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 Muhammad b. Ishāq al-Nādīm (d. 385/995 or 388/998)\(^1\). 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-Šūli (d. 335/947) and Muḥammad b. Jaʿir 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 tabāqāt 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\(^2\), 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.


\(^2\) Cf. for example F. Sezgin who calls the Fihrist «die äusste und vielleicht die einzige arabische Literaturgeschichte» (GAS I, 386). More recently, cf. H. Preissler, «Ordnungsprinzipien im Fihrist», in Ibn al-Nadim und die mittelalterliche arabischen Literatur, Beiträge zum 1. Johann Wilhelm Fick-Kolloquium (Halle 1987), ed. M. Fleschhammer and Stefan Leder, 38-41, 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-Nadim's scholarship were exactly the same as Brockelmann and Sezgin's. The Tajaddud edition and B. Dodge's translation in the early seventies prompted a new series of studies on single chapters or sections of the book, and also a few evaluations of it in more general terms. The present work aims at being part of both groups, to attempt to bring two methods together: that of "seeing what the Fibrist says on a certain personage or discipline or particular issue, and that of examining the priorities given by Ibn al-Nadim and the different ways in which he conceived and approached different subjects and authors.

An example of this is the fact that the two volumes of the Cambridge History of Arabic Literature concerning the Abbasid era quote the Fibrist 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 Ashton Bray, T.M. Johnstone, J.D. Latham, R.B. Serjeant and G. Rex Smith, eds., Abū Ḥāshim B. Ṣamh, The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990).


4 An interesting point of view is the one expressed in H.H. Wellisch, "The First Arab bibliography, Fibrist al-Ulūm", Champaign, Graduate School of Library and Information Science, University of Illinois, 1988 (occasional papers, 175), 42 pp. This paper is mainly a presentation to non-Arabs, 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 Fibrist. He goes so far as to say that Ibn al-Nadim'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-Nadim'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-fibrist 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-Nadim wrote: the students of those men were still alive in Ibn al-Nadim's time, and present in the same place wherein Ibn al-Nadim lived. Therefore, the Fibrist constitutes a first attestation of fame in these cases, rather than the 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 Fibrist itself, and the way in which to approach it.

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

7 Cf. note 5 above.
cially in certain parts of the Fihrist, which deal with remote lands and peoples. 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-Nadim’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-Nadim’s time, it was used only in some subject areas, whereas it became a fashion in the following centuries. 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-Nadim, the different characteristics of the subject itself, and of course the existence of written material on that subject and its accessibility to Ibn al-Nadim. 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 maqāla 10 seems to be broadly linear: a historical introduction of the subject followed by a list

---

8 E.g. maqāla eight and nine.
9 Cf. note 5 above. The relative novelty of chronological order is further highlighted by Wellsch (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-Sull̄i.
10 In this paper I have translated, and used interchangeably, maqāla with «chapter» and jāmā with «section».

---

D. Sturm has devoted several studies to this chapter, one on geographers (s Die arabisch geographische Literatur in Historikerkapiel des Kitab al-Fihrist von Ibn an-Nadim, Hallesche Beiträge zur Orientalwissenschaft 10 [1986], 23-36), another on plagiarism and forgery (s Ibn al-Nadim’s Hinweise auf das Verhältnis zum geistigen Eigentum im Historikerkapiel des Kitab al-Fihrist, Hallesche Beiträge zur Orientalwissenschaft, 13-14 [1990], 55-70), a third on the information given by this chapter concerning society (snote 5 above). Sturm’s approach is usually very specific. The present analysis can only take into account his considerations on Ibn al-Nadim’s objectivity, especially in the third of the articles mentioned, where he concludes that Ibn al-Nadim, despite being a sibī, was generally objective in his description of ummi 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 fa'n, on the akhbâr 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 akhbâr (akhbâriyyân), of genealogies (nasabiyân), of biographies (asbîb-siyar) and of anecdotes (asbâb al-ahdâb). 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-Kalbi and Abû-l-Faraj al-Isfahâni's entries being very close to each other. Also to be noted, and interesting for the present case studies, is the fact that, while Abû-l-Faraj's Kitâb al-ahdâb is classified as history, al-Tabâri's Ta'rîkh al-rusul wa-l-muluk is not mentioned in this maqâla. If the first fa'nah of the third maqâla deals with various skills and specialities all grouped in one category, the remaining two fa'nah have many subdivisions of different kinds. In the second fa'nah, «on the akhbâr 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 (khbarî, administration, etc.). The third fa'nah is «on the akhbâr of the boon companions, the jumla, the adaba, 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-Nâdim 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».

The principle of kinship is therefore added to those of rank and chronology. Maqâla four, on poetry and poets, presents a completely different structure: here, Ibn al-Nâdim explains, it is not necessary to write tâbâqat 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. The main information provided is the amount of poetry produce by a poet. For the most important ones, the name of the editor of their diwan 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-Nâdim seems merely to juxtapose his sources without editing them in any way.

The sixth maqâla, on jurists (jmâhî), is very neatly arranged, in a very similar fashion to the second maqâla on

---

12 Fihrist, 163.
13 Fihrist, 181. After some entries on very famous poets like Abû Nawâs, Ibn al-Nâdim relies totally on two sources: the first one is the Kitâb al-warasa by Muhammad b. Dâwûd b. al-Jarrî, the second is Ibn al-Hajîb. Muhammad b. Dâwûd died in 968/908, and Ibn al-Hajîb is used for the period which is not covered by Muhammad b. Dâwûd. Next is a section on «names of a group of modern poets who were not secretaries, after the year 300 (913) up to our times». 

---
grammarians. Here, every leading faqīh (Mālik b. Anas, Abū Hanīfa, al-Shafi‘i, Dāwūd al-Isfahānī, shī'ī jurists, jurists depending on the hadith, al-Tabari, jurists of the shu‘rah) 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 hadith. This is hardly surprising, as Ibn al-Nadim 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 these 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-Nadim 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. Finally, the kinds of source on which Ibn al-Nadim relies 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-Nadim gives us a list of poets taken mainly from three books; on other occasions he mentions pieces of information which he remembers, or has in his lecture notes, from his own masters (such as al-Sirāfī); at other times, he recalls the lives and works of people to whom he has actually met. The question of focus in the Fihrist is a crucial one for the next step of the present analysis. Ibn al-Nadim, 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-Sūlī (d. 335/947) is frequently mentioned in the Fihrist thanks to his many different skills. Besides one appearance in chapter two, and another in chapter five, his territory is to be found in maqāla three and four. There, we learn that he deserved not only a mention among the courtiers and boon companions, but also one among the poets, players, and a respectable place among editors of poetry. The

15. Cf. the section on ‘people whose origin and akhkhār are not known on the basis of investigations’, in 2.3, p. 92.
17. Fihrist 2.1, p. 65. Here al-Sūlī 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-Sūlī 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.
18. Fihrist 5.1, p. 208. His name appears as the last link of an inā‘id reporting comments on the death of al-Jā‘īz.
entry devoted to him in *maqāla* three is particularly detailed, despite the caveat that this 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-Sūlī, and the list of his writings following his biography specifically describes even the different parts of his *Kitāb al-aʻwarāq*. Al-Sūlī is described as a *zarif* (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. After mentioning his services to the royal family, mainly as a boon companion and tutor, Ibn al-Nadim describes him even as a man of virtue (*ḥasan al-muʻarruwa*), which is not a very common definition for people belonging to his category. The fact that this quality is mentioned for al-Sūlī 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-aʻwarāq*, Ibn al-Nadim adds: «For the composition of this book he [al-Sūlī] relied on the book of al-Marthadī, *al-šiţr wa-l-šu'ara*’, or rather he copied it word by word and plagiarised it. I have seen the manuscript (distier) in the handwriting of the man himself [al-Marthadī], a manuscript which came from the library of al-Sūlī and through which the plagiarisms became evident to me». This piece of information is also present, with almost the same wording, in the entry on al-Marthadī (d. 286/899), who was the secretary of al-Muṭadād’s brother al-Muwaffaq, d. 279/892), and the fact that Ibn al-Nadim actually claims to have seen the original gives a particular strength to his accusation. However, the contradiction between plagiarism and *muʻarruwa* is not as sharp as it might seem, as the attitude towards plagiarism (saraq) was not unequivocally negative in medieval Arabic literature. The entry also mentions al-Sūlī’s death more or less in exile 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.

The only other time when al-Sūlī appears in chapter three is as a source for information on Ishāq b. Ibrahim al-Mawsili, the great musician and singer of the eighth century, and his son Hammād. 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 *diwān* collected by him are usually said to be *al-šiţr wa-l-šu’ara*, in alphabetical order, which is not always a feature of the other editions listed by Ibn al-Nadim. Of the many places where al-Sūlī’s work is mentioned, two are controversial. The first one...
concerns the poet Ibn Harma (d. 176/992), whose poetry is described as follows: ‘wa-shī‘rahu mu‘jarrad nawbū mi‘ātay wa‘raqa, wa-fī san‘at ʿAbī Sa‘īd al-Sukkārī buwwa khamsum‘ūt wa‘raqa, wa-qad šan‘a‘bī al-Sūlī wa-lam ya‘ti bi-shay‘.’ Dodge’s translation says that his poetry ‘by itself fills about two hundred leaves. In the edition of ‘Abī Sa‘īd al-Sukkārī, however, there are about five hundred leaves. Although al-Sūlī also worked over it, nothing came of it’. 33 By contrast, Leder, describing this passage, says that ‘Ibn al-Nādim... 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-Sūlī’s entry, which includes Akhbār Ibn Harma wa-mukhābāt shī‘rībih: a choice of his poetry, which could also be an abortive 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 Khubār Aruzzī (d. c. 327/938) had himself arranged his poems in alphabetical order, but this work was attributed to al-Sūlī. 34 Here, however, the misidentification is not voluntary, therefore al-Sūlī cannot be blamed.

As the above examples show, Abū Bakr al-Sūlī 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-Sūlī 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. 35 However, we have seen that an entire fann, the seventh, is devoted to him

33 Dodge, p. 352.
34 Fihrist, 195: ‘wa-qad ṣumāla shī‘rābī ʿalā-l-burāfī, wa-nabīs ilā-l-Sūlī’.

and his legal school in the sixth magāla 36, and there also his Taʾrīkh al-rusul wa-mulkā 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 37, ‘better than which has not been made’, together with the scholars who wrote abridgements of it 38. 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 39; 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 milieu wrote referring to him or arguing against him, 40 which was usual practice, but also time and length were measured according to his standards: in the entry of Ibn ʿAbī Dāwūd al-Sijistānī (d. 316/929) it is said that he wrote a Tafsīr at the time when al-Ṭabarī wrote his 41, while in order to explain how much Yahyā b. ʿAdī (d. 363/974) worked, it is said that he made two copies of the entire Tafsīr of al-Ṭabarī 42.

The difference between the kind of fame enjoyed by Abū Bakr al-Sūlī, 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-Sūlī’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,
in our eyes)? And why, despite having at hand several works composed or copied by al-Tabari, does Ibn al-Nadim never openly rely on them for information, as he does with other works which he owns? 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-Nadim 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-Tabari has been illustrated above. The writings listed in his entry include, besides the Ta’rikh and the Ta’fsir, only books on legal matters. Therefore, it can be assumed that none of them contained data which Ibn al-Nadim could use for the Fihrist. On the other hand, al-Tabari had the fame of an indefatigable copyist, and the books which he copied belonged to the most disparate subjects. Ibn al-Nadim claims to have seen many of them, as mentioned above. While it seems unlikely that none of those books were on subjects of interest to Ibn al-Nadim, there are several other possible explanations. Ibn al-Nadim 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-Tabari were both in demand and expensive. Also the contrary is possible: despite being able to use such books, Ibn al-Nadim might have preferred to rely on others, or he might have used them, but without mentioning it. This would imply that, despite al-Tabari’s established reputation, his handwriting was not particularly appreciated, and was considered inferior to that of other copyists; for instance, Ibn Muqta (early tenth/fourth century) and Ibn al-Kufr (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-Tabari’s death (Ibn al-Nadim 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. 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-Nadim’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-Suli, 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-Tabari, the personality and life of the scholar will come out clearer. (In addition, there are cases, like those of Thalab, al-Mubarak and al-Balkhi, 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 maqala. As we have seen above, the modern concepts of history and historian cannot be blindly applied to the disciplines described in the third maqala. Moreover, the word ta’rikh itself appears in titles of single works, but it is never used in the titles of sections and subsections of the third maqala, or of any other maqala. It should not be too surprising, therefore, that, while al-Tabari is not present in maqala 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-Suli and al-Tabari are only two examples.

45 To be sure, as said above, in one occasion Ibn al-Nadim remembers seeing a book by Hisham al-Daray in the handwriting of al-Tabari. This would seem to corroborate our first hypothesis, but, being an isolated case, it cannot be used for more than a footnote.

46 Cf. also Claude Cahen’s article, “History and Historians”, in M.J.L. Youngs 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’rikh: p. 191 on al-Tabari’s eclecticism.
of a way in which the Kitāb al-fihrist 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-Nadim. 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 tabaqāt, and exactly for this reason it can more easily tell us something about the cultural mentality of Ibn al-Nadim and his contemporaries.

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

KEY WORDS
Medieval literature. Medieval history. Fihrist.