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HUMOROUS APPROACH OF THE DIVINE IN THE POETRY OF AL-ANDALUS

THE CASE OF IBN SAHL

BY

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Quoting two lines with Koranic allusions by Ibn Sahl in his famous book on Hispano-Arabic Poetry, A. R. Nykl says in a note: 'These two allusions do not show great respect for the Qur’ān; they are examples of the typically Isra’īlī mocking sarcasm' (p. 354). Here is not meant sarcasm in the sense of a bitter or wounding remark, but more a scornful and mocking use of what was considered by the Muslims as God's speech, a disrespect shown by mixing the sacred and the profane. By combining these quotations with his love for a boy called Mūsā—namesake of the Biblical prophet Moses—he derided Judaism and Islam at the same time. In the following we will examine Ibn Sahl's disrespectful and mocking style in the light of his Mūsā poems and the many allusions from the Koran and the Bible and early Islamic religion.

Ibn Sahl was called in full Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm Ibn Sahl al-Isrā‘īlī al-Ishbīlī. The name al-Isrā‘īlī denotes that he was born of a Jewish family, and later officially converted to Islam. He was born in Seville in about 609/1212-3 and spent nearly all his life there, devoting himself entirely to poetry. The editor of his Diwān, Qūbah, divides his life into three periods: the Sevillian, the Minorcan, and the Ceutan period. He seems to have been most fertile and prolific during the first of these. He frequented majālīs (poetic seances) in the parks known as Marj al-Fiḍṭa, Al-Ṣūrūs and Fam al-Khalīj. There he also met Ibn Sa‘īd, author of the biographic work al-Qidh.
al-Mu'allâ. During this first period, he did not become involved in the nasty politics of his time. In 625/1227, at the age of only sixteen, he impressed his contemporaries by inserting a verse by al-Haythami in a poem in praise of Muhammad b. Yusuf b. Hûd.

Not much is known about the Minorcan period, but it is thought that Ibn Sahl left Seville for a while. His patron on Minorca was apparently Abû 'Uthmân ibn Ḥakam, governor and famous adîb. At this time, Ibn Sahl engaged himself in political life, although we know almost nothing about this period of his life. According to al-Râ'î, Ibn Sahl settled in Ceuta after Seville had fallen to Ferdinand III (646/1248). In Ceuta he became one of the secretaries of the governor, Abû 'Alî Ibn Khalaṣ. In 649/1251, when the latter decided to despatch his son with a message for Abû 'Abd Allâh al-Mustanṣîr I, the Ḥafṣid ruler of Ifriqiya, Ibn Sahl was chosen to accompany him. The travellers set sail on board a galley which was wrecked in a violent storm, and all its occupants perished. According to others, however, he died in 1261.

The Diwàn of Ibn Sahl consists almost exclusively of love poems (mostly devoted to a youthful person named Mûsâ), laudatory poems, satirical poetry and muwashshahât. Mûsâ might be a symbol in connection with Ibn Sahl's original faith. The name of the real, youthful Mûsâ was supposedly Mûsâ ibn 'Abd al-Ṣamad, but it may be clear that this original Mûsâ may not have had the eternal youth which his namesake disposes of in Ibn Sahl's poetry. His role is an icon of the beloved one and is comparable with the Lauras and Beatrices in Italian love poetry. Ibn Sahl clearly elaborated his own individual genre of múšâwîyat. Like Ibn Khafâjah, he probably worked upon and reworked his poetry throughout his whole life, although Ibn Sahl lived only half of the more than eighty years that Ibn Khafâjah did. Thus his múšâwîyat may have been his trademark as a poet throughout his career, regardless of the real circumstances of his possible love for a Mûsâ, let alone his supposed love for a certain youth called Muḥammad, which probably derives from a funny, satiric poem by Ibn Sahl in the style of Abû Nuwâs, whom Ibn Sahl mentions two times in his work as his forerunner. Therefore there is no justification for calling his poetry romantic, as Monis did. Ibn Sahl's múšâwîyat are a rhetorical and thematic

2. Cf. Muwashshah no. 19: line 3: 'Say to a reproacher who forbids: leave me alone with the religion of Abû Nuwâs'; Muwashshah no. 21: 'I followed in this [i.e. drinking the wine of the cheek of the beloved] Abû Nuwâs'.

construct of his own, composed in a very satirical and ironic vein. He calls himself 'Udhri', his love is supposedly unrequited, but his attitude clearly is only playful and dissimilating, combining religious motifs from the Koran and the Bible in a funny way. One should not take his so-called 'Udhri love too seriously.

Perhaps his 'serious' poetry consists of his laudatory poems. Here he speaks earnestly about Islam and other religious matters, but more as a superficial symbol for the justification of the patron's power than something deeply religious, and merely in an abstract superficial way. Like many other Arab poets, religion did not seem to play a major role in Ibn Sahl's life. Poets are representatives of the secular world, and are thus the natural counterparts to faqīhs, sūfis, rabbis and other pious and devote men, representing the opposite pole of society. Therefore one should also look with a secular eye at one of his first long laudatory poems which describes the march of a caravan of pilgrims towards Mecca (See Poem no. 87 [Tawīl]).

The question of his Islamic faith has been amply discussed. A Jew who converts to Islam (Yahūdī 'aslam) is never taken seriously. But Qūba'ah, the editor of his Diwān, accepts the sincerity of his conversion with the following words (pp. 27-28):

‘All of them who spoke of Ibn Sahl or studied him have immersed themselves in the case of his Islamic faith [we are reminded of the ancient: Ibn Sa'id, Abū Ḥayyān from Granada, al-Rā'ī and al-Maqqari, and of the recent: Muhammad Sawālīh, Ihsān 'Abbās, Ḥusayn Mu'nis, and many others]. Did the poet really embrace Islam, or did he stick with the religion of his forefathers, and merely profess Islam in external appearance? It seems that the incentive for immersing oneself in this case is the frequent mention of Mūsā [Moses] in his poetry and his love for him, in addition to his Jewish descent. This was enough to say that Ibn Sahl remained attached to his old belief, expressing this in an indirect manner. But we are inclined to speak about his Islamic faith because most of the biographies, and especially those which were written in Ibn Sahl's time, state that he came to Islam and shower the poet with high praise. As testimony to this, they produce a trustful support which cannot be contested. Thus doubt of his Islamic faith is only doubt of the truthfulness of the intention of the poet and his uprightness. We do not find in his poetry--despite the fact that the majority of it is realistic, love poetry--anything that could be explained or interpreted in such a way that the writer of this poetry remained Jewish. Further

4. See Poem no. 60 [Sarf']: verse 13.
on his name became ‘al-Isra’īlī’ and not ‘al-Yahūdī’ [the name other Jewish poets from Muslim Spain and their scholars are given], a clear sign that the poet abandoned the religion of his forefathers and was known between his contemporaries because of his Israeli descent.’

Apparently, for Ibn Sahl himself this was not a problem. According to Ibn Sa‘īd’s al-Qidh al-Mu‘allā, Ibn Sahl said to Ibn Sa‘īd: ‘The appearances are for men, for God what is hidden.’

To give an impression of the structure of a mūsāwīyah, I will translate one of the small poems in its entirety, after which I will give an account of the Koranic allusions, the comparisons of Mūsā with Moses and the other prophets, the mention of Mosaic attributes such as magic, light, the stick to cleave the waters and to beat the rock, Mount Sinai and others, ending with some general religious notions such as the worship of the beloved and the references to Paradise and Hell.

In poem no. 101 [Tawīl] Ibn Sahl said:

1.  
   Sali al-ka’sa tazhū bayna šabghin wa-ishrāqi/ a-dhuwwiba fihā al-wardu
   am wajnātui al-sāqi ?//

2.  
   Ku’ūsun tuḥayyihā al-nufūsu ka-‘annahā/ ḥadīthu talāqin fī masāmī‘i ʿush-
   shāqi//

3.  
   Idhā qatalūhā bi-‘l-mizāji li-yashrabu/ aʾāshu munāhum bāda mawtīn wa-
   ikhlāqi//

4.  
   Tathiru ka-‘annahā al-māʾa yalsaʿu širfahā/ fa-ṣawtu al-mughannī mithlu
   haynāmati al-rāqi//

5.  
   Bi-Mūsā idhā mā shi’ta sukriya ghannini /wa-adhiq ku’ūsa al-khamri
   ayyata idhāqi//

6.  
   Wa-in shi’ta iǰāzan, ḍarabta bi-dhikrihī / fuʾādī, fa-faḏjarta al-ziyūna bi-
   ḍamāqi//

7.  
   Yusāʾīdu anfāsī dujan nafasu al-šabāl/ wa-taqdahu nāru al-bargī nīrāna
   ashwāqi//

5.  
   Cf. Soualah, p. 186.

6.  
   All references to poems and muwashshāhs in the text are according to the edition of Muhammad Quba’ah, Manshurat al-Jami‘at al-Tunisiyah, Tunis 1985, indicating the numbers of the poems, mentioning the metre between square brackets.
8. *idhâ ana ḥammaltu al-balîla šâbâbatî/ ghadat ka-samûmî al-fatî lafţata ihrâqi/

1. Ask the glass--because it is splendid between colouring and illuminating--whether the roses or the cheek of the pourer has been made fluid in it?

The poet describes how in the glass there is wine as red as roses or as red as the blushing cheeks of the youth who pours the wine. The pourer is the object of the poet's love.

2. They are glasses which greet the souls as if they were the conversation during a love rendezvous with a beloved in the ears of lovers.

3. When they kill the wine by mixing it with water so that they can drink it, they bring back to life their wishes which were nearly dead.

4. The wine gives a bound, when the water bites in his purity; thus the voice of the singer sounds as the whispering of the snake-worshipper.

The water is compared with a snake, which bites the wine, so that it jumps up in pain: the singer functions as snake-worshipper. The jumping up of the water stands for the bubbling of the wine during the mixing.

5. *By Mûsâ! If you want my drunkenness, then sing for me and fill the glasses with quite a filling!*

The poet invokes Mûsâ, who reminds us of the prophet Moses, whose miracle is alluded to in the next line.

6. *If you want a miracle, beat then on my heart by mentioning his name, so that you make wells stream in my eyes."

So the poet says: If you pronounce the name of my beloved Mûsâ, then you make him perform a miracle like that of the prophet Moses, when he smote the rock twice and the water came out abundantly, which reminds us of Numeri 20: 11 and *Sūrat al-Baqara* ['the Cow'; no. 2]: verse 60 ['‘Strike the
Rock with thy staff”] and Sūrat al-‘A’rāf ['The Elevated Places'; no. 7]: verse 160.

7. The deep sighing of my breathing, the cool morning wind looks like it, but in the intestines the fires of my longings are kindled.

8. When I would make the moist wind carry my burning longings, then it would break out as a destroying and hot wind

9. The wind knows my sighs as if from a lover, the lightning grasps my glance as if from a longing beloved.

The poet says that the wind is an expert in the field of sighs and the lightning is one in the field of passionate lightning, so they will deeply understand his situation.

In this poem, we see how as well as common love motifs there are those connected with the namesake of the boy Mūsâ, namely the prophet Moses, in this case the beating on the rock which is one of his characteristic deeds, as noted in the Hebrew Bible and the Koran. So we read in Numeri 20:11: “And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts [also].” And Sūrat al-‘A’rāf ['The Elevated Places'; no 7]: 160b says: “We suggested to Moses, when his people asked him to give them drink: 'Strike the rock with thy staff'; then there gushed out from it twelve springs.”

The name-dropping of Sūra names occurs more than twenty times in the poetic works of Ibn Sahl. For example, in poem no. 91 [Tawīl]: 9. In this line, the Sūrat al-A‘lā ['The Most High'; no 87] is called 'Sabbih' Sūra because the first word of it says: “Praise the name of your Lord”. At the end, in verse 19, the first writings—the writings of Abraham and Moses—are spoken of.

Other references are, for instance, poem no. 162 [Sarf] which refers to \textit{al-Fath} ['The Victory'; no. 48] and \textit{Yā Sin} [no. 36], saying in lines 1-2:

1. \textit{Qad kataba al-husnu 'alā khaddi-hi:/ innd fatahnd la-kafathan mubīn//}
2. \textit{Yā qalbu, in milta 'ilā ghayrihi/ mā 'anta 'illā fi 'alālin mubīn//}

1. Beauty has written on his cheek: “We have gained a clear victory over you.” [\textit{Surat al-Fath} no. 48: verse 1]
2. O heart, when you bend yourself towards another than him, you are nothing but in clear error [\textit{Surat Yā Sin} no. 36: verses 24 and 47].

The satirical trait of the poet may be obvious here.

Poem no. 164 [Kāmil]: line 2 mentions two \textit{Sūras}:

2. \textit{Wa-agharrā tatālū al-Fajrā ghurratuhu kamā/ yatīlī li-qalbi Fāṭirān bi-jufūnihi}

“And a noble one whose face [forehead] recites the \textit{Surat al-Fajr} [=’The Daybreak’; no. 89] is as if he recites with his eyelids for my heart the \textit{Surat al-Fāṭir} [‘The Originator’; no. 35].”

Poem no. 41 [Ṭawīl] combines two other \textit{Sūras}:

1. \textit{La-qad kuntu 'arjū 'an takūna muwāsīlī/ fa-jarrātanī bi-al-bū'di fātiḥata al-Rā'dī//}
2. \textit{Fa-billāhi barrid mà bi-qalbī min al-jawā/ bi-fātiḥati al-A'rāfī min riqika al-shahadī//}

1. I had hoped that you were the person who would have had contact with me, but you made swallow me by your distance the opening letters of the \textit{Ra’d} [‘Thunder’; no. 13]”

This \textit{sūra} begins with the letters \textit{alif lam mīm rā’} meaning \textit{al-marr}, 'departure, going away'; or \textit{al-murr} 'bitterness'.

2. By God! Make cold the burning love which is in my heart with the opening letters of the \textit{A’raf} [’the Elevated Places’; no. 7] of your honey like saliva’
Here again, the poet plays with the mysterious beginning letters of the mentioned *Sūra*, namely *alif, lam, mim, sād= al-maṣṣ* which means 'suck­ing'.

Finally, I mention poem no. 150 [Khaṭif], in which *Sūrat Yā Sīn* [no. 36] and *Sūrat Yūsuf* [no. 11] are referred to:

20. *Akbarūhu wa-lam tuqattd akuffu/ bi-madan, bal qulūbuhum bi-al-jufūnī/.*

"16. The hair wrote on him a Sīn and I sought the protection of Yā Sīn [no. 36] against the beauty of this Sīn.
20. They [mankind] were astonished at him without their hands being cut with long knives, much more, even the hearts were not cut by the eyelids”

Line 20 alludes to the women mentioned in *Sūrat Yūsuf* no 12: verse 31 which goes as follows: 'So when they saw him they were so astonished at him, that they cut their hands'.

Speaking about prophets such as Yūsuf or Joseph, the poet confronts us generally with the theme that Mūsā is even more beautiful than Joseph, or is at least as beautiful as him. Poem no. 60 [Sarī]:13 says for instance:


"13. O Yūsuf-like in beauty, Samaritan-like in separation, have compassion with the 'Udhrite love.”

The Samaritan in *Sūrat Tā Ḥā* [no. 20]: verse 97 is someone who apparently had a bad influence on the people of Isra’il, because another verse says in *Muwashshah* 10: 24 (referring to the boy):

24. *Afdīhi min Sāmiri/ khitābuhu bi-“lā misās”//

24. I redeem him from a Sāmiri who has to say [during his whole life-time]: 'No contact (lā misās).”

8. The Samaritan in the Koran is understood as the man who made the golden calf [see Ex. 12: 35].
In his poems, there are also references to the Christian Trinity, because of the tripartite body of the ideal youth. Jesus or 'Isā occurs in many poems because of his wondrous ability to revive the dead. Also Mūsā is compared with Jesus in poem no. 142 [Wāfir]:

2. Fa-Mūsā lağzuhu yuḥyī al-rufāta/ ḥakā 'īsā bi-iḥyā'i al-ramīmi/
2. Fa-mūsā lağzīhi yuḥyī al-rufāta/ ḥakā 'īsā bi-iḥyā'i al-ramīmi/

"2. Because Mūsā, when reviving the decayed bones by his glance, looked like 'Isa [Jesus] in his reviving the rotten bones."

"2. Because the knife of his glance when reviving the decayed bones, looked like 'Isa [Jesus] in his reviving the rotten bones."

In poem 139:11 [Wāfir] there is a parallel of Mūsā to 'Isā:

11. La-in wāsalta, yā Mūsā, muḥibban/ la-qaḍ aḥyayta yā 'īsā ramīmā/

"If you bring yourself in contact, o Musa, with a lover, then you, o 'Isa [Jesus], will bring to life again a decayed body."

In Muwashshah 40:11-12 we find a similar expression:

11. Yā ṭabība al-saqām/ yā ḥayāta al-anām/
12. Rabbu 'Īsā bni Maryam/ muḥayyī rufāti al-rīmām/

"O, healer of disease, O life of men, Lord of Jesus ['Isā], Maria [Maryam]'s son, the reviver of decayed bones"

I cannot deal at length with the other prophets who crop up in Ibn Sahl's poems (such as Zakariyyā'10, Shu‘ayb/Jethro11, Jacob12, Abraham13 and Aaron14), but I should mention the prophet Muḥammad. The famous lines of poem 38 [Ṭawīl] go as follows:

10. Poem no. 169 [Khafif]: verse 5; this poem as a whole contains many allusions to sūrat Maryam ['Mary'; no. 19; verse 7 mentions Zacharias].
12. Muwashshah no. 41: line 17.
13. Poem no. 133 [Kāmil]: line 2, see note 21 hereafter.
1. "Tasallaytu 'an Mūsā bi-ḥubbī Muḥammadī/ law-lā ḥudā al-Raḥmānī mà kuntu aḥtādī/
2. Mā 'an qillī fāraqtu dhāka wa-innāma/ sharī'atu Mūsā 'uttīlat bi-Muḥammadī/

"1. I have sought diversion from Mūsā in the love for Muḥammad; were there not the guidance of the Merciful, I would not have found the right way;
2. Not because of my insufficiency did I separate from the first mentioned person, but it is so that the Law of Moses has been abolished by Muḥammad."

This poem does not necessarily imply the poet's amorous liaison with a boy called Muḥammad. In my view, it is nothing but a coquettish expression used by the poet to frighten his boy Mūsā, in the same way that Abū Nuwās teased his boy Hamdān by saying that he had sworn to have relationships only with women in the future.15

Another group of persons celebrated in Ibn Sahl's poems are famous personalities of early Islam, among whom are also enemies of the prophet Muḥammad: so we find Zubayr ibn al-ʿAwwām, a prominent companion, Abū ʾṬalib, Abū Lahab, and Abū Jahl, leader of the Meccans and a strong opponent of the prophet. One of the Abū Lahab passages in poem no. 14 [Basīt] is full of allusions to the Koran:

1. Amā tarā damahu fi-ṭašṭī ḫīna jarāʿ/ sulafata al-rāḥi fi kaʾsin min al-dhahabī/
2. Law lam takun min dami al-ʿanqūdi riqatuhu/ la-mā ktaṣā khadduhu al-qānī Abā Lahabī/
3. Tabbat yadd ḫaddīlayya fīhi wa-wajnatuhu/ ḥammālātu al-wardī là ḥammālātu al-ḥaṭābī/16

17. Poem 126 [Ṭawīl]: lines 1,2.
20. See Ewald Wagner, Abū Nuwās: Eine Studie zur arabischen Literatur der frühen
4. Ḥatta 'idhā dakhalat fī kunnīhi yaduhu/ kal-l-shamsi ghābat 'āni al-'anẓāri fī al-ḥujubi/


1. Didn't you see his blood in the basin when the young first wine flowed in a cup of gold
2. Were his saliva not from the blood of the bunch of grapes, then his scarlet cheek would not be covered with Abū Lahab [a fire]
3. May the hands of both my reproachers [of my liaison with him] be cut off because his cheek is a bearer of roses not a bearer of firewood.
4. So that when his hand enters in his sleeve, it is as if it is like a sun hiding herself from the eyes in the veils
5. Come back because of what our Creator said in the Revelation, namely: 'Lower your wing [of humility], O Mūsā, out of fear'.

How artistically interwoven with the red cheeks bearing fire [Abū Lahab] and the bearer of firewood, the cutting of hands and the lowering of the wing, occurring in Sūrat al-Lahab ['The Flame'; no. 111] and Sūrat al-Isrā' ['The Nightly Travel'; no. 17] verse 24!

Another important issue in the description of the boy Mūsā are the attributes of the prophet Moses given to him: the eyes are magic, although the prophet Moses annihilated the works of the magicians at Pharaoh's court. Poem 133:1 [Kāmil] says:

1. Wa-mukarririn sihra al-ławāḥiẓi aḥyafū/ qalbī bi-mdṣā nāẓirayhi kalīmu/
2. Sakana al-fiʿādu wa-lam yakhaf nāṣanahū/ a-yakhāfu ḥarrā al-nāri 'Ibrāḥīmu/

"A svelte young boy repeating the magic of his glances, my heart is wounded [kalīm] by the sharp knife [mūsā] of his eyes.
My heart is quiet without fearing its fires, would Ibrāhīm fear the heath of a fire?"
The first line is a pun on the name Mūsā [Moses] and his title al-Kalīm ['The Interlocutor'], the second line alludes to the prophet Ibrāhīm [Abraham], who, according to the Islamic religion, was the first Muslim, and therefore his people were about to burn him in the fire, but the fire was turned into coolness for Abraham\(^1\). Ibrāhīm is also the name of Ibn Sahl.

The signs or miracles of Mūsā appear in Muwashshah 24:

14. Yā sihra al-jufūni, ṣaddaqtu/ʿīmānan bi-ʾl-siḥrī wa-ʾl-sāḥīr/
15. Daʿānī Mūsā fa-ʿāmantu/ bi-ʿāyāti ḥusnihi al-bāhīr/

"14. O magic of the eyelids, I was sincere in my belief in magic and the magician.
15. Mūsā called me and I believed in the miracles of his splendid beauty."

In the following fragment from poem 166 [Kāmil], the famous stick with which Moses struck the sea is mentioned, as is Pharaoh's host being drown in the sea, and everything is adapted to the new Mūsā:

2. Yahdi ilā dīni al-ṣibā wa-li-ḥusnihi/ āyun yuḍillu bihinna man yahdihi/
3. Faʿalat faʿāla aʿṣā al-Kalīmi liḥāẓūhu/ bi-muṣaddiqin daʿwahu lā yāʿsihi/
4. Taṣʿā li-qaṣlī al-ṣabbī min-hā ḥayyatun/ awdat bihi ṣaṣṭ an fa-man yar-qaḥī\(^2\)/
5. Waʿarā ṣulūba al-ʿāshiqīna taḥayyarat/ min tihihi fi mithli qafri al-tiḥi/
6. Jadda al-ghalīlu wa-law ṣarāda taḥaṣṣarat\(^3\)/ mithla al-ṣayyīni lanā maraṣṣifu fihi/
7. Shaqqat lūbī al-ṣabī bi-hawd/ shaqqa al-asbī li-ʾl-ṣabbī kay turdihi/
8. Ḥattā idhā amʿantu fihi mugharraran/ aghraqtanī maʿa jundi šabī fihi/

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\(^{21}\) See Surat al-Anbiyāʿ ['The prophets'; no. 21] verse 68- 69: "They [his people] said: "Burn him and help your gods, if you are going to do (anything). We said: "O fire be coolness and peace for Abraham" . The following lines by Ibn Sahl develop upon the same theme: poem no. 121[Wāfir] line 6; Muwashshah 10: line 4.

\(^{22}\) Cf.Sūrat al-ʾAʿrāf ['The Elevated Places'; no. 7]: verses 103-126.

\(^{23}\) Ibidem, verse 160. See above.
“2. He guides to the religion of love, but by the miracles of his beauty the ones whom he leads, are misled.

3. His glances have the effect of the stick of the Interlocutor [= Moses, al-Kalīm] on a believer of his religion who does not rebel against him.

4. A snake of his glances strives for the heart of an ardent lover, in order to destroy him by biting. Who can use magic against [this snake]?

5. And I see the hearts of the lovers loosing themselves because of his haughtiness in the same sort of desolation of desert [as the Israelites did].

6. And the thirst became heavy, but if he only would want, the lips of his mouth would burst out like fountains.

7. The lances of his glances divided for the lover the sea of love like the stick did, so that these [glances] destroyed him.

8. So that when I am eager for [the sea of your love] as someone who is seduced and misled, you will drown me with the host of my patience [instead of that of the Pharaoh] in it.

9. So that I called him: I am believing in your love, if a grieved one could be saved by his belief.”

Here we also see the very frequent theme of the religion of love, instead of God’s religion. Other Koranic mosaic themes in Ibn Sahl’s poetry are the forbidden nurses 

- In Muwashshah 14: 8-10 occur the motifs: 'cleaving water', alluding to Sūrat Ṭā Hā (no.20): verse 77 ["Then strike for them a dry path in the sea"] and Sūrat al-Shū'arā' [’The Poets'; no 26]: verse 63 ["Strike on the sea with thy staff"] and Sūrat al-Baqara [’the Cow’]: verse 60 ["Strike the Rock with thy staff"] and Surat al-’A’râf [’The Elevated Places; no.7] verse 160:

8. Qad balaghta, Mūsā, mina al-hajri/ kulla multamas//

24. Poem no. 152 [Ṭawīl]: verses 6, 12; Sūrat al-Qaṣaṣ [’the Narrative’; no. 28]: verse 12.
25. Muwashshah no. 36: line 13; Sūrat Ṭā Hā [no. 20]: verses 37-41; Sūrat al-Qaṣaṣ [’the Narrative’; no. 28]: verses 7-13.
27. Poem no. 142 [Wāfīr]: verse 7.
29. See below.
30. See below.
9. Law shaqaqta dam'i ‘alâ al-l-barri/ lam ya‘ud yabas/
10. Khalli Ţūra Sinâ fa-fî šadrî/ li-al-hawd qabas/

“8. You have reached in separation everything askable;
9. When you cleaved my tears on the dry land, it did not become dry again.”

This is can also be an allusion to Ex. 14: 21: “And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go [back] by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry [land], and the waters were divided.” and also to Numeri 20: 11 [“He smote the rock twice and the water flew abundantly”]. Then the poet continues:

“10. Go away from the [Sinai] mountain because in my heart there is a firebrand [qabas].”

This alludes to Sûrat Ţâ Hâ (no. 20) : verse 10: “When he saw a fire, he said to his people: Stay, I see a fire; haply I may bring to you therefrom a live coal [qabas].” and Sûrat al-Qâṣâs [‘the Narrative’; no. 28]: verse 29: “He perceived a fire on the side of the mountain. He said to his family: ‘Wait, I see a fire; may be I will bring to you from it some news or a brand of fire, so that you may warm yourselves.’”.

In poem no. 142: 3-7 [Wâfir] Mount Sinai and the prophetic tradition are mentioned with an allusion to Sûrat al-Qâṣâs [‘the Narrative’]: 29:

3. Wa-fi kanafi al-khudûdi lahu ‘idhârun/ rawiya al-âyâti ‘an ahli al-raqîmi/
4. Bi-Ţûrî khudûdihî ānastu nâran/ fa-inna bi-hâ hudâ qalbî al-kalîmi/
5. Wa-law fajara al-ţumayya min lamâhu/ la‘askarati al-ţumayya bi al-shamîmi/
7. Ḥadîthu jufûnihi kam’amma jafni/ yusalsiluhi ‘ani al-fiqhi al-qadîmi/

“3. And on the side of his cheeks he has juvenile down which transmitted the Koranic verses from the men of the tablets;
4. On his cheeks which resemble Mount Sinai, I perceived from far a fire; verily there is a guidance for my wounded heart in [that fire].
5. And suppose an anger would burst out from the redness of his cheeks, then the flush of youth would inebriate by its sweet smell.
6. And a back which in form resembles a Dāl upon the Alif of a straight figure;

7. How much the narrative tradition [Hadith] of his eyelids embraced my eyelid, chaining it up, on the authority of the old religious jurisprudence [the Law of Moses].”

In Muwashshah 24: 21-22 the poet mentionens the lightning, the cloud, and the swoon from Sūrat al-A‘raf ['The Elevated Places'; no. 7] verse 143; cf. 139: “fell down thunderstruck/fell down in a swoon”:

Muwashshah 24: 21-22:

21. In abdā min thaghrihi barqan/ fa-dam‘ī saḥābatun tharrah//
22. Wa-ahkī samiyahu ša‘ qan/ in marrat min dhikrihi khāṭarah//

“21. When he shows of his mouth the lightning so that my tears are a cloud full of water.

22. I am alike to his namesake, falling down in a swoon, when a pompous walk passes which denounces his arrival.”

In poem no. 88 [Tawīl]: 1-3, the sea, Pharaoh, and the marvels are broached. Here we find an allusion to Sūrat Tā Hā (no. 20): verse 78 [“So the Pharaoh followed them with his armies, and covered them of the sea that which covered them”] and the marvel of the staff turning into a gliding serpent [Sūrat Tā Hā: verse 20; see also verses 55-73 on Moses and the enchanters]:

2. Saḥarta fu‘ādī hīna ‛arsalta ḥayyata/ al-‘idhārī wa-qad ‛aghraqtanī fi madāmī//
3. Mā kuntu ‛akhshā an takūna maniyati/ bi-kaffay-ka, wa-‘l-ayyâmu dhâtu badā‘ī//

“1. O Mūsā you have led me to the worst drinking-place, but I am not a Pharaoh who sins against the religious Laws.

2. You bewitched my heart when you sent [me] the serpent of the juvenile down and yet you drowned me in my tears.

3. I was not afraid that my Fate of Death was between your hands, when the Days were full of marvels.
In poem 105 [Tawîl]: 1-2 allusions are made to Sûrat al-’Arâf ['The Elevated Places'; no. 7] verse 143 ["When his Lord manifested His Glory to the mountain, He made it crumble and Moses fell thunderstruck"]: 

1.  "Sû’iqtu wa-qad nânaytu Mûsâ bi-khâṭirî/ wa-aśbaḥa Tûrû al-şabri min ha-jrihi dakkâ/"
2.  "Qâlû: 'slu ’anhu aw tabaddal bihi hawan/ a-bâ’da al-hudâ arḍâ al-juḥûda awi al-shirka/"

1.  I fell thunderstruck when having whispered secrets to Moses as it pleased me, and the Mount [Sinai] of my patience became crumbled.
2.  They said: ‘Console yourself from him or replace him with someone other in love’. Should I after having followed the right course be pleased with apostasy or polytheism?

From the foregoing we can see how much the Mûsâwîyât love poems by Ibn Sahl are an intellectual exercise, playing with intertextuality by means of Koranic quotations and allusions. In poem no. 105 also the idea of the parallel of love and religion is elaborated. Mûsâ even is sometimes compared with God, e.g. in Muwashshaĥ 14:

19.  "Mâ kâna ḥubbuka yâ fitnah/fî al-hashâ makîn/"
20.  "Lawlâ muḥayyâka li jannah/ wa-hawâka din/"
21.  "Aḥyâ muḥjatan anta mufnîhâ/ mubdi’un mu’îd/"
22.  "Law ruziqat min waṣlika al-ghâlî/ jannatu al-shahîd/"

"19. Your love, o temptation, would not have a place in my heart,
20. Were it not that your face is my paradise and my love for you a religion.
21. Revive my soul [life-blood] which you have wasted, Beginner and Repeater,
22. If only the paradise of a martyr [of love] could be provided with a high priced reunion with you."

The religious theme crops up again and again in the rest of Ibn Sahl's poems, just as there are countless references to Paradise and Hell.

In all probability, Ibn Sahl composed his collection of Mûsâ poems according to a pre-established plan, with the deliberate intention of making
his so-called love for a young boy Mûsâ his trademark. As a poet, he did not like the heavy-heartedness of the religious functionaries of his time. He remained young enough to devote his poems to the religion of love, without the earnestness of old age which obliged a poet like Ibn Khafâjah to complain.

31. Salma Jayyusi suggested that Ibn Sahl never really converted to Islam, and that his *musawiyât* reflect his secret adherence to Judaism.