Among al-Farazdaq's contemporaries was the poet, al-Akhtal. His judgment of al-Farazdaq's poetry was not restricted to a particular genre; rather, it was of a general nature and was the product of a combination of motives. In the first place, it is possible that as a Christian poet who was chosen by the Caliph 'Abd al-Malik as his Court Poet, al-Akhtal thought it prudent to assess the degree to which competition from the Muslim poets, Jarir and al-Farazdaq, was something really to be feared. Such a reading of motives has the attraction of fitting in nicely with the version of events offered by Ibn Sallâm in his Tabaqat Fuhul al-Shu'arâ'.

"When al-Akhtal received news of the personal satires (hija') Jarir and al-Farazdaq were writing against each other, he said to his son, Malik, 'Go to 'Iraq and listen to the poetry written by both of them! And bring back with you whatever other information about both you can find'. Malik went to 'Iraq as he was instructed and heard the poetry of both al-Farazdaq and Jarir. When he returned to his father he expressed himself as follows: 'Jarir scoops water from the sea, but al-Farazdaq hacks as from boulders'. And then his father replied: 'So Jarir is the better poet'. Then he uttered the following verses, 'Impartially have I judged, having heard what I needed to know: Dried up is the milk of al-Farazdaq's camel, he has been bitten by a malevolent snake [i.e., Jarir] issuing from his own tribe'."

But according to another version of the same story told by Ibn Sallâm (also in the Tabaqat), al-Akhtal's judgment of al-Farazdaq's poetry was
actually the result of an order imposed upon him by the Umayyad governor in Kūfa, who wished to set Jarīr and al-Farazdaq against each other. This version is related as follows:

“The Farazdaq, Jarīr and al-Akhṭal met each other in the presence of the Governor, Bishr b. Marwān. The Governor, who always tried to set the tribes against each other by means of their poets, said to al-Akhṭal: ‘Judge ye between Jarīr and al-Farazdaq, who is the better poet!’ Al-Akhṭal answered: ‘Spare me this unenviable task, O Amir!’ But the Governor replied: ‘Judge ye, I say, as between both!’ Yet again al-Akhṭal begged not to be made to sit in judgment, but the Governor could not be moved. Al-Akhṭal then cried, ‘My judgment will be ominous!’ and proceeded to judge as follows: ‘al-Farazdaq hacks as from boulders, whilst Jarīr scoops as from the sea’.”

But Jarīr was not at all satisfied with this judgment, and his dissatisfaction is supposed to be the underlying reason for the reciprocal satires which he and al-Akhṭal later exchanged against each other. Al-Akhṭal’s ability to judge was something Jarīr held in the greatest contempt: he was, after all a Christian, for whom alcohol was not forbidden, and drink clearly befuddled his judgment:

‘O man garbed in the flowing cloak, the Governor well knows what the judgment of a wine-sot is worth!’

This judgment pronounced in the presence of the Umayyad governor is commonly believed to be the genesis of the collection of Naqā’īd between Jarīr and al-Akhṭal which later came into being.

Alongside the very generally-phrased judgment of al-Akhṭal on the whole work of both Jarīr and al-Farazdaq we may also place the criticism of the later ‘Abbāsid poet, al-Buḥṭuri. However, al-Buḥṭuri’s judgments are specifically concerned with the satires written by both of these poets. His opinion may be found in a book written by a well-known expert on poets and their themes, namely Abū Hilāl al-’Askārī’s Kitāb al-Šinā’atayn, who relates that,

“Al-Buḥṭuri preferred al-Farazdaq’s poetry to that of Jarīr. He thought that al-Farazdaq had a command of poetic themes which Jarīr could not equal. Each qasida of al-Farazdaq’s poetry shows a new variation of...”

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5 Ibn Sallām, Ṭabaqāt, I, 474.
6 Ibid. For the same text see also Dīwān Jarīr bi-sharh Muhammad b. Habīb, ed. Nu‘mān Muḥammad Amin Ṭāha, Cairo 1969-71, II, 1012; and The Nakā’īd of Jarīr and al-Farazdaq, ed. A. A. Bevan, Leiden 1905-12, II, 897; and Naqā’īd Jarīr wa ʿl-Akhṭal (see next note), 207.
7 For the poetry exchanged between Jarīr and al-Akhṭal see Naqā’īd Jarīr wa ʿl-Akhṭal, Taḥṣif al-Imām al-Shārīr al-Adīb al-Māhir Abī Tamam, ed. A. Salhani, Beirut 1922.
8 Al-Walīd Abū ʿUbāda al-Buḥṭuri, died about 284 H./897 A.D.