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HERAUSGEGEBEN VON
RAINER BRUNNER, MONIKA GRONKE,
JENS PETER LAUT UND ULRICH REBSTOCK

»... nor have I learned it from any book of theirs«
Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī: a Medieval Arabic Author at Work

Sebastian Günther

The Book of the Killing of the Ṭālibids (Arabic: *Kitāb Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyīn*)[1] by the celebrated 10th century man of letters, historian and sociologist,[2] Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, is a unique encyclopaedia of historical-biographical information on the Shīʿites of the first three centuries of Islam. It contains more than two hundred biographies of the descendants of the Prophet Muḥammad in the line of his uncle Abū Ṭālib (thus called Ṭālibids), i.e. from Jaʿfar ibn Abī Ṭālib (who was, like his more prominent brother ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, one of the first Muslims) to the seventy Ṭālibids who died during the reign of the ʿAbbāsid caliph al-Muqtadir (r. 295–320 AH/ 908–932 CE). In the author's own words, it reads that the *Maqātil* consists of »collections of historical accounts« (*jumal min akhbār*) of Ṭālibids who lived in the period of time »from the generation of the Messenger of God until the time when we started this book, and this was in Jumādā I of the year 313 (July 925 CE).«[3] Abū l-Faraj states furthermore that he dedicated this book to those Ṭālibids who were tracked and poisoned; feared the government (*ṣulṭān*), escaped and died in hiding; or were imprisoned (for political reasons) and kept there until they died. Yet, only the stories of Ṭālibids were included in the book who had shown laudable manners and behavior; followed the legitimate way of life and faith (*maḥmūd al-ṭarīqa, sadīd al-madhhab*); had not departed from that nor from the path of their predecessors (*madhhab aslāfihī*); and had not caused any disturbance and damage to the community.[4]

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[1] Sing. *maqtal*, Pl. *maqātil*: murder, death; murderous battle; also »a [vital] place in man [or an animal] where a wound causes death« (E.W. Lane: *Arabic English Lexicon*, Edinburgh 1993, part VIII, p. 2984). Ed. Aḥmad Ṣaqr, Cairo: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyya, 1368/1949; ¹reprint Teheran: Moʾassase-ye Maṭbūʿātī-ye Esmāʿīliyyān, 1970; ²reprint (with a new pagination) Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Aʿmalī li-l-Maṭbūʿāt, 1408/1987. Ed. Kāẓim al-Muẓaffar, Najaf: Manshūrāt al-Maktaba al-Ḥaydariyya, 1385/1965; ³reprint Qom: Manshūrāt-e al-Rāzī-Zāhid, 1405ˢʰ. All references here are to Ṣaqr's edition (henceforth *Maq*).

[2] Hilary Kilpatrick: *Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī as a Sociologist and Historian of Literature*, in: *The Dr. Irene Halmos Chair of Arabic Literature Lecture Series* [no. 7]. Tel Aviv University: [University Press], 1995.

[3] *Maq* 4 (preface); the information on the completion of the book in the same month is given on p. 721 in the author's conclusion.

[4] *Maq* 4–5. See also my *Quellenuntersuchungen zu den »Maqātil aṭ-Ṭālibiyyīn« des Abū ʾl-Faraǧ al-Iṣfahānī (gest. 356/967)*. Hildesheim: Olms, 1991 (henceforth *QU*), p. 14.

Abū l-Faraj admits that there might have been news of Ṭālibids, of which he did not learn because these people lived in remote territories of the Islamic empire. Interestingly, however, he provides further reasons why he was unable to acquire certain items of information. He points to

> the shortcomings of this time of ours and its people, and the absence of those who record historical information (*man mudawwinūn al-khabar*) and transmit tradition (*nāqil al-athar*) in the way their predecessors did, who used to record (*yudawwinūna*), classify (*yuṣannifūna*), arrange (*yunaẓẓimūna*) and put [historical information] together (*yuraṣṣifūna*)

in their writings.[5] Nonetheless, regarding his own scholarly work, the author is confident enough to add that »whoever admits shortcomings, should not be blamed.«

The *Maqātil* is considered to be Abū l-Faraj's second most important work, next to his literary masterpiece: the monumental *Book of Songs* (*K. al-Aghānī*).[6] Two reasons have particularly contributed to this view. Firstly, the *Maqātil* is a precious historical source: in a concise and well-structured manner,[7] it deals with various aspects of society and politics in early Islam, in particular with Shīʿite uprisings and the stances taken by the individuals and groups participating therein. Secondly, it is remarkable in terms of the history of classical Arabic literature and scholarly writing, since with this compendium a particular form of historical-biographical text, the so-called *maqātil* genre, reached its culmination. On the one hand, Abū l-Faraj's *Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyīn* is the most comprehensive extant work of this genre in terms of historical-biographical information; thus this work contributed considerably to providing the textual ground for a large number of hagiographies written later in Arabic and Persian on the martyrs of the Shīʿa.[8] On the other hand, it is one of the oldest extant ›real books‹ of this genre:[9] it has an introduction and a conclusion which facilitate the author's expressing

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[5] *Maq* 5. In a similar way, the Shāfiʿite scholar Abū Sulaymān al-Khaṭṭābī, a contemporary of Abū l-Faraj, criticizes the decline of scholarship, genuine research and academic debate at his time; see my article *Der šāfiʿitische Traditionalist Abū Sulaimān al-Ḥaṭṭābī und die Situation der religiösen Wissenschaften im 10. Jahrhundert*, in: Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft 146/1 (1996), pp. 61–91.

[6] See above all Hilary Kilpatrick: *Making the Great Book of Songs. Compilation and the author's craft in the »Kitāb al-aghānī« of Abū l-Faraj al-Isbahānī*. Richmond: Curzon, forthcoming 2002.

[7] Cf. *Maq* 5.

[8] See my articles *New Results in the Theory of Source-Criticism in Medieval Arabic Literature*, in: Al-Abḥāth 42 (1994), pp. 3–15, esp. 7–11; and *Maqātil Literature in Medieval Islam*, in: Journal of Arabic Literature 25 (1994), pp. 192–212, esp. pp. 205–209.

[9] Many of the earlier – and today lost – works dedicated to the topos of *maqātil* seem to represent rather loose (written) collections of material. The 11 *maqtal* works listed by Ibn al-Nadīm in his *Fihrist*, however, point to somewhat more confined literary compositions and, perhaps, to ›real books‹ in the later understanding of the word. Most of these *maqtal* works are attributed to scholars such as Abū Mikhnaf, Naṣr ibn Muzāḥim al-Minqarī, Haytham ibn ʿAdī, al-Wāqidī, who were both prominent historians and prolific writers. See also Ahmad Ṣaqrs introduction to his edition of the *Maqātil*, pp. k-l.

his intention of compiling this volume and outlining its thematic scope. Furthermore, the book displays internal and external cross-references (i.e. references between chapters that provide the reader with directions; along with three explicit references to the *K. al-Aghānī*).[10] And last but not least, the text was revised and edited by the author himself. This is obvious, for example, from the definite dates the author gives in the introduction and the conclusion of the book for the time when he began and when he completed working on it; these dates tell us that he wrote this book in only one month.

1. Abū l-Faraj's working techniques

As was common practice among the authors of historical and biographical writings at least as of the 2nd/9th century onwards, Abū l-Faraj in his *Maqātil* makes extensive use of the *isnād*. In principle, he was obliged to follow the method of meticulously referring to the sources of information as established by the Ḥadīth scholars. Although consistent in using *isnād*s throughout the book – in contrast, Abū l-Faraj's contemporaries, the man of letters Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889 in Bagdad) and Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih (d. 328/940 in Cordoba), for example, felt much less confined to these conventions – the *Maqātil* displays a number of idiosyncrasies. The latter have caused a modern scholar to note that Abū l-Faraj's »relations to the sources (...) are not easily comprehensible«[11]; and at first glance, it even seems as if the author used his sources in a rather unsystematic way. Of course, observations like these may additionally challenge any historical analytical study of the sources (Germ.: *Quellenstudium*) of a given medieval Arabic compilation, let alone the attempt of reconstructing these materials. Nonetheless, for a better understanding of a medieval compiler's relation to his sources, and for possibly determining them, one may be advised first to try to understand this scholar at work. The clarification of questions as to how this scholar made use of his sources and how he processed the reports, narratives and individual data he incorporated may eventually help to deal with larger issues such as which sources these are and how they might have been transformed.

Regarding the techniques and methods Abū l-Faraj used in compiling his *Maqātil*, some findings shall be outlined here.

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[10] *Maq* 398/7, 616/3, 630/1. See also *QU* 15. The use of cross references by Abū Ḥanīfa al-Dīnawarī (3rd/9th century) in his *Book of Plants* (*K. al-Nabāt*) has been discussed by Thomas Bauer: *Das Pflanzenbuch des Abū Ḥanīfa al-Dīnawarī*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1988, pp. 36 and 79.

[11] Ursula Sezgin: *Abū Miḫnaf. Ein Beitrag zur Historiographie der umaiyadischen Zeit*. Leiden: Brill, 1971, p. 59.

1.1 The use of collective *isnād*s

Most striking in the *Maqātil* is the use of so-called collective *isnād*s. The expression collective *isnād* signifies that a medieval Arabic compiler has listed the chains of transmitters relevant to a certain passage or chapter without the ›body texts‹ or text units (Sing.: *matn*) to which these *isnād*s belong.

For the *Maqātil*, the use of collective *isnād*s is typical. Most times, Abū l-Faraj gives a collective *isnād* at the beginning of a chapter (*bāb*), directly after the genealogy of the Ṭālibid to whom the chapter is dedicated. In the following account, he labels text units, then, only by giving the name of the MAIN AUTHORITY (i.e. the person whom Abū l-Faraj considered most important in terms of the origin and transmission of a particular text unit).[12] In subsequent passages, he identifies these texts attributed to a MAIN AUTHORITY by simply noting »he said (*qāla*)« or »he mentioned (*dhakara*)«.[13] In other words, Abū l-Faraj does not always provide the full *isnād* prior to each quoted piece of text as, for example, his teacher al-Ṭabarī does in his famous *Chronicle* when using collective *isnād*s.

This way of using collective *isnād*s has its consequences for the literary composition of his book. By referring only to the names of MAIN AUTHORITIES within the course of an account, or by simply labeling quotations with *qāla* or *dhakara*,[14] both the portrayal of the events and the presentation of ideas become more compact in their textual shape as well as more flowing and elegant in style. It becomes easier for the medieval compiler to combine information taken from different sources and present the events according to his view and understanding. Though still entirely relying on the data and texts drawn from sources, the accounts – and the manner in which events are portrayed – are much more the compiler's own. He ›writes‹ history.

One even gets the impression that the collective *isnād*s provided Abū l-Faraj with the privileges of more creative writing. As a historian, he gained a larger degree of authorial freedom in arranging historical-biographical material. As a littérateur, he

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[12] Many of the transmitters classified as MAIN AUTHORITIES for the *Maqātil* were active COL-LECTORS of material relevant to Abū l-Faraj's book. In fact, according to the medieval bio-bibliographical dictionaries, most of them were known as writers and authors. Whenever Abū l-Faraj quotes from these old writings and books directly, one may thus call these texts the compiler's ACTUAL SOURCES. For the definitions of these and other terms useful in historical analytical studies of the sources of a given medieval Arabic compilation, see *QU* 74–91 and my article *Source Criticism and Isnād Analysis in Classical Arabic Literature*, in: *History and Historiography in Early Islamic Times*. [= *Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam* IX]. Ed. Lawrence I. Conrad, Princeton: Darwin Press, forthcoming.

[13] Though rather general in their way of appearance, these two expressions are often used as technical terms indicating the compiler's transcribing from a written source.

[14] Al-Ṭabarī uses *qāla, dhakara, rawā* or *ḥuddithtu* to label quotations from books for whose transmission he had not received explicit authorization, see Fuat Sezgin: *Geschichte des Arabischen Schrifttums* [= *GAS*], I. Leiden: Brill, 1967, 324.

obtained flexibility in shaping the text material according to his fine literary taste and ambitions. For Abū l-Faraj, the collective *isnāds* appear to have been a subtle literary device that helped ›liberate‹ his writing from the rules and restrictions which had been set in the first place to regulate the transmission of reports and narratives (sing.: *ḥadīth*) that are of exceptional significance for Islamic faith and practice.[15]

To illustrate this complex relation between compiler, sources, and style of writing, we refer here to the chapter in the *Maqātil* that is dedicated to the Ṭālibid Abū l-Ḥasan Mūsā ibn ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Ḥasan (pp. 390–397).

The collective *isnād* given at the beginning of this chapter (pp. 390–391) shows that the relevant data had reached Abū l-Faraj along three paths of transmission. Abū l-Faraj acknowledges:

(1) *akhbaranī bi-qiṣṣatihī, wa-ḍarbi l-Manṣūri iyyāhu fī l-dafʿati l-ūlā, ʿUmar ibn ʿAbdallāh ibn Jamīl al-ʿAtakī, qāla: ḥaddathanī ʿUmar ibn Shabba ʿan rijālihī: ... .*

[My informant] ʿUmar ibn ʿAbdallāh al-ʿAtakī[16] reported to me his (i.e. the Ṭālibid Mūsā ibn ʿAbdallāh's) story, and al-Manṣūr's beating him in the first group. He (ʿUmar ibn ʿAbdallāh) said: ›ʿUmar ibn Shabba related [this story] to me, relying on his [aforementioned] transmitters: ...‹ .

The collective *isnād* continues as follows:

(2) *wa-nasakhtu min kitāb Aḥmad ibn al-Kharrāz dhālika.*

I copied this [information also] from Aḥmad ibn [al-Ḥārith] al-Kharrāz's book.

Since Abū l-Faraj apparently had neither studied this book with Aḥmad al-Kharrāz nor received from him the obligatory permission which would authorize him to transmit the material contained therein, he states furthermore:

wa-lam asmaʿhū illā anna ʿĪsā ibn al-Ḥusayn dafaʿa l-kitāb alladhī nasakhtu hādhā minhu ilayya, wa-qāla lī: hādhā kitāb Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥārith.

[However,] I did not hear him [transmitting this information]. But ʿĪsā ibn al-Ḥusayn [al-Warrāq] gave me the book from which I have copied this [story], saying to me: ›This is Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥārith's book!‹

Then Abū l-Faraj says:

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[15] The general impact the introduction of collective *isnāds* had on medieval Arabic-Islamic historiography (and on the increasingly ›fine-literary‹ writing style applied by many historians of the 3rd/9th century onwards) has not been studied sufficiently yet. This entire issue, however, seems to be of relevance also for the alternative approaches towards medieval Islamic historiography as suggested in some recent studies. See, for example, Tayeb El-Hibri: *Reinterpreting Islamic historiography: Harun al-Rashid and the narrative of the ʿAbbasid caliphate.* Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

[16] For further verification of medieval scholars and writings referred to in this article, see the annotated catalogue in *QU* 112–230, along with the bibliographical references given there.

(3) *wa-ḥaddathanī fī l-marra al-akhīra Aḥmad ibn ʿAbdallāh ibn ʿAmmār, qāla: ḥaddathanī Muḥammad ibn Abī l-Azhar, qāla: akhbaranā ʿUmar ibn Khalaf al-Ḍarīr, qāla: ḥaddathanī Buthayna al-Shaybānī.*

The last time [I came across this information was when] Aḥmad ibn ʿAbdallāh Ibn Ammār told me his (i.e. the Ṭālibid Mūsā ibn ʿAbdallāh's) story.

The collective *isnād* concludes:

wa-qad dakhala baʿḍu l-ḥadīthi fī baʿḍin »wa-suqtu khabarahū fīhi«.[17]
Some parts of the narration (*ḥadīth*) [taken from different sources] were integrated one into another, »and I have given the news about him (i.e. the Ṭālibid Mūsā ibn ʿAbdallāh) in it (i.e. the following account)«.

In the subsequent account, Abū l-Faraj switches several times between these three sources, combining passages drawn from all of them. Thus, he creates an account that can be viewed as representing best the author's own understanding of the events. Nonetheless, each major quotation is labeled with the name of the authority primarily responsible for its transmission. The authorities are the historian ʿUmar ibn Shabba (d. 263/876 in Samarra), the historian and man of letters Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥārith (d. 258/872 in Kufa; relying on his teacher al-Madāʾinī), and the historian Aḥmad ibn ʿUbaydallāh ibn ʿAmmār al-Kātib al-Thaqafī (d. ca. 314/926 in Kufa). All these Shīʿite scholars are known as authors of texts that were directly accessible to Abū l-Faraj in one way or another. Shortly before the end of this chapter (p. 396), however, Abū l-Faraj says:

wa-hādhā laysa min hādhā l-bāb, wa-lākinna l-ḥadītha dhū shujūnin, wa-l-shayʾu yudhkaru bi-l-shayʾi.
This (i.e. the following stories) is not part [of the topic] of this chapter. However, the narration [naturally] drifts from one topic to another while one thing is recalled by another [to which it is related].

At this point, Abū l-Faraj introduces a new source (4): It is Aḥmad ibn (Muḥammad ibn) Saʿīd al-Hamdānī (d. 333/944 in Kufa), one of his most important INFORMANTS and TEACHERS for the *Maqātil*. Aḥmad al-Hamdānī is known as a learned Shīʿite biographer, historian and writer. Abū l-Faraj gives the *isnād* with the transmitters on whom Aḥmad al-Hamdānī relied. These are Yaḥyā ibn al-Ḥasan [al-ʿAlawī] (d. 277/890 in Mecca) – Ismāʿīl ibn Yaʿqūb – ʿAbdallāh ibn Mūsā (the son of) – Mūsā ibn ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Ḥasan (i.e. the Ṭālibid to whom this chapter is dedicated). It is the latter himself who is then quoted with a lively report on an occasion when he, as a young boy, went with his father to see the first ʿAbbāsid caliph Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Saffāḥ. Abū l-Faraj adds that none of his other sources contained this eyewitness report. For this reason, as it seems, the mention of Aḥmad ibn Saʿīd's *isnād* in full length is needed. Thus he acknowledges the use of a source that was not given in the collective *isnād* at the beginning of the chapter.

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[17] The remarks given in »quotation marks« are indicated by the editor of the *Maqātil* as being based on only one of the manuscripts he used for the edition.

Only a few lines further, at the beginning of the conclusive passage of the chapter, Abū l-Faraj refers again to Aḥmad al-Hamdānī. Here he mentions the latter's *isnād* together with the *isnād* of ʿUmar ibn ʿAbdallāh [al-ʿAtakī] – ʿUmar ibn Shabba – ʿĪsā ibn ʿAbdallāh (see above collective *isnād*, see no. 1). Abū l-Faraj concludes with a poem about the protagonist of the chapter: the Ṭālibid Mūsā ibn ʿAbdallāh. Again, Abū l-Faraj states that it was Aḥmad ibn Saʿīd who had recited the poem to him, relying on Yaḥyā ibn al-Ḥasan. From this information it becomes obvious that for the entire final part of this chapter Abū l-Faraj relied exclusively on Aḥmad ibn Saʿīd – Yaḥyā ibn al-Ḥasan.

1.2 Appraisal of sources

An aspect of Abū l-Faraj's working method that particularly contributes to depicting him as a ›creative writer and author‹ rather than a ›traditional collector and (re-)organizer of data‹ is related to the numerous comments he makes on his sources. These assessments of sources are particularly striking whenever he points out differences or similarities in the material transmitted to him;[18] when he expressly mentions whether an item of information is correct or incorrect;[19] or when he criticizes reports that he considers weak in terms of their contents and/or the chain of transmitters attached to them.[20] At times, he thus verifies and occasionally explains information relevant to the transmission of a text,[21] rectifies mistakes,[22] and makes remarks that expressly state or even support the completeness of a tradition vis-à-vis comparable other ones.[23] Occasionally he informs the reader that he refrains from quoting certain traditions or reports,[24] or distances himself from not generally approved information.[25] Sometimes he even feels free to say that he prefers a certain report to another which contains similar data.[26]

These comments are most frequently given after a collective *isnād*. At times, however, they are attached at the end of the presentation of a topic (and, as it seems, especially when the sources differ substantially from each other in terms of subject matter or tendency). Furthermore, taking the focused scope of the *Maqātil* for granted, authorial remarks of this sort also facilitate abridgment (*naqṣ*), synopsis (*ikhtiṣār*) or expansion (*ziyāda*) of accounts that the author felt needed to be made.[27]

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[18] *Maq* 31/2, 33/16, 170/8, 229/12, 245/8, 311/8, 480/16, 489/1, 552/6.
[19] *Maq* 78/9, 79/1, 79/6, 79/14, 179/5, 201/13, 335/9, 343/15, 625/3.
[20] *Maq* 68/15, 78/8, 170/11.
[21] *Maq* 78/8, 80/9, 413/16.
[22] *Maq* 50/5, 78/8, 201/12.
[23] *Maq* 27/9, 372/14, 605/7.
[24] *Maq* 81/11, 168/7.
[25] *Maq* 593/4.
[26] *Maq* 26/6, 67/11.
[27] *Maq* 177/7, 234/5, 456/9.

2. The nature of the sources

Not only in terms of the history of Arabic literature and scholarly writing is it of significance to ascertain which and what kind of sources a given medieval Arabic writer used; it is important for historical research, too. For the purpose of identifying the sources Abū l-Faraj relied on for the *Maqātil*, the determination of three major categories was useful: 1) oral sources, including material processed by ›aural‹ transmission; 2) written sources, which are related to the former, and include: 3) named written sources, i.e. written sources whose use was acknowledged by giving a) the name of their compilers, authors, copyist, or owners, or even b) by providing a book title. However, it may have become clear already that these categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

2.1 ›Oral‹ sources & aural transmission

There are only a few indications in the *Maqātil* that specifically point to Abū l-Faraj's relying on (PURELY) ORAL SOURCES, or incorporating texts he had memorized without taking notes. That he did make use of material transmitted to him orally is shown, for example, by a statement given in the chapter on the Ṭālibid ʿĪsā ibn Zayd ibn ʿAlī (pp. 405–428).[28] Abū l-Faraj says:

> *ḥaddathanā Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Saʿīd ʿalā sabīl al-mudhākara, fa-ḥafiẓtuhū ʿanhu wa-lam aktubhu min lafẓihī; wa-l-ḥadīth yazīdu wa-yanquṣu wa-l-maʿnā wāḥid (Maq 408).*
> Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Saʿīd related [this] to us by means of ›consultation‹.[29] So I memorized it from him, but I did not write down his words literally. However, narration [in general terms] can be lengthy or short while the meaning is [still] the same.

On a few other occasions, Abū l-Faraj states that he incorporated information that was related to him orally. To be more precise, it was related to him by means of AURAL TRANSMISSION.[30] The following statements indicate this common form of instruction in medieval Islam: from one of al-Zuhrī's books (perhaps his *K. al-Maghāzī* or his *K. Nasab al-Quraysh*), Abū l-Faraj quotes in the form of the so-called *qirāʾa*:[31]

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[28] This chapter is part of the section on the reign of Abū ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad al-Mahdī (r. 158–169/775–785, the third ʿAbbāsid caliph who had »attempted to heal the rift which had developed in the family of the Prophet between the ʿAbbāsids and the ʿAlids)«; see *EI²* V, 1238.

[29] For the term *mudhākara*, see below, fn. 34.

[30] The term AURAL came to be seen as useful in historical analytical studies of the sources of medieval Arabic compilations because it values both the written material (on which most lectures, seminars and tutorials were based) as well as the actual way of teaching this material (by reading aloud from a written text while the students listen, memorize and perhaps take notes); see also Günther, *Source Criticism* (fn. 12) 5.

[31] *GAS*, I, 59, 240; and *QU* 45.

wa-quriʾa bi-ḥaḍratī ʿalā Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Jaʿd al-Washshāʾ, qīla: ḥaddathakum (...)
ʿan Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī fī khabar Jaʿfar ibn Abī Ṭālib (...) (Maq 10).

[The material] was read to Aḥmad ibn al-Jaʿd al-Washshāʾ while I was present. It was said: it was related to you (...) , on the authority of Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī, the news of Jaʿfar ibn Abī Ṭālib (...).

On another occasion, he states:

hādhihī riwāyatu l-Ḍaḥḥāk ibn ʿUthmān. Wa-mā aʿlamu aḥadan min ahli l-sīrati dhakara
anna Muḥammad ibn Jaʿfar qatīlu ʿUbaydallāh ibn ʿUmar, wa-lā samiʿtu li-Muḥammad fī
kitābi aḥadin minhum (i.e.: min ahl al-sīra) dhikra maqtalin. (Maq 22).

This is al-Ḍaḥḥāk ibn ʿUthmān's narrative. However, I do not know anybody from amongst the biographers who mentioned that Muḥammad ibn Jaʿfar was killed by ʿUbaydallāh ibn ʿUmar, nor have I learned[32] concerning Muḥammad [ibn Jaʿfar] from any book of theirs (i.e. the books of the biographers) the mention of a killing.

This information indicates that Abū 1-Faraj was relying here on a number of biographical ›writings‹ or ›books‹ that he presumably had studied with his teachers. Thus the somewhat odd expression *samiʿtu fī kitāb* turns out to reveal vividly the very characteristic of learning and teaching in medieval Islam: the close and on-going interaction of oral/aural and written transmission of knowledge. Similar associations are provoked by the following statement:

wa-qad dhakara Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī ibn Ḥamza [fī kitābihī] anna (...), wa-mā samiʿtu bi-
hādhā [l-khabar] min ghayrihī (i.e. Muḥammad [...]), wa-lā raʾaytu li-Ibrāhīm fī shayʾin min
kutubi l-ansābi dhikran (Maq 87).

Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī ibn Ḥamza mentioned [in his book – which was at Abū 1-Faraj's disposal as the *isnād*-analyses has proven][33] that (...). However, I have not learned/heard this from anybody else except from him, nor have I seen concerning Ibrāhīm any mention in the books of genealogy.

Furthermore, the frequent occurrence of the term *mudhākara* (conversation, consultation, memorization) in the *Maqātil* points to the fact that the young scholar Abū 1-Faraj (he was only 28 years old when he finished his book) used to attend tutorials or consultations. Tutorials and consultations commonly took place either prior to or after lectures. Based on the teacher's lecture notes or the notes the students had taken themselves, these sessions served to deepen the students' knowledge of a certain topic, and to allow them to discuss and memorize the material presented in a lecture.[34]

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[32] As is known, the verb *samiʿa* means in the first place ›to hear‹ and ›to listen‹. However, it means also ›to learn of (something)‹ and consequently ›to know‹. The latter meaning is supported by the qurʾānic use of the root *s-m-ʿ*. For the so-called written *samāʿ* as a special technique of transmitting knowledge in medieval Islam, see Gregor Schoeler: *Die Frage der schriftlichen und mündlichen Überlieferung der Wissenschaften im frühen Islam*, in: Der Islam 62 (1985), 201–230, esp. 209–214; and *QU* 44–48.

[33] See *QU* 190–191.

[34] »Al-Mudhākara (...) originally an innovation of students, was an informal exchange of Ḥadīth

2.2 References to written sources

In the *Maqātil* as well as later in the *Aghānī*,[35] the direct use of written texts is acknowledged by the author. Striking are formulations such as:

nasakhtu min kitāb (or: *khaṭṭ* [...]) – I transcribed/copied from the piece of writing/book (or: [manu]script) of (...);[36]

kataba ilayya (...) – he wrote to me;[37]

wajadtu fī kitāb (...)*/bi-khaṭṭ* (...) – I came across [this information] in the writing/book of (...) [and transcribed it]; or: in the handwritten text/[manu]script of (...); or: written by (...) [and transcribed it];[38]

katabtu (...) *ʿanhu* (...) – I wrote down [this information] on the authority of (...); or: I copied [this information] from the writing/book of (...);[39]

qaraʾtu (...) *fī kitāb* (...)*/fī baʿḍ al-kutub* (...) – I read [this information] in the piece of writing/book of (...); or: (...) in some writings/books of (...).[40]

As mentioned, Abū l-Faraj many times introduces information simply by *qāla*,[41] *rawā*, and *dhakara* or *dhakara/dhukira* (...) *fī* (...). By this, he usually labels quotations of larger fragments of text that he copied from written sources. More specifically and apart from *qāla*, Abū l-Faraj uses the term *dhakara* (at least 41 times) to indicate that he has transcribed information from a piece of writing that he apparently had not studied with a teacher (*kitāba*).[42]

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among themselves, characterized by recapitulation and review. It had no fixed time, place or form. (...) Through the years, it developed into an institution, with rules and regulations of its own«; cf. Munir-ud-Din Ahmad: *The institution of al-Mudhākara*, in: ZDMG, Suppl. I/2 (1969), 595–603, here 595. Further examples are: *ḥaddathanī Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī ibn Mahdī bi-l-Kūfa ʿalā sabīl al-mudhākara* (...) (*Maq* 131) and *ḥaddathanā Muḥammad ibn al-ʿAbbās al-Yāzijī ʿalā sabīl al-mudhākara, qāla: ḥaddathanī ʿammī ʿan abīhi ʿan jaddihī Abī Muḥammad al-Yāzijī, fī-mā arā, qāla* (...). (*Maq* 338).

[35] In the *Aghānī*, Abū l-Faraj uses *nasakhtu*; *qaraʾtu*; *wajadtu*; *fī kitāb* (...); *qāla* (...) *fī kitāb*; *dhakarahū* (...) *fī* (...); *fī kitāb* (...); and above all *nasakhtu min kitāb* (...), see Leon Zolondek: *The sources of the K. al-Aġānī*, in: Arabica 8 (1961), pp. 294–308, esp. p. 301, and the comprehensive study by Manfred Fleischhammer: *Quellenuntersuchungen zum Kitāb al-Aġānī*. Halle/Saale (Habilitationsschrift) 1965, pp. 17⁺ and 18⁺; as well as his article *Hinweise auf schriftliche Quellen im K. al-Aġānī*, in: Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg. Gesellschafts- und Sprachwissenschaftliche Reihe 28 (1979), pp. 53–62. Furthermore, see Dāwūd Sallūm: *K. al-Aghānī. Maṣādiruhū wa-asānīduhū*, in: Majallat Kulliyyat al-Ādāb [fī Jāmiʿat Baghdād] 12 (1969), pp. 175–202, esp. p. 178.

[36] *Maq* 390/15, 410/14, 442/17, 579/1, 620/2.

[37] *Maq* 484/11, 518/2, 556/9, 645/10, 689/6, 645/10.

[38] *Maq* 384/4, 442/17.

[39] *Maq* 14/1, 442/14.

[40] *Maq* 10/10, 296/13, 364/11.

[41] For *qāla* in the *Aghānī*, see Fleischhammer, *Quellenuntersuchungen* (fn. 35), 18⁺.

[42] *Maq* 29/5, 72/6, 85/11, 86/14, 87/2, 87/6, 87/11, 89/7, 92/10, 92/13, 93/13, 94/6, 94/11, 94/13,

3. ›Naming‹ sources

In the *Maqātil*, Abū l-Faraj only coincidentally names his written sources. Only two books are quoted by title. The way he refers to them, however, is rather odd though not unusual for medieval scholars: To Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq's *K. al-Maghāzī*, he refers as follows:

> I read that from the *Book on The Military Expeditions* to Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, and he confirmed it. I said: »Muḥammad ibn Ḥumayd al-Rāzī told you: ›Salama told us on the authority of Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq that (...)‹.« (*Maq* 10).

The other named book is the *K. [Waqʿat] Ṣiffīn* by Naṣr ibn Muzāḥim al-Minqarī (d. 212/827). Its title is given within an *isnād*:

> Aḥmad ibn ʿĪsā ibn Abī Mūsā al-ʿIjlī related to me the information on the killing of ʿUbayd-allāh ibn ʿUmar from the *Book on Ṣiffīn*. He said: »al-Ḥusayn ibn Naṣr ibn Muzāḥim told us, he said: ›My father told us, he said: ›ʿUmar ibn Saʿd[43] al-Baṣrī told us on the authority of Abū Mikhnaf Lūṭ ibn Yaḥyā al-Azdī, [and he] on the authority of Jaʿfar, [and he] on the authority of al-Qāsim, [and he] on the authority of Zayd ibn ʿAlqama, [and he] on the authority of Zayd ibn Badr. He said: (...)‹.« (*Maq* 22).

Abū l-Faraj refers to written sources also by just giving the names of their authors and transmitters. For example:

> – the book/piece of writing (*kitāb, khaṭṭ*) of Hārūn ibn Muḥammad ibn ʿAbdalmalik al-Zayyāt;[44] or
> – the book/[manu]script of Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥārith al-Kharrāz.[45]

Direct access to writings (and purely written transmission of their contents) is expressed in various ways:

> – al-Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī al-Washshāʾ reported to us in his piece of writing (or: letter?, which he sent) to me (*fī kitābihī ilayya*); (...) he said (...);[46]

126/10, 60/9, 164/6, 167/5, 170/8, 176/7, 176/8, 188/10, 189/4, 190/5, 228/1, 229/12, 316/3, 412/13, 451/14, 490/1, 497/5, 506/6, 540/7, 541/1, 552/6, 556/11, 566/7, 570/9, 588/7, 593/3, 633/7.

[43] The printed text has Saʿīd.

[44] *Maq* 410/14, 620/2. Hārūn ibn Muḥammad al-Zayyāt was an *akhbārī* and student of ʿUmar ibn Shabba (d. 263/876); *QU* 166–67.

[45] The latter was most likely the review of a book by al-Madāʾinī (cf. *Maq* 296/12, 390/15, 443/1); Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥārith al-Kharrāz (258/872 in Kufa) was a historian and littérateur, see *QU* 118–121.

[46] *Maq* 31/11. al-Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī al-Washshāʾ al-Bajalī (d. 224/839) was a well-known Shīʿite transmitter (*muḥaddith*) and collector of traditions; frequently he is quoted by Abū l-Faraj directly, see *QU* 173.

– al-Mundhir ibn Muḥammad reported [this material] to me in his piece of writing, granting [me] his permission to transmit it on his authority (*fī kitābihī ilayya bi-ijāzatihī*) (...),[47] or
– (...) and I added to this what Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī ibn Ḥamza mentioned in his book (*wa-aḍaftu ilā dhālika mā dhakarahū Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī ibn Ḥamza fī kitābihī*).[48]

At least 25 times, Abū l-Faraj identifies the origin of sources by stating that »news/a report (*khabar*)« or »narrative, account (*riwāya, ḥadīth*)« is so-and-so's. Examples are:

This is al-Ḍaḥḥāk ibn ʿUthmān's account (*riwāya*) (*Maq* 22/5)[49] – Abū Mikhnaf's account (*riwāya*) (*Maq* 72/7)[50] – The report/news (*khabar*) Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān [al-Bāghandī] told me (*Maq* 80/9) – Al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār said in his report (*khabar*) (*Maq* 303/7)[51] – ʿUmar ibn Shabba said in his report (*khabar*) (*Maq* 366/14)[52] – Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥārith mentioned in his account (*riwāya*) (*Maq* 451/14).

4. Conclusions

Abū l-Faraj commonly makes use of a collective *isnād* whenever he combines information from different sources in an account of his own. Remarkably, he incorporates entire segments of reports and narratives by just copying them from his written sources. He labels these quotations then with the name of the relevant main authority.

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[47] *Maq* 133/7. al-Mundhir ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Mundhir al-Qābūsī (d. at the beginning of the 4th/10th c.) was a prolific Shīʿite historian and author from Kufa; Abū l-Faraj transcribed information from at least one of his books, see *QU* 210–211.

[48] *Maq* 165/8. Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī ibn Ḥamza al-ʿAlawī al-Hāshimī (d. 287/900) was a ʿAlid historian and poet; he is known to be the author of a *K. Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyīn* from which Abū l-Faraj transcribed information directly, see *QU* 190/91.

[49] Al-Ḍaḥḥāk al-Qurashī (d. 180/796 in Medina): appointed by Hārūn al-Rashīd as head of Medina, famous *akhbārī*; Abū l-Faraj indicates that he directly quotes his account on the *Maqtal Muḥammad ibn Jaʿfar*, since it was the only alternative one he had come across, see *QU* 155.

[50] Lūṭ ibn Yaḥyā Abū Mikhnaf al-Azdī (d.157/774): well-known Shīʿite collector of traditions and author of more than 40 books and writings. Abū l-Faraj quotes from him numerous passages. However, he transcribes them from books by later authors to which he had direct access, see *QU* 181–184.

[51] Al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār al-Qurashī (d. 256/870 in Mecca): genealogist, historian and author; in later years judge in Mecca; the material (most probably) drawn from his genealogical-historical book on the Quraysh was transmitted to Abū l-Faraj by one of al-Zubayr's students, see *QU* 229–230.

[52] ʿUmar ibn Shabba (d. 263/876): historian, poet, collector of traditions and productive writer. He is Abū l-Faraj's MOST FREQUENTLY QUOTED OLDER TRANSMITTER in the *Maqātil*. However, Abū l-Faraj used the material originating from ʿUmar ibn Shabbas writings indirectly, i.e. it was transmitted to Abū l-Faraj by his three main informants for the *Maqātil*; see *QU* 220–225.

As a computer-based analysis of the *isnād*s of the text of the *Maqātil* has shown, Abū l-Faraj studied for his *Maqātil* with 53 persons. His most important informants and teachers are the following:

ʿUmar ibn ʿAbdallāh al-ʿAtakī (first half 4th/10th c.)	mentioned 171
Yaḥyā ibn ʿAlī al-Munajjim (d. 300/912)	138
Aḥmad (ibn Muḥammad) ibn Saʿīd al-Hamdānī (d. 333/944)	120
Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Ushnānī (d. 315/927)	49
Aḥmad ibn ʿUbaydallāh ibn ʿAmmār al-Thaqafī (d. 314/926)	47
Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Jawharī (first half of the 4th/10th cent.)	39
ʿAlī ibn Ibrāhīm al-ʿAlawī (first half of the 4th/10th cent.)	35 times.

Eight of Abū l-Faraj's INFORMANTS are mentioned only once. Most of his INFORMANTS were natives of Baghdad and Kufa or had stayed at these centers of Muslim learning for a long time. Almost ten percent of his INFORMANTS are member of the extended family of the Prophet (ʿAlawids). This is corroborated by a) the historical settings at that time (the Shīʿa was well-represented especially in Kufa), and b) the dedication of the *Maqātil* to Shīʿite history. Also, a considerable number of Abū l-Faraj's INFOR-MANTS were booksellers, clerks or perfume vendors. This has been proven by a) the information given in the medieval bio-bibliographical dictionaries, b) the statements made by the medieval biographers about Abū l-Faraj, and c) the names of Abū l-Fa-raj's INFORMANTS and TEACHERS (in 10% of the cases). Thus, Abū l-Faraj is very likely to have selected the majority of the writings and books he relied on for the *Maqātil* at the book-market in Baghdad, the city where he studied and spent most of his life. Indications that point to Abū l-Faraj's relying exclusively on ›oral‹ sources are rare.

Only on a few occasions does Abū l-Faraj expressly name his written sources, and only two books are mentioned by title. The names of authors or transmitters of wri-tings, however, are given more frequently. Several times the use of written materials is acknowledged by statements such as »I copied from the writing/book of (...)«, or »so-and-so wrote to me (...)«. Nonetheless, most of the older writings directly quoted by Abū l-Faraj seem to represent more recent copies and recensions of older books; it is rather unlikely that Abū Faraj had autographs of older works at hand.

The majority of these ACTUAL, WRITTEN SOURCES of Abū l-Faraj's are to be ascribed to scholars from the end of 8th to the middle of 9th centuries. This group of scholars includes well-known historians and authors such as:

ʿUmar ibn Shabba al-Numayrī (d. 264/877)	mentioned 311
Yaḥyā ibn al-Ḥasan al-ʿAlawī (d. 277/890)	89
Abū Mikhnaf (d. 157/774)	57
al-Madāʾinī (d. 235/850)	49
Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥārith al-Kharrāz (d. 258/872)	29
ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad al-Nawfalī (d. 204/819)	20
ʿAbbād ibn Yaʿqūb al-Rawājinī (d. 250/864)	19

al-Faḍl ibn Dukayn Abū Nuʿaym al-Mulāʾī (d. 219/834)   14

Muḥammad ibn ʿUmar al-Wāqidī (d. 207/823)   14

Naṣr ibn Muzāḥim al-Minqarī (d. 212/827)   13

al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār al-Qurashī (d. 256/870)   13 times.

In general, many of Abū l-Faraj's written sources bear titles that provide clear evidence of the great interest the Shīʿite scholars of the second and third centuries of Islam had in the *maqātil* topic. The following writings are those that have been identified as being VERIFIABLY USED by Abū l-Faraj:

a) More recent written sources, directly used by Abū l-Faraj, are:

K. Akhbār Abī Ḥanīfa wa-musnadihī by Abū l-Faraj's INFORMANT Aḥmad (ibn Muḥammad) ibn Saʿīd al-Hamdānī (d. 333/944 in Kufa)

K. Akhbār Ṣāḥib Fakhkh by the INFORMANT ʿAlī ibn Ibrāhīm al-ʿAlawī (still alive in the first half of 4th/10th cent.)

K. Akhbār Yaḥyā ibn ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Ḥasan by ʿAlī ibn Ibrāhīm al-ʿAlawī

K. Man rawā ʿan Zayd ibn ʿAlī wa-musnadihī by Aḥmad (ibn Muḥammad) ibn Saʿīd al-Hamdānī

Kitāb [Man qutila min al-Ṭālibiyyīn ?] by Aḥmad (ibn Muḥammad) ibn Saʿīd al-Hamdānī

K. Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyīn by Aḥmad ibn ʿUbaydallāh al-Thaqafī al-Kātib (d. 314/926 in Kufa)

K. Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyīn by Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī ibn Ḥamza al-ʿAlawī (287/900)

K. al-Shīʿa min aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth by Aḥmad (ibn Muḥammad) al-Hamdānī

K. Ṣulḥ al-Ḥasan wa-Muʿāwiya by Aḥmad (ibn Muḥammad) al-Hamdānī.

b) Older written sources used by Abū l-Faraj:

K. Akhbār Abī Ṭālib wa-wuldihī by al-Madāʾinī

K. Akhbār Muḥammad wa-Ibrāhīm ibnay ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Ḥasan al-Hāshimī al-Qurashī by ʿUmar ibn Shabba

K. Man qutila min al-Ṭālibiyyīn by al-Madāʾinī

K. al-Manṣūr by ʿUmar ibn Shabba

K. Maʿrifa fī maʿrifat al-ṣaḥāba by ʿAbbād ibn Yaʿqūb al-Rawājinī

K. Maqtal al-Ḥusayn by Abū Mikhnaf

K. Maqtal al-Ḥusayn by al-Wāqidī

Maqtal al-Ḥusayn by Naṣr ibn Muzāḥim al-Minqarī.

K. Maqtal ʿAlī [ibn Abī Ṭālib] by Abū Mikhnaf

K. Mawlid al-Ḥasan wa-l-Ḥusayn wa-maqtal al-Ḥusayn by al-Wāqidī

K. Nasab Āl Abī Ṭālib by Yaḥyā ibn al-Ḥasan al-ʿAqīqī al-ʿAlawī (d. 277/890)[53]

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[53] For a recently discovered unique manuscript entitled *Fī tasmiyat man aʿqaba min wuld Amīr al-Muminīn Abī al-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn Ṭālib ʿalayhi l-salām, taʾlīf Abī l-Ḥusayn Yaḥyā ibn al-Ḥasan ibn Jaʿfar ibn ʿUbaydallāh ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib,* see Hans Daiber: *Catalogue of the Arabic Manuscripts in the Daiber Collection,* Institute of the Oriental Culture, University of Tokyo, Tokyo: Document Center for Asian Studies, 1988, p. 127.

K. Nasab Quraysh wa-akhbārihā by al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār (d. 256/870)

Kitāb [Tarīkh (...)] by ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad an-Nawfalī (d. between 246/860 and 256/870)[54]

K. Waqʿat Ṣiffīn by Naṣr ibn Muẓāḥim

K. Zayd ibn ʿAlī by Abū Mikhnaf.

Though the individual pieces of information given in this article might appear simply to be details, they open a direct window into the world of 10th century Arabic scholarship. In an astonishingly definite manner, they provide us with an idea of who Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī was, how he lived and worked. They let us picture a young scholar who is as hard working as he is talented, full of enthusiasm, ambition and scholarly vision. While collecting and studying the material for his *Maqātil*, he builds up his own library. His working space gets filled with valuable copies of books and other manuscripts which he has obtained at the Baghdad book-market, along with the copies of manuscripts and the notes he himself has prepared in lectures, seminars and tutorials. These writings are the major sources he consults, transcribes and quotes. Once he actually starts writing his book, he works day and night. At the end of the book, he is able to acknowledge that he has completed it in only one month. Yet, he has already another project in mind, to which he expressly draws the reader's attention: it is an undertaking of the magnitude of *The Great Book of Songs*. Nonetheless, it is the scholar's outstanding literary *œuvre* as a whole that has made many later generations celebrate his contributions to medieval Arabic literature and culture.

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[54] See also my article *Al-Nawfalī's lost History. A Shiite source used by al-Ṭabarī and Abū l-Faraj*, in: *Tabari: The Historian and His Work*, ed. Hugh N. Kennedy, Princeton: Darwin Press, forthcoming.