

## ANNALI DI CA' FOSCARI

*Direttore responsabile*  
Giuliano Tamani

### *Comitato di redazione*

Serie occidentale: Eugenio Bernardi, Maria Teresa Biason, Costantino Di Paola, Mario Eusebi, Anco Marzio Mutterle, Lucia Omacini, Eloisa Paganelli, Giannantonio Paladini, Sergio Perosa, Carlos Romero.

Serie orientale: Adriana Boscaro, Giovanni Canova, Mariola Offredi, Maurizio Scarpari, Giuliano Tamani, Boghos L. Zekian.

### *Direzione e redazione*

Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia  
Dipartimento di Studi eurasiatichi  
San Polo 2035 - I 30125 Venezia - tel. 041/5287687 - 5287220

### *Amministrazione*

Studio Editoriale Programma - Piazzetta I. Nievo 3/bis - 35121 Padova -  
tel. 049.8753110

### *Editore*

Editoriale Programma - Piazzetta I. Nievo 3/bis - 35121 Padova

### *Fotocomposizione*

Studio Editoriale Gordini - Via Crescini 96 - 35126 - Padova

### *Stampa*

Grafiche T.P.M. - Via Vigonovese, 52/a - 35020 Padova

© Copyright 1975 Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia

### *Abbonamento*

L. 185.000 - Estero \$ 135 - Prezzo del presente volume: L. 50.000.  
Il prezzo dell'abbonamento va versato sul c.c.p. n. 11646353 intestato a Studio Editoriale Programma o a mezzo vaglia postale, assegno bancario o circolare, o direttamente a mezzo bonifico sul conto dell'editore n. 22834, agenzia 1 di Padova della Banca Antoniana Popolare Veneta.

### *Inserzioni pubblicitarie*

Sono possibili inserzioni pubblicitarie dopo l'approvazione della direzione della Rivista, al prezzo di L. 200.000 per una pagina e di L. 120.000 per mezza pagina, impianti eventuali esclusi.

Dal 1962 (a. I) al 1967 (a. VI) gli «Annali di Ca' Foscari» sono stati stampati con periodicità annuale; dal 1968 (a. VII) al 1969 (a. VIII) con periodicità semestrale; dal 1970 (a. IX) con periodicità quadrimestrale: ai due volumi della serie occidentale, indicati con i numeri 1 e 2, è stato aggiunto un terzo volume (n. 3) dedicato alla serie orientale.

È vietato riprodurre articoli, notizie e informazioni pubblicati sugli «Annali di Ca' Foscari» senza indicare la fonte.

Gli autori sono responsabili degli articoli firmati.

Autorizzazione n. 364 del Presidente del Tribunale di Venezia, 25 ottobre 1963.

### *Avvertenza per gli autori*

I dattiloscritti da presentare alla rivista vanno indirizzati a:  
Direzione degli «Annali di Ca' Foscari»  
Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia  
San Polo 2035 - I 30125 Venezia

ISSN 1125-3762

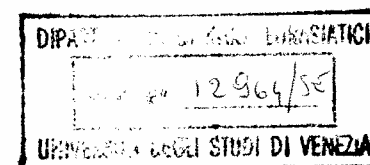
## ANNALI DI CA' FOSCARI

RIVISTA DELLA FACOLTÀ  
DI LINGUE E LETTERATURE STRANIERE  
DELL'UNIVERSITÀ CA' FOSCARI  
DI VENEZIA

XXXVIII, 3

1999

(Serie orientale 30)



Editoriale Programma

AUTHORS, SUBJECTS AND FAME  
IN THE *KITĀB AL-FIHRIST* OF IBN AL-NADĪM:  
THE CASE OF AL-ṬABARĪ AND AL-ṢŪLĪ\*

The aim of this paper is to suggest a possible approach to one of the fundamental works of medieval Arabic literature, the *Kitāb al-fihrist* by Muḥammad b. Ishāq al-Nadīm (d. 385/995 or 388/998)<sup>1</sup>. The case studies for analysis will be two of the most prominent residents of Baghdad in the late third/ninth and early fourth/tenth centuries: Abū Bakr al-Ṣūlī (d. 335/947) and Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), who are among the most frequently mentioned scholars in the *Fihrist*. These examples will show how a work more loosely structured than *ṭabaqāt* can be analysed from an internal point of view and yield interesting results.

The uniqueness of the *Fihrist*, both in its aims and structure and in its completeness, has always been recognised<sup>2</sup>, and the information contained in it has been extensively used. However, the usual way in which the book has been approached by secondary literature is that of an encyclopaedia

\* I thank Dr Julia Bray and Dr Angus Stewart for patient proofreading and useful advice.

<sup>1</sup> For biographical details on Ibn al-Nadīm, cf. the entry on him by J.W. FÜCK in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edition, Leiden - Paris, E.J. Brill - Maisonneuve, 1960-. Cf. also F. SEZGIN, *Geschichte des Arabischen Schrifttums*, 9 vols., Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1967-1984, vol. I, pp. 385-388.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. for example F. Sezgin who calls the *Fihrist* «die älteste und vielleicht die einzige arabische Literaturgeschichte» (*GAS* I, 386). More recently, cf. H. PREISLER, «Ordnungsprinzipien im *Fihrist*», in *Ibn al-Nadīm und die mittelalterliche arabische Literatur: Beiträge zum 1. Johann Wilhelm Fück-Kolloquium* (Halle 1987), ed. M. Fleischhammer und Stefan Leder, 38-43, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 1996, where he names a number of scholars who similarly attempted to put the mass of existing information in order, for which work patronage was always ready. He also highlights the different orientations of such works, and that none of them is as complete (from the point of view of branches of knowledge treated) as the *Fihrist*.

to consult, as if Ibn al-Nadīm's scholarship were exactly the same as Brockelmann and Sezgin's<sup>3</sup>. The Tajaddud edition and B. Dodge's translation in the early seventies<sup>4</sup> prompted a new series of studies on single chapters or sections of the book<sup>5</sup>, and also a few evaluations of it in more general terms<sup>6</sup>. The present work aims at being part of both groups, to attempt to bring two methods together: that of «seeing what the *Fihrist* says on» a certain personage or discipline or particular issue, and that of examining the priorities given by Ibn al-Nadīm and the different ways in which he conceived and approached different subjects and authors.

<sup>3</sup> An example of this is the fact that the two volumes of the *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature* concerning the Abbasid era quote the *Fihrist* on many occasions, for information on this or that scholar or poet, but do not devote a single paragraph to the book itself or to its author (cf. M.J.L. YOUNG, J.D. LATHAM and R.B. SERJEANT, eds., *Religion, Learning and Science in the 'Abbasid Period*, The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990; JULIA ASHTIANY BRAY, T.M. JOHNSTONE, J.D. LATHAM, R.B. SERJEANT and G. REX SMITH, eds., *'Abbasid Belles Lettres*, The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. IBN AL-NADĪM, MUHAMMAD B. ISHĀQ (d. 385/995), *Kitāb al-fihrist*, ed. Riḍā Tajaddud, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Tehran, 1973/1393; IBN AL-NADĪM, MUHAMMAD B. ISHĀQ, *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm*, ed. Bayard Dodge, translated by Bayard Dodge, 2 vols, New York, Columbia University Press, 1970. In this paper, unless otherwise specified, I cite the pagination of the Tajaddud edition and I provide my translation.

<sup>5</sup> Besides the article by H. Preissler, the volume mentioned in note 2 above contains several other studies: J. VAN ESS, «Die Mu'tazilitenbiographien im *Fihrist* und die mu'tazilitische biographische Tradition», 1-6; PJOTR A. GRJAZNEWITSCH, «Südarabien im *Fihrist* von Ibn an-Nadīm», 38-43; STEFAN LEDER, «Grenzen der Rekonstruktion alten Schrifttums nach den Angaben im *Fihrist*», 21-31; WALERIJ W. POLOSIN, «Die Erforschung des *Fihrist* von Ibn an-Nadīm nach J. Fück und die Aktualität einer neuen wissenschaftlichen Ausgabe des Textes», 32-37; DIETER STURM, «Der *Fihrist* des Ibn an-Nadīm als Quelle für die Kenntnis sozialer Zusammenhänge am Beispiel der dritten Maqāla», 44-50; GOTTHARD STROHMAIER, «Die ḥarrānischen Sabier bei Ibn an-Nadīm und al-Birūnī», 51-56. A few other works will be mentioned later.

<sup>6</sup> An interesting point of view is the one expressed in H.H. WELLISCH, «The first Arab bibliography, *Fihrist al-'ulūm*». Champaign, Graduate School of Library and Information Science, University of Illinois, 1986, (occasional papers, 175), 42 pp. This paper is mainly a presentation to non-Arabists, based on Dodge's translation. However, not being an Arabist in any of the current senses, Wellisch does not suffer from the but-it's-completely-different syndrome, and is therefore able to recognize some modern cataloguing criteria which were already present in the *Fihrist*. He goes so far as to say that Ibn al-Nadīm's division of the book in ten chapters has a parallel in Melvil Dewey's ten main classes.

In the study of only one source, the perspective will have to remain internal, rather than aiming at universal conclusions. The criterion which will allow us to conduct such a kind of analysis is fame, and it is twofold: it involves reputation on the one hand and written production on the other. Anyone who was, or had been, even slightly influential in the cultural life of Ibn al-Nadīm's times will have had something to say, that is, to teach. The number of people who listened to such teaching, the number of people who decided to repeat it to others and the number of people who decided to use it as authoritative, determined the extent of that influence. The only way left to us to measure all those factors is necessarily through written elements: the more people talk about someone, the more widespread his (good or bad) reputation will be; the more a person's books are transmitted and quoted, the more this person will be influential. This is why the *Kitāb al-fihrist* is so significant: it provides a record of the fame achieved by certain individuals on the cultural scene, giving them a place in a vast hierarchy of doctrines and subjects, and devoting to them proportionately more or less space. This seems especially true for the learned men active in Baghdad a generation before Ibn al-Nadīm wrote: the students of those men were still alive in Ibn al-Nadīm's time, and present in the same town wherein Ibn al-Nadīm lived. Therefore, the *Fihrist* constitutes a first attestation of fame in these cases, rather than a confirmation of already established reputations. For this reason, the two scholars on whom the present study focuses both lived in Baghdad in the late ninth/third and early tenth/fourth centuries. Before looking at them, however, it seems necessary to point out some problems concerning the *Fihrist* itself, and the way in which to approach it.

The criterion chosen, that of fame, helps us to address the question of Ibn al-Nadīm's personal point of view, and of the *Fihrist*'s reliability in general. The issue, which is nothing new for medieval Arabic literature in general, but had somehow managed to avoid touching the *Fihrist* for a long time, has been raised by Stefan Leder<sup>7</sup>. He argues that, for the sake of completeness, Ibn al-Nadīm often names books and people of whom he has only vaguely heard, thus neglecting precision and certainty. This point appears perfectly legitimate, espe-

<sup>7</sup> Cf. note 5 above.

cially in certain parts of the *Fihrist*, which deal with remote lands and peoples<sup>8</sup>. Nevertheless, this loses importance if, instead of looking for an exact bibliography, we look at looser concepts like fame and reputation. Fame concerns views and opinions more often than plain facts. For example, the fact that a certain author was believed to have written a hundred books but he had in fact written twenty, might still mean something, if only that he was reputed to be a prolific author even in life, or that he must have had many pupils who transmitted his works with slightly different titles. What can still be extracted from the *Fihrist* is, then, Ibn al-Nadīm's view of Baghdad in this period, a view which he must have shared with at least some contemporaries and with the earlier authorities on whom he relied.

The second point, which has been raised on the *Fihrist* in general, concerns the order and priorities with which subjects and authors are listed within the book. H. Preissler states that the general principle of the *Fihrist* is a chronological one, that priority is given to disciplines where there is more written material, and that alphabetical order is not systematically followed because, despite being already known at Ibn al-Nadīm's time, it was used only in some subject areas, whereas it became a fashion in the following centuries<sup>9</sup>. To this I would add that a very interesting field to explore is the internal order in each chapter, and the way in which it changes according to the different sources used by Ibn al-Nadīm, the different characteristics of the subject itself, and of course the existence of written material on that subject and its accessibility to Ibn al-Nadīm. What follows is a series of observations on different ways in which writers and their works are listed in the *Fihrist*, in the chapters in which our two case studies appear.

The general pattern of *maqālas*<sup>10</sup> seems to be broadly linear: a historical introduction of the subject followed by a list

<sup>8</sup> E.g. *maqāla* eight and nine.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. note 5 above. The relative novelty of chronological order is further highlighted by Wellisch (cf. note 6 above), footnote 40, where he notes that this method of ordering data had been completely forgotten in the West after antiquity. In the *Fihrist*, it appears to be used mainly for collections of poetry, for example by Abū Bakr al-Šūlī.

<sup>10</sup> In this paper I have translated, and used interchangeably, *maqāla* with «chapter» and *fann* with «section».

of people who wrote on it. Those people, and the subjects themselves, are generally divided into subcategories, which take into account different criteria. Within the subcategories, people seem to be listed in a roughly chronological order. To keep the reader oriented, a table of contents for each chapter is here provided:

- |          |  |
|----------|--|
| Maqāla 1 | Languages, including religious sciences for Christianity, Judaism and Islam                  |
| 2        | Grammar  |
| 3        | History, secretarial skills, <i>adab</i> , entertainment including music                     |
| 4        | Poetry (ancient and modern)  |
| 5        | Theology ( <i>kalām</i> )  |
| 6        | Law ( <i>fiqh</i> )  |
| 7        | Philosophy, geometry, arithmetic, music, mathematics, astronomy/astrology, physics, medicine |
| 8        | Stories and fables, exorcists, jugglers, magicians, etc.                                     |
| 9        | Dualistic sects, Indian religions  |
| 10       | Alchemy  |

As may be inferred from its title, the third chapter is both particularly interesting and particularly problematic; several studies have been devoted to it and to its many aspects, especially by D. Sturm<sup>11</sup>. It is «on the *akhbār* of the historians, genealogists, writers of anecdotes and *adab*». Here, more than anywhere else in the book, the thousand years which separate us from Ibn al-Nadīm are important. History as a discipline

<sup>11</sup> D. Sturm has devoted several studies to this chapter, one on geographers («Die arabische geographische Literatur in Historikerkapitel des *Kitāb al-Fihrist* von Ibn an-Nadīm», *Hallesche Beiträge zur Orientalwissenschaft* 10 [1986], 23-36), another on plagiarism and forgery («Ibn al-Nadīm's Hinweise auf das Verhältnis zum geistigen Eigentum im Historikerkapitel des *Kitāb al-Fihrist*», *Hallesche Beiträge zur Orientalwissenschaft*, 13-14 [1990], 65-70), a third on the information given by this chapter concerning society (cf. note 5 above). Sturm's approach is usually very specific. The present analysis can only take into account his considerations on Ibn al-Nadīm's objectivity, especially in the third of the articles mentioned, where he concludes that Ibn al-Nadīm, despite being a *shī'ī*, was generally objective in his description of *sunni* scholars, and that it is not likely that he altered or left out data due to his personal beliefs.

seems to have been, in the fourth/tenth century, something which one would practice as a side activity, rather than a profession like that of grammarian or jurisconsult. It is significant that the enormous amount of biographical literature, which the Abbasid period has left us, does not include one single work devoted to historians. In fact, the third chapter is the least homogeneous of the book, as is evident from the number of topics with which it deals, and this can be taken as a testimony of how little history was felt as a unitary discipline. The first *fann*, «on the *akhbār* of the historians, genealogists, writers of biographies and anecdotes» is on what one would be tempted to call history proper: it starts with an account of how and when history began to be written, and the rest of the chapter consists of information on writers of *akhbār* (*akhbāriyyūn*), of genealogies (*nassābiyyūn*), of biographies (*aṣḥāb-siyar*) and of anecdotes (*aṣḥāb al-aḥdāth*). Contrary to other subsections, here there is no subdivision according to the different specialisations of the writers, but only a chronological one. It seems that to unify all these topics and authors in the eyes of a medieval Arabic reader it is sufficient that they deal with the past, in one way or another. This results, for example, in Ibn al-Kalbī and Abū-l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī's entries being very close to each other. Also to be noted, and interesting for the present case studies, is the fact that, while Abū-l-Faraj's *Kitāb al-aghānī* is classified as history, al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'riḥ al-rusul wa-l-mulūk* is not mentioned in this *maqāla*.

If the first *fann* of the third *maqāla* deals with various skills and specialities all grouped in one category, the remaining two *fanns* have many subdivisions of different kinds. In the second *fann*, «on the *akhbār* of the kings, the secretaries, the preachers, the writers of epistles, the ones in charge of the revenues and the administrators», chronological order is secondary to rank. The first names listed are therefore those of caliphs who had literary skills, then members of the royal family, then the secretaries, divided into several groups according to their specialisation (*kharāj*, administration, etc.). The third *fann* is «on the *akhbār* of the boon companions, the *julasā'*, the *udabā'*, the singers, the slap-takers, the jesters and the buffoons». It is structured more or less in the same way as the preceding section, but it deals this time with categories of people who, though being close to the court, were

not involved with the government, but with entertainment. Here, Ibn al-Nadīm explains his method of dealing with families within a chronological order. He says: «When I mention one of the writers, I have him followed by the mention of those who are close to him and similar to him, even if their period comes after the period of those whom I mention after them. This is my way in the whole book»<sup>12</sup>. The principle of kinship is therefore added to those of rank and chronology.

*Maqāla* four, «on poetry and poets», presents a completely different structure: here, Ibn al-Nadīm explains, it is not necessary to write *ṭabaqāt* of the poets, because many people have already done this. The aim, as he says in the second section, is «to mention the names of the poets, the amount of the production of verses of every one of them, especially the moderns, and the variations which take place in their verses, so that anyone who wants might know all those books and verses, and have insight into them». It is, as Dodge notes, a real bookdealer's catalogue, conveying just the information necessary to someone who buys or sells<sup>13</sup>. The main information provided is the amount of poetry produced by a poet. For the most important ones, the name of the editor of their *dīwān* is also given. Besides families, there also is a subsection devoted to women, and another on Syrian poets. The chapter ends, as do others, with a list of authors ordered according to the theme of their writings. Dodge occasionally suggests that this is not consistent with the rest of the work, and that therefore it has been added by someone else. But it could also just be a way of listing people and works which were not important or famous, a *miscellanea* part present in each chapter. Here, more than elsewhere, Ibn al-Nadīm seems merely to juxtapose his sources without editing them in any way.

The sixth *maqāla*, on jurists (*fuqahā'*), is very neatly arranged, in a very similar fashion to the second *maqāla* on

<sup>12</sup> *Fihrist*, 163.

<sup>13</sup> *Fihrist*, 181. After some entries on very famous poets like Abū Nuwās, Ibn al-Nadīm relies totally on two sources: the first one is the *Kitāb al-waraqā* by Muḥammad b. Dāwūd b. al-Jarrāh, the second is Ibn al-Hājib. Muḥammad b. Dāwūd died in 296/908, and Ibn al-Hājib is used for the period which is not covered by Muḥammad b. Dāwūd. Next is a section on «names of a group of modern poets who were not secretaries, after the year 300 (913) up to our time».

grammarians. Here, every leading *faqīh* (Mālik b. Anas, Abū Ḥanīfa, al-Shāfi'ī, Dāwūd al-Iṣfahānī, *shī'ī* jurists, jurists depending on the *ḥadīth*, al-Ṭabarī, jurists of the *shurāt*) is listed, together with his followers, in chronological order, with usually very detailed entries, especially in the section on jurists who were authoritative on the *ḥadīth*. This is hardly surprising, as Ibn al-Nadīm could already rely on a large amount of *rijāl* collections which provided vast biographical information, to which he added his first hand knowledge.

The observation of patterns and priorities in these parts of the *Fihrist* can give us a few useful clues, some of which are obvious, and some of which may be less so. Above all, each subject is described according to the same broad pattern: origins, people who have written on it in chronological order, together with what they have written, translators, translations and commentaries where applicable. Secondly, uniformity of general methods corresponds to wide variety in the details. Not only the number of *fanns* contained in a chapter varies, but also the number of subgroups in which every *fann* is subdivided does, and criteria for these subgroups and their internal order change. There are several reasons for those shifts in order, subdivisions and focus. The more obvious ones, as has already been said, are connected to the existence of written production on a certain topic, and to the different pictures given by different sources. In addition, other elements play an important part. First and foremost of these is Ibn al-Nadīm and his readers' familiarity with a subject: there is obviously no need to explain in detail what the Koran is (*maqāla* one), while not many people knew Manichaean festivities (*maqāla* nine). In such cases, the *Fihrist* adds to its primary function that of giving basic information on the merit of certain topics. Another reason is the existence of encyclopaedic works on a given subject: extensive information on poets' lives is already given elsewhere, therefore the fourth *maqāla* only concentrates on names and amount of poetry<sup>14</sup>. Finally, the kinds of source on which Ibn al-Nadīm relies

<sup>14</sup> Cf. above on chapter four. This point cannot be made everywhere in the *Fihrist*. The existence of *ṭabaqāt* for *ḥadīth* scholars did not prevent Ibn al-Nadīm from giving information, though not extensive, on them. To explain this one must look at another element: the kind of source on which Ibn al-Nadīm relies, which will be presently considered.

also affect the organisation of the *Fihrist*. Different sources, in fact, do not only mean different names of people who lived in different times and had different opinions, mental structures, qualities and levels of reliability. They also mean different ways of transmission: in some cases, as in *maqāla* four, on poetry, Ibn al-Nadīm gives us a list of poets taken mainly from three books<sup>15</sup>; on other occasions he mentions pieces of information which he remembers, or has in his lecture notes, from his own masters (such as al-Sīrāfi<sup>16</sup>); at other times, he recalls the lives and works of people whom he has actually met<sup>17</sup>.

The question of focuses in the *Fihrist* is a crucial one for the next step of the present analysis. Ibn al-Nadīm, in fact, can adapt his work to shift, for the reasons mentioned above, from a bibliography into an encyclopaedia, and from an encyclopaedia into an *ante litteram* Who's Who. What happens if our focus remains on the latter aspect, that is, on scholars and their fame and reputation? One significant example of this is that which I illustrate below.

Abū Bakr al-Ṣulī (d. 335/947)<sup>18</sup> is frequently mentioned in the *Fihrist* thanks to his many different skills. Besides one appearance in chapter two<sup>19</sup>, and another in chapter five<sup>20</sup>, his territory is to be found in *maqālas* three and four. There, we learn that he deserved not only a mention among the courtiers and boon companions, but also one among the chess players, and a respectable place among editors of poetry. The

<sup>15</sup> Cf. note 13 above.

<sup>16</sup> Abū Sa'īd al-Ḥasan b. 'Abd Allāh b. al-Marzubān al-Sīrāfi (d. 368/979), a grammarian, is especially present in the second *maqāla*.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. the section on «people whose origin and *akhbār* are not known on the basis of investigation», in 2.3, p. 92.

<sup>18</sup> Ibn al-Nadīm actually gives a different date in his entry on al-Ṣulī pp. 167-8 (330/941-42), but this is present only in Flügel's edition and is lacking in the Chester Beatty and Tonk manuscripts. Moreover, all later sources agree on 335/947. Cf. S. LEDER in *EI2* (1997), «al-Ṣulī»; *GAS* I, 330-1.

<sup>19</sup> *Fihrist* 2.1, p. 65. Here al-Ṣulī is reported to have said that he heard al-Mubarrad saying that he was born in the year 307. Although there is no other mention of al-Ṣulī in this chapter, other sources (for which cf. Leder in *EI2*) confirm that he had heard the lectures of both Tha'lab and al-Mubarrad, as nearly every contemporary of his with some sort of scholarly aspiration had.

<sup>20</sup> *Fihrist* 5.1, p. 208. His name appears as the last link of an *isnād* reporting comments on the death of al-Jāḥiẓ.



entry devoted to him in *maqāla* three<sup>21</sup> is particularly detailed, despite the caveat that «his story is too renowned, famous and near to our time for us to examine it deeply». The reader is informed of both the work and the hobbies of al-Šūlī, and the list of his writings following his biography specifically describes even the different parts of his *Kitāb al-awrāq*<sup>22</sup>. Al-Šūlī is described as a *zarīf* (a refined man) and an *adīb* (a learned man), two not unusual characteristics of a court companion of his time, and as a collector of books<sup>23</sup>. After mentioning his services to the royal family<sup>24</sup>, mainly as a boon companion and tutor, Ibn al-Nadīm describes him even as a man of virtue (*ḥasan al-muruwwa*), which is not a very common definition for people belonging to his category. The fact that this quality is mentioned for al-Šūlī as an individual, and not as part of a category, seems to be in contradiction with the accusation of plagiarism a few lines below: after describing the various parts which form the *Kitāb al-awrāq*, Ibn al-Nadīm adds: «For the composition of this book he [al-Šūlī] relied on the book of al-Marṭhadī, *al-Shi'r wa-l-shu'arā'*, or rather he copied it word by word and plagiarised it. I have seen the manuscript (*dustūr*) in the handwriting of the man himself [al-Marṭhadī], a manuscript which came from the library of al-Šūlī and through which the plagiarism became evident to me». This piece of information is also present, with almost the same wording, in the entry on al-Marṭhadī (d. 286/899, who was the secretary of al-Mu'taḍid's brother al-Muwaffaq, d. 279/892)<sup>25</sup>, and the fact that Ibn al-Nadīm actually claims to have seen the original gives a particular strength to his accusation. However, the contradiction between plagiarism and *muruwwa* is not as sharp as it might

<sup>21</sup> *Fihrist* 3.3, pp. 167-8.

<sup>22</sup> Only parts of this work are extant, and only three of these have been edited (al-Šūlī, Abū Bakr (d. 335/947). *Kitāb al-awrāq: akhbār al-shu'arā' al-muḥdathīn, akhbār al-Rādī bi-llāh wa-l-Muttaqī li-llāh, ash'ar awlād al-khulafā'*, ed. J. Heyworth Dunne, Beirut, Dār al-Masīra, 1934-36.

<sup>23</sup> «*min... al-jammā'in li-l-kutub*».

<sup>24</sup> Al-Šūlī was a boon companion of al-Muktafi (caliph from 289/902 to 295/908), of al-Muqtadir (caliph from 296/908 to 320/932), and tutor and then boon companion of al-Rādī (caliph from 322/934 to 329/940).

<sup>25</sup> *Fihrist*, 3.2, p. 143: «His books were: ... *Kitāb ash'ar Quraysh*, on which al-Šūlī relied in his *Awraq*, plagiarizing it, and I saw the manuscript in al-Marṭhadī's hand». It is amusing that the only divergent elements in these two passages should be the book's title!

seem, as the attitude towards plagiarism (*sariqa*) was not unequivocally negative in medieval Arabic literature<sup>26</sup>. The entry also mentions al-Šūlī's death more or less in exile<sup>27</sup> and his ability in the game of chess, which makes him worthy of another entry later in the same section, in the part devoted to chess players<sup>28</sup>.

The only other time when al-Šūlī appears in chapter three is as a source for information on Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī, the great musician and singer of the eighth century, and his son Ḥammād<sup>29</sup>. It is in the fourth *maqāla* that his importance as a collector and editor of poetry comes to the fore, especially for the work of «modern» poets. The *diwāns* collected by him are usually said to be '*alā-l-ḥurūf*', in alphabetical order, which is not always a feature of the other editions listed by Ibn al-Nadīm<sup>30</sup>. Of the many places where al-Šūlī's work is mentioned<sup>31</sup>, two are controversial. The first one<sup>32</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Cf. D. STURM, «Ibn al-Nadīm's Hinweise...», pp. 65-70, where al-Šūlī's case is also mentioned. Sturm, though, refers the accusation of plagiarism only to the last two parts of *Kitāb al-awrāq*, the ones on Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī and on Sudayf b. Maymūn. This appears strange, because, after mentioning the section on Sudayf, Ibn al-Nadīm says: «*wahdhā-l-kitāb 'awwala fī ta'līfihī 'alā kitāb al-Marṭhadī*». While it is possible that *hadhā-l-kitāb* refers either to the part on Sudayf only, or to the whole *Awraq*, one does not see how it could refer to the parts on al-Mawṣilī and Sudayf. For an overview of plagiarism and forgery in medieval Arabic literature, cf. also ABDELFAṬTAH KILITO, *L'auteur et ses doubles. Essai sur la culture arabe classique*, Paris, Seuil, 1985.

<sup>27</sup> «He died while hiding in Basra, because he transmitted a piece of information on 'Alī, peace be on him, for which everybody was trying to kill him».

<sup>28</sup> *Fihrist*, 173, an entry containing only the titles of two books.

<sup>29</sup> *Fihrist*, 157 and 159. DODGE, p. 307, note 4, says that it is probably his great-uncle Ibrāhīm b. al-'Abbās al-Šūlī, but does not explain why. It is true that Ibrāhīm b. al-'Abbās was a contemporary of Ishāq and Ḥammād, but it is also true that part of the *Kitāb al-awrāq* was devoted to *Akhbār Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm wa-mukhtār shi'rihi*, as we read in the list of his writings (p. 168).

<sup>30</sup> Cf. what is said above on order in general. Some of the appearances of al-Šūlī in this *maqāla* are, again, indexed by Dodge under the name of his great-uncle (cf. note 29 above), as in the case of the edition of Abū Nuwās' *diwān*. This is obviously an oversight, because, besides being mentioned in his entry of p. 168, the *Diwān Abī Nuwās* by Abū Bakr al-Šūlī is actually extant (cf. GAS I, 331).

<sup>31</sup> *Fihrist*, 182 (Abū Nuwās); 133 (Dī'bīl b. 'Alī); 186 (al-'Abbās b. al-Aḥnaf); 190 (al-Buḥturī, Ibn al-Rūmī, Khālid al-Kātib); 194 (al-Ṣanawbarī).

<sup>32</sup> *Fihrist*, 181.

concerns the poet Ibn Harma (d. 176/792), whose poetry is described as follows: «*wa-shi'rubu mujarrad naḥw mi'atay waraqa, wa-fī ṣan'at Abī Sa'īd al-Sukkarī huwa khamsumi'at waraqa, wa-qad ṣana'ahu al-Ṣūlī wa-lam ya'ti bi-shay'*». Dodge's translation says that his poetry «by itself fills about two hundred leaves. In the edition of Abū Sa'īd al-Sukkarī, however, there are about five hundred leaves. Although al-Ṣūlī also worked over it, nothing came of it»<sup>33</sup>. By contrast, Leder, describing this passage, says that «Ibn al-Nadīm... suspected him of having produced the poetry ascribed to Ibn Harma himself», adding that this is the only existent accusation. Dodge's translation seems more consistent with what is in al-Ṣūlī's entry, which includes *Akhhār Ibn Harma wa-mukhtār shi'ribi*: a choice of his poetry, which could also be an aborted attempt at the collection and edition of the entire *diwān*. The second case is also related to plagiarism and forgery, concerning false attribution: the poet Khubz Aruzzī (d. ca. 327/938) had himself arranged his poems in alphabetical order, but this work was attributed to al-Ṣūlī<sup>34</sup>. Here, however, the misidentification is not voluntary, therefore al-Ṣūlī cannot be blamed.

As the above examples show, Abū Bakr al-Ṣūlī was not an unambiguous individual, with his eclecticism, his suspected tendency to plagiarise books that he had in his library, and his death in disgrace. Nevertheless, there are many places in the *Fihrist* where his genuine scholarly work is mentioned, and where he is praised and relied upon. As controversial as he could be, Abū Bakr al-Ṣūlī could not be avoided. Let us compare the way in which he appears in the *Fihrist* with the way in which another, and to modern eyes much more important scholar, does.

It is interesting to see that Muhammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), who is today considered the most important historian of this period, is mentioned only once, and in a marginal way, in the chapter on historians<sup>35</sup>. However, we have seen that an entire *fann*, the seventh, is devoted to him

<sup>33</sup> DODGE, p. 352.

<sup>34</sup> *Fihrist*, 195: «*wa-qad 'amila shi'rabu 'alā-l-ḥurūf, wa-nuḥila ilā-l-Ṣūlī*».

<sup>35</sup> *Fihrist*, 161: Abū-l-Ḥasan Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā b. 'Alī b. Yaḥyā b. Abī Maṣṣūr al-Munajjim (late third/ninth century) was a follower of al-Ṭabarī in *fiqh*, and Ibn al-Nadīm saw copies of al-Ṭabarī's books written in his handwriting.

and his legal school in the sixth *maqāla*<sup>36</sup>, and there also his *Ta'riḥ al-rusul wa-mulūk* is dealt with, including mention of those scholars who abridged it and those who wrote continuations to it. Al-Ṭabarī's *Tafsīr* also appears here<sup>37</sup>, «better than which has not been made», together with the scholars who wrote abridgements of it<sup>38</sup>. The rest of the *fann* consists of disciples of the legal school of al-Ṭabarī, but it is outside it that one can fully perceive the authority and huge production of this scholar. On the one hand, in fact, al-Ṭabarī copied an enormous amount of books<sup>39</sup>; on the other, he played a role as a point of reference in various fields of knowledge (more the religious than the historical ones, according to what can be gathered from the *Fihrist*). Not only people of different *milieus* wrote referring to him or arguing against him<sup>40</sup>, which was usual practice, but also time and length were measured according to his standards: in the entry of Ibn Abī Dāwūd al-Sijistānī (d. 316/929) it is said that he wrote a *Tafsīr* at the time when al-Ṭabarī wrote his<sup>41</sup>, while in order to explain how much Yaḥyā b. 'Adī (d. 363/974) worked, it is said that he made two copies of the entire *Tafsīr* of al-Ṭabarī<sup>42</sup>.

The difference between the kind of fame enjoyed by Abū Bakr al-Ṣūlī, with its bright and dark patches barely distinguishable from each other, and that of the virtuous but monochromatic al-Ṭabarī, is evident. At this point, two questions emerge from our data. Why are al-Ṣūlī's works scattered in different sections, while al-Ṭabarī's writings are all dealt with in one block, regardless of different topics (different, at least,

<sup>36</sup> *Fihrist*, 291-3.

<sup>37</sup> The *tafsīr* had already been mentioned in 1.3, p. 37, within a list of books composed on the Koran.

<sup>38</sup> The only other people to whom this treatment is reserved, i.e. who have the abridgers of their works listed in their own entry, are the ancient Greeks, like Aristotle, in the seventh *maqāla*.

<sup>39</sup> *Fihrist*, 2.2, p. 76, in the entry on the grammarian Hishām al-Darīr (d. 208/824): Ibn al-Nadīm saw a copy of a book of his in the handwriting of al-Ṭabarī. Also, in al-Ṭabarī's entry, Ibn al-Nadīm says: «I saw in his own handwriting many books on grammar, language, poetry and tribes».

<sup>40</sup> *Fihrist*, 5.5, p. 246: the *shī'ī* Ibn al-Junayd (d. 298/910) wrote a book referring to his epistles; 6.4, p. 272, Muḥammad b. Dāwūd wrote a book against him.

<sup>41</sup> *Fihrist*, 6.6, p. 288.

<sup>42</sup> *Fihrist*, 7.1, p. 322.



in our eyes)? And why, despite having at hand several works composed or copied by al-Ṭabarī, does Ibn al-Nadīm never openly rely on them for information, as he does with other works which he owns<sup>43</sup>?

The questions can be formulated in a more general way: why is the information on different scholars, particularly on their writings, organised in different ways? And why does Ibn al-Nadīm use certain sources rather than others? Whatever role chance may play in these issues, it cannot be the only actor on stage, and the time has long gone when everything could be blamed on the supposed lack of structure and the chaotic mentality of medieval Arabic prose writing. The only scientific way in which we can approach these questions is as conscious decisions of the author. As such, there must be a reason for them.

All the information possessed by the reader of the *Fihrist* on al-Ṭabarī has been illustrated above. The writings listed in his entry include, besides the *Ta'riḫ* and the *Tafsīr*, only books on legal matters. Therefore, it can be assumed that none of them contained data which Ibn al-Nadīm could use for the *Fihrist*. On the other hand, al-Ṭabarī had the fame of an indefatigable copyist, and the books which he copied belonged to the most disparate subjects. Ibn al-Nadīm claims to have seen many of them, as mentioned above<sup>44</sup>. While it seems unlikely that none of those books were on subjects of interest to Ibn al-Nadīm, there are several other possible explanations. Ibn al-Nadīm might have seen those books without being able to consult them properly because he did not own them; this would mean that copies of books in the handwriting of al-Ṭabarī were both in demand and expensive. Also the contrary is possible: despite being able to use such books, Ibn al-Nadīm might have preferred to rely on others, or he might even have used them, but without mentioning it. This would imply that, despite al-Ṭabarī's established reputation, his handwriting was not particularly appreciated, and was considered inferior to that of other copyists; for instance, Ibn

<sup>43</sup> Throughout the *Fihrist*, Ibn al-Nadīm occasionally mentions not only the source of a piece of information, but also the handwriting in which it was written. The formula «I read in A's handwriting that B said...» (for example, «qara'tu bi-khaṭṭ Ibn Muqla anna Tha'lab qāla», extensively used in the second *maqāla*) is very frequently found, but never with al-Ṭabarī.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. note 39 above.

Muqla (early tenth/fourth century) and Ibn al-Kūfī (d. 348/960), who are among the most quoted copyists in the *Fihrist*. It could also be the case that, more than sixty years after al-Ṭabarī's death (Ibn al-Nadīm writes in 377/987), only very few of the books which he copied were still extant. There is no evidence, in the *Fihrist*, of which hypothesis might be closer to the truth<sup>45</sup>. Whichever the case, though, it remains a matter of fame and reputation.

As for the arrangement of information, obviously the type and availability of Ibn al-Nadīm's sources will be accountable for part of it, but two other elements should be considered. Firstly, the focus: if a scholar's works are briefly mentioned in several places, as in the case of al-Ṣulī, the reader's attention will go to what they have written, rather than to who they were. If, on the contrary, the information is concentrated in one block, and the entry includes many biographical details, as in the case of al-Ṭabarī, the personality and life of the scholar will come out clearer. (In addition, there are cases, like those of Tha'lab, al-Mubarrad and al-Balkhī, in which both these aspects are present, and which will deserve separate treatment elsewhere).

The other element to be considered has to do with the modern reader's perceptions, and with the particular structure of the third *maqāla*. As we have seen above, the modern concepts of history and historian cannot be blindly applied to the disciplines described in the third *maqāla*. Moreover, the word *ta'riḫ* itself appears in titles of single works, but it is never used in the titles of sections and subsections of the third *maqāla*, or of any other *maqāla*<sup>46</sup>. It should not be too surprising, therefore, that, while al-Ṭabarī is not present in *maqāla* three, other works are, which one would think twice before defining as historical. With this idea in mind the arrangement of information appears perhaps less illogical.

The cases of al-Ṣulī and al-Ṭabarī are only two examples

<sup>45</sup> To be sure, as said above, in one occasion Ibn al-Nadīm remembers seeing a book by Hishām al-Ḍarīr in the handwriting of al-Ṭabarī. This would seem to corroborate our first hypothesis, but, being an isolated case, it cannot be used for more than a footnote.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. also CLAUDE CAHEN's article, «History and Historians», in M.J.L. YOUNG *et al.*, *Religion, Learning and Science...*, especially pp. 188-9 and 197, on the different terms used for historical works, and on the appearance and use of the word *ta'riḫ*; p. 191 on al-Ṭabarī's eclecticism.

of a way in which the *Kitāb al-fibrīst* can be approached. The observation of internal patterns of presence, criteria of listing, roles and principles of selection, all from a rigorously internal point of view, is bound to yield several questions concerning fame in the eyes of Ibn al-Nadīm. Moreover, the recognition of changing motives and structures in the composition of the book shows us a work which is maybe less finished than a book of *ṭabaqāt*, and exactly for this reason it can more easily tell us something about the cultural mentality of Ibn al-Nadīm and his contemporaries.

#### ABSTRACT

This paper suggests an approach to the study of the *Kitāb al-fibrīst* by Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 386/995), which takes into account his criteria of priority and order within the book's structure, when analysing the information the author provides about a scholar or group of scholars. The case studies for the present paper are Abū Bakr al-Ṣūlī (d. 335/947) and Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), two prominent scholars who lived one generation before Ibn al-Nadīm, and whose biographical information he treats in contrasting ways.

#### KEY WORDS

Mediaeval literature. Mediaeval history. *Fibrīst*.

Leonardo Capezzone

#### UN ASPETTO DELLA CRITICA IMAMITA ALLE TRADIZIONI ETERODOSSE: IL KITĀB AL-HAFT WA'L-AZILLA E LE MOLTEPLICI REDAZIONI DI UN KITĀB AL-AZILLA

Il fondamentale saggio di Heinz Halm sul *Kitāb al-haft wa'l-azilla* aveva posto questo testo eterodosso – attribuito al rapporto di docenza/discenza tra l'imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq e Mufaḍḍal ibn 'Umar al-Ju'fī – al centro degli studi sulla duplice relazione tra ortodossia ed eterodossia nella storia dello sciismo e tra lo sciismo degli imam e quello elaborato dai tradizionalisti imamiti fra il III/IX e il IV/X secolo (HALM)<sup>1</sup>. Con queste note, si vuole indagare sulla presenza, o meglio ricorrenza, di un testo che le fonti di *'ilm al-rijāl* registrano come *Kitāb al-azilla*, dietro il quale si snoda una rete di passaggi di sapere e di testi che connette alcuni maestri e alcuni allievi del grande teologo e giurista Abū Ja'far Muḥammad al-Kulaynī (m. 328-329/940-941), figura centrale dello sciismo del IV/X secolo, e autore del primo grande canone di tradizioni sciite. È un'indagine che prelude a un lavoro, più ampio, sul materiale eterodosso confluito negli *Uṣūl min al-kāfi* di al-Kulaynī.

Qui sono stati seguiti in particolare i flussi di trasmissione che riguardano, fra i maestri, Ḥumayd ibn Ziyād e Sahl ibn Ziyād, e, fra gli allievi, Abū'l-Mufaḍḍal al-Shaybānī. Il percorso a ritroso, dagli allievi ai maestri di al-Kulaynī, permette di cogliere e di descrivere meglio la prospettiva storica in cui si sviluppa, si accentua o si trascura il criterio di ortodossia/affidabilità della trasmissione degli imam, con un particolare riferimento alla scuola di Qumm<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Per le fasi storiche e politiche inerenti a questa evoluzione dello sciismo, si vedano E. KOHLBERG, «From Imāmiyya to Ithnā 'Ashariyya», *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, XXXIX, 1976, 521-34; J.M. HUSSAIN, *The occultation of the twelfth imam*, London 1982.

<sup>2</sup> Le scuole contrapposte di Qumm (rappresentata da Ibn Bābawayh) –