

An Unknown Aspect in the Life of Al-Jahiz

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This study aims at shedding some light on another aspect in the broad and exciting life of al-Jahiz¹ (159 h.-255 h.). This aspect is related to the moral side of al-Jahiz' life and the doubts that have been raised about it. It investigates his attitude about the widespread phenomenon of Uranism/homosexuality),² which is sometimes called "inversion" when it occurs among the two sexes. *Inversion* is a kind of sexual deviation that is characterized by the individual's attraction to the same sex, for which modern psychologists use the term "homosexuality" among males and "lesbianism" among females. However, this study focuses on homosexuality among men in Islamic society in general and al-Jahiz and his generation in particular.

To achieve this goal, I had to investigate the stories and information in classical sources, which, despite their rarity, neither confirm nor deny categorically that al-Jahiz practiced 'homosexuality'. However, if these bits and pieces of information in the classical sources are collected, they can form a certain image that can give a clearer idea about this characteristic.

Most researches avoid dealing with this moral trait of al-Jahiz' character, preferring not to indulge in it, and rather keeping it secret for unknown or justified reasons. Probably, this attitude is apparently a result of oversensitivity towards the subject itself, or for fear to harm al-Jahiz' status or the value of his literary position, as some researchers believe, though, in my view, neither the moral aspect nor even the religious one³ are likely to raise or lower, or increase or decrease the value of an author or his writing status in any way. These criteria should not be part of the criteria and standards of judging writers and their writings. In fact, they do not affect the

advantages or disadvantages of an author or his works at all. In view of this, one can argue that the researchers' precautions stem from other sources and probably have certain justifications. Dealing with this aspect in al-Jahiz' life does not mean in any way to dispraise or lower the value of his works, whether he practiced Uranism or not. There is a unanimous attitude among both Arab and non-Arab scholars that al-Jahiz is the 'Master' of Arabic rhetoric due to his great contribution to Arabic literature and both Arab and international thought. Al-Jahiz' works are more than three hundred and sixty⁴ in various fields of human knowledge and sciences. Some of the famous sayings about his works are: "al-Jahiz works teach the mind first, and literature next"⁵. Another one says in exaggeration: "I will be satisfied in Heaven with al-Jahiz' books more than with its paradise!"⁶ The most well-known books that al-Jahiz wrote are *al-Bayan wa al-Tabyin*, *al-Hayawan*, *al-Bukhala'*, *al-Rasa'el*.

Though the study seeks to shed more light on one specific aspect out of various angles in the life of al-Jahiz, it also equally seeks to reconsider the attitudes towards the Arab legacy, especially history, which bestows on him great veneration and dignity, and qualities that we have inherited as for granted, holy, or semi-holy postulations that cannot be touched or questioned such as al-Jahiz' extraordinary character. The study aspires to achieve a balanced, objective and open-minded reading in view of the developments of the modern methodological and systematic knowledge, combined with reference to the necessity of understanding the social environment of that period as it was, and the necessity to judge that period by the standards that fit it. However, this approach might seem unacceptable to some readers.

The development of the Abbasid Empire in its Golden Age (132 - 232 h.) and its flourishing in various scientific, financial, cultural and martial fields helped the development of book-writing, publishing and wide readership.

Iraq and its main cities of Baghdad, Basra, Kufa and Samarra' were the most famous cities of the Abbasid Empire. They had a sophisticated society that enjoyed a luxurious materialistic life and extravagance⁷. In addition, they were meeting places of cultures and races, including the Arabs, Persians, Greek and Turkish. What concerns us here is the nature of the financial life and its effect on the people then. It was natural that the liberal surrounding environment and its products at that time would lead to scandalous sorts of flirtation, debauchery, and homosexuality. "The issue of sexual deviation has become in its public and open image an accompaniment to the cultural development and materialistic silence, which led to its stability rather than the contempt of those who practice it"⁸.

This reality reminds us of a similar reality in ancient history: "It is a mistake to believe that the periods of homosexuality in ancient times was only periods of corruption; on the contrary, they were the brightest periods in that history, like the period of Pericles the Greek, Augustus, the Roman emperor, the period of Shakespeare in Britain, the period of the Renaissance in Britain, Italy and France (under the rule for Luis 13th), and the period of Hafiz in Persia, which are periods during which homosexuality was about to become official"⁹. It might be a strange coincidence that some Caliphs were among those who practiced homosexuality most. Some of them include: al-Amin, and previously, his father Haroun al-Rashid, who was permissive in this issue¹⁰. If this was the condition for the elite people, what about the others? As the saying goes: people adopt the religion of their kings !

It is no wonder then that the individual in a luxuriant and extravagant society like that of the Abbasid would be a captive to his own pleasures and desires, and would seek more sexual pleasure, which would reach the point of deviation. The pursuits and practices of sexual intercourse in various ways

in that period were so exaggerated and different from the ordinary and normal .

We can strongly argue that the Arab Islamic culture inherited this custom from previous civilizations, but it became a phenomenon during the Abbasid Empire. Some people attribute the widespread of the phenomenon of homosexuality, and the leakage of male-to-male adultery into the Arab society, and its increase in the second century of Hegira and during the Abbasid Caliphate, which was of the Persian nature, to the Persians themselves.¹¹ The following quotation about the definition of "the best kind of life" is attributed to Abu Muslim al-Khorasani, who said: "delicious food, yellow wine, and a youth with deep-white-black eyes." When asked why he preferred a young-man to an odalisque, he said: "Because on your way, he is a companion; when you are drinking, he is a drinking companion; and when you are alone, he is a wife"¹². Homosexuality phenomenon might also be attributed to ancient civilizations, such as the Greek civilization, which influenced the Abbasid civilization, and specifically al-Jahiz. About this we read the following: "We should take into consideration that sexual inversion was a common phenomenon – in fact we can say that it was a system that was serving certain functions – among ancient societies at the apex of their civilizations"¹³. Moreover, "sexual inversion was connected to the attempt of "philosophizing the body" by the ancient Greeks in an attempt to "canonize" or "legislate" homosexuality as an essential need to reach broader horizons of human pleasure"¹⁴. These philosophers mostly have high qualifications and "are characterized in reality and specifically by an intellectual growth and moral education of high degree"¹⁵. Andre Gide, for instance, praises the Greek lifestyle through the character "Corydon" who says: "She did not excel in sculpture and plastic art only, but in all fields of life, whose best representatives are adherents of homosexuality such as Sophocles, Pindar, Aristophanes, Socrates, Plato"¹⁶. Will Durant mentions the issue by stating:

"Homosexuality nearly became one of the requirements of recreating the Greek civilization, and the Humanists write about it with a kind of scientific pride, such as Aristotle, Politan, Snodo" ¹⁷. Another scholar elaborates: "Most of them believe that they belong to a high elite of people that are characterized by sensitivity and creative artistic ability, and the strange actual thing is that most of these deviant men are highly intelligent!!, and highly creative!, like Michael Angelo..., Plato..., Leonardo Da Vinci...! (dots are given as in the original source)" ¹⁸. Like them are Tsaikovsky, and Schubert... and Andre Gide and others"¹⁹.

Similarly, the Caliphs gave full freedom to liberties and emotions, with no censor, no religion, or rule. Thus, many poets and writers were indulged in luxury, amusements, and libertinage!

Al-Jahiz grew up in this kind of environment (in the 3rd century of Hegira). Undoubtedly, society has its influence on the individual's response to its manners and behavior, which confirms the strong relation between society and the individual. Al-Jahiz expresses his view about this issue saying: "people are more similar to their times than to their parents!"²⁰ Thus, we cannot understand the individual unless we understand his age. Besides, al-Jahiz was taught by the Grammarians Abu al-Hassan al-Akhfash, who was known as an ironic person who believed in Fate and Predestination. Al-Jahiz was contemporary with about ten Abbasid caliphs. If we check his birthday date, (159 H.), we conclude that it was in the days of al-Mahdi, the third of Abbasid caliph. His date of death is (255 H.) during the caliphate of al-Muhtadi. It appears that his relation was closest to four caliphs: al-Ma'moun, al-Mu'tassem, al-Wathiq, and al-Mutawakkil.

Homosexuality²¹ spread in the Abbasid period like a disease till it became a worrying phenomenon, when libertine poets talked about it openly, like:

Bashar bin Burd, Abu Nuwas, Muti' bin Iyas, Yahya bin Ziyad, Hammad Ajrad, Salm al-Khasir, Waliba bin al-Habbab, Iban al-Lahiqi, and others. Profligacy as homosexuality was not exclusive to poets, but included other groups such as scientists, authors and prose writers like the well-known grammarians Abu Obaydah from Basra, and al-Kisa'i²². We can find an echo for this phenomenon in the words, "sex is a guiding force in the writer's life and production"²³. The same situation applies to some judges like Yihya bin Aktham, judge of Basra, who was known of his exaggeration of practice of homosexuality till the people got annoyed of him and sued him to the Caliph Ma'moun. "The people who knew the news said that judge Yihya bin Aktham was known of his love to young males, and the people of Basra complained about him to the Caliph Ma'moun before his contact with him and said that he corrupted their children and his lewdness appeared so openly that Ma'moun found it outrageous and isolated him from them"²⁴.

Some poems were written in this field describing the predominant situation at that time²⁵:

Our emir is bribed; our ruler practices
 homosexuality, evil spreads among the people
 A judge forces the law on fornicators
 but does not force it on homosexuals

Another example is:

When will the world and its people become righteous if the judge of Moslems practices homosexuality?

Another judge who practiced homosexuality was al-Jurjani, the writer of the book *al-Wasatta bayna al-Mutanabbi wa Khusoomihi* (Mediation between al-Mutanabbi and his Rivals). Al-Jurjani was known of his love to young males and his practice of that habit. One scholar wrote about this

phenomenon saying: "Judges, jurists and tellers of traditions share their age the approval of this habit"²⁶. For example, al-Jurjani was a friend of the Minister and author al-Sahib bin Abbad and close to him. The Minister was also attracted by one of his many male young men through his coquetry and lisping. He says about him:

I asked a gazelle: What's your name?

He replied with coquetry "Abath" (Abbas)

Due to his lisp, I started lisping and said:

Where is the cup and the "glath" (glass)²⁷

As a result of the spread of the phenomenon of homosexuality and the over-attraction of men to young males in different classes of Abbasid society made the odalisques imitate the young males in their clothing and appearance, and they were given the title of "gholamiyyat", i.e. imitation of young males rather than the opposite. Al-Jahiz says in this respect that "the advantage of the male young man over the odalisque is that if she is described as "beautiful," people will say: she is like a young male, and a male-maid!"²⁸.

The following quotation from al-Basheer al-Majdoob (1992) describes the phenomenon of homosexuality in an accurate way and reflects the social reality at that time: "Among the symptoms of the tyranny of sex is the large spread of sexual deviation so that homosexuality (nearly) became a natural phenomenon that is not strange, and that is not limited to a certain category of people. It included the general public and special elite of the Caliphs, emirs and the ministers, the judges ...and the vulgar masses participate in it. It is a phenomenon that is no more considered horrible or denied; its practitioners started declaring it, and refer to it in their poems, showing pride in it, and see in it a sign of excellence in taste, and evidence to insight in the

art of life, and the high level of culture"²⁹. What is clear is that such comments confirm with no doubt that that phenomenon of homosexuality was not only a proliferate one but also a sign of a highly sophisticated taste and wise insight in life.

There is another writer who includes in his version a story by a homosexual doctor, which shows that homosexuality, even if it is considered a kind of deviation, is like poetry - another kind of creativity!!. He mentions the name of al-Jahiz and others as one group in the same context. He says that "poetry and creativity are deviations, like androgynity/ bisexuality and homosexuality. Both of us penetrate a partition, no matter what its sort is, and both of us bring results and punishment to oneself. Bashar bin Burd, for instance, was a homosexual and a poet. But no one punished him. So where is our Bashar, O Salimah, Even Abu Nowas is castrated and is taught in our schools under the scissors of censorship, and he has become a sign of bad beer that is not drunk, except in the darkness of the inns of poverty, despair and depression. Where is al-Jahiz? Where is the judge? Where is our insight? Where is Hamdan bin Qurmut? They died and our culture faded and our civilization was burnt under the dust of the sun and the fire of candles" ³⁰ .

Some modern psychologists support this view, including Sigmund Freud, who decides that "it is impossible to consider homosexuality as a sign of degeneration of society"! ³¹ .

Regarding al-Jahiz, some scholars deny this suspicion of homosexuality. They consider him above it, but without dealing with it extensively or in a detailed way, or profound analysis of his thoughts on this topic. They seem to be satisfied with only one part of his arguments and they only refer to them indirectly³² . I mean that they refer only to those parts in some of his treatises that condemn homosexuality such as *Mufakharat al-Jawari wa al-*

Ghilman/ Bragging of the Odalisques and the Catamites, The Teachers, Preference of the Abdomen to the Back. However, the scattered facts suggest the opposite to this. Obviously, al-Jahiz exposed the phenomenon of homosexuality just as a reaction and no more. So he condemns it, especially after it became so widespread in society and the people became annoyed of it. In addition, al-Jahiz used to work in the field of education and teaching young children. It appears that he was anxious about his reputation! It is worthwhile mentioning the viewpoint of the French researcher Charles Blat, who deals with this ambiguity only casually, and it is sufficient for him to say the following: "We should mention something about homosexuality that spread among the Arabs so widely that it became the main favorite topic among the libertine poets such as Abu Nuwas and others" ³³. Blat does not give a detailed description of the topic in his study about al-Jahiz. Instead, he jumps and talks more about "miserliness" and "lying"!!

Researcher Ibrahim Jeries says that "the attitudes of al-Jahiz towards homosexuality – as it appears in his two treatises of *Bragging of Odalisques and Catamites*, and *Preference of the Abdomen to the Back* is a fully negative one... and here he reaffirms his despise of this habit in his book *The Teachers*³⁴... Jeries devotes to this topic a few lines in which he refers to its ugliness in itself, and the negative attitude of Islam towards it"! The least that one can say about this judgment that its aim is to defend al-Jahiz. However, this attitude lacks evidence and investigation, though the researcher depends on al-Jahiz himself! No one denies the ugliness of this habit in itself! Besides, the researcher accepts the testimony of the accused person, who is under suspicion. This judgment cannot be fully accepted.

Wadee'ah Taha concludes that "the treatise of *Mufakharat al-Jawari wa al-Ghilman* appears in its argument as the debaters do not give any interest to any social or moral social convention"³⁵. It seems that each of them intends

to promote his commodity and describes how he lives and expresses what he feels internally and externally. Thus, each side appears to be genuine and true in what he says, or feels or thinks, without equivocation. In other words, this reality was not exceptional. On the contrary, it was quite common in the Abbasid society. If al-Jahiz condemns homosexuality in what he writes or says, does it mean that he really tells the truth? These words can be taken as true or untrue. Maybe his words are a way to self-defend, or push away the accusation of homosexuality for fear of being accused of it and the blame or criticism that can be directed at him from society. Here, does the reader have the right to think that probably al-Jahiz condemned homosexuality and hated it, though he himself was practicing it? Aren't there any people in society who make mistakes and sins and practice vices, and though they admit and declare openly what they do but at the same time they condemn what they do privately and publicly?

We should not forget that al-Jahiz does not give care to some duties of Islam. One witness says that "I attended a meal which al-Jahiz attended, and we attended the noon prayer. We prayed but al-Jahiz did not, and I attended the afternoon prayer, and we prayed but al-Jahiz did not. When we were about to leave, al-Jahiz said to the host: "I did not pray for a certain doctrine for a cause which I will let you know. He said to him: I do not think that you have a certain doctrine in praying; your only doctrine is leaving it!"³⁶

Ibn Qutaybah comments on this: "You find that he intends frivolity in his books for the fools, and by this he seeks to attract the young people and the wine drinkers... and he – despite this - is one of the greatest liars of the nation and the lowest in his speech, and greatest supporter of evil!"³⁷ So how can the reader trust his word if he has such qualities? How can he believe his condemnation of homosexuality, even if his words appear on the surface to refuse it and correspond with the spirit of Islam and its teachings?

It is known that Islam fights the idea of homosexuality strongly, as the Koran mentions it in the verse (aya):

(أتأتون الذكران من العالمين وتذرون ما خلق لكم ربكم من أزواجكم بل أنتم قوم عادون) ³⁸ .

The Islamic Sunna also condemns homosexuality as we see in the Prophet's Hadith (من وجدتموه يعمل عمل قوم لوط، فاقتلوا الفاعل والمفعول به!)³⁹ (If you find someone practicing the act of Lot's people (i.e. homosexuality), kill the doer and the receiver.)³⁹ .

One of the strange attitudes of some scholars is their acceptance of his witness when al-Jahiz attacked homosexuality but they ignored it when he praised it. This is an unacceptable judgment and one is allowed to ask: How can this judgment be accepted?

It is clear that these scholars were not fair or objective in quoting half of his witness (in which he condemns homosexuality) and ignoring the other half (in which he praises it). Their conclusion was one-sided, which says that al-Jahiz disapproves of homosexuality and hates it! In fact, his words include an argument for him and against him as well!

It is clear also that their conclusion is not sure. If they were fair, they would introduce al-Jahiz' attitude in full, rather than partial. When he condemns homosexuality and shows it as ugly, he soon praises it and introduces it in a positive way! Once he praises and the other he dispraises! On the one hand, he praises the odalisques and prefers the abdomen to the back, while on the other, he praises the catamites and prefers the back to the abdomen! So, how can the reader rush into making conclusions like these? Al-Jahiz says, through the words of the catamite owner⁴⁰: "If Kuthayyir and Jameel and Orwah, and anyone you name of their peers looks at some of the servants of our age who have been purchased by lots of money for their beautiful body,

pure color, elegant is past attitude? Al-Jahiz would not find any discomfiture especially that his personality structure was contradictory. He used to talk about a certain topic and soon changed his attitude and introduced a contrasted one. He rarely showed his real attitude that is characterized by repetition leaving the reader in a puzzle.

It is known also that al-Jahiz enjoyed an exceptional ability in exposing a certain idea and its opposite, and defending both of them at the same time, without taking sides of one against the other. He books on praising and dispraising a certain item, or building it up and denying it are clear and frank. Contradiction in al-Jahiz' thought and expression exists in his writing.

One thinks that there is something in the following facts and events which make the researcher tend to accept cautiously the viewpoint that al-Jahiz was actually indulged in homosexuality. Such facts include:

1. al-Jahiz' Deviation

al-Mas'oudi⁴¹ says about al-Jahiz that "no one of the relaters and the writers is known to have more books than him... al-Jahiz' books – despite his well-known deviation – polish the rust of minds and reveal the clear evidence, because he arranged them in the best arrangement, and inlaid them in the best way..."

Abd asl-Salam Haroun⁴² commented in the margin on that deviation saying briefly that "he meant his (al-Jahiz') "isolation / I'tizaaal" and hostility to the Shiites, as al-Mas'oudi was a Shiite" without elaborating or giving any evidence or helpful justification. The state of things and fact denies this opinion and its logical basis.

If we trace the writings of al-Masoudi about a non-isolation / Mu'tazilah character, we would not find another example in which he dispraises someone who adopted the doctrine of Mu'tazilah like: Caliph Ma'moun.

Al-Masoudi, who praises al-Jahiz more than he dispraises him says in his description of al-Ma'moun that "He expressed openly his belief in monotheism and reward and threat/ punishment, and sat with the theologians and drew to himself many [brilliant] polemist and debaters, and he was one of the most forgiving, most tolerant, most able, most generous in giving money and gifts!"⁴³ .

There is another example that supports our argument and I mean Ahmad bin Du'ad, who is considered one of the most famous leaders of Mu'tazila, whom al-Ma'moun appointed to be his counselor. Al-Mu'tassem, who adopted the doctrine of al-Mu'tazila, kept Abu Du'ad in his position and brought him closer and made him one of his government officials. This implies that al-Mas'udi probably wanted to insinuate that al-Jahiz was a deviant, who was involved in homosexuality.

M. Newcomb, one of the American researchers of sexual behavior, mentions in one of his studies about homosexuality that some of the fixed characteristics that he concludes regarding homosexuals are:

- "1. Attraction to sexual encounters and activities
2. Self-confidence and self-respect
3. Specific attitudes regarding female sexual role
4. Mixture with deviant sectors"⁴⁴ .

No one can deny that these characteristics are available in al-Jahiz and apply to him strongly. Besides, al-Jahiz was very interested in what is known by the name "Literature of the Bottom", i.e. literature of low groups in society, where literature of sex spreads and "many of the prominent famous people of heritage were very interested in the events around them and in what they inherited from the "literature of the bottom" in that period, and among them was al-Jahiz. I have no doubt

that literature of the bottom in its majority belongs to the bottom social level."⁴⁵ .

2. al-Ma'moun's Dismissal of al-Jahiz

It is not far from the truth to argue that Caliph al-Ma'moun noticed the unusual (abnormal) behavior of al-Jahiz, who was known of his overjoyful life, good humor, and good manners. One of the critics argues in a rhetorical way: "Show me any happy homosexual, and I will show you a joyful body."⁴⁶ It seems that al-Ma'moun was not pleased at al-Jahiz' behavior, so he hurried to dismiss him from his court, only after three days of taking the position Head of Diwan al-Rasael / Office of Communications. A certain writer said about this, "al-Jahiz was given the position of Head of Diwan al-Rasael during the reign of al-Ma'moun for three days, but then he asked to be released, and he was released. Sahl bin Haron used to say: "If al-Jahiz remains in this position, the star of the writers will fade." ⁴⁷ However, some people could not find justification for al-Jahiz' resignation from this position, saying: Probably his release from the position is due to al-Jahiz' refusal to give in to al-Ma'moun's rules and traditions, preferring freedom to the rules. Therefore, he asked to resign, and his resignation was accepted!

3. Al-Mutawakkil's Dismissal of al-Jahiz

A certain anecdote is passed on from al-Jahiz that he said: "I was mentioned to the Mutawakkil to educate his sons, but when he saw me he considered my appearance to be ugly. He ordered that I be given ten thousand dirhams and dismissed me." ⁴⁸ .

The question that rises in one's mind is: How can the reader accept this version with its shortcomings, and said by one side only? Is it possible to believe that al-Mutawakkil, who was from the Caliphate family did not

know about al-Jahiz' appearance or hear about it before he called him, though al-Jahiz was very well-known and popular "more popular than a flag on a mountain top, and especially that al-Jahiz was contemporary with ten Abbasid caliphs, including al-Mutawakkil himself before he called him to educate his sons? Yaqut al-Hamwai says that "Caliphs know him and Princes take him a friend and drink with him." ⁴⁹ Therefore, the reader has the right to argue that probably al-Mutawakkil was afraid about his sons of him, and he might probably dismissed him from his court for that, though I am not fully certain about it.

Yousof Bakkar also argues that" because of that bad custom [homosexuality] the caliphs and princes were worried that such corruption can be passed to their sons by their educators and drinking companions, who were known of having this habit, they hurried to drive them out and keep them away from them."⁵⁰ Such action was taken by more than one caliph!

4. Homosexuality as an Accompanying Quality to Writers

The argument that the quality of homosexuality accompanied many writers at that time is mentioned by al-Jahiz himself ⁵¹ through a certain poet who says about writers, and probably including al-Jahiz:

Don't blame any writer for homosexuality

Homosexuality is a characteristic of writers

It is clear that the poet's statement is said in general and this proves that al-Jahiz did not find it necessary for him to react or deal with the poem, or even discuss it at all. On the contrary, he preferred just to leave it without any objection. Does that mean that he admits it and accepts the writer's indulgence in homosexuality? or does it mean that he excludes himself without defending other writers? Can his silence and avoidance

to talk about it be considered an implied acceptance and defense about it?

5. al-Jahiz' Encouragement to Purchase Catamites

al-Jahiz' tendency to homosexuality was repeated in his writing and he encourages it in several places including *al-Haywan* . Here he discourages men and warns them against women and encourages them to purchase catamites. He says through the Dog-Owner: "Beware of love of women... You should take catamites. Your catamite is more beneficial to you than your brother, and more helpful to you than your cousin." ⁵²

6. Reference to al-Khatib al-Baghdadi

In his reference to al-Jahiz' books, al-Baghdadi attributes to him a book on homosexuality, and describes him using the terms of those books when he says: "Some of his books are on prostitutions, dogs and homosexuality... and the meanings of these books are suitable to him and his qualities and his family"⁵³. It is clear that al-Baghdadi accuses al-Jahiz frankly of being homosexual, let alone his insinuations to his character and his family.

7. al-Jahiz' Celibacy

Celibacy can be a major reason and result in the life of homosexuals.⁵⁴ al-Jahiz' celibacy can be attributed to more than one reason – either for his physical appearance or for his voluntary abstinence from marriage and hatred of being in physical contact with females. This can also give a hint to his tendency for homosexuality. Charles Blat says that "al-Jahiz did not have a wife legally and he did not mention her at all." ⁵⁵ However, there is a certain unbelievable version about his marriage. It is

nearer to imagination than to reality, and it can also be attributed to al-Jahiz.⁵⁶

8. al-Tifashi's Version

Shihab al-Din al-Tifashi narrates a story that he claims to have heard from al-Jahiz this story: "A certain guest came to me and I allowed him to sleep in my home, but during certain nights I found him in my bed fucking me. I asked him: woe upon you! What is this? And why did you come in here? He said: It is cold. And I asked: Why did you get on my bed? He said: Because of the fleas. And I asked: Why do you fuck me? He said: This is not the heart of the matter."⁵⁷

Though one cannot take al-Tifashi's story as fully true, especially that he is considered a late author (580-651 H.), the reader has the right to wonder: if this suspicion has no grounds, why should al-Jahiz be accused of it rather than others – and by the judge of his town? Is it mere accident?

In fact we give more weight to the view that not many people repeated this "issue" during the lifetime of al-Jahiz, and probably for fear of him. People in general and writers in particular were cautious of him and even afraid of his tongue, so they avoided him and evaded any insinuation against him for fear of his strong personality and bitter bawdy tongue, which was known of its sharp and bitter sarcasm, ironic criticism and quick wit in reacting and retaliating against the other. As evidence to this, I would like to introduce the following incident:

"Abu Haffan was asked: "why don't you dispraise al-Jahiz, though he inveighed you and took you by the neck? He said: Can someone like me be deceived of his mind? By God if he writes a letter about the tip of my nose, it would be known in China, but if I recite a thousand lines of

poetry against him, no line would be heard of in a thousand years." ⁵⁸
 This story shows that al-Jahiz was extremely feared of and it was a common phenomenon. It is clear that al-Jahiz preferred disengagement from anything and he lived his life as he liked it - according to his tendencies and temper. Thus, he had full freedom in knowledge, research, religion and belief. He also had freedom in language usage, literature, writing, classification, and even in mixture and behavior.

9. Intellectual Sophistication of the Homosexuals

According to Freud, most homosexuals are characterized by "moral, educational, and intellectual growth"⁵⁹. Al-Jahiz is well-known of his wide knowledge and powerful mind, and he established a Mu'tazila sect that carried his name as al-Jahiziyya ⁶⁰.

In conclusion, if we follow the principle of division and probability, and depend on the historical facts and read them in a deductive way, we can take the attitude of conviction rather than acquittal of al-Jahiz regarding the issue of homosexuality. However, this approach in this study does not claim that it is exhaustive and comprehensive in dealing with this issue, but it leaves the door open for more and more research, and scrutiny. Probably, if the manuscript of al-Jahiz book *al-Latta* (Homosexuality) becomes available, more light can be shed on this issue and the moral aspect of al-Jahiz' life. Then, we will be more certain and accurate about al-Jahiz real attitude regarding homosexuality.

NOTES

¹ EI², vol. II, p. 385-387, *Al-Jahiz*

² A term used by Karl Heinrich Ulrichs in 1982 to mean homosexuality of males but it is rarely used now.

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- ³ Al-Jurjani, A. A. (1966). *al-Wasatta bayna al-Mutanabbi wa khusoumahu*. Edited by Mohammad Abu al-Fadhl Ibrahim, Ali Mohammad al-Bajawai. Beirut: al-Maktaba al-Assriyyah, p. 64.
- ⁴ Al-Jahiz. (1992). *Kitab al-hayawan*. Introduction by Abd al-Salam Haroun. Beirut: Dar al-Jil. vol.1. p. 5.
- ⁵ Ibid., p. 10
- ⁶ al-Jahiz. (1991). *al-Rasa'el*. Introduction by Abd al-Salam Haroun. Beirut: Dar al-Jil, vol. 3, p. 5.
- ⁷ Ibn Khaldoun. (1993) *al-Muqaddimah*. Mawarid Bait al-Mal bi-Baghdad Ayyam al- Ma'moun. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah. p. 141.
- ⁸ Mathhar, M. (2001). *al-Mut'ah al-muharramah, al-liwatt wa-al-sihaq fi al-tarikh al-'Arabi*. Cairo: al-Dar al-Alamiyyah li al-Kutub wa al-Nashr. p. 141
- ⁹ Awadh, R. & Andre', G. (1996). *Corydon* (Autobiography), *majallat al-qahira*. Cairo: al-Haya'at al-Missriyyah al-Aammah li al-Kuttab. no. 162, p. 108.
- ¹⁰ Bakkar, Y. (n. d). *Ittijahat al-Ghazal fi al-qarn al-thani al-hijri, al-ghazal al-shaz fi al-muthakkar*. (s. l): Dar al-Andalus. 2nd ed. pp. 198-199.
- ¹¹ Ibid., pp. 184-185.
- ¹² Ibid., p. 185. See also: Abu al-Qasim. (1287H). *Husein bin Mohammad al-Raghib al-Assfahani. muhadharat al-udaba'*. (s. l): Mattba'at al-Muwailihi. vol. 2.
- ¹³ Freud, S. (1989). *Thalath raseel fi nathariyyat al-gins* (Three Letters on the theory of Sex). Cairo and Beirut: Dar al-Shuruq. p. 44.
- ¹⁴ Mathhar, p. 141.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., p. 141. He noted in the margin that "some individuals, who are among the most famous ones, were homosexual, and probably, fully homosexual". About the relation of "Liwatt" with literature and other types of art, see Andre' Gide (1869-1951) in his work *Corydon*, where he defends the phenomenon of homosexuality and love-for-catamites; Jean Jeanet (1910-1986) in his work *Diary of a Thief* in

his autobiography. *Majallat al-qahirah*, no. 162, pp. 40-52, and pp. 102-108. See also Michael Foku (1926-1984), the French philosopher who wrote the history of sex in his book *Love of Catamites among the Greeks*, and in modern time in his book *History of Sexual Activity*, in *Majallat al-Fusoul*, no. 70, p. 31. Cairo, 2007. See also Mohammad al-Nuwaihi. (1970). *Nafsiyyat Abu Nuwas*. Cairo: Maktabat al-Khajanzhi and Dar al-Fikr. 2nd ed. p. 76.

¹⁶ Awadh, R., p. 108.

¹⁷ *Qissat al-Hadharah*, Translated by Mohammad Badran. vol. 4, *Majma' 5*. p. 19. 1959. See also: Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Before homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic world, 1500-1800*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London,....., Note 62, p. 175 .

¹⁸ Shawqi, M. (1989). *Saikologiyyat al-gins (psychology of sex)*. Cyprus: al-Dar al-Missriyah li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzi'. p. 125.

¹⁹ Wilson, C. (1986). *Usul al-dafi' al-jinsi (origins of sexual impulse)*, Translated by Yousof Shrorou and Samir Kuttub. Beirut: Dar al-Adab. 3rd Ed. P. 203.

²⁰ Al-Jahiz. (1984). *Al-bayan wa al-tabayin*. Edited by Abd al-Salam Haroun. Beirut: Dar al-Jil. vol. 3, p. 294.

²¹ For more about Liwat see: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Brill, Leid Leiden, 1983; and Arno Schmitt and Jehoeda Sofer. (1991). *Sexuality and Eroticism Among Males in Moslem Societies*. New York. London . Norwood (Australia). (s. n). pp. 13-19.

²² Bakkar, Yousof, p. 189-190. For more information, see: Ibrahim Mahmoud, al-Mut'ah al-Mahthoorah. (2006). *Al-shuthuth al-jinsi fi tarikh al-'arab*. Riyadh al-Rayyis li-Al-Kutub wa al-Nashr. Beirut. pp. 168-227.

²³ Van O'connor, W. (1960). *Al-naqd al-adabi: al-adab al-amriki fi nisf qarn / literary criticism. American literature in a half-century*. Translated by Salah Ahmad Ibrahim. Beirut: Dar Sader. p. 202.

²⁴ Al-Sharishi (1952). *Sharh maqamat al-hariri al-busayri*. Beirut: Maktabat al-Thaqafah, vol. 1, p. 185. al-Mas'udi added that "and al-Ma'moun said: If they

rejected his judgments, their rejections would be accepted" in 1973. *Muruj al-Dhahab*. Beirut: Dar al-Fikr. 6th ed. vol. 4, p. 21.

²⁵ Ibid., p.185-186.

²⁶ Al-Samrah, M. (1966). *Al-Qadhi al-Jurjani, al-adib al-naqid / the critic author*. Beirut: al-Maktab al-Tijari li al-Tiba'ah wa al-Tawzi' wa al-Nashr (The Commercial Office for Printing, Distribution and Publishing). p. 92. For more details, see: Metz A. (1957). *al-Hadharah al-Islamiyyah fi al-Qarn al-Rabi' al-Hijri*. Translated by Mohammad Abd al-Hadi Abu Redah. Cairo: Mattba'at Lajnat al-Ta'lif wa al-Nashr. 3rd ed. vol. 2, pp. 161-167.

²⁷ Al-Samrah, Mahmoud, p. 92.

²⁸ Al-Jahiz. *Rasa'el*, vol. 2 , p. 195. See also: Franz Rosenthal, *Male and female, homoeroticism in classical Arabic literature*. J. W. Wright Jr. and Everett K. Rowson, (1997). New York: Columbia University press. p. 28.

²⁹ al-Basheer al-Majdoub. (1992). *al-zarf bi al-Iraq fi al-assr al-abbasi fima bayn al-qarnayn al-thani wa al-rabi' li al-hijrah* (Circumstances in Iraq in the Abbasid Era between the Second and Fourth Century of Hegira). Tunis: (s.n). p. 93.

³⁰ Boujadra, R. (1982). *Al-tafakkuk / degeneration*. Beirut: Dar Ibn Rushd. p, 211. About Hamdan Ib Qurmutt, see: (1967). *Tarikh al-Tabari*. edited by Mohammad Abu al-Fadhk Ibrahim. Beirut. 2nd ed. vol. 10, pp. 23-27. See also Awadh, R. & Andre' G. p. 108, who says in his *Corydon* : Athens started its way to degeneration when the Greeks stopped coming to the gymnasium where their catamites and youths were practicing athletic games. This means that it collapsed after it gave up practicing homosexuality!.

³¹ Freud, S. 3rd ed. p. 44.

³² The reader is likely to feel that al-Jahiz talks about "homosexuality" as a person who believes in it and accepts it and does not see it as an abnormal behavior. From his point of view, it is a social convention that is quite natural.

³³ Blat, C. (1961). *al-Jahiz fi al-basra wa baghdad wa samirra'*. Translated by Ibrahim al-Kilani. Damascus: (s.n). pp. 359-360.

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- ³⁴ For example, see: Ibrahim J. (1980). *Kitaban li al-Jahiz, kitba li al-mu'allimin wa kitab fi al-radd 'ala al-mushabbaha*. Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University. p. 44. See also: Blat C. *al-Jahiz fi al-Basra, Samirra' wa Baghdad*, pp. 359-360.
- ³⁵ Al-Najim, W. T. (1965). *al-Jahiz wa al-hadhira al-abbasiyyah*. Baghdad: Matba'at al-Irshad. p. 123.
- ³⁶ Al-Khatib al-Baghadi. (n. d). *Tarikh Baghdad / history of Baghdada*. Beirut: (s.n.). vol. 12. p. 217.
- ³⁷ Ibn Qutaybah. (1989). *Ta'weel mukhtalif al-hadith*. p, 57. Beirut: Dar wa Maktabat al-Hilal.
- ³⁸ *The holy Koran*. Surat al-Shua;ara' / Poet's Sura. Verse 165.
- ³⁹ Ibn Maja. (n.d) *al-Sunan. kitab al-hudud. bab man amila amala qawmi lutt* . Edited by Mohammad Fu'ad Abd al-Baqi. Cairo: Dar al-Hadith. vol. 2, p. 856. with reference to the fact that the Bible forbids "Liwatt" / homosexuality as it says: "Do not sleep with a male as you sleep with a female" (*Leviticus*: 18).
- ⁴⁰ Al-Jahiz. (1991). *Rasael al-Jahiz*. Edited by Abd al-Salam Haroun. Beirut: Dar al-Jil. vol. 2, p. 105.
- ⁴¹ Al-Mas'uodi. (1973). *Muruj al-dhahab wa ma'adin al-jawhar*. Beirut: Dar al-Fikr. ^{5th} ed. vol. 4, p. 195.
- ⁴² Al-Jahiz. *Kitab al-hayawan*, vol. 1, p. 9.
- ⁴³ Al-Mas'uodi. *Muruj al-dhahab*. ^{5th} ed. vol. 4, pp. 318-319. See also his description of al-Mu'tassim and al-Wathiq p. 319. He does not mention them at all.
- ⁴⁴ Conn, A. S. (1993). *Ilm nafs al-jins / psychology of sex*. Translated by Munir Shahud. Syria: (s. n). p. 40.
- ⁴⁵ Salman, N. (1994). *Fitmat al-sard wa al-naqd*. Ladhikiyya: (s. n). p. 17.
- ⁴⁶ Conn, A .S. p. 154.
- ⁴⁷ Yaqut al-Hamwai. (n. d). *Mu'jam al-udaba'*. Beirut: Dar al-Mustashriq. vol. 16, pp. 78-79.

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- ⁴⁸ Ibn Khillikan. (1948). *Wafayat al-a'yaan*. Cairo: Mohyi al-Din Abd al-Hamid. vol. 3, p. 141.
- ⁴⁹ Yaqut al-Hamawi, vol. 16, p. 98.
- ⁵⁰ Bakkar, Yousof, p. 193.
- ⁵¹ Al-Jahiz. *Rasa'el*, vol. 2, p. 112
- ⁵² al-Jahiz. *Kitab al-hayawan*: vol. 2. p. 366.
- ⁵³ Abd al-Qahir al-Baghdadai. (n. d). *Al-farq bayna al-firaq*. Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifah. p. 177.
- ⁵⁴ Freud, S. 3rd edition. p. 46.
- ⁵⁵ Blat, C. p. 339
- ⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 339-340. quoting al-'Utaibi. (1980). *'Uyoon al-tarikh. maktabat al-nahdha al-missriyyah*. Cairo, 1980. No page number.
- (The traditional version says that because of his ugly face, he married a beautiful, but a foolish lady hoping to have a child with her beauty and his mind. But what was the result? It was the opposite! He had an ugly face like his, and a foolish mind like hers.)
- ⁵⁷ Al-Tifashi, Shuhab al-Din Nuzhat. (1992). *Al-albab fima la yujad fi kitab*. Edited by Jamal Jum'ah, Lanodon-Cyprus: Riyadh al-Rayyes li al-Kutub wa al-Nashr. p. 214.
- ⁵⁸ Yaqut al-Hamawi. *Mu'jam al-'udaba'* . vol. 16, p. 99.
- ⁵⁹ Freud, S. 3rd ed. p. 44.
- ⁶⁰ Abd al-Qahi al-Baghdadi. (n.d). *al-Farq bayna al-firaq*, Edited by Mohammad Muhyi al-Din Abd al-Hamid. Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifay. p. 175. Also: al-Shahrastani. (1980). *al-Milal wa al-Nihal*. Edited by Mohammad Sayyid al-Kilani. Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifah. vol. 1, p. 75.