



---

The Boon-Companion in Early 'Abbāsid Times

Author(s): Anwar G. Chejne

Source: *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 85, No. 3 (Jul. - Sep., 1965), pp. 327-335

Published by: American Oriental Society

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/597815>

Accessed: 14-02-2018 20:59 UTC

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

*American Oriental Society* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Journal of the American Oriental Society*

to it.”<sup>51</sup> He adds that through the physical act of raising the hands and eyes to heaven, the mind is raised to God. Heaven is a symbol of the majesty of the Creator.

Philoponus obliterates the pagan-Aristotelian distinction between the divine, eternal heavens and the transitory sublunar world. But it is not quite precise to say that he abrogates the superiority of heaven.<sup>52</sup> Heaven and earth are placed in the same order, but heaven ranks higher than earth. That heaven ranks higher than earth and is more closely associated with the divine is part of his Christian heritage. The light metaphor and the idea that all things receive the divine illumination and do so according to their capacity are reflections from Neo-Platonism, but they appear to have been integrated into his Christian vision, and the idea that all things are filled with God<sup>53</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Ed. G. Reichardt, Leipzig, 1897, p. 49, 15–18.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Sambursky, *op. cit.*, p. 174. The superiority of heaven is implied in several places by Philoponus. Apart from the passage just quoted from *De opificio mundi*, see, e.g., *De aeternitate mundi contra Proclum*, p. 396, 20–397; 20; and the fragment from *Contra Aristotelem* in Simplicius, *In De caelo*, p. 142, 17–19.

<sup>53</sup> Note the expression *theōn einai plērē* (“to be full of

is not inconsistent with the biblical view that the whole earth is filled with His presence.

gods”) in the excerpt of Simplicius. It is possible that Philoponus used such an expression in the original passage and that it has been omitted in the Arabic text (note the lacuna). The notion that “idols are divine and filled with the divine presence” was put forth by Iamblichus in his *Perì agálmátōn*, a work which was refuted by Philoponus (for this quotation, which is cited from Philoponus’ refutation by Photius, *Bibliotheca*, ed. Bekker, [215], p. 173b, 6–8, see E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1963, p. 294). It is also possible that Philoponus used a light metaphor to indicate the divine presence (see *Simplicius, In De caelo*, p. 141, 24: *tōn theiōn ellámpseōn en toútois* [*scil.* in the temples, the holy places and the idols]). These pagan ideas and expressions are then borrowed by Philoponus at the end of the passage and used for his own purposes in the phrases “all things are filled with God” and “the light of God is shed upon everything.” (For the phenomenon of a luminous presence of the divine in the temples and cultic images of Hellenistic pagan mystery religions, see F. Cumont, *Textes et monuments figurés relatifs aux mystères de Mithra*, I, Bruxelles, 1899, pp. 322–323; K. de Jong, *Das antike Mysterienwesen*, Leiden, 1909, p. 316; G. Wetter, *Phōs*, Uppsala and Leipzig, 1915, pp. 27–28; and R. Bultmann, “Zur Geschichte der Lichtsymbolik im Altertum, *Philologus*, XCVII [1948], p. 36.)

## THE BOON-COMPANION IN EARLY ‘ABBĀSID TIMES\*

ANWAR G. CHEJNE

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

IN MEDIEVAL ISLAM, people of artistic and intellectual talent depended, as a rule, on the court, which they eagerly sought in the hope of tangible or intangible rewards. Thus, the court of a ruler comprised—in addition to regular appointees such as viziers, secretaries, chamberlains, and others—a goodly number of people with diversified talents such as tutors, literateurs, astrologers, physicians, poets, singers, charlatans, buffoons, dancing girls, and so forth. From this conglomerate of people there emerged a group of

individuals—the boon-companions—who constituted a class by themselves. They were selected from among the best talents to befriend the ruler, and were given a permanent position at the court which carried great prestige and influence. It is hoped that the following notes, although incomplete, will help to shed some light on the boon-companion (*nadīm*) and the institution of boon-companionship (*munādamah*) in early ‘Abbāsīd times.

The importance of boon-companionship as an enviable institution, say, comparable to that of a secretary or chamberlain, is attested by the num-

\* A portion of this paper was read in 1962 at a meeting of the American Oriental Society.

ber of works dealing with it, and by the wide references to it by biographers, historians, belles-lettrists, and other authors.<sup>1</sup> In the *Fihrist*<sup>2</sup> of

<sup>1</sup> References to the boon-companion (*nadīm*) and to the institution of boon-companionship (*munādamah*) are quite abundant in Arabic literature. Following are some of the works and abbreviations used in this paper:

Abū al-Faraj al-Isfahānī, *Aghānī*, 21 vols. ed. by a Board of Scholars, Beirut 1956-57.

Bowen, H. *The Life and Times of 'Alī b. 'Isā "The Good Vizier"*, Cambridge 1928.

Brockelmann, C. *Geschichte der arabischen Literatur*, Supp., I, Leiden, 1942.

Chejne, A., "Al-Faḍl b. al-Rabī': A Politician of the Early 'Abbāsīd Period", *Islamic Culture*, 36 (1962), 167 ff. and 237 ff.

*Encyclopaedia of Islam: (EI)*, New Edition (Leiden 1960).

Farrūkh, 'U., *Abū Nuwās*, Beirut 1946.

al-Firūzābādī, *al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ*, Cairo n.d.

Grunebaum, G. E. von, *Medieval Islam*, 3rd Impression, Chicago 1956.

Ḥajjī Khalīfah, *Kashf*, ed. by G. Flügel, 7 vols. Leipzig-London 1835-58.

Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi, *Kitāb al-'iqd al-farīd*, ed. by Aḥmad Amīn et al., 7 vols. Cairo 1948-53.

Ibn Iskandar, K. K., *Qābūs Nāma*, Eng. transl. by R. Levy, *A Mirror for Princes*, New York 1951.

Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt*, 2 vols., Cairo n.d.

Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, 20 vols., Beirut 1955-56.

Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, Cairo 1348 H.

Ibn al-Ṭiḡṭāqā, *al-Fakhrī*, Cairo n.d.

Jahshiyārī, *Kitāb al-wuzarā'*, Cairo 1938.

Levy, R., *A Baghdad Chronicle*, Cambridge 1929.

al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj*, 2 vols., Cairo 1303 H.

Mez, A. *El Renacimiento del Islam*, Madrid 1936.

Nizām al-Mulk, *Siyāset nāmeḥ*, Eng. transl. by H. Darke, *The Book of Government or Rules for Kings*, New Haven 1960.

Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-'Arab*, Cairo 1345 H.

Rāghib al-Iṣbahānī, *Muḥāḍarāt al-udabā'*, 2 vols., Cairo n.d.

Rāghib al-Iṣbahānī, *Mufradāt fī gharīb al-Qur'ān: (Mufradāt)*, Cairo n.d.

al-Rāzī, Muḥ. b. 'Alī Bakr. b. 'Abd. al-Qādir, *Mukhtaṣar al-ṣiḥāḥ*, Cairo 1308 H.

Rosenthal, F., *History of Muslim Historiography: (History)*, Leiden 1952.

Rosenthal F., *Aḥmad b. al-Ṭayyib aṣ-Ṣarāḥsī: (al-Sharakhṣī)*, New Haven 1943.

Rosenthal, F., *Humor in Islam: (Humor)*, Leiden 1956.

al-Ṣūlī, *Akhbār al-'Abbās*.

al-Ṣūlī, *Adab al-Kuttāb*, Cairo 1341 H.

al-Suyūṭī, *Ta'rīkh al-khulafā'*, Cairo 1351 H.

Ibn al-Nadīm (d.995) there is a whole section devoted to boon-companions, companions, learned individuals, singers and others. Following are some of the well-known boon-companions and their respective works on the institution of boon-companionship as given by Ibn al-Nadīm:

The famous singer Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī (d.850) wrote three works: *Kitāb al-nudamā'*; *Kitāb al-munādamah*; and *Kitāb munādamāt al-ikhwān wa-tasāmūr al-khullān*.<sup>3</sup> His son Ḥammād is credited with *Akhbār al-nudamā'*.<sup>4</sup> Aḥmad b. Ḥamdūn (d.922), whose family served as *nadīms* for generations<sup>5</sup>, wrote *Kitāb al-nudamā' wa-l-julasā'*.<sup>6</sup> Abū al-Ḥasan Aḥmad b. Ja'far b. Mūsā b. Khālīd b. Barmak Jaḥḥāh (d.944), a descendant of the famous Barmakid family, has *Kitāb al-nadīm*.<sup>7</sup> Ibn Khurdādhbih (d.ca.886) wrote *Kitāb al-nudamā' wa-l-julasā'*; Ibn Marzabān, *Kitāb al-julasā' wa-l-nudamā'*; Abū al-'Abr al-Ḥāshimī, *Kitāb al-munādamah wa-akhlāq al-khulafā'*; and Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn b. al-Ṣabgh b. al-Ḥarrūn, *Kitāb mujālasāt al-ru'asā'*.<sup>11</sup>

In the *Irshād* of Yāqūt (d.1229) appear the following: 'Alī b. 'Ubaydah al-Rihānī, who lived under al-Ma'mūn, and who is credited with three works: *Kitāb madḥ al-nadīm*, *Kitāb al-mujālasāt*, and *Kitāb al-munādamāt*; Muḥammad b. Aḥmad, who served at the court of Sayf al-Dawlah, wrote *Tadhkirat al-nadīm*; and Ibn 'Abd al-Ṣamad (d.865), *Kitāb al-munādamah wa-akhlāq al-ru'asā'*.<sup>14</sup>

Finally, Ḥajjī Khalīfah (d.1659) lists two works, *Adab al-nadīm* and *Adab al-nudamā' wa-laṭā'if*

al-Tha'libī, *Yatīmat al-dahr*, 4 vols., Damascus 1304 H.

Yāqūt, *Irshād*, ed. by D. S. Margoliouth, 7 vols. London 1907-27.

<sup>2</sup> *Fihrist*, 201-22.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>5</sup> See below, 14 ff.

<sup>6</sup> *Fihrist*, 207.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 212; cf. Yaqut, VI, 279.

<sup>12</sup> Yāqūt, V, 270.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, VI, 247.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, VI, 272.

*al-ẓurafā'*<sup>15</sup>, by Abū Faṭḥ Kushājīm (d.961), the astrologer and chef of Sayf al-Dawlah.

There is also the *Rās māl al-nadīm* by Aḥmad b. 'Alī al-'Abbās Bābah, which is in manuscript form in Istanbul.<sup>16</sup>

Except for the last three, the works alluded to have not come down to us. One may presume that this considerable number of works may contain identical material that may be traced to one single original source. The state of the data available does not allow for a definite judgment in this regard. Be this as it may, the subject under investigation can be clarified, although with serious limitations, with the use of biographical, historical, and *adab* works, through a careful study of biographies of well known *nadīms*. For instance, the historian al-Mas'ūdī (d.956) gives us valuable data on the institution in his *Murūj*,<sup>17</sup> and often refers the reader to his *Akhbār al-zamān* where, he says, the subject is dealt with at some length. Unfortunately, this work as it is now in a Cairo edition can hardly be genuine, since it contains next to nothing on the subject. On the other hand, supplementary information may be secured in the *Akhbār al-'Abbās* of the historian and literateur al-Ṣūlī (d.946), himself a boon-companion, which contains valuable information about the institution, particularly with reference to literary and drinking sessions, and the manner in which they were held and concluded.

One may add that the eleventh century ruler Ibn Iskandar, who composed his *Qābūs nāma* as a guide to his son, did not fail to include a section on the importance and function of boon-companionship, an acquaintance with which he considers necessary to anyone aspiring to rulership.<sup>18</sup> Likewise, the able vizier Niẓām al-Mulk (d.1092) has a chapter on boon-companionship in his well-known *Siyāset nāmeḥ*.<sup>19</sup> The belles-lettrist Rāghib

al-Iṣbahānī (d.1108) also has a section in his *Muḥāḍarāt*,<sup>20</sup> which deals with the various aspects of the institution. Finally, one may mention the anthologies of al-Iṣfahānī (d.967) and Ibn 'Abd Rabbihī (d.940), the *Yatīmat* of al-Tha'ālibī (d.1038), the *Nihāyat* of al-Nuwayrī (d.1332), the *Irshād* of Yāqūt (d.1229), the *Wafayāt* of Ibn Khallikān (d.1282), among many others that have significant information on the subject.

In the light of the data available, it appears that the boon-companions constituted an important group at the court of the ruler, and that the office of boon-companion formed a part of a well-organized institution with a set of rigorous requirements and protocol. It also seems that the office evolved in the same manner and at the same time as that of the vizier, reaching its most institutionalized form under the 'Abbāsids. There are indications that the Umayyad rulers did befriend people of talent, but it is doubtful that the institution of the boon-companion ever developed under them to any appreciable degree in terms of exacting requirements, etiquette and ceremonials. Even under the early 'Abbāsids, the *nadīms* were kept at a distance from the caliph, with a curtain separating them as had been the custom under the Parthian and Sassanian kings.<sup>21</sup> However, they were given generous gifts then. Al-Mas'ūdī<sup>22</sup> states that the first 'Abbāsīd caliph al-Saffāḥ (750–54) kept them at a distance from him with a curtain separating them. This practice was followed by his two successors al-Manṣūr and al-Mahdī. However the latter changed their seclusion and mingled with them, stating that one derives more pleasure from being with and beholding them.<sup>23</sup> In fact, al-Mahdī is said to have liked their close company, but refused to allow his two heirs al-Hādī and al-Rashīd to be influenced by them. He gave express orders to his *nadīms* not to come near the princes. When he discovered that his favorite singer al-Mawṣilī and the poet Ibn Jāmi' had been associated with them,

<sup>15</sup> Hajjī Khalīfah, III, 224; cf. Brockelmann, S., I, 137. They were published in Būlāq 1298 H. and Alexandria 1329 H. respectively.

<sup>16</sup> Ms. Istanbul, Nuru Osmaniye 3296; cf. Rosenthal, *Humor*, 12.

<sup>17</sup> For instance, *Murūj*, I, 105ff.

<sup>18</sup> Ibn Iskandar, 196–200.

<sup>19</sup> Niẓām al-Mulk, 92–94; and 122.

<sup>20</sup> Rāghib al-Iṣbahānī, I, 330–34.

<sup>21</sup> Mas'ūdī, I, 106; Rāghib al-Iṣbahānī, I, 331.

<sup>22</sup> Mas'ūdī, I, 156; Rāghib al-Iṣbahānī, I, 331; Suyūṭī, 179.

<sup>23</sup> Rāghib al-Iṣbahānī, I, 331; Suyūṭī, 184.

al-Mawṣilī received 360 lashes and Ibn Jāmi' was banished from the city.<sup>24</sup>

However, al-Hādī and al-Rashīd were not dissuaded. When they assumed the throne, they allowed the *nadīms* to be closer to them than ever before<sup>25</sup>, to such a point that some of them came to exert no small influence in the court. It seems, therefore, that from this time on the institution gained more respectability, acquiring weight and dignity, and at the same time requiring certain qualifications pertaining to conduct, ability and manners. Already, the poet Abū Nuwās (d.ca. 814), who often befriended al-Rashīd, succeeded in gaining the confidence of al-Amīn to be his full-fledged *nadīm*.<sup>26</sup> In fact, the poet sheds some light on the institution. He remarks that alcoholic beverages should not be partaken alone, but with people, who are pleasing to the eye, to the ear and to the heart.<sup>27</sup> To him, an ideal session (*maḡlis*) should consist of five persons: three guests, the host and a musician, and any addition may spoil it.<sup>28</sup> The boon-companion must observe good deportment, forbearance, humility and brevity in speech, and should remember that the talk uttered at night should be forgotten by daybreak.<sup>29</sup>

It is quite apparent, therefore, that by the time of al-Rashīd (786–809) the institution of boon-companionship had reached a definite stage of development. This is attested further by the existence of a galaxy of *nadīms* at that time, who were outstanding individuals in the various pursuits. Consequently, it is likely that the *nadīm* became part of the court on a permanent basis, befriending the caliph in his time of solitude, hunting parties, chess games, and drinking and

literary sessions, and in whatever occasion, depending on the proclivity and taste of the ruler. Moreover, the close association of the *nadīm* with the ruler made his position all the more important and influential, especially in the ninth and tenth centuries when the title of *nadīm* was eagerly sought, to a point that al-Muqtadir (908–32) found no better title to confer on general Mu'nis, the actual ruler of the Empire, than the title of *nadīm*.<sup>30</sup>

Now the question may be posed concerning the origin of the institution. This is a difficult problem in the light of the data available. However, according to al-Mas'ūdī<sup>31</sup>, it dates back to the Parthian king Ardashīr, who is credited with having been the first person to classify his entourage according to ranks within the framework of certain qualities, requirements and qualifications, mainly the quality of nobility. Ardashīr believed the boon-companionship to be part of government (*siyāṣah*), and the means of strengthening rulership. He classifies it into three categories. The first is made up of nobles and princes who sit at the right side of the king at a distance ten yards away from him; they form the retinue of the king, his boon-companions, and conversationalists from among the nobles and learned people. The second category includes the Marzabāns and the governors of provinces who sit ten yards away from the first category. And the third category, which is placed ten yards away from the second, is made up of jesters and jokers, but does not include any person of low origin, or of no consequence; or defective of limbs, or too tall or too short.<sup>32</sup> According to the same author, subsequent kings and caliphs followed Ardashīr's example. It would also seem that the institution was borrowed by the Byzantine Emperors.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Mez, 46; general Mu'nis, who made and unmade viziers, was invested with the honorary title of boon-companion. Ḥusayn b. Qāsim, who was made vizier by Mu'nis, plotted against the latter, and it was for al-Muqtadir to honor him with the title of boon-companion. (See Bowen, 313).

<sup>31</sup> Mas'ūdī, I, 105 ff.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 105.

<sup>33</sup> Grunebaum, 214.

<sup>24</sup> Levy, 34–35; Ibn al-Ṭiḡṭaqā, 138, says that al-Mahdī used to order his guards to whip the boon-companions whenever they came near the heir-apparents, in order to protect them. It appears, however, that al-Hādī's boon-companions had much inclination for drinking and singing; so had al-Hādī.

<sup>25</sup> Mas'ūdī, II, 328.

<sup>26</sup> See *EI*, "Abū Nuwās."

<sup>27</sup> Farrūkh, 72.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 74; also, Rāghib al-Iṣbahānī, I, 331; Ṣūlī mentions nine (see below, 11); and Niẓām al-Mulk, 94, mentions that the Sultans of Ghazna had always had twenty companions: ten standing and ten sitting.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

On the other hand, the word *nadīm* does not suggest a non-Arabic origin. How and when the word took its technical connotation as a boon-companion is as difficult to determine as the question of origin. Already in pre-Islamic times there are ample references to *nadīms*, especially in connection with the courts of the Lakhmīds and Ghassānīds. At any rate, the word *nadīm* is definitely derived from the Arabic root *nadīma*, meaning “to repent of”, or “to regret”. This connotation is apparent in the *Qur’ān*, *Ḥadīth* and other literary texts. Lexicographers such as Rāghib al-Iṣbahānī, Fīrūzābādī, and Ibn Manẓūr do not offer a satisfactory and convincing explanation as to the manner in which the word *nadīma* “to regret”, or “to repent of” took the connotation of conviviality and companionship. They equate the third form *nādama* with *jālasa* ‘*alā al-sharāb* “to drink with, or to join in drinking”, and take *munādamah* as a synonym of *mujālasah*. Rāghib al-Iṣbahānī further states that the word *munādamah* may be equated with the word *mudāwamah*, meaning “perseverance”, or “asking or receiving respite”, and mentions the view that two drinkers (*sharībān*) can be called *nadīmān*, because of their repentance for what they have done.<sup>34</sup> Thus, from the union or reunion of more than one person in any given session, whether for drinking, literary discussion, games, or other pursuit, emerged the connotation of conviviality or boon-companionship. This etymological explanation conforms rather to the historical development of the institution than to semantics.

Be this as it may, all indications point to the fact that boon-companionship in Islam was so institutionalized that it required a rigorous set of qualifications. Unlike its counterpart under the Parthians and Sassanians, the institution was not restricted to the nobility, but was open to anyone

of talent. Its *raison d’être* in Islam was justified in that the ruler ought to have suitable companions with whom he could enjoy complete freedom and intimacy in his time of leisure. Perhaps rightly, Nizām al-Mulk rules out the company of officials and nobles on the ground that it tends to diminish the king’s majesty and dignity, and leads by virtue of familiarity to high-handed practices and oppression. He thus concludes:

As a general rule, people who are employed in any official capacity should not be admitted as boon-companions, nor should those who are accepted for companionship be appointed to any public office ....<sup>35</sup>

To him, even physicians and astrologers should be excluded. He says:

The physician forbids us to eat the things we like and gives us medicine when we are not ill and bleeds us when we have no pains; likewise, the astrologer prevents us from doing what we want to do and hinders us from important business.<sup>36</sup>

To Nizām al-Mulk, the advantages of having boon-companions are four: company for the king; the boon-companions can serve as bodyguards; the king can say frivolous and serious things not suitable for the ears of the viziers or other nobles; and finally, all sorts of things—bad and good—can be heard from the boon-companions.<sup>37</sup>

The prospective *nadīm*, as already indicated, had to meet stiff requirements and submit to rigorous rules of etiquette depending on the taste and inclination of the ruler.<sup>38</sup> He must be fit physically, and is expected to have a good knowledge of the *Qur’ān*, Prophetic Traditions, Arabic

<sup>35</sup> Nizām al-Mulk, 92. In actual practice, however, prominent officials were not altogether excluded.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 94. Some astrologers, like al-Munajjim, and physicians, as in the case of al-Sharakhsī, were not excluded either.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 93. Nizām al-Mulk says that the *nadīms* can be consulted on feasting, drinking, polo, wrestling, and the like.

<sup>38</sup> Nizām al-Mulk, 94, says: “A boon-companion is the reflexion of his ruler. If he is affable, liberal, patient, gracious, the ruler is likely to be so.” Ibn al-Ṭiḡṭāqā, 31, likewise equates the character of the ruler with that of the *nadīm* when he says that al-Musta’ṣim was given wholly to pastime and singing, so were his *nadīms* and entourage.

<sup>34</sup> Rāghib al-Iṣbahānī, *Mufradāt*, 505, says, *qāla ba-ḍuhum al-munādamah wa-l-mudāwamah yataqārabān wa-qāla ba-ḍuhum al-sharībān summiyā nadīmayn limā yata ‘aqab aḥwāluhumā min al-nadāmah ‘alā fi ‘layhimā*. Fīrūzābādī, IV, 183, says, *wa-nādamahu munādamatan .... jālasahu ‘alā al-sharāb*. Ibn Manẓūr, XII, 572, says, *wa-l-nadīm al-sharīb al-ladhī yunādīmuḥ ... wa-nādamānī fulān ‘alā al-sharāb fahuwa nadīmī*. Cf. Rāzī, 371.

grammar, poetry, prosody, music, history, and even the arts of cooking and horse breeding.<sup>39</sup> He must be of age<sup>40</sup> and have a good physical appearance, although unusual ability might compensate for physical shortcomings.<sup>41</sup> He must not be repetitious, for this would lead to boredom and annoyance.<sup>42</sup> Again Nizām al-Mulk states the requirements in detail. He says that a boon-companion should be well-bred, accomplished and cheerful of face. He should have pure faith, be able to keep secrets, and wear good clothes. He must possess an ample fund of amusing and serious stories, and be able to tell them well. He must be a good talker and pleasant partner; he should know how to play backgammon and chess, and if he can play a musical instrument and use a weapon, so much the better. He must always agree with the king.<sup>43</sup> Ibn Iskandar similarly asserts that the boon-companion must have the aptitude for the office and possess certain qualities and qualifications. For one thing, he must make a contribution to a company, for “. . . if his master's assembly (*majlis*) gains no adornment from him, he should at least not disfigure it.”<sup>44</sup> He must possess all the five senses and must “present an appearance from which men's eyes are not averted in disgust.”<sup>45</sup> He must have the ability to act as secretary in Arabic and Persian; he should know what is good and bad in poetry and have some notion of the art of versification; he should commit to memory poems both in Arabic and Persian; he should have some knowledge of medicine, astrology, some skill with playing a musical instrument; be a raconteur; should play backgammon and chess; should know the *Qur'ān* by heart and comment upon it; know some Traditions, jurisprudence, application of the law, and be well read concerning the lives of monarchs and their character. He must be endowed with both serious-

ness and humor, “yet conscious of the appropriate time for each.” He must not be unaware of his master and must never cast glances at his slaves that might arouse suspicion.<sup>46</sup> Finally, he must possess the qualities of chivalry and manliness for whenever the occasion may arise, and must have the ability to contend with any one man or two. Thus, he concludes:

If the qualities I have described exist in you, then you are equipped for the function of boon-companionship with the king. But if you regard the purpose of such companionship to be no more than eating, drinking, and jesting [you are wrong], that is the conduct of worthless people.<sup>47</sup>

As can be readily seen,<sup>48</sup> the *nadīm* was in actual practice an unusual person with some superior qualities. A rather humorous note is supplied by Rāghib al-Iṣbahānī concerning some of the exacting demands. It is related that al-Mu'taṣim sent for Ibn al-Junayd to be his companion, and when Ibn al-Junayd inquired what was expected of him and how he should proceed, he was told to beware of spitting, yawning, blowing the nose, coughing, or sneezing. This was too much for Ibn al-Junayd to accept, and when he was called before the caliph, he excused himself by saying that such conditions can scare even the devil, adding that he would prefer a company where one can pass gas in this or that direction without much fuss being made about it.<sup>49</sup>

As members of a group, the *nadīms* had their ranks, and it appears that they had to wear special clothes for each occasion. Ibn al-Ṭiṭṭaqā reports that during drinking parties held by Ja'far b. Yaḥyā al-Barmakī with his *nadīms*, the latter had to wear red, yellow, and green attires, apparently according to their ranks.<sup>50</sup> In actual practice, the *nadīm* was expected to be able to converse about any conceivable subject, or participate in many activities of trivial or serious nature. He was highly paid, and drew a salary often

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Rosenthal, *History*, 47; also, Grunebaum, 214.

<sup>40</sup> Mas'ūdī, II, 257, relates that a lad with the rank of a *nadīm* had to attend the sessions of boon-companions standing, on account of his age.

<sup>41</sup> See below, 14.

<sup>42</sup> Mas'ūdī, II, 158; Rāghib al-Iṣbahānī, I, 330.

<sup>43</sup> Nizām al-Mulk, 93.

<sup>44</sup> Ibn Iskandar, 196-97.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>46</sup> See below, 94.

<sup>47</sup> Ibn Iskandar, 199.

<sup>48</sup> See below, 12 ff.

<sup>49</sup> Rāghib al-Iṣbahānī, I, 330.

<sup>50</sup> Ibn al-Ṭiṭṭaqā, 150.

higher than that of judges and theologians.<sup>51</sup> In addition, he was given generous rewards, awarded villages in fief, and even given a wide territory to administer and exploit for himself.<sup>52</sup> Al-Mutawakkil awarded his *nadīm* 'Alī b. al-Munajjim one hundred thousand dinars for the preparation of a meal he liked, but ordered after a second thought to pay the sum in installments so as to avoid criticism.<sup>53</sup> Al-Rāḍī, to cite another example, became famous for his prodigality to his *nadīms* to whom he gave daily rewards, and for which he was severely criticized.<sup>54</sup>

The *nadīms* met regularly in a *majlis* presided over by the ruler or host. The session dealt with literary, scientific, military matters, or with any subject or amusement that appealed to the ruler. On one occasion, al-Mu'taṣim put his *nadīms* to cook foods in different pots, and made an unwelcome guest taste them all and pass judgment on the quality of each dish.<sup>55</sup> Al-Mu'tamid (869–92) liked the discussion of music, and was interested in the origin of musical instruments.<sup>56</sup> Al-Rāḍī (933–40) liked to hear stories about past kings,<sup>57</sup> and to discuss food and drink, and the way they should be prepared and partaken.<sup>58</sup> The *nadīm* al-Ṣūlī gives an eye-witness description of the manner in which the inaugural session between al-Rāḍī and his *nadīms* was held, conducted and concluded.<sup>59</sup> Al-Ṣūlī states that the *nadīms* sat according to their ranks: four at the right side of the caliph and five at his left. At the right were the prince Ishāq b. al-Mu'tamid, al-Ṣūlī himself as an expert in chess, a philologist and the famous *nadīm* Ibn Ḥamdūn.<sup>60</sup> At the left were three courtiers-literateurs of the Munajjim family<sup>61</sup> and two other high officials. The session started with recitation of some poetry: then al-Rāḍī re-

flected on the burden bestowed upon him as the new caliph and on the trouble caused to him by one of his uncles. It was for al-Ṣūlī to console him and to advise him not to pay heed to his uncle, calling his attention to a similar experience of the Prophet with his uncle Abū Lahab. The rest of the session was spent in drinking. The meeting was concluded after the utterance of a formula by the caliph; it was of about three hours duration.

It may be assumed that the office of *nadīm* was not a permanent appointment at first, and that the many people who attended the court for either entertainment or praise of the caliph could hardly be called *nadīms*. As already suggested,<sup>62</sup> it was about the time of al-Rashīd that the *nadīms* may be said to have become an integral part of court life, thus enjoying great prestige and many of the prerogatives of the regular courtiers, but without the official responsibilities required, say, of a chamberlain or a secretary. Already they seem to have exerted no small an influence on the caliph al-Hādī.<sup>63</sup> His brother and successor al-Rashīd is said to have been the first caliph to give the *nadīms* ranks and categories (*marātib wa-ṭabaqāt*).<sup>64</sup> To be sure, al-Rashīd's entourage was quite large. There were the Barmakids, who served him not only in an official capacity but as intimate associates as well. The great poet Abū al-'Atāhiyah (d.828) was the court poet of al-Mahdī, and later on, of al-Rashīd, who bestowed on him a yearly pension of five thousand dirhams and numerous gifts. Likewise, al-'Abbās b. Aḥnaf was the favorite of al-Rashīd, who employed him for the purpose of amusing him in time of leisure. Moreover, high contemporary officials like the Barmakids and Faḍl b. al-Rabī' had their *majlis*, which was attended by the leading talents of the time.<sup>65</sup>

Moreover, it was under al-Rashīd that the famous singer and *nadīm* Abū Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī (d.ca.826) held an enviable position at the court. He sang accompanied by his son-in-law Zalzal who

<sup>51</sup> Mez, 232.

<sup>52</sup> See below, 93.

<sup>53</sup> See below, 93.

<sup>54</sup> Mas'ūdī, II, 375.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 267.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 325.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 375.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 384 ff; cf. Mez, 187.

<sup>59</sup> Mez, 186–87; Mas'ūdī, II, 294 and 384.

<sup>60</sup> See below, 94.

<sup>61</sup> See below, 92 ff.

<sup>62</sup> See above, 84.

<sup>63</sup> Ibn al-Tiqṭaqā, 137 ff.

<sup>64</sup> Suyūṭī, 196.

<sup>65</sup> Chejne, 201; cf. *Aghānī*, III, 308.



was an accomplished musician. Al-Rashīd awarded him on one occasion four thousand dirhams for a single performance. Al-Mawṣilī was succeeded by his son Ishāq (d.ca.847), who served as *nadīm* to various caliphs. In addition to being a gifted singer, Ishāq was conversant in grammar, poetry, historical information, Prophetic traditions, jurisprudence and other subjects, qualifications that were admired by al-Ma'mūn, who is said to have told Ishāq on one occasion, "Had it not been for your singing I would have made you a judge."<sup>66</sup> Ishāq used to have some squabbles with Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī (d.839)—a prince and for a time caliph—who himself was an accomplished poet and *nadīm*.

From the galaxy of *nadīms*, who excelled in the different branches of knowledge known to the time, one may single out a few names. There was the poet Abū 'Alī Ḥusayn b. al-Ḍaḥḥāq b. Yāsir (d.250/862), who served in the capacity of *nadīm* from the time of al-Amīn to that of al-Mu'taṣim;<sup>67</sup> the literateur and astrologer Abū al-Anbas Muḥammad b. Ishāq al-Saymarī (d.888);<sup>68</sup> the prolific writer and thinker al-Sharakhsī (d.899), tutor and later on the *nadīm* of al-Mu'taḍid, who met a violent death, presumably for having violated one of the caliph's secrets.<sup>69</sup>

But of special interest are the families of Banū Munajjim and Banū Ḥamdūn. Both families served for almost a century as *nadīms* and contributed to elevate the institution to a height never attained before. Some members of the two families not only succeeded in mastering the etiquette and demands of boon-companionship, but excelled in many pursuits, and came to acquire an enormous fortune and powerful social position.

One may distinguish five *nadīms* of the Banū Munajjim. Abū Maṣṣūr Yaḥyā al-Munajjim, from whom the family took its name, was the astrologer of Faḍl b. Sahl, the powerful and able vizier of the caliph al-Ma'mūn. Al-Faḍl relied

heavily on his prognostications, especially during the civil war between the two brothers al-Amīn and al-Ma'mūn. Al-Munajjim later became the astrologer and *nadīm* of al-Ma'mūn, who is said to have at first remained aloof from the *nadīms*. He was succeeded to the office of *nadīm* by his son 'Alī, his two grandsons Yaḥyā and Hārūn b. 'Alī and his great-grandson 'Alī b. Hārūn.

Al-Munajjim's son 'Alī (d.275/888)<sup>70</sup> was given the investiture of boon-companionship under al-Mutawakkil on the recommendation of Faṭḥ b. Khāqān.<sup>71</sup> His ugliness was described by a contemporary as "worse than that of a monkey".<sup>72</sup> Yet his many abilities and knowledge of medicine, astrology, poetry, literature, history, singing, cooking, jesting, and so forth, may have compensated for it. In fact the same observer, who witnessed 'Alī in action, saw 'Alī in a different light, and remarked that 'Alī was "as lofty as a mountain", and his ugly face appeared to him as beautiful as beauty itself. Al-Mutawakkil thought highly of him, and showered him with many gifts. Among the sizable gifts was a reward of one hundred thousand dinars for the preparation of a dish.<sup>73</sup> He also drew a salary, which amounted to about three hundred thousand dinars during the reign of al-Mutawakkil alone.<sup>74</sup> His financial position enabled him to own and endow a sizable library, which was put to the use of scholars.<sup>75</sup> Al-Mutawakkil seemed to have an unreserved confidence in 'Alī, to the extent that he used to take him along to his harem, a situation that worried 'Alī a great deal for fear of a mishap, especially in time of drunkenness.

'Alī also served in the capacity of *nadīm* under the caliphs al-Muntaṣir, al-Musta'in, al-Mu'tazz, al-Muhtadī, and al-Mu'tamid, who ruled in a turbulent period. Al-Muntaṣir upheld him with high esteem, and appointed him over most of the region bordering the Tigris river, a post he held

<sup>70</sup> Ibn Khallikān, I, 365; Yāqūt, V, 459 ff.

<sup>71</sup> *Fa-khal'a'a 'alayhī khal 'al-mujālasah* (Yāqūt, V, 473).

<sup>72</sup> Yāqūt, V, 469.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, V, 464–65.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, V, 465.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, V, 467.

<sup>66</sup> Ibn Khallikān, I, 65–66.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 154; cf. Suyūṭī, 202, who says that Ibn al-Ḍaḥḥāq was the inseparable *nadīm* of al-Amīn.

<sup>68</sup> Rosenthal, *Humor*, 11.

<sup>69</sup> Rosenthal, *al-Sharakhsī*.

under his successors, except for al-Muhtadī, who slighted him on account of his close association with al-Mutawakkil. Al-Mu'tazz gave him thirty-three thousand dinars in cash, endowed him with a village in fief (*aqṭa'ahu ḡay'ah*), and entrusted him with the building and supervision of the Kāmil palace. While still a *nadīm*, his two sons Hārūn (288/901)<sup>76</sup> and Yaḥyā (d.300/912)<sup>77</sup> served as boon-companions. They held on to the post in their own right, because of their versatility in many pursuits required of the office. And the family tradition was continued by 'Alī b. Hārūn (d.352/962).<sup>78</sup>

The Banū Ḥamdūn, four in number, likewise enjoyed similar prodigality and influence. Ibrāhīm b. Ismā'il b. Dāwūd, known under the surname Ḥamdūn, served as the boon-companion of al-Mu'taṣim, al-Wāthiq, and al-Mutawakkil. He fell into disgrace under the latter, because of his close association with al-Wāthiq, and was exiled to Sind.<sup>79</sup> His son Aḥmad, an able linguist and author,<sup>80</sup> was for a time one of the closest *nadīms* of al-Mutawakkil, but also fell into disgrace, with the punishment of having to divorce his wife and to undertake the pilgrimage for a period of thirty years. He also had his ear cut off by al-Mutawakkil, who objected to his helping Faṭḥ b. Khāqān with a youth with whom the latter was infatuated. In spite of it all, he managed to draw under al-Mutawakkil's reign three hundred thousand dinars, and even a bigger sum during al-Mustakfī's reign of about three years' duration. His son 'Abdallāh as well as his grandson Ibrāhīm,<sup>82</sup> who were gifted singers, followed Ḥamdūn's footsteps.

Finally, mention should be made of the able historian and literateur al-Ṣūlī (d.ca.947),<sup>83</sup> who discharged the function of *nadīm* under al-Muktafī, al-Rāḍī, and al-Muqtadir. He was *the* expert at chess, and it seems that his ability at playing chess was a more valuable asset to him as *nadīm* than any of his other talents.

In conclusion, the *nadīm* emerges as an important figure at the court. Although he may fall into the pitfalls of his surroundings he is, nevertheless, the object of praise and admiration. He does not only enliven the assembly of men (*majlīs*), but is its very core.<sup>84</sup> As such, he is deserving of notice, recognition, ample sitting space, and attention to what he has to say.<sup>85</sup> In fact, says al-Mas'ūdī, there is none like him from among the companions and entourage of the king, for he surpasses all in nobility of character, superior learning and charm.<sup>86</sup> He is compared favorably to a secretary or chamberlain, and even is placed above them in the saying, "A secretary represents the tongue of a man, a chamberlain his face, and the boon-companion all his being".<sup>87</sup> Al-Mas'ūdī<sup>88</sup> relates that a secretary was boasting to a *nadīm* saying: "I am a help and you are a hindrance; I am for eagerness and you are for jest; I am for hard work and you are for leisure; I am for war and you are for peace." To which the *nadīm* retorted: "I am for well-being and you are for trouble; I am for companionship and you are for service; when you get up I sit down; and when you are angry I am friendly. I am called *nadīm* because of the chagrin felt at my departure."

<sup>76</sup> Ibn Khallikān, II, 194; cf. Yāqūt, V, 234 ff.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 235; cf. Yāqūt, V, 288.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 356; cf. Yāqūt, V, 440.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 368 ff.

<sup>80</sup> Yāqūt, I, 365 ff.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 372.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 369.

<sup>83</sup> Ibn Khallikān, I, 105; cf. Yāqūt, VII, 136.

<sup>84</sup> Rāghib al-Iṣbahānī, I, 330.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 330.

<sup>86</sup> Mas'ūdī, I, 105.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 229.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 229.