ON THE TERM KHĀDIM IN THE SENSE OF «EUNUCH» IN THE EARLY MUSLIM SOURCES

BY

DAVID AYALON

In a very recent article A. Cheikh Moussa studied meticulously the main passages of al-Jāḥiẓ dealing with the eunuchs in his Kitāb al-Ḥayawān and Kitāb Muḥākharat al-Jawārī wal-Ghilmān (later — Hayawān and Jawārī). This is a welcome and timely contribution. In spite of the obvious centrality of the eunuch institution in Muslim history and civilization the subject was very much neglected (with the possible partial exception of its study regarding the Ottoman empire). Any systematic research into that subject will quickly show that its importance far surpasses all previous expectations. The passages of al-Jāḥiẓ are essential for the study of certain aspects of the eunuch phenomenon in Islam, and their thorough analysis is long overdue. Their detailed scrutiny by A. Cheikh Moussa (later — M.) is certainly superior to anything written about them earlier. This does not imply the absence of certain flaws in that scrutiny, which are outside the scope of the present lines.

In an addendum to the above cited article, the same author expresses disagreement with a statement and a conclusion of mine included in the first installment of my study «On the Eunuchs in Islam». The statement relates to the attitude towards the black eunuchs as compared to the attitude towards unemasculated blacks in major Muslim centers. The conclusion is about the term khādim in the sense of «eunuch» in the Muslim Medieval (especially historical and related) sources.

Since he deals with the first of the two very briefly, and since I myself

2 Ibid., pp. 212-214.

Arabica, Tome XXXII, 1985
am discussing that subject in much greater detail in other works of mine, some of which are not yet published, I shall concentrate at this stage on replying to his arguments concerning the term *khādim*.

In a nutshell: M. disagrees with my attempt (a most tentative one, as far as the very early part of the Muslim era is concerned, a fact which I stress in my study), to establish the date of the introduction of *khādim* in the above mentioned meaning. In particular he contradicts my attributing the use of that term in that sense to al-Jāhiz. From his conviction that that author never employed *khādim* as equivalent to *khasil* he draws much wider conclusions.

My comments on his criticism are these: From his presentation the reader cannot form a proper idea about the range and variety of the source material with which I back my conclusion on this subject, or about the reasoning and the line of argumentation which I use in order to reach it. Even if he is right about al-Jāhiz and *khādim*, which I believe he is not, what he infers from it is not correct. Finally, what he attributes to me as stating is not always accurate.

These comments on M.’s criticism had been written only with reference to two instances which I bring in my above mentioned study, where al-Jāhiz uses, in my view, the term *khādim* in the sense of «eunuch»\(^4\). M., in opposing that identification, deals only with one instance, and overlooks the other. In both cases individual persons are involved.

Those two instances were the ones I knew (or, more precisely, remembered) when I wrote my article on the eunuchs, and in an earlier reply to M. (which I shall call «the first version») I had to confine myself only to them. It goes, of course, without saying, that in following a term and its development throughout a number of centuries, exhausting the whole data pertaining to that term is impossible. If, however, one is on the right track, there are very good chances that with further reading he will find not only additional or better proofs to support his thesis, but even such proofs which will overshadow the earlier ones. Within the context of the present difference of opinion between M. and myself, I found, after having written the first version, a proof of that category in the writings of the selfsame al-Jāhiz. Furthermore, it is included in one of the two works which M. used in his research on that author and the eunuchs.

\(^4\) *JSAI*, I. p. 85.
That piece of evidence is not only decisive in connection with the present difference of opinion, but is of the highest importance for the reconstruction of the history and development of our term in the early Muslim period. I shall, therefore, deal first of all with it, and in some detail. The discussion regarding the two original instances will be only somewhat abbreviated, because it contains points which are both pertinent to our subject and can be better clarified here than elsewhere.

The work of al-Jähiz which contains the evidence in question is the epistle Jawāri⁵, mentioned in the opening lines of the present study. But before presenting and analyzing the evidence, a few remarks about the epistle have to be made, which will explain the background of the evidence.

Al-Jähiz contrasts there the qualities of the boys and the girls (mainly the slave-boys and the slave-girls), shifting very often to men and women in general, and putting special emphasis on the sexual aspect (including adultery and pederasty)⁶. He does it by means of a debate or dispute between a protagonist of the girls (ṣāhib al-jawāri) and a protagonist of the boys (ṣāhib al-ghilmān). A repeated argument of this second protagonist is that the lovers of the females are primitive and rude, whereas the lovers of the males are refined and sophisticated. He includes the early Arabs (and particularly their poets) in the first category and the later ones in the second.

The passage on the eunuchs occupies two full pages⁷ out of a debate covering about thirty sparsely printed pages (including the scholarly apparatus)⁸, and it comes at the very end of that debate. It is represented as the pronouncement of ṣāhib al-jawāri, and it opens with these words.

I. «You [i.e. ṣāhib al-ghilmān] mentioned the khisyān and the beauty of their figures and the smoothness of their complexions, and the [practice of] having [carnal] pleasure with them. And [you also said] that that is something with which the first ones were not acquainted. You thus drove me against my will to describe the characteristics of the khisyān in spite of the fact that that is senseless in our [present] book, for we confined ourselves to speaking only about the jawāri and the ghilmān» (wa-dhakarta al-khisyān wa-ḫuṣn qudādihim wa-naʿmat abshārihim wal-taladhdhud bihim wa-anna dḥilika lā

---

⁵ It is included in ‘Abd al-Salam Muhammad Hārūn’s Rasā’il al-Jähiz, vol. II (1965), pp. 87-137 (it was published earlier in the form of a booklet by C. Pellat, Beirut, 1957, 94 pp.).
⁶ «We liked to mention what went on between the pederasts and the adulterers» — ʿabhabnā an nadḥkur mā jārā ḥayna al-lāṭa wal-zunāt (ibid., p. 95, ll.6-7). This statement is included in the introductory part of the epistle.
⁷ Ibid., pp. 123, 1.4 -125, 1.4.
⁸ Ibid., pp. 95, 1.12-125, 1.7.
These opening lines are followed by the enumeration of those characteristics with the clear major aim of demonstrating that the eunuchs are neither men nor women and, therefore, should be excluded from the debate.

What the protagonist of the Jawārī affirms in the clearest possible terms is that the whole discussion about the eunuchs had been forced upon him by his fellow-disputant, because it was that disputer who had been the first to refer to them. This affirmation has a sole, single and inevitable meaning: the protagonist of the boys must have already mentioned the eunuchs. One has only to examine the few preceding pages which contain that protagonist's statements, and he will surely discover that reference. It is most regrettable that M. did not do that obvious thing.

In looking for that reference in those preceding few pages one will not find the word khasi (or khasi). The inescapable conclusion to be drawn from this fact is that the eunuchs must appear under a different name. And, indeed, they do appear under such name in the following circumstances.

II. According to the assertion of sahib al-jawdri it never happened that the love of a ghulām caused the death of any lover (lam nasma’ bi-‘āshiq qatalahu hubb ghulām). As by contrast, he names seven poets who died because of their love to a woman. Amongst them were Kuthayyir, Jamāl and ‘Urwa, whose respective love to ‘Azza, Buthayna and ‘Afrā had been the cause of their death.

The answer of sahib al-ghilmān to this assertion is the following one.

III. «Had Kuthayyir, Jamāl and ‘Urwa, as well as their likes whom you named, seen some of the k h a d a m of the people of our time — [I mean] those who had been bought for huge sums of money — [and perceived] how good looking, clean coloured, and well balanced [they are], and how beautiful are their figures [literally: the beauty of their figures], they would have cast off Buthayna, ‘Azza and ‘Afrā ... and discarded them

---

9 Lane in his dictionary translates alja'ahu ild shay'in thus: «He constrained, compelled, forced, drove, or necessitated, him to have recourse to or betake himself to, or to repair to, or to do a thing; he impelled him, or drove him against his will, to it, or to do it». I preferred the underlined.

10 Jawārī, etc. p. 123, II.4-6. To help the reader follow my line of argument I gave Roman numerals to the five major citations from al-Jāhiz’s epistle. For convenience sake I call all of them «passages» even when that author’s words are fully or partly paraphrased.

11 Ibid., pp. 123, 1.7-125, 1.4.

12 Ibid., pp. 104, 1.11-105, 1.2.
as if they [i.e. these women] had been [mere] dogs (law nazarā Kuthayyir wa-Jumayyil wa-ʿUrwa wa-man sammayta min nazarā ihim ilā baʿd k hadam ahl ʿāsrinā minīmin qad ushṭuriva bil-ṭalā al-ʿazīm fa-rāḥatan wa-shaṭṭātan wa-naqāʿ la wān wa-Ḥusn iʾīdāl wā-jawdat qadd wa-qawām la-nabadhū Buthayna wa-ʿAzza wa-ʿAfrāʿ min ḥalīq wa-tarakkhunna bi-mazzar al-kilāb). But your line of argument was [to bring as an evidence] against me [the view of] rude and uncivil Beduins (wa-lakinnaka ihtajajta alā nadd bi-ʿArdb ajlIf jufā), who were nurtured in misery and wretchedness and grew up in them. They know nothing about the luxuries of life and the worldly pleasures. They live in the deserts and shy away from [civilized] people like wild animals. They eat hedgehogs and lizards and cut open the colocynth [in order to eat its kernel]. The maximum that any one of them can reach is to cry over the remnants of the [Beduin] encampment, and liken the woman to a cow or a gazelle, when, in fact, the woman is more beautiful than both. Moreover, he [i.e. the Beduin poet] would liken her to a serpent and call her the disfigured and the scabby, alleging that he does it for fear of the evil eye.  

That sāḥib al-jawārī decided to speak about the k hitayn only in reaction to what sahib al-ghilman said about the k hadam, there cannot be the slightest doubt. This is because another alternative simply does not exist in those few pages which contain the statements of the boys’ protagonist. This alone settles the whole matter. Since, however, I have already decided to perform an «overkill» in connection with the term under discussion long before I came across M.’s article and comments, I shall do the same again.

First of all, there is complete agreement between what the protagonist of the boys says about the khadam and what his antagonist attributes to him as saying about the khisyān: it is their being distinguished by their beautiful features and their serving as an object of carnal pleasure. Both antagonists use also very close expressions in their respective passages (III and I): compare jawdat qadd with ḥusn quḍūd, and naqāʿ al-lawn with ṣafāʾ al-lawn.

Secondly, the opening lines about the khisyān, which we have reproduced and translated (passage I), contain the word al-awwah («the first ones»), which is a key term in our context. The same word appears two additional times in the epistle (passages IV, V below), and once in the form of al-awwalūn (passage IV).

---

13 Pellat (op. cit., p. 27, l.1 and note 1) corrects حائف إلى حائف. I am not sure about the translation, but this has no bearing on the meaning of our passage.
14 Jawārī, etc., p. 105, ll.3-12.
15 In the articles «From Ayyūbids to Mamlūks» (REI, in the press), and «Ḥārūn al-Rashid and his Eunuchs» (in an advanced stage of preparation).
16 This expression is used by sāḥib al-jawārī in connection with the khisyān a few lines after his opening words on the eunuchs, which were reproduced above (Jawārī, p. 123, l.10).
17 Ibid., p. 123, l.5.
IV. Ṣāḥib al-jawārī quotes verses of the earlier poets who wrote love songs about the women (shabbabā bil-nisā’) and states that those verses are far superior to the ones composed by the modern poets (about the boys)\(^\text{18}\). He considers Imru’u al-Qays as shā’ir al-shu’arā’ min al-awwalin wal-ākhirin\(^\text{19}\), and calls the rest of the earlier poets al-qudamā’ fi al-Jāhiliyya wal-Islām\(^\text{20}\) and a1-a wā’i1\(^\text{21}\). He names the modern poets al-muḥdathūn\(^\text{22}\).

The retort of ṣāḥib al-ghilmān to his antagonist’s praise of the earlier poets is this.

V. «You have been wrong in the debate and unjust in your argumentation. For we have not denied the merit of the awā’il among the poets. The only thing we said was that they had been rude and uncivil Beduins (a’rāb ajlāf jufāt). They do not know the delicacies of life and the worldly pleasures. For even if any one of them would exert himself he would [not go beyond] comparing the woman to a cow or a gazelle or a snake. And if he wanted to say that she had been well balanced and straight he would compare her to a stick and her thigh to a reed. For they grew up with wild animals and snakes, and were acquainted with nothing else. But we know that the very good looking girl is more beautiful than the cow or the gazelle, or anything else with which she had been compared»\(^\text{23}\).

The passage just quoted (V) proves most decisively that the awā’il of the protagonist of the jawārī (passage I) and the A’rāb ajlāf jufāt are identical from the point of view of the protagonist of the ghilmān. It goes also without saying that the a’rāb ajlāf jufāt of this passage (V) are exactly the same as their namesakes of the khadam passage (III). Note also the identity of the detailed characterization of the early Arab poets (awā’il, A’rāb ajlāf jufāt) as primitive people by the boys’ protagonist in passages III and V.

This leads to the following inescapable conclusion: When ṣāḥib al-jawārī quotes ṣāḥib al-ghilmān as saying that the awā’il were ignorant of the [carnal] pleasure experienced with the khisyān (passage I), he could refer to nothing else but to that selfsame person’s statement about the ignorance of the a’rāb ajlāf jufāt (whom he identifies with the awā’il-passage V) of the [carnal] pleasure experienced with the khadam (passage III). The first line and a half of the khisyān passage (I) is purely and simply a brief summary of the khadam passage (III).

\(^{18}\) Ibid., pp. 114, l.1-116, l.2.
\(^{19}\) Ibid., p. 114, ll.1-2.
\(^{20}\) Ibid., p. 115, l.10.
\(^{21}\) Ibid., p. 115, l.13.
\(^{22}\) Ibid., p. 115, l.12.
\(^{23}\) Ibid., p. 116, ll.3-10.
The synonymity of *khadam* and *khisyān* in al-Jahiz’s *Jawārī* has thus been determined in the most definitive way\(^{24}\), and this fact has several implications. First of all, it alone demolishes the whole structure which M. built in order to disprove my argumentation about the early use of *khādīm* as equivalent to «eunuch» in the Muslim historical and related sources\(^{25}\). By far his major point is that, contrary to my claim, al-Jahiz never employs that term in that sense in any of his writings which he (i.e. M.) or I quoted. This is how he formulates his final verdict in the very last sentence of his criticism:

> «Rien dans les passages considérés [de Jahiz] ne permet de relever la moindre ambiguïté: *hādim* signifie bien serviteur mais jamais *éunuque*» (my italics — D.A.)\(^{26}\).

Anything else he says becomes meaningless with the elimination of this point. Secondly, it completely vindicates my claim in my article «On the Eunuchs in Islam», that in the two instances I brought there al-Jahiz meant «eunuch» when he mentioned *khādīm*. The proofs that I mobilized in the first version of my reply to M. thus lose their primary place. However, because of their much wider inferences I shall repeat most of them here, leaving the main implication of the evidence from *Jawārī* for a later stage in the present paper.

What I said in my article «On the Eunuchs, etc.» about al-Jahiz’s employment of *khādīm* as the synonym of *khasī* is this: «Jahiz also uses it, and al-Masʿūdī also attributes its use to him»\(^{27}\). What M. attempted to refute is the first part of this short passage, overlooking the second. We shall treat both of them in the same order.

Al-Jahiz, in his well known passage (or chapter) on the eunuchs in *Hayawān*, mentions *Hādīj* (or *Khādij*) *al-khasī khādim al-Muthammā b. al-Zubayr*\(^{28}\). In the light of the evidence from *Jawārī*, *khādim* here can have only one meaning, especially when it is attached to *khasī*. This is, however, what I said in the first version of my reply.

Grammatically M. is right, of course, in separating between the two, but practically he is not so. The combination of *khādim* and *khasī* is most frequent in the sources, even long after the first as equivalent to the

\(^{24}\) Needless to say that Pellat was mistaken when he stated in connection with the opening words of the *khisyān* passage that al-Jahiz did not mention the eunuchs in the previous pages of our epistle (*lam yadhkurhum fimā sabaqa min nass al-kitāb*, p. 52, note 4 of his Beirut edition).

\(^{25}\) See also below.


\(^{28}\) *Hayawān*, I, p. 118.
second had already become not only well established, but absolutely dominant. The same authors, who usually use only *khādīm*, revert from time to time to the combination, when the addition of *khasī* is utterly unnecessary. Quite often one will find in one source *khādīm* (or *khadam*) and in another *khādīm khasī* (or *khadam khisyān*) in connection with the same person or group of persons. Of particular significance is the following instance: Hilāl al-Šābī, speaking of the court of Caliph al-Muqtadir, states that there were in it 11,000 *khādīm*, whereas al-Khatīb al-Baghdādī mentions them as 11,000 *khādīm khasī*. For him every single *khādīm* of that huge group was a *khasī*, and with full justification. Incidentally, this practice of combining the two terms also helps very much in establishing their identity.

In contradiction to M.'s view, al-Jāḥiz's illuminating remarks about the *khasī*’s aptitude for <<service>> (*khidma*) only strengthens the connection between the two terms. They give us an insight into why the euphemism *khādīm* was chosen to designate *khasī*.

Thus, in each of the two works which served as the main sources for M.’s study on al-Jāḥiz’s eunuchs, that author employed *khādīm* as the equivalent of «eunuch» (once in the singular and once in the plural).

We shall now turn to the second part of my above cited statement, which M. overlooked. Since al-Jāḥiz had been proved to have used the term in question in the meaning under discussion, there is no wonder that other Muslim writers would attribute its use to him. That is how one of them did it.

Al-Mas’ūdī brings several anecdotes related by al-Jāḥiz about a Romeo and Juliet type of love affairs between slave-girls and slave-boys in the Muslim courts. The last of them starts like this: «Al-Jāḥiz said:

---

29 Even in my very limited selection that combination appears quite frequently («On the Eunuchs, etc.»). See e.g. passages XII (p. 78), XXXI, XXXII (p. 82)). In No. XII I put *al-khasī khādīm* on an equal footing with *khādīm khasī*, and this is the correct thing to do from a practical point of view. The closeness of the two is evident. After all, the development of a language and its expressions is not necessarily subject to grammatical pedantry.

30 See «On the Eunuchs, etc.», passage VII, p. 77.


32 I have already alluded briefly to the connection between *khādīm* (= *khasī*) and *khidma* on the basis of certain data included in the published part of my study («On the Eunuchs, etc.», p. 83, note 60). In my «Hārūn al-Rashid and his Eunuchs» I am discussing in some detail al-Jāḥiz’s evidence on the eunuchs and the *khidma*, and my conclusions are totally different from those of M. (incidentally, this had been done long before I came across his Jāḥiz article). Similarly to *khādīm* becoming the equivalent of *khasī* the reason for calling the eunuch *ustādh* was that he used to teach small children (*ibid.*, p. 90, note 91).
'I told this story to Abū ʿAbdallāh Muhammad b. Jaʿfar al-Anbārī in al- Başrā'. He [al-Anbārī] said: 'I shall tell you a story similar to the one you told me. Fāʿiq al-khādim, who was the mawla of Muhammad b. Humayd al-Tūsī33 told me: 'Muhammad b. Ḥumayd was sitting once with his boon companions. A slave-girl sang behind the curtain (ṣīṭāra)".34

What should be emphasized about this quotation is that al-Jāhiz speaks and cites here in the first person. This increases considerably the chances that our author preserved al-Jāhiz's own words. Fāʿiq is a quite frequent name among eunuchs35.

A central aspect of M.'s interpretation of al-Jāhiz's khādim is that he does not confine himself to that author's terminology. He has a much wider goal. By means of it he wants to question my whole attempt at tracing the earliest occurrences of that term in the sense under discussion (an attempt which he does not present with absolute accuracy). Since that interpretation had been proved to be without foundation, anything he wants to base on it belongs perforce to the same category. However, the examination of his line of argument and his conclusions contribute to the clarification of the issue of the present debate.

In the last paragraph of his Addenda M. states that I am completely right (a entièrement raison) to point out the uncertainty which dominates the employment of the term khādim by the authors of the second half of the third/ninth century, like al-Ṭabarī, or those of the fourth/tenth century like al-Maṣʿūdī36. To say the least, this is not exactly my view. Here is what I say.

«It is very difficult to establish, with any degree of certainty, when the term khādim started to be used in the sense of eunuch. Some scholars believe it to have been in the beginning of the 4th/10th century (see below). It can be proved, however, that this had happened considerably earlier. The chronicle of al-Ṭabarī is replete with that term, and includes even instances pertaining to the very beginning of the ʿAbbāsīd period. [Jāhiz (160-250)/776-868] also used it, and al-Maṣʿūdī also attributes its use to him.]
«Of great interest is the episode of Fākhita, Muʿāwiyya's wife (passage I). The term khādim, mentioned in the account of that episode, might belong to the vocabulary of al-Maṣʿūdī, or al-Maḍāʾinī, or an earlier traditionalist who had been al-Maḍāʾinī's source (even the possibility that it had been used in the reign of Muʿāwiyya himself

---

35 The famous Fāʿiq, the Samanid commander (died 389/999) was a eunuch (kāna khāṣṭiyān min mawlaṭ Nāḥī b. Asad — Ibn al-ʿAthīr, al-Kāmil, Beirut, 1966, vol. IX, p. 149, line 2). There are, of course, non-eunuch Fāʿiqs, but they are not called khādim.
cannot be excluded). The same uncertainty prevails about the *khādīms* mentioned by al-Ṭabarī, and who lived in a period preceding his own time. This ambiguity, however, is not confined to the term under discussion, but extends practically to all, or most, of the terminology relating to the early period of Islam, which came down to us, in most cases, through considerably later sources. In fact, this is the basic difficulty in dealing with early Muslim history in general since we possess for it mainly this kind of comparatively late sources. Under these circumstances, the only thing that can be said about our term is that it appears in the sources in connection with events and occurrences which took place from the beginning of the Umayyad period (or even earlier — see the testimony attributed to Husayn b. ʿAlī, passage XVIII)\textsuperscript{37}.

M.’s interpretation of what I say about the account regarding Muʿāwiyah and his wife is included in another passage of his criticism, which will also be cited in this paper, and will be answered there. At the present moment I shall limit myself to my view of al-Ṭabarī and later historians as expressed in the just quoted passage of mine, stating beforehand that the data contained in al-Ṭabarī’s chronicle about our term constitute the backbone of the study of the eunuchs in the lands of Islam during the period which it covers. What I state in that passage is precisely the contrary to what M. ascribes to me\textsuperscript{38}. The uncertainty as I see it is not about al-Ṭabarī’s own time, but about the period preceding it\textsuperscript{39}. In the second half of the 3rd/9th century the term *khādīm* («eunuch») becomes not only very frequent, but is the predominant one\textsuperscript{40}. As for the beginning of the 4th/10th century and later on, there are no uncertainties whatsoever about the use of *khādīm* by the historians of that period, including al-Masʿūdī, as M. believes me to think.

The greatest part of M.’s comment on my attempt at dating the earliest references to *khādīm* in the sense under discussion is dedicated to the Fākhita-Muʿāwiyah incident, which I mentioned in the passage quoted above in full. For that purpose he reproduces al-Masʿūdī’s evidence on

\textsuperscript{37} «On the Eunuchs, etc.», p. 85. All the italicized words or phrases in this passage are added. The passage in the original is also accompanied by a considerable number of notes, which are not repeated here.

\textsuperscript{38} The extraordinary thing is that M. reproduces in the note the opening lines of the present passage (up to the word «earlier») (op. cit., p. 214, note 105).

\textsuperscript{39} In order to remove any doubt, in spite of its being self-evident, I would like to emphasize that *khādīms* mentioned in al-Ṭabarī’s chronicle and in writings of other authors during the periods preceding their own time, especially if they are prominent persons, are also undoubtedly eunuchs. The uncertainty is solely about whether the early lost sources call them already *khādīm* (pl. *khadam*), or this represents only the terminology of later extant sources, which copied from them and changed their original wording (see also below). The insurmountable difficulty of having to reconstruct early Islamic history on the basis of later sources, which I raise so emphatically a propos the term *khādīm*, will again be referred to below.

\textsuperscript{40} This by no means implies that the term *khaṣī* became extinct (see also below).
the incident, as well as the evidence of al-Jāhīz, which is almost, but not absolutely, identical.

Each of the two versions will be dealt with separately.

Al-Masʿūdī says:

Wa-dliakara al-Maaddini anna Muʿawiyah b. Abi Sufvdn dakhala yawmin ʿalā imraʿatihi Fūkhita wa-kānat dhāt ʿaql wa-hазm wa-muʿaḥlu k ḥāṣi wa-kānāt makhshāfat al-raʿs fa-lammā raʿat muʿāhu l- k ḥādım ghaṭṭat raʿsaḥa fa-qāla Muʿawiyah innahu k ḥāṣi fa-qālat yā amīr al-muʾāminin a-tarā al-muḥla bihi aḥallat lahu mā ḥarāmahu ʿAllāh alayhi fa-istarjāʿa Muʿawiyah wa-ʿalima anna al-ḥaqq mā gālathu fa-lam yudkhil bāʿda dhālika ʿalā ḥaramih khādīman illā kabra fāniyan 41.

Khādīm is mentioned twice in this excerpt. According to M.’s reasoning it is more likely that in the first time it means <<servant>>, for otherwise why should Muʿawiyah tell his wife <<he is a eunuch>>, if she had already known it. On the other hand, M. argues, the lines from the word istarjāʿa onwards, where khādīm appears for the second time, are not repeated in any parallel form in the earlier version of al-Jāhīz. From this he concludes that this second reference to khādīm seems to reflect only the language and connotations of the time of the later al-Masʿūdī.

These considerations are unacceptable. First of all, because M.’s view about the meaning of that term in the vocabulary of al-Jāhīz, has already been proved to be erroneous. Secondly, because they are unreasonable in themselves (we shall return to this point), and the absoluteness of that unreasonableness comes into bold relief when one considers the context in which al-Masʿūdī brings these lines. They are part of a passage in which he comments on the murder in Damascus of Abū al-Jaysh Khumārawayhi, the son and successor of Ahmad b. Tūlūn, by his eunuchs (Dhū al-Qaʿda 282/December 895). He says that those who killed him were khadam min khadamihim (<<some khadam of their khadam>>, i.e. of himself and of ʿUghj), and he continues: «We have already exhausted the subject of khadam belonging to the [ethnical groups of] the Sūdān, the ʿṢaqālība, the Rūm and the ʿṢīn in our book Kitāb al-Zamān. There we mentioned that the people of al-Ṣīn castrate (yakhsūna) their children like the Rūm [= Byzantines] [who] do [the same] to their children. [We also spoke there] about the contradictory traits of the khisīyān, resulting from the cutting of that [sexual] member. [We have also spoken about] the changes which nature brought upon them as a result of this [operation] in accordance with what people told about them and about their characteristics». The lines about

41 Murūj, VIII, pp. 148-149.
al-Madāʾini’s account on Muʿawiyah and his wife follow here uninterruptedly, and immediately after them al-Masʿūdī states that people distinguish between two kinds [of eunuchs]: the «deprived one» [of his virility] (al-masṭūḥ), and the «one whose sexual organ is cut off» (al-majbūb). He then expresses his support to the standpoint of Muʿawiyah’s wife, namely, that the fact that the eunuchs are beardless and without their male reproductive organ does not turn them into women. They remain males (rijāl, dhukūr). Al-Masʿūdī concludes his exposé in referring to the fact that the armpits of the khadam do not exude bad odor (repeating the word khadām twice in this connection), and declaring that this is one of the virtues of the khadām⁴².

Now how on earth can khādim in the sense of «servant» infiltrate into such a context? Whereas M. contends that nothing indicates in the Masʿūdī-Madāʾini account that khādim is equivalent there to khasī (« Rien n’indique, etc... » — the fourth paragraph on p. 213, ll. 2-3 of that paragraph), the truth is that everything indicates it. Furthermore, this passage alone refutes M.’s assertion about uncertainty in the use of khādim by al-Masʿūdī (to say nothing about numerous other instances in his Murūj)⁴³. The recurrence of khādim as equivalent to khasī in the historical and related literature of the 4th Hijra century and the centuries which follow is overwhelming in its frequency and its clarity.

Even when the account attributed to al-Madāʾini stands alone, the claim that in a passage of about four lines, Khādim, which is mentioned there twice in the same connexion, means «servant» in the first time and khasī in the second, does not seem to have any foundation. Furthermore, it is utterly inconceivable that Muʿawiyah would be so inconsiderate and heedless that his wife would suspect him of bringing an adult unemasculated male to her private quarters, and at a moment when she had been barefaced. If that had been the case, he would have entered first and warned her. Even with such a forewarning it is extremely doubtful that under ordinary circumstances a Muslim would allow a man to enter the

⁴² Murūj, VIII, pp. 147-8 (in Pellat’s edition: V, pp. 151-2). Al-Tabari recounts the murder of Khumarawayhi in these words: dhahabahu baʿd khadāmihi min al-khāṣṣa ... wa-quantla min khadāmihi alladhina uttuḥimū bi-qatīlihi nayyīf wa-īshrīna khāḍīman (Tabari, III, p. 2148, lines 15-18). Al-Tabari, like on numerous other occasions in his chronicle, does not deem it necessary to explain here the meaning of our term, either in the singular or in the plural. He was absolutely certain that his readers would know that eunuchs are meant.

⁴³ In the Khumarawayhi-Muʿawiyah passage al-Masʿūdī employs repeatedly khādim (pl. khadām) as equivalent to khasī (pl. khisīyān) in connection with all the ethnical groups, even before their entrance into Dār al-Īslām. See also note 21.
secluded apartment of his wife. All this excludes the possibility that the Caliph’s wife could mistake her husband’s companion for an uncastrated servant. We have also to remember that we are not dealing with what crossed the mind of Mu‘awiya’s wife when she saw her husband’s associate but with the terminology of the transmitters of the story. And at least about the last of them, al-Mas‘ūdī, there cannot be the slightest doubt.

On top of all that, M.’s interpretation is contradictory to the very purpose of the anecdote. The Caliph’s retort to his wife was not at all to dispel her fear about the masculinity of his companion. The only thing it reflects is their contrasting views about eunuchs in the harim; and the only reason that al-Mas‘ūdī calls that companion, within seven words, once khādim and once khasi, is to avoid repetition.

As far as khadim vis-a-vis khasi is concerned, the incident just discussed, together with the whole passage in which it is included, serves as a good example for the employment of both words. Although khādim became more and more dominant, the original khasi by no means disappeared. It recurs in the sources quite frequently, and in passages where «eunuch» has to be mentioned repeatedly (like in the Khumārawayhi-Mu‘awiya one), they alternate the two words. This greatly facilitates the task of establishing their identity.

Yet another, and very interesting, aspect of the Mu‘awiya incident is revealed by M. As already stated, he quotes another version of it which he found in al-Jāḥiz’s writings, and which is also attributed to the same al-Madā’inī. In that version khādim is not mentioned at all. Since al-Jāḥiz was al-Madā’inī’s contemporary — he argues — his citation should be considered the reliable one, and not that of the later al-Mas‘ūdī.

This piece of evidence from al-Jāḥiz was unknown to me. However, it still leaves insurmountable the difficulty caused by the lost early sources which I have clearly mentioned, and to which I shall return in the present paper. With the absence of the original works of al-Madā’inī, one can argue, with the same degree of credibility, that these are not identical accounts, but similar versions. Such versions of traditions grouped

---

44 The Mu‘awiya incident reflects a certain revulsion from the introduction of eunuchs into the harim. We know of short-lived attempts to mitigate that practice by letting into the women’s quarters only over age or under age eunuchs (i.e. below or above the age of the virility of the unemasculated male).

45 See e.g. «On the Eunuchs, etc.», passage XXI, p. 80.

46 Moussa, op. cit., p. 213.
together in the same source, or scattered over numerous sources, and with varying degrees of differences (including differences in wording) are very common in Muslim writings. Al-Madā'inī was a prolific writer, and both al-Jāḥiz and al-Mas'ūdī could pick non-identical versions either from the same or from different works of his. What supports that possibility is: a) the fundamentally different language of the two versions47; b) the fact that in al-Jāḥiz's rendition the wife in question is Maysūn, the daughter of Bahdal, and in that of al-Mas'ūdī it is Fakhita, the daughter of Qaraza; c) the existence of an account about a very similar incident connected with the sister of Ḥusayn b. 'Alī48.

The introduction of emasculated males into the harim must have caused hesitations and reservations, especially in the beginning; and traditions of antagonism to it connected with this or that personality is the natural thing to expect. A more thorough reading of the sources might well bring an additional crop of similar traditions. Like the three versions just referred to, they will, in all probability, differ both in language and in details of varying degrees of importance. All this serves only to diminish the chances that al-Jāḥiz and al-Mas'ūdī copied from al-Madā'inī exactly the same account49. Neither is it certain that the first of them copied more accurately than the second.

We reach now the main implication to be drawn from the khadam of al-Jāḥiz in Jawārī. The context of that term's appearance there shows how widespread its euphemistic use had already become in that author's time. Al-Jāḥiz employed khadam without any additional clarification, because he had no doubt that his readers would know exactly what he means. He then used khisyān without any addition, being again completely certain that those readers would know precisely to which earlier passage in his epistle he refers50. It is thus made absolutely certain that

47 The reader can easily verify that fundamental difference, because M. reproduced the two versions.
48 See «On the Eunuchs, etc.», passage XVIII, on pp. 79-80.
49 As M. states (op. cit., p. 213, note 103), al-Jāḥiz repeats the Mu'āwiya incident in Kitāb al-Jawārī, etc. (ed. Hārūn), II, p. 125. But there he omits the name of Mu'āwiya, as M. points out. However, he does much more than that: he replaces Mu'āwiya by «one of the kings» (ba'd al-muluik). He omits also the name of al-Madā'inī. Only a small part of al-Jāḥiz's two versions is identical in its wording. Now what is the guarantee that the version of Kitāb al-Hayawān is a verbatim copy from al-Madā'inī? The attribution of the incident to an anonymous king corroborates my view that the same anecdote had been told in connection with various personalities.
50 There is yet another instructive aspect of the use of the term in our epistle. The one who employs the euphemism khadam in connection with the eunuchs is sāhib al-ghilmān,
in our author’s period *khadam* in the sense of «eunuchs» became so common and so well rooted (and consequently long in use) that there was no danger of its being confused with *khadam* in the original meaning of «servants>>, even when it appeared in the most general and undefined form. Thus the date of the frequent appearance of our term in its euphemistic sense can be considerably advanced. In the first version of my reply to M. I regarded the first half of the third/ninth century as a safe estimate. In view of the fact that al-Jāḥīz was born in 160/775 that estimate can be pushed well beyond that.

It is also worthwhile to link al-Jāḥīz’s *khadam* with those of some contemporary, near contemporary and later authors. For the purpose of my argumentation I shall not deal with them in an exact chronological order.

The earliest author I can quote is Ibn Khurdādhbih (205 [or 211]-280 [or 300]/820 [or 825]-893 [or 911]) who compiled his geography in 232/846 and made a number of additions to it in 272/885. I shall reproduce here two short passages.

They run as follows: a) «Jazirat al-Dhahab [= al-Rāhib ?]. The *khadam* used to be castrated there» (wa-bihā kāna yuḵ ġā al-ḵa- dam)53. b) «What is coming from the Western sea is the *khadam* belonging to the Slav, Byzantine and Frankish [ethnic groups] (wa-

who approves of pederasty with boys and eunuchs. By contrast, ṣāḥib al-jaw ri, who disapproves of it and is particularly opposed to the inclusion of the eunuchs in the debate, calls them by the unveiled designation ḥisāḏn with all its pejorative connotations. Pederasty and sexual relations with eunuchs are discussed in considerable detail in M.’s study (op. cit., pp. 206-209). One reason for al-Jāḥīz’s rare use of *khādim* or *khadam* in his discussion of the eunuchs is that when one deals with castration and the castrated, describing the operation and the results ensuing thereof, there is little need for euphemisms. Another reason is that a major aim of that author was to show that the eunuch is the very contrary of the perfect model («modèle parfait») of the male, as M. so aptly puts it (op. cit., pp. 210-211).

52 Miquel, *op. cit.*, 1, pp. XXI, 9a. According to Brockelmann Ibn Khurdādhbih «schrieb zwischen 230-4/844-8» (*GAL*, I, p. 225 (p. 258 of the new edition). I can express no opinion about the unresolved controversy in regard to the date of the composition of the said source, and to the authenticity of the version which survived (M. Hadj-Sadok, *El*, II, p. 839). However, in view of the fact that we all treat it as a major geographical and historical source, and use it abundantly (with full justification, in the present state of our knowledge), there is no reason whatsoever to have any reservation towards these two passages (especially as long as there is no very specific and weighty cause to doubt the earliness of each one of them).
53 *Kitāb al-Masālik wal-Manālik*, p. 112, line 8, and also «On the Eunuchs, etc.», p. 76, passage IVa.
Thus the khadam, who are «the castrated ones» (khisyān) according to al-Jāḥīz, are the khadam who are castrated (yukhsā) according to Ibn Khurdadhbih. Equally there cannot be the slightest doubt that the Šaqāliba and Frankish khadam of passage b from Ibn Khurdadhbih are as thoroughly castrated as the khadam of passage a from the same author.

Other comparatively early authors are al-Baladhuri, al-Ya‘qūbī and even al-Ṭabarī. We shall skip them for the moment and go straight to the evidence of al-Masʿūdī and al-Muqaddasī of the 4th/10th century.

Al-Masʿūdī, in the passage we have already cited, speaks about the khadam belonging to the following ethnical groups: Südān, Šaqāliba, Rūm and Șin. All of them undergo the process of castration (Yakhsūnahum) and all of them are eunuchs (khisyān).

Al-Muqaddasī speaks about the various kinds of khadam brought over to the lands of Islam (Barbar, Ḥabash, Šaqāliba, Rūm). All of them are castrated (the verb khasā in the relevant passage is mentioned four times, and salla once).

I cannot see any difference between the khadam of al-Jāḥīz and those of the three other authors. All of them demonstrate the perseverance of that term in that meaning, and these are only very few instances out of many. Note also the all-embracing character of the term, not limited to any social group or class, and including the various races.

The evidence just quoted from Ibn Khurdadhbih and al-Muqaddasī (and corroborated by numerous other instances) is most revealing in yet another way. The eunuchs mentioned there are called khadam even in the process of being imported to the lands of Islam (or being the target of such importation), and, therefore, even before being assigned to any job or task. Other names for slaves represent the state in which they actually are: either their state of slavery or their youthfulness (raqiq, ‘abid, mamālik, ghilmān, jawārī, etc.). This can have only one meaning: these khadam are not «servants», because at that stage they are jobless. They must be something else. And that «something else» can be nothing but eunuchs, as proved from the evidence of Ibn Khurdadhbih and al-

---

54 Kitāb al-Masilik wal-Mamālik, Leiden, 1889, p. 92, lines 4-6. Cp. also «On the Eunuchs, etc.», p. 76, passage V, no. e.
56 Al-Muqaddasī, pp. 242, 1.2-243, 1.3 (see also JSAI, I, pp. 75-6).
Muqaddasī and many others, as well as from the whole history of the term in the Muslim sources. 

We shall return now to the authors whom we skipped.

Ahmad b. Yahyā al-Baladhuri, who died well inside the third Hijra century (279/892 at the latest), mentions Faraj al-khādim twice as the builder of Tarsūs and Adhana in the years 171/787 and 194/810. Khalīfa b. Khayyāt calls him Faraj al-khasī. The instructive thing about this piece of evidence is that al-Baladhuri did not deem it necessary to explain khādim in the sense under discussion to his readers. Which is a decisive proof that in his time that sense had become a matter of common knowledge.

The historian-geographer al-Ya‘qūbi (died 284/897) wrote his geographical book quite late in life in Egypt, in 276/889-90 or 278/891. But his chronicle, which ends with the year 259/872, is considered to have been written well before his geography, while he still had been in the East. Each one of the important eunuchs of Sāmarra he mentions in his geographical book is called khādim, and the whole group al-khadam al-kibār. In al-Ya‘qūbi’s earlier chronicle that term is repeatedly mentioned.

What certainly constitutes the backbone of the whole study of the eunuch institution in the early centuries of Islam, is the combination of the chronicles of al-Ya‘qūbi and al-Tabarī. Al-Tabarī’s chronicle is, of course, much richer. But there is more than sufficient data in the first of the two, to establish that a good number of the individuals who are called khādim by al-Tabarī, are already so designated by the earlier source of al-Ya‘qūbi.

That all these very numerous khādīms are eunuchs can be established by an argument which had not been mentioned in the published part of my study, to which M. refers. The overwhelming majority of these individuals are prominent people. In spite of the fact that most of them are repeatedly mentioned in the sources, there is no trace (or almost so),

---

57 See also the examples in passage V, p. 76 of «On the Eunuchs in Islam», which can be multiplied.
61 The same is true of other contemporaries of al-Baladhuri.
62 Miquel, op. cit., p. XXI; Brockelmann, EI¹, IV, pp. 1152b-1153a.
63 See e.g. Kitāb al-Buldan, Leiden, 1892, p. 261, lines 10-13.
of any offspring of them. Suffice it to take any small number of unemasculated dignitaries and follow their careers in the sources, and the existence of their offspring would emerge quite quickly.

The implication of this formidable fact is the following one. It is very regrettable that for the period which precedes the time of the historians whose works came down to us, we cannot establish for sure whether the term \( \text{khādim} (= \text{khaṣī}) \) had already been then in use. However, any prominent person of that early period who is called \( \text{khādim} \) in later sources can be considered as eunuch with a very high degree (perhaps almost absolute) certainty. This gives us the key for a sure and unhesitant reconstruction of the eunuch institution in the crucial Muslim period for which we possess almost no contemporary sources. This fully applies to the important reign of Hārūn al-Rashīd, on whose eunuchs I am now completing a study (see notes 15 and 32). All the prominent \( \text{khādīms} \) of that famous Caliph (as of other Muslim rulers) are never mentioned as having children.

A no mean factor which helped the newer meaning of \( \text{khādim} \) to overshadow the original one is this. With its constant spread at the expense of other synonymous terms, more and more anonymous individual, as well as groups of, eunuchs were designated by it. By repeated use, however, \( \text{khādim} \) lost its euphemistic character (or, at least, most of it), thus defeating the purpose for which it came into being. In spite of that it had not been replaced by another euphemism. That is what quite usually happens to euphemisms of similar character. The implication of this phenomenon is that there would be a very great reluctance to use such terms in their original (usually literal) sense, lest people would confuse them with the prevailing (or at least very common) basically offensive meaning. Consequently, there is every chance that an unemasculated man servant would be believed to have been a eunuch, if he

---

64 There are both \( \text{khādīms} \) and \( \text{khaṣīs} \), who are called Abū so and so. But these are nonexistent sons. Some of the \( \text{khādīms} \) or \( \text{khaṣīs} \) have even wives and concubines. All this was given them in order to mitigate their mutilation.

65 There is a reasonable possibility that it had been. It is hard to believe that later sources had been so systematic as to replace every single \( \text{khaṣī} \) of earlier sources by \( \text{khādim} \). Thus the existence of a residue of \( \text{khādīms} \) from the earlier sources should not be ruled out. This supposition is considerably strengthened by al-Jāḥīz’s use of \( \text{khādim} \) and \( \text{khadami} \) in that sense.

66 The number of those earlier \( \text{khādīms} \), who are called also \( \text{khaṣī} \) is not negligible. And this can serve as an excellent Stichprobe for verifying the identity of the two terms. The only reason for designating a prominent person with the not too flattering title of \( \text{khādim} \) is to avoid using a much worse designation.
had been called *khādim*. The same goes for the term «eunuch>>, the original meaning of which is «bed chamber attendant» (the Greek *eunoukhos*). A virile bed chamber attendant would not be called «eunuch». For the same reason «rest room>>, «water closet>>, *bayt al-rāḥa* and the numerous other euphemistic appellations of the «privy» in the various languages, would be hardly used in their literal sense.

One should not infer from the above series of arguments that every single *khādim* encountered in the historical and related sources is a eunuch beyond any shadow of doubt, especially if he is not a prominent person. Such an absolute certainty does not exist with regard to any term which underwent a similar process of development. I have already stressed this point several times in my study «On the Eunuchs in Islam>>, and I deal with a number of specific instances in «Hārūn al-Rashīd and his Eunuchs». My sole aim was to demonstrate how overwhelming are the chances that that term means «eunuchs» in this kind of sources. The absolute assertion found in a work of Ghars al-Nīʿma Muḥammad, the son of Hilāl al-Ṣāḥī (died 480/1087), that *khādim* does not have a child (*khādim lā yakūn lahu walad*) in the sense that it is impossible for a *khādim* to have a child, should be interpreted in this way. That is how I actually interpreted it:

«It [khādim as equivalent to khasī] had become dominant to such a degree ... that it had relegated the original meaning of this common word to a very secondary place».

Thus, even as late as the eleventh century, where the predominance of our return in the sense under discussion is generally accepted, there is no 100 percent certainty concerning each single case.

In concluding this reply we shall return to al-Jāḥīz. His employment of *khadam* as the synonym of *khisyān* in Jawari, and the circumstances and context in which he did it, necessitated a thorough reevaluation on my part of the contribution of that author to the proper understanding of that term and its historical development. The reevaluation is, however, in the very opposite direction to M.’s conclusions.

---

68 *Ibid.*, pp. 84-5. See also p. 84 above.
69 On the basis of the data available then to M. and myself the evaluation in the first version of my reply was completely justified. See also the detailed remarks in note 50. The importance of al-Jāḥīz's contribution is mainly qualitative. That of al-Ṭabarī is quantitative as well. Yet al-Jāḥīz as a source for the study of the place and functioning of the eunuchs within the socio-military institution is of a quite marginal importance. An important aspect of the evidence of al-Jāḥīz, Ibn Khurdadhbih, al-Balādhuri, al-Yaʿqūbī and al-Ṭabarī is
This is as far as the reply is concerned. A remark of a much more general character has to be made. The clarification of the meaning of the term Khādim forms the pivot of the whole study of the eunuch phenomenon in Islam during the Middle Ages. Establishing its unequivocal sense is, therefore, of the highest possible importance.

D. Ayalon

that the lives of all these authors are overlapping. Thus we have an unbroken continuity in the study of our term.

Remarks made in the present paper without the mention of sources are based partly on data scattered in the already published chapter of my study on the eunuchs and used there for a different purpose, and partly on forthcoming chapters. In those chapters the important contribution of C. Pellat to the study of the subject in his article Khaṣi in El² is acknowledged.