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Musical Concepts in the Works of Saadia Gaon

I

Saadia Gaon, the major figure in Jewish thought during the Geonic period, is the author of the oldest known text on music written by a Jew. This is a paragraph at the end of the tenth treatise of his *Kitāb al-amānāt wa'l i'tiqādāt* (Book of beliefs and opinions).¹ This text was written in 933, at a time and place that knew the highest blossoming of music and musical theory in Islamic civilization. It seems appropriate, therefore, to examine Saadia's observations on the properties and virtues of music and its influence on the human soul against the background of the ideas expounded in the major Arabic theoretical treatises of the time.

¹ I use the edition of Yosef Kafah (Jerusalem 1970), p. 320–323 (annotated text and Hebrew translation), checked against the one given in Israel Adler, *Hebrew Writings Concerning Music* (Munich: G. Henle, 1975) (= Répertoire international des sources musicales [RISM], vol. B/IX/2), which includes new critical editions of Saadia's Arabic passage on music and of its three Hebrew translations: Pitron A, Pitron B, and Judah Ibn Tibbon's, p. 288–295. The passage has been edited, translated into English, and examined in detail by Henry George Farmer in his excellent study: *Sa'adyah Gaon on the Influence of Music* (London: Arthur Probsthain, 1943), published to mark the thousandth anniversary of Saadia's death. See also the recent discussion in Ulf Haxen, "The Captions 'Fi Wazn' and 'Fi Lahñ' in Strophic Poetry," *Zotot* 1 (2001): 91–96.

It should be remembered that the science of music became a subject of significant intrinsic intellectual value in Islamic civilization as a result of the vast enterprise of translation of non-Arabic, mainly Greek, texts into Arabic. Under Caliph al-Ma'mūn (813–833), the process of accumulating and translating Greek scientific and philosophical books reached its peak as a well-organized activity carried on in *bait al-hikma* (house of wisdom) in Baghdad. The major music writings of that period are characterized by their emphasis on the ethical, cosmological and therapeutic approach.²

The paragraph in *Kitāb al-amānāt* to be discussed here is not the only reference to music in Saadia's writings. Of particular importance and interest is his introduction to and commentary on his Arabic translation (*šarḥ*) of the book of Psalms. Due to the Psalms' close relationship to music, Saadia's *šarḥ* contains several references to music, musical performance, and musical instruments. It is introduced by several prefaces, of which the so-called "long preface" discusses the Levites' musical tasks. In 1968, the late Hanoch Avenary published an important study on this preface and its musical aspects.³ Avenary used a Geniza fragment discovered by Nehemia Allony to fill an important lacuna in the preface as previously known from a unique manuscript. This was crucial for establishing the five conditions Saadia attached to the sacred service in the Temple. Avenary called attention to the fact that Saadia replaced references to the biblical *kinnor*, *nevel*, *tof* etc. with medieval Arabic instruments. He suggested that this exceptional attitude toward the instruments may be ascribed to Saadia's efforts to make the Bible comprehensible to non-Jews, as shown in his use of common Arabic designations for religious terms as well as biblical names of places, animals, and plants.⁴

Although the *šarḥ* contains some allusions to contemporary musical practice, its approach is different from the philosophical speculations expounded in the musical passage in *Kitāb al-amānāt*. It seems that in the *šarḥ* Saadia's purpose was to point out the specific historical and

functional meaning of the Levites' music, which, as he himself notes, disappeared after the destruction of the Temple.

II

We now turn to the musical passage in the *Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, found at the end of the tenth treatise (paragraph 18). Its subject is the eight rhythmic modes known at the time and their influence on the human soul. The tenth treatise as a whole is entitled "Concerning How it is Most Proper for Man to Conduct Himself in This World." Its approach largely reflects the prevailing doctrine of the *ethos*, which emphasizes the importance of harmony in its broad sense as an equilibrating force. Saadia argues that human beings should strive to attain an ideal equilibrium and harmony in all their activities, experiences, and desires. The theory about ways to attain this ideal equilibrium is based on the postulate that the compound (in which two powers hold one another in check) is superior to the single (where no such balance can be established).

After discussing what this theory implies for human character, Saadia moves to an examination of the effects produced by the senses. He introduces the discussion with the following words:

At the end of this treatise I now wish to provide proofs concerning the blending of sensibilia [*maḥsūsāt*, i.e. things

² For further details see Amnon Shiloah, *Music in the World of Islam: A Socio-Cultural Study* (London: Scolar Press; Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995), chapter five.

³ Hanoch Avenary, "A Geniza Find of Sa' adiah's Psalm-Preface and Its Musical Aspects," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 39 (1968), 145–162.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

sensed], thereby offering additional illustrative examples concerning the blending of characters, dealt with in the previous paragraph. I say in this respect that it is known that the sensibilia are of five kinds: what is tasted, what is seen, what is heard, what is smelled, and what is touched.⁵

Saadia next states that, taken separately, colors, sounds, and smells do not produce beneficial effect; it is their blending and combination that give joy and pleasure to human beings.⁶ It is noteworthy that Saadia refers to three senses only—sight, hearing, and smell, in this order—and leaves out touch and taste: the first, because, he says, it “provides only one pleasure, namely tenderness”; the second, because the blending of things tasted is well known (he gives the example of *falūdḥaj*—a mixture of starch, sugar derived from honey, and saffron).⁷ Saadia then offers a short discussion of sight, arguing that single colors have a weakening and even harmful effect on sight and thus do not produce a beneficial effect on the soul, whereas a blend of colors is pleasing to the eye, stimulates the humors, and stirs many forces of the soul. He offers several examples of blending: the combination of red and yellow stimulates the yellow bile and arouses courage; the combination of yellow and black stimulates the phlegm and triggers dejection; the combination of black, red, yellow, and white stimulates the blood and arouses sovereignty and dominion; and the combination of green and yellow stimulates the black bile and triggers fear and sorrow.⁸

The discussion of the effect of colors on sight is immediately followed by an inquiry into the effect of the rhythmic modes on the sense of hearing. In parallel to what he affirmed of colors, Saadia maintains that the repetition of single sounds or beats creates monotony and may harm the soul, whereas a combination of diversely patterned beats produces an agreeable effect.⁹

As noted, Saadia omitted taste and touch. It has been affirmed that in this he was following in the footsteps of Arab philosophers, specifically

al-Kindī.¹⁰ Indeed, the latter has been considered as the source from which Saadia derived the bulk of his material in the musical passage. This seems to me incorrect, however: al-Kindī actually excluded only touch, which he took to be subsumed under the other four senses. This brings us to the general question of the sources of Saadia’s views on music.

III

According to a widely accepted thesis, first put forward by the eminent historian of Arab music H. G. Farmer (1882–1965), Saadia’s statements on the rhythmic modes and their link to the theory of ethos are directly borrowed from al-Kindī’s *al-Risāla fī ajzā’ khabariyat al-mūsīqī* (Treatise imparting concise information on music).¹¹ This is one of the thirteen treatises on music that the famous Abū Yūsuf Ya‘aqūb ibn Ishāq al-Kindī (d. after 265/870), known as “the philosopher of the Arabs,” is reported to have written on music; only six of them are extant. Al-Kindī’s *Treatise* deals with the eight rhythmical modes in vogue in his time and links them to the theory of ethos.¹² This is

⁵ *Kitāb al-amānāt wa’l i’tiqādāt*, ed. Kafah, p. 320:6–12. The rendering of the passage on music in *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, translated from the Arabic and the Hebrew by Samuel Rosenblatt (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1948) is unfortunately unreliable and could not be used here.

⁶ Ibid., p. 320:24–27.

⁷ Ibid., p. 320:12–16.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 320:19–321:5.

⁹ Ibid., p. 321:6–11.

¹⁰ Farmer, *Sa‘adyah Gaon*, p. 12.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 17–26, includes an edition and commented translation of al-Kindī’s treatise.

¹² Amnon Shiloah, *The Theory of Music in Arabic Writings (c. 900–1900)* (Munich: G. Henle, 1979) (= RISM, vol. B X a), pp. 253–260.

precisely what Saadia does in his text, in terms very similar to those of his predecessor. It is this close resemblance that led Farmer to write that “the similarity between the two is so close that one is tempted to look upon Al-Kindī as the source from which Sa^cadyah derived much of his material.” Although Farmer did add the caveat that “it is possible, of course, that both Al-Kindī and Sa^cadyah borrowed from a common source,” he immediately rejected this possibility.¹³ Below I shall re-examine Farmer’s thesis.

Al-Kindī was the promulgator of the Greek scientific and philosophic tradition in the early period of Islamic science and philosophy; in Saadia’s age his towering figure still dominated Arabic thought in the philosophical tradition. Al-Kindī’s approach, particularly perceptible in his works on music, is characterized by the close association of the ethical, cosmological, and therapeutic aspects. Harmony, in its broadest sense, is central to al-Kindī’s understanding of the complex network linking music to all aspects of the universe. His cosmology thus borrows some of its technical aspects and parameters from music: sound, scales, melody, rhythm, etc. This network of correspondences is usually explained in reference to the four strings of the ^c*ūd*. This is true not only for al-Kindī, but also for roughly contemporary major representatives of this trend in cosmological thought, notably the Christian philosopher and physician Ḥunain ibn Ishāq (d. 873) and the tenth-century brotherhood known as Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’ (Brethren of Purity), who wrote a comprehensive encyclopedia of 52 epistles covering all the fields of knowledge and research of the time, including music.¹⁴ All three developed their theory about the harmony of sounds, colors, smells, and the like in direct relation to the ^c*ūd* and the symbolic meaning of its strings. The most elaborate list of interrelations between music and other aspects of the world is that provided by the Ikhwān under the title “the *murabba^cāt*” (the tetrads or the four-fold things).¹⁵

Saadia was certainly exposed to these general ideas and it seems reasonable that he was influenced by them. A comparison between the

passage on music in Saadia’s *Amānāt* and al-Kindī’s *Risāla* indeed reveals a striking similarity, both on the level of the major theme—the rhythmical modes—and on that of the doctrine of the influence of music on the soul. It is thus quite likely that al-Kindī’s *Risāla* was indeed Saadia’s major source.

A close comparison of the respective passages, however, shows that Saadia’s contains significant differences and deviations from al-Kindī. Below we will examine the two texts not in order to determine what they have in common—this is clear enough—but to identify the significant differences between them. My contention is that Saadia used the material he found in al-Kindī’s *Risāla* but adapted it to suit his own general needs and purposes.

To this end, I set one against another Saadia’s Arabic text in Hebrew characters (left)¹⁶ and al-Kindī’s text (right).¹⁷ English translations of both texts follow.¹⁸

¹³ Farmer, *Sa^cadyah Gaon*, pp. 15–16.

¹⁴ I translated the epistle on music into English in Amnon Shiloah, *The Epistle of Music of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’* (Tel Aviv: Tel-Aviv University, 1978); the translation is reprinted in Amnon Shiloah, *The Dimension of Music in Islamic and Jewish Culture* (London: Variorum, 1993) (Collected Studies, CS 393), Item III.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 60–64.

¹⁶ *Kitāb al-amānāt wa’l i^ctiqādāt*, ed. Kafah, p. 321:6–322:8.

¹⁷ *Al-Risāla fī ajzā’ khabariyat al-mūsīqī*, ed. Farmer, in Sa^cadyah Gaon, p. 19.

¹⁸ The English translation of Saadia’s passage is my own, although I consulted Farmer’s (*Sa^cadyah Gaon*, pp. 30–31); that of the passage from al-Kindī is taken with modification from Farmer, *Sa^cadyah Gaon*, p. 21.

والرمل نقرة منفردة ونقرتان متواليتان لا يمكن بينهما زمان نقرة وبين رفعه ووضعه ووضعه ورفعته زمان نقرة

وخفيف الرمل ثلاث نقرات متحركות ثم يعود الايقاع كما ابتدئ به

وخفيف الخفيف نقرتان متواليتان لا يمكن بينهما زمان نقرة وبين كل نقرتين ونقرتين زمان نقرة

والهزج نقرتان متواليتان لا يمكن بينهما زمان نقرة وبين كل نقرتين ونقرتين زمان نقرتين

ואלסאדס מקדארה ת'לאת' נגמאת מתחרכה.

ואלסאבע מקדארה נגמתאן מתואליתאן לים בינהמא זמאן נגמה ובין כל את'נתין ואת'נתין זמאן נגמה.

ואלת'אמן מקדארה נגמתאן מתואליתאן לים בינהמא זמאן נגמה ובין כל את'נתין ואת'נתין זמאן נגמתין. והד'ה אלארבע כלהא תחרכ אלסודא ותט'הר מן אלנפס אבלאקא מתקסמה אלי אלסרור תארה ואלי אלגם תארה אכרא. ומן עאדת אלמלכ אן ימוג'וא בעצהא מע בעצ' חתי תתעדל פיכון מא תחרכ מן אח'לאקהם אד'א סמעוהא במקדאר מא יצלח נפוסהם לתדביר אלממלכה ולא יחיה עליהם בפרט רחמה או קסוה ולא סרף שג'אעה או ג'בן, ולא בזיארדה ונקצאן פי אלפרח ואלסרור.²⁰

¹⁹ Read *mutawāliyatān* instead of *mutabāyinatān*, following al-Kindī's text.

²⁰ The last sentence, which is clearly an essential part of the passage on music, was omitted by Farmer (p. 30). By contrast, Adler correctly recognized that it is an integral part of the passage and included it in his edition of the Arabic text and the three Hebrew translations; see Adler, *Hebrew Writings*, pp. 289, 291, 293, 295.

Saadia, *Kitāb al-amānāt wa'l-iṭiqādāt*

וכד'לכ אלצות אלמפרד ואלתנגים ואללוחון אנמא תחרכ מן אח'לאק אלנפס שיא ואחדא פקט, וכת'ירא מא יצ'רהא, ולכן אמתזאג'הא יעדל מא יט'הר מן אח'לאקהא וקואהא וקד ינבגי אן תערף תאת'יראתהא מפרדה חתי יכון אלמוזאג' בחסב ד'לכ. פאקול אלאן אן אלאלחאן ת'מאניה לכל אחד מקאדיר מן אלתנגים.

פאלאול מנהא מקדארה ת'לאת' נגמאת מתואליה וואחדה סאכנה.

ואלת'אני ת'לאת' נגמאת מתואליה וואחדה סאכנה וואחדה מתחרכה. והד'אן אללחנאן יחרכאן קות אלדס וח'לק אלמלכ ואלסלטאן.

ואלת'אלת' מקדאר נגמתאן מתואליתאן לים בינהמא זמאן נגמה וואחדה סאכנה, ובין וצ'עה ורפעה [ורפעה] ווצ'עה זמאן נגמה. והד'א וחדה יחרכ אלצפרא ואלשג'אעה ואלג'ראה ומא מאת'להא.

ואלראבע מקדארה ת'לאת' נגמאת מתואליתאן לא יכון בינהא זמאן נגמה ובין כל ת'לאת' ות'לאת' זמאן נגמה. והד'א וחדה יחרכ אלבלגם יט'הר מן אלנפס קות אלד'ל ואלחצ'רע ואלג'בן ומא אשבה ד'לכ.

al-Kindī, *al-Risāla fī ajzā' khabariyat al-mūsīqī*

اما الايقاعات التي هي كاللجناس لسائر الايقاعات فتتقسم بثمانية ايقاعات وهي الثقيل الاول الثقيل الثاني الماخوري خفيف الثقيل الرمل خفيف الرمل خفيف الخفيف الهزج...

اما الثقيل الاول فثلاث نقرات متواليات ثم نقرة ساكنة ثم يعود الايقاع كما ابتدئ به

والثفيل الثاني ثلاث نقرات متواليات ثم نقرة ساكنة ثم نقرة متحركة ثم يعود الايقاع كما ابتدئ به

والماخوري نقرتان متواليتان لا يمكن ان يكون بينهما زمان نقرة ونقرة منفردة وبين وضعه ورفعته ووضعه زمان نقرة

وخفيف الثقيل ثلاث نقرات متواليات لا يمكن ان يكون بين واحدة منهن زمان نقرة وبين كل ثلاث نقرات وثلاث نقرات زمان نقرة

... This is also the case concerning a single sound, a single rhythmical pattern and a rhythmical modes [*al-luḥūn*],²¹ which stirs from among the characters of the soul only one, and this is frequently harming to her, whereas their mixture contributes to the balancing of its characters and forces which appear in her. Therefore, one must acquaint oneself with their influence as singles in order to be able to appreciate their [influence as a] mixture.

So I say now that there are eight rhythmic modes (*alḥān* = melodies), to each are [associated] measures of combinations of beats (*tanghīm*).

As for the *first* of them, its measure is three consecutive beats (*naghamāt*), and one quiescent.

And the *second*, [its measure] is three consecutive beats and one quiescent, and one moving. Those two modes stir the humor of the blood and the temperament of sovereignty and dominion.

As for the *ʿiqāʿāt* [rhythmical modes], which constitute the genres of [i.e. from which derive] all the rhythms, they are divided into eight modes, and they are: *al-thaqīl al-awwal*, *al-thaqīl al-thānī*, *al-mākhūrī*, *khafīf al-thaqīl*, *al-ramal*, *khafīf al-ramal*, *khafīf al-khafīf*, *al-hazaj*.

As for the *al-thaqīl al-awwal*, it is three consecutive beats (*naqarāt mutawāliyyāt*), then a quiescent beat, then the rhythm returns as it began.

Al-thaqīl al-thānī is three consecutive beats, then a quiescent beat, then a moving beat, then the rhythm returns as it began.

And the *third*, its measure is two consecutive beats—there is not between them the time of a beat—and one quiescent, and between putting down and raising up [and raising up] and putting down is the time of a beat. And this mode alone moves [the humor of] the yellow bile, [the temperament of] courage and audacity, and what is like them.

And the *fourth*, its measure is three consecutive beats—there is not between them the time of a beat—and between every three beats and three beats is the time of a beat. And this mode alone moves [the humor of] the phlegm, and raises in the soul a feeling of abasement, submission and cowardice and the like.

And the *fifth*, its measure is a solitary beat and two consecutive beats—there is not between them the time of a beat—and between [raising up and putting down], putting down and raising up is time of a beat.

Al-mākhūrī is two consecutive beats—there should not be between them the time of a beat—a solitary beat, and between putting down and raising up, and raising up and putting down is the time of a beat.

And *khafīf al-thaqīl* is three consecutive beats—there should not be between any one of them the time of a beat—and between every three beats and three beats is the time of a beat.

And the *ramal* is a solitary beat and two consecutive beats—there should not be between them the time of a beat—and between raising up and putting down, and putting down and raising up is the time of a beat.

²¹ *Luḥūn* is one of two plurals of *laḥn* (melody); the other is *alḥān*. Saadia uses the latter in the following sentence as equivalent to the term *ʿiqāʿ* (rhythmic mode), which appears in al-Kindi's text. See the discussion on p. 280.

And the *sixth*, its measure is three moving notes.

And the *seventh* its measure is two consecutive beats—there is not between them the time of a beat—and between every two beats and two beats is the time of a beat.

And the *eighth*, its measure is two consecutive beats—there is not between them the time of a beat—and between every two beats and two beats is the time of two beats. And these [last mentioned] four rhythmical modes, all of them move [the humor of] the black bile and raise in the soul different manifestations—sometimes of gladness, and sorrow at other times. It is in the habit of kings to blend them [i.e. the various modes] with each other until they are in a state of equilibrium. As a result, the change [lit. motion] produced in their characters when they listen to them will be beneficial to their souls, which will thus be suitable to conduct the affairs of government. They will then not be unjust, evincing either excessive clemency or excessive harshness, nor will they show undue courage or cowardice, nor excessive or too little joy and gladness.

And *khafif al-ramal* is three moving beats, then the rhythm returns as it begun.

And *khafif al-khafif* is two consecutive beats—there should not be between them the time of a beat—and between every two beats and two beats is the time of a beat.

And *al-hazaj* is two consecutive beats—there should not be between them the time of a beat—and between every two beats and two beats is the time of two beats.

IV

As already noted, the immediately apparent similarity between the two passages—the technical descriptions of the eight rhythmic modes are practically identical—led Farmer to write “that Sa^cadyah borrowed from Al-Kindī or his pupils is therefore highly probable”²² and that “Sa^cadyah’s text on rhythm and its influence ... is practically identical with what Al-Kindī says on the subject, except that where the former treats of rhythm and its influence together, the latter discusses them separately.”²³ But when examining two works that obviously contain identical material and ideas we should look beyond the similarities for the differences, with a view to establishing their particularities. A close examination of the passages from al-Kindī and Saadia seems to be a case in point, for their comparison reveals significant differences.

Al-Kindī’s *Treatise* differs significantly from the passage from Saadia in its basic scope, approach, and argument. First and foremost, al-Kindī’s is a treatise on music theory; its purpose is to explain musical elements in relation to the art of music and to relate music to the dominant theory of ethos. The *Treatise* is divided into two discourses (*maqālatān*), each of them subdivided into four sections (*fuṣūl*). In the first section of Discourse I, al-Kindī describes the fundamental structures of the eight known rhythmic modes (*‘īqā’āt*) in musical practice, indicating their names as they were current in contemporary writings. The other three sections of the first discourse complement the presentation of the rhythmical modes and deal with modulation from one rhythmic mode to another, the arrangements of rhythms according to cognate metrical forms, and the appropriateness of specific rhythmic modes to certain hours of the day.

All four sections of Discourse II are devoted to the doctrine of the

²² Farmer, *Sa^cadyah Gaon*, p. 90; see also p. 35 and the quotation above, p. 269–270.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

influence of music on the soul. In the first section, al-Kindī offers an extensive exposition of the doctrine, describing a network of correspondences that combine melody, rhythm, humors, and activities of the soul. The exposition is entirely based on the classical *‘ūd* (lute) and the symbolism attached to its four strings. To this topic al-Kindī devoted a separate treatise, in which he called the *‘ūd* “the instrument of philosophers,”²⁴ having in mind the Greek philosophers who allegedly conceived of the instrument and its parts as the image of the perfect harmony ruling the universe. A similar view was held by the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’: “The musician-philosophers limited themselves to four strings of the *‘ūd*, no more, no less, so that their productions would be comparable to the sublunar natural things [i.e. the four elements] and in the image of the science of the Creator.”²⁵ Positing a whole network of correspondences involving sublunar things and the theory of the influence of the four strings of the *‘ūd* (four being a symbolic number) was common to al-Kindī, Ḥunain ibn Ishāq, the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, and their followers, including later Jewish authors. As already mentioned, the longest list of correspondences between the strings of the *‘ūd* and other aspects of the universe is certainly that given by the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’ in their *Epistle on Music*. This list, entitled the Four-Fold Things (*al-murabba‘āt*), links each string to various objects that are themselves four-fold: elliptical arcs, parts of the zodiac, the elements, the winds, the seasons, the quarter of the month, the quarter of the day, the humors, the human ages, the powers of the soul, the powers of the body, the virtues, the rhythms, the colors, and the smells.²⁶

Following a detailed enumeration of the diverse correspondences pertaining to each string taken separately, al-Kindī writes: “If we mix those features, the mixture will be similar to that of the four natures [i.e. elements]. As a result, the influence that appears in the activities of the soul will be different from the influence produced by each taken separately. Thus the blending of [what pertains to] the strings *zīr* and *mathlath* will be comparable to the blending of courage and cowardice,

which means equilibrium and harmony between them. In the same way, the blending of the strings *mathna* and *bamm* will be comparable to the blending of gladness and grief.”²⁷ Al-Kindī’s last chapter is entitled *Nawādir* (rare sayings of the philosophers on music). This is a subject also studied by Ḥunain ibn Ishāq and the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’.²⁸

Whereas al-Kindī discussed the rhythmic modes and their effects on the body and soul in separate discourses of his *Treatise*, Saadia integrated the respective discussions into a single passage. But, contrary to what Farmer thought,²⁹ this is not a trifle, a merely formal matter pertaining to presentation alone. Saadia’s passage is embedded in a context and follows a purpose very different from al-Kindī’s. It is not a section of a specialized treatise on musical theory and practice, but part of a book on religious philosophy. Saadia’s discussion of musical theory

²⁴ See Amnon Shiloah, “Un ancien traité sur le *‘ūd* d’Abū Yūsuf al-Kindī,” *Israel Oriental Studies* 4 (1974): 179–205 (repr. in Shiloah, *The Dimension of Music*, Item I), on p. 181 (translation) and MS Manisa 1705 (reproduced in the pages following that article), fol. 110b:5 (Arabic text); see the same expression, cited from al-Kindī’s *Book of Sounding Stringed Instruments of One to Ten Strings*, in idem, “Musical Modes and the Medical Dimension: The Arabic Sources,” in J. Kassler, ed., *Metaphor: A Musical Dimension* (Paddington [Australia], 1991), 147–159 (repr. in Shiloah, *The Dimension of Music*, Item VI), on p. 149.

²⁵ Shiloah, *The Epistle of Music of the Ikhwan al-Ṣafā*, p. 43.

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 60–63.

²⁷ MS Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, We 1240, f. 34a.

²⁸ In his *Kitāb ‘ādāb al-falāsifa*, Ḥunain ibn Ishāq included three chapters called “Aphorisms (*nawādir*) of the Philosophers on Music.” Ḥunain’s work was widely known among medieval Jews through al-Ḥarizi’s Hebrew translation (*Muserei ha-filosofim*). See: Adler, *Hebrew Writings*, pp. 145–155; Shiloah, *The Theory*, pp. 134–135, 237. The penultimate chapter of the Ikhwān’s epistle is entirely devoted to the *nawādir*; see Shiloah, *The Epistle*, pp. 65–71.

²⁹ Farmer, *Sa‘adyah Gaon*, p. 18.

appears in a section discussing the effect of the senses on man's soul; his aim is to advise readers how to achieve the ideal and harmonious balancing of all their activities. To this end, Saadia refers to the theory of the superiority of the compound over the single and to the related theory of harmony as producing mental and physical equilibrium. This is why, in the sentence introducing the passage on music, Saadia underscores the necessity for human beings to know the theory of influences on the soul and that of the superiority of the compound over the single, a point repeated in the last sentence. Furthermore, Saadia deliberately omits al-Kindī's opening sentence, which refers to the widely accepted names of the rhythmic modes (ʿiqāʿāt), and thereafter systematically replaces these names with epithets like "the first [rhythmical mode]." Noteworthy is also the absence of any mention of the ʿūd and its strings, even though all the great theorists of the epoch referred to it to establish the network of correspondences in illustration of the theory of influence. I venture to say that these omissions and modifications are deliberate and that they are directly related to Saadia's specific purpose in his work of religious philosophy.

Some significant differences between the technical terms used by al-Kindī and Saadia should also be noted.³⁰ Saadia uses *alḥān* (plural of *laḥn* = melody) where al-Kindī usually assigns or indicates the rhythmic modes; he uses *naghma* (note) instead of *naqra* (beat); and *tanghīm* (= intonation), an uncommon word in music theory, as a derivative of *naghma* (here it probably refers, together with *maqādīr* [pl. of *miqdār* = measures], to a combination of beats of diverse time values). These terminological choices must not be considered an error or whim. Rather, they testify to Saadia's acquaintance with a different theoretical tradition; one finds a similar usage in contemporary works on musical theory. For instance, in their *Epistle on Music*, the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ write: "melody (*laḥn*) is composed of well-ordered notes (*naghāmāt*), and notes arise from beats."³¹ It is thus perfectly sound to maintain that rhythm consists of "beats" or of "notes." So what appears at first sight

to be an incompatibility between Saadia and al-Kindī in fact depends on whether one holds that rhythm is made up of "beats" or of "notes." This terminological ambiguity stems from the fact that most Arabic music theory refers to the technique of the plectrum (*miḍrāb*) in playing the ʿūd. When a string is struck with the plectrum, a beat and a note are produced simultaneously. Therefore, "notes" and "beats" were as a rule produced together. In sum, it seems probable that Saadia has this duality in mind in his passage on the rhythmical modes and their structural patterns of beats.

It may be noted in passing that the enigmatic terms "raising up" and "putting down," as well as the terms "quiescent" and "moving," used by both al-Kindī and Saadia, also stem from the playing technique of the ʿūd. "The notes and measured beats," write the Ikhwān, "cannot be produced except in a succession of alternate movements and rests. ... Movement (*ḥaraka*) is a displacement from one place to another, during a second interval of time; its opposite is the silence (*sukūn*) that indicates the stopping at the first place, during the second interval of time."³² Indeed, when using a plectrum, after a string is plucked the player's hand has to move in order to pluck the string again; during the interval between the two beats there is a certain silence, due to the special character of the plucked strings of the ʿūd, whose sound disappears immediately after it is produced.

V

Although Saadia's passage is obviously related to al-Kindī's *Risāla fī ajzāʾ khabariyyat al-mūsīqī*, some significant differences should be

³⁰ For what follows, cf. the discussion in *ibid.*, pp. 31–35.

³¹ Shiloah, *The Epistle*, p. 17; quoted also in Farmer, *Saʿadyah Gaon*, pp. 24f.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 22.

noted. For one thing, there are the terminological variants, which we have just considered: they suggest that al-Kindī may not have been the only source on which Saadia drew for his musical passage and that he made deliberate choices in his theoretical terminology. We should also note that, with reference to the eight modes, Saadia does not mention the names commonly in use at that time in both theoretical writings and musical practice. Lastly, unlike al-Kindī and other theorists of that epoch, Saadia refrained from referring to the *ʿūd* and its symbolic links to the doctrine of ethos, an approach current in his time. These differences, I submit, are intentional and call for an explanation.

My suggestion, as already intimated above, is the following. Contrary to al-Kindī, Saadia's purpose was not to deal with music in its own right; rather, he drew on musical theory as an illustration of the idea of harmony in its broader sense and of the doctrine of influence then in vogue. Saadia, moreover, wrote as a religious authority; when borrowing from al-Kindī's *Risāla* he modified the borrowed material to fit his needs. Specifically, he was intent on avoiding all reference to musical performance. This explains his omission of the names of the eight modes, which evoked musical practice no less than musical theory. It also accounts for the absence of the *ʿūd* from Saadia's passage: independent of its significance in philosophical and cosmological speculations, the *ʿūd* was the chief instrument of the blossoming art of music. As such, Muslim theologians regarded it as the very symbol of the life of pleasure and depravity and attacked it violently. There can be little doubt that Saadia was aware of this attitude. I suggest that this is why he chose to express his adherence to the general philosophical ideas regarding harmony while avoiding allusion to any religiously objectionable ideas or practices.³³

³³ My interpretation is thus the exact opposite of that offered by Farmer, *Saʿadyah Gaon*, p. 12.