

Abū al-Faraj ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn al-Isfahānī, the Author of [the *Kitāb al-Aghānī*](#)

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Abū al-Faraj ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. al-Haytham al-Umawī al-Isfahānī (died after 356/967¹) was a tenth-century litterateur, genealogist, poet, musicologist, scribe, and boon-companion, mainly based in Baghdad. He is best known as the author of [the *Kitāb al-Aghānī*](#) (“The Book of Songs”), a unique work which includes abundant information about Arabic classical music and the lives of poets and musicians from the pre-Islamic period to al-Isfahānī’s time.

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Dates

The commonly accepted dates of al-Isfahānī’s birth and death are 284/897–8 and 356/967.² However, the credibility of these dates is to be treated with discretion. The dates are given by al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (392–463/1002–1071), who bases his information on al-Isfahānī’s student, Muḥammad b. Abī al-Fawāris (338–412/950–1022).³ The account of al-Khaṭīb, being late, is not necessarily unreliable, but the death date would be irreconcilable with a reference in the *Kitāb Adab al-ghurabā’* (“The Book of the Etiquettes of Strangers”), attributed to al-Isfahānī, to his being in prime youth (*fī ayyām al-shabība wa-l-ṣibā*) in 356/967.⁴ If we accept al-Isfahānī’s authorship of *Adab al-ghurabā’* and the authenticity of all the accounts in it, none of the above dates makes sense.⁵ However, it is possible to

Commented [A4]: Al-Khaṭīb was writing roughly a century after Abū l-Faraj. If on p. 4 Yāqūt (12th-13th cent) is described as a ‘late’ source, al-Khaṭīb hardly fits into the same category.

¹ See below, the section on Dates.

² Other dates of death are 360s/970s and 357/967–68, suggested respectively by Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 385/995 or 388/998) and Abū Nu‘aym al-Isfahānī (430/948–1038); see: Abū Nu‘aym al-Isfahānī, *Akḥbār Isfahān* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Islāmī, n.d.), vl.2, 22; Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, ed. Riḍā Tajaddud (Tehran: Dār al-Masīra, 1988), 128.

³ Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Madīnat al-Salām*, ed. Bashshār ‘A. Ma‘rūf (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2001), vl.13, 338. On Ibn Abī al-Fawāris; see: Al-Khaṭīb, *Tārīkh*, vl.2, 213.

⁴ Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam al-udabā’*, ed. Aḥmad F. Rifā‘ī (Cairo: Maṭbū‘āt al-Ma‘mūn, 1922), vl.13, 95–97; al-Isfahānī, *Kitāb Adab al-ghurabā’*, ed. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Jadīd, 1972), 83–86.

⁵ The attribution of *Adab al-ghurabā’* to al-Isfahānī is much-disputed in current scholarship. The scholars who affirm al-Isfahānī as the author of *Adab al-ghurabā’* include: Azartash Azarnoosh, *Encyclopaedia Islamica*, s.v. “Abū al-Faraj,” ed. Wilferd Madelung and Farhad Daftary (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 733; Sebastian Günther, *Et*, s.v. “Abū al-Faraj al-Isfahānī,” accessed July 24 2018, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_0105; Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid, *Muqaddima of Kitāb adab al-ghurabā’*, by Abū al-Faraj al-Isfahānī, ed. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Jadīd, 1972), 10–16; Hilary Kilpatrick, “On the difficulty of knowing mediaeval Arabic authors: The case of Abū l-Faraj and pseudo-Isfahānī” in *Islamic reflections, Arabic musings. Studies in honour of Professor Alan Jones from his students*, edited by Robert G. Hoyland et al. (Oxford: Gibb Memorial Trust, 2004), 230–242; Hilary Kilpatrick, “The *Kitāb adab al-ghurabā’* of Abū l-Faraḡ al-Isfahānī” in *La signification du bas Moyen Age dans l’histoire et la culture du monde musulman. Actes du 8me Congrès de l’Union Européenne des Arabisants et Islamisants Aix-en-Provence 1976* (Aix-en-Provence: Édisud, 1978), 127–

calculate the approximate dates of his birth and death through the lifespans of his students and his direct informants. Muḥammad b. Abī al-Fawāris — the youngest to have transmitted from him — was born in 338/950.⁶ If we assume that Muḥammad started to attend al-Isfahānī's lectures at the age of ten, then we may suggest that al-Isfahānī remained active from 348/960 onwards. The informant known to have died at the earliest date is Yaḥyā b. 'Alī b. Yaḥyā al-Munajjim, who lived from 241/855 to 300/912.⁷ Again, if we postulate that al-Isfahānī transmitted from Yaḥyā when he was at least ten years old, we can infer that he was born before 290/902. Therefore, al-Isfahānī's intellectual activity took place in the first six decades of the tenth century, from about 290/902 to 348/960.

Family

The epithet, al-Isfahānī, refers to the city, Isfahan, on the Iranian plateau. Instead of indicating al-Isfahānī's birthplace,⁸ this epithet seems to be a mutual property of al-Isfahānī's family. Every reference al-Isfahānī makes to his paternal relatives bears the attributive, al-Isfahānī.⁹ According to Ibn Ḥazm (384–456/994–1064), some descendants of the last Umayyad caliph, Marwān b. Muḥammad, al-Isfahānī's forefather,¹⁰ settled in Isfahan and Egypt.¹¹ Isfahan was the refuge of various 'Alids and their supporters in the Umayyad

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135. On the opposite side are: Patricia Crone and Shmuel Moreh, *The Authorship of the Ghurabā' in The Book of Stranger: Medieval Arabic Graffiti on the Theme of Nostalgia*, by al-Isfahānī, trans. Patricia Crone and Shmuel Moreh (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2000), 128–143 and following them Robert G. Hoyland, "History, Fiction and Authorship in the First Centuries of Islam" in *Writing and Representation in Medieval Islam: Muslim Horizons*, ed. Julia Bray (London: Routledge, 2006), 36–39;

⁶ Muḥammad 'A. al-Aṣma'ī, Abū al-Faraj al-Isfahānī wa-kitābuhu al-Aghānī: dirāsa wa-taḥlīl li-azhā al-'uṣūr al-islāmiyya (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1951), 81–85; al-Khaṭīb, *Tārīkh*, vl.2, 213–214.

⁷ Manfred Fleischhammer, *Die Quellen des Kitāb al-Aghānī* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2004), 68–69.

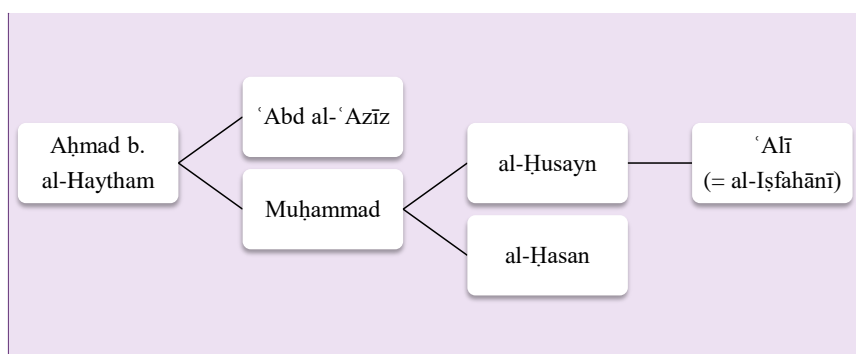
⁸ Khayr al-Dīn al-Ziriklī, *al-A'lām* (Beirut: Dār al-'Ilm li-l-Malāyīn, 2002), vl.4, 278; Gernot Rotter, *Und der Kalif beschenkte ihn reichlich: Auszüge aus dem Buch der Lieder* (Tübingen: Horst Erdmann Verlag, 1977), 7; Aḥmad Amīn, *Zuhr al-Islām* (Cairo: Sharikat Nawābigh al-Fikr, 2009), 248–249; Dāwūd Sallūm, *Dirāsāt Kitāb al-Aghānī wa-minhaj mu'allifihī* (Baghdad: 'Ālam al-Kutub, 1969), 9. This misconception, according to Azarnoosh, was first disseminated by Ṭāshkubrīzādah (d. 968/1560) and was thereafter followed by ~~the~~ some modern scholars; see: Azarnoosh, *Encyclopaedia Islamica*, s.v. "Abū al-Faraj," 719.

⁹ Muḥammad A. Khalafallāh, *Ṣāhib al-Aghānī: Abū al-Faraj al-Isfahānī al-Rāwiyya*, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Anjalū al-Miṣriyya, 1962), 23–25; Azarnoosh, *Encyclopaedia Islamica*, s.v. "Abū al-Faraj," 720.

¹⁰ While most of the sources agree that al-Isfahānī was amongst the offspring descendants of the last Umayyad caliph, Marwān b. Muḥammad (72–132/691–750), Ibn al-Nadīm alone claimed that he was a descendant of Hishām b. 'Abd al-Malik (72–125/691–743): *al-Fihrist*, 127; al-Khaṭīb, *Tārīkh*, vl.13, 337; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar al-lām al-nubalā'*, ed. Ḥassān 'Abd al-Mannān (Beirut: Bayt al-Afkār al-Dawliyya, 2004), 2774; al-Qifṭī, *Inbāh al-ruwāt 'alā anbāh al-nuḥāt*, ed. Muḥammad A. Ibrāhīm (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, 1986), vl.2, 251.

¹¹ Ibn Ḥazm, *Jamharat ansāb al-'arab*, ed. Muḥammad 'A. Hārūn, 5th ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, n.d.), 107.

period.¹² The Umayyad branch, from which al-İşfahānī came, may have been attracted by these 'Alid groups when it settled in Isfahan. However, it has to be borne in mind that the earliest information we have regarding al-İşfahānī's family history only dates to the generation of his great-grandfather, Aḥmad b. al-Haytham, who settled in Sāmarrā' sometime between 221/835–6 and 232/847.¹³ That is, the interaction between al-İşfahānī's forefathers and 'Alids back in Isfahan remains in mystery.



The Members of the İşfahānī Family

Based on al-İşfahānī's references in the *Kitāb al-Aghānī* (hereafter, *Aghānī*), Aḥmad b. al-Haytham seems to have led a privileged life in Sāmarrā', while his sons were well linked with the elite of the 'Abbāsīd capital at that time.¹⁴ His son, 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Aḥmad, was "one of the high ranking scribes in the days of al-Mutawakkil (r. 232–247/847–861) (*min kibār al-kuttāb fī ayyām al-Mutawakkil*)".¹⁵ Another son, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad (*viz.*, al-İşfahānī's grandfather), was associated with the 'Abbāsīd functionaries, the vizier, Ibn al-Zayyāt (d. 233/847), the scribe, İbrāhīm b. al-'Abbās al-Şūlī (176–243/792–857), and the vizier 'Ubaydallāh b. Sulaymān (d. 288/901), besides the Ṭālibīd notables, above all, al-Ḥusayn b.

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¹² Andrew Newman, *Twelve Shiism: Unity and Diversity in the Life of Islam, 632 to 1722* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 37.

¹³ I-Wen Su, "The Family History of Abū Al-Faraj Al-İşfahānī: The Ninth-Century 'Abbāsīd Political Elite and the Ṭālibīd in Samarra," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 29-3 (2018): 421–422.

¹⁴ Su, "The Family," 422–423.

¹⁵ Ibn Ḥazm, *Jamharat*, 107.

al-Ḥusayn b. Zayd, who was the leader of the Banū Hāshim of his time.¹⁶

The close ties with the 'Abbāsīd court continued in the generation of Muḥammad's sons, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn (al-Iṣfahānī's father). Al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad, al-Iṣfahānī's uncle, was also a scribe and tightly connected with the court elite, including 'Ubaydallāh b. Sulaymān, the sons of Ibn al-Zayyāt, and the Ṭālibīd, Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. Ḥamza (d. 286-7/899-900).¹⁷ Meanwhile, al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad, al-Iṣfahānī's father, seems a rather obscure figure. That al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad, transmitted works on poets and musicians though to a lesser extent, perhaps reveals the family's general interest in these subjects and its subsequent influence on al-Iṣfahānī's scholarly pursuits.¹⁸ However, it does not inform much about himself, except for his presence in Baghdad since 300/912-3,¹⁹ and his friendship with Muḥammad b. Khalaf b. al-Marzubān (d. 309/921).²⁰ That said, al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad's marital connection with the family of Thawāba (Āl Thawāba) deserves further discussion.

In various places in the *Aghānī*, al-Iṣfahānī refers to Yaḥyā b. Muḥammad b. Thawāba as his grandfather from maternal side; this indicates the marriage between al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad and a woman from the family of Thawāba.²¹ It is often suggested that the family of Thawāba, being Rāfiḍī Shī'ī, bequeathed their sectarian inclination to al-Iṣfahānī.²² However, the identification of the Thawāba family as Rāfiḍī Shī'īs is only found in a late source, Yāqūt's (574–626/1178–1225) work.²³ Although it is not implausible for the family of Thawāba to have been Shī'ī-inclined in one way or another, since many elite families working under the 'Abbāsīd caliphate during this period of time indeed allied with 'Alids or

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¹⁶ Su, "The Family," 424–426; al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil al-Ṭālibīyīn*, ed. Aḥmad Ṣāqir, 2nd ed. (Qom: Manshūrāt al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, 1991), 547.

¹⁷ Su, "The Family," 426–430.

¹⁸ Al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, ed. Yūsuf al-Baqā'ī and Gharīd al-Shaykh (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-A'lamī, 2000), vl.2, 124–125; vl.13, 90.

¹⁹ Al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Aghānī*, vl.23, 21.

²⁰ Al-Iṣfahānī mentions a conversation between his father and Muḥammad b. Khalaf b. al-Marzubānī and notes the long-term friendship and marital tie between the two families; see: al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Aghānī*, vl.24, 37. I owe this reference to Hilary Kilpatrick, *Making the Great Book of Songs: Compilation and the Author's Craft in Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī's Kitāb al-Aghānī* (London: Routledge, 2003), 17.

²¹ Al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Aghānī*, vl.12, 29; vl.14, 113, 157; vl.16, 317–318; vl.19, 35, 49; vl.20, 116. For the identity of Yaḥyā b. Muḥammad b. Thawāba and other members of the Thawāba family; see: Khalafallāh, *Ṣāhib*, 52–58; Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 143–144.

²² Khalafallāh, *Ṣāhib*, 58. Both Kilpatrick and Azarnoosh follow Khalafallāh's argument as to the Thawāba family's impact upon al-Iṣfahānī's Shī'ī conviction; see: Kilpatrick, *Making*, 15; Azarnoosh, *Encyclopaedia Islamica*, s.v. "Abū al-Faraj," 728.

²³ Yāqūt, *Mu'jam*, vl.4, 147–149.

their partisans,²⁴ there is no evidence that every member of the Thawāba family embraced an extreme form of Shī'ism.²⁵

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In short, al-Iṣfahānī came from a family well-entrenched in the networks of the 'Abbāsīd elite, which included the functionaries and the 'Alids. Despite the epithet, al-Iṣfahānī, it does not seem that the Iṣfahānī family has much to do with the city, Isfahan. Rather, the family was mainly based in Sāmarrā', since the generation of Aḥmad b. al-Haytham, and then Baghdad. In the seats of the caliphate, many members of this family worked as scribes, while maintaining friendship or alliance with other scribes, viziers, and notables. As many of the court elite, al-Iṣfahānī's family maintained an amicable relationship with the offspring of 'Alī and allied with the families, such as the Thawāba family,²⁶ sharing their veneration of 'Alī and 'Alids. However, it is hard to pinpoint such a reverential attitude towards 'Alids in terms of sectarian alignment, given the scanty information about al-Iṣfahānī's family and the fluidity of sectarian identities at the time.

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Education and Career

The Iṣfahānī family's extensive social outreach is reflected in al-Iṣfahānī's sources. Among the direct informants whom al-Iṣfahānī cites in his works, one finds the members of al-Iṣfahānī's own family, who were further connected to other notables, as mentioned above,²⁷ the Thawāba family,²⁸ the Munajjim family,²⁹ the Yazīdī family,³⁰ the Ṣūlī family,³¹ the

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²⁴ Su, "The Family," 433–441.

²⁵ Su, "The Family," 431–432.

²⁶ Besides the Thawāba family, one may count among the pro-'Alid or Shī'ī families the Banū Furāt and Banū Nawbakht; see: Su, "The Family," 429–430.

²⁷ Su, "The Family," 421–432; Khalafallah, *Ṣāhib*, 41–51.

²⁸ Al-Iṣfahānī's sources are al-'Abbās b. Aḥmad b. Thawāba and Yahyā b. Muḥammad b. Thawāba, al-Iṣfahānī's grandfather from the maternal side, who is cited indirectly; see: Fleischhammer, *Die Quellen*, 29, 133.

²⁹ Al-Iṣfahānī has three informants from the Munajjim family, whose members were associated with the 'Abbāsīd court as boon companions, scholars, or astrologists: Aḥmad b. Yahyā b. 'Alī (262–327/876–940); 'Alī b. Hārūn b. 'Alī (277–352/890–963); and Yahyā b. 'Alī b. Yahyā (241–300/855–912); see: Fleischhammer, *Die Quellen*, 38, 40, 68–69. About the Banū Munajjim; see: Manfred Fleischhammer, *EP*, s.v. "Munadjjim," accessed July 24 2018, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_5501.

³⁰ The Yazīdī family was famed for its members' mastery of poetry, the Qur'ānic readings, the *ḥadīth*, and philology. Muḥammad b. al-'Abbās al-Yazīdī (d. c. 228–310/842–922) was the tutor of the children of the caliph, al-Muqtadir (r. 295–320/908–932) and transmitted Abū 'Ubayda's *Naqā'id*, Tha'lab's *Majālis*, and the works of his family; many of his narrations are preserved in the *Aghānī*; see: Fleischhammer, *Die Quellen*, 54–56; Rudolf Sellheim, *EP*, "al-Yazīdī," accessed July 24 2018, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1365.

Ḥamdūn family,³² the Ṭāhirid family,³³ the Marzubān family,³⁴ and the Ṭālibid family.³⁵

Given that al-Ḥamdūn and his family very likely settled in Baghdad since the beginning of the tenth century,³⁶ it is no surprise that he narrated from a multitude of the inhabitants of or visitors to that city. To name just a few: Jaḥḥā (d. 324/936),³⁷ al-Khaḥḥāf, ³⁸ ‘Alī b. Sulaymān al-Akhfash (d. 315/927 or 316/928),³⁹ and Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/922).⁴⁰ Like the scholars of his time, al-Ḥamdūn travelled in pursuit of knowledge. Although the details are not sufficient for us to establish the timeline of his journey, based on the chains of transmission (*isnāds*) al-Ḥamdūn cites consistently and meticulously in every report, it is certain that he narrated from ‘Abd al-Malik b. Maslama and ‘Āṣim b. Muḥammad in Antakya;⁴¹ ‘Abdallāh b. Muḥammad b. Iṣḥāq in Ahwāz;⁴² and Yaḥyā b. Aḥmad b. al-Jawn in Raqqā.⁴³ If we accept the ascription of the *Kitāb Adab al-ghurabā*’ to al-Ḥamdūn, then he once visited Baṣra besides other towns.⁴⁴ Yet, none of these cities seems to have left as

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³¹ The association with the Ṣūlī family likely began in the generation of al-Ḥamdūn’s grandfather, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad, who was close to Ibrāhīm b. al-‘Abbās al-Ṣūlī; see above, the section on Family. Al-Ḥamdūn’s direct sources from this family are the famous al-Ṣūlī, Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā (d. 335/946 or 336/947), who was the boon companion of a number of the caliphs and a phenomenal chess player; his son, Yaḥyā b. Muḥammad al-Ṣūlī; and al-‘Abbās b. ‘Alī, known as Ibn Burd al-Khiyār; see: Fleischhammer, *Die Quellen*, 32, 64–65; al-Ḥamdūn, *al-Aghānī*, vl.9, 229. See also: Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 167; Stefan Leder, *S EP*, s.v. “al-Ṣūlī,” accessed July 24 2018, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_7177.

³² The Banū Ḥamdūn were known for their boon-companionship at the ‘Abbāsīd court in the ninth century; al-Ḥamdūn’s informant is ‘Abdallāh b. Aḥmad b. Ḥamdūn; see: Fleischhammer, *Die Quellen*, 30; about the Ḥamdūn family; see: Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 161; Jean-Claude Vadet, *EP*, “Ibn Ḥamdūn,” accessed July 24 2018, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_3187.

³³ Yaḥyā b. Muḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh b. Ṭāhir, identified by al-Ḥamdūn as the nephew of ‘Ubaydallāh b. ‘Abdallāh b. Ṭāhir (d. 300/913); that is, he is the son of Muḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh b. Ṭāhir (d. 296/908-9), the governor of Khurāsān; see: Fleischhammer, *Die Quellen*, 69; al-Ḥamdūn, *al-Aghānī*, vl.21, 48. See also: Karl V. Zetterstéen, *EP*, s.v. “Muḥammad b. Ṭāhir,” accessed July 24 2018, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_5367; Clifford E. Bosworth, Manuela Marín and G.R. Smith, *EP*, “Ṭāhirids,” accessed July 24 2018, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1152.

³⁴ The old friend of al-Ḥamdūn’s father, Muḥammad b. Khalaf b. al-Marzubān, is a ubiquitous informant in the *Aghānī*; see footnote 20; Fleischhammer, *Die Quellen*, 58–59.

³⁵ The Ṭālibid informants of al-Ḥamdūn comprise: ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī b. Ḥamza; ‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad; ‘Alī b. Muḥammad b. Ja’far; Ja’far b. Muḥammad b. Ja’far; Muḥammad b. ‘Alī b. Ḥamza; see: Sebastian Günther, *Quellenuntersuchungen zu den “Maqātil al-Ṭālibīyīn” des Abū-l-Faraḡ al-Ḥamdūn (gest. 356/967): Ein Beitrag zur Problematik der mündlichen und schriftlichen Überlieferung in der mittelalterlichen arabischen Literatur* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1991), 140–141; 141–144; 150; 161–162; 190–191.

³⁶ See footnote 19; al-Ḥamdūn’s uncle, al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad, mentioned in the *Tārīkh Madīnat al-Salām*, either settled in Baghdad with him or at least active for some time there; see: al-Khaḥḥāf, *Tārīkh*, vl.8, 440.

³⁷ Fleischhammer, *Die Quellen*, 34–35.

³⁸ Fleischhammer, *Die Quellen*, 46–47.

³⁹ Fleischhammer, *Die Quellen*, 41–42.

⁴⁰ Fleischhammer, *Die Quellen*, 58.

⁴¹ Al-Ḥamdūn, *al-Aghānī*, vl.13, 25; vl.14, 46–50.

⁴² Al-Ḥamdūn, *al-Aghānī*, vl.17, 157.

⁴³ Al-Ḥamdūn, *al-Aghānī*, vl.24, 67.

⁴⁴ Azarnoosh, *Encyclopaedia Islamica*, s.v. “Abū al-Faraj,” 721; Kilpatrick, *Making*, 18.

tremendous an impact upon al-İşfahānī as Kūfa and Baghdad did. While al-İşfahānī's Baghdādī informants were wide-ranging in their expertise as well as sectarian and theological tendencies, his Kūfan sources, to a certain degree, can be characterised as either Shī'ī or keen on preserving and disseminating memory that favours 'Alī and his family. For example, Ibn 'Uqda (d. 333/944), mentioned in both the *Aghānī* and the *Maqātil*, is invariably cited for the reports about the 'Alids and their merits.⁴⁵ It was

Commented [A52]: also a centre of study of Arabian antiquity and preserved an indigenous musical tradition.

The journey in search for knowledge taken by al-İşfahānī may not be particularly outstanding by the standard of his time,⁴⁶ but the diversity of his sources' occupations and fortes is beyond doubt impressive. His informants can be assigned into one or more of the following categories⁴⁷: first, philologists and grammarians;⁴⁸ second, singers and musicians;⁴⁹ third, booksellers and copyists (*ṣahḥāf* or *warrāq*);⁵⁰ fourth, boon-companions;⁵¹ fifth, tutors (*mu'addib*);⁵² sixth, scribes (*kātib*);⁵³ seventh, imams or preachers (*khaṭīb*);⁵⁴ eighth, religious scholars (of the *ḥadīth*, the Qur'ānic recitations and exegesis, or jurisprudence) and judges;⁵⁵ ninth, poets;⁵⁶ tenth, *akhbārīs* (transmitters of reports of all sorts, including genealogical,

⁴⁵ Günther, *Quellenuntersuchungen*, 127–131; Fleischhammer, *Die Quellen*, 36–37; I-Wen Su, "The Shī'ī Past in Abū Al-Faraj Al-İşfahānī's Kitāb Al-Aghānī: A Literary and Historical Analysis," (PhD diss., The University of Edinburgh, 2016), 204–209. About Ibn 'Uqda, see also: Jonathan Brown, "Crossing Sectarian Boundaries in the 4th/10th Century: Ibn 'Uqda, a Man for All Seasons," *al-'Usur al-Wusta*, 20-2 (2008): 55–58.

⁴⁶ Compare with, for instance, his teacher, al-Ṭabarī: Clifford E. Bosworth, *EP*, "al-Ṭabarī", accessed 23 July 2018, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1133.

⁴⁷ ~~It has to be kept in mind that the categorisation is based on the attributives given by al-İşfahānī. Just as al-İşfahānī was not a local İşfahānī, the subjects discussed here do not necessarily engage with the professions their *nisbas* indicate. This list is based on the characterisations al-İşfahānī himself provides.~~

⁴⁸ Fleischhammer, *Die Quellen*, 41–42 (al-Akhfash); 60–61 (Ibn Durayd); 32 (Ibn Rustam); 30 ('Abd al-Malik al-Darīr).

⁴⁹ Fleischhammer, *Die Quellen*, 42 (Dhukā' Wajh al-Ruzza); 34 (Jaḥza).

⁵⁰ Fleischhammer, *Die Quellen*, 52–53 ('Īsā b. al-Ḥusayn al-Warrāq); 40 ('Alī b. al-Ḥusayn al-Warrāq); 37 (Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Ṣahḥāf); 31 ('Abd al-Wahhāb b. 'Ubayd al-Ṣahḥāf); 65 (Muḥammad b. Zakariyyā al-Ṣahḥāf).

⁵¹ Fleischhammer, *Die Quellen*, 32 (Abū al-Qāsim al-Shīrbābakī); see footnotes 27–35 above.

⁵² Fleischhammer, *Die Quellen*, 32 (Aḥmad b. al-'Abbās al-Mu'addib); 35 (Aḥmad b. 'Imrān al-Mu'addib); 61–62 (Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Mu'addib); 62 (Muḥammad b. 'Imrān al-Mu'addib).

⁵³ Fleischhammer, *Die Quellen*, 43–44 (Ja'far b. Qudāma al-Kātib); 50–51 (al-Ḥusayn b. al-Qāsim al-Kawkabī al-Kātib); 53 (Ishāq b. al-Ḍahḥāk al-Kātib); 41 ('Alī b. Ṣāliḥ al-Kātib); 39 ('Alī b. al-'Abbās al-Ṭalḥī al-Kātib); 39–40 ('Alī b. 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Kātib); 49 (al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad al-Kātib); 57 (Muḥammad b. Baḥr al-İşfahānī al-Kātib).

⁵⁴ Fleischhammer, *Die Quellen*, 61 (Muḥammad b. Husayn al-Kindī was al-İşfahānī's tutor and the preacher at the congregational mosque in Qādisiyya); 40–41 ('Alī b. Muḥammad, an imam of a Kūfan mosque). See also: al-İşfahānī, *al-Aghānī*, vl.15, 255; vl.19, 38; vl.20, 163; vl.21, 158.

⁵⁵ Fleischhammer, *Die Quellen*, 30 ('Abdallāh b. Abī Dāwūd al-Sijjīstānī); 36–37 (Ibn 'Uqda); 58 (Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī); 59–60 (Muḥammad b. Khalaf Wakī').

⁵⁶ Fleischhammer, *Die Quellen*, 42 ('Āsim b. Muḥammad al-Shā'ir); 49 (al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad al-Shā'ir).

historical, and anecdotal reports).⁵⁷ The variety of the narrators and their narrations enriched al-İşfahānī's intellectual output, which covers a wide range of topics from amusing tales to the accounts of the 'Alids' martyrdom.⁵⁸ Al-İşfahānī's erudition is best illustrated by Abū 'Alī al-Muḥassin al-Tanūkhī's (329–384/941–994) comment:

Amongst the Shī'ī narrators whom we have seen, none has learnt poems, melodies, reports, traditions (*al-āthār*), *al-aḥādīth al-musnada* [narrations with chains of transmission, including the Prophetic *ḥadīth*], and genealogy by heart like Abū al-Faraj al-İşfahānī. Very proficient in these matters, he is also knowledgeable in the military campaigns and the biography of the Prophet (*al-maghāzī* and *al-sīra*), lexicography, grammar, legendary tales (*al-khurāfāt*), and the sciences desirable in the court (*ālat al-munādama*), like falconry (*al-jawāriḥ*), veterinary science (*al-bayṭara*), something about medicine (*nutafan min al-ṭibb*), astrology, drinks (*al-ashriba*), and other things.⁵⁹

With his encyclopaedic knowledge of music, musicians, poetry, poets, genealogy, history, and other subjects, al-İşfahānī established himself as a learned scholar and taught in teaching circles.⁶⁰

He may also have made his living as a scribe. This is not surprising, given his families' scribal connections, but the details of his *kātib* activities are rather opaque.⁶¹ Although both al-Tanūkhī and al-Baghdādī refer to al-İşfahānī with the attribute, *kātib*, they mention nothing of where he worked or for whom.⁶² The details of his job as a scribe only come later, with Yāqūt, many of whose reports about al-İşfahānī prove problematic. For instance, a report from Yāqūt claims that al-İşfahānī was the scribe of Rukn al-Dawla (d. 366/976) and

Commented [A53]: possessed expertise in one or more of the following domains: philology, grammar, poetry, singing and music, Qur'ānic studies, *ḥadīth*, jurisprudence, genealogy, history and anecdotal reports. They included court companions, judges, tutors, booksellers and copyists.

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⁵⁷ Fleischhammer, *Die Quellen*, 37 (Aḥmad b. Sulaymān al-Tūsī); 37–38 (Ibn 'Ammār); 42–43 (Abū Khalīfa al-Jumāhī); 45–46 (al-Ḥaramī b. Abī al-'Alā').

⁵⁸ See below, the section on Legacy.

⁵⁹ Al-Khaṭīb, *Tārīkh*, vl.13, 339; Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-a'yān wa-anbā' abnā' al-zamān*, ed. Iḥsān 'Abbās (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1972), vl.3, 307; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 2774; al-Qifṭī, *Inbāh*, vl.2, 251. It is noteworthy that the first sentence of this quote is written differently from the works given here in al-Khaṭīb's *Tārīkh*.

⁶⁰ Yāqūt, *Mu'jam*, vl.13, 129–130; Khalafallāh, *Ṣāhib*, 168–169; al-Aṣma'ī, *Abū al-Faraj*, 73–85; Ḥusayn 'Āṣī, *Abū al-Faraj al-İşfahānī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1993), 24–30.

⁶¹ For the few references by al-İşfahānī to his administrative tasks; see: Kilpatrick, *Making*, 18.

⁶² Al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh*, vl.13, 337; al-Tanūkhī, *al-Faraj ba'da al-shidda*, ed. 'Abbūd al-Shālījī (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1978), vl.2, 334; al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār al-muḥāḍara wa-akhbār al-mudhākara*, ed. 'Abbūd al-Shālījī, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1995), vl.1, 18.

mentions his resentment at Abū al-Faḍl b. al-ʿAmīd (d. 360/970).⁶³ However, the very same report is mentioned by Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī (active fourth/tenth century⁶⁴) in his *Akhlāq al-wazīrayn*, where the aforementioned scribe of Rukn al-Dawla is identified as Abū al-Faraj Ḥamd b. Muḥammad, not Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī.⁶⁵

Thus, it is hard to know with certainty to what extent al-Iṣfahānī was engaged in *kātib* duties. Nevertheless, we can still confirm his association with the vizier, Abū Muḥammad al-Muhallabī (291–352/903–963), with much more confidence. The friendship between the two began before al-Muhallabī’s vizierate in 339/950.⁶⁶ The firm relationship between al-Iṣfahānī and al-Muhallabī is supported by al-Iṣfahānī’s poetry collected by al-Tha’ālibī: half of the fourteen poems are panegyrics dedicated to al-Muhallabī.⁶⁷ In addition, al-Iṣfahānī’s own work, *al-Imā’ al-shawā’ir* (“The Slave Poetesses”), refers to the vizier — presumably, al-Muhallabī — as his dedicatee.⁶⁸ His *Manājīb al-khiṣyān* (“The Noble Eunuchs”), which addresses two castrated male singers owned by al-Muhallabī, was composed for him.⁶⁹ His *magnum opus*, the *Aghānī*, was very likely intended for him, as well.⁷⁰ As a return for his literary efforts, according to al-Tanūkhī, al-Iṣfahānī frequently received rewards from the vizier.⁷¹ Furthermore, for the sake of their long-term friendship and out of his respect for al-Iṣfahānī’s genius, al-Muhallabī exceptionally tolerated al-Iṣfahānī’s uncouth manners and poor personal hygiene.⁷² The sources say nothing about al-Iṣfahānī’s fate, after al-Muhallabī’s death. In his late years, according to his student, Muḥammad b. Abī al-Fawāris, he suffered from senility (*khallaṭa*) before his death.⁷³

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⁶³ Yāqūt, *Mu’jam al-udabā’*, vl.13, 110–111.

⁶⁴ Samuel M. Stern, *EP*, “Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī,” accessed July 24 2018, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_0202.

⁶⁵ Azarnooosh, *Encyclopaedia Islamica*, s.v. “Abū al-Faraj,” 726–727; Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī, *Akhlāq al-wazīrayn*, ed. Muḥammad T. al-Ṭanjī (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1992), 421–422.

⁶⁶ Yāqūt, *Mu’jam*, vl.13, 105. Among the frequently cited sources in the *Aghānī* is Ḥabīb b. Naṣr al-Muhallabī (d. 307/919), presumably from the Muhallabid family, but it is not clear how this source relates to Abū Muḥammad al-Muhallabī; see: Fleischhammer, *Die Quellen*, 44.

⁶⁷ Al-Tha’ālibī, *Yatīmat*, vl.3, 127–131.

⁶⁸ Al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Imā’ al-shawā’ir*, ed. Jalīl al-ʿAṭīyya (Beirut: Dār al-Niḍāl, 1984), 23.

⁶⁹ Yāqūt, *Mu’jam*, vl.13, 100.

⁷⁰ See discussion below, the section on Legacy.

⁷¹ Al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār*, vl.1, 74; Hartmut Fähndrich, *EP*, “al-Tanūkhī,” accessed July 24 2018, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1172.

⁷² Yāqūt, *Mu’jam*, vl.13, 101–103, quoting the *kātib* and historian Hilāl al-Ṣābi’ (359/969–448/1056).

⁷³ Al-Khaṭīb, *Tārīkh*, vl.13, 340. See also: Kilpatrick, *Making*, 19.

Personality, Preferences and Beliefs

As a boon companion, al-İřfahānī was unconventional in the sense that he does not seem to have been bothered to observe the social decorum of his time: he with his uncleanliness and gluttony presented a counterexample to elegance (*ẓarf*), as defined by one of his teachers, Abū al-Ṭayyib al-Washshā' (d. 325/937).⁷⁴ His unconformity to the social norms did not hinder him from being part of al-Muhallabī's entourage or participation in the literary assemblies, but, inevitably, it resulted in frictions with other scholars and detraction from his enemies.⁷⁵ Although al-İřfahānī appeared eccentric to his human associates, he was a caring owner to his cat, by the name of Yaqaq (meaning: white): he treated Yaqaq's colic (*qulanj*) with enema (*al-ḥuqna*).⁷⁶

In contrast to his uncomely *modus vivendi*, al-İřfahānī's prosaic style is lucid, "in clear and simple language, with unusual sincerity and frankness."⁷⁷ His pinpoint documentation of the *isnāds*⁷⁸ and meticulous verification of information,⁷⁹ provided in his works, embody scholarly character entirely different from his social life. Usually, in his treatment of a bsubject or an event, al-İřfahānī lets his sources speak, but, occasionally, he does voice his evaluation of pomes and songs, as well as their creators.⁸⁰ When dealing with conflicting reports, al-İřfahānī either leaves his readers to decide or issues his judgment as to the most credible account.⁸¹ Yet, he frankly condemns sources whom he holds unreliable, for instance, Ibn Khurdādhbih on the history of music and Ibn al-Kalbī on genealogy.⁸² Indeed, al-İřfahānī assesses his source material with a critical eye, while impartially presenting his

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⁷⁴ Al-Washshā' says: "It is not permissible for the people of elegance and etiquette to wear dirty clothes with clean ones, or clean ones with new ones," and they should eat with small morsels, while avoiding gluttony. Al-İřfahānī never washed his clothes and shoes and only replaced them when they became too shabby to put on. See: Yāqūt, *Mu'jam*, vl.13, 101–102, 107–108; al-Washshā', *al-Muwashshā*, 161 (quotation), 167.

⁷⁵ Kilpatrick, *Making*, 17–18; Azarnoosh, *Encyclopaedia Islamica*, s.v. "Abū al-Faraj," 730–731.

⁷⁶ Yāqūt, *Mu'jam*, vl.13, 104–105. For the discussion of colic and its treatment by enema; see: Golnoush S.M. Nezhad, *et alii*, "Insights into Avicenna's Knowledge of Gastrointestinal Medicine and His Account of An Enema Device," *Acta Medico-Historica Adriatica* 13 (2005): 29–40.

⁷⁷ Azarnoosh, *Encyclopaedia Islamica*, s.v. "Abū al-Faraj," 731. See also: Jabrī, *Abū al-Faraj al-Ařbahānī* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1965), 27–29; Sallūm, *Dirāsat*, 56–69.

⁷⁸ Al-İřfahānī specifies not only his sources (the identities of his informants, or the titles of the written material used by him) but also the methods by which he acquired the reports. Now and then, he mentions the occasions in which he received the given information. See: Kilpatrick, *Making*, 94–104.

⁷⁹ Kilpatrick, *Making*, 40–46, 60–63, 115–119; Sallūm, *Dirāsat*, 38–55, 101–118.

⁸⁰ Kilpatrick, *Making*, 46–47, 66–69.

⁸¹ Kilpatrick, *Making*, 111–119.

⁸² Kilpatrick, *Making*, 112–113; Sallūm, *Dirāsat*, 85–89.

biographees, by focusing on their merits instead of elaborating on their flaws.⁸³

That said, al-Isfahānī's personal preferences and sectarian partisanship are not absent from his works. In terms of music and songs, al-Isfahānī is a fan of Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī (155–235/772–850). In al-Isfahānī's eye, Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm was a multi-talented man, who excels in a number of subjects, but, most importantly and phenomenally, music.⁸⁴ Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm, as a collector of the reports about poets and singers, is an important source in his *Aghānī*.⁸⁵ Besides being a mine of information, Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm's nomenclature for the description of the melodic modes are preferred over his opponent, Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī (162–224/778–839), and adopted by al-Isfahānī in his *Aghānī*.⁸⁶ Furthermore, al-Isfahānī embarked on the compilation of the *Aghānī*, because he was commissioned by his patron to reconstruct the list of exquisite songs selected by Ishāq.⁸⁷ In other words, the *raison d'être* of the *Aghānī* is partly related to al-Isfahānī's idol, Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm and its theoretical framework tremendously shaped by him. Al-Isfahānī's admiration for scholars or men of letters can be detected from time to time, usually in the passing comments in the chains of transmission.⁸⁸ Yet, al-Isfahānī outspokenly expresses his admiration, in some cases, such as Ibn al-Mu'tazz (247–296/862–909) he expresses it outspokenly.⁸⁹

As an Umayyad by ancestry, al-Isfahānī's biographers mention his Shī'ī affiliation with exclamation.⁹⁰ Yet, in the light of the history of the family's connections with the 'Abbāsīd elite of Shī'ī inclination and the Ṭālibids, and of his learning experience in Kūfa, his Shī'ī conviction is understandable. Al-Ṭūsī (385–60/995–1067) is the only early source specifying

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⁸³ Kilpatrick, *Making*, 46–47, 68–69, 114–115; Jabrī, *Abū al-Faraj*, 19–20, 25–26.

⁸⁴ Al-Isfahānī, *al-Aghānī*, vl.5, 190.

⁸⁵ Fleischhammer, *Die Quellen*, 89–91.

⁸⁶ Al-Isfahānī, *al-Aghānī*, vl.1, 15–16.

⁸⁷ Al-Isfahānī, *al-Aghānī*, vl.1, 16. See the section below on al-Isfahānī's works.

⁸⁸ Kilpatrick, *Making*, 111–112; Khalafallah, *Ṣāhib*, 66–84.

⁸⁹ Su, "The Shī'ī Past," 175–179; Al-Isfahānī, *al-Aghānī*, vl.10, 228–229; Kilpatrick, *Making*, 83–84.

⁹⁰ The cited statement expressing astonishment (*al-'ajab*) comes from: al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 2774; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-tārīkh*, ed. Muḥammad Y. al-Daqqāq (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1987), vl.7, 302. The earliest mention of the Umayyad-Shī'ī combination in the biographical sources is: al-Khaṭīb, *Tārīkh*, vl.13, 340; this is then cited by: al-Qiftī, *Inbāh*, vl.2, 253. A similar tenor, in a slightly different formulation, in "Alī b. al-Ḥusayn Abū al-Faraj al-Isfahānī al-Umawī, the author of the *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, the Shī'ī, and this is rare for an Umawī (*wa-hādihā nādīr fī Umawī*)", see: al-Dhahabī, *Mīzān al-i-'tidāl fī naqd al-rijāl*, ed. 'Alī M. Mu'awwad and 'Ādil A. 'Abd al-Mawjūd (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1995), vl.5, 151; Ibn Hajar, *Lisān al-mīzān*, ed. 'Abd al-Fattāh Abū Ghadda and Sulaymān 'A. Abū Ghadda (Beirut: Maktabat al-Muṭbū'āt al-Islāmiyya, 2002), vl.5, 526. Another formulation "min al-'ajā'ib annahu marwānī yatashayya 'u," see: Ibn al-'Imād, *Shadharāt al-dhahab fī akhbār man dhahaba*, ed. 'Abd al-Qādir al-Arnā'ūt and Maḥmūd al-Arnā'ūt (Beirut: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 1986), vl.4, 292. [See comments on sources in accompanying review]

the exact sect to which he pertains in the fluid Shīʿī world: al-Iṣfahānī is a Zaydī.⁹¹ Although al-Tūsī’s view is widely accepted, its veracity is not beyond doubt.⁹² Al-Iṣfahānī does not seem to have been informed of the latest Zaydī movements in Yemen and Ṭabaristān of his time, while his association with the Kūfan Zaydī community, which to some degree became less distinguishable from the Sunnīs, is yet to be studied in depth.⁹³ It is clear, based on examination of al-Iṣfahānī’s editorial decision, that he does honour ‘Alī, who plays a far more prominent role in his works than the first three caliphs, and some of his descendants, including Zaydī Shīʿism’s eponym, Zayd b. ‘Alī (75–122/694–740), by presenting them positively, while, in some cases, leaving their enemies’ rectitude in question.⁹⁴ In spite of that, al-Iṣfahānī is neither keen to identify the imams in the past, nor articulate as to the qualities of an imam.⁹⁵ As a matter of fact, he hardly uses the word, not even applying it to Zayd b. ‘Alī.⁹⁶ Furthermore, he does not unconditionally approve any ‘Alid revolt and seems somewhat lukewarm to the group he refers to as Zaydīs.⁹⁷ Taken together, al-Iṣfahānī’s Shīʿī conviction is better characterised as *tashayyuʿ*, as defined by al-Dhahabī, that is, moderate love for ‘Alī without impugning the dignity of the caliphs before him.⁹⁸

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Legacy

Al-Iṣfahānī authored a number of works, but only a few survive. Three of them are preserved through the quotations: *al-Qiyān* (“The Singing Slave Girls”), *al-Diyārāt* (“The Monasteries”), and *Mujarrad al-aghānī* (“the Abridgement of the Book of Songs”).⁹⁹ A fragment of the *Mujarrad al-aghānī* can be found in Ibn Abī Uṣaybi’a’s *ʿUyūn al-anbāʾ fī ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbāʾ*,

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⁹¹ Al-Tūsī, *al-Fihrist*, ed. Muḥammad Ṣādiq (Qom: al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, n.d.), 192.

⁹² Kilpatrick, *Making*, 14–16; Sebastian Günther, *EP*, s.v. “Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī,” accessed July 24 2018, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_0105; Najam Haider, *The Origin of the Shīʿa: Identity, Ritual, and Sacred Space in Eighth-Century Kūfa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 197; Najam Haider, “The Community Divided: A Textual Analysis of the Murders of Idrīs b. ‘Abd Allāh (d.175/791),” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 128-3 (2008): 459–475; Patricia Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 100, footnote 4.

⁹³ Wilferd Madelung, *Der Imam al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm und die Glaubenslehre der Zaiditen* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1965), 223–228; Su, “The Shīʿī Past,” 72–90.

⁹⁴ Su, “The Shīʿī Past,” 183–265.

⁹⁵ Su, “The Shīʿī Past,” 253–260.

⁹⁶ Su, “The Shīʿī Past,” 253.

⁹⁷ Su, “The Shīʿī Past,” 87–89.

⁹⁸ al-Dhahabī, *Mizān*, vl.1, 14; Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb*, ed. Ibrāhīm al-Zaybaq and ‘Ādil Murshid (Beirut: Muʿassasat al-Risāla, n.d.), vl.1, 53.

⁹⁹ Kilpatrick, *Making*, 24–25.

which quotes a poem by the caliph, al-Ma'mūn, and arranged as a song by Mutayyam.¹⁰⁰ The first two have been reconstructed and published by al-'Atiyya, who collects and collates the passages from later works that are taken from al-Iṣfahānī.¹⁰¹ The former, *al-Qiyān*, is a collection of the biographies of the singing slave girls. In it, al-Iṣfahānī provides the basic information about the biographees, their owners and their interaction with poets, notables such as caliphs, and their admirers, with illustration of their poetic and/or music talents. The latter, *al-Diyārāt*, is concerned with the tales related to the monasteries, with the indication of their geographical locations and, sometimes, history and topographical characteristics. However, it is questionable to what extent the reconstructed editions can represent the original texts, since the passages, which quote al-Iṣfahānī as source in the given subject and are thus included by the editor, seldom identify the titles of the works.¹⁰²

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Four works survive in manuscripts: *Maqātil al-Tālibīyīn* ("The Tālibid Martyrs"), *Kitāb al-Aghānī* ("The Book of the Songs"), *Adab al-ghurabā'* ("The Etiquettes of the Strangers"), and *al-Imā' al-shawā'ir* ("The Slave Poetesses").¹⁰³ As noted above, al-Iṣfahānī's authorship of the *adab al-ghurabā'* is disputed.¹⁰⁴ The author, whoever he may have been, mentions in the preface his sufferings from the hardship of time and vicissitude of fate, and the solace which he seeks through the stories of bygone people.¹⁰⁵ Hence, he collects in the *Adab al-ghurabā'* the reports about the experiences of the strangers — those away from their homes or their beloved ones. Some of the stories centre on the hardship which the strangers, anonymous or not, encountered in their journey or exile, usually shown in the epigrams written on the monuments, rocks, or walls.¹⁰⁶ Others relay the excursion to the monasteries for drinking.¹⁰⁷

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The *al-Imā' al-shawā'ir* was composed at the order of the vizier al-Muhallabī, al-Iṣfahānī's patron, who demanded collection of the reports about the slave poetesses from the Umayyad to the 'Abbāsīd periods.¹⁰⁸ Al-Iṣfahānī confesses that he could not find any noteworthy poetess in the Umayyad period, because the people at that time were not

¹⁰⁰ Kilpatrick, *Making*, 25.

¹⁰¹ Al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Qiyān*, ed. Jalīl al-'Atiyya (London: Riad El-Rayyes, 1989); al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Diyārāt*, ed. Jalīl al-'Atiyya (London: Riad El-Rayyes, 1991).

¹⁰² Kilpatrick, *Making*, 25.

¹⁰³ Kilpatrick, *Making*, 25.

¹⁰⁴ See above, the section on Dates.

¹⁰⁵ Al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb Adab al-ghurabā'*, 20–21.

¹⁰⁶ For an example, see: al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb Adab al-ghurabā'*, 25–26, 29–31.

¹⁰⁷ Al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb Adab al-ghurabā'*, 34–36.

¹⁰⁸ Al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Imā' al-shawā'ir*, ed. Jalīl al-'Atiyya (Beirut: Dār al-Niḍāl, 1984), 23.

impressed with the verses featuring tenderness and softness. Thus, he only records the 'Abbāsīd poetesses, with mention of the relevant fine verses or the pleasant tales, and arranges them in chronological order.¹⁰⁹ There are 31 sections, addressing 32 poetesses, most of which are short and usually begin with al-İřfahānī's summary of the subject.¹¹⁰

The *Maqātil al-Ṭālibīyīn* is a historical-biographical compilation concerning the descendants of Abū Ṭālib, who died under the following circumstances: being killed, poisoned to death in a treacherous way, on the run from the governmental persecution, or confined until death.¹¹¹ The *Maqātil* literature was rather common, amongst Shī'īs particularly, before al-İřfahānī and he used many works of this genre as sources for the *Maqātil al-Ṭālibīyīn*.¹¹²

Although al-İřfahānī does not explain the motivation behind this compilation nor mention any dedicatee, but, according to the preface of this work, al-İřfahānī sets out as a condition to recount the reports about the Ṭālibids who were "praiseworthy in their conduct and rightly guided in their belief (*maḥmūd al-ṭarīqa wa-sadīd al-madḥhab*)."¹¹³ Like the *al-Imā'*, the work is structured in chronological order, beginning with the first Ṭālibī martyr, Ja'far b. Abī Ṭālib, and ends in the year of the compilation — Jumādā I 313/August 925.¹¹⁴ For each biographical entry, al-İřfahānī gives the full name, the lineage (sometimes adding the maternal side), less often the virtues and personal traits of the given subject and other material al-İřfahānī thinks noteworthy, for example, the prophetic *ḥadīth*. Then, al-İřfahānī gives the account of the death, which more often than not constitutes the end of the entry. Sometimes poetry for or by the subject is attached.¹¹⁵ The *Maqātil* was adduced by many Shī'ī and non-Shī'ī compilers of the following centuries.¹¹⁶

The *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, al-İřfahānī's best known work, is an immense compilation, including the biographies of poets and musicians of different periods in addition to historical material. As noted above, al-İřfahānī embarks on compiling the *Aghānī* first under the command of a patron, whom he calls *ra'īs* ("head" or "chief"), to reconstruct the list of one hundred fine

¹⁰⁹ Al-İřfahānī, *al-Imā'*, 23.

¹¹⁰ Kilpatrick, *Making*, 26.

¹¹¹ Al-İřfahānī, *Maqātil*, 24; Ali Bahramian, *Encyclopaedia Islamica*, s.v. "Maqātil al-Ṭālibīyīn," 734–735.

¹¹² Sebastian Günther, "Maqātil Literature in Medieval Islam," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 25(1994): 200–205.

¹¹³ Al-İřfahānī, *Maqātil*, 24–25.

¹¹⁴ Al-İřfahānī, *Maqātil*, 24–25, 565.

¹¹⁵ Günther, "Maqātil Literature," 205–206; Ali Bahramian, *Encyclopaedia Islamica*, s.v. "Maqātil al-Ṭālibīyīn," 734–735.

¹¹⁶ Ali Bahramian, *Encyclopaedia Islamica*, s.v. "Maqātil al-Ṭālibīyīn," 734–735; Sebastian Günther, *EP*, s.v. "Abū al-Faraj al-İřfahānī," accessed July 24 2018, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_0105.

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songs, selected by Iṣḥāq b. Ibrāhīm.¹¹⁷ Due to an obscure report in Yāqūt’s *Mu’jam*, this *ra’īs* is often assumed to be Sayf al-Dawla al-Ḥamdānī (r. 333–356/945–967),¹¹⁸ but recent studies suggest the more plausible candidate for the dedicatee of the *Aghānī* being the vizier al-Muhallabī.¹¹⁹ The *Aghānī* is divided into three parts: first, The Hundred Songs (*al-mi’a al-ṣawt al-mukhtāra*) and other song collections; second, the songs of the caliphs and of their children and grandchildren (*aghānī al-khulafā’ wa-awlādihim wa-awlād awlādihim*); third, al-Iṣfahānī’s selection of songs. The articles in each part are arranged based on different patterns, but it is mostly the song which introduces the articles on biographies or events.¹²⁰

As for the works that did not survive, based on their contents, as implied by their titles, they can be divided into the following categories¹²¹:

The genealogical works, such as *Nasab Banī ‘Abd Shams* (“The Genealogy of ‘Abd Shams”), *Jamharat al-nasab* (“The Compendium of Genealogies”), *Nasab Banī Shaybān* (“The Genealogy of the Banū Shaybān”), and *Nasab al-Mahāliba* (“The Genealogy of the Muhallabids”), probably dedicated to his patron, the vizier, al-Muhallabī.

The reports about specified or unspecified topics, such as *Kitāb al-Khammārīn wa-l-khammārāt* (“The Male and Female Wine Sellers”), *Akhbār al-ṭufaylīyīn* (“The Reports about Party Crashers”), *al-Akhbār wa-l-nawādir* (“The Reports and Rare Tales”), and *Ayyām al-‘arab* (“The Days of the Arabs”), which mentions 1700 days of the pre-Islamic tribal battles and was in circulation only in Andalusia.¹²²

The reports about music, musicians and singers: the aforementioned *Manājīb al-*

¹¹⁷ See above, the section on Personalities, Preferences and Beliefs.

¹¹⁸ Khalafallāh, *Ṣāhib*, 101, 105–110: the misconception that al-Iṣfahānī gave his *Aghānī* to Sayf al-Dawla came from a misreading of the text in *Mu’jam al-udabā’*; the original initially mentioned that Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī al-Maghribī made an abridgement of the *Aghānī* and gave it to Sayf al-Dawla Abū al-Ḥasan Ṣadaqa Fakhr al-Dīn b. Bahā’ al-Dawla, whom Yāqūt mistook for the Ḥamdānīd Sayf al-Dawla. This account is then followed by a comment of al-Ṣāhib b. ‘Abbād and a dialogue between al-Muhallabī and al-Iṣfahānī and then returns to the words of Abū al-Qāsim, who states that he only made one copy of this work in his life and that that is the one given to Sayf al-Dawla. See also: Yāqūt, *Mu’jam al-udabā’*, vl.13, 97–98. Although Khalafallāh admits that his reading is conjectural, he rightly points out the obscurities in this text.

¹¹⁹ Khalafallāh, *Ṣāhib*, 101–110; Kilpatrick, *Making*, 19–20.

¹²⁰ Kilpatrick, *Making*, 259–267.

¹²¹ The list is taken from: Kilpatrick, *Making*, 23–24.

¹²² This and the *Nasab ‘Abd Shams* seem to have been only available in the Iberian Peninsula; see: al-Khaṭīb, *Tārīkh*, vl.13, 338.

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khiṣyān (“The Noble Eunuchs”), *Akhbār Jaḥḥa al-Barmakī* (“The Reports concerning Jaḥḥa al-Barmakī”), *al-Mamālīk al-shu‘arā’* (“The Slave Poets”), *Adab al-samā’* (“The Etiquettes of Listening to Music”), and *Risāla fī ‘ilal al-nagham* (“The Treatise on the Flaws of the Rules of Tones”).

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There are two works, only mentioned by al-Ṭūsī: *Kitāb mā nazal min al-Qur’ān fī amīr al-mu‘minīn wa-ahl baytih ‘alayhim al-salām* (“The Book about the Qur’ānic Verses Revealed regarding the Commander of the Faithful and the People of His Family, Peace upon Them”) and *Kitāb fih kalām Fāṭima ‘alayhā al-salām fī Fadak* (“The Book concerning the Statements of Fāṭima, Peace upon Her, regarding Fadak”).¹²³ Should the attribution of these two works to al-Iṣfahānī be correct, together with the *Maqātil al-Ṭālibīyīn*, they reveal al-Iṣfahānī’s Shī‘ī partisanship.

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¹²³ Kilpatrick, *Making*, 23.