn Ma'n took him and struck him a hundred times with a whip. Abu'l-'Atāhiya reacted by a furiously sarcastic poem which began with this verse:

1. Ma'n's daughter struck me...

and another poem began

1. O my friend of my journey
   Do not blame me because I defamed
   Ibn Ma'n 'Abdullāh.

There are also these verses:

1. Ma'n's daughter struck me with her hand. She made her own hand painful but never hurt me.

2. If she had no pain in her hand she was not going to leave me.

Ma'n's brother Yazīd also grew angry, so Abu'l-'Atāhiya satirised him in his poetry as well. Finding themselves quite

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1. *Agh.* iii, 137.
unable to stop him, the sons of Ma'n asked Mandal and Hayyān the 'Anazites and the masters of Kūfa to intercede for them, knowing that Abu'l-'Atāhiya could hardly reject their mediation, Abu'l-'Atāhiya then actually became friendly towards them again and made excuses for their behaviour in another poem.

Elsewhere, Abu'l-Faradī himself describes the course of their reconciliation in rather a different way. According to him 'Abdullāh b. Ma'n took Abu'l-'Atāhiya forcibly off to his house and after punishing him again made him choose between peace and war. Abu'l-'Atāhiya chose the former, and produced the following poem:

1. What then is the relationship between myself and my constant critic? They ordered me to do what is wrong.

During this protracted quarrel brought about by Su'dā, Zā'ida b. Ma'n continued to be friendly with Abu'l-'Atāhiya and was not rude to him. When he died, Abu'l-'Atāhiya composed an elegy for him:

1. I became sad because of Zā'ida b. Ma'n's death. I owe it to him to remain sad for a long time.

2. Zā'ida is the youth of youth, the pure, he is Abu'l-'Abbas, my brother and my friend.

But none of this could prevent the fame of Abu'l-'Atāhiya's satirical poems, written during the period of the quarrel, from spreading so much that al-Rashīd himself was accustomed to recite the following verse whenever he saw 'Abdullāh b. Ma'n(1):

1. Agh, iii, 135.
1. The sister of Banū Shaybān passed by us....

'Abdullāh b. Ma'n was so affected by these satiric poems that he described his psychological state by saying that every time he saw anyone looking at him while he was carrying his sword, he felt embarrassed because he thought they were recalling Abu'l-‘Atāhiya's verses about his sword. (1)

These are:

1. Take the decoration of your sword and cast it in a mould of anklets.
2. What can you do with your sword if you are not going to fight.

After this we cannot find any trace of Su'dā in his poetry or his life. We find him mentioning her only once in a poem made afterwards in Baghdād in which he attempted to attract 'Utba. These verses are:

1. I said to my heart which ceased its love for Su'dā because of my love of noble origins.

2. You are similar to one who flies from the shower to keep dry, and then goes under the gutter. (2).

These two verses are found in Al-Aghānī and Tarīkh Baghdād with a slight difference. The other sources make no reference to Su'dā or the quarrel with Ma'n's sons.

These happenings shed some light on Abu'l-‘Atāhiya's life

during that period, and the quarrel over his satire on Ma'n's sons shows us the eminent position in the field of poetry which he had reached by them. All this helps to explain his journey to Baghdad and his attempt to become friendly with al-Mahdi which we are going to discuss.

We get little help from his biographers as to the stage of Abu'l-'Atahiya's artistic development, but we can tell from the satirical poems which were composed at Kufa before his arrival in Baghdad, that from the literary point of view he had already reached the level of the great poets of his time. Although these poems cannot be placed in a high position as regards their moral value, their considerable literary worth is quite clear.

Since we know that he was quite friendly with the sons of Ma'n who represented the highest social class in the community we can understand his social position at Kufa, and also how he hoped to establish good relations with the governing class and go to Baghdad where he could find his way to the Caliph. Our sources of information do not mention anything about his journey to Baghdad, nor when it occurred, nor who helped or encouraged him to go. The name of Yazid b. Mansur, the uncle of al-Mahdi, appears in Abu'l-'Atahiya's life soon after his arrival at Baghdad when he began to mention 'Utba in his poetry. He exaggerated in this to such an extent that al-Mahdi ordered him to be sent to prison.

Ibn al-Mu'tazz mentions that al-Mahdi ordered him to be
sent to prison when he had referred to 'Utba in his poems, and adds that with the good offices of Yazīd, the uncle of al-Mahdī and friend of Abu'l-'Atāhiya, he was released. Ibn Qutayba also relates that Yazīd interfered when al-Mahdī ordered Abu'l-Atāhiya to prison because of his poems addressed to 'Utba. Abu'l-Faradj argues that Yazīd took Abu'l-Atāhiya's part because in his poems he was writing a panegyric of the Yemenite, al-Mahdī's uncle. Yazīd, who was from one of the best families, was the most generous and sincere of patrons. He was very good to Abu'l-'Atāhiya, who was very well defended by him in spite of all the dangers that he exposed himself to in so doing.

We must now consider when Abu'l-'Atāhiya first met Yazīd, and how he came to occupy such an important place in his life that Yazīd felt bound to protect him.

Al-Ṭabarī tells that Yazīd b. Mansūr was the governor of Kūfa in the year 161 A.H. We know that al-Mahdī became Caliph at the end of the year 158 A.H. We know also that Abu'l-'Atāhiya went to Baghdād at the beginning of al-Mahdī's caliphate. From this we can infer that he began his friendship with Yazīd while still at Kūfa, and that he sent him his poems when he was the governor there. Possibly his success in

1. Tabaqat, 106.
2. Shi'r, ii, 766-7.
3. Agh, iii, 141
4. Tabari, 3-1, 491.
Kūfa encouraged him to go to Baghdad and strike up a relationship with the Caliph with the help of Yazīd. We can suppose that this happened the same year that Yazīd became governor (161 A.H.) or very shortly afterwards. But we cannot do more than guess because we have no precise information to help us. We cannot even find a text which allows us to assert that he did in fact meet Yazīd at Kūfa.

At all events Abu'l-'Atahiya arrived in Baghdad with a well developed poetic talent which was quite sufficient to enable him to find his way there.

* * *

The first thing that we know about Abu'l-'Atahiya at Baghdad is of his love for 'Utba and the poems which he addressed to her. Accounts of this affair fill a good part of the literature about Abu'l-'Atahiya. There appears to be some basis of fact in the story, but from a very early period it was heavily embellished. The imaginative element in all that we have about it is only too evident. The same stories have been related in a variety of different ways, and we can pick out characteristic ideas of the chroniclers' own period in what they added to the stories. We cannot, therefore, give to these stories any great historical credence, but it is nevertheless quite useful to study them from a literary point of view. They help us to understand something of the development of the story in Arabic literature in this early period, although we can hardly use the technical word "story" for this type of literature.
Who, then, was 'Utba? All our sources tell us that she was the slave of the daughter of Abu'l-'Abbās al-Saffāh and the wife of al-Mahdī Rayṭa. The only exception to this is al-Mas'ūdī. He says:

When Abu'l-'Atāhiya out-reached himself in addressing his love poems to 'Utba, al-Khayzuran’s slave...

But al-Mas'ūdī, himself, mentions in another place that"Rayṭa sent her slave 'Utba with Ibn Malik, the Khuza'ite, to buy slaves which she was intending to liberate. It is said that 'Utba was her slave and later on al-Khayzuran’s." Whether 'Utba later became al-Khayzuran’s slave we cannot tell. All we can accept is that 'Utba was in fact Rayṭa's slave.

We should mention in passing that 'Utba's name is not really a strange one. It is a very common name for men, but quite frequently male names are given to women. We have many examples of this to-day, and in early times it was specially common for slaves. We can take as an example Fadl, the poetess, Badhā and Mutayyam.

We must now consider how Abu'l-'Atāhiya knew 'Utba, how

1. Shi'r, ii, 766; Tabaqāt, 105; al-Husrī, ii, 42.
4. Al-Fihrist, 164.
5. Agh, vii, 33.
he met her, whether this was on his arrival at Baghdaḍ, and what his relations with her really were?

A good many stories which tell of their relationship with each other have been lost. We can tell this from the beginning of Abu’l-Faradż’s chapter on Abu’l-‘Atāhiya. He says that he is not going to say anything about the stories of ‘Utba and Abu’l-‘Atāhiya because they are so numerous and he will mention them in another chapter(1). Unfortunately Abu’l-Faradż seems to have forgotten this promise, and nothing remains to us regarding this part of Abu’l-‘Atāhiya’s life in Al-Aghānī. Unfortunately Kitāb Abi’l-‘Atāhiya Wa ‘Utba(2) mentioned by Ibn al-Nadīm is now lost. Nevertheless, what has come down to us is sufficient to allow for a fairly detailed sketch of this famous love affair.

It may be desirable to summarise these stories as related in the different books, and to start with al-Baghdadi because he tells two versions, one of which comes from Abu’l-‘Atāhiya himself and the other from his son. Such a direct account has more likelihood of being accurate and true. After these stories from al-Baghdadi we can consider the others in chronological order.

Al-Baghdadi, then, tells that Abu’l-‘Atāhiya himself gives this account of what happened to him:

1. Agh., iii, 126.
He came from Kūfa with two friends. They had no-one to help them and they used to sit down in the early morning in the Mosque of Bāb al-'ajr. They once saw a woman accompanied by negro servants, and when they asked who she was they were told that she was Khālīsa. One of them said he had fallen in love with her. Then another woman passed by accompanied by white servants. When they asked who she was they were told that her name was 'Utba. Abu'l-'Atāhiya said that he fell in love with her. Then they all began to write poems and delivered them to 'Utba and Khālīsa. For this reason they were badly treated and later more serious attempts were made on their persons. Abu'l-'Atāhiya put on monk's clothes and came to 'Utba while she was in the street, declaring his repentance and kissing her hand. When he removed his disguise, 'Utba recognised him and had him pursued.

'Utba went to see Khālīsa and they decided together to test the sincerity of their lovers by offering them money to leave them alone. At her meeting with Abu'l-'Atāhiya, 'Utba began by threatening to tell the Caliph, but Abu'l-'Atāhiya told her that it would be better for him to be killed than to live without seeing her. When he was offered the money he ran away. She ordered him to be brought back, but he insisted on refusing the money because he declared 'Utba herself, and not money, was his only hope.

When he arrived home, he discovered his friend suffering great pain with his ears all swollen up because he had accepted the money. 'Utba felt elated because she believed him to be serious in his love. She sent for him a few days later and insisted that he take some money for his needs.

In Abu'l-'Atāhiya's poetry there is this verse:

1. I had a misfortune which began as a joke, then became a true love. Every misfortune has to have a beginning (1).

Al-Baghdādī relates another story which is shorter but more important. Abu'l-'Atāhiya's son relates that his father was writing a panegyric to al-Mahdī in an attempt to establish

1. *Agh*, iii, 146.
good relations with him. Some time passed without any real result. So he thought it might be more profitable to attract the attention of al-Mahdī by acquiring for himself any kind of notoriety; when he met 'Utba he hoped that an affair with her would open up a way to the Caliph. So he started to address poems of great passion to her. His first poem to her was that in which he mentioned Su'dā for the first and last time in Baghda:

1. O Yazīd, the voice of the raven fortelling to me the break with my beloved frightened me.

2. I said to my heart which ceased its love for Su'dā because of my love of noble origins. (1).

Ibn Qutayba does not say much about this, and he mentions only that Abu'l-'Atāhiya was addressing love poems to Rayta's slave 'Utba, and that al-Mahdī grew angry about it and ordered him to prison (2).

Ibn al-Mu'tazz says that Abu'l-'Atāhiya addressed love poems to 'Utba who was Rayta's slave. According to him Rayta's husband, al-Mahdī, grew angry and ordered him to prison. But Yazīd b. Mansūr spoke in favour of him, and on his release, Abu'l-'Atāhiya again started to address his love poems to her. Rayta complained against him because she believed that her slave was slandered in his poetry. Al-Mahdī then had him whipped.

1. Tarīkh Baghdad, vi, 254-257.
2. Shi'r, ii, 766.
When Abu'l-'Atahiya recovered consciousness, he saw 'Utba and said:

1. Oh 'Utba! who can compare with you? Al-Mahdi killed a man for you.

Then al-Mahdi felt pity for him and promised to allow him to marry 'Utba. 'Utba refused on the pretence that he was only after money. On hearing that al-Mahdi ascribed to him a large sum of money without specifying whether it would be paid in darahim or dananir. Abu'l-'Atahiya demanded the figure in the larger financial unit, but the treasuries refused to pay. Abu'l-'Atahiya came at regular intervals to ask for the money and on one occasion 'Utba, accusing him of not being serious in his love for her, said:

If you were sincere in loving me you would be in too much of a hurry to worry about whether you were going to accept the gift in darahim or dananir.

After this al-Mahdi changed his mind and was convinced that 'Utba understood Abu'l-'Atahiya better than he did.(1)

Al-Mas'udi gives a more highly fanciful account of Abu'l-'Atahiya's relations with 'Utba; an account which hides the historical facts beneath a mass of fabrications.

He relates that 'Utba complained to her mistress al-Khayzuran against Abu'l-'Atahiya. Seeing her weeping, al-Mahdi asked what was the matter. He sent for Abu'l-'Atahiya

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and asked him about the content of some of his verses to 'Utba, but Abu'l-'Atāhiya cunningly replied by reciting the verses in the same poem which eulogised al-Mahdī. Al-Mahdī ordered him to be whipped, and when Abu'l-'Atāhiya recovered consciousness, he said:

1. Oh 'Utb! who can compare with you? Al-Mahdī killed a man for you.

'Utba became sad, and al-Mahdī took pity upon them. He ordered money to be given to Abu'l-'Atāhiya, but Abu'l-'Atāhiya gave away this gift and distributed it around, saying that he would not take a price for his beloved. Al-Mahdī then gave him another sum of money, this time insisting that he should retain it.

From this story we know that al-Mahdī asked him about these two verses:

1. What is the matter with my mistress? She became haughty in her lovely manner.

2. She is a king's slave, and beauty is to be seen in her attire.

Abu'l-'Atāhiya replied by adding these verses:

1. The caliphate came to him on his merits....

We can, however, doubt the truth of this story because we know that Abu'l-'Atāhiya recited this poem to al-Mahdī in the presence of such people as Bashshār and Ashīja; and we know that Abu'l-'Atāhiya was al-Mahdī's favourite. It is difficult

1. *Agh.,* iii, 142; *Tārikh Baghdad,* vi, 257.
to imagine that al-Mahdī would order a favourite of his to be whipped. Abu’l-’Atāhiya’s love for 'Utba was so well known (and incidentally had been publicly approved by al-Mahdī) as to allow him to recite his panegyric to al-Mahdī starting with the verses addressed to 'Utba.

Al-Mas’ūdī mentions another story in which Abu’l-’Atāhiya sent to al-Mahdī on a Nayrūz day, a tray containing a dress on which was written:

1. My soul is concerned with one thing in this world. Both God and al-Mahdī can satisfy it.

2. I lose hope of her, but again your disdain for matters of this world sustained me.

Al-Mahdī wanted to give 'Utba to him, but in the end 'Utba refused because Abu’l-’Atāhiya was really a potter, but wanted to earn money by making poems.

Al-Mahdī again ordered him to be given some money but Abu’l-’Atāhiya spent some time wrangling with the treasurers about it. 'Utba saw him and accused him of concentrating on making money and not being a genuine lover.

In these two stories Abu’l-’Atāhiya is given two contradictory characters. In the first story he is a man who distributes largesse because he does not want to accept a price for his loved one; in the second story he is a man who is eager to obtain the largest possible sum as a substitute for 'Utba.

Al-Mas’ūdī relates that after this Rayṭa sent her slave
'Utba off with 'Abdullāh b. Malik the Khuza'ite to buy slaves and liberate them. Abu'l-'Atāhiya dressed himself up as an old ascetic slave and begged 'Utba to buy him and restore his freedom. This she did, and Abu'l-'Atāhiya kissed her hand. The Khuza'ite realised who he was and informed 'Utba, who immediately felt shy and ran away.

Later on, according to al-Mas'ūdī, Abu'l-'Atāhiya repeatedly besought al-Rashīd to intercede with 'Utba on his behalf. Al-Rashīd promised him that he would do so, but for a time after this Abu'l-'Atāhiya could not manage to see him. In order to succeed in his endeavour he offered him three hand fans on each of which were written one of the following three verses:

1. I tried to recognise the smell of my ambition in the air. I found that I was smelling your hands.

2. I made myself have so much trust in you that I run fast towards you.

3. When I am inclined to lose hope, I say to myself, 'No, my success is insured by a very generous man'.

Al-Rashīd gave his assurance to Abu'l-'Atāhiya, and asked 'Utba to allow him to visit her at home. 'Utba regarded the visit of the Caliph as a great honour. At 'Utba's house, al-Rashīd asked her to promise that she would do whatever he asked her. She agreed provided that it had nothing to do with Abu'l-'Atāhiya, because she said that as far as she was concerned she was bound by an oath which she had already given to al-Mahdī.

Al-Rashīd then lost all hope, and so did Abu'l-'Atāhiya as he believed that 'Utba was unlikely to accept any other
intercessions after rejecting al-Rashīd's. He put on an old woollen garment and became an ascetic. On this occasion he said the following poem:

1. I cut the ropes of hope....etc.

Besides this, al-Mas'ūdī mentions that al-Rashīd on hearing the verse:

1. The Caliph's gazelle hunted me and concerning her I am helpless.

he grew angry on the supposition that Abu'l-'Atāhiya was denigrating his huram and had him sent to prison (1).

Al-Husrī tells that al-Mahdī was once out hunting. He had heard some verses which Abu'l-'Atāhiya had addressed to 'Utba, and admiring them, he asked for information about the poet and his beloved. When he was told that the beloved woman was actually one of his own slaves he refused to believe on the grounds that if this was truly the case, he would have offered the beloved slave to the poet.

Al-Husrī adds that Abu'l-'Atāhiya was too violent in his declarations of love to 'Utba in that the chroniclers imply that he was not sincere in his love, but only sought to make a name for himself, through a dramatic love affair. He also tells us that Abu'l-'Atāhiya begged Yazīd Hawrāʾ, the famous singer, to intercede between him and al-Mahdī. Yazīd advised him to compose verses which he, Yazīd, could then sing to the

Caliph. So Abu'l-‘Atāhiya said:

1. My soul is concerned with one thing in this world. Both God and al-Mahdī can satisfy it.

2. I lose hope of her, but again your disdain for matters of this world sustained me.

Yazīd sang these two verses to al-Mahdī, and told him of Abu'l-‘Atāhiya's hope. Al-Mahdī promised that all would be well.

A few months later Abu'l-‘Atāhiya asked Yazīd to sing the following verses to al-Mahdī:

1. How I long to know what news there is! How I long. Perhaps the answer was delayed by an important matter.

2. No answer make me more grateful than an answer obtained after a month.

Al-Mahdī did in fact speak to 'Utba, but she told him she wanted to know the opinion of her mistress and nothing happened after that. Yazīd then came again to al-Mahdī to sing him these verses:

1. I made myself have so much trust in you that I run fast towards you.

2. I tried to recognise the smell of my ambition in the air, I found that I was smelling your hands.

3. When I am inclined to lose hope I say to myself, 'No, my success is insured by a very generous man'.

Al-Mahdī again besought 'Utba, but she told him that her mistress would not allow it, and this time he accepted that.

When Abu'l-‘Atāhiya was told of the reply, he said:

1. I lost every hope in you (literally: I cut the ropes of hope from you).

Al-Husnī records that al-Mahdī had Abu'l-‘Atāhiya whipped
a hundred times for the following verse:

1. The Caliph's gazelle hunted me and concerning her I am helpless.

As we have seen al-Mas'ūdī also relates this story, but he puts al-Rashīd instead of al-Mahdī here. Al-Husrī adds that in addition to having him whipped the Caliph had him exiled to Kūfa, and he mistanced the following verses of Dahmān as an argument for the fate of Abu'l-'Atāhiya.

1. If the Caliph was not wont to whip the lovers because of their love.

2. I would have mentioned the name of my own beloved, but did not because I was afraid.

At Kūfa, Abu'l-'Atāhiya had not stopped talking about 'Utba, and he said:

1. My spirit is in Baghdad while my body is in Kūfa.

and

1. Every time I recall the gazelle living at Baghdad, I cannot prevent myself from weeping.

Abu'l-'Atāhiya established his relationship with al-Rashīd during his father's caliphate. Al-Mahdī said to him: "You are going straight towards your death".

Abu'l-'Atāhiya recited to him his eulogistic poems. Al-Mahdī said he could choose between two alternatives: either he could be whipped and given money for his eulogistic poems, or he could simply be satisfied without receiving money. Abu'l-'Atāhiya asked him to forgive him and give him the money, and this he did(1).

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When we compare these stories, we can clearly notice both points of similarity and points of difference. We can also draw some conclusions as to what has been added and how the versions were modified as they passed from one writer to another. (We have to leave Ibn Qutayba aside because he spoke very simply on this subject).

Ibn al-Mu'tazz, who lived in the third century A.H. gives more details. He mentioned that al-Mahdī ordered Abu'l-'Atāhiya to prison and had him whipped, and that after that he took pity on him and wished to let him marry 'Utba. 'Utba rejected him. He then gave money to Abu'l-'Atāhiya instead, and when Abu'l-'Atāhiya spent time wrangling over whether he was to be paid in darāhim or ḍanādir, he revealed the insincerity of his love.

Later, al-Mas'ūdī who lived in the fourth century A.H. added more details and complications which leads us to suspect that he was sometimes drawing on his imagination. He tells us of al-Mahdī meeting 'Utba while she was weeping in al-Khayzurān's presence and complaining of Abu'l-'Atāhiya's poetry. Al-Mahdī had him brought to him and tried, as we have seen before, and had him whipped. Al-Mas'ūdī does not here mention that he was sent to prison. He simply related that al-Mahdī felt pity for Abu'l-'Atāhiya after he had had him whipped. He then offered him money. On this point we can see a difference between the accounts of Ibn al-Mu'tazz and al-Mas'ūdī, because according to al-Mas'ūdī Abu'l-'Atāhiya distributed all the money. Al-Mas'ūdī also tells us a story which Ibn al-Mu'tazz does not mention: according to this Abu'l-'Atāhiya on a Nayrūz day presented to al-Mahdī as a
gift, a garment on which some verses about 'Utba were written. Al-Mahdī said he was willing to give him 'Utba as a wife if she could accept the fact that he was bargaining with the treasurers about the money unit in which he was to be paid. This story reminds us of the following one which concerns Ishāq b. 'Uzayz, who was in love with al-Muhallabiya's slave, 'Abbāda. Apparently al-Mahdī interceded with her on behalf of Ishāq that she should accept him as a husband, but she rejected him weeping and saying that al-Khayzuran had promised that he would not give her to Ishāq. So al-Mahdī then gave Ishāq fifty-thousand dinār in compensation, and this gave rise to the following verses of Abu'l-'Atahiya:

1. If there are sincere lovers everywhere, Ibn 'Uzayz's love is untrue.

2. Fifty-thousand dinār which jingles in any parcel and which constitutes all that is beautiful and seemly.

3. Made him forget 'Abbāda and stole away his love.

Abu'l-'Atahiya also said:

1. Your love for money is not comparable with your love for 'Abbāda. O, the inconstancy of lovers!

2. If you had a genuine love for her you would not sell her for fifty-thousand.

This story is so similar to the story of Abu'l-'Atahiya and 'Utba that we may doubt its historical truth. Who sold his love? Abu'l-'Atahiya or Ishāq b. 'Uzayz? Or was the whole

1. Agh., iii, 155.
thing simply the imagination of that century as we are inclined to believe?

Al-Mas'ūdī was the first to relate the story that Abu'l-'Atāhiya pretended to be an old slave, and that when 'Utba restored his freedom, he kissed her hand. Another story with additions was that of the intercessions of al-Rashīd with 'Utba, the three hand fans sent to al-Rashīd, and al-Rashīd's visit to 'Utba in her own house. Al-Mas'ūdī, next tells us of 'Utba's refusal and Abu'l-'Atāhiya's hopelessness. The whole atmosphere reminds us of The Thousand and One Nights.

Later, al-Husrī, living in the fifth century A.H. describes a different attitude of al-Mahdī. According to him al-Mahdī began by being influenced by Abu'l-'Atāhiya until the point at which he said that if Abu'l-'Atāhiya's poems were truly directed to his slave, he would give her to him. Al-Husrī was the first to express doubt about the account of Abu'l-'Atāhiya's sincerity in his love, and their belief that he was using his declared passion as a means of becoming famous. Al-Husrī, in fact, transmitted what al-Mas'ūdī had written before, but in a different style. He said that instead of sending the garment to al-Mahdī with some verses written on it, Abu'l-'Atāhiya asked Yazīd to sing these verses to al-Mahdī. And again, instead of sending three hand fans with verses, he asked Yazīd to sing them:

1. I made myself have so much trust in you... etc.

When 'Utba rejected him even after al-Mahdī's intercession Abu'l-'Atāhiya said:
1. I lost every hope in you, etc...

Al-Husri also mentions what other writers mentioned before concerning the punishment of Abu'l-'Atāhiya ordered by al-Mahdī, but added that al-Mahdī had him exiled to Kūfa. Al-Husri was the first to mention Abu'l-'Atāhiya's exile. He also says that al-Mahdī threatened him a second time when he again addressed his poems to 'Utba, but when Abu'l-'Atāhiya recited his panegyric, al-Mahdī forgave him and ordered him to be given some money.

Al-Baghdādi, who is contemporary to al-Husri gives us some new information as to how Abu'l-'Atāhiya knew 'Utba, how she tested him on the question of money. This reminds us of the story of the money which al-Mahdī gave to him instead of 'Utba. As far as 'Utba was concerned, Abu'l-'Atāhiya passed his examination very well. We remember how al-Mas'ūdī made Abu'l-'Atāhiya distribute al-Mahdī's gift to him. Here also al-Baghdādi mentions the same story which was mentioned by al-Mas'ūdī: that Abu'l-'Atāhiya made himself a slave and kissed 'Utba's hands when she released him. The only difference is that in al-Baghdādi's story Abu'l-'Atāhiya made himself a monk.

The story that al-Baghdādi transmitted from the son of Abu'l-'Atāhiya seems both significant and logical and lacks the element of fantasy which was apparent in the earlier story that he had related. Abu'l-'Atāhiya made an attempt to reach al-Mahdī but failed. Then he tried addressing 'Utba in his poems in the hope that by this means he might get into the presence of al-Mahdī. It is possible that Abu'l-'Atāhiya later became more
sincere in his love as he said:

1. I had a misfortune which began as a joke. Later I became a true lover for every misfortune has a beginning(1)

Or possibly he continued to pretend love, and versified as we can see from the accounts of Ibn al-Mu'tazz and al-Husri and al-Baghdadī.

Ibn Tayfur mentions that Abu'l-'Atāhiya met 'Utba in al-Fadl's house during al-Ma'mūn's caliphate, and when he was asked whether anything was left in his heart of his love for 'Utba, he swore that nothing remained. When they presented 'Utba to him he turned and fled(2). This story seems to imply that Abu'l-'Atāhiya may really have been serious and true in his love.

There is little doubt that the reason why they did not marry was that 'Utba in fact rejected Abu'l-'Atāhiya as a husband. No other explanation fits the evidence. It is possible that al-Mahdī interceded on Abu'l-'Atāhiya's behalf, but we have to remember that the imagination of succeeding centuries gave a romantic character to many events which may in fact not have happened in quite that way. The same imagination which appears in the story of Ishaq and 'Abbāda can be seen in that of Abu'l-'Atāhiya and 'Utba. It was the atmosphere of the period which produced most of the details in the story. Their

1. Agb, iii, 146.
2. Kitāb Baghdād, 18
attitude to poets, and especially to court poets, was to expect them not simply to produce poems, but to amuse the Caliph and present something unusual. It was not easy then for people to see a poet as an ordinary man with normal ambitions. So we find in the Arabic literature a great many stories about poets and their relations with caliphs and kings even from the pre-Islamic period. Poets were not at any time free and independent. They depended entirely upon patronage and at any time the Caliph could order them to come to him to amuse or console him, and they had always to obey whatever was the circumstances.

Possibly this situation excited the imagination of people to attribute an unusual role to poets and exaggerate in their telling and creating stories about their lives, their relations with the caliphs, or their love affairs. As we said before, the historical value of such stories is not very great, but they do have a literary value, which is especially significant for anyone interested in the history and development of Arabic literature.

It is difficult to believe that Abu'l-'Atähiya became an ascetic after 'Utba rejected al-Rashîd's intercession (al-Mas'ūdī) or al-Mahdi's (al-Hasrī). We should not deny that his rejection by 'Utba may have caused him to become an ascetic, but we should point out that this is not the sole nor the most important reason, as we shall see.

Most of Abu'l-'Atähiya's poems to 'Utba have been lost.
and only a very few remain to us. These make it clear that 'Utba herself was never in love with him nor had been particularly moved by his poems. Abu'l-'Atahiya stopped writing love poetry after he became an ascetic during the caliphate of al-Rashīd.

* * *

Next we must relate and discuss the question of Abu'l-'Atahiya's dissipated life. Unfortunately, most of his poems which relate to this aspect of his life and behaviour have been lost. What we have left are his ascetic poems, with a few poems of panegyric and some love poetry.

The following poems is related in Al-Aghānī by 'Umar b. Shabba:(1)

1. **Alas! for the short and pleasant time in which we were living between Khawarraq and Sadir.**

gives us some sort of picture of his past, but it is very difficult to believe that this is the real picture.

Possibly the following story tells us more: Abu'l-Faradj says

that Isma'il b. Ma'mar al-Kūfī, who was the mawla of al-Ashā'ītha, was a friend of poets. Abū Nuwās, Abu'l-'Atahiya and others used to meet in his house where they relaxed and played and grew drunk. He used to bring in girl and boy slaves for them. Abu'l-'Atahiya referred to him when he said:

1. **Al-Qarātīsī became a chief...etc.**

One day Abū Nuwās, Husayn al-Khalī' and Abu'l-'Atahiya met together, all rather drunk. They discussed where they should meet and al-Qarātīsī said the following short poem:

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1. Agh., iii, 156.
1. Come all of you to the house of al-Qaratīsī.

2. A young, elegant, Tūsī boy prepared the house for us.

3. He filled the bottles for us with wine from Balqīs's country.

4. And different kinds of birds and camels for a feast.

5. And brought some beautiful girl slaves who are like the peacocks (1).

The story describes quite well the atmosphere in which Abu'l-'Atāhiya was living. There was wine, women, boys, and other poets to drink and sport with him.

Attempts to find anything concrete about al-Qaratīsī did not reveal more than a few dispersed verses and the mention of his name in Al-Fihrist among the poets who have only a few poems (2). It would be easy to describe the atmosphere in which Abu'l-'Atāhiya lived more precisely if we could find out something about al-Qaratīsī and his house which was the place of meeting for these poets, but we can at least tell from this story that he was a frivolous and sensuous man.

* * *

Al-Mahdī, with whom Abu'l-'Atāhiya had so many dealings, became Caliph in the year 158 A.H., and there were many similarities between his reign and that of his father. There was much discontent and revolution both within and without his territory, but he succeeded in keeping control, though he was

1. Agh., xx, 88-89
2. Al-Fihrist, 164.
obliged to dismiss two of his ministers: Abū 'Ubaydillāh and al-Ya'qūbī. He made an attempt to transmit the succession to the caliphate from Īsā b. Mūsā to his sons al-Ḥādī and al-Rashīd. He was generous and clever. At the same time he was severe to unbelievers and heretics whom he hounded down and killed without pity. He died in the year 169 A.H. and was succeeded by his son al-Ḥādī.

When we were discussing Abu'l-'Atahiya and 'Utba we mentioned that al-Mahdī ordered Abu'l-'Atahiya to prison after he had heard his poems to 'Utba(1). Abu'l-Faradāj relates that al-Zubayr b. Bakkār said that when al-Mahdī ordered Abu'l-'Atahiya to prison Yazīd b. Mānsūr interceded and then al-Mahdī ordered his release. For this service Abu'l-'Atahiya wrote Mānsūr an eulogy(2). Abu'l-Faradāj also relates that Djabala b. Muhammad's father had claimed to have seen Abu'l-'Atahiya visiting regularly a doctor who was treating him for his eyes. Somebody said to him: "Your pain has lasted for a long time". Abu'l-'Atahiya then said:

1. Woe is me. Woe is me. Woe is me! Is there any way to escape from the pitfall of the net?

2. Woe to my eye! It is hurt by weeping. The kuhl in the kuhl-pot was not enough to cure it.(3)

When we have all these texts in agreement we can scarcely

1. Shi'r, ii, 766; Tabaqāt, 106.
2. Agh, iii, 145.
3. Agh, iii, 155.
doubt that al-Mahdī ordered him to prison because of the love poetry he addressed to 'Utba, and that he had been released after the intercession of Yazīd. (1)

It is not easy, however, to assess the exact time at which this took place. There is no text to help us with this, but it seems reasonable to suppose that al-Mahdī ordered him to prison before he became a close favourite of his, and this would place his imprisonment shortly after his arrival at Baghdād. We have already seen that his arrival at Baghdād was likely to have taken place in the year 161 A.H. or very shortly afterwards. Since we can place Abu'l-'Atahiya's imprisonment with some degree of certainty at this time, so we can establish that it was also during this period that he was whipped, as mentioned by al-Mas'ūdī (2), Ibn al-Mu'tazz (3), and al-Husrī (4).

Abu'l-Faradj quotes two verses of Abū Dahnān which he composed after Abu'l-'Atahiya had been whipped:

1. If the Caliph was not wont to the lovers because of their love.

2. I would have mentioned the name of my own beloved, but did not because I was afraid (5).

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1. Shi'r, ii, 767; Tabaqāt, 106, Agh, iii, 145.
3. Tabaqāt, 106
4. Zahr, ii, 43.
5. Agh, xix, 151
We know that after this period, Abu'l-'Atahiya became the favourite of al-Mahdī and was allowed to recite before Bashshār and Ashdja' (1), and recited before al-Mahdī on many occasions both of a normal and of a special nature (2). We know that he received large sums from him as a compensation for his failure to win 'Utba and as a price for his eulogies until at length he provoked the jealousy of Marwān b. Abī Hafsa already an established and famous poet (3).

Abu'l-'Atahiya's relations with al-Mahdī grew closer as time went on. We hear later that al-Mahdī took him with him on hunting expeditions, and when al-Mahdī lost track of his companions and was forced to sleep in the cottage of a peasant he asked Abu'l-'Atahiya to compose a humorous poem on it. This he did (4). One occasion Abu'l-'Atahiya interceded on behalf of Abū 'Ubaydillāh the Vizier (5).

All these things help us to understand the position held by Abu'l-'Atahiya during the caliphate of al-Mahdī.

Now we come to the period of the new Caliph, al-Hādī, the son of al-Mahdī. He succeeded his father on his death in 169 A.H. and his own caliphate was very short since he too died in 170 A.H. It has been said that he was assassinated by his mother because his jealousy caused him to debar her

1. Agh., iii, 142.
2. Agh., iii, 162.
3. Tarīkh Baghdaḍ, vi, 258.
4. Agh., iii, 149-150
from a share in political activity or because he was planning to overthrow al-Rashīd and give his power to his son. Although his rule was so short, at least one momentous event happened. One of the 'Alīds, well known as Qaṭīl-Fakhkh rebelled and was killed. Al-Hādī's character was similar to that of his father. He was generous and strong, and bold, and stern to unbelievers.

It is only in Al-Aghānī that we can find out anything about the relations of Abu'1-'Atāhiya with al-Hādī. 'Urwā b. Yūsuf al-Thaqafī said that al-Hādī was not very pleased with Abu'1-'Atāhiya's conduct at the time he became Caliph, because Abu'1-'Atāhiya had neglected him during his father's caliphate and cultivated the friendship of al-Rashīd, and when al-Hādī had asked him to accompany him to Rayy, he had refused. All this alarmed Abu'1-'Atāhiya when al-Hādī got the caliphate, and he attempted to seek a reconciliation with him and said:

1. Is there anyone who can intercede with the Caliph and avert the prophecied doom for us?

'Umar b. Shatba tells us that al-Hādī bore some resentment against Abu'1-'Atāhiya for preferring to cultivate the friendship of al-Rashīd rather than his own. When al-Hādī became the Caliph, Abu'1-'Atāhiya said:

1. Fear and hope is felt whenever Mūsā moves his stick or seems to move it.

1. Agh, iii, 152.
2. Agh, iii, 156.
Al-Hādī forgave him then, and Abu'l-'Atāhiya recited this poem:

1. Alas for the short and pleasant time in which we were living between Khawarnaq and Sadīr (1).

Muhammad b. Abi'l-'Atāhiya told that Abu'l-'Atāhiya also recited to al-Hādī, complaining of his lot and asking for money; al-Hādī ordered the treasurer to give him money but as related by Abu'l-'Atāhiya, he refused to do this because when al-Hādī asked Abu'l-'Atāhiya some questions about poetry he was unable to give a reply because al-Hādī was so redoubtable a figure and Abu'l-'Atāhiya used to fear him. But Abu'l-'Atāhiya asked Ahmad b. 'Uqāl to help him, and with his help he got the money (2).

The important thing in this text is the expression: "He was redoubtable and Abu'l-'Atāhiya used to fear him" and to be so afraid of him that he was unable to reply. This gives us some idea of al-Hādī's character and Abu'l-'Atāhiya's position with regard to him, which seems to have been one of considerable awe.

We can assume that Abu'l-'Atāhiya was accustomed to recite to him on occasion, as we can see from the following verses in which he congratulated al-Hādī when a child was born to his wife during the first days of his caliphate:

1. Agh., iii, 156.
1. Musa increased the distress of those who are jealous of him. He decorated the earth with his children.

2. The earth had great happiness. The birthday was a time of rejoicing in his reign.

Al-Hadi ordered a large sum of money to be given to him and became pleased with him in contrast to his recent anger. But unfortunately, almost as soon as Abu'l-'Atahiya had established good relations with al-Hadi, the latter died. When al-Rashid became the Caliph, he asked Abu'l-'Atahiya to write love poetry, but Abu'l-'Atahiya refused to do so, and said: "I am not going to make any more poetry after the death of al-Hadi".

Al-Rashid became Caliph in 170 A.H. He imitated al-Mansur in almost everything except in his manner of spending money, for al-Rashid was very generous. During his time the 'Alids again rebelled, but al-Rashid was victorious over them. His kingdom was so vast that it was said of him that he drew taxes from most of the world. His reign marked the culmination of power and the ultimate downfall of the famous vezieral family of the Barmacide, but at all events his caliphate was a most prosperous time. Al-Rashid himself used to go off one year for pilgrimage and the next for conquest. He was an educated person himself, loving poetry and poets, and was inclined to patronise educated people and savants. He gave them large

1. Agh, iii, 153.
2. Agh, iii, 162.
sums of money, and so by the time of his caliphate he had collected many of them at his door. He died in 183 A.H.

Our texts are rather confusing regarding Abu'l-'Atāhiya's relations with him. Most of them speak of his life in al-Rashīd's prison. We have seen that Abu'l-'Atāhiya was on friendly terms with him during al-Mahdī's caliphate, and that he cut short these good relations during the caliphate of al-Hādī. But al-Hādī's life was very short, and Abu'l-'Atāhiya found himself once again threatened by an angry Caliph. We may suppose that al-Hādī's death was such a severe shock that Abu'l-'Atāhiya found himself unwilling to write love poetry(1).

The accounts of Abu'l-'Atāhiya's imprisonment are among the most important accounts of his life during al-Rashīd's caliphate; but they are rather confused, and it is difficult to deduce from them the actual reasons which caused al-Rashīd to order him to prison, or how many times he was in fact, in prison. Only one text tells us specifically that he was in prison directly after al-Hādī's death and the beginning of al-Rashīd's reign.

Ahmad b. Khallād's father tells that Abu'l-'Atāhiya and Ibrāhīm al-Mawsili were ordered to prison because Abu'l-'Atāhiya had refused to versify after al-Hādī's death, and Ibrāhīm had refused to sing. After a while, though, they agreed to versify and sing, and Abu'l-'Atāhiya said this poem:

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1. Agb, iii, 162.
May my father be a ransom for one
whom there was once a little love
in my heart though later it departed (1).

In the same text another reason for Abu'l-'Atāhiya's release is mentioned. Al-Rashīd had quarrelled with one of his girl slaves and he asked Abu'l-'Atāhiya to make some verses for him which would help him to effect a reconciliation with this slave, but Abu'l-'Atāhiya refused to do this until he was set free; when released he did in fact make a few verses for al-Rashīd's girl slave(2).

It is as well to compare this story with one told by the nephew of Khālid al-Harbī. According to him al-Rashīd ordered him to put Abu'l-'Atāhiya in prison and to treat him severely until he was prepared to produce some love poetry. When Khālid did so, Abu'l-'Atāhiya asked for his freedom before he could make the poems he was asked for. When he was released he composed this poem:

1. Who can help a slave whose master
has humiliated him? He has nobody
to intercede for him except his
master himself.

Al-Rashīd had Abu'l-'Atāhiya brought to him and asked him to recite these verses:

1. O, 'Utb, my mistress, have you no
faith? How long are you going to
keep my heart with you?(3).

Both these quotations imply that Abu'l-'Atāhiya could not

1. Agh, iii, 162-163.
2. Agh, iii, 163.
3. Agh., iii, 158
bear to be in prison and that he quickly accepted al-Rashīd's condition.

The other texts say that Abu'l-'Atāhiya was sent to prison for refusing to write love poetry and that he said he would not write love poetry after having put on woolen clothes and become an ascetic.

Mukhāriq, the illustrious singer, relates that al-Rashīd had Abu'l-'Atāhiya beaten sixty times and swore not to release him before he had composed verses, but Abu'l-'Atāhiya replied by swearing to give freedom to all his slaves and to divorce his wife if for a whole year he spoke anything except the Qur'ān and the statement in which it is confessed that there is only one God and that Muḥammad is his Prophet(1). After a year he did write a poem addressed to his wife, and then al-Rashīd released him.

The quotation from Abū Khaytham, the 'Anazite also assures us that Abu'l-'Atāhiya was imprisoned. He said that Abū Habash said to him when al-Rashīd ordered Abu'l-'Atāhiya's imprisonment:

Have you heard anything more strange than this? The poets are saying their best and most unique poetry and nobody would listen to them, while this effeminate man is saying his poems only after he has been implored to do so. Abū Habash then recited these verses:

1. O', Abū Ishaq you returned to society and to poetry' and to the poetic profession.

1. Agh, iii, 140.
2. Pull on the silk that you used to be given as a present and leave aside the asceticism and the ugliness.

3. Speak of your beloved and tell her that you die hourly.

4. Nobody wants us, even when we do well; but you say your poems after you have been interceded for (1).

The third verse is a sarcastic parody of Abu'l-'Atahiya's verse:

1. O, 'Utba, within this hour I am going to die, within this hour.

Numerous anecdotes are related about Abu'l-'Atahiya in prison, and the poetry that he composed there. We heard, for example, that al-Rashīd asked someone to write to him giving him news of Abu'l-'Atahiya, and that the correspondent heard Abu'l-'Atahiya reciting these verses:

1. Oh, by God, oppression is base; and the offender is still the oppressor.

2. We are going to the Ordainer of the Last Day, and with God all adversaries meet together.

Al-Rashīd wept, and ordered Abu'l-'Atahiya to be released, and gave him money (2).

Abu'l-'Atahiya's son, Muhammad, relates that his father constantly accompanied al-Rashīd, both at home and on his travels. When al-Rashīd arrived in al-Raqqā, Abu'l-'Atahiya wore wool and became an ascetic, and stopped being a boon companion and

1. Agh., iii, 149.
2. Agh., iii, 151.
saying poems of love. Al-Rashīd ordered him to prison. Abu'l-
"Atāhiya sent him these verses:

1. Since months have been passed,
Praise be to God, anxiety comes
to me from you morning and
evening. etc...

Al-Rashīd said: "Say to him, there is no harm intended towards you".

Abu'l-'Atāhiya sent to him:

1. I was wakeful and sleep departed
   from my eyes. The conversationalist
   slept and did not console me.

2. O, faithful of God! the prison is
   harmful and you sent word that no
   harm was intended to me.

Abu'l-'Atāhiya sent other verses to him and al-Rashīd ordered
him to be released. (1)

In these texts we have seen that Abu'l-'Atāhiya wore
wool and stopped writing love poems when al-Rashīd arrived in
al-Raqqa. We have now to consider when he did arrive.

Al-Tabarī, in describing the events of the 180 A.H. says
that in this year al-Rashīd left Baghdad to go to al-Raqqa (2).
This is the earliest date that al-Tabarī mentions concerning al-
Rashīd's journey to al-Raqqa. It is quite possible to imagine
that Abu'l-'Atāhiya was imprisoned in this year, and it is clear
that this last story (3) is in conflict with the preceding story (4),
which tells that Abu'l-'Atāhiya was in prison for one year; but
it is also clear that the reasons given for his being ordered

1. Agh., iii, 157-158.
2. Tabari, 3-11, 180, 649.
3. Agh., iii, 151, 157-158.
4. Agh., iii, 140.
to prison are the same in both stories and the dating of them is nearly the same.

In al-Tabari the last story is attributed to Abū Nuwās. Al-Amīn, the Caliph, heard that Abū Nuwās was imprisoned and said: tell him that no harm is intended towards him and Abū Nuwās sent him these same verses:

1. I was wakeful, etc... (1)

The same verses are also to be found in Abū Nuwās' Dīwān.(2)

It is difficult to decide from a literary point of view, whether these verses were in fact composed by Abu'l-'Atāhiya or Abū Nuwās because they show similarity to both their styles. It is difficult either to reject this story, or to assume that it happened to Abu'l-'Atāhiya or to Abū Nuwās.

A similar story is told by Ibn Qutayba in which Abu'l-'Atāhiya wrote from his prison, the following verse to al-Rashīd:

1. My soul is your ransom from all you dislike. If I am guilty please forgive me.

Al-Rashīd wrote that no harm was intended to him and Abu'l-'Atāhiya wrote to him:

1. If the people were like a single person with one head, then you are the head and they are the body.

2. Oh, faithful of God! The prison is harmful and you sent word that no harm was intended to me.

1. Tabari, 3-21, 198, 960.
2. Dīwān, 425.
Then al-Rashīd ordered him to be released. From his prison Abu'l-'Atāhiya wrote to him:

1. You are pity and peace, etc...(1)

Ibn al-Mu'tazz also quotes a similar story. He mentions that al-Rashīd bore some resentment against Abu'l-'Atāhiya and kept him in prison. Then Abu'l-'Atāhiya wrote to him:

1. My soul is your ransom for all you dislike. If I am guilty please forgive me.

Al-Rashīd wrote that no harm was intended to him and he wrote again:

1. If the people were like a single person, etc...

Al-Rashīd then ordered his release(2).

However we cannot take the frequency of this story as evidence for attributing it to Abu'l-'Atāhiya and not to Abū Nuwas.

Abu'l-Faradj relates yet another story about Abu'l-'Atāhiya's imprisonment. He tells from Abu'l-'Atāhiya's son that when his father was wearing the wool garment of an ascetic and was imprisoned and badly treated, he said:

1. O! cousin of the Prophet, I obeyed you and removed my woolen garment.

2. I returned to my business because my renunciation brought the Caliph's anger upon me.

1. Shi'r, ii, 767.
2. Tabaqāt, 106.
and he said:

1. Did she have no pity for me when she went away quickly and left me standing and turning towards her.

But al-Rashīd did not release him. And then he said:

1. By God, oppression is base, and the offender is still the oppressor.

Al-Rashīd then felt pity for him and released him. Al-Husrī tells that when al-Rashīd arrived in al-Raqqa, Abu'l-’Atāhiya again became an ascetic, and stopped being a boon companion and writing love poetry. Al-Rashīd ordered him to write love poetry and when Abu'l-’Atāhiya refused he had him imprisoned. On hearing a song from one of his poems, al-Rashīd had him brought before him and reminded him how he had been imprisoned in al-Mahdī's time on account of his love poetry and how he was now imprisoned for his refusal to write such poetry. But Abu'l-’Atāhiya asked to be excused on account of his age. Al-Rashīd sent him back to prison, and Abu'l-’Atāhiya wrote him the following verses:

1. Since months have passed, praise be to God, anxiety comes to me morning and evening, etc...

Here again al-Husrī mentions al-Rashīd's sentence: "there is no harm intended towards you", and Abu'l-’Atāhiya's verse:

1. If the people were like a person, etc...(2), after which he was released (3).

1. Agh, iii, 160.
2. These verses are attributed to Abū Nuwās in his Dīwān, 426.
It is clear that al-Husri was the first to speak of al-Rashid's judgment on Abu'l-‘Atahiya in this way. The story in all its forms has the same nucleus, though slight changes appear in it from text to text. For this reason, we can accept the basic accuracy of the story seeing it as a whole rather than in detail.

It remains to discuss the story related by Abu'l-‘Faradji from three different narrators. He says that al-Rashid put Abu'l-‘Atahiya in prison because he refused to write love poetry, and when Abu'l-‘Atahiya entered the prison he met Khass, 'Isa b. Zayd's emmissary, who was unknown to Abu'l-‘Atahiya. He overheard him reciting these two verses:

1. I became so used to patience
   that it became a habit with me.
   Sincere consolation inspires patience
   in me.

2. To lose hope in people makes me hope again
   in the goodness of God, that he will give
   me something good from unknown source.

Abu'l-‘Atahiya did not know the recitor, but he asked him to recite the two verses again before he spoke to him. During a discussion with him, Abu'l-‘Atahiya discovered that he was Khass. After a while al-Rashid ordered him to be put to death because he refused to tell the whereabouts of 'Isa b. Zayd(1).

Abu'l-Faradji tells the same story in Al-Maqatil(2), but in this version Abu'l-‘Atahiya was ordered to prison by al-Mahdi for refusing to versify, and in prison he met Hadir, who was at

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1. Agb., iii, 172.
that time 'Isā b. Zayd's emissary, and not Khāṣs. The story then continues as in the other account. Abu'l-Faradż mentions at the end that it is also related that this story happened in the time of al-Rashīd, but Abu'l-Faradż believed that this was incorrect and that his version in Al-Maqātil was the more authentic one. There is nothing about Khāṣs in al-Tabarī, though Hādir is mentioned in Al-Maqātil. Abu'l-Faradż says that al-Mahdī had him put to death when he refused to tell where 'Isā b. Zayd was hidden. Al-Tabarī confirms that 'Isā b. Zayd died in 167 A.H. in the time of al-Mahdī.

The reason given here for the imprisonment of Abu'l-'Atāhiya makes it more logical to believe that he was imprisoned in al-Rashīd's time. In addition, it is difficult to believe that Abu'l-'Atāhiya refused to compose verses at the end of al-Mahdī's caliphate, since he was at that time very friendly with him. This makes it impossible to believe that al-Mahdī ordered him to prison in the year 167 A.H., since all the available texts show that Abu'l-'Atāhiya was ordered to prison only once at the beginning of al-Mahdī's caliphate when he first began to address love poetry to 'Utba.

We can see from many stories that al-Rashīd was really an admirer of Abu'l-'Atāhiya. Ibn al-A'rābī tells us that many

1. Maqātil Al-Tāhlīyin, 420.
2. Tabarī, jāvi-44, 167, 251.
poets came to al-Rashīd's door. Abu'l-'Atāhiya, however, was allowed to recite his panegyric to him, and al-Rashīd showed that he admired his poems and did not give entrance to any other poet (1). When he was in prison, Abu'l-'Atāhiya was asked to make a poem for the sailors to sing to al-Rashīd (2). In addition al-Rashīd tried to reconcile his slave by using one of Abu'l-'Atāhiya's poems, and once he asked Abu'l-'Atāhiya to continue the verses which he had composed for his slave girl (3).

We can see from Al-Aghāni (4) and Al-Murūdī (5) that Abu'l-'Atāhiya was badly treated by Mindjāb in al-Rashīd's prison. But according to Ibn Qutayba, Abu'l-'Atāhiya was under the care of Thābit in prison. Thābit apparently treated him well, and Abu'l-'Atāhiya praised him in his poetry (6). Ibn al-Mu'tazz also says that he was well treated but gives the name of his jailor as Māhir (7).

It is not particularly important whether his name was Māhir or Thābit, but what is interesting is that Ibn Qutayba and Ibn al-Mu'tazz both assert, ever against Abu'l-Faradī, that Abu'l-'Atāhiya was well treated in prison.

1. Agh., iii, 146-147.
2. Agh., iii, 177-178.
3. Agh., iii, 162-163.
5. Murūdī, vi, 336-337.
6. Shi'r, ii, 767.
After Abu'1-'Atahiya left prison, according to his son, he stayed in his house and refused to see anybody. On inquiry al-Rashīd was told of his isolation and he said:

Say to him, You have become a woman-lover and prefer to stay at home.

Abu'1-'Atahiya wrote to him:

1. I felt weary of people and their character and I am comforted by isolation.

2. You can count up many people but in the end they are few.

And with these he composed some verses of praise

Abu'1-'Atahiya's relations with al-Rashīd were in general very good. Al-Rashīd admired his poetry and rewarded him, and when Abu'1-'Atahiya preached to him he wept.

Abu'1-'Atahiya was said to be his constant companion, reciting verses in the palace, and composing poems for special occasions. His poem for the occasion of al-Rashīd's bestowing the succession on his three sons is a good example of that. It was in the year 186 A.H., and Abu'1-'Atahiya said:

1. He strengthened Islam by three young royal men to whom he gave the succession.

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1. *Agh., iii*, 179
2. *Agh., iii*, 175, 159.
2. They are the best children of their father and they had the best father and ancestors (1).

Al-Riṣāṣī tells us a very strange story. He says that the king of Byzantium sent an ambassador to al-Raḥīṣīd, and this ambassador asked about Abu'l-'Aṭāḥiyya and heard his poetry. He told the king of Byzantium about him, and the king sent to al-Raḥīṣīd to send Abu'l-'Aṭāḥiyya to him, taking what he wanted as a pledge of his safe return, but Abu'l-'Aṭāḥiyya refused to go. Al-Raḥīṣīd was then told that the Byzantine king ordered that the following two verses of Abu'l-'Aṭāḥiyya must be written on his door:

1. Day and night did not make their round and the stars in the sky did not move in the celestial sphere
2. Except when they wanted to take power from one king who had handed on the succession to another (2).

Al-Raḥīṣīd died in the year 193 A.H. (3). We hear no mention of Abu'l-'Aṭāḥiyya writing his elegy despite the good relations that existed between them.

The next Caliph was al-Amīn, who succeeded al-Raḥīṣīd in the year 193 A.H. He had lead a dissolute life and never really became interested in the administrations of his kingdom. A great quarrel between him and al-Ma'mūn began soon after he

1. Ṭabārī, vii, 178-179.
2. Ṭabārī, iii, 179.
3. Ṭabārī, 3-12, 193, 735.
got the caliphate, when he tried to overthrow al-Ma'mūn in order to give the succession to his son. Al-Fadl b. al-Rabī', the Arab faction, and al-Fadl b. Sahl, the Persian faction, played the chief roles in the struggle and the battle was to some extent a struggle between the Arabs and the Persians led by these two brothers and their ministers. Al-Ma'mūn eventually won, and al-Amīn was killed in 198 A.H.

Nothing is known about Abu'l-'Atahiya during the caliphate of al-Amīn. Possibly his new ascetic principles kept him apart from al-Amīn who was leading a dissipated life.

An aged man from Kūfa related how he once entered the mosque in Baghdad after al-Amīn had become the Caliph, and he saw an old man with some people gathered round him while he was reciting:

1. Oh, alas, for the leaves of youth, and its wet, green branches!...

2. I will weep for my youth and the goodness of the loving days.

3. I hope to become eternal but death is calling me.

The old man was reciting and the tears were falling down his cheeks, and when the aged man asked who the poet was, he was told that it was Abu'l-'Atahiya. (1)

Habīb b. al-Djahm tells that Abu'l-'Atahiya arrived from Mecca and went to al-Fadl who was planning to go to al-Amīn.

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1. Agb, iii, 148.
Al-Fadl told the door-keeper that he could not receive him, and Abu'l-'Atahiya then gave the door-keeper a present of a pair of shoes with the following verses written on them:

1. I sent these shoes to be worn by a hero who walks in them to glory.

2. If it were possible to use my cheeks as the sole of your shoes, I would do so.

Al-Fadl took these shoes to al-Amīn and told him their story. Al-Amīn ordered money to be given to Abu'l-'Atahiya which he took and went home\(^1\). This story of the shoes was told by Ibn al-Ma'ṭazz, but according to him the shoes were presented by Abu'l-'Atahiya himself directly to al-Rashīd\(^2\). Whether the shoes were sent to al-Amīn or not this story does not tell of a direct encounter between them.

During al-Amīn's caliphate nothing is told of Abu'l-'Atahiya, but just after his death we heard that Zubayda, al-Amīn's mother, asked Abu'l-'Atahiya for some verses for her to send to al-Ma'mūn, and he said:

1. The unhappiness of the times joins or separates. All times have days which can be praised or blamed.

2. I say to the misfortune of the times, if one hand went away from me, the other, God be praised, remained.

3. If al-Ma'mūn remains, al-Rashīd, Dja'far and Muhammad, all remain for me.

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1. Agh., iii, 165-166.
2. Tabaqāt, 107
This story was told by Ibn 'Abd Rabbih (1) and Ibn Tayfur (2), but Ibn 'Abd Rabbih added that Zubayda wrote some other verses of Abu'l-'Atāhiya's which began:

1. For the best leader appeared in the best people, and the most generous, cheerful face on the rostrum

and that al-Ma'mūn asked Zubayda how much she ordered for him and when she told him he ordered the same sum to be given to Abu'l-'Atāhiya. Zubayda, as Ibn Tayfur said, gave him every year, money from the gift of al-Ma'mūn (3). To what extent can we believe this story?

We find in al-Tabarî those same verses, but there they are attributed to Khuzayma b. al-Hasan, making the elegy for al-Amīn, but this time on behalf of Zubayda:

1. For the best leader...etc...(4)

But the style of these verses gives us cause for doubt. Their construction is very weak and differs from Abu'l-'Atāhiya's style, but this is not enough to convince us that the verses are not his.

Abu'l-'Atāhiya's relations with Zubayda were good. Al-Husayn b. Abîl-sarîf said that she recognised his merits (5). The story of Abu'l-'Atāhiya and al-Qāsim is a good example.

1. Al-'Iqd, iii, 215.
4. Tabarî, 3:2, 198, 946.
5. Agh., iii, 159.
Al-Qāsim once passed by Abu'l-'Atāhiya. Abu'l-'Atāhiya stood up in his path but al-Qāsim did not pay him any attention. Abu'l-'Atāhiya then recited a verse criticising him and al-Qāsim had him whipped a hundred times and imprisoned. Abu'l-'Atāhiya sent some verses to Zubayda complaining of his treatment. Zubayda told al-Rashīd and al-Rashīd gave him money, and treated his son severely until he asked Abu'l-'Atāhiya to forgive him. Then al-Rashīd treated him well again (1).

During al-Ma'mūn's caliphate, Abu'l-'Atāhiya advised al-Husayn b. al-Dahhāk, who was composing an exaggerated elegy for al-Amīn, to stop saying that kind of thing and to escape from danger. Al-Husayn took his advice and escaped (2).

From all this we can see that Abu'l-'Atāhiya's attitude to al-Amīn was rather a negative one. Or again it is possible to suppose that al-Amīn's flamboyant style of life and Abu'l-'Atāhiya's psychological state at that time account for the lack of friendship between them.

In 198 A.H. al-Ma'mūn became Caliph. He was a clever and generous man, and the active intellectual life of his period caused great progress to be made in science in general. The contention about the creation of the Qur'an started in his period. His minister, al-Fadl b. sahl, the Persian, played a

1. Agh, iiii, 159.
2. Agh, vi, 204.
great role during his reign. Al-Ma'mūn settled all the problems in his kingdom and lead a very wise life. What happened to Banū Sahl in this period is quite similar to what happened to the Barmakides. He died in 218 A.H.

We have only a little information about Abu'l-'Atāhiya's relationship with al-Ma'mūn, but from this we can deduce that it was fairly good, and that he was often with al-Ma'mūn, although he was not the court poet who is expected to utter verses on every occasion as he had been in al-Rashīd's life.

Ahmad b. 'Abdillāh tells that Abu'l-'Atāhiya's position was the same as al-Fadl b. al-Rabī' in al-Ma'mūn's house (1). Although this seems to be degrading to al-Fadl especially in comparison with his position in al-Rashīd's house and al-Amīn's house, it was not so for Abu'l-'Atāhiya. Abu'l-'Atāhiya used to recite his poems to al-Ma'mūn. Al-Mu'allā b. Ayyūb, once saw al-Ma'mūn speaking to an old man with a beautiful beard and very white clothes and a head-dress. Al-Ma'mūn asked him to recite some ascetic poems and discussed some other verses with him (2), and once he had him brought round to speak to him about his inclinations towards self-isolation. Abu'l-'Atāhiya recited to him some verses on this theme (3). 

2. Agh., iii, 151-152.
3. Murūḏī, vii, 31; Kitāb Baghdaḏ, 158.
had a disputation with Thumāma in al-Ma'mūn's presence and was defeated by him(1).

It was the custom of Abu'l-'Atāhiya to do his pilgrimage every year and to present a gift to al-Ma'mūn. Then al-Ma'mūn would give him a large sum of money; but on one occasion he forgot and was reminded by Abu'l-'Atāhiya(2).

Abu'l-Farādž relates that once a piece of paper was found in al-Ma'mūn's army. Mādjaši b. Mas'ada read it and recognised the style of Abu'l-'Atāhiya, but said that it was not for him. Al-Fadl said the same, but al-Ma'mūn said that it was for him and he understood it. The letter consisted of these two verses:

1. We are not in the position that we were in when we separated in Sandān, and friendship is not like that.

2. You strike people with the sword because of their infidelity, and yet you forget to be faithful yourself (3).

From the style of these verses, and the nature of Abu'l-'Atāhiya's attitude as revealed in these texts (there is lack of any specific praise or eulogy addressed to al-Ma'mūn by Abu'l-'Atāhiya), we can see that their relationship was of an unusual type, suitable to Abu'l-'Atāhiya's ascetic personality

1. Agh., iii, 128.
2. Agh., iii, 152.
3. Agh., iii, 150.
which isolated him from public life, but still did not prevent him asking for money.

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Now we must discuss Abu'l-'Atāhiya's family. From the verses which follow, which he wrote in order to obtain his release from al-Rashīd's prison, we can see that he had only one wife, though in fact we have no other text to confirm this:

1. My longing for the woman who lives in my house increases. How I long to know whether we will meet again or not.

2. She is my share of the creatures with the necklaces. I limited myself to her (1)

that he had only one wife, but we cannot find any other text about that.

'Umar b. Shabba tells that Abu'l-'Atāhiya had two daughters called "Lillāh" and Billāh and that al-Mansūr b. al-Mahdī asked him to allow him to marry Lillāh, but Abu'l-'Atāhiya refused (2). Ibn al-Mu'tazz also relates that one of the old writers told him that he used to go to Abu'l-'Atāhiya and write down his poems, and that Abu'l-'Atāhiya had two daughters, Billāh and Lillāh (3).

Ibn Qutayba relates the same story as Ibn al-Mu'tazz, but

1. Agh, iii, 140.
2. Agh, iii, 170.
3. Tabaqāt, 105.
he adds that this old writer disapproved of these names\(^{(1)}\). The names are certainly strange and it is possible that they were invented at the time when Abu'l-'Atahiya was accused of being an unbeliever. But perhaps they were in fact common names at the time.

Abu'l-Faradj mentioned them and did not say anything about them, but Ibn al-Mu'tazz mentioned them just after he had accused Abu'l-'Atahiya of being an unbeliever and a polytheist, and Ibn Qutayba also mentioned that this old writer did not approve at all.

Abu'l-Faradj mentions another daughter whose name was Ruqayya. Apparently Abu'l-'Atahiya asked her in his last illness to weep over him and to use some verses which he had composed especially for this purpose\(^{(2)}\).

We hear of one son only. Ibn Qutayba says that Abu'l-'Atahiya had a son who was an ascetic and a poet\(^{(3)}\). When Mukhāriq was recounting the story of Abu'l-'Atahiya's ascetic period he mentioned that "Abu'l-'Atahiya ordered his son and his servants to do so..."\(^{(4)}\). Ibn al-Mu'tazz says that Abu'l-'Atahiya had a son who was an ascetic and a poet, but who later renounced\(^{(5)}\). Abu'l-Faradj also tells us that Abu'l-

\(^{\text{1. Shi'r, ii, 765.}}\)
\(^{\text{2. Agh, iii, 182.}}\)
\(^{\text{3. Shi'r, ii, 765.}}\)
\(^{\text{4. Agh, iii, 180.}}\)
\(^{\text{5. Tabaqāt, 105.}}\)
'Atāhiya had a son called Muḥammad who was a poet\(^1\). In Al-Fihrist it is said that Abu'1-ʿAtāhiya's son Muḥammad had the nickname "ʿAtāhiya"\(^2\). It is also related that Abu'1-ʿAtāhiya once said to his son that he was not gentle enough\(^3\).

The transmission of many stories are attributed to Abu'1-ʿAtāhiya's son, Muḥammad. If he had another son, his name would be as familiar to us as that of Muḥammad, so we can safely say that he had only one son. * * *

Many stories are told of the avarice of Abu'1-ʿAtāhiya despite the fact that he was or became a wealthy man. Those stories make him out to be as mean as those in the book of al-Djāhiz, and in spite of the fact that Abu'1-ʿAtāhiya was constantly attacking avaricious people and encouraging people to be generous. Thumāma told that Abu'1-ʿAtāhiya recited to him these verses:

1. If a man does not free himself from money, he will become the slave instead of the possessor of money.

2. That which I spend is my money, but that which I leave and do not spend I do not possess.

3. If you have money hasten to spend it, otherwise your money will not last.

1. Agh., iii, 170.
3. Agh., iii, 165.
Thumāma asked him what made him think this, and Abu'l-'Atāhiya replied that he got it from the Prophet's speech:

You possess the money which you spend on your own food and clothes or in helping other people.

Then Thumāma asked why he did not spend money even on his own food, and Abu'l-'Atāhiya replied that he is afraid of becoming poor. Thumāma told him that he was living just as though he was a poor man

According to al-Djahiz he was very mean and did not even eat well, being quite satisfied with bread and vinegar as his normal diet. He found it sufficient to ask God to help his neighbour who was old and poor, but did not think of helping him, himself. He prayed to God on his own neighbour's behalf for about twenty years, but when he was asked why he did not actually help him, he replied that he did not want to turn him into the sort of person who was ready to make a convenience of other people. Also he refused to give to an especially tall servant of his more than two pieces of bread a day in case he should become a bad servant. One day he had a humorous conversation with some beggars. They were arguing with him and making use of his poems in the argument, but he still refused to give them anything.

1. Agh, iii, 132-133.
2. Agh, iii, 133.
3. Agh, iii, 133.
4. Agh, iii, 133-134.
5. Agh, iii, 134.
Abu'l-'Atāhiya was once asked why he did not give alms to the poor, and he replied that he spent the alms money on supporting his own family. He was told that he must spend some money on the poor, but he said that if he were ever to stop giving alms to his own family no-one would be poorer than them (1).

Sālih al-Shahrazūrī spoke with al-Fādil b. Yahyā and asked him to help Abu'l-'Atāhiya. Al-Fādil replied that he hated doing anything for him because he never seems to put it to any use (2).

Abu'l-'Atāhiya was once asked why he did not spend what God gave him. He said that he just did not do so. His Inquirer said to him that he had so much money in his house that he could not account for it all. He replied that the money did not really belong to him, otherwise he would spend it (3).

It is possible that all these stories are simply fabrications, but there is enough there to make us think that there may well have been an avaricious streak in him. What is strange is that Abu'l-'Atāhiya should have accused others of avarice. He said:

1. Look wherever you like, you will see avarice.

1. Agh, iii, 134.
3. Agh, iii, 174.
Mukhārīq told him that he was exaggerating, but Abu'l-‘Atāhiya asked him where he thought he could name a generous one (1).

It is difficult to find any reconciliation between avarice and asceticism, but we can dismiss his supposed avarice as an individual tendency which can be explained in psychological terms. We have many living examples in the eastern countries to-day of individuals who spend their time collecting money and at the same time show personal asceticism and piety, and live simply as poor men.

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Now we must consider the question of Abu'l-‘Atāhiya's unbelief or żandaqa. Ibn al-Mu'tazz says that

Abu'l-‘Atāhiya was accused of unbelief although he had composed many ascetic poems in which he referred to death, the Last Day; Hell and Heaven. The truth was that he was a polytheist.

After that he mentions that Abu'l-‘Atāhiya has two daughters called "Lillāh" and "Billāh" (2).

We must consider for what reason he was accused of unbelief, and at what time people started to accuse him. Ibn Qutayba mentions that Abu'l-‘Atāhiya was accused of unbelief because he pointed to the sky and said:

1. If you allow yourself to doubt concerning things which you can see, it is more reasonable to doubt things which you cannot see.

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1. *Agh*, iii, 165.
and this verse:

1. O God, if you try to make me forget her by showing me beautiful women from Heaven, I will not forget her.

and these verses:

1. God looked on you as the best of His creatures, and He saw your beauty.

2. By His power He created the women of Heaven to be like you (1).

Abu’l-Faradj relates that Muhammad b. Abi’l-’Atāhiya said that Mansūr b. 'Ammār heard Abu’l-’Atāhiya recite the following verses:

1. 'Attāba with her beauty is like a monk's doll who attracts the monk.

2. O God, if You try to make me forget her by showing me beautiful women from Heaven, I will not forget her.

Mansūr said "he is degrading Heaven and misusing its name by using it in his poems in that way". Mansūr also said about the following verses: "Is it possible that God imitated an example of a human being when he created heavenly women? God does not need an example":

1. God looked on you as the best of His creatures and He saw your beauty.

2. By His power He created the women of Heaven to be like you.

Mansūr had a great influence upon the masses of the period and from this time onwards Abu’l-’Atāhiya had great difficulty with them (2).

From these texts we can see that Mansūr b. 'Ammār was the

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1. Shi'r, ii, 769.
2. Agh., iii, 151.
most prominent in accusing Abu’l-'Atāhiya of unbelief. Why then, did he do so?

Abu’l-Faradī relates from Abū 'Umar al-Qurashi that Abu’l-'Atāhiya said when he heard about one of Mansūr’s public speeches madīlis al-ba'ūda: "Mansūr stole the speech of a Kūfite man". When he heard that Mansūr said:

Abu’l-'Atāhiya is an unbeliever. He does not mention either Hell or Heaven in his poems. He speaks only of death.

Abu’l-'Atāhiya then directed these verses to Mansūr:

1. O, preacher to the people! You are accused now because you are criticising people for something that you do yourself... etc.

Abū 'Umar says that Mansūr died a few days after this quarrel and that Abu’l-'Atāhiya visited his grave and forgave him(1).

We should be able to assess the time at which Abu’l-'Atāhiya was accused of unbelief if we could find the date of Mansūr’s death, but unfortunately it was not possible to find out anything about that.

Al-Baghdādi relates a similar anecdote with some differences. He says that Mansūr once said in a public speech that Abu’l-'Atāhiya was an unbeliever. Abu’l-'Atāhiya then wrote to Mansūr:

1. The Last Day is a very difficult day. Nobody will help the oppressor.

2. O Mansūr! You have to prepare yourself for the grave and the terrible Last Day.

1. Agb., iii, 142.
After that Mansūr regretted what had happened and re-asserted that Abu'l-'Atāhiya was a believer because he believed in death and resurrection\(^{(1)}\).

It seems that Mansūr was not the only one who spoke of Abu'l-'Atāhiya's unbelief. Radjā' b. Salama tells that he heard Abu'l-'Atāhiya saying that he read yesterday this āyāt: 'Amma yatasā'alūn and that he composed a poem which was better than this āyāt\(^{(2)}\).

Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī's son tells that Abu'l-'Atāhiya sent to Ibrāhīm condemning him after he had heard that Ibrāhīm had accused him of unbelief. Ibrāhīm sent these verses to him:

1. Oh'Atāhī, death left you but did not forget you, though your heart forgets.

2. Do not be proud if they say to you that you are eloquent or that you are in a high position.

3. Render good your hidden thought and fear God....etc. (3)

In addition to all this his neighbour saw him praying at night and said that he was praying to the moon. Hamdūya went to her house and watched Abu'l-'Atāhiya till he finished his prayer and went to sleep. But he could not see him doing anything strange\(^{(4)}\).

In this story we first hear the name of Hamdūya, the

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1. Tarīkh Baghdād, vi, 253-254.
2. Agh., iii, 142.
3. Agh., iii, 177.
4. Agh., iii, 142-143.
official responsible for unbelievers, and we hear it again in the following text: al-'Abbās b. Rustum tells that Hamdūya was planning to arrest Abu'l-'Atāhiya as an unbeliever but Abu'l-'Atāhiya was frightened and began to act as a cupper (1).

We know from al-Tabarī that Hamdūya became the official responsible for unbelievers after the first one, 'Umar al-Kulwādī in the year 168 A.H. (2), which was towards the end of al-Mahdī's caliphate. It is possible then to suppose that Abu'l-'Atāhiya was accused of unbelief at the end of al-Mahdī's caliphate or at the beginning of al-Rashīd's time. In this period it was very easy to accuse anybody of being an unbeliever and to have him executed. This appears clearly from this official appointment of such men as al-Kulwādī or Hamdūya to a post which had not previously existed.

Abu'l-'Atāhiya was accused in al-Rashīd's caliphate as we can see from al-Rashīd's question. Al-Rashīd said to Abu'l-'Atāhiya: "People say that you are an unbeliever". But Abu'l-'Atāhiya assured him with an oath that he was a believer and recited some verses to convince him (3).

Abu'l-'Atāhiya tried strongly to defend himself. Al-Nawshadānī said that Abu'l-'Atāhiya came onee to their house and swore that he believed in one God despite the fact that people accused him of disbelieving. They asked him to compose

1. Agh, iii, 129.
2. Tabarī, 3-1, 168, 522.
3. Tarikh Baghdad, vi, 253.
some verses which might become famous, and this he did\(^{(1)}\).

It would not have made any difference in fact whether he had written these verses or not, as far as the question of his alleged unbelief is concerned, because he wrote many poems, and all of them show that he was in fact a believer. In spite of the fact that he frequently mentions death as though it were the end, in many verses he refers also to Hell and Heaven. Perhaps that is why many people did not accuse him of unbelief.

The verses which give grounds for accusing him of unbelief were related by other transmitters than Mansūr\(^{(2)}\) without comment. The basic fact was that it was common in that period to accuse people of unbelief for no reason at all or on very flimsy pretexts.

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The period of Abu'l-'Atāhiya's asceticism began, according to Abu'l-Farādī, when al-Rashīd arrived at al-Raqqa. At this time Abu'l-'Atāhiya began to wear the wool and ceased writing love poetry\(^{(3)}\). We have already seen that al-Rashīd's first visit to al-Raqqa was in the year 180 A.H., and this means that Abu'l-'Atāhiya was then about fifty years old. It can be understood from this text that the first signs of his asceticism were his wearing of woolen clothes and his refusal to write love poetry. Mukhāriq says that when Abu'l-'Atāhiya became

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1. *Agh*, iii, 143.
an ascetic and put on these woolen clothes, al-Rashīd ordered him to write love poems, and he refused\(^1\). Abu'l-'Atāhiya's son also mentions that his father put on woolen clothes and refused to write love poetry\(^2\). Al-Husnī also says that when al-Rashīd arrived in al-Raqqa Abu'l-'Atāhiya asserted his asceticism and stopped writing love poems\(^3\). Al-Baghdādī mentions that Abu'l-'Atāhiya was writing love poetry and panegyrics and satire, but when he became an ascetic he stopped all that and started to write only ascetic poetry\(^4\).

Mukhārīq, the famous singer, relates a story about how Abu'l-'Atāhiya began to be an ascetic. He said that Abu'l-'Atāhiya asked him to come to his house one day when he would be quite free from any other business. Mukhārīq came and noticed that the house was very clean. After they had had their meal, Abu'l-'Atāhiya started to drink and weep, and asked Mukhārīq to sing his poems to 'Utba. By the evening he declared that all the wine must be poured out. He then bathed himself and made his farewell to Mukhārīq, who did not take him very seriously and thought that the new resolution would not last long. But later when he visited Abu'l-'Atāhiya he saw him wearing a garment made of reeds. He laughed and went away. Mukhārīq tells that he heard later that Abu'l-

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1. Algh, iii, 140.
'Atāhiya started to cup people, but he himself could not see him in that position\(^{(1)}\).

This is a very strange story. It is not impossible to imagine that Abu'1-'Atāhiya asked Mukhāriq to sing for him while he was drinking, and after that he poured all the wine away. But it is difficult to imagine that he would wear reeds, and doubtful that he started to cup people.

Abu'1-Paradı relates from 'Ali b.Zayd that when Yahyā b. Khālid had been told that Abu'1-'Atāhiya became an ascetic and started to cup people because he wished to humiliate himself, he himself was of the opinion that Abu'1-'Atāhiya's first job as a potter was humiliating enough\(^{(2)}\).

Bishr b. al-Mu'tamir asked Abu'1-'Atāhiya why he chose to cup people, and Abu'1-'Atāhiya said then that he wished to humiliate himself and to get recompense from God, for he was cupping the poor only\(^{(3)}\). Al-Baghdādi tells us that al-Riyāshi related that Abu'1-'Atāhiya came to them once and refused to let them go until they had brought him someone that he could cup. They brought him some of their slaves and Abu'1-'Atāhiya did cup them saying:

1. Piety towards God is glorious and noble. To love this world is humiliation and nothingness.

2. You cannot lay blame on those who obey God, if they are sincere, even if they sew or cup\(^{(4)}\).

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1. Agh., iii, 180-181
2. Agh., iii, 129.
3. Agh., iii, 128-129.
4. Farīkh Baghdad, vi, 257-258
What, now, were the reasons which made Abu'l-'Atāhiya become an ascetic? According to al-Mas'ūdī when Abu'l-'Atāhiya lost his hope of 'Utba after al-Rashīd's intercessions had failed, he started to live his life as an ascetic. Al-Baghdādī said that when al-Chanawī asked Abu'l-'Atāhiya for the reasons which made him abandon the composition of love poetry for ascetic poetry, Abu'l-'Atāhiya said that he had a dream after he had composed these verses:

1. God is between me and my mistress.  
She was indifferent to me and  
turned away from me, etc...  

then someone appeared to him and said: "Could you not find anyone but God to intercede between you and 'Utba and make her disobey God?" Abu'l-'Atāhiya rose frightened and repented of his behaviour and decided never to say love poems again.

This story cannot, of course, be taken seriously. We have to look for real rather than anecdotal reasons for his asceticism. We can assume the reasons to be among the following ones: in the first place there is Abu'l-'Atāhiya's special psychological make up. Some people are inclined by their nature to the ascetic life, and very simply, happenings which lead others to a more normal life lead them to an ascetic life. Then there are the continued shocks which Abu'l-'Atāhiya sustained during the course of his life. There was

1. Murūdī, vi, 336.  
2. Tārīkh Baghdad, vi, 258.
'Utba's refusal to marry him, his frequent periods of imprisonment, his experiences with the Caliphs who imagined that everyone was born especially to bring delight to them, and there was his first job and his early life in fairly primitive family conditions. Also there was a perpetual feeling of insecurity. He felt always that one word from the Caliph was sufficient to alter the course of his life again and have him imprisoned. Then there was the question of his age. He was, as we have seen, about fifty at the time of his conversion to asceticism, and many people, as we can say, become more concerned about religion about that age. In addition to this asceticism was at this time a recognised part of the social structure and had the appeal of being fashionable. This lead people to it more easily in general. Whether Abu'l-'Atāhiya's contemporaries thought him to be a sincere ascetic is another matter. On the whole, it would seem that few people doubted it, although now and then we come across one or two who did deny Abu'l-'Atāhiya's sincerity. The most important of these was Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī. Ibrāhīm b. al Mahdī's son tells that when Abu'l-'Atāhiya put on his woolen clothes, Ibrāhīm wrote to him these verses:

1. O 'Atāhī, death left you but did not forget you, while your heart did not remember.

2. Render good your hidden evil thoughts and be afraid before God.

3. It is a very wrong thing for a man who does not believe in the Last Day to be an ascetic.
4. You show forth your asceticism but in fact you have great need of becoming a real ascetic.

5. If you believe that to wear the wool will bring you safety, I advise you not to believe it.

6. If your hidden thoughts are evil your clothes will do nothing to save you.

7. You can continue to hope if you don't put another God alongside our God. (1)

Abu'1-'Atāhiya did not reply to Ibrāhīm but he said that he did not wish to say anything evil to him.

Al-Djammāz, the nephew of Salm said after he heard Abu'1-'Atāhiya reciting the ascetic poem:

1. It is very unbecoming to ask people to become ascetics while you yourself are not an ascetic.

2. If he was sincere in his asceticism he would go very frequently to the Mosque.

3. He is always afraid that his money will come to an end, but what God provided cannot come to an end (2).

Those who wish to impugn Abu'1-'Atāhiya's asceticism can find a weak point in his insistence on having enough money; as we have seen it displayed in his relations with the Caliphs. Nevertheless, anyone who reads Abu'1-'Atāhiya's numerous poems will find himself inclined to believe that he was sincere in his asceticism in spite of his lapses .

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1. Al-Awrāq, 48; Agh, iii, 177.
2. Agh., iii, 164.
According to Ahmad b. Harb:

Abu'l-`Atāhiya believed in one God who formed the universe out of two opposite elements, which he created from nothing and held, further, that everything would be reduced to these same elements before the final destruction of all phenomena. Knowledge, he thought, was acquired naturally (i.e. without divine revelation) by means of reflection, deduction, and research. He believed in the threatened retribution, al-wa'īd, and in the command to abstain from commerce with the world, jahrim al-makāsib. He professed the opinions of the Batrites, a subdivision of the Zaydites, as that sect of the Shī'a was named which followed Zayd b. `Alī b. Ḥusayn b. `Alī b. `Abī Talib. He spoke evil of none and did not approve of revolt against the government. He held the doctrine of predestination, djabr. (1)

This quotation shows that Abu'l-`Atāhiya shared in the current ideas of his century, and also that he was able to choose his own particular brand of thought and have his own special beliefs. But Ahmad b. Harb is the only one to speak in that way of Abu'l-`Atāhiya's beliefs. We cannot find any trace of Shi'ism in Abu'l-`Atāhiya's poems, or in the anecdotes and texts about his life. Abu'l-`Atāhiya's discussion with Thumāma in al-Ma'mūn's presence shows that Abu'l-`Atāhiya had quite a simple mentality. It also explains his Djabrism quite simply as well. Abu'l-`Atāhiya said to Thumāma: "I say that everything that people do is caused by God and you are denying that"(2).

We can agree that Abu'l-`Atāhiya was mujbir in the simplest

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2. Agh, iii, 128.
meaning of the word. We can see that from his numerous poems, and this will be further expounded in the chapter about his Diwān. Concerning the two contrary elements from which God is said to have created the world, we can find in Abu'l-'Atāhiya's urdījūza some verses on that.

1. All things, the smallest, the ordinary, and the greatest, have each a source and an essence.

2. Everything follows its essence, the smallest is linked with the largest.

3. Every man has two natures, good and evil, and they are in opposition.

4. God predetermines this, so what can I do? If speech is impossible silence is better (1).

All this does not show that Abu'l-'Atāhiya had the capacity for philosophical thought or that he had had any philosophical instruction. It simply shows the current religious ideas of the period that are often expressed in Abu'l-'Atāhiya's poems. From his poems we can see that the main tenets of his belief are fate and predestination, one God and the presence of both good and evil in the human personality; but we cannot see any logical structure of thought, nor can we see, as Ibn Harb claims, that he believed that God would eventually reduce everything to the opposite elements from which he originally formed the universe. Nor is there anything about

1. *Agh.*, iii, 143-144.
methods of acquiring knowledge, nor any evidence of Shi'ism.

Once when he was discussing with Thumāma, al-Ma'mūn said to him:

Did I not tell you to be satisfied by composing poetry and leave to others those things which are not your business?(1).

Al-Ma'mūn's speech shows that Abu'l-'Atāhiya had no connection with the discussions and problems current at the time.

Abu'l-'Atāhiya was once asked about the "creation of the Qur'an" but he would not reply clearly. We can understand though that he believed that the Qur'an had been directly created by God(2).

'Amrūs, a neighbour of Abu'l-'Atāhiya, related that Abu'l-'Atāhiya had only a very little knowledge, and that he once heard Bishr saying to him: "Do not pray behind the leader of your Mosque because he is mushabbih", but Abu'l-'Atāhiya replied that he is not, because he had simply heard him reading in his prayer this sūra: "Say that there is only one God".

'Amrūs said that then he knew that Abu'l-'Atāhiya simply did not know that a mushabbih could read this sūra(3); (Mushabbiha just means the anthropomorphism(4)).

From this we can see how scanty was Abu'l-'Atāhiya's knowledge of what was common in that century. Possibly his

1. Agh., iii, 128.
2. Agh., iii, 129. The problem of the contention about the creation of the Qur'an started in al-Ma'mūn's time when Abu'l-'Atāhiya was living his last years. It is quite understandable if he did not share positively in it.
3. Agh., iii, 166.
early childhood and the low social position of his family kept him from learning much of current philosophy and theology. His poems show that he knew the Qur'an and the traditions and speeches of the ascetics. These were things which almost everyone knew about.

How then did he learn? Was it from teachers or from listening to the circles which met and talked in the Mosque? Nothing that we know about him points to that. When we turn to study his Diwan we shall see the simplicity of his intellectual life and how far it was from the complications of al-Mu'tazila which appears in Ibn Harb's quotation about the belief of Abu'l-'Atahiya in the style of al-Mu'tazila.

When we turn to consider Abu'l-'Atahiya's position in the literary activity of the period we find that he was the contemporary of many poets of genius, such as Abū-Nuwās, Bashshār, Muslim b. al-Walīd, al-'Attābī, al-Husayn b. al-Dakhk, Ashdja' and Salm. Abu'l-'Atahiya was considered to be among the best of them and many people thought him superior to any other, even to Abū-Nuwās. We can see this from reading the opinions put forward in the old literary books which are quoted below in the chapter on his Diwan.

He gained the admiration of the caliphs, especially that of

1. Al-Marzubānī tells that Abu'l-'Atahiya was a layman of the lower classes. His ability and genius were far greater that what he could have learned. Al-Muwashshah, 260.
al-Rashīd, who constantly defended his reputation and was aggrieved if anyone ever suggested the superiority of another poet(1). Even the poets themselves believed him to be a better poet than the rest of them and admired him. Abū-Nuwas, as we shall see in the next chapter, greatly esteemed him and said to someone who told him that he, Abū Nuwas, was the best poet alive: "Not during the life of Abu'l-’Atāhiya"(2).

Salm asserted that he was the best poet to be found between an ordinary human being and a Dāīn(3). Dawūd b. Bazzayn Razīn said the same thing(3), and al-’Attābī admired him as the best poet not only of his people but of all times(4).

When he heard Abu'l-’Atāhiya, Bashshār thought that the Caliph would throw himself from his throne because of his intense admiration for what Abu'l-’Atāhiya was reciting(5).

Muslim b. al-Walīd did not at first admire him, but when he heard some of his poems recited, he changed his mind and gave him devoted admiration(6). Ibn Munādhīr considered him to be the best poet among the Muslems(7). Al-Djahiz(8), al-Farrā'i(9),

4. Agh., iii, 144-145, 176-177.
5. Agh., iii, 142
6. Agh., iii, 145-146.
8. Agh., iii, 143.
and al-Asma’i (1), also greatly admired his poetry.

In addition to these admirers, however, we also find a few critics who discussed Abu'l-'Atahiya’s poetry among themselves and with others. Take, for example, the discussion between Ahmad b. Abi Fanan and al-Fath b. Khāqān (Agh, iii, 180). They criticised his weak poems, and they agreed that he had also composed good poems. The discussion about his poems did not take the form of a literary quarrel, like the quarrel between al-Mutanabbi’s friends and enemies, or between the friends of Abū Tammām or al-Buḥṭurī.

We can not get from this discussion more than some few points of view which are dispersed among our sources and do not appear to amount to a strong attack against Abu'l-'Atahiya.

Abu'l-'Atahiya was very famous during his life and, of course, his position as a court poet greatly enhanced his reputation.

But although Abu'l-'Atahiya has his own distinctive features (as, again we shall see in the following chapter) and was a considerable technical innovator, although he wrote entire poems on ascetic themes, just as Abū Nuwās did on wine poems, and although he wrote in a simple style which made him understandable to a wide public, none of these things are in themselves sufficient to make good the claim that he was the foremost poet of the century or the superior of Abū Nuwās. So we can understand how it happened that when the political circumstances

1. *Agh*, iii, 130.
which raised Abu’l-’Atāhiya into the leading poet of the day
had changed, later commentators considered that he was among the
best, but he was not the greatest. Ibn Qutayba thought him to
be among those poets with natural talent(1), and so also did
al-Djāhiz (2). Ibn Khallikān ranked him with Bashšār and
Abū Nuwās(3).

To-day, Abu’l-’Atāhiya is not particularly well known. In
the Arabic literary magazines there are a great many articles
about poets such as Abū Nuwās, al-Ma’arrī, Abū Tamnān, Ibn al-
Rūmī, but only a few articles in Al-Risāla are to be found about
Abu’l-’Atāhiya. He does not feature in the text books of
secondary schools, and it is only this year that he has been
included in the syllabus for literature of the Syrian University.

This lack of recent interest does not mean that Abu’l-
’Atāhiya does not deserve to be better known. The main
inhibiting fact seems to be that most of his poems which have
come down to us are those written on ascetic themes, and most people
respond more easily to poems written on other themes which have
more in common with their own active lives. Perhaps it was
easier for the poetry of Abu’l-’Atāhiya to be more widely
appreciated during those centuries when all his poems were known.

We must consider now whether there was ever a serious

1. Shi’r, 11, 766.
2. Al-Bayān, 1, 58.
3. Wafayāt, 90.
quarrel between him and any of the other poets which may have led to the exchange of satirical poems. Dramatic quarrels are a familiar feature of Arabic literary history and evidence of them appears in both poetry and prose, but in the sources which have come down to us we cannot find anything which points to such a quarrel in the life of Abu'l-‘Atāhiya. All we can find is a sort of minor controversy between him and other poets, all of whom show their admiration for him on other issues. Al-Husayn b. Abi’sarīy relates that Abu'l-'Atāhiya met Muslim b. al-Walīd and they had a dispute.

Muslim said to him:

"If I agree to say as you say in your verse:

1. Praise and honour is due unto you, and it is you who reign. No God is like unto you. Here I am at your service, it is for you to reign,

I would be able to say one thousand verses, but I have to speak as in this verse:

1. He comes to souls as quickly as disillusionment comes to their hopes,

Abu'l-'Atahiya said to him: If you will compose in my style then I will compose in yours"(1). This should have been enough to irritate Abu'l-'Atāhiya if he was anything like those other poets who easily become angry and answered in satirical verse.

Ibn Munādhīr, who considered Abu'l-'Atāhiya to be the

1. Aghī, iii, 139.
greatest of Moslem poets (1) met him, and Abu’l-’Atāhiya criticised his work and said that his poems were not eloquent and strong, and don’t achieve the quality of greatness like the poetry of old poets, and, moreover, that he is not considered among the latest poets. Ibn Munādhīr felt embarrassed and went away, and since that occasion there was naturally enough, a rift between them (2). But there were no satirical poems produced as a result of the estrangement.

One further fact we know about them: they met together on one occasion and Abu’l-’Atāhiya asked him about the number of verses he could compose in one day. He replied that he was only able to produce a few verses whereupon Abu’l-’Atāhiya boasted that he was able to compose a great number. Ibn Munādhīr said to him:

Of course you can produce a great many if you simply want to say things like —

1. O ’Utba, in this hour, I am going to die in this hour (3)

In Al-’Aghānī it is said that Abu’l-’Atāhiya asked this question of Ibn Munādhīr in order to expose his inadequacy in front of al-Rashīd, but that al-Rashīd recompensed Ibn Munādhīr (4). In spite of all this unpleasantness, however, no satirical poems were exchanged between them.

1. Agh, iii, 154-155
2. Agh, iii, 171.
A similar discussion took place between Abu'l-'Atāhiya and Mansūr al-Namari. Mansūr asked him how much time he needed to compose a poem. Abu'l-'Atāhiya replied that it was a simple matter for him. He just placed his ink pot beside him and produced anything he wanted. Mansūr then said:

Oh yes, but that is simply because you are prepared to produce still like —

1. O 'Utba, in this hour I am going to die in this hour.

But I require a whole month in order to produce a poem because I am prepared to throw out a verse and re-write it until I feel quite sure that it is good. All poetry reveals the mind of the man who composed it (1).

Again there appeared to be no aftermath to that meeting.

We have only one verse in which he mentions Salm:

1. O Salm, God be glorious, avarice has humiliated men.

Al-Ma'mūn admired this verse especially, and Salm was very annoyed. Al-Djammāz, Salm's nephew, satirised Abu'l-'Atāhiya in some verses, and Abu'l-'Atāhiya asked to be excused from responding as he had no wish to satirise Salm. The only mention he ever made of him was the reference in the verse above (2). All this shows that Abu'l-'Atāhiya really had no desire to spend his time satirising other poets. Al-Madā'imī mentions an occasion when Abu'l-'Atāhiya had quarrelled with Abu'l-Shamaqmaq and left the house of a friend instantly on

1. Al-Marzubānī, 256
2. Agh, iii, 163-164.
hearing that Abu'l-Shamaqmaq was within\(^{(1)}\); but still he wrote no satirical poem. All we have is a small poem in which he attacked Waliba \(^{(2)}\) but there is nothing else at all\(^{(3)}\).

Why was it then, that Abu'l-'Atahiya refused to attack other poets? Was it that he was afraid of being attacked himself, or was he by nature so kindly disposed that he did not wish to satirise people? The latter reason seems unlikely because Abu'l-'Atahiya never had any hesitation in satirising his friends. He composed a satire on 'Alī b. Yaqtīn, his very good friend who was constantly supporting him just because for one year he did not do so\(^{(4)}\). He attacked a great many people and his poems to 'Abdullāh b. Ma'n were designed to irritate.

From this we can see that he was not the sort of person who tried to avoid hurting others. Possibly he was afraid of competing in satire with other poets who would be more capable of defending themselves in the same vein than other people, but we cannot assume that. Some of his lost poems may show the contrary.

Possibly it was the fact that Abu'l-'Atahiya concentrated on the composition of ascetic poetry in his later period which assured him his contemporary reputation, but it may well have

1. Agh, iii, 169.
2. Appendix to the Diwan, 359.
3. Agh, iii, 129-130. It is said here that he exchanged satirical verses with Waliba, but in fact only Waliba's satirical verse to him is related. It is also said that Abu Qābūs satirised him because he preferred al-'Attābī to him.
4. Agh, iii, 150-151.
been this fact also which prevented him from being given the same eminent position in the history of literature which he held during his lifetime.

When we were dealing with Abu'l-'Atahiya's asceticism and his unbelief we mentioned that contemporaries held differing opinions concerning him. Some believed that he was sincere in his professed asceticism, others that he was just pretending, yet others that he was a complete unbeliever. The majority, however, did believe him to be sincere. We saw also that the Caliphs approved his poems and he became the court poet over the heads of all other contemporary poets. We have seen also the position he held in the eyes of other poets most of whom esteemed him highly and acknowledged his superior genius. It now remains to consider more fully his social life and his friends in order to understand all the circumstances of his way of life.

Our sources show that he mixed freely with the greatest in the land. Most of his friends that we know of were members of the government or the aristocracy. This was so even during Kūfa's period; Mandal and Ḥayyān who came from the chiefs of Kūfa were among those who helped and defended him. The sons of Ma'n, before and after his quarrel with them were his close friends. In Baghdād, Yazīd b. Mansūr was among his

1. Agh., iii, 127.
best friends. Being the uncle of al-Mahdī he was able to defend him and obtain his release from prison. Abu'l-ʿAtāhiya sung his praises in his poems. His relationship with al-Fadl b. al-Rablī was also a very close one. He helped Abu'l-ʿAtāhiya to be reconciled with al-Rashīd, praised his poems in al-Rashīd's presence, and ordered money to be given him. He presented at once to al-Amīn whatever Abu'l-ʿAtāhiya presented to him. This friendship remained firm until Abu'l-ʿAtāhiya recited to him his poem about the Barmacides. At this al-Fadl turned away from him and his manner and attitude towards him changed.

His relationship with Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī were, however, very friendly. Ibrāhīm's poetry satirising Abu'l-ʿAtāhiya was a very light-hearted affair. It seems that, in fact, Abu'l-ʿAtāhiya's connection with the Barmacides was not very intimate. In Al-Aghānī we find that Abu'l-ʿAtāhiya was in the house of Dja'far b. Yahyā and that shows that he was on reasonably friendly terms with them, but we also find that al-Fadl b. Yahyā said that more than anything else he disliked doing something which might help Abu'l-ʿAtāhiya.

1. Agh, iii, 141
2. Agh, iii, 140-141.
3. Agh, iii, 159-160.
4. Agh, iii, 165-166.
5. Agh, iii, 170-171
7. Agh, iii, 169.
'Atāhiya's elegy on the Barmacides, if it can really be called an elegy, shows neither affection nor sincerity. In the realm of personal relations we can see that Abu'l-'Atāhiya was very quick to satirise his friends if he ever fell out with them, even though they had been very close. For example, he avoided his best friend, Sāliḥ al-Shahrazūrī, when he refused to speak to al-Faḍl b. Yahyā on his behalf. Sāliḥ on this occasion asked Abu'l-'Atāhiya to take something away from himself instead. Abu'l-'Atāhiya refused with a satiric poem. Sāliḥ then did speak to al-Faḍl and the friendship with Abu'l-'Atāhiya was renewed and commemorated by a poem of praise from Abu'l-'Atāhiya.

Mudjāshi' b. Mas'ādā, one of the leaders of the army under the rule of al-Ma'mūn was satirised by Abu'l-'Atāhiya whom he considered to be his friend simply because he did not bother to inquire after him when Abu'l-'Atāhiya did not visit him. They were reconciled and Abu'l-'Atāhiya again praised him in a poem. Abu'l-'Atāhiya also satirised Mudjāshi''s brother because he once refused to receive him when Abu'l-'Atāhiya visited him, and on another occasion because he was slow in coming to his assistance after the death of Mudjāshi who always used to help him out when he needed it.

1. Tabarî, 3-21, 187, 687, 688.
3. Agh., iii, 150.
4. Agh., iii, 171.
5. Agh., iii, 135.
6. Agh., iii, 134.
7. Agh., iii, 134.
Another person satirised by Abu'l-'Atahiya was 'Ali b. Yaqtîn who ruled over ǧiwan ḥisām al-ʾazīmā (1) which controlled the other dawāwīn because for one year only he did not give him what he used to give him before. They became reconciled when 'Ali began to give it to him again.

Another friend was Ahmad b. Yusuf. When he got a job in ǧiwan al-rasā'īl in the time of al-Ma'mūn he became arrogant and his manner towards Abu'l-'Atahiya altered. Then Abu'l-'Atahiya satirised him (2), and also Yahyā b. Khāqān because on one occasion he refused to receive him (3).

Ṣāliḥ al-Miskīn, the son of al-Mansūr the Caliph had a very friendly relationship with Abu'l-'Atahiya but as time moved on he treated him less well, and so Abu'l-'Atahiya attacked him strongly in his verses (4).

From these texts we can understand more of Abu'l-'Atahiya than only his character. He was clearly very ready to take offence even from very close friends, but we can also see from them that he had a distinguished position in society which enabled him to attack these friends with impunity, even though they were among the most famous in the land.

Abu'l-'Atahiya had a friendly relationship with 'Umar b.

1. Tabarî, 3-1, 168,522,
2. Aga, iii, 165.
3. Aga, iii, 169.
4. Aga, iii, 168.
al-'Ala’, one of the army leaders under al-Mahdi’s rule. He praised him in a very fine poem, but after he had written it he had constantly to ask him for its price\(^1\), and even to satirise him. Also he praised Yazid b. Mazyad, one of the leaders of the army under al-Rashid, but it is difficult to say there was anything more in this relationship than the mere acceptance of a fee for a eulogistic poem\(^2\).

He was antagonistic, however, to Khuzayma, the illustrious army leader, and satirised him also, while Khuzayma then attacked him in his turn in a speech\(^3\). Two other people are mentioned in connection with him: al-Nawshadjani\(^4\) and Muhammad b. 'Isa al-Djuzaym\(^5\); but we know nothing about them.

Ibrahim al-Mawsili was one of his really close friends. He used to sing his poems and to send Mukhariq to Abu'l-'Atahiya in prison to bring news of him. He sang the poem that Abu'l-'Atahiya made after a year of imprisonment when he ceased to be bound by his oath\(^6\). Abu Khaythama al-'Anazi was also Abu'l-'Atahiya’s friend, but again we know nothing of him\(^7\).

Our sources show that among his friends he had two special

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1. Zahr, ii, 41; Agh, iii, 144, reading 'Umar instead of 'Amru, who is the well-known transmitter.
2. Agh, iii, 176.
3. Agh, iii, 176.
4. Agh, iii, 130.
5. Agh, iii, 133. He was his neighbour.
6. Agh, iii, 140.
7. Agh, iii, 149.
ones. These were 'Ali b. Thābit and Mukhāriq. Each one played a special part in Abu'l-'Atāhiya's life. 'Ali b. Thābit was an ascetic. It is said in Al-Aghānī that he and Abu'l-'Atāhiya had many exchanges on the subject of asceticism, and when 'Ali died Abu'l-'Atāhiya composed his elegy. We find nothing among Abu'l-'Atāhiya's elegies so full of depth and sincerity as these sad verses.

Mukhāriq was the famous singer who sang many of his friend's poems, and was with Abu'l-'Atāhiya during many periods of his life. If our quotations can be taken seriously Mukhāriq was with him when Abu'l-'Atāhiya severed his relations with ordinary life and became an ascetic. Even after this he frequently asked Mukhāriq to sing for him, and before his death he asked for Mukhāriq to come and sing two verses for him. They always spoke together in a friendly manner, and Mukhāriq always defended him and took his part.

From all this information we can see that Abu'l-'Atāhiya was living in the best social circle of that century, and that he did not live in ascetic circles, apart from his one friend

1. Agh., iii, 147.
4. Agh., iii, 164.
5. Agh., vi, 186.
'Ali b. Thabit. At all events he enjoyed considerable reputation in his time. Many admired him both as a poet and as an ascetic. We can even see his worth through the accusations directed at him because the discussion which arose about him shows that he was regarded as being sufficiently important to be discussed very critically. Naturally, his genius alone helped to give him his reputation, but many poets in his century who were as great as he were considered less in their time. Abu'l-'Atahiya in fact, enjoyed a reputation rather greater than he deserved.

Al-Tabarî says that he died in the year 211 A.H.\(^{(1)}\). Ibn Qutayba says it was in the year 205 A.H.\(^{(2)}\), and Abu'l-Faradj mentions various dates\(^{(3)}\). He quotes from Mukhāriq that he died in 213 A.H., and from Ismā'īl b. Abī Qutayba that his death was in the year 209 A.H., and from Muhammad b. Sa'd, who used to write to al-Waqīdī that it was in 211 A.H., and that his grave was beside Qantarat-al-zayyātīn on the west side of Baghādād. He also cited Muhammad b. Abī'l-'Atāhiya as saying that his death was in the year 210 A.H.\(^{(4)}\).

Al-Baghdādī mentions, with a longer isnād than Al-Aghānī, that Muhammad b. Sa'd said that his death was on Monday the 8th Dju'māda the second in 211 A.H. Al-Baghdādī relates from

1. Tabarî, 3–2, 211,1098
2.  
3.  
4.  

\(^{(1)}\) Shi'r, ii, 769
\(^{(2)}\) Agh., iii, 182.
\(^{(3)}\) Agh., iii, 182.
Ahmad b. Kamil al-Qadī that he died in 213 A.H., and from Muhammad b. Abi'l-'Atāhiya that he died in Baghdad and his grave is to be seen beside the river 'Īsā, on the face of Quantarat-al-zayyātīn (1).

Al-Mas'ūdī asserts that he died in 211 A.H. (2). Ishaq b. Shu'ayb says that Abu'l-'Atāhiya said in his will that he had made some verses especially to be written on his grave, but in another quotation his son Muhammad denies this (3).

Ahmad b. Zuhayr says that people say that he wrote verses which he ordered in his will to be written on his grave, but that this is denied by his son (4).

Abu'l-Faradj says that 'Abd al-Rahman b. al-Fadl read these verses on a stone beside Abu'l-'Atāhiya's grave (5). Al-Baghdādī quoted from someone who heard Ishaq b. Ibrahim al-Baghwālī saying that he read the verses on his grave (6). We have no evidence to put against this, but we can still assert that the evidence of his son is more likely to be reliable in matters of detail in his personal history.

1. Ṭārīkh Baghdad, vi, 260.
3. Agh, iii, 182-183
4. Agh, iii, 183.
5. Agh, iii, 183.
6. Ṭārīkh Baghdad, vi, 260.
Chapter II

ABU'1-'ATĀHIYA'S DIWĀN

The Diwān was edited for the first time in Beirut, in 1886 by Father Shaykhu and reprinted by him with additions (Beirut 1909). The first edition was attributed to "one of the Jesuit fathers" but the two editions are very similar and the prefaces are identical, so that there is good ground for believing that Father Shaykhu, whose name appears on the title page of the second edition was responsible for the first as well. It has been reprinted a few times since then, but it is still in serious need of re-editing.

Father Shaykhu says that he found two different manuscripts of this Diwān and used them jointly. In Al-Rawa'i', he mentions that there are many manuscripts of the Diwān in Cairo, Damascus, Constantinople and the Oriental Library of the Jesuit Fathers. He does not, however, refer to the manuscript in Berlin, or the one in Petersburg which O Reser refers to.

Furthermore, there are considerable differences between the printed Diwān and Damascus manuscript in the verses included and in the wording, which sometimes even affects the meaning. Some verses are not in the Diwān and yet others are not in the

1. Diwān, introduction, 3.
2. Rawa'i', 584.
3. WZKM, 28, 362, (1914).
4. This compilation of Abu'1-'Atāhiya's Diwān is by Ibn 'Abd al-Barr al-‘Namarī who died in 463 A.H. We don't know much about his life, but we find many references to his books in the standard biographical dictionaries (see Wafayat of Ibn Khallikān, 348, Nafh al-Tib of al-Maqrīzī, ii, 116, 123 and (footnote cont. on next page)
manuscripts. In Appendix I, the differences between the Dīwān and the Damascus manuscript have been tabulated. O Reşer, in his article on the edition of 1909\(^1\) refers to some grammatical mistakes. On some occasions he was correct and on others wrong.

Father Shaykhū gave headings to the poems, but unfortunately these do not always convey the meaning or subject matter of the poem.

He compiled an appendix to the Dīwān in which he put most of the poems which are not to be found in the original manuscripts and which include many non-ascetic poems; but he neglected Abu'l-'Atāhiya's love poetry. This part of the Dīwān was kept through the centuries in the old literary or historical books which are named on the title page as those of al-Asfahānī, al-Mubarrad, Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, al-Mas'ūdī, al-Mawardī, al-Ghazzālī and others. Although there are not many

footnote cont. from previous page...

Al-Shadharāt of Ibn al-Imād, iii, 314, Al-Fahrasa of Ibn Khayr, i, 133, 216, 227). Possibly his reputation as a Jurist overshadowed his literary reputation. None of the above mentions his collection of Abu'l-'Atāhiya's Dīwān. In the Damascus manuscript, Ibn 'Abd al-Barr gives Abu'l-'Atāhiya's biography in a few pages. Although Ibn 'Abd al-Barr seems reliable he shows taste for anecdotes characteristic of his age. The date of this manuscript is (1119) and the writing is quite clear. It would seem that many folios are missing.

1. WZKM, 28, 362, 1914.
of these poems they do serve to give us a more comprehensive picture of Abu'l-'Atáhiya’s poetical activity in these other fields of poetry.

* * *

It is known that Abu'l-'Atáhiya was a prolific poet. Ibn al-Nadim says: "Abu'l-'Atáhiya’s collection of poetry is similar to that of Bashshár", of whom he says "it was impossible to collect all his poems and this is why they were not collected in a Diwan"(1). Al-Baghdādī also mentions that no-one could collect all Abu'l-'Atáhiya's Díwān because it was so massive(2). Ibn al-Nadim tells us that he saw "about twenty volumes [of the Diwan] format known as ansāf al-talhī written by Ibn 'Ammār who used to write down the work of contemporary poets", and he indicates that it originally consisted of thirty volumes(3). Ibn al-Nadīm died in 335 A.H., that is, just about two centuries after Abu'l-'Atáhiya and if Ibn al-Nadim’s statement is correct about ten volumes of Abu'l-'Atáhiya's Díwān were lost during these two centuries. He also mentions the titles of two books containing selections of Abu'l-'Atáhiya’s poetry about which we know nothing now. One of them was compiled by Abū 'Abdillāh Hārūn b. 'Alī b. Yahyā b. Abl Mansūr (d. 283 A.H.) and Abu'l-Farādī frequently quotes from this work. Its title is:

1. Al-Fihrist, 159.
2. Tarikh Baghdaḍ, vi, 250-251.
3. Al-Fihrist, 160.
Ikhtiyar Al-Shu'ara' Al-Kabir; of it Ibn al-Nadim says that it was not completed but dealt only with Bashshar, Abu'l-'Atahiya and Abū Nuwas (1). The other book is: Ikhtiyar Shi'r Abī'l-'Atahiya compiled by Ibn Tayfur (2).

* * *

Abu'l-'Atahiya composed all sorts of poems: panegyric, elegiac, satirical, sententious, erotic and ascetic. Later however, when he became an ascetic he concentrated on the composition of ascetic poems. The Diwan that we have largely consists of ascetic poetry, interspersed with short pieces on other subjects such as friendship, unworthy divines, ambition and so on (3). These brief exceptions do not change the nature of the Diwan; it is essentially a collection of ascetic poems, which survived throughout the centuries whereas most of his other poetry has been lost.

As the Diwan contains mainly ascetic poetry the study of his Diwan means in effect study of his ascetic poems or al-Zuhdīyat. The zuhdiyat seem to be poems rather thin in ideas and sentiment. They deal with similar ideas clothed in different expressions which differ widely in literary value. They show how Abu'l-'Atahiya saw and understood life although Abu'l-'Atahiya's way of understanding life does not reach the degree of becoming a coherent individual.

1. Al-Fihrist, 144.
2. Al-Fihrist, 147.
3. cf. (D. 289; R. 269, D. 287; R. 268, etc..)
philosophy of life.

The first thing that we come across in the Zuhdiyat of Abu'l-'Atahiya is the concept of death which plays a prominent part throughout his Dīwan, appearing as it does in nearly every poem. He discusses this concept in many different forms and ways. He includes it in any and every context and displays it in its most dread and terrible aspects.

One thing which should be mentioned here is that Abu'l-'Atahiya's concept of death and decay is not sufficiently coherent or far-reaching to merit the term "philosophical". It is little more than an intensive awareness of death and decay which spare nothing and no-one. There is nothing more than that in his poetry. What Abu'l-'Atahiya tries to say about death may be reduced to the following notions:

To perish is the end of everything.  
Our world is not an eternal place.  
That which was created from dust will be dust again.

1. The whole creation was created for death.  
We are going to die and only our names and tales told about us will remain.  
(D., 1; R., 1).

1. By your very life this world is not an eternal one! The fact that it is a place where death exists is enough to show you that it is a place of perishing.  
(D., 2; R., 2).

1. There is no doubt that you have been created from dust and that you will soon return to dust.  
(D., 31; R., 26).

Everyone is going to die and be taken to his grave.
Everything will perish at the end; even the high mountains. We cannot protect ourselves against death which does not overlook us as we try to overlook it. Life may be short or it may be long but the end is the same. There are no exceptions, no possibilities of escape, because it is the law of life and the end for which the whole world was created.

1. It is impossible for you to fly from death. Do not let yourself be guided by an impossible hope. (D. 16; R. 14).

1. It is impossible to prevent death from coming to you, no medicine can heal that disease. (D. 2; R. 2)

1. Death has not overlooked us but we all try to ignore it and occupy ourselves with pleasure. (D. 194; R. 176)

1. Is there no way to be protected from death? Nay, every man will die.

2. O you who are unworried about your family, every life is limited and will come to an end.

One moment you will see this man happy and the next moment you will see him perishing. (D. 3-4, 11.15,7,8; R. 4).

1. One moment a man is in a good position and the next moment he will be placed under the dust. (D. 5; R. 5).

1. Who can escape from perishing if even the hard stone and the iron must perish? (D. 71; R. 62).

1. Even the hard and high mountains perish in the end because they cannot endure the sorrows of life. (D. 40; R. 34).
1. Even if it last for a long time, everything must eventually perish from divers diseases. (D. 224; R. 206)

1. Every young man must eventually die. The process of life itself makes certain of this. (D., 49; R., 43)

1. Do you hope to escape from death while death watches you from every side. (D. 20; R. 18).

1. Even the man who hides himself in a tower built on the top of a high and inaccessible mountain will die. (D. 8; R. 8)

1. No-one could escape from death by any means even if he was escorted everywhere and protected in a strong tower. (D. 132; R. 116).

1. Is not death the aim of every living creature? Then why do I not hasten to it? (D. 38; R. 33).

Abu'l-'Atáhiya speaks about death in a very impressive and moving way by picturing his end or making his hearers picture their own end. He conjures up the grave and the ceremonies in a narrative manner until we can almost imagine that he is displaying something actual and not imagined. He says for example:

1. It is as if you have been accosted by death while in the midst of your family. It is as if your death has been announced by your neighbour.
2. It is as if you have been a stranger to them, for you alone have drunk the pure glass of death.

3. Houses will be empty after you have died as though you had never enjoyed life in them (1) (D. 43; R. 38).

and he says:

1. Why do I not worry about myself? Why am I not afraid of death?

2. I am sure that I will not exist for ever, but I realize that I do not care.

3. It is as if the male nurse[looking after me in my illness] has started to walk with my bier, carried by four speedy men.

4. Behind me there are sad women crying as if their hearts were scorched by a slow fire. (D. 206, ll. 1-2, 4-5; R. 188)

Abu'l-'Atahiya also says:

1. I am as if the soil covered me and I was separated from my possessions.

2. When my people gently cover me with soil I am as though I had never existed.

3. I am as though people buried me and went away, and no-one is turning towards me.

4. I am as if I became quite lonely living only with [the burden of] my actions [on earth].

5. As if the women began to weep over me, yet crying can do nothing for me.
6. I remembered my death and then I wept over myself. O my brother, help your brother in his weeping (1).

(D. 300; R. 280)

He also says:

1. I shall weep because soon I am going to travel to the abode where I am to be isolated from this world.

2. Oh house of death! Oh house of isolation! Oh house of death, of banishment!

3. Oh house of separation which parts me from sincere people! Oh house of death! Oh house of loneliness!

4. Have I imagined the disaster of the Last Day when I roll my eyes and begin to suffocate.

5. Oh, every time that I use my sight or my breath carelessly because I am neglectful, then I lose them for ever out of my lifetime. 

(D. 303, 11. 5-7,12,17; R. 284).

In other poems he gives different pictures. In one he accompanies the dying man step by step, and goes on with him from the suffocation of death until his grave:

1. Who knows, and can tell me, of the people of the grave? Who has seen them? Who knows what they feel between the layers of soil?

2. Who knows, and can tell me, of the one who used to be friendly with me and I with him? I feel now the impossibility of our meeting.

3. Who knows, and can tell me, of his suffering from suffocation, too occupied with this to see who spoke to him?

1. (D. 303, MS. 306).
4. Who knows, and can tell me, of his last journey on his bier as people took him away to the world of death? (D. 7; R. 7).

We can link with this idea of death, which is the dominating idea in his Zuhdīyat, the depths to which Abu'l-Atāhiya was moved by the sight of graves and cemeteries, and his long discourses on them on many occasions. He says for example:

1. Why do cemeteries not answer when the unhappy man calls to them?

2. There are roofed holes in them and upon them are stones and sands.

3. They contain babies and very young children and many young and old people.

4. How many beloved ones are there that I wished never to be separated from?

5. I left him lying in one of them, he who was the beloved.

6. I have forgotten him although it was only a short while since I had seen him (L). (D. 25; R. 22).

Abu'l-Atāhiya found that these graves were themselves the best preachers if only people were able to understand them:

1. The quiet graves have preached to you and silent time itself has told of your death.

2. These graves tell of the faces of people who have perished and give many different pictures.

1. (D. 25, MS. 22.)
3. They have shown you your grave while you are yet alive. (1)
(D. 52; R. 47).

He speaks to the dead in their graves in a very sad and moving way, and says such things as:

1. O my two brothers, pass by the graves and salute them before you leave them.
2. O people that are in the grave both young and old
3. Have you among you anyone who is protected or who offers protection.
4. Or who ever speaks or hears words good or bad.
5. O people of the grave, O my beloved, after merriment and joy;
6. After the freshness and tenderness of life and well-being and happiness,
7. After public occasions and private meetings, after the parades and the palaces,
8. You lie under the soil among the rocks and the stones.
(D. 96-97, 11.5,8, 1-5,8; R. 85).

Innumerable examples could be given because most of Abu'l-'Atáhiya's poems contain something about death which to him is the end in which all people are made equal, and about cemeteries and graves which contain old and young, distinguished and humble, kings and slaves, rich and poor. What we have seen is enough to show Abu'l-'Atáhiya's later outlook on life and death and give a clear impression of his views.

Connected with the idea of death in Abu'l-'Atáhiya's poems are his references to hoariness which is the harbinger of death
1. Several variants of these verses are mentioned in the Zuhdíyat
itself. Abu'l-'Atahiya was always deeply moved by white hair and as soon as his own hair began to turn white he started to think about it. He wept over his lost youth hoping that it would come back again:

1. I poured my tears over my youth. My tears and sobbing could do nothing about it.

2. How sad I am! I lament my lost youth for my white hair and dyed head announced the death of youth.

3. I am stripped of my youth which had been tender, as the bough is stripped of its leaves.

(D. 23; R. 20).

Abu'l-'Atahiya saw in his white hair the announcement of his death:

1. Can you not see that the white hair which took the place of the youthful hair announces your death?

(D. 185; R. 168).

1. White hair proclaims the death of youthfulness just as the empty house proclaims the death of a friend.

(D. 224; R. 206)(1)

1. White hair is the announcer of death of Adam's son. It appears on his cheeks and he bemoans it.

(D. 296; R. 277).

Abu'l-'Atahiya tells in his poetry that he tried to defend himself against white hair. He first dyed his hair, but then

1. (D. 23; R. 20).
discovered this was useless. After that he quietly accepted what had happened because he could do nothing else:

1. I tried to take refuge in dyeing my hair but it was clear that it had been dyed.

2. In spite of myself my youth departed from me. In God I will find solace for my lost youth.

3. Death is the inevitable end for one who has lost his youth and whose hair has become white (1).
   
   (D. 14; R. 12-13.)

Abu'1-'Atāhiya warned himself many times, saying:

1. Till when will you ignore the call of the death-announcing white hair, O white haired libertine. (2)
   
   (D. 28; R. 24).

1. When you see your head white your white hair announces your death.

2. Youth departs with all its pleasure, and the white hair of age comes to teach you.

3. What you already know is enough. Enough for everybody is the experience which he has
   
   (D. 32; R. 28).

And because it is a harbinger of death, Abu'1-'Atāhiya considers it a warning, urging us to repent and live aright.

1. I have no excuse now for the age of hoariness has come upon me. Would that I could tell when I was going to repent.
   
   (D. 18; R. 18).

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1. (D. 14; MS. Buildings).
2. (D. 14; MS. Buildings).
1. The warning of your death came to you with the white hair on your face.
   (D. 224; R. 206).

1. The white hair gave me its message and performed its duty a few days ago.
   (D. 240; R. 221).

From all this we can see also Abu'l-'Atāhiya's sense of the continuous movement of everything in the world towards death. Youth is followed by white hair and of necessity the natural end of death follows that. Man tries to protect himself from old age but hoariness drives him irresistibly towards death and makes certain of his eventual journey away from this world.

1. While a man protects himself from white hair by dyeing it, his white hair drives him towards death.
   (D. 162; R. 145-146).

1. I will weep for my lost youth when my white hair proclaims that I must travel from this earth.
   (D. 303; R. 283).

There is no stage to move on to after white hair has come except death which will as surely attack the old age as did white hair previously attack the youth:

1. You, O, death, will attack my old age with its white hair just as my white hair attacked my youth.
   (D. 23; R. 20-21).

Man was born to grow up, to be young, then to be white-haired, and finally to be dead, for he was born to die. The building was erected only to decay at the end, and so it is as though it were built for this end.

1. Bear children for death and build for demolition! You are all going to
1. Whoever continues to live is going to grow older, and whoever grows older will die. Death does not care whom it attacks. 
(D. 39; R. 33).

How does what Abu'l-'Atahiya say about this world (al-dunya) tally with what he says about death and decay? Did Abu'l-'Atahiya really love this world? Did this world and all that it contains really attract him? Did he find it beautiful or ugly and unattractive? He says himself that in fact he felt a strong love for this world, a love which amounted to madness:

1. I love this world to distraction and spend all my hours in a tumult of desire. 
(D. 263; R. 243).

He thought that even those who professed to criticise and dislike it were in fact very much in love with it for a long time.

1. We all rant against this world but at the same time love it passionately. 
(D. 261; R. 241.).

1. Our souls look forward to a long stay here. Souls love to live for a long time. 
(D. 20; R. 18).

Why then, did Abu'l-'Atahiya reject this world? Why did he become an ascetic? We may perhaps find the answer in these verses:

1. (D. ٢٥٢ ، MS. ٢٥٢ ).
1. I tried to possess you, O world, [dunya], and exerted myself to the utmost. But all I obtained was anxiety and weariness.

2. When I realised that I could get no pleasure unless I paid for it its multiples of pain,

3. I did my best to reject you as people fly from the plague. 

(D. 25-26, 11. 21, '1; 3; R. 22)

Abu'l-'Atahiya expressed here just what Abu'l-'Alā' revealed when he said:

1. I did not turn away from pleasure until the best pleasures turned away from me.

More than that Abu'l-'Atahiya revealed the reason which made him become an ascetic despite the beauty of the world and his love for it. Every sweet thing in life, he thought, was mixed with bitterness, and every good with bad. The lover of this world is not happy, nor is what he loves eternal. It is going to decay, and this is the fact which underlies, as we can see, all Abu'l-'Atahiya's ideas.

1. Do not love this world, O my brother! The lover of this world suffers from great sorrows.

2. The sweetness of this world is mixed with bitterness and its comfort with exhaustion. 

(D. 2; R. 2).

1. O my soul, this world of ours is not eternal! Let me hasten to think of my death.

2. If I felt any confidence in this world and its beauty, I would leave it with sorrow. 

(D. 304; R. 285).
1. Beware of this world and its pleasures! Death is in it, savagely devouring God's creatures. (D. 129; R. 113).

1. Who can feel any confidence in this world while he can see as I do that neither its sweetness nor its bitterness is constant. (D. 49; R. 43).

1. Pity him whom the world has deluded with hopes! How often has the world toyed with his likes!

2. He who insists upon having his part in this world, is forgetting his death while he tries to gratify his immediate desires. (D. 232; R. 213).

1. Hope in this world deludes those who indulge in it. God did not give them eternal happiness here. (D. 242; R. 224).

Abu'l-'Atahiya then ultimately rejected this world, tried to show how ugly it was and how inconstant, and did his best to win people from their attachment to it on the grounds that our world does not deserve love. But to think that this world ought not to be loved does not affect the fact that it is indeed well loved, nor do exhortations win people away from their love of this world, and Abu'l-'Atahiya himself could not manage to free himself from it and confessed his love freely:

1. I cling to this world as if I did not expect to depart from it soon. (D. 204; R. 187).

However, he continued to insist that he ought not to be so attached to this world, and he regretted his past actions done through love of this world.
1. Woe is me, I find myself clinging to this world and not to my religion. (D. 267; R. 262-263).

2. I have looked upon this world with a diseased eye, with the thoughts of one deluded and the methods of an unenlightened person.

3. I said to myself that this was the only world that I was going to have. I competed for vanities and falsehood.

3 3. For the sake of a few short days of pleasure I have disregarded long ages of terror ahead of me. (D. 219; R. 202).

In spite of all this Abu'l-'Atáhiya could not stop loving this world, and he blamed it bitterly for inciting people to love it while it conceals hidden evil.

1. O world, you place so many hopes before us that our lives will end before these hopes do.

2. If any particular need of a person is ever satisfied, he will at once become aware of other needs. (D. 3; R. 3).

1. How strange it is that the world draws us to it with its trappings, while under the trappings is poison. (D. 157; R. 141).

After this Abu'l-'Atáhiya tried to demonstrate ways and means of dealing with this infatuation with this world, but he was unable to say more than:

1. Try to find sufficient self-restraint to be able to reject love of this world. Have nothing to do with the man who obeys his passions, which will eventually bring him to destruction. (D. 287; R. 267.).
I have seen what this world does and therefore I leave what I love for that which I fear.
(D. 4; R. 4).

He rejected life though it is sweet and chose the things which will give him eternity.
(D. 80; R. 70).

From these last examples we can see the great psychological struggle that took place within Abu'l-'Atahiya before he could free himself from the love of this world which so strongly attracted him. He was not among those who reject life in this world because it does not appeal to them very much in the first place. He appreciated to the full all the exciting things in this world, but because he was unusually sensitive to the fact that beauty eventually fades, that pleasure is always mixed with pain, that nothing in this life is constant, and that everybody is going to die, Abu'l-'Atahiya eventually became an ascetic and encouraged others to follow his example.

* * *

In Abu'l-'Atahiya's poetry we find signs of the anxiety which can be traced in other ascetics of his century. Abu'l-'Atahiya imagined that the one who understood the end of life ought never to sleep:

1. The one who has seen the sorrow of life must not sleep but be perpetually on guard.
(D. 120; R. 106).

1. 'Iqd., iii, 127-128.
He also thought that he who is constantly aware of death must constantly weep: (1)

1. You play like a child! Desist, for Fate has enturbed you with age.

2. Had you been afraid of death you would have made your eyes sore with weeping.
   (D. 94; R. 83)

The fear of God is a certain characteristic of the ascetic:

1. The best way to die is to be killed for the sake of God, and the best way to live is to fear God and become an ascetic.
   (D. 74; R. 64-65) (2)

His anxiety appears also in his urging himself to repent.

He constantly reproved himself in an emphatic style.

1. For how long are you going to be stirred with vain hopes; O my soul?

2. O My soul, repent before it is too late to repent!

3. Ask God to forgive your sins. God is the forgiver of sins.
   (D. 31; R. 27).

This was similar to the style of other ascetics in reproving themselves and forcing themselves towards repentance, and Abu'l-'Atâhiya followed their manner. His contribution has been to give these ideas poetic expression (3).

* * * *

The universe, as Abu'l-'Atâhiya imagined it, is in continuous

2. (D. 128, MS. ابن السما).  
1. 'Iqd., iii, 127-128.  
3. cf. al-Mawardî, 53-64.
and speedy movement. The direction of this movement is towards death. The beginning of this movement was before his eyes, its end he readily imagined, and he imagined it near. He telescoped large tracts of time in his mind and saw what was a long way off as being very near, and the future as though it were the present.

1. Even though you live happily for as long as you want, yet the longest life is near to its death. (D.39; R.34)

1. The newest thing is very near to the day of its decay. Everything that is coming will come very quickly.

2. Night and day are working their way towards our end but we completely ignore their work. (D. 41; R. 35).

Nights and days are at work, and both together drive men and the universe towards their natural ends, urging them to hasten because their time is coming near:

1. Every soul is led to its ultimate end by the moving days and nights.

2. If I have hearing I will listen to the message given by the sunset and the sunrise. (D. 177, 11. 7, 5; R. 161).

1. We see the nights and days pursuing us and we do not know which of them is more determined in its pursuit.

2. The day and the night surround us and we cannot escape them.

3. Everything has a time appointed for its end and everyone leaves a trace to be recorded. (D. 27; R. 24).
There is nothing constant in this world and circumstances apparently favourable are quickly replaced by unfavourable ones:

1. No sooner is a matter straightened than it is twisted up again; no sooner does something come one's way than it goes away again. (D. 22; R. 19-20).

1. I can see that life gives a great deal, but it takes back again very quickly. (D. 24; R. 21).

People are like a caravan which is always on the move and cannot stay very long in one place:

1. These creatures are going to God. Their feet are going through the motions of travelling. (D. 24; R. 21)

The night drives away the day and the day the night, and both are ending the lives of people.

1. If we were able to understand that the day drives the night and the night the day (1).

2. We would see that they are eagerly folding away the lives of people and their very traces. (D. 99; R. 87).

All the phenomena in the universe stir Abu'l-'Atahiya and seem to him to be announcing his death in every movement:

1. You act as if you do not know that the sunset and the sunrise drive you towards destruction.

2. By your life, every time that the wind blows or ceases to blow it announces the fact of destruction. (D. 15,11.15.13; R. 13-14)

1. (D. مس. لى النسيك. (D. 15,11.15.13; R. 13-14)
1. O my brother, whenever the wind blows or ceases to blow it does so but to herald diminution and decay.
(D. 165; R. 149)

1. Whatever makes you survive also sends you to your death. There is someone urging you on your way who intends no pleasantry.
(D. 10; R. 10)

From these verses we can see how obsessed Abu'l-'Atahiya was with the inconsistency of the human condition, how he brooded over it. Second by second, and hour by hour he lived his life in fear, anxiety and despair. Every night that passed was taken from his short life in this world and every day that passed was urging him to his end. So the universe in Abu'l-'Atahiya's conception in its movement towards corruption, played a part which fitted in with his conception of the inevitability of death, his description of the dead, of death, of graves and the movement of life towards this end.

* * *

Abu'l-'Atahiya's conception of God is the typical Islamic one; often he even uses the very expressions of the Qur'ān. He does not have any individual outlook on this matter, nor does he give arguments in support of his views, as did the Mu'tazila and other religious sects. He speaks very simply about God just as any ordinary Moslem would do. He says for example:

1. God who knows everything is glorious!
   He is glorious and He is one God;
   this is most clear!
2. He is too glorious for there to be anyone like Him. In truth He is too exalted to have an equal.

3. He knows all secrets, He saves from disaster, and He forgives bad deeds in the Day of Judgment.

4. There are no keepers at His door. He listens to His creatures' call.
   (D. 11; R. 11).

All these features of God acclaimed by Abu'l-'Atahiya are exactly those that are used in the Qur'ān to describe God. The last verse reminds us of many verses which invite people to direct their call to God himself: "Call upon me and I shall answer you" (Qur'ān, 40:62), and: "I am near to answer the call of the caller when he calls upon me" (Qur'ān, 2:182). Abu'l-'Atahiya says:

1. Praise is due unto Thee, O Owner of the throne, O most adored, O best of helpers, O most praised.

2. We affirm that Thou art uncreated. Thou art the Master and no-one can deny this.

3. And Thou art the God who was and still is both near and far, both present and unseen.
   (D. 70, 11. 3-4; R. 61).

and then he also says:

1. He is the one who will exist after these creatures have perished, and who was from the beginning and still is in this eternal kingdom.
   (D. 211; R. 193)

and he says:

1. God be praised, the One and the Eternal. My hope comes from Him and He is my help. (1)

1. (D. 11; R. 11; MS. 11; R. 11).
2. He gives us everything. We need no-one else besides Him. (D. 78; R. 68).

1. Every day we are given new sustenance from our praiseworthy and self-sufficing king, our God.

2. He is dominant, omnipotent, merciful, well-disposed, transcendent, immanent, near and far.

3. Our [imperfect] sight prevents us from seeing Him yet He is everywhere consoling every lonely man.

4. God is enough for us. He is our Lord and our Master. He is the best Master and we are the worst slaves.

5. We are all going to the King who judges His people and who is the Master of Masters in the day of wrath. (D. 85, 11. 6-9, 12; R. 76).

These examples are enough to show that Abu'l-'Atahiya's conception of God is quite simply that of the Qur'ān. One is left to wonder once again on what grounds Ibn al-Mu'tazz based his accusations when he said: "It is true to say that Abu'l-'Atahiya believes in two Gods"(1).

Abu'l-'Atahiya's attitude towards predestination and fate is made quite clear in his Zuhā'īyāt. There are many verses which show that he had quite a blind belief in them. He says, for example:

1. God be praised! He determines what He wishes and no-one else can impose his will upon Him! His creatures cannot have what they will. (D. 1; R. 1.)

1. Tabaqāt, 105.
And:

1. Man may ordain something for himself but Fate may not agree (1).

2. Man's sustenance may come whence he had placed no hope, and often his hopes go stray. (D. 4; R. 4).

And:

1. Every soul will have its end and its own appointed day. (2).

2. The pen dried up when it had registered what God had decreed for us. (D. 21; R. 18).

And:

1. The sleeping man may get what he desires while he still sleeps while the one who is working hard may lose it. (D. 61; R. 54).

And:

1. If Fate is not on your side your heart's desire will be far from you. (D. 95; R. 84).

He describes God as the One who controls Fate:

1. He is the King who controls Fate, and time cannot make the newness of His kingdom decay. (D. 258; R. 238-239).

And he says:

1. Where is the place where we can escape from Fate, who reaches the East and West.

1. (D. ـ ــ ـ MS. ـ ـــ ).

2. (D. ـ ــ ـ MS. ـ ـــ ).
2. See if you can find a place of exile or a place to escape to! (D. 32; R. 28).

Also:

1. Be quiet, and do not think that it is too late for something ordained to happen. Every predestined thing is going to be. (D. 265; R. 244).

All these examples show that Abu'l-'Atāhiya had a deep faith in predestination and fate, and believed that both of them are under the control of God. This faith is an essential element in the Islamic orthodox dogma which says that every Moslem should believe that everything predestined, whether good and bad, comes from God (1). Therefore we can agree with Ahmad b. Harb who describes Abu'l-'Atāhiya as a ājabrist.

* * *

Among the reasons which caused Abu'l-'Atāhiya to be accused of unbelief we find the assertion that though he used constantly to refer to death he never mentioned the resurrection and the Last Judgement. Though Abu'l-'Atāhiya certainly appears to concentrate unduly on death we can easily refute the particular accusation of neglect of the resurrection by reference to his poetry.

In his Zuhdīyāt, there are here and there some verses in which he refers to Heaven and Hell and the Day of Judgement.

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1. Al-Rasā'il Al-Sabī'a Fi Al-'Aqā'id, 31
Admittedly they are few in comparison with his verses about death, but they do exist:

1. You who repent! Before you there is a world of happiness in which there is everlasting life, and also a world of misery (1).
(D. 3; R. 3).

1. Would that I knew whether my tongue will be able to answer in the Day of Judgement. (2)

2. Would that I knew whether I shall receive my book in my right hand or in my left.
(D. 29; R. 25).

This last alludes to the Qur'anic passage:

As for him who is given his book in his right hand, he will say: Here, read my book. Verily I thought that I should meet my account.

But as for him who is given his book in his left hand, he will say: Oh, would that I had not been given my book, and had not known my account.
(Qur'an, 69:19-20, 25-26).

He says also:

1. People die in order that they may be resurrected, and every soul will then receive its due reward according to its works.
(D. 50; R. 44).

Abu'l-'Atahiya speaks of the Last Day in a vivid way which suggests that he truly believed in it:

1. How could I forget the Day of confrontation! How could I forget that day, the day of return to God.

1. (D. ا楂ئ. MS. املا )
2. (D. املاي. MS. املاي )
2. What a day the day shall be in which we stand before God, the Day of Judgement and testimonus.

3. What a day it shall be when we pass through Hell which is full of dreadful things.

4. What a day it shall be when we escape from Hell and suffering.
   (D. 76; R. 67).

1. You will go to Heaven if you have done the will of God; otherwise you will go to Hell.
   (D. 96; R. 85).

1. O my soul, you will be questioned on the Last Day, so prepare your answer now before you are asked.
   (D. 189; R. 172).

Whether Abu'l-'Atāhiya mentions the Resurrection, Heaven and Hell, more or less often than the fact of death in his Zuhāiyāt is not so important for the proving of our point than the fact that he mentions them at all. The few dispersed verses in which he does are evidence that he did believe in the Day of Judgement and Resurrection. There is no reason to advance his absorbing interest in the problem of death and decay as a proof of his unbelief.

*  *  *

In studying Abu'l-'Atāhiya's Zuhāiyāt we notice that many of his concepts are taken directly from the Qur'ān, from the tradition and from the sayings of ascetics and wise men. We will now examine some examples of the precepts which Abu'l-'Atāhiya formulated and recommended to those who would be wise.
He says also for example:

1. True wealth is not the money you have in your hand, but the richness of your soul.
   (D. 3; R. 3).

The Prophet says: "Wealth is not the money you possess but the richness of your soul" (Riyād Al-Sālihīn, 246)

Abu'l-'Atahiya says:

1. The disease of mankind is its love for this world. Man becomes tyrannous when he feels himself to be independent of others. (1)
   (D. 4; R. 4).

In the Qur'ān we have: "Nay, but verily, man acts presumptuously because he thinks himself independent" (Qur'ān, 96:6-7).

Abu'l-'Atahiya says:

1. You possess no food except what you have lawfully acquired and eaten and thus consumed.

2. You possess nothing except what you prepare for your future, and never what you leave to your descendants.

3. You possess no clothing except what you have bestowed upon others or clothed yourself with, and thus worn out (2)
   (D. 45; R. 40-41)
The Prophet says:

O son of Adam, of all your possessions you have retained only what you have eaten and therefore consumed, what you have clothed yourself with and therefore worn out and what you have given away in charity and therefore perpetuated. (Riyad Al-Salihin, 228)

Abu'l-'Atahiya says:

1. Place your trust in God and be content; and do not try to get charity from boastful people. (D. 78; R. 68).

The Qur'an says: "In Allah let the believers place their trust" (Qur'an, 3:118).

Abu'l-'Atahiya says:

1. Would that I knew how you shall be, my soul, tomorrow when you stand between a driver and a witness. (D. 85; R. 76) (1)

The Qur'an says: "Each soul comes accompanied by a driver and a witness" (Qur'an, 50:20)

Abu'l-'Atahiya says:

1. I wish you well, but every soul is going to die even if it does its best to avoid death. (D. 88; R. 78).

The Qur'an says: "Everyone is subject to death" (Qur'an, 3:182)

Abu'l-'Atahiya says:

1. How I long to know for I do not know it, which day is to be my last.

2. In which country shall I die and which country will hold my grave. (D. 99; R. 86).
The Qur‘ān says: "But no person knows what he will gain tomorrow, but no person knows in what land he will die" (Qur‘ān, 31:34)

Abu’l-‘Atāhiya says:

1. A wise and good administrator controls this world. He is Gentle and Well-informed and He knows all secrets. (D. 100; R. 88)

Here, as in other references to God, the qualities which Abu’l-‘Atāhiya attributes to God are taken from the Qur‘ān:

"He is the Gentle, the Well-informed" (Qur‘ān, 6:103)

"He is the Wise, the knower" (Qur‘ān, 43:84)

"knower of the hidden" (Qur‘ān, 6:73) etc..

Abu’l-‘Atāhiya says:

1. Can you not see that this world is as nothing and all that is in it is vanity. (D. 108; R. 95)

The Qur‘ān says: "This present life is only an illusory enjoyment" (Qur‘ān, 3:182).

Abu’l-‘Atāhiya says:

1. Towards God is the outcome of all affairs... (D. 157; R. 141).

The Qur‘ān says: "And towards Allah is the outcome of affairs" (Qur‘ān, 31:21)

Abu’l-‘Atāhiya says:

1. Wherever you are, you must wait for death which is going to disperse your family after it has been united. (D. 189; R. 172-173).

The Qur‘ān says: "Wherever ye may be, death will overtake you". (Qur‘ān, 4:80)
Abu'l-'Atahiya says:

1. Nobody can ever escape from death even if he lives in a strong tower very well protected.
   (D. 132; R. 116)

The Qur'an says: "Wherever ye may be, death will overtake you, even though ye were in strongly built towers". (Qur'an, 4:80)

Abu'l-'Atahiya says:

1. O you, who are taking care of your own soul do not be careless. You are responsible for that which you are looking after.
   (D. 193; R. 175).

The Prophet says: "Everyone has something to take care of and everyone is responsible for this thing" (Riyad Al-Sâlihin, 155)

Abu'l-'Atahiya says:

1. Do not think that God will not keep his promises which He gave to His Prophets.
   (D. 212; R. 194)

The Qur'an says: "So think not Allah is going to fail His promise to His messengers" (Qur'an 24:48)

Abu'l-'Atahiya says:

1. It is death. Be on your guard and be happy if you are able to save yourself either by having no bad deed held against you, or by having some good deed to your credit (l)
   (D. 189; R. 172).

These echo a famous saying which has been attributed to Abû Bakr and also to 'Umar: "I hope for no more than that my deeds will balance one another".

1. (D. [scribal note] MS. [scribal note]).
Al-Mawardī, in his book: Adab Al-Dunyā Wal Din (1) gives examples of what Abu'l-'Atāhiya took from the other ascetics and wise men. Thus al-Mawardī says:

One of the ascetics was once asked, 'What is the best exhortation?' and he answered, 'To look at the graveyard'. Abu'l-'Atāhiya took this up and said:

1. The quiet graves preached to you and the silent times announced your death.
2. They told you about faces which have perished and pictures which are no more.
3. They show you your grave in your lifetime. (D. 52-53; R. 47; al-Mawardī, 81).

A man known for his eloquence said:

Every hour of your yesterdays goes away and with it a part of your life is lost.

Abu'l-'Atāhiya took this up and said:

1. Within the eternal time scheme there is tomorrow. Watch and see what will happen tomorrow.
2. When a man moves even his eye in his pleasure and enjoyment a part of his body dies. (D. 89; R. 79; al-Mawardī, 81-82).

Another wise man said:

If all your sins had a smell, everyone's faults would be known and no-one would be able to hide his.

Abu'l-'Atāhiya took it up and said:

1. God dealt kindly with us in not letting our faults smell.
2. If they did, those who appear to do good works would also be defamed. (D. 66; R. 58; al-Mawardī, 82).

1. Al-Mawardī, 81.
A wise man said:

Whoever feels happy on account of his children will feel sorry on his own behalf.

Abu'l-'Atāhiya said of this:

1. As the child grows he hastens the decay of his father.

2. Of what use if the father's survival while the life of his children forces decay upon him.
   (D. 290; R. 271; al-Mawardī, 82).

Al-Hasan al-Basrī (God be merciful to him) was asked: "How do you view this world?" and he replied: "I was too occupied for its sorrow to enjoy its goodness". Abu'l-'Atāhiya took this saying and said:

1. When the days give him his heart's desire they just make him fear the ultimate end.

2. The days show him what it is that makes him afraid even when the times are in his favour.
   (D. 169; R. 153; Al-Mawardī, 202)

We find in Al-Aghāni that Abu'l-'Atāhiya once stood beside the grave of 'Alī b. Thābit weeping and saying:

1. O my brother, how can I ever again enjoy your wonderful presence, how can I tell you all my worries?

2. The sorrows of life took you away and this is the way of the sorrows of life.

3. I shed my tears for you, O 'Alī, but my tears could not do me any good.

1. Al-Aghāni, iii, 147.
4. During your life you preached
to me about many things; now
you can do so even better.

Concerning these verses Abu'l-Faradj says:

Abu'l-'Atāhiya took them from what was said by some
philosophers attending the funeral of Alexander.
On this occasion one of them said: 'The king was
yesterday more terrible; but to-day he is more
able to preach'. Another said: 'The activity of
the king in his pleasurale round has ceased;
now he moves us in his silence as we feel sorrow
for his death'. Abu'l-'Atāhiya incorporates
the substance of these two sayings in the foregoing
verses. (1)

Whether any sages said such words over the grave of Alexander
is of course irrelevant. What is important is that this story
was commonly told and well-known in Abu'l-'Atāhiya's time. It
confirms that Abu'l-'Atāhiya did in fact get many of his ideas
from other wise men and ascetics.

The influence of other poetry on Abu'l-'Atāhiya's poems
does not appear to be very great. But from time to time we do
come across ideas in his poems which appear to have been lifted
from contemporary or older poets as in the following verse:

1. Everything that you have been given
has only been lent to you and our
days will not come to an end
before you have to return it.
(D. 88; R. 78).

This reminds us of Abū Dhu'ayb's verse:

1. It is a certain fact that all
borrowed things must one day
be returned.

1. Agh., iii, 147.
The influence of poetry on Abu’l-’Atāhiya’s Zuhdīyat is not nearly so clear and definite as the influence of the Qur’ān, tradition, and the precepts of wise men and other ascetics. Possibly the reason for this is that Abu’l-’Atāhiya was the first poet to make extensive poetic use of ascetic ideas.

* * *

The idea of equality is another of Abu’l-’Atāhiya’s ideas which corresponds closely with the Islamic concept. As we can see from his poems Abu’l-’Atāhiya does not value very highly the ancestry of individuals: he believes in the equality of people:

1. Be merciful to all people. They are of the same race as you.  
   (D. 186; R. 170)

He believes that it is the piety of a man rather than his genealogy which makes his worth because in any case all men had one father and one mother:

1. The nobility of a man lies in his piety. Pure belief in his strength and his religion is his ancestral pride. (1)

2. The earth is good, and all the children of Eve have one genealogy. 
   (D. 34-35, 17. 17, 20; R. 30).

Abu’l-’Atāhiya thought also that it was present wealth rather than ancestry which made for inequality:

1. From one father and mother we were all created, but in the matter of money we have no common father.  
   (D. 236; R. 217)

He refused to listen to those who took special pride in their family and said:

1. Do not speak of your father and grandfather and your ancestry as bringing you distinction.

2. Only of piety, asceticism, and obedience to God, which bring you to Paradise, can you be proud. (D. 69; R. 60).

1. People should not be proud of their ancestry; all people come from dust and water. (D. 4; R. 4).

People, he said, will in any case all be equal after death:

1. Whoever dies is finished and under the soil; the high one and the low again become equal. (D. 163; R. 147).

This last idea recurs frequently in Abu'l-'Atahiya's poems. Everyone is buried in the grave; kings and slaves, rich and poor; and there they are equal. Death is common to all.

1. Death is common to all people. No-one lives for ever whether he is a king or a labourer.

2. Those who are rich cannot make use of all that they have, and those who have no great possessions cannot even defend themselves against death. (D. 186; R. 169).

1. I walked over the graves and could not find there any difference between masters and slaves. (D. 4; R. 4-5).

We may well believe that it was Abu'l-'Atahiya's early life in a family of humble origin at a time when great value was generally attached to good birth and family, that led him to
support the concept of equality. At all events it is an Islamic idea which we often find in the Qur'ān as for example in the following verse:

O ye people, we have created you of male and female and made you races and tribes, that ye may show mutual recognition; verily the most noble of you in Allah's eyes is the most pious.
(Q. 49:13).

* * *

Abu'l-'Atāhiya makes frequent reference to the twin concepts of good and evil in his poems. It seems that he believed firmly in their related existence in this world. Evil always exists alongside good:

1. Evil exists in people; if it was apparent they would refrain from living together in amity, but God conceals this.
   (D. 3; R. 3).

1. The Causes of good and evil are constantly advancing and receding.
   (D. 66; R. 58).

1. He tries people with good and evil in order to make them ask Him to give them what He has (1).
   (D. 211; R. 193).

1. Good and evil are a pair, and each has its own consequences.

2. How can you acquire purity when there is not pure thing? There is something of good and evil in all things.
3. Every man has two contrary natures: one good and one evil.

4. If you speak of good and evil you find that there is a great difference between them. (D. 386; Agk., iii, 143-144.)

It is in line with his gloomy outlook that he never mentioned good without referring to evil at the same time.

* * *

It seems that Abu'l-'Atāhiya believed in certain ideal virtues that people ought to have in this life and tried to persuade people to live up to them. In appetency, or contentedness with one's lot, is one of these: it brings its own honour and is far from being a state of humiliation.

1. I tried everything and found that the best and highest condition was that of contentedness. (D. 4; R. 4).

1. Hopelessness protects man's honour, and evil ambition is a kind of illness. (D. 4.; R. 4).

Contentedness is in fact riches, he says, and it is the best thing that anyone may achieve:

1. The rich man is the one who feels contented. He who is ambitious or mean is very far from riches. (D. 7; R. 7).

1. I can think of no better fortune for a man than that he be contented, and that he be moderate in what he asks for. (D. 26; R. 22-23).
With contentedness, he says, a little will be sufficient. Without it, a great deal will be insufficient:

1. Less than a little is enough with contentedness. But for some much is not enough. (D. 93; R. 82).

1. If someone cannot be contented with what is sufficient, then even the whole earth full of gold will not be enough to satisfy him. (D. 16; R. 14).

We do know, however, that Abu'l-'Atahiya himself was not during his life content with a little. Right up to the end of his life he was constantly hoarding and wrangling about money.

We cannot link with Abu'l-'Atahiya's views on contentedness the pictures that he gives of the ideal life as he sees it. He insisted upon simplicity and urged himself and others to be satisfied with a very little of any given thing:

1. A piece of dry bread that you eat in a corner.

2. A jar of cold water that you drink from a pure source.

3. A narrow room in which your soul can be alone.

4-5. Or a Mosque in which you can be isolated from people, where you can study your papers with your back against a great column.

6. Hours spent thus are better than any spent in high palaces.

7. Listen to a compassionate adviser whose name is Abu'l-'Atahiya. (D. 307, 11, 3-7, 9, 13; R. 287-288).
He says also:

1. It is I who am the rich one, provided I have a small place to sleep and a little money to live on. (D. 93; R. 82).

Among the ideal virtues that Abu'l-'Atāhiya impressed upon others is that of kindness and benevolence. He insisted upon this, and considered that those who were kind were fulfilling the ideal of virtue (1).

1. The best man is he who is kind, gives good advice, and is compassionate.

2. The best man is given a sure promise of Heaven and its shade and sweetness (D. 177; R. 161)

He believed that kindness led to good results for those who practise it and urged it upon people:

1. Kindness brings what bad temper and small-mindedness cannot bring you. Those who have a good character are very few. (D. 172; R. 155).

2. Treat the wound of bad temper with gentleness. Test before you praise or blame.

2. Treat people with good nature. Nothing is unbearable to good nature. (D. 171; R. 155).

He considered that he who loses his kindness loses what he values in this life and loses also his reward in the life to come:

1. Even though he uses the superlative here it is contentedness that he more often praises.
1. Keep only what suffices you and give to your brother and treat him with constant kindness.

2. I can see that if a man loses his kindness he loses his portion in the next world and in this. (D. 170; R. 153).

* * *

It seems from Abu'l-'Atahiya's poetry that he hated asking people to give him things and he tried to make others hate it also. He believed that no benefit which was received after asking for it could be sufficient to make worthwhile the humiliation involved in the request.

1. I considered the question of asking for help and found his esteem more valuable than any benefit which might be received in response to the request.

2. We should be as reserved in asking for money as people are reserved in giving it. (D. 197; R. 179-180).

and he says:

1. Do you realize how much humiliation is involved in asking people for help? (l). (D. 226; R. 208-209)

and

1. Whosoever needs the help of other people, people look on him as a humiliated person.

1. (D. כ.מ.ס; MS. כ.מ.ס).
2. Respect yourself by not desiring what other people possess (1)
(D. 131; R. 115)

In his life Abu'l-'Atáhiya did not stop asking people. As we have seen he was very acquisitive. His asceticism did not prevent him from that up to the end of his life. Yet there is in the Zuhdīyat a note of sincerity that will not allow us to believe that his asceticism was mere pretence. He appears to have been true to his nature in his avarice and true to his aspirations in his condemnation of it. Such contradictions are not unusual in human beings and we may look upon his greed as a disease that his asceticism could not cure.

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Abu'l-'Atáhiya disliked covetousness and meanness and in his Zuhdīyat he frequently attacks it.

1. Covetousness is wicked and so is ambition. It never goes hand in hand with piety.
   (D. 147; R. 129)

2. He who is properly educated cannot be controlled by covetousness. Man becomes extraordinarily active in the service of his own covetousness.

3. O my God! How the covetous longs to get what he has not got!

4. The greed of the covetous makes him hope to get what he cannot get!

5. The covetous will never be content. He is always tired and unhappy.
   (D. 16; R. 14).

And why should there be covetousness, asked Abu'l-'Atáhiya,
when all means of livelihood are shared out by God?

1. God decided what our share of sustenance would be and we are constantly collecting (1).
   (D. 6; R. 6)

1. Many people receive their sustenance from places where they had never hoped or dreamed of gaining anything.
   (D. 22; R. 19)

For whom should men collect the wealth and why should they collect it?

1. O, you who build, you are building for others and you who collect, you are collecting for others.

2. Can you not see that the man who keeps his money is keeping it for his heirs who will enjoy it tomorrow?
   (D. 146; R. 128).

Abu'l-'Atāhiya frequently satirised the relative of the dead who lead him quickly to his grave, quarrel over what he leaves, and enjoy it after him. Abu'l-'Atāhiya thought that this was a good reason for people to spend what they possessed and please God while they were yet alive:

1. O, you who hoard your money in this life for your heirs!
   Can you gain anything from money after you are dead?

2. Do not keep your money. Instead try to please God by spending it [in charitable works]. It is enough for you to acquire with it enough to eat and to drink.
   (D. 156; R. 140)
Abu’l-'Atahiya spoke also in his Zuhdiyat of other ideal virtues such as honesty, helpfulness, patience, and endurance. He spoke also of the sincere friends that are hard to find in this life. He exhorted people to be good and do kind actions, and he attacked pomposity and insincerity. He also composed many verses on similar subjects which are included in his sententious poems, and which we do not need to mention here. Abu’l-'Atahiya’s ideas and concepts are not particularly profound or original, but he does explain and expound them in many ways and with varied illustrations which often give them great beauty.

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It seems that Abu’l-'Atahiya had a deep scepticism about human nature and had little respect for people. He pointed out that people always trail after those who are rich:

1. We have savoured the character of people and found them following the rich.

2. The beloved of the masses is the one who gratifies their greed by giving them money. Greed is the dominant passion in most people. (D. 151; R. 134)

Also, he said, people oppress each other:

1. The tyranny exercised by people on each other increases more and more, and so does their pride. (D. 138; R. 121).

Everyone tries to pursue his own interests:
1. I studied many people and found that everyone was working on his own behalf.
   (D. 4; R. 4).

They desert the poor and try to curry favour with the rich:

1. If any person finds that his fortunes are beginning to fail, his friends begin to desert him and he finds himself unable to fulfil his ambition.
   (D. 177; R. 161).

The best man is he who does no harm to others:

1. People have become more evil. The best one among them is he who does no actual harm to others.
   (D. 287; R. 267).

Even the learned men whose duty is to lead others towards an ideal way of behaviour are sometimes further from that ideal than those they are supposed to guide:

1. Islam wept on account of its learned men, but they did not care.

2. Most of them deem the good in others to be evil and their own faults to be excellencies.

3. In whom can we hope on account of his religion? And whom can we trust because of his sound wisdom.
   (D.11; R. 10)

The ambitions compete for precedence in an ugly fashion:

1. The love of precedence drives people to tyrannous action till some are actually oppressing others.
   (D. 139; R. 123)

1. For as long as I have known, the desire for precedence has drawn a great many competitors.
2. People do violence to one another for the sake of precedence. (D. 133; R. 118)

He saw so many people living difficult lives that he was compelled to say:

1. If those who could see really took notice of what they saw, their eyes would never cease from weeping.

2. The person who can drink when he wishes does not know what it is like to be thirsty, and the full cannot understand the hungry man.

3. The bellies of hungry women are empty and their orphans are homeless and hungry. (D. 150; R. 132).

Abu'l-'Atahiya tried to bring to the attention of the rulers the problem of the hungry, of the high prices and low wages, and showed them in his poems the position of women, children and orphans:

1. Who will convey to the Imam some often-repeated recommendations from me?

2. I see that the prices are too high for the people.

3. The salaries are too small. Need is widespread.

4. I see the orphans and the widows in houses empty of food.

5. I hear them complaining of their misery in weak high pitched voices (2)

1. (D. MS. )
2. (D. MS. )
6. Who is to fill the hungry stomachs and clothe the naked bodies?
   (D. 306, ll. 3-5, 8,10, 15; R. 287).

This shows that Abu'l-'Atahiya was sensitive to the social ills of the time and was making an effort to improve conditions. This attitude was by no means common among his contemporaries.

These are the main ideas to be found in his Zuhdiyat. A good many subsidiary ideas to be found among the Zuhdiyat are better included in his sententious poetry. Suffice it to say at present that they do not go far beyond the ideas outlined above.

*   *   *   *

It is probable that Abu'l-'Atahiya composed many eulogistic poems because he was on good terms with the Caliphs, the important officers and leaders of the army, with the ministers and other high officials. In fact a very few fragments of his eulogistic poems are to be found scattered in the adab books. In these extracts Abu'l-'Atahiya praises al-Mahdi, al-Hadi, al-Rashid, Yazid b. Mansur, Yazid b. Mazyad, Ma'n b. Zaid, al-Fadl b. al-Rabi', 'Umar b. al-'Ala' and other famous people.

Abu'l-'Atahiya in his eulogistic poems did not break away from the traditional forms of praise used by other poets. He praised, for example, the antiquity of a man's family and ancestry(1), and this is a feature found in nearly all the

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1. In praising people for their ancestry Abu'l-'Atahiya contradicts the assertions he himself made in his ascetic poems where he speaks of the equality of all people and asserts that nobility lies only in piety. Such inconsistencies, however, are (footnote cont. on next page)
Eulogistic poems in Arabic literature from the pre-Islamic period right through till the twentieth century. Abu'l-"Atâhiya said to al-Mahdî:

1. When you speak of your relation to your father, glory fastens on to you.

2. When your uncle speaks of his ancestry, no uncle can be nobler than he.
   (D. 311; Zahr, ii, 44)

To al-Hâdî he says:

1. Who is like Mūsâ or his father al-Mahdî or his grandfather Dja'far.
   (D. 315; Agh., iii, 156.)

To  Hârûn:

1. The best house in Quraysh is his and the first glory and the last are his also.
   (D. 318; Agh., iii, 132)

1. There is no house which can be compared with his two houses in their nobility and glory.

2. Hashim built one of his houses and Tubba' built the other.

3. If the ages tried to take away what he has, they would come off the worse for it.
   (D. 323).

He says to al-Mahdî:

Footnote cont. from previous page.

Common in Abu'l-"Atâhiya's life and poetry. We can assume here that Abu'l-"Atâhiya in his panegyrics simply followed the traditions of Arabic panegyric literature. He does not expound in them his ideas on ideal behaviour as he does in his ascetic poems.
1. I will thank al-Mahdī till the cycle of death should overtake me.

2. He has two good houses, one is of Tubba' and the other is in the Holy City.
   (D. 337; Agh., iii, 141)

He says to him also:

1. Who is like him whose paternal uncle is the Prophet and whose maternal uncles are the noblest.
   (D. 313; Agh., iii, 155)

Abu'l-'Atahiya also praised generosity and this again is a traditional feature of Arabic literature.

He says to al-Mahdī:

1. If the wind were to compete with you in generosity you would win in the end.
   (D. 313; Zahr, ii, 45).

To al-Rashīd he says:

1. If we refrain from asking and seek no gift from him yet does he take the initiative in giving.

2. And even though we seek no benefit from him yet does his beneficence seek us out.
   (D. 314; al-Marzubānī, 40)

He also says of him:

1. O sons of 'Abbās, among you there is a king, and all beneficence comes from him.

2. You are indebted to Hārūn and to his generosity for great munificence and for silver.
   (D. 319; Agh., iii, 163)

To al-Fadl he says:
1. He found the little thanks he received more than enough for him, and he gave away a great deal. (D. 319; Agh, iii, 159)

To 'Umar b. al-'Alā':
1. Before you such generosity did not exist and on the day you die it will then cease. (D. 324; Zahr, ii, 40)

He praised also the courage of leaders and the way in which they advance boldly in a manner which strikes fear into the heart of their enemies. He says to al-Mahdi:
1. People know that death takes away from you those who do not obey you.

2. When you direct your spear towards a tyrant it comes back to you covered with blood. (D. 313; Zahr, ii, 44-45)

And to Hārūn:
1. Who can escape from death which will attack everybody? Even so, can none of Hārūn's enemies escape him. (D. 318; Agh., iii, 132).

When al-Rashīd conquered Nīqfūr he said:
1. Hārūn went early thundering at them with death and flashing his sword like lightening.

2. Flags accompanied him bringing him victory and passing like pieces of cloud.

3. O, prince of the faithful, you won the victory, may you be saved and rejoice as your return laden with booty. (D. 322; Tabārī, 3:12, 698, 187)

Along with these traditional features to be found in his poems
we come across him praising piety, compassion, and the defence of religion. Perhaps this was a faint echo of Abu'l-'Atāhiya's asceticism in his panegyrics. We can see these elements especially clearly in the poems which he addressed to al-Rashīd. Possibly also it was a reflection of the spirit of Abu'l-'Atāhiya's age and of the personality of al-Rashīd. Abu'l-'Atāhiya says to al-Rashīd:

1. He is an Imam who holds sound opinions. He has compassion and all that he does is good.

2. He is the king who is pious by nature. His soldiers are protected from all possible danger.

3. If Islam were ever to suffer a disaster, among all peoples Harūn would prove its principal defender and supporter.

He says also:

1. Harūn is good. Since he was born he has destroyed evil everywhere.

2. He says also:

And when al-Rashīd conquered Niqfūr:

1. O, Imām of the good path! You became interested in religion, and you began to help everyone who needed your help.

2. O, prince of the faithful, you are the man of piety. You distributed alms which had been hidden away.

* * *
Abu'l-‘Atāhiya's satire, however, is usually of a sarcastic character, but sometimes it expresses haughty indignation. Although he does not break away from the traditional ideas he presents them in a very skilful way. Now and then Abu'l-‘Atāhiya uses a direct method of satire without using his sarcastic style, as in these verses which he wrote to his friend Sālih al-Shahrazūrī:

1. O, pretentious people, if pretence could last then would I place myself under the wing of the pretentious.

2. People are all alike in their meanness. Therefore if any discrimination were to be attempted, to which of them should I cling?

3. We are living in an age when people are used to being as proud as kings and as condescending as those who give charity.

(D. 355; Agh., iii, 174)

Abu'l-‘Atāhiya attempts to give a caricature of the one he is satirising by comparing him to a woman or speaking of him as a woman. This is considered one of the most hurtful forms of satire in Arabic literature and at it he is particularly skilful. He satirises, for example, by implying meanness and says:

1. How I yearn to know how long it is, O Ibn Yaqṭīn, that I must praise you for something which you never gave me!

2. The greeting and the cheery reception which come from someone like you are not enough for me.

3. O God recompense you and increase your goodness, O Ibn Yaqṭīn, do you not know
4. that I want your help against this world and against its necessities; I don't need you to bolster my religion on the Day of Judgement.
(D. 350, ll. 9-10, 12-13; Agh., iii, 150-151)

And he said to Yahyā b. Khāqān after he had refused to see him:

1. I see you are afraid when you see my shadow. What is there in my shadow to frighten you?

2. Are you afraid that I am going to ask for your help? O, be sure that I will not ask you!

3. I'll spare you the trouble. Your position does not attract me enough to entice me to exchange my position for yours.
(D. 353; Agh., iii, 169)

He says to 'Abdullāh b. Ma'in for example:

1. Say to Ibn Ma'in who withdrew his friendship.

2. I have been told what he has said and do not care.

3. Take the ornaments off your sword and make anklets with them.

4. Of what use is your sword if you do not intend to fight?
(D. 362, ll. 17-18, 10-11; Agh., iii, 137)

Then he says:

1. Ibn Ma'in presented himself and said: Who is going to have me? O my parents!

2. I am the [most desirable] girl of this district of Wa'il. I come from the noblest family.

3. There is no other girl like me in Banū Shayhān, who are renowned for wisdom.
4. A girl whose kunya is Abu'l-Fadl and whoever saw a girl called Abu'l-Fadl?

5. She gives what even generous people never give; by my life, she is the soul of generosity.
(D. 363, ll. 9-12, 17; Agh., iii, 136)

He says again:

1. The daughter of Ma'n struck me with her hand.

2. She struck me with her hand - my father be ransom for this striker.

3. She struck me without moderation ninety-nine times.

4. Strike, strike and strike again, for you are like a mother!
(D. 364; Agh., iii, 137)

Other fragments of poems exist which Abu'l-'Atahiya addressed to friends who sometimes refused to admit him, or were overbearing in their manner to him, or refused to give him financial assistance. These pieces are often in this skilful sarcastic style. He says to 'Amu'ib. Mas'ada who once refused to receive him:

1. Why have you altered your friendly attitude to me, and acquired instead an unpleasant manner?

2. When the doorkeepers become haughty I will at once leave this door for ever.

3. We do not hope for your help at the Day of Judgement, or the day when the Heavens will be cleft.
(D. 349; Agh., iii, 135).

If we regret what we have lost from Abu'l-'Atahiya's other poetry we must regret even more the loss of his satirical poems
because it seems that in them he reached a high level of artistry; that is if we agree that the main aim of satirical composition is to hurt, as indeed is the traditional view among Arab critics.

The elegy in Arabic literature is quite similar to the eulogy or panegyric written during the subject's life. In the elegy the good features of the dead are usually pointed out and praised, and in addition the author announces his death and bemoans it. Only a few fragments remain of Abu'l-'Atāhiya's elegies. The most important one is that in which he mourns his friend 'Alī b. Thābit. The feeling of tragedy and sorrow dominates in it and harmonises with the ascetic element in Abu'l-'Atāhiya's soul. Here, unlike his other elegies, we can say that he is more concerned with the expression of sorrow than with the praising of his friend, but that does not mean that we do not find any praise in his elegy. He does praise the dead man, but he weeps painfully while he praises, and tries to find a message he can preach to people through his sorrow. He says, addressing 'Alī b. Thābit:

1. O, 'Alī b. Thābit, when you left me
   I was left by a friend that I could
   not endure to lose.

2. O, 'Alī b. Thābit where are you? You
   are among the graves where you have been
   buried.

3. By my life, you showed me what the
   suffocation of death is like. You
   moved me towards it and yourself stopped
   moving.

(D. 369, 11. 4-50, 72; MS)
Also he says to him:

1. O, my brother, who can give me the kindness that you gave? O, how can I now whisper my worries to you?

2. The sorrow of eternity took you away and that is the habit of eternity.

3. I wept for you, O, 'Alī, with my tears, but my tears availed nothing.

4. It is sufficient sorrow that I buried you and shook the dust of your grave off my hand.

(D. 369-370, II. 8; 1, 3-4; Agh., iii, 147; MS)

When Abu'l-'Atāhiya composed the elegies of others who were not as close to him as 'Alī b. Thābit was, he followed the more traditional methods of composing them. After the death of Yazīd b. Māsūr he said:

1. I announce the death of Yazīd b. Māsūr to all people. I announce his death to the people of the towns and to the bedouins.

2. I sensed your death in my financial situation. I felt its effects in my poems and in my happiness (1).

(D. 368, II. II, 13; Agh., iii, 141)

We need deal only briefly with the rather inane verses which Abu'l-'Atāhiya sometimes wrote. It was considered one of his greatest defects that he sometimes produced verse like the following:

1. Adopting the variant ِـاتـ for ِـاتـ.
1. By God, Sa`Id b. Wahb has died. My God forgive Sa`Id b. Wahb.

(Al-Muwashshah, 258)

When al-Fadl b. al-Rabì' heard these verses he said:

It would be more appropriate to compose an elegy on Abu'l-'Atahiya during his life than on Sa`Id after his death (1).

His elegy on `Isa b. Dja'far is similar to that on Sa`Id. He said:

(Al-Muwashshah, 259).

It is worth noting that such inanities occurred only in Abu'l-'Atahiya's elegies and love poems.

* * *

The discussion on Abu'l-'Atahiya's ascetic poems necessarily covered much of his sententious poetry, so only a few additional remarks need/be made here.

His wisdom is of the popular kind of the time. We can hardly say that it is the result of Abu'l-'Atahiya's own personal philosophy of life, and it is not in fact much more than little pieces of advice presented in the form of proverbs or aphorisms which sometimes contain precepts drawn from his own experience and which fit in general with his ascetic attitude.

1. Al-Muwashshah, 258.
Abu'1-'Atahiya's famous urdjuza (al-Muzdawidja) contains many of his aphorisms:

Poverty is in what you possess over and above your need.  
(D. 385)

How inaccessible a thing seems to be when it is lost.  
(D. 387)

Follow honest and religious people.  
(D. 388).

If you make a request do not be extravagant.  
(D. 388)  
(D. 385-388; Agh., iii, 143-144; MS )

There are many examples of this kind of composition elsewhere in his Zuhdiyat. He says:

1. Be patient with the vicissitudes of time and with its grievousness and inconstancy.

2. A man is noble when he tries to get only what he needs, and is honest in that matter.  
(D. 36, 11. 8, 6; R. 31).

1. If you feel the fear of God in everything that you do, you will be successful.  
(D. 44; R. 38-39).

1. Silence without thought is heedlessness. Speech without wisdom is nonsense.  
(D. 299; R. 280)

These extracts are enough to give some idea of the wisdom of Abu'1-'Atahiya.

* * *
It would seem that quite a number of Abu'l-'Atāhiya's love poems have been lost. Some poems, or verses from poems, do remain, however, and these are sufficient to show Abu'l-'Atāhiya's technique in love poetry.

We have already seen that Abu'l-'Atāhiya was in love with 'Utba and that she neither loved him nor consented to have any kind of relationship with him. She refused outright to marry him. Naturally we find more than an echo of this situation in Abu'l-'Atāhiya's love poems. He tells us about 'Utba turning away from him and says:

1. What is the matter with my mistress? Is it a coquetry that I can endure?

2. Otherwise why did she accuse me when I did not do anything wrong? God bless with the sites of her past abodes.

3. God wearied me in her love and wearied those who blame me for loving her. (Agh., iii, 142).

He says:

1. God be the judge of me and my mistress, she turned away from me and was wearied.

2. I gave her my love and my soul. My recompense was that she broke away from me.

3. My love for her dominated me and made me the common gossip of my neighbours. (Tārīkh Baghdād, vi, 258)

Also he says:
1. O, 'Utba, if you break off your relations with me it will bring me many sorts of illness. To break relations with me is not the right reward for my love.

2. I hope for her and I fear her, so I am suspended between hope and fear.

3. She was ungenerous in her friendship while I gave her all mine.

4. Our passions were of a different quality and in this case death intervened. 
   (Tarikh Baghdād, vi, 253)

Arabic love poetry is full of conventions. The beauty of women's features and especially mouth, teeth and eyes, is often extolled and a recurrent cliché is the comparison of a woman's face to the moon. Equally conventional was the expression of emotion at parting from the beloved. Indeed, these things were the very centre of Arabic love poetry and Abu'l-'Atāhiya made no attempt to change this. He says of 'Utba:

1. I have an excuse for loving her for her face itself is the excuse.

2. If she appeared during the time of the full moon you would see that she was more beautiful than the moon.

3. God wishes me to die for love of the lady who has the beautiful eyes and delicious smell.

4. When she smiles she shows her attractive teeth which are as pearly as if they had been taken from the shells of the sea. 
   (Tarikh Baghdād, vi, 257)
And he says:

1.  O, by God, You who have such beautiful eyes! Come and visit me before I die or else let me visit you. (Murūdī, vi, 246)

In other poems Abu'l-'Atāhiya tells of his utter misery in love, and in many of these his artistry is at a low ebb and he speaks in a foolish and inaesthetic way. He says for example:

1. Oh! how great is my misery and unhappiness! How powerful is my love.

2. Oh! the power of love! Be Thou praised, O my God! (Tārīkh Baghdād, vi, 252)

and he says:

1. O, 'Utba, the moon of al-Raṣāfa! O, possessor of cleanliness and beauty.

2. When I see you I remain very silent as if you had inflicted upon me a kind of illness. (Marūdī, vi, 247)

He says also:

1. O, 'Utba, in this hour, I am going to die, in this very hour. (Al-Muwashshah, 256.)
There is no doubt that these poems do not reach a high artistic level. Ibn Qutayba says of his love poems that they are weak and "closer to the nature of women and to their taste". He gives an an example these verses:

1. I stretched my hand towards you, questioning. What answer will you give the questioner?

2. If you will not give him an answer say some gracious words to him instead.

3. If you have nothing to give him this year, Oh, death, come to me! — promise him something for next year (1).

These verses are among the best we have of Abu'l-'Atáhiya's love poetry and it is possible to disagree with Ibn Qutayba's judgement upon them. Nevertheless, it must be conceded that what we have available of Abu'l-'Atáhiya's love poetry (which is not, of course, the sum of his numerous compositions) is not of his best.

To what extent was Abu'l-'Atáhiya influenced by other poets in the composition of love poetry? In fact, not enough of his love poetry has come down to us to enable us to come to any conclusion on this point. We do find in Al-Aghānī that Bashshār said to Abu'l-'Atáhiya that he admired his poem on an excuse for weeping:

1. How many friends have I from whom
   I hide my tears, feeling shy.

1. Shi'r, ii, 766.
2. When he noticed me he blamed me and I denied that I had been weeping.

3. I say that as I was putting on my coat, the coat touched my eye.

Abu'l-'Atahiya said to him: "O, Abū Mu'ādh! I took these lines from you:

1. I complained to the unadorned women of my suffering and told them that my last day was not far away.

2. They asked me whether I cried, and I said, 'No' although strong men do weep for love.

3. 'A speck of dust entered my eye and it had a sharp point'.

4. They asked me then why both my eyes were in the same case. Did the dust enter both your eyes?" (1)

Also in Al-Aghâni we find that Abu'l-'Atahiya once recited this verse:

1. Whoever saw before he saw me a murdered man who wept because of his love for the killer.

Someone then said to him: "This is identical with the idea of Djamîl when he said:

1. O, my two friends, have you ever in all your life seen a murdered man who cried because of his love for the killer?

Abu'l-'Atahiya smiled and said: 'Yes, it is so'. (2)

1. Agh., iii, 139
Too little of Abu'l-'Atahiya's love poetry has come down to us to enable us to trace to what influences he was subject. It is worth noting, however, that it is only in connection with love poetry that he has been accused of plagiarism. In his Zuhdiyat he did echo—as has been pointed out—some religious texts and the sayings of ascetics, but he was not indebted to other poets.

* * *

Abu'l-'Atahiya was like all other poets and spoke his verses in many different circumstances and on many different occasions. He composed when he was in prison in order to bring the pity of caliphs upon himself. He wrote in verse to his friends, and answered questions, but nothing in the content of these occasional poems deserves special note except these verses which he wrote to al-Rashīd from prison, and which begin with this verse:

1. By God, oppression is base and he who does evil things is an oppressor (l).

In this moving poems he complains of his lot and reminds his captors that eventually they will die and return to God. He directs his speech also to al-Rashīd and promises him that he will go to Heaven if he restores his freedom (l).

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1. Agb., iii, 160
In our study of the themes of Abu'l-'Atahiya's Diwan we have shown that he was more of an imitator than an originator. Most of his ideas and concepts are taken from the Qur'ān, tradition, from traditional wisdom, and the sayings of the ascetics. He appears to be original only in that he wrote entire poems on ascetic subject, in his insistence upon the idea of death to a degree which no previous poet had ever done, and in his imaginative and suggestive style when he describes what happens to a man after death, or when he speaks of the graves or apostrophises them. His compositions on the subject of death, as we have seen, do not show a philosophical mind but rather a kind of obsession. The fearful atmosphere of death is perpetually present in his mind, and those who read his Zuhdiyyāt weary sometimes of the constant repetition of some simple ideas. At the same time they may well feel that Abu'l-'Atahiya was a poet who had wide experience of the difficulties of everyday life, and an obscure but nevertheless vibrant awareness of its deeper problems. His response was an attempt to adjust the individual, or at any rate himself, to these immutable problems and difficulties. The most important thing is that Abu'l-'Atahiya gives his reader these ideas about life: death is the end of life; everything will eventually decay; the world is in a continual movement towards destruction, and therefore man must struggle against his own desires and free himself from worldly concerns. These ideas are identical with those of the ascetics of his time. Abu'l-'Atahiya does not attempt to make them into a serious original philosophy, and this fact leads
us to think that in any case he was not capable of doing that.

When we try to compare his ideals expounded in his ascetic verse with his behaviour in ordinary life we find two different people facing us: the ordinary fallible man of everyday and the ascetic idealist. This is easily understood for anyone can be very exalted in his speech, but it is not so easy to be so in life

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However, Abu'l-'Atāhiya does have his own distinct artistic personality and his own style by which he can be recognised. The first notable feature of his poetic style is the clarity and even simplicity which make him so easy to understand, that/ordinary readers can respond to what he says. From time to time, a difficult word or expression may occur but this is not a general feature of his poetry. These general features are simplicity of language, clarity of expression, fluidity and readiness of phrase. Al-Baghdādi describes him as "clear in what he says and easily understandable"(1), and Ibn Munādhīr said, when speaking of the best poets in Islam: "Among the moderns there is this knave who picks his poetry out of his sleeves"(2). This expression means that he was able to write verses and expound his ideas fluently without any difficulty. We do not need to give any examples here because almost all his Dīwān shows this feature of his style.

1. Tarīkh Baghdād, vi, 250-251.
2. Abbasī, iii, 154.
Besides his simplicity and clarity Abu'l-'Atahiya's poetry was unaffected and very direct in explaining his ideas and emotions. No trace of effort can be detected. Again it is not necessary to give examples because his entire Diwān illustrates this. His contemporaries and successors noticed this feature as we shall see when we discuss the opinions of his contemporaries on him.

In his Zuhdīyat, Abu'l-'Atahiya assumes the style of a preacher. He speaks in the second person and frequently uses the imperative. We can only rarely find a poem in which he does not speak in the second person. He says for example:

1. That which brings you life may at any hour bring you death. A driver who means no pleasantry is leading you towards your end.
   (D. 10; R. 10)

and he says:

1. Ask Him, O neglectful man, and do so quickly. You will be given a gift out of his kindness.
   (D. 11; R. 11).

and also:

1. Make special efforts to obey God or do so without effort.
2. Give your master what you would like your slave to give you (1).
   (D. 86; R. 77).

This style in the second person is the one used in the
Qur‘ān, and by all the ascetics generally. Perhaps Abul-‘Atāhiya was influenced by this in his poetry.

Occasionally Abu'l-'Atāhiya uses an illustrative and graphic style and draws a clear and sometimes moving picture of a scene. This he does most frequently when he is describing what happens to a man after his death. There are so many examples of this that it is enough to confine ourselves to one here:

1. It is if a man was wept over by his relatives.

2. It is as if people told themselves to hurry to him before he died.

3. Ask him, speak to him, stir him, tell him to chant a prayer before he dies.

4. When people despaired over him they said, 'Bury him'.

5. Turn him and direct him towards al-Ka'ba, make him lie down and close his eyes.

6. Quickly make him ready for departure, make him ready quickly, do not keep him for long.

7. Raise him up, bathe him, wrap him in the shroud, prepare him for burial.

8. When he is wrapped in white linen then carry him away'.

9. Then they took him away and went with him.

10. When they have said a prayer over him they said 'bury him'.

11. When they had put him under the soil, they left him in its keep.

(D. 293-4,11.14-17, 1-7 ; R. 274-275)
From this example we see not only his graphic style but also the precision with which he draws his pictures and the amount of detail which he manages to include.

We also find that a feature of Abu'l-'Atāhiya's style is one which is common to Arabic poetry in general, and this is that he lacks discipline and unity and a quick haphazard change of subject from verse to verse is frequently found. There is no unity in the poem. Each verse is self-sufficient. From time to time we do find some exceptions in Abu'l-Atāhiya's poetry where a few verses are linked together to express a unified thought. We saw an example of this in our last quotation and here is another:

1. How many kings became highly esteemed and were escorted by troops of horse.

2. People were afraid of the king's warlike movement, and hoped to get gifts from him.

3. He felt very proud and admired his own character.

4. When the truth of death came to him his vanity departed.

5. He shut his eyes because of death and allowed his joints to relax.

(D. 228; R. 210)

Following on these verses we find series of independent verses then again a collection of verses making one unit. Abu'l-'Atāhiya was not the first to do so. We find a similar practice even in pre-Islamic poetry. We find it more commonly in Abu'l-'Atāhiya's contemporaries, and it is notably frequent in Abu'l-
'Atahiya's work.

Leaving aside his ascetic poetry, we find that the dominant feature of his satirical poetry is the skilful sarcastic style in which he presents a caricature of the man he is satirising. He says, for example, to Ahmad b. Yusuf:

1. How can a man who goes to you for something get it when half of you is sleeping and the other withdrawn from people? (Shi'r, ii, 767)

His satire on Ibn Ma'n is another good example and the caricature which he gives of him has achieved wide and lasting notoriety among Arabs.

In his love poetry Abu'l-'Atahiya's style does not seem to reach such a high level as in his other poetic forms. The poet who was distinguished by the simplicity of language, his fluidity, and effortlessness, becomes in his love poems much less than we have grown to expect of him. It would be preposterous, for example, to compare him with such masters of the genre as 'Umar b. Abi Rabia. The fluidity of his poetry and its appeal to what Ibn Qutayba called feminine taste do not allow the comparison. Even the words which he uses in his love poems do not seem suitable for love poetry. He says, for example:

1. 0 'Utb, 0 moon of al-Rasafa, 0 possessor of all beauty and cleanliness.

2. You have my affection and my favour, but, may I be your ransom, I can find no pity in you.
3. I remain silent when I see you
as you inflict on me some kind
of disease.
(Murūdij, vi, 247)

These verses are not to our taste, because their style is
not suitable to love poetry and the ideas that he expresses
in such words are both trivial and incongruous. What is the
place of the idea of "cleanliness"? How can the lover tell
us that when he sees his beloved she inflicts a disease upon
him? The other love poems which we have of his are not
distinguished by any special features. From the artistic point
of view they are below the level which Abu'l-'Atāhiya attained
in other types of poetry. If we make an exception of two or
three pieces of love poetry like the one which begins with the
following:

1. Ahmad said to me without knowing
what I have, 'Do you love her now
seriously?'
(Murūdij, vii, 83-84)

We do not find anything of interest in Abu'l-'Atāhiya's love
poetry. We have, of course, to bear in mind that many of his
works in this field have been lost to us, and what remains is not
sufficient for us to give a final judgement.

Abu'l-'Atāhiya's poems lack sublimity. Even his panegyrics
lack that. Abu'l-'Atāhiya's poetry, as we have seen, is simple and
effortless but it is not sublime. A great difference can be
noted here between his poetry and that of Bashşhr. They belong to different literary schools. If we accept as authentic the text in Al-Aghanī in which Abu'l-'Atāhiya gives advice to Ibn Abī'l-Abyad, it would seem that Abu'l-'Atāhiya understood this difference and deliberately developed his own style and was aware that it differed completely from those of Bashşhr for example, and that he considered it "second best". Abu'l-
'Atāhiya said to Ibn Abī'l-Abyad:

Poetry ought to be like the poetry of the giants who went before us, like the poetry of Bashşhr and Ibn Harima. If the poet cannot achieve this it is better for him to make his words simple so that they may be easily understood by all people as my poems are, and this is especially true in the composition of ascetic poetry (1).

Abu'l-'Atāhiya's contemporaries stressed above all his facility in verse. Ibn Qutayba says:

Abu'l-'Atāhiya can compose so easily and quickly that although he sometimes composes poems which scan they do not correspond to the traditional metres of the Arabs. He was once sitting in a fuller's shop and he heard the sound of the grinder, and imitated its rhythm at once in a few verses:

1. Death has cycles which control its movement.

2. The pick us out one by one"(2)

Ibn al-Mu'tazz relates that Muhammad b. al-Bāṣrī said:

1. Agh., iii, 161.
2. Shi'r, ii, 766.
Abu'1-'Atahiya, because of his facility in verse and his considerable natural endowments, was able to compose poems in metres which did not correspond to the well-known ones. He played with poetry as freely as he chose (1).

Al-Mazubānī relates from al-Mubarrad that:

Abu'1-'Atahiya often said things which did not proceed from the normal metres provided that his intuition approved the rhythm (2).

Al-Mas'ūdī says that Abu'1-'Atahiya has poems in which he broke away from the well-known metres as in this one:

1. The judge's concern is a pleasant verse.
2. The judge said when he was blamed,
3. in this world there are only guilty ones.
4. This is the justification for the judge, now reverse (3)

Al-Mas'ūdī comments:

1. Tabaqāt, 105.
2. Al-Muwashshah, 262.
3. What is intended is not clear. It may be that the meaning is to be reversed, i.e., that for "justification" we should read "condemnation". Or it may be that the letters of one word ought to be transposed, reading, e.g. ḥu'ra'rt[terror] for ḥudhr [excuse].
The metre of these verses is fa'luun four times. [i.e. four feet each consisting of two long syllables]. Some people say that Arabs never composed poems in this metre. Al-Khaṭṭāṭī never mentions it at all, and neither do the other prosodists (1).

The poems which we find in Abu'l-'Atāhiya's Dīwān are all in the traditional metres and it is only in the texts which we have just quoted that we have examples of departures from tradition. These examples are not, in fact, serious ones and the authenticity of some is doubtful. Al-Mas'ūdī's example is a joke. The last verse is an example of verbal artifice of a kind which was current and popular in al-Mas'ūdī's time rather than in Abu'l-'Atāhiya's. It may well be that, as Abu'l-Faradj relates, Muḥammad b. Abī'l-'Atāhiya said that "when his father was asked whether he knew these metres he answered that he was greater than the metres" (2), because in order to be a poet it is not necessary to understand the metres. But when Muḥammad asserted that "he did in fact compose in metres which did not correspond to the usual ones"(3) we can only comment that these cannot, in fact, be traced in what we have of Abu'l-'Atāhiya's poetry.

Al-Marzubānī relates from al-Mubarrad that the latter accused Abu'l-'Atāhiya of making grammatical faults, and that he said:

In spite of his ability to compose easily, Abu'l-'Atāhiya made a great many mistakes, both grammatical and in his use of all sorts of a`ārid, metres which do not proceed from the traditional ones provided that

2.  Agh., iii, 131.
3.  Agh., iii, 131.
the rhythm suited his intuition.

One of his grammatical faults can be seen in the following verse:

1. Often is the miser asked to give what is scarcely worth anything.

The correct word would be lā yusawī from sawāh yusawī [the third stem sawiya should have been used instead of the first]. There is also this verse:

1. By the God, who is the Lord of Minā, and the camels which walk there, wherever I am I will thank Yazīd.

2. The superiority of Yazīd is more than I can describe, whenever I try to say anything to praise him.

Abu'l-'Atāhiya twice used the word Yazīd with tanwīn; without it the metre would still have been correct but considerably strained (1).

Abu'l-'Atāhiya is not without defence against al-Mubarrad's strictures. Some lexicographers allow lā yaswā as "of a rare dialect" (see Lane), and the practice of using a diptote with tanwīn is a fairly common poetic licence. Besides, such lapses - if lapses they are - are quite rare in Abu'l-'Atāhiya's work.

The facility and abundance of Abu'l-'Atāhiya's poetry makes us suppose that he was master of the language since he was quite easily able to express anything he wanted to. He was asked once whether he ever had difficulty in finding words and was forced to use uncommon or difficult words in the manner of other poets, but Abu'l-'Atāhiya said he did not find this difficulty. The Questioner then said: "I think that is because you so often use

1. Al-Muwashshah, 262.
the easy rhyme". Abu'l-'Atahiya then asked him to choose a difficult rhyme for a poem and the man chose the rhyme of al-balāgh. Abu'l-'Atahiya then extemporised a poem which began:

1. Any life is better than one in which you find only the bare necessities, enough food to prevent you actually being hungry. (1)

Both this and the following verses are very easy and simple.

If we add to this the fact that Abu'l-'Atahiya expounded all his ideas in many different ways we can see clearly that he did indeed have an excellent command of the language and a rich vocabulary. It is also clear that his ability to express himself was far greater than his capacity for original thought. The poverty of his ideas is offset by his richness of expression and of his clarity and simplicity despite this richness.

His mastery of words apart, he was particularly impressive in expressing his ideas of death, in apostrophising the graves and in the way he pictured the end of the human being. He was here very suggestive and able to stir the emotion by the evocation of precise images. (2)

Above all, it is necessary to mention here that Abu'l-'Atahiya broke loose from the traditional frame of the ode when he composed entire poems in one theme. In this he did not follow the

1. Agh., iii, 144-145.
2. cf. this chapter, 149-153, 212.
practice of many of his contemporaries who were displaying conservative tendencies. He fostered a revolution and spoke directly on the subject he wished to speak on. He devoted a large collection of poems to ascetic subjects only and he was the first poet to do that.

* * *

Among the problems that face anyone studying Arabic poetry is that of misattribution. The same verses are often attributed to several people.

We find that there is a number of short ascetic poems which appear in the Dīwān of both Abu'l-`Atāhiya and Abū Nuwās. They both lived at the same time, were friends and admired each other. They both lived dissipated lives in their youth and were later converted to asceticism although Abu'l-`Atāhiya changed his way of life earlier than Abū Nuwās. Abū Nuwās is credited with the innovation of composing entire poems on wine just as Abu'l-`Atāhiya composed entire poems on ascetic themes.

Abū Nuwās was much more of a rake than Abu'l-`Atāhiya at the beginning of his life. So it is very easy to distinguish Abū Nuwās's love poems for example from Abu'l-`Atāhiya's ones. Abū Nuwās's wine songs cannot give rise to any confusion with Abu'l-`Atāhiya's poetry because we have nothing of Abu'l-`Atāhiya on this subject. In their panegyrics, Abū Nuwās's virile style can be distinguished very easily from Abu'l-`Atāhiya's very simple and clear language. As regards their ascetic poems, however,
it is not the same. Although it is sometimes possible for critics to attribute some poems to one particular poet on artistic or historical grounds as we can do for their panegyric and love poems it is not so in the case of their ascetic poetry. There is nothing in these particular poems which make them appear to be out of place in the collected works of either, nor is there anything which is different from either Abu'l-'Atāhiya's or Abū Nuwās's style or way of thinking. For so far as ascetic poetry is concerned, they both wrote in the same vein and expressed ideas which appear to have been common among the ascetics of their time, although not previously expressed in verse.

The claim made by the editor(1) of Abū Nuwās's Diwān for his authorship of the disputed poems cannot be allowed to stand. He says that such poems could only have been written by a man who was repenting warmly of a thoroughly mis-spent youth. Abu'l-'Atāhiya could just as well be the author of such poems as Abū Nuwās for the spirit of repentance appears in most of his ascetic poetry.

There is also no little difficulty about attributing them to one or the other on stylistic grounds, for the characteristics peculiar to one or the other do not appear very clearly in them. Take for example, the poem which begins:

1. O, you who are placed between two pots of wine and a musical instrument in the hands of a singer(2)

L. Abū Nuwās's Diwān, 609.
2. Abu'l-'Atāhiya's Diwān, 254; R. 234; Abū Nuwās' Diwān, 617.
It is possible to argue that this poem is more likely to have been composed by Abū Nuwās than by Abu'l-'Atāhiya because the mention of wine and music is evocative of Abū Nuwās' pleasure poems, but the argument is not conclusive.

Towards these next examples an even less positive attitude must be taken.

1. If you find yourself alone do not say to yourself that you are alone but say that someone is watching you (1) and

1. God who knows the unknown, be praised, how strange is the changeableness of events (2). and

1. You accepted your own defects. You did your best to please yourself. (3) and

1. I was neglectful and thought only of my hope when I did not do my work properly. (4) and

1. In life there is always tomorrow. Wait and see what tomorrow brings to you. (5)

1. Abu'l-'Atāhiya's Dīwān, 14; R.13; Abū Nuwās' Dīwān, 615.
2. Abu'l-'Atāhiya's Dīwān, 31; R.27; Abū Nuwās' Dīwān, 616.
3. Abu'l-'Atāhiya's Dīwān, 56-57; R.50-51; Abū Nuwās' Dīwān, 611.
4. Abu'l-'Atāhiya's Dīwān, 207; R. 189; Abū Nuwās' Dīwān, 614.
5. Abu'l-'Atāhiya's Dīwān, 89; R. 79; Abū Nuwās' Dīwān, 619.
In Al-Aghānī the following verses are attributed to Abu'l-ʿAtahiya, but they are also in the Dīwān of Abū Nuwās:

1. Time will not allow a man's house to wait for him for ever (2).

Apart from these ascetic pieces there are two short poems combining panegyric and lamentation and attributed to both poets. These are the poems which begin as follows:

1. If all people were in one body you would be the head (3).

and

1. Remember, O faithful one of God, for past relations must be remembered. Remember when I used to stand in front of a crowd of people and recite to you (4).

These last two poems were referred to when we were trying to examine the facts behind Abu'l-ʿAtahiya's imprisonment. Here again there is no basis for attributing these either to Abu'l-ʿAtahiya nor Abū Nuwās.

As regards the following poem which is in both Dīwāns:

1. I have seen virtue reclining and apostrophising with the sea and the fishes (5)

Here the word al-Fadl may be taken either as a man's name, or in

1. Agh., iii, 157; Abū Nuwās' Dīwān, 182.
2. Agh., iii, 130; Abū Nuwās' Dīwān, 615.
3. Agh., iii, 158; Abū Nuwās' Dīwān, 425.
5. Abu'l-ʿAtahiya's Dīwān, 181; R. 164; Abū Nuwās' Dīwān, 535.

There is a slight difference in the wording of this verse as related in Al-Aghānī and in Abu Nuwās' Dīwān.
its literal sense of "virtue". Such rhetorical tricks involving
in addition the personification of "Virtue" which is made to
recline, and apostrophise, were virtually unknown in / time, but
are characteristic of the literary production of a later age.

* * *

There is one more poem of disputed authorship, although it
does not involve Abū Nuwās. It is the one which begins:

1. I do not think that Man is ever
   safe from Time, for as long as it
   continues, he is subject to its
   malice.

This occurs in Abu'l-Atūhiya's Dīwān (p. 108) but is also
attributed to Wābīsa (Al-Wasīla Al-Adabīya, ii, 327 ).
Whether or not it is by Wābīsa, it is clearly in too vigorous
a style to be Abu'l-Atūhiya's.

* * *

On the question of his contemporary and later reputation
there is much evidence. Those who spoke of him were aware of
his particular artistic characteristics and on the whole gave him
due recognition. He was among those who were duly esteemed and
perhaps even over-esteemed in their time rather than neglected as
is the lot of so many poets. Al-Baghdādī says of him:

He was a prolific composer of love poems, panegyrics
and satires until he became an ascetic and then he
stopped producing anything except ascetic poetry. On
these themes he composed some excellent poems and
surpassed all those who had produced work in these
fields. Most of his poems are sententious and
aphoristic and his style is simple, without affectation
and quite natural (1).

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1. Tarīkh Baghdād, vi, 250-251.
Ibn al-Mu'tazz relates from Abu'l-'Aṣâ' al-Basrî that Abu'l 'Atāḥiya was a "born poet" and one of those whose speech is nearly all poetry\(^1\). He also relates from Muhammad b. al-Basrî that:

Because of his directness and natural talent Abu'l-'Atāḥiya composed poems which scan although they do not fit the traditional metres. It was easy for him to toy with poetry on whatever he wanted to say.\(^2\)

Ibn Qutayba says: "He was a natural poet and among those whose speech is nearly all poetry....". Because he composed quickly and easily it so happened that he sometimes produced poetry which scans, though it did not always fit the familiar metres of Arabic poetry\(^3\).

Al-Djahiz says:

The naturally gifted among our contemporary poets are Bashshār al-'Uqaylī, al-Sayyād al-Ḥimyārī, Abu'l-'Atāḥiya and Ibn Abu 'Uyayna\(^4\).

Abu'l-Faradj says:

His rhymes are good, his ideas sound, his words have facility, and there is much variety and little affectation about his poetry, but he does have a good many very bad poems. Most of his poems are on ascetic subjects or in the form of proverbs. He used pleasant metres which are quite original\(^5\).

Ibn al-ʿAraḍī said to someone who described his poetry as weak:

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1. **Tabaqāt**, 105.
2. **Tabaqāt**, 105.
3. **Shi'r**, i, 766.
4. **Al-Bayan**, i, 58.
5. ** Ağh**, iii, 126.
By God, I have never before seen a poet who was more natural or had greater facility. His style was a kind of magic. (1).

The naturalness, the abundance of his poetry, his facility and lack of affectation were the features most readily noticed by those who wrote about him. His ready wit and ability to extemporise was also the subject of comment. Al-Ḥirmāzī mentions that he was witness of a meeting between Abu'l-'Atāhiya and Abū Nuwās. Abu'l-'Atāhiya was the better of the two when they had to extemporise, but when they took time to compose Abū Nuwās was clearly superior. (2) Abu'l-'Atāhiya was also proved to be the quickest in wit on the occasion of a horserace meeting held by al-Rashīd. (3) When, on another occasion, he was asked how he composed he replied that on whatever subject he tried to speak he found matter fairly easily and so he said what he liked and left unsaid what he preferred not to say. (4) Once, he went to console al-Mahdī on his daughter's death, and found that al-Mahdī had already regained his happiness. He was able to extemporise a short poem on what al-Mahdī said to him and abandon the poem he had prepared. (5) On another occasion al-Rashīd admired a verse which someone sang to him and demanded that another verse be added to it. Dja'far b. Yahyā told him that

1. *Agh.*, iii, 131.
2. *Agh.*, iii, 168.
3. *Agh.*, iii, 147.
4. *Agh.*, iii, 131.
5. *Agh.*, iii, 162.
he would have to ask Abu'l-'Atāhiya to do that because he had such facility in composition\(^1\). Al-Hirmāzī says that he once heard Abu'l-'Atāhiya saying that he could, if he wanted to, turn all his speech into poetry\(^2\). Ibn Tayfūr relates from Mūsā Ibn 'Ubaydillāl al-Tamīmī that Mansūr al-Nāmari, Abu'l-'Atāhiya, Ābu Nuwās and Ābu Zughba met together on one occasion and declaimed verses they had composed on one metre. Abu'l-'Atāhiya was considered by all to be the best\(^3\).

Considering that Abu'l-'Atāhiya was the contemporary of Bāshshār and Ābu Nuwās we can say that he enjoyed a reputation greater than he deserved. Al-Rashīd thought him superior to Ābu Nuwās and found it very strange that he was criticised by others\(^4\). Even contemporary poets esteemed him highly. Ābu Nuwās, who was a great poet, respected him and stood up in deference to him even though he refused to do that for others\(^5\); and he once said of him after he had departed: "My God, whenever I see him, I realize that he belongs to the Heavens and I to the earth"\(^6\). And on one occasion when he heard some verses from Abu'l-'Atāhiya he said to his friend: "Is it some unknown magic or do you just imagine it to be so?"\(^7\). And when someone said

1. Agh., iii, 162.
2. Agh., iii, 131.
6. Tarikh Baghdad, vi, 259.
7. Tarikh Baghdad, vi, 259.
to him that he was the best poet of the day he replied, "But not while Abu'l-'Atāhiya is still alive."(1) Abū Nuwās recited one of his own poems to al-Husayn b. al-Dahhak and when he finished al-Husayn said to him: "By God it is almost as if your friend had written it", by whom he meant Abu'l-'Atāhiya(2). It is related by Ibn al-Nadîm that Ishāq al-Mawsilī said that he knew of three men who collapsed when they saw three other men: ʿAllūya when he saw Mukhāriq, Abū Nuwās when he saw Abu'l-'Atāhiya, and al-Zuhri when he saw Hisām.(3)

Other poets than Abū Nuwās shared their admiration. Salm al-Khāṣīr, for example, said to someone who asked him to recite his poetry:

Rather I will recite to you the best poem ever composed, by a poet who is the best among human beings and Djinn, Abū'l-'Atāhiya (4).

Dāwūd b. Razīnā also considered him the best poet to be found among human beings and Djinn.(5) And Bashshār said to Ashdīja' on hearing Abu'l-'Atāhiya reciting to al-Mahdī:

Look at the Caliph, did he not fly from his throne enchanted by what this Kufite is reciting to him? (6)

Al-'Attābī said to Muhammad b. Naṣīr:

1. Agh., iii, 131-132.
3. Al-Fihrist, 96.
5. Agh., iii, 131
6. Agh., iii, 142.
Whenever I wish to refer to Abu'l-'Atahiya I shall simply say to you: 'recite to me of the poetry of the best poet among all human beings, not of 'Iraq only;'(1)

and he said also concerning him:

'he is the best poet among both the past and present poets' (2)

Muslim b. al-Walīd who did not at first respect him, said after he had heard some of his poems:

O, Abū Ishāq, one who can produce such poems does not need to worry about any worldly losses he may have to endure (3).

And Ibn Munādhir considered him the greatest poet among all the Moslems (4). It was not only poets but also people of the very highest class and learned men who expressed their admiration for Abu'l-'Atahiya. Muṣ'ab b. 'Abdillāh admired him (5), and al-Riyāsh said that he heard al-Asma'ī praising some of Abu'l-'Atahiya's verses (6). Al-Farā'ī said that Dja'far b. Yahya assured him that he thought Abu'l-'Atahiya to be the poet of the century and that al-Farā'ī had agreed with him and sworn that he believed him to be the best (7). 'Abdullāh b. 'Abd al-'Azīz al-'Umarī considered him to be the greatest among all people (8). Al-Djāhiz greatly admired some verses from his famous urdujūza (9).

1. Agh., iii, 144-145.
2. Agh., iii, 176-177.
3. Agh., iii, 145-146.
5. Agh., iii, 130.
6. Agh., iii, 130.
7. Agh., iii, 131.
9. Agh., iii, 143.
Harûnb. Mukhallid al-Râzî described two of Abu'l-'Atahiya's verses as being "spiritual and soaring between earth and Heavens"(1).

The prince, 'Alî b. 'Isâ mentions that after they had heard a poem of Abu'l-'Atahiya's, Ibrâhîm b. al-Mahdî said to him: "My son, it must be very difficult to attain this degree of facility"(2).

People frequently discussed Abu'l-'Atahiya and Abû Nuwâs together comparing them with each other, as did Ahmad b. Abî Fanan and al-Fath b. Khâqân(3), and also al-Rashîd and Ishâq b. Ibrâhîm al-Mawsîlî (4), and Mukârîq and al-Dâhâk(5). Ahmad b. Abî Fanan preferred Abu'l-'Atahiya, indeed he thought him the best in the whole field of Arabic literature. He believed that in every poem he had some good verses, some not so good, and some bad ones, but that if all his good verses were gathered together they will be more numerous than those of any other great poets. When they asked al-Husayn b. al-Dâhâk to decide in favour of one of them, he too said that he preferred Abu'l-'Atahiya(6).

From these judgements can be seen the methods of judging poetry of that particular century. It is enough to be able to find one verse in a poem to admire in order to make the assertion that the poet in question is the greatest among human beings and Abî Dînn. In Ahmad b./Fanan's discussion on Abu'l-'Atahiya's poetry

1. Agh., iii, 154.
3. Agh., iii, 180.
5. Agh., iii, 186.
when he compares the quantity of his good poetry with the quantity of the good poems of others, we can see the naive manner in which they attempted to assess poets by quantity, rather than quality.

However, to counterbalance this rather excessive praise there were some contemporary critics who gave him a much lower rating than the admirers we have been quoting. Abu'l-Paradž after praising him, says: "He does not have many bad poems". Ibn al-A'rabi too quotes someone as arguing about him and asserting that some of Abu'l-'Atahiya's verse were very weak, and that though many of his poems were ascetic ones in which he excelled, yet his panegyric poems did not reach the standard set by these.

Al-Husayn b. Abi'l-*Sarī says that Abu'l-'Atahiya once met Muslim b. al-Walīd. Muslim said to him:

If I agree to compose poems similar to your verse:

1. Praise and charity are due to you, O God, and so is the kingdom, There is no God beside you. Here I am at your service, the Kingship is yours.

then I would be able to compose ten thousand verses in a day. But I say instead this verse:

1. He comes to all souls as quickly as destruction comes to put an end to all hope.

Abu'l-'Atahiya said to him: "Compose verses like mine and then I will compose verses like yours". Although it is not a good
method to criticise a poet on the strength of some verse or other we find that there is some justice in Muslim's criticism especially as in the Arab tradition the line and not the poem is the unit. Other instances in which Abu'l-'Atāhiya falls into the trivial and the prosaic are not few. He said:

1. Oh how great is my misery and unhappiness! How powerful is my love (1).

1. He is God, He is God, but God forgive (2).

This is reminiscent of the amusing discussion which took place between Abu'l-'Atāhiya and Mansūr al-Namārī, the poet. Mansūr asked him about the time he needed to compose a good poem. Abu'l-'Atāhiya said that he did not need any longer than the time he took to put his inkpot beside him in order to express himself exactly as he wanted. Mansūr said to him:

If you are going to say a verse like:

1. O 'Uthman, in this hour, in this hour, I am going to die in this hour, in this hour.

Of course you will be able to say what you like but I do not allow any poem of mine to appear for at least a month until I have crossed out this verse and re-worded that other; only then do I allow it to appear. For the poetry of a man is the thoughts that he presents to others. (3)

1. Tarīkh Baghīd, 252.
3. Al-Muwashshah, 256.
This discussion is similar to that of Abu'l-'Atāhiya with Ibn Munādhir. Abu'l-'Atāhiya asked him about the number of verses he could compose in a day. He replied that he could produce between five and six, while Abu'l-'Atāhiya claimed that he could if he wished produce a thousand verses. Ibn Munādhir retorted:

Of course you can if all you want to say is:

1. O 'Utba in this hour, I am going to die in this hour, in this hour (1).

Abu'l-'Atāhiya's desire to produce a great quantity of verses and poems, and the exaggeration of his claims in this respect forced him to compose a good deal of bad verse which no really good poet would like to have attributed to himself. Al-Samarqandī told Muslim b. al-Walīd that Abu'l-'Atāhiya and Abū Nuwās were considered the best poets and the Kufites put Abu'l-'Atāhiya above Abū Nuwās. Muslim then replied quite rightly:

How could they do so when he says:

1. O man, go slowly, stop jumping
do you think that a good poet could ever say "jump" [in such a context] (2)

Yet others who made some assessment of Abu'l-'Atāhiya were moderate in their judgement. They did not confine themselves to the best of the worst feature of his work. Abu'l-Farādj

relates that Abū Ḥātim said:

If the ease and facility of Abu'l-ʿAtāḥiya were accompanied with a more virile language he would be one of your greatest poets (1).

It has been noted earlier that Abu'l-ʿAtāḥiya's choice of words and his style were not particularly powerful. Abu'l-Parādī also relates that Abu'l-ʿAbbās al-Khuraymī said that Abu'l-ʿAtāḥiya was erratic and did not keep up an even standard in his poetry. Whereas he could say, addressing Mūsā al-Ḥādī [such a delicate thing as]:

1. Alas for the short and pleasant time in which we were living between Khawarnaq and Sadīr.

He also said [in another context]:

1. O you who are dirty, you exaggerated in your accusation (2).

Al-Sidrī relates from al-ʿAṣmaʾI that he said:

The poetry of Abu'l-ʿAtāḥiya is quite similar to the courtyard of the king's palace in which we can find precious stones, gold, soil, pottery and seeds. (3).

These more moderate points of view assess the worth of Abu'l-ʿAtāḥiya more accurately than the more polemical ones which place him higher among poets than Bashshār or Abū Nuwās. There is no doubt that Abu'l-ʿAtāḥiya's contemporaries exaggerated in giving him such a high place as a poet. Abu'l-ʿAtāḥiya was a poet by

3. Agh., iii, 145.
nature; he produced many fine poems to which we can respond and which we must admire, but he cannot be placed before Abū Nuwās for example. He can certainly be placed among the greatest poets in Arabic literature, but equally certainly he cannot be placed at their head.
APPENDIX I

The chain of narrators in Al-Aghānī

Muhammad b. Mūsā b. Ḥammād (1)  1. Muhammad b. Yahyā al-Sūlī
                      2. Muhammad b. Yahyā

Maimūn b. Ḥārūn (2)  1. Muhammad b. Yahyā
                      2. Muhammad b. Mūsā

Muhammad b. Sallām (3)


L. This name occurs frequently in Al-Aghānī. He tells us how Abu'l-'Atāhiya acquired his nickname, what he looked like, about his wala' and of his relations with 'Abdullāh b. Ma'īn and his brother Zā’ida.

2. All he tells us of Abu'l-'Atāhiya is how he acquired his nickname.

3. He gives an account of his origin.

4. From his account we can understand something of Abu'l-'Atāhiya's relationship with the 'Anazite.

5. His only account of Abu'l-'Atāhiya is that in which he tells us about his wala'.
Al-Ḍāḥiẓ (1)

1. Al-Ṣūlī, Yamūt b. al-Muzarri‘.

Khiyār al-Kāṭīb (2)


Al-Khalīl b. Asad al-Nawshāḏjānī (3)


1. He tells us about Abu’l-‘Atāḥiya’s avarice and about his discussion with Thumāma in al-Ma’mūn’s presence.

2. Khiyār gives only one account of Abu’l-‘Atāḥiya’s origin, his place of birth and his family’s profession.

3. Al-Khalīl who was Abu’l-‘Atāḥiya’s friend gives an account of his unbelief, his profession and that of his family, and he describes to us one of Abu’l-‘Atāḥiya’s visits to his house.

2. Al-Šūlī, al-'Anazī, Abū 'Ikrimā.


5. Al-Šūlī, 'Alī b. al-Šabbāh.


9. Al-Šūlī, ʾAwīn b. Muḥammad


12. Al-Ḥasan, Ḥamad b. Zuhayr

Ahmad b. Ḥarb (2)

1. Al-Šūlī, Mūsā


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1. Muhammad's contribution is one of the most important. Being the poet's son he was able to tell us many things about his father's life. He gives accounts of Abu'l-ʾAtāhiya's relation with al-Hādī and al-Rashīd; his life in al-Rashīd's prison, and how he was accused of being an unbeliever. He relates some of his poetry and points to his ignorance of al-ʿarūd. He mentions the date of his death and insists that his father did not leave a poem to be written on his grave.

2. Ahmad b. Ḥarb is the only one to give such an account of Abu'l-ʾAtāhiya's beliefs and dogmas. Ibn Ḥarb relates as well a few verses of Abu'l-ʾAtāhiya which were addressed to Sālīḥ al-Shahrazūrī, his friend.
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<th>Author</th>
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<tr>
<td>Abu’l-Shamaqmaq</td>
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<td>Ahmad b. Ibrāhīm b. Ismā‘īl</td>
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<td>Abū Di‘āma ‘Alī b. Yazīd</td>
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<td>Abū Shu‘ayb</td>
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1. He gives two accounts of Abu’l-‘Atāhiya, one about his unbelief and the other about the inconstancy of his belief.
2. He gives one account of Abu’l-‘Atāhiya’s effeminacy.
3. He quoted a conversation between Bishr and Abu’l-‘Atāhiya after the latter started cupping people.
4. He tells us about Abu’l-‘Atāhiya sitting to cup people.
5. He gives an account concerning Abu’l-‘Atāhiya’s answer when he was asked about the creation of the Qur’ān.
Muhammad b. 'Umar (al-Djurjānī) 1


Al-Riyāshī (4)


1. He was the only one to relate that Abu'l-'Atāhiya exchanged satire with Abū Qābūs al-Nasrānī, but he only mentions a poem which the latter addressed to Abu'l-'Atāhiya.

2. He gives only one account in which he points out Muṣ'ab's admiration for Abu'l-'Atāhiya's poetry.

3. He gives one account in which he mentions that he had seen Abu'l-'Atāhiya as a potter.

4. Al-Riyāshī gives an account of Abu'l-'Atāhiya's life, his origin, his trade and that of his family, and how he arrived at Baghdad. He pointed to al-Āṣima'I's admiration of Abu'l-'Atāhiya's poetry and told that the Byzantine king admired him and tried to persuade him to visit him, while Abu'l-'Atāhiya refused this.

5. He gives one account of Salm's admiration of Abu'l-'Atāhiya.

6. He gives two accounts of Abu'l-'Atāhiya: one concerned with Salm's admiration of him and the other of his unbelief.
Yahyā b. Ziyād al-Farrā' (1)  
1. Al-Yāzīdī, al-Fāḍl, 'Abdullāh b. Muhammad

Muhammad b. Shirawayh al-Armāṭī (2)  
1. Muhammad b. Yahyā al-Ṣūlī

Al-Zubayr b. Bakkār (3)  

Al-Mu'allā b. 'Uthmān (4)  
1. Al-Ṣūlī, Muhammad b. Mūsā, Ahmad b. Ḥarb

Rawḥ b. al-Faradj al-Himmāzī (5)  
1. Ibn 'Ammār, Ibn Mahrūya
2. Al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī, Ibn Mahrūya

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1. He gives one account in which he tells us about the admiration of Dja'far b. Yahyā for Abū'l-'Atāḥiyya and of al-Farrā'ī's acceptance of that.

2. He gives one account concerning Dāwūd b. Razīn's admiration of him.

3. He gives two accounts; one concerning Yazīd's intercession on Abū'l-'Atāḥiyya's behalf and the other of Salm's anger when he heard Abū'l-'Atāḥiyya mention him in his poetry.

4. He gives an account of the comparative ease with which Abū'l-'Atāḥiyya composed his poetry.

5. He gives a few accounts of Abū'l-'Atāḥiyya's poetry, how it was easy for him to compose and he relates a few verses of his and compares him with Abū Nuwās.
Abū 'Ikhrima (1)

1. Al-Hasan b. 'Ali al-'Anazi

Hārūn b. Sa'dān b. al-Ḥarīth (2)


Al-Ḥusayn b. Abī'l-Sarī (3)


Thumāma b. Ashras (4)


1. He gives many accounts of Abu'l-‘Atāḥiya's relations with al-Rashīd, the discussion of Ibn al-A'rāfī with one who did not admire Abu'l-‘Atāḥiya's poetry, the latter's relations with Ma'n's son and how al-Rashīd used to recite one verse of Abu'l-‘Atāḥiya's satire whenever he saw 'Abdullāh b. Ma'n and Abu'l-‘Atāḥiya's recitation of one of his poems in al-Amīn's time.

2. Twice he tells us about Abū Nuwās' admiration and respect for Abu'l-‘Atāḥiya.

3. He gives many accounts of him concerning his avarice, his discussion with Muslim, his relations with Yazīd b. Mansūr and how he changed his wala' after Yazīd's death and also a story concerning al-Qāsim b. al-Rashīd's quarrel with Abu'l-‘Atāḥiya.

4. He gives a few accounts of Abu'l-‘Atāḥiya's avarice and his discussion with al-Ma'mūn over some of his verses.
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<td>Ibrahim b. Abi Shaykh (2)</td>
<td>1.</td>
<td>'Isa b. al-Husayn al-Warrag, al-Zubayr b. Bakkar, Sulayman b. Abi Shaykh</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>'Isa, al-Zubayr b. Bakkar</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Al-Haram b. Abi'l 'Ala', al-Zubayr</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Waki', al-Zubayr b. Bakkar</td>
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<td>'Abd al-Rahman b. Ishaq al-'Udhri (4)</td>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Ahmad b. al-'Abbas al-'Askari, al-'Hasan b. 'Ulayl al-'Anazi</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Muhammad b. Dja'far al-Nahwi</td>
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1. Muhammad tells us many stories concerning Abu'l-'Atahiya's avarice.
2. He gives one account telling us of what Abu'l-'Atahiya said when he was asked which was the most sententious of his poems.
3. He gives a few accounts of our poet concerning his quarrel with 'Amru b. Mas'ada, his personal relationship with him and the story of Ishaq b. 'Uzayz with our poet, who criticised Ishaq's attitude towards his beloved.
4. He gives one account of Abu'l-'Atahiya in which he tells us what he did with the shop assistant who asked him to pay his bill.
5. He gives an account of his quarrel with 'Amru b. Mas'ada.
6. He gives a few accounts of Abu'l-'Atahiya concerning his quarrel with 'Amru and 'Ali b. Yaqtin, and his stay in al-Rashid's prison until he had been released.
Abū Suwayd 'Abd al-Qāwī b. Muhammad b. Abī'l-'Atāhiya (1) and Muhammad b. Sa'd

1. Muhammad b. Yāḥyā al-Ṣūlī
   Muhammad b. Mūsā al-Yāzīdī

Mahdī b. Sābiq (2)

1. Al-Ṣūlī, al-Ghallābī

Sulaymān al-Madā‘īnī (3)

1. Al-Ṣūlī, Muhammad b. Mūsā
   'Abdullāh b. Muḥammad al-Rāzī
   Ahmad b. al-Hārīth

'Awn b. Muḥammad (4)

1. Al-Ṣūlī

Abū Djabala b. Muḥammad (5)

1. Al-Ṣūlī, Djabala b. Muḥammad

Ahmad b. Abī Fanan (6)

1. Al-Ṣūlī, al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī al-Rāzī
2. Abūl-Faradīj's uncle, Ahmad b. Abī Tāhir

1. He tells us a story concerning Abu'l-'Atāhiya and Su'dā
2. He gives two accounts of him: One concerning Ibn Ma'n's threats to him when he mentioned Su'dā and the other Bashshār's admiration of him.
3. Al-Madā‘īnī gives two accounts. One concerning the story of Abu'l-'Atāhiya and Ibn Ma'n and the other his relationship with Abu'l Shamaqmaq.
4. He gives one account of the restoration of good relations with Ma'n's sons.
5. He gives an account of the restoration of good relations with Ma'n's son, and of the trouble with his eyes which forced him to consult an optician.
6. He gives two accounts of the echo of Abu'l-'Atāhiya's satire to Ibn Ma'n and of Ahmad's discussion with al-Fath b. Khāqān and how Ahmad preferred Abu'l-'Atāhiya.
Ibn Muhammad b. al-Fadl al-Hashimi (1)  

Ibrâhîm b. Khalaf (2)  
1. Ibn 'Ammar, Muhammad b. Ibrâhîm b. Khalaf

Mukhâriq (3)  
1. Ahmad b. 'Ubaydillâh b. 'Ammâr, Muhammad b. Dâwûd b. al-Dîrârî, 'Alî b. Muhammad
2. 'Amrû, 'Alî b. Muhammad al-Hîshâmî, Ibn Hamdûn
5. Dîhâsa, Maymûn b. Hârûn

Abû 'Umar al-Qurâshî (4)  
1. Yahyâ b. 'Alî, Ibn Mahruya

1. He gives an account in which he quotes a speech which took place between Abu'l-'Atâ’îya and Ibn Muḥammad’s father.
2. He tells us how Abu'l-'Atâ’îya recited to al-Mahdî before Bashshâr and how Bashshâr in the end admired him.
3. Mukhâriq, as a friend of Abu'l-'Atâ’îya gives a few accounts of him concerning his imprisonment in al-Râshîd’s time, his reciting to him verses which show that all people are mean, the story of his asceticism and the date of his death.
4. He gives only one account about his unbelief.
Abū Dulaf Muhammad b. Ḥashim al-Khuza‘ī (1)  

'Abdullāh b. al-Dāhkhāk (2)  
1. Al-Ṣūlī, al-Ghallābī  

Muhammad b. al-Nasr (3)  
1. Al-Ṣūlī, Muḥammad b. 'Awn  

Hārūn b. Sa‘dān (4)  
1. Abu’l-Farādī’s uncle, 'Abdullāh b. Abī Sa‘d  

Al-Fadl b. al-'Abbās (5)  

Al-Sidrī (6)  

‘Abdullāh b. al-Ḥasan (7)  

1. He tells us of al-Djāhiṣ’s admiration of his urdjuza  
2. He gives two accounts concerning his story with ‘Umar b. al-'Alā’ and the general admiration of his poetry.  
3. He tells us of al-‘Attābī’s admiration of Abu’l-‘Ātāhiya’s poetry.  
4. He tells how Abu’l-‘Ātāhiya said that most people unconsciously use poetry in their speech.  
5. He gives one account concerning al-Fadl b. al-Rabī’’s intercession with al-Rashīd on Abu’l-‘Ātāhiya’s behalf.  
6. He gives one account which shows al-Āṣma’T’s judgement on Abu’l-‘Ātāhiya  
7. He tells us of the ease with which Abu’l-‘Ātāhiya composed his poetry and how he quarrelled with Salm.

)


1. He tells us how Muslim's disrespect later turned to admiration.
2. He relates al-Rasīd's admiration of his poetry and how he used to compose on special occasions for him.
3. He mentions Abu'l-'Atāhiya's elegy to 'Alī b. Thābit.
4. He tells how they asked Abu'l-'Atāhiya to recite some of his poetry.
5. He gives a few accounts concerning Ibn al-Ārābī's criticisms of Abu'l-'Atāhiya, the latter's admiration for two of his verses, and his poem congratulating al-Hādī on the birth of a new baby.
6. He tells us of Abu'l-'Atāhiya's competition with some young people to complete half a verse.
1. Abu'l-'Faradji's uncle, 'Abdullāh b. 'Abī Sa'd, Muhammad b. 'Abdillāh

2. Ahmad b. al-'Abbās al-'Askari, al-'Anazī, Muhammad b. 'Abdillāh

Some of the secretaries of al-Hasan b. Sahl (2)

1. 'All b. Sulaymān al-Akhfash, Muḥammad b. Yazīd

Al-Mu'allā b. Ayyūb (3)

1. Muḥammad b. 'Imrān al-Sayrafi, al-Hasan b. 'Ulayl al-'Anazī, Yahyaw b. 'Abdillāh al-Qurashi

Al-Hasan b. 'Ā'idh (4)

1. Ahmad b. al-'Abbās al-'Askari, al-Hasan b. 'Ulayl al-'Anazī, Ibn Sinan al-'Idžī

'Urwa b. Yūsuf al-Thagafi (5)


1. He gives two accounts concerning Abū Ḥabash's anger when al-Rashīd imprisoned Abu'l-'Atāhiya to force him to compose, and of Abu'l-'Atāhiya's journey with al-Mahdī on a hunting expedition.

2. He tells us of Abu'l-'Atāhiya reminding al-Ma'mūn to help him.

3. He tells us a story concerning Abu'l-'Atāhiya reciting one of his poems in the presence of al-Ma'mūn.

4. Only once does he give an account showing Abu'l-'Atāhiya's relations with al-Ma'mūn.

5. He gives an account of Abu'l-'Atāhiya's relations with al-Hādī and how the latter forgave Abu'l-'Atāhiya after he had been angry with him.
1. The only thing he tells us of Abu'l-'Atāhiya is the admiration of some of his verses.

2. He tells of Abu'l-'Atāhiya's intercession with al-Mahdī on behalf of Abū 'Ubaydillāh.

3. He tells us of Ibn Munādhir's admiration of Abu'l-'Atāhiya.

4. He gives accounts of Abu'l-'Atāhiya's relations with al-Hādī after they had been strained, of his daughter whom Mansūr wanted to marry and of a monk who preached Abu'l-'Atāhiya's poetry.

5. The only thing he tells us is about Abu'l-'Atāhiya reciting ascetic poems in al-Ma'mūn's time.

6. He gives an account of Abu'l-'Atāhiya's position in al-Ma'mūn's house which was equal to that of al-Fadl b. al-Rabī'.
1. He tells us how Abu'l-'Atāhiya was asked which were his best verses and of those he recited in answer.

2. He gives us some details of Abu'l-'Atāhiya in al-Rashīd's prison.

3. He tells of al-Faḍl's intercession with al-Rashīd to acquire a present of money for Abu'l-'Atāhiya.

4. He speaks of Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī's admiration of Abu'l-'Atāhiya.

5. He relates Abu'l-'Atāhiya's advice to one who was attempting to compose ascetic poetry.

6. He speaks of al-Bashshār's admiration of Abu'l-'Atāhiya.

7. He relates in detail Abu'l-'Atāhiya's visit to al-Mahdī to console him on the death of his daughter.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Father</th>
<th>Father 1</th>
<th>Father 2</th>
<th>Father 3</th>
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<td>Shabib b. Mansur (2)</td>
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<td>Ahmad b. Khalaf al-Shimri (5)</td>
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<td>Musa b. 'Abd al-Malik (6)</td>
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<td>Abū Dja'far al-Mabādī (7)</td>
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1. He tells how Abu'l-'Atahiya and Ibrāhīm al-Mawsili were imprisoned by al-Rashīd for refusing to compose and sing after al-Hādī's death.

2. He tells us of his meeting with Abu'l-'Atahiya at al-Rashīd's door.

3. He tells how al-Rashīd asked Abu'l-'Atahiya to compose verses in order to win back the affection of a slave, and how 'Abdullāh was fond of singing Abu'l-'Atahiya's poems.

(footnotes cont. on next page)
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(foot note cont. from previous page)

4. He tells us that Abu'l-'Atāhiya accused his son of being ungentle.

5. He tells of the shoes that Abu'l-'Atāhiya presented to al-Fadl who in turn presented them to al-Āmīn.

3. He brings us evidence in support of his theory that Abu'l-'Atāhiya was uneducated.

4. He tells us of the letter Abu'l-'Atāhiya sent to a friend who was in prison.
Ahmad b. 'Ubayd b. Nāṣir (1)  

1. Al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī, Ibn Mahrūya

Ismā'īl b. Muhammad b. Abī Muhammad (2)

1. Al-Yazīdī from his uncle

Abū Dulaf al-Qāsim b. Ḥsā al-'Idjī (3)

1. Al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī, Ḥudhayfa b. Muhammad al-Tā'ī

'Amru b. Addja' (4)


Al-Zuhayr b. Mu'rūf al-'Amyī (5)

1. Ahmad b. al-'Abbūs b. 'Ulayl al-'Anazi, Abū ʿAnas Kathārī b. Muḥammad al-Hizāmī

Musāwir al-Sabbāq (6)

1. Ahmad b. 'Ubaydillāh b. 'Ammār 'Alī b. Sulaymān al-Nawfalī


1. He tells how Abu'l-'Atāhiya hated pride and proud people

2. He tells of his admiration of Abu'l-'Atāhiya and how he told him of it.

3. He tells us about Abu'l-'Atāhiya's discussion with a bedouin

4. He tells us how he tried to stop Ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz admiring Abu'l-'Atāhiya

5. He tells of Abu'l-'Atāhiya's relations with Sāliḥ al-Miskīn

6. He gives an account of his meeting with Abu'l-'Atāhiya who refused to recite to him.
Maymūn b. Ḥārūn (1) } 1. Abu'l-Faraḍī's uncle al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad and ʿAnājah

Sulaymān b. Munādhīr (2) } 1. Ahmad b. ʿUbaydillāh b. ʿAmmār ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Nawfālī, Sulaymān b. ʿAbūd

'Abdullāh b. al-Ḥasan b. Sahl al-Ḳāṭib (3) } 1. From the book of Ḥārūn b. ʿAll b. Yaḥya, Zakariyāḥ al-Ḥusayn


Ibrāhīm b. ʿAbdullāh (6) } 1. Abu'l-Faraḍī's uncle al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad, Maymūn b. Ḥārūn, Ibrāhīm b. Rabāh

1. He tells what happened between Abu'l-'Atāḥiya and Yaḥya b. Khāqān


3. He tells how he asked Abu'l-'Atāḥiya to recite some poetry, how Ibn al-Rabi' became unfriendly with Abu'l-'Atāḥiya after he recited his verses about the Barmacides, how Ibn Sahl helped him because of that and later tells us a story about Abu'l-'Atāḥiya and Mudjāshi'.

4. He relates Abu'l-'Atāḥiya's discussion with Ibn Munādhīr about their poetry.

5. He speaks of a meeting between ʿUbaydillāh b. ʿIshāq, Abu'l-'Atāḥiya and Abu'l-Faḍl al-Ḥāshimī and their poetical discussion.

6. He gives an account of Abu'l-'Atāḥiya's meeting with Khāṣ in al-Rashīd's prison.
They all give accounts of Abu'l-'Atāhiya's meeting with Khass in al-Rashīd's prison.

2. He gives a judgement on Abu'l-'Atāhiya's poetry.

3. He tells a story about Abu'l-'Atāhiya and Salm when the former recited some poems to him in his house.

4. He tells us a story concerning Abu'l-'Atāhiya and Humayd al-Tūsī in which Abu'l-'Atāhiya attacked pride.

5. He tells a story concerning Abu'l-'Atāhiya's relations with Sālih al-Shahrazūrī.

6. He tells of al-Rashīd's admiration of Abu'l-'Atāhiya's poetry and how he liked it to be used for singing and education.
'Abdullāh b. Abī Sa'd (1)


Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Malik al-Zayyāt (2)

1. Ḥāshim b. Muḥammad al-Khuzā'ī, 'Abdullāh b. Muḥammad al-Umawī, al-'Utbī

Yahyā b. Sa'id al-Ansārī (3)

1. Al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī, Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim b. Mahruya, Muḥammad b. Sa'id al-Mahdī

Ḥabīb b. 'Abd al-Rahmān from some of his friends (4)

1. From the book of Hārūn b. 'Alī b. Mahdī

Abu'l-'Atāhiya (5)

2. Al-Sūlī, Muḥammad b. Mūsā, Muḥammad b. Ṣāliḥ al-'Adawī

Dia'far b. Djamīl (6)

1. Muḥammad b. 'Imrān al-Ṣayraffī, al-‘Anasī, al-Fādil b. Muḥammad al-Zārī

1. He gives an account of Abū Tammām's admiration of five verses of Abu'l-'Atāhiya's poetry.

2. He speaks of al-Wāthiq using Abu'l-'Atāhiya's poetry to explain an idea.

3. He tells of one occasion when Abu'l-'Atāhiya was the best consoler of the bereaved.

4. He gives an account of Abu'l-'Atāhiya's wordy exchange with Khuzayma

5. He tells of his panegyric to Yazīd b. Mazyad and how he composed sad poems for the sailors to sing to al-Rashīd

6. He speaks of al-'Attābī's admiration of Abu'l-'Atāhiya
'Alī b. 'Abdillāh al-Kindī (1) 1. Muhammad b. 'Imrān, al-'Anazi
Muhammad b. Ishāq

Baqiyyatullāh b. Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī (2) 1. Djahza

Al-Ḥasan b. Dījābir (3) 1. Al-Sūlī

Ahmad b. Mu'awīya al-Ṣurāshī (4) 1. Muhammad b. 'Imrān al-Ṣayrāfī
al-'Anazi

Hammad b. Ishāq's father (5) 1. Djahza, Hammad b. Ishāq

Muhammad b. Sālīh al-Nattāh (5) 1. Abu'l-Ḥasan al-Asadī
2. Ibn 'Ammār, Abu'l-Abbās, Ibn Abī Sa'd

Abū Muhammad al-Mu'addillī (6) 1. Muhammad b. 'Imrān al-Ṣayrāfī
al-Ḥasan b. 'Ulayl, Ahmad b. Hamza al-Dabūlī

Ismā’īl b. 'Abī Ḥutayba (7) 1. Al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī b. Mahruṣa, Ahmad b. Yusuf, Ahmad b. al-Kalīl

1. He gives an account of how Abu'l-'Atāḥiya preached to Abū Nuwās who just laughed.
2. He tells of Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī's satire on Abu'l-'Atāḥiya
3. He tells of Abu'l-'Atāḥiya's relations with Mīnādji while he was imprisoned under the latter's care.
4. He gives an account of Abu'l-'Atāḥiya's congratulations to al-Ḫāshīd after he gave his succession to his three sons.
5. He tells us about Abu'l-'Atāḥiya's desire to hear Mukhāriq singing just before he died.
6. He tells how Abu'l-'Atāḥiya asked his daughter Rūşayya to weep over him just before he died.
7. He mentions the date of his death.
Muhammad b. Sa'd (1)

Ishāq b. 'Abdillāh b. Shu'ayb (2)

Ahmad b. 'Abī Khaythama (3)

'Abd al-Rahmān b. al-Fadl (4)

1. He mentions the date of his death.
2. He tells about the verses that Abu'l-'Atāhiya ordered to be written on his grave.
3. He speaks of Muhammad's elegy to his father.
4. He tells us that he actually read the verses on Abu'l-'Atāhiya's grave which are said to have been composed by the latter for this purpose.
The Chain of Narrators in Kitāb Baghdād

Abū'l-Ḥasan b. 'Abd al-Khāliq  

Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm  

Muhammad b. al-Ḥasan b. Ḥafṣ al-Makhramī  

Mūsā b. 'Ubaydillāh al-Tamīmī
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<td>Al-Ma'rūs al-Kūfī</td>
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<td>Abu'l-Bilād</td>
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<td>Ibn Djabala al-Nabawi</td>
<td>Muhammad b. Rashīd al-Kātib</td>
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## The Chain of Narrators in Al-Muwashshah

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Al-Fadl al-Yazidi


Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Samarqandi

Ahmad b. 'Ammar


Muhammad b. Yahya.
The Chain of Narrators in Tarikh Baghdād

Hārūn b. Sa'dān


Muhammad b. Yazīd al-Nahwī

1. 'Alī b. Ayyūb al-Qimmi, Muḥammad b. 'Imrān al-Marzubānī, Ibrāhīm b. Muhammad b. 'Arafa

AlḤusayn b. 'Abd al-Rahmān


Abū'l-'Ibar


Abū Shu'ayb Ahmad b. Yazīd


'Atāhiya b. Abī 'Atāhiya

Ashdja' al-Sulami


al-'Utbi


Abu Tamman

### APPENDIX II

Table of Differences between the Printed Text and the Manuscript

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Verses Omitted from the Diwan

أ. ألا ترى لو دم فلاد لاتنة
(8.35)
أ. أي أية من أمهات الله من مهتم
(8.35)
في اليوم والمساء والليل

قد علمت أن البشر قد

في هذه الأيام، نعلم أن

من هذه السؤال الإضافي.

وهكذا الاقتران، لا

ومع ذلك، أنا لا أنصح

وان تقضي في الحلال، و

(8.3)

(8.4)

(8.5)

(8.6)
السيرة العطرية التي تغطي
(8.62)
بالنقد من ماء نير يقع
(8.64)
ديانة وآباء دينهم
(8.65)
لم أن تعود لبقرة قبل الماء
(8.66)
لم يعد أعلم إلا أن يكون زكريا
(8.44)
بمعلومة تزعمه الغزاة
(8.80)
أدرت خيالًا لإزالة
منع الله! لم أدر
- تعالى واللهم صل على
- قد أدرت غيبًا لله
1. مريم، والثوبي بنيت له
(95 آية)
2. باحث الله وسأنت
(95 آية)
3. يبكى الله نزعة
(95 آية)
4. يغمي الله نزعة
(95 آية)
5. جمع الباحتات
(95 آية)
6. صلى الله عليه وسلم
(98 آية)
7. دعي الله واستغفر له
(98 آية)
لا يوجد نص يمكن قراءته بشكل طبيعي من الصورة المقدمة.
كتبت نقبة جبل حمص بإرادة اليوم أرسلت بعثة (108 م) وردت في بعثة في ثلاث وردت في الشام فيها (112 م) وانفوج في كال تسعة ونحو هنالك هنالك.
1. **Abu'l-'Atāhiya:**
   
   Al-Anwār Al-Zāhiya Fī Diwān Abī'l-'Atāhiya ed. by Father Shaykhu (Beirut, 1914)

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