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FĀRĀBĪ'S FUNNY FLORA
AL-NAWĀBIT AS «OPPOSITION»

BY

ILAI ALON

For Zahavah

Introduction[1]

IN HIS description of the excellent city (K. *al-siyāsat al-madaniyah* and *Ārā᾽ ahl al-madīnat al-fāḍila*), al-Fārābī mentions those citizens who are not philosophers, but rather the opponents of the principles of their community. To these groups, of which several are enumerated al-Fārābī refers either as «the rest» (*al-Bāqūn*)[2], or, «*al-Nawābit*»[3]. It is this group, and in particular this name, that is intriguing, for although on the face of it carries no politico-religious significance at all, some conclusions that touch upon these fields may be drawn by scrutinizing it. I would like to show that al-Fārābī abstracted the private name of the *Nawābit* and gave it the meaning of «opposition». In order to do this, I will first analyze his use of the name along the following lines: first, a short survey of the lexical usage of the root *nbt*, then, I will show that the *Nawābit* were regarded by al-Fārābī as oppositional; then, that they belong to the excellent cities; that their description entails all areas of political activity; that al-Fārābī was aware of the meaning of the name; that he used it in an abstract manner and the reasons for his choosing this particular name for «opposition». Secondly, I will show the earlier use of the name by a real historical group, and finally—its later use by Ibn Bājjah.

The question of the origin of the name of the *Nawābit* is not a new one. Several mediaeval and modern writers tried their hand at it,

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[1] I should like to thank Michael Bonner, Michael Cook, Manfred Halprern, Etan Kohlberg, Muhsin Mahdi and Roy Mottahedeh for their help in making the good parts of this paper. For the other parts I admit debt to nobody.

[2] al-Fārābī, *Ārā᾽*, 278, 12 as distinct from the philosophers and their followers.

[3] In *Ārā᾽*, the term *Nawābit* appears in a distorted manner as *nawā᾽ib*, where it indicates individuals *outside* the excellent cities. See below, note 69.

but they all seem to have failed to provide a decisive explanation
for the name. Thus, E. Rosenthal, while rejecting the possibility
that the name's origin is to be found in Plato[4], renders it «spon-
taneous growth» and suggests a relationship between the *Nawābit*
and the Nabateans[5] and Madelung translates it «Neuerwachsene[6].»
    Literally the stem has been used to render the sense of growing
with reference to plants, but it lends itself very easily to
metaphorical use as well: in the *Qurʾān* man is compared to plants,[7]
and ʿAlī is reported[8] to have likened the Caliph's understanding to
vegetation growing on good soil. Classical dictionaries found the
noun at least ambiguous[9], and sometimes the stem seems to have
been   connected   with   *ǧumr*,   another   root   with   negative
connotations[10].
    I should first like to go into a brief treatment of the individual
groups dealt with by al-Fārābī under the title of «*Nawābit*» that seem
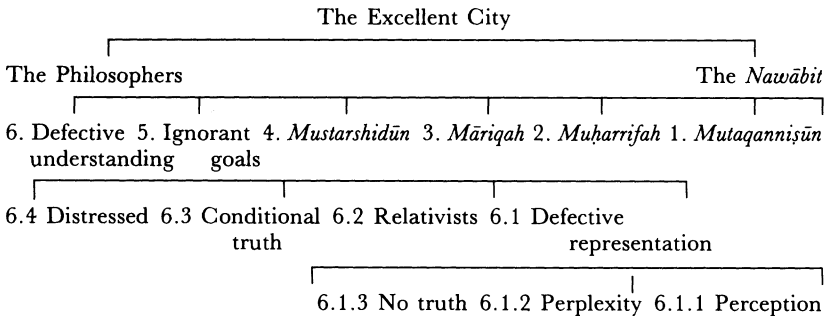to be six major ones and eight subgroups[11].

Figure 1. al-Nawābit in the Excellent Cities

    [4] E. I. J. Rosenthal, (1971) p. 53 n. 63.
    [5] E. I. J. Rosenthal, (1955) p. 5 n. 5.
    [6] Madelung (1965) p. 224.
    [7] Quran, 71,17: «*Wa-llāh anbatakum min al-arḍ nabatan*».
    [8] Ibn Taimiyyah, *Naqḍ al-manṭiq* p. 79,12.
    [9] They speak of «lowly and poor man» (*Lisān*, vol. 2 p. 403,1) but also of
«nobility» (*ibid.*, p. 403,4) and «the young generation» (*ibid.*, p. 402,4), or
«anything fresh.» (*ibid.*, vol. 2 p. 401,6).
    [10] See note 34 on p. 62 below. *Lisān*, vol. 2 p. 402,6.
    [11] E. I. J. Rosenthal, e.g. divides them into four major and two minor groups
(1955) p. 170,31.

1. Mutaqanniṣūn[12]

The first group mentioned by al-Fārābī is the *Mutaqanniṣūn*. The stem *QNṢ* is usually employed to indicate hunting, in particular of birds[13], and as far as I am aware, it bears no political meaning[14]. Members of this group differ from the philosophers in the excellent cities in that their goals are other than felicity[15], namely honour, power or riches or some other goals, all such that may be achieved by laudable deeds[16].

Parallel to the *Mutaqanniṣūn*, and similar to them, *ʾĀrāʾ ahl al-madīnat al-fāḍila* reports[17] about an unnamed group, in the domain of religion, who pretend to adhere to religion and ethics, but actually entertain plans for personal gain. The only clear title that al-Fārābī attaches to them is the domain of their activity, namely piety (*ḫušūʿ*). Their main views concern (1) belief in God and the Spirituals, and (2) belief in the world-to-come at the expense of this world. Paradoxically enough, their very behaviour engenders love and respect among people towards them.

In his notes to this passage, Walzer[18] does not raise the possibility that these characteristics may point at a particular group or person in Islamic history or contemporary politics. Instead he concentrates on the Greek origins of the description.

2. Muḥarrifa[19]

The second group that al-Fārābī mentions is the *Muḥarrifah*. This group desire (*hawan*) the goals of the ignorant cities, but are debarred from working towards them by the cities' laws (*šarāʾiʿ*) and religion (*millah*). They therefore distortingly (*ḥarrafu*) interpret (*taʾ-*

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[12] al-Fārābī, *Siyāsat*, p. 104,7.

[13] The stem QNṢ was also used by two people as a name: Bazar whose mother was called QANAṢ(?) (Ṭabarī, *op. cit.*, I 1111,1) and QANAṢ b. Maʿad (Ṭabarī, *ibid.*, I 748,7).

[14] Najjar translates this term as «opportunists» in Lerner and Mahdi, *Political Philosophy*, p. 53.

[15] See *ʾĀrāʾ*, p. 290,13 for the generation of improper views in «the [excellent?] cities».

[16] The distinction between views and deeds is an important element in al-Fārābī's writings. E.g., *kalām* is divided into two parts according to this distinction (*Iḥṣāʾ al-ʿulūm*, p. 131,13).

[17] *ʾĀrāʾ*, p. 304,3.

[18] *ʾĀrāʾ*, p. 492.

[19] *Siyāsat*, p. 104,10.

wīl) the sayings and inscriptions of the lawgiver in such a manner as to justify (*ḥassana*) their goals.

The stem of the name of this group obviously has a negative connotation: it is employed in *ḥadīṯ* in connection with interpretation (*tafsīr*)[20].

3. Al-Māriqa[21]

The third group, *al-Māriqa*, is characterized first by the evaluation made by al-Fārābī that they mean no distortion (*taḥrīf*), and that their acts are only wrong because they fail to understand the intentions of the law-giver. They also misunderstand the city's legalities (*ʾumūr šarāʾiʿ al-madīnah*) without even realizing their mistakes.

While the *Mutaqanniṣūn* and the *Muḥarrifa* are referred to by their name (*hāʾulāʾi yusammūna Mutaqanniṣīn*), the author refers to the *Māriqa* not as a name but rather as an identification (*fa-hāʾulāʾi hum al-māriqa*), perhaps to indicate that there is no need to introduce the name to the reader, because he is already familiar with it.

4. The Mustaršidūn[22]

The fourth group of the opposition is that of the *Mustaršidūn*. These are people who permanently cast doubt[23], and as a result find themselves both misled and misleading others in theory (*bil-aqāwīl*), although in practice they look for truth. al-Fārābī avoids, however, the use of the stem *šakk*, although he was familiar with it, and used it elsewhere[24].

Their doubting leads the members of this group from a lower stage to a higher one until they are brought[25] (by an unspecified

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[20] al-Dārimī, *op. cit.*, *Muqaddima*, 56.

[21] al-Fārābī, *Siyāsat*, p. 104,14.

[22] al-Fārābī, *Siyāsat*, p. 104,17. The same group, under this name is mentioned in *ʾĀrāʾ*, p. 280,15. Walzer (ibid., p. 281,22) translates the name as «those who seek the right path».

[23] The term al-Fārābī uses is *tazyīf*, which in a literal sense would mean «blaming for falsity»; «refutation.» See the definition of *Kalām* (*Iḥṣāʾ*, p. 131,10) which consists in «refuting the views that oppose the religion which the *mutakallim* is set to defend.»

[24] E.g. al-Fārābī, *Iḥṣā*, p. 137,9.

[25] al-Fārābī uses the verb *rufiʿa* in the third singular passive voice (*Siyāsat*, p. 105,2).

agent) to the final stage, that of truth which reflects «things as they are» (al-ašyā³ ʿala mā hiya), where their doubts disappear[26]. Their process is not one of misunderstanding, but rather of doubt and refutation. The verb zayyafa as used here does not carry a criminal connotation, but rather an attempt to settle inconsistencies, or to refute others arguments. This is a kind of interpretation, and unlike that of the Muḥarrifa, it is of a positive goal that is not intended to contradict (tuʿānid) the excellent city. al-Fārābī uses the stem as used here in two different meanings: first it is used in the political sense of opposition: ġayr muʿānidin lil-madīna l-fāḍila, and later, in the sense of contradiction, perhaps logical: mawāḍiʿ yumkin an tuʿānad.

The Mustaršidūn are the «odd-man-out» of the opposition groups: their good quality is their search for truth, and in fact, their doubting. It seems that al-Fārābī thought highly of them, as he saw in them a potentiality for becoming philosophers themselves. It is doubt and questioning that make the philosopher, and what is perhaps more important, is the knowledge of when to stop doubting and to be able to recognize truth, an ability lacking in the next party, those of ignorant goals.

5. Those of Ignorant Goals[27]

A very similar ideology is shared by members of the next group. These people distort (zayyafa) what they represent to themselves (taḥayyul), a process that is similar to that of doubt, in that it may enhance its practitioner closer towards truth.

There are a number of differences between them and the previous group: first, they aim at ignorant goals, in particular, power; they object to listening to anyone who might talk to them of felicity and truth, and always look for an argument by which they might defeat felicity. At the same time they try to keep up appearances.

The members of this group are discriminated against by al-Fārābī in comparison with the Mustaršidūn. The latter are elevated to the degree of truth, where the reality of things is explained to them. In contradiction, members of this group do not enjoy this

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[26] This description of the stage of truth corresponds to al-Fārābī's definition of truth in his K. al-Fuṣūṣ, (Haidarabad 1349) p. 21,18. See also another definition in his K. al-Milla, p. 46,18.
[27] Siyāsat p. 105,17.

privilege, and they keep to their practice of distortion even when it has been elevated to the degree of truth. This difference can be viewed as a variation on the problem of predestination and free will.

6. Defective Understanding[28]

The next group can only represent (*taḫayyul*[29]) felicity and the principles (*mabādiʾ*), but they are absolutely unable to understand (*taṣawwur*)[30] them properly. They therefore distort what they represent and manage to find what they regard, mistakingly, as the loci of contradiction in it. They are then elevated to a higher degree which they distort too, but because they can not understand (*fahima*) truth, they cannot attain it.

They are divided into four sub-groups:
(1) Those of defective representation;
(2) Relativists;
(3) The partisans of conditional truth;
(4) The distressed.

6.1. Those of Defective Representation[31]

Those of defective representation are characterized by their inability to understand (*fahm*) truth, even if they tackle the loci of objection (*mawāḍiʿ al-ʿinād*)[32], because they fail to represent things sufficiently well. As a result, they take those who claim to have attained truth either for liars, whose hidden motif is search for honour or power (*ġalaba*), or else for misguided persons. It seems that what this description amounts to is that they take the true philosophers to be the *Muḥarrifa*. They thus distort truth and play down those who have attained it.

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[28] *Siyāsat* p. 105,13. A group similar to this is mentioned in *ʾĀrāʾ*, p. 282,6 f.

[29] For al-Fārābī's definition of *taḫayyul* see *Siyāsa*, p. 85,5: «Representing them (i.e. the principles of existence) means that their representation (*ḫayāl*), likeness and things that imitate them be sketched in man's soul».

[30] For al-Fārābī's definition of *taṣawwur* see *Siyāsat* p. 85,4: ...their (i.e. the principles of existence) essence (*ḏāt*) be imprinted (*yursamu*) in man's soul as it is in reality (*ḥaqīqa*).

[31] *Siyāsat* p. 106,1.

[32] Translated by Walzer in *ʾĀrāʾ* as «grounds for objection», e.g. *ʾĀrāʾ* p. 280,11.

This group in turn, is divided into three sub-groups which are determined by the consequences of this characteristic: (1) Those who blame everyone for being misguided (*maġrūrun*) about everything they claim to have grasped; (2) those who are perplexed about everything, and (3) those who claim that nothing perceived (*fīmā yudraku*) reflects truth (*ṣādiq*) and that anyone who opines (*ẓanna*) that he has grasped anything is a liar. It is those whom the philosophers regard as ignorant novices (*aġmār* and *ġuhhāl*)[33].

It is in connection with this group that al-Fārābī advises the leader of the excellent city to attend to each party of the Nawābit according to their nature and to punish those who need punishment[34], although the advice is universally applicable to all the Nawābit.

6.2. Relativists

The second sub-group[35] of those of defective understanding is that of the relativists. They hold that truth is what anyone thinks it is at a given time.

6.3. Conditional Truth

The third[36], the partisans of the conditional truth, claim that no one truly attains truth, and if such exists at all, it has not yet been attained.

All these sub-groups have in common one form of skepticism or another. Still, in his account, al-Fārābī does not use the verb *šakka*. The most he does is to use «perplexity» (*ḥaira*) or «opinion» (*ẓann*) (although in *ʾIḥṣāʾ al-ʿulūm* he mentions the «sophists» making the point that those who were called by this name rejected science (*ʿulūm*) and perception (*ʾidrāk*)[37]. The reason for this choice of terms

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[33] The term *ġumr* means a boy devoid of intelligence (Lane, p. 2292), and it is used by al-Ǧāḥiẓ* in connection with the *Ḥašwah* as traditionists (*taqlīd*) (*Rasāʾil*, vol. 4 p. 243,13). In *Iḥṣāʾ*, 133,11, the most excellent of men is like *al-ṣabī wal-hadaṭ wal-ġumr* compared to those of divine intellects.

[34] *Siyāsat*, p. 106,9.

[35] *Siyāsat*, p. 106,12.

[36] *Siyāsat*, p. 106,13.

[37] *ʾIḥṣāʾ*, p. 71,12. His own definition of «sophists» has to do with distortion of truth rather than with skepticism. Cf. *ʾIḥṣāʾ al-ʿulūm* p. 81,2; FFA 113,1 and FFA p. 267,3.

is probably that those intended here are not the philosophical school
but rather some historical group which he was reluctant to name
explicitly[38].

In the period of the actual Nawābit a controversy was under way
between the Muꜥtazila and some skeptics[39] (sometimes refered to as
«al-Ḥisbāniyya»)[40]. As a care in point we learn about one incident in
which Ṯumāma b. ꜣAšras (d. 213/828), al-Maꜣmūn's court
theologian, is reported to have confronted someone who believed
that «all things are mere phantasy and conjecture, that man grasps
them only according to his own mind (which means-subjectivity),
and that there is no truth in (what we call) reality.»[41]

ꜥAbbās b. Sulaimān, a colleague of Ṯumāma, is reported to have
met one of these «sophists» who wanted to make him believe that
«every conviction is nothing but a mirage»[42] and elswhere truth was
also related to as a dream[43]. We may assume that similar views
were held, at least by some of the schools of the time, such as The
Ḥašwiya, alias Batriyyah[44], alias Aṣḥāb al-Ḥadīṯ, (perhaps the
Nawābit?)[45] who were also called Šukkāk by Muꜥtazilites such as al-
Ḥayyāṭ, al-Ǧubbaꜣī and al-Warrāq[46].

Among the personalities who were named in connection with
these schools were Sufyān al-Ṯaurī, Šārik b. ꜥAbd Allāh, Ibn Abī
Laila, Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Šafīꜥī and Mālik b. Anas[47]. The same
name (i.e. Šukkāk) was applied to them by the Ibadites as well[48].
The Skeptical movement in Islamic lands at the time of al-Fārābī

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[38] For a condensed description of three schools of skepticism, see al-Baġdādī,
Uṣūl, p. 6; one school negates reality (ḥaqīqa) to anything, a second doubts (šakk)
the reality of things, and the third claimed that all beliefs (iꜥtiqādāt) are true.
[39] For the view of the speculative theologians about doubt see F. Rosenthal,
Knowledge, p. 302. See also Van Ess (1968) p. 1 who refers to Maqālāt, 434,1;
Qudāma Ibn Ǧaꜥfar, Naqd al-Naṭr, Cairo 1938, p. 33,11; al-Maqdīsī, al-Badꜣ wal-
Tāꜣrīḫ, 48,11; ꜥAbd al-Ǧabbār, al-Muġnī, XII 41,1.
[40] al-Ǧushamī, Risāla, p. 35,4.
[41] Van Ess (1968) 1 refers to Ibn ꜥAbd Rabbihi's al-ꜥIqd al-Farīd. See his note
1 p. 15.
[42] Ibn al-Nadīm, Fihrist p. 70,4 ff.
[43] al-Ašꜥarī, Maqālāt, (ed. Ritter) p. 433,11 f. Van Ess (1968) p. 2 who points
to the Helenistic roots of calling the Skeptics by the name of «Sophists».
[44] Which is known as a Zaidi school, the closest to the Sunnis.
[45] See al-Ǧušamī, Risāla, p. 35,4.
[46] Van Ess (1968) p. 7.
[47] al-Naubaḫtī, Firaq, p. 7,6.
[48] Cf. Cook, Early, p. 45 n. 19, who quotes Šabīb b. ꜥAṭiya's, Al-Radd ꜥAlā al-
Šukkāk wal-Murǧiꜣa, where the author may also have traditionists in mind as
skeptics.

may have survived from the Skeptical-Empirical into the
epistemology of early Murji²ism[49], and later, keeping «alive the
disputes between Skeptics and Stoics of antiquity to the most subtle
detail, and that, up to the fourth and fifth centuries of Islam»[50], that
is our period. It seems that the tenth century was characterized by
a tolerant mood that was accompanied by a spirit of skepticism[51]
and skeptics at the time were quite a few for instance, Abū
ᶜAbdallāh al-Baṣrī, was one who expressed his radical position in
the formula of equivalence of proof[52]. In fact, his school may have
been a stronghold of skepticism with regard to basic religious prin-
ciples such as prophecy[53].

Perhaps due to the lack of «academic» translation of Skeptic
works from Greek, «true skepticism... in the Greek sense of the
word was long extinguished in Islam,»[54] and in its stead, a different
«mild» skepticism was introduced, that did not doubt truth, but
only the intellect as a means to attain it. The Bāṭinis for example,
advocated abandoning reason and adhering to the Taᶜlīm[55], while
the Shīᶜite theologian Ibn Baqqāl (d. 363/974) argued that of the
Imam is the sole source of knowledge, then reason is unreliable[56]
and that conviction is no more than a function of dialectical
ability[57]. al-Fārābī's concept of skepticism is clearly the traditional
Greek one, and it fits the mould of «philosophical» rather than of
«theological» skepticism[58].

It is against this background that al-Fārābī's account ought to be
studied: his opposition to the «mild» skepticism is apparent in his
attacks on Ibn al-Rāwandī, who was considered by the Muᶜtazila at
al-Fārābī's time as a Mušakkik[59]. Apart from this indication, and a
single additional one, where Van Ess calls attention to the fact that

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[49] M. Cook, *Early*, p. 156.
[50] Van Ess, *op. cit.* p. 11.
[51] Kraemer, *Humanism*, p. 15.
[52] Kraemer, *op. cit.* p. 181.
[53] Kraemer, *Humanism*, p. 189.
[54] Van Ess (1968) p. 14.
[55] See Van Ess (1968) p. 10 where he refers to al-Ğazālī, *Faḍāʾiḥ Al-Bāṭīniya*, p.
80,11; 13: «When we regard something as a «necessity» and not to be doubled,
it is only to afterwards discover that it was nevertheless false.»
[56] Kraemer, *Humanism*, p. 189.
[57] Van Ess (1968) p. 6.
[58] See also Kraemer, *Humanism*, p. 191.
[59] Van Ess (1980) p. 4.

al-Fārābī mentioned Pyrrhon, calling his school «al-Maniᶜa»[60]. al-Fārābī's treatment of the Skeptics has been unjustifiably ignored by modern scholarship.

6.4. The Distressed[61]

Last is the group of «the distressed». These people do perceive that truth exists, but their perception is as dim as is if in a dream. They believe some of those who claim to have attained truth but fail to do the same themselves, either because of the effort and time required for such an undertaking, or because of their inclination for pleasures. They therefore become distressed and envious, and dismiss the former as misguided or as lying, persons whose real goals are honour and wealth. Some of these overcome their distress by adhering to ignorant goals themselves until death relieves them from their distress.

A few general remarks on all the groups are in order: out of the fourteen groups and sub-groups enumerated in K. al-siyasāt al-madaniyya, only three carry a name or a nick-name: The Mutaqan-niṣūn, the Muḥarrifa and the Māriqa. All the other groups are only referred to by a description.

All the groups described by al-Fārābī have a common goal, namely felicity. They differ, however in their definition of that felicity, which is very reminiscent of the difference between the excellent city and its external opponents.

Since the excellent city is a philosophical entity, objects of knowledge in it are of significance. Al-Fārābī mentions three such objects, but the distinction between them is not always clear-cut: the first is felicity, the second is truth and the third «the sayings of the law-giver.» In some cases, however, «truth» may mean «felicity» and «the sayings of the law-giver» (which basically is the idea behind the perfect city), but in others it is clear that these are not identical.

In contrast with modern politics, the groups described here do not have, in general, a «platform» where their views may be presented. Only three of the fourteen groups are made to state

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[60] Van Ess (1968) p. 3 refers to al-Fārābī's Risālah fīmā yanbaǧī an yuqaddam qabla taᶜallum Al-Falsafa, in Schmoelders, Documenta Philosophiae, p. 4,1-4.

[61] Siyāsat, p. 106,15.

explicitly, though very briefly, their views which revolve around rejecting the concept of felicity as it is accepted by the city. Other groups either state their opposition in the domain of epistemology, or leave the task of finding out their position to the reader.

The common denominator of most of these opposition groups is a faulty epistemological process which results from intellectual shortcomings, and which negates the attainability or even the existence of thruth.

Of the fourteen groups of the Nawābit, three major parties and one sub-group share explicitely the goals of the ignorant cities. These groups are the *Mutaqanniṣūn* (who are after honour [*karāma*], rule [*riʾāsa*] or wealth [*yasar*][62] the *Muḥarrifa*[63] the group which I have labled as «those of ignorant goals» [whose emphasis is laid on power (*ġalaba*)[64]] and the «distressed» who are basically after honour or wealth[65].

The goals of the ignorant cities themselves are of the same interest as those mentioned above. The difference, though, is that whereas in the excellent cities some of the Nawābit are not described as having a particular goal exclusively[66], the ignorant cities are established individually according to particular goals, e.g., the city of honour, that of power, wealth, and the like.

One may conclude, then, that the goals of the Ignorant cities beyond the borders of the excellent ones are the same as those of the Nawābit within them, and if we accept that the ignorant cities are opposed by definition[67] to the excellent ones, we may pass the same judgement on the nawābit. In addition to the cities themselves are those individuals who are «common people» (*min afrād al-nās nawāʾib*[68] *al-mudun*)[69], whom al-Fārābī calls *nawābit*. Here it is clear that the Nawābit, if indeed the corrected reading is valid, are those who live outside the perfect city.

Accordingly, on the one hand there is a greater affinity between the Nawābit and the excellent cities, of which they are citizens, but

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[62] *Siyāsat*, p. 104,10.
[63] *ibid.*
[64] *ibid.*, p. 105,7.
[65] *ibid.*, p. 106,15.
[66] E.g. the *Muḥarrifa*, those of ignorant goals and the distressed.
[67] *ʾĀrāʾ*, p. 252,15: «In opposition to the excellent cities are the ignorant city...»
[68] E. I. J. Rosenthal suggests the reading of *nawābit*. See his (1971), p. 204, note 59.
[69] *ʾĀrāʾ*, p. 252,15. See Walzer's note 725 on p. 451.

on the other hand, ᵓĀrāᵓ Ahl al-madīna al-fāḍila clearly separates
them from it and emphasizes the fact that their goals are similar of
those of the ignorant cities. The similarity goes even further
between the views of the excellent cities' Nawābit and the external
ignorant cities: al-Fārābī makes the point that the latter are a
development of the respective views within the excellent cities: they
only come to exist when religion (milla) [and not as Walzer
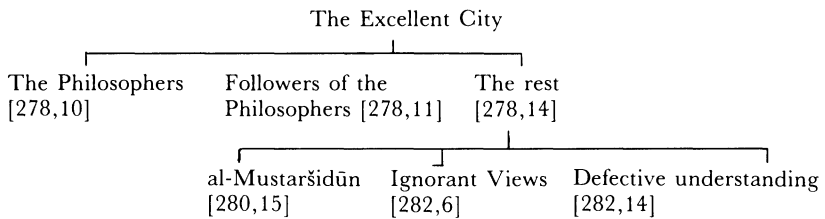translates—«their religion»] is derived from some old pernicious
views[70].

The Excellent City

The Philosophers [278,10]   Followers of the Philosophers [278,11]   The rest [278,14]

al-Mustaršidūn [280,15]   Ignorant Views [282,6]   Defective understanding [282,14]

Figure 2. Structure of the Excellent City according to ᵓĀrāᵓ ahl al-madīnat al-faḍila

Again, in the context of the wrong views that negate the
necessary nature of human society and their advocacy of solitude,
al-Fārābī says[71]: «Then, from these [views] (i.e. those about
aggressiveness in nature and among humans), any opinions which
are of the ignorant [cities] arise in the cities,» and it is my under-
standing that the cities in which these wrong ideas arise are the per-
fect cities which are contrasted with the ignorant ones.

The antagonism which results from an oppositional status
between the excellent cities and the Nawābit is stressed by al-
Fārābī, in making it the duty (waǧib ᶜalā) of the ruler (presumably
the Imam-Philosopher) to watch over (tatabbuᶜ) the Nawābit, to
engage them (išǧāluhum) and to treat (ᶜilāǧ) each kind in an
individual manner, be it by punishment (ᶜuqūba[72]), expulsion from
the city, detention (ḥabs) or by fine (taṣrīf fī baᶜḍ al-aᶜmāl), even if
they are not fit for them[73].

The second point that needs to be demonstrated is that the

[70] ᵓĀrāᵓ, p. 286,2.
[71] ᵓĀrāᵓ, p. 290,13.
[72] The term can also mean «detention». Cf. Lane, Lexicon, vol. 1 p. 2103.
[73] Siyāsat, p. 106,9.

Nawābit indeed are part of the excellent cities[74]. Although it is true that in ʾĀrāʾ they do not belong to it. Twice in *al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya* the belonging of the Nawābit to the excellent cities is made: the first, in the opening words of the relevant paragraph[75] and the other—in its closing words[76].

This city, which al-Fārābī defines[77] as «a group of people who concur with one another in holding excellent views, and who live near to one another» is substantially different from the one that is compared with the body, all of whose parts complement and cooperate with one another[78]. Thus, society in the excellent city is arranged hierarchically, in an order that is one of service rather than of views: the lower groups serve the purposes of the higher ones[79]. It may still be analysed from the sociological point of view, according to which it includes five classes:

(1) The Meritorious (*al-afāḍil*) who are the wise (*ḥukamāʾ*);
(2) The Eloquent (*ḏawū al-alsina*) who are those charged with things religious (*ḥamalat al-dīn*);
(3) The Quantifyiers, such as the arithmeticians, geometers and astronomers;
(4) Fighters on the Holy war (*Muǧahidūn*);
(5) Financiers (*Mālīyūn*).

Had excellent cities only to be analysed in sociological terms there would be no room left for the Nawābit, ...This analysis is much closer to the description of the *Republic* of Plato, and it seems as though al-Fārābī had two directions in treating the excellent city: on the one hand the Platonic, and on the other, the Islamic-contemporary, and he never really managed to unite these two direction in a happy marriage.

It seems that on this point ʾĀrāʾ and *Siyāsat* differ strongly. It is therefore useful to compare them now:

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[74] In FFM 120,4, al-Fārābī makes the distinction between the «necessarity» (*ḍarūriya*) and the «perfect» (*Fāḍila*) cities. Perhaps this pair of terms is to be interpreted on the quantitative level, i.e. the former means — necessary = *sine qua non*, the other, the superfluous.

[75] *Siyāsat*, p. 104,7—«*Waʾammā al-Nawābit fī -l-mudun al-fāḍila...*»

[76] *Siyāsat*, p. 106,3—«*fa-hāʾūlāʾi hum aṣnāf al-nābita fī ḫilāl ahl al-madīna...*»

[77] ʾĀrāʾ, p. 52,2.

[78] ʾĀrāʾ, p. 230,4.

[79] ʾĀrāʾ, p. 230,12-231,14; see conclusions.

K. al-siyāsa al-madaniyya	K. ʾĀrāʾ ahl al-madīnat al-fāḍila
A dual division: Philosophers	A triple division
	philosophers,
and *Nawābit*	those who follow
	the philosophers
	and «the rest.»
Secondary division-6	Secondary division-3
Tertiary division-4	No tertiary division
The Nawābit are within the	The Nawābit-outside the
excellent cities	excellent cities.
No followers of the	No *Muḥarrifa, Māriqa,*
philosophers	*Mutaqanniṣūn* or Skeptics.

Why are the Nawābit mentioned in *al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, and basically, in *ʾĀrāʾ*, they do not?

Although they were probably written around the same time, namely between 330/941-331/942[80], The differences between the two books are noticeable. These differences may result from the difference in audience or from differences in the goals of each book.

It is obvious that *Siyāsat* is much more direct and immediate than *ʾĀrāʾ*. In it al-Fārābī does not hesitate to mention names of actual groups or nicknames that leave little to the readers' faculty of guessing. Terms like *Nawābit* and *Māriqa* are very clear, as we have seen, and so it seems that *ʾĀrāʾ* was intended more as a propaganda type of book, or perhaps more on the utopian side, while *al-Siyāsat* was intended to be more on the practical descriptive side.

The next point to be demonstrated is that the term «Nawābit» was indeed abstracted by al-Fārābī. The idea behind the abstract term is its generality which goes beyond the particular. «Opposition» means the common denominator of all the views that are not those held by the people or groups in power. In his survey, al-Fārābī touches upon most, if not all the areas that may give grounds for opposition in his, or any city: these include considerations of the domains of politics that have to do with the goals of the cities; philosophy, namely attitudes towards truth and its attainability; economy the acquisition of riches, and personal— gaining power and control.

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[80] Sherwani, op. cit. p. 16,14 and Mahdi (1975) p. 64.

Was al-Fārābī indeed aware of the meaning of the term *Nawābit*, and did he use it for that reason? The most decisive demonstration in favour of this supposition would be an explicit statement to that effect, but unfortunately I could find none. Second best would be to show that the term was in common use at the time of al-Fārābī, and that its meaning was that of «opposition,» and it would stand to reason that al-Fārābī was aware of this use. There is no such evidence either. The third, and least persuasive, but unfortunately the only existent evidence is circumstantial: the very use of this particular term in a political context is so unlikely, that I can think of no explanation for its use, other than al-Fārābī's acquaintance with it and his wish to make a point by using it. In addition, the treatment of the group in the very end of *al-Siyāsa* gives it more significance than it would have had in any other location in the book. Another indirect evidence for the generic sense of the word is its use in a double plural that of the noun itself and that of the «city» *madīna*[81].

Walzer thought that al-Fārābī may have been thinking of specific events while writing *ʾĀrāʾ*[82], but he has come up with no specific evidence for his statement. Thus, after calling attention to al-Fārābī's close relation to the ancient Greek philosophers he says: «...but he (i.e. al-Fārābī) is, at the same time, fully aware of the Islamic discussion of his day: this throws new light on these slightly fossilized Greek school topics and fills them with a different life without changing their traditional form.»[83] He goes further to indicate that al-Fārābī's expressions are close to Shiʿite ones, e.g. the view which he shares with them that all the excellent kings (or Imams) are to be thought of as if they were one single personality[84]. In that, argues Walzer, al-Fārābī agrees with the political views of the Shiʿites about he Caliphate[85]. If one accepts the observation that although in themselves, the *Nawābit* had earlier ceased to exist as a separate entity, they had become a part of the *Ḥašwiyya*, which remained in the tenth century and continued the controversy with the *Mutakallimūn*[86], one may conclude, I think, that the contem-

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[81] *Siyāsat*, p. 104,7. See note 65 above.
[82] *ʾĀrāʾ*, p. 455.
[83] *ʾĀrāʾ*, p. 472.
[84] *ʾĀrāʾ*, p. 259,13; 462.
[85] Walzer, *ʾĀrāʾ*, p. 334.
[86] Pines (1971) p. 230.

porary ideological environment kept views of the original *Nawābit*, and perhaps their name as well.

A similar phenomenon on al-Fārābī's part, namely his reacting to a former and partially extinct reality is manifest in his attitude towards the *Mutakallimūn*: it does not reflect reality in his own time, and may indicate his awareness of the historic rift that which took place at the beginning of the ʿAbbasid era[87].

Let me turn now to a number of expressions of Islamic character used by al-Fārābī that will help to show that he was aware of the special meaning of the name *Nawābit*[88]:

The stem *hrf* employed for the name of The *Muḥarrifa* when used within a polemical context was traditionally of a negative content[89]. For example, al-Darimī (d. 256/869) uses it thus: «Rabbis (*Aḥbār*) and monks (*ruhbān*), while contradicting the Book in their actions sought to cheat their own folk with regard to what they did, for fear that they might lose their positions (*tafsudu*) and that their own corruption should become clear to people. They therefore distorted (*ḥarrafū*) the Book by interpretation, and whatever they failed to interpret, they concealed, keeping silent about their own mischief with the goal of holding on to their positions[90]. The term *taḥrīf* was in use in early Imamite literature of Quran interpretation, where it meant originally «substitution of a letter (*ḥarf*) by another[91], «omission»[92] or distortion of the original revelation[93]. There were even whole books dedicated to this question[94]. In all these instances, the term was a negative one and was directed at the Sunnis.

The negative sense of the other term—*taḥsīn* that describes the purpose of the *Muḥarrifa* in their interpretations, was shared by some in the context of anti-Sunnah groups who were engaged in

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[87] Pines (1971) p. 228.
[88] This is a common practice with al-Fārābī. See E. Rosenthal (1955), e.g. p. 170.
[89] Although Allāh is called *Muḥarrif al-qulūb* («The Turner, or incliner of Hearts») Lane, *s.v.* HRF. For the negative sense, see Dozy, *Supplem...*, I, p. 271.
[90] al-Dārimī, *Sunan, Muqaddima* 56. The opposite to this term is *Taqbīḥ*, used by al-Fārābī in *ʾIḥṣāʾ*, e.g. 136,13 meaning «to refute another's argument.»
[91] See Kohlberg (1972) p. 211.
[92] *Ibid.*, p. 212,11.
[93] *Ibid.*, p. 213,15.
[94] *Ibid.*, p. 213,8.

presenting non-sense as valid views (*taḥsīn al-abāṭīl*)[95]. Even the term *taʾwīl* is employed here by al-Fārābī in a negative sense, although it can also carry a positive one[96].

Another term employed frequently throughout the paragraph, that conveys Islamic content is *Aġrāḍ al-Ǧāhiliyya*. It is used in two directions: on the one hand the excellent city is created out of the ignorant cities, and on the other, the latter springs out of the former. Both directions occurred in Islamic history: the creation of the *Umma* out of the *Ǧāhiliyya*, and the deterioration of the Just Caliphate into the Ummayad Kingdom. Incidentally, the word *ǧahiliya* itself used by al-Fārābī in a double sense: a political sense (ignorant cities as opposed to the excellent one) and an epistemological one: ignorance as opposed to truth).

The name of the Māriqa too, is very heavily loaded in Islamic terminology: In *Hadit* literature it is used to indicate those who cast themselves out of Islam, or who are regarded as having done so[97]. ʿAlī is quoted as saying, after killing the *Ḥawāriǧ* at the battle of *Nahrawān*, that the Prophet had ordered him to do the right things (*Amaranī bi-kulli ḥaqq*), and he interpreted it to include the killing of the *nākiṯīn wal-qāsiṭīn wal-māriqīn*[98]. Tirmidī dedicates a whole chapter to this term[99], and al-Ǧahiẓ, along with naming a number of sects of his own time (including the Nawābit), mentions them in this form[100]. Not only in a religious, but also in a political context, this word was in use in or around the year 289/901. It appears in a letter sent by ʿAbd Allāh b. Aḥmad b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Mahdī al-Manṣūr with reference to the Fatimid uprising: «..fī kulli man maraqa ʿan al-ṭā ʿa wa-nḥarafa ʿan al-ʾīmān...[101] This is also the way

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[95] al-Nasafī, op. cit. p. 57. One example of a group that might have been in people's minds in this regard is the Jahmiyah who were accused of distortingly interpreting verse 5,93 of the *Quran* so as to allow them to disregard Islamic dietary laws. See Ašʿarī, *Maqālāt*, vol. I p. 170,7. On the other hand, in the fourth form the verb is also employed positively, i.e. «serving God as if He were before one's eyes», (Muslim, *Iman*, (1).)5 The opposite to this term is *Taqbīḥ*, used by al-Fārābī in *ʾIhṣāʾ*, e.g. 136,13 meaning «to refute another's argument.

[96] E.g. Abū Dāʾūd, *Manāsik*, 56: «The Quran will come down to him (i.e. the Prophet), and he knows its interpretation (*taʾwīl*).»

[97] See al-Buḥārī, *Dyat*, 6 «Wal-māriq fī -l-dīn al-tārik al-ǧamāʿa».

[98] Ibn Abī Ḥadīd, op. cit., VI, p. 129,10.

[99] al-Tirmidī, *Bāb Ṣifāt al-māriqa*.

[100] al-Ǧāhiẓ, *Risāla fī -l-Nawābit, Rasāʾil*, vol. 4 p. 243. The other groups being the Rafidite and the *Murjiʾite*.

[101] Ṭabarī, *Annales*, p. 2235,10.

they are referred to by al-Ašʿarī, according to whose report they were even happy with the name[102]. The same term was used by al-Muʿadid in reacting to a poem by Yazīd, in which the latter called for taking revenge from ʾAwliyāʾ Allāh-haḏā al-murūq min al-dīn[103], and even authorities as late as Ibn Taimiyah identify them with the Ḥawāriǧ[104]. In describing this group, al-Fārābī uses the expression ḥaraǧa ʿan maqṣad al-raʾīs al-ʾawwal[105]. The combination ḥaraǧa ʿan means, in political contexts, to rebel[106] or ceder[107]. It was, also, naturally applied to the Ḥawāriǧ, explaining the origin of their name[108]. It stands to reason then, that the Islamic identification could hardly have escaped al-Fārābī's attention...

The importance of the religious aspect for al-Fārābī is emphasized by him in his Taḥṣīl al-Saʿāda[109]. He makes the recommendation that the leader be of sound religious convictions. This indicates that al-Fārābī was indeed interested in things religious and held strong views, although they were almost always out of sight for his readers. It is true that no religious books have come down to us by al-Fārābī, except for one for which his authorship has been contested or even proven wrong, i.e., Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikma[110]. Does this mean that al-Fārābī deliberately avoided the topic? How can one possibly avoid it at the time?

al-Fārābī uses extensively and with a very special meaning the term Imām... Could it be the case that he himself participated in the controversy about the Imāma in a philosophical rather than a religious guise?

A good evidence for al-Fārābī's employing a specific name in an abstract manner would be to show that although he was aware of the actual views of the specific group, he attributed to «his» Nawābit different ones. This is exactly what happened with al-Fārābī's accusation of the Mutaqannisūn of employing scriptural interpretation[111] that stands in contrast with the attitude of the

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[102] al-Ašʿarī, Maqālāt, I 191,10.
[103] Ṭabarī, Annales, p. 2174,9.
[104] Ibn Taimiyya, Muʿāwiya, p. 31,2.
[105] Siyāsat, p. 104,15.
[106] Lane, vol. 1 p. 718.
[107] Dozy, Supplem. vol. 1 p. 358.
[108] Lisān, s.v. khrj.
[109] See Taḥṣīl, e.g. p. 45,6.
[110] See S. Pines (1957).
[111] See above, p. 59 (note 20).

historical Nawābit (as reported by Masʿūdī[112]) who opposed the
institution of interpretation altogether[113].

Having established what «Nawābit» meant for al-Fārābī we can
now proceed and see if the term was shared by any other author in
Arabic. This sect was not unanimous on every issue, so much so
that al-Ḥayyāṭ refers to it in one place as «different (or differing)
groups» (firaq muḫtalifa)[114].

There is enough evidence to indicate that a party or sect of some
prominence was in existence at the time of al-Ǧāḥiẓ (d. 869) and
later[115]. al-Ǧāḥiẓ wrote an entire treatise that is dedicated to the
Nawābit[116], and Pellat even names them as one of the three main
parties along with the Muʿtazila and the Šīʿa[117]. In fact, it is temp-
ting to surmise that the word as a private name was used for the
first time by this author, who still uses it as a derogatory general
term in the sense of «novices, young, newcomers and innovators»[118]
nābitat ʿaṣrinā wa-mubtadiʿ at dahrinā[119] as well as a socio-national
one: Arabs in general, he claims, both sedentary and Beduin are
indisputably better poets than the Muwalladūn and the Nābita[120] who
have their origin in the Mawālī[121]. This remark brings to mind a
wild hypothesis that the name «Nawābit» can be explained as a
transliteration-translation of the Greek Neophytes. This term was
used for many centuries by Christians, Eastern and, later, Western
alike, to designate new converts, but literally it means «new
plants.»[122] Add to the plausibility of this hypothesis the fact that the

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[112] See Masʿūdī, Tanbīh, p. 395,13.
[113] See below p. 82 (n. 180).
[114] al-Ḥayyāṭ, Intiṣār, p. 55,15.
[115] The group has been the subject of a number of scholarly works since van
Vloten published al-Ǧāḥiẓ's treatise in 1897. In his article he described this group
as the relation between the Muʿtazila and the Ḥašwiyya (p. 112), or even as a part
of them (ibid. p. 113), a view that Halkin adopted (1936, p. 4 n. 5): «without a
shadow of a doubt». The Nawābit in turn—as formed, together with the Sufis the
Karāmiya (van Vloten, p. 114). For Lecomte (op. cit. p. 338) the Nawābit were
identical with the ʿUṯmaniyya, a group that he thought had started at about the
same time as which is sometimes attributed to Abū al-Walīd Muḥammad b.
Aḥmad Ibn Abī Daʾūd.
[116] See Majallat Lughat al-Arab, (1930) as quoted by al-Ḥaǧirī, op. cit. p. 191.
[117] Pellat (1956) p. 56-7.
[118] al-Ǧāḥiẓ, Rasāʾil, vol. 1 p. 300,5.
[119] al-Ǧāḥiẓ, R. Fī al-Nābita, p. 119,2.
[120] al-Ǧāḥiẓ, Ḥayawān, 2nd ed. vol. 3 p. 130,4.
[121] al-Ǧāḥiẓ, Risāla fī al-Nābita, p. 122,10 f.
[122] Liddle and Scott, Lexicon, vol. 2 p. 1000. See The New Catholic Encyclopaedia,
McGraw-Hill, 1967, vol. 10 p. 333 f.

term «Nawābit» appeared first at the time of al-Ǧaḥiẓ and al-
Maʾmūn, when the relations with Byzantium became stronger and
opened the door to greater influence. al-Ǧāḥiẓ went one step fur-
ther on the road from a general term to a particular one when he
characterised the Nābitī as one who is rebellious (yaḫruǧu)[123].
This historical group was very much involved in the politics of
the day: al-Ǧāḥiẓ describes the situation in his own «difficult and
corrupt time» (his treatise about the Nawābit was written around the
year 226/840[124]) as follows: «They (the Nawābit) started to grow
(nabatat) and appeared (nasaʾat) at that time, they introduced these
new illicit innovations (abdaʿat hāḏihi al-bidʿa) namely, advocating
Muʿāwiya.» They gained considerable power and influence, so
much so that al-Ǧāḥiẓ laments that situation in which he felt
obliged to pray to God on behalf of the opponents of non-
believers[125]. Others also describe the Nawābit in terms that connect
them to important political and religious events: In 201/816, two
separate groups in Baghdad bearing the name al-amr bil-maʿrūf wal-
nahiy ʿan al-munkar took to arms, which resulted in the victory of ahl
al-ḥadīt by gainining control of Baghdad in the time of al-Wātiq,
especially in the year 231/845[126].
    Eleven years later, In 212/827, the mob became angry over
Maʾmūn's decree to condemn Muʿāwiya in mosques all over the
Caliphate because of the latter's alleged reply to Muǧīra to the effect
that it did not pay to be good person[127]. Yaḥya Ibn Akṯam, the
celebrated Qāḍī, managed to prevent him from doing so[128].
    In 227, one year after our Risāla was compiled, another round
of disturbances took place, in which the Jahmites in Baghdad were
attacked[129]. The cause this time was an attempt to erase an inscrip-
tion of the Mosque of Šuʿaib b. Sahl al-Qāḍī[130] stating that the
Quran was created[131].

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[123] al-Ǧaḥīẓ, Risālat al-Nubl Wal-Nubālāʾ, in Rasāʾil, vol. 2 p. 173,13.
[124] Lambton, op. cit. p. 62.
[125] Ǧāḥiẓ, R. Fī al-Nābita, p. 122,2.
[126] Dodge, Fihrist, p. 918.
[127] Masʿūdī, Murūǧ, vol. 4 p. 338.
[128] Pellat (1956) p. 55, n. 1.
[129] Ṭabarī, Annales, vol. 3 p. 1098; Masʿūdī, Murūǧ, vol. 7 p. 91; See Pellat
(1965) p. 55.
[130] Sourdel (1962) p. 39.
[130] A governor who had been appointed to his post by al-Maʾmūn.
[131] al-Ḫaṭīb al-Baġdādī, Taʾriḫ Baġdād, vol. 12, p. 464.

Another controversy then occurred this time over the question of succession to Ma'mūn[132] as well as over the «official colour» of clothes to be worn which al-Ma'mūn decreed should be green, rather than black. In opposing him, the Kufans joined the Baghdadians from a number of quarters: *Ahl al-Bait*, the *Mawālī* and the extremist army officers[133]. They did not restrict themselves to Iraq[134], but were also quite prominent in Syria, especially at the time of al-Ḥayyāṭ who calls them «the rebellious sect of Syria»[135].

The result of these steps was that Ibrahīm and Manṣūr, the sons of al-Mahdī, together with the uncle of al-Ma'mūn took to arms, received the confidence of the Baghdadians and deposed al-Ma'mūn[136]. It was for this rebellion that Ibrahim b. al-Mahdī borrowed money to finance his military operations. When he failed to pay back the debt, a poem was compiled by Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Mālik, one of the creditors, in which Ibrahīm was referred to as «the leader» (*imām*) of «this *Nabātiya*», and the author threatened him with showing this poem to al-Ma'mūn. The money was promptly returned[137]. A sign of the importance of the *Nawābit* is the report that goes the farthest with regards the *Nābita*, that of Masʿūdī, who tells that ʿAlī, in the year 9 made public the divine decree prohibiting entry to Mecca to non-Muslims, among whom the *Nābita* were named[138].

For all its historicity, however, the only person who has been explicitly named in connection with the *Nawābit* is that of the Ḥanafī faqīh ʿAlī al-Rāzī Ibn al-Muqātil, who is reported by al-Ḥayyāṭ as participating with a group of the *Nawābit* in a meeting[139].

When dealing with sects in general, and the *Nawābit* in particular, one must bear in mind that what is known of the *Nawābit's* views is drawn from writers who are either Muʿtazilite themselves,

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[132] al-Ma'mūn appointed his successor ʿAlī ibn Ǧaʿfar Ibn M. b. ʿAlī b. Ḥusain b. ʿAlī Ibn 'Abī Ṭalīb, a direct offspring of ʿAlī, in disregard of both the Abbasids and the other Alawites.
[133] Ṭabarī, *Annales*, p. III 1026,8.
[134] And in particular in Wasit. See Madelung (1965) p. 224.
[135] al-Ḥayyāṭ, *Intiṣār*, p. 102,2 («al-fiʾ ah al-baghiyah min ahl al-šhaʾm»).
[136] al-Ḥatib al-Baġdādī, *Taʾriḫ*, vol. 12 p. 464.
[137] *Aġānī*, XXIII 50,8.
[138] Masʿūdī, *Tanbīh*, 273,13. Naming our group in this context is quite curious. It may be explained by a scribal error, a name shared by two different groups or by retroactive attribution of the name to ʿAlī.
[139] al-Ḥayyāṭ, *K. al-Intiṣār*, p. 68,10.

or who report the views of Muᶜtazilites, both Basran like al-Ǧāḥiẓ, and Baġdādī like al-Ḥayyāṭ al-Ǧušamī (d. 494), Ibn Qutaiba, al-Isfahānī, al-Masᶜūdī and al-Ǧubbaʾī (in *al-Munya wal-ʾamal*[140]). Others do not seem either to have written of them or to have used this particular name.

Ibn Qutaiba (d. 276/889), himself far from being a Muᶜtazilite, reports[141] that the name *Nawābit* was given to *ahl al-Ḥadīṯ* by the *mutakallimūn*, and al-Masᶜudī mentions them as forming, along with the *Ḥašwiya*, a group called *fuqahāʾ al-amṣār*, who, in turn, were one of three main parties of contemporary Islam[142]. Their theologians' main points of ideology[143] were:

(1) Muᶜāwiya

The first point made is the very emotional way in which al-Ǧāḥiẓ recounts the refusal of the *Nawābit* to condemn Muᶜāwiya. This refusal, al-Ǧāḥiẓ states, puts them in a lower position even than the criminal himself[144].

The Sunni attitude was taken up by al-Ǧāḥiẓ to show their excessive and unconditional obedience[145], a position that on the one hand could conform with authority, but coming as a complaint from al-Ǧāḥiẓ is intended to portray them as opposition to a rightful reᵧ̣ime.

To thᴗir veneration of Muᶜāwiya[146], sometimes their support of ᶜAlī is added too, a position they shared with the *Ḥaramiya*. In counter-arguing the above statement the point was made that even ᶜAlī himself forbade his followers to condemn Muᶜāwiya, and so did ᶜUmar b. ᶜAbd al-ᶜAzīz[147].

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[140] See p. 78 below.
[141] Ibn Qutaibah, *Taʾwīl*, Cairo 1966 p. 80.
[142] Masᶜūdī, *Tanbīh*, Beirut 1965 p. 337.
[143] al-Ḥayyāṭ ᵗepeatedly quotes «those of the *Nawābit* who theologize (*man takallama min al-Nawābit*) e.g. p. 22,5.
[144] al-Ǧāḥiẓ, *Risāla*, p. 119,9. E. Rosenthal (1971) p. 53, n. 63. al-Ḥanafī, *Al-Farq*, 40,13.
[145] Cf. also Lambton, *op. cit.* p. 63.
[146] The connection between Muᶜāwiya and the stem *NBT* is indicated in *Lisān*, vol. 2, p. 402,8, where the noun *Nābita* is used in a general way. In the context of the positive attitude towards Mawiyah, another name was used with the same connotations as «*Nabitah*», namely «*našiʾa*». See Sirat Salim, in Cook, *Early*, p. 160,15. Could these two names be related?
[147] al-Ḥanafī, *Al-Farq*, p. 40,13.

The issue must have been so important that a *ḥadīṯ* is quoted that attacked the *Nawābit*: «It is related that the Prophet, may God pray for, and bestow peace on him, said to ʿAlī, al-Ḥasan, al-Ḥusain and Fāṭima: 'I am your ally against whomever you fight. These *Nawābit* amaze me: they adhere to this *ḥadīṯ*, then support Muʿāwiya»[148]. Some hold that at the time of al-Ğāḥiẓ the two main parties that competed, and whose point of disagreement was the attitude towards Muʿāwiya, were the *Nawābit* on the one hand and the Muʾtazila on the other[149]. In the circular letter that Maʾmūn intended in 211/826 to send to all parts of the Caliphate with the decree to condemn Muʿāwiya, the venerators of the late Caliph are referred to as common people (*ʿāmma*) whose religious belief (*adyān*) suffered *šubha*, whose convictions (*muʿtaqadihim*) are corrupt (*fasad*), and whose misguided objectives (*ahwāʾ*) have been overcome by separatistic-nationalistic tendencies (*ʿaṣabiya*)[150]. These could include the Ḥanbalites[151] and even the Rawafid who became Muʿāwiya's supporters in a later period (if the story reported by a disciple of Ġulām Ṯaʿlab (d. 957) is to be believed[152]).

al-Maʾmūn was dissuaded from taking this step by the high *qāḍī*—Yaḥyah Ibn Akṯam[153] who put forth the argument that such an action would meet with fierce popular opposition, especially in the east and Khurāsān[154]. In the year 284/89, when al-Fārābī was about 27 years old, al-Muʿtaḍid contemplated the possibility to issue the same decree, but he again was dissuaded from doing so.

Even a century later, at the time of al-Maqdīsī (375/985) there existed in Baghdad a group that «exaggerated» in loving Muʿāwiya, who were also anthropomorphists and *barbahāriya*(?). Al-Maqdīsī related the story that on one occasion he, while visiting the Wasit mosque, heard a prophetic *ḥadīṯ* to the effect that Allah will sit Muʿāwiya on the day of resurrection to His right and uncover him

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[148] Quoted in al-Ḥağirī, *op. cit.* p. 191 note 1 from *al-munyah walʾamal*, on the authority of al-Ğubbāʾi. See also Ibn al-Murtaḍa, *Ṭabaqāt*, p. 82.

[149] Ḥağirī, op. cit. p. 189. Funnily enough, The most outspoken supporter of Muʿāwiya was, reportedly, al-Asamm the Muʿtazilite who claimed that ʿAlī had never been an Imam and that there was no necessity that Imam should be in the world.

[150] Ṭabarī, *Annales* p. 2167,12.

[151] Pellat (1956) p. 58.

[152] Pellat (1956) p. 56-7.

[153] For him see Masʿūdī, *Murūğ*, vol. 4 p. 316 ff.

[154] Pellat (1956) p. 55; Ṭabarī, *Annales*, vol. 3 p. 1098; 2164; Masʿūdī, *Murūğ*, vol. 7 p. 90; Baihaqī, *Maḥāsin*, p. 151.

to all mankind like a bride[155]. The topic of condemning Muᶜāwiya is still hot at the time of Ibn Taimiya, whose view is that such a condemnation is prohibitted because Muᶜāwiya's had been one of the Ṣaḥāba[156]. Another argument put forwards in favour of Muᶜāwiya (according to Pellat—by the Nawābit[157]) was that during the entire 40 years that the man served as governor and Chaliph, he commited no crime at all.

A more modes description of the Nawābits' stand was that their basic principle was quᶜūd (avoiding political judgements)[158]. However, not all students of the events agree on this being the most important matter for the Nawābit: In contrast to Houtsma[159] who thought that the main issue advocated by the group was hatred of ᶜAlī, Halkin is of the opinion that they merely supported ᶜAlī's opponents and did not really hate him[160], while Lecomte thinks that the group opposed both the Alawites and the ᶜAbbāsides[161].

All this quite detailed history serves as ample evidence for the vividness of the issues, as well as of the parties involved over long centuries, including of al-Fārābī's own. Certainly one might say that, judging by the emotionality expressed in the style of al-Ǧāḥiẓ, then the issue of Muᶜāwiya was the one most hurting for him, and probably to his contemporaries. Although it seems to me that there is very little in common between al-Fārābī's account of the Nawābit and that of the other authors, it is possible that al-Fārābī's view about Muᶜāwiya was similar to that of Ibn Rušd, namely that he exemplified the transition from a perfect society and government into a deteriorated kingship, from accepted traditions to innovated whimsical (ahwāʾ) innovations[162].

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[155] Aḥsān Al-Taqāsīm, p. 126,14. Other groups who took up the issue of Muᶜāwiya in a like manner to that of the Nawābit were the Šafiᶜiyya who claimed that al-Maʾmūn belonged to the people of paradise because he was a martyr just as ᶜAlī was. (Ssfadi, Al-Ǧaiṭ, vol. 1 p. 165,15), and the Hanbalites whom Maqdīsī blamed for excessive love towards Muᶜāwiya (Maqdīsī, Badʾ, p. 126) and Ahl Al-Sunna Wal-Ḥadīṯ, (Lecomte, op. cit. p. 337).

[156] al-Ǧāḥiẓ, Risāla, p. 3; Ibn Taimiya, Yazīd, p. 21,9.

[157] Pellat (1956) p. 59.

[158] Lecomte, op. cit. p. 338.

[159] Houtsma, ZA 26 (1911) p. 196.

[160] Halkin, op. cit. p. 3.

[161] Lecomte, op. cit. p. 337.

[162] See E. I. J. Rosenthal, (1956) p. 290, who refers to Ibn Rušd's Talḫīṣ Siyāsat Aflaṭūn. The same attitude in al-Ǧāḥiẓ, Risāla, p. 117,13 f.

(2) Election of the Imam

The *Nābita* are mentioned as one of the groups that had held the view that the *Imām* should be elected by the *Umma* or by part of it[163], on which issue they were vehemently opposed by the *Muʿtazila*, who put it under the title of «the rule of the many» (*wilayat al-ǧamīʿ*)[164]. They thus took part in the renewed political controversy in the ninth century that revolved around the question of whether the *Umma* was to be governed according to the interpretation of the *Qurʾān* and *ḥadīṯ* by one single Imam, or by that of the many[165]. The *ʿUṯmāniyya* movement in the ninth century, which advocated the Umayyads, were not so much for their return, as they were opposed to the veneration of ʿAlī by the Rawāfiḍ. They did point out the positive aspect of ʿUṯmān being elected by the council.

(3) Anthropomorphism

One of the gravest and most frequent accusations made against the *Nawābit* was that of anthropomorphism (*tašbīh*)[166], and it is more often made by association with other groups whose views on the matter were well-known, e.g., the Jews and the *Nawābit'* «brothers» from amng the *Rāfiḍa*[167] and the *Ḥašwiyya*[168]. Even some modern scholars have adopted this method of describing the views of the *Nawābit*, e.g. the Karāmiyya, whom van Vloten described as a mixture between the *Nawābit* and Sufism, and who held the view that Allah has a body[169].

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[163] Election of the *Imām* is excercised by the *Šura*, and was advocated by a faction of the Zaidites. See *Maqālāt* I p. 135,1.

[164] al-Ḥayyāt, *Intiṣār*, p. 102,1.

[165] Masʿūdī, *Tanbīh*, 232,8; Watt, *Formative*, p. 166.

[166] al-Ǧāḥiẓ, Risāla, p. 119,14. al-Ḥāyyaṭ, *Intiṣār*, p. 105,14.

[167] For the views of the Rafidite on this issue see *Maqālāt*, I 102,12. The views of the *Nawābit* on anthropomorphism correspond to those of *Ahl-Al-Hadīṯ wal-Sunna*, ibid. I 320 ff. The *Nābita* shares anthropomorphistic views with the *Rawāfiḍ*, and both are clear heresy. [al-Ǧāḥiẓ, Ḥalq Al-Quran, *Rasāʾil* III, 296,13]; ibid. al-Ǧāḥiẓ, *al-raddʿala al-Naṣārā*, I 300,4, ibid. 351]

[168] al-Ǧāḥiẓ, al-raddʿala *al-Nāṣārā, Rasāʾil*, III 351.

[169] al-Isfarāʾini, *op. cit.* p. 100,2.

(4) Creation of the Qurʾān:[170]

The Qurʾān is uncreated. However, al-Ǧāḥiẓ accuses[171] the Nawābit of attaching to it all the attributes of creation without calling it by this name. They are forced into this position because they do not differentiate between the speech of humans, which is not created by them and that of God.

We know, or at least we learn, that the Nawābit did not always speak in one voice on this matter, to the extent that some even accused others of disbelief[172].

For Madelung they are «the traditionalists» and he quotes al-Ǧāḥiẓ as arguing «that on the one hand they use with regard to the Qurʾān terms that imply creation, but on the other hand do not admit the term «Ḫalq», because they imagine God speaking in the same fashion as human beings speak, and human beings do not create their speech»[173].

(5) Predestination

The Nawābit's stand on the topic of predestination is not univocally determined either: al-Masʿūdī reports two contradictory views allegedly held by them: on the one hand they were not included in his list of the partisans of free choice[174], but on the other hand, later, in the same work they are mentioned and criticised by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Muḥammad al-Wālī in the year 345/956, along with other partisans from «the Muʿtazila, the Zaidiya, the Ḫawāriǧ, the Murjiʾah and the Ḥašwiyya[175].» Their theologians were therefore included by al-Ḥayyāṭ[176] and Ibn an-Nadīm, who, incidentally, is the only heresiographer who mentions their Nawābit as far as I could establish, among the rest of the Muǧbira[177]. From other instances we know that al-Fārābī tried to dissociate himself from

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[170] On the controversy regarding the createdness of the Qurʾān in the period that preceded the Miḥna, see Madelung (1985), especially p. 617 n.

[171] al-Ḥayyāṭ, Intiṣār, p. 55,15.

[173] Madelung, (1985) p. 121 where he also refers to Van Vloten. See also Sourdel (1962) p. 45.

[174] al-Masʿūdī, Tanbīh 273,13 f.

[175] Masʿūdī, Tanbīh, 337,7. The views of the Nawābit correspond, although with a difference, to the report in Maqālāt I 321.

[176] al-Ḥayyāṭ, Intiṣār, p. 105,15.

[177] Ibn al-Nadīm, Fihrist, (English translation), I 446,3.

determinism. This attitude is expressed in *Iḥṣāʾ al-ʿulūm, FSM* and *de Int.*, and one could see that he favoured, at least in this context, the Muʿtazilte position, although he did not mention them by name. This failure brought Zimmermann to observe that it was a sign of disdain that he failed to make a common cause with them[178]. It is interesting that he did not stop to elaborate on this issue in his portrait of the *Nawābit*, which may indicate once more his lack of both information on and interest in their actual standpoint. On the other hand, although his position seems to have been against that of the historical *Nawābit*, his failure to elaborate on the point is curious. It could be interpreted, however, as a sign that he had already dissociated himself completely from this specific case, and only dealt with the abstract for which instances of agreement and disagreement are of no consequence.

(6) Textual Interpretation (*Taʾwīl*):

al-Fārābī went to some length to attribute to some of the *Nawābit* the technique of scriptural interpretation (*taʾwīl*) for the purpose of strengthening their goal in an illegal manner (*taḥsīn*).

As a historical fact, the *Nawābit* were quite opposed to this technique and to those who practiced it most—the *Baṭīniyya*. al-Ǧāḥiẓ connected the *Nawābit* with the slogan of *bilā kaifa*, the celebrated principle of the Ḥanbaliyya[179].

(7) God's ability to do wrong (*Taǧwīr*)

The *Nawābit* seem to have taken part in the theological controversy over God's ability to do injustice[180], taking the position that this is possible for Him[181]. In this they were at variance with the Muʿtazila as represented in this paragraph by al-Naẓẓām[182],

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[178] Zimmermann, Introduction to his edition of *de Int.*, pp. cxi and cxvi. Compare al-Fārābī's definitions of choice (*iḫtiyār*) in ffa p. 124,4: *Siyāsat* p. 72,9 and *ʾĀrāʾ*, p. 205,14 which certainly accept human choice.

[179] al-Ǧāḥiẓ, Risālah, p. 120,22. *Cf. Maqālāt*, vol. 1 p. 322,23 for the attribution of this position to *Aṣḥāb Al-Hadīṯ Wa-Ahl Al-Sunna*.

[180] For God's ability to do injustice, see al-Ašʿarī, *Maqālāt*, I 138,19 ff. where part of the Zaidiya is described as holding this view. The main discussion though, is that of the Muʿtazilite views on the topic (*ibid.* I 252 ff.). Even some Muʿtazilites agreed that Allah is capable of doing injustice, e.g. al-Iskāfī (*Ibid.* I 253,13).

[181] al-Ǧāḥiẓ, *Risāla*, p. 119,9; 14.

[182] For his detailed position on the issue, as well as that of the other Muʿtazilites, see R. Frank, «Can God do What is Wrong?»

holding the view that God is bound by nothing, including His own promise. Thus, «Those among the *Nawābit* who practiced *kalām* claimed that God can do injustice (*zulm*), a view they shared with the entirety of the *Rafiḍa*[183]. They also claimed, in a similar manner to Ibrahīm al-Naẓẓām that God can put in hell those who had been promised eternity in paradise in reward for their obedience in this world[184], or even to send the inhabitants of Paradise to Hell in spite of His promise. They further said that the expression «After having stated that He would do something, God can refrain from doing what He had said He would do» is paradoxical and has no meaning at all, once God had indeed said that He would do that [thing][185].

(8) Divine Knowledge:

The *Nawābit* believed that God knows by means of eternal knoweledge, a view strongly opposed by Abu al-Huḍail the Muʿtazilite[186].

(9) The *Ṣaḥāba*:

The group, as reported by al-Ḥayyāṭ seems to have held much in common with *aṣḥāb al-hadīṯ* and the *Murǧiʾa*. On the issue of the *ṣaḥāba* and their rights. They differed from them however over the identity of some of these people and their order of priority[187].

As a considerable part of the description of the *Nawābit*, the technique of comparison and combination was widely used by authors who dealt with this group. Thus, for an educated reader, seeing their name mentioned along with other group or groups, reveals by itself the author's attitude towards them.

For the most part the *Nawābit* are combined, as we saw[188], with the *Ḥašwiyya*[189], but also with the *ʿIbāḍiyya*, with whom they were

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[183] al-Ḥayyāṭ, *Intiṣār*, 22,4.
[184] al-Ḥayyāṭ, *al-Intiṣār*, 22,22.
[185] al-Ḥayyāṭ, *al-Intiṣār*, 22,4.
[186] al-Ḥayyāṭ, *al-Intiṣār*, p. 59,18.
[187] al-Ḥayyāṭ, *al-Intiṣār*, p. 105,17. The same idea this time in reference to the similarity between the *Muʿtazila* and *Aṣḥāb Al-Ḥadīṯ, ibid.* p. 101,21.
[188] See p. 63.
[189] E.g. Ǧāhiẓ, *Fī ḫalq Al-Qurʾān, Rasāʾil*, vol. 1 p. 287,14 f; al-Ǧušamī, *K. Al-ʿuyūn fī al-Radd ʿala Ahl Al-Bidaʿ*, Ms. Ambrosiana B66 fol. 12a; *ibid. k. fi Naṣīhat*

attacked together by Bišr Ibn al-Mu°tamir[190] in a poem[191] he wrote, and the Rawāfiḍ[192] who used the name «Nawābit» for the traditionists[193].

On the other historical, as well as the value side of al-Fārābī is Ibn Bāǧǧa (d. 533/1138) who used the term in his book Tadbīr al-Mutawaḥḥid indicating that the word has two meanings: (1) A private name for a particular group of people who live in ignorant cities who hold right philosophical views and as such are the sole candidates of achieving felicity[194]. The greater the gap between them and their opponents, the more appropriate is the name. As such each individual is called ġarīb «and is similar to his Ṣūfī homonym[195]. Incidentally, one can trace this view to al-Fārābī's: In FFM, the obligation is on the meritorious person (al-fāḍil min al-nās) to live in the Excellent City, if one exists in his time. If none does, then he is regarded as «a stranger (ġarīb) in the world, his life is so bad that death is preferable to him to life[196].» (2). A generic noun that indicates any opposition, regardless of how right their views are[197]. The Nawābit are mentioned as living in the four cities that are not the excellent one. For him, the Nawābit, whose name he suggests means «weeds that spring out of themselves among plants»[198], are the cause for the coming-to-be of the Excellent City, which he calls «the wholesome city» (al-madina al-kāmila)[199] out of the lesser ones[200], a direction opposite to that pointed out by al-Fārābī, who allows the Nawābit in the excellent cities to act towards changing them into ignorant ones. He seems more geared towards the notion of Islamic history as starting from a peak and deteriorating with the passage of time. Ibn Bāǧǧa's choice of name for his city makes

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al-°Amma, Ms. Ambrosiana C5 fol. 23a as quoted by H. Modaressi in al-Ǧušamī, Risāla, p. 8 n. 1. I am grateful to Prof. Modarisi for given me his edition of the book.
[190] Of the leaders if the Mu°tazila. In prison, where he was jailed by Harūn, he composed poems on justice, Tauhīd and Wa°id.
[191] al-Ǧāhiẓ, Ḥayawān, vol. 6, p. 62,10.
[192] al-Ǧāhiẓ, Fīhalq al-qur°ān, in Rasā°il, vol. 1 p. 296,13.
[193] Rosenthal (1955) p. 25.
[194] Ibn Bāǧǧa, Tadbīr, p. 43,1.
[195] Ibn Bāǧǧa, Tadbīr, p. 43,9. See also E. I. J. Rosenthal, (1971) p. 51,23.
[196] Al-Fārābī, Fuṣūl Muntaza°a, p. 95,12.
[197] Ibn Bāǧǧa, Tadbīr, p. 42,17.
[198] Ibn Bāǧǧa, Tadbīr, p. 42,18.
[199] Except for one instance where Ibn Bāǧǧa uses al-Fārābī's term. Tadbīr, p. 41,3.
[200] Ibn Bāǧǧa, Tadbīr, p. 43,3.

sense: for him this community has no opposition or difference of opinion, which would imply the existence of false ones[201]. Within the ignorant cities, Ibn Bāǧǧa tells us, the *Nawābit* appear almost as a professional group, along with physicians and lawyers, and are indicative of the inferior state of the society to which they belong. The philosophical views which they hold give the impression of accident (*man waqaʿa ʿala raʾy ṣādiq*) rather than systematic and intentional striving to the truth[202]. Ibn Bāǧǧa does not mention the historical *Nawābit* explicitly. However, his attitude towards Muʿāwiya, we know, was negative. He pointed out that Muʿāwiya was not preferable to ʿAlī, because an examination of these two personalities would reveal their truth[203]. This attitude is somewhat contrary to the fact that Spain was ruled by the Ummayads long after they had ceased to govern the East; but on second thought, perhaps this explains the fact even better. Ibn Bāǧǧa may have not known the *Nawābit* directly. He could have drawn all his information from al-Fārābī, a possibility which is strengthened by a passage in which he attributed to al-Fārābī an intention to describe in his works the politics of the ancient Persians whose society was a mixture of all five kinds of cities, and in particular, the lesser ones[204]. To sum up: Whereas for al-Fārābī the *Nawābit* live in the perfect cities, for Ibn Bāǧǧa they are the citizens of the ignorant ones; for both writers they are the opposition, their political role for al-Fārābī is mostly dangerous and negative, whereas for Ibn Bāǧǧa it is positive and constructive; contrary to Ibn Bāǧǧa, al-Fārābī does not attempt to come up with an explanation of the name «*Nawābit*», but he goes into greater detail in describing the group, perhaps because of his closer historical proximity to the real party.

Conclusions regarding al-Fārābī:

1. Al-Fārābī constantly discusses real existing groups. But when he does so, he calls them by other names, or omits to name them altogether. Al-Fārābī never addresses himself in partisan fashion to the burning contemporary issues of the imamate. What he does is to treat it in a detached philosophical manner.

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[201] Ibn Bāǧǧa, *Tadbīr*, p. 43,1.
[202] Ibn Bāǧǧa, *Tadbīr*, p. 42,14.
[203] Ibn Bāǧǧa, *Tadbīr*, p. 57,9.
[204] Ibn Bāǧǧa, *Tadbīr*, p. 43,5.

He also gives a precise detailed account of the skeptical schools and moods of his own time albeit very concisely.

If trying to interpret *K. al-siyāsa l-madaniyya* with the help of *ʾĀrāʾ ahl al-madīna al-fāḍila* is legitimate because of the almost complete parallelism between the descriptions in these two texts, one can learn that *al-siyāsa* is more outspoken than the latter. Here a severe criticism is levelled against the leaders of the perfect city (taking into account that this is the city where the *Nawābit* exist, according to al-Fārābī).

2. The different treatment of the *Nawābit* in the *ʾĀrāʾ* and *al-Siyāsa* indicates a different role for each: the former is used for more general consumption and reflects views that are more favourable to the existing government, while the latter is more realistic in that it takes into account the existence of opposition within the perfect city and even advises the ruler how to deal with them.

3. al-Fārābī did his best to avoid being too explicit in naming groups and views. His intentions show through his efforts, especially by using loaded names and expressions. I therefore would agree that al-Fārābī «carefully avoided the theological, sectarian and political controversies»[205] of his time but would restrict this attitude to the explicit realm only.

Conclusions Regarding Opposition.

(1) It was al-Fārābī who introduced the term «*Nawābit*» in the abstract sense of «opposition».
(2) The process of the development of this introduction use was:
    (a) A derogatory political general noun used mainly by the ruling Muʿtazilites in the 9th century or perhaps even earlier used to indicate a proto-Sunnite group that opposed the «state-religion» of the *Muʿtazila*.
    (b) A derogatory private name used by the ruling Muʿtazilites for the same group.
    (c) A general unified generic noun used by the semi-neutral al-Fārābī to denote negatively all the factual and possible views of a group that opposes the philosophers in the Excellent City. We saw that al-Fārābī's *Nawābit* had in

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[205] Mahdi (1971), p. 524.

some cases views different from those of their historical homonym.

(d) A generic philosophical noun used by the philosophically-neutral Ibn Bāǧǧa to indicate positively both opposition in general, and in particular the private case of that opposition which is individual and positive, and is under a hostile government[206].

	al-Ǧāḥiẓ	al-Fārābī	Ibn Bāǧǧa
Attitude	Negative	Negative-Neutral	Positive-Neutral
Nature of Word	General Noun + Private Name	Private Name(?) + Generic Name	Generic name
Political Stance	Opposition to real govt. on political + theological issues	Opposition to utopian govt.(?) on political + philosophical issues	Opposition to real govt. on philoso-phical issues

Figure 3. The Development of Concept

(3) One explanation for the choice of this particular term is that while it was indicative enough, it was not overtly offensive, as *mukhāṣimūn, Mujādilūn* or *fitna* might have been. The latter, the most commonly used for «opposition» in Islam, carries more than a tinge of religious sense to it, beyond the degree that al-Fārābī would be willing to surrender. This undertone of apparent detachment is also manifest in al-Fārābī's reluctance to use terms that are clearly negative.

(4) Al-Fārābī's importance in this process lies in the fact that he served as a link between the real, actual group with their immediate convictions, and the fully abstract concept as was used by Ibn Bāǧǧa (who, as we saw, was aware of his debt to al-Fārābī). It was al-Fārābī who was the first to make the abstraction. To the best of my knowledge, up to him no Muslim writer had thought of joining, all the sects and factions at variance with the ruling government on different grounds under the same title so as to draw conclusions about them as a unit.

(5) Al-Fārābī's treatment of the groups in the perfect cities covers the entire range of possible grounds for opposition: political,

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[206] On the whole, a process similar to that was undergone by the Rafidite. See Kohlberg (1972).

ideological, personal and economical. In this the *Nawābit* as opposi-
tion contribute to rendering politics a most broad discipline that is
both practical and theoretical, something along the lines suggested
by Mahdi in his analysis of *Iḥṣā*[207].
(6) Finally, this is not a militant opposition, although al-Fārābī
does advise the leader to take steps against the *Nawābit* when these
are necessary, steps that may include harsh measures such as deten-
tion and expulsion. After all, in the Excellent City the battle-
ground would be intellectual, would it not?

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[207] On the whole, a process similar to that was undergone by the Rafidite. See
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